

Berkshire Local Nature Partnership Strategic Plan 2014

The objective of this document is to clarify specific objectives for the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership to focus on during 2014 with ideas for how those objectives might be achieved.

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1. Background

As a starting point and to create the context for the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership's remit it is useful to reflect on the external drivers that resulted in the Local Nature Partnership being formed and why it has an important role to play.

Political

- The UK Government published the Natural Environment White Paper in 2010. This was, in some part, a response to the Lawton Report that criticised the increasing fragmentation of key habitats and the general state of protected land.
- We are expecting government to produce a consultation paper on biodiversity offsetting for England during the autumn of 2013.
- Government has made clear that growth in the economy is a priority.
- The six unitary authorities in Berkshire prioritise the environment differently according to the landscape within their boundary.
- The six unitary authorities appear to act independently of each other with regards to their strategy for the environment, although there is a degree of knowledge sharing and ideas.
- National Planning Policy states "The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
 - protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
 - recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
 - minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures..." (NPPF Paragraph 109)

Economical

- Natural capital is an integral part of our economy, and being able to attribute a monetary value to our natural assets will assist with decisions to invest in the natural environment.
- "We need to avoid growth that erodes our natural capital and encourage growth which conserves or enhances our natural assets... Growing the economy and improving the environment go hand in hand

because a healthy environment is essential to our future prosperity”
Owen Paterson, Secretary of State for Environment

- Growth in the economy is the key driver for government and is the sole focus and message for the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
- Many businesses have produced CSR objectives and they regard being seen to do the right thing as important to their economic future.
- Businesses of a certain size are now paying a carbon tax on their emissions. The cost per tonne of carbon is likely to increase, driving behaviour to reduce emissions.

Social

- The Ramblers produced a report earlier this year that revealed 25% of the adult population walks for less than 9 minutes per day
- The National Trust’s Natural Childhood report published in 2011 highlights the social and mental health consequences of ‘nature deficit disorder’ in children who don’t get outside enough.
- The more people we help to become physically active outside the more chance there is of them building a relationship with the natural world and wanting to support the LNP and its partners in protecting and improving it.

Technological

- Since the National Ecosystem Assessment report numerous organisations have created methodologies to measure the value of nature.
- Low carbon technologies such as wind farms and solar panels might reduce carbon but could have other environmental impacts.
- We are aware that the LEP focus is infrastructure: roads, rail links and digital connectivity. These types of projects will undoubtedly have an impact on the environment.

Natural

- We failed to reach the national target to halt the decline in our natural environment by 2010. Nature is still declining.

- A lot of our environmental protection is the result of the work of charities, not-for-profit organisations and volunteers. The current state of the economy means these are finding it more challenging to find the funds to continue working as people have less money to donate to charity.
- The national Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) was forced to close leaving a gap in wildlife advice provision across the country.
- Our natural environment has become fragmented and is under greater risk from external pressures.
- There is a need to consolidate core strategic aims of all organisations working for the benefit of nature.

2. The Local Nature Partnership

The Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (BLNP) is a 'force' and 'single voice' representing the best interests of the natural environment throughout the county of Berkshire.

We will play a part in recognising the national target of 'a net gain for biodiversity' by working to achieve the national objectives at a local level. We trust that other Local Nature Partnerships will share these objectives and that together we will achieve landscape-scale improvements in England's biodiversity.

2.1 Our key Stakeholders

In defining who we are, it is important to consider our interaction and engagement with our stakeholders, which ultimately establishes our purpose.

