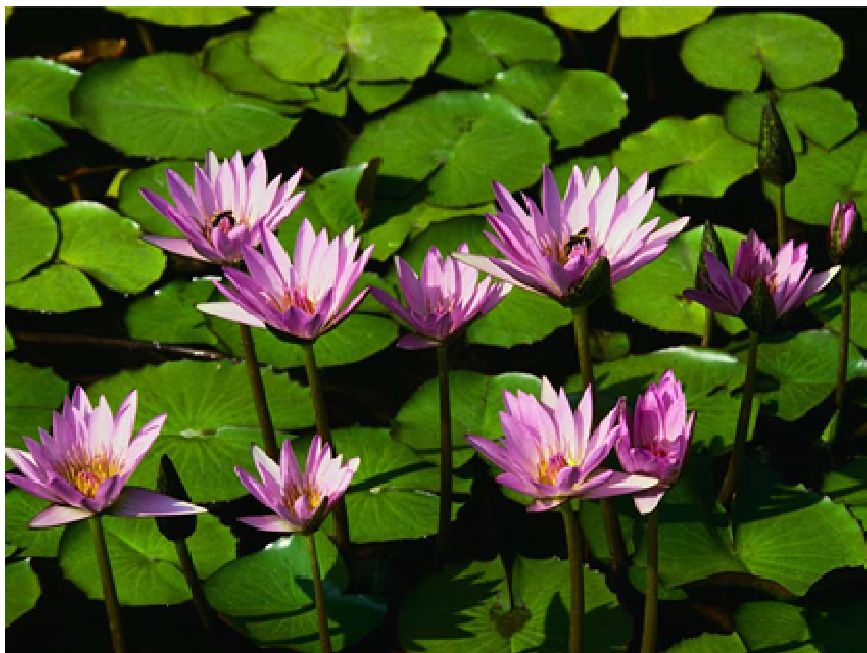


East of England Local Records Centre Review Project



Improving and Standardising Data Enquiry Services

Lizzy Carroll, Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service

March 2011



Contents

	PAGE
1. Project Background	4
2. Project Objectives	4
PART I: IMPROVING DATA ENQUIRY SERVICES TO CONSULTANTS	
3. Background	5
4. Methods Outline	5
5. Consultants' Requirements	5
6. Summary of Consultant Responses	6
7. The Standard Data Enquiry Service	8
8. Metadata	12
9. Response Time	12
10. Data Format	12
11. No Data No Fee	13
12. Cross-boundary Searches	13
13. What Was Not Included?	13
14. Requesting Data Back From Consultants	14
15. Gaps in Current Service Provision	15
16. January Update	15
17. Automated Data Enquiry Tool	16
18. Promotion of the Standard Data Enquiry Service	16
PART II: IMPROVING SERVICES PROVIDED TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER PUBLIC BODIES	
19. Background	18
20. Methods Outline	18
21. Data Needs of Local Authorities and Public Bodies	18
22. Current Service provision	19
23. Gaps in current Provision and How Local Authority Data Needs Could be Met	21
24. Automated Planning Application Screening	21
PART III: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE	
25. Background	23
26. Natural Environment White Paper and England Biodiversity Strategy	23
27. Localism Bill	24
28. Natural England	24
29. LRC Collaboration	25
30. Online Data Provision	25
31. LRCs and the NBN Gateway	27
32. Regional Data Provision Strategy	27
33. Dealing with potential Loss of LRC Funding	29
34. Taxonomic Gaps in Data Holdings	30
35. OS Licensing	32
36. Project Performance Measures	34
37. Project Legacy	35
38. Acknowledgements	35
39. References	36

Figures and Tables

		PAGE
Figure 1	Summary of the Standard Data Enquiry Service	9
Figure 2	Data products recommended in <i>Lott (2006)</i>	19
Table 1	Progress update from each LRC in January 2011	15
Table 2	Development of NBIS online data provision tool	26
Table 3	Suggested actions for LRCs to take over the next 5-10 years in order to be able to meet the environmental data needs of their users	28
Table 4	Gaps in data holdings and action being taken to obtain them	30
Table 5	Outcomes of Project Performance Measures	34

1. Project Background

Local Records Centres are not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and disseminate information on the biodiversity and geodiversity of the geographical area in which they are based. Their users range from Local Authorities and environmental consultants to conservation charities and the general public.

Natural England was appointed by Defra to administer the Fund for Local Biodiversity Recording, with the aim of developing the national network of local biological recording and improving the coverage, quantity and quality of biological information available.

In 2009, a Defra-funded Review of LRCs in the East of England region was carried out by RPS on behalf of Natural England. The East of England region covers the LRCs for Bedfordshire and Luton, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. The aims of the Regional Review were to identify prioritised actions to secure sustainable funding for LRCs and to address the gaps that currently exist in the coverage and consistency of biodiversity data collection and management.

The project discussed in this report was one of three taken forward in the East of England region, alongside a project advocating the need for and value of LRCs, and another to develop a fully functioning LRC in Essex.

2. Project Objectives

- Establish a standard data enquiry service and examine the possibility of a standard charge for all LRCs across the East of England.
- Examine the provision of a premium service for data requests.
- Make enhancements to the supply of data moving towards a one stop shop across county data holders and for cross boundary searches.
- Investigate the potential of a pay as you view web-service.
- Promote the services and use of the LRC network to ecological consultants within the region.
- Work to improve services provided by LRCs to public bodies by implementing delivery of services identified by the separate advocacy project.
- Identify a long-term strategy for improving the consistency of data provision across the region.

The project is divided into three sections: improving services provided to consultants; improving services provided to Local Authorities and other public bodies; and developing a regional long term strategy for data provision based on potential future data needs. Each of these sections is discussed separately within this report.

PART I: IMPROVING DATA ENQUIRY SERVICES TO CONSULTANTS

3. Background

The RPS Review found that the data enquiry service provided to LRC users lacked consistency, both across the region and nationally. These inconsistencies included response quality, charges applied and services offered. Part I of the project aimed to address these problems by establishing a consistent standard service for data enquiries across the region. This delivers against the Defra Fund by improving the coverage, quantity and quality of biological information provided to consultants. The data supplied to consultants are used to support decision-making during the planning process therefore improving the data supplied should lead to better informed decisions.

4. Methods Outline

- Questionnaires were sent out by email to environmental consultants to determine their views on current LRC service provision and how these could be improved. These questionnaires supplemented the outputs from two relevant consultants' events held in the region before this project commenced. The questionnaire used is shown in Appendix 1.
- A preliminary document was produced from the questionnaire and event responses and circulated amongst the LRCs in the region to ensure the output was an improvement to current services and also feasible to provide within a year.
- Representatives of IEEM, the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE) and Natural England were asked to comment on the draft.
- Each LRC in the East of England was contacted to determine their current level of service provision, which was compared to the new agreed Standard Data Enquiry Service.
- Each LRC was visited to discuss the steps necessary for them to be able to provide the Standard Data Enquiry Service, and what (if any) help was required, either from the Project Officer or from another LRC.
- The LRCs were contacted periodically for the remainder of the project to ensure that they remained on track to be able to provide the Standard Data Enquiry Service by the end of March 2011.
- The Standard Data Enquiry Service was promoted to environmental consultants through a regional conference held in January 2011, a promotional leaflet and through LRC websites and newsletters. It is intended that a reminder email will be sent out to consultants at the start of April to let them know that the new service is up and running.

