

Natural England Guidance on Local Transport Plans and the Natural Environment



1. Introduction and purpose of this guidance

Natural England is the Government's adviser on the natural environment - ensuring the conservation, enhancement and management of the natural environment for the benefit of current and future generations.

Natural England calls for an environmentally sustainable transport system – one that protects and enhances the natural environment, as well as delivering economic and social benefits. Transport affects the natural environment, and people's experience of it, in three key areas:

- **Biodiversity, landscape, geodiversity and soils** – through direct and indirect impacts from land take and traffic;
- **Climate change and energy** – through greenhouse gas emissions and the environmental challenges posed by biofuels; and
- **Quality of life** – through people's access to and experience of the natural environment, and through links between walking, cycling, health and well-being.

Natural England¹ seeks more positive outcomes for these three areas, with the aim of securing the future of England's natural environment in a society that faces a fundamental challenge - to 'square' our desire for greater accessibility with the urgent need to reduce our carbon emissions. Natural England advocates the prioritisation and protection of the natural environment in transport planning and policy-making and in decisions about the way our lifestyles and economy are developed.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide advice to local transport authorities on how they might achieve prioritisation and protection of the natural environment in the development and implementation of their Local Transport Plans (LTPs). It is also intended to provide an early and clear indication of what Natural England will be looking for when responding to LTP consultations.

2. Natural England's priorities for Local Transport Plans (LTPs)

Natural England advocates that five key areas are covered in LTPs:

- **Protection and enhancement of the natural environment** - Natural England promotes the inclusion of programmes, policies and solutions within LTPs that protect and enhance the natural environment (including landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and soils); and encourages local transport planners to have early discussions with their local authority ecologists and landscape officers during the development of LTPs.
- **Climate change mitigation and adaptation** - Natural England believes that there is a need for an integrated approach to climate change, addressing both adaptation and mitigation. LTPs need to include policies that reduce carbon emissions but also recognise the opportunities the transport network has to assist the natural environment in adapting to climate change. Sound design principles for new transport infrastructure and innovative management of the existing transport network could achieve multiple benefits both for the natural environment and for network resilience.
- **Improving sustainable access to the natural environment** - Natural England encourages local authorities to consider how their LTP can improve environmentally sustainable access² to the natural environment for both local residents and visitors, in both urban and rural settings. More

¹ For more information on our transport work, see: <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/planningtransportlocalgov/transport/default.aspx>

² Sustainable Leisure Travel Natural England <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/responsible recreation/leisuretravel/default.aspx>

environmentally sustainable forms of access to the natural environment can deliver a range of benefits for people, the environment and the economy. Natural England encourages local transport planners to involve Local Access Forums, whose role is to advise local authorities on improving public access for open air recreation and enjoyment, in the development of the LTP.

- **Integrating Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs)** - the public Rights of Way (RoW) network is an integral part of the transport system. It provides a means of sustainable, active travel, particularly for short journeys, in both urban and rural areas, and can play a significant part in reducing traffic congestion and harmful emissions, providing safer routes for vulnerable travellers. Natural England encourages local transport planners to have early and continued dialogue with their RoW colleagues and Local Access Forum to ensure that the contribution the RoW network can make to LTP priorities is fully embedded in the plan. To help achieve this integration, Natural England, Department for Transport and Defra have produced guidance³.
- **Delivering green infrastructure** - multi-functional green infrastructure⁴ can deliver a range of benefits for the natural environment and local communities, including health and recreation, climate change adaptation, flood alleviation and water management, sustainable transport and biodiversity. A green infrastructure network of existing and new RoW, quiet lanes and greenways, and other green spaces and corridors provides an essential framework for an effective non-motorised transport network threading through an urban area, linking homes to schools, places of employment, recreational areas and the countryside.

The table below identifies how these key areas should be addressed under the five national transport goals⁵. A number of the measures outlined below will deliver against many of the transport goals.

