

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 1 April 2026

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

---

## East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan

### Report summary:

East Devon DC has provided detailed input into the recently adopted Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) process under the Environment Act 2021. Devon CC is the identified 'Responsible Authority' for developing this spatial nature recovery Strategy and all of Devon's District Authorities are identified as 'Supporting Authorities' who will help with its implementation through their own Local Nature Recovery Plans. The draft East Devon Local Nature Recovery (LNR) Plan has identified our local priorities that have taken full account of the data and priorities within the Devon LNRS. The actions the Council will need to take will flow from the East Devon LNR Plan once finalised and also be guided by the new responsibilities placed upon local authorities by the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2026 and Environment Act 2021 that targets and prioritises 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 ;

1. To agree to the public consultation of the draft East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan
2. To note and agree that the draft East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan will be published on the Council's website to fulfil the Council's statutory Biodiversity Reporting report duty for the period 1st September 2023 – 1st January 2026.

### 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 the delivery of the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It will also enable East Devon DC to adopt a Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local Habitats Map that will target the improvement of the priority habitats and species identified within the Plan.

Officer: Charlie Plowden, Assistant Director – Countryside, Environment & Ecology  
Charlie.Plowden@eastdevon.gov.uk; Will Dommett, District Ecology Manager  
[Will.Dommett@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:Will.Dommett@eastdevon.gov.uk); James Chubb, Countryside Manager  
[James.Chubb@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:James.Chubb@eastdevon.gov.uk)

---

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

Assets and Economy

- Communications and Democracy
- Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- Environment - Nature and Climate
- Environment - Operational
- Finance
- Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Medium Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk;

**Links to background information**

[Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) | Devon County Council](#)

[Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy Cabinet report 3 September 2025](#)

[East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan 2023-2033](#)

[EDDC Nature Recovery Network Report February 2026](#)

[EDDC Biodiversity Reporting Duty 2023-2025](#)

**Link to [Council Plan](#)**

Priorities (check which apply)

- A supported and engaged community
- Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- Resilient economy that supports local business
- Financially secure and improving quality of services

---

**Report in full**

1. [Office for Environmental Protection Report 2026](#)

It is recognised that the UK has both a Climate and Biodiversity crisis – currently the UK is in the bottom 10% globally and 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.

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) was set up after the UK left the EU. It holds the government to account under the Environment Act 2021 which was passed to replace EU law. Its report in January 2026 states:

- The approach taken over the past 70 years has been a focus on nature conservation: this has led to preserving ‘pockets of nature’. However, this approach hasn’t stopped the decline of biodiversity so the priority has shifted towards nature restoration and nature recovery, In the words of the Lawton Report (2010) we need: ‘Bigger, better, more, more joined up’.
- On its current trajectory that the government’s progress towards meeting its targets to protect wildlife in England is failing on the majority of its environmental measures.

- The OEP reported that seven of the ten targets set in the Environment Act 2021 have “little likelihood of being met by 2030” which is the deadline set in legislation.
- The three remaining targets: clean air, reducing the harmful impact of environmental hazards, and improving the beauty of nature – “are only partly on track”.
- Specifically the biodiversity target, which means the stopping of the decline of nationally important protected species (e.g. Red Squirrel) “will likely not be met”. The report says: “Important species continue to decline. The opportunity to effect further change ahead of the 2030 target has now largely passed.”
- The report from the OEP found that out of 59 environmental trends, covering issues such as clean water, air pollution and species abundance, only 24 were improving, while 11 were static, 16 were deteriorating and eight were not assessed owing to a lack of data availability.

## 2. Nature Recovery Network (NRN)

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.

The work programmes that will flow from both the Devon LNRS and also the East Devon LNR Plan will enable the continuing development of East Devon’s own nature recovery network. This will roll out alongside and where appropriate in collaboration with other partner environmental organisations delivering nature recovery across East Devon. The aims of this approach will follow Nature Recovery Network national guidance:

- 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.

