

Report to CABINET

Approval of draft GM Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Elaine Taylor Cabinet Member for Decent Homes and Cllr Chris Goodwin, Cabinet Member for Don't' Trash Oldham

Officer Contact: Paul Clifford, Director of Economy

Report Author: Georgina Brownridge, Senior Planning Officer
Ext. 1670

14 October 2024

Reason for Decision

To confirm that Oldham Council provides its approval for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) (on behalf of the Mayor of Greater Manchester) to publicly consult on the Draft Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Executive Summary

Under the Environment Act 2021, the Mayor of Greater Manchester is required to prepare and adopt a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the City Region and seek agreement from each of the ten districts.

This Report seeks Cabinet agreement for the Mayor to consult publicly on the Draft Strategy in the autumn. This will mean that Oldham Council has given its support as a supporting authority, which will allow consultation on the draft LNRS once all ten GM districts have confirmed support or no objections. There are no disadvantages to this option.

The Final Strategy will return to Members for agreement prior to adoption by the Mayor.

Recommendations

To provide approval for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (on behalf of the Mayor of Greater Manchester) to publicly consult on the Draft Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Approval of draft GM Local Nature Recovery Strategy

1 Background

Biodiversity emergency:

- 1.1 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) declared a biodiversity emergency in March 2022. The abundance and diversity of nature is now in long term decline, which means that our natural environment is becoming less resilient and less able to provide us with the benefits we often take for granted.
- 1.2 The extent of this decline is set out in the “State of Nature in Greater Manchester” report, published in March 2024. Bringing together available local evidence, it sets out the declining trends in local wildlife populations, the challenges in growing and managing our most important spaces for nature, the use of land and pressures this puts on nature and the varying degrees of access to which people across the city-region have access to nature. This all puts under increasing pressure the benefits we receive from the natural environment, particularly for health and wellbeing.
- 1.3 There have been efforts across Greater Manchester, both within the private, public and third sectors, to try to halt this decline, but despite these, the decline continues, reflecting the broader picture across England.
- 1.4 The recovery of nature is important for everyone who lives and works in Oldham. It is fundamental to our prosperity, quality of life, and health and wellbeing. It increases our defence against climate change and the extreme weather that we are already experiencing, as nature helps reduce flood risk and the impact of heatwaves in urban areas, and store carbon that would otherwise contribute to climate change.
- 1.5 Approval was given in March 2023 to support the proposed appointment (by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) of the Mayor as the responsible authority for the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Greater Manchester.¹

What are Local Nature Recovery Strategies:

- 1.6 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a range of measures to seek to halt the decline in biodiversity. This included the requirement for LNRS to cover the whole of England, to set out where and how efforts should be focused locally to contribute to halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity. There are 48 strategy areas across England, including one for Greater Manchester.
- 1.7 The Greater Manchester LNRS is an opportunity to set out a long-term vision for a greener city region, where nature is returning, and more people have better access to greenspace.
- 1.8 The strategy is aimed at encouraging all organisations, communities and residents to take action to support nature’s recovery. It will be of particular importance for landowners and, once adopted, will incentivise investment through Biodiversity Net Gain and environmental land management schemes.

¹ https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/documents/s25477/11%20GM%20Local%20Nature%20Recovery%20Strategy_29.02.2023.pdf

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- 1.9 In preparing the strategy, to meet the requirements of the Environment Act 2021, underpinning regulations and statutory guidance, and to adapt this to what's needed locally, the GMCA has produced a draft for public consultation. This will build on previous engagement in the preparation of the strategy – GMCA ran a public survey in early 2024 and has undertaken a number of workshop sessions with a range of public, private and Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCSFE) organisations over the past year.
- 1.10 The LNRS will link to the Council's Corporate Plan priority for a clean and green future through creating and improving green spaces.
- 1.11 In terms of the purpose of the report there are no / limited implications for:
- (a) Community Cohesion Implications, including crime and disorder implications under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 – n/a.
 - (b) Risk Assessments – there is a risk the LNRS will be seen as a barrier to development, but the strategy explains its status.
 - (c) Co-operative Implications, Human Resource Implications, IT implications, Property Implications, Procurement Implications and Environment and Health and Safety Implications – the LNRS will help to guide investment and decisions to improve the environment and the associated health benefits that flow from enhanced wildlife. The council may have assets within the opportunity areas, but the LNRS does not introduce any new binding actions or designations. The council is required to have regard to the LNRS in land use management / development design etc.

