

# Supporting Sustainable Growth

Improvement Plan for Planning and Licensing

October 2014

**At Natural England we want to support new development which enables sustainable economic growth and protects and enhances the natural environment.**

Our work aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of how we regulate and give advice, as well as our customers' experiences of dealing with us. It is about doing our job better without affecting our statutory responsibilities.

This updated plan sets out what we are doing to support this - through the advice that we give and the ways we work with you.

## **What you are telling us?**

You have told us that you want improved consistency in our advice and casework handling, ease of contact, better sharing of data, enhanced and more practical and consistent advice earlier in the process, clarity in terms of engagement in casework and a greater understanding of your business needs.

We have recently undergone a restructure to bring the organisation closer to customers and partners. These changes have been strongly influenced by the feedback provided both through the Triennial Review process and customer and partner surveys. As part of these changes Director portfolios have been reviewed and reallocated and 14 Area Managers have been appointed to lead new area teams. ([New management arrangements](#))

## **What are we currently doing?**

We currently respond to over 25,000 marine and terrestrial consultations and object to 1.58 per cent of those on environmental grounds. Work is underway to reduce the number of consultations received, which will allow us to focus on consultations with more of an environmental impact and work with others to address complex environmental issues. Through our chargeable services we will aim to work with developers at the pre-application stage to resolve any issues before statutory consultation.

In 2013/14 we responded to 98.9% of planning application consultations within the required 21 days or agreed timeframe. This was a 0.85% improvement on 2012/3 and a significant achievement given the 9.8% increase in consultations.

## **Who is this plan for?**

Our key customers, including ecological consultants, house builders, energy companies, renewables firms, infrastructure developers, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, city and growth deal areas and third sector organisations.

## **Why are we updating the plan?**

Natural England's Improvement Plan was first published in March 2012 in response to the Government's Autumn Statement in 2011. It was approved by the Secretary of State in autumn 2012.

This update reflects a series of actions announced in December 2013 as part of the Triennial Review Action Plan (published jointly with the Environment Agency). It also shows how we are improving our service in the light of the implementation of recent reforms to cut red tape and boost economic growth. **Annex 1** sets out specific details on how we are improving our services.

We are continually looking to find ways to improve our services and this update also includes progress on some of our recent changes.

## Improving our service to you

By talking to us before submitting planning applications, we will work with you to identify solutions to environmental concerns early because we want to ensure that your planning application is as right as possible. We offer an initial level of free pre-application advice, whatever the size and scale of the development. For further advice we have a chargeable service, which helps maintain our ability to give pre-application advice. Interest in this service from our customers continues to be very strong with 250 chargeable cases in place by April 2014. We dealt with around 198 [Discretionary Advice](#) cases, mainly from developers, with a number also from the energy sector and transport companies working on major infrastructure projects. Natural England and the Environment Agency are also working to pilot a joint charged for service in Autumn 2014/15. Furthermore we are continuing to roll out further components of the chargeable services suite during 2014/15.

We have also had more than 52 [Pre-Submission Screening](#) service applications covering European Protected Species mitigation licences for bats, great crested newts and dormice. We screen application drafts prior to formal submissions, whether or not planning permission is in place. Screening allows us to help applicants by seeing if the application is likely to meet licensing requirements and address any shortfalls. The advice should provide more certainty and help developers and consultants better manage the risk and costs faced.

Working with Defra's **Major Infrastructure and Environment Unit (MIEU)**, set up to take forward the actions identified by the Habitats and Wild Birds Directive Implementation Review, we are continuing to improve our handling of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) casework, providing improved information and evidence services. This includes improved **Conservation Objectives** for European Protected Sites, which will be rolled out on terrestrial and marine sites over the next few years.

The Government's **Accountability for Regulator Impact (ARI)** scheme enables businesses to have a stronger voice in influencing how we – as a regulatory body – apply new regulatory activities. We will share and discuss arrangements with trade association and other businesses through our Business Engagement Assessments, for example when developing changes we make to licensing and regulatory activities.

We have published updated [Standing Advice for ancient woodland and veteran trees](#) which has been revised in partnership with the Forestry Commission. It is designed for use by Local Planning Authorities throughout England and sets out a series of checks that will guide planners when assessing the impact of any proposed development on ancient woodland. This standing advice follows from our revised Protected Species Standing Advice which was updated in October 2013.

