



Environment Agency and Natural England Joint Working – Report on Triennial Review Action Plan

November 2014



Contents

Foreword	2
Executive summary	3
Introduction and background	5
Triennial Review Joint Action Plan delivery	6
1. Working together	6
Ways of working	6
Estates	7
2. Spatial planning	8
Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects	8
High Speed 2	9
Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)	9
The ‘Big 5’ initiative	10
A coordinated service for planning applicants	11
Engagement with developers	11
3. Land management	11
Maximising outcomes by taking an integrated approach (Synergies Pilots)	11
NELMs (the new agri-environment scheme)	12
4. Improved customer experience	13
Customer service approaches and standards	13
Farm visits pilot - Cumbria	13
Coordination of scheduled farm visits and integrated advice: Dorset Case Study	16
Farm inspection visits	16
Catchment Sensitive Farming	17
Regulatory reform	17
Coastal Concordat	18
5. Evidence and monitoring	20
Marine monitoring	20
Terrestrial and freshwater	20
Remote sensing and geomatics	20
Academic partnerships	21
Sharing data	21
6. Partnership and innovation case studies	21
Fisheries	21
Secondment of Natural England adviser to AB.Sustain	22
National Nature Reserves (NNRs)	22
7. Joint working outside Triennial Review Action Plan	22
Flooding	23
National Permitting Service	24
Climate Change	24
Next steps	24
Annex 1: Environment Agency and Natural England Joint Working: Report on Triennial Review Action Plan – summary by action	25



Foreword

The Triennial Review Action Plan is part of an ongoing commitment made by the Environment Agency and Natural England to work more closely together. The plan is overseen by a Joint Board Sub Group of Environment Agency and Natural England board members on behalf of both boards.

The Joint Board Sub Group has helped provide a focus to the implementation of the Triennial Review recommendations which has resulted in significant progress.

This report details many examples of the two organisations working together to deliver better outcomes for the environment and local communities, in addition to improving the effectiveness with which we serve our customers and work with business and public bodies.

In a number of areas we are enhancing existing work. In others we are challenging our previous practices in a way that is bringing a new approach to how both organisations deliver individually and collectively in the future.

It's easy to document the hard outcomes of our work together but it's the more intangible outcomes that often have greater long term impact. We believe that working together and increasingly with others will bring significant rewards in the years to come for the environment, for business and the communities we serve.



Rt Hon Lord Smith of Finsbury
Chairman
Environment Agency



Andrew Sells
Chairman
Natural England

Joint Board Sub Group members are:

Robert Light, Chair of Joint Board Sub Group, Environment Agency
David Hill, Deputy Chair of Joint Board Sub Group, Natural England
Karen Burrows, Environment Agency
Doug Hulyer, Natural England
Richard Leafe, Environment Agency
Nigel Reader, Natural England
Jeremy Walker, Environment Agency



Executive summary

The Triennial Review of the Environment Agency and Natural England was published in June 2013. The review concluded that the Environment Agency and Natural England should be retained as separate public bodies with separate purposes and functions.

- The Environment Agency's purpose is "so to protect or enhance the environment, taken as a whole, as to make the contribution that the Secretary of State considers appropriate towards achieving sustainable development".

The Environment Agency works to protect and improve the environment in England. It reduces the risks to people and properties from flooding; makes sure there is enough water for people and wildlife; protects and improves air, land and water quality; and applies the environmental standards within which industry must operate. Acting to reduce climate change, and helping people and wildlife adapt to its consequences, are at the heart of all that the Environment Agency does. The Environment Agency is a Category 1 responder and works with other emergency services to prepare for and respond to incidents, and to help communities recover after an incident.

- Natural England's purpose is "to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development".

Natural England is a national organisation which covers the whole of England, extending 12 nautical miles out to sea. As an independent organisation, Natural England provides a range of specialist advice and incentives at both local and national levels to maintain, protect and enhance the natural environment. Natural England makes available evidence and information on the natural environment which Government, local authorities, communities and others can use in their work.

The Triennial Review also concluded that both organisations needed to continue to improve effectiveness and efficiency through further reform of their functions and ways of working.

The Environment Agency and Natural England published a [Joint Action Plan](#) in December 2013 which sets out how they will work together to maximise environmental outcomes, deliver improved customer services and secure efficiencies through working together. Many of the actions in the Joint Action Plan involve working closely with other partners such as the Marine Management Organisation, the Forestry Commission and Defra.

The Joint Action Plan sits alongside Defra's 'one business' portfolio. The ambition is for Defra and its network to operate together as 'one business', underpinned by a business model which is strategic, flexible and resilient. This includes areas such as estates, IT infrastructure, evidence, customer experience, and back office services.

This report describes the progress made and benefits achieved since the Joint Action Plan was published, including:

- Sharing office space at 12 locations, ranging from hotdesking to permanent shared space. Future projects could result in up to 70% of Natural England staff and 50% of Environment Agency staff sharing office space by 2020.



- Providing joint advice to the Planning Inspectorate and developers on a number of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. The Environment Agency and Natural England have developed joint working approaches and a good practice protocol to support this work.
- Implementing an account manager approach with major developers, and piloting a joint account manager approach to make it easier for customers to do business with us.
- Working with the Forestry Commission and other stakeholders to develop a suite of soil and water improvement measures for the new agri-environment scheme (NELMS) which will help meet resource protection and biodiversity objectives.
- Implementing the Coastal Concordat for England. Benefits to applicants, regulators and advisors include less duplication, streamlined assessments and greater transparency and consistency of advice.
- The Environment Agency and Natural England have been collaborating on joint marine monitoring programmes over the last 5 years. In 2012/13 savings worth £500,000 were achieved through joint surveys and sharing data for monitoring undertaken for the Water Framework and Habitats Directive.

Throughout this report we refer to our business customers; these include developers, farm businesses, fisheries, food and drink businesses, and waste carriers, many of whom are Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This report provides information about how the Environment Agency and Natural England have engaged with these businesses and the organisations which represent them. In some cases we have already received feedback from them on our Action Plan activities since December 2013, and have included this in this report. In other cases, we are still delivering the actions, and the Plan (Annex 1) outlines how we will capture feedback in the near future.

The Triennial Review Joint Action Plan is part of Environment Agency and Natural England's ongoing commitment to work more closely together. The life of the Joint Action Plan does not end with this report. Both organisations will continue to carry out the actions set out in the plan and look for further opportunities to collaborate for the benefit of people and the environment.



