Background to Natural England

[Natural England](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england) is the government’s advisor on the natural environment. We provide practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England’s natural wealth for the benefit of everyone.

Natural England was formally established on 1st October 2006 following the successful passage of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 through Parliament. We are an independent statutory Non-Departmental Public Body. Our remit is to ensure sustainable stewardship of the land and sea so that people and nature can thrive. It is our responsibility to see that England’s rich natural environment can adapt and survive intact for future generations to enjoy.

Natural England’s work is described in our 2023-24 [Action Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-england-action-plan-2022-to-2023) and is delivered through four strategic programmes as follows:

Resilient Landscapes and Seas - creating thriving, resilient, functioning landscapes and seas rich in plants, wildlife and character that provide wide ranging benefits for nature, climate and people

Connecting People with Nature - more people than ever in England are spending time outdoors and a majority of adults in England report that protection of the environment is important to them as a result. Our work will sustain that trend and focus on reforming key areas of Natural England’s local delivery, working in partnership to tackle barriers to nature

Greener Farming and Fisheries - sustainable farming and fisheries rely on a healthy natural environment. Food production and supply depends on healthy fish stocks, soils, water, air and natural processes. Addressing the causes of climate change and environmental degradation is now paramount; how we manage our land and seas is a major factor

Sustainable Development - the purpose of our sustainable development programme is to enable thriving wildlife populations, with beautiful landscapes and seascapes that are enjoyed by people whilst enabling society to prosper.

These are underpinned by two supporting programmes:

Science and Evidence - we will realise our ambition for Natural England to be an evidence-led organisation. We will be recognised, respected and trusted for our expertise and the provision of evidence-based advice on the natural environment, locally and nationally

Managing the Organisation - our aim is to be a values-led organisation which delivers excellent service standards to all partners, organisations and communities engaged in achieving nature’s recovery. Continuous learning and development for our people will maintain high levels of skill and expertise.

Health, Wellbeing, Nature and Sustainability (HWNS) Tool – Nature Dashboard Data Interpretation at a Local Nature Recovery Strategy Spatial Scale

Background to HWNS Tool

Local Authorities are grappling with a challenging range of interlocking issues, from nature and climate emergencies to health and wellbeing crises. Yet they have inherited a 20th century strategic planning system which is discipline-specific and makes it difficult to take sufficient account of important, interrelated interactions. Many alternative metrics and dashboards have been proposed, but these have not provided a convincing account of the complex relationships underpinning the outcomes. In response to this Natural England (NE) are co-developing a tool which focuses on Health, Wellbeing, Nature and Sustainability (HWNS) as final outcomes. It will provide Local and Combined Authorities (LCAs) with validated insights on what matters for HWNS and how these outcomes can be prioritised in strategic decision-making and planning. The tool will help LCAs to spot previously hidden trade-offs, opportunities and synergies, thus supporting evidence-led decisions which will help people and nature to thrive and contribute to global sustainable development.

NE worked with FutureGov in 2021 bringing the idea to life, with a range of stakeholders focused around our partnership and advisory groups including the Environment Agency, Office for Health Inequalities and Disparities, UK Health Security Agency, What Works Wellbeing, Centre for Thriving Places, Local Partnerships, Local Government Association, ADEPT, University of Exeter, University of the West of England, University of York, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Plymouth City Council, Birmingham City Council, Nottingham City Council, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Norfolk County Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Surrey County Council.

Local Partnerships (owned by Local Government Association, HM Treasury and Welsh Government) have agreed to host the tool. The tool will be free to access and use, linking to open data sources. See the website link for an example of the webpages/toolkit layout that the HWNS tool will follow:

[Resources - Local Partnerships](https://localpartnerships.gov.uk/resources/)

The HWNS Tool is now under development as an online tool which has two key elements. The first is a dashboard which shows key performance indicators relating to HWNS outcomes, linked to open access, regularly updated data. The second element is a relevant factor diagram (RFD) for each of the HWNS outcomes. The diagrams show factors that influence each outcome and we anticipate the digital tool allowing these factors to be interactive.

