

# Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre Business Plan 2015-2017

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## **Purpose of the Business Plan**

- To guide the future running of the Centre between April 2015 and 31st March 2017
- To set out the management structure and operational framework for the Centre
- To set out the work programme of the Centre for the next three years
- To aid communication with stakeholders; data suppliers, users etc.
- To demonstrate the viability and continuing long term financial security of the Centre
- To continue to seek external funding and encourage new partners to enter into Service Level Agreements and Data Exchange Agreements and equivalents.

## **WSBRC List of partners**

WSBRC is grateful for the support, be it from funding, guidance and/or biological information which is received from the following organisations:

Wiltshire Council	Wiltshire County Recorder's Group
Swindon Borough Council	Cotswold Fungus Group
New Forest National Park Authority	Wiltshire Botanical Society
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	Butterfly Conservation – Wiltshire Branch
Natural England	Wiltshire Ornithological Society
Environment Agency	Wiltshire Mammal Group
Wessex Water	Wiltshire Bat Group
Thames Water	Wiltshire Amphibian & Reptile Group
Forestry Commission	RSPB (Wiltshire)
Cotswold Water Park Trust	

## Achievements

The Business Plan sets out a strategy and vision for the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre over the next three years and will inform its future priorities and work plans. It is, however, instructive to reflect on achievements over the past few years in order to demonstrate how the Centre has developed in terms of its role and the services delivered.

As a Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) WSBRC provides numerous services and outputs and these can differ widely year on year depending on its resourcing levels and the needs of its users. The following provides a summary of WSBRC's key **achievements and outputs** during the period 2008-2014 giving an overview of its primary areas of work and service delivery.

WSBRC has been able to establish and maintain **Service Level Agreements** or their equivalents with nine funding partners.

On behalf of those funding partners it has:

- Entered field survey data (habitats and species) and boundary information for over 434 existing County Wildlife Sites, onto its Recorder 6 database and MapInfo GIS and entered survey data for a further 87 newly identified CWS and 50 non-wildlife sites (all derived from the Wiltshire & Swindon Wildlife Sites Project).
- Maintained and updated a detailed GIS-based **habitat and land use map** of Wiltshire from which most of the **UK BAP Priority habitat parcels** can be extracted. This map is made up of three data layers containing presently [at 31 December 2014] 73,646 polygons, 6,114 points and 473 polylines.
- Handled over 1,600 **data enquiries**, from consultants, developers, land managers, local groups, students and so on, bringing in an income of over £135,000 to contribute towards core costs.
- Undertaken planning screen of 51,306 planning applications for notified sites and protected and S41 species, for Local Authority partners, **reporting on potential impacts for over 3,000 of these**.
- Migrated data held in Recorder 3.3, dBase and MapMate to the **Recorder 6** database which now (as at 31 December 2014) holds over **1,523,517 species records, of which 166,732 are deemed notable species; 4,979 locations (sites with known boundaries) and 12,461 habitat observations** from site surveys and aerial photo interpretation.
- Hold the Wiltshire County Recorders Annual Meeting and contributed to a number of **workshops, training days, conferences** and other meetings benefiting recording groups, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, landowners, community groups and the wider public.
- Provided over **1.2 million records for public access on the NBN Gateway**.

- Launched the Wiltshire Mammal Atlas project with the Wiltshire Mammal Group and supported the Cotswold Water Park Bat and Dragonfly atlas projects.
- Submitted over 67,000 Moth records to the National Moth Atlas project on behalf of Butterfly Conservation - Wiltshire Branch.
- Provided information for the **Wiltshire & Swindon State of the Environment report** 2012 and 2013.
- Provided analyses and species and habitat information for the Wiltshire BAP 2008 and Landscape areas BAP
- Provided information and mapping for the Wiltshire Council Joint Strategic Assessment maps and constituencies narratives, and nineteen Community Area Board JSAs
- Supported and contributed to the Local Nature Partnership

*Purgle Linham, WSBRC Biological Recorder*

*December 2014*

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## 1. Overview

Wiltshire has a wealth of biodiversity interest alongside its predominantly farming heritage with more than 15% of its area covered by some form of nature conservation designation (SSSI, SAC/SPA, CWS). Many sites and the habitats contained within them are of national and international importance (Ref Landscape Biodiversity Framework and State of Environment reports 2012 and 2013)

There is an increasing body of UK and European legislation and planning guidance that requires local authorities and other organisations to take account of biodiversity in order to fulfil a range of statutory and non-statutory duties, the most recent being the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 and the Localism Act 2011. Alongside these is the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 which places a duty on all public bodies, including local authorities, to have a regard for biodiversity.

There have also been a number of important strategic documents published in the last couple of years, including the Lawton Review, Natural Environment White Paper and the National Ecosystems Assessment, which have all informed the NPPF. Most importantly they confirm and outline the need for a more comprehensive, and connected series of wildlife sites and ecological networks, and the need for these to be informed and underpinned by good evidence.

Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre was originally set up in 1975 by Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (WANHS) to support the production of the Wiltshire Flora, but transferred into the ownership of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in 1998, and since then has been housed at the Trust's headquarters in Devizes.

The Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan (2002, revised 2008) stated that "WSBRC needs to be at the forefront of collecting data and reporting on the BAP process, monitoring the status of habitats and species, facilitating a review of the effectiveness of the approaches taken to tackle issues, and feeding in Wiltshire's contribution to the UK BAP process. In order to do this WSBRC needs to be adequately resourced to enable it to plan and develop a programme of survey and data collection to obtain the information it needs"

WSBRC is supported by a formal stakeholder group comprising those organisations who provide essential funding and who are also the primary providers and users of data held by WSBRC. The Centre is overseen by the WSBRC Advisory Committee, representing the key stakeholders. The WSBRC Advisory Committee has the task of setting the overall aims and priorities of the Centre and agreeing the Business plan. Within the governance structure of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust the WSBRC Advisory Committee is a specialist advisory group to the Trust's Conservation Policy Committee.

WSBRC secures its funding from a variety of sources although its principle income comes from Local Authority partners and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Funding to maintain the essential core services and functions of the Records Centre has declined in recent years (see section 3). This presents significant challenges at a time when there is an increasing demand for a secure and reliable evidence base upon which to make decisions.

Wiltshire is fortunate in that there are many individuals and organisations recording its wildlife and habitats and their combined expertise and data holdings contribute towards the sound foundation and essential evidence base upon which WSBRC is founded.

The benefits to be gained from a partnership approach to maintaining & supporting WSBRC include; economies of scale, a 'one-stop shop', improved data acquisition, reduced duplication of effort, greater availability of data that can be used many times by many different audiences, a wider range of products, an improved service to users, and ultimately, more informed decision-making leading to greater protection and conservation of Wiltshire's rich wildlife.

