

Natural England Commissioned Report NECR047

Natural Leaders: actions for local environmental leadership

First published 07 July 2010

www.naturalengland.org.uk



Foreword

Natural England commission a range of reports from external contractors to provide evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties. The views in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England.

Background

Local Authorities are vital to realising the benefits of the natural environment for their communities. They can lead the debate on management of natural resources, galvanise the private and voluntary sector, find resources and develop local policy.

Local Authorities are also vital partners for Natural England (NE) as it delivers its statutory duties. They can be involved in service delivery, information provision and joint enforcement.

In 2009 Natural England commissioned the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) to find and analyse examples of environmental best practice amongst Local Authorities. The aim was to use the findings to improve the quality and relevance of its sustainable land use advice to Local Government.

Natural Leaders presents the information from this research and looks at the lead role councils can play in promoting their natural environment. It brings together their ideas and experiences as they activate the private and voluntary sector, acquire resources and develop a local vision to deliver positive outcomes for both people and wildlife.

The actions suggested within the report also challenge local authorities to think differently about these issues and identify how best they can be addressed.

The research points to four areas where the council's leadership can have the biggest impact:

- partnership;
- long term vision;
- community engagement; and
- investment in natural capital.

Natural England will use the findings from this research to:

- Share good practice as part of our advice to Local Government.
- Promote good environmental leadership that puts the natural environment at the heart of local decision making.
- Encourage routine and systematic collection of environmental leadership best practice from Local Government.

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Keywords - Environmental Leadership, Green Infrastructure, Ecosystem Services, Local Authorities

Further information

This report can be downloaded from the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk. For information on Natural England publications contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0845 600 3078 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

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ISSN 2040-5545

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NATURAL LEADERS
ACTIONS FOR LOCAL
ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The natural challenge ahead	3
Natural leadership	5
Natural partners	8
Natural vision	11
Natural communities	15
Natural capital	18
References	21
Appendix 1: research participants	22



INTRODUCTION

Now, more than ever, local leaders need to be well equipped to provide a secure future for their communities. The challenges are stark for chief executives and local politicians. Public spending cuts need to be made in the most effective way possible. Local economies need to be rebuilt, while at the same time making sure challenges like climate change, health inequalities and biodiversity loss do not persist.

The natural environment is a cost effective means to meet a range of these economic, social and environmental outcomes. But it needs local leaders to recognise its worth and translate this into action. Research in Scotland of the European network of protected areas (Natura 2000) showed the public benefits were more than three times greater than the management costs (TEEB, 2009). Yet in a survey of local authorities in England 40 per cent of respondents were concerned that they would have less funding for the natural environment in 2011 (LGiU, 2010).

This could be a missed opportunity. Whether it is a small patch of park in a busy urban centre or an expansive rural upland, to deliver a better quality of life for communities, local leaders must capitalise on the often hidden value of a healthy natural environment, including:

- **On the economy:** in North West England alone the environmental economy supports a wide and diverse range of jobs and businesses – worth up to £2.6bn GVA and providing 109,000 jobs (4NW, 2009).
- **On health:** living close to high quality accessible natural environment can lengthen life irrespective of other factors affecting life expectancy (Coombs et al, 2009).
- **On climate change:** improved management of lowland peat soils would help address an annual loss of carbon estimated to be worth as much as £150 million (Natural England, 2009b).

Local environmental leadership can transform this evidence into tangible change for local communities. It should inspire, motivate and support people within the organisation and outside. Alongside communities, NGOs and businesses, councils can create sustainable solutions by integrating environmental, social and economic

ambitions. At the same time it will be necessary to take a strategic view and make tough decisions about future priorities.

The debate about what local environmental leadership looks like was first explored in the LGiU paper *Local Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Local SONAR). For too long decision-making for the natural environment has been centralised, rather than recognising the importance of people and places in shaping the management of their natural resources. The unfolding national policy context (*see panel below*) supports this ambition, potentially providing the freedoms and levers for local leadership. In the government's coalition programme there is explicit recognition of the need to protect and promote green spaces and wildlife and to meet challenging climate change reduction targets. There are also a number of measures planned to increase local accountability and devolve responsibilities to community groups and neighbourhoods. Councils will be taking the initiative to make the localism agenda their own.

In this guide we aim to present the first principles for local environmental leadership through a series of chapters that provide ideas and success stories from councils across England. This research was commissioned by Natural England and is based on workshops and interviews carried out by the LGiU with councils across England (*see Appendix 1*). We encourage you to share this guide with the local leaders across your organisation to test your approach — are you doing enough to promote stewardship of your natural environment?

