

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Hampshire 2050 and Corporate Services
Date:	23 January 2025
Title:	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
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.

Recommendations

2. That the revised timetable for delivery of the Strategy be approved.

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.
 9. Defra committed to provide each responsible authority with a Natural England Senior Advisor, a full-time resource to support the preparation of the Strategy and provide guidance and advice. The Senior Advisor appointed to Hampshire has unfortunately been on long-term sick leave since the beginning of the year and therefore Hampshire has not had the benefit of this support.

Governance for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire

10. 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.
11. 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

12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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 objection which must then be referred to the Secretary of State. Similarly, when the Responsible Authority comes to publishing 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

16. Engagement took place at the beginning of the year, with a series of workshops held between January and March of this year to engage with both key stakeholders and communities to gain insight on priorities for nature recovery. An online survey was also made available between December to March to get the public's views. Overall, the response to the engagement programme was extremely positive, with over 450 people attending the workshops and over 1200 people responding to the survey. The outputs from the engagement were then analysed and fed into the preparation of a draft Strategy.
17. A draft Strategy has been prepared, shaped by the engagement feedback received and guided by existing strategies and initiatives. As part of the Strategy, a Local Habitat Map has been prepared which consists of three layers: the areas that are of particular importance for biodiversity (APIB), the areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity (ACB) and the measures map.
18. The APIB layer shows existing designations including national conservation sites, Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites (SINCs), and irreplaceable habitat. The ACB layer was preparing using the Natural England network model and the outputs of the engagement – identifying sites that would provide opportunity to deliver nature recovery by supporting existing or creating new habitat. The measures map highlights the measures that will help achieve the nature recovery for each habitat or species. With such as significant proportion of Hampshire already designated (23%), the opportunities identified for nature recovery were many and varied and resulted in the ACB map covering 46% of the Strategy area.
19. The Local Habitat Map is important in so far as it sets the high-level strategy for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), guiding where it should be delivered to achieve the most impact and value for nature. If BNG is delivered in an area identified in the

Local Nature Recovery Strategy as somewhere that interventions can take place to deliver good outcomes for nature, it will be considered to have 'strategic significance' and therefore will be worth more than any BNG delivered in an area not identified in the Strategy.

20. As part of the process set down by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy Regulations, and in order to move to the next stage of engagement and undertake a public consultation on the draft Strategy, pre-consultation had to be undertaken with the supporting authorities – the local planning authorities within Hampshire, which includes the two unitary authorities and two national park authorities, and Natural England. The Regulations require the supporting authorities to provide approval to consult, and if any of the supporting authorities raises an objection the consultation the matter must be referred to the Secretary of State.
21. The Natural England process for managing the supporting authority consultation is to hold a Panel, with representatives of the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, the Natural England central team and three Natural England area directors. The Hampshire panel was held on 22 October and involved the Hampshire team presenting the draft Strategy and then answering questions from the Panel. Following the Panel, a representative from Natural England informed us that the Strategy should be withdrawn and advised that more work needed to be undertaken before a public consultation could take place.
22. The reason for this advice was that Natural England did not consider that the draft Strategy adequately prioritised areas for action, or provide clarity on priority measures where multiple options could apply to a single area.
23. In light of the additional and unexpected work that is required, the timetable for delivery of the Strategy has had to be reviewed. It will no longer be possible to deliver the Strategy by July 2025, as envisaged in the previously approved timetable.
24. Defra has advised that responsible authorities should proceed as quickly as possible, acknowledging that different circumstances in each area will dictate progress. The County Council has written to Defra requesting that Natural England support is provided as a matter of urgency in order to ensure any amended Strategy meets with Natural England expectations.

Proposed amended timetable

25. In light of the delay to the Strategy as a result of Natural England's advice, 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



Finance

26. 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.
27. 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. This sum was not ring-fenced and can be moved between financial years as necessary to support the delivery of the Strategy.
28. In light of the additional work that is required to be undertaken before the statutory public consultation can take place, the County Council has requested additional funding to enable the Strategy to be completed. Defra has confirmed that Ministers will be updated on LNRS progress early in the new year, following which the business planning process will be completed to determine budgets for 2025/26. Following this, Defra will provide an update on future funding arrangements.
29. 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'.

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.

Consultation and Equalities

30. 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.
31. 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.
32. 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

33. 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.
34. 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 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

35. 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

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

Conclusions

37. Following appointment as Responsible Authority to prepare the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire, the draft Strategy was prepared and ready for statutory public consultation. However, Natural England advised following the supporting authority pre-consultation that the Strategy be withdrawn and further prioritisation work be undertaken.
38. Approval is therefore sought to amend the timetable for delivery of the Strategy to December 2025.

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

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u> Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire	<u>Date</u> 27 June 2024

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>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.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
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 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.