

<b>Cabinet / Council Report</b>	<b>Sefton Council</b> 		
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>Approval of Draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy</b>		
Date of meeting:	9 January 2025		
Report to:	Cabinet		
Report of:	Assistant Director (Place) Economic Growth and Housing		
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member – Housing and Highways		
Wards affected:	All		
Is this a key decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

### Summary:

The Liverpool City Region (LCR) Local Nature Recovery Strategy is being prepared by the LCR Combined Authority as ‘responsible body’ in line with government deadlines, with public consultation on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy due to take place from February 2025 and the final Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be approved in mid-2025. Sefton Council as a ‘supporting authority’ should approve both the draft and final Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to their approval by the Combined Authority. The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to its consideration by the LCR Combined Authority. The LNRS is a cross-cutting theme across several Cabinet Member portfolios and Services.

### Recommendation(s):

That Cabinet:

- (1) On behalf of Sefton Council as a supporting authority, recommend the draft Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy is approved for consultation by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority as responsible body;
- (2) Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Highways, in consultation with the Assistant Director Place (Economic Growth and Housing) or the Chief Planning Officer, to agree any subsequent changes to the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy arising through the supporting authority and Combined Authority approval process; and
- (3) Delegate authority to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Highways, to make minor editorial and presentational changes to the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy arising through the supporting authority and Combined Authority approval process.

## 1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

- 1.1 To allow the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority to approve the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy for public consultation, in line with national requirements. Supporting authorities such as Sefton Council must agree the draft LNRS prior to its approval by the Combined Authority.

### **Introduction/Background**

- 1.2 The 2021 Environment Act set out a requirement for the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) by 2025, to:
- Agree priorities for nature's recovery (reversing the decline in biodiversity)
  - Map the most valuable existing areas for nature
  - Map opportunities for nature recovery 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 (LCR).
- 1.3 To do this, the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) will consist of:
- a statement of biodiversity priorities (attached)
  - a local habitat map which will be web-based and interactive (pdf representations only for Sefton attached, not the LCR as a whole).
- 1.4 The LCR Combined Authority is the 'responsible body' for preparing and approving the LNRS for the Liverpool City Region. Like the other LCR districts, Sefton Council is a designated 'supporting authority' with a specific role in this preparation process. The LCR LNRS is being prepared in line with national requirements, evidence such as a report on the state of nature in the LCR and consultation with supporting authorities, land managers, other key stakeholders and the local community. The Combined Authority intends to carry out public consultation on the draft LNRS to take place from February 2025, and on the final LNRS in mid-2025, in line with Government's deadlines.
- 1.5 The LNRS is cross-cutting across several Sefton Cabinet Member portfolios (for example Public Health & Wellbeing, Housing & Highways, Regeneration & Skills) and Services. Sefton Council as a supporting authority should agree both the draft and final LNRS prior to their approval by the Combined Authority.

### **LNRS linkages and benefits**

- 1.6 The LCR LNRS will agree priorities for nature's recovery, map the most valuable existing areas for nature and map opportunities for nature recovery 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, agricultural areas (bird feeding), coast, community and other woodlands and wooded estates (red squirrel, bats, breeding birds, farmland mammals) and Countryside Recreation Areas and parks throughout Sefton's urban areas (existing or potentially important areas for biodiversity or for wider environmental goals).
- 1.7 Potentially, nature recovery and restoration of the natural environment has a range of benefits for Sefton, notably to people and the environment. These may include helping adapt to and mitigate for climate change (e.g. temperature, carbon emissions, flood risk), increased access to quality green spaces and local improvements to air and water quality; all with inherent economic and health and

well-being benefits. Responses to LNRS public consultation in autumn 2023 highlighted the importance of these well-being and access to nature benefits for local people.

