



LNP Evaluation: Draft Thematic Discussion Paper

LNPs and LEPs: working together to protect and enhance the natural environment and strengthen the economy

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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 and LEPs: working together to protect and enhance the natural environment and strengthen the economy

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 and LEPs working together to protect and enhance the natural environment, and strengthen the economy.

The consultations completed by ICF during the first stage of the evaluation highlighted that the majority of respondents have found it difficult to engage with LEPs, and difficult to influence their economic plans and strategies. LNP chairpersons and coordinators expressed an interest in finding out about:

- Examples or best practice of other LNPs that had successfully engaged with LEPs and made a difference to LEP economic strategies including:
 - The evidence base that helped to influence economic plans and strategies,
 - The language used.
 - The type of projects and initiatives in which LEPs are most interested.
- Examples of the evidence used to demonstrate the link between the economy and the environment.

This paper includes a brief summary of the expected synergies between LEPs and LNPs. We also present the findings of the research to date, including examples of the main successes and challenges LNPs have encountered when engaging with LEPs. The paper includes common themes raised by LNP members, chairpersons and coordinators, and summarises the proceedings of a workshop held in June 2014. The workshop was attended by XX LNP participants and a representative from Defra.

Policy background

There is an expectation that LNPs and LEPs will work together

The 2011 Natural Environment White Paper¹ highlighted a need for local areas to work in a joined up and strategic way to help manage the natural environment. The ambition for LNPs is that they promote joined-up partnership action and 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. The White Paper states as such:

“We expect them [LEPs and LNPs] to work in a co-operative and constructive fashion to drive forward green growth locally. Together they can help create the conditions needed for thriving local enterprise, innovation and inward investment – all of which can benefit from and contribute to, a better natural environment. We would encourage LEPs and Local Nature Partnerships to work together to forge strong links that capture the value of nature. LEPs and Local Nature Partnerships may arrange reciprocal representation, but local discretion would apply here.”

In addition, the Government, in the same paper, specifically calls on LEPs to use local natural capital sustainably to secure economic growth:

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228842/8082.pdf

“LEPs have a key role in securing a green economy locally where economic activity should use natural capital sustainably; local economic growth should be increased by enhancing natural capital”

In documentation published for the LNP application process, Defra 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, LEPs and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The same report emphasises the expected value that LNPs have that will be of use to LEPs.

“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.”

There is a clear expectation that collaboration between LNPs and other partners such as LEPs will contribute to enhanced outcomes for all. The White Paper acknowledges that economy is critically dependent on the environment, and this relationship needs to be given sufficient recognition in economic planning.

LEPs’ role is clearly defined

The Local Growth White Paper² listed some of the roles for LEPs which included working with Government to set out key investment priorities, including transport infrastructure and supporting or coordinating project delivery:

- Coordinating proposals or bidding directly for the Regional Growth Fund;
- Supporting high growth businesses, for example through involvement in bringing together and supporting consortia to run new growth hubs;
- Making representation on the development of national planning policy and ensuring business is involved in the development and consideration of strategic planning applications;
- Lead changes in how businesses are regulated locally;
- Strategic housing delivery, including pooling and aligning funding streams to support this;
- Working with local employers, Jobcentre Plus and learning providers to help local workless people into jobs;
- Coordinating approaches to leveraging funding from the private sector;
- Exploring opportunities for developing financial and non-financial incentives on renewable energy projects and Green Deal; and
- Becoming involved in delivery of other national priorities such as digital infrastructure.

The Local Growth White Paper does not describe how LEPs should engage with other organisations; it is up to LEPs to determine how best to deliver local growth. However, the importance of partnership with local organisations for the successful delivery of LEP plans is

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-growth-realising-every-places-potential-hc-7961>

emphasised in the Government's Guidance for Local Enterprise Partnerships on Growth Deals³:

"It will be important therefore for Local Enterprise Partnerships to consider their wider delivery capability so that they can effectively implement their strategy for growth. Local Enterprise Partnerships should mobilise local partners and fully exploit the support offered by Government".

In addition, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) guidance⁴ for LEPs references LNPs by name, stating that LEPs should consider engaging with them in the development and delivery of ESIF strategies.

