

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 17 March 2026

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 7 April 2026

Report of: Strategic Director for Place

Title: Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The publication of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the geographical territory that includes the whole of the County of Devon combined with that of Plymouth and Torbay unitary authorities. The Strategy is a new resource, tool and mechanism for improving biodiversity, promoting habitats for rare and endangered species and generally supporting the restoration of a greater abundance of natural flora and fauna.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Exeter City Council (as a 'Supporting Authority') should confirm that it is content for Devon County Council (as the 'Responsible Authority') to publish the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 The draft Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy addresses requirements set out in the Environment Act 2021. The LNRS has been drafted by Devon County Council as the Responsible Authority in collaboration with a wide range of partners including ECC. ECC is a Supporting Authority in this process and officers have been involved. Elected Members received an 'All Members Briefing' on the strategy from the County Ecologist in the Autumn of 2025. The draft Strategy has now been subject to public consultation and is in its final draft form.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources:

4.1 There are no direct costs associated with this initiative.

4.2 The 'High Opportunity Areas' identified within the Strategy are expected to attract investment / grant-funding to effect ecological improvements to those spaces, creating stronger habitats for nature.

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5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no financial implications for Council to consider.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 A LNRS Strategy is required in order to comply with Sections 104 to 106 of the Environment Act 2021.

6.2 Devon County Council as the Responsible Authority have been required to follow the procedure for creating the Strategy, as laid out in The Environment Regulations 2023 (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure).

6.3 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.

6.4 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.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 No governance or procedural issues arise from this report. The recommendations fall within the City Council's statutory responsibilities under the Environment Act 2021 and associated regulations.

8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

8.1 In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because the Strategy is exclusively about actions affecting ecology and natural systems rather than outcomes that relate to impacts on people.

9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

9.1 No direct negative carbon/environmental impacts arise from the recommendations.

9.2 Clearly, the strategy is intended to greatly improve biodiversity and some of the resulting actions may well also contribute to the other positive environmental improvements as listed at 10.5 below.

10. Report details:

10.1 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 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) for identified areas across the Country. Devon is one of 48 such areas.

10.2 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.

10.3 Devon County Council (DCC) was appointed as the Responsible Authority for Devon LNRS under section 105 of the Environment Act 2021. Responsible Authorities 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.

10.4 LNRSs must be produced in collaboration with Supporting Authorities and all other relevant stakeholders. A Supporting Authorities Officer Group was set up and has met regularly throughout the preparation of the LNRS. Exeter City Council is a Supporting Authority for the LNRS, along with other local authorities and Natural England.

10.5 Co-benefits to nature recovery include:

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

10.6 The draft LNRS comprises a website and interactive mapping (see Appendix for links). These formats will enable the material and GIS-linked data to be accessible and useful to a wide range of audiences.

10.7 There are strong correlations between the aspirations and objectives of establishing the Strategy with ECC corporate priorities as expressed by the Exeter Vision 2040 and the Corporate Plan priority of achieving a 'Sustainable Environment'. The 'Liveable Exeter' principle of creating 'Places for People and Nature' will also be supported and reinforced.

10.8 DCC's Ecology Team has led the development of the LNRS under the umbrella of the Devon Local Nature Partnership. 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.

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10.9 An officer working group from ECC have worked with the DCC LNRS team to develop the draft LNRS. This has included officers from City Development, Public and Green Space, Dorset Ecology Services (as ECC's appointed ecology consultants) and the City-Wide Net Zero team. This has ensured that relevant ECC key interests are reflected in/consistent with the final draft LNRS (e.g. Valley Parks identified as 'High Opportunity Areas', initiatives such as habitat bank, habitat mitigation strategy, Clyst Valley Regional Park, Green Circle are all aligned).

10.10 An ECC 'all members briefing' was held (15th September) at which the County Ecologist presented the draft strategy and took questions and observations from participants.

10.11 The public consultation conducted by DCC was predominantly positive and supportive of the Strategy in its final form (see Appendix) and included a variety of engagement techniques with two 'drop-in' sessions organised in Exeter (at the City Library and the Custom House).

10.12 The final draft version of the Strategy is endorsed by the ECC Officer Working Group.

10.13 Existing ECC planning policy supports the enhancement of biodiversity within the city and the draft Exeter Plan makes explicit reference to the LNRS within its specific policy "NE3 Biodiversity".

11. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

11.1 The Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy is fully aligned with the Corporate Plan Strategic Priority "Sustainable Environment" in taking action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. This includes the Outcome of providing "Well-maintained parks, open spaces and biodiversity across the city".

12. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

12.1 There are no direct risks identified – the main challenge to effective delivery will lie in the means of implementation and use of the Strategy. Officers will need to become alert to 'best practice' in how to interpret and give influence to the Strategy, particularly in the plan-making and decision-taking activity of the planning service.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 The approval to publish could be withheld, but this would delay the Strategy taking effect. Officers are not aware of any inadequacies in the current draft nor of any need for additional work to be undertaken in preparing a Strategy that might be regarded to be more satisfactory.

Strategic Director for Place, Ian Collinson

Authors: Matt Diamond (Assistant Service Lead – Development Management (Major Projects)) + Mark Pearson (Principal Officer, Urban Design + Landscape)

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Environment Act 2021 (legislation.gov.uk)

The Environment Regulations 2023 (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) (legislation.gov.uk)

Defra [LNRS Supporting Authority Factsheet 0.pdf](#)

Update to the Natural Environment section of [planning practice guidance](#) on 19/02/25

List of Appendices:

- EQIA (attached a separate document)
- The Devon LNRS website www.naturerecoverydevon.org.uk/
- A short Powerpoint explaining the DNLRs (using a series of website screenshots)
 [LNRS Screenshots Updated Jan 26.pptx](#)
- DCC “Draft Devon LNRS Public consultation – Qualitative responses”
(also includes a hyperlink to an overall summary of the quantitative data)
 [Summary of Devon LNRS Public Consultation Qualitative Responses.docx](#)

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