Introduction and background

The Environment Agency and Natural England published their Joint Action Plan in December 2013, in response to the Triennial Review. This report sets out the progress we are making on joint working, which includes the commitments made in the Joint Action Plan. Delivery of the plan has been governed by a non-executive Joint Board Sub-Group, with members drawn from both the Environment Agency and Natural England boards.

The Joint Action Plan builds on earlier initiatives to improve the way Environment Agency and Natural England work together. One example of this is the Single Voice initiative, which has improved the consistency with which the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission engage with local government, developers, Local Enterprise Partnerships and others.

The Environment Agency and Natural England have consulted stakeholders extensively about how they can improve their joint working, including, for example, through programmes such as the Smarter Environmental Regulation Review, the Coastal Concordat and spatial planning and industry forums. We have also sought views and feedback from Defra and other government departments.

Both organisations have faced challenging events in recent months. The east coast tidal surge of December 2013 and floods of early 2014 were nationally significant events. They also provided new opportunities for innovative joint working on the ground. For example, in the preparation for the east coast tidal surge, Environment Agency and Natural England officers worked closely together to help people to prepare and minimise impacts.

More information on joint working can be found in the [Environment Agency](#) and [Natural England](#) corporate plans.



Triennial Review Joint Action Plan delivery

1. Working together

Ways of working

Close working between the Environment Agency and Natural England is common practice. The Chairs and Chief Executives meet regularly and the Joint Board Sub Group meets at least four times a year to guide and monitor the progress on joint working. Staff routinely work together at national and local level and some of these areas of work are described in this report.

There is a clear commitment to joint working in both organisations' corporate plans through shared office space (outlined below), and joint training programmes, job swaps and assignments. The Environment Agency's "yes if" and Natural England's "solutions-focused" approaches have helped to promote a common objective of achieving environmental objectives and sustainable economic growth.

"I organised and attended the job shadowing programme with Natural England. We felt that it was beneficial for us to experience the culture of another public sector organisation and to network with our external partners. The experience helped broaden my knowledge and understanding and led to some innovative process improvement. We now have a very positive relationship. It also fed into people's performance plans which has helped personal development. Overall a fantastic opportunity."

Laura Horrocks, Permitting Technical Specialist, Environment Agency

Both the Environment Agency and Natural England are implementing organisational changes to achieve efficiencies and improve customer service. New structures established in April 2014 reflected a common decision to move to a two-tier national and local structure. For operational reasons, our area boundaries vary in some instances, but we have put in place mechanisms to ensure that our customers receive a coordinated service.

Area Managers regularly hold discussions with their counterparts to agree how best to engage jointly with stakeholders common to both organisations. In some forums there is single representation provided for key stakeholders, for example board membership of Local Nature Partnerships. In other places joint meetings are used to make things easier for specific customer groups, for example MPs. As a result, stakeholders benefit from a single coordinated conversation between Natural England, the Environment Agency and, where appropriate, other Defra network agencies such as the Forestry Commission.

Local approaches are adapted according to local need. For example in the North East, management teams frequently meet together to discuss opportunities for closer working and to resolve contentious issues; this approach has led to a number of innovative joint projects, such as the 'Slowing the Flow' project which brings organisations together to look at a variety of ways to tackle flood risk management. In Norwich, Environment Agency and Natural England staff are located on the same floor of the building, encouraging regular liaison on casework and areas of shared interest such as coastal management.

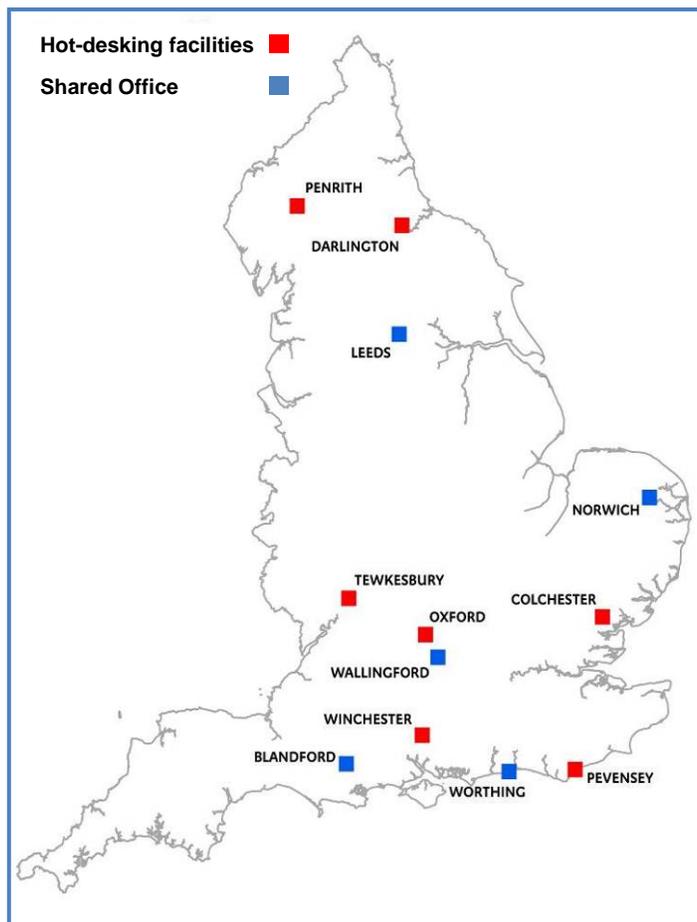


Estates

The Environment Agency and Natural England are both rationalising their estates. Since 2008, the Environment Agency has left 57 properties and reduced running costs by £5.7 million. Since 2010, Natural England has reduced offices from 67 to 25 and achieved savings of £3.3 million.

Both organisations require a network of offices across England to fit with business needs; strong links with local areas are fundamental to ways of working. Environment Agency and Natural England currently share 5 offices including Dragonfly House in Norwich and Guildbourne House in Worthing, with a further 7 offices providing hot-desking facilities.

Working with Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England supported the development of the Defra-wide Estates Rationalisation Programme. Currently 29 projects are in the planning stage, 16 of which may involve both the Environment Agency and Natural England moving into further shared office space, often alongside other Defra network organisations. These joint projects represent an ambitious programme which could involve up to 70% of Natural England staff and 50% of Environment Agency staff by 2020. As part of these projects, ways of enabling closer working are being supported by shared use of open plan office space and shared reception areas, meeting rooms and informal spaces.



