

25 October 2021

PR 21-21 LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGIES

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the nationally recognised membership and support organisation representing the interests of around 10,000 parish and town councils and many parish meetings in England, 70% of which are situated in rural areas. Local (parish and town) councils are the backbone of our democracy and closest to local people, providing our neighbourhoods, villages, towns and small cities with a democratic voice and structure for action, contributing in excess of £2 billion of community investment to supporting and improving local communities and delivering neighbourhood level services.

Context

- NALC firmly believes that local councils can and should make a significant contribution to both the preparation and the implementation of local nature recovery strategies.
- NALC has been lobbying DEFRA and the government since January 2021 on the passage of the Environment Bill through parliament and NALC's main position on local nature recovery strategies is that the responsible authority for a local nature recovery strategy should consult / involve local councils within its area in the preparation of its local nature recovery strategy. This would ensure that the vital need for local councils to be consulted by responsible authorities when such strategies affecting their areas are being framed, is satisfied.
- We also firmly believe that the partnership responsible for a local nature recovery strategy should include representatives of local councils from within the same local nature recovery strategy area. There could be an obligation on the governing body to contact their county association of local councils to secure a representative.
- Following recent engagement with the National Recovery Network (NRN) and Natural England it is apparent that this consultation is focussing on the regulations and guidance that sit underneath the primary legislation so we are using this response as an opportunity to highlight the role of local councils and their willingness to be involved in the formation of local nature recovery strategies – after all – they have a huge combined knowledge of

the ecology of their place and have much to contribute to the protection of the biodiversity of their areas.

- Clarification is needed as to whether local nature partnerships will actually be statutory bodies, or not. Thought needs to be given by DEFRA as to what the future will be for existing local nature partnerships such as the one in Greater Manchester.
- If the government wants local nature partnerships to be a powerful new tool, they will require proper funding with paid professionals to manage them. Consideration is urgently needed by DEFRA as to who will chair these bodies and how they will be funded.
- We consider that the lack of cross references to the climate emergency or to climate change bodies is worrying in the consultation document.
- There are some 50 local government areas in England - but their boundaries bear little relationship to the natural areas of the country. Natural England has identified nearly 160 National Character Areas (NCAs) from the Northumberland Coast to the Isles of Scilly. These areas have relatively coherent ecosystems and would make an ideal footprint for Local Nature Recovery Partnerships (on a merged or sub-regional basis). They nearly all span several principal LAs but rarely do local councils take in more than one. DEFRA needs to remember that LA boundaries themselves are not appropriate in the natural world, they are economic and socio-geographic but do not fit local ecosystems or the networks that these need to form to become sustainable. We should be setting up LNRPs for groups of NCAs, separately serviced and with representatives for LPAs, local councils, landowners, conservation bodies and others.

NALC's responses to the consultation questions with most relevance to local councils are below:

5. Which of the groups listed below do you consider essential for the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategies?

- **Local authority(s) other than the "responsible authority", where the Strategy covers more than one Local Authority area**
- **Local authorities adjacent to the Strategy areas.**
- **Local Nature Partnership(s), where active and geographically aligned**
- **Natural England**
- **The Environment Agency**
- **The Forestry Commission**

- **Other public bodies e.g. Highways England**
- **Environmental non-governmental organisations active in the Strategy area**
- **National Park Authority(s), where present in the Strategy area and if not the “responsible authority”**
- **Area of Outstanding National Beauty organisation(s), where present in the Strategy area**
- **Local Records Centre(s), where separate from any of the other groups listed**
- **Local farming, forestry and landowning groups**
- **Local Enterprise Partnerships**
- **Utilities providers, such as water companies**
- **Other local business representative bodies**
- **Individual landowners and land managers (including farmers, both landowners and tenants)**
- **Individual businesses**
- **Members of the public**
- **Don’t Know.**

Our main point here is the obvious one – that local (parish and town) councils are not included in the above list and should be. Though the strategies may primarily be about working with local nature and ecology bodies, responsible authorities are likely to be principal local authorities so it seems very odd even by omission to exclude local councils (who are the closest tier of local government to their communities and who have an excellent local knowledge of the ecology and biodiversity of their areas) from the list of consultees.

Other more general views are that the majority of respondents NALC heard back from consider all of the groups listed in the consultation document to be essential for the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. However it was felt that it is the responsibility of all of the above bodies to coordinate and generate practices that facilitate the Nature Recovery Strategies. Respondents feel it is essential that the complete spectrum of views is taken into account for this important piece of work.

6. Are there any organisations not listed above whose involvement you consider essential? [Yes/No/Don’t Know] If yes, which ones and why?

Yes - local councils. Per the answer given to the previous question local councils often manage open spaces and local wildlife areas within their boundaries (or at

least spaces containing much local flora and fauna) so would make excellent partners in framing Nature Recovery Strategies.

