

Minutes of the 13th meeting of ALERC Tuesday 13th December 2011: 10:00a.m. to 4:00p.m. Offices of EcoRecord 28 Harborne Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham. B15 3AA

5 minutes walk from Fiveways Railway Station (trains from New street to Fiveways leave every 10 mins and take 3 minutes)



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Association of Local Environmental Records Centres

Meeting of Directors

10:00a.m. to 4:00p.m. Tuesday 13th December 2011, Offices of EcoRecord

28 Harborne Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham. B15 3AA

AGENDA

Items in red are prioritised by the Chairman

1. Apologies & introductions

2. Minutes of 11th Meeting

Note that the 12th meeting was the AGM

3. Matters arising – not dealt with on agenda

4. Officers Reports

- Chairman (general)
- Treasurer
- Specific meetings attended (if any)

5. Issues for discussion and resolution

a. ALERC Officer

- 1. Chairman to lead on discussion

b. General issues

- 2. Process for ALERC input to consultations etc
- 3. ALERC funds used for LRC project work - development of a process - if we think we should
- 4. NE SLA outcomes etc

c. Accreditation

- No issues at present (see ALERC Officer above)

d. NBN-

- removed: insufficient time

e. ALERC Conference

- removed: insufficient time

f. Website

- ? report from Craig and/or Mark (I'm guessing here)

g. Establishing priorities and work programme

- 5. Work Programme

h. Working groups

- removed: insufficient time

i. Company work

- Proposal for Martin Horlock (Norfolk) to be elected as Director (from Teresa Frost 5/12/11)
- e.g. Annual Returns

6. Any Other Business

- Proposal that we write to the LRCs of the retired ALERC Directors to thank them for the contribution that they have made to ALERC (DS)
- Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to establish integrated local and national structures for collecting, analysing and sharing biological (Scotland petition via Alexa Tweddle)
- Proposed Withdrawal of University of Birmingham Biological Recording Courses (via Mandy Rudd)
- Local Habitat Surveillance (via Gary Lewis)
- **Date(s) of next meeting(s)**

Minutes of the 13th meeting of ALERC

Present: Darwyn Sumner, Craig Slawson, Gary Lewis, Aisling Carrick, Mark Wills, Simon Wood, Mandy Rudd. Alexa Tweddle (10:50), Tim Corner (13:00)

The Chairman (Gary Lewis) declared the meeting open at 10:10

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Nicky Court & Tim Corner (indicated he was unsure if he could come or not but that if he did he would be late)

Alexa Tweddle apologised for lateness due to late arrival (10:10 in Birmingham) of earliest flight.

2. Minutes of 11th Meeting

Darwyn Sumner had previously distributed the Minutes for the 11th Meeting on 25/7/11 and sent them again on 11/12/2011.

(The 12th Meeting was the AGM at Birmingham in September)

3. Matters arising – not dealt with on agenda

4. Officers Reports

The Chairman

1. GL told us that much of what he had to say was in the bulk of the agenda, he offered thanks to Mark and the other organisers of the Conference which went very well, to Craig and Mandy who were attenders at NFBR and indicated that whilst he had not attended the NBN Trustees meeting due to a clash with another important meeting at ERCCIS he had briefly seen the Minutes to the recent meeting.

Treasurer

2. NC Nicky was unable to attend but sent an email to the Directors as follows:

I have attached an updated spreadsheet re member renewals, an updated spreadsheet re members emails for the private forum, plus a financial statement to 9th December 2011.

Conference :We still have £220 to receive from bookings from the conference. BVSC have been paid. Please let me know if there are any other expenses that need paying arising from the conference. At the moment we made a loss of £1,171 which will come down to £950 once all the booking fees are in.

Membership 2011-12: 16 LRCs paid up so far. Awaiting payment from 24 others (c£6,800 expected). We have had enquiries for (new) membership from Essex & Notts, plus Martin Horlock is interested in becoming a director (east of England - where there is very poor coverage).

Our bank account stands at £13,374 as of yesterday. With the expected income from membership fees and the conference booking fees we should reach £20,000 by end of financial year minus any forthcoming expenditure such as room bookings, Directors travel, Darwyn's costs, plus the upfront salary for the new officer - for the first month?

5. Issues for discussion & resolution

a. ALERC National Coordinator (ANC)

1. [1] GL provided a summary of the current status, remarking about the speed with which progress had been made, from nothing to interview in the space of 3 weeks. He indicated that as ALERC chairman (GL) was to be the line manager for this post this was very satisfactory as this ensured that the ~40% of the post's time was devoted to ALERC issues.

