

sustainable development commission

Sustainable Development
Progress Report

Natural England
With SDC Commentary
November 2007

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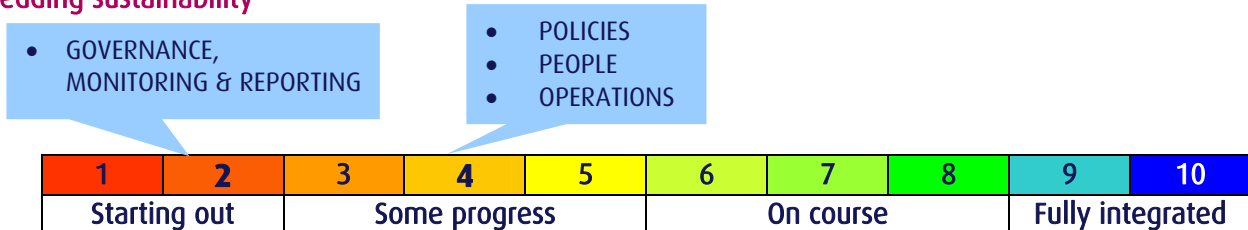
NATURAL ENGLAND'S SELF-ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

This is a summary of Natural England's progress report; the full version begins on page 7.

Natural England works for people, places and nature to conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas. It promotes access, recreation and public well-being, and contributes to the way natural resources are managed so that they can be enjoyed now and in the future. Natural England is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). It was formed in October 2006, bringing together the former English Nature, and elements of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service.

Progress against actions: All three actions were reported as complete or on target.

Embedding sustainability



Procurement – Flexible Framework



SDC'S SUMMARY COMMENTS

This is a summary of SDC's commentary; the full version begins on page 4.

Natural England did not have an SDAP to report progress against, but took the initiative to report how it had progressed towards supporting the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy, since its formation in October 2006. From the information provided, the SDC concludes that Natural England made good progress on laying the foundations for the future, although there is much scope for further development.

Strengths:

- Natural England engaged in the progress reporting process and provided an honest self-assessment
- It developed staff resources to tackle the organisation's approach to sustainable development, including the appointment of a Principle Specialist and a Network of Officers
- It established a carbon baseline for 2005/06 – essential for future monitoring of carbon emission trends.

Weaknesses:

- There was a lack of detail in places, particularly in relation to the criteria listed in the "Embedding Sustainability" and "Procurement" sections of the self-assessment tool.

Challenges for next year's SDAP progress report:

- Report how Natural England has developed a vision for SD within the organisation, identified a structured way forward (through an effective and strategic SDAP), and ensured that this is embedded in working practices
- Demonstrate how it has considered SD in its policy approval processes, and how it has assessed the SD impacts of its actions
- Show how it has succeeded in identifying new channels of communication to engage more effectively with staff and external stakeholders on sustainable development
- Report details of the systems in place to measure, monitor and report progress on the SDAP and on sustainable development in general.

INTRODUCTION

Government has made it clear that it wants the public sector to be a leading exponent of sustainable development (SD). The UK SD strategy, *Securing the Future*,¹ requires all central government Departments and their Executive Agencies (EAs) to produce Sustainable Development Action Plans (SDAPs) and report progress on them regularly. An SDAP sets out the strategic actions that the organisation intends to take to integrate sustainable development into its decision-making and everyday operations. It thereby helps the organisation make its required contribution to the delivery of the Government's commitments and goals set out in *Securing the Future*.

Securing the Future also empowers the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) to act as the Government's watchdog for sustainable development. This includes "scrutinising and reporting on Government's performance on sustainable development".

Most Departments published their first SDAP in 2006. These plans contained commitments for 2006/07, and the SDC is now reporting on progress made by Departments against those commitments.

The purpose of progress reporting is three-fold:

1. To see what progress had been made against the first plans
2. To encourage Departments and others to evaluate the quality, purpose and contribution of their SDAPs, as well as the individual actions and policies, in regards to the UK's SD goals
3. To strengthen the quality of future SDAPs and reporting by identifying strengths, weaknesses and priority areas for improvement.

