

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Report to Cabinet**

**16th April 2024**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Nature Recovery Declaration</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>Councillor Nigel Yates - Portfolio Holder for Environment</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Katie Hampton - Biodiversity Officer David Smith – Head of Communities, Culture and Climate Change</b>
<b>WARDS INVOLVED:</b>	<b>All</b>

**Appendices Attached**

**Appendix One: Nature Recovery Declaration SMDC**

**1. Reason for the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to acknowledge that we are facing a nature emergency and to identify steps that the District Council can take in response.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the adoption of the Nature Recovery Declaration.

**3. Executive Summary**

- 3.1 The serious decline of nature has been highlighted since the UK began targeted species monitoring in 1970, with many habitats lost and remaining habitats in increasingly poor condition. The requirement to take action to reverse this decline is critical and is reflected in the statutory duty imposed on the Council by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (and subsequently the Environment Act 2021) to take appropriate action to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Many areas of the Council's work have an impact on nature and the co-benefits, ecosystem services and support that nature provides us with are considerable. These include (but are not limited to) enhanced mental and physical health, climate change adaption including urban cooling, better air quality, and improved access to green spaces.
- 3.2 The Council adopted a Climate Change Emergency Declaration on 10th July 2019. This declaration recognised the threat posed by climate change and

made a commitment to work with partners to make the Staffordshire Moorlands carbon neutral by 2030. The climate and nature emergencies are intrinsically linked – we cannot solve one without tackling the other. Nature recovery is key in tackling climate change, and climate is increasingly impacting wildlife.

- 3.3 The Council committed to producing a Plan for Nature and this was adopted by the Council in September 2023. The Plan was produced with support from the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The Plan provides a review of the existing state of nature within the Staffordshire Moorlands and recommends how and where nature recovery efforts should be prioritised.
- 3.4 The Nature Recovery Declaration would act as a formal acknowledgement by the Council of the current nature crisis and provide a strong commitment to nature's recovery.

#### **4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Aim 4 of the Corporate Plan for 2023-27 seeks to “*Protect and improve the environment*” and contains the following objective: “*Develop and implement a Plan for Nature*”. It is considered that the Nature Recovery Declaration will provide context behind the Council's wider nature and biodiversity ambitions and will reinforce the delivery of the Plan for Nature by providing a strong commitment to nature recovery, thereby helping meet this objective. Aim 4 also includes an objective to “*Develop plans to ensure effective use of Biodiversity Net Gain*”. Declaring a nature emergency and committing to its recovery will support the review of upcoming policy with nature and biodiversity net gain in mind and will also put into context any subsequent formal biodiversity strategy/action plan.
- 4.2 Nature fundamentally underpins a thriving and sustainable economy and healthy society<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, committing to its recovery helps to deliver priorities under Aim 1 of the Corporate Plan: “*To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work*”.

#### **5. Alternative Options**

- 5.1 To not adopt the Nature Recovery Declaration.

#### **6. Implications**

- 6.1 Community safety, including safeguarding and prevention of terrorism  
None.
- 6.2 Workforce

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<sup>1</sup> [www.hiwwt.org.uk/nature-emergency](http://www.hiwwt.org.uk/nature-emergency)

Delivery of the Plan for Nature will be through a Biodiversity Delivery Group(s) which is in the process of being established. It is anticipated that Heads of Service will be present at an 'overseeing' group and will be responsible for highlighting workforce issues in response to the development of project strands from the Plan for Nature.

In relation to the Nature Recovery Declaration itself, no significant resource requirements have been identified.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment  
None.

6.4 Financial Considerations  
The adoption of the Nature Recovery Declaration itself is not anticipated to present any financial requirements. Financial considerations in the context of the delivery of the Plan for Nature are considered separately.

6.5 Legal  
Local Authorities do not have a statutory obligation to adopt a Nature Recovery Declaration. However, Local Authorities do have a strengthened duty under the Environment Act 2021 to conserve and enhance biodiversity. It is considered that the adoption of a Nature Recovery Declaration is fully in line with duty.

6.6 Climate Change and Sustainability  
The Climate Change Officer has been and will continue to be consulted when overlap is identified with the delivery of the Climate Change Action Plans.

6.7 Conservation and Enhancement of Biodiversity  
The concept of adopting a Nature Recovery Declaration is fully in line with the Council's commitment to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

6.8 Consultation  
Discussions to inform this report have taken place with selected elected members, in meetings with partners such as the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, with the relevant head of service and at officer level.

