

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

3 December 2024

TITLE:	Plan for Nature Delivery
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Nigel Yates - Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Environment
CONTACT OFFICER:	Katie Hampton, David Smith, Gillian Wright - Biodiversity Officer, Head of Communities, Culture and Climate Change, Climate Change & Biodiversity Officer
WARDS INVOLVED:	All

Appendices Attached –Staffordshire Moorlands Plan for Nature

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The report sets out the next steps for delivering the Staffordshire Moorlands Plan for Nature, following its adoption by the Council in October 2023. This includes:
- an outline of the proposed governance structure;
 - a broad action plan;
 - timescales; and
 - proposals for reporting.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the proposed governance structure responsible for delivering the Staffordshire Moorlands Plan for Nature.
- 2.2 That the Cabinet notes the content of the report by way of an update on the Plan for Nature.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The serious decline in nature has been highlighted in recent years, with many habitats lost and remaining habitats in increasingly poor condition, threatening various species with extinction.
- 3.2 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 enhanced by the Environment Act 2021) to take appropriate action to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

- 3.3 Many areas of the Council's work have an impact on nature and the co-benefits, ecosystems and the support that nature provides us with are invaluable. These include (but are not limited to) enhanced mental and physical health, climate change adaptation including urban cooling and flood management, better air quality, and improved access to green spaces.
- 3.4 The Council adopted a Nature Recovery Declaration on 16 April 2024 which recognised the nature crisis and made a commitment to work with partners to support the recovery of nature across the Staffordshire Moorlands. Similarly, back in October 2019, the Council adopted a Climate Change Emergency Declaration which recognised the threat posed by climate change and made a commitment to work with partners to tackle climate change. 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 change is increasingly impacting wildlife.
- 3.5 The Council developed a Plan for Nature with support from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The Plan for Nature was formally adopted by the Council in October 2023. 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.
- 3.6 Through development of the Plan for Nature, it has been identified that a robust governance structure needs to be established to facilitate delivery of the Plan, and enable transparent and comprehensive reporting against targets in the Plan. Cross-departmental working will be key to ensure that nature is considered across all the Council's operations.
- 3.7 The Plan for Nature initiatives will ensure alignment with climate adaptation, nutrient neutrality, biodiversity net gain, and the Council's other strategies including the Green Spaces Strategy. There may also be consideration in the future to offsetting emissions.

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*". The Plan for Nature has been produced in accordance with Aim 4.
- 4.2 Nature fundamentally underpins a thriving and sustainable economy and healthy society . Therefore, committing resources to nature's 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 approve the proposed governance structure for the Staffordshire

6. Implications

6.1	<p><u>Community safety, including safeguarding and prevention of terrorism</u></p> <p>None</p>
6.2	<p><u>Workforce</u></p> <p>Cross-departmental officer groups, working with our communities where possible, will facilitate delivery of the Plan, headed by the Biodiversity Officer.</p> <p>Delivery of the Plan for Nature will be overseen at officer level by the existing Climate and Biodiversity Delivery Group (CBDG), and at member-level by the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG).</p> <p>Heads of Service will be responsible for highlighting workforce issues in response to the development of project strands from the Plan for Nature.</p>
6.3	<p><u>Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment</u></p> <p>No impacts identified at this stage but the potential impacts of any projects emerging from the delivery plan will be revised at that stage.</p>
6.4	<p><u>Financial Considerations</u></p> <p>Council activity is funded through individual service budgets.</p> <p>Funding for community groups is available through the Council's Climate Change and Nature Fund.</p> <p>The Council has an earmarked reserve for Climate Change which currently stands at £300,000.</p>
6.5	<p><u>Legal</u></p> <p>Local Authorities have a strengthened duty under the Environment Act 2021 to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The duty requires the authority from time to time consider what action it can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity ("general biodiversity objective").</p> <p>Establishing robust mechanisms for delivering the Plan for Nature (including reviewing funding, resources and governance for its</p>

	delivery), will help the Council to meet its duty.
6.6	<p><u>Climate Change and Sustainability</u></p> <p>Delivery of the Plan for Nature supports the Council's commitment to address climate change.</p>
6.7	<p><u>Conservation and Enhancement of Biodiversity</u></p> <p>The delivery of the Plan for Nature is fully in line with the Council's commitment to conserve and enhance biodiversity.</p>
6.8	<p><u>Consultation</u></p> <p>Discussions to inform the delivery of the Plan for Nature have taken place with the Climate Change Working Group, in meetings with partners including the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, and with relevant Officers.</p>
6.9	<p><u>Risk Assessment</u></p> <p>An adaptation risk assessment is to be carried out with Defra's reporting programme. This may highlight some nature based solutions to adapt to climate change.</p>

Anna Eastgate
Executive Director (Community Services)

**Web Links and
Background Papers**

www.staffs Moorlands.gov.uk/Nature-Biodiversity

<https://democracy.highpeak.gov.uk/documents/s35686/Plan%20for%20Nature.pdf>

[Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#)

Contact details

Katie Hampton, David Smith, Gillian Wright
Biodiversity Officer, Head of Communities,
Culture and Climate Change, Climate
Change & Biodiversity Officer
katie.hampton@highpeak.gov.uk,
david.smith@highpeak.gov.uk,
gillian.wright@highpeak.gov.uk

7. Background

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 Report¹ revealed that UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth which is a shocking fact: for example, the abundance of terrestrial and

¹ <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

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 Review² 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.

8. Legislation

- 8.1 The publication of the Environment Act 2021 was a key step for the Government 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 a 'Biodiversity Net Gain' requirement, which among other things (including imposing a minimum 10% net gain requirement for developers in the planning process) included a new statutory duty for local authorities to 'conserve and enhance' biodiversity. It is therefore key that local authorities have robust plans and strategies for improving biodiversity to help meet this duty. The enhanced duty also includes new statutory biodiversity reporting requirements for local authorities.
- 8.3 The Environment Act also introduced 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. The Council has been involved in the development of the LNRS from an early stage and has ensured that information from the Plan for Nature has fed into the process.

