

NBN Strategy Refresh Workshop
Natural England, Peterborough, 3rd 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

Peterborough Workshop

The following document summarises the outcomes of the first Strategy Refresh Workshop held on the 14th November 2014 in Peterborough. This workshop was attended by representatives from the main organisations providing financial support for the NBN including Natural England, The Environment Agency, DEFRA and the JNCC. 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

The delegates were:

Mark Stevenson (by phone)	DEFRA
Keith Porter	Natural England
Oliver Grafton	Natural England
Paul Rose	JNCC
Paul Gibbertson (by phone)	JNCC
James Phillips	Natural England
David Heaver	Natural England
Steven Peters (by phone)	Environment Agency
Andy Webb	Natural England
John Sawyer	NBN Trust
Sarah Keast	Facilitator: Sarah Keast Associates

Workshop Structure

The workshop was structured into two parts. Part one examined the issues of concern about the NBN focusing on the 5 objectives for the NBN from DEFRA. The second half of the workshop identified strategic objectives and actions to address these concerns.

DEFRA Objectives for NBN

- 1. Long term supply and widespread availability of data**
This is to support local decision making, national reporting and research (Supply).
Data capture, data quality, data visibility.
- 2. Establishing a wider, more diverse funding base (Resourcing)**
Broader audience, more powerful brand, more attractive to sponsors and private sector, diversification of products, services to new and existing markets.
- 3. Strategic support for volunteer recording (Volunteers)**
Improve standardisation of data collection, curation, validation and verification. Standardised visualisation, mapping and analysis tools for key NBN partners. Appropriate training, support and *career* progression.
- 4. Efficient and effective infrastructure (Infrastructure)**
Effective, industrial strength Gateway, recording and analysis tools available to all.
- 5. Ability to make data sources interoperable (Interoperation)**
Standards, systems and examples of where NBN data can interface with other sources to add value and answer questions.

Programme for Workshop

NBN strategy workshop with DEFRA family

Friday 14 Nov 2014

Natural England, Peterborough

- 10-30** **Introductions, H&S etc**
- 10-45** **Introduction to NBN strategy refresh, what we heard and timeframe**
- 11-15** **Part A Discussion of issues of concern to Defra Family structured around the 5 strategic objectives for the NBN:**
- 1 Long term supply and widespread availability of data**
 This is to support local decision making, national reporting and research (Supply).
 Data capture, data quality, data visibility.
- 2 Establishing a wider, more diverse funding base (Resourcing)**
 Broader audience, more powerful brand, more attractive to sponsors and private sector, diversification of products, services to new and existing markets.
- 3 Strategic support for volunteer recording (Volunteers)**
 Improve standardisation of data collection, curation, validation and verification.
 Standardised visualisation, mapping and analysis tools for key NBN partners.
 Appropriate training, support and *career* progression.
- 4 Efficient and effective infrastructure (Infrastructure)**
 Effective, industrial strength Gateway, recording and analysis tools available to all.
- 5 Ability to make data sources interoperable (Interoperation)**
 Standards, systems and examples of where NBN data can interface with other sources to add value and answer questions.
- 12-15** **NBN Gateway - proposed changes (John Sawyer)**
- 12-30** **Discussion of strategic issues for NBN Gateway**
- 13-00** **Lunch**
- 13-30** **PART B Prioritising the issues for the revised strategy**
- 14-00** **Strategic objectives and actions for the revised Strategy**
- 15-15** **Feedback from groups discussions**
- 15-45** **Final remarks and where to from here?**
- 16-00** **Close**

This workshop was the final workshop on the strategy and many issues which were raised in the previous 4 workshops were also raised in this workshop. However the audience for this workshop held a key strategic position as agencies and government departments so the decision was taken to focus discussion on areas which these attendees could make a unique contribution to.

Key these which emerged from this workshop were:

- **The importance of generating a more diverse funding base for the NBN**
- **Analysis of the cost and placing a value on the services (including in kind tasks or freely given hours/work) of the current system for funding and running NBN family especially LRC's and using this data in any decision making about future funding**
- **An urgent need to improve data flow and a need to review access restrictions which increase the cost of the gateway platform and reduce efficiency in the system.**
- **An need to focus on data use and users needs as the starting point for future strategy.**
- **Strategy for overcoming the conservative and reserved approach of scientists which produces rigor in data analysis but equally slows the functionality of the network and generates resistance to change within the recording community and many of the key organisations and the scientific community involved in the NBN**

Part A Issues for the next NBN strategy to address

1. Supply and availability of data issues

1.1 Users of data

- End user needs – uses of data is a key starting point for the strategy
- NBN =National experts – specific multiple taxa downloads, specific national extracts from the NBN gateway
- The data is fit for the needs of the user of data and the quality of the data is certain. These are the core elements which must robust for the NBN to succeed.

