

Local Nature Partnerships: Delivering for nature

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together 36 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management, and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic and marine environment and biodiversity. Taken together our members have the support of over 8 million people in the UK and manage over 690,000 hectares of land.

This document is supported by the following 12 organisations:

- Bat Conservation Trust
- Butterfly Conservation
- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- Friends of the Earth England
- The Grasslands Trust
- The Mammal Society
- National Trust
- Plantlife
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Woodland Trust

1. Background

The concept of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) was introduced through the Government's Natural Environment White Paper in June 2011. Whilst their establishment is broadly welcomed by Link members, many organisations are concerned that insufficient guidance or supporting systems have been provided through the White Paper, or since publication.

Link believes LNPs could play a vital role in strategic planning for the natural environment at a local level to deliver real benefits for wildlife, people and the local economy. The White Paper relies heavily on new voluntary approaches to deliver its headline commitments, so there is real pressure for LNPs to succeed.

Link firmly believes that the commitments made regarding LNPs in the White Paper must be the start of an ongoing, evolving process. We recognise that too much central direction will stifle local ownership and innovation but it is important to recognise that too little will result in disparate groups with no purpose or shared sense of identity.

As national representatives of organisations acting locally, with many volunteers and representatives based at community level, we can authoritatively say that LNPs want further guidance from Government.

In this short paper, we outline what we believe the role of LNPs should be, and the systems they will require around them, to ensure that they are influential in achieving restoration and

recovery of the natural environment in their area for the benefit of people, wildlife, landscapes and the local economy. We hope this will help Defra to produce further guidance and support for LNPs ahead of the application process next year.

2. The purpose of Local Nature Partnerships

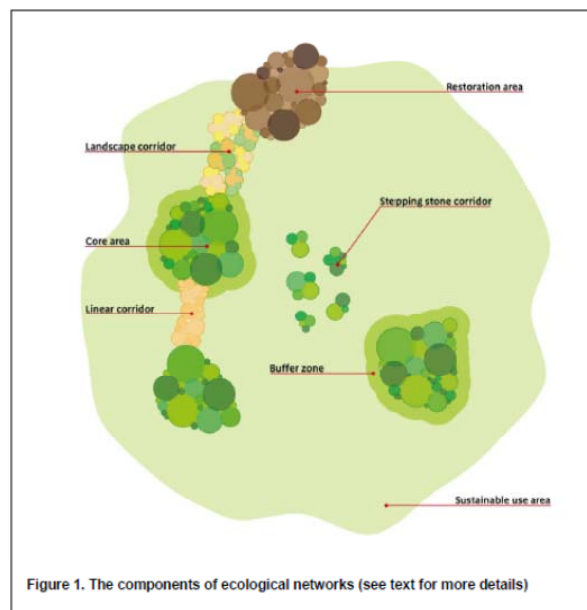
Link believes that the purpose of LNPs should be to:

- Drive positive change in the local natural environment, particularly in the local ecological network, to deliver social and economic gains.
- Contribute to achieving the measurable outcomes of the Natural Environment White Paper and the new England Biodiversity Strategy, *Biodiversity2020*.
- Become local champions within decision-making relating to the natural environment, in particular, through becoming the principle body for facilitating the local authority duty to cooperate, and through working closely with planning authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

3. What should LNPs do?

Link believes that LNPs should:

- Establish a **shared vision** for the protection and restoration of the local ecological network (see fig 1, from *Making Space for Nature*¹), including opportunities to improve species, habitats, landscapes and provision of ecosystem services. This should take the form of a map with supporting text. The biodiversity opportunity mapping that was undertaken to feed into Regional Spatial Strategies could be used as a basis alongside the work done to develop Regional Landscape Character Frameworks.



¹ *Making Space for Nature: A review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network*, Lawton, J.H. et al, 2010.

