

Nature Recovery Networks for Northern Ireland

-What are they and why do we need them?

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This briefing has been produced by The Landscape Partnershipⁱ and is part of a series, so should be read in conjunction with other documentation available at <https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/nature-recovery-networks>

Restoring and connecting nature

We are facing a climate and nature crisis. Northern Ireland ranks 12th worst out of 240 countries when it comes to biodiversity loss, largely caused by natural habitats being broken up into small patches, or lost altogether. With 11% of species at risk from extinctionⁱⁱ and just one of 49 priority habitats in good conditionⁱⁱⁱ, we need a step change in how we manage the natural environment. To halt the decline of nature and mitigate against climate change, the protection, creation, restoration, enhancement, and connection of places for nature through Nature Recovery Networks (NRNs), is essential, as recognised in the recent Nature Positive 2030 report produced by the UK's five statutory nature conservation bodies^{iv}.

To address the nature and climate crises in Northern Ireland effectively, we need transformative solutions which go beyond simply conserving existing habitats and species, to actively restoring nature at a landscape scale through Nature Recovery Networks (NRNs). **NRNs are a strategic, long-term approach to managing, creating, restoring, and enhancing habitats and landscapes, linking together ecological processes across protected areas and the wider landscape, while highlighting the link between the status of our natural world and human well-being.** Nature has an incredible ability to recover, if we just give it a chance. With binding targets for nature's recovery, long-term funding, and the technical tools and expertise, we could create a nature positive future - in addition to carving a green path for recovery from the global pandemic. By legislating for and adequately financing Nature Recovery Networks in Northern Ireland, we could put nature onto the path of recovery, and deliver far-reaching benefits to society.

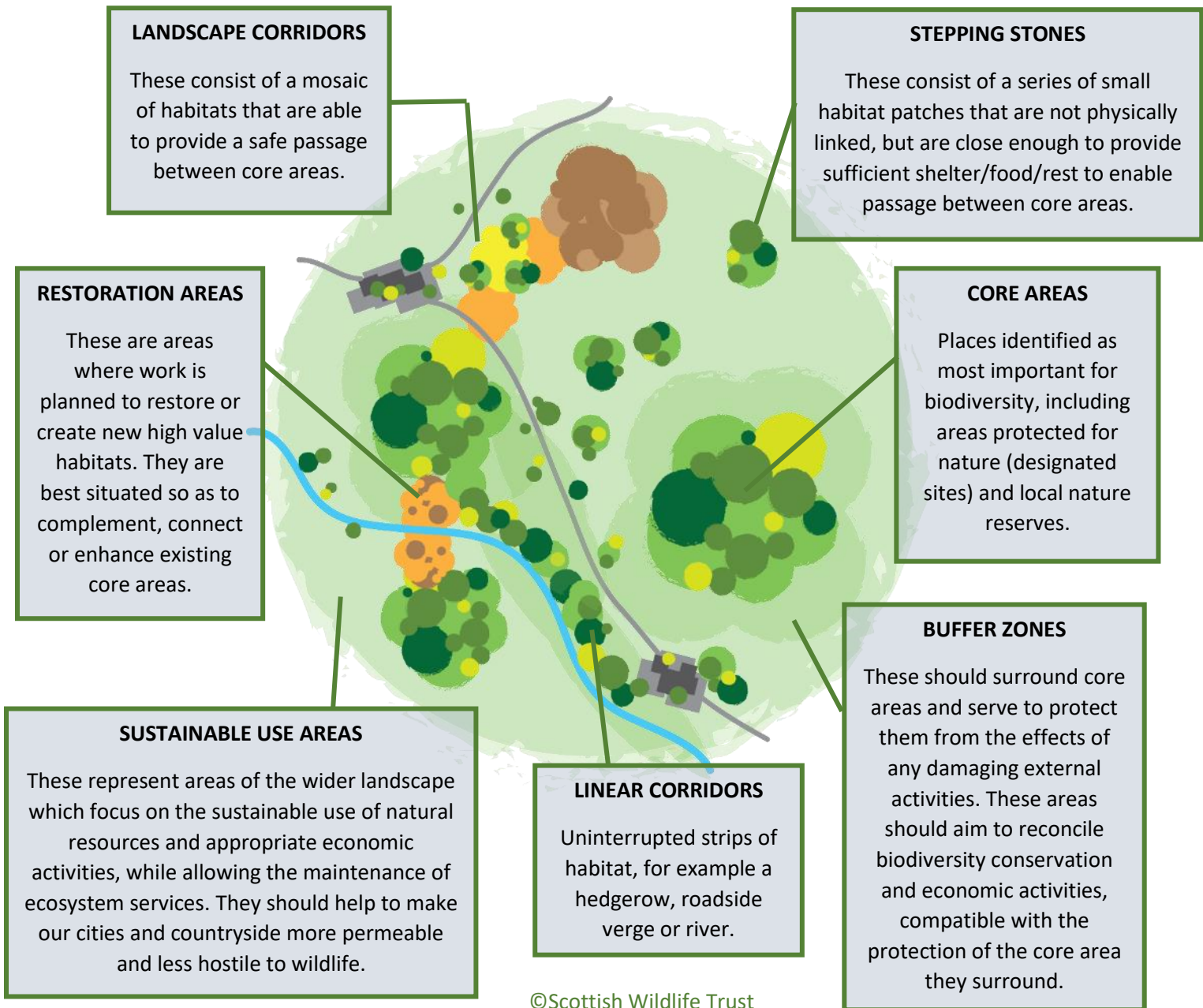
Well-designed Nature Recovery Networks could enable species and habitats to thrive and fulfil their role in tackling both the climate and nature crises, whilst proving significant benefits to people and society. With ambitious action across the NI Executive and Local Authorities, as well as from land-managers and communities, NRNs could help to renew our countryside, towns and cities; benefitting nature's recovery, while reconnecting places and people. Transformative action across political and public spheres is essential to champion nature's recovery and achieve a nature positive future for Northern Ireland.

What do Nature Recovery Networks look like?

Working with the principles of **More, Bigger, Better and more Joined-up^v** spaces for nature, NRNs bring together a wide range of insights and actions to recover nature, where habitat extent, quality, and connectivity are key ingredients. In essence, NRNs are characterised by i) the identification and protection of the most critical areas; ii) a focus on conserving biodiversity at regional and landscape scale; iii) an emphasis on creating a coherent^{vi} and well-connected network of designated sites and wider habitats, so that wildlife can move easily across the landscape, and adapt to change and, finally iv) the creation of 'buffer zones' to protect core areas from the effects of damaging activities in the



surrounding area. Components of NRNs can be natural or man-made, and of any size ranging from green roofs to landscape-scale conservation projects. These physical features are summarised in the diagram below:



ⁱ [The Landscape Partnership Agreement](#)

ⁱⁱ <https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-Northern-Ireland-summary.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/about-us/48398rspb-biodiversity-intactness-index-summary-report-v4.pdf>

^{iv} <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-role/the-uk/nature-positive-2030/>

^v Lawton, J. H., P. N. M. Brotherton, V. K. Brown, C. Elphick, A. H. Fitter, J. Forshaw, R. W. Haddow, et al. 2010. "Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network. Report to Defra."

^{vi} For more detail, see <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-02/Ecological%20Coherence%20Definitions%20in%20Policy%20and%20Practice.pdf>