

Summary of Initial Engagement on Cheshire & Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy



Gathering your views for a Nature Friendly Cheshire and Warrington

Prepared for Cheshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy by
Cheshire West and Chester Council – November 2024

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1.0-Executive Summary

1.1- Background to the engagement

In Cheshire and Warrington, the responsible authority (RA) designated to carry out and lead on the development of the LNRS is Cheshire West & Chester Council. The Supporting Authorities, who are helping with the process and directing its preparation, include Cheshire East and Warrington Borough councils, Peak District National Park Authority. The work engages all three DEFRA Arms length bodies including Natural England, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission. The LNRS will be taken as a material consideration across all departments in the council and will be made statutory for the next 3-10 years. Future review of LNRSs will be determined within that timeframe by the Secretary of State.

The aim of the RA is to engage with their supporting authorities and key stakeholders, such as Farmers, Landowners, eNGO's, businesses, community groups and the general public to create an LNRS that everyone is able to deliver and use. With the LNRS aiming to be published by March 2025, CW&C began their engagement programme by developing the public survey to inform ambition for nature recovery across Cheshire and Warrington.

In January 2024, the public survey was launched as a pre-engagement to the public workshops (where we further developed the priorities longlist) to understand what the general public's, businesses, farmers, landowners and other stakeholders' priorities for nature recovery over the next 3-10 years. Within this survey, there was an opportunity to answer questions, which is the main topic for discussion for this report, to pledge actions for nature (showcasing people's actions for nature on a map) and for land owners to put forward potential sites for Biodiversity Net Gain and/or other environmental schemes to help us develop the opportunity map (Step 5 of the LNRS process).

1.2-Asking people for their feedback

On February 2nd 2024, Cheshire West and Chester council launched a questionnaire, supported by the Supporting Authorities and the LNP, to find out people's views on the state of nature and their nature recovery priorities for the LNRS to help achieve a nature positive future for Cheshire and Warrington. This survey was live for 11 weeks until April 20th2024, and was promoted at a range of meetings, via social media posts and short website articles as well as sharing of QR codes linking to the engagement webpage, to raise the awareness of the engagement and encourage people to respond.

1.3-Summary of responses

In total, 876 survey responses were received. Responses came from different sectors, including the agricultural and ecological sectors as well as, but not limited to, local authorities, businesses and tourists into the area.

The purpose of this document is to provide an analysis of the responses to the engagement on what priorities are needed for nature recovery over the next 10 years in Cheshire and Warrington.

It is recommended that this document be read alongside the public workshops report [[Cheshire LNRS public Workshops report v14](#)], to understand how the engagement helped to inform the public and LNP priorities shortlisting workshops.

Key messages

The key messages to emerge from the engagement were:

- Improvement in water quality is wanted by nearly all participants.
- “Nature friendly” street lighting was mentioned by some respondents.
- Many respondents commented that they would like more nature and gardening workshops/ education for residents.
- Some respondents commented that better awareness of nature could be achieved through the use of communications campaigns.
- Many respondents requested more natural greenspace in urban areas e.g. wildflower meadows.

1.4-How people responded

The majority of respondents to the survey identified as a Cheshire/Warrington resident, with 90% of respondents coming from the area, whilst 9% identified as coming from other areas outside of Cheshire, with majority coming from either the Wirral or Greater Manchester. Also, despite putting forward themselves as from other locations, majority of those put forward their profession rather than which location they were from. Of the 876 respondents, 6% were from the farming and landowning community, representing the largest sector in the group, with Ecological professionals at 5%. The lowest representative sector in the respondents were from the Utilities sector.

This was the first out of three stages of engagement during the LNRS process, with the following stages being the public workshops and the final being the public consultation on the draft LNRS. The aim of the report is to identify themes, which arose during the initial engagement stage and insight about what is deemed important to the people in Cheshire when they think about the future state of Cheshire and Warrington’s natural environment in 10 years’ time.

2.0- Background

In 2017, the UK Government set out their plans for the 25 year Environment plan. They set out a vision to “help the natural world regain and retain good health”. As part of this, they created the Environmental Improvement Plan 2021, revised in 2023. In the Environmental Improvement Plan, they have set out how they will address the declining state of nature and the actions needing to be taken for a Net Zero UK by 2050. One of these proposals was creating the Local

Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), a statutory document that aims to address the historic and ongoing declines of nature in England (DEFRA, 2023).

