

The Current Position of the National Biodiversity Network Trust on the Nature and Desirable Activities of Local Records Centres

The attached Position Statement is being widely distributed to those concerned for, or interested in, the maintenance and further development of a network of LRCs to provide the kinds of biodiversity information and associated services needed by all those concerned for, and interested in, the wild life of a local area/region, and for its conservation and conservation-informed planning. It is *not* a NBN Standard but rather a considered collection of reasonable aspirations that represent the current view of the Trustees. It is liable to modification in the light of any future developments or as a result of further discussion

The Trustees hope, therefore, that this working paper will promote further constructive discussion about the adequate maintenance and improvement of existing LRCs as well as the establishment of new ones, and of the functions for which they should be responsible. They will be glad to receive 'feedback' either individually or collectively to the NBN Secretariat or to its website (www.nbn.org.uk).

From the outset, the National Biodiversity Network Trust (NBN Trust) has always envisaged that Local Records Centres (LRCs) should be incorporated as important, interconnecting foci for the collection, collation and provision of regional or sub-regional biodiversity information. That LRCs should collaborate with the many other kinds of local record holders in their respective catchment areas goes without saying.

Existing LRCs operate under very considerable constraints and different kinds of problem face them in different areas. Sadly, the majority of existing LRCs operate with inadequate funding, and/or lack of adequate equipment and staffing for the many activities which they perform or should perform. In addition, others have problems of coverage, especially in sparsely 'recorder-inhabited' areas while inadequate contacts with recording organizations and individuals are also a handicap. The existing LRC network is far from operating optimally and geographical coverage still far from complete. Extended discussion continues as to how a truly effective a network can be achieved and who should maintain it.

The NBN Trust is concerned to promote and facilitate every aspect of LRC operation and development and believes that mutual benefits arise from their active collaboration with LRCs. This collaboration has resulted in the clarification of some of the basic issues in earlier joint Wildlife Trust/ NBN Trust publications, 'Running a Local Records Centre, Vols 1 & 2,' and 'Proposals for an Accreditation System for Local Records Centres'. But a major deficiency has been the lack of a clear definition of what a LRC is and what it should do so that potential funding sources have not realized clearly the benefits that might accrue from the development of an effective LRC in an area, let alone the additional value of a network of LRCs.

Nevertheless, this has not impeded discussion as to the range of activities for which an 'ideal' and effective LRC should be responsible and the NBN Trust has promoted wide discussions within its LRC Steering group, with concerned Local Authority representatives, by members of the National Federation for Biological Recording, and others. Slowly a consensus based on present practice and future needs is developing. The Trustees felt that the time had come to provide a working definition of what is meant by an LRC and what activities it might reasonably be expected to carry out; hence the attached document.

In concluding, the Trustees express their thanks to their LRCs Steering group and its present chairman, Mr. Bill Butcher, who has been responsible for collating the widespread and prolonged discussions that underlie the conclusions set out and fully endorsed by the Trustees in this Statement.



John Burnett,
Chairman NBN Trust

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NBN Trust Position Statement on Local Records Centres

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1. Background

This statement originated as a request in 2002 from the National Biodiversity Network Trust's (NBN Trust) LRCs Steering Group to the National Federation for Biological Recording (NFBR) to define the essential nature of a Local Records Centre (LRC), to describe its functions and its relationship with the NBN Trust. It has been developed with contributions from a wide range of partners. In particular, it draws on the work of the Linking LRCs Project, 1998-2001, led by the Wildlife Trusts for the NBN Trust. In particular the functions have built on two products of that project – “Running a Local Records Centre, Volumes 1 and 2” and “Proposals for a Accreditation System for Local Records Centres”.

The statement commences with a working definition of a Local Records Centre and describes their role in terms of essential and enhanced functions. It aims to distil the definition of a LRC in terms of its functions in order to provide an agreed clear and succinct statement of the concept for the benefit of NBN partners, stakeholders, funding bodies and others. In addition, the current position of LRCs within the NBN is summarised and the relationship between the NBN data exchange principles and LRC business models clarified.

The definition relates to biodiversity information. It is recognised that this represents the minimum scope of LRC coverage and that some may hold information relating to geological, historical and other attributes. The geographical area covered may be a sub-region or region as well as the traditional county or equivalent scale. For coastal LRCs the extent of coverage in the marine environment needs to be agreed with local partners.

