

Report Title:	Natural Rossendale Action Plan		
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny	Date:	14 th September 2026
Report of:	Director of Place	Cabinet Portfolio:	Environment and Corporate Services
Cabinet Lead Member:	Councillor Adrian Lythgoe	Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	☐ Forward Plan ☒	☐ General Exception	☐ Special Urgency ☐
Integrated Impact Assessment:			
Required:		No	Attached: No
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Valley Plan Priorities	Thriving Local Economy: This involves securing new inward investment, creating a sustainable economy, matching local skills with future job opportunities, and supporting town centres as unique destinations.	☒
	High Quality Environment: This includes having a "clean and green" local environment, reducing the borough's carbon footprint, improving waste and recycling rates, and delivering new homes with a good mix of housing tenures.	☒
	Healthy & Proud Communities: This priority focuses on improving the health and physical/mental wellbeing of residents, reducing health inequalities, ensuring access to better leisure facilities and health services, and fostering a sense of pride in the community.	☒
	Effective & Efficient Council: The aim is to provide good quality and responsive services, embrace new technology, be a financially sustainable council with a commercial outlook, and ensure sound governance.	☐

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To introduce the Natural Rossendale Action Plan, attached at Appendix 1, that sets out how Rossendale Borough Council will use the land and assets in its ownership to support nature recovery and deliver wider environmental and community benefits.
- 1.2 It focuses on practical projects that can improve habitats, increase biodiversity, enhance the resilience of the natural environment and enable more residents to enjoy and connect with nature.
- 1.3 This report seeks permission to use the assets for these purposes and to allow officers to seek and accept external funding for these purposes.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Overview and Scrutiny recommend Cabinet to:

- 2.1 Allocate land at Cow Toot Lane and Cribden Moor for the purposes of habitat renewal
- 2.2 Delegate Authority to the Director of Place in consultation with the Head of Finance and the Monitoring Officer to apply and enter into agreements for external funding for the purposes of delivering the Natural Rossendale Action Plan.

- 2.3 Delegate Authority to the Director of Place in consultation with the Monitoring Officer to enter into agreements and seek permissions for the purposes of delivering the Natural Rossendale Action Plan

3. BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1 Nature and biodiversity are under increasing pressure but improvements to the natural environment also play an important role in addressing some of the challenges facing Rossendale, including flood risk and the wellbeing of our residents.
- 3.2 The Natural Rossendale Action Plan sets out how Rossendale Borough Council will use the land and assets in its ownership to support nature recovery and deliver wider environmental and community benefits. It sets out a range of projects that can improve habitats and biodiversity while enabling residents to enjoy the countryside.
- 3.3 The plan intends to provide a pipeline of projects which can be developed and delivered as funding and other resources become available and will be shaped by land management considerations, planning and regulatory requirements. The plan will be reviewed and updated as projects progress, new opportunities arise and additional resources become available.
- 3.4 The Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), published in January 2026, provides the strategic framework for nature recovery across Lancashire, including Rossendale. In line with its objectives, the Natural Rossendale Action Plan aims to:
- Increase biodiversity and improve habitat quality on land owned or managed by Rossendale Borough Council;
 - Improve the health and wellbeing of residents by increasing opportunities to access and enjoy high-quality natural and green spaces;
 - Support climate change mitigation and adaptation through measures that increase carbon storage, improve natural flood management and strengthen the resilience of local ecosystems;
 - Improve the connectivity of habitats to support the movement and recovery of wildlife across the borough; and
 - Increase opportunities for residents and communities to engage with and benefit from nature.
- 3.5 The current projects are:

Cow Toot Country Park – Arboretum and Natural Flood Management	Create a publicly accessible arboretum using native and climate-resilient tree species. The project will manage surface water run-off to help reduce impacts on Bacup Football Club.
Cribden Moor Peatland Rewetting Scheme	Restore a section of peatland on Cribden Moor by blocking drainage grips and restoring natural water levels. The project will improve peatland habitat, support biodiversity, retain carbon and help reduce rapid water run-off into Haslingden.
Cribden Pond and Tree Scheme	Plant hedgerows, field trees and restore ponds on Council-owned grazing land and increase the use of native tree species within existing woodland. The project will improve habitat connectivity, enhance biodiversity and contribute to natural flood management.
River Irwell Habitat Renewal	Related to the Pride in Place programme to improve the River Irwell and Limey in Rawtenstall and Waterfoot by

	removing litter and improving river and riparian habitats such as restoring gravel beds and riverside planting.
Council Estate Habitat Scheme	Introduce biodiversity features across Council-owned buildings and land, including bird and bat boxes and other habitat enhancements.