Of the ~20 applicants the list had been shortened to 5 (one of which had dropped out as they had obtained other employment), this work had been carried out by Mark Wills, Gary Lewis and Paula Lightfoot. The candidates to be interviewed on 14th December (tomorrow) are Valeria Wheeler (ex National Trust), Sarah Shaw (ex NBN support on NBN Forum), Ed Santry (ex Sheffield WT) and Tom Hunt (rECOrd).

The post is to be based in York for a variety of reasons (good travel links, access to partners, the offer of hosting the post with no overhead costs) and will be for a period of 2years 3 months. SW remarked about the notice that the successful candidate may be required to give to their current employer and it was concluded (also taking into account the busyness of GL in the run up to Christmas) that the "target" start date would be 9th January 2012.

MW has details of the finances, ALERC funds will be needed to "front-load" the post as other payments from partners will be made in arrears, funds are available also for travel and equipment.

b. General issues

[2] Process for ALERC input to consultations etc

This topic was not addressed as such, discussion immediately turned to the role of the ANC in such matters (see below) followed by the introduction of the Draft Work Plan into the debate. This may account for the reason why the titling of the ANC Work Programme has been termed "Processes and procedures" by some.

1. All - stick to the agenda (request by Company Secretary)

Brainstorming - [5] Work Programme for ANC*

* aka "Processes & procedures", "Procedures etc."

Directors then brainstormed ideas for the tasks that the ANC should perform, this took place in two parts, firstly as general ideas based upon the JD and other perceived needs (this process was necessarily incomplete and GL asked for the **discussion to continue via emails**) and secondly via a detailed work-through of the "Draft Work Plan 2011" prepared by Aisling Carrick and previously distributed

• Part 1: General brainstorming:

[3] ALERC funds used for LRC project work - development of a process This was briefly raised as it related to a topic previously raised regarding lists of funding opportunities - which the ANC should be aware of. The full treatment of the topic is below.

Meet up with Directors at their LRCs

Meet up with a wider range of LRCs either through their Regional meetings or specific visits

Start the Accreditation process within 6 months

Seek further funding to extend the ANC post

2. All - to come up with more ideas for the work programme as a matter of some urgency since the ANC will need to be able to work to a plan

• Part 2: Draft Work Plan

See f. (below) for a continuation of ideas arising re the ANC Work Programme

c. Accreditation

1. Not dealt with as a specific item, but referenced in several other topics (above and below)

d. NBNT

1. Not debated

e. ALERC Conference 2011

1. Not debated specifically but some issues did arise and are mentioned elsewhere in these Minutes

Draft Work Plan

f. Website

1. Mark Wills gave a brief account of progress, since the site was developed using a Content Management System (CMS), Directors may have access to pages related to distinct areas of responsibility. GL would like a "Chairman's rant" page

After the close of the meeting, most Directors stayed on for an hour or so as MW demonstrated tools which Directors may use to edit material on the site

g. Establishing priorities and work programme

1. Gary Lewis had produced a short paper "ALERC Priorities" to outline ALERC priorities and objectives for the short term and this had been followed up by Aisling Carrick "Draft Work Plan 2011" (distributed 23 August 2011) which was then studied closely in order to determine progress which had been made and to determine areas of responsibility for ANC and others. The following table reproduces that plan, 2 extra columns added, the Green/Amber/Red shading is hopefully self explanatory, the last column (greyed) contains comments made at the meeting - please check these as they may contain additional actions.

ALERC Aims

Work within the ALERC community

	Objective		Action	By	Completion date		Comment
1	To launch a new ALERC website. This to be the key source of information and means of communication for the ALERC membership and a source of information for external bodies which interact with ALERC. The website to be managed and maintained by ALERC Directors, to include an interactive forum, and to host all relevant ALERC information including minutes of Directors' meetings and information relating to the accreditation process.	1.1	Develop website	MW and website working group	31/07/2011		ongoing, see above
		1.2	Test and provide comments	All Directors	31/08/2011		
		1.3	Launch new website	All Directors	ALERC Conference (29/09/2011)		
2	To organise an annual conference for ALERC members and members of other LRCs	2.1	Set date and advertise	All Directors, ALERC Officer	Annually		completed 2011, ANC to do in future
		2.2	Organise programme	All Directors, ALERC Officer	Annually		
3	To achieve full geographic coverage for ALERC across the UK Including representation of all countries on the ALERC Directors' board	3.1	Recruit a director from Scotland	All Directors	ALERC Conference (29/09/2011)		completed
		3.2	Recruit a director from Northern Ireland	All Directors	End 2012		contact Damian McFerran
		3.3	Increase membership by 10 LRCs from 2010/2011 level	All Directors	?		ANC task + Directors
		3.4	Recruit all LRCs to ALERC	All Directors	End 2015		