The staffing level is currently 3.2 FTE (since September 2014) and comprises 4 staff, 2 of which, the Biological Recorder and one of the Biological Records Officers, work full time hours. The activities performed by the Centre were based on a historical complement of around 4 FTE but funding levels over the last five or so years led to a reduction to 2.6 FTE. The shortfall between expectation and resourcing has been covered to some extent with the help of several valuable long-term volunteers and occasionally students undertaking work experience. However higher level development work and direct support for biological monitoring in the county has been impacted by this lack of staff resource. The recent recruitment of a full time Biological Records Officer (contracted until March 2016) will increase capacity to support development work.

The Centre is a member of the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC) which was formed in 2009. The Association aims to provide a central voice for the views and concerns of the Local Records Centre community, whilst building a support-based network of knowledge and advice to meet the needs of its members. Its forum provides a vital resource for discussion, involvement and support between LRC staff and allows the ALERC National Coordinator and directors an efficient way to share information and canvass responses when writing national responses on behalf of ALERC members.

The Centre is also a supporter member of the National Biodiversity Network ([www.nbn.org.uk](http://www.nbn.org.uk)) and provides the majority of its data to the public and certain organisations via the NBN Gateway. The Gateway has become a key means of gaining access to nationally held data and it is important that WSBRC can access national datasets, for example using the web services functions of this portal, in the near future to be able to make use of this additional data.

## **2. Purpose and Principles of WSBRC**

### **2.1 The Purpose of a Local Records Centre**

The National Biodiversity Network Trust defines a Local Records Centre (LRC) is as follows:

*"A Local Records Centre is a not-for-profit service run in partnership for the public benefit, which collects, collates, manages and disseminates information of known quality relating to the wildlife, wildlife sites and habitats for a defined geographical area". (February 2004)*

WSBRC adopted its mission statement in July 1999 and this states:

*“The Local Records Centre for Wiltshire and Swindon will work to increase the understanding and knowledge of wildlife. It will provide high quality information especially to decision-makers, and will support and guide recorders within Wiltshire & Swindon, recognising the valuable contributions of volunteers.”*

## **2.2 Guiding Principles**

The main principles guiding WSBRC are that it:

- is the focus of a local partnership represented by an Advisory Committee, is a non-profit making, service-providing business, accountable to the Advisory Committee and WWT Council (via the Conservation Policy Committee)
- acts as an independent and impartial source of biological data
- conforms to NBN standards through agreed policies and procedures
- has the ability to enter into contracts so that it can enter into service level agreements and data supply or exchange agreements with other bodies
- is soundly managed
- is accountable and transparent for its business and financial performance

## **2.3 Functions**

For the Centre to meet the needs of its stakeholders it is expected to:

- act as a focus for biodiversity records management in the area (including geodiversity records where available)
- act as a contact point for access to datasets by local and national users
- manage specified key datasets on behalf of participating organisations and individuals
- support the collection, validation and maintenance of other key datasets
- make data available to all those that require it including local authorities, government and non-government bodies, consultants, students and the public, subject to agreed policies on charging and access.
- research the availability of data sources at an appropriate level
- provide a link for local users and suppliers to other local records centres and national data centres
- provide support and guidance for recorders
- encourage more people to gain enjoyment from, and understanding of, biological recording
- ensure the Centre meets the criteria established for accreditation by the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC), to comply with standards for data management and access.

A more complete list of functions and qualifying criteria as set out in 'A Local Records Centre Accreditation System' produced for Natural England and the Association for Environmental Records Centres (ALERC) can be found in Appendix 2 and at:

<http://www.alerc.org.uk/accreditation.html>

## 2.4 National/Local Policy

Stringent European and domestic legislation, together with national planning guidance requires that local authorities and government agencies take account of biodiversity in the course of carrying out their statutory undertakings; including preparing local development frameworks (Local Plans), assessing planning applications, designating and monitoring SACs, SPAs, SSSIs & CWSs, guiding habitat management work, evaluating 'important' hedgerows etc. It is essential therefore that good quality, up-to-date and comprehensive biodiversity data (evidence) is available to inform this work.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides guidance on what might be considered as strategic planning priorities. These include:

- Creation, protection, enhancement and management of ecological networks and Green Infrastructure
- Recognising wider benefits of ecosystem services
- Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes
- Minimising impacts and delivering net gains in biodiversity.

The **Localism Act 2011** requires that Local Authorities have regard to the views of the Local Nature Partnership in relation to the planning of certain categories of sustainable development or use of land

**Countryside Stewardship** – this new agri-environmental scheme will be much more specifically targeted to achieve multiple benefits across a number of land holdings within a given area, not just on an individual farm scale. Information on important habitats and species held by WSBRC is essential to ensuring that the scheme targets the right areas for maximum benefit to wildlife.

## 2.5 Biodiversity 2020 and national indicators

The latest version of the UK Biodiversity Indicators 2014, was published in November 2014. The indicators are used for international reporting in respect of the UK, as a signatory to the Convention on Biological diversity (CBD). Data held by WSBRC contributes to the assessment of these national biodiversity indicators, through the annual provision of data by WSBRC to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN).

## 2.6 Local Biodiversity policy

The National Planning Policy Framework sets the context for sustainable development, and in particular Article 17 provides the context for much of the need for a comprehensive evidence base secured through the Local Records Centre.

To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should:

- plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries;
- identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife



corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation;

- promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan;
- They must have regard to economic, social and environmental sustainability.

**The Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan** states that:

*'Up-to-date and accessible information is essential to the successful implementation of any BAP and to monitor progress towards targets'.*

The document; Landscape Biodiversity Areas: A landscape scale framework for conservation in Wiltshire and Swindon 2013, updates the previous Biodiversity Action Plans published in 2008 and 2010. It frames planning for future biodiversity conservation in the light of the Lawton Review and the Government's white paper, The Natural Choice.

## **2.7 Strengths and weaknesses**

Most of the functions expected of a local records centre are carried out by WSBRC, in partnership with Wiltshire's recording groups and key recorders. One of the strengths of the Wiltshire network is the large scale involvement of so many local naturalists involved in collecting, validating and verifying their own and other's data, before providing it to WSBRC, enabling it to act as a one-stop-shop in responding to data requests, particularly on planning and land management issues.

**Strengths** - the most encouraging features are:

- Comprehensive data holdings which represent species records from different 51 taxonomic groups and all priority habitats found within the county
- The strong contributions that the many recording groups and individuals make to recording biodiversity in Wiltshire e.g. butterflies & moths, mammals, birds, vascular plants and fungi
- The ever increasing baseline of data to work from and the many valuable outputs and products that can be derived from these datasets (e.g. habitat maps, atlases and reports)
- Engagement and liaison with the network of County Recorders and support of local groups
- Close relationship with Wiltshire & Swindon Wildlife Sites Project, whereby WSBRC manages, maintains and is the sole provider of CWS data.