- 3.6 The three plots of land – two plots on Cribden Moor and Cow Toot Lane – are proposed for nature recovery as part of this plan:

Cow Toot Lane – this site is a derelict farm that is largely allocated in the Local Plan for approximately 100 houses. The top of the area is used by the public including dog walkers and is the site of the Sentinel public art which is part of the River Irwell art trail. It is not expected that the 100-house target is achievable so the recommendation is to use the rest of the site to promote public access.

Cribden Moor North – this site stretches from the top of Cribden Hill and incorporates a wide strip of land comprising moorland, conifer plantation and scrubland extending towards the Haslingden Household Waste Site. It is recommended that the existing land uses are retained, while habitats are enhanced and restored, including through the use of native species

Cribden Moor South – again, this site stretches the top of Cribden Hill and is made up of low-grade grassland to the Halo. The site hosts the Rossendale and Hyndburn Model Aircraft Club. The proposal is to improve the quality of the grassland, plant some low-density field trees that allow grazing and restore some ponds to encourage habitats.

4. RISK

- 4.1 There are no significant risks directly arising from this report. However, the following potential risks should be noted:
- Delivery Risk: the delivery period will likely to be over several planting seasons so will be finished by Pennine Lancashire Council.

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS (FINANCE)

- 5.1 All work must be contained within existing budgets and resources and be in line with the requirements of any external funding.

6. MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS (LEGAL)

- 6.1 Agreements to be put in place for external funding and funding requirements to be explored to protect the best interests of the Council and to meet the objectives of the Action Plan.

7. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 No integrated impact assessment is required.

8. POLICY/STRATEGY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The report supports the delivery of the Valley Plan and the Climate Change Strategy

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no immediate implications arising from this report however the projects will need to be completed by Pennine Lancashire Council.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 There are no background papers.

Natural Rossendale Action Plan

Introduction

Rossendale is fortunate to have a rich and varied natural environment, from the upland moors and peatlands to its rivers, woodlands, hedgerows, parks and urban green spaces. These natural assets make an important contribution to the character of the borough and the quality of life of its residents.

However, nature and biodiversity are under increasing pressure from climate change, habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution, land management and many decades of industrial development. At the same time, the natural environment has an important role to play in addressing some of the challenges facing Rossendale, including flood risk, climate change, health and wellbeing of our residents, and access to attractive green spaces.

The Natural Rossendale Action Plan sets out how Rossendale Borough Council will use the land and assets in its ownership to support nature recovery and deliver wider environmental and community benefits. It focuses on practical projects that can improve habitats, increase biodiversity, enhance the resilience of the natural environment and enable more residents to enjoy and connect with nature.

The plan is intended to provide an initial pipeline of projects which can be developed and delivered as funding and other resources become available. It will also provide a basis for working with Lancashire County Council, the new Pennine Lancashire Authority, landowners, community organisations, environmental groups and other partners to deliver nature recovery at a larger scale across Rossendale.

The plan will be reviewed and updated as projects progress, new opportunities arise and additional resources become available.

Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), published in January 2026, provides the strategic framework for nature recovery across Lancashire, including Rossendale. Its vision is to protect, enhance and connect Lancashire's biodiversity and natural environment so that nature can recover and thrive and more residents and visitors can benefit from it.

The Strategy aims to:

- Halt and reverse local biodiversity loss and support thriving species populations;
- Protect, enhance and connect important habitats;
- Conserve natural resources and improve resilience to climate change;

- Provide wider environmental and societal benefits for local communities;
- Improve access to nature and green and blue spaces; and
- Strengthen partnerships to deliver nature recovery at a landscape scale.

The Strategy identifies the pressures affecting Lancashire's biodiversity and sets out priorities and potential measures for nature recovery. Its Local Habitat Map identifies important existing areas for biodiversity and areas where habitat creation, restoration and enhancement could deliver significant benefits for nature and the wider environment.

The LNRS is not a delivery plan and does not impose obligations or restrictions on landowners. Instead, it provides a framework for targeting action and investment and for identifying opportunities to work collaboratively to deliver nature recovery.

How the Lancashire LNRS influences Natural Rossendale

Natural Rossendale supports the objectives of the Lancashire LNRS by translating its county-wide priorities into practical projects on land owned or managed by Rossendale Borough Council.