3. WP 3.2 Investigate the recruiting of Director from Ireland

4	To recruit an ALERC officer	4.1	Agree a job description	All Directors	30/09/2011?		completed
		4.2	Identify potential sources of funding	All Directors?	30/09/2011?		
		4.3	Secure funding	All Directors?	30/09/2011?		
		4.4	Advertise position	All Directors?	31/10/2011?		
		4.5	Recruit officer	All Directors?	31/11/2011?		
		4.6	Agree officer work plan	All Directors	Next Directors' meeting?		
		4.7	Manage officer	?	Ongoing		
		4.8	Review officer work plan	All Directors	3 times per year at each Directors' meeting		actions in these minutes + each Director's meeting
5	To carry out an audit of the IT tools and systems LRCs have developed	5.1	Create an online database accessible to Members through the ALERC website? Or set up a web-based survey?	MW and website working group?	End 2011??		Discussed by MW, this task to be carried out by ANC. Suggestions included Job logging and TC asks for liaison with BRERC due to previous work

6	To ensure ALERC fulfils all legislative requirements as a Community Interest Company	6.1	Complete an Annual Return for Companies House	ALERC Secretary	End July each year		ongoing, update required for new Directors, DS to complete for latest 2
		6.2	Complete a financial return for Companies House	ALERC Treasurer	End of each financial year?		
7	To introduce and maintain a programme of ALERC accreditation for member LRCs, with the aim of having at least 50% of ALERC LRCs accredited to the standard level by 2015.	7.1	Review the Accreditation guidance document produced in 2011	All Directors	End 2012, and annually thereafter		see Action below
		7.2	Move agreed version (in PDF format) to ALERC website	?	End 2012		Guidance (Handbook 2.12) is on the website as is the LRC status
		7.3	Open accreditation Scheme for applicants	All Directors	?		see Action below, by end of March 2012, assessments to begin by Autumn 2012
		7.4	Assess 10 LRCs per year	ALERC Officer	?		

- 5.1 IT tools audit

4. MW/ANC to collaborate on web system

5. All to contribute

- 7.1 Review the Accreditation guidance document produced in 2011

The Accreditation documentation needs reviewing

6. DS/GL to gather together all relevant documents into a package (GL to obtain LRC responses to scheme arising from the survey carried out by Bill Butcher)

7. All (after receipt of above package) to assist in review

- 7.3 Open accreditation Scheme for applicants

8. Somebody? - to email/Forum/website invitations to all LRCs for expressions of interest in participating in the next round of Accreditation assessments

Work with outside bodies

8	To develop and introduce processes by which ALERC has regular dialogue and input into legislation and policy issues, interacting with DEFRA, JNCC and the Country Agencies	8.1	Develop ALERC policies on.....	ALERC officer and Directors	?		ongoing, both ANC and Directors
		8.2	Respond to relevant consultations	ALERC Directors	Ongoing		
		8.3	Represent ALERC at relevant meetings	ALERC Chair and Directors	Ongoing		
9	To develop and maintain relationships with NBN Trust.	9.1	Represent ALERC on NBN Trust Board	ALERC Chair	Ongoing, biannual meetings?		Gary Lewis
		9.2	Provide representation to NBN Technical Steering Group	An ALERC Director/LRC staff member?	?		ANC or coopt if technical expertise is desirable
10	To develop and maintain relationships with IEEM and practitioners in the ecological consultancy sector This to lead to increased use of LRC data by consultants, and also improved data flow to LRCs of data they gather.	10.1	Assist NBN Trust with running a training course for ecological consultants on biodiversity data use, to be incorporated into IEEM's Professional Development programme.	An ALERC Director	By end 2012		ANC

11	To promote use of LRC data by ecological consultants	11.1	Work with NBN Trust to create a 1 page PDF for Local Authority planners on standards for biodiversity data in support of planning applications	An ALERC Director	By end 2011		completed
		11.2	Work with NBN Trust to look at incorporating clear standards on biodiversity data into the 'standing advice' given by the country agencies to Local Authority planners.	An ALERC Director?	?		ongoing
		11.3	Provide LRC boundary datasets to NBN Gateway	CS?	By end 2011		completed
12	To develop and maintain relationships with the wider recording community, including BRC, NSS and NFBR This to facilitate data flow between all relevant parties.	12.1	Represent ALERC on NFBR Council	CS/MR	Ongoing, x meetings/year		Craig & Mandy
		12.2	Work with NBN Trust on developing standard Data Exchange Agreements between NSS and ALERC members	ALERC Officer	Ongoing...		ANC

- Other issues

Publicity, news, networking, press releases etc.