5. Consultants' Requirements

Environmental consultants were informed of this project (in the form of a letter circulated by email) and their input requested as to what LRCs needed to

provide. Two events were run before the project commenced, providing relevant outputs. These events are summarised below.

- A regional consultants' workshop was organised by IEEM in December 2009. This workshop had three aims: to explore the current use of East of England LRCs by environmental consultants; to determine the information needs that environmental consultants have for biological data; and to discuss possible future enhancements to the service provided by LRCs. The outputs of this workshop are summarised in Appendix 2.
- A regional conference for LRCs and environmental consultants was held in Norwich in January 2010. Hosted by Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service (NBIS), the conference aimed to explain the role of LRCs, and to discuss how relationships between consultants and LRCs in the region could be strengthened.
During the conference, Roger Buisson of RPS presented the work he had done on the East of England Regional LRC Review and the recommendations arising from it. The afternoon's discussions centred on the themes outlined by Roger. For a summary of the notes taken during the discussion groups see Appendix 3.

Questionnaires were sent out to supplement the responses from the two events outlined above. They also gave consultants who had been unable to attend the events the chance to input. The questionnaires were sent out by email to over 200 consultants known to have used at least one of the East of England LRCs in the past two years. Whilst the response rate was low (unfortunately the start of this project coincided with the consultants' survey season) the responses that were returned were helpful and consistent with the event discussion outcomes. For a summary of the responses received from the questionnaires, see Appendix 4.

6. Summary of Consultant Responses

The main problems with the data enquiry service currently provided by LRCs were specified as:

- Having to source datasets from other organisations (LRCs not having the full picture; in particular where LRCs don't hold County Wildlife Site or SNCI information. LRCs not stating clearly enough what datasets they do or don't hold).
- Lack of detail and/or completeness of the records held, plus it is sometimes unclear whether all records being provided have been validated.
- Variability in charging and response times and being charged when no or very few records are returned.
- Large datasets being sent out on paper rather than electronically.

Consultants want to receive, for a specified location, all of the records of protected, rare and BAP species recently collected in that area. Particular reference was made during the consultation to species covered by Berne Annex 1 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act, Biodiversity Action Plan

species, European Protected Species, Red Data Book species and locally rare plants. Records of invasive species are also required. The species records need to contain details including a full date and the record type – whether the species was seen or if it was recorded from a sign such as droppings or burrows. The records need to have been validated as accurate and should be accompanied by a metadata statement describing the quality and currency of the datasets held by that particular LRC.

Information also needs to be provided on protected sites (both statutory and non-statutory) including the site boundaries and reasons for designation. Information on local sites is particularly important.

Consultants want LRCs to be one-stop-shops across data holders rather than simply signposting to other sources of data.

A 'premium service' could involve a faster service (e.g. a 24 hour turnaround), greater depth of information or products such as opportunity or ecological network mapping, or GIS datasets for BAP habitats. A 'news service', giving early warning of new datasets coming in might also be of use.

Regarding how much LRCs should charge for a standard data search, suggestions ranged from £50-£250 (with one suggestion of £500 for a larger search!!) Most were in the range of £70-£100 plus VAT. The cost needs to be proportionate to small developments and should be standardised. Consultants might be willing to pay more for extra datasets but only if the extra charge was low.

In terms of search time, the data need to be supplied as quickly as possible. Five to ten working days was generally seen as acceptable. There were mixed views on paying more for a faster service, perhaps because some LRCs already provide a very fast service as standard.

All responses showed that LRCs need to dispense with paper and provide data in electronic format, as this makes analysis easier.

The format required varies widely, and is often project dependent. PDF documents, Excel spreadsheets and GIS layers were all specified as useful. Being able to choose the format was suggested by several respondents.

Possible 'extra' products included BAP habitat mapping (though there is a lack of coverage in most counties at present), validated negative records (as long as their metadata specifies the survey methodology used) and a list of high quality datasets available over and above the standard service.

A standard data request form could be used, and a standard response be sent out to acknowledge the receipt of the data request, stating when the consultant can expect to receive their data. The LRCs should be a one-stop-shop not only within their county but also for cross boundary searches, and there should be no charge if no records are returned.

Finally, it was suggested that LRCs could provide a list of local surveyors who could survey difficult species, and that important or BAP species could be highlighted or colour-coded in the list of records returned so that they stand out.

7. The Standard Data Enquiry Service

The responses from the consultants' conference, the IEEM workshop and the questionnaires were collated into a preliminary Standard Data Enquiry Document. This was circulated amongst the East of England LRCs and revised to ensure that the final document was an improvement to the services currently offered while still being feasible to provide within a year.

The document was sent to representatives of IEEM, ALGE and Natural England for further comment, and these comments were included before the document was finalised (see Figure 1)

Figure 1: Summary of the Standard Data Enquiry Service

To be provided by Local Records Centres in the East of England region to Environmental Consultants

The following notable species records will be provided as standard for a defined search area:

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Schedules 1, 5 & 8
The Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010 Schedules 2 & 5
Protection of Badgers Act 1992
Bonn Convention Appendix 1 & 2
Bern Convention Annex 1 & 2
Birds Directive Annex 1
Habitats Directive Annex 2, 4 & 5
NERC Act 2006 Section 41 Species
UKBAP & LBAP Species
Veteran Trees

The following notable species records will also be available if requested:

IUCN Red List Species
Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 9 (non-native species)
Red & Amber List Bird Species
Nationally Notable Species
Locally Rare Species

The following information (as a minimum) will be provided for each notable species record:

Taxon Group
Latin & Common Species Name
Location
Grid Reference
Date (as full as possible)
Record Type (e.g. was the species seen or just a sign of it; where available)
Designations
Comments (where available)

LRCs will provide the most up to date information available covering at least the last ten years, as appropriate to their data holdings. A metadata statement will be available on each LRC website to provide further details (see below).

Notable species information can be provided either as a list in an Excel or Word table, or as a GIS layer, as requested. Paper copies can be provided on request but may incur an extra charge to cover printing and postage.

The following Important Site information will be provided as standard for a defined search area:

Ramsar
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
Special Protection Areas (SPA)
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
National Nature Reserves (NNR)
Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
County Wildlife Sites (CWS)
Roadside Nature Reserves (RNR)
Local Geological Sites/RIGS
Ancient Woodland

The following Important Site information will also be available if requested:

Geodiversity Sites (where applicable)*
BAP Habitats (where available)

Important Site information will be presented in map form (pdf or jpg/gif) or GIS layers as requested by the consultant and depending on licensing issues. Paper maps can be sent out on request but may incur an extra charge to cover printing and postage.

SSSI boundaries cannot be sent out as GIS layers; a link to the appropriate page of Natural England's website will be sent out instead.

