



House of Commons
Environmental Audit
Committee

Local Nature Partnerships

Twelfth Report of Session 2014–15



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*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

All publications of the Committee (including press notices) and further details can be found on the Committee's web pages at www.parliament.uk/eacom.

Membership at the time of the report

[Joan Walley MP](#) (*Labour, Stoke-on-Trent North*) (Chair)

[Peter Aldous MP](#) (*Conservative, Waveney*)

[Neil Carmichael MP](#) (*Conservative, Stroud*)

[Martin Caton MP](#) (*Labour, Gower*)

[Katy Clark MP](#) (*Labour, North Ayrshire and Arran*)

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[Mike Kane MP](#) (*Labour, Wythenshawe and Sale East*)

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[Caroline Lucas MP](#) (*Green, Brighton Pavilion*)

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[Rt Hon Mrs Caroline Spelman MP](#) (*Conservative, Meriden*)

[Mr Mark Spencer MP](#) (*Conservative, Sherwood*)

[Dr Alan Whitehead MP](#) (*Labour, Southampton, Test*)

[Simon Wright MP](#) (*Liberal Democrat, Norwich South*)

The following members were also members of the Committee during the parliament:

Richard Benyon MP (*Conservative, Newbury*) [ex-officio], Chris Evans MP (*Labour/Co-operative, Islwyn*), Ian Murray MP (*Labour, Edinburgh South*), Sheryl Murray MP (*Conservative, South East Cornwall*), Paul Uppal MP (*Conservative, Wolverhampton South West*).

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Local Nature Partnerships

1. Setting up Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) was a commitment in the Government’s 2011 Natural Environment White Paper.¹ Following an application and assessment period in 2012, 48 LNPs have now been established across England,² though coverage is not universal: Essex does not have an LNP, for example, and there are areas of overlap between adjacent LNPs.³ They cover the bulk of the country—both urban and rural areas. We undertook this brief inquiry into LNPs after we learnt, in our *Environmental Scorecard* inquiry, about concerns with their funding and support and with their relationship with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).⁴ We took evidence from West of England LNP, Natural England, and the Chair of the Association of Directors of Environment Economy Planning & Transport (‘ADEPT’) in local authorities, as well as written evidence from a third of all the LNPs and others.

Aims

2. The principle underlying the establishment of LNPs was the Government’s commitment to support “the empowerment of local people to make decisions that affect their areas [and] a need for local strategic oversight and co-ordination of natural environment activity”.⁵ They were intended to be “partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who aim to help bring about improvements in their local natural environment”.⁶ They have been asked to “work strategically to help their local area manage the natural environment ... to make sure that its value, and the value of the services it provides to the economy and the people who live there, is taken into account in local decisions”.⁷ LNPs were encouraged to consider a range of work and projects that covered the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental), to work at a large (‘landscape’) scale and to identify Nature Improvement Areas (another initiative of the White Paper), using a specific set of criteria set out by Defra.⁸ Those perspectives—considering the value as well as the role of natural capital and applying a landscape scale approach—were mirrored in the rationale for the Natural Capital Committee which was charged with advising Government on how natural capital could be embedded in policy-making.⁹ Dr Dominic Hogg of the West of England Nature Partnership told us that he felt in many ways that the Natural Capital Committee was “trying to do at the national level what Defra has asked the LNPs to do at the local level”.¹⁰ Kent Local Nature Partnership explained that their role, for example, was “to make the best use of their available resources

1 HM Government, *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*, (June, 2011)

2 Defra ([LNP0014](#)) para 5

3 Defra, [Local Nature Partnerships in England](#) (March 2013)

4 Environmental Audit Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2014–15, [An environmental scorecard](#), HC 215

5 Defra ([LNP0014](#)) para 3

6 Defra, [Policy: Protecting biodiversity and ecosystems at home and abroad—Local Nature Partnerships](#), Gov.uk

7 *ibid*

8 *ibid*

9 Environmental Audit Committee, Fifteenth Report of Session 2013–14, [Well-being](#), HC59

10 Q26

in order to achieve significant gains for the natural environment”, which they sought to achieve through:

- Setting the strategic direction and policies to conserve the natural environment;
- Facilitating collaboration and joining up partner agendas and actions;
- Enabling partners to work together across sectors to create resilient ecological networks;
- Providing integrated advice on the value of the natural environment to the economy and society; and
- Promoting and encouraging best practice.¹¹

3. Defra explained that “LNPs have their foundation in the principle that local people know their local priorities better than central policy officials and should have the opportunity to influence and lead”.¹² In an overview of the LNP role, Defra stated that “It will be important that LNPs develop a good overview of the range of activity in their area and identify how they can add value in a collaborative way and avoid duplication of effort”.¹³ Dr Hogg agreed with the general principle that local people know local priorities best:

A lot of value when you are talking about the natural environment is that it is very much locally contingent and it is difficult to take a top-down view and say, “This type of thing works everywhere.”¹⁴

4. There were concerns, nevertheless, that with such an approach, LNPs’ performance has been mixed. The Woodland Trust identified that “LNPs in different areas are at different stages of development and some simply exist in name”,¹⁵ whilst Dr Hogg explained that “because of the variance in the level of resourcing and what they are able to do, it is not necessarily the case that coverage by an LNP means the same thing in all places”.¹⁶ The Woodland Trust captured the dilemma well when they explained that the Natural Environment White Paper

offers insufficient guidance and supporting systems to enable Local Nature Partnerships to deliver benefits to wildlife, people and the local economy ... We recognise that local ownership and innovation would be suppressed by too much central direction. However, we are presently seeing that too little is causing disparities to increase between groups, which in turn diminishes their purpose and sense of identity.¹⁷

11 Kent Local Nature Partnership ([LNP0020](#)) para 2.3

12 Defra ([LNP0014](#)) para 4

13 Defra, [An overview of the Local Nature Partnership role](#), p8

14 Q26

15 Woodland Trust ([LNP0017](#)) para 7

16 Q14

17 Woodland Trust ([LNP0017](#)) para 9

Funding of LNPs

5. Defra funding was instrumental in the establishment of LNPs. During 2011–12 to 2012–13, Defra made a total ‘capacity fund’ of £1m available to local partnerships or groups seeking LNP status.¹⁸ Additional funding was provided by Natural England, who have contributed a “further £500,000 in small grant support over the last few years”.¹⁹ However, there is no formal funding in place to sustain LNPs in the longer term, and while some have successfully attracted funding from private partners and local authorities, the lack of core funding was the “chief concern” of the Campaign to Protect Rural England Oxfordshire.²⁰ Dr Dominic Hogg of the West of England Nature Partnership explained that the funding and resources available to some LNPs was at breaking point: “We have some nature partnerships ... where there is virtually no money left. There is very little in terms of resourcing left and it is a struggle”.²¹

6. The Woodland Trust told us that a general shortage of funding was having an impact on the “governance and composition” of LNPs.²² For many LNPs, the secretariat and board only work on a part-time and voluntary basis. CPRE Oxfordshire felt that “lack of funding (and hence lack of human resources) is a severe hindrance to the organisation’s ability to be proactive in key areas”.²³ Dr Hogg told us that if LNPs “are to play a role in ... generating a step change around provision of natural capital—biodiversity—then I cannot see how we can do it in the absence of some form of resourcing”.²⁴

7. Several LNPs told us that they felt that a shortage of day-to-day funding was not just an issue in regard to Defra’s support. They felt that other Government departments, including Communities & Local Government, Business Innovation & Skills, Department of Health and the Department of Energy & Climate Change should be involved with, and financially support, LNP activities.²⁵

Relationship with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Health & Well-being Boards

8. Defra emphasised that LNPs “need to be self-sustaining strategic partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people with the credibility to work with, and influence, other local strategic decision makers”.²⁶ It highlighted that the Natural Environment White Paper “specifically encouraged LNPs and LEPs to work together to forge strong links to drive forward green growth within their area”.²⁷ Rupert Clubb, with a local authority perspective, told us that

18 Defra ([LNP0014](#)) para 5

19 Q16

20 CPRE Oxfordshire ([LNP0013](#)) para 4

21 Q5

22 Woodland Trust ([LNP0017](#)) para 7

23 CPRE Oxfordshire ([LNP0013](#)) para 4

24 Q7

25 Dorset Local Nature Partnership ([LNP0015](#)) Para 2.9

26 Defra, [An overview of the Local Nature Partnership role](#), p2

27 Defra ([LNP0014](#)) para 17

There is evidence across the country of some really good practice [and] strong partnership work in particular with LEPs, but there are other examples where it would probably be fair to say that the LEPs are not clear about the existence of LNPs.²⁸

In some areas there is a risk that LNPs are seen as quite conservation-driven—purist conservation—and I think that can turn off LEPs, business and others.²⁹

Natural England Yorkshire found that “many LNPs have struggled to get meaningful engagement directly from private sector/industry representatives or representatives from the health sector.”³⁰

9. There are 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) which have been allocated £12 billion of local growth funding to spend on local projects over the next five years, to 2020.³¹ In April 2013, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee had criticised the then short-term (two-year) funding allocation provided for LEPs.³² Since the Committee’s report, the Government has published its *operational programme for the European Structural Investment Funds 2014–2020*, in which LEPs “will be responsible for coordinating partners and driving the production and delivery of the European Structural Investment Funds strategy ... [reflecting] the aims set out in the area’s Strategic Economic Plan.”³³ Dr Hogg felt that the way in which LEPs have been asked to assess and make decisions regarding the allocation of this money was not aligned with the fundamental tasks and priorities of LNPs, which should be pivotal European Structural Investment Fund ‘partners’ but in many cases were not.³⁴ The LNPs were “trying to emphasise to decision makers the links between natural environment and economy, and the benefits of the natural environment to the economy”.³⁵ He reported that DCLG had suggested to LEPs that:

The [funding] criteria should be based around gross value added and employment. From the point of view of organisations trying to demonstrate the value of the natural environment to the economy, that is almost like kicking one leg away from us before we have even begun our task.³⁶

Another issue raised was the geographical coverage and overlap between LEPs and LNPs. With 39 LEPs and 48 LNPs, some LNPs have several different LEPs with responsibility for some area within their boundary and others fewer. Natural England Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire, who provide the secretariat for Yorkshire regional LNPs, told us that “The geography of LEPs and LNPs is very different in some areas and this does make

28 Q8

29 Q33

30 Natural England Yorks & N. Lincs ([LNP0005](#)) para 1.2

31 [WMS 18 Dec 2014 cc1590-1593](#)

32 Business Innovation & Skills Committee, Ninth Report of session 2012–13, [Local Enterprise Partnerships](#), HC 598

33 DCLG, [European Regional Development Fund: England Operational Programme, 2014 to 2020—Executive Summary](#) (August, 2014), p22

34 Q13

35 Q9

36 *ibid*

engagement harder for some of the peripheral authorities around the core city regions”.³⁷ This has created an irregular pattern of engagement.

10. Rupert Clubb told us that “the key for LNPs to survive and be successful going forward has to hinge on that relationship with LEPS. I think that was the original intent, and somehow strengthening that will be a fine step forward”.³⁸ Some LNPs, like the West of England Nature Partnership, have given a seat on their board to the relevant LEP,³⁹ but from the limited evidence we received this appears to be the result of isolated local initiative. Liz Newton from Natural England told us that the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and Natural England had been working to bring LNPs and LEPS together. She explained that they had created a ‘local environment and economic development toolkit’ and that 15 of the LEPS and the relevant LNPs had used that

to help them start thinking about how they can create more of a positive win-win approach to what is going on in their area. Those sorts of partnerships are working well and we need the LNPs to share that experience and to do that more.⁴⁰

11. The Woodland Trust wanted the Government “to commit to recognition of LNPs so that organisations will once again start working through them”.⁴¹ That applies not just to LEPS but also Health & Well-being Boards (HWBs). In our June 2014 *Well-being* report, we highlighted the link between the environment and the well-being benefits that people get from open green spaces.⁴² Dr Hogg described some of the successes that LNPs have had in attracting funding from HWBs to support each other’s work, which he thought was “really positive because it is definitely an area where the natural environment and the economy go well together”.⁴³ In addition, Rupert Clubb told us that there were some good examples of HWBs working with LNPs:

In Surrey, for example, the director of public health sits on the LNP so I think that is positive. The LNP in Sussex covers ... three administrative [local authority] areas, and there are some pilot sites for health and wellbeing. In other authorities there are local authority elected members who are on LNPs and sit on health and wellbeing boards. There is no one-size-fits-all for how health and wellbeing links in with LNPs but there is a lot of evidence out there that helps us understand the importance of green infrastructure, of green space and of that natural capital in relation to health and wellbeing improvement.⁴⁴

12. The voluntary approach to determining the scope of the LNPs’ work is in keeping with the spirit of the initiative but, we were told, LNPs could provide a more valuable service to

37 Natural England Yorks & N. Lincs ([LNP0005](#)) Para 3.2

38 Q34

39 West of England Nature Partnership ([LNP0009](#)) para 3

40 Q27

41 Woodland Trust ([LNP0017](#)) para 12

42 Environmental Audit Committee, Fifteenth Report of Session 2013–14, [Well-being](#), HC59

43 Q31

44 Q32

LEPs and local authorities “were there to be a statutory requirement for them to engage ... but this would need to be adequately resourced”.⁴⁵ Dr Hogg felt that for such a formalisation of the LNP remit there would need to be “proper metrics that allow the Local Nature Partnerships to make their case, because at the moment the metrics that we are using [gross value added and employment⁴⁶] are almost antithetical to the demonstration of the case for the benefits of the natural environment to the economy”.⁴⁷

Birds and habitats directives

13. The LNPs might have demonstrated their essential role in local nature conservation by contributing to the European Commission’s ongoing ‘fitness check’ of the Birds and Habitats Directives. There appeared to be little awareness among LNPs, however, of this work, although Dr Hogg did see scope for LNPs to “have a positive influence on the directives”.⁴⁸ The ‘fitness check’ will examine, among other things:

- “Implementation and integration successes and problems;
- The costs of implementation and of non-implementation of the legislation;
- Opportunities for improving implementation and reducing administrative burden without compromising the integrity of the purpose of the directives;
- The situation of implementation in different EU countries; and
- The views of key stakeholder groups.”⁴⁹

A data-gathering exercise is currently under way, which will be followed by a 12-week consultation running from April to July 2015. Publication of the Commission report on the results of the fitness check is expected early in 2016.⁵⁰ The directives, and whether they strike an appropriate balance between environmental and developmental concerns, have in the past been the subject of some contention which may exacerbate existing tensions between the objectives of the LNPs and the LEPs.

