

Actions from the meeting

- i. Each LAF to consider the key issues relevant to their situation that they will raise in a letter to send to a senior officer in their appointing access authority.
- ii. David Barker to circulate an electronic copy of the body text of the letter that he had sent to Suffolk MPs concerning a range of countryside matters including access on to farmland. Attendees are welcome to use that text that makes the general points to prepare their own letter to send to their local MPs but to remember to modify it to their own locality and case studies. Please do not copy and send it verbatim.
- iii. Attendees to write their email address on the sheet circulated by Mary Sanders to confirm that they are willing for other LAF members to see and use their email address to correspond about LAF matters. Through this willingness to supply an email address it is understood that GDPR requirements will have been satisfied.
- iv. NE (FT) to follow up and clarify the position regarding each LAF producing an Annual Report.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Attendance

Person	LAF / Organisation
Clive Beckett	Central Bedfordshire & Luton
David Barker	Suffolk
Fiona Taylor	Natural England
Katherine Evans	Essex
Keith Bacon	Broads
Ken Hawkins	Norfolk
Liddy Lawrence	Hertfordshire
Louis Upton	Central Bedfordshire & Luton
Martin Sullivan	Norfolk
Mary Sanders (Chair)	Cambridgeshire
Ralph Barnett	Natural England
Ray Booty	Essex
Roger Buisson (Notes)	Cambridgeshire

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Barry Hall, Suffolk LAF and Alex Hartley, Broads LAF.

3. Minutes of last meeting

On page 3, item 4 on coastal access funding the text should read “up to 75% grant can be claimed”.

4. Matters arising from minutes of last meeting

Email correspondence after the last meeting had raised the matter of a request for a letter to be sent from Natural England to the access authorities to remind them of their responsibility toward their LAF and rights of way. Fiona Taylor recommended that a letter from the grass roots i.e. LAF members, would be more effective. This could cover the access authorities' responsibilities to their LAF, including for instance that the access authority should be appointing elected members (from both county and district where relevant). **Action: Each LAF to consider the key issues relevant to their situation that they will raise in a letter to send to a senior officer in their appointing access authority.**

Item 9 Lost Highways: Rumours had been heard about an extension to the cut-off date for submitting claims. Others had heard the same. It was considered better to act on the basis that there will not be an extension. BHS is offering a £100 'grant' toward the costs of submitting a claim for a lost highway. [post meeting information: The BHS website <https://www.bhs.org.uk/our-work/access/campaigns/2026/financial-support-dmmo> states *"With generous support from Sport England, matched by the BHS's own funding, we are able to offer a grant of £100 towards your expenses for each eligible application that you submit to a local authority and is accepted on their statutory register of DMMO Applications. Due to funding conditions, the grant is available in England only, and for applications made on or after 1st January 2018. The grant is available to anyone, you do not have to be a BHS member."* A 'toolkit' for making a claim is here: <https://www.bhs.org.uk/our-work/access/campaigns/2026/2026-toolkit>]

It is still not clear whether or not a LAF annual report is required. It is understood that the minimum is that an annual report should be produced but no one from natural England will be chasing if one is not produced. An annual report is a good LAF profile raising exercise within a council and is as used in this way by some LAFs. **Action: Fiona to follow up within NE to clarify.**

5. Round-up of issues affecting your LAF

Bedford Borough: Not attending.

Broads:

- Meet in Broads Authority office, have members from the BA but not local council members. Have cross membership with Norfolk LAF.
- Little development pressure within the Broads National Park but there is adjacent to the NP.
- Erosion of river embankments - responsibility for remedial action is disputed.

Cambridgeshire:

- Considering merging with Peterborough LAF given the latter's current in status of being in abeyance.
- Development pressures including new settlements. There are poor links between planners, developers and highways authority.
- Road developments – the A14 is being built, the A428 will come next.
- Greenways - leisure and commuting cycle routes planned from surrounding villages in to Cambridge - pressure from LAF to make each of bridleway status to ensure NMU use.

Central Beds & Luton:

- Concerns over the impacts of major developments / growth areas and the low priority given to funding green infrastructure.
- Specific Houghton Regis development - several developers involved and lack of coordination that risks fragmenting network. Within that development the access routes are not likely to be PRoWs which places them at risk if the developers fold. Consider it better to have a commuted sum and then local authority adoption.
- Oxford to Cambridge expressway route near Milton Keynes - environmentally sensitive areas on the route include Rushmere Country Park and 800 acres of access land at Aspley Woods.
- East-West rail impacts on the PRoW network.

Essex:

- Network rail closures inquiry - still ongoing because of the large number of objections.
- LAF Membership - difficulty in getting councillors to be LAF members.
- Support from the council is poor.
- A12 and A120 improvements delayed due to delays with the planning of a new garden community. Lower Thames Crossing - this primarily affects Thurrock.
- The Council's fault reporting system is still unsatisfactory.
- TRO extensions of over 2 years' length are still being used with no facility for the public to know which are closed.
- PRoWs claimed under 20 year use rule - they are going on to the definitive map but without any obligations on the council to maintain them at public expense, as a result they are not being maintained. Some have been taken on by volunteers but that requires liaison time from a council officer. [A post meeting update of the relevant text from the 'Blue Book' is included as Appendix 1 to this meeting note]
- Bridges over PRoWs that are in an unsafe condition have caused problems.