Changing national context for councils

The *Decentralisation and Localism Bill* (2010) aims to devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions. The proposals include:

- return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils
- new powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services
- give councils a general power of competence
- give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases
- give greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups.

Additional government commitments in *The Coalition: our programme for government* (2010) are to:

- maintain the Green Belt, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and other environmental protections, and create a new designation — similar to SSSIs — to protect green areas of particular importance to local communities
- introduce measures to protect wildlife and promote green spaces and wildlife corridors in order to halt the loss of habitats and restore biodiversity
- work towards an ambitious global climate deal that will limit emissions and explore the creation of new international sources of funding for the purpose of climate change adaptation and mitigation.



THE NATURAL CHALLENGE AHEAD

Innovation and inspiration are going to be the attributes of councils that continue to lead on their ambitious natural environment programmes in the near future. Having a strong team from across the council that can think creatively and use sound evidence to promote the natural environment.

From the research it was clear that while councils are passionate about improving the natural environment for their communities, challenges still persist. This guide sets out the areas where councils can have the greatest impact through environmental leadership. But it should also be the start of a debate about finding new ways of working that deliver cost-effective and well targeted interventions.

Despite examples of success across the country, there is not a consistent message about what local environmental leadership looks like. There are still a number of questions that need to be answered to ensure the value of the natural environment for the whole community is understood and delivered. This is not simply a challenge for local government. NGOs, business and national public bodies can provide the support and advice to get this right. These are the questions we need to be able to answer to have maximum impact:

- Where can we get more robust evidence of the economic value of the natural environment that will influence potential funding partners?
- Should councils have more power to enforce their vision for the natural environment?
- How do you develop community programmes in areas where there is less of a sense of community, similarly how do you make sure the success of a project does not stand or fall on a single community activist?
- How can we get more out of partnerships with the private sector?
- In hard times, how can we make enhanced public investments in the natural environment to deliver greater efficiency and improved outcomes?

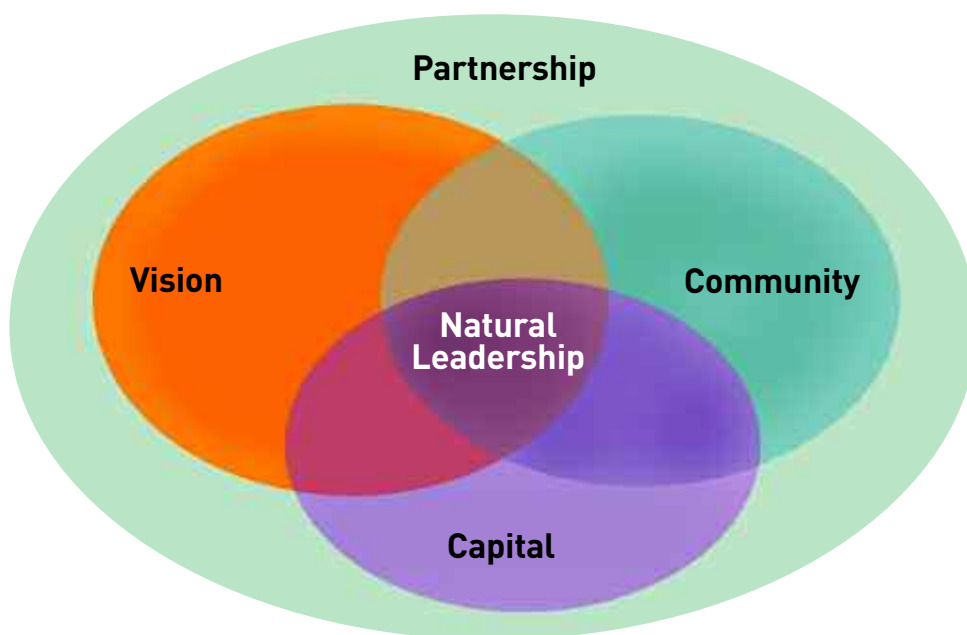
- What new mechanisms and partnerships are needed to enable ecosystem services (*see Definitions, page 6*) to become part of the formal economy, thereby stimulating innovation, enterprise and investment in their provision?

This research is part of a broader area of study into local stewardship of natural resources (Local SONAR), which looks at a new way of managing natural resources that brings environmental issues into the mainstream of decision and policy making processes. If you are interested in more information on this topic or taking this research forward please get in touch with the LGiU info@lgiu.org.uk.



NATURAL LEADERSHIP

The experience from local authorities points to four principles where the council's leadership can have the biggest impact: setting a long term vision; promoting community engagement; attracting investment; and progressive partnership, which is the overarching principle for successful leadership.



