

Report to: Climate, Energy and Environment Committee

Date: 21 March 2023

Subject: **Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

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Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1. To provide Committee Members with an introduction to / update on the forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy and to seek feedback.

2. Information

Legislative context

Environment Act 2023

- 2.1. The [Environment Act 2021](#) enacted a commitment to a [Nature Recovery Network](#) made in the government's 2018 [25-year Environment Plan](#) to create a national network of nature-rich places.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs)

- 2.2. Key to this are Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) – a new mandatory system of spatial strategies for nature (including species, habitats, ecosystems, natural processes, and the relationships between them). They will map where local habitat improvement and restoration could improve ecological networks on the ground, establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery. They will also identify opportunities for wider environmental benefits (such as health and wellbeing, nature

connectedness, air quality, access to high quality green space). They might show, for example, whether, should the opportunity arise, it would be best to plant trees to expand existing woodland, extend wildflower meadows to create 'stepping stones' for pollinators to spread into new places, extend wetlands to prevent plant extinctions or improve grassland to improve the condition of soil. They will be periodically updated.

- 2.3. LNRSs will have no status in planning or delivery – they will be 'opportunity maps' that will help identify what action would be most likely to help nature to recover and deliver wider environmental benefits in that place. It is not yet clear how LNRSs will interact with mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain legislation; guidance on these areas is expected.

Policy context

- 2.4. Wider policy areas with the potential to benefit by LNRS include health and wellbeing, culture (nature as a cultural asset), climate resilience, tourism, economic growth, flood risk management, spatial planning, and green and blue infrastructure.
- 2.5. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority has declared a climate emergency and committed the region to be net zero carbon by 2038 at the latest, with significant progress by 2030. The [West Yorkshire Climate and Environment Plan](#) (CEP) – approved by the Combined Authority in October 2021 – is the Mayor's and Combined Authority response to tackling the climate emergency, protecting the environment and achieving a net zero West Yorkshire. For nature and the environment, the following action areas are most relevant:

Cross-cutting

- CC01 Communications, Engagement and Marketing

Natural environment

- NE01 Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- NE04 Regenerative Nature Recovery Schemes

DEFRA

- 2.6. DEFRA is appointing a responsible authority to deliver each LNRS. The Combined Authority is the provisional responsible authority for the West Yorkshire LNRS, supported by a senior advisor at Natural England.
- 2.7. Five pilots took place in 2021 to test a potential LNRS development process. DEFRA published the [lessons learned here](#).
- 2.8. The DEFRA regulations and guidance are expected to be available by April 2023 so that work on the LNRSs can begin.
- 2.9. The Government has committed to funding all new burdens on responsible authorities relating to the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

DEFRA has indicated that the detail of this offer can be expected in the next few weeks.

- 2.10 The Combined Authority's agreement to be provisional responsible authority and response to a formal offer of appointment as responsible authority is subject to the cost of the responsibility being fully met by Government. Should the commitment to fully funding burdens change, the Combined Authority may want to consider whether/how to proceed.

Action to date and next steps

- 2.11. Governance options have been developed in consultation with Natural England and the preferred option agreed in principle following initial officer level council partner engagement. This may change once DEFRA regulations are published (expected April 2023). The LNRS process will be guided by senior officer groups and a dedicated steering group¹, seeking endorsement by this committee for Combined Authority approval. The proposed governance model will include an expert panel to advise on the wider environmental benefits. There will also be wider consultation and engagement with other stakeholders and working groups where appropriate. The proposed governance arrangements are outlined at Appendix 1 for information.
- 2.12. DEFRA expects responsible authorities to consult widely in order better to understand what the LNRS needs to do for people in West Yorkshire and to develop this collaboratively. Natural England has commissioned research into participatory democracy methodologies to steer this process, the results will be available by April 2023.
- 2.13. Next steps include: establish the steering group and expert panel in anticipation of DEFRA requirements; draft a communications plan; understand data mapping/graphic information system (GIS) and specialist ecology expertise requirements and how best to meet those; identify existing data sources; continue to build stakeholder map.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1. The LNRSs will identify and prioritise opportunities to restore habitats, connect ecological networks and deliver wider environmental benefits. If acted on, these will increase biodiversity, which in turn helps the natural processes that underpin all life. They also have the potential to support wider measures to help tackle the climate and ecological emergencies. Examples include grasslands or woodlands to engineer and control water storage and flow; plants to filter toxic air; restored peatland to capture carbon; tree canopy cover to cool urban spaces; accessible and biodiverse rich spaces to reconnect people with the rest of nature and boost pro-environmental behaviour.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

¹ Likely to comprise: Senior CA Rep; :A Spatial Planning Rep; DEFRA Rep; LA Ecology Rep; Farmer/Landowner Rep; 3 x Nature Rep; One position TBC

- 4.1. Increased action to recovery nature will increase opportunities for more people, including training, skills and employment in existing and future 'green jobs' directly or indirectly.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1. Depleted natural environments have disproportionate impacts on people, sometimes amplifying existing inequality due to the interplay between factors such as differences in the amount / quality of nearby nature available to residents, poverty, disability, education, exposure to toxic air, impact of heatwaves / floods, or infrastructure barriers such as public transport and road danger. The LNRS will identify and prioritise opportunities for ecological equity and wider environmental benefits for more people, such as access to green space, high-quality natural environments to restore relationships with the environment and the health, wellbeing and restorative benefits of the 'natural health service'.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. DEFRA allocated a total of £48,500 seed-funding for LNRS preparatory work and help to develop capacity. This is likely to be spent mostly on securing GIS expertise. DEFRA will allocate further funding, but the amount is not yet known.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1. There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

8. Staffing Implications

- 8.1. There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

9. External Consultees

- 9.1. Early-stage engagement is underway with key stakeholders such as wildlife and conservation organisations, farmer representatives, local authority ecology leads and researchers.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1. That the Committee:
 - notes the work done to prepare for the launch of the LNRS;
 - advises on governance proposal and its own role;
 - suggests experts / stakeholders from their own areas of expertise;
 - considers whether it wants to suggest a representative to join the LNRS 'Expert Panel'.

11. Background Documents

There are no background documents referenced in this report.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Proposed governance structure