9. Other strategic context

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2014 - 2033)

- 9.1 Local plans provide a framework for delivering development over a set period. They should reflect the views of local communities and aim to contribute towards wider social, economic, and environmental objectives.
- 9.2 The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan was adopted in 2020 and sets out the Council's vision and strategy for the district until 2033. The Local Plan identifies the main priorities which the Council will focus its resources on.
- 9.3 The Plan for Nature will contribute towards a number of spatial aims and spatial objectives in the Local Plan:

SA1: "*Creating distinctive, sustainable, self-supporting settlements*".

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-space-for-nature-a-review-of-englands-wildlife-sites-published-today>

SA2: *“Meeting the needs of our communities”*.

SA4: *“Maintaining a quality environment and special places”*.

SO2: *“To create a District where development minimises its impact on the environment, helps to mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change and makes efficient use of resources”*.

SO8: *“To promote local distinctiveness by means of good design and the conservation, protection and enhancement of historic, environmental and cultural assets throughout the District”*.

SO9: *“To conserve and improve the character and distinctiveness of the countryside and its landscape, heritage, biodiversity and geological resources”*.

SO10: *“To deliver sustainable, inclusive, healthy and safe communities”*.

Green Spaces Strategy (2024 – 2034)

- 9.4 The Green Spaces Strategy was developed to help the Council focus its internal resources and attract additional resources / funding, to enhance the Council’s green spaces further and ensure they are maintained effectively in the future. Six sites have been selected initially under the Green Spaces Strategy for developing detailed site management plans.
- 9.5 Parks and green spaces provide an important opportunity for improving biodiversity across the District. Biodiversity enhancements will be included when creating the individual management plans for the six ‘pilot’ sites under the Green Spaces Strategy. This will be addition to progressing wider changes in mowing regimes and greater cross-departmental working.

Climate Change

- 9.6 The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, and published subsequent action plans in 2021 which set out the Council’s proposed actions to combat climate change. Within the action plan there are 7 pillars, including ‘look after our environment’, which contained the following actions:
- Increase tree cover and improve nature.
 - Protect and extend the existing green infrastructure.
 - Reduce the risk from flooding.
 - Work in partnership with our communities, including the most vulnerable.

Other relevant strategies

- 9.7 The Council’s Tree Strategy was published in 2016. Although described as a strategy, it is an operational guide for the management of trees and woodlands in the Staffordshire Moorlands, which the Council has duties and responsibilities for. An opportunity has been identified to create a new the Tree

Strategy to include targets for increasing canopy cover, linking with climate change adaptation and the woodland habitat opportunity mapping within the Plan for Nature.

- 9.8 The Move More Strategy is a partner strategy which has been adopted by the Council. The core value of the strategy is “*Together, our aim is for everyone across the Staffordshire Moorlands to move more every day and to provide greater support to those that need it most*”. In alignment with this value, work on nature walks has been developed throughout 2024, through connections with local groups and partners.

10. Plan for Nature

- 10.1 The Plan for Nature was developed in conjunction with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. It is essentially a review of the existing state of nature within the Staffordshire Moorlands and recommends how and where nature recovery efforts should be prioritised by the Council.
- 10.2 There are several targets and key actions within the Plan for Nature which can be delivered through projects with community groups, changes to Council management practices, projects on council-owned land, and other means.
- 10.3 One of the key targets in the Plan for Nature is to “*ensure that 30% of all land in the Staffordshire Moorlands [is] protected and looked after so that wildlife can thrive there*” by 2030. Reviewing the management and maintenance of council-owned green spaces and assets for habitat improvement potential will be key to meeting this target.
- 10.4 Habitat mapping and modelling within both the Plan for Nature and resources such as the Net Gain Staffordshire portal³ display key locations that are strategically significant for the creation and enhancement of different habitats; creating and strengthening nature recovery networks.
- 10.5 The Vision within the Plan for Nature is one of important habitats and wildlife corridors forming a robust network where wildlife can migrate, live and breed. Woodlands, hedges and verges, rivers, species-rich meadows, peatlands and moorland will be flourishing across the Moorlands, with traditional orchards making a come-back in urban green spaces.
- 10.6 The purpose of the Vision is to provide the Council with something to work towards when delivering actions. Fundamentally, the vision is for a district rich in wildlife, with connected corridors of sites in good condition, and the Council leading the way in sustainable planning, collaborative working, community projects and good quality green infrastructure.

11. Governance Structure

³ <https://netgainstaffs.com/>

The following section sets out further detail on the proposed governance structure responsible for delivering the Plan. The structure covers work across the Alliance.