These principles are all interlinked and should be mutually supportive. Through our research we have seen local authorities providing the strategic co-ordination and shape to their services to put people at the heart of local natural environment policy that recognises a green infrastructure approach (see *Definitions, page 6*). But they recognise there is still more that they could be doing to provide transformational leadership for the natural environment.

To varying degrees councils are already corporate and community leaders, working within their organisations to build efficient and effective responses and with a range of organisations to build co-operation and new ways of working. In our research we would have expected to see a more consistent approach to environmental leadership.

Gaps still exist. Braver decisions are needed to give recognition of environmental limits in local visions, such as questioning developments on flood plains. There is still widespread disagreement about how valuation of natural resources is integrated into public policy making. And rather than tokenistic involvement, how do councils create a more coherent and enabling approach to handing power to communities, NGOs and businesses?

We all need to stretch our ambitions to bring all the elements of local environmental leadership together in one place.

Definitions

Ecosystem services: The goods (e.g. food, fibre and clean water) and services (e.g. water purification, pollination and climate regulation) ecosystems provide, and which sustain human well-being.

Green infrastructure: A strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.

For more information: www.naturalengland.org.uk

What makes a natural leader?

Recognising the real worth of the natural environment to the local economy and the community's quality of life; personally putting this into action by:

- creating an atmosphere where people are inspired to make a real difference for the environment
- passionately explaining environmental policies both internally and externally
- exhibiting personal credibility in advocating sustainable development objectives throughout your organisation and community
- arguing convincingly and persuasively for putting the environment at the heart of community planning
- engaging partners and suppliers early, actively and regularly.

Building natural partners

Forge new and innovative partnerships that deliver outcomes, including:

- a shared natural vision — agreeing on the targets of the partnership and the responsibilities of all partners

- opportunities for natural communities — incorporating the views of the communities in all partnerships
- new, sustainable natural capital
- strategic support to lower tier authorities and community and voluntary organisations.

Strengthening the shared natural vision

Take a green infrastructure approach to the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework, based on:

- identifying and enlisting the support of councillors
- building the value of the natural environment into decision-making, as part of the total economic equation
- working with the community to develop a long term vision to ensure credibility and public support.

Giving opportunities to natural communities

Give communities ownership by giving them power to make decisions on the natural environment, councillors can support them by:

- getting communities involved at an early stage so they can proactively promote the natural environment
- working with local organisations and voluntary groups to reach out to a wider audience
- not just consulting communities but guiding and supporting them to deliver projects
- making use of local knowledge and experience.

Attracting sustainable natural capital

Identify projects where collaboration could lead to more efficient use of resources, consider:

- making sure your Section 106 guidance is clear about seeking opportunities to invest in the natural environment and talking to designers and developers early to identify what they can do for the natural environment
- identifying how resources or projects could be designed to make the most of non-financial assets
- using smaller amounts of council funding or guidance to leverage other funds
- promoting ecological solutions as some of the most highly efficient and cost-effective means of tackling a range of environmental, social and economic problems.



NATURAL PARTNERS

Partnerships are the overarching theme of strong local environmental leadership. Collaboration will drive forward the vision, attract investment and support community involvement. Without strong partners councils risk providing overlapping services and failing to have the necessary impact to deliver change.

“The natural environment is multi-functional and there is something in it for everyone if it is well managed. This is a strong reason for working in partnership.”

Linda Tartaglia-Kershaw, Head of Landscape Planning and Heritage, Hampshire County Council

Whether it is planting street trees, mapping biodiversity opportunities or publishing a strategy, managing the natural environment is not the responsibility of a single agency. Collaboration should be about redesigning services to make sure they are as effective and efficient as possible.

Partners can help reach out to a wider audience, to enable a participative approach. Lessons from the Total Place approach (HM Treasury, 2010) showed that a cooperative approach is necessary to find new solutions that will deliver both value for money and local services more tailored to local needs.

Different partnerships will be formed to deliver different objectives. Successful partnerships have a common vision; shared commitment; and equal ownership. They involve different tiers of government, NGOs and the private sector to share resources, expertise and ideas as well as give more credibility and reputation to the work.

Local communities are a key part of any partnership to help create a sense of identity and purpose, reflect local needs and offer local knowledge and expertise. Councils are bringing people together and offering leadership to support their partners.

To respond to the changing landscape of the natural environment, partnerships also need to be able to evolve and respond to future changes. This requires flexibility and tolerance. Councils might consider what incentives would encourage active participation in partnerships over the long-term.

Hampshire County Council: building effective partnerships

Hampshire is predominantly a rural county with a strong coastal influence in the South East of England with a population of around 1.3 million. With the New Forest and South Downs National Parks, the county is a popular tourist destination.

