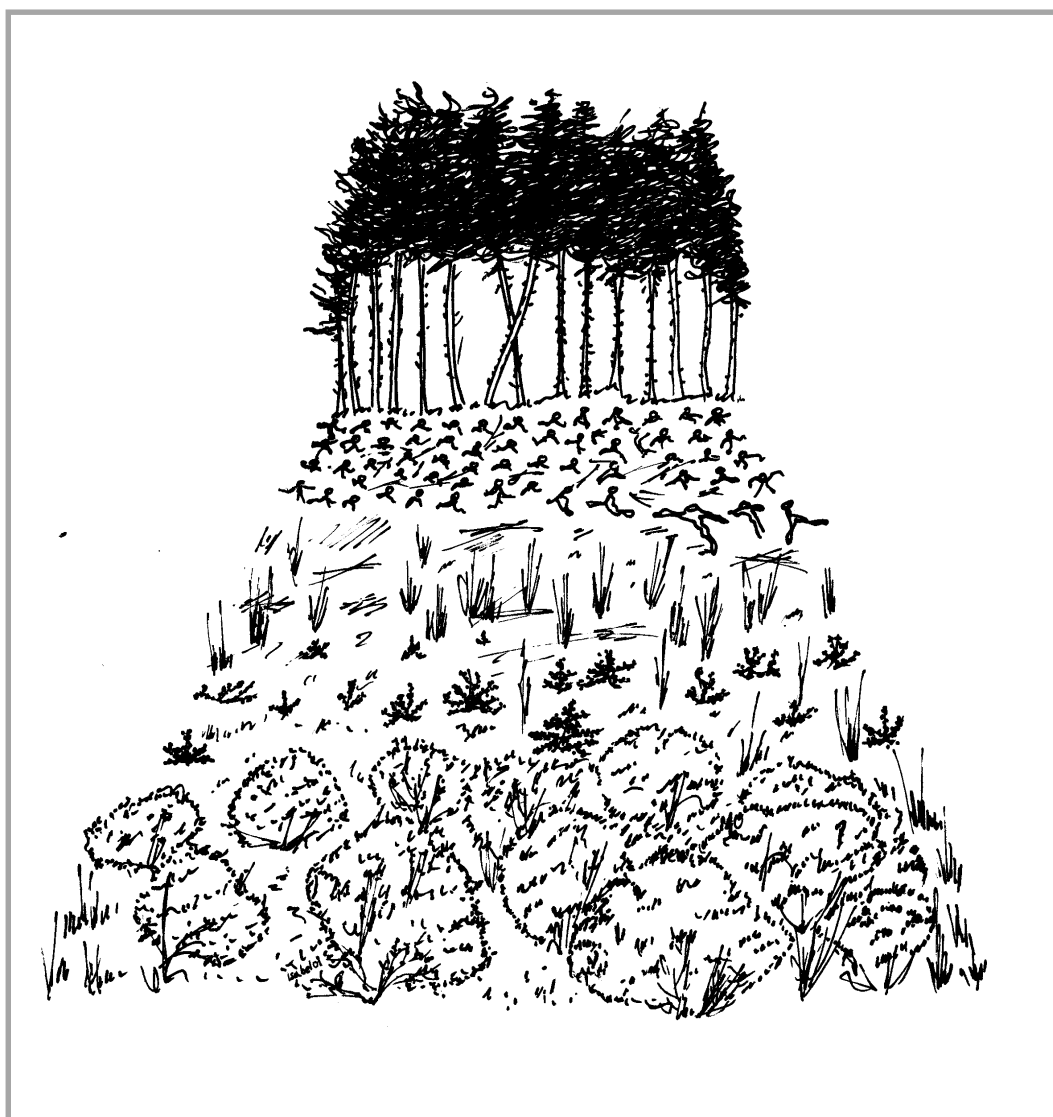


Review of the value of published
lowland heathland re-creation plans
in progressing the BAP objectives

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Review of the value of published lowland heathland re-creation plans in progressing the BAP objectives

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1. Introduction

The Biodiversity Action Plan for lowland heathlands was published in 1995. The overall targets are:

- Maintain, and improve by management, all existing lowland heathland in the UK (58,000 ha).
- Encourage the re-establishment by 2005 of a further 6,000 ha, with the emphasis on the counties of Hampshire, Cornwall, Dorset, Surrey, Devon, Staffordshire, Suffolk and Norfolk in England and Pembrokeshire, Glamorgan and west Gwynedd in Wales, particularly where this links separate heathland areas.

