

Minutes of the 17th meeting of ALERC Thursday 14th February 2013: 10:30a.m. to 4:00p.m. Offices of EcoRecord 16 Greenfield Crescent, Edgbaston, Birmingham. B15 3AU

5 minutes walk from Fiveways Railway Station (trains from New street to Fiveways leave every 10 mins and take 3 minutes) Note that these new offices are around the corner from the previous offices, opposite the sandwich shop.



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 Creators **Darwyn Sumner**
Company Secretary
Association of Local Environmental Records Centres cic
 122, Link Road, Anstey, Leicestershire LE7 7BX
 Tel: 0116 212 5075
 Email: Darwyn.sumner@ntlworld.com
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Directors

Chair **Gary Lewis**
ERC for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
 Tel. 01872 240777 ext 247
 gary.lewis@cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk
 Treasurer **Nicky Court**
Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre
 Capital House, 48-52 Andover Road,
 Winchester, Hampshire, SO23 7BH
 Tel: 01962 832322
 Email: nicky.court@hants.gov.uk
 Company Secretary **Darwyn Sumner**
 122, Link Road, Anstey,
 Leicestershire LE7 7BX
 Tel: 0116 212 5075
 Email: Darwyn.sumner@ntlworld.com
 National Coordinator **Tom Hunt**
 Tel: 07972 131035
 Email: tom.hunt@alerc.org.uk

Director

Mark Wills
North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre

Tel: 01904 641631
 Email: mark.wills@neyedc.co.uk

Director

Tim Corner
Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC)

Third Floor, Bristol Central Library
 College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TL
 Tel: 0117 9349833
 Email: tim.corner@brerc.org.uk

Director

Eric Fletcher
rECOrd

Oakfield House
 Chester Zoological Gardens
 Upton, Chester, Cheshire CH2 1LH
 Tel: 01244 383749
 Email: eric@record-lrc.co.uk

Director

Craig Slawson
Staffordshire Ecological Record

The Wolseley Centre,
 Wolseley Bridge, Stafford, ST17 0WT
 Tel: 01889 880100
 Email: craig@staffs-ecology.org.uk

Director

Teresa Frost
Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre

Tullie House Museum, Castle Street, Carlisle. CA3 8TP
 Tel: 01228 618732
 Email: manager@cbdc.org.uk

Director

Aisling Carrick
Cofnod

Intec, Ffordd y Parc, Parc Menai,
 Bangor, Gwynedd. LL57 4FG
 Tel: (01248) 672603
 Email: Aisling.Carrick@cofnod.org.uk

Director

Simon Wood
Worcestershire Biological Records Centre

Lower Smite Farm, Hindlip, Worcester, WR3 8SZ
 Tel: 01905 759759
 Email: simon@wbrbc.org.uk

Director

Mandy Rudd
Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL)

Tel: 020 7803 4278
 c/o London Wildlife Trust, Skyline House, 200
 Union Street, London SE1 0LX
 Email: mandy.rudd@gigl.org.uk

Director

Alexa Tweddle

Fife Nature Records Centre
 Fife Council, Bankhead House, 211 Tantallon
 Avenue, Glenrothes, Fife, KY7 4QA
 Tel: 08451 555555 Ext: 445361
 Email: Alexa.Tweddle@fife.gov.uk

Director

Martin Horlock

Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service
 R301 County Hall, Martineau Lane
 Norwich NR1 2SG
 Tel: 01603 224458 Mob: 07770 303286
 martin.horlock@norfolk.gov.uk

Minutes of the 17th meeting of ALERC

Present: Gary Lewis (until 3:00), Nicky Court, Darwyn Sumner, Tom Hunt, Mark Wills (chair from 3:00), Tim Corner, Eric Fletcher, Craig Slawson, Teresa Frost, Aisling Carrick, Mandy Rudd (until 3:00). Alexa Tweddle, Martin Horlock

The Secretary apologised for mixing up the meeting numbering in the Doodle (again) - the 16th meeting was, of course, our Conference and AGM.