LEPs role is evolving from planning to delivery

LEPs' future is dependent on successful implementation of their strategic economic plans. The plans have been submitted (as of June 2014) and the remaining timeline of activities is as follows:

- April 2014- June 2014: Feedback and revisions to Strategic Economic Plans, and European Structural and investment funds strategies.
- June 2014: Government starts the formal assessment of Local Enterprise Partnership strategic plans with final assessments.
- July 2014: Local Growth Fund offer made to Local Enterprise Partnerships, Growth Deal negotiations completed. Spending of European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 begins, subject to approval of the European Commission.
- April 2015: Local Enterprise Partnerships and Government implement Growth Deals.

Key findings from the research

Most LNPs consider it of high priority to engage with LEPs so early activity has focused on this. Several examples were identified of LNPs informing the development of LEP economic strategies and plans, and of LEPs incorporating objectives related to the natural environment. However, the evaluation suggests that LNPs would like to have a much more significant impact on LEPs. During the interviews, some respondents expressed disappointment about the extent of engagement with LEPs and the difficulty of influencing LEP economic strategies. LNPs linked the difficulty of engaging with LEPs to several issues.

Main successes

Awareness-raising

Approximately 65 per cent of LNPs either agree or strongly agree that LNPs have increased awareness about the natural environment. This is less common with LEPs than other organisations, but at least four mentioned specific examples. LNPs have helped to raise general awareness among LEPs of the environmental assets that exist in local areas, and the potential economic benefits of enhancing and protecting them. Most of these are 'active' awareness raising activities which involves LNPs undertaking specific initiatives to disseminate information about the benefit and value of the natural environment.

Influence

The research findings indicate that engaging with LEPs is a (high) priority action for virtually all LNPs. As such, much initial activity has taken place in trying to engage with LEPs, and for

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224776/13-1056-growth-deals-initial-guidance-for-local-enterprise-partnerships.pdf

⁴ HM Government, 2013. The Development and Delivery of European Structural and Investment Funds Strategies. Supplementary Guidance to Local Enterprise Partnerships. July 2013. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224755/13-1049-development-and-delivery-european-and-investment-fund-strategies-guidance-for-leps.pdf

most, some early examples of results and progress have been made with around 70 per cent of LNPs. Some LNPs have had good levels of engagement with LEPs, reflecting the policy timetable and the need to influence LEPs in the phase of their establishment and strategy development. In such cases, LNP engagement has led to the inclusion of objectives or plans related to the natural environment.

Early examples of cooperation

In addition to providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and information, LNPs also facilitate the delivery of collaborative projects / initiatives between LNP members and between the LNP and other (non-member) organisations. There is one example of this happening with a LEP.

Examples of successful LNP and LEP cooperation

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes	<p>LNP and LEP have undertaken joint workshops through Natural England. Local property / land developers also attended the workshops.</p> <p>The LNP's contribution helped to influence the preparation of the growth programme by emphasising the importance of natural capital to the local area.</p>
Dorset	<p>The LNP and LEP are working towards a Joint Planning Charter that will set out their joint position on issues relevant to the natural environment and local economy, such as biodiversity offsetting.</p>
Tees Valley	<p>The LNP enabled different organisations with different views to contribute to the development of the LEP strategy. The LNP provided suggestions to the LEP about how local environment priorities could be reflected in the LEP's strategy, suggestions that the LEP took on board.</p>
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	<p>The LNP had the status and credibility to engage with the LEP and influence its economic strategy for the 2014 – 2020 period. The LNP's contribution resulted in the inclusion of objectives and plans related to the natural environment.</p>
Birmingham and Black Country	<p>The LNP offered advice on the LEPs sustainable water and conservation plans, resulting in changes to the LEP's economic strategy.</p>
Gloucestershire	<p>The main achievement has been the engagement with the LEP. The LNP provided its inputs into the LEP's EU funding strategy and economic plans. As a result, the LEP incorporated environmental sections in its economic plans.</p>
Hull and East Yorkshire	<p>The LNP engaged with the LEP about the importance of the natural environment, highlighting the potential to improve the quality of specific areas of green infrastructure and enhance the economic potential of the area. The result of the LNPs work with the LEP was the allocation of £1.7m of EU funding over the 2014 – 2020 period.</p>
Wiltshire and Swindon	<p>Following a difficult start, the LNP established a good working relationship with the LEP. The key breakthrough was a meeting between the LNP and a consultant working on the LEP strategy, which provided the opportunity for the LNP to articulate what the LNP could offer the LEP and why it should be listened to. During 6 working groups between the LNP and the LEP, the LNP was able to demonstrate how access to its members' skills and expertise could help the LEP prepare its strategy.</p> <p>There is now a LEP representative on the LNP board, and plans in place for an LNP representative on the LEP board.</p>
Lowland	<p>The LNP structure has helped to facilitate engagement between the LEP</p>

Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

and LNP members, engagement which would have been unlikely to occur in the absence of the LNP. There is a senior LA planner, who is part of the LEP, working with the LNP on the development of its strategy. The LNP has a representative on a management steering group of the LEP, and also a representative on the LEP board.

The collaboration between the LEP and LNP has resulted in the preparation detailed information about potential natural tourism business opportunities.

Main challenges

Lack of understanding leading to lack of credibility

Approximately 86 per cent of LNPs reported that establishing links with LEPs posed significant or very significant challenges. Some LNP participants commented that LEPs appear to have little understanding of how the natural environment can contribute to economic growth and instead view the natural environment as a barrier to growth. LNP participants expressed frustration with the limited appreciation LEPs have for the potential for economic growth offered by enhancing and protecting the natural environment, and were of the opinion that many LEPs see their role in terms of industry and manufacturing only. LNP participants also suggested that LEPs have little incentive to engage with LNPs to improve their comprehension of the potential opportunities offered by the natural environment. LEPs are advised to engage with LNPs, but are not required to demonstrate how the views and opinions of LNPs have been incorporated into LEP economic strategies.

In areas with overlapping LNP/LEP boundaries, respondents stated that LEPs do not typically understand why there is more than one LNP in an area and why two LNPs in the same area might be addressing different priorities related to the natural environment. However several LNPs have found that working together with other LNPs increases their credibility with LEPs and puts the LNPs in a better position when attempting to influence LEP economic strategies.

Chairpersons and coordinators, and some members too, considered that the purpose of LNPs and their role is not adequately defined, and that LNP responsibilities are not well articulated.

Resources

Without the resources necessary to action or implement anything, respondents commented that LNPs are not taken seriously by LEPs and are often viewed as ‘talking shops’ of limited consequence. However the lack of backing for LNPs, and their limited profile, was considered to be more significant than the lack of resources – as demonstrated above. LNPs felt that an increase in resources would be less effective at improving credibility compared to the potential benefits of enhanced backing from central government about what LNPs are for and why they matter. The lack of resources has, in some cases, prevented LNPs commissioning or identifying evidence necessary to justify a particular initiative.

One LNP discussed the difficulty of influencing LEP economic strategies without the resources to commission evidence necessary to link improvements to the natural environment with positive economic outcomes.

Suggestions to address challenges

- Respondents saw a role for central government departments to encourage LEPs to work with LNPs. Suggestions included promoting the role and function of LNPs to LEPs, requiring (rather than encouraging) LEPs to work closely with LNPs, and providing the resources necessary to maintain a full-time dedicated coordinator.
- The majority of chairpersons and coordinators suggested that more leadership from Defra (and other central government departments) would help to increase LNPs’ credibility with LEPs.

- It was suggested that Defra should set out a vision to provide a clear role and purpose for LNPs to work towards.
- Some respondents suggested that a national network of LNPs, similar to the national LEP network⁵, would help LNPs to work together and increase the visibility of LNPs among other organisations.

How LNPs could work with LEPs

A point consistently raised during the thematic workshop was the need for individual LNPs to define what it is that they offer to LEPs. There needs to be a clear rationale for the LEP to engage with the LNP, and funding is only likely to follow if an LNP can provide something to the LEP that will help the LEP meet its own objectives. This 'offer' may be helping to facilitate collaboration with LNP partners, or by providing information and evidence the LEP needs to inform decision making.

LNPs could influence economic plans and strategies by creating 'hooks' for environment and nature conservation and then suggesting ways forward as appropriate. For example, by defining high-level criteria for LEPs relating to environment-economy linkages, LNPs can add value within EU funding applications. There may be scope for LNPs to collaborate with EU Technical Assistance facilities and champion the integration of stakeholders within consortia.

