

Report Title: LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy - update and next steps towards approval of draft LNRS

Date of meeting:	17 th September 2024		
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration & Skills)		
Report of:	Stuart Barnes, Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing)		
Portfolio:	Housing and Highways		
Wards affected:	All		
Is this a key decision:	No. The decision by Overview and Scrutiny is not a Key Decision but subsequent decisions of Cabinet will be	Included in Forward Plan:	No. Not in respect of this report but details of subsequent reports to Cabinet will be
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

Summary:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet have agreed that the Council’s Executive/Scrutiny Protocol be updated to include the following paragraph (paragraph 6.13):

“Executive Directors and Assistant Directors, whose responsibilities fall within the remit of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, should seek the views of the Committees on all strategies and plans prior to submission to Cabinet and Council; and that if it is not possible, due to time constraints, to submit the final strategy or plan for consideration, then an outline or synopsis be submitted to the Committees to allow an oversight of the proposals to be considered and commented upon.

The purpose of this report is to comply with the above decision and to provide details of the preparation and approval of the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). While the LCR Combined Authority is the ‘responsible body’ for the approval of the draft and final Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Sefton Council as a ‘supporting authority’ has a specific role in approving both these stages of the Strategy, prior to the Combined Authority’s approval. The LNRS will set out the priorities for enhancing nature (nature recovery) across the LCR, in contrast to the loss of biodiversity nationally and locally in past decades. LNRS preparation has been an opportunity for Sefton to promote its habitat, species and wider environmental priorities, within a wider strategic context.

Recommendation(s):

That the Committee considers the approval role of the Council as a 'supporting authority' in the preparation of the LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the next steps in the preparation of the LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the submission of views to Cabinet or Council.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

To comply with Paragraph 6.13 of the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol.

2. Financial Implications

There are no new funding streams specifically for implementing any LNRS. However, once approved the LCR LNRS could help influence how Council Services such as Green Sefton and Highways (verges), and other landowners, manage their assets within existing resources, or help to justify any future sources of external funding.

There are no direct revenue implications arising for the Council from this report. Sefton's input to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy preparation process, including its formal role as a supporting authority, has been met from existing resources. There are no direct capital implications arising for the Council from this report.

3. Legal Implications

There are no direct implications arising from this report, subject to the risk implications below.

4. Risk Implications

Preparation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is required by the 2021 Environment Act. Any failure of the Council to approve the consultation draft and final LNRS in line with the timescale for the subsequent draft and final approval by the LCR Combined Authority could have implications and lead to delays in the draft and final approval of the LNRS by the LCR Combined Authority.

5 Staffing HR Implications

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

6 Conclusion

This report has been submitted to comply with Paragraph 6.13 of the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None. There is a need to comply with Paragraph 6.13 of the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol.

Equality Implications:

There are no equality implications. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy may help increase access to higher quality nature space in Sefton, including for disadvantaged groups.

Impact on Children and Young People:

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy may help increase access to higher quality nature space in Sefton, including for disadvantaged groups.

Climate Emergency Implications:

The recommendations within this report will have a Positive / ~~Neutral~~ / ~~Negative~~ impact.

The potential benefits of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in relation aspects of climate change and the Climate Emergency are set out in the report.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial (FD.7766/24) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5866/24) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

Consultation about Sefton’s input to the LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy has also taken place with Green Sefton, Highways, and other officers, and with Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service. Relevant Cabinet Members have been briefed.

(B) External Consultations

The Combined Authority has carried out consultations with the community, farmers and landowners, health stakeholders, Council officers and other partners. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy has an Advisory Board and Technical board, which include officer representatives from range of organisations and groups including Sefton Council, members organisations also part of Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership, and Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service. See the Combined Authority website - [Local Nature Recovery Strategy | Liverpool City Region Combined Authority \(liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk)

Implementation Date for the Decision:

Immediately following the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report: Local Nature Recovery Strategy Member Briefing Note prepared by the Combined Authority (July 2024)

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 The 2021 Environment Act set out a requirement for the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) across the country, to be approved by March 2025, to:

- Agree priorities for nature's recovery
- Map the most valuable existing areas for nature
- Map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals.