To help Departments and EAs produce quality progress reports, the SDC designed a self-assessment guidance tool. The tool covers the following areas:

- **Progress against actions:** Report progress against 2006/07 commitments and against any significant actions that did not feature in the original SDAP
- Consider the impact of actions and the contribution these actions would make to the SD "shared

priorities for immediate action"² (from here on referred to as the "SD shared priorities")

- **Embedding sustainability:** Consider how well SD had been embedded into policies, people, operations and reporting mechanisms
- **Procurement:** Gauge progress on sustainable procurement against the criteria in the Flexible Framework³ or a suitable alternative
- **Taking stock:** Identify what had helped and hindered the organisation in delivering its SDAP.

Natural England was formed in October 2006, bringing together English Nature and parts of the Countryside Agency and Rural Development Service. Rather than adopting any existing SDAP, Natural England decided that it would start afresh and develop new policies that would clarify the work of the new organisation better. The writing of an SDAP was put on hold pending a baselining study to identify the organisation's operational impacts. Natural England intends to work towards the development of an SDAP for next year.

The SDC is pleased that Natural England chose to assess the level of progress made on SD and used the SDC's Guidance Tool. This report comprises the SDC's commentary, followed by Natural England's full progress report.

The SDC's commentary evaluates the progress reported by Natural England, as well as the quality of its self-assessment.⁴ All ratings/levels reported are the organisation's own judgement of performance, and there was no process of external verification by the SDC.

The SDC has already commented on Departments' first SDAPs and provided summarised assessments in the 2006 report *Off the Starting Block*.⁵

¹ *Securing the Future - Delivering the UK Sustainable Development Strategy*, HM Government, March 2005.

² The SD shared priorities for immediate action, as outlined in *Securing the Future*, are: sustainable consumption and production, climate change and energy, natural resource protection and environmental enhancement, and sustainable communities.

³ *Procuring the Future*, Defra, June 2006 – see Section 2 for more details.

⁴ Please see SDAP Progress Report methodology paper – www.sd-commission.org.uk.

⁵ *Off the Starting Block*, Sustainable Development Commission, November 2006.

SDC'S COMMENTARY

Natural England was formed in October 2006 from three legacy bodies: English Nature, the Rural Development Service, and the Countryside Agency. Natural England has not yet written an SDAP, but plans to do so next year.

The SDC welcomes the fact that Natural England chose to report the progress it has made in embedding sustainability throughout the organisation, even though it did not have an SDAP to report progress against.

Progress against actions

Natural England reported progress against three actions which had been identified since the organisation was formed. These related to carbon emissions, procurement and flexible working. Excellent progress was reported against these actions.

- All three actions were reported as complete or on target
- Evidence was reported as readily available for two of the three actions.

The SDC would like to have seen more detail on the progress made against its actions. For the actions on carbon emissions and procurement, no detail was provided about what had already been achieved, although both were reported to be on target.

Natural England reported that one of the actions (relating to enabling flexible/home working for staff) "was difficult to measure due to a lack of outcomes." **This highlights the importance of setting specific and measurable actions, with appropriate milestones.** In this instance Natural England reported that it had completed the target, by switching desktops to laptops and docking stations. However, this tells us little about whether this resulted in more flexible working and a better work-life balance. The SDC would have expected to see an indicator of this progress, for example the number of staff opting to work at home, or feedback through staff surveys.

Although Natural England considered that its actions as a whole would make a good

contribution to the SD shared priorities, it did not provide any rationale for the impact levels chosen. The SDC would like to see evidence of how Natural England is assessing the impacts of its actions in future progress reporting. The contributions of actions to Government's sustainable development strategy should also be considered carefully when writing a new SDAP.

It is worth noting that Natural England's target to reduce its carbon emissions by 50% by 2010 (relative to a 2004/05 baseline) is far more ambitious than the Government's target for its estate (12.5% reduction in carbon emissions, relative to 1999/2000 baseline⁶). The SDC is pleased that Natural England has taken the initiative to set itself such a stretching target, which exceeds the Government mandate.

Embedding sustainability

Natural England reported that it had made "some progress" towards embedding sustainability in *people, policies and operations*, but was only "starting out" with respect to *governance, monitoring and reporting mechanisms*.

