

<b>This report is public</b>	
<b>Draft Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Consultation Approval</b>	
<b>Committee</b>	Portfolio Holder Decision – Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities
<b>Date of Report</b>	25 September 2024
<b>Portfolio Holder presenting the report</b>	N/A
<b>Date Portfolio Holder agreed report</b>	20 September 2024
<b>Report of</b>	Corporate Director – Communities, Ian Boll

## Purpose of report

To seek the approval of the Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities for the draft Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be published for public consultation.

## 1. Recommendations

The Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities resolves:

- 1.1 To approve the draft Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy for public consultation.

## 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 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 (RA) for Oxfordshire and each of the District Councils the City Council and Natural England are Supporting Authorities (SA's).
- 2.2 Supporting Authorities are required to confirm in writing that they are content for the consultation to proceed within 28 days of the RA providing them with the consultation draft of the LNRS. The council received the consultation documents on 6 September 2024, and the deadline for confirming is 8 October 2024. The approval of the Portfolio Holder to the consultation is therefore sought.

## Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
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<b>Finance</b>	<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 RA.</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, 9 September 2024</p>			
<b>Legal</b>	<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 Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023.</p> <p>Shahin Ismail, Legal Services Manager, 13 September 2024</p>			
<b>Risk Management</b>	There are no risks arising from the proposed consultation.			
<b>Impact Assessments</b>	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
<b>Equality Impact</b>	X			Delivering the priorities set out within the Oxfordshire LNRS is intended to strengthen the economy, 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
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			Delivery of the Oxfordshire LNRS would have a positive impact as set out above
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			Delivery of the Oxfordshire LNRS would have a positive impact as set out above.
<b>Climate &amp; Environmental Impact</b>	X			The production and, once finalised, the implementation of the actions in the Oxfordshire LNRS are integral to efforts to address both the climate and ecological 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.
<b>ICT &amp; Digital Impact</b>				N/A
<b>Data Impact</b>				N/A
<b>Procurement &amp; subsidy</b>				N/A
<b>Council Priorities</b>	Supporting Environmental Sustainability			
<b>Human Resources</b>	N/A			
<b>Property</b>	N/A			
<b>Consultation &amp; Engagement</b>	Councillor Tom Beckett, Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities			

## 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 regulations.
- 3.2 LNRS's 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 has appointed Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as the 'responsible authority' to lead the production of the LNRS for Oxfordshire.
- 3.4 A countywide steering has been formed and has been meeting monthly. The purpose of the steering group 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. In this way it is hoped that all the supporting authorities are ultimately supportive of the outcomes. The steering group has been setup as a subgroup of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and includes the following organisational representatives:
- Oxfordshire County Council (Responsible Authority)

- Oxfordshire LNP
- Oxfordshire National Landscapes
- Oxfordshire City and Districts (Supporting Authorities)
- Forestry Commission
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Wild Oxfordshire
- Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust
- Representative from the farming and landowning community.

## 4. Details

- 4.1 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 (RA) for Oxfordshire and each of the District Councils, the City Council and Natural England are Supporting Authorities (SA's).
- 4.2 Supporting Authorities are required to confirm in writing that they are content for the consultation to proceed within 28 days of the RA providing them with the consultation draft of the LNRS. The council received the consultation documents on 6 September 2024, and the deadline for confirming is 8 October 2024.
- 4.3 The Council's ecologist have been closely involved in the preparation and drafting of the LNRS, and there has been a series of public and stakeholder engagement events. The engagement exercise was designed to reach out to a wide variety of people, organisations, and landowners to understand their priorities for nature. Over 1162 people and organisations responded to the engagement exercise.
- 4.4 The Draft LNRS documents have now been drafted based on the feedback from the engagement exercise and on input from a wide variety of biodiversity experts. The Draft LNRS has four key parts:
- 1) A description of the strategy area
  - 2) A Statement of biodiversity priorities (habitats)
  - 3) A species priorities list
  - 4) A local habitat map
- 4.5 With regard to Cherwell specifically, the areas of existing importance for biodiversity and areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity are mapped.
- 4.6 At this stage the council is not being asked for comments on the draft LNRS documents, just whether we are content for the documents to be subject to public consultation. Officers are content that the Draft LNRS is fit for public consultation.
- 4.7 Once the public consultation commences members will have the opportunity to provide individual comments on the Draft LNRS. In addition, the Council is able to submit a corporate response to the consultation.
- 4.8 Following the public consultation period, which will run from 15 October for 6 weeks, the draft documents will be revised to take account of the comments received before a final draft of the LNRS is produced. The final draft LNRS will then be submitted to this Council for formal approval.

4.9 Following approval from all the supporting authorities, OCC will approve the final LNRS for publication and submit the documents to DEFRA.

## 5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Do not confirm that Cherwell DC is content for the public consultation to commence.

Option 2: To object to public consultation on the draft LNRS.

Both of these options have been rejected as Officers have been closely involved in all stages of the development and preparation of the Draft LNRS and are content that the draft strategy would be substantively beneficial to meeting the Council's environmental sustainability objective and should proceed to public consultation.

## 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). Oxfordshire County Council is the Responsible Authority (RA) for Oxfordshire and each of the District Councils the City Council and Natural England are Supporting Authorities (SA's).

6.2 Supporting Authorities are required to confirm in writing that they are content for the consultation to proceed within 28 days of the RA providing them with the consultation draft of the LNRS. The council received the consultation documents on 6 September 2024, and the deadline for confirming is 8 October 2024.

6.3 The Council's 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. The Draft LNRS documents have now been drafted based on the feedback from the engagement exercise and on input from a wide variety of biodiversity experts. Officers are satisfied that the draft document is fit for publication and will contribute towards the Council's environmental sustainability objectives.

## Decision Information

<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Subject to Call in</b>	N/A
<b>If not, why not subject to call in</b>	N/A
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	All

## Document Information

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	1A: LNRS draft Description of Strategy Area v1 06SEP2024 final draft without comments for Sas  1B: Species Priorities  1C: Biodiversity Priorities  1D: Cherwell - Inclusion Layer (Areas of existing importance for biodiversity) and Solution layer (Areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity)  1E: Oxfordshire – Inclusion and Solution Layers
<b>Background Papers</b>	None
<b>Reference Papers</b>	<a href="#">Local nature recovery strategy</a> <a href="#">statutory guidance</a> <a href="#">biodiversity duty</a>
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