SEDN Steering Group Terms of Reference

March 2015

1.0 Background

The **Shropshire Ecological Data Network** was established in 2008 as an informal partnership of organisations and individuals who use or gather ecological data. SEDN has since grown and continues to evolve, but the broad principles as outlined below have changed little since inception. It is a not-for-profit partnership, aiming to bring into the public realm a high standard of biodiversity data, validated by local experts. Key to its operation is the assumption that recording groups own and manage their own data. SEDN provides support, both in-kind and financial, to enable them to do so, whilst disseminating the data in a form which can be used by all, at a local, regional and national level.

SEDN's activities cover the old Vice County of Shropshire (VC40), approximating to the current administrative boundaries of Shropshire Council, and Telford & Wrekin Council. It provides a means of securing funding to support the vice-county wide collation and management of ecological data for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. SEDN provides biodiversity data to standards compatible with those set by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and uploads these data to the NBN at full resolution and with all available detail.

2.0 Vision

- SEDN will manage and make available sufficiently comprehensive data to enable well balanced decisions to be made on issues that impact the biodiversity of Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

- To facilitate the gathering of ecological data, making these available as quickly, easily, and cheaply as possible, and to as wide an audience as possible.

- SEDN provides a means to ensure that the best possible use is made of wildlife records and that they directly contribute to the protection of wildlife.

3.0 Objectives

- To provide the evidence upon which the biodiversity assets of Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin can be most appropriately managed.

- To supply species data to the public domain, for anyone who wishes to use it for non-commercial purposes.

- To provide an ecological data service for commercial customers.

- To ensure decisions made by public bodies are informed by high quality data to enable them to fulfil their statutory Biodiversity Duty.
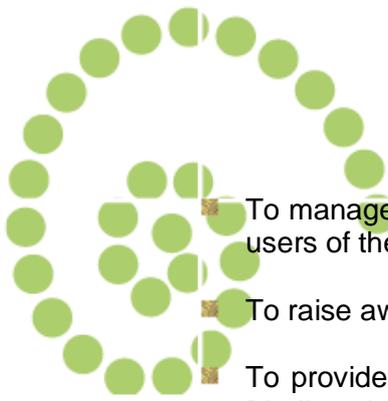
To manage SEDN in an open and transparent manner for the benefit of partners and users of the data.

To raise awareness and promote the value of good quality ecological data.

To provide biodiversity data to standards compatible with those set by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and to upload this data to the NBN.

4.0   Wider membership of SEDN

The purpose of SEDN is to collect and collate the ecological data collected by any organisation or individual who is recording, to an acceptably high standard, and to make that data available to those who can make use of it for the benefit of wildlife conservation.
This can include:-

- Natural History Groups

- Expert naturalists

- Universities and other teaching institutions

- Consultancies

- Governmental and non-governmental bodies that are involved in land management or nature conservation

- Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership (via SBP steering group members)

- Local Nature Partnership (via secretariat)

- Shropshire Wildlife Trust

SEDN may choose to run an annual forum or other promotion event at the discretion of the steering group.

5.0   Steering Group, Data Providers, and Data Co-ordinator. Structures, roles and responsibilities

SEDN is a partnership of organisations and individuals, with an interest in the gathering and use of ecological data, working together towards the vision. It is intended that SEDN be given adequate structure without being burdened by formality. The Group will endeavour to operate by communication and consensus, reflecting its main role of co-ordination and involvement. SEDN is guided by a Steering Group as detailed below.

5.1   Steering Group

The Steering Group will meet four times a year, or as agreed by the group members. A Chair and Vice-Chair will be nominated annually and will ordinarily serve a maximum of two consecutive years.
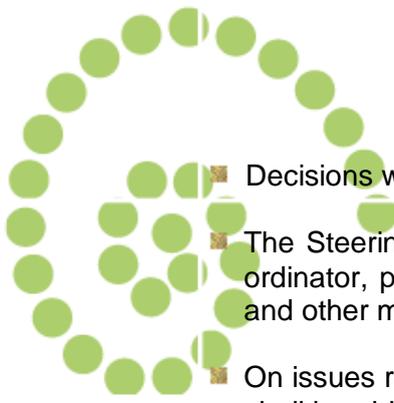
Decisions will be reached by majority vote.

The Steering Group will be composed of representatives of key funders, SEDN co-ordinator, primary data providers (to a maximum of two), the Field Studies Council, and other members co-opted for their expert knowledge.

On issues relating to the spending of funds and agreeing of funding bids the following shall be able to vote: key funders (one vote each) and the Field Studies Council (one vote).

On wider SEDN issues the following shall be able to vote: key funders (one vote each), primary data providers (to a maximum of two with one vote each), the Field Studies Council (one vote), and the Data co-ordinator.

The Steering Group will review its membership every two years, and may co-opt new members to the Steering Group or Data Providers (Tsars) Group.

