Meeting: **Cabinet**

Date/Time: **Tuesday, 17 June 2025 at 2.00 pm**

Location: **Sparkenhoe Committee Room, County Hall, Glenfield**

Contact: **Ms. J. Bailey (Tel. 0116 305 2583)**

Email: **jenny.bailey@leics.gov.uk**

Membership

Mr. D. Harrison CC (Chairman)

Mr. J. Boam CC	Mr. V. Richichi CC
Miss. H. Butler CC	Mr. M. Squires CC
Mr. H. Fowler CC	Mr. A. Tilbury CC
Mr. C. Pugsley CC	Mr. C. Whitford CC

Please note: this meeting will be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's web site at Cabinet meeting webcasts - notices will be on display at the meeting explaining the arrangements.

AGENDA

Item		Report by		Key Decision
1.	To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.			
2.	Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.			
3.	Provisional Revenue and Capital Outturn 2024/25.	Director of Corporate Resources	(Pages 3 - 52)	Yes
4.	Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.	Director of Environment and Transport	(Pages 53 - 214)	Yes
5.	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028.	Director of Children and Family Services	(Pages 215 - 290)	Yes

Democratic Services ◦ Chief Executive's Department ◦ Leicestershire County Council ◦ County Hall Glenfield ◦ Leicestershire ◦ LE3 8RA ◦ Tel: 0116 232 3232 ◦ Email: democracy@leics.gov.uk

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Item		Report by	Key Decision

6. Adults and Communities Department Strategy 2025-2029: Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire.

   Director of Adults and Communities

     Yes

7. Items referred from Overview and Scrutiny.

8. Any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent.

Leicestershire County Council

CABINET – 17 JUNE 2025

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

PROVISIONAL REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2024/25

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1.   The purpose of this report is to set out the provisional revenue and capital outturn for 2024/25.

Recommendations

2.   It is recommended that:

   (a)   The 2024/25 provisional revenue and capital outturn be noted;

   (b)   The prudential indicators for 2024/25 as shown in Appendix E to this report be noted;

   (c)   The net underspend is used for the additional commitments as specified in the report;

   (d)   To endorse an additional £10m treasury management investment in bank risk sharing product (capital release funds) in line with the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

   (e)   To note that the current MTFS gap of £90m by 2028/29 requires immediate action to deliver savings, and give delegated authority to the Director of Corporate Resources following consultation with the Leader and Lead Member for Resources to undertake procurement processes, as required, to appoint external support.

(Key Decision)

Reasons for Recommendations

3.   To inform the Cabinet of the provisional revenue and capital outturn for 2024/25 and seek agreement to the transfers to earmarked reserves to fund future commitments and endorse an additional £10m treasury management investment in bank risk sharing product (capital release funds), in line with the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4.   A report on the provisional revenue and capital outturn will be considered by the Scrutiny Commission on 9 June 2025 and any comments or recommendations will be reported to the Cabinet at the meeting.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5.   The County Council approved the 2024/25 to 2027/28 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in February 2024. The key aim of the Strategy is to ensure that the Authority has appropriate resources in place to fund key service demands over the next few years. The Strategy includes the establishment of earmarked reserves and the allocation of ongoing revenue budget and capital resources for key priorities.

6.   The 2024-28 capital programme was reviewed over the summer of 2024 and an updated programme was approved by the Cabinet on 13 September 2024.

Resource Implications

Revenue Outturn

7.   A summary of the revenue outturn for 2024/25, excluding schools grant, is set out below:

	£000
Updated budget	567,607
Provisional outturn	561,376
Net underspend	-6,231
Additional funding	-2,544
Net underspend	-8,775
Additional commitments	8,775
Net position	0

8.   Overall there has been a net underspending of £8.8m, which will be used to meet additional commitments detailed later in the report. A more detailed summary is given in Appendix A. Details of the variances for departments and central items are included in the report and in Appendix B.

9.   The General Fund Reserve is proposed to increase to £25m as at 31st March 2025, which represents 4.1% of the 2025/26 revenue budget (excluding schools' delegated budgets), in line with the County Council's approved reserves policy target range of 4% to 7% of net expenditure. This will be achieved by a transfer from earmarked reserves. . The current MTFS includes contributions of £1m per year to increase the general fund. These will be reviewed as part of the updating for the MTFS for 2026-30. It is necessary to increase the General Fund to reflect increasing uncertainty and risks over the medium term and to avoid a reduction in the percentage of the net budget covered given the overall budget increase.

<u>Capital Outturn</u>

10. A summary of the capital outturn for 2024/25, excluding schools devolved formula capital, is set out below:

	£000
Updated budget	168,223
Less provisional outturn	134,079
Net Variance	-34,144

11. Overall, there has been a net rephasing of expenditure of £34.1m compared with the updated budget. This funding will be carried forward to 2025/26 to fund schemes that were not completed in 2024/25.

12. Details of the variances and key projects delivered in 2024/25 are included in the report, and in Appendix D.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

13. None.

Officers to Contact

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PART B

Overall Position - Revenue

14. Appendix A shows the provisional outturn position for 2024/25. This compares the actual net expenditure incurred with the updated budget. The original budget has been updated for transfers between services and from central contingencies.

15. Appendix B gives details of significant variances by departmental revenue budgets for 2024/25.

Children and Family Services – Schools Budget

16. Overall there is a net overspend of £16.3m on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This comprises an overspend of £23.2m on the High Needs Block, which has been forecast at that level for most of the year, offset by an underspend of £5.0m on the Early Years Block, and an underspend of £1.9m on the Schools Block from schools' growth, which will be retained for meeting the costs of commissioning school places in future years.

17. The High Needs Block overspend of £23.2m in 2024/25 is £6.2m more than the £17.0m forecast included within the original MTFS due to a higher than budgeted number of High Needs students in both independent schools and mainstream schools.

    • Overall there is an overspend in the placement budgets of £6.4m as a result of an increase of 1,028 (17%) in the number of funded places above budgeted position. The significant increases are within mainstream schools which are 33% above budget, and Post-16 Further Education Colleges by 59%. The department is undertaking further analysis to understand the reasons for the increase in numbers. Costs per place appear stable in most provision types. The department is investigating the utilisation of places in the Council's own specialist units, currently circa 81%, to reduce the need for placements in the more costly Independent sector. An overspend on specialist teaching services and the Secondary Education Inclusion partnerships of £0.8m further increases overall overspend position.

    • Additionally, the final figures published by the Department for Education (DfE) resulted in a £0.2m reduction in 2024/25 High Needs DSG income. This is due to an increase in students placed in provisions outside of Leicestershire as at the Spring census date than the same point the previous year.

18. Nationally, concern over the impact of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reform on High Needs expenditure, and the financial difficulties this exposes local authorities to, is growing. Whilst the Government's Green Paper is set to result in systemic changes to the national SEND system, such changes may take a number of years to be implemented and none appear to address the funding issues.

19. Leicestershire is actively engaged within the DfE's Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND programme as a result of the DSG deficit. At the end of 2023/24 the accumulated High Needs deficit stood at £41.2m and this rises to £64.4m at the end of 2024/25. The

Transforming SEND in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme has moved to an implementation and sustainability phase and improvements created during the design stage are being rolled out; this programme and the DBV programme are closely aligned.

20. Without new interventions the High Needs Block deficit is expected to continue to increase over the MTFS period and is not financially sustainable, despite planned savings in the region of £50m by 2028/29. This creates a significant and unresolved financial risk to the Council.

21. The Early Years budget is showing a financial year-end underspend of £5.0m. The budget is based on the number of hours used to calculate the original 2024/25 Early Years DSG income in December 2023. Both payments and income are higher than budgeted due to the outputs of the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) expansion and a higher number of 2-year-olds with working parents and a higher number of under-2s now taking up their FEEE entitlement. Changes to the methodology and funding lag around timings as to when grant income is received and means the 'true' underspend position in relation to 2024/25, will not be confirmed until later in the summer of 2025 upon DfE confirmation of any funding adjustments.

22. The overall underspend position includes the budgeted planned underspend of £1.1m as part of the payback of previous years' Early Years deficits. The Early Years DSG deficit as at 31 March 2024 was £3.1m. The plan was to clear this deficit over 4 years which would be March 2027 at the latest. Once the final DfE funding position is known (over the summer 2025) this will then determine the final position on the Early Years Block for 2024/25 and therefore the extent to which the deficit position could be cleared sooner than the planned March 2027 date.

Children and Family Services – Local Authority Budget

23. The Local Authority budget is overspent by a net £8.8m (7.1%), mainly relating to overspends on the Children's Social Care Placements budget (£5.0m), Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children's budget (£1.5m), Education Psychology Service (£1.2m), and Disabled Children Service (£0.8m).

24. The overspend on the Children's Social Care Placement budget (£5.0m) is largely due to the change in demand / numbers in relation to children in residential provision, in comparison to budgeted assumptions. The MTFS budgeted residential numbers by March 2025 to be at 86 children (this includes parent and child placements). Trend and demand analysis at the time of budget setting, based on numbers between April 2021 to January 2024, indicated that this assumption was reasonable and reflective of data-driven demand analysis. However, between the period of January 2024 and summer 2024, residential numbers increased rapidly to over 100 children. The end-of-year position showed 108 children in residential provision (26% increase vs budgeted MTFS projection). The financial impact overall on this budget due to the change in demand is significant.

25. The graph below illustrates how demand in residential provision has changed over time, and the sharp increase in demand from 2023/24 quarter 3 to 2024/25 quarter 1.

Number Of Unique Mosaic ID's Requiring A Residential Placement At The End Of The Period (includes P&C)
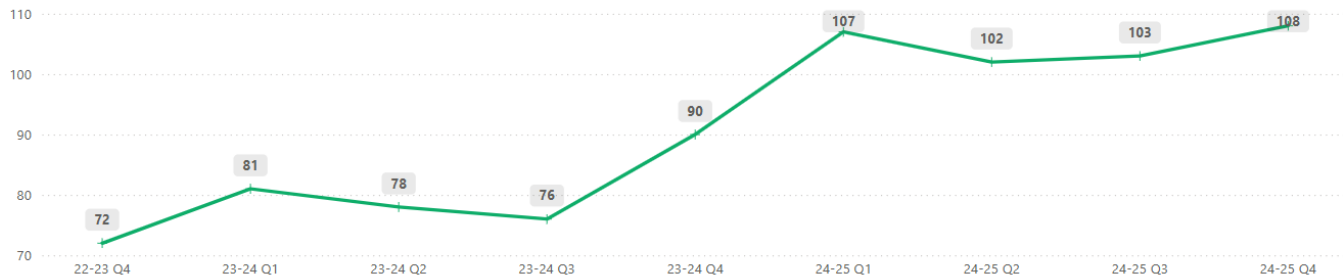
26. The table below shows the difference in both numbers and weekly unit cost for some of the costliest placement types, comparing MTFS budgeted position to the current position / cohort of children at the end of March 2025.

Placement Type	24/25 MTFS budgeted Assumptions by March 25		24/25 Position at end of March 25		Change	
	Numbers	Weekly Cost £	Numbers	Weekly Cost £	Numbers	Weekly Cost £
Residential Provision (Including Parent and Child)	86	6,181	108	6,055	22	-126
Independent Fostering Provision	150	926	145	980	-5	54
16plus Supported Accommodation (Non UASC)	77	1,666	82	1,750	5	84

27. The financial pressure is further compounded by market instability and provider choice which is resulting in children with a range of complex needs being 'unattractive' to the market (for example, where they display violence and aggression as a result of experiencing trauma) and results in the use of high cost, £12,000+ per week per child, interim provision until behaviour stabilises or another placement can be found. This can also result in volatility in the average unit cost of this cohort at any one time. Other sufficiency issues impacting on budget pressure include a lack of step-down options from residential provision. There are approximately 11 children who have been waiting long periods (6 months plus) for a family-based placement, with continued searches and work with providers to try to identify suitable provision. This is not helped by a low recruitment pipeline for mainstream carers nationally which particularly affects availability of placements for older children and those with more complex needs.

28. As part of the direct actions being taken to mitigate against these financial pressures, the Defining Children and Family Services for the Future programme has several workstreams to enable MTFS benefits to be achieved alongside the Social Care

Investment Programme (SCIP) working in partnership with Barnardo's. This will have a positive impact through the creation of additional residential provision capacity for under 16's, over 16's and parent and children places. The Council has been successful in obtaining additional capital grant funding (match funded by the Authority) to enable investment in a number of properties creating provision for 20 plus placements over the lifetime of the MTFS. Several units are now live and operational, with the remainder of units due to open over the next 12-18 months.

29. The £1.5m overspend position in relation to the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) budget is largely due to the continued increase in UASC in care and care leavers, which has required a greater resource requirement to meet their needs. The impact of the development of dispersal into private residential accommodation by the Home Office and the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) protocol development has resulted in an increase in the number of children who are UASC being accommodated by Leicestershire.

30. Local authorities are mandated to receive UASC through the NTS if they are below their 0.1 % threshold, which is calculated from the number of UASC funding claims (for under-18s) made by that local authority, and the latest ONS estimate of that local authority's total child population at that time. In Leicestershire's case, 0.1% threshold currently equates to circa 145 Looked After Children UASC aged under 18. No consideration is given to the number of UASC care leavers aged 18+ within the allocation of the 0.1% by the Home Office. This in turn means the Council continues to have more demand for care leaver services and the current funding for care leavers decreases, but the demand grows. The Council is working with the East Midlands Councils' Strategic Migration Partnership which continues to challenge the situation with the Home Office.

31. The number of UASC care leavers is 216 by the end of the financial year, which includes a number of UASC Looked After Children (i.e. those in the care of the Authority) who will have turned 18 in the last six months. In addition to the UASC care leaver numbers growing, the Council will also receive more referrals from the NTS as it is likely to fall below the 0.1% threshold level of 145. Overall this is a significant demand and financial pressure. The level of grant paid by the Home Office is sufficient to cover the costs of the cohort that are under 18, but it drops significantly for those over 18 and does not cover the cost incurred. The table below shows the change in demand over the last three financial years, and with demand likely to increase further over the period of the MTFS.

	UASC In Care (Under 18's)	Annual % Increase	UASC – Care Leaver (Over 18's)	Annual % Increase
Mar-22	60		69	
Mar-23	97	62%	112	62%
Mar-24	132	36%	163	46%
Mar-25	82	-38%	216	33%

32. The Education Psychology service is overspent by £1.2m in 2024/25. Difficulties recruiting into vacancies in this area have resulted in an increased reliance on locums at a significantly higher cost. Increased demand due to the growing number of Education,

Health and Care Plan (EHCP) needs assessments has further impacted the overspend position.

33. The Special Educational Needs Assessment Service budget is overspent by £0.5m in 2024/25. Increased service demand and complexity has resulted in the need for additional service resources to ensure demand can be managed in the most efficient and effective manner. Although some growth funding was approved for 2024/25, this was insufficient to meet statutory responsibilities. A heavy reliance on agency workers to undertake (EHCP) writing, tribunal work and provide additional management resource has contributed to the overspend. Meanwhile mediation costs remain high, adding to the in-year financial pressure.

34. There is also an increased demand for children in need of financial support who meet the thresholds as set out in Sections 17/23 of Children's Act 1989, which targets children with challenging behaviour, as well as children with high needs 'on the edge of care'. Therefore such preventative spend is seen as a more cost effective solution, avoiding the high costs of supporting children in the actual care system. The overspend on this budget for this financial year is £0.7m.

35. There are further budget pressures (£0.5m) linked to frontline social care service budgets – mainly within Family Safeguarding and First Response - due to some recent challenges with caseload management linked to incoming service demand. Key staff in First Response have been absent and, due to demand, additional agency staff were required. This has led to a review of longer-term staffing need for the service. In respect of Family Safeguarding, continued struggles to recruit experienced social workers have led to recruiting more newly qualified social workers needing agency staff working alongside them for the first 12 months. This will enable the service in 12 months' time to have a suitably experienced and skilled permanent workforce. The reliance on agency will reduce after 6 months with a significant reduction in 12 months. Agency usage and its appropriateness is reviewed on a monthly basis as part of business-as-usual practice.

36. The Disabled Children Service overspent by £0.8m. Difficulties recruiting into vacancies within the service has resulted in an increased reliance on agency workers at a significantly higher cost (£0.3m). The remainder of the overspend position (£0.5m) relates to increased demand across both direct payments and commissioned support due to increasing numbers eligible and needing access to short breaks and wrap around support for this cohort of children on the edge of care.

37. As a direct response to the financial pressures which were being seen in-year across the different service areas, the departmental management team is carrying out a review of non-statutory services, supported by the introduction of corporate led financial controls. Together with continued robust management and review of vacancies within the department, this work has delivered some one-off in-year efficiencies, and budget opportunities of £1.5m. This includes delaying recruitment to non-essential posts where appropriate, as well as maximising any grant funding to ensure such prescribed outcomes can be met in the most efficient, effective and compliant way possible. Further work is being undertaken to explore the feasibility of this work delivering ongoing future budget efficiencies.

38. In light of the various financial pressures across the department, further mitigating actions (acting as key enablers in supporting both current and/or future MTFS savings / demand management) in place include:

    a) Pro-active reviews of a child's placement package, ensuring package of support and care is fit for purpose and aligned to needs. This is supported by ensuring reduced periods of care or avoiding the need for care through family help support and new models of working, and targeted interventions through exiting care by legal orders and step-down from residential interventions.
    b) Improved oversight and sign-off processes for those children with complex and escalating needs extending from Heads of Service to Assistant Director/Director level.
    c) Continued business as usual activity introduced by the Defining Children's and Family Services programme focusing on children who have been referred to the Children and Family Services commissioning service for a placement and are likely to result in residential care due to market sufficiency issues or high need. This is being extended to include foster care referrals received for children age 12+ who, by virtue of their age and due to market pressures, are at risk of residential care.
    d) Continued focussed management and review of vacancies within the department; this is projected to deliver some one-off in-year efficiencies and budget opportunities, including delaying recruitment to non-essential posts where appropriate.

Adults and Communities

39. There is a net underspend for the departmental revenue budget for 2024/25 of £17.3m (7.2%).

    Overall Demand Trends

40. The chart below shows the overall number of service users being supported across Residential Care, Homecare, Supported Living, Direct Cash Payments and Community Life Choices from April 2021 through to March 2025. Prior to the introduction of the Fair Outcomes Panel (departmental panel to review care packages) in September 2023 annualised growth from April 2021 to September 2023 was approximately 3.5%. Since then, the department has worked to be more efficient with commissioning and the number of service users supported has now decreased to an annualised rate of 1.5% over the whole period.

Number of Service Users
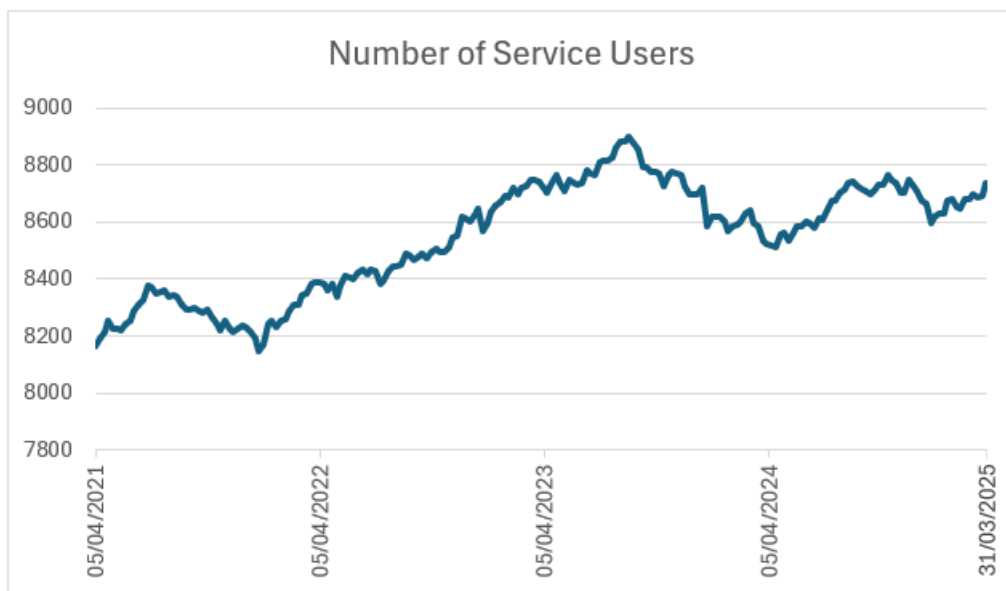
41. The average cost per service user rose over the same time period. The rise from April 2024 relates to the annual fee review uplift. Uplifts occur in April each year.

Average Cost per Service User
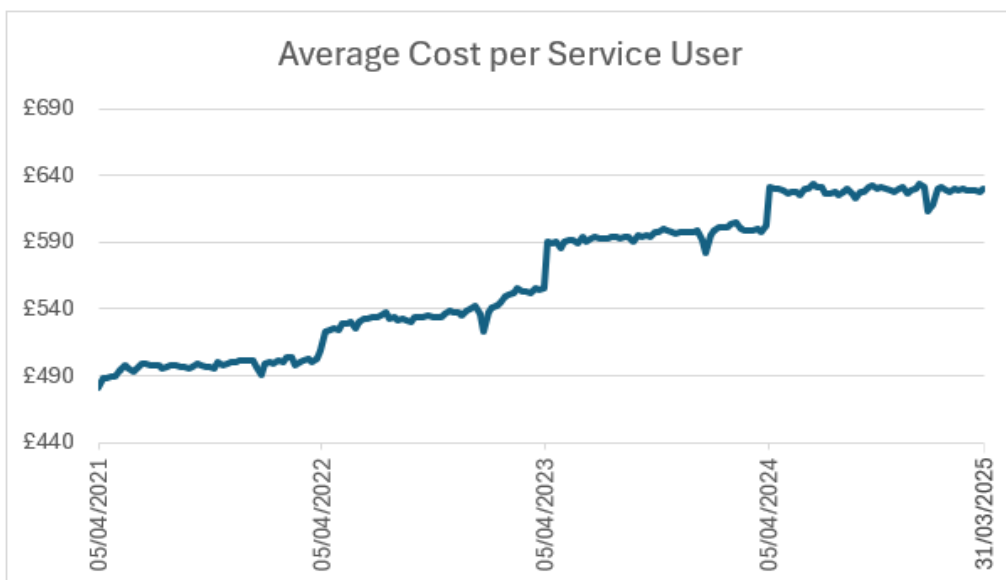
42. The department has established a wide-ranging demand management programme and a panel to review care packages since September 2023 which has started to have an impact on all commissioned services.

43. The main areas of budget variance forecast in 2024/25 are:

Homecare - £3.8m underspend

44. The number of home care service users and average hours had been falling since the introduction of the Fair Outcomes Panel in September 2023. The budget is based on an average of 2,690 service users per week. At the start of the year there were 2,550

service users. Over the year there has been a 4% growth in SU numbers to 2,650 as of March 2025. Average hours per service user are currently around 10.7 per week which has now reached a stable position, having fallen from around 11.2 hours a year earlier. The average cost per week per service user over the year is £340, (2023/24. £330).

Residential Care - £3.2m underspend

45. Residential service user income overachieved the budget by £2.6m predominantly from clearing a backlog of financial assessments which has generated additional one-off income. This income may not be fully guaranteed due to the charges being raised relating to the past and therefore being more difficult to collect. Additional health income was also received of £1.1m due to increasing numbers of service users with funding following the introduction of the Fair Outcomes Panel. The additional income was partially offset by an overspend on residential care expenditure of £0.8m due to an increase in service user numbers. There was an average of 2,384 service users over the course of the year with an average cost of £1,095 per week. There are also fewer service users in shared lives residential placements creating an additional underspend of £0.35m.

Better Care Fund (Balance) / Other NHS Income - £2.7m underspend

46. Additional BCF and Discharge Grant income of £2.7m which can be used to support hospital discharge related costs.

Home First - £1.3m underspend

47. The underspend relates to staffing vacancies that are in the process of being filled. Recruitment is ongoing to ensure that the new Homecare Assessment and Reablement Team (HART) delivery model (intake model) is fully staffed. This will have the benefit of increasing reablement capacity, reducing the commissioning of external provision when there is not adequate HART capacity.

Supported Living - £1.1m underspend

48. There was an increase of approximately 20 service users over the course of the year which is lower than anticipated. The underspend was due to lower referrals coming via the care pathway, but also resulted from alternative commissioning options being pursued by the Fair Outcomes Panel and in group supervisory meetings. Currently there are 526 service users at an average cost of £1,645 per week.

Direct Cash Payments - £1.1m underspend

49. The underspend is due to 2.45% reduction in service users leading to a £1.2m underspend. The number of new packages being commissioned has decreased by 30% since the introduction of the Fair Outcomes Panel leading to lower service user numbers. The cash payment income target was £0.1m lower than budgeted, and the department is working to improve this process where service users have not used their full allocation and have surplus balances building. Currently there are 1,726 service users receiving a

direct cash payment and 1,279 carers receiving a carers cash payment. The department has actively encouraged the uptake of personal assistants by cash payment recipients. This was implemented in August 2023 and has had a slow start but numbers are expected to scale up over 2025/26.

Community Life Choices (Day Services) - £0.8m underspend

50. The number of service users peaked in October 2023. Since then numbers have been lower than budgeted for. There has been a noticeable increase of 6% in working age adult service user numbers over the year, which are likely to be young adults who have transitioned from the Children's and Family Services Department.

51. The net underspends above are increased by a net £3.3m underspend mainly from staffing vacancies, grant income and other minor variations. Collection of adult social care debt has been challenging during the year as it is dependent on many factors, some of which are outside the Council's control, such as delays within the court system to process Court of Protection applications.

52. During budget setting for the new MTFS 2025-29 a total of £9m was reduced from the 2025/26 Adults and Communities budget in light of the ongoing impact of the variances from 2024/25. Following the outturn position another review will be undertaken to determine if there are any further reductions that can be made to the 2025/26 budget. This will be reported as part of the Period 2 monitoring position in June 2025.

Public Health

53. The outturn is as budgeted after movements to the earmarked public health reserve. Additional public health grant and underspends on teen health and sexual health services, offset by a reduction in planned contributions (£1m) from the earmarked reserve.

Environment and Transport

54. A net underspend of £1.8m (1.6%) is reported.

55. Across Highways and Transport operations a net £1.1m overspend is reported as a result of:

- Mainstream School Transport - £1.5m overspend. This arises from an increase in overall number of entitled students (6.7% since 2021/22) and a rise in the number of routes. Bus operational costs have also increased resulting in higher contract costs which, combined with limited bus capacity, have resulted in more pupils being transported by taxi. Furthermore, with effect from September 2024, additional costs arose from a DfE statutory change to Mainstream home to school transport policy.
- Environmental and Reactive Maintenance – net overspend £1.9m. This is in response to increasing demand for reactive repairs on a deteriorating road network and severe weather conditions. This is a statutory duty with works being undertaken in line with service policy.

- SEND Transport – £0.2m underspend. Due to the ongoing targeted tendering work.
- Passenger Fleet – a net underspend of £0.4m due to vacant driver and escort posts, net of additional vehicle hire and maintenance costs.
- Social Care Transport - £0.6m overspend. This is due to an under reserve in 2023/24 and additional taxi spend, being met by an underspend on Passenger Fleet.
- Network Management - a £0.7m underspend arising from additional Temporary Traffic Regulation Order applications.
- Engineering Services – a £1.6m underspend due to an increased recharge to the Capital Programme for staff time incurred on capital works.

56. Development and Growth services are reporting a £0.5m underspend arising from vacancies across teams (£1.0m) offset by a shortfall in developer income (£0.1m) and recharges to capital programme for staff time incurred on capital works (£0.4m).

57. There is a net underspend of £2.7m reported for Environment and Waste Management services. Additional income from the sale of dry recyclable and electrical materials (£1.6m), together with underspends arising from staffing vacancies (£0.1m); and net underspends arising from changes to waste treatment including diverting waste away from landfill (£0.9m). There is also a £0.1m underspend on environmental policies and initiatives due to reduced capacity for service delivery and lower take up of planned initiatives.

Chief Executive's

58. The Department had an underspend of £0.8m (4.7%), mainly due to staffing vacancies within the Growth Unit (£0.5m), Democratic Services (£0.2m) and across the remaining service areas (£0.1m).

Corporate Resources

59. There is a net underspend of £1.1m (2.6%).

60. There have been vacancy underspends across the directorate due to difficulty in recruiting to posts and continued corporate recruitment controls. Recruitment to professional and technical posts is particularly difficult due to competition in both the public and private sector markets. There have been reduced energy costs across Council buildings and increased income from some areas that deliver chargeable services for other organisations such as Human Resources and Internal Audit. This will enable some earlier delivery of savings in 2025/26. Continued tighter corporate led financial controls, together with existing robust management and review of vacancies within the department have helped to deliver a number of in-year efficiencies.

61. Commercial services have also performed better than anticipated but it remains a challenging environment, due to the impact of inflation and reducing customer base in some parts of the service. Schools are the main customer and are under increasing financial pressures.

62. The underspends are offset by contributions to earmarked reserves as below:

- £0.5m to the Investing in Leicestershire Programme (IiLP) earmarked reserve (sinking fund) to help offset a forecast fall in the net asset value of £1.8m relating to the divestment of certain pooled property investments, explained in more detail within the IiLP section later in this report.
- £0.4m to earmarked reserves to offset one-off costs related to the relocation of the data centre currently located at Romulus Court, Leicester to a third party host.
- £1.4m towards a sinking fund for corporate buildings (particularly Beaumanor Hall due to urgent maintenance requirements) and country parks.

Central Contingencies

63. MTFS Risks Contingency (£10m original budget, £9.0m balance). £1m of the contingency has been released to provide temporary support to the Commercial Services budget. The balance of funding has been transferred to corporate earmarked reserves to assist with addressing the projected MTFS budget gaps in future years. The 2025-29 MTFS shows a gap of £38m in 2026/27 rising to £62m in 2027/28. To mitigate the impact it is important that wherever possible funding is set aside to meet those future years' challenges and the budget equalisation reserve should aim to at least have the equivalent of 2 years budget gaps to avoid financial resilience issues.

64. Inflation Contingency (£36.1m original budget, £12.3m balance). The contingency was underspent by £10.3m. This mainly relates to lower costs on the Adult Social Care Fee review than anticipated in the MTFS, linked to falling inflation. The pay settlement for Local Government staff for 2024/25 was also lower than the assumption in the MTFS. Given a shortfall in government funding regarding the impact of changes to National Insurance from April 2025 and uncertainty of the impact on the costs of supplies and services to the Council, an amount of £2m has been carried forward to 2025/26 via a transfer to earmarked reserves.

65. Service Investment Fund (£0.2m original budget). This budget was transferred for 2024/25 purposes to the Environment and Transport budget, to be used for flood investigation and scheme development work to address flooding as well as bidding for funding for project delivery. It also provided capacity to administer Government flood-related grant funding.

Central Items

66. The Financing of Capital budget is £6.2m overspent. This comprises an underspend of £0.9m (part year 2024/25) due to a reduction in interest payments following the early repayment of £39m of external debt principal during 2024/25, offset by early repayment premiums of £7m charged in 2024/25. Following high periods of inflation in the UK there had been an increase in the discounts available for the premature repayment of debt which will then lead to annual savings in interest payments for the next 40 years in excess of the premiums paid. At the start of the year the Council was £18m overborrowed against the capital financing requirement (the level of historic capital expenditure required to be funded). At the year-end the Council is now underborrowed by

£20m, which can be funded using internal investment balances rather than more expensive external borrowing.

67. Bank and other interest, has provided £7.5m increased investment income. This is due to the Bank of England base rate levels during 2024/25 being higher, and for longer than forecast, and higher than estimated average Council balances. The Bank of England base rate now stands at 4.25%. Average balances remain strong due to earmarked reserves, the latest phasing of spend on the capital programme and government grants received in advance.

68. Central expenditure budgets are overspent by £0.5m. A contribution of £1m has been made to the Pension Fund to cover actual ill health retirement costs incurred in 2024/25, offset by underspends in other budgets, including £0.2m relating to higher than forecast income from a share of the surplus for ESPO (the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation, a public sector consortium) in 2023/24.

69. There is an underspend of £2.2m on Other Items, mainly relating to £1.2m from cleansing of receipted aged purchase orders that are no longer required and £0.7m regarding a reduction to prior year business rates relating to some properties including Beaumanor Hall and Century Theatre.

70. Additional contributions to corporate earmarked reserves of £6.6m. This relates to £3.1m to provide cover for the increase in the High Needs Block deficit, £2.5m from increased business rates income, as set out below, to be used to offset the anticipated gap in the MTFS projection in 2025/26, and a £1m contribution to the Transformation reserve, which is forecast to require additional funding over the MTFS period.

71. The Cabinet on 13th September 2024 approved the use of the Period 4 forecast net underspend of £6.4m to fund an increase in the capital programme risk contingency. This has already been reflected in the outturn position.

72. The approved MTFS projected a net gap in 2024/25 of £6.4m which was planned to be covered by a contribution from the budget equalisation reserve. Given the improved overall position, that contribution was not required in 2024/25 but is likely to be needed in future years, with the approved 2025/26 budget only being balanced with the use of reserves (£4.7m).

Business Rates

73. Additional Business Rates income of £1.3m is forecast in 2024/25, based on the last information received from district councils on their NNDR1 forms and forecast section 31 grants. The final position will be based on the NNDR3 returns to be submitted to the Government by the end of May. The MTFS adopted a prudent approach and did not allow for potential real terms growth or for the full impact of inflation in charges to businesses and section 31 grants.

74. Additional Business Rates Pool levy income of £0.7m is forecast for 2024/25. The current forecast, based on data in the NNDR1 forms and monitoring exercises, shows a total of

£21.7m, of which one third (£7.2m) will be allocated to the County Council under the treatment of levies reported to the Cabinet in June 2023, compared with the forecast of £6.5m included in the 2024/25 budget. The actual levy position will be determined from the data in the NNDR3 returns due by the end of May.

75. The Government redistributed £100m from the national Levy and Safety Net fund, of which the County Council was allocated £0.5m.

Overall Revenue Summary

76. Overall, there is a net underspend of £8.8m. It is proposed that this is added to the Transformation reserve, to provide funding for the costs of work to support the development of further savings to mitigate the projected shortfalls in future years' funding, and initial costs relating to Local Government Reorganisation.

77. The scale of the County Council's challenge will require all areas to be reviewed for opportunities. In common with previous years, it is expected that a mixture of internal and external resource will be required to identify and deliver savings, and the underspend from 2024/25 will be used to support this where required. The current MTFS gap, combined with the uncertainty over the Spending Review and Funding Reform, requires immediate action to identify further deliverable savings options. The process to refresh the MTFS is underway, and a progress report will be taken to scrutiny in September providing further information on the approach to identifying new opportunities to ensure a sustainable budget can be set for 2026/27. Areas that are likely to require external support are:

- An overall review of the cost base and efficiency of the Council to identify further savings opportunities.
- A review of Third Party Spend to identify savings opportunities, either from reduced spend or rationalizing suppliers, or contract negotiations.
- Reviewing the current operating models for Business Support and Customer Services to improve efficiency across the organization.
- Undertaking a series of service reviews to identify opportunities to deliver services differently.
- Reviewing the current operating model for the Transformation Unit to ensure savings delivery is maximized at an increased pace.
- Development of Preventative interventions to better manage demand on services.
- Capacity to ensure change activity can be undertaken at sufficient pace.
- Specialist expertise to supplement the Council's knowledge.

