

Minutes of 30th Directors Meeting - 11.00am Thursday 26th May 2016

Offices of Environment Agency, Kings Meadow House, Kings Meadow Road, Reading RG1 8DQ

Present: Martin Horlock (MH,Chair), Nicky Court (NC), Tom Hunt (TH), Adam Rowe (AR), Mandy Rudd (MR), Craig Slawson (CS), Mark Wills (MW), Marina Flamank: Guest from Environment Agency (MF)

Actions carried forward from previous meetings

Meeting# / Action#	Action item <i>Full description of carried action</i>	Status <i>This column updated as a result of this meeting</i>	Who
22/3	Associate membership of Wildlife link to be progressed on one year trial basis.	Carried forward Annual report required for 2015/16 Agreed to still put in for 1 years membership	NC/MH
22/16	NC to establish DCLG contact re possible new Defra Guidance on LWS and 'introduce' ALERC.	Carried forward (also see update on action 29/1 below) The new Biodiversity DCLG contacts are Tom Selley and Pamela Roberts. TH suggested they could perhaps be contacted once the outcomes of the research by LERCs (London, SEWBREC and Northamptonshire) on the use of Biodiversity data in planning were available. Need to be clear on what we will be talking to them about.	NC
22/21 & 24/2	Request information/update from Bill Butcher regarding offsetting project. To be made available through the forum.	Carried forward MR has asked BB, who has agreed but not yet supplied information.	MR
25/9	Position Statement on working with DEFRA and BMSS present to DEFRA as a letter response from ALERC - Revise position statement, pending further progress Re: Natural England	Carried forward MR: BMSS will be part of Defra's 25 year plan, but we are not yet clear whether the previous draft document will form part of the new doc. Position statement will be produced once 25 year plan is released	IE/MH
26/2	MW&DS to review Company Secretary Role description. MW to finalise the Company secretary's role description and remuneration agreement.	Completed. See 2a this meeting.	MW
28/3	Update board members details on the Companies House website as part of the submission of the annual returns.	Completed. It was agreed that board membership is to be updated annually by Company Secretary as part of the Annual Return.	DS
28/11	Research guidance on the use of colours on websites to ensure website is fully accessible (e.g. make the website accessible to those who are colour blind).	Carried forward	MW
28/24	Suggestions for projects that could potentially fund the ANC post and that fulfil ALERC objectives to be submitted via the	Carried forward	All

	Forum.		
28/27	Circulate the draft ALERC members' code of conduct to the board for agreement.	Completed Code of Conduct was agreed by board – This will be circulated with the membership renewal	TH
28/28	Report back on the outcome of the clarification requested by several local authorities on the European Court of Justice ruling on Environmental Information Regulations.	Carried Forward. No update has been received	NC
28/29	Request suggestions via the forum for ways of changing the website so products and services that might be of use to the LERC community are more prominent.	Carried forward	TH
29/4	NC to draft and circulate a paragraph describing the time limit rules for the role of ALERC Director so it can be agreed and included in the articles of association.	Doesn't appear the Articles of Association can be amended to include the time limit. NC has sought clarification from the CIC association. It may have to be an internal policy document. Carried forward	NC
29/14	MH to contact IE and check if the Strategy and Policy Group willing to be responsible for converting the current ALERC work plan into the ALERC 5 year strategy action plan?	MH stated that due to IE's absence this item has not been progressed. Carried forward	MH/IE
29/15	TH to review ALERC's strategy and action/work plan, note what has been achieved and circulate to members along with a reminder of the new membership prices.	This is tied in with the production of the Annual Report and the membership renewal letter. TH will produce the annual report	TH
29/19	TH to contact BCT to request they update the link to find an LERC on their guidance document from the current link to the NFBR website to the ALERC website.	The outdated link (to the old NFBR LRC database) was in the BCT Survey Guidance document. Carried forward	TH

