

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

4 March 2025

Subject: Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) - Consultation Draft

Cabinet Member: Cllr Dominic Muns - Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment

Key Decision: Non-Key

Executive Summary

The UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (published in 2018) sets out the aim to create a national-scale Nature Recovery Network (NRN) in England. Local Nature Recovery Strategies have been laid out in the [Environment Act 2021](#) to deliver nature recovery at a local and regional scale, by mapping ecological networks and identifying habitat restoration priorities.

On the 26 June 2023, Wiltshire Council was formally appointed the responsible authority for the LNRS for the Wiltshire and Swindon area under section 105 of the Environment Act 2021. Supporting Authorities included in this area are Swindon Borough Council and the New Forest National Park Authority, as well as Natural England. There are 48 responsible authorities across England.

The production of the LNRS has involved extensive partnership working with Responsible Authorities, Supporting Authorities and Defra. Other stakeholder groups include farming and environmental, protected landscapes, ecological NGOs, river catchment partnerships, Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre. This work has been completed to meet the requirements set out in guidance produced by Defra and [The Environment \(Local Nature Recovery Strategies\) \(Procedure\) Regulations 2023](#).

A draft LNRS (**Appendix 1 and 2**) has been produced, and this has been issued to the supporting authorities - Swindon Borough Council, New Forest National Park Authority and Natural England – on 20 Jan 2025 for sign off. This requirement is stipulated in regulations and supporting authorities have 28 days to respond. The public consultation version will incorporate any comments made by supporting authorities.

The next stage in the process is public consultation on the draft LNRS before the final strategy is adopted by the Council. This report is to seek approval for the public consultation stage of the process.

Proposals

To seek approval to undertake the public consultation stage of the draft Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Reason for Proposals

As the Responsible Authority for the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy the council has a duty to undertake a public consultation on the draft LNRS to meet the requirements set by [The Environment \(Local Nature Recovery Strategies\) \(Procedure\) Regulations 2023](#).

Parvis Khansari
Corporate Director - Place

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

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Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval to undertake the public consultation stage of the draft Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

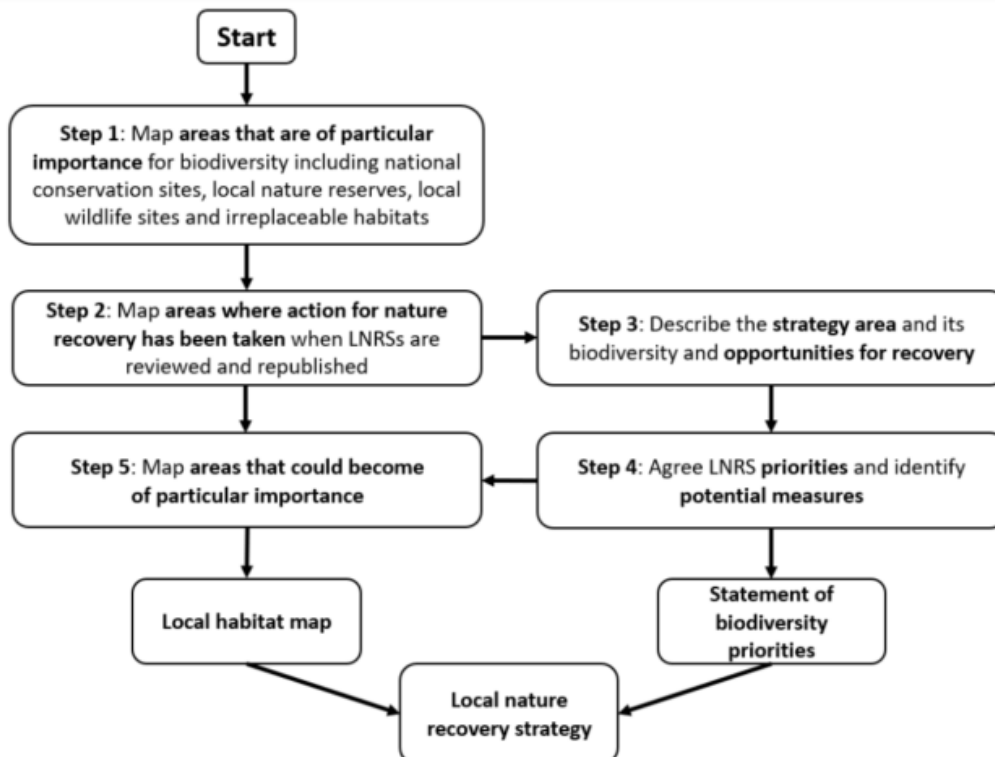
Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The Business Plan 2022-2032 'Sustainable Environment' seeks to improve and protect biodiversity and to promote and encourage sustainable sympathetic development.

