

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Hampshire 2050 and Corporate Services
Date:	27 June 2024
Title:	Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire
Report From:	Director of Hampshire 2050

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire and seek approval for a revised timetable for delivery.

Recommendation

2. That the Executive Member for Hampshire 2050 and Corporate Services approves the revised timetable for delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire.

Executive Summary

3. This paper seeks to:
 - set out the background to Local Nature Recovery Strategies
 - set out the progress made on the Strategy to date
 - set out a revised timetable for delivery of the Strategy.

Contextual information

4. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are an important part of an ambitious package of measures introduced by the Environment Act to reverse nature's decline. These include Environmental Improvement Plans, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), Species Conservation Strategies and Protected Sites Strategies, and conservation covenants. The LNRS has been designed to work with all these measures, and to help link them together in a coherent and effective way.
5. LNRS are a new system of spatial strategies for nature recovery, covering the whole of England. In short, they are a key mechanism for planning and delivering the National Nature Recovery Network.
6. Each strategy will:

- map the most valuable existing habitat for nature
 - map proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environment goals
 - agree priorities and targets for nature's recovery
 - support the delivery of wider environmental objectives.
7. The LNRS will be used to:
- channel investment into local priorities for protection and enhancement, such as the Environment Land Management scheme
 - map areas of opportunity for the use of “nature-based solutions” to wider environmental problems like flooding, climate change mitigation and adaptation or poor water quality
 - guide mandatory biodiversity net gain investments
 - provide a source of evidence for local planning authorities, helping these authorities understand locations important for conserving and enhancing biodiversity.
8. Hampshire County Council was appointed Responsible Authority for delivering the Strategy for the whole of Hampshire, including the areas covered by Southampton and Portsmouth City Councils, and the New Forest and South Downs National Parks that are within Hampshire.

Governance for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire

9. Following appointment as the Responsible Authority, the County Council established a Steering Group and Local Planning Authority Working Group as part of the project governance.
10. The Steering Group has representatives of key stakeholders as follows
- Natural England (Supporting Authority)
 - Portsmouth City Council (Supporting Authority)
 - Southampton City Council (Supporting Authority)
 - New Forest National Park Authority (Supporting Authority)
 - South Downs National Park Authority (Supporting Authority)
 - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Nature Partnership
 - Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
 - National Farmers Union (NFU)
 - Country Business and Land Association (CLA)
 - Local Planning Authority Working Group Representative
11. The Local Planning Authority Working Group has representatives of each of the Hampshire local planning authorities, who also have a role as Supporting Authority within the LNRS process.

12. Supporting Authorities have a key role in the Regulations, defined as any local authority or national park authority within the Strategy area, along with Natural England.
13. The regulations require the Responsible Authority to take reasonable steps to involve all Supporting Authorities in the preparation of the LNRS. The County Council must provide the Supporting Authorities with all relevant information, ensure they are aware of how to contact us, and have regard to their views.
14. The Regulations set out the points at which the supporting authorities need to be engaged in the process and consulted on the draft LNRS. There are provisions within the Regulations should the Supporting Authorities have concerns about the draft LNRS and how it was prepared, enabling them to raise an objection which must then be referred to the Secretary of State. Similarly, when the Responsible Authority comes to publish the LNRS, Supporting Authorities have the ability to refer to the Secretary of State if they consider it to be materially deficient.

Progress on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire

15. Engagement is a key part of the preparation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. In December 2023 a public survey was launched, asking respondents to identify areas in Hampshire which would benefit from improvement for nature, set out their priorities for nature recovery and any barriers to accessing nature.
16. The survey was open from 14 December 2023 to 17 March 2024, in which time 1234 individuals completed the survey and 1574 individual locations for nature recovery were identified.
17. At the same time as the survey was running, a series of 20 workshops were held to engage with stakeholders and the community - 10 community workshops which were hosted by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and 10 thematic workshops which were aimed at organisations and specialist groups. Over 450 people representing over 100 organisations attended the mix of online and in-person sessions.
18. Participants of the workshops were asked to highlight work that has been taking place to date across Hampshire for nature recovery, their priorities for nature recovery and what they thought would help or hinder the delivery of the Strategy.
19. The workshops yielded a wealth of data which is being analysed so that it can feed into the emerging Strategy.
20. Progress has been made on the preparation of the Local Habitat Map, which will consist of three layers – Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity, Areas that Could Become of Particular Importance for Biodiversity, and Potential Measures.
21. The Areas of Particular Importance has been pulled together using existing data but in the form that Defra wish to see it presented in the Local Habitat Map. Guidance is continuing to be published by Defra on how to map the areas that could become of particular importance and the measures.