**Weaknesses** - the major weaknesses in the current system are:

- Current staffing resource has only recently increased but is still lower than the national average (around 4 FTEs) and considerably lower than the best resourced
- In financially constrained times, the declining degree of involvement and level of financial support coming from Wiltshire Council and Natural England
- Comprehensiveness of datasets needs to be improved for groups for which there is no County Recorder or where data exchange mechanisms are not well established – particularly invertebrate groups

- A small number of datasets held by individuals, groups or organisations at a local level are as yet not available for WSBRC to use, perhaps because records have not been digitised or are held in a format which is not easily shared. This can make it difficult to fully satisfy an individual enquiry or support a project without forwarding enquirers on to other data holders. Data requesters may not have the time to follow these up, leading to a real concern that some important species populations might not be fully considered in plans or projects which may well affect them
- In addition there may be other groups recording wildlife who are not known to WSBRC or are hard to reach and the data held by these may not be shared elsewhere locally or nationally either. Actively seeking out these groups and engaging them is an additional drain on resources and is presently done fairly opportunistically at a low level.
- One final weakness is the insecurity of yearly funding from the majority of the funding partners, making it difficult to plan ahead long term, and in particular to plan for essential investment. Most funding is subject to annual review (despite some SLAs being agreed for the longer term)
- Although it has been known for a long time that work is needed to identify spatial gaps in data, e.g. in species distribution, there has been no resource to carry out this valuable work - beyond production of simple distribution maps - that would focus the efforts of recording groups and provide additional information to the evidence base used by stakeholders.

### **3. Fundamentals of WSBRC**

#### **3.1 Constitution**

WSBRC operates is hosted by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, a charitable trust (Reg no 266202) and a company limited by guarantee.

#### **3.2 Stakeholders**

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and those organisations representing key data users and suppliers are equal stakeholders supporting the advisory committee. A stakeholder is defined as an organisation, group or individual who contributes essential services, funding and/or useful data to the Centre, or who derives a useful benefit. The relationship between the various stakeholders and WSBRC is defined by an agreed Service Level Agreement and/or Data Exchange Agreement or their equivalents.

Organisations entering into formal service agreements with the Centre include the three local authorities (Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, and the New Forest National Park Authority), Natural England, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, plus Thames Water, Wessex Water and the Forestry Commission.

In addition, although WSBRC has limited formal data exchange agreements – presently one, with the Cotswold Water Park Trust – it also has numerous informal arrangements in place with many of the data-holding organisations including the Wiltshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation, Cotswold Fungus Group and the Botanical Society of the British Isles (for VCs 7 & 8) and others. These arrangements involve ‘data for data’ and/or support in other ways to assist their recording activities.

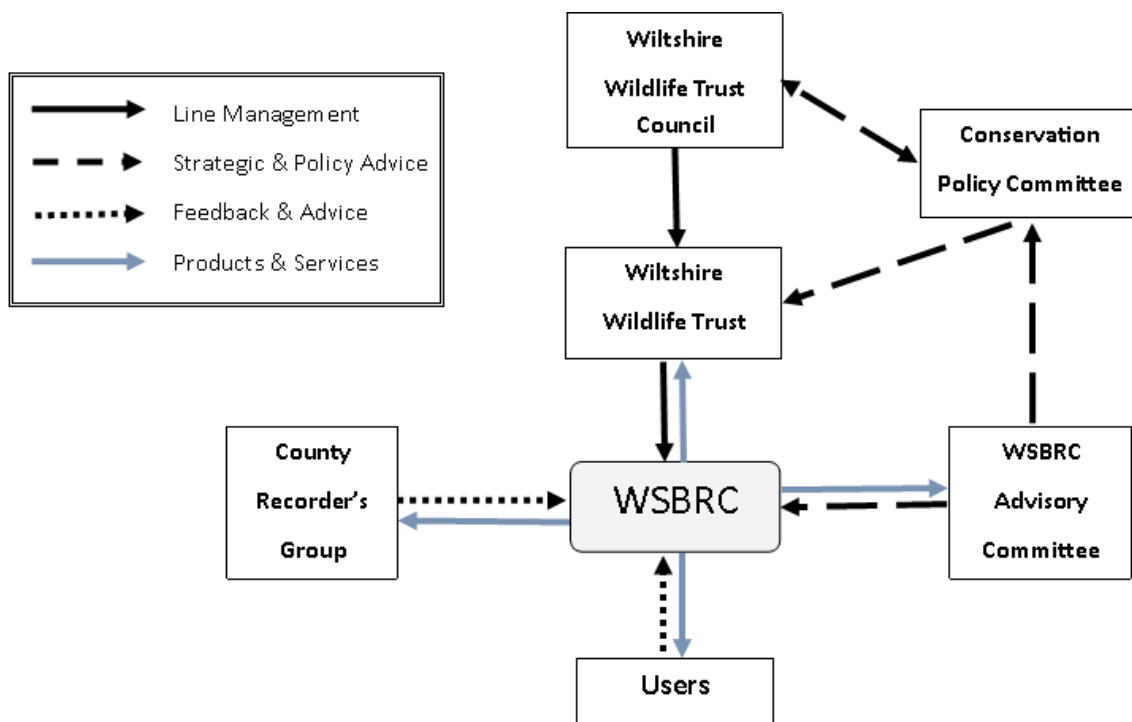
### 3.3 Management framework

The management framework is as follows:

WSBRC is hosted by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (Lead Partner), within the Conservation Policy section. The Biological Recorder, responsible for the day to day management and running of the Records Centre and its staff and volunteers, is directly line managed by the Head of Conservation Policy at Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

The work of the Conservation Policy section is advised and guided by the WWT Conservation Policy Committee.

**Figure 1: Management Structure**



### 3.4 Host Organisation

The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust will:

- Continue to employ the Centre staff. Staff are therefore covered by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust terms and conditions of employment. Support for WSBRC will include payroll and other financial and administration services, personnel and recruitment services, legal services, and provision of all relevant 'in-house' training such as H&S and IT
- Continue to provide office space, services and equipment

- Continue to provide IT technical support for the maintenance of the database, GIS & web pages, in accordance with WWT IT protocols and NBN standards. Any development work will be subject to an assessment of needs and available resources and any successful external funding.
- Provide intellectual and professional support.

Data collected and managed by WSBRC underpins much of the work of the Wildlife Trust and through its funding arrangement with WSBRC can be accessed by WWT staff.

### **3.5 The WSBRC Advisory Committee**

The WSBRC Advisory Committee comprises representatives drawn from the partnership as follows:

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Head of Conservation Policy  
 Wiltshire Council  
 Swindon Borough Council  
 Natural England  
 New Forest National Park Authority  
 Environment Agency  
 County Recorder's Group

The committee meets four times a year, and is currently chaired by the Head of Conservation Policy Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The Biological Recorder reports to the Advisory Committee and attends every meeting. Not all representatives attend the meetings. Each organisation selects its own representative on the Advisory Committee.

