

FAQs

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE & MILTON KEYNES LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership (NEP) is leading the preparation of a new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. A series of introductory webinars for the LNRS were held in late July 2023. This document summarises questions raised at those webinars, provides responses to them, and seeks to explain what we know about LNRS so far. This document is divided into three sections: 'Overview of the LNRS,' 'Links between the LNRS and other policies,' and 'Getting involved in the LNRS.' You will also find full links for the linked documents at the end.

Note that LNRS is a relatively new concept and there are some uncertainties as the process evolves. While the information in this document is provided in good faith, it is based on our current understanding, which may be subject to change. This document was produced in August 2023 and may be updated periodically to reflect any changes and additional key questions that arise.

I. OVERVIEW

1. What is an LNRS?

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a new, England-wide system of spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits, such as health & wellbeing and climate change adaptation benefits. LNRSs will be prepared for individual areas, such as for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, finally leading to several locally specific LNRSs, which will come together to form a nation-wide Nature Recovery Network. They will consist of a written document (the 'Statement of Biodiversity Priorities') and a map (the 'Local Habitat Map'), which will collectively serve to set out an overview of the nature present in the area, identify and map priorities for nature recovery based on stakeholder consultation, and recommend measures by which these priorities can be achieved.

2. Why do we need an LNRS?

The Environment Act 2021 requires LNRS' to be prepared. Defra has appointed Buckinghamshire Council to prepare an LNRS that covers the entirety of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. The LNRS will help to address the biodiversity, climate, and wellbeing emergencies, by providing a blueprint for nature recovery. The LNRS will also serve to direct certain relevant funding sources.

3. Who is in charge of developing the LNRS?

As set out in the LNRS [regulations](#), 'responsible authorities' or RAs are in charge of developing the LNRS. In our case, the RA is Buckinghamshire Council. In addition, each RA is supported by supporting authorities or SAs. In our case, the SAs are Milton Keynes City Council and Natural England. The RA has commissioned the area's Local Nature Partnership, the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership (NEP), to act as the project manager for the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes LNRS. In addition, the whole strategy is being guided by a steering group consisting of members from relevant departments of both Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes City Councils, the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre, Environment Agency, Berks, Bucks & Oxford Wildlife Trust, Milton Keynes Parks Trust, Chilterns Conservation Board, Forestry Commission, and Natural England.

4. How will responsible authorities (RAs) and supporting authorities (SAs) work together?

The government [regulations](#) and [guidance](#) for the LNRS clearly state the roles each authority is meant to play and the need for a strong partnership between all the authorities. Please review the linked documents for more specific detail. The Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes LNRS includes members of both councils in all key decision-making groups.

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5. When will the LNRS be finished?

It is anticipated that the LNRS will take 12–18 months to prepare. Note that it will be reviewed and refreshed every 3–10 years (based on Defra’s recommendation).

6. Will / how will the strategy be delivered?

The LNRS is expected to guide and focus a range of public and private funding mechanisms to deliver nature recovery in a coherent and thought-out way. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) – wherein most new developments will be required to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than before the development took place, delivering a minimum of 10% ‘gain’ in biodiversity – is expected to be a key delivery mechanism, as the government’s method for measuring this (which will be a requirement from November 2023) incentivises delivery of net gain that contributes to the delivery of LNRS priorities. Other delivery mechanisms include emerging Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMs), which fund farmers to deliver for nature on their land. Other funding mechanisms could include carbon credits, and woodland creation, natural flood management, protected species and charitable grants. The LNRS is a strategy identifying key priorities and opportunities for nature recovery in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, and is not expected to include detailed, site-by-site proposals that would be needed to provide a costed delivery plan.

7. Who will be responsible for the LNRS delivery mechanisms?

While the LNRS development team may not oversee the specific delivery mechanisms, delivery mechanisms such as ELMs (Environmental Land Management Schemes) and BNG, which are managed by Defra and other bodies, have been designed with regard to the LNRS.

