

Summary of 2nd Annual Local Nature Partnership Event on 12 March 2014

Session 1 – where are we now?

Keynote

Alex Pratt OBE, Chair of the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership. Alex spoke about the diversity among Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in terms of composition, leadership and objectives, about how the LNP/LEP relationship is working in his area and shared his thoughts on the ingredients for success.

Soapbox

This involved a series of quick fire LNP sessions designed to showcase what LNPs are currently engaged in, their successes as well as the inevitable challenges and the opportunities LNPs offer if the barriers can be overcome.

See Annex A for a quick summary of the main points. If anyone would like the full speaking notes – please mail LNPs@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

Ministerial Address

The Minister talked about his respect and appreciation for the work of LNPs and set out three key priority areas for Defra where he thought LNPs might make a real difference: taking account of Biodiversity 2020 outcomes in their strategic plans (including identifying local NIAs); innovative thinking on the value of the natural environment and working across sectors to demonstrate the true value of the natural environment to local decision makers.

He emphasised the value that an LNP could bring to an area. They were designed to align existing activity and attract influential decision makers from the business, health and landowning sectors. He said that he recognised the challenges LNPs faced and was impressed with what was being achieved in the face of stern tests.

He thought that having an excellent understanding of local priorities was critical to success as an LNP and was what LNPs can uniquely offer. He reinforced this when talking about Biodiversity 2020 when he encouraged LNPs to have a clear picture of the most valuable areas for biodiversity on their patch, and sites where habitat creation and restoration could be carried out.

For his part, the minister committed the ministerial team to seeking to champion LNPs, to go out and visit LNPs to see and discuss achievements at first hand, and to make sure that LNPs are aware of national priorities and have sufficient access to the department, particularly through the pilot account manager scheme.

The Minister stayed for a short question and answer session. Alex Pratt remained available to add his perspective if required.

- The Minister was asked about support from other Government Departments. The Minister committed to seeking a meeting with Department for Business Innovation and Skills Minister Michael Fallon but was keen to meet a few more LNPs first. He explained that more LNP visits were planned and that he would be looking for locally based examples to help make the economic case for protecting or improving the natural environment and therefore why LEPs should engage with LNPs. (The Defra LNP team will work with LNPs to produce this).
- In response to a question about where he saw LNPs in a matrix of delivery or strategy, nature conservation or sustainable development the Minister expressed his belief in localism and while he tended to come from more of a nature conservation angle both improving both the environment and the economy were priorities for Defra. Alex Pratt added that it was important to think about the relationship between strategy and delivery. What is strategy if it's not getting more delivery – an LEPs role is not to deliver but to ensure more delivery happens.

- LNPs emphasised how critical the next 2 months were in terms of ESIF funding (for instance writing LNPs into the Partnership Agreement) to which the Minister stated that he understood the urgency of meeting with BIS. He also added that he was taken with Chris Woodley-Stewart's concept of environmental investment strategies outlined in his soapbox presentation and offered a further conversation with Chris.
- In response to a question about the timing of Defra making a decision on biodiversity offsetting the Minister explained that the Department was considering the responses to the consultation and would need to evaluate the pilots which had not yet finished.
- Another LNP made the point that the work of the Natural Capital Committee was not being promulgated to LEPs, which made it more difficult for LNPs to engage with them. The Minister responded that he would take it as sound advice.

Evaluation Results

Matt Rayment gave a Powerpoint presentation on the evaluation, its objectives, progress made to date and emerging findings. His talk was structured around the themes of the day – Where are we now? Where do we want to get to? And how do we get there?

Following the presentation there was a short Q&A session.