Actions from this 30th meeting

Action #	Action item	Who
1	Include a poll/vote of members on the location for next year's conference at this year's conference.	TH
2	All Directors to submit a summary of ALERC activities, time spent and costs covered to MH.	All Directors
3	Send documentation on Directors work areas and working groups to potential Directors	AR
4	Write letter to JNCC asking for information on the future of Recorder 6.	MH
5	Send NC full accounts for ANC post, plus income due for this coming financial year.	MW
6	Send report to TH on which LERCs are not conforming to terms of EA agreements.	MF
7	Communicate with member LERCs who are not conforming either directly or via regional meetings.	TH
8	Liaise with MF over a paper on the reasons for the differences in charges.	TH
9	Produce a generic pie chart of LERC income sources using existing sample data which can better reflect the current situation and supply to MF.	TH
10	Provide description to MF of what the Welsh system may be able to deliver in the future.	AR
11	Amend membership form to include a field to commit to accreditation date	TH
12	Amend work plan reporting to be just a year at a time, rather than covering 2-3 years	TH
13	Pass comments on online membership renewal form to TH before 4th June	All Directors
14	Explore options for sponsorship of 2016 conference	MH
15	Expand the accreditation complaints procedure out to become a general ALERC complaints	TH

	procedure.	
16	Talk to Maria Longley, chair of dataflow working group about subsuming the dataflow working group into the NBN dataflow working group.	MR
17	Email any further comments on the Position paper on LERC to charging to MR	All
18	Amend the LERC charging document based on comments above and any further comments and to recirculate to Business Group	MR
19	Business group to look at the use of LERC term (L.E.R.C. Vs LERC/Lurk), plus some of the other older style terminology	MR
20	Produce a draft protocol on how consultations with members are carried out by ALERC	TH

Minutes of the 30th meeting

1. Apologies & Introductions

Apologies were received from Darwyn Sumner (DS).

2. Minutes of previous meeting and outstanding actions

The minutes of the 29th meeting were accepted.

The status of all previously outstanding action items is detailed in the table above. Updates on actions of the previous meeting are as follows:

1. **MR** confirmed that GLA have agreed to release the methodology of the study on the use of Biodiversity data in planning once finished. Completed
2. **TH** confirmed it would not take a huge amount of work to produce data on LA engagement with LERCs. It was agreed to incorporate this work into the ANC work plan. Completed
3. ANC Work programme has been circulated, see item 5b this meeting. Completed
4. **NC** informed directors that it doesn't appear the Articles of Association can be amended to include the time limit on Directors' length of service, but has sought clarification from the CIC association. It may have to be an internal policy document. Carried forward.
5. Contacting of new Potential Directors – see item 2a this meeting. Completed
6. Marina Flamank is in attendance at this meeting. Completed
7. **MW** has provided information on ANC project income to NC. Completed
8. All LERCs who had not renewed have been contacted. Completed
9. Potential member LERCs for 2016-17. See item 3c this meeting. Completed
10. **TH** confirmed the venue has been booked for this year at Birmingham. It was suggested we ask attendees at this years conference.

Action 1: TH to include a poll/vote of members on the location for next years conference.

11. **TH** confirmed the conference date and venue has been circulated via the ALERC forum. Completed
12. Re: Accreditation re-assessment process, see item 7b this meeting. Completed
13. **TH** confirmed that Mark Wills and Lizzy Oddy from the Accreditation Working group will be additional assessors. They will be shadowing TH on 2 assessments each to learn the process. Completed.
14. Is the Strategy and Policy Group willing to be responsible for converting the current ALERC work plan into the ALERC 5 year strategy action plan? **MH** stated that due to IE's absence this item has not been progressed. Carried forward.
15. TH to review ALERC's strategy and action/work plan, note what has been achieved and circulate to members along with a reminder of the new membership prices. This is tied in with the production of the Annual Report and the membership renewal letter. **MH** proposed that Directors' input into ALERC should be included as part of the renewal information. Carried forward.

Action 2: All Directors to submit a summary of ALERC activities, time spent and costs covered.

16. LERC charges paper, see item 8a this meeting. Completed.

17. **MR** confirmed that the Open Data Institute would be willing to speak at this years conference and TH has been in touch with them. Completed
18. **TH** has shared the links to creative commons license information via the ALERC forum. Completed
19. **TH** to contact BCT to request they update the link to find an LERC on their guidance document from the current link to the NFBR website to the ALERC website. **NC** noted that the outdated link (to the old NFBR LRC database) was in the BCT Survey Guidance document. Carried forward.
20. **TH** confirmed finalised letters to Natural England and the Secretary of State have been published on the forum. Completed
21. **MH** Final response letters to Natural England were sent. Completed
22. **TH** Only 2 LERCs were solely using NE's OS license to access OS mastermap, Staffs and Beds. **MF** confirmed that EA are unable to offer an OS contractor license under the terms of their License with LERCs. **TH** ALERC will offer help to those two LERCs. **MR** suggested an approach on behalf of members to Ordnance Survey regarding costs of OS licenses. Completed
23. Doodle poll initiated and meeting booked. Completed

