

To: Cabinet

Date: 22nd October 2025

Report of: Director of Economy, Regeneration and Sustainability

Title of Report: Endorsement of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Publication

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	Agree that approval be given to the Oxfordshire County Council to publish the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for a Zero Carbon Oxford
Corporate Priority:	Zero carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:
1. That Cabinet agrees to give approval to the Oxfordshire County Council to publish the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy by.

Information Exempt From Publication	
None.	None.

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	1. Description of Strategy Area for SA approval process v8	No

Appendix 2	2. Final LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities 26AUG2025	No
Appendix 3	3. Final LNRS Species Priorities List v2.2 28AUG25	No
Appendix 4	Link: https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ea43e0bc07c044ef8ca4b16803c5e59c	No

Introduction and background

1. The Environment Act 2021 establishes the requirement for upper tier Local Authorities to publish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) as Responsible Authorities (RA). Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is the designated RA for Oxfordshire and each of the Oxfordshire districts (including Oxford City Council) and Natural England are Supporting Authorities (SA's). Supporting Authorities are required to confirm in writing whether they agree that the RA should proceed to publication within 28 days of the RA providing them with the final publication draft of the LNRS.
2. The Council has worked closely with the RA throughout the preparation of the LNRS and it was agreed that the SA's would be given time to take the LNRS through their full democratic process. As a result, the final LNRS was received by the Council on 22nd July 2025, and Oxfordshire County Council has asked for responses before 21st October 2025. Due to the City Council's Cabinet meeting falling on 22nd October, Oxfordshire County Council are aware that our approval will fall after the 21st October.
3. OCC intends, subject to approval by the supporting authorities, to publish the final LNRS on its website in early November 2025, therefore, all the Oxfordshire Supporting Authorities are taking it through their internal decision-making processes between July and October 2025.
4. Once the final LNRS has been approved by the supporting authorities, Oxfordshire County Council must then notify the Secretary of State of its intention to publish the strategy; and can proceed to publish once the Secretary of State has given approval. Thereafter there will be duty for the responsible authority to undertake a review of the final LNRS following notification from the Secretary of State there is a need to do so.
5. Officers from the Council's Environmental Quality and Planning Policy Teams have been involved in the preparation and drafting of the LNRS, attending both the LNRS Steering Group and Supporting Authority meetings.
6. Public consultation on the Draft LNRS ran for six weeks between 18th October and 1st December 2024. The Council's response was developed with input from officers from several service teams, including Planning Policy and Environmental Quality. Portfolio holders for Climate/Net Zero and Planning were briefed prior to the response being submitted, and a presentation was given to the Climate and Environment Scrutiny Panel in November 2024.

7. The Oxfordshire County Council's consultation generated over 2100 comments; seventy five percent of these were supportive of the LNRS.

LNRS Overview

8. The main purpose of the LNRS is to identify locations where the creation and/or enhancement of specific habitats would provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment, and in particular reconnecting habitats as part of an ecological network. The inclusion of measures within the LNRS does not mean that landowners/managers will be required to implement them. Instead, the Government is encouraging the delivery of targeted actions for nature recovery as opportunities for funding and investment arise and as part of other projects and plans.
9. It should also be noted that the LNRS does not preclude or prevent any other type of land use or development, but it is part of a wider policy framework that helps plan development in a way that protects and enhances the natural environment. Local Authorities have a legal duty to consider the LNRS when creating or updating their local plans, which guide where and how building and development happens.
10. The final publication version of the LNRS comprises of four key parts:
 - 1) A description of the strategy area - an explanation of what the LNRS is and how it has been prepared, and a written description of biodiversity in the county, opportunities, and the pressures it faces.
 - 2) A statement of biodiversity priorities - a written list of the most important outcomes (priorities) to achieve nature recovery in the area and a list of actions (potential measures) that would need to be carried out to achieve these.
 - 3) A species priorities list - a written list of species that require additional, specific, actions beyond the general habitat improvements contained in the Statement of Biodiversity Priorities, and which outlines the specific actions needed to recover the species populations within the county.
 - 4) A local habitat map - an online interactive map tool that identifies the existing areas that are particularly important for biodiversity and areas that could become important for biodiversity in the future. These are priority locations for creating a nature recovery network where habitat creation or enhancement is most likely to result in the greatest benefits for nature, certain species and the wider environment. The mapped measures come from the actions listed in the Statement of Biodiversity Priorities and the Species Priority List.
11. The publication version (subject to minor tweaks and formatting) of the LNRS was submitted to the SAs on 22nd July 2025. Officers have worked closely with the RA and other partners to ensure that the final documents and maps have addressed the comments that were submitted during the public consultation – including those submitted by the SAs.
12. Officers from the Council's Environmental Quality and Planning Policy Teams have been actively engaged in developing the LNRS and have been represented on the LNRS Steering Group by the Environmental Quality Team.

