



Establishing a Local Nature Partnership for Hertfordshire

Report of the Biodiversity Partnership Group

Executive summary

During this summer the government invited local areas to propose new Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), aiming to strengthen local action, inform local decision-making, and lead on a wide range of integrated issues relating to the natural environment. Guidelines were given for the broad remit and function of LNPs, according to the vision and spirit of the Natural Environment White Paper published in June 2011.

With support from the Hertfordshire Environmental Forum (HEF), the Biodiversity Partnership Group (BPG) led on developing a LNP proposal for Hertfordshire. The proposal was successful and attracted funding and approval from government to put the steps in place necessary to formalise the LNP in 2012. The Hertfordshire proposal does not seek to establish a completely new independent partnership; instead it aims to replace the existing BPG as a subgroup of the Hertfordshire Sustainability Forum (HSF), whilst broadening and strengthening its remit, functionality and representation.

The broad aims and objectives of the Hertfordshire LNP are defined by the proposals submitted to Defra. However, the detailed objectives and remit, as well as the priorities for focus, are still to be decided. This will be done in consultation with HSF members and other partners in the county.

Background

The government's first white paper on the natural environment in 20 years 'The Natural Choice' was published in June and aims to improve the quality of the natural environment across England, halt the decline in habitats and species and strengthen the connection between people and nature. The White Paper also acts on the recommendations of 'Making Space for Nature', a report into the state of England's wildlife sites, led by Professor John Lawton. The report published in September 2010 showed that England's wildlife sites are fragmented and not able to respond to the challenges of climate change and other pressures and that there is a need to restore ecological networks across the country. Key measures in the White Paper to take forward these recommendations include identifying and establishing Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) and Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs). NIAs are landscape-scale schemes aiming to provide bigger, connected areas of habitat for wildlife to live in and adapt to climate change. LNPs are broad integrated local partnerships aiming to strengthen local action, inform local

decision-making, and lead on a wide range of integrated issues relating to the natural environment.

LNPs are expected to have a number of roles but their main aims are to improve the range of benefits and services we get from a healthy natural environment, provide local leadership on environmental issues and to contribute to the green economy by linking with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Partnerships will be fully inclusive with representation from local authorities, community forums, government arms-length bodies, civil society organisations and environmental charities, existing biodiversity and green infrastructure partnerships, land owners, businesses, LEPs, health and wellbeing reps and education establishments. Co-operation between existing partnerships resulting in more efficient use of resources and better outcomes is also encouraged.

Operating at a strategic level to plan and deliver integrated environmental action with a wide range of benefits, it is anticipated there will be around 50 LNPs across the country. The Government has provided a one-off fund in 2011/12 worth £1 million to help partnerships (both existing and new) to respond to the proposals to develop LNPs. The BPG, with support from HEF, successfully submitted a bid to support the development of a LNP for Hertfordshire and will use the funding to coordinate the development and consultation process to set up the new LNP. Existing membership of the group will be expanded, involving new partners and expertise able to provide a more integrated approach, achieving multiple benefits from the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment in Hertfordshire.

The LNP agenda will enable the BPG to improve the integration of its work, particularly with wider Green Infrastructure (GI) issues. Hertfordshire has recently produced a Strategic GI Plan, in conjunction with North East GreenArc, which received a good level of participation but no formal GI partnership exists. The development of a LNP for Hertfordshire offers a great opportunity therefore to pull all biodiversity and relevant wider GI practitioners and partners together in one enduring partnership, enabling more integrated environmental action and strategies at the landscape-scale. The Group will also need to engage with new partners and stakeholders such as local businesses, health authorities, private companies and education establishments to ensure the LNP aligns to the vision and spirit of the White Paper.

Aims

The aims of a LNP for Hertfordshire are to deliver a strategic lead for how the natural environment can be taken into account in decision-making and to develop an ambitious environmental vision and set of priorities for the natural environment that will improve social and economic benefits for the county.

The BPG will identify and engage with HSF members, as well as relevant new partners, partnerships, groups and individuals, working with them to develop an integrated environmental vision and agreed list of priorities for the county. Developing a LNP for Hertfordshire will allow us to build upon existing

structures improving effectiveness, participation and the ability to deliver across a wider range of agendas in a more productive way.

Structure and membership

The HSF is a county-wide strategic group providing high-level collaboration and sharing of ideas on environmental issues and policies. It has a number of task/delivery subgroups to ensure it covers all environmental issues effectively and the LNP will be a subgroup providing specialist knowledge on issues surrounding the natural environment. There are already a number of existing specialist groups and partnerships, which it is proposed will become subgroups or associated groups of the LNP. This will provide a rationalised network of related partnerships, which will allow a clearer multi-directional flow of information between partners at different levels. It is anticipated that the LNP will also be a conduit of information between Hertfordshire partners and cross-boundary initiatives such as NIA partnerships and neighbouring LNPs.

Establishing the partnership – next steps

The BPG will hold a stakeholder event in the New Year to bring potential LNP partners and stakeholders together for a detailed discussion on the roles of the LNP and opportunities for integrated ways of working. The event will also help develop the vision and agreed list of priorities for the natural environment in Hertfordshire. The main aim of the event will be to agree the governance and remit of a LNP for Hertfordshire and following this it is proposed that Terms of Reference for the partnership outlining the operating arrangements and decision making process will be developed. The ambitions are that we will achieve a broad partnership expanding beyond a biodiversity focus and will be able to work towards applying to become a formally recognised LNP in 2012. Applications for LNP status will open this winter and the first government-recognised LNPs will be announced next summer.

The BPG will spend the next couple of months identifying and engaging with new partners, partnerships, groups and/or individuals to establish the potential membership of the LNP. It will also spend the time developing a programme for the stakeholder event. With several LNPs being developed across the East of England region the BPG will also be liaising with neighbouring partnerships over the development of LNPs and any opportunities for collaborative working.

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