

Annual Report 2015-2016

Introduction

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.

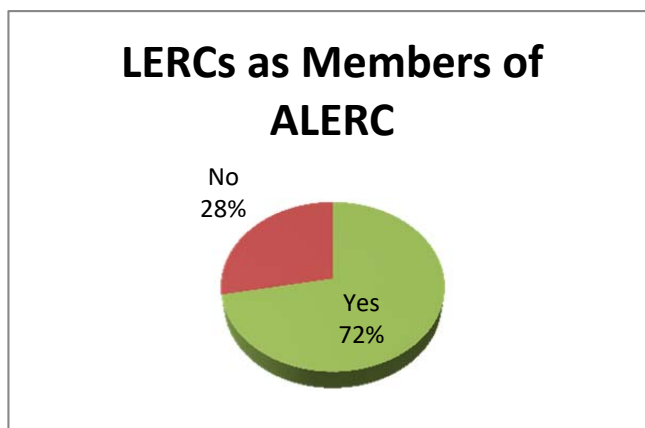
Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) are not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area. LERCs support and collaborate with a network of experts to ensure information is robust, and make information products and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

Association Objectives

- To promote and encourage the completion of a UK-wide network of Local biodiversity and geodiversity Records Centres.
- To promote and develop good standards of practice in the collation, management, dissemination and analysis of biological and geological records.
- To promote Local Records Centres regionally, nationally and at a UK level to potential users and suppliers of data.
- To provide full representation of the UK with country specific solutions and equal emphasis on the individual countries' requirements.
- To develop and promote accreditation schemes for biodiversity and geodiversity records centres and their staff.
- To encourage and facilitate networking between Centres to enable exchange of ideas, collaborative working, developing joint tools and sharing good practice.

Membership Report

In 2015-16, both Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service and Sheffield Biological Records Centre did not renew their membership, leaving the membership rate as 42 out of a possible 58 LERCs. Isle of Wight Local Records Centre became members for the first time.



ALERC Board of Directors and Officers (serving during 2015/16)

Name	LERC	Officer Position	Working Groups and Responsibilities
Martin Horlock	Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service	Chair of Directors	Data Management and Data Systems
Nicky Court	Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre	Treasurer	Consultations
Mark Wills	North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre	Vice chair	Website, accreditation, ALERC forum, conference
Darwyn Sumner		Company Secretary	Publicity
Craig Slawson	Staffordshire Ecological Record		Membership and recruitment
Mandy Rudd	Greenspace Information for Greater London		Business Development
Ian Egerton	Devon Biodiversity Records Centre		ALERC Strategy & Policy
Eric Fletcher (resigned 14/10/15)	RECORD, Cheshire		
Tim Corner (resigned 05/06/15)	Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre		Enquiries
Adam Rowe	South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre		
Teresa Frost (resigned 07/11/15)	Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre		
Mark Pollitt (resigned 05/06/15)	Dumfries & Galloway Environmental Records Centre		
Steve Hannah (resigned 27/07/15)	The Wildlife Information Centre.		
Simon Wood (resigned 24/02/16)	Worcestershire Biological Records Centre		
Tom Hunt		National Coordinator	ALERC Work programme.

Chair's Report

Martin Horlock, ALERC Chair (2015-present)

This has been a year of contrasts for ALERC. We have raised our profile further and been invited to take part in a variety of projects and consultations. We continue to attract new members and our 5 year strategy is bringing us nearer to sustainable funding for our National Coordinator who alongside the Board delivers the aims of ALERC and works for members. However we have also seen changes within the board with some long-time members leaving and taking with them their valuable expertise. We thank them for their contributions and wish them all well. We have however gained a new cohort of Directors who have volunteered to take up roles on the board, some old faces returning to the fold and some new.

The Board continues to work hard on your behalf and this year has seen some major items of work. The most prominent was of course the decision by Natural England to end their long-standing funding of English LERCs. Whilst made for economic reasons, the decision by NE to make claims about our provision of Open Data, and our role in data flow at a national level, meant that we had work to do to challenge assumptions and to maintain a positive profile. It was good to see other organisations and recorders offering very vocal support for our work and challenging NE's decision. Whilst we were unable to reverse the move we continue to challenge it robustly and welcome input on how we do this.

On a more positive note we were invited to provide input to a variety of projects and continue to play a lead role in the NBN working groups. Our Directors and members in Wales and Scotland are leading the development of new technologies and ensuring that the views of LERCs directly influence the development of work such as the Living Atlases. We are also seeing new members and more of our existing members becoming accredited.

