

NBN Trust Membership Scheme Review 2016 Consultation Paper

Introduction

The National Biodiversity Network Trust (NBN) Board of Trustees has recognised that the current NBN membership scheme is no longer fit for purpose and needs to be reviewed.

A working group has been set up and has already gathered initial views from a limited number of organisations both members and non-members which has helped shaped this document. We are now seeking the views of the Network on the proposed changes to the membership scheme.

It is intended that the review will be completed by January 2017 with the revised scheme in place by April 2017.

Executive summary

This paper sets out the benefits and limitations of the current scheme, why it no longer meets the needs of the Charity or the Network and proposes a revised membership scheme.

The evolution of the NBN Trust membership scheme over the last fifteen years means it is now very complex, difficult for existing members to understand and difficult for potential new members to know why they should join and how they can contribute. The current membership scheme does not allow enough flexibility to grow the membership as the NBN Trust and the Network develop.

The Network would benefit from a simpler membership scheme that clearly shows the benefits of being a member and helps with the growth of the NBN.

Section 1 – Current Scheme

1.1 Background

The NBN Trust is a charitable organisation with a membership that shares biological data and information under the banner of the National Biodiversity Network, usually referred to as the NBN. Network members have collaborated to set standards for data exchange, to raise awareness of the importance of biological recording, and to share and aggregate data both regionally and nationally. It is the UK's largest partnership for nature with 160 members.

The current NBN Trust membership scheme has been in place since summer 2013 following a minor review. There are still a number of anomalies in relation to the amounts paid by different organisations at different levels. In addition the NBN Strategy 2015 – 2020 and the development of the NBN Atlas projects should mean that the membership requirements will change and there is potential for different streams of income.

1.2 Existing Membership Scheme

The main levels of membership are listed below. In recent years new members have joined at Supporter, Bronze or Silver Membership.

Table 1: Current Membership Levels and Fees

Type	Target organisation	Cost	Discounts
Supporter	small societies and individuals with turnover less than £300,000	£30	100% for organisations if supply data direct to the NBN Gateway
Bronze	small schemes and societies	£200	50% if supply data direct to the NBN Gateway
Silver	larger commercial and academic organisations	£1000	50% if supply data direct to the NBN Gateway
Gold	larger organisations	£5000	50% if supply data direct to the NBN Gateway
Student	Students, interns, trainees	Free	Offered to 'student' attendees of NBN Conference for one year
Honorary	Awarded by Board of Trustees	Free	Lifetime award
Affiliate	Include founder members and those who have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)	Variable	None

1.3 Current membership

As at September 2016 there were 160 members including students and Affiliates. The growth of the membership has been steady and slow. A number of organisations including local record centres and conservation organisations support the NBN Gateway by supplying data but are not part of the membership scheme. There are also a large number of academic and commercial organisations who use the data, benefit from the work undertaken by the Secretariat, its membership and the wider Network but do not financially support the Network.

1.4 Current Income

The majority of the NBN Secretariat's income is from the Affiliate and general membership. In 2016/7 this income will be approximately £200,000. Other limited sources of income are anticipated through training courses, project management cost for NBN Atlas development work, sponsorship and donations. The Annual Conference budget is set to operate on a cost neutral basis.

This income is used to manage the costs of the NBN Secretariat and all associated activities including support to the Network members, development of innovative projects eg NBN Atlas, managing consultations and communications as well as carrying out NBN's commitment to the NBN Strategy 2015 – 2020.

1.5 Current issues

- Members and non-members find it hard to distinguish between the NBN Network and support provided by the Secretariat and the online platform of the NBN Gateway.

- People and organisations do not know if they are members. e.g. some organisations that only supply data assume they are members.
- Many organisations support the NBN Gateway by supplying data but are not members of the membership scheme.
- A large proportion of Network members pay no membership fee towards the running of the organisation despite the benefits received in terms of standards, databases, third party advocacy, training and networking.
- Many people and organisations sign up to our free communications (e.g. Network News) but this does not require membership. This means we have a vast audience (almost 3000 Network News subscribers and over 8000 social media followers) but a small number of members.
- The current various levels of membership appear indistinguishable in terms of benefits and it is difficult to convey the increased benefits of Gold over Bronze membership
- There is discrepancy between sizes of organisations in the different categories. For example, an organisation with a turnover of over £3 million is choosing to pay £100 while a smaller one with a turnover of around £150,000 is electing to pay £200.
- The majority of the Network's income comes from 11 Affiliate Membership with payments varying from several hundred to over £30,000.
- The Network has not been effective in providing a clear message about why people and organisations should join and the work it does on member's behalf.

