

Natural England Commissioned Report NECR058

# Development of a Local Record Centre accreditation system

First published 10 July 2012

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# Foreword

Natural England commission a range of reports from external contractors to provide evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties. The views in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England.

## Background

Local Record Centres are a not-for-profit service run in partnership for the public benefit, which collect, collate, manage and disseminate information of known quality relating to biodiversity, geodiversity, and sites of importance for nature conservation for a defined geographic area.

LRCs in the UK operate under an array of setups and fulfil a diverse range of functions and services in addition to their basic operations. The information provided by LRCs is utilised by a variety of data users, including local authorities and developers for planning purposes, local authorities and conservation groups for the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity, and by statutory agencies for policy and monitoring purposes.

Natural England is interested in the development of an accreditation system to help improve standards across LRCs and facilitate data exchange and use across with national voluntary recording schemes, other members of the National Biodiversity Network community and geodiversity community.

A proposal for an accreditation system for LRCs was originally prepared as part of the Wildlife Trusts' Linking LRCs project (2001). In 2009 the Association of Local Environmental Record Centres was formed. One of its objectives is to develop and promote accreditation systems for LRCs and their staff.

This work was commissioned by Natural England and was part funded through the Defra Fund for Local Biodiversity Recording. It was overseen by a steering group with representatives from Natural England and the Association of Local Environmental Record Centres. The resulting accreditation criteria represent existing good practice that all LRCs should aim to be operating to.

The contract was however not designed to consider challenges or opportunities in how biodiversity data may be managed in the future. As such Natural England does not specifically endorse any particular operating model for an LRC as implied by these criteria.

Further guidance on the assessment of LRCs were developed in a follow on project to pilot the accreditation criteria (see Natural England Commissioned Report 093). The implementation of an accreditation system for LRCs is being led by the Association of Local Environmental Record Centres.

This report should be cited as:

BUTCHER, W.G. 2012. *Development of a Local Record Centre accreditation system*. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 058.

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**Keywords** - Accreditation system, association of local environmental records centres (alerc), conservation management, development control, local record centres (lrc), monitoring and reporting, strategy planning

### Further information

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ISSN 2040-5545

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**Project supported by Natural England and under the Defra Fund for Local Biodiversity Recording, and by the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC).**

**This document (Version 5 including draft reports) was approved for release by the Project Steering Group on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2010.**

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**Thanks to the Steering Group and staff of GCER, NEYEDC, NESBREC and COFNOD for constructive comments on early drafts of the standard criteria, and to LRC staff for constructive comments on Version 1 at the ALERC conference in Birmingham on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2010.**

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## Glossary

ALERC – Association of Local Environmental Record Centres

BAP– Biodiversity Action Plan

GIS – Geographic Information System

LBAP – Local Biodiversity Action Plan

LNP – Local Nature Partnership

LRC – Local Record Centre

LGS – Local Geological Site

LWS – Local Wildlife Site

NBN – National Biodiversity Network

NGO – Non-Government Organisation

NIA – Nature Improvement Area

NSS – National Schemes and Societies

Priority Species and Habitats: –

- Species and habitats which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England or Wales, published by the Secretary of State under Section 41 or Section 42 respectively of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006, or any replacement for this list.
- Scotland - Species and Habitats of Principal Importance in Scotland under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.
- Northern Ireland species requiring conservation action, Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy (updated 2004).
- UK BAP Revised UK BAP Priority Habitats Lists, 2007.

## Introduction

Natural England, working closely with the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC), commissioned the development of an Accreditation System for Local Records Centres across the UK. The project ran over the period February to August 2010 and included consultation workshops at the ALERC conference in Birmingham in April, followed by wider consultation in May/June. The principal consultant for the project was former Somerset Environmental Records Centre Director, NBN Trustee and NFBR Chairman, Bill Butcher, of WGB Environment.

## Background

Local Record Centres are

**not-for-profit services run in partnership for the public benefit, which collect, collate, manage and disseminate information of known quality relating to biodiversity, geodiversity, and sites of importance for nature conservation for a defined geographic area<sup>1</sup>.**

LRCs in the UK operate under a diverse array of setups and fulfil a range of functions and services in addition to their basic operations. The information provided by LRCs is utilised by a variety of data users, including local authorities and developers for planning purposes, conservation groups for the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity, and by statutory agencies for policy and monitoring purposes. Across the UK the coverage and capacity of LRCs varies considerably.

In 2009 the Association of Local Environmental Record Centres was formed. One of its objectives is to develop and promote accreditation systems for local environmental record centres and their staff. Natural England is also interested in the development of an accreditation system to help improve standards across LRCs and facilitate data exchange and use across with National Schemes and Societies, other members of the National Biodiversity Network community and geodiversity community.

The aims of LRC Accreditation are to identify a minimum level of standards, to build confidence in LRCs as bodies which hold biodiversity information in trust for society and manage public resources well, and to encourage improvement. More specifically, the Accreditation System should

1. Provide a set of objective criteria against which the LRC operation can be assessed to demonstrate that it is effective and efficient.
2. Outline core levels of products and services that an LRC should provide to assist key users.
3. Ensure that an LRC is actively working with data holders to improve the availability and quality of data across the NBN partnership.
4. Recognise the existing range of models that LRCs operate under, provided these are effective and efficient.

An accreditation process was also developed in the project, for agreement by ALERC.

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<sup>1</sup> NBN Position Statement on Local Record Centres (NBN Trust, 2004)

## Accreditation Outline

Two accreditation levels are proposed: standard and advanced.

Once the system has been fully developed and agreed, ALERC will invite its members across the UK to apply for accreditation.

The accreditation application process will be evidence-based and primarily self-assessed, with support of a mentor appointed by ALERC.

At least 16 of the 20 standard level criteria, including numbers 6,8,9,11,13,14,15,17,18 and 19, will need to be met before accreditation is approved. The applicant will also need to demonstrate commitment to addressing any criteria that it is not able to meet fully, with a reasonable expectation that these will be met within 2 years of the accreditation date.

On approval, an LRC will remain accredited at the standard level for a period of three years.

LRCs accredited at the standard level will have the opportunity to apply for advanced standard after one year. The advanced criteria comprise a mixture of mandatory and optional (choose 10 from 21) criteria.

Further details of the proposed process are included later in this document.