78. The current MTFS gap, combined with the uncertainty over the Spending Review and Funding Reform, requires immediate action to identify further deliverable savings options. The work set out above will support this process and will focus on strategic, organization-wide opportunities to identify savings of a sufficient scale. It is likely to be a significant investment, but it is necessary to ensure acceleration of the current savings programme, especially in light of the risks from funding reform, the Spending Review and Government's planned reform of services.

79. In terms of Local Government Reorganisation, the current timeline is to prepare and submit a full business case in November this year. That is likely to involve significant work in terms of financial modelling, options appraisal and consultation and may require additional capacity. The Council has recently received feedback from government on its interim plan submission and is now reviewing it to understand what further work will be needed. The government has also made a contribution towards business case development for each area.

80. Despite the overall net underspend position for 2024/25, the underlying position remains very challenging, even after actions taken to reduce expenditure. There are significant overspends in the Children and Family Services budget and the 2024/25 £23m deficit on the High Needs Block (resulting in a £64m cumulative HNB deficit) is of particular concern, especially as the government has not yet set out any plans to extend the Statutory Override beyond March 2026 or announced any alternative proposals. The local government settlement did not provide any clarification on government's plans for SEND reform. The High Needs deficit is forecast to exceed £100m by the end of the MTFS period.

81. Many of the underspends are due to staff vacancies which by their nature are not on-going, and the significant additional income from bank and other interest is likely to be short-term too. Tight control over spending and reducing running costs where possible through ongoing financial controls has enabled the Council to produce a net underspend position, despite continued cost pressures, particularly on children's services.

82. The current MTFS still shows a gap of £90m by 2028/29, despite demand pressures in adults being well managed and inflationary pressures reducing. Whilst a review of the MTFS is currently underway to take into account the final outturn position, this is incredibly difficult before any final proposals on local government funding reform are released. The Spending Review is expected on 11th June and further funding consultations are due before the summer recess, but it could be well into autumn before the actual impact on the Council is known. This means that it is even more important to have clear, deliverable savings plans and a robust level of reserves as there may be limited time to react once the financial position for 2026/27 becomes clearer.

83. The national financial position remains extremely tight, and the Chancellor may need to announce further spending reductions in June to remain within fiscal rules. As local government is not a protected department, unlike Health and Education, it may be harder hit from any reductions. Funding reform is not expected to be favourable for county areas, with the government giving a bigger focus to areas of deprivation. This has already impacted on Leicestershire through the 2025/26 finance settlement. The combination of further government spending reductions and funding reform could present a very challenging budget setting process for 2026/27.

General Fund and Earmarked Reserves

84. The current balance of the General Fund is £21m, representing 3.7% of the 2025/26 net revenue budget, which is below the Council's approved Reserves policy target range of 4% to 7% of net revenue expenditure. The latest MTFS 2025-29 includes contributions of

£1m per year to increase the General Fund by the end of the MTFS period to £25m. Subject to the proposed addition of £8.8m from the 2024/25 net underspend to the Transformation reserve, it is proposed to transfer £4m of this balance to the General Fund. This would increase the General Fund balance as at 31 March 2025 to £25m and to 4.1% of the 2025/26 net revenue budget, and within the Reserves policy target range. It is necessary to increase the General Fund to reflect increasing uncertainty and risks over the medium term and to avoid a reduction in the percentage of the net budget covered given the overall budget increase.

85.   The level of earmarked reserves held as at 31 March 2025 totals £230m including schools and partnership funding. They can be summarised as below:

Capital/Repairs	£126m
Risk	£110m
Revenue projects	£23m
Ring fenced grants etc	£18m
Schools DSG	-£48m
Partnerships	£1m
Total	£230m

86.   Earmarked reserves are shown in more detail at Appendix C. This shows balances at April 2024 and as at the end of March 2025. The MTFS includes further analysis of the County Council's earmarked reserves including the reasons for holding them.

87.   The risk-based reserves shown in the table above include the Budget Equalisation reserve which is held to support the MTFS and provide some level of cover for future funding gaps in case adequate savings are not identified or delivered. This reserve also provides some mitigation for the High Needs deficit. Given that the budget gap in 2026/27 is expected to be in the region of £38m, as well as the future challenges on the High Needs deficit, it is important that this reserve is held at a reasonable level.

88.   The main earmarked reserves are set out below.

Renewals of Vehicles and Equipment (£2.2m)

89.   Departments hold earmarked reserves for the future replacement of vehicles and equipment such as ICT.

Trading (£5.8m)

90.   Sinking fund set aside to fund repairs and maintenance of the Investing in Leicestershire Programme (IiLP).

Insurance (£15.6m)

91.   Earmarked reserves of £10.7m are held to meet the estimated cost of future claims to enable the Council to meet excesses not covered by insurance policies and smooth

fluctuations in claims between years. The levels are informed by advice from independent advisors.

92.   The uninsured loss fund of £4.9m is required mainly to meet potential liabilities arising from Municipal Mutual Insurance (MMI) that is subject to a run-off of claims following liquidation in 1992. The fund also covers the period before the Council purchased insurance cover and any other uninsured losses.

Children and Family Services

93.   Children and Family Services Developments (£2.3m). This provides funding for a number of projects such as improving management information, information access and retention and responding to changing requirements as a result of OfSTED and legislation.

Adults and Communities

94.   Adults and Communities Developments (£1.4m). This earmarked reserve is held to fund a number of investments in maintaining social care service levels and assisting the Department in achieving its transformation.

Public Health

95.   Public Health (£5.8m) – to fund Public Health initiatives within Leicestershire.

Environment and Transport

96.   Commuted Sums (£1.9m). This funding, received from housing developers, is used to cover future revenue costs arising from developer schemes where the specifications are over and above standard developments. For example, block paving, bollards, or trees adjacent to the highway. These liabilities can arise many years after the funding is received and therefore the balance on this earmarked reserve has built up over time.

Corporate

97.   Transformation Fund (£12.0m), subject to approval of £8.8m from the 2024/25 net revenue underspend and a transfer of £4m to the General Fund. The Fund is used to invest in transformation projects to identify and deliver efficiency savings and also to fund severance costs. To achieve the level of savings within the MTFS the Council needs to change significantly and this will require major investment, including in some of the core 'building blocks' such as improvements to data quality, and improvements to digital services enabling more self-service.

98.   Broadband (£2.7m). This earmarked reserve was established to allow the development of super-fast broadband within Leicestershire. There is a significant time lag in spending County Council funds as a result of securing grant funding from Government and the European Regional Development Fund that required those funds to be spent first and within a set period.

99. Budget Equalisation (£91.9m). This manages variations in funding across financial years and potential one-off funding for future MTFS gaps. As things stand, there could be a significant call on this reserve in the medium term if further savings are not identified and delivered in the short term. The reserve also includes the increasing pressures on the High Needs element of the DSG which is in deficit by £64.4m at the end of 2024/25. The Children and Family Services Department is investigating a number of actions that could over the course of the MTFS reduce demand and therefore the overall deficit.

Capital

100. Capital Financing (£129.2m). This earmarked revenue reserve is used to hold MTFS revenue contributions required to fund the approved capital programme in future years. When financing actual capital expenditure incurred, capital funding is used first and this revenue reserve is used last (as revenue funding is less restricted than capital funding, the latter of which can only be used to fund new capital expenditure). This reserve is fully committed to fund the 2025-29 MTFS capital programme and will be used before any of the planned £84m new unsupported borrowing included in the 2025-29 programme is used.

101. Pooled Property Fund(s) (-£18.1m) balance after principal repayments. The Cabinet previously approved the investment of £25m of the Council's earmarked reserves into pooled property funds. The investments are held to achieve higher returns than if the funds were invested as cash and return an annual contribution of approximately £1m. The investment is funded from the overall balance of earmarked reserves and can be realised in the future when required.

Other / Partnerships Earmarked Reserves

102. DSG (overall deficit of £48.3m). DSG is ring-fenced and can only be applied to meet expenditure properly included in the Schools Budget, as defined in the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations. This reserve is earmarked to meet the revenue costs of commissioning places in new schools, early years and to support pressures on the High Needs block. A summary is shown below:

	Schools Block	Early Years Block	High Needs Block	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m
As at 31 March 2024	12.3	-3.1	-41.2	-32.0
Changes 2024/25	1.9	5.0	-23.2	-16.3
As at 31 March 2025	**14.2**	**1.9**	**-64.4**	**-48.3**

103. Within the Schools block funding, future DSG allocations for schools' growth will be retained and added to the earmarked reserve to support the revenue costs of commissioning new schools. The deficit on the High Needs Block will increase in the medium term until the savings arising from the High Needs Development Plan are delivered. In the short term the surplus on the Schools Block will partially offset the high needs and early years deficits.

104. Health and Social Care Outcomes (£10.2m) used in conjunction with Health partners across Leicestershire.

105. Active Together (£1.1m). The main purpose of this earmarked reserve is to hold partner contributions until expenditure on the agreed activities has been incurred. A significant part of the service's funding from external agencies is uncertain in nature, so the earmarked reserve also allows management of funding variations and a redundancy provision.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME

106. The updated capital programme for 2024/25 totals £168m. This follows a review of the programme undertaken over the summer and approved by the Cabinet in September 2024. A total of £134m has been invested during 2024/25.

107. A summary of the capital outturn for 2024/25, excluding schools devolved formula capital, is set out below:

Programme Area	Updated Budget £000	Actual Expenditure £000	Net Variance £000	%
Children and Family Services	44,367	48,736	4,369	110%
Adults and Communities	7,080	5,580	(1,500)	79%
Environment and Transport	95,910	75,259	(20,651)	78%
Corporate Resources	4,542	2,203	(2,339)	49%
Corporate Programme	16,324	2,301	(14,023)	14%
Total	**168,223**	**134,079**	**(34,144)**	**80%**

108. A summary of the net variance is shown below:

Programme Area	Underspend £000	Overspend £000	Rephasing of expenditure £000	Acceleration £000	Total £000
Children and Family Servs.	(13)	13	(11,565)	15,933	4,369
Adults and Communities	(0)	0	(1,500)	0	(1,500)
Environment and Transport	(983)	1,413	(21,081)	0	(20,651)
Corporate Resources	(503)	0	(1,852)	16	(2,339)
Corporate Programme	(0)	0	(14,023)	0	(14,023)
Total	**(1,499)**	**1,426**	**(50,021)**	**15,949**	**(34,144)**
	(73)		**(34,072)**		

109. The net underspend has been added to the capital financing reserve to reduce the level of internal borrowing required for the new MTFS capital programme. The net rephasing of expenditure of £34m has been carried forward to the capital programme 2025-29 to fund reprogrammed projects.

110. A summary of the key projects delivered and main variations are set out below. Further details of the main variations are provided in Appendix D.

111. Appendix E compares the provisional prudential indicators with those set and agreed by the Council at its budget meeting in February 2024. These are all within the limits set except for the 'actual capital financing costs as a percentage of net revenue stream' indicator – increase due to premiums on the early repayment of debt, reducing future interest costs, explained earlier in the report.

112. A review of the new 2025-29 MTFS capital programme will be undertaken during the summer 2025 in light of the outturn and financial pressures on large capital projects. An updated capital programme will be reported to the Cabinet in September 2025.

Children and Family Services

Key Projects Delivered

113. Creation of additional school places across the County at eleven different schools across all phases of Education. A total of 315 new primary school places across two Primary Schools including a second zero carbon school, Wellington Place Primary in Market Harborough. Regarding secondary provision, work started in year on 1,145 new school places across four schools. This involved expansions at existing schools which will conclude early in the 2025/26 financial year. The SEND programme saw the completion of a project with the DfE for the Bowman Academy Communication and Interaction Special School that opened 64 places. A further 36 places were delivered across other schools to support the growing need for High Needs places in Leicestershire.

Main Variances

114. Overall, the departmental outturn is net acceleration of £4.4m.

115. The main variances relate to the Provision of School Places Programme:

- Shepshed Iveshead School, £6.8m acceleration. This scheme delivers additional teaching spaces on a large and complex campus which houses multiple different education provisions that have some degree of interaction. The budget was profiled prudently between 2024/25 and 2025/26 in the MTFS. Good progress has been made and it is now forecast that the scheme will complete in early summer 2025.

- Burbage Hastings High School, £4.5m acceleration. This project creates a new sports hall and addition classrooms. The budget had been prudently profiled in the MTFS. Good progress has been made and it is now forecast that the scheme will complete in late summer 2025.

- Hinckley Redmoor (secondary), £3m acceleration. This project delivers a new science block, sports hall and refurbished catering facility. It is an academy delivered scheme, prudently profiled in the MTFS.

- Oadby Brocks Hill Primary, £1.8m slippage. This passported scheme creates 210 places at the school. Delays in the planning permission process have resulted in only internal configuration work being undertaken before the end of the financial year.

116. Other variations include rephasing of expenditure of £5m on the Children's SEND programme (across various schemes), £1.2m reprogrammed on the Strategic Capital Maintenance programme, and £0.5m rephasing on the Children's Social Care Improvement Programme (SCIP).

Adults and Communities

Key Projects Delivered

117. Disabled Facilities Grant of £5.5m passported to Leicestershire district councils to help people with the cost of adapting their homes to meet their essential needs.

Main Variances

118. Overall, the departmental outturn is net rephasing of expenditure of £1.5m. The variance is on the SCIP programme relating to two extra care schemes where the land transactions have been delayed to 2025/26.

Environment and Transport

Key Projects Delivered

119. A total of £45.3m was spent on the preparation and delivery of major projects in 2024/25, including:

- North and East Melton Mowbray Distributor Road, £40.1m – for the construction of the new distributor road to ease congestion in the town centre and facilitate growth.
- A511 Major Road Network scheme, £1.8m in designing and preparing the full business case to the Department for Transport. Project to tackle longstanding congestion and traffic related problems on the A511 between Leicester (M1 Junction 22) and the A42 commenced 2019/20 with a completion on site anticipated in 2028.
- Zouch Bridge, £3.4m – the existing bridge is at the end of its life. It forms part of the A6006 which is strategically important in terms of transport infrastructure and the regional economy. Construction commenced in 2024/25 and is ongoing.

120. A total of £22m was invested in Highways Asset Maintenance:

- £18.0m on carriageways
- £1.6m on footways and rights of way
- £0.8m on bridge maintenance and strengthening
- £1.2m on street lighting maintenance
- £0.1m on flood alleviation
- £0.3m on traffic signal renewal

121. A total of £0.7m has been invested in Environment and Waste improvement works, including at Recycling and Household Waste Sites (RHWS).
    - £0.4m on General Improvements at RHWS locations
    - £0.3m on improvements to Ashby Canal

Main Variances

122. Overall, the departmental outturn is a net rephasing of spend of £20.7m and a net overspend of £0.4m. The main capital programme variances are:

    - North and East Melton Mowbray Distributor Road, £10.5m rephasing of expenditure due to reprograming of work with the contractor. The scheme is expected to complete in early 2026.
    - Zouch Bridge Replacement – Construction and enabling works, £1.9m.
    - Council Vehicle Replacement Programme, £1.8m rephasing of expenditure as orders have been committed. |However, due to supplier issues this has delayed the delivery of the vehicles.
    - RHWS - £0.9m rephasing due to minor delays across various projects to 2025/26.
    - Advance Design, £1.0m rephasing of expenditure due to alignment of programme to Multi Module Area Investment Plans (MMAIPS) and delivery of cycling and walking programmes.
    - Externally Funded Schemes, £0.7m rephasing of expenditure based on latest construction estimations for a number of small, programmed schemes.
    - Melton Depot Replacement, £0.6m rephasing of expenditure due to designs for the programme taking longer than anticipated.
    - Property flood risk alleviation, £0.6m rephasing of expenditure due to latest project profiles.
    - Safety Schemes, £0.6m rephasing of expenditure due to awaiting outcomes from the community speed management initiative survey that ran until March 2025.

123. Overall there is a net overspend of £0.4m across the departmental programme. This comprises the following areas: (the overspend can be managed across the overall capital programme from underspends in Corporate Resources).

    - Restorative and preventative maintenance programmes, £2m additional costs, in order to keep the network safe due to the deterioration of highway assets. Additional government grant funding has been included in the new MTFS for highways maintenance in 2025/26.
    - RHWS programme, £0.7m underspend. Reduced costs and contingencies not required.
    - Transport Asset Management, capital schemes and design, £0.6m underspend, reduced scheme risk contingencies required and
    - Other minor underspends - £0.3m

Corporate Resources

Key Projects Delivered

124. During 2024/25 £2.2m was invested, including the following programmes:

- ICT end user devices, £0.5m, updating Council-owned computers.
- Hyper-Converged Infrastructure refresh, £0.4m, a refresh of the virtualised network datacentre servers along with associated network storage devices across both data centre sites.
- Ways of Working programme, £0.7m, a programme to drive efficiency and promote productivity by promoting a culture of flexible, smarter working and office optimisation enabling rental income from partners.
- Property services, £0.5m, extending the life of council properties.

Main Variances

125. The overall departmental position was £1.9m rephasing of spend and an underspend of £0.5m. The main variances are:

- Climate Change (Energy Initiatives) - £0.7m rephasing of expenditure awaiting the design of the fleet transition plan and the outcome of match funding bids.
- ICT - End user device programme (PC, laptop), £0.5m rephasing of expenditure agreed by the Ways of Working programme board to ensure refresh funds are available beyond the existing MTFS period.
- Property Services - £0.6m rephasing of expenditure across various smaller schemes due to revised completion.
- Workplace Strategy – Office Infrastructure, £0.3m underspend due to latest estimations of works remaining costing less than previously anticipated.
- Other minor underspends £0.2m across the climate change and property programmes.

Corporate

Key Projects Delivered

126. During 2024/25, £2.3m was invested into the direct property estate, including a £1.8m investment in Airfield Business Park, Market Harborough.

Main Variances

127. The overall programme requires rephasing of expenditure of £14m on the Investing in Leicestershire Programme (IiLP). The main variances are:

- Airfield Business Park, £6.2m, project spend reprofiled due to delays with signing build contract.

- Lutterworth East Planning and pre highway construction works programme, £3.2m
This follows a review of the scheme, reported to the Cabinet in June 2024. The
revised profile shows the majority of spend now being incurred in 2025/26 and
2026/27.
- Lutterworth Leaders Farm, £2.7m due to the requirement to obtain highways
approval for a pedestrian crossing.

Capital Receipts

128. The requirement for new capital receipts to fund the capital programme for 2024/25,
excluding the sale of pooled property investments, was £5m. The actual receipts were
£0.7m due to delays in planned disposals. In all cases the sales are still proceeding but
did not complete by the year end. The temporary shortfall can be managed due to
reprogramming of spend across the programme and will be carried forward to 2025/26 to
be replenished when the sales are completed.

Overall Capital Summary

129. The Council has delivered a number of key capital projects during 2024/25, including new
school places and investment in a number of transport projects. Managing and delivering
major capital projects is complex and the spend on some projects has been rephased
into future years to match completion timescales.

130. The Capital Programme in future years is challenging, with a funding gap in the MTFS.
However, further opportunities to generate capital receipts or secure external funding will
continue to be explored to reduce the gap and minimise any borrowing requirement.

Investing in Leicestershire Programme (IiLP)

131. The Investing in Leicestershire Programme (IiLP) is an integral part of the MTFS.
Investments in property and other indirect holdings generate income that supports the
Council's MTFS whilst contributing to the wider strategic objectives of the Council and the
economic wellbeing of the area. The IiLP Strategy is approved annually as part of the
MTFS.

132. A summary of the IiLP position at quarter four for 2024/25 is included within Appendix F
and shows total net income for the year of £8.6m which is in line with the budget
for 2024/25.The total budget is split between direct core holdings and diversifier
investments as shown in the appendix. The position is after an additional contribution to
the sinking fund of £2.8m during 2024/25. The sinking fund totalled £5.8m at the end of
2024/25. It is intended to increase the amount held in the sinking fund to £7m by the end
of the MTFS 2025-29 period assuming no large utilisation is needed.

133. The actual percentage in year net return for the IiLP is 5.4% for 2024/25 when excluding
the development assets still in construction, and the rural portfolio. Including these asset
classes reduces the forecast net income return to 3.0% for the year as a consequence of
the low percentage returns against the rural portfolio which is expected. Valuations as at
the end of March have not yet been received from the external valuer for the direct

holdings so only the income returns are showing in the table against this part of the portfolio.

134. The solar project on the outskirts of Quorn has now been withdrawn and as such the forecast income for that scheme from 2026/27 has been removed and will be replaced by other in-flight projects. The site, which has planning permission to build a solar farm, has now been sold and the Council will benefit from the sale proceeds as well as receiving business rates income from the site. There is an incentive within the business rates system whereby the authority granting planning permission for renewable projects retains the business rates income directly. The decision to sell the site was primarily based on the technical knowledge and experience required to build a solar farm in the short timescale required to guarantee the grid connection.

135. The diversifiers are indirect holdings with the purpose of reducing overall portfolio risk by investing in differing asset classes and geographies. Four separate types of investment are included: UK pooled property funds, a global infrastructure fund, three vintages of a pooled private credit (debt) strategy and a bank risk share strategy. The aim is to provide diversified income from a variety of differing sources.

136. One of the four pooled property funds within the diversifiers' portfolio is in the process of being liquidated after large investors requested redemptions. The liquidation comes at a time when property prices have fallen as interest rates rose through 2022 and 2023. The liLP programme invested £7.5m in this fund in December 2015. During 2024/25 £5m capital was returned to the liLP from asset sales by the manager but this related to £6.6m of the original principal investment, resulting in a £1.6m realised loss that has been reflected in the financial outturn position though a charge against the liLP sinking fund. The remaining principal at year-end was £0.9m compared to the year-end market valuation of £0.7m. The estimated remaining £0.2m loss would be a further charge to the sinking fund in 2025/26 depending on the actual sale values. However, it should be noted that the liLP fund has received over £2m in income from this fund over the time of the investment.

137. Another of the four pooled property investments is also undergoing restructuring as the result of a large number of redemption requests. It is likely that the liLP will see its capital returned during 2025. This Fund, at present, is valued at just below the original investment but has received £2.6m in income since the first investment was made in February 2016.

138. No new diversifiers were committed to during 2024/25 although the Partners' MAC 7 (private debt) has called capital totalling £6.8m and has uncalled commitments of circa £3m which are likely to be called through 2025/26. The diversifiers' actual net income for this year is £6.2m which is £3.4m ahead of the budget as a result of income from the bank risk share and private debt investments being ahead of budget. This level of one-off outperformance, mainly within the diversifier investments, will likely not persist as the Bank of England base rates have reduced and capital has been returned during 2024/25.

139. An independent review of the Fund was undertaken by Hymans Robertson in December 2023. The report recognizes the challenges faced by the property market resulting from

higher interest rates and inflation over the past two years and acknowledged the challenges facing the market and the liLP. The report made a number of recommendations including setting ranges / limits on exposure to individual assets, tenants, property sectors and asset classes in order to guide the development of the portfolio. It also recommended the liLP explore opportunities to dispose of selected properties, partly to adjust property sector allocations but also to recycle funds into developments.

<u>Bank Risk Share – additional investment £10m</u>

140. In June 2022 the Cabinet approved the initial investment of £10m into the Christofferson Robb and Company's, Capital Relief Fund 5 (CRF5). A subsequent investment of £5m was invested in March 2023. After capital returns the latest amount held as at March 2025 is £12.5m. This will continue to reduce as the underlying loans are repaid. The Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy Statement allows a maximum investment of £20m.

141. Within the banking regulatory environment, regulatory capital has to be held as support for loans. This is to ensure that the bank has adequate 'buffers' against losses under a range of scenarios. If a bank wishes to increase its lending activity it has to hold more regulatory capital and this capital can be expensive. For example, raising equity can be difficult if the amount to be raised is a large portion of the existing equity value. The riskier a type of loan, the more a bank needs to hold in reserve in capital.

142. By arranging a mechanism for transferring the risk for loans made, banks can receive approval from the regulators to hold less regulatory capital against existing loans. This releases capital to support other banking activities. The risk transfer and the approval by regulators makes bank capital release attractive to both the bank and the investor. As capital is expensive for banks, they can afford to pay a healthy premium to the counterparty (the investor) that the risk is being transferred to. In return, the banks end up with lower risk weighted assets (loans weighted on the level of risk they present to the bank) and better capital ratios.

143. Returns to investors in the fund come from the insurance premium paid by the bank which will be distributed to investors, less any fees. The invested capital will be returned as underlying loans are repaid less any losses incurred.

144. CRF5 has performed ahead of expectations, its target return is 9% pa. It is estimated that capital will be returned over the next 24 to 36 months and as such a new commitment would need to be made in order to maintain exposure to this asset class. This is a closed ended investment product with a life of seven years and as such regular commitments are needed in order to maintain an exposure.

145. The asset class is one that the independent review of the liLP strategy by Hymans Robertson proposed should be in the range from 15-25% of total liLP assets. This investment will help bring the liLP back towards the middle of the range alongside other investments that will be proposed later in 2025/26.

146. Christofferson, Robb & Company is a private credit management firm that was founded in 2002 with capital first deployed into bank risk share strategies in 2004 and which specialises in European bank capital release. It has a dedicated team split across mainly London and New York and has the longest track record of managers operating this strategy.

147. The strategy has been known to the County Council since 2017 when the Leicestershire County Council Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) invested in an earlier release of the bank risk share strategy, Credit Relief Fund 3 (CRF3). The Leicestershire LGPS has invested into CRF5 and more recently in CRF6 and was advised by the investment consultant firm, Hymans Robertson.

148. The current iteration of the strategy (CRF6) targets an internal rate of return of 13%. This is higher than the previous fund CRF5 and is due to the higher interest rate environment that is expected to continue whilst bank risk share transactions are being conducted. CRF6 commenced conducting risk transfer transactions in 2024. The premiums paid by banks are linked to the base rate plus a margin. At time of uncertainty and stress the margin being agreed between Christofferson, Robb & Company and the transacting bank can be higher to the benefit of investors if loan losses are below estimations.

149. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement, approved by Council in February, allows for a maximum of £20m to be invested into this asset class. It is not proposed to increase this limit and so a commitment of up to £10m is proposed, ensuring that the overall limit is not breached. The investment period for this product ends at the end of 2025 (although the manager can request an extension) and as such at present income distributions are expected to commence around April 2026.

150. As with all investments there is a level of risk that exists. As a part of the review of the IiLP Strategy Hymans Roberston proposed that maintaining an allocation to this asset class would benefit the aims of the IiLP. This proposed allocation is in keeping with the strategy. Types of investment risk include:

- Leverage – the manager, Christofferson, Robb & Company, can employ leverage at Fund (CRF6) level. In addition, the underlying loans which are being insured are leveraged.
- Key man risk – the departure if key employees can halt investments due to be made. This provision within the investment particulars is to protect investors.
- Regulatory dependency – the manager relies on the EU Bank Recovery and Resolution Directive (2015) to mitigate risks associated with counterparty defaults and capital recovery. Changes by the European Banking Authority could impact the viability of Bank Capital Relief transactions. The manager will cease investing if this occurs during the commitment period, although it is unlikely existing transactions would be affected.
- General investment risk – this could come from a variety of sources including poor selection of loans to insure and general economic conditions deteriorating that affects the borrower's ability to service loans.

East Midlands Freeport

151. The County Council is acting as Accountable Body in relation to the establishment and ongoing activity of the East Midlands Freeport. The Freeport has been in operation since March 2023.

152. The County Council has provided up front funding to support business case development and wider set up costs. This is in the form of a commercial loan capped at £4m. Capacity funding has also been received from MHCLG. A total of £2.9m of the loan has been drawn down and has started to be paid back from the Freeport's retained business rates income stream. The balance remaining at year end was £8,800, which has since been fully repaid, with interest. However, the loan facility continues to March 2027 and so there is potential for funds to reborrowed up until that date.

Equality Rights Implications

153. There are no direct equality implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Human Rights Implications

154. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Appendices

Appendix A - Comparison of 2024/25 Expenditure and the Updated Revenue Budget
Appendix B - Revenue Budget 2024/25 – main variances
Appendix C - Earmarked Reserve balances 31/3/25
Appendix D - Capital Programme 2024/25 – main variances
Appendix E - Prudential Indicators 2024/25
Appendix F - Investing in Leicestershire Programme 31/3/25

Background Papers

Report to the County Council on 21 February 2024 - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 – 2027/28
https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=7305&Ver=4

REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25 - PROVISIONAL OUTTURN STATEMENT

	Updated Budget	Actual Expenditure	Difference from Updated Budget	
	£000	£000	£000	%
Schools Budget				
Schools	73,538	71,673	-1,865	-2.5
Early Years	63,169	58,147	-5,022	-8.0
DSG Funding	-136,707	-136,707	0	0.0
	0	-6,887	-6,887	
Earmarked fund - start of year			*-9,167*	
Earmarked fund - end of year			*-16,054*	
High Needs	107,112	130,327	23,215	21.7
Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)	-107,112	-107,112	0	0.0
	0	23,215	23,215	
Earmarked fund - start of year			*41,188*	
Earmarked fund - end of year			*64,403*	
LA Budget				
Children & Family Services (Other)	124,177	132,938	8,761	7.1
Adults & Communities	241,074	223,733	-17,341	-7.2
Public Health *	-2,606	-2,606	0	0.0
Environment & Transport	112,895	111,095	-1,799	-1.6
Chief Executives	16,806	16,023	-783	-4.7
Corporate Resources	41,042	39,958	-1,084	-2.6
DSG (Central Dept. recharges)	-2,285	-2,285	0	0.0
MTFS risks contingency	8,970	8,970	0	0.0
Contingency for Inflation	12,309	2,000	-10,309	-83.8
Total Services	552,382	529,826	-22,556	-4.1
Central Items				
Financing of Capital	17,400	23,557	6,157	35.4
Bank & other interest	-14,200	-21,688	-7,488	52.7
Central Expenditure	3,402	3,911	508	14.9
Other Items (including prior year adjustments)	0	-2,199	-2,199	n/a
Total Central Items	6,602	3,581	-3,021	-45.8
Contributions to earmarked reserves	15,000	21,606	6,606	44.0
Additional commitments (capital programme risk contingency)	0	6,363	6,363	n/a
Contribution from budget equalisation reserve to balance 2024/25 revenue budget	-6,377	0	6,377	-100.0
Total Spending	567,607	561,376	-6,231	-1.1
Funding				
Revenue Support Grant (new burdens)	-29	-29	0	0.0
Business Rates - Top Up	-42,383	-42,383	0	0.0
Business Rates Baseline / retained	-31,490	-32,542	-1,052	3.3
S31 Grants - Business Rates	-17,517	-17,719	-202	1.2
Allocation of Business Rates Pool Levies	-6,500	-7,233	-733	n/a
Business Rates -allocation from national Levy surplus	0	-519	-519	n/a
Council Tax Precept	-397,916	-397,916	0	0.0
Council Tax Collection Funds - net surplus	-1,918	-1,918	0	0.0
New Homes Bonus Grant	-1,012	-1,012	0	0.0
Improved Better Care Fund Grant etc.	-14,190	-14,190	0	0.0
Social Care Grant	-43,697	-43,697	0	0.0
Market Sustainability & Fair Cost of Care Fund	-10,562	-10,562	0	0.0
Services Grant	-394	-432	-38	9.7
Total Funding	-567,607	-570,151	-2,544	0.4
Net Total	0	-8,775	-8,775	
Use of Underspend				
Contribution to Transformation earmarked reserve	0	8,775	8,775	
	0	0	0	

* Public Health funded by Grant (£27.4m)

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Revenue Budget 2024/25 – forecast main variances (provisional outturn)

Children and Family Services

Dedicated Schools Grant

There is a net overspend of £16.3m. The main variances are:

	£000	% of Budget
DSG High Needs Block (HNB) earmarked reserve drawdown	17,027	n/a
The DSG budget in the original MTFS included an estimated HNB drawdown of £17.0m as the forecast in year overspend.		
Special Educational Needs	6,394	6%
Higher than budgeted numbers of High Needs students in FE Colleges, Independent schools and mainstream schools are resulting in overspend for the year. This is partially offset by vacant places at ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) and SEMH (social emotional and mental health) units.		
Secondary Education Inclusion Partnerships	503	16%
Secondary Education Inclusion Partnerships are supporting a growing number of secondary students.		
Specialist Teaching Service	253	10%
The STS Service is a fully HNB funded service, with a fixed budget envelope, and does not receive inflation in response to pay awards. It also has a built-in annual savings target which is usually achieved through in-year vacancy savings. This year due to the significant, unfunded pay award, this target was not met.		
High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant	207	n/a
The budget included estimated 24/25 High Needs Grant of £108.456m as published by the DfE in December 2023. This has been updated in July 2024 and includes a reduction in grant value of £207k due to an increase in students placed in provisions outside of Leicestershire as at Spring census date than the same point the previous year.		
Early Years /Nursery Education Funding	-5,022	-8%
The Early Years budget is showing an overall underspend of £5.0m. The budget is based on the number of hours used to calculate the original 2024/25 Early Years DSG income in December 2023. Both payments and income are higher than budgeted due to the outputs of the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) expansion and a higher number of 2-year-olds with working parents and a higher number of under 2s now taking up their FEEE entitlement. Changes to the methodology and timings as to when Grant income is received means part of this underspend position at the end of March 2025 will need to be ear-marked for the next term where it is likely additional spend will be incurred for those parents, we are choosing to stretch their FEEE entitlement over the full 52 weeks. The overall underspend position includes the budgeted planned underspend of £1.1m as part of the payback of previous years' Early Years deficits. The Early Years DSG deficit as at 31 March 2024 was £3.1m. The plan is to clear this deficit over 4 years which would be March 2027 at the latest.		
Schools Growth / Budget Allocations	-1,779	-63%
This funding has been earmarked to help meet the revenue costs associated with new schools. The underspend will be transferred to the DSG earmarked reserve to fund pupil growth in future years.		
HNB Development Programme	-707	n/a
Reduced Programme spend on HNB development workstreams supporting Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme vs budgeted position. Partly due to maximising grant funding received through bids made into the Change Partnership Programme (CPP) pilot - the outcome of such bids were not known at budget setting.		
Education - Medical Grounds	-104	-19%
Due to vacant posts in year.		
Other variances (under £100k)	-443	n/a
TOTAL	16,329	n/a

Local Authority Budget

The Local authority budget shows a net overspend by £8.8m (7.1%). The main variances are:

	£000	% of Budget
Children's Social Care Placements	4,953	8%
The overspend on the Children's Social Care Placement budget (£4.95m) is largely due to change in demand / numbers in relation to children in residential provision, in comparison to budgeted assumptions. The MTFS for this financial year assumes budgeted residential numbers by March 2025 to be at 86 children (this includes parent and child placements). Trend and demand analysis at the time of budget setting, based on numbers between April 2021 to January 2024, indicated that the budgeted assumption of net demand of residential numbers growing to 86 by March 2025 to be reasonable and reflective of data-driven demand analysis. However, between the period of January 2024 and summer 2024, residential numbers increased rapidly to over 100 children. The end of year position showed 108 children in residential provision (26% increase vs budgeted MTFS projection). The financial impact overall on this budget due to the change in demand is very significant.		
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)	1,474	29%
The continued increase in UASC in care and care leavers has required a greater resource requirement to meet their needs. The different entry routes include both the National Transfer scheme, as well as spontaneous arrivals, but more recently through the hotel dispersal scheme where requests to accommodate people placed in Asylum Dispersal Hotels in Leicestershire are made, and whilst they have been deemed adults by the Home Office, subsequently claim to be children, and creates an additional pressure for the service to manage which is not fully funded. In addition, delays in asylum claim processes mean that we are often accommodating young people well past 18 and the Home Office funding drops significantly at 18 but the costs do not.		
Educational Psychology Service	1,235	93%
Difficulties recruiting into vacancies in this area has resulted in an increased reliance on locums at a significantly higher cost. Increased demand due to an increase in the number of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) needs assessments has further impacted the overspend position.		
Disabled Children Service	810	21%
Difficulties recruiting into vacancies within the service has resulted in an increased reliance on agency workers at a significantly higher cost (£0.3m). Remainder of overspend (£0.5m) relates to increased demand across both direct payments and commissioned support due to increasing numbers eligible and needing access to short breaks and wrap around support for this cohort of children on the edge of care.		
Social Care Children in Need - Section 17/23 support	692	152%
Increased demand, including for support at home for children with challenging behaviour which is more costly for some children with high needs and 'on the edge of care'.		
Frontline Social Care Services (Child Protection / First Response / Children in Care)	545	4%
There are further budget pressures linked to frontline social care service budgets – mainly within Family Safeguarding, Children In Care and First Response due to some recent challenges with caseload management linked to incoming service demand. Firstly, key staff in First Response have been absent and due to demand, additional agency staff were agreed for a period of time. This has led to a review of longer-term need in staffing for the service. In respect of Family Safeguarding, continued struggles to recruit experienced social workers has led to recruiting more newly qualified social workers needing agency staff working alongside them for the first 12 months. This will enable the service in 12 months' time to have a suitably experienced and skilled permanent workforce. The reliance on agency will reduce after 6 months with a significant reduction in 12 months. Agency usage and appropriateness is reviewed on a monthly basis as part of business-as-usual practice.		
SEN Service Budget	497	19%
Increased service demand and complexity has resulted in the need for additional service resource to ensure demand can be managed in the most efficient and effective manner. Although some growth funding was approved for 24/25, this was insufficient to meet statutory responsibilities. A heavy reliance on agency workers to undertake EHCP writing and tribunal work has resulted in a significant forecast overspend in this area. Meanwhile mediation costs remain high, adding to the overspend.		

