

Natural England Communication Strategy

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Executive Summary

This is a report from the COI to Natural England, concluding a review of Natural England's communications involving staff and Board between November 2006 and February 2007. The Board will consider its recommendations on the 21st February 2007.

It is proposed that a second phase is conducted during March and April 2007 to deliver a comprehensive three year communications plan built on this strategy.

Recommendations

- Natural England's approach to communications should be framed around a consistent interpretation of its role and brand proposition as an 'authoritative campaigner';
- Natural England needs to embed communications considerations further upstream in its delivery work;
- Natural England should develop a single communications function with the appropriate capacity and skills to ensure that the organisation speaks with one voice. This will require an immediate review of the function;
- Only one of the campaigns should be public-facing at any one time;
- Phase two should be implemented to ensure that a full communications plan is in place by the end of April 2007.

Our analysis reveals a number of issues that have informed the recommended strategy:

- The role and positioning of the organisation is currently unclear;
- The sector is extremely crowded;
- Natural England needs to build its brand in the minds of key audiences;
- The communication function has been created by faxing the communications functions of three smaller organisations with very different approaches to communications. It is therefore dispersed and separate in its approach.

The strategy has been developed around the following principles:

1. Natural England's role and position within the category needs to be established internally and externally

Natural England is a major player within the sector as evidenced by its credentials: it is a respected advisor; it is evidence-based; it makes a difference with its agri-environment schemes and it is solution-oriented. This has led us to define Natural England's role as an "Authoritative Campaigner" which means that it offers solutions alongside commentary.

2. An overarching proposition needs to be developed that encompasses the statutory and campaigning aspects of the organisation

Alongside the credentials above, two other building blocks have informed the development of the overarching brand proposition:

The needs of the environment – to emphasise that it needs Natural England's help

How Natural England is meeting this need – the fact that Natural England is solution-oriented and tackles issues head on.

This has led to the following draft proposition:

“Natural England relentlessly strives to ensure that everybody can continue to enjoy the natural environment’s intrinsic beauty by tackling a wide range of and finding evidence-based solutions that really make a difference.”

3. The proposition should be supported by the four campaigns and Breathing Places.

The report presents a strategic messaging framework that recommends the current campaigns act as support for the overarching proposition – the ‘reasons to believe’. The framework shows which aspects of the proposition each campaign specifically supports.

However, the campaigns must work holistically to support the proposition and a single priority campaign selected for public-facing activity. We propose that the Climate Change campaign fulfils this role as it is of increasing public and media interest.

The Breathing Places partnership with the BBC is a potentially very strong channel but careful planning is required to achieve its potential as a key activity that could help raise brand awareness.

4. A strong public facing brand needs to be developed.

The organisation has yet to deliver its strategy for targeting the general public. Owning a strong public brand gives increased power and leverage with Government and stakeholders, and is therefore essential in achieving its Strategic Outcomes.

Internally, it will be necessary to embed the proposition throughout the organisation before investing in external public activity. This will require extensive, ongoing training and the implementation of robust internal communications channels, which should be undertaken through the transition work programme currently being developed.

The report proposes ten communications tactics and activities that will raise the profile of external communications and, consequently, help develop the brand.

5. The status of communications needs to be elevated internally.

There is a need to promote greater understanding of communications within the organisation as a whole and to move communications up-stream and involve it during the scoping phase of the policy process to optimise its potential for communications.

6. The communication function should be single and skills and capacity built.

Steps should be taken immediately to develop the communications function in line with the size and remit of the organisation

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1. Context

1.1. Introduction

In the period to vesting, Natural England's communications focused on the areas needed for day one: a corporate identity; a website; core publications re-branded and launch activities that operated at national and regional levels. Initial dialogue with key stakeholders focused on communicating its Strategic Direction.

Following a successful launch, the COI was commissioned to develop a communications strategy and plan for the next three years. The key requirement of the brief was to identify the strategic communications priorities that Natural England needs to define and focus on to achieve its ambition and goals.

As part of this project, the right processes and engagement between regional and national communications activity needed to be carefully considered, stakeholders, customers and target audiences mapped and clear strategy and messaging defined.

Whilst the focus of this project was external, a holistic approach was required and consideration of the implications for internal communications essential, particularly given that internal and external communications are integrated in the same corporate function in Natural England's management arrangements.

The core objectives of phase one of the project were:

1. To develop a communications strategy that supports Natural England in achieving its strategic outcomes.
2. To recommend the optimum strategy, processes and channel selection to meet corporate objectives.
3. To benchmark recommendations against best practice from other relevant organisations from both private and public sector.

In arriving at the recommendations documented in this report, COI has consulted extensively with Natural England's Board, Executive Board, the Executive Leadership Group, Communications team, Stakeholder and Government Relations team and Campaigns Major Project Managers. A workshop was also conducted with a group of national and regional communications staff and Regional Directors.

This report focuses on developing a strategy and principles to underpin its implementation. It is proposed that a second phase is conducted to develop and deliver a full communications plan in April covering the next three years, on the basis of the principles and framework set out in this report.

1.2. Analysis

Summary

- **The role and positioning of Natural England is currently unclear**
- **The sector is extremely crowded.**
- **As a new brand, it currently stands for little in the minds of key audiences.**
- **The communications function is dispersed and disparate in its approach.**

1.2.1. Organisation

Natural England was launched in October 2006. The organisation's remit is diverse. It has been charged with the responsibility to ensure that England's unique natural environment including its land, flora and fauna, freshwater and marine environments, geology and soils are protected and improved in addition to helping people enjoy, understand and access the natural environment.

To achieve its purpose, Natural England has defined four strategic outcomes:

- A healthy natural environment;
- Enjoyment of the natural environment;
- A secure environmental future;
- Sustainable use of natural environment;

The three founding bodies bring very different approaches to their communications and capacity that reflected their scope, size and remit. Therefore a coherent approach is needed urgently that is fit for an NPDB of 2,500 staff that is committed to being a bold commentator and a campaigning organisation.

1.2.2. Sector

Whilst Natural England does not compete at a statutory level with other organisations, it does compete for share of voice when considering communications. An overview of key competitors appears in the appendices and demonstrates the diversity of organisations operating in the category ranging from the Environment Agency to the RSPB.

As environmental issues have moved up the public and political agenda, many organisations have broadened their propositions and the natural environment sector is now very crowded.

1.2.3. Natural England brand

The diversity of the organisation and the crowded sector places increased onus on having a powerful brand. As a new organisation awareness of Natural England is limited and restricted to key stakeholders, particularly farmers, and beyond the establishment of a corporate identity and website there has been no significant brand building activity. Developing a strong public facing brand will give Natural England power developing its relationships with Government and stakeholders.

