

Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership

Communications Strategy

March 2009 - March 2012

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1. Introduction

Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership (LBP) – the partnership responsible for coordinating the Biodiversity Action Plan for Lancashire (LBAP) – has, since 1999, directed its work priorities through a Business & Communications Plan. Actions aimed at communicating the work of the group to its partners are integral to that plan.

A new Memorandum of Agreement between Natural England (NE) and the LBAP Partnership came into being in 2008 and it includes a new requirement for a separate communications plan. The purpose of this document is to meet that requirement and provide a specific focus for communication around the LBAP for the next three years.

2. Objectives

The overarching aim of the plan is to emphasise the importance of good communications to the success of the LBAP. The Partnership needs to be communicating its work, and therefore its worth, within the various sections of society it operates. This is key to promoting the real worth of the Partnership and its successes, which will relate to the values perceived from both current and future funding or project partners.

The objectives of the communications plan are to:

1. Bring the LBAP and biodiversity issues to the attention of the people of Lancashire;
2. Bring the LBAP and biodiversity issues to the attention of policy makers
3. Improve representation in the LBP from all sectors;
4. Inform Partners of LBAP work;
5. Ensure LBAP parties focused within the broader UK BAP framework;
6. Fulfil reporting requirements of the LBAP;

In order to meet these objectives, we need to be clear about our target audiences, the messages and information we want to convey and the mechanisms for doing so.

3. Audiences

The LBP is a very broad and dynamic partnership of organisations and individuals concerned with conserving biodiversity in Lancashire. An important notion for the communications of the partnership is to move past our peers, therefore into wider audiences. Specific audiences can be clearly identified within the broader partnership, from the wider governmental framework to the public:

- Public.
- Biodiversity Forum for wider partners
- LBP Executive and Technical Groups
- BAP framework partners and NWBF;

BAP framework partners are those involved in the BAP framework and process at national and wider regional levels – for example the North West Biodiversity Forum (NWBF), the England Biodiversity Group and the UK Biodiversity Partnership. The LBP Executive and Technical Groups are described in more detail within *Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership Business Plan 2009-2011* and represent the technical and managerial input for the work of the Partnership, from within specific organisations such as Lancashire County Council, Natural England, Environment Agency, RSPB, and The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire,

Manchester and North Merseyside. The Biodiversity Forum represents the wider members of the Partnership, and includes members from the Executive and Technical Groups, together with other parties with interests in biodiversity. Examples include the universities, Community and Natural History groups, and British Waterways.

Despite the original good intentions for the UK BAP framework to be inclusive and foster a 'broad constituency', a 2007 Gallup poll uncovered some telling attitudes towards biodiversity in the UK (and the rest of Europe).¹ For example, when asked how well informed they felt about biodiversity loss, a staggering 63% of UK citizens felt that they were not well enough informed. It is still not uncommon – 15 years after the BAP process started – to be asked by people of all ages and backgrounds "*What does biodiversity mean?*" If we fail to communicate our concerns, vision and plans to the people that live and work in Lancashire, then all the LBP will be seen to be of little value and ultimately fail.

4. Our messages

At the most basic level, it is necessary to communicate why the LBP and the LBAP is needed. It is most important to communicate these messages to audiences that are not already directly involved in the business of conserving biodiversity. This means that we should take every opportunity to:

- explain why Lancashire's biodiversity is important; and
- describe the threats to Lancashire's biodiversity.

Beyond these basic messages, we are mainly concerned with communicating the content, structure, delivery and progress of the LBAP. To do this we must:

- 'advertise' the targets and proposed actions of the LBAP to ensure that they are understood and 'owned' by relevant partners;
- report successes against the HAPs and SAPs;
- report failures against the HAPs and SAPs; and
- invite opinions and assistance with the future development of the BAP.

These messages and information are aimed more at those within the closer partnership, but not exclusively so. For example, the audience for messages about our successes against HAP and SAP targets span the entire gamut from framework partners to the general public.