“Each local nature recovery strategy will agree priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has appointed 48 responsible authorities to lead on preparing a local nature recovery strategy for their area. Together these 48 [strategy areas](#) cover the whole of England with no gaps or overlaps.” (DEFRA,2023).

According to the UK State of Nature report, published in May 2023, the UK has been designated as one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, with it being in the bottom 10% globally (BBC,2021). Of 753 terrestrial and freshwater species studied, there has been a decline on average of 19% since 1970, with nearly one in six species being threatened with extinction from the United Kingdom (RSPB,2023).

Despite the UK’s status as being one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, it’s work on the global scale has helped to set up the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity framework’s goal of 30% of all terrestrial and marine land being nature rich by 2030 and it has set up the Green Finance initiative, whereby the UK government aims to achieve £500million of private investment into nature recovery by 2042 and become nature positive (DEFRA, 2023).

Locking in on the previous UK Government’s ambitions, the new UK Government has set up five priorities, one of which includes Nature’s recovery therefore the LNRS is best placed to help with the ambitions set to achieve a sustainable, nature positive environment.

“Today’s report shines a spotlight on the continuing declines of many of our native species, a trend symptomatic of the overall health of Nature and the wider environment in this country. If we are to get on track toward meeting our national target to become Nature-positive then we are going to need a big step up in the way we treat and value Nature.”

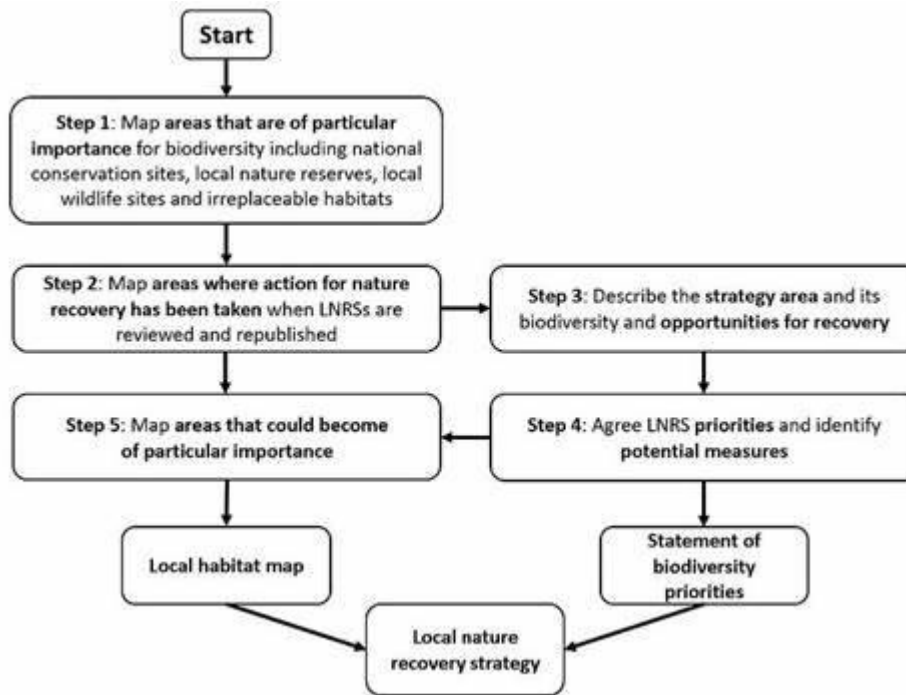
Source: Tony Juniper, chair of Natural England comment for DEFRA press office- **“The State of Nature Report highlights the importance of supporting biodiversity in the UK” [September 2023](#)**.

The UK government has committed to reversing the trend of nature’s decline to becoming nature positive by 2042. Prior to this, the UK lead the call to aim for all countries to achieve 30 by 30, with 30% of all land, coastal and marine areas protected and managed for nature by 2030, which was adopted in the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity framework talks in 2023 (UNEP, 2022). In addition to this, the UK government have set up the Green Finance Initiative in 2022, whereby they aim to increase investment into nature’s recovery and more nature-based solutions to the challenges facing us currently including Climate change, Economic and societal collapse. The aim is to get £500Bn of private investment into nature recovery by 2040. The cost to the global economy if nature’s decline were to go unchecked would be \$2.7trillion per year if ecological tipping points were reached (2021).

