

ADEPT Natural Capital and Heritage Working Group

Meeting

24th May 2021, 10.00am-12.30pm

Minutes

1. Attending and apologies

Sylvie Allan, Environment Agency
Anita Appleby, OxCam Arc NC Project
Hannah Bartram, ADEPT
Quinton Carroll, Cambridgeshire
Hugh Clear Hill, North Yorks
David Dale, ADEPT
Tim De-Keyzer, Suffolk
Louise Etherington, OxCam Arc NC Project
Allison Jean, Environment Agency
Helen Jenkins-Knight, Lincolnshire
Matthew Millington, North Yorks
Liz Milne, Kent (co-Chair)
Peter Moore, Reading
Luke Newbey, OxCam Arc NC Project
Philip Sterling, Butterfly Conservation (guest)
Liz Small, North Yorks (co-Chair)
David Sutherland, Bucks

Apologies:

Don Baker, West Sussex
Neil Coish
Peter Chamberlain, Devon
Adam Stewart, Defra

2. Actions from last meeting

- Peter Chamberlain to draw up note on concerns relating to data and evidence use in respect of Environment Bill and share with group and ALERC. To be discussed at later date with Defra (via Adam Stewart).
- Liz Milne to circulate note of BNG Implementation Advisory Group meeting - complete.
- Tim De-Keyzer to coordinate some thoughts on EA's Natural Capital Register and Account Tool and Supporting local growth planning and delivery: promoting the value of natural capital in decision making document. Initial thoughts to be circulated to group for additional input; final comments to be sent to Sylvie within 3 weeks - complete.
- Sylvie Allan to confirm links of OxCam work to wider EA natural capital work; and provide details on how heritage value may be embedded in valuation work - complete.
- Liz Milne to draft comments on LATF and circulate to the group for additional input - complete.
- Adam Stewart to confirm who these comments should be sent to - complete.

- Adam Stewart to get update from protected landscapes team on Glover response development and associated timelines; plus to note to the team the need to engage LPAs in the development of the reforms. No contact from protected landscapes team – Liz has followed up with Adam.
- Liz Milne to make proposal to Environment Board and coordinate meeting as appropriate - complete.

3. Verge management – Phil Sterling, Butterfly Conservation

The group received a presentation from Phil Sterling about how verge management could be improved. The following was noted:

- Soil fertility is key – thin topsoil/low fertility – fine grasses & herbs; plenty of gaps for germination – and needs less management/cutting.
- Low nitrogen in soil – coarse grasses and docks and thistles can't dominate and allows room for more wildflower diversity.
- Control amount grass grows – less to cut and less costs.
- Best time – during road construction – specify maximum of 15mm topsoil or sub-soil only – sow seed mix straight to sub-soil; seed mix – quick growing.
- See Weymouth Relief Road case study – from 30 species sowed, 141 species plant and 30 species of butterfly including species of concern recorded in under 10 years. And no management in that time other than some buddleia removal. Construction savings from not placing topsoil and maintenance savings; predict maybe one cut in 20 years. Savings also translate into emissions reductions too from construction and management (mower) – 97% reduction on total emissions.
- But can you retrofit low fertility to existing amenity?
- Need for community and political support – parallel campaign to gain support #loveyourverge.
- No mow isn't necessarily answer because if just left can be unmanageable – need to reduce soil fertility in tandem otherwise growth becomes over wild.
- Invested in cut and collect mowers – on invest to save business case.
- All towns in rural Dorset are under cut and collect.
- Process – reduce fertility first through repeated cut and collect – 3 cut and collect in 2021 (Apr, July and Sept); no cuts required a year later and has already grown wildflowers. Growth is slow and provides still for a neat and tidy and safe verge; as well as biodiverse.
- Blandford bypass example: cut and collect; after 5 years, now cut once a year.
- Disposal of arisings – disposed on highway land so not classed as contaminated waste.
- Verge management budget has reduced year on year; was £927k in 14/15, reduced to £501k in 21/22.
- Good and recommended practice is set out in Plantlife Managing grassland road verges - <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/road-verge-management-guide>
- Conclusions: low fertility is the key to increasing biodiversity; low fertility road verges (& parks & open spaces) are demonstrably cheaper to look after; contribute significantly to carbon reduction targets through reduced fuel usage; safety critical areas require fewer maintenance visits.