## Standard Level Criteria

Section	No.	Criteria
Organisation fundamentals	1	The LRC is partnership led.
	2	The partnership includes, as a minimum, local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation NGOs and voluntary recorders.
	3	Impartiality is demonstrated in its constitution and policies.
	4	The LRC complies with the Environmental Information Regulations.
	5	The LRC has the legal status to be able to enter contractual agreements, either as an independent incorporated body or a part of a larger organisation.
	6	The LRC is accountable and transparent for its business and financial performance.
	7	The geographical area covered does not overlap with any other LRC.
	8	The LRC proactively engages with its users and providers.
	9	The LRC employs sufficient professional staff, including a manager or equivalent, to maintain efficient and effective service to its users and providers.
	10	<b><i>The LRC is a Process Orientated Organisation</i></b>
	10.1	Independent process steps are identified
	10.2	Tasks, responsibilities and authority of individuals are known
	10.3	Continuous improvement of processes
	10.4	All staff undertake Continuing Professional Development
Data Custodianship	11	The LRC manages species (flora and fauna) and habitat data for its area.
	12	The LRC is responsible for datasets custodianship, and management of dataset copies, by agreement with its partners and data providers.
	13	In its custodianship responsibilities, the LRC observes the Data Exchange Principles of the National Biodiversity Network. These include provision for Data access (13.1), Confidentiality (13.2), Metadata (13.3), Authority transfer (13.4), Transparency (13.5), Personal data (13.6), Charging & Resourcing (13.7).
	14	The LRC ensures quality control of its species and habitat data through validation and verification systems.
	15	The LRC acts as a secure archive for the data in its care in perpetuity.

Products and Services	16	The LRC offers a basic suite of products and services to its users, defined as follows
	16.1	GIS data search of a project area showing statutory and non-statutory sites and recorded BAP/ legally protected species
	16.2	GIS data search of a project area showing recorded habitats
	16.3	List of all recorded BAP priority and legally protected species in a defined area
	16.4	List of all recorded BAP priority habitats in a defined area
	16.5	Records distribution map of any recorded species for area
		In delivering these products and services, the following <b>standards</b> are met:
	17	<b>Species</b>
	17.1	Species reporting naming conforms to NBN Species Dictionary, while retaining recorded name
	17.2	Records are available at variable precision in GIS, but held electronically at most geographically precise level recorded
	17.3	Records are linked with a source
	18	<b>Habitats</b>
	18.1	Habitat reporting includes Biodiversity priority habitats in GIS, while retaining original records in any classification recognised by the NBN Habitats Dictionary
	18.2	Habitats are mapped in GIS by habitat parcel, one category only per parcel
	18.3	Habitat records are available at variable precision, having been digitised at the most geographically precise level recorded
	18.4	Records are linked with a source
	19	<b>Sites</b>
	19.1	The LRC holds and reports on a current copy of the Local Wildlife Sites (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) boundaries and short descriptions for its area.
	19.2	The LRC holds and reports on a current copy of the Local Geological Sites boundaries and short descriptions for its area. (not applicable to Scotland)
	19.3	If the LRC is the agreed custodian of the Local Wildlife Site (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Wildlife Sites Systems.
19.4	If the LRC is the agreed custodian of the Local Geological Site dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Geological Sites. (not applicable to Scotland)	
20	The LRC promotes high quality species and habitat recording	

## Reasons for inclusion, Interpretation/ Thresholds & Evidence

### Criterion

#### 1 The LRC is partnership led.

##### Reason for Inclusion

The most successful LRCs are those led by broad partnerships, with each partner feeling a sense of joint responsibility for successful outcomes.

##### Interpretation/ Thresholds

Partners do not necessarily need to be legally responsible for the LRC - indeed under some successful governance models this is not achievable. In all cases, though, there must be opportunities for partners to influence the strategic direction and operation of the LRC, a route for views to be expressed and evidence that partners' views are taken into account.

##### Evidence

Constitution or equivalent document in an LRC hosted by another organisation. Terms of reference of any separate Steering Group/ Advisory Group. Minutes of meetings demonstrating partnership influence.

### Criterion

#### 2 The partnership includes, as a minimum, local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation NGOs and voluntary recorders.

##### Reason for Inclusion

These four partner types are always present in successful LRC partnerships and give a broad and balanced representation to key data users and providers.

##### Interpretation/ Thresholds

“Partnership” in this context means the group of organisations involved in governance, steering group or equivalent, rather than those with which the LRC has a contractual or other relationship. The wording means at least one representative from each group. LRC partnerships will often include many more partners than this. If one of these four groups is missing from an LRC that seeks accreditation, exceptional circumstances will need to be demonstrated. It will not be necessary to demonstrate that all local authorities in the area are engaged with the LRC.

##### Evidence

Constitution or equivalent document in an LRC hosted by another organisation. Terms of reference of any separate Steering Group/ Advisory Group. Evidence that steering group is meeting and providing direction, e.g. minutes of meetings.

### Criterion

#### 3 Impartiality is demonstrated in its constitution and policies.

##### Reason for Inclusion

LRC credibility to all potential information users relies on an even handed approach to all.

##### Interpretation/ Thresholds

Any in kind contributions from the host to the LRC, such as office space, management support and administration should be transparent and valued in cost equivalence. Services to paying partners can reflect the level of financial contribution.

##### Evidence

Constitution or equivalent document in an LRC hosted by another organisation. Data Access Policy. Data Capture/Management Policy.

**Criterion**

**4 The LRC complies with the Environmental Information Regulations.**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Local Records Centres are required to comply with the Environmental Information Regulations, 2004. Prompt response to enquiries promotes a professional perspective of LRCs.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

At least 90% of enquiries should be answered within 20 working days. The LRC should give reasons to the enquirer for any that cannot be met in this timeframe. Responses for planning enquiries should normally be automated and made well within 20 days, the standard being set out in Service Level Agreements between the LRC and planning authority.

**Evidence**

Data Access Policy. Data Capture/Management Policy. Management Reports.

**Criterion**

**5 The LRC has the legal status to be able to enter contractual agreements, either as an independent incorporated body or a part of a larger organisation.**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Experience shows that successful LRCs cannot be operated as unincorporated bodies. Funding bodies need to be able to interact with legal entities.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Accreditation will not prescribe the preferred legal entity.