The relatively low ratings Natural England assigned itself reflected the large scope for improvement in embedding sustainability into the organisation's activities. However, some good groundwork was reported, which should be built upon through the new SDAP. For example, Natural England:

- Appointed a Principle Specialist to manage the overall approach to SD
- Established a dedicated team of staff charged with implementing the sustainability agenda across the organisation
- Incorporated sustainability into quarterly team performance reviews
- Established a carbon baseline for 2005/06 – essential for future monitoring of carbon emission trends
- Led on the Sustainability Workstream of the Defra Procurement Group

⁶ As set out in the *Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (SOGE)*.

- Implemented an Environmental Management System (EMS) at one site (ISO 14001 accredited).

The SDC would have liked more information provided in places, to explain how Natural England had progressed against some of the criteria listed in the self-assessment tool. For example:

- How well Natural England felt its policies aligned with and supported the Government’s SD strategy and the UK framework
- Whether, and how, SD was reflected in policy approval processes (e.g. Impact Assessments)
- How it had broadened SD awareness and developed capability amongst its staff throughout the organisation, to ensure that all staff had the knowledge and skills required to incorporate sustainable development into their work
- How it had engaged with its stakeholders and worked to build SD capability among its delivery partners
- What governance structures had been established around sustainable development, and how progress was monitored and reviewed within the organisation
- How it had considered the impact of its operations on biodiversity and the community.

The SDC looks forward to seeing how Natural England progresses, in particular:

- With influencing timber procurement through agri-environment grants for farmers
- How it uses the results of the travel and transport profile review, to reduce the organisation’s carbon footprint.

In addition, although Natural England’s Strategic Direction includes the sustainable use of the natural environment, the SDC would like to see how the organisation is incorporating the social and economic aspects of SD into its core vision.

Procurement

Natural England reported progress on sustainable procurement against the Flexible Framework. It reported that it was at the “foundation” level for all themes except

engaging suppliers, for which it had not met the criteria required for that level.

However, Natural England had undertaken a detailed spend analysis, demonstrating some early progress against the *engaging suppliers* theme. In order to reach the “foundation” level, Natural England would need to take this further by:

- Identifying high impact suppliers
- Engaging with key suppliers and seeking their views on procurement policy.

Under the other themes (*people, policy strategy and communications; procurement process; and measurements and results*), several examples of progress were reported. For example, Natural England:

- Recruited a sustainable procurement adviser, whose role included ensuring that relevant policies (including Quick Wins) were adhered to
- Provided basic sustainable procurement training to all buyers
- Held workshops for stakeholders, on a “strategic approach to sustainable procurement”, which included sustainability risk identification for all contracts over £25,000
- Written a sustainable procurement strategy, which was awaiting approval by the CEO (this approval is required for achievement of the “foundation” level)
- Included the Precautionary Principle in its contract terms and conditions (it claimed to be the first UK Public Sector organisation to do this)
- Undertook a detailed supplier spend analysis.

It is clear that much had been achieved in terms of getting the basics in place for sustainable procurement, and there were plans to take this work further. However, to support the “foundation” level assessments, the SDC would also have liked Natural England to provide information on how it had:

- Included sustainable procurement in the induction programme for key employees, and in ongoing training and development
- Ensured all staff and key suppliers understood how the procurement policy and objectives related to them (i.e. evidence of more active communication than an intranet site)

- Identified the key sustainability impacts of its own expenditure, and that of its suppliers
- Awarded contracts on the basis of value-for-money, not lowest price.

While there were signs that Natural England had considered the links between its procurement activity and the Government SOGE⁷ targets, the SDC would like to see more detail to explain the comment that “sustainability is featured in Natural England’s Strategic Direction 06/09 as Outcome 5. Procurement has mapped its activities against this and the SOGE targets”.

The SDC looks forward to seeing how Natural England will now build on the foundation for sustainable procurement, that it established in its first year.

Taking stock

Natural England reported that upheavals in working practices resulting from its creation from three bodies, hindered progress. It set itself the challenging task of developing its policies and procedures from scratch, rather than taking on established procedures from its legacy bodies. The SDC recognises the benefits to this approach, as it will ensure that policies are relevant to the remit of the new organisation, and looks forward to seeing how its SD policies develop, and how they are reflected in a future SDAP.

Furthermore, it was reported that support functions (e.g. finance, procurement, estates and facilities) had not explicitly been expected to contribute to the sustainability agenda or resourced as such, and this had also hindered progress. However, Natural England indicated that the role of support functions in delivering sustainability will be considered in the Strategic Direction refresh during 2007/08.