- The point was made that 'we' as a community are good at getting maps and shiny documents printed but are we recording all the habitats created/restored/enhanced/managed and does the evaluation say that we are making a difference on the ground. Chris De Grouchy made it clear that we are keen to make sure we implement the goals within Biodiversity 2020 and that we and NE are keen to capture this information. Sue Goodfellow added (from a Devon perspective) that resources were tight and they wouldn't want to spend too much on monitoring although it was clear this would sometimes be required. Matt Rayment felt that it was very early and it wouldn't have been right to attribute an activity of an LNP to a particular outcome. Jim Smyllie added that NE is relatively confident about its information on priority habitats and that there are robust national groups such as the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group taking forward Biodiversity 2020 targets, the Major Landowners Group and the protected landscapes network although he acknowledged that the information hadn't yet been broken down to a local level which would be helpful to LNPs.
- It was emphasised how critical the next year is to LNPs and particularly those heavily reliant upon voluntary staff that are struggling to get traction. Chris De Grouchy acknowledged this point and made it clear that the Minister understood this too. While Defra can't make any promises we are looking at other ways we can demonstrate support as the Minister had promised. It was suggested that we should be making more of technology and that we should have a UK biodiversity observatory, similar to the UK soils observatory, as a portal where information could be deposited and removed. The UK soils observatory was supported by the National Environment Research Council and other research communities such as CEH and BGS – could we get them involved? Chris De Grouchy replied that he was keen on portals but they are not always that easy to set up. It was however certainly something for everyone to reflect on.
- Finally, the importance of knowledge sharing between LNPs was made, for example how to get traction locally, which illustrated the value of the day.

Session 2 – where do we want to get to?

Interactive brainstorming

Interactive brainstorming sessions in order to generate ideas. Some key themes to come out of this session were:

How do we grow the economy and improve the environment?

Opportunities: Build concept of sustainable business and economy. Build case studies with business. Work at links to BIS. Promote benefits of green infrastructure and the links between a green environment and productivity. Exploit current interests e.g. flood management.

Challenges: Talking the right language for business. The SME sector is a big challenge. Business less interested in a strategic role. Joining up planning and the economy.

Bigger, better, more joined up. How do we bring about landscape-scale delivery for biodiversity?

Opportunities: LNPs to provide a co-created landscape vision. Ensuring synergies (without duplication) with catchment partnerships. A surge of public interest in pollination services. Pride in place. Geographical boundaries offer opportunities and challenges.

Challenges: The need for standard tools for valuing natural capital that are easy to use. Delivering on the ground in the NELMS era with fewer resources. Need a better understanding of NELMS. Doing people engagement first to give ownership. Stakeholder buy-in. Access to data on location and condition of key habitats and species.

How can we reconnect people with nature?

Opportunities: Local health – natural areas to engage. Promotion of green infrastructure. Neighbourhood planning. Connect to schools. Use of MENE data. Flood summits. IT – mobile apps and social media. Corporate Social Responsibility.

Challenges: Duplication and competition between different groups. Language – make it relevant to people. Acronyms. Short termism. Not enough focus on areas where people live. Lack of knowledge about benefits.

How do we resource and sustain LNPs in the future?

Opportunities: LNPs need to produce high quality outcomes to get corporate support. LNPs can offer a service they can charge for. Funding from health board/businesses where they can see the benefit. Make LNPs relevant to wider interests.

Challenges: Make it clear what LNPs are delivering for local people. Local authority budget cuts. An over-emphasis on LEPs. Unclear what 'gap' Defra wants LNPs to fill. Stronger commitment from Government.

We will analyse these more thoroughly but in the meantime if you would like a copy of the notes from the session, please see Google+ forum or request them from LPNs@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

Session 3 – how do we get there?

Roundtable discussions

Chris de Grouchy gave a short summary of the main points that had come out of the Chairs meeting on 26 November 2013 to set the context for these discussions. He also explained that Robin Mortimer, the Director who attended the Chairs meeting, had left Defra for the Port of London Authority and hoped that his successor, Shirley Trundle, would take a similar interest in LNPs.

