Surrey Nature Recovery

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Annex – Methodology Statement

June 2025

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

Introduction

This document sets out, in brief, the approach taken by Surrey County Council and its partners to produce the first Local Nature Strategy for Surrey. It is designed to provide additional context and information to the Description of the Strategy Area, Statement of Biodiversity Priorities and the Local Habitat Map which are the core elements of the LNRS.

The process was informed and guided by several documents including:

- The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023
- LNRS Statutory Guidance
- Additional non-statutory guidance from Natural England

The LNRS would not have been possible without the invaluable input from our workshop attendees, partners and supporting authorities.

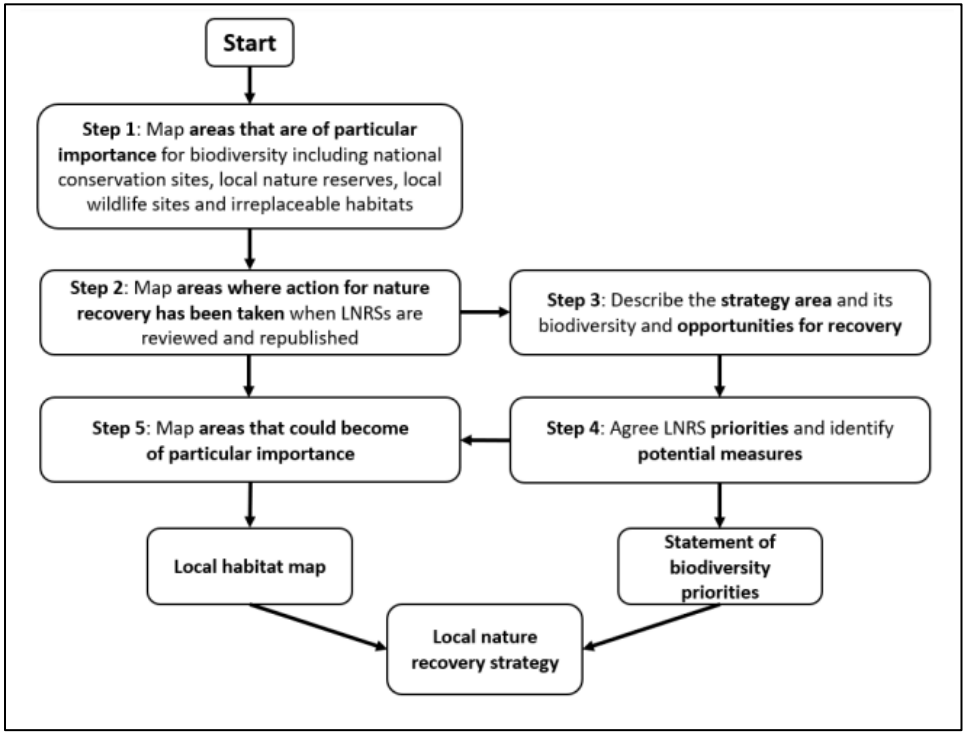


Fig.1 - Order of steps to be followed in preparing contents of a local nature recovery strategy – Reproduced from LNRS Statutory Guidance



Engagement Methodology

Engagement Methodology

Surrey Nature Partnership (SNP) were commissioned in 2023 to produce a broad engagement strategy for the development of the LNRS and provided key support throughout the process, organising workshops and attending events to raise awareness of the LNRS. Below is an overview of the Surrey LNRS engagement method and governance structure.

Stakeholder analysis

SNP collated a list of organisations and groups who have an interest in nature recovery, or we felt would be interested in the subject. At this stage guidance was still awaited on what the document should look like.

Surrey Nature Partnership was already working with a large number of groups and organisations who are interested in nature recovery in Surrey and used those contacts to develop a spreadsheet which included all the Government bodies and Arm's Length Bodies, the eNGOs and local societies who worked in the county. Stakeholders were assessed on their interest in and influence on nature recovery in the county.

Groups were categorised into:-

1. Manage Closely-this group had a high interest in the LNRS and high influence on the deliverability, e.g landowners, local planning authorities
2. Keep Informed-this group had a high interest but a lower impact on the deliverability, e.g. community groups, parish councils.
3. Keep satisfied-this group has higher influence on deliverability but lower interest directly in the subject. They needed to be aware of the LNRS as it could become important to them, e.g neighbouring authorities, businesses with land, land associated with schools, colleges and universities and land associated with health, i.e. hospitals, medical centres.