The Chairman (Gary Lewis) declared the meeting open at 10:30

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Simon Wood

2. Minutes of the 15th Meeting

Minutes for the 15th Meeting were sent out on 1/8/12, no modifications were requested, Action points below:

1. DS to correct and redistribute Minutes #14 **no further amendments were requested**
2. DS to update Application Form and send to both Mark and Nicky **this is now OK but a new version will be needed for this year**
3. GL/TH to send ANC report to Directors **TH distributed updates**
4. DS asked if TH was putting our SBIF notes onto the website, GL indicated that this was planned **this will be done as information becomes available**
5. TH & GL to announce Accreditation Fees **to be put on website**
6. DS to adapt Logo design to produce an agreed "ALERC Accredited" logo for use by LRCs **completed**
7. NC (who had noted errors and inconsistencies in the workbook) to coordinate fixing this with TH **completed**
8. TH to ensure availability of accreditation workbook for LRCs **completed**
9. GL (+TH), Mark & AC to update Work Plan and provide copies to Directors in an upright /portrait format for use at ALERC meetings **completed by DS**
10. DS to produce Conference Flyer in cooperation with MW & TH **completed**
11. GL to circulate NBN strategy document when published **GL was to receive a copy in 2 weeks' time (NC asked that ALERC have an input)**
12. DS to complete Annual Return **completed**
13. DS to initiate a Doodle for February 2013 **completed**

3. Matters arising – not dealt with on agenda

None

4. Officers Reports

a. The Chairman

- GL gave a report on his workload as Chairman of ALERC, his total of 28 days spent on ALERC and related work this year was giving rise to concern with his Wildlife Trust employers even though 23 of these were donated by Gary from his holiday entitlement. He indicated therefore that the situation was not sustainable and asked for support from Directors. Various comments were made as follows: 1) allowance from employers was 5 days 2) 28 days is equivalent to approximately £7k at callout rates 3) everybody wants a piece of ALERC and therefore the Chair 4) TC asked for a breakdown of tasks to be drawn up 5) NC suggested the election of a Vice-Chair (it was indicated that Mark actually fulfils this role as he partially line-manages TH)
- TF speculated that some of the tasks might be taken on by appropriate people who had just left LRCs (e.g. DS) and whilst a number of ideas were floated, a resolution was not achieved until after the meeting

1. All to seek a solution to the Chair's ALERC work overload

b. Treasurer

1. NC Nicky distributed copies of the latest Financial statement and summarised the membership status, 33 LRCs at the last count, somehow that's comprised of 36 with 4 of them as yet unpaid. No response had been received from Herts (fyi Martin Hicks ~ NFBR committee) or Bucks. Regarding the conference, NC indicated that National Trust individuals who attended as non-paying delegates at the last one will not be reinvited. Nicky also observed that several LRCs have shrunk from **Medium** to **Small**

c. ALERC National Coordinator (ANC)

- (1) ALERC National Coordinator (N.B. it was agreed that this item in future be removed as a separate entity in the Minutes, it was felt there was good reason why the contributions from the ANC fit into the overall framework of Minutes topics that are currently established in the Agenda, any ANC items not covered in this way would be placed at or near AOB)

Emails from both Darwyn Sumner (1 Aug 2012 & 4th Feb 2013) and Aisling Carrick commented upon the absence of documentation for ANC accomplishments. Directors were due to receive quarterly summaries of ANC work priorities and reports of activities. At the last meeting only hard copies (photocopied at the meeting then summarised by TH) were available. DS pointed out that concise summaries were of key importance to ALERC for both our publicity and for our mandatory Annual Report.

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

TH distributed copies of reports prior to the meeting (and to DS in advance of this, see 5i) (TH also has an obligation to produce a summary of work for NBN)

Arising from these reports:

- i) The gathering of data and statistics about LRCs using the membership form, some communication has already been made regarding this, NC suggested locating an old review on the topic. MR suggested obtaining data through the regional groups (Directors approved this as a method). **N.B. the objectives of this "survey" has yet to be outlined (DS)**

3. Outline objectives of survey (TH)

4. Contact regional groups to initiate the collecting of LRC data (TH)

- ii) Accreditation (see 5b)

5. Issues for discussion & resolution

a. General issues

- Defra MoA 2013/14 (GL)

(Company Secretary's note: The issue of the Defra MoA has been the subject of a huge amount of email traffic amongst the Directors and LRC managers over the past few months and seems set to continue. The best one can hope from the ALERC Minutes is a brief note about current concerns and perhaps, some time in the hopefully not-too-distant future, a summary of the resolution)

GL met up with Andrew Thompson in January, Defra wanted LRCs to sign up for metrics over which we have no control. The latest MoA version had been sent to **only** to TH this week, omitting GL. GL has told Andrew that TH is not empowered to negotiate on behalf of ALERC/LRCs and that messages need to be sent to Chair and other Directors.

