



# Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee

**25 October 2024**

Title:	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Report of:	Judith Barker, Executive Director for Place and Connectivity
Lead Member:	Cllr. Bridget Smith, Lead Member for the Environment
Public Report:	Yes
Key Decision:	No
Voting Arrangements:	A simple majority of voting Members

## Recommendations:

A	To receive an update on the progress of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and updated timeline
---	--

## Strategic Objective(s):

The proposals within this report fit under the following strategic objective(s):

	Achieving ambitious skills and employment opportunities
	Achieving good growth
	Increased connectivity
X	Enabling resilient communities

## 1. Purpose

1.1	This paper is providing an update to this Committee on the current progress of the LNRS.
1.2	It is proposing a revised timeline recognising some further work that needs to be done prior to going to public and constituent authority consultation.

## 2. Proposal

2.1	The purpose of the LNRS is to identify locations to create or improve habitat that is most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. The strategy must contain a local habitat map and a statement of priorities.
2.2	To date, the following have been achieved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baseline mapping of habitats and areas of particular importance has been completed and shared with the Ecologist Group and Steering Group.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A draft Strategy has been produced which includes priorities and proposed measures relating to habitats and species.</li> <li>• Development of methodology for mapping of measures in conjunction with Ecologists.</li> <li>• A web version of the draft LNRS is now live with work continuing on final website ahead of the public consultation.</li> </ul>
2.3	<p>A Steering Group meeting was held on 15 October and the following actions were agreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensuring all stakeholders understand the methodology for the mapping exercise.</li> <li>2. Further work to agree the priorities for recovering nature and enhancing biodiversity.</li> <li>3. Mapping of the interdependencies and risks to ensure consideration and mitigation and in particular understanding how the LNRS will operate alongside the development of draft and emerging Local Plans.</li> <li>4. Revised timeline and updated project plan to be developed.</li> <li>5. Communications and engagement strategy to be finalised.</li> </ol>
2.4	<p>These actions will take time to deliver in collaboration with the supporting authorities and organisations on the Steering Group. It is now unlikely that we will reach the target date of March 2025 as the draft strategy has to be approved by each Local Authority as 'supporting authorities' before then being the subject of a public engagement.</p> <p>A consultation report will be produced and then considered with revisions to the documentation before being considered for approval. This will not be possible to achieve before summer next year. Natural England has informed us that only six responsible authorities out of 48 are potentially on track to complete the strategy by March 2025; so whilst we are disappointed not to be in that group, we are still leading the second tranche of responsible authorities in terms of our progress. However, it is important that an appropriate strategy is produced which is aligned with other key strategies and documents including Local Plans. A revised project plan is being produced at the time of writing and a verbal update will be given.</p>

### 3. Background

3.1.	<p>Under the Environment Act 2021, the Government introduced a nationwide system of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).</p> <p>They are a new mandatory system of spatial strategies designed as tools to encourage more coordinated focused action and investment in nature. They are part of a broader, strengthened duty on Local Authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.</p>
3.2.	<p>Nationally, the LNRS were to be produced by March 2025 but DEFRA have recently indicated that to have a draft by this point will be helpful.</p>
3.3.	<p>Each LNRS should contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mapping the most valuable existing areas for nature;</li> <li>• mapping specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals; and,</li> <li>• priorities for nature's recovery.</li> </ul> <p>The LNRS will identify areas with potential for nature enhancement. However, any formal designation of areas for specific nature conservation protection will remain within existing approval routes (e.g. Local Plans, Natural England).</p>
3.4.	<p>The Government provided capacity funding to the Combined Authority as the proposed Responsible Authority for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to start preparing for the new duty. The Board agreed to allocate this funding to Cambridgeshire County Council to provide operational capacity in developing the LNRS, working closely with Councils and Natural Cambridgeshire (the Local Nature Partnership).</p>
3.5.	<p>In June 2023 an update was provided to this Committee with a further update in June 2024. Governance and sign-off of the LNRS remain with the Combined Authority, with the work programme overseen by Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee (E&amp;SC).</p>

3.6.	Due to timings of meetings, it was proposed that the Board formally delegate the authority to E&SC Committee to approve a draft Strategy for consultation. This would be proposed for the September E&SC meeting on 11 September 2024. The Board would be briefed and engaged on the emerging draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to the E&SC meeting.
3.7.	<p>The Committee should be aware that the Government set a statutory role for Councils who are not themselves a 'Responsible Authority'.</p> <p>At key stages in the LNRS preparation, these Supporting Authorities have a formal role in commenting on the proposals and have a 28-day period to approve for consultation and publication. Responsible Authorities must demonstrate how they have engaged with Supporting Authorities and responded to any comments raised at the consultation stages.</p> <p>An officer Steering Group of the Combined Authority, the Supporting Authorities (made up of the County Council, Peterborough City Council, Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council), key partners such as Natural Cambridgeshire, National Farmers Union (NFU) and Natural England are all working together to produce the LNRS. Natural England is also a Supporting Authority as well as a key partner in this process, and where appropriate will bring along other representatives to workshops and Steering Group meetings to inform the process e.g. the Environment Agency.</p>
3.8.	<p>The LNRS also has a formal interaction with the planning system. The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements of planning permissions can achieve extra 'credits' when delivered against LNRS priorities.</p> <p>The mandatory BNG system started in February 2024 (having slipped from its original planned implementation date of November 2023). Local Planning Authorities should use the LNRS when adopted, having an impact on land use planning and determinations.</p>
3.9.	The statutory guidance states that Responsible Authorities should involve people and groups from across the public, private and voluntary sectors and help them to work together. The Strategy will benefit from their understanding of what environmental issues are most important locally. This will also encourage them to carry out the proposals in the Strategy. Effective engagement with farmers and landowners will be particularly important in the LNRS development. The LNRS can also, as per DEFRA and Natural England's aspiration, become an opportunity to explore, promote, and educate about the wider environmental benefits of nature restoration, such as natural flood management and climate adaptation. At the 15 October Steering Group, the representative of the Environment Agency said that every LNRS process has experienced some tricky periods as it is about 'breaking new ground' but that they were supportive and welcomed the collaborative approach being taken in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

## 4. Appendices

4.1	None
-----	------

## 5. Implications

### Financial Implications

5.1	Government funding of £307k via DEFRA has been allocated to the Combined Authority. This will be paid via a Section 31 Grant and will be split with £164k in 2023-24 and £143k in 24-25.
-----	--

### Legal Implications

5.2	The LNRS needs to be produced in compliance with the Environment Act 2021 (Local Nature Recovery Strategy)(Procedure) Regulations 2023: <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2023/341/made">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2023/341/made</a>
-----	--

### Public Health Implications

5.3	There are significant public health benefits of access to nature as referenced in the 2022 Health & Wellbeing Integrated Care Strategy for the area. <a href="#">link to strategy</a>
-----	---

Environmental & Climate Change Implications	
5.4	The LNRS aim is to enhance (and thereby recover) biodiversity and nature, contributing to tackling the biodiversity crisis. Solutions can have wider environmental and other benefits, including flood resilience, water management, carbon sequestration and storage.
Other Significant Implications	
5.5	All Local Authorities have a duty introduced by the Environment Act 2021 to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity by January 2024, and to agree policies and objectives as soon as possible afterwards. The LNRS will be an important input into that duty. More details on this are <a href="#">here</a> .
Background Papers	
5.6	Board Report, LNRS Grant, November 2022, <a href="#">link to report</a>
5.7	Natural England, Green Infrastructure Framework, <a href="#">link to webpage</a>