

IPENS AfterLIFE Implementation Plan

Delivering actions and outcomes on England's Natura 2000 sites



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1. Purpose

The purpose of this AfterLIFE Implementation Plan is to set out how conservation activities are planned to continue and to develop after the end of the IPENS Programme, and how the longer-term management of the Natura 2000 series will be secured.

Information is provided on the proposed prioritisation, implementation and monitoring of the actions identified through the IPENS programme. The plan describes the steps that we will need to take with partners to secure the environmental outcomes. A communications plan is also included which sets out how we will continue to promote the programme and disseminate its results.

2. Background – the IPENS Programme

The Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 sites (IPENS) is a new strategic approach to managing England's Natura 2000 sites.

It has enabled Natural England, the Environment Agency and other key partners to plan what, how, where and when they will need to target their efforts on Natura 2000 sites and areas surrounding them.

There are 338 Natura 2000 sites in England, in both marine and terrestrial locations, covering over 2 million hectares (the terrestrial sites are underpinned by SSSIs). These are:

- 253 Special Areas of Conservation
- 85 Special Protection Areas

Whilst a number of our Natura sites are in a good state, many face challenges which affect their condition. These are from issues such as pollution, inappropriate grazing and impacts from invasive species.

The aim of IPENS was to identify the programme of work needed to improve or maintain (where they are already in a good state) the condition of England's Natura 2000 sites.

Whilst each site is unique, the wildlife on many sites is affected by common, often complex problems as well as site specific issues. We reviewed every Natura 2000 site to ensure that these are successfully tackled. We developed:

- A Site Improvement Plan covering every Natura 2000 site in England.
- Theme Plans to address issues that are common across many sites (eg invasive species and air pollution).
- Evidence Reports that will help fill the gaps in our knowledge about Natura 2000 sites.

This is the first time that this information has been drawn together for the entire suite of Natura 2000 sites. It has enabled the current Natura 2000 network and its contribution to biodiversity outside the network to be reviewed, and highlighted where further measures are needed to improve the network.

The findings of the programme have been brought together in a Programme Report

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5757712073752576?category=4878851540779008> which highlights the wide range of actions needed, from practical management on sites to development of priorities for funding and evidence.

3. A Summary of the IPENS Findings

The detailed findings of IPENS have been brought together in a programme report which is available in the [Natural England Publications Catalogue](#).

A summary of the programme findings is below.

3.1 SIP records

Most of the Site Improvement Plans (96%) and therefore sites are affected by at least one issue with only a very small number (less than 4%) of SIPS having no issue affecting the condition of the site.

The SIPs with a large number of issues (11 or more) are large complex sites such as estuaries, upland sites or large lowland sites with multiple interest features. The SIPs (sites) with no issues reported are generally small lowland grassland sites, species sites or sites where the management is closely controlled.

The most frequently reported issues in the SIPs are air pollution and invasive species and disease (including deer). These are not necessarily the issues affecting the most SACs and SPAs across the country. Some issues such as game management and moor burning, whilst only affecting a relatively small number of sites (10 SIPs) account for up to 38% of the Natura 2000 land area.

3.2 Actions required to address the issues

There are over 3000 'priority actions' required (in addition to work already underway) to tackle these issues in order to achieve favourable condition of features on sites (contributing to favourable conservation status). These relate to:

- securing appropriate habitat management;
- reducing environmental pressures, such as pollution, invasive species or disturbance;
- adapting to a changing environment, whether a result of climate change, habitat fragmentation, or development; and
- restoration of habitats, species populations and ecosystem processes.

Depending on the issue and the site(s) priority actions need to be taken at:

- a site or local level;
- a catchment/landscape level; and
- a national or international level.

The SIPs and theme plans enable us to see which actions are best tackled at which level and where a combination of these might be required. Management of some issues in the wider environment (including on other protected sites) is vital for their successful management within the Natura 2000 network. Natura 2000 sites do not exist in isolation and issues such as invasive species, climate change, air pollution and habitat fragmentation all need to be addressed at a national or landscape scale. Further work is now required to ensure the coordination of effort at the appropriate level. This is discussed below.

3.3 On site management challenges

As well as highlighting the importance of strategic and offsite issues, the SIPs have shown that there are still a lot of onsite habitat management issues to resolve (640 issues recorded) The SIPs highlighted that a change in on-site habitat management is required to maintain or restore the feature of interest. Issues like grazing, scrub control or the risk of discontinued management are normally managed through existing mechanisms, but this is not always possible. Despite our best efforts, factors such as a lack of funding, insecurity of long term funding and practical problems such as difficult terrain are the reasons why management has not yet been secured or fully effective.

On some sites, we have been unable to secure favourable management with the landowner/occupier. Conflicting objectives for the site can make the use of voluntary or soft measures difficult, particularly where the incentives are not seen as big enough. This results in long and drawn-out negotiations and/or a failure to secure favourable on-site management.

3.4 The tools to implement these actions

A wide range of mechanisms that enable the implementation of actions exists, from advice and plans to enforcement and regulation, to habitat creation or restoration.

Difficult and complex issues such as diffuse water pollution will often require a combination of mechanisms operating in an orchestrated and sequential way over a lengthy time period.

Whilst a range of mechanisms exist, in many cases these have either been partially implemented or in some cases not put in place at all (for example investigative actions to clarify appropriate site management action). This can be due to a lack of funding, staff time, a reluctance to use regulatory mechanisms available or a lack of a strategic framework within which they can be applied consistently. In addition voluntary approaches may be effective when applied appropriately but they are not able to fully deliver the required results, simply because they are optional. Better targeting of a mix of mandatory and voluntary mechanisms and the development of strategic frameworks to guide their use might help to overcome these barriers.

In some cases (such as on particular sites or for specific issues) there are no mechanisms available. This is true for air pollution, so the IPENS Atmospheric Nitrogen theme plan is proposing that Site Nitrogen Action Plans are developed. In other cases, even where mechanisms are available to tackle an issue they are not necessarily available on every site. An example of this is where partnership working is potentially an appropriate mechanism, but there is a lack of support or resource to put this in place. Another example is where grazing is an appropriate mechanism, but there are restrictions in place, such as no fencing allowed, due the site being Common Land.

3.5 Evidence

IPENS has invested over £1 million in 54 projects, to help plug gaps in our knowledge about Natura 2000 sites and the issues affecting their features. The site and theme plans, however, highlight that a lot more is still required, particularly for issues such as invasive species including deer, and disease; public access and disturbance; water pollution; natural or unexplained change; and air pollution.

In some case the gaps in our knowledge are at a site level (with over 500 gaps identified in the SIPs), whilst for issues such as climate change, air pollution and invasive species the gaps in our knowledge relate to more strategic issues such as predicting future trends (eg arrival of new invasive species), so we can prepare appropriately to tackle them.

3.6 How much will it cost?

SIPs contain cost estimates for approximately 48% of actions (with a further 8% stating no cost or staff time only). By extrapolating these cost estimates to the whole range of actions identified, a cautious estimate of £1.7 billion has been made for implementation of SIP actions. The estimate includes a high proportion of short-term, low-cost actions (eg to implement enforcement action or develop an invasive species strategy), with a much smaller number of larger and more expensive actions for long term implementation, including actions to address river management, water pollution and hydrological functioning . This figure does not include the additional costs of implementing the priority actions identified in the theme plans.

Whilst the costs estimated here are not small, it is important to understand them in the context of the far more significant ecosystem service and economic benefits this level of investment will bring. Natura 2000 sites deliver a range of provisioning, regulating and cultural services including tourism, education, water purification and climate regulation. At some sites, unfavourable condition (of the underpinning SSSI) has led to a reduction in the delivery of regulating services such as the ability to store carbon and regulate water flows.

In economic terms, The Natural Capital Committee's State of Natural Capital Report (January 2015)¹ provided a significant underpinning economic analysis of the benefit cost ratios (BCRs) of a range of natural capital investments. For example, it highlighted a BCR of at least 5:1 for a woodland planning programme; 4:1 for a catchment case study; salt marsh restoration in the region of 2 to 3:1 and inland wetlands restoration projects of up to 9:1. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2014)² estimated that in 2011 the bundle of services (water quality, flood control, recreation, tourism and amenity) provided by inland and coastal wetlands (many of which are Natura 2000 sites) was worth between £0.7 – 5.7 billion per year. Studies undertaken for The Benefits of Sites of Special Scientific Interest report (2011)³ highlight that the public would be willing to pay £827m for the benefits currently provided by SSSIs in England (the designation which underpin nearly all terrestrial UK Natura 2000 sites) and that the benefits of increasing funding to enable all sites to reach favourable condition are estimated at £666 million in England. This study was used in a recent assessment of the overall benefits and costs of Defra regulations to estimate a 7:1 benefit from biodiversity regulations for SSSIs. In some cases there will be costs associated with not taking action, for example non-native invasive species are estimated to cost £1.7 billion per year in damage and management costs incurred.

A range of funding sources exist (such as the Rural Development Programme for England, the budgets of Defra and its environmental agencies, and EU and UK grants eg EU LIFE+ and Heritage Lottery Fund) that will help finance a significant proportion but not the full extent of the work required. A prioritisation exercise will be carried out to look at which of the actions from IPENS will be delivered, by whom, by when and how. This will include a more

¹ Natural Capital Committee (2015) The State of Natural Capital: Protecting and Improving Natural Capital for Prosperity and Wellbeing. Third report to the Economic Affairs Committee.

² UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2014) The UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Synthesis of the Key Findings. UNEP-WCMC, LWEC, UK.

³ Defra (2011) Benefits of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Final report. URL: <http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=1&ProjectID=17005>

accurate assessment of the funding gap. It is however clear that additional investment in Natura 2000 management, on top of the current and planned funding, will be required to fully meet the requirements of the Habitats Directive and realise all the associated ecosystem service and economic benefits.