Hertfordshire:

- Network rail crossing closures, currently the major focus is on a crossing in St Albans that splits the community from the town centre.
- The LAF has organised a local conference on development planning.
- Following pressure on the council the LAF has been provided with additional support from officers.
- LAF Membership - seeking to co-opt a student each year from the University of Hertfordshire environment planning course, cannot get a district council member, have recently been through a 3 year membership refresh.

Norfolk:

- Good support from the council.
- LAF Membership – undergoing a refresh after a three year period - currently advertising and there has been good interest.
- Pathmakers charity arm of LAF (<http://pathmakers.org.uk/>) is going well and continuing to put in funding applications for specific projects (two this year).

Peterborough: Not attending.

Suffolk:

- Network rail crossing closure inquiry - representations made, now with Inspector for report and recommendations.
- Sizewell C – potential for large impacts on PRoW network.

- There is strong council support for the production of an annual report.

Thurrock: Not attending.

6. Update from Natural England

Fiona Taylor provided an update on the following topics:

- LAFs
- Deregulation Act rights of Way reforms implementation
- Motoring Stakeholder Working Group
- Agriculture Bill, Environmental Land Management scheme
- Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)
- ORVAL Outdoor recreation evaluation tool
- Opening access to the countryside
- Impact of PoW and Sweetman
- Land management - Farmland Conservation
- Living Coast
- Parks
- National Trails
- Protected sites and species
- National Nature Reserves
- Wildlife licensing
- Publications, maps, data

A full copy of the text of the update sent by Fiona after the meeting is attached as Appendix 2 to this meeting note.

Ralph Barnett, NE National Trails Officer, also attended the meeting and spoke about National Trails (NT's). The England Coast Path is scheduled to open in 2020 but this may be delayed. NE is still funding NT's although for 2019 Defra agreed to fund NT's directly from its budget rather than via the NE core budget. NT's funding has been at standstill for 5 years, a 5% reduction is expected in 2019. There is no programme in place at present to designate any new trails as funding is limited and the England Coast Path takes priority.

England's Great Walking Trails - an initiative from the Discovering England Fund with a budget of £1M to promote holidays in England to the US, German and Dutch market (project details here: <https://trade.visitbritain.com/destination-uk/discover-england-fund/englands-great-walking-trails/> and the public facing website here: <https://www.greatenglishtrails.com/>).

7. Public access under the Agriculture Bill

David Barker of Suffolk LAF spoke of his own experience and the position more generally. On his own farm he has yet to receive money for a new stewardship scheme agreement that started in 2018, a common picture amongst farmers. The loss of access options in stewardship was in part said to be because of EU rules. That position clearly changes with Brexit and there is now the opportunity for the UK to support access on farms. There is the opportunity with the Agriculture Bill (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-agriculture-bill-to-deliver-a-green-brexite>) and the Government stated policy of public money for public goods, a policy that can include

public access. The Agriculture Bill is enabling legislation. It is a good time to lobby local MPs. He has written to his own MP and the other Suffolk MPs. The text of that letter can be used as the basis for others to prepare their own letter but please do not reproduce DB's letter verbatim. It would be helpful to add in reference to the Defra 25 year environment plan. **Action: DB to circulate an electronic copy of the body text of the letter that he had sent to Suffolk MPs.**

8. The impact of the People Over Wind & Sweetman court case on ECP progress

This issue was raised by Ken Hawkins of Norfolk LAF and spoken to by Fiona Taylor and Roger Buisson. The conclusion was that this court judgment, through requiring additional detail and procedural steps, would be likely to result in longer lead times in approving England Coast Path proposals but that the outcomes are not expected to change.

9. Network Rail level crossing closures

Essex LAF: Essex still at inquiry phase following an adjournment and restart. Essex LAF involvement is in the strategic case. Believe that Network Rail had not understood the level of opposition prior to the Inquiry. Concerned about the promises made by Network Rail that were stated at the Inquiry but have not been seen in writing. The concern is over whether or not they will be delivered. The County Council is not known to be recording and following up these promises.

Cambs, Herts & Suffolk LAFs: In contrast to the above, in the cases of the Inquiries for crossings in Cambs, Herts and Suffolk the respective county council has been very active and particular in ensuring that undertakings (promises) were followed up with detailed negotiation. Those crossings that would require significant redesign and landowner negotiation were withdrawn from the Inquiry process.

10. Regional road schemes

Road schemes highlighted during the earlier discussions were: A414, A12, A120, A14, A428 and the Lower Thames Crossing.

11. AOB

The following topics were very briefly addressed in the limited time available:

- Height restriction barriers on parks and green spaces – these restrict access for horse boxes and hence excludes horse rider use.
- HLF and National Trust have joined forces to fund the 'Future Parks Accelerator', an initiative that aims to secure the future of urban parks and green spaces (more information here: <http://www.futureparks.org/home-page>) The local NE link is John Torlesse.
- Cambridge/Milton Keynes/Oxford (CaMKOx) Arc – There is £1 million funding for green space across the Arc.
- Seasonal TROs using gates with lock codes - some linked to track condition and rainfall. Viewed as a successful initiative.
- Publication of the existence and details of TROs - Central Beds and Cambs have good systems, Essex has no system.

