

## Mayoral Combined Authority Board

12 September 2023

### Local Nature Recovery Strategy – Governance Proposal

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**Is the paper exempt from the press and public?** No

**Reason why exempt:** Not Applicable

**Purpose of this report:** Governance

**Is this a Key Decision?** No

**Has it been included on the Forward Plan of Key Decisions?** Not a Key decision

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**Director Approving Submission of the Report:**

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#### Executive Summary

As the 'Responsible Authority', the Mayor of South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority is required by law to lead, prepare, publish, review, and republish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and to have regard to statutory guidance in the process. Officers have prepared a governance structure to ensure the prepared strategy takes into account the needs of South Yorkshire as a region, the views and challenges faced across our region, and creates a strategy that is deliverable.

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

The main purpose of the strategy is to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. It will also help communities map out the action needed in their area to restore nature, working closely with local stakeholders, from farmers to school children. The preparation of the Strategy gives South Yorkshire the opportunity to understand the state of the natural environment across the region.

## Recommendations

The MCA Board is asked to:

1. Note the policy development on Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
2. Agree the LNRS governance proposal.
3. Consider any additional governance procedures each Local Authority will require for timely LNRS development.

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

None.

### 1. Background

1. On 26<sup>th</sup> June the Mayor was appointed by Trudy Harrison MP, as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Land Use, to act as 'Responsible Authority' for preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for South Yorkshire.

1.2 South Yorkshire is one of 48 areas in England required by law to develop a LNRS under Section 105 of the Environment Act 2021. The main purpose of the strategies is to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. They will also help communities map out the action needed in their area to restore nature, working closely with local stakeholders, from farmers to school children.

1.3 Each LNRS must:

- map the most valuable existing areas for nature.
- agree priorities for nature's recovery.
- map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has indicated that the strategy should take 12-18 months to develop and that all strategies should be published by March 2025. Strategy development is not a one-off process and Responsible Authorities will be required to refresh plans roughly every 5 years. SYMCA has been allocated £241,265 to fund strategy development.

1.4 As the designated accountable body SYMCA is required by law to lead, prepare, publish, review, and republish a LNRS and to have regard to DEFRA's Statutory Guidance in the process.

In addition to 'Responsible Authorities' DEFRA has designated other bodies as 'Supporting Authorities' in the development of LNRSs. DEFRA intends that Local Authorities, national park authorities and Natural England, as planning authorities and the government's nature advisor, have formal roles to play in supporting the preparation and delivery of LNRSs. In South Yorkshire, the six Supporting Authorities are:

- Barnsley MBC
- City of Doncaster Council
- Rotherham MBC

- Sheffield CC
- Peak District National Park Authority
- Natural England

## 2. Key Issues

- 2.1 A key learning from the five LNRS pilots which took place during 2020-21 is that establishing good governance quickly and drawing upon a wide range of people and organisations was important for strategy development. LNRS Statutory Guidance also suggests that groups from public, private, and voluntary sectors ought to be brought together to identify opportunities and support delivery of nature recovery initiatives.
- 2.2 SYMCA officers have therefore been developing a governance proposal for strategy development in conversation with all six Supporting Authorities. The proposal is based upon learning from the LNRS pilots and has been developed to reflect key stakeholders in South Yorkshire.
- 2.3 The governance proposal is described below and illustrated in a diagram on slide 1 of Appendix A.
- 2.4 It is proposed that:
- The MCA Board will provide initial strategic guidance on strategy objectives and system engagement principles and then receive regular updates alongside providing formal approval of initial high-level principles, first (and any subsequent) draft and final draft.
- 2.5
- The 'Steering Group' will provide oversight of and executive decision-making on general strategy development. It will ensure compliance with statutory guidance and provide feedback on content produced from other groups in the governance structure (detailed below). It will also act as liaison to the MCA Board on LNRS development, identifying key milestones that require MCA Board approval, and providing sponsorship for the LNRS.
  - Its membership will consist of one Head of Service from each Supporting and Responsible Authority, chaired by the Chief Executive. We anticipate a frequency of meeting once every six weeks.
  - It is proposed that the Heads of Service cover the relevant touch points of the Supporting Authorities, including Planning, Parks and Countryside Services, Climate Change etc.
- 2.6
- The 'Advisory Panel' will provide recommendations on high-level and complex issues as required for strategy development, such as strategy outcomes, outputs, and conceptual approach. Its core purpose will be to encourage a range of perspectives, provide challenge, and generate new ideas on key topics. Its recommendations will be submitted to the Steering Group for decision-making.