National Transport Goal	Natural England would like to see local authorities' LTPs include policies that:
Tackle climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reduce transport carbon emissions in line with national carbon reduction targets. ✓ Promote accessibility by developing integrated spatial planning that enables people to walk, cycle or take public transport. ✓ Reduce the need to travel by challenging assumptions over the need for increasing 'mobility' where this could be achieved by other means e.g. by increased digital connectivity. ✓ Shift necessary travel (people and goods) to more efficient sustainable, low carbon modes and technologies that benefit air quality and the natural environment by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Recognising the importance of public transport and active travel and investing in infrastructure that supports these low carbon modes, including the Rights of Way (RoW) network. b. Encouraging the use of 'smarter choices', such as workplace, school and visitor travel plans. c. Recognising the importance of rail, water and more fuel efficient vehicles for more sustainable transport of freight. d. Reinforcing positive driver behaviour and encourage eco-driving.
Support economic growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Recognise the importance of the natural environment for the economy, particularly for tourism, and therefore seek to protect the natural environment from the negative impacts of transport. ✓ Protect natural attractions from the impacts of traffic by improving environmentally sustainable access and using tools such as visitor travel planning for countryside leisure destinations and targeted marketing to encourage behaviour change. ✓ Lock in the full benefits of existing transport infrastructure to ensure maximum gain for minimum investment whilst also minimising the impacts on the natural environment by reducing the need for land take for new roads. ✓ Recognise the importance of modal shift and reducing the need to travel in tackling congestion.

³ Natural England, DfT & DEFRA (2009) LTP and ROWIP Integration Good practice note <http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/product.aspx?ProductID=a9f67df9-f61d-40ae-9ed7-457b60b89394>

⁴ What is Green Infrastructure? Natural England <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/planningtransportlocalgov/greeninfrastructure/default.aspx>

⁵ Department for Transport Delivering a Sustainable Transport System <http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/transportstrategy/dasts/>

National Transport Goal	Natural England would like to see local authorities' LTPs include policies that:
	<p>Climate Change Adaptation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Recognise the role that transport networks and their associated green infrastructure can play in providing valuable ecosystem services that assist in the management of, and adaptation to, climate change e.g. carbon storage, drainage and water conservation, and cooling urban heat islands. ✓ Consider the effects of climate-proofing transport schemes on the natural environment. Ensure that the implementation of these measures does not reduce the ability of wildlife to adapt.
Promote equality of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Improve accessibility to, and within, the natural environment taking account of the needs of disadvantaged groups and communities, particularly in relation to health and obesity. ✓ Recognise the importance of providing and maintaining a network of green infrastructure, including RoW, quality greenspaces, quiet lanes, greenways and corridors, for an effective non-motorised transport network threading through urban areas and linking to more rural areas. ✓ Recognise that rural transport schemes, such as demand responsive schemes or community rail schemes can serve the needs of visitors as well as residents. ✓ Ensure that information on sustainable transport information provision covers access to the natural environment, as well as access to urban services, and is targeted at under-represented groups in appropriate style and language.
Contribute to better safety, security and health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enable physically active travel in both urban and rural areas. ✓ Recognise the importance of providing and maintaining RoW for encouraging active travel. ✓ Recognise the link between healthy communities and access to the natural environment and establish links with the health sector to foster partnership working and improve health and well-being through access to the natural environment.
Improve quality of life and a healthy natural environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Protect and enhance the natural environment, including biodiversity, landscape, geodiversity and soils by seeking net environmental gain from necessary transport development whilst avoiding, mitigating or compensating for negative impacts. ✓ Consider the effects of noise and light pollution from transport on the natural environment and loss of tranquillity. ✓ Invest in protected landscapes (e.g. National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) as exemplars of sustainable transport through developing integrated and well designed networks both within and to these areas.

