

Local Nature Recovery Strategies: A successful step in nature recovery

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We recently published an article on Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), accessible [here](#). In this update, we explore the publication of the first LNRS and its implications for biodiversity and planning policy in the UK.

On November 7, 2024, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) published England's first LNRS, representing a significant step forward in the implementation of measures proposed under the Environment Act 2021 to improve England's natural environment.

The latest annual report on progress towards legally-binding environment targets in England published in January 2025 by the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) and titled "[Progress in improving the natural environment in England 2023/2024](#)" specifically recommends that Government should progress LNRS while pointing out that plans on their own are not enough without resources to implement them.

The LNRS published by WECA covers Bristol, South Gloucestershire, and Bath & North East Somerset and seeks to identify and prioritise opportunities for nature recovery across these areas.

Natural England supported WECA in crafting the strategy, ensuring it met the national standards for ecological planning and was developed and published in accordance with statutory requirements.

As Natural England have highlighted in their blog on the newly published LNRS (accessible here:

<https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/07/working-together-for-nature-collaborating-on-the-first-local-nature-recovery-strategy-in-england/>),

LNRS are intended from the outset to be collaborative, with people and groups from across the public, private and voluntary sectors involved not only in the development and publication of the LNRS but also in its delivery through working collaboratively to deliver the ambitions set out in each LNRS.

In developing the new LNRS, WECA went to some lengths to ensure representation from a broad range of stakeholder interests, including local government, environmental NGOs, regulatory bodies, utility companies, farming and landholders, and the healthcare sector, reflecting the wide range of stakeholders with an interest in nature recovery.

Natural England praised the LNRS for setting a "*high standard for collaborative environmental planning*" and emphasised its potential to guide future strategies.

LNRS are intended to help identify where effort, time and resources can be best focussed to deliver nature recovery. The new LNRS published by WECA includes a list of priority outcomes and measure to achieve them, such as securing more and better wetland, woodland and grassland habitats through management, habitat creation and restoration measures.

A key feature is its alignment with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) policies, incentivising developers to integrate LNRS priorities when planning biodiversity offsets.

Among the key initiatives in the new LNRS are:

- **Nine Nature Recovery Programmes:** Includes targeted projects such as woodland restoration, grassland and wetland connectivity, urban nature enhancement, and river restoration.

This in turn would support biodiversity by protecting habitats and reintroducing species while addressing ecological barriers like transport infrastructure.

- **Nature Recovery Toolkit:** A practical resource for residents, landowners, businesses, and community groups to actively participate in recovery efforts, translating strategic goals into actionable steps.

This would aid in engaging local authorities, environmental NGOs, and the private sector investors to align efforts.

- **State of Nature Monitoring:** The interactive map identifies "mapped measures" for optimal habitat creation or enhancement, forming "focus areas for nature recovery" and showing where Biodiversity Net Gain units can be maximised. The accessibility of this feature would encourage local citizens to engage with areas of interest and raise awareness amongst the British population.

The WECA LNRS is accompanied by various guidance and technical documents, including three separate "practical guides":

- User Guide for planners, ecologists and developers
- User Guide for Farmers and Landholders
- User Guide for Residents and Businesses

Each guide provides context-specific information on how the Nature Recovery Toolkit can be used, for example by developers in identifying sites for the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), or by farmers in deciding what actions to prioritise in making farming more nature-friendly, or by parish councils seeking guidance and funding for creating new habitats for wildlife.

The wider picture

LNRS complement existing policies and mandatory requirements, such as BNG – where developers are required by law to deliver 10% biodiversity net gain on all new developments (subject to limited exemptions). If further advice is required on BNG, we have published various articles, including one accessible [here](#) and are very happy to answer any queries.

Furthermore, The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), notes that the LNRS framework supports strategic habitat creation, bolstering resilience against climate change impacts. By mapping ecologically significant areas, LNRS provide critical data for planners and developers seeking to align their projects with sustainability goals. LNRS remain an integral part of the Government's efforts in meeting the ambitious 2030 target to halt biodiversity decline.

What's next?

The intention is that LNRS will cover the whole of England – with no gaps or overlap – and further LNRS are therefore expected to be published this year. These are anticipated to address ongoing challenges, such as balancing ecological recovery with development pressures.

The Autumn 2024 budget reiterated the Government's commitment to biodiversity funding by allocating £70 million in 2025-26 to support infrastructure and housing development while boosting nature recovery. This includes £14 million for the Nature Restoration Fund to offset the environmental impact of development, with a developer contribution, and £13 million to expand Protected Sites Strategies in priority areas. This demonstrates the UK Government's continued support for nature recovery.

We will continue to watch this space as local authorities across the UK as a clearer image emerges regarding the LNRS and their goal in the Government's wider plans for nature recovery.

How can we help?

Our planning, environment and public law team can assist with queries on LNRS from responsible authorities or other organisations involved or impacted by LNRS - having considered the procedural and policy elements from the perspective of both responsible authorities and supporting authorities, as well as discussing LNRS and how they link in with other nature recovery schemes and policies with landowners, public sector bodies and charities.

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