

Towards an Evidence Strategy for Liverpool City Region Coastal Sites

Scoping Report - 27 March 2017

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1. Background and Context

This activity was stimulated through the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Regulatory Pilot (Pilot) – more information can be found here (hyperlink to be inserted). A key objective of the Pilot was to encourage activity to strengthen the environmental baseline of the LCR particularly around sites of international nature conservation importance (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites; collectively referred to as N2K sites in the report). It recognised the need to do this because:

- Environmental baseline survey information was patchy and incomplete for the N2K features themselves and supporting habitats;
- Quality of the environmental baseline was deteriorating for some locations and for some habitats and species e.g. gaps in overwintering bird counting sectors on the Mersey Estuary due to a lack of volunteer surveys resulting in an incomplete baseline;
- Environmental baseline data have seasonal and temporal variations and to understand these changes it is sometimes necessary to focus baseline surveys to particular times of year or collect a dataset over longer timescales. For example, to confidently establish bird use of an area may require survey effort over a quite a period of time (e.g. August to May for waterbirds to capture overwintering and passage periods) and this needs to be factored into project planning and resourcing;
- Knowledge of the distribution of habitats and species and how this changes over time needs to be better understood – this means that the baseline data are dynamic and need to be captured at appropriate scale intervals;
- Low confidence in the environmental baseline was leading to uncertainty in regulatory assessments with the effect that a precautionary approach was being taken when assessing impacts of plans and projects. As a result Government was becoming increasingly concerned that “perceived Regulatory Red Tape”¹ was delaying development.

Together these factors were perceived by prospective developers and economic development colleagues as a constraint to development aspirations.

The Pilot was successful because it:

¹ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20150522175321/http://redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/home/index/>

- Stimulated new investment in collecting baseline environmental data for the LCR N2K sites during the period 2013 - 2015 with which to address the highest priority gaps identified and also to stimulate discussion on how a more strategic approach could be developed to the on-going collection, monitoring, review and reporting of that baseline;
- Raised awareness and generated substantial good will for public, private and voluntary organisations to work together in an informal partnership to improve the way in which environmental data and evidence are collected, used and shared to inform policy, management and decision taking;
- Accelerated the preparation of revised Conservation Advice Packages for designated sites²;
- Helped to increase certainty for project-based regulatory assessments during the period from 2013 to the present.

A more detailed explanation and evaluation of the Pilot and associated LCR Deal can be found at <http://www.natureconnected.org/resource-library/> [link to be updated].

The idea of developing an Evidence Strategy for the Liverpool City Region Coastal Designated sites (Evidence Strategy) came about following wide partner engagement at two workshops in Bootle and Liverpool in September 2013 and September 2016 respectively. The participants felt that there was substantial added value to be gained from a partnership approach to environmental evidence gathering and it also had potential to add value to the Pilot by providing a lasting legacy of that activity.

2. Evidence Strategy Workshop 13 &14 September 2016

Partners in the Pilot such as Environment Agency, Liverpool John Moores University, MEAS and Natural England agreed to collaborate and deliver a workshop focused at developing a lasting long term collaborative approach to invest in the environmental baseline for the coastal sites. This workshop was delivered in September 2016.

The objectives of the workshop and other documents referred to in this paragraph can be found at <http://www.natureconnected.org/resource-library/> on the Nature Connected website. The workshop was very much seen as an opportunity to continue the dialogue started in 2013 and a broad range of organisations from all sectors were invited (see website). The feedback and main outcomes from the workshop are also available on-line. **Appendix 1** provides a summary of the main issues and opportunities identified.

The main outcome from the workshop was that there is clear evidence for the need and desire for a collaboration and partnership mechanism to inform data gathering and steer any Evidence Strategy for the Liverpool City Region coastal designated sites. There was a very strong consensus around five themes:

² Natural England Standard, Conservation Advice for Marine Protected Areas, 17\3\2014

- Theme 1 – Signposting and Data Accessibility;
- Theme 2 – Efficient Use and Sharing of Resources;
- Theme 3 – Metadata (Quality Assurance and Reliability);
- Theme 4 – Strategy or Framework for Collaboration;
- Theme 5 – Prioritising Data and Evidence Collection.