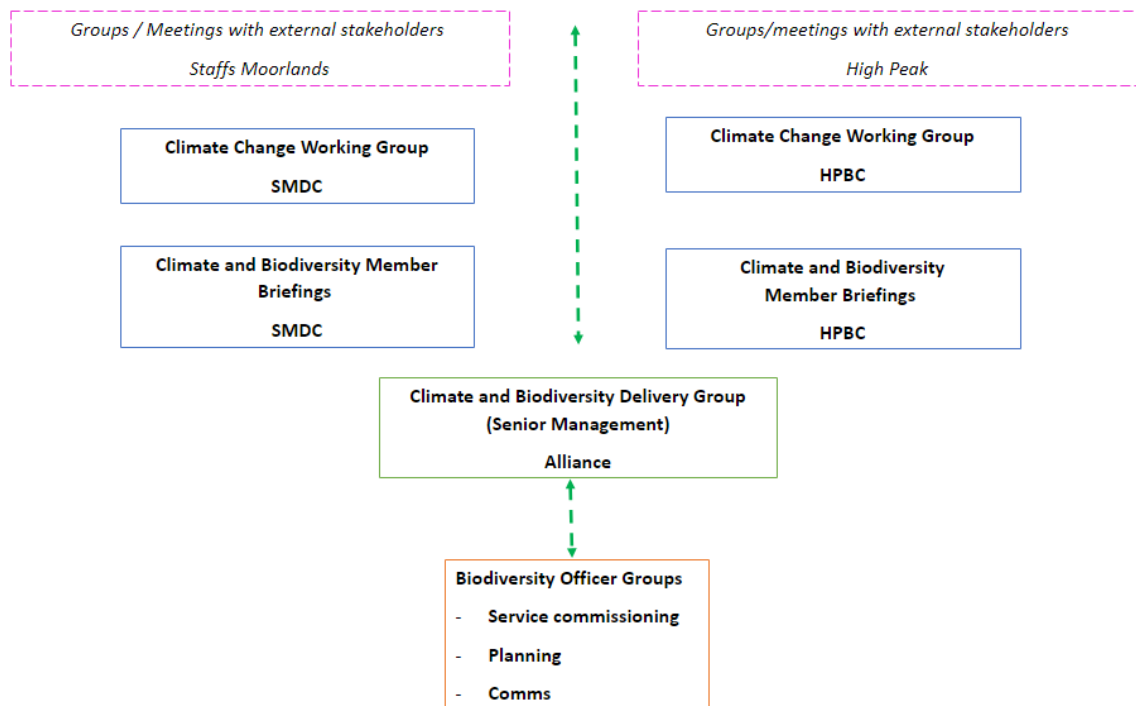


Figure 1: Simplified Governance Structure - Plan for Nature

- 11.1 Officer groups have already been established and meet regularly to progress biodiversity work across the Alliance.
- 11.2 There is an existing 'Climate and Biodiversity Delivery Group' which includes Heads of Service and senior management. This group meets regularly to discuss overall strategy, actions, key projects, approve workstreams, etc.
- 11.3 Member briefings have also been set up to inform portfolio holders on work completed to date, and to guide long term strategy and vision.
- 11.4 The Plan for Nature and biodiversity agenda is regularly discussed at the Climate Change Working Group to give all members an opportunity to input and provide oversight on delivery. The Terms of Reference are being reviewed by the Executive Director for Communities.
- 11.5 A review of relevant external stakeholders has been undertaken and is presented within Appendix 1. As can be seen, most external stakeholders are represented on existing groups, networks and meetings – including the County Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and the Moorlands Green Network. Furthermore, it is intended to engage with Towns and Parish Councils through the Parish Assembly.
- 11.6 Consideration has been given to establishing an external stakeholder group for the Moorlands; however, the stakeholder mapping exercise at Appendix 1

suggests that such a group is not needed at this stage. If required, this can be reviewed further down the line into delivering on the Plan for Nature.

12. Action Plan

- 12.1 The Plan for Nature contains a high level of detail and numerous suggestions for the Council to explore to support nature's recovery across the Staffordshire Moorlands.
- 12.2 The Council has the potential to have substantial positive impacts on the environment, through land that is owned or influenced by the council, changes to planning policy, and relationships with key stakeholders and community groups, by means of some examples.
- 12.3 Any actions should sit behind the wider context of a 'nature recovery network', which is represented in mapping presented within the Plan for Nature, on the Staffordshire Net Gain portal, and which will form a key part of the LNRS. Actions taken by the Council will help to achieve the vision within the Plan.
- 12.4 A high-level outline action plan is provided below which builds upon the recommendations provided within the Plan and indicates timescales for delivering these actions. The purpose of this is to provide members with a high-level overview of what is required, before any detailed action plan / strategy is developed.
- 12.5 A more detailed action plan / strategy will be needed to support the delivery of the Plan. This will be developed and presented to the Climate Change Working Group for consideration in Q3 2025 before final sign-off by the Cabinet. The detailed action plan will build upon the high-level action plan presented below, and will take into consideration the following points:
 1. Set out objectives clearly and concisely.
 2. Provide detail of the tasks for the Council to deliver to meet those objectives.
 3. Establish a clear, finite timeline. (For work which is ongoing, this will be embedded into wider Council operations by a set deadline).
 4. Assign resources to actions.
 5. Assign responsibilities for actions.
 6. How we report performance against actions.

Focus	Lead Service Area	Actions	Challenges / Considerations
Key – SMDC influence		<p><i>Direct Influence (likely to lead to direct action by the Council, e.g. improving biodiversity on our parks and green spaces)</i></p> <p><i>Moderate Influence (Council likely to influence others to take action, e.g. citizen science projects)</i></p> <p><i>Lower Influence (Council less likely to influence action, e.g. external landowners, government farm schemes)</i></p>	
Council-owned land / green spaces	Leisure and Environmental Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity improvements (through habitat enhancement, restoration and creation) on council-owned land and green spaces (including parks, residential verges, etc), which also contribute towards carbon sequestration. This should include urban meadow creation, tree planting and hedgerow creation. • Carry out surveys to ensure ‘right habitat, right place’, or capital works such as planting and wildlife boxes. • Create management plans for sites under the Green Spaces Strategy. 	<p>Existing equipment from traditional management may no longer be suitable and staff may need to be upskilled in certain areas.</p> <p>Lack of community engagement on land changes can result in complaints so good communication and relationships with residents are key.</p>
Contracts	Leisure & Environmental Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review management and maintenance regimes and contracts. • Change mowing regimes for improved biodiversity. • Review herbicides / pesticides with 	<p>Potentially long timescales / lead times for discussions before a position is reached to amend contracts.</p> <p>Contracts with external organisations – limited influence to amend these?</p> <p>AES need to be on board with any of these</p>