**Evidence**

Constitution or equivalent document in an LRC hosted by another organisation.

**Criterion**

**6 The LRC is accountable and transparent for its business and financial performance.**

**Reason for Inclusion**

This is particularly important where the LRC is part of a larger organisation. Effective management and partnership engagement can only take place where the performance of the LRC itself, rather than a larger unit of which it is part, is described and reported.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

The LRC Annual Report, normally compiled by the Manager for the governing body or partnership, and more frequent management reports, should include numbers on business results, such as records captured and data searches completed, and finance, including income and expenditure against budget. The annual report should be publicly available.

**Evidence**

LRC Annual Report/ Management Reports.

### Criterion

#### 7 The geographical area covered does not overlap with any other LRC.

##### Reason for Inclusion

Clear boundaries between LRCs avoids duplication of effort and confusion among data providers and users.

##### Interpretation/ Thresholds

LRC boundaries should normally follow local authority boundaries rather than recording areas.

Non-overlapping should be from the users' perspective; LRCs may establish arrangements with neighbouring LRCs to service needs of organisations not following administrative boundaries. For example, a recording group using a vice-county boundary could supply all of its records to the LRC covering the majority of its area, with the LRC passing on relevant records to its neighbouring LRC. Access to records for users would always be on a strict geographical basis following LRC boundaries. Such arrangements should be in the form of written agreements.

This criterion should not preclude:

- Two tier arrangements, where, for example, smaller LRCs engage with their local recorders and work with a regional LRC providing services to users across the region
- Collaboration between LRCs and established Geological Records Centres and Partnerships, working together in partnership to meet the user requirements of criterion 19.
- LRCs offering short term contract services over wider areas.

Partnerships for coastal LRCs should agree the marine limit for the LRC's geographical coverage.

An LRC seeking accreditation should seek to resolve any overlap issues with neighbouring LRCs before applying for accreditation. It will be required to submit a map of its proposed area and seek to resolve any boundary disputes before applying. If any dispute cannot be resolved it should describe any other claims to parts of that area. It should submit the views of the local authority, statutory conservation agency and any National Park Authority covering disputed areas. ALERC will be the arbiter of any disputes and will seek the views of the neighbouring LRC in disputed cases.

##### Evidence

LRC Boundary Map, including the extent of marine coverage for coastal LRCs. Details of any disputed areas.

### Criterion

#### **8 The LRC proactively engages with its users and providers.**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

The LRC concept fundamentally concerns a specific role as part of a complex network linking biodiversity observations with use of biodiversity information. Full engagement with other parts of the network is essential to effective operation.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

"Users" include the full range of national, regional and local users whether supplied through the National Biodiversity Network Gateway or direct.

"Providers" includes individual recorders, local recording groups, National Schemes and Societies, NGOs and Conservation Agencies. Some are both users and providers. LRCs should seek to engage with all relevant providers in order to collate the best possible view of species, habitats and sites data for the area, and make this available to the widest possible range of users for use in decision making, research and education.

**The role of data providers/ suppliers is critical to the success of the whole biodiversity and geodiversity information system at local, regional and national levels. In some cases LRCs are more formally linked with other groups in BAP or geological partnerships. For clarity, accreditation is restricted in this scheme to the LRC operation, but the importance of the wider network is fully recognised. Data suppliers and partners are invited to help their LRC meet these accreditation criteria.**

Accreditation recognises that engagement is a two way process and not all attempts at engagement will result in positive outcomes; however there will need to be evidence of positive effort on the part of the LRC and a reasonable spread of positive outcomes. Reviews of the degree to which services are meeting user needs should be included in partners' feeding back through the Steering Group or equivalent.

##### **Evidence**

LRC Annual Report/ Management Reports.

### Criterion

#### **9. The LRC employs sufficient professional staff, including a manager or equivalent, to maintain efficient and effective service to its users and providers.**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

Successful LRCs always have sufficient professional staff to deliver effective services. Partners sometimes seriously underestimate the staff resources needed to undertake "behind the scenes" data custodianship, which is essential to underpin robust outputs.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

This criterion is not prescriptive in terms of staff numbers, which will vary widely according to area covered and user demand. The LRC Accreditation Team should use the guidance on this subject available from various sources to assess staffing sufficiency, and unanimously sign off compliance. "manager or equivalent" means a post with responsibility for strategic and operational performance of the LRC, with at least three days per week devoted to LRC business (the post will normally be full-time, but some split posts with a hosting organisation can be effective provided the focus of the post is on the LRC).

##### **Evidence**

Staff complement review by the LRC Accreditation Team. Job description of manager or equivalent and filled post.

**Criterion**

**10 The LRC is a Process Orientated Organisation**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Becoming a process-orientated organisation will help LRCs develop effective, professional organisations.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

A process orientated organisation is a development stage in the Business Excellence Model (European Framework for Quality Management, EFQM). Working to the Business Excellence Model would be a good way of showing that the LRC meets this criterion. There are other models with similar approaches that may be suitable, especially where a host organisation wishes to include LRC staff in its training and personal development programme.

**Criterion**

**10.1 Independent process steps are identified**

**Reason for Inclusion**

LRC operation can be usefully broken down into a series of processes and steps within processes.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Processes could usefully be defined under the headings of User Liaison, Data Collation, Data Management, Interpretation and Information Delivery. Accredited LRCs should be able to define steps in at least three processes and show that they are complying with the process steps.

**Evidence**

List of written procedures & processes and evidence of compliance

**Criterion**

**10.2 Tasks, responsibilities and authority of individuals are known**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Clarity on the relationship between personnel and processes is crucial to effective delivery.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Evidence of links between individuals and processes in job descriptions or other documents.

**Evidence**

Job descriptions, Annual work plan, Line manager identified, Annual Reporting.

**Criterion**

**10.3 Adopt continuous improvement of processes**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Diagnosis of problems and measures to improve processes result in improved performance.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

At least one example of a process audit trail and a response to improve the process.

**Evidence**

Audit trail of whatever process is being monitored, continuous improvement

## Criterion

### 10.4 All staff undertake Continuing Professional Development

#### Reason for Inclusion

Staff training should contribute to all LRCs attaining new professional standards over time.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

Staff CPD summary shows a number of days training suitable to the needs of the individual, including one day for the manager on the Business Excellence Model or equivalent on the subject of process-orientated organisations. The benefits of a targeted training programme for all LRC staff and key volunteers should be recognised.