5. TH to ask Andrew to send new MoA annexe to Directors

- Funding beyond 2014 for ANC post

The appointment of Tom Hunt as ANC has raised ALERC's reputation and the expectations of both its members and partner organisations to such a great extent that this post **must** continue.

6. Publicise the work of ALERC, emphasising the need for the continuation of the ANC post at every opportunity - ALL

- NE/EA Triennial Review

The 24th January consultation closed in early February, our submission was in.

b. Accreditation

- Progress (TH)

Four are booked and three are completed.

Previously it had been agreed that the formal approval would be made by the Directors at a meeting, based on a report submitted by the Accreditation team.

7. NC asked for a basic Accreditation tick sheet to be circulated

The next scheduled LRC is TVERC, TH is to visit them on 28th March. Biobank is postponed due to staff changes (manager moved to FSC), Bedfordshire & Luton will take place in June.

It was observed that the Guidance is a bit unwieldy and prone to becoming outdated.

8. Review Accreditation Guidance - All

c. **Work programme**

9. Review Work Plan (All)

ALERC Work Plan

During the course of this meeting, several items were presented which had a bearing on the Work Plan, items 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 were all discussed either wholly or in part. The following summarises these items, text in blue indicating expansion of a topic via a number of new subtopics

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
13	To raise awareness of ALERC and LRCs among the general public	13.1	Release occasional press releases relating to key national or local developments/stories	ANC	Ongoing		
		13.2	Recruit volunteers to assist with Publicity campaign	DS	Initiated via Forum		Louise Bacon has volunteered
		13.3	Summarise Publicity campaign options and present to Directors	DS	Completed at this meeting, see Minutes		Powerpoint presentation made to Directors, see below
		13.3a	Design & place advertisement	DS	Initiated: see Minutes		Design initiated by DS and circulated to Directors, input from MR and LB (see 13.2)
		13.4	Address ALERC website issues to ensure that it acts as a suitable entry point for General Public and Members	DS proposals, ANC + MW	Proposed		See comments regarding ALERC website home page in these Minutes
14	To raise awareness among the ALERC membership of the work carried out by ALERC Directors and others contributing to its development, and to facilitate members' involvement	14.1	Produce a regular e-newsletter to update members, entitled 'The Swan's Legs'	ANC and Directors	Ongoing		Title changed
		14.2	Post updates regularly on the ALERC Forum	ANC and Directors	Ongoing		
		14.3	Make available on the website a map showing key regional contact points among the ALERC Directors.	DS and MW			

15	Develop a programme of ALERC funding for individual/groups of LRCs to carry out small projects of benefit to the ALERC community						
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Wildlife Link: NC suggested joining this group (relates to item 11.2 or thereabouts) as NE had proposed in advertising material that “interested persons” use this as a source of key information and list of key organisations involved in the kind of work that LRCs do - thus missing us out as we’re not members

10.TH to check this issue with NE and Wildlife Link

11.Amend Work Plan under section 11 accordingly

d. Website & Publicity

A. Promoting Local Records Centres (a presentation by DS)

DS introduced this as a refocus: “Promoting Local Records Centres”.

This arose from a couple of initiatives and observations, one being a posting on the ALERC Forum at <http://forum.lrcs.org.uk/viewtopic.php?id=701> asking for volunteers to help build an advertising and publicity portfolio, various emails amongst Directors relating to LRC models and endorsement thereof (see The Model debate) and an awareness of changes and improvements made by our friends and partners in this area of work (e.g. NFBR)

DS gave a brief PowerPoint presentation entitled “Promoting Local Records Centres” which covered basic terms and categories used by the PR industry, indicating how ALERC itself performed within these categories and what kind of a job it was doing to “Promote” the work of its membership (three of our mission tasks start with the term “To promote ...”).

- The model debate

A debate amongst Directors regarding the aims to establish a UK-wide network of LRCs, as mandated by NE and approved via their funded Accreditation system, was conducted via emails and discussions at the Conference,

[see emails from Directors dated 23/10/2012 to 29/10/2012, starting within an email from GL entitled “Information on proposed joint NE/EA MoA” (mistitle) and ending with one from Craig Slawson],

- Advertising

Several ideas have come about, an outline advertisement with high visual impact (but no text yet) was designed and circulated by DS (intended to promote LRCs, NOT ALERC) and an appeal placed by DS onto the ALERC Forum for anyone prepared to assist with such a publicity campaign. One person responded to this appeal, Louise Bacon, who offered to support an ALERC stand and display at two events well attended by naturalists: AES & BENHS.

