1. The Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP) is a Local Nature Partnership (LNP), a Defra accredited body. The GLNP is one of 48 LNPs across England, each one is unique in structure and function but all seek to bring about improvements in their local natural environment.

2. Working together achieves more. Partners choose to join the GLNP because they see benefits in doing so. The GLNP achieves more for nature because we work to high standards, look for opportunities and seek to add value to existing initiatives. Most importantly we use sound information and build on it to inform strategy; delivering for the Partners. The GLNP currently has 49 organisational Partners including local and national organisations, charities, public authorities and businesses, including Natural England. The GLNP operates as a not-for-profit partnership. For more information on what we do see www.glnp.org.uk

3. **Rural advocacy and the Commission for Rural Communities**

4. Since the closure of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC), and subsequent winding up of the Defra Rural Communities Policy Unit, how – if at all - are the CRC’s original functions of advocate, adviser and watchdog being fulfilled?

5. No comments

6. Are sufficient measures being taken to ensure that policies are rural-proofed at national and local levels? Who is taking the lead on policy for rural areas – and who should be taking the lead on such matters?

7. No comments

8. What role should Defra – or other Government departments – play in co-ordinating policy for rural areas? How effectively are the interests – including social and economic interests - of rural communities being represented within the current structures of Government, and how could representation and co-ordination be improved?

9. No comments

10. **Natural England**

11. How well has Natural England fulfilled the mandate that it currently has? How well do its wide-ranging functions fit together, and does it have the appropriate powers and resources to perform these functions?

12. The GLNP is unable to comment on the entire remit of the question; however we are able to offer insight from working with various department and individuals within Natural England across Greater Lincolnshire over the last 10 years.
13. Over the last 10 years the ability of Natural England to fulfill its mandate has declined. In our opinion, this has been due to successive rounds of funding cuts that have both reduced available funding for grants, but most significantly reduced the staff resources available to undertake its core work.
   a. As such it is the GLNP’s impression that it may have the appropriate powers to fulfill its mandate but it does not have nearly enough resources.
   b. Around seven years ago Natural England had both budget and staff time to commit to projects that achieved their mandate and worked in wider partnerships to create greater value for money and impact for biodiversity. At the current time this funding no longer exists. It is significant that Natural England has not attended the GLNP quarterly Steering Group meetings for over two years. This is not an isolated depiction but an example of a wider trend.

14. In another example, Natural England now only responds on spatial planning matters if SSSIs are likely to be impacted by a development, due to resource constraints.
   a. This neglects a wide range of other important sites for biodiversity – particularly as SSSI designations are representative, not comprehensive.
   b. Local Sites are designed to be a comprehensive suite of sites protected through planning policy. As Natural England no longer makes reference to these sites their importance and protection in the eyes of other organisations is weakened. This is something that the GLNP has seen slowly occur.
   c. The Government is committed to a landscape-scale and natural capital approach in order to achieve its biodiversity commitments in Biodiversity 2020 and under Nagoya. This cannot be achieved with a focus on one suite of designated sites alone – something that is clearly recognised in these documents.

15. Related to this example is Natural England’s lack of access to up to date evidence for the natural environment. Since cancelling their Service Level Agreement with the Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre (part of GLNP) at the end of 2015-16 staff no longer have access to species or Local Site data without charge.
   a. Given the budget cuts local Natural England staff cannot afford data requests, and even if they could, the GLNP have been informed that there was a central decision not to request data from any Local Environmental Record Centre. Thereby tying the hands of local staff in achieving their duties.
   b. The Lincolnshire Environmental Record Centre has received more requests for data from Natural England, the MMO and Defra since the cancellation of the Service Level Agreement. All of these requests expected the data to be provided free of charge and also considered the data to be important in new and ongoing research/work on the natural environment, some of it at a national level.
   c. For clarification, data charges are made on a not-for-profit basis for collation and management of the data. Without this charge there would be no staff in post to undertake this role and the data would either not exist or would not be up to date.

16. To highlight another issue it is concerning that Countryside Stewardship uptake in Lincolnshire seems to be dictated by staff resources rather than by available funding or even the government ambitions for a better natural environment.
17. To explain, in 2016, out of 37 Higher Level Scheme expiries, just two were supported into Higher Tier agreements and only 15 went on to request Mid Tier packs. In 2017 the GLNP understands that there are 37 Higher Level Scheme expiries and Natural England was intending to encourage nine of these to apply for Higher Tier with a potential further three to be approached. The remainder were to receive a letter inviting them to request Mid Tier packs and it is not yet known what the uptake from that will be.
   a. Local Natural England representatives have said that 12 Higher Tier agreements will be a struggle for them to process due to staff resources, and this is not allowing for any potential new applicants
   b. In addition there will be a loss of local confidence in Natural England and the scheme from the expiring Higher Level Schemes who are offered no support into Mid Tier
   c. The result is a significant loss of public investment into environmental enhancement on farmland for at least the previous 10 years if not longer.

