

Meeting: Cabinet

Date: 17th February 2026

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy

When does the decision need to be implemented?

As soon as possible and before the end of February 2026 to enable Devon County Council (DCC) to apply to the Secretary of State to publish the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) (for the Devon LNRS area, including Plymouth and Torbay,) within the agreed timeline with Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Councillor Chris Lewis, Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth, chris.lewis@torbay.gov.uk & Councillor Adam Billings, Cabinet Member Pride in Place, Transport and Parking; adam.billings@torbay.gov.uk

Director Contact Details: Alan Denby, Director Pride in Place, alan.denby@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To present the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) – a joint strategy for Devon, Plymouth and Torbay (website & mapping) to Cabinet for approval. This follows a public consultation which took place over 6 weeks in autumn 2025.
- 1.2. To delegate authority to the Director of Pride in Place to make or approve any non-substantive amendments to the LNRS prior to publication (or post publication) subject to consultation with Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth and Cabinet Member Pride in Place, Transport and Parking. Granting delegated powers will ensure the Council will be able to fulfil its role as a supporting authority within the required timeframes.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1. The final draft Devon L N R S addresses requirements set out in the Environment Act 2021. The LNRS has been prepared by Devon County Council (DCC) as Responsible Authority (RA) in collaboration with a wide range of partners, including Torbay Council. Torbay Council is a Supporting Authority (SA) in this process, and officers have been closely involved.

- 2.2. The Strategy needs to be finalised in very early 2026 in order for Devon to meet the statutory deadlines. The draft LNRS was made available for public consultation for 6 weeks in the autumn of 2025 and some minor amendments have been made to reflect the consultation feedback where practicable. Section 9 of this report provides further details in this regard.
- 2.3. The LNRS will support our Corporate vision of a healthy, happy, and prosperous Torbay and in particular our strategic theme of Pride in Place.
- 2.4. There are considered to be no risks associated with this decision. LNRSs are all about opportunity rather than restriction and as such are normally considered as low-risk strategies. The explanatory note of The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 notes¹ “A full impact assessment has not been prepared for this instrument as no, or no significant, impact on the private, voluntary or public sectors is foreseen.”.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1. That as a Supporting Authority Torbay Council, provides consent for the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be published; and
- 3.2. That the Director of Pride in Place (as designated Supporting Authority lead officer), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth and Cabinet Member Pride in Place, Transport and Parking be given delegated authority, to approve any non- substantive amendments to the LNRS prior to publication (or post publication).

4. Appendices

Appendix 1: <https://www.naturerecoverydevon.org.uk/summary/>

Appendix 2: <https://www.naturerecoverydevon.org.uk/mapping/>

Appendix 3: 3-minute video summary about the Devon LNRS: <https://youtu.be/Ttfs9B-qoal>

5. Background Documents

- Draft LNRS website & Mapping: [Start here | Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) | Devon County Council](#)
- Other useful papers:
- [Environment Act 2021 (legislation.gov.uk) The Environment Regulations 2023 (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) (legislation.gov.uk)

¹ [Local nature recovery strategy statutory guidance - What a local nature recovery strategy should contain](#)

- Defra [LNRS Supporting Authority Factsheet 0.pdf](#)
- Update to the Natural Environment section of [planning practice guidance](#) on 19/02/25]

Supporting Information

6. Introduction

- 6.1. England is considered to be one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world following historic losses and ongoing declines. The Government has made legally binding commitments to end these declines and for nature to recover. Part of this commitment includes a statutory requirement through [Sections 104 to 106](#) of the Environment Act 2021 for the preparation of LNRS for identified areas across the Country. Devon (including Plymouth and Torbay) is one of 48 such areas.
- 6.2. All public authorities have a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity and must have 'regard' to relevant local nature recovery strategies in this process. The LNRSs are new spatial strategies that will inform nature recovery at a strategic local level, by mapping habitats, features and key species to identify opportunities and priorities to boost ecological connectivity, diversity and abundance. They will support the delivery of biodiversity net gain and provide a focus for the strengthened duty on all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Online resources aim to help everyone to play a role in nature recovery. Importantly, the LNRS does not restrict land use or prescribe how it should be used, instead it is a way to help us work together for nature across landscapes, joining up ideas and actions so they have more impact.
- 6.3. DCC was appointed by Defra as the RA for Devon LNRS under section 105 of the Environment Act 2021. RAs are responsible for preparing, publishing, reviewing and republishing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy following the process set out in The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023.
- 6.4. LNRSs must be produced in collaboration with SAs and all other relevant stakeholders. A SA Officer Group was set up and has met regularly throughout the preparation of the LNRS. Torbay Council is a SA for the LNRS, along with other local authorities² and Natural England.