We are supporting the **Consents Service Unit (CSU)** in the Planning Inspectorate which offers a bespoke consent management service to support NSIP developers in coordinating and aligning multiple applications to consenting bodies. Alongside the Environment Agency, we continue to provide a full-time secondee to the CSU.

We have launched a new online tool for planners to assess development issues around Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) dataset maps zones around each SSSI according to the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified and specifies the types of development that have the potential to have adverse impacts.

Publishing the IRZs will help LPAs, developers and other partners to consider whether a proposed development is likely to affect a SSSI and determine whether they will need to consult us to seek advice on the nature of any potential SSSI impacts and how they might be avoided or mitigated.

The new tool should cut out the need for a number of consultations with NE and provide clear advice on what should or should not be built on land close to SSSIs. The IRZs tool is available as a downloadable [GIS dataset](#) on the NE website and also available to view through the government's interactive mapping website [MAGIC](#).

Following Defra's Triennial Review, we launched with the Environment Agency a [Joint Action Plan](#) to provide a more joined up service to developers and planning authorities. The plan contains some immediate actions including:

- Implementing a series of improvements as part of DCLG's work with statutory consultees;
- More joined up working with Local Enterprise Partnerships;
- Delivering the Coastal Concordat, streamlining consenting processes in coastal areas;
- Providing a single point of advice for offshore wind developers;
- Single account management for major developers when requested.

## Reducing Costs

As part of the Government's work on Better Regulation, we need to reduce financial and administrative costs for our customers and ourselves, without compromising the natural environment. We are continuing to make good progress in this area, particularly around species licensing processes. Savings during 2013/14 from improvement initiatives stand at more than £290,151. We are also streamlining licensing processes, which should result in reduced application and processing time and cut delays and costs for business.

We have launched new simpler licensing processes for [bats and dormice](#) which will save developers and consultants time and money. These new annexed licences will reduce the number of licence re-submissions and follows the establishment of a similar system for Great Crested Newts, which was launched last year.

As part of our work, we are strengthening our evidence-base by working with developers to learn more about their costs. We need to know the source of added cost to help us develop solutions-focused improvement.

We are also expanding our risk-based approach to licensing, **moving low impact activities from individual to class and organisational licences**. Class licences are available online for eligible customers to register for and use, removing the need to apply for individual licences for low impact activities. We ran a bat class licence trial which finished in June 2014. This piloted a new streamlined means of permitting works affecting certain bat roosts; i.e. those of low conservation status for common species. We ran the trial with experienced consultants and registered more than 148 sites, offering a system with radically reduced paperwork and reducing turnaround by more than 50 per cent.

Organisational licences allow a specific organisation to carry out a range of activities without having to apply for a licence every time.

The improved licensing arrangements reduce application and processing time, cutting delays for customers in starting developments. They should also free up time to enable wildlife adviser to focus on other areas such as compliance, ensuring environmental objectives and outcomes are met.

We are working on a project to provide licensing advice for European Protected Species (EPS) at the planning stage for certain types of development casework. The **Planning and Licensing Interface** project will offer advice on EPS planning and licensing issues at an early stage, saving developers time, money and resources. It will provide greater consistency of advice, developing alternative practical approaches to allow local authorities to execute their EPS duties in a streamlined way.

Working with partners, we are exploring ways of improving standards in the ecological consultancy profession, including chargeable training courses to enable us to build further on the **earned recognition** principle, established in the Regulators Code. Together with the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) we are working on a joint project to streamline and speed up decision making for low risk species licensing activities through using earned recognition. We have been awarded a grant, under the Better Regulation Delivery Office's Regulatory Innovation for Growth Programme, to develop this project between July 2014 and June 2015.

Earned recognition in this context means that ecologists and environmental managers with the right skills and experience could be registered to use a licence to undertake low risk activities affecting protected species without the need to apply for an individual licence each time.

### **Great Crested Newts**

In March 2014, Defra published the results of a study on the use of environmental DNA (eDNA) to detect Great Crested Newts (GCN) in water.

The results showed that the test can be more effective in confirming the presence or absence of great crested newts than a combination of conventional survey techniques, potentially making it easier and less costly for developers needing to clarify GCN populations. However a conventional survey will still be required where there is a need to obtain an estimate of the size of a population.