Shared offices and hot-desking facilities

“The Environment Agency and Natural England have shared an office in Norwich for over 4 years and we are both convinced that there have been very significant benefits from this arrangement. Our staff meet and talk on a daily basis across a wide range of subjects where we have a shared interest. This has allowed us all to provide a more responsive and collaborative approach for our customers and to benefit from sharing expertise and experience.”

Pamela Abbott , Area Manager, Natural England and Dr Charles Beardall, Area Manager, Environment Agency



Dragonfly House staff survey



Dragonfly House, Norwich

Dragonfly House is part of the wider St James' Mill development in the centre of Norwich. Environment Agency and Natural England moved into Dragonfly House shortly after the building was completed in December 2009.

To collect information about working together in a co-located office, 142 front-line Environment Agency and Natural England staff were invited to participate in a joint online staff survey in May 2014.

The results showed effective collaborative working enabled by a shared office. Examples of shared work areas included planning-related advice, Catchment Sensitive Farming, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) casework, flood and coastal management, Water Framework Directive and diffuse water pollution.

77% of those responding said that sharing an office made it easier or significantly easier to work together.

Comments included the following:

- Designated sites - *“Being co-located in the same office makes it easier to get a quicker answer to a query than phoning/emailing, resulting in a quicker turnaround for consultation responses where Natural England and the Environment Agency are jointly involved”.*
- Flooding - *“Working together in a shared office during the winter floods enabled us to share information more quickly and reach better decisions on the appropriate responses”.*
- Planning-related advice - *“I can have informal pre-application discussions more easily and clarify information verbally, reducing email traffic and enabling me to issue assents more quickly”.*
- Norfolk Broads - *“I am often working on a complex issue that involves a response from Natural England. It is much more effective being able to pop over to Natural England and book an informal meeting with no travel time / expense”.*

2. Spatial planning

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

The Environment Agency and Natural England are advising the Planning Inspectorate and developers on a number of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). Learning from four early major infrastructure cases (Hinkley, Sizewell, York Potash and the Humber Renewable Energy Cluster) is being used to develop a protocol on ways of working together on NSIPs.

Together we have recently carried out a survey of NSIP developers who have been through the key stages of the Planning Act process. We selected a range of different developers and projects (including energy, transport and marine) to obtain insights from as wide a range of sectors and experiences as possible. This will help in the design of further customer service improvements.



Working together on NSIPs: Sizewell C nuclear new build



Sizewell C nuclear new build

Environment Agency and Natural England have a Protocol which sets out ways of working together on Sizewell C nuclear new build, using learning from Hinkley Point C. This brings together the Environment Agency, Natural England, Marine Management Organisation and EDF Energy. We take a Defra network ‘Single Voice’ approach by agreeing lead roles. The protocol supports positive engagement by setting out agreed behaviours, timescales and ensuring clarity of purpose. Next steps are to develop a set of principles which will allow the Defra network to provide aligned and timely responses. Working together in this way helps us to provide good customer service and to meet developer expectations.

When we work together, we are better at:

- Responding to, and managing developers’ expectations.
- Inputting effectively into the Development Consent Order examination process.
- Working constructively with the developer to ensure the environmental risks and opportunities are taken into account throughout the design, consenting and construction processes.

High Speed 2

The Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission have been advising High Speed 2 (HS2) on its project proposals since 2009. We have been advising the company on environmental mitigation that will be required, and, equally as important, on potential environmental enhancement that could be achieved as the project progresses. For example, we have provided joint advice on potential impacts on designated sites and jointly advised that the project should include ‘Woodlands for Water’ in their landscaping strategy to ensure planting results in Water Framework Directive (WFD) enhancement and flood risk reduction.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

Our joint working approaches with LEPs are well established locally. The Defra network offer to LEPs and City Deals has set a framework for our engagement with LEPs. We continue to develop joint approaches under the offer, for example taking a Defra network approach to reviewing LEPs’ investment strategies and plans where needed.

The Environment Agency and Natural England will work towards ensuring Local Enterprise Partnerships take full account of environmental considerations, through direct contact with LEPs and by continuing and improving their engagement with Local Nature Partnerships.

“The New Anglia LEP has met regularly with the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission on a range of issues. The LEP values this relationship and considers it to be central to the achievement of sustainable growth in Norfolk and Suffolk”.

Iain Dunnett, Stakeholder Manager, New Anglia LEP

Growth Ready in the Tees Valley

The Environment Agency and Natural England have also worked together to implement an innovative evidence project called *Growth Ready* for the Tees Valley Enterprise Zone. Through *Growth Ready*, we are actively setting out the environmental risks and opportunities associated with development sites so



“The local approach from both organisations is consistently well balanced and sensitive with respect to collaboration with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership. Work on land and water issues has been positive and has benefited from evidence-based and place-based advice and technical expertise. Their roles on the local nature partnerships have also been important, as have their broader roles on sustainability, climate change and resilience, in assisting the partnership to work towards better environmental, economic and social outcomes.”

Edward Twiddy, Director, North East Local Enterprise Partnership

that the LEP, local authority and developers are aware of any constraints or designations associated with the site at the outset. This active approach is popular with partners.

The Humber Single Conversation

The Environment Agency and Natural England also worked with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in the Humber *Single Conversation* pilot. We have supported the LEP by seconding a Natural England officer to work with them directly, and we are collaborating on a Memorandum of Understanding with the LEP. We have worked together on a ‘Lessons Learnt’ case study for the Humber, drawing on experiences of the Environment Agency, Natural England and MMO colleagues. This includes practical advice for colleagues who might need to adopt similar approaches elsewhere. We are using this to inform proposals for integrated approaches with other agencies in the future.

The ‘Big 5’ initiative

Both the Environment Agency and Natural England are playing an active role in the cross-Whitehall Statutory Consultees Working Group. This is known as the Department for Communities and Local Government’s ‘Big 5’ initiative; the five statutory agencies this refers to are the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Health and Safety Executive, English Heritage and the Highways Agency.