3. Evidence Strategy for LCR Coastal Sites

A more sustainable way forward is needed to develop, through collaboration and partnership, an evidence strategy for the LCR coastal sites as a risk reduction mechanism for projects, plans, the designated sites and their functionally linked habitat. It also has the potential to provide a lasting legacy of the Pilot through an on-going collaborative approach that should outlive the Pilot and lead to better monitoring of the coastal sites.

Many organisations have a stake in and a role to play in understanding the environmental baseline of the LCR coast. These range from voluntary organisations, academic institutions for research, private sector including development projects, regulators and decision takers, statutory advisors and local communities.

To be effective and sustainable it would need to be supported by a broad cross-sector partnership with a stake in the wider LCR, the coastal sites, functionally linked habitat or projects and activities that may impact upon those.

Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS), Natural England and Environment Agency are particularly supportive of this initiative as these organisations often have to deal with uncertainty in baseline data during consenting and consultation for both plans and projects. These organisations helped drive forward and project-manage the Pilot. Having a higher level of certainty in environmental assessments substantially reduces project risk, especially at consenting. It also assists the statutory advisors and regulators in meeting their legislative responsibilities in the consent and planning processes.

Liverpool John Moores University, University of Liverpool, Liverpool Hope University, MEDIN and Merseyside BioBank Local Environmental Records Centre have also become involved and are supportive of the objective to develop the Evidence Strategy.

Each of the 5 themes identified at the Workshop are being taken forward to form the basis for an Evidence Strategy through preparation of a Vision, Objectives and Action Plan for implementation.

4. Vision

The following vision is proposed:

The Liverpool City Region has a clear, relevant and up to date evidence base that stakeholders contribute to, understand and use. This evidence base will inform the conservation, management and enhancement of the Liverpool City Region's coastal natural assets. A Liverpool City Region evidence partnership will seek to make good use, prioritise, resource and share this evidence.

5. Objectives

Six objectives are proposed for the LCR Coastal Evidence Strategy:

- Prepare and maintain the Evidence Strategy which specifies metadata requirements and good practice. It is envisaged that data will be stored at a range of locations and managed by different organisations which will ensure it is readily accessible and that data sources are clearly identified. The scope of the Evidence Strategy is expected to be specific to the LCR, reflect section 6 below and will be kept under review in response to user need and coastal change;
- Establish and develop a LCR Evidence Partnership and keep it under regular review;
- Prepare, agree and implement a data and evidence Action Plan the scope of which will include, amongst other matters, priorities for data and evidence collection to deliver the Strategy;
- Promote easy access to data and evidence as part of the Strategy;
- Provide opportunity for partners to share and add value to the scope of proposed data and evidence projects such as new data collection, baseline survey and evidence review. Scope of web-based notice board to provide an accessible platform and searchable database for collaboration, joint funding, partnership support and potentially commissioning portal;
- Regularly hold data and evidence workshops and /or conferences to share information and review progress with implementation of the Strategy.

The Vision will be driven forward through the formation of an LCR Evidence Partnership of stakeholders. The Partnership will be open and inclusive of a wide range of organisations and will initially be driven by Environment Agency, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University, Local Enterprise Partnership, MEDIN, Merseyside BioBank Local Environmental Records Centre, Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service, Natural England, Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory and the University of Liverpool. Membership will be open and inclusive

and subject to regular review and draft Terms of Reference are included in **Appendix 2.**

In developing the Evidence Strategy the Evidence Partnership will seek to address the greatest risks e.g. gaps in data sets or “out of date” evidence by facilitating co-operation and agreeing actions. The Action Plan will need to integrate with existing mechanisms of monitoring and review including for example implementation of site management plans and management priorities for designated sites.

6. Proposed Scope

Geography - The scope of the proposed Evidence Strategy will include terrestrial and marine protected areas within and extending out of the Liverpool City Region including the following designated sites:

- Dee Estuary SAC;
- Dee Estuary SPA;
- Dee Estuary Ramsar site;
- Mersey Estuary SPA;
- Mersey Estuary Ramsar;
- Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore SPA;
- Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore Ramsar;
- Liverpool Bay SPA;
- Liverpool Bay proposed extension SPA;
- Ribble and Alt Estuaries SPA;
- Ribble and Alt Estuaries Ramsar site;
- Sefton Coast SAC.

