

WHAT DOES GOOD STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR NATURE CONSERVATION LOOK LIKE?

Introduction

This is a summary of discussions at a joint ADEPT workshop using RUFshire as a hypothetical strategic planning prompt on 27th January 2020.

The results are presented in a bullet form narrative with some comments, links and questions as appropriate. It would be really useful if you were able to review the points and add any further reflections, examples or amendments to help inform and finalise this DRAFT report and feed into the wider work on strategic planning. **In summarising the information, I have generalised away from RUFShire and it would be good now if you can apply this material to your own authority situation with any comments on its value and added insight.**

I very much enjoyed working with you on this and would be very happy discuss the draft with you should you so wish. I will forward a copy of the final report of the PAS project in March for circulation.

Could I receive any further comments on this workshop by the 20th February 2020. This will enable me to finalise the report. Please note this draft has not been fully proof read and is circulated for feedback purposes only.

Can any replies be emailed to me directly Alister.scott@northumbria.ac.uk

Questions

The following 4 questions formed the basis of the workshop and the responses from flip charts have been bulleted with a supporting narrative.

1 What are the core ingredients of a good strategic planning process?

- **Political**
- **Positive change management**
- **Co-design and coproduction: (participatory)**
- **Integration across different sectors and scales from different agencies**
- **Evidence-led proportionality:**
- **Effective communication**
- **Investment:**
- **Delivery**
- **Leadership**

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These were all seen as valuable components but as **tools**. They need to be seen within the national, regional and local **POLITICAL contexts** that act as strategic umbrella and drive their use/misuse. Understanding the governance frameworks and scope for subsidiarity were crucial cross cutting ingredients.

Need to focus on the **OUTCOMES** and **GOALS** of what you are trying to achieve and the challenges being addressed. We see all too often separate plans and strategies. BUT: How do they fit together;

for example the 25YEP, NPPF and SDGs have issues of their integration. In addition there is the wider problem of disintegrated development with nature as a bolt on.

Regulatory tools were seen to be very helpful for nature conservation. But there is a danger that these only become a minimum standard that needs to be reached. Biodiversity Net Gain becomes a new ingredient for strategic planning as it is becoming mandatory. Opportunities also exist within Duty to Cooperate and Community Infrastructure levy but currently nature is way down the list of priorities and danger with duty to cooperate is that it has become somewhat toxic.

However, it is also important to address **strategic issues through ambition as well as through vision**. Here the value of strategic planning forums formed due to need not legislation reflecting that there are many built environment professionals who value and champion strategic planning. However, key to issues of successful strategic planning is working across different scales simultaneously with strong leadership.

2. What are the key experiences and lessons for strategic planning for **Rufshire**?

The bullet points highlight the umbrella issue of disintegrated development. Housing numbers are perceived to dominate the placemaking agenda from national priorities which distorts other actions. The importance of securing buy in with elected members and other stakeholders raises the importance of engagement and building partnerships and codeveloping plans, policies and interventions. Working with unusual suspects was also important to develop innovative solutions. This all helps wider coordination and delivery where communication was seen to be fundamental. In building partnerships a more positive and consensual approach to planning was desired. Here the framing of nature as an asset was important. We also need to secure baselines and to monitor our interventions more effectively.

The key lesson is that nature is an integral part of decision making and needs to be inputted early into decisions using established and trusted evidence. Here the resource and skill base needs to be strengthened.

- Don't start the conversation with housing numbers. Need to understand the bigger picture of connections and interdependencies first.
- Need to know what are the joint priorities and outcomes why are you doing this at the outset and invest in this process with stakeholders and publics.
- Secure political buy in from outset and work across political divides given short term nature of administrations. Political obfuscation is a big **problem**.
- Need to work across silos and improve understandings of different sectors. Nature conservation can also be a very effective silo
- Be aware what you are doing and what others are doing -improve communication within and across different agencies. (often within can be the more difficult)
- Role of building effective and long term partnerships ; need good leadership and champions who can unite,.
- Need stronger **worded** policies to ensure that nature conservation has clout in decisions.
- Focus more on who is doing the delivery and what and where are the resources; too many strategies developed but not delivered.
- Monitoring becomes important. To understand impact of interventions.
- Be prepared to things differently (develop odd new partnerships and coalitions and develop joint solutions.

Commented [u3]: These have been generalised to apply to strategic planning more generally. I have merged he tables into one set of results.

