

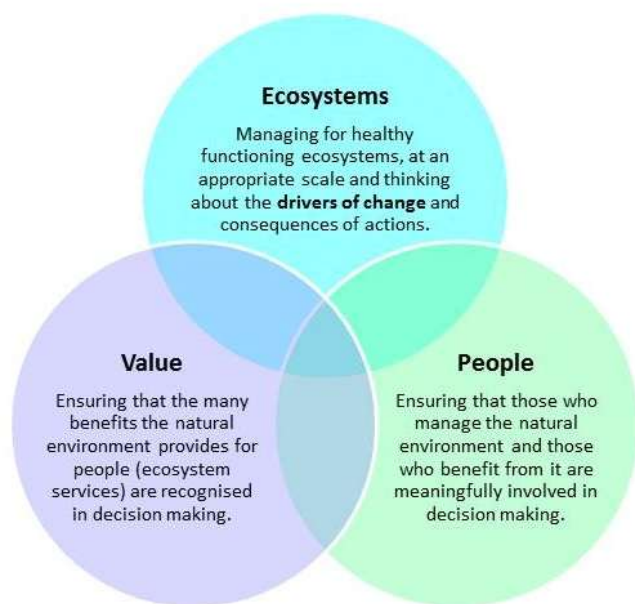
# Ecosystem Approach Quick Start Guide #1

## How to Adopt an Ecosystem Approach

### What is the ecosystem approach?

The ecosystem approach is a way of working that helps us to identify the benefits we get from nature, value them and build them into planning, decision making and management. It helps us to deliver a healthy sustainable environment and involve people in that process.

The ecosystem approach is about:



This quick start guide provides more information on what these key elements mean in practice.

### Who is this guide for?

This guide is for everyone responsible for delivering environmental outcomes and improvements for nature. The ecosystem approach is relevant to all our work, and will help us become more joined up and effective in our delivery.

This guide is especially useful for partnerships and anyone who wants to develop a joined-up plan to enhance multiple benefits for a place or project area.

### And why should we use it?

- The ecosystem approach can enhance our natural environment for wildlife and the benefits it provides for people such as food, clean water and recreation opportunities.
- Because it delivers multiple benefits we get added value from our interventions.
- It takes account of ecosystem processes and function, helping us to manage ecosystems more effectively, so they can adapt to change.
- It links people, business and the economy with nature by highlighting the importance of a healthy natural environment to our social and economic wellbeing.
- With an emphasis on partnership working it can help integrate across different sectors dealing with competing demands and make best use of knowledge and resources.
- It can be applied in many contexts and at different scales.
- It considers outcomes and impacts for the environment and people together.
- It is a government priority, the [Natural Environment White Paper](#) and [Biodiversity 2020](#) have the ecosystem approach at their core.

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### How can we adopt an ecosystem approach in our work?

This guide identifies the key elements you need to adopt the ecosystem approach. It provides advice on how to incorporate these into your actions and decision making at whatever scale (local, regional, national) you are working. There is no fixed process that must be used, you can adjust how you work to bring the key elements in.

### People

People are at the heart of the ecosystem approach. This means involving a range of stakeholders in the whole process, particularly those who have a direct stake in the future of the area in question. Ask yourself:

- Who are the stakeholders who have direct influence or control over the way the land is used, planned or managed? These are likely to include the main **providers** of ecosystem services such as farmers, other land managers and water companies.
- Who are the **beneficiaries** and where are they? These may be stakeholders, the local community or wider public who benefit from different ecosystem services (See Quick start guide #2 for more information on ecosystem services).

It is valuable to involve people who represent the range of environment, social and economic interests and this involvement is **more than just consultation**. You will be providing an opportunity for those involved to inform decision making and your outcomes will be more meaningful as a result. Make sure you use the appropriate language for your participants as ecosystem approach jargon can be off-putting for non-specialists.

Because resources will be limited it is important to set realistic goals for wider community engagement and prioritise key audiences. **Are the right people involved?** Decide *who* to engage, *how* and *when* to make best use of time and resources available.

### Ecosystems

The ecosystem approach requires a shift to working with **healthy functioning ecosystems** rather than focussing our decision making on just species and habitats alone. What this means in practice, is placing more emphasis on the underlying **functions and processes** that govern the way living and non-living parts of the environment interact. Such processes include nutrient cycling, organic matter breakdown, soil formation, water flows, interactions between species and also the influence of human activity on the environment (and vice versa). If we understand these functions then it becomes easier to manage for ecosystem services

The extent of your project area, its landscape context (physical, natural and cultural) and wider relationship to adjoining areas will influence the way in which you apply an ecosystem approach. Think beyond existing and established site boundaries and consider the **scale** at which key processes operate (such as catchments for water related processes) and linkages with other ecosystems. If you focus actions on achieving bigger, better and more joined up ecosystems then your system will be more resilient to change.

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### Value

Part of the ecosystem approach is about ensuring that the value of nature is recognised in decision making. In some circumstances this may mean monetary value but more often it will simply be **recognising the value** in terms of the **multiple benefits** the natural environment provides to people such as food, clean water and recreation opportunities. You can achieve this by identifying the key **ecosystem services** (See Quick start guide #2) your place provides. An understanding of what makes your place special and different from other areas is a good starting point to identifying ecosystem services. It is the value that people place on the benefits of ecosystems that makes the ecosystem approach unique.

Engaging a range of stakeholders at this point is particularly beneficial by asking what people value about their place and the benefits they feel they get from its nature or landscape. Natural England's [National Character Area Profiles](#) contain an analysis of the ecosystem services being delivered across England, and can provide useful context for your stakeholder discussions.

**Monetary Valuation** may be appropriate but requires the correct application of economic techniques and will not be necessary for all management and decisions. This approach and other aspects of **valuation** are outlined in more depth in Quick start guide #4.

### Further advice on adopting an ecosystem approach

More specific and detailed advice exists for using the ecosystem approach with landscape scale partnerships, taking you through a series of steps to inform your partnership discussions. The [Ecosystem Approach Handbook](#) can be accessed on the [Ecosystems Knowledge Network](#) which is a network for sharing knowledge and experiences of practical application of the ecosystem approach and has a range of resources, events and a newsletter.

Patricia Rice, Jane Lusardi and Ruth Waters work for Natural England on the ecosystem approach.

### Drivers of change

When you adopt an ecosystem approach you will take a **long term** view and need to look ahead at climate and other drivers of change that will affect the project area and the ecosystem services it provides. Consider:

- What are the factors that are likely to put pressure on your natural resources in the future?
- What are the opportunities as well as the risks for ecosystem services?
- Try and address the pressures in-combination rather than individually.
- Managing for healthy functioning ecosystems can enhance their resilience to climate change ([Defra principles of climate change adaptation](#)).

### Integrated Delivery Plan

A helpful tool for delivering the ecosystem approach is use of an integrated delivery plan, joining up actions across the range of ecosystem services. The plan involves looking for “win-wins” (multiple benefits), addressing trade-offs (potentially conflicting actions) and identifying how actions contribute to different partners’ objectives. You can find advice on how to develop an integrated delivery plan in Ecosystem Approach Quick Start Guide #3.