

Nature recovery and town and parish councils

How 12 rural local authorities are
relating Local Nature Recovery
Strategies to their local town and
parish council network

Dr Jack Reed

j.reed2@exeter.ac.uk



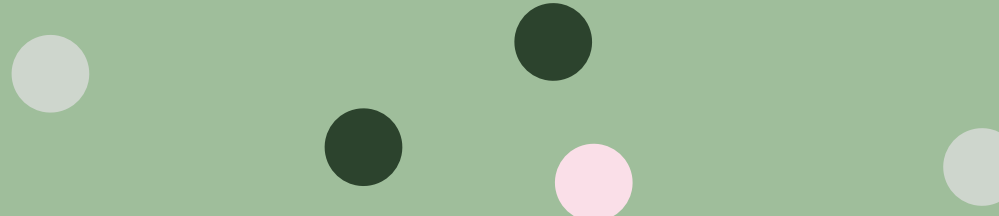
University
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Economic
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NaRReD
Nature Recovery and Regional Development



A bit of context

Three-year research project hosted at the University of Exeter.

I'm a postdoctoral researcher on the project having completed my PhD in 2023.

This project got started in January 2024.

Exploring the relationships between nature recovery and regional development, including health and wellbeing, economics, heritage and community.

We are working with 12 local authorities who form a coalition called 'Britain's Leading Edge'.

Britain's Leading Edge

12 local authorities in England's rural
periphery without a major city

Regional Stakeholders in Britain's Leading Edge



STATE OF NATURE

Great Britain found to be one of the most nature depleted countries on the planet.

Nearly one in six species are threatened with extinction from Great Britain.

43% of bird and 28% of fungi and lichen species are in a state of decline.

“We have never had a better understanding of the State of Nature and what is needed to fix it”.

2023

state of
nature
PARTNERSHIP

The UK's natural capital is worth £1.5 trillion, with ecosystem services valued at an additional £35.7 billion.

Rich biodiversity equals greater population health and wellbeing, critical for a stable and functioning economy.

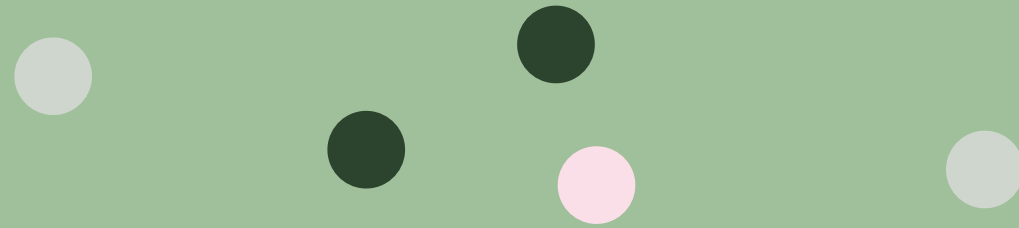
A thriving nature supports local economies through tourism and recreation. The visitor economy in Shropshire currently supports 10,776 jobs and is worth £987m to the local economy.

Opportunities for outdoor learning and developing a tangible connection to nature that lasts a lifetime.

The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review

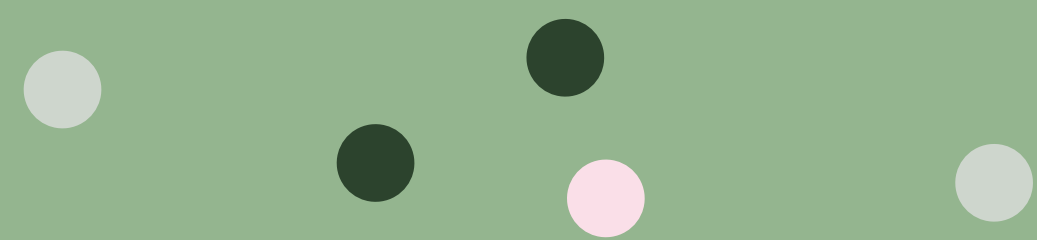


What have we been doing?



We've been interviewing local authority officers about the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and links between the LNRS and community, politics and economy.

We currently have over 400,000 words of data with much more to come!



What are we
asking?

**What role might town
and parish councils have
in the delivery of
meaningful and
impactful local nature
recovery?**

Some initial findings

1. Town and parish councils could offer a place-based vehicle for the delivery of local nature recovery.
2. Town and parish councils understand the importance of nature recovery.
3. Greater intention to engage with town and parish councils from local authorities.

“Town and parish councils could offer a place-based vehicle for the delivery of local nature recovery”

And then you've got sort of like, **the excellent town and parish councils**, those who are picking up and working on this, **they're really keen to embed nature recovery** within their sort of local plans (Cornwall).

I think town and parish councils certainly on the island will **play a key role**. And thinking down the line in terms of once the LNRS is in place, **they're going to be a key stakeholder in terms of some of that localised delivery** ... they're going to be really important to get some of that real kind of, you know, **boots on the ground, local, physical action**, if you like in terms of nature recovery (Isle of Wight).

“Town and parish councils understand the importance of nature recovery”

1. Parish councils, **they understand that intrinsic value** that people have for the marine environment, and how they should consider it in what they're doing (Cornwall).
2. I've worked with a lot of parish councils and their steering groups and communities. And **nature is the big thing** [emphasis] (Herefordshire).

“Greater intention to engage with town and parish councils from local authorities”

Something **we've not done enough of**, you know, we're very good at the county level, but it's only really now that we're starting to be able to work at like the parish level. I know **there's a hell of a lot more we could do** (Cornwall).

So, **for us, it's the parish network**. And every parish will have a little cluster of LNRS materials within its domain. And the Isle of Wight is a very interesting place, the Isle of Wight as a whole has almost no identity, I would say, it's very difficult to pin down, but **it has incredibly strong cultural identity within its 33 parishes** (Isle of Wight).

Nature recovery will also need to be devolved and involve the parish councils and the town Councils as well, in terms of those relationships and communities, which are good in some respects, and **really underdeveloped and underutilised and not empowered** in others, I would say (Rutland).



Why Shropshire is leading the way

Shropshire's ambition to have a bespoke nature recovery plan in every town and parish council is positioning Shropshire as a national leader on this agenda.

Whilst our data shows that unitary local authorities across England want to involve parish councils, it is Shropshire and the Isle of Wight where we are seeing greatest momentum.

In 2023/24, the precept was £10,155,575 across 165 town and parish councils in Shropshire. Town and parish councils utilising this finance in greater ways than other areas in England.



Summary

Town and parish councils can offer a vehicle to deliver on national-level nature recovery policy.

Local authorities do not yet know what funding they will have to deliver on-the-ground nature recovery from Defra. Town and parish councils are seen as one mechanism for ensuring effective delivery.

All 12 of our authorities are demonstrating the importance of the town and parish council network, including here in Shropshire.

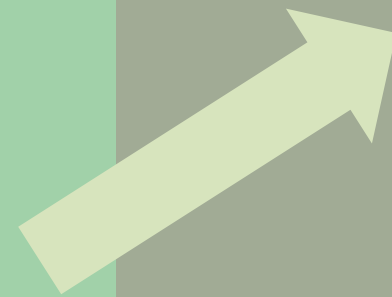
There is much more work to do for us as a research project to understand the opportunities, barriers and key stakeholders as we all strive to make a positive difference for people and nature.

Next steps

In 2025, we will be seeking interviews and site visits with town and parish councils working to deliver local nature recovery.

We would love to promote best practice and draw attention to the critically important delivery mechanism town and parish councils can offer for local nature recovery strategies.

We'd really like to hear from you if you and/or your parish would like to be involved.



Get in touch

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