3.7 Who needs to be involved?

In each SIP, the delivery partners were recorded. This citation by the SIPs is not itself a commitment to delivering the SIP actions, but shows where existing and new partnerships are needed. Further work will be needed to agree priorities and commit to specific delivery plans, including engagement with landowners and managers. Over 650 organisations, from government departments and agencies, to conservation NGOs and private companies, have a role in helping to take forward the priority actions identified by IPENS.

3.8 Cross-cutting and strategic key messages

A range of cross-cutting issues have emerged in developing IPENS products, including factors which affect many sites or have strategic implications for the delivery of improvements on site. These are captured below as key messages and are of relevance for those with responsibility for the oversight of the Natura 2000 network in England and wider.

3.8.1 Data issues

For terrestrial Natura 2000 sites, more and different issues were recorded in the SIPs than have been recorded for their underpinning SSSIs on Natural England's reporting system for protected sites (CMSi). Public access disturbance and air pollution, for example, have been identified as an issue far more frequently in the SIPs. This may be a result of the protocols for assessing the condition of SSSIs, where condition is reported against a limited list of indicators. Production of SIPs and the research IPENS has funded has allowed staff to think more widely about what is required to enable each site to make a full contribution to favourable conservation status, resulting in other issues being highlighted. CMSi also does not include data relating to marine Natura 2000 sites. So, through the development of SIPs, for the first time we have been able to capture on a single database the issues affecting marine and terrestrial Natura 2000 sites.

Some issues have been recorded inconsistently in SIPs, for example climate change and habitat fragmentation. Site officers have a good general understanding of these issues, but in many cases have not reported their effects at the site level. This is likely to be because there is no consistent assessment method available currently. The theme plans on these topics will help to address this for future SIP updates. Issues relating to development and infrastructure are also reported inconsistently, but this is usually because the majority of issues will be dealt with via existing regulatory processes and so do not need to be recorded on SIPs.

3.8.2 Conflicting objectives

The SIPs and theme plans have identified some perceived conflicts between objectives, driven either by different approaches to implementation of European policy and legislation or the requirements of different interest features, which require a balance of onsite management and favourability of European features. This may relate to the need to deliver multiple management objectives under different legislation eg where a site is both a SAC and a SPA, with requirements under both the Habitats and Birds Directives, but the management objectives for one interest feature may have negative consequences to others. There may also be a need to take into account the objectives of different legislative drivers, e.g. the Habitats Regulations concerning management for biodiversity, and the Water Framework Directive and Nitrates Directive concerning management for environmental quality.

Potential conflicts have also been highlighted between European and domestic legislation, for example legislation which enables access to the natural environment (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and Marine and Coastal Access Act) which may be difficult to always balance with the Habitats and Birds Directives, particularly where access may be a key reason why features do not achieve a favourable condition.

The need to find solutions for the management of mosaic habitats has been highlighted, particularly on sites where localised interest features (eg arctic alpine plant species or high altitude base-rich flushes/fens) exist within other larger-scale protected habitats. It cannot be assumed that appropriate management for the larger habitat type will meet the specific requirements of rare species or localised habitat types within it.

Care needs to be taken where multiple legislative instruments and policy objectives are relevant to management decisions, available guidance is unclear, and stakeholders hold disparate views. Where this is the case, a pragmatic approach to management decisions at site level may yield the best outcome for nature.

3.8.3 Use of regulatory and enforcement mechanisms

In some cases regulatory and enforcement mechanisms such as enforcement of SSSI legislation are the way to resolve a long-standing problem, once all efforts to secure voluntary solutions have been exhausted. However, the development of SIPs and some theme plans has highlighted that available regulatory and enforcement mechanisms are often not used, where this could be appropriate, due to funding and staff resource constraints and a desire to maintain good working relationships with landowners and other stakeholders. In some cases mechanisms exist, but have only been applied very infrequently and so there has been limited experience of how they might be applied.

3.8.4 Flexibility of objectives and management

An issue, cited in 54 SIPs and some theme plans is the need for flexibility in protected sites management given the changing climate, the need to better reflect ecological processes and to acknowledge and prepare for the effects of rising sea levels and coastal erosion/squeeze.

Evidence strongly suggests that designated sites will be vitally important in enabling habitats and species to respond to climate change, and changing the boundaries or interest features of designated sites introduces uncertainty to stakeholders and places a significant administrative burden on statutory conservation bodies and so it is not a task that is undertaken lightly. A SSSI designation review is currently underway, which will benefit some Natura 2000 sites, and reviews of the SPA series are undertaken regularly (although are not always implemented). Depending on budgets and priorities, a review of the features and boundaries under the existing designation may be prudent for some sites.

New approaches to objective setting and management may also need to be considered; ensuring designations are ecologically appropriate and can facilitate flexibility and change over time. The work we are doing to better understand Favourable Conservation Status and the contributions sites play within the wider network will help. Additionally, the ability to protect land specifically for its function within the wider landscape may be required if habitat fragmentation is to be adequately addressed, for example 'stepping stone' or linear habitats which make significant contributions to connectivity.

3.8.5 Investigation and closer monitoring

The need for additional information is a common message coming out of IPENS, including baseline survey, condition monitoring and post-implementation monitoring.

Examples include investigation of:

- Site/feature condition, for example to put in place more frequent monitoring of very vulnerable/changeable habitats than the standard monitoring regime.
- Small / localised / specialised / mobile features that are not well monitored by Natural England's current processes, such as some SPA bird populations.
- Improvements as a result of IPENS implementation - including things like gene flow to monitor increases in habitat connectivity.
- Post restoration or mitigation to provide evidence/feedback on whether measures are achieving desired outcomes and if necessary to inform additional actions which might be required (eg lake restoration, mitigation of public access disturbance effects).
- Site feature extent (particularly in the marine environment), where in some sites extent is not fully mapped, and also to reflect changes in extent or quality of the feature(s).

3.8.6 Skills/capacity

From the range of issues and actions recorded in the SIPs, it is clear that successful management of the Natura 2000 network relies in large part on the skills, knowledge and capacity of staff in the environment sector as a whole. In delivering IPENS SIPs, site responsible officers have spent time developing a much deeper understanding of the features on their sites, which will help greatly as we look at which actions need to be addressed, by whom, how and when. There remains a concern however about the patchy nature of that knowledge and the risks around loss of key knowledgeable staff from the sector.

4. Implementation

Foreword

The Natural England Protected Sites Programme includes action for both domestic (SSSI) and international (Natura 2000 (N2K)) sites. Work to implement the products of IPENS - Site Improvement Plans and Theme Plans – is integrated across an outcome-focussed programme. The governance of the programme sits within the Biodiversity team in Natural England. The Senior Responsible Officer is Mike Smith, who is also Chair of the IPENS AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group. A formal programme board is being set up, although at the time of writing, the Board has not yet been convened.

There are three streams of work within the programme as follows:

- Operations – day to day delivery of short-term actions including safeguarding sites and work towards meeting the Biodiversity 2020 Strategy (Bio2020) outcomes for protected sites.
- Strategy – high level planning and co-ordination to ensure synergies between and across programmes, national partners and government policy, coupled with a strong focus on strategic solutions to on- and off-site issues in direct support of local delivery and developing our understanding of the relationship between Favourable Conservation Status and Favourable Condition SSSI.
- Reform – transforming the way we deliver and monitor outcomes on protected sites including by developing new funding streams to pay for work on protected sites and by modernising our approach to survey and assessment of condition.

In the short-term, IPENS data is being used to update the England section of the UK Prioritised Action Framework (PAF), CMSi, and to develop new cross-sector funding bids. At the same time, Bio2020 priorities are being mapped onto Natura 2000 sites to ensure we take opportunities to deliver for both SSSI and N2K features in the run-up to 2020 (including by realising synergies between programmes e.g. agri-environment and Water Framework Directive). Other SIP and Theme plan actions will be addressed over the medium to long term as working groups tackle them.

The IPENS programme has significantly increased our understanding of the issues affecting Natura sites and the areas surrounding them, and proposed actions that might address these.

The most frequently reported issues in the SIPs are ‘air pollution’ and ‘invasive species, disease and deer’. Other issues such as game management and moor burning are reported far less frequently, but affect large areas of the Natura 2000 network.

The SIPs and theme plans indicate that over 3000 ‘priority actions’ are required (in addition to work already underway) to tackle these issues in order to achieve favourable condition of features on sites, thereby contributing to favourable conservation status. These relate to:

- securing appropriate habitat management;
- reducing environmental pressures, such as pollution, invasive species or disturbance;

- adapting to a changing environment, whether a result of climate change, habitat fragmentation, or development; and
- restoration of habitats, species populations and ecosystem processes.

Depending on the issue and the site(s), priority actions need to be taken at:

- a site or local level;
- a catchment/landscape level; and
- a national or international level.

The SIPs and theme plans enable us to see which actions are best tackled at which level and where a combination of these might be required. Natura 2000 sites do not exist in isolation and management of some issues in the wider environment (including on other protected sites) or at a national or landscape scale is vital for their successful management within the Natura 2000 network.

There is no specific implementation programme or fund for Natura 2000 improvement in England. The management and restoration of our Natura 2000 sites is integrated in a range of government policies and in the work programmes and schemes run by Natural England and partner organisations. In addition, many important conservation actions are carried out by volunteers and charitable organisations. Examples of relevant programmes are those associated with the Biodiversity 2020 strategy and implementation of the Water Framework Directive, which deliver the objectives of Natura 2000 alongside, and in synergy with, other objectives.

Within the current context of funding and capacity constraints in Natural England and other delivery partners, it is clear that the full range of improvement actions identified under IPENS cannot be implemented immediately. Implementation will require on-going dialogue and partnership working, in which clarity on priorities is essential.