Accompanying site citations can be included on request (those for SSSIs, Ramsar sites, SPAs and SACs may link to the appropriate citation on the Natural England or JNCC website).

* Geodiversity Sites are those sites identified as important for their geological, geomorphological or archaeological interest. They currently have no status within planning policy (unlike RIGS) but it is hoped that they will eventually function in a similar way to County Wildlife Sites. They are not applicable to every county so will not be available from every LRC.

A clear, plain metadata statement will be posted on each records centre website, providing information on:

- The temporal coverage of the records held.
 - The geographical coverage of the records held.
 - The quality of the records held, including what validation/verification procedures are in place.
 - The data security procedures in place.
 - Details of who to contact for any datasets not currently held by the records centre.
-

When you submit your data enquiry you will receive acknowledgement that it has been received along with an indication of how long it is likely to take to process and the estimated charge.

Records will be sent out within 10 working days of receiving your completed data request form.

In the unlikely event of no records being found within your search area, out of goodwill there will be no charge.

Where a data search crosses the boundary between two counties in the East of England region*, the cross-boundary search procedure will apply. You will only be charged by one of the LRCs, whilst being provided with records from both.

* Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre; Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre; Biological Records in Essex; Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre; Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service; Suffolk Biological Records Centre.

8. Metadata

Consultants at the regional conference requested that a clear and honest metadata statement be made available describing the quality and currency of the dataset held by each LRC.

A metadata statement will be available on each LRC's website from the launch of the Standard Data Enquiry Service. The format of these statements may vary, but they will all describe the temporal and geographical coverage of the records held. They will also cover data quality procedures – how records are validated and verified – and data security procedures. The metadata will also signpost to the holders of any data not currently held by the LRC.

Each LRC is working towards becoming a one-stop-shop for environmental data in their county. However this is an ongoing work in progress and will not be completed by the launch of the Standard Data Enquiry Service at the start of April. The issue of taxonomic gaps in data holdings and how these are being addressed is discussed in Part 3 of this report.

9. Response Time

While consultants want to receive data from LRCs as soon as possible, most thought that sending the records out within one to two weeks was acceptable. Several LRCs in the region already provide a faster service than this – frequently sending out data within a day or two. Other LRCs cannot realistically provide a 48hour response time, and even the quickest LRCs cannot guarantee such a service, particularly during busy periods or when a member of staff is away.

Records will be sent out within ten working days – both a reasonable and realistic timeframe. All data requests will be acknowledged on receipt, giving the consultant an indication of when they will receive the data.

10. Data Format

All respondents specified that receiving data in electronic format was preferable to paper, as redigitizing paper records is time consuming and unnecessary as the records have likely come from an electronic database in the first place. While Excel spreadsheets and PDF maps were often specified as useful, along with GIS layers for consultancies with suitable software, several consultants suggested that having a choice of data format would be particularly useful.

The format in which the data is sent out will be user specified from a number of options.

Paper will still be offered as an option, as it is occasionally asked for. However this format may incur a small extra charge to cover printing and postage. Species records will be offered as Excel spreadsheets or as GIS layers. Site boundary maps will be available as jpg or gif files, as PDF documents (layered

if possible, so layers of information can be switched on and off), or as GIS layers, subject to licensing issues. To distribute boundaries based on any MasterMap-derived product, both the LRC and the recipient are required to hold an OS MasterMap licence. Additionally, SSSI boundaries cannot be given out as GIS layers, but a link to the Natural England website will be provided, from which this information can be obtained.

11. No Data No Fee

LRCs charge for the time taken to maintain, manage and search the database and to prepare and produce the report, rather than for the data themselves. This time remains the same regardless of whether or not any records are returned so it follows that these charges should still apply. However it has been agreed within the region that, out of goodwill and in response to the consultation, where no records are returned, no charge will apply.

12. Cross-boundary Searches

Previously where a data search spanned the boundary between two counties, two separate data searches would be requested (one from each county LRC) and both LRCs would charge their standard fee. From now on when this occurs (within the East of England region), while two separate searches will still be carried out, the LRC in the county in which the largest section of the search area falls will be the 'lead' LRC. Only the lead LRC will charge (at their standard rate).

13. What Was Not Included?

While as many of the suggestions as possible given by consultants were considered, it was, not feasible to implement all of them. The main omissions are discussed below.

- A Premium Service could have involved either a faster response time and/or the provision of more comprehensive data.

A fast response time – perhaps with a 24 to 48 hour turnaround – is already often provided by some LRCs in the region. It was felt that consultants wouldn't want to pay extra for something that they sometimes already receive as standard! Additionally, during busy periods or when staff are away some LRCs would not be able to guarantee their ability to provide such a service.

In terms of providing more comprehensive data, each LRC is currently able to provide different "extra" datasets, therefore standardising this across the region, would currently be very difficult. Premium services will therefore be provided at the discretion of each LRC.

- Inconsistent charging for data searches between LRCs is seen as a problem by many consultants, particularly as they often don't reflect the quality of the responses sent out. This was discussed by the LRCs in the

early stage of the project but it was found unfeasible to agree standard charges across the region. The proposal was dropped to avoid derailing the whole process. Variations in charging often reflect the different set-ups of each LRC, each of which are funded and run in different ways.

As a region we are coming closer to standard charging, with four of the six LRCs charging between £90-100 per hour for the first hour of work (and with BRIE yet to set its charges).

- Alongside the development of the Standard Data Enquiry Service, a standard data enquiry form was drawn up. Refined over several drafts in consultation with the LRCs, a number of consultants were also asked to comment on it. However for a number of reasons, some of the LRCs opted to not use this 'standard' form. Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre (BRMC) had recently re-designed their data enquiry form and wanted to keep using it. Suffolk Biological Records Centre (SBRC) currently deal with all of their data enquiries by email only and want to continue this. The final data enquiry form was made available to the remaining LRCs to use if they chose to and they were given the option of altering it to better meet their needs. The data enquiry form template can be seen in Appendix 5.

14. Requesting Data Back from Consultants

Making it as easy as possible for consultants to provide LRCs with data from their ecological surveys will result in an improved data enquiry service by increasing LRC holdings of recent data.

A standard statement was developed for use on LRC websites, data enquiry forms and/or in data enquiry terms and conditions. This statement reminds consultants that LRCs need to keep collecting recent records to be able to provide a high-quality data enquiry service, and that consultants can help by sending in the records collected from their ecological surveys.

The statement developed reads as follows, and will be adapted for each LRC: *"[NBIS] also requests that, wherever possible, any biological records collected by the enquirer during environmental surveys within [Norfolk] are supplied free of charge to [NBIS]. We understand that certain reports are confidential, but are in urgent need of recent data in order to maintain and improve our high quality datasets."*

Discussions on data sharing revealed that many consultants are unsure what data LRCs want and in what format it should be sent. Many of the region's LRCs have templates on their website that can be downloaded, filled in and sent back, but most consultants are unaware of this. It was therefore decided to produce a regional template (to ensure consistency) and for this to be posted on each LRC website where it can be found easily by consultants. For the regional template, see Appendix 6.

