

## **England NBN Strategy Refresh Workshop Natural History Museum, London, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014**

### **Introduction**

The National Biodiversity Network is refreshing its strategic direction in 2014. Drivers for this refresh include the recent changes in NBN Trust staff, technological advances for biological recording and data curation and the ever changing landscape of biodiversity activity in the UK. The current strategy, published in 2010, is now four years old so a refresh is timely. Preliminary work began on this strategy refresh over 18 months ago through two Extraordinary General Meetings (in Feb 2013 and Feb 2014) at which a draft skeleton structure for a new strategy was prepared.

The NBN Trust sought input from Network members and associates, from data providers and potential collaborators and NBN Gateway users throughout the UK via a Strategy Refresh Questionnaire. A summary of the 225 responses to this questionnaire can be found [here](#).

The NBN Trust organised a series of workshops throughout the United Kingdom (in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland) to gather a more country focussed perspective of the current state of the NBN, how people would like the NBN to work within each country, and what the different partners of the NBN, including the NBN Trust, could do to achieve the strategic aims.

The objective of this engagement was to ensure as many people were listened to during the course of the Strategy refresh (from the largest to the smallest recording schemes, from government agencies and non-government organisations to environmental planners and local authorities, and from universities and research institutes to ecological consultants). This work was to ensure the collaborative nature of the Network was truly reflected in the Strategy, that all voices were heard and that all participants had the opportunity to influence the development of the new 10 year Strategy.

### **England Workshop**

The following document summarises the outcomes of the first Strategy Refresh Workshop held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014 in Edinburgh. This workshop was attended by representatives from ten Local Record Centres, Open University, Friends of the Earth, Linnean Society, RSPB, NFBR, Natural England, BTO, Tachinid Recording Scheme, British Myriapod & Isopod Group, Bumblebee Trust, Natural History Museum and an NBN Trust honorary member . The workshop was facilitated by an external facilitator to allow all attendees, including the NBN Trust to be engaged with, and involved in, the discussions throughout the day.

#### Objectives for the workshops

- To provide feedback on the results from the strategy refresh questionnaire
- To highlight and discuss major issues and ensure all voices are heard
- To brainstorm ways forward for the NBN
- To detail the timeframe and process for the final stages of the refresh

This workshop also provided a forum for people to meet and network and to continue strengthening the collaborative nature of the National Biodiversity Network.

The delegates were:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Martin Harvey	Open University
Paul de Zylva	Friends of the Earth
Professor David Cutler	
Dr Elizabeth Rollinson	Linnean Society
Paula Hewitson	Somerset ERC
Mandy Rudd	GiGL / ALERC
Mark Eaton	RSPB
Charles Roper	Sussex BRC
Penny Green	Sussex BRC
Trevor James	NFBR
Keith Porter	Natural England
John Newbould	NBN Trust Honorary Member
Charlie Barnes	Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership
Steve Whitbread	Northants BRC / NFBR Acting Secretary
Martin Horlock	NBIS
Andy Musgrove	BTO
Matt Smith	Tachinid Recording Scheme
Bob Foreman	Sussex BRC
Paul Harding	British Myriapod & Isopod Group
Richard Comont	Bumblebee Trust
Nicky Court	Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre
Andy Webb	Natural England
Simon Pickles	North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre
John Sawyer	NBN Trust
Sarah Hyslop	NBN Trust
Sarah Keast	Sarah Keast Associates
Chris Raper	NHM
Martin Richardson	NHM

### **Workshop Structure**

The format of the day was structured around the five proposed Strategic Aims for the NBN. These are;

#### **a. Capturing, diversifying and enhancing wildlife data**

*This is about supporting biological recording in the UK. It includes the development and maintenance of systems and processes to support the capture and verification of raw biological data through survey and recording and plugging gaps in data coverage.*

## **b. Making wildlife information available to those who need it**

*This is about processing, organising and visualising data to create wildlife information for use by educators, researchers, planners, government agencies, NGOs etc. It includes increasing the interoperability of data and information.*