The remit of the WSBRC Advisory Committee is to support and advise the WSBRC and is described in full in the Terms of Reference for the committee (see Appendix 1).

#### **In addition it will:**

- Review and Agree the Business Plan for the Centre to cover the period 2015-2017 and future plans.
- Support the Biological Recorder in securing finances for the period 2015-2017 through service level agreements, and make recommendations regarding alternative sources of funding.
- In the light of the above & the work programme (Section 5) agree staff roles and participate in the recruitment process where relevant.

### **3.6 The Wiltshire County Recorder's group**

The Wiltshire County Recorder's Group is made up of the individual County Species Recorders. Some recorders are the representative of a recording group or society while others represent their taxonomic group on behalf of a smaller collective of volunteer recorders, and additional other key recorders who are active in the county. The group has a formal gathering yearly in February/March when members report the activities of the previous year, with additional ad-hoc field meetings at

other times. The group is in regular liaison with WSBRC to discuss recording priorities, data verification, policies, future developments etc.

### **3.7 The Operational Framework**

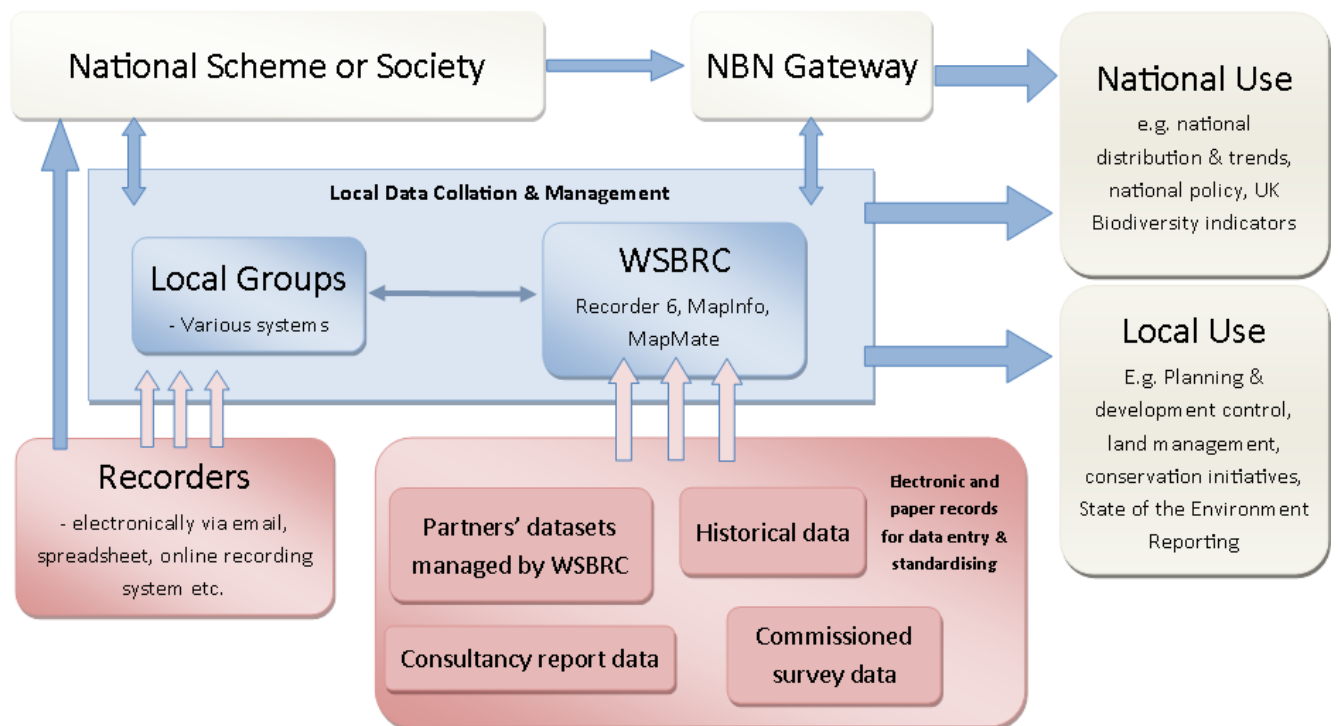
WSBRC sits alongside a number of well-established recording groups/individuals (data custodians) who continue to own and manage large datasets usually on behalf of their recorders. Examples include the Wiltshire Ornithological Society, the Wiltshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation, Cotswold Fungus Group etc. Through informal agreements some groups provide copies of their data to WSBRC on a regular basis and receive data and support from WSBRC. This enables their data to be used to further nature conservation in Wiltshire. This also ensures their data will contribute to national datasets where they do not submit data nationally themselves, through data exchange with national schemes or through sharing data via the NBN Gateway.

WSBRC manages a Recorder 6 database and provides data management services to partners for data collected by partners or by WSBRC on behalf of partners. It also services the data and information requirements of many of the partner organisations. These services are set and funded through Service Level Agreements which incorporate both NBN national and locally agreed standards and policies.

WSBRC also services the data and information requirements of many other data requesters, working to a set of agreed standards, policies and procedures covering access and charging. Many of these were agreed within the SW LRCs through their work on Defra Project 2: LRC Best Practice (2010-11).

- All recording groups and individuals (data custodians) collecting data within Wiltshire are responsible for ensuring the validation and verification of their own datasets before being invited to pass copies on to WSBRC. Co-ordination of the supply of data and data flow network is managed between WSBRC and these groups or individuals
- WSBRC also develops and maintains various GIS datasets on behalf of its funders
- For effective operation it is important that data custodians and data suppliers use, wherever possible, compatible software capable of seamless data exchange. WSBRC uses Recorder 6 on SQL Server for its own species data and can accept MapMate and other formats of data from suppliers as long as they roughly conform to the NBN data standard.
- WSBRC will also support recorders in the digitisation of their data where resources allow. WSBRC encourages recording groups to submit data in a standardised digital format using either its Excel-based recording form or using Living Record in order to reduce the re-processing of data

**Fig 2: Data Flow in Wiltshire**



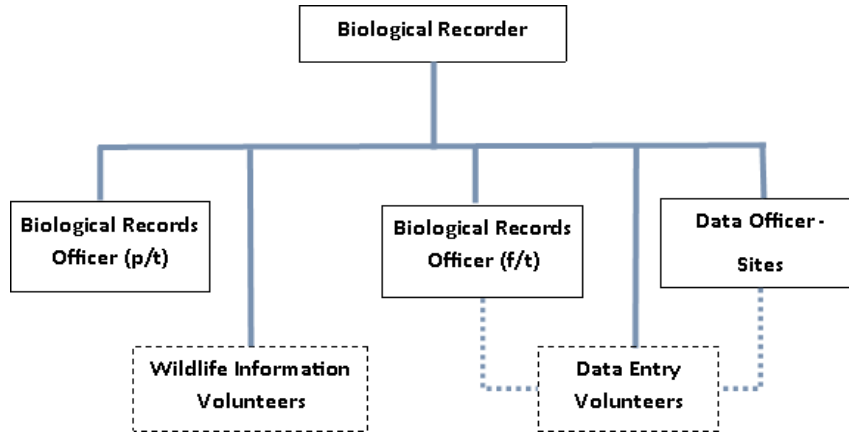
### 3.8 Staffing

Together the Biological Recorder and staff encompass a range of skills including, biological data management, IT, GIS, database development, taxonomic expertise, habitat and species survey, community engagement, website design, communications, project management, event organisation and staff and volunteer management.

