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Audit of the Towns, Cities and Development Workstream of the England Biodiversity Strategy

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Introduction

The aim of this report is to critically assess the work of the Urban Workstream Group and to provide recommendations towards achieving the objectives set out in the 'Towns, Cities and Development' section of the document *Working with the Grain of Nature*. *Working with the Grain of Nature* sets out five aims relating to urban biodiversity, from which several indicators are derived. These indicators and associated objectives have been assessed within the Defra report *Measuring Progress: Baseline Assessment*. The five aims set out in *Working with the Grain of Nature* are:

- To ensure that cities, towns and other settlements contribute fully to the goals of biodiversity conservation.
- To ensure that cities, towns and other settlements contribute fully to the goals of biodiversity conservation.
- To ensure that construction, planning development and regeneration have minimal impacts on biodiversity and enhance it where possible.
- To ensure that biodiversity conservation is integral to sustainable urban communities, both in the built environment, and in parks and green spaces.
- To ensure that biodiversity conservation is integral to measures to improve the quality of people's lives, delivered through other initiatives eg Community Strategies, including Neighbourhood Renewal and Cultural Strategies.
- To value, further and enhance people's own contributions to improving biodiversity in towns and cities and to increase their access to it.

What was done

This report provides a critical assessment of *Measuring Progress: Baseline Assessment* produced by Defra and suggests ways in which the indicators could be improved. In terms of the methods used for measuring the indicators, recommendations have been made to ensure that the surveys are not biased and that full use is made of the data gathered for these surveys. Alternative sources of baseline data are provided, and, in some cases, a revised methodology for measuring the baseline is proposed.

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Results and conclusions

The majority of the indicators provide a good method for assessing the biodiversity value of urban areas. In some cases, the definition of the indicator could be misleading and suggestions have been made to focus these indicators on truly urban biodiversity issues. *Measuring Progress: Baseline Assessment* did not include an objective for 'Progress towards urban related SAP targets' and a suggestion has been made for an objective that can be realistically achieved. In some cases, it would be appropriate to expand the scope of the assessment to provide more valuable and informative data and realistic targets. Areas where this would be beneficial have been identified.

A number of priorities for action for the Urban Workstream Group to improve performance against the indicators include:

- Prioritising species or habitats that should be included on the UKBAP and carrying out research to determine their status.
- Working with English Nature to improve the condition of urban SSSIs, particularly of acid grassland, built up areas and gardens and dwarf shrub heath.
- Increasing community awareness of urban birds and their conservation by distributing leaflets and setting up a website with links to relevant organisation's websites.
- Improving the condition of green spaces for wildlife and encouraging local people to visit green spaces by working with groups such as CABI Space.
- Increasing awareness of the value of wildlife gardening and ensuring that information is readily available to communities.
- Ensuring that local authorities are given information on how to include biodiversity targets within Local Plans and Unitary Development Plans.

English Nature's viewpoint

English Nature broadly endorses the report's conclusion that the six indicators for the 'Towns, Cities and Development' workstream provide a good method for assessing progress towards conserving and restoring biodiversity in urban areas, but that there is scope to improve them especially to ensure they reflect urban biodiversity issues. The report provides a number of more specific recommendations relating to the individual indicators. These are intended for consideration by the workstream group and do not necessarily reflect English Nature's views.

Selected references

- DEFRA. 2002. *Working with the Grain of Nature*. London: Defra Publications.
DEFRA 2003. *Measuring progress: baseline assessment*. London: Defra Publications.

Further information

For the full report or other publications on this subject, please contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or email enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

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