- 1.8 Once approved the LCR LNRS could, potentially, influence how Council Services such as Green Sefton and Highways, manage their assets. It may encourage moves towards particular funding initiatives and be a focus for attracting any future new nature-related funding income streams, for example environment-led agricultural payments, tree planting/ carbon offsets, off-site biodiversity net gain. Potentially the LNRS may lead to increased green skills and training opportunities within Sefton, including Natural Alternatives, for example. For the Planning Service, any future review of the Local Plan should have regard to the LNRS.
- 1.9 The preparation of the LCR LNRS has provided an opportunity for Sefton to help shape and deliver LCR nature recovery priorities. Green Sefton, Planning and other Council officers, supported by advice from Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) officers, have had an input to the preparation of the emerging LNRS, in line with corporate and partner Landscape Development priorities. MEAS have also provided specialist 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.
- 1.10 The 2021 Environment Act also introduced mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) in all development (except nationally exempt development, such as house extensions); now in force. Other net gains for biodiversity may be required by other local development plan documents. The LCR LNRS will provide guidance to the Planning Service, developers and the public about the preferred habitat type for on-site or off-site biodiversity net gain, and preferred locations for off-site biodiversity net gain.
- 1.11 Additionally, the 2021 Environment Act amended the 'biodiversity duty' for all public authorities introduced by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The Council must 'conserve and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of its functions' (not just 'conserve'). This also links to the activities and priorities of Services such as Green Sefton, Highways, Asset Management and Planning. The Act also introduced new environmental reporting duties for local authorities.

#### **Draft LNRS Statement of Biodiversity (nature recovery) Priorities**

- 1.12 The Draft LCR LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities sets out background, context, a Vision, habitat and species priorities for nature recovery in the LCR, an overview of the Local Habitat Map and a section of delivery of the LNRS.
- 1.13 Habitat priorities and headline measures for nature recovery in the draft LCR LNRS focus on the following broad habitat types: wetland and watercourse, coastal and estuarine, grassland, woodland and trees, urban and farmland habitats. A number of mapped and unmapped measures / actions are included for each habitat priority. Species priorities and measures include bats, ground-nesting birds, willow tits, forester moths, Natterjack toads, non-protected reptiles and amphibians, and red squirrels.

- 1.14 For example, one of the 'urban' priorities is "*More high quality and interconnected green and blue infrastructure in urban areas designed in collaboration with communities*", with a measure for '*Use of roadside verges, railways and other linear infrastructure to connect areas of biodiversity, and aid movement of key species*'.
- 1.15 While there are currently no new funding streams specifically for delivery of this or any LNRS, once approved the LCR LNRS could potentially influence how Council Services and other landowners manage their assets, encourage them to move towards particular funding initiatives or help attract any future new nature-related funding income streams. Mandatory biodiversity net gain may help delivery of the LNRS. Other factors that will play a role in delivery include continued collaboration, partnership working, community involvement and care, behavioural change, skills and capacity building and on-going recording and monitoring.

### **Draft LNRS Local Habitat Map**

- 1.16 The Local Habitat Map is made up of two components:
- Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIBs) – existing areas
  - Areas that Could become of greater importance for Biodiversity (ACBs) - potential nature opportunities.
- 1.17 **Areas of particular importance for biodiversity (APIBs)** are the most valuable existing areas for nature are. They include internationally, nationally and locally designated sites (Local Wildlife Site and Local Geological Sites) and 'irreplaceable habitats (which are very difficult to replace once lost).
- 1.18 For Sefton, such sites include the Sefton Coast. 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 Whinny Brook in Maghull. Irreplaceable habitats as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework include ancient woodland and lowland fen. Sefton's only ancient woodland is in Lydiate.
- 1.19 The aim set out in the draft LNRS is that, wherever possible, APIBs should be enhanced and expanded, managed for biodiversity and connected by the opportunities identified in the LNRS. There are actions / measures identified for these areas which relate to those identified in section 6 of the Statement of Biodiversity (nature recovery) Priorities.
- 1.20 **Areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity (ACBs)** are places where an opportunity to enhance, restore or create habitat has been identified. These areas and their associated measures have been mapped based on where action would have the greatest impact for nature recovery and for people (taking into account factors like the needs of nature, ability to provide multiple benefits, aspects relating to climate change, nearby habitats, existing constraints and deliverability). Again, these actions / measures relate to those identified in section 6 of the draft Statement of Biodiversity Priorities.
- 1.21 There has been Council and community input to the draft Local Habitat Map and actions/ measures. While they would have the greatest impact for nature, the measures/actions are not binding and do not prohibit other habitat creation, enhancement or management measures on these sites or areas or action in other areas. Identification of a site as an ACB would not prevent other forms of land use,

or development of that site. Rather, they show developers, planners and others where there are opportunities identified to do something significant for nature recovery and what the best action to take would be (for example through mandatory biodiversity net gain for development proposals). They identify the preferred habitat interventions to support nature recovery of locally important species.