Prioritisation should inform implementation planning to identify which of the actions are needed most urgently for ecological and statutory reasons and over which timescales. Whilst all Natura 2000 interest features on English sites receive the same level of protection, establishing priorities across the network can help to focus effort and achieve better outcomes. Delivery planning will need to examine synergies with other objectives; and which actions can be embedded in relevant programmes.

The implementation of IPENS therefore consists of the following elements, which are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections:

- **Detailed prioritisation of the IPENS outcomes**
- **Identifying synergies between IPENS outcomes and existing delivery programmes**
- **Enabling implementation of actions through partnerships**
- **Development and implementation of new mechanisms identified by the IPENS programme**
- **To develop and agree an implementation plan**
- **Appropriate governance to co-ordinate, manage and monitor IPENS implementation**

4.1 Prioritisation of IPENS outcomes

The Site Improvement Plans articulate the potential actions to address the particular issues and threats at site level. The Theme Plans set out priority actions to address the main threats across sites. There is not sufficient resource (staff or funding) to deliver all of it at once, or even in the next five years, so we need a sense of criticality and practical application of the actions.

A prioritisation exercise will be carried out on the actions and measures that are recorded in the IPENS SIPs and theme plans. The prioritisation exercise will be carried out by Natural England, advised by a specialist working group which will include Environment Agency representation and involving the existing IPENS Steering Group and the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group (see below). Partners will be engaged through the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group complemented with partners from the Marine sector. Prioritisation will enable a planned and joined up approach to implementation.

A methodology is being developed which approaches the prioritisation of issues, actions and mechanisms through the lens of Natura 2000 interest features. The table 1 below shows the criteria included.

Table 1 Prioritisation Criteria

Criteria group	Criteria
Statutory duty	Importance according to the directives
	Declines within England N2k network (Habitats Directive article 6.2 duty)
Importance	Importance of UK in international context
	Importance of England Natura 2000 sites in UK context
	Ecological significance of designated features in an English / UK context
Conservation	UK and international conservation status (using Article 17 and 12 reports)
	Condition in England's Natura 2000 sites

SIP and theme plan data will be analysed to identify prominent issues associated with each feature. This will subsequently enable priority actions, mechanisms and funding options to be identified. The priorities will be summarised in 'core conservation priorities' at ecosystem level, grouping associated features, issues and measures together to include the benefits for features that may initially be classed as lower priority.

This prioritisation will help Natural England and our delivery partners to look ahead at what needs to be delivered over the next five years and beyond. This can in turn inform delivery planning across the environment sector. The core priorities will be published as a Natural England report for future reference. It will also be used to inform the review of the England section of the UK Prioritised Action Framework (PAF). There is no formal timetable to update the England section of the PAF, but work has already begun, with an ambition to have completed the update by Spring 2016.

4.2 Identifying synergies

The second stage of the delivery planning process is to identify synergies between the actions and mechanisms needed to achieve the core conservation priorities and the objectives of existing policies, commitments, work programmes and delivery schemes. The purpose is to identify in practical terms what existing and planned work by Natural England and partner organisations will deliver for Natura 2000 and over what timescales. It will also help to identify where the main delivery gaps are. The synergies analysis will examine:

- Alignment with Natural England's existing programmes and delivery priorities including the European and England Biodiversity 2020 Strategies, the Rural Development Programme, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Water Framework Directive;

- Synergies with the delivery priorities of our delivery partners including sister agencies and non-governmental organisations;
- Locally driven priorities and capacity;
- Other benefits, such as eco-system services or skills and capacity building potential.

Further information about existing policies, commitments, work programmes and delivery priorities through which IPENS can be delivered is in Annex 1.

Information from the prioritisation and synergies analyses will contribute to the update of the UK Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) as required by Article 8 of the Habitats Directive.

4.3 IPENS implementation plan

An implementation plan will be drawn up by Natural England, in close liaison with the Environment Agency. The Steering group will be consulted on this and we will also share with existing stakeholder groups such as the TBG.

The implementation plan will be based on the prioritisation and synergies analyses and will set out short (to 2020) and longer term (up to 25 year) priorities for delivery. It will acknowledge where existing programmes of work are expected to deliver for Natura 2000; set out where improved efficiency in delivery for Natura 2000 may be gained through better integration with existing programmes; and finally will identify new programmes of work needed to address actions for which there are currently no delivery options available.

This plan will be an integral part of the overall Protected Sites Programme which is being managed by Natural England. Partners' input is sought on the programme development and delivery to ensure that it is inclusive and that the solution to the issues is the responsibility of all. Governance of this programme is discussed below.

It is intended that the agreed priorities for delivery from IPENS will be embedded in the Corporate Plans for Natural England and the Environment Agency in the first instance. We will work closely with our partners to encourage this to be the case within their organisational planning too (see section 4.4).

The embedding of IPENS priority actions into Natural England local delivery plans is a fundamental way to ensure IPENS outcomes are incorporated in day-to-day management and improvements of sites. We will transfer SIP information to the Designated Sites System (CMSi) which informs the planning of local management action with partners, and tracks their delivery (this data migration exercise is due in 2016 and in the meantime, we will maintain the IPENS database). This will be important for Natural England as well as our delivery partners if we are to achieve the outcomes. A focus on outcomes will be critical here, with locally driven decision making supported by specialist advice and guidance.

4.4 Enabling implementation of actions through partnerships

Natural England and the Environment Agency are recorded as the two main delivery partners for the majority of SIP actions and the scale of work required is not achievable by these organisations alone. Implementing the measures required to improve Natura 2000 sites is a shared responsibility.

As shown in the SIPs and theme plans, there are many organisations and people involved. In delivering IPENS it has been made even clearer that there needs to be improved co-ordination across the organisations and individuals involved on site and at a policy level.

4.4.1 Natural England and the Environment Agency

Natural England and the Environment Agency will continue to join-up to meet multiple outcomes and our responsibilities for Protected Sites. The SIP and RBMP link will continue and will be updated to ensure actions are relevant, practical and achievable on the ground.

We will also join up on the prioritisation of IPENS implementation to embed priority actions into our delivery planning for the years to come.

4.4.2 Delivery organisations and representatives

Throughout the life of the IPENS Programme, we have been keeping in touch with the Major Landowners Group, the Marine Protected Areas Conservation Advisory Group and the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group. The members of these groups will be critical in achieving practical action on the ground at site level. We will continue this close liaison, working with these groups to enable the integration of actions identified through IPENS in relevant delivery programmes. To this end Natural England will include IPENS actions in our Designated Sites system which is used by delivery partners to inform their organisation planning. TBG and MLG and MPACAG will (be invited to?) biannually review how actions are embedded in delivery programmes. Progress reports will be submitted to the IPENS After Life Steering group.

We will promote and facilitate the equivalent conversations at local delivery level where needed, led by Natural England's Area teams. New partnerships may be required at a local and national level to support the implementation and take forward specific actions, particularly for new mechanisms such as Site Nitrogen Action Plans.

We will also continue our close liaison with the other countries of the UK in delivering priorities for our cross border sites and in agreeing priorities for funding through the Inter Agency Funding Group.

4.5 Development and implementation of new mechanisms and approaches

As discussed above, a wide range of mechanisms exist which can potentially deliver the priority actions. In some cases there are no mechanisms available and IPENS has proposed new approaches to address some of these as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2 New mechanisms and approaches

New mechanism or approach	Description	Leads for further development and implementation
Site Nitrogen Action Plans (SNAPs)	SNAPs will document the current status of the site in terms of nitrogen deposition and the attribution of this nitrogen to identify the most significant sources; the contribution of national and international measures to the deposition trends of the site; coordinated locally targeted measures to further reduce the deposition on the site; and habitat restoration and management measures that mitigate the impact of atmospheric nitrogen	Lead: Natural England Water & Pollution team

Strategic principles for invasive species	Four overarching principles are proposed: i) consider the wider environment around Natura 2000 sites; ii) apply the prevention, rapid response and control hierarchy; iii) Natura 2000 requirements inform prioritisation; and, iv) shift to a strategic, proactive approach. These aim to enhance the management of invasive species in the Natura 2000 network, whilst complementing the existing GB invasive non-native species strategy.	Lead: Natural England Ecological Networks team
Strategic framework for climate change	A national prioritisation exercise using the National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (NBCCVA), followed by site-level interpretation and detailed advice for the identification of climate change adaptation action.	Lead: Natural England Ecological networks team
Strategic framework for habitat fragmentation	A national prioritisation exercise using output from the NBCCVA model to identify which Natura 2000 sites are especially vulnerable to habitat fragmentation. This is accompanied by practical advice for the production of local 'connectivity plans'.	Lead: Natural England Ecological Networks team
Long term hydrological restoration plans for SAC terrestrial wetlands	Develop with partners a programme of local hydrological restoration plans that focus on achieving natural hydrological functioning as far as possible (for sites where this is relevant only). Comparable to the approach for river restoration.	Lead; Natural England Water & Pollution team

At this point, the resource requirements of these new mechanisms and strategies have not been calculated and this will be considered within the prioritisation and synergies work. Opportunities to pilot proposed mechanisms ahead of wider application will be sought with Natural England's Area Teams.

4.6 The implementation monitoring strategy – governance and administration

Monitoring of progress and co-ordination of the implementation will be required. The main governance to be put in place is via Natural England's Protected Sites Programme.

4.6.1 IPENS implementation project within Natural England's protected sites programme

The IPENS implementation project sits within Natural England's Protected Sites Programme. The IPENS element will be managed by Julie Erian who was part of the IPENS team. The Senior Responsible Officer for the Protected Sites Programme is Mike Smith who is also the Chair of the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group. Through this programme, we have close working relationships with stakeholders through with the Major Landowners Group and Terrestrial Biodiversity Group. The protected sites programme informs the planning for local delivery of actions on Protected Sites and the surrounding areas and IPENS implementation will be an integral part of this.