This assessment of stakeholders was kept under review to allow them to be moved into another group if necessary and to ensure that ways were considered to engage with them outside the workshops, which weren't always an appropriate way to engage some groups.

Engagement Methodology

To ensure we could engage community groups, we worked with the Community Engagement Officers at the County Council to assess the best way to disseminate information to the communities across the County. Paying particular attention to hard-to-reach groups, people in areas of deprivation, smaller ethnic groups and those with disabilities.

Experience of SCC, Surrey Wildlife Trust and the Nature Partnership had shown that young people can also be a hard-to-reach group with the usual type of engagement and as they are a key group to engage to ensure the future delivery of the LNRS, a focus was put on ensuring we got them involved.

Another key group for the LNRS are the landowners, including farmers, forester and growers as well as golf course owners and owners of large estates. Surrey has around 33 percent of its land in agriculture with the rest of the open land in forestry, woodland, golf courses, and large gardens and estates.

Landowners were engaged through circulating information to the local branches of the CLA (Country Land and Business Association) and National Farmers Union along with golf course owners, the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, National Trust, Ministry of Defence and Crown Estate.



Engagement Methodology

Creating the Steering Group

A Steering group with representatives from a range of sectors was established to drive the LNRS process with a small sub group set up to design and oversee the Engagement and communications work.

The main Steering Group for the LNRS comprised representatives from the key organisations who the team needed to engage in the process to develop the Strategy and who could use their contacts/ membership base to get information out to stakeholders. The Steering Group was set up initially as a relatively small groups with the ability to bring in further representatives where necessary.
The Steering Group is chaired by the Director of Environment from the Responsible Authority, Surrey County Council, and included representatives from:

Natural England
Environment Agency
Forestry Commission
Surrey Nature Partnership
Surrey Wildlife Trust
The CLA
NFU
A Planning Representative from the Boroughs/District
Surrey Hills Protected Landscape
SCC County Ecologist
SCC Representative for health and wellbeing
Surrey Biodiversity Record Centre
Hampton Estate

These were all selected to help the process of engagement and developing the LNRS, making use of their networks in the county. The role of the Steering Group is to advise, help with disseminating information and provide comment on the draft papers for the LNRS, at the stage of sharing with the Supporting Authorities and then the consultation draft. The final version of the LNRS, once approved by the Supporting Authorities will also be signed off by the Steering Group before going to the Cabinet of Surrey County Council for final sign off.

Engagement Methodology



Creating and refining the engagement plan

The Design Group is a sub group of the Steering Group with the role of designing and approving the stages of the Engagement Process. The Design Group comprised:

A Landowner representative
A Community Engagement Officer from SCC
NRS lead for the Responsible Body
Director of Surrey Nature Partnership
The Director of Engagement from Surrey Wildlife Trust (NGO)
Resources for Change (R4C)
Natural England lead for the Surrey LNRS
Environment Agency (arms-length body)
A representative of the local authorities, who is an active member of the Biodiversity Working Group

A decision was taken by the Design Group and supported by the Steering Group, to use a simplified version of the engagement process set out in a report by TPX Limited . The Design Group met in April and May 2024 to help co-design the process; these workshops were run by Resources for Change (R4C) who were employed to run the workshops that formed the main engagement phase of the process. The group was then kept involved through e-mail and most of the members were also involved in workshops and other meetings throughout the LNRS.