This offer prompted the idea that anyone manning such an event would need to have good materials to hand in order to promote LRCs. Brochures, banner display, promotional leaflets from every LRC, a big printed map of the UK showing LRC areas, conference flyers, newsletter, access to internet.

- Website

Any attempt at publicity through whatever media will inevitably involve the ALERC website as a major port of call for persons taking an interest in the work of our members. The adequacy of the ALERC website for this purpose was discussed from two aspects, firstly from an artistic design point of view (presented in the above Powerpoint) and secondly from the view of the adequacy of the text to convey key messages. N.B. Only the Home page was dealt with in this regard.

- **Website Home page visuals**

Web design is to a large extent a creative process and can therefore be called more art than science. But because it is intrinsically a medium of presentation, some rules apply. Visual hierarchy is one of the most important principles behind effective web design. You should rank elements on your website based on your business objective. If you don’t have a specific goal, you can’t know what to prioritize.

- **Website Home page text**

According to our constitution,

“The Company’s object is to carry on activities which benefit the community and in particular (without limitation) to represent the interests of local biodiversity and geodiversity record centres

(commonly referred to as Local Records Centres) in the British Isles and to promote standards and services in biodiversity and geodiversity data collation and provision.” (see our Companies House MMA),

the original website read

“The Association represents the interests of Local Records Centres in the UK, promoting standards and services in biodiversity and geodiversity data collation & service provision.”

and the current one began

“Formed in 2009, ALERC is an association between the Local Records Centres of the Britain and Ireland”

and, following an email from DS now reads

“Formed in 2009, ALERC is an association between the Local Records Centres of Britain and Ireland. The Association aims to provide a central voice for the views and concerns of the Records Centre community, whilst building a support-based network of knowledge and advice to meet the needs of its members.”

It is the contention of DS that the phrase “represents the interests” (MMA) has a positive tone as does “promoting standards and services” whilst “voice for the views and concerns” has a negative one and actually represents a shift in our objectives - it is not one of our Objectives.

ALERC is categorised under Companies House as a “professional association” and has long been seen as a means of unifying LRC workers, from disparate backgrounds, fundings, job descriptions and affiliations through line management, under a single profession.

In that regard we have similarities to IEEM

“To raise the profile of **professional** ecological and environmental management and to promote the highest standards of practice for the benefit of nature and society”

or ALGE

“The Association of Local Government Ecologists represents **professional** ecologists working in local government in the UK. In partnership with others, ALGE supports and develops the nature conservation work of local authorities”

both firm and positive statements and yet the word “professional” does not appear on our website.

- **Home page - Twitter**

I have to confess that the quality of the material displayed in this feed exhausts my capacity for tact and diplomacy. No more than 3 feeds at a time are shown, on several occasions these have all been the same twitter, the subject matter is surreal, from papier mache bee models to twee birdie messages - the relevance of this material on our home page is close to zero and the impression it gives to visitors is a negative one.

- **Proposal for a redesign of ALERC Website home page**

Start from the top, redesign a page comprising branding (discrete) and with a visual hierarchy that emphasises Habitat, then Geography (a simple outline map that reflects the idea of a UK-wide network) and use the smallest image to indicate wildlife species (e.g. on upper strapline), include white space judiciously. Lose the Twitter. For text add a short and snappy line near the top that grabs the attention of the first-time visitor to the site and informs them of the subject matter (“Making biodiversity work harder” worked as it indicated we had a sense of humour too). Change “What is an LRC” to “Who do we represent” which now means you can meld the first two paragraphs into the one. Drop the full list of objectives, they can be listed via a link elsewhere, we now have a huge number of accomplishments, link the best of these to one or two of our “Objectives” and do a bit of positive showing off and name-dropping. Get the word “professional” somewhere up near the top to emulate the positive and forward-thinking concepts we see in IEEM and ALGE, also the word “mandated” (e.g. “Mandated by Defra to complete a UK-wide network of LRCs” as map title).

Consider who our users are and what they may want to access straight away when visiting the site.

The above text was distributed with the Agenda and the Powerpoint presentation is included with these Minutes.

Inevitably with so many proposals and observations coming thick and fast in such a presentation, too few firm decisions were made and the material may have to be revisited in the future. The following comments and proposals were made by Directors (necessarily difficult to compile since the Company Secretary was simultaneously making a presentation, responding to Directors comments, attempting to keep on track and taking Minutes).