## **c. Captivating and engaging people about wildlife**

*This is about communication about the UK's wildlife, what it is, why it is special, what it does for us. This is also about communicating the value of data and biological recording and being involved.*

## **d. Providing the best wildlife information management**

*This is about ensuring the NBN technical data recording, storage and dissemination infrastructure is the best it can be (e.g., NBN Gateway, iSpot, iRecord, Indicia, local record centres etc).*

## **e. Supporting the Network to support wildlife**

*This is about the administration of the NBN through supporting the on-going development of the NBN, its wider membership, and its business processes, the board and the NBN Trust.*

These aims were discussed as a collective group with a particular focus on what is currently working well and what issues and challenges exist. Priority issues raised were then developed into objectives which formed the basis of afternoon discussions. Workshop attendees worked to determine what needed to be done, how it would be done (including options) and who would do the work.

The outcomes of these discussions will be used to inform the final NBN Strategy, making the Strategic Aims realistic and achievable and developing ownership of the NBN Strategy across the Network, as well as identifying areas where the NBN can have a more country focussed approach.

## **Workshop Outcomes**

Feedback to the NBN Trust over the last five months is that the current level of ownership, and feeling of involvement and engagement with the NBN is extremely varied, and this was reflected at the Strategy Workshop. Themes which arose from the workshop discussions included;

- **Conflicting business models** – The NBN model is currently conflicting with the business models of many of the partners within the Community. This needs to be resolved in order for the NBN model to work efficiently
- **Verification** – A joined up approach to verification is required, with ownership from across the NBN Network.
- **Terminology** – Confusion around terminology (NBN, NBN Gateway and NBN Trust).
- **Roles and Responsibilities** - There is a requirement for agreed clarification as to the roles and responsibilities of the partners of the NBN to avoid duplication. This came up in other workshops but in a different context to the discussions of this workshop.
- **Collaboration** – To create a greater sense of partnership, increased collaborative working would be beneficial.
- **Communication** - There is a need for greater promotion of the NBN network.

- **Training** – There is a need for more training to upskill and support volunteers and establish a Train the Trainers mechanism to ensure skill gaps are plugged. Much of this issue has been addressed in the Field Studies Council Consultation *Tomorrows Biodiversity*. We need to work together on this.

### **Noted issues with the current Strategy**

- Need to raise brand / NBN presence
- Changes within the network – more work needed to establish team working / leadership. Need to justify why we are working together – this would strengthen our business case as it currently impacts on funding / government money
  - Data capture forms - Need to enter details before this is accepted e.g. invasive species. Active process of collecting data – proactive rather than waiting for reports to come through.
  - There are issues with data capture – e.g. apps – cant upload photo instantly if taken on camera rather than phone.

---

#### **a. Capturing, diversifying and enhancing wildlife data**

*This is about supporting biological recording in the UK. It includes the development and maintenance of systems and processes to support the capture and verification of raw biological data through survey and recording and plugging gaps in data coverage.*

The current issues that need to be overcome to realise the full potential of this Strategic Aim were discussed. They can be separated into the following;

- **Verification**
- **Cost**
- **Standards**
- **Usability**

Verification was seen by a show of hands as the top priority. It was agreed that there is a lack of a joined up approach to verification. It is important to note that some of the issues raised under this theme belong to the NBN as a whole, for example NBN approachability.

The issue of cost came in second as a priority. A solution for this could be having a nominal value placed on each record as a way of showing the contribution of biological recording. This has to be a theoretical value and not a move to pay volunteers for each record!

#### **Solutions**

Verification was discussed in greater detail as this was the key issue for this Strategic Aim, with standards and usability also being raised.

A possibly improvement to verification of records would be to ensure that all records on the NBN Gateway are to a known trusted industry standard, i.e. trusted, unchecked, incorrect etc. It was recognised that this may not be suitable for all partners in the Network but it is key that there is an audit trail of the data verification as this allows the user to assess if the record is reliable and fit for purpose. An NBN steering group with input from LRCs (It was suggested that we could provide representation by working with ALERC. Not all LRCs are members, but perhaps should be!) and National Societies and Schemes would be useful to lead on this and it would be important to draw on current examples of good practise such as the Dragonfly Society. The aim was to initiate a community discussion to come up with an agreed (majority) solution. was also suggested that that the data provider could determine their data standard based on knowledge and experience of the recorder *etc.* but it is key that this should be at no further burden or change to the current system. This approach could work through having a trusted Network and key leads within each group who would produce the standards however it would be important that all players are involved in the process.