I hope this is OK

Commented [u4]: Good example from Vancouver 2020 <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/Greenest-city-action-plan.pdf>

Commented [u5]: Role of GI policy assessment tool <https://mainstreaminggreeninfrastructure.com/project-page.php?green-infrastructure-planning-policy-assessment-tool>

- Work from a clear national vision. (not always present)
- Review of green belt toxic and anachronistic; need planning to be seen more positive and consensual.
- Major development sites need to include ALL infrastructure:
- Do we collect too much evidence that distracts? We need to use our evidence base more effectively for baseline and long-term monitoring.
- Duty to cooperate is seen to be a failure but could be a hook to try and work across political divides on issues like climate change as a hook.
- Strategic tools like CIL raise never enough to cover main priorities like education and highways. Nature loses out.
- Skills and resource deficit in local authorities to develop plans. Heavy reliance on consultants.
- All growth is not good growth
- Need more consistent methods to identify need across different sectors. Role here for environmental limits. Here natural capital baselines become important.
- Good to see biodiversity net gain becoming mandatory but how do you achieve it. Lack of guidance.

Commented [u6]: role of building with nature GI standard's

<https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/>

Commented [u7]: https://www.ciria.org/Resources/Biodiversity_Net_Gain.aspx?WebsiteKey=3f18c87a-d62b-4eca-8ef4-9b09309c1c91

3. Outcomes:

Natural capital, green infrastructure are both seen as the collective glue to help deliver improved nature conservation outcomes. Key to realising this is the governance frameworks. Elected member and community structures (assemblies) were seen as vital steps to co develop and identify the outcomes that were desired. **The process by which the outcomes are identified, matters.**

The main outcome was centred on improving biodiversity but set within a wider connectivity discussion which included health and wellbeing, transport (walking and cycling). The summary tapes also indicated here that the outcome needed to be more joined up rather than have siloed nature based outcomes. **Here the links to economic and social gains were important reinforcing a more system based approach.**

- Integrating role of local plan as a hub through which other plans and strategies can emerge.
- Better use of CIL and 106 for strategic planning outcomes.
- Development of a green infrastructure strategy as nature conservation glue. Nature based solutions as the delivery mechanism,
- Importance of outcome of increased biodiversity but set within wider connectivity theme that covers access and landscape.
- Enhancing environmental performance through natural capital re-generation and opportunity plans. Natural capital plans help join up nature and economy. (eg. Ox Cams)

Commented [u8]: this seemed after listening to the tapes and looking across the material a really fundamental outcome.

Commented [u9]: <https://naturegreatermanchester.co.uk/project/greater-manchester-natural-capital-investment-plan/>

4. **Interventions:** How might the challenges for nature conservation be best addressed with respect to policy and delivery on the ground

This has been split based on flip chart content.

a. Governance interventions

The focus here was about improving the integration between different plans and policies with agencies working collectively across placemaking functions. The importance of contemporary policy

Commented [u10]: <https://mk0partnersdevoovx4n.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/12/Environment-Agency-Ox-Cam-Natural-Capital-Plan.pdf>

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hooks was recognised; here both climate and biodiversity emergencies offer political and public traction.

Within existing NPPF the duty to cooperate was seen as an opportunity and threat. Some views identified its toxicity with regard to housing numbers but others felt it could offer potential depending on what emerges from the environment bill building on the climate emergency. There was concern over the powers and resources of LEPS and LNPs with widely varying performances across the country.

- The duty to cooperate has a potential role and could be strengthened using the outcomes of the environment bill
- Holistic approach across all government agendas perhaps using climate change and biodiversity emergencies as hooks. UNSDGs really should have a stronger foothold in the NPPF. However also need a political champion who can unite.
- Avoid too many disparate plans being produced. Need a coordinating plan (local plans?)
- Joint members forum help address cross cutting issues
- Role of LEPS and LNPs: different spatial geographies and also different outcomes and resources. How can these produce better outcomes and are these fit for purpose.
- Local plans need to have stronger policies but critically dependent on the evidence base to back them up (resource limitations). Who funds?

b. Interventions on improving public engagement

Public and political engagement was seen as a vital delivery tool. But it often lacked upfront investment (funding deficit) with a focus on consultation. The adversarial nature of planning did not help and it was seen as important to have external facilitators to help in difficult and contested situations. Nature was seen as an early priority that could help drive more positive and consensual discussions towards a shared vision. However, these would be helped by regulations such as biodiversity net gain for example. Interestingly, neighbourhood plans were seen as useful mechanisms but needed to be made much simpler.

