



Corporate Plan

2014 – 2019

Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	2
What we do	3
Who we work with	4

Business Areas

Our Priorities	5
Terrestrial Biodiversity	6
Marine Biodiversity	7
Landscape and Geodiversity	8
Access and Engagement	9
Environmental Land Management	10
National Nature Reserves	11
Support to the Planning System	12
Wildlife Management	13
Evidence	14
Corporate Services	15

Resources and Reporting

Managing our resources	16
Reporting our performance	20
Managing risk	20

Appendices

Appendix One – Key Performance Indicators for 2014-16	21
Appendix Two – Summary of Triennial Review Joint Action Plan	24
Appendix Three – Governance and management arrangements	26

Foreword

The 2011 Natural Environment White Paper set out the most powerful policy context for our wildlife and landscapes for a generation. The White Paper is clear that a healthy natural environment is the bedrock on which our future prosperity rests and our ongoing work to protect and improve the natural environment in England has a key role to play in the growth of the UK economy.

Natural England has achieved a great deal in a short time. We have been integral to the design and designation of a network of Marine Protected Areas, including European Marine sites and Marine Conservation Zones. We have improved the condition of England's Sites of Special Scientific Interest while designating over 40 new ones. We have delivered a step-change in the environmental enhancement of agricultural landscapes through Higher Level Stewardship and reduced diffuse pollution from agriculture through Catchment Sensitive Farming. We can be proud of our formidable track record of delivery and efficiency.

2013/14 was a challenging year for Natural England, but the government's Triennial Review confirmed our status as an independent public body, while encouraging us to continue to adapt to the demands of the government's growth agenda, and to collaborate more, not only with the Environment Agency, but with other bodies in the Defra network and beyond. We take these challenges seriously, and work is in hand to fully deliver on the Triennial Review Action Plan.

Partnership will continue to be key to the way we work, and our new local delivery model, with more decisions taken at a local level, will strengthen our relationships with local partners and communities. Support from business and industry has also always been, and will continue to be, important. We have taken every opportunity to improve the way we work with those businesses on whom the country relies on to keep the economic recovery going – in particular by simplifying our regulatory processes, adhering to the Regulators' Compliance Code, and offering support to developers to help them comply with environmental legislation.

Our delivery challenges for the next two years are considerable. The Biodiversity 2020 targets for habitats, species and ecosystems are at the heart of these, and we will continue to support Defra and partners on the design and transition to the new rural development programme so that agri-environment schemes can continue to support our work here. We will also make a substantial contribution to Water Framework Directive targets for water quality and flood protection.

With continuing pressure on budgets and capacity we will develop and implement, with our partners in the Defra network, a more integrated approach to environmental planning and delivery to maximise the benefits that can be delivered from available sources of funding. We are also going to have to be increasingly innovative in our delivery of our environmental purpose and to explore new partnerships and new ways of funding environmental outcomes. The critical role of a properly functioning natural environment is delivering economic prosperity and social cohesion as highlighted by flood events in the winter of 2013/14. Natural England will play its full part in this.



Andrew Sells
Chairman,
Natural England



Dave Webster
Chief Executive,
Natural England

Introduction

This new Corporate Plan for 2014 – 2019 sets out our medium term ambition for, and the steps we can take to move towards how we will help to bring about a natural environment which is healthy, properly functioning and resilient, and recognised as the foundation for sustainable growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. The plan has been developed in the context of the Government’s policy priorities for the natural environment and our expected funding position to the end of 2015/16. It therefore contains only the funding and performance indicators for the first two years. We will receive a reduced budget of £145 million from Defra in 2014/15 and £139 million in 2015/16. This equates to a 35 per cent reduction in 2014/15 of our overall funding since 2010/11, the baseline of the 2010 Spending Review. The plan explains how we are adjusting our priorities to reflect the changing financial context, the resources that we will allocate to them and the key performance indicators we will use to measure and report on our performance.

Our general purpose under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 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”*. Our duties and powers under this general purpose are wide ranging. For example, we may undertake research, give advice to any public authority or person, and publish information about our work. All of our work is carried out under this and other environmental legislation (including European and international obligations) or at the specific request of Government. We are formally responsible to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who is accountable to Parliament for our activities and performance.

We are a national organisation that covers the whole of England, extending 12 nautical miles out to sea (and 200 nautical miles for advice on renewable energy impacts). Around 2,100 people work for us, bringing a range of specialist skills and knowledge in all aspects of the natural environment and the ways in which people engage with it.

What we do

Natural England is the Government's adviser for the natural environment in England. Our job is to help protect England's nature and landscapes, for people to enjoy and for the services they provide, both now and in the future. Our work is a significant component in the delivery of the Government's aspirations for improving the natural environment in England as described in the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) of 2011, and we are the lead delivery body for the Government's Biodiversity 2020 programme.

Working with government and our partners, we have already achieved a great deal. We have successfully protected many of England's most valued landscapes, we have secured an extensive series of protected wildlife sites which provides the basis of a coherent ecological network, and there is a reservoir of public goodwill towards the natural environment. Moreover, we have the expertise to deliver the effective conservation of particular species or habitats.

We need to continually challenge ourselves to ensure that our overall approach to conservation is delivering the whole range of integrated environmental benefits that our purpose requires and meeting the needs and opportunities of the natural environment. In the future, our approach needs to:

- Work at a landscape/larger scale to restore ecosystem function and develop ecological networks, with 'bigger, better, more and joined' habitat areas that will be as resilient as possible to climate change and other pressures;
- Improve our understanding of the way that habitats and species contribute to landscape quality;
- Promote and support more access to and engagement with the environment;
- Enable people and communities to identify and act for the places and priorities that matter to them, and increase wider understanding of the natural environment and the benefits it brings.

