

Name of Exercise: Stakeholder Dialogue in Local Environment Agency Plans

Location: Surrey and Hampshire, UK

Participation Exercise under which Article? *Article 7*

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To involve all key stakeholders in the process of producing Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs).

Background:

Between March 1998 and March 1999, the South East Area office of the Environment Agency's Thames Region, piloted the use of stakeholder dialogue as part of the process of producing Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs). The term 'stakeholder dialogue' refers to a process in which people work together to overcome shared concerns. It is carefully managed to ensure a balance is reached to meet different stakeholder's needs and expectations.

The British Government encourages the Environment Agency to collaborate with other organisations in order to work towards shared objectives regarding management of the environment. Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs) are one of the Agency's main tools with which to achieve this objective by:

- focusing all attention on the environment of a specific area;
- involving all interested parties and the local community in planning for the future of the area;
- agreeing a vision for the area which guides the Agency's activities over a 10-20 year period; and
- establishing an integrated plan of action for managing the local environment over a five year period.

The LEAP Process

This is an ongoing process involving several stages. In general, the method and degree of informal and formal consultation varies according to what is appropriate for the local area and the lessons learnt from previous consultation exercises. Figure 1 shows the standard LEAP process and traditional consultation at the time of the River Wey LEAP (Phases 1 to 3).

The underlying theme of the LEAP process is the partnership approach. It is recognised that the Agency cannot work on its own to manage the environment effectively and joint action with consultees is essential to address environmental issues.

In the South East Area of the Thames Region, LEAP Consultees are usually divided into 'Primary' and 'Secondary'. Primary consultees include local authorities, statutory bodies, potential partner organisations, members of the Agency's Area Environment Group, and locally significant interest groups. Other organisations generally interested in commenting on LEAPs are classified as Secondary. Typically, there are about 20-40 Primary and 200-400 Secondary consultees, depending on the size and characteristics of the LEAP area.

LEAP Officers had 3 main concerns about the traditional approach to consultation:

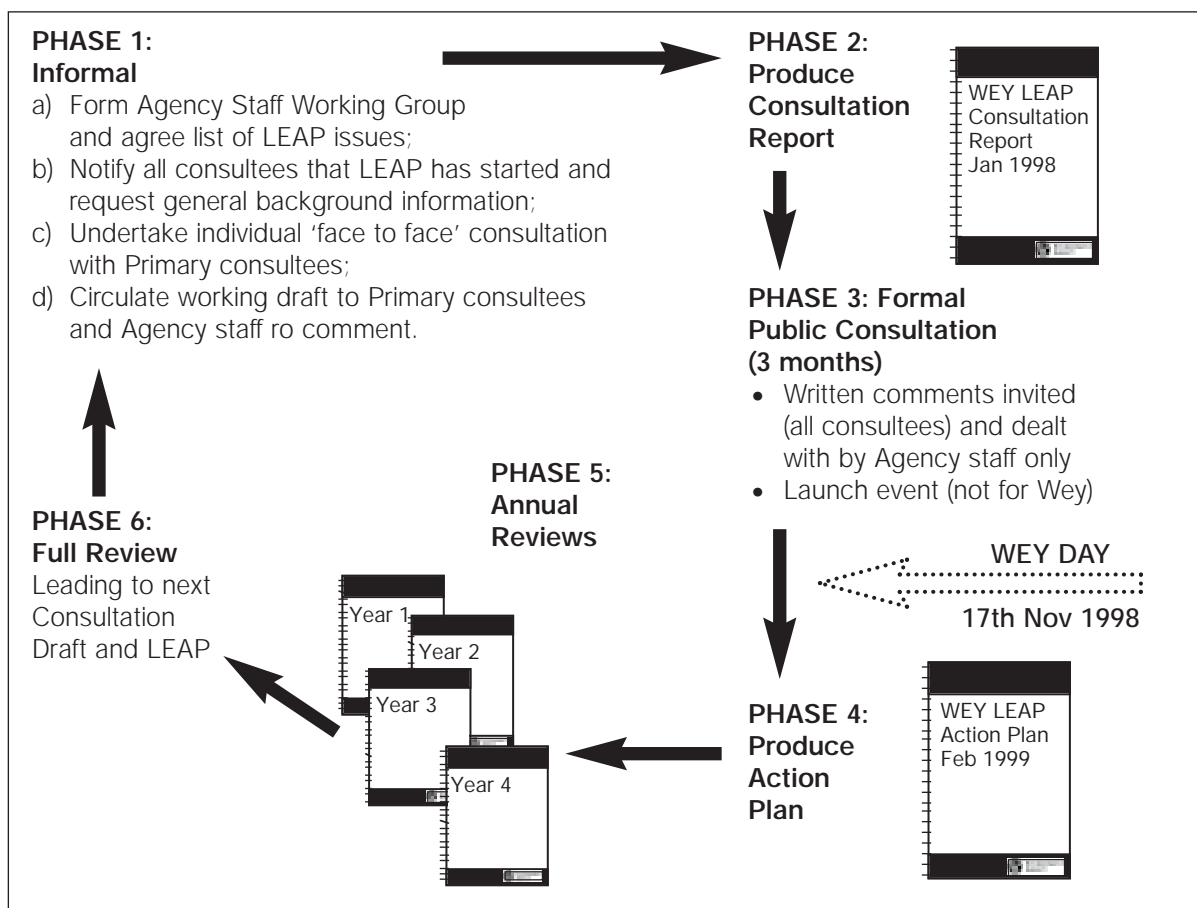
1. The use of written consultation exercises and one-to-one meetings meant that the LEAP Officer acted as a messenger between the different groups which did not increase mutual understanding amongst stakeholders, and meant that historical conflict and contentious issues were not always addressed. A lot of time was spent revisiting internal and external consultees to clarify their comments.
2. Although all views were taken into consideration, all the power and accountability for decisions lay solely with the Agency. External organisations saw the LEAP process as closed and secretive and many queried the usefulness of the plans. They did not feel any ownership of the LEAP actions and few partnership opportunities arose.