8. Have Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes prepared an LNRS before?

LNRS’ are a new requirement, so they have not been done before. However, in 2020–2021, Defra funded five pilot LNRS projects, of which Buckinghamshire was one (not including Milton Keynes). The purpose of the pilot was to help the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) test the LNRS process to inform the final regulations and guidance. As such, the pilot documents are not a final product and the LNRS currently being prepared may differ substantially from what was produced at that time. Now that the [regulations](#) and [statutory guidance](#) have been published, we need to carry out a full LNRS in accordance with the process and requirements set out in these documents. In addition, since the pilot only covered Buckinghamshire, without Milton Keynes, and had a more restricted timescale, in this iteration, we will be expanding the reach and depth of our stakeholder engagement to develop a more comprehensive LNRS. This said, we will draw on the work from the pilot and ensure we incorporate all the consultation responses from the pilot.

II. LINKS BETWEEN THE LNRS AND OTHER POLICIES

1. What is the link between the LNRS and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)?

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is a way to contribute to the recovery of nature while developing land. It requires overall habitat for wildlife to be in a better state than it was before development. This will apply to developments from November 2023 unless exempt.

While BNG is meant to be first delivered on the site of new development itself, this may not always be possible. As such, Councils and others will look to develop off-site habitat banks where habitats are created. Habitat banks are sites earmarked for habitat creation, which may begin prior to any loss occurring. This habitat creation is legally secured and managed for a 30-year period with BNG units sold to developers who require offsite provision. The LNRS will be key in identifying areas where these habitat banks should be situated. For more information regarding biodiversity net gain, please see here:

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[Biodiversity Net Gain Brochure \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://blog.gov.uk) - A high level overview of BNG

[Biodiversity Net Gain | Buckinghamshire Council](#) - Guidance on BNG delivery in Buckinghamshire

[Biodiversity Net Gain \(BNG\) | Milton Keynes City Council \(milton-keynes.gov.uk\)](#) - Guidance on BNG delivery in Milton Keynes

2. How does the LNRS relate to Local Plans/Neighbourhood Plans?

LNRSs have been designed with local area planning in mind (for example, they align with local planning authority boundaries). The Environment Act 2021 requires local planning authorities to have regard to the LNRS both in respect to policy and development management decisions. The Government is currently preparing further advice on this. The planning departments at both Buckinghamshire Council and Milton Keynes City Council are involved in the LNRS preparation, and we would encourage those involved in neighbourhood plan preparation to engage as well by joining a relevant stakeholder consultation group (see more info in section IV). We would like to hear about any opportunities you have already identified for nature recovery. We envisage that the LNRS will be a very good evidence base to inform emerging local plans and neighbourhood plans.

3. How will the LNRS regard large/national infrastructure projects?

The LNRS is designed to spatially show the priorities and opportunities for nature recovery across the geographic area to which the plan relates. As such these are opportunities that will guide habitat creation from a whole variety of funding sources potentially including nature recovery mitigation measures from nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs). We are also awaiting advice from government on how local planning authorities are meant to have regard to the LNRS. However, we will aim to liaise with already approved national infrastructure projects in the area, such as East-West Rail and HS2, to understand the opportunities and constraints arising from these projects, and how to maximise nature recovery, for example through their biodiversity plans and funding.

4. How will the LNRS affect other council policies, for example, how the Councils manage the natural environment on their land?

Under the Environment Act 2021 Local Authorities now have an enhanced duty to conserve and increase biodiversity via all the services they deliver. As such they are required to report to government on what actions we are taking to meet this new obligation.

The act requires councils to:

1. Consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
2. Agree policies and specific object on our consideration
3. Act to deliver these policies

In undertaking the above, we must check how the LNRS affects land that we manage. We will need to consider how the land that we manage across the whole Council could improve biodiversity, including sites such as cemeteries, parks, roadside verges, woodland.

As such, the LNRS process will work closely with various council departments, including through a dedicated stakeholder consultation group, and will ensure there is synergy across departments with respect to nature management.

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5. How will the LNRS regard previous environmental strategies and how will it differ from them?

This is the first time there has been a coordinated requirement across the country to produce a strategy for nature and wider environmental benefits, including a requirement for extensive stakeholder engagement and public consultation prior to its agreement. As such, the LNRS will provide a collaboratively agreed way forward to restore and enhance nature, while taking into account nature's other benefits and what is valued by those who live and work in the area. The LNRSs will also link into other policy areas such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Environment Land Management Schemes (ELMS) in signposting where the greatest opportunities are for nature and so where the focus of funding might be best placed.

