



South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Help us reverse nature's decline in South Yorkshire

Summary document for consultation

Take part at southyorkshirenaturerecovery.co.uk

Share your views by Friday 31st July 2026



Have your say



South Yorkshire is home to an incredible natural landscape, from our rivers and woodlands to the green spaces at the heart of our communities. These places matter deeply to us all and are central to our health, wellbeing, and pride in where we live.

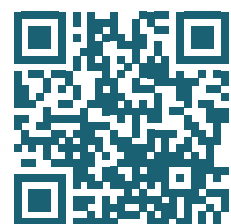
But we know nature is under pressure, with many habitats in poor condition. Our Local Nature Recovery Strategy is about turning that around. Restoring nature and building a greener, healthier future for South Yorkshire.

Our consultation is a chance for everyone to have their say. I'd encourage everyone to explore the draft strategy and share their views so we can shape the way forward together.

Oliver Coppard
Mayor of South Yorkshire



Read the complete South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy at
southyorkshirenaturerecovery.co.uk



Restoring nature across South Yorkshire

Nature is in crisis – across the UK and right here in South Yorkshire. Habitats are shrinking, species are disappearing, and the pressures of climate change and land use are accelerating the damage. The South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is our collective response: an ambitious, evidence-based plan to restore nature at scale, and to build a more resilient region for people and wildlife.

Developed in partnership with local authorities, businesses, farmers, environmental organisations, and over 1,800 residents and community members across South Yorkshire, this strategy represents a shared vision for nature's recovery.

South Yorkshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy has a central mission, vision, and principles, which set out what we want to achieve and how.

- **Our Mission** is to restore thriving, connected natural habitats across South Yorkshire to benefit people and nature.
- **Our Vision** is to deliver nature recovery at scale and pace in South Yorkshire, maximising our region's contribution to the UK's commitment to positively manage 30% of land and sea for nature in England by 2030.



Our commitments to nature

Improve the quality and extent of habitats – more, bigger, better, more joined up.

Value wildlife everywhere – not only in designated sites, but across urban, farmed, and post-industrial landscapes.

Work in partnership – recognising that every landowner, community, and organisation has a role.

Build climate resilience – using nature to help mitigate and adapt to heat, drought, flooding, and wildfire risk.

Connect people with nature – prioritising places with greatest need and supporting responsible access.

Learn, adapt and invest – using the best evidence and maintaining a long-term commitment to delivery.

Recover our lost and declining species – reversing the long-term decline in abundance and diversity of our key species.



What is this strategy?

- Nature recovery strategies are local plans for restoring and improving wildlife, habitats, and green spaces — required by law under the 2021 Environment Act.
- South Yorkshire's strategy is 1 of 48 covering the whole of England, developed by local authorities, agencies, and conservation organisations working together.
- Our strategy covers Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, and Sheffield, developed with input from farmers, landowners, communities, and conservation experts across the region.
- Through expert input and public consultation, we've identified where nature recovery will have the greatest impact, whether that's farmland or post-industrial landscapes.
- The mapped areas identify strategic opportunities for nature recovery. They're not a legal designation — this means they don't change what you can do with your land, but they can help guide decisions and unlock funding for nature recovery.
- The strategy also guides planning decisions and helps direct investment giving developers, businesses, and landowners a clear framework for supporting nature recovery.
- Delivering the strategy is a shared responsibility — from landowners and communities to businesses and local authorities.
- This is a living plan, reviewed regularly to reflect the latest evidence and priorities.



Why is nature important?

South Yorkshire's natural habitats are not just beautiful, they are essential. Nature provides the food we eat, the water we drink, the medicines we rely on, and the raw materials that underpin our economy. Healthy ecosystems regulate our climate, recycle nutrients, and keep our environment in balance.

Nature is also fundamental to our health and wellbeing. Access to wildlife-rich green spaces improves physical and mental health, brings communities together, and strengthens our connection to the places we live. Our green spaces are part of what makes South Yorkshire a great place to live.