The chairs meeting resulted in a long list of actions primarily for Defra. These included most notably: Defra to seek to increase level of Ministerial engagement on LNPs and more endorsements of LNPs through visits and speeches; Defra to look for further opportunities to raise the profile of LNPs, stressing to other Government Departments (OGDs) and LEPs that LNPs exist, are important and had expertise that they really needed; Defra to follow up the idea of an 'account manager' for each LNP who could look for opportunities and to promote their LNP in the course of their own work; Defra to improve communication with LNPs and facilitate best practice sharing amongst the LNP community including through Google+ and investigate other social media routes as appropriate.

Chris reported positive progress on the following:

A series of visits to LNPs by Lord de Mauley lined up plus Chris had attended the Devon LNP Conference only last Friday; The Minister's evident involvement and his offer to approach other Government Departments starting with BIS; Account Managers approach well underway (with >20 LNPs matched with a range of Defra staff and with introductory meetings underway); LNP Google+ Forum up and running (with 31 members representing 20 LNPs so far); This event today, designed with input from a sub-group of LNP Chairs, to be a way of sharing best practice and growing the combined power of the LNP community.

Roundtable discussions would also pick up on how to take forward some of the ideas from the earlier brainstorm session.

There was quite a bit of discussion about what the unique role of LNPs is as this is tending to be more of a sustainable development one rather than just a nature conservation role. Many LNPs asked for a clearer steer from Defra as to the 'gap' they should be filling.

There was also discussion about whether LNPs were purely strategic or whether they had a delivery role. The original ambition was for LNPs to be strategic but the balance will depend on local circumstances (and sources of funding).

There was a lot of discussion about funding, centring on the need for a full-time co-ordinator for each LNP, among other things, to access other funding sources.

What can Defra/network do to support LNPs?

There was a request for more ambassadorial support for LNPs, including across government. Defra was already aware of the difficulties in engaging with LEPs, but difficulties in engaging with the health sector also came out strongly at the meeting.

Defra was urged to 'get off the fence' and make a decision on offsetting.

Strong message that LNPs need access to the relevant datasets available (including those held by Defra's Arm's Length Bodies) and need to learn how to use the 'tools' available.

LNPs offer a great opportunity for getting messages across on environmental opportunities (e.g. to different sectors, individual businesses) but need greater clarity in those messages. Defra/network could help develop the core case which could be tailored locally.

There was an ask of Defra to produce a regular LNP bulletin.

What LNPs can do working together?

There was a challenge to the group: Are LNPs co-ordinating well enough across the group, particularly to share what is working well? How do LNPs know as a group whether they are making a difference? Knowledge sharing was raised recurrently during the day.

There seemed to be an appetite amongst some LNPs to produce an 'offer' to Defra – using their local knowledge to contribute to policy design as well as delivery.

Suggestion of forming sub-groups for working on specific issues.

Also a suggestion that LNPs could share core narratives to use e.g. with particular sectors.

We will analyse these more thoroughly in order to draw up an action plan, but in the meantime if you would like a copy of the notes from the session, please see Google+ forum or request them from LPNs@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

Conclusions and Closing remarks

Chris De Grouchy thanked everyone for coming and participating with such enthusiasm. There was a lot of food for thought for Defra to take away and he hoped they would see the obvious interest from the minister. He also committed to getting out and visiting more LNPs this year.

Alan Knight from the Cornwall/Isles of Scilly LNP brought the event to a close. He posed a hypothetical question about what the next conference might look like? What would LNPs be celebrating ideally? Would LNP partners such as LEP Chairs be present? He also commented on the amazing energy, commitment and intellectual capacity within LNPs and finished with something which seemed to strike a chord with everyone in the room: that there are 48 LNPs, possibly with 10 board members each, which means there are the best part of 500 influential people across the country championing the natural environment.

Actions

- To support the minister in making a 'business case for the natural environment' for various departmental visits. He asked for local evidence from LNPs.
- Defra to arrange Ministerial meetings with BIS and other Government Departments as appropriate.
- Defra to progress further discussion with Chris Woodley-Stewart regarding his ideas on LNPs producing an Environmental Investment Strategy.
- Arrange future LNP visits at both Ministerial and Official level
- Defra to seek feedback on the event.

