

Slough Borough Council

Information needed	Details
Report To:	Planning Committee
Date:	29 th January 2025
Subject:	Berkshire local nature recovery strategy
Chief Officer:	Dan Ray; Chief Planner
Contact Officer:	Howard Albertini, Special Projects Planner
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	NO
Appendices:	None

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report is to inform Members that the Berkshire local nature recovery strategy is due to go out to public consultation. It is part of a proposed national spatial strategy to help recover nature by showing where actions to improve and restore habitats would be most effective. And in particular helping to connect nature across the country other than in just protected sites.

Recommendations:

1.2 Committee is recommended to:

Note the report.

Commissioner Review

Not required

2. Report

Introductory paragraph

2.1 The proposal links primarily to the Council's third strategic priority of 'A cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough' and the sub priority that refers to taking action to prevent or minimise the impact of climate change. The Strategy will also inform the content of the future new Local Plan regarding land use and environment policy and it can potentially inform Council decisions on management of its open spaces.

Background

- 2.2 The draft Strategy has been prepared, using Government grant, by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead as appointed Responsible Authority for Berkshire. The 6 boroughs of the county are supporting authorities. Preparation of the strategy has been guided by a steering group (see para 2.12). There has been input from stakeholders and interested members of the public.
- 2.3 The subsequent draft of the Strategy is to be subject to a public consultation exercise expected to start in early February and end in early March with an aim of adoption of it in during Summer.
- 2.4 Local Nature Recovery Strategies, introduced by the 2021 Environment Act, are spatial strategies to help recover nature across England. Together, they will cover the country in a Nature Recovery Network. Defra, Natural England and other government bodies are working with national and local partnerships to deliver the Network.
- 2.5 The Network is intended to create a connected network of wildlife-rich habitat across England. It comprises a core network of designated sites of importance for biodiversity and adjoining areas that function as stepping stones or wildlife corridors, areas identified for new habitat creation.
- 2.6 And extract from the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery web site summarises intentions regarding a local strategy ; *Each local strategy will map areas of current particular importance for biodiversity, and work with partners from many groups, from landowners to businesses, to environmental non governmental organisations, and the public. Priorities for nature recovery will be agreed and these will be used to create a local habitat map. These will depict what needs to happen to achieve the agreed aims for nature. This will link up with delivery mechanisms, such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for planning and Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes for land management including farming.*
- 2.7 A local strategy can be a guide for Berkshire's Nature Recovery Network that will help prioritise where and how to invest and target action in the short-term. In so doing, it can be a delivery plan for the long-term ambitions of Local Authority's future biodiversity action plans, climate strategies etc. This can include Council decisions on its own land holdings in particular management of or projects on open spaces, highway verges, amenity areas, drainage/flood alleviation schemes.
- 2.8 Future Development Plans such as the new Local Plan are required, under the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework), to protect and enhance biodiversity. The Government has yet to set out how Local Nature Recovery Strategies may influence Development Plans beyond the existing requirements in the NPPF.
- 2.9 Through the Biodiversity Net Gain process, implemented through the Planning process, there may in the future be developers seeking opportunities to deliver their Net Gain duty off – site rather than on their development site. An approved local Strategy can guide them, in some circumstances, to appropriate local opportunities rather than out of borough sites. It should be noted there is no opportunity for planning authorities to direct developers to enhance particular sites via the BNG process.

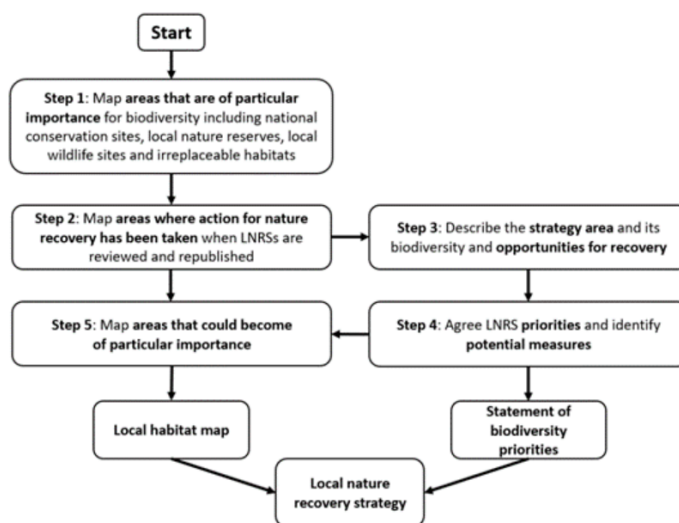
2.10 The identification of any actions, measures, proposals in the Strategy will not bind land owners or planning authorities. If any of those, in the final consultation document, are considered by officers to create complications for implementing Council planning policies the implications can be reported to the Lead Members for Planning and/or Environment before the end of the consultation period.

2.11 As the aim of the recovery networks is to focus on the best places for nature recovery there will be extensive countryside areas in other Berkshire boroughs where existing natural habitat provides a good opportunity for further enhancement and much of the Strategy will focus on those. Slough is likely to have fewer and smaller opportunities. But some are likely to be worth pursuing in particular larger open spaces that link to open countryside beyond the Borough. And around the Jubilee River. Plus parts of the larger parks. Members may wish to use the Strategy web site link below, under Background Papers, after the 3rd February to view the Strategy.

2.12 These are members of the steering group referred to in para. 2.2

- Berkshire Nature Partnership
- Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust
- Wokingham Borough council, representing Berkshire ecologists
- West Berkshire Council representing local authorities of Berkshire
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- NFU (National Farmers Union)
- The Crown Estate
- University of Reading, Head, Agri-Environment Group
- The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead - Climate Change and Biodiversity Cabinet member

2.13 This is the process gone through in preparing the draft:



- 2.14 The Strategy describes Berkshire in terms of landscape, natural habitat and wildlife. The 2 key sections of the document are for Species and Habitats – for both priorities and potential measures (or actions) are listed. And there is a map to show existing habitat and the location of potential measures. The consultation also has supporting information - FAQs for land owners, farmers and planners; the shortlisting process and examples of habitats referred to.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 None as this is an information report. For information preparation of the Strategy is Government funded. The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead are the responsible authority for preparing the strategy on behalf of all Berkshire local authorities.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 None as this is an information report. See paras. 2.8 and 2.10 for some matters associated with legal matters.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 None as this is an information report.

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 ... None as this is an information report. Implementation of the strategy is intended to enhance biodiversity across Berkshire which will in turn will contribute towards green infrastructure and adapting to climate change.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 None as this is an information report.

4. Background Papers

Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy web site
[Berkshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy | RBWM Together](#)

Planning Practice Guidance – Natural Environment
[Natural environment - GOV.UK](#)

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