Administrative support will be provided by the financially responsible organisation(s) with the support of the data co-ordinator. Agendas and supporting documents will be circulated at least two weeks before meetings.

All Steering Group members or Data Providers can request an item for consideration to go onto the agenda of either Group's agendas. Individuals wishing to include items on the agenda should give adequate notice to the Chair or responsible Officer.

The Data Co-ordinator and one other member of the Steering Group will attend the Data Providers (Tsars) Group meetings to answer questions and enable two-way feedback.

Organisations may send alternative or additional representatives to meetings, with the agreement of the Chair.

The SEDN Steering Group will review its own performance annually to ensure it is operating to maximum effectiveness and recommend any changes needed in its Terms of Reference or membership.

5.1.2 The purpose of the Steering Group

Oversee and direct the development of SEDN and the services it provides.

Set priorities, identify gaps in data collation and communicate these to partners.

Direct the work of the Data-co-ordinator

Guide the process and format of data provided by Shropshire Wildlife Trust to outside organisations on behalf of SEDN

Advise the organisation(s) with financial accountability for grant funding for SEDN on how funds should be allocated.

Provide support and advice for data recorders and recording groups in Shropshire.

- Report progress and issues to the Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership and Local Nature Partnership.

5.1.3 Responsibility of Steering Group members

- Attend Steering Group meetings. If no longer able to attend meetings on a regular basis, to step down or to seek another representative.

- Contribute to the development and implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SEDN strategies, objectives and priorities.

- Report back to their organisation regarding SEDN objectives and implement action to help achieve these objectives

- Promote and champion the work of SEDN and, when necessary, represent SEDN and its objectives at public events.

- Operate in an open, accessible, responsive and accountable manner and represent the interests of their sector at Steering Group meetings.

- Conduct themselves in a manner that promotes a culture of mutual respect.

5.4 Data Providers

The SEDN Steering Group will annually provide small amounts of grant funding to individuals who can provide a specific service for SEDN. These individuals are known as the Data Providers (or Tsars).
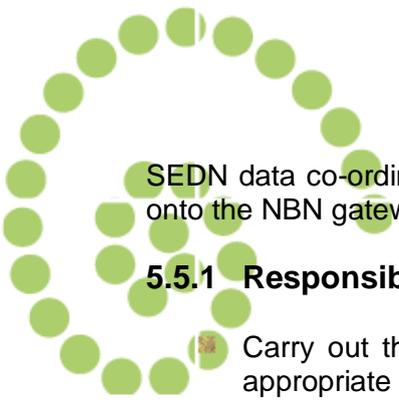
5.4.1 Responsibility of the Data Providers Group

To provide validated data to SEDN and to provide advice to SEDN on specialist species issues.

The Data Providers Group shall comprise those who feed in ecological data to SEDN and will:

- Meet up to 4 times a year.

- Nominate a Data Provider to take minutes of each meeting to be provided to the Steering Group and the Data Co-ordinator, unless other administration support is available.

- Provide high quality, validated data.

- Provide occasional specialist advice to the funders.

- Provide and update UK BAP species lists and Local Priority Species (axiobiota).

- Nominate two Data Providers annually to attend the Steering Group meetings.

5.5 Data Co-ordinator

SEDN data co-ordinator will facilitate the delivery and uploading of the Data Providers data onto the NBN gateway in the appropriate format.

5.5.1 Responsibility of the Data Co-ordinator:

- Carry out the uploading of the Data Providers data onto the NBN gateway in the appropriate format (at least twice a year).

- Attend the SEDN Steering Group and Data Providers Group meetings.

- Organise meetings of the Data Providers Group up to 4 times per year and co-ordinate the agenda for the group.

- To provide Steering Group minutes to the Data Providers Group and vice-versa.

- Liaise with the Data Providers regarding, training needs, software and hardware issues and progress.

- Work under the guidance of the Steering Group.

- Work to develop an independent website for the SEDN under the guidance of the Steering Group.

- Co-ordinate the bidding process ensuring that the current Data Providers, Recording Groups, County Recorders, and Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership are included in the invitation to bid, that the standard bid format is used and that clear timescales and processes are established in line with the requirements of the Key Funders and the Steering Group.

- Advise the Steering Group on the bidding process.

- Advise the Steering Group when new data is available.

- Provide the data in any other required formats agreed by the Steering Group.

5.6 Front End Body

The purpose of the Front End Body is to provide a public facing presence for the SEDN in line with the requirements and data standards set out by the Steering Group and guided by the Data Providers and Data Co-ordinator.

5.6.1 Responsibility of the Front End Body

- Respond in a timely fashion to data requests from ecological consultants.

- Provide a feedback form to ecological consultants that have requested data requests once a year by March 31st and provide feedback to the Steering Group at least annually on issues relating to quality, cost and delivery of the public service.

- Provide a breakdown of costs and income to the Steering Group annually.