Alongside the three dashboards and RFDs (one each for health and wellbeing, nature and sustainability) will be a guidance and facilitation package to encourage uptake and effective implementation of the tool. This will include:

* Limitations and assumptions of the HWNS Tool
* Guidance on using the tool and options for facilitated workshops
* Context setting/scenarios for the wider drivers and pressures experience by LCA
* Signposting to domain specific tools such as the Green Infrastructure Framework, Biodiversity Net Gain and Finger-Tips Public Health data.

Three Local Authorities piloting the early tool in 2022/23 provided additional feedback to inform the tool content and suggested the tool’s ‘Nature’ element would be more effective if it focus on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy areas, given that these are now a mandatory requirement for LCAs.

Background to Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs)

England is widely considered to be one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world following historic and ongoing declines. Government has made legally-binding commitments to end these declines and for nature to recover. This is important for nature’s own sake and for all the things that we rely on nature for, like clean water and food production. For nature to recover, targeted, co-ordinated and collaborative action will be required.

Each LNRS 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 LNRS for their area. Together these 48 [strategy areas](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-nature-recovery-strategies-areas-and-responsible-authorities) cover the whole of England with no gaps or overlaps and the majority of responsible bodies are LCAs.

Responsible authorities will work with other organisations and partners in their area to agree what should be included in their LNRS. They will identify practical, achievable proposals developed with the input of people who know and understand the area, especially landowners and managers.

Responsible authorities will provide local leadership to draw together knowledge, expertise and the best available information and data. Each local nature recovery strategy will be specific and tailored to its area. The responsible authorities and people involved in preparing a strategy can choose how they want it to look, but every strategy must contain:

* A local habitat map.
* A written statement of biodiversity priorities.

[Statutory guidance for responsible authorities](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-nature-recovery-strategy-what-to-include) explains in detail what these two things should contain and is focused on the state of nature.  Together they set out what the strategy is aiming to achieve and what practical actions will help do this. They will also propose where actions could be carried out for best effect and to connect and expand existing areas that are important for nature. There is also a future provision in the Environment Act for LNRSs to include other environmental benefits to responsible bodies.

As part of Natural England’s support for LNRSs, the LNRS Data Viewer  [[LNRS Data Viewer (arcgis.com)](https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/7c5242fdec7f433aa4ee4510383e3909/page/Home/?data_id=dataSource_19-183f5ea9f46-layer-79%3A47))](https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/7c5242fdec7f433aa4ee4510383e3909/page/Home/?data_id=dataSource_19-183f5ea9f46-layer-79%3A47)  has been developed. The data can be viewed in an interactive map and download links are provided to the external sites that host the data. The data is grouped by the relevant sub-sections of the Environment Act 2021 and each data layer has a summary document that indicates how it may be used in developing a LNRS.

See additional background documents:

* Appendix 1, Nature Dashboard Content Summary Slide-deck
* Appendix 2, Example of an interpretation guide - [How to Start Using Your Natural Capital Atlas](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6012728994168832)
* [Natural Capital Atlases: Mapping Indicators for County and City Regions - NECR318 (naturalengland.org.uk)](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6672365834731520)
* [Natural Capital Indicators: for defining and measuring change in natural capital - NERR076 (naturalengland.org.uk)](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6742480364240896)

Background to the HWNS Tool Nature Dashboard Interpretation

Since the project inception and discovery phase for the HWNS Tool (2021) there have been significant changes in data availability and relevant legislation through the Environment Act, particularly mandating Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). We have therefore revised our approach for the Nature Dashboard. Instead of this focusing on Local and Combined Authority area indicators we are proposing that the Nature Dashboard works to the identified 48 LNRS areas.

The HWNS Tool Project have appointed a contractor to deliver the HWNS Tool digital alpha prototype (started October 2023). We are also working to the LNRS roll-out timeframe to ensure responsible bodies have sufficient guidance with respect to accessing and applying the relevant data collated through the LNRS Data Viewer before the end of December 2023.

