

Nature Improvement Areas Best Practice Event - Connectivity

Day 2 Plenary

NIA representatives were asked to consider their experiences with planning / successes, failures and issues with interaction with the planning system?

Wild Purbeck: confirmed they had been quite cautious in a formal planning sense, as one quarter of Wild Purbeck is already covered by formal designation. They had considered this because of the potential of an important s106 agreement emerging from a large oil field development in Purbeck (£1.5M of funding)

Meres and Mosses: confirmed that there had been a lot of reluctance to make any formal comments on planning issues because as there are Local Authorities and Defra bodies etc. involved in the project board, it would not represent the individual views of these organisations.

Nene Valley: have a dedicated planning person. They got around the collective endorsement issue by submitting comments from one person specifically and making it clear it was not a collective view. They have been influencing policy development quite well by working with local authorities on local plans etc. Development control is a bit different, and often boils down to the individual Planning Authority and case officer. The culture differs between the nine Local Authorities although they have brought different parties together successfully. They confirmed that it was important to recognise key drivers such as in Nene Valley population and housing development pressures which mean it is crucial to engage with the planning system. Often non official engagement but key people talking to each other is critical.

South Downs: partnership hasn't really got involved in planning discussions but have used NIA to act as lever to get money to support restoration work from a large cable project running through the NIA. There was a feeling that the NIA enabled greater leverage and therefore more funding was channelled to restoration.

North Devon: don't have much need to engage with planning system as the District Council is not so much of a problem. They were hopeful about biodiversity offsetting offering source of funding however but this hadn't happened. They are also looking at establishing local nature reserves.

Humberhead levels: similar to ND and M&M no District Council responses. They confirmed it was difficult to agree on an NIA view but do support planning decisions with evidence. Two pilot biodiversity offsetting schemes had limited outputs. Habitat basemapping has been carried out/provided for Local Authorities. There has been some success with use of s106 agreements to extend core sites.

Marlborough Downs: nature of the NIA partnership seen as allies within the AONB. People considering development have come to partnership to get advice on how to mitigate developments / offset voluntarily. The NIA sought ministerial reassurance at the beginning of the programme that NIAs would not be a development barrier.