

Questions about the Water Resources East Natural Capital Plan



Questions from the introductory webinar on 14/10/2020

Answered by Sam Sinclair (sam@biodiversify.org)

1. How many people are you expecting - and how many are here now?

We had around 155 people attending the webinar.

2. In what way(s) does Systematic Conservation Planning differ from Habitat Opportunity Mapping/ planning tool used as done currently for e.g. OxCam Growth Arc? Is this about more than habitats enhancements and include wider natural capital as well?

Habitat opportunity mapping identifies where actions *could* take place, however it is more a way of visualising data than making decisions. Systematic conservation planning takes the opportunity data for many different actions simultaneously and optimises them against the costs of actions. This identifies where you should act in order to achieve the objectives you want in the most cost-effective way. This is partially about coordinating actions spatially, for example you can't plant a tree in the same place that you restore a wetland, but it's also about identifying where you can deliver the objectives most cost effectively, for example where can you plant a tree so that it delivers multiple different objectives simultaneously.

3. How do you relate to NatCap East and the work on the Arc?

Good question! We are in frequent contact with both the Arc and Natural Capital East teams so we're still exploring this. One of the most important purposes of this plan is to attract funding for natural capital action. The plan will make it clear how the private sector and central government can pay farmers and land managers a fair rate to manage their land for natural capital in a cost-effective way.

4. The map looks like a field map. Are there any areas to manage for farming and food production?

Yes absolutely, the goal of this plan is to maximise the potential of Eastern England which includes food production.

5. Who will decide what changes in land management should be? An arable farmer will want to see as much arable as possible, a grassland farmer will want to see as much grassland as possible, an environmentalist will want to see as many trees, reedbeds etc as possible. Most decisions are obvious because of wetness of soil but in Broadland drainage has meant there have been historic changes to land management. Will compensation be paid to those being forced to change or is WRE expecting ELMS to fund the loss of capital value as well as annual subsidy?



This question raises quite a few important points simultaneously. Firstly, this project will be about helping different groups come together to make trade-off decisions, so we want the arable farmer, grassland farmer and environmentalist to come together and think about the overarching objectives they all want. It's pretty likely that there will be some clear agreements, for example they will all depend on having a landscape that has clean water and is resistant to droughts and floods. Once we've started to reach agreement on these basic principles, we can then ask the question of how much arable farming, grassland and natural capital do we need to achieve these objectives? This will involve negotiating compromises to reach a shared vision for the landscape which the plan will then represent.

Secondly, the purpose of the WRE plan is to allow stakeholders to come together in this way so that when resources become available, for example through ELMS, they are used to deliver this shared vision which absolutely should include fair compensation to those who change their land management practices.

6. so this sounds like its aimed at local, small scale actions that add up to strategic outcomes - what about strategic, large scale projects?

This is about all scales within the WRE region. We will be supporting county councils on large projects as well as catchment partnerships and farming clusters on local action.

7. Does this come with a budget to implement that actions or does it rely on people finding the cash out of existing local budgets?

This plan does not come with a budget, rather it is a tool for attracting funding and support. This will enable a farmer or land manager to make the case that their local action will provide an important regional benefit, thus providing a clear reason for the private sector or central government to provide financial support.

8. What range of / how many Ecosystem Services are you going to be taking into consideration?

That's up to you! We'll seek to include as many of the ecosystem services that are suggested as we can. Apart from that it's largely up to whether good data exists to map them.

9. Are you providing grants /funding for actions?

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10. How do you know that the actions submitted will deliver the outcome to justify the cost?



In many cases there are great models which connect actions to outcomes, for example Natural England have produced detailed maps of where to plant trees in order to prevent flooding. In terms of the justification of the cost, that probably depends on the perspective of the viewer however there is increasing interest in providing funding such services.

- 11. From that part only you appear to be concentrating on fur, fin and feather, but not considering people, I am a conservationist, but as a councillor I do not see where you are protecting my people from flooding, my farmers and businesses who use water from shortages. I had thought WRE was taking these into account.**

WRE is absolutely taking these things into account, partially through this project but mainly through their other water management planning work.

- 12. At this scale how does the wider demand of moving water around the region in which the benefits for area A come from areas B-C-D etc.**

We are working to connect the spatial prioritisation model with the water simulators in order to draw a clear connection between water management decisions and natural capital management. In addition, in many cases there are datasets or opportunity maps which have modelled directional effects like these for specific actions.

- 13. can we have a list of the priority parishes?**

This will be the main outcome of this work. The first draft will be released in February.

- 14. Is it whole life costs SCP considers? How does it ensure all 'options' are consistently costed for consideration alongside one another?**

Our planning team is working on exactly this question, how do we accurately and spatially represent costs of different actions across the WRE area? We're going to be working with some key WRE partners to tackle this issue and full details of the approach will be released as soon as it's ready. Again, we're really keen for this to be as accurate and fair as possible so we'll be keen to get your feedback. Critically, these costs aren't binding and indicate no form of agreement, they're just there to represent the *potential* differences in costs between different areas.

- 15. River Lark Catchment Partnership. Are we better off sticking to our most obvious large scale project; or entering multiple, less developed ideas! I think the former.**

Tell us about everything that you're up to! We'd love to hear about your historical, ongoing and planned work. What is particularly useful is if you can send us a report of some form or ideally a map. We'll then seek to include that in our analysis.