On the other hand, Natural England felt that its policies, culture, leadership and procedures helped it to progress towards its sustainable development aims. Sustainability was at the heart of its remit and was defined in its *Strategic*

⁷ Government Framework – *Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate* (SOGE).

Direction 2006-09. Natural England reported that staff were aware that their performance reviews were linked to this organisational target, and as such were predisposed to the sustainability agenda, and that there was little or no resistance to changes in working practices. Staff were often happy to contribute and improve new working practices.

A supportive and well-informed senior Board (including the CEO) helped to ensure that the sustainability agenda was driven forward. Natural England also reported that its dedicated carbon accounting team enabled realistic targets for carbon emissions to be set, and would enable an action plan for meeting these targets to be drawn up. A network of sustainability officers, accountable to the Transition Director for Sustainability, helped to promote information sharing across the organisation and ensure a consistent approach.

Summing up

Natural England did not have an SDAP to report progress against, but took the initiative to report how it had progressed towards supporting the Government’s Sustainable Development Strategy, since its formation in October 2006. From the information provided, the SDC concludes that Natural England has made good progress, especially on sustainable procurement.

There were areas of the progress report where the SDC would have liked to see more detail, particularly in relation to the three actions, and against the criteria listed in each theme of the “Embedding Sustainability” and “Procurement” sections. **The SDC would also have liked to know how Natural England was assessing the SD impacts of its policies and actions, and to what extent SD was included in policy approval processes.**

There is much scope for more to be done in all areas of Natural England’s work, but its status as a new organisation meant that it was taking care to lay the appropriate foundations for future development. **The SDC looks forward to seeing Natural England’s plans and commitments set out in an SDAP, and to seeing how the organisation progresses against it.**

sustainable development commission

Sustainable Development Progress Report

Natural England's
Self-Assessment

18th September 2007

1 EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY

Natural England was asked to consider whether the activities arising from its SDAP enabled it to capture the opportunities of sustainable development for its customers, partners and staff and, if so, how.

Regarding the work programme outlined in its SDAP, and based on progress towards actions, Natural England rated itself out of 10

for its performance on embedding sustainable development in its:

- Policies
- People
- Operations (i.e. operations policy)
- Governance, monitoring and reporting.

The following scale was used:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Starting out		Some progress			On course			Fully integrated	

Natural England's response

Level: 4	Policies: Some Progress	<p>Natural England's comments in support of this rating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste Disposal Strategy and Sustainable Procurement Policy created and agreed. • Procedures in place to ensure QW07 and Govt Timber Policy are integrated into procurement procedures. • Natural England lead on Sustainability Workstream of the Defra Procurement Group. Sustainable Procurement Training developed for Defra Network. • Natural England presence on the Defra as Sustainability Leader (DaSL) working group. • Opportunities to extend procurement's influence into agri-environment grants for farmers with regards to timber procurement. A series of meetings will be taking place later this year to form a consolidated approach. • Carbon policy exceeds Government SOGE target – 50% reduction of emissions by 2010.
<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some alignment of policy with Government SD Strategy, UK Framework and related guidance • Some joining-up policy goals under the SD umbrella • Some signalling SD in external partnerships and relationships • Some embedding SD in policy approval processes / Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) • Some effective stakeholder engagement • Some building SD capacity among delivery partners 		

Level: 4	People: Some Progress	<p>Natural England’s comments in support of this rating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural England’s Strategic Direction includes ‘Sustainable Use of the Natural Environment’ – a set of targets which must be met by 2009 to ensure that <i>“the use of land, freshwaters and seas do not compromise the natural environment and development can occur in a manner which protects and enhances the natural environment.”</i> • Sustainability incorporated into Quarterly Team Performance Reviews (balanced scorecard approach). • Dedicated team of staff charged with implementing sustainability agenda across the organisation. • Principle Specialist post created and advertised to manage overarching approach.
<p>Criteria:</p> <p>SD is partially reflected in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core vision and values • Training and development (e.g. core skills, induction, leadership development) • Performance management (e.g. competency framework) • Recruitment • Career planning and placements • Internal communications • Volunteering • Fund raising 		

