

Local Nature Partnerships – Briefing Note

The purpose of this briefing, provided by North West Environment Link, with thanks to the Voluntary Sector North West briefing service, funded by The Big Lottery Fund, is to raise awareness about the purpose and functions of Local Nature Partnerships.

Introduction

Local Nature Partnerships were one of the key proposals made in the Natural Environment White Paper. Their overall purpose is to bring a diverse range of individuals, businesses and organisations together at a local level to create a vision and a plan of action about how the natural environment can be taken into account in decision making. They will be a crucial mechanism for ensuring that environmental issues are taken seriously and embedded in local decision-making and it is therefore vital that the voluntary sector has a strong presence on them.

Vision and functions

The Government said in the Natural Environment White Paper that Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) will be a key part of a new “institutional framework to support nature restoration”, as part of a necessary “fundamental shift in approaches to conservation and land management”.

The Government expects there to be about 50 LNPs, and they are intended “to mirror Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)”, they will presumably cover similar-sized areas, although they are intended to reflect natural features, systems and landscapes rather than just administrative boundaries. They should also work together where appropriate to deliver landscape-scale action. Government explicitly “encourage(s) LEPs and Local Nature Partnerships to work together to forge strong links that capture the value of nature.”

The Government's vision for LNPs is that they will:

- Demonstrate local leadership on environmental issues and raise awareness of the benefits of a healthy environment
- Develop a shared environmental vision and set priorities for their area
- Contribute to local authority plans that affect the environment
- Contribute to the Green Economy, e.g. by providing relevant information to LEPs
- Bring together a range of local stakeholders
- Co-operate with other partnerships
- Work at a landscape scale to improve the range of benefits and services we get from the environment
- Form at a level that can take a strategic-enough approach to deliver integrated outcomes with a wide range of benefits.

They suggest that this could be done by taking on some or all of the following roles:

- Support delivery of Nature Improvement Areas
- Embed natural value into local decision-making
- Provide integrated advice to local authorities on the natural environment
- Influence decisions about organisations' resource allocation so that they can be aligned with the locally-agreed vision and priorities
- Support biodiversity offset pilots
- Champion ideas of natural value in the area and engage communities
- Provide local leadership on environmental issues
- Monitor and report on progress of environmental outcomes
- Plan and deliver integrated environmental action
- Make links between the economy and the natural environment
- Generate local participation in debates about landscape scale change
- Contribute to relevant reporting mechanisms such as the Biodiversity Action Reporting System.

Potential membership

The Government suggests that memberships should include "many of the following":

- Local authorities (county and district)
- Areas of outstanding natural beauty
- Parish councils
- Community forums
- National parks

- Arms length bodies (Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry Commission, Marine Management Organisation, English Heritage, British Waterways etc)
- Civil society organisations and environmental charities (e.g. wildlife trusts, RSPB, National Trust, Butterfly Conservation etc)
- Existing partners (e.g. coastal partnerships, local biodiversity action plan partnerships, local access forums, LEADER local action groups, rural and farming networks, green infrastructure partnerships)
- Land owners
- Local businesses
- Local enterprise partnerships
- Health and wellbeing reps
- Education/learning organisations
- Community organisers
- Local environmental record centres
- Local universities.

Funding and formal recognition

Government will provide a one-off £1million to help set up LNPs in 2011/12. If 50 LNPs are expected, this equates to an average of £20,000 per LNP, but many are likely to apply for more than this. The first deadline for applications to this capacity-building fund was 30 July 2011, with a second deadline on 30 October. The fund is intended simply as a transition fund to do the groundwork of establishing new partnerships or developing existing ones to meet the broad criteria for LNPs. Partnerships will be expected to be self-funding and meet their own day-to-day costs.

- In late 2011 – early 2012, Government will invite expressions of interest from local partnerships who wish to be recognised as LNPs. A partnership would not have had to apply to the LNP fund in order to request formal recognition, and Government acknowledges that not every partnership who applied for the fund will be able to establish an LNP. There will however be further opportunities to apply for recognition if potential partnerships miss the first deadline.

Nature Improvement Areas

A competition has been launched, primarily by LNPs, to bid for part of a £7.5million pot to develop 12 initial Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs). NIAs were also outlined in the Natural Environment White Paper and are in response to the recommendations set out in *Making Space for Nature* to enhance and reconnect nature on a significant scale. They will be:

"large, discrete areas that will deliver a step change in nature conservation, where a local partnership has a shared vision for their natural environment. The partnership will plan and deliver significant improvements for wildlife and people through the sustainable use of natural resources, restoring and creating wildlife habitats, connecting local sites and joining up local action."

- Learning from these pilots will then be used to help extend this landscape-scale approach to restoration and conservation. The deadline for expressions of interest – the first stage in the application process – was 30 September 2011.

Further information

More information about Local Nature Partnerships can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/local-nature-partnerships.

Full details of the Nature Improvement Area programme can be found at www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/funding/nia/default.aspx, with a broader and less technical overview at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/nia.

One East Midlands

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