



LNP Evaluation: Draft Thematic Discussion Paper

Strengthening the LNPs' mandate: developing a vision and role for LNPs

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Note on status of discussion paper

This discussion paper is a draft working document and will be revised.

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LNPs' mandate

The purpose of this discussion paper is to provide some 'food for thought' on a topic stakeholders wished to discuss in more depth on the basis of the findings from the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) Phase II Evaluation to date. The evaluation is being delivered by ICF International (ICF) and our associate, Rick Minter, for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The aim of the evaluation is to examine the implementation and outcomes of LNPs, and support and enable LNPs to work with representatives from other partnerships and organisations to determine the potential to improve coordination between other initiatives.

This paper covers LNPs' mandate.

The paper includes a brief summary of the interim findings of the LNP evaluation, and sets out issues for consideration about defining mandates for individual LNPs and defining mandates for the LNP network. The paper is also informed by the proceedings of a workshop held in June 2014 attended by 10 LNP representatives, and a representative from Defra and Natural England.

Policy context

Local Nature Partnerships aim to strengthen local action for the natural environment and now cover most of England

Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) are partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who aim to help bring about improvements in their local natural environment. Their establishment was announced by the Government in the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP)¹, in order to strengthen local action on natural environment issues. The NEWP stated that LNPs will enable local leadership and may operate across administrative boundaries. They will raise awareness about the services and benefits of a healthy natural environment, and will be encouraged to form strong links with Local Enterprise Partnerships in order to strengthen the green economy.

As well as reflecting the localism agenda, the establishment of LNPs emphasises the importance of local action in connecting people with nature, recognising and strengthening the benefits that ecosystems provide to society, and bringing together the different actors and decision makers who influence on the natural environment and green economy. LNPs have a key role to play in delivering or contributing to many of the initiatives and ideas set out in the NEWP, such as biodiversity offsets, payments for ecosystem services, catchment based approaches, local public health initiatives and landscape-scale conservation projects.

The Government has encouraged local areas to establish LNPs voluntarily, where there is an interest in doing so. The NEWP envisaged that around 50 partnerships might form around England, and announced the provision of one-off funding of £1 million in 2011/12 to help to build their capacity. In addition, it was announced that an annual Ministerial event will be held, at which partnerships can come together to share best practice, discuss implementation issues and celebrate success.

There are now 48 LNPs, covering most of England. Defra hopes to build a close relationship between LNPs across the country, to encourage mutual learning and to help them collectively to deliver on national priorities.

¹ HM Government (2011) *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*. <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

By pursuing local priorities LNPs are expected to contribute to positive change for the natural environment across England

In April 2012, Defra published a paper² further elaborating the role of LNPs. This stated that 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.

In order to fulfil this role, an effective LNP is likely to have:

- A shared strategic vision and set of priorities;
- A broad membership that includes economic, health and environmental interests;
- Effective and accountable governance and leadership.
- Influence and knowledge about the natural environment and its services
- A good overview of the range of activities and partnerships concerned with the sustainable management of the natural environment in its area.

By officially recognising and supporting LNPs, the Government has sought to develop their credibility and influence at the local level, while giving them the flexibility to define and pursue local priorities. It is intended that LNPs will become 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.

While emphasising the importance of local decision making, the Defra paper also suggests how LNPs may contribute to the policy agenda for the natural environment, as set out in the NEWP and other documents. It suggests that LNPs have a role to play in relation to three overall themes and a number of specific initiatives within them:

- **Sustainable land use and management** – identifying and embedding ecological networks, informing the Government's biodiversity strategy, sustainable land management, green infrastructure, maintaining countryside character, working with National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, working with local initiatives on flooding and water management, protecting and improving public access to the countryside, and promoting biodiversity offsetting.
- **Green economic growth** – working with Local Enterprise Partnerships on the natural environment/ economy interface, engaging local businesses in initiatives such as PES and offsets, and engaging with other partnerships such as RDPE LEADER groups on natural environment issues.
- **Quality of life and local health and wellbeing** – through green infrastructure and public access, and by working with Local Health and Well-being Boards.