WSBRC operated for a number of years with a minimum staffing level (2.6 FTE) following a decline in the availability of core funding from partners. This only recently increased to 3.2 FTE in September 2014. In real terms the funding available from partners to support the core running costs has been reduced by 20% over the last 4 years, and is likely to continue to decline. The current staff comprises, one Biological Recorder and 2.2 FTE data officers.

The work of WSBRC is augmented by the voluntary support of at least five volunteers covering the following roles – data checking, capture and re-formatting, GIS mapping, library and archival support and wildlife information service. The ideal/proposed structure of employed staff and voluntary roles is indicated below.

**Figure 3: Staff structure**



Section 5 gives an approximate breakdown of the main duties of the Centre staff.

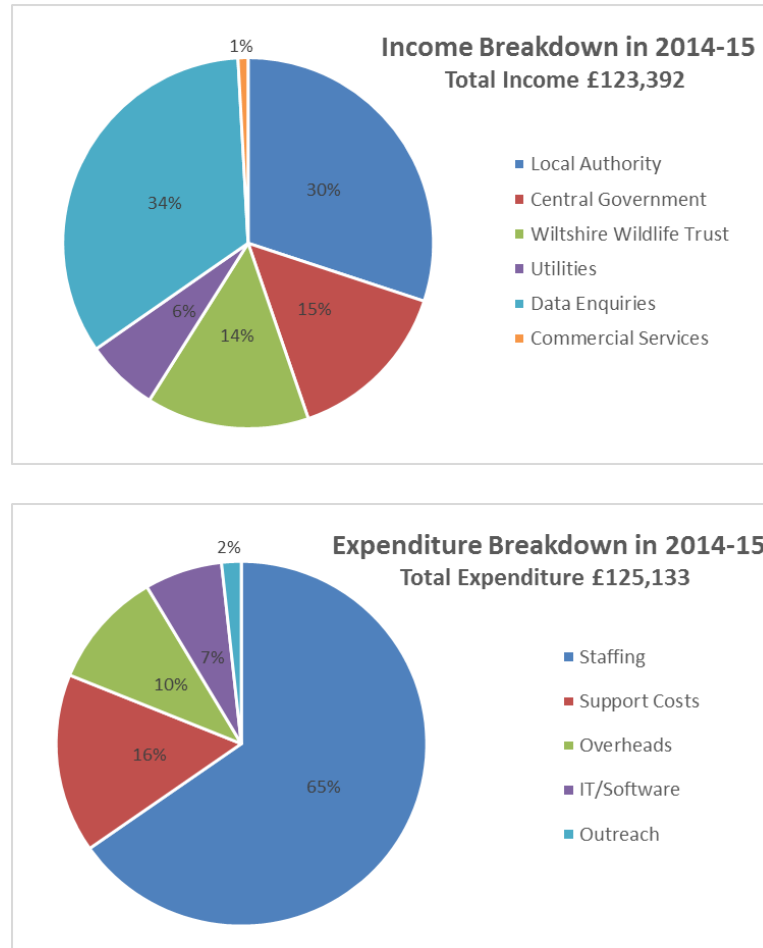
### **3.9 Funding**

See Section 6 and the Appendices for detailed financial projections

- The average annual running costs of the Centre now come to around £140,000 (salaries/travel/training/equipment/office overheads etc.). These costs are broadly comparable to those of other LRCs of a similar size.
- Funding of the Centre is effectively supported through Service Level Agreements between the Centre and the key data users. While most agreements are for the provision of services through SLAs, all funding partners contribute (in part) through these agreements towards the core running costs of the Centre. Each Service Level Agreement specifies a range of services and products to be provided and sets out when these are required.
- For those organisations (e.g. private companies not covered by service level agreements) any request for data is charged on a commercial 'pay-as-you go' basis to cover all reasonable staff costs, similar to any other commercial user. The fee charged for this type of data provision is expected to contribute towards the full (core) cost of data collection and management and not just the provision of data.
- In the past some land management advisors/agents (e.g. FWAG) have received a limited free service for Farm Environment Plans via provision of data to land management advisors on a reciprocal data/information exchange and landowner information basis. This occurs when it is considered to be mutually beneficial to provide information in return for the supply of data and identification of potential new CWS.
- The full costs associated with this type of data are difficult to quantify when so much is collected and supplied on a voluntary basis (Figure 2). However it is possible to put a figure (based on conventional methods for costing volunteer time e.g. HLF) to the amount of (in kind) support that WSBRC receives from the voluntary sector with respect to data collection, input and data

management services. This is invaluable and the records centre could not function without this critical support (and good will).

**Figure 4: Income and Expenditure Breakdown for 2014-15**



### 3.10 Information technology

IT support is essential for the smooth running of the Centre, but is particularly necessary for the development and maintenance of the biological database and geographic information system (GIS). To ensure wide data compatibility and its compliance with the NBN data quality standards WSBRC's database is Recorder 6.

General IT support is provided by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Database and GIS support beyond the present capabilities of WSBRC staff (supported by the present Wildlife Sites Officer) is mainly obtained through the NBN user's forum and R6 technical support.

The Centre is also required to employ a level of flexibility to facilitate in the exchange of data with other data custodians and recorders in a variety of different formats.

### 3.11 Communications



The WSBRC website, letterhead and leaflets give WSBRC a clear identity so that people with no previous knowledge of biological recording know where to come for information. Most people prefer to contact WSBRC by email or phone, and most data requests come into WSBRC via the Information Request Form, available online from the website.

Access to information and staff support is facilitated mainly through email links with funders and partners. The public, including recorders students, community groups etc, are able to visit the offices in person if they wish, however visitors are required to make appointments to ensure that the appropriate member of staff is available to assist them.

