

Local Nature Improvement Areas



Briefing note

Background

In the Natural Environment White Paper, the government set out a vision for Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) to be created wherever the opportunities or benefits are greatest, driven by the knowledge and vision of local partners.

What is an NIA? Nature Improvement Areas are a new name for the “Ecological Restoration Zones” proposed by the Making Space for Nature review¹. These landscape-scale initiatives aim to ensure that land is used sustainably to achieve multiple benefits for people, wildlife and the local economy. There are 12 government funded ‘pilot’ NIAs of which the Humberhead Levels is one.

What is our role? It has been suggested² that as an LNP we will be ideally placed to help establish new, locally determined NIAs.

It is for local authorities to decide whether and how to recognise an NIA in their Local Plans, but the GLNP has a function in the assessment and selection applicants.

What will the impact be? Greater Lincolnshire has many areas of ecological significance where existing partnerships work at a landscape scale to reconnect and improve the natural habitat. Whilst it could be argued that many of these areas should be recognised as NIAs, it must be considered that this may lead to a diluted impact. Therefore we need to avoid resources being spread too thinly, and ensure that investments are made in those areas that have the potential to achieve the most for nature and the economy.

¹ Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network
<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/2010095pace-for-nature.pdf>

² An overview of the Local Nature Partnership role
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192580/local-nature-partnerships-overview120402.pdf

The National Planning Policy Framework³ states that Local Plans should, crucially, contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment, and supporting Nature Improvement Areas where they have been identified.

Selection process

The application consists of four sections covering the main topics that encompass the selection criteria. They are:

- Biodiversity
- Ecosystem services
- Socio-economic benefits
- Partnership working

To demonstrate that the proposed initiative meets each criterion applicants are required to evidence this by giving a written explanation, which can be supported by other documents and sources to be compiled as an appendix.

Completed applications will be considered by the GLNP Steering Group and awarded a score based on how well the initiative meets the specified criteria. These criteria are based on the Defra criteria⁴ and guidance and have been interpreted for a Greater Lincolnshire context. If the application is deferred there will be an opportunity to discuss and resubmit.

³ The National Planning Policy Framework
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/2115939.pdf>

⁴ Criteria for Local Authorities, Local Nature Partnerships and others to apply when identifying Nature Improvement Areas.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69600/pb13824-nia-criteria.pdf

