

This report is public	
Local Nature Recovery Strategy	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	7 October 2025
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities, Councillor Tom Beckett Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management, Councillor Jean Conway
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	24 September 2025
Report of	Corporate Director Communities, Ian Boll

Purpose of report

To endorse the publication of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To endorse the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and approves its publication by Oxfordshire County Council.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report presents the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for consideration (Appendix 2). It outlines the purpose, scope and content of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- 2.2 The Environment Act 2021 establishes the requirement on Local Authorities to publish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Oxfordshire County Council is the Responsible Authority for Oxfordshire and has the duty to prepare the LNRS. Each of the District Councils, the City Council and Natural England are Supporting Authorities who play a key role in shaping the LNRS throughout its preparation.
- 2.3 LNRS's are a new system of spatial strategies for nature recovery. The main purpose of the LNRS is to identify locations where the creation and/or enhancement of certain habitats would provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment, including reconnecting habitats as part of an ecological network. Landowners and managers will not be required to implement any of these measures. However, the LNRS encourages the delivery of targeted actions for nature recovery as opportunities for funding and investment arise. The LNRS itself is not a constraint in Planning and does not preclude or prevent any other type of land use or development.

- 2.4 The LNRS comprises four key documents/components:
1. Description of the Strategy Area;
 2. Statement of Biodiversity Priorities;
 3. Species Priority List; Local Habitat Map; and
 4. An online public and interactive map tool.
- 2.5 The draft LNRS was subject to public consultation from October to December 2024 and, in response to feedback and comments, the Strategy was adjusted accordingly.
- 2.6 The final LNRS documents and map have now been shared with this Council as a so that they can be taken through the formal democratic process for the endorsement of the publication of the LNRS.
- 2.7 The Supporting Authorities are required under The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (procedure) 2023 to confirm that they “raise no objection” to the Responsible authority publishing the LNRS. However, Oxfordshire County Council is asking supporting authorities to go further in their intention and ‘endorse’ the LNRS for publication.
- 2.8 Once published, the LNRS is intended to be used across a wide audience within Oxfordshire including the public, community groups, charities, NGOs and Councils.
- 2.9 The Environment Act places a duty on Local Authorities to have regard to the LNRS in exercising their functions and Supporting Authorities will be key users of the Strategy. It is intended that Local Plans will refer to the LNRS as a guiding document and for it to be used to inform decisions within Planning and direct any Council efforts for nature recovery. This will help the Council deliver other organisational objectives and duties more effectively such as biodiversity net gain and the Biodiversity Duty but will not otherwise have direct implications for the Council’s processes and operations.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	<p>The costs of producing the LNRS are being met from ‘new burdens’ funding from DEFRA which is paid to Oxfordshire County Council as the Responsible Authority.</p> <p>Officers have been closely involved in supporting the development and production of the LNRS but other than this ‘in-kind’ commitment of staff time there are no costs to the council as a result of the production and consultation on the Oxfordshire LNRS.</p> <p>Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 28 August 2025</p>
Legal	<p>The production of an Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is a requirement of the Environment Act 2021. The role of this Council as a supporting authority is set out in Section 11(2)(b) of</p>

	Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023.			Denzil Turbervill, Head of Legal Services, 3 September 2025
Risk Management	There are no risks arising from the proposed publication of the LNRS. Any risks arising in the future in relation with this proposal will be managed through the service risk register and escalated to the Leadership risk register as and when deemed necessary.			Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 17 September 2025
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact	X			Delivering the priorities set out within the Oxfordshire LNRS is intended to help mitigate and improve Oxfordshire's resilience to climate change, boost public health, and secure an improved, healthy and functioning environment. This will be of benefit to future generations within the whole community including people who share and do not share protected characteristics as set out by the Equality Act 2010.
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			Positive impact as above.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			Positive impact as above
Climate & Environmental Impact	X			The production and implementation of the actions in the Oxfordshire LNRS are integral to efforts to address both the climate and biodiversity crises. The restoration and creation of new habitats will act as a direct carbon sink as well as restoring important ecological processes, reducing climate vulnerability, and restoring nature.
ICT & Digital Impact		X		
Data Impact		X		