More than half of South Yorkshire's habitats are in poor condition. Flood risk is rising, extreme heat is becoming more common, and development and land use changes are fragmenting the natural environments that wildlife and people depend on. The cost of doing nothing is high, so the time to act is now.

“ Nature on our doorstep is what we see and experience every day – any improvement to it will directly impact the quality of our lives

Public engagement participant ”



Our natural landscape

South Yorkshire covers 1,552km² of varied landscape, from the wild moorlands of the Peak District to ancient woodlands, rivers, wetlands, and the urban green spaces of our towns and cities. Some of our most special places are protected by law, including 40 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 3 Areas of Conservation, 2 Special Protection Areas, and 1 National Nature Reserve.

Below are the habitats critical for nature recovery in our region. For more detail, see **Section 3** of the full strategy.

Habitat	Rarity indicator	Description
Ancient woodland	Rare	Irreplaceable woodland that has existed since at least 1600. Once lost, it cannot be recreated. Covers around 2.9% of South Yorkshire.
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	Widespread	Broadleaf woods of oak, ash, and birch, rich in wildlife and a vital refuge for wildlife. Covers over 7% of our region.
Upland heathland and acid grassland	Locally common	Open moorland dominated by heather and grasses, home to ground-nesting birds and rare wildlife. Covers around 4.5% of South Yorkshire.
Blanket bog	Rare	Deep peat moorland that stores vast amounts of carbon and feeds our rivers. Covers around 2.9% of South Yorkshire.
Lowland raised bog	Very rare	One of our most special habitats; a type of peatland found in low-lying areas where layers of partially decomposed mosses and plants have built up over thousands of years. South Yorkshire is home to Britain's largest remaining area at Thorne and Hatfield Moors.
Floodplain grazing marsh	Rare	Wet grassland along our river valleys. Vital for wading birds and managing flood risk.
Lowland meadow	Rare	Wildflower-rich grasslands buzzing with insects in summer; once a common sight, now increasingly scarce.
Lowland heathland	Very rare	Open, sandy heathland supporting rare plants, reptiles, and insects. Scarce and fragmented, with the largest areas found in east Doncaster.
Reedbed and fen	Very rare	Wetland habitats found mainly in the Dearne Valley, vital for birds like bittern.
Lowland dry acid grassland	Very rare	Species-rich grassland on free-draining soils, important for butterflies and other invertebrates.
Calcareous grassland	Exceptionally rare	Chalk and limestone grassland which is amongst the most flower-rich habitats in the UK, and extremely scarce in South Yorkshire.

“ We are all part of nature whether we realise it or not. Disconnection from nature results in many problems for us and the world.

Public engagement participant ”

The challenges we face

South Yorkshire's nature is under pressure from several directions. Understanding these challenges has shaped the eight priorities that follow.

- **A changing climate** — flood risk, extreme heat, and drought are putting habitats and species under increasing stress.
- **Development and land use** — pressure from housing and infrastructure is fragmenting and damaging natural habitats.
- **Disconnection from nature** — people in the most disadvantaged parts of South Yorkshire are 10 times less likely to live near green spaces, making it harder to access the health and wellbeing benefits that nature provides. Whilst making access to nature fairer doesn't directly restore it, research shows that people who experience nature regularly are more likely to care and take positive action to protect it.
- **Habitat condition** — 57% of our habitats are in poor condition.
- **Visitor pressure** — increased use of green spaces, along with anti-social behaviour, is causing damage to habitats and disturbance to wildlife.

The following 8 overarching priorities have been identified to address these challenges.

A shared plan for nature

Working with farmers, landowners, communities and conservation experts, we have developed priorities for nature recovery and identified measures we can take to achieve them.

Our priorities and measures are divided into 2 categories: 'overarching' actions that apply across a range of different habitats, and 'habitat-based' actions that are specific to certain habitats.

