

## NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET

DATE 13<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2026

**Report Title:** Support for Draft Staffordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

**Submitted by:** Service Director Sustainable Environment

**Portfolios:** One Council, People & Partnerships; Sustainable Environment

**Ward(s) affected:** All

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
For the Borough Council to support the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Staffordshire prior to full public consultation being undertaken in early 2026.			
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>			
That Cabinet:			
<p><b>1. Confirms the Council's support for the development of the LNRS for Staffordshire and responds to the consultation for the draft LNRS with the comments set out in section 2 of this report; and</b></p> <p><b>2. Adopts a model of delivery within a specific plan for the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme.</b></p>			
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>			
Nature depletion is a major issue for England, with urgent action required halt and start to reverse this decline. Development and implementation of the 48 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) across England of which Staffordshire is one is an important milestone in reversing the historic and current decline.			

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 Local Nature recovery Strategies (LNRS) were introduced through the Environment Act 2021 as a new way to enhance local wildlife and ecosystems. Staffordshire's local nature recovery strategy is one of 48 strategies covering all of England. A map showing all 48 LNRS areas is shown in Appendix 1.
- 1.2 This is in recognition that '*England is widely considered to be one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world following historic and ongoing declines. Government has made legally binding commitments to end these declines and for nature to recover. This is important for nature's own sake and for all the things that we rely on nature for, like clean water and food production. For nature to recover, targeted, co-ordinated and collaborative action will be required.*' -Source Gov UK Website

- 1.3** Each local nature recovery strategy must be specific and tailored to its area. The responsible authorities and people involved in preparing a strategy can choose how they want it to look, but every strategy must contain:
  - A local habitat map
  - A written statement of biodiversity priorities
- 1.4** Government expects LNRS's to propose actions such as the:
  - Creation of wetlands
  - Restoration of peatlands
  - Planting of trees and hedgerows
  - More sustainable management of existing woodlands and other habitats like grasslands
- 1.5** These actions are intended to help nature itself and to also help improve the wider natural environment
- 1.6** Staffordshire County Council is the designated Responsible Authority for Staffordshire. Responsible authorities are required to provide local leadership to draw together knowledge, expertise and the best available information and data. Anyone who can play a part in recovering nature and the wider environment in their local area could be involved in preparing a strategy.
- 1.7** Cabinet approved its support for the development of the LNRS for Staffordshire in July 2024, with the process starting in a workshop entitled Developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire facilitated by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust in December 2022.
- 1.8** The Council itself was the first in Staffordshire in making a Nature Recovery Declaration in November 2021.
- 1.9** The County Council identified a range of partner types to engage with:
  - Landowners
  - Supporting authorities such as the Borough Council
  - Regulatory bodies
  - Neighbouring regional authorities
  - Communities
  - Businesses
  - Environmental bodies
  - Utilities
- 1.10** Work has been undertaken to identify practical, achievable proposals developed with the input of people who know and understand the area, especially landowners and managers. This approach is essential if the proposed actions are to be taken and owned.
- 1.11** A first initial draft strategy has now been developed, attached as appendix 2, and it is intended that this document will be used for pre consultation with partners and stakeholders between now and January 2026. A workshop was held on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2025 in County Buildings as the first phase of this pre-consultation phase.

**1.12** The draft strategy sets out a shared vision for Staffordshire's LNRS, and how that will be achieved through 9 strategic priorities. It then goes on to provide an overview of Staffordshire's environment, including areas for tree planting proposals, areas at risk of flooding, air quality and socio-economic information.

**1.13** The 9 strategic priorities are –

- Expand, buffer and improve the condition of existing wildlife habitats and create new areas for nature.
- Increase species and habitat resilience by connecting habitats together to make it easier for wildlife to move through the landscape.
- Protect and increase species abundance and range, particularly focussing on interventions for priority species.
- Improve ecological functionality of habitats and restore natural processes to mitigate climate change and increase the resilience of our communities and landscapes to the changing environment.
- Reduce pressures and threats to wildlife and habitats by tackling pollution, invasive species, disease, and unsustainable practices.
- Support the transition to nature-friendly and regenerative farming, promoting practices that increase biodiversity and improve soil health.
- Integrate green and blue infrastructure and wildlife corridors into urban planning and design.
- Promote equal access and engagement with nature and empower communities to take action for nature recovery.
- Expand knowledge of state of nature in Staffordshire through robust system of ecological monitoring and use data strategically to contribute to nature recovery aims.

**1.14** The draft then sets out detail on Staffordshire's diverse natural landscape, key habitats, key pressures, and opportunities for several areas across the county, including Newcastle under Lyme.

**1.15** It should be noted the Council is disappointed that the draft LNRS process hasn't moved faster, with the original timetable not being adhered to.

**1.16** Once complete it is intended to go out to formal consultation in February 2026 with the intention to formally publish and launch the final LNRS in April 2026.

