

Minutes of the 14th meeting of ALERC Wednesday 15th February 2012: 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. Wednesday 15th February 2012, 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 13th Meeting

Minutes for the 13th Meeting were sent out on 16/12/11, revised on 13/01/2012 and 17/01/12 (the email enclosing this final version included a separate listing of the Action points below)

1. All - stick to the agenda (request by Company Secretary)
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
3. WP 3.2 Investigate the recruiting of Director from Ireland
4. MW/ANC to collaborate on web system
5. All to contribute
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
8. Somebody? - to email/Forum/website invitations to all LRCs for expressions of interest in participating in the next round of Accreditation assessments
9. Action - Directors
10. Action - members
11. DS to distribute simple regional maps for discussion/regional allocation
12. AC to produce Version 1 of the Work Plan
13. Contact Martin to tell him
14. CR - Add Martin to ALERC mail group
15. Description of MoA negotiations to be added to any ALERC publicity
16. NC to determine amount at some appropriate time
17. All to debate
18. All + ANC
19. GL to write to Adam & Charles to formally thank them (if this has not already been done)
20. MW to provide that list
21. DS to see if he has it elsewhere
22. Training Sleepers to be awoken (liaise with ANC)
23. GW, AC, AT
24. DS to initiate a Doodle for February Meeting

3. Matters arising – not dealt with on agenda

4. Officers Reports

- Chairman.
- Treasurer (see email)
- (1) **ALERC National Coordinator**
 Tom to give us an update as to where he is and his programme for the next couple of months. As Directors we need to agree what it is we want to get out of his attendance at various meetings etc and agree his work plan
- Specific meetings attended (if any)
 1. Defra English Biodiversity Stakeholders Group – Feb 22nd
 2. IEEM Data Management meeting – Feb 29th
 3. IEEM Conference – March 21st
 4. Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum – May 24th

5. Issues for discussion and resolution

a. General issues

b. Accreditation

- (2) **Review of Standard Criteria**

This is important as we need to agree them so Tom can prepare for the official launch planned for 1st May. I have sent out all I have to help with the decision making process. I would like to bring this to a resolution at the meeting if at all possible.

c. Establishing priorities and work programme

- (3) **Work Programme**

Can all Directors look at this and bring along any proposed amendments to the meeting or let Aisling know beforehand. I would like to be able to agree this as a live document at the meeting and then it will become a standing agenda item as it will be an evolving document.

d. Website

(4) Mark has sent out the sitemap for the website. We need to agree who is responsible for what sections of the site or whether Tom takes responsibility for it. Tom needs to have an input on this as I do not want to overload him to the detriment of other outputs

e. ALERC Conference

(5) We need to agree a date and venue etc so Tom can start booking and getting flyers out in due course. I think September has been good up to now, but am happy for alternative opinions. We also need to think of a theme for this year.

f. NBN

g. NFBR

Report from Craig and/or Mandy

h. Working groups

i. Company work

- Annual Returns + Financial Returns

6. Any Other Business

- Tim Corner: I would like a discussion on Indicia.

Can we organise a dedicated LRC meeting to discuss Indicia and on-line recording from an LRCs perspective rather than from a national/government perspective. Its potential impact on our roles in the recording community and data handling.

Is it good for LRCs that we all use Indicia rather than our own current and developing local systems that may have better validation whilst meeting national and international standards? What have our users (not just national government users), local, regional and national expressed as their desire?

OPAL's recent approach promoting Indicia to many recording groups seem to have generated much confusion and concern. Indicia has been provided with national platforms to promote it and I am concerned that we have not really had an opportunity to discuss whether it will meet our needs, particularly if the impact or intention is to replace the way in which we manage species data.

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

Minutes of the 14th 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:??

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)

2. Minutes of 11th Meeting

Minutes for the 13th Meeting were sent out on 16/12/11, revised on 13/01/2012 and 17/01/12 (the email enclosing this final version included a separate listing of the Action points below)

