

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 6 September 2023

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Review date for release N/A

Nature Recovery Declaration for East Devon

Report summary:

East Devon DC is required to have input into the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) process under the Environment Act 2021. Devon CC as the identified 'Responsible Authority' has requested that all District Authorities who are identified as 'Supporting Authorities' contribute to the consultation and preparation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This will mean identifying what is important to us so that our local priorities and views are taken full account of in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) process. Defra has provided advice on the preferred approach to developing all Local Nature Recovery Strategy's and the governance arrangements each Responsible Authority should put in place to enable the preparation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The Nature Recovery Declaration for East Devon recognises the crisis we are facing ecologically alongside climate change and sets out how the Council will respond to this emergency at a high level. The actions East Devon DC will need to take will flow from this Declaration and also be guided by the new responsibilities placed upon local authorities by the Environment Act 2021 for developing a Nature Recovery Network that targets our most important and vulnerable habitats and species.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Cabinet recommend to Council;

1. To adopt the Nature Recovery Declaration for East Devon
2. To support Devon CC as the 'Responsible Authority' in developing a Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy in our role as a 'Supporting Authority' as defined by the Environment Act 2021;
3. To develop a Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local Habitat Map for East Devon as a 'Supporting Authority' as defined by the Environment Act 2021.

Reason for recommendation:

This will enable East Devon DC to fulfil its role as a Supporting Authority as defined in the Environment Act 2021 and support Devon CC in developing a Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). It will also enable East Devon CC to prepare a Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local Habitats Map that will develop the district's Nature Recovery Network and improve those habitats and species most under threat.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk; The Environment Act 2021 has created a new duty for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be prepared by the Responsible Authority (Devon CC) and that all Supporting Authorities (District Councils) to have regard to it so that it can be integrated within the Local Plan making process as policy. Therefore, if we fail to be part of the process of collaborating and informing the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy and then preparing a Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local Habitat Map for East Devon we may fail in our delivering on this new duty.

Links to background information [Nature Declaration for East Devon](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

Report in full

1. What is the problem?

We have both a Climate and Biodiversity crises and currently the United Kingdom is within the bottom 10% countries globally and also the worst G7 nation for biodiversity loss. Nature is key to mitigating and adapting to climate change, and supporting health and wellbeing. These twin crises present environmental, social and economic impacts and risks.

- Economics of Biodiversity, The Dasgupta Review (2021) stated: “Our economies, livelihoods and well-being all depend on our most precious asset: Nature”.
- Our approach over past 70 years has been a focus on nature conservation: this has led to preserving pockets of nature. However, this approach hasn’t stopped decline of biodiversity so as a matter of urgency we now need to move towards nature restoration and nature recovery, In the words of Lawton Report (2010) we need: ‘Bigger, better, more, more joined up’.

2. Overarching Nature Recovery Network (NRN) strategic ambition

The Nature Recovery Network (NRN) is a national network of wildlife-rich places, connecting across urban, rural and coastal landscapes, recovering nature at scale, benefiting people and nature. Through establishing a Nature Recovery Network:

- Enhances, restores and expands existing wildlife sites.
- Complements and connects sites through wildlife corridors and stepping stones, buffering zones of sustainably managed land.
- Provides ecosystem benefits such as carbon capture, climate resilience, flood management, improved air and water quality, pollination, sustainable resources.
- Enables access to and enjoyment of nature – benefitting health and wellbeing.

3. Why is it important for local authorities?

For local authorities, nature recovery links to a range of agendas:

- Addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies.
- Flood resilience and drought management.
- Mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- Green infrastructure (GI).
- Access to greenspace and nature.
- Sustainable management of public green spaces to encourage wildlife and improve forage for pollinators, including wildflower meadow and longer grass cutting regimes
- Energy efficiency.
- Improving air and water quality.
- Providing healthy soil that supports sustainable food production.
- Thriving wildlife, including services like pollination.
- Secure livelihoods and the basis of a healthy economy.
- Place-making.

These are all areas that have been identified within the current Council Plan and also within East Devon's Climate Change Strategy, Public Health Plan and Greenspace Strategy as well as the East Devon and Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plans.

