



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Environment Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 2 July 2025

Update on Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Carolyn Healy - Cabinet Member: Neighbourhoods, Planning & Sustainability
Lead Director:	James Dunn - Director: Prosperity & Investment
Service Area:	Prosperity & Investment
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Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	Environment Scrutiny – 2 July 2025

1.0 Recommendations for noting:

It is recommended that the Environment Scrutiny Committee:

- 1.1 Note the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has on 17th June 2025 received formal approval from Natural England and the statutory public consultation will follow.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To update the Committee on the progress of the LNRS.
- 2.2 To inform the Committee on next steps including consultation.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy is one of fortyeight LNRS's being completed across England as part of a nationwide initiative to fulfil the statutory obligations that are set out in Section 104 of the Environment Act 2021. These strategies are designed to support nature recovery through locally driven planning and prioritisation of biodiversity and environmental enhancement efforts. The geographical boundaries for each LNRS have been determined by central government, typically aligning with ceremonial county borders to ensure consistency and administrative coherence across regions. The LNRS process is required to deliver a step-change in the conservation and recovery of biodiversity across England to meet our international and national obligations.

3.2 The Specific components of the LNRS has been set out in section 106 of the Environment Act; these include, at a minimum, the preparation of a Statement of Biodiversity Priorities, which sets out local objectives for nature recovery, and the development of a Local Habitat Map, which identifies areas of existing and potential ecological value within the strategy area. The statement document must contain:

- a description of the area and its biodiversity,
- the opportunities and priorities for recovering or enhancing habitats & species, measures to deliver these

The map must identify:

- National conservation sites
- Local Nature Reserves
- Areas which are, or could become, of particular importance for biodiversity
- Areas where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits

3.3 This mapping, although utilising a number of existing designations, does not constitute a designation in itself with regard to restricting land use or development. Rather it is to identify where specific conservation measures could be most effective should the land manager wish to undertake them.

3.4 The Secretary of State appointed Shropshire Council as the Responsible Authority for the development of the LNRS. In accordance with Regulation 3 of The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023, Natural England and Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC) were designated as Supporting Authorities. Together, this core partnership has established a strategic

steering group, along with several thematic sub-groups, to guide the formulation of a robust and actionable strategy. The LNRS steering group comprises of a diverse range of stakeholders, including representatives from Country Land and Business Association (CLA), Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, National Farmers Union, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Shropshire Hills National Landscape. In addition to these organisations, the species sub group benefits from the expertise of numerous local species experts.

- 3.5 In order to consider the priorities for the strategy and measures for nature recovery across the area, numerous stakeholder and public consultation events have been held across the borough and wider Shropshire since September 2024. These have included stalls at large events, online consultations, in person presentations (including for Telford Green Spaces Partnership) and workshops, including with TWC officers, a public workshop at Meeting Point House, Telford and at the Nature Recovery conference by Shropshire Association of Local Councils.
- 3.6 As LNRS' have no power to enforce implementation or the dedicated funding to support the delivery, active engagement with key stakeholders has been essential including land owners such as TWC, this collaborative approach has helped to identify shared priorities and develop realistic, achievable actions that will align with local interest and capacities. It is anticipated that, over time, central government funding streams, such as agricultural incentives, grants and other initiatives will become aligned with LNRS priorities, thereby supporting their implementations.
- 3.7 The development of the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin LNRS is progressing in line with the majority of LNRs across the country. Whilst some have formally been adopted and others remain in earlier stages of preparation, valuable insights have been gained from those further ahead in the process. These learnings are being actively considered to inform and strengthen the local approach.
- 3.8 The mapping component has been carried out in partnership with the University of Oxford through a research initiative, called Agile. This partnership has enabled the application and refinement of a best practice methodology for spatial prioritisation. As part of this process the most accurate and up-to-date datasets available have been sourced and integrated to support evidence based decision making.
- 3.9 Guidance issued by Natural England throughout the process has encouraged the use of relatively fine grained mapping of measures, such as at a field scale to identify and prioritise nature recovery measures. However the mapping of priority measures at this scale can introduce inaccuracies, particularly when relying on datasets which may be at a broad scale or outdated, despite being the best available. Addressing and refining these will be a key objective of the forthcoming

public consultation. For example, a mapped recommendation might suggest the creation of a reedbed in a floodplain field based on ecological suitability, however site specific constraints such as underground services or ground stability could make this impractical. To prevent these constraints blocking positive action, a degree of flexibility is needed to ensure the recommended measures are evidenced, but are broad enough to allow landowners to apply their local knowledge to refine the proposals. In this case, a more feasible alternative might be the establishment of a species rich wet grassland which still delivers biodiversity benefits while accommodating on-the-ground realities.