Hampshire County Council places great emphasis on the natural environment. Cllr Ken Thornber, Leader of Hampshire County Council, is a strong advocate of environmental sustainability and works with officers to implement strategic and practical projects to address issues such as climate change and biodiversity. In addition to the steer and support from councillors, much of the council's work depends on a range of strong partnerships with districts and parishes, local and national organisations, schools, the voluntary sector as well as good inter-departmental working.

One of the most influential projects is the establishment of a Climate Change Commission to identify how Hampshire responds to climate change. The Commission was established in partnership with academics, the media and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Cllr Thornber is also keen to ensure young people, such as children in care, take part in this project and put forward their advice. To make sure the Commission leads to practical outcomes, they have set up a Centre of Excellence panel to develop a vision, strategy and an action plan that will be debated at a conference later in 2010.

Another example of a collaborative approach is the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership. This involves local authorities, statutory agencies, NGOs and landowners working to agreed objectives for conserving and enhancing biodiversity in the county. This partnership has established the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, which is hosted by the County Council. The centre manages data on Hampshire's wildlife and natural environment and provides a comprehensive information service to its wide range of partners, business, community groups and the public. This centralised information hub was made possible with funding from its partners, including Natural England, the Environment Agency, and all the local authorities in the county.

There is also a partnership approach to producing management plans for the three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in Hampshire. Together with local councils, Natural England, the land management sector, local organisations and the local parishes and voluntary sector, the plans set out how the land will be managed, covering topics such as sustainability, enhancing landscape character, biodiversity, development and leisure and tourism. The development of the plan was an inclusive process with the County Council sharing expertise and knowledge with partners and local communities. The plans are now being reviewed and a new approach will be used to make the plans accessible to as many communities as possible on the web.

A strong driver for the council to better manage the natural environment comes from local communities. For example, councillors are under pressure from the public to reduce traffic speed in the South Downs area. However, the County Council does not

have the scale of budget required to respond to the demand for delivering this on the ground. Instead, the council piloted a toolkit in one of the villages in the South Downs area of Hampshire. This provided the parish council with information and guidance on how they can work with the local community to return the village centre to the community, improve the local distinctiveness and quality of place, address problems of traffic speed and understand the value of the natural environment.

Further information:

Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership

www.hampshirebiodiversity.org.uk

Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, 2010

www3.hants.gov.uk/biodiversity/hbic.htm

Hampshire County Council, 2010, *Land Management Planning*

www3.hants.gov.uk/landscape-and-heritage/planning-the-landscape/land-management-planning.htm

Action: building natural partners

Forge new and innovative partnerships that deliver outcomes, including:

- a shared natural vision — agreeing on the targets of the partnership and the responsibilities of all partners
- opportunities for natural communities — incorporating the views of the communities in all partnerships
- new, sustainable natural capital
- strategic support to lower tier authorities and community and voluntary organisations.



NATURAL VISION

It takes time to deliver projects and see the benefits of promoting the natural environment. A long term vision steered and supported by councillors makes planning for the natural environment more systematic and influential.

“My role is to help shape the Core Strategy to ensure the natural environment is taken into account and ensure good quality design as part of the planning agenda.”

Cllr Linda Baldry, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Design, High Peak Borough Council

“Our green infrastructure strategy is like connecting the green dots that already exist in Lancashire – ensuring all different projects are linked up and delivered more systematically.”

Andy Mullaney, Head of Environment and Communities, Lancashire County Council

A well managed natural environment brings a range of benefits from tackling and adapting to climate change to improving physical and mental health. While different landscapes have different priorities and needs, they all need a strategic policy framework to meet the ambitions of communities and place. For instance, evidence to the recent inquiry on rural uplands points to a need for “a more holistic approach to policy and governance, and empowerment of the communities so they have a greater say in effective service delivery” (CRC, 2010). The value and impacts of a healthy natural environment may only be seen with long term commitment. The vision will need to reflect these timescales, while at the same time providing short term achievable targets to provide milestones to deliver in the long term.

One of the foundations of a long term vision is having the evidence base. There is increasing recognition that a good quality natural environment supports economically important services. There have been a range of research projects showing the value of the natural environment to the wider economy, including the multiple indirect benefits for communities and society:

- Across England around 60 per cent of rural tourism and recreation activity is dependent on landscapes and wildlife, supporting more than 190,000 FTE jobs (GHK Consulting Ltd and GFA-Race Partners Ltd, 2004).

- Research in New York shows that investing \$1 per year in trees can return \$5 in quantifiable benefits (Trees and Design Action Group, 2008).
- People who live within 500 metres of accessible green space are 24 per cent more likely to be active at the levels recommended by the Chief Medical Officer. Increasing the amount of accessible green space to reduce the sedentary population by just 1 per cent would reduce morbidity and mortality rates and save an estimated £1.44bn for the UK (Natural England, 2010).