We now accept eDNA test results as evidence of presence or presumed absence of GCN from consultants and developers, provided they strictly follow the method set out in the [Technical Advice Note](#). Developers therefore need to make a risk based judgement on the benefits to their project of using eDNA compared with using conventional surveys.

We are also working in partnership with Defra and Industry to develop better data on GCN distribution across England. The project aims to:

- Develop, test, and compare species distribution models for GCN.
- Build on these models, develop a methodology for assessing the impact of a plan or project on the local conservation status of GCN including targeting of measures to maintain or improve their status.
- Assess the practicalities of using the models, through testing with a range of stakeholders and applications.

We hope the results from this research will open the way for more informed and proportionate local decision making by developers, planning authorities and regulators.

### **Smarter Guidance and Smarter Data**

The [Smarter Guidance project](#) is reforming all guidance owned by the Defra Network and transferring it to GOV.UK. There are currently over 100,000 environmental guidance documents spread over multiple websites in different formats and with no overarching structure. This makes it difficult for customers to find the information they need from us. Natural England is leading on a range of guidance themes in the project. We are currently implementing the guidance reform plans that were consulted on earlier this year. Revised guidance will be quicker to access and easier to understand. The project aims to help businesses to save more than £1bn over ten years. The guidance reforms will be completed by Spring 2015 and new business as usual arrangements will be put in place to continue to improve guidance.

The [Smarter Data](#) project is reviewing the information that businesses are required to submit to Defra and its regulators, to ensure that they only ask for information that is needed and used and to simplify the way it's collected. Natural England is responsible for taking forward four improvements to species licensing – the launch of our online application system (May 2014) that reduces the amount of text required in application forms, further roll-out of class and organisation licences, the development of professional standards and associated class licences for accredited consultants and the development of spatial models for key protected species.

## Working in Partnership

We continue to have a strong focus on working with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). As part of the Defra network, we have developed a joint offer to LEPs and City Deals, this offer sets the framework for our local 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 Strategic Economic Plans where needed. In the autumn we will be seeking feedback from LEPs on how they value our services

For example, The Environment Agency and Natural England work 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 Environment Agency and Natural England will work towards ensuring LEPs understand their environmental obligations and opportunities in their areas and to recognise the strong positive links between the environment and a thriving local economy, both working closely with individual LEPs and supporting their engagement with Local Nature Partnerships

Alongside the Environment Agency, we are also advising the Planning Inspectorate and developers on a number of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). Learning from five major infrastructure cases (Hinckley, Sizewell, High Speed 2, 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) in order to secure insight from as wide a range of sectors and experiences as possible. This will help in the further design of customer service improvements. The results of the survey will be available in the autumn.

We continue to play an active role in the Government's 'Big Five' Statutory Consultee Initiative,

which aims to improve co-ordination and consistency and share best practice across the five agencies which together receive the most planning consultations. This involves Natural England, Environment Agency, Highways Agency, English Heritage and Health & Safety Executive.

As a result of this initiative, a [Common Service Commitment](#) has been published on the planning portal website and we are piloting an escalation procedure to resolve conflicting advice from agencies. The Statutory Consultee Engagement Network (SCEN), hosted by the Planning Inspectorate, is being piloted as a way to resolve conflicting advice from the statutory consultees on planning applications for major development. Where there is a conflict between the advice given by the 'Big Five' statutory consultees that cannot be resolved locally, developers or local planning authorities will be able to refer the case to a single point of contact at the Planning Inspectorate who will agree a timescale for resolving the issues with the relevant agency representatives and the local planning authority.

The five bodies are also taking forward a common local authority customer survey to ensure we approach customer surveys consistently and avoid unnecessary duplication or repeat questioning of the same individuals in local authorities. We will undertake this survey during 2014, using the results to further improve our service.

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

The Coastal Concordat for England was launched in November 2013. The Concordat approach helps to reduce regulatory duplication, providing better sign-posting, streamlining assessments and increasing transparency and consistency of advice. Concordat working is now available to those Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) that wish to adopt its principles with 13 coastal LPAs-agreeing to adopt these to date. We will be undertaking a review and reporting back on the implementation of the Concordat including surveying a sample of customers who have used the concordat process to understand their experience of it.