3.10 Following the presentation on the LNRS to the Committee on 12th February 2025 substantial progress has been achieved across several key areas including:

- Drafting priorities and measures
- Assembling and finalising the publication draft
- Mapping measures for an online viewer
- Approval of the draft by Natural England

3.11 As the designated Responsible Authority (lead organisation) Shropshire Council has a legal duty under The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 to consult the public (Reg 12) as well as Natural England and TWC, as designated Supporting Authorities (Reg 7) on the draft LNRS.

3.12 Natural England holds a central responsibility in ensuring all LNRSs adhere to the standards outlined in the Statutory Guidance. Due to the broadness of some of the guidance, the experience from other LNRS' has found that the Natural England feedback has sometimes been unforeseen and at times challenging. These responses have been carefully considered and have informed the development of the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin LNRS. To discharge this function, Natural England assembled a panel review on 6th June which included their Defra partners, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission. This multi-agency panel provided expert input to assess the strategy's alignment with national expectations. Representatives of the LNRS Steering Group used the Panel not only to seek endorsement to progress to public consultation, but to obtain additional clarification on subjective issues such as grouping of topics/measures and effective formatting.

3.13 Informal verbal feedback from Natural England (and their Defra partners from Environment Agency and Forestry Commission) was supportive and constructive. Natural England's formal written response, received on 17th June maintained a consistent tone and outlined several technical recommendations to strengthen the draft strategy. The response acknowledged the quality of the work to date, stating

that the LNRS was “*gearing up to be a very high quality LNRS.*” However it also noted that the timetable to assimilate their advice within the final consultation draft document for consultation to begin in late July “*might be unrealistic*”.

- 3.14 Given the significant importance of the agricultural sector in delivering the LNRS opportunities to engage with the farming community have been carefully considered. In particular the two major agricultural shows at Burwarton (7th August) and Minsterly (16th Aug) have been identified as valuable platforms for promoting the public consultation. In anticipation of these events, substantial preparatory work has been undertaken to produce a revised draft of the strategy that incorporates the verbal recommendations provided by the review panel. This updated draft was finalised on 20th June, and a final Consultation Draft will be available from w/c 21st July.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 In accordance with The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023, Shropshire Council are legally required to consult TWC on the Consultation Draft under The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023. This consultation is planned to take place in advance of the wider public consultation.
- 4.2 Although the statutory consultation period for Supporting Authorities is 28 days, TWC, Cllrs and Officers will be able to provide feedback throughout the public consultation period, which is expected to close in October. Additional face-to-face meetings have been offered to support this engagement.
- 4.3 Under Regulation 9 (1), TWC may raise formal objections regarding either the content of the LNRS or the extent of the Councils involvement in its preparation. Any such objections must be submitted in writing within 28 days of receiving the draft, with reasons clearly stated (Regulation 9(2)). If objections cannot be resolved, the matter will be referred to the Secretary of State for determination (Regulation 10).
- 4.4 The consultation LNRS will then be published for comment (Reg 12).
- 4.5 Following the statutory consultation (Regulation 12), Shropshire Council are required to finalise the LNRS. Should TWC believe the consultation process was inadequate or the final strategy contains material deficiencies, Regulation 15 allows for the submission of a formal publication advisory notice to both Shropshire Council and the Secretary of State.

4.6 Although there is no statutory deadline when the LNRS must be completed, Defra, who are funding the strategy's delivery via Shropshire Council, have requested that the final versions are submitted by December 2025. Adoption may follow thereafter. Current communications indicate failure to commit to this December milestone is likely to affect future governmental funding.

4.7 It is intended that the final LNRS will be brought to TWC for formal adoption in due course.

5.0 Alternative Options

5.1 This item is for information only in advance of statutory and general consultations.

6.0 Key Risks

6.1 Delays in progressing the LNRS could result in several outcomes:

- It may limit positive engagement with stakeholders critical in the delivery of nature restoration.
- Defra may withhold future funding.
- Nature restoration opportunities could be missed/delayed.
- Potential nature restoration funding could be missed/delayed.

6.2 Natural England have scrutinised the previous draft for soundness and provided detailed recommendations and clarification. Providing these and subsequent legal steps are followed, the LNRS is expected to be legally compliant.

6.3 No in-principle conflicts with TWC's objectives are anticipated. TWC has been an active and engaged partner throughout the development of the LNRS, contributing through:

- bi-weekly core "authorities" meetings
- representation on the Steering Group
- representation on Species group
- Input into the drafting of the strategy content
- participation in targeted officer consultations
- Invitation to public consultation events.

