

OPEN

Environment and Communities Committee

13 November 2025

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Report of: Director of Planning and Environment

Report Reference No: EC/06/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 To consider publication of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cheshire and Warrington.

Executive Summary

- 2 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a key place making tool that provide strategic direction to protect and enhance the environment and habitats. They are a statutory requirement under the Environment Act 2021 and it is a legal requirement for Local Authorities to have a Local Nature Recovery Strategy as part of their enhanced biodiversity duty. Due to the legal standing of the LNRS, the mapped areas of strategic significance for nature's recovery will affect the planning process and the calculation of Biodiversity Net Gain Units.
- 3 LNRSs are prepared by a Responsible Authority and require support from the Supporting Authorities to develop the strategy bring it into effect. Cheshire West and Chester have acted as the 'Responsible Authority and led the production of the LNRS. Warrington and Cheshire East Councils have acted as Supporting Authorities. Publication of the LNRS brings it into effect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment and Communities Committee is recommended to:

1. Agree that the final Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cheshire and Warrington should be published by the Responsible Authority (Cheshire West and Chester Council).
2. Agree to host the LNRS and supporting material on the Cheshire East website.

Background

- 4 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) set out priorities and practical actions to protect, connect and improve habitats across a region. They are a legally required policy document that guides local planning decisions and longer-term investment in nature, particularly from Biodiversity Net Gain.
- 5 In Cheshire & Warrington, Cheshire West and Chester Council was appointed as the lead authority, the 'Responsible Authority', supported by several regional and national bodies. LNRSs were mandated by the Environment Act 2021 to address England's severe biodiversity loss. Each strategy must include a habitat map and a statement of biodiversity priorities, tailored to local needs and landscapes.
- 6 The LNRS is prepared ahead of devolution however joint working between the future Combined Authorities has produced a regionally strategic document that will help to shape the development of matters such as the Local Growth Plan and the Spatial Development Strategy, key documents that will articulate ambitions for communities across the region and establish an investment framework to support key economic sectors, growth and infrastructure.

Consultation and Engagement

- 7 Extensive pre and post draft LNRS public consultation gave the opportunity for the public, farmers and landowners, NGO's, communities and businesses to comment and help shape proposed priorities, measures and areas mapped for nature's recovery.
- 8 Over a two-year period, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy was shaped through extensive public consultation and engagement. Diverse stakeholders contributed via surveys, workshops, school competitions, and other outreach methods. More than 900 people shared their vision for a nature-positive future between February and April 2024.

- 9 Workshops held in Chester, Macclesfield, and Warrington focused on six key themes for nature recovery, later expanded to include Farmland and Urban areas. Following these, the Responsible Authority, Supporting Authorities, and the Local Nature Partnership collaboratively reviewed and refined priorities and actions over two six-week phases.
- 10 A shortlist of priorities and actions was agreed in October 2024 and ratified ahead of the draft strategy's public consultation, which ran from 14 February to 31 March 2025. The 160 responses received led to further amendments, finalised with Supporting Authorities for publication

Reasons for Recommendations

- 11 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is a key tool for guiding nature-focused investment and shaping long-term development through Local Plans in Cheshire and Warrington. It enables coordinated decision-making by providing a shared approach and detailed habitat data. The strategy proposes actions such as protecting peatlands, boosting habitat recovery, forming a county-wide Future Farming Group, expanding green infrastructure in disadvantaged areas, and identifying Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) investment opportunities.
- 12 A detailed delivery plan is being developed with the Local Nature Partnership to support collaborative implementation. Once established, the LNRS must be considered in planning and policy decisions across the region.
- 13 LNRS are not 'adopted' in the same way as Local Plans; the term used to bring them into effect is 'publication'. Publication has a specific legal meaning held within the Environment Act 2021 and Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023.
- 14 The responsibility for publication rests with the 'Responsible Authority', this is Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC). Therefore, in its role to support the development of policies that relate to inclusive and sustainable growth, and to improving the quality of the environment, the Committee is asked if it is content for CWaC to publish the LNRS, and that Cheshire East also hosts the LNRS and supporting material.

Other Options Considered

15

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The benefits outlined in the LNRS will not be realised;	The opportunity to give the document statutory status in the Local Plan making process and in

	government funding to implement recommendations will be put at risk.	development management decision making will be lost; the ability to deliver recommendations of the LNRS will be limited
--	--	---