## **2. Support for Staffordshire LNRS**

**2.1** The Council has fully supported and contributed to the development of the draft LNRS for Staffordshire from the start of the process. This was recognised in the Council confirming its support in development of the LNRS by Cabinet in June 2024.

**2.2** Support in the strategic priorities set out in the draft LNRS is further recognised with the Council being the first in Staffordshire to pass a motion making a nature recovery declaration. This has been actioned through the drafting and approval of the Council's Sustainable Environment strategy and delivery Plan which is a live document which is formally reviewed by Cabinet and Health Wellbeing & Environment Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

**2.3** Officers from Planning, Planning Policy, Neighbourhood Delivery, Streetscene and Sustainable Environment have reviewed the draft LNRS and have the following comments which will be formally fed back to the County Council as part of this initial pre formal consultation phase.

**2.4** Comments are favourable over the principles set out in the draft document, but overall, it is felt there needs to be more information and structure as to how the LNRS strategic priorities will be delivered in practice. Further comments include –

- It is noted that the draft LNRS is still a work in progress with more details/information to come – no real concerns or surprises. The overall vision and strategic aims/objectives all seem to make sense. The analysis of Staffordshire and Stoke in totality and by character areas is clear and well summarised. Given the links however to the more detailed thematic actions I would have expected this to be more explicit in the document as it stands the pre-consultation document doesn't really say much.

- Works that we currently undertake on our own trees already fit with the outline principles given in this draft document.

The Councils own principles which support those in the draft LNRS from an arboriculture point are covered in our Tree Risk Management Strategy (council policy). They are:

- *'Supporting the council's principle of avoiding pruning and felling of trees unless there is a safety, arboricultural or legal reason or need that can be demonstrated.'*

- *'avoiding the unnecessary removal or disfigurement of our trees which could cause environmental, wildlife, landscape or cultural harm.'*

- *'conserving habitats that are provided by trees especially those that are old and decaying.'*

- *'By ensuring minimal tree operations the amount of carbon that is released is reduced back into the environment from those operations and increases the potential of those trees to sequester more carbon.'*

- An issue as with all strategies, will be the challenge in funding and delivery. I think we'll have limited opportunities to make much impact in our landholdings, particularly where we must strike a balance between nature recovery and public use/amenity. However, it will be good to have this as a backdrop whenever we consider potential investment in our open spaces.

- It would be good to see a shorter overarching document which sits in front of the LNRS that portrays all the relevant information together with SMART actions on the risks identified.

### **3. Recommendation**

- 3.1** That Cabinet confirm the Councils support for the development of the LNRS for Staffordshire and responds to the consultation for the draft LNRS with the comments set out in section 2.
- 3.2** That the Councils comments on the draft LNRS are fed back to the County Council as principal authority in this pre-consultation phase by the end of January 2026.
- 3.3** That the Council develops a specific LNRS plan for Newcastle-under-Lyme.

#### **4. Reasons**

- 4.1** The Council recognises the importance of nature recovery recognised with the Council itself being the first in Staffordshire in making a Nature Recovery Declaration in November 2021.

#### **5. Options Considered**

- 5.1** Development and implementation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a legal requirement, and the Council has a duty to support the strategy.

#### **6. Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1** The Environment Act 2021 requires Local Nature Recovery strategies to be developed and implemented across England.

#### **7. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 7.1** There are no equality impacts resulting from this report

#### **8. Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1** There are no financial implications resulting from this report, however, there will be resource implications in terms of officer time to support the consultation process and subsequent actions to help in delivering outcomes from the LNRS once adopted.

#### **9. Major Risks & Mitigation**

- 9.1** Delivery of the principles set out in the draft LNRS pose a major risk, together with how delivery will be achieved. With much of the identified areas requiring support throughout Staffordshire being in private ownership, engagement with landowners will be key.
- 9.2** The Council recommends that the working group set up by the County Council as the Responsible Authority should continue in some form to ensure that actions in the priority areas are delivered.

#### **10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG**



## 11. One Council

Please confirm that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work:

**One Commercial Council**

*We will make investment to diversify our income and think entrepreneurially.*

**One Digital Council**

*We will develop and implement a digital approach which makes it easy for all residents and businesses to engage with the Council, with our customers at the heart of every interaction.*

**One Sustainable Council**

*We will deliver on our commitments to a net zero future and make all decisions with sustainability as a driving principle.*

The Council's support for the LNRS fully supports our Sustainability agenda, and ongoing development of our Sustainable Environment Strategy and delivery plan. Over the last two years Cabinet have approved the Council's Grassland Management Strategy, and Tree Management Policy, both of which fully support and help deliver a number of the principles of the draft LNRS.

## 12. Key Decision Information

12.1 The report is a key decision as it effects all wards within the borough.

## 13. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

13.1 Cabinet approval to support the development of the LNRS, June 2024.

## 14. List of Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1 – Map showing the 48 LNRS designated responsible authority areas across England.

14.2 Appendix 2 – Draft LNRS pre full consultation document

## 15. Background Papers

15.1 None