5. Delivery mechanisms

The LBP has already had considerable success with leveraging a variety of communication devices. Key methods of communication used by the Partnership are:

- LBP website;
- Biodiversity News email group;
- Partnership events; and
- Reporting to funding partners.
- Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS);
- Media (e.g. local press and radio); and
- Communication channels of our partners.
- Representation (e.g. meetings and networking, annual reporting)
- Print material (e.g. flyers, leaflets, display stands)

¹ Flash Eurobarometer series #219: Attitudes of Europeans towards the issue of biodiversity.

5.1. LBAP Website

The LBP website is hosted and maintained by Lancashire County Council, who is able to quickly and accurately update information when provided by the LBM. The website had previously been reviewed and re-developed in 2007/8, going live in February 2008.

5.2. Biodiversity News

The Biodiversity News email group is a simple way of communicating news items of biodiversity interest to a wide group of individuals who can request to join if they have an interest in biodiversity in Lancashire. It can also communicate more regional and national issues or events, and thus offer a strategy for communicating larger-scale work. The news group could be reviewed in terms of the possibility for more formal promotion of the LBP, and a more straight forward route to subscribe or unsubscribe through the website.

5.3. BARS

In Lancashire, BARS has been used to fulfil the obligations of the 2005 and 2008 UK BAP reporting rounds. BARS is fundamentally a national reporting mechanism but can be used at a local scale. The Partnership has been successfully using the system to record the progress of the BAP more systematically so that progress on the LBAP is routinely picked up through reports run on BARS. Developing this local use of BARS within the Partnership is an important delivery area. Recording progress against actions rather than targets is important because automated reports on BARS *only* report against actions – not targets. So unless progress is recorded against actions, the LBAP can appear as if no progress has been made outside of BARS. Previous BAP managers in Lancashire have provided training and events for relevant members of the Partnership so that they can report their work on BARS, and if taken further this strategy can offer more complete coverage of the BAP work in Lancashire. This would still be coordinated by the regional BAP manager and NE.

5.4. Media

Considerable use has been made of opportunities to use local media to promote the LBP and BAP work to the public and interested parties. The previous LBM, Jane Ashley, had used local papers, local radio and publications such as Lancashire Life to promote LBP events and work. Importance needs to be placed on adopting a style people want to listen to or read, and as this is an important route to the public time should be focused developing this area.

5.5. Partners Communication Channels

There is considerable potential to use the communication channels of our partners to deliver some of our messages to our target audiences. . Of particular interest are the following:

- Newsletters of Partners such as Local Authorities, the Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the Environment Agency.
- Develop the potential associated with the new Local Record Centre in Lancashire.

5.6. Representation

Representation and advertising the value of the work of the partnership to members will become an increasingly important aspect of communication to consider. To make sure wider community see the value of BAP work and that the Partnership (through the LBM) represents the views of members such as local authorities. This could be imperative to persuade politicians and managerial staff of the benefit of the UKBAP and Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership. With the development of the Natural Environment Service in Lancashire, outputs communicating these values will be relevant to sustained support. Consideration for such things as an Annual Report, with a simple communicative format to really push the representation of the LBAP and the value of its work would be a simple and effective way of communication. Simply asking for local authorities views to express before a meeting, may provide a simple way of revealing the LBM is representing their views at relevant meetings. Meetings can also be an important networking point, point of contact and a way to show that the BAP is out working to secure biodiversity in relevant areas.

5.7. Print Material

The final category covers many forms of communications through printed material. Display stands and presence at events can be an important communication tool to relevant sections of the Partnership and the wider public. To compliment this project information, carefully designed to restrict the date wear of material, can convey much about work of the Partnership. Simple flyers may also provide good advertising for direction to the website which is easier to keep up to date for information, and can be taken to meetings, passed for circulation by partners. The relevance of these materials, and their cost, would need to be reviewed, but may become more relevant at times such as major events, or redevelopments of the Lancashire BAPs.

