

## **Cumbria Habitat Maps, Habitat Network Maps and the Cumbria Nature Recovery Network (& pilot LNRS): Advice for local planning authorities**

### **Background to the Mapping**

The **Cumbria Habitat Basemap** and **Habitat Network Maps** have been developed as part of the Cumbria **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** pilot, funded by Defra and led by Cumbria County Council in partnership with the Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre (CBDC), Cumbria Local Nature Partnership (CLNP) and a wide range of organisations across the county. The Habitat Basemap and Habitat Network Maps will continue to be developed, including work to link them with other useful 'nature' mapping and to make them more accessible to all users. Eventually these maps will be used as part of the 'Spatial Plan' or 'Local Habitat Map' within Cumbria's Local Nature Recovery Strategy and will also help to guide the development of **Cumbria's Nature Recovery Network**.

### **Habitat Networks and the Nature Recovery Network**

Making Space for Nature, A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Networks, published in 2010, outlines what needs to be done to enhance the resilience and coherence of England's nature sites, and highlights the needs to develop our ecological networks.

Ecological (or habitat) networks are an approach to conserve and enhance biodiversity across landscapes, where the linkages (or connectivity) between habitat areas are developed. The creation, and enhancement of ecological networks allows species to move over larger areas and is considered a key conservation action to assist biodiversity in adapting to climate change.

To help deliver the recommendations of the Lawton Report, the [Government's 25 Year Environment Plan](#) outlines an ambition to develop a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) - aiming to help nature recover through the enhancement of existing habitat areas, and the restoration/creation of new habitat to connect nature across the landscape.

### **How do Habitat Networks relate to the Nature Recovery Network (NRN)?**

Paragraph 012 of the [Guidance: Natural Environment July 2019](#) outlines the relationship between ecological/habitat networks and the NRN - "As set out in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, the Nature Recovery Network is an expanding and increasingly-connected network of wildlife-rich habitat across England. It comprises a core network of designated sites of importance for biodiversity and adjoining areas that function as stepping stones or wildlife corridors, areas identified for new habitat creation and up to 25 nature recovery areas for targeted action. Defra, Natural England and other government bodies are working with national and local partnerships to deliver the Network, which includes support

for developing maps and advice to show where actions to improve and restore habitats would be most effective”.

To summarise the Cumbria Habitat Networks, along with the designated sites and priority habitats (see the Cumbria Habitat Basemap) they contain, will form the ecological framework of the Cumbria Nature Recovery Network. The Habitat Networks will link with other locally important wildlife habitats, and locally developed habitat networks, to create a healthy environment for nature to recover and flourish. The Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Strategy will provide the statutory underpinning of the NRN, ensuring it is recognised and delivered across our local authorities, other public bodies and statutory agencies.

### Key policy drivers for local authorities

[Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#) places a duty on all public authorities in England and Wales to have regard, in the exercise of their functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. A key purpose of this duty is to embed consideration of biodiversity as an integral part of policy and decision making throughout the public sector, which should be seeking to make a significant contribution to the achievement of the commitments made by government in its [25 Year Environment Plan](#).

**[National Planning Policy Framework \(updated 2021\) Section 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment:](#)** The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) outlines the requirement for both planning policies, mapping and decision making to take into account and look to establish ecological (habitat) networks. This includes the need for local plans to identify and safeguard ecological networks and their component parts, including areas identified by national/local partnerships

#### **National Planning Policy Framework (2021)**

**174.** Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent **ecological networks** that are more resilient to current and future pressures;

**175.** Plans should: ..... take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing **networks of habitats** and green infrastructure .....

**179.** To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and **wider ecological networks**....; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation....

b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, **ecological networks** and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity

[Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment July 2019](#) : The Planning Practice Guidance (Natural Environment section last updated July 2019) provides further details as to how planning authorities can work with partners (including Local Nature Partnerships) to develop ecological networks and help to create the Nature Recovery Network. The guidance also provides further information as to the evidence required to identify/map ecological networks and how this can relate to green infrastructure and other spatial planning. The guidance also outlines the support Local Nature Partnerships and similar partnerships working to conserve wildlife can provide with respect to sourcing information for existing ecological networks, which reflects the position in Cumbria where the Habitat Network Maps have been produced through the LNRS pilot and work of the CLNP and CBDC.