Natural England has a marine delivery programme, with national co-ordination and locally led delivery projects. The project officer will liaise with the Marine representatives of the AfterLIFE Steering group and also the marine team in Natural England to ensure actions and outcomes for the marine sites are taken forward within that programme.

4.6.2 Ownership of the theme plan actions

Each of the theme plans are to be owned by managers within Natural England, who together with relevant specialist staff will lead on their implementation according to the agreed priorities. Oversight and monitoring of the whole programme of theme plan implementation will be maintained by Natural England's Protected Sites team as an integral part of the overall IPENS implementation project.

4.6.3 Data management

Natural England records the condition of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest on the Designated Sites System, which is based on Conservation Management System (CMSi) software. Information on terrestrial Natura 2000 site condition can therefore be derived from the condition data for the SSSIs. The original protected sites database from which IPENS data was sourced, was called ENSIS but this was superseded by the Designated Sites System during the IPENS programme. The CMSi Designated Sites System is a new database for all designated sites information. Sites of Special Scientific Interest data has already been migrated from ENSIS to CMSi. Natura 2000 data will follow in 2016, including IPENS data. The threats data is already on CMSi.

Via this system it is envisaged that implementation of IPENS actions will be able to be tracked and monitored by Natural England and partners at the site level. In particular the system will facilitate monitoring of specific types of actions, for example Water Framework Directive related actions. The Environment Agency and other delivery partners also have access to the system.

4.6.4 Document management

SIPs will remain as live documents. They are published documents and stored on the Natural England publications catalogue, available to external and internal audiences.

It is likely that over time, some changes to the content of SIPs will be necessary, for example as a result of implementation of identified actions, new evidence, stakeholder comments, River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) consultation or legislative change.

Natural England Area teams are responsible for keeping SIP information up to date. Once SIP information has been transferred to the Designated Sites System updates can be made in that system when required, rather than the dedicated IPENS database. Area Teams have agreed to publish one new edition of each revised SIP a year (if this is needed as a result of new information). Area teams are already using the SIPs to look at priority actions for the year ahead on their Natura 2000 sites, particularly where they also deliver Biodiversity 2020 outcomes and targets.

Due to the Water Framework Directive requirement for public consultation of River Basin Management Plans, which ran to the end of March 2015, all the integrated SIPs have been open for greater scrutiny than those which are not integrated into RBMPs. Whilst the focus of the consultation has been on water related actions, some comments have been received on the integrated SIPs. These changes and others received from stakeholders will be picked up in the annual update of SIPs.

We are not planning to update the IPENS theme plans. The focus here will be on implementation of agreed priority actions and filling remaining evidence gaps. Actions will be taken forward as part of the relevant work programmes owned by managers within Natural England. Progress will be reported to the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group. The leads for the theme plans will ensure that priority actions are put in place.

4.6.5 The AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group

Membership of the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group is Natural England, the Environment Agency, the RSPB, the Woodland Trust, the River Restoration Trust, JNCC, Defra and the Marine Management Organisation. The Terms of Reference are to be agreed at the first AfterLIFE steering group meeting on 8 October 2015 and a draft copy is at Annex 2. This Steering group will oversee the implementation of the priority actions. The group will meet twice a year, firstly to agree the priority actions and the implementation plan and thence to monitor the implementation of the actions on the ground.

5. Our strategy for funding – filling the gap

Access to sufficient quantities of funding continues to be cited as one of the most significant issues hampering the environmental sector's ability to fully contribute towards the desired outcomes for biodiversity. The pressure to reduce public expenditure remains high, with ongoing pressures to Defra and the Arm's Length Bodies' budgets.

The traditional source of funding and the most popular one cited in IPENS SIPs is the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The RDPE was formally approved on Friday 13 February 2015 and it includes the Countryside Stewardship scheme, Countryside Productivity Scheme and Leader. It will invest £3.5 billion between now and 2020, including around £2.1 billion on existing environmental schemes and around £900 million on the new Countryside Stewardship scheme, to support rural businesses to improve the countryside environment. However, whilst RDPE does provide funding for protected sites, only a relatively small proportion of the overall budget is available for such, with the balance spent on delivery of wider biodiversity outcomes. Consequently, the lack of new money available for our protected sites remains a limiting factor to deliver real change.

In the context of these resource pressures, it is important to understand and be clear on:

- the priorities of what needs doing where and when on and around our protected sites;
- the current funding landscape and the subsequent gaps;
- the opportunities to look beyond the traditional funding streams;
- what partnerships and programmes and real join-up are needed to take this forward with the funders; and
- commitment of time and resources by all parties.

The IPENS programme has taken us forward in our understanding. The analysis of priorities and synergies being undertaken during the implementation period will enable us to:

- better match funding opportunities with delivery needs;
- provide greater clarity on the relative priority and use of existing funding streams such as Countryside Stewardship and Catchment Sensitive Farming for Natura 2000 actions;
- articulate a clearer set of priorities to funders across our protected sites in England;
- prioritise delivery partner efforts to increase funding;
- inform an update to the UK Prioritised Action Framework; and
- influence follow-up initiatives on England's Natura 2000 sites, including future LIFE funded Programmes to address the funding gap.

Led by Defra, there are initiatives to optimise the effectiveness of funding for biodiversity and increase the opportunities for alternative and innovative sources of funding:

- Getting the most value out of public sources of funding;

- Enhancing the understanding of all sectors contribution to biodiversity and biodiversity 2020 outcomes (financial and action);
- Developing and testing new and innovative resourcing/ delivery mechanisms;
- Increasing the sectors effectiveness in accessing funds through the development of a 'pipeline' for LIFE funding bids.

Part of this work is to improve the capability of the sector in developing LIFE and other projects, and coordinating efforts to develop Integrated Projects, the first of which is likely to focus on peatlands. Natural England is contributing funding expertise to this and also providing input from IPENS on the scale and themes for funding on Natura 2000 sites.

In the development of the SIPs, the IPENS programme has cautiously indicated that the scale of funding needed to improve the condition of Natura 2000 sites is £1.7 billion. This was a desk exercise and remains at a high level, for example proposals to apply for support under certain funding streams, both domestic and EU. None of the proposals come with a firm commitment at this stage, they are based on current knowledge of existing and potential funding streams.

There is more work needed now to translate this into site specific resource requirements and funding streams. This will only be possible as priority actions are agreed with landowners on the sites and when timings for these actions are agreed.

Nevertheless the outputs from IPENS (and also the Biodiversity 2020 delivery) will form key components of our approach to prioritising efforts to increase delivery resources.

Natural England's Biodiversity Delivery Review Programme has also highlighted some key habitats and species that are most likely to miss the Biodiversity 2020 target. IPENS findings will be utilised to inform a discussion on priority habitats and species to focus on future funding bids. These discussions will involve delivery partners.

In addition to the Defra led pipeline approach to LIFE funding, Natural England is looking at new and innovative ways of drawing in funds to support our Protected Sites through close partnership working in the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group. A significant partnership bid has been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a major programme work focussing on species at risk of extinction, some of which are Natura 2000 interest features..

6. The Natura 2000 Evidence Gap – next steps

Evidence gaps that IPENS has been unable to fund have been recorded in theme plans and individual SIPs. A collated list has been published and is available on the [Natural England Publications Catalogue](#).

A summary of the evidence gaps is below.

- A common message is that we (the environment sector) need to be able to articulate the residual evidence gap clearly, including what needs to be done, by when and by whom.
- The theme plans identify that a significant amount of more detailed investigation is required to better understand the condition of Natura 2000 sites and features issues and to inform action to be taken, not just in the SIPs but more widely.
- There is a large funding gap in the evidence area, so strong links will need to be made with any funding strategy for protected sites and to the Prioritised Action Framework.

- A common message is that there is a gap in our detailed knowledge of the location and extent of some Natura 2000 habitats and species within sites.
- With regards data, there is a gap on our database of which SPA features link to which units, which is being addressed, but was not available to inform IPENS work.
- All issue groups identify evidence gaps of some sort. Some issues such as river management and forestry and woodland management do not highlight any major gaps, whereas issues such as public access and disturbance and coastal management record numerous evidence gaps.
- Issues such as river management; forestry and woodland management; illegal and legal third party access; off-site issues; other habitat management tend to be more site-specific gaps, often tied in with identifying and understanding the impact on a site or feature and identifying and tailoring the management requirements. Lack of feature surveys for individual sites is a common evidence gap.
- The broader issues such as climate change; air pollution; invasives and disease; habitat fragmentation; development and infrastructure and public access and disturbance tend to have more strategic gaps.
- Climate change highlights a lack of sensitivity data across all Natura 2000 features, whereas air pollution highlights uncertainties around current knowledge and evidence. Horizon scanning is highlighted as a need for a couple of issues such as invasives and disease; and development and infrastructure. For development and infrastructure and public access and disturbance there appears to be a lack of evidence of cumulative impacts.
- There is also a clear need for some consolidation of existing evidence in order to review current status, identify remaining gaps and inform actions. There is also a gap in our knowledge of whether existing mitigation measures to address issues actually work.

Our plans to fill the gaps include:

- Making more specific links to the Natural England, Environment Agency and Defra evidence programmes.
- Making better use of Natural England's SSSI funding for evidence work (SACs are seen as a priority for this funding).
- Making links and joining up with our partners' evidence work.
- Aligning IPENS priorities to existing evidence projects such as Species Recovery Programme.

7. Filling the Capability gap

From the range of issues and actions recorded in the SIPs, it is clear that successful management of the Natura 2000 network relies in large part on the skills and capacity of staff in the environment sector as a whole.

Feedback from stakeholders is that positive condition change of protected sites features mainly occurs (in their experience) when there are experienced conservation officers working on a site.

