



NATURAL AREA PARTNERSHIPS

FEASIBILITY STUDY

FINAL REPORT

APRIL 2007

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SUMMARY

This document reports the findings of a Feasibility Study, commissioned by the County Durham Environment Partnership, to investigate possibilities for setting up a pilot Natural Area Partnership in the Durham Magnesian Limestone Natural Area.

Natural Areas are sub-divisions of England within which there is a characteristic association of wildlife and natural features, and these associations are reflected in the Natural Areas' historical land uses and landscape characters. Administrative boundaries usually do not follow Natural Area boundaries, potentially leading to inconsistent land management policies being followed across different parts of similar areas. A total of nine local authorities have greater or lesser interest in the management of the Durham Magnesian Limestone Natural Area.

The importance of landscape issues is reflected in emerging policy and legislation at international, national and regional level. A proposed Natural Area Partnership may address these new priorities by producing landscape management and action plans; promoting the creation and protection of green infrastructure; co-ordinating funding applications in support of existing programmes and partnerships; and influencing policy at the local and regional level. There is a strong record of partnership working in County Durham, which provides a positive indication for the proposed new Natural Area Partnership.

Existing policies and plans governing the development and management of the area vary in their commitment to landscape issues, and the potential uses of the Natural Areas in influencing policy are sometimes only hazily understood in planning offices. In addition, data concerning the landscape are patchy, concentrated mainly on designated sites at the expense of the wider countryside, and often not well publicised or used.

A major part of the study was a stakeholder workshop at which relevant issues were discussed: What the objectives of the partnership might be; how it would interact with existing partnerships; how it would deal with existing policies, strategies and plans; where funding might come from; how the partnership would be managed and staffed; and how it would interact with its stakeholders. The general view of the proposals at the workshop was very positive.

The study concluded that a pilot Natural Area Partnership in the Durham Magnesian Limestone Natural Area is feasible, and a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are presented in support of this conclusion. Further research would be required to determine which natural areas across north-east England may also be suitable candidates for Natural Area Partnerships.

The report concludes with a draft action plan for setting up the Natural Area Partnership.

INTRODUCTION

This Feasibility Study was commissioned in January 2007 by the Environment Department of Durham County Council, under the auspices of the County Durham Environment Partnership (CDEP). It was jointly funded by the County Council and by Natural England, and was carried out by the County Council landscape team in partnership with Capita Symonds Ltd.

The purpose of the Study was to explore the feasibility of developing a pilot Natural Area Partnership (NAP) in the Durham Magnesian Limestone Natural Area (Natural Area number 6, Joint Character Area number 15), other Natural Areas in the North East of England, and England as a whole. For further information regarding the background to the Study, please see Appendix 1: Letter of invitation to stakeholders.

In the course of the study the team:

- Carried out a desktop and telephone audit of available environmental data relevant to NA6, including GIS and other datasets;
- consulted relevant statutory and other bodies (including Natural England, English Heritage, the Environment Agency, local authorities, interest groups and landowners – please see Appendix 2 for a full list) regarding their attitudes to any proposed NAP;
- carried out a desktop, telephone and internet audit of relevant policies, plans, programmes and strategies (such as Local Plans and Local Development Frameworks, Regional Spatial Strategies, Heritage Coast Management Plans, Local Transport Plans etc.) in order to make an initial assessment of the extent to which they tend to conflict with or reinforce each other;
- ran a stakeholder partnership workshop to which all interested bodies were invited (please see Appendix 3 for an attendance list), at which the proposals were explained in greater depth and participants were asked to provide feedback; and
- produced this report.

The purpose of this report is to explain the background to the study, describe its findings, and make recommendations as to next steps for the project.

NATURAL AREAS AND JOINT CHARACTER AREAS

Natural Areas

Natural Areas (NAs) are sub-divisions of England, each with a characteristic association of wildlife and natural features (Natural England 2007), and were originally defined by English Nature. They reflect the geological foundation, the natural systems and processes and the wildlife in different parts of England, and provide a framework for setting objectives for nature conservation. Crucially, they are independent of administrative boundaries except the national boundaries with Scotland and Wales. This provides a wider context for nature conservation action.

Natural Areas should take into account not only the wildlife and natural features of the landscape, but also the views of the people who live and work there. Thus they are designed to incorporate a sense of place into the areas and their descriptions.

Natural Areas should help in setting objectives, defining national priorities and local targets, and deciding where in England resources should be focused to best effect. Carried out successfully, this would result in national targets being converted into local action. The instigation of local action by local people is a key ambition of the Natural Area approach.

There are 97 terrestrial Natural Areas. The boundaries of the Natural Areas are defined as broad transition zones with a minimum width of 1,000m (in other words, the line on the map should never be interpreted literally at large scale on the ground). The same applies to the boundaries between terrestrial Natural Areas and the related maritime Natural Areas, of which there are 23.

Natural Areas provide a consistent, ecologically coherent countrywide framework to focus national targets at a locally useful level. Examples of their use include their role as a means to target the Countryside Stewardship scheme, administered by Defra (the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), and the breakdown of national targets or priorities, such as those set out in the Biodiversity Action Plan and the Habitats Directive, to a more local Natural Area level. However, to date they have been relatively little used at the local policy level for setting local land management objectives.

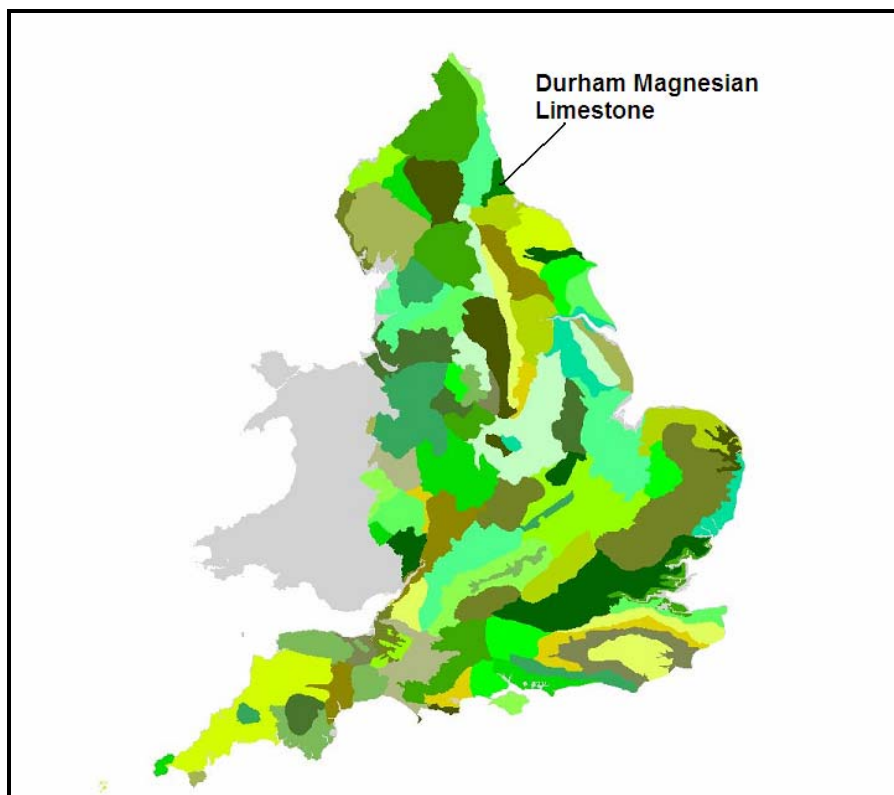


Figure 1: Natural Areas of England

Joint Character Areas

In 1996 the former Countryside Commission and the former English Nature, with support from English Heritage, produced the Character of England Map (Natural England 2007a). This map combines English Nature's Natural Areas and the Countryside Commission's Countryside Character Areas into a map of 159 Joint Character Areas (JCAs) for the whole of England. Joint Character Areas provide a context to local planning, action and development. These areas are unique in terms of a combination of physiographic, land use, historical and cultural attributes.

In many cases JCAs form sub-divisions of Natural Areas, although in the case of the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau the boundaries of the Natural Area (NA6) and the Joint Character Area (JCA15) coincide.

The JCAs form a widely recognised national spatial framework, used for a range of applications. These include the targeting of Defra's Environmental Stewardship scheme and the Countryside Quality Counts project. Like Natural Areas, however, they have been relatively little used at the local level for setting forward-looking landscape and environmental management objectives. An exception in Durham is the County Landscape Character Assessment which is based on JCAs and Natural Areas.

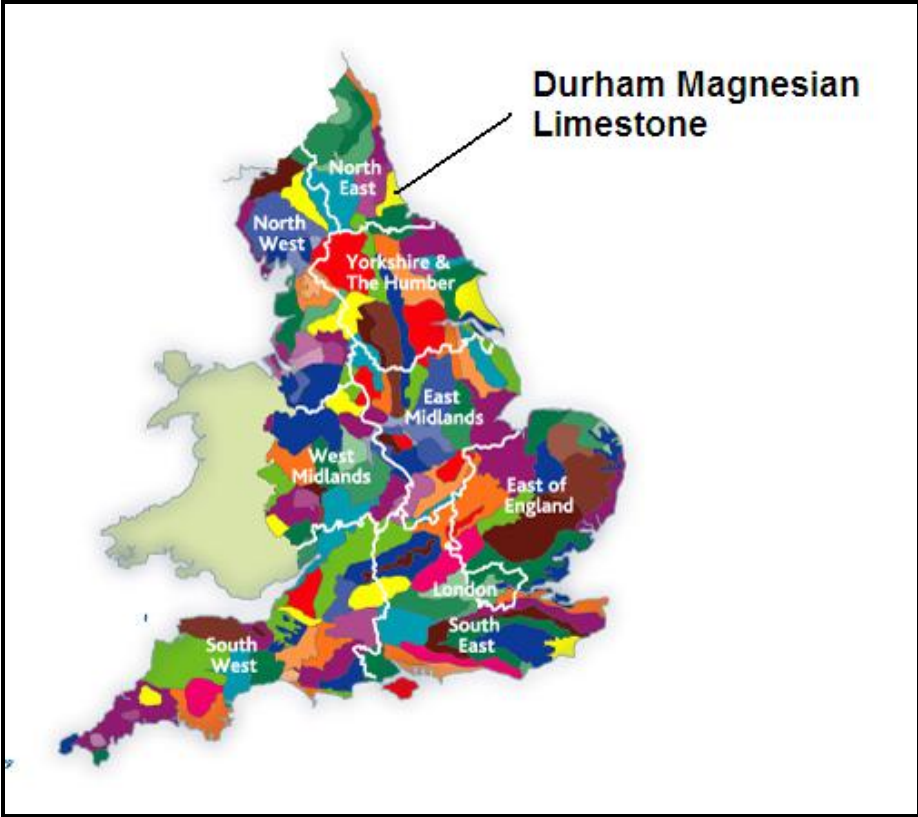


Figure 2: Joint Character Areas of England

THE DURHAM MAGNESIAN LIMESTONE NATURAL AREA / JOINT CHARACTER AREA

The Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau is designated as both a Natural Area (number 6) and Joint Character Area (number 15).