	£000	
Departmental Financial Controls / Vacancy Control Management	**-1,469**	**n/a**
As a direct response to the financial pressures which were being seen in year across the different service areas, the departmental management team undertook and continue to lead on a review of non-statutory services supported by the introduction of corporate led financial controls. Together with continued robust management and review of vacancies within the department the output of this work has delivered some net one-off in year efficiencies, and budget opportunities of £1.5m, which includes delaying recruitment to non-essential posts where appropriate, as well as maximising any grant funding to ensure such prescribed outcomes can be met in the most efficient, effective and compliant way possible. Further work is being undertaken to explore the feasibility of this work and its scope to deliver on-going future budget efficiencies.		
Other variances (net)	**22**	**n/a**
TOTAL	**8,759**	**n/a**

Adults & Communities

The Department has a net underspend of £17.3m (7.2%). The main variances are:

	£000	% of Budget
Extra Care	**220**	**60%**
Overspend due to additional changes made to the service (including floating support) after the budget was set. Additional spend is intended to assist in making progress on the savings target for service users having more higher needs by supporting through extra care.		
Homecare	**-3,811**	**-8%**
The number of home care service users and average hours had been falling since the introduction of the Fair Outcomes Panel in September 2023. The budget is based on an average of 2,690 service users (SU) per week. At the start of the year there were 2,550 SU. Over the year there has been a 4% growth in SU numbers. Average hours per SU are currently around 10.7 per week which has now reached a stable position, having fallen from around 11.2 hours a year earlier. The average cost per week per SU over the year is £340.		
Residential Care and Nursing	**-3,215**	**-3%**
There was an overspend for residential care expenditure of £0.8m due to an increase in service user numbers. There was average of 2,384 service users over the course of the year with an average of £1,095 per week. There are also fewer service users in shared lives residential placements creating an underspend of £0.350m. Residential service user income overachieved the income budget by £2.6m predominantly from clearing a backlog of financial assessments which has generated an additional one-off income. However this income may not be fully guaranteed due to charges being raised relating to the past and was offset by an increased allocation to the credit loss allowance. There is also additional of health income of £1.1m due to increasing numbers of service users with funding following the introduction of the Fair Outcomes Panel.		
Better Care Fund (Balance) / Other NHS Income	**-2,696**	**11%**
There was an additional £0.7m overachievement on the original Discharge to Assessment income budget of £2.8m from the utilisation of Discharge Grant monies which can be used to support discharge related costs from hospital. BCF Income received was £1.9m higher than the budget. In addition Discharge Grant monies were allocated for administrative costs (£80k).		
Home First	**-1,294**	**-13%**
Underspend relates to staffing vacancies. Recruitment is ongoing to ensure that the new HART delivery model (intake model) is fully staffed. This will have the benefit of increasing reablement capacity reducing the commissioning of external provision when there isn't adequate HART capacity.		
Supported Living	**-1,146**	**-3%**
There was an increase of approximately 20 service users over the course of the year which is lower than anticipated. The underspend was lower than budget as there were lower referrals coming via Care Pathway but also alternative ways to commission are being pursued from the Fair Outcomes Panel and in Group Supervisory Meetings. Currently there are 526 service users at an average cost of £1,645 per week.		

Direct Cash Payments (DP)	**-1,116**	**-2%**
Underspend due to 2.45% reduction in service users (SU) leading to a £1.2m underspend. The number of new package starts have decreased by 30%, since the introduction of the Fair Outcomes Panel leading to lower service user numbers. DP clawback was £100k lower than budgeted, and the Department is working to improve the clawback process. Currently there are 1,726 service users receiving a Cash Payment and 1,279 Carers receiving a Carers Cash Payment. Over the course of the year, the Department has actively encouraged the uptake of Personal Assistants by DP recipients. This was implemented in August 2023 but has had a slow start with numbers expected to scale up over 2025/26 with the recruitment of Direct Payments Support Team.		
Care Pathway - Cognitive & Physical Disability	**-817**	**-10%**
Various staffing underspends due to vacant posts during the course of the year, which were being recruited to.		
Community Life Choices (CLC) Commissioned Services (Day Services)	**-808**	**-9%**
An underspend from a lower number of service users than originally budgeted for due to the Fair Outcomes Panel. The budgeted average number of service users was 669, however as at March the average is 653. It should be noted however, that there has been a noticeable increase of 6% in working age adult service user numbers which are likely to be young adults which have transitioned from the Children's and Family Services Department.		
Care Pathway - Heads of Service (Integration, Access and Prevention) & Strategic	**-597**	**n/a**
Additional Better Care Fund (BCF) funding for Care Act implementation £30k. Additional Prisons Grant increase of £150k for Fosse Way Prison. Vacancies throughout the year and an underspend on staffing costs due to slippage in the recruitment of a specialist social care consultants to improve on Continuing Healthcare practices.		
Supported Living, Residential and Short Breaks Team	**-414**	**-8%**
An underspend due to difficulties in recruiting staff in the current social care market across Short Break sites leading to vacancies. A targeted recruitment campaign is underway to improve recruitment rates which should yield benefits in 25/26. Work is ongoing to improve the utilisation of the Short Breaks sites as part of departmental project. Operational improvements are required which were highlighted by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), work is ongoing to remedy this.		
Access & Digital Services	**-275**	**-8%**
Underspend on customer services due to staff vacancies (£259k) and other staff vacancies across remaining Access & Digital Teams (£72k). This is partially offset by an overspend of £56k in Adults Social Care Finance which includes additional temporary staff recruited in Adult Social Care Finance to support the processing of assessments and cases.		
Care Pathway - Learning Disability & Autism (LD&A)	**-254**	**-5%**
Various staffing underspends due to vacant posts during the course of the year, which were being recruited to.		
Social Care Investment	**-225**	**-34%**
The budget for work undertaken from other departments/external consultants for Social Care Investment Plan (SCIP) projects underspent due to a lower number of new upcoming schemes.		
Business Support & Strategy and Planning	**-205**	**-10%**
Various staffing underspends due to vacant posts during the course of the year, which were being recruited to.		
Care Pathway - Mental Health & Safeguarding (MH&S)	**-168**	**-2%**
Various staffing underspends due to vacant posts during the course of the year, which were being recruited to.		
Community Commissioned Services Income	**-130**	**0%**
Total health income exceeded the budget by £0.25m as the numbers of home care and cash payments service users with health funding grew when the Fair Outcomes Panel first came into operation and were higher than budgeted at the start of the year. There was an overall shortfall in the Non-Residential Client Income budget of £0.1m. There was additional income raised over the course of the year mainly from the one-off processing of the backlog of financial assessments. However, this income may not be fully guaranteed due to charges being raised relating to the past and was offset by an increased allocation to the credit loss allowance.		
Communities and Wellbeing	**-124**	**-2%**
Staffing underspend from vacant posts across the Communities services (£278k) offset by an overspend within Adult Learning Service (£153k) from the closure of the Transitions Learning Programme service and the Multiply Project coming to an end, higher than expected accommodation rental costs and pay award increases which were not funded by the ESFA.		
Other variances (under £100k)	**-266**	**-4%**
TOTAL	**-17,341**	**n/a**

Public Health

The Department shows a balance position, after earmarked reserves movements. The main variances are:

	£000	% of Budget
Community Delivery	292	25%
Variance mainly due to overspend on Warm Homes (+£87k) through increased expenditure and reduced income, transfer from reserve not used (+£226k) offset by an underspend on Oral Health materials (-£10k).		
0-19 Children's Public Health	201	2%
Variance due to the Agenda for Change payment (+435k) and transfer from reserve not required (+£72k) offset by Teen Health running cost underspends (-£306k).		
Mental Health	78	17%
Variance largely due to transfer from reserve not required (+£108k) offset by additional Health contributions (-£28k).		
Public Health Leadership	-551	2%
Includes additional PH grant (-£868k) to fund Agenda for Change costs plus underspend on staffing (-£175k) mainly offset by overspend on running costs (+56k) and transfer from reserve not required (+£436k).		
Sexual Health	-214	-5%
Online Sexual Health overspend (+£210k) offset by Out of Area underspend (-£145k), Contraception overall underspend (-£166k) due to reduced activity and underspend on Sexual Health Advice due to re-negotiated contract (-£112k).		
Other variances (below £50k)	194	n/a
TOTAL	0	n/a

Environment and Transport

The Department has a net underspend of £1.8m (1.6%). The main variances are:

	£000	% of Budget
Mainstream School Transport	1,527	33%
Overspend continues to reflect increased costs and reduced competition which have meant that contract prices have remained high and not been able to recover from the fuel crisis. This position reflects that of authorities across the country. Forecast includes additional cost of policy change from September 2024 to meet new DfE requirements. Overspend position includes £610k relating to growth that has been experienced over recent years due to an increased number of service users and also an increased proportion of pupils requiring taxi transport to accommodate both the increase and disparity of routes. Growth has been included in the new 2025 MTFS budget.		
Reactive Maintenance	1,486	59%
Overspend in reactive repairs to meet demands, network deterioration and comply with policy, in addition to additional costs due to recent flooding and storm damage events.		
Social Care Transport	588	8%
Overspend due to additional taxi costs that are met by an underspend on Passenger Fleet. Overspend also includes £399k due to an under reserve in 2023/24.		
Treatment and Contracts	484	3%
Overspend due to diversion from landfill into Energy from Waste (EfW) and Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) Treatment.		
Highways & Transport - Staffing & Admin Delivery	461	13%
Overspend due to a shortfall in capital recharge income and greater overtime costs than expected, in addition to absorbed contribution from reserves for flooding (£40k) and market premia (£11k) through department underspends.		
Highways & Transport - Staffing & Admin Resourcing	379	20%
Absorbed contribution from reserves for Assisted Travel project resource (£379k) from departmental underspends.		

Environmental Maintenance	374	6%
Overspend on gulley emptying as a result of additional flooding and storm damage events in addition to absorbed contribution from reserves for flooding (£225k) through department underspends.		
Concessionary Travel	305	7%
Overspend due to additional concessionary travel reimbursement costs in 2024/25 arising from a greater number of passenger journeys and a higher reimbursement rate. This overspend is met by a corresponding underspend in local buses revenue support.		
Environment &Waste Management - Management & Admin	251	10%
Absorbed contribution from reserves £0.5m through departmental underspends partly offset by vacancies across Department and Business Management.		
Highways & Transport - Staffing , Admin & Depot Overheads	-2,898	-187%
Underspend due to additional capital recharge income, increased Highways Network Management permitting and Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTRO) income, external street lighting works income, staffing vacancies, vehicle access income and highways operatives labour/overhead. This is partly offset by absorbed contribution from reserves for Commuted Sums (£127k) through departmental underspends.		
Dry Recycling	-1,347	-51%
Underspend mainly due to higher dry recycling materials income, prices higher than expected.		
Landfill	-850	-21%
Underspend due to diversion from landfill into Energy from Waste (EfW) and Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) Treatment.		
Passenger Fleet	-426	n/a
Overall underspend due to vacant driver and escort posts, net of additional vehicle hire and maintenance costs.		
Haulage and Waste Transfer	-327	-13%
Lower bulk haulage than budgeted due to operational changes and lower fuel prices.		
Public Bus Services	-300	-13%
Underspend on local buses budget to fund corresponding overspend on concessionary travel reimbursements. (Additional BSIP grant used to fund bus service support in 24/25, while local bus budget funds overspend on concessionary travel).		
Highways & Transport Network -Staffing & Admin	-248	-14%
Underspend due to vacancies across the service area which are partly offset by a shortfall in developer income.		
SEN Transport	-219	-1%
Underspend of £0.2m due to ongoing targeted tendering work. A full review of growth allocated for 2025/26 will be undertaken in the new year.		
Development and Growth	-186	-14%
Underspend due to vacancies across the service area which are partly offset by a capital recharge income shortfall.		
Waste Management - Income	-171	11%
Increased Trade Waste Income.		
Street Lighting Maintenance	-163	-6%
Underspend mainly due to street light dimming pilot savings.		
Recycling & Household Waste	-148	-3%
Underspend due to reduced costs of recycling and household waste haulage due to operational changes and lower waste site staffing, partially offset by increased property repairs.		
Composting Contracts	-139	-7%
Reductions of composting waste tonnages due to the weather.		
Waste Management - Initiatives	-108	-36%
Underspend on environmental policies and initiatives due to reduced capacity for service delivery and lower take up of planned initiatives.		
Other variances (under £100k)	-123	n/a
TOTAL	-1,798	n/a

Chief Executive's

The Department has a net underspend of £0.8m (4.7%). The main variances are:

	£000	% of Budget
Departmental Items	**125**	**n/a**
Departmental-wide saving for staffing vacancy held in this budget. Overspend offset by underspends elsewhere in the department.		
Coroners	**119**	**7%**
Overspend due to higher University Hospitals of Leicester (UHL) costs for the winter period and an increase in the costs invoiced from Leicester City Council, largely due to a high profile inquest.		
Legal Services	**62**	**1%**
Variance is largely due to a reduced transfer from reserve (+£120k) and lower income (+£204k), offset by an underspend on demand-led budgets (-£252k).		
Growth Service	**-478**	**-38%**
Underspend largely due to staffing vacancies (-£363K), reduced spend on consultants (-£77k) and lower recharges (-£36k).		
Democratic Services and Administration	**-237**	**-16%**
Variance due to staffing vacancies (-£190k) and additional income (-£72k) from the Home Office, Leicester City Council and Committee Room hire offset by an overspend on running costs (+£25k).		
Business Intelligence	**-89**	**-5%**
Variance mainly due to additional income (-£123k) and underspend on staffing vacancies and general running costs (-£20k) offset by additional Tableau licence costs (+£52k) .		
Trading Standards	**-70**	**-3%**
Variance is mainly due to underspend on staffing (-£186k) and additional income (-£75k) offset by a transfer to reserve (+£200k) to fund the Trading Standards database implementation costs in 2025/26.		
Civic Affairs	**-62**	**-51%**
Variance mainly due to reduced number of Civic events in year (-£48k) and lower cost of running an electric Civic car (-20k).		
Management & Administration	**-52**	**-7%**
Underspend largely due to staffing vacancies (-£50k).		
Registrars	**0**	**0%**
Underspend of £200k mainly due to increased income as a result of buoyant demand for wedding ceremonies, offset by a £200k transfer to reserve to fund refurbishment work at the South Wigston Registration Office.		
Other variances (under £50k)	**-101**	**n/a**
TOTAL	**-783**	**n/a**

Corporate Resources

The Department has a net underspend of £1.1m (2.6%). The main variances are:

	£000	% of Budget
Corporate Resources Schemes	**1,360**	**n/a**
Contribution towards a sinking fund for corporate buildings including the need to move to more efficient boilers and country parks large infrastructure risks including future structural repairs for bridges and buildings.		
Corporate Resources Schemes - Investing in Leicestershire Programme	**500**	**n/a**
Contribution from the overall departmental position to help offset a loss of £1.8m that is being funded from the sinking fund relating to the divestment of certain Pooled Property investments.		
Corporate Resources Schemes - Departmental Earmarked Reserve	**400**	**n/a**
Contribution from the overall departmental position to offset one-off costs related to the relocation of the data centre to a third party host from Romulus Court.		

ICT	**-782**	**-6%**
The underspend mainly relates to vacancies within the different teams due to the difficult recruiting market for specific vacancies.		
Operational Property	**-583**	**-7%**
Reduced energy costs and staffing vacancies across several Operational Property Teams.		
Strategic Finance	**-463**	**-9%**
Vacancies and additional staffing income from recharges across Strategic Finance services.		
Commercial Services	**-248**	**-42%**
Difficult trading conditions across the commercial sector have started to ease in part due to the transformation of some of the services. Commercial services have had temporary additional funding of £1m to support them through these challenges.		
East Midlands Shared Services (EMSS)	**-240**	**-10%**
The Council's share of the EMSS underspend due to vacancies.		
Learning and Development	**-192**	**-13%**
Early achievement of savings. Underspend due to staffing and escalated controls and tightened governance on training.		
Corporate Projects	**-139**	**56%**
Reduction in requirements for project expenditure.		
Human Resources	**-139**	**-6%**
Underspend due to staffing vacancies and increase in income.		
Audit & Insurance	**-132**	**-6%**
Additional income for Internal Audit as the Leicester City Council audit contract extended and increased income from ESPO and Pensions.		
Other variances (under £100k)	**-426**	**n/a**
TOTAL	**-1,084**	**n/a**

EARMARKED RESERVES BALANCES

	Revised Balance 01/04/24 £000	Provisional Outturn 31/03/25 £000
Renewal of Systems, Equipment and Vehicles	1,414	2,157
Trading Accounts		
Investing in Leicestershire Programme (IILP)	1,046	5,763
Insurance		
General	10,259	10,625
Schools schemes and risk management	34	34
Uninsured loss fund	5,120	4,929
Committed Balances		
Central Maintenance Fund	60	1,360
Other		
Children & Family Services		
Supporting Leicestershire Families	500	500
C&FS Developments	2,134	2,309
Youth Offending	895	929
Other	111	54
Adults & Communities		
A&C Developments	1,435	1,384
Adult Learning Service	139	0
Public Health	7,032	5,822
Environment & Transport		
E&T Developments	13	13
Commuted Sums	2,425	1,866
Pan regional transport model (PRTM)	539	1,122
Waste Developments	665	561
Major Projects - advanced design	534	1,195
Section 38 Income	435	435
Other	517	545
Chief Executive		
Economic Development-General	200	200
Chief Executive Dept Developments	371	656
Other	103	103
Corporate Resources		
Community Library building contingency	340	388
Ash Dieback	288	288
Other	87	199
Corporate:		
Transformation Fund	8,920	11,993
Broadband	2,253	2,715
Business Rates Retention	568	568
Elections	501	1,351
Budget Equalisation	66,786	91,901
Carbon Neutral Investment Fund	2,000	2,000
Flooding Restoration Works	1,000	1,000
Other	5	104
Capital		
Capital Financing (phasing of capital expenditure)	154,687	129,156
Pooled Property Fund investment *	-24,766	-18,086
Schools and Partnerships		
Dedicated Schools Grant	-32,021	-48,349
Health & Social Care Outcomes	9,608	10,178
Active Together	1,242	1,062
Emergency Management	895	848
Leicestershire Safeguarding Children Board	238	235
Music Service - Arts Council England	142	141
East Midlands Shared Services - other	52	0
Leics Social Care Development Group	33	33
TOTAL	**228,839**	**230,287**

* Pooled Property Fund investments - funded from the overall balance of earmarked funds

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Capital Programme 2024/25 – main variances

Children and Family Services

Net acceleration of £4.4m:

	£000
Additional school places - net acceleration	**11,393**
Acceleration: Shepshed Iveshead - £6.8m; Hastings High School - £4.5m; Hinckley Redmoor Academy - £3m Manor High - £1.3m, Other schemes - £0.3m Slippage: Oadby Brocks Hill Primary - £1.8m as planning permission delayed until March, Robert Smythe - £1.4m; Payment subject to school claiming funding to reimburse costs Welland Park - £0.3m due to revision to the scope of works, Ibstock High School - £0.2m due to delays in planning process, Coalville Forest New Primary - £0.2m, scheme in defects period till October, Slippage of £0.5m on unallocated additional places schemes programme.	
SEND slippage	**-5,022**
£1.2m - Balance of High Needs Capital Grant to be carried forward to 25/26 to meet emerging needs. £1.0m on Birchwood Extension from delays in agreeing project scope (change of Headteacher), £0.9m on Oakfield South school from refining project scope deferring start dates £0.7m on Ravenhurst primary as completion pushed into 25/26 £0.6m on St. Botolph's from defects period coming to an end	
Strategic Capital Maintenance	**-1,195**
There are a number of smaller schemes within this area. The timing of the Easter break, and the nature of some of the works needing to be done whilst the school is closed resulted in a number of areas not being completed by 31st March.	
SCIP	**-516**
Workspace 17 - Slippage of £0.3m as this scheme has hit a number of setbacks, including contractor insolvency, vandalism and burglary at the site. This has impacted delivery timeframes and the scheme will now not be completed until at least Summer 2025. Other Schemes - slippage of £0.2m	
Schools Access & Safeguarding	**-289**
TOTAL	**4,372**

Adults & Communities

Slippage of £1.5m. The variance is as follows:

	£000
Social Care Investment Plan (SCIP):	**-1,500**
This budget relates to two extra care schemes, but these schemes have not progressed out of the planning stage as quickly as intended. This is due to the need to ensure the financial viability of the projects. Both projects are expected to progress in 2025/26.	

Environment and Transport

Slippage of £21m and a net overspend of £0.4m. The main variances are:

	£000
Restorative/Preventative Maintenance	**2,029**

Additional costs on restorative maintenance works due to the need to keep the network safe due to the deterioration of highway assets: £0.5m Roadmender works, £0.7m Carriageway Patching, £0.6m Surface dressing pre-patching, £0.2m Footways. Additional government grant funding has been included in the new MTFS for future highways maintenance.

Melton Mowbray Distributor Rd	**-10,494**

Slippage as the latest estimated timetable for the scheme is highlighting more deliverables anticipated in 2025/26 rather than 2024/25. The programme of works remains flexible to accommodate weather events, reprioritising works to appropriate times to ensure completion of the overall programme remains on track.

Zouch Bridge	**-1,879**

Work on the scheme is underway with latest estimation highlighting more work to be completed in 2025/26 and less in 2024/25. The programme commenced this financial year and demobilising in the winter months in line with anticipated Environmental Agency permit constraints, however design works and programme timetables works remained ongoing. The review of deliverables timetable does not highlight any concerns with completion of the programme.

Vehicle Replacement	**-1,836**

Due to additional procurement requirement on mini buses after original supplier ceased trading, resulting in a delayed programme and delivery of vehicles.

Recycling Household Waste Sites	**-1,601**

Slippage of £0.4m on General Improvements as Whetstone resurfacing project will commence in 25/26,
Underspend of £0.2m on Lighting due to lower testing requirements, less material and staffing costs,
Underspend of £0.3m on Ashby canal reed bed project because key risks have not materialised,
Weighbridge - £0.3m slippage due to implementation delays in programme,
Waste Transfer Station £0.2m - Contingency funding for the programme now not required until 2025/26,
RHWS Externally funded £0.1m slippage

Advanced Design	**-989**

The forecast has been aligned to the delivery of the Multi Module Area Investment Plans (MMAIP) as part of the 2025/26 MTFS process identifying slippage in the programmes.

Externally funded schemes	**-681**

Review of spend to construction has identified slippage across a number of externally funded sites.

Highways Capital Schemes	**-636**

Underspend due to reprioritising design work in favour of safety critical highways maintenance, in addition scheme risks haven't materialised.

Property Flood Risk Alleviation	**-625**

Latest profile of delivery of programme with external funding bodies and assumptions of the construction works for the projects at Breedon and Diseworth requires slippage into 2025/26

Area Office Accommodation	**-606**

Due to ongoing work regarding the Melton Depot Site and design the programme has slipped.

Safety Schemes	**-585**

Slippage due to realignment of delivery of programmes after commencing community speed management initiative survey which evaluated 514 sites by the end of the 2024/25 financial year.

A511/A50 Major Road Network	**-523**

Slippage due to delays in procurement in Early Contractor Involvement (ECI)

Traffic Signal Renewal	**-508**

Procurement exercise has delayed the implementation of DfT grant funded programmes.

Pan Regional Transport Model (PRTM)	**-458**

Slippage due to delays in model completion and formal sign off as a result of increased stakeholder involvement in assurance processes.

Hinckley NPIF phase 4	-302
Underspend due to descoping of the programme, to help offset the highways maintenance additional costs. Works will now be considered as part of the local cycling and walking improvement plan in the new MTFS.	
Highways Flood Alleviation	-215
Delays in designing of programme has caused the delivery of the programme to be slipped to 2025/26 financial year.	
Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI)	-179
Slippage due to parts of programme delivery slipping into next year.	
M1 J23/A512 Improvements	-154
Due to less costly snagging works being required than anticipated there is an underspend of £0.1m on M1 Junction 23.	
Other variances	399
TOTAL	20,641

Corporate Resources

Net slippage of £1.8m and an underspend of £0.5m. The main variances are:

	£000
Ways of Working	-400
Underspend of £0.3m on Office Infrastructure due to latest estimations of works remaining costing less than previously anticipated. Additionally slippage of £0.1m relates to works reprofiled to 25/26.	
ICT - End User Device Refresh	-485
Slippage from review of laptop replacement programme to increase longevity of End User Device fund beyond MTFS period.	
Climate change - Environmental Improvements	-704
Slippage of £0.4m as awaiting design of Fleet Transition plan. Slippage of £0.2m as awaiting outcome of match funding bids and underspend of £0.1m from completion of works at Glebe house.	
Property Services slippage	-658
Slippage due to revised dates for completion of the Tree planting programme £0.1m, Data Centre Replacement £0.1m, Snibston Ancient Monument £0.1m, other minor schemes £0.3m and a £0.1m underspend	
Other variances	-91
TOTAL	-2,338

Corporate Programme

Net slippage of £14m. The main variances are:

	£000
Airfield Business Park - Phase 3-4	-6,199
Slippage as project spend reprofiled due to delays with signing build contract.	
Lutterworth East - Planning and Pre-Highway construction Works	-3,227
Following a review of the programme over the Summer, the revised profile of works shows a rephasing of spend into 2025/26 and 2026/27.	
Lutterworth Leaders Farm - Drive Thru Restaurants	-2,732
Slippage - due to requirement to obtain highways approval for a pedestrian crossing on the A4303 dual carriageway.	
Lutterworth East - SDA	-500
This scheme has not progressed so the H&T fees budget has slipped to 25/26.	
M69 Junction 2 - SDA	-357

Works have been rescheduled into 2025/26 due to ongoing delays in connection with Blaby DC Local Plan being approved.	
County Farms Estate slippage	**-350**
Industrial Properties Estate slippage	**-303**
Quorn Solar Farm	**-250**
Other variances	**-104**
TOTAL	**-14,023**

PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2024/25

	Original Indicator	Provisional Actual as at 31/03/2025
Capital Expenditure	£157.0m	£134m
Capital Financing Requirement	£195.0m	£195m
Actual Capital Financing Costs as a % of Net Revenue Stream	3.1%	4.1%
Net income from commercial activities as a % of net revenue stream	1.0%	0.9%
Operational Limit for External Debt	£221.0m	£221m
Authorised Limit for External Debt	£231.0m	£231m
Liability Benchmark – Gross loans requirement	£-3.0m	£-191m
Actual debt as at 31/3/2025 (£000's)	£214.2m	£175m

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Investing in Leicestershire Programme – 2024/25 Q4 Update

Asset Class	Opening Capital Value [1]	Capital Incurred (returned) 2024/25	Change in valuation	Q4 24/25 Capital valuation [2]	Net income YTD	Budget Net Income FY	Variance to Budget	Actual net income return % [3]	Since Inception IRR [4]
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	%	%
Direct Commercial Holdings									
Development	40,600	2,005	0	42,605	-255	-109	-147	-0.6%	
Rural	81,776	0	0	81,776	114	265	-151	0.1%	
Offices inc County Hall [5]	62,321	248	0	62,569	3,883	3,874	9	6.2%	
Industrial	25,833	0	0	25,833	1,227	1,475	-248	4.8%	
Other	4,727	0	0	4,727	207	226	-19	4.4%	
Direct Holdings	**215,257**	**2,253**	**0**	**217,510**	**5,177**	**5,732**	**-555**	**2.4%**	
Diversifier Holdings									
Private debt MAC 4 2017	4,538	-2,672	403	2,269	71			2.1%	5.1%
Private Debt MAC 6 2021	20,559	-3,532	-3,747	13,281	1,557			9.2%	7.3%
Private Debt MAC 7 2023	5,661	1,190	628	7,479	0			n/a	too early
Private Debt - total	30,758	-5,014	-2,715	23,029	1,629	811	818	6.1%	5.8%
Pooled Property	20,728	-5,040	403	16,091	657	557	100	3.6%	2.1%
Pooled Infra Fund	8,706	0	36	8,742	477	282	195	5.5%	3.7%
Pooled Bank Risk Share	16,801	-2,512	-1,638	12,651	3,432	1,168	2,264	23.3%	14.6%
Additional sinking fund					-2,822		-2,822		
TOTAL (All IiLP)	**292,249**	**-10,312**	**-3,915**	**278,022**	**8,550**	**8,550**	**0**	**3.0%**	
TOTAL exc development and rural	**169,873**	**-12,317**	**-3,915**	**153,641**	**8,691**	**8,393**	**298**	**5.4%**	

1. Opening valuations based on market valuations not historic cost
2. Direct property is valued annually at year end, Q2 information not yet available for the diversifiers
3. In year actual net income return % is based on the opening capital value and in year net capital and valuation change
4. IRRs for diversifier investments, private debt and pooled property are the combination of all underlying investments in the relevant asset class.
5. Rented areas only for County Hall

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Leicestershire
County Council

CABINET – 17 JUNE 2025

LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY FOR LEICESTERSHIRE, LEICESTER AND RUTLAND

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the outcome of public consultation on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and seek the Cabinet's agreement for its submission to Council for approval.

2. LNRSs are a new statutory duty placed on local government in England, as part of the Environment Act 2021. The Act requires local authorities to work together to develop LNRSs across 48 areas in England. LNRSs are a new England-wide system of plans designed to drive nature recovery and provide environmental benefits by identifying the most valuable areas for wildlife, mapping opportunities for nature improvement and prioritising local actions.

3. The final LNRS is attached as Appendix A to this report. The LNRS Local Habitat Map is attached as Appendix B to this report.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that:

    a) The outcome of consultation on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) including comments of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;

    b) The LNRS is submitted to the Council meeting on 2 July 2025 for approval;

    c) The Director of Environment and Transport, following consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member, is authorised to make any final amendments to the draft LNRS and supporting documents prior to its submission to the Council meeting.

    (Key Decision)

Reasons for Recommendation

5. Leicestershire County Council is the 'responsible authority' for the development of a LNRS for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and as such has a statutory duty to produce an LNRS. The consultation has informed the content of the LNRS.

6. The LNRS identifies nature priorities for the area and will support national environmental targets as well as the UK's international biodiversity commitment.

7. The LNRS will form part of the Council's Policy Framework and thus requires approval by Council.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

8. The Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on 22 January 2025 and its comments are set out in paragraphs 39 to 41 of this report. The Committee will consider a further report on 11 June and its comments will be reported to the Cabinet.

9. The final LNRS is also going through the approval processes of the supporting authorities (the role of which is explained in paragraph 27 below) before it is submitted to Full Council on 2 July 2025. The period for raising formal objections has passed but as the LNRS is a collaborative effort, each supporting authority has the opportunity to approve it via their governance process and show their commitment. All supporting authorities have indicated that they will do this by 2 July.

10. Once approved by the Council and supporting authorities, the LNRS will be sent to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to approve its publication.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

11. The new statutory duty supports the aims and objectives of the Council's Environment Strategy 2018-2030, in particular those in relation to Biodiversity, Habitats and the Local Environment. It also fits with the Council's Strategic Plan Refresh 2024-2026 priorities, in particular those under the 'Clean and Green' Outcome.

12. The strengthened biodiversity duty, also introduced under the Environment Act 2021, requires public bodies, including local authorities, to 'conserve and enhance biodiversity'.

13. Development of the LNRS will identify the nature priorities for the area, while the implementation of the proposed measures will support the protection and recovery of nature and contribute to the Government's national environmental targets as well as the UK's international biodiversity commitment to protect and conserve 30% of the UK's land and sea for biodiversity by 2030.

14. The Cabinet at its meeting on 17 December 2024 approved the draft LNRS for public consultation.

Resource Implications

15. Leicestershire County Council receives 'new burdens' funding for taking on the role of 'responsible authority' in the form of a Section 31 grant. The amount provided was calculated using a national formula, with the County Council receiving £337,741 over two years (2023-24 – 2024-25). This is in addition to almost £49,000 received over 2021-22 and 2022-23.

16. The funding provided has been used for developing the LNRS, including employing a project manager and specialist support and ensuring that full and proper engagement took place with partners, stakeholders and residents to develop the draft LNRS, and to carry out the public consultation.

17. The total expenditure in 2023-24 was £76,432 and in 2024-25 was £160,768. The remaining unspent funding of £145,018 has been carried forward into 2025-26, to support the delivery of the LNRS and implement the LNRS Delivery Plan (the content and monitoring of which will be the subject of further work). The efficient and prudent expenditure of the funding means that a significant amount can be spent on supporting the delivery of the LNRS.

18. Further new burdens funding is expected to be provided by the Government for 2025-26, to support the delivery of the LNRS. However, at this point no details have been provided on the amount or the conditions of any funding.

19. The Government expects projects identified within the LNRS to be delivered through mechanisms such as the Environmental Land Management Scheme, Biodiversity Net Gain, and specific grant schemes.

20. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

21. This report will be circulated to all members.

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PART B

Background

22. As part of the Environment Act 2021, the Government introduced the requirement to develop LNRSs across England. There are 48 LNRS areas across England.

23. This new mandatory system of spatial strategies will map the most valuable existing areas for nature, establish priorities and set out proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits, such as reduced flooding and overheating, and improvements to water and air quality.

24. In March 2022, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) approached higher-tier councils to take on the "responsible authority" role as part of the new LNRS duty. Leicestershire County Council agreed on a provisional, non-binding basis to be the responsible authority for the LNRS area which covers Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. Over the next year, the Government put in place a national framework for the preparation of LNRSs. This included confirming the strategy boundaries and formally agreeing the roles of the responsible authority to lead in each area.

25. In March 2023 the official regulations and guidance pertaining to LNRS (the Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023) were released. These provided details on the appointment of responsible authorities, the creation of the role of 'supporting authorities', and what was required in developing and publishing LNRSs.

26. In May 2023 all provisional responsible authorities were notified by DEFRA that they had been appointed as the responsible authority for their respective LNRS area.

Development of the Draft LNRS

27. Responsible authorities and supporting authorities are defined in the Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023, in summary:

    - Responsible authorities - are required to work with stakeholders across the public, private, and voluntary sectors to agree priorities, map the most valuable existing areas for nature, and establish shared proposals for action.

    - Supporting authorities - work closely with the responsible authorities to help shape the local LNRS, provide local data, and review the draft strategies, and following agreement of the LNRS to inform the rollout of Biodiversity Net Gain, provide evidence to inform Local Plans, and consider the LNRS as part of their statutory duties.

28. Responsible authorities are required to "take reasonable steps to involve" supporting authorities, "have regard" to their opinions, share information with them and seek their agreement before consultation and publication of the finalised LNRS. Locally, the supporting authorities are Leicester City Council, Rutland Council, the seven district councils, and Natural England.

29. In addition, the County Council has involved other public bodies in the development of the LNRS, such as the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission, and the National Forest Company.

Governance

30. A governance structure was established to support the development of the draft LNRS. It consisted of a Steering Group, comprising officers from the County Council (as the responsible authority), the supporting authorities, and the DEFRA bodies of the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and the National Forest Company.

31. The Steering Group was supported by a Strategic Reference Group which provided cross-sectoral expert guidance, and a number of thematic working groups (covering areas such as communication and engagement, GIS mapping and modelling, species technical expertise) consisting of key partners and stakeholders including representatives from the supporting authorities and the DEFRA bodies, the National Farmers Union, Countryside Land Managers Association, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, and Trent Rivers Trust (a full list of the partners and stakeholders is referenced in Appendix A).

Communication and Engagement

32. A wide-ranging programme of communication and engagement was undertaken to promote development of the LNRS, and to encourage stakeholders and residents to get involved and share their expertise, knowledge and views. This has developed a LNRS that has been co-created by those with an interest in nature's recovery and who will be affected by implementation of the new Strategy across Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland.

33. The engagement programme included an online survey of residents which asked about their attitudes and access to nature with 1,077 responses being received. A separate survey for stakeholders, farmers and landowners was also conducted with 96 responses received. In addition, an interactive map was provided which allowed all to comment on where existing nature activity was happening, where there was an opportunity to do more, or where there were pressures on nature. Some 516 comments were placed on the map.

34. The engagement programme also included a series of farmer/landowner and resident workshops across the LNRS area. These allowed for the sharing of the results of the surveys and the interactive map, for the early consideration on the possible nature priorities and the measures to achieve these and to identify areas of agreement and consensus and areas that needed further work.

35. Specialist support was provided by a data analysis and mapping consultancy. This included the development of separate data layers and the use of modelling software to create opportunity maps, suggesting localities where nature could be conserved and enhanced. From these, a local habitat map was developed, as well as a series of maps that contributed to the identification of the priority areas for nature.

36. An analysis of almost 100 existing strategies and plans from across the area was undertaken to identify priorities and objectives which could contribute to the development of the LNRS or which the LNRS could support in delivering.

37. The above work resulted in a draft LNRS which was approved by the Cabinet for public consultation in December 2024.

Public Consultation

38. An eight-week public consultation exercise took place from 6 January to 28 February 2025. The draft LNRS, a summary version, and the associated Local Habitat Maps were all available for comment. Comments could also be added to an interactive map. In addition to the online consultation, a total of 24 in-person and online events were held across the area. This was all publicised via local newspapers and the usual social media channels.

Comments of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee

39. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on the draft LNRS on 22 January 2025 as part of the public consultation process.

40. The Committee noted the Council's role as designated responsible authority for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and was pleased with the approach taken to the development of the LNRS including the interactive mapping, which would encourage continued participation. It was suggested that hard copies of the Strategy could be deposited in local libraries.

41. The Committee noted that the LNRS had the potential to produce significant beneficial effects on the local environment and welcomed the new Strategy.

Consultation Feedback

42. A total of 386 completed surveys were received as well as 307 comments on the interactive map and six written submissions. Approximately 360 people engaged with the consultation through the in-person and online events.

43. Over 1,600 individual comments were made in relation to the draft LNRS document and supporting documents, in addition to the 307 comments in relation to the Local Habitat Maps.

44. Overall, the LNRS was very positively received, with 97% of respondents agreeing with its strategic aims. This likely reflected the effort to involve

partners, stakeholders and residents in the development of the draft LNRS and the thought put into the design, layout, style and tone of the document.

45. Most of the changes made to the draft LNRS and supporting documents arising from the feedback most related to improving the accuracy and clarity of the document, in summary:

a) The addition of two paragraphs, one on the Jurassic Limestone area (page 64), and one to highlight the need to consider species reintroduction projects in the future (page 79).
b) The addition of the measure codes in the LNRS document to make it easier to cross reference to those codes used in the Local Habitat Map (pages 68-77).
c) Rewording of nine paragraphs to make them clearer.
d) Clarification of two statistics.
e) One image change.
f) Re-wording of three of the geodiversity measures to be consistent with the style of the other measures (page 77).
g) The addition of one new measure in relation to Local Wildlife Sites, to the Green and Blue corridors priority as follows: 'Restore, enhance and manage Local Wildlife Sites to recognise their ecological value and strengthen their role as stepping stones across the wider ecological network' (page 76).

46. In addition, eight changes were made to the Local Habitat Maps, including the addition of a missing data layer and improving the clarity of certain boundary lines.

Content of the LNRS

47. The content of the LNRS is largely prescribed in the 2023 Regulations and guidance, with draft strategies required to meet certain criteria in order to be approved by Natural England for consultation. The LNRS consists of two key components: the LNRS strategy document, and the auxiliary webpages that include an interactive copy of the Local Habitat Map and the supporting information.

48. The important elements of the Strategy document are:

a) The 8 strategic aims of the Strategy (Section 4):

   i. Increase the area and diversity of land and water managed for wildlife in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland (make more space for nature).
   ii. Increase biodiversity by improving the ecological condition.
   iii. Reinstate natural processes, make space for water and utilise nature-based solutions to support nature and climate resilience.
   iv. Protect and enhance green and blue spaces within urban habitats.
   v. Promote sustainable agriculture and support local food systems.

vi.   Improve ecological connectivity by establishing coherent and resilient ecological networks at scale.

vii.   Reduce major pressures and threats to nature including invasive non-native species.

viii.   Improve understanding of the state of nature and actively monitor habitat/species change over time.

b) The area description of the natural landscape and how people have shaped it;

c) An assessment of the state of nature across the area (including a presentation in map form of the existing areas of particular importance for biodiversity, to be published on the LNRS webpages);

d) The key environmental considerations, such as the future pressures and wider environmental issues (Section 8);

e) A presentation in map form of the areas that could become of importance for biodiversity and the wider environment (also to be published on the webpages);

f) Main biodiversity priorities and measures to take place within the priority areas as well as the landscape scale (area-wide) action;

g) Key factors needed to support the delivery of the LNRS;

h) Appendices with supporting information and technical detail.

49.   The LNRS ultimately serves as a call to action for everyone to play a role in the recovery of nature, ensuring that the biodiversity and the natural beauty of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland can thrive for future generations, while at the same time supporting the lives and livelihoods of the people and communities that live and work there.

Equality Implications

50.   There are no equality implications arising from the content of this report.

51.   There will be equality implications arising from the implementation of the LNRS and an Equality Impact Assessment, attached as Appendix C, was carried out as part of the process. This identified the key areas where equality implications are likely to arise and highlighted the need to address these at the relevant point of implementation of the measures within the LNRS.

Human Rights Implications

52.   There are no human rights implications arising from the content of this report.

Environmental Implications

53.   The development and implementation of the LNRS should have a significant positive impact on the local environment, in that its intended purpose is to support the recovery of nature as well as provide for additional environmental benefits such as reducing emissions, reducing the impacts of a changing climate, for instance through reduced flood risk, and improving water and air quality.

Risk Assessment

54. The project risk assessment has been updated. The key risks remaining after the existing control measures that have been taken are:

    a) Insufficient funding to implement the LNRS.
    b) Reputational damage to the Council as the responsible authority.

55. Thus far, funding has only been provided by the Government for the development of the LNRS, though it is expected that the underspend is sufficient to support the development of an initial delivery plan. An announcement on the future new burdens funding from the Government for the LNRS is awaited.

56. The implementation of the measures within the LNRS are expected to be partially funded through mechanisms such as Biodiversity Net Gain, the Environmental Land Management Scheme, the Natural Flood Management projects and other investment, such as philanthropic donations, future grants from the Government or other grants. However, funding is needed to cover the costs of managing the implementation of the LNRS, supporting governance, and future reviews.

57. While it is considered that the Council's reputation has been enhanced by the professional and collaborative approach taken in developing the LNRS, there remains the risk of reputational damage for the Council in its role as the responsible authority, for instance were any of the supporting authorities or key stakeholders to raise any concerns about the final LNRS during the final approval phase or should difficulties arise in delivering the measures that are set out in the LNRS.

58. Both these risks will be mitigated by continued regular and professional communication and engagement with the DEFRA, the supporting authorities, other partners and stakeholders, and the collaborative and collective approach planned for the further development and delivery of the LNRS. A Responsible Authority Network (established by the DEFRA) brings those authorities together on a national and regional basis to provide support and give feedback to DEFRA, and will also be a means to lobby for sufficient funding and clarity as to how the LNRS is expected to be delivered.

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet on 26 May 2024, Local Nature Recovery Strategy Responsible Authority Status:
https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7076&Ver=4
(item 237)

Report to the Cabinet on 17 December 2024, Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy:

https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s187228/FINAL%20Draft%20Local%20Nature%20Recovery%20Strategy%20Cabinet%20171224.pdf

Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023:
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/341/made

Reports to the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 January 2025 and 11 June 2025
https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1292&MId=7906
https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1292&MId=7908

Appendices

Appendix A: Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland
Appendix B: LNRS Local Habitat Map (includes link to interactive map)
Appendix C: LNRS Equality Impact Assessment

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Making Space for Nature

Contents

Foreword

The development of this first Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland has been the culmination of almost two years of work by a wide range of people and organisations.

But the work did not start two years ago. Many people and organisations have been beavering away, sometimes in the background, for decades, if not longer, to protect the habitats, species, landscape, waters, soils and wider environmental resources of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

So, this strategy builds on their work, their efforts, their knowledge, expertise and most of all passion. Their passion for nature, be it an individual species or habitat, or a particular part of our area. It also builds on their belief that nature is important, that it provides vital eco-system services to us as humans, for our economy and for the survival of our wider society.

We started off developing this strategy because we had to. It was a new statutory duty placed on local government. We were required to work together.

But as we worked together and got to know more about the biodiversity, habitats, species and landscape of the area and learned from each other and heard how important nature was to the people of the area, how much they appreciated being in nature and recognised the health and wellbeing benefits it gave them, we more and more wanted to develop this strategy.

We have sought to develop a strategy that provides a solid foundation on which we can collectively work together for nature's recovery, knowing that this is a long-term project. We will not be able to overturn centuries of depletion and destruction of nature in 5 years, but we can together make a good start, with the opportunity to review where we are and recalibrate our approach and our efforts as needed.

This strategy sets the course for nature's recovery and wider environmental benefits for the next 30+ years. It presents a collective vision for both restoring and enhancing the biodiversity in our area and connecting to a network of ecological recovery spanning the whole of England.

We are immensely grateful for the input and collaboration of all partners, stakeholders, farmers, landowners and community members who have contributed their knowledge, expertise, and passion to this strategy. Together, we can create a legacy of nature recovery that will benefit generations to come.

Thank you for your continued support and involvement in making this strategy, and the work that flows from it, as comprehensive and effective as it can be.

Ultimately, the test of its success will be the emergence of more, better and better-connected space for nature across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, and all the benefits that creates.

Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy Steering Group

1. Executive Summary

This first Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland outlines a comprehensive strategic, landscape scale approach for enhancing and restoring biodiversity across the strategy area.

Developed in collaboration with local authorities, government agencies, environmental organisations, farmers, land managers, communities, residents, and many supporting organisations and individual stakeholders, the strategy is designed to address the urgent challenges of habitat loss, species decline, and climate change.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies key habitats and species that require immediate attention and lays out strategic aims to increase biodiversity, improve habitat quality, and create a connected and resilient landscape for wildlife, people and livelihoods.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy ultimately serves as a call to action for all sectors of society to play a role in the recovery of nature, ensuring that the biodiversity and natural beauty of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland can thrive for future generations, while at the same time supporting the lives and livelihoods of the people and communities that live and work there.

Key features of the strategy include:

- A description of the natural and people shaped landscape of the area.

- The identification of existing areas of particular importance for biodiversity.

- The setting out of the current state of nature of the area.

- The identification of priority habitats across various landscapes, including woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, farmland, and urban environments.

- The identification of priority species and species which are known indicators of habitat quality.

- A focus on nature-based solutions to make space for nature, mitigate climate change impacts, enhance ecosystem services, and improve environmental health.

- A strong emphasis on community involvement through citizen science, partnerships with landowners and farmers, and local biodiversity initiatives.

- The identification of areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity or where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits. Including specific landscape opportunities for creating and expanding habitats, improving habitat connectivity, and safeguarding key species.

- A roadmap for delivery to ensure long-term success, alongside a monitoring framework to track progress and make the necessary adjustments.

2. Introduction

This first Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland is a forward-thinking strategy aimed at addressing biodiversity loss and other ongoing environmental challenges.

By setting out a clear and structured approach, this strategy focuses on making space for nature, restoring biodiversity, improving habitat quality, and fostering greater ecological connectivity across various landscapes from woodlands and wetlands to urban green spaces and farmlands.

This strategy is structured around key principles that reflect both local and national priorities. At its core, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is underpinned by extensive stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and alignment with over 100 existing plans and policies, including national biodiversity action plans and local conservation efforts.

The document is divided into several thematic areas, including a comprehensive area description which sets out an overview of current landscape conditions, priority habitats and species, opportunities for nature recovery, and detailed strategies for implementation.

The methodology guiding the Local Nature Recovery Strategy involved a rigorous, evidence-based process, combining local ecological data, national biodiversity datasets, and stakeholder input to identify key areas for intervention.

The strategy uses geographic information systems (GIS) to map biodiversity hotspots and wildlife corridors, ensuring that efforts are focused where they will have the most significant impact. Special attention was given to landscapes such as Charnwood Forest and the National Forest, Leighfield Forest, Rutland Water and surrounding areas, Leicester City and urban areas, the Soar and Wreake and Welland Valleys, which provide vital habitats for many endangered and priority species.

This strategy also introduces a collaborative approach to nature recovery. It integrates contributions from local communities, farmers, businesses, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), emphasising the importance of citizen science in tracking the health of ecosystems.

In the long term, the strategy sets ambitious but achievable aims, including increasing the area of land managed for wildlife, improving the condition of priority habitats, and reinstating natural processes like floodplain restoration.

By focusing on key indicators of ecological health and leveraging the expertise of local stakeholders, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy aims to create a landscape that is more resilient to climate change, more connected for wildlife, and more accessible for the people who live and work in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

This strategy not only aims to reverse biodiversity decline but also to integrate nature into our everyday lives, ensuring a sustainable future for all.

3.   Methodology

The development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland followed statutory regulations and guidance set out by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). It also sought to be an ambitious and comprehensive process designed to find solutions to the problems nature is facing and approaches to make space for nature. The following methodology outlines the processes undertaken in developing the first ever Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, from stakeholder involvement and data collection to the mapping of priority areas and the establishment of bespoke conservation measures for key species and habitats.

3.1   Principles

As the appointed responsible authority to lead on the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Leicestershire County Council was expected to work to the following principles:

- Transparency - be able to show how partner contributions have been considered, how decisions have been made, and what the basis for them is.

- Inclusivity - enable everyone with an interest to be involved where possible.

- Clear communication - avoid using technical terms that may not be understood by partners and end users.

We have sought to include these principles throughout the process of developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, through involving as many partners, stakeholders and residents as possible, engaging with them in a variety of ways, listening to and taking on board the views and knowledge of others and being clear and transparent in communications. These principles have also been embedded into how this document has been produced in that we have sought to use clear and simple language where possible, minimise the use of technical terms and abbreviations, and placed the more technical detail in the appendices, for those that need or want to read it.
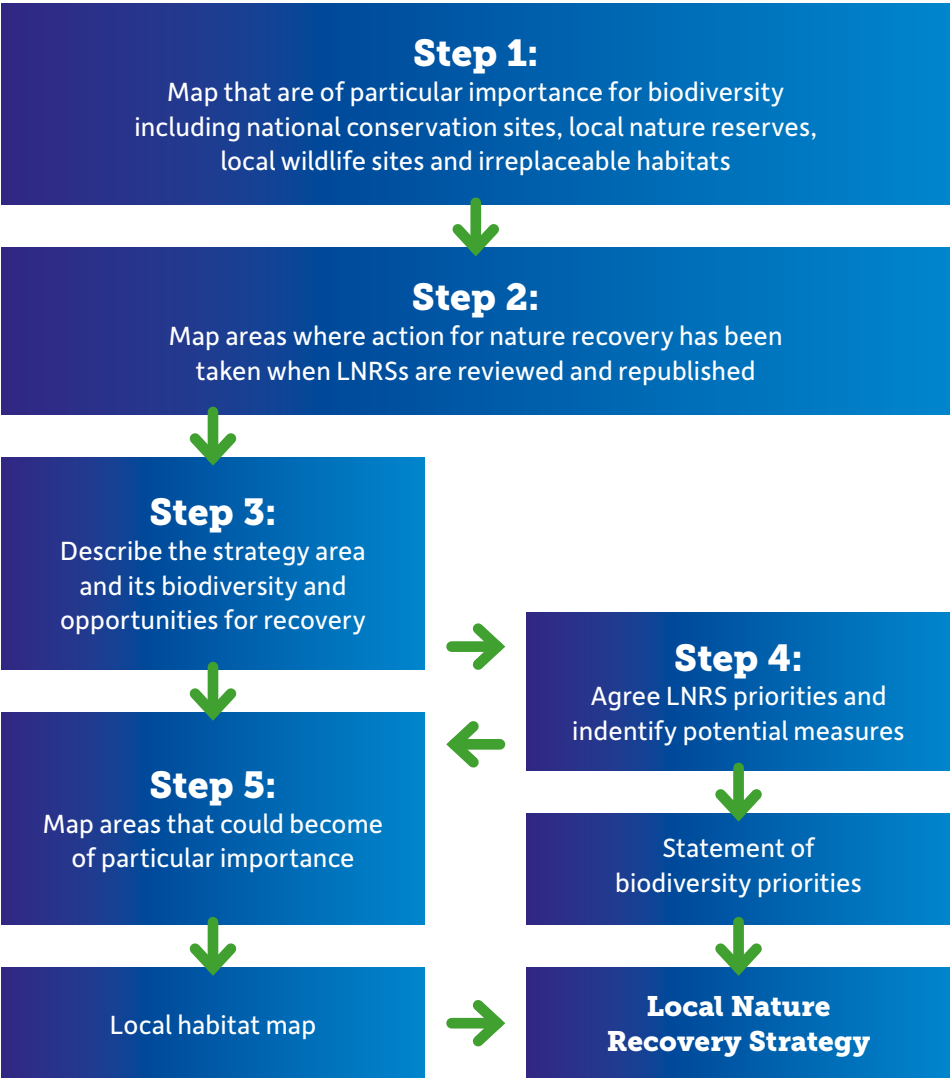
> **Nature needs a voice of its own. Too often in the past it has been taken for granted or dismissed as unimportant. I am glad that this is being introduced. It is of the utmost urgency.**
>
> (Residents' survey)

3.2 Prescribed Process for Developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The government guidance set out a prescribed process for developing local nature recovery strategies. This consisted of a five steps process as set out in Figure 1 and described in the following paragraphs.

Step 1:
Map that are of particular importance for biodiversity including national conservation sites, local nature reserves, local wildlife sites and irreplaceable habitats

Step 2:
Map areas where action for nature recovery has been taken when LNRSs are reviewed and republished

Step 3:
Describe the strategy area and its biodiversity and opportunities for recovery

Step 4:
Agree LNRS priorities and indentify potential measures

Step 5:
Map areas that could become of particular importance

Statement of biodiversity priorities

Local habitat map

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Step 1: Map Areas That Are of Particular Importance for Biodiversity

Data Collection and Analysis:

A critical component of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy was the use of the best available data to inform decision-making, prioritise areas for nature recovery, and guide the development of conservation measures.

The Local Habitat Map is the foundation of the strategy and identifies areas of particular importance for biodiversity. The local habitat map must identify:

• national conservation sites in the strategy area

• local nature reserves in the strategy area

The habitat map must also identify other areas in the strategy area, which in the opinion of the responsible authority:

• are, or could become, of particular importance for biodiversity, or

• are areas where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits.

Its purpose is to provide a clear visual way for groups and individuals to understand the areas which are or could become of particular importance for biodiversity and the environment to target nature recovery action.

Figure 1: Order of steps to be followed in preparing contents of a local nature recovery strategy

Data Sources:

- Local ecological surveys: Data from recent species counts and habitat quality assessments across Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland.

- National biodiversity datasets: Integration of data from the UK BAP, NBN Atlas, and State of Nature Reports.

- Historic land and species records: Data from the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust and Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre.

- Habitat mapping: Sourced from several organisations such as Natural England's datasets, Rural Payment Agency, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, UK CEH, National Forest Inventory 2021[1].

- Environmental conditions: Access to nature and air quality data, Environment Agency data on water quality, natural flood management and ecological status of catchment areas.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for Mapping:

GIS was employed to:

- Overlay species distribution with habitat data to identify areas of ecological importance.

- Model wildlife corridors using connectivity analysis.

- Identify areas for habitat creation based on land use and ecological significance.

- Assess land use and constraint patterns for feasible implementation.

Step 2: (Not applicable for the first strategy)

Over 1,000 residents responded to the Nature Recovery survey.

Step 3: Describe the Strategy Area and Its Biodiversity and Opportunities for Recovery

Overview of the Strategy Area:

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy focuses on Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland, which comprise areas that are rich in biodiversity and contain key habitats such as wetlands, woodlands, urban, farmland and grasslands. Opportunities for recovery are centred around enhancing these habitats, restoring connectivity, and addressing species decline.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- Interactive workshops, online maps, focus groups, and surveys were used to gather input from stakeholders, including identifying local pressures, opportunities, land use and biodiversity preferences and priorities.

- Stakeholders included farmers, tenant farmers, land managers, landowners, local government, environmental organisations, residents, and national agencies (Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, National Forest and DEFRA).

- Engagement Phase (March – July) comprised of a stakeholder survey - 96 responses received. A public survey - 1,077 responses received. An online interactive map - 516 comments added. Stakeholder briefings/workshops - 7 online briefings for stakeholders (90) and 6 member briefings (77). In-person workshops - 4 farmer and landowner workshops (35 attendees) - 10 resident workshops (over 80 attendees). A copy of the Engagement Report including the results from the public survey can be found here: www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/lnrs-resources

- A core stakeholder advisory group was established to guide the strategy development, called the Strategic Reference Group.

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[1] National Forest Inventory 2021 – provides detailed data on the extent of tree and forest cover across the country.

Step 4: Agree Local Nature Recovery Strategy Priorities and Identify Potential Measures (Statement of Biodiversity Priorities)

Species and Habitat Prioritisation

Species and habitats were prioritised based on:

- Guidance provided by Natural England.

- Assessment of 1500 species by 40 county recorders and local species experts.

- Conservation status (e.g., Red List species, UK BAP species).

- Vulnerability to local pressures.

- Ecological importance (e.g., keystone species, pollinators).

- Stakeholder preferences for culturally or economically significant species (e.g., farmland birds, pollinators).

Alignment with Existing Plans:

Over 100 local and national plans were reviewed to ensure the Local Nature Recovery Strategy aligned with existing priorities, including local biodiversity action plans, local plans, blue and green infrastructure strategies, climate strategies, flood management plans, environmental organisations habitat and species best practice guides and agri-environment schemes such as the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes.

Stakeholder Input on Priorities:

Continuous feedback from stakeholders ensured that the strategy reflected local and national priorities, with particular focus on land management practices and habitat restoration.

Step 5: Map Areas That Could Become of Particular Importance (Local Habitat Map)

Mapping of Priority Areas for Nature Recovery:

Areas of opportunity for habitat creation, biodiversity enhancement, and nature-based solutions were mapped. This included identifying areas critical for floodplain restoration, wetland creation, grassland enhancement, urban green and blue space protection and woodland creation and expansion.

Criteria for Priority Area Selection:

- Ecological important areas with high biodiversity value.

- Habitat connectivity: Locations that could enhance wildlife corridors and Nature Recovery Networks.

- Climate resilience: Areas critical for adaptation to climate change impacts.

- Feasibility of intervention: Areas with high stakeholder buy-in and suitable management practices.

Opportunity Mapping:

- Habitat creation example: Wetland restoration in the Soar and Wreake Valley, woodland expansion in the National Forest, Charnwood Forest and Leighfield Forest.

- Species reintroduction example: Potential areas for reintroducing species like Glow Worm, Hazel Dormouse and Water Voles.

- Nature-based solutions example: Mapping areas for actions such as floodplain restoration to deliver both biodiversity and ecosystem services.

3.3 Governance Structure

The development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy was supported by a governance structure consisting of a Steering Group, in turn supported by a Strategic Reference Group and several Working Groups. See figure 2. All of which was supported by a dedicated Project Manager.
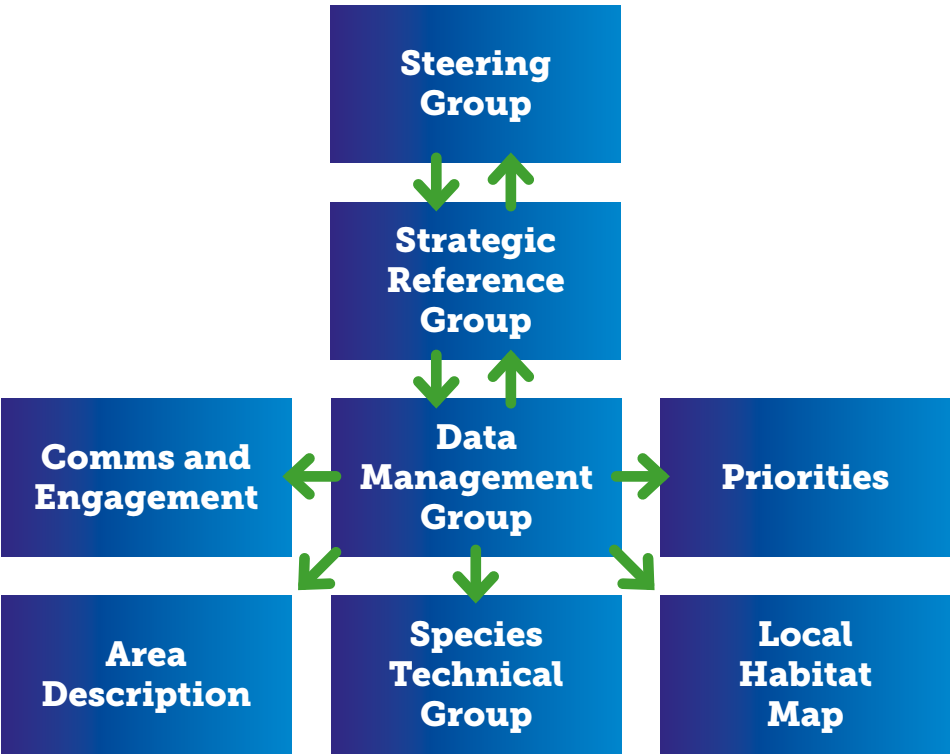
The structure allowed the right people and organisations to be involved in the right way at the right time, to enable the most effective use of people's time, knowledge and expertise.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy was developed through a rigorous and collaborative process, leveraging the best available data, integrating stakeholder perspectives, and aligning with over 100 existing priorities and plans. This comprehensive approach ensures that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is both ambitious and achievable, providing a blueprint for nature recovery that will benefit biodiversity, people, and the local economy for years to come.

Further information about what a responsible authority should include in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy is found in the government's statutory guidance: (www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-nature-recovery-strategy-what-to-include)

Responsible and supporting authorities should read this guidance about what to include in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy alongside The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023: (www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/341/made).

The regulations set out the process they must follow when they prepare, publish, review and republish their strategy.
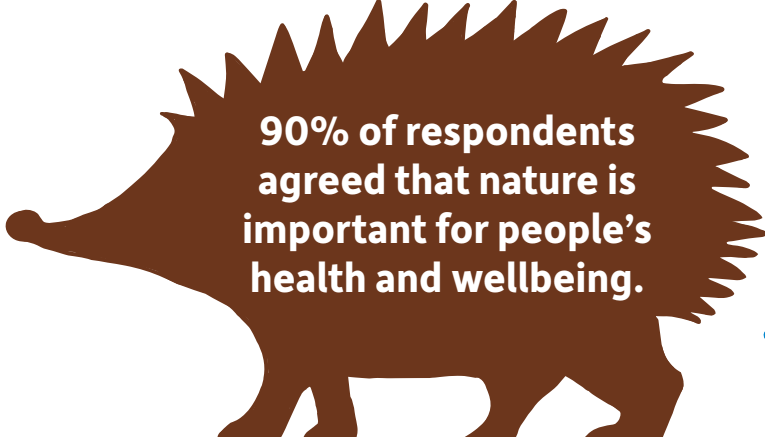
Authorities that are responsible for delivering the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will need to review the strategy and report on progress with its partners and stakeholders within 3 to 8 years of the initial strategy being approved. Thereafter, strategies are expected to be reviewed approximately every 5 years.

Figure 2: Governance structure for the development of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

4. Strategic Aims

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy has been developed through a comprehensive review of over 100 existing plans and strategies, along with an assessment of more than 400 associated priorities against Natural England's National Environmental Objectives. This robust analysis has allowed the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to align with a wide range of national and local plans, ensuring it is not only comprehensive but also complementary to ongoing initiatives.

As the strategy focuses on nature recovery, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy plays a critical role in supporting other key strategies that address pressing environmental issues, such as flood management, climate resilience, and improvements to air and water quality. By implementing nature-based solutions, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy contributes directly to these areas, demonstrating the essential role of biodiversity and ecosystem health in broader environmental goals.

The strategic aims outlined are designed to address the specific challenges facing nature while also supporting sustainable farming practices and development objectives. Each aim has been carefully crafted to ensure that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy not only promotes biodiversity recovery but also contributes to the area's resilience to climate change and other environmental stressors.

90% of respondents agreed that nature is important for people's health and wellbeing.

i. **Increase the area and diversity of land and water managed for wildlife in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland (make more space for nature):**

Large-scale integrated habitat creation and restoration measures/projects within both areas of existing high wildlife value, and less ecologically distinct areas to improve habitat corridors, ecological connectivity, and support natures recovery.

ii. **Increase biodiversity by improving the ecological condition (habitat quality) of existing areas for nature conservation:**

Conserve and enhance wildlife habitats, increasing the biodiversity value of protected/priority sites. Drive species recovery by targeting bespoke management in the right places to improve habitat quality. Improve ecological condition of existing habitats to support priority species.

iii. **Reinstate natural processes, make space for water and utilise Nature-Based-Solutions to support nature and climate resilience:**

Re-instate natural processes and utilise nature-based solutions to support resilience, both ecological and for projected climate change. Reconnect rivers with their floodplains, restore floodplains and reverse historic channel straightening to reduce flood risk. Plant trees and encourage natural regeneration of woodlands to draw down carbon and improve both water and air quality. Allow dynamic mosaics of habitat to develop to support biodiversity and natural succession of wildlife communities to occur.

iv. **Protect and enhance green and blue spaces within urban habitats:**

Implement green and blue infrastructure into urban design and planning, adopt management strategies that increase resilience to environmental stresses and climate change and create corridors and networks facilitating wildlife movement and ecological interactions.

v. **Promote sustainable agriculture and support local food systems:**

Encourage farming practices that enhance soil health, reduce chemical inputs, and promote biodiversity. Encourage the production and consumption of local and sustainable food that reduce food miles and promote environmentally friendly farming practices.

vi. **Improve ecological connectivity by establishing coherent and resilient ecological networks at scale:**

Create, conserve, and enhance the Nature Recovery Network by linking with existing and establishing new green/blue corridors across the strategy area and neighbouring strategy areas.

vii. **Reduce major pressures and threats to nature including Invasive Non-Native Species:**

Significantly reduce the prevalence of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and its detrimental effects on native ecosystems.

viii. **Improve our understanding of the State of Nature and actively monitor habitat/species change over time:**

Engage and educate all ages about the importance of the natural world. Establish robust monitoring systems to track the effectiveness of nature recovery practices and adapt strategies as needed. Using indicator species at landscape scales develop key data to show responses to pressures and positive conservation measures. This includes using data-driven approaches to assess environmental impacts and inform continuous improvement efforts.

> "I am grateful for the natural world and love to be in it. I feel better surrounded by nature."
>
> (Resident)

# 5. Area Description - Natural Landscape

5.1 Introduction

The natural landscape of the strategy area is defined by its diverse physical characteristics, which include unique topography, varied geology, and rich hydrological systems. These natural features have shaped the biodiversity and ecosystems of the part of middle England. Understanding these elements is crucial for identifying key areas for conservation and nature recovery efforts. This section explores the natural foundations that make up the distinctive character, from its national character areas to its geodiversity and hydrology.

5.2 The National Character Areas

There are 159 National Character Areas (NCAs) in England, each of which is distinctive with a unique 'sense of place'. These broad divisions of landscape form the basic units of countryside character, on which strategies for both ecological and landscape issues can be based.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy area of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland contains ten National Character Areas, each emphasising their unique ecological features and biodiversity. What follows is a brief overview of each of the ten areas.