Overarching priorities for nature recovery

- 1 **Bring nature closer to people** — especially in communities where access to green spaces is limited
- 2 **Build partnerships** — working together across organisations, farms, and communities to drive nature recovery
- 3 **Get people involved** — creating opportunities for communities to take part in nature recovery activities
- 4 **Tackle invasive species** — managing non-native plants and animals that threaten our native wildlife
- 5 **Improve our green spaces** — enhancing management of existing public spaces and creating new ones for nature
- 6 **Help people understand nature** — reducing damage to habitats caused by visitors to important nature sites
- 7 **Build climate resilience** — future-proofing our natural habitats against the effects of climate change
- 8 **Protect and connect habitats** — safeguarding, expanding, and joining up the places where nature can thrive



Habitat-based priorities for nature recovery

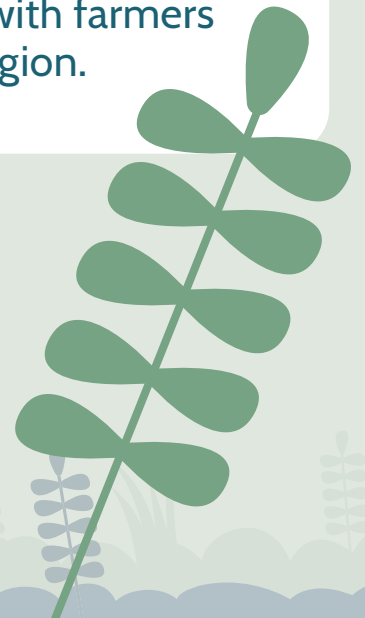
Grassland and heathland

South Yorkshire's grasslands and heathlands support a range of rare plants and animals, help manage flood risk, and store carbon. This must happen hand in hand with food production; nature can thrive in farmed landscapes, which cover over 40% of the region.

Our priorities:

- Restore and better connect our grasslands so they can support a wider range of wildlife.
- Expand and improve moorlands and heathlands to help manage flood risk, reduce wildfire risk, and store carbon.
- Protect and improve our rare lowland heathlands.
- Work with farmers to create wildlife-friendly landscapes that support both nature and food production.

At Ughill Farm in the Peak District National Park, the Sheffield Lakeland Partnership, led by Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, is testing nature-friendly practices to help recover threatened farmland birds such as curlew, and sharing what works with farmers across the region.



Urban Nature

South Yorkshire's towns and cities are home to a rich network of parks, waterways, and green spaces. Expanding and connecting these spaces helps wildlife mobility, reduces flooding, improves air quality, and increases direct access to nature.

Our priorities:

- Make green spaces and water spots in our towns and cities larger, higher quality, and better connected for wildlife and people.
- Create and improve habitats along roads and cycleways, so wildlife can move more easily through the landscape.
- Improve access to nature for everyone, whilst protecting sensitive habitats and species from the impacts of recreation.

Community groups such as Kids Plant Trees have already planted thousands of trees as part of the Mayor's commitment to plant 1.4 million trees - a tree for every person in South Yorkshire.



Woodland and Trees

South Yorkshire's woodlands and trees provide rich habitats for birds, mammals, insects, and plants. Well-managed woodlands help reduce flood risk, improve water quality, and store carbon.

Our priorities:

- Ensure our woodlands are well-managed and form part of a connected network of habitats.
- Protect our ancient woodlands for future generations as irreplaceable sites for nature, culture, and communities.
- Connect communities with their local woodlands to support biodiversity gain and promote wider societal benefits.

On former coalfield sites across Barnsley, Doncaster, and Rotherham, The Conservation Volunteers and The Land Trust are working together to restore and manage community woodlands, transforming post-industrial land into thriving wildlife habitats and green spaces for local people.



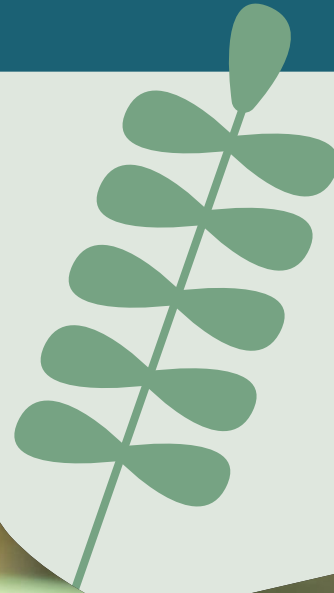
Watercourses, waterbodies and wetlands

South Yorkshire's rivers, streams, canals, ponds, and wetlands are vital for wildlife and connect habitats across the landscape. These environments face growing pressure from climate change, water quality issues, invasive species, and development, but there is strong public appetite for restoring them.