1.2.4. Communications function

The current structure of the communications function mirrors the management arrangements. There is a tightly defined central team of 36 with an additional 56 roles in the nine regions and numerous others with marketing responsibility associated with specific programmes. The team is widely dispersed, skills are varied and a consistent approach to communications still developing.

More important is the relationship between communications and the rest of the organisation, which is shaped by the cultures of the legacy organisations. In the absence of a strategy, the communications function is currently tactical and service led in nature and only consulted at the delivery end of processes.

This presents a strong case for centralising the communications function to ensure that:

- Natural England speaks with one voice;
- An holistic and strategic approach to communications is embedded;
- Cost efficiencies are maximised.

1.2.5. Communications activity

A communications review has been in place until recently but four major campaigns are in development that will be at the heart of communications activity over the coming years, namely: Marine; Health; Land Management and Climate Change.

Breathing Places is a major programme of activity that has been developed with the BBC and other partners in recent years and any communications strategy should incorporate this.

Implications

- **As an organisation, Natural England's role and position within the sector needs to be established internally and external.**
- **An overarching proposition needs to be developed that encompasses the statutory and campaigning aspects of the organisation.**
- **The proposition should be supported by the four campaigns and Breathing Places.**
- **A strong public facing brand needs to be developed.**
- **The status of communication needs to be elevated internally.**
- **The communication function should be single and skills and capacity developed.**

2. Strategy

2.1. Vision and objectives

In light of our analysis, the communications strategy must deliver:

VISION	OBJECTIVES
An organisation and brand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>That talks with one voice;</i> • <i>That's known and respected by everyone;</i> • <i>Whose audiences know what it stands for;</i> • <i>That champions action alongside commentary.</i> 	To ensure, by October 2007, that all members of staff know the brand's proposition within the sector.
Communication activities that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Deliver against the Strategic Direction;</i> • <i>Build the brand externally and internally;</i> • <i>Deliver added value and value for money;</i> • <i>Empower the brand.</i> 	To have in place a full three year communications plan by the end of April 2007.
A communications function that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is respected within the organisation;</i> • <i>Helps to shape policy and programmes;</i> • <i>Is transparent;</i> • <i>Shares best practice;</i> 	To have a single communication function with the necessary capacity and skills in place by end of June 2007.

2.2. Strategic positioning

2.2.1. Defining a position

- As a new organisation, Natural England needs to define its role in the natural environment sector, in comparison to others that operate in the same category. Natural England has five levers (advice, advocacy, incentives, regulation, practical action) and an audit of the organisation's products and activities clearly demonstrates that the organisation is a major player within the category with strong credentials:
- It is a respected advisor to Government;
- It lives and dies by the quality of its evidence-base;
- It makes a visible difference to the natural environment through agri-environment schemes and management of SSSIs and NNRs: visible changes that benefit everyone;
- It regulates delivery of schemes and is responsible for providing consents;
- It is solution-oriented.

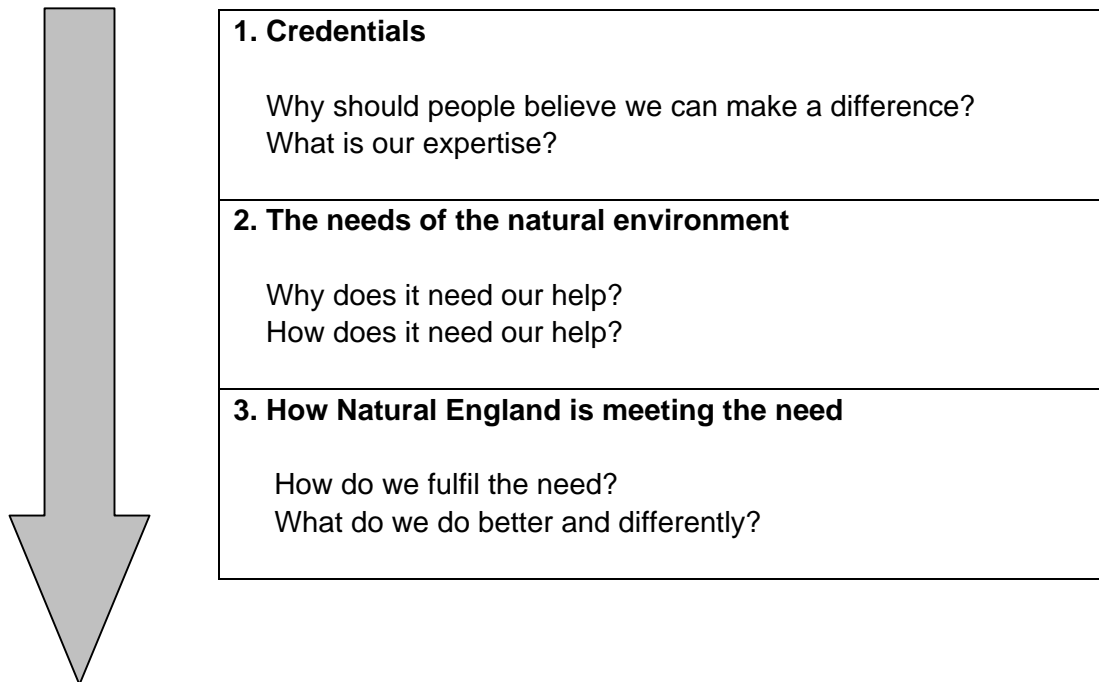
Unlike other organisations within the category, in particular NGOs, who exert pressure to create change without the need to accept final responsibility, Natural England goes beyond simply commentating on the environment and offers solutions that it takes responsibility for.

This leads us to recommend that Natural England take the role of '**Authoritative Campaigner**', which means that it offers solutions for which it takes responsibility. This concept should frame Natural England's approach to its communications.

2.2.2. The importance of the overarching proposition

It is essential that Natural England has a single-minded and powerful overarching proposition that encompasses all of its communications. This proposition will enable the brand to speak with one strong voice. All communications must be framed to build this proposition. Indeed, the ability of communications activities to build this proposition should become the key criterion for their selection and prioritisation.

There are three key building blocks for the proposition:



Draft proposition

“Natural England relentlessly strives to ensure that everybody can continue to enjoy the natural environment’s intrinsic beauty by tackling a wide range of problems and finding evidence-based solutions that really make a difference.”

Phase two of this project would create a corporate line for all internal and external communications that takes this proposition and turns it into a motivating thought.