### **Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment**

**010** Planning authorities and neighbourhood planning bodies can work collaboratively with other partners, including [Local Nature Partnerships](#), to develop and deliver a strategic approach to protecting and improving the natural environment based on local priorities and evidence. Equally, they need to consider the opportunities that individual development proposals may provide to conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, and contribute to **habitat connectivity** in the wider area (including as part of the **Nature Recovery Network**).

In this context, it is useful to consider:

- opportunities to restore or enhance local **ecological networks**, including those that contribute to the wider **Nature Recovery Network**;

**011** Relevant evidence in identifying and mapping local ecological networks can include:

- the location and extent of internationally, nationally and locally designated sites;
- the distribution of protected and priority habitats and species;
- areas of irreplaceable natural habitat;
- main landscape features which, due to their linear or continuous nature, support migration, dispersal and gene flow, including any potential for new habitat corridors to link any isolated sites that hold nature conservation value, and therefore improve species distribution;
- areas identified by national or local partnerships with potential for habitat enhancement or restoration, including those necessary to help biodiversity adapt to climate change or which could assist with the habitat shifts and species migrations arising from climate change;
- audits of green infrastructure, such as open space within urban areas

(Note the list provided above does not include all the bullet points set out in the guidance)

## Using the Cumbria Habitat Basemap and Habitat Networks in Local Plans

Local planning authorities are required (National Planning Policy Framework (2021)) to include provisions for, protection and enhancements of ecological (habitat) networks) within local planning documents and decision making. Local ecological networks should be mapped as a part of the plan-making process, with policies identifying appropriate levels of protection and opportunities to create, restore or enhance habitats or improve connectivity.

The **Cumbria Habitat Basemap** and **Cumbria Habitat Network** mapping produced by the Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre and Cumbria Local Nature Partnership as part of the Cumbria County Council led Defra **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)** pilot can be used by Cumbria's local authorities as part of their biodiversity 'evidence base'. By using the Cumbria mapping (and supplementing with local mapping, nature and community priorities where needed) the local planning authorities will help ensure that Habitat Network development is joined up across the county, leading to the development of a coherent joined up Cumbria Nature Recovery Network. Using and supporting the future development of the Cumbria Habitat Networks (and underlying evidence base) will also help local authorities meet their obligations with regards to identifying and support the establishment of ecological networks.

**Cumbria Habitat Basemap** - This can be used by local planning authorities and developers to identify the locations of wildlife habitats. The Cumbria Habitat Basemap includes both the national Priority Habitat Inventory (PHI) and local data and will be updated as new survey information becomes available. **Note:** This mapping does not have up-to-date or comprehensive coverage across the county but does represent the most up-to-date habitat data available.

Please note that habitat maps may not be 100% accurate due to the type of surveying and the age of data collation. Some important habitats may have missed during surveys and others may have been damaged or destroyed since the surveys were completed. It is therefore very important to re-survey land before making decisions around land management change or potential development.

**Cumbria Habitat Networks** – These can be used by local planning authorities for both strategic and development planning purposes, and linked to specific policies relating to the protection of ecological networks. **Note:** At present the Habitat Networks are provided as 20+ individual habitat networks which may provide a confusing picture with regards to highlighting things on local spatial plans/maps. We are working to produce some combined Habitat Networks for rivers/wetlands, woodlands, grasslands and uplands which will be made available as soon as they are completed.

### Using within Development Planning Decision making:

For development proposals located within the Habitat Networks, the natural environment should be taken into consideration early in the design process; the underlying principle being that ecological connections through and around development sites, and with the wider ecological networks should be maintained and where possible enhanced.

This does not preclude development proposals taking place within Habitat Networks, and in fact development may have potential to contribute quantifiable **benefits** to the Habitat Networks including:

- Restoring existing, or creating new areas of 'Priority habitats'

- Enhancing, restoring or creating other wildlife habitats
- Improving management of existing wildlife habitats

In addition there are many design features which if included within developments have the potential to enhance the Habitat Networks and the overall Nature Recovery Networks (see draft Cumbria LNRS 'Measures' for some examples)

Development proposals may also have **adverse impacts** to the Habitat Networks and local planning authority planning decisions should aim to ensure that development proposals do not adversely impact either individual wildlife habitats or the overall integrity of the network (see Cumbria LNRS Outcomes). Adverse impacts may include:

- Damaging or destroying existing 'Priority habitats' or other wildlife habitats
- Damaging or destroying habitat features which provide movement corridors or linkages between wildlife habitats, or provide important lifecycle needs of species
- Damaging or destroying small areas of wildlife habitats that on their own may be considered insignificant or of low ecological value, but may form an important part of Habitat Networks and Nature Recovery Network.