One of the main services that LNPs can offer LEPs is to offer an advisory and educational role. Workshop participants suggested that LNPs are in a good position to provide insights and data relating to emerging environment-economy links and establishing possible areas where the LEP could collaborate with other local interests. LNPs could draw on their membership to:

- Act as a conduit to data related to local environment concerns and the mitigation of environmental risks relevant to local businesses, such as access to water resources or flood risk. Doing so would make environmental dialogue clear and efficient all round, and especially for LEPs, which might otherwise feel reluctant to engage with the wide range of environmental bodies they can be faced with.
- Play an advisory role on biodiversity offsetting, explaining how it works and how to make it effective.
- Advise on the links between policy areas such as tourism and social inclusion, and describe their relationship to environment-economy related issues.
- Highlight possibilities for innovative nature-based solutions to pressing local problems, such as flood management.
- Provide a link to national strategies, particularly on issues of key relevance to the local economy such as the New Environmental Management Scheme (NELMS).

Workshop participants agreed that **evidence** about the links between nature, the economy and enterprise will have the most influence on LEPs (and other organisations). While full cases studies were considered to be useful to show the detail, even small snippets of information which make the environment-economy links more tangible were deemed worthwhile. Evidence that would be most useful for LNPs working with LEPs is likely to have the following characteristics:

- Locally relevant.
- Targeted to the appropriate stage.
- Uses the right level of detail.
- Uses hard and soft evidence, according to circumstance.
- Uses examples and stories to engage audiences.

⁵ The LEP Network is a <http://www.lepnetwork.org.uk/>

- Uses visual material, including maps, for audiences to relate to.

Potential barriers preventing LNPs working with LEPs

The terminology and language used by LNPs and LEPs often differs quite dramatically (even within shared areas of interest). LNPs need to be careful in the language they use to engage with LEPs, and some effort and thought may be required to create a shared language and understanding between both partnerships. During the workshop three main points were made on language:

- Avoid confusing other sectors, especially business interests, with environmental jargon (including 'biodiversity').
- Recognise there will be language and jargon issues to navigate on both sides when having engaging with the business and economic development sectors.
- Dialogue will lead to understanding. Once talking and interacting with business and economic interests, some of the language barriers will lessen and all parties may start to learn from each other as relationships develop.

Many LNPs suggested that it is difficult to overcome ingrained perceptions and 'silo thinking' within LEPs, such as the preference for 'hard engineering' approaches which disadvantages green infrastructure projects, and a common resistance to innovative or unproven approaches. The perceptions and preferences may be overcome through collaborative working between LNPs and LEPs. However the time and resource commitments necessary from both sides, including the time of participant organisations, to establish collaborative working could be significant. This time could be considered as a barrier, or potentially, an investment.

There may be a distinction between the geographical focus of LEPs and LNPs, with the former focusing on urban issues and the latter engaged in many rural projects, and that this may reflect different priorities. Cases where multiple LEPs or LNPs overlap creates further challenges for collaborative working, potentially increasing the workload associated with engaging with LEPs.

Opportunities for LNPs to influence LEPs

A range of opportunities were identified during the thematic workshop:

- LNPs can build a powerful case for environment-economy linkages by providing convincing case studies of success, for example site visits to completed projects.
- LEADER Rural Development action groups represent a clear convergence of the interests of LNPs and LEPs that could be developed.
- Establishing personal contacts within LEPs on specific issues (for example, sector leads in tourism or SMEs) is a proven means to build collaboration over time. The interests of individuals are important, and a change in personnel can quickly create new opportunities when previously there were barriers to engagement.
- Understanding a LEP's priorities – and finding a way to help the LEP to address the challenges – can be a key entry route for LNPs. If the LEP is preoccupied with a particular priority it may be a barrier to engagement, but LNPs may be able to offer to help the LEP with the particular priority.
- LNPs could relate their work more explicitly to activities with a clear economic focus, such as green infrastructure and low carbon investment, as a means to gain the attention of LEPs
- Better integration and communication of existing evidence- for example, through the development of accessible tools- can aid communication of environment-economy linkages.
- As offsetting is a complex process, there is scope for mutual learning and exchange of best practices by LEPs and LNPs.