- Many of the Agency's technical staff felt detached from the LEAP process and the external consultation exercise as they were not directly involved.

These general concerns were also evident during the formal consultation for the LEAP for the River Wey in Surrey (January – April 1998). Written comments received indicated that, on some major issues, there was still little understanding between many organisations involved in managing and using the environment (including the Environment Agency). The majority of comments were single-interest focused and lacked a holistic view of the issues that needed to be tackled.

A balance had to be struck between the different expectations of the stakeholders (including the Environment Agency), and this could only be achieved by enabling everyone to talk directly to each other. This need for more dialogue was also recognised by the key external organisations who felt that more needed to be done before the River Wey LEAP Action Plan was finalised. The use of stakeholder dialogue was also trialed at the beginning of the process for LEAPs covering the River Loddon and the River Mole.

Figure 1: The LEAP Process (Jan 1998)



The River Wey LEAP

The *Wey Day* took place on 17 November 1998 and was attended by 40 out of the 65 organisations invited. The event was designed to maximise the opportunity for dialogue between the stakeholders, whilst also obtaining a list of possible actions to resolve the LEAP issues. The aim was to enable organisations with different interests, values and resources to build mutual understanding, find common ground, resolve shared problems and reach agreement over some of the more complex issues.

It was, therefore, essential for the day to be designed and facilitated by an independent third party to ensure that the process was transparent in order that any real or potential conflict was positively managed. The Environment Council, which is an independent charity dedicated to enhancing and protecting Britain's environment, provided the lead facilitator whose role was to design the event, with overall responsibility for managing the process on the day.

Pre-event planning timetable:

April 1998: Core Group set up consisting of four representatives from key external organisations, the lead facilitator and LEAP Officer. Two meetings were arranged to:

- help the Agency identify key stakeholders to be invited
- agree the objectives of the Action day
- spread the word about the event through 'word of mouth' and using their existing networks

September 1998: Telephone main stakeholders, followed by a formal invitation in order to:

- publicise the event
- answer any concerns or queries immediately
- maximise the chances of formal invitation being accepted

October 1998: Briefing of Agency Staff to:

- ensure that they were up to date with issues
- familiarise them with the objectives of the day
- allocate delegates to subgroups, according to interest, to ensure a mixture of representatives and views to balance discussion of the LEAP issues raised

The lead facilitator was supported by a group of trained facilitators from the *Surrey Consensus-Building Network* which was set up to promote the use of consensus building techniques (see *Case Study UK11*).

The 'voluntary' facilitators managed the sub-groups, working with the principle that all views were valid. Without the help and expertise of the Network members and the informal exchange system, the *Wey Day* would not have been possible, as funds were limited.

The main outputs from the sub-groups were:

- a) Agreed list of issues
- b) Existing initiatives/actions/plans that partly or completely address these issues
- c) Areas where new or more work is needed
- d) Actions needed, lead organisation and partners, timescales and resources

The River Loddon and the River Mole LEAPs

1. Set up working group (primary consultees and Agency staff)
2. 'Issues Workshop' to facilitate discussion and agree a list of key issues to be raised in LEAP
3. Action planning day, similar to *Wey Day*
4. Circulate working draft of plan amongst working group
5. Publish documents for consultation
6. Formal Public Consultation leading to production of final plan, annual reviews and a full review, leading to the next Consultation Draft.

Issues Workshops

A one-day workshop was held in October 1998 for the Loddon, followed by a half-day event in December 1998 for the Mole. In an attempt to save money, the workshops were designed and run by environmental consultants (not specialists in stakeholder dialogue) and the LEAP Officers. No Core Group was formed although the main stakeholders were contacted by phone in advance of the written invitations.

The workshops involved a general introduction to the Agency and the LEAP process, followed by identification of issues. For the Loddon, the stakeholders were also asked to group and prioritise the issues. No trained facilitators were used for sub-group work at either events.

