Local Nature Partnership Board Meeting

29th February 2024, 09am-11:30pm, County Hall & Online (Teams)

Agenda Item	Time	Who
1. Welcome and Introductions	9 – 9:10	Simon Lyster
2. Chair & Coordinator Updates	9:10 – 9:20	Simon Lyster and Helena Taylor
3. Business Working Group	9:20 – 9:30	Simon Lyster and David Rayner
4. Agricultural Working Group	9:30 – 9:40	Simon Lyster and Emma Gray
5. Biodiversity Net Gain Working Group	9:40 – 9:50	Simon Lyster and Emma Goodings
6. Community Working Group	9:50 – 10:00	Simon Lyster and Susie Jenkins
7. Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS): Where we are now	10:00 – 10:10	Tim Simpson
8. LNRS: Review of engagement & feedback from board	10:10 – 10:15	Katie Skingle
9. LNRS: 10. Baseline and Opportunity mapping overview presentation	10:15 – 10:35	Dan Mellor and Matt Nokes
11. LNRS: High level feedback from the board and discussion: content and mapping	10:35 – 11:05	All board members
12. LNRS: Next steps	11:05 – 11:15	Tim Simpson and Helena Taylor
13. Q&A / AOB	11:15 – 11:30	All board members

4. Chair & Coordinator Updates

The UK is the first country to embed in the law that we must not only conserve biodiversity but also enhance it. Key component of the 2021 Environment Act, every county has to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). There have been a few pilots, but this is one of the first drafts.

6. Business Working Group – Simon Lyster

The proposal to establish a Business Working Group, chaired by David Rayner, from Birkett Long, has been approved.

7. Biodiversity Net Gain Working Group – Simon Lyster and Emma Goodings

The Biodiversity Net Gain Working Group has gone from a preparation stage to an implementation stage. Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have agreed to fund a BNG Officer based at ECC (Ben Howe). After discussions, it has been agreed that the LPAs are going to be part of Ben's LPA Group, which will be dealing with the everyday aspects of the BNG, and the BNG working group will focus on the strategic side, such as the work around 20% viability and lobbying.

Comments surrounded monitoring, 20% and call for nature sites.

- Important for the LNRS to be clear on the desire to equalise monitoring enforcement for both on-site and off-site BNG.
- Hoping for an Essex wide approach on some settings and monitoring fees. We can work with the LAP Group on what they need and potentially take a more strategic role in looking at monitoring and enforcement over the whole of Essex.
- All LPAs set their own level, anything above 10% is for the individual LPA to decide. We are working to provide evidence and support. There are already some LPAs that are looking to put 20% in their plan. From the supply side, not averse to 10% or 20%, they just want to know what that number actually is so that they can adjust accordingly.
- At least one LA has done call for nature sites individually. The right time might be once we have the LNRS draft so we can see what it is identifying. Will take it back to the group. The current call for sites that are out there tend to be limited to LPA boundaries, you can provide off-site BNG further away and outside LPAs. This might give a more consistent view across the region.

8. Agricultural Working Group – Simon Lyster and Emma Gray

The focus at the moment is supporting the farm clusters. Over the last 18 months three farm clusters have been established: North Essex Farm Cluster, Roding Farm Cluster and Tendring Farm Cluster.

Pant Valley Pilot Project, 12 farms involved, runs from Braintree to Wethersfield, doing a variety of habitat creation and restoration projects. Project has been funded by a mixture of Countryside Stewardship, some district level licencing funding for ponds, and funds from the water companies, the Environment Agency.

Discussion surrounded community engagement:

- The Pant Valley Pilot Project has farm walks for three of the villages involved, can show the new habitat and explain what we (North Essex Cluster) are doing. Shelford and Wethersfield are inviting the schools within walking distance to a farm on that project to come and have a look at some of the engagement work.

- One of the challenges can be getting schools to site. Our local schools have started using DigiGo transport and equivalent to get pupils to farm visits. LNRS could promote the use of those existing sustainable transport solutions.

9. Community Working Group – Simon Lyster and Susie Jenkins

The Brightlingsea Project is about connecting people and the environment. We [Brightlingsea] are trying to make our neighbourhood plan the first 20% BNG neighbourhood plan and a local Nature recovery plan as well. Looking at inspiring the local community groups in time for the strategy, so that they have got people who can advise them and inspire them to do as much as they can to make the strategy happen.

Comments were made on the Essex Cultural Diversity Project and how to mobilise local communities.