2.2.3. Proposed strategic messaging framework

Ensuring that campaigns and all other communications conform to and builds the overarching proposition requires discipline. All the activity messaging should conform to a strategic messaging framework. Within the framework, these comprise the “support for” or the “reason to believe” the overarching proposition.

Activities that are at the heart of our delivery (such as ESS) need to be communicated as strong credibility-building support for the proposition. It is important that real discipline is employed to ensure that activities are both at the right stage of delivery, and totally fulfil their ability to support the proposition, before they are communicated to the public. For this reason, care needs to be taken in communicating Natural England through the BBC Breathing Places project until a programme of activity has been implemented to which the public can be directed.

Overarching Proposition

“Natural England relentlessly strives to ensure that everybody can continue to enjoy the natural environment’s intrinsic beauty by tackling a wide range of problems and finding evidence-based solutions that really make a difference.”

SUPPORT

HOW:	ROLE:
<p>By actively encouraging all sections of society and community to take part in our activities and change behaviours to enhance the natural environment.</p>	<p>Authoritative Campaigner</p>
<p>A healthy natural environment - tackling problems</p> <p>Marine programme – We are leading a campaign to raise awareness in the importance of tackling the pressures on preserving our marine habitat and landscape and establishing a coherent network of marine protected areas by 2012</p>	
<p>Enjoyment of the natural environment – for everyone to enjoy</p> <p>Health Campaign – a campaign that positions us as the main link between the environmental sector and the health profession. We will engage nationally and regionally with the GPs, Practice Nurses and Health trainers to help them develop their understanding of the health benefits of the natural environment and to use access to it as part of their overall healthcare package offered to patients</p>	
<p>Sustainable use of the natural environment – making a difference</p> <p>Sustainable Land Management Campaign – a campaign to secure public sector funding for sustainable land management by the creation of an effective constituency for the benefits that this management provides for society</p>	
<p>A secure environmental future – finding solutions that are evidence based</p> <p>Climate Change Campaign - This is a campaign to bring about selective, landscape-scale habitat creation to help England’s wildlife best survive climate change</p>	
<p>A distinctive public body</p> <p>Internal communications, brand implementation, 2,500 advocates, brand ambassadors Integrated customer delivery, carbon accounting system</p>	

Credentials – our delivery work

eg. Environmental Stewardship, AONB, Walk your way to health, evidence -base, NNRs, SSSIs, National Parks, Breathing Places

Brand Equities:

Passionate, optimistic, determined to find solutions, gets things done, plain speaking, experience, active

2.3. Segmentation

Segmentation enables more targeted and consequently more successful activity. Whilst the principle is the same, the approach to segmenting stakeholders is different to the approach to segmenting the public.

Natural England has inherited from its funding bodies segmentation information about its most relevant stakeholders and customers. This segmentation needs to be further refined through mapping of the relative influence and propensity to engage of each individual stakeholder. The current key segment definitions are detailed below:

Stakeholder type	Primary Segments	Sub Segments
Direct Customers	Land managers	Priority land managers
	Sea managers	
Partners	Voluntary organisation	
	Key local public bodies	
	Key regional public bodies	
	Key national and international bodies	
	Key businesses	
Research, academic and teaching community		
End Customers (the public)	Engaged public	Engaged actives
		Engaged users
		Engaged non-users
	Wider public	Unengaged users
		Unengaged non-users
Staff		

This treats audiences as either engaged or unengaged: those funded by Natural England or proactively involved with the organisation versus those (the general public) who are passive.

However, in developing a public facing brand there will be a new set of stakeholders – opinion formers. Probably the most powerful group of these is the media.

Segmenting the public will be an imperative in launching the public facing brand, as cost will prohibit a non-targeted approach. There are two key segmentation sources for future target analysis:

Defra Segmentation – segmentation by attitude to the environment

Typology	Range	Summary Characteristics
Green Activists	11%-13%	High Household and vehicle energy consumption but doing what they can to reduce impact
Conscientious Consumers	11%-19%	Doing more than average to limit environmental damage but consuming at highest level
Young Greens	8%-17%	Low consumption with little opportunity to practice more environmentally friendly behaviour
Mainstream Recyclers	19%-49%	Moderate consumers, concerned, but resistant to change unless it's made easy for them
Sceptics	7%-26%	Moderate consumers, unconcerned, won't change behaviour without a direct benefit
Struggling	19%-22%	Below-average household emissions, low consumption, already conserving energy for financial reasons

BBC – Segmentation for Breathing Spaces

Typology	Size	Summary Characteristics	Triggers to action
Nature Enthusiasts	5m	"I really want to get more involved – I love nature"	Wildlife in the garden Helping endangered species
Child-led	8m	"I'm into nature and wildlife because of the children"	Child focused activities, events and information
Passive preservationists	3.5m	"We should try and keep natural things / the environment as they should be"	Places to visit, conservation focus
Helpless backyarders	5.6m	"I'm interested in nature and stuff but it's all just too much"	Wildlife in the garden
Armchair action	5.3m	"I love the programmes"	Wildlife in the garden Possibly attend local events?
Concerned Campaigners	2.1m	"Let's make a difference"	You name it...

2.3.1. Segmentation and Targeting

The easiest public segment to target in terms of seeking active participation and behaviour change is the segment that already has a high level of concern about the natural environment. Indeed our experience in researching Defra's climate change activity indicates that even converting this group to action is not easy, as there is a huge gap between their concern and what they actually prepared to do about it.

Even so, Natural England should not confine itself to this predominantly suburban middle class segment. This group is already very good at accessing the natural environment, whereas there are other segments who need to be encouraged to do so. For example, the Health Campaign needs to be targeted at a broad segment of the population but with special emphasis on those segments that do not currently enjoy the health benefits of the natural environment. These will tend to be disadvantaged, black and minority ethnic and predominantly urban groups. Therefore a thorough understanding of diverse audiences is required to ensure that the communications plan targets these groups.

The real solution to this issue is that the choice of which segments to target will be determined by the objective of the activity. For example, if we want individuals with relatively high carbon footprints to change their behaviour, this will be a different segment than enabling less fortunate segments access the natural environment. The more specific the target audience selection, the more cost effective the communication.

2.4. Elevating the status of communications internally

Natural England can gain competitive edge and leverage more strongly all of its activity if communications are moved up-stream and more strongly embedded in all of its activity. To this end, we suggest adopting the Engage model developed by Government Communications Network (a full explanation of which appears in the appendices), and mirroring that of organisations such as the Food Standards Agency.



We are not suggesting that the organisation becomes communication led, rather that, when developing policy and programmes, communications helps frame projects from the first scoping. The proposed communication plan should therefore be a key factor in decision making.