Internal Stakeholders

- The Executive Board
- The Steering Group
- The wider partnership, which currently consists of the various conservation groups and volunteers that were previously affiliated with the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum

External Stakeholders

- Government – specifically Defra and the Defra family
- Local Authority – the six unitary authorities of Berkshire
- Businesses based in Berkshire
- Local Communities who make use of natural green space and would like to see it enhanced and protected
- Other LNPs, specifically our colleagues within the South East cluster
- Media - local and national press have an interest in the environment and are particularly vocal when new policies are introduced that might damage the environment

3. Who do we need to influence and engage with?

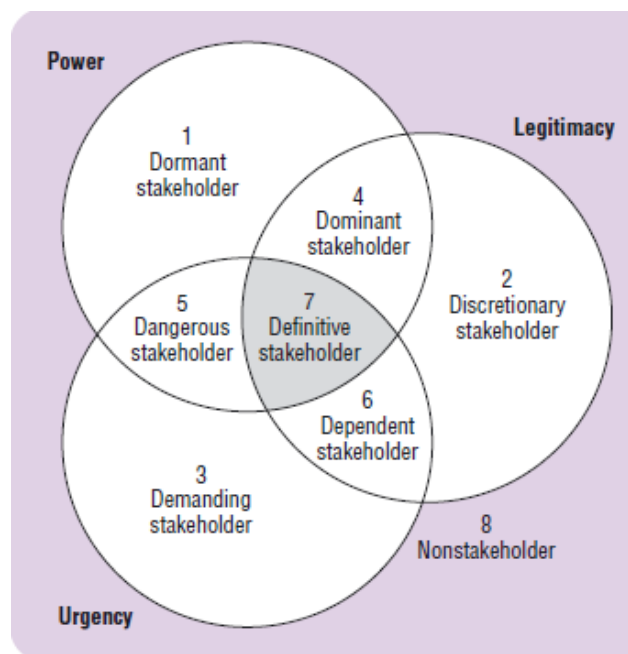
In achieving our prime objective: 'a net gain in biodiversity' we will need to protect what biodiversity we already have, enhance biodiversity that is being or has been eroded, and create opportunities for biodiversity in new areas.

Looking at the model below with regard to our objectives, we could say that the Dormant Stakeholders (with Power) are Government and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

Land Owners are currently Discretionary Stakeholders (not fully engaged with the LNP) who have Legitimacy because they own land and determine what they will do with it.

Local Authorities are Dominant Stakeholders with both power and legitimacy. They are well placed to make a positive difference to the LNP.

The Demanding stakeholders are probably the local community and our wider group of partners who have an expectation of what we will deliver.



Therefore we can assume that our objectives rely on engagement with and influencing the decisions of, the Local Authorities, Berkshire-based landowners and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) represents the interests of the business community; therefore engaging directly with businesses could help us to influence the LEP.

The most senior officials of the local authorities are also part of the LEP.

4. Getting our message across

We need to convey the natural environment as relevant to the objectives of key decision makers in Berkshire. However, just valuing the environment and putting a price on it won't help us to protect and improve it in the longer term.

The concept of natural capital is a good way to get the attention of decision makers but long-term investment in the natural environment requires a mindset that believes nature to be priceless. We can only achieve this if we can persuade local stakeholders to build a relationship with nature. That is why our strategy has to include initiatives that encourage people to get outside into natural green space and feel the value in their hearts in minds and not just in their wallets.

5. Our priorities for 2014

We identified the following as objectives for the BLNP in 2012:

1. Identifying and embedding local ecological networks
2. Helping to achieve a better range of outcomes through sustainable land management
3. Promoting the maintenance and enhancement of green infrastructure
4. Helping to maintain the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside
5. Working with other local initiatives and plans on flooding and water quality
6. Contribute to efforts to protect and improve public access to the countryside, nature and green space
7. Advising and consulting with local decision makers about the options for biodiversity offsetting
8. Promoting green economic growth
9. Contributing to quality of life and local health and wellbeing
10. Working with other initiatives and partnerships

Many of these are already being addressed individually by our partners as part of their normal activity. The BLNP will focus primarily on boosting efforts in the following areas during 2014:

- Identifying and embedding local ecological networks
- Advising and consulting with local decision makers about the options for biodiversity offsetting
- Promoting green economic growth
- Contributing to quality of life and local health and wellbeing
- Working with other initiatives and partnerships

5.1 Identifying and embedding local ecological networks – creating a vision for the natural environment

A vision and plan for the natural environment in Berkshire is essential.