Although the feedback received showed that these workshops had been beneficial by increasing mutual understanding and awareness of issues, the parts of the day involving issue identification and prioritisation needed to be improved.

It was clear that better preparation and design of the workshops, as well as using trained facilitators, were essential for effective stakeholder dialogue. Consequently, the Environment Council was once again approached to design and run the Loddon and Mole Action Planning days.

Action Planning Days

These one-day events took place in March 1999 and were very similar to *Wey Day*. Once again, the sub-groups were facilitated by members of the *Surrey Consensus-Building Network* (see case study X).

Who participated?

Key stakeholders – those organisations and individuals responsible for, or with an interest in, management of the local environment, including local authorities, statutory bodies, potential partner organisations, members of the Agency's Area Environment Group, and locally significant interest groups.

What information was made available?

The River Wey LEAP

The Wey LEAP Consultation Draft was the main source of background information to the issues and was used as the basis for discussion at the *Wey Day*. Participants also received a letter of invitation with a briefing pack outlining the aims and structure of the day, what was expected of them (guidelines at end of this document), list of organisations represented, map of the area and details of the LEAP process. After the event, they received a photo report of the flipcharts, a draft of the Action Plan and then the final version of the plan.

The Loddon and Mole LEAPs

Issues Workshops

Organisations were asked to nominate one or more representatives and sent a pack similar to that for the *Wey Day*. After the workshops, they received a typed report of the work carried out outlining the list of issues identified and a proposed grouping.

Action Planning Days

A briefing pack similar to the *Wey Day* was again sent out before the event. A photo report of the flipcharts was then produced as a record of the event, followed by a working draft of the Consultation Drafts for their comments. They then received the published documents.

Advertising:

The events were not advertised but a list of participants was drawn up using existing Agency consultee lists, external lists and 'word of mouth'. Participants were initially contacted by telephone. Numbers were limited to an extent so that the sub-groups could be effectively managed. Invitations were therefore sent out to key stakeholders only.

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

The River Wey LEAP

The *Wey Day* was well received by the stakeholders who felt that there was now a better understanding of the variety of issues and the pressures placed on the resources of the Agency and other organisations. As a result, external expectations of the Agency are perhaps more realistic. Partnership opportunities also emerged as the stakeholders signed up to new joint actions. Both external stakeholders and Agency staff

welcomed the opportunity to discuss areas of concern and new issues, not raised during written consultation, were identified. The outputs of the day were also extremely useful in formulating the final Action Plan which took much less time to draft. The real measure of success however, will be in the delivery of the actions and this will be monitored through Annual Reviews.

The Loddon and Mole LEAPs

Stakeholders felt that the days had been productive and almost all felt that this approach was better than the traditional informal consultation. There were some concerns over the fact that a few key organisations were not represented and that everything was not covered during the Action Planning Days.

Much of the work carried out during these days was used to formulate the Mole and Loddon LEAP Consultation Drafts. However, the outputs from the initial 'Issues Workshops' slowed down the LEAP process, as clarification of issues and supporting information was still needed.

General

The stakeholder dialogue process was found to be worthwhile when designed and managed carefully. The benefits of using this approach as part of the LEAPs process were:

- an increase in understanding amongst participants
- stronger partnerships and external ownership of LEAP actions
- identification of new issues
- reduced duplication

Key Lessons Learnt

- 1) The stakeholder dialogue process must be carefully designed and tailored to meet the particular needs of each exercise.
- 2) An experienced lead facilitator must be identified for the design and management of the process. Eventually, this resource must be provided from within the Agency or the Network to keep costs to a minimum.
- 3) Sub-groups must be managed by trained facilitators to ensure that conclusions are reached.
- 4) When properly managed, stakeholder dialogue may shorten the consultation exercise and the drafting of the LEAP by improving stakeholder involvement in its development.
- 5) If not managed or designed properly, stakeholder dialogue can increase time spent on consultation as well as the LEAP production.
- 6) Stakeholder dialogue is worth including in the LEAP process. However, the following areas need to be given more consideration and developed further by LEAP staff:
 - Including stakeholder dialogue effectively at the beginning of the LEAP process and in Annual Reviews
 - Ensuring that supporting information and data for issues is obtained
 - As external facilitators are expensive, there is a need to develop the existing pool of trained and experienced people locally (for example, supporting the Network and training more Agency staff)

EXAMPLE OF GUIDELINES SENT TO ORGANISATIONS FOR THE WEY DAY:

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GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING PARTICIPANTS

- To maximise the effectiveness of the day, please bear the following in mind when selecting your representative:
 - They may need to be briefed or should otherwise be able to represent your organisation as a whole;
 - As far as possible, they should be empowered to make "in principle" decisions and sign up to joint initiatives on behalf of your organisation;
 - They should have a broad appreciation or understanding of environmental issues, especially those relating to the Wey LEAP area;
 - They should be familiar with the Wey LEAP Consultation Report (published January 1998)
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