

## A Partnership Vision for a Cumbria-wide Nature Recovery Network

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan sets out an ambition to:

*'Leave our environment in a better state than we found it and to pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future'*

It also commits to the establishment of a country-wide **Nature Recovery Network (NRN)** in order to protect and restore wildlife, and to restore ecosystems and habitat networks at a landscape-scale. The rationale for a Nature Recovery Network is set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan:

*"If we are to reverse past declines in wildlife populations and the extent and condition of their habitats, and if we are to secure wider economic and social benefits for people, we need not only to continue to conserve and improve our best wildlife sites, but also to expand our resource of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site series".*

The Cumbria Local Nature Partnership (CLNP) is responding to the ambition outlined in the 25 Year Environment Plan and is developing a Nature Recovery Network for all of Cumbria. The CLNP will work with environmental, land management/owner, local authority (including National Parks and AONB), public body, business and local community sectors to recover nature and the multiple benefits it brings to humankind such as the provision of clean water, climate regulation and health and wellbeing. The CLNP will also work with partners to ensure that the Nature Recovery Network can play a key role in the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) as envisaged in the Environment Bill 2020; in particular supporting Cumbria County Council to develop and implement a Cumbria LNRS.

## A Vision for nature recovery in Cumbria

We need a '**Vision for Cumbria's Nature**' which identifies what nature, ecosystems and their management should look like in 50 years' time; ensuring our environment will be healthy, resilient to change and able to sustainably deliver services which will meet both nature's and societal needs. It will be forward thinking and ambitious and will be set within the context of:

- A need to increase the amount, quality and resilience of nature to make up for degradation seen over previous decades.
- Ensuring that our future nature and landscapes can provide the goods and services (such as clean water, pollination, carbon sequestration, water retention, timber and food) which help both the people of Cumbria and wider society.
- A need to develop and support sustainable land management systems.

The CLNP will work with partners to agree an overarching vision for nature in Cumbria, aiming to create a more wildlife-rich and healthier environment and delivering the Natural Capital which will help sustain future generations and make Cumbria a more beautiful place to live and visit.

## What does nature need?

The Making Space for Nature Report 2010 (The Lawton Report) stated in simple terms that the ambition for nature recovery nationwide should **be more, bigger, better quality and joined up** (connected). In simple terms this means we need to create more new nature rich areas, increase the size and condition of our existing sites and make them all better connected. In practice things are slightly more complicated. We will also need to consider the needs of individual species, the impacts of climate change and other environmental changes both now and in the future. Working from existing information sources such as the Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan, State of the Park 2018, Natural England's National Character Area Plans, River Catchment Plans and Natural England's Natural Capital Atlas, the Partnership will identify what nature needs and then use this to agree overall goals and ambition for nature in Cumbria.

## Nature and People working together

To be successful the planning for nature recovery needs to work with the biodiversity, landscape and the people living or working within Cumbria. As well as nature's inherent value and beauty, and the benefits these provide for our health and wellbeing, nature also provides a number of other ecosystem services. Across most of our land, water and coast, nature is managed or influenced by people, whether through farming, urban infrastructure, water abstraction, forestry or gardening. As such, once we have identified and agreed what nature needs to recover and sustain itself, we need to identify how and where we can work together to improve or increase wildlife and the ecosystem services that it provides for us. We will work with the people who manage and own the land, water and coastal areas to see how this can be achieved, and to jointly design and create the Nature Recovery Network. The Partnership will work with the land management/owner sector, local authorities, local communities, businesses and other partnerships to plan the Nature Recovery Network and to seek additional funding to enable this to be delivered.