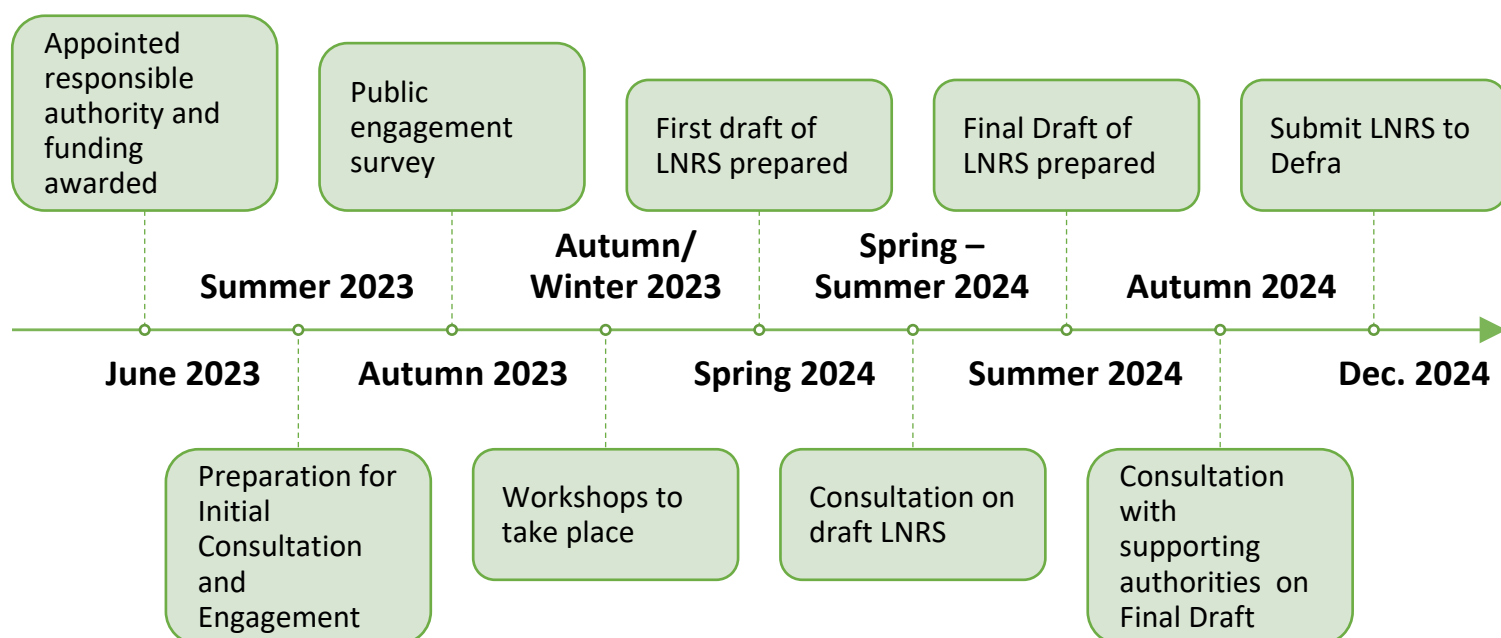
22. The guidance on the relationship between Local Plans and the LNRS, which is eagerly awaited by our Supporting Authorities, has been delayed as a result of the elections and there is no timescale currently for that to be provided.