The meeting finished at 3.30pm.

Soap Box sessions

Facilitating a biodiversity gain from appropriate development - Dr Simon Cripps, Chair – Dorset LNP

Three key points:

1. The DLNP has developed a Planning Charter which we are seeking to be adopted by both the various Local Authorities and the LEP. The Charter guides the role of the LNP, its interactions with LAs within the NPPF and sets some overarching aims consistent with the Natural Environment White Paper.
2. The DLNP is proposing a system which we have developed for extending the Dorset Biodiversity Protocol at the existing pre-application stage. Using the DEFRA offsetting metric, compensation for residual losses can be calculated allowing developers to quantify costs at an early stage and secure this funding once avoidance and mitigation have been considered. This will both assist developers and save them consultancy costs as well as securing funds for the environment.
3. The funds would be administered by an officer group of the LNP who will evaluate suitable projects to be signed off by the LNP Board taking a more strategic view.

Recognising Locally-determined NIAs in Gloucestershire

Dr Colin Studholme, Gloucestershire LNP

Three key points:

The following elements have helped us to move forward with identifying locally-determined NIAs in Gloucestershire

1. The structure of our LNP - which brought existing initiatives together under the LNP umbrella
2. A strong underlying ecological evidence base for landscape scale working in the county already recognised in policy
3. Existing autonomous landscape scale partnerships which are at various stages of project development and delivery

Environmental Investment Strategies for LNPs – a challenge to us and to Government

Chris Woodley-Stewart, Northern Upland Chain LNP

Three key points:

1. Many LNPs are still searching for purpose and relevance, and when it comes to funding they are being asked to go primarily to the LEPs and to routes through which we will always be asking for 'the crumbs from the master's table';
2. the production of Environmental Investment Plans, at the behest of Government, would provide that purpose and increase the local relevance of LNPs, as well as mirroring the process being undertaken in the LEP world;
3. whilst we all have to repeat the mantra that 'there is no new money' I'd like to challenge Government to look seriously at re-routing existing funds into LNPs to help them deliver strategies such as this – a lack of willingness to take things such as this seriously would suggest to many that LNPs have little real importance within Government, and the opposite would also hold true.

Natural Capital Trust: facilitation of PES markets

Dr Bevis Watts, Chair West of England LNP

Three key points:

1. WENP has set out to develop an investment strategy for the natural environment and then seek to advocate its integration into our economic development, spatial planning and health & wellbeing strategies.
2. Part of our initial work has been seeking to influence the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan and have been able to contribute to the plan which recognises natural capital and the need to manage our natural assets. Securing funding for work to achieve that has not been easy and I will explain some of the challenges. However, we have been successful in getting our LEP to allocate funding for the formation of a Natural Capital Trust.
3. The Natural Capital Trust will firstly explore the feasibility of payments for ecosystems services (initially focused on the most mature market; water) with the ability to broker payment mechanisms by funding the legal costs of an initial 6 transactions. In an area with 4 Unitary

Authorities, it is also the intention that the trust will also serve as an independent distributor of biodiversity offset payments and strategically direct them in line with the investment strategy.

Enhancing the environment and growing the economy

Darren Clarke, Manager, Humber Nature Partnership

Three key points:

1. Humber Nature Partnership brings together two existing organisations with a strong track record. Focus is to ensure the sustainable management of the estuary.
2. Identify why businesses should engage with LNPs. This may be easier in some areas than others e.g. where statutory designations exist. What's in it for them? What services does the LNP offer? Building trust between partners. Need to deliver real practical benefits to ensure continued support from and engagement with business
3. Importance of good quality data - should be seen as infrastructure by LEPs etc. Development of the concept of strategic ecological mitigation on the Humber. This will help to smooth the development planning and consenting process as well as delivering a better result for biodiversity