

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

**An overview of the
Local Nature Partnership role**

April 2012

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1. Introduction

Local Nature Partnerships are a key [Natural Environment White Paper](#) commitment. One of the particularly clear messages from our consultation for the white paper was that there was a need for local areas to work in a joined up and strategic way to help manage the natural environment to produce multiple benefits for people, the economy and the environment.

This echoed conclusions of the independent [UK National Ecosystem Assessment](#), which emphasised the need for an integrated, landscape-scale approach to managing the natural environment. Government responded by committing to:

“encourage and support Local Nature Partnerships where local areas wish to establish them”

The ambition for LNPs is that they will help their local area to manage the natural environment as a system and to embed its value in local decisions for the benefit of nature, people and the economy. To do this effectively they will need to be self-sustaining strategic partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people with the credibility to work with, and influence, other local strategic decision makers.

We want to help local areas to realise this ambition. You told us that you would like Government to recognise LNPs to help establish their status in their area so we have developed an application process to give successful applicants that credibility. By recognising an LNP, we will be signalling that we see it as a credible partnership that has the potential to work with others effectively and add real value to important decision making in an area, including on local planning matters and strategic plans around local economic growth and the health and wellbeing of local people.

This document sets out some general information about what we envisage from the LNP role, including the attributes an LNP is likely to need to have to be effective, what Government recognition will mean for an LNP and how Government will work with the LNPs that achieve recognition. We have also set out some ideas about some of the opportunities we see for LNPs. In reading this information it is important to remember that, within the framework of the overall LNP role, it is for each LNP to decide what their priorities are and how they will work in a way that best suits the needs and challenges of their local area. We fully expect each LNP to be different.

2. What would an effective LNP look like?

The overall purpose of an LNP is to:

- Drive positive change in the local natural environment, taking a strategic view of the challenges and opportunities involved and identifying ways to manage it as a system for the benefit of nature, people and the economy.
- Contribute to achieving the Government's national environmental objectives locally, including the identification of local ecological networks, alongside addressing local priorities.
- Become local champions influencing decision-making relating to the natural environment and its value to social and economic outcomes, in particular, through working closely with local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

We are keen that LNPs form in the most appropriate way for their area and therefore won't be setting out detailed guidance about how an LNP should work. Instead, we have worked with organisations representing a wide range of interests to identify some key ways of working that are likely to be an important part of being an effective LNP.

To fulfill the above role, an effective LNP is likely to need to:

- Develop a shared strategic vision and set of priorities for the restoration and enhancement of their local natural environment at a landscape scale, focusing on outcomes that integrate economic and social as well as environmental needs.
- Have a broad membership that includes active involvement of economic, health and environmental interests and a range of public, private, NGO and local community organisations, including Local Authorities and those directly involved with land management.
- Have effective and accountable governance and leadership, including the ability to effectively engage and collaborate with people at a senior level in local organisations and involve local communities in the role of the LNP and its vision.
- Be sufficiently influential and knowledgeable to be able to raise awareness of the value of the natural environment and the range of services it provides with local decision makers. To do this effectively LNPs will need to ensure that their work is informed by the best available information and data and that both short and long term pressures and needs of an area are taken into account.
- Have a good overview of the range of activities and partnerships concerned with the sustainable management of the natural environment in their area and work collaboratively to build on what's working well and co-ordinate action to deliver integrated outcomes for priority issues.

3. Boundaries and scale

We envisage about 50 LNPs forming across the country and want them to be large enough to add value at a strategic scale, but small enough to be manageable. We are not being prescriptive about how boundaries are defined as we want each LNP to establish the most appropriate boundary for their area, whether it is ecological, administrative or a mixture of both.

However, wherever boundaries are drawn, there will be a need to work effectively across them. It may be that some partnerships feel that there is value in having an area of overlap between two partnerships. Ideally, overlaps would be minimised, but where partnerships wish to have an area of overlap, we will need to see details in the applications about:

- why an overlap is appropriate
- what agreement has been reached about how the overlap will be managed and
- how any outstanding issues will be resolved.

4. What will being a Government-recognised LNP mean?

All LNPs that apply for and achieve recognition by Government will:

- have recognition that Government sees them as a balanced, strategic and knowledgeable partnership that can add value to important decision making in an area.
- have an important contribution to make to strategic planning matters within their area. Government's intention is to add LNPs to the Duty to Co-operate in the Local Planning Regulations as soon as possible after the first LNPs have been announced. This will mean that bodies bound by the duty will need to have regard to the views of LNPs on strategic planning matters. This will include informing and working collaboratively with Local Planning Authorities, and along with Local Enterprise Partnerships, on cross-boundary strategic issues, as envisaged in the new [National Planning Policy Framework](#):

“165. Planning policies and decisions should be based on up-to-date information about the natural environment and other characteristics of the area including drawing, for example, from River Basin Management Plans. Working with Local Nature Partnerships where appropriate, this should include an assessment of existing and potential components of ecological networks”

“180. Local planning authorities should take account of different geographic areas, including travel-to-work areas. In two tier areas, county and district authorities should cooperate with each other on relevant issues. Local planning authorities should work collaboratively on strategic planning priorities to enable delivery of sustainable development in consultation with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships”

- be part of a group of partnerships with the same credentials who can network with each other to share knowledge and experience.
- have access to Government, with the support of a liaison function within Defra and the opportunity to attend an annual Ministerial event.
- have their details published on the Defra website to help promote their profile with other organisations (national and local) and to help LNPs to network with each other.