These steps will help us to build a more robust, resilient natural environment on land. Similar approaches may be needed at sea. This will take time, and will require resources and tools that are presently outside the reach of the traditional natural environment sector. It demands a change in mind set - away from a sometimes over-precautionary approach towards one that is prepared to take risks and sustain some losses in order to secure greater gains.

We have already started to identify the areas where we can use different approaches. At the national level, we want to build on the lead provided by government and others in areas such as the development of new markets for 'natural capital' and in biodiversity offsetting, bringing this sense of innovation to the national programmes we deliver and to the key services we provide – for example in the further development of class licensing for our wildlife licensing customers. We will also play our part in building resilience to extreme weather events and adapting to climate change, as set out in the National Adaptation Programme. At the local level we will encourage our local teams to explore new approaches and support them in developing ideas that are applicable in their area but may not always translate to other places. In all that we do at both local and national levels, we will seek to find innovative ways of delivering multiple benefits for people and wildlife.

We will retain the professionalism of purpose and business process which has characterised Natural England since we were founded, and the ‘organisational contract’ which is the foundation of the way all our people work. We will continue to be expert, collaborative, confident and proportionate in our approach. In particular:

- We will focus on place not process;
- We will share our evidence and knowledge;
- We will deliver in partnership, and respect the interests and priorities of others;
- We will always work for the best not the perfect solution;
- We will deliver excellent customer service.

Who we work with

Our remit is too wide-ranging for Natural England to deliver alone. We have always believed in and worked in partnerships, but we know we can do better. It is vital that we work with civil society, business and other public sector organisations to get the most out of collective resources and to deliver better and more joined-up outcomes for the natural environment. Our new approach will be guided by three principles:

- We do not always need to lead
- We will look for partnerships beyond our traditional stakeholders
- We recognise that partnership means that not all parties can always secure all their goals.

We will look to our partnerships to help us find the ‘best owned’ rather than the perfect solution. Above all we will focus on being locally responsive and work with local places and people.

We work closely with Defra, who is our sponsor in Government and sets our priorities. Defra is responsible for defining environmental policy and in doing so takes account of our advice and that of others. Defra is also a major partner in delivery and in the development of our evidence base. In addition, we advise other Government Departments such as: Business, Innovation and Skills; Communities and Local Government; Energy and Climate Change and the Ministry of Defence because of its sizeable land holdings.

Outside Government we will work with all sectors, from those who own and manage the land, marine users, local businesses, volunteers, conservation charities, local government and local people, to redraw, where appropriate, the boundaries between what we do and what our partners do – and to work always for shared agendas and consensus.

We also work closely with other agencies such as the Environment Agency, Marine Management Organisation, the Forestry Commission and English Heritage to achieve better outcomes for people and the environment, to improve efficiency in our operations and to provide better customer service. This includes joining up on advice to planning authorities, land management and agri-environment schemes, advice on climate change adaptation, and monitoring and evidence. We will find new ways of working with partners in the Defra network, especially the Environment Agency, so that we secure the best overall environmental outcomes from the public sector’s investment in the natural environment, and that we ensure that our customers enjoy as joined-up and seamless a service from government as is possible. Appendix Two of this Plan sets out a summary of the Triennial Review Joint Action Plan recommendations and how we will be working with the Environment Agency to deliver on these commitments. To drive delivery of this plan the two Boards, of Natural England and the Environment Agency, have appointed a non-executive joint sub-group to oversee and support the pace of progress.

Our Priorities

Our plan is structured around delivery of our statutory duties and core environmental outcomes. The following section of the plan sets out the key areas of our business which are defined by legislation and by our statutory purpose. The NERC Act requires us to:

- Promote nature conservation and protect biodiversity;
- Conserve and enhance the landscape;
- Secure the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment;
- Promote access to the countryside and open spaces and encourage open-air recreation; and
- Contribute in other ways to social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment

In addition we have a range of tools to support the delivery of the core environmental outcomes which are central to our purpose, and these tools are often underpinned by specific delegations from government. Foremost among these are our role as statutory adviser to the planning system, our work as a regulator in the natural environment, and our delivery of incentives through agri-environment schemes.

Our approach to achieving these outcomes is underpinned by our commitment to science and evidence, to customers, and to efficient business processes.

Our priorities for 2014-2019 are as follows:

Terrestrial Biodiversity

While we have protected many important sites, restored the population of some vulnerable species and are working to deliver government's ambitious targets for the restoration of important habitats, as set out in the England Biodiversity Strategy (Biodiversity 2020), much remains to be done. In particular, we have a long way to go to restore biodiversity to a level that is sustainable across our countryside. Our ambition must be to create resilient ecosystems across the country, both through and beyond protected sites.

We increasingly recognise the important interactions between land, biodiversity and water. Working with the Defra network we will seek to achieve greater integration to take advantage of the synergies between our work on restoring biodiversity and programmes to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive and flood and coastal risk management.

Our priorities:

Over the next five years we will:

- Increase the proportion of our best wildlife sites that are in favourable condition.
- Refresh our processes for the management and monitoring of protected sites, making them sustainable and their value understood by and relevant to the people who own, manage and benefit from them.
- Invest in new partnerships to increase the resilience of current protected sites and the natural capital that they provide.
- Complete the integration of species conservation into site and habitat management.