15. Gaps in Current Service Provision

Once the Standard Data Enquiry Service was agreed, it was necessary to determine where gaps existed between the service currently provided and the agreed service. This was not done for Biological Records In Essex (BRIE), which is still in development. The Project Officer visited each LRC to discuss steps needed for that centre to be able to provide the Standard Service, and how the Project Officer (or any other LRC in the region) could help. BRIE was also visited, as this LRC will be set up to be able to provide the Standard Data Enquiry Service.

16. January Update

An email was sent to all LRCs in January 2011 to check progress with being able to provide the Standard Data Enquiry Service, and if any further help from the Project Officer was necessary. The responses to this email are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Progress update from each LRC in January 2011.

LRC	Progress
Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing everything except habitats (including ancient woodland, although most are CWS and therefore listed as such in the citations). - All ready to go, apart from the current OS licensing issue, which prevents them from sending out maps.
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Now searching for all the sites in the Standard Service. - More work needed on the species side, partly due to recent problems with Recorder software. - Would still like to validate and import some more datasets before running the service fully. - Once fully running, will release species records into Excel rather than Word as they do currently. - Plan to alter their data request form to be closer to the template. - Working on metadata.
Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Currently loading database with the necessary records (should be done by end Jan). - Need to get documentation on website (this is an internal HCC training issue).
Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All datasets available. - Metadata currently being written. - All other documentation is in place on the new website for when it is launched.
Suffolk Biological Records Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can't see any problems with being able to deliver the service. - Couple of final tweaks will be made at the next update (Feb/Mar). - Still awaiting some Veteran Tree data.

17. Automated Data Enquiry Tool

To further improve their data enquiry service, NBIS developed a tool to automate the data enquiry process. This tool can be given to and used by any other LRC in the region. Data enquiries can take a long time when they are done manually. The same process is used for each enquiry, making automation possible. This frees up staff time for other tasks such as GIS project work.

The tool, which is used with MapInfo, automatically searches the GIS for species and site data and produces a report in Excel. The only input needed is an easting, northing and radius. The tool can also be used for non-standard search areas (e.g. for pipelines). The spreadsheet produced contains tabs for species of conservation concern, non-native species and the various statutory and non-statutory site details. Summary sheets are also included, summarising the number of records there are for each species, resulting in a more manageable table when there are multiple records of the same species.

18. Promotion of the Standard Data Enquiry Service

A number of promotion methods have been employed in order to reach as many consultants as possible.

- In early 2010 a leaflet was produced by NBIS on behalf of the East of England LRCs to promote their services to environmental consultants. This leaflet was sent out to all of the consultancies that had used at least one of the region's LRCs in the last couple of years.

Before the Consultants' Conference 2011 this leaflet was re-designed to promote the new Standard Data Enquiry Service (see Appendix 7). This updated promotional leaflet was sent out with the invitations to the conference to an updated consultants' mailing list.

- The Regional LRCs and Environmental Consultants' Conference was held for the second time on the 24th January 2011 in Cambridge. The event was jointly organised by NBIS and CPERC.

The aim of the conference was to explain the new Standard Data Enquiry Service - showing the consultants how their comments had been implemented – and to consider 'where do we go from here?' At the end of the Standard Data Enquiry Service presentation, feedback was requested from the consultants present. The feedback received was very positive.

The discussion groups centred on how LRCs could work better with environmental consultants, focussing on data exchange, online data provision, Service Level Agreements, habitat data and how we could better engage with the consultant community. A number of useful suggestions were given which should be considered by the LRCs. A summary of the discussion groups is given in Appendix 8.

The conference also included an update from BRIE project officer Lorna Shaw, and a write up of the conference was included in the NBN e-newsletter. The feedback to the conference was overwhelmingly positive and is summarised in Appendix 9.

- Each LRC in the region has been asked to promote the new Standard Data Enquiry Service on their website, and, if they produce one, in their newsletter too.
- An email will be sent out at the start of April to the consultants' mailing list to inform them that the new Standard Data Enquiry Service is up and running.

PART II: IMPROVING SERVICES PROVIDED TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER PUBLIC BODIES

19. Background

The RPS Review highlighted the need to raise the profile of LRCs and to emphasize the need for biodiversity information by public bodies in meeting their statutory obligations. An Advocacy Project was set up, managed by CPERC. One of the Advocacy Project's objectives was to identify the present and future needs of public bodies in the region relating to biodiversity, along with the products and services that LRCs need to provide in order to meet these requirements. The outcomes of the Advocacy Project were then to feed into this project for the steps required to ensure each LRC was able to provide an improved service to Local Authorities and other public bodies in the region to be identified. This delivers against the Defra Fund by developing a strategy to improve the coverage, quantity and quality of biological information provided to Local Authorities and other public bodies.

In addition, NBIS were keen to investigate the feasibility of setting up and providing an Automated Planning Screening Service for Local Authorities in Norfolk. An assessment of current tools in use by LRCs around the UK and the potential of developing one in Norfolk (with the possibility of rolling it out regionally once it was working) were therefore included in this project.

20. Methods Outline

- Review outcomes of CPERC Advocacy Project regarding the data needs of Local Authorities and other public bodies in the East of England.
- Compare these data needs with the services currently being provided by LRCs in the region.
- Develop a strategy outlining how LRCs can meet the data needs identified.

21. Data Needs of Local Authorities and Public Bodies

Unfortunately, due to the timings of this project and the Advocacy Project, the outcomes of the Advocacy Project were not available. Therefore the document "*Biodiversity Data Needs for Local Authorities and National Park Authorities*" published by ALGE in 2006 was used as a basis for this section instead.

Local Authorities are required by the NERC Act 2006 "to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity" (Lott, 2006). To fulfil this, information on local biodiversity is required, and as Natural England is pulling back from providing advice (Birt, 2010), LRCs have an opportunity to be able to meet this need. Lott (2006) assessed nine areas of Local Authority work for which biodiversity information is needed, and summarised 17 recommended data products to meet these needs. Biodiversity information is required during a wide range of

Local Authority work including strategic planning, development control, highway maintenance, land management, hedgerow enquiries and formal education (*Lott, 2006*).

Different work areas require the information to be provided in different ways. Being able to provide a wide variety of data products to Local Authorities is likely to help when attempting to set up SLAs and other funding agreements. The data products recommended by the ALGE report (*Lott, 2006*) are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Data products recommended in *Lott (2006)*

- Strategic data audit
- List of important species
- BAP Priority habitat map
- BAP Priority habitat condition report
- Species distribution map
- Species population level report
- Opportunities map for biodiversity enhancement
- Important factors for predicting biodiversity trends
- Alert map of statutory and non-statutory designated sites
- Site species report
- Specialist site report
- General Wildlife Site/Local Site report
- Public access site map and information
- Latest news
- Hedgerow report
- Ancient Woodland inventory
- Veteran Tree inventory

Many Local Authorities in this region do not employ an ecologist. They often do not make use of LRC data because they don't have anyone to interpret it. Therefore many Local Authorities would likely welcome a product that provides both the data and also some interpretation of it.

22. Current Service Provision.

All of the LRCs in the region were contacted directly to determine the current services they provide to their Local Authorities. These services are summarised below.