6. Delivery and Implementation Matrix

This matrix cross references each of the main types of message that we want to communicate against the most useful delivery mechanisms. It also identifies which are the target audiences for each combination of message and delivery mechanism.

		Message to communicate					
		Activity	Responsibility	Audience	Barriers	Targets	Timeframe
Delivery mechanism	LBP Website	Site updates and news items. Review statistics and development.	LBM, LCC and Exec Group	Exec and Tech Forum Public	Staff time, communication and promotion.	One update per month (e.g. news). Annual review of stats.	Ongoing, Review March 2010.
	Biodiversity News	Email news alerts	LBM	Forum Public	Communicating relevant information. Staff time.	Monthly email.	Ongoing. Review possible development linked to website Sept 2009.
	Events	Two specific Biodiversity Forum events and a biennial conference.	LBM LBP Partners	Forum Public	Communication of relevant issues or themes	2 lead forum pa One conference biennially.	Two events to be organised 2009. Biennial conference 22 nd May 2010.
	International² Year of Biodiversity 2010	Co-ordinated series of events/ publicity capitalise for Partnership	LBM LBP Partners	Forum Public Framework Exec and Tech	Staff time, communication and promotion.	Use annual conference. Produce specific plan for events/publicity	Plan for Autumn 2009

² 2010 is International Year of Biodiversity, and as such warrants an extra section in the table to focus getting the most out of potential publicity for the Partnership in Lancashire and wider in the NW and promoting UK BAP work. As such it may not be as relevant post 2010, though it may remain in some form and be reviewed in 2011.

	Periodic reports³	Supply updated reports.	LBM	Framework Exec and Tech		6 monthly updates to NE and 3 yrs UK BAP	March and September updates. Reporting round 2012.
	BARS	Record and update actions linked to projects and targets.	LBM and related Partners	Framework	Training and communication with partners to input or provide data.	Ongoing input. Annual review and update together with 3yr reporting.	Review update annually for September, and reporting round 2012.
	Media	Use to promote activities and issues.	LBP Forum	Forum Public	Making most of opportunities.	2 lead stories in local media annually. 2 non-lead articles annually, and 2 further mentions.	Ongoing. Look for new project opportunities.
	Partners	Utilise Partner communication tools.	LBM Forum	Forum Public Framework	Communication for contacts and deadlines, also relevancy.	2 articles annually. Preferably rotating through Partners	Review possibilities by Sept 2009. Utilise easy target for 2009 articles.
	Representation	Communicate representation and value of work to wider authorities	LBM LBP Partners	Forum Public Framework	Staff time Communication Contact details	Annual document Use two events pa	Review for Sept 2009 Create format Jan 2010 if supported.
	Printed Material	Produce and update Display stands, relevant flyers or project leaflets.	LBM LBP Partners	Public Forum	Costs Staff time relevancy	Use and maintain display stand. Produce relevant flyer	Ongoing Dec 2009.

³ Most regular of the reports are the updates of the Business Plan and Core Services Report, together with this report, which are submitted to Natural England as part of the Memorandum of Agreement signed annually. Further details are found in *Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership Business Plan 2009-2012*.

Abbreviations and Technical Terms:

LBM – Local Biodiversity Manager.

Forum – Biodiversity Forum for members of Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership.

Exec and Tech Groups – the Executive Group and Technical Working Groups for the Lancashire Biodiversity Partnership; Management and technical delivery for the BAP in Lancashire.

Framework – Framework partners for the LBAP, regional and national stakeholders responsible for statutory delivery of the UK BAP. Includes DEFRA and through them organisations such as Natural England and Environment Agency to which reporting may be delivered. It also includes important decision making authorities, for example Local Authorities, County Council and Politicians.

Partner – A signatory to the Lancashire Biodiversity Partnership, or potential signatory. A comprehensive list can be found in the *LBP Business Plan 2009-2012*.

LCC – Lancashire County Council.

NE – Natural England.

Public – the populace of Lancashire in its entirety.