One of the proposed actions in the costed HAP was to “produce county lowland heathland re-creation plans identifying areas with high potential for heathland re-establishment by 2000 for all lowland heathland counties”. The agencies in charge of taking this action forward were English Nature, the Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage. It is understood that the lowland heathland counties are those where lowland heathland is of international, national or, at least, local importance, namely the above cited.

Under the National Lowland Heathland Programme (NLHP), the following plans were produced:

- A heathland re-creation plan for **Breckland**.
- A heathland re-creation plan for **Berkshire**.
- A heathland re-creation plan for **Dorset**.
- A heathland re-creation plan for **Cornwall**.
- **Nottinghamshire** heathland re-creation.
- Priorities for the re-creation of lowland heathland in **Staffordshire**.
- **Coversands** Natural Area Heathland re-creation plan.
- Lowland heathland re-creation plans: **Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Isle of Wight**.

A local project funded by English Nature produced as a result the ‘**Worcestershire Heathland Strategy**’, which fulfilled the same function for this county, although it was not part of the National Lowland Heathland Programme.

The Lowland Heathland BAP Steering Group, in their work programme for 1999-2000, identified some significant gaps in the coverage of the published plans. The following are the counties listed in the original UK BAP without a re-creation plan:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Devon | 4. Pembrokeshire |
| 2. Suffolk (except Breckland) | 5. West Glamorgan |

3. Norfolk (except Breckland) 6. West Gwynedd

There is a further group of counties where, although not cited in the UK BAP, lowland heathland is a significant feature:

7. Somerset 9. Cumbria
8. Shropshire 10. Merseyside

Funding and staff resources available locally were the constraints to action identified by the organisations represented in the Steering Group in the assessment of the progress of plans undertaken in 1999. Since staff numbers have increased in the last years and a bigger injection of grant in aid has been made available for the BAP habitats and species, we think this could be a good moment to re-take this task. The production of re-creation plans for the rest of the counties is a priority, although the original deadline of 2000 has not been met. The steering group has considered the need to review the effectiveness of the existing plans in terms of 'model examples' to be followed in other counties in the near future.

We have developed a questionnaire aimed to collect the views of representatives of key organisations who may (or should) have worked with the existing plans. The results have helped us to assess the value of the plans produced so far and will provide guidance for the agencies and contractors who will compile plans for the remaining counties.

Annex 1 is a copy of the questionnaire sent.

2. Participants

Questionnaires were sent either to the contact of each organisation in the Lowland Heathland BAP Steering Group, for them to distribute, or directly to their regional representatives. A total of 56 questionnaires were sent and 37 (66.1%) were filled out and returned (Table 1). Unfortunately not all organisations replied or the numbers of returned questionnaires was not a great percentage of those sent.

Table 1 A breakdown of the percentage of responses by organisation.

	EN	RSPB	MOD	NT	WT	LA	FE	TOTAL	Responses
Questionn. sent	23	7	10	8	6	2	?	56	
Responses back	13	4	4	7	6	2	1	37	66.1%
% per Org.	56.5	57.1	40.0	87.5	100.0	100.0	?		

A further respondent noted that he had commissioned the plan and therefore he thought it was not appropriate for him to judge the quality of the produce. This response wasn't taken into account for any analysis. Some respondents pointed out that there was no re-creation plan for their area or county (see 3.2.).

3. Results

3.1 Question 1: Involvement

Most of the respondents were members of local offices for the different organisations (n = 22). There were also site/property managers (n = 8), project officers (n = 3), Heathland Forum members (n = 1), records managers (n = 1) and LBAP representatives (n = 2). Few respondents were involved in heathland re-creation in different ways (eg. as project officer and local staff), but they were counted only once.

3.2 Question 2: Awareness of plan

Nineteen respondents (51.3%) did know the published re-creation plan for their county (Table 2). Ten respondents (27.0%) pointed out that there were no re-creation plans for their counties: Devon, Bedford-Cambridgeshire-Northamptonshire, Northumbria, Somerset, Kent, Derbyshire. However, most of them noted that a heathland re-creation plan for their area could be very useful to target opportunities which may arise. Some respondents also raised the question of what is the attitude of the national BAP group to counties where opportunities for heathland re-creation are i) good and ii) being explored and yet not recognised in the national BAP process.