## **4. Products and services**

### **4.1 Core Products and services**

The services required of the Centre go beyond collecting and providing raw habitat & species data. Without the collation and management of all data it would be impossible to provide interpreted or contextual data, or to monitor losses, trends etc. The Centre is also able to discharge the duties of its 'public authority' Partners under the Environmental Information Regulations -by making data available to others on their behalf.

The following list summarises the main services and products which the Centre provides to help participating key data users & others meet their information needs:

- Promote high quality biological recording in the county; directing and advising recorders activities; providing data standards and ensuring full validation and verification of data is undertaken where possible.
- Maintain and provide habitat and species data and other supportive material, on request, for use when making decisions and giving advice, including use in development control, land use planning, land management, and the preparation/ implementation of action plans and local assessments. The presence of UK priority habitats and species and other notable species is a key factor in all the above.
- Data is released to all valid enquirers in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations and WSBRCs Data Access Policy, with particular attention being paid to the release of sensitive species data.
- As new Wildlife Site surveys are undertaken and evaluated WSBRC will hold and manage the data on behalf of the local planning authorities and other organisations. The Wildlife Sites Project will notify landowners where their land has been identified as meeting the CWS criteria.
- Assessment of the weekly local authority planning lists, and draft local development framework documents to highlight any development proposal or allocation within the known vicinity of a notified site or priority species or habitat (criteria as agreed with the LPA).
- Provision and maintenance of several GIS layers, particularly of boundary and attribute information covering areas of nature conservation importance, geodiversity importance, WWT reserve boundaries and management units, habitat/land use polygons, polylines and points,

Strategic Nature Areas, geology etc. WSBRC will provide funding organisations with updated copies of specific GIS layers at least once a year (or as agreed through relevant SLA)

- Validation and management of all habitat and species data collected in order to achieve the above
- Ensuring suitable verification of all species data is undertaken with support from County Recorder network
- Provision of a secure archive for all original & copied survey material collected
- Provision of data to consultants, landowners, community groups, students and the general public on behalf of the partners
- Support from WSBRC for volunteer recording groups and individuals who provide invaluable species data in support of all the above. This will however remain outside the scope of service level agreements with the key data users

## **4.2 Current and future development**

### Current

- Continue to review and update all existing Service Level Agreements and their equivalents
- Continue to develop new Service Level Agreements and their equivalents
- Continue to support new and existing monitoring schemes and recording groups
- Continue to develop online recording and others tools to improve verification and data flow between WSBRC and County Recorders

### Future

- Develop WSBRC's website and other appropriate web-based media to showcase its work and promote its services
- Develop strong branding for all WSBRC products and outputs
- Identify areas of work that add value to the products and services currently provided and either implement as opportunities allow or seek specific funding/payments to enable implementation. Service areas include commercial data enquiries, planning and development support, data management support, GIS mapping and interpretation and aerial photo interpretation.
- Develop and deliver services such as training, project and consultancy work. This might include
  - Training in biological recording tools and recording methods e.g. Living Record and Recorder 6 use; habitat mapping; basic and intermediate MapInfo GIS; managing data and databases
  - Involvement with new species atlas projects
  - Working on producing tools or mapping outputs looking at habitat connectivity and ecological networks
  - Providing support to biodiversity offsetting work if implemented in Wiltshire
  - Investigate desktop publishing services to deliver high quality mapping and data outputs for publications and other media for WWT and other organisations

## 5. Work programme and staff duties

### 5.1 Work programme and timescales

WSBRC work programme covers the period 2013-16 and is set out below; it will be reviewed towards the end of 2016. There continues to be a focus on core activities (and delivery of core services) but there is also an increased focus on the development of special projects & data collation from other sources, to deliver an increased range of products to data users; such as opportunity mapping, on-line recording, biodiversity monitoring, increased range of notable species data, and species coverage etc., alongside more efficient IT delivery. The work programme contributes to the actions of the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Partnership, and the Landscape Scale BAP's for Wiltshire and Swindon.

**Figure 5: Work Programme**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Responsibility of</b>	<b>Timescale Milestone</b>	<b>Priority</b>
<b>Management and development of WSBRC</b>			
1. Review and update the new business Plan every three years	Head of Conservation Policy (HoCP) & WSBRC Biological Recorder (BR) in consultation with Advisory Committee (AC)	Feb 2015	High
2. Secure finances for 2015-17	BR and HoCP	March 2015	High
3. Revise and renew Service Level Agreements	BR and HoCP	Annually by end March	High
4. Service & Report to Advisory Committee	BR and staff	Four times/yr	High
5. Prepare and review policies, procedures & agreements as required	BR	On-going	High
6. Continue to develop WSBRC's services and profile to attract new partners & clients and encourage more people to make use of its services	BR and staff	On-going	High

7. Help develop external funding opportunities to support work of WSBRC	BR and HoCP WWT Fundraising staff	On-going	High
8. Maintain external presence through WSBRC website and other media	WSBRC staff & volunteers	On-going	High
9. Keep an overview of current developments in biological recording with a view to maximising opportunities.	BR, BRO	On-going	High
10. Produce annual report	BR, BRO	May/June	Medium
11. Continue to provide work experience for students and volunteers	WSBRC staff	On-going	Low
<b>Data Management &amp; Key Outputs</b>			
12. Secure and collate new biological data, maintain data flows and look to fill gaps in spatial or taxonomic coverage	WSBRC Staff	On-going	High
13. Undertake standardised data capture, validation and import to R6	DO, BRO assisted by volunteers	On-going	High
14. Ensure verification of all WSBRC data	WSBRC staff	On-going	High
15. Continue GIS mapping of UK habitats using IHS, prioritising priority habitats, utilising available field data	BRO assisted by volunteers	On-going	Medium
16. Maintain and develop all WSBRC data management systems	BR, BRO	On-going	High
17. Provide information to all who require it, subject to access and charging policies.	BRO supported by other staff	On-going	High
18. Advise planning authorities through the planning screen of where application sites are within the vicinity of notified sites and priority species or habitats	BRO	Weekly	High
19. Provide data in relation to allocations to Core strategies and neighbourhood plans	BRO	As required	Medium
<b>IT Development Work</b>			

20. Implement review of IT systems and needs, develop solutions for increased IT efficiency	BR/BRO – in consultation with WWT IT Officer	On-going	Medium
21. Continue development of Recorder 6 to meet the needs of WSBRC	BR/BRO assisted by WWT Wildlife Sites Officer	On-going	High
22. Continue development of the updated Planning screen tool as required	BRO	On-going	Low
23. Implement new WSBRC website and continue to develop its content and interactive functions	BR/DO with content from all WSBRC staff and volunteers	Once WWT site operational (approx. June 2015)	Medium
<b>Initiatives &amp; Projects</b>			
24. Maintain the County Recorder network; provide support to it and to the wider network of key recorders	WSBRC staff	On-going	High
25. Organise the annual County Recorders' meeting	BR	Yearly	High
26. Support the production of county or local species atlases	WSBRC staff	On-going	High
27. Assess and develop appropriate web services to access nationally held datasets via NBN Gateway and other online information	BR, BRO	On completion of new website & NBN tools	Medium
28. Promote and support use of Living Record online recording system	WSBRC staff	On-going	High
29. Work with existing recorders to develop and promote recording amongst new recorders. Support the development of a new generation of recorders	WSBRC staff and partners & County Recorders	As opportunities arise	Medium
30. Identify areas of opportunities to restore habitat networks – to feed into Landscape Scale initiatives	WSBRC staff – with partners and State of Environment project	As required	Medium