Level: 4	Operations: Some progress	Natural England’s comments in support of this rating:
<p>Criteria: Some structure around the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate including elements such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management systems (e.g. EMS) • Energy, water, waste (resource efficiency, recycling etc.) • Travel • Sustainable procurement (e.g. efficient, green, fair, local, healthy) • Construction and refurbishment. • Biodiversity • Positive social and community impact 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISO 14001 in place for Northminster House. • Carbon baseline established for 2005/6 for Natural England operations. Reports for subsequent years are under development. • Integration of OGC Common Minimum Standards for refurbishment contracts on Natural England’s office estate. • A review of our travel and transport profile is underway with a view to reducing the associated carbon footprint. • Monitoring and targeting the SOGE objectives.

Level: 2	Governance, Monitoring and Reporting: Starting Out	Natural England’s comments in support of this rating:
<p>Natural England rated itself based on how it felt it was progressing on creating and embedding the appropriate mechanisms and processes to record and report progress of SDAPs, and sustainable development generally. This was a subjective assessment, with no pre-defined criteria.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbon Baseline allows organisation to record its emissions and energy consumption, including annual fluctuations. • Buy4NE routing means sustainable procurement adviser can monitor contracts for sustainability.

2 PROCUREMENT

Procurement is an area of key importance to delivering sustainable development. Sustainable procurement (policy, processes and operations) should be embedded into all areas of organisations, and should be incorporated in the whole SDAP process.

The Flexible Framework (detailed in *Procuring the Future*⁸) identifies five key themes which are, in effect, the key behavioural and operational change

programmes that need to be delivered in each public sector organisation to deliver sustainable procurement. For each theme, compliance criteria for five levels are detailed.

For each theme in the Flexible Framework, Natural England identified the level it has reached, and provided information in support of this self-assessment.

⁸ *Procuring the Future*, The Sustainable Procurement Task Force National Action Plan. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, June 2006.

Natural England’s response

PEOPLE	
Level 1: FOUNDATION	
<p>Criteria: Sustainable procurement champion identified. Key procurement staff have received basic training in sustainable procurement principles. Key staff have received advanced training on sustainable procurement principles</p>	<p>Natural England’s comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In April 2007 Natural England recruited a sustainable procurement adviser to help embed sustainability into the procurement process. • All buyers have received basic sustainable procurement training. • Future plans include a one-day training event for key internal stakeholders. • All relevant stakeholders are invited to participate in Structured Approach to Strategic Procurement Workshops, which include sustainability risk identification, for all contracts over £25k.

POLICY, STRATEGY & COMMUNICATIONS	
Level 1: FOUNDATION	
<p>Criteria: Agree overarching sustainability objectives. Simple sustainable procurement policy in place endorsed by CEO. Communicate to staff and key suppliers.</p>	<p>Natural England’s comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sustainable procurement policy has been developed and agreed, in accordance with the LEAP (Local Environment Action Programme guideline on SP Policy formulation. It will be sent to Natural England’s CEO for approval and cascade. • The procurement intranet portal has been restructured to afford SP a more prominent position. The SP page houses important documents including the SP Policy, Quick Wins list and Government Timber Policy. • Developments in SP will be cascaded through the organisation using the fortnightly ‘Two Weeks’ online publication – Natural England’s in-house e-magazine.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Level 1: FOUNDATION

Criteria:

Expenditure analysis undertaken and key sustainability impacts identified. Key contracts start to include general sustainability criteria. Contracts awarded on the basis of value-for-money, not lowest price. Procurers adopt Quick Wins.

Natural England's comments:

- Sustainability is featured in Natural England's Strategic Direction 06/09 as Outcome 5. Procurement has mapped its activities against this and the SOGE targets.
- Data has been collated detailing spend by supplier, but will require further analysis in order to demonstrate spend by category code. Once this has been undertaken, the SPTF prioritisation methodology will be applied to Natural England's expenditure profile and a toolkit and training developed and rolled out to Natural England buyers.
- Buy4NE is an internal procurement portal. From the 27th July 2007, certain requisitions have been routed to the sustainable procurement adviser, to ensure the Quick Wins and Government Timber Policy are being adhered to. Further change requests will be made on priority spend areas following the application of the prioritisation methodology.
- Natural England is the first UK Public Sector organisation to include the Precautionary Principle in its contract terms and conditions.