BRIE

- Although still in development, BRIE is currently providing (or will soon be providing) four Local Authorities with GIS mapping files of species and habitats.

BRMC

- Provide administration and provision of County Wildlife Site, Local Geological Site, Roadside Nature Reserve and Accessible Wildlife Site

GIS layers and give notification of changes and updates to the boundaries and/or citations.

- Provide administration and provision of the latest county Biodiversity Action Plan habitat GIS layers including notification of updates.
- Provide access for specified individuals via BRMC Partner web pages to BRMC species data on the NBN Gateway.
- Can provide Monitoring Reports, which summarize the effects of the year's developments on habitats and species.
- Undertake specific project work e.g. digitization of Phase 1 habitat maps and hedgerow information, Green Infrastructure mapping etc.
- Provide species data for specific projects e.g. site sensitivity analysis.
- Assist with NI197 statistics in conjunction with the Wildlife Trust.

CPERC

- Respond to ad hoc queries, from simple questions to standard data searches.
- Provide supporting information for Local Authority Annual Monitoring Reports.
- Undertake NI197 analysis and provide the final figures.
- Run a Planning List Search service for Peterborough City Council.
- Undertake larger scale searches of sites proposed in their Local Development Framework documents.
- Assessment of minerals and waste sites.
- Small scale mapping projects also undertaken e.g. woodland map of Peterborough.

HBRC

- HBRC is slightly different to the other East of England LRCs as it acts largely as an advisory body on planning applications to Hertfordshire County Council and other Local Authorities, rather than impartially providing data.

NBIS

- Provide data searches on request.
- Provide NI197 monitoring statistics.
- Undertake Habitat and land-use mapping.
- Have been involved in opportunity mapping and Green Infrastructure mapping projects.
- Producing a State of the Environment report for North Norfolk.
- Provide data to the Highways department at the County Council.

SBRC

- Send data to their SLA partners annually rather than answering data requests on demand, and also support and help their partners to use the data.
- Small ad hoc mapping projects and support are included in the SLAs.
- Larger mapping projects are also undertaken but charged separately.
- Provide mapping and data support to Suffolk County Council who host them.

23. Gaps in Current Provision and How Local Authority Data Needs could be Met

Firstly, it is important to stress that the improvements made to data enquiry services for consultants will also improve the data services provided to Local Authorities and other public bodies, for example through improving the efficiency of the data enquiry process and the amount of data available.

A large gap in the data holdings of the LRCs in this region is habitat data. Some LRCs have more habitat data than others, but none are currently able to provide full coverage for their county. Habitat data is a particularly useful product for Local Authorities for assessing the condition of BAP habitats, creating opportunity maps for biodiversity enhancement and producing site reports among many others. It will also allow LRCs to play a key role in monitoring habitat changes over time. Therefore habitat mapping should be a priority for collection by LRCs in the region.

LRCs also need to have the ability to produce a wide variety of custom 'products' and reports such as those outlined in Figure 2 if required by their Local Authority customers (and other public bodies and organisations). Some of the LRCs in this region are already providing a good range of products and outputs. It is important that LRCs maintain in close contact with the needs of their customers in order to be able to take advantage of any new data needs that occur. Demonstrating products produced by the LRC could also be a useful incentive to get more reluctant Local Authorities to sign up to SLAs.

Producing some form of interpretation to be sent out with data to local authorities should be investigated. This could take the form of colour coding to highlight the most 'important' species (such as European Protected Species).

The Advocacy Project has just begun investigating the feasibility of regional SLAs with public bodies that work on a regional scale (such as utility companies and the Forestry Commission). One LRC in the region would probably act as a regional 'hub' for each SLA and be responsible for collating the data from each of the other LRCs and receiving and distributing the money. This would avoid the public body having to approach six separate LRCs and could potentially be useful for data exchange. The idea of regional SLAs should be pursued and recommendations that come out of the Advocacy Project implemented.

24. Automated Planning Application Screening

One service potentially of use to Local Authorities is screening planning applications for biodiversity interest. A number of LRCs around the country currently provide a planning application screening service to Local Planning Authorities, using an automated (or semi-automated) tool to do so. It may be a service that helps to increase the number of Local Authorities signing up to SLAs with LRCs in this region. As this service is already in use around the country (see Appendix 10 for a summary of current tools in use) there is little point in developing something entirely from scratch. Instead, a tool currently in

use will be adopted and adapted to fit local needs. This tool could be developed by one LRC and rolled out to the other interested LRCs in the region. In preparation for this, a review of the current tools in use was undertaken through consultation with nationwide LRCs.

NBIS are keen to look in to setting up such a tool in Norfolk. Developing a tool would require the input of a lot of time and money (particularly if it required an external contractor to build it) therefore it would only be worth proceeding if the Local Authority planners (the users of such a product) thought it would be useful. To determine the level of interest, a presentation was given by NBIS at the Planning and Biodiversity Topic Group in Norfolk. Unfortunately the feedback received was not very positive. Most of the District Councils at whom we would target the tool do not have ecologists in post. Therefore however the information resulting from the tool was presented, because there would be no-one to interpret it, it would be unlikely to be used. There is also little chance of getting any money out of the Districts to use such a tool at present, during this time of cutbacks. It was therefore decided to put the development of a planning screening tool on hold for the moment and to concentrate NBIS resources towards website development and online data provision. The situation will be reviewed regularly and if the opportunity arises for the tool to usefully be developed it will be taken forward.

PART III: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

25. Background

Finally, the future data needs of key LRC data users including consultants, Local Authorities and Natural England were considered, and a broad regional strategy as to how LRCs can be ready to meet these needs identified.

LRCs are currently experiencing uncertain times, particularly in terms of funding, and anticipating what major changes may occur over the next few years is difficult. In the near future, the publication of the Natural Environment White Paper, the new England Biodiversity Strategy and the introduction of the Localism Bill are both likely to affect the data needs of current and potential LRC users. These are discussed here, as are the changing data needs of Natural England. Strategies to increase the taxonomic coverage of LRC data holdings and the potential of online data provision are also considered.

26. Natural Environment White Paper and England Biodiversity Strategy

The government's Natural Environment White Paper is due to be published in May 2011. Billed as a 'bold and ambitious statement' it will outline the government's vision for the natural environment. As an opportunity to change the way we think about and manage the natural environment, it is meant to give local communities and councils the freedom to take control and find new and innovative ways to protect and enhance it (*Defra 2010a*).

The background to the White Paper also talks about a move towards 'landscape scale' approaches to management that recognise the interconnected nature of natural systems and realise that the impacts of decisions are not necessarily contained within administrative boundaries (*Defra, 2010a*).

During the stakeholder consultation there were responses regarding spatial planning calling for national frameworks and improved guidance to ensure that biodiversity was given a higher priority throughout the planning process (*Defra, 2010b*).

While the final contents of the White Paper are unknown, if it results in changes to the planning system this could lead to a change in what Local Authorities, environmental consultants and other users need LRCs to provide for them. In addition, a shift towards landscape-scale approaches could affect how LRCs work, with potentially more of a focus on cross-boundary working. In challenging financial times it is crucial that LRCs can keep pace with the changing needs of their users.