- Essex highways devolution pilot - this would transfer various maintenance responsibilities to town and parish councils. The initial view of one parish was that it was a lot of work for very little finance – the fund was calculated on a per capita basis and not on a need/assets basis. District councils had declined to participate. A similar Bedfordshire initiative had got nowhere. The approach to parishes appears to be motivated by the fact that county and district council precepts are capped but parish councils are not.
- Sharing email addresses - currently emails are sent bcc for data protection reasons, please sign on list giving consent for email address to be circulated.

A repeat of this meeting?: Yes. Proposed for next meeting:

Wednesday 10th July 2019, 10.30 am – 2.30 pm, Natural England Peterborough office.

See Appendix 3 for further details of office location and how to get there.

Appendix 1: No public maintenance of 20 year claimed routes

The following is the text supplied by Katherine Evans, EssexLAF Chair, taken from pages 277 and 278 of the 'Blue Book', more correctly known as 'Rights Of Way: A Guide to Law and Practice' published jointly by the Ramblers and the Open Spaces Society in 2007 (updates are published here:

<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/advice/rights-of-way-law-in-england-and-wales/the-blue-book/the-blue-book-extra.aspx>).

Section 10.3

All expressly created public paths (i.e. footpaths & bridleways) are maintainable at public expense except those in the following categories...

(c) a path dedicated after 1949 in respect of which the statutory procedure under the Acts of 1835, 1959 or 1980 has not been observed.

Public paths that came into existence after the 1959 Act from long usage are not publicly maintainable because

(i) the procedure required to be followed for a way to be publicly-maintainable has not been (indeed cannot be) followed;

(ii) the liability of the inhabitants of the parish to maintain highways no longer exists; and

(iii) no other provision of law imposes the duty to maintain.

A way added to the Definitive Map is therefore publicly-maintainable only if it can be shown to have come into existence prior to the 1959 Act.

No statute imposes a duty to maintain a path or way that arises from long usage. But power is conferred by the 1980 Act [s. 50(2)] on a district, parish or community council to undertake the maintenance "of any footpath or bridleway" within its territory, thus including a path that arises out of long usage.

I think I could be forgiven for not immediately grasping the implications of all that in the Blue Book:-)
No mention of byways of any sort.

The 1959 Act is... Highways Act 1959 (I think)

The 1980 Act is . . Highways Act 1980

Essex Highways / ECC used to include these types of paths in their maintenance schedules - but with budget cuts this is no longer the case. The suggestion is that Parishes - whose ability to increase their Precepts is not capped - should fund /carry out the maintenance and/or interested User groups like the Ramblers, BHS, etc.

Appendix 2: Update from Natural England

Below is a compiled copy of the text provided by Fiona Taylor in a series of emails after the meeting.

Access and rights of way and recreation (Andy Mackintosh)

LAFs NE has once again had to focus its spending on a reduced number of areas and, apart from delivering the England Coast Trail and supporting National Trail Partnerships, public access is not currently a priority. This means that we still don't have any proper cover for a LAF co-ordinator role but a case has been made to allocate resource for this. In the meantime I will continue to monitor HUDDLE and answer queries. *[This text is subject to confirmation: It is again unlikely that LAF will be asked to submit annual reporting forms this year (but any received are still welcome) but NE will continue to receive annual reports as required by the CROW Act and LAF regulations.]*

Deregulation Act rights of Way reforms implementation: Due to Defra's Dave Waterman's retirement and Brexit work prioritisation, the planned introduction of the regulations and guidance associated with the rights of way measures is currently delayed until the latter half of 2019. Defra appreciates that this is leaving increasingly little time before the 2026 cut-off date but will continue to work with the Stakeholder Working Group to explore options and refine processes and guidance.

Motoring Stakeholder Working Group: This group, (convened to look at off-road vehicle use issues in the countryside and chaired by NE) last met in May and Defra and NE have decided to take forward actions to consult with order-making authorities regarding the suitability of current regulation e.g. the use of Traffic Regulation Orders and other off-road vehicle management approaches, and aiming to revise the existing 2005 Defra guidance in "Making the Best of Byways" and "Regulating the Use of Motor Vehicles on public rights of way and off road".

Agriculture Bill, Environmental Land Management scheme: The new bill recognises that public access is a public good and makes provision for the Secretary of State to give financial assistance: *'...for or in connection with any of the following purposes—(including)*

(b) supporting public access to and enjoyment of the countryside, farmland or woodland and better understanding of the environment;'

In relation to this, options are being considered for a new land management scheme that may include measures of provision for improving/enhancing public access. NE is providing evidence and justification for support of access and green infrastructure. As with much of current activity in this area the main driver is Defra's 25 year Plan objectives e.g. *Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment - Making sure that there are high quality, accessible, natural spaces close to where people live and work, particularly in urban areas, and encouraging more people to spend time in them to benefit their health and wellbeing.*

Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) - New national statistics published by Natural England show that more people than ever before are visiting and spending time in the natural environment.

The proportion of adults visiting nature at least once a week has increased from 54 per cent in 2010 to 62 per cent in 2018. 51% visiting countryside and coast and 49% in and around towns. In 2017/18 health and exercise was the main motivation for spending time in the natural environment (reported for over half of all visits).