It is also worth saying here that during the five pilots to engage with local areas earlier this year with the Nature Recovery Network (Greater Manchester, Cumbria, Cornwall, Northumberland and Buckinghamshire) we are only aware of one pilot area (Buckinghamshire) where engagement actually occurred with local councillors. That will not have likely been caused by local councils in the other four pilot areas not being willing to engage. NALC has learnt that local councils in all of those pilot areas would have been willing to engage in the pilots had they had knowledge of them but (possibly due to COVID-19) many did not know so an opportunity was missed. Now is the time to rectify that nationally and for relevant local council representatives to be appointed by their county association to local nature partnerships.

More generally whilst the land per se is not under their control, all members of a local council are affected by any impacts on their environment in which they live and also the landscape in which their communities are placed.

One respondent stated a wish that local councils should be allowed to nominate a representative, not necessarily a councillor but a co-opted expert who can speak with authority, to a partnership.

Charities such as the Wildlife Trust and National Trust should be involved as many charities own large land areas. Internal Drainage Boards should also be involved.

9. Are you aware of specific locally-held information that would make an important contribution to the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies that you do not believe would be made available without a requirement to do so? [Yes/No/Don't Know] If yes, what information should be included?

NALC believes that the following specific locally held information that would make an important contribution to the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and that would not be made available without a requirement to do so are key:

- Pre-Submission Sustainability Appraisals;
- Tree Protection Order maps and information;
- Neighbourhood Plans that have been produced by local councils. They may have undertaken Wildlife and Biodiversity investigations and have reports;

- Water companies have lots of information on such as releases of untreated sewage; &
- Flooding and flood risk information is essential.

10. How do you think neighbouring Local Nature Recovery Strategy responsible authorities should be required to work together?

- **Required to inform neighbouring responsible authorities of their progress in preparing their Strategy**
- **Required to give information to neighbouring responsible authorities that would help them prepare their Strategy**
- **Required to collaborate when setting objectives for areas close to boundaries**
- **Left to local discretion**
- **Other [If other, please specify]**
- **Don't know**

NALC believes that neighbouring Local Nature Recovery Strategy responsible authorities should be required to work together in the following ways:

- Required to inform neighbouring responsible authorities of their progress in preparing their strategy;
- Required to give information to neighbouring responsible authorities that would help them prepare their strategy;
- Required to collaborate when setting objectives for areas close to boundaries; &
- Required to have regard to cross boundary factors and projects.
- We feel that the environmental and biodiversity impact does not stop at the artificial boundaries that human inhabitants have imposed, so the collective response is paramount in making protection measures effective; &
- Polluted air and water move across many local authority areas.

It goes without saying that if local councils are involved in framing strategies in their areas, then the parish perspective between strategy areas will already have been hardwired into the process.

11. Should draft Local Nature Recovery Strategies be subject to a local public consultation prior to publication? [Yes/No/Don't Know]

Yes. We believe that draft Local Nature Recovery Strategies should be subject to a local public consultation prior to publication.

We feel that a public consultation will help to increase public awareness and encourage and support local involvement in implementing the strategy.

Members of the public should be actively encouraged to partake in discussions of their local wildlife and nature. Audit of current environmental/nature/species status should be carried out to ensure correct action, which does not negatively impact already established biodiversity. This should include those at parish level.

**12. Should individual landowners or managers be able to decide that land they own or manage should not be identified by a Local Nature Recovery Strategy as an area that could become of particular importance for biodiversity?
[Yes/No/Don't Know]**

No. We feel that individual landowners or managers should not be able to decide that land they own or manage should not be identified by a Local Nature Recovery Strategy as an area that could become of particular importance for biodiversity.

We note that landowners are not outside how nature and the environment occur. Land owned must be included in any Local Nature Recovery Strategy. If not, it devalues the whole idea.

Landowners should be made aware of their land that has been identified as important to biodiversity. This will act to increase awareness and may encourage landowners to think of their land as integral to aiding nature recovery and biodiversity.

14. How prescriptive do you think regulations made under clause 101 should be in setting out how the responsible authority should work with local partners?

- **Setting broad principles only**
- **Setting broad principles and specific requirements on who to engage or how**
- **A standardised process of who to engage and how**
- **Don't know**

We believe that regulations made under clause 101 should set broad principles and specific requirements on who to engage or how. However we would prefer it if local councils after being listed as required partners in parished areas when strategies are being framed were included in guidance for responsible authorities to consult with.

These specific requirements and broad principles should be set out in advance. The list of specific requirements should not be exhaustive and should be added to according to local discretion and specific circumstances.

The nature of each authority in terms of its variation in the natural environment may differ significantly (even if adjoining) therefore it would be difficult to develop a standardised process that will work everywhere. The best approach in this situation is to set the broad principles but make specific requirements about who to engage with.

Should you require any further information on this response please do not hesitate to contact Chris Borg, policy manager, on 07714 771049 or via email at chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk.

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