- 1.22 Across Sefton (and indeed the whole LCR) the Draft Local Habitat Map identifies a number of Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity and Areas that Could become of greater importance for Biodiversity and associated actions / measures. These are subject to the caveats set out in the draft Statement of Biodiversity Priorities (see paragraph 4.6 above). For example, these sites and areas include:
- Main parks across Sefton (the largest parks with the biggest range of facilities) and other Council-owned sites which are considered to be priority potential sites for 'off-site biodiversity net gain'
  - 'Greenways' networks of parks, the canal and other key paths / routes, other greenspaces, countryside recreation areas, across Sefton and notably within Bootle and Netherton, such as grassland enhancement and wetland enhancement in Rimrose Valley
  - Safeguarding important bird roosting sites and management of the intertidal habitat at Seaforth Nature Reserve
  - Red squirrel measures in Formby Pine Woodlands
  - Habitat creation including woodland and wetland habitats in Lunt Meadows and Forest Park
  - Enhancement and invasive species control in Lydiate's Ancient Woodland
  - Wetland enhancement and invasive species control measures on Whinny Brook, Maghull
  - Woodland enhancement and pond management in Hesketh Park, Southport.

### **Next steps**

- 1.23 The Combined Authority intends to approve the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy for public consultation after it has been approved by Sefton Council and the other supporting authorities, with public consultation taking place from February 2025. The Combined Authority's intention is to approve the final LNRS in mid-2025, again after prior approval of supporting authorities.

## **2. Financial Implications**

- 2.1 There are no direct revenue implications arising for the Council from this report. The LCR Combined Authority is the 'responsible body' for preparing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Sefton's input to the preparation process, including its formal role as a supporting authority, has been met from existing resources.
- 2.2 There are no new funding streams specifically for implementing any LNRS. However, once approved, potentially the LCR LNRS could influence how Council Services manage their assets. Potentially also, the LNRS may be a focus for attracting any future new nature-related funding income streams.

## **3. Legal Implications**

3.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report. However, any failure of the Council to approve the consultation draft and final Local Nature Recovery Strategy 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 Local Nature Recovery Strategy by the LCR Combined Authority.

**4. Corporate Risk Implications**

4.1 Any risk would seem be to the Council’s reputation, as Sefton’s approval is needed before the Combined Authority can approve the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy for public consultation. The Combined Authority is required to prepare the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in line with government guidelines and timescales.

**5. Staffing HR Implications**

5.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

**6. Conclusion**

6.1 It is concluded that Council should approve the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to its consideration by the LCR Combined Authority, in line with the recommendations set out elsewhere in this report.

**7. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

7.1 None. The LCR Combined Authority have advised that Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) supporting authorities such as Sefton Council must agree the draft LNRS prior to its approval by the Combined Authority.

**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: No**

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 impact	Yes
Have a neutral impact	No
Have a negative impact	No
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Yes

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 & Commercial (FD.7862/24) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5962/24) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

### (B) External Consultations

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

The Combined Authority has carried out consultations with the community, farmers and landowners, health stakeholders, Council officers and other partners and stakeholders. 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 \(liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk\)](http://liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk)

### Implementation Date for the Decision

Following the expiry of the "call-in" period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Andrea O'Connor
Telephone Number:	0151 934 3560
Email Address:	andrea.oconnor@sefton.gov.uk

### Appendices:

Draft Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy prepared by the Combined Authority – strategy and representational PDF map of Sefton only, not the whole of the LCR (as set out in paragraph 1.3 above)

### Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.