- The membership will include an intentionally diverse set of organisations: attendance will be sought from senior representatives from both Wildlife Trusts in South Yorkshire, DEFRA arms-length bodies such as the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission, the farming sector, South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue, and landowning, community, and voluntary sectors. Its chair will be independently appointed. We anticipate a frequency of meeting once every six weeks.
- This group will be convened at the start of the development process and will likely run through until publication of the Strategy. However, it may be that once the main content and direction of the work is agreed that the group is disbanded,

- 2.7
- The 'Project Team' refers to SYMCA officers responsible for project management and resourcing of the strategy, ensuring timely development and providing a point of contact for DEFRA and Natural England. This team will manage the budget allocation and act as commissioner for additional activity as required by the Working Groups.

- 2.8
- The 'Working Groups' identified will undertake the tasks agreed by the Steering Group. These have been split into three thematic areas: evidence, engagement, and delivery.
  - The 'Evidence' group will be responsible for collating relevant data and analytical insights, drawing upon ecological expertise, and developing an interactive mapping portal for multiple users.
  - The 'Engagement' group will develop and execute a plan for engaging and liaising with external stakeholders, from the general public to strategically significant stakeholders such as the farming sector. It will also establish an approach to external communications and have regard to ensuring that all partners are sighted on messages.
  - The 'Delivery' group will outline and prepare for delivery of LNRS following strategy completion and will consider the variety of potential delivery mechanisms and users of the strategy. It will propose how and where the strategy can go beyond the statutory requirements and prepare high-level scheme proposals in anticipation of future funding opportunities. This group will ensure that a resourced delivery plan, with outcome measures is developed alongside the strategy.
  - Membership of these groups will include Supporting and Responsible Authority officers, as well as individuals from stakeholder organisations such as DEFRA arms-length bodies or Wildlife Trusts, with further appointments based on subject matter expertise. We anticipate a frequency of meeting once every three weeks.

- 2.9
- We anticipate that there may be the need over time, and as deemed necessary, to adjust this governance structure, and suggest that any changes should be agreed upon by the Steering Group.

### 3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

#### 3.1 Option 1

Agree to the proposed LNRS governance structure and process. Following approval, the Project Team will appoint individuals to each group in consultation

with the portfolio holder and lead Chief Executive and begin formal LNRS development.

### 3.2 **Option 1 Risks and Mitigations**

There is a risk that some organisation or body will feel underrepresented in the governance structure. The MCA has engaged widely with partners, considered structures in place in other MCAs, and used knowledge of groups in South Yorkshire to try and minimise the potential for this.

### 3.3 **Option 2**

Reject the LNRS governance proposal on the basis of changes needed.

### 3.4 **Option 2 Risks and Mitigations**

There is a risk that if extensive changes are required, needing subsequent MCA Board approval, LNRS development will be delayed.

### 3.5 **Recommended Option**

Option 1

## 4. **Consultation on Proposal**

4.1 Stakeholder engagement will be a critical aspect of LNRS development and is designed into this governance proposal.

4.2 Supporting Authorities have been consulted and have helped to shape the governance structures within the proposal.

## 5. **Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

5.1 DEFRA have indicated that LNRS should all be published by March 2025, and the Project Team is working to this deadline.

5.2 An agreed governance structure is required before the end of September 2023 in order to meet the project timeline.

## 6. **Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice**

6.1 As Responsible Authority for LNRS, SYMCA has been allocated £241,265 to fund strategy development.

## 7. **Legal Implications and Advice**

7.1 SYMCA is required by law to meet its duty as Responsible Authority as outlined in Section 105 of the Environment Act 2021.

## 8. **Human Resources Implications and Advice**

8.1 SYMCA has allocated resource with its staffing structure, and there is further human resource required from Supporting Authorities to co-develop the LNRS.

## 9. **Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice**

9.1 Equality and diversity will be addressed through deliberations within the proposed Advisory Panel and through developing the evidence base on impacts of nature recovery to human health and wellbeing.

## **10. Climate Change Implications and Advice**

10.1 DEFRA has emphasised the significance of 'wider environmental benefits' which result from nature recovery. These include climate adaptation (such as flood risk mitigation) and climate mitigation (such as carbon sequestration).

## **11. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice**

11.1 SYMCA is developing a public-facing webpage to communicate LNRS developments to the wider public.

## **12. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice**

12.1 Developing an approach to communications is proposed within this governance structure.

### **List of Appendices Included**

A 'LNRS Governance [MCA Board]' slides