4. Background to Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a new system of spatial strategies for nature, contained in the Environment Act 2021. The Local Nature Recovery Strategies have been designed to work closely alongside other measures in the Act. They will, for example, support delivery of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and provide a focus for a strengthened duty on all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. They will also work to develop partnerships and to integrate nature into our incentives and land management activities.

They are designed as tools to drive more coordinated, practical and focussed action to help nature. Each strategy will, for the area that it covers:

- 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.

The production of each Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) will be evidence based, locally led and collaborative, to help create a network of shared plans that public, private and voluntary sectors can all help to deliver. This will provide a locally owned foundation to the developing Nature Recovery Network, identifying the places, which, once action has been taken on the ground, will enable the network to grow over time.

Defra has identified that each LNRS needs to be developed by a Responsible Authority:

- Appointed to lead the LNRS for an area by the Secretary of State this will be Devon CC.
- Local leadership, knowledge and expertise, underpinned by a national framework of regulations, guidance and support.
- 48 provisional responsible authorities appointed who must: prepare > publish > review > republish their LNRS.
- Regulations include rules on how to do these things to promote consistency and minimum standards.
- Not prescriptive – about how responsible authorities must work with others to create strategies with collective support to create foundations for joint delivery.

The core purpose of LNRSs is to help reverse an ongoing decline of nature and biodiversity in England. To do this, a key feature of the strategies is that they will identify areas that are already of importance for nature, along with areas that could become of particular importance and where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits. In other words, LNRSs will identify where we should take action for nature's recovery as well as where nature-based solutions can help address wider environmental problems. There are specific initiatives in East Devon where LNRSs will help to deliver long-term solutions, which are identified in the report.

5. The role of East Devon DC in the LNRS process

Where upper tier authorities have been identified as the Responsible Authority for leading the process then District Councils have been defined as Supporting Authorities in the process in helping to contribute to the LNRS and what is important to them. This means that the LNRS process is both collaborative and inclusive so accounting for local priorities and views.

The Regulations create the role of “supporting authority” and say how responsible authorities must work with them. Supporting Authorities are in essence local planning authorities (including National Park Authorities) in the Strategy area and Natural England for all LNRSs;

5.1 Why are they needed?

- To make sure LNRSs dovetail with the planning system as we don't want conflicting steers for the same piece of land.
- LNRSs will identify areas for nature recovery for Local Plans;
- Local Plans will help LNRSs understand which areas of land are earmarked for other uses so that the LNRS reflects Local Planning Authority thinking on delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain.
- To provide a different point of view & constructive challenge.
- Natural England will provide support and advice, and encourage consistency and join-up.

5.2 The role of East Devon DC as a Supporting Authority is also critical in a number of ways:

- Adopting a Nature Recovery Declaration for East Devon that recognises the crisis nature is facing and is used to inform all strategic council plans and policy areas.
- Developing a Local Habitat Map for East Devon.
- Developing a Local Nature Recovery Plan (an updated and refreshed version of East Devon DC's Local Biodiversity Action Plan).
- Ensuring that these documents are considered and embedded within the Local Plan review work.
- That East Devon DC's Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local Habitat Map links directly to our Biodiversity Net Gain policy and delivers off site mitigation enabling the integration of nature recovery into the planning system.

- Working collaboratively with the Responsible Authority to ensure that the Districts priorities are considered through active engagement with the process. This includes sitting on specialist task groups, e.g., BNG, raising any concerns with the Responsible Authority (Devon CC), and ensuring any agreements to consult and publish on the LNRS is consistent with our Nature Recovery work.

Supporting Authorities will “have regard” to their LNRS and further advice is due to be published by DLHUC for Local Planning Authorities on this issue and how the LNRS needs to be consistent with Local Plans. It will be essential that any plans for new housing allocations and significant development will need to be compatible with both the LNRS and Local Plan policy as they will be feeding into each other.