Natural Area 6

The Durham Magnesian Limestone Natural Area forms a narrow belt across south-east Tyne and Wear and east Durham (Natural England 2007c). The Natural Area largely coincides with the outcrop of Permian magnesium-rich limestone escarpment. The area is predominantly agricultural in character, mixing intensive arable production with pastoral farming

on the bulk of the East Durham Plateau. Urban areas include Sunderland, Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe. The industrial character of the area is shown by the many magnesian limestone quarries and coal spoil heaps.

Semi-natural habitats are concentrated on the limestone escarpment and the coast. Nationally important areas of limestone grassland are found on the escarpment and plateau where soils are shallow and free-draining and often occur in disused quarries which are nationally important for their geological interest.

The full Natural Area Profile for NA 6, which runs to 60 pages, can be accessed on the Natural England website at Natural England (2007d).

Joint Character Area 15

The key characteristics of the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau JCA are:

- Gently undulating low upland plateau, of open, predominantly arable, farmland dipping southward and eastward, with incised denes cut into the coastal edge on the east.
- Clearly defined west-facing escarpment, dissected by minor streams, with remnant broadleaved woodland, scrub and species-rich limestone grassland on steeper slopes.
- Widespread industrial development, with large scale active and disused quarries and landfill sites, often prominent on the escarpment, and areas of derelict, under-used or recently restored colliery land.
- Varied coastal scenery of low cliffs, bays and headlands, rich in wildlife, although despoiled in places by former extensive dumping of colliery waste on beaches and foreshores.

- Strong urban development, dominated by Sunderland and by larger mining towns and villages towards the north and east, contrasting with small villages in rural areas.
- A19 corridor, railway lines and other infrastructure elements.

(Natural England 2007b)

The full Character Area Profile for JCA 15 can be accessed at Natural England (2007e).

Other Relevant Issues

Natural Area 6 experiences conflicts between industrial land use requirements (in particular those of the mineral extraction industry, but also wind energy developments and other uses) and landscape and biodiversity interests. The area contains some heavily built up and industrialised zones (for example Sunderland) and other semi-natural areas which are relatively undeveloped (for example Castle Eden Dene). It is managed by a total of nine separate local authorities at county, unitary and district level.



Why use the Magnesian Limestone Plateau as a case study?

The plateau is an interesting landscape in its own right. It boasts one of the largest areas in the country of a valued habitat, namely magnesian grassland; it has a long and interesting history of agriculture, industry and mineral extraction; and it is valued for its character by people who live there and by people who visit.

Apart from this, however, part of its attraction as a case study for this project is its ordinariness: apart from the Heritage Coast it has little in the way of environmental designations, and therefore it has been comparatively overlooked by the statutory bodies while other, more favoured, areas take the limelight. The fact that most environmental data are concentrated on designated sites and areas is well known and is brought out once again in this study. Associated with this lack of data is an equivalent absence of landscape scale activity.

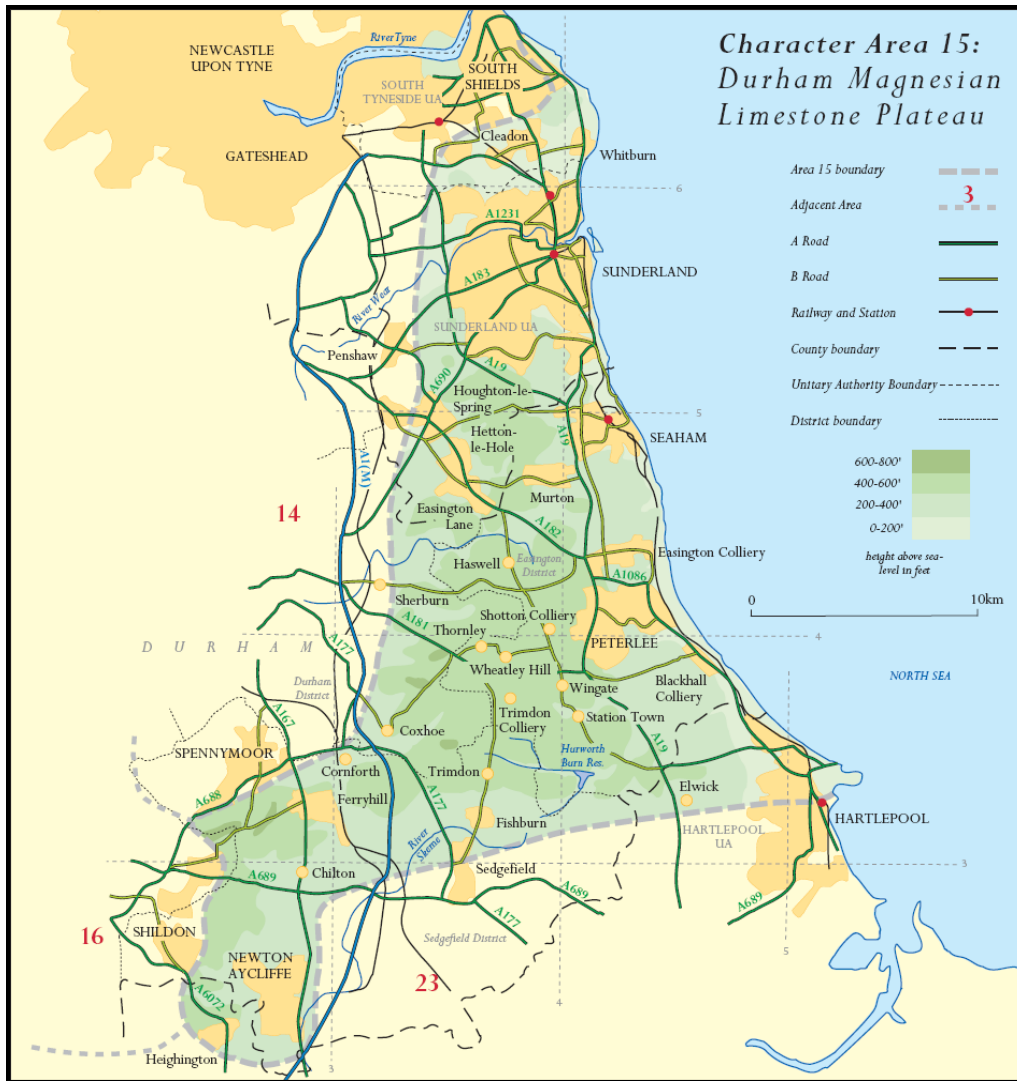


Figure 3: Joint Character Area 15 (map used by permission of Natural England)

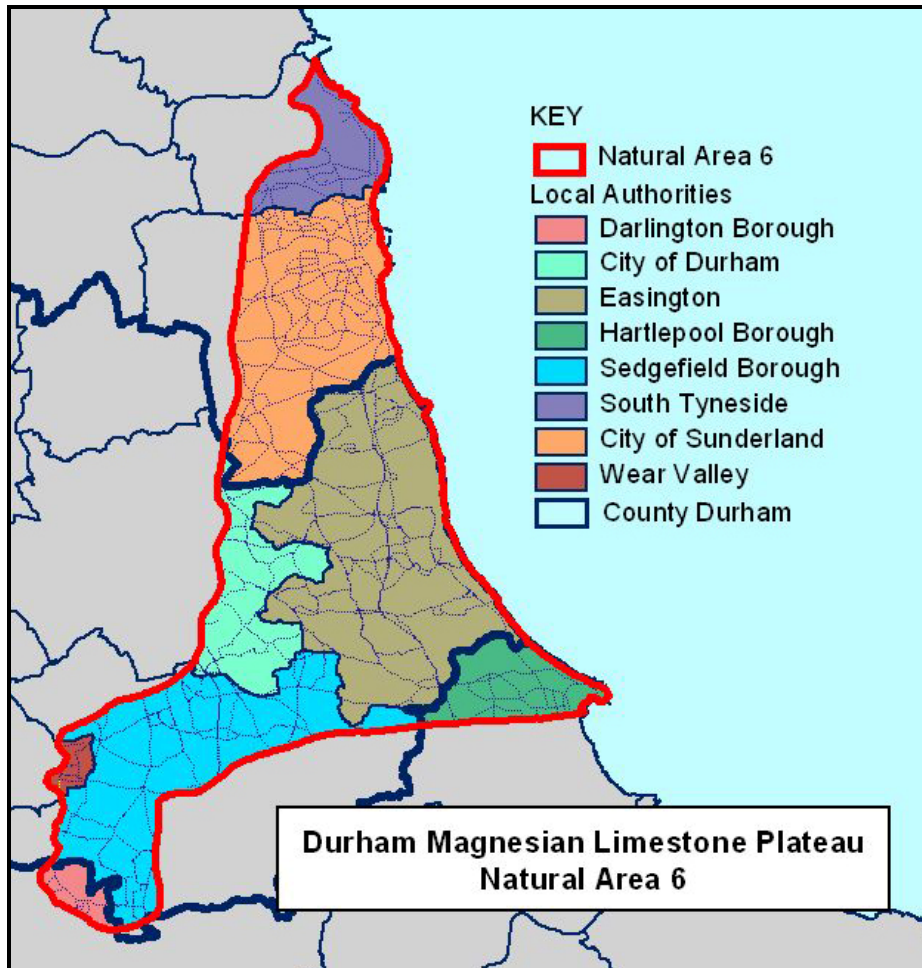


Figure 4: Local Authorities whose areas overlap Natural Area 6. Note that Easington is entirely within the Natural Area while Wear Valley and Darlington both overlap only to a very small extent.