## Getting a better understanding of industry

### Staff Interchange

We are continuing with our staff interchange programme involving short-term staff placements with key industry customers. This provides a chance for our staff to further build their understanding of some of our key development customers and their business, exchange views on our different roles and perspectives and share best practice. Ultimately, we hope this will lead to improved partnership working, better customer service around our advisory and regulatory roles in development planning and better outcomes for the natural environment. The programme also involves shared workshops, inviting customers to our meetings and training events. Successful interchanges have taken place with house builders, energy companies, aggregates industry and a LEP.

### Developer Relationship Management

Following last year's successful pilot, we are working more closely with a small number of our developer customers (HS2, EDF Energy, Scottish Power, DONG Energy, Homes and Communities Agency and National Grid). We have assigned a dedicated relationship manager to each of these companies and they will meet on regular basis to help address concerns and work collaboratively to help resolve issues. During 14/15, working with the Environment Agency, we will be piloting single account management, where developers request it.

### Development Industry Group

We work closely with developers through our Developer Industry Group (DIG), which brings together our key development partners and customers. The DIG includes representatives of businesses and professional bodies with an interest in housing, minerals and onshore energy development, together with decision making bodies, including other Government Departments, the Local Government Association and the Environment Agency. The group provides insight and advice on the challenges facing developers, enabling us to listen to our customers and partners and to improve our products and services.

There are close links with our **Developer Customer Panel**, which for example has looked at a range of species licensing improvements. We have found the panel to be extremely useful in providing us with feedback and helping us to understand the practicalities of how our licensing systems operate on the ground – all of which is helping to inform future improvements.

We will continue to build on our encouraging **Customer point of service feedback** results where 92% of our customers said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with our Land Use Planning services.

Our customers have also been reporting a positive improvement since we launched our revised customer complaints & feedback procedures in July 2014. We also publish regular summaries of customer complaints and feedback and our actions in response on the **'You said, We did'** section.

The feedback we receive from our annual customer surveys are extremely important and give us renewed food for thought on how we can improve our services. We are currently developing detailed action plans in response to this useful insight.

### Next Steps

With our new organisational structure now in place, we restarted our programme of Customer Service Excellence accreditation in July 2014 with the objective of maintaining our organisational accredited status.

By March 2015, we believe there will be substantial new benefits to our customers from our work, ranging from better use of resources and efficiencies for the taxpayer to a more streamlined service, reduced regulatory costs, greater certainty about the provision and use of evidence and smarter guidance in place on gov.uk. Above all, we will be "solutions focused" in all that we do.

### Where can I find more information?

If you'd like further information about Natural England, please visit our website [www.gov.uk/natural-england](http://www.gov.uk/natural-england)  
If you'd like to comment on our work, please email us at [sustainabledevelopment@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:sustainabledevelopment@naturalengland.org.uk)