The BLNP will pull together the natural environment objectives of all relevant groups across the county to create a Berkshire wide strategy and vision. We will be able to identify synergies, make recommendations and support community conservation at the most local level, ensuring a coordinated and joined up approach to nature conservation.

The task for the BLNP is to understand what each of the diverse groups operating in this field is hoping to achieve, what their priorities are and what the barriers are. With this information the BLNP will build up a clear picture of what the shared vision for Berkshire's natural environment looks like. Once developed in consultation and partnership with our stakeholders, we will then have a vision to share with the LEP and local authorities who are developing their own strategy for infrastructure, business park development and housing, all of which could impact the natural environment.

5.2 Advising and consulting with local decision makers about the options for biodiversity offsetting

We are expecting government to produce a consultation paper on biodiversity offsetting with England during the autumn of 2013.

We will form a BLNP response to the paper and develop our own guidelines for biodiversity offsetting which we would recommend to the local planning authorities in Berkshire.

We would also consider a joint response to the consultation paper with other LNPs who we have been working closely with since becoming established.

5.3 Promoting green economic growth

“We need to avoid growth that erodes our natural capital and encourage growth which conserves or enhances our natural assets... Growing the economy and improving the environment go hand in hand because a healthy environment is essential to our future prosperity” Owen Paterson, Secretary of State for Environment

We will work with other land-based partners to influence the Local Enterprise Partnership to include natural environment growth into their EU Funding Strategy and their overall vision for Berkshire.

If necessary we will remind the Secretary of State of his comments and ask him how this is being measured and what LNPs can do to help him ensure his wishes are being met.

Growth in the economy is the key driver for government and is the sole focus and message for the LEP.

The BLNP should be able to benchmark the state of the natural environment now and measure whether there has been a decrease or enhancement in future years.

Clarifying what data points would be useful, gathering the data and letting other stakeholders such as the LEP and local authorities know that we have a benchmark and are monitoring will be a key way of measuring the success and effectiveness of the BLNP.

5.4 Contributing to quality of life and local health and wellbeing

We will engage and work with Health and Wellbeing Boards and businesses to encourage physical activity in the natural environment.

Through organized themed walks and volunteering activities that contribute to the restoration and management of habitat we intend to improve peoples quality of life and health.

The more people we help to become physically active outside the more chance there is of them building a relationship with the natural world and wanting to support the LNP and its partners in protecting and improving it.

5.5 Working with other initiatives and partnerships

In Berkshire we are fortunate to have many organisations, institutions and causes all working for the benefit of the environment. The LNP has a role to play in helping to avoid duplication of effort but also lending its weight to initiatives and groups that can contribute to our own objectives.

6. Delivering the vision – working groups

Our purpose is to improve the state of the natural environment within Berkshire and increase the biodiversity value through net-gains of species.

There will be four elements to achieving these objectives:

1. Influence local stakeholder policy and decision-making
2. Collect information from organisations, groups, and local experts involved with conservation to build a picture of what the current strategy for Berkshire's natural environment will deliver and where further opportunities exist
3. Enthuse everyone to talk, write about, engage with, get involved with and invest in, the natural environment
4. Co-ordinate the management of our natural environment as a complex, interconnected system, and create habitats that are 'better, bigger, more and more joined up' (Lawton 2010).

With limited resources and many partners being constrained for time the best approach will be to create working groups of 4-5 people to focus on a specific objective.

Each working group should comprise the team with the most relevant experience and should consider the wider partnership population as well as other potential partners not yet involved with or aware of the BLNP.

We should aim to establish working groups by November 2013 and allow each group six months to work on their objectives and feedback their findings, success and recommendations to the board.

7. Funding

The future of the BLNP relies on a sustainable source of income to support an LNP Officer and cover the costs that will inevitably be incurred in pursuance of our objectives.

