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Response to the Nature Recovery Strategy Consultation

Harlestone Manor Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft West Northamptonshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). We fully support the Strategy's objective to significantly enhance nature and nature-based solutions, to embed nature recovery into planning, land management, and decision-making across West Northamptonshire.

As a Parish Council, we acknowledge our biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2021. We see the LNRS as a vital framework to help us act strategically and effectively, ensuring we are responsive to biodiversity needs while aligning with our local priorities.

Harlestone Manor is a relatively new Parish Council (established 2020) located on the northwestern outskirts of Northampton, bordering the Althorp Estate situated off the A428 between New Duston and Lower Harlestone. Our Parish is situated next to Harlestone Firs and connected to wider ecological networks, including Dallington Brook and the River Nene catchment, making it highly relevant to LNRS priorities around connectivity and watercourse restoration. Harlestone Manor green space will increase as the Parish grows as part of the West Northamptonshire SUE development.

Harlestone Manor's Green Assets

Jubilee Wildlife Garden

Harlestone Manor holds ownership of a small parcel of land situated within Loxton Field's estate, forming part of the Parish. This land is currently being developed into a designated wildlife area known as the Jubilee Wildlife Garden. The Jubilee Wildlife Garden represents a key local biodiversity asset, forming part of a developing green infrastructure network in the parish and providing opportunities for habitat creation, community engagement and nature recovery.

The asset was acquired by the Parish Council from the developers in April 2022. Ongoing grounds maintenance is carried out under contractual arrangements overseen and managed by the Parish Council with a focus on ensuring maintenance has as little impact as possible on wildlife.

The Jubilee Wildlife Garden is a relevant local example for the LNRS because it has a watercourse, Dallington Brook, a tributary of the River Nene running alongside the edge of the open space. Dallington Brook is prone to flooding during periods of prolonged rainfall,

contributing to saturated ground conditions which perform an important natural flood management function by storing water and reducing downstream impacts.

The Parish Council considers it essential that the LNRS delivery programme strengthens public understanding that waterlogged conditions in such areas are beneficial and reflect the intended function of natural flood storage systems. When the wildlife garden is waterlogged, it is often performing an important role in holding water and reducing downstream impact. This aligns to the Strategy's nature-based solutions and natural flood management

We recommend that the final LNRS and supporting guidance include:

- Explicit recognition that certain urban parks and open spaces are designed or managed to store water during wet periods as part of natural flood management.
- Clear public communications and on-site signage explaining that seasonal wetness and muddy conditions can be expected and beneficial, and that visitors should choose to use the park accordingly.
- Guidance on balancing access with habitat protection (e.g., targeted resilient path improvements where appropriate, while retaining wet features and rough grass areas for wildlife).
- Support for parish and community engagement to shift perceptions from 'poor maintenance' to 'natural function'.

Development pressures: biodiversity loss and floodplain reduction

Harlestone Manor Parish Council has significant concerns regarding the cumulative impacts of development, particularly in relation to biodiversity loss and ecological resilience. In particular, the long-term impacts of:

- Loss of ecological diversity through habitat removal and simplification of green space design.
- Fragmentation of habitats and disruption of wildlife corridors (particularly along urban edges and watercourse routes).
- Loss of functional floodplain areas and water-retention capacity, increasing surface water runoff and increase in local flooding
- Increased recreational pressure on remaining habitats and open spaces.

Harlestone Manor Parish Council encourages the LNRS to place strong emphasis on safeguarding floodplains, including the important role of 'functionally linked land' around watercourses and wet areas. The ongoing loss of floodplains and permeable, water-retaining land is not only a biodiversity concern; it also has implications for achieving the LNRS's shared objectives around flood risk reduction, water quality, and climate resilience.

We would also welcome a consistent approach from WNC in applying the LNRS through planning policy and development management. In working together, it would be helpful to establish a clear expectation that applicants demonstrate how they have avoided harm, maximised opportunities for on-site nature recovery and connectivity, and contributed to biodiversity and wider environmental benefits.

Planning and Biodiversity Net Gain: securing local benefit

The Parish Council supports the role of the LNRS in informing planning decisions and guiding Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). It offers an important opportunity to ensure that biodiversity enhancements are delivered in a coordinated way, contributing to a well-connected and resilient ecological network rather than in isolation.

We encourage WNC to ensure that opportunities within urban parishes are fully represented in the Local Habitat Map and associated measures. This will help direct investment including off-site BNG, where appropriate towards locally important corridors, watercourse buffers, and parish-managed open spaces.

We would also welcome the inclusion of clear guidance within the final LNRS for parish councils. This could outline how to interpret the mapping layers and how parishes can put forward local sites and projects for consideration during consultation and implementation.

Practical Delivery Priorities in Harlestone Manor

Harlestone Manor Parish Council is keen to support the delivery of LNRS aligned measures at a local level, particularly those that can be implemented within urban parks, open spaces, historical bridal ways, verges, and alongside watercourses. Key practical priorities for our parish include:

- Urban habitat enhancement and ‘stepping-stone’ connectivity between green spaces (trees planting, hedgerow restoration, wildflower areas and rough grass, and management of bridleways as ecological corridors).
- Pollinator-friendly management (reduced mowing, seasonal cut-and-collect regimes, and native planting).
- Management of wet features (ponds, scrapes, wet grassland margins) and watercourse buffers to improve biodiversity and water quality.
- Management of historical bridal ways – historic routes like bridal ways can provide established landscape corridors that can be enhanced to support biodiversity, improve habitat connectivity, and strengthen community access to nature
- Target hedgerow restoration, grass margins and targeted tree planting
- Targeted tree planting and shading to address heat, mitigate flood risk, and improve air quality while ensuring appropriate species selection and long-term maintenance.
- Community engagement, volunteering and education to build stewardship and improve public understanding of nature-based solutions.

Requests to Strengthen LNRS Delivery

To support meaningful engagement at parish level, Harlestone Manor Parish Council asks that WNC provide or develop the following:

- A Parish Council LNRS toolkit, including a clear, plain-English summary of priorities, practical actions for common parish assets, sample management plans, and guidance on accessing funding.
- Guidance and templates for public communications and signage that explain the purpose of wet areas, seasonal changes, and nature-based flood management approaches.

- Practical advice on incorporating natural flood management into parish open spaces where appropriate, alongside access to technical expertise.
- Practical advice on management of historical bridle ways and hedgerow restoration
- A clear process for parish councils to contribute local knowledge and identify opportunities via Nature Map IT or consultation channels, with feedback from WNC on how this input has been used.
- Continued engagement with parish councils during implementation, including regular progress reviews and opportunities to collaborate on partnership projects.
- Clear planning guidance and policy expectations to ensure developers recognise and incorporate the Local Nature Recovery Strategy at the earliest planning stages, including how it aligns with biodiversity net gain requirements and contributes to local priorities.

Conclusion

The Parish Council supports the Draft West Northamptonshire LNRS and welcomes the strategic, evidence-led approach it sets out. We believe the LNRS would be strengthened by explicitly recognising the important role of parish-owned and West Northamptonshire Council-maintained urban open spaces in delivering nature recovery, ecological connectivity, and flood resilience.

This is particularly relevant in local settings where the function of open spaces during wet weather, alongside community understanding and perception, is central to the successful delivery and long-term sustainability of nature-based measures.

Yours sincerely



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