3. Effective engagement

Stakeholder and community engagement is an important part of the plan-making process. Natural England encourages local authorities to contact us⁶ early in the planning-making process so that we can plan our time in order to provide the most effective input into the process. Holding stakeholder meetings early in the process could be particularly useful to ensure that key issues are being considered throughout the plan development.

4. Statutory requirements relating to LTP preparation

Protection and enhancement of the natural environment

Local authorities have statutory duties regarding the protection of the environment through various European and national legislation, including the Transport Act 2000 (as amended)⁷.

⁶ Contact details for Natural England offices are available on the Natural England website http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about_us/contact_us/default.aspx

⁷ The Transport Act 2000 (as amended), requires local transport authorities to have regard to Government guidance and policies on the environment when formulating LTPs and policies.

In relation to biodiversity and landscape, local authorities have a duty to have regard to the:

- **conservation of biodiversity** in exercising their functions. Defra has produced useful guidance⁸ on how this duty can be implemented; and the
- **purposes of National Parks, the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**⁹ when making decisions or carrying out activities that affect land within these areas.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

SEA is a valuable part of the LTP process, ensuring consideration of environmental issues within the plan-making process and suggesting enhancements to the plan which could improve its environmental outcomes. To ensure the integration of environmental considerations into the plan from the early stages of its development through to its adoption, the SEA process should run alongside the development of the plan and its findings should be **fully integrated** into the plan-making process.

The Statutory Consultation Bodies (English Heritage, Environment Agency and Natural England) – who are required to be consulted at several stages of the SEA process – have set out the services and standards¹⁰ that plan makers can expect when consulting them. We also recommend that local authorities refer to the SEA Practical Guide¹¹ and to WebTAG Unit 2.11, which provides specific guidance on how to undertake SEA of transport plans. Authorities should also (where appropriate) make use of the evidence base collected for the SEA of LTP2 and the information collected while monitoring the SEA.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

When local authorities begin to develop their LTPs they will need¹² to undertake HRA screening to determine whether their Plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site¹³, alone or in combination with other plans and projects. If it cannot be determined at this stage that a significant effect will not arise, the plan must then be subject to an Appropriate Assessment¹⁴.

While HRA at plan level will not be as detailed as at project level the approach should still be as rigorous as possible. The findings of the HRA process will need to be integrated into the plan making process. If the Appropriate Assessment cannot rule out adverse effects on the integrity of a European site then the LTP should be amended to eliminate the potential effects of the plan on the LTP. Where significant effects cannot be eliminated then the plan can only proceed if there are no satisfactory alternatives to the relevant element(s) of the plan, there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest and adequate compensatory measures are secured to ensure the overall coherence of the network of European sites.

Natural England is the statutory consultee for HRA and should be consulted from the beginning of the process alongside other relevant bodies that are considered appropriate, for example the Environment Agency, Local Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB.

The SEA and HRA processes are separate processes and should be reported upon individually. There are, however, a number of linkages between the two processes. For example, evidence gathered for the HRA on European sites can be fed into the SEA process and the findings of HRA can feed into the SEA assessment.

⁸ DEFRA (2007) Guidance for Local Authorities on Implementing the Biodiversity Duty <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/pdf/biodiversity/la-guid-english.pdf>

⁹ DEFRA (2005) Duties on relevant authorities to have regard to the purposes of National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Guidance note <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/pdf/protected-areas/npaonb-duties-guide.pdf>

¹⁰ Strategic Environmental Assessment Consultation Bodies' Service Standards for Responsible Authorities http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Research/sea_sos_eng_1705376.pdf

¹¹ ODPM (2006) A Practical Guide to the SEA Directive <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/practicalguidesea>

¹² See DfT guidance on LTPs, chapter 4, section 2, paragraph 42 on Habitats Regulations Assessment

¹³ European sites are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and listed Ramsar sites. Proposed SPAs and candidate SACs are also regarded as European sites. The location of these sites can be found using Nature on the Map <http://www.natureonthemap.org.uk/>

¹⁴ As required by Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and Regulation 85B of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994.