2a – New Directors

- **AR** has been in touch with all prospective Directors listed at the last meeting asking for expressions of interest and level of interest in becoming a Director. Gary Lewis has stated he would like to return as a Director. Lindsay Bamforth (Fife) has tentatively agreed but is concerned about travel time – we've offered the possibility of remote input into meetings, via written submissions, telephone or skype. Clare Blencowe (Sussex) is interested, Nik Bruce (Lancs) has said he'll think about it. No response has yet been received from Camilla Burrows (TVERC), Sara Carvalho (Ecorecord), Bed Deed (Mersey), Charlie Barnes (Lincs). Board need to agree the process for selection.
- **MW** wouldn't necessarily see regional representation as a priority. Focus should be on skills and level of enthusiasm / commitment.
- **AR** has already sent the Director Role Description to everyone on the list.

Action 3: AR to send documentation on Directors work areas and working groups to potential Directors.

- **AR** will ask candidates for a ½ page skills summary by mid-June. Board will then consider appointments via email conversation.
- **CS** tendered his resignation from the board as of the AGM in October, which was accepted by the board. The board of Directors wish to thank Craig for his 7 years of service to the ALERC board of Directors.

2b – Company Secretary Role description

- Updated Role description has been circulated in advance of the meeting.
- **MH** will contact DS to ensure he is aware of the RD

3. Officers reports

3a Chair (MH)

- No specific report tabled. **MH** has spent most of his ALERC time on Natural England over the last 3 months. Still wants to send follow-up letter to Rory Stewart to ask for answers to questions sent.
- Regarding R6, asked if we should write a letter to JNCC asking if an alternative is being proposed if the funding for R6 is withdrawn entirely and what is this alternative? If support is being withdrawn how will NSS and LERCs manage their data holdings? Directors agreed to and ALERC letter being sent to JNCC.

Action 4: MH to write letter to JNCC asking for information on the future of Recorder 6.

- **TH** raised the lack of response to ALERCs input to JNCC on the possible alternatives. **MH** to incorporate raising this into the same letter.
- **MF** will ask JNCC how they are taking users views into account on the decision-making around R6
- **MR** – queried what the total cost to JNCC is. The business model for R6 should include an annual fee to bigger users such as LERCs and NSSs.

3b Treasurer (NC)

- ALERC accounts spreadsheet was circulated
- Income: Total last year would have been £15,380 if everyone had paid in the year. Instead it was £14,430
- Expenditure: £28,575 comprising ANC post £22,800, Conference breaks even, Company secretary costs £1376 (2 yrs), Ecobuild £1,051, NBN membership £350, and other smaller items Running Costs outside of ANC post and Co. Secretary are generally around £800 pa
- Forecast income from LERCs under this year's increased fees, including 3 new members could be £24,350
- **NC** noted that whilst she had been sent project income for the ANC post, she needed more full accounts for ANC post.

Action 5: MW to send NC full accounts for ANC post, plus prospective income due for this coming financial year.

3c Membership (TH)

- Membership renewal and joining procedure document was circulated.
- TH has created membership form on website. Data for LERC stats will also be captured at the same time and the form cannot be completed without the stats. Payment chasing will need addressing – TH suggested milestones and deadlines, these are contained in the Membership renewal and Joining procedure document.
- All agreed to set milestones for completing renewals and chasing payments as set out in TH's document.
- MW updated on Sheffield Biological Records Centre, they did not renew last year and they did not get round to completing the paperwork. They now cannot pay retrospectively for last year but will definitely be re-joining this FY, MW will ensure this happens and chase. MW pointed out to them the importance of consistent membership now we are self-funding the ANC post
- TH – Suffolk asked about cost but never replied to Tom's emails.
- Timescale for this FY sending out renewal docs – end of next week

3d Legal duties

- DS to complete Annual return to Co House and Director changes by end July

4. Environment Agency and LERCs (MF)

4a Presentation by Marina Flamank

- Heading towards getting wildlife data into EA Easimap system.
- Collation in-house costing c. £500k.
- A number of core licensing functions (85 licence types) are set-up with their own spheres of influence and criteria, and 80+ species buffered in the system.
- 21 screening and planning functions identified that will use the data via Easimap.
- A huge time-saver ... things take seconds which used to take days.
- MF reported that only about half of data supplies from LERCs are complete and as per specification in agreements. Funding is now secured so MF will now work on getting better data in.
- ALERC members need to be reminded of the importance of fulfilling the contract they have with EA. Cannot afford to go down the route of NE where funding was threatened by poor performance.