5. What sort of relationship will LNPs have with Defra’s delivery bodies?

Defra’s delivery bodies will support LNPs in the following ways:

Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission will support LNPs in their work by offering some level of support to all LNPs that are recognised by Government. Specifically, these delivery bodies will work in a joined up way to help all LNPs that are recognised by Government to:

- Build an evidence-based picture of the local natural environment by sharing information they hold about natural assets and systems with LNPs in an accessible way.
- Understand and contribute to national policy objectives by sharing their strategic priorities for an area with LNPs
- Implement the LNP’s visions by considering an LNP’s priorities and ideas when undertaking strategic planning and making decisions about the targeting of resources.

Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission will target more intensive involvement on areas where environmental opportunities, needs and risks are greatest.

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) will work in a joined up way with other delivery bodies (Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency) to support coastal LNPs recognised by Government by:

- Helping LNPs build an evidence-based picture of their local natural environment by, where appropriate, sharing information about natural assets and systems with them in an accessible way.
- Supporting LNPs in understanding and contributing to national policy objectives by sharing MMO strategic priorities for an area with them.
- Consider LNPs' priorities and ideas when undertaking strategic planning and decision making.

The MMO will target involvement on areas where environmental opportunities, needs and risks are greatest.

6. How might LNPs work in an area?

A key function of an LNP is to take a strategic overview of the local natural environment and look for ways to manage, enhance and promote it that will produce **outcomes that integrate the needs of nature, people and the economy**. There are a wide range of ways in which LNPs might pursue these integrated outcomes.

Government is keen for each LNP to deliver their role in the way that best suits their local needs, taking into account how those needs will change over time in anticipation of things like climate change and local population growth.

Some of the opportunities available to LNPs are set out below along with links to some of the other key initiatives and local partnerships that LNPs may want to work with.

They are included here for information only. It is for each LNP to decide what their priorities are and how they work. Once established, LNPs will want to add value to existing activity and avoid duplication. The list below is not exhaustive and the activities described are potential opportunities, not requirements.

We have grouped this information into three themes, each with a number of ideas about what an LNP could get involved with:

- Sustainable land use and management
- Green economic growth
- Quality of life and local health and wellbeing

These three themes are, of course, interlinked and should not be seen as separate from each other. Integration of these three themes is at the heart of the LNP role.

a. Opportunities for contributing to sustainable land use and management:

- **Identifying and embedding local ecological networks:** As set out in the Natural Environment White Paper, we want to restore nature at a landscape scale to create

a resilient and coherent ecological network at national and local levels across the country. LNPs will be ideally placed to take the lead on this locally, identifying new ecological networks in their area and across their boundary and embedding these networks in their visions. LNPs may also wish to recommend such networks to their Local Planning Authorities. LNPs could work with and support the 12 Government-funded [Nature Improvement Areas](#) and help to establish new NIAs wherever the opportunities or benefits are greatest, driven by the knowledge and vision of local partners. It is, however, for the LPA to decide whether and how to recognise an NIA or other ecological network in their local plans.

- **Informing the delivery of Government’s strategy for wildlife and ecosystem services, ‘[Biodiversity 2020](#)’:** LNPs will have a seat on the national England Biodiversity Stakeholder Group (two members representing the views of the network of LNPs). The Natural England-led delivery group for ‘Biodiversity 2020’ will also be considering how it can best link to local action, including the role of LNPs. LNPs will be able to feed in to the national picture of action for biodiversity through access to a new **improved tool for online reporting of biodiversity data and projects (the refreshed Biodiversity Action Reporting System)**. This online tool will also provide LNPs with an information resource on action in their area.
- **Helping to achieve a better range of outcomes through sustainable land management:** LNPs could help to ensure that opportunities to achieve multiple benefits from the good management of land are made the most of, working alongside other local groups, such as those linked to the Campaign for the Farmed Environment. In doing so they could help to ensure that the value of good land management is recognised and captured. This might include exploring opportunities for ‘payments for ecosystem services’ approaches and the use of existing agri-environment schemes. Natural England will work with LNPs as well as other key stakeholders to inform future agri-environment agreements.
- **Maintaining and enhancing green infrastructure:** LNPs could help local authorities to develop, improve and deliver Green Infrastructure plans. LNPs will be able to use tools and resources produced by the national [Green Infrastructure Partnership](#) and Natural England’s forthcoming ‘Community and the Natural Environment toolkit’ to engage their local communities and decision makers in how to make the most of, and enhance, local green infrastructure.
- **Helping to maintain the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside:** Taking into account, and building on, [National Character Area profiles](#), LNPs could contribute to sustainable management of the landscape through their visioning and work with others.
- **Working with National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty:** LNPs could use existing management plans to inform their vision. They could build on and learn from existing good practice in integrated land management and cross-sectoral partnership working. They could add value by looking for opportunities to work across the boundary of the National Park or AONB in terms of both ecosystems and the services they provide.