Figure 3: Map showing the ten National Character Areas that cover the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy area.
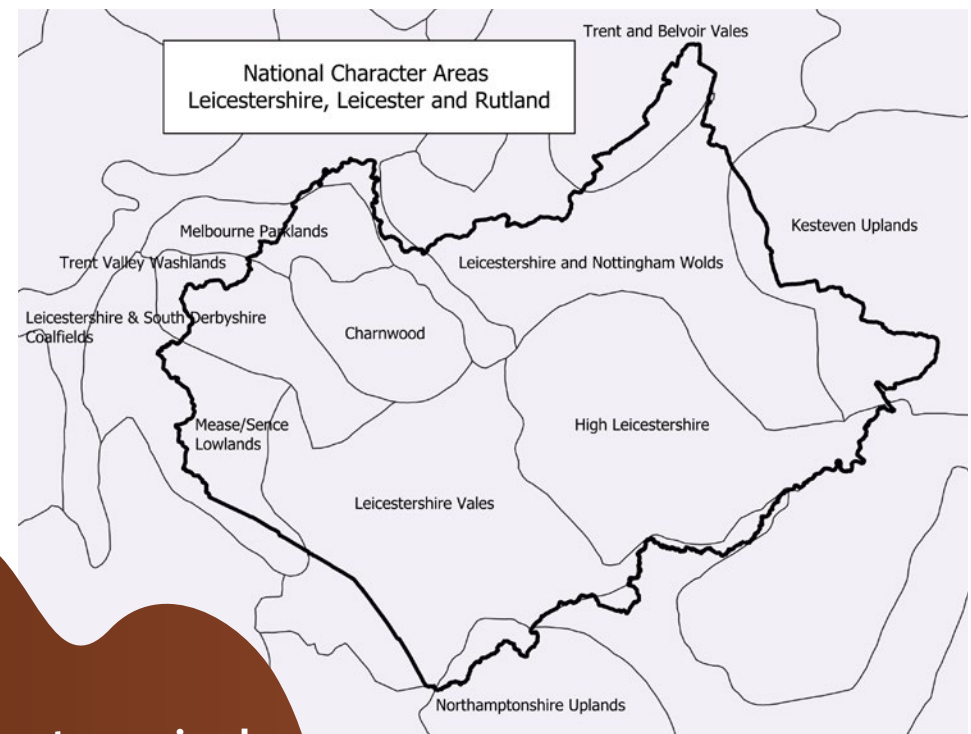
"I am concerned about perceived separation from nature for many people, leading to less empathy."

(Oadby and Wigston resident)

a) Trent and Belvoir Vales National Character Area

Characterised by undulating farmlands and rural scenery, and surrounding the **River Trent**, this character area covers a small part of the north of Leicestershire. Newark-on-Trent sits at its heart, while Grantham, Nottingham, Lincoln, and Gainsborough mark its periphery. Settlements include Bottesford, Barkestone and Hose. These low-lying landscape provide expansive open views due to its limited woodland cover.

The area's fertile soils have long-supported diverse agricultural practices, yet this has led to the loss of much semi-natural habitat. The river Trent acts as a vital biodiversity corridor, supporting various wetland habitats and serving as a significant route for wildlife movement. Notably, it also serves functions like flood storage and provides cooling water for local power stations.
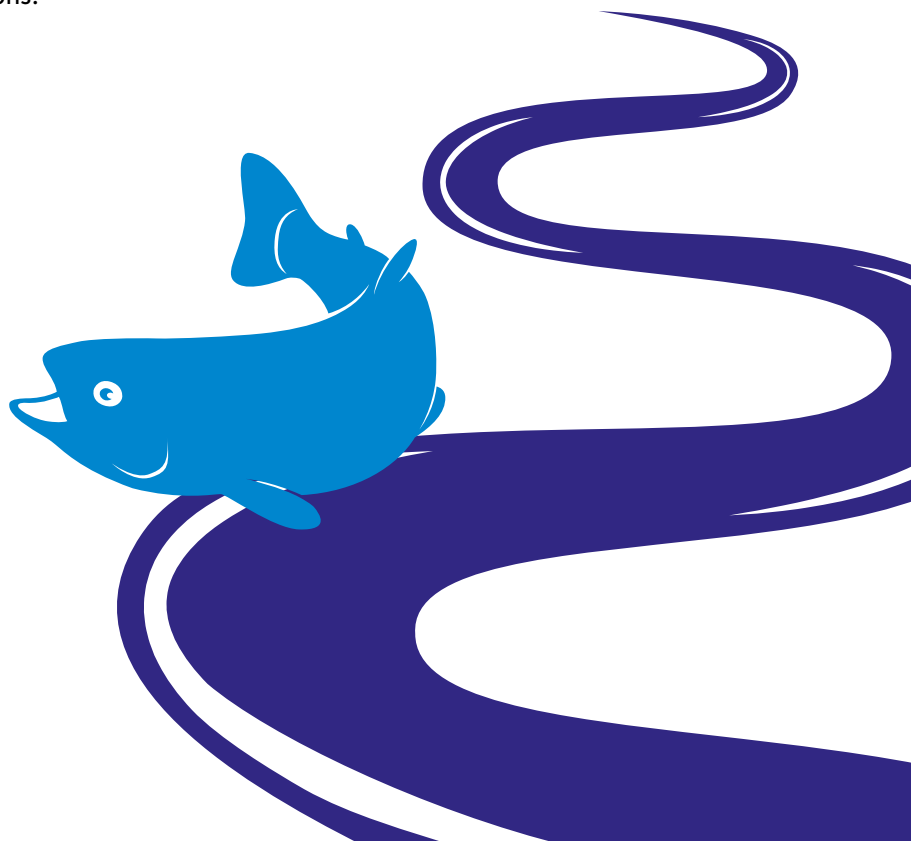
b) Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds National Character Area

Moving eastwards towards the gently dipping Jurassic rock landscape between Nottingham and Leicester, this rural, open landscape features mixed farmlands and includes the bustling market town of Melton Mowbray. Further South the **River Eye** with its Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designation has a significant impact on the landscape. **Rutland Water** stands out as a prominent feature within this rural backdrop, offering a picturesque setting atop undulating hills.

c) Kesteven Uplands National Character Area

Lying at the intersection of several counties and predominantly within Lincolnshire's historic Kesteven district, this character area covers a small part of the east of Rutland and Leicestershire and includes settlements such as Empingham, Thistleton and Saltby. The gentle, rolling landscape features a mix of farmland dissected by rivers like the Witham, and the East and West Glen. It boasts diverse geology, showcasing various soil types, from limestone to heavy clays. Calcareous loam soils support the growth of cereals, oilseeds, and root crops. The region's distinct network of narrow country lanes, hedgerows with wildflowers, and scattered woodlands contribute to its rural charm.
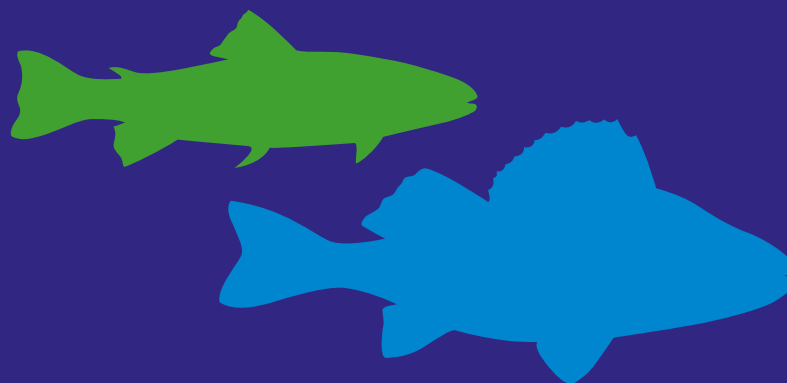
d) Northamptonshire Vales National Character Area

A series of low-lying clay vales and river valleys define this character area, as it skirts along the southeast of Leicestershire and Rutland and includes settlements such as Market Harborough and Great Easton. The rivers Nene and Welland, along with their tributaries, shape the landscape, where settlements often dominate the visual landscape due to its 10 percent urban coverage. Major road networks, including the M1, A45, A6, and A5, crisscross this region, influencing its visual dynamics and land use.

e) Leicestershire Vales National Character Area

Adjacent to Northamptonshire Vales and extending from Hinckley to Leicester and towards Market Harborough and Lutterworth, a range of towns dot this area, with contrasting urbanisation in the north and rural tranquillity in the south. This expansive, relatively open landscape features low-lying clay vales interspersed with varied river valleys and a mix of arable and pastoral farmland.

f) Trent Valley Washlands National Character Area

This character area covers a very small part of northwest Leicestershire near Marston and the Kingsbury Water Park and Wanlip and Watermead Park. Comprised of river floodplains in the heart of England, it offers a distinctly narrow, linear, and low-lying landscape. Predominantly flat these washlands consist of flood plains and gravel terraces periodically flooded deliberately for flood management purposes. The geological composition and soil types greatly influence settlement patterns and agricultural land use, dividing the area into arable lands on river terraces and pastoral farming on flood plains.

g) Charnwood National Character Area

Situated amidst urban areas, Charnwood maintains its rural essence, with villages nestled within its bounds. Distinguished by its geology and upland qualities, this character area stands out amidst the gentle lowlands. A mosaic landscape, it comprises rivers and waterbodies, heathland, farmland, parkland, and woodland, featuring rugged, rocky outcrops owing to its underlying Precambrian geology. The region is relatively well-wooded, with mixed deciduous and coniferous woodlands providing a unique contrast to the surrounding landscapes.

h) Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfields National Character Area

This transitioning landscape has evolved from extensive coal mining heritage to a blend of restored landscapes, woodlands, and agricultural spaces including settlements such as Ashby-de la-Zouch, Ibstock and Newbold Verdon. It spans a plateau offering panoramic views of shallow valleys and gentle ridges. An ongoing transformation aims to integrate these formerly industrial spaces into the predominantly rural agricultural scenery.

i) Melbourne Parklands National Character Area

Bordered to the north and west by the Trent Valley, with the Burton-upon-Trent to its southwestern arc, the area includes settlements such as Castle Donnington, Breedon on the Hill and Diseworth. Situated between ancient forests, it comprises a mix of farmland, woodlands, and grand estates. Calke Abbey, just across the Derbyshire border, hosts a Grade II listed historic park, designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR), and boasting significant woodland cover.

j) High Leicestershire National Character Area (includes most of West Rutland)

Emerging from the clay of the Leicestershire, West Rutland and Northamptonshire Vales, and scattered with small villages such as Great Dalby, Tur Langton and South Luffenham, this character area rises above lowland plains and valleys. Characterised by broad, rolling ridges and secluded valleys, it exudes a quiet, remote, and rural charm. Farms dot the landscape, interconnected by a network of country lanes and footpaths. Throughout this diverse area, the delicate balance between agricultural practices, wildlife corridors, and urban settlements contributes significantly to maintaining a rich and diverse ecosystem. These landscapes offer an array of challenges and opportunities for conservation efforts and co-existence, showcasing the importance of varied ecosystems and human interaction with nature.

k) Mease/Sence Lowland National Character Area

The Mease/Sence Lowlands are a gently rolling agricultural landscape centred around the rivers Mease, Sence and Anker. The area extends across: Derbyshire in the north, Warwickshire in the south, Leicestershire in the east and Staffordshire in the west. With its towns lying on the fringes of the National Character Area (NCA), only a very small percentage of it is urban. These lowlands retain a rural, remote character, with small villages, red brick farmsteads and occasional historic parkland and country houses. The National Forest extends into the area north of the River Mease.

The NCA contains one Special Area of Conservation (SAC) - the River Mease, which is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - and has 139 ha of nationally designated SSSI, including the Ashby Canal SSSI. Important habitats include neutral grasslands, wet meadows, parkland, wet woodlands, rivers and streams, all of which support characteristic and rare species of international importance, including the White-clawed Crayfish, the Spined Loach and the Bullhead fish.

83% of respondents said creating new or expanding existing habitats is very important.

5.3   Geodiversity

Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland boast a rich geodiversity that has shaped the landscapes, ecosystems, and economies of the area over millions of years. From the ancient Precambrian rocks of Charnwood Forest, Oolitic Jurassic Limestone outcrops of Rutland and the glacial deposits of the Pleistocene era, the geological make-up of the area has left an indelible mark on its character.

Charnwood Forest is home to some of the oldest Precambrian rocks in England. These rocks offer a glimpse into the early geological history of the region, with evidence of marine environments, volcanic activity, and ancient life forms. Additionally, the Carboniferous rocks in the west, particularly in the Leicestershire Coalfield, have played a significant role in the area's economic history, once fuelling a thriving coal mining industry.

Moving eastward, the landscape transitions to Mesozoic rocks, including Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous formations. These rocks have yielded valuable insights into past environments, from arid deserts to shallow seas. The Jurassic strata, for example, are rich in fossils, providing a window into ancient marine ecosystems and the creatures that inhabited them.

Glacial deposits from the Pleistocene era cover much of the area, offering evidence of past ice ages and shaping the modern topography through processes like glacial till deposits and river erosion. These are not only of geological interest but also provide resources for construction materials, such as aggregates found in quarries throughout the region.

The use of geological resources has played a crucial role in the economic development of the area. From coal mining in the **Leicestershire Coalfield** to limestone quarrying and ironstone mining in **Rutland**, the extraction of minerals has left a lasting impact on the landscape and local communities. Distinctive building stones, such as Sandrock and Marlstone Rock Formation, have contributed to the unique architecture of the area.

The area's geological heritage has been a focal point for scientific research and education. **Fossil discoveries**, like the Rutland dinosaur Cetiosaurus and the Barrow Kipper pliosaur, have captured the imagination of researchers and the public alike, shedding light on ancient ecosystems and prehistoric life.

Image courtesy of Charnwood Forest LPS

5.4 Hydrology

The hydrology of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland is significantly influenced by an intricate and diverse network of rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and canals - examples of the significant waterbodies can be found in **Appendix D1.a**.

These water bodies play a crucial role in shaping the landscape, supporting biodiversity, and providing essential environmental benefits. Not only vital for sustaining local ecosystems, but they also contribute significantly to regional water supply, flood management, and recreational activities.

The **River Soar** is the most prominent watercourse in Leicestershire, draining a large portion of the county and flowing into the **River Trent** and its surrounding catchment area, which covers approximately 1,380 km². It traverses both urban and rural landscapes, influencing the hydrology of Leicester City, Loughborough, and Melton Mowbray. Several stretches of the River Soar are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), particularly where it supports rich aquatic habitats and species, including wetland areas and floodplain meadows.

The catchment faces several hydrological challenges due to urbanisation and agricultural activities. Urban areas contribute to issues like pollution, with sewage spills and plastic waste being significant problems. The rural sections, particularly around Melton Mowbray, experience pressures from agricultural runoff, which affects water quality and increases flood risk.

Physical modifications to the river, such as culverts and weirs, have altered natural flow regimes. This in turn reduces oxygen levels and negatively impacts aquatic ecosystems. Additionally, the catchment is vulnerable to exacerbate flood risks caused by climate change, impacting water resources further. Those responsible for our hydrological management, working with catchment partnerships, aim to address these challenges through initiatives like natural flood management, river restoration, and improving water quality. These projects aim to enhance the river's resilience to environmental pressures and ensure sustainable water management for the region.

Also in Leicestershire, the **River Wreake** is a significant tributary of the **Soar**, flowing through predominantly agricultural landscapes. It is known for its meandering course, which contributes to local floodplains and wetland habitats. Similarly, the **Eye Brook** and its reservoir are vital for both water storage and biodiversity, supporting a range of species, including wildfowl and aquatic plants.

The **River Welland** flows through the picturesque Welland Valley, forming a vital part of the landscape and ecology of the area. Originating in the hills of Northamptonshire, the river meanders through rural Leicestershire and Rutland before continuing its journey eastward. The River Welland plays a crucial role in nature conservation and water management efforts, with ongoing initiatives to enhance its ecological value, improve water quality, and increase resilience to flooding. The river is also a key feature in local efforts to restore wetland habitats and promote sustainable land management practices, ensuring the Welland Valley remains a thriving environment for both wildlife and people.

The **River Mease** is a lowland river of significant ecological importance, flowing through the counties of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, and Staffordshire. Recognised as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to its rare habitats and species, the river is home to nationally important populations of species such as the **Spined Loach** and the **White-clawed Crayfish**. The surrounding floodplains and meadows along the river support a rich diversity of wildlife, contributing to the river's exceptional environmental value. However, the River Mease faces ongoing challenges, particularly from nutrient enrichment and changes in land use. Conservation efforts are focused on improving water quality, restoring habitats, and protecting its unique biodiversity. As part of wider environmental initiatives, the River Mease continues to be a focal point for nature recovery and sustainable water management within the region.

Rutland is home to **Rutland Water**, one of the largest artificial lakes in Europe was only created in 1976 and consequently its effect on the landscape is only in its infancy. This reservoir is fed by the Upper and Lower Gwash Rivers and several large streams playing a critical role in water supply and providing a vital habitat for birds, including Osprey and other waterfowl, making it a site of international importance for bird conservation.

The rivers and water bodies in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland support a variety of habitats, including wetlands, floodplains, and riparian woodlands. These areas are crucial for biodiversity, providing habitat for species such as otters, water voles, and a range of fish, including brown trout, European eel and Atlantic salmon.

Complementing the natural rivers are man-made canal systems, such as the **Ashby Canal SSSI**, **Oakham Canal** and **Grand Union Canal** including the SSSI-designated Leicester Line of the **Grand Union Canal**, once used for trade and transportation. Today, these waterways offer corridors for leisure activities and provide habitat and connectivity for a variety of species.

Ponds, both natural and artificial, are scattered throughout the landscape, providing connectivity and homes for mammals, birds, amphibians, insects, and other aquatic species. These changing, often temporary waterbodies play a crucial role in supporting biodiversity, particularly in agricultural landscapes where natural wetlands are scarce. Ponds, particularly in acid soils such as those around Charnwood Forest provide the acidic water vital for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland rarest amphibian, the **Palmate Newt**.

Ditches, though often overlooked, are vital components of the hydrological landscape, helping to manage water flow, reduce flooding, and support wetland habitats. These linear water features crisscross the countryside, providing connectivity and refuge for a variety of aquatic plants and animals. However, habitat loss and fragmentation and invasive, non-native species significantly disrupt these aquatic ecosystems and corridors.

The hydrology of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland is not without its challenges. Urban areas are affected by polluted runoff from impermeable areas, roads, and water treatment system discharges. Poor urban drainage systems and surface water management are a cause of localised flooding and impact groundwater recharge and stream conditions. Intensive land management in the upper reaches of the Soar contributes to high levels of diffuse agricultural nutrients and sediment affecting water quality. Rivers previously adapted for these intensive agriculture and historical industrial activities, now affect natural flows and water levels.

Climate change poses additional threats, altering rain patterns and exacerbating droughts and floods. The changing climate, catchment practices and modification of river channels impact on flow levels and contribute to increased flood risk across the catchment areas.

The catchment areas also feature grasslands and agricultural fields, where traditional farming practices co-exist with efforts to conserve natural habitats. Initiatives like the creation of buffer strips along riverbanks and the restoration of wetlands help to mitigate the impacts of agriculture on local ecosystems.

The rivers are also home to several species of birds, including **Kingfishers**, **Herons**, and various species of warblers that thrive in the riparian vegetation. The presence of Invasive Non-native Species like the **American Signal Crayfish** and **Himalayan Balsam**, however, poses challenges to the local biodiversity, as these species compete with native flora and fauna.

Conservation efforts, led by local catchment partnerships, focus on improving water quality, restoring natural river functions, and enhancing habitats to support the region's rich biodiversity. These initiatives are crucial in ensuring that Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland's rivers continue to provide ecological, recreational, and economic benefits to the local communities.

"Nature fills me with good feelings so there is less room for all the bad stuff."
(Charnwood resident)

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6. Area Description – People Shaping the Landscape

6.1 Introduction

Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland are at the heart of rural England and is characterised by a blend of lowland landscapes, rural expanses, and densely populated urban areas. Leicestershire's and Rutland's position as a key hub for agriculture, industry, and transport places significant pressure on its natural resources, making it a focal point for biodiversity action.

The rural character of Rutland, with its rolling hills, agricultural fields, and woodlands, contrasts with the more urbanised areas around Leicester City, which serves as a thriving cultural and economic heart. This mixture of urban and rural environments creates a complex ecological mosaic that presents both opportunities and challenges for nature recovery. The diversity of these landscapes, from floodplains and grasslands to ancient woodlands, supports a rich array of wildlife, though many habitats have been fragmented by urban development and intensive land use.

Human activity has significantly influenced the landscape of the strategy area over centuries, from rural farming practices to urban development. These interactions have shaped not only the physical environment but also the cultural and ecological heritage. This section examines how various human influences ranging from farming and urbanisation to the preservation of heritage sites and wildlife conservation efforts have played a vital role in shaping the landscape as we see it today.

6.2 Rutland

Rutland is the smallest historic county in England, located in the East Midlands region, bordered by Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, and Northamptonshire. Despite its size, Rutland is renowned for its picturesque landscapes, rich history, and vibrant community. Rutland is characterised by its rolling hills, patchwork of agricultural fields, and well-preserved rural environment. The county is predominantly rural, with much of the land used for farming and conservation. The landscape includes a mix of woodlands, meadows, and wetlands, providing diverse habitats for wildlife.

The county town of Oakham is the administrative and commercial centre of Rutland. It is known for its historic architecture, including Oakham Castle, one of the best-preserved Norman halls in England. Uppingham is another notable town, famous for its public school and its charming market square. Rutland is also dotted with picturesque villages, each with its own unique character, often featuring traditional stone-built houses and historic churches.

Rutland has a rich history that dates back to the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, with numerous historical sites and buildings. The county maintains a strong sense of identity and community, with local traditions and events celebrated throughout the year.

Agriculture plays a significant role in Rutland's economy, with arable farming, livestock, and sheep farming being prominent. The county has a growing tourism sector, driven by its natural beauty, historic sites, and Rutland Water, which attracts visitors for outdoor activities such as sailing, birdwatching, and cycling.

Rutland is home to a variety of wildlife, supported by its diverse habitats, including woodlands, grasslands, and wetlands. The county's natural environment is actively managed and conserved through various local initiatives and organisations. Conservation efforts in Rutland are particularly focused on maintaining and enhancing the quality of its natural landscapes and supporting biodiversity across the network of nature reserves.

Rutland may be the smallest county in England, yet it boasts one of the best nature reserves in the entire country - **Rutland Water**, the focus of much of the county's conservation efforts. For such a diverse, beautiful and excitingly wild place, Rutland Water is relatively young. The reservoir, one of the largest man-made bodies of water in Western Europe, covers over four-square miles, and the path around the edge is 23 miles long. When full, it has enough water for about three years of drought, supplying mainly the east of England.

6.3   Leicester City and Urban Towns and Settlements

Across the Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy area, the urban environment is a complex and dynamic mosaic of built infrastructure, green and blue spaces, and natural habitats. In Leicester City and the urban towns and settlements, this mosaic provides unique opportunities and challenges for biodiversity conservation and the enhancement of ecosystem services.

Green spaces such as parks, gardens, urban woodland, and nature reserves serve as vital connections and refuges for biodiversity, supporting a rich variety of plant and animal species. These areas are essential for maintaining ecological networks within urban environments, acting as vital corridors that connect isolated patches of habitat. This connectivity is crucial for the movement of species, genetic diversity, and the overall health of urban ecosystems.

In Leicester City, for example, iconic green spaces like **Watermead Park**, **Abbey Park**, **Victoria Park**, and **Aylestone Meadows** provide not only recreational opportunities, but also important habitats for species ranging from common urban wildlife like foxes and songbirds, to fewer common species such as bats and rare invertebrates. The presence of ancient and veteran trees, wildflower meadows, woody scrub and wetland areas within these parks adds to the mosaic of habitats increasing biodiversity and opportunities for nature to flourish within the urban landscape.

Urban gardens, allotments, cemeteries and community-managed green spaces also play a crucial role in enhancing urban biodiversity. These areas often feature a mix of native and ornamental plants, which provide food and shelter for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. Community gardens and urban agriculture initiatives contribute to local food production, reduce food miles, and support pollinator populations - essential for domestic food security. These also provide valuable opportunities for people to experience and engage with nature on their doorsteps.

Blue spaces, encompassing rivers, lakes, ponds, and wetlands, are equally significant in shaping the urban ecological fabric of Leicester City and the surrounding towns. The River Soar, flowing through the heart of Leicester, is a key blue corridor that supports a range of aquatic and semi-aquatic species. Its banks and associated wetlands are home to species such as kingfishers, otters, and various fish, aquatic invertebrates and amphibian species, which rely on the clean water and riparian habitats for survival.

In addition to the River Soar, urban water bodies such as canals, reservoirs, and artificial lakes provide critical habitats for aquatic and bird species. The Grand Union Canal, for instance, not only serves as a recreational waterway but also as a habitat corridor, facilitating the movement of species between different parts of the city and beyond. These blue spaces are particularly important for species that are otherwise isolated in urban settings.

Moreover, blue spaces contribute significantly to the overall health of urban ecosystems by regulating water flow, reducing the risk of urban flooding, and improving water quality through natural filtration processes. Wetlands and vegetated riparian zones act as natural buffers, absorbing excess nutrients and pollutants before they enter watercourses, especially crucial in urban areas.

Both green and blue spaces offer vital ecosystem services that contribute to the quality of life for urban residents. Trees and vegetation in parks and along streets help to capture carbon, mitigate the urban heat island effect[2], and improve air quality by filtering out pollutants. Similarly, blue spaces provide cooling effects and help regulate local climates, which is increasingly important in the face of climate change.

These natural areas also offer cultural and recreational services, providing spaces for outdoor activities, relaxation, and community engagement. Urban residents benefit from the mental and physical health advantages of having accessible nature close to where they live and work. The presence of water bodies and well-maintained parks can enhance property values, attract tourism, and foster a sense of place and community identity.

Despite the numerous benefits of green and blue spaces, urban areas like Leicester face significant pressures that threaten the integrity of these natural ecosystems. Urbanisation, with its associated infrastructure development, often leads to the loss, fragmentation, and degradation of habitats. This fragmentation can isolate populations of wildlife, making them more vulnerable to environmental changes and reducing overall biodiversity.

Urban areas are also hotspots for pollution, including air, water, and noise pollution, with proven detrimental effects on both human health and ecosystem functioning. Water bodies in urban areas are particularly susceptible to pollution from sewage overflows and storm water runoff, carrying pollutants from roads, gardens, and industrial areas into rivers and lakes, degrading water quality and harming aquatic life.

Climate change exacerbates these pressures, leading to more frequent and severe weather events such as heatwaves, storms, and flooding. These changes pose additional risks to both natural habitats and the built environment, requiring adaptive management strategies to ensure the resilience of urban ecosystems.

Addressing these challenges necessitates a thoughtful and integrated approach to urban planning and management. Nature-based solutions, such as the restoration of rivers and wetlands, the creation of green roofs and walls, and the expansion of urban green spaces, can enhance the resilience of urban ecosystems and mitigate the impacts of urbanisation and climate change.

In Leicester, initiatives like the High Quality Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) implemented in new developments helps manage storm water runoff, reducing the risk of flooding while also providing habitats for wildlife. Similarly, the redevelopment of brownfield sites offers opportunities to create new green and blue spaces that contribute to urban biodiversity and the wellbeing of residents.

Leicester City and its surrounding towns can create a more sustainable, resilient, and biodiverse urban environment, where nature and people co-exist harmoniously. This approach not only conserves and enhances the natural heritage of the area but also ensures that urban ecosystems continue to provide essential services to current and future generations.

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[2] An urban heat island is a localised area of increased temperature (compared to surrounding rural areas) in a dense, urban area. It is caused by human-made structures, like buildings and roads, absorbing and retaining heat more than natural surfaces, such as grass and forests.

6.4 Open Mosaic Sites

Open mosaic habitats are complex and diverse habitats that emerge on post-industrial or urban land, such as former quarries, brownfields, or derelict urban areas. These habitats are characterised by a mix of bare ground and quick-to-establish plant life known as early successional communities. They include grassland, scrub and wetland areas all in close proximity. They are particularly significant for supporting a variety of species that are adapted to these unique conditions, including rare invertebrates, birds, and plants that thrive in nutrient-poor or disturbed soils.

In Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland, open mosaic habitats are often found in areas that have undergone industrial decline or urban redevelopment. Notable examples include parts of the National Forest and former coalfield sites, where natural regeneration has led to the development of these valuable habitats. The **Cossington Meadows** nature reserve and areas around Coalville are examples where open mosaic habitats have been allowed to develop, supporting a wide range of species, and contributing to local biodiversity.

These habitats are crucial for biodiversity because they provide niches for species that are not typically found in more stable or less disturbed environments. In Leicestershire, these areas are important for species such as the **Dingy Skipper Butterfly**, various species of bees and wasps, and pioneer plant species. The diversity within open mosaic habitats also supports a high number of invertebrate species, which in turn provide food for birds and other wildlife.

Open mosaic habitats are recognised as a priority habitat under UK conservation frameworks. In Leicestershire, they are often included within designated Local Wildlife Sites and are subject to conservation efforts aimed at preserving their unique ecological character. These habitats are particularly valued for their role in supporting species that are declining elsewhere in the landscape, making their preservation a key aspect of local biodiversity strategies.

In addition to its scientific significance, the geological diversity of the area serves as a testament to the interconnectedness of natural processes, economic activities, and cultural heritage.

Image courtesy of NatureSpot
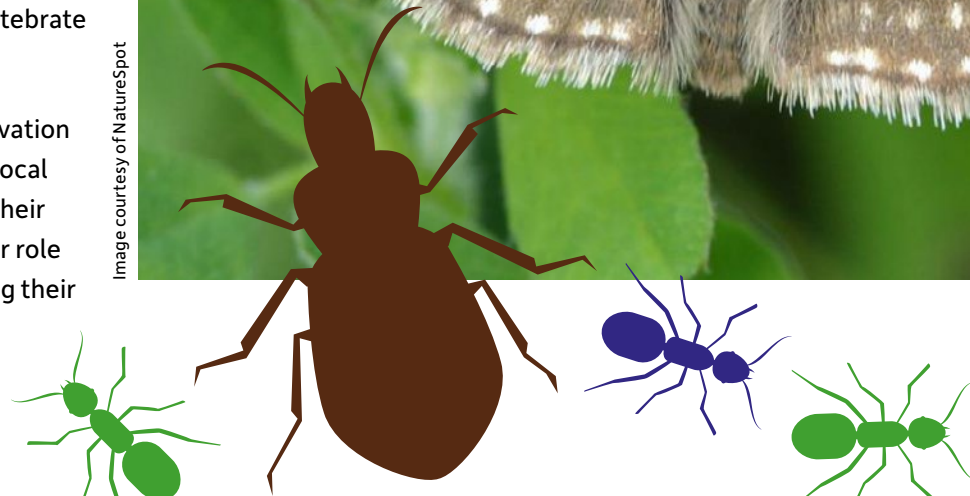
Several quarries are particularly known for their extraction of limestone, granite, and other minerals. These quarries are typically situated in rural areas, often in proximity to key geological features. Notable examples include quarries around Mountsorrel, known for its granite, and **Ketton** in Rutland, renowned for its limestone.

Mountsorrel Quarry, located in Charnwood, Leicestershire, is one of the largest granite quarries in Europe. The surrounding area is characterised by nationally important woodland, heathland, and grassland habitats. **Ketton Quarry**, situated in Rutland, is a limestone quarry surrounded by arable fields, hedgerows, and small woodlands, contributing to a varied landscape. **Bardon Hill Quarry**, also in Leicestershire, lies near one of the highest points in the county, in a landscape that includes scarce and important heathland and ancient woodland.

To boost biodiversity, quarries in Leicestershire and Rutland can be transformed and managed to create a valuable mosaic of habitats once extraction ends. The steep walls and deep pits can be filled with water to create lakes and wetlands and, when properly managed, can create valuable wetland habitats for amphibians, birds, and aquatic plants. Surrounding areas can be reforested or converted into grasslands and heathlands, supporting a wide variety of species. The use of native plants in the restoration process ensures the returned land is suitable for local wildlife. Native plants help prevent soil erosion, maintain local water quality, and provide habitat and food sources for native species.

Adopting a phased approach to this restoration work means sections of the land can be returned more quickly to a natural state, allowing various habitats to recover sooner. Over time, with a well-implemented restoration plan and effective post-restoration monitoring, these transformed quarries can serve as critical habitats for wildlife, contribute to regional ecological networks, and even become important recreational and educational sites for local communities, all while enhancing landscape connectivity and resilience against climate change.

6.5   Cultural and Heritage Assets

The rich historical and cultural heritage of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland is deeply intertwined with the natural landscape. These areas are home to numerous historic monuments, battlefields, ridge and furrow landscapes, and registered parks and gardens, each contributing to the region's unique character and biodiversity. Conserving and integrating these features into the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is essential not only for safeguarding our cultural heritage but also for enhancing the ecological value of the landscape.

Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland boast a wealth of **historic monuments** that reflect the region's long and varied history. These include ancient earthworks, medieval castles, historic churches, and industrial relics. Many of these monuments are designated as Scheduled Monuments, offering them legal protection due to their national importance.

These sites often serve as important habitats for wildlife, with the surrounding landscapes providing undisturbed environments that support a variety of species. For example, old stone structures can host bat colonies, while the grounds around ancient monuments often support rare plant species and invertebrates. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy recognises the need to protect these historic sites from degradation while promoting their ecological enhancement through careful management and habitat creation.

The counties are also the site of several **historic battlefields**, most notably the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, which marked the end of the Wars of the Roses and the beginning of the Tudor dynasty. The Battle of Bosworth site is registered as a Battlefield under the Historic England register, highlighting its national significance.

Farmers and landowners also thought nature is important for our sense of heritage and identity.

These battlefields are not only of great historical interest but also represent significant open landscapes that have remained largely unchanged for centuries. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will consider the preservation of these battlefields as part of the overall strategy, ensuring that any interventions enhance their ecological value without compromising their historical integrity.

The **ridge and furrow** landscapes of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland are some of the best-conserved examples of medieval ploughing systems in the country. These landscapes, characterised by parallel ridges and troughs, were created by the methodical ploughing of fields with oxen during the medieval period.

Today, many ridge and furrow fields have been agriculturally improved, and would benefit from efforts to restore species rich elements. Those that remained undisturbed provide valuable grassland habitats that support a wide range of species, including wildflowers, birds, and insects.

They are also a visual reminder of the region's agricultural history. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will encourage conservation of these landscapes as part of the overall strategy to maintain biodiversity, recognising their dual value as both cultural and ecological assets.

Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland are home to **several registered parks and gardens**, which are designated for their historical significance and landscape design. These include grand estates, such as **Belvoir Castle** and **Bradgate Park**, **Burley on the Hill** and **Exton Park**, as well as smaller, locally important gardens.

These parks and gardens are not only of cultural importance but also serve as important green spaces that contribute to local biodiversity. Many contain ancient woodlands, veteran trees, ponds, and flower meadows, all of which provide habitats for a variety of species. This strategy promotes the continued management and enhancement of these areas to support both their heritage and ecological function.

6.6 Farming Landscapes

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland sit at the heart of agricultural England, and rightly enjoy enviable reputations as being among the leading 'foody' counties of Britain, with a profusion of specialties.

There is a huge level of diversity to Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland's agricultural landscape, from the volcanic rock and mudstones of Charnwood Forest in North West Leicestershire, to the flat, wide plains in the centre of the county, the rolling, heavy slopes along the Leicestershire and Rutland border, to the sandstones and ironstones in the west, mudstones in the middle and Oolitic limestones in the east of Rutland, where today successful vineyards are even being established on southward facing slopes.