Co-benefits to nature recovery include:

- Climate Change adaptation and mitigation.
- Water quality.
- Natural Capital and ecosystem services.
- Wellbeing.

² Devon has thirteen SAs: Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council, Exeter City Council, North Devon District Council, Torridge District Council, East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council, South Hams District Council, West Devon District Council, Teignbridge District Council, Dartmoor National Park, Exmoor National Park, and Natural England.

- 6.5. The draft LNRS comprises a website and interactive mapping. These formats will enable the material and GIS-linked data to be accessible and useful to a wide range of audiences. Links are provided in the appendices.

Progress with the Strategy and public consultation

- 6.6. DCC's Ecology Team has led the development of the LNRS under the umbrella of the Devon Local Nature Partnership (LNP). Funding has been used to engage a team of wildlife experts to pull together the information required for the LNRS and to liaise with relevant partners. DCC has also engaged a web designer, copy writer and other consultants to work on mapping, water quality, natural flood management etc. Officers within the Spatial Planning Team and SWISCo have engaged with the development of the LNRS, particularly where it relates to Torbay.

Background details

- 6.7. LNRSs are statutory strategies and must include:

- A **description** of the county's wildlife, including opportunities and pressures.
- **Priorities** for habitats and species (to prevent extinctions and increase abundance, following the Lawton principles of Better, Bigger, More, Joined up).
- **Actions** needed to achieve the priorities.
- Actions for nature restoration that **will help to meet other priorities** such as carbon sequestration, flood control, better water quality, health and wellbeing.
- **Maps** showing (a) designated sites and irreplaceable habitats; (b) places where we most need to focus action.

- 6.8. The LNRS must also:

- Be user friendly. They must be produced in collaboration.
- Set out opportunities and will influence funding (Environmental Land Management, Biodiversity Net Gain, Heritage Lottery Fund, etc.). They are not about new designations or restrictions. However, Local Planning Authorities (LPA) must have regard for them.
- They are part of a 'nested suite' of nature strategies at a range of scales. The LNRS sets out priorities at the county level and what we need to do to help meet relevant national targets. In turn it informs nature strategies at the sub county level which will also have their own local priorities (Protected Landscapes, local authorities, community groups etc.).
- Involve Statutory 'Supporting Authorities' (Local Authorities and Natural England) who are given a 28-day formal consultation period prior to public consultation and post public consultation.

- 6.9. The development of the LNRS is funded by Defra and each Strategy has a Natural England lead officer. All LNRS had a target to be finalised in 2025. This deadline has been extended for the Devon-wide LNRS to February 2026. More details about the requirements of the LNRS can be found in the Environment Act 2021 and Defra LNRS guidance documents (see background links).

Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the planning system

- 6.10. All public authorities have a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity and must 'have regard' to relevant local nature recovery strategies in this process. LPAs should consider how LNRS priorities, actions and mapping are reflected in Local Plans and development management decisions. LNRSs have been given a statutory link to biodiversity net gain (BNG). Simplistically, BNG proposals will be assessed as having a 'high strategic significance' score in the statutory metric if they are located in an area mapped for action in the LNRS Local Habitat Map, and the proposal is consistent with said actions.
- 6.11. The Government has made it clear that LNRSs are not intended to act as a barrier to development or place new restrictions on developing land or making land use changes. LNRSs provide guidance and an evidence base to inform Local Plans and decision making. Planning decisions at both the plan making and planning application stage need to consider all material considerations and the LNRS will be one consideration amongst many. Further guidance on the LNRS and planning is available on the LNRS website³.