What we will do:

- Facilitate partner contributions to the delivery of Biodiversity 2020 habitats, protected sites, species and ecosystem outcomes and make a significant contribution ourselves through practical management and research on our series of 143 National Nature Reserves (NNRs).
- Maintain a suite of internationally and nationally protected sites designated for their biodiversity.
- Work with landowners and land managers to maintain 95 per cent of all Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) area in favourable or recovering condition and work towards getting 50 per cent of SSSI in favourable condition by 2020.
- Use Environmental Stewardship and Green Infrastructure to maintain, restore and create priority habitat as a contribution to enhancing ecological networks.
- Working with the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group implement the actions needed to reduce extinction risk for our most threatened species.
- Continue to work closely with the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and other partners in applying an ecosystem approach at an appropriate scale to biodiversity, flood risk, water quality and water management to secure an enhanced range of multiple public benefits locally.
- Develop a terrestrial biodiversity surveillance strategy, coordinated across the Defra network, which will be more efficient and effective through innovation and more integrated approaches.
- Continue to work with the Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) and encourage wider adoption of the approach by working with local partners.
- Build climate change adaptation and mitigation into objectives for designated sites and NNR management plans and facilitate this through communicating the evidence base, particularly through our climate change adaptation manual and vulnerability model.

Marine Biodiversity

Our seas are extremely rich and diverse, with the widest range of habitats in Europe. The marine environment contributes substantially to our economic and social well-being, providing a range of ecosystem services, including playing an important role in climate regulation. Unsustainable human activity has damaged the marine ecosystem, threatening wildlife as well as the goods and services it provides. To address these challenges, effective planning and management of the seas around England is needed. This means applying an approach that integrates the identification and management of an ecological network of Marine Protected Areas, with management of the wider ecosystem, guided by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. This will help achieve the Government's commitments under Biodiversity 2020 and its priorities to achieve clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas. Natural England's role is to provide advice and an evidence base to government and regulators to improve decision making in the marine environment and deliver environmental objectives.

Our priorities:

Over the next five years we will:

- Through the provision of evidence-based advice, support government in the designation and management of a network of Marine Protected Areas.
- Set clear and practical long-term aims to help sea users and regulators appropriately integrate their activities with agreed marine conservation objectives.
- Improve the evidence base through data collection and analysis to guide and inform effective and practical marine conservation.
- Build new partnerships across government, with industry and conservation organisations to improve collaboration and joined up delivery to business, sea users and coastal communities.

What we will do:

- Deliver advice to Defra on the pre-consultation and designation of the new Marine Protected Areas by 2016.
- Deliver a programme of producing advice packages and conservation objectives, in line with Defra's smarter guidance principles, for existing and new Marine Protected Areas by the end of 2016.
- Working with marine management authorities including the Marine Management Organisation and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities increase the percentage of features in Marine Protected Areas in favourable or recovering condition.
- Continue to invest in the evidence base through data collection, monitoring and research to inform the designation, condition and management of Marine Protected Areas and wider marine biodiversity.

Landscape and Geodiversity

England's geology and geomorphology create our landscapes, which in turn frame our unique diversity of habitats and species. It is through these landscapes that most people engage and connect with the natural environment.

England's landscapes are diverse and dynamic. Over the last 60 years, the government has protected our most iconic landscapes, designating them as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), and managing the process of change there. In addition, we have protected many of the most significant geological and geomorphological sites in England, but others remain vulnerable.

The wider landscape, outside protected areas, is often taken for granted, and change there is less well monitored. The importance of underlying geodiversity and the dynamic geomorphological processes that continue to shape our landscapes often goes unrecognised. Our job is to provide protection where that is called for but also to increase understanding of landscape and provide opportunities for people's engagement with all our changing landscapes.

Our priorities:

Over the next five years we will:

- Establish the National Character Area (NCA) profiles as the primary local evidence base for landscape and wider environmental work, owned and understood by local communities and stakeholders.
- Agree a sustainable approach to monitoring landscape change at a national level to better inform decision-making about further change.
- Prioritise our designation programme for protected landscape boundary changes, so that we invest in the most valuable and appropriate areas.
- Increase the number of nationally important geological and geomorphological sites notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and declared as National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

What we will do:

- Work with a range of partners, notably the 48 Local Nature Partnerships, utilising the NCA profiles, the catchment based approach and other evidence, to inform locally targeted outcomes and to support landscape scale delivery that benefits local communities and stakeholders and that encourages an ecosystem approach to be adopted more widely.
- Engage with wider partners to determine a long term future for designating new and extending the boundaries of existing National Parks and AONBs.
- Develop a programme to build on the evidence of the Geology Conservation Review and progress the number of SSSIs and NNRs designated for their geology and geomorphology.
- Work with partners to review useful sources of data and analysis on landscape change in order to develop a programme of landscape monitoring and surveillance.

Access and Engagement

Natural England is charged with conserving the natural environment as a resource for people to enjoy, understand and study. We are responsible for promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation.

We have a strong inheritance in the provision for access to the natural environment across England. There are hundreds of miles of National Trails, over a million hectares of open access land where people can wander more freely, extensive networks of local public rights of way, and a programme to deliver a path around the entire English coastline - half of which will be in place by 2020. But we know that these facilities are not always as widely used as they might be and, at a time when local and national maintenance funding is reducing, we have a key challenge to maintain and improve the quality of access infrastructure for all the users of it.

