

Summary of the ESTA Project



Environmental Sustainability
Technical Assistance

The Environmental Sustainability Technical Assistance (ESTA) project was established in 2012 to provide participating Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and their partners with technical assistance to maximise environmental sustainability opportunities associated with their economic development priorities, in particular those aligned to the new ERDF Structural Funds Programme 2014-2020.

The project was delivered through a combination of technical expertise delivered by a small team of environmental sustainability advisors, together with a discrete research budget which was utilised to help to build an appropriate evidence base.

Over a period of two and a half years, we worked closely with four participating LEP areas (Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region) with the overarching aim to help bring forward activity to increase the capacity of LEPs to successfully engage with environmental sustainability opportunities under the new ERDF programme.

HEADLINE ACTIVITIES:

- 1 We have established an environmental sustainability evidence base for each LEP to define what environmental sustainability means in the context of existing and future economic development priorities, and to guide investment priorities for current and future ERDF programmes;
- 2 Through a combination of environmental sustainability technical expertise, together with a small research budget, we have helped to demonstrate environmental sustainability opportunities, gaps and market failures to justify public sector intervention, which can be used to support future funding applications;
- 3 We have helped to identify lessons learned from past ERDF funded projects to enhance the development of any new projects brought forward under the new ERDF programme (2014-2020);
- 4 We have helped to maximise the environmental sustainability outcomes of any projects brought forward under the new ERDF programme (2014-2020) through the development of a sustainable development cross-cutting theme advice note;
- 5 We have kept the LEPs up-to-date on new and emerging environmental sustainability issues through the provision of specialist briefings;
- 6 We have supported the delivery of appropriate communication and engagement opportunities with wider stakeholders to support the understanding of environmental sustainability requirements of future ERDF funds and to ensure lessons are learnt and shared;

'The ESTA project has provided valuable capacity support, evidence base and independent advice to the LEP to help us to take advantage of our low carbon and wider environmental sustainability opportunities. The ESTA project has been an asset to our team and has made a significant contribution to the development of Liverpool City Region's new EU SIF Strategy.'

Mark Knowles - Head of Low Carbon, Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership

FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE

The ESTA project stemmed from a Technical Assistance call from the ERDF Northwest Operational Programme 2007-2013. ENWORKS responded to this call and secured match funding from the Environment Agency to deliver the project, with specific resources aligned to each of the four participating LEPs.

The project was governed via an Advisory Group with representation from each of the LEP areas, together with the Environment Agency, ENWORKS and a representative from DCLG responsible for the ERDF programme. The total project budget over two and a half years was £781,000.

The role of the Advisory Group was to advise on the delivery of the project, to ensure that it was carried out in accordance with agreed timescales and deliverables, including advising on the allocation of the project research budget, facilitating pan-LEP communication and where appropriate pan-LEP collaborative opportunities.

To achieve its objectives the project had to be mindful that each LEP has different needs and opportunities in relation to environmental sustainability. In practice this means that, while the scope of the offer was consistent across the areas, the size, timing and sequencing of support varied greatly from LEP to LEP to reflect local circumstances and to achieve its desired outcomes. Local project steering groups were established to advise on priority activities at a local level and the composition and format of these steering groups varied across each LEP area.

In addition to formal advisory and steering group meetings, the project team also engaged in regular liaison with the Environment Agency's climate change partnership manager and DCLG's cross-cutting theme manager.

'The Cheshire and Warrington LEP is committed to becoming one of the strongest performing economies, nationally and internationally. The ESTA project has provided valuable support to help maximise our environmental opportunities particularly through the new ERDF Structural Funds Programme which has an allocation of over £13million to be invested in the low carbon economy. Consideration of environmental sustainability will make our economy more resilient and able to respond to change. It can also reduce business and organisational costs making Cheshire and Warrington's economy more competitive, therefore underpinning economic growth.'