By putting a price on these outcomes, the consequences of decisions about the future of the environment are more transparent. Councils who understand these values and impacts have taken a proactive role to ensure the long term vision for improving community wellbeing takes account of the natural environment.

For some councils, this means integrating the natural environment or green infrastructure into their Core Strategy as part of the Local Development Framework. Other councils have taken a different but equally effective approach by developing Biodiversity Action Plans and Climate Change Action Plans that take a long term view of the natural environment.

Pertinent to developing a long term vision is the role of councillors in steering and driving forward the natural environment agenda. Councils with strong member support make a vision more credible. As community leaders, councillors understand what the community wants. They are well placed to balance the views of different parts of the community and other stakeholders, making tough decisions about the future of the natural environment.

Leeds City Council: Core Strategy

“Green and grey infrastructure have to have equal weight and can be happy partners.”

Glenn Gorner, Countryside Operations Manager, Leeds City Council

As a city and metropolitan borough in West Yorkshire, Leeds has a population of around 770,000 with the central areas of Leeds predominantly urban. In spite of this, over 65 per cent of Leeds district is green belt land and central Leeds is located on the River Aire, exposing the city to some element of the natural environment.

Leeds City Council has integrated green infrastructure into its Core Strategy to ensure the quality of and access to the natural environment is a key element of their planning decisions. With no Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or National Parks, Leeds City Council arranged for local designation of “Special Landscape Areas” to protect high quality landscape from visually harmful development — so it remains attractive in appearance and character.

Leeds City Council was keen to adopt the concept of green infrastructure as part of the Local Development Framework process in its Core Strategy. This is not just about nature conservation and biodiversity. The main impetus for integrating green

infrastructure into the strategy is the evidence that improved access to good quality natural environment can improve community wellbeing. The council's policy is based on the idea that green infrastructure is not just grassland but a multi-functional area. It contributes to promoting biodiversity, addressing climate change and its impacts, improving health, absorbing urban pollutants, providing quality space for people and wildlife and adding value to the economy.

Green infrastructure is now a key element of the Core Strategy. Incorporating green infrastructure into the core strategy has been fundamental to informing and shaping Leeds planning decisions to ensure communities and wildlife have access to good quality natural environments.

The Core Strategy was developed through inter-departmental working within the council and regular consultations with the public. The aims were to direct planning policy and provide a set of clear principles that future developments must consider. While the Core Strategy is still in draft form, the emphasis of green infrastructure in the council's planning decisions is already recognised by developers. For example, Leeds New Forest Village is a development site in South Leeds that aims to provide 1,200 homes. As former agricultural land of poor quality and limited functionality, the developers embraced integrated green infrastructure into the site, such as woodlands, ponds and avenues of trees.

Further information:

Leeds Biodiversity and Development Guide

www.leeds.gov.uk/files/Internet2007/2005/week32/inter__0B2F8FD05B8159E080256E0C00577173_5f776324-60f1-4784-bdb5-4b1680c720c5.pdf

High Peak Borough Council: Landscape Character Supplementary Planning Document

“The council is here to listen to the general public and to help them get what they want.”

Cllr Linda Baldry, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Design, High Peak Borough Council

High Peak in north Derbyshire is a small predominantly rural area with a population of around 93,000. The local authority area lies mainly within the Peak District National Park (which has its own National Planning Authority) and consequently maintenance of the high quality landscape in the areas outside the National Park is a priority for the Borough Council.

High Peak Borough Council ensures its surrounding landscape can be protected and improved by developing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to provide guidance on good design of developments appropriate to the landscape character. As portfolio holder for Planning and Design, Cllr Linda Baldry steered and supported the Council's development and adoption of the SPD.

To ensure the community was fully involved in the development of the SPD, the council ran public events to get input on the design principles. Cllr Baldry, along with other councillors, played a key role in talking to residents and understanding and reflecting their views. The public consultation resulted in amendments to the SPD, which was later signed off by Committee.

The outcome is a user friendly SPD document, which highlights the characteristics of each landscape character type and the design necessary for developments to enhance each one. The SPD is used by planning officers and by developers to ensure their proposals are consistent with the council's design principles.

The SPD has been instrumental in ensuring good quality and landscape-friendly design is fundamental to future developments in the local area. Rather than a stand alone document, the SPD is being incorporated into the Core Strategy, which aims to emphasise the protection and access to natural environment in the council's management of future housing growth. Cllr Baldry's leadership will be a key element to make this process accountable to the public.