Therefore, Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland sit in prime, traditional 'mixed farming' country where all manner of agricultural enterprises have the potential to thrive. Livestock farming dominates the steep, rain-soaked west while the dryer, flat arable and horticultural lands lie to the east.

a) Soil health

England has a great profusion of soil types and Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland are no different. The area's predominant soil type is a **loamy clay** (representative of some 20% of England). This can be considered 'slowly permeable, seasonally wet, slightly acid but base-rich', that is to say: the soils in Leicestershire and Rutland can be challenging to farm, but in a kind weather season have the potential to be fertile and productive. In a more challenging weather season, they have the potential to be very difficult indeed, with a risk of overland flow and run-off in heavy rainfall situations, if left bare.

In general, agricultural soils in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland are classified as '**Grade 3**' ('good to moderate') in terms of productivity. Some areas are 'Grade 2' (very good') - in particular to the south of Ashby-de-la-Zouch and between Loughborough and Melton Mowbray, while there are also some corridors and pockets of 'Grade 4' (poor) land, especially along the routes of some of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland's watercourses, which are often flooded.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland are among the most densely cropped and most densely livestocked areas in England, reflecting its mixed farm heritage and relatively productive land.

> **If there is collaborative working with neighbouring land owners, this will develop the motivation needed to implement nature recovery strategies.**
>
> (Farmer)

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b) Farming composition

There are **2,167 farm holdings** in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (2021) covering a total of 190,000 hectares of farmed land, making the average farm size some 88 hectares (exactly matching the national average). The number of farm holdings has decreased by around 25% since 1995, reflecting the general trend towards consolidation in UK farming.

The largest single categorisation of farms in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland is 'lowland grazing' (40%) followed by 'cereals' (23%) and 'general cropping' (16%). However, by far the largest agricultural land use is 'cereals' (94,845 hectares) followed by 'lowland grazing' (32,489 hectares) and 'mixed' (26,701 hectares). There are some 7,500 hectares of farm woodland, with owned versus tenanted land at a roughly 2:1 ratio.

Across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, there are some **295,000 sheep, 105,000 cattle and 55,000 pigs**. There are also more than **2.5 million kept poultry**, pretty evenly split between laying hens and broiler chickens.

Around **5,300 people** are considered to be a part of the **agricultural workforce**, with 3,600 of them 'family' members working either full or part-time. Family farms are, as across the nation, the backbone of farming in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

In overview, there is a significant element of **cereal and general cropping** in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (wheat being the predominant crop at some 50%), as well as beef, dairy and sheep production. There are also significant minority interests in **pig and poultry production**. There is, however, very little in the way of horticultural production, with fruit and vegetable farming occurring in better soil conditions elsewhere in the country.

The largest single categorisation of farms in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

40% Lowland Grazing	23% Cereals	16% General Cropping

The largest agricultural land use

Cereals 94,845 Hectares	Lowland Grazing 32,489 Hectares	Mixed 26,701 Hectares

Across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland there are some

295,000 Sheep

105,000 Cattle

55,000 Pigs

2.5m kept poultry

As across most of the UK, there is a wide range of farming practice in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. However, in general a distinction should probably be made between those sectors (often more 'intensive') such as pigs, poultry and dairy where data, innovation and attention to detail are commonplace, and the more traditional sectors such as red meat and general cropping where practices may be much the same as in decades past.

However, in general British farmers are on a journey towards more sustainable, high welfare production (from an already high base) in areas such as soil health ('regenerative farming'), use of technology (such as drones, satellite data and AI) and generation of renewable energy on-farm, to name but three.

In the last seventy years, farming has changed significantly across the UK. As the nation seeks economies of scale in its food production, there has, in general, been a move away from smaller-scale traditional mixed farming toward mechanisation, specialisation and consolidation. In large part this has been driven by government imperatives concerning food security during and following the Second World War, with many government policies and incentives (both outside and inside the EU's Common Agriculture Policy or CAP) driving so-called 'intensification', most obviously manifested in measures such as the clearing of hedgerows to create larger, more efficient fields or the increased use of agro-chemicals and fertilisers to boost production. These policies, underpinning the cheap food culture demanded by consumers, have undoubtedly played their part in the decline of biodiversity across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, as across much of the UK and the world.

However, recent decades have seen increasing efforts at reversing these trends, both from individual farmers and encouragement by EU and now UK schemes under the CAP and **Environmental Land Management** (ELM). In the 2010s around 70% of farmed English land was in some form of '**agri-environment scheme**' (AES), and although confusion in the delivery of these schemes in the late 2010s saw that number decline significantly, it is now once again on the rise. For example, hedgerow plantings are at record levels across the country.

While farmers have always been required to respond and adhere to government policy, it must be recognised in the context of this strategy, that the production of food materials is an increasingly devalued practice, from which it is ever harder to draw a profit.

## 6.7 Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes

The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes initiative has been central to conservation efforts for over 15 years. Five areas of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland are recognised as particularly valuable for wildlife thanks to the quality of existing habitats, the concentration of important sites and the opportunities for habitat creation within and around them.

These landscapes describe focal areas for habitat restoration, where active conservation measures have helped to maintain and enhance biodiversity, and these areas will be referred to later in the opportunities for nature recovery, section 9.

The initiative prioritises reconnecting fragmented habitats, enabling wildlife to move more freely across the landscape, and making ecosystems more resilient to the pressures of climate change and development. This approach also involves working with local communities, landowners, and partners to promote sustainable land use and ensure long-term conservation success.

By building on this foundation, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy aims to expand these efforts, creating larger, better-connected landscapes that support a wider range of species.

Figure 4: Map of the Living Landscapes for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

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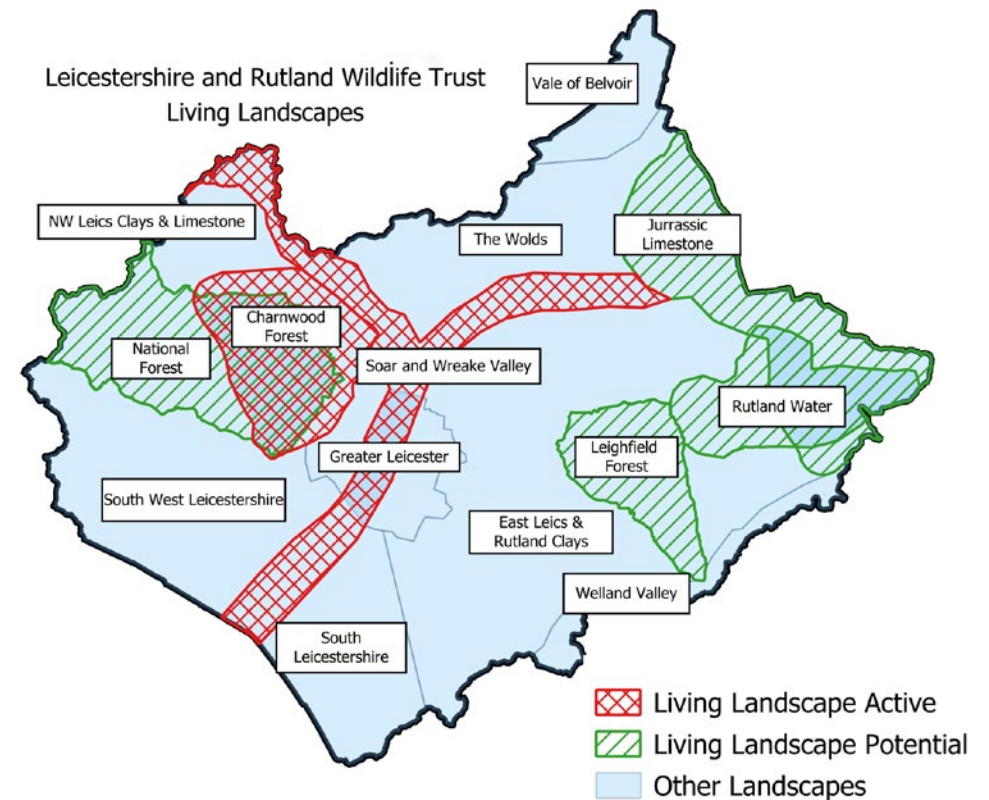
a) Charnwood Forest and the adjoining National Forest

Covering around 16,600 hectares, the **Charnwood Forest Living Landscape** is unique in the East Midlands. Craggy hilltops, dry stone walls, fast flowing streams, ancient woodlands, and open views define the area. The volcanic geology, comprising some of England's oldest rocks, combined with the dynamic relationship between people and natural forces is the key to this landscape and its wildlife.

By the late eighteenth century, Charnwood Forest probably looked like a small, wetter, version of Dartmoor. Remnants of this historic scenery are preserved at Bradgate Park, a medieval deer park. There would have been wide open spaces of rough grazing land, boggy in places, with patches of heather and bilberry. The Enclosure Act of 1808 changed the landscape, which was drained, ploughed, and replaced with small fields bounded by hedges and walls. Wildlife was still abundant but became increasingly threatened in the twentieth century by intensive land use.

The area now has the highest density of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in Leicestershire and Rutland. Charnwood Lodge, Charley Woods, Ulverscroft and Lea Meadows are some of our most precious habitats in this area.

Covering 200 square miles, half of which lies in western Leicestershire, the National Forest is an ambitious project to create a new forest in the Midlands, for the enjoyment and benefit of all. Established in the early 1990s, the National Forest stretches west from Charnwood Forest to the border with Derbyshire. Public funding has seen the creation of over 8,500 hectares of forest habitats, including over 2,500 hectares of non-woodland. Forest creation continues to be a key element of the Government's approach to meeting the challenges of climate change, with funding increasing in recent years to reflect this.

b) Leighfield Forest

The **Leighfield Forest Living Landscape** is a roughly triangular area covering the high ground straddling the Leicestershire and Rutland border between Tilton-on-the-Hill, Oakham, and Eyebrook Reservoir.

It is a well-wooded area of high nature conservation, landscape and historical importance. With 23 ancient woodlands[3] - 16 of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) - spanning 594 hectares, it is one of the prime woodland biodiversity areas in the East Midlands. The area includes the entire Eyebrook catchment, as well as lengths of the Chater and Gwash rivers, all of which feed the River Welland.

As well as its wildlife, the area has great historical value. It was once part of the Forest of Rutland - a Royal hunting area created by Henry I soon after 1100 AD. The forest originally covered the southern half of Rutland together with a small part of Leicestershire. Later, following the disafforestation of the Leicestershire portion in 1235 and most of the eastern half of Rutland in 1299, the remainder became known as Leighfield Forest. Charles I removed the Royal protection on the forest in 1630 and the land was subsequently sold. The boundaries of the historic Leighfield Forest fall within the current Living Landscape.

Factors such as changes in woodland and agricultural practice mean the level of biodiversity in the forest declined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Work is taking place to better conserve the forest, for both its biodiversity and heritage interest. This work includes woodland restoration and changes in land management practices to improve the quality of the watercourses and farmland for wildlife.

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[3] English Nature's Ancient Woodland Inventory - Everett and Robinson 1990

c) Soar and Wreake Floodplain

The **Soar and Wreake Living Landscape** covers the extensive river corridors and associated floodplains of Leicestershire's two principal rivers, the Soar and the Wreake.

The River Soar rises in the south of Leicestershire and flows slowly northwards through a shallow valley. Fed by several streams and smaller rivers, it flows through the City of Leicester growing rapidly in size before joining with the River Trent on the Nottinghamshire border. The River Wreake, the main tributary of the Soar, flows from the West of Melton Mowbray towards the village of Cossington where the rivers join together, forming an extensive network of valuable freshwater and riparian habitats for the people and wildlife of Leicestershire.

The river valleys have changed dramatically over several thousand years, facing historic and modern pressures, each cumulatively contributing to an ever more degraded landscape for nature. Major issues have included canalisation, widespread dredging, increasingly intensive farming, extensive development within the floodplain and pollution, all of which have had a devastating impact on local wildlife.

d) Rutland Limestone (Jurassic limestone Living Landscape)

The **Jurassic Limestone Living Landscape** extends along the eastern side of Rutland from Ketton in the south up towards Waltham-on-the-Wolds in northeast Leicestershire. It is part of a much bigger Lincolnshire and Rutland Limestone Natural Area.

The underlying geology is 'Oolitic' limestone. This is made up of small spheres which were formed when calcium carbonate was deposited on the surface of sand grains rolled by wave action under a shallow sea during the Jurassic period.

Soils derived from this rock are lime rich and give rise to diverse grasslands with a range of characteristic plants such as Common Rock-rose and Tor-grass. This grassland is now confined to a few small remnants mainly associated with former quarries, including Bloody Oaks, Ketton and Stonesby Quarry nature reserves, as well as roadside verges – many of which are Local Wildlife Sites.

Other important habitats include arable field margins where the free draining lime rich soils are good for arable plants such as **Venus's-looking glass, Round-leaved Fluellen, and Night-flowering Catchfly**.

e) Rutland Water

Rutland Water Nature Reserve holds significant designations, including Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), and Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. It is renowned for its outstanding populations of wintering waterfowl and serves as the site of the successful Rutland Osprey Project. This project, led by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust (LRWT) in partnership with Anglian Water, has played a crucial role in reintroducing breeding ospreys to the region, marking a key achievement in UK species recovery efforts.

The reserve regularly hosts over 20,000 wintering wetland birds, including internationally important populations of gadwall and shoveler, as well as nationally significant numbers of other ducks, grebes, and swans. The diversity of migrating waders using the reserve is particularly impressive for an inland location, while the growing numbers of breeding waterfowl, waders, and passerines are increasingly important. Additionally, large wintering gull roosts have become a prominent feature, with recent counts recording over 50,000 individuals, primarily **Black-headed Gulls**.

Owned by Anglian Water and managed alongside the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, the reserve features a variety of wetland habitats on the western end of the reservoir, including lagoons, reedbeds, marshlands, and wet grasslands. Other habitats such as woodlands, scrub, and species-rich grasslands also support a wide range of breeding birds and invertebrates.

Monitoring of the Ramsar, SPA, and SSSI conditions is primarily conducted through monthly Wetland Bird Surveys (WeBS), ongoing since 1975. The Reserve Management Plan outlines additional annual surveys, covering species such as ospreys, water voles, and seabirds, along with habitat-specific assessments of grasslands, trees, and invertebrate populations to ensure effective habitat management.

In summary, landscape-scale conservation efforts highlight the importance of well-managed habitats in supporting biodiversity recovery. It is crucial to examine the current state of nature across the strategy area, identifying both the challenges and opportunities for biodiversity restoration. Understanding the broader ecological context helps guide efforts to protect and enhance natural habitats across the strategy area.

7. State of Nature

7.1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, the UK has experienced a significant decline in biodiversity across most species' taxonomy groups, reflecting a broader trend of ecological degradation driven by human activity. This decline is particularly evident in mammals, birds, amphibians, invertebrates, and fish, with many species now at risk of local extinction.

The **State of Nature 2023** report reveals that over 26% of terrestrial mammals in the UK are facing the threat of extinction. Iconic species such as the **Hazel Dormouse** and the **Water Vole** are among those that have seen sharp declines due to habitat loss, predation by invasive species, and changes in land management. The **European Hedgehog**, a species once commonly found across the countryside, has declined by more than 50% in rural areas over recent decades. These declines are linked to factors such as intensive farming, the loss of hedgerows, and increased pesticide use, which reduce the availability of food and shelter.

Birds are one of the most severely impacted groups, with 43% of species facing risk of extinction. Species like the **Turtle Dove** and **Curlew** have seen catastrophic declines due to habitat destruction, agricultural intensification, and hunting during migration. The Turtle Dove population has decreased by a staggering 94% since 1995. In contrast, urban-adapted birds such as the **Peregrine Falcon** have flourished, benefiting from the availability of nesting sites on tall buildings.

Invertebrate populations have also shown worrying declines. On average, invertebrate species are found in 13% fewer places than in 1970, with pollinators like bees, hoverflies, and moths suffering even larger reductions. Pollinator species have decreased by 18% on average, while crop pest control invertebrates, such as the **2-Spot Ladybird**, have declined by more than 34%. This decline poses a serious threat to ecosystem services such as pollination and pest control.

Freshwater habitats are particularly vulnerable, with species such as the **European Eel** and **Atlantic Salmon** facing dramatic population declines. The European Eel has seen a 95% decrease in its numbers due to overfishing, habitat degradation, and migration barriers. Amphibians like the **Great Crested Newt** are similarly affected by pollution and habitat loss, exacerbating the pressures on these already fragile populations.

The main drivers of biodiversity loss in the UK are habitat destruction from agricultural intensification, urban development, pollution, and climate change. Unsustainable fishing practices and marine development also contribute to declines in coastal and marine species. Less than half of the UK's biodiversity remains, with only 7% of woodlands and 25% of peatlands in a healthy ecological state.

Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland cover over **255,000 hectares** of land. According to the most recent data provided by Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Record Centre, approximately 7% of the land in is designated for nature conservation, encompassing around **15,000 hectares**. These areas, protected under various designations serve as critical habitats for biodiversity and include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs), and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Regionally Important Geology Sites (RIGs) and irreplaceable habitats such as Ancient Woodland.

7.2   Local Habitat Map

The Local Habitat Map is a crucial component of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, providing a detailed, visual representation of the most important areas for nature within Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland.

Figure 5: Image of Local Habitat Map showing the Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity
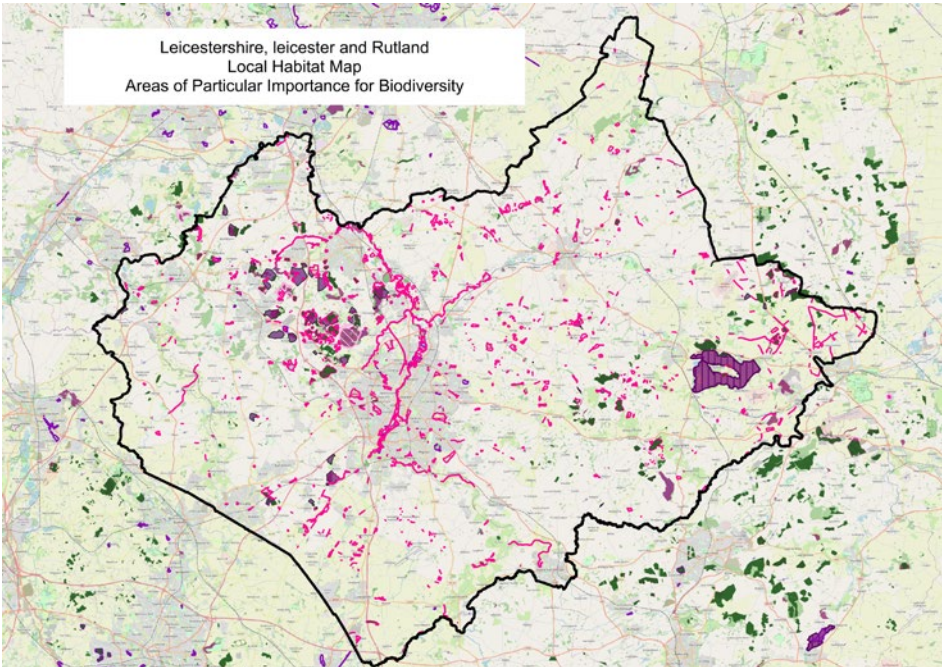
The Local Habitat Map can be viewed online: https://haveyoursay.leicestershire.gov.uk/local-nature-recovery-strategy-local-habitat-map

The map shows the existing **Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIB)** and acts as a foundation for identifying opportunities for nature recovery. The map incorporates legally protected designated areas and irreplaceable habitats as outlined in the National Policy Planning Framework.

Figure 6: Table showing the number of designated sites and irreplaceable habitats, and the approximate area in hectares they cover.

Designation Type	Count	Description	Approx Area (Hectares)
Special Area of Conversation (SAC)	1	River Mease	23
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	4	2 ecological 2 ecological/geological	593
Special Protection Area (SPA)	1	Rutland Water	1,225
Ramsar Site	1	Rutland Water	1,225
Irreplaceable Habitat (Ancient Woodlands)	500+	Count includes existing AW and those being assessed for AW status	2,679
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	98	76 biodiversity, 14 geological, 8 geological and biodiversity	5,136
Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	1176	1176 notified and 1353 candidate sites	Notified 4053
Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS)	60	60 confirmed and 10 candidate sites	Confirmed 1829
Local Nature Reserves (LNR)	26		345
Irreplaceable Habitat (Lowland Fens)	254		97.5
Irreplaceable Habitat (Ancient Trees)	c1814		

The Local Habitat Map is an essential tool for local government decision-makers, developers, farmers and landowners, and conservationists. By visualising the existing landscape, the map supports informed decision-making and fosters collaboration towards nature recovery goals.

The Local Habitat Map is a dynamic representation of the area, serving as a blueprint for restoring and enhancing biodiversity. It plays a central role in shaping the **Areas that Could Become of particular importance (ACB)** and the Priorities and Measures required to deliver the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, helping to create a more connected and resilient natural environment.

The following sections describe the different habitats and species found in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland.

7.3   UK Habitats of Principal Importance

UK Habitats of Principal Importance, also known as Priority Habitats, are those identified as being the most threatened and in need of conservation efforts under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP), see Appendix C 2.a and C 2.b. Following the publication of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, these habitats are legally recognised as requiring protection and restoration in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The NERC Act specifically mandates public bodies and decision-makers to have due regard to the conservation of biodiversity, including these priority habitats.

There are 56 Priority Habitats in the UK, ranging from woodlands and wetlands to grasslands, heathlands, and coastal habitats. Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland are home to 19 of these priority habitats, supporting a wide range of species, including many that are rare or under threat. They provide essential ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, and water purification, while also contributing to human well-being and sustaining agricultural systems.

These habitats are recognised for their high conservation value, not just for the rare species they support, but for the broader ecosystem services they provide. Many of these habitats are under threat from human activities such as development, pollution, invasive non-native species, pests, disease unsustainable agricultural practices, and climate change, making their conservation a priority for biodiversity strategies at national and local levels. The protection and enhancement of pressures these habitats are key objectives within the UK's biodiversity commitments, including Biodiversity 2020 and subsequent nature recovery initiatives.

While there are 19 UK Habitats of Principal Importance present in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland, the region supports a wide range of other habitats that also hold significant ecological value. These include urban environments like walls, gardens, and allotments, as well as managed landscapes such as plantations and ornamental parks. Each of these habitats, though not classified as priorities, plays an essential role in supporting biodiversity and contributing to ecological networks.

Efforts to conserve and restore these habitats involve collaboration between government agencies, landowners, conservation organisations, and local communities, all working together to ensure that these vital ecosystems can continue to thrive and support wildlife for generations to come.

For more information on these habitats see the Biodiversity Action Plan for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland 2016-2026 and the Biodiversity Action Plan for Leicester 2021-2031: Appendix C.

7.4 Freshwater and Wetland Habitats

Image courtesy of NatureSpot

Freshwater and wetland habitats of principal importance Include rivers, streams and canals, lakes and reservoirs, lowland fens, reedbeds, purple moor-grass and rush pastures, and ponds.

Rivers, canals and streams are the backbone of freshwater ecosystems. These habitats support a range of aquatic plants and animals, providing critical breeding grounds and feeding areas. The River Mease is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to its importance for species like the **Spined Loach** and **White-clawed Crayfish**, both of which have experienced significant declines due to pollution and habitat degradation. Efforts to restore riparian habitats along rivers and streams have resulted in the return of species such as Otters and Water Voles to areas where they were had once previously disappeared. Exact figures for river habitats are variable, but rivers in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland span across hundreds of kilometres.

❝I survey wildlife – I'm currently trying to find habitat and traces of water vole. ❞
(Leicester resident)

Image courtesy of NatureSpot

Seasonally, waterlogged grasslands found alongside rivers and streams create **floodplain grazing marshes**, also referred to as **floodplain meadows** which are valuable for both biodiversity and agriculture, supporting a wide range of wetland birds and acting as buffers for floodwaters. Important areas of floodplain grazing marsh can be found in the Soar Valley and Welland Valley, some of which are designated as SSSIs. Floodplain grazing marsh is limited but covers around **200 hectares**. Birds like the **Lapwing** and **Snipe** benefit from these marshes, as do amphibians and invertebrates such as damselflies.

Lowland fens are waterlogged habitats rich in peat and organic matter. They support a variety of sedges, reeds, and mosses and are essential for flood control and water filtration. Fens can be found within designated Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and nature reserves such as Watermead Country Park. Lowland fens are fragmented and cover relatively small areas, estimated at around **50-100 hectares**. However, they are rich and diverse in many specialist plant and invertebrate species including **Marsh Stitchwort** and **Common Cottongrass**, which are under pressure from land drainage and development.

Ponds and lakes are widespread, with many man-made ponds supporting significant biodiversity. They are important for a variety of species, particularly amphibians, insects, and birds. Unlike the diverse flora of the fens, **reedbeds** are dominated by **Common Reed** and provide essential habitats for birds, amphibians, and invertebrates. Huge numbers of Starlings can be seen roosting in reedbeds during winter months, although the once common murmuration's of thousands of birds, are much smaller due to population declines. One of the most notable successes has been the **Rutland Osprey Project**, which has reintroduced ospreys to England after they had been extinct in the country for over 150 years. Since its inception in 1996, the project has seen over 200 chicks successfully fledged, with the ospreys now being a well-established breeding population at Rutland Water. This reintroduction is a shining example of successful species recovery and habitat management. Reedbeds are a favourite habitat for endangered species such as **European Eel**, which have seen their numbers decline by **approximately 95%**. They also provide vital nesting sites for some of the more elusive wetland birds, such as the **Eurasian Bittern**, **Water Rail**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Marsh Harrier**. They are particularly valuable for species that rely on aquatic vegetation.

These freshwater and wetland habitats are vital for supporting biodiversity across the region, with designated sites playing a crucial role in their conservation. However, many of these habitats face threats from land drainage, pollution, and habitat fragmentation, making ongoing conservation efforts essential for their protection.

7.5 Woodland, Hedgerows and Trees
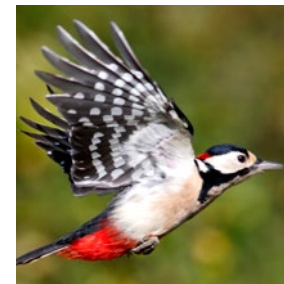
Woodland habitats of principle importance include ancient woodlands, lowland mixed deciduous woodland, wet woodland, wood pasture and parkland, traditional orchards, and hedgerows. Ancient and veteran trees are not a UK habitat of principle importance but are however defined as irreplaceable habitat in the National Planning Policy Framework. They are also recognised in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy as priority habitats due to their importance for providing habitats for rare invertebrates, Bat roosts and nesting cavities for Owls and Woodpeckers.

Woodland habitats play a crucial role in the ecological landscape of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland, encompassing a diverse array of forested areas that provide vital habitat for wildlife and contribute to the region's biodiversity, ecological and cultural significance. A table showing examples of important woodlands in the strategy area can be found in **Appendix C**.

Ancient woodlands, remnants of historical forest cover, provide important habitats for biodiversity. Existing woodlands, including **Charnwood Forest** and **Leighfield Forest**, are areas that have been continuously wooded for over 400 years and offer valuable ecosystems and corridors for wildlife. New plantations, established through sustainable forestry practices, contribute to flood management, carbon capture and storage and resource management.
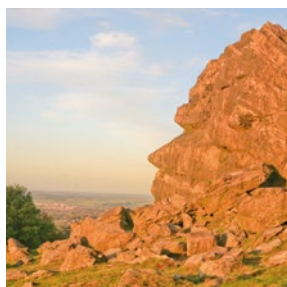
In urban environments, trees play crucial roles in air quality improvement and urban heat island mitigation. Urban forests, consisting of street trees and green spaces, are integral to urban ecosystem services and public wellbeing. Ancient trees, such as oaks and yews, serve as notable landmarks and repositories of ecological history.

Canopy cover across the area varies, with efforts underway to increase tree cover through planting initiatives and woodland restoration. However, threats such as habitat loss, disease, and climate change pose challenges to tree health and forest resilience.

[4] Designated as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) or Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)

Existing woodland cover within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy area accounts for approximately 6% of the total land area, equivalent to 15,822 hectares. Trees outside woodland including orchards account for another 11,569 hectares taking the total tree canopy cover to 27,391 hectares and 10.74% of the total land area. This area is low compared to the national average of around 13% (Woodland Trust, 2021). This woodland cover comprises a variety of woodland types, with broadleaf woodland dominating at 65% (10,075 hectares), followed by coniferous woodland at 1,024 hectares, mixed woodland at 800 hectares, and the remaining hectares comprise of active management such as recently planted young trees.

Among the woodland habitats, **ancient woodland** stands out as irreplaceable, covering approximately 3,025 hectares within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy area. These ancient woodlands[4] represent ecosystems with high conservation value due to their long-term ecological continuity and unique variety of species. However, the management status of these habitats varies, with 36% of designated plantations on ancient woodland sites and 64% of ancient semi-natural woodland sites currently under management. Efforts to improve the management of these irreplaceable habitats are crucial for safeguarding their ecological integrity and enhancing biodiversity conservation.

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Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) are ancient woodlands that were replanted, often with non-native species like conifers. These sites are now undergoing restoration to reintroduce native species and return the habitat to its original state. PAWS offer great restoration opportunities, where native species like Oak and Hazel can be re-established. This creates a habitat for birds such as the **Wood Warbler** and mammals like the **Pipistrelle Bat**. As native trees return, the restoration of PAWS also enhances habitats for species such as **Purple Hairstreak Butterflies**, which depend on native oak trees for their life cycle.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland boast a significant amount of **priority woodland habitat** compared to other habitat types within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy area. **lowland mixed deciduous** woodland, covering **9,894 hectares**, stands as the most extensive priority woodland habitat in the area, while **wet woodland** is a scarce and fragmented habitat, covering approximately 60 known sites and about **300 hectares** of land, it is primarily associated with floodplain wetland.

Notably, Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland also feature **4,500 hectares** of **parkland**, an estimated **20,000 mature trees**, including **1,800 ancient trees** and more than **17,000 km** of **hedgerow**, further enhancing the green infrastructure, and providing valuable ecological benefits and wildlife corridors which enable species movement and connections between woodlands and other priority habitats.

Woodlands are among the most biodiverse ecosystems, offering stable habitats for rare species. The **Willow Tit** dependent on wet woodland, has suffered a dramatic 94% decline due to habitat loss and competition from other species. The **Marsh Tit**, reliant on diverse woodland structures, has also experienced a 68% decline.

The **Hazel Dormouse** is extremely rare in the strategy area and has become a priority species for reintroduction. For its survival it requires well-managed, dense woodland but faces challenges from habitat fragmentation. The **Black Hairstreak Butterfly** found in **Blackthorn** scrub, is threatened by changes in scrub management, while the **White-letter Hairstreak** has been impacted by the loss of **Elm Trees** due to Dutch Elm Disease.

Woodland plants such as **Bluebell** and **Wood Anemone** thrive in undisturbed ancient woodlands but are vulnerable to habitat degradation and fragmentation.

Woodland habitats have been affected by agricultural expansion, urbanisation, **Deer** and **Grey Squirrel** pressures, invasive non-native species, disease, such as Ash Die-back. A decline in woodland management practices has led to darker and more simply structured woodlands which therefore support less biodiversity and provide fewer niches for specialised species.

Efforts to conserve and restore woodland habitats include the planting of new woodlands and the restoration of ancient woodlands. Initiatives such as the National Forest aim to expand woodland cover, while targeted management like coppicing helps preserve species diversity. Hedgerow restoration also enhances connectivity between fragmented woodlands.

85% of respondents would like to enjoy or access nature more often.

7.6 Grassland, Heathland and Shrub Habitats

Grassland habitats of principle importance comprises lowland calcareous grassland, lowland dry acid grassland, neutral lowland meadows and floodplain grazing marsh.

Grasslands are a vital component of the landscape in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland, supporting a rich diversity of species and contributing significantly to the area's ecological health. The grasslands in these counties can be broadly categorised into neutral, acid, calcareous, and other specialised types such as lowland meadows and floodplain grazing marsh. These habitats are crucial for biodiversity, providing essential services such as pollination, carbon capture and storage, and serving as breeding grounds for a variety of fauna.

A table showing examples of important grasslands in the strategy area can be found in Appendix D.

Neutral grasslands are typically found on soils with a neutral pH, supporting a diverse array of plant species. These grasslands are most prevalent in traditional hay meadows and pastures across Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland. The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) data from 2016 indicates that approximately **2,550 hectares** of neutral grassland of UK BAP quality remain, although this has been in decline, especially outside protected sites. The loss of these grasslands underscores the importance of conservation efforts to protect and restore these valuable habitats.

Acid grasslands and heathlands are associated with poorer, more acidic soils, such as those found in Charnwood Forest. These habitats support a range of specialised flora and fauna adapted to the challenging ground conditions such as Adders and Palmate Newts. The area covered by acid grasslands and heathlands is less than **500 hectares**, primarily within the Charnwood Forest, and is also in decline. The importance of these habitats is recognised in their designation as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), particularly due to the presence of unique species like Heather and Bilberry.
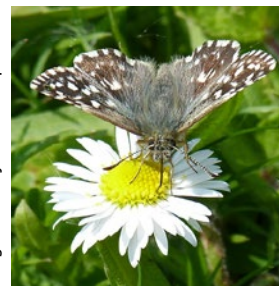
Calcareous grasslands, which develop over limestone and other calcium-rich substrates, are particularly notable in the eastern parts of the region, such as Rutland and around Ketton Quarry. These grasslands are among the most species-rich, supporting a variety of wildflowers, including orchids and **Rockrose** and rare butterflies such as **Grizzled Skipper** and **Dark Green Fritillary**. However, they are now largely confined to small patches, often on roadside verges and in quarries. The estimated extent of calcareous grasslands in the region is under **200 hectares**, highlighting the urgent need for targeted conservation.

Lowland meadows, characterised by their species-rich grasslands managed traditionally as hay meadows, are also present across the area, particularly in the Leicestershire Vales and the floodplains of the River Soar. These meadows are significant for their biodiversity, supporting a variety of invertebrates, birds, and wildflowers. The restoration and expansion of these meadows are critical for maintaining their ecological value, especially in the face of pressures from agricultural intensification and development.

Other grasslands such as floodplain grazing marshes are areas of periodically submerged grassland along rivers and streams, important for both agriculture and wildlife. In Leicestershire, the Soar Valley is a key area for these habitats. These marshes support a range of species, including waders like **Curlew** and **Lapwing** and contribute to flood management and water quality improvement. Efforts to restore and connect these habitats are vital for enhancing their ecological function and resilience.

Grasslands in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland are under significant threat, with many types in decline due to changes in land use and agricultural practices. There is urgent need for protection, restoration, and connectivity of these habitats. For instance, targeted actions such as appropriate grazing regimes, invasive species control, and habitat creation are crucial for preserving these landscapes. The integration of these efforts into broader conservation strategies will help ensure the long-term survival of these vital ecosystems.
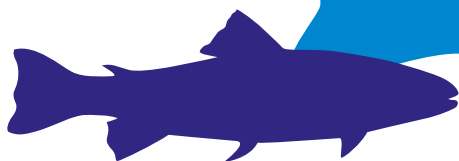
74% of respondents were concerned a great deal about access to green spaces and nature.