In addition we have received comments that a barrier to progress is the somewhat limited degree to which expertise and knowledge are shared effectively across the sector.

As the implementation phase of IPENS begins it will be important to look at the staff resource and skills available and plan how any constraints can be addressed collectively as a sector.

Our focus on local delivery of outcomes in Natural England will help with this. This includes a new Field Unit of specialist ecologists who are contributing their capability and time to delivering Biodiversity 2020 across England. The IPENS findings will inform the priorities for this team. In addition we have a local delivery model which includes reducing the administrative burden for the advisers on the ground so that they are able to spend more time using their technical expertise.

8. AfterLIFE Communications Planning

The SIPs and theme plans suggest that improved communication is needed, both across Natural England and the Environment Agency and between all bodies involved. This includes being clear on the issues affecting the sites, the priorities for delivery to improve their condition and having a coherent and shared narrative on what are the priorities for funding. It will therefore be necessary to continue to build on the communications work IPENS has undertaken once the LIFE programme has completed.

8.1 Aims and objectives

Detailed communications planning will be undertaken by the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group (see below). However, we envisage that the objectives of this communications plan would include:

- Raising awareness of the Natura 2000 network, its importance and how it relates to our national biodiversity objectives and targets.
- Ensuring Natural England and Environment Agency staff and stakeholders are aware of the key findings, recommendations and products (e.g. Site Improvement Plans, theme plans, evidence etc) from the IPENS programme, how it relates to their work and the next steps.
- Securing ownership within Natural England and the Environment Agency for oversight of the AfterLIFE Implementation work in conjunction with the AfterLIFE Steering Group.
- Supporting partner commitment to the delivery of the prioritised actions arising from the Site Improvement Plans (SIPs), Theme Plans and AfterLIFE Plan.
- Making Natura 2000 evidence and good practice more widely and easily accessible.

8.2 Audience

The key audiences for the AfterLIFE communications will be the individuals / organisations that have a key role in helping to implement the prioritised actions. This will include:

- Staff within Natural England and the Environment Agency responsible for the delivery of protected sites and River Basin Management Plan work, for example.
- Partner organisations / groups such as members of the Major Landowners Group, the Marine Management Organisation, Defra.

In addition, there will need to be wider awareness raising of Natura 2000, the IPENS findings and next steps with a broader range of national and local stakeholders. This will include organisations and individuals that whilst not having a direct role in helping to implement the actions will have an interest in the work being undertaken.

A detailed stakeholder analysis will be led by the Natural England Protected Sites Programme and endorsed by the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group (see below).

8.3 Role of the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group in communications

The Steering Group will play a role in the assessment of the audiences/recipients of our communications and what role each party plays. This group will also play a role in looking at efficiencies in communications between the parties involved. We will utilise our three main stakeholder groups (the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group (Communications Sub Group) the Major Landowners Group and the Marine Protected Areas Conservation Advice Group) to help with improvements to communications nationally. Area Managers will be engaged to help improve the communications locally and between local and national bodies.

8.4 Disseminating evidence and good practice

Making evidence and good practice more widely and easily accessible is proposed in the SIPs and theme plans, including for some issues the development of national networks to share knowledge and expertise and to seek consensus on direction of travel. This approach is already in place for some issues (eg river restoration and invasive non-native species) but would be beneficial to address other issues such as lake management and public access disturbance. Again this will be taken forward with existing stakeholder groups.

8.5 Stakeholder engagement

As mentioned above communications and engagement with external audiences will be critical to success for IPENS implementation and to ensure this is successful a close relationship with Natural England's Terrestrial Biodiversity Group, Major Landowners Group and Marine Protected Areas Conservation Advice Group are planned. Other specific engagements are planned such as with the NFU on the prioritisation and implementation of the grazing theme plan actions. This will be mapped out as part of our implementation planning.

8.6 Communications tools

Apart from the existing groups and networks as mentioned above, there are specific tools which will support our communications about IPENS findings in the AfterLIFE Implementation phase. These include the on-going maintenance of the IPENS webpages, which will be the responsibility of the Natural England communications team.

In order to further promote IPENS findings and the actions needed, a series of webinars based around the theme plans will be run over the course of the next six months. The audience for these will be Natural England Area Teams, and will involve our relevant technical specialists.

We continue to write articles for relevant external publications including ENDS.

A range of options are available to promote and engage internal and external stakeholders in the IPENS implementation. The following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the options which will be considered in communications planning:

8.6.1 External

- Articles in specialist newsletters and journals. For example, Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process Newsletter, Spotlight (Sites of Special Scientific Interest newsletter), Biodiversity News, David Tyldesley associates journal, and other specialist newsletters.

- Press Releases.
- Social media.
- Workshops / events / meetings. Either hosting or attending.
- Targeted stakeholder meetings, detailed discussion groups and one-to-one discussions.
- Joining existing external networks or establishing new ones.
- Networking with other EU countries.

8.6.2 Internal

- Intranet news articles and features.
- Webinars.
- One-to-one and group discussions.
- 'Market stalls', discussion groups, and poster sessions at internal staff events.
- Articles in internal newsletters and bulletins.
- Briefings to Directors and Managers.
- Targeted meetings.
- Technical Information Exchange (Natural England's internal information sharing tool).

A draft AfterLIFE Implementation Communications Plan is included at annex 3. This will be discussed, developed and agreed by the AfterLIFE Steering Group.

9. SWOT

The insight gained from the IPENS programme has indicated a number of strengths and risks that need to be addressed in order to ensure successful and efficient implementation of IPENS findings. This has been formalised in the SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) presented below. Reference to this will help to inform IPENS implementation:

Table 3 SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Necessary structures put in place in establishment of NE Area Teams to support local delivery	Organisational focus on short term corporate planning, restricting ability to commit resources for future years
Local knowledge capital, experience and partnerships	Protected sites governance and data-information systems (CMSi) currently focus on SSSI and unit level.
Strong governance through the Protected Sites Programme in Natural England	Organisational resource challenges across the sector, and particularly in public body cuts and efficiencies
CMSi system contains structured site condition data informed by standard monitoring and enables tracking of measures for all sites with key delivery partners.	Funding gap
Area condition planning of SSSIs applies to the majority of Natura 2000 sites.	Evidence gap: the implementation of many identified actions requires further investigations as a first step.
Synergies between SSSIs and Natura 2000 sites in delivering Biodiversity 2020 targets,	Capability gap
Synergies with Water Framework Directive targets	Lack of capacity in single organisations
Support from national partnerships and delivery bodies such as through MLG and TBG	Lack of proactive, strategic action planning (corporate planning cycles in many organisations are short term and focus on reactive action)
Existing relationships such as EA, JNCC, RSPB, DIO, FC, NT, Moorland Association, NFU, CLA, Plantlife	Existing national delivery partnerships through MLG and TBG don't include some other partners that need to be involved in planning delivery. SIPS indicate over 650 organisations need to be involved, making coordination a challenge.
Scalability of IPENS recommendations to SSSIs	
Natural England constant presence and leadership	
Opportunities	Threats

Existing conservation status of the sites: most terrestrial Natura 2000 sites are in recovering condition	Lack of resource and programme budgets in delivery organisations (therefore lack of ability to deliver new programmes or to match fund).
Alignment of SSSI threats and Theme Plans	
Strong legislative framework for Natura 2000 sites help ensure achieved improvements are secured for the future.	Invasive non-native species and climate change are an ongoing threat to all our habitats and species
We now have a baseline of information across the whole Natura network, both in database format and easily accessible for each site in published Site Improvement Plans	Some key threats to biodiversity are driven by economic and social factors that influence land and natural resource management decisions.
Increased awareness of Natura 2000 needs with those involved in protected sites management	Other priorities ahead of national protected areas' which will compete for resources
Increased funding opportunities through the reformed EU funds	
New funding streams and partnerships work more closely together to draw in funds for the environment and manage it effectively.	
Evidence programmes in Natural England and other organisations could be an opportunity if we join up better to fill the gaps	

10. Summary of priority actions

Table 4 below outlines the priority actions for implementing the findings of the IPENS programme. The actions table should not be seen as a fully funded, committed-to implementation plan. It is aimed at informing the work programme of the IPENS Implementation Project and the AfterLIFE Steering Group, working with national and local delivery partner organisations. The detail of each action will need to be developed, agreed and appropriately resourced as the implementation project progresses.

