ALERC Conference 2014
Notes from afternoon discussion sessions

1. Website Group

Mark Wills provided an update:

The website is now in a content management system so can be edited remotely. The "Find an LRC" map will soon be replaced by the system used by the [Welsh LRC network page](#).

Question: The current function of the website is primarily an information source for ALERC members, but should it become a more public facing marketing tool?

Charles Roper suggested that the website should include a page listing the services which are offered by LRCs, and links through to the LRCs which can fulfil that service.

Eric Fletcher asked if LRCs keep records of how people learned about them when submitting a data enquiry. No one present had ever had ALERC cited as the sign post to their LRC.

John Sawyer mentioned the recent NBN website overhaul, and how working out five key objectives for a website can be a useful process when restructuring a site.

Steve Goddard stated that the website can be slow and unresponsive, particularly on tablets and mobile phones. Mark Wills explained that this was a known issue, but unlikely to be one which will be resolved soon, due to costs. General consensus from the room was that the website works reasonably well on mobile devices.

It was also suggested that the website could include case studies / examples of work which can be done by LRCs. Eric Fletcher mentioned that there are advocacy documents and case studies for some LRCs on the NBN website.

Adam Rowe suggested that the website should stay with its primary function as an information source for members, rather than adding case studies etc. But that the site could be improved to become a more appealing shop window for LRCs, and better sign posted to individual LRC websites.

It was mentioned that drop down menus don't work for some browsers, and on slower machines. Charles Roper suggested adding the links from each drop down list to the initial page for each section.

David Slade stated that he was not a fan of the "blobby" map on the front page, and would prefer a proper geographical map. Mark Wills explained that this will eventually be replaced, once the proper boundaries for the Scottish LRCs were known. TWIC should be working on getting the improved Scottish LRC boundaries.

Darwyn Sumner suggested that a header photo on the website could make it look more attractive. The general consensus was that adding more photos to the site would be an improvement.

2. Business development group

A working definition of a Local Records Centres was shown to the conference delegation:

Environmental Records Centres (LRCs) are organisations that provide a systematic and rigorous evidence base to support research, informed debate, decision making and sustainable development relating to the natural environment within a specific geographical area. Supported by a range of stakeholders, LRCs seek to maximise the value of all data by maintaining a network of local expertise to provide contextual information and through data analysis and the production of derived data products. These services are provided on a not-for-profit basis.

It was noted that there is no agreement as to the generic term for Local Records Centres (i.e. LRCs vs Environmental Records Centres), and the rest of the discussion revolved around whether it is desirable to have agreement on a term, and what that term should be. It was agreed virtually unanimously that the term LRC does not adequately describe centres and what they are trying to achieve. At the very least, adding the word "environmental" should be included to make "Local Environmental Records Centres".

ALERC will take this on board and consult members on a change to the generic name for LRCs. As discussion during the session was focussed so much on this single issue, further consultation will be required on agreeing the actual definition of LRCs.

The only other discussion point noted was the suggestion that a centralised list of LRC skills could be placed on the ALERC website.

3. Accreditation

Question: Does reducing the cost of accreditation make anyone more interested in applying for accreditation? (No answer from the floor)

NEYEDC went for accreditation:
- as they are committed to standards for LRCS
- to show support for ALERC

Kent went for accreditation:
- to demonstrate standards
- as it was more straightforward for an independent LRC
- to support ALERC
- as funding bodies may only fund accredited LRCs in the future
- £300 wasn't an obstacle – staff time is the issue

Having a target accreditation date was off-putting. Perhaps allow more flexibility and drip feed evidence – this would take the pressure off.

It was felt that a mentor is not essential – especially since example documents have been prepared.

- It was agreed that mentoring could be optional
- It was agreed that documents could be submitted online
- Should ALERC make accreditation a mandatory requirement of membership? A general feeling was yes, but perhaps not yet – or introduce a two tier level of membership – full and "working towards". There's no point in accreditation if it's optional.

4. Data flow

Future Questions:

If data sharing will be via the NBN Gateway will we want separate data exchange agreements? Should it all be via standard text requests?

Could ALERC maintain a List of organisations who are happy to accept data and carry out data flow back to the gateway?

- Data exchange agreement test case with GiGL was found to be unwieldy and there is a need for standard agreements.
- NBN Lead person (John Sawyer) offered to negotiate (on our behalf) full capture resolutions to LRCs with organisations on the gateway, possibly through a web services process.
- Charles Roper- There has been a proliferation of community licence agreements. I think there should be a move to a standard between GBIF, NBN, data use and standard licensing, giving greater confidence in the data.
- Lizzy peat- BWARS are keen for a data exchange agreement, however they asked for one step further. One day they would like to see ALERC talking to LRCs on their behalf who have not tackled known errors in Hymenoptera data which still appears on the NBN gateway. Charles Roper suggested this might be more like a service level agreement.
- Tom Hunt- Perhaps a way to do this would be to have more data request categories on the NBN gateway (i.e. one specifically described as "LRC"), or would it be better for the NBN to broker an agreement that all data can be used by LRCs and then we could focus on those organisations who say no. Wording will need to include something like "to improve decision making, define categories for environmental planning decisions" as critical use is more saleable.

Role of online recording

- Sue Timms (Leicestershire) voiced dissatisfaction of the quality of validated data in i-record, including sea creatures in Leicestershire.
- This has been presented to Tom Hunt who is talking to BRC about it. It is understood this puts pressure on a few national verifiers. In Lincolnshire a recorder has dropped out because of verification issues. It is therefore important to better define roles.
- Charles Roper however has had a positive experience and i-Record is working well for his LRC. They have invested in training recorders in its use and this has vastly improved the quality of data. If you invest and engage then you get good results.
- Maybe Tom should approach Martin Harvey about this and not David Roy