- **Working with other local initiatives and plans on flooding and water quality:** LNPs could work closely with [Catchment Partnerships](#) and take [Local Catchment Flood Management Plans](#) into account when developing their visions.
- **Contribute to efforts to protect and improve public access to the countryside, nature and green space:** LNPs could work with [Local Access Forums](#) and other access stakeholders and groups to explore local access priorities and integrate them into the LNP's vision.
- **Helping to promote interest in, and uptake of, [biodiversity offsetting](#):** In the six biodiversity offsetting pilot areas, LNPs, working with local authorities, could: help to design and publicise the strategy for using biodiversity offsetting; encourage interested developers to participate and help them to find potential offset providers; and, could play a role in overseeing and monitoring the pilot in their area.

b. Opportunities for contributing to green economic growth:

The NEWP highlighted the important contribution that the natural environment makes to our economy and the need to embed its value into decisions made by business and others to create economic growth. Government also states its ambition in [Local Growth: Realising Every Places' Potential](#) of achieving “economic growth that is environmentally sustainable and inter-generationally fair”.

LNPs could help to do this at a local level by:

- Working collaboratively with their [Local Enterprise Partnership](#), by providing advice and expertise on the value of the natural environment and exploring how LNPs and LEPs can help deliver each other's aims. LNPs could help LEPs to integrate the value of the services provided by the natural environment in their economic decision making, such as around sustainable tourism, climate change strategies and environmental risk reduction. We are working with BIS on developing some information on LNPs and the value of nature that we plan to put in the LEP Toolkit.
- Engaging local businesses directly on issues such as payments for ecosystem services, biodiversity offsetting and community engagement.
- Engaging with other partnerships such as [RDPE LEADER Groups](#) to offer a strategic view of the natural environment challenges and opportunities in their area and seeking to align funding with LNP priorities.

c. Opportunities for contributing to quality of life and local health and wellbeing:

LNPs have the potential to play an important role in contributing to Government's aim in the Natural Environment White Paper to 'help more people enjoy the benefits of nature by giving them more freedom to connect with it' and that 'Everyone should have fair access to a good-quality natural environment'. In addition to the opportunities LNPs will have to contribute to public access and Green Infrastructure work (as above), there is real potential for LNPs to make a difference to how the natural environment is seen and valued by the health sector.

Government's public health white paper "[Healthy lives; healthy people](#)" set out plans to establish [Health and Wellbeing Boards](#) in late 2012. These boards will be a forum for local commissioners across the NHS, public health and social care, elected representatives and patient representatives to discuss how to work together to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of the people in their area.

By working closely with Health and Wellbeing Boards, LNPs could:

- Raise awareness of the value of public access to the natural environment and green spaces in the prevention and treatment of mental health and obesity problems
- Contribute to shaping the priorities in '[joint health and wellbeing strategies](#)'
- Incorporating the value of the natural environment to people's health and wellbeing in '[joint strategic needs assessments](#)'.
- Contribute to local delivery of [Public Health Outcomes Frameworks](#)

d. Working with other environmental initiatives and partnerships

There is a range of other land-based and environmental initiatives and partnerships already working, or being set up, in local areas. It will be important that LNPs develop a good overview of the range of activity in their area and identify how they can add value in a collaborative way and avoid duplication of effort. Some of the key local initiatives and partnerships LNPs may want to work with are:

- [Nature Improvement Area partnerships](#)
- [Catchment Partnerships](#)
- [Total Environment initiatives](#)
- [Rural and Farming Networks](#)
- [Local Access Forums](#)
- [Biodiversity offsetting pilots](#)
- [Coastal Change Pathfinders](#)
- [Climate Change Partnerships](#)

7. Monitoring and evaluation

It is important that LNPs are able to track, review and evaluate their progress so that they can target their efforts most effectively and communicate the difference they are making in their area to local people in a transparent way. It is up to each LNP to decide how they monitor and evaluate their work in this way. There is a specific application question on monitoring and evaluation to capture your ideas about this.

Nationally, we are exploring how best to evaluate the impact of the network of Government-recognised LNPs. LNPs will be able to feed in to the national picture of action for biodiversity through access to a new improved tool for online reporting of biodiversity data and projects (the refreshed Biodiversity Action Reporting System) as referred to in section 6 above. This is a facility that will be available to LNPs, but will not be mandatory.

Government will hold an annual Ministerial event for Government-recognised LNPs. The event will be an opportunity for LNPs and Government to celebrate achievements, discuss challenges and share learning about what sorts of activities and ways of working are enabling LNPs to be effective.

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<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/local-nature-partnerships/>

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