Procurement & subsidy		X		
Council Priorities	This report and the endorsement of the LNRS publication links to the Council's '...Vision for Lasting Change 2025-2030' Priority 3 – Environmental Stewardship, specifically according with 'to Safeguard the environment and promote biodiversity'.			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	<p>A countywide steering group set up as a subgroup of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) has been formed and has been meeting monthly.</p> <p>Consultation has also occurred via workshops throughout Oxfordshire during March/April 2024 and an online survey to all residents of Oxfordshire.</p> <p>Public consultation of the draft LNRS was carried out for six weeks (18 Oct- 1 Dec), including over 50 engagement events.</p>			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is a requirement of the Environment Act, which came into force in November 2022. At the end of March 2023 DEFRA published the local nature recovery strategy guidance document and the local nature recovery strategy Regulations.
- 3.2 Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a system of spatial strategies for nature and environment improvement and each strategy must:
 - 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.
- 3.3 DEFRA appointed Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as the responsible authority to lead the production of the LNRS for Oxfordshire. Cherwell District Council is one of the Supporting Authorities.
- 3.4 Supporting Authorities have an integral role in shaping the LNRS. There are two key statutory stages in the process of preparing the Oxfordshire LNRS where the supporting authorities must be consulted and approval sought. The first stage is prior to the draft LNRS going out to public consultation. The second stage is prior to the publication of the final draft.
- 3.5 The strategy sets out where and how people and organisations in Oxfordshire could best work together to create a more resilient ecological network within identified

priorities. The strategy also offers recommended actions to be taken in the wider countryside to improve the natural environment across the County.

4. Details

- 4.1 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy comprises four main documents / components, which are summarised below:
1. The **Description of Strategy Area** summarises Oxfordshire's biodiversity, habitats and areas of particular importance, as well as the river catchments and underlying geology. It also outlines the opportunities, pressures and a summary of what needs to be done for biodiversity.
 2. The **Statement of Biodiversity Priorities** has a list of the most important outcomes (priorities) to achieve the recovery of nature in Oxfordshire and a list of actions (potential measures) to achieve these. There are 40 priorities and 85 potential measures, 40 of which have been mapped on the local habitat map.
 3. The **Species Priorities List** is a list of species that require specific additional actions that goes beyond the Statement of Biodiversity Priorities. This includes 61 species-specific measures which targets 105 species. A number of species current and historical distribution maps across Oxfordshire are also displayed in this document and some distribution maps have been added onto the local habitat map. Over 800 threatened and near threatened species that are expected to benefit through large-scale habitat improvements listed in the Statement of Biodiversity Priorities.
 4. The **Local Habitat Map** an interactive mapping tool which displays existing areas in Oxfordshire that are important for biodiversity as well as areas that could become particularly important for biodiversity. The biodiversity priorities are mapped and these show locations for specific habitat and species actions. The map promotes connectivity across the county and linking areas of particular importance for biodiversity.
- 4.2 The LNRS strategy has been in preparation since August 2023 and a series of early engagement events were held in 2024 for nature conservation groups, the general public, local authority officers and local councillors, to begin the prioritisation process.
- 4.3 The Council's Senior Ecologist has had input into the preparation of the LNRS via the Supporting Authorities working group, technical subgroups, an open invitation to the LNRS Steering group meetings and the public consultation response.
- 4.4 The purpose of the LNRS steering group, a subgroup of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, is to manage the process of producing the LNRS and to ensure that all stakeholders, including Local Authorities, NGO's, local environmental groups and the public are fully engaged in helping to produce the LNRS.
- 4.5 The public consultation garnered more than 3500 responses with more than 50 engagement events held. This Council also submitted comments to the public consultation at Officer level.