A new version of the England Biodiversity strategy will be published following the White Paper. This will expand on and develop the proposals set out in the White Paper, set out the ambition for biodiversity and identify the strategy for achieving it by 2020 (*England Biodiversity Group, 2011*). While promoting a

landscape-scale approach, the EBS will “outline a means to assess, measure and drive progress” (*England Biodiversity Group, 2011*). LRCs are in an ideal position, what with the kind of data they hold, to play a key role in assessing and measuring progress, and need to ensure that they are in a position to be able to provide the relevant information.

27. Localism Bill

The Localism Bill, due to become law towards the latter half of 2011, aims to ‘shift power from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils’ (*Communities and Local Government Website, 2011*). Of particular note from the point of view of LRCs is the proposed reform of the planning system, including abolishing regional strategies and giving local communities more power in the planning process. Communities will be able to introduce neighbourhood plans, deciding where new houses, shops and offices should go and which green spaces should be protected. Additionally, Right-to-Build powers will enable local communities to deliver small-scale development without needing separate planning permission (*UK Parliament website, 2011*).

If and when this bill comes into force, it will be important that local communities have access to biodiversity information to be able to make informed choices. It is vital that, as LRCs, we are able to provide them with this information in the most effective way.

28. Natural England

The data needs of Natural England are already changing.

A current problem for Natural England is their lack of accurate habitat data. This affects their ability to make informed decisions. It is likely that Natural England will in future obtain species data from the NBN Gateway, and will fund LRCs to provide habitat data (*Alexander, 2011, pers. comm.*) There will likely be a standard framework for this habitat monitoring to ensure consistency. National stratified sample points already exist which require repeat surveying. Other points can also be added in to allow monitoring at a finer geographic scale (*Alexander, 2011, pers. comm.*)

Currently, most species records are collected by volunteer recorders in an ad hoc way (*Birt, 2010*). Natural England is still keen to make use of the network of volunteer recorders across the country. However, in order to address gaps in coverage and to monitor changes in species populations and range, more structured surveillance work needs to be undertaken. Sites containing BAP species are already known by Natural England and should be a priority for repeated surveying by volunteers, using standard methodologies potentially set by the national recording schemes (*Alexander, 2011 pers.comm.*).

29. LRC Collaboration

Lott (2006) recommends that LRCs “collaborate at a regional level” as “participation in regional networks will add considerable value to LRC services.” LRCs in the East of England have already begun to work together as a region. All participate in the East of England Regional LRC Forum, which meets regularly, and the regional projects have increased collaborative working. This regional collaboration should be continued and increased.

Project work spanning county borders, requiring two or more LRCs to work together, should be encouraged. Many conservation organisations work nationally and species are not contained by administrative boundaries therefore it is important that differences between adjacent LRCs do not prevent them from working together. A recent example of cross-boundary working involving two LRCs was the Brecks Biodiversity Audit. Focussing on Breckland, this ground breaking project involved both NBIS and SBRC, and the conservation recommendations of the work are already being put into practice on the ground.

The participation of LRCs from this region in national issues, such as through the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC) is also important. Improving the consistency of services provided as a region has been welcomed by LRC users but there are some issues for which it would be more beneficial to standardise on a national basis. For example, a national template that consultants could use to send their data in the LRCs would be more useful than a regional version as many consultants work country-wide. Involvement in national discussions about issues that affect the way LRCs in this region work means that their views are taken into account and they are at the forefront of new developments and best practice.

Should the ALERC accreditation process be rolled out nationwide, LRCs in this region should work toward becoming accredited. CPERC are already an accredited LRC having taken part in the pilot and will therefore be able to mentor other LRCs through the process. Accreditation will demonstrate to users that the LRC is run according to best practice, and the data and services provided are high quality.

30. Online Data Provision

Access to data online is a potentially useful service for LRCs to provide. It allows users to search the LRC database and/or the NBN Gateway and could be used by consultants, Local Authorities (potentially as part of an SLA) and even the general public.

It would operate through a password protected area of the LRC website and be based on NBN web services. Access levels could be varied according to user type, and this would govern which datasets are searchable and what resolution the data are provided at.

Consultants were asked for their opinions on online data provision during the Standard Data Enquiry Service consultation. The subject was also discussed

at the 2011 LRCs and Consultants' Conference. There was general agreement that online data provision should be offered as an extra service and not as a replacement to the current data enquiry service. It could be a useful tool to assess the volume of data available, or as a follow-up search to produce, for example, distribution maps. The extra-quick turnaround and the possibility of having more control over the end product were seen as the main advantages. Potential technical problems were seen as a downside to online data provision. It would need to be user-friendly and easy to operate, with adequate technical support from the LRC. Some consultants would still prefer to talk to the LRCs, and others don't have the time to run searches themselves. They would also expect the charge for a data search to be lower as they are doing a larger amount of the work themselves.

Despite the mixed reception from consultants, online data provision is still seen as a useful service to provide and has a wide variety of potential users including Local Authorities and the general public.

LRCs around the UK are beginning to provide online data access for their customers, and this is likely to be helped by the development of NBN web-services. rECOrd (the LRC for Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral) already have an online data search tool on their website. This searches both their own database and the NBN. A simple species search can be performed with no log-in, but for more detailed information a log-in and password are required to access the secure section of the rECOrd website.

BRMC have developed a Partners area of their website, accessed via a user-ID and password based on NBN web-services. This currently contains County Wildlife Site, Roadside Nature Reserve and Local Geological Site citations along with a bundle of Google Earth layers displaying the corresponding site boundaries. Partners signed up for SLAs with the BRMC have access to:

- NBN web-services for producing species distribution maps focussed on Bedfordshire.
- NBN web-services for that search a user-defined radius and report the number of records and the species recorded within it (by category).
- Council Pages, where information is maintained on behalf of the Local Authority and can be accessed by the appropriate Council employees.

NBIS is currently developing a new website and plan to build an online data provision tool into this. A strategy for the development of the NBIS tool is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Development of NBIS online data provision tool.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Completed by...</i>
Get new NBIS website up and running	July 2011
Review Beds & Luton BRMC tool to determine whether parts of it are transferable to NBIS	July 2011
Finalise specification of what the NBIS tool needs to do and how it will work	Dec 2011

Build tool	March 2012
Test, evaluate and refine tool if necessary	May 2012
Make tool available to other LRCs in the region who are interested	June 2012

31. LRCs and the NBN Gateway

A lot of mistrust currently exists between the network of LRCs and the NBN Gateway. LRCs feel that the NBN is advertising itself as an alternative source of data, and some resent having to put their records on the Gateway. The NBN 2010-2020 Strategy document states that “By 2020 we want the NBN to be the preferred means of accessing biological records in the UK whether for local or national use.” The roles of the NBN Gateway and the county LRCs have not been clearly defined and there is a lot of confusion among users of the service. Some consultants see the NBN Gateway as a cheap alternative to having to pay for a data search from an LRC and do not always realise the dubious quality of unvalidated data on the Gateway.