Improving co-ordination and consistency with the other three agencies builds on work already undertaken by the Environment Agency and Natural England, and shares good practice across the agencies. Examples of initiatives we have progressed with the ‘Big 5’ include a Common Service Commitment and piloting an escalation procedure for external parties to resolve conflicting advice from agencies.

“We have good engagement with you and your teams directly across a range of pro-growth initiatives, including supporting the work of the Consents Service Unit and Major Infrastructure Environment Unit, ongoing engagement with DCLG on the issue of ‘s150 consents’ for nationally significant infrastructure projects and supporting and delivering on commitments agreed through the cross-Whitehall statutory consultee working group, alongside the other ‘Big 5’ statutory consultees. This group is delivering a range of commitments on improving data and analysis of performance of statutory consultees and establishing a new ‘Statutory Consultee Engagement Network’ to improve coordination and escalation approaches in cases where more than one statutory consultee is involved in an application and advice is potentially conflicting.”

Sue Lovelock, Deputy Director, Planning Development Management, DCLG

We have also developed common monitoring and reporting criteria to improve reporting on our planning consultee performance.



A coordinated service for planning applicants

The Environment Agency and Natural England have produced a schedule of joint working protocols on planning and permitting. This will help us further foster streamlined approaches to our advice as a planning consultee. In 2014 we will be piloting joint charging to customers and developing options for joint Environmental Impact Assessment advice. We are sharing current practice and scoping options for delivering these actions. We have also developed proposals for working together on our advice to minerals planning authorities on fracking applications.

We are planning to share training resources, which will help improve consistency between us and in our response to customers.

Engagement with developers

The Environment Agency and Natural England have both implemented an account manager approach with major developers, and we will pilot a joint account manager approach with companies who have extensive involvement with both organisations and who are keen to participate. Improved links between the Environment Agency and Natural England enables us to provide more efficient and consistent service to developers (including Small and Medium Enterprises, SMEs), as well as streamlining customer engagement. We jointly convene the Developer Industry Group (DIG) which brings together major developers such as house builders (e.g. Countryside Properties and Berkeley Strategic Land), energy companies (e.g. Centrica, National Grid and EDF Energy), infrastructure developers (e.g. the Peel Group), industry bodies (e.g. the Home Builders Federation, the Minerals Products Association, Renewable-UK, Energy UK, the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, the Royal Town Planning Institute, and the Tees Valley Industry and Nature Conservation Association) and local and central government (e.g. the New Anglia LEP, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT), DECC and DCLG). We work together to provide this group with regular updates on our work and engage them in the development of new approaches and products.

A senior project manager for a business member of the Developer Industry Group provided the following feedback on one of the new initiatives that Natural England has taken on wildlife licensing, whereby a licence is issued to a company for routine activities:

“The organisational licence really helps us as a business, as we will no longer need to apply for an individual licence each time bird issues are identified during works. Holding a licence will allow the company to address these situations much more efficiently, which will in turn help ensure [service continuity] and keep costs down.”

3. Land management

Maximising outcomes by taking an integrated approach (Synergies Pilots)

The Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry Commission and Defra are working together to develop and test a local approach to planning to achieve multiple benefits from biodiversity, flood and water programmes and forestry / woodland interests. This work builds on the recommendations of the [Synergies project](#) (October 2013), which highlighted some of the opportunities to achieve more for the environment in an efficient and effective way by working better together. Opportunities identified included providing a common evidence base, joint stakeholder engagement and better coordination / targeting of measures to achieve multiple objectives and it is these areas that form the central part of this work going forward.



The Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and Defra have agreed the broad scope for this work and identified two pilot Areas: Derwent, North Yorkshire and Taw / Torrridge, Devon, where we will fully test the approach. This project will continue through planning and delivery phases in 2014. The nature of the pilots will be different in each of the chosen areas due to the different environmental challenges, partnership working arrangements and the approaches already in place.

Designing NELMs (the new agri-environment scheme) to meet combined objectives for resource protection



Sampling for water quality in the River Dove in the Peak District

Agri-environment schemes operate to enable farmers and land managers manage their land to deliver a wide range of environmental benefits. At present a New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS) is under development, and following EU approval, detailed information about the scheme will be available in early 2015.

Natural England and Environment Agency staff and stakeholders have developed a proposed suite of soil and water land management options and capital items for this scheme, to meet resource protection objectives alongside biodiversity and other scheme objectives. The aim of these options is to protect soils, for example from erosion, and to keep water clean. Examples of these options are buffer strips (e.g. alongside water courses), winter cover crops (to prevent soil erosion), livestock and crop management, and control of invasive species. There will also be a range of related capital items available.

evidence), and with Area teams, to propose and validate where these options will be prioritised or targeted to maximise the environmental benefits on the ground, for example to improve the condition of SSSIs.

Natural England and the Environment Agency will also continue to work together nationally (e.g. by sharing

Natural England and Environment Agency have also worked closely together and with the Forestry Commission to assess the extent to which joint benefits can be achieved from NELMs delivery between

“Many thanks once again for all your efforts on this, this has been a really good piece of work and an excellent example of joint working”

Mike Rowe, Deputy Director, Defra

measures on water quality, biodiversity and flood risk management. This high level study indicated that it should be theoretically possible to achieve a good level of synergy between these policy outcomes, but in practice it will depend upon local targeting and uptake of the most effective NELMs options by land managers.



4. Improved customer experience

Customer service approaches and standards

Both the Environment Agency and Natural England have published service commitments to their customers which have many common principles and approaches. Both organisations support the Customer Service Excellence principles – Natural England is accredited to the Cabinet Office Customer Service Excellence Standard and the Environment Agency has accreditation in one Directorate and three Areas. We welcome feedback and respond quickly and learn from complaints and commendations. For example, the Environment Agency and Natural England both publish, “You said. We did” responses to customer feedback. We are working through the Defra customer insights network to assess the benefits of a single customer satisfaction measure across the Defra network.

Farm visits pilot - Cumbria

The Environment Agency and Natural England both undertake farm visits. Environment Agency visits are for regulation purposes, while Natural England provides advice on good practice and grants. The farm visits project tested the potential for rationalising scheduled farm visits in an area where the Environment Agency and Natural England share in an office in Penrith.

Information about scheduled farm visits in Cumbria between April 2013 and March 2014 was mapped to illustrate the location and nature of the visits. This exercise identified that there were a relatively small number of farms which had visits from both Environment Agency and Natural England advisers during this time. Of the 49 Environment Agency visits, 13 were at farms also visited by Natural England or Catchment Sensitive Farming advisers.