- 16. How does the visitor economy agenda fit within this. In Thetford we're keen to press on with projects on and around the River Little Ouse to leverage its place in**



the centre of the town...not many towns benefit from such an accessible river. Does expanding visitor and resident access to such assets fit within your scope?

This should be submitted as an objective, public access to green space is increasingly important.

17. funding is one aspect who would be expected to manage the projects to ensure they are maintained?

WRE and Biodiversity won't be managing project but rather using the plan to support and coordinate projects across the region. Projects will be managed in the normal way.

18. Will you be looking to include details of DEFRA funded projects across the area? Clearly there are numerous 'on the ground' projects underway, also being planned for.

Absolutely!

19. Given that a considerable area is below current sea level - predicted to rise by 1m by 2120 - and the lower rivers are tidal, how are you incorporating the risk of future flooding from the sea and the rivers + salinity related issues?

This is an issue for WRE's more water focused planning projects.

20. If this project focuses on the 'water environment' is this not an incomplete tool compared to other NC plans? Should it be called something different to ensure clarity? While it will add value in areas where no other NC investment planning is happening/has taken place, it will be important to ensure it 'adds value' where a process (often covering a wider range of ESS) is already underway or complete.

This will not be a water focused plan, rather it will address all natural capital. Where there are local plans, this will support them by identify which aspects of potential improvement are not only of local importance but also regional importance.

21. WRE covers a very wide area but it looks as if most engagement is from organisations towards the east of the region. Are there plans to draw in organisations further west? this relates in part to the query about the Ox/Cam Arc.

We are working with the OxCam Natural Capital Planning team to coordinate approaches. WRE is continuing to reach out to organisations to get as full a representation as possible.

22. In a region that is short of water and demand is growing there is unlikely to be consensus as to how to achieve the objectives.

That's what this process is all about, we're hoping to help people work to reach consensus on what outcomes are desired first and then move onto what might happen where. A large part of this project will be identifying the shared objectives



and then seeking to find resolution where there are disagreements. Because this works at the regional level however, it will not focus in on local disagreements.

23. Who will make the decision as to what schemes, actions are taken

The decisions will always be made by people at the local level. This plan just identifies the optimal places for actions to take place, it's in the hands of local actors to turn this guidance into projects. We will however be using the plan to make the case to central government and the private sector for natural capital investment, however that will be directed to local actors who will have an equal say in project development.

24. Will this mapping feed into ELMS targetting and Nature Recovery Network mapping forshadowed in the Environment Bill?

That is one of our main ambitions for this plan. Defra is currently exploring the role of SCP and spatial prioritisation to support ELMS and we feel that this will be an amazing opportunity to co-develop an approach which can then set the precedent for future plans.

25. Is there resource for Biodiversify to add projects from partners existing plans (e.g. Diffuse Water Pollution Plans, Catchment Plans)

Yes definitely. Please send us details of your plans and projects and we'll talk to you about how to include them.

26. Defra ELM scheme policy team said to me this morning that they have yet to decide on the mechanisms for spatial prioritisation under ELM. The Test and Trials are investigating many models.

This is true. There is currently an open tender for the trial of SCP to support local nature recovery strategies and ELMS so that will likely make things clearer as it progresses.

27. How will you narrow down the 'options' to a manageable amount for insertion into 'the model' ? Is there a screening methodology?

Great question. Basically we will develop umbrella Objectives and Actions which include all those suggested, for example "restore habitat" might be suggested to summarise "restore wetland", "restore forests" and "reduce grazing on important grasslands". We will post all of the inputs we receive on our website and make it clear how we have summarised and collated stakeholder input. We'll talk about this in more detail at 14:00 on the 3rd of November.

28. Would an intervention such as introducing abstraction license flexibility for improving water resource be something that the SCP could accommodate?

That is probably something best dealt with in the other WRE planning projects. That said, "increasing water available for the environment" could be a key objective and "improved management of extraction" might be an action. Please suggest your idea!



29. What administrative boundaries are you proposing to use? Parish/District/County?

We will use Parishes. This is because they are small enough to provide useful guidance but large enough to still allow considerable stakeholder agency over how actions are coordinated.

30. very happy to contribute to this wider process - validation of delivery will be key ie funded, sustainable delivery to be identified.

Fantastic, we look forward to your input. We agree about the need for funding and having a sustainable project and we're working very hard to make the case for natural capital investment to do exactly that.

31. What about interventions that conflict one another? How will SCP address these issues?

Great question, this is actually a key strength of SCP. The analysis will identify how to coordinate different conflicting actions across a landscape. For example, you can't establish a forest and a grassland in the same spot, however both will be needed across the landscape. The SCP analysis will identify the best places to establish both grassland and forest in order to achieve the targets of both and deliver the maximum benefits to society and nature.

32. RLCP - As a follow up - Having heard further presentations I guess my 'project' is more a major objective to reconnect the Lark with its flood plain and the aquifer - so it would define many further sub-objectives.

That's a great objective. Something that major and specific might be outside of the scope of the regional plan, however it is absolutely something that could be achieved through a local plan. Please get in touch if you'd like to chat more about this.

33. There is a list of (I think) 18 Ecosystem Services that Defra has endorsed - if this plan looks at all NC assets and ESS as you say, this would be a good baseline.

Thanks, we'll check that out!

