



House of Commons
Environmental Audit
Committee

**Local Nature
Partnerships:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Twelfth Report of
Session 2014–15**

**First Special Report of Session
2015–16**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 21 July 2015*

The Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

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Powers

The constitution and powers are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152A. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by the Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/eacom.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Slater (Clerk), Charlotte Simmonds (Second Clerk), Tom Leveridge (Committee Specialist), Ameet Chudasama (Senior Committee Assistant), Anna Browning (Committee Assistant), and Nicholas Davies (Media Officer).

Contacts

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First Special Report

The Environmental Audit Committee reported to the House on 19 March 2015 (HC 858). The Government response to the Committee's Report was received on 14 July 2015, and is appended below.

Appendix—Government response

Introduction

The Government welcomes the Environmental Audit Committee's report: Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and the broad thrust of the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee's report discusses some of the key challenges and accurately summarises the mixed performance record of individual LNPs. The Government believes that local people know their local priorities better than central policy officials and it is therefore important that they have functioning mechanisms available to enable them to make decisions that affect their areas. These Partnerships are considered an important part of the picture.

The Government is currently developing a framework for a 25 year environment plan which will set out our ambition for a healthy and resilient natural environment, which benefits people and the economy, and the key actions that will be taken to get us there. Local delivery will be an important component of the 25 year environment plan and the contribution of LNPs will therefore be evaluated in that context.

Recommendations and Responses

The next Government should undertake an early review of the LNP programme, to identify an agenda for action linked to other nature conservation initiatives with approaching deadlines.

The Government accepts the recommendation to undertake a review of LNPs. After 3 years of operation it is an appropriate point at which to take stock. The recent independent LNP evaluation, published in March 2015, together with the Environmental Audit Committee report, provides an excellent basis for this review.

Specifically, such a review should:

- (a) **examine LNPs' funding and their links to LEPs (including the appropriateness of the criteria and metrics for disbursement of European Structural Investment Funds) HWBs and local planning authorities, as well as potential new links with additional stakeholders such as landowners and farmers.**

We recognise that LNP links to local stakeholders and the potential funding opportunities they offer are a primary factor in their effectiveness. Defra's provision of non-financial

support is crucial to LNP credibility, directly affecting a Partnership's local standing and ability to draw in local and national/EU funding. Options for strengthening this support will be considered as part of the review.

- (b) Identify best practice from the successful LNPs, but also the barriers that have hindered the less successful ones, including the role played by conflicting objectives of the local bodies involved.**

Work to support LNPs has aimed to facilitate sharing of best practice and barriers to success. The annual LNP event in March, hosted by Defra, was designed specifically to provide an opportunity for LNPs to celebrate and share success and to discuss the issues they face, and the means by which to overcome them. We are also building a collection of LNP case studies/best practice and will continue to explore ways in which we can support this information sharing in the future.

- (c) Identify those LNPs where the Government will need to relaunch the initiative, providing newly targeted seed funding to establish an effective national coverage.**

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And the review should be linked to and coordinated with:

- (i) the European Commission's fitness check of the birds and habitats directives, to ensure both that the protections remain robust and that England's experiences with LNPs inform the deliberations.**

We have made the LNPs aware of, and encouraged them to participate in, the consultation that forms the first part of the EU Commission's 'Fitness Check' of the Habitats and Birds Directives. We will continue to play an active role in the next stages of this process, considering national, regional and local implications.

- (ii) the next Government's deliberations on the long-term future of the Natural Capital Committee beyond its current September 2015 remit.**

The Natural Capital Committee's (NCC) third State of Natural Capital report made a series of recommendations on the activity required to ensure the sustainable use of natural capital and Government will be responding to this in due course. However, the Government has committed to extending the life of the NCC until at least the end of this Parliament and to the development of a 25 year environment plan.

Over the summer we will develop new Terms of Reference for the NCC and will consider the most appropriate form for the Committee in light of these. The review will align with this work.