Of all the respondents, eight (21.6%) were not aware that there was a re-creation plan for part or all of their county. These plans with an apparently short distribution list were: 'Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Isle of Wight' in five cases and 'Nottinghamshire', 'Berkshire' and 'Staffordshire' in a case each.

Table 2 Number of responses from counties with published lowland heathland re-creation plans.

	Total no. responses	Respondents who knew the plan
Breckland	2	2
Berkshire	2	1
Dorset	3	3
Cornwall	2	2
Nottinghamshire	5	4
Staffordshire	3	2
Coversands	1	1
Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Isle of Wight	7	2
Worcestershire	2	2
TOTAL	27	19

The analysis below refers *only to the 19 respondents who knew the re-creation plan* for their county.

3.3 Questions 3 and 4: Use of plan

Thirteen respondents (68.4%) recognised having used the re-creation plan for their county at least some times or usually, and five of them used it always during the course of their involvement with heathland re-creation initiatives. The use of the plan may have been by direct involvement or through consultants or contractors which carry out the work.

Among the reasons for not using the plans always the following were identified:

- Not all the partners for the re-creation projects always agreed with the plan recommendations.
- No GIS based maps and therefore more difficult to use.
- Occasionally the plan was forgotten.
- The location of sites for re-creation depended on land which became available, not on the score in the plan.
- Plan did not reflect all possibilities or sites where there was not heathland historically.
- In some cases, when opportunities have arisen, it was only assessed whether heathland re-creation was realistic at that particular location based on personal experience and knowledge.

On the other hand, six people (31.6%) never or rarely used the published plans. The following were the reasons they gave:

- The plan was considered superfluous and re-creation sites were obvious to all involved.
- Respondents were not pro-active or directly involved in heathland re-creation.
- There were doubts about the accuracy of the information.
- The content of plan was incorporated into Local Biodiversity Action Plans and used through this way.

The plans less used in specific projects to re-create lowland heathland were: **Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Isle of Wight** (the two respondents who did know the plan either did not like it or used other document (LBAP) which incorporated the plan); **Staffordshire and Dorset** (in one case, the respondent was not directly involved in heathland re-creation).

Lack of funding to drive BAP projects forward in a co-ordinated manner has been also pointed out as a cause for not using the plan and respond individually to re-creation proposals.

3.4 Question 5: Agreement with priorities in the plan

Most respondents (68.4%) agreed with all or most of the suggested search priorities of their respective plans. Three respondents thought they were not familiar enough with the plan to respond to this question. However, inaccuracy of the information or the maps was flagged up as a problem (e.g. **Staffordshire**).

There have been some contradictory responses to this question. Some people thought that the plan was well thought through and put together involving all the significant partners. On the other hand, others pointed out just the opposite, that not all the right people were involved and therefore the results were not of their like.

3.5 Question 6 and 7: Accuracy and usability of maps

The general view was that the plans were accurate and flexible enough to be easily used for the purpose of heathland re-creation. However, some inaccuracies were detected. The cause probably was that the maps were interpretations from aerial photos and not properly checked on the field. Five respondents did not think they could say if the maps were accurate or not, but they seemed so.

Few cases were pointed out where grasslands (acid or neutral), important in their own right, were identified as suitable for heathland re-creation (including an existing SSSI notified for neutral grasslands).

The plan for **Dorset** is thought to be a sub-set of possible re-creation sites. Most of the county is potentially viable for lowland heathland re-creation and thus not all sites were included in the published plan. Only one person clearly indicated that the maps were inaccurate due to the lack of resources when producing the plan.

3.6 Questions 8 and 9: Heathland re-created under and outside the plans

Table 3 presents the amount of lowland heathland which has been re-created in the counties with a plan as far as the respondents knew. Figures are not always accurate because in some cases respondents for the same plan produced different figures.

In some cases it was pointed out that re-creation would have been carried out anyway, even if the plan did not exist (**Dorset, Hampshire**), and sometimes the plan was not taken into account for the reasons indicated in the previous sections. The biggest contributions to heathland re-creation have been funded by the Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage Project, in many cases based on the re-creation plans.