It was agreed that the relevant recording schemes should specify how to manage the common / certain species. It was noted that this should not override existing standards and to know the level of the data as this makes it more usable. To have trusted data as the default i.e. BTO data

An additional improvement would be the development of the NBN Gateway to be able to differentiate between verified and unverified data and to reinstate the comment tool on records as this was seen as an essential step to be able to know records had been verified!

We need to emphasise the important role of iRecord to encourage senior recorders to volunteer to verify data. Those recorders/verifiers need to have some idea of the skills of an unknown person's work they are asked to verify.

---

## **Aim 2**

### **b. Making wildlife information available to those who need it**

*This is about processing, organising and visualising data to create wildlife information for use by educators, researchers, planners, government agencies, NGOs etc. It includes increasing the interoperability of data and information.*

It was suggested that the wider public, who have an interest including local natural history societies should be added to this aim.

The top priority areas for discussions around this Strategic Aim were how to address:

- **data use**
- **data access**

#### **Data use**

Data needs to live beyond publication and be used by local government decision makers. There is a need to address the assumption that, if data is reordered by an NBN member that it will be available to support decision making, as this is not always the case.

## Solutions

- To assess the business needs and interest groups – local (LRC) to National (NGO's / Agencies) and all in between. This is however not new, and has been tried many times. One of the issues is that users are often unaware of what can be done with the data, therefore often are unambitious about their needs!
- To have a product such as interpreted data and habitat data
- A data needs analysis should be undertaken to assess the different types of data use and how the NBN Gateway meets these uses.
- To have better links which detail information about the species themselves i.e. status of the species.
- To be able to record non-presence of data to be able to know where records are not present.

## Data Access

The varying levels of data access currently make partnership working problematic. We are perhaps being too risk adverse by not revealing the locations of rare species. As there are multiple end users, meeting their individual requirements is not always possible.

- An objective is needed here....such as *'to promote open access where possible without compromising business models of NGO's, NSS's, LRC's and research capital'*

There is conflict here with data funded by public money – there is a requirement that the public funded data will be made fully available unless for reasons of exceptional sensitivity of release.

Usability, including web services was also discussed but it was agreed that this may not fit within this aim. The question was asked "who is going to enable administrative use of web services?" There is a need to expand on the capabilities of NBN web services to make them more easily available and to possibly also expand the outlets for NBN information e.g. Wildlife Trust and Recording Scheme websites.

---

### c. Captivating and engaging people about wildlife

*This is about communication about the UK's wildlife, what it is, why it is special, what it does for us. This is also about communicating the value of data and biological recording and being involved.*

It was noted again that we need to make clear this is not just for experts but any person interested in the wildlife around them.

