



Environment & Energy Board

Date	7 March 2024
Report title	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Portfolio Lead	Environment, Energy & HS2 - Councillor John Cotton
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Report has been considered by	None

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Environment and Energy Board is recommended to:

1. Endorse the Responsible Authority role of the West Midlands Combined Authority in the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
2. Note the progress of the West Midlands Combined Authority's work on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update to the board on the progress of the West Midlands Combined Authority Environment Team's work on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and what the outcomes will be from this project.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategies are spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement, required by law under *The Environment Act 2021*. The requirements of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy development are set out further in *The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 (Local Nature Recovery Strategy Regulations)*.
- 2.2 The West Midlands Combined Authority has been assigned by the Secretary of State as one of 48 Responsible Authorities, which will lead the production of the West Midlands Combined Authority's Local Nature Recovery Strategies, which represents a new statutory duty.

3.0 What is the Local Nature Recovery Strategy?

- 3.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategies are explicitly regional in their scope, with a clear purpose of connecting nature recovery opportunities across boundaries to create a Nature Recovery Network across the entirety of England. They are also explicitly collaborative in their approach, involving public, private and voluntary sectors, working particularly with local authorities. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy Regulations, identifies local authorities (the seven constituent local authorities in the West Midlands Combined Authority case) as 'Statutory Authorities' and they have a key role in the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- 3.2 The strategies do not force the owners and managers of the land identified to make any changes. Instead, the Government is encouraging action through, for example, opportunities for funding and investment. By bringing together actions for nature recovery and nature-based solutions, strategies will help join up work to improve how land is managed for different environmental reasons and identify activities that have multiple benefits. This approach will also help to inform the delivery of biodiversity through the new Biodiversity Net Gain planning obligation.
- 3.3 Each Local Nature Recovery Strategy must do the following:
- agree priorities for nature's recovery;
 - map the most valuable existing areas for nature; and
 - map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals (adopting Nature Based Solutions).
- 3.4 There is no published deadline for the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, but the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs have confirmed funding will be provided until March 2025.
- 3.5 Across the West Midlands Combined Authority constituent authorities, much work has already been undertaken to map nature and develop strategies for nature recovery to support planning processes. This work and the knowledge developed by the constituent authorities at the local level will form a strong basis from which a whole region strategy can be created. Rather than undermine these existing local strategies the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will provide a broader regional framework recognising that nature does not stop at authority boundaries. As this is a statutory requirement contributing to a national network it will provide greater

strength to local based actions and a framework to assist in attracting public and private sector finance.

- 3.6 The role of the West Midlands Combined Authority as Responsible Authority for producing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will also align with the wider West Midlands Combined Authority Natural Environment Programme. The completion of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy by March 2025 aligns with the completion of the West Midlands Combined Authority's Local Investment in Natural Capital project, exploring the routes to unlocking nature finance and investment for the region. Together this will put the West Midlands Combined Authority and stakeholders in a strong position to attract funding (both public and private) to deliver the identified priorities and will form a key part of the medium-long term delivery.

4.0 Progress

4.1 *Project setup*

Following its appointment as Responsible Authority, work on the West Midlands Combined Authority's Local Nature Recovery Strategy has focused on the following:

- Recruiting a Local Nature Recovery Strategy coordinator (in post since end of November 2023).
- Developing project processes, governance, and timeline.
- Exploring the key data and evidence needed to produce the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

4.2 *Stakeholder engagement*

Engagement with key stakeholders has focused on the following key groups:

- Officers from the West Midlands Combined Authority constituent local authorities as "Statutory Authorities".
- Natural England, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission.
- Regional Local Nature Recovery Strategy neighbours (Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire).
- Local Nature Partnership.

4.3 *Governance*

- Establishment of the '**Local Nature Recovery Strategy Working Group**' to lead on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy production. This comprises of the West Midlands Combined Authority, lead officers from the West Midlands Combined Authority's constituent local authorities, environmental Non-Governmental Organisations and Natural England.
- **Local Nature Recovery Strategy Supporting Authority Forum** will provide a space for local authority representatives to provide input to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy as part of the requirement for the West Midlands Combined Authority to consult with "Statutory Authorities".
- **Task and Finish Groups** will support delivery of specific activities throughout the completion of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. These will be made up of relevant regional stakeholders associated with each activity.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy updates will be provided to the Environment and Energy Board.
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be submitted to the West Midlands Combined Authority Board for approval.

5. Next Steps

5.1 An overview of the project timeline is provided below:

- During spring and summer 2024 there will be an intense period of data gathering and interpretation, consultation with key stakeholders and identification of priorities and proposals for nature recovery and other environmental benefits.
- In late summer and autumn 2024, the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy will take shape and consultation on this will lead to its refinement and finalisation for approval and publication in March 2025.
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy Regulations set out a cyclical programme of review and updating to ensure that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy remains relevant. This is set out as between 3 – 10 years and will be requested by the Secretary of State with a 4 month notice period.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no immediate financial implications from this paper.

6.2 The West Midlands Combined Authority has so far received £175,760 of revenue grant funding from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs through to the end of March 2024, to support the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy project. This will cover the cost of a dedicated project officer, as well as the cost of consultancy support services such as data/evidence collation/analysis, stakeholder facilitation, etc. Funding for FY24/25 has not yet been announced.

6.3 The West Midlands Combined Authority is not required to contribute any match funding, although there will be in-kind support from existing officers to ensure the programme is successfully delivered.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 As a 'Responsible Authority' appointed by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, the West Midlands Combined Authority is required to prepare the Local Nature Recovery Strategy as per the requirements of *the Local Nature Recovery Strategy Regulations* but we are not required to deliver the actions set out in the strategy.

8. Equalities Implications

8.1 Across the West Midlands Combined Authority geography, there is a correlation between the least advantaged areas (highest indices of multiple deprivation score) and climate related risk factors, poor access to green space, and poor air quality. Though the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is principally focussed upon developing a strategy for delivering nature recovery, it also provides an opportunity for identifying other actions for additional environmental benefits that can be delivered through Nature Based Solutions and have positive social impact. Suitable equalities data would be factored into considerations of the emerging priorities to be set out in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. In terms of implications for reducing health inequalities for all people and communities irrespective of their protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act, the impact of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is likely to be positive.

9. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 9.1 This report links to a number of the West Midlands Combined Authorities 8 inclusive growth priorities, which are identified as 'a catalyst for improved and sustained outcomes for people and place, co-designed with partners and beneficiaries. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy relates most closely to the climate resilience, health and wellbeing and equality fundamentals.

10. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 10.1 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy covers all West Midlands Combined Authority constituent local authorities.

11. Other Implications

- 11.1 None.

12. Schedule of Background Papers

- 12.1 Appendix 1: Relationship between the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the planning system.

Appendix 2: Alignment between the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and other West Midland Combined Authority Programmes.

Appendix 3: Local Nature Recovery Strategy Process

Appendix 4: West Midland Local Nature Recovery Strategy Governance Structure

Appendix 5: Local Nature Recovery Strategy Timeline