Next steps

- 6.12. Following the formal public consultation to place over 6 weeks in autumn 2025, details of which are included in Section 9 below. Some (minor) further amendments have been made to the draft LNRS, and it is now in its final draft, with a minimum formal 28-day period when the Supporting Authorities have been consulted before the strategy is finalised. It is expected that, subject to approval being given by the SAs, DCC (as R A) will publish the final Devon LNRS for a public consultation in February 2026.
- 6.13. This post consultation, final LNRS, is being reported to Cabinet for approval. Once the final LNRS has been approved by the SAs, DCC must then notify the Secretary of State of its intention to publish the strategy. When the Secretary of State has given approval DCC can then publish the strategy and make hard copies available. Thereafter there will be duty for the R A to undertake a review of the final LNRS following notification from the Secretary of State there is a need to do so.

Options under consideration

- 6.14. **Option 1.** Cabinet confirms they are content for the LNRS to be published.
- 6.15. **Option 2.** Cabinet is not content for the LNRS to be published, but requires amendments and enters negotiation with DCC because it considers that parts of the LNRS cannot be justified based on the results of the consultation undertaken by the responsible authority; or it is or is materially deficient
- 6.16. Should Option 2 be suggested by Cabinet then the Council would have only a few days to negotiate with DCC as R A and may, in turn need further consultation with the other S As on any new content, which would be extremely challenging given the short timescale. The

³ LNRS and Planning guidance paper

Council would have to state why it considers that the final local nature recovery strategy cannot be justified (based on the results of the consultation) or that the current LNRS is materially deficient via a formal 'advisory note'. This would risk failure to publish the Devon-wide LNRS and reputational damage to the Council and DCC

7. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 7.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the contents of this report. Torbay Council makes a small contribution per annum to the work of the Devon LNP which has been a key delivery mechanism of the LNRS. Funding of the LNRS is set out in Section 10.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended by the Environment Act 2021) places a duty on all public authorities who operate in England to consider how they can conserve and enhance biodiversity. In complying with this duty, all public authorities must "have regard" to any relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This includes development of Local Plans. By identifying specific priorities/sites the LNRS directly interacts with the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain through planning permissions, as additional BNG credits are generated by delivering BNG action on LNRS priorities. A Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is likely to assist the development of the Torbay Local Plan update because it provides spatial, evidence-based priorities for nature recovery—which Local Plans (LP) are now expected to reflect.
- 8.2. The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 set out the procedure to be followed for preparation and publication, and review and republication, of these strategies. Under regulation 3, The Council is deemed a "supporting authority". Regulation 4 requires responsible authorities to take reasonable steps to involve all supporting authorities for the local nature recovery strategy in its preparation and make provision as to the form this must take. Regulation 7 requires responsible authorities to provide all supporting authorities for the local nature recovery strategy with both the draft strategy it considers ready to consult on, and to request their comments (this has been done) and for SAs to confirm that 'they are content for the local nature recovery strategy to be published (this current stage).
- 8.3. The LNRS could have a positive impact in these thematic areas:
- Strengthening the evidence base for biodiversity and Green Infrastructure
 - Informing the Spatial Strategy site selection
 - Supporting the delivery of BNG
 - Influencing LP policy development
 - Having a bearing on legal and policy integration
- 8.4. This will help to ensure that the LP evidence base for biodiversity/natural capital is robust and up to date, and that a synergy exists between the LP evidence base and the that coming forward in the LNRS.

9. Engagement and Consultation

Summary of Devon LNRS Public Consultation Overall Summary and Quantitative Data

- 9.1. The public consultation for the draft Devon LNRS took place over 6 weeks in autumn 2025. The Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth as well as the Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking were briefed on the LNRS and public consultation in advance.
- 9.2. Responses were collected via two online questionnaires (also available in printed format), one Short questionnaire (160 responses), Full questionnaire (79) responses. Feedback was also received via direct conversation and written comments separate to the questionnaires (this is the case for most key partners) which are not addressed in this summary. This summary will be published as a Power BI Workbook on the LNRS website in due course.
- 9.3. The DCC consultation involved:
- Ambassador training to allow further reach at community events (LNRS specific events, community, church and school events)
 - Public webinars (two general, farming, water) with recordings hosted on the draft Devon LNRS website and Devon Local Nature Partnership (LNP) website
 - Public drop-in sessions
 - Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group facilitated farmer group events & National Farmers Union manager event
 - Press releases, newsletters, social media, printed materials and pop-up banners shared through partners Continued feedback discussions with partners (including discussion on Temperate Rainforests)
 - Two public questionnaires were shared: Short (160 responses), Full (79 responses)
- 9.4. All questions were optional, and each response could include more than one comment.
- 9.5. Through analysis responses were divided to address individual comments, resulting in over 700 comments. In summary:
- General:
- 239 questionnaire responses resulting in over 700 comments
 - Intro webinars/deep dive webinar – 104 attendees live (135 tickets sold)
 - Water webinar – 38 attendees live (67 tickets sold)
 - 35 written responses from partners were received outside of the questionnaire
 - Farming
 - Over 60 farmers were engaged through FWAG facilitated events
 - NFU managers were engaged (prior and during the public consultation)
 - Farming webinar 23 live attendees (39 tickets sold)
- Partners:
- 32 experts directly engaged to provide specialist species and habitats input and engaging with relevant local recording groups and other experts.