Presenting the state of nature at an LNRS spatial scale is challenging and complex. As outlined above the LNRS Data Viewer collates and provides access to the LNRS Responsible bodies in one place. We are therefore phasing our approach for the Nature Dashboard to:

* Firstly, provide interpretation on the data available and how this can be best applied to the development, implementation and monitoring of LNRSs
* Secondly (and beyond the scope of this specification) identify a meaningful, easily understood set of indicators for nature recovery than can be monitored at LNRS spatial scale, supported by opensource, regularly updated data sets. This Nature Dashboard for LNRSs would allow responsible bodies to monitor how they are performing on nature recovery and other key environmental outcomes.

Requirement

We require a supplier to create an evidence and advice package to operationalise the HWNS Tool Nature Dashboard at LNRS spatial scale. This product will support decision making for the development of LNRSs relating to the state of nature and other environmental benefits in the responsible body areas.

Using the HWNS Tool Nature Dashboard as the starting point, we require a supplier to provide:

* A link between Nature Dashboard indicators and key data sets available in the data viewer that best track nature recovery
* Identification of other key data sets in the Data Viewer that provide evidence for other environmental benefits/ benefits to people using the Natural Capital Indicators and Atlases as the evidence base
* A succinct, attractive and easy to understand interpretation guide, written in Plain English, that aids interpretation of the Nature Dashboard indicators for nature recovery and other environmental benefits / benefits to people
* Interpretation on how to use the Nature Dashboard to aid nature recovery decision making, with reference to the [Nature Networks Evidence Handbook - NERR081 (naturalengland.org.uk)](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6105140258144256) and the Natural Capital Evidence Handbook [Natural Capital Evidence Handbook: to support place-based planning and decision-making - NERR092 (naturalengland.org.uk)](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4658498148499456)

Sustainability

Natural England protects and improves the environment and is committed to reducing the sustainability impacts of its activities directly and through its supply chains. We expect the Contractor to share this commitment and adopt a sound, proactive sustainable approach in keeping with the 25 yr environmental plan/our commitments compliant with all applicable legislation. This includes understanding and reducing direct and indirect sustainability impacts and realising opportunities, including but not restricted to; resilience to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, water use and quality, biosecurity, resource efficiency and waste, reducing the risk of pollution, biodiversity, modern slavery and equality, diversity & inclusion, negative community impacts.

As a delivery partner, the successful contractor is expected to pursue sustainability in their operations, thereby ensuring the Contracting Authority is not contracting with a supplier whose operational outputs run contrary to the Contracting Authority’s objectives. The successful contractor will need to approach the project with a focus on the entire life cycle of the project

Outputs and Contract Management

Note - the deliverables will be produced collaboratively and iteratively with ongoing review and input from the NE project team.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reference | Activity/Deliverable | Responsible Party | Date of completion |
| D 1 | Finding the relevant data and interpreting it for the HWNS Nature Dashboard:  A) from the Data Viewer  B) from the Natural Capital Atlas  C) from anywhere else  Identify what the data sets tell us, what they don’t, limitations, assumptions.  Make a recommendation for key data set(s) to consult on for each dashboard indicator. | Contractor, with input from NE | End December 2023 |
| D 2 | Finding data and interpreting it for other environmental benefits/ benefits from nature to people:  A) from the Natural Capital Atlas  B) from the Data Viewer  C) from anywhere else  Identify indicators not already in the Nature Dashboard that tell us other environmental benefits / benefits for people. Identify what the data sets tell us, what they don’t, the limitations and assumptions.  Make a recommendation for key data set(s) to consult on for each dashboard indicator. | Contractor, with input from NE | End December 2023 |
| D 3 | Provide a visually engaging interpretation package written for a non-technical audience that enables the Nature Dashboard and Data Viewer to be used for nature recovery | Contractor, with input from NE | Draft Interpretation Package by early January 2024  Final, designed package by end January 2024 |

We anticipate an initiation meeting in early December 2023 between the contractor and the Natural England project team. Thereafter Natural England and the contractor will meet through regular online project meetings to be agreed to meet the needs of the deliverables and associated work programmes. Attendance may be requested at occasional wider HWNS Tool progress meetings.