7.7 Urban
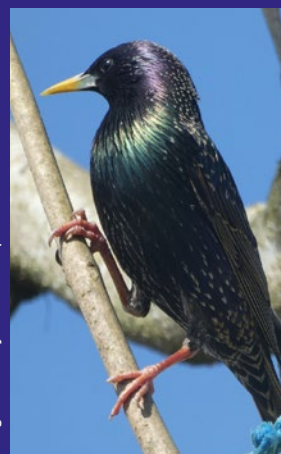
Urban areas, though often heavily modified by human activity, provide a mosaic of habitats that can support a surprising range of wildlife. Large parks such as Watermead Park, Bradgate Park, Abbey Park, and Burbage Common offer green oases for wildlife. These areas support **Hedgehogs**, **House sparrows**, and **Starlings**. Nationally, Starlings, once abundant, have seen a **66% decline** and House Sparrows have seen a **71% decline** since the 1970s, though urban populations are relatively stable compared to rural ones, likely due to the availability of food and nesting sites in cities.

Private spaces such as gardens and allotments provide significant biodiversity benefits, particularly for pollinators like bees and butterflies. Species such as the Hedgehog, which is now classified as vulnerable to extinction, and birds like the **Swift (which has declined by 58% since 1995)** benefit from urban gardens where food sources, shelter and nesting sites can be found. Gardens are also critical for invertebrates such as moths and butterflies, with urban areas now being hotspots for species like the **Holly Blue**.

Street trees and roadside grass verges provide important habitats for species such as **Glow Worms**, **Ox-eye Daisy**, and **Bird's-foot Trefoil** (an important plant for species such as **Common Blue Butterflies**. Although difficult to quantify, the 2016 Biodiversity Action Plan estimates there are over **100km of verge** with a Wildlife Site designation, designated since 2000, and 4km designated as SSSI, providing a network of green corridors, which contribute to wider environmental benefits such as rainwater storage, pollination and buffering and protecting neighbouring habitats from run-off from vehicle pollution. In turn, street trees help moderate temperatures in urban heat islands, hold water in the soils, capture carbon, improve air quality and provide nesting sites for urban-adapted species.

Watercourses in urban areas, like the River Soar and the Oakham Canal, provide feeding and breeding sites for species such as Kingfishers, dragonflies, and Water Voles. Efforts to improve water quality and restore riparian vegetation through initiatives like river restoration, Natural Flood Management and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are crucial for maintaining these habitats.

Additionally, former industrial sites or disused land, often found along these watercourses (known as open mosaic habitats), support rare and specialist species like **Black Redstarts**, which have found new nesting opportunities in the post-industrial urban landscape. These areas often support rare plants and invertebrates, contributing to biodiversity even in heavily urbanised areas.

Churchyards and cemeteries are often undisturbed spaces can provide homes for species such as **Foxes**, Bats, internationally important lichens such as **Lasallia Pustulata** which can be found on gravestones and old buildings. These green pockets in the urban landscape can be extremely important for pollinators where they provide a rich diversity of wildflowers. The presence of mature trees in these areas enhances their value as biodiversity hotspots in urban landscapes.

Urban wildlife faces threats from habitat fragmentation, pollution, and development. However, there are growing opportunities to enhance urban biodiversity through green and blue infrastructure initiatives, wildlife-friendly gardening, and the expansion of urban trees and green spaces.

68% of respondents were very interested in helping wildlife in their garden.

44

7.8   Farmland

Farmland in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland is a dominant land use and plays a vital role in supporting wildlife. Key farmland habitats include arable field margins, hedgerows, and traditional farm ponds. These habitats are crucial for sustaining biodiversity, particularly in areas of intensive agriculture.

Arable field margins consist of uncultivated strips of land between fields and hedgerows, providing shelter and food for a range of species. They are particularly important in intensively farmed landscapes where other natural habitats may be limited. These habitats are often part of Environmental Stewardship schemes, though they are rarely designated as standalone protected sites. Exact data on field margins is difficult to calculate, but they exist across hundreds of hectares within farming areas. Species benefiting from field margins include the **Grey Partridge**, **Skylark**, and **Yellowhammer** farmland birds that have seen dramatic declines in recent decades. Insects, such as bumblebees and butterflies, also use field margins for foraging, particularly wildflower-rich margins.

Hedgerows are critical wildlife corridors, allowing movement between fragmented habitats. They provide shelter, food, and nesting sites for many species, as well as acting as barriers that prevent soil erosion and support biodiversity. Many hedgerows in Leicestershire and Rutland are classified as important under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, with some forming part of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). There are an estimated **17,000 km of hedgerows**, forming an extensive network across farmland. Hedgerows support **Hazel Dormice**, **Brown Hares**, and birds like the **Linnet** and **Tree Sparrow**. Insects such as the **White-letter Hairstreak Butterfly** also rely on hedgerows, particularly Elm-dominated ones.

Recent data estimates there are around **13,000** ponds across Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland. Farm ponds though small in size, are essential freshwater networks for supporting amphibians, invertebrates, and wetland plants, although many have been lost due to agricultural intensification, those that remain can be key biodiversity hotspots. Ponds on farmland are often included in agri-environment schemes but are rarely designated as protected sites unless part of a wider reserve. Farm ponds cover a small area, though they are widely scattered across the agricultural landscape. Ponds support species such as the Great Crested Newt, a priority species in the region, as well as amphibians like **Common Frogs** and **Common Toads**, and numerous invertebrates, including **Ruddy Darter Dragonflies** and **Banded Demoiselle Damselflies**.

> **"Its important to educate people, young and old about the value, intrigue and beauty of nature, and how to help it."**
> (Charnwood resident)
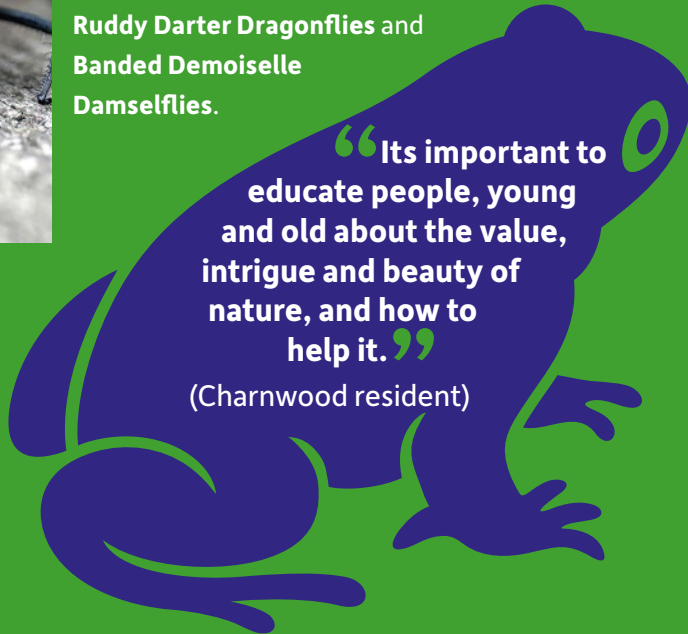
Lowland meadows and pastures cover approximately 2550 hectares, with good management they can become species-rich meadows which are vital for plants, pollinators, mammals, and birds. Traditional hay meadows and pastures, though in decline, support rare species such as the **Great Burnet** and **Green-winged Orchid**. Nationally, lowland meadow habitats have decreased significantly, and their restoration is a priority for enhancing biodiversity. In areas like the Soar Valley, floodplain grazing marshes are important habitats for wetland birds such as **Lapwings** and **Snipe**. These wetlands cover approximately **107 hectares** and provide flood mitigation services and support a large number of invertebrates and amphibians.

Small patches of woodland within farmland are critical for species such as woodland plants, beetles, fungi, amphibians' birds and bats. The woodland edges are particularly important for species that require mixed habitats. Farm woodlands also contribute to the overall ecological network, improving landscape connectivity for wildlife.

The main concerns of farmers and landowners were the increase in extreme weather events, the increase in pests and diseases and soil degradation.
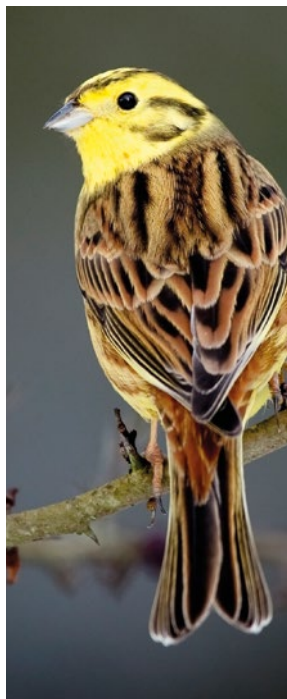
Farmland species have been among the most severely affected by agricultural intensification. The Farmland Bird Index shows that populations of key farmland birds have declined by **57% since 1970**. However, agri-environment schemes such as the Environmental Land Management (ELM) provide opportunities for farmers to adopt wildlife-friendly practices, including reduced pesticide use, wildflower planting, and the restoration of field margins and hedgerows.

The future of farmland habitats lies in sustainable farming practices that balance agricultural productivity with the needs of wildlife. By encouraging diverse crop rotations, hedgerow management, and the protection of semi-natural habitats, farmers can play a keyrole in biodiversity conservation.

8. Key Environmental Considerations

8.1 Introduction

The health and resilience of natural environments are heavily influenced by a range of interconnected environmental factors. As we look toward the future, it is crucial to anticipate and address the growing pressures that threaten habitats and biodiversity in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland. This section explores key environmental considerations that will shape the success of nature recovery efforts, including anticipated pressures such as climate change, land-use changes, and pollution. Additionally, it considers broader environmental issues like habitat fragmentation, invasive non-native species, and the implications of national and global environmental policies. Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective strategies to safeguard ecosystems and promote long-term sustainability.

8.2 Anticipated Future Pressures

As Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland look to the future, several pressures are expected to impact species, habitats, and ecosystems. These pressures primarily arise from climate change, infrastructure developments and intensive farming, all of which could alter the natural landscape, affecting biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and ecosystem services.

Climate change is expected to intensify existing threats such as habitat fragmentation, degradation, and loss. Extreme weather events including floods, droughts, wildfires, and storms pose a significant risk to ecosystems by disrupting ecological processes and escalating biodiversity loss, altering habitats, and impacting agricultural productivity.

Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns will directly affect habitat suitability for many species. For instance, warmer temperatures could enable the expansion of thermophilic species, potentially outcompeting native species adapted to cooler conditions. Shifts in rainfall patterns may further impact freshwater ecosystems by altering hydrology, affecting the distribution of aquatic species, and leading to changes in ecosystem dynamics.

The recent Met Office climate report for the area predicts that the area, assuming a 1.5°C increase in average global temperatures, is likely to see an increase in the number of summer days where the daily maximum temperature is above 25°C (from 23 to 26) and above 30°C (from 3 to 4). The amount of winter precipitation (mm/day) is likely to increase by 4%, while average winter temperature is likely to increase by +1°C and average summer temperature to increase by +1.4°C.

27% of respondents felt they didn't have enough time to access nature.

Ongoing and future developments, such as urban expansion and infrastructure projects, are poised to exert further pressure on biodiversity. Housing developments and commercial projects contribute to habitat loss and fragmentation, especially in areas of high ecological value. Converting natural habitats for residential and industrial purposes reduces habitat availability for native species and weakens ecological connectivity. See Appendix D 2.d Accessible Greenspace Standards (ANGSt).

Additionally, linear infrastructure developments like road and railway expansions create physical barriers that hinder wildlife movement. Such barriers fragment populations, isolate species, and disrupt genetic flow, potentially increasing vulnerability to local extinctions. Construction activities often degrade habitat quality through soil compaction and pollution, further stressing wildlife and natural systems.

Intensive agriculture and certain farming methods pose significant pressure on habitats and biodiversity in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland, particularly through habitat loss and fragmentation. Intensive farming practices, including monoculture cropping, contribute to a loss of habitat complexity, limiting resources for wildlife and increasing vulnerability to pests and diseases. This decline in biodiversity also impacts key ecosystem services such as pollination and soil health, vital for both natural systems and agriculture itself.

In addition to habitat loss, agricultural intensification leads to soil degradation and water quality issues. The heavy use of fertilisers and pesticides results in nutrient runoff, causing eutrophication in nearby rivers and wetlands, harming aquatic ecosystems. Water extraction for irrigation, coupled with the drainage of wetlands, depletes freshwater habitats, and disrupts natural flood mitigation. Moreover, agriculture is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbating climate change, which in turn creates additional pressures on land use, driving further intensification and habitat loss. Sustainable farming practices are critical to mitigating these pressures and preserving biodiversity in agricultural landscapes.

8.3   Wider Environmental Issues

The broader environmental challenges facing Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland extend beyond localised habitat pressures. These challenges include issues related to water quality, flood risk management, and climate mitigation and adaptation, all of which require coordinated action to ensure the long-term sustainability of ecosystems and communities.

Water quality is threatened by sewage, agricultural runoff, urban pollution, and industrial discharges, which lead to issues like eutrophication and habitat degradation. These impacts result in biodiversity loss, particularly in freshwater ecosystems. The latest available figures for 2019 showed that 9.4% of Leicestershire rivers were in good ecological status, below the England average of 14%. While none were in good chemical status. See Appendix D 2.e Ecological Status of Catchment Map

To address these concerns, it is essential to implement sustainable land management practices such as establishing riparian buffer zones, restoring wetlands, and reducing chemical inputs. These actions will help mitigate pollution and improve the resilience of aquatic ecosystems, benefiting both biodiversity and human health.

Flood risk is a pressing concern for the area, exacerbated by the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as heavy rainfall and storms. Urbanisation and changes in land use have altered natural drainage patterns, leading to higher surface runoff, and contributing to more frequent and severe flooding in low-lying areas. Implementing natural flood management techniques such as floodplain restoration, tree planting, and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) can help alleviate these risks by slowing floodwaters, improving water filtration, and promoting natural flood mitigation processes.

Poor air quality from vehicle emissions, industrial activities, and agriculture contributes to health issues in both humans and wildlife, as well as global warming. Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen oxide (NOx) are concerns around urban areas like the M1 corridor and Leicester City. The latest available figures for 2023 showed that the average annual mean for the amount of PM2.5 in the area was 9.2 µg m^{-3} (ranging from 8 µg m^{-3} in Rutland to 11 µg m^{-3} in Leicester). While the average annual mean for the amount of nitrogen oxides in the area was 20 µg m^{-3} (ranging from 8 µg m^{-3} in Rutland to 37 µg m^{-3} in Leicester)[5]. Enhancing urban green and blue infrastructure to reduce air pollution by planting trees and creating green spaces will filter pollutants and contribute to cleaner air. See Appendix D 2.b Air Quality Maps.

Figure 6: Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland air quality - PM2.5

[5] Source: https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/compliance-data
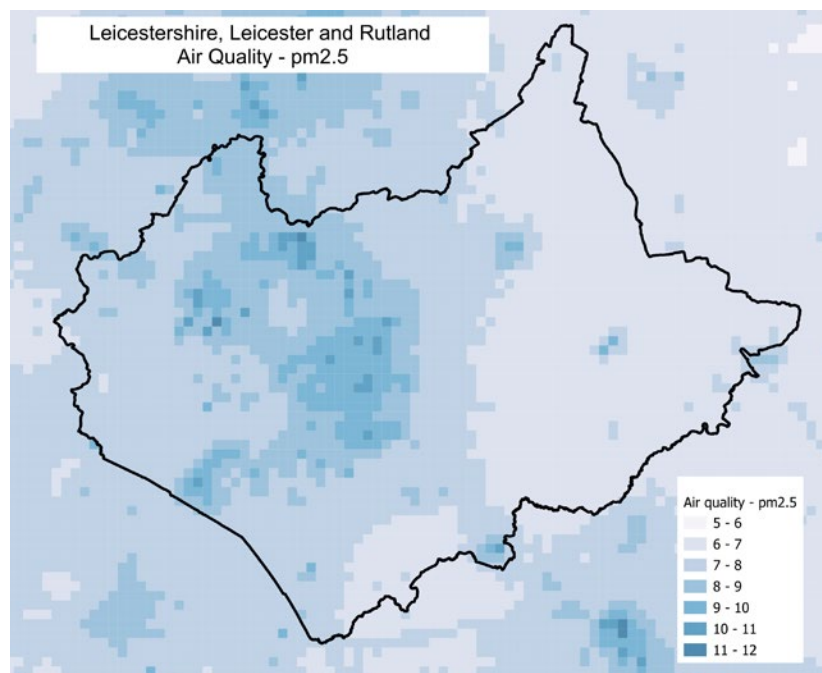
Disturbance from people, traffic and aircraft, along with artificial lighting, can disrupt wildlife behaviours, including breeding, migration, and predation. Disturbance can interfere with communication in birds, while light pollution impacts nocturnal species. It is important where appropriate to establish "quiet zones", and "keep out zones" and reduce noise and disruption in sensitive wildlife areas. Implementing dark-sky initiatives and use shielded lighting to minimise light pollutions will benefit nocturnal wildlife.

The spread of existing and new invasive non-native species (INNS), pests, and diseases often worsened by climate change and human activity threatens native species and ecosystems. Managing invasive species through control programs and promoting biosecurity measures and supporting research into disease-resistant species will help to mitigate threats to biodiversity.

As it stands there are over 2,000 plants and animals introduced to Britain, of these several are of particular concern in Leicestershire Leicester and Rutland, such as **Himalayan Balsam**, **Floating Pennywort**, **American Mink**, **American Signal Crayfish, Grey Squirrel** and non-native deer species such as **Muntjac**.

> **I am 71. I cannot think of a more important social and political issue. The fact that nature gets far less attention than it merits saddens me for those yet to live their lives in an ever-degrading world.**
> (Resident)

9. Opportunities for Nature Recovery

9.1 Introduction

We have been guided by the 'Lawtonian' principles of bigger, better, and more joined up, as well as our additional local principle of nature being more protected. These have guided the recommended priorities and measures captured in this strategy.

To make space for nature, this Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies areas that hold the greatest ecological value, and the measures needed to achieve the greatest benefits for nature, to achieve bigger, better, and more joined up habitats that are protected, robust, resilient, and rich in biodiversity.

Here, we set out key opportunities for nature recovery across the strategy area, focusing on priority habitats and species. These opportunities can be realised by delivering the priorities and measures set out in section 9.3.

Achieving these benefits will be a collective effort, with various partners working collaboratively to create new, expand and connect priority natural habitats. The role of partnerships, individual actions, and funding mechanisms all present exciting and important opportunities to help us create space for nature that is bigger, better, connected and protected.

This section presents the key findings from ecological modelling conducted by a professional GIS consultant, highlighting strategic opportunities for nature across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. By identifying spaces for nature while considering constraints such as development, food production, and historical sites, the findings reveal valuable prospects for habitat creation and connectivity. Key areas of opportunity include flood zone 3[6], suitable agricultural lands (Grade

4, 5, and where appropriate, 3b), and historic railway lines, which offer significant potential for ecological enhancement. Additionally, improvements to habitats along existing railways, road verges, hedgerows and canals, including expanding habitats into adjacent land have been identified as promising opportunities. This work also factors species movement across core woodland, grassland, and urban areas, identifying strategic areas for habitat creation and buffering to expand and connect fragmented habitats, and establish a more resilient ecological network.

Planning status

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are not intended to provide red line boundaries preventing or placing new restrictions on land use which may be changed either through development or in taking advantage of new opportunities identified through the strategy. This has been established by national guidance. LNRS's are an additional evidence base to inform Local Plans, and other elements of the formal Development Plan which include Neighbourhood Plans and the proposed new Spatial Development Strategies. Local Plans remain the primary tool used by local planning authorities to determine which land should be developed and how.

90% of respondents agreed that nature should be protected for its own sake.

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[6] Flood zone 3 includes land that has a 1 in 100 (1%) or greater annual probability of river flooding, or a 1 in 200 (0.5%) or greater annual probability of flooding from the sea.
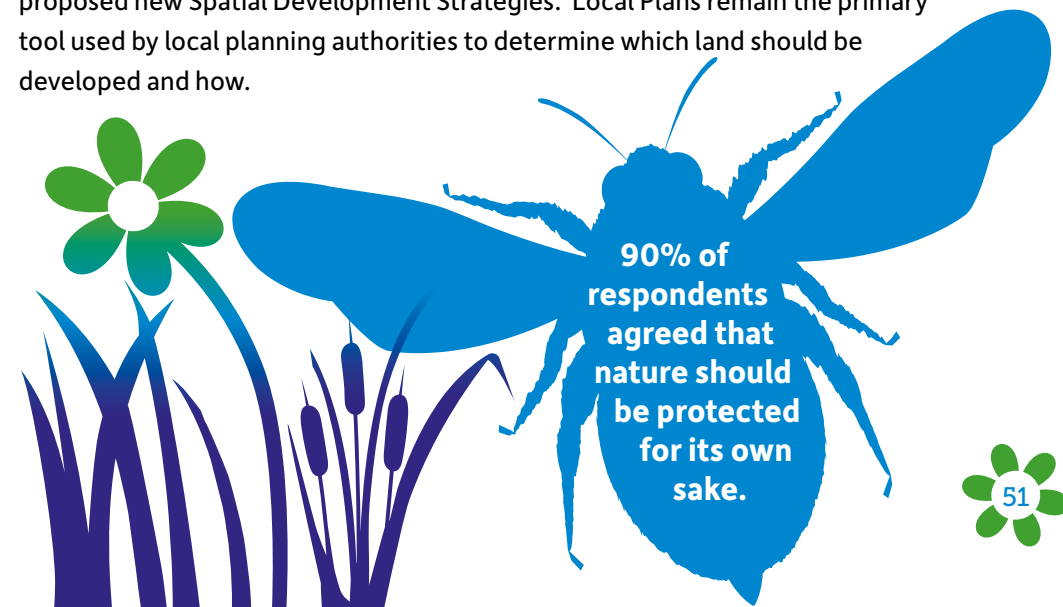
Relationship with the legal protection and designation of land

The LNRS is a guide for nature recovery across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. It does not provide any new protection, designation or restrictions on how land can be used or managed or any other kind of legal designation. LNRS's provide data to inform opportunities for nature's recovery. Whether those opportunities are acted on is entirely a decision for individual landowners.

9.1.1   New Bigger Areas for Nature

Creating new bigger areas for nature is a vital strategy for reversing biodiversity loss, increasing wildlife populations, and enhancing ecosystem resilience to climate change. A network of bigger, contiguous habitats and well-connected smaller, currently isolated habitats will benefit the local area, and contribute to national environmental objectives.

Image courtesy of James O'Brien

Additionally, bigger, better, more joined up and protected spaces for nature offer benefits that extend far beyond enhancing biodiversity. Increasing natural areas improves air and water quality, as woodlands and wetlands play a critical role in carbon sequestration, runoff reduction, and pollutant filtration. These habitats contribute to flood risk management by enhancing natural water retention and slowing surface runoff.

The creation of natural areas also offers significant societal benefits. Enhanced ecosystem services, such as carbon storage, water purification, and soil stabilisation, contribute to overall environmental and physical human health. Access to larger, well-managed natural areas promotes mental and physical wellbeing by providing opportunities for recreation, education, and a deeper connection with nature. Moreover, protecting and enhancing these areas can boost local economies through nature-based tourism, generating income and job opportunities for local communities, while also preserving the cultural heritage associated with traditional landscapes and rural livelihoods.

Flood zone 3 and grade 4 and 5 and where appropriate grade 3b agricultural lands are highly desirable and incredibly suited for creating new bigger, and more connected areas for nature. Their ecological potential, natural flood management capabilities, and the lower economic costs make these areas extremely attractive. Creating new areas for nature and connecting priority habitats through these landscapes can create rich habitats that support biodiversity, improve water quality, mitigate climate change, and provide valuable ecosystem services.

What follows are opportunities for creating bigger areas for nature within the aforementioned land types.

a) Flood Zone 3 - Key Opportunities

Opportunity: Floodplain grazing marsh

Creating new floodplain grazing marshes and increasing the size of these areas means more flood defences and more extensive habitats for wetland species such as **Curlew** and **Lapwing**. Rivers, streams, and wetlands connected to floodplain grazing marshes support rich biodiversity, including water voles, otters, and a wide variety of aquatic plants and invertebrates.

Floodplains naturally have rich, fertile soils deposited by floodwaters. Their diverse range of plant species attracts a variety of wildlife, making these areas prime areas for nature recovery.

Opportunity: Riparian and Catchment Woodland

Establishing new riparian woodlands along riverbanks can significantly enhance flood resilience by slowing down water flow, reducing erosion, and stabilising riverbanks. These woodlands also act as natural buffers, filtering pollutants from surface runoff before they reach waterways. Creating woodland in the wider catchment can help slow water flow, reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide critical wildlife habitats, contributing to flood resilience and broader ecosystem restoration. Moreover, they create critical habitats for a wide range of species, including birds, insects, and mammals, while providing shade that helps regulate water temperature, fostering healthier aquatic ecosystems.

Opportunity: Wetland Creation and Reedbeds

Floodplains are typically well-supplied with water, essential for sustaining wetland habitats, supporting aquatic life, and fostering plant growth. This abundance of water resources creates ideal conditions for restoring and creating wetlands, ponds, reedbeds and other aquatic habitats.

b) Agricultural Land - Key Opportunities

Opportunity: Woodland

Grade 4, 5, and 3b agricultural lands offer excellent opportunities for woodland creation, particularly for the development of priority habitats like Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland and Wet Woodland. These woodlands can provide critical habitats for species such as bats, woodland birds, and invertebrates, while also acting as natural flood defences. By stabilising soil and reducing surface water runoff, they contribute to improved water management and increased carbon sequestration, making them valuable for both biodiversity and climate change mitigation.

Opportunity: Grassland

The conversion of these agricultural lands into grasslands can support the creation of priority habitats like Lowland Meadows and Calcareous Grasslands. These habitats are essential for a wide variety of plant species, pollinators, and ground-nesting birds such as Skylarks. Grassland restoration can also enhance soil health, improve water retention, and support grazing management strategies that contribute to sustainable land use.

Opportunity: Wetland

Flood-prone grade 4, 5, and 3b lands are ideally suited for the creation of priority wetland habitats such as Reedbeds, Floodplain Grazing Marsh, and Fens. These wetlands support a wide array of species, including amphibians, wading birds, and invertebrates, while improving water quality and acting as flood storage areas. Wetland creation can also contribute to the recovery of species like Otters, Water Voles, and Herons, offering a rich and dynamic landscape for nature recovery.

9.1.2 Better Quality Areas for Nature

Good quality habitats are just as crucial to nature recovery as habitat expansion. High-quality natural areas provide the necessary conditions for a diverse range of species to thrive and maintain healthy populations.

Healthy ecosystems perform a range of functions that are essential for both biodiversity and human wellbeing. These include nutrient cycling, water filtration, carbon sequestration, and pollination. High-quality habitats and ecosystem functions are fully operational and resilient to pressures including pollution, overgrazing, disturbance from human activities, and encroachment by invasive species.

Healthy habitats support greater levels of biodiversity, characterised, by a broad variety of physical features within an ecosystem, such as vegetation layers, water bodies, and terrain – known as structural diversity. This provides a range of niches and microhabitats that support different species with varying requirements. For example, a well-managed woodland might include a mix of mature trees, understory shrubs, deadwood, and open glades, each of which offers habitat for different birds, insects, mammals, and plants.

Creating high-quality habitats for nature involves a multifaceted approach that integrates:

- effective management and monitoring,
- thoughtful design and planning, and
- robust protection measures, particularly in urban areas.

To achieve better-quality habitats, this strategy identifies the following approaches:

a) Opportunity: Better habitat management

Management planning for nature conservation sites is very important and should include best practice guidance. Embracing the approaches recommended in best practice guidance for habitat restoration, maintenance, and monitoring is the starting point for creating higher quality habitats. These emphasise the importance of activities such as grazing and mowing regimes in grassland habitats, woodland management, natural flood management, invasive species management, and habitat connectivity. Proper management ensures that habitats remain suitable for native species, supports ecological balance, and enhance the resilience of natural areas against environmental changes.

With approximately 80% of the strategy area classified as agricultural land, nature-friendly farming is essential for enhancing habitat quality and supporting biodiversity on agricultural land. It involves practices that balance food production with conservation, such as creating wildlife corridors, maintaining hedgerows, and using less intensive farming methods to reduce pollution and habitat destruction. The implementation of Sustainable Farming Incentives (SFIs) under the UK's Environmental Land Management scheme (ELM) offers a practical framework for achieving this balance. SFIs encourage farmers to adopt environmentally beneficial practices, including improving soil health, reducing pesticide use, and enhancing water management. By integrating these measures, farmers can promote biodiversity, increase pollinator populations, and restore habitats such as wetlands, woodlands, and grasslands, ultimately leading to more resilient ecosystems and agricultural landscapes. These initiatives are pivotal in ensuring that agriculture contributes positively to nature recovery and the broader aims of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Links to management plans and good practice guides can be found in Appendix G.

b) Opportunity: Natural flood management

Natural Flood Management (NFM) techniques work by restoring or mimicking natural hydrological processes to reduce flood risk, while also offering significant benefits to wildlife. Below is a list of Natural Flood Management techniques, and their impact on both flood management and benefits to nature.

Wetland Creation and Restoration: Highest impact for flood management and biodiversity.

Floodplain Restoration and Reconnection: Significant dual benefits for nature and flood control.

Tree Planting (Riparian and Upland): Long-term benefits for flood risk reduction and wildlife.

Leaky Dams and Woody Debris Dams: Strong benefits for aquatic life and slowing water flow.

River Re-meandering: Medium impact on flood management, but excellent for riverine species.

Peatland Restoration: Important for flood risk in specific areas, with significant wildlife gains.

Gully Blocking: Focused on upland water flow control and habitat restoration for specialised species.

Buffer Strips and Grassland Management: Smaller flood impact but important for biodiversity in agricultural landscapes.

c) Opportunity: Design and planning - better green and blue infrastructure

Thoughtful design and planning are key to creating high-quality habitats. This includes integrating green (vegetation-based) and blue (water-based) infrastructure into urban and rural landscapes. By designing spaces that prioritise natural elements like parks, rivers, canals, gardens and street trees, planners can create interconnected habitats that support wildlife movement, improve water quality, and provide essential ecosystem services. Green roofs, sustainable urban drainage systems, permeable surfaces, and urban forests are examples of how urban areas can incorporate nature into their infrastructure, promoting both biodiversity and human wellbeing.

d) Opportunity: Better protection - especially around urban areas

Urban expansion often threatens natural habitats, making protection efforts critical. Implementing and enforcing conservation policies that protect green and blue spaces and prevent habitat fragmentation are vital, particularly in and around cities and other built-up areas. Strategies might include establishing protected areas such as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR), creating wildlife corridors, and enforcing policy that limit development in ecologically sensitive regions. Engaging local communities in conservation efforts and raising awareness about the importance of conserving and enhancing natural habitats can help ensure that these areas are valued by those living nearby and so more likely to be protected for future generations.

9.1.3 More Joined Up Areas for Nature

Connecting habitats contributes to landscape-scale conservation. This approach recognises that biodiversity conservation cannot be achieved in isolated pockets. Instead, it requires assessing the entire landscape, including how different habitats and land uses interact. By integrating conservation efforts across agricultural lands, urban areas, woodlands, rivers, and wetlands, we can create a network of connected habitats that support biodiversity at a larger scale.

This approach often involves collaboration between multiple stakeholders, including farmers, landowners, conservation organisations, and local communities. Working together to identify and protect key habitats and wildlife corridors, can create a more connected and resilient landscape that benefits both wildlife and people. Connecting fragmented habitats to form new networks of continuous natural spaces is crucial for supporting biodiversity because it allows species to move freely across landscapes, maintain genetic diversity, and adapt to changing environmental conditions.

As climate change alters habitats and environmental conditions, species need to move to new areas where conditions are more suitable for their survival. For example, as temperatures rise, some species may need to move to cooler, higher altitudes or migrate northward. However, if their habitats are fragmented, they may be unable to make these necessary migrations, leading to local extinctions.

Joined-up areas for nature are critical for enabling species to adapt to climate change. By creating corridors and steppingstones that connect different habitats, we provide pathways for species to migrate and shift their ranges in response to changing conditions. This connectivity is essential for building resilience into ecosystems.

There are several barriers to connectivity which can be addressed through various solutions, creating a more cohesive landscape that supports wildlife movement and genetic exchange.

The two main opportunities for connectivity arise from corridors and steppingstones.

a) Opportunity: Corridors

A corridor is a continuous strip of natural habitat that connects different ecosystems, allowing wildlife to move freely between areas, which supports species migration, dispersal, and genetic diversity.

Hedgerows and trees: Planting and maintaining mixed hedgerows and tree networks of optimal conditions provides essential wildlife corridors, supports a wide range of species, and increases landscape connectivity.

Rivers: Taking a catchment-based approach to the protection and restoration of river habitats, to provide vital connections across landscapes, linking urban and rural areas (business, farming, and leisure), whilst enhancing different ecosystems, providing healthy natural corridors, facilitating the movement of species, and supporting biodiversity.

Riparian buffers: Planting native vegetation to create riparian buffers along streams and rivers. These buffers connect different water bodies and provide important habitats for wildlife.

Agricultural field margins: Enhancing field margins by planting native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs provides important habitat for pollinators and other wildlife, creating a network of stepping-stones across agricultural lands.

Canals: Enhancing canal corridors, including a 20 metre buffer either side, by restoring adjacent wetland habitats, enhancing and connecting hedgerows and conserving native aquatic vegetation to create continuous green and blue corridors for wildlife.

Railway networks: Managing railway corridors, including a 20 metre buffer either side, adjacent land with native plants, wildflowers, ponds to create linear habitats that support pollinators and other wildlife while improving ecological connectivity.

Road verges: Restoring roadside verge grassland into biodiversity hotspots by allowing wildflowers to develop and thrive; reducing mowing frequency to support pollinators and small mammals.

Cycle network: Integrating green infrastructure along cycle networks by planting native trees and shrubs, creating shaded pathways that also serve as wildlife corridors.

Public rights of way: Planting hedgerows and wildflower borders, enhancing biodiversity and providing vital habitat connectivity across the landscape.

"Let hedgerows and roadside verges grow."
(Harborough resident)

b) Opportunity: Steppingstones

A steppingstone is a small, isolated patch of habitat that provides refuge and resources for species, allowing them to move between larger habitat areas, even if the patches are not directly connected.

Ditches: Managing drainage ditches for biodiversity and water management, maintaining a balance between regular clearance to prevent blockages and allowing vegetation to thrive. This encourages diverse plant and animal habitats, enhances water filtration, and reduces flood risk while supporting ecological health.

Pond networks: Establishing and restoring pond networks provides vital water sources that act as stepping-stones, allowing species to move, enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem resilience across the landscape.

Private gardens: Supporting local communities to adopt wildlife friendly gardening approaches and create a network of microhabitats such as bug hotels, hedgehog highways, natural planting that feeds pollinators, and small garden ponds that support aquatic life and amphibians. Prioritising best practices to design garden connectivity (including hedgerows, open spaces, and corridors) via the planning process, so they are inbuilt in new developments enhancing the environment for biodiversity and residents.

Pocket parks: Developing small parks in urban areas that provide green space and habitat for wildlife. These parks can be planted with native vegetation and designed to support local fauna.

Green roofs and walls: Installing green roofs and living walls on buildings. These features provide habitat for birds, insects, and plants, acting as vertical stepping-stones in dense urban environments. They also contribute to mitigation against urban heat islands.

Street trees: Planting Street trees provides habitat for birds, insects, and plants, as well as stepping-stones for species movement. They also contribute to cleaner air, water management and climate adaption and mitigation.

Community gardens: Encouraging the establishment of community gardens with dedicated areas for native plants and species provides important refuges and stepping-stones for urban wildlife.