Eric Fletcher and Tim Corner were broadly in support of 5dA4 (Proposal for a redesign of ALERC Website

home page)

12. MW, EF & TH to address Website Home Page design, incorporating map and fixing twitter feed etc.

The term “mandated” was considered to be excessively firm - to the point of not being strictly accurate, especially now that that project had ceased. DS considered that some form of words were required to maintain the desirability of the notion and status of Accreditation now that it could no longer be considered as a potential prerequisite to funding.

13. How best to promote the desirability of Accreditation - All

Paid advertising (5dA2): Strongly supported by Tim Corner who considered that the kind of ballpark monies outlined in the British Wildlife fees (pdf circulated by DS, a full page is ca £550) would pay dividends in BRERC if appropriately worded/targetted. MR suggested adverts in the Local Authority trade press and NC suggested the IEEM magazine.

14. Still thinking about paid advertising - Working Group to develop further

NC suggested the writing of an article about ALERC - to obtain free publicity in certain areas.

15. ALERC article(s) to be written and targetted - TH (and others?)

It was proposed that a Publicity/Promotion group be extended amongst the Directors and engaging the assistance of persons volunteering via our Working Groups.

16. Working Group: Publicity - to contact DS if they wish to contribute to this initiative - Any Director?

17. TH to be kept in the loop (that's not to say he necessarily has to be part of the Working group)

18. Advertise the Working group on the Forum (best done after we've some more Directors on board - EF and TC please confirm)

With the exception of the above, there were no strong objections to the ideas and observations outlined in the above presentation, Tim Corner seemed particularly taken with the simple phrase in my Powerpoint “**You have to market your success**” - so it seems we're broadly in accord with most of it.

19. Amend Work Plan under section 13 (and possibly section 12) accordingly (DS, All)

e. Regions

(see j for Conference)

- Wales updates (Aisling)

AC reported on recent developments from Wales LRCs. There has been some degree of uncertainty in recent times while waiting for the ‘new Body’ (Natural Resources Wales) to be formed which will take over the functions of CCW, FC Wales and EA Wales. LRCs Wales currently have all Wales Service Level Agreements with all three existing bodies, with varying lengths of time remaining on each of these. The idea of having a single agreement between LRCs Wales, the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales has been raised again recently and is to be looked at again once NRW is formed – this is seen by the LRCs as a positive move. We currently receive no finances directly from Welsh Government.

All four LRCs are fairly stable financially, and differ slightly in the proportion of their funding which comes from Service Levels Agreements, commercial income and one-off projects.

A few recent projects were mentioned:

1. BIS has developed a web mapping system for use with their data and with the idea that it can be used by all the Welsh LRCs to allow us to ‘synch’ our data automatically (currently all Wales data layers are put together as and when required). It is also possible that NBN Gateway data could be pulled into this system.
2. Cofnod recently produced an online Wales Amphibian and Reptile Atlas for ARC, including an online recording facility. <http://arc.cofnod.org.uk/>
3. Cofnod are working on a project for North and Mid Wales Trunk Roads Agent – this covers parts of 3 LRC areas – to create a decision support system pulling in data they hold, data held by the LRCs and again po-

tentially data from the NBN Gateway.

General message from our strategic partners is that increasingly they seem to want data served in data layers, online access, via web mapping rather than the traditional style reports.

- Scotland updates (Alexa)

AT informed us that a new post of SBIF coordinator had been advertised, to run until 31st March 2014.

- Ireland? (MW)

TH has made contact

- Role of regional LRC groups (Mandy)

MR wanted to check how the ALERC regional group communications were working at the regional LRC meetings. Such meetings were seen as an opportunity to convey information to LRCs who might be small or otherwise unresponsive to ALERC.

20. MW to brief MR and MR to feed back on ALERC promotion at regional meetings

TF raised the issue of membership by other bodies, notably BRC, CeDAR and NBN

NC told us that Guernsey and Alderney were asking for an even lower category of membership - for what are essentially 1 man bands (or perhaps even less than 1)

f. **NBN**

TC raised the issue of the changes in access controls on the NBN Gateway. He can no longer access them and feels that this loss of control - concerning which he was not consulted, has eroded trust considerably. A key part of his reassurances to his recorders regarding the security of the data they submit is based upon his reassurances that he is in control.

g. **NFBR**

MR and GL were obliged to cut short their attendance at this ALERC meeting, MW now chairing ALERC meeting

h. **Working groups**

The Publicity group is currently being reformed and has a sizable remit - see above

DS asked what happened to the Training group?

i. **Company work**

DS summarised this as follows:

- **Financial Returns**

Timeline: Year 2012/3 ends March 31st 2013. Then Treasurer has to sort out financial statement and chase auditor, 9 months to get this done or we get fined but it can be sent in earlier.