² Defra (2012) *An overview of the Local Nature Partnership role*.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192580/local-nature-partnerships-overview120402.pdf

Interim findings of the LNP evaluation

LNPs are making good progress establishing partnerships, putting the necessary governance structures in place and identifying priorities. A frequently identified issue constraining the ability of LNPs to influence other organisations is the lack of a mandate for LNPs, perceived or otherwise.

Continued Defra support is considered as crucial to sustain LNPs

LNPs expect that their profile and role in the future will depend on continued support from Defra over the long term. Defra support is considered necessary to ensure that LNPs have the credibility and status required to influence other organisations.

Several LNP participants stated that although LNPs are established and are starting to gain traction locally, without Defra's continued support it is unlikely that they would continue. Defra's support is necessary to give LNPs the credibility necessary to attract senior level appointments to the board, and to be taken seriously by local authorities, LEPs and other organisations. If Defra were to withdraw its support, for example if a change of government resulted in a change in Defra priorities, then the future of LNPs would be highly uncertain.

Wider support from across central government will help LNPs to influence other organisations

During the interviews, a significant number of chairpersons and coordinators highlighted the need for support for LNPs from across government. They stated that continued and increased support is vital to ensure that LNPs have the weight and status necessary to influence other organisations and have positive impacts on the natural environment. The support LEPs receive from central government was frequently cited as an example of what should be provided to LNPs. Several chairpersons and coordinators commented that central government should help to increase networking between LNPs. Doing so would, in their opinion, increase LNPs' mandate by providing a means for LNPs to more clearly articulate what LNPs are for and why they matter.

Guidance would help LNPs to work towards common objectives and define a core LNP 'offer'

LNPs frequently cited a need for clear guidance from central government, pointing to the guidance available to LEPs as an example of what is required. LNPs stated that there was a good amount of central government guidance during the initial LNP establishment stages, but that there was no clear vision or strategy for LNPs to work towards. Clear guidance about LNPs' role and purpose would help them to work together as a coherent network, and help LNPs to demonstrate to other organisations what they are for and why they matter. LNPs suggested that Defra could usefully set out the vision for LNPs, what they are expected to achieve and examples of the governance structures or modes of working that might be expected to contribute towards achieving this vision. The LNPs stated that the lack of a strategic vision undermined the credibility and security of LNPs as it was not clear exactly what LNPs should be doing. Several respondents suggested that clearer guidance from Defra would facilitate better engagement with LEPs as it would demonstrate that LNPs are credible partnerships that have the support and backing of central government.

A few LNP participants stated that Defra could help to strengthen the LNP initiative by working with LNPs to set out a strategy for LNPs that describes their role and objectives. Doing so would, in their opinion, enable LNPs to function as a coherent national initiative with a higher profile than they have now working in isolation.

How central government could help strengthen the credibility of LNPs

LNPs offered examples of how central government could help to strengthen the credibility of LNPs:

- Providing LNPs with a clearer policy strategy that LNPs are an important government priority and LEPs and LAs should cooperate with them.
- Raise awareness at a national level about LNPs and what their role is.
- Designate LNPs as a statutory consultee for LAs and LEPs.
- Ensure LEPs had a duty to cooperate with LNPs and demonstrate how LNP concerns are reflected in LEP plans and strategies.
- Allocate LNPs something specific and concrete to do, that is, give them a specific purpose. For example a formal role in biodiversity offsetting, or sponsoring LIFE bids.
- Obtain support from other government departments such as BIS and CLG.
- National level representation for LNPs, such as national LNP network that could contribute to policy development and engage with other national networks, such as the LEP network.
- Allocate funding for LNPs to maintain core support services, such as a coordinator and an active website.

Increasing the LNPs' credibility would, in the opinion of LNP participants, help LNPs to obtain funding from other sources and have a more significant influence on other organisations.

Defining a mandate for LNPs

What does 'mandate' mean & how does it matter?