Further information:

High Peak, Planning for sustainable development

www.highpeak.gov.uk/planning/sustainabledevelopment

Action: strengthening the shared natural vision

Take a green infrastructure approach to the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework, based on:

- **identifying and enlisting the support of councillors**
- **building the value of the natural environment into decision-making, as part of the total economic equation**
- **working with the community to develop a long term vision to ensure credibility and public support.**



NATURAL COMMUNITIES

Promoting the natural environment is not just for its own sake, it is about what local people want from their area. Councils need to know how to understand their community's ambitions and reflect their views in action.

“We don't want to make people's decisions for them, we want to know what they want.”

Hendryk Jurk, Biodiversity Manager, Sutton Council

“We don't prescribe solutions to communities. We empower people to do it themselves.”

Linda Tartaglia-Kershaw, Head of Landscape Planning and Heritage, Hampshire County Council

Councils are implementing their duty to improve the economic, environmental and social well-being for the people in their area. To deliver this effectively, councils need to understand and respond to community needs and aspirations. And with community buy-in and involvement, the project or policy becomes more credible and justifiable.

As regular users of the natural environment, communities can help councils better understand the value of green spaces. According to CABI's recent research, nine out of 10 people use and value their parks (CABI, 2010). They also found that good quality parks are likely to be used more, and that people who are satisfied with their parks tend to be satisfied with their councils. Communities can provide a reality check for the council when making tough decisions on issues such as protecting the natural environment and promoting development.

There are many ways of working with communities. The right approach will be based on the scale of the projects and the role communities want to play. Most councils run public consultations to get feedback and agreement from communities on specific projects or policy.

For example, green infrastructure strategies and Biodiversity Action Plans go through a series of consultations with residents and stakeholders. This meets the statutory requirement under the Duty to Involve (CLG, 2009) for councils to inform and consult stakeholders and the public on issues of local interest.

Increasingly, communities want more involvement and can offer much to the delivery of environmental projects. Rather than prescribing what communities should do, councils increasingly provide people with information and options for communities to shape the design and implementation of projects. This may include running workshops, developing volunteer programmes or direct investment for community ideas. Councils are also working with grassroots campaigns, such as in Hampshire where the ‘Greening Campaign’ is partly funded by the county and district councils.

Councils are maximising their outputs with very limited resources. Outreach activities to engage with local people can be resource-intensive. Some councils are addressing this problem by working through organisations — such as voluntary groups, schools and parish councils — to engage with the public. This helps save money, reach out to a wider audience base and tap into expertise not readily available within the council.

London Borough of Sutton: community involvement

“People sometimes only notice when wildlife areas are no longer there. But once they learn about them, they are very keen to get involved to protect these areas.”

Hendryk Jurk, Biodiversity Manager, Sutton Council

With a population of around 180,000, Sutton is the southernmost borough of London. While it is predominantly urban, Sutton sits on part of the London green belt. The south of the borough has farmlands and open green space, while the north tends to have less access to the natural environment. Some open spaces are designated wildlife sites or Local Nature Reserves.

Sutton Council has always been keen to make the borough a green area, and community involvement is crucial to making this happen. They found people are not always aware of the benefits and functions of the natural environment. Sutton has adopted an “early intervention” approach to inform the public about the value of, and their access to, the natural environment as a way of changing their behaviour.

To make the natural environment accessible to more people, the council has developed a new approach to community engagement. Through support for volunteers it builds a network of expertise in the community. This is exemplified in a range of different projects.

The council supports Sutton Nature Conservation Volunteers, a charity that improves and conserves the wildlife value of the Borough. Community members volunteer to work on practical maintenance, habitat management and ecological surveys and monitoring. With direction and guidance from the council, the volunteers have adopted certain sites. They require very little resources and attract people from across the community wanting to learn about the natural environment. Community groups can also utilise funding streams that are not available for councils.

A specific example of working in collaboration with volunteers was to improve access on the Sutton Countryside Walk as part of the Downlands Countryside Management Project (DCMP). Volunteers of the DCMP worked on a new walks leaflet, signposting

the walk and improved access points on the path to replace stiles to make it easier for people with mobility problems.

To ensure projects are sustainable, the council has adopted exit strategies. For example, the council will encourage volunteers to get involved but will need to support them on bigger projects such as tree works. The council will make sure they have the ability to carry out the work on a smaller scale and recruit new volunteers if key volunteers can no longer commit.