The Local Nature Recovery Strategies are the first step in achieving our goal as a country. A key part of the Environmental Improvement Plan (2023), was that 48 responsible authorities across England will work alongside key stakeholders and supporting authorities within their strategy area to develop and create the LNRS. The LNRS “will identify practical, achievable proposals developed with the input of people who know and understand the area, especially landowners

and managers” (DEFRA, June 2023). This is not limited to experts either as anyone can play a part in recovering nature and the wider environment and are key in helping to prepare this strategy. Everyone, from every sector, has an essential role in ensuring a healthier natural environment within their local area.

There are 5 steps required by Defra’s Statutory Guidance within the LNRS, as shown by the diagram below:



Source: DEFRA consultation: Local Nature Recovery Strategies (2021)

Towards the end of 2023, Cheshire West and Chester council (CW&C) began its pre-engagement process by developing the stakeholder engagement plan, which was subsequently agreed upon by the LNRS project board. Following the agreement, Cheshire West and Chester began to develop the first stage of the public/ stakeholder engagement process by developing the web page along with members of the LNP.

This followed a structured engagement process, which is reflected below:

- An early engagement on views, attitudes, and nature recovery priorities - to inform the development of the LNRS.
- Specialist technical engagement (to add to broader views) to qualify baseline, develop targets, identify priorities, inform initiatives and actions that may be advocated as part of the strategy.
- Round of in person workshops and online engagement with a range of stakeholders to review and refine these initial proposals.
- Draft strategy formal public consultation in line with statutory regulations and guidance.
- Final Strategy drafted for formal agreement and adoption by Supporting Authorities and LNP (on behalf of broader range of interests)

As part of the first stage of the engagement process, the following procedure was followed:

- Write and produce a questionnaire, pledge for nature map and call for sites map
- Receive and analyse responses to questionnaire
- Produce an engagement report at the end.

3.0-Structure of engagement

3.1- Engagement materials

The earliest stage of the engagement involved promotional activity and awareness raising, to feed into the first round of engagement. This was coordinated with Cheshire West and Chester, Warrington and Cheshire East Comms teams and included 4 elements:

- Promotion via website (as required by statutory guidance)
- Paid social media promotion for the LNRS
- Reaching out to key affected groups in advance
- Reaching out to the relevant local press and promoting the LNRS

As part of an early-stage engagement, Cheshire West and Chester Council engaged with the Cheshire population and with key stakeholders for a minimum of one month to identify a set of key themes and inform priorities for nature recovery. It ran alongside other targeted engagement, channels and opportunities identified with supporting authorities and partners to get key qualitative testimonies for the analysis of results. Some of these included:

1. **Video** introduction to LNRS to inspire engagement and need for action.¹
2. Online **Questionnaire** for public/all stakeholders.
3. To complement these, respondents were asked to **map places that are special to them and/or ideas for action**. These are visible to the public.
4. There was a separate opportunity for **landowners to register land** where they might be prepared to explore support/act for nature's recovery. This is and will be kept confidential, with data only being shared between the 3 authorities.
5. Everyone were also given the opportunity to **Pledge** things they are prepared to do to aid nature's recovery.

Opportunities 3 – 5 helped to capture tangible opportunities that might be incorporated in priority mapping, but also to consider how we might engage with organisations, businesses, groups and individuals to support/encourage them to deliver their own aspirations, capture or measure successes of ongoing contributions to nature's recovery going forward.

3.2- Other materials

Other materials that were also produced to help encourage engagement, included

¹ [Gathering your views for a nature-friendly Cheshire and Warrington | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)

- Pledge postcards.
- An article to the North West and North Wales Chamber of Commerce
- Social media posts by Cheshire West & Chester council, Cheshire East Council and Warrington Borough Council communications team.
- Local Nature Partnership members shared with their members an e-mail.
- DEFRA Funding master document, that was produced by ADAS, an agricultural consultancy.

3.3- How the engagement was carried out?

Due to the mixture of engagement methods involved during the early part of the process, the pledge postcards were shared across the county in the councils' offices, tourist information offices and in some boroughs' libraries at the end of the engagement period and post-engagement because the other elements, such as the pledge for nature and call for sites map remain live until the LNRS publication.