Defra’s Expectations on Timescales for Delivery

23. When the County Council was appointed as Responsible Authority in July 2023, Defra advised that the LNRS should take 18 months to prepare and the expectation was that it would be published by December 2024.

24. As such a timetable was established in order to achieve this date as set out in figure 1.

Figure 1: Timeline for delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire



25. Whilst initial statutory guidance was issued in March 2023, as Responsible Authorities have embarked on the preparation of Strategies, questions and queries have been raised to seek clarification of specific elements of the process. As such, advice has been issued by Defra throughout the process, with the most recent guidance on mapping measures being provided in May 2024.

26. The County Council had a meeting with Defra’s LNRS team in March 2024, at which it was noted that the County Council had made good progress with the Strategy to date and was further advanced than many other Responsible Authorities. At that time, it was advised that the deadline for completion of the Strategy was extended to March 2025.

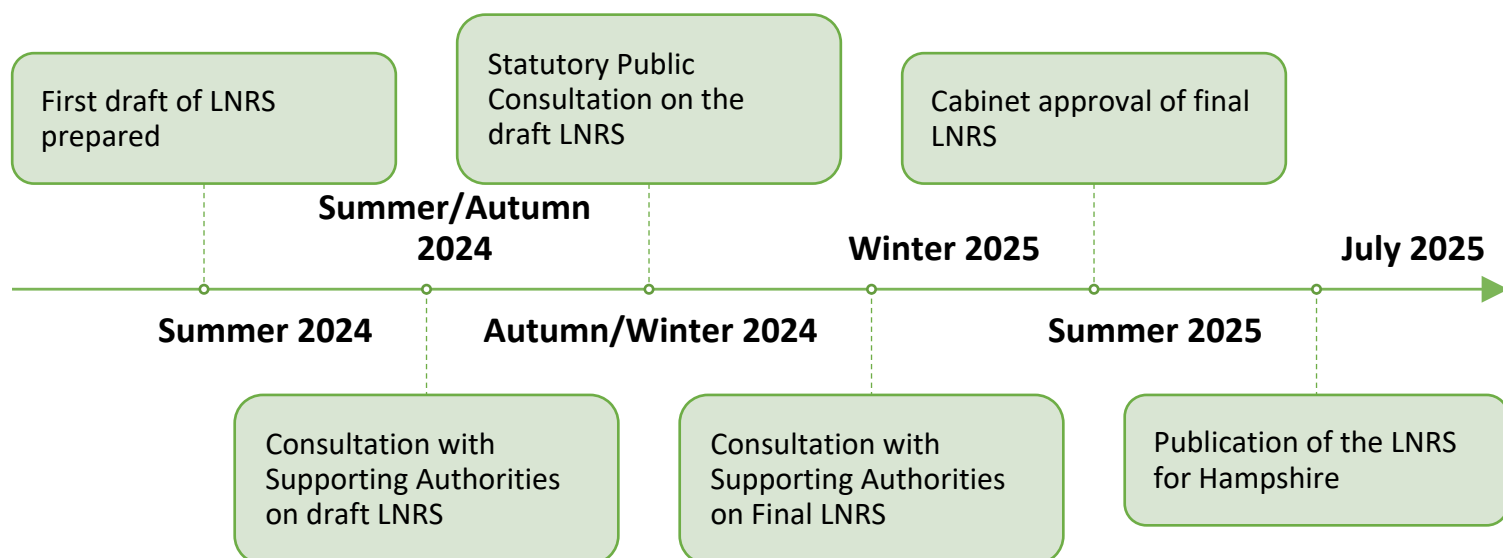
27. Since then, further advice has been issued but we are awaiting advice on a series of technical issues that we need to resolve before being able to finally prepare the draft Strategy. In addition, the local plan guidance that has been promised for over a year is still awaited. Progress has therefore stalled whilst we await this.

28. The Defra LNRS team attended the ADEPT Natural Capital and Heritage meeting on 20 May 2024, providing an update on the strategies nationally. At that meeting it was confirmed that, given the recognition of Local Planning Authorities ongoing frustrations, the timescales have been relaxed and Defra is now happy for the first public consultation to have been completed by March 2025.
29. Additionally, following the announcement of the forthcoming General Election on 4 July 2024 and associated pre-election period means that any awaited guidance or advice is likely to be further delayed.