Overall as a community we are continuing to work well despite the challenges we face, with an increasing demand for the data and services we provide, particularly at a local level. It is this that we should celebrate and champion. LERCs are LOCAL, which is why we continue to exist and why we have support. We provide a service for the communities we work with on a daily basis and in a way that they have helped to shape. Despite changes at a national level it is this focus that enables us to continue collecting and providing high quality data, ensuring it is there to enable better decision-making.

Who knows what the year ahead will bring. We can be sure that government will try to change to the way we work yet again through the upcoming Defra 25 year plan and through proposals for an alternative to CAP and EU legislation on the environment. Whatever happens we will continue to represent our members through ALERC responses to consultations and taking other opportunities as they arise. Alongside this we will put in place a more efficient way for you to feed into our responses. The Directors and ANC work hard on your behalf but we do need your help. Please be active in your regional groups and contact the Board to tell us what you want us to do for you. Get involved with ALERC, feed into the NBN working groups where you can and continue to champion the role of LERCs.

- Over the past year the Directors and the ALERC National Co-ordinator (ANC) have:
 - Held three Board meetings and one AGM
 - Sought members' feedback on consultations and items of interest via the ALERC forum
 - Dealt with membership applications and membership renewals in good time
 - Filed the Annual Return and Company Accounts to Companies House in good time
 - Provided a Trustee to the NBN Board of Trustees and contributed to NBN Annual Report
 - Ran a successful annual conference well attended by 79 LERC members
 - Begun the implementation of our 5 year Strategy
 - Written to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs challenging the loss of the NE MoA and answering subsequent responses
 - Led and attended NBN strategy working group workshops
 - Input into the work of the Bat Conservation Trust Planning toolkit project
 - Accredited 4 LERCs
 - Provided an ALERC stand/presence at the NBN Conference

Further details are given in the accounts from the working groups and the ALERC National Co-ordinator.

ALERC National Coordinator Report

Summary of achievements

The year 2015/16 saw an increasing internal ALERC focus in the National Coordinator work as the push for accreditation took off and more and more LERCs applied to be assessed. As well as this, there were still projects with outside organisations to work on, ensuring that the LERC voice was taken into account. Towards the end of the year, liaising with organisations become particularly important as the NBNT formed working groups to execute its strategy and Natural England announced its decision to end the Memorandum of Agreement with English LERCs.

The main achievements for the year have been:

- Accreditation
 - Accredited four new LERCs and reaccredited one.
 - Supported the creation of two new assessors to increase assessment capacity.
- Consulting with local authorities on the subject of ecosystem services to support an eCountability led project investigating the feasibility of a spatial decision support tools for ecosystem services decision making.
- Submitting consultation responses on behalf of ALERC specifically:
 - EU Habitats and Birds Directive fitness check.
 - JNCC review
- Working with the Wildlife Trusts to assess the feasibility of incorporating LWS information into Countryside Stewardship.
- Providing continued LERC input into in to BCT led Partnership for Biodiversity in Planning.
- Co-leading NBN verification working group and inputting into the online recording group.
- Reacting to the NE announcement to end MoA with English LERCs, and ensuring LERC voice is heard, including in the Guardian.

Tom Hunt, National Coordinator

ALERC Working Group Reports

Business Development - *Mandy Rudd, Chair of group.*

Other group members: Ian Egerton, Eric Fletcher, Adam Rowe, Simon Pickles, Camilla Burrow and Tom Hunt

At the start of the 2015/16 reporting period, the new generic name and brief definition of local environmental records centres developed by the group was agreed and signed off by the ALERC Board members.

Work continued on mobilising biodiversity data generated by members of BuildUK (formerly UK Contractors Group), with an outcome that suited the constituent parts of the working group. It is hoped that it will result in BuildUK's scope of works reflecting a commitment by their members to sharing their data with Local Environmental Records Centres that ensures the time cost of doing so is covered under relevant contracts, meaning that neither the LERC nor consultant has to bear the cost of data mobilisation.

Towards the end of the reporting period, work began on ALERC's Charging Position, a document that ALERC Board, ANC and members could promote to stakeholders to improve their understanding of LERC charges, and why they're all different.

Accreditation - *Mark Wills, Deputy Chair of group and Tom Hunt.*

Other group members: Gary Lewis (Chair), Jackie Ulyett, Hannah Cook, Lizzy Oddy, Camilla Burrow and Charlie Barnes.

In 2015/16, ALERC accredited Doncaster BRC, Norfolk BIS, Hampshire BIC and ERC for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and reaccredited Lincolnshire ERC for a further five years. This was the first time a reaccreditation process had to be performed as five years had passed since the initial pilot accreditations were made. The accreditation group developed a system for the reassessment process which didn't require a submission of a full suite of evidence, but focussed on those documents that had changed since being submitted originally, and also to those criteria that were not originally met.