6.9 Risk Assessment  
None.

**ANDREW P STOKES**  
**Chief Executive**

## **Web Links and**

### **Background Papers**

2023 'State of Nature' report (<https://stateofnature.org.uk/>)

2010 'Making space for nature' (the 'Lawton review') (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-space-for-nature-a-review-of-englands-wildlife-sites-published-today>)

Staffordshire Moorlands District Plan for Nature ([https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/media/8679/Staffordshire-Moorlands-Plan-for-Nature---2023/pdf/Staffordshire\\_Moorlands\\_Plan\\_for\\_Nature\\_-\\_September\\_2023.pdf?m=1697009095627](https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/media/8679/Staffordshire-Moorlands-Plan-for-Nature---2023/pdf/Staffordshire_Moorlands_Plan_for_Nature_-_September_2023.pdf?m=1697009095627))

## **Contact details**

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## **7. Background and Introduction**

- 7.1 Nature is in long term decline. The number and abundance of species has declined significantly and continues to do so. The 2023 State of Nature Report<sup>2</sup> revealed that UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth: for example, the abundance of terrestrial and freshwater species has on average fallen by 19% across the UK since 1970, with 2% extinct in Great Britain and a further 16% threatened with extinction.
- 7.2 The Lawton Review<sup>3</sup> highlighted that wildlife sites in England did not comprise a coherent and resilient ecological network that is also capable of coping with the challenge of climate change and other pressures. In order to reverse this decline, there must be more space given to wildlife, existing wild spaces must be expanded, the quality of existing wild spaces should be improved and the connectivity between wild spaces must be increased.
- 7.3 The Council's Community Climate Change [and Nature] Fund<sup>4</sup> provides small scale grants to community-based organisations taking measures locally to tackle the climate and nature emergency. Therefore, the Fund could facilitate some individual project strands from the Plan for Nature moving forwards.

## **8 Legislation**

- 8.1 The publication of the Environment Act 2021 was a key step in committing to nature's recovery, and essentially serves to operate as the UK's new framework of environmental protection.
- 8.2 The Act also introduced the 'Biodiversity Net Gain' requirement, which included a new statutory duty for local authorities to 'conserve and enhance' biodiversity. The enhanced duty includes new biodiversity reporting requirements for local authorities.
- 8.3 There is also a requirement for responsible authorities (Staffordshire County Council) to develop mandatory spatial strategies for nature: Local Nature Recovery Strategies or 'LNRS', with support from stakeholders including Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

## **9 Plan for Nature**

- 9.1 The Plan for Nature was developed in conjunction with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. It is essentially a review of review of the existing state of nature within the Staffordshire Moorlands and recommends how and where nature recovery efforts should be prioritised.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-space-for-nature-a-review-of-englands-wildlife-sites-published-today>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/article/6706/Community-Climate-Change-Fund>

- 9.1 We are looking to formalise the actions and recommendations outlined within the Plan for Nature into a formal council biodiversity strategy/action plan in due course.
- 9.2 There are a number of targets and key actions within the Plan for Nature which can be developed through projects with community groups, changes to council management practices, projects on council-owned land, and other means.

## **10 Nature Recovery Declaration**

- 10.1 The requirement to take action to reverse nature decline is urgent. Nature provides us with many vital support systems and co-benefits. Many areas of the Council's work have an impact on nature, and as such the Council has responsibilities to make decisions to protect and enhance it. The Nature Recovery Declaration has been developed by the Wildlife Trusts and is proposed to serve as a formal acknowledgement of the current nature crisis.
- 10.2 The Nature Recovery Declaration recognises the 'Bigger, Better, More and Joined Up' principles of the Lawton Review and sets out a number of commitments to support the recovery of nature across the Staffordshire Moorlands. Many of these are in line with the aims outlined within the Plan for Nature, existing work streams, and statutory requirements including Biodiversity Net Gain and supporting the development of Staffordshire County Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 10.3 The climate crisis and nature crisis are strongly linked. The decline of nature has been caused by human activities, including the destruction of natural habitats, demand for too many natural resources, and releasing harmful emissions to air and water. The decline of nature is further accelerated by climate change, with weather and temperature changes making it harder for many plants and animals to survive and adapt.
- 10.4 Nature recovery, including strategic planting and habitat creation, can help address the climate crisis through increased carbon sequestration, natural flood management techniques, and shading through tree canopy cover, to name a few co-benefits.
- 10.5 A Nature Recovery Declaration would provide context and backing behind the Council's wider biodiversity and nature ambitions. It would reinforce the delivery of the Plan for Nature, including developing individual project strands and incentivising the review of existing Council policy and management practices, by providing a strong commitment to nature recovery.
- 10.6 Similar to the approach taken with the Climate Change Emergency Declaration and the development of Climate Change Action Plans, a Nature Recovery Declaration would lay the foundations for the development of any subsequent formal biodiversity strategy/action plan.

10.7 Taking all of the above into consideration, it is recommended that the Council adopts the proposed Nature Recovery Declaration.