31. Provide key data outputs for State of Nature Report	WSBRC staff – with HoCP and Environmental Intelligence Officer (EIO)	As required	High
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## 5.2 Staff duties and projected allocation of tasks for 2014 onwards

**Figure 6: Staff duties**

Post	Primary Tasks	Yearly % time
<b>Biological Recorder (PL)</b>		
	Management of WSBRC & partnerships	25
	Projects & training provision	10
	Data output, analysis and reporting	15
	Data validation & management	5
	Volunteer engagement	10
	Development & liaison	20
	Staff & volunteer management & supervision	10
	Professional development, organisation etc	5
<b>Biological Records Officer (AM)</b>		
	Projects & training provision	20
	Data output, analysis and reporting	20
	Database development and management	20
	Data validation & management, supervising volunteers	15
	Development & liaison	10
	Volunteer monitoring	10
	Professional development, organisation etc	5
<b>Biological Records Officer (DM) (0.6 FTE)</b>		
	Data output, analysis and research	40
	Planning screen	40
	Volunteer engagement	5
	Development & liaison	10
	Professional development, organisation etc	5
<b>Data Officer (Sites) (VJ) (0.6 FTE)</b>		
	Data output, analysis and research	15

	Data validation & management, supervising volunteers	40
	Volunteer engagement	10
	Promotion/Publicity	20
	Development & liaison	10
	Professional development, organisation etc	5

## 6. Financial Projections

The following financial projections cover a two year period starting on 1st April 2015 and ending on the 31st March 2017. The previous three years figures are also shown for comparison/completeness. All costs have been rounded up to the nearest £1 and the assumptions upon which the financial projections are based are summarised below.

### 6.1 Projected Cash flow Statements

The projected income & expenditure for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 is shown below. Figures for 2016/17 should be considered very uncertain as the majority of contractual agreements are 1-year and so funding levels are not known beyond 2015/16 at this time.

Salaries are based on zero cost of living pay award over the three years although an increase of 3% per year is built into agreements where possible (subject to annual review). Projected carry forward surplus for 2014/15 is approximately £40,000 and offsets the predicted in-year deficit up until the third quarter of 2016/17 at the predicted income and expenditure levels.

*Figure 7: Cash flow 2012-2017*

	<b>Year 2012/13 Actual £</b>	<b>Year 2013-14 Actual £</b>	<b>Year 2014-15 actual £</b>	<b>Year 2015-16 Projected £</b>	<b>Year 2016-17 Projected £</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	105,287	102,636	124,953	139,222	139,222
<b>Income</b>	127,175	125,189	124,768	121,922	124,692
<b>Local Authority</b>	41,314	37,075	37,092	37,092	37,092
<b>Statutory Agency</b>	16,000	16,000	18,100	13,100	13,100
<b>Data searches</b>	26,003	35,441	43,072	44,000	46,000
<b>WWT</b>	31,062	17,200	17,550	15,100	15,100
<b>Other</b>	12,797	19,474	8,954	12,630	13,400

## 6.2 Contingency planning

A few partners have a three or five year Service Level Agreement which has a notice period but most are on a one year rolling agreement, negotiated each year. This means that WSBRC is operating at a level of risk at present, with little time to seek new funding if any partners decide to withdraw. Present levels of staffing are vulnerable to any further decline in funding and this would have an adverse impact on service delivery.

## 6.3 Financial assumptions

- a) **Financial contributions** – Funding partners will contribute the same level of funding or an increase of 3% on the previous year. In reality most of the agreed annual funding contributions have in fact decreased.
- b) **Staffing** – Salary costs. Staff rates are based on Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's pay scales and are likely to remain at present levels.
- c) **On-costs** - National Insurance, pensions, insurance are consistent with HMRC and relevant national guidelines.
- d) **Office costs** – These are calculated as a pro rata cost by WWT and cover all office overheads, support services and WWT governance costs.
- e) **Capitalisation** - A small amount of office equipment (books and survey equipment) have been purchased by the Centre and so capitalised items will exist.
- f) **Travel** – Expenses are based on mileage costs: 45p/mile for staff and 24p/mile for volunteers
- g) **VAT** – Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is able to recover VAT on all related expenditure so this is not included in the financial projections.



## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: WSBRC Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

1. To advise and support the WSBRC so as to influence the delivery of its objectives (see below), and to monitor client satisfaction, by, amongst other aspects:
  - Ensuring that the WSBRC has a sustainable future
  - Developing policies to guide recording practice across the county
  - Advising and supporting WSBRC on data management
  - Advising the WSBRC on the needs of stakeholders
  - Facilitating the flow of biological records from other organisations
  - Reviewing the relevant Risk Register components annually at the request of the Board of Trustees
2. To report through the Chair to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Board of Trustees.

**The objectives of the WSBRC** may be summarised as:

- To gather, host, manage and disseminate accurate biological and geological data;
- To support and encourage recording by many groups and individuals;
- To support others in delivery of biodiversity gain by means of 1 to 2 above;
- To encourage public engagement with nature through recording;
- To facilitate the work of all WSBRC funders and other customers.

#### **Membership of the Committee**

Membership of the Advisory Committee will include representation from the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Local Authorities, Natural England, the Environment Agency and the County Recorder's Group. The Committee may also invite representation from other stakeholder organisations where appropriate.

Each stakeholder organisation will normally have one representative at Committee meetings, although occasionally there may be a need for additional representatives to attend. The Advisory Committee will be chaired by a WWT trustee and will always be attended by the Biological Recorder.

## **APPENDIX 2: ALERC Association Objectives**

Formed in 2009, ALERC is an association between Local Environmental Records Centres (LRCs) in Great Britain. The Association aims to provide a central voice for the views and concerns of the Records Centre community, whilst building a support-based network of knowledge and advice to meet the needs of its members. It presently has one full-time national coordinator and a board of unpaid directors drawn from the LRC community.

Its objectives are:

- To promote and encourage the completion of a UK-wide network of Local biodiversity and geodiversity Records Centres.
- To promote and develop good standards of practice in the collation, management, dissemination and analysis of biological and geological records.
- To promote Local Records Centres regionally, nationally and at a UK level to potential users and suppliers of data.
- To provide full representation of the UK with country specific solutions and equal emphasis on the individual countries requirements.
- To develop and promote accreditation schemes for biodiversity and geodiversity records centres and their staff.
- To encourage and facilitate networking between Centres to enable exchange of ideas, collaborative working, developing joint tools and sharing good practice.