Action 6: MF to send report to TH on which LERCs are not conforming to terms of agreements.

Action 7: TH to communicate with member LERCs who are not conforming either directly or via regional meetings.

- Funding for LERCs varies greatly between £4K and £20k/yr.

- If delivering the same data could this be more standardised? MF happy that they won't all be the same, due to local variations. The ALERC position document on charging (discussed later) may be all the justification that is required.
- Discussion over whether EA are able to support an element of core costs of supporting recorders. EA not allowed to give grants. Need to be treated as and referred to as a customer, rather than a partner.

Action 8: TH to liaise with MF over a paper on the reasons for the differences in charges.

- MF showed a pie chart of typical income sources for a LERC. She has used this frequently over the years, but it is very out-dated.

Action 9: TH to produce a generic pie chart of LERC income sources using existing sample data which can better reflect the current situation and supply to MF.

- EA don't charge for the permit data screening, but up-front licence charges in theory contribute to the costs.
- AR described how Aderyn in Wales will provide a customer-facing website for purchasing data searches. This could be customised to fit all the criteria required by all different EA licences. Data could be supplied in a way that could smoothly export into EA systems.

Action 10: AR to provide description to MF of what the Welsh system may be able to deliver in the future.

- Atlas of Living... discussions followed.

5. National Coordinator

5a. ANC report

- Report circulated. MH asked that it should be amended to reflect more of TH's work on NE meetings, letters, liaison, etc.
- Since report: GiGL Accreditation assessment done.

Action 11: TH to amend membership form to include a field to commit to accreditation date.

Action 12: TH to amend work plan reporting to be just a year at a time, rather than covering 2-3 years.

- TH flagged up concerns about his co-lead role in the NBN verification working group. Fine at the moment, but keen not to get bogged down in old issues. Now have a dedicated verification area on NBN forum.

5b. Work Plan

- No time to discuss now, but need to focus on proactive tasks, not just reactive. These actions will come from IE/MH's action to integrate the ALERC work plan into the ALERC Strategy Action Plan.

5c. Membership – revised joining/renewal process

- Online renewal form developed by TH.
- Should save a lot of time and effort and make the gathering of data from members more effective.
- Renewal invitation emails due to go out by Friday 4th June.

Action 13: All to pass comments on online membership renewal form to TH before 4th June.

6. ALERC conference – Theme of conference

- Suggestions: 'Open data challenges and opportunities'; 'the Open Data environment'.
- Jo Judge, new NBN Chief Executive should not be invited to attend this year
- Workshops/break-out due to return after a few years without them. Suggested themes: Welsh Aderyn/eMapper/Atlas developments; QGIS plug-ins (Richard Burkmar)
- Conference working group: MH has joined, MR, TH and Elaine Wright. NC happy to input ideas.
- MH will explore ideas for conference sponsorship. Tried and failed with NHBS last year. Build UK - may be worth pursuing for 2017 on a building themed conference. MF suggested a large aggregates company she knows.

Action 14: MH to explore options for sponsorship of 2016 conference.

7. ALERC Accreditation

7a Confirmation of LERCs qualifying

- TH had circulated Accreditation reports for Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly and Hampshire Biological Information Centre, along with the Accreditation Renewal report for Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre in advance of the meeting. All three had met the criteria and the Accreditation working group had approved them.
- The board agreed with the decision of the working group.
- NC questioned if the Cornwall disagreement with local recorders had been resolved. TH updated on this, with several further meetings taking place but no final decision on ERCCIS use of the ERICA database had been reached.
- MW outlined the way the accreditation at ERCCIS had been conducted, with a second assessor shadowing TH remotely and completing a full assessment report independently.
- MR stated that the ERCCIS issue had been raised in an NBNT board meeting. It was agreed that ALERC should publicise the story of this situation to highlight the issues once it is resolved.