6. How will species be considered within the LNRS?

The [statutory guidance](#) states that the LNRS must 'identify the existing or potential species (or groups of species) in the area that the strategy could make a particular contribution to enhancing or recovering.' The Government has also recently published specific guidance on how species should be regarded within the LNRS. The LNRS will also take account of existing plans and strategies and once finalised, should be used to inform future plans and strategies on species conservation.

7. How will the LNRS differ from the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)?

The LNRS will replace the BAP, but it does have some differences. Every part of the country will have an LNRS (which is not the case for BAPs), so it will introduce some consistency of approach with regards to nature recovery. While biodiversity-led, the LNRS will also consider other environmental benefits (such as regulating flood risk and climate change), and wider benefits (such as health and wellbeing). In addition, the LNRS will be a highly collaborative product, with input from a wide range of people and organisations.

9. How will the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes LNRS coordinate with neighbouring areas?

The LNRS process recognises that nature is not bound by borders. As such, we are part of a network of responsible authorities (RAs), established by Natural England, for coordination and communication that meets on a regular basis in regional clusters. The Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes LNRS is also coordinating closely with all its neighbouring RAs.

III. GETTING INVOLVED IN THE LNRS

1. Who are the key stakeholders that need to be involved in the LNRS?

LNRS guidance emphasises the need to involve the people who own and manage the land, people who live and work in the area, and the people who take regulatory decisions, so they can contribute to what action is being proposed, where and why. We are aiming to be as inclusive as possible and are seeking input from a range of different stakeholders and stakeholder groups, including farmers and landowners, Council directorates, residents of the area, businesses, developers, Town & Parish Councils, (environmental) Non-Governmental Organisations, various convening groups, students, and key infrastructure and utilities groups, among others. The LNRS team has, and will be, setting up several different channels, such as stakeholder consultation groups, surveys, etc., through which stakeholders will be welcomed and encouraged to relay their priorities for nature. If you would like to be involved in the process, please fill out this form.

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2. What are the implications for land identified in the LNRS? How can I suggest sites for consideration?

The LNRS will identify areas that are currently designated for nature conservation (such as nature reserves) and irreplaceable habitats ('areas of particular importance for biodiversity'). In addition, the LNRS will identify areas to focus funding and efforts going forwards to achieve our agreed priorities for nature ('areas that could become of particular importance'). These areas will all be depicted on the LNRS map, known as the 'local habitat map.'

'Areas of particular importance for biodiversity' will map where the best opportunities to expand, recover or join up nature, and provide added ecosystem services, may be. Areas that could become of particular importance will be identified through the LNRS process using a range of inputs, including feedback from stakeholder engagement. If you are interested in submitting a particular site for consideration, we recommend joining one of our stakeholder consultation groups (register your interest [here](#)).

These areas will indicate where action should be focused to make the greatest impact and will help inform decisions on land management. Note that the LNRS does not give any level of protection; prevent alternative uses of the land; nor does it give permission to create habitat or alter land use without consulting relevant specialists, statutory consultees, or obtaining appropriate permissions.

3. How can I stay updated on the LNRS or input into the process?

Please use [this link](#) to register your interest in the LNRS or join our mailing list. We will also be updating the LNRS pages of the [NEP's website](#) on a regular basis, which you can find here. If you have a more specific query, please contact us at sachi.shah@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

LINKS

LNRS Statutory Regulations: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/341/made>

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

LNRS Pages on the NEP's Website: <https://bucksmknep.co.uk/nature-strategy/overview/>

Form to Register your interest in getting involved in the LNRS: <https://rb.gy/632pi>

A high-level overview of BNG: https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/183/2022/04/BNG-Brochure_Final_Compressed-002.pdf

Guidance on BNG delivery in Buckinghamshire:

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/environment/ecology-and-biodiversity/biodiversity-net-gain/>

Guidance on BNG delivery in Milton Keynes: <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/environment-parks-and-open-spaces/ecology/biodiversity-net-gain-bng>