- LNRS partners were engaged through the public consultation. This includes the Defra family, SAs (including Torbay Council), local eNGOs, all Devon Protected Landscapes, ecological consultants, farmers and land agents, public health sector, Libraires Unlimited, and all Devon LNP networks including Network of Environmental Educators in Devon, Wild About Devon, Naturally Healthy. Through the LNP the LNRS public consultation had a wider reach, including Devon Communities Together, Devon Association of Local Councils, Active Devon, VCSE Assembly, LVEP. All partners were encouraged to share information about the LNRS and public consultation, with the help of the communication pack. For further details please see the Stakeholder Engagement Overview

- 9.6. Comments on behalf of Torbay Council have all been addressed except those which related to the national constraints of the LNRS process, which are outside the control of DCC.
- 9.7. If the Council, as SA chose to state that the final LNRS cannot be justified based on the results of the consultation undertaken by the RA; or it is or is materially deficient (through a formal 'advisory note') :- Giving a 'publication advisory notice' has the effect of preventing a responsible authority from publishing its local nature recovery strategy until the issues raised in the notice are resolved.

9.8.

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10. Procurement Implications

- 10.1. DCC as the RA has primarily funded the development of the LNRS through the expenditure of the 'new burdens' funding allocated to them by central government.
- 10.2. Defra announced the level of revenue funding to Devon (as RA) was allocated £388,000 over a two-year period, with this provided as a Section 31 grant to DCC. The funding has been used to cover the dedicated staffing and contractor input needed to support the preparation of the Devon LNRS, along with all other costs incurred through stakeholder engagement and through its publication. This has been directly managed through DCC budgets, however, decisions on its allocation have been taken in liaison with the SAs.

11. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 11.1. The LNRS agrees priorities for nature recovery and proposes actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities. As such, its production contributes to the mitigation of Climate Change.
- 11.2. The LNRS will demonstrate how the restoration and re-creation of habitats will sequester carbon, support approaches to climate adaptation, as well as offering a wider range of nature based solutions to issues such as flooding, air and water quality, sustainable

management of soils etc. However, there is a clear government expectation that the LNRSSs should also strongly highlight how nature recovery will also support wider social and economic priorities. The Devon LNRSS also contributes to supporting sustainable economic recovery by prompting opportunities for green growth and to improve health and wellbeing by re-connecting people with nature.

12. Associated Risks

- 12.1. The most significant risk is Cabinet not approving this item for publication would be the resulting potential delay in the Devon-wide LNRSS being approved for publication by the Secretary of State, given the very tight timeline being managed by an external body.

13. Equality Impact Assessment

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age	<p>18 per cent of Torbay residents are under 18 years old.</p> <p>55 per cent of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old.</p> <p>27 per cent of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older.</p>	<p>Nature recovery can deliver benefits for wildlife and people of all ages. The strategy aims to improve nature access across the county recognising the benefits nature provides to our wellbeing and environment.</p> <p>Access to nature is important for lots of people. We will consider how barriers that affect engagement with nature can be reduced.</p> <p>h..</p>	<p>Opportunities to improve access to nature, will include enhancing green space access, involving underrepresented communities in decision-making, and ensuring communications are inclusive.</p>	R A : DCC
Carers	<p>At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay.</p>	<p>Implementing the strategy aims to improve nature across the county,</p>		