18. As a conclusion, the GLNP view is that the reach and effectiveness of Natural England is severely curtailed through a lack of resources.

19. Are any changes to the remit and responsibilities of Natural England required, either as a result of Brexit or of other significant developments in the period since 2006?

20. Continuing from the previous question, the GLNP view is that the main factor influencing the effectiveness of Natural England is a lack of resources.

21. It is also pertinent to state the GLNP believes that the current role of Natural England as the watchdog for the natural environment and as an impartial advisor to government with solely the interest of the environment at heart is still needed.
   a. Pressures to weaken this remit should be resisted as it will only undermine the effectiveness of the organisation further.
   b. Natural England should be able to give advice to Government when it believes it is in the interest of conserving the natural environment and where action could further the Government’s objectives under Biodiversity 2020 and Nagoya.

22. Do the arrangements and provisions for enabling and managing access to the countryside remain appropriate? How effective have Natural England – and other partners – been in promoting better access?

23. No comments

24. Sustainability and biodiversity

25. Is the duty to ‘have regard’ to biodiversity, which is contained within the Act, well understood by those bodies to whom it applies? Is any further work required to raise awareness of the duty?

26. The GLNP experience is that the duty is not well understood by those bodies to whom it applies and a great deal of further work is required to raise awareness of the duty.
27. The GLNP works with a range of public bodies, primarily local authorities and internal drainage boards. On frequent occasions senior (and junior) staff, in relevant departments, have been unaware of the duty, requiring the GLNP to explain it to them.
   a. This is despite good working relationships with these organisations, and frequently their desire to do more for the natural environment.

28. Work is always ongoing with GLNP Partners to raise awareness of the duty, due to inevitable staff changes in public bodies. This awareness raising is a difficult task as it seems we are often the first to mention the duty to relevant individuals.
   a. Is there a gap in formal or professional training where this duty should be being covered?
   b. The lack of recent government guidance on the duty – and that it is left to the third sector to explain it – gives the impression that it is not as important as other areas.
   c. There is no clear path for fulfilling the duty, if further examples or process pathways could be given this would give public bodies more security that they were doing the right thing.

29. What has been the practical impact of the 2006 duty? Is any modification to the duty required as a result of developments in our understanding of the value of ecosystems and biodiversity since 2006?

30. The GLNP’s view is that the largest area of practical impact of the duty has been to give third sector organisations a greater lever with which to engage with public bodies.

31. This of course is not necessary where there is already a good working relationship. However, in cases where a relationship needs to be built between new staff members or with a new GLNP Partner, the duty has offered a way for the GLNP to demonstrate relevance and usefulness.

32. The duty has also proved useful in more formal situations such as local plan and individual planning responses. There is now a key way to demonstrate that the public body must have considered the natural environment and, if it is not clear to us this has happened, then the duty can be cited to bring about change.
   a. Actual benefit to biodiversity is difficult to measure as a metric of this, but again these formal responses through the planning process frequently lead to greater engagement with the authorities concerned and GLNP believes that better decisions are made through such engagement.
   b. It must be noted, however, that this engagement relies upon the staff in the third sector to have the capacity to raise the issue of the duty and work with local authorities. This is not always the case, particularly as many in the third sector have taken on addition work as the reach of the statutory sector has reduced.

33. The GLNP also believes that there is a subsidiary area of impact for the duty. This is use by well-informed individuals within public bodies enabling them to stand up for biodiversity in the course of their roles.
a. Such examples may be to ensure that local authority documents are considering the Section 41 species or ensuring that related organisations are considering biodiversity in their operations e.g. housing associations

b. The GLNP’s experience is that these examples are limited to public bodies that already have ecological expertise in-house. As in-house ecological expertise is very limited in Greater Lincolnshire the benefits are not as widely felt as they should be.

34. How does the English duty to ‘have regard’ to biodiversity compare to the Scottish duty to ‘further’ biodiversity and the enhanced biodiversity duty introduced in Wales in 2016?

35. No comments

36. **The changing context since 2006**

37. Will the structures established by the Act be sufficient to ensure appropriate protection for nature and environmental standards following Brexit? Are any modifications or changes to the structures established by the Act required to address the implications of Brexit?

38. Continuing from the previous question, structures established by the Act are insufficient to ensure appropriate protection for nature and environmental standards at the current time, given the lack of awareness of the Duty and what is needed to enact it.

   a. The GLNP does not necessarily believe that the Act itself is insufficient, rather it is about the necessary measures and political will to enact and enforce it.

39. GLNP believes that, if further pressures are brought to bear on the natural environment as a result of Brexit or any other political or economic forces, then changes in some format – either to the Act itself or in how it is enforced – will be required in order to ensure that the public bodies do ‘have regard’ for biodiversity and that the Government’s commitments and aspirations for the natural environment have a chance of being achieved.

40. Are there any further parts of the Act which are currently in force that need to be reconsidered as a result of developments since 2006?

41. No comments

12 September 2017