It is important to note the different practicalities of defining LNPs' mandate, and that mandate is understood differently. The discussions during the thematic workshop revealed that LNP participants have different understandings of the concept of 'mandate', for example related to delivery, influence and funding, and whether LNPs have a mandate or not. These differences are important to understand. LNPs interpret mandate differently, and have a different understanding of whether LNPs have a mandate or not, and what the mandate means in practice.

Some consider that there is a mandate for LNPs to exist, provided by the Natural Environment White Paper and related Defra publications, but that there is no operational mandate for LNPs to be involved in local decision making and delivery. The absence of any requirement for other organisations to pay heed to LNPs undermines, in the opinion of some LNP participants, the ability of LNPs to effect change. Other LNP participants considered that there is sufficient mandate for LNPs, but it is the responsibility of LNPs to define what it is they are for and what they can offer to other organisations.

Three different levels of LNP mandate were identified:

1. The delivery of natural environment-related initiatives.
2. Local mandate to engage with local partners and achieve legitimacy.
3. National mandate (yet to be fully defined).

LNPs considered that having a clearly defined mandate can:

- Provide a clarity of scope and help to define an LNP's role. It is important to be clear about what the LNP is doing and not doing. Defining individual roles also helps to create synergies with partners, and to provide a 'one voice' approach whereby LNPs are working together to achieve similar aims and outcomes.
- Enable LNPs to more effectively influence partners, for example, LEPs Health and Well-being Boards.
- Help LNPs to develop a specific offer – e.g. a point of contact to direct queries related to the environment or a body that collects available data and ensures that it is quality controlled. This would also contribute towards translating national policy into local action.

- Contribute to specific tasks such as data provision and collection and development of local toolkits. A well-defined role for LNPs provides clarity of purpose, facilitating better cooperation between LNP participants and more strategic coordination of LNP participants' initiatives.
- Help to mitigate the potential tension between LNP delivery and delivery by LNP participants / members. An LNP is best placed for strategic coordination rather than actual delivery, and there is a need to avoid duplication.
- Shift from the negative framing of what LNPs cannot do, to a more positive approach that sets out what LNPs (together and separately) can do. This could help to have LNPs included in planning and strategizing, and get LNPs more involved in local coordination.

How can stronger national mandate help?

There are two sides to LNPs' mandate – local and national. LNPs have a role to influence local delivery by Defra family organisations and other local organisations. At the national-level, LNPs have a role to influence national policy design.

Although there are examples of local and regional cooperation, the interim findings of the evaluation suggest that LNPs' collective impact is limited by a lack of cohesion and cooperation across the network. LNPs have suggested that a more concrete role, and responding to issues with a unified voice, may help to increase the credibility and effectiveness of the network.

Defining a more concrete role for LNPs depends on balancing Defra's expectations with LNPs' capabilities and interests. Defra's objectives for LNPs are described in the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP)³. The NEWP states that LNPs are expected to play a key role in delivering or contributing to many of the initiatives and ideas it sets out, such as biodiversity offsets, payments for ecosystem services, catchment based approaches, local public health initiatives and landscape-scale conservation projects. However defining what specifically LNPs can / should do across the NEWP's initiatives and ideas depends on identifying what collectively LNPs can offer.

It is not clear whether it is appropriate or necessary for government to provide a mandate and / or guidance for LNPs. The absence of funding from central government, and the localism agenda, suggests that LNPs need to work collectively to define what it is they are willing and able to commit to. However, at the same time there may be a role for government to more clearly specify what is expected.

Workshop participants suggested that it would be helpful for LNPs if Defra could confirm LNPs' mandate as set out in the NEWP. Doing so could draw on the progress LNPs have made, and re-confirm the role of LNPs at the local and national level. There is a need for a refreshed message with specifics included to enhance credibility and offer examples to other LNPs and related organisations. Defining the refreshed message may require collaboration between Defra and LNPs.