		<p>aim of reducing overall usage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with our bedding supplies to ensure that they have a pathway to zero peat usage whilst increasing benefits for pollinators. 	<p>points before we can implement. New equipment may be required for mowing longer grass.</p> <p>Other solutions to herbicides / pesticides are emerging and effectiveness is not fully confirmed yet.</p> <p>Using peat free suppliers only may not necessarily be local suppliers.</p>
Surveying and designation	Communities & Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the quality (and number) of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) designated across the Staffordshire Moorlands by contracting professional survey and assessment work. • Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to identify priority preliminary LWS (pLWS) sites for survey. This will likely be based on the list of SWT maintained sites and proposed management sections provided in the Plan for Nature. • Work with partners to improve the quality and management of SSSI sites for biodiversity. 	<p>Relatively new approach so some risks and opportunities are unknown.</p> <p>Lack of engagement with and responses from landowners will affect how quickly sites can be progressed.</p> <p>Potentially long lead times between surveying and designation due to the analysis/research/due diligence that is required.</p>
Communications	OD & Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness via the council's website and social media channels to encourage the wider public to take action for nature, including a 'Team Wilder' seasonal activity calendar. • Review potential for setting up a competition / rewards scheme / 	<p>Communications should be targeted and serve a purpose, without 'clogging up' the message through information overload.</p> <p>Wider website development to be completed before interactive Plan for Nature webpages can be progressed.</p>

		<p>survey related to wildlife gardening, based on the suggestions provided in the Plan for Nature.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority species campaigns – comms, potential to link to specific projects. The two species highlighted in the Plan for Nature are the curlew and the hedgehog. • QR codes (e.g. on lampposts) for species like swifts. • Interactive Plan for Nature webpages. • Promote community group events and works on Council media where appropriate. 	
Planning and development	Development Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the potential for setting up a council owned habitat bank. • Encourage and facilitate external habitat bank providers to deliver BNG locally in the Staffordshire Moorlands. 	<p>As a new market, there are unknowns in relation to long term viability. Successful evaluation of risks and opportunities may require external sources of advice and insight.</p> <p>A 30 year commitment introduces management and maintenance costs. Future development pressures must be considered when setting aside sites for nature.</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use section 106 money for strategic biodiversity improvements. 	<p>Multiple parties required in discussions – cross departmental working is key.</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure effective delivery of biodiversity net gain through robust internal systems and 	<p>Potential costs of additional software. Effective communication between officers is key.</p>

		processes.	Data management and storage – applications will build up over time, so this needs to be well thought out and organised.
Planning policy	Development Services	<p>Make biodiversity a key focus of Planning Policy (through adoption of supplementary planning guidance ‘SPG’), including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating features such as bird/bat/swift boxes on new development, insect hotels, pollinator friendly planting, nature based solutions. • Potential to adopt further supplementary planning guidance on biodiversity and BNG (there are suggestions in the Plan for Nature for development not subject to mandatory BNG). • Explore site designations and giving communities the opportunity to put forwards local nature sites. • Improve access to green infrastructure in line with the Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards and the existing Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy. <p>Develop a project to build on and deliver existing objectives within the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Various datasets could be overlaid to find the</p>	<p>Robust evidence needed for justifying any policies to the planning inspector. Long term financial viability and development pressures will need to be considered when setting aside sites for nature. This is especially relevant given new government housing targets. Potential pushbacks from developers resulting in ineffective delivery of biodiversity policy. ‘Bigger picture’ to be considered in relation to green infrastructure and connecting up areas.</p>

		<p>areas within settlements most in need of intervention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Tree Strategy to include a target for tree cover and woodland creation, and how this can be achieved. • Work with the County Council to develop the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, ensuring it underpins planning, development and land management decisions. 	<p>Any target must be realistic and achievable. Although the Council has direct influence over its own land, other considerations like amenity usage and future development allocation must be taken into account. The Council may have limited influence over large areas of privately owned land which are suitable for woodland creation.</p> <p>Multiple stakeholders involved in discussions. Short timescales imposed by Government for developing the strategy. Uncertainty surrounding how the LNRS can be incorporated into e.g. the SMDC Local Plan.</p>
Assets	Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Council assets for biodiversity improvement – identifying constraints and opportunities. • Assess buildings owned by the council regarding the suitability of implementing green infrastructure such as green roofs or walls, rain gardens, bird, bat and bug boxes, community orchards, wildlife friendly planting and greening of hard surfaces especially shared spaces. • Consider adopting Building with Nature standards for any new development on public land. 	<p>Officer resource and capacity is limited to undertake an assessment. Capital costs would need to be appropriately funded. It may not be suitable to progress green infrastructure changes e.g. on listed buildings.</p>

Citizens science and monitoring	Communities & Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run a citizens science project focussing on monitoring a priority species. The two species highlighted in the Plan for Nature are the curlew and the hedgehog. • Work alongside the Staffordshire Ecological Records centre and biodiversity groups to create clear, effective data collection methods. 	<p>Clear methodologies and data collection methods will be required. External advice may need to be sought.</p> <p>There will be more impact when campaigns are targeted to specific species.</p>
Strategizing and taking advantage of funding opportunities	Communities & Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design shovel-ready projects for when further funding streams become available, through cross-departmental working: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Climate change (NFM and adaption, tree planting). ○ Planning including tree officers, links with BNG and other green finance schemes. ○ Service commissioning (parks and open spaces). ○ Assets (green infrastructure). ○ Regeneration (large scale projects). ○ Boost populations of two wild species that have been identified as a priority for local conservation efforts, through producing a plan to secure funding to resource the species recovery work. The two species highlighted in the Plan for Nature are the curlew and 	<p>Funding applications often have short deadlines.</p> <p>Close working between departments will be required.</p> <p>Difficulty in deciding 'what & where' – how to prioritise?</p>