#### Evidence

Staff CPD summary for previous 12 months.

## Criterion

### 11 The LRC manages species (flora and fauna) and habitat data for its area.

#### Reason for Inclusion

Species and habitats are the essential components of biodiversity. There are many drivers that now require an increasing emphasis on habitat data. An LRC capability to provide both species and habitat data, including interactions between them, enhances LRC services.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

The LRC should cover the full range of species taxonomic groups and habitats present in its area, including marine biotopes in coastal LRCs where there is partnership agreement that the marine environment should be included in the LRC geographical scope. There are no prescribed minimum levels of coverage in the standard level criteria, but the LRC should seek to maximise coverage from available data and coverage of at least the principal species groups and habitats to meet user needs.

The word “manage” covers both custodianship and management of copy datasets that the LRC has access to (see criterion 12); it implies that the LRC should have sufficient rights to be able to integrate views of various datasets and present results to users that are most likely to meet their needs.

Where an LRC chooses to arrange access to a majority of datasets, rather than holding master or copy datasets, it will need to demonstrate that it can generate comprehensive data products and services to meet user needs. This arrangement may be appropriate, for example, where a regional LRC hub with a reporting focus operates in partnership with several smaller LRCs with a data collection focus. The innovative use of web service and similar arrangements will be encouraged.

#### Evidence

Statistics on species records in database and habitat parcels mapped in GIS, including, separately, those external datasets accessed and included in integrated products and services.



### Criterion

**12 The LRC is responsible for datasets custodianship, and management of dataset copies, by agreement with its partners and data providers.**

#### Reason for Inclusion

Clarity around dataset custodianship and responsibilities is important for efficient data management and transfer. Users need to know which datasets an LRC manages.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

Custodianship has rights and responsibilities attached. The custodian, who may or may not be the dataset owner, manages the dataset master copy. If the custodian is not the dataset owner, the rights and responsibilities are agreed between the custodian and owner. The principal right is normally the right to edit. Responsibilities include safeguarding in perpetuity, respecting intellectual property rights and providing appropriate levels of access to users.

Managing a copy dataset carries a different set of rights and responsibilities, and normally does not include the right to edit.

This criterion does not imply that the LRC should be the custodian for every dataset that it holds, but there should be clarity and agreement with partners and providers, and a list of datasets of each sort (custodianship/ management of dataset copy) on the LRC's website. Any significant gaps in data, especially where the data is known to exist but the LRC currently has no access, should be highlighted as part of this commentary, together with the reasons for the lack of access.

For interpretation of “access to datasets” arrangements please refer to criterion 11.

#### Evidence

List of datasets under custodianship and management on website

### Criterion

**13 In its custodianship responsibilities, the LRC observes the Data Exchange Principles of the National Biodiversity Network. These include provision for Data access (13.1), Confidentiality (13.2), Metadata (13.3), Authority transfer (13.4), Transparency (13.5), Personal data (13.6), Charging & Resourcing (13.7).**

#### Reason for Inclusion

LRCs are part of the National Biodiversity Network. The Data Exchange Principles have been established and well tested over a number of years.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

LRCs will need to provide evidence in the form of policies and additional material as described to show compliance with the principles. Charging policy must be justified as in line with principle 7. The NBN Trust is currently working with partners on developing Data Flow models for key taxonomic groups. (see Appendix 1, a draft for bat data, developed from one of these models.) Accredited LRCs will need to show that they are working towards these preferred data flows as they emerge.

#### Evidence

13.1 Data access policy on website. Information delivery results. 13.2 Data Access Policy includes confidentiality. Evidence of some data held with controlled access. 13.3 Metadata on website. 13.4 Data Access Policy. 13.5 Data access policy on website. 13.6 Data Access Policy. 13.7 Data Access Policy includes Charging Policy. Evidence of data exchange with a National Scheme and Society as part of a preferred data flow model.

### Criterion

#### **14 The LRC ensures quality control of its species and habitat data through validation and verification systems.**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

Data quality control is essential to LRC credibility across the country.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Validation is the process of checking if something satisfies a certain criterion. Verification is confirmation: additional proof that something that was believed (some fact or hypothesis or theory) is correct. Validation and verification systems are likely to use the emerging NBN Data Validation toolkit and may be managed in combination with local recording groups and/or National Schemes and Societies. LRCs should apply appropriate validation and verification systems and record the quality status of datasets in metadata and individual records in the database. Invalidated and unverified data should not be supplied, except in exceptional circumstances and then with clear quality warnings in both metadata and individual records.

Verification systems should include consideration of the need to support records of certain taxa with voucher specimens or photographs. Voucher specimens should be deposited with professionally maintained collections. The range of taxa for which additional material is needed should be agreed with National Schemes and Societies and local recording groups.

##### **Evidence**

Validation & Verification Policy. Evidence of policy implementation e.g. Dataset attributes

### Criterion

#### **15 The LRC acts as a secure archive for the data in its care in perpetuity.**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

Permanence is one of the most valuable LRC attributes for data providers, and historic datasets are very important for monitoring change.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Secure backup and archiving should be applied to all electronic datasets, and those paper datasets in LRC custodianship that contain significant data unless completely captured electronically. LRCs may also hold other resources of value that should be included in an archiving system. A Business Continuity Plan, including Disaster Recovery Plan, should be in place for the LRC or its host organisation. An ALERC Working Party report is available to provide guidance and best practice in this area.

##### **Evidence**

Data Security Policy. Business Continuity Plan.

#### Criterion

### **16 The LRC offers a basic suite of products and services to its users, defined as follows**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Many users who access LRC data in more than one area will find it helpful to know that there are recognisable basic products and services available from all accredited LRCs.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Most LRCs will be able to offer a much wider range of products and services than this list implies; this is the basic list that all accredited LRCs should be able to offer. While evidence includes statistics on frequency of supply it may exceptionally be the case that the product has not been requested; in such cases evidence of promotion that it is available is sufficient.

#### **Evidence**

See 16.1 to 16.5

#### Criterion

### **16.1 GIS data search of a project area showing statutory and non-statutory sites and recorded priority / legally protected species**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

This product has many applications, especially in development planning and agri-environment scheme support.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Statutory sites means nature conservation sites designated at national or international level. Non-statutory sites means Local Wildlife/ Geological Sites (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland). Priority species means species on the respective country list of species of principal importance (see glossary). Legally protected species means any species protected through national or European legislation.