Greater understanding of communications (as a discipline and a function) needs to be promoted within the organisation as a whole. Our recommendation is that internal communications address this. Potential activities should include, for example, an 'official' launch of the new communications function, an introduction to the team and the opportunity to build relationships amongst relevant internal stakeholders. Additionally, a more formal training programme should be developed that introduces non-communications staff to the discipline and embeds ways of working.

The necessary structures and processes which need to be put in place to facilitate this are detailed later in this proposal (Implementation and Processes).

2.5. Elevating the profile of external communications activities

To build your brand quickly, Natural England will need to significantly elevate the profile of its communications. It is essential that the organisation creates the right relationships and content hooks to obtain more national coverage, and build more strategic feature articles where it gets the opportunity to merchandise its knowledge and activities in more detail.

The quickest way to make a real impact on raising the profile of communications is to improve media relations and the way the whole press system works. Focus on a strategic, structured and properly resourced approach to getting maximum coverage nationally as well as regionally and getting high quality feature articles must be an immediate goal. We have prioritised this area in the recommended activities/channels.

In general, more of Natural England's communication resource needs to be spent on major public facing communications to achieve its potential profile. This means that, wherever possible, resources should be used more efficiently, eg. putting leaflet content on the website in downloadable form to save printing costs.

3. Required Activities and Programmes

3.1. General Principles

Before looking at our recommended top ten activities, there are some general principles that should be considered. These concern campaigns, channel selection, database management and internal communications.

3.1.2. Campaigns

3.1.2.1. Current role in Natural England

The current role of campaigns in Natural England is fully documented in the appendices. The main principles are:

- Campaigns will be a distinctive feature of the way Natural England works, particularly where its objectives need new awareness, understanding and broad support.
- The ambition is for Natural England's campaigns to raise awareness of major environmental issues with the public, and present options and choices for the future of the environment, which trigger a step-change in behaviour required to secure a sustained environmental outcome. Each campaign will run for approximately three years.
- The aim is also to engage more people in accessing environmental benefits, and to reinforce understanding of the public benefits arising from effective conservation of the natural environment.
- The four Natural England campaigns have each been aligned with one of the organisation's four strategic outcomes and will make an important contribution both to the delivery of those outcomes and, the organisation's strategic communications objectives by providing partners, stakeholders and staff with a window into each of those outcomes.
- More specifically, the campaigns will:
 - Be relevant to peoples daily lives and appeal to the wider society;
 - Draw upon and promote Natural England's science and evidence programme;
 - Contribute to Natural England's transition programme by providing all staff with opportunities to actively engage in the organisation's delivery programme;
 - Create opportunities for our advocacy programme and position the organisation as an authoritative campaigner
- Whilst each campaign will have a specific proposition and target audience, it is critical that all campaigns are inter-connected and work together both internally and externally and fit within the wider communications activity of the organisation.
- The campaigns will help to support the delivery of our communications strategy by:
 - Differentiating Natural England's approach to communications from the three founding bodies;

- Providing a more focused, structured, sustained and coherent approach to our communications activities;
 - Positioning Natural England as a bold commentator of what needs to be done, and trenchant champion of the natural environment;
 - Establishing Natural England's brand, with both external audiences and staff.
- The principles Natural England has chosen to use to guide the development and implementation of campaigns are as follows:
 - Campaigns should be based on sound science and evidence. It would be inappropriate to say anything in a campaign that it could not justify.
 - Campaign messages will be positive and enabling rather than negative.
 - Natural England will operate a no surprises policy with Defra, as its sponsor department.
 - Campaigns can include working with corporate partners; however, this will be agreed by the Campaigns Steering Group on a case-by-case basis.
 - Natural England can promote campaigns using advertisements and advertorials but these must **not** be funded by Natural England.
 - Sponsorship of Natural England's campaigns must be agreed by the Campaign Steering Group until a sponsorship strategy is in place.
 - Natural England's campaigns will **not** involve direct action (eg demonstrations) or use communications tools such as petitions.

3.1.2.2. Role of campaigns moving forward

3.1.2.2.1. Role in brand strategy

The current campaigns are important communication activities. As the strategic messaging framework demonstrates, they have an important role to play in providing support and reasons to believe the brand proposition. In consumer terms, they provide the proof of the brand message – they make it real. However, they need to be committed as part of a consistent overarching brand campaign and not in isolation.

This means that Natural England's campaigns must not compete for share of voice externally. Rather than view each as a stand-alone activity, the campaigns will be stronger if they work harmoniously to support the brand.

Ensuring that the campaigns support the brand

The individual messaging of each campaign needs to be seen as part of the wider brand building effort. Each campaign should support the overarching brand position. For example, the Climate Change campaign is about adapting to the changing climate and this reflects the solutions-oriented approach that Natural England adopts.

Prioritising campaigns – investment in communication

The individual campaigns bring to life different aspects of the brand proposition. Strategically some of these aspects are more surprising and motivating for a wider target audience than others. Overall, those campaigns that offer solutions not being offered by others have the potential to build a stronger brand footprint. However, in general all the campaigns need to be strategically focused on communicating the solutions-oriented approach of Natural England.

Communication investment is not primarily about paid-for media, but about where the organisation is investing its time, energy and communications resources. It is essential to prioritise the campaigns in terms of communication investment reasons. In our experience, successful brands align themselves to single campaign issues. For example, the Food Standards Agency's remit covers a large number of health issues but, in their communication campaign, they have chosen to focus on the single issue of salt to great effect. This is even more important in the establishment of a new brand. The organisation cannot afford to confuse the media and the public about what it requires from them.

Associating the brand with four campaigns at once is more confusing and harder to build in the public's mind. The first objective must be to consider which campaign should be the first priority for public-facing communication. Which campaign will establish the right brand franchise with the public for the organisation's future requirements?

Where does this leave the rest of the campaigns?

There is still an important communication job to be done for the other campaigns. However this needs to be focused on the direct campaign specific target audiences who are necessary to enable the success of the campaign – i.e. these are more likely to be stakeholders, opinion formers of customers than large public segment groups. This targeting will necessitate the messaging being more specific, but even so it is important that all communication builds the main brand proposition.

Next steps

The communication strategies, messaging and plans for the campaigns will need to be reviewed in the light of the brand proposition.

3.1.3. Channel Selection

Role of channels

Each communication channel has a very different role. Historically, channel selection for communications in the founding bodies has led to a passive and narrow communication focus. Investment has been weighted towards printed materials at the expense of channel communication.

Channel selection can say much about an organisation's brand. High profile channels add stature and confidence to the brand. Profile within specific communities builds strong community association. If Natural England's brand role is as an "Authoritative Campaigner" then stature of channel, its visibility and its ability to motivate are critical.