1.2 Data Access issues

- How does the data access work (users don't know)
- Different levels of access for different "customers"
- Problem of sharing data with others when some users and data holders do not share permissions
- Permission should be given at point of submission of data by recorder / collector
- Loss of data precision and detail when sharing on NBN – e.g. summarised to 100m, and suppliers not sharing/recording all attributes
- Access controls are stopping the functionality improvement of the gateway
- NBN gateway not transparent – where data is held and goes in the process
- Lack of visibility of a lot of data - difficulty accessing data
- If govt money in then data should be made freely available - Need to see a demonstrable improvement in return on investment
- Long term vision is for free and open data but the issue of the business model for LRC's is causing a difficulty in delivery of this – so need a long term vision for the business model for LRC's too.
- If we simplified access rules on the gateway the cost of building would be greatly reduced.
- £150 has been spent supporting the current business model for the last few years. If access controls were simplified the functionality of the gateway would increase. There is a need for a root and branch review of the access controls and decisions on how to move forward with them.

1.3 Data flow issues

- Some providers restricting data flow to attract funding and research primacy
- You have to go to the data holders to get access to the data (LRC, BTO and national schemes)

- Length of time between data being collected and availability for use in licensing and planning issues
- What balance between timeliness and quality?
- Interoperability - lack of shared vision or strategy satellite observation of combined data , other remote data , field observations – in effect data stacking e.g. Habitat and economic and other data over the top of other records - combining NBN data with other gateways to improve the usefulness of data

1.4 Data quality Issues

- How do we know we can trust the quality of the data
- Data has to be right to make the NBN sustainable
- Need to show data with known quality
- Need to have a measure of confidence in data quality
- WE won't use the data unless we have certainty about its verification – so this prevents engagement in data flow
- Data should be uniquely identifiable at point of entry for record
- Verification is focussed on the recorder not the data
- Gaps and nil records
- Data quality concerns: pitfalls of interpretation e.g. a bird is recorded flying over a farmers land – but record is of it being there – how fit for purpose is this data?
- Need standardisation of terms and attributes - use a biological standard?
- Concern about the time it takes to understand and work around constraints and limitations
- Data quality is not always known – needs a commentary e.g. geographic variation in quality, standards)
- Fitness for purpose - critical differences between different record types – e.g. breeding birds versus flying over
- Is it possible to demonstrate any savings from adopting on line recording methods e.g. iRecord and the Gateway?
- Online recording – are different systems in competition? Does this help?

1.5 Strategic Support for volunteers

- Volunteer recorders time restrictions (a Sunday afternoon activity written up on Sunday night)
- The capacity of the volunteer network is a high risk in ensuring quality of data especially verification
- No support out there for volunteers – so limited ability to influence change
- Secretariat / LRC failing to facilitate volunteer recording
- Verification - this is the wild west – needs rules
- Concern about the capacity of the volunteer network to ensure the quality of the data especially verification
- Accreditation for data capture tools and apps would make it easier to have confidence in data - could also be broadened to other tools e.g. data analysis tools. THIs would help to give confidence in data – in senior management in DEFRA they are often presented with contradictory data sets. Accredited data and data analysis tools would help give weight to data for decision making.

2. The need to develop a new funding model for NBN

2.1 Concerns about current model

- High risk funding model for NBN relying on government funding. TO move forward , in the short term it's important not to undermine the existing funding model, but in the longer term a strategy is needed which broadens the funding options for NBN e.g. research money, private investment
- Public sector funding dominance is not healthy or sustainable and does not guarantee delivery of that sector's priorities with the current model
- Useful to see where the current resources are being spent
- Might help to sell interpretation of the data and not the data itself
- Costing the current business model would help in any comparison of future models.
- What is it costing us to keep funding the current model with its data restrictions?
- Where does current income go? How is it used?
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2.2 Supporting the network

- Opportunity to develop different roles for different parts of the network e.g. national societies leading on verification
- Alignment and divergence of priorities of different parts of the NBN family could be a cause of problems for smooth running of the network
- Move towards partnership with some aspects of the network / some members. There was a feeling that the longer term approach was to move more members towards a partnership style relationship within NBN. An important first step is to make the current position and relationships within the strategy explicit.
- Important to move understanding of inter-relationships in the network from covert or unclear to overt and clear.

Part B Development of new objectives and actions for a future strategy

The group elected to focus their time on developing strategies to address data management issues and the future funding model for NBN.