Leadership and mandate

Workshop participants suggested that the lack of national coordination undermines LNPs' potential. The network needs a strong voice that can interact with upstream policy discussions. This will help to embed LNPs in policy making and help to strengthen LNPs' local mandate and interactions with local delivery agencies. Workshop participants consider that LNPs need a national coordinator for involving LNPs in strategy and policy making at the national level.

A strong national mandate would help to provide a single vision for the natural environment, and open doors with key policy makers at national level. Interacting with national policy makers is key to protecting and enhancing the natural environment, and for providing LNPs with the mandate to work with other (non-environment) organisations.

³ HM Government (2011) *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*. <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

Topic-based mandate

Some LNPs felt that a greater national steer on a topic by topic basis would be useful and would help LNPs to deliver on expectations.

There was a view that the Defra mandate is currently very vague but it was acknowledged that there were pros and cons as a result. However greater recognition and status at a national level is thought to be useful and this may help to open more doors, particularly with the LEPs. It is also important that LNPs are consulted on new policy and initiatives right at the very beginning of the process and not just towards the end.

Local offer

LNPs mandate to influence local decision making is perceived by some LNP participants to be constrained by their lack of influence at national level. However other LNP participants consider that there is sufficient mandate to have local influence, but it is up to LNPs to create the opportunities to do so. Having a local mandate is important as it defines how the national programme will work at the local level and it can also help in fund raising.

Different LNPs will have distinct strengths. LNPs could identify and promote the niche services they provide in their area. The local offer of LNPs includes:

- One voice for the environment: There was general agreement at the workshop that the environment sector is diverse and not always well coordinated. It was suggested that a key role for LNPs could be to provide a strategic coordination function between local organisations working on issues related to the natural environment.
- A conduit for advice: It was agreed that the 'one voice' role of LNPs could be more strongly promoted as other bodies may find it efficient to receive one clear message on the environment. LNPs represent a partnership of bodies and viewpoints, acting as a conduit LNPs could:
 - Moderate diverse views to offer one voice on key issues.
 - Provide efficient communication to partners such as local authorities, LEPs and health bodies, with one rather than multiple messages.
 - Acts as an honest broker. LEPs, developers, public bodies and health bodies, may benefit from advice through the trusted relationship of an honest broker.

LNPs vary in terms of, for example, their membership, the expertise and experience available to them, the funding and resources secured, and the priorities they intend to address. An issue that is consistent across LNPs is the need to define an 'offer' or 'service' that they can provide. LNPs that can articulate what they are for, and what they can offer, are more likely to successfully engage with other organisations and partnerships.

The evidence collected as part of the LNP evaluation suggests that some LNPs are struggling to define exactly what it is they offer to other organisations. LNPs may be struggling to do so due to the difficulties associated with obtaining funding and the (perceived) reliance on funding to provide a focus and well defined remit. It may also be due to the divergent nature of LNPs' membership complicating the identification of the most appropriate niche.

Confidence /Success factors

The following factors were identified as affecting the strength of an LNP's mandate:

- Well defined LNP role: A clear role and strategy and a published document can help provide focus and influence. It can also help to provide credibility and helps others to better understand the LNP's offer. Having a certain profile or a level of awareness is useful and can mean that LNPs are better able to achieve objectives.
- Track record: Having a track record helps to develop trust in the offer – the track record of the different organisations involved in the LNP is also important.

