

Mayoral Combined Authority Board

21 March 2022

Local Nature Recovery Strategy ‘Responsible Authority’

Is the paper exempt from the press and public?	No
Reason why exempt:	Not applicable
Purpose of this report:	Policy Decision
Is this a Key Decision?	No
Has it been included on the Forward Plan?	No

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Executive Summary

The Environment Act 2021 contained new requirements for regional and local authorities to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies. While full details are yet to emerge, at this point Defra are looking to assign a ‘Responsible Authority’ for each area. The preference of Defra, and of colleagues consulted in South Yorkshire, is that the SYMCA take on this role. Since every part of England will need to be covered by a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, if South Yorkshire is not the desired footprint for the Strategy development, alternatives will need to be proposed.

What does this mean for businesses, people and places in South Yorkshire?

Local Nature Recovery Strategies will cover every part of England, so all businesses, people and places will have a strategy in place to drive nature’s recovery and provide wider benefits.

Recommendations

That the Board agree that SYMCA should be ‘Responsible Authority’ for a South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, subject to the cost of the responsibility being met by Government funds.

Consideration by any other Board, Committee, Assurance or Advisory Panel

None

1. Background

- 1.1 The Environment Act 2021 contained new requirements on regional and local authorities to take greater management over the natural environment. One element immediately relevant to SYMCA and South Yorkshire Local Authorities is the roll out of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are new, England-wide system of spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. These include carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change, managing flood risk, and contributing to green economic recovery objectives.

Government's overall ambition is that Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be a powerful new tool that will help the public, private and voluntary sectors work more effectively together for nature's recovery, and enable collective effort to be focussed where it will have most benefit. Key to achieving this will be creating genuine local collaboration with a partnership of organisations and individuals working closely with each 'responsible authority'.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The full details of the LNRS have not yet been released by Defra. At this stage Defra is looking to appoint a 'Responsible Authority' to lead each area's Strategy.

The expectation has long been that MCA's, where they exist, would take on the role of 'Responsible Authority'. The Government anticipates that there will be roughly 50 LNRS areas in England with no gaps and no overlaps, encompassing an area that is both large enough to plan for nature recovery across landscapes and meaningful to local people.

As anticipated, Defra has expressed a preference that South Yorkshire is covered by one Strategy and that SYMCA is appointment Responsible Authority. Defra has written to us to extend a provisional offer for SYMCA to take on this role – see Appendix A – and has indicated that a formal offer will be extended by the Secretary of State in 'late Spring'.

- 2.2 Throughout discussions with South Yorkshire Local Authority officers, Heads of Planning, and wider stakeholders, there has been no indication of a preferable alternative to SYMCA leading the LNRS. There are likely governance, organisational, and delivery benefits of South Yorkshire being one Strategy area.

There are some natural advantages to the South Yorkshire geographical footprint, for example, as an approximate water catchment area for the River Don. It is also the footprint of relevant structures such as the South Yorkshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP), whose membership will comprise stakeholders for the Strategy development. Members of this group have collaborated on relevant projects such as natural capital mapping for South Yorkshire, which assesses 'ecosystem

services' such as carbon sequestration, flood risk mitigation, air quality regulation, and more. Natural England has indicated that this evidence base will be directly relevant for LNRS development.

Members of the South Yorkshire LNP have also collaborated on a project to consider the scope for a South Yorkshire LNRS. It has contributed thinking around how to agree on Strategy principles, how stakeholders will work together, what the data and evidence needs are, and other issues.

- 2.3 The Government has committed to funding all new burdens on Local Authorities relating to the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Detail on the quantum of 'burden payments' is yet to be finalised, and Defra has indicated that this 'offer', along with further detail on Strategy development guidance and regulations can be expected in 'late Spring'. Work on the Strategies is expected to begin shortly after formal 'Responsible Authority' appointments are made.

3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

3.1 Option 1

That the Board agree that SYMCA become the 'Responsible Authority' for a South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, subject to the cost of the responsibility being met by Government.

3.2 Option 1 Risks and Mitigations

At this stage, agreement is provisional and there are no resource implications for the MCA. Formal appointment is expected to be extended by the Defra Secretary of State by late Spring 2022. As discussed above, Defra has reassured that these 'burdens' will be fully funded.

3.3 Option 2

The Board consider alternative arrangements for leading the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which may or may not align with a South Yorkshire footprint.

3.4 Option 2 Risks and Mitigations Reputational/strategic

Given connections between the development of LNRS and other strategically significant work such as the Net Zero Work Programme, it could be argued that SYMCA ought to take the opportunity to playing a leading role in shaping the Strategy to maximise synergies between related policy areas.

3.5 Recommended Option

Option 1

4. Consultation on Proposal

- 4.1 A wide range of stakeholders have been involved in discussions regarding South Yorkshire's potential approach to Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This includes:
- South Yorkshire Local Nature Partnership whose membership includes (but isn't limited to) all four Local Authorities, Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife

Trust, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, and Natural England.

- South Yorkshire Heads of Planning
- SYMCA Management Board

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Formal appointments by Defra Secretary of State are expected from April 2022 onwards.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice

6.1 There are no financial implications at this stage. Defra has given an undertaking to funding but the quantum is not yet known.

7. Legal Implications and Advice

7.1 Production of a LNRS will be a statutory requirement for the Responsible Authority, so there will be legal implications of accepting a formal offer if/when extended by the Defra SoS. The full extent of this is not yet known.

8. Human Resources Implications and Advice

8.1 Once 'burden payments' are known the MCA can consider how this is deployed.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

9.1 There is no anticipated impact on equality and diversity.

10. Climate Change Implications and Advice

10.1 Nature recovery has an important connection with climate change, and LNRS will seek to achieve multiple benefits include mitigating the effects of climate change (for example through natural flood management) and directly contributing to Net Zero (for example through carbon sequestration).

11. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

11.1 There are no anticipated IT implications.

12. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

12.1 The development of a LNRS will require external communications, especially given the emphasis placed on collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders which emerged from the LNRS pilot scheme.

List of Appendices Included

A Provisional offer letter from Defra

Background Papers

None