



North Devon Council

Report Date: 2nd August 2021

Topic: Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan and Declaration

Report by: Lead Officer Planning Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Both nationally and within northern Devon, our wildlife is a shadow of its former glory. Many species are in long-term decline and we have lost many important and keystone species. Today, the UK is among the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. Nature has been, and continues to be, restricted into smaller and smaller fragments of suitable habitat due to the destruction of wildlife habitats and intensification of land use. Climate change is exacerbating these problems.
- 1.2. Our natural environment can no longer guarantee the multiple benefits it provides through ecosystem services, for our food and water security, health and wellbeing and for tackling the immense threat of climate change. Both the rivers Taw and Torridge are failing ecological and chemical standards, revealing that land use and activities in their catchments are not sustainable.
- 1.3. However, there is still an opportunity to support and facilitate nature's recovery. One of the Biosphere Reserve's purposes is to be able to test innovative approaches for living sustainably as an exemplar for sustainable development. As such, a Nature Recovery Plan has been prepared by the Nature Improvement Group of the Biosphere Reserve Partnership as its response to the global ecological emergency [accessible at [Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan](#)].
- 1.4. It covers the terrestrial parts of the North Devon Biosphere Reserve, which includes the whole of North Devon district, and it sets out the priority actions required from 2021-25 to move towards a 2030 Vision for nature's recovery across northern Devon. It is proposed that the actions, and progress against them, will be reviewed in 2025. It is also a living document that will be updated as new data becomes available.
- 1.5. The draft Nature Recovery Plan was published on 6th July and is subject to public consultation until 15th August 2021.
- 1.6. This Nature Recovery Plan sets out to 'turn the tide' and facilitate nature's recovery across northern Devon, but it requires a combined effort by everyone in partnership with each other to engage through their choices and



actions. This applies to all local councils, local businesses, schools and community groups in their roles as land managers and policy makers, as well as to individual consumers. The plan also proposes to prioritise, target and coordinate our combined efforts towards achieving this vision.

1.7. A Nature Recovery Declaration has also been prepared [[Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan](#)] seeking all community groups, businesses and individuals to sign up to actions within their control and responsibility that would contribute towards achieving this vision. These are aspirational targets rather than strictly binding requirements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. To authorise the Lead Officer Planning Policy to respond to the draft Nature Recovery Plan by supporting the proposed vision and actions within it.

2.2. To sign the Nature Recovery Declaration, agreeing to undertake each of the actions identified for Councils.

2.3. To encourage and invite all members and staff to pledge their support for this Declaration as individuals, and to share it with their family and friends where appropriate.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To respond to and support the draft nature plan, which has been published for consultation, to help address the recovery of nature.

3.2. To contribute to delivering the proposed strategy for recovery of nature across northern Devon.

3.3. To fulfil one of the proposed actions to enable and encourage staff and members to sign the declaration as individuals rather than just the council as an organisation.

4. REPORT

Nature Recovery Plan

4.1. This Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan focuses on five key habitat types, which together cover the majority of northern Devon.

- a) Coast
- b) Grassland and Arable

- c) Towns and Villages
- d) Trees, Woodlands and Hedges
- e) Wetlands and Waterbodies

4.2. Within the section for each habitat:

- a) Part I sets out a vision for 2030, followed by a description of the scope and location of the habitat type;
- b) Part II identifies priority actions for nature's recovery, which are split into habitat-related actions, species-related actions and enabling actions, together with monitoring and research priorities; and
- c) Part III sets out supporting information including the importance of that habitat type for nature, an estimated baseline condition assessment and perceived trends, as well as identifying root causes of decline and potential solutions to address them. Achievements over the last 10 years are also recognised.

4.3. For each of the actions listed in Part II, a lead organisation is identified, together with an estimated cost for undertaking or facilitating the work. Some actions have existing resources, or are part of existing workloads. The source of any additional funding to facilitate and undertaken these additional actions is not yet identified.

4.4. District Councils across the Biosphere Reserve are identified as the lead partner or a supporting partner for several actions, primarily within the Towns and Villages section. Officers from the Parks and Planning teams were involved in drafting this section. However, in most instances the actions are being undertaken or are planned to be undertaken anyway (such as proposed new woodland planting at Yeo Valley); or can be accommodated and facilitated within existing workloads, such as the proposed update of the joint Local Plan or emerging Biodiversity Net Gain Supplementary Planning Document.