Engagement Methodology

Phase 1 Workshops - Generating the long list of priorities
The programme was originally designed with 7 workshops on different themes and then an 8th was added on Water, which is a particular problem in the County, with issues around flooding, drought, and pollution. The eight workshops were held in the Summer of 2024 with different themes. The idea was to hold focussed conversations around different aspects of nature recovery. Workshop themes / groups were:

Workshop 1 Non-farming Landowners – Aimed at institutional landowners such as Ministry of Defence, Crown Estate, and Golf Courses and landscape gardens, i.e. Royal Horticultural Society, Wisley, Painshill and National Trust properties.
Workshop 2 Community – Aimed at community groups, parish councils and others with an interest in nature
Workshop 3 and Workshop 6 Farmers and Growers – Split by west and east of the county
Workshop 4 Nature and People – aimed at access and health and wellbeing groups
Workshop 5 Landscape and Habitats – aimed at traditional nature and conservation organisations
Workshop 7 Nature and Young People – aimed at people aged 16-30 years
Workshop 8 Waterways and Wetlands – aimed at organisations managing the freshwater environment, rivers, wetlands, lakes and ponds

Participants were selected from the lists of stakeholders to encourage a wide range of views pertinent to the subject, but the workshops were also open to anyone who was interested and were advertised on the websites of the Steering Group partners, via the webinar in May 2024, via the social media channels of partners and at all other opportunities.

The venues were chosen to be in different parts of the county and all the workshops broadly followed the same format so that if people couldn't make the one that was aimed at their sector, they could still attend a workshop. Refreshments were provided and we ensured the venues were all accessible and facilitated car sharing to help where people couldn't drive and there was no convenient public transport.
A report was produced for each workshop and made available to all those who came and put on the Surrey Nature Partnership's website with links from partners websites. https://surreynaturepartnership.org/snr-workshops/

Engagement Methodology

The outputs including priorities and measures to achieve nature recovery across the county were analysed by the consultants and the team working on the engagement process to ensure they met the criteria set out in the guidance from Defra on Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). The criteria used were, does it relate to: Restoring, creating or improving habitats, Delivering wider benefits, National Environment Objectives

140 people attended the first set of workshops and produced 1506 suggestions of priorities and measures. These were then refined to 32 priorities across 5 themes by the Design Group and agreed by the Steering Group to go forward to the Geographic Workshops.

Phase 2 Workshops - Testing the Priority shortlist and building the measures longlist
The three Geographic Workshops were based on the North, East and West of the County and held on the Autumn of 2024 to refine the priorities and measure further. These geographic workshops were open to all those who attended the first set of workshops and to anyone else who wanted to get involved. We were particularly aiming at getting engagement from the local councils and community groups, in addition to the participants in the first set of workshops.

The aim was to review and refine the draft priorities list and create a long list of measures. These workshops also sense checked the information coming out of the earlier workshops for each of these areas of the County.

80 people attended theses three workshops and reduced the outcomes to 46. The workshops produced three combined word clouds which quite clearly showed the main concerns of the county around development and infrastructure and the fragmentation of current sites for nature. The final measures list was refined through engagement with the Steering Group, supporting authorities and other core partners and subject experts. Anything that had been recorded as important by the workshops but didn't meet the criteria for the LNRS was recorded to allow the team to agree if we should take those items forward in another way. For example, one of the issues that repeatedly came up was a need for education in its widest sense so that people understood nature and the need to manage land and resources. This particular action has been taken up by Surrey Nature Partnership, who are bringing together a range of organisations who currently engage the public and run campaigns as well as provide environmental education with a view to combining efforts on engagement and communications where it would have a greater impact.

Engagement Methodology



Fig. 2 – Word cloud showing responses to “Vision for Nature in Surrey” from the LNRS Workshop Series

Engagement Methodology



Fig. 3 – Word cloud showing responses to “How you view nature in Surrey now” from the LNRS Workshop Series



Fig. 4 – Word cloud showing responses to “Fears for the future of nature recovery” from the LNRS Workshop Series

Surrey Nature Day

To engage new groups with nature recovery and reach beyond the usual suspects the engagement group, led by the SCC Community Engagement Manager, organised a bespoke event aimed specifically at school aged children.

Surrey Nature Day featured over 20 stalls from partners across the sector and the county council showcasing nature recovery activities and the work they do.

Held at West Horsely places, the centrepiece was a piece of original promenade theatre written using the sonnets of Shakespeare and performed by the Guildford Shakespeare Company on a rolling basis throughout the day.

Day 1 was aimed at school trips and, despite driving rain, was attended by over 500 students from 16 different schools

Day 2 was open to all and welcomed over 1000 members of the public.

The event was a huge success, and we hope to recreate it in the coming years.