We need to develop wider opportunities for people to engage with the natural environment, near to where they live, in ways that meet their needs including health, learning and recreation. Enjoyment of the natural environment is one of the benefits that flows from people having access opportunities. Ultimately any approach to conservation will only be successful when it starts from a public understanding of the value of the natural environment.

Our priorities:

Over the next five years we will:

- Deliver a new management model for National Trails and work with others to make the most of this national asset for trail users and local economies.
- Continue our work to deliver the England Coast Path and demonstrate the social and economic benefits it brings.
- Build the evidence base on how people use the natural environment and the benefits they gain from this, principally through the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) surveys.
- Increase public accessibility to our own and the wider public estate.

What we will do:

- Work with, and through, National Trail Partnerships to maintain and improve the 13 National Trails as high quality long distance routes and ensure effective delivery frameworks are in place for all of them.
- Ensure proposals on 982 kilometres of the England Coast Path have been submitted for approval to the Secretary of State by 2016 and work commenced on approximately 1,500 kilometres.
- Work with Defra and partners from the health, education and heritage sectors to strengthen the connection between people and nature enabling more people to enjoy the benefits of a high quality natural environment.
- Achieve successful implementation of the agreed recommendations of our Stakeholder Working Group on Unrecorded Rights of Way.
- Continue to support Local Access Forums to identify sustainable local solutions to access provision.

Environmental Land Management

We deliver most of the Rural Development Programme on behalf of the government. This supports good environmental land management by farmers and other landowners, and enables improvement in the condition of many of our protected sites and secures better environment outcomes across the wider countryside.

Following reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the new agri-environment scheme will be more closely targeted to secure maximum environmental benefits, including climate change adaptation and mitigation as a cross-cutting aim. We will seek more participative, grass roots local partnerships that deliver at a landscape-scale both to protect and enhance our most important environmental assets, and to stimulate greater determination and ownership of environmental outcomes by farmers. We will work to secure the greatest possible environmental return from this investment in the farming industry, aligning our advice with voluntary initiatives.

Natural England continues to support Defra in the design and implementation of the new agri-environment scheme and associated systems, ensuring the scheme is simplified to benefit customers and that it is in line with European Union (EU) regulations to avoid disallowance. Within the boundaries laid down by the EU we will help our customers through the transition with as little disruption to their businesses and the environmental outcomes they deliver on our behalf as possible.

During 2014/15 the scope of our role will change as the payment-related CAP functions currently undertaken by Natural England begin to be transferred to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). Bringing responsibility for processing payments together will result in an improved customer service for both existing and future customers. As part of this change technical advice on land-based schemes will be focused in Natural England, and the Forestry Commission will remain the principal source of expert forestry advice. This will improve consistency and delivery and bring significant benefits to our customers. In particular, it will enhance the integrated advice offer following the incorporation of the England Woodland Grant Scheme into the new environmental land management scheme under the new rural development programme. The transition of this work will commence in 2014/15 and continue into 2015/16.

What we will do:

- Support Defra in the design, implementation and launch of the new rural development programme and new environmental land management scheme. Deliver the new scheme from 2015.
- Work with our existing 50,000 agri-environment customers to deliver the environmental benefits of their current agreements until they end.
- Deliver the priority Environmental Stewardship agreements under transition regulations.
- Support our customers through transition from the current programme to the next, including the move to universal start dates, whilst continuing to provide excellent customer service.
- Continue to work with Defra on monitoring and evaluating agri-environment schemes.
- Pilot joint land management investments, including coordinating and rationalising farm visits, with the Environment Agency as part of the Triennial Review Action Plan.
- We will work with the Defra One Business (EU Payments) programme, the RPA and the Forestry Commission to implement the decision to move to a new approach for CAP transactional and technical delivery.
- Support wider delivery of Water Framework Directive objectives, specifically through ensuring effective delivery of the new environmental land management scheme, for example through a Catchment Sensitive Farming scheme providing agricultural businesses with expert advice capacity to direct capital grants towards measures that reduce diffuse pollution.

National Nature Reserves

There are 224 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) in England covering 94,000 hectares with Natural England managing 143 of these on its own or jointly with others, and the remainder are managed by Approved Bodies. As well as being some of the most valuable examples of England's wildlife and geology, the NNRs offer significant opportunities to contribute to the restoration of wider ecosystems and to get people involved in looking after their natural environment. The NNRs have a major role in contributing to our evidence around changes to our biodiversity, and they provide nationally important facilities for research and public understanding in the natural environment.

What we will do:

- Ensure management of designated features and the wider NNR is exemplary at sites managed by Natural England - as a minimum we are on track towards 70 per cent of NNRs being managed at favourable condition by 2020 and all sites are pro-active in supporting species commitments in Biodiversity 2020.
- Promote research opportunities at 50 per cent Natural England's NNRs. NNRs are contributing to corporate evidence priorities, e.g. Long Term Monitoring Network and surveillance of 'restricted distribution' species.
- Ensure all Natural England's NNRs meet public engagement standards providing opportunities for the public to get involved.
- Ensure all Natural England's NNRs wherever feasible, are dedicated for open access including for higher rights with suitable measures in place to protect key features and habitats.
- Broaden the funding base for Natural England's NNRs, innovate and establish partnerships that realise the potential of the asset and more efficient delivery of services.