		the hedgehog.	
Landowner engagement	Communities & Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landowner engagement, particularly targeting moorland restoration, wetland creation, river restoration. Provide additional support e.g. advice on funding, grants etc – linking with SWT initiatives. • Deliver a biodiversity summit or similar event with major stakeholders and landowners. • Involvement with or creation of advisory groups for specific issues (such as river pollution/restoration). • Work and engage with specialist conservation groups and landowners / farmers, including to pursue nature friendly policies. 	<p>Relationships between landowners and authorities may historically not have been great.</p> <p>Difficulty engaging with individual landowners – other organisations/groups could facilitate this?</p> <p>Differing of opinions and interests when it comes to habitat restoration projects – common ground to be found.</p> <p>Getting attendance at meetings may be challenging.</p>
Community engagement	Communities & Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person community engagement days and workshops. Aiming for local groups to take ownership of projects to increase capacity, as well as helping to facilitate training needs. • Work with schools, communities and residential areas on team wilder projects such as wildlife gardening (a number of suggestions are provided in the Plan for Nature), hedgehog conservation, building-dependent biodiversity like swifts, etc. • Creation of a skills matrix to identify where communities can support and facilitate delivery of projects. 	<p>Knowledge levels with different groups will vary – any major projects or decisions must primarily be informed by published evidence and guidance, professional judgment, and best practice.</p> <p>Potential to take up a considerable amount of officer time/resource.</p>

Partnership work	Communities & Climate Change	<p>Actions to include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close involvement and partnership working on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire. • Working with the Wildlife Trust on the Nature In Your Neighbourhood project. • Partnership working with members of the Moorlands Green Network. • Closer working relationships with larger authorities such as the Peak District National Park authority, RSPB, etc. 	<p>Clear aspirations, aims and outcomes should be set, to ensure that any meetings are valuable.</p> <p>Different organisations have different priorities and visions.</p> <p>Potentially hard to engage with larger organisations and NGOs in terms of receptiveness.</p>
Cemeteries	Leisure & Environmental Services	<p>Leek Cemetery and Buxton Road Cemetery are owned by SMDC.</p> <p>Furthermore, other churchyards and cemeteries are mown by AES regardless of ownership.</p> <p>Actions to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating meetings between management teams, church representatives and ecological experts. • Creation of management plans for Leek Cemetery and Buxton Road Cemetery. 	<p>Representatives of other 'eco churches' could be invited to meetings to provide valuable input and advice.</p> <p>Lead times with altering mowing regimes etc must be considered along with wider public perception.</p>
Nature education	Communities & Climate Change	<p>Promote a wider understanding of the importance of biodiversity and connect more people with nature, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature walks and trails. • Work with schools. 	<p>Officer capacity and resource to be considered in addition to who can lead wider initiatives.</p> <p>Costs associated with signage in parks.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretative nature signage in parks and open spaces. 	
Nature Based Solutions and Climate Change – adaption and air quality	Communities & Climate Change	<p>Establish and explore projects to benefit nature and climate, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural flood management including pond and wetland creation, river restoration, etc. • Tree planting for shading (adaption). 	<p>Project success will depend on availability of funding.</p> <p>No one-size-fits all solution – should be considered on a site-by-site basis.</p> <p>Limited officer resource and capacity to lead on projects.</p> <p>Influence depends on land ownership etc. Will be lower for e.g. river restoration as compared to higher for tree planting on council land.</p>
Water quality and river restoration	Communities & Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a measurable target for rivers, streams and wetlands in consultation with other stakeholders. • Work with catchment-based partnerships such as the Dove Catchment Partnership on projects. • Work with partner agencies to create publicly accessible reports on the ecological health of watercourses in the Staffordshire Moorlands, which will help to inform future conservation efforts. 	<p>Many stakeholders in this area. It will be key to tap into existing partnerships, to avoid duplication.</p> <p>Water quality is a controversial topic. SMDC may have limited influence over certain aspects/improvements as a district council, and not owning/having responsibility for most watercourses.</p> <p>Reporting may be more appropriate coming from government bodies like the Environment Agency.</p>

Other	Communities & Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review other relevant Council policies, procedures and partnerships and integrate with the Plan for Nature where appropriate to ensure that nature is considered across all Council operations. • Provide suitable training opportunities for officers and councillors on nature / biodiversity to improve skills across the organisation. • Working with other key bodies, particularly town/parish and county councils, neighbouring borough/district councils, and key wildlife bodies such as Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to ensure joined up approach and less silo working. • Closer working with the County council in relation to verges, and also hedgerow connectivity. • Set a target for the Churnet Valley, following on from / supporting the Churnet Valley Masterplan. 	<p>Close working between Council departments required. All Heads of Service and Directors need to be 'on-board' with nature targets and aspirations. Both nature and climate need to be integrated into core operations.</p> <p>Encourage staff and members to get 'on-board' with training.</p> <p>Make use of existing links/meetings/groups with e.g. parish councils and county council.</p>
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13. Budget / Funding Considerations

- 13.1 The Council's Community Climate and Nature Fund⁴ 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 forward. However, scope is limited by the maximum award amount of £600 per project. In addition, this could be less appropriate for making biodiversity improvements or funding surveys on council owned land.
- 13.2 Existing budgets and potential external funding options will be reviewed before deciding whether a separate budget should be requested to make larger changes and enhancements on council-owned land and assets (including surveys), to contribute towards reaching the targets committed to within both the Plan for Nature and Nature Declaration.
- 13.3 One alternative to setting an annual budget for Plan for Nature delivery could be to set up annual funding streams which focus on different areas/topics in the Plan for Nature that interested stakeholders can apply to (essentially larger, more specific grants compared to the existing Community Climate and Nature Fund). Project strands under this option could include support for pLWS owners, tree planting, wetland creation, natural flood management, peatland/moorland restoration, monitoring and citizens science, priority species conservation, etc. This option could be explored further in the medium term, depending on how successful delivery of the Plan is being met taking into account initial reporting against targets.

