

Evidence to the National Infrastructure Commission

Formed in 2009, ALERC is an association between Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) in Great Britain. 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.

Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) are not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area. LERCs support and collaborate with a network of experts to ensure information is robust, and make information products and services accessible to a range of audiences including decision-makers, the public, and researchers.

ALERC considers it has relevant evidence to submit in relation to the following question:

10. What changes could be made to the planning system and infrastructure governance arrangements to ensure infrastructure is delivered as efficiently as possible and on time?

ALERC would encourage changes to the planning system and infrastructure governance arrangements which ensure that biodiversity constraints and the need for site-specific ecological surveys are taken into consideration at the earliest possible stage in the infrastructure development process.

We would draw the Commission's attention to the British Standards Publication, *Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development* (BS42020:2013), which states:

“Where available, Local Environmental Record Centres should be approached initially for species and habitat information to inform desk studies.”

It is straight forward to find the record centre in your area of interest, using the map on the ALERC website, here: <http://www.alerc.org.uk/find-an-lerc-map.html>

The British Standards Publication also states that, “Ecological surveys should be carefully programmed into the early phases of the pre-application process. They should also, ideally, be carried out sufficiently in advance of detailed design work to enable the results to be taken fully into account in the design process.” It goes on to note that, “the cost of incorporating biodiversity into the development could be higher if surveys are not conducted until after designs are well advanced.”

LERCs are often the authoritative source for local biodiversity information, including protected species and priority habitats. It is therefore essential that they are approached as early as possible to ensure infrastructure is delivered as efficiently as possible and on time.

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