The [Monitoring of Engagement with the Natural Environment](#) (MENE) report also found that this trend could be seen across population groups, including groups where levels of participation have historically been lower.

ORVAL Outdoor recreation evaluation tool. An online model that predicts the number of visits to existing and new greenspaces in England, and estimates the welfare value of those visits in monetary terms (partly based on MENE data). It is increasingly being used by Local Authorities to show the value of existing and new access provision. <https://www.leep.exeter.ac.uk/orval/>

Opening access to the countryside <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/opening-access-to-the-countryside>

The country's first ever specialist centre in Oxfordshire will improve countryside access for wheelchair users, those with mobility needs, horse riders, cyclists and walkers.

Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve has been turned into a specialist site for accessibility including structures compliant with the new BS5709 standard following our self-closing gate trial. (You will also see in his speech that he reaffirms NE's commitment to promoting public access and that access is a means of achieving Defra 25 Year Plan objectives).

The new National Land Access Centre, located in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, has been designed to demonstrate the use, maintenance and installation of gaps, gates and stiles meeting the new British Standard for improved countryside access.

The centre has been developed by Natural England, in partnership with The British Horse Society, Centrewire and the Pittecroft Trust, to ensure those who usually struggle with access to the countryside can access the natural environment and enjoy England's beautiful countryside.

Natural England research shows there are around 519 million visits to paths, cycleways and bridleways in England each year. However, mobility issues can be a major barrier to people heading to the countryside. Over 20% of England's population cannot use public rights of way, either because they cannot use stiles or kissing gates themselves, or they are accompanying someone who can't.

Deputy Chair of Natural England, Lord Blencathra, said:

'Improved access will help to connect more people with their natural environment, giving them a chance to enjoy our countryside, its open space and fascinating wildlife– all key aspects of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.'

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Sarah Newton said:

'Installation of easy-access gates. This is key to the National Nature Reserve Strategy, itself a year old in September, which seeks to see England's nature restored, enriched and reconnected to people.'

The British Standard 5709: 2018 for Gaps, Gates and Stiles requires 'the least restrictive option' to be made available to users. Its implementation will help ensure that everyone can access and enjoy the countryside.

For more information about the new National Land Access Centre or to register for a training course please contact NLAC@naturalengland.org.uk.

Impact of PoW and Sweetman (Chris Pope) - Following the result of the People over the Wind case, Natural England is working closely with local authorities, developers and other partners to make sure the implications of this ruling are properly understood.

In most cases, we already work with developers at the pre-application stage on options to reduce or minimise impacts on protected sites. This ruling simply requires us to carry out a more formal assessment of their mitigation measures.

Continuing these conversations at an early stage will ensure this process is streamlined and any additional delays are minimised.

We have also set up a new unit that will be concentrating on delivering the Habitats Regulations assessments.

Land management (Dougal McNeill) - Farmland Conservation

Following the Health and Harmony Consultation the government published a [policy statement](#) which sets out England's agricultural policy for the next 10 years and how the Agriculture Bill will help achieve this. This includes a timeline for transition from the current CAP to the new arrangements. As part of this some existing HLS customers with agreements expiring in 2019 have been given the option to extend their agreements by one year (with potential for renewal) rather than move to Countryside Stewardship. This option may be available to some HLS customers in 2020 and beyond subject to ministerial approval.

In addition Defra are in the process of developing a new domestic Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme which will ultimately replace both pillars of CAP namely Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and agri-environment schemes (Countryside Stewardship and Environmental Stewardship)

2019 and 2020 – Direct payment (BPS) continues (with possible simplifications). CS agreements continue to be signed. HLS agreements extended (subject to ministerial approval for customers with agreements expiring in 2020). Tests and trials for ELM.

2021 – First year of progressive reductions in BPS payments. CS agreements continue to be signed. HLS agreements may be extended (subject to ministerial approval). First pilots and ongoing tests and trials of ELM.

2022 to 2024 - progressive reductions in BPS continue. Final CS agreements start (but numbers depend on ELM). HLS agreements may be extended (subject to ministerial approval). ELM pilot, tests and trials continue.

2025 to 2027 - progressive reductions in BPS continue. ELM fully up and running.

2028 – No Direct (BPS) payments.

Landscape (Sarah Manning) - We will be hearing from the team again in the near future but as an overview of the work of Living Coasts:

SUMMARY PAPER: England's Living Coast: More than a Path – using the England Coast Path to secure a better future for people and the environment.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan recognises the opportunity provided by the completion of the England Coast Path in 2020 to enable more people to benefit from and help deliver a net improvement in the quality of the natural environment.

Natural England has been developing Living Coast which we aim to roll out as a national programme to capitalise on the completion of the England Coast path (ECP) in 2020.

What will Living Coast be?

A high profile programme that builds on the huge public investment in the ECP. It will use the new National Trail as a catalyst to unlock and sustain greater investment at the coast, ensuring an inclusive and long term legacy for society and the environment.

Living Coast will be a visionary, landscape scale programme for the whole of the English coastline. Locally delivered projects within a national framework will deliver big outcomes for nature and people.