For further information:

London Borough of Sutton, 2009, One Planet Action Plan

www.sutton.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=8680&p=0

Sutton Nature Conservation Volunteer

www.sutton.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1964

Downlands Countryside Management Project (DCMP) — as a local community project, DCMP relies on volunteers to improve countryside access and community involvement

www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/LookupWebPagesByTITLE_RTF/Downlands+Project?opendocument

Action: Giving opportunities to natural communities

Give communities ownership by giving them power to make decisions on the natural environment, councillors can support them by:

- **getting communities involved at an early stage so they can proactively promote the natural environment**
- **working with local organisations and voluntary groups to reach out to a wider audience**
- **not just consulting communities but guiding and supporting them to deliver projects**
- **making use of local knowledge and experience.**



NATURAL CAPITAL

Councils will increasingly need to look beyond their own budgets to attract investment for the natural environment. There are a number of drivers for organisations to invest, but there will need to be clarity about using the money efficiently and ensuring projects get the desired results.

“Natural environment projects require long term commitment and funding. Even with external funding and investments, they can’t be sustainable if you don’t have a well thought out plan and clear exit strategy in place for when the initial project funds cease.”

Joanne Clough, Senior Parks and Countryside Manager, Leeds City Council

Attracting external funding is a core task for councils hoping to deliver ambitious environmental projects. A survey of local authorities in England showed that 75 per cent of respondents sought joint funding from partners to deliver natural environment projects. In answer to the same question only 35 per cent were also seeking innovative ways of financing (LGiU, 2010). There is likely to be increasing pressure to find new partners and finance models as public spending is reviewed.

For many councils planning obligations present one of the most assured funding streams. Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows councils to seek finance for the provision of services to make a development acceptable in planning terms. Councils need to talk to designers and developers early, so they start the process thinking about what they can do for the natural environment and wider ambitions for the environment and communities.

For instance, proposals for Staynor Hall farm buildings complex in North Yorkshire included an agreement that requires the developers to put in place detailed Landscape Strategy and Nature Conservation Master Plans for the site (Natural England, 2009). This led to investment in a range of measures such as protection for Staynor Hall Plantation, wildlife corridors and recreational green spaces that created a green residential development.

Showing the link between the environment and the economy can lead to significant investment. Investment in the natural environment has been intrinsic to regeneration plans for New East Manchester, knitting together green space from natural green

corridors to community gardens. They have developed Master Plans that show the potential for neighbourhoods and as new development investment is brought into the area they can make sure the green initiatives are also delivered.

This principle is being taken in an innovative direction with the idea of conservation credits. The idea is that any cost to biodiversity through development is compensated for with investment in biodiversity elsewhere. The Environment Bank is already testing this approach in the Thames Estuary, where they will be selling shares in a £100 million project to restore and reconnect the fragmented landscape (*Guardian*, 2010). At this stage buying credits is voluntary, but it could be possible for developers to invest in credits to meet planning standards.

Away from planning there are a range of partners that have a stake in the natural environment that can provide both financial and non-financial support to projects. The value of non-financial resources in particular should not be overlooked. In Sutton, one member of staff from the council coordinates the equivalent of 700 work days of volunteers a year to work on Sutton Nature Conservation. Based on £50 per work day, the council is saving £40,000 a year on staff costs. There will be a range of opportunities for partners to share skills, expertise or resources that will lead to cost-effective projects.

Ensuring projects that attract investment are effective and efficient is also vital. In particular, councils are considering not only the upfront capital but also the long term cost of maintenance. Plans for how projects continue to thrive need to be made from the start.

Lancashire County Council: Community design grant scheme

“The community design of the park cost us very little but was worth far more to the local people.”

Cllr Tim Ashton, Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning, Lancashire County Council

With 80 per cent of the county classified as rural, two sites designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and three regional parks, the natural environment is central to the economy and culture of Lancashire. There are 1,445,100 people living in Lancashire and 82 per cent live in the urban centres of the county, including Preston, Blackpool, Lancaster and the towns of east Lancashire. The contrast between the industrial legacy of these centres and the vast countryside is recognised in the vision for Lancashire’s green infrastructure, which emphasises developing and maintaining these green spaces and places as part of a network that connects urban and rural areas.

Lancashire County Council has developed a range of partnerships and support packages to maximise external funding for the natural environment. One way they are putting communities first in Lancashire is by pump-priming investment for the changes local people want to see in their local area. They use council funding as a catalyst to attract other partners to invest and for every £1 they invest in the natural environment they attract £5 in additional investment. There is also recognition that different green

spaces and places need different models to attract investment, from converting contaminated land into marshes to a plot of derelict land that needs grass and a bench.

There has been particular success in stimulating community involvement in small scale environmental projects through a team which specialise in leveraging external funding. The programme Community Design gives grants of up to £1,000 and puts them in touch with designers to work on their ideas and to bring them to the fore. This initial funding and guidance from the council provides them with a professional plan for the project that then generates support from other partners. There are around 200 schemes given assistance each year, which has brought a lot of income into the county and benefited the community environmental schemes.