2 **Current Position**

What the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy contains:

- 2.1 The strategy covers the following, as required by requirements under the Environment Act 2021, regulations thereunder and statutory guidance issued to responsible authorities:
- A shared vision for nature recovery in Greater Manchester;
 - Shared priorities and targets for nature recovery;
 - Actions we can all work towards to help deliver them;
 - Maps of:
 - Core local nature sites - existing valuable areas for nature; and
 - Nature network - opportunity areas where action should be focused.
- 2.2 In Oldham, as well as core wildlife sites, the LNRS includes:
- Woodland priority corridors;
 - River, canal and waterbodies priority corridors;
 - Lowland wetland priority corridors;
 - Grassland priority corridors; and
 - Generic priority corridors.
- 2.3 The LNRS sets out priorities and practical actions in relation to these.

Maps within the strategy:

- 2.4 The strategy sets out a Nature Network for Greater Manchester. This has its basis in the national policy and evidence on nature recovery and the principles of “more, bigger, better and joined up” spaces for nature. This uses existing core local nature sites as its basis by:
1. Improving the quality of those sites by better habitat management.
 2. Increasing their size.

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3. Enhancing the connections between them, through corridors or stepping stones.
 4. Creating new sites.
 5. Reduce pressures by improving the wider environment, including buffering those sites.

2.5 These 5 principles are reflected in the two main maps set out in the strategy, as follows:

Map of core local nature sites

2.6 This sets out Greater Manchester's existing wildlife sites, including those designated and protected at an international, European, national and local level. What to include in this map is prescribed by Defra through statutory guidance and termed "areas of particular importance for biodiversity."

Opportunity areas map

2.7 This sets out how these existing wildlife sites (core local nature sites) can be joined up to create a Nature Network. What to include in this map is not prescribed in legislation or statutory guidance: GMCA has taken the following approach, building on previous work by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit and local authorities, comprising three stages:

- Ecological mapping – used connectivity modelling to map a nature network of how best to join up core local nature sites.
- Refinement with local views and knowledge – local authorities and other stakeholders inputted to refine the map, adding or removing areas based on local knowledge.
- Mapping measures on the nature network map – based on suitable land cover type and any constraints on the site.

2.8 This results in a final map, setting out the priority areas within which to focus action to create a joined-up Nature Network across Greater Manchester. This does not preclude action elsewhere across the city-region – the strategy sets out the reasons, priorities, and actions to support nature and access to it across the city-region.

2.9 Officers at Oldham Council have attended workshops and meetings to review the opportunity areas. Officers have suggested additions (such as proposed Local Green Spaces, countryside sites and northern roots). No deletions have been requested.

Status of the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy, including the maps

Overall:

2.10 As a local authority, Oldham Council will have to have regard to any relevant LNRS when performing its duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2016 when considering what action they can take to "further the general biodiversity objective" of conserving and enhancing biodiversity when delivering their functions.

In planning:

2.11 The Environment Act 2021 sets out that local authorities will need to "have regard" to the LNRSs in local planning policy and decisions.

2.12 The Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 included a clause which creates a new requirement on all relevant plan-makers and requires all tiers of planning to take account of the relevant LNRS.

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- 2.13 The Act also requires the Secretary of State to set out further guidance on how to do this in practice, but this is yet to be published.
- 2.14 Taken together, these legislative provisions are designed to support development plans and provide closer alignment with the planning system and environmental outcomes.
- 2.15 However, it is important to note that the LNRS (which includes the mapping of opportunity areas) does not introduce any new protections of sites or designations – for example, the opportunity areas do not have any status in planning – nor introduce any new barriers to development. However, the GMCA and local authorities will continue to work together as to how the LNRS can be reflected in the planning process.
- 2.16 It is only the core areas which have status, which is already the case as this consists of sites for their value to nature (including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs); Special Protected Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), National Nature Reserves (NNRS), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), locally designated Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) and irreplaceable habitat.
- 2.17 Development proposals will, however, need to have regard to the Strategy and should consider how nature is integrated into the design and operation of new development. The strategy will also help to guide mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) investments.
- 2.18 Overtime there could be more areas protected for nature. The strategy proposes to increase the amount of land protected from 11% to 15% across Greater Manchester. However, any new local designations would be a separate approval process, as it is now through reports on updates from GMEU. Oldham has already increased the number and extent of SBIs from 18 (142.4 hectares) in 1984 to 38 (3457.9 hectares) in 2020 and considers the implications of these with each decision.

Governance and development of the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy:

- 2.19 The GMCA on behalf of the Mayor, has been working in consultation with the ten local authorities and stakeholders across the city-region over the past 18 months to develop the Greater Manchester LNRS.
- 2.20 Officers across Oldham Council (strategic planning and countryside officers) have been closely consulted and involved in the development of the Draft Greater Manchester LNRS. This has included monthly meetings and individual sessions to input into the key elements of the strategy, particularly:
- The vision and aims.
 - The priorities and measures.
 - The Nature Network map of opportunity areas.
- 2.21 The strategy is therefore aligned with Oldham Green Infrastructure Strategy in terms of thriving wildlife and seeking to create nature recovery networks and the Green New Deal Strategy in terms of the role that Northern Roots can contribute towards nature recovery.