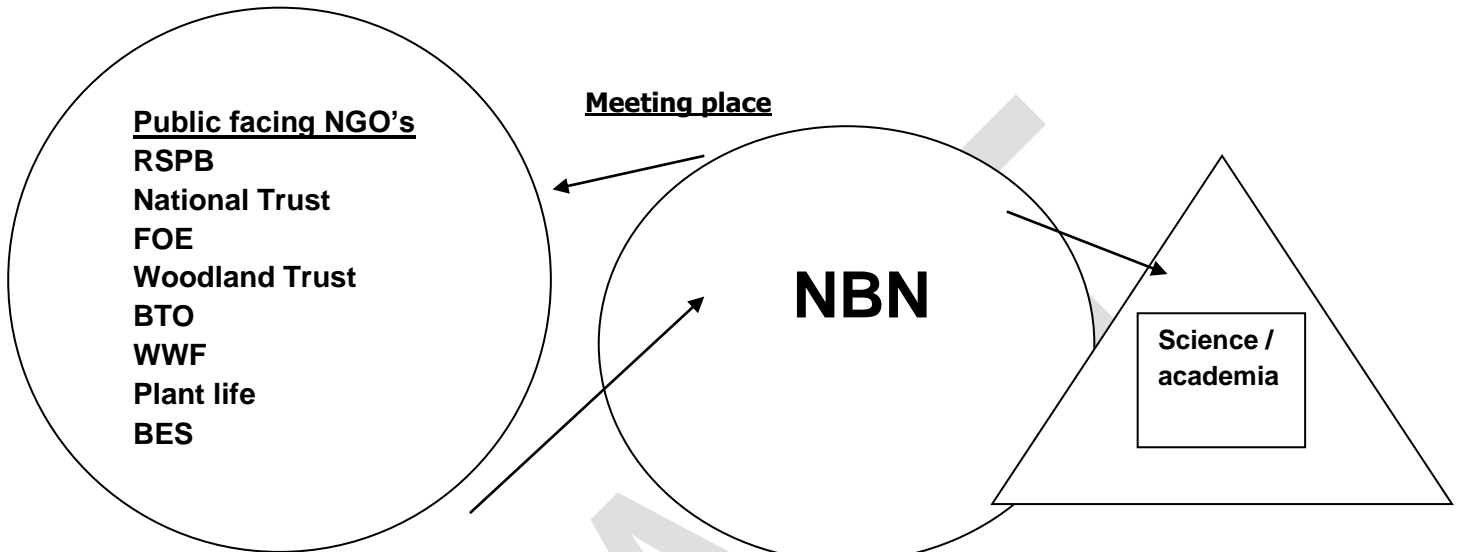
The top priority areas for realising this Strategic Aim were;

- **Engaging** the wider public
- **Motivating** people

It is key;

- that we know who our stakeholders are, and why and how we could all work together.

- to diversify the end users to which NBN data can be shared.
- to identify how public facing we want the NBN to be? Currently the NBN is not public facing whereas the NGO's are. The diagram below shows this;



We should identify if we need external assistance? The NBN Gateway is potentially a powerful tool and it is currently not being used as it should be. It was suggested that an Engagement Strategy would be beneficial as this would enable the Network to recognise the opportunities, while avoiding duplication.

Communications and marketing is a key aspect for this Strategic Aim and we need to ensure that we have the skills and resources to deal with this effectively. An important point to note is that we must recognise the needs of different audiences when communicating, and cater accordingly via appropriate use of systems such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube For the future, the key aims are to **raise profile**, have a **sufficient funding model** and to be able to **report to the media** on what it holds i.e. gaps in UK data.

It is important to be clear on the name 'NBN' as, if it sits outside the Network, then it should be referred to as the NBN Trust, NBN partnership or NBN Gateway. This is an important message for all communications.

Future experts and promotion / marketing were also noted as key issues for this Strategic Aim.

- To improve how we engage people in the process even if they don't become expert recorders themselves. This could be done by;
  - producing specific factsheets e.g. killer shrimps.
  - to make the process simpler and more accessible, including avoiding duplication with different systems and datasets. perhaps change the name NBN 'Gateway' as this could be confusing to non 'NBN' community.
- Who do we want to attract?

- What can we do to benefit them?
- Do we 'the NBN' have the ability to do this itself?
- The NBN needs regional county volunteer representatives, trained in the public facing side of the NBN and equipped with promotional material e.g. leaflets and display banners.

---

#### **d. Providing the best wildlife information management**

*This is about ensuring the NBN technical data recording, storage and dissemination infrastructure is the best it can be (e.g., NBN Gateway, iSpot, iRecord, Indicia, local record centres etc).*

The question was asked if Strategic Aims 'a' and 'd' could be merged into one Strategic Aim. It was clarified that the reason for this split is to capture the various technology such as the NBN Gateway infrastructure, processes, systems, iRecord etc.