Background

3. The UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (published in 2018) sets out the aim to create a national-scale Nature Recovery Network (NRN) in England, based on Lawton's, 'Bigger, Better, More Joined up' principles so that 30% of land will be well managed for nature by 2030, alongside plans to create 500,000 hectares of new or improved habitat outside of designated sites.
4. In the [Environment Act 2021](#), Local Nature Recovery Strategies are laid out as a mechanism to deliver the Lawton Review recommendations at a local and regional scale, by mapping ecological networks and identifying habitat restoration priorities.
5. Once adopted, the LNRS will assist in compliance with the [biodiversity duty placed](#) on public bodies. The LNRS will be relevant to the implementation and preparation of Local Plans and neighbourhood plans as well as the assignment and value of BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain). The LNRS while being designed to support nature recovery does not in itself prevent development taking place in the areas identified in the strategy. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is an evidence base which contains information that may be a 'material consideration' in the planning system. It is for the decision-maker to determine what is a relevant material consideration based on the individual circumstances of the case. Once developed the LNRS should also assist in drawing investment into the region.
6. The LNRS will help to define how wider environmental goals outlined in the Council's own strategies such as the Green Blue Infrastructure Strategy and the Carbon Strategy will be delivered and furthermore will be used by government to lay out the national nature recovery network in England.

7. On the 26 June 2023, Wiltshire Council was formally appointed the responsible authority for the LNRS for the Wiltshire and Swindon area under section 105 of the Environment Act 2021. Supporting authorities included in this area are Swindon Borough Council and the New Forest National Park Authority, as well as Natural England. There are 48 responsible authorities across England.
8. The LNRS officer was appointed in July 2023. Wiltshire Council is responsible for preparing, publishing, reviewing, and republishing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy following the process set out in [The Environment \(Local Nature Recovery Strategies\) \(Procedure\) Regulations 2023](#).
9. The [Statutory Guidance](#) may also be seen to lay out the expected process to be followed. The below image is provided as a summary.



Main Considerations for the Council

10. The LNRS has been recognised as a significant piece of novel work by government and to complete it Defra have provided Wiltshire Council with Section 31 grant of £277,813. Defra has set a tight timeline for completion of the 48 LNRS across England. The requested due date of this work was March 2025, although most Responsible Authorities are likely to be delivering through Summer 2025 due to lengthy and complex process involved in developing a LNRS.
11. The production of the LNRS (**Appendix 1 and 2**) has involved extensive partnership working. Representatives of major stakeholder groups (Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, River Trusts, National Landscapes, Farming, neighbourhood planning, Biodiversity Records centre, Forestry England, Environment Agency) and Representatives of supporting authorities (Swindon, Natural England and The New Forest NPA) were made part of a steering group and oversight group respectively so they could be consulted with throughout this project.

12. Council members, experts, other stakeholder group representatives and the public were consulted at key decision points or milestones including a 'user testing' event early in the project to establish what was wanted, widely held longlisting events to gather priorities and measures, shortlisting and validation meetings to finalise the selection of priorities and measures and a pre consultation survey to highlight major issues with the first draft of the mapping ahead of moving into the formal consultation.

13. The following engagement and stakeholder events have been held with council members:

- September 2023 – Early engagement with the Climate and Environment Forum
- February 2024 - Councillor briefing note sent regarding longlisting events
- May 2024 – Councillor briefing note sent regarding progress update
- September 2024 – Councillor briefing note sent regarding draft mapping and members first look events
- October 2024 – First Draft, first look members' event. These were well received.