This is in the light of loss of biodiversity nationally and locally in past decades, for example in grasslands, lowland peat and heathland in Sefton and/or the Liverpool City Region. Sections 3 to 5 of this report deal with each of these points in more detail.

1.2 The LCR Combined Authority is the 'responsible body' for preparing and approving the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the Liverpool City Region (LCR). Like the other LCR districts, Sefton Council is a designated 'supporting authority' with a specific role in this preparation process. The Combined Authority has consulted Sefton as a key stakeholder formally and informally on an on-going basis, as set out in section 2 below.

1.3 The Combined Authority are intending to approve a draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for public consultation in autumn/winter 2024/5, and the final LNRS in spring 2025 in line with Government's deadlines.

1.4 The LNRS will be cross-cutting across several Sefton Cabinet Member portfolios (for example Public Health & Wellbeing, Housing and Highways), and has linkages with the corporate biodiversity duty and mandatory biodiversity net gain in development. Sefton Council as a supporting authority should approve both the draft and final LNRS prior to their approval by the Combined Authority. A member briefing note prepared by the Combined Authority is attached as Appendix 1.

2. LNRS linkages and benefits

2.1 The LCR LNRS will agree priorities for nature's recovery, map the most valuable existing areas for nature and map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals. While the Sefton Coast is internationally valuable for nature (habitats and species), other parts of Sefton are also important, for example farmland birds, coastal and other woodlands and wooded estates as important refuges for red squirrel, bats, breeding birds and farmland mammals such as brown hare. Some parts of more recently-planted community woodlands, other Countryside Recreation Areas (like the Rimrose Valley Country Park), and parks/ greenspaces throughout Sefton's urban areas, may be valuable existing areas for nature, with scope for further nature recovery in future.

2.2 Potentially, nature recovery and restoration of the natural environment has a range of green and blue infrastructure benefits for Sefton: notably to health, people and the environment, but also benefitting the economy. Benefits include recreation and health and well-being benefits and increased access to quality green spaces (accessible nature space), especially regarding urban parks and Countryside Recreation Areas. Responses to the Combined Authority's public consultation in autumn 2023 highlighted the importance of these health and well-being and access to nature benefits to local people. Other benefits may include local improvements to air and water quality, helping adapt to and mitigate for climate change (e.g. temperature, carbon emissions, flood risk).

2.3 There are no new funding streams specifically for implementing the LCR LNRS. However, once approved the LNRS could help influence how Council Services such as Green Sefton and Highways (verges), and other landowners, manage their assets within existing

resources. It may lead to further moves towards particular nature-friendly improvements or management regimes; or help them to take advantage of future funding initiatives, for example environment-led agricultural payments, tree planting/ carbon offsets, off-site biodiversity net gain monies. Potentially also, the LNRS may influence take-up of or help secure any future new nature-related funding income streams, for example increased green skills and training opportunities.

- 2.4 The Combined Authority's formal and informal consultations with Sefton as part of the LNRS preparation process has provided an opportunity for Sefton to promote its habitat, species and wider environmental priorities. Green Sefton, Planning and other Council officers, supported by advice from Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) officers, have had an input to emerging LNRS priorities, in line with corporate landscape development priorities. MEAS have also provided technical advice and support to the Combined Authority. Key Cabinet Members have been briefed. The Combined Authority have consulted the public and specific groups such as landowners as well as the Council.
- 2.5 There is a relationship between Local Nature Recovery Strategies and other provisions of the 2021 Environment Act, which also introduced new environmental reporting duties for local authorities. The Act amended the 'biodiversity duty' introduced by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Sefton Council, like all public authorities, now has a statutory duty to 'conserve and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of its functions' (previously the duty was only to 'conserve' biodiversity). As above, management of Council assets can fulfil both the biodiversity duty and help secure nature recovery and implement the LNRS.
- 2.6 The 2021 Environment Act also introduced the requirement for mandatory biodiversity net gain in all development (except nationally exempt development, such as house extensions). This is now in force. The LNRS would help identify sites and other priorities for specific and measurable biodiversity net gain.