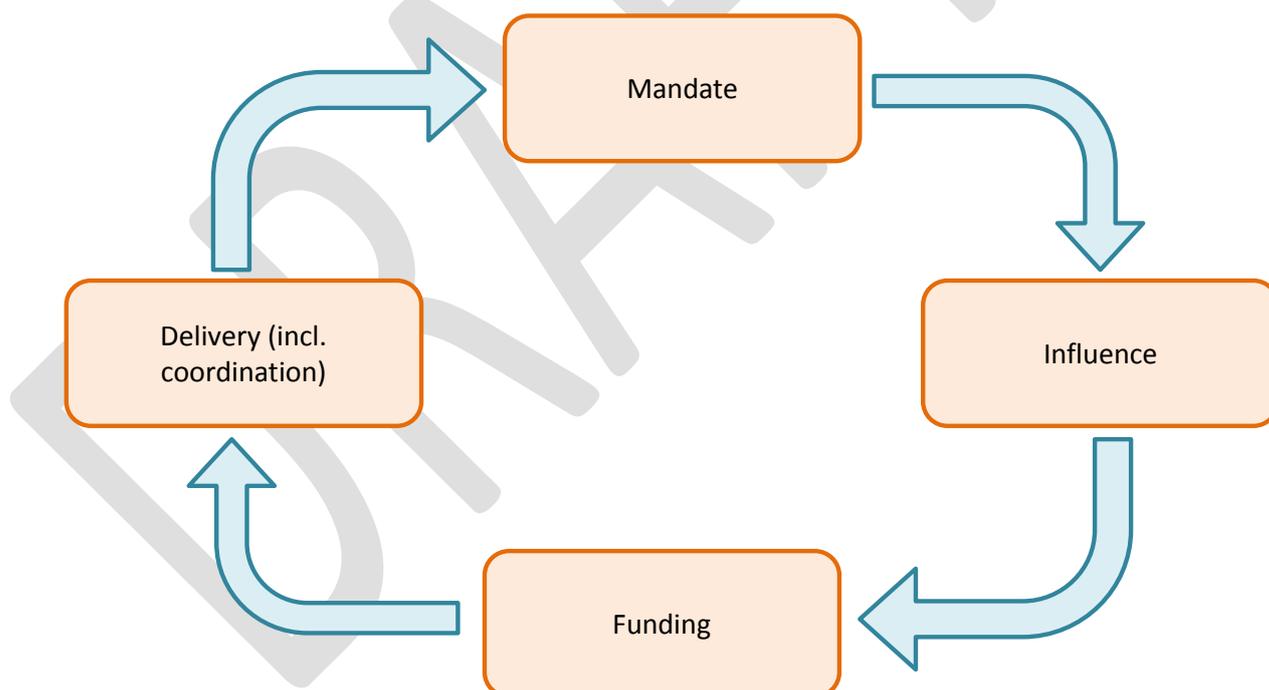
- **LEPs:** Developing a relationship with the LEP is important in building confidence and having a greater impact and reach.
- **High profile chair:** Having a high profile chair that puts in sufficient time can be a big benefit. For example one of the LNP chairs comes from a private sector background and they were able to talk to businesses in their own language as well as undertake a significant amount of business networking, raising profile and awareness.

Next steps

Defining a mandate and achieving influence is difficult and depends on several interconnected factors. It is a vicious circle – without mandate it is difficult to have influence, with no influence it is difficult to obtain funding. With no funding it is impossible to deliver (delivery includes providing a strategic coordination function). Without anything to deliver, the LNP has no mandate (Figure 1.1).

Breaking out of this vicious circle, by focusing efforts on one element of it, will help LNPs to unlock their potential. Workshop participants suggested that concentrating efforts on the ‘influencing’ element could potentially be the most effective approach. They suggested that having LNP national leads, one for each policy area, to engage with national decision-makers could help LNPs achieve the influence necessary. Related to this point was the need for a prospectus of LNP services / offers that could be used in national discussions.

Figure 1.1 Vicious circle suppressing LNPs’ potential and constraining their mandate



Workshop participants suggested that LNPs should prepare a national prospectus setting out what the potential offer of local LNPs is. The prospectus would be informed by Defra’s expectations for LNPs, as defined in the refreshed message from Defra, and would have to emphasise that LNPs capabilities will vary locally. The prospectus could act as a ‘menu’ for an external audience, helping them to understand what LNPs are and what they have to offer.

Currently it is not clear how LNPs can get involved in national-level discussions. Workshop participants suggested that it would be useful to have national LNP leads for each policy area to engage with Defra and other central government departments and national bodies about LNPs and the role they could play. The national leads could represent LNPs at strategic discussions and champion LNPs to embed them at the policy development stage.

This would help to strengthen LNPs' mandate to get involved in local decision making and delivery.

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