In summary there is

- Confusion of membership levels
- Confusion between the NBN Network and the NBN Gateway
- Discrepancy over amounts paid by differing organisations of similar size / turnover
- Benefits from membership unclear
- Potential loss of income due to high level of discounts available
- Need to secure wider membership base

1.6 Initial Review Responses

As part of the responses received to the Action Plan Consultation and the initial review carried out earlier in 2016 feedback was received that the membership scheme should

- ✓ Be simple
- ✓ Be clear on its benefits
- ✓ Offer wider benefits and support
- ✓ Be inclusive
- ✓ Give value to data provision
- ✓ Generate income

1.7 Limitations of the Current Scheme

There are a number of weaknesses in the current scheme e.g. many organisations receive the benefits of the work undertaken by the Secretariat and members without financially contributing to maintaining the Network.

The scheme does not bring out the strengths of being part of the Network for data sharing and protecting members' data for the future. The NBN Trust need to develop its strengths and illustrate that joining the network is a worthwhile endeavour.

New organisations joining the membership scheme have been limited although existing membership has remained steady. The current scheme is not fit for purpose to allow us to generate more interest from a wider base of potential members and increase our income.

Section 2 – Benefits of Association

2.1 Benefits of Association

British wildlife is probably the best recorded and, therefore, the most studied, in the world. But there is still much that is unknown and many species that are under-recorded. At the same time, British wildlife has never been under greater threat: from the impacts of climate change; from the arrival of invasive non-native species; and from the loss of habitat to development and intensive agriculture.

By joining the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) members can play a part in better understanding our wildlife and in combating these threats to it.

There has been an active wildlife recording community in the British Isles since the latter part of the 18th century. The Victorian age saw a boom in the formation of recording societies, devoted to the study of particular taxa and species. Many of these have survived to the present day, including some very well-known names, such as the British Trust for Ornithology; and some less well known and much smaller bodies, such as the British Lichen Society. Many of these schemes and societies are in membership of the NBN, while others supply data to the NBN. Collectively, the NBN is currently a repository for some 128 million records. This is an unrivalled wildlife data collection but it is far from complete. Many records are undigitised and survive in paper format in poor storage conditions. Some geographical areas are significantly under-reported compared with others; and the natural biases of recorders (who record what they like and are interested in) mean that many species are under-recorded.

By joining the NBN, members can help recorders collect even more data; make that data available online; improve our knowledge of species distribution and trends in populations; and thereby enable decision takers in government, industry and local communities to take better, wildlife friendly decisions.

These benefits have never been more important. Our understanding of our wildlife is rooted in our historic data sets. But British wildlife is changing and historical patterns of population distribution and species ranges may no longer be valid. Climate change is leading to significant increases in our average temperatures and to more variable weather patterns with an increase in extreme weather

events. The response of many species of animals and plants is to move: generally speaking, to move uphill and northwards. For some species this means that their range is increasing and we will get to see more of them. For others, already at the limits of their range, the impact could be of catastrophic loss. Only by recording presence and absence can we understand what is happening and, potentially, intervene.

Partly as a consequence of climate change but also due to other causes, including interventions by humankind, we are seeing an increase in non-native species entering the British Isles. Some of these new entrants are benign and a welcome addition to the diversity of our wildlife – for example, the arrival of egrets in southern England over the last 30 years. Other new arrivals are less welcome and can pose a real threat to native species. The arrival of so-called “killer shrimp” in east Anglian waterways in the early years of this century are a case in point. Wildlife recording is a vital component of our efforts as a society to understand what is happening and to take action where necessary.

Even without these external threats, British wildlife has been and still is being significantly affected by loss of habitat driven by ever more intensive agricultural practice and by the loss of land to development. No one would argue that we should not produce food or that we should prevent the building of new homes or the development of new industries. But we need to understand that these changes can come at a cost. In order to limit that cost to the minimum possible, decision takers at all levels of government and in all industries, including agriculture, need reliable information on which to base their decisions. The planning policy framework provides for such informed decision taking but it depends hugely on volunteer recorders to gather data and thereby minimise costs to business.

By joining the NBN, members can contribute to our understanding of the impacts on wildlife of climate change and the arrival of non-native species. In doing so members will help to equip society with the information we all need in order to frame our collective response to these challenges.

By joining the NBN, members will help to make more and better information available to decision takers, enabling them to avoid damage to our fragile environment and site new developments in places that will put wildlife at risk and can help species to thrive.

By joining the NBN, therefore, members can help to make the British Isles a better place for wildlife.

Question 1

Do you agree that the Benefits of Association provide the right emphasis for current and potential members?

2.2 Benefits of Membership

The NBN and the Network offer members many benefits and should represent and emphasis the work the Secretariat and members carry out on behalf of the Network.

