

Making Local Nature Recovery Strategies deliver for nature: The need for adequate resources

Background

Now that the landmark Environment Act has received Royal Assent, the hard work of ensuring that it delivers on its promise to halt the decline in the abundance of species by 2030 begins. The Act's Local Nature Recovery Strategies (Clauses 104-108) are essential to achieving this.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) will be local-level, data-driven instruments to identify and prioritise opportunities for nature recovery. They are likely to be at the county level but will cover the whole of England. Once developed, they will then have multiple roles including being a mechanism for targeting funding for nature's recovery, such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), Environmental Land Management (ELM) and the Nature for Climate Fund.

Those local authorities that are nominated by the Secretary of State will be obliged to develop LNRSs and the process will involve stakeholder consultation across a broad range of sectors. This means that there will be a democratic mandate, through the elected local authorities, and wider buy-in from a range of stakeholders who will then 'own' the process. If developed and supported effectively, the chances of successfully delivering recovery at a local scale should be considerably improved.

Throughout England, LNRSs will be formed locally but should join up to create the national Nature Recovery Network. The Nature Recovery Network is not in the Environment Act but comes from the *25-Year Environment Plan* to enable recovery of nature. It is a network to a) support nature recovery, b) coordinate and deliver other environmental benefits, such as water and carbon, and c) enable improved access for people and communities.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be an essential tool in restoring the natural environment. To be ecologically coherent and cost-effective, environmental decision-making must be targeted and tailored according to local circumstances. At the moment, local authorities have no single spatial plan to guide relevant decisions to improve the environment. LNRSs will provide the mapping and planning information necessary to do this effectively. They will be based on sound and reliable data, collected and managed through locally accountable processes.

LNRSs should help deliver Government targets

- LNRSs are intended to help coordinate BNG through local planning and have the potential to ensure that the benefits of its delivery are maximised for nature's recovery by highlighting local opportunities.
- With the correct coordination, they will be a framework to help direct the Local Nature Recovery component of ELM.
- Provided there is a link up of policies, they should help deliver Government targets such as 30,000 hectares of new woodland a year by 2025, and the Environment Act target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.

LNRs funding requirements

In order to ensure that LNRs are successful and that the strategies will help to reverse the decline of nature, they must be adequately funded. As things stand, most Local Authorities have neither the resources nor the expertise^{1, 2} to take on the burden of developing and implementing LNRs. It has previously been suggested that new burdens resulting from the Environment Act will be met by Defra³.

These burdens need to be met fully. An under-resourced process would result in poorly put together LNRs that lack comprehensive stakeholder engagement. This would mean that they weren't truly co-produced, and so co-owned, by local interests and so would not be deliverable. If the outcomes from the LNRs are not delivered, then LNRs would become one more tick-box exercise - an expensive waste of money.

To address this, based on discussions with the five Defra-funded LNRs pilots⁴, we have modelled the funding requirements to set up the LNRs⁵:

LNRs set-up cost

Estimate of **total upfront** cost of resources required to set up LNRs: **£36,525,000**

This is broken down into⁶:

<i>Direct costs:</i>	£17,797,500	(£355,950 per LNRs)
<i>Indirect costs:</i>	£18,127,500	(£362,550 per LNRs)
<i>Of which are Local Authority costs:</i>	£8,145,000	(£162,900 per LNRs) ⁷

LNRs ongoing costs

Furthermore, for LNRs to ultimately deliver recovery of nature, they will need to be live documents and so will require ongoing resources to ensure:

- Local planning pays due regard to LNRs
- Funding for the recovery of nature is prioritised to opportunity areas identified by LNRs
- Ongoing monitoring of delivery of measures and opportunities
- Reporting back to the Secretary of State and updating LNRs

Much of this ongoing funding will be for local authority staffing. This additional resourcing will have multiple other benefits that will include a more timely handling of some key procedures, such as processing Environmental Impact Assessments for local planning decisions and, therefore, would ultimately be a cost saving.

Estimate of **annual ongoing** costs: **£16,443,095**

This is broken down into⁸:

<i>Direct costs:</i>	£6,516,667	(£130,333 per LNRs)
<i>Indirect costs:</i>	£9,526,429	(£190,529 per LNRs)

The direct costs are those that will be required by the local authorities involved.

¹<https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/LPA-Survey-Full-Report-Aug-23-2021-FINAL.pdf>

²<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7463/documents/78144/default/>

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5960/1926282.pdf

⁴The pilots ran from October 2020 to May 2021

⁵https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/LNRs_resource_requirement_estimate_summary_v2.2.pdf

⁶Excludes core Defra family costs (£600k)

⁷Includes 1xFTE for Responsible Authority, 0.1xFTE for other local authorities, data and stakeholder engagement for each LNRs

⁸Excludes core Defra family costs (£400k)

Next steps

Her Majesty's Treasury announced a £250m budget for implementing Environment Act priorities over the next three years⁹. This estimate of the required resources represents 24%¹⁰ of the uplift. Additional local authority capacity will also be required for, for example, BNG and some of this is built into the running cost estimates for the LNRs because of the role LNRs will have in targeting BNG. Fully funding the new burdens of LNRs and BNG from this uplift will mean that there is a funding gap for fulfilling all the Environment Act priorities. This will need to be filled from both the remainder of this £250m and from the rest of the core Defra budget.

There are two further steps that need to be taken to ensure LNRs are successful:

- The legal duties should be strengthened to ensure that local planning authorities act in accordance with LNRs and that they are embedded in local plans. This could be accomplished through the forthcoming Planning Bill.
- There needs to be an accessible central user interface that is open to all and is integrated with both planning and ELM.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are an opportunity to act now before it is too late to identify areas where delivering recovery of nature will help halt the decline of biodiversity. Developed locally but combined as a whole, they will form a national network that will prioritise funding from, for example, ELMS, BNG and the Nature for Climate Fund. This will deliver action across England and with just over eight years until the 2030 target, we need LNRs to be successful.

For LNRs to be successful, they must be adequately funded otherwise they will just be an expensive tick-box exercise, a wasted opportunity and we will continue to be one of the most nature depleted countries in the world¹¹.

For questions or further information please contact:

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[Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) (Link) is the largest environment coalition in England, bringing together 63 organisations to use their strong joint voice for the protection of nature.

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⁹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1029974/Budget_AB2021_Web_Accessible.pdf

¹⁰£61m, which is £37m upfront costs for 18 months, followed by £16m pa for 18 months

¹¹<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/data/biodiversity-indicators/global-biodiversity-intactness-index.html>