

Annual Report 2016-2017

Introduction

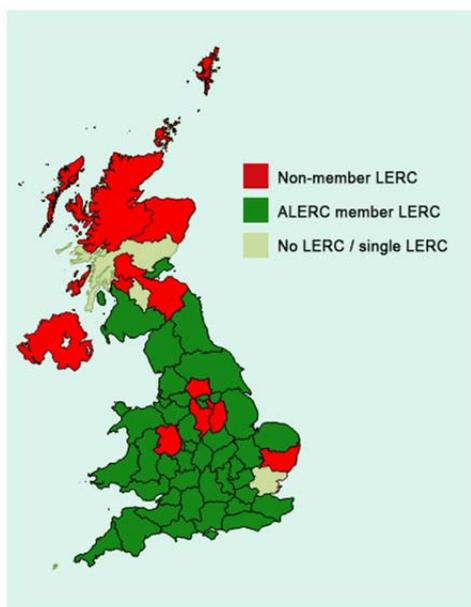
Formed in 2009, ALERC is an association between Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) in Great Britain. The Association aims to provide a central voice for the views and concerns of the Records Centre community, whilst building a support-based network of knowledge and advice to meet the needs of 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 Environmental Records Centres (LERCs).
- To promote and develop good standards of practice in the collation, management, dissemination and analysis of biological and geological records.
- To promote LERCs 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 LERCs and their staff.
- To encourage and facilitate networking between LERCs to enable exchange of ideas, collaborative working, developing joint tools and sharing good practice.

Membership Report



ALERC Board of Directors and Officers (serving during 2016/17)

Name	LERC	Officer Position	Working Groups and Responsibilities
Martin Horlock	Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service	Chair	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 (resigned 12/10/16)		Company Secretary	Publicity
Craig Slawson (resigned 16/05/16)	Staffordshire Ecological Record		Membership and recruitment
Mandy Rudd	Greenspace Information for Greater London		Business Development NBN Data Access Group NBN Atlas Steering Group
Ian Egerton	Devon Biodiversity Records Centre		ALERC Strategy & Policy
Adam Rowe	South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre		NBN Atlas Steering Group ALERC board recruitment
Clare Blencowe (started 12/10/16)	Sussex Biodiversity Record Centres		
Sara Lovell (started 12/10/16)			
Tom Hunt		National Coordinator	ALERC Work programme including conference, membership and accreditation

Chair's Report

This has been another busy year for ALERC. We have continued to raise our profile further and been invited to take part in a variety of projects and consultations. To increase our opportunities to influence policy and contribute to consultations at a higher level this year we took the decision to apply to become members of Wildlife and Countryside Link. I am pleased to announce that we have now been accepted as members and are already contributing to a number of consultations and letters to parliament about issues that will affect the work of LERCs in years to come such as the Defra 25 year plan and any future changes to wildlife legislation.

We are still bringing new members into ALERC and the implementation of our 5 year strategy brings us ever closer to sustainable funding for our National Coordinator. We were pleased this year to be able to reduce the planned increase to membership fees. We have done this by continuing to seek out relevant project work and by providing paid services to a number of LERCs seeking help with accreditation and other development work.

We have again this year seen changes within the board and are pleased to welcome new faces who bring with them a wealth of experience and new ideas. As always the chair and board continue to work hard to deliver the aims of ALERC and work for members. However we are now at a point where we need to examine the type of work and representation that you as members wish us to undertake on your behalf. The year ahead will see us talking to you all to establish the role that ALERC should take on your behalf.

This year we have undertaken a series of key work items on your behalf. We continue to play a lead role in the NBN working groups. Directors have been active and vocal members of the NBN Atlas steering groups, working hard to represent the views of LERCs, and we continue to meet regularly with NBN and NSS representatives to continue discussions around the Atlas and more general data issues. The potential system for full resolution data publication that was discussed earlier in the year was a direct result of these ongoing meetings. Further discussion on this will take place soon.

As I always say, 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:

- Sought members' feedback on consultations, such as the Defra District Level Licensing consultation, and items of interest, such as the Natural England MoA cancellation, 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 representation to the NBN board of Trustees, contributed to NBN Annual Report and responded to NBN members' survey.
- Ran a successful annual conference well attended by over 90 LERC members
- Continued the implementation of our 5 year Strategy
- Taken an active role in the NBN Atlas steering group
- Input into the work of the Bat Conservation Trust Planning toolkit project
- Taken a lead role in the European Interreg BID-REX project, which is a European project investigating biodiversity, from data to decision making.
- Accredited 4 LERCs
- Provided an ALERC stand/presence at the NBN Conference
- Provide support to two LERCs threatened by Local Authority funding reductions – successfully in one case and we wait to hear about the second.
- Held three board meetings and one AGM

ALERC National Coordinator Report

The year 2016/17 was bookended by the final stages of one external project and the beginning of another. In between work continued on accreditation and the conference as well as other ALERC work areas such as open data and conversations with partners such as the Wildlife Trusts, Country Agencies and CIEEM.