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 16 There is an express duty to publish the LNRS. The Environment Act 2021 requires Responsible Authorities to consult in line with the Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023, ensuring that the Responsible Authority (Cheshire West and Chester Council) must share a publication draft with the Supporting Authorities, as per regulation 13 (1).
- 17 Before being published, the Cheshire West and Chester Council LNRS team must inform the Secretary of State for DEFRA of their intent to publish, as per regulation 17 (1). The final LNRS is brought into effect as part of the enhanced Biodiversity Duty of all Local Authorities, with the Responsible Authority responsible for reporting upon its progress.
- 18 As the Responsible Authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, must publish the LNRS. As a Supporting Authority, Cheshire East Council must also publish the consultation feedback report alongside the LNRS document and the Local Habitat Map.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 19 The development of the Strategy has been funded externally with support provided from Cheshire East officers, the staff time for which is funded from existing service budgets.
- 20 The proposal does not require additional budget approval or create future unfunded pressures and funding for improvements to nature highlighted by the strategy will come from a variety of grants, land management and private investment sources.
- 21 In recognition of the significant resource implications of preparing the LNRS, funding support is provided solely to the Responsible Authority, Supporting Authorities have a far more limited role, and therefore no access to funding is available to them.
- 22 DEFRA funding is available to implement the strategy (£135k for financial year 2025/6). The Responsible Authority will manage this. If the LNRS is not approved by December 2025, the funding is put at risk.

Human Resources

- 23 There are no Human Resources issues arising from the decision. Actions arising from the decision will be addressed by existing staff resource, within budget.

Risk Management

- 24 The table below outlines a summary of the risks being managed.

Risk	Mitigation
Removal of delivery funding from DEFRA	Approval of the LNRS
Impact financial gain from Biodiversity Net Gain on Council owned sites if the LNRS is not approved	Approval of the LNRS
Complaints from Farmers/Landowners about inclusion of their sites in the Local Habitat Map	Detailed communication paper shared with landowners regarding the implication of inclusion in the Local Habitat Map
Use of the Local Habitat Map by community groups/ parish councils to stop development	Legislation states that the LNRS must be 'taken regard of' in planning decisions but it does not have legislative power to prohibit development in the 'Opportunity Areas for Nature Recovery' as per Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (updated) 2023 and subsequent guidance published by the UK Government.
Biodiversity Duty non-compliance that leads to possible fine by national government	Approval of LNRS
Impact on future Spatial Development Strategies due to rejection of LNRS	Approval of LNRS

Impact on other Committees

- 25 The LNRS will have a cross-cutting effect on the development of corporate policy, particularly in relation to the Local Plan, and therefore will potentially support and shape decisions that are taken by other committees.

Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all	Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing	Commitment 3: An effective and enabling council
Key topics in the LNRS document focus on the impact of water availability/flood risk, SuDS/Natural Flood management, agroforestry and Biodiversity Net Gain, all of which can have a significant impact on the local economy. Investment in nature based solutions will also support the rural economy and the opportunities presented by devolution.	The LNRS focuses on the need to incorporate nature better into education. The LNRS seeks to achieve the national environmental objective of everyone being 15 minutes from a semi-natural greenspace and providing green skills opportunities.	The LNRS is a strategy to deliver action via Biodiversity Net Gain, will help ensure development has a positive impact on placemaking, the ecological network and broader landscape quality.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 27 The LNRS considers all needs, including ethnic minority communities and those living in areas of social, economic and environmental inequality, often places where investment in additional green infrastructure could act as a catalyst for better health, wellbeing, environmental quality and a stronger economy.
- 28 A range of methods should ensure the LNRS's use for delivery is as inclusive and accessible as possible, considering the needs of different audiences, offering a wide range of ways to take participate.
- 29 An Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the process and is included at Appendix 3.

Other Implications

- 30 The LNRS seeks to improve the lives of children and young people by promoting forest schools, encouraging better stewardship of the natural environment and providing the evidence base to encourage developers to provide more natural greenspace within developments.

- 31 The LNRS will benefit rural communities through better placemaking and improved strategic countryside management with nature and people in mind.
- 32 The Council has an ambition to help rural communities to thrive and Devolution will support targeted improvements to rural transport but also represents an opportunity to strategically invest in nature. The strategic nature of the LNRS will support delivery of ELMS (Environmental Land Management Strategies) and other nature-based solutions to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The integration of the LNRS with the Devolution agenda therefore represents an important opportunity for investment in our rural communities.
- 33 The Nature-based solutions theme within the document provides action that would help communities in Cheshire East adapt to climate change and become more resilient to heatwaves, drought and flooding events.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	24/10/25	28/10/25
Hilary Irving	Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer	30/10/25	30/10/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Wendy Broadhurst	Finance Business Partner – Place	16/10/25	20/10/25
James Thomas	Senior Lawyer - Place	16/10/25	20/10/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Directors</i>			
Chris Allman	Director Planning and Environment	16/10/25	20/10/25

Phil Cresswell	Executive Director - Place	24/10/25	27/10/25
----------------	----------------------------	----------	----------

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Tom Evans, David Malcolm, Angela Johnson Tom.Evans@cheshireeast.gov.uk, David.Malcolm@cheshireeast.gov.uk, Angela.Johnson@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Cheshire and Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy Appendix 2: LNRS Consultation Report Appendix 3: LNRS Equality Analysis (the appendix can be found under 'Local Nature Recovery Strategy' toward the bottom of the page)
Background Papers:	n/a