



Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

LARIA Mini Newsletter April 2026

LARIA Updates

Watching the dance (and knowing when – and how – to join in)

I was reminded of a short video recently while attending a programme workshop in my day job. It's one of those clips that periodically does the rounds in leadership circles: a grainy recording of a lone man dancing, enthusiastically and without much self-consciousness, at what looks like an outdoor festival. For a while, he's entirely on his own. Then someone joins him. Then another. Before long, a crowd forms and what started as an odd, solitary act becomes a movement.



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During the session, the host put the video up and began doing what facilitators are contractually obliged to do, drawing parallels with leadership, influence and momentum. After a short pause, they looked in my direction, smiled a little too knowingly, and suggested that this could quite easily be me. Apparently *"joyfully committed, slightly oblivious, and entirely convinced it's a good idea... even when nobody else has joined in yet"*. I'm still not entirely sure whether that was meant as high praise or a gentle warning. Either way, I found myself being proud and offended in equal measure, while quietly admitting there might just be enough truth in it.

If you haven't seen the video, [you can find it here](#).

The reason it stuck with me wasn't just the personal comparison, but how neatly it linked to reflections I'd already been carrying from the recent LARIA conference. A number of people

commented on how useful it was to step back, watch how others were approaching similar challenges, and take ideas away without feeling the pressure to immediately *do* something with them. That really landed, because it cuts across how much of our working lives tend to feel.

LARIA's membership is a mix of leaders and officers, and in reality, most of us move between those roles depending on the situation. Leadership isn't only about grade or job title, it shows up whenever someone puts an idea on the table, asks a different question, or invites others to think again about how evidence is being used. Equally, there are moments when the most helpful thing you can bring is challenge, judgement, or simply saying "*not yet*".

In local government, research and insight teams often work at pace. We are asked to scan, interpret, advise and respond, and increasingly to do that quickly and with confidence. There isn't always much room to say "*we're not sure yet*", or to sit with the uncertainty that comes with complex issues and limited evidence.

The dancing man video is often used to talk about leadership, particularly the role of the *first follower*. But I've come to think it's just as helpful as a reminder that movements don't usually start with certainty. They start with someone willing to act without all the answers, and others deciding, openly or quietly, whether to follow, support, adapt the idea, or simply stand back and see how it plays out.

That balance feels especially important for a community like LARIA. For those of us in leadership roles (formal or informal), part of the job is creating space for uncertainty: being able to say *this feels promising, but it's not finished; this might work, but we'll need to learn as we go; let's try this and see what happens*. Buy-in usually comes from people feeling involved early, not from being presented with a perfectly wrapped solution.

At the same time, for officers and practitioners closer to delivery, there's real skill in knowing when to lean in and when to hold back. Not every idea needs to be taken forward straight away. Not everything that sounds good elsewhere will fit your context. Sound judgement, based on evidence, experience and understanding how things actually work is a strength, not a lack of ambition.

One of the quieter strengths of spaces like LARIA is that they give permission for both. They allow us to watch how others are tackling similar problems, sense what's genuinely transferable, and be honest about what might not be. They remind us that sometimes learning is the outcome, not immediate action. In that sense, LARIA feels like our movement. Not a movement with a single leader or a fixed agenda, but something shaped collectively over time. It works because people choose to show up, share what they're trying, follow others when it makes sense, question things when it doesn't, and occasionally step back to get a clearer

view.

As we think about where LARIA goes next, it would be really helpful to hear from members about what you want from it. How can LARIA best support you to be the best you can be - whether that's backing you to take thoughtful risks, helping you make sense of what's happening elsewhere, or supporting you to manage the very real constraints we all work within? Also, I wouldn't be doing my job as Chair if I did remind you all about the benefits of being a Corporate or Individual member, so check out the LARIA webpage and give your organisations a nudge if they're not already a member. #JoinTheMovement

The dancing man starts a movement by being visible and unashamed, but the crowd only forms once others feel comfortable enough to join. In our world, that comfort usually comes from trust, credibility and timing rather than sheer enthusiasm. Sometimes the right thing to do is to lead, even when the path ahead isn't clear. Sometimes it's to be the first follower. And sometimes it's to watch carefully, ask better questions, and help shape what comes next without rushing onto the dance floor. As I've reflected on the conference, and on LARIA more broadly, I've been struck by how valuable that mix is. In a sector that often rewards speed and certainty, there's something quietly powerful about places that allow us to slow down, compare notes, and decide our next steps together.

Perhaps the real challenge isn't choosing whether to lead or follow, but knowing when each is needed, and having the confidence to do both.

Cheers,

Paul (LARIA Chair)



LARIA AGM 2026

The LARIA AGM 2026 will take place on Microsoft Teams at 4-5pm, Monday 11 May. All

LARIA members are invited to join us for the AGM. Full LARIA members may take part in the voting and stand for election to LARIA Council. To attend, please email Katie Worman at admin@laria.org.uk for the meeting details.

Winner Announced!

Thank you to everyone who completed the feedback survey following the LARIA One Day Conference & Awards 2026. It was wonderful to read such positive comments, and your insights will play an important role in shaping the next LARIA Conference.

We are pleased to announce the winner of one free ticket to attend the next LARIA One Day Conference & Awards is Stephen Foreman of Newcastle City Council - Congratulations!

Courses, Training Events and Webinars

Make the most of your geospatial data – join us at the GeoPlace Conference 2026

Join us at [GeoPlace's Annual Conference 2026](#) to unlock even greater value from your data.



Taking place on Thursday 21 May at Leicester Tigers

Stadium, the conference brings together local authorities, government, and the wider geospatial community to explore how authoritative address and street data can be integrated with OS datasets to improve insight, coordination and decision-making.

Through a mix of strategic sessions and practical discussions, you'll hear how organisations are combining UPRNs, USRNs and OS NGD to support joined-up services, improve data quality, and deliver more efficient outcomes. Practical guidance will be provided on data sharing, address matching tools, use of NGD, delivering value through the PSGA and plenty more!

Whether you're working in GIS, data analysis, research or transformation, you'll leave with practical ideas you can apply immediately.

Jobs

Organisation: Improvement Service

Job Title: Analytical Support Officer

Job Location: Hybrid/Livingston

Salary: £32,102 - £34,246 per year

Contract Type: Temporary to 31 March 2027, with possibility of extension

Work Location: Hybrid/Livingston

Hours: Full time (36 hours)

Job Description: The Improvement Service are seeking an Analytical Support Officer to provide support within the National Planning Improvement team. The team is responsible for monitoring the performance of planning authorities in Scotland and providing advice to them on what steps might be taken to improve their performance. The successful candidate will be responsible for supporting the analytical strategy of the team by identifying and analysing intelligence, evidence, and data generated through the National Planning Improvement Framework.

Application Deadline: Sunday, 10 May 2026

Contact for any queries: NPI@improvementservice.org.uk

[More information available here](#)

To submit a job advert to appear in the newsletter or on the LARIA website, please download and complete this [form](#) (Full Corporate and Corporate Members only). You can also post Job Vacancies on the Jobs Board in the LARIA [Members' Area](#).

The next newsletter submission deadline is [Thursday 21st May](#).



Are you a Corporate or Full Corporate Member?



Your LARIA Corporate Membership entitles you to submit content to the monthly LARIA newsletter, if you have any research, events, job adverts, resources or news which you would us to include please send it to admin@laria.org.uk.

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