

Natural England North East Pilot Project Update July 2014



Green Infrastructure and Priority Habitat Creation Opportunities from Minerals and Waste Reclamation

Creative conservation elements of mineral reclamation schemes have long been supported by Natural England via proactive engagement in the development process at various stages, from policy guidance and strategic planning through to advice on individual applications and reserved matter considerations linked to restoration and aftercare.

The temporary nature of mineral development is recognised as offering unique “blank canvas” opportunities for the creation of biodiversity and amenity afteruses in situations where these did not exist prior to site working – and on a scale rarely practicable or affordable on undisturbed land.

The North East Pilot Project to identify Green Infrastructure (GI) and Priority Habitat (PH) creation from minerals and waste reclamation schemes was initiated in 2011, arising from local concerns that outcomes from this sector were at risk of being overlooked. Natural England has a role facilitating partner contributions to the delivery of the Biodiversity 2020 Strategy outcomes for habitats, protected sites, species and ecosystems, and Priority Habitat creation from minerals and waste sites represented a significant potential contribution to these national targets.

Through engagement with Mineral Planning Authorities and the Industry, Natural England has achieved an understanding of the most significant reclamation schemes to achieve these objectives within the study area, and created a new, regularly updated, database to identify restoration schemes that were;

- Approved in detail post March 2011
- Delivery due to commence prior to 2020
- Capable of delivering > 30 hectares GI and PH benefits



WOODBIDGE QUARRY – SEASONAL WETLANDS



SEGHILL LANDFILL SITE – BROADLEAF PLANTING

Through this approach, minerals and waste reclamation sites in the North East (primarily Northumberland) have contributed around **20% (550 ha)** of the England-wide Priority Habitat creation target for 2013-14 (2,500 ha), with a similar contribution towards the previous year's targets.

What have we learnt from the Project so far?

- The reliability of the project is dependent on the successful implementation of approved restoration plans – highlighting the importance of effective management and ongoing monitoring of Priority Habitat delivery.
- The need for a flexible approach post-restoration to capitalise on “what works well”, rather than adhering too rigidly to a pre-working concept which may not be wholly deliverable.
- In the majority of cases, these targets have been met by schemes which also include reclamation to agriculture, woodland, or other income generating afteruses.
- While in most cases, these schemes have offered valuable opportunities for new Priority Habitat creation, an equally important outcome in some cases will be to replace or enhance pre-existing habitat lost to the development.



POTLAND SURFACE MINE – OPERATIONAL WORK



BRENKLEY SURFACE MINE - NEWT MITIGATION POND

Given these promising outcomes, we propose rolling-out this approach to other parts of England; initially targeting areas where we believe that the MPAs and Industry stakeholders would support a similar initiative. We welcome this opportunity to highlight achievements being made in the sector and would be pleased to receive feedback from Industry and Mineral Planning Authority representatives.

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