Proposed amended timetable

30. In light of the delay to critical advice relating to the preparation of the LNRS as a result of the pre-election period, and Defra’s relaxation of the timetable for delivery of the Strategy, a revised timetable (figure 2) has been prepared for approval.

Figure 2: Revised timetable for the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire



31. It should be noted that, whilst the decision to approve the Strategy and subsequently publish the Strategy would take place next financial year, the preparation of the Strategy would be completed within the 2024/25 financial year in line with the grant funding awarded.

Finance

32. Defra has provided each responsible authority with funding to enable it to deliver the LNRS in the required timescales. The funding formula is based on the number and type of supporting authorities in the LNRS area and the number of farm businesses, recognising that these are resource intensive to engage with. Defra acknowledges that the Hampshire area is particularly complex with the

number of Supporting Authorities, National Landscapes, and neighbouring Responsible Authorities¹ to engage with.

33. The funding settlement for Hampshire is £388,000 over two years, with £207,000 paid in 2023/24 and £181,000 expected to be paid in 2024/25.
34. Once the LNRS is in place there is a requirement for the Responsible Authority to review, update and republish the Strategy every three to 10 years, subject to instruction from the Secretary of State. The letter confirming the County Council's appointment as Responsible Authority stated that 'the review and publication process set out in the LNRS Regulations will be accompanied by additional funding commensurate to the task at that time'.

Consultation and Equalities

35. The preparation of the LNRS requires significant engagement and consultation as part of the process of preparing the LNRS, including supporting authorities and neighbouring responsible authorities, partners such as the Local Nature Partnership and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, farmers and landowners, local interest and community groups, and the general public.
36. A series of workshops was held between January and March to engage with key stakeholders and communities at the outset of the project, alongside a public survey seeking the views of residents and workers of Hampshire. Further consultation will take place on the draft Strategy once it has been prepared.
37. The decision sought in this report will not reduce the scope of the service provided or have any impact on service users or the individuals working on the service, so has been assessed as having a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

38. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
39. The tools to assess specific impacts on climate change adaptation and mitigation were found not to be applicable on the grounds that the decision relates to the statutory responsibility to prepare a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. However, the LNRS is expected to include the wider environmental benefits of nature recovery, including nature-based solutions that counter the effects of climate change, such as natural flood management. The pilots have shown the potential for LNRS to bring together land use planning and land management. For example, they've identified woodland to store carbon, reduce

¹ The neighbouring Responsible Authorities are Dorset Council, Wiltshire Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (on behalf of Berkshire), Surrey County Council, West Sussex County Council and Isle of Wight Council.

flooding and cool urban areas; and peatlands, which absorb then store water while capturing carbon dioxide, contributing to Net Zero targets. Whilst the possibilities for Hampshire are not yet known, the LNRS will undoubtedly have a positive impact in respect of climate change.

Climate Change Adaptation

40. The LNRS, once prepared, will help to identify nature-based solutions to help counter the impacts of climate change and therefore will be a key tool in helping to ensure Hampshire's natural environment can adapt to the changing climate.

Carbon Mitigation

41. The LNRS, once prepared, will help to identify opportunities for carbon mitigation and therefore will have a positive impact in this respect.

Conclusions

42. Following appointment as Responsible Authority to prepare the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire, good progress has been made to date on engaging with key stakeholders and communities to provide the evidence base for the preparation of the Strategy.
43. Delays in key technical advice and guidance on how to prepare the Strategy has been delayed, partly as a result of the pre-election period for the General Election, and as such progress has stalled.
44. Approval is therefore sought to amend the timetable for delivery of the Strategy to July 2025.
45. The County Council has been awarded £388,000 by Defra to undertake the LNRS, split between the financial years of 2023/24 and 2024/25.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

The decision will not reduce the scope of the service provided or have any impact on service users or the individuals working on the service, so has been assessed as having a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics.