



**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 22 JANUARY 2025**

DRAFT LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Committee the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (attached as Appendix A) for comment as part of the ongoing public consultation exercise.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. LNRS's are a new statutory duty placed on local government as a result of the Environment Act 2021. Under the Act, the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has appointed Leicestershire County Council as the 'responsible authority' for the development of a LNRS for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (LLR). The Committee received a report setting out this new statutory duty now placed on the Authority at its meeting on 7 June 2023.
3. The new statutory duty fits with the aims and objectives of the Council's Environment Strategy 2018-2030, in particular those in relation to Biodiversity, Habitats and the Local Environment. It also fits with the Strategic Plan Refresh 2024-2026 priorities, in particular those under the 'Clean and Green' outcome. Furthermore, it supports the Council's Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy and Action Plan.
4. The strengthened biodiversity duty, also introduced under the Environment Act 2021, which requires public bodies, including local authorities, to 'conserve and enhance biodiversity', will support delivery of the LNRS.
5. Development of the LNRS will identify the nature priorities for the area, while the implementation of the proposed measures will support the protection and recovery of nature, and contribute to the Government's national environmental targets, as well as the UK's international biodiversity commitment to protect and conserve 30% of the UK's land and sea for biodiversity by 2030.

6. The Cabinet at its meeting on 17 December 2024 approved the draft LNRS for public consultation which commenced on 6 January 2025.

Background

7. As part of the Environment Act 2021, the Government introduced the requirement to develop LNRSs across England; there are 48 LNRS areas across England.
8. This new mandatory system of spatial strategies will map the most valuable existing areas for nature, establish priorities, and map proposals for specific actions at a landscape scale to drive nature's recovery and wider environmental benefits. The draft Strategy must go out to public consultation and the final Strategy must be agreed by the Secretary of State.
9. In March 2022, the DEFRA approached upper tier councils to take on the responsible authority role as part of the new LNRS duty. Leicestershire County Council agreed at that time, and on a provisional basis, to be the responsible authority for the LNRS area which covers LLR.
10. Since March 2022, the Government has put in place a national framework to enable the preparation of LNRS's to commence across the country. This includes confirming the Strategy boundaries and formally agreeing the roles of the responsible authority to lead in each area. The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 were laid before Parliament and the statutory guidance on the LNRS was released on 23 March 2023, with the 2023 Regulations coming into force on 13 April 2023. The 2023 Regulations and guidance provide details on the appointment of responsible authorities, the creation of the role of 'supporting authorities', and what is required in developing and publishing LNRSs.
11. Defra sent a formal letter to all provisional responsible authorities, including Leicestershire County Council, in mid-May 2023 to notify them that they had been appointed as the responsible authority for their respective LNRS area.
12. Locally, an interim LNRS Steering Group was established, initially with officer representation from Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and Rutland Council. Subsequently, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission, the National Forest Company and a representative from the district councils joined the Steering Group. The LNRS Steering Group has since been formally established with agreed terms of reference.

Development of the Draft LNRS

13. The development of the draft LNRS required Leicestershire County Council to work in partnership with neighbouring authorities, including Leicester City Council, Rutland Council and the seven district councils, as well as other public bodies such as the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and the National Forest Company.