Our priorities:

- Restore natural river processes to reconnect rivers and streams with their floodplains, supporting wildlife and reducing flood risk.
- Improve river channels and banks to enhance habitats, improve water quality, and support thriving native species.
- Create a network of healthy wetlands, including fens, reedbeds and ponds, to help wildlife recover and build climate resilience.
- Protect and restore our lowland raised bogs to ensure peat formation, supporting unique wildlife and carbon storage.
- Protect and restore our blanket bogs and wet peat habitats to support upland wildlife, store carbon, and preserve cultural heritage.

Created in response to the flooding of 2019, the Connected by Water partnership brings together 7 organisations: the 4 local authorities of South Yorkshire, SYMCA, the Environment Agency, and Yorkshire Water. They are working together to address flood risk in harmony with nature, through natural flood management techniques such as restoring rivers, creating wetlands, and reconnecting floodplains.



Supporting the wildlife we love

South Yorkshire is home to an extraordinary range of wildlife, but many of our best-loved species are struggling. Working with local and national experts, we have identified a list of priority species.

Our priority species include:

4

Reptiles — including adder, grass snake, and common lizard

56

Flowering plants — including cornflower, meadow saffron, and marsh pea

15

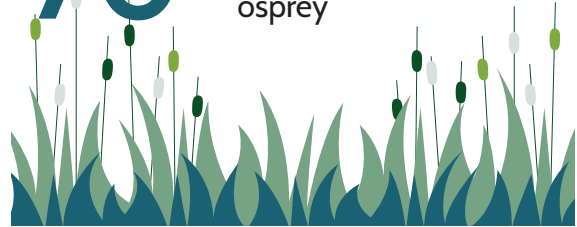
Mammals — including eurasian otter, red squirrel, and whiskered bat

70

Birds — including nightjar, hen harrier, bittern, and osprey

55

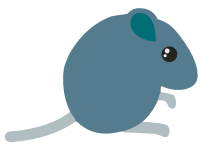
Insects — including white-letter hairstreak, goat moth, and dingy skipper



These species are rare, declining, or under pressure in our region. By focusing conservation action on the species that need it most, we can make sure every effort counts.

Species we hope to bring back

Some species have been lost from South Yorkshire entirely, but could return. We have identified 11 species as candidates for reintroduction, including:



3 mammals

Eurasian beaver, pine marten, and hazel dormouse



3 flowering plants

Oblong leaved sundew, coral-necklace, and pennyroyal



1 mollusc

Freshwater pearl mussel

Have your say

This strategy has already been shaped by over 1,800 contributions from people and organisations across South Yorkshire – and we want to hear from you too.

There are several ways to get involved:

Complete our public survey

Visit southyorkshirenaturerecovery.co.uk to share your views on the strategy.

Read the full strategy

The complete South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is available at southyorkshirenaturerecovery.co.uk

Explore our interactive map

See opportunities for nature recovery in your area, and use it to share your ideas, highlight local opportunities, and suggest where action is needed most at southyorkshirenaturerecovery.co.uk

Get in touch

Email us at lnrs@southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk with any questions.

Delivering this strategy is a shared responsibility. It will take farmers, landowners, communities, businesses, and organisations across South Yorkshire working together to ensure success. We all have a part to play.

Thank you for taking the time to read this overview and for caring about the future of nature in South Yorkshire.



Please do all you possibly can to address nature decline before it's too late. I want my grandchildren to experience nature at its finest.

Public engagement participant



We are grateful for the involvement and input from the LNRS Supporting Authorities, which were represented on the Steering Group and Working Group.



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