Support to the Planning System

Natural England works with a variety of stakeholders and planning processes whilst undertaking our role as a statutory adviser to the planning system. Our advice supports sustainable development, avoids unnecessary conflict between the built environment and nature and helps to identify opportunities to deliver benefits for people, from green infrastructure, including sustainable urban drainage and urban cooling. We have made great strides in making our advice services more accessible and easier to use, becoming more efficient and removing delay and uncertainty for developers and planning authorities. We will continue to focus our efforts on where we can make the biggest difference to the environmental impact of development, and we will maintain and strengthen strong connections through our local teams.

What we will do:

- Facilitate sustainable growth as part of the Defra network offer to the 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships both through collaboration with relevant partners including Local Nature Partnerships and Catchment Partnerships.
- Respond to 95 per cent of planning consultations within the 21 day statutory deadline.
- Deliver improvements in how we exercise our statutory consultee and competent licensing authority roles, including establishing joint working protocols with the Environment Agency. This will provide increased transparency and better services for developers on land and at sea and support sustainable economic development.
- Provide statutory advice, in line with Defra's smarter guidance principles, on new Local Plans under the National Planning Policy Framework and the Marine Policy Statement in coastal areas, and advice on marine plans under the Marine and Coastal Access Act to help ensure that these enable appropriate future development that supports environmental resilience.
- Contribute to delivering Defra's biodiversity offsetting initiative.

Wildlife Management

Certain species of animals and plants found in the wild in the UK are legally protected from being harmed or disturbed by a range of legislation. We are a regulator in the natural environment, partly through our role as the licensing authority for wildlife management and as the consenting authority for operations on protected sites. Regulation provides an important backstop to prevent damage and deterioration to the environment but we need to regulate in a way that is proportionate and transparent. We will continue to find ways to refine regulatory processes and to streamline our advice and guidance, while creating a robust regime that promotes compliance.

What we will do:

- Continue to support Defra's Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) eradication policy.
- Continue to license over 10,000 customer applications for wildlife management and improve the efficiency of licensing including making more general and class licences available.
- Provide licensing advice on major infrastructure projects and other planning developments.
- Provide technical advice to government and other bodies on wildlife management and legislation including for example bats in churches, great crested newts, bees and input to the Law Commission review of Wildlife Legislation.
- Continue to roll out our programme of regulatory improvement in order to reduce the costs and burden to our customer.

Evidence

Natural England is the statutory adviser to government on the natural environment and requires the best available evidence to inform that advice. We want to ensure that the evidence we use is of sufficient quality, is understood and trusted to support good decisions. Our role is to mobilise evidence from our own sources and from others; present it in compelling and accessible ways; and make it available to shape our own decisions and those of partners, communities, businesses and individuals across the country.

What we will do:

- Deliver a high quality and accessible evidence base that underpins the management and protection of England's protected sites and the wider environments and takes account of climate and other environmental changes.
- Improve our ways of working with evidence to ensure the advice that we give to our customers is up to date, auditable, clearly articulated and consistent.
- We will work with partners across and beyond the Defra network to ensure that our evidence programme reflects current and future needs especially in relation to innovation. We will work with a range of bodies including universities and research institutes to help influence research priorities which benefit our evidence capacity. This will include working within new planning and coordinating arrangements to deliver an aligned programme of evidence activity across the Defra network.
- We will ensure that our evidence is produced and used following clear standards and in line with government best practice guidance.

Corporate Services

The expectation that our people will be responsive, pragmatic and empathetic underpins our approach to achieving our priorities, and we will continue to improve our understanding of the businesses and communities we work with. We will also work with partners in the Defra network and beyond to ensure that our business processes are effective and efficient, delivering for our customers and providing value for money and supporting environmental outcomes. We will ensure staff are supported with the tools they need to do their work including Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

What we will do:

- Invest in our people, and ensure they are able to access the right training, tools and equipment, and experience to deliver their roles.
- Continue to embed our cultural values of being 'helpful, practical, trustworthy and impartial' in everything we do and deliver on customers' expectations of us as a public body by strengthening our commitment to deliver excellent customer service.
- Implement the guidance reform plans for all Natural England guidance.
- Enhance operational effectiveness by promoting continuous improvement enabling more efficient delivery against Natural England's priorities.
- Deliver within our Grant in Aid budget.
- Work with our staff, the Defra network and our suppliers to achieve the maximum value for the money we spend and find further opportunities for innovation for the delivery of better environmental outcomes and efficiencies to improve the way we work.

Managing our resources

Grant In Aid (GIA) Funding settlement

Our main funding is provided by Defra who have faced significant budget cuts of 30 per cent during the spending review 2011 to 2015 (SR2010), and a further 9.6 per cent cut covering the period 2015/16 (SR2013). In addition the Autumn statement of 5 December 2013 imposed a further 1.1 per cent reduction to the Defra budget for 2014/15 onwards.

Defra has confirmed Natural England's grant in aid allocation for 2014/15 and indicative allocations for 2015/16 which are shown in the tables below.

The settlement for 2014/15 represents a further reduction of £7.6 million and indicative £14.1 million cumulative reduction for 2015/16. This is in addition to the £44.2 million reduction (22 per cent cut in overall budget, and 30 per cent cut in the portion we directly manage) in Natural England's core grant in aid over the four years 2011-2015.

The settlement has necessitated the need to make further hard choices in reaching a balanced budget for both years, whilst still delivering on Defra's key priorities and ensuring we have an affordable plan given the funding constraints.