We can generate revenue in the following ways: -

- Business sponsorship for specifically identified projects
- Management fees for advice and reports
- Applying to funding bodies such as NE, HLF
- Carbon offsetting scheme
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

7.1 Business sponsorship

Local businesses could be persuaded to fund specific projects from their existing CSR and PR budgets. We need to develop a list of credible projects that clearly state the benefit and value that a business could achieve from being a sponsor.

We may wish to target certain businesses or sectors if we believe that a project is very relevant to them. Obtaining a list of businesses in Berkshire and the sectors they work in would be very useful.

National and International businesses also provide sponsorship and funding of projects, which we should explore. Swarovski, Opticron and numerous outdoor clothing companies will often fund local initiatives and projects. If we can develop projects that encourage people outside then there is a good chance that these types of businesses will see the potential for future sales of their products if we succeed.

7.2 Management Fees

As the LNP develops in-house expertise and a reputation for providing useful advice, we can start to charge organisations for this service.

7.3 Funding Bodies

Applications for grants can be made to funding bodies such as Natural England, Heritage Lottery Fund and other trusts.

7.4 Carbon offsetting

The voluntary carbon offsetting market in the UK is worth around £60m per annum. About 15% of this is spent on projects that restore habitat. Currently all of this money is spent abroad.

The process for voluntary offsetting requires the business to use a calculator to determine their emissions and then, through an agent, pick a project they want to offset against. Whilst carbon has a value of roughly £6 per ton, the offsetting projects can ask for up to £20 per ton. Once they choose, they pay the price based on the tonnage they are offsetting and receive a certificate.

We believe there is a good story for Berkshire businesses to contribute some of their offsetting budget to restoring and improving habitat in Berkshire.

If we can find an agent to become a partner we could work with them to develop an offer that sends some funds to a credible project(s) that will earn them official certification but some funds will also go to the BLNP to fund projects.

Therefore if there is an existing project that is asking for £15 per ton, we could develop an offer for Berkshire based businesses that asks for £18 per ton and the BLNP would receive £3 for every ton of carbon being offset.

7.5 Membership Fees

Once the Berks LNP is established, we may be able to implement a membership scheme which includes a tiered charging system with varying levels of benefits for members and also depends on the size and nature of the member organisation. For example, the NBN Trust runs a similar scheme (<http://www.nbn.org.uk/The-NBN/Membership.aspx>), as does Business in the community (<http://www.bitc.org.uk/>).

7.6 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a payment made by developers to the planning authority once permission to develop has been granted. 20% of all CIL funds are claimable by Parish Councils to invest locally. Based on figures provided by West Berkshire and making some assumptions about the amounts of CIL funding to be received by the other five unitary authorities in Berkshire we estimate that Parish Councils will be entitled to access £2m of CIL funding per year.

The objective is to incentivise Parish Councils to allocate some of this funding for investment in green infrastructure projects.

The Local Nature Partnership will agree criteria for investment in projects with the LEP and will set up a Green Infrastructure Fund from EU Funding.

Parish Councils who wish to invest in Green Infrastructure locally will be able to apply for the Green Infrastructure funds if they can demonstrate they have the ability to 'match fund' out of their own budgets.

Investment in Green Infrastructure would have multiple benefits including:

- Contribute to environmental protection by reducing flood risks
- Improve air and/or water quality locally
- Improve health and wellbeing by providing more green space locally
- Strengthen ecological networks that will result in a cumulative benefit across the length of the network

7.7 How much do we need?

We can keep our running costs to a minimum by asking the business sector to provide services and resources free-of-charge. These might include advice, meeting space, help with design or web services. Below is an estimate of the costs per annum for the operation of BLNP and the funding required. The figures may not be totally accurate but it demonstrates the scale of funding required to support the modest costs of the BLNP.

	Expenditure	Example Income
LNP Officer	£23,492	
Running expenses	£2,937	
Misc costs	£2,550	
	£28, 379	
Business Sponsorship		£50,000
Grants		£50,000
Carbon Offsetting		£40,000
		£140,000
Professional fees		£2,000
Retained by LNP*		£30,000

*If the BLNP retains a 20% management/admin fee on all contributions