2. The Definition

‘A Local Records Centre (LRC) is a not-for-profit service run in partnership for the public benefit, which collects, collates, manages and disseminates information of known quality relating to the wildlife, wildlife sites¹ and habitats for a defined geographical area.’²

3. Local Records Centres within the NBN

Local Records Centres

- represent the local delivery of the NBN vision
- promote NBN standards

¹ The use of the term “wildlife sites” here is NOT restricted to sites of recognised nature conservation importance

² This definition was first proposed by Charles Copp during the accreditation project, was refined after consultation and has received widespread support.

- link professionals with volunteers and data providers with data users
- act as a focus for volunteer recording effort at the local level
- disseminate biodiversity information held by local organisations throughout the NBN
- are custodians of key NBN datasets
- make biodiversity information accessible to users both through direct communication and through the gateway

The NBN Data Exchange Principles state that biological data should be placed in the public domain wherever possible. They also recognise that users should expect to contribute to sustaining the collection, collation and management of the biological data. Local Record Centres (in common with many other data contributors) require the security of a long-term sustainable funding base in order for them to meet their users needs. They currently depend on their users contributing financially to the costs associated with data collation and management (often through Service Level Agreements).

LRCs provide a vital service to local data contributors and users and in many cases they are the local representation of the NBN. The NBN Trust will facilitate partnership initiatives that can build a stronger business case for LRCs as key components of the NBN and hence make a positive contribution to securing a more sustainable funding base for LRCs.

4. Functions

Functions³ of LRCs are here divided into two groups. The **essential functions** are those which every LRC is expected to perform. The **enhanced functions** are optional in the sense that each LRC will include a variable number of these within its operation, depending on local needs, stage of LRC development and funding availability. It is unlikely that any LRC will take on all of the enhanced functions.

LRCs are in essence partnerships. For each of the **essential functions** the LRC will take prime responsibility for its geographical area on behalf of the partnership. For the **enhanced functions** the situation will be highly variable depending on local circumstances. For these enhanced functions the LRC may be the only body involved, it may be working closely with many of its partners in a defined role or it may have no involvement at all.

³ The use of the term “function” in this paper is applied loosely to encompass functions, products and services together with some organisational characteristics which enable or modify functions

4.1. Essential functions

ELIGIBILITY

1. Partnership	The LRC should be partnership led, the partnership including at least local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation NGOs and voluntary recorders.
2. Legal body	The LRC should have the legal status to be able to enter contractual agreements and should be accountable and transparent for its business and financial performance
3. Impartiality	The LRC's constitution and documented policies should ensure impartiality and prevent dominance by any one organisation or partner.
4. Non overlapping	The geographical area covered by the LRC should be agreed by its partners and should not overlap with any other LRC
5. User led	The LRC should have mechanisms for determining the needs of its users and primarily exist to meet those needs

SERVICES

6. Services	The LRC should be capable of offering at least basic biodiversity information services to local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation NGOs and voluntary recorders
7. Data requests	The LRC should at all times be capable of responding to minimum specification data requests within a reasonable time period, at least that set by the Access to Environmental Information Regulations
8. Products	The LRC should develop, maintain and promote a suite of basic information products for its core users
9. Controlled Access	The LRC should implement a confidentiality policy that keeps sensitive data secure within the terms of the NBN Data Access Principles
10. Data capture service	The LRC offers a service to partners of capturing their dataset to agreed standards, making it available to users including export to the original partner's system
11. Data Management	The LRC should be capable of maintaining and managing agreed datasets on behalf of partners and other organisations

DATA

12. Data scope	The scope of an LRC's data holdings should include records of fauna, flora, habitats and sites of wildlife importance
13. Data coverage - species	The LRC should aim to hold or at least have access to all available data, including marine, for at least the protected, RDB and BAP species (national and local) that occur in its geographic area
14. Data coverage - habitats	The LRC should aim to hold or at least have access to all available data, including marine, relating to semi-natural and BAP priority habitats for its geographic area
15. Data coverage - sites	The LRCs should aim to hold site definitions and boundaries, including marine, for all classes of land of recognised nature conservation importance in its geographic area

16. Metadata	The LRC should know what data it holds, supply details to the NBN Gateway and/ or describe its data holdings on its own web site
17. Archive	The LRC should act as a secure archive for the data in its care in perpetuity, protecting it from alteration, damage, loss and unauthorised use