It also includes functionally linked land for those sites³.

Technical Scope – the technical scope of the Evidence Strategy relates to environmental evidence and data and is not precisely defined due to the complexity of interactions between for example chemical, biological, geomorphological, hydrological and paleoecology factors.

Organisational Scope – the Evidence Strategy is potentially relevant to a multitude of public, private, third and voluntary sectors organisations and individuals.

³ Natural England Commissioned Report NECR207. Functional linkage: How areas that are functionally linked to European sites have been considered when they may be affected by plans and projects - a review of authoritative decisions, 29/2/2016

7. Measures of Success

Measures of success will need to be developed over time and the following table gives initial suggestions of how this can be measured.

Measure of Success	Output / Outcome
New evidence studies commissioned completed for LCR coastal sites	Number of published reports. Number of new data and evidence collected
Added value to projects, plans, policies and management decisions informed by data and evidence collected for wider purposes and made available through the Evidence Strategy.	Number of projects, plans, policies and management decisions and assessments informed by the Evidence Strategy and data identified in the accessible data platform e.g. referencing.
Use of Evidence Strategy to signpost new data / evidence; originating from evidence studies, projects, plans, policies and management decisions; that would otherwise not be accessible.	Annual change in number of data, number and evidence.
Data / evidence gathering according to metadata good practice and made available through “open data” principles in the Evidence Strategy and data use licence agreements.	Number of new data and evidence reports compliant with metadata good practice e.g. from research and / or from planning, licencing and other regulatory processes.
Use of web-based “notice board” by partners and stakeholders for commissioning purposes such as new projects, studies, reviews and, calls for collaboration or draft scope for comment.	Number of project briefs posted and informed through the “web-based” application/notice board, number of commissions and number of new data and evidence reports compliant with META data good practice.
Updateable web based metadata MEDIN compatible database	Number of times meta database accessed and updated
Avoidance of data collection duplication through increased openness and data/evidence sharing.	Through periodic evaluation of the Evidence Strategy

Partners are invited to consider additional measures of success though these will need to be easily collected for accurate monitoring and reporting purposes.

8. Next Steps - Immediate Priorities and Action

Between now and July 2017, the Evidence Partnership will commence work on developing the Evidence Strategy and Action Plan for consultation and, in due course, “sign-up” from partners across the sectors. To maintain progress the following immediate priorities and actions have been identified which are focused on the Liverpool City Region coastal sites.

Priority 1 – Convene a meeting of the LCR Evidence Partnership to agree terms of reference and develop the content of the Evidence Strategy.

Priority 2 - Develop a web-based “notice board” where proposed data and evidence studies and projects are shared and opportunities for collaboration sought. This could include inviting comment on draft project briefs, putting out calls to share resources and making requests for voluntary advice and/or volunteer capacity.

Priority 3 – As an interim solution, on the web-based “notice board” post links to recently published data/evidence reports and also signpost where data is available.

Priority 4 – Commence development of the Action Plan including immediate priorities for data and evidence collection, metadata good practice to deliver the Strategy and a resourcing plan, and planning for a further workshop event to be held later in 2017.

Priority 5 – Agree Web based metadata database requirements (MEDIN compatible).

In terms of establishing a voluntary Evidence Partnership, initially this should include the following organisations to help guide and steer the work; Environment Agency, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University, Local Enterprise Partnership, MEDIN, Merseyside BioBank Local Environmental Records Centre, Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service, Natural England, Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory and the University of Liverpool. Engagement of the private sector is also essential e.g. Peel Ports. This partnership will be asked to steer the Evidence Strategy and develop key outcomes or measures of success and reporting mechanisms. Other stakeholders may be engaged as required depending on the scope of evidence needed.

9. Developing and Implementing the Evidence Strategy

The workshops and Pilot have been successful in raising awareness and generating a lot of good will. There is now an opportunity to make good use of the momentum generated in developing the Evidence Strategy and collaborating through the emerging Evidence Partnership.

Implementation of the Evidence Strategy therefore provides an opportunity for a lasting legacy for the Pilot that will help inform many projects, policies and plans and; will also help stimulate new funding and research in the designated coastal sites which are one of the greatest natural assets to be found within the LCR.