14. Reporting

- 14.1 The following section details the associated reporting requirements (both statutory and voluntary) for the Council in relation to nature and biodiversity.
- 14.2 Public authorities will be required to report back to the Government on how they are meeting their biodiversity duties, including details of biodiversity net gain units consented within planning. The first statutory biodiversity report to Government must be submitted by 1 January 2026. Thereafter, reports must be submitted at least once every 5 years.
- 14.3 It is proposed to publish annual reports on progress against Plan for Nature targets. These will be separate to the Climate Change Annual Reports, in which a summary will be included. The purpose of the annual reports will be for transparent reporting on projects and actions taken by the Council to improve biodiversity and progress against targets. The reports are intended to satisfy (and go above and beyond) the statutory requirements described above. Every 5 years, a more detailed report will be required to fulfil statutory obligations – for example, including details of BNG delivery secured through the planning process.

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<https://www.highpeak.gov.uk/CommunityClimateChangeFund#:~:text=The%20High%20Peak%20Community%20Climate,to%20tackle%20the%20climate%20emergency.>

30% Target

- 14.4 The Plan for Nature includes a target to ‘ensure that 30% of all land in the Staffordshire Moorlands [is] protected and looked after so that wildlife can thrive there’ by 2030. Quantitative data will be required to report progress against this target.
- 14.5 Work to contribute towards this target will include direct interventions on Council-owned land; and more indirect working with (and influencing) external stakeholders, organisations and landowners.
- 14.6 30% was selected as the Plan for Nature target to align with wider Government commitments to protect 30% of the UK’s land by 2030⁵ (also known as ‘30by30’).
- 14.7 The Government have released guidance which defines what counts against its 30by30 target:
- Areas contributing towards 30by30 will include land within and beyond Protected Areas. These areas should be well-connected with each other and with the wider landscape. 30by30 areas should be making progress towards ‘in-situ conservation outcomes⁶’, should be effectively conserved and managed for nature with this sustained over the long-term. If the area is not a protected area, it must be recognised as an ‘Other Effective area-based conservation measure’ or ‘OECM’ – the Government is currently developing a mechanism for formal recognition of OECMs in England.
 - 30by30 areas should meet the following 3 criteria:
 1. **Purpose** – will the purposes or management objectives for the area ensure the delivery of in-situ conservation outcomes.
 2. **Protection** – is the conservation of this area secured for at least 20 years through legal or other effective means.
 3. **Management** – is there area effectively managed and monitored, and able to demonstrate overall progress towards in-situ conservation outcomes?
 - Protected areas include: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (which are in ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable recovering’ condition), National Nature Reserves, Ramsar sites, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, National Landscapes, National Parks. The Government has also calculated initial figures which include additional areas beyond the protected areas, including public woodland under favourable management for biodiversity.

⁵ A global 30by30 target was adopted (by the UK and others) at the UN Biodiversity Summit COP15 in December 2022, as part of an ambitious Global Biodiversity Framework.

⁶ In-situ conservation outcomes are defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity as: ‘the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties’.

- The Government states “New contributions towards 30by30 will be made on a voluntary basis, so encouraging and supporting buy-in from landowners and land-managers will be crucial to achieving this target. We will do this by integrating and streamlining 30by30 into existing mechanisms, such as Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes and Biodiversity Net Gain”.

14.8 Staffordshire Wildlife Trust should be able to calculate the 30by30 figures for the Moorlands in accordance with the Government guidance. If the Peak District National Park is not included in the figures, the value will reduce.

14.9 It is proposed to report on the 30by30 figures in the Council’s annual biodiversity reports using the Government methodology described above. However, as the Council has limited influence over designated sites (especially those under external landownership), this cannot be the only reporting the Council does. Therefore, it is also proposed to report against progress made on improving biodiversity at other sites the Council has more influence over, including:

- Parks and green spaces owned by the Council.
- BNG sites consented through the planning process.

14.10 The nature of reporting on these sites (i.e. quantitative or qualitative) will depend on datasets the Council has access to. For example, data is available on council land ownership across the Staffordshire Moorlands, but not the area currently ‘managed for wildlife’ (which can be considered a subjective definition). Accordingly, further analysis could be undertaken to estimate the percentage of this land that is currently managed for wildlife, the aim being to increase this with changes to management, habitat creation and enhancement over the coming years.

14.11 Other sites which are not owned by the Council and not designated, such as road verges, private land, etc, should also be considered against the wider targets in the Plan for Nature. However, it is unlikely that quantitative data could be obtained on these sites. Therefore, qualitative reporting could be more appropriate for these types of sites, such as details of collaborative working undertaken with the County Council, partnership with work community groups, etc.

15. Review of targets

15.1 When the Plan for Nature was developed, it was the intention to follow up with a public-facing strategy/action plan (which should include SMART targets).

15.2 As part of this exercise, the targets in the Plan for Nature require refinement. Furthermore, the timescales need reviewing and updating to reflect a more realistic timeframe – for example, a lot of the targets in the current document refer to deadlines of the ‘end of 2023’ (note: the Plan was only adopted in Oct 23) or the ‘end of 2024’, when in reality, developing the various project strands and initiatives will take longer.

15.3 Suggestions are provided in the table below for refined targets and timescales to form the basis of any subsequent, public-facing strategy/action plan, including realistic actions that SMDC can take as a district council (e.g. in relation to water targets).