ENGAGING SUPPLIERS

Level 0: NOT MET FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORK

Not met the following criteria:

Key supplier spend analysis undertaken and high sustainability impact suppliers identified. Key suppliers targeted for engagement and views on procurement policy sought.

Natural England's comments:

- Detailed analysis of supplier spend undertaken. No further action decided.

MEASUREMENTS & RESULTS

Level 1: FOUNDATION

Criteria:

Key sustainability impacts of procurement activity have been identified.

Natural England's comments:

- Simple measures based on achieving all aspects of the Foundation level of the flexible framework are put in place and delivered
- Sustainability is featured in Natural England's Strategic Direction 06/09 as Outcome 5. Procurement has mapped its activities against this and the SOGE targets.
- Meeting set for 18th September 07 to create an action plan for delivery against the Flexible Framework.

3 TAKING STOCK

SDC asked Natural England a series of questions designed to reflect on the success, barriers and progress of its SDAP, and to identify what helped or hindered. Natural England's responses to these questions are detailed below.

Natural England is aware of the SD Strategy Target that every central department and associated agencies must produce a yearly SDAP, Natural England has, however, decided against publishing an action plan for this year.

This decision has been made in light of the current organisational profile. Natural England is a new organisation, established in October 2006, amalgamated from three legacy bodies: English Nature, Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency.

Rather than adopt the procedures of any one of the legacy bodies and dispensing it across the entire organisation, it was deemed prudent to begin afresh and develop new policies which would better clarify the unique work of Natural England.

The SDAP has been put on hold on account of a baselining study to identify the organisation's operational impacts. These fall under four core units – facilities, transport, estates and procurement. A sustainable development roundtable has been agreed to coordinate a consistent approach to improving the environmental and social impacts of our operations.

The baselining study will be presented to the policy steering group over the coming months and targets and KPIs will be established so Natural England can work towards a consolidated SDAP for next year.

Natural England understands the importance of sustainable operations and has been implementing various policies and procedures to reduce our negative environmental and socio-economic impacts. In the absence of a consolidated action plan, we have pulled together an overview of current practice which will eventually feed into an action plan.

1. What has helped your organisation to deliver its SDAP? e.g., capacity, funding, culture, leadership, policies, procedures and/or organisational arrangements.

Policies

As a conservation organisation, Natural England has the advantage of having to work towards environmental objectives as part of its core remit. Therefore all primary organisational functions are predisposed to delivering sustainable development as defined in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 – *“to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development”*. This Act, and NE's plan to achieve it, are defined in Natural England's Strategic Direction 2006 – 2009.

Culture

Staff are aware that their performance reviews are linked to this organisational target. Staff are therefore predisposed to the sustainability agenda, which means changes to working practices have met little or no resistance. Often staff are happy to contribute and improve new working practices.

Leadership

Natural England's CEO and board members are extremely supportive of the agenda. Having come mainly from environmental backgrounds themselves, they are able to see the value in the sustainability agenda, not only from an environmental or socio-economic perspective, but for the organisation's corporate image and contribution to the efficiency agenda as well. Having well-informed leadership provides opportunities to implement the agenda which may otherwise have been delayed by business cases or negotiation.

Procedures

Having a resource dedicated to carbon accounting on the Natural England estate has provided Natural England with the management information required to benchmark its procedures against its 2004 emissions baseline and subsequent years. Furthermore, this information allows Natural England to set reasonable reduction and offset targets and an action plan to meet these targets.

Natural England is committed to 'horizontal' working which ensures the people responsible for embedding sustainability in different aspects of the organisation are kept abreast of the developments in each others work. The sustainability officers are accountable to the Transition Director for Sustainability and meet quarterly to ensure a consistent approach to the work they are undertaking.

2. What has hindered the delivery of your SDAP? e.g., capacity, funding, culture, leadership, policies, procedures and/or organisational arrangements..

Organisational Arrangements

As an organisation in transition, upheavals in working practices have been numerous and great. Rather than adopt the procedures of any one of the legacy bodies and dispensing it across the entire organisation, it was deemed prudent to wipe the slate clean and develop new policies which would better clarify the unique work of Natural England. This would ensure all legacy body staff arrived into Natural England on a level playing field. What this has meant, however, that Natural England's policies and procedures, including its approach to sustainable development, are embryonic.