14. Under the 2023 Regulations, the role of the supporting authority was created, and it required responsible authorities to “take reasonable steps to involve” supporting authorities, “have regard” to their opinions, share information with them and to seek their agreement before the draft Strategy’s consultation and publication. Locally, the supporting authorities are Leicester City Council, Rutland Council, the seven district councils and Natural England.
15. A governance structure was established to support the development of the draft LNRS. It consists of the Steering Group, supported by a Strategic Reference Group and a number of thematic working groups consisting of key partners and stakeholders including, representatives from the supporting authorities and the Defra bodies, the National Farmers Union, the Countryside Land Managers Association, the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust, and the Trent Rivers Trust. A full list of the partners and stakeholders involved in the development of the draft LNRS is included in the LNRS report, which is attached to this report as Appendix A.
16. A programme of communication and engagement was undertaken to promote the work to develop the LNRS, to encourage stakeholders and residents to get involved, to enable them to share their expertise, knowledge and views to develop a LNRS that was co-created by those that both had an interest in nature’s recovery and would be affected by the efforts to recover nature.
17. The engagement programme included a survey of residents, which asked about their attitudes and access to nature, with 1,077 responses being received. A separate survey for stakeholders, farmers and landowners was also conducted, with 96 responses received. In addition, an interactive map was provided which allowed residents and other stakeholders to make comments on where the existing activity was happening for nature, where there was an opportunity to do more for nature, or where there were pressures on nature. Some 516 comments were placed on the map.
18. The engagement programme also included a series of farmer/landowner and resident workshops across the LNRS area. These allowed for the sharing of the results of the surveys and the interactive map, and the early thinking on the possible nature priorities and measures to achieve the priorities. The workshops provided an opportunity to discuss these, identify areas of agreement and consensus, as well as areas that needed further work.
19. Alongside the engagement programme, specialist support was provided by a data analysis and mapping consultancy to allow for the processing and mapping of the collected data sources. This included the development of separate data layers and the use of modelling software to create opportunity maps of where nature could be conserved and enhanced. From these, a local habitat map was developed as well as a series of maps that contributed to the identification of the priority areas for nature. The final versions of these maps can be found in Appendix B.
20. An analysis of almost 100 existing strategies and plans from across the LNRS area was undertaken to identify the priorities and the objectives which could

either contribute to the development of the LNRS or for which the LNRS could support in delivering.

21. The combination of all of the above elements has contributed to the production of the draft LNRS, namely, the involvement of partners, stakeholders and residents, listening to their views and their contributions through the working groups, workshops, surveys and one-to-one discussions; the analysis of the existing strategies and plans, collating, analysis, modelling and mapping of data; and checking the initial thinking and wording of the draft LNRS with people and organisations.

Overview of LNRS Contents

22. The contents of the LNRS are largely set out in the official LNRS guidance, with strategies required to meet certain criteria in order to be approved by Natural England to go out to the public for consultation. The LNRS consists of two key components: the LNRS strategy document, and the auxiliary webpages that include an interactive copy of the Local Habitat Map and the supporting information.
23. The draft LNRS for LLR was presented to a Natural England panel on 8 October 2024. The panel found that the LNRS had met all of the criteria, however, some minor amendments to be made to the document and the webpages to improve their readability and functionality were suggested.
24. Of the five LNRSs that have been presented to a Natural England panel to-date, the Council's LNRS was the first one to pass without a 'formal pause' being placed on the LNRS, before it was approved by Natural England to go out for public consultation.
25. The amendments were made to the designed version of the LNRS and the webpages, and they were presented to a Natural England sub-panel on 5 November 2024, after which the draft LNRS was formally approved to go out to public consultation.
26. The key components of the LNRS are:
 - a) The setting-out of the overall strategic aims of the Strategy;
 - b) The area description, which describes the natural landscape and how people have shaped the landscape;
 - c) An assessment of the current state of nature across the area, including a presentation in map form of the existing areas of particular importance for biodiversity (located on the supporting LNRS webpages);
 - d) A presentation of the key environmental considerations, such as the future pressures and the wider environmental issues;
 - e) A presentation in map form of the areas that could become of importance for biodiversity and the wider environment (located on supporting LNRS webpages);

- f) The setting-out of the main biodiversity priorities and measures, that will take place within the priority areas as well as the landscape scale (area wide) priorities and measures;
- g) The setting-out of the key factors needed to support the delivery of the LNRS;
- h) A suite of appendices that provide supporting information and technical detail.

27. The LNRS ultimately serves as a call to action for all sectors of society to play a role in the recovery of nature, ensuring that the biodiversity and natural beauty of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland can thrive for future generations, while at the same time supporting the lives and livelihoods of the people and communities that live and work there.