These issues need to be incorporated into the ANC's work schedule, TF suggested targetting news items at appropriate media, DS suggested a printed newsletter, TC reminded us of the "Meet the species" initiative and its links with next year's Olympics. Bioblitzes were also mentioned. All were in agreement on the need to sell ourselves.

9. Action - Directors

10. Action - members

Regional representation

Directors were concerned to ensure that each LRC had a Director who could serve as a point of contact with ALERC so we fiddled about with a map of the UK regions again.

11. DS to distribute simple regional maps for discussion/regional allocation

Work Plan

The above table is based upon Version 0 of the the Work Plan devised by Aisling Carrick. It is a document which will have various versions over time as actions are fulfilled and revised.

12. AC to produce Version 1 of the Work Plan

h. Working groups

Removed due to time constraints but issues arose later

i. Company work

- Proposal for Martin Horlock (Norfolk) to be elected as Director (from Teresa Frost 5/12/11) - accepted

13. Contact Martin to tell him

14. CR - Add Martin to ALERC mail group

Other items from "b. General Issues"

- **[4] NE SLA outcomes etc (strictly speaking "MoA" and termed as such in the following)**

The recommendation from GL is that LRCs should sign the MoA, ALERC achieved a result (the VAT issue). The current MoA ends in 2013 when JNCC, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Natural England will merge (any ideas for the name of the new body?) and thus any new MoA will reflect the needs of all 4 of these agencies/interests.

MW asked if we could spell out (to membership etc.) exactly what ALERC had done to negotiate these MoAs,

this was supported by GL.

15. Description of MoA negotiations to be added to any ALERC publicity

• **[3] ALERC funds used for LRC project work - development of a process**

Directors were agreed in principle to the idea of using ALERC funds for projects. There were a number of caveats expressed:

That we should determine how much money was available

16. NC to determine amount at some appropriate time

That it should be a project which benefits all LRCs

That it could be broader, perhaps supporting an NSS (which would as a consequence help all LRCs)

That it might only benefit some LRCs (e.g. by supporting a Recorder scheme as detailed by Sally Rankin at our conference)

17. All to debate

That we assemble a list of projects

18. All + ANC

GL acknowledged the source of this idea, Devon's LRC

6. Any Other Business

a.

Proposal that we write to the LRCs of the retired ALERC Directors to thank them for the contribution that they have made to ALERC (DS)

19. GL to write to Adam & Charles to formally thank them (if this has not already been done)

b. Scottish issues

Alexa Tweddle was present at this meeting and took the opportunity to outline some of the issues that were of interest to Local Records Centres (still a disliked term up north) in Scotland.

She began by referring to BRISC's (Biological Recording in Scotland) petition which lobbied the Scottish Government to "establish integrated local and national structures for collecting, analysing and sharing biological data to inform decision making processed to benefit biodiversity". In response to this petition, the Scottish Government's Biodiversity Science Sub-Group had produced a number of recommendations, one of which was that "The Scottish Government, SNH and others should establish a Scottish Environmental Information Forum (SEIF), whose role should be to develop a strategic approach to the collection, collation and sharing of biological data across Scotland". Unfortunately, for the past 12 months there has been no progress on establishing a SEIF as the person within SNH whose responsibility it is has been ill. However, she has recently returned to work. (As an aside AC said that there was a similar initiative in Wales, driven by CCW and that whilst she was aware of meetings she wasn't aware of anything arising from it). AT thought that this recommendation was particularly pertinent for ALERC and hoped that it might result in the setting up of standards for data sharing (especially amongst NSSs) and that there might be assistance to set up other LRCs and improve communications and willingness to share data. She remarked upon SNH's stance to LRCs, telling us that they supported the Fife LRC but not any others, several of those based in museums and simply static 'data collections'.

c. Training

Mandy spoke of the "Proposed Withdrawal of University of Birmingham Biological Recording Courses", Directors were interested in what FSC had to say about the situation as many of their courses were intended to back up this course. There was some speculation as to where the slack might be picked up, some thought it unlikely that FSC would do so but others thought that other Universities might, perhaps the Open University. NFBR are in the process of responding to the closure but it is thought to be a fait accompli.