Cllr Terry O'Neill - Leader of Warrington Borough Council
and Board Member for the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership

Technical assistance was provided through two core project resources; experienced environmental practitioners worked with the local areas providing expertise and knowledge; and technical research was commissioned to support collaborative activities between LEP areas and bring in further specialist skills. Key areas of project delivery included:

ESTA Action Plan Development

Local ESTA action plans were developed for each of the participating LEPs by the project's Sustainable Growth Advisors, with input from local project steering groups and wider stakeholders, as directed.

To shape the action plans, the ESTA team developed an initial environmental sustainability evidence base for each LEP in the context of existing and future economic development priorities. This was developed into a common framework for each LEP area, to ensure a consistency of approach.

The project team developed a 'checklist' approach to identifying gaps through a process designed to review economic development strategies, priorities and activities against a broad set of environmental sustainability issues.

In summary, the process involved:

Identification of 10 environmental sustainability issues, giving broad coverage of key areas, particularly as they pertain to economic growth.

Development of eight assessment criteria against which each issue was reviewed (e.g. evidence base, LEP priority or key strategy, existing projects).

This was used to identify both risks and opportunities that the ESTA project could help to mitigate or maximise.

This process enabled bespoke ESTA project action plans to be developed for each of the individual LEPs, reflecting the key priorities and opportunities for each area. It is a methodology that could be replicated for other environmental sustainability action planning processes.



Diagram 1

An objective assessment was carried out using known data sources and local knowledge, to assess issues for the scale of their importance to the LEP from the perspective of both risks and opportunities to assess existing policy, strategy, projects or initiatives relevant to each theme.

Based on the information collected a graded gap analysis was carried out by triangulating the information collected and highlighting where knowledge, evidence, policy or action was missing. This proved to be a useful tool to promote discussion and debate with LEPs and their partners. In particular it established a common ground for the consideration of prioritised actions and enabled the LEPs to broaden their understanding of environmental sustainability.

The final stage in this process was to determine what action could be developed by the ESTA project to help fill the gaps identified.

The Checklist Framework used by the ESTA project can be found on the ESTA website: www.enworks.com/ESTA-project-outcomes

The methodology employed has proved invaluable to prioritise limited resources for this important agenda. The basic framework checklist approach should provide a starting point for similar environmental sustainability action planning processes well beyond the life of the ESTA project.

Diagram 2 overleaf provides an overview of the process:

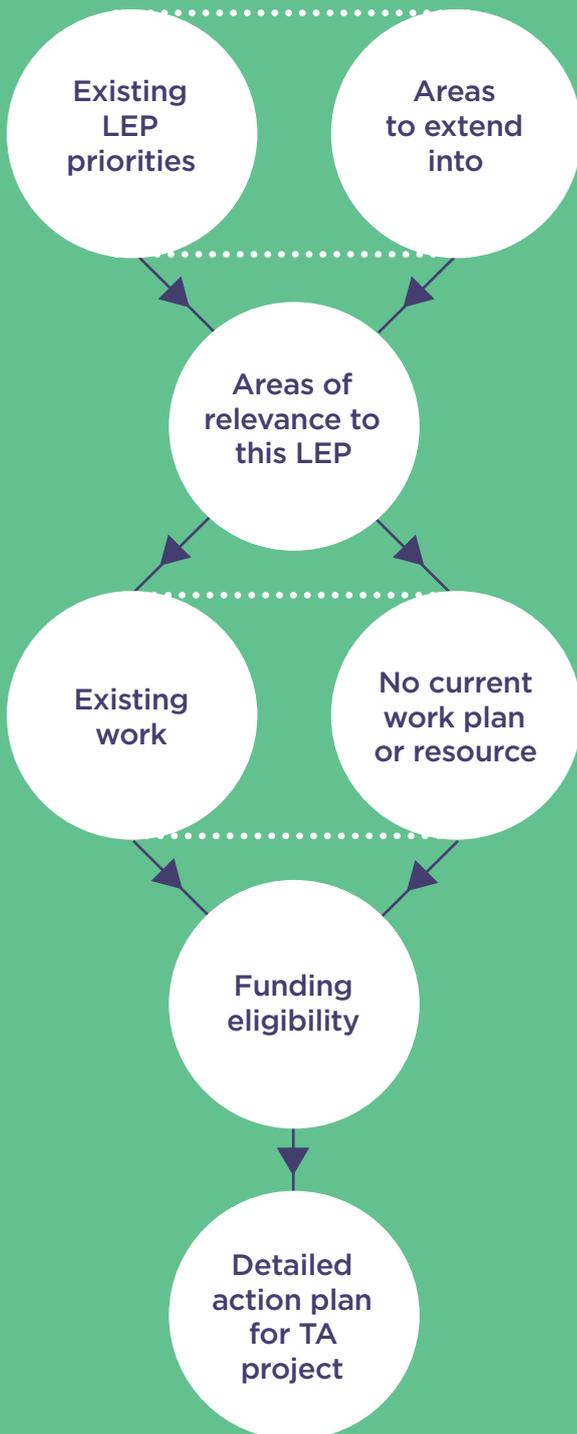
‘The ESTA project has provided a cost effective resource for the Greater Manchester Low Carbon Hub as we drive forward our transition to a low carbon economy. The technical expertise and the additional research that the project has delivered have made a significant difference to the quality and effectiveness of our evidence base to deliver the changes required. Sharing information and experiences across the participating LEPs has also brought useful benefits. Moving forward, the project’s legacy will continue to help in the development of our future project pipeline.’