The Council will use the LNRS and its Local Habitat Map to help identify opportunities where projects can deliver the greatest benefits for biodiversity and the wider environment. Projects will seek to:

- **Protect and enhance existing habitats**, including woodlands, moorland, peatland, rivers and grassland;
- **Restore degraded habitats**, including the rewetting of peatland and improvement of river and riparian habitats;
- **Connect habitats and improve ecological networks**, enabling wildlife to move more freely through the landscape, including rivers and streams;
- **Increase biodiversity within urban areas**, including through tree planting, pollinator-friendly planting and habitat improvements on Council land;
- **Support natural flood management and climate resilience**, including through woodland creation, peatland restoration and measures to slow the flow of water;
- **Improve access to nature**, creating attractive and accessible places for residents to walk, exercise and enjoy the natural environment; and
- **Support partnership working**, recognising that the greatest benefits will be achieved by connecting Council projects with work undertaken by Lancashire County Council, landowners, environmental organisations, community groups and other partners.

The LNRS will therefore help inform the location, design and prioritisation of projects within Natural Rossendale. Projects will also be considered in terms of their potential to deliver multiple benefits - for example, improving biodiversity while also reducing flood

risk, improving public access, supporting health and wellbeing and increasing the resilience of Rossendale's natural environment.

Rossendale Aims and Objectives

Aims

The Natural Rossendale Action Plan aims to:

- **Increase biodiversity and improve habitat quality** on land owned or managed by Rossendale Borough Council;
- **Improve the health and wellbeing of residents** by increasing opportunities to access and enjoy high-quality natural and green spaces;
- **Support climate change mitigation and adaptation** through measures that increase carbon storage, improve natural flood management and strengthen the resilience of local ecosystems;
- **Improve the connectivity of habitats** to support the movement and recovery of wildlife across the borough; and
- Increase opportunities for **residents and communities to engage with and benefit from nature.**

Objectives

To achieve these aims, the Council will:

- Increase tree planting and woodland management on Council-owned land, using appropriate native species and locally suitable planting schemes to improve biodiversity, increase carbon storage and contribute to natural flood management;
- Restore and enhance moorland and peatland habitats to improve biodiversity, retain carbon and reduce rapid water run-off;
- Increase the use of native and pollinator-friendly planting on Council land and within appropriate urban locations;
- Increase the provision of street trees and trees around play areas and other public spaces to provide shade, improve biodiversity and enhance the quality of the urban environment;
- Improve the quality and accessibility of walking routes and points of interest to enable more residents to enjoy the outdoors and connect with nature;
- Improve the ecological condition of rivers, watercourses and their surrounding habitats, working with relevant landowners and partners;
- Incorporate opportunities for biodiversity enhancement into the management of Council-owned buildings, estates, parks and open spaces; and

- Work with partners to identify and secure external funding and investment for nature recovery projects.

Action Plan

The projects below form the initial pipeline of projects that Rossendale Borough Council will pursue to improve habitats and biodiversity on Council-owned land and to deliver wider environmental and community benefits.

The projects are indicative and will be subject to further feasibility work, land management considerations, planning and regulatory requirements, available funding and other resources.

The Council will seek to develop a longer-term pipeline of projects so that opportunities can be taken forward as funding becomes available. The Action Plan will be updated periodically to reflect progress, new projects and as we progress through Local Government Reorganisation additional land can be considered.

Project	Description	Indicative Timescale
Cow Toot Country Park – Arboretum and Natural Flood Management	Create a publicly accessible arboretum using native and climate-resilient tree species. The project will provide an attractive and accessible walking route, increase biodiversity and explore opportunities to slow and manage surface water run-off to help reduce impacts on neighbouring properties and land, including Bacup Football Club.	Autumn/Winter 2026/27 and 2027/28
Cribden Moor Peatland Rewetting Scheme	Restore a section of peatland on Cribden Moor by blocking drainage grips and restoring natural water levels. The project will improve peatland habitat, support biodiversity, retain carbon and help reduce rapid water run-off from the moorland.	Autumn/Winter 2028/29
River Irwell Habitat Renewal	Remove litter and accumulated rubbish from appropriate sections of the River Irwell and improve river and riparian habitats through measures such as restoring gravel beds and appropriate riverside planting. Explore opportunities to remove or modify weirs and other barriers to improve fish passage and ecological connectivity, working with relevant partners and regulatory bodies.	Summer 2027
Council Estate Habitat Scheme	Introduce biodiversity features across appropriate Council-owned buildings and land, including bird and bat boxes and other habitat enhancements. Opportunities including green roofs, pollinator-friendly planting and improved	Autumn 2026–2028

Project	Description	Indicative Timescale
	management of grassland where appropriate.	
Cribden Pond and Tree Scheme	Plant new hedgerows and field trees on Council-owned grazing land and increase the use of native tree species within existing woodland. The project will improve habitat connectivity, enhance biodiversity and contribute to natural flood management and landscape character.	Autumn 2027