Raising profile through channel selection

Natural England's ambition requires raising the profile of the channels employed for its communications. Public-facing national channels such as key TV and press editorial is imperative. However, there are other channels that significantly raise profile on a local level. These are:

- Events
- Joint partnerships
- Regional TV editorial

Day-to-day communication of all parts of the organisation needs to up its game on channel selection and raise profile.

Importance of improving channel profile

It is easy to get excited about high profile national activities, but continually raising the communication profile through channel selection on a daily basis will have substantial results. Always looking for maximum visibility within each local context will push the brand forwards. As part of this strategy, it is essential to dominate relevant events and the highest profile media channels.

3.1.4. Database management

Efficient database management is increasingly becoming a minimum requirement for operating a successful communications programme. This is even more critical when the objective of this programme is to engage people and ask them to change behaviours, because this usually requires more personalised communications.

Importantly, it is vital that an integrated way of working with a single point of access is established to ensure that all direct communication with audiences is logged and tracked to avoid, for example, embarrassing duplication or multiple mailings from different parts of the organisation competing with each other.

The key requirements for Natural England's database are:

Internal

We recommend a much more focused approach to internal account management of stakeholders and data to support a more integrated communications planning approach.

Stakeholders and customers

As stakeholder engagement becomes more sophisticated and the number of customers more complex, a good database management system is essential to support the current plans to establish single account managers for the top 100 stakeholders.

Media

Media contacts are always changing and an updated database of not only these contacts and their relationship with Natural England will need to be constantly updated.

Consumers

In order to establish a proper electronic customer relationship management (eCRM) programme, the database will need to be highly sophisticated and connected to Natural England's website.

Communication needs should underpin Natural England's database management system: the importance of this cannot be underestimated and should be implemented as a matter of urgency.

Too often in organisations, database management systems are framed by IT, finance and customer relationship functions and not communications. This risks under utilising the huge potential benefits of the database management systems for the communications function. As a new organisation, Natural England is well positioned to avoid this pitfall.

3.2. Proposed Activities

The following activities are initial proposals that have the potential to become the backbone of the communications plan to be developed in phase two. In selecting these proposals the following considerations have been taken into account:

- How to improve currently under-performing communication areas?
- What activities would most help build a public facing brand both nationally and regionally?
- What can have a relatively big impact relatively quickly?

The Natural England communications team, in a workshop held in January 2007, has further developed these activities. Each has been looked at in general terms with a specific list of recommendations. Most of these are already being addressed by the organisation. The risk factors and likely impact of each activity has been taken into account.

3.2.1. Improve Media Relations and Best Practice Press Desk

We recommend a complete overhaul of your media relations activity as follows:

1. **A dedicated senior manager** - with overall responsibility for all media relations within the organisation.
2. **A media account management system** – trained media managers with clearly defined portfolios of media contacts. Their role will be strategic, as well as tactical - i.e. they will develop features and long running stories pro-actively and have a list of communication priorities that will build the brand.
3. **Trained spokespeople** – These must be properly informed, responsive with relevant experience, specific responsibility areas and 24 hour availability. Senior people, who have the least time are often not the best option, as availability is usually the decisive factor that converts to airtime or press comment. Once the spokespeople list has been agreed, it needs to be circulated to all relevant staff and adhered to. Spokespeople need ongoing media and messaging training.
4. **Consistent and pre-determined points of view** – all communication must be consistent and on brand message – to ensure the organisation speaks with one strong voice. The communication flow from policy to communication must be seamless. As an evidence-based organisation, all points of view should be backed up by relevant data. We recommend that an editorial board is set up to identify up-and-coming issues and agree points of view. These points of view then need to be communicated to everyone and strictly adhered to.
5. **Efficient real-time 24 hour press desk System** – This will ensure all information is collected and delivered to the right part of the organisation to interface with the media. It can electronically monitor and evaluate press coverage of Natural England and be “plugged” into the knowledge resource function. A press/media summary should be generated for all key staff daily and ‘alerts’ notify relevant staff of emerging events. The press desk system needs to reflect the structure of the organisation and have clear lines of communication internally and externally.
6. **State-of-the-art media centres in London and Sheffield** – these need full technical support to keep informed about breaking news, access to current lines to take and provide opportunities for live or recorded broadcast interviews. Full media access is required along with newswire services. Press officers need to know lines to take before spokespeople go ‘live’.
7. **Media alliances** - Forming strong commercial relationships and alliances with key media in each category, where Natural England has a presence, is a logical progression of this strategy e.g. BBC Breathing Places. Alliances require careful planning and project management to ensure both partners’ agendas are met.
8. **Risk factors** -This system will only work if it is carefully planned and properly scoped. Clear responsibilities for relationship and content management are essential and the press desk needs to be staffed by experienced and skilled people. A thorough skills audit will therefore be required.

3.2.2. Optimising Natural England website

As a key brand gateway, optimising the website is essential as it is central to many comms activities. Before starting the IBM project, the following must be considered:

1. Joining up Natural England websites

The web presence needs to be consistent for all internal and external audiences. The front-end should be a strong visualisation of the brand's overarching proposition. The home page can then direct different target audiences to relevant content, some of which can be password-protected for privacy or to collect revenue.

2. Using customers and consumers to specify the website

We would recommend conducting research to investigate different target segment's needs for websites in Natural England's category. By formatting the website around real customer requirements, a sector leading site can be built. It is important to overlay these requirements with future requirements of the organisation.

3. Powering up the website

The communication plan will require many website features not available until completion of the second phase of the IBM project due to finish in late 2008. The website needs to profile, capture data, and conduct eCRM programmes, to build relationships and interact with target audiences. Our vision would be for a site that knows its visitors from previous visits enabling content to be personalised, and where visitors can sign up for and receive information about activities, by email or mobile.

4. A website that lives up to the brand

Thinking about the website from a brand perspective is important. How can it bring the brand to life? Can it visualise England and its habitats in an exciting way? Can it enable visitors to home in on habitats in detail in their area? Can it connect people with local issues, activities and threats to their local habitat and get them involved? The site should track the progress of the campaigns.

5. Driving target audiences to a website that enriches their experience

It is important that, when Natural England's other communication activities drive people to the website, their brand experience is good. The transition from another linked site, eg. the BBC website for Breathing Places) or a visit generated by the communication plan is a crucial time for converting visitors to the brand agenda. A good experience will inspire engagement; a bad experience might result in brand rejection.