The engagement materials can be found on: [Gathering your views for a nature-friendly Cheshire and Warrington | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)

To ensure that the engagement targeted the general public and various other key stakeholders, Cheshire East and Warrington Borough Council developed their own webpages, which linked to the Cheshire West webpage. Other forms of communication came from e-mailing stakeholders, having online and in-person meetings and by creating a members briefing to go out to all the councillors in CW&C, in order for them to share with their residents.

A dedicated page was set up on Cheshire West's website which, along with the questionnaire, pledge for nature and call for sites map, included background information and a video on the engagement, a supporting document for farmers and landowners regarding the DEFRA grants and local advisor details was provided.






Although the survey and the pledge map was the main response method, people could also respond by sending an e-mail to the nature's recovery e-mail address: naturesrecovery@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk. This information was provided on the webpage along with our privacy guidelines.

4.0- Analysis of responses to the questionnaire

Each section contains figures for all responses received, however respondents may not have answered a question or left some questions blank.

The following answers related to questions 3,4, 5, 6,7 and 8 in the questionnaire. These questions allowed the respondent to correspond their concerns about the state of nature, the causes they believe have lead us to this point, what is nature worth to them individually and how we can reverse this trend to achieve a nature rich Cheshire and Warrington in 10 years' time.





4.1- To what extent do you agree or disagree that you are concerned about the state of nature in your local area








3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you are concerned about the state of nature in your local area?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Strongly agree		81%	699
2	Agree		15%	128
3	Neither agree nor disagree		3%	30
4	Disagree		1%	5
5	Strongly disagree		1%	5
			answered	867
			skipped	0

Strongly agree- 81%, Agree-15%, Neither Agree nor Disagree- 3%, Disagree- 1%, Strongly disagree- 1%.

The above chart shows that the majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed, (95%) that they are concerned about the state of nature in their local area.

4.2- Please indicate which of the following options you feel may be reasons why nature is under pressure....?

4. Please indicate which of the following options you feel may be reasons why nature is under pressure....?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Pollution		72%	619
2	Species loss		61%	525
3	Habitat loss		88%	761
4	Current lack of regulations/enforcement		59%	507

4. Please indicate which of the following options you feel may be reasons why nature is under pressure....?				
5	Climate Change		68%	588
6	People being disconnected from nature		52%	453
7	Lack of awareness		55%	472
8	Agricultural or forestry practices		46%	399
9	Invasive species		38%	331
10	Development		76%	654
11	Other (please specify):		21%	184
			answered	865
			skipped	2
Climate Change- 68%, People being disconnected from nature- 52%, Lack of awareness- 55%, Agricultural or forestry practices- 46%, Invasive species- 38%, Development- 76%, Other (please specify)- 21%				

The respondents were given the opportunity to answer a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 3 causes which they believed were the most impactful.












The above chart shows that, according to respondents, the two major causes of nature's decline are development and habitat loss.

Pollution and Climate Change were the third and fourth main causes raised as particularly important pressures on nature.

4.3- Please pick 3 of the following options in order of importance to you as to why you care about nature?

5. Please pick 3 of the following options in order of importance to you as to why you care about nature?		
Answer Choices	Response Percent	Response Total

5. Please pick 3 of the following options in order of importance to you as to why you care about nature'

1	....it is important for our physical health and wellbeing		46%	396
2	....it provides us with goods and services (e.g. food and raw materials)		16%	136
3	....it is important for our mental health and wellbeing		53%	461
4	....it protects us from natural hazards like flooding and pollution		52%	445
5	....it is important for our heritage and sense of identity		22%	187
6	....it is beautiful		24%	207
7	....it is important for our jobs and our businesses		4%	33
8	....I am a part of nature		33%	288
9	....it provides an essential service		11%	92
10	....it is important for education and skills		9%	75
11	....it is important for tackling climate change		59%	513
			answered	864

it is important for our physical health and wellbeing- 46%, it provides us with goods and services (e.g. food and raw materials)- 16%, it is important for our mental health and wellbeing- 53%, it protects us from natural hazards like flooding and pollution- 52%, it is important for our heritage and sense of identity- 22%, it is beautiful- 24%, it is important for our jobs and our businesses- 4%, I am a part of nature- 33%, it provides an essential service- 11%, it is important for education and skills- 9%, it is important for tackling climate change- 59%

The above chart shows that more than half of respondents believe that nature is important to them for tackling Climate Change (59%), protecting us from natural hazards (52%) and for our mental health and wellbeing (53%). Whilst the lowest percentage of respondents believe nature is important for their jobs and businesses (4%), is an essential service (11%) or is important for education and skills development (9%).