THE PURPOSE OF A PROPOSED NATURAL AREA PARTNERSHIP

Drivers for Change

Landscape and environmental management is given increasing prominence in international, national, regional and local policy. Internationally, the European Landscape Convention came into effect in Europe in 2004 and in England in 2006. It emphasises integration in landscape planning and development, and aims to put people at the heart of the planning process. Significantly, in relation to the Durham Magnesian Limestone, it recognises the importance of all landscapes, not just designated landscapes.

Nationally, PPS1 (Delivering Sustainable Development) was published in 2005 and sets the overarching principles of sustainable development which apply to the whole of the planning system in England. In particular it emphasises the value of the environment as a key determinant of people's quality of life, and specifies landscape and townscape as key aspects of the environment which are to be protected and enhanced.

PPS9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation) was published in August 2005 and sets out the Government's policy on promoting sustainable development, conserving and enhancing biodiversity and geodiversity, and contributing to rural renewal and urban renaissance. It sets great emphasis on data sharing, in particular through opportunity mapping of environmental, social and economic aspects, and the use of GIS; integration of strategies at different spatial scales and geographical coverages; and partnership working, including tapping local informal knowledge.

PPG17 (Sport and Recreation) was originally published in 1991. It requires local planning authorities to take account of local communities' requirements for recreational open space within urban areas, the urban fringe, Green Belt and the countryside in general. Its focus is on sport and recreation, and the value of the environment and landscape is assessed more in terms of its opportunities for social and community development than for its inherent qualities.

The general aims of these policies are reflected as commitments in documents such as "Sustainable communities in the North East: Building for the future" published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Communities and Local Government) in 2003. It pledged that the Government would work with local planning authorities to ensure that "the region's communities have access to high quality environments within our cities, towns and villages, and that we protect the region's high quality natural environment."

As well as legislative drivers there have been a number of initiatives which have placed landscape at the heart of policy development. One is the Countryside Quality Counts project (CQC) run in partnership between Natural England and English Heritage. CQC is a project to develop a national indicator of how the countryside is changing. It aims to understand how and where change is occurring, and most importantly, where change matters most. This information is intended to be used to help plan future landscapes and inform change that delivers public benefits, enhancing and maintaining the character and quality of the countryside for current and future generations

Over time a number of individuals within the County Durham Environment Partnership have developed the opinion that there is a need for new landscape scale partnerships to be



developed in the north-east region, and that if successful they might form the model for similar partnerships across the country. Existing partnerships, for example formal or informal groupings of planning officers or countryside management professionals, have tended to be constrained by administrative boundaries which do not necessarily provide a useful framework for integrated land management, especially where the management relates to biogeographical factors on the ground which do not follow administrative boundaries. It is the purpose of this Study to determine whether such landscape scale partnerships are feasible.

Natural Areas, Character Areas or Joint Character Areas?

Various possible frameworks for landscape scale partnerships exist in the shape of the former Countryside Agency's Countryside Character Areas, and the former English Nature's Natural Areas. These have been combined to form Joint Character Areas as described above. In designing this project it was decided to concentrate on Natural Areas as the more suitable for partnership working, following on from the findings of the Durham Landscape Scale Partnerships working group meeting in May 2006. Many Joint Character Areas are subdivisions of Natural Areas. Using Joint Character Areas as the basis of the partnerships would result in a large number of new partnerships being formed with a rather narrow strategic scope. Using Natural Areas, on the other hand, would result in a smaller number of partnerships with a broader strategic view, based on areas which have been defined for their overall coherence in geological, geomorphological, biodiversity, landscape and cultural terms.

All three area types (Natural Areas, Countryside Character Areas and Joint Character Areas) have the further advantage that they are not subject to future boundary changes as a result of local government or regional re-organisation. However, because the boundaries of the natural areas are themselves "zones of transition" rather than hard lines, the partnership boundaries themselves (and especially the projects which stem from partnership work) need careful definition.

The Functions and Activities of the Partnerships

Landscape Action Plans and Management Plans: As envisaged, the NAPs would take a strategic rôle in developing action plans and management plans for their areas. They would therefore be required to have a strong vision for the future of their areas. Their work would initially be based on the existing Natural Area (and Character Area) Profiles, but adding the more recent work done by local authorities (such as the County Durham Landscape Strategy), existing partnerships, the Countryside Quality Counts initiative and further public consultation and engagement. Within funding constraints the plans should be of similar scope and content as existing Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans, with a strong vision for the future of the landscape. They should be plans for action rather than aspirations, containing smart targets which are specific and resourced, and which form part of a coherent policy direction.

Green Infrastructure: NAPs would facilitate the identification, creation and maintenance of “green infrastructure”¹ by means including opportunity mapping. This would tie in with the objectives of PPS9 for integrated environmental data management, and would provide opportunities for partner organisations to rationalise and integrate data holdings across their areas. In this context green infrastructure also has an important rôle to play in delivering sustainable communities in line with PPS1.

Funding advocacy: An NAP would not be the only organisation carrying out environmental work in its area. Others would include existing partnerships as detailed elsewhere in this report, conservation volunteers, local authorities and other bodies. However, for these organisations, being part of the delivery of a natural area scale Action Plan may help to secure funding from bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) which increasingly require evidence of strategic vision and overall coherence in the projects they support.

Support for existing partnerships: County Durham has a history of effective partnership working in the environmental field. On the one hand this strengthens the case for new NAPs which, in this context, can be expected to succeed. On the other hand the NAPs must ensure that they do nothing to threaten the work of the existing partnerships. Funding advocacy and co-ordinating match funding are areas where the new partnerships will be able to support the existing partnerships.

Influencing policy: Contacts with local authorities would be crucial in ensuring that the strategic objectives of the Partnerships are reflected in local policy development and in development control decisions taken on a daily basis. The NAP would also have a rôle to play in influencing policy at the regional scale, including both the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Regional Strategy for the Environment.



¹ Green infrastructure consists of public and private assets, with and without public access, in urban and rural locations, including allotments, woodland, children’s play spaces, village greens, public rights of way, water bodies, nature reserves and many other types of natural or semi-natural environment.

EXISTING LANDSCAPE-SCALE AND OTHER PARTNERSHIPS

There is a number of existing partnerships within County Durham, with varying geographical coverages, rôles and funding arrangements. In general our research found that these partnerships have been effective and valued by stakeholders, and this positive experience of partnership working is an important factor in favour of setting up NAPs.

In general there appears to be broad support for the concept of landscape-scale partnerships across the membership of the County Durham Environment Partnership, an impression which was reinforced by positive feedback from the stakeholder workshop described elsewhere in this report.

Existing partnerships include:

- Minerals Valley Partnership, a successful but time-limited partnership which covers an area of 81,000 hectares in west County Durham. Its focus is on environment-led community regeneration. It consists of fifty or more businesses and statutory, community and voluntary organisations led by Natural England and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and match funding. (Match funding presents its own challenges to the Partnership, in particular co-ordinating the delivery of projects with the availability of cash which arrives in accordance with local authority financial years.)
- The County Durham Environment Partnership (CDEP) is part of the County Durham Strategic Partnership, the other elements being the Strategic Partnership for Education and Lifelong Learning, the County Durham Economic Partnership and the County Durham Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities Partnership.
- The North Pennines AONB Partnership has a statutory function of co-ordinating efforts to conserve and enhance the AONB. It consists of almost 30 statutory agencies, local authorities and voluntary organisations and is seen by the CDEP as providing a good, successful model for partnership working. It is core funded by nine local authorities and Natural England.
- The Durham Heritage Coast is entirely within Natural Area 6. It is run as a partnership of local authorities, agencies and community bodies and promotes conservation, education and the integrated sustainable development of the area.
- The North East Community Forest is a Public Interest Charitable Company whose members are local authorities, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. Its work is mainly channeled through the two major forest regeneration projects in the region, the Great North Forest (in southern Tyne and Wear and north-east Durham) and the Tees Forest. Its vision is “the creation of an interconnected network of green spaces that supports biodiversity, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, in order to make a major contribution to the prosperity, health and quality of life of North East communities,” and green infrastructure is explicitly a major part of its remit.
- The North East Environment Forum is a forum of public, private, statutory and voluntary sector organisations with a common interest in maintaining and improving

the environment of the North East region. Its purpose is to work towards greater understanding of environmental issues, providing an effective voice for the environment in strategic planning, securing resources for the environment, identifying clear priorities, disseminating good practice and supporting sustainable development. Its draft strategy (“North East Strategy for the Environment”), currently in consultation, sets the environmental context and describes actions that can be taken in order to further the cause of environmental regeneration.

Sustainability and integration are the key themes running through the document, with the provision of green (“environmental”²) infrastructure seen as a key component in delivering benefits to the community and environment. Landscape scale partnerships are seen as an appropriate mechanism for delivering green infrastructure improvements and other benefits.

- The North East Biodiversity Forum is a partnership of over 25 organisations with a common interest in conserving biological diversity in the North East. Its objective is to ‘support, encourage and positively influence the conservation and enhancement of biological diversity as a strategic issue in North East England’
- Turning the Tide was a partnership project funded by the Millennium Commission and a consortium of local authorities and agencies. Its purpose was to carry out a wide range of regeneration and improvement projects on the derelict areas of the Durham coast, with a view to having the whole area designated National Nature Reserve.
- The Five Villages Project was a partnership (now closed) of local authorities, parishes, English Nature, Durham Wildlife Trust and Durham County Waste Management. It was part funded by Landfill Tax Credit and was effective in creating local nature reserves, hedgerows, access paths etc. Problems arose when funding ceased, since maintenance of these features then became an issue.
- The County Durham Environmental Trust is a non-profit grant distributing organisation run from Durham County Council. It distributes contributions from County Durham Waste Management Company for qualifying schemes.
- Tyne and Wear Planning Policy Managers’ Forum is an informal group of local authority policy planners which meets at irregular intervals to discuss policy development in the region.
- Groundwork Trusts in East and West Durham receive core funding from local authorities, and are key partners in regeneration and policy advocacy. Together with Groundwork South Tyneside they cover the whole region and have a record of successful projects in the region.
- Durham Biodiversity Action Partnership (DBAP) have developed a number of successful projects including Magical Meadows (run by Durham Wildlife Trust), whose aim is to conserve, connect and enhance magnesian limestone grassland on the

² Environmental infrastructure in this context is taken to mean both green infrastructure as defined earlier in this document, together with other elements of the air, water and human environment.

magnesian limestone plateau. It is part funded by the ALSF, the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, run by Defra. (Feedback from this organisation demonstrates the crucial value in having a project officer in place from the start.)