Mark E. Atherton – Director of Environment, Association of Greater Manchester Authorities

Diagram 2: Action Planning Process

What

Full scope of environmental sustainability



How

Develop checklist to define scope of environmental sustainability



Technical Research

Through an analysis of the common evidence based framework approach, collaborative actions across multiple LEP areas were identified, which in turn helped to identify suitable areas of technical research to be funded via the ESTA consultancy budget.

ESTA commissioned nine areas of discrete research. The outputs are available on the ESTA website at www.enworks.com/esta-project-outcomes

Mapping the LCEGS sector:

2011/12 and 2012/13 data analysis, providing LEP-level reports and local authority-level reports detailing the Low Carbon and Environmental Goods and Services (LCEGS) sector baseline by scale, activity, sales, employment, growth and exports; plus, identification of key companies, specific strengths and opportunities for diversification.

Supporting local LCEGS sector growth:

Identifying practical ways in which public procurement activities can maximise opportunities for local Low Carbon and Environmental Goods and Services (LCEGS) companies. The project involved the development of tools and guidance for use in public sector procurement, including an overview of existing good practice, case studies, and the development of new, practical procurement tools to maximise opportunities for local suppliers. A bespoke offer of support was made to each LEP to disseminate this work, for example in Greater Manchester it has informed the development of a 'social value procurement framework' to drive a range of sustainability and social value outcomes, including maximising access to public procurement opportunities for local suppliers.

Economic impact of ERDF housing projects:

Assessing the economic impact of previously funded ERDF projects on energy efficiency in social housing. This project highlighted a number of useful lessons for future projects, including appropriate technology selection for different circumstances and the importance of consistent and transparent quantification methods, both for economic metrics such as jobs as well as for CO₂e.

Water innovation capacity of Liverpool City Region

Identifying the industrial and academic capabilities and expertise in water technology across Liverpool City Region to support future specialism and growth in this sector. Focusing on key strengths and opportunities for further innovation and growth and providing recommendations for delivering those opportunities.

Developing a wedges approach for carbon emissions reduction in Greater Manchester

Development of a wedges approach to illustrate how carbon emissions reductions in Greater Manchester can meet a 48% reduction target by 2020 against a 1990 baseline.

The wedges approach is anchored on the central thesis that no one single activity (or policy measure) will be able to stabilise carbon emissions by itself. Rather, stabilisation will be attained through a combination of various activities. The focus is therefore on the aggregated impact that a number of measures can potentially bring to contribute to the stabilisation of carbon emissions over the medium to long-term.