## **What could a Cumbrian Nature Recovery Network be and what are its constituent parts?**

Nature needs **more space and needs to be better connected** across our landscapes. Our Nature Recovery Network will need to be designed around the needs of nature, and will need to include a number of different landscape-scale habitat features. As outlined in 'Making Space for Nature 2010' our Network will include:

**Core Nature Areas:** At the core of our Nature Recovery Network will be our existing designated nature sites (SSSI, County Wildlife Sites, Nature Reserves and other Priority Habitats). These are places that sustain thriving wildlife populations that may expand across the network. Many of these areas are already afforded protection under wildlife legislation and land managers are supported financially to manage them for wildlife. In the future we must aim for these sites to be managed into the best possible condition for wildlife.

**Ecological Connections (Corridors and Stepping stones):** Using ecological modelling, opportunity mapping and work with the land management sector, we will identify important existing and new connections between nature areas. Connections may take the form of 'stepping stones' of newly created or restored habitats, physical wildlife corridors or nature/habitat rich zones. Species need these connections into and across landscapes both to interact with other individuals, to find food/shelter and/or to find new suitable areas as their existing habitats are changed or lost through climate and/or other environmental change.

**Restoration Areas:** Where possible existing nature areas will be made bigger through habitat restoration and creation around their edges. In addition the restoration and creation of nature areas will be targeted to help with the development of ecological connections between sites, and or to add currently restricted or missing habitats back into individual landscapes. Habitat restoration and creation may also be targeted at areas where key ecosystem services could be enhanced or increased. We will identify and set a target for habitat creation/restoration in Cumbria based on, as a minimum, 'our' proportion of the 25 Year Environment Plan 500,000ha target.

**Wildlife-enriched landscapes (Sustainable Use Areas):** Much of our wildlife is not confined just to 'nature areas'. Many species use different habitat features across landscapes, catchments or valleys, for example a bird might nest in a woodland but feed on insect rich fields nearby, or a hoverfly might feed on flower-rich grasslands but its young live within ponds or muddy areas. We therefore need to conserve and recreate features, creating 'habitat mosaics' within the landscape surrounding the nature areas.

In addition to the areas outlined in 'Making Space for Nature' (see above) the Nature Recovery Network will also be designed to identify and create the following features:

**Large Nature Areas:** Our wildlife needs some 'large nature areas' where it can develop larger, more sustainable populations of species, where environmental pressures are reduced and where more natural ecosystem functions can take place. These sites will provide 'reservoirs' of nature which can then colonise or move into other parts of the Nature Recovery Network. In these areas the priority should be given to the conservation of nature and management should be adapted to nature's needs. Initially these areas are likely to be developed from 'core areas' and 'restoration areas', however over time new areas may also be identified and located where they can provide the greatest benefits to nature and to society. Examples might include restored or expanded lowland wetlands benefitting both the wildlife which these habitats will sustain and the flood management benefits which would also be accrued from such areas.

**Nature Areas for people:** Often our most wildlife-rich sites are not in the best locations for many of our local communities to access them. The Nature Recovery Network will be designed to bring nature into everyone's lives, working with green infrastructure initiatives to bring nature into the heart of our major towns and cities. Some ecological connections will be designed to forge nature-rich corridors into our urban areas and local communities will be encouraged to design the ways in which nature can be encouraged and restored. Working with and within local communities will lead to increased awareness, better engagement and more joined up dialogue between societal sectors.

**A Species Recovery Initiative:** There are a number of species that have gone extinct from the county in recent times and many current species are at risk of extinction. In addition there are species which may wish, or need to move into Cumbria as the climate changes. The Nature Recovery Network should support the habitat needs of our species at risk and provide for the opportunities to (re)introduce absent, new and iconic species to enhance our natural environment.

## **Identifying and developing a Nature Recovery Network in Cumbria**

The Cumbria Local Nature Partnership is leading on the identification of a Nature Recovery Network for Cumbria. Although the Nature Recovery Network will become a physical network on the ground, its vision and approach will be expressed and planned through spatial mapping.