4.4- What would you like Cheshire's nature to look like in 10 years time?

The LNRS, once published, will be a statutory document for the next 3-10 years, depending on the DEFRA Secretary of State review timetable. Therefore, respondents were asked what they would like Cheshire's nature to look like in 10 years' time. The key messages from these comments were:

- Respondents would like to see more people focussed actions, such as community allotments, community wild days out and encourage gardens for nature.
- More of a focus on habitat restoration, by changing mowing practices along the road edges and on amenity grassland edges to being more pollinator friendly.

4.5- What are your top 3 actions that you believe we need to take for a wilder Cheshire over the next 10 years?

To help us better understand what approaches to undertake to enable us to achieve the priorities that will be set for the LNRS, respondents were asked to provide actions they would like to see. Common themes included:

- Greenspaces, tree, woodlands and wildflower meadows instead of mown grass.
- Better protection and restoration of natural habitats.
- Making better nature-sensitive planning decisions.

The least common themes discussed but might need to be taken into consideration for the creation of the LNRS priorities were:

- Encouragement of better public participation in helping nature, by utilising local interest groups.
- Improved education and training for green skills.

The reasons why these should still be considered is mainly due to their link with other national environmental objectives, which are directing the LNRS, such as "*work to ensure everyone in England lives within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space*".

4.6- Please tell us any ideas you may have for how we and our partners can support you to act for nature? (i.e. toolkit, raising awareness, workshops etc.)

The difference between the LNRS and the Biodiversity Action Plan from the 1990's is the need for every part of society to undertake individual or collective action to help reverse the decline of the state of nature. Therefore, we positioned this question in the survey to help us identify necessary measures (actions or initiatives) for us, as the RA, as well as the Supporting

Authorities and the LNP to encourage the wider public to take action within the LNRS. The following comments were raised:

Many of the themed comments focused on encouragement, better awareness raising, education and hyper-localised activities. There are already actions or initiatives, led by some of the LNP partner organisations, but the amount of awareness could be increased through better collaborative action.

Certain themed comments, such as “Affordable public transport”, are outside the scope of the LNRS which will not be able to affect this due to it being another department’s policy area. However active travel routes can enable both affordable travel and corridors for nature.

Due to the LNRS being a material consideration in Planning discussions, other thematic comments such as “*Replace concreted areas with greenery, remove 'fake grass'*” and “*Encouragement and advice for residents to make gardens more nature friendly e.g. free seeds and native plants*” could possibly be considered but this will need to be highlighted in discussions with the Planning departments of CW&C council and the Supporting Authorities. However, the LNRS is not a policy document, rather an evidence base for local policy. Therefore, we cannot ignore the purpose of the LNRS where the measures in the LNRS will deliver the agreed priorities for nature recovery in Cheshire and Warrington.

5.0- Responses to the engagement

5.1- The engagement in numbers

The total number of respondents was 876, with additional responses raised on the pledge for nature map and Call for Sites:

Questionnaires answered: 876

Pledges for nature: 153

Call for sites: est. 10,000 ha (ongoing).

5.2- Who responded to the engagement

The following demographic information relates to people who completed the questionnaire, including those who partially completed the questionnaire. Where the numbers do not represent the full 876 (the total number of questionnaires completed), the remainder of those who did not respond to this part of the questionnaire or preferred not to say.

Q1- Which of these statements best represent you?