SYSTEMS

18. Format	The LRC should seek to hold the majority of the data in its care in electronic format.
19. Database	The LRC's database should at least be capable of import to the NBN data model, the data capture interface conforming to minimum NBN standards
20. GIS	The LRC should use GIS to help it capture, manage, manipulate, analyse and display data with geographical or spatial elements..
21. Datasets	The LRC should be capable of integration of datasets and reporting on integrated datasets

NBN COMMITMENT

22. NBN Data Access Principles	The LRC should conform to the NBN Data Access Principles when agreed
23. Data custodianship	The LRC is capable of taking on the responsibilities of data custodianship within the NBN for agreed datasets, including data exchange with National Schemes and Societies
24. Promotion of standards	The LRC should take a lead in encouraging high-quality recording and promoting NBN standards among volunteer recorders, recording schemes, organisations, professionals and contractors.
25. Validation and verification	The LRC should ensure quality control by having documented procedures in place for validation of its data against agreed standards and managing a verification system, working in partnership with others

PERSONNEL

26. Voluntary recorders	The LRC should network with the majority of the voluntary recorders in its geographical area
27. Staff resources	The LRC should employ and arrange training of staff as necessary to undertake these minimum functions. The staffing complement will vary across the UK according to the demands placed on the LRC's services. The maintenance of these minimum functions will nowhere be possible with a full-time staff equivalent of less than two and in some areas may require five to ten staff.

4.2. Enhanced functions

SURVEYS

1. Strategic Surveys	The LRC manages or undertakes strategic sites, habitats and species surveys
2. Public Surveys	The LRC engages in public involvement surveys
3. Reactive Survey	The LRC offers a reactive survey service

DATA

4. Species	The LRC holds or at least has access to copies of all available species data for its geographical area and strives to obtain valid and comprehensive data for as many species and taxon groups as possible
5. Habitats and habitat change	The LRC works towards comprehensive land cover and habitat information for its geographic area and has a strategy for recording change.
6. Detailed sites data	The LRC holds or has access to copies of all relevant detailed site surveys in support of sites of recognised importance

SYSTEMS

7. GIS application	The LRC uses GIS to map habitats and to relate species records to habitat parcels and site boundaries.
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VOLUNTARY RECORDING

8. Building recording capacity	The LRC has a programme to improve recording and identification skills through training and to recruit new voluntary recorders
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DATA ACCESS

9. Enhancing data access	The LRC has a programme to improve access to and interpret its data to enhance understanding by the general public
10. Educational materials	The LRC generates materials for educational purposes based on its data

DATA INTEGRATION

11. Links to other heritage data	The LRC integrates and analyses biodiversity data with other forms of heritage data to enhance understanding by the general public
12. Links to socio-economic data	The LRC integrates and analyses biodiversity data with externally supplied socio-economic data
13. Wider environmental information	The LRC holds additional information relating to other environmental attributes such as land cover, land use, landscape, soils, geomorphology and Local Geological Sites.

INTERPRETATION AND EVALUATION

14. Objective interpretation	The LRC leads on the development of objective criteria for interpretation of significance e.g. County Notable lists, Local Wildlife Site selection and applies these in interpreting data searches for users
15. Site evaluation	The LRC evaluates raw data against criteria in support of selection of sites of defined status e.g. Local Wildlife Sites
16. Gap Analysis	The LRC offers to users a commentary on survey coverage and analysis of information gaps

MONITORING

17. Site monitoring	The LRC monitors Wildlife Sites or other sites of defined importance
18. BAP Action Reporting	The LRC monitors and reports on the implementation of actions in relation to Biodiversity Action Plan targets
19. BAP Outcome Reporting	The LRC monitors and reports on biodiversity outcomes in relation to Biodiversity Action Plan targets
20. Indicator monitoring	The LRC monitors sustainability, performance or biodiversity indicators on behalf of partner organisations

ENQUIRY SERVICE

21. Wildlife Enquiry Service	The LRC runs a wildlife enquiry service for the public on behalf of partner organisations
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PUBLICATIONS

22. Publications	The LRC offers support for publication or direct publication of distribution atlases and other relevant materials
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THE GATEWAY

23. Full NBN Gateway integration	The LRC is fully integrated into the NBN Gateway and is able to participate as an internet linked node in the NBN
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PROJECTS

24. Project management and support	The LRC has the capability of managing or supporting biodiversity information related projects at the request of its partners
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