The Park View 4U project used this approach to particularly good effect. The council was approached by the local community to help them turnaround a derelict park that had in the past been popular. The council worked with the community to draw up a design for how the park should look. Park users, parents, neighbours, young people and the police were all involved in the design process. This was then used by the community to pitch to funders for delivery and implementation. The success of the design and the ongoing voluntary work has meant the project has attracted £1.6m funding.

There is now a charitable trust that continues to improve the park. They have recently been recognised with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. Accepting the award on behalf of the trust Mr Ray Norsworthy said: "The Charity 'Park View 4U' was set up with the simple aim of regenerating the Park View Road Playing Fields for the benefit and enjoyment of the children and people of Lytham. Over the years the project has grown beyond our wildest belief."

Further information:

Lancashire community design

<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/?siteid=5136&pageid=24486>

Park View <http://www.parkview4u.org.uk/>

Action: attracting sustainable natural capital

Identify projects where collaboration could lead to more efficient use of resources, consider:

- **making sure your Section 106 guidance is clear about seeking opportunities to invest in the natural environment and talking to designers and developers early to identify what they can do for the natural environment**
- **identifying how resources or projects could be designed to make the most of non-financial assets**
- **using smaller amounts of council funding or guidance to leverage other funds**
- **promoting ecological solutions as some of the most highly efficient and cost-effective means of tackling a range of environmental, social and economic problems.**

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APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Manchester workshop: 17 May 2010

Martin Tincknell, Head of Conservation & Landscape, Charnwood Borough Council

Cllr Jean Wharmby, Derbyshire County Council

Jane Morwood, Principal Landscape Architect, Lancashire County Council

Mike Corcoran, Strategy & Development Manager — New East Manchester, Manchester City Council

Julie Lawrence, Environmental Programme Manager — New East Manchester, Manchester City Council

Mike Grace, Natural England

Richard Walker, Head of Countryside Service (Economic & Rural Services), North Yorkshire County Council

Cllr Mark Alcock, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

Nick Andrews, Team Leader, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

Ian Trickett, Green Volunteer, Participation & Inclusion Officer, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr Derek Antrobus, Salford City Council

Annie Surtees, Assistant Principal Ranger Services, Salford City Council

Keith Missen, Environmental Planning Team Manager, Sheffield City Council

Andy Nolan, Director of Sustainable Development, Sheffield City Council

London workshop: 27 May 2010

Luke Bristow, Countryside & Ecology Officer, Essex County Council

Gwyn Owen, Quality of Life Partnerships Manager, Essex County Council

David Carman, Landscape Planning Manager, Hampshire County Council

Linda Tartaglia-Kershaw, Head of Landscape Planning & Heritage, Hampshire County Council

Andrew Bedford, Principal Parks Manager, LB Islington

Steve Goulette, Assistant Director of Environmental Services, Maidstone Borough Council

Cllr Ben Shearheard, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Maidstone Borough Council

Cllr Ron Forrest, Mendip District Council

Richard Lemon, Natural England

Cllr Lynne Stagg, Cabinet Member for Transport, Portsmouth City Council

Cllr Roland Dibbs, Rushmoor Borough Council

Frances Martin, Head of Policy and Performance, Southampton City Council

Julie Davies, Lead Officer for Climate Change, Tewkesbury Borough Council

Cllr Jim Mason, Lead Member for Climate Change, Tewkesbury Borough Council

Cllr Maureen Rowcliffe-Quarry, Member on Climate Change Working Group, Tewkesbury Borough Council

Interviews

David Hopkins	County Archaeologist	Hampshire
David Carman	Landscape Planning Manager	Hampshire
David Pape	Head of Ecology for HCC	Hampshire
Linda Tartaglia-Kershaw	Head of Landscape Planning and Heritage	Hampshire
Hendryk Jurk	Biodiversity Manager	Sutton
Peter Jepson	Specialist advisor — Ecology	Lancashire
Andy Mullaney	Head of Environment and Communities	Lancashire
Ian Welsby	Group Head Projects & Implementation	Lancashire
Cllr Tim Ashton	Portfolio Holder for Environment and Planning	Lancashire
Andrew Ashcroft	Head of Rural policy	Lancashire
Hilary Senior	Principal Planning Policy Officer	High Peak
Cllr Linda Baldry	Portfolio Holder for Planning and Design	High Peak
Glenn Gorner	Countryside Operations Manager	Leeds
Helen Miller	Principle Planner	Leeds
Jo Clough	Senior Parks and Countryside Manager	Leeds

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The LGiU is an award winning think-tank. Our mission is to strengthen local democracy to put citizens in control of their own lives, communities and local services. We work with local councils and other public services providers, along with a wider network of public, private and third sector organisations.

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Pictures: (cover &
p15): Third Avenue