Details of several case studies in Cumbria where the Environment Agency and Natural England have worked together were shared with stakeholders as part of the project. The aim was to identify best practice, opportunities and barriers and propose new ways of working. Examples include:

- **Diffuse Water Pollution Plans (DWPP)** – Environment Agency, Natural England and Catchment Sensitive Farming advisers working together to prioritise farms that require measures to be delivered via DWPP.
- **Longsleddale Gravel Removal** – streamlining Environment Agency and Natural England advice and regulatory procedures for flood defence consent applications for gravel removal in a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- **Environmental Land Management Service (ELMS)** – supporting Environmental Stewardship applications as Environmentally Sensitive Area agreements expired.
- **River Ehen** – A community wide initiative to work with partners to protect the important pearl mussel population.
- **Ullswater Valley Planning** – A geographical approach to partnership working, to set out what people want to see happening in their area.
- **Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil Regulations (SSAFO)** – a local process to reduce farm visits where farmers apply for grants that may fall under these regulations.

Feedback about the customer experience of scheduled farm visits was sought. This was gathered from farmers and farming representatives from the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) and from representatives from the National Park, National Trust and Forestry Commission.



Key messages were:

- A coordinated approach from the different agencies should be adopted, where each representative knows what the others are doing.
- In general more than one site visit from 'experts' rather than one 'generalist' was preferred.
- Farmers wanted to avoid duplication (e.g. different organisations visiting farms for the same information or reason).
- Farmers suggested co-ordinating visits so each representative comes on the same day to prevent interruption of work, so they can then set one day aside to cover a lot of visits/subjects. But they also noted that some farmers can find this overwhelming, so a flexible approach is needed.
- Good individual relationships between advisers/officers are important to coordinate visits and create new initiatives for effective ways of working.
- Shared offices make collaborative working between Environment Agency, Natural England and Forestry Commission easier and more effective.
- Data sharing is important, and we should seek opportunities to improve this further in future.
- There may be opportunities to look at the wider Defra network, for example the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) to coordinate farm visits across all network organisations.



© Environment Agency/Jo Ratcliffe

The farm visits workshop in Cumbria, April

“This Triennial Review project has really helped colleagues on the front line to understand how both organisations work with farmers, land managers and stakeholders. As a result, we have been able to develop further collaborative ways of working which will deliver improved customer service and environmental outcomes”

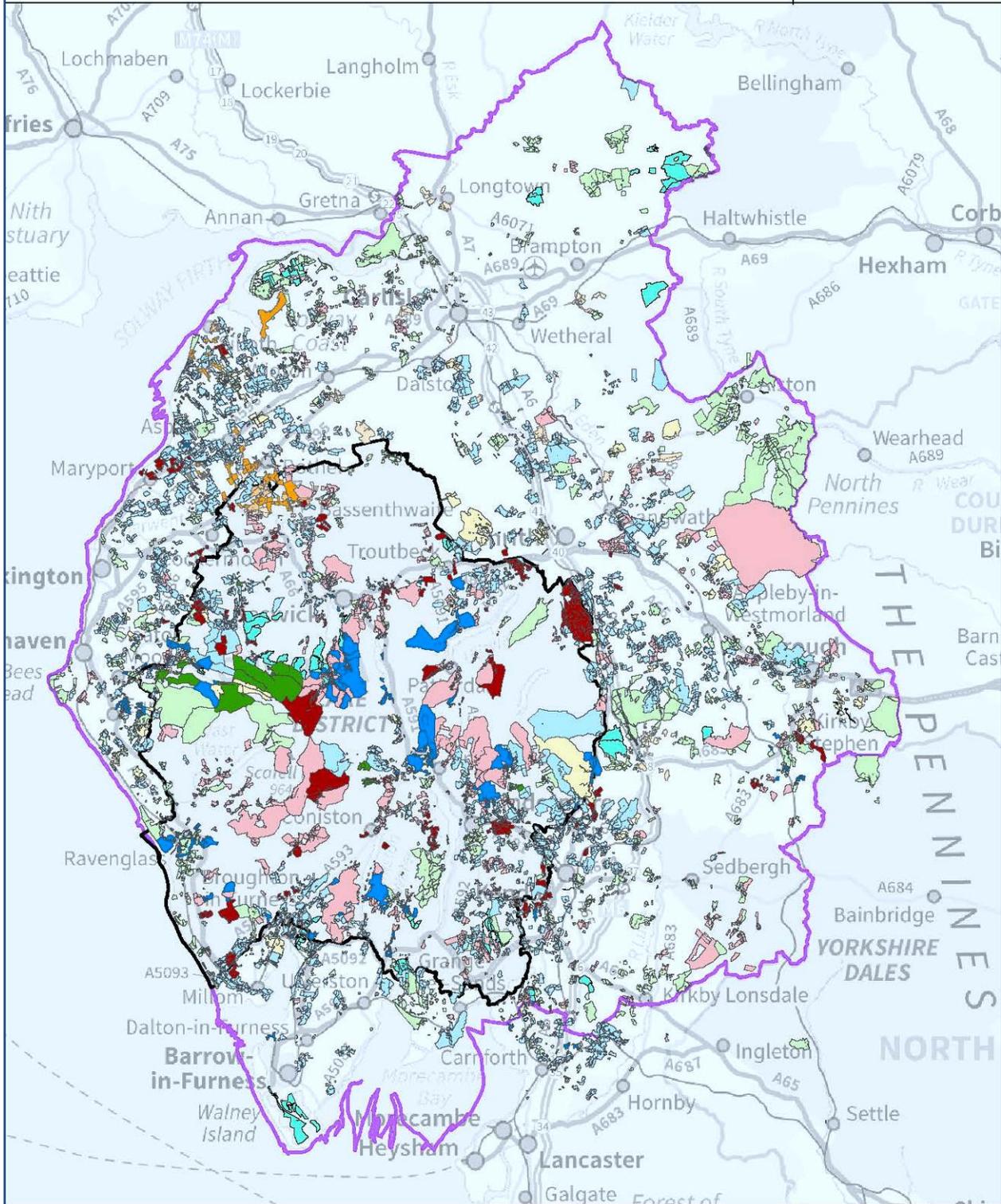
Simon Humphries, Area Manager and Project Sponsor, Natural England

Next steps for the project

The Environment Agency and Natural England will now work together to:

- Continue, develop and improve the existing models of joint-working, business planning and data sharing to monitor progress of existing initiatives and look for new ideas for joint working with other members of the Defra network.
- Ensure that advisers share intelligence and meet regularly.
- Continue to seek feedback on ways of working from NFU, CLA and farmers.