Building the evidence base for behaviour change interventions to reduce GHG emissions in businesses and households

A review of how effectively designed behaviour change activities can add value to low carbon policies and interventions by Greater Manchester and Cheshire and Warrington LEP areas to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) in business and households. As well as delivering bespoke reports relevant to the activities and priorities of the Greater Manchester and Cheshire & Warrington LEAs, a third, non-geographic related report has been produced providing useful information and guidance for all LEAs and their partners who are considering designing behaviour change programmes.

Review of the evidence base to promote sustainable food

A review of the evidence base for sustainable food production and consumption and the development of recommendations to promote sustainable food within the LEP areas of Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria and Greater Manchester. The work has primarily focused on GHG impacts and mitigation measures, which have been complemented by analyses of impacts in the areas of water, land and energy. The approach incorporates the impacts of food production, as well as life cycle impacts (field to waste) of food consumption. As well as identifying 'at scale' interventions on GHG, the project has also identified interventions that will have positive impacts on food and fuel poverty.

Assessing climate risks and opportunities for strategic growth sites for the Liverpool City Region and Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnerships

An assessment of current and future climate risks and opportunities for strategic employment sites and key growth sectors across Liverpool City Region and Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership areas. This project utilised a methodology developed through a Defra-funded pilot in the Cheshire and Warrington area, to provide a consistent approach across the two participating LEP areas.

Developing advice to project applicants on embedding environmental sustainability into ERDF projects

Development of a simple and compelling 'advice note' aimed at project applicants to help them to embed the sustainable development cross-cutting theme into new ERDF projects as they are being designed and developed.

'ESTA has provided a tremendous resource for Cumbria both in terms of advocacy and specialist advice across a range of sectoral activity. Having a dedicated resource to progress the agenda in Cumbria has created a strategic legacy embedded within key strategic documents but also shapes the future in an exciting project pipeline of new activity.'

Nik Hardy – Operations Manager, Cumbria LEP

EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK (ESIF) STRATEGIES

An offer was made to each of the participating LEPs to provide ESTA resources to support the production of the EU Structural Investment Framework (ESIF) strategies. The offer encompassed staff time and expertise as well as information and evidence, including: mapping local priorities against EU thematic objectives; drafting relevant content to maximise opportunities for future investment in the broad environmental sustainability agenda; and outlining the rationale for and benefits of delivering activity at the local level.

The individual support provided to each LEP area varied according to LEP requirements, but included activities such as; facilitating 'low carbon' thematic workshops; drafting appropriate text for the ESIFs to strengthen the environmental sustainability / low carbon elements; the development of guidance on meeting the Sustainability cross-cutting theme requirements of the EU SIF and undertaking a sustainable development appraisal of the Greater Manchester ESIF.

PROJECT COMMUNICATIONS

In support of the Environment Agency's wider communication objectives for ESTA, an external agency was commissioned to develop a small suite of marketing tools to provide a consistent look and feel to ESTA materials, particularly where they are authorised for dissemination/external use, and to ensure appropriate funder recognition, this includes: a report 'wrapper' (cover and disclaimer), slide templates for presentations and an online presence.

ESTA web pages were launched at the beginning of September 2013
www.enworks.com/esta-intro and
www.enworks.com/esta-project-outcomes

Other project communication material included an environmental sustainability knowledge bank, which was created at the start of the project and was structured around the 10 environmental sustainability themes, containing publicly available evidence papers, research and policy documents. This was a time-limited knowledge bank, to provide an evidence base hub to support the development of ESTA work under each of the relevant themes.

The ESTA team also provided regular briefings to update the LEPs on emerging environmental sustainability and where requested, provided evidence of lessons learned from past and current ERDF funded projects to feed into the development of new emerging project ideas under the new ERDF programme.

PROJECT COMPLETION

The ESTA project came to a close on December 2014. It is anticipated that LEPs will source local Technical Assistance resources as per their individual requirements under the terms of the new ERDF programme (2014-2020).

View the project reports here:

www.enworks.com/ESTA-project-outcomes

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This briefing note has been produced from
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