**Note** the Mitigation Hierarchy (avoid, minimise, remediate and as a last resort compensate) should always be strictly adhered to.

### **Biodiversity Net Gain and Habitat Networks (Nature Recovery Network)**

Habitat Network Maps and the wider Nature Recovery Network can be used by Local planning authorities to inform the detail and location of biodiversity net gain secured through the land use planning system. The NPPF (2019) guidance provides further details as to how Habitat Networks should be used to identify and target biodiversity net gain mitigation and compensatory measures.

#### **Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment (July 2019)**

**021** Plans, and particularly those containing strategic policies, can be used to set out a suitable approach to both biodiversity and wider environmental net gain, how it will be achieved, and which areas present the best opportunities to deliver gains. Such areas could include those identified in: natural capital plans; local biodiversity opportunity or ecological network maps; local green infrastructure strategies .....

**027** New or improved habitat needs to be located where it can best contribute to local, national and international biodiversity restoration, including the Nature Recovery Network proposed in the 25 Year Environment Plan, locally identified ecological or green infrastructure networks and biodiversity opportunity areas. Providing biodiversity net gain close to where people live can improve access to nature and bring health and wellbeing benefits.

Where on-site mitigation is not possible, Habitat Networks (and in particular the habitat fragmentation zones highlighted on the maps) can be used to target habitat creation measures. The Habitat Networks may help provide a first 'filter' for Biodiversity Net Gain

habitat creation, however ecological expertise is required to interpret the mapping and ensure that proposals meet nature recovery priorities as outlined in the LNRS, or as identified by statutory or local conservation organisations.

## Habitat Networks and Green infrastructure

Green infrastructure comprised multi-functional sites/corridors/networks identified as a place for both wildlife and people, however mapping of green infrastructure is often underpinned by habitat mapping. The link between Green Infrastructure and Habitat Networks is outlined in the Planning Practice Guidance (2019).

### Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment (July 2019)

#### 006 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

High-quality networks of multifunctional green infrastructure contribute a range of benefits, including ecological connectivity, facilitating [biodiversity net gain](#) and nature recovery networks and opportunities for communities to undertake conservation work.

#### Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change

Green infrastructure can contribute to carbon storage, cooling and shading, opportunities for species migration to more suitable habitats and the protection of [water quality](#) and other natural resources. It can also be an integral part of multifunctional sustainable drainage and natural [flood risk management](#).

Green Infrastructure is the network of green spaces and natural elements that intersperse and connect our cities, towns and villages and can include open spaces, waterways, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, wildlife habitats, street trees, natural heritage and open countryside.

Green infrastructure in its own right can provide the following benefits for biodiversity:

- Supports wildlife sites and features and refuges
- Supports environmental processes and natural resources (air, soil and water, sustainable urban drainage and flood alleviation)
- Protects, restores and reconnects fragmented habitats that support priority species currently threatened by agricultural intensification, urban spread and climate change.
- Provides supporting habitat for mobile species within designated sites.

As such there are clear links between elements of Green Infrastructure and Habitat Networks and the two need to be considered together as part of the Nature Recovery Network – benefiting both people and nature. Habitat Networks have the potential to bring nature into our towns and cities, and wider Green Infrastructure has potential to provide important wildlife habitats and features.

Local authorities should identify synergies between Habitat Networks and existing green infrastructure mapping, and look towards supporting the development of the Nature Recovery Network within and around human settlements. As the work on the LNRS develops future work will look at ways of linking Habitat Network and Green infrastructure mapping to create one joined up Network.

### **Accessing the mapping**

Guidance on how to access the Habitat Basemap and Habitat Networks is provided in a separate guidance note 'Cumbria Habitat Map and Habitat Network Maps: User Guide'. This includes guidance on how the mapping should be interpreted and includes some 'warnings' on the accuracy of data.

Please contact the Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre if you wish to access the data.