Environment Agency and Natural England Farm Visits in Cumbria (April 2013 to March 2014)

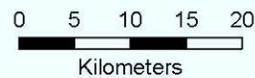


Environment Agency Visits

- EA Officer Scheduled Farm Visits (advisory and regulatory)
- EA WFD Farm Visits
- EA Scheduled farm visits and EA WFD
- Lake District National Park Boundary
- Cumbria County boundary

Natural England Visits

- Agri Environment Scheme (Agril Enviro)
- Agri Enviro and CSF Visits
- Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer Visits (CSF)
- CSF and High Level Scheme
- Agri Enviro, CSF and High Level Scheme
- Agri Enviro and High Level Scheme
- High Level Scheme
- Natural England ISA Visits



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Coordination of scheduled farm visits and integrated advice: Dorset Case Study

In Dorset there is good integration and collaborative working between the Natural England led Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) initiative and the work of Environment Agency Land and Water teams undertaking farm inspections. This ensures that the advice and grants delivered through CSF inform and complement the regulatory activities of the Environment Agency, to provide a seamless customer experience. Sharing an office in Blandford has helped to develop close team working and strong personal working relationships.

Joint delivery, shared data and targeting

Natural England and Environment Agency officers routinely attend each other's team meetings and jointly organise farm events. This helps to develop good working relationships with the wider agricultural community. They also provide personal introductions from their local contacts. For example, Environment Agency Land and Water staff attend the CSF steering group which includes farmers and representatives from the National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association.

When a pollution incident occurs, Environment Agency officers can signpost farmers to CSF contacts to provide advice and grant information. Similarly, if CSF advisers have concerns, they are able to liaise with Environment Agency officers to discuss the case.

Environment Agency and Natural England staff share data and intelligence on pollution incidences, good and bad practices, to make sure that both organisations are up to date. They also jointly target collective resources to enable effective targeting of visits. This is the approach for Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) compliance visits, where the information from these visits is shared with CSF colleagues to target their intervention and provide a joined up service to farmers.

Farmer feedback

Farmers report positively on the integration between the two agencies. They recognise the benefits of pro-active engagement and advice from the Environment Agency and CSF, for example in helping to secure planning consent from local planning authorities to construct storage containers for slurry which are compliant with NVZ regulations.

Farm inspection visits

Defra Ministers have publicly committed to reducing the burden and, where possible, the number of inspections carried out by Defra regulators on farms in England. There is a new project under Defra's wider change programme "One Business", to investigate further opportunities to reduce the burden of inspections on compliant farmers, and to improve the effectiveness of Defra network organisations. The Environment Agency and Natural England are working with Defra and the wider Defra network on this project under the overall lead of Paul Leinster. Work will include:

- Improving the evidence base of visits currently carried out, including whether any exceed the minimum number required by EU and domestic legislation and, if so, why.
- Using the evidence base to improve communications with farmers on the reasons for inspections, building on the Farmers Guide to Inspections. Targeting communications by sector providing information on "who, why, what and when" visits are made by regulators.
- Developing principles for measuring the effectiveness of risk-based approaches used across the Defra network; ensuring any earned recognition opportunities are incorporated into the risk models, and developing a common language to make it easier for farmers to understand why they have been selected for inspection.
- Developing and piloting an inspection planning and data sharing tool, that joins data from different datasets held across the Defra network.

Proposals for changes to ways of working will be developed by September 2014.



Catchment Sensitive Farming

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) is a joint Environment Agency and Natural England project which helps farmers to take action to mitigate diffuse pollution from agriculture. Since 2006, both organisations have worked as a joint team to make measurable water quality improvements.

The Environment Agency and Natural England have looked carefully at which organisation is best placed to deliver each aspect of this service and have established a much clearer, more coordinated offer for customers, particularly for farm visits and associated advice. These service delivery improvements have been audited by a joint Environment Agency and Natural England team who identified the shared project governance as best practice.



Catchment Sensitive Farming advisory visit in the Shropshire Hills

As a result of this work, both organisations are now developing a more effective joint approach to mitigating diffuse pollution with Natural England engaging farmers and helping them with advice and incentives to take action. This will be coordinated with the Environment Agency's work with farmers on regulatory compliance, taking enforcement action where appropriate.

By developing such a framework we aim to:

- Simplify messages for farmers.
- Target regulatory farm visits where they are most needed.
- Signpost farmers to advice and acknowledge the voluntary action taken by farmers.

Guidance is now being produced for local Environment Agency and Natural England and teams to help them advise farmers about this approach and how it will help them. It will support working together to establish the best way to help farmers achieve basic environmental protection in a catchment where diffuse pollution from agriculture means WFD objectives are not being achieved. It outlines the Environment Agency's risk-based approach to enforcement and Rural Payments Agency's (RPA) related role. It will help inform the development of future approaches to diffuse pollution mitigation including in the future Rural Development programme.

Overall the approach developed will promote real efficiencies in delivery through more targeted farm visits, a better customer experience and one point of contact for advice.

Regulatory reform

Improving customer service and removing unnecessary regulatory requirements are priorities for both Environment Agency and Natural England. We are working with Defra to deliver the Smarter Environmental Regulation Review (SERR) Programme which includes providing a more customer-focused approach to gathering information.

The Smarter Guidance project will reduce and simplify existing guidance for businesses, including SMEs. We are working with Defra to produce a single set of government guidance on GOV.UK and are using the transition of our websites to GOV.UK to drive this simplification. We have engaged actively with customers through online consultation and through feedback on the web pages.



The Environment Agency moved its website to GOV.UK on 1 April 2014 and Natural England plans to move in summer 2014. Government has set a target to reduce the volume of environmental guidance by 80%, and we are achieving this reduction alongside the work to transition our websites.