Some of the core funders of LRCs such as the Environment Agency and Natural England require LRCs to provide them with species records via the NBN Gateway as terms of the funding agreement. This can cause a problem for some LRCs whose recorders are suspicious of the Gateway and don't want their records uploaded to it. The roles of the NBN Gateway and LRCs need to be clearly defined. The data need to be validated and made available for access by national recording schemes, LRCs etc so that there is one set of data available at a common standard.

Much of the necessary discussions needed to define the roles of the NBN and LRCs will be done on a national level, probably through ALERC, but LRCs from this region should take the opportunity to feed into these discussions where opportunities arise.

Each LRC needs to work with its voluntary recorders to enable permission to be granted for species records to be put onto the NBN Gateway. The LRCs should then start to make use of NBN web services, allowing their users to access the LRC records from the Gateway, via the LRC website.

32. Regional Data Provision Strategy

All LRCs are currently at different stages with regards their data holdings and the products they provide therefore any regional scale strategy is necessarily broad. Developing the Standard Data Enquiry Service on a regional basis has highlighted the difficulties in achieving a common standard across LRCs, mainly due to differences in starting points and working practices. Combined with regional differences in data needs, the steps needed to be taken by each LRC are likely to be slightly different to each other. Therefore, Table 3 contains broad suggested actions to be taken by LRCs in the region over the coming few years in order to ensure that they are able to meet the environmental data needs of their users.

Table 3. Suggested actions for LRCs to take over the next 5-10 years in order to be able to meet the environmental data needs of their users.

Action Required	Steps to be Taken
Respond to the outcomes of the Natural Environment White Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review outcomes of White Paper to determine potential changes to LRC users' data needs. • Compare revised user needs to existing service provision. • Determine steps necessary to be able to meet revised user needs and discuss at Regional Forum. • Implement steps identified. • Review success of implementation and revise if necessary.
Ensure LRCs are able to provide appropriate data to local communities if the need arises following the implementation of the Localism Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise the service at public wildlife events. • Target LRC publicity at local communities through talks, newsletters, websites and social media. • Develop access to data online. • Develop output reports with input from local community groups to ensure that they are useable by people with little/no ecological knowledge.
Collecting and mapping habitat data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete on a rolling cycle, section by section and regularly repeating each area to ensure the information is as up to date as possible. • Ground truth where necessary to ensure accuracy. • Complete mapping according to recognised national criteria (e.g. BAP). • Develop a way of capturing habitat information from consultants' reports.
Targeted and structured species surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with County Recorders and local wildlife groups to set up and carry out targeted and structured surveys, using repeatable methodology, preferably of a national strategy so the records can be used by national organisations. • Organise BioBlitzes to help fill in

	<p>the gaps in data holdings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how to encourage the next generation of recorders – perhaps by aiming events at that age group or developing an apprenticeship scheme with local recorders.
NBN Web Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with County Recorders where necessary, to gain permission to put records on the NBN Gateway. • Develop web services via LRC websites to facilitate access to these records online (see below for further discussion).
Regular contact with users to determine any changes in data needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish contacts at relevant organisations such as Local Authorities, Environment Agency etc where none already exist.
Maintain and increase collaboration between LRCs in the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with the East of England LRC Forum to discuss and share ideas and best practice.
Communication with UK wide LRCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share best practice and discuss ideas. • If new products or initiatives are developed in other regions, follow them up determine the outcomes and any lessons learnt. • Be actively involved in ALERC.
Increases partnership working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote closer involvement with local Biodiversity Partnerships. • Involvement in projects involving other organisations e.g. Wildlife Trusts, Environment Agency etc. This will help to bring in funding and will raise the profile of LRCs.

33. Dealing with Potential Loss of LRC Funding

In the current economic climate, LRC funding is likely to reduce and they will therefore need to prioritise their work to ensure survival (*Birt, 2010*). They should give some thought as to how prioritisation could occur, to what might happen if funding for a particular LRC stopped completely, and how to ensure that the data they hold could still be accessed by the people who need to use it.

If funding is reduced, LRCs will either need to become more commercial, enhancing the data products and interpretation services offered, or to minimise data management costs by switching to online data access and

management (*Alexander, 2011, pers. comm*). It is very important that records of protected and priority species are still made available for decision making. Obtaining habitat data should be continued if possible, as it is a sought after product not likely to be available from other sources.

In extreme cases it may be appropriate for an LRC to undertake project work that is not in the conservation sector, for example using staff skills in GIS or website design, in order to generate sufficient income for the core LRC work to continue.

Most LRCs already have plans in place for what would happen to their data should they have to shut down completely; this generally involves data being passed to a county recording group or local Wildlife Trust. It is recommended that each LRC form a contingency plan in case of partial or total funding loss.

34. Taxonomic Gaps in Data Holdings

Consultants want LRCs to be one-stop-shops for environmental data in their county, rather than signposting to other sources of data. Therefore improving the taxonomic coverage of their data holdings and accessing data that is currently only available to consultants through third parties is important for all of the region’s LRCs.

Each LRC in the region was contacted to determine what datasets they currently hold and which they don’t have access to. Measures that have been taken to date to try and obtain these datasets were discussed and potential future actions suggested where appropriate. Securing access to datasets not yet held is an ongoing task for all of the LRCs, so no timescales have been specified. In some cases there are quite complex political and personal issues that need to be resolved before datasets can be made available to LRCs. A summary of the main gaps in data holdings and current and potential future actions to obtain these is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Main gaps in data holdings and action being taken to obtain them

<u>Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording & Monitoring Centre</u>		
<i>Dataset</i>	<i>Reasons Not Held & Action to Date to Obtain</i>	<i>Suggested Future Action</i>
Bats	The bat group distribute their own data which they charge for to generate income.	
Fungi & Bryophytes	County Recorder is very busy and hasn’t had chance to go through his records to send them in.	Work with the Recorder to support the digitization of his records. Could a volunteer help with the process?
Flies, hoverflies & minor invert groups	No County Recorders for these groups.	

<u>Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre</u>		
<i>Dataset</i>	<i>Reasons Not Held & Action to Date to Obtain</i>	<i>Suggested Future Action</i>
Non-native Species	Some records are held but not been specifically gathered. Data exchange with the Plant Recorder later in the year should increase holdings.	Ensure planned data exchange goes ahead.
Badgers	Mammal group charge consultants for badger records and want to retain their income. In discussion with mammal group to draw up an agreement allowing limited badger data to be sent out to consultants.	Have thought about providing some of the income from data searches to the mammal Group to resolve this problem. Not possible in current financial climate but may be worth investigating in future.
Mammals (held but not verified)	Difficulties in finding anyone to verify mammal records. In discussion with Mammal Group to resolve this.	Continue discussions with Mammal Group.
Bats (held but restricted access to consultants)	Consultants provided with just species, 1km grid reference and date. Bat group charge for full information.	Current situation is a recent improvement to don't want to try and change anything else yet. As with badgers, have thought about providing income from data searches to the Bat Group to resolve this problem. Not possible in current financial climate but worth considering in future.