- 4.6 Comments received within the consultation period have now been acted on where appropriate and responses to all comments can be found on the Oxfordshire County Council LNRS website. Responses to this Council's comments are provided at Appendix 1.
- 4.7 There will be presentational changes to the LNRS documents before publication. Separate guidance documents for using the LNRS are to be produced for different user groups, including Planning Officers for the delivery phase of the LNRS.
- 4.8 Oxfordshire County Council intends to publish the final LNRS on its website in the second week of November 2025. National guidance states that the Secretary of State will tell Responsible Authorities when they must review and republish their LNRS. This will be every 3-10 years.
- 4.9 The LNRS will assist the Council with the implementation of the statutory biodiversity duty placed on public bodies (Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 which was strengthened in the Environment Act 2021) by directing nature recovery actions.
- 4.10 The priorities and measures set out in the LNRS will be considered in plan-making and will support the National Planning Policy Framework requirement for plans to enhance the local and natural environment. The LNRS supersedes the draft Nature Recovery Network in this regard and proposed modifications to the Local Plan to reflect this are being drafted for consideration at its Examination.
- 4.11 Once published the LNRS will define 'Strategic Significance' in the Biodiversity metric for statutory Biodiversity Net Gain – encouraging net gain in the most appropriate places for the greatest biodiversity benefit. This will form part of the usual assessment process of net gain for planning applications.
- 4.12 The LNRS will be used as a focus for investment and funding into nature conservation projects in the County and will help meet the Council's strategic environmental sustainability objective.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative option has been identified.

Option 1: Object to the publication of the LNRS and submit a PAN (publication advisory notice). Regulation 15 of the LNRS regulations provides that a Supporting Authority may submit a publication advisory notice to the Responsible Authority. It may do this if it considers that, either parts of a final local nature recovery strategy cannot be justified based on the results of the consultation undertaken or that the strategy is materially defective.

This option has been rejected because CDC Officers have been closely involved in all stages of the development, review and preparation of the LNRS and support the publication and endorsement of the LNRS.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The Environment Act 2021 establishes the requirement on Local Authorities to publish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- 6.2 Supporting Authorities are required to confirm in writing that they are content for the LNRS to be published within 28 days of the Responsible Authority providing them with the final draft of the LNRS. The council received the final draft of the LNRS on 22 July 2025 and the deadline for raising an objection or endorsing the LNRS is the 15 October 2025.
- 6.3 The Council's Senior Ecologist has been closely involved in the preparation and drafting of the LNRS, and there has been a series of public and stakeholder engagement events and a full public consultation. Consultation comments have now been acted on and the final draft LNRS documents have now been prepared based on the feedback from the public consultation and input from a wide variety of biodiversity experts as well as the Supporting Authorities. Officers are satisfied that the document is fit for publication and should be endorsed.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes - Community Impact. Decision is significant in its impacts on all wards in the area of the Council for a number of years and on communities in terms of environmental well-being.
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	CDC comments on the draft LNRS consultation and LNRS response
Appendix 2	Appendix 2a: Description of Strategy Area Appendix 2b: Statement of Biodiversity Priorities Appendix 2c: Species Priority List Appendix 2d: Local Habitat map- LNRS Final App

	Appendix 2e: Letter to Supporting Authorities
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	<p>Local Nature Recovery Strategy Statutory Guidance, DEFRA March 2023 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1146160/Local_nature_recovery_strategy_statutory_guidance.pdf</p> <p>The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2023/341/made</p> <p>The Environment Act 2021 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents</p> <p>Oxfordshire County Councils LNRS pages including responses to public consultation Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Oxfordshire County Council</p>
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Corporate Director Approval (unless Corporate Director or Statutory Officer report)	Corporate Director – Communities, Ian Boll 22 September 2025