6. Existing nature recovery plans/delivery partners

6.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs):

- The two AONBs (Blackdown Hills and East Devon) both have Nature Recovery Plans which already prioritise where and how nature recovery can be implemented within the AONBs.
- These plans identify targets to achieve the objective of 30% of land in wildlife management by 2030 (a target of the 25 Year Environment Plan).
- They both identify habitats and species which are the focus of the Nature Recovery Plans. In order to achieve the goals of the Nature Recovery Plan, a range of mechanisms are proposed to deliver nature recovery:

6.2 Clyst Valley Regional Park

- The Clyst Valley Regional Park masterplan contains detail on species recovery targets and contains an indicative nature recovery network map (which is separate to the ongoing Nature Recovery Network mapping being carried out for the LNRS, although is similar in principle).
- The Clyst Valley Regional Park aims to generate a pipeline of projects to deliver nature recovery, amongst other benefits. Within this, a focus is placed on community engagement, volunteering, citizen science, engagement with land owners/managers and Non-Government Organisations, advice to landowners regarding grants and drivers for land use change (Biodiversity Net Gain delivery investigations).

6.3 Triple Axe initiative

- The River Axe is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Triple Axe Action Plan (2021-26) contains specific targets for improvements within the Axe catchment. These have the ultimate goal of improving the condition of the River Axe, but will achieve this goal through a range of mechanisms which ultimately provide nature recovery.
- The Triple Axe is based around three main themes – Farming, Nature and People. The key principles of the Triple Axe Action Plan are:
 - A focus on supporting farming businesses to further improve, adapt or transform.
 - Involving farmers, their representatives, milk companies and the wider industry, with a focus on business as well as environmental advice.
 - Encouraging peer support networks to share best practice and collaborate in practical ways.
 - Targeting activity to the sub-catchments that are either most vulnerable or appear to be generating the most impact.
 - Tying this work to the development of a Nature Recovery Network.
 - Involving the whole community.
 - Increasing the focus on regulatory obligations and enforcing regulations when required.

- Recognising the costs of this work and access the finance required.
- Investing in monitoring to enable gauging of problems and improvement.
- Creating a single programme that cuts across county, AONB and organisational boundaries, supported by all partners and agencies.

Within the LNRS, responsible bodies are encouraged to work in a cross boundary way, in order to integrate the Devon LNRS with bordering counties. The Triple Axe is perfectly positioned to do this.

6.4 EDDC Countryside

- The Countryside team hosts projects such as Wild Exmouth and Wild Honiton, and has direct links into local community groups. These advise and facilitate urban nature recovery, as well as community engagement with nature assets in the wider landscape.
- The Countryside team in general plays a significant role in community nature related engagement and environmental education in the district. There is significant potential for the Local Nature Recovery Plan and Countryside Team activities to complement each other in these two areas .

6.5 Common themes

Common themes to all of these delivery partners are

- Provision of farming and land management advice, including dissemination of information on grant funding e.g. Biodiversity Net Gain, Nutrient Neutrality and Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL).
- Building relationships with land owners and managers.
- Creation, support and engagement with local community groups, for the purposes of volunteering and citizen science.
- Small-scale community funds for projects.

7. Potential new projects, strategy and policy

There are potential East Devon DC specific priorities (outside of the AONBs nature recovery objectives) that have been discussed between the Countryside Team Manager, Green Infrastructure Project Manager, Habitats Regulations Delivery Manager and District Ecologist. These areas should be progressed as part of the Council's commitment to delivering a Nature Recovery Network for East Devon. A summary of those potential area are:

- Investigate delivery of a District-wide Nature Recovery Network that is focused around the District's six major towns – this would take the form of Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategies and Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) based master planning. This is where the LNRS process will have the most impact in protecting important wildlife areas from development and providing green infrastructure in and around our main towns.
- Embed the master planning of a second new community around the principles and processes of both LNRSs and a Green Infrastructure framework/strategy.
- Expand farm advice and community engagement work to areas outside of the AONBs – using lessons learned from and advice of the AONBs.
- Implement Development Management team training to effect meaningful protection of biodiversity and nature recovery through planning processes.
- Identify species to target through East Devon's Local Habitat Map and Local Nature Recovery Plan for those which present specific opportunities for habitat creation and

integration into policy/strategic nature recovery such as Cirl Bunting consultation zones, Nightjar foraging areas into policy as a Habitat Regs Assessment (HRA) measure.

These will form part of the delivery outcomes of developing and adopting a Local Nature Recovery Plan for East Devon DC and shaping the future Nature Recovery Network for East Devon.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications identified within the report.

Legal implications:

This report refers to the Councils legal responsibilities under the Environment Act 2021 and seeks members approval to the adoption of a Nature Recovery Declaration for East Devon.