- The North East Environment Forum consists of public, private, statutory and voluntary sector organisations with a common interest in maintaining and improving the environment of the North East Region. Its Strategy for the Environment of the North East was published in draft form for consultation in December 2006.

Individually these partnerships are often successful and effective. However, they have varying remits, varying geographical coverage which often takes little account of physiographic boundaries, are sometimes short-lived and often have little if any link to policy or strategy development: they result from, rather than have influence upon, policy.

Ideally a landscape scale partnership would have a more strategic and holistic approach; have complete geographical coverage of the region; be long-lived; be based on robust natural boundaries which are independent of local authority boundaries (and hence not vulnerable to local authority reorganisation); be integrated with other strategies; and complement existing successful partnerships.

Nationally, there are few partnerships which are comparable with the proposed NAP other than existing AONB Partnerships. One which does bear comparison is the Severn and Avon Vales Wetlands Partnership (SAVWP), which was established in 2000 to “achieve the planned recovery and enhancement of the wetland resource of the Severn and Avon Vales by the wise use of land and water, in ways that are economically sound, socially responsive and environmentally sensitive.” To achieve its aims the SAVWP draws on the support and resources of statutory and voluntary organisations from the environmental and agricultural sectors including: the Environment Agency, English Nature, The Wildlife Trusts, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups (FWAG), Department of Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), National Farmers Union (NFU), the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA), County and Local Councils, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (W&WT) and Severn Trent Water. The partnership also has a full-time Project Officer. To this extent it is similar to the proposed NAP. However, it is focussed to a greater extent on the particular ecology of the wetlands in question and is less concerned with land management through the planning system than a partnership in the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau would be.



Other partnerships with similar purposes include the marine estuary partnerships including the Solway Firth, Morecambe Bay and Severn Estuary Partnerships.

EXISTING STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS

Regional Spatial Strategy

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East (entitled “View”) is the document which sets the regional context for planning. It is informed by government policy such as PPGs and PPSs, and in turn informs the development of local development frameworks. It has no direct effect on development in the region, being implemented through the offices of subsidiary plans at county, unitary and district level.

“View” contains a number of policies relevant to NAPs, in particular Policy 10 which deals with Green Belts and open areas and supports the development of strategic networks of green infrastructure. “Green infrastructure” includes biodiversity target zones, habitat creation and enhancement areas, wildlife sites, cultural sites and many others.

In addition, Policy 9 contains extensive commitments to conservation and enhancement of a wide range of cultural and environmental features, although a great deal of it is specific to designated sites rather than to the landscape in general. Policy 33 relates specifically to the protection of landscape character. However, it is almost exclusively concerned with designated protected landscapes (national parks, AONBs etc.) and not at all with undesignated countryside or urban spaces. Policy 35 provides guidance on the management of biodiversity and geodiversity in the region.

County Structure Plans

The County Council is responsible for strategic development planning at county level through the County Structure Plan, and also produces the Minerals Local Plan and Waste Local Plan for the county. The Structure Plan is informed by research done at county level through initiatives such as the Durham Landscape Character Assessment, which also feeds into work done at district and unitary level in their respective local authorities’ local plans and local development frameworks.

The Minerals Local Plan discusses the magnesian limestone plateau in detail, since this area has a long history of mining and quarrying and a number of currently active mineral extraction sites. Limestone itself is an economically valuable resource, and according to county mineral planning officers mineral extraction in general is expected to persist on the magnesian limestone plateau until at least 2042. However, although the term “Natural Area” is defined in the glossary to the Minerals Local Plan, the term is not used within the text or in any stated policies. In proposals maps within the text the magnesian limestone plateau has a defined boundary, but it is not the same as the Natural Area boundary. Part of the reason for this is that the Minerals Local Plan is a legal document where boundaries have important implications for development control, whereas the Natural Area boundary is an indicative zone of transition, as described above.

Unitary, District and Borough Authority Local Plans and Local Development Frameworks

We interviewed planners and other professionals from Hartlepool, Sedgefield, Sunderland, Easington, South Tyneside and Darlington. We were unable directly to contact appropriate people from remaining district-level and unitary authorities.

Authorities at this level are responsible for producing Local Development Frameworks (LDFs), which since the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act have taken over the functions formerly performed by Local Plans. LDFs provide the framework for land management and development at the local level, and are developed within the structure provided by PPSs and PPGs, Regional Spatial Strategies and County Structure Plans. They are therefore important documents which have a direct and lasting influence on the way an area develops, including its biodiversity and landscape character.

All these authorities' plans contain policies relating to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the landscape and promoting the use of brownfield sites. However, policies which make specific reference to defined Natural Areas are unusual. For example Easington, which is entirely within NA6, has policies and programmes specifically aimed at management of the coastal magnesian grassland (partly through an initiative known as Turning the Tide), but the Natural Area itself is not mentioned. Darlington's policies E7 and E8 refer to the magnesian limestone plateau as a landscape type contributing to an Area of High Landscape Value but do not refer to the Natural Area as a designation in itself.

Some planners with whom we spoke in other authorities were unaware of the Natural Area or Joint Character Area designations, some had never heard of the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau, and some were not aware of its particular characteristics. On the other hand we received a positive response from most interviewees, who expressed interest in using the developing knowledge of natural areas to inform their evolving plans and policies. The planning system is currently in transition from the old local plans to the new LDFs, and many authorities are currently in the process of developing policies for the new documents.

Conflict and co-operation between plans and policies

As one might expect, planners take the view that their local, structure and unitary plans are internally and externally consistent, take account of all the appropriate guidance and avoid conflict between policies. The process of developing these plans, as laid down by regulation, certainly requires a high level of consultation with the public and with statutory and non-statutory consultees and stakeholders. And informal bodies such as the Tyne and Wear Planning Policy Managers' Forum help to put this process of co-ordination in place.

In reality the picture is rather varied. Political and economic pressure inevitably means that environmental protection and landscape management policies are frequently qualified by the requirements of "over-riding public need" so that ultimately a development decision often rests with planning committees. For example Policy 8 of Easington's Local Plan supports the restoration of magnesian grassland in the coastal

zone unless it conflicts with Policy 12, concerning development on “best and most versatile” agricultural land. From a strictly conservationist point of view this situation has obvious drawbacks because it allows apparent loopholes in the protection of un-designated sites (designated sites have a much higher level of protection, depending on their exact status). Arguably, however, this flexibility is a strength of the planning system seen as a whole, since it allows a case-by-case assessment of proposed measures rather than a prescriptive structure within which no variation is allowed.

The Minerals Local Plan, and the people we spoke to about it, recognise the conflict between the requirements of the mineral developers and conservation interests on the magnesian limestone plateau, including not only nature conservation and landscape but also water supply, the escarpment being an important aquifer (a “major aquifer”). They seek to meet the interests of both groups where they can, while adhering to central and regional government requirements.



DATA ISSUES

The Importance of Data

Without sufficient environmental and landscape information about the area it may be difficult to design and implement an effective action plan, particularly in the case of non-designated areas: generally, a great deal of information is available about Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and so on, but relatively little is known (or at least recorded systematically) about the non-designated sites which may, nevertheless, contain important habitats and landscapes. This contextual information is particularly important in the light of increasingly fragmented habitats – increasingly fragmented both in terms of relative isolation, and in terms of the functional isolation created by modern land management methods.

Lack of existing information is not necessarily a show-stopper. A valid function in the early days of a partnership may be to drive the collection and management of data on a Natural Area scale, ensuring that constituent authorities hold consistent datasets relating to the whole of the Natural Area.

Data Holdings

Two main points stand out from our research (see Appendices 7 and 8). First, and as discussed above, although a great deal of data are held about specific sites, in particular designated sites (SSSIs, Ramsar sites, SACs etc., and other specific sites such as verges and registered hedgerows), there is almost no environmental data relating to the general landscape – the context within which the designated sites exist. All interviewees that we asked agreed that this was a problem, and it appears to be particularly marked in relation to data from statutory bodies – whose focus, naturally, is on the statutory designated areas which it is their job to look after.

Second, knowledge of organisations' data holdings is extremely patchy. Generally the GIS officer or data manager is a good source of information about what data an organisation holds; but often the professionals whose job it is to use those data (planners, landscape architects or estate managers) do not know of its existence within the organisation.

Most organisations obtain their data from several sources: Government agencies, local wildlife trusts, consultancies etc., supplemented by ad-hoc surveys. For this reason superficially identical datasets in adjacent authorities may be substantially different in terms of their scale, scope, currency and accuracy. Even where data are similar in these respects they may be held in dissimilar formats (for example in different proprietary brands of GIS or database software) which may or may not be compatible. Assembling a coherent dataset for an area spanning several authorities may therefore be problematic. In other cases data may be held for part of a Natural Area but may not exist for another. An example would be the absence of a detailed landscape character assessment outside County Durham, or Historic Landscape Character Assessment outside County Durham and Darlington.

STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

A stakeholder workshop was held at Seaton Holme, Easington on Tuesday 13th March 2007. Please see Appendix 3 for a complete list of all attendees, and Appendix 4 for a copy of the agenda. (English Heritage was unable to send a representative to the workshop but wrote to express support for the principle of establishing landscape scale partnerships in County Durham. Please see Appendix 6 for a copy of their letter.) The main parts of the workshop consisted of an introduction to NAPs, a keynote address, and breakout sessions discussing key aspects of the proposals.

Throughout the workshop participants were encouraged to voice concerns regarding the proposed NAPs. The study team expected these concerns to address issues such as impacts on existing partnerships; “partnership fatigue” due to the overlap of multiple bodies with similar aims; fears that the NAP would rob funding from existing work; and confusion over the objectives of the various (potentially competing) partnerships. In the event very few such concerns were raised, and a show of hands at the end of the morning revealed a large majority in favour of the proposals, with none expressing opposition. A minority expressed no view.

A thread running through the workshop was that participants value the work of existing partnerships and took this as an indication that, run correctly, an NAP could benefit land management for environmental and landscape purposes. However, a strong message was received that any NAP needs to be very clear about what it is intending to achieve over and above what is already accomplished by existing bodies. A gap analysis should be an early activity to identify where the activities of the NAP should be focussed.

The breakout sessions were the most important part of the workshop, since they provided the opportunity for participants to express their views. Six breakout groups were conducted in two consecutive groups of three, so that each participant was able to join two breakout groups. Subjects covered were:

- The objectives of the NAP;
- relationships with existing partnerships;
- relationships with existing policies, strategies and plans;
- funding;
- management and staffing; and
- relationships with stakeholders.

