

Somerset Council
Scrutiny Committee
– Thursday 6th June 2024[Click **here** and type date]



Local Nature Recovery Strategy

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Executive Lead Member: Cllr Dixie Darch, Lead member for Climate Change and Environment

Division / Local Member:

1. Summary

1.1. The purpose of this report and presentation is to:

- Update the Committee on recent progress on work on developing the Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy, for which Somerset Council is the ‘Responsible Authority’

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

2.1. Members are asked to consider and note the update.

3. Background

3.1. Somerset Council is leading on the creation of a new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Somerset, in partnership with the Somerset Local Nature Partnership

3.2. The strategies are statutory requirements of the 2021 Environment Act. This means that local areas must develop them, and report on the progress of the strategy every three to ten years.

3.3. Defra has appointed Somerset Council as the Responsible Authority for the Somerset area, and are providing funding to support the development of the strategy.

- 3.4.** The production of each Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be evidence-based, locally led and collaborative, to create a network of shared plans that public, private and voluntary sectors can all help to deliver. Natural England are leading the Government's involvement and are work alongside each of the Responsible Authorities to help shape the strategy and ensure overall consistency. The preparation of each LNRS is also supported by the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission.
- 3.5.** When completed, the strategy will become a blueprint for the recovery of nature, showing how and where we can support things like wildflowers, woodlands, wetlands and wider and wilder hedges and edges.
- 3.6.** The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is a spatial strategy that will identify locations to improve nature and provide other environmental benefits, such as carbon sequestration, flood regulation and access to nature-rich spaces where this is most needed for health and wellbeing.
- 3.7.** The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will:
- Agree priorities for nature's recovery
 - Map the most valuable existing areas for nature
 - Map specific proposals for creating and improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals
- 3.8.** It is in the gift of Somerset to debate and decide on priorities collectively and we are using both a collaborative and evidence-led approach to steer and guide this process.
Priorities are being gathered collaboratively with interested parties through a series of workshops and surveys. This includes habitats, species, processes and nature-based solutions for societal issues. These priorities will be assessed based on their merit, local distinctiveness, and impact

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** Somerset Council and other local organisations are supporting the local evidence base to support the strategy. We are working closely with people and groups across the county to develop the strategy.
- 4.2.** A series of thematic habitat-based Workshops have been held with Environmental practitioners to compile possible priorities and potential measures, informed by their expert opinion.
- 4.3.** A targeted questionnaire was sent to those organisations active in nature's recovery. Aimed at Defra ALBs, e-NGOs, Protected Landscapes etc.. To ensure we have considered all relevant plans, strategies and evidence.

- 4.4.** These are the primary ways that local people can take part in their LNRS. There are 2 surveys directed at different audiences:
- Public Survey aimed at Somerset residents. This asks questions about how and where people connect with nature, the habitats or species they value, and any wider benefits they'd like to see in their local area. (link on Somerset Council webpage). Survey closes 31 May. 800 responses to date.
 - Landowners, managers and farmers survey. Seeks to capture views from landowners and managers. Asks questions about land size and whether potential actions for nature have already been considered. Link to survey publicised by those working with farmers and landowners e.g. protected landscapes, NFU, CLA, FWAG SW
- 4.5.** Multiple presentations and Workshops on Somerset LNRS given by Steve Dury, including:
- 23 & 29 Nov: Webinar for Members (Somerset Council)
 - 25 Nov: Drayton Wildlife Fair
 - 30 Nov: Somerset Business Support Group Meeting
 - 30 Nov: Blackdown Hills AONB Management Group Meeting
 - 7 Dec: Peatland Partnership Meeting
 - 14 Dec: Joint Environment Committee, Drainage Boards
 - 19 Feb: Somerset Committee, CLA
 - 9 Mar: Carhampton Wildlife Fair
 - 13 Mar: LCN team leaders
 - 17 April: Hestercombe LCN
 - 24 April: Workshop for farmers / landowners
 - 30 April: Somerset Catchment Partnership
 - 18 May: 'Action For Somerset's Future' Event. A joint event by Somerset Climate Action Network, Community Action Groups Somerset and Somerset Local Nature Partnership.
 - 21 May: Nature Conservation Advisory Panel meeting, Exmoor National Park Authority
- 4.6.** We are liaising with Democratic Services to organise a public consultation once the draft is ready, likely to be in Autumn this year. Final, approved drafts should be ready by March 2025.

5. Implications

- 5.1.** The Local Nature Recovery Strategy plays a unique role in translating the broader, long-term vision of Somerset's Climate and Ecological Emergency Vision into actionable, community-driven plans with tangible outcomes. By distilling these other strategic visions into shorter-term, more digestible plans, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will ensure that economic and

environmental agendas harmonise effectively, fostering a balanced approach to sustainable development going forwards. We are also be working with a wide range of organisations across Somerset to ensure that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy aligns with their strategies and plans and vice versa.

- 5.2.** Local Nature Recovery Strategies will help to direct several new funding streams including for agri-environment funding and Biodiversity Net Gain.
- 5.3.** Local Nature Recovery Strategies are set to play a pivotal role in co-ordinating Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) practices by outlining habitats and locations where we will be able to deliver opportunities for nature. Statutory BNG requires developers to provide a 10% uplift in the amount of biodiversity after a development. This ensures that development projects give back to nature more than they take. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy can support this by providing maps of what habitat or actions would be best in distinct locations. This will help both onsite and offsite delivery of BNG
- 5.4.** Areas identified as opportunity areas in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy do not infer any level of added protection. Any sites put forward for future designations will still have to follow the process/criteria specific to that designation. This would still be the case for land identified as opportunity area or land in Countryside Stewardship +/-Landscape Recovery Scheme. However, it would be sensible to expect a degree of overlap between opportunity areas and proposed sites - simply by virtue that many opportunity areas will become increasingly valuable to nature over time
- 5.5.** The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will possess an influential capacity. By guiding and inspiring individuals, communities, and organisations, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy intends to foster a collective effort toward nature recovery. This influential aspect will stem from its ability to shape perspectives, drive policy discussions, and motivate positive actions for nature
- 5.6.** Cross-cutting collaboration is an essential element to both the development and delivery of LNRS, and the relationships we build during the development of the strategy will be vital in helping to deliver the strategy once adopted. Collaboration is also vital across our regional boundaries given nature does not have boundaries. We have been actively collaborating with the wider southwest region on LNRS activity.
- 5.7.** Currently there's no legislative requirement on the council to do anything post-publication but Defra have informed they are hoping that the momentum developed by the LNRS, and the leadership role that it puts Responsible Authorities in, can continue. And Defra are looking at what level of resource is needed to do that. So Defra are viewing LA's as being in that leadership role, the kind of coordinating, convening, and facilitating the project pipeline type role.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.**
- Local_nature_recovery_strategy_statutory_guidance.pdf
 - Local Nature Recovery Strategies - Advice on governance and working with partners.pdf
 - Data Standards Advice for LNRS Responsible Authorities.pdf
 - Species Recovery within Local Nature Recovery Strategies v.1 August 2023.pdf
 - LNRS National Environmental Objectives.pdf

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author