



Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee	Agenda Item
12 June 2023	9

Title:	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Report of:	Lead Member for Climate and Environment
Lead Member:	Cllr. Bridget Smith
Public Report:	Yes
Key Decision:	Yes KD2023/021
Voting Arrangements:	A simple majority of voting Members

Recommendations:

A	To accept new burdens funding of £309k from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for the preparation of a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy
B	To allocate this funding of £165k in 2023/24 and £144k in 2024/25 to the LNRS Approved Budget line of the Medium Term Financial Plan
C	To agree the outline programme as set out in Appendix A
D	To delegate to the Executive Director of Place and Connectivity to agree operational delivery arrangements with Cambridgeshire County Council
E	To note the arrangements for the involvement of constituent councils

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	The government intends to designate the Mayor of the Combined Authority as the “Responsible Authority” for the preparation of a statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Regulations and guidance require a LNRS to be prepared within 24 months; and sets a formal role for all councils within that process.
1.2	This report asks the Committee to allocate funding to the Approved Budget line within the MTFP and to delegate appropriate authority so that activity can commence as soon as possible.

2. Proposal

2.1	Under the Environment Act 2021 the government has introduced a nationwide system of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The Combined Authority has been allocated a budget of £309k over two years to develop a LNRS for the area. In November 2022 the Board allocated DeFRA capacity funding to Cambridgeshire County Council to lead the LNRS preparatory work on behalf of the Combined Authority. This report sets out proposals for the County Council to provide the operational role in developing the LNRS, working with Councils and with the Local Nature Partnership. Governance and sign-off of the LNRS remain with the Combined Authority, with the work programme overseen by Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee.
2.2	The LNRS will be produced over the two year period, with an interim statement in November 2023 to assist its interaction with biodiversity net gain policies in the planning system. An outline programme plan is attached as Appendix A.
2.3	The LNRS delivers to the Strategic Objective of enabling resilient communities. It will enable businesses and communities across the region to be adaptable to environmental / climate crises and deliver against the doubling nature target.

3. Background

3.1	Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a new mandatory system of spatial strategies for nature established by the Environment Act 2021. They are designed as tools to encourage more coordinated practical focused action and investment in nature. They are part of a broader, strengthened duty on local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
3.2	Each LNRS will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• map the most valuable existing areas for nature• map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals• agree priorities for nature’s recovery
3.3	In 2022 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). The County Council appointed a Project Officer in December 2022.
3.4	Government issued the detailed Regulations and Guidance in March 2023. Its summary factsheet is provided as Appendix B. The new burdens funding allocation was announced in May 2023. The amount allocated to the Combined Authority was based on a formula that took into account the number of Supporting Authorities and the number of farm businesses in the area. Proposals in this report have regard to the regulations and guidance, informed by preparatory work including a multi-

	sector collaboration workshop held on 15 th May 2023 (full analysis of the output from this workshop has yet to be undertaken but will inform the LNRS process).
3.5	Government has set a statutory role for councils who are not themselves a Responsible Authority. At key stages in the LNRS preparation these Supporting Authorities have a formal role in commenting on the proposals. Responsible Authorities must demonstrate how they have engaged with Supporting Authorities and responded to any comments raised at the consultation stages. Alongside these formal requirements, the Combined Authority's partnership working approach means that all constituent councils are invited to be involved in the working groups developing the LNRS. Where possible existing thematic groups will be utilised to input into the LNRS development. An officer Steering Group of the Combined Authority, County Council, Peterborough City Council, Natural Cambridgeshire and Natural England will programme manage the LNRS process. Supporting Authorities will, as well as engaging on the thematic working groups, be invited onto a Development Group meeting on a six monthly cycle. The governance structure is attached as Appendix C.
3.6	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. As the mandatory BNG system starts in November 2023 it is proposed that an LNRS interim statement is prepared to assist planning authorities on this aspect (this is not a formal requirement of the Regulations). However, given the stage in the process reached by November 2023 this will not have the full planning impact of an approved LNRS and given the timing will largely be based on existing information. This is in line with DEFRA guidance for BNG that states that Local Planning Authorities should use whatever is available until the LNRS is adopted.
3.7	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).
3.8	The Combined Authority is in an excellent starting place on the LNRS process. This reflects the strong support for nature by the Combined Authority, including adopting the doubling nature target and targeted revenue support to Natural Cambridgeshire to build capacity and early engagement with the County Council in getting underway. Constituent councils have engaged with the process, and have existing biodiversity strategies, Local Plan evidence and/or nature-based interventions and the County Council already has a natural capital assessment that helps identify priority areas for inventions. The County Council has a project manager in place and preparatory work has commenced with the supporting authorities.
3.9	Several themes have emerged from the preparatory work to guide the C&P LNRS. The first is delivery. The LNRS should aim for more than a mapping of nature areas and establishing a set of priorities for enhancement. It needs to facilitate delivery of bigger, better and more joined up biodiversity. Secondly it has to remain dynamic to respond to changing circumstances. Thirdly, it needs to reflect the diversity of landscapes, nature and communities across the Combined Authority area (including urban areas). Finally, it needs to draw input from existing evidence base including local biodiversity strategies and data kept by the Environmental Records Centre and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Parks Partnership.
3.10	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.
3.11	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.
3.12	To complement the LNRS work the County Council submitted a bid to access £5k of Nature Recovery Network funding provided by Natural England to understand the relationship between the emerging LNRS and the Green Infrastructure Framework (a suite of tools and guidance issued in January 2023 to support Local Authorities and stakeholders deliver high quality green infrastructure and nature-rich spaces for the benefit of people and wildlife). This workstream will consider how the two can work together in a complimentary way.

4. Appendices

4.1	Appendix A – Work Programme
4.2	Appendix B - Factsheet
4.3	Appendix C – Governance structure

5. Implications

Financial Implications

5.1	Government funding of £309k via DeFRA has been allocated to the Combined Authority. This will be paid via a Section 31 Grant and will be split with £165k in 2023-24 and £144k in 24-25.
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Legal Implications

6.1	The LNRS needs to be produced in compliance with the Environment Act 2021 (Local Nature Recovery Strategy)(Procedure) Regulations 2023: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2023/341/made
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Public Health Implications

7.1	There are significant public health benefits of access to nature as referenced in the 2022 Health & Wellbeing Integrated Care Strategy for the area. link to strategy
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Environmental & Climate Change Implications

8.1	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.
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Other Significant Implications

9.1	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 here .
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Background Papers

10.1	Board Report, LNRS Grant, November 2022, link to report
10.2	Natural England, Green Infrastructure Framework, link to webpage