The proceedings of the breakout groups were recorded and are reproduced in full in Appendix 10. The following notes summarise the main points raised.

Objectives of the Partnership

The partnership must ensure that its activities do not conflict with or overlap with the activities of other partnerships. This means that objectives need to be agreed jointly and be inclusive of all stakeholders’ interests (including those in commerce and industry who already contribute to a number of the existing partnerships listed above). This workshop



group concluded that the partnership should work at the strategic level, co-ordinating at a high level the work of other bodies. However, the opinion was expressed in other groups that the partnership should also commission its own projects on the ground.

Apart from practical project work, the partnership should address wider issues. The most immediately important of these is to contribute to the formulation of the spatial development frameworks which direct the activities of development control planners in their day-to-day work. (It was identified in the group looking at relationships with other policies that this means the partnership must have a very clear idea of “what success looks like” to drive its agenda and form its identity; and on a number of occasions during the day the importance of setting strong, clear, objectives and goals at an early stage was stressed.) The partnerships should also take account of wider environmental concerns, such as global warming, in their objectives.

Relationships with Existing Partnerships

There are many existing partnerships. An NAP could help them by drawing their workings together under the umbrella of a strategy which directly addresses the real-world conditions of the area in question rather than artificially defined areas. These benefits could be manifested in terms of cash and funding generation, policy and project integration, higher profile working (especially for smaller partnerships) and delivery of statutory functions amongst others.

Potential costs for existing partnerships are those identified elsewhere, principally competition for finance and the danger of conflicting or overlapping with the activities of other partnerships.

In defining which other partnerships are relevant the NAP should make an effort to engage with the private sector and industry, without whose support the objectives of the partnership could not fully be met.

Relationships with Existing Policies, Strategies and Plans

The policies and plans of the NAP need to fit into their own niche within the wider system of plans and strategies, especially the local development framework. For local authorities, the partnership could be a way of integrating sustainability into the plan-development process, but in return the partnership should be capable of influencing the process so that landscape-scale issues are taken into account in local development documents.

The particular character of the magnesian limestone area means that intensive agriculture and suburbanisation are factors to be taken into account here. It would be a mistake to automatically assume that these trends are necessarily to be resisted; in the wider picture they may be trends to be worked with rather than against.

NAPs may provide a balancing force against the metropolitan focus of the City Region concept. Again, this developing area of policy provides opportunities for constructive work rather than automatic antipathy.

Funding

Dedicated funding is crucial to the success of the project. There was some discussion concerning the stage at which funding would be required, but agreement that a dedicated team is required to get things moving; this carries its own implication that the team needs to be explicitly funded from the beginning, with ongoing commitment from project partners.

Potential sources of funding, apart from the lead project partners, include the health sector, the voluntary sector, the private sector (for example for green infrastructure projects connected with utility companies), the Heritage Lottery Fund, Landfill Tax Credit and the England Rural Development Programme. However, the partnership should take care to ensure that its activities do not result in loss of funding for existing schemes.

Management and Staffing

There was general agreement that the NAP would need to be run by a dedicated team, perhaps based on models provided by existing partnerships such as the AONB and the Mineral Valleys, with a Project Officer in post from the beginning to drive the establishment of the organisation. To achieve this, a commitment is required of partner organisations for long term funding. Ideally there should be a separate partnership for each natural area which, with dedicated staff, should allow for independence of vision and action. This provides an opportunity for Natural England to lead development of the project, since their remit crosses administrative boundaries.

The importance of development control in shaping the development of the area makes it crucial that local authorities have buy-in to the staffing and management of the partnerships. However, it was felt that too much political control of the day-to-day management of the partnership would be detrimental, and a “light touch” approach, possibly controlled by means of an annually agreed SLA, may be more effective.

Relationships with Stakeholders

Stakeholder relationships are, by definition, crucial to the partnership. The partnership must genuinely reflect stakeholder views rather than simply adopting its own agenda. Once again, the importance of engaging with the private sector was stressed, since development is such a significant driver for change in the landscape, and hence there needs to be an economic agenda for the partnership as well as an environmental agenda.

SUMMARY: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

The Feasibility Study has revealed a number of strengths of the proposed NAP system; weaknesses which it must address; opportunities which it provides; and threats both to itself and to other organisations. This section summarises the identified issues.

Among the *strengths* of proposed NAPs are that they:

- Would be based on coherent landscape units which cross artificial administrative boundaries
- would be independent of local government reorganisation, currently on the agenda in Durham
- enjoy broad conceptual support from the large majority of potential stakeholders whose experience of partnership working in Durham is generally very positive
- would benefit from the experience of existing models such as the AONB partnerships
- would have a broad remit and hence would take a holistic view of environmental and landscape management
- should be founded on long-term commitments to core funding which would therefore provide stability and the ability to provide long-term leadership
- would align with some existing funding strands such as Defra agri-environmental schemes
- would not be restricted to designated protected landscapes or environments
- would encourage input from a wide range of stakeholders including private industry and agriculture
- would provide a means for local authorities to meet their obligations under the European Landscape Convention, PPS1, PPS9 and regulations stemming from them
- would benefit from “buy-in” from partners who would have an interest in seeing the partnerships succeed.

Among the *weaknesses* of NAPs are that:

- Awareness of the use and significance of NAs in general, and the characteristics of individual areas in particular, is patchy – even in local authority planning offices
- environmental and landscape data holdings across NA boundaries are patchy and inconsistent
- they would add a new element to an already complex system of statutory bodies, planning authorities, formal and informal partnerships, pressure groups, voluntary sector organisations and other groupings which compete for resources and attention

- crossing administrative boundaries is a strength in terms of integrated landscape management but may be awkward to put into effect and manage.

NAPs would provide *opportunities* to:

- Enable stakeholders, including the public and private industry, to express their views on landscape scale development
- provide unified and consistent landscape management and planning regimes within landscape types across administrative boundaries
- do collaborative work like the “Keys to the Past” website, which provides public access to Durham and Northumberland SMR
- plan the provision and protection of green infrastructure at the landscape scale and link the planning to project work at the local scale
- co-ordinate funding applications through Landfill Tax Credit, HLF, ALSF etc.
- add value to the work of existing partnerships by providing a coherent framework of objectives within which they could work
- embed environmental concerns in LDFs, greenspace strategies, biodiversity action plans etc.
- address wider environmental concerns such as climate change in policy development
- provide a coherent means for carrying out opportunity mapping at the landscape unit scale rather than within administrative boundaries
- enable delivery of environmental objectives through planning conditions, e.g. S.106 agreements
- initiate new landscape scale projects by staff with a focus on a particular natural area rather than an administrative area
- fill in missing data relating to the landscape and environment of non-designated areas
- help partners to cut costs by passing some policy development work to the NAPs, with the additional benefit that the resultant policies would be more concordant with surrounding authorities’ policies.

***Threats* to NAPs include:**

- Lack of commitment by partners caused by “partnership fatigue” in an area already replete with partnerships, leading to lack of secure long-term funding
- potential desire by partners to exercise political influence over the activities of the partnership
- political, professional or personal disagreement among the partners
- failure to set clear, jointly agreed goals or to have a clear vision of “what success looks like”

- failure to engage effectively with the private sector
- competition with other partnerships for funding
- continued concentration of effort and funding by statutory and other bodies on designated sites at the expense of the landscape in general
- lack of understanding by funding, statutory and other partners of the nature of the partnership, how it differs from other partnerships and why it is necessary
- differing priorities between partnership members
- professional jealousy from staff in other organisations fearful that their niche will be taken over or that their jobs are under threat.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the Study was to explore the feasibility of developing a pilot NAP in the Durham Magnesian Limestone Natural Area (Natural Area number 6, Joint Character Area number 15), and subsequently NAPs in other Natural Areas in the North East of England, and England as a whole.

In relation to the Durham Magnesian Limestone Natural Area, our conclusion is that a pilot NAP is feasible and should be pursued. The area exhibits a number of characteristics which make it an interesting proposition as a pilot study: It is a distinctive landscape with a particular (though not unique) set of challenges and land use pressures; it does not enjoy a high level of landscape protection through designation; it benefits from a history of successful partnership working; and it is administered by a variety of local authorities at different levels.

The situation varies across the country. For example in many places the work of an NAP is effectively carried out by existing bodies such as AONB Partnerships. In National Parks the situation is less clear. In some cases the administrative area is roughly equivalent to the natural area (as is the case in the Lake District); but a National Park Authority is not a partnership, rather an administrative body with responsibility for development control. Therefore our recommendation is that further research should be commissioned to identify natural areas which appear to be suitable for implementation of NAPs based on experience gained in the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau.

DRAFT ACTION PLAN: SETTING UP THE PARTNERSHIP

The following major milestones need to be addressed in setting up the NAP. At this stage timescales and specific dates are not proposed, at the request of the project team.

- Secure funding for Project Officer (and Assistant).
 - A full time Project Officer is required to develop the project. An assistant will be a valuable asset but in the early stages administrative and other support may be available from lead partner organisations.
 - Lead partners (namely Natural England and Durham County Council) may take responsibility for funding the Project Officer for the first year of the project. The appointment would need to allow lead time so that further financial commitments from other partners can be planned and worked into local authority and other organisations' budgetary planning processes.
 - Accommodation and facilities including administrative support need to be identified and secured before a Project Officer is appointed.
 - The basis of employment of the Project Officer should be established at this stage. It is likely that he or she will be nominally an employee of one of the lead partners, but this may depend on factors such as availability of accommodation, whether he or she is already an employee and so on.
- Secure agreement in principal from other partners.
 - In the event that one or more key partners withholds agreement a decision will need to be taken as to whether the project can continue.
- Appoint Project Officer.
 - From this point on the majority of the work of setting up the NAP will be carried out by the Project Officer.
 - A major part of the Project Officer's work will be communications: with partners, the public, funding bodies, statutory bodies, the voluntary sector, the media etc. The Project Officer should therefore be an excellent communicator and co-ordinator. All other attributes are secondary.
- Undertake structured research on lessons learned from the experiences of other projects, in particular the North Pennines AONB Partnership, the Mineral Valleys Project and the Severn and Avon Vales Wetlands Partnership.
 - Lessons should be incorporated into the setup of the NAP.
- Establish the Vision.
 - The Vision is the statement of "what success looks like". Without a clear vision, clear objectives and targets cannot be set.
 - The Vision needs to be established at an early stage.