4.5. There are also identified actions for the District Councils in the Coast section relating to reducing disturbance at the high tide roosts around the Taw-Torrige estuary. However, this work is also already underway with the recent introduction of a public space protection order (PSPO) and proposals for associated signage and enforcement. Again, further opportunities to reduce disturbance at high tide roosts could be considered as part of the new joint Local Plan. The Coast section also incorporates the proposed nature recovery strategy for North Devon Coast AONB.

4.6. Whilst some actions within these sections are already starting to be delivered, the actions are intended to be challenging but achievable. The actions are

aspirational but are not set as binding targets that must be met by a partner organisation. Rather they are aspirational targets or visions to which all partner organisations can contribute.

- 4.7. The Nature Recovery Plan is considered to complement and help to deliver some of the objectives in the Council's corporate plan. It will also contribute to achieving the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan "A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment". It will also contribute to the Devon Nature Recovery Strategy that is being prepared in response to the Environment Bill.

Nature Recovery Declaration

- 4.8. The Nature Recovery Declaration accompanies the Nature Recovery Plan. This document is not a draft for consultation, but there is an invitation for any organisation or individual across northern Devon to sign up to it as a pledge to undertake the actions selected. Cumulatively, enough people and organisations undertaking these actions will contribute significantly towards delivering the vision and meeting the actions set out in the Nature Recovery Plan. The number and scope of the declarations made will also provide a good indicator of the level and range of support for the vision and aspirations of the draft Nature Recovery Plan.
- 4.9. The declaration sets out a list of potential actions that the signatory is pledging to undertake. The list of actions differs between individuals and different types of organisations. For Councils the list of actions includes:
- o Help nature to recover on land over which we have responsibility or influence by creating new habitats and through nature-friendly management of public spaces and verges, working with local communities;
 - o Seek opportunities for net nature gain in all of our policies, procedures, plans, operations and decisions;
 - o Ensure the principles of Building with Nature are incorporated into new housing developments;
 - o Encourage our members, residents and staff to individually pledge their support for this Declaration and share it with their family and friends;
 - o Carry out our duty for conserving biodiversity across the Biosphere, aligning with Nature Recovery Plan priorities;
 - o Lead, support and collaborate as appropriate to help deliver nature recovery plan actions for which we are named and, where necessary, endeavour to utilise resources to do so.

4.10. All of these actions are considered by Officers to be appropriate and achievable for North Devon Council. The second and third points could be incorporated into and delivered through the proposed new Local Plan. Officers consider that the Council could and should be able to sign up to this declaration.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. There are no direct financial or staffing costs associated with any decision to respond to the draft Nature Recovery Plan consultation and/or sign the Nature Recovery Declaration.

5.2. The actions in the proposed Nature Recovery Plan should be able to be incorporated into existing and future workloads, such as the update to the Local Plan, without any significant additional expenses. Bringing future grounds maintenance back into the Council will provide greater flexibility to accommodate some of the proposed actions on the Council's own land, such as tree planting.

6. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The proposed Nature Recovery Plan and the Nature Recovery Declaration would have a big positive impact on nature and biodiversity across North Devon. Other sustainability implications (social, economic and environmental) are likely to be broadly positive (such as for health and wellbeing, and opportunities for tourism) or generally neutral.

7. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

7.1. There are not considered to be any negative equality impacts arising from the nature recovery plan. The plan does not contain any formal policies and focuses on improving nature and biodiversity across the Biosphere Reserve area, which would benefit everyone.

8. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

8.1. Article of Part 3 Annexe 1.

8.2. Referred power.

9. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

9.1. This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.



10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- North Devon Biosphere Strategy for Sustainable Development 2014-2024
- North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (adopted October 2018)
- A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (HM Government, 2018)

10.2. The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report.

11. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

11.1. The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers.

Executive Member: Councillor Netti Pearson

Author: Andrew Austen (Lead Officer Planning Policy) Date: 1 July 2021

Reference: S&R 2 August 21 (Nature Recovery Plan)