Action no.	Action description	Timescale	Funding option	Lead body	Others involved
Planning and governance					
1	Undertake an exercise to prioritise the actions identified in the IPENS site and theme plans and analyse the synergies. Publish the results as Natura 2000 priorities.	2015 – 2016	Staff resource	Natural England / Environment Agency	AfterLIFE Steering Group, Terrestrial Biodiversity Group, Major Landowners Group, Marine Protected Areas Conservation Advisory Group
2	Develop and agree an Implementation Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify existing policies, programmes and other mechanisms which will deliver the priority actions ▪ Work with stakeholders to identify who can lead on the priority actions and who else needs to be involved 	2015 - 2016	Staff resource		
3	Embed the agreed priorities within NE and EA organisational delivery plans (local and national). Influencing planning cycles and alignment of resources with others where possible.	2015 – 2016 and onwards	Staff resource	Various	
4	Establish an AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group to monitor and oversee delivery of the Implementation Plan. Group to meet for at least two years.	2015	Staff resource	Natural England	
Funding					

Action no.	Action description	Timescale	Funding option	Lead body	Others involved
5	Update the England Prioritised Action Framework to reflect priority funding needs.	2015/ 2016	Staff resource	Natural England	
6	Feed into the Natural England External funding Strategy (Sept 2015) with priorities for funding on Natura 2000 sites and features. Link this to the Prioritised Action Framework.	September-December 2015 for 2016 funding priorities and updating of PAF		Natural England and Defra Terrestrial Biodiversity group	
7	Inform the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group (TBG) 'pipeline' of conservation projects to be submitted to external funding streams (such as LIFE, Heritage Lottery Fund) to ensure Natura 2000 objectives/requirements are considered	2015/2016	Staff resource	Terrestrial Biodiversity Group	AfterLIFE Steering Group
Developing our evidence base					
8	Ensure the IPENS evidence findings inform the Natural England, Environment Agency and Defra evidence programmes	2016		Natural England. Evidence programme	
9	Pilot (as appropriate) the new mechanisms and approaches identified in the IPENS theme plans	2015-2020		Natural England	
Enhancing capability					
10	Undertake a review of the Natura 2000 resource and skills currently available in the environmental sector and develop a plan to address any shortfall			Natural England Protected Sites Programme to lead,	
Data management					
11	Ensure successful migration of IPENS database into the Conservation Management System (CMSi).	2016		Natural England, Protected Sites Programme	

Action no.	Action description	Timescale	Funding option	Lead body	Others involved
12	Ensure that Natura 2000 data in CMSi is kept up-to-date so that it accurately reports against the actions in it and can be used to help monitor implementation	On-going	Staff resource	Natural England Area teams	Relevant local delivery partners
13	On an annual basis re-publish (on Natural England's publications catalogue) any Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) where there has been an update	On-going	Staff resource	Natural England Area Teams, supported by, Protected Sites Programme	
Communications					
14	<p>Develop a communications strategy to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ongoing awareness raising of Natura 2000 and the work that the AfterLIFE Steering Group and others are doing to implement the priority actions; and that ▪ Natura 2000 evidence and good practice is more widely and easily accessible. 		Staff resource	AfterLIFE Steering Group	

Annex 1

A1.1 Existing obligations, policies and commitments which support and align with the delivery of actions on Natura 2000.

There is a range of existing commitments, obligations and policies that support the management and restoration of the Natura 2000 network. We will identify where the Natura 2000 priorities align with their objectives and where the implementation of the Natura 2000 priorities may also help deliver these.

a) Biodiversity 2020 – A Strategy for England’s Wildlife and Ecosystem Services

Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services was published in 2011 after the publication of a new Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) that same year. Biodiversity 2020 is the successor strategy to the previous England Biodiversity Strategy and is one of the four devolved national strategies that collectively comprise the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework.

Biodiversity 2020 is led by Defra and delivered by Natural England, the Forestry Commission the Marine Management Organisation, the Environment Agency and non-government organisations including RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust, Buglife, and Butterfly Conservation. It sets out a long-term vision for England together with a mission it is seeking to deliver by 2020 through 4 key outcomes and a series of key actions as set-out below.

The vision for England and mission for 2020 is that “By 2050 our land and seas will be rich in wildlife, our biodiversity will be valued, conserved, restored, managed sustainably and be more resilient and able to adapt to change, providing essential services and delivering benefits for everyone.”

The four outcomes set out in Biodiversity 2020 are as follows:

- **Outcome 1 - Habitats and ecosystems on land** (including freshwater environments)

By 2020 we will have put in place measures so that biodiversity is maintained and enhanced, further degradation has been halted and where possible, restoration is underway, helping deliver more resilient and coherent ecological networks, healthy and well-functioning ecosystems, which deliver multiple benefits for wildlife and people.

- **Outcome 2 - Marine habitats, ecosystems and fisheries.**

By 2020 we will have put in place measures so that biodiversity is maintained, further degradation has been halted and where possible, restoration is underway, helping deliver good environmental status and our vision of clean, healthy, safe productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

- **Outcome 3 – Species**

By 2020, we will see an overall improvement in the status of our wildlife and will have prevented further human-induced extinctions of known threatened species.

■ Outcome 4 –People

By 2020, significantly more people will be engaged in biodiversity issues, aware of its value and taking positive action.

b) The EU Water Framework Directive (WFD)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) provides the main framework for managing the water environment throughout Europe. Under the WFD a management plan must be developed for each river basin district. Since the current River Basin Management Plans were published, new information has emerged on risks or impacts to Natura 2000 sites and some new measures have been identified which are being included in the update to the plans.

A key WFD deadline is Dec 2015. By this date the UK government will need to have established a framework for the protection of all surface waters and groundwater with the aim to reach good status in all waters. An analysis of IPENS priority actions for watery Natura 2000 sites will help to ensure that WFD targets are met where possible.

c) The EU Biodiversity Strategy

The EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy includes six targets and 20 actions. Two of the targets make specific mention to species and habitats conservation status, i.e. Target 1 which addresses nature conservation objectives through proper implementation of the Nature Directives (seeking to achieve measurable improvements to the conservation status by 2020) and Target 3 which aims at increasing the contribution of agriculture and forestry to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. Target 2 also has a relation to Natura 2000 as it aims to restore 15% of degraded ecosystems, and achieving Favourable Conservation Status is likely to contribute to that target. In the prioritisation and synergies work we will assess which actions are likely to contribute most to achieving the targets of the EU Biodiversity 2020 strategy.

d) The Conservation Objectives Review

High level Conservation Objectives (COs) for the SACs and SPAs have been published in order to meet with the legal requirements of the Habitats Regulations. To support their use with more detailed information, Natural England has committed to producing further **supplementary advice** to help developers and competent authorities scope, screen and assess their plans or projects under the Habitats Regulations.

The revised Conservation Objectives will provide the necessary framework for the implementation of IPENS and the achievement of target conservation status on our Natura 2000 sites, a more consistent basis for the advice we provide to other regulators and our own decision-making on SACs and SPAs. Provision of supplementary advice for these COs is due to be completed by December 2016.

Some of the strategic IPENS findings around improved governance and management arrangements for Natura 2000 sites are likely to align with the work on conservation objectives review (e.g. conflicting objectives, flexibility of designations)

e) The UK Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) and the Offshore PAF

The PAFs set for each country our funding needs and priorities for Natura 2000 sites, currently for the financing period 2014-2020. This will help the European commission to direct their funding for biodiversity and nature. We will need to agree our priorities to inform an update of the PAFs by the end of December 2015. IPENS findings are a key consideration in this prioritisation.

A1.2 Existing programmes which help deliver action on the Natura 2000 network and the areas surrounding them

There are several key programmes in Natural England which deliver the policies mentioned above and which will deliver the priority actions from IPENS. These programmes are within our Corporate Plan and have key performance indicators attached to them. The Protected Sites Programme manager will lead an exercise to embed IPENS priority actions into the planning for the years ahead. This is also where we will look for alignment with other priority programme delivery.

a) The Biodiversity 2020 Programme

Defra and Natural England have established a programme to deliver the outcomes for Biodiversity 2020, working with the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group, Major Landowners Group, Species Technical Advisory Group and the Marine Protected Areas Conservation Advice Group. It is our mission to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people. Although the targets do not specifically mention Natura 2000 sites, the contribution of this series is recognised and implicit within the outcomes.

Outcome 1 delivery:

1A. Better wildlife habitats with 90% of priority habitats in favourable or recovering condition and at least 50% of SSSIs in favourable condition, while maintaining at least 95% in favourable or recovering condition;

1B. More, bigger and less fragmented areas for wildlife, with no net loss of priority habitat and an increase in the overall extent of priority habitats by at least 200,000 ha

1C. By 2020, at least 17% of land and inland water, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, conserved through effective, integrated and joined up approaches to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services including through management of our existing systems of protected areas and the establishment of nature improvement areas.

1D. Restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems as a contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Outcome 2 delivery:

2A. By the end of 2016 in excess of 25% of English waters will be contained in a well-managed Marine Protected Area network that helps deliver ecological coherence by conserving representative marine habitats;

2B. By 2020 we will be managing and harvesting fish sustainably;

2C. By 2022 we will have marine plans in place covering the whole of England's marine area, ensuring the sustainable development of our seas, integrating economic growth, social need and ecosystem management

Outcome 3 delivery:

Our species work revolves around a Species Recovery Programme and is currently focused on a major funding bid led by Natural England in partnership with others such as the RSPB and Plantlife, for some of the most vulnerable species and associated habitats.

There is also close alignment between the Biodiversity 2020 Programme 'threats' and IPENS theme plans. Theme Plans identify solutions to address these threats across England's Natura 2000 sites using a thematic, rather than a site-by-site approach. Solutions may then be customised and applied to a particular site as appropriate. This new approach to finding solutions will, through addressing risks on Natura 2000 sites, also reduce the risks to achieving

the Biodiversity 2020 outcomes. It also presents an opportunity to understand how this approach and the plans/solutions can be used across the wider SSSI network.

Our partnership working and communications work will also support enhanced awareness in biodiversity issues, as articulated in outcome 4.

b) Natural England's Water Programme

There are various relevant strands to the water programme which have been informed by and will support delivery of IPENS findings.

IPENS findings have not only increased our knowledge of the condition of the Natura 2000 Sites, but they also clarify the priority actions needed to move water dependent Natura 2000 Sites towards meeting their conservation objectives.

From now on, where possible, water related Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives will be harmonised, enabling SIPs to be used as supporting information for Natura 2000 sites to accompany the River Basin Management Plans for 2015 -2021. Over this period it is envisaged they will be used by Environment Agency and Natural England to guide the planning and delivery of appropriate WFD related measures.

Information within SIPs for issues which require medium to long term action will continue to be useful in informing the next cycle of RBMPs (RBMP3) which are due to run from 2021 to 2027.

SIPs also provide a link to the detail of certain riverine objectives which have been negotiated locally following changes to UK Common Standards. The additional clarity this will provide will be beneficial for Water Framework Directive (WFD) purposes.