- A clear vision will help to secure partner buy-in to the project. It must therefore be agreed between the partners and will repay considerable investment of effort.
- All plans, objectives and targets must address some aspect of the Vision.
- Research budgetary requirements.
 - Most costs in the early stages will be employment costs for the Project Officer.
 - Later costs will depend on the proposed activities of the Project Officer and his or her team.
 - Activities depend on the targets and objectives, and they in turn depend on the Vision.
- Research funding options.
 - Funding may be available both from external funding agencies such as HLF and internally from members of the NAP.
 - Funding should be in separate streams for core activities and for project-based work.
- Secure funding and formal agreements to proceed.
 - It may be that funding becomes available from different sources at different times. Care must be taken to secure a commitment to long-term core funding from key partners to fund the work of the Project Officer as a minimum.
- Draft Natural Area Plan.
 - Consult partners and existing partnerships for potential synergies and conflicts.
 - Carry out gap analysis to establish what activities the existing partnerships are missing.
 - The plan must the aspirations stated in the Vision.
 - The plan must include details of targets and objectives, how success will be measured and how activities are to be resourced.
 - Like the Vision, the Plan is a vital document which will guide the work of the NAP for some years into the future. It will therefore repay considerable investment of time, particularly in consultation with partners whose acceptance of the Plan will be crucial to the success of the NAP.
- Launch Natural Area Partnership.
 - Launch event could be combined with launch of Natural Area Plan for publicity purposes.

REFERENCES

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- Natural England (2007e) Durham Magnesian Limestone Character Area Profile. Natural England, Sheffield, http://www.countryside.gov.uk/Images/JCA15_tcm2-21123.pdf accessed 27th March 2007

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INVITATION TO STAKEHOLDERS



22nd January 2007

Dear Colleague,

On Tuesday 13th March the County Durham Environment Partnership, in association with Natural England, will hold a partnership workshop at Seaton Holme, Easington. The purpose is to discuss proposals for a Natural Area Partnership in the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau Natural Area, as part of a feasibility study for partnerships in this and other Natural Areas. Participants have been invited from a wide range of organisations and local interest groups, and we would be very pleased if you could attend.

The workshop will take place in the morning, and refreshments and lunch will be provided. It will include an introduction to the proposals, and you will be invited to contribute your thoughts and opinions on them, whether positive or negative. The purpose is to gather information which will help us to understand whether Natural Area Partnerships would be well received and supported, and if so what issues need to be considered in setting them up.

It may be that you or your organisation have relatively little involvement in the area designated as the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau Natural Area. Even so, I would still encourage you to attend, since the intention would be to establish similar partnerships in other Natural Areas in the North East (and further afield) if this one succeeds. I have attached overleaf some background information about the proposals; if you have any questions please do call me.

Please contact my colleague Glen Shah in our Durham office, telephone 0191 370 6033, email glen.shah@capita.co.uk, to confirm whether you wish to attend the workshop.

Yours sincerely,

Oliver Moffatt
EIA Team Leader
Capita Symonds Ltd

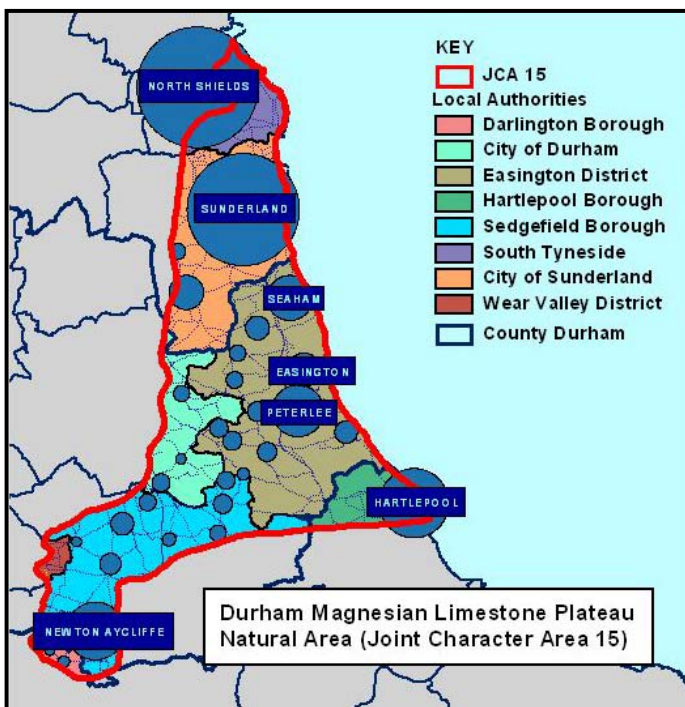
NATURAL AREA PARTNERSHIPS: BACKGROUND

The County Durham Environment Partnership (CDEP) believes that there is a need for new landscape scale partnerships to be developed in the North East Region. The varied partnerships that already exist have, in many cases, demonstrated the effectiveness of partnership working at a landscape scale, but vary considerably in their geographical scale and coverage, their remit and their resources. There is an emerging need for new partnerships which deal with all of the region's landscapes and deliver environmental objectives in a way which is fully integrated with economic, social and cultural agendas.

The CDEP believes that Joint Character Areas (JCAs), and specifically the Natural Areas (NAs), provide the most appropriate framework. JCAs reflect both the underlying biogeography and cultural geography of the region, and are independent of administrative boundaries. They form part of a consistent framework across England which is now well established and influential in the work of both government agencies and local authorities. The creation of new Natural Area Partnerships (for those areas which are not already covered by similar entities such as the North Pennines AONB Partnership) would provide a small number of partnerships of a robust and strategic scale

Central to the work of such partnerships would be the development of 'landscape action plans' or 'management plans' through a process of public engagement and consultation. This would build on work done by the former Countryside Agency and English Nature in their Natural Area Profiles, Countryside Character Area profiles, and Countryside Quality Counts initiative. Core areas of work for new partnerships would include planning and

delivery of green infrastructure and strategic opportunity mapping for the restoration and creation of BAP priority habitats and conservation of BAP priority species at a landscape scale.



THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

The CDEP is investigating the feasibility of setting up a landscape-scale partnership using NA 6 (the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau Natural Area) as its study area. This Natural Area covers the District of Easington and parts of Durham District and Sedgefield District in County Durham, together with parts of the City of Sunderland,

South Tyneside, Hartlepool and Darlington. The Feasibility Study will draw conclusions about the scope for partnership working based on Natural Areas generally as well as

making specific recommendations as to how such a partnership should be established, constituted and resourced in NA 6.

The study will –

- Review the existing ‘information base’ on landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage resources in NA 6 and identify gaps and weaknesses.
- Audit the role and coverage of existing environmental strategies and plans.
- Audit the role and coverage of existing partnerships and initiatives.
- Audit the relationship between environmental, social and economic agendas, plans, strategies and initiatives.
- Identify the key issues and objectives for the environment of NA 6.
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing mechanisms in dealing with those issues and delivering those objectives.
- Identify key areas of work where a Natural Area Partnership would be of benefit.
- Make recommendations, informed by stakeholders, on how such a partnership could be formed and constituted and how it would relate to existing structures and initiatives.
- Assess the resources required and identify potential sources of funding.
- Formulate a programme of action.
- Draw conclusions about the wider application of Natural Area Partnerships across the North East Region and England.

APPENDIX 2: STAKEHOLDER CONTACT LIST

Alan Hunter	English Heritage North East Region
Alison Learmonth	Durham PCT
Amanda Hunter	Natural England
Andrew Smith	Government Office for the North East
Andy Lees	Durham Biodiversity Partnership
Andy Whitehead	Natural England
Barry Grainger	Easington District Council
Bob Kirton Darling	Lambton Estate Office
Bob Moorhouse	Highways Agency
Brad Tooze	Natural England
Brendan Callaghan	Forestry Commission
Bryn Morris-Hill	Sedgefield Borough Council
Celia Port	Natural England
Chris Myers	Sedgefield Borough Council
Chris O'Neil	City of Durham Council
Chris Scaife	Hartlepool Borough Council
Clive Davies	North East Community Forest
Dave Winder	South Tyneside Council
David Porteous	City of Sunderland
Denis Rooney	The National Trust
Dolly Hannon	Easington District Council
Gary Shears	Easington District Council
Gavin Scott	City of Durham Council
Graham Bell	North of England Civic Trust
Ian Bond	Hartlepool Borough Council
Ian Kendall	Natural England
James Cokill	Durham Wildlife Trust
James Howard	Environment Agency
John Locken	Sedgefield Borough Council
Judy Hennessy	County Durham Environmental Trust Ltd
Kate Stobart	Environment Agency
Kathryn Warrington	Sunderland City Council
Keith Hamilton	City of Sunderland
Laurie Norris	NFU Regional Office
Lisa Roberts	South Tyneside Council
Liz Fisher	The National Trust
Louise Hunter	Northumbrian Water
Lynne Smith	Sedgefield Borough Council
Maggie Bosanquet	Durham County Council
Matthew Hawking	South Tyneside Council
Melanie Sensicle	County Durham Tourism Partnership
Michael Appleton	Smiths Gore
Mike Preston	Seaham Town Council
Nic Best	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
Oliver Sherratt	Easington District Council
Richard Hall	Natural England

Richard Waldmeyer	Hartlepool Borough Council
Rick Long	Durham County Council
Rob George	Darlington Borough Council
Simon Longstaff	Easington District Council
Steve Bhowmick	Durham County Council
Stuart Pudney	Northumbrian Water
Sue Zissler	Tyne Tees FWAG
Terry Coult	Durham County Council
Tim Ducker	City of Sunderland
Tony Laws	Natural England

APPENDIX 3: STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP ATTENDANCE LIST