DS suggested reviewing available alternatives and publishing on our website. SW supported this and this led to a discussion of the ALERC Working groups, at the 2010 conference we had a number of members who had expressed an interest in Training, Tim recollected that he was one of them.

It was felt that the time was appropriate to resurrect (is that the right term? they are like spy "sleep-

ers” that we are waking up to go into action). MW has all the “volunteer” sheets from that conference, listing all those that wanted to involve themselves in training.

20. MW to provide that list

21. DS to see if he has it elsewhere

22. Training Sleepers to be awoken (liaise with ANC)

d. Local Habitat Surveillance

This is the text from Oliver Grafton received by GL:

Hopefully you, as chair of ALERC, have received some initial information from Kathryn Everitt about an opportunity for local partnerships to tender for a Natural England project to pilot local habitat surveillance. I'm conscious that this may not have included any specific details about the work itself. Once our internal procurement hurdles are finalised the full specification will be available via the Bravo system. For now I can offer the briefing below which offers a little more context to the work. Can ALERC circulate amongst LRC's in England?

“The aim of the contract is to explore whether more targeted survey of a structured sample of sites can be used to provide reliable information on the status of priority habitats throughout England as part of a consistent national framework. The work will run from January 2012 till December 2013.

Natural England would like to develop more structured local habitat surveillance as part of a broader strategy. We are keen to adopt more targeted surveillance and monitoring of priority habitat condition against a consistent sampling framework. This sample framework will help detect and assess changes in the condition of existing priority habitat within different management regimes at a national, but also more local landscape scales (e.g. National Character Area, Nature Improvement Area). In pursuing this it is important that Natural England secure condition monitoring on reference sites outside the SSSI and higher level environmental stewardship sites we monitor ourselves, and that the methodologies are complementary.

This contract is to explore new approaches and practically test a more integrated way of capturing information on habitats in which local communities determine how the local coordination is achieved. This work is particularly focused on exploring approaches to monitoring habitats, but NE acknowledges significant opportunity to incorporate associated species surveillance on the same reference sites. We envisage the work being commissioned at a regional scale and are particularly keen to see proposals with clearly collaborative local partnership building on previous investment by Natural England in local biodiversity data. Similar work is already being progressed within Yorkshire & the Humber so we are interested in proposals from other areas.

Each partnership would be required to identify a sample of sites sufficient to detect habitat change at a landscape scale; adopt survey methods compatible with Natural England led Integrated Site Assessments and national sample survey work; and commission professional and/or voluntary work to survey each site at least every five years. The findings and outputs of the pilot will help inform future investment by Natural England in local data partnerships across England.”

e. The ExeGesIS survey

ExeGesIS have sent around a survey that they are conducting on behalf of JNCC. Since it is putting all LRCs to the trouble of completing it, it was suggested that it might be useful to have details on our website. Surprise was expressed that advance notification of this initiative had not been received by ALERC

f. Local Nature Partnerships and NIAs

Teresa mentioned that these initiatives are not really taking data needs and partnerships into account, we need to make our presence (and existence) felt.

g. Publicity

Darwyn mentioned the Conference Report by Aisling, Mandy and Paula, produced in a very efficient timescale after the conference but which had not yet been distributed amongst members. He felt it extremely important for ALERC to tell members about everything we have done on their behalf.

h. CCW and SNH representation on the National Co-ordinator's steering group,

The need for Gary and CCW/SNH to follow up details of the funding stream which is being used by DEFRA?

23. GW, AC, AT

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman but other Directors stayed on, DS and TC going through the notes from the meeting and MW demonstrating the website editing tools to everyone else (see 5f)

7. Documents associated with these Minutes:

a. ALERC Work Plan

Circulated and maintained by AC

b. Wales Environmental Information Steering Group WEISG Update paper for November 2011 WBP (2)

c. WEIF WEISG WBP Data Sharing Charter for Public Third and Private Sector Organisations in Wales

Distributed by AC to Directors on 16th December 2011

8. Date(s) of next meeting(s)

24. DS to initiate a Doodle for February Meeting

Chairman