#### **Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

#### Criterion

### **16.2 GIS data search of a project area showing recorded habitats**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Increasingly users need access to mapped habitat information. In some cases this can be combined with the sites/ species data search.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Habitats means a habitat category mapped as a parcel (polygon/region, line) in GIS.

#### **Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

**Criterion**

**16.3 List of all recorded priority and legally protected species in a defined area**

**Reason for Inclusion**

This product is a basic output for purposes related to biodiversity and land use planning.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Priority species means species on the respective country list of species of principal importance (see glossary). Legally protected means any species given special protection under domestic legislation or international Directives or Conventions. In some cases this product may be offered as part of a broader product that includes other species status categories.

**Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

**Criterion**

**16.4 List of all recorded priority habitats in a defined area**

**Reason for Inclusion**

This product is a basic output for purposes related to biodiversity planning.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

BAP priority habitats means habitats on the respective country list of habitats of principal importance (see glossary). In some cases this product may be offered as part of a broader product that includes other habitat status categories.

**Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

**Criterion**

**16.5 Records distribution map of any recorded species for area**

**Reason for Inclusion**

This product supports survey work and can be combined with other data for a wide range of purposes.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

The product should be supplied at least at 10km grid precision, with 1km wherever possible.

**Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

### **Criterion**

#### **16.6 Statistics and commentary on coverage, currency, accuracy and precision of species and habitat records**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

User perceptions of LRC products and services are often based on the relationship between the information supplied and “reality”. An objective assessment of that relationship can be very helpful to users.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

It should be noted that there are no criteria at standard level relating to the quantity of data held. The inclusion of this criterion is a clear statement that it is more important to provide clarity to users on data quality than to accumulate data quantity.

The criterion relates to data held electronically. There is no criterion related to the proportion of data electronically captured, since it is assumed that LRCs will be prioritising data capture to meet user demand. Data held only in paper format is not accessible and is therefore largely irrelevant for most purposes.

Since data quality assessment is a new area of work for most LRCs, a timeline is appropriate to allow assessments to be included in work programmes. For LRCs seeking accreditation before the deadlines included here it will be necessary to show that the work is in hand.

1 January 2012 Statistics and commentary on priority and legally protected species records and priority habitat records.

1 January 2013 Statistics and commentary on all habitat records.

1 January 2015 Statistics and commentary on all species records.

Guidelines on the format of data quality reporting should be available well before the deadlines to ensure consistency.

##### **Evidence**

Data quality reports (or evidence that the work is in hand if accreditation comes before the stated deadlines)

### **Criterion**

In delivering these products and services, the following standards are met:

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

All of these standards must be met for data captured or imported from the date of accreditation. For pre-existing data, reports should normally be restricted to data that meets these standards. If an accredited LRC judges that it is in the best interests of users to receive previously collected data that does not meet the standards, a clear quality warning must be given in metadata and against each record in listings.

### Criterion

#### **17.1 Species reporting naming conforms to NBN Species Dictionary, while retaining recorded name**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

Nomenclature standards are essential for compatibility between parts of the NBN and consistency across LRC boundaries for users.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

NBN Species Dictionary current recognised name should be used for output, but it's also important to retain the name as originally recorded. For Recorder 6 users the use of the latest update is sufficient. For non Recorder 6 users, translation to NBN Species Dictionary current recognised name will be essential at the reporting stage to meet this criterion.

##### **Evidence**

Species reporting nomenclature, link to dictionary.

### Criterion

#### **17.2 Records are available at variable precision in GIS, but held electronically at most geographically precise level recorded**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

Records should be captured once and used many times, so there should be no summarising of precision at data capture stage as a later use might require the greater precision. GIS reporting may need to show the record at a lower precision depending on map scale and purpose required.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Geographical precision relates to a scale, normally from 10km square down to 10m or 1m precision recorded through GPS. 100m, 10m and 1m records are generally more precise than site records. Species records linked to mapped habitat parcels may be an attractive option for georeferencing, provided the parcels are relatively small.

##### **Evidence**

Species records in 16.1 product example. Data capture policy.

### Criterion

#### **17.3 Records are linked with a source**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

Datasets are often defined by surveys or groups of surveys. This is required for dataset custodianship. Users need to be able to assess whether data is fit-for-their-purpose by reading metadata.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Tools such as Recorder 6 provide such database functionality. Metadata is required through criterion 13 and the wording of 13.3 should be used to determine whether other, non Recorder 6, terminologies are sufficient. Valid ad hoc records received by LRCs may be assigned to a generic "survey" called "ad hoc records" or similar.

##### **Evidence**

Database statistics, populated attribute

### Criterion

#### **18.1 Habitat reporting includes Biodiversity priority habitats in GIS, while retaining original records in any classification recognised by the NBN Habitats Dictionary**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

A wide range of uses require habitat data in Biodiversity priority habitats format and it is important that consistent Priority Habitat data can be aggregated across LRC boundaries at regional and national levels.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

BAP priority habitats means habitats on the respective country list of habitats of principal importance (see glossary). The NBN Habitats Dictionary contains at least 10 habitat classifications, including Phase 1, NVC (National Vegetation Classification) and IHS (Integrated Habitat System). If habitat data has been collected in a classification other than Priority Habitats or IHS, it will require translation to Priority Habitats. It is recognised that some translations give a poor quality dataset, and this weakness should be described in the metadata. Local customisations of recognised classifications will be acceptable provided the customisation has retained compatibility with its parent classification. An LRC seeking accreditation should aim to translate all habitat data that it manages into Priority Habitats, and to have completed the translation of at least one substantial dataset. This criterion does not preclude the supply of habitat data in non BAP format, provided that a BAP format product is also offered.

##### **Evidence**

Product example 16.2. Statistic of habitat coverage (area by classification).

### Criterion

#### **18.2 Habitats are mapped in GIS by habitat parcel, one category only per parcel**

##### **Reason for Inclusion**

GIS habitat mapping retains its integrity only when habitat parcel boundaries are defined on the basis of a single habitat category.

##### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

One category only per parcel means within the primary classification being used; a translated dataset will normally have the original habitat category in the attributes as well as the translated category. Genuine mosaics, of, for example, acidic grassland and heathland in the uplands, where recognised by the habitat classification being used, can be considered an exception. Otherwise, the size of habitat parcels should be reduced to fit one category only; if that generates too detailed or onerous a map, another classification system or higher hierarchical level in the classification should be used.

##### **Evidence**

GIS data format for habitat layers.

#### Criterion

### **18.3 Habitat records are available at variable precision, having been digitised at the most geographically precise level recorded**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

As with species records, habitat records should be captured once and used many times, so there should be no summarising of precision at data capture stage as a later use might require the greater precision. GIS reporting may need to show the record at a lower precision depending on map scale and purpose required.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Habitat data capture projects are normally commissioned, so the specification should follow the standards supplied by the commissioning organisation. In the absence of such specification the digitising should be at the most precise level the survey allows, and normally follow OS Master Map boundaries where appropriate. Reporting may sometimes be at lower precision than captured e.g. 10km habitat distribution map.

#### **Evidence**

Habitat records in 16.2 product example. Data capture policy.

#### Criterion

### **18.4 Records are linked with a source**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Datasets are often defined by surveys or groups of surveys. This is required for dataset custodianship. Users need to be able to assess whether data is fit-for-their-purpose by reading metadata.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Metadata is required through criterion 13.

#### **Evidence**

GIS database statistics, populated attribute

#### Criterion

### **19.1 The LRC holds and reports on a current copy of the Local Wildlife Sites (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) boundaries and short descriptions for its area.**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Users have a reasonable expectation that all LRCs should be able to include headline information on Local Wildlife Sites in their reports, even in areas where the LRC is not the custodian of the LWS dataset.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Accredited LRCs will have the discretion to exclude sites data that does not meet basic data quality standards from its data supply or to supply it accompanied by a clear data quality statement. Accredited LRCs should never supply poor quality data without quality warnings. If an LRC chooses not to report on a sites dataset for data quality reasons, it should draw the users' attention to the dataset and refer them to the custodian. In such situations the LRC should seek to engage relevant partners in a programme to improve data quality over time.

#### **Evidence**

Dataset included in metadata on web for whole LRC area



#### Criterion

**19.2 The LRC holds and reports on a current copy of the Local Geological Sites boundaries and short descriptions for its area. (not applicable to Scotland)**

#### Reason for Inclusion

Users have a reasonable expectation that all LRCs should be able to include headline information on Local Geological Sites in their reports, even in areas where the LRC is not the custodian of the LGS dataset.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

Local arrangements will vary as to the roles and responsibilities for geological sites data between the LRC, Local Geological Conservation Groups and third parties. This requirement is the minimum involvement expected of an LRC. The caveats for 19.1 above apply equally here. If there are no Local Geological Sites in the area, then this criterion will be considered to be met.

#### Evidence

Dataset included in metadata on web for whole LRC area

#### Criterion

**19.3 If the LRC is the agreed custodian of the Local Wildlife Site (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Wildlife Sites Systems.**

#### Reason for Inclusion

Where the LRC is the agreed custodian, it needs to apply consistent standards, for credibility of both LRCs and non-statutory sites systems, and to allow consistent use across LRC boundaries.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

“National guidelines for Local Wildlife Sites Systems” refers to the Defra Local Sites guidance (2006) and the Guidance on Establishing and Managing Local Nature Conservation Site Systems in Scotland (2009). These guidelines cover both selection criteria and process, covering such areas as landowner engagement and partnership involvement. Any local deviations from the national guidelines need to be justified. A reasonable implementation period beyond date of accreditation is allowed, but reports that include sites that have not been re-assessed against the guidelines should include a quality warning.

For interpretation of “custodian”, see criterion 12.

#### Evidence

LWS policy. LWS selection criteria. LWS process. Example of selection process. Landowner consent evidence.

### Criterion

**19.4 If the LRC is the agreed custodian of the Local Geological Site dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Geological Sites. (not applicable to Scotland)**

### Reason for Inclusion

Where the LRC is the agreed custodian, it needs to apply consistent standards, for credibility of both LRCs and non-statutory sites systems, and to allow consistent use across LRC boundaries.

### Interpretation/ Thresholds

“National guidelines for Local Geological Sites” refers to the principles advocated in the Defra Local Sites guidance (2006) and the local adaptation of the national RIGS guidance (1990) on selecting Local Geological Sites (formerly RIGS) (available at: [www.geoconservationuk.org.uk](http://www.geoconservationuk.org.uk) )

For interpretation of “custodian”, see criterion 12.

### Evidence

LGS policy. LGS selection criteria. LGS process. Example of selection process. Landowner consent evidence.

## Criterion

### 20 The LRC promotes high quality species and habitat recording

#### Reason for Inclusion

The local promotion of high quality recording is regarded as one of the most valuable roles of LRCs, with extensive influence to the benefit of the NBN, National Schemes and Societies, conservation agencies, NGOs and biodiversity conservation generally.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

High quality species and habitat recording can be regarded essentially as recording that generates data meeting standards described in these accreditation criteria. Specific points requested by National Schemes and Societies include: High resolution records with detail, checked with an expert, communicated electronically to a national scheme, use of standard survey methodologies, consultation with NSS on local methodologies, attributes appropriate to taxa, inclusion of record type, consistent habitat mapping standards. LRCs should have recording advice on their website, links to external sites and offer at least a day's training a year to voluntary recorders.

#### Date and recorder precision

A precise date for species records is important for validation/verification and audit trail purposes, and enables analysis of trends e.g. phenology. Standard approaches to date precision across the country enables trend analysis e.g. for climate change response.

Precise date means day-month-year. The vagueness of dates associated with many historical records is recognised. It is also recognised that, for many common species that are recorded extremely frequently, a pragmatic compromise is to summarise records at data entry stage to month, season or even year. However accredited LRCs should promote the use of precise dates for records collected directly or collated from recorders or other organisations. A proposed standard is as follows:

Day-month-year precision for all

1. Priority species and legally protected species
2. Records in taxonomic groups for which observation date is critical, including moths, butterflies and bats
3. Breeding or juvenile records
4. Winter visitors
5. Invasive species

The use of month or season minimum precision for all other records should be promoted.

The use of quality warnings is encouraged when supplying data that does not meet these standards.