Appendix 1 – Summary of the main issues and opportunities and gives an indication on the degree of consensus from workshop participants.

Issue	Outcome	Level of Consensus & Priority (high, medium, low)
Duplication of evidence gathering	Evidence strategy supported by accessible and managed database of information available.	Good High
Poor collaboration misses opportunity and results in sub-optimal data quality.	Framework or strategy for collaborative working improves evidence quality and identifies future needs.	Good High
Evidence baseline gaps and priorities poorly understood.	Single evidence strategy can target investment to priority issues / areas.	Good High
Data and evidence gathering should be purposeful.	User needs for data and evidence better understood – a collaborative approach will help.	Good Medium
Poor awareness of evidence that already exists.	Require an approach which sign-posts to evidence and data sources with agreed high-quality meta data.	Complete consensus High
Benefits of evidence gathering are dispersed, polarised and diluted.	Legislative drivers and decision taking require evidence and this involves all sectors.	Good High
Evidence and data management requires resourcing and active management.	Any evidence strategy requires resourcing plan, organisational commitment and accountability.	Good High
Resource limitations require a targeted approach to strengthen the baseline.	Data key indicators could be identified to secure a robust baseline when resources are restricted.	Medium Medium
Priority evidence gaps need to be collated and better understood.	Evidence strategy to deliver improved evidence for the priorities identified including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile species • Diffuse pollution links • Historical pollution in sediments and their effects • Shifting baseline of sensitive species such as birds in relation to changing patterns and level of human pressure 	Good High

Issue	Outcome	Level of Consensus & Priority (high, medium, low)
	including visitor disturbance.	
No-one has responsibility for collating data and synthesising what it means – an issue of dispersion and lacking accountability.	Evidence strategy and supporting partners collaborate to provide data overview, key messages and meaning.	Good High
Information collected for one purpose is not shared and poor use is made of it. For data gatherers focus can be short term projects leading to lost opportunity by wider “community.”	Evidence strategy and mechanism to signpost and make data available for wider use and increase value and efficiency of those investments.	Good High
Organisations no longer have resources and capacity for data gathering.	Evidence strategy needs to be built on co-operation, collaboration and citizen science and; enable data sharing between the stakeholders. It also requires investment and active management.	Complete consensus. Very high.
Data and data quality is not static and deteriorates.	Risk-based approach to evidence gathering informed by Strategy.	Moderate – topic based High

Appendix 2 – LCR Coastal Designated Sites Evidence Partnership; draft Terms of Reference

The Evidence Partnership is a voluntary group of public, private and voluntary organisations that have come together to help deliver the Evidence Strategy for the Liverpool City Region coastal designated sites (N2K sites).

Membership of the Evidence Partnership is open and inclusive. An initial core group of organisations will be responsible for co-ordinating and managing development of the Evidence Strategy and its associated Action Plan. The core group could be drawn from Environment Agency, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University, Local Enterprise Partnership, MEDIN, Merseyside BioBank Local Environmental Records Centre, Natural England, Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory and the University of Liverpool. The Partnership will also seek representation from the private sector.

Objectives

The Evidence Partnership will collaborate and work together to take-forward the following six objectives for the LCR Coastal Designated Sites Evidence Strategy:

- Prepare and maintain the Evidence Strategy;
- Establish and develop an Evidence Partnership and keep it under regular review;
- Prepare, agree and implement a data and evidence Action Plan the scope of which will include, amongst other matters, priorities for data and evidence collection and Meta data good practice to deliver the Evidence Strategy;
- Promote easy access to data and evidence as part of the Evidence Strategy;
- Provide opportunities for partners to share and add value to the scope of proposed data and evidence projects such as new data collection, baseline survey and evidence review;
- Hold data and evidence workshops/conferences to share information and review progress with implementation of the Evidence Strategy.

Chair and Secretariat

To be discussed

Frequency of Meetings

To be discussed but initially it may meet more frequently to benefit from the momentum generated during 2016.

Resourcing

To be discussed but the Evidence Partnership will be seeking organisational endorsement and contributions in terms of time, provision of facilities and possibly some funding.

Reporting

To individual organisations as per Governance arrangements and also progress reports to Nature Connected.