6. Content management

To achieve its objectives, Natural England will need the content management to be efficient and expert. We recommend the appointment of an overall content manager - with individual managers responsible for specific areas. IBM must create a user friendly content management system with responsive content. The interface between the content management system and the organisation must be carefully scoped.

7. Risk Factors

The communication requirements for the website need to be fed into the IBM brief in time. Any delay in developing the back-end database management and profiling functions will affect the rest of the communication plan, Also enough time and resource must be invested in developing the content management piece.

3.2.3. Becoming the definitive category source

It is important that the Natural England brand is given credibility and authority with all target audiences. Natural England should be the first port of call for information, knowledge and intelligent, informed comment about the natural environment. To gain this position requires hard work and it is therefore imperative that this information and knowledge is made available at the right time, in the right format and in the right places. We recommend the following:

1. Audit of information requirements

Auditing the information and knowledge requirements of different audiences or stakeholders will uncover information opportunities e.g. education is a target audience that has a huge information requirement. These should be pursued according to their ability to provide profile and visibility for Natural England as an authoritative organisation.

2. Becoming an authoritative source with the media

The audit will probably highlight the media as one of Natural England's most significant audiences. Providing definitive information for the media requires a good press desk system and negotiation to guarantee that the brand is always quoted as the source. The media will be more inclined to quote the brand as a source if it has some established public profile.

3. Developing a good Knowledge Management System

To become a definitive information source, Natural England needs an efficient knowledge management system, enabling information to be properly accumulated, searched and formatted as required.

4. Commenting on news items in real time

Commenting knowledgeably about current events is a powerful way to become a definitive source and requires a press desk system that can identify the key upcoming issues. For example: if there are oil spills on the English Coast, then Natural England should be able to forecast the likely impact on the local environment.

5. Creating definitive and popular formats

In its normal course of business, Natural England is creating and commissioning information on many aspects of the natural environment. Often this information is presented in academic form to a narrow target audience. However, creating more accessible formats that can be published and made available to the public could gain profile for Natural England. Specific audits of different aspects of the environment – e.g. of species, of rivers, of habitats – would all be newsworthy. We believe an audit of “how climate change is impacting on your local environment” would be very powerful.

6. Risk factors

This initiative is mainly a tool or content provider for other activities. The key risk is that the initial audit does not lead to patchy implementation, or that Natural England is not named as the information source; this requires strong project management and professional press office skills.

3.2.4. Accreditation Scheme

An important way of extending Natural England's brand credentials is for the brand to recognise other organisations and people that clearly demonstrate the same values and commitment to the natural environment.

Here are some ways this concept could be implemented:

1. Internal Recognition Scheme

It is important that everyone at Natural England lives and breathes the brand. The scheme would recognise anyone who had exceeded expectations. It could also recognise external activities or interests that staff pursued outside work that complemented the brand objectives.

2. Schools Accreditation Scheme

The accreditation scheme has potential to be part of the educational outreach programme. Some schools are already showing great initiative in this area, eg. there is already a carbon neutral school. Natural England could encourage and accredit other schemes.

3. Content-providers accreditation scheme

As an evidence-based organisation, many people look to Natural England to provide authoritative comment and information about the natural environment. There is an opportunity to accredit other content providers and provide links from Natural England's website. Accreditation is not an easy process; Natural England would need a rigorous selection process to associate them with its brand name.

4. Accrediting other organisations

An event-based accreditation scheme could be some form of awards scheme based on a series of regional heats. The winner could be a local community environmental initiative, or a business or other non-environmentally-focused organisation that has done something extraordinary for the natural environment. This type of activity lends itself to a strong media campaign. Awards could even generate television coverage (Green Oscars). A permanent accreditation scheme could operate at a different level. This could be a "charter mark" scheme whereby many organisations have their contribution to the natural environment recognised. This recognition could be specific activities or it could be for lessening the environmental impact of the organisation's main activity.

5. Accrediting people

A scheme to recognise unsung heroes of the natural environment could have real potential to obtain media profile.

6. Risk factors

The key risk of this activity is accrediting people or organisations that are not credible or do not continue to represent Natural England's beliefs and ethics. This means that care needs to be taken in the selection process. How far the programme is geared up in terms of awards schemes and ceremonies depends on a proper detailed analysis and risk assessment. Full costs and the management resources required needs to be carefully assessed, as this activity can be highly resource intensive and the awards' credibility can take time to establish. Finally, there is the risk that the organisation might be seen to be wasting public money if the awards are not framed in the appropriate way.

3.2.5. Reviewing Education Outreach Programmes

The environment is an important part of primary, secondary and further education curricula and offers a substantial opportunity for communication. Children are keen to participate in environmental programmes and activity in inner city schools could encourage urban and disadvantaged groups to access the natural environment.

Natural England has relatively strong links with further education but weaker relationships at primary and secondary level. Organisations such as the police and the Department for Transport consider outreach programmes in education an important part of their communications strategy. However, these must offer real curriculum benefits to engage teachers. It is important to consider the following:

1. Audit of curriculum opportunities

Too often, educational outreach programmes are developed in a piece-meal fashion, and from the perspective of available content rather than what is required. It would be necessary to undertake a detailed audit of primary and secondary school curricula to identify the relevant areas relevant. Part of this audit would be an analysis of how Natural England could improve on existing materials and content. It would develop priorities in terms of educational need and where Natural England can best add value.

2. Working with teachers to develop content

Once the audit has been completed and the opportunities have been identified, it is important to get teachers' input. Focus groups or one-to-one's with teachers are easy to set up. Once their input has been taken on board, testing out the activity or content in the real school environment is highly recommended.

3. National activities

Schools and their pupils like taking part in national activities. Developing a competition for environmental projects is an obvious activity. Creating participative activities along the lines of the Breathing Places initiative should be a priority.

4. Blue sky idea

This is to create a school based environmental organisation in the same way that the Armed Forces have managed to do with the cadet corps. Already many schools have different forms of community service as a supplement or an alternative to sports activities. Natural England could initiate and sponsor the development of a youth environmental organisation, to act as guardians and experts on the local natural environment. Accreditation could be given and managed through youth movements and membership groups providing a link with the accreditation proposal.

5. Importance of website

Increasingly schools are using the internet as a key communication vehicle. This has significantly lowered the cost of providing content and creating activities with schools. However, this places emphasis on developing a good website with relevant material.

6. Risk factors

These are either producing irrelevant content or activities that do not get taken up; or worse, content that is seen to only serve the Natural England agenda. The other risk is that the outreach programme is so successful that take-up exceeds all expectations and budgets are exceeded.