- Even when LEPs have launched their key strategies and programmes of work, there are still opportunities for LNPs to shape the detailed work and priorities as these programmes get rolled out. The European Structural Investment Funds represent a key opportunity for collaborative working (for example, joint project delivery if the LNP and partner organisations have the capacity).
- Water was highlighted as a key area of shared interest between LNPs and LEPs that could be developed, for example, with respect to Environment Agency integrated catchment management pilots. The pilots may provide the opportunity for LNPs to demonstrate their added value with respect to managing diverse data sets and coordinating environmental activities of LNP participants.

Next steps

Regional-level networks, or potentially a national-level network of LNPs, could provide a powerful shared voice for environment-economy linkages and strengthen the case for LEP working. A prospectus could be drawn up at a national level which promoted the various advice and services on offer from LNPs, for different challenges facing business interests. (This recommendation was also made, on a wider level for the full span of LNPs' work, during the discussion and reflections on LNPs' mandate during another workshop, see the LNP Mandate discussion paper for details).

The regional or national LNP network could disseminate briefings and evidence to government departments and business leaders about ways for business to embrace nature. Engaging with national-level organisations could help to ease the way for LNPs to provide advice locally.

LEPs are not the only local groups related to environment-economy links. There are other potential partners, for example relating to green infrastructure, water resource management and soil management. LEPs often focus on SMEs, but there can also be benefits of direct engagement with big business.

LEP Programme Governance Groups may provide a further opportunity for LNPs to steer the work of LEPs. Joint approaches may help to share experiences among LNPs and make more effective cases for collaboration to LEPs.

Information sources

The LEED Toolkit

Defra (through its agencies Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry Commission and the Marine Management Organisation) has taken steps to encourage LEPs to work more closely with LNPs. In addition, Natural England has published a [Local Environment and Economic Development \(LEED\) Toolkit](#) to help LEPs and local authorities meet their economic growth targets through engagement with the environment.

Local Environment and Economic Development (LEED) Toolkit

The LEED Toolkit has been piloted by the New Anglia LEP and Wild Anglia LNP, and a report detailing their experience is available from Natural England (see 'Useful Contacts' section below).

- The LEED Toolkit has been produced by the Defra network (the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission), working in partnership with several Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Local Authorities (LAs) and Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs).
- The toolkit has been produced to support LEPs because they have responsibility for strategic planning for sustainable economic growth.
- The LEED Toolkit offers an "easy-to-use, technically robust, systematic and proportionate" way of making sense of environmental information in relation to economic planning by supporting LEPs to systematically consider the evidence relating to the local economy/environment relationship in order to reveal opportunities and threats and to consider appropriate responses to

them.

- The toolkit produces accessible, non-technical outputs that assist strategic economic decision making. The toolkit will support Local Enterprise Partnerships to make operational sense of complex environmental information, so that it can support vision development through feeding in to SWOT analysis.
- It supports the examination of: economic planning through examining the socio-economic situation and setting goals; the physical economy through resource use, waste and emissions; relationship with the environment through provisioning, regulating and cultural services; and outputs through examining opportunities and threats, and strategic and tactical solutions.
- Other local organisations such as LAs and LNPs can be involved in working through the toolkit via a consortium approach, thereby bringing a wider mix of perspectives.
- It begins with a one day workshop to identify opportunities, threats and solutions, and can be extended to two further levels to consider these environmental relationships in detail.

Defra Network Offer to LEPs and City Deals

Defra and the Defra Network (Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry Commission and the Marine Management Organisation) have reviewed how they can help to facilitate and support sustainable growth and respond to localism, and have published an 'offer' to LEPs and City Deals, including Enterprise Zones⁶.

Defra Network Offer

The offer sets out how the Defra Network will work with LEPs and City Deals to help them meet their objectives. The Defra Network has committed to

- Provide advice on planning, permit and licence applications, and help business meet the requirements of environmental legislation.
- Promote sustainable growth and increase certainty by working with businesses and communities to manage flood risk and coastal erosion and encourage the sustainable management of water and land.
- Promote the value of Green Infrastructure to business, communities and the environment.
- Build the visitor economy and strengthening supply chains.
- Enable marine industries to grow by providing greater certainty for investors and developers.
- Maximise skills and knowledge for businesses and the jobs market.
- Share its evidence and knowledge to help LEPs and City Deals understand and manage the relationship between the economy and the environment, and bring a long term perspective to growth decisions.

⁶ http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/defra-network-offer_tcm6-35836.pdf