The group discussed verge management and the following points were noted:

- Member buy-in is key.
- Buckinghamshire Council and Fife Council noted as good example.
- Helped to have ecologists involved; and bringing verge management into greenspace management service from highways.
- Question over future climate change impacts on growth? Soil fertility can help address these (by reducing fertility).

- Lincolnshire also looking at re-use of grass cuttings; and use of grass verges as habitat banks for BNG.
- Noted that Highways England have adopted construction guidance that recommends minimal topsoil use near junctions/bridges/difficult to access areas, recognising safety benefits of low growth for maintenance staff in these areas.
- In Phil's opinion, verges are easier to convert to high biodiversity than most farmland – "habitat in waiting" with just a change in management needed to realise potential within 3-5 years. Big opportunity with total over 200,000 ha of road verges in UK.
- Impact of salt/gritting on verges? Need to include salt tolerant species in seed mix.
- Phil welcomes invites to speak with highways etc.
- Suggested that Phil to present to the ADEPT Engineering Group.

Action: Liz to circulate copy of presentation with minutes.

4. OxCam LNCP update and Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment project – Luke Newbey, Environment Agency

The group received a presentation from Luke Newbey on the OxCam LNCP. The following was noted:

- NC baseline and ecosystem services baseline both developed.
- Maps developed by assigning scores to different habitat types based on ecometric tool, now known as the Environmental Benefits from Nature (EBN) Tool.
- Maps show what services are being provided and where there are areas needed for enhancement to gain better benefits.
- Used EA's natural capital accounting tool to assign value to services and develop a natural capital account for the OxCam Arc. Has shown some significant sums in terms of the values flowing from the natural capital assets in the area. At least £2.3 bn provided each year from natural capital assets in the Arc.
- A number of other wider outputs from the project (tools, maps and reports) – see presentation for detail.
- Includes a report which looks at applying the natural capital approach to planning and growth policies, looking at strategic, county, neighbourhood, masterplan and planning reform levels.
- Natural capital approaches guide – six step framework for how to take a natural capital approach, with guidance.
- How LNCP can help:
 - Supplies environmental baseline.
 - Link to wider group of engaged stakeholders.
 - Promotes greater understanding of value of environment and wide range of benefits it provides.
 - Supports early factoring in of environmental aspects and impacts into decision making.
 - Provides basis for considering opportunities and where these should be focussed
 - Assist join up including BNG and carbon storage
 - Gives basis for measuring change to you can understand potential improvements.

The group discussed the LNCP approach and the following points were noted:

- How will findings of this work feed into taking forward the Dasgupta recommendations and inform the Planning Reform and Environmental Principles.
- Majority of environmental bodies feel the sums assigned are underestimating the value of the ecosystem services. Noted that the values come with confidence ratings.
- How do we use these tools to engage communities in the process in a meaningful way?

- Resources - mapping £100k; GIS expertise; accounting tool was staff time. Costs for project were high because it was research as well as application. Resources required will depend on the purpose of the LNCP work – is it to inform policy or identify opportunity?

The following links were noted following the meeting:

www.oxcamlncp.org

Natural capital account tool can be requested from the EA Natural Capital team at

naturalcapital@environment-agency.gov.uk

[Enabling a Natural Capital Approach: tool summaries - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-a-natural-capital-approach-tool-summaries)

Action: Liz to circulate copy of presentation with minutes.

5. Environmental principles consultation

The group reviewed and commented on the draft ADEPT consultation response to the consultation. Hannah Bartram noted that it was probably the most 'robust' ADEPT response to a consultation like this to date but agreed that needs to be. Cambridgeshire, North Yorks and Suffolk confirmed that they would be submitting authority responses and would use the ADEPT response to inform these.

It was noted that once again the consultation document had not referenced the historic environment.

Action: Quinton to provide sentence in respect of absence of historic environment.

Action: All to send David comments on draft by close of play Wednesday.