Our vision is that: more people from more sectors of society benefit from the environmental, economic and social services provided by the England Coast Path.

The core objectives to underpin and deliver this are:

- To increase the number and diversity of visits and visitors to the coast.
- To develop the ECP as a responsible tourism destination that provides high quality, locally distinctive, inclusive facilities and experiences for both local communities and visitors.
- To create sustainable tourism and local economies that value the ECP and invest in the path's corridor to manage and improve the access and environmental assets.

Key outcomes:

- A distinctive and resilient nature-rich corridor created around the entire coast. Demonstrating sustainable land management, enhancing our coastal landscapes and contributing to healthy and biologically diverse seas.
- More people visiting the coast, benefitting from a rich, coastal environment and contributing to the coastal economy.
- ECP better valued and supported as a foundation for building stronger, healthier, more environmentally connected and economically stable coastal communities.

Leading to:

- Health and wellbeing improvements across more sectors of society as more people access coastal landscapes and engage with the natural environment. Reduced socio-environmental deprivation within coastal communities.
- A society that through a greater connection and understanding of the value of the coastal and marine environment is interested and passionate about caring for it.
- Increased natural capital as a result of more people inspired to take action for the environment.
- Sustainable local economies underpinned by decision makers, business, communities and visitors committed to and investing in management of ECP and its corridor.

Why do we need to do this?

There are significant environmental assets at the coast, the interface between our terrestrial and marine environments. Both the environment and coastal communities face big challenges. For example:

- Coastal towns have above national average levels of socio-environmental and economic deprivation with growing risks to the [health & wellbeing of coastal communities](#). Our coastal and marine habitats face increasing challenges from climate change, fragmented management and the effects of development.
- We know that spending time in and enjoying the natural world is hugely important to improving health and wellbeing for both urban and rural communities. [MENE](#) data shows that 45% of people never or rarely visit the coast but would like to do so.
- Walkers on the [Welsh Coast Path](#) spent £84.7 million in 2014. Walkers on the [South West Coast Path](#) spent £436 million in 2012. Domestic coastal tourism contributes £8 billion annually to the economy, and the [National Coastal Tourism Academy](#)

believes this can grow. We need some of this to be invested in the environment which makes the coast so special.

Without a national framework to facilitate transformational, timely and integrated outcomes for people, places and nature, it is likely that the full potential of the ECP will not be realised and ineffective, scattered and small scale change will occur instead, not necessarily where it is needed most.

Where and how will the benefits be delivered?

The whole coast will be in scope, but we will prioritise places where investment will make the most difference. Through a small number of demonstration pilots we will show how the benefits of the ECP can be amplified by working with local stakeholders to develop a shared plan for that stretch of coast.

With a unique interest in people, environment and heritage across the whole coast, Natural England is well placed to provide the coordination of this national project and we will work across Government departments, with NGOs, communities and new sectors including business.

Publication of the Government's 25YEP coupled with the energy and publicity generated by completion of the ECP in 2020 provides us with a unique moment in time to initiate this ambitious project.

Next Steps

Work with local stakeholders through our Area Teams to develop and deliver three or four demonstration pilots using a mix of funding sources.

Create a national partnership of interested and influential external partners to help further develop and refine the project.

The learning from the pilot projects and our partner contributions will feed into the development of a business plan which will then facilitate the roll out of the national project once the England Coast Path is completed.

Parks (Dave Solly) - In October 2017 the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Parks Minister (then Marcus Jones MP) convened [the Parks Action Group](#) to bring sector experts – including Natural England - together with government to find solutions for the issues facing public parks identified by a 2016 Communities and Local Government Select Committee thereby helping England's public parks and green spaces meet the needs of communities now and in the future. Government committed to support the work of the group in its [25 year Environment plan](#) (page 77).

The group initially identified 6 priorities for consideration:

- Addressing sustainable **funding** for parks
- The importance of **standards** to ensure continued quality of delivery
- How to better **empower communities** to be involved in parks
- Addressing loss of **knowledge and skills** for delivery
- The importance of **increasing usage** amongst disadvantaged groups to ensure equitable access to the benefits of parks
- The need for a **vision** for parks and greater **valuing** of the benefits of parks in decision making

The Group will draw on baseline information it is collating as it develops its recommendations to Government on options for solutions to in particular the issues that Government committed to respond to in [its response](#) to [the inquiry report](#). We anticipate that MHCLG will report on group progress during early 2019.

National Trails (Ralph Barnett) - Ralph will be attending in person to give an update of this area of Natural England's work.

Protected sites and species (John Torlesse) - NE's overall approach is to invest in making a long term contribution to Government's ambition, as set out in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#), for a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife. This involves the following activities:

- SSSI casework (Dealing with notices, consents, assents or advice and notifications)
- SSSI designations – we have a small programme of designations (both new sites and changes to existing sites). This programme is publicised on 'gov.uk'.
- Ensuring good management of sites through new Countryside Stewardship schemes and through working with existing Stewardship agreement holders on SSSIs.
- Partnership working to deliver Government's Biodiversity 2020 strategy for protected species and habitats. This includes supporting externally funded projects (e.g. Back From The Brink), developing guidance for Nature Recovery Networks and Species Re-introductions
- SSSI condition assessments – focussing this current year particularly on those with agri-environment schemes
- Taking enforcement action for species and SSSI offences.

