

**To:** Future Oxfordshire Partnership

**Title of Report:** Update on Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy

**Date:** 30 July 20224

**Report of:** Chloe Edwards, Local Nature Recovery Strategy Project Manager, Oxfordshire County Council]

**Status:** Open

### **Executive Summary and Purpose:**

This report is being brought forward to update the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) development and the plan to go out to public consultation. No decisions are being sought from this summary update, but it will explain the process of approvals that it is taking with each District and City Council in Oxfordshire alongside County Council approval and adoption in future.

The report is being brought to update the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on the steps being taken by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire and the progress and role of this strategy.

### **How this report contributes to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision Outcomes:** [\(Oxfordshire Strategic Vision\)](#)

**1. Our natural environment will be in a better state than that in which we found it.**

This is the main outcome of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision (OSV) towards which the LNRS will contribute. LNRSs are expected to work with people and organisations across Oxfordshire to create a collaborative written 'statement of biodiversity priorities' – those which are most important to achieve in the county. Each priority will have corresponding actions for achieving it. It may be possible to map some of those actions to a specific location in Oxfordshire where they are particularly important. This is what the LNRS's Local Habitat Map will do. These documents, together, aim to support people to make decisions about what they could do in Oxfordshire and where they could do it. The LNRS will be selective in the areas which it maps and with the priorities that it lists. The goal of this is to focus resources towards 'top priority' issues and locations.

**2. We will already be carbon neutral and accelerating towards a carbon negative future.**

The creation, restoration, and improvements of a habitats across a large area significantly contributes towards the ability of our landscape to store carbon.

**3. Our residents will be healthier and happier, and overall wellbeing will have improved.**

Improving the amount of habitat and quality of biodiversity has positive impacts on people and wellbeing.

## **8. Our county's connectivity will be transformed in ways that enhance wellbeing.**

The LNRS aims to improve the connectivity between location which are 'of particular importance for biodiversity' and has tried to align this with the existing work being done by people and organisations in Oxfordshire.

### **Recommendations:**

1. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and constituent partners are aware of the progress being made by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
2. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and constituent partners are aware of the process of approvals and adoption planned for each Supporting Authority (District and City Councils).
3. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership is able to discuss and comment on the progress and future plan.

### **Appendices: None**

### **Introduction**

1. The Environment Act 2021 introduced a requirement to produce Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). LNRS will be an England-wide system of spatial strategies that establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. They will agree priorities for nature's recovery, map the most valuable existing habitat for nature, and map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals.
2. In March 2022 the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) identified that the county of Oxfordshire is an appropriate geographical area on which to prepare a LNRS. 48 geographical areas have been identified across England.
3. The production of an Oxfordshire LNRS provides a key opportunity to agree shared priorities for nature recovery across a wide range of stakeholders in Oxfordshire. The county has a strong background in collaborative working between nature conservation partners, and in spatial prioritisation of priorities through the identification of Conservation Target Areas (CTAs) and more recently the draft Nature Recovery Network, produced to inform OP2050. The LNRS will provide a critical framework for delivery of environmental aspects of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, particularly guiding principle 4.
4. There are a range of ways that LNRS will be delivered both by Oxfordshire County Council and partners. LNRS are intended to provide a focus for off-site biodiversity net gain (BNG) from development as well as having a broader role in the land use planning system as a source of evidence for preparation of Local Plans. LNRS will also support the delivery of wider environmental objectives, for example by mapping opportunities to use 'nature-based solutions' to problems such as flooding, climate change adaptation or poor water quality. It has been indicated that LNRS will be used to identify and prioritise activities eligible for funding under future agri-environment schemes.

5. Additionally, the Environment Act strengthens the existing duty on all public authorities to conserve biodiversity and includes a specific requirement for all public authorities to 'have regard' to LNRS, and a duty for some public bodies to report every 5 years on what action they have taken.

### **Financial Implications**

6. Officers and Cabinet Members for Finance and Climate Change Delivery and Environment from Oxfordshire County Council met with Defra Officers on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. During this meeting, Defra verbally confirmed that funding of £238,000 would accompany the appointment of the County Council as Responsible Authority. This is in addition to £48,500 already received from Defra as seed funding.
7. The funding amount is intended to cover the cost of the new burden introduced by the legislation and has been calculated by DEFRA using a formula considering the number of Supporting Authorities and number of agricultural businesses within the LNRS area.
8. The Defra funding will be received as two grants under Section 31 of the LGA 2003 - one (£127,000) soon after appointment as RA, and the second (£111,000) at the start of the financial year 24/25.
9. These funds are considered adequate by officers to cover the cost of LNRS production, which included recruitment of an FTE post to project manage the work, as well as fulfilling the requirements set out in the Regulations and Guidance for stakeholder engagement, mapping, public consultation and publication of the LNRS. Any costs that exceed the grant will be funded through existing County Council budgets.

### **Legal Implications**

10. As Responsible Authority, Oxfordshire County Council is required to ensure the LNRS is compliant with requirements of the Environment Act 2021 and The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 as well as any relevant policy or guidance issued by the government.
11. The Environment Act indicates that the responsible authority is to prepare and publish the LNRS, and that the strategy is to be reviewed and republished from time to time.
12. The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 sets out procedure to be followed in the preparation, publication, review and republication of LNRS.
13. Under Section 40(A) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 the Council must have regard to the LNRS in considering action it can take with regard its duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

### **Other Implications**

14. This paper is about LNRS production. Whilst there are no direct legal requirements on any one organisation to **deliver** the recommendations or actions suggested within the LNRS, it is for each partner to consider the extent to which their existing

and future budgets and policies represent adequate contribution towards nature's recovery.

15. It is important that the role of the LNRS is understood as a tool which can focus resources and efforts towards locations and priorities which could help more of Oxfordshire to become 'of particular importance to biodiversity'. Delivering the Strategy will require resources, plans and policies that incentivise land management change and habitat enhancement. One specific limitation is that the LNRS cannot directly influence other elements which are key factors in nature recovery including how we use land across the county.

### **Conclusion**

16. Oxfordshire's Local Nature Partnership, other partners, and all supporting authorities (the district councils, city council and Natural England) have been involved in the creation of the strategy since late 2023. They have been included in opportunities to shape and amend the strategy decisions and documents. The LNRS is now preparing to put documents up online for public consultation in mid September and all authorities, organisations, and partners will be invited to consult on the draft strategy documents to enable us to create a final version of the LNRS using your comments.

### **Background Papers**

- [The Environment \(Local Nature Recovery Strategies\) \(Procedure\) Regulations 2023](#)
- [Local Nature Recovery Strategy Statutory Guidance \(2023\)](#)

Report Author:

*Chloe Edwards, LNRS Project Manager – on behalf of: Oxfordshire County Council*

Contact information: [chloe.edwards@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:chloe.edwards@oxfordshire.gov.uk)