



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Local Nature Recovery Strategy Pilots - Lessons Learned

June 2021



Purpose of the report

- The primary purpose of this report is to share the key high-level lessons and findings from the five Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilots. The pilots were hosted in Buckinghamshire, Cornwall, Greater Manchester, Northumberland and Cumbria and ran from August 2020 to May 2021.
- This report is a summary of some of the main lessons learned, organised into five themes. The pilots have provided a wealth of other lessons that will directly inform the development of Regulations and Statutory Guidance.
- **Readers of this report should recognise the following points;**
 1. The products are prototypes only and the process which the pilots followed may change during passage of the bill.
 2. The pilots were run during the pandemic which impacted their ability to fully interact with stakeholders (i.e. most interaction was online) due to governmental restrictions.
 3. They were also constrained by demanding timelines and capacity, we expect more time to be available when the strategies are fully rolled out nationally.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies



Picture taken from a LNRS Pilot area – Buckinghamshire – Combe Hill

What are Local Nature Recovery Strategies?

- **Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a new system of spatial strategies for nature, established in the flagship Environment Bill, covering the whole of England.**
- They are designed as tools to drive more coordinated, practical and focussed action to help nature.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies will support delivery of mandatory biodiversity net gain and provide a focus for a strengthened duty on all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity which are also being introduced by the Bill.
- They will underpin the Nature Recovery Network, alongside work to develop partnerships and to integrate nature into our incentives and land management actions.
- Each strategy will, for the area that it covers; agree priorities for nature's recovery, map the most valuable existing habitat for nature; and map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals.



What are Local Nature Recovery Strategies?

- The production of each Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be evidence-based, locally-led and collaborative, with the intention of creating a shared plan that public, private and voluntary sectors can all help to deliver.
- We anticipate each strategy will cover an area roughly county-sized. This area will be established by the Secretary of State on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration important local circumstances.
- The Secretary of State will also appoint a “responsible authority” to lead production of each Strategy from the list of potential public bodies set out in the Bill. By and large they are public bodies that will have a strong knowledge of the local area and democratic mandates, ensuring necessary legitimacy and local ownership.



Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Nature Based Solutions

- **The core purpose of Local Nature Recovery Strategies is to help reverse an ongoing decline of nature and biodiversity in England.**
- A key feature of the strategies is that they will identify both areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity and areas where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits.
- In other words, Local Nature Recovery Strategies will identify where we should take action for nature's recovery as well as where **nature based solutions** can help address wider environmental problems.
- Key examples of environmental issues where LNRSs and nature based solutions could play a role are:
 - Climate change mitigation through tree planting and peat restoration
 - Natural flood management
 - Improved water quality



The five Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilots



North Pennines - Upper Weardale

How were the five pilot areas chosen?

- The pilot areas were selected from a long-list of areas already active in spatial planning for nature. We were keen to roll-out Local Nature Recovery Strategies quickly after Royal Assent of the Environment Bill and so it was important that the pilots get off to a running start.
- The individual locations were chosen to give a good geographic spread and to reflect varying local circumstances, plus the opportunity to test how Local Nature Recovery Strategies could support the delivery of key policy priorities such as tree planting, peat restoration and natural flood management.



Orton Fells - Muddygill Plain



Pilot objectives

- **The pilots had three main objectives:**
 1. Test the Local Nature Recovery Strategy process working through the five steps we have set out and share experience to inform guidance and regulations;
 2. Create prototype Local Nature Recovery Strategy to show the rest of the country, and their own stakeholders, what an LNRS looks like, to support national rollout;
 3. Consider how Local Nature Recovery Strategy will fit with existing spatial planning tools, e.g. National Park Management Plans, Local Plans, River Basin Management Plans, and increasingly bring priorities together into a single strategy.



How did the pilots work?

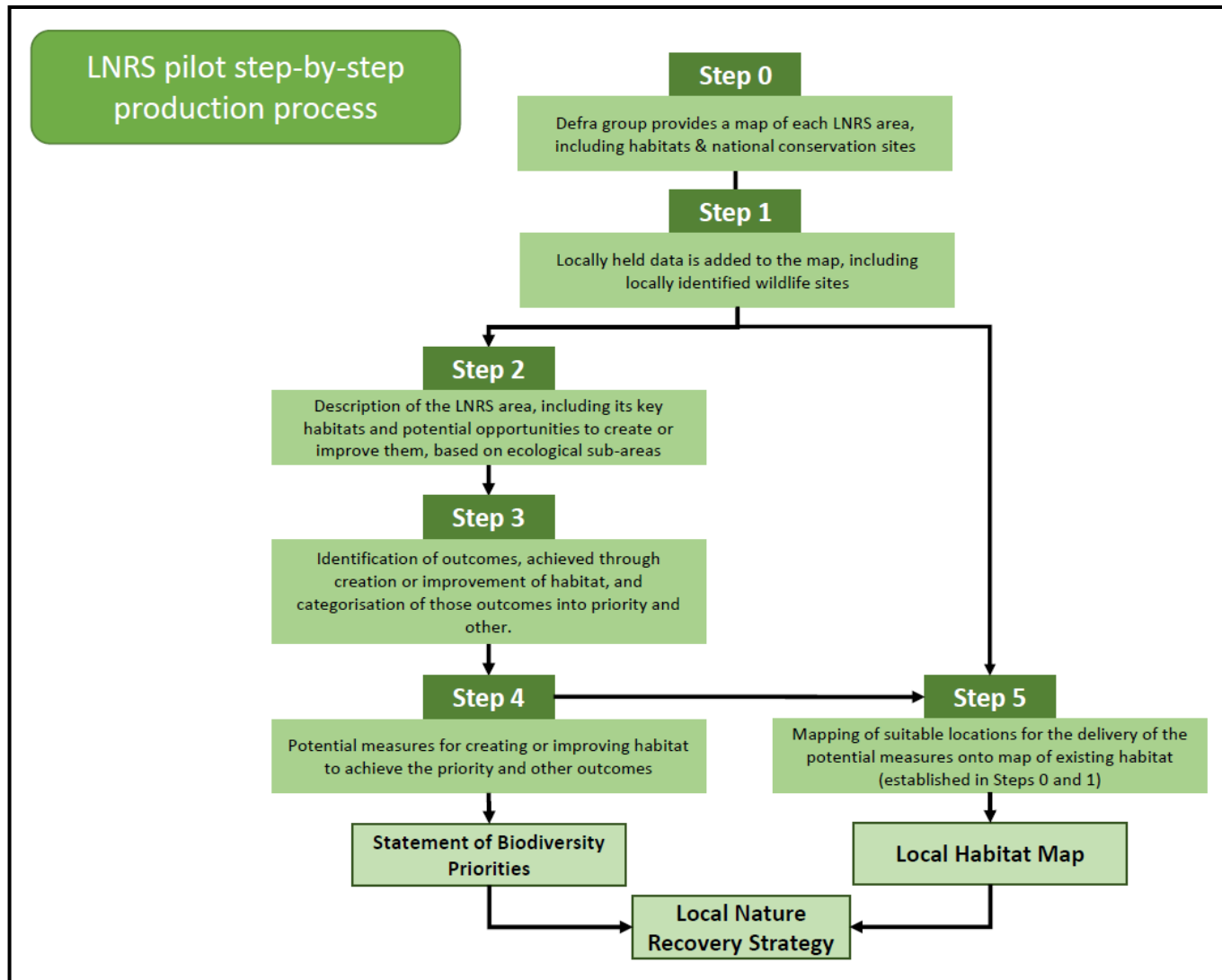
- **The pilots worked through a proposed step by step process established by government, based on the Environment Bill clauses, to agree, prioritise and map outcomes to spatially plan nature recovery.**

(see the next slide for a diagram of the five step process)

- Natural England played a key role in helping Defra to set up, oversee the delivery of the LNRS pilots led by local authorities. Both the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission have contributed nationally and locally to the delivery and review of the pilots.
- They tested a brand new process and the local authorities in the areas the pilots covered were established as the responsible authority to lead the production of the pilots locally.
- Environmental experts, like Local Nature Partnerships and environmental NGOs, have important expertise and capacity made important contributions throughout the collaboration.



The five step process the pilots followed

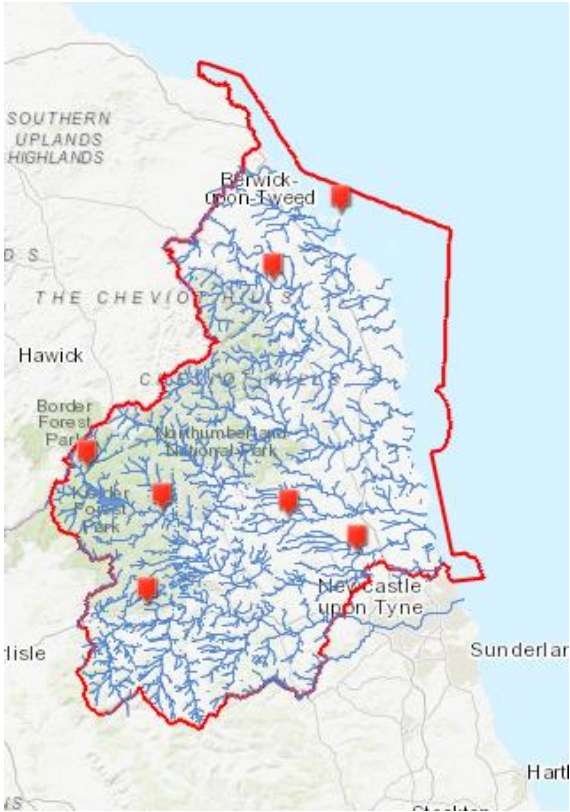


What did the pilots do?

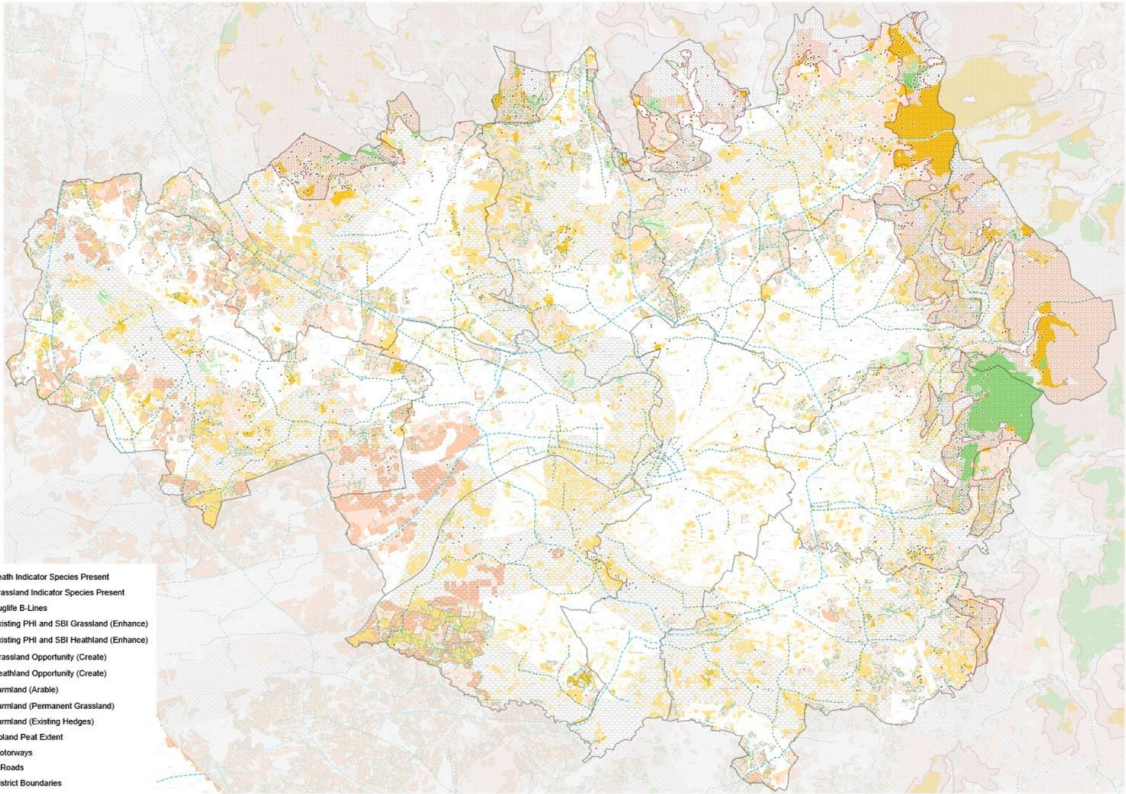
- **The pilots produced excellent prototypes of the strategies, that contained the two key elements required for a LNRS;**
 - The Statement of Biodiversity Priorities
 - The Local Habitat Map
- The pilot leads worked collaboratively with existing local partnerships and stakeholders to agree the top priorities for nature in their area (Statement of Biodiversity Priorities) and to map the those priorities (Local Habitat Map).
- Each pilot area took their own unique approach to produce the prototypes, which has provided a suite of valuable lessons from each one that will help inform the implementation of the strategies nationally.
- Individual pilot prototypes are being shared online by the local authority leads.
- Examples of the Local Habitat Map from the pilots are illustrated on the next slide.