Credit: John Hawkins

Mapping Methods

Habitat Opportunity Mapping

Following a data review, it was highlighted that we had a gap around habitat opportunity mapping in the county. In addition, we had many competing baseline habitat maps all in various stages of completion and with differing geographic coverage. To bring this data together and fill these gaps, Surrey Wildlife Trust were commissioned to undertake some spatial analysis using Oxford Universities AGILE Habitat Opportunity Mapping Model. For more information visit the link here

Agile Opportunity Maps: Identifying Nature Recovery and Nature-Based Solutions Opportunities

The Agile Opportunity Maps are a set of open-source tools designed to identify opportunities for Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and nature recovery across England. Developed using spatial analysis and ecological principles, these maps help locate areas best suited for environmental interventions, such as:

- Creating woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, and ponds
- Restoring peatlands
- Enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services

By following a structured methodology, these maps maximize environmental benefits while minimizing trade-offs, ensuring that interventions are implemented in the most suitable locations.

The Agile Opportunity Maps follow a four-stage process:

1. Stage 1: Habitat Baseline Mapping
2. Stage 2: Integrating Additional Data for Ecosystem Services & Constraints
3. Stage 3: Identifying Nature Recovery and NbS Opportunities

Habitat Opportunity Mapping

Agile Opportunity Maps Methodology

Stage 1: Habitat Baseline Mapping

The habitat baseline map serves as the foundation for opportunity mapping, integrating data from multiple sources to create a comprehensive and gap-free spatial dataset.

Data Sources:

- OS MasterMap – Base mapping data
- Natural England's Priority Habitat Inventory – Key biodiversity features
- CROME Crop Map of England (Rural Payment Agency) – Identifies agricultural land as arable or improved pasture
- OS Greenspace Data – Identifies green spaces such as allotments, playing fields, playgrounds, cemeteries, and amenity grasslands
- Local habitat data

These datasets are merged into a single, seamless layer, ensuring full spatial coverage without overlaps or gaps.

Stage 2: Integrating Additional Data for Ecosystem Services & Constraints

To enhance the functionality of the habitat baseline, additional datasets are integrated to assess ecosystem services and land-use constraints that influence Nature-based Solutions (NbS) opportunities.

Key Data Inputs:

- Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) – Evaluates land suitability for food production
- Environmental Designations – Identifies areas of conservation importance
- Public Accessibility – Assesses the potential for nature-based recreation, incorporating:
    - CROW (Countryside and Rights of Way) open access land
    - Public greenspaces
    - 50m buffer zones around public footpaths

By incorporating these factors, the opportunity maps ensure that NbS interventions align with land use priorities, minimize conflicts, and enhance public benefits.

Habitat Opportunity Mapping

Stage 3: Identifying Nature Recovery and NbS Opportunities
This stage maps areas suitable for nature recovery and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) based on ecological principles and land constraints. Key Principles for Opportunity Mapping

1. Prioritizing low-biodiversity areas (e.g., farmland, degraded grasslands) for habitat restoration
2. 2 Protecting high-grade farmland (Grade 1 & 2), except where restoration benefits outweigh agricultural loss (e.g., peatland, wetlands, agroforestry)
3. Restoring peatlands carefully to prevent carbon loss
4. Limiting wetland creation to flood-prone areas, while using hydrological models to expand options
5. Expanding woodlands, grasslands, and wetlands near existing natural habitats (distance-based ecological zoning)
6. Matching grassland restoration to soil types using geological data
7. Encouraging agroforestry, except where it negatively impacts soil carbon or biodiversity
8. Locating community orchards near urban areas to maximize social and environmental benefits
9. Targeting erosion prevention efforts on steep slopes and highly erodible soils
10. Utilizing woodlands for flood management in areas with poor drainage

This process culminated in a county wide habitat map and opportunity map that have underpinned the mapping of potential measures

Measures Mapping Method

The table below sets outs the data sets and targeting used to generate the mapped measures extent found on the Local Habitat Map here