- Be central to the local plan process. Their vision **must** be incorporated into local plans by local authorities, together with supporting policies agreed between the authorities and the LNP. Where an LNP covers a number of local authorities, they should act in accordance with the duty to cooperate and determine whether joint approaches are required to adequately incorporate the local ecological network into local strategic planning.
- Use the mapped vision to identify opportunities for:
 - **direct delivery** by member organisations that will contribute to the objectives of the network.
 - **community engagement** and outdoor education for local schools.
 - **payment for ecosystem services**, for example, by liaising with local businesses.
 - **targeted planning gain**, through a biodiversity offset scheme or specific local planning policies relating to the local ecological network.
- Agree **annual objectives** arising from the vision and analysis of opportunities and assign actions to individual members. The objectives should recognise advice from Defra's delivery bodies and show how the LNP is contributing to ambitions in the White Paper and *Biodiversity2020*.
- Establish a **baseline** for the state of the natural environment within their local area, using data provided by Defra and its delivery bodies and from Regional Spatial Strategies.
- Facilitate **joint delivery** by member organisations and hold members to account against their commitments. Cross-government support for the LNP process will be required to ensure political backing.
- **Report** on progress annually against objectives, and the local baseline, back to Defra (see below).
- Provide **advice, evidence and support** to help ensure that all other locally-determined plans, strategies and programmes follow the principles of sustainable development² e.g. by working closely with LEPs to help shape their priorities and delivery and encouraging them to focus new development and investment in appropriate locations.

4. Where should LNPs be?

- Government should aim for LNPs to be in place across England. This may require a second round of applications for formal recognition.
- The desire for LNPs to be strategic should be reflected in their geography. Link believes that partnerships ideally should follow natural ecological boundaries rather

² [Securing the future – delivering UK sustainable development strategy](#), Defra, 2005

than administrative ones. Groups covering smaller areas may wish to become sub-groups to larger, more strategic LNPs, and may wish to have slightly different remits.

- LNPs should be expected to co-operate across administrative boundaries.

5. Who should be involved?

- LNPs must contain *at least* two members of Wildlife and Countryside Link (ideally many more), local authorities, Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, English Heritage and ideally representatives of local landowners and managers, LBAP groups, and local businesses. They should aim to represent a good cross-sectoral balance by having at least one representative for the three pillars of sustainable development (economy, society and environment).
- Representatives should be senior enough to make decisions on their organisation's behalf.
- LNPs should actively engage with local communities, and aim to incorporate their views into the vision and other key plans and decisions. They should be open and transparent with key documents like the vision and annual reports easily accessible.
- Each LNP should adopt its own Terms of Reference (ToR) for members to sign up to. Defra should provide a template set of ToR to assist LNPs in this process which can be tweaked to fit local circumstances. The ToR should include:
 - The core functions Defra expects LNPs to undertake (see above for Link recommendations).
 - How partnerships of over 15 members will set themselves up to allow effective decision-making. For example, by having a smaller steering-group that makes recommendations to the wider membership.
 - How the partnership will manage funding.

6. How should they relate to other groups?

- LNPs should provide a focus for the duty to cooperate for local authorities in the areas of land use, natural environment, flooding etc. To achieve this, LNPs should be included as prescribed bodies within the Local Planning Regulations.
- Links between local authorities, Health and Wellbeing Boards, LEPs and LNPs are essential, as the Natural Environment White Paper highlighted.
- Link believes that access to further public funding for either LEPs or LNPs should be dependent on a display of mutual support.
- Cross-representation is important and LEPs and LNPs should consider developing strategic level documents such as joint development plan documents or joint approaches.
- LBAPs should be represented on LNPs.

7. How will they contribute to national ambitions?

In the absence of many other new mechanisms within the Natural Environment White Paper, it is essential that LNPs make a significant contribution toward achieving our national ambitions for the natural environment. Each LNP should contribute to a range of Government objectives and commitments through the Water Framework Directive, the measurable national ambitions set out in the White Paper, health and well-being and *Biodiversity2020* (see annex 1 for biodiversity commitments).