#	Target in current Plan for Nature	Proposed / refined target
1	<p>By 2030, we will ensure that 30% of all land in the Staffordshire Moorlands will be protected and looked after so that wildlife can thrive there - focusing particularly on priority habitats and wildlife corridors as identified in the Nature Recovery Network mapping. Caring for our land in this way will provide many benefits for local people too – such as helping to reduce flooding, buffering us from extreme temperatures and making us more resilient to the impacts of climate change.</p>	<p>We will work towards ensuring that 30% of all land in the Staffordshire Moorlands is protected and looked after for wildlife by 2030, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct interventions on Council-owned land; and • Working with and influencing external stakeholders, organisations and landowners. <p>We will focus on improving priority habitats and wildlife corridors as identified in wider Nature Recovery Network mapping, and explore nature based solutions for climate change adaptation.</p>
2	<p>By the end of 2023, we will investigate the opportunities to reintroduce or boost populations of two wild species in the Staffordshire Moorlands that have been identified as being a priority for local conservation efforts. During 2024, we will produce a plan to secure funding to resource the species recovery work.</p>	<p>By the end of 2025, we will identify opportunities to support the populations of at least two wild species in the Staffordshire Moorlands that have been identified as a being a priority for local conservation efforts, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness; • Supporting citizens science and monitoring; • Partnership working with community groups and NGOs; and • Seeking funding for partners (such as the Wildlife Trust) to undertake more specialist species recovery work.
3	<p>By the end of 2023, we will set a measurable target to restore the rivers, streams and wetlands in the Staffordshire Moorlands that have been identified as being most in need of re-naturalisation, utilising the expertise of the Environment Agency, who monitor the ecological health and pollution levels in our watercourses, and other stakeholders. From 2025, we will work with partner agencies to create publicly accessible</p>	<p>From 2025, we will work with Catchment Partnerships to help contribute to restoring rivers, streams and wetlands in the Staffordshire Moorlands identified as most in need of intervention. In 2025, we will work with partners to hold a ‘Moorlands Water Day’ to raise awareness of the issues facing our local watercourses, provide advice and support, and encourage action.</p>

	reports on the ecological health of watercourses in the Staffordshire Moorlands, which will help to inform future conservation efforts.	
4	By the end of 2024, we will launch a citizen science project to involve local people in supporting wild species that are at risk in the Staffordshire Moorlands. The project will focus on supporting volunteers to collect data on species which have been identified as a priority by Staffordshire Ecological Record because population data is currently lacking/limited.	In 2026, we will launch a citizen science project to involve local people in supporting wild species that are at risk in the Staffordshire Moorlands. The project will focus on supporting volunteers to collect data on species which have been identified as a priority by Staffordshire Ecological Record because population data is currently lacking/limited.
5	By the end of 2024, we will set a measurable target to make our Local Wildlife Sites better for wildlife. Local Wildlife Sites are places that have been identified as some of the best wild habitats across the Staffordshire Moorlands. Work to improve them could include, for example, restoring wetland areas, increasing wildflower diversity on grassland areas and making woodlands better for birds and butterflies.	By the end of 2025, we will set a measurable target in collaboration with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to make our Local Wildlife Sites better for wildlife. This will include identification of actions and projects that SMDC can work on to improve LWS across the Moorlands, including close partnership working with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.
6	Target TBC - focusing specifically for the Churnet Valley, following on from / supporting the Churnet Valley Masterplan.	TBC
7	By the end of 2025, all residents of recognised settlements in the district will have adequate access to natural greenspace in line with the Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards.	Policy development: work with planning to improve protection of green spaces and greater designations, more emphasis on green infrastructure in planning policy, improve accessibility of existing parks, review Green Infrastructure Strategy and set out where actions can be linked with Plan for Nature, etc? What can SMDC itself do to improve access to green infrastructure?

16. Next steps

16.1 The next steps in the short term for the Plan for Nature, now that it has been adopted, will be as follows:

- Hold a community engagement day to raise awareness of the Plan for Nature, and facilitate kick-off of certain project strands with community groups, present the rationale, aims, implication regarding local green

spaces and ambitions to the Parish Assembly and the three Town Councils.

- Pull together a detailed action plan/strategy (as a public facing document) for delivering the Plan for Nature, which would set out key project strands, SMART targets, assign responsibilities, set out stakeholders, timescales, costs, etc.
- Agree detailed site criteria for quantitative reporting against 30% target, and establish robust databases / systems for tracking progress.
- Formally establish governance structure and set up additional stakeholder group(s) if required.
- Establish a 'nature and biodiversity' page on the Council's website, which will be built upon over time and will draw together relevant information to ensure the public is kept fully informed on how the Council is delivering against the Plan for Nature.

17. Conclusions

- 17.1 The Council has developed a Plan for Nature for Staffordshire Moorlands with support from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, in response to the Council's statutory duty to 'conserve and enhance' biodiversity. The Plan provides a review of the existing state of nature within the Staffordshire Moorlands and recommends how and where the Council should prioritise nature recovery efforts. This report sets out the 'next steps' to facilitate delivery of the Plan for Nature now that it has been adopted.
- 17.2 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the proposed governance structure for delivery of the Plan for Nature.
- 17.3 It is requested that the Cabinet notes the content of the report by way of an update on the Plan for Nature.

Appendix 1 – Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder	Presence on existing groups / meetings	SMDC involvement	Comments / potential future actions
Town and parish councils	Staffordshire Parish Councils Association	Parish assemblies Parish newsletters	Plan for Nature: Present the rationale, aims, implication regarding local green spaces and ambitions to the Parish Assembly and the three Town Councils.
Adjacent borough and district councils	LNRS meetings	Data and mapping group Habitat task and finish group Tree and woodland group?	Further working on verges and mowing is recommended, to share best practice and lessons learned.
	Staffordshire Ecologists Assemblé	Regular meeting attendance	
Staffordshire County Council	All LNRS groups	SMDC regular attendance at LNRS meetings.	Further working on verges is recommended, mowing, to share best practice and lessons learned. Can LNRS groups in some form be continued even once strategy is published?
Local community groups	Moorlands Green Network ⁷	SMDC regular meeting attendance.	Run engagement day for community groups. Continue partnership working on lottery project 'Nature In Your Neighbourhood' with SWT, Moorlands Climate Action, Outside Arts, Keele University, SCVYS.

⁷ Includes: Borderland Voices, Moorlands Climate Action, White Peak Farmers, Swifts of Leek, Gaming Potion and Tean Youth Club, Potteries Educational Trust, Churnet Valley Conservation Society, Dane Valley Climate Action Group, Waterway Images Ltd, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Caldron and Uttoxeter Canals Trust, SCVYS, Support Staffordshire, Outside Arts, Globe Foundation, Swainsley Fishing Club, Staffordshire County Council, AES, Manifold Community Action for Nature (CAN), Trent Headwaters and Trent Renew, Inland Waterways Association.