Seaton Holme, Easington, 13th March 2007

Name	Organisation
Amanda Gregory	DCC
Amanda Hunter	Natural England
Andrew Whitehead	Natural England
Andy Lees	Durham Biodiversity Partnership
Barry Luccock	City of Sunderland
Chris Wiltsher	CPRE
Clare Rawcliffe	South Tyneside Council
Clive Davies	North East Community Forest
David Mason	DCC
David Park	Lafarge
David Walton	Durham City Council
Gary Shears	Easington DC
Ged Lawson	DCC
Glen Shah	Capita Symonds Ltd
James Cokill	Durham Wildlife Trust
Jason McKeown	DCC
Joanne Hodgson	DCC
John Bragg	DCC
Jonathan Elmer	Durham City Council
Keith Hamilton	City of Sunderland
Maggie Bosanquet	DCC
Mark Knowles	Highways Agency
Michael Hurlow	Durham City Council
Mike Preston	Seaham Town Council
Niall Benson	DCC
Oliver Moffatt	Capita Symonds Ltd
Peter Richards	Groundwork
Rachel Sparks	Forestry Commission
Richard Hall	Natural England
Richard Jackson	DCC
Richard Waldmeyer	Hartlepool Borough Council
Steve Bhowmick	DCC
Steve Cooper	Hartlepool Borough Council
Stuart Pudney	Northumbrian Water
Sue Jackson	Landscape Institute
Sue Stewart	One North East
Sue Zissler	FWAG
Terry Coult	DCC
Thomas Bennett	Sedgefield BC
Tony Laws	Natural England

APPENDIX 4: WORKSHOP AGENDA

Natural Area Partnership Feasibility Study Seaton Holme, Easington 13th March 2007

Agenda

- 9.30 Refreshments and welcome (Richard Jackson, Durham County Council)
- 10.00 Introduction – Ged Lawson (Durham County Council)
- 10.30 Keynote speech – Richard Hall (Natural England)
- 10.45 Breakout Session 1 (Issues)
- Objectives of a partnership
 - Relationships with existing partnerships
 - Relationships with existing policies, strategies and plans
- 11.05 Coffee
- 11.25 Breakout session 2 (Options)
- Funding
 - Management and staffing
 - Relationships with stakeholders
- 11.45 Presentation of findings by groups
- 12.00 General discussion and questions to the panel
- 12.30 Summary and close
- 12.45 Lunch

APPENDIX 5: OTHER CONTACTS

The following people were also contacted for their views during the initial phase of the study:

Brian Wilkinson	Durham County Council
Fiona Morris	Environment Agency
Fred Tippett	South Tyneside Council
Ged Lawson	Durham County Council
Jan Brown	Hartlepool Borough Council
Kevin Dolan	Darlington Borough Council
Rachel Ford	North East Assembly
Richard Pall	Forestry Commission
Simon Luthwait	Easington District Council
Steve Cooper	Hartlepool Borough Council
Tony Sambridge	City of Sunderland Council

APPENDIX 6: LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE



ENGLISH HERITAGE

NORTH EAST REGION

Mr Oliver Moffatt
EIA Team Leader
Capita Symonds Ltd
The Capita Building
Kingmoor Business Park
Carlisle
Cumbria CA6 4SJ

Direct Dial: 0191 269 1237

Your Ref:

Our Ref: AWH/DU-Durham Magnesian Limestone
Plateau-National Area Partnership

Date: 9 February 2007

Dear Mr Moffatt

**Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau
Natural Area Partnership**

Thank you for your letter of 22 January 2007 regarding the above.

English Heritage welcomes the possibility or intention of establishing Landscape Scale Partnerships reflecting the joint character areas in County Durham. Owing to limited staff availability, however, we must decline the invitation to take part in the upcoming workshop at Seaton Holme. I would further advise you that calls on our time and resources are such that we are unlikely to be able to take part in future workshops or partnership activities in respect of other joint character areas.

County Durham has commenced work on its Historic Landscape Characterisation through David Mason at the County Council. It is important that this characterisation work is fed into the work you are doing. English Heritage is helping to fund the HLC with the express intention that it should inform activities such as those you outline.

Once again I am sorry to decline the invitation but trust under the circumstances you will understand our reasons. If I can be of assistance in providing further information I shall be pleased to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Hunter
Regional Planner
e-mail: alan.hunter@english-heritage.org.uk

BESSIE SURTEES HOUSE, 41-44 SANDHILL, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, NE1 3JF

Telephone: 0191 269 1200 Facsimile: 0191 261 1130

English Heritage operates an access to information policy

APPENDIX 7: ENVIRONMENTAL DATA HELD BY COUNCILS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

- ✓ Information held
- X No information held
- ? Unsure

Where there are two columns for an organisation it is because we contacted more than one person there. In several cases we received different answers from different people within a single organisation, reflecting the lack of knowledge about data holdings within even quite small organisations.

	City of Durham Council	City of Sunderland Council	Darlington Borough Council	Durham County Council	Easington District Council	Hartlepool Borough Council	Seaham Town Council	Sedgefield Borough Council	South Tyneside Council	English Heritage	Environment Agency	Durham Wildlife Trust	Forestry Commission	Highways Agency	Natural England	North East Assembly
Area of County Landscape Value		X		✓	✓			X	✓		X					✓
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty		X		✓	X	X		X	✓		✓					✓
County Landscape Area		X		✓	✓	X		X	X		X					X
District Landscape Areas		X		?	✓	X		✓	✓		X					X
Heritage Coast		X		✓	✓	X		X	X		X					✓
National Park		X		X	X	X		X	X		✓					✓
World Heritage Site		X		✓	X	X		X	X		X			X		✓
Conservation Areas		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			X	X	
Listed Buildings		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	X			X	✓	
Registered Battle Fields		X		✓	X	X		X	X	✓	X			X	✓	
Registered Parks & Gardens		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	X			X	✓	
Scheduled Ancient Monuments		✓		✓	✓	✓		X	✓	✓	✓			X	✓	
Sites & Monument Record		✓		✓	✓	X		X	✓	X	X			X	✓	
World Heritage Sites		X		✓	X	X		X	X	✓	X			X	✓	
Bird Reserves		X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X			✓
Local Nature Reserve		✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X			✓
National Nature Reserve		X	X	X	?	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
RAMSAR		✓	✓	X	?	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	?	✓	X	✓	✓
Registered Hedgerows		X	X	X	?	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Special Area of Conservation		X	?	X	?	✓	✓	✓	X	X	?	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Site of Important Nature Conservation		✓	✓	X	?	✓	X	✓	✓	X	?	X	✓	✓	X	X
Special Protected Area		✓	?	X	?	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Site of Special Scientific Interest		✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Verges		✓	X	X	?	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Other...		X	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Holds no data.

APPENDIX 8: RESPONSES TO DATA QUESTIONNAIRE

	City of Sunderland Council	Durham County Council	Easington District Council	Hartlepool Borough Council	Sedgefield Borough Council	South Tyneside Council	Environment Agency	Durham Wildlife Trust	Forestry Commission	Highways Agency
Can you identify any gaps or weaknesses within the data?	Yes. Lack of information on non-designated areas.	Data restricted to environmental designations. Missing data on environmental attributes, which would be needed for any detailed spatial planning.	Yes.	Yes.	No.	Yes.	No formal process for reporting local changes. Existing data may be out of date and need updating. National data are updated formally and regularly.	Lots of holes in current dataset, due to ad-hoc surveys. No systematic surveys for non-designated areas.	No.	When information is required, the HA undertake a survey of the road corridor and immediate area using MAGIC and consultancies. An Environmental Information System is being developed, but will not include areas outside the road corridor. It is unlikely to include data on Natural Area 6. The format that the data will take is not known at this stage.
Are there any other data that are missing, but would be useful to you?	Ability to validate planning applications against data on GIS. Bird data to be extended to include habitat.	Yes (see Appendix 9)	Grass verges, birds, SMR data, etc.	Data about the quality of the area(s). Current data are old.	No.	Too many to mention.	No.	BAP species / habitats outside designated areas.	No.	
Are there any data held by anyone else that you use?	Agencies.	British Geological Survey.	Agencies.	Agencies.	Agencies.	Agencies.	Agencies.	Information donated by agencies and consultancies.	Agencies.	
Do you charge for access to or use of your data?	Remit to make money where possible.	Unsure.	OS Map that data is displayed upon. May charge for 'time'.	No. Trying to upload key data onto website for free access.	No.	Not always. Depends upon amount requested. May charge for 'time'.	EA cannot charge for data obtained and digitised in-house (primarily relates to species data).	Charge for time, but not for data.	Free to applicants for grant aid.	

APPENDIX 9: OTHER USEFUL DATA

In the course of research we asked “what other data relating to the landscape and environment would be useful?” The following table is the response from Durham County Council:

Some GIS datasets exist, some give only partial geographical coverage, some have their own accuracy limitations. They include the following:

Dataset	Comments
GEOLOGY: 1:250,000	DCC have solid and drift geology at something like 1:250,000 scale for County Durham only - in GIS format sourced originally from BGS.
GEOLOGY: 1:50,000	DCC have 1:50,000 solid and drift for County Durham only - from British Geological Survey (50,000 Geology for the rest of the Natural Area from BGS would be useful).
GEOLOGY: 1:10,000	Mag Limestone Outcrop - DCC have the outcrop digitised by Durham County Council at 1:10,000 covering whole Natural Area.
SOILS: Soil Survey	Soil map - DCC have soils mapped by the Soil Survey of England at around 1:250,000 scale for County Durham only - in GIS format. (1: 250,000 Soils for the rest of the Natural Area from BGS would be useful).
SOILS: Agricultural Land Classification	DCC have data for County Durham from National Dataset held by DEFRA.
WATER: GSPZs	DCC have Groundwater Source Protection Zone (East Durham limestone aquifer) County Durham and Sunderland in GIS Format - from Environment Agency.
WATER: Flooding	Indicative Flood Plain Map - National dataset from Environment Agency.
WATER: Flood Zone 2	National dataset from Environment Agency.
WATER: Flood Zone 3	National dataset from Environment Agency.
WATER: Groundwater Vulnerability	National dataset from Environment Agency.
WATER: Watercourses and water bodies-	DCC have Reservoirs, Rivers, Ponds for County Durham only - in GIS format extracted from national OS Mastermap.
WATER: River catchments.	DCC have Durham County Council dataset of river

	and stream catchments - County Durham only.
LAND USE: Land Cover	DCC have Land Cover Map 2000 (LCM2000) for County Durham only - in GIS Format - from CEH. LCM2000 has inaccuracies but is the only available comprehensive land use dataset.
LAND USE: Land Cover	DCC have Landscape Database - detailed land use data for County Durham only - in GIS format.
BIODIVERSITY: Phase 1 Habitat Survey	Paper only, County Durham only. Accuracy issues & increasingly out of date.
BIODIVERSITY: Phase 1 Habitat Survey	1km square data summaries in GIS format - County Durham only.
BIODIVERSITY: Protected species	
BIODIVERSITY: Ancient Woodland.	National dataset available from Natural England but poor quality in terms of accuracy. Some work is currently being done in the region to improve this.
LANDSCAPE: Landscape Character Assessment -	Detailed Landscape Character Area covering County Durham only - in GIS format
CULTURAL HERITAGE: Historic Landscape Character Assessment.	Currently being undertaken in County Durham and Darlington - available in GIS format
ACCESS: Public rights of way.	DCC have PROWs for Durham only - in GIS format
ACCESS: Access Land.	National Dataset available from Natural England.
ACCESS: Cycleways, multi-user routes & railway walks	DCC have data for County Durham only - in GIS format. Strategic but often permissive, so don't show up as PROWs.
MINERAL EXTRACTION: Active mineral sites.	DCC have Durham County Council GIS dataset for County Durham only.
MINERAL EXTRACTION: Old quarries.	DCC have dataset digitised by Durham County Council covering whole Natural Area.
LAND OWNERSHIP: Land owned by public bodies.	DCC have Durham County Council Terrier digitised for County Durham only.
LAND OWNERSHIP: National Trust Land.	DCC have GIS data for County Durham only - should be available from NT nationally.
LAND OWNERSHIP: Woodland Trust Land.	DCC have GIS data for County Durham only - should be available from WT nationally
LAND MANAGEMENT: Agro-environment schemes.	National GIS data available from DEFRA showing land in Countryside Stewardship, Environmental