The adoption of both the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan will provide the framework for the targeting and delivery of nature restoration and better connectedness of fragmented habitats which will in turn support and help declining species to recover.

## 3. Why is nature recovery 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.
- 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 East Devon Trees, Hedge & Woodland

Strategy as well as the East Devon and Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plans and Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

#### 4. Role of the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which was approved by Natural England in January 2026 and recently adopted by East Devon DC is a system of spatial strategies for nature, contained in the Environment Act 2021.

- The Devon LNRS has 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 the strengthened duty on all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- The Devon LNRS will also work to develop partnerships and to integrate nature into incentives and land management activities across the whole of the county.

All of England's LNRS are designed as tools to drive more coordinated, practical and focussed action to help nature. Each LNRS 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 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 the Devon LNRS will help to deliver long-term solutions, which are identified in the report.

LNRSs are intended to support Local Planning Authorities in preparing Local Plans that conserve and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment. The LNRS provides a spatial evidence base and a set of locally agreed priorities which can help shape policies within a Local Plan. Local Planning Authorities should consider the priorities set out in the Devon LNRS when determining how their Local Plan should contribute to and enhance the local and natural environment.

#### 5. Role of the East Devon DC Local Nature Recovery Plan

Following the adoption of the Devon LNRS (as the Responsible Authority designated by Government to publish its Strategy) the Environment Act 2021 identified second tier Local Authorities to develop their own Local Nature Recovery Plans as a 'Supporting Authority' to help deliver nature recovery targets within its own localities.

The work carried out so far to develop a draft East Devon LNR Plan has:

- Followed the adoption of a 'Nature Recovery Declaration for East Devon' that recognised the crisis nature is facing within our district and now helps to inform all strategic council plans and policy areas.

- Developed a Local (Habitat) Opportunities Map for East Devon (background report EDDC Nature Recovery network report).
- Developed a draft East Local Nature Recovery Plan (background report)
- Now ensured that these two documents are considered and embedded within the Local Plan review work.
- That once finalised the East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local (Habitat) Opportunities Map links directly to our Biodiversity Net Gain policy and delivers off site mitigation enabling the integration of nature recovery into the planning system.
- We will be working collaboratively with Devon CC (the Responsible Authority) to ensure that the District's priorities are consistent with the Devon LNRS and our wider nature recovery work.

The development of the East Devon LNR Plan is compatible with both the Devon LNRS and Local Plan policy for nature recovery as they will be feeding into each other.

## 6. The Priority Habitats in East Devon

The East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan identifies five key habitats for nature recovery mapped to form a 'Nature Recovery Network' (NRN). The NRN was produced using published and repeatable methodology which synergises with National Planning Policy Framework. The detailed methodology and mapping report is provided in the background papers.

The NRN identifies five key habitat types and identifies areas with good coverage of these habitats and areas where habitat creations would contribute towards the Lawton principles of 'Bigger, Better, and More Joined-up'. The habitat types include:

- Lowland Heathland
- Wetlands
- Woodland (and Hedges)
- Species Rich Grassland
- Urban Fabric

## 7. Nature Recovery work programmes in East Devon

The East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan will align and complement other existing nature recovery-based plans in the District to ensure there is a joined up and collaborative approach to ensuring nature recovery is being delivered at a wider landscape scale.

### National Landscapes

- The two National Landscapes (Blackdown Hills and East Devon) both have Nature Recovery Plans (NRPs) which already prioritise where and how nature recovery can be implemented within the National Landscapes.
- 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 NRPs. In order to achieve the goals of the NRP, a range of mechanisms are proposed to deliver nature recovery:

### EDDC Countryside:

Managing 12 nature reserve sites across the district, the team has first hand experience of habitat creation, restoration and maintenance. The majority of East Devon's Local Nature Reserves representing a Priority Habitat for East Devon.

