

Briefing Paper: Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and Health Outcomes

For: Health in All Policies & Planning Task and Finish Group

Purpose: Awareness raising and strategic discussion

1. Purpose of this Briefing

This paper provides a brief introduction to the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and explains why it is relevant to the Health in All Policies & Planning Task and Finish Group's work. It is intended to provide context so that members can explore how nature recovery can contribute to health and wellbeing outcomes across Shropshire.

Although it has a focus on nature recovery, the LNRS can be used as a strategic tool for improving health, reducing inequalities and supporting wellbeing across the county. Nature-based approaches and outdoor activities provide low cost, high impact opportunities to improve population health, build resilience and reduce pressure on the NHS. This briefing document sets out the beginnings of those linkages, highlights future opportunities, and invites this working group to help shape how nature recovery contributes to better health outcomes for all communities.

2. What is the LNRS and why it matters for health?

The LNRS is a statutory, evidence-led strategy that identifies:

- What the county priorities are for nature recovery
- Where there are greatest benefits for habitats to be restored, created or connected
- How environmental investment can deliver multiple public benefits, including health

The LNRS is relevant to healthcare and wellbeing because environmental conditions are key determinants of health. The LNRS provides a county-wide framework, not a single-council plan, and is designed to align with multiple systems including:

- Public health and prevention
- Spatial planning and local plans
- Transport and active travel
- Climate resilience
- Community and voluntary sector activity

In this sense, the LNRS acts as a bridge between environment, planning and health, supporting a Health in All Policies approach in practice.

3. Nature, health and wellbeing: the evidence in brief

A strong and growing evidence base shows that access to nature supports:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing: 91% of adults agree that spending time outdoors improves their mental health¹
- Increased physical activity²
- Reduced exposure to air pollution, urban trees and green spaces serve as natural filters that trap pollutants
- Reduced heat stress (2022 heatwave caused 3271 excess deaths across the UK³): Nature acts as an urban air conditioner to counter the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect
- Greater community connection and social cohesion⁴

¹ [Adults' Year 5 Annual Report \(April 2024 - March 2025\) - GOV.UK](#)

² [Making sense of the evidence around nature, health and wellbeing: a new report from Natural England - NHS Forest](#)

³ [Excess mortality during heat-periods - Office for National Statistics](#)

⁴ [Social interaction, inclusion and community cohesion](#)

- Reduced long-term demand on health services through prevention: The two-year Cross-Government GSP Programme reported up to £2.42 social return on investment for every £1 spent

These benefits are not evenly distributed. Communities with lower access to green space, lower tree canopy cover, or higher levels of deprivation experience poorer health outcomes.

4. Looking ahead: challenges and pressures to 2050

We know that increasing numbers of people, housing and infrastructure along with an aging population means careful planning is essential. These increasing pressures along with the changing climate means that ensuring land delivers multiple benefits is increasingly important. Sound planning and early intervention will make the most of opportunities and deliver maximum benefits for Shropshire's communities. Two key considerations are:

4.1 Access to green space

Projections to 2050 indicate increasing pressure on accessible greenspace, particularly in and around urban areas. Evidence shows that for every additional 360m a person lives away from a green space they have a 5% higher risk of anxiety and depression.

Without intervention, this risks:

- Reduced opportunities for everyday contact with nature
- Increased health inequalities
- Greater exposure to heat, air pollution and climate stress

The LNRS offers a mechanism to help protect, expand and improve access to green infrastructure, especially where future growth is planned.

4.2 Tree canopy cover

There is a clear relationship between:

- Low tree canopy cover
- Higher deprivation indices
- Poorer health outcomes
- Vulnerability to extreme heat events – average July temperature in 2050 could exceed 50°

LNRS mapping can help identify areas where tree planting and habitat creation would deliver the greatest combined benefits for climate adaptation, biodiversity benefits and health. The [tree equity score tool](#) provides a helpful indicator for our larger towns.

5. Urban verses rural

While the LNRS applies across the whole county, the greatest opportunities to deliver health benefits are in urban areas, where population density and health inequalities are highest. In particular:

- Urban areas offer the strongest potential to align nature recovery with prevention, mental wellbeing and physical activity through everyday access to green space.
- New development, regeneration and better master planning can maximise health outcomes by improving the quality, function and accessibility of new and existing green space, rather than relying on low-value amenity grassland.
- Targeted improvement of green space in more deprived neighbourhoods can help address health inequalities and support wider social and environmental resilience.
- Council-owned land and other public estates, including NHS sites, present clear opportunities to lead by example and deliver joined-up health and environmental outcomes.
- Voluntary partnerships between communities and willing landowners can further support conservation and access, though any changes on private land remain landowner-led.

- While rural areas provide important benefits for those able to access them, focusing LNRS delivery in urban locations offers the greatest opportunity to improve everyday contact with nature and deliver preventative health outcomes at scale.

6. Existing initiatives and partnerships

There are already many foundations to build on, including:

- Green social prescribing, linking people into nature-based activities to support mental health and wellbeing⁵
- Community-led initiatives supported by parish councils, voluntary groups and local partnerships. Strong links have already been made with Shropshire Association of Local Councils and a [workbook](#) produced to make the LNRS relevant to town and parish councils. This could be adapted to make specific reference to health benefits.
- Public health programmes that recognise the role of environment in prevention
- Links between planning, transport and green infrastructure, particularly around active travel and road verge management (providing people with a connection to nature on their daily commute)

The LNRS provides a way to join these initiatives up, give them a shared spatial evidence base, and attract wider backing.

7. Where links could be strengthened

This awareness-raising exercise also highlights further opportunities, including

- Integration of LNRS priorities into local plan making and growth decisions
- Stronger alignment with transport planning, particularly active travel and access
- Clearer connections between nature recovery and health inequalities
- Engagement with public health and healthcare partners in shaping delivery

Making these links early reduces the risk of missed opportunities and increases the preventative value of investment.

8. Alignment with corporate priorities

The LNRS aligns strongly with corporate ambitions including

- Economic benefits (nature degradation could cause a 12% loss to UK GDP⁶)
- Environment and climate resilience
- Healthy people and communities
- Prevention and reducing long-term demand on services

Framing LNRS as part of the “healthy people” agenda, not just the environmental agenda, helps embed it across corporate planning and delivery. As part of the Biodiversity Duty, Shropshire Council has a statutory requirement to consider biodiversity in all its decision making – similar to the Health for all policy.

9. How the Health in All Policies & Planning Task and Finish Group can add value

The Health in All Policies & Planning Task and Finish Group is well placed to:

- Challenge where links between health and nature are weak or absent
- Help shape recommendations that strengthen prevention, equity and access
- Identify where member insight and local knowledge could improve delivery

Key questions members may wish to explore include:

- Where in our areas is access to nature most limited, what does that mean for health?
- How can green infrastructure be planned to support both urban and rural wellbeing?
- How can health partners help prioritise LNRS delivery areas?
- What information or evidence would members find most helpful going forward?

⁵ [NHS England » Green social prescribing](#)

⁶ [Nature degradation could cause a 12% loss to UK GDP | University of Oxford](#)

10. Suggested outcomes and next steps

Possible outcomes from this discussion could include:

- A recommendation for an all-member briefing on the LNRS and health, to broaden understanding and build shared ownership. An all-member briefing could be offered flexibly, aligned with workloads, and supported by a short presentation and background material.
- Agreement on how health considerations should be reflected in future LNRS delivery
- Identification of areas where scrutiny input would be most valuable as work programmes develop