

## COTSWOLDS NATURE RECOVERY PLAN

**Summary:** To present the Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan.

**Recommendation:** That the Board adopts the Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan as guidance.

**Report by:** Simon Smith – Nature Recovery Lead

### BACKGROUND

1. The National Landscapes Review undertaken by Julian Glover and published in 2019 contained a strong overarching message that National Landscapes need to be doing a lot more for nature.
2. Partly in response to the Landscapes Review the National association of AONBs issued the Colchester Declaration at its annual conference in 2019. One of the core pledges in the Declaration was to prepare a Nature Recovery Plan for every AONB.
3. These two documents reflect wider thinking across the conservation sector. Urgency driven by the need for species to be able to adapt to climate change has combined with a new confidence and ambition driven by developing delivery mechanisms such as Environmental Land Management and Biodiversity Net-Gain. Conservationists are talking less about decline and protection, instead they are talking about restoration and recovery.
4. The pandemic has changed the relationship millions of people have with their local natural environment adding further impetus to the recovery of nature.

### PROCESS

5. The plan (*Appendix A*) was developed as a partnership project between the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) and the Cotswolds Nature Recovery Forum. Founded in May 2020 the Forum currently has 74 members drawn from 41 organisations.
6. A working group drawn from the membership of the Forum guided the development of the plan. It has met eight times since September 2020 with working group members undertaking a great deal of work between meetings. 17 individuals served on the working group including a current and two previous CNL Board Members. As well as national and local NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), members also came from local authorities and Local Nature Partnerships. The Board owes a debt of gratitude to the working group for their efforts and the significant contributions made.
7. The full Forum was consulted on the structure of the plan in December 2020 and a full version on the plan in March 2021 in addition to the formal consultation.

8. The Nature Recovery Plan Working Group (NRPWG) linked to the CNL committee structure through the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG). The chair of the CCWG also attended the NRPWG. The CNL Land Management Lead and Nature Recovery Lead also attended both working groups.
9. The CNL Board received a briefing on the development of the plan at its meeting in October 2020.
10. A series of before and after visualisations have been commissioned for the plan. They have been through several cycles of revisions with the Nature Recovery Lead and the working group. The versions included in the current draft of the plan are the near final colour versions. A few final revisions have been discussed with the illustrator and there is limited scope for further minor revisions to be considered up until the date of the Board meeting.

### **CONSULTATION**

11. The consultation draft of the plan was circulated to 218 individuals representing over 75 organisations over the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of August with a deadline of August 31<sup>st</sup>.
12. All CNL Board members were included in the consultation
13. The overall reach of the consultation was greater with at least two Catchment Partnerships, two Local Nature Partnerships and an Environment Body sharing it across their membership. Many officers, particularly local authority officers shared it with colleagues too.
14. 41 responses were received, a response rate of 19%. Six were late.
15. Conversations with farming CNL Board Members and the Working Group concluded that an opportunity to comment on a draft document was unlikely to engage with the farming and land managing community. A focus group style workshop was held with a targeted variety of farmers on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021. 10 people attended. Key points raised focused on funding, advice and collaborative working.

### **KEY MESSAGES FROM THE CONSULTATION**

16. When embarking on the production of this plan there was a concern around reaching a consensus on the extent of woodland creation, particularly in the context of the impact on landscape character. The rationale of applying the national target for increased woodland extent to the Cotswolds was widely supported by partners, including the Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission.
17. The overall target of the extent of wildlife rich habitat covering 40% of the CNL area is consistent with the scientific advice for National Landscapes. The target of 93% including the inclusion of arable fields with environmental measures is significant in the light of the national ambition of “protecting 30% of land by 2030 to support

nature recovery". National Government counts the whole land area of national landscapes as contributing towards this target.

## NEXT STEPS

18. Following adoption by the Board the plan will be designed for publication. The version presented for adoption contains some editorial notes in red text. These refer to presentational changes that will be completed at the design stage. There will be three versions.

- The core document. A full copy of the plan containing all the content to provide a thorough evidence base.
- A concise version for policy makers and fund holders focussing on priorities, desirable outcomes, targets and strategic recommendations.
- A concise version for land owners and managers and their advisors focussing on practical measures.

Content listings of the concise versions are included in *Appendix B*. The visualisations when combined with descriptions of key measures have great potential for use as a standalone resource for communicating key messages from the plan.

19. The publication of the plan will mark the start of the work of promoting its messages and supporting its delivery. Its production has been timed to influence key delivery mechanisms, in particular but not exclusively:

- Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Environmental Land Management Schemes
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Payment for Ecosystem Services

20. The Cotswolds National Landscape will continue to provide leadership and work as a champion for nature recovery across the Cotswolds and beyond. This plan provides us with an important tool for achieving this.

## Supporting documents

- Appendix A – Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan
- Appendix B – Contents of tailored versions

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