The use of precise dates is also important for habitat records for monitoring purposes; year and month are usually adequate. Where the data relates to interpretation of an earlier resource (e.g. aerial photograph or satellite image) the dates of the resource and the interpretation should be separately recorded.

A precise recorder is also important for validation/verification and audit trail purposes for both species and habitat records.

Precise recorder means an individual rather than an organisation. It is recognised that many historical records have an organisation rather than individual recorder. It is also recognised that sometimes an external organisation is entirely responsible for verification to accredited standards and wishes to supply the dataset to the LRC with the organisation listed as the recorder. However accredited LRCs should promote the use of individual rather than organisation recorder attributes.

#### Evidence

Website recording guidance. Training event detail or written advice.

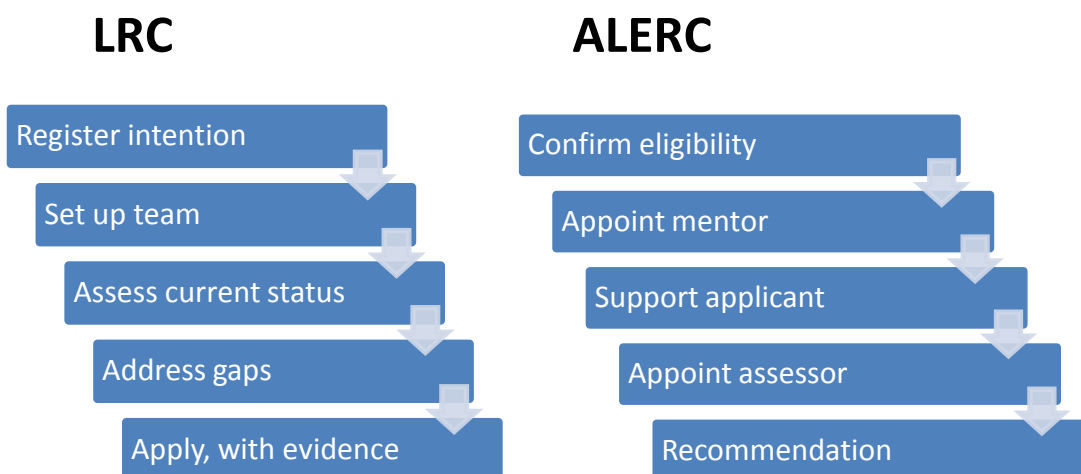
## Advanced Criteria (Draft)

These draft criteria, together with supporting interpretation, will be finalised in the light of experience in using the standard level criteria. Responses received from consultees in June 2010 will be taken into account at that stage. This version has the additional draft criterion 131 compared with the consultation draft.

Section	No.	Criteria
<b>Business Excellence Model</b>	100	<b>The LRC is a System Orientated Organisation</b>
	100.1	All parts of organisation continuously and systematically work on improving whole organisation
	100.2	Deming Circle of continuous improvement is applied on all primary, supporting and managing processes
	100.3	Client focus is dominant for policy
	100.4	Focused on preventing problems instead of dealing with them
		<b>Delivers all of the following value added services to accredited standards (see standard criteria 17-19)</b>
<b>Mandatory Criteria</b>	101	Holds and reports on at least 0.5 million species records of which at least 100,000 are priority species records
	102	Holds and reports on habitat mapping, with currency less than 10 years, for at least 10% of its area
	103	Has an agreed strategy to achieve habitat mapping, currency less than 10 years, for at least 50% of its area within 5 years
	104	Assigns species records to habitat parcels and sites in GIS
	105	Provides species trend analysis
	106	Provides composite ("best current view") habitat maps from multiple, overlapping habitat surveys
	107	Provides habitat trend analysis
	108	Provides seamless data searches across boundaries with all neighbouring LRCs
		<b>AND Offers at least 10 of the following services to accredited standards (see standard criteria 17-19)</b>
<b>Species</b>	111	Undertakes strategic species surveys
	112	Undertakes species surveys through public involvement
	113	Undertakes Habitat Suitability Mapping/ Modelling for species
<b>Habitats</b>	114	Undertakes strategic habitats surveys (extent and distribution) using a system that includes Biodiversity Priority Habitats
	115	Implements a habitat quality monitoring strategy
	116	Undertakes Habitat Opportunity Mapping
<b>Sites</b>	117	Custodian Local Wildlife Sites dataset (see standard criterion 19.3, counts as 2 services in Scotland)
	118	Custodian Local Geological Sites dataset (see standard criterion 19.4, not applicable in Scotland)
	119	Undertakes strategic Wildlife Sites surveys (mapping)
	120	Implements a Local Wildlife Site quality monitoring strategy

	121	Implements a Local Geological Site monitoring strategy
	122	Holds and reports on Green Infrastructure information
	123	Undertakes Green Infrastructure Mapping
<b>Interpretation and Reporting</b>	124	Interpretation of its data to enhance public understanding
	125	Publishes or provides support for publication of distribution atlases and other relevant materials
	126	Operates a Wildlife Enquiry Service for the public on behalf of partner organisations
	127	Monitors and reports biodiversity outcomes against targets for the LBAP/LNP/NIA partnership
<b>Standards Promotion</b>	128	Monitors and reports on biodiversity indicators on behalf of partner organisations
	129	Supports at least five local recording groups
<b>Innovation</b>	130	Leads a training programme to promote high quality recording
	131	Develops a new service, product or tool that is potentially useful to LRCs generally, and share it across the network

## Accreditation Process Outline



### Standard Level Application Procedure

Around 6 months before it wishes to attain accreditation the LRC should register its intention to apply with ALERC, and state its eligibility.

ALERC will respond with confirmation of the LRC's eligibility to apply. It will also appoint a mentor – normally an LRC manager from another region – who will work with the applicant through the application period.

The LRC will then establish an accreditation team, comprising its Manager, a Local Authority, a Voluntary Recorder and another organisation, such as a Conservation Agency or NGO, drawn from the LRC's governing body or partnership. The role of this team will be to support the LRC staff through the accreditation process and to sign off the final application self-assessment.

The LRC will then complete an initial assessment of current status, indicating which of the criteria it considers to be easily meeting already, doubtfully meeting or clearly need work to address. The LRC will share this with the mentor.

The mentor will support the LRC in its work programme to clarify the doubtful points and address the gaps, and advise the LRC when it is ready to make the full application.