	Stewardship, ESA scheme & Organic Scheme.
LAND MANAGEMENT: Woodland management.	National GIS dataset available from FC showing woodland in WGS

APPENDIX 10: BREAKOUT GROUP PROCEEDINGS

A: Objectives of the Partnership

- Establish jointly agreed objectives
- Manage ecological systems on the appropriate scale
- Reconcile and co-ordinate interests of existing partnerships
- Focus on objectives not covered by existing partnerships
- Be as inclusive as possible in defining objectives, activities and partners
- Remain strategic: co-ordinate at high level, rely on partners for delivery (e.g. co-ordinate funding activity to increase chances of success)
- Draw together action plans currently in existence
- Produce supplementary planning guidance across partners
- Raise importance of critical assets (e.g. magnesian limestone) with councillors. Raise in context of broader social and economic benefits
- Tackle issues such as climate change
- Establish objectives which involve industrial partners, e.g. mineral extraction industry
- Create a brand for the partnership and area to ensure it can attract interest, influence and funding.

B: Relationships with Existing Partnerships

- Existing partnerships are:
 - DBAP / Magical Meadows
 - Durham Heritage Coast Partnership
 - LA21's
 - Durham Wildlife Trust
 - Tees Forest (NECF)
 - Groundworks LSP's
 - Great North Forest
 - Tees ARC
 - Sunderland ARC
 - Local regeneration partnerships
 - Headland Partnerships
- Other Partnership models:
 - North East Sea Fisheries Committee

- NE Coastal Authorities Group – Sea Defences
- LTP (x sub-regional)
- Lack of engagement with other sectors including the private sector
- Benefits of Natural Area Partnership for other partnerships:
 - Political added value to smaller areas of some L.A.'s
 - Resources (cash)
 - Big Ambition – clearly stated
 - Symbiosis
 - Pooling policy as well as delivering resources
 - Dedicated x sectoral/delivery team/greater integration
 - Profile
 - BAP Delivery
 - Natural England delivery
 - Statutory function delivery
 - GI Delivery
 - Other stakeholder involvement health/climate change/culture
 - Employment
 - Environmental respect
 - QOL Quality of Life
- Disbenefits of Natural Area Partnership for other partnerships:
 - Loss of identity/focus – MVP View
 - Competition for finance
 - Potential duplication
 - Lack of community 'buy in'
 - Partner agenda conflict
 - Is this a priority for partners
 - Over ambitious – bigger failure
 - Overlooking fringe partners

C: Relationships with Existing Policies, Strategies and Plans

- There would be a need for any partnership action plans or strategies or initiatives to 'nest' within the wider complex of plans & strategies both existing and emerging in the region.

- Need for a partnership to have a strong relationship with Local Development Frameworks. Development seen as an important driver of environmental change (both positive and negative) – offering opportunities through mechanisms like 106 agreements.
- Supplementary Planning Documents might be a mechanism for achieving links with LDFs – the County Durham Landscape Strategy provides a basis for such a document.
- Important that a Partnership has a clearly defined role otherwise in danger of becoming yet another ‘talking shop’ full of good intentions but with no ‘teeth’. Development control policy needs to reflect NAP policy.
- Partnership seen as a good way of ‘joining up’ thinking about environmental / social / economic issues.
- Partnership seen as helping to balance the strength of the City Region concept as developing in metropolitan areas – helping the bits ‘in between’ from being ‘squeezed out’ of the battle for resources.
- Partnership must have clarity of purpose & must be able to deliver change on the ground or it will fail.
- Partnership must have a strong vision of ‘what success looks like’ to drive its agenda and form its identity.
- Much of the area in agriculture so agri-environmental agendas important. Given the intensively farmed nature of the area existing agri-environmental schemes are likely to under-deliver in this area. It may be appropriate to look to other aspects of the ERDP – farm diversification, local food economy, energy crops – as drivers of change. Generally, agri-environment schemes are complementary to NA emphasis but may not be the prime driver.
- ‘Suburbanisation’ of rural landscape a key feature here with demands for development & diversification into recreational/ commercial uses. Offers challenges to our attitudes to rural landscape – may also be appropriate to this ‘semi-rural’ landscape – something to work with rather than against.
- CPRE/NE work on tranquillity mentioned – possibly as a way of identifying the most rural of these landscapes where a more conservative approach might be appropriate.
- Resources very important – Partnership needs to have enough core funding to work & to win further resources.
- City Regions emerging as a significant concept but with a metropolitan focus – need to be acknowledged & accommodated in working of partnership.
- Important to learn lessons from existing partnerships like AONB and MVP.

D: Funding

- Options:
 - Coordination is the primary role of a Natural Area partnership

- Funding may be resolved at a later date, once partnership is established
- Function of partnership initially is liaison
- Is the first step to get community focus/buy-in? - which would enable establishment of the issues in the area and the opportunities from (e.g.) the health and employment sectors
- The process of establishing such a partnership needs a dedicated team to start the liaison process
- Although all partnerships stumble without dedicated resources, e.g. if you don't have funding
- Who's the lead partner?
- Commitment need from partners (iterative cycle)
- Sources
 - Health sector
 - ERDP
 - Building on existing funding sources - then match-fund from the HLF.
 - Current developments: planning gain arising from GI, e.g. £500 per unit in Easington
 - Voluntary sector: Community Foundations are Trusts (Newcastle has an Environmental Fund)
 - MVP is a possible resource to assist in establishment
- Problems
 - Reduction of funding Peter to pay Paul - leads to loss of current structures, funding, etc.
 - Current developments: Options for development in area are limited (space running out)
 - Lack of development land
 - HLF - cuts to their funding (Olympic requirements?) mean that they're not able to fund as much social/access/partnership as previously
- Resources needed
 - £5 million for MVP project
- Landfill Tax Credit (already funds CDENT – County Durham Environmental Trust)
- Infrastructure funding from Northumbrian Water? (esp. for GI). But this would be for project work, whereas project needs effective resourcing itself – core funding to avoid short-termism

E: Management and Staffing

- Partnerships would need to be effectively co-ordinated, managed and staffed. Good models in this respect exist in the structures of the AONB Partnership, the Heritage Coast and the Mineral Valleys Project.
- It is very important for the NAPs to have clear objectives, with specific objectives and goals.
- A Project Officer must be appointed as early as possible in order to drive the establishment of the project.
- Dedicated staff are required with long-term core funding from Partner organisations. Staff seconded from other jobs could work as an interim measure but will not provide continuity or security for the NAP. There was general agreement that the NAP could not function if it was run by staff carrying out their NAP rôles in addition to other full- or part-time jobs.
- Options for staffing include having one NAP team for each Natural Area; one for each district or county; one for each Natural England area office; and other arrangements. The consensus was that each Natural Area should have its own NAP project officer or team. The principal reason is that NAP officers based in other organisations would be focussed on their own organisations' priorities rather than on the Natural Areas. For example, two districts with a stake in the Durham Magnesium Limestone, namely Wear Valley and Darlington, each have only a small area within Natural Area 6. It is likely, or at least possible, that they would be more inclined to prioritise work relating to Natural Areas with a greater impact within their own districts. Conversely, NAP officers dedicated to a single Natural Area would have a clearer focus on the special features of their area and will be able to effectively lobby for its interests.
- The NAP will commission its own projects. It is also important that it should commission work from partners.
- Ideally the NAP should be run by its own staff led by a Project Officer. Members of the Partnership will, of course, require input into setting objectives, perhaps through the mechanism of an annually-reviewed SLA. There is a danger that too much intervention by partner organisations may skew the work of the NAP for political reasons.
- There is an opportunity for Natural England to lead development of the project.

F: Relationships with Stakeholders

- Reference made to DCC LDF Statement of Community Involvement as indicator of good practice. Stakeholder involvement may need to be carried out to same standard.
- Reference made to difference between consultation and participation. Consultation may be appropriate at strategic level. Participation more important closer to delivery.

- Existing mechanisms of stakeholder ‘view gathering’ should not be ignored. Use existing networks. LSPs very important – a two way street of listening to what LSPs have to say and providing them with environmental information, advice and ideas.
- Stakeholder fatigue a risk – particularly if raising expectations that then aren’t met by action. Use must be made of existing consultation processes, and consultation must be followed by action.
- Important to ‘profile’ stakeholders and identify key stakeholders – those mentioned included agricultural sector, minerals industry, policy and DC planners, business community.
- Important to genuinely reflect the views of stakeholders – who may be more concerned with public realm issues in urban areas and ‘grey’ environmental infrastructure like railways and cycleways.
- Evidence based links between environmental improvement and economic performance need to be established to fully engage some stakeholders holding resources.
- Development a big driver of change in this landscape – important to engage with developers. Direct (106 agreements) and indirect (Environmental Trusts) mechanisms were discussed.
- Using stakeholder views to challenge preconceptions by others (e.g. planners) were discussed. Planners not keen to see that process interfere with complex planning issues particularly if they were nimby (we don’t want quarrying) in nature rather than positive (we’d like more renewable energy).
- There should be an economic agenda as well as an environmental agenda for the NAP