

ADEPT Natural Capital & Heritage working group Monday 18th July

The group met on 18th July and focused on the progress being made locally with biodiversity net gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The group discussed shared concerns and challenges with BNG and LNRS delivery – and wish to bring these to Defra’s attention, via the Environment Board. It was noted that there may be other relating to delays and uncertainties for the Environment Act and that this could be part of a wider discussion; or may just focus on the nature elements of the Act. These concerns include:

- Confirmation of burdens funding for both BNG and LNRS; hindering preparations and budget/work planning.
- Absence of secondary legislation. Concerns that delays are meaning that some LPAs are going ahead with things in local plan preparation that won’t gel with the LNRS.
- Timing of BNG and LNRS – issue with LNRS not being ready in time for BNG.
- Suggested that Defra are not overly concerned about LNRS being in place for commencement of BNG; as long as there are the “bones” of the strategy. But noted that 12 months may not be time even for just this outline – not recognising the time it may take to recruit or commission the additional capacity/expertise needed by the RA and that commencement of work may well be delayed.
- All this uncertainty results in difficulties relating to planning decisions and Local Plan development.
- No firm deadlines for implementation of LNRS and BNG – not helpful to planning.
- Some stakeholders have seasonal working patterns – if we want them to engage needs to be over autumn/winter in less busy periods; cannot miss that opportunity because of delays.
- LPAs are working ahead of game – risks associated with this.
- Resources and capacity, couple with recruitment difficulties.
- Length of time and timing for internal governance.
- Unknowns and issues in terms of stacking benefits/credits.
- Goldrush – credits being developed in absence of any regulation and standards; likened to the “wild west”!
- Need more guidance and support in respect of conservation covenants and preparing to lead on these.
- Land demand issues to deliver all the services – food security, BNG, trees, carbon etc.

The group also felt it would be beneficial to have someone from Natural England regularly attending in respect of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.