The issues within this aim are as follows;

- To improve data connection and functionality of the NBN Gateway / database
- Recorder 6 should be looked to be replaced / resourced as this is a key tool.
- We need to have a strong core to the NBN Trust and the NBN Gateway.
- To have a strategic approach when dealing with the technical issues such as metadata / vocabulary / open data policy.
  - Out of data systems – need to plan for the future.
  - Enable distributed data by different models e.g. Bird Track.
  - Data provider to automatically be able to manage own data on the NBN Gateway

#### **Possible solutions**

- It is important to remember that we can't do everything and key to success is to focus on the critical areas of work. The NBN Trust should facilitate more joint working which could include paying people's travel costs so they are able to meet more regularly
- Central NBN Trust staff requirements – a possible chief data officer who can do some strategic thinking – non technical
- Volunteer coding community – could the coding be open sourced? Would be beneficial – would need a lead from the Trust with input from external data community.
- Need to bring in new people and have some room for new thinking.
- Need to look at broad data world – changes and advances

---

#### **e. Supporting the Network to support wildlife**

*This is about the administration of the NBN through supporting the on-going development of the NBN, its wider membership, and its business processes, the board and the NBN Trust.*



Issues which fall under this Strategic Aim were;

- Role and responsibilities
- Framework
- Training

The key priority for this Strategic Aim was **Roles and responsibilities** as these are currently not clear. It was noted that Natural England will not use the data if it isn't fit for purpose but who in Natural England decides that?

### **Possible solutions**

There is a clear requirement to define roles and responsibilities as this hasn't ever been done properly before now and this is key to data access. Clear roles and agreements would help to make the NBN a proper partnership, similar to CIEEM and there should be clear incentives for the different interest groups within the Network. It was raised that the key role for the NBN Trust is leadership. Although this may not be possible as many of NBN's core data providers are volunteers or data providers through a non-professional organisation.

The following were also noted as issues within this aim;

### **Framework**

The lack of a technical framework including the biodiversity / knowledge was seen as the second priority for this aim. To date the frameworks have never been explicit and there is a need for a technical explanation for local to national level. There needs to be a framework for how this works and to be detailed and fed into the NBN Strategy.

### **Training**

There is currently a lack of effective support for volunteers to up skill and for organisations to help them to do so. We need better skills and a practice of mentoring throughout the Network. A Train the trainers programme is also important as this would ensure that there is a stronger geographical spread of training opportunities. It was identified that regional museums could be utilised more. The discussions were not conclusive as to what additional aspects of training could be developed but it was clear that some additional support is required across the Network.

**Appendix**  
Agenda



**Building Biodiversity Knowledge in Scotland**

**Refreshing the NBN Strategy Workshop**

**Monday 3rd November, 10.00 – 16.00**

Natural History Museum,  
Neil Chalmers Lecture Hall,  
Cromwell Road,  
London SW7 5BD

Facilitator – Sarah Keast

**Objectives for the workshops**

- To provide feedback on the results from the strategy refresh questionnaire
  - To highlight and discuss major issues and ensure all voices are heard
  - To brainstorm ways forward for the NBN
- To detail the timeframe and process for the final stages of the refresh

These workshops will also be a forum for people to meet and network.

**Morning Session**

10.00		Registration & Coffee		
-------	--	-----------------------	--	--

10.30	Introduction	Introduction to attendees and aims and objectives for the day	Sarah Keast	Sarah Keast Associates
10.45	The NBN and Strategy overview	Overview of the NBN and background and where we are now with revising the NBN strategy including responses and feedback received	John Sawyer	NBN Trust
11.15	Challenges and issues	What are the priority issues for England - what is blocking progress?	Sarah Keast	Sarah Keast Associates
12.00	Setting knowledge objectives for England	Brainstorm session to determine priority objectives for NBN	Sarah Keast	Sarah Keast Associates
<b><u>Afternoon Session</u></b>				
12.45		Lunch		
13.30	Breakout	Three breakout groups to tackle priority issues and objectives	Three facilitators (one for each group)	
14.30	Report Back and summary	Reporting back on the discussions and open floor question session	All	
15.15	Summary	Outcomes and actions from the day	All	TBC
15:30	Wrap Up	Closing remarks and summary	John Sawyer/ Sarah Keast	
16:00		Coffee & depart		