Legal/procedural aspects:

- 2.22 The Environment Act 2021 set out that the Secretary of State would determine the geographical areas for each LNRS and the “responsible authority” for developing it – for Oldham Council, the area for the strategy is Greater Manchester and the responsible authority is the Mayor of Greater Manchester.

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- 2.23 Each local authority in Greater Manchester is a “supporting authority” under Regulation 3 of The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023. Natural England and the Peak District National Park are also designated supporting authorities.
- 2.24 These supporting authorities are to be closely involved in the development of the LNRS and their approval sought before publication of the draft strategy for consultation and the final strategy itself.
- 2.25 Under Article 7 of those regulations, the responsible authority must provide all supporting authorities with the consultation draft of its Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This is what the GMCA has provided Oldham Council with.
- 2.26 Each supporting authority is asked to confirm it is content for the Mayor of Greater Manchester for the consultation to proceed. If each supporting authority either confirms or does not object to this, the consultation will be launched subject to final approval at a meeting of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority on 25th October 2024.
- 2.27 If Oldham Council wishes to raise an objection with the draft for consultation (or how it has been prepared by GMCA) it must do so in writing to GMCA, provide reasons for the objection and do so within 28 days of the draft for consultation being provided. The LNRS has been made available ahead of Cabinet to the portfolio leads to allow review within the 28-day period.
- 2.28 GMCA would then consider this objection(s) and whether it (or they) can be accommodated within the draft for consultation. There are then two possible outcomes:
1. A resolution to the objection is agreed between GMCA and Oldham Council (i.e. the draft for consultation is changed to meet the objection); or
 2. As a last resort, if a resolution cannot be agreed, the responsible authority can seek the Secretary of State’s approval to consult without the objection being accommodated.

3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 Option 1- To provide approval for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (on behalf of the Mayor of Greater Manchester) to publicly consult on the Draft Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). This will mean that Oldham Council has given its support as a supporting authority, which will allow consultation on the draft LNRS once all ten GM districts have confirmed support or no objections. There are no disadvantages to this option.
- 3.2 Option 2 – Not to provide approval for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (on behalf of the Mayor of Greater Manchester) to publicly consult on the Draft Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). This will mean that Oldham Council will need to give reasons in writing to GMCA for the objection. The advantage of this option is that Oldham Council will have any formal objections reviewed. The disadvantage of this option is potentially delaying consultation on LNRS for GM to either allow for amendments to be made or for the Secretary of State to intervene and approve consultation.

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 Option 1- To provide approval for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (on behalf of the Mayor of Greater Manchester) to publicly consult on the Draft Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). This will mean that Oldham Council has given its support

as a supporting authority, which will allow consultation on the draft LNRS once all ten GM districts have confirmed support or no objections. There are no disadvantages to this option.

5 **Consultation**

- 5.1 Officers at Oldham Council have reviewed the Draft LNRS to date through workshops and meetings. The LNRS also sets out other stakeholders who have informed the draft LNRS. This report is seeking support to allow public consultation on the LNRS.

6 **Financial Implications**

- 6.1 GMCA will cover all costs for consultation and therefore there will be no requirement for any additional financial resource from the Council.

(Mohammed Hussain)

7 **Legal Implications**

- 7.1 Under sections 104 and 105 of the Environment Act 2021 there are to be local nature recovery strategies for areas in England to be prepared by responsible authorities appointed by the Secretary of State. Under Regulation 11 of the Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023 the Mayor (as responsible authority) may not consult the public on the draft local nature recovery strategy until either 28 days have expired beginning with the date on which all supporting authorities for the strategy have been provided with the consultation draft or all the supporting authorities confirm in writing that they are content for the consultation to proceed. (A Evans)

8 **Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People**

- 8.1 Yes. Please see Appendix 2.

9 **Key Decision**

- 9.1 Yes

10 **Key Decision Reference**

- 11.1 ESR-09-24

12 **Background Papers**

- 12.1 None

13 **Appendices**

- 13.1 Appendix 1: Nature for All - A new plan for nature recovery for Greater Manchester (GM LNRS)

Appendix 1a: Appendix 1 – Relationship between the GM LNRS and other GM policies and strategies

Appendix 1b: Appendix 2 – Evidence and processes used in preparing the GM LNRS

Appendix 1c: Appendix 3 – Greater Manchester State of Nature Report

Appendix 1d: Appendix 4 - Stakeholder Engagement undertaken for the GM LNRS

Appendix 1e: Appendix 5 - Greater Manchester Plan for Nature Public Survey Results

Appendix 1f: Appendix 6 – Detailed Description of Greater Manchester landscapes and habitats

Appendix 1g: Appendix 7 – Greater Manchester Habitat Priorities and Actions, including technical details

13.2 Appendix 2 – Oldham Impact Assessment