7b Renewal process

- A paper describing the Accreditation renewal process, as developed by the accreditation working group, was circulated.
- It was agreed to take feedback from Lincolnshire ERC who are the first LERC to be re-assessed before reviewing the renewal process.

7c Complaints procedure

- An accreditation complaints procedure document was circulated
- It was agreed that we should broaden this document to be a general complaints procedure

Action 15: TH to expand the accreditation complaints procedure out to a general complaints procedure.

8. Proposed Open data working group

- MH proposed the formation of an Open Data working group. Suggested it might look towards generating an ALERC-wide open dataset.
- IE suggested it could work with the Data flow working group. He would be keen to keep the number of working groups down.
- MR it should be more linked to Business working group, due to links with business models. All agreed to start an Open Data project within the Business working group.
- AR highlighted the lack of activity of the dataflow working group. It was suggested that this group could be replaced by the NBN dataflow working group. All agreed as this would then bring together other data partners.

Action 16: MR to talk to Maria Longley, chair of dataflow working group about incorporating ALERC group into the NBN dataflow working group.

- MR raised the Open data Institute events and workshops including an upcoming Business Model Course. ODI are really keen to work with LERCs and NBN. MR is going to try and get a place on the Course and will report back on it.
- IE noted that the business development group being proposed as an NBN working group hadn't materialised.

9. ALERC Business Development Group

9a ALERC position document on LERC charging

- MR presented a document written by the Business Development Group describing the factors behind the differential charging by LERCs at a high level.
- AR raised a concern about the term "funding". It was agreed to amend the term funding to income.
- MR agreed and that there are other issues about terminology that need to be resolved as well, as noted on the document
- IE could we highlight and strengthen the elements about the need to incorporate payment for LERC services, as part of big project funding bids.
- MR asked if we should proactively send the document around and if so who to?
- All agreed we should publicise the finished document - CIEEM, NBN e-news, conservation NGOs, DCLG, CEH, BRC
- NC queried the phrase 'Aiming for Full Cost Recovery' and its implications for LERCs that enjoy some in-kind contribution from host organisations. These contributions should be factored in, MR agreed and suggested full cost reporting as an alternative term.

Action 17: All Directors to send through any further comments to MR

Action 18: MR to amend the document based on comments above and any further comments and to recirculate to Business Group.

- It is envisaged this would be the first in a series of position statements and technical guides produced by ALERC
- AR we should look at the style and presentation of these documents to make them attractive and consistent.

Action 19: (MR) Business group to look at the use of LERC term (L.E.R.C. Vs LERC/Lurk), plus some of the other older style terminology.

10a Member engagement

- IE raised the issue of how we engage with our members, and how members' views are taken into account. IE highlighted the recent joint letter between ALERC and NE and how it didn't represent some members' views.
- TH the letter was meant to address the false notions contained in Andy Webb's email to LERC managers.
- IE suggested that ALERC should not have signed the letter, if it wasn't what ALERC members wanted.
- MH there was considerable discussion and the letter was largely amended on the basis of members input into the letter.
- TH the big concern members had in the aftermath of the NE event was that the NE decision and initial email causes partners/potential partners to question their funding of LERCs.
- IE suggested that a proportion of members might just want us to simply take on bigger decisions without consulting. But in some cases, better consultation with members to better reflect members' wishes.
- MW part of the problems that have arisen with some ALERC consultations is that there is no set process for consulting with members. Members don't know what level of consultation to expect and what form it might take, so they form their own expectations which may or may not be met by the way we consult. This is illustrated by the recent Membership price rise proposal.
- MR The outcome of this discussion should be to produce a protocol to engage the membership and consult on things.
- MW: Summary seems to be 1) give ourselves some time to consider and decide whether we should consult or not; 2) Decide what exactly we are asking the members – what information we need? What

questions are we asking them? 3) state what we propose to do and the milestones involved in communication to members

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Action 20: TH to draft protocol on consultations with members

7. AOB

- AR asked whether anyone else has escalated a breach of data license. He will be escalating a breach by a Local Authority who distributed SEWREC data without permission or an agreement being in place. AR will be reporting it to the Information Commissioner's Office.
- NC raised the issue of the registered address and letters still going to the Chester Zoo to Eric Fletcher. MW suggested NEYEDC could take over the registered address. TH suggested that payments (cheques etc) should be sent directly to NC Action NC to change company address?