The Environment Agency created a new service in December 2013 for small scale waste carriers (including those who are SMEs), using customer insights and user testing to develop an exemplar customer-focused service. By April 2014, over 13,000 customers had registered using the new service, with over 93% of those who have left feedback being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service. Examples of feedback from waste carriers include:

- "It is a great improvement on the former paper version. I am very pleased to have registered so easily."
- "very straightforward and easy procedure to go through, very happy"
- "service good, simple to apply, thank you"
- "Perfectly simple, no need to change"

The Environment Agency and Natural England are now working with the wider Defra network to determine how this model can be applied to other network registration services.

In April, Defra published "'Smarter Data': Plans to simplify information requests by Defra and the Defra network". The document details 92 actions, many of which will be led by the Environment Agency and Natural England, to be carried out by March 2016. It's estimated these actions will save businesses around 850,000 hours a year by reducing demands for information and making it easier to submit.

Coastal Concordat

The Coastal Concordat for England is a set of principles for public bodies involved in overseeing planning and development applications on the coast. Launched in November 2013, the concordat approach has benefits for applicants (including SMEs), regulators and advisors. It reduces duplication in regulation, improves signposting for customers, streamlines assessments, and increases transparency and consistency of advice.

A key change is that applicants are aware from the first contact they have with the regulatory system which regulators are likely to have a role in the approval process for their development. This 'no surprises' approach underpins the concordat.

Concordat working is now available to local planning authorities who wish to adopt its principles. To date, 13 coastal authorities have agreed to adopt the concordat principles. The concordat signatories are now working with them to help with implementation.

The Environment Agency, Natural England and the Marine Management Organisation are working well together to train staff and implement the Coastal Concordat in participating local planning authority areas. We have jointly published guidance for staff.

"The concordat (announced today) should serve as a future blueprint, with government seeking single points of contact for businesses needing approvals from several regulators, and ensuring that regulators collaborate to remove cost, delay and red tape for business."

Tim Thomas, Head of Employment Policy at EEF, the manufacturers' organisation



The concordat is already raising the profile of marine consents and the need to engage early in the regulatory process, which is a key objective. The Environment Agency, Natural England and the Marine Management Organisation are currently processing concordat cases in North Norfolk, Portsmouth, Southampton, Cornwall and Plymouth, Sunderland and Exeter. We are in discussions with partners to bring more forward as local planning authorities agree to adopt the principles.

13 coastal local authorities have adopted the Coastal Concordat, which aims to streamline regulatory processes for coastal developments

“The early contact and discussions as a result of the Coastal Concordat have been invaluable. The developer at Royal Pier is pleased to know we are all talking and clarifying who does what and when.”

Dr Chris Lyons, Planning & Development Manager, Southampton City Council



5. Evidence and monitoring

The collaborative approach undertaken by the Environment Agency, Natural England, CEFAS and others on monitoring activities has been used as a basis for how to deliver greater joint working across the Defra network under the wider One Evidence monitoring project. These joint working arrangements have contributed to an overall estimated saving of £6m planned for monitoring across the Defra Network in 2014/15.

Marine monitoring

The Environment Agency and Natural England have been collaborating on joint marine monitoring programmes over the last 5 years. With the introduction of the new Environment Agency coastal survey vessels, owned and crewed by Briggs Marine, together with the aerial survey capability of the Environment Agency, the collaboration has continued to strengthen. In 2012/13 we reduced the ongoing annual cost of Water Framework Directive and Habitats Directive monitoring by £500,000 through joint survey work and improved data sharing. We are continually looking for ways to collaborate across the wider Defra network. For example, since 2012, CEFAS and Defra have also been using the Environment Agency vessel services for Marine Conservation Zone verification surveys with 30 zones having been surveyed by the Environment Agency since 2012 and more planned in 2014/15.



© Environment Agency/Søren Peairs

Environment Agency, Natural England and CEFAS working together to sample the seabed to confirm the presence of broad scale habitats for potential designation in the Dover to Folkestone recommended Marine Conservation Zone

Terrestrial and freshwater

Natural England and the Environment Agency are working with Defra to develop a Defra Network strategy for the monitoring and surveillance of terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity in England. This will result in more efficient and effective monitoring and will further develop existing areas of collaboration such as data sharing, remote sensing and developing novel techniques.

There is already a significant amount of data sharing with the Environment Agency providing chemical and biological data to Natural England to support Habitats Directive assessments and reporting. We will extend our partnership approach to co-ordinate nationally local requests for monitoring, provide clarity on funding mechanisms and continue to develop links to other bodies such as the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH). We will also produce a joint programme to meet both organisations water quality evidence needs.

Remote sensing and geomatics

The Environment Agency and Natural England undertake collaborative work on Operational Spatial Monitoring in both the marine and terrestrial environments. This collaborative arrangement recognises the wide scope for joint working across all aspects of spatial monitoring including marine survey and remote sensing. The full scope of the work covered by this agreement includes: spatial data monitoring from vessels and aircraft; laboratory analysis; development of shared expertise; data sharing and spatial data analysis and advice. Some examples of this work are: marine benthic sampling, inter tidal remote sensing data analysis to help understand coastal processes; and Habitats Directive and Marine and Coastal Access Act reporting.



Academic partnerships

Natural England and the Environment Agency seek to make the most of our evidence, skills and capabilities to deliver timely, robust and fit-for-purpose evidence. To support this ambition we will soon be publishing a joint statement of our evidence needs to share with the environmental science community. This signifies our commitment to working together on our shared priorities that are captured in Defra's Evidence Strategy. The joint statement will set out our areas of interest, provide information on our ways of working, including MSc projects, PhD training and knowledge exchange fellowships, and explain how our work can have greater impact by working with universities.

Sharing data

Both organisations are committed to help deliver the Government's approach to transparency and open data. We are working together to gather data to support our decisions, make better use of the data we and others hold, and make our data available to others. We are also looking for innovative ways to combine our existing data to answer new questions and support the delivery of environmental outcomes. By harmonising the way we commission, collect, and use data we will gather and share data and information about the natural environment more efficiently and make better decisions at lower cost.

DataShare

DataShare is the way we make environmental information available to our partners and customers. It is an online tool that enables anyone to freely access Defra and its agencies' datasets. Making environmental information available is key to informing decisions, influencing actions and achieving sustained environmental improvements. Between January and March this year, DataShare has been further improved for Natural England and the Environment Agency's customers by: sharing and updating 70 datasets (for example Flood Map, National Flood Risk Assessment (NaFRA), Marine Conservation Zones and National Nature Reserves); providing a mechanism to update users regularly on changes; improving the homepage to aid accessibility; and providing opportunities for users to send feedback and suggestions for improvements easily.