Title	Description and Progress	Timetable & Status
<b>Supporting Sustainable Development</b>		
<b>Standards &amp; Staff Guidance</b>	<p>We published Standards on our core outcomes and on our advisory and regulatory roles e.g. Advice on Development, Regulation Strategic Standards etc. They give guidance to our staff and clarity to our customers on the level, quality, volume, timeliness and evidence basis for advice and decisions.</p> <p>Our standards also reflect Natural England's commitment to driving cultural change and to continue to deliver a solutions-focused approach, centred on achieving environmental benefit through excellent customer service.</p>	<p>Standards published on <a href="#">NE Website</a></p> <p>Standards published and being embedded.</p>
<b>Standing Advice</b>	<p>Standing Advice allows competent authorities to make risk based decisions without consultation.</p> <p>We have issued new Standing Advice on Ancient Woodlands and Veteran Trees. This was prepared in partnership with the Forestry Commission for use principally by Local Planning Authorities when considering planning applications that may have an impact on species or habitats.</p> <p>This standing advice follows from our revised Protected Species Standing Advice which was updated in October 2013.</p>	<p>Standing advise for Ancient Woodland and Veteran trees published on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014</p>
<b>Impact Risk Zones for SSSIs</b>	<p>Natural England made available SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) as a downloadable GIS tool/dataset for local planning authorities, developers, consultants and members of the public from our website. IRZs maps zones around each SSSI according to the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified and specifies the types of development that have the potential to have adverse impacts at a given location.</p> <p>LPA's have a duty to consult Natural England before granting planning permission on any development that is in or likely to affect a SSSI. The IRZs tool will help planners and developers to consider whether a proposed development is likely to affect a SSSI and determine whether they will need to consult Natural England to seek advice on the nature of any potential SSSI impacts and how they might be avoided or mitigated.</p> <p>The IRZs tool/ dataset can be downloaded from our website or viewed through the government's interactive mapping website MAGIC.</p>	<p>Impact Risk Zones available from <a href="#">website</a> and <a href="#">MAGIC</a> from June 2014.</p>
<b>Providing Improved Certainty</b>		
<b>More responsive pre-application advice</b>	<p>Natural England has since 2012/13 offered a chargeable Discretionary Advice Service (DAS) for developers/consultants providing non-statutory advice. This provides a responsive, consistent pre-application advice service to discuss issues early on in the planning and licensing process providing developers with improved certainty and aiming to improve the quality and appropriateness of development at an early stage.</p>	<p>Full service in place since April 2013 with guidance on our website about <a href="#">DAS</a> and <a href="#">species licensing</a>. Subject to continuous review and improvement.</p>
<b>Species licensing 'prior-approval' service – a Penfold commitment</b>	<p>Since April 2013 this service has been available across our Marine, Regulation and Land Use work areas as our standard offer. It includes a pre-submission application screening service for protected species licensing, enabling developers to seek earlier advice on their licence application proposals.</p> <p>In 2014 we will be developing with the Environment Agency joint charging service.</p> <p>Overall feedback from developers/consultants has been positive.</p> <p>We continue to offer a limited amount of discretionary advice free, and we will continue to offer a full range of free published web-based advice.</p>	
<b>Getting a Better Understanding of Industry</b>		
<b>Sharing and Improving our understanding of Business</b>	<p>We are run a staff interchange programme involving short term placements with key industry customers. This is part of our learning and development programme and enables staff to further build their understanding of our key development customers business and exchange views on our different roles and share best practice.</p> <p>We are also undertaking joint training events with industry partners across land and sea.</p>	<p>Staff Interchange in place from April 2013</p>
<b>Developer Relationship Management and Single Account Management</b>	<p>We continue to look to strengthen the relationship between major developers and Natural England. We have reviewed our major stakeholders across land and sea.</p> <p>After successful completion of our Developer Relationship pilot in 2013/14 we have mainstreamed this work with named principal advisers managing our strategic relationship with a selected number of major developers.</p> <p>Working with the Environment Agency we are piloting during 14/15 different approaches to single account management, where developers want it.</p>	<p>We will evaluate the pilot in Single Account Management in March 2015.</p>