3.2.6. Developing a public facing research programme

It is suggested that Natural England commissions specific research to obtain maximum public profile and to ensure that the research supports the overarching brand proposition. This might be completely new research, or extending the scope of research already planned.

This proposed activity can be divided into the following three specific categories:

1. Establishing annual public research audits

Developing popular annual audits of the effects of change on the environment would be of considerable media interest. We think Natural England is best placed to give an annual review of the state of England's natural environment. In keeping with the brand positioning this could highlight the good as well as the bad and highlight positive solutions. The audit should emphasise all areas of the organisation's remit.

This programme should be divided up into a number of specific audits – e.g. audits for each region, rivers, coastal areas and the specific effects of climate change. To ensure maximum coverage, each of these audits would be targeted at individual media and the format and media placement of each of these audits carefully planned. The audits would be made available on the website and made available to all interested stakeholders.

2. Tactical PR seeking research

Tactical research to get specific headlines or news pieces is a common PR practice. Often evidence-based scientific organisations are cynical about this PR tool, but it is too powerful to ignore. As part of developing better relationships with the media, these projects should be part of our discussions.

3. Public facing research to back up other activities

Public facing research will need to be developed to support specific activities, eg. for the education outreach programme. This research will need to be performed by a communication research department that is either stand alone or a specialist part of Natural England's Science and Evidence function.

4. Creating a market research function

As the organisation extends its communication programme to be more public-directed, it will need to develop a market research function. It is important that the organisation learns about the public's attitude to the natural environment, and how it can be persuaded to engage with Natural England and help it achieve its objectives. This function will require an expert to run it: someone who understands how to brief, commission and interpret this type of research.

5. Risk factors

The biggest risk is that research is commissioned that fails to interest the media or public and, therefore, does not achieve the required profile and impact. This can be mitigated by public research and discussing the initiatives with the media prior to commissioning. The introduction of a market research function is an important way of lowering the risk of investment in the communication plan, as the research will help frame the activities to make them more effective.

3.2.7. Bringing the natural environment to the city

This activity is important for two reasons. First, Natural England has a remit to provide greater access to the natural environment to all; especially people in urban areas and from ethnic or deprived backgrounds. Second, there is more natural environment in urban areas than most people realise.

The following recommendations are starting points for developing this programme:

1. Develop a specific diversity communication plan for this project

Previous research¹ has shown that Black Minority Ethnic audiences face considerable barriers in accessing the countryside, whether perceived or real. We recommend that a specific communications strategy be developed urgently that addresses Black Minority Ethnic audiences.

2. Creating experiential road-shows

Road-shows should be developed to merchandise the excitement and vulnerability of the natural environment to urban dwellers. This should be tailored to specific urban locations to reference local areas of interest and habitats. It would be interactive and encourage participation in a visit to a site of interest, or specific campaign if required.

3. Increasing awareness and participation in urban natural environments

Connecting urban dwellers with the natural environment challenges assumptions about Natural England's reach and agenda. This activity can operate both on and off line. The website could encourage people to post information about their urban environment and contain tips about how habitats and wildlife have adapted to the urban environment. Natural environment open days in key urban centres with urban safaris could be run with local sponsors in key urban centres. These could "kick start" local environmental projects and support activity like Breathing Places.

4. Urban school programmes

Targeting urban schools, particularly in deprived areas, to take part in open days and activities will be especially important.

5. Taking part in related urban events

There are various events in urban centres that are relevant to Natural England, such as the Hyde Park farming event in London. These provide a good context for the Natural England road show, although they are unlikely to reach disadvantaged groups.

6. Blue sky idea

A blue sky idea is to talk to Sainsbury's who have run farmers' markets in their car parks and see if we could run Natural England natural environment markets instead where we can showcase all that's best about England's natural environment and demonstrate the way farmers are taking on a green management responsibility.

7. Risk factors

As long as the road-shows are developed so that they can be easily transported and adapted, this programme should be capable of being properly budgeted. The key risk is that the most disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups are not engaged. Also it is important that the activities are not one-off and that there are opportunities for long-term engagement.

¹ Capturing Richness, The Countryside Agency and the Black Environment Network, 2003

3.2.8. Branded Content – including Breathing Places

With the proliferation of TV channels, there are new opportunities to develop branded content and to develop integrated programmes alongside co-produced programming even on the major terrestrial channels. Ofcom rules mean that on-air branding will always be problematic and limited. However, the value comes from driving traffic from the on-air programming to off-air promotional activity. The integration of this off-air activity is essential to success. Our recommendations are:

1. Optimising the benefits of BBC Breathing Places

BBC Breathing Places is consistent with the required brand positioning for Natural England. Its objective of involving a broad audience and encouraging mass participation is in line with its objectives. However, the key concern is how to ensure sufficient numbers of viewers also get a chance to experience the Natural England brand and take part in its projects. Our recommendation is to focus on one project within the programming and make sure that all the elements of the journey from on-air programming to the off-air bridge to Natural England activity and brand experience are properly connected. Scoping this out with the Breathing Places project is an urgent next step.

2. Seeking other branded content opportunities

Breathing Places is a very powerful project, but because Natural England is not the only partner, there are limits to how much it can affect the on air programming. We recommend that as well as the Breathing Places project, that the organisation also pursues discussions with other broadcasters.

3. Producing a magazine with a TV channel

Producing a magazine that takes environmental content from many different programming strands is likely to have appeal to a wide audience. Natural England is well placed to supply content for this sort of project.

Other formats to consider

The accreditation idea could be developed into a TV awards programme that would recognise groups of people who had made a special contribution to the natural environment. This could involve a co-sponsor to mitigate Natural England's costs.

4. How to approach branded content

Our strong recommendation is that Natural England approaches branded content from a position of strength, and try to ensure it is a sole or equal partner with the broadcaster wherever possible. If Natural England can have direct input into developing formats, it will get more editorial control. Do not enter any agreements or projects without understanding how the back-end bridges to the organisation's brand and how to optimise it.

5. Risk Factors

Co-producing branded content with broadcasters can be a very expensive exercise, both in terms of share of production costs and making the back-end promotional links work. Finding a commercial sponsor can mitigate some of this.

3.2.9. Other proposed activities

The following proposed activities have not been worked up in the same level of detail, but are no less important. The ideas will be developed further in Phase 2.

Creating a membership base

Natural England wants to engage and enrol large sections of the public in its activities and campaigns. Therefore it will be important to create a close relationship between these participants and the organisation.

It is recommended that there is a formal membership of a specific campaign, or even of Natural England. At the very least, people who want an active relationship with the organisation should be encouraged to register their details. Then through an eCRM programme Natural England can communicate with them cost effectively.