National Nature Reserves (Ben le Bas) - Natural England is responsible for the designation 'National Nature Reserve' in England: that is to say, the selection and declaration of sites, the management of some sites and the approval of other organisations to manage others.

Today there are 224 NNRs in England - c95,000 ha -managed by 53 different organisations. NE manages c2/3rds of England's NNRs by number and area. Other managers include the conservation NGOs, local authorities and a small but increasing number of private parties.

In the last few years an effective partnership has developed nationally between NE and some of the managing organisations and we have launched a joint NNR strategy. NNRs are an active work area for NE and as well as managing our own reserves we are busy expanding the NNR network.

Wildlife licensing (Gareth DGLISH) - District Level Licensing is a pioneering new approach to authorising developments affecting great crested newts (GCN).

Instead of developers carrying out detailed survey and mitigation measures within development sites, the scheme provides for new or enhanced GCN habitat at a landscape scale in the best locations for GCN within a given local authority area, and on the basis of net gain – i.e. more habitat is created than will be lost. This way, GCN habitat is created in areas away from developments, on greenspaces and farmland, which will improve the conservation status of the species.

Developers pay into the scheme to fund the habitat improvements. The scheme is being rolled out to 150 local authority areas over the next couple of years, including all Essex authorities and a number of other areas across the East of England. There will be opportunities for farmers and

landowners to participate in the scheme by providing land for new ponds and allowing derelict ponds to be restored

Publications, maps data (Richard Alexander) - Evidence Services provide scientific and evidence leadership, so that Natural England operates as an evidence-based organisation.

We:

- lead the delivery of Natural England's Evidence Programme (£2m pa) of prioritised terrestrial and marine monitoring projects, monitoring reform activities (e.g. piloting new techniques like eDNA) and evaluation/evidence reviews
- lead the delivery of NE/Defra's agri-environment monitoring and evaluation programme (£2.8m pa)
- provide expert analytical, data management and interpretation services to Natural England and its customers which include spatial analysis and mapping, earth observation, statistical analysis and modelling
- ensure adequate and appropriate access to evidence through on-line systems (e.g. MAGIC) and scientific publications (GOV.UK)
- lead on the Evidence Strategy and the Evidence Standard underpinning the delivery and use of evidence in Natural England

Green Infrastructure: Our Natural Future - People, Places and Prosperity
Natural England Internal Policy Briefing

Purpose of the Paper: The purpose of this document is to provide an internal policy briefing setting out what Green Infrastructure (GI) is, why it matters to Natural England, what GI outcomes we want to achieve in the next five years, where and how we will prioritise our efforts.

What is Green Infrastructure?

The National Planning Policy Framework defines Green Infrastructure (GI) as: *A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities'*

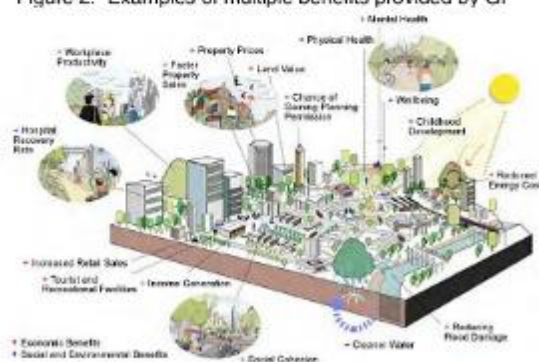
Essentially Green Infrastructure is 'nature doing a job' where it is most needed and adds greatest value. At its heart is the relationship between people and nature. At an operational level it involves working collaboratively with stakeholders, often outside the environment sector, to secure mutually beneficial outcomes.

- GI is a critical infrastructure, performing multiple functions and delivering benefits for people, places and nature, as well as for the economy.
- GI comprises a living network of green and blue spaces, corridors and other environmental features in urban and rural areas at a local and landscape scale¹.
- Benefits of GI include outdoor recreation and access; enhanced biodiversity and landscapes; producing food and energy; adapting to climate change; flood protection; clean air and water.
- These benefits support health and wellbeing; make better places to live, learn and work; and enhance resilience to climate change.

Figure 1: GI networks at landscape scale. Enlarged diagram available [here](#). (page 26)



Figure 2: Examples of multiple benefits provided by GI



Photograph courtesy of ARUP. Enlarged diagram available [here](#).(page 11)

- GI is important for connecting biodiversity, landscape and access. It comprises features like wildlife areas, woodlands and field margins; road verges and rights of way; parks and gardens; canals, rivers and wetlands; green-grey infrastructure such as green bridges and green walls/roofs; natural flood management and sustainable drainage.
- GI can be delivered as part of new development via the planning system; upgrading of existing GI and retrofitting of new GI in areas where provision is poor.

¹ Whilst much GI is publically accessible, not all GI can provide public access

Why Green Infrastructure Matters to Natural England

Whilst GI is an asset, it is also an approach that optimises delivery of environmental services and benefits for people, places, nature and the economy. GI delivers across our three Conservation Strategy (C21) themes and is pivotal to delivering place-making, resilience and growth:

1. Putting people at the heart: **Place-Making for Nature and People**

As part of people's everyday experience of nature, GI helps to deliver our ambition to put 'people at the heart' of the environment'. Often close to where people live, GI connects people with nature, improving health and wellbeing and contributing to the beauty and prosperity of the places where they live, learn, work and visit.