Link believes that:

- LNPs have a key role to play in achieving these national ambitions, as well as other national ambitions for the protection and enhancement of our landscapes, and the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon and resource-efficient economy and must therefore demonstrate how their actions are contributing to them and where and how delivery is being held back.
- Defra's delivery bodies should provide a link between national ambitions and local delivery by establishing a national framework for LNP delivery (perhaps as part of *Biodiversity2020's* delivery plan) and using this to provide information to LNPs about where national priorities could be delivered locally (e.g. particular species or habitats, or particularly vulnerable catchments).
- LNPs should have a clearly defined role within the forthcoming *Biodiversity2020* Delivery Plan (expected in March 2012), linked to delivering national ambitions and embedded within the emerging *Biodiversity2020* governance structures. This is an important component of establishing clarity on the roles and status of LNPs.
- LNPs should be expected to report on their progress toward these ambitions (see below).

8. How will we know if they are succeeding?

- Each member organisation should report to the LNP on their contribution toward delivering the vision annually.
- LNPs should then use this information to produce concise annual reports showing progress, including toward national ambitions. In the first year, these may need to focus more on processes, such as agreeing the vision and establishing the partnerships, but in the longer-term, these should shift their focus to delivery outcomes (comprised of the delivery achieved by individual organisations, and by the partnership as a whole). This process should be supported locally by Defra's delivery bodies, including making their own local data available.
- Reporting should cover areas including, but not exclusively:
 - Habitat loss, gain and condition
 - Population responses of s41 species

- Area of accessible natural green space, community engagement and education activities
 - Ecosystem services
 - Access and the historic environment
 - Local landscape quality and significant impacts on character and tranquillity
- The annual reports should show how links have been made with other relevant local partnerships, linking to Government's desire to see LNPs align available public funding.
 - The annual reports should then be submitted to a team within Defra, who will be able to summarise collective LNP progress toward nationally agreed outcomes. The summary report should also be made publically available on Defra's website, and should feed into wider reporting on the natural environment.

9. Who within Government should be responsible for LNPs?

- A cross-departmental grouping, coordinated by Defra but also involving CLG and the Cabinet Office should be created to support LNPs. Defra should also establish a national team to support LNPs which should include a named contact that LNPs can liaise with directly.
- The role of the team should include **cascading relevant national information** and encouraging LNPs to **highlight blockages** they encounter which can only be resolved through national policy.
- This team should also establish means by which LNPs can share best practice and lessons learnt. This may include the annual ministerial conference promised in the White Paper, but it should also include more frequent means of communication with Ministers and their Departments.

10. What must Government do to support LNPs?

- Defra and its delivery bodies have clear roles to play, and much of this is set out above.
- CLG must reflect the role of LNPs in the final National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Above we have set out a role for LNPs that centres on a shared mapped vision of a local ecological network. This clearly links to the text in paragraphs 167 and 168 of the draft NPPF, and we believe these paragraphs or their equivalents should mention LNPs in the final NPPF.

Annex 1

Key commitments from *Biodiversity2020* (pp12-15)

- *By 2020 we will have put in place measures so that biodiversity is maintained and enhanced, further degradation has been halted and where possible, restoration is underway, helping deliver more resilient and coherent ecological networks, healthy and well-functioning ecosystems, which deliver multiple benefits for wildlife and people, including:*
 - *1A. Better wildlife habitats with 90% of priority habitats in favourable or recovering condition and at least 50% of SSSIs in favourable condition, while maintaining at least 95% in favourable or recovering condition;*
 - *1B. More, bigger and less fragmented areas for wildlife, with no net loss of priority habitat and an increase in the overall extent of priority habitats by at least 200,000 ha;*
 - *1C. By 2020, at least 17% of land and inland water, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, conserved through effective, integrated and joined up approaches to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services including through management of our existing systems of protected areas and the establishment of nature improvement areas;*
 - *1D. Restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems as a contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation.*
- *By 2020, we will see an overall improvement in the status of our wildlife and will have prevented further human-induced extinctions of known threatened species.*
- *By 2020, significantly more people will be engaged in biodiversity issues, aware of its value and taking positive action.*