1 Future Funding Models for the NBN

The group considered:

- How much is a biological record worth
- How to value the services delivered
- Not all records are of equal value or equal cost to acquire
- Business Model for LCRs – how is their value recognised at present

1.1 What are the current sources of funding

- Membership
- JNCC / country agencies
- DEFRA
- Up to now there has been no direct discussion with Treasury about funding

1.2 Potential new sources of funding

- Sponsorship – big companies who use NBN data but are currently unaware of NBN
- Advertising - on web sites?
- Services / providing data interpretation and analysis services
- Contracting for species projects
- Taxation? Contributions to NBN from related sources
- Valuing in kind and other costs e.g. volunteer time, fuel, buying species keys
- Could you tax species key publishes and give a sum to NBN?

1.3 Charging for Services

This was a major area of discussion which looked at the following issues:

- Currently not selling services – could begin to do this e.g. £20,000 for a natural capital map of Wales
- Could NBN (meaning partners and family of organisations) be commissioned to provide Biodiversity data reports?
- How could the benefits of membership be shared? E.g. commercial charging for services such as planning generates more income in London than elsewhere due to the high number of planning applications. Benefits could be shared based on contribution of data for reports?
- If fees for planning were charged at £15 per query that would raise £10million per year
- The risk of this is that it would monetise data for other uses e.g. research
- It could also result in competition to be the data provider for NBN e.g. between NGO's and LRC's within the NBN family
- Developers would prefer to deal with a “national” data source with “quality assurance” within its system so NBN needs to move into this commercial model
- Data charges and paying for services – is it the slippery slope? How will it impact individual recorders?
- Competition between NBN partners for delivery of services needs to be accommodated in this model
- Trick is to separate data from the services – i.e. data free, services are paid for
- Also important to distinguish the value of services and the separate value of data (services use data and add value but data has its own value as without it you could not offer the services)
- Another model would be service delivery behind the firewall of the NBN gateway – this could provide enhanced modelling of data currently not available
- There is a need to move the strategy language from “supporting wildlife” to “ecosystem services” because funders are keyed into this approach.

Part C Data flow issues and the functioning of the NBN and the NBN Gateway

1.1 NBN gateway and LRC's

- A common use of the gateways is that people find data on it and then turn to the same source to deliver the analysis of the data but this threatens the roll of the LRC within their current business model

- could occupy “data capture service role” but most of their time is currently spent processing data requests (which is paid for)
- there are limits to the services LRCs deliver and they are variable at present
- they do hold habitat data and can add value to data interpretation
- it would be worth doing a review of the cost of current business model for all LRC’s. An annual average over the last 5 years of the income generated by the current business model compared against the running costs and the value of the data services provided.

1.2 Role of government in protecting environment

- government can’t protect environment – it has to be done by business and developers - they have to manage their harm
- Developers see £ as the bottom line not environment – role of government is to enforce protection through legislation and rules for development permissions