- Provide examples of data output to the Steering Group and work to improve data quality and provision
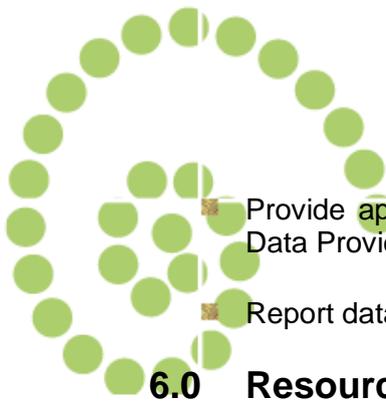
Provide appropriate caveats with data outputs as agreed with the Steering Group, Data Providers and Data Co-ordinator

Report data errors and issues back to SEDN.

6.0 Resources

SEDN currently relies on in kind contributions by partners and grant funding from a range of sources. The primary financial drivers for gathering biodiversity data are based around statutory requirements by public bodies to have regard for biodiversity; protected species legislation; and a requirement to monitor the impacts of various land based schemes and projects. Therefore local authorities and statutory agencies have typically been the primary sources of funding for SEDN. Occasionally SEDN can offer analysis and interpretation of the database for large ecological projects and a charge is made for the time and expertise of the Tsars involved. Various other small sources of funding have been secured at times from organisations such as Defra, Opal and RSPB.

Full details of funding and expenditure will be attached to the minutes of the SEDN steering group and circulated to partners, recording groups and the SBP, or will be made available on request.

Much of the resources of SEDN lie with its partners and the in-kind support they donate;

- All voluntary recording groups are in effect providing substantial in-kind funding via the records obtained by their volunteers.

- Other organisations also gather species data and usually provide this free of charge. In particular Shropshire Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Natural England and both Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council.

- The Fields Studies Council has provided a significant proportion of the time of Pete Boardman to the collection and management of data via his Invertebrate Challenge project.

- Shropshire Council has a full time Biodiversity Records Officer who works primarily on habitat mapping from aerial photos and collating habitat survey data. The outputs of this post have largely been provided as an in-kind contribution.

- Shropshire Council also provides staff time into the running of SEDN, including financial management, negotiation with partners, potential funders and users of the data and attendance of the regional LRC forum.

7.0 Operation

The SEDN Steering Group will annually provide small amounts of grant funding to individuals who can provide a specific service for SEDN. These individuals are known as the Data Providers (Tsars) and can work independently or on behalf of another organisation - typically a society or group with a species interest. What the individual does with the funds is up to them. SEDN only require the specific service is carried out. Some Data Providers use the money to cover their personal time involved. Others donate the funds to the species group in question and others split the funding.
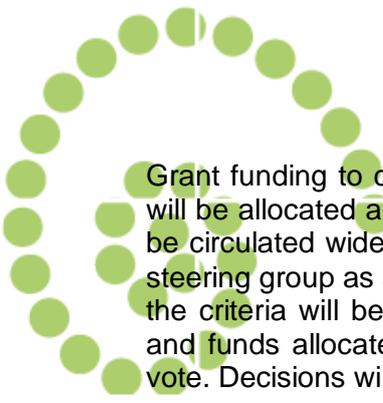
Grant funding to carry out many of SEDN's operations (administrational and data collation) will be allocated annually. A brief outlining SEDNs requirements and an application form will be circulated widely (to previous Tsars, Recording Groups, county recorders and the SBAP steering group as a minimum) before the start of the new financial year. Anyone able to meet the criteria will be eligible to apply. Resulting bids will be discussed by the steering group and funds allocated. Where differences of opinion occur, decisions will follow the majority vote. Decisions will be based on the following factors:

- Level of expertise

- Amount, quality and value* of data being provided

- Standard of validation proposed

- Addressing SEDN priorities

- Value for money*

*'Value' of the data is based on the needs of the funders and the likely applicability of the data to land management decisions (including age of the records).

Members of the Steering Group will be required to declare any conflict of interest during the bidding and allocation process and will not participate in discussions or voting. The organisation(s) administering grant funding will report the requirements of any Memoranda of Agreement or contracts to the Steering Group before these are agreed and keep the Steering Group informed of progress with outputs.

SEDN advises and supports the Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership and Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Local Nature Partnership on matters concerning ecological data.

SEDN is unincorporated and is not a legal entity. As such, SEDN cannot hold or expend funds itself. The organisation standing as the financially accountable body with respect to most grant funding received by SEDN is currently Shropshire Council.

SWT is currently the 'Front End Body' and receives a copy of the database each year to provide an enquiry service for those outside SEDN, particularly data requests by consultants. A charge is made to cover administration, report production and other duties as set out in the above paragraph on duties of the Front End Body. The charge is per business enquiry, but data is free to individuals or volunteer organisations for non-commercial study

All SEDN data is also made freely available to everyone via the NBN Gateway and to participating organisations as an Excel table.