- Role of an external facilitator in helping drive a process within safe managed spaces. Important to invest on what the outcomes are and the key challenges before a plan is produced. Rarely enough resources invested in upfront engagement. Consultation dominates.
- Stakeholder forums with ability to influence and inform decisions and policy; danger of tick box syndrome.
- Potential role for nature conservation as a mechanism for initial community engagement; easier to get agreement on a vision or set of outcomes.
- Neighbourhood plans get 35% of CIL in some areas. Are neighbourhood plans a good positive mechanism to join up public views. Need to be a simpler process however.
- Need funding sources to help invest in behaviour change. Not funded from capital funds yet crucial to improved success with nature conservation

c. Interventions using strategic tools

Natural capital was seen as generally positive here although concern over the multitude of terms and range off different tools available. Natural capital accounts could be used to highlight the value

Commented [u12]: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SDLP11-Duty-to-Cooperate-Statement.pdf>

Commented [u13]: <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/planningandbuildingcontrol/plymouthplan>
an example of the local plan being champion as the hub for over 150 other plans

Commented [u14]: Is there a real danger in trying to engage over strategic issues as often people are logically more concerned with local issues. There is a strategic deficit here.

of green assets and interventions when compared with more traditional grey interventions. Biodiversity net gain becoming mandatory offered another tool that had strategic potential but interestingly a lack of guidance for its successful operation was causing concern. CIL also had potential but was limited through the funds it could raise. Spatial variation in levies capability was critical. The role of Sustainability Appraisal was also mentioned and it reflected the need to use existing tools rather than try and develop new ones. Here the challenge was to integrate natural capital into these rather than create yet another additional check for local authorities to do.

- Biodiversity net gain and community infrastructure levy might allow for more strategic sites to be identified. Wider issue of offsetting and mitigation
- Role of natural capital accounts to demonstrate the value of green assets but also initiatives and interventions under the umbrella of nature based solutions. Important to have baselines to measure and monitor. Need resources for this.
- Role of developing a tool for identifying environmental limits ; link into viability.
- Neighbourhood plans as positive tools but how to scale up strategically.

d. Interventions to improve investment in nature

The answers here revolved around building from the industrial strategy (circular economy) with natural capital accounting seen as a key driver. Additionally, a key area to work on was tax changes to affect local economies and incentivise brownfield land and to levy charges on green field sites. Preferential rates can also accrue from enterprise zones but it was recognised that such sites should have minimum standards for urban natural capital. Finance should be secured through innovative partnerships which could result in sponsorship under CSR from big companies keen to promote their green credentials but also could lead to more innovative payments for ecosystem service schemes. Notwithstanding this the preparation of GI strategies was still seen as key to highlighting how nature based solutions could be delivered in simple language.

- Corporate sponsorship from industry
- Promote social value and community benefits from nature: target messages to different audiences.
- Circular economy models.
- Change tax structures to benefit local economies. Levy on green belt development used to fund brownfield land. Tax exemptions on brownfield sites.
- More Enterprise zones introduced but these need to have minimum requirements for urban natural capital
- Mixed public private payments for ecosystem service schemes.

e.. Interventions to improve success

Here there was a desire to use demonstration case studies to highlight success and learn lessons. This was seen as key to motivate key stakeholders. Reports rarely do. Learning lessons from mistakes was also highlighted as important but often difficult to secure.

- Best practice review of why did that plan work/didn't work well for persuasion of communities, politicians and other stakeholders.
- Demonstration examples but need to be living labs
- Look at wide examples such as Copenhagen building 7k timber homes on derelict land
- Best practice review of how to deliver successful biodiversity net gain and wider environmental gains.

Commented [u15]: https://www.dropbox.com/s/ubgscwde109431s/D%2085_Naylor_Paper.pdf?dl=0
Useful papers by Larrissa Naylor.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/150672/>

Commented [u16]: <https://sweep.ac.uk/portfolios/natural-capital-sustainability-appraisal/>
see work by Sweep on this

Commented [u17]: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/payments-for-ecosystem-services-pes-best-practice-guide>
see best practice guidance by defra.

Commented [u18]: Is it better to have demo sites with virtual information to enable people to grasp value and power of such interventions. Does need long term monitoring however. Funding? .