The Water Framework Directive delivery includes a Catchment Based Approach to outcome delivery. Catchment Partnerships set up to deliver joint outcomes in river catchments, provide a valuable forum for exploring evidence with local communities and identifying synergies between Natura 2000 outcomes and other stakeholder objectives. This can also help identify innovative approaches and funding mechanisms to help tackle diffuse water pollution for example.

Work on WFD delivery has been captured within Natural England and Environment Agency delivery plans for 2015/16, particularly:

- Prioritising and re-focussing efforts on progressing remedies on water dependent Natura sites.
- Continuing to review and implement Diffuse Water Pollution Plans and Nutrient Management Plans, prioritising Natura sites.
- Implementing other water related remedies and plans for Natura sites e.g. Water Level Management Plans, River Restoration Plans, Lake Restoration Plans, non-native species actions. (including making the links to Countryside Stewardship agreements).

The Environment Agency and Natural England have agreed that further prioritisation and phasing of delivery will be needed to ensure that implementation is practical and achievable, is meeting relevant targets and importantly we can join up to meet multiple outcomes. This work will be included in the prioritisation and synergies part of the After Life implementation. Conversations have already begun and on-going monitoring of the effectiveness of this will be carried out by the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group.

c) The Uplands Delivery Programme

This programme aims to deliver improvements in the English Uplands, which covers a large area of SACs. At a national level, Natural England is working to define Favourable Conservation Status and provide supporting advice

to aid delivery and at a local level we are working closely with uplands stakeholders to build consensus and build long term delivery plans. The IPENS SIPs and theme plans are informing these decisions and action planning directly.

d) Delivering the Marine Strategy Framework Directive

Defra is currently consulting on their proposals for a Programme of measures to deliver Good Environmental Status (GES) for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Defra 2015).

IPENS will contribute to the delivery of GES for a number of descriptors including marine mammals and non-natives. IPENS findings will also contribute to the protection of birds through improvements to SPA management.

e) Reviewing the UK PAF

The IPENS Programme was specifically developed to inform the UK Prioritised Action Framework, especially the England section. Natural England is working with Defra and the other country agencies of the UK, to complete a review and revision to the UK PAF by the end of 2015.

As a direct result of IPENS, the updated PAF will:

- Articulate strategic conservation priorities for the Natura series in England and the areas around them.
- Incorporate a more coherent evidence base for our Natura sites.
- Act as a planning tool to document the various means through which we will manage the Natura 2000 series in England and how these activities are or might be funded through the various regional, national and EU mechanisms.
- Include a more accurate estimate of the financial needs for the management of the Natura 2000 series in England.
- Align with the PAFs of the other countries of the UK, especially Wales, with whom Natural England has worked closely. This in turn will lead to collaboration on the update to the UK PAF.
- Signal some of our priorities for future EU funding, including LIFE.

A1.3 Existing mechanisms which will help to deliver IPENS priority actions.

a) Agri Environment Schemes

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Pillar 2 schemes (administered in England by Natural England) have been and will continue to be a primary mechanism for delivering the desired outcomes and priority actions on and around our protected sites.

For example, 23% of Environmental Stewardship, Higher Level Scheme annual spend is on protected sites. Protected sites land (Natura 2000 and SSSIs) makes up approximately 43% of the land covered by the HLS scheme.

There is an operational policy expectation (in Natural England) that the new Countryside Stewardship scheme Higher Tier will be offered to support SSSIs and Natura 2000 sites. Indeed, Natural England's proactive support will be available for applications including these protected sites.

The total spend under the current seven year programme for environmental measures is £2.99 bn. We will have c£3.1 billion in the future seven year programme.

Explicit references to SSSIs and Natura 2000 sites are made in the targeting statements for the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

The findings and priority actions identified in IPENS will help in the assessment of applications and also support the land managers and stakeholders as they put together proposals for Countryside Stewardship agreements on Natura 2000 sites and their underpinning SSSIs.

b) Remedies and Condition Threats

Remedies are the tasks that need to be undertaken to move a site towards unfavourable recovering / favourable condition. Condition threats are the mechanism whereby favourable and unfavourable recovering condition is maintained, by addressing threats that would cause the condition of an SSSI to decline. It is also the mechanism to record planned actions to move a SSSI from unfavourable recovering into favourable condition.

This assessment work and the programme of remedies for SSSIs are key elements of Natural England's local delivery planning and action for English protected sites. IPENS SIP actions will be an integral part of this.

As all terrestrial Natura 2000 sites are underpinned by SSSIs, this is an important mechanism to deliver for Natura 2000.

The remedies work focusses on biodiversity 2020 targets and this this programme will contribute to the restoration and favourable condition of Natura 2000 sites and features.

The prioritisation exercise will look in detail at how this programme aligns with the priorities coming out of IPENS and where there is scope for optimisation in the fine-tuning of delivery.

Currently, the Water Framework Directive remedies on Natura 2000 sites have been given particular priority and IPENS findings will inform this work directly.

Annex 2 Draft Terms of Reference of the IPENS AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group

Role & Responsibilities

After 30 June 2015 the delivery of the recommended actions will fall to Natural England's area teams and our relevant partners. This will be co-ordinated by the Terrestrial Biodiversity team in Natural England, in liaison with the Marine team.

The first action will be a prioritisation of which sites and actions will be tackled and by when, as there is neither sufficient time or funding to achieve every action. This work will have begun before the programme closes and will tie in to the detailed delivery review work being undertaken across England by the area teams.

Relevant partnerships will need to be set up to achieve this and in addition appropriate resource (time and funds). Again, a call to action with our key partners will have begun before programme closure.

Area teams will be encouraged to do this collaboratively so that synergies may be found across areas, across borders and across multiple sites and also in the partnerships that are set up.

The After Life Steering Group will provide a strategic overview of the implementation phases of IPENS, helping support the implementation of the programme findings by contributing knowledge, understanding and information.

The Steering Group has a role in tracking general progress of the implementation and assisting with the promotion of the benefits.

The Steering Group will:

- critically assess and agree implementation priorities
- oversee management of the implementation, (according to the agreed priorities), and identify and manage risks and issues
- identify dependencies and contribute to their management (for example the links with Article 17 Reporting and achieving Favourable Conservation Status; and identifying cross border synergies where collaboration needs to be focussed)
- help ensure the implementation is well coordinated and communicated in NE and within other organisations and relevant groups, internationally, nationally and locally, supporting the Implementation lead within the NE Biodiversity Delivery Team.
- evaluate progress and outcomes

Individual members of the Group will:

- represent the interests of their organisation / function
- share ideas and put forward suggestions that will enable successful implementation of the programme within agreed timescales
- provide advice relating to areas of their particular expertise

- feedback to their organisation / function/ other relevant groups the decisions and progress made
- provide help, support and advice to Natural England, especially the Protected Sites Management team (via Julie Erian and Mike Smith) and within protected sites leads in their own organisation.
- help promote the IPENS implementation within their organisations and with external stakeholders and where possible seek out relevant external funding sources
- bring to the Group their knowledge and understanding of Natura 2000 site management and the associated threats.
- Any issues that the Steering Group is unable to resolve will be escalated to the Biodiversity 2020 Programme Board via the Director of Biodiversity Delivery, Natural England

Membership

Defra	Heeran Buhecha, Andy Tully
Environment Agency	Richard Handley and Steve Peters
Natural England	Protected Sites SRO – Mike Smith (Chair) Habitats Regulations and EU expert – Christina Cork Area team representation x2 (tbc) Julie Erian, Project Manager, IPENS Implementation Project Wilbert Van Vliet – Senior Adviser, Prioritised Action Framework and Favourable Conservation Status Rachel Williams – Marine Biodiversity
RSPB	Alice Groom
MMO	Michael Coyle
JNCC	Alexandra Cunha
Woodland Trust	Ann Rooney
River Restoration Trust	Martin Janes
Local Nature Partnerships	Sarah Bentley (Staffordshire)

Annex 3 AfterLIFE Implementation Communications Plan

Title	Improvement Programme for England’s Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) implementation Communications Plan
Owner/Version/Date	Owner Julie Erian. Version1.0, Date: July 2015

1. Background

- 1.1 The Improvement Programme for England’s Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) was a new strategic approach to managing England’s Natura 2000 sites. It enabled Natural England, the Environment Agency, and other key partners to plan what, how, where and when they will need to target their efforts on Natura 2000 sites and the areas surrounding them.
- 1.2 The three year programme, which finished in June 2015, was supported by the European Union LIFE+ Nature fund. Its aim was to identify the programme of work needed to improve or maintain (where they are already in a good state) the condition of England’s Natura 2000 sites.
- 1.3 The IPENS programme developed:
 - A **Site Improvement Plan (SIP)** covering every Natura 2000 site in England.
 - **Theme plans** to address issues that are common across many sites (e.g. invasive species).
 - **Evidence reports** that help fill gaps in our knowledge about Natura 2000 sites.
 - An **AfterLIFE Implementation Plan** which outlines the future management of England’s Natura 2000 sites.
- 1.4 Collation and analysis of all the findings from the 267 SIPs, 11 theme plans and 54 evidence projects was undertaken at the end of the programme. The findings from this analysis, and an overview of the programme methodology, are presented in a [programme report](#) and a short [non-technical summary report](#). These reports were launched at the IPENS [final event](#) and through a [press release](#).
- 1.5 Following the completion of the IPENS LIFE programme the work has moved into the next phase: IPENS implementation. This work is guided by the IPENS AfterLIFE Implementation plan which sets out how conservation activities are planned to continue and to develop after the end of the IPENS Programme, and how the outcomes will be assured in the longer-term management of the Natura 2000 series. The following individuals/groups have been appointed/established to oversee this work:
 - Julie Erian, who worked on the IPENS LIFE programme; will be project manager for IPENS implementation.
 - Mike Smith, who is senior responsible officer for the Natural England Protected Sites Programme and Chair of the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group.
 - An AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group involving representatives from government, the conservation sector and other organisations that manage Natura 2000 sites.