Natural England's Financial Outlook

Natural England's medium term financial outlook sets out to ensure our resources are utilised in an efficient manner to deliver maximum returns for the natural environment. Our income, expenditure and funding requirements are set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Income, Expenditure and Total Funding Analysis

	2013/14 Budget £'m	2014/15 Plan £'m	2015/16 Plan £'m
Direct Programme Delivery	40.9	26.9	21.7
Salaries	87.3	80.7	81.5
Non Pay Operating Costs	64.6	59.6	55.4
Total Expenditure on the Natural Environment	192.8	167.2	158.60
<i>Funded by:</i>			
Grant-in-Aid	162.0	145.6	139.2
Other Defra Funding	18.6	18.1	14.4
Defra Capital Funding	2.7	-	-
Non Defra Funding	9.5	3.5	5.0
Total Funding	192.8	167.2	158.6

Notes to Table 1:

- We have assumed Other Defra Funding for key programmes will continue in 2015/16.
- Non pay operating costs consists mainly of charges from Defra for Shared Services, IT and Estates.
- Defra confirm Capital expenditure on an annual basis, and we are awaiting details for the 2014/15 outcome.
- Natural England is responsible for the management and delivery of most of the funding in the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), through schemes which pay landowners and farmers for delivery of environmental benefits. The RDPE budget is £412 million and the programme spend is accounted for by Defra, and agreement claims are paid by the Rural Payment Agency (RPA). Natural England incurs the administrative cost of delivering the RDPE programme. The current RDPE finishes during 2014. Future funding depends on transitional arrangements Defra have put in place. We will deliver RDPE schemes within the budgets set out by Defra.

In addition to GIA funding received from Defra, Natural England works with a number of partners and other organisations to deliver environmental outcomes. The main sources of non GIA income are outlined in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Non Defra Funding

Non Defra Funding	2013/14 Budget £'m	2014/15 Plan £'m	2015/16 Plan £'m
Lottery	5.5	-	
EU	1.3	0.6	
Discretionary Advice Chargeable Income	0.2	1.0	2.0
Other	2.5	1.9	3.0
Total	9.5	3.5	5.0

Note: Figures for Lottery and EU income for 2014/15 and 2015/16 have not yet been confirmed and are not therefore included above.

Table 3 below shows Natural England’s anticipated staff resources for 2014/15 and 2015/16. We have taken the necessary steps and difficult decisions concerning staff resources to allow us to deliver the full set of ambitions in this Corporate Plan. To ensure our staff resource is affordable, we have had to implement a voluntary exit scheme to reduce our total pay costs. We have also sought to maintain a flexible workforce through a combination of fixed term contracts and tight manpower controls.

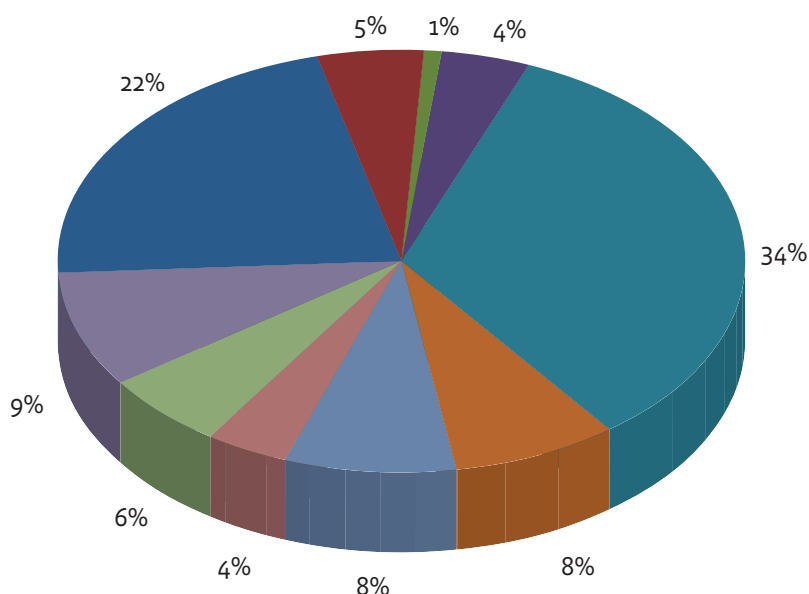
Table 3: Staff Resource

	2013/14 Budget	2014/15 Plan	2015/16 Plan
Permanent Staff	2,040	1,920	1,920
Short or Fixed Term Appointments	211	150	150
Total FTE	2,251	2,070	2,070

We constantly review how our resources are deployed to frontline delivery to ensure we maximise the outcomes for the natural environment. The table below illustrates how we plan to deploy our resources to support our business in 2014/15. However, it should be noted that resource allocations shown below do not reflect full spending on each business area since we operate an integrated approach to delivery where resource allocated in areas such as evidence also support other parts of the business.

Table 4 – Resource utilised by key business areas:

- Terrestrial Biodiversity (22%)
- Landscape and Geodiversity (1%)
- Environmental Land Management (34%)
- Support to the Planning System (8%)
- Evidence (6%)
- Marine Biodiversity (5%)
- Access and Engagement (4%)
- NNR Management (8%)
- Wildlife Management (4%)
- Corporate Services (9%)



Reporting our performance

We will measure and report on our performance in implementing this plan through our corporate reporting system. Progress against the key performance indicators, full list can be found at Appendix One, will be reported to the Natural England Board quarterly and this information will be available to the public on our website.

We will report high level progress through six performance indicators and against our main objectives to the Secretary of State and Defra's Supervisory Board.