	5,185 of these provided 50 hours or more of care.	including access to nature spaces which may benefit people with caring responsibilities. This includes more access to nature areas for recreation and opportunities to help with nature recovery. These activities may have physical and mental health benefits.		
Disability	In the 2021 Census, 23.8% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by a physical or mental health condition or illness.	Implementing the strategy aims to improve nature across the county, including promoting accessibility to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health benefits can be expected from increased access to nature recovery areas.		
Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth.	Implementing the strategy aims to improve nature across the county, including access to nature spaces and increasing		

	<p>This proportion is similar to the Southwest and is lower than England.</p>	<p>accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.</p>		
<p>Marriage and civil partnership</p>	<p>Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.</p>	<p>Implementing the strategy aims to improve nature across the county, including access to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to participate in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.</p>		
<p>Pregnancy and maternity</p>	<p>Over the period 2010 to 2021, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 63.7 per 1,000) than England (60.2) and the South West (58.4). There has been a</p>	<p>Implementing the strategy aims to improve nature across the county, including access to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and</p>		

	notable fall in the numbers of live births since the middle of the last decade across all geographical areas.	physical health benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.		
Race	In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as white. This is a higher proportion than the South West and England. Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.	Implementing the strategy aims to improve nature across the county, including access to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.		
Religion and belief	64.8% of Torbay residents who stated that they have a religion in the 2021 census.	Implementing the strategy aims to improve nature across the county, including access to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.		

Sex	51.3% of Torbay's population are female and 48.7% are male	Implementing the strategy aims to improve nature across the county, including access to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.		
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, 3.4% of those in Torbay aged over 16 identified their sexuality as either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or, used another term to describe their sexual orientation.	. Implementing the strategy looks to improve nature across the county, including access to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.		
Armed Forces Community	In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the	Implementing the strategy looks to improve nature across the county,		

	UK armed forces. In Torbay, 5.9 per cent of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.	including access to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.		
Additional considerations				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)		Positive Implementation of this strategy will include more opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery and connect with nature.		
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay)		Positive Implementing the strategy looks to improve nature across the county, including accessibility to nature spaces and increasing accessible opportunities for people to get involved in nature recovery activities. Mental and physical health		

		benefits can be expected from increased nature recovery areas and accessibility.		
Human Rights impacts		Neutral - there is no differential impact.		
Child Friendly	Torbay Council is a Child Friendly Council, and all staff and Councillors are Corporate Parents and have a responsibility towards cared for and care experienced children and young people.	Positive - There will be a positive impact on children and young people as the aim of implementing the strategy looks to improve nature across the county, which also brings benefits for people. A healthy natural environment gives us what we need to survive, from clean air and water, to flood protection and carbon storage.		
The implementation of the LNRS is expected to have positive impacts on several groups, particularly older people, children and young people, disabled people, those with caring responsibilities, and individuals experiencing socioeconomic deprivation. These benefits stem from improved access to nature, enhanced biodiversity, and associated physical and mental health outcomes. For most other protected characteristic groups—including gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and marital status—the strategy is assessed to have a neutral impact, with no anticipated negative effects. The strategy is designed to be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that nature recovery benefits are shared across all communities.				

14. Cumulative Council Impact

- 14.1. The LNRS could have a positive impact in these thematic areas.
- Strengthening the evidence base for biodiversity and Green Infrastructure
 - Informing the Spatial Strategy site selection
 - Supporting the delivery of BNG
 - Influencing Local Plan policy development
 - Having a bearing on legal and policy integration
- 14.2. The Environment Act 2021 introduces a strengthened 'Biodiversity Duty' requiring all public authorities operating in England to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Public authorities are defined as government departments, public bodies and agencies, local authorities and local planning authorities, and statutory undertakers.
- 14.3. Local planning authorities are required to publish a biodiversity duty report. The end date of the first reporting period should be no later than 1 January 2026. After this, the end date of each reporting period must be within 5 years of the end date of the previous reporting period. All reports must be published within 12 weeks of the reporting period end date.
- 14.4. The Biodiversity Duty has links to the development of LNRS to help identify how we are conserving and enhancing biodiversity through nature recovery, identification and protection of priority habitats opportunities to restore and enhance habitats, particularly through BNG.

15. Cumulative Community Impacts

- 15.1. The LNRS will be a material consideration in for the Local Authority as part of the Planning application decision and plan making process.