2. Resilient landscape and seas: **Resilience to Climate Change**

Re-connecting urban, urban-fringe, coastal and rural areas across multiple scales contributes to building resilient landscapes and seas and enhances landscape character. GI can reduce the impacts of climate change on towns and cities, for example by providing more resilient water supply and natural flood risk solutions.

3. Growing Natural Capital: **Growth and Prosperity**

GI is a collection of connected natural capital assets managed to provide ecosystem services and benefits for people and nature. Delivering high quality, well designed and maintained GI will grow the natural capital of city-regions, rural-urban fringe (including Green Belts) and rural areas. Biodiversity and environmental net gain can lever investment in new and existing GI assets. Taking a GI approach can help manage pressures and improve the quality and performance of housing, industry, transport, energy, agriculture, and is essential for economic growth and prosperity.



The natural capital and ecosystem services approaches are broadly equivalent to the GI approach. GI is a network of connected natural capital assets. An 'ecosystem service' is broadly equivalent to a GI 'function', and the 'need' for GI is usually referred to as 'demand' in ecosystem services parlance.

Drivers and Opportunities

In England over **80% of people live in urban environments** and [ONS projections](#) shows the number is set to increase. Our towns and cities face challenges such as pollution, flooding, heat and extreme weather impacts on infrastructure. Often these are diagnosed and treated in isolation and yet GI innovations² can help address these challenges in a more joined up way.

There is growing evidence to support the **economic and business case** for GI. [London's public green spaces](#) are valued at £91 billion³. A [Sheffield](#) study found for every pound spent by the Council on parks, £36 of services are supplied. The challenge is to realise these values in budgets through innovative payments for ecosystem services and other market based instruments.

The **inter-relationship(s) between town and countryside** is vital, with urban populations often benefitting from rural and urban-fringe GI and natural capital e.g. woodlands, sustainable drainage or wetlands contributing to natural flood management (NFM). Any environmental land management (ELM) system needs to recognise these inter-dependent relationships, and maintain and manage GI into the future. Well designed and maintained GI alongside [linear infrastructure](#) (such as transport networks, canals and rivers) can play an important role connecting town and countryside.

Across England there is an unequal spatial distribution of environmental goods and services⁴ giving rise to environmental and social inequalities. **Environmental deprivation** is strongly associated with existing measures of deprivation and is linked to place, with urban and coastal areas being

² Natural England [Annual Horizon Scanning Synthesis](#) 2017

³ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/11015viv_natural_capital_account_for_london_v7_full_vis.pdf

⁴ Sustainable Development Research Network, 2004 Environment and Social Justice: Rapid Research & Evidence Review

most vulnerable. GI can help address these inequalities and changing demographics, targeting interventions (new and retrofit) where they are most needed such as GI close to where people live.⁵

Policies driving the GI agenda, such as the 25 YEP, the Industrial Strategy and Clean Growth Strategy, are summarised in annex 1.

What Outcome Natural England Wants...

- More, better quality, well managed GI⁶ at local and landscape scales, delivering multiple benefits for the people and places that need them most, in line with emerging GI standards.
- GI embedded in national and local policy, including statutory development plans (strategic, local or neighbourhood plans) and local industrial strategies (LISs) and delivered by developers, infrastructure providers and land managers.
- Strategically planned and designed GI, developed collaboratively through partnerships and co-created shared plans, integrated with local natural capital plans and environmental land management, as a means of delivering environmental net gain, nature recovery networks, accessible natural greenspace and resilient landscapes.

Where... we will focus our work on areas where there is greatest opportunity and most need for new and enhanced GI, shifting our geographical focus to prioritise:

- Environmentally deprived urban, urban-fringe, rural and coastal areas, where there is not enough good quality green infrastructure.
- Growth areas and corridors, creating inter-city green growth corridors through investment that regenerates natural capital and creates prosperous places to live and work.

How... we will deliver our work aligned to the following 6 themes. The GI delivery plan will develop these themes in more detail.

1. National GI projects:
 - Developing a framework of GI Standards and testing in up to 6 local areas by 2019
 - Support the Parks Action Group to test solutions to issues faced by England's public parks and green spaces to ensure their multiple benefits are enhanced for communities.
 - Developing next generation GI Strategies to embed 25 YEP GI ambitions in local planning and strategy
2. Place-based GI projects:
 - GI for growth and net gain: embedding GI outcomes through new development, focusing on areas with major change such as growth corridors/garden towns.
 - Green urban recovery: developing an urban nature recovery network for people and wildlife that tackles environmental deprivation and delivers 25 YEP targets for net gain, community forests and re-purposed green belts.
 - Urban/rural interactions: embedding GI approaches in nature recover networks, new environmental land management schemes and natural flood management
 - Coasts and Seas: GI approaches for enhancing coastal towns through living coasts project.
 - Cohesive Investment: joining up multiple funding mechanisms such as those controlled by LEPs, for bigger, better GI.
3. Develop and promote a GI chargeable services offer
4. High impact evidence and horizon scanning to address gaps and capture GI benefits
5. GI conversations that put people at the heart of decision-making, locally and across government.
6. GI skills training on what tools and techniques work best for what job.