The six Supervisory Board indicators are:

- Maintain and improve the condition of protected sites
- Maintain, improve and create priority habitats
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our statutory advice, our work and guidance as a regulator, and transactional services to support growth and protect the environment
- Advise on spatial planning and sustainable development
- Support farm businesses and other land managers to deliver environmental outcomes
- Advise on the network of Marine Protected Areas

In addition, on a six monthly basis, the Chairman and Chief Executive report on progress against the full extent of Natural England's work to the Secretary of State and other Defra Ministers.

Managing Risk

Our approach to risk management follows HM Treasury guidance and aims to identify risks that may prevent us meeting our stated outcomes. While it is inevitable that some risk is unavoidable and cannot be managed to a tolerable level the overriding aim is to ensure that risks are identified and then managed in the most effective way to support the delivery of those stated outcomes.

Risks are continuously reviewed at all levels of the business, from individual teams to the Natural England Board, and part of these reviews is to scan the horizon to identify emerging risks. The key requirement of these reviews is to ensure the ongoing ability of Natural England to respond appropriately to any emerging situation while maintaining critical business as usual activities.

Our internal audit plan takes account of the key risks and also provides assurance on the effectiveness of risk management, internal control and governance to Natural England's Accounting Officer and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), which is chaired by a non-executive Board Member.

Appendix One – Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2014 – 2016

Key Performance Indicators	Measures	2014/15 Metric	2015/16 Metric
Maintain and improve the condition of protected sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ % of SSSIs in favourable condition ■ % area of SSSIs in favourable and unfavourable recovering condition <p><i>*Subject to RDPE arrangements and previous year's delivery</i></p>	38%* 95%	40%* 95%
Maintain, improve and create priority habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Area maintained(outside of SSSI) ■ Area brought into recovery ■ Area created <p><i>* Subject to details and design of the new RDP scheme</i></p>	549,000ha 15,000 ha 2,500ha	* * 2,500ha*
Maintain and enhance the diversity and character of England's Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Promote landscape scale delivery through local partnerships, to deliver multiple environmental outcomes informed by NCAs ■ Contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation, including through ecosystem restoration 	Task Based Task Based	Task Based Task Based
Advise on the network of Marine Protected Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ % of features in marine protected areas in favourable or recovering condition ■ Number of new marine protected areas advised on ■ Number of marine protected areas with updated conservation objectives and associated advice packages 	60% Advice on 27 MPAs including SPAs & T2 pre-consultation on MCZs 47 sites	66% All SPAs, T2 pMCZs, T3 pre-consultation MCZs (no. to be confirmed) 44 sites
Conserve threatened priority species and manage invasive non-native species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implement partnership programme for priority species ■ Implement Invasive Non-Natives control programme 	Task Based Task Based	Task Based Task Based
Deliver Coastal Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Km of coast on which work has started since 2010 (cumulative) ■ Km route submitted to Secretary of State for approval (cumulative) 	982km 627km	1,459km 982km

Key Performance Indicators	Measures	2014/15 Metric	2015/16 Metric
Advise on spatial planning and sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ % of casework consultations responded to within agreed deadlines 	95%	95%
Continue the programme to deliver significant improvements in availability of, and access to, evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improve the standards of data management and custodianship of evidence across the organisation ■ Maintain the publication of our evidence and access and use of others' data and evidence 	Task Based 750,000 downloads of technical publications 50 evidence publications 1,800 MAGIC users per day	Task Based 750,000 downloads of technical publications 50 evidence publications 2,000 MAGIC users per day
We manage our money effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Actual expenditure as a percentage of planned/budget expenditure 	100%	100%
Deliver excellent customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ % of our customers are satisfied with the way we deliver our services 	88%	90%

Appendix Two – Summary of Triennial Review Joint Action Plan

The Joint Action Plan responds to the recommendations of the Triennial Review of Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA). The Review concluded that the two bodies should remain as separate Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), retaining their current purposes and statutory roles. However, the Review also concluded that further joint working and reform is needed, and that we should be more customer-focussed, develop effective partnership working and reduce regulatory burdens.

A summary of the actions that we will be taking to implement the Joint Action Plan are set out below. Full details of the Joint Action Plan can be found at http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/joint-triennial-action-plan_tcm6-37052.pdf

Operational alignment

- Ensure that EA and NE local areas, despite differences in precise boundaries, are working closely together wherever possible and that Area Managers from each organisation have a dedicated point of contact.
- Share offices wherever possible and use opportunities of space being created. Presumption is that EA and NE will share offices in preference to other members of Defra network assuming this works for the operational needs of both bodies.

Delivery of spatial planning advice

- Trial 4 approaches to joint working on spatial planning:
 - Align work on national infrastructure including common processes for customers and work with The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) and Major Infrastructure and Environment Unit (MIEU)
 - Joint working arrangements in a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
 - Statutory consultee engagement in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Big 5 consultees initiative
 - Identify ways to provide a seamless coordinated service for planning applicants for overlap cases
- Pilot joint charging arrangements for pre-application advice
- Single agency advising on offshore wind development impacts

Land management delivery

- Land management: see how outcomes can be maximised by taking an integrated approach:
 - Pilot local planning for multiple benefits from biodiversity, flood and water programmes in 2 counties / 2 catchments
 - Habitat and biodiversity benefits delivered through Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM)
 - Ecological benefits delivered by Water Framework Delivery
 - Water quality and quantity benefits delivered by New Environmental Land Management Schemes
- Data sharing for key customer groups from the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) IT system.

