

Natural England Board



Meeting: 10
Date: 30 April 2008

Paper No: **NEB PU10 03**

Title: **Natural England's Strategic Direction and Corporate Plan**

Sponsor: **Helen Phillips, Chief Executive**

1. Purpose

1.1 To note the refreshed Strategic Direction 2008 -13 and the 2008-11 Corporate Plan.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Board notes the Strategic Direction 2008-13 and the 2008-11 Corporate Plan.

3. Introduction

3.1 It is expected that, by early May, the Minister will have noted the Strategic Direction 2008-13 and approved the Corporate Plan 2008-11. These documents together with the annual review for 2007/8 will then be circulated to staff and stakeholders. On 21 May, we will publicly launch our State of the Natural Environment report 2008 alongside our 'manifesto for the natural environment'.

3.2 This set of documents comprises:

- State of the Natural Environment 2008 bringing together the best available evidence across Natural England's remit on the current state of the natural environment in England;
- Strategic Direction 2008 -13, setting out what we are seeking to achieve and how we will address the key challenges and opportunities for the natural environment, our approach to delivery and measures of success;
- Corporate Plan 2008 – 11, setting out our corporate plan targets, annual milestones, resource allocation and partnerships to deliver our Strategic Direction;
- Manifesto, setting out the significant issues facing the natural environment (as identified from evidence in the State of the Natural Environment report), the actions we are asking of others to address these challenges (from the refreshed Strategic Direction) and the commitments that we are making to deliver on the issues (from our Corporate Plan);

- Annual review 2007/8, setting out what we have achieved in the year featuring case studies and highlights of our work.
- 3.3. The current Strategic Direction published in June 2006 was ‘an unusual document for unusual times’; part strategy and part corporate plan. In producing two complementary documents in 2008 we will focus Strategic Direction on the outcomes we want to achieve, our approach to making this happen and how we would measure success. The Corporate Plan will be more specific about what we will do each year within the context of the resources available.
- 4. Strategic Direction**
- 4.1 At its February meeting the Board discussed the first draft of the Strategic Direction. In parallel, the draft was sent out to national and regional stakeholders, including Defra, to seek their input.
- 4.2 The Strategy Refresh Board Sub-Group considered the feedback from stakeholders and Defra alongside a second draft of the Strategic Direction at their March meeting.

Key messages emerging from the consultation exercise which have been reflected in the revised draft included:

- positive tone – the vast majority of organisations supported the general direction of the document and welcomed the opportunity to engage with Natural England both on the strategy itself and its implementation;
 - partnership – it was felt by many that the true the extent of Natural England’s delivery through others could be further emphasised as could references to key groups including business and land managers;
 - terminology – some clarification of key terms was requested e.g. ‘ecosystem services’ and ‘geographical literacy’;
 - national/Regional/Local – some concerns were expressed about how an organisation with national priorities would be able to respond flexibly to the needs of regions and sub-regions.
- 4.3 The Strategic Direction is attached at annex 1.

5. Corporate Plan 2008-11

- 5.1 The Strategy Refresh Board Sub-Group considered the first draft of the Corporate Plan at their March meeting.

The following key points were made and taken account of in the next draft of the plan:

- a direct reference to Natural England’s financial position was suggested;
- both the integration with, and the distinction between, the Strategic Direction and the Corporate Plan requires further attention;

- Outcome 2 in particular needs to be updated to reflect the ambitions set out in the Strategic Direction;
- the coverage of partnerships, noting who we work with, needs to be coordinated across the two documents, with generic partnerships being referred to in Strategic Direction and specific activities in the Corporate Plan;
- the Corporate Plan should demonstrate that Natural England is prepared to work outside its comfort zone and will reach out to new partners – e.g. housing developers;
- reference should be made to the private sector with the inclusion of relevant hooks to attract their engagement;
- the links with PSA targets of other government departments, DCLG in particular, should be made clear;
- the tone of how the work and activities read and how partners might will react to it need to be considered further.

5.2 The group of core stakeholders, including Defra, which have met regularly since July 2007 to input to the refresh of the Strategic Direction were also consulted on an early draft of the Corporate Plan. The tone of their responses was generally positive. The headlines (not covered by Board Sub Group comments above) included:

- our leadership in many areas is welcomed;
- clarity on priorities was requested;
- integration between the outcomes in delivery could be emphasised further;
- clarity is needed about how and where we explain how we discharge our statutory duties (and consistency);
- the plan could say more about our evidence base – particularly about how we might share/make it available to others.

5.3 A revised draft of the Corporate Plan, including the latest budget information from Defra, considered by Board members in April. The agreed Corporate Plan is attached at Annex 2. This will be circulated to the Board on 25 April.

6. Next Steps

6.1 Formal publication of the Strategic Direction and Corporate Plan, along with the State of the Natural Environment report will take place in May 2008.