⁵ [Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment visits to urban greenspaces \(2009-2016\) \(JEP227\)](#), Natural England 2018

⁶ This can include green infrastructure in new developments, upgrading of existing green infrastructure and retro-fitting of new green infrastructure in areas where provision is poor.

Annex 1: Key Policy Drivers for Green Infrastructure

25 Year Environment Plan	Green Infrastructure is a theme that threads through the 25 YEP. Net gain in chapter 1 provides a key mechanism for securing better quality green infrastructure. It includes reference to natural capital, woodland, sustainable drainage systems (SUDs), natural flood management and soils which are all highly relevant to GI. The Nature Recovery Network in chapter 2 will link existing sites with urban green and blue infrastructure to bring a wide range of public benefits. Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing is a key theme in chapter 3 and includes a commitment to update green infrastructure standards. A full summary of GI in the 25 YEP is attached here .
Industrial Strategy	Highlights importance of <i>'enhancing natural capital as an essential basis for economic growth and productivity over the long term'</i> , achieving this through <i>'infrastructure investment that aims to regenerate natural capital'</i> . Four Grand Challenges include artificial intelligence and big data; clean growth; the future of mobility; and meeting the needs of an ageing society.
Clean Growth Strategy	Recognises that the land and agriculture sectors play a significant role in low carbon growth, with UK forests absorbing 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The revised NPPF outlines that Plans are to take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure. GI is identified as a strategic policy area to be included in strategic plans. Green belt protection is maintained and strengthened and requires compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land are to be made where land is removed.
EU Exit	Proposed new land management system with its focus on public goods for public money and on all land, offers significant opportunities for GI integration.
Public Health Outcomes⁷	Framework recognises the significance of accessible outdoor space as a wider determinant of public health.
Sporting Future⁸	Highlights potential of our natural capital (e.g rights of way, canal and river paths, National Parks and AONBs, accessible forests and open spaces) to meet physical activity needs.

Annex 2: Further Reading

Published Documents

[Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards in Towns and Cities](#), NE

[Cities Alive: Rethinking Green Infrastructure](#)

[Invest in Green Infrastructure video](#)

[Local Green Infrastructure](#), 2011

[Green Bridges Technical Guidance Note](#), Landscape Institute, 2015

[Green Infrastructure: and Integrated approach to Land Use](#), Landscape Institute, 2013

[Greenspace design for health and well-being](#), Forestry Commission, 2012

[Natural England's Green Infrastructure Guidance](#), NE 2009

[Maximising linear infrastructure resilience, environmental performance and return on investment](#), LINet 2017

[Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment visits to urban greenspaces \(2009-2016\) \(JP027\)](#), NE, 2018

[Microeconomic Evidence for the Benefits of Investment in the Environment 2 \(MEBIE2\) \(NERR057\)](#), NE 2014

Internal Guidance:

[Green Infrastructure briefing note](#)

[GI Case Studies](#)

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/545605/PHOF_Part_2.pdf

⁸ [Sporting Future](#), 2015

Appendix 3: Next meeting

Wednesday 10th July 2019

10.30 am – 2.30 pm (room available 9am – 3pm)

Red Kite room, Suite D, Natural England, Unex House, Bourges Boulevard, Peterborough, PE1 1NG.

[View map](#) (Google)

Telephone 0300 060 3900

Natural England Unex House reception desk: 0208 026 1774

How to get there

1. The office is a 10-minute walk from the station. If you are on foot, walk from the station towards the multi-storey car park (Perkins yellow) on the right hand side of Station Road, near the traffic lights. Just before the car park entrance/exit, on the right there's a footpath/cycleway leading to an underpass. Go through the underpass; walk past the steps on your left and bear right, to come up onto Bourges Boulevard, a dual carriageway. Cross the road at the first set of lights.

Alternative route: turn right out of the station, walk through the main car park (watch out for cars obviously!) and turn right through the yellow framed exit onto the road. Then follow 2. and 3. below.

2. Look for Asda and the 'Pets At Home' shop ahead of you on the right. Head towards 'Pets At Home' and then walk down the right hand side of this building, keeping it on your left.
3. Walk past a barrier and small car park; at the end of the 'Pets at Home' building is another barrier which marks the main entrance to the Unex House car park.

The walking route has some areas of uneven surfaces and no drop kerbs. If you have walking difficulties, visual impairment or use a wheelchair you may wish to consider taking a taxi from the station, especially if you are taking this route on your own for the first time.

Car parking

There is limited visitor parking on site; contact the NE reception desk on 0208 026 1774 before your visit to find out if there is a space you can use.

If there isn't, there's ample parking available in the public car parks close by (see Google map - link above).

Access to building

Unex House is shared with 3 other companies and the building is open from 7.00am to 7.00pm.

For access into the building, press the Natural England buzzer to the left of the front entrance. The NE office is on the first floor; press the buzzer to the right of the NE office door to gain access.

Sign in at reception; Fiona (or another Natural England colleague) will come and meet you.

You should wear Natural England pass cards at all times when in the building.

Entry to and exit from the building is via the main front doors. The other ground floor doors are for emergency evacuation use only.