Stakeholder	Presence on existing groups / meetings	SMDC involvement	Comments / potential future actions
Walking groups	Move More	Service Commissioning department – work with Move More.	Better cross-departmental working to ensure biodiversity officer and communities officers are involved in projects. The service commissioning team has recently appointed a Community Engagement Lead. Greater community engagement work and ‘connecting the dots’ with different walking groups.
Staffordshire specialised groups / societies (e.g. amphibian and reptile group, bat group, etc)	LNRS species task and finish group	SMDC is not on this specific sub-group, but is on other LNRS groups.	Explore potential to link up with groups as required. Potential to invite to e.g. Moorlands Green Network meetings as external speakers?
Farmers / landowners	White Peak Farmers / Churnet Valley Farmers are on Moorlands Green Network	Attends Moorland Green Network	Use existing links with community groups to engage with farmer clusters. Attend events run by moorland conservation groups such as Moors for the Future. Meet with SCC LNRS Farmer Liaison Officer and link in with LNRS sub-group if possible. Review SWT farmer / landowner projects and link in if possible.
	Moors for the Future	Expected project specific	
	Nature Friendly Farming Network	None	
	Dove Catchment Partnership	Invited to meetings	
	LNRS sub-group	SMDC is not on this sub-group, but is on other LNRS groups.	
	Staffordshire Young Farmers	None	
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT)	LNRS Nature in Your Neighbourhood project	SMDC is closely involved with SWT and holds a Service	Further working and collaboration on Nature in Your Neighbourhood. Linking up on community projects such as

Stakeholder	Presence on existing groups / meetings	SMDC involvement	Comments / potential future actions
	Dove Catchment Partnership	Level Agreement for services and advice.	swift streets, wildlife gardening, etc.
Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA)	LNRS Peak SAC Working Group (nutrient neutrality) Dove Catchment Partnership	SMDC is on both of these groups. The Peak SAC group is less relevant to Staffordshire Moorlands.	There were previous 'Peak District Nature Recovery Strategies/Plan Group' meetings which have dropped off. We should explore options for closer working with PDNPA.
National Trust and other large estates	Unknown if on LNRS Dove Catchment Partnership	SMDC is not in a particular sub-group with National Trust, but is on other LNRS groups.	Explore how SMDC can better link up with other large estates and landowners.
RSPB	Unknown if on LNRS	SMDC is not in a particular sub-group with RSPB, but is on other LNRS groups.	Explore how SMDC can better link up with other NGOs such as RSPB.
Woodland Trust	LNRS tree and woodland sub-group?	SMDC tree officer and net zero officer invited to these.	Explore how SMDC can better link up with other NGOs such as the Woodland Trust.
Canal and River Trust	Unknown if on LNRS Assume on catchment groups?	SMDC on LNRS and catchment groups.	Explore how SMDC can better link up with other NGOs such as the Canal and River Trust. Join any catchment groups that we are not already on to link with watercourse stakeholders.
Smaller NGOs (bat and butterfly conservation trusts,	Unknown if on LNRS	SMDC is on a number of LNRS	Explore how SMDC can better link up and work with smaller NGOs.

Stakeholder	Presence on existing groups / meetings	SMDC involvement	Comments / potential future actions
etc)		groups.	
Environment Agency	LNRS sub-group Dove Catchment Partnership	SMDC is on a number of LNRS groups. SMDC has been invited to Dove Catchment Partnership meetings.	Strengthen EA contacts, especially in relation to water quality.
Natural England	LNRS Dove Catchment Partnership Peak SAC Working Group	SMDC attends these meetings Peak SAC group is less relevant to Staffordshire Moorlands.	More involvement with protected site strategy work and Catchment Sensitive Farming?
Forestry Commission	LNRS tree and woodland sub-group?	SMDC tree officer and net zero officer invited to these.	Explore specific projects which may require input from Forestry Commission.
NFU	LNRS Dove Catchment Partnership	SMDC is not on the farmer LNRS sub-group, but is on other LNRS groups. SMDC has been invited to Dove Catchment Partnership meetings.	SMDC to explore connections and how better to engage with farmers and landowners.

Stakeholder	Presence on existing groups / meetings	SMDC involvement	Comments / potential future actions
Dove catchment partnership	Dove catchment partnership meetings	SMDC has been invited to Dove Catchment Partnership meetings.	SMDC to strengthen involvement in catchment meetings.
Trent Rivers Trust	Dove catchment partnership meetings	SMDC has been invited to Dove Catchment Partnership meetings.	SMDC to strengthen involvement in catchment meetings.
United Utilities	Unknown	Unknown	Explore how SMDC can better link up and work with utilities companies?
Severn Trent	Dove Catchment Partnership	SMDC has been invited to Dove Catchment Partnership meetings.	SMDC to strengthen involvement in catchment meetings.
Local schools and scouts / guides	Buxton Wild Weeks initiative is expanding to Staffordshire Moorlands.	SMDC has been invited to be involved with Buxton Wild Weeks.	Greater involvement with 'Buxton Wild Weeks' in relation to the Staffordshire Moorlands.
Universities	Nature in your Neighbourhood – Keele University	SMDC is a partner in the Nature in Your Neighbourhood project.	Continue partnership working on Nature in Your Neighbourhood project
Tourism organisations and activities (e.g. Enjoy Staffordshire, Alton Towers,	LNRS sub-group Unknown if on LNRS	Officers in regeneration work closely with tourism	Further cross-departmental working in relation to tourism.

Stakeholder	Presence on existing groups / meetings	SMDC involvement	Comments / potential future actions
Staffordshire Moorlands Walking Festival)		organisations.	