3. Emerging LNRS priorities for nature recovery

- 3.1 The emerging LCR LNRS aims to set out habitat and species priorities for nature recovery. It will also explain why these are priorities. Habitat priorities will focus on coastal and estuarine, farmland, urban and suburban, woodland, grassland, and wetland and watercourse habitats. Likely priorities include:
- Interconnected and dynamic coastal habitats and appropriate management of coastal and estuarine recreation
 - Improved water quality in marine, estuarine and intertidal areas
 - Estuarine and intertidal habitats, plus functionally linked land
 - More sustainable farming methods and water management on agricultural peat soils
 - Reconnected and new tree, ditch and hedgerow networks
 - More high quality and interconnected urban green and blue infrastructure
 - Nature at the heart of urban design and planning, with Biodiversity Net Gain on or close to development sites
 - A network of open mosaic habitats on brownfield land
 - Existing species-rich grasslands enhanced, and new grassland networks created
 - Naturally functioning wetland, pond and river habitats networks
 - Restored lowland raised bogs, wet woodlands and fens.
 - Good condition or good management for these habitats.
- 3.2 Species priorities are likely to include bats, ground-nesting birds, willow tits, forester moths, Natterjack toads, non-protected reptiles and amphibians, and red squirrels.

3.3 The Combined Authority prepared a briefing note for members in July 2024 and this is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

4. Emerging LNRS mapping of the most valuable existing areas for nature

4.1 It is anticipated that LNRS mapping of the most valuable existing areas for nature will include internationally, nationally and locally designated sites (Local Wildlife Site and Local Geological Sites), Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs), ancient woodland and 'irreplaceable habitat', and reflect Priority Habitats.

4.2 For Sefton this will include the Sefton Coast, which includes designated sites, Priority Habitats, Priority Species and protected species and irreplaceable habitats such as sand dunes and salt marsh. The Sefton Coast is also mostly within the Sefton Coast NIA Focus Area.

4.3 Inland areas include Local Wildlife and Geological Sites such as North Meols Estate, Churchtown, Wham Dyke Meadows in Formby, Ince Blundell and Little Crosby Estates, Rimrose Valley and Canal, and Pond and Open space at Copy Lane Netherton, and Whinny Brook in Maghull. NIA Focus Areas include the River Alt and M57 Corridors and Formby Mosslands. Irreplaceable habitats as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework include ancient woodland and lowland fen. Sefton's only ancient woodland is in Lydiate.

5. Emerging LNRS mapping of specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals.

5.1 The Combined Authority has recently consulted the public and key stakeholders for suggestions of specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals although the results of this consultation are not yet available. While detailed site priorities should be identified within individual Service Plans or other Sefton documents, general Sefton priorities include:

- Sites within Sefton's existing green network of parks, Countryside Recreation Areas and other greenspaces, including some Council-owned sites which may be potential sites for 'off-site biodiversity net gain'
- Land at Lunt, and other areas and sites linked to NIA Focus Areas within Sefton
- 'Making Space for Water' (natural flood management) schemes such as that proposed in Churchtown and Crossens
- Green infrastructure-related nature recovery on transport route such as rail, roads, canals, strategic paths, and including significant street tree planting schemes
- Green infrastructure-related nature recovery as part of urban regeneration plans and projects.

6. Next steps

6.1 The Combined Authority and Sefton are finalising the timetable for Sefton and the other LCR districts to approve the consultation draft and final LNRS, prior to their respective approvals by the Combined Authority. The intention is that the draft LNRS should be reported to Sefton's Cabinet in autumn/winter 2024/25, seeking approval of the draft LNRS for public consultation. Ideally, the final LNRS would be reported to Cabinet in spring 2025.

6.2 As a designated 'supporting authority' for the LNRS, these Sefton Council approvals are necessary before the Combined Authority as 'responsible body' for the LNRS approves the draft and final Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

6.3 This report relates to Sefton Council's approval of the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy. A subsequent reporting process will deal with the approval of the final Local Nature Recovery Strategy in due course.