- Heathland restoration has taken place on two sites of denuded habitat
- Species rich meadows have been created on a further site at Knapp Copse.

- Holyford Woods is a woodland LNR which contains 4 hectares of natural regeneration woodland, now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year – a valuable case study for this highly effective woodland creation method.
- Seaton Marshes is a freshwater grazing marsh with water control features to allow for managed winter flooding and summer grazing.
- Black Hole Marsh is a tidal lagoon created as realignment and flood mitigation scheme on the River Axe and is the only site in Devon to have breeding Avocet.

The Countryside team has partnered in conservation projects such as the Bat Conservation Trust's Saving the Grey Long Eared Bat project to research this extremely rare mammal with a stronghold in East Devon. In this project, the Countryside Team will deliver habitat restoration and management outputs based on hedgerows and wildflower meadows.

The Countryside team holds two Beaver Class Licences to allow them to work on sites with active beaver populations and intervene in instances where wild living beavers are proving to be causing conflict with infrastructure and property. Alongside beaver licences, the team hold protected species licences for bats and dormice for research purposes.

The Countryside team play a significant role in community engagement and education in the district. There is potential for the LNRS/LNR Plan and Countryside Team activities to complement each other

The Countryside team has hosted projects such as Wild Exmouth and has developed 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.

### 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 (NRN) 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 landowners/managers and NGOs, advice to landowners regarding grants and drivers for land use change (BNG delivery investigations).

### 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.

### 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. BNG, Nutrient Neutrality and Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL).
- Building relationships with landowners and managers.
- Creation, support and engagement with local community groups, for the purposes of volunteering and citizen science.
- Small scale community funds for projects.

## 8. Implementing the East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan

The East Devon LNR Action Plan will be developed in detail once the public consultation has finished and the list of priority habitats and species has been finalised. This will be presented to Cabinet as part of the final version of the East Devon LNR Plan and will clearly set out desired outcomes, timelines, key partners any resource implications and the priority around these.

Initial thinking within the Countryside, Environment & Ecology Service has identified some potential areas to embed within the Action Plan:

- Consider targeting nature recovery actions around the District's six major towns – linking our work on Green Infrastructure with the LNRS/LNR Plan so it will have the most impact, in helping to provide green infrastructure around the main towns, identifying potential wildlife corridors for enhancements so connecting fragmented habitats so benefitting communities and nature.
- Embed the master planning of a second new community around the principles and processes of both LNRS and a GI framework/strategy.
- Deliver specific priority habitat nature recovery targets within the LNRS/LNR Plan – such as the creation of new inter tidal habitat on Sheep's Marsh (Southern extension of the Seaton Wetlands).
- 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 curlew consultation zones, Nightjar foraging areas into policy as a HRA measure, barn owl/grey long-eared bat consultation zones etc.
- Embed the LNR Plan within the work of the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership identifying opportunities to help enhance and connect important wildlife areas;

The specific habitat and species priorities that will be targeted for restoration, creation and enhancement will flow from the East Devon LNR Plan. **These would be part of agreed business as usual outputs of the Place Directorate Service Plan 2026-2028 and will be integrated into the workstreams of the Council's Countryside, Environment & Ecology Service.**

## 9. Summary

The East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan will help the Council meet its Environment Act 2021 duties and responsibilities as laid out in the report by highlighting and working to restore, enhance and protect the priority habitats and species managed across its Nature Reserves and greenspaces.

This Plan, will also serve as a resource for the new Unitary Authority going forward, guiding local actions to restore wildlife sites and create important wildlife corridors in the District.

---

**Financial implications:**

This report does not request additional budget above that already approved. Should the Plan require additional budgets to be approved, although this is not indicated at this stage, then this will be subject to a separate report to Cabinet and Council for consideration

**Legal implications:**

This Plan is necessary to assist in meeting requirements set out in the Environment Act 2021.