1. All - stick to the agenda (request by Company Secretary) **completed**
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 of this meeting**
3. WP 3.2 Investigate the recruiting of Director from Ireland **TH & GW to deal with after the meeting**
4. MW/ANC to collaborate on web system **ongoing**
5. All to contribute **ongoing**
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) **Accreditation: completed**
7. All (after receipt of above package) to assist in review **Accreditation: ongoing**
8. Somebody? - to email/Forum/website invitations to all LRCs for expressions of interest in participating in the next round of Accreditation assessments **too soon**
9. Action - Directors **ongoing**
10. Action - members **ongoing**
11. DS to distribute simple regional maps for discussion/regional allocation **completed**
12. AC to produce Version 1 of the Work Plan **completed**
13. Contact Martin to tell him **completed**
14. CR - Add Martin to ALERC mail group **completed**
15. Description of MoA negotiations to be added to any ALERC publicity **completed**
16. NC to determine amount at some appropriate time **ongoing**
17. All to debate **ongoing**
18. All + ANC **ongoing**
19. GL to write to Adam & Charles to formally thank them (if this has not already been done) **completed**
20. MW to provide that list **ongoing**
21. DS to see if he has it elsewhere **ongoing**
22. Training Sleepers to be awoken (liaise with ANC) **TH & GW to deal with after the meeting**
23. GW, AC, AT **(CCW & SNH representation) - dealt with during the meeting (see Matters arising below)**
24. DS to initiate a Doodle for February Meeting **completed**

3. Matters arising – not dealt with on agenda

CS pointed out a date error

1. DS to correct and redistribute Minutes #13

Gary Lewis will send a letter to Welsh and Scottish Assemblies to acquaint them with ALERC and the ALERC National Coordinator and offer our services and collaboration

2. GL & TH with advice from AC & AT

4. Officers Reports

a. The Chairman

- GL welcomed Martin and Tom to ALERC

b. Treasurer

- NC Nicky was unable to attend but sent a summary as follows:

Membership/Financial Summary to 4th February 2012:

Balance at last meeting (to 9th Dec) - £13,374

Income - further LRC subs received by BACs - 2x£500 + 2x£200 = £1,400

Expenditure - web-hosting expenses (Mark) - £47.66

Balance on 4th February 2012 = £14,739

Notes:

- Cheques received to pay in - 2x£350 + 2x£200 plus £100 for 5 late conference fees
- Near future balance - **£15,939 (=20 LRCs paid up)**
- Still chasing membership subs for **14 LRCs** (£4,175), and 2 late conference fees of £40
- £5000 cheque for ALERC's contribution to Tom's post sent before Christmas but still not cashed?
- Possible end of year (31 March 2012) balance (£15,939 + £4,175 + £40 - £5000) = **£15,154**
- Still to come - ALERC expenses and Companies House expenses

I will need all expenses claims to be paid by end of March please, and I will be chasing late payers when I get back from leave on 20th Feb.

c. ALERC National Coordinator (ANC)

- (1) ALERC National Coordinator

Prior to the meeting, Tom Hunt sent Directors a spreadsheet listing his outputs to date.

3. TH & GL to provide quarterly summaries of ANC work priorities which had been addressed

- Specific meetings attended

Tom had attended two meetings recently, details of these and the following forthcoming meetings will be provided as summaries in due course. Forthcoming ones are:

- Defra English Biodiversity Stakeholders Group – Feb 22nd
- IEEM Data Management meeting – Feb 29th
- IEEM Conference – March 21st
- Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum – May 24th

4. TH & GL: "I like the idea of a monthly resumé of meetings that could be placed on the forum and as an attachment to the minutes" (outcome of an issue debated before, during and after this meeting)

- Membership

Tom had gathered together a range of databases (including discontinued ones) used by various Directors, amalgamating them all into one centrally held list. Tom is now the sole source of lists required for various functions. Theresa Frost requested that Tom add **ALERC Forum username** to his lists and DS asked for **FTE** (*Full time equivalent* = annual proportion of LRC work, on a scale of 0 to 1). DS also asked that an eye be kept on DPA requirements.

5. Investigate the embedding of query system into ALERC website

Tom also discussed his meeting with Scottish LRCs accompanied by Alexa Tweddle, Alexa showing us an outline map of all the LRCs. They undertook jointly to contact all Scottish LRCs introducing ALERC and SBIF. DS mentioned BRISC's involvement.

6. DS to send BRISC link to Directors

5. Issues for discussion & resolution

a. General issues

- UK All Party Parliament Group (APPG) on Biodiversity

Discussions on government initiatives led to a reminder about the current UK government enquiry, the

UK All Party Parliament Group (APPG) on Biodiversity.

The purpose of the All Party Group is to provide a forum for cross party Parliamentarians, senior policy makers, academics, leading industry figures, and other interested parties to have an informed discussion on all aspects of protecting biodiversity in the UK and abroad. Their primary role is to make best use of this forum to help facilitate Parliamentary debate on

biodiversity.

In November the APPG launched a members' inquiry into 'Planning & Biodiversity' Danny Stevens (APPG Secretariat) told us that "The Government has committed to "retain protection and improvement of the natural environment as core objectives for local planning." It has also stated that the planning system will contribute to the overall objective of no net loss of biodiversity". and then detailed the Inquiry which APPG had initiated and which involved consultation with interested parties.