- **Annual Returns**

Timeline: this is just the same but easier and DS does it (not Treasurer) and gets it in by July 31st.

This job got a lot harder suddenly because we now have an employee, which we didn't have at the time of the last one - so we've done a lot more, hence my request for our "accomplishments" - many thanks to Tom for replying.

Achievements 2012/3

This is a list based upon all our emails since March 2012 + Work Programme + ANC reports + instructions taken in this meeting (for example I have not consulted the ALERC Forum). I propose starting with a full list (a version of the one below), then get each item worded concisely and correctly, then use that list to prepare material not only for CH Annual Report (which will be highly condensed and MUST relate to our stated MAA aims) but also for our own Annual Report (members would like to know - maybe via Newsletter) & other Publicity in various forms.

B. Participated in consultations on:

1. Planning Guidance Review (DCLG Consultation) + attendance at TCPA Seminar (Town & Country Planning Association) "Planning for Green Infrastructure in the New Planning Context"
2. Data quality consultations with NE and BCT (Piltown records)
3. EA/NE Triennial Review (via stakeholder meeting)
4. Participated in consultation exercise on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee's

Report 4, Natural Environment White Paper

5. British Standard 420202 (commented)

C. Involved in steering groups for:

6. NBN Gateway version 5 consultation (Data Access controls for NBN Gateway)

7. Joined Recorder 6 Steering Group + JNCC Online Recording Meeting

8. Membership of NBN Trust + Trustee of same

9. Membership of NFBR (individuals)

D. Publications and guidance:

10. Aided in production of Local Authority guidance leaflet (English & Welsh versions) wrt to new planning regulations

11. Liased with IEEM over best data practices (published in "In Practise September 2012) following survey we conducted in conjunction with IEEM ("IEEM Biodiversity Data Management Meeting")

12. Liased with British Waterways and NSSs and Severn Trent Water over data provision at regional level

13. Biodiversity Data leaflet (NBNT aided)

14. *Article in NBN eNews

15. Article in NFBR newsletter

E. Conducting surveys

16. Data use survey for NBNT

17. ? Invitation to Tender for Biological Recording in the Voluntary Sector: Project 1

18. IEEM data usage survey

F. Attending meetings and conferences

19. Attended inaugural meeting of SBIF (Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum)

20. ~~(consultation on "the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity" - did we do anything?)~~

21. Attended Wales Biodiversity Partnership Conference

22. *ANC meetings with Regional LRC Meeting

23. *Presentation at NBN Conference

24. *Presentation at IEEM meeting

25. *Westminster Briefing: National Ecosystem Assessment

G. Organising events

26. Held annual LRC Conference

H. Promoting LRCs

27. ALERC Newsletters 1 & 2

28. Initiated schemes to promote LRCs (in these Minutes)

I. Supporting LRCs

29. Defra funding for LRCs & Service Level Agreements (=MoAs), *meeting with NE officers

30. Provided a wide range of support through the ALERC Forum

31. Launch of Accreditation

32. *Mentoring of 3 Accreditation LRCs via workshops

33. LRCs Accredited = 1

J. Honours

34. Invited by Defra to submit nominations for consideration for the UK Honours list

Text in blue as compiled by DS and included in Agenda to this meeting, amendments and additions in black.

21. Achievements list to be maintained - DS TH and All (be better in a spreadsheet)

j. **Conference - feedback**

Great success!

22.MW & TH to analyse feedback forms

6. Any Other Business

Online data standards (TC)

The who, what, where. why when, wtf debate

There was a considerable amount of debate on this topic, arising from the use and publication of data which was considered in many areas to be substandard. There have been a huge number of emails amongst Directors on the topic and a lot of discussion on the Forum. So much so that DS indicated that it was not possible to summarise the situation - particularly since it continues to develop.

TH suggested that JNCC might be the lead in this area since they developed and adopted the original standards and model

(DS) There's a lot more to deal with now that we have an employee, I propose that we increase the number of meetings per year back to it's previous number.

23.I didn't get a record of any response to this but according to GL on 13/3/13 Director's meetings are at 3 per year plus the conference (which counts as training in everyone's book) - any comment?

7. Documents associated with these Minutes:

- a. ALERC Work Plan
- b. ANC reports
- c. ALERC Achievements list
- d. Publicity presentation

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

24.DS to initiate a Doodle for next Meeting

Chairman