Code	Measure	Total Extent	Targeting
W1.2	**Restore Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)**	Natural England Ancient Woodland - Planted Ancient Woodland Sites	None - All PAWS selected
W1.5	**Improve the management of existing conifer plantations to benefit biodiversity**	National Forest Inventory 2023 and AGILE Existing Habitat data - Conifer and Mixed mainly confier habitats attributes selected	PAWS Removed as targeted Greater than 0.5 Ha Selected by intersect with Ancient Wooodland Network Enhancement Zone
W2.1	**Establish new woodland and sutiable edge habitats to buffer and better connect Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland**	Natural England Ancient Woodland sites buffered by 75m	Selected AGILE Woodland Opportuntiy areas on existing improved grassland or arable land Removed potential creation of grassland and heathland habitats
W2.2	**Establish new urban and peri-urban woodland**	AGILE Opportunity Maps: Woodland	Lowest 10% of LSOA by Tree Equity Score (all those below score of 85) All woodland opportunity mapping within 200m of Air Quality Management Zones Cut by improved grassland and arable

Measures Mapping Method

WR1.1	**Undertake targeted river restoration**	WFD Non-modified water bodies	None - all included
WR1.2	**Remove redundant artificial barriers**	WFD all water bodies	None - all included
WR1.3	**Improve habitats along canals, navigations and heavily modified rivers**	WFD Modified bodies	None - all included
WR1.5	**Maintain, create and widen areas of semi-natural habitats next to watercourses**	EA Detailed River Network and OS water ways polygons	Buffered by 20 metres Existing habitat and urban removed
WR1.6	**Enhance, restore and maintain chalk streams and their headwaters**	Natural England Chalk Rivers SERT Additions	All locations included - linear features buffered by 10m to ensure width of river covered
WR2.1	**Safeguard, enhance and maintain areas of lowland fen**	Natural England Priority Habitats Inventory: Lowland Fen	None - all included
WR2.2	**Safeguard, enhance and maintain areas of floodplain grazing marsh**	Natural England Priority Habitats Inventory: Lowland Fen Draft Surrey Old Grasslands - fgm attribute	None - all included
WR2.3	**Safeguard, enhance and maintain reedbed habitat**	Natural England Priority Habitats Inventory: Reedbed Landapp Best Guess: Reedbed	None - all included
WR2.4	**Create new wetland habitats which contain a matrix of various wetland habitat types which are suitable for the site**	AGILE Opportunity Maps: Wetland	Areas selected by: SCC Priority Flood Zones with NFM opportunity and 500m upstream SWT Draft Wetland strategy areas Habitat Netowrk Lowland Fen Network Expansion zone Flood Plaing Grazing Marsh buffer 300m Wetland Vision: Future Potential Wetlands

Measures Mapping Method

GSH1.1	**Create and restore areas of heathland and acid grassland**	AGILE Opportunity Maps: Acid Grassland and Heathland	Existing Acid Grassland and Heathland Buffered by 500m All areas included in Habitat Network for Acid Grassland and Lowland Heathland (Not incl Network Expansion Zone)
GSH1.2	**Enhance, safeguard and maintain existing heathland and acid grassland**	AGILE Existing Habitat: Heathland Surrey Old Grasslands Inventory: Acid Grassland Natural England Priority Habitat Inventory: Lowland Heathland, Acid Grassland	None
GSH2.1	**Enhance, safeguard and maintain existing calcareous grassland**	AGILE Existing Habitat: Calcareous grassland Surrey Old Grassland Inventory Natural England Priority Habitat Inventory	None
GSH2.2	**Create and restore new areas of calcareous grassland**	AGILE Opportunity Maps: Chalk Grassland	Selected areas within 500m buffered of existing calcareous grassland Additional areas included to ensure full linear connectivity for regional Big Chalk programme
GSH2.3	**Enhance, safeguard and maintain existing lowland meadows and and other priority neutral grasslands**	Natural England Priority Habitat Inventory Lowland Meadows Draft Surrey Old Grasslands Inventory	None
GSH2.4	**Create and restore areas of lowland meadows and other priority neutral grasslands**	AGILE Opportunity Maps: Neutral Grassland	NE Habitat Network for Lowland Meadows (not including Network Expansion Zone) 200m buffer around OGI grasslands
UR2.1	**Create and enhance habitats within priority corridors identified in the Urban Biodiversity Opportunity Areas**	Urban Biodviersiy Opportunity Areas - Created by SWT 2021	Buffered by 50m