## APPENDIX 3: ALERC Accreditation Criteria v1.2

Natural England, working closely with the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC), commissioned the development of an Accreditation System for Local Records Centres across the UK. The project ran over the period February to August 2010 and included consultation workshops at the ALERC conference in Birmingham in April, followed by wider consultation in May/June. The principal consultant for the project was former Somerset Environmental Records Centre Director, NBN Trustee and NFBR Chairman, Bill Butcher, of WGB Environment.

The criteria agreed for the pilot have been reviewed by ALERC and the Standard Criteria published here are those that will be used for future assessment.

In 2009 the Association of Local Environmental Record Centres was formed. One of its objectives is to develop and promote accreditation systems for local environmental record centres and their staff. Natural England is also interested in the development of an accreditation system to help improve standards across LRCs and facilitate data exchange and use across with National Schemes and Societies, other members of the National Biodiversity Network community and geodiversity community.

The aims of LRC Accreditation are to identify a minimum level of standards, to build confidence in LRCs as bodies which hold biodiversity information in trust for society and manage public resources well, and to encourage improvement. More specifically, the Accreditation System should

1. Provide a set of objective criteria against which the LRC operation can be assessed to demonstrate that it is effective and efficient.
2. Outline core levels of products and services that an LRC should provide to assist key users.
3. Ensure that an LRC is actively working with data holders to improve the availability and quality of data across the NBN partnership.
4. Recognise the existing range of models that LRCs operate under, provided these are effective and efficient.

### Standard Level Criteria

Section	No.	Criteria	Evidence
Organisational Fundamentals	1	The LRC is Stakeholder led	Constitution or equivalent document, Terms of Reference of a Steering Group or Advisory Group & minutes of meetings
	2	Engaged stakeholders, as a minimum include, local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation NGOs and voluntary recorders.	Constitution or equivalent document, Terms of Reference of a Steering Group or Advisory Group & minutes of meetings
	3	Impartiality is demonstrated in its constitution and policies.	Constitution or equivalent document, Data Access Policy, Data Capture/Data Management Policy

	4	The LRC complies with all relevant legislation and regulations	Data Access Policy, Data Capture/Data Management Policy, Management reports
	5	The LRC has the legal status to be able to enter contractual agreements, either as an independent incorporated body or a part of a larger organisation.	Constitution or equivalent document
	6	The LRC is accountable and transparent for its business and financial performance.	Management reports
	7	The terrestrial area covered does not overlap with any other LRC	LRC Boundary Map
	8	The LRC proactively engages with its users and providers.	Management reports
	9	The LRC employs sufficient staff, including a manager or equivalent, to maintain efficient and effective service to its users and providers.	Staff complement review (by LRC Accreditation Team), JD of manager or equivalent, figures for core services such as average turnaround times for enquiries
	10	The LRC is a Process Orientated Organisation	
	10.1	The LRC has documented procedures for its routine processes	List of written procedures & processes and evidence of compliance
	10.2	Tasks, responsibilities and authority of individuals are known	Job descriptions, Annual work plan, Line manager identified, Annual reporting
	10.3	Adopt continuous improvement of processes.	Audit trail of process being monitored, continuous improvement
	10.4	All staff undertake continuing professional development	Staff CPD summary for previous 12 months
Data Custodianship	11	The LRC manages species and habitat data for its area.	Statistics on species records and habitat parcels held
	12	The LRC is responsible for datasets custodianship, and management of dataset copies, by agreement with its partners and data providers.	List of datasets under custodianship & management on website
	13	In its custodianship responsibilities, the LRC observes the Data Exchange Principles of the National Biodiversity Network.	
	14	The LRC ensures quality control of its species and habitat data through validation and verification systems.	Validation & verification policy; Evidence of policy implementation e.g. dataset attributes
	15	The LRC acts as a secure archive for the data in its care in perpetuity.	Data Security Policy; Business Continuity Plan
Products and Services	16	The LRC offers a basic suite of products and services to its users, defined as follows:	

	16.1	Geospatial data search of a project area showing statutory and non-statutory sites and recorded BAP/legally protected species.	Product example; statistic of supply frequency
	16.2	Geospatial data search of a project area showing recorded habitats	Product example; statistic of supply frequency
	16.3	List of all recorded BAP priority and legally protected species in a defined area.	Product example; statistic of supply frequency
	16.4	List of all recorded BAP priority habitats in a defined area	Product example; statistic of supply frequency
	16.5	Records distribution map of any recorded species for area	Product example; statistic of supply frequency
	16.6	Statistics and commentary on coverage, currency, accuracy and precision of species and habitat records	Data quality reports
		In delivering these products and services, the following standards are met:	
	17	Species	
	17.1	Species reporting naming conforms to NBN Species Dictionary, while retaining recorded name	Species reporting nomenclature, link to dictionary
	17.2	Records are available at variable precision spatially, but held electronically at most geographically precise level recorded	Species records in 16.1 product example; data capture policy
	17.3	Records are linked with a source	Database statistic; populated attribute
	18	Habitats	
	18.1	Habitat reporting includes Habitats in GIS, while retaining original records in any classification recognised by the NBN Habitats Dictionary	Product example 16.2; statistic of habitat coverage (area by classification)
	18.2	Habitats are mapped in GIS following recognised mapping standards	GIS data format for habitat layers
	18.3	Habitat records are available at variable precision, having been digitised at the most geographically precise level available	Habitat records in 16.2 product example; data capture policy
	18.4	Records are linked with a source	GIS database statistic; populated attribute
	19	Sites	
	19.1	The LRC holds and reports on a current copy of the Local Wildlife Sites (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) boundaries and short descriptions for its area.	Dataset included in metadata on web for whole LRC area

	19.2	If the LRC is the agreed custodian of the Local Wildlife Site (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Wildlife Sites Systems.	LWS policy; LWS selection criteria; LWS process; example of selection process; landowner consent evidence
	19.3	If the LRC is the agreed custodian of the Local Geological Site dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Geological Sites. (not applicable to Scotland)	LGS policy; LGS selection criteria; LGS process; example of selection process; landowner consent evidence
	20	The LRC promotes and supports high quality species and habitat recording	Website recording advice; training event detail or written advice

The advance criteria are still in draft form. (See:

[http://www.alerc.org.uk/uploads/7/6/3/3/7633190/lrc\\_accreditation\\_criteria\\_final\\_v1.2.pdf](http://www.alerc.org.uk/uploads/7/6/3/3/7633190/lrc_accreditation_criteria_final_v1.2.pdf) for full information)