14. The formal consultation process with supporting authorities (Swindon Borough Council, New Forest National Park Authority and Natural England) started on the 20 January 2025 and concluded with permission given for the public consultation stage on the 16 February.

15. The following tasks remain to complete the LNRS process and produce a final strategy:

- From 4 March 2025 – start of formal public consultation (subject to approval)
- May – June 2025 – Environment select TBC
- 8 July 2025 – Approval of final LNRS being considered at Cabinet
- 22 July 2025 – Approval of final LNRS being considered at Full Council

16. Public consultation on the LNRS is required under Regulation 12 of [The Environment \(Local Nature Recovery Strategies\) \(Procedure\) Regulations 2023](#). It is also necessary to fulfil the requirements in Regulations 5, 6, 7 and 8, which refer to the following provisions:

- Publication of information relating to local nature recovery strategies
- Local nature reserves and other areas of local importance for biodiversity
- Provision of consultation draft to supporting authorities (28 day period commenced 20 January 2025)
- Provision of consultation draft to neighbouring responsible authorities (24 January 2025). These were Gloucestershire, West of England, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Hampshire, and Dorset.

17. The public, council members and stakeholders will be provided the map and strategy document for comments which will be collected via online survey. Hard copy survey forms will also be available at libraries and at engagement events. The following documents form part of the public consultation:

- A local habitat map in the form of an online mapping tool.
- Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy -Public Consultation Draft.

18. Subject to approval, the public consultation will start from 4 March 2025 and run for 6 weeks. The consultation will be to gather in comments and views, and additions, changes or errors with the mapping and to provide confidence that the LNRS is fit for purpose.

Safeguarding Implications

19. There are no safeguarding implications associated with the proposal.

Public Health Implications

20. There are no direct public and health and wellbeing implications from the work in creating the strategy, but the LNRS will deliver these benefits:

- Green space is shown to be significantly beneficial to the Health and Wellbeing of people who have access to it. One of the goals set by Natural England is for the LNRS to contribute to the government target of ensuring everyone lives within a 15-minute walk of a green or blue public space.
- The ability to secure provision of housing while protecting the integrity of wildlife sites helps meet the needs of a growing population in a sustainable way supporting the well-being of communities.
- Healthy and well-functioning natural systems are integral to and touch on every aspect of life, ecosystem services (a metric which tries to account for this) includes food, pollination, clean air and water, flood prevention and other such benefits.

Procurement Implications

21. Procurement has and will continue to be undertaken in line with corporate procedures

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

22. The public consultation is considered to be low risk from an equalities perspective. Paper copies of the document and forms with consultation questions will be made available in 33 libraries and the three main council hubs. Three webinars will also be run to ensure that a wide audience is reached, and a recording will be made available. The online Storyboards for the habitat and species priorities include an accessibility statement. The engagement strategy has been able to engage effectively, with a wide range of audiences and this has been undertaken in line with the Public Sector Equalities Duty.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

23. The LNRS is entirely centred around strategically delivering nature recovery and all its associated benefits. The LNRS strategy will contain direct references to Climate mitigation and which actions will have impact for relevant risks (flood, drought, carbon etc). The LNRS has involved well-informed process that includes all the relevant data from spatial analysis, strategic document analysis and local engagement with stakeholders and communities. The LNRS will therefore include priorities and measures aimed at delivering on wider environmental goals such as climate change

and flood prevention where needed. If time and budget allow a further piece of work can be considered identifying areas where action for certain climate risks will have the most impact, this is however not statutory.

Workforce Implications

24. The Defra grant is providing the additional support needed to deliver the LNRS. Whilst fully funded, the preparation of the LNRS has involved support of wider teams outside of the Environment and Climate service – this includes GIS services, comms services and input from planning and public health. Additional resource has been recruited to assist with this process including a project officer, graduate ecologist and senior administrator.
25. A working group has been selected for the mapping work and a contractor has been appointed to undertake this detailed work. Consideration will be given to capacity implications for using in-house services to ensure the map is consistently hosted, maintained, and updated as necessary.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

