

Guidance for Local Authorities: accessing biodiversity data through your Local Environmental Records Centres

In order to discharge their duties effectively, Local Authorities need high quality information about the distribution of legally protected, rare or threatened species, important habitats and designated sites. Without up-to-date and data they can find themselves exposed to avoidable legal and economic risks. Reliable access to accurate information will enable timely, well-informed decisions regarding consents or planning permission without delaying important site management works or hold up time and finance-critical developments.

Local Environmental Records Centres provide cost-effective information services which help Local Authorities to comply with their statutory duties, thereby reducing risk and liability. These services are essential for underpinning policies and decision making and for protecting and enhancing the natural environment for the benefit of the local community.

What is a Local Environmental Records Centre?

Local Environmental Records Centres support and collaborate with a network of experts to ensure information is robust, and make information products and services accessible to a range of audiences including decision-makers, the public, and researchers. This information plays an essential role in decision-making at all levels, helping to protect and improve biodiversity and geodiversity within the region and beyond.

A Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) is much more than the database of records it manages. LERCs are partnership-led and employ experienced staff who provide tailored data services, taking account of local policies and priorities. By working with local and national experts, LERCs validate and verify data to known standards, enabling them to be used with confidence. Much of the data managed by LERCs is gathered by highly dedicated expert volunteer recorders and professional ecologists. Without LERCs, this valuable data resource would not be made available to local and national users promptly and in a suitable format.

The data services provided by LERCs to Local Authorities are needed for:

- Forward planning and development control
- Land Management Advice Projects
- Bio/Geodiversity Action Planning
- Local Sites monitoring and reporting
- Control of invasive species
- Biodiversity offsetting/Green infrastructure planning
- Ecological network mapping
- Highway maintenance

- Sustainable Urban Drainage/flood alleviation Planning
- Public health projects

The services of LERCs should be sought to ensure compliance with:

- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016
- The Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- The Hedgerow Regulations 1997
- INSPIRE Regulations 2009 and the UK Location Strategy
- Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011
- UK Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) and Freedom of Information Act
- Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004; Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment Scotland Act 2011
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2007
- National Planning Policy Framework **chapter 11 “Conserving and enhancing the natural environment”**
- National Planning Policy Guidance - Natural Environment; Biodiversity, **ecosystems and green infrastructure “How can evidence on ecology be gathered and kept up to date?”**
- Technical Advice Note 5, Nature Conservation and Planning (2009) (Wales)

“I cannot over-estimate the value of LERCs in supporting local authority decision making which affects the natural environment. LERC information represents a cost-effective and reliable basis for land use and infrastructure planning, development management, land management, day-to-day property maintenance and strategic planning for biodiversity and green infrastructure. The LERC partnership approach, which involves substantial volunteer input, is a model for a multi-sectoral approach that provides high-value outputs.”

Ali Glaisher BSc MSc MCIEEM, Principal Ecologist
Staffordshire County Council

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How to find your LERC:

www.alerc.org.uk/find-an-lerc-map

The Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC) represents Local Environmental Records Centres throughout the UK, sharing innovation and best practice and promoting standards in environmental data management and service provision.

LERCs in the National Biodiversity Network

LERCs are an integral part of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), a partnership of organisations who collect and use biodiversity data and are committed to making this information available for planning decisions, nature conservation and the public benefit. LERCs play a vital role in the NBN by supporting and guiding local biological recording effort, managing and quality controlling species and habitat records and ensuring that biodiversity data are used to inform local decision making.

The NBN Atlas is a tool for sharing biodiversity data through the system of creative commons licences ([more information here](#)). These are global standardised licences that describe exactly what records can and cannot be used for and how it should be acknowledged. They can place some restrictions on use, particularly commercial use.

Important note:

Data searches within survey reports submitted in support of planning applications should utilise the most comprehensive and up-to-date biodiversity data, available from the relevant LERC.

If the report quotes only the NBN Atlas as the data source, and not the LERC, then this may be in breach of Creative Commons Licences (e.g. use of data shared under a commercial licence, CC-0 or CC-BY). Furthermore, these data may not be fully up to date, nor at an appropriate geographical resolution. This must be clarified with the author before accepting the report.

By negotiating special data access agreements with local and national data providers and making innovative use of the tools and technology offered by the NBN, LERCs provide a 'one-stop-shop' for

information on sites, habitats and species in the region. The NBN Atlas is not a substitute for the data services provided LERCs but it can enhance these services, ensuring that Local Authorities benefit fully from the achievements of the NBN.

Services provided by LERCs:

- List of all recorded Priority and legally protected species and Priority habitats in a defined area
- Records distribution map of any recorded species in a defined area
- GIS data search of a defined area showing recorded habitats, statutory and non-statutory sites and Priority/ legally protected species
- Local Wildlife and Geodiversity Sites boundaries and descriptions
- Regularly updated alert layers of Priority and protected species and habitats within an administrative boundary
- Species richness maps to highlight biodiversity 'hotspots'
- Public Wildlife Enquiry Service
- Training and guidance to promote high quality species and habitat recording

Many LERCs also provide the following enhanced services:

- Management of Local Wildlife/Geological Sites dataset
- Green infrastructure mapping
- Specialised species and habitat surveys
- Habitat suitability mapping and species modelling
- Local Wildlife/Geological Site surveys and monitoring
- Habitat opportunity mapping
- Data interpretation to enhance public understanding
- Monitoring and reporting on biodiversity indicators and LBAP outcomes

For more information on LERCs, please visit www.alerc.org.uk. For more information on consultancy use of biodiversity data, please read [Guidelines for Accessing and Using Biodiversity Data](#) (CIEEM, 2016)