1. Which of these statements best represent you?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	I am a Cheshire/ Warrington resident		90%	780
2	I am a Local landowner		4%	36
3	I represent/ own a local business		3%	27
4	I represent a town/parish or local authority		3%	27
5	I am an environmental/ ecological professional		5%	44
6	I represent a utility company		0.00%	0
7	I am a student or a young person		2%	14
8	I am an academic/ educational professional		3%	24
9	I am a visitor to Cheshire		2%	16
10	I am a Farmer		1%	11
11	Other (please specify):		9%	76
			answered	867
			skipped	0
Other (please specify): (76)				

I am a Cheshire/ Warrington resident- 90%, I am a Local landowner- 4%, I represent/own a local business- 3%, I represent a town/parish or local authority- 3%, I am an environmental/ ecological professional- 5%, I represent a utility company- 0%, I am a student or a young person- 2%, I am an academic/ educational professional- 3%, I am a visitor to Cheshire- 2%, I am a Farmer- 1%, Other (please specify- 9%








Other representatives who responded to the survey included University graduate students, members of local wildlife and community groups in the Cheshire and Warrington area, a representative from the Natural History Museum, Angling club members and local residents.

Q2- Where are you a resident of?

2. Where are you a resident of?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Cheshire West & Chester		32%	279
2	Warrington		11%	95
3	Cheshire East		48%	418
4	Peak District (inside Cheshire East Council boundary)		1%	8
5	Other (please specify):		8%	67
			answered	867
			skipped	0
Other (please specify): (67)				
Cheshire West & Chester- 32%, Warrington- 11%, Cheshire East- 48%, Peak District (inside Cheshire East Council boundary)- 1%, Other (please specify)- 8%				

In the other section, we had respondents coming from Wrexham, Denbighshire, Staffordshire, Liverpool and Manchester.

Q12- Which age category are you in?

12. Which age category are you in?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	17 or younger		1%	7
2	18-20		1%	6
3	21-29		3%	25
4	30-39		9%	77
5	40-49		15%	122
6	50-59		24%	205
7	60 or older		47%	398
			answered	840
			skipped	27

17 or younger- 1%, 18-20-1%, 21-29- 3%, 30-39- 9%, 40-49- 15%, 50-59- 24%, 60 or older- 47%

5.3- Lists of organisations that responded

Respondents who said their response was on behalf of an organisation are listed below.

List of organisations represented in the questionnaire:

- Active travel Crewe
- Audlem Wildlife and Ecology group
- Beech Hill allotments
- Brookhouse gardeners

- Butterfly conservation society
- Cheshire East council
- Cheshire Wildlife Trust
- Chester Zoo
- Christleton Parish Council
- Congleton Food4free
- Crewe Town Council
- CW& C hedge laying
- England Golf-Sustainability
- Friends of Birchwood Forest Park
- Friends of Hesketh Park & Mellor green urban wildlife area.
- Friends of Ladybrook Balley
- Friends of Longbarn Park
- Friends of St. Elphins Park
- Grosvenor rural estates
- Ince Neighbourhood plan team
- Lach Dennis and Lostock Green Parish council
- Lymm Parish Council
- Macc Wild Network Trust
- Macclesfield community tree nursery
- Merseyside Environmental Advisory service (MEAS)
- Middlewich Crazy Daisies
- Middlewich Toad patrols
- Nantwich Angling society
- National Trust
- Neston U3A
- New cut heritage and ecology trail group
- Norley wildlife group
- NPL group
- Poynton Heritage garden and mini orchard project
- Private Landowner
- Risley Moss Action Group
- Save Dane's Moss
- Sherrington Associates
- Staffordshire grey squirrel control group
- Stamford Street Allotment Society
- Stockton Heath Parish Council
- Sustainable Northwich
- Swifts Local Network (SLN)
- Tarvin community Woodland Trust ltd.
- Tatton Estate
- The Conservation volunteers
- The Mersey Forest
- The People's pantry Ellesmere Port
- The Woodland trust
- Transition Tattenhall
- Warrington Borough Council Social media team
- Warrington Conservative Party

- Welsh Dee Trust
- Wild About Stockton Heath
- Wings and things- the animal experience company
- Winwick Litter Network
- Winwick.org.uk
- Wirral Wildlife
- Wybunbury Anglers Association
- Wychwood community group
- Youth justice services

6- Next steps

The RA have reviewed the findings from the engagement, along with the public workshops in May and LNP working group sessions held in June and July. From this exercise, we have ratified the priorities and measures with the help of our supporting authorities and the LNP in October. As required by legislation, the draft LNRS will be drafted and submitted to the SA's and Neighbouring authorities to review before the public consultation in January 2025.

During the consultation on the draft LNRS, the RA will formally respond to any comments and feedback given and will amend the strategy accordingly before sending it to the Local Authorities' cabinets for approval.

7.0- References

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