Common mapping systems

Natural England is adopting the same mapping platform as the Environment Agency (Easimap) to upgrade its mapping system. The Environment Agency is assisting Natural England with this development and once a common mapping system is in place sharing ideas, data and developments will become easier, more efficient and effective.

6. Partnership and innovation case studies

Fisheries

The Environment Agency has been reviewing its fisheries work to determine where future activities are best carried out and a programme of work. The Environment Agency is now working with a range of civil society organisations to support them in delivering the National Angling Strategy. For example, with Environment Agency and Sport England funding the Angling Trust is leading work on increasing angling participation, including building and managing an angling information hub website and app (www.fishinginfo.co.uk), and trialing a volunteer bailiff service.

In April 2014 the Environment Agency, Defra and Natural England worked together to recruit three Fisheries Management Advisors to engage with customers and help manage predation by fish-eating birds. The Environment Agency and Natural England will continue to work together with the Angling Trust and others on the Defra-led Fish-Eating Birds Project Group to advise and support the trial of the Fisheries Management Advisors and new area-based licensing in 2014-15.



Secondment of Natural England adviser to AB.Sustain

In May 2014 Natural England seconded an adviser to the supply chain consultancy AB.Sustain to work on projects to develop biodiversity advice with major retailers and their farm supplier groups. AB.Sustain are part of the AB Agri group, itself a part of the global food sector company, Associated British Foods. The secondment is providing invaluable insight into the challenges for farm SMEs of integrating environmental objectives with production objectives.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

Natural England is responsible for about two thirds of the 224 National Nature Reserves in England. It is exploring how best to share resources and engage members of the public at these sites.

Sharing resources

Natural England is exploring the potential to transfer management of 10 to 15 of its sites. For example, staff resource will be saved when Hambledon Hill transfers to the National Trust (funded by Natural England through a land purchase grant).

At Ribble Marshes in Lancashire, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has purchased land with support from the Environment Agency and advice from Natural England leading to discussions on sharing resources and management across marshes and the adjoining National Nature Reserve.

Natural England is also using reserves as sites for the study of the impacts of climate change on biodiversity. A major partnership with the Met Office continues to gather momentum. Together we are exploring a new £1 million Heritage Lottery funded skills project to provide 99 opportunities for students to learn new environmental skills and vocational training on a number of National Nature Reserves.

Public engagement

Public engagement standards are now in place across 107 National Nature Reserves, which has brought access facilities up to a higher standard and increased access rights.

The public engagement standards require staff to build stronger community engagement. For example, at Shapwick Heath, Natural England has worked with the local authority, Wildlife Trust and RSPB to develop an independent charitable trust to raise income and share resources. The Avalon Marshes Community Trust will encourage local businesses and stakeholders to work together on common goals in Somerset.



Volunteers developing conservation skills

Natural England's National Nature Reserves engagement strategy highlights the need to develop 'friends of groups', and a further 16 groups have been created. For example, the Barnack Hills group has established a committee, website and programme of activity. At Lindisfarne in Northumberland, the new visitor facilities (part funded via the Islands Development Trust) are staffed by community volunteers and there is an extensive visitor events programme.



7. Joint working outside Triennial Review Action Plan

Flooding

The Flood and Coastal Risk integrated environment programme

The Environment Agency and Natural England work together on flood and coastal schemes to achieve shared objectives and make the best use of our collective resources. We aim to work with natural processes where possible so that methods of managing flood and coastal risk are more sustainable and resilient.

Our Integrated Environment Programme will also enable us to work more effectively with other partners who can help us create new habitats. Together we can plan long-term projects.

The east coast tidal surge, December 2013



Public consultation event in Blakeney, attended by over 200 people

In December 2013, a North Sea storm and tidal surge breached flood embankment and walls and made spectacular changes to the coastal landscape. This presented major challenges, and the Environment Agency and Natural England worked closely together and with local authorities, landowners and local communities. The immediate priority was to assist flood and coast risk management authorities in making sure that people and property in immediate peril were safe. When the priority moved onto recovery, together we provided quick and pragmatic advice on repairs to floodwalls and other infrastructure.

One example of where the Environment Agency and Natural England have worked together on a coastal wildlife site was at Blakeney Freshes on the Norfolk coast. The sea wall was breached in more than 20 locations during the tidal surge. Environment Agency staff, supported by Natural England, held a public consultation event in February, to consider alternative options for sustainable site management.

Both organisations have continued to work closely together to help implement pragmatic interim solutions to public safety and footpath access. Both the Environment Agency and Natural England continue to play a key role with others in finding a sustainable future for this location which encompasses flood risk and conservation management as well as tourism and the rural economy.



One of the 20 plus breaches in the flood embankment protecting the Blakeney Freshes European Site



National Permitting Service

In April 2013, Natural England and the Environment Agency's National Permitting Service began an initiative to improve ways of working together and to share technical knowledge. Key outcomes included:

- Better quality assurance and methods of data exchange
- Agreed protocols around multiple licence renewals and amendments, reducing the number of times the Environment Agency needs to consult Natural England

Overall, we estimate that this initiative has already saved Natural England the man hours equivalent of 0.7 full-time employee (FTE) and the Environment Agency 0.6 FTE. The exchange of information between organisations is now faster, helping to improve customer service.

Climate Change

Joint working across the Defra network on climate change adaptation includes the provision of guidance to Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers, the joint running of the National Adaptation Programme Biodiversity and Ecosystems Working Group, and the recently published Climate Change Adaptation Manual. A new Climate Change Adaptation Delivery Group has been established across the Defra network.

Next steps

This progress report sets out the good progress the Environment Agency and Natural England have made in working together to maximise environmental outcomes, deliver improved customer services and secure efficiencies. The Triennial Review Action Plan is part of an ongoing commitment that has been made by both organisations to work more closely together. The experience we have gained will help to improve and frame future joint working, embed a strong culture of working together and enable a collaborative approach to change management.

The life of the Action Plan does not end with this report. The Boards of Environment Agency and Natural England with a particular focus via the Joint Board Sub Group will continue to drive forward delivery of the actions set out in the Plan as well as looking for further opportunities beyond the scope of the initial plan to collaborate for the benefit of customers and the environment.