Title	Description and Progress	Timetable & Status
<b>Species Licensing - Reducing costs and Innovation</b>		
<b>Reducing delays &amp; Further Information Requests</b>	<p>To reduce the number of applications 'not right first time' (and thus delayed), Natural England introduced in April 2013 <b>Annexed (Conditioned) Licences</b> for Great Crested Newts applications. Following on from this we have launched this process for bats and for Dormice This new style of licence empowers staff to discuss and resolve minor issues in paperwork with applicants.</p> <p>Benefits include reduced delays from further information requests, faster assessments, improved relationships between Natural England advisers and customers, and simplified modification paperwork.</p>	Annex licence process launched for Bats in March and for Dormice July 2014.
<b>Great Crested Newts</b>	<p>In March 2014, Defra published the results of a study on the use of environmental DNA (eDNA) to detect Great Crested Newts (GCN) in water. The results showed that the test can be more effective in confirming the presence or absence of great crested newts than a combination of conventional survey techniques, potentially making it easier and less costly for developers needing to clarify GCN populations.</p> <p>We now accept eDNA test results as evidence of presence or presumed absence of GCN from consultants and developers, provided they strictly follow the method set out in the <a href="#">Technical Advice Note</a>.</p>	Ongoing. NE will be reviewing lessons learned from the application of eDNA test over 2014 survey season.
<b>Expand Class and Organisational Licensing – risk-based approaches</b>	<p>Class licences remove the need to apply for individual licences for certain low impact activities. Survey Class licences for Bats, Dormice, White Clawed Crayfish, Great Crested Newts and Lesser Whirlpool Ramshorn Snail have been introduced together with class licences for low impact forestry and water course maintenance works affecting badger setts.</p> <p>A pilot of innovative class licence for experienced consultants permitting low impact development works on bat roosts was undertaken between July 2013 and June 2014. We will be fully launching this new class licence later in 2014/15 together with other survey and low impact class licences including those for White Clawed Crayfish and Water Vole.</p> <p>Organisational licensing allows a specific organisation to carry out a range of activities (often routine and temporary impact activities) without having to apply for a licence every time.</p> <p>An organisational licence for survey activities is in place for the Environment Agency. In February 2014 we issued an organisational licence to the National Grid for use in their major programme of network improvements and also issued a licence in March permitting the Canal and River Trust to undertake site management activities affecting certain protected plants.</p>	<p>We have established the Class licensing process and are continuing to expand their development</p> <p>Organisational licence mechanism in place. Suite of organisational licences are being developed for a wider range of customers and activities in 2014/15</p>
<b>Earned Recognition</b>	<p>To enable NE to build improved services around the principles of earned recognition and co-regulation we are working with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Managers (CIEEM) utilising grant funding from the Better Regulation Delivery Office on an earned recognition and species licensing project in 2014/15. This project will support the development of streamlined licensing services e.g. class licensing, underpinned by earned recognition principles and the development of training products to support this work and improve standards. As part of this partnership work we are aiming to improve standards in ecological consultancy related to licensing.</p>	Earned recognition partnership project with CIEEM to be completed June 2015
<b>Consultation on changes to Class and General Licenses.</b>	<p>The consultation for changes to Class and General licensing to reflect the risk in licence decision making commenced on 24<sup>th</sup> February and closed on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2014. We are reviewing responses in order to prepare future proposals.</p>	Ongoing
<b>Increased Transparency and Enhanced Performance Reporting</b>		
<b>Enhanced performance reporting and published statistics</b>	<p>We publish quarterly statistics on our performance as a statutory consultee along with the publication of licensing statistics.</p> <p>Our performance as a statutory consultee and in reducing the costs to those we regulate is also reported on a quarterly basis to Defra's Supervisory Board. In addition we also produce an annual report on our work as a statutory consultee which includes a wider range of statistics.</p>	Quarterly, monthly and annual Statutory Consultee <a href="#">land use consultations</a> and <a href="#">licensing statistics</a> published on our website.



Title	Description and Progress	Timetable & Status
<b>Customer Service - Feedback, Satisfaction and Excellence</b>		
<b>Feedback</b>	<p>Natural England maintains a wide range of feedback mechanisms: including annual partner (including 100+ Local Authorities) survey (run by Ipsos Mori), hosting the Developer Industry Group (representative of the main sectors we regulate) and Customer Panels (local or focussed customer forums). We also ask customers for written feedback when they have done business with us using feedback postcards with every planning consultation responded to and every licence decision made (whether a licence was granted or not). Customer feedback is shared and agreed with customer panels to agree actions and priorities to inform areas for review and improvement.</p>	<p><b>Feedback arrangements</b> in place and resultant actions being implemented on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Results from the 2014/15 Partner survey to be available Autumn 2014.</p>
<b>Customer satisfaction surveys</b>	<p>We annually conduct a focused customer survey, seeking customer views on working with Natural England including measures of the helpfulness and timeliness of our services in the planning, consenting and licensing system. The survey sample includes a good number of local authorities.</p> <p>In 2013/14 we used an online survey approach as part of our efficiency measures rather than working with MORI using a telephone survey. MORI advised that online surveys can result in lower overall satisfaction figures than telephone surveys. This has come through in our survey results which have given us renewed food for thought and we have developed action plans in response to this useful insight.</p>	<p>Customer survey undertaken and results <b>published</b>.</p> <p>Action plans developed addressing any concerns.</p>
<b>Customer Service Excellence</b>	<p>Natural England received Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation in June 2013. We are working to keep our accreditation in place in our new organisational structure and have in place a three year programme of reaccreditation.</p>	<p>3 year CSE re-accreditation programme underway</p>
<b>Working in Partnership – Single Voice and Triennial Review Action Plan with the Environment Agency</b>		
<b>Implementing the Triennial Review Joint Action Plan with the Environment Agency</b>	<p>NE and the Environment Agency already work well together to achieve benefits for our customers and the environment. We both have Improvement Plans for Planning and Permitting. The publication of a Joint Action Plan in December 2013 and the subsequent delivery of actions demonstrate a continued commitment to deliver a more joined up service to developers and planning authorities.</p> <p>The joint action plan provided a strong focus on jointly working to improve our spatial planning work, improve customer experience and our joint working culture which builds upon existing work within this Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Delivery of the plan has involved some of the actions listed below including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Implementing a series of improvements as part of DCLG’s work with statutory consultees;</li> <li>■ Improved join up on NSIPs and development of joint working protocols</li> <li>■ More joined up working with Local Enterprise Partnerships;</li> <li>■ Delivering the Coastal Concordat, streamlining consenting processes in coastal areas;</li> <li>■ Single account management for major developers when requested (see getting a better understanding of industry – section)</li> </ul> <p>Our progress on these and other actions is detailed below and elsewhere in our improvement plan</p>	<p>Ongoing. Delivery of actions building on existing areas within the Improvement Plan.</p>
<b>Defra network Offer For LEPS City Deals and Enterprise Zones</b>	<p>We continue to have a strong focus on working with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). As part of the Defra network, we have developed a joint offer to LEPs and City Deals, this sets out how we can protect the environment and facilitate economic growth, avoid blockages and set up working practices which make the Network easy to do business with. We have published a Local Environment and Economic Development (LEED) toolkit which underpins the offer.</p> <p>We continue to develop joint approaches under the offer, for example taking a Defra network approach to reviewing LEPs’ investment strategies and Strategic Economic Plans where needed. In the autumn we will be seeking feedback from LEPs on how they value our services.</p>	<p><b>Offer published.</b> Ongoing engagement with LEPs to help develop Strategic Economic Plans and growth Deals</p>

