

Information for Unitary Councillors

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Relevant ELT Director and sign-off date:	Kirsty Larkins
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Date:	05/10/23
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To:	All Unitary Councillors
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Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy

This is an update to all members to inform what the Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy is, why it is needed, the early progress with developing the strategy, and to give notice of a follow-up to the briefing event for members that was held on 12th May. The next one will likely take place in late November, with an opportunity for members to contribute to the development of the strategy.

National policy and legislation

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a number of new duties for local authorities which are of relevance to nature recovery and biodiversity including:

- Enhanced duty for LAs to conserve and enhance biodiversity (S102) and report on their actions (S103)
- LPAs will need to comply with the above duty and have regard to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in local planning policy and decisions (S102).
- Responsible authorities appointed by the Secretary of State (S105) to lead the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), working with a broad range of stakeholders.

What is the Local Nature Recovery Strategy?

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is a new spatial strategy to 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.

Somerset Council has been appointed by DEFRA to be the Responsible Authority to lead on the development of the LNRS for Somerset. Assistance is being provided by the Somerset Local Nature Partnership.

The production of each LNRS will be evidence-based, locally led and collaborative, and each LNRS must:

- agree priorities for nature's recovery, with a written statement of biodiversity priorities
- map the most valuable existing areas for nature, with a local habitat map
- map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals

Further info on Local Nature Recovery Strategies can be found here:

[Local nature recovery strategies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-nature-recovery-strategies)

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will:

It will help drive more coordinated, practical, focussed action and investment to help nature and people flourish together, whilst delivering wider nature-based environmental benefits.

Why does Somerset need a Local Nature Recovery Strategy?

The natural environment has an innate value that means we have a strong responsibility to protect it. Its value to us is also clearer than ever: it is fundamental to our health and wellbeing, is the foundation of a productive economy and provides us with attractive neighbourhoods and access to green spaces we can enjoy.

Despite this the natural environment faces urgent and significant challenges, with the UK being one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. By tackling the twin biodiversity and climate emergencies, we will help nature recover and, at the same time, secure health and economic benefits from an enhanced natural environment, for wildlife, for people and for our economy.

Reversing this decline will require a coordinated effort across society, as well as an improved understanding of the most important actions for nature recovery and how these can be delivered.

Who is funding the preparation of the strategy?

DEFRA are providing funding to support the development of the LNRS.

When will the strategy be produced?

Our aim is for the strategy to be completed by the end of 2024. To kickstart the process, we have set up a steering group with representatives of key partners and stakeholders, and a number of habitat-based thematic groups for initial evidence gathering.

Engagement and evidence gathering

Somerset Council and other local organisations are providing the local evidence base to support the strategy. We will work closely with people and groups across the county to develop the strategy.

1) Evidence gathering - Environment Practitioners:

We have completed the first round of thematic workshops for environmental practitioners, people from a range of organisations with some expert knowledge across 8 habitat types.

We are holding the second round of meetings late September / early October

2) Evidence gathering – Farmers and Landowners:

A questionnaire for landowners has been finalised, following consultation with those involved in landowner engagement. This has been sent to contacts and organisations who can disseminate widely to the landowning community.

3) Wider stakeholder engagement

It is important that LNRs are developed alongside our communities and represent the wide range of views, needs and opinions from across Somerset. That is why we are developing and will be launching a wide-ranging engagement campaign. We will be hosting workshops, webinars and discussions as we seek to understand WHERE, WHY and HOW nature can be recovered and grow across Somerset. These will take place late November – March.

4) Member engagement

We plan to hold an interactive briefing event for all members in late November, before we commence the wider stakeholder and public engagement.

How will it be delivered?

Government is putting in place a package of measures to encourage and support people to carry out proposals in each local nature recovery strategy. The measures include:

- a new duty on all public authorities to have regard to relevant LNRs
- integration of LNRs into the planning system, so that areas of greatest potential for nature recovery can be better reflected in planning decisions
- an incentive in how the new requirement for biodiversity net gain is calculated - to recognise the added impact of taking action where the LNRs proposes
- funding for specific activities that LNRs will be expected to propose locations for
- Private finance. Government has a goal to raise at least £500 million per year of private finance for nature recovery by 2027 and more than £1 billion by 2030. LNRs can support this ambition by identifying viable and well-scrutinised proposals for nature recovery at the scale needed to be attractive to private finance.

Will the Local Nature Recovery Strategy be ready for the start of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain?

The strategy will not be completed ahead of the commencement of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (in November 2023 for major development and April 2024 for small sites). In the meantime, existing local biodiversity policy and guidance and relevant plans and strategies should be used to inform proposals and decisions. The Somerset BNG team are collating these.

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