Conclusions and recommendations

14. There is a mixed performance record between individual LNPs. Some are functioning effectively, working well with LEPs, whilst others appear to have become inactive or sidelined. Since initial seed money was provided by Defra to establish them, LNP budgets have been under pressure unless they have been able to attract funding and resources from NGOs, local authorities, the private sector or volunteers. Where LNPs have been successful, they have demonstrated the benefits of local engagement and harnessing enthusiasm in finding solutions to local priorities. Where they have not

45 Berkshire LNP ([LNP0026](#)) p3

46 West of England Nature Partnership ([LNP0009](#)) para 17

47 Q9

48 Qq46-48

49 European Commission website: [“Fitness Check of EU Nature Legislation \(Birds and Habitats Directives\)”](#)

50 ibid

been successful, the solution is not to impose additional tasks but to re-energise the unfocussed local commitment.

15. The next Government should undertake an early review of the LNP programme, to identify an agenda for action linked to other nature conservation initiatives with approaching deadlines. Specifically, such a review should:

- a) examine LNPs' funding and their links to LEPs (including the appropriateness of the criteria and metrics for disbursement of European Structural Investment Funds) HWBs and local planning authorities, as well as potential new links with additional stakeholders such as landowners and farmers;*
- b) identify best practice from the successful LNPs, but also the barriers that have hindered the less successful ones, including the role played by conflicting objectives of the local bodies involved; and*
- c) identify those LNPs where the Government will need to relaunch the initiative, providing newly targeted seed funding to establish an effective national coverage.*

And the review should be linked to and coordinated with (i) the European Commission's fitness check of the birds and habitats directives, to ensure both that the protections remain robust and that England's experiences with LNPs inform the deliberations, and (ii) the next Government's deliberations on the long-term future of the Natural Capital Committee beyond its current September 2015 remit.

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 17 March 2015

Members present:

Joan Walley, in the Chair

Peter Aldous
Martin Caton
Mark Lazarowicz

Caroline Nokes
Mrs Caroline Spelman

Draft Report (*Local Nature Partnerships*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 15 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Twelfth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[The Committee Adjourned

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at www.parliament.uk/eacom.

Wednesday 4 March 2015

Question number

Dr Dominic Hogg, Executive Chair, West of England Partnership, **Liz Newton**, Director, Landscape and Geodiversity, Natural England, and **Rupert Clubb**, Chair, Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport.

[Q1-61](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at www.parliament.uk/eacom. LNP numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Bbowt ([LNP0018](#))
- 2 Berkshire Lnp ([LNP0026](#))
- 3 Birmingham & Black Country Local Nature Partnership ([LNP0002](#))
- 4 Campaign To Protect Rural England ([LNP0019](#))
- 5 Cla ([LNP0022](#))
- 6 Cpre Oxfordshire ([LNP0013](#))
- 7 Cumbria Wildlife Trust ([LNP0025](#))
- 8 Department For Environment Food & Rural Affairs ([LNP0014](#))
- 9 Dorset Local Nature Partnership ([LNP0015](#))
- 10 Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership ([LNP0006](#))
- 11 Humber Nature Partnership ([LNP0001](#))
- 12 Kent Nature Partnership ([LNP0020](#))
- 13 Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust ([LNP0016](#))
- 14 Link2nature, Wiltshire & Swindon LNP ([LNP0004](#))
- 15 Lowland Derbyshire And Nottinghamshire Local Nature Partnership ([LNP0024](#))
- 16 National Farmers Union ([LNP0011](#))
- 17 National Trust ([LNP0008](#))
- 18 Natural England Yorks & N. Lincs ([LNP0005](#))
- 19 Paul Wickham ([LNP0021](#))
- 20 Rspb ([LNP0007](#))
- 21 South Yorkshire Lnp (C/O South Yorkshire Forest) ([LNP0003](#))
- 22 The Greensand Trust, On Behalf Of The Beds Lnp ([LNP0027](#))
- 23 The Wildlife Trusts ([LNP0023](#))
- 24 The Woodland Trust ([LNP0017](#))
- 25 West Of England Nature Partnership ([LNP0009](#))
- 26 Wild Oxfordshire ([LNP0010](#))
- 27 Yorkshire West Local Nature Partnership ([LNP0012](#))