13. The Council's officers believe that the final LNRS is a comprehensive strategy that will help to drive the recovery of nature in Oxfordshire, and that it has addressed concerns raised internally during the process.
14. All SAs must confirm that they are happy for the Oxfordshire LNRS to be published.
15. Whilst the LNRS is not an Oxford City Council document and does not have significant direct implications for the Council. Approval from Cabinet is sought due to the strategic nature of the proposed LNRS.

Alternative Options Considered

16. There are two options:

- a) To confirm that the Council is happy for the Oxfordshire LNRS to be published, or
- b) To issue a 'publication advisory notice' to the RA and the Secretary of State stating why the publication cannot be justified based on the results of the consultation and explaining why the LNRS is materially deficient.

17. Officers recommend option a), as the Council has worked very closely with the RA and other partners in preparing this LNRS and believe it will have significant long-term benefits for the habitats and species in the Oxfordshire districts.

Other implications

18. Consultation and communications – minor, a press release will be issued upon publication of the LNRS.
19. Sustainability and Environmental – the LNRS will contribute to delivery of the Council's environmental and sustainability goals, through enhancement of biodiversity and ecology.
20. Planning - Concerns were raised as to the implications of the LNRS for development sites, specifically those allocated in the existing/emerging Oxford Local Plans, where they were identified as target areas in the LNRS mapping. As previously stated, the LNRS will not preclude or limit any other land uses in mapped areas, nor will landowners or managers be required to implement recommendations.
21. With regards to this, the statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide issued by the Department for Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) gives guidance on how the LNRS should be used with regards to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Where land is within the LNRS mapped target areas, if BNG is delivered utilising the specific recommended measures in that area, then the biodiversity metric calculations will receive an uplift of 15%, by way of a Strategic Significance Multiplier. This is to guide strategic delivery of habitat creation and enhancement and ensure that the most effective measures are delivered in the most appropriate areas.
22. Planning – Local authorities have a legal duty to consider the LNRS when creating or updating local plans. The Council's Planning Policy Team is aware of this and has participated in the LNRS development process.

Financial implications

23. The LNRS is generally a high-level strategic document, which seeks to identify opportunities. The Council is unlikely to be in a position to fund any initiatives. Any future funding will be assessed as required.

24. Aspects of the LNRS, including BNG aspects, will feed into planning work undertaken by Council. However, this falls under business as usual and requires no additional resource and subsequent cost.

Legal issues

25. In accordance with [The Environment \(Local Nature Recovery Strategies\) \(Procedure\) Regulations 2023](#) district councils have two options when considering how to respond to a proposed LNRS, which are set out above at paragraph 16.

26. All public authorities have a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity and must have 'regard' to the relevant LNRS in this process. Government guidance is clear that LNRSs should be used by Local Authorities preparing local plans to inform the way those plans address the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirement to protect and enhance biodiversity. It is expected that a future update to the NPPF will include how LNRSs should be given weight in the plan making process. The Government will also provide separate guidance on how local authorities will be expected to comply with their duty to have regard to LNRSs through their planning functions.

Level of risk

27. There are no direct risks to Oxford City Council arising from the publication of the LNRS.

28. The progress of local government reorganisation and devolution may impact the delivery phase of the LNRS following publication. It is however, highly likely that responsibility for the delivery of the LNRS will fall to the successor authority.

Equalities impact

29. An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken as the LNRS is a high-level strategic document with no direct delivery implications for the Council.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

30. N/A -not a key decision.

Conclusion

31. The Oxfordshire LNRS should be approved for publication.

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