ALERC have not been involved directly with this but our partners NBNT and NFBR have

7. DS to send APPG materials and contacts to TH to help him track developments

- IEEM and data from consultants

It was noted that there was currently an opportunity to influence policy on data management by IEEM members that would be of mutual benefit.

8. All to discuss the development of an IEEM/ALERC Consultant publicity leaflet re data sharing

b. Accreditation

- (2) Review of Standard Criteria

This topic had been discussed at length in Director emails recently. We need to review the current guidelines so that by the end of March we are able to agree the final Criteria.

Tom Hunt had gathered together numerous documents, Bill Butcher's Report and Guidebook together with as much information as were available on the online questionnaire and the notes from the two Pilot Schemes (Cambridgeshire & Lincolnshire)

1. It was agreed that in view of the above timescale there was no opportunity to take the Criteria back to the ALERC members again and thus Directors would carry out the review prior to launch (1st May) by which time they had to be fit for purpose.
2. Directors debated the 2 tier system, the consensus was that whilst we did not wish to dispose of this system (the second tier acting as an aspirational incentive), we should not allow the 2nd tier to act as a barrier to implementation.
3. The two pilots should be used as a source to determine "fit for purpose"

9. TH & GL

4. The report (see pp 5 & 6 of LRC Accreditation System - Final Report) was then examined briefly as follows:

Section	No.	Criteria	Comments	
Organisation fundamentals	1	The LRC is partnership led	OK	
	2	The partnership includes, as a minimum, local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation NGOs and voluntary recorders	OK	
	3	Impartiality is demonstrated in its constitution and policies	OK	
	4	The LRC complies with the Environmental Information Regulations	Reword to allow for future changes in legislation, along the lines of "comply with all relevant legislation"	
	5	The LRC has the legal status to be able to enter contractual agreements, either as an independent incorporated body or a part of a larger organisation	OK	
	6	The LRC is accountable and transparent for its business and financial performance	OK	
	7	The geographical area covered does not overlap with any other LRC	It was noted that there would be difficulties particularly in Scotland, suggest rewording to cover only terrestrial boundaries	
	8	The LRC proactively engages with its users and providers	OK	
	9	The LRC employs sufficient professional staff, including a manager or equivalent, to maintain efficient and effective service to its users and providers	Review of this is required, it was suggested that it could be assessed by other means such as turnaround times	
	10	The LRC is a Process Orientated Organisation	Whilst all considered that a firm and effective Business Management Plan was desirable and that the particular system outlined was arguably one of the best available, Directors expressed apprehension about proscribing a plan that might conflict with one already adopted by an LRC and its hosts and partners.	
1	Independent process steps are identified			
2	Tasks, responsibilities and authority of individuals are known			
3	Continuous improvement of processes			
	4	All staff undertake Continuing Professional Development		

Section	No.	Criteria	Comments	
Data Custodianship	11	The LRC manages species (flora and fauna) and habitat data for its area	OK	
	12	The LRC is responsible for datasets custodianship, and management of dataset copies, by agreement with its partners and data providers	OK	
	13	In its custodianship responsibilities, the LRC observes the Data Exchange Principles of the National Biodiversity Network. These include provision for Data access (13.1), Confidentiality (13.2), Metadata (13.3), Authority transfer (13.4), Transparency (13.5), Personal data 13.6), Charging & Resourcing (13.7)	Slight modification required	
	14	The LRC ensures quality control of its species and habitat data through validation and verification systems	OK	
	15	The LRC acts as a secure archive for the data in its care in perpetuity.	OK	
Products & Services	16	The LRC offers a basic suite of products and services to its users ...	Suggested replacement of the term "GIS" with "geospatial" where appropriate	
	17	Species ...	OK	
	18	Habitats ...	The "single parcel" issue needs to be removed as some LRCs do not map habitats directly to parcels	
	19	Sites ...	LGS to be made non-mandatory	
	20	The LRC promotes high quality species and habitat recording	OK	

The following actions were agreed in respect of the above:

10. All - to comment on the issues flagged in the above table, particular attention is required on those issues flagged red.

11. TF - to undertake the revisions discussed

Mandy Rudd pointed out that there was now a need to emphasise the positive outcomes from Accreditation now that the NE cash incentive no longer acts as a "carrot" to becoming accredited.

GL indicated that there would need to be a fee to cover costs, the figure of £250 was suggested

DS asked that we determine the particular ALERC logo style that accredited LRCs could use on their publicity etc.

c. Establishing priorities and work programme

• **(3) Work Plan**

This is now a standing agenda item and the Work Plan V1.1 distributed at this meeting will be an evolving document.

Directors made the amendments to V1.1 indicating tasks which had been completed/implemented, these are recorded in Work Plan V1.2.