The main achievements for this year have been:

- Accreditation: four LERCs were accredited for the first time, and one was reaccredited.
- Working on the later stages of the Spatial Decisions in Ecosystem Services (SPADES) project (more information on the ALERC forum), which uses LERC data to model Ecosystem Services decision in order to aid decision making. Also, representing the view point from ALERC and the findings from a consultation of local government ecologists. The final event in August was attended by a range of stakeholders from developers to local and national government, and included several LERC leaders as well.
- Following on from the previous year's work liaising with the Wild Trusts and Natural England about incorporating Local Wildlife Sites information in England into Countryside Stewardship, discussions continued, reinforcing the message that the creation and sharing of this data requires resources.
- Continuing to represent LERCs in the BCT led Partnership for Biodiversity in Planning.
- Updating guidance on use of biodiversity data by local authorities in light of the new NBN Atlas, and gaining endorsement from CIEEM, NBNT and ALGE.
- Leading national verification work through a workshop at the NBN conference.
- Organising a successful 2016 ALERC conference, attended by over 90 people, and which allowed new technical developments (most notably the FSC Tom.Bio tools and the NBN Atlas) to be showcased.
- Working on the European Interreg BID-REX project which aims to "create/reinforce the link between relevant biodiversity data and conservation decision-making processes". Ensuring UK input (much of it from LERCs) via the stakeholder surveys, and by attending the first workshop. This project runs until spring 2019. At the moment, it is looking at what the data needs of decision makers actually are. In the future, the project will look at matching data to the needs of decision makers, improving data flows and building capacity. More information can be found on the [project website](#).

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

The focus of the business development subgroup during the reporting period was largely around open data, and the threats and opportunities it presents to members. The starting point for this work was to write ALERC's position statement on how members charge for their services, with the aim of giving members a clear, succinct message to communicate to stakeholders in the UK. Other outputs included an internal reference document for board members and ANC that set out the open data Institute's data spectrum and information on shared and open data licences, and a public-facing [statement](#) setting out ALERC's position on open data.

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

ALERC continues to try and fulfil its Strategic Plan target of all LERCs being accredited by 2020. Currently there are 15 accredited. Importantly, this year has seen an increase in trained assessors which gives us the capacity to undertake a greater number of assessments. LERCs still needing to achieve accreditation should make sure they have a plan so that ALERC isn't inundated in the final year; advice can be taken from any of the Accredited LERCs or members of the accreditation sub-committee. Additionally, the National Coordinator is available to assist in preparing LERCs for accreditation; this is a paid service, but will significantly speed up the preparation process.

Data Flow Group – *Clare Blencowe, Chair of group*

Other group members: 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

The data flow working group discussed changes to the National Bat Monitoring Data, which were fed back to BCT, and gathered some insights into current data-sharing arrangements between NSSs and LERCs, which will feed into further engagement with NSSs in 2017-18.

Conference – *Tom Hunt, Group secretary*

Other group members: Elaine Wright, Martin Horlock and Steve Whitbread

The conference working group planned and delivered a successful national conference in October. Steve Whitbread joined the group in February and is assisting the organisation of a conference focused on natural capital for October 2017. He developed a detailed consultation for members on the conference, designed to provide the information to help make the event very relevant to the specific work of LERCs. Other venues have also been considered for the 2017 conference, but the BVSC in Birmingham is still offering the best value for money. We will continue to look at different venues however in order to ensure we are getting good service, in a good location for a good price.

Strategy Group - *Ian Egerton, Chair of group*

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

The strategy group has aligned the National Coordinator work program more closely to delivering the strategy, and worked on external contracts and bids to ensure the National Coordinator post is secured again for the coming year, in line with the reduced increase in membership rates for 2017-18.

Treasurer's Report 2016/7

Points to note

- Membership fees covered two thirds of the National Co-ordinator post with the remainder being met from the Interreg BID-REX, and SPADES projects and surplus carried forward held by NEYEDC, the employing body
- Accreditation costs are now covered by membership fees
- The 2016 conference raised a surplus of £500
- Directors expenses were nil as costs of travel and time are currently met by employers

Expenditure		Income	
ANC Officer Salary and expenses	£20,500	Membership fees~	£23,940
Conference	£2,246	Conference fees	£2,740
NBN membership fee	£350		
Companies House fees	£15		
Room hire – board meetings	£150		
Accountants	£150		
Website hosting #	£0		
Directors expenses	£0		
Total	£23,271		£26,690
Surplus/deficit c/f	£8,537		
Balance 31st March 2017	£11,955.75		

~ Includes late payments from 5 LERC for 2015/16

c£60 paid every two years

A full set of accounts will be available for inspection and will be filed at Companies House by 31 December 2017.