6. Environment Bill update

Adam Stewart, Defra gave his apologies for the meeting and sent through the following by way of an update:

- The Bill is back in the commons.
- Amendments have been coming in since Tuesday last week (when it came back formally) and the second day of commons report stage is on Wednesday this week, before it will then move to the Lords.
- The Nature chapter (NERC Duty, BNG, LNRS, PSS, SCS) clauses will be covered in this second report stage
- Government is looking to move quickly through the Lords.

The group discussed the Bill and the following was noted:

- When will Defra be seeking to input to guidance being developed?
- Responsible authority – who and how will protected landscapes be included? Soundings suggest County with locally defined solutions to how to work with National Parks etc.
- Legally binding commitment to biodiversity target noted – but tight timeline. Further pressure to deliver on local government. Ask Adam about development of this target.
- When will we know about how and when burdens on local government will be met?
- Potential of pooling resources to make the most of it. Future agenda item on development of this.

Action: Liz to send questions/comments back to Adam.

7. Local Authority Treescape Fund

The group received a copy of the Forestry Commission/Defra response to previously raised concerns regarding the LATF.

Liz asked the group who was bidding and any experience to date of the application process; the following was noted from the group:

- Helen Jenkins-Knight – tight timescales and a lot of work to coordinate strategic and appropriate response.
- Hugh Clear Hill – decided not to bid; nobody quite there with projects to go. Issues with MOA and third party delivery risks. These concerns would need to be addressed by Defra if doing another funding round.
- Tim – four out of five districts joining. Per-urban sites. Not sure if should actually be UTCF bid.
- Quinton – are trying to put something in with two districts. Difficulty with pulling something together.
- David Sutherland – putting in bid but concerns over legal and financial risks; also procurement issues for large stock.
- Liz Milne – upper tier issues with capacity/resource to develop the bid; timelines for bid development; and procurement issues for large stock meant one district had to pull out.

The group agreed we should follow up, writing to Forestry Commission/Defra with experience of LATF; the following was noted in respect of this response:

- Need longer term approaches for funding – not year on year bids.
- Lack of reality over expectations – good that resources are available for these policies areas but we can't reasonably respond
- Timelines don't allow for quality and meaningful applications.
- The LATF comes alongside a plethora of calls for applications to other bids – big burden on local government to respond.
- Question how this is delivering right trees in right places – trees will be delivered where upper tier and districts had time/capacity to put a bid together; not necessarily where there most needed.
- Noted that Build Back Better provided funding to give support to be able to respond to these bidding rounds; could we ask for same.
- In response, be constructive – how can it be improved?

Action: Liz to draft letter following LATF submission deadline; group to send comments to be included.

8. ADEPT Environment Board

Peter Moore volunteered to represent the group at the next Board meeting on 30th June 2021, 2-3pm.

9. AOB and agenda for next meeting

It was noted David Sutherland would be providing evidence to the House of Commons EFRA Committee Tree Planting & Woodlands inquiry.

[Response to EFRA Select Committee inquiry on trees | ADEPT \(adeptnet.org.uk\)](https://adeptnet.org.uk)

Action: Any further comment based on what was previously circulated should be sent to David before 15th June.

ADEPT spring conference noted; will include networking tables – there will be two for environment: green space in town centres and action for COP26.

[ADEPT Spring Seminar and Awards - Choose Registration \(eventscloud.com\)](https://www.eventscloud.com)

Question asked if any news on Government response to the Glover Protected Landscapes Review? Reported that still a lot of 'chatter' indicating response is imminent but nothing confirmed. Reports from some areas that Natural England has been taking informal soundings about possible new/extended designations of NPs/ AONBs but nothing concrete as yet. Noted that Liz has asked Adam to follow up on request for update with Protected Landscapes Team.

Noted that ALGE/ADEPT/Defra study on LPA skills and capacity to deliver BNG is report is almost complete and will then go through Defra sign off processes. Will come to this group at a future meeting once approved for publication.

Draft agenda for 19th June 10am-12pm:

- a) BNG skills and capacity project report – Liz Milne, Kent County Council (if approved for release)
- b) Dasgupta Review – for group to review and discuss Government's response (TBC – depends if published)
- c) Discussion on approaches to make the most of "new burden" funding and potential of pooling resources.