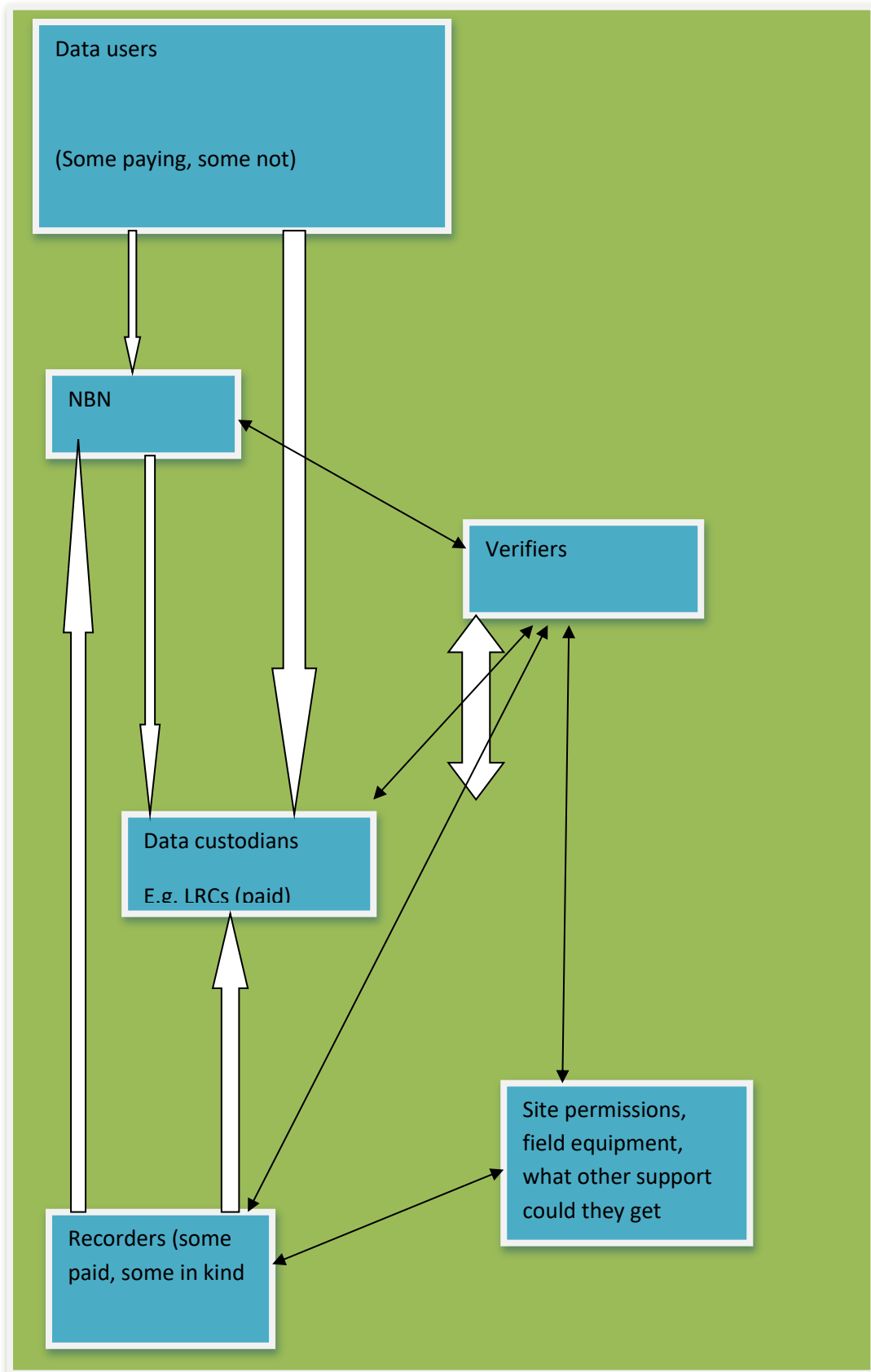
1.3 Agriculture /Forestry /Estates

- A majority land use and a lack of data
- Data is all on developed land and this is also where the potential to generate income is based so that’s the focus of this discussion
- SSSI mechanism has saved species in British Isles
- NBN data could inform restoration ecology - a service which could be paid for
- Lots of NGO’s / volunteer bodies all seeking tiny monies doe individual projects – could NBN offer a benefit of joined up resources /scale?
- Key questions – should funding support the network?
- Should funding be used to raise funds for the network / grow the network / develop NBN

Supporting the network

- Need a forum for the network
- What’s in it for me? What is gained by being a member – need to offer something that creates value in membership
- Recorders newsletter would support and communicate important information to the network of recorders – possibility of targeted communications like this strengthening and promoting membership of the network
- Maybe need to stratify the network differently e.g.
 - Recorders
 - Verifiers
 - Data storer’s
 - Data users

Maybe need to target communication and actions to strengthen the network at these key groups - provide services and information to support these groups and STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS to NBN trust and within the NBN



- Key outcomes for improving the network include :
 - Build trust
 - Increase targeted communications
 - Listen more
 - Understand needs and concerns of each group
 - Ask what can NBN do for you?
- Issues of competition
 - Data custodians could end up in position of competition e.g. LRC's National schemes and societies
 - Potential there to really make NBN work by running a demo project embracing change and grasping the opportunities [presented by this issue
 - Identify champions (visible) to promote successful models for new approach
- Verifiers are the gate keepers – they control data flow – most are either on the board of a national scheme or society or are LRC staff
 - There are also technical solutions – e.g. get volunteers to work through suitable apps e.g. fix I Record and use it
- CEH / BRC - don't give iRecord data until free – slows down data uplift (by at least one year). A key requirement for government is fast data flow. So a key objective has to be to increase data flow and move away from existing model of slow data flow which is an entrenched and historical way of working which no longer meets current needs. This is critical to future of NBN
- iSpot is going to become a data provider with rapid flow
- Resistance to adopting new technology and Apps. Within the NBN family of organisations there is a historic and entrenched resistance to new systems. There is concern – some of which is valid) about the links to BBC, iCloud, commercial connections.
- Access controls
 - Restrictions on access of data are the root cause of a lot of difficulties in data flow within NBN - specifically differences between what is recorded on IRecord and NBN.
- Devolved issues
 - England and Wales are both funding into closed data sets. Scotland and Ireland are funding into an opening model
 - Concern that there is a risk that if the 4 regions of the UK begin to have their own databases there will be a loss of the resolution of the overall UK picture
- Duplication and overlap of organisations and data management
 - CEH data is also closed
 - JNCC, CEH and EN fund part of iRecord via BRC
 - CEH retains IPR on data
 - Species dictionary should not be on a different system
 - BRC and NBN should not be separately funded
 - Is there an opportunity to influence in Government to generate obligation on developers to fund LRC's?