12. AC to update Work Plan from V1.1 to V1.2

The following action(s) were agreed in the meeting and can be found in WP V1.2, Directors should check the Work Plan. This should also be checked for actions not specifically mentioned in this meeting.

13. Various: WP actions: 1.4, 3.2, 4.2, 4.3, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 11.2, 14.3, 15.2

14. [WP 3.2] GL & TH Investigate the recruiting of Director from Ireland

d. Website

Mark has sent out the sitemap for the website. We need to agree who is responsible for what sections of the site or whether Tom takes responsibility for it. A balance needs to be struck between the work MW has in continuing to run it and input from the ANC.

DS mentioned the Dropbox which he had used to help share files with TH (and MW) which are of use in website and other projects

15. DS to invite all Directors to Dropbox

e. ALERC Conference

Directors agreed the same approximate date and venue to allow Tom to start booking and getting flyers out in due course.

16.All - Conference theme ideas required

17.DS - Doodle - for the simple purpose of determining the best date (not specifically for individual availability, but to avoid clashes with other events)

The possibility of introducing a second day for workshops was considered.

18.TH - to ask membership if they think this is a good idea

One idea floated was the subject of training - maybe a speaker from FSC

f. NBN

GL will be attending a meeting next week. NBNT's new patron is Lord Selbourne

g. NFBR

Mandy and Craig gave a brief summary of issues that NFBR are currently dealing with. Their "Join the dots" paper (their future aims and objectives etc.) is still under debate although pretty well completed, they have agreed to seek charitable status, NFBR conference is on 19th-20th April 2012 and Carolyn Steele has now stood down as newsletter editor.

h. Working groups

It was noted that the lists of volunteers (those who volunteered at the 2010 conference) for assisting ALERC in certain specific areas might constitute a valuable resource to ALERC when pursuing some of its aims. In particular it was noted that those who volunteered to help with Training and Marketing + Promotion would be of assistance to the ANC.

19.MW to provide TH with names of those volunteering at the 2010 Conference

i. Company work

- Annual Returns + Financial Returns

The Company Secretary was asked to provide some means of indicating clear timelines for the submission of mandatory documents required for Company House. DS outlined the timeline and methodology for the Annual Returns - a document which basically kept details of our Directors and Company details up to date.

The Financial Returns are required by the end of the Calendar Year after the Financial Year. Thus a Financial Statement could be begun shortly after the end of March, thus allowing a total of 9 months for its completion and submission.

The ALERC Year planner in these Minutes flags these key dates.

6. Any Other Business

a. Local Authority guidance

Alexa Tweddle discussed a letter received from John Cornell regarding relationships with Local Authorities. The consensus of Directors was that ALERC were able to provide general guidance on a variety of matters but that we were unable to assist with specific disagreements.

b. Scottish issues

Alexa Tweddle tells us that the status of Fife LRC is about to change. Its host will change from a Countryside agency to a Local Authority - thus saving £5k pa

c. Local Authority reorganisation

Mandy Rudd requested that ALERC formulate a letter template to be addressed to Local Authorities. The subject of this to be to point out that Local Authority reorganisation may result in LRCs moving away from principles espoused in recognised Accreditation documents.

20.MR + all to formulate letter template

d. Indicia letter (Tim Corner)

Can we organise a dedicated LRC meeting to discuss Indicia and on-line recording from an LRCs perspective rather than from a national/government perspective. Its potential impact on our roles in the recording community and data handling.

Is it good for LRCs that we all use Indicia rather than our own current and developing local systems that may have better validation whilst meeting national and international standards? What have our users (not just national government users), local, regional and national expressed as their desire?

OPAL's recent approach promoting Indicia to many recording groups seem to have generated much confusion and concern. Indicia has been provided with national platforms to promote it and I am concerned that we have not really had an opportunity to discuss whether it will meet our needs, particularly if the impact or intention is to replace the way in which we manage species data.

It was noted that OPAL has been writing to all NSS promoting Indicia. (*editor's note: I've seen no sign of OPAL contact to Dipterists Forum, Stuart Ball manages such things for us*) MW happens to be using it for online recording, he tells us that it simply stores all incoming online recording data in to a silo, it is the same engine that underpins iSpot. Dragonfly people are also using it.

(Darwyn and Mandy came up with a canned beans analogy - salesmen wasting our time pushing their own brand whilst Mandy is happy with her current beans ("our beans are fine"))

7. Documents associated with these Minutes:

a. ALERC Work Plan

Circulated and maintained by AC

b. ANC outputs

c. Accreditation documents

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

21.DS to initiate a Doodle for next Meeting

Chairman