ALERC will then appoint an Assessor whose role will be to peer review the self-assessment.

The full application, signed off by the LRC Accreditation Team, will then be submitted to the Assessor. The assessor may ask for clarification or further evidence.

The Assessor will then make a recommendation to the ALERC Accreditation Committee.

If approved, the LRC will be accredited for a period of 3 years.

If rejected, ALERC will offer further support to the LRC to help it towards accreditation standards. A sample-based on-site validation system may be included within the process.

### **Application Renewal for Accredited LRCs**

2.5 years after accreditation the LRC should inform ALERC that it intends to seek renewal of accreditation. It will have the option of requesting a mentor for the renewal, and ALERC will have the option of appointing a mentor. 2.75 years after accreditation the LRC should submit a full renewed application, with updated evidence.

If approved the LRC will be accredited for a further period of 3 years.

### **Changes in Status**

ALERC will maintain a list of Accredited LRCs on its website.

If an Accredited LRC knows that it will fall below accredited standards at any time it should notify ALERC immediately. ALERC can withdraw Accredited Status with one month's notice; it should give the LRC an opportunity to appeal against the decision.

ALERC is recommended to set up a complaints procedure against Accredited LRCs. Any LRC data provider or user should be able to make a complaint against an accredited LRC, having already raised the matter with the LRC and given it an opportunity to respond.

### **Application Procedure for Advanced Standard**

LRCs that have been accredited at standard level for 6 months will have the option to register its intention to apply for Advanced Standard.

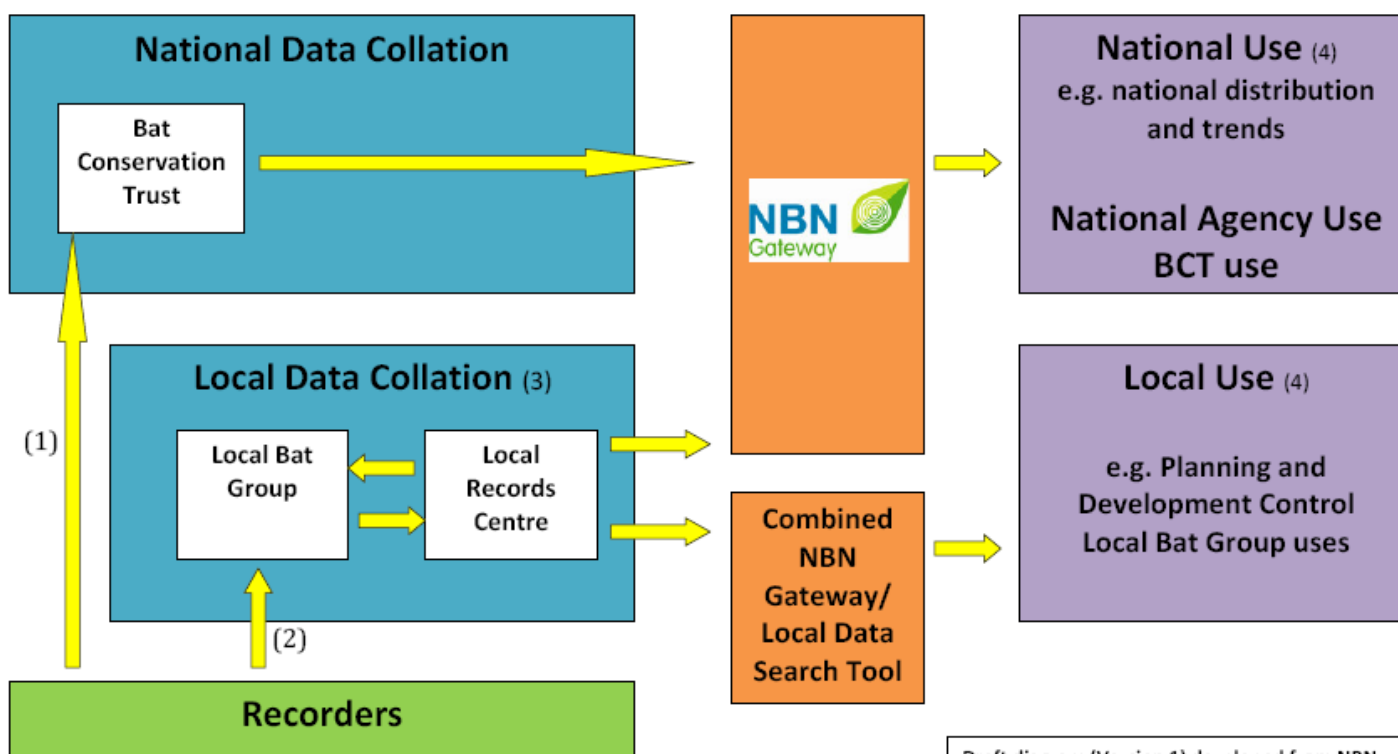
The same application process will be followed as for standard level. Where possible ALERC will appoint the same Mentor as in the standard application. The outcome if approved will be accreditation at Advanced Standard not less than 12 months after initial accreditation. If rejected the LRC will continue as a Standard Accredited LRC.

Renewal at Advanced Standard will be concurrent with Standard i.e. 3 years after the original accreditation.

## Appendix 1 An Example of a Preferred Data Flow for a Taxonomic Group

Note that this diagram is intended to illustrate the type of data flow arrangements that may emerge by consultation between interested parties over the next few years. It is neither final for bat data, or necessarily representative of arrangements that may be agreed for other taxa. Data flow is referred to in interpretation of standard criterion 13 and is also relevant to standard criteria 8 and 12.

Bat Data – Preferred Data Flow DRAFT



- (1) NBMP data (2) Non NBMP data
- (3) Local arrangements will vary and should be agreed locally, but should include data capture and validation, normally at the LRC, data verification of at least Annex 2 species by the Bat Group, data mobilisation to the Gateway by the LRC and support to the Bat Group by the LRC, for example in IT, links to habitat data and analysis.
- (4) Spatial resolution available to different users controlled through Gateway tools

Draft diagram (Version 1) developed from NBN Trust Data Flow model type 1 from discussions between Bill Butcher (WGB Environment) and Lisa Hundt (Bat Conservation Trust) as part of Natural England/ALERC LRC Accreditation Project consultation, April 2010