

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Cabinet – 08 June 2026

**Report Title**

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

Yes

**Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Andrew Bramidge, Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment

**Report Author(s)**

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**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

The South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is being prepared by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), which is the designated Responsible Authority under the Environment Act 2021, working collaboratively with Rotherham, Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster local authorities and the Peak District National Park Authority as Supporting Authorities.

The South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (SYLNRS) seeks to identify existing valuable habitats, priority species, priorities for nature recovery, and opportunities for enhancing biodiversity across the sub-region. The Strategy has been developed collaboratively with the four South Yorkshire Local Authorities and the Peak District National Park Authority, alongside voluntary and public sector partners.

The SYLNRS provides a strategic evidence base for nature recovery. While it does not place legal obligations on landowners, it will support funding bids, inform wider policy, and help attract public, voluntary and private sector investment into South Yorkshire's green environment. Local planning authorities, in preparing new local plans and in development management decision-taking, will have regard to the LNRS and reflect the requirements of the LNRS within the preparation of a new Local Plan.

This report provides an overview of the pre-consultation draft of the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Appendix 1), outlines the governance and

consultation timetable, and seeks Cabinet support for the Council's participation in the formal consultation process.

The draft South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is supported by a series of technical annexes (Annexes A–E), which provide the underlying evidence base, mapping and methodological detail that informed the preparation of the strategy.

## **Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

1. Note the pre-consultation draft of the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, including the proposed governance and consultation arrangements led by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. .
2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Waste Services, Leisure and Green Spaces, to:
  - a. agree and submit the Council's final consultation response to SYMCA on the draft South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, as set out in paragraph 3.1.
  - b. Endorse the final version of the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy in autumn 2026, following the public consultation process and prior to final sign-off by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority.

## **List of Appendices Included**

Appendix 1 Draft South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Pre-consultation draft (including Annexes A-E)

Appendix 2 PART A - Initial Equality Screening

Appendix 3 Climate Impact Assessment

## **Background Papers**

Environment Act 2021:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents>

DEFRA Local Nature Recovery Strategy statutory guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-nature-recovery-strategy-what-to-include>

## **Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

Improving Places Select Commission – 21 April 2026

## **Council Approval Required**

No

## **Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## **Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a statutory requirement for all areas in England to prepare a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The purpose of an LNRS is to provide a strategic framework to support nature recovery, halt biodiversity loss, and improve the condition and connectivity of habitats. South Yorkshire is one of 28 areas nationally required to produce an LNRS.
- 1.2 The South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (SYLNRS) seeks to identify the most valuable existing areas for nature across the sub-region, along with priority habitats and species. It also sets out agreed priorities for nature recovery and highlights opportunities where action could deliver the greatest environmental benefit, helping to create a more connected and resilient Nature Recovery Network.
- 1.3 Preparation of the SYLNRS is being led by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), working in partnership with the four South Yorkshire local authorities – Rotherham, Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster – as well as the Peak District National Park, and a range of voluntary and public sector organisations. This collaborative approach helps ensure that the strategy is evidence led, reflects local priorities, and provides a coordinated response to biodiversity loss that supports wider social, environmental and economic objectives.
- 1.4 The pre-consultation draft of the SYLNRS represents the formal consultation draft issued to the South Yorkshire local authorities as well as the Peak District National Park, and a range of voluntary and public sector organisations incorporating comments received on earlier versions and providing the basis for final pre-consultation review.

### **2. Key Issues**

#### **2.1 About the Strategy**

The draft Strategy identifies key priority areas across South Yorkshire for nature recovery, including river corridors, urban green networks, woodland expansion areas and biodiversity opportunity zones.

The proposed Mission is to restore thriving, connected natural habitats across South Yorkshire for multiple benefits to people and nature across the region.

The proposed Vision is to deliver landscape-scale nature recovery activity at pace in South Yorkshire, maximising the region's contribution to the UK's commitment to positively manage 30% of land and sea for nature in England by 2030.

It sets out that success will be reliant on adopting the strategy's principles of partnership working and a shared endeavour, in order to:

1. **Improve the quality and extent of habitats** – bigger better and more connected.
2. **Build climate resilience** – using nature to help mitigate and adapt to heat, drought, flooding and wildfire risk.
3. **Work in partnership** – recognising that every landowner, community and organisation has a role.
4. **Value wildlife everywhere** – not only in designated sites, but across urban, farmed and post-industrial landscapes.
5. **Connect people with nature** – prioritising places with greatest need and supporting responsible access.
6. **Learn, adapt and invest** – using the best evidence and maintaining a long-term commitment to delivery.
7. **Recover our lost and declining species** – reversing the long-term decline in abundance and diversity of species

The Strategy sets out 24 priorities and 130 measures, including spatial mapping, key habitats and species, and a series of high-level measures intended to guide planning, investment and partnership working. For Rotherham, this includes priority locations such as the River Rother and River Don corridors, Anston Stones Wood and Roche Abbey Woodlands, Maltby Commons, and areas of urban and post-industrial land. At these sites, the Strategy promotes measures focused on restoring river and floodplain processes, creating wetlands and riparian habitats, delivering natural flood management, protecting and buffering ancient woodland and limestone grassland, restoring heathland and species-rich grassland mosaics, enhancing urban green and blue infrastructure, and safeguarding open mosaic (brownfield) habitats. Collectively, these measures support the Council's planning, land management and investment decisions, including the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain, climate resilience and public wellbeing outcomes.

- 2.2 Preparation of the SYLNRS has been led by SYMCA in partnership with Rotherham, Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster local authorities and the Peak District National Park Authority. Appendix 1 represents a consultation draft, incorporating feedback received, from these organisations, during earlier stages of development.
- 2.3 The draft SYLNRS was considered by the Improving Places Select Commission on 21 April 2026, which supported the overall approach and the Council's continued engagement with SYMCA through the formal consultation process.
- 2.4 The SYLNRS is non-statutory in terms of delivery and does not create new legal obligations on the Council or landowners. However, as Local Planning Authority, the Council is required under the Environment Act 2021 to "have regard to" the LNRS when preparing a new Local Plan and when making planning decisions, in the same way as other material considerations.

- 2.5 Through the planning application process, the Council is required to secure a minimum of 10 percent biodiversity net gain (BNG) for most qualifying developments. Once published, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will provide an important evidence base to help guide how biodiversity net gain is delivered, both on-site and, where appropriate, through off-site provision. The Strategy will inform developer proposals and decision-making by indicating priority habitats and locations for nature recovery, but it does not prescribe site-specific requirements or create new planning obligations beyond those already established in national planning policy and legislation.
- 2.6 The Strategy provides a shared strategic framework that will support and strengthen partnership working between the Council and external organisations, including neighbouring local authorities, Natural England, landowners, environmental non-governmental organisations and local wildlife trusts. By establishing a common evidence base, consistent spatial priorities and an agreed narrative for nature recovery across South Yorkshire, the SYLNRS will help partners align objectives, coordinate activity and identify opportunities for collaboration where this supports existing priorities. This joined-up approach is intended to improve coherence across organisational boundaries while respecting each partner's distinct roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes. Any partnership activity arising from the Strategy will remain subject to existing governance, funding availability and service priorities.
- 2.7 The Strategy provides an externally recognised evidence base that will support the Council and local partners in accessing funding, working collaboratively across administrative boundaries, and engaging with voluntary, public and private sector organisations to support nature recovery and green infrastructure investment.
- 2.8 Receipt of the consultation draft of the SYLNRS provides the Council with an opportunity to formally review and comment on the Strategy, through the SYMCA-led consultation process. This enables the Council to seek assurance that the strategy accurately reflects the Borough's environmental assets, priorities and constraints, and that it clearly articulates the non-statutory nature of delivery, avoiding the creation of unrealistic expectations in relation to resourcing, funding or implementation. At this stage, it is considered that the draft strategy does reflect the Borough's environmental assets and priorities. It will provide an up-to-date evidence base for the development of a new Green Infrastructure Plan and guide operational planning and delivery in Green Spaces.
- 2.9 Engagement with the consultation and future use of the SYLNRS will be managed within existing officer capacity and alongside the delivery of the Council's statutory duties and agreed priorities. Any decisions to use the Strategy to support funding bids, develop projects or enter into partnership activity would be subject to separate consideration and approval through the Council's established governance and decision-making processes and would depend on the availability of appropriate resources and external funding.

- 2.10 Clear communication through the consultation process will be essential to reinforce that the SYLNRS does not impose new obligations on the Council and does not commit the Council to unfunded activity. The strategy should therefore be regarded as an enabling and influencing framework rather than a delivery plan.

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

#### **3.1 Recommended proposals**

The recommendations in the report include for Cabinet to note the draft of the SYLNRS that includes the governance and consultation arrangements.

The delegation recommended is intended to enable the comments from the Council to be fed into the consultation process, and, subject to consideration of the final outcome, enable the Council to communicate to SYMCA the nature and level of its support for the final version of the SYLNRS.

This approach enables the Council to positively influence the final Strategy through the consultation process while maintaining clarity about its role and avoiding the creation of unrealistic expectations regarding delivery or resourcing.

#### **3.2 Alternative option considered**

An alternative option would be for the Council to either not participate in the formal consultation on the draft SYLNRS.

This option is not recommended, as the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy is a statutory requirement under the Environment Act 2021, with SYMCA acting as the Responsible Authority and the Council as a Supporting Authority. The Council has been actively engaged in the development of the Strategy to date, and continued participation in the consultation process provides an appropriate opportunity to ensure that Rotherham's local circumstances, priorities and constraints are clearly set out and understood.

A constructive consultation response will enable the Council to support the overall strategic aims of the SYLNRS while clearly articulating its position on governance, delivery expectations and resourcing, without committing the Council to implementation or future expenditure.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 Public consultation on the draft SYLNRS will be undertaken by SYMCA from 8 June to 17 July 2026.

- 4.2 Improving Places Scrutiny Commission considered the draft South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy on 21 April 2026 and supported the Council's continued engagement in the SYMCA-led process. In doing so, the Commission requested that its concerns regarding the advisory nature of the Strategy and the absence of enforcement powers be formally communicated to the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and the Department for

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, noting that these matters arise from the national policy framework rather than local discretion.

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

- 5.1 The pre-consultation draft of the SYLNRS was issued by SYMCA to South Yorkshire local authorities for review and comment between 22 April and 20 May 2026.
- 5.2 As part of the Council's internal governance arrangements, the draft Strategy was considered by the Improving Places Select Commission on 21 April 2026, which supported the overall approach and the Council's continued engagement in the development of the Strategy.
- 5.3 This report is presented to Cabinet to seek approval for the Council's participation in the SYMCA-led formal consultation on the draft South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and to provide oversight of the Council's role as a Supporting Authority. Agreement to the proposed delegation enables the Council's consultation response to be agreed and submitted within the consultation period, having regard to the views expressed by Cabinet, while ensuring that the Council is not committed to delivery activity, expenditure or obligations beyond those already approved.
- 5.4 The draft SYLNRS will be issued by SYMCA for public consultation, which will take place from 8 June to 17 July 2026. Following the consultation, SYMCA will review responses and make any necessary amendments.
- 5.5 Responsibility for finalising, agreeing and publishing the SYLNRS rests with SYMCA as the Responsible Authority. The final version of the Strategy will be agreed by the SYMCA Board and published in December 2026. The Council will continue to engage as a partner authority throughout the remaining stages of the process.
- 5.6 It is proposed that, following publication, the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for Green Spaces, be authorised to note the final Strategy on behalf of the Council and to confirm the Council's position, ensuring that this does not commit the Council to any delivery activity, financial expenditure or obligations beyond those already approved.

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

- 6.1 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report.
- 6.2 The costs of taking part in this consultation will be contained within approved revenue budgets. As part of approving the strategy, the Council will not commit to any expenditure outside of current approved budgets.

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

- 7.1 The Environment Act 2021 places a statutory duty on Responsible Authorities to prepare, publish and review a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority is designated as the Responsible Authority for the South Yorkshire LNRS, with the Council acting as a Supporting Authority in its preparation.
- 7.2 The statutory requirement relates solely to the preparation of the Strategy. There is no legal requirement on the Council, landowners or other stakeholders to implement the priorities or measures identified within the LNRS. The Strategy is intended to operate as a strategic evidence and guiding framework to inform future policy, planning and partnership activity, and to assist the Council in achieving its Enhanced Biodiversity Duty, placed on it through the Environment Act 2021.

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

- 8.1 There are no immediate Human Resources implications arising from this report.
- 8.2 Any future delivery activity would be considered through the appropriate governance and Human Resources processes.

## **9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

- 9.1 Nature recovery and improved access to high-quality green spaces can provide wider health, wellbeing and educational benefits for children, young people and vulnerable adults, including opportunities for outdoor learning, physical activity and improved mental wellbeing.

## **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

- 10.1 This report relates to the Council's role in reviewing and commenting on a draft, strategic framework prepared by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. It does not approve delivery actions, allocate resources or change access to services and therefore does not give rise to direct equality or human rights impacts.
- 10.2 The framework supports inclusive access to nature and aligns with wider equality, health and wellbeing objectives and assists the Council in meeting its Enhanced Biodiversity Duty. Any future delivery activity arising from the strategy will be expected to consider equality and accessibility impacts as part of detailed project development.
- 10.3 These considerations are set out in more detail in the Initial Equality Screening at Appendix 2.

## **11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change**

- 11.1 The draft South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy supports climate change mitigation and adaptation by promoting improved habitat resilience, biodiversity enhancement and increased carbon sequestration through nature-based approaches. While this report does not commit the Council to delivery activity, the strategy provides a strategic framework that may help to influence future investment, partnership working and projects that contribute to longer-term reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and increased resilience to the impacts of climate change.
- 11.2 These considerations are set out in more detail in the Climate Impact Assessment at Appendix 3.

## **12. Implications for Partners**

- 12.1 The delivery of opportunities identified within the SYLNRS will be dependent on effective partnership working across local authorities, public bodies, voluntary and community organisations, landowners and the private sector.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

### **13.1 Delivery Expectation and Capacity Risk**

#### **Risk:**

There is a risk that publication of the SYLNRS could give rise to expectations regarding delivery, investment or outcomes that extend beyond the Council's role as a Supporting Authority, particularly in the absence of additional funding or agreed delivery mechanisms.

#### **Mitigation:**

Clear messaging to reinforce the supporting of the strategy, through local plan making, approval of planning applications and its role as an enabling and influencing framework. As part of approving this strategy, the Council must not commit to any expenditure outside of current approved budgets.

### **13.2 Reputational Risk**

#### **Risk:**

There is a reputational risk to the Council if the purpose, status or implications of the SYLNRS are misunderstood by stakeholders, partners or the public, particularly if the Strategy is perceived as committing the Council to delivery activity, enforcement or investment beyond its role as a Supporting Authority

#### **Mitigation:**

The Council will ensure clear and consistent messaging through its consultation response, reporting and engagement activity to explain the non-statutory nature of the Strategy, the respective roles of SYMCA and Supporting Authorities, and the fact that any future delivery activity would be

subject to separate decision-making, governance and funding approval processes

**14. Accountable Officers**

Polly Hamilton, Service Director – Culture, Sport and Tourism

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive	John Edwards	15/05/26
Executive Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	12/05/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	11/05/26

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