Consultation

28. Under the 2023 Regulations and the LNRS statutory guidance, Leicestershire County Council, as the responsible authority, is required to obtain the approval of the draft LNRS from all of the supporting authorities before it goes out to public consultation, with supporting authorities having 28 days to raise an objection. No objections were received.
29. A report on the draft LNRS was presented to the Cabinet on 17 December 2024. The Cabinet approved the draft Strategy for public consultation which commenced on 6 January and will run until 28 February 2025.
30. The public consultation seeks to engage with residents from across the LNRS area, partner organisations, and stakeholders such as farmers, landowners, planning officers, representatives of environmental organisations. An online briefing session will also be held for Elected Members from across the LNRS area.
31. The public consultation will utilise the Council's 'Have your say' website. The Council will also work with the supporting authorities, other partners and stakeholders to promote the consultation. A consultation summary version of the draft LNRS has been produced to support the consultation. (See Appendix C).
32. The draft LNRS is being presented to the Committee for its comments as a part of the public consultation.

Resource Implications

33. The County Council has received 'new burdens' funding for taking on the role as the responsible authority in the form of a Section 31 grant. The amount of funding provided was calculated using a national formula, with the County Council receiving £337,741 over two years (2023/24 – 2024/25). This was in addition to the almost £49,000 received over 2021/22 and 2022/23.

34. The funding provided is being used for developing the LNRS and it is being spent on employing a project manager, employing specialist support, and ensuring that a full and proper engagement takes place with the partners, stakeholders, and residents.
35. The total expenditure in 2023/24 was £76,432, with a forecasted expenditure of £220,000 in 2024/25. The expenditure to-date in 2024/25 is approximately £110,000.
36. Further 'new burdens' funding is expected to be provided by the Government to support the delivery of the LNRS and to undertake future reviews of the LNRS (the timescales are to be determined by the Government). However, at this point, no details have been provided. The Government expects projects identified within the LNRS to be delivered through mechanisms such as the Environmental Land Management Scheme, Biodiversity Net Gain and specific grant schemes.
37. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Timetable for Decisions

38. Following the completion of the public consultation exercise, an assessment will be undertaken of the comments that were received by the Council, and the draft LNRS will be amended as appropriate to produce the final LNRS.
39. The final LNRS will go through the Council's internal approval processes between April and July 2025. A report on the final LNRS is scheduled to be presented to the Committee on 11 June 2025 for comment, before being presented to the Cabinet on 17 June 2025 and to all Members of the County Council at its meeting on 2 July 2025 for final approval.
40. The final LNRS will also go through the approval processes of the supporting authorities at the same time.
41. The approved final LNRS will then be sent to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to be agreed, before it can be formally published.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

42. This report will be circulated to all Members.

Equality Implications

43. There are no equality implications arising from the content of this report.
44. There will be equality implications arising from the implementation of the LNRS and an Equality Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the process; the assessment is attached as Appendix D. This identified the key areas where

equality implications are likely to arise, and it highlighted the need to address these at the relevant point of implementation of the measures within the LNRS.

Human Rights Implications

45. There are no human rights implications arising from the content of this report.

Environmental Implications

47. The development and implementation of the LNRS should have a significant positive impact on the local environment as its primary objective is to support nature's recovery and to deliver other environmental benefits such as reducing carbon emissions, reducing the impacts of climate change, and improving water and air quality.

Background Papers

Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2023/341/made>

Report to the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2 June 2023, Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Responsible Authority Status:
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s176539/Local%20Nature%20Recovery%20Strategy%20Scrutiny%20070623.pdf>

Report to the Cabinet, 17 December 2024, Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy:
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s187228/FINAL%20Draft%20Local%20Nature%20Recovery%20Strategy%20Cabinet%20171224.pdf>

Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland

Appendix B - Auxiliary LNRS webpages with Local Habitat maps and supporting information

Appendix C – Consultation Summary of the Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland

Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment for the draft LNRS

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