Sample pilot prototype Local Habitat Map layers



Northumberland – Wetland opportunities



Greater Manchester – Grasslands and Heathlands opportunities

Lessons Learned - Preparation

The pilots showed how Responsible Authorities can best get set up for the LNRS process

- **Clear leadership and transparency** from the Responsible Authority was crucial in getting others involved from the outset
- **Setting up governance quickly** was important. All of the pilots had a 'Pilot Area Team' which included Defra Group ALBs, environmental NGOs, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, other Local Planning Authorities and Local Nature Partnership representatives
- **Tapping into existing networks** was crucial given the time constraints but LNRSs require a wide range of inputs and no single existing group can provide this



Lessons Learned – Resources and Capacity

LNRs need to be well resourced with appropriate expertise and capacity to have the required impact

- **LNRs require contributions from different parts of an organisation** at different stages. For instance in Natural England and the Environment Agency required input from several different specialist officers
- **Existing capacity within the Responsible Authority is important** to completing the process quickly. The Pilot Areas had existing capacity to build on but we recognise that this is not likely to be the case everywhere
- **Responsible Authorities have to draw on partners** to give them the capacity and expertise they need. They will not have everything they need ‘in-house’ so will need to draw on others
- **Resource needs will be different** between Responsible Authorities depending on local circumstances



Lessons Learned – Data and Evidence

Strong and credible data is essential to LNRS success, these are some of the important lessons relating to this

- **National-level habitats information provided to the pilots by Defra and NE was too data-heavy and hard to use**
- **Strong guidance as to what data is ‘in scope’ is needed to prevent LNRS partnerships spending too long gathering data**
- **Assessing habitat quality was difficult** due to a lack of recent data. Similarly trends for some species and habitat types were hard to ascertain
- **Presentation of Step 2 data needs to be accessible** enough to empower non-specialists to make informed suggestions about what their priorities are.
- **Data licensing** is a significant issue but it is possible to include datasets whilst protecting their commercial value
- **GIS expertise is vital** but this can come from partner organisations rather than from Responsible Authorities



Lessons Learned - Collaboration

LNRSs will be collaboratively developed- the pilots took different approaches to achieve this. Here are some of the key lessons

- **Early engagement of a wide range of people and organisations** is crucial- effective collaboration takes time so it is one of the first things to think about in preparing an LNRS.
- **There cannot be ‘one size fits all’ engagement**, different stakeholders need to be engaged differently. In particular, land managers’ role as stakeholders and key delivery partners must be recognised
- **Professional facilitation** expertise was helpful
- **Use of stakeholder inputs needs to be transparent** so individuals can see their priorities reflected
- **Establishing a common understanding** of the purpose of LNRS’s and the process with all stakeholder groups is essential to gathering constructive inputs



Lessons Learned – Using the Products

The pilots had a strong focus on the end users of their products

- **The prototypes will appeal to a range of potential end users** as they cover the wider environmental benefits of nature recovery as well as nature recovery itself
- **LNRS products should be consistent across boundaries** to make it easier to use more than one at a time
- **Certain end users require specific guidance** on how to use the LNRS products for their means, e.g. planners or land managers
- **A delivery plan is wanted by stakeholders** to plan how to implement the potential measures identified in the LNRS. Some pilots are investigating how this could look



Next steps for LNRS Implementation

- **Defra Group** will continue to work on refining the LNRS process and developing Regulations and Statutory Guidance based on the lessons learned from the pilots. We also intend to consult on this in parallel to Environment Bill passage
- **Defra Group** will continue the LNRS implementation programme, hoping to start LNRSs soon after royal assent of the Bill. We will be talking to local authorities over the summer about Responsible Authority appointments
- **Local areas** can start building the partnerships and networks needed to prepare for LNRSs- broadening out environmental partnerships to include a wider range of stakeholders
- **Local areas** can start bringing together local data sets that will be helpful in preparing their LNRS