26. If we do not undertake public consultation, we will not have fulfilled the statutory requirement to consult on the Wiltshire and Swindon LNRS.
27. In a LNRS guidance workshop on the 14 September 2024 Defra representatives announced that they wanted the LNRS's to be in place by March 2025 so that it aligned with further funding they will be seeking to roll out. Wiltshire is included with most Responsible Authorities that have been unable to meet this desired deadline. It has not been confirmed that missing the delivery timeframe will affect further funding, but this does remain a risk that will increase the more the deadline is missed by.
28. If the proposed public consultation is not approved at this time, the council will still have to consult on the LNRS at a later date, and before finalisation. This creates an extremely high risk that the intended full Council adoption date of 22 July 2025 will be missed, and the LNRS will have to wait until October 2025 for adoption. This will move Wiltshire out of the larger proportion of Responsible Authorities intending to adopt over the Summer. If we do not stay within tolerance limits for Defra regarding the adoption on the Wiltshire and Swindon LNRS then there is a risk this could impact further Defra funding.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

29. There are no risks if the proposed decision is taken. The public consultation stage is required by the legislation and due process has been followed for preparing the LNRS. Public consultation is only possible once sign off from the supporting authorities has been received.
30. However, there is a risk that the LNRS strategy may be misunderstood in its influence. Therefore, the LNRS Strategy includes a section on this. For example, the LNRS is not designed to place new restrictions on developing land or identify areas to be given legal nature protections that create restrictions on how land can be used or managed.

Financial Implications

31. The appointment as Responsible Authority for the Wiltshire and Swindon LNRS was supported by a Defra Section 31 grant of £277,813 for delivery. All work for delivery of the LNRS will be fully funded by this grant. This includes appointment of consultants and officer resource. There are no other funding implications.

Legal Implications

32. It is a statutory stage of this process to go to public consultation, as listed under [Section 106 of the Environment Act 2021](#) and [The Environment \(Local Nature Recovery Strategies\) \(Procedure\) Regulations 2023](#)

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

33. Engagement has and will continue to be undertaken with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function.
34. The LNRS has not yet been discussed at the Environment Select Committee as reporting has not aligned with LNRS timelines, however the Chairman of the Environment Select Committee received a briefing on 11 February 2025. Councillor briefings have been sent out and a copy of the LNRS will be sent to the chair for consideration in May to June 2025.

Options Considered

35. To streamline the work stages in the preparation of the LNRS to meet earlier deadlines set by Defra. This would not have allowed the extensive public and stakeholder engagement that the process requires and would risk that the LNRS is not fit for purpose.

Conclusions

36. The Wiltshire and Swindon LNRS (**Appendix 1 and 2**) should be approved to advance to the formal public consultation stage of the process.

Sarah Valdus - Director, Environment

Report Author: Alison Levy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy Officer
Lynn Trigwell, Head of Climate and Environment

Appendices

Appendix 1

[Wiltshire LNRS Web App 2025](#)

For ease of reference please also see this link for the collection of measures tables to be able to view them separately from the mapping.
([Local Nature Recovery Strategy Measures](#)).

Appendix 2 – Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Wiltshire and Swindon Public Consultation Draft March 2025 (pdf document)

Background Papers

Reports on creating the Wiltshire and Swindon LNRS, For Copies of these documents please email LocalNatureRecoveryStrategy@wiltshire.gov.uk

1. Governance agreement document for the oversight and Steering group
2. Report on user testing
3. Spreadsheet of Strategies reviewed
4. Report on longlisting and raw data
5. Report on Shortlisting and raw data
6. Validation group presentation
7. Report on Species longlisting and shortlisting
8. Timeline chart
9. Communications plan
10. Farmer Engagement Report

Defra Guidance and advice documents, For Copies of these documents please email LocalNatureRecoveryStrategy@wiltshire.gov.uk LNRS Statutory guidance

1. Governance and Working with Partners
2. Data Standards
3. Inclusive Engagement with Communities
4. Engaging the Land Management Sector
5. National Environmental Objectives
6. Identifying and Agreeing Priorities and Potential Measures
7. Mapping Potential Measures
8. Species Recovery
9. Natural England advice on LNRS ambition for nature
10. Delivery Policy Update