Some problems, such as the no cross-referencing between re-creation plans and BAP reporting were also pointed out when answering these questions.

Table 3 Amount of lowland heathland which has been re-created in the counties with a plan.

	Re-creation* within the plan (ha)	Re-creation outside the plan (ha)
Breckland	300 (THH)	unknown
Berkshire	177 (till '97)	unknown
Dorset	94 (THH)	some, but not known
Cornwall	>765	not aware
Nottinghamshire	70 to-date, 230 proposed (FE), other sites unknown	none or unknown
Staffordshire	25	little (some in places it never existed!)
Coversands	250 proposed	none
Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Isle of Wight	c. 2000	none to knowledge
Worcestershire	c. 3 proposed	none
TOTAL	3914 ha	?

* Heathland restoration as well as re-creation was considered together in some plans. Restoration figures have not been included in this table.

3.7 Question 10: Format of the plan

Most respondents thought that the plans were appropriate for the purpose intended as they were produced. However the following were some comments which would help to improve future plans when they are produced.

- The plan would greatly improve if maps were available in GIS format.
- Scoring the suitability of sites for heathland re-creation may not be always appropriate because in many cases it depends on land availability, and sites are used for re-creation when they did not score top marks.
- The plan was thought to have an appropriate format but it was felt it was awkward to reproduce or assimilate into a document which could also be used as a practical tool by land management advisors.
- The plans could benefit of regular updates (not indicated how often).
- The maps and information provided need checking against county inventories for other habitats, SSSI/SBI maps and field level studies.
- The scoring of the sites for re-creation could be improved by looking at historical data.

3.8 Other Comments

From the comments of some respondents it may be possible that a broad definition of heathland re-creation has been used in some plans. This definition would include both heathland restoration and re-creation as defined by the Lowland Heathland BAP Steering Group.

Some respondents have questioned the relevance of producing 'single habitat' re-creation plans, when nowadays we are encouraged to take a more holistic, 'wider countryside' view of environmental conservation and management.

Some novel approaches have been suggested. For example, a series of heathland plans showing where re-creation is possible (based on soil types/historical data?) rather than ideally placed, with up-to-date, locally relevant information on the likely requirements of a re-creation attempt: current land use, issues to be tackled, timetable for success, likely succession of habitats and (perhaps) 'target' conservation objectives descriptions (similar to those produced for the Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage projects). All information supplied should avoid terming sites/mechanisms 'better' when what is meant is quicker or easier.

Also, alongside this a wider countryside 'master plan' for all habitat re-creations across an area (Natural Area/AONB/other), where different possible re-created habitat types could overlap if appropriate.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 In general the production of the plans for lowland heathland re-creation in the different counties where they have been carried out has proved to be positive and useful.
- 4.2 There were however significant exceptions, such as the **Dorset** and **Hampshire** plans. In these two counties re-creation would have happened anyway and in land which become available, regardless of its value for the objective. Re-creation in these counties is therefore not targeted, but a result of opportunity.
- 4.3 The questionnaire was sent to different organisations and some respondents were not aware of the existence of the plan for their county. Thus, it can be concluded that some of them (e.g. **Hampshire**) were not widely publicised among the organisations which may have direct involvement on heathland re-creation.
- 4.4 Future plan should include GIS maps which will make them more easy and readably to use.
- 4.5 It is worthwhile to invest more resources in checking the accuracy of the information and the maps accompanying the re-creation plans.
- 4.6 It is important to involve all the potential partners in lowland heathland re-creation for a county in the future to avoid disappointment and increase the chances that the resulting plan is widely used.
- 4.7 Although it is recognised that in many cases the location of re-creation sites depends on opportunity rather than on choice, it is important that the re-creation plans

represent a vision of the potential heathland areas in the county. Small scattered re-created heathlands may add figures to a local or national target but they are unlikely to have any conservation value and will not represent a real contribution towards BAP targets. Project officers should pay better consideration to the worthiness of a re-creation project, even if there is funding available, if the location is not in the published, agreed plan for the area.

