



Research Information Note

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A practical toolkit for assessing cumulative effects of spatial plans and development projects on biodiversity in England

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Introduction

'Going, going, gone? The cumulative impact of land development on biodiversity in England' (English Nature, 2005) highlighted the risk of significant cumulative effects of land development on biodiversity in England. However, it was not possible, based on the evidence available, to determine if the cumulative weight of planned or desired development in England is sustainable, or if it is likely to prevent recovery of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and resilience to sustainable levels. To convince decision-makers that the cumulative effects of a spatial plan or development project on biodiversity are significant, or otherwise, it will be essential to prepare a robust case.

What was done

English Nature commissioned Land Use Consultants:

- to develop a basic toolkit to enable cumulative impacts to be identified, evaluated, and presented to decision-makers;
- to undertake a thorough explanation and evaluation of relevant tools and methodologies which are currently available, and which can be used in the process; and
- to undertake an evaluation of additional sources of evidence.

Results and conclusions

The study resulted in a practical toolkit for revealing and evaluating cumulative effects of development plans on biodiversity. The toolkit is structured into 5 sections, with the first two setting the context for the study and exploring general background to cumulative effects assessment. Two core sections are in effect stand-alone guides to cumulative effects assessment, the first intended for use with Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks, the second for use in assessing individual development projects. The final section provides pointers to further possible development of the toolkit and an overview of available cumulative assessment methodologies.

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Key messages from the study were:

- Consideration of cumulative effects should be an integral part of the environmental assessment conducted in preparing spatial plans and in designing, constructing and operating developments and should be taken into account from the very earliest stage in these processes.
- An ecosystem-based approach, ecosystem resilience, environmental capacity and environmental limits, should be adopted when considering cumulative effects of development.
- The precautionary principle should be applied where there is uncertainty about cumulative effects.
- The assessment of cumulative effects should consider both positive and adverse effects, and requires a long-term view. Global, national, regional and local concerns all need to be taken into account.

English Nature's viewpoint

This toolkit presents practical guidance on how to carry out an assessment of the likely cumulative effects on biodiversity of spatial plans and development projects as a part of an overall environmental assessment influencing the preparation of these plans and projects.

The toolkit is designed primarily to assist English Nature staff in responding to consultations from Regional Planning Bodies and Local Planning Authorities. However, Planning Authorities and developers may also find it useful in ensure that the likely cumulative effects of their spatial plans and development projects are considered from the very earliest stages of plan preparation and development design. It also gives Planning Authorities and developers insight into English Nature's expectations with respect to identification, examination and reporting of likely cumulative effects of plans and projects.

Selected references

ANON 2005. *Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents* Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES, ENGLISH NATURE, ENVIRONMENT AGENCY, ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS 2004. *Strategic Environmental Assessment and Biodiversity: Guidance for Practitioners*

ENGLISH NATURE 2005. Going, going, gone? The cumulative effects of land development on biodiversity in England *English Nature Research Reports*, No. 626

Further information

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