

Common questions about Natural England's chargeable advice services

To maintain our existing staffing levels and services our aim is for an income target of 3 million in 2016 / 2017 and 12 million by 2020. Income generation is now a crucial part of our work.

We know that some staff have concerns about charging. Here are questions that the commercial team have been asked recently; we hope our answers will enable you to feel more confident about providing chargeable services.

See also the intranet article: <http://neintranet/news/Pages/mythbustingincomegeneration.aspx>

1. ***"I chose to work for Natural England, not a consultancy."***

We don't replicate the work of a consultancy. ***Our role is fundamentally different from consultants;*** we seek to complement, not compete with, their offer. We provide early awareness of our likely statutory advice. We don't run scoping exercises, design and conduct survey work, write reports or design and implement mitigation proposals. We do provide advice on consultancies' work. We will provide constructive solutions to consultancies when we are aware of information or opportunities that may inform a proposal.

Most DAS customers for planning and marine advice are consultancies. We expect that most customers for discretionary assent advice will also be consultancies.

2. ***"Natural England is profiteering from its monopoly position and is undercutting consultancies."***

Natural England does have a monopoly on providing statutory advice and consents for SSSIs and landscapes, managing Stewardship schemes and running the protected species licensing scheme, because that is what it is asked and empowered to do by Government.

If a service user seeks early awareness of our likely statutory advice, then that is at their discretion ("if you choose, we can charge"). As above, ***most requests for the DAS come from consultants*** - so it is not clear how we undercut them.

Treasury guidance states that Natural England must aim for full cost recovery from its services. Our charges cover the time it takes us to deliver the agreed advice, so we are not profiting from the service. Our charges are typically higher than those of a consultant, reflecting the level of supporting functions that we have as a public body (eg in terms of evidence, legal, governance etc)

If we don't charge we are more likely to be approached for lengthy and ill-focused requests for pre-application advice; ***there is more risk that we would undercut a consultant by not charging.***

3. ***"I'm not with Natural England to sell anything."***

There's not a lot of active sales advocacy involved; our customers are clear that they want our advice. The high reputation of Natural England advisers does most of the selling required. Most structured approaches to potential customers will be made by your Management Team.

4. ***"Charging will drive away people who want our advice and make it harder to improve SSSI condition"***

We have designed the chargeable advice services to ensure that they enable us to offer a better service to customers and secure better environmental outcomes. ***We offer a basic uncharged service*** that will allow potential customers to decide whether to proceed to Charged Advice. ***We do not charge for projects that are solely intended to improve SSSI condition.*** As the competent authority for consent advice, if permission is secured, we will provide an appropriate amount of uncharged advice so that in practice, most discretionary consent and assent advice consultations will not need Charged Advice.