<u>Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre</u>		
<i>Dataset</i>	<i>Reasons Not Held & Action to Date to Obtain</i>	<i>Suggested Future Action</i>
Locally Rare Species	Data are held but Recorder 6 will only pull out Locally Rare Plants currently. No time at the moment to update the statuses in Recorder 6.	Update statuses in Recorder 6 to enable other locally rare species to be searched for.
County Bird Records	Other bird data are held. The County Recorders want to do some more work on the County Bird data before handing them over to the LRC. Recent change of County Bird Recorder.	Build and maintain relationship with new County Bird Recorder to ensure the records are made available as soon as possible.
Beetles	County Recorder has	Maintain in contact with

	promised to digitise his records but has not yet got round to doing it.	County Recorder to support the digitization of his records.
--	---	---

<u>Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service</u>		
<i>Dataset</i>	<i>Reasons Not Held & Action to Date to Obtain</i>	<i>Suggested Future Action</i>
Dragonflies	County Recorder waiting for the publication of the Dragonfly atlas before sending the records through.	Continue to try and improve relationship with the recorder and support the production of the atlas so it is completed asap.
County Bat Data	Other bat records held. County Recorder has not submitted records for some time.	Continue to try and improve relationship with the recorder and provide support for the digitisation and submission of his records.

<u>Suffolk Biological Records Centre</u>		
<i>Dataset</i>	<i>Reasons Not Held & Action to Date to Obtain</i>	<i>Suggested Future Action</i>
Geodiversity Sites (paper copies only)	Resistance from the local geology group (GeoSuffolk) to release the data more widely.	Continue to work with GeoSuffolk, explaining how the data will be used and why it is so important that it is made available.

Biological Records in Essex

BRIE is currently still in the development phase so is considered separately. BRIE currently holds (or has access to) most of the site data needed to provide the Standard Data Enquiry Service, but their species data holdings are more limited. Limited data are held for bats and badgers, though BRIE is in the process of getting an SLA signed for the provision of bat group data. Bird data are a particular problem, and records are not held for locally rare species, Local Biodiversity Action Plan species or non-native species. There are limited data for all taxa at present, except for mammals and crayfish. Time and effort are being put into building relationships between BRIE and the various recording groups in Essex, including the Essex Field Club. These organisations hold lots of useful records. This work is ongoing as BRIE develops.

35. OS Licensing

A key part of an LRC's work is producing and providing maps of sites, species and habitats. These maps are usually based on OS data therefore holding an OS license (or being part of an organisation that does) is very important. BRMC is currently experiencing problems regarding OS licensing. Until fairly recently they were covered by a licence with the now abolished County Council allowing them to send out maps with an OS background and use OS maps in their day to day work. However having negotiated a subcontractor licence with one of the Borough Councils they have been told that they cannot

pass any data they have for that area, based on OS maps, to anyone other than the Council. They fear the other councils in Bedfordshire might impose similar restrictions on them, and are currently waiting to hear back from them. BRMC are considering purchasing their own 1:10k and 1:50k OS licence but they cannot afford MasterMap – and this is what their CWS boundaries and habitat maps are based on, so these cannot be sent out. The existing OS licences change from April 1st so will be renegotiated then. This problem will impact on data provision both to consultants and other users and much time and effort is currently being put into resolving it.

36. Project Performance Measures

The outcomes of the Project Performance Measures which were drawn up before the project began are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Outcomes of Project Performance Measures

Description	Measure	Outcome
Time savings for data providers	Change in time taken to respond to data request	Bedfordshire & Luton BRMC have decreased their official response time from 20 working days to 10. The other LRCs were already providing this response speed. Automated data enquiries tool developed by NBIS (and available to all other LRCs in the region) increases the speed at which each individual data enquiry can be processed.
Increased use of data by local decision makers	Change in number of data requests as a result of the project	As the Standard Data Enquiry Service will be launched at the end of the project this outcome cannot yet be measured.
Increase in geographic coverage in England	Change in the number of counties able to provide the Standard Data Enquiry Service	Five of the six counties will be able to provide the Standard Data Enquiry Service from the end of March 2011. The sixth centre is BRIE which will provide the Service once it is established.
Increase in taxonomic coverage of data	Additional data included in data request responses as a result of the project	CPERC have vastly increased the species designations included in their data enquiries as a result of the project. BRMC now provide veteran tree data and are working towards providing Ancient Woodland. Hertfordshire BRC have also increased data provided in enquiries. During the project, data sharing agreements were set up with each LRC and the Woodland Trust to access veteran tree data.

37. Project Legacy

- The Standard Data Enquiry Service will be provided by five of the counties in the East of England region (and Essex once BRIE has been established).
- During the course of this project, the Project Officer has been in contact with Paula Lightfoot who has been working towards establishing an LRC standard data enquiry service to be provided in the North West of England.
- The regional standard template for accepting data back will remain on LRC websites. This will reduce confusion over what data LRCs need from consultants and should also make it easier for the LRCs to process the data as they will be in a standard format.
- Throughout this project the ALERC Forum has been used to receive and disseminate information. For example, a document looking into Automated Planning Screening Tools was posted on the Forum and discussed. This document, which outlines the tools currently used by LRCs around the country, will remain available on the Forum for members to make use of. The outcomes of this project will also be made available to other LRCs through the Forum.
- While improving its data enquiry service, NBIS has developed an automated enquiries tool, which simplifies and streamlines the data enquiry process and produces a report to be sent out to consultants. This tool can be used by any other LRCs in the region who want it.
- Finally, the Project Officer will be kept on at NBIS for another year. Although her focus will be on other projects, and she will be employed by NBIS rather than regionally, she will still be able to take forward any further ideas that have come from this project, such as online data provision and other issues arising from the consultants' conference.

38. Acknowledgements

The Project Officer is grateful to the following people and organisations:

- Natural England and Defra for funding the project.
- Richard Alexander and Michelle Russell for their input and encouragement.
- Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service for hosting the project.
- Martin Horlock at NBIS for all his help and for Project Managing.
- The other LRCs in the region (Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre, Biological Records in Essex, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre, Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre and Suffolk Biological Records Centre) for their helpful input and ideas throughout.

- The consultants who provided invaluable input to the development of the Standard Data Enquiry Service.

39. References

- Alexander, R. (2011). *Personal Communication*. Natural England.
- Birt, MJ. (2010). *Local Record Centres Business Model Review*. Natural England Commissioned Report, Number 057.
- Communities and Local Government Website (2011). <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/localismbill/> Accessed 07/03/2011.
- Defra (2010a). *An Invitation to Shape the Nature of England. Discussion Document*.
- Defra (2010b). *An invitation to shape the Nature of England. Summary of responses to the Discussion Document*.
- Lott, D. (2006). *Biodiversity Data Needs for Local Authorities and National Park Authorities*. Association of Local Government Ecologists.
- NBN Trust (2010). *Sharing Information About Wildlife. A Strategy for the National Biodiversity Network 2010-2020*.
- England Biodiversity Group (2011). *Development of a new England Biodiversity Strategy*. EBG 11 – 06a.
- UK Parliament Website (2011). <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/localism.html>. Accessed 07/03/2011.