Furthermore, whilst primary functions (such as National Programme Delivery) have been provided with specific resource to meet these objectives, support functions (such as finance, procurement, estates and facilities) have not been explicitly expected to contribute to the sustainability agenda. However, the culture of the organisation is such that these functions have embedded sustainability into their working practices, at no added cost to the organisation and with the justification that it is the right thing to do. The Strategic Direction is due for a refresh during 2007/8 and increasing the role of the support functions in delivering the sustainability agenda will be considered.

3. **What information do you hold and collect relating to the sustainable development impact of your organisation's overall policies/projects/activities? e.g., Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA).**
- Annual Carbon Accounts and recorded savings.
 - Value-focused procurement forms must be filled out for every SP change made to existing practice. Records the predicted costs and benefits of implementation and the KPIs required to measure progress.
 - Fulfilment of Flexible Framework
4. **Were there any key updates/changes to your 2005/06 SDAP? Please briefly list.**
- Natural England did not exist in a capacity to develop a 2005/6 SDAP.

4 PROGRESS AGAINST ACTIONS

The table that follows reports Natural England’s progress against specific actions it had set itself. The table was designed by the SDC as part of the self-assessment tool for departments, and encourages critical assessment of the value of each action, as well as the progress achieved.

Progress is represented using a RAG+ Analysis (red, amber, green, +blue) (column E), and provides a subjective indication of the completion of an action towards its stated objectives:

- **Complete** indicates that an action is complete, and the associated output/outcomes fully realised
- **On target** indicates the action is incomplete in one or more aspects, but is still on target
- **Recoverable** indicates that an action is behind target, but recoverable
- **Behind target** indicates that an action is far behind target and that recovery is unlikely.

Column F details evidence to verify the reported progress made, such as:

- Published strategies, policies, Bills, guidance, literature
- Objective performance measures, indicators and associated sources of data
- Reports of events, particularly outcomes and next steps
- Auditable correspondence
- Auditable activities.

In column G, Natural England reported whether this evidence is readily available for scrutiny by the SDC.

While each action is important in itself, the aim of an SDAP is to help organisations fulfil their contributions to the government’s wider sustainable development priorities for immediate action, as set out in its 2005 strategy, *Securing the Future*⁹. These are:

- Sustainable consumption and production
- Climate change and energy
- Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement
- Sustainable communities.

Column H contains Natural England’s critical assessment of how each action impacts on these priority areas, using a scale of 1-4 (see table below).

Column H Score	Contribution of action to one or more of the priority areas
1	Zero or small
2	Fair
3	Good
4	Outstanding

⁹ *Securing the Future – Delivering the UK Sustainable Development Strategy*, HM Government, March 2005.

Natural England's self-assessment of progress towards sustainable development actions

Natural England did not have a Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP) to report progress against. However, some key actions had been identified and, progress was reported against these.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Ref	Action	Target	Responsibility	Progress (RAG analysis)	Evidence/crosscheck used to measure action	Readily available?	Impact (1-4)	Comments
1	Natural England to reduce its carbon emissions by 50%, relative to 2004/5 levels.	End 2010	Environmental Management	On target	Carbon Accounts	✓	3	
2	Natural England to be at Level 1 of the Sustainable Procurement Flexible Framework.	End 2008	Procurement	On target	FFW mapping	✓	3	
3	Consider more flexible/ intermittent/ad hoc arrangement for staff to work from home.	End 2007	KMIS	Complete	Desktops switched to laptops and docking stations	✗	2	This action is difficult to measure due to a lack of outcomes.

Notes:

Ref 1: This target was agreed in Natural England's Strategic Direction under "Outcome 5".

Ref 2: This target was a team development plan target for procurement.

Ref 3: This target was a reaction to changes in Defra's IT systems.

Natural England response signed by:

SD Reporting Officer: Ben Brown, Sustainable Procurement Adviser, 18-09-07

SD Responsible Officer: Louise Thornhill, Project Manager – One Planet Living, 18-09-07

SDC review and commentary:

Commentary by: Rachel Hurle, Watchdog Team

Peer reviewed by: Claire Monkhouse, Watchdog Team

Authorised by: Becky Willis, SDC Commissioner

Sign-off date: 29-10-07