The other major development during the year was to develop a system for creating new accreditation assessors. The appointment of additional assessors increases ALERC's capacity and reduces its dependency on the ALERC National Coordinator to conduct assessments. The use of these additional assessors allows the National Coordinator to support those LERCs who have less capacity to compile their accreditation submission. It is hoped that at least one more assessor will be appointed in 2016/17, taking the total number up to four.

Website - *Mark Wills, Chair of group.*

Other group members: Teresa Frost, Elaine Wright, Tom Hunt (secretary)

The website working group had reduced to three members by the start on 2015/16, in addition to the ALERC National Coordinator. Teresa Frost also left her post within the LERC sector during 2015/16 so by the end of the year the group was down to two plus the National Coordinator.

The major content achievement of the group in 15/16 was an overhaul of the content relating to LERC accreditation and relocating it to a dedicated area of the website. This reflects the requirement of all members to set a date for Accreditation and therefore the increasing number of LERCs going through the accreditation process. The volume of material in this section has grown as more LERCs go through the process and so further examples and supporting documents are provided.

The aims of the group in the next year are to implement the 'Top Task Analysis', which came out of the 2015 conference feedback session, to review the front page content to reflect the maturing of ALERC from a developing organisation into a settled and active membership organisation.

Data flow group -, *Tom Hunt*

Other group members: Maria Longley, Catherine Burton, Charlie Barnes, Daniel Marshall, David Slade, Lizzy Peat, Teresa Frost, Martin Horlock, Purgle Linham, Rachael Potter, Gary Hedges, Christine Johnston, Tim Corner and Tony Witts.

It has been a quiet year for the data flow group, with discussion limited to how local groups can best interact with their LERC in order to avoid duplication of effort when it comes to submitting records. Next year is likely to be more involved however, since this group will provide important advice for ALERC as it looks to take part in the NBN working group on dataflow.

Conference - *Mark Wills, Chair of group.*

Other group members: Elaine Wright

The conference working group planned and delivered a successful national conference in October 2015. The event included two external (non-LERC) speakers including a keynote speech from Professor Alister Scott – a national authority on planning Policy. It also included a number of short talks from within the LERC community.

The conference was attended by 84 delegates with 79 from member LERCs and five non-members. Despite keeping the fees for members at the same low level they have been for 4 years, the conference group delivered a cost-neutral event.

Strategy Group - *Ian Egerton, Chair of group*

Other group members: Mark Wills, Tom Hunt and Nicky Court

During the early part of 2015/16 the draft ALERC five year strategy was issued for consultation with members, and comments were gratefully received. The response was very positive, and minor changes were made post the October conference, after final input was collated. Changes in the wider landscape such as NE's withdrawal from MOA's, and their push for 'Open Data' have required ongoing review of the strategy, including the membership rates which are fundamental to maintaining the ANC post, but our vision remains intact and delivery of the strategy is now underway. This group has also developed a code of conduct for members, which further enhances our professional policies.

Treasurer's Report 2015/6

Points to note:

- Membership fees covered just half of the national co-ordinator post with the remainder being met from projects and surplus carried forward held within the ALERC account and by NEYEDC.
- Accreditation fees are now covered by membership fees
- The 2015 conference was cost neutral
- Directors expenses were nil as costs of travel and time are currently met by employers

Expenditure		Income	
ANC Officer Salary and expenses*	£22,800.00	Membership fees~	£14,430
Conference	£2,202.27	Conference fees	£2,280
Ecobuild event/ALERC displays	£1,051.20	Bank interest	£9.49
Company Secretary	£1,376.90		
'Find an LRC' facility	£420.00		
NBN membership fee	£350.00		
Companies House fees	£15.00		
Room hire – Board meetings	£150.00		
Accountants	£150.00		
Website hosting	£60.39		
Directors expenses	£0.00		
Total	£28,575.76		16,719.49
Surplus/Deficit			
Balance 1 st April 2015	£20,392.93		
Balance 31 st March 2016	£8,536.66		

*The full cost of the ANC officer was met with additional funding from two projects (Innovate UK and NBIS) paid directly to the employing organisation (NEYEDC) plus some carry forward held by NEYEDC.

~ Includes two late LERC payments from 2014/15 and doesn't include four late LERC payments made in April/May 2016.

A full set of accounts are available for inspection and will be filed at Companies House by 31st December 2016.

Nicky Court, ALERC Treasurer