Benefits for members could include:

- *Welcome Pack for new members, including details of membership, our most recent reports, lapel badge(s) and promotional material*
- *Be able to attend our annual conference and other hosted events, at a discounted price*
- *Receive members only communications with news about the NBN and our members*
- *Be eligible to vote at AGM*
- *Be able to use the NBN logo and NBN Members logo*
- *Be able to use the NBN logo and quote our support in any Corporate Social Responsibility publicity materials (business members only)*
- *Be able to make use of the NBN website for publicity and advertising*
- *Be eligible to receive financial and/or staff support for digital data recording initiatives*
- *Be eligible to make use of staff time in preparing funding bids to government or other funders*
- *Be eligible to bid to an NBN small grants scheme*

Table 2: Potential Benefits of Membership

<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Organisations</i>	<i>Affiliates</i>	<i>Benefactor</i>
<i>Networking</i>				
<i>Member of UK's largest partnership for nature</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Support the largest species database of any country in the world</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Access to Network of data providers and partners</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Receive Network News</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Receive Member only updates</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Development</i>				
<i>Access to API tool for members website from NBN Atlas</i>	✗	✓	✓	✓
<i>Support to develop a sub NBN Atlas database for member organisations</i>	✗	✓	✓	✓

Support to develop other tools from NBN Atlas e.g. Field Guides

x ✓ ✓ ✓

Support

Support for mobilising data

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Provision of resources e.g. leaflets

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Receive support for funding bids

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Access to NBN provided training courses

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Involvement

Involved in consultations

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Members only Events and Focus days

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Access to funding

✓ ✓ ✓ x

Access to small grants scheme

✓ ✓ ✓ x

Advice and support

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Status

Data provider membership fee discount

✓ ✓ ✓ x

Conference Registration Discount

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Use of NBN logos

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Members page on NBN website

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Publication of Members events via NBN website, social media channels

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Voting rights

✓ ✓ ✓ x

Representation

Be represented in national consultations

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Be represented in NBN negotiations on members behalf

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Benefits to Network

Increases sharing of Data



Assist to deliver the Strategy



Grows the stature of NBN



Assists to secure future funding



Ensure success of NBN Atlas



2.3 Future Benefits

The NBN Trust will work to increase the benefits available to its members. These could include affiliation with other organisations to receive mutual discounts to membership, access preferential rates to journals or mapping tools. Our aim will be to support and enhance the benefits for our members.

Question 2

Do these benefits represent a package sufficient to encourage potential members to join the NBN?

Section 3 – Proposed Membership Scheme for implementation from 2017

3.1 Considerations

A new scheme should be simple and benefits distinct. It should allow to increase the membership and increase the stake that members have in supporting the NBN Trust and the Network. For example more organisations should have the right to vote at meetings.

The NBN is in a unique position to bring together all conservation focused groups and organisations by having a membership scheme that appeals to a wide body of organisations from public, private and charitable sector.

3.2 Proposed Scheme

The scheme proposed is that of four main categories

- Individual
- Organisational
- Affiliates
- Benefactor

3.2.1 Individual

This category would include Individuals, Students* and Honorary members. The fees would be tiered at appropriate rates for low / unwaged.

It allows flexibility to include family and/or couple membership.

Life membership would be available for individuals, family and couple membership.

*Students – encompassing term for students, interns, apprentices or similar.

3.2.2 Organisational

This category would be tiered and the fee charged based on turnover.

There will be a level of suggested fees based on turnover. Organisations can select to pay more than the suggested rate based on turnover.

3.2.3 Affiliates

The current Affiliates would remain and new members who wish to join this category would be required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding demonstrating their commitment to partnership working.

3.2.4 Benefactor

This category would be available for organisations who support the aims of the NBN but may not need the full benefits of membership or indeed their organisation constraints mean that they are unable to be an organisational member of the NBN.

3.2.5 Advantages

- It is clear which category a member sits in
- Fee paid relates to turnover / income
- The Benefactor category allows more flexibility for support from a wider base of organisations

3.2.6 Disadvantages

- It is possible that some organisations may have to pay more as the fee structure is related to turnover
- It is possible that some members chose not to renew their membership due to the change in fee structure

Question 3

Do you agree with the categories of membership that we have identified?

3.3 Fee Structure

The proposed fee structure is based on current fee levels in place currently. The intention is that the amount paid represents a more equal level of contribution. The use of tiered fees is easily understood and recognised and many organisations adopt this approach. In addition the NBN Trust recognise the value of data and this is taken into account in the discounts applied.

Table 3: Proposed Fees and discounts

Category	Annual Fee	Discount
Personal		
Individual	£40	Not applicable
Students / Unwaged	£10	Not applicable
Family/Couple	£50	Not applicable
Life (individual / family)	£300 /£500	Not applicable
Honorary	free lifetime membership	Not applicable
Organisational		
Up to £300,000	£100	100% if supply data
£300,001 to £2,000,000	£200	50% if supply data
£2,000,001 to £5,000,000	£500	25% if supply data
£5,000,001 and above	£1,000	None
Affiliates	Variable	None
Benefactor	Minimum £1,000 / Enquire	Not applicable

Question 4

Do you agree with the proposed fee structure?

Questions

Question 1

Do you agree that the Benefits of Association provide the right emphasis for current and potential members?

Question 2

Do these benefits represent a package sufficient to encourage potential members to join the NBN?

Question 3

Do you agree with the categories of membership that we have identified?

Question 4

Do you agree in principle with the proposed fee structure?

Thank you for taking the time to provide your thoughts and ideas.

Please email your responses before **WEDNESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2016** to support@nbn.org.uk or complete the online survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/VS59FZH>