- 4.8 To avoid that funds are unavailable for re-creation in a 'non-priority area', the project officers or partnership when they exists, should ensure not only the prime quality sites are included in the plan.
- 4.9 The production of re-creation plans for the following ten counties should be considered a priority, bearing in mind that the deadline set in the original Biodiversity Action Plan for Lowland heathland (year 2000) has not been met.
- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Devon | 6. West Gwynedd |
| 2. Suffolk (except Breckland) | 7. Somerset |
| 3. Norfolk (except Breckland) | 8. Shropshire |
| 4. Pembrokeshire | 9. Cumbria |
| 5. West Glamorgan | 10. Merseyside |
- 4.10 Special care should be paid to the agreed definitions of heathland re-creation and restoration, as indicated in Annex 2. Some of the existing plans may have include both objectives under the same name.

5. Acknowledgements

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Annex 1. Questionnaire

Contact details (for reference only)

Name

Post Organisation

Address.....

1. Please indicate the nature of your involvement in heathland re-creation initiatives (circle relevant letter):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a) English Nature local team member | e) FE Officer |
| b) County Project Officer | f) RSPB Conservation Officer |
| c) THH Project Officer | g) LBAP Representative |
| d) FRCA Stewardship Officer | h) Other (specify) |

2. Does your organisation's local office/team know the published lowland heathland re-creation plan for your county? (circle relevant letter)

- a) Yes b) No

(If you responded NO to this question you can ignore the rest of the questionnaire. Please indicate the name of the person in your organisation you think should have passed this information in to you. Please send the questionnaire back anyway, so we can find the gaps in the distribution channels).

Person to contact in the future with information on re-creation plans:.....

3. To what degree have you made use of the relevant re-creation plan during the course of your involvement with heathland re-creation initiatives? (circle relevant letter)

- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| a) Always | c) Rarely |
| b) Usually | d) Never |

4. If you don't always use the plan to guide re-creation initiatives please give reasons.

5. To what degree do you agree with the suggested search priorities set out within the plan? (circle relevant letter)

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| a) Agree with all | c) Agree with none |
| b) Agree with some | |

If you don't agree with all, please give reasons.

6. How accurate were the maps within the plan found to be when undertaking site assessments prior to re-creation work beginning?

7. Are the maps within the plan easy to interpret and work with? If not, how could they be improved?

8. As far as you know, how much heathland has been/is to be re-created in areas of high potential since the plan was produced?

9. As far as you know, how much heathland has been/is to be re-created outside areas of high potential since the plan was produced? What were/are the reasons for progressing low to medium potential areas?

10. Is the current format of the plan appropriate? Please add comments on how you think the format and content of the re-creation plans could be improved in the future.

Annex 2. Definitions

Heathland **management** is defined as operations (such as low-intensity stock grazing, controlled burning, heather cutting, rotovation and the creation of bare ground) which are carried out to maintain the quality of *existing* lowland heathland vegetation and landscapes.

Heathland **restoration** is defined as operations (such as scrub removal, bracken and rhododendron control) which are carried out to improve the quality of existing lowland heathland vegetation and landscapes by recovering heathland vegetation in situations where it has been partly, but not totally, lost to the invasion of other vegetation types such as bracken, scrub and rhododendron. For the purposes of the heathland habitat plan, heathland management and restoration are considered together under the target of maintaining, or improving, all existing lowland heathland vegetation. Combining heathland management and restoration is appropriate because the distinction between management and restoration operations is often a rather fine one.

Heathland **re-creation**, by contrast, refers to situations where the intention is to create new heathland. This implies a change of land use in situations where heathland vegetation is currently absent. Examples include agricultural land, forestry and established deciduous woodland. The classification of forestry plantations is a difficult area because heathland vegetation may be present in rides and other places, but it is suggested here that this should generally be regarded as re-creation because in most situations only a relatively low proportion of heathland vegetation remains in relation to the overall area of the relevant parcel of land.

Annex 3. Acronyms

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
EN	English Nature
FE	Forest Enterprise
LA	Local Authorities (in this case Staffordshire and Worcestershire)
LBAP	Local Biodiversity Action Plan
MOD	Ministry of Defence, Defence Estate Organisation (Conservation)
NLHP	National Lowland Heathland Programme (1993-1998)
NT	The National Trust
RSPB	The Royal Society for the Protection of the Birds
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WT	The Wildlife Trusts