Improving customer experience

- Customer: agree shared approaches including piloting or implementing:
 - Integrated advice to farmers and land managers
 - Coordination of scheduled farm visits
 - Integrated advice and single account manager for agri businesses
 - Single account manager for developers
 - Participation of both EA and NE in meetings with developers' groups
 - Integrated advice for local authorities and LEPs
 - Common customer service approaches and standards
 - Coastal concordat
- NDPB commitments on Red Tape Challenge, Smarter Environmental Regulation Review (SERR) etc
- Develop shared plan for engagement with developers to improve understanding of costs of meeting regulations

Evidence

- Evidence and monitoring: seek to agree common or aligned approaches to:
 - Monitoring
 - Data sharing
 - Other options to consider e.g. academic links, capacity building

Joint working culture

- Agree a set of ground rules for when we are working together
- Agree a route to resolve issues that are potentially contentious at a local level
- Both new Corporate Plans to carry aligned sections on working together and the Triennial Review action plan
- Use EA and NE change programmes to confirm consistent expectations and approaches
- Investigate adoption of common customer service standards
- Develop and promote joint escalation process for contentious cases

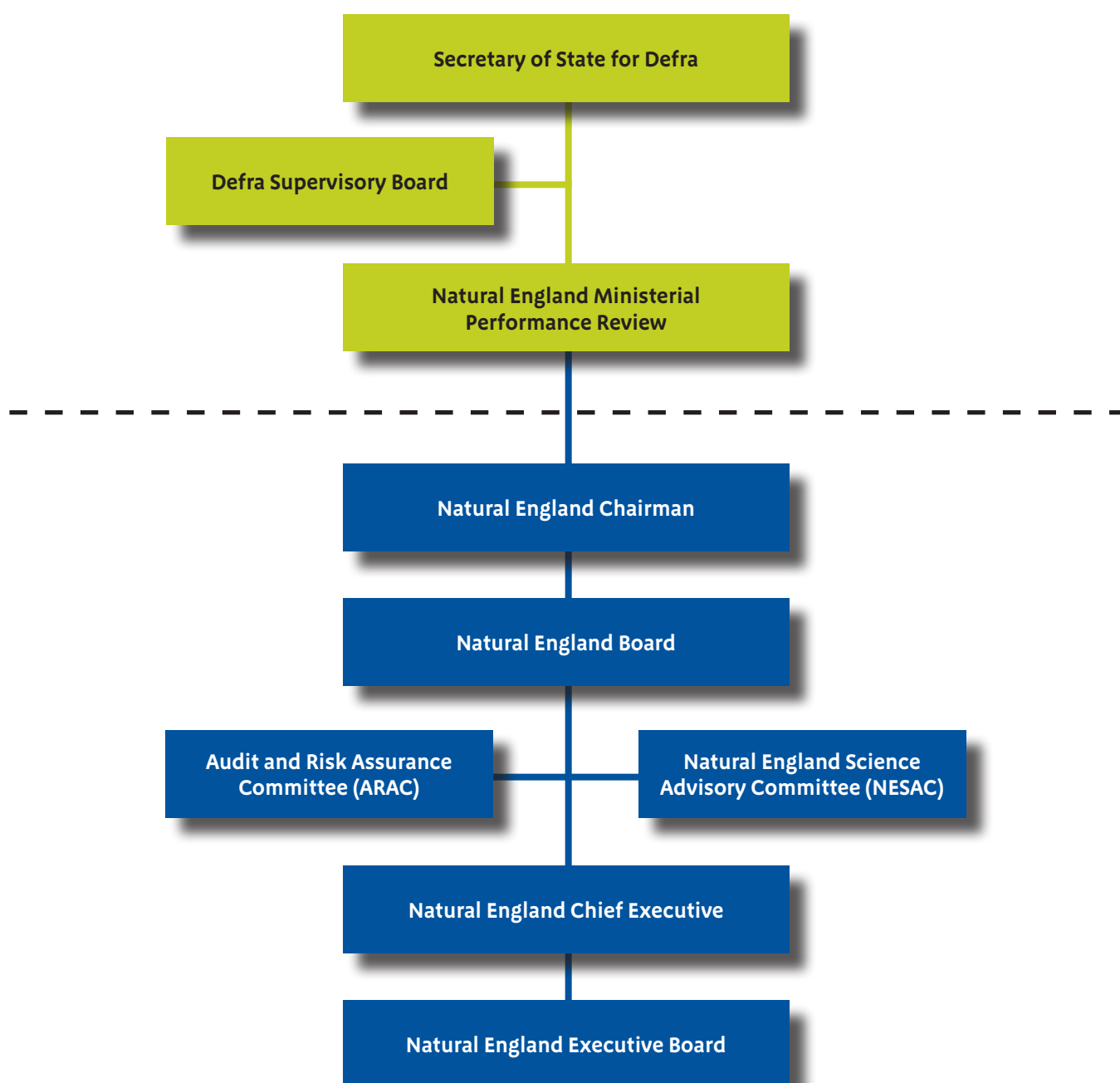
Partnerships & innovation

- EA review of fisheries work
- NE plans for commercial opportunities and reserve management.

Appendix Three – Governance and management arrangements

As a Non-Departmental Public Body our Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that Natural England fulfils the aims and objectives set by the Secretary of State. The main roles of the Board are to establish Natural England’s strategy, approve direction and review performance of the organisation.

The Executive Board comprises the Chief Executive and four Executive Directors. Its purpose is to assist the Chief Executive in discharging his responsibilities as delegated to him by the Board. The Executive Board therefore provides overall strategic leadership to the organisation, in setting plans, reviewing performance and ensuring resources are allocated accordingly.





Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

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