It is worth considering the revenue model of charging membership for participating with or having a closer relationship with Natural England, especially if that membership revenue is solely used for a particular campaign purpose.

Sponsorship

It is recommended that Natural England considers involving sponsors in funding specific communication activities. If these activities result in tangible output then sponsors will be interested in getting involved. Subject to this being permissible within the organisation's remit, we would suggest Natural England discusses the potential for attracting commercial sponsorship funding with a specialist agency.

4. Implementation and Processes

4.1. Skills and capacity building within a single communications function

We recommend that the communication function is single, skills and capacity built and appropriate processes put in place. Training of existing staff is not sufficient and given time pressures, appropriate resource has to be bought in immediately to raise the standard to the necessary level.

A single team need not be location-dependent; in fact communications representation is required across England.

This needs to happen immediately. We believe that Natural England is unable to adopt a traditional 'transition strategy'. A new communications function needs to be built as a matter of urgency with the capacity, skills and expertise required to deliver in place. This offers an opportunity to draw a clear line between the way that communications has operated in the past, and the way it will operate under Natural England.

Beyond team development, there are specific structures and processes that will bring the team together:

4.1.2. Internal communication

The ongoing development of the existing intranet provides a forum for the sharing of information, for example, project planners, communication plans, creative and evaluation reports. Previous work should be available to review, it should be possible to track work in progress and the planning of future projects should be visible.

4.1.3. Universal formats and traffic management

In a similar vein to the visual identity guidelines, other pro-forma need developing to ensure that all staff adopt the same processes for each project and that a common currency becomes standard. Such forms may include:

- Project proposals: within which the project's contribution to Strategic Direction and communication objectives is stated;
- Project assessment: a formal method of appraising proposals;
- Project briefing: clearly stating the scope, rationale, deliverables, timeframe, costs and responsibilities;
- Evaluation: measuring the impact of the activity against objectives;
- Case studies: a summary of the activity (taken from the project brief) along with key measurements and recommendations for future optimisation.

Whilst a more traditional account management system ensures that individual projects run to time and to budget, we recommend that a Head of Traffic be appointed who oversees the progression of all projects and adds a layer of accountability. This person would work in conjunction with communications planning (see below).

4.1.4. Communications planning

In order to ensure that all communications activity is delivered against the organisation's Strategic Direction, a new communications planning function is required. This function would be responsible for informing the development of the overall communications plan and then ensuring that it is delivered against and helping communications move further upstream. It would be the role of the planning function to assess project proposals, help develop project briefs and evaluate finished projects. Working with Head of Traffic, communications plans should be continuously updated to provide an overview of all activity and its progress at any given time: monthly, annual and rolling.

4.1.5. Common brand guidelines

The visual identity guidelines that have been produced will ensure that all creative is developed to a common set of principles and maintains the integrity of the brand. This would also save on design costs from third party suppliers as in-house capacity will be able to handle work that might otherwise be contracted out. Centralised print buying and an in-house graphics function will also save money.

4.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important that the processes put in place around the new communication function and the way in which it interacts with the rest of the organisation are reviewed regularly. However, any new processes should be given time to bed down. We would recommend that, whilst regular reviews of progress be undertaken, at least 6 months be given before further changes are implemented.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of communications activity, every project will require a communications plan and a set of measurable objectives. Measuring the impact of each project against its objectives will provide a vital planning tool.

We recommend two measures are established to track delivery against strategy amongst external audiences:

1. The first is an annual brand equity study that is conducted amongst all targets. Over time, the progress and development of the brand can be tracked and data can inform development of future corporate plans.
2. The second is ongoing, tactical tracking that monitors the success of specific activities throughout the year. This can inform the appraisal of individual projects and the development of future projects against best practice.

Internally, attitudes and perceptions of the communications function and the performance of the function itself can be monitored and evaluated in a number of ways:

- Individual project assessment - at the end of each project, internal stakeholders should hold a wash-up meeting to assess not just the deliverables but also the way the project was managed.
- Through 360 degree feedback at personal appraisal.
- Through an annual staff survey: within which specific data can be drawn out that relates to the communication function, activities and brand specifically.

More specific measures can be worked up with the development of a full communications plan in Phase Two.

4.3. Next Steps

4.3.1. Towards a full communications plan and function

Upon Board approval of the strategy detailed within this report, the key requirement of the brief for Phase Two is two-fold. The overarching requirement is to develop a full communications plan that details activities, targets, messages, timings, resources and likely costs. Alongside this, there is a clear requirement to make recommendations as to how Natural England moves from the broad strategy as presented in Phase One, to a stage where the plan is ready to be implemented.

This suggests that a staged approach is required that broadly encompasses the following:

- Refining the broad strategy and plan following feedback from the Board;
- Developing a more detailed communications plan;
- Defining the actions necessary to turn the plan into a fully scoped implementation schedule for each activity;
- Aggregate the above into one unified action plan that details resource requirements, processes, tools etc that enables Natural England to implement the communications plan.

The key objectives for this brief are:

1. To deliver a comprehensive communications plan;
2. To define the action steps necessary to implement each activity;
3. To provide an aggregated action plan that results in Natural England being in a position to implement the communications plan;
4. Working with Natural England to develop a communications structure.

ACTIVITY	TIMINGS
Refining the broad plan and strategy following feedback from the Board	Expected delivery 5 th March
Developing a more detailed communication plan	Expected delivery 2 nd April
Provision of one unified action plan that details resource requirements, processes, tools etc., that enables Natural England to implement the communications plan	Expected delivery 23 rd April
Provision of a communications structure: process, roles, tools, etc.	Expected delivery end of April

4.3.2. Phasing considerations

In implementing the communications plan it is important that care is taken to get the correct phasing of activity. In general the plan should be implemented from the inside out.

The key phasing milestones for this project should be:

1. Definition of the brand positioning and proposition

This has to be signed off by the organisation at the start of the process. Without agreeing this, there is no chance of achieving brand and message consistency.

2. Improved communications function

Before investment is wasted on communications activities, it is essential to have a fit-for purpose communications function. Communications staff must understand and live and breathe the brand positioning and proposition.

3. Other staff

The next step is to create 2,500 brand ambassadors who are the living embodiment of the brand. They have to be fully trained on the Brand strategy and proposition to enable them to speak with one strong voice: activity that can be integrated into the current Transition Programme

4. Direct customers and close stakeholders

The next target are the people and organisations that Natural England has close relationships with. It is important that their experience of the organisation lives up to the brand and that they know how the organisation is positioning itself.

5. General Public

The public should only be engaged and targeted after all the previous phasing stages have been completed.

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