<p>2. Aim</p>
<p>This Communications Plan aims to support the delivery of the IPENS AfterLIFE implementation plan and its goal that...</p> <p>Natural England and partners have a shared understanding of the desired outcomes for England’s Natura 2000 sites; the associated priorities for delivery and their respective roles in taking the outcomes of IPENS forward.]</p> <p>The Plan provides the work programme for IPENS implementation with clearly identified communication messages, and identifies who we need to communicate these to, when and how.</p>
<p>3. Objectives</p>
<p>The interim objectives of the plan are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Raise awareness of the Natura 2000 network, its importance and how it relates to our national biodiversity objectives and targets. ▪ Make Natura 2000 evidence and good practice more widely and easily accessible. ▪ Continue to raise awareness of the key findings, recommendations and products (e.g. Site Improvement Plans, theme plans, evidence etc.) from the IPENS LIFE programme, and share good practice and experience of running LIFE projects. ▪ Raise awareness of the IPENS implementation work with stakeholders and Natural England and Environment Agency staff, and ensure they understand how it relates to their existing work programmes, and how they can engage with the work. ▪ Engage stakeholders and Natural England and Environment Agency staff in helping to shape, inform and deliver the IPENS implementation. ▪ Manage expectations about what the implementation programme will tackle. ▪ Enable those involved in the implementation to be able to clearly communicate about the work, how it relates to other programmes, and the role of the AfterLIFE Steering Group. <p>These objectives will need to be discussed, refined and agreed with the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group.</p>
<p>4. Resources</p>
<p>Staff resources will be required to deliver the IPENS implementation communications work. This will include staff time from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IPENS implementation project officer; ▪ Members of the AfterLIFE Steering Group; and ▪ Natural England’s Terrestrial Biodiversity Information Services team and internal and external communications teams.
<p>5. Strategy</p>
<p>Communications and engagement with external and internal audiences will be critical to the success of IPENS implementation. To ensure this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group will need to play a key role in identifying and reviewing the communications requirements for the implementation work. ▪ There will need to be a close relationship with the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group, Major Landowners

Group and Marine Protected Areas Conservation Advice Group.

The latter includes ensuring the communication plans are complementary and wherever possible coordinating communications to maximise efficiency/resources but also clarity and context of message (i.e. individuals will be able to understand how the IPENS implementation work fits into the broader protected sites programme, national biodiversity objectives etc.).

The broad strategy for the communications work includes:

- **Early and inclusive engagement** – with key stakeholders who can help shape and inform the planning and delivery of the implementation programme.
- **Ongoing dialogue** – continued dialogue with delivery partners and national stakeholders throughout the programme. Through this approach we hope to minimise the risk of disagreements occurring.
- **Sharing best practice and disseminating results** – both within Natural England and the Environment Agency and externally with stakeholders and other interested parties.

6. Target Audience(s)

The target audiences for the IPENS implementation communications can be divided into various broad groups:

- **National stakeholders** – wider interest in some or all of the issues affecting *Natura 2000* sites and the work to address them. This includes, for example, the AfterLIFE Steering Group itself, the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group, Major Landowners Group and Marine Protected Areas Conservation Advice Group. In addition, funding groups and organisations will have an interest, such as the Natural Environment Funders Group, which is co-ordinating the review of the UK Prioritised Action Framework.
- **Delivery partners** (e.g. RSPB, Forestry Commission, local authorities) – responsible for the delivery of specific actions on *Natura 2000* sites (for marine site these are the relevant and competent authorities). We would expect these organisations to be involved in the translation of SIPs into action on the ground where they have a responsibility for delivery of actions.
- **Local stakeholders** (e.g. Estuary partnerships) – individuals/groups with an interest in the management of the site, but no direct delivery responsibility. We would expect these organisations to be involved in the delivery of SIPs where they have an interest.
- **Individual owner/occupiers** – involved in the more detailed translation of the SIPs into actions on the ground, for example through agri-environment agreements.
- **Staff within Natural England and the Environment Agency** – who have role in helping to deliver the IPENS implementation plan through their protected sites and river basin management plan work, for example.

These groups are not mutually exclusive, and some organisations may be delivery partners for some sites/issues and local or national stakeholders for others. For example, the RSPB would be a delivery partner for the sites they own/manage and a national stakeholder involved in the AfterLIFE Steering Group which has a role in overseeing work across a wide range of issues/sites etc.

A more detailed stakeholder analysis will be led by the Natural England Protected Sites Programme and endorsed by the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group.

7. Messages

The 'high-level' key messages for the IPENS LIFE programme and implementation work are outlined below; these will need tailoring to specific audiences. The IPENS implementation key messages will need to be discussed, refined and agreed by the AfterLIFE Steering Group.

IPENS LIFE programme

- IPENS provides a much better understanding and new evidence of the issues affecting England's Natura 2000 sites and what needs to be done to address these issues at an individual site level and where required, for the whole network. This is the first time that this information will have been drawn together for all of England's Natura 2000 sites.
- A Site Improvement Plan (SIP) has been produced covering every Natura 2000 site in England. The SIP outlines what is required to achieve and maintain sites in a good condition.
- Virtually every Natura 2000 sites is affected by at least one issue, with air pollution and invasive species and disease (including deer) affecting most sites. Collectively the SIPs propose over 3000 actions to tackle the issues affecting England's Natura 2000 sites.
- Around half of the SIP actions include an initial cost estimate. This comes to £800m with river management, water pollution and hydrological functioning being the mostly costly to tackle.
- IPENS has helped plug gaps in our Natura 2000 knowledge but many still remain. The areas of greatest research need are: invasive species and disease; public access and disturbance; water pollution; natural or unexplained change; and air pollution.
- England's conservation sector will need to look for additional and innovative ways to fund the future management of Natura 2000 sites, as current funding mechanisms will not be sufficient to fund all the work identified by IPENS.
- IPENS has made recommendations for the actions required to improve the condition of our Natura 2000 sites. A high degree of partnership working will be needed to implement these recommendations. A Steering Group including representatives from government, the conservation sector and other organisations that manage Natura 2000 sites will coordinate future work.

IPENS implementation

- No single organisation can deliver the outcomes for the Natura 2000 series and the surrounding areas.
- We may not be able to deliver all of the actions recorded in IPENS, but we will prioritise the actions and do our best to improve the Natura 2000 series and deliver outcomes for the natural environment.
- We need to work together to deliver priority actions for our joint outcomes.
- We need to work together to seek out resources and funding sources to support this work.
- The data and information collected during IPENS through the SIPs will be owned by the relevant area based teams in Natural England and used to inform their delivery planning.
- SIPs are live documents and will be kept up to date using an agreed process in Natural England.
- Delivery on Natura 2000 sites as a result of IPENS, will be embedded in the work programmes of Natural

England and the Environment Agency, in partnership with our delivery partners.

- Theme plans and their actions will be embedded in relevant programmes across Natural England, such as the Water Programme for the Diffuse Water Pollution Plan. This will be overseen by the Project Manager and the AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group.

8. Action

A broad programme of action will be required in order to engage, and raise awareness with internal and external stakeholders. This programme could include the following the balance of which would need to be discussed and agreed by the AfterLIFE Steering Group:

- Awareness raising and dissemination
- Partnership working
- Networking
- Guidance and training

9. How we will do it. (Mechanisms for delivery)

A range of options are available to promote and engage internal and external stakeholders in the IPENS implementation. The following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the options which will be considered in communications planning:

External:

- Articles in specialist newsletters and journals. For example, Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process Newsletter, Spotlight (Sites of Special Scientific Interest newsletter), Biodiversity News, and other specialist newsletters.
- Updating IPENS gov.uk page (e.g. when the new Prioritised Action Framework has been published).
- Press Releases (e.g. when we have been successful in securing external funding e.g. LIFE for Natura 2000 sites).
- Social media.
- Workshops / events / meetings. Either hosting or attending.
- Targeted stakeholder meetings, detailed discussion groups and one-to-one discussions.
- Joining existing external networks or establishing new ones.
- Networking with other EU countries.

Internal:

- Intranet news articles and features.
- Webinars.
- One-to-one and group discussions.
- Workshops.
- 'Market stalls', discussion groups, and poster sessions at internal staff events.
- Articles in internal newsletters and bulletins.
- Briefings to Directors, Managers and relevant networks (e.g. protected sites network).
- Targeted meetings.
- Technical Information Exchange (Natural England's internal information sharing tool).

10. Timetable

An interim timetable is outlined below. The AfterLIFE Implementation Steering Group, as part of its communications planning, will need to develop this further.

Comms objective	Target audience	When	How
Ensure Biodiversity 2020 funding priorities are informed by IPENS findings	Terrestrial Biodiversity Group (TBG) / Major Landowners Group (MLG)	July 2015	Presentation at Biodiversity 2020 funding priorities workshop
Engage relevant staff in shaping the IPENS prioritisation	National specialists	August 2015	Webinars
Raise awareness of IPENS findings and the implementation programme with protected sites network	Area Teams in Natural England initially	September 2015	Agenda slot on protected sites network meeting
Informing Natural England's corporate planning for 2016/17	Natural England's Corporate Planning team with endorsement from the Senior Leadership Team	October 2015	Engaging in the corporate planning process
Embed IPENS SIP guidance and other tools developed (e.g. mechanisms directory) into day-to-day protected sites work	Natural England national and area teams	November 2015	Project Manager is a part of the Protected Sites Programme governance
Ensure Natura 2000 evidence needs are recognised with Natural England's, Environment Agency's and Defra's evidence teams	Respective Evidence Directors	likely to be early 2016	Project Manager to liaise with Evidence team in Natural England initially
Ensure latest PAF is publicly available	Natural Environment Funders Group, Defra	Mid 2016	Update IPENS gov.uk webpage

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