When designing the Nature Network there are many aspects which need to be considered. The needs of nature and natural systems must be placed at the fore, otherwise we risk making plans which provide limited or no overall benefits for wildlife or the environment. Of key importance, is working with those who have the ability to make it happen, including land managers and landowners, the planning system, local communities and businesses and potential investors. The Partnership will bring outline plans for the Nature Recovery Network to these sectors at the earliest opportunity and then work with them to mould the network to help both nature and people.

The evidence base for the natural environment in Cumbria has significant limitations. The Partnership will use the best available local wildlife and habitat data to help plan for the Nature Recovery Network, updating this where possible and then integrating it with the most useful national data.

### **The Partnership has agreed to work within the following principles and approaches in their work to model and identify the Network:**

1. **Agreeing an ambitious 'Vision for Cumbria's Nature'** - this will be underpinned by the 'needs of nature' but will also reflect the needs of society.
2. **Developing a project team** which will oversee the work at a Cumbria-wide level. This team will be a subset of the wider Partnership, helping to ensure integration with existing partnerships and groups.
3. **Working with land management/owner, local authorities, National Park Authorities, AONB, other partnerships and local communities** to build their views and needs into the final design of the Nature Recovery Network. Learning and evidence from existing pilot studies and programmes will underpin the design and functioning of the Network. Links will be maintained with the National NRN Partnership.
4. **Developing a Nature Recovery Network at a Cumbria-wide scale** while ensuring that more detailed, finer-scaled or different approaches may be needed for individual landscapes or settings. A strategic county-wide approach will guide but not constrain mapping and action at a local scale.
5. **Agreeing key ecological principles** which will underpin the identification and development of the Nature Recovery Network. These will be evidence-based and likely to include principles around improving resilience of nature, increasing connectivity, increasing ecological diversity, developing habitat mosaics at all scales, resilience to future climate change and allowing nature to evolve and change.

6. **Agreeing the initial design of, and methodology** for identifying the Nature Recovery Network. This will be designed by learning from existing ecological/network design in the UK, national guidance and working with existing nature mapping in Cumbria
7. **Making the Nature Recovery Network Plan adaptable** so it is useful to, and usable by a wide range of user groups and stakeholders - helping everyone to do their bit for nature.
8. **Gathering the best available evidence around the state of nature in Cumbria**, and where possible improving the evidence base with new information. Ensuring the modelling and mapping work is scientifically robust. The Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre will be a key partner in this work.
9. **Ensuring that strategic mapping assists** rather than constrains local/individual decision making, by combining maps with guiding principles, advice and delivery/practical guidance. Ideally mapping will provide a tool to guide local advisors, land managers and communities.
10. **Building in the concepts of Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services** into the design of the Nature Recovery Network, helping nature to help us, and identifying priority areas for investment. NRN design principles and goals will be used to guide, and where possible be integrated into, key funding streams, including Environmental Land Management, Biodiversity Net Gain and grants for tree planting and peatland restoration.
11. **Ensuring the Network is closely linked** with, and supports development and implementation of the Cumbrian Local Nature Strategy being led by Cumbria County Council. The NRN will also link with both within the county and to other areas of the country through liaison and planning with other partnerships and adjacent counties.
12. **Ensuring that accessibility of mapping and data, and long-term monitoring** are built into the planning and delivery of the Nature Recovery Network.

## Timescales and Planning

The overall work outlined above may take a year or more to complete, however work is already commencing on improving the evidence and developing the methodology. The world will not stop while we are developing the NRN. We need to work with current programmes to ensure the developing NRN influences activity at the earliest opportunity and that feedback and lessons learnt will be used to strengthen the approach. Identification and development of the NRN will require funding, however in line with government thinking we expect the development of the overall strategic spatial framework will assist in attracting new investment into Cumbria's natural environment, support development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and help to focus/target the ELMS.

*This document has been prepared by the CLNP NRN Working Group and agreed by the CLNP Board. It will provide a framework in which the CLNP will develop its thinking and work on NRN/LNRS, and also act a framework/set of principles to work with wider partners and partnerships. It will be refined and developed by the CLNP as work is developed.*