- Essex Cultural Diversity Project has connections to communities across Essex and beyond. Have the connections and the ability to join funding to support projects that could drive interest at local levels.
- Working directly with people and word of mouth. Doing visible things in the middle of communities, using social media, knowing what's popular and pulling people in with them.

10. Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS): Where we are now – Tim Simpson

Started these conversations in 2021 with RSPB, the Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Essex County Council. From those very first discussions, this has been a collaborative process. Last year a lot of time was spent with the working groups getting ideas and understanding what people's views were on these different elements.

We have got a rough timeline for going to public consultation, focus is going to be the Supporting Authority consultation in June and the public consultation at the start of summer.

11. LNRS: Review of engagement & feedback from board – Katie Skingle

Now that the timeline has been extended, it allows for a lot more to take place in terms of engagement until we do go out to public consultation. We have engaged with several groups, organisations and businesses. There are a high number of events that are still to come to connect with farmers and landowners.

We have extended the public consultation period further than the statutory guidance, from 6 weeks to 8 weeks.

Libraries will be a key part for people to be able to physically go in and leave feedback during the public consultation.

Discussion was generated around groups that could still be further engaged/ have not been engaged enough and measuring impact.

- Engagement with people with mental health issues, learning disabilities, people in urban areas. Have had conversations with some charities already but moving forward with every intention of continuing that.

- Digital aspects are quite easy to monitor. Nothing better than being able to have direct conversations with people.

12. LNRS: Baseline and Opportunity mapping overview presentation – Dan Mellor

Outline of progress, 3 phases: initial review of overall Essex priorities; building and testing of our proof of concept, based on conversations from phase one; and once happy with our proof of concepts, we begin building the final version. In phase 3: Trees & Woodland, Grassland & Meadows; in phase 2: Freshwater & Wetland, Costal & Marine; in phase 1: Urban, Species Specific.

Essex has rich areas of coastal marine habitats and important Woodlands and grasslands stretching from west to east. Analysis is all about connectivity and connecting with protected zones. Overall opportunity mapping, engagement has been key.

Costal & Marine: Essex Coast is really important, there are a few protections, have been advised by Natural England that some areas should not be touched in terms of opportunities because they have their own opportunity plans.

Urban: Looking at more localised, specific opportunities for Southend, bringing different datasets to add value and to build a value index and at the potential of introducing habitat creation opportunities within flood risks zones to help alleviate those risks. Plan is to interconnect with existing green open spaces and with the rural areas that surround Southend.

Next steps: continuing to work with stakeholders, particularly freshwater, marine and urban; continuing to build model 3.

Comments surrounded Agri-environment data and opportunity maps.

- Every farmland in Essex has an opportunity to enter stewardship, that should be represented on a map.
- Opportunity maps to drive multi-benefits outcomes and presenting singular opportunities doesn't pick up the multi-benefits nature of what we want to achieve.

13. LNRS: High level feedback from the board and discussion: content and mapping

The discussion surrounded the structure of the document, Southend and urban areas, frameworks, land sparing and land sharing, farming and agriculture, support for data and recording, supply chains, and local wildlife sites. Some of the main points being:

- Would be useful to have some key features on there: urban areas, rivers, wetland corridors, so you can see those multi-benefit opportunities. Doesn't provide us with where my biggest focus effort should be. It would be interesting to see how the different priorities are going to link up.
- Southend isn't devoid of nature, there's huge amounts of biodiversity. The majority of the population of Essex is in that South Essex corridor. Urban areas need to demonstrate the impact of how people can have a positive impact on nature and vice versa.
- Needs a bit more framework for drivers of biodiversity decline. Would use the UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and for ecological principles, the Lawton principals.
- Land sparing is the key driver for biodiversity improvement, but land sharing where you can do things on farmland which is still being agriculturally managed for a crop is still important.
- Need to structurally test how people will interact with the strategy, what they think they can then do with the information.

14. **LNRS: Next steps – Tim Simpson and Helena Taylor**

Some things that stood out from today's discussions: user journey, we have started talking to a proofreader, and a non-technical summary.

Timeline: looking to go to Supporting Authorities in June, will be sent to Cllr Schwier (ECC's Climate Czar) in April, will be going to some key internal governance meetings at ECC. Will receive feedback from the Nature Partnership and Cllr Schwier in June. Will be out for Supporting Authorities for 28 days, letter process in place where they can say they are happy for this to go to public consultation or raise any objections. Public consultation in July for 8 weeks.

ACTIONS:

- All that made comments on the draft LNRS to follow it up with an email.
- Volunteers to be a board rep of this group to re-work next draft to send an email.