6.4 However, due to the broad scope of the strategy and the evolving policy landscape, it is essential that TWC provides ongoing appropriate local scrutiny of the process and its outputs at each stage to ensure:

- The LNRS is legally sound
- The strategy effectively supports nature recovery within the plan area, including the borough.

7.0 Council Priorities

- 7.1 One of the adopted Council Plan's four priorities is that "*our natural environment is protected, and the Council is taking a leading role in tackling the climate emergency*". One of the four key outcomes to deliver this priority is working towards protecting and enhancing wildlife.
- 7.2 To meet the Council's statutory Biodiversity Duty, the LNRS is integrated into TWC's adopted Biodiversity Duty Consideration Report and Action Plan (2025) specifically in the following actions:
- D02 Identify and align appropriate TWC activities to contribute to the delivery of the LNRS via appropriate strategy/plan reviews and project delivery.
 - G13 Ercall & Lawrence's Hill LNR and Limekiln Wood LNR have new management plans written to align with wider NL and LNRS priorities and opportunities for beneficial management identified.
 - G15 Use LNRS and GI studies to identify wildlife corridors and required ecological functions.
 - G18 Provide officer time to fully engage and support the production and delivery of the LNRS.
 - G19 Formal approval of the LNRS.
 - G20 Open space management plans assess, and where possible commit to, actions to support LNRS priorities.
 - G36 Ensure TWC contributes to the production and implementation of the LNRS.
 - G37 Align LNRS priorities with Local Nature Reserve management plans when they are reviewed.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 No direct additional governmental funding is anticipated for TWC through the LNRS process. However, central funding is provided to Shropshire Council to coordinate across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.
- 8.2 Delay in LNRS production may put future Defra LNRS funding at risk.
- 8.3 It is predicted in the event that future nature conservation funding (governmental and/or grant schemes) is available that it will become aligned with delivery of LNRS priorities and measures.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

- 9.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are systems of spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits in accordance with provisions under the Environment Act 2021. The strategy will outline a strategic approach to

provide opportunity for the restoration of nature across all parts of Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

9.2 Under the Act as the Council are designated as a Supporting Authority for the LNRS with a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

9.3 The proposals contained in this report can be delivered using existing resources.

10.0 Ward Implications

10.1 The LNRS encompasses the entire area of Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. As part of a national framework, all of England will eventually be covered by individual LNRSs. Therefore, although certain areas will have higher concentrations of mapped locations and opportunities for nature recovery, the strategic approach is designed to deliver benefits across all of the borough.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

11.1 Many studies have shown the significant benefit of biodiversity to human health, social wellbeing and economic growth, not least the HM Treasury's internationally respected "The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review (2021). Additional research since this review by Oxford University concluded that damage to the natural environment is slowing the UK economy and could lead to a 12% drop in GDP, which would be bigger than the global financial crisis or Covid-19.

11.2 TWC's Health and Wellbeing Board's strategy for 2023-2027 has identified a "Green and Sustainable Borough" as one of its eight priorities. It also quotes the 2022 residents' survey that found that improved open green spaces is the most important priority for them in improving cultural, leisure and sports facilities and services.

11.3 The Shropshire Hills National Landscape, which includes the Wrekin, is a significant resource for the tourist industry. The LNRS is expected to support improvements to environment which helps underpin this resource.

11.5 The LNRS is also anticipated to influence wider governmental spending, including agri-environment schemes. A well-evidenced and practical strategy will strengthen the case for attracting investment into the land management and farming sectors

11.6 Therefore, the actions proposed through the LNRS aim to improve the health and wellbeing of residents of all ages, whilst also supporting inward investment and long-term economic sustainability for the borough.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 Environmental degradation, including biodiversity loss, has greater impact on those in society who are more vulnerable. This has a number of drivers often connected to economic status, health and age. Therefore, preventing and reversing this degradation is likely to have a greater proportional benefit on those groups.

12.2 Actions proposed have tangible local benefits that are accessible to all.

13.0 Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

13.1 The LNRS is primarily a mechanism for biodiversity recovery. However, measures will specifically aid environmental improvement and the efforts against climate change including:

- reduction in carbon emissions
- capture of carbon
- local climate cooling
- flood prevention
- air pollution reduction
- air pollution capture
- water pollution reduction
- water conservation

14.0 Background Papers

None.

15.0 Appendices

None.

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Finance	23/06/2025	01/07/2025	AEM
Legal	23/06/2025	25/06/2025	SH
Director	23/06/2025	24/06/2025	JD