Title	Description and Progress	Timetable & Status
<b>Nationally significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)</b>	<p>We are working with the Environment Agency following a review of 4 major NSIP cases to develop a protocol on ways of working on NSIPs.</p> <p>We also have undertaken a survey of NSIP developers from a wide range of sectors and experiences to help us design further customer service improvements.</p>	Ongoing
<b>Develop and Embed Joint working Protocols with the EA</b>	<p>The Environment Agency and Natural England have produced a schedule of joint working protocols on planning and permitting. This will help us to foster further streamlined approaches to our advice as a planning consultee. We are developing options for joint Environmental Impact Assessment advice and are sharing current practice and scoping options for delivering on this. We have also developed proposals for working together on our advice to minerals planning authorities on fracking applications.</p>	Ongoing
<b>Engagement with DCLG's 'Big Five' Initiative</b>	<p>We are playing an active role in the Department for Communities and Local Government's 'Big Five' initiative working with the other major statutory consultees of the Environment Agency, Highways Agency, English Heritage and the Health and Safety Executive to improve co-ordination and consistency. We have developed common monitoring and reporting criteria and published a common service commitment. We are also piloting the Statutory Consultee Engagement Network (SCEN) to resolve conflicting advice from these consultees on major planning applications. This pilot is hosted by the Planning Inspectorate.</p> <p>We are taking forward a common local authority customer survey during 2014.</p>	Ongoing work to improve co-ordination and consistency and to further improve our service
<b>Coastal Concordat</b>	<p>Working with government, the Environment Agency, the Marine Management Organisation and the Local Government Association a Marine and Coastal Concordat was developed to make it easier for businesses and developers involved in coastal developments to engage with the relevant competent authorities and receive consistent advice. It reduces regulatory duplication, gives better signposting and increases the consistency of advice for developments spanning the intertidal areas on estuaries and coasts that require multiple consents including both a marine licence and a planning permission. The Concordat was launched in November 2013 and is available to those Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) that wish to adopt its principles with 13 coastal LPAs agreeing to adopt these to date</p>	Ongoing. The Concordat is being implemented as local planning authorities choose to adopt its principles
<b>Green Infrastructure as a Catalyst for Growth</b>	<p>We have published the findings of an NE/ Defra study into the role of green infrastructure plays as a catalyst to economic growth. The report has been used to underpin evidence to inform DCLG guidance for LEPS on producing their strategies for the EU Structural Investment Fund.</p>	Report <a href="#">published</a> .