Agroforestry strips: Integrating strips of trees and shrubs, and isolated field trees into agricultural fields supports biodiversity by providing corridors and steppingstones, while also benefiting crop production.

Woodland glades and clearings: Creating small clearings or gaps within woodlands and forests promotes the growth of diverse understory plants. These clearings provide habitats for species that require open spaces within woodland environments and provides links through the sites and to the wider landscape.

Edge habitats: Enhancing the edges of forested areas with a mix of native plants creates rich transitional zones that support a variety of wildlife. These edges act as stepping-stones connecting larger forest patches.

Wildflower patches: Planting small patches of wildflowers within grasslands and meadows. These patches support pollinators and other insects, providing food resources and habitat connectivity.

No-mow zones: Changes to mowing regimes in public parks, golf courses, and along roadsides. These areas serve as refuges for wildlife and connect larger grassland habitats, as well as being popular with many members of the public.

Vegetated road verges: Enhancing Road verges with native vegetation adds linear habitats and stepping-stones for species moving through fragmented landscapes.

Golf courses: The creation of diverse habitats such as wildflower meadows, native woodlands, and wetland areas around ponds and water features provides valuable resources for pollinators, birds, and amphibians. Careful management practices like reducing chemical use, implementing no-mow zones, and maintaining natural rough areas further enhances biodiversity.

Fisheries: Well managed fisheries support wildlife by maintaining varied aquatic vegetation, offering shelter and breeding grounds for fish and invertebrates, as well as feeding areas for birds. Creating buffer zones of native plants around water bodies reduces runoff pollution and provides additional habitat for terrestrial species. Additionally, enhancing the structural diversity of the water's edge with logs, stones, and shallow margins supports amphibians, reptiles, and insects.

Schools: Establishing outdoor learning environments such as native plant gardens, pollinator habitats, and small wetlands can create microhabitats that support birds, insects, and small mammals. These green spaces not only enhance biodiversity but also serve as living classrooms where students can engage directly with nature, something actively encouraged by the public. Implementing green roofs or walls, rain gardens, and tree planting projects further increases the ecological value of school grounds.

Larger campuses: A similar approach can be taken, alongside best practice management of existing natural areas such as woodlands or grasslands to enhance their biodiversity and the wider learning environment. Maintaining and restoring these areas with native species, creating wildlife corridors, and establishing no-mow zones supports a diverse array of species. Campuses can also integrate sustainable water management practices, such as bioswales and permeable surfaces, to benefit both the environment and local wildlife.

Cemeteries: Managed into havens for nature by adopting a more naturalistic approach to grounds management. Allowing grass to grow longer in selected areas, planting native wildflowers, and preserving mature trees and shrubs creates a mosaic of habitats that support a wide range of species, from pollinators and small mammals to birds. By reducing the frequency of mowing and limiting chemical use, cemeteries can develop into rich ecological sites that also offer a peaceful, reflective space for visitors.

Allotments: Inherently diverse landscapes that can be further enhanced to support biodiversity. Encouraging the planting of native hedgerows, maintaining wildflower borders, and installing ponds or water features that are beneficial to insects, birds, and amphibians. Allotment plots can serve as miniature wildlife reserves, where the cultivation of a variety of crops alongside wild spaces creates a patchwork of habitats. Compost heaps, log piles, and bug hotels can provide shelter and breeding grounds for invertebrates and small animals, making allotments not just productive spaces for people but also vital refuges for wildlife.

Corporate green spaces: Promoting the development of green spaces around corporate buildings and industrial areas.

9.1.4 More Protected Areas for Nature

Gaining and enforcing the right protection for priority areas is crucial for biodiversity, safeguarding ecosystems, and mitigating the effects of climate change.

This approach emphasises the need to protect, often through legal status, the network of important habitats to ensure that diverse habitats, species, and geological features are conserved and enhanced.

The four types of protections the Local Nature Recovery Strategy seeks to increase are:

a) Opportunity: Local nature reserves (LNR)

Establishing new nature reserves is essential. These protected spaces offer opportunities to conserve large, contiguous areas that can support viable populations of plants and animals, maintain ecological processes, and provide refuges for species affected by habitat loss elsewhere. These reserves also serve as important sites for research, education, and eco-tourism, fostering a deeper understanding of natural ecosystems and generating support for conservation efforts.

b) Opportunity: Local wildlife sites (LWS)

Like nature reserves, local wildlife sites (LWS) are areas recognised for their biodiversity value at a local level. Identifying and protecting more local wildlife sites is important because they often represent the remaining fragments of semi-natural habitats within developed landscapes. The ongoing monitoring and provision of management advice for LWS's is crucial. These sites provide essential ecological functions, such as serving as steppingstones for species dispersal, contributing to habitat connectivity, and maintaining genetic diversity within populations. Protection of local wildlife sites is especially crucial in urban and peri-urban areas, where they often represent the only green spaces available for both wildlife and people. Any development proposal impacts on LWS's should be minimised and carefully mitigated in line with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

c) Opportunity: Regionally important geological sites (RIGS)

Regionally important geology sites (RIGS) also known as geosites, are designated areas that protect significant geodiversity sites. These sites are important not only for their scientific and educational value but also for understanding the geological history and processes that shape landscapes. Protecting regionally important geology sites helps preserve unique landforms, fossil records, and mineral deposits, which are essential for geoscientific research and education. Additionally, these sites contribute to biodiversity conservation by maintaining natural habitats associated with specific geological features, such as cliffs, caves, and karst systems.

d) Opportunity: Statutory designated sites

Statutory designated sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), are legally protected areas recognised for their outstanding natural value. These sites are often part of national or international conservation networks and are selected based on their importance for specific species, habitats, or ecological processes. Expanding the number of designated sites is critical for ensuring that representative examples of all ecosystems are protected and that the conservation of key species and habitats is legally enforced. Designated sites play a crucial role in meeting national and international biodiversity targets.

9.2 Areas that Could Become of particular importance (ACB)

9.2.1 Introduction

This section outlines the Areas that Could Become of particular importance (ACB) and the key opportunities for nature recovery and habitat conservation across the various landscape areas. It focuses on creating bigger, better, and more connected habitats while ensuring the long-term protection of existing biodiversity hotspots. Each landscape presents unique opportunities to create and restore priority habitats, enhance habitat quality, and strengthen ecological networks.

The Areas that Could Become of particular importance (ACB) have been identified and mapped using professional ecological modelling techniques and contributions from many stakeholder groups, government agencies and decision makers.

To view the Areas that Could Become of particular importance (ACB) , visit the online map here: https://haveyoursay.leicestershire.gov.uk/local-nature-recovery-strategy-local-habitat-map

9.2.2 Mapped Areas that Could Become of particular importance (ACB)

What follows are details of the opportunities for targeted nature recovery action within the areas that could become of particular importance, aligned mainly to Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes.

Figure 7: Showing the Areas that Could Become of particular importance (ACB).
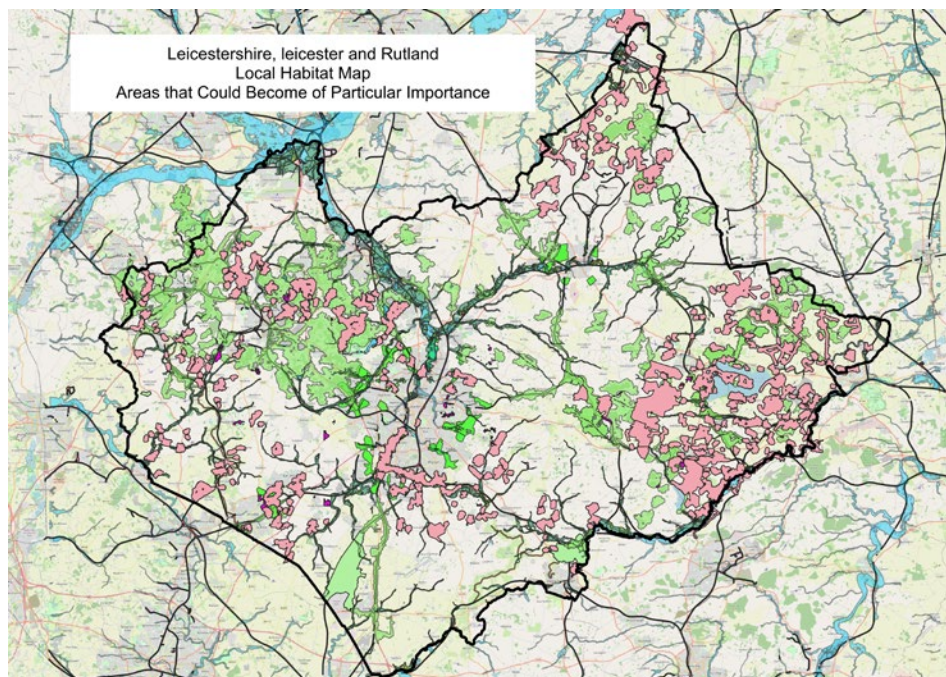
a) Charnwood Forest

Charnwood Forest presents significant opportunities for expanding ancient woodlands, restoring heathlands, and improving habitat connectivity to support key species and enhance ecosystem resilience.

Opportunity: Charnwood Forest offers significant opportunities to expand ancient woodlands, particularly lowland mixed deciduous woodland, wet woodland, and ancient woodlands. These expansions will benefit species like the Hazel Dormouse, Willow Warbler, and Barbastelle Bats, and contribute to carbon sequestration, flood regulation, and ecosystem resilience.

Opportunity: Restoring degraded heathlands will expand priority habitats, such as lowland heathland, for species like Adders and Common Lizards.

Opportunity: Enhance grasslands and heathlands by reducing nutrient inputs and managing deadwood, which supports species like the Lesser Stag Beetle and Wood Warbler.

Opportunity: Enhance habitat connectivity by creating ecological corridors (hedgerows, wildflower strips, riparian buffer zones), aiding species like dormice, bats, and woodland birds.

Opportunity: Protect ancient woodlands such as Swithland Wood SSSI and The Outwoods. Additional protections could focus on lowland heathland sites and significant geological features in Charnwood Forest, given its potential as a UNESCO Geopark. Protecting Biodiversity Action Plan habitats like lowland mixed deciduous woodland will also be crucial.

b) Soar Valley and Wreake

The Soar Valley and Wreake landscape offers valuable opportunities to restore floodplains, enhance riparian woodlands, and create wetland networks to support biodiversity and improve natural flood management.

Opportunity: Restore floodplain meadows and create larger meadows to support species like Devil's-bit Scabious, Ragged-Robin and Meadow Buttercup.

Opportunity: Remove barriers to fish migration and improve habitats for key fish species such as salmon.

Opportunity: Enhance riparian habitats by planting native vegetation along riverbanks, controlling invasive species, and improving water quality.

Opportunity: Create a connected network of wetlands, supporting species like water beetles, newts, and dragonflies.

Opportunity: Protect existing habitats like Cossington Meadows, focusing on floodplain grazing marshes and riparian woodland. Further protections should target wetland Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, such as reedbeds, and riverside habitats for species like water voles and otters.

c) Rutland Water and Surrounding Landscape

Rutland Water and its surrounding landscape provide prime opportunities to restore grasslands and wetlands, enhance riparian buffer zones, and protect habitats for breeding and migratory birds and other species.

Opportunity: Restore species-rich meadows, hay meadows, and calcareous grasslands to support species like skylarks, brown hares, and orchids.

Opportunity: Establish large buffer zones to protect migratory bird populations and improve water quality.

Opportunity: Link woodlands, grasslands, and wetlands through green corridors, supporting species like bats, badgers, and butterflies.

Opportunity: Existing protections for Rutland Water should be expanded to include surrounding calcareous grasslands and ancient woodlands. These areas could support additional priority habitats, such as lowland meadow and wet woodland.

d) National Forest and Leicestershire Coalfield

The National Forest and Leicestershire Coalfield landscape offer large-scale opportunities for woodland creation and the restoration of former industrial sites to support diverse species and improve habitat connectivity.

Opportunity: The National Forest offers significant opportunities to create large-scale woodlands to support species like woodpeckers, bats, and butterflies, while enhancing ecosystem resilience.

Opportunity: Deliver River Mease restoration projects.

Opportunity: Restore former coal mining areas by planting native vegetation and creating ponds and grasslands for species like Common Lizards and pollinators.

Opportunity: Restore hedgerows and develop green corridors to connect fragmented landscapes, facilitating species movement.

Opportunity: Protect existing ancient woodlands within the National Forest, such as Martinshaw Wood and areas of reclaimed industrial land. Additionally, protect former industrial sites that have been restored into key habitats for species such as bats, reptiles, and invertebrates.

e) East Leicestershire and Rutland Clays

East Leicestershire and Rutland Clays present opportunities to convert arable land to species-rich grasslands, create and restore hedgerows, and enhance riparian buffers to improve biodiversity and water quality.

Opportunity: Restore low-productivity arable lands into species-rich grasslands to benefit species like Barn Owls, shrews, voles and wildflowers.

Opportunity: Create and restore hedgerows and plant native trees in the right places to improve habitats for farmland birds and pollinators.

Opportunity: Establish riparian buffer zones to improve water quality and support species like Brown Trout and Water Voles.

Opportunity: Focus on protecting areas of restored grasslands and riverside habitats. Ancient hedgerows and nearby priority habitats, such as arable field margins and lowland meadows, should be prioritised for protection.

f) Jurassic Limestone Area - Rutland, East Leicestershire, and Adjoining Lincolnshire

The Jurassic Limestone landscape across Rutland, East Leicestershire, and adjoining Lincolnshire provides a unique opportunity to enhance calcareous grasslands, woodlands, and species-rich meadows. This area supports rare chalk-loving flora, important pollinators, and farmland birds, while also offering potential for carbon sequestration and soil restoration.

Opportunity: Restore and expand calcareous grasslands to support priority species such as chalk hill blue butterflies, pasqueflowers, and pyramidal orchids. This will also improve soil health, reduce erosion, and enhance carbon storage.

Opportunity: Protect and connect fragmented limestone grasslands by establishing habitat corridors and buffer zones between existing sites, increasing biodiversity and ecological resilience.

Opportunity: Enhance and restore species-rich hay meadows and wildflower pastures, supporting pollinators such as bumblebees, solitary bees, and butterflies, as well as ground-nesting birds like skylarks and yellowhammers.

Opportunity: Promote regenerative agricultural practices on limestone soils to improve soil quality, water retention, and carbon sequestration, while reducing chemical runoff into watercourses.

Opportunity: Protect and enhance ancient woodland remnants while providing habitat for woodland birds, bats, and invertebrates.

Opportunity: Improve water quality and restore natural hydrology in limestone stream catchments by implementing buffer zones, wetland creation, and reduced nutrient pollution to benefit aquatic species.

g) Welland Valley

Welland Valley offers opportunities to restore meadows and wetlands, enhance grasslands, and create riparian woodland and buffers to improve habitat connectivity and flood resilience.

Opportunity: Restore floodplain meadows and wetlands to support species like Curlews, Snipes, and Scarce Chaser dragonflies.

Opportunity: Manage existing grasslands to promote wildflower growth, supporting invertebrates and small mammals.

Opportunity: Establish riparian buffers and create woodland along the River Welland to cool the river, support aquatic species and link fragmented habitats.

Opportunity: Expand protections around the Welland Valley floodplain meadows and River Welland itself. Designate new Local Wildlife Sites focused on priority habitats such as wet woodland and lowland meadows.

" Beekeeping directly connects you to nature. Positively improving the environment and helping nature. "

(Blaby resident)

h) Melton and Vale of Belvoir

Melton and the Vale of Belvoir offer opportunities for grassland restoration, hedgerow management, and pond creation to support farmland wildlife and improve landscape connectivity.

Opportunity: Create new woodlands in the right places and expand hedgerows to increase habitats for woodland species and support wider environment al benefits such as carbon sequestration, water storage and improved air quality.

Opportunity: Restore arable land to species-rich grasslands to support species like Linnets, Brown Hares, and pollinators.

Opportunity: Expand woodland and wildflower meadows to create connected habitat corridors along the historic railway line between Melton to and Nottingham.

Opportunity: Restore and optimise hedgerows and improve grasslands to benefit pollinators, farmland birds, and small mammals.

Opportunity: Landscape scale river restoration and sediment management projects in the Wreake below Melton Mowbray.

Opportunity: Landscape scale river restoration and sediment management projects in the Eye north of Melton Mowbray.

Opportunity: Protect and restore the area's ancient woodlands like Barkestone Wood and hedgerow networks, alongside designating important stream and pond habitats, especially those supporting priority species.

i) Leighfield Forest

Leighfield Forest presents opportunities for woodland expansion and connectivity, improving habitat quality and supporting woodland species such as dormice and bats.

Opportunity: Enhance and expand woodland, hedgerows, and wildflower-rich habitats along the historic railway line between Loddington and Melton.

Opportunity: Improve woodland conditions by managing deadwood and controlling deer and invasive non-native species.

Opportunity: Connect isolated woodlands through creation and management of new hedgerows, wood pasture and grassland networks to support species like Bluebell, Wood Anemones and Daubenton's Bats.

Opportunity: Focus on protecting existing ancient woodlands in Leighfield Forest. Designate new Local Wildlife Sites to protect ancient woodland and woodland priority habitats like lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

j) South and South West Leicestershire

South and South West Leicestershire offers significant opportunities for woodland creation, hedgerow expansion, and riparian woodland management to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Opportunity: Create new woodlands in the right places and expand hedgerows to increase habitats for woodland species and support wider environment al benefits such as carbon sequestration, water storage and improved air quality.

Opportunity: Restore grasslands, wildflower meadows, and scrubland along the disused railway line and the M1 corridor, between Ullesthorpe and Leicester City to improve connectivity for species between urban and rural areas.

Opportunity: Deliver River Anker restoration including barrier mitigation and longitudinal connectivity in Upper Anker which forms part of the Leicestershire County boundary near Atherstone.

Opportunity: Expand and enhance riparian woodlands and improve water quality through natural flood management.

Opportunity: Connect grasslands through wildflower margins and pond networks to support pollinators and amphibians.

Opportunity: River Avon (border between Leicestershire and Northamptonshire) has the potential for future Natural Flood Management delivery.

k) Urban

Urban landscapes provide opportunities to expand green and blue infrastructure, enhance habitat quality in green spaces, and create steppingstones for wildlife in built environments.

Opportunity: Expand and create new urban green and blue spaces like pocket parks, sustainable urban drainage solutions, and community gardens to support urban wildlife.

Opportunity: Create new species rich habitats in 'Green Wedge Areas' and 'Areas of Separation', conserve natural habitats, provide recreational opportunities, support sustainable land use, and help mitigate climate effects in urban areas. Deploy exemplary urban/landscape design and biodiversity enhancement to sustain nature connectivity and mitigate any new development proposal impacts.

Opportunity: Enhance urban green spaces by planting native species and reducing mowing.

Opportunity: Create steppingstones for wildlife in urban areas, such as wildflower verges and hedgehog highways.

Opportunity: Designate existing urban green spaces, including brownfield sites, historic railway lines and canal corridors, as Local Wildlife Sites to protect their biodiversity potential.

Opportunity: Enhance and improve the blue green infrastructure of existing parks and gardens for the benefits of people and wildlife.
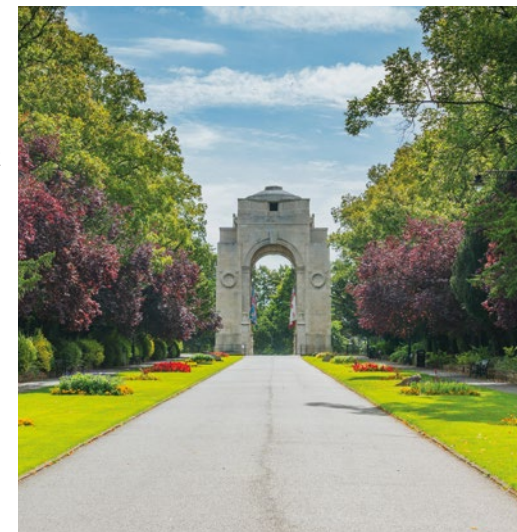
9.3 Habitat Priorities and Measures

9.3.1 Introduction

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies a range of priority habitats that are essential for supporting biodiversity and ecosystem services. Each of these habitats play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance, supporting species, and providing environmental and social benefits to our communities. Our approach focuses on protecting, creating and enhancing, managing and connecting these habitats to ensure their resilience and sustainability for future generations.

The strategic priorities outlined in this Local Nature Recovery Strategy were meticulously developed through a comprehensive and inclusive process. To ensure alignment with both local and national environmental objectives, existing plans and strategies, including Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and Local Plans were thoroughly assessed (See Appendix G). This extensive review produced over 400 potential priorities, each of which was evaluated against the specific criteria of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy as well as the National Environmental Objectives.

All these were then systematically categorised and organised into a long list of priorities, forming the foundation for an extensive consultation process. Key partners, including those on our Steering Group, Strategic Reference Group, farmers, landowners, community groups, and residents, were engaged to provide feedback and insights. Through this collaborative approach, both the long list of priorities and the specific measures required to deliver them were carefully refined. This ensured that the resulting set of strategic priorities and associated actions not only aligned with broader environmental goals but also reflected the needs and aspirations of stakeholders.

The guiding principles for this work were identifying the priorities most important in achieving bigger, better, more joined up, and protected spaces for nature, as well as ensuring conservation and enhancement of our most precious irreplaceable habitats, threatened species and vulnerable ecosystems.

These selected priorities will guide our efforts to enhance and protect biodiversity, support sustainable land management, and contribute to the overall resilience of our natural environment.

The tables that follow pull together the sum of the work set out above, and show the 'habitat-focused' priorities, opportunities and measures that have been mapped on the Local Habitat Map and should be adopted by anyone contributing to the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The codes shown against each measure are there for cross referencing measures with the ACB map.

To view the priorities and measures for the Areas that Could Become of particular importance (ACB), visit the online map here:

https://haveyoursay.leicestershire.gov.uk/local-nature-recovery-strategy-local-habitat-map

85% of respondents agreed that nature is important for tackling climate change.

9.3.2 Habitat Priorities and Measures

Woodland

Woodlands are vital ecosystems that support a rich diversity of species and provide essential services such as carbon capture and storage, water management, air purification, and recreational spaces for communities.

Protecting and enhancing, creating, and expanding, and connecting woodland habitats will not only improve biodiversity but also contribute to climate change mitigation and adaption, and enhance the wellbeing of residents by providing accessible natural spaces for relaxation and recreation.

Priority	Measure	
Protection and expansion: Ensure existing woodlands are protected and conserved, and new woodlands are established to increase overall forest cover.	WD001	Buffer and connect ancient and priority habitat woodlands to reduce fragmentation and create wildlife corridors.
	WD002	Restore plantation on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) to native broadleaf species composition.
	WD003	Manage ancient and veteran trees, including identification of successors to ensure habitat continuity.
	WD004	Expand woodland cover through a range of establishment methods and using a diverse mixture of tree species.
	WD005	Increase structural diversity of woodlands to support a diverse range of flora and fauna.
Connectivity: Develop and maintain wildlife corridors that link fragmented woodlands, promoting biodiversity and ecosystem health.	WD006	Create and maintain wildlife corridors linking woodlands with other habitats, promoting biodiversity, and facilitating species movement.
	WD007	Increase transitional habitats around and between woodlands to increase ecotones and establish wildlife rich dynamic mosaics.

Priority	Measure	
Management and Resilience: Implement sustainable management practices to enhance woodland health and resilience against climate change and pests.	WD008	Increase and implement sustainable woodland management practices to enhance biodiversity and bring all woodlands into good ecological condition.
	WD009	Enhance resilience of new and existing woodland through the creation of diverse, mixed species stands using tree species best suited to individual site characteristics, and future climate projections.
	WD010	Restore woodlands impacted by ash dieback, target management actions to diversity species compositions to aid ecological and climate resilience.
	WD011	Follow best practice to control invasive non-native plant species and minimise the risk of introducing pests and diseases within woodlands.
	WD012	Control and monitor deer and grey squirrel populations, especially in sensitive priority habitats and ancient woodlands.
	WD013	Manage water levels within wet woodlands to maintain suitable hydrological conditions for associated species.
	WD014	Buffer priority wet woodlands with appropriate vegetated habitats to reduce incursion of pollutants.

Freshwater

Freshwater habitats, including rivers, canals, lakes, and wetlands, are critical for supporting aquatic life and providing clean water for human use. These habitats also play a key role in flood regulation and water purification. By protecting, enhancing, and connecting freshwater habitats and wider catchment habitats, we will improve water quality, increase resilience to flooding, and support a diverse range of species, while also ensuring that local communities have access to clean water and recreational opportunities.

Priority		Measure
Natural Flood Management: Implement natural flood management techniques to reduce flood risk, enhance water quality, and support biodiversity.	FW001	Connect rivers to their floodplain and utilise wetlands for natural flood management.
	FW002	Create and maintain new floodplain meadows to manage excess water and provide priority habitat for species.
	FW003	Implement other natural flood management techniques to reduce flood risk and improve water retention. Such as re-meandering rivers, woodland and scrub planting, leaky dams, buffer strips, gully blocking and pond and scrape creation.
Protection and Restoration: Safeguard freshwater habitats and restore them to achieve favourable ecological status.	FW004	Control and manage invasive species in freshwater habitats.
	FW005	Promote the better management of soils and use of fertilisers on farmland to reduce sediment and phosphate entering rivers and damaging water ecology.
	FW006	Take a catchment-based approach to the protection and restoration of river habitats, recognising the unique features of the river system at every stage, from headwater to confluence with other waterbodies.
	FW007	Safeguard freshwater habitats and restore them to achieve favourable ecological status.
	FW008	Restore rivers in rural areas that have been artificially widened and straightened to support improved water quality and increased habitat.

Priority	Measure	
Protection and Restoration Cont'd	FW009	Restore rivers that have been heavily modified in urban areas to improve water quality and habitat.
	FW010	Manage water levels within wetland habitats to maintain suitable hydrological conditions.
	FW011	Enhance fish habitat through gravel bed restoration and instream structures.
	FW012	Restore riparian habitats along waterbodies.
Creation and Connectivity: Enhance connectivity between freshwater bodies to strengthen ecological resilience and create new freshwater associated habitats to facilitate species recovery and movement.	FW013	Create and manage wetland habitats to support diverse aquatic and semi-aquatic species.
	FW014	Create new pond networks and restore existing ones to increase habitat and prevent pollution.
	FW015	Connect waterbodies with other priority habitats, creating resilient networks of ecologically favourable habitats.
	FW016	Improve fish and other aquatic life passage by removing barriers like dams and weirs.

Grasslands

Grasslands are home to a variety of plant and animal species, many of which are rare or endangered. These habitats are important for pollinators, soil health, and carbon storage. Protecting and enhancing, creating and expanding, and connecting important grassland habitats will boost biodiversity, improve agricultural productivity through better pollination services, and contribute to carbon sequestration. Moreover, well-managed grasslands provide beautiful landscapes for public enjoyment and promote cultural and historical connections to the land.

Priority	Measure	
Protection and Expansion: Conserve and enhance existing grasslands and create new ones to expand these vital ecosystems.	GL001	Protect and restore species rich grassland.
	GL002	Create new or expand existing species rich grassland.
Connectivity: Establish networks of grasslands to improve habitat connectivity and support diverse wildlife populations.	GL003	Connect areas of priority grassland with other habitats to support diverse species populations, facilitate movement and build resilience to pressures.
	GL004	Create new heath grassland habitats to increase connectivity and create wildlife corridors.
Management and Resilience: Apply best practices for grassland management to boost their ecological health and resilience.	GL005	Implement appropriate management and grazing regimes to maintain habitat structure.
	GL006	Manage water levels and drainage within grasslands to maintain suitable conditions.
	GL007	Control invasive plant species and encroaching scrub in grasslands.

Urban

Urban habitats, including parks, gardens, and green roofs, are increasingly important as cities expand. These habitats provide essential green spaces for urban wildlife and enhance the quality of life for residents by offering recreational spaces and reducing the urban heat island effect. Protecting, enhancing, and connecting urban habitats will support biodiversity within cities, promote mental and physical health among residents, and contribute to climate resilience by managing stormwater and reducing temperatures. Retaining existing green and blue habitats in urban areas also contributes to the national environmental objective that everyone in England lives within a 15-minute walk of woodlands, wetlands, parks, canals, and rivers.

Priority	Measure	
Protection and Enhancement: Conserve and enhance green spaces within urban areas to support biodiversity and provide ecosystem services.	UB001	Protect brownfield sites with habitats that that support important biodiversity, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species and locally important species.
	UB002	Protect, restore, and enhance existing green and blue spaces into favourable ecological conditions.
	UB003	Increase the urban tree canopy by planting native and climate-resilient tree species in streets, parks, and other public spaces to provide habitat, reduce urban heat islands, and improve air quality.
	UB004	Protect and enhance urban rivers and their riparian boundary recognising their key role in supporting nature in towns and cities.
	UB005	Create new green and blue spaces and manage them to keep them in favourable ecological conditions.
Connectivity: Create green and blue corridors and networks to link urban habitats, facilitating wildlife movement and ecological interactions.	UB006	Connect existing green and blue spaces with other habitats (urban, sub-urban and rural) through best management practices, protection, and design of urban green corridors.
Management and Resilience: Implement urban habitat management strategies that increase resilience to environmental stresses and climate change.	UB007	Manage habitats within buildings (including roof spaces) when considering energy retrofits, change of use or new build; and use of appropriate mitigation measures.
	UB008	Create and manage high quality sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) based on urban design expertise and following the Leicester City Technical Guidance (2021).
	UB009	Integrate biodiversity into urban planning and development processes and promote sustainable urban design practices that incorporate green spaces.

Agricultural

Agricultural habitats, vital for food production, also have the potential to support a wide range of wildlife through sustainable farming practices. Protecting, enhancing, and connecting agricultural habitats can increase biodiversity on farmland, improve soil health, and support pollinators, essential for crop production. In addition, promoting sustainable agriculture can enhance food security and provide economic benefits to local communities.

Priority	Measure	
Sustainable Food Production: Promote sustainable and viable food production practices that increase biodiversity and improve soil health.	AG001	Promote suitable Agri-environment schemes that incentivise nature-friendly farming practices.
	AG002	Implement sustainable farming systems that enhance soil health, improve water management and quality, and increase and supports biodiversity.
Habitat Management: Manage agricultural landscapes to support biodiversity, including the conservation and enhancement of hedgerows, field margins, and wetlands.	AG003	Implement appropriate management and grazing regimes to maintain habitat structure.
	AG004	Manage water levels and drainage within agricultural land to maintain favourable conditions.
	AG005	Control invasive plant species on agricultural land.
Priority Habitat Creation: Develop and maintain priority habitats on agricultural land to support key species and enhance ecosystem services.	AG006	Create and manage priority wildlife habitats in agricultural landscapes.
	AG007	Create and manage priority habitat connections between existing habitats.

Open mosaic habitats

Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land are characterised by a mix of bare ground, grassland, scrub, and wetland, providing unique opportunities for colonising species and biodiversity. Protecting, enhancing, and connecting these habitats will help to sustain rare and specialist species, improve landscape diversity, and contribute to the ecological recovery of degraded lands. These habitats also offer opportunities for community engagement in restoration projects and can serve as unique recreational spaces.

Priority	Measure	
Protection and Expansion: Ensure existing important open mosaic habitats are preserved and new open mosaic are established to increase transitional habitats between priority habitats and species populations.	OM001	Protect existing important open mosaic habitats and associated species in a manner consistent with national planning policy to make effective use of brownfield land.
	OM002	Create new or expand existing open mosaic habitats.
Connectivity: Develop and maintain wildlife corridors that link fragmented habitats, promoting biodiversity and ecosystem health.	OM003	Connect important open mosaic habitats with other priority habitats.
Management and Resilience: Implement sustainable management practices to enhance open mosaic habitats and resilience against climate change and pests.	OM004	Implement appropriate management regimes to maintain habitat structure.
	OM005	Manage water levels and drainage within open mosaic habitats to maintain suitable conditions.
	OM006	Control invasive plant species in open mosaic habitats.

Green and blue corridors

Sometimes referred to as Nature Networks, green and blue corridors, such as hedgerows, railways, road verges, canals, rivers, and streams, are crucial for connecting fragmented habitats and allowing species to move freely across the landscape. Protecting, improving, and connecting these corridors will enhance ecological connectivity, support species migration, and increase resilience to climate change. Additionally, these corridors provide scenic routes for walking and cycling, promoting outdoor activities and enhancing the wellbeing of local communities.

Priority		Measure
Protection and Expansion: Ensure existing important green and blue corridors are conserved and enhanced and new habitats are established.	NN001	Protect existing hedgerows and promote the planting of new native hedgerows.
	NN002	Manage and enhance biodiversity along railway corridors with native vegetation.
	NN003	Create wildlife-friendly road verges with native wildflowers and grasses.
Connectivity: Develop and maintain wildlife corridors that link fragmented habitats, promoting biodiversity and ecosystem health.	NN004	Use hedgerows to create wildlife corridors.
	NN005	Restore, enhance and manage Local Wildlife Sites to recognise their ecological value and strengthen their role as stepping stones across the wider ecological network.
	NN006	Enhance ecological value of canal paths, cycle networks and public rights of way as green infrastructure corridors.
	NN007	Recognise the value of watercourse in urban spaces as unique connected habitats and manage them to keep them in favourable ecological conditions.
	NN008	Create green and blue corridors and networks to link urban habitats, facilitating wildlife movement and ecological interactions.
	NN009	Utilise railway lines (operational and disused) to create new bigger, better habitats, connecting existing priority habitats at landscape scale.
Management and Resilience: Implement sustainable management practices to enhance green and blue corridors and resilience against climate change and pests.	NN010	Encourage traditional hedgerow management techniques.
	NN011	Enhance biodiversity along green corridors with native vegetation and wildflower meadows.
	NN012	Promote pollinator-friendly habitats along networks.
	NN013	Control invasive plant species along networks.

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Geodiversity

Geodiversity, encompassing the variety of rocks, minerals, soils, and landforms, underpins the health of all other habitats. Protecting, enhancing, and connecting geodiversity sites will help to maintain soil health, support unique ecosystems, and conserve geological heritage. This also provides educational opportunities and promotes tourism, which can bring economic benefits to local communities.

The development of the Charnwood Forest Geopark provides an opportunity to deliver the priorities and measures within this habitat.

Priority		Measure
Protect and Manage: Protect important geological sites and implement sustainable management practices to conserve and enhance these sites.	GE001	Promote geoconservation through the protection and management of important geological sites, such as National Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Regionally Important Geological Sites, Geological Conservation Review sites. This includes work to prevent human actions that may damage geoheritage, as well as measures to mitigate erosion and vegetation growth, where appropriate.
	GE002	Through collaboration with Natural England, academia, voluntary groups, and others, ensure that geoheritage sites are adequately monitored.
	GE003	Seek to safeguard new sites of geological significance where necessary to ensure representative sections of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland's geodiversity are conserved.
	GE004	Integrate geodiversity data, including bedrock, superficial, and soil information, into biodiversity assessments, nature recovery plans, and special planning processes to inform integrated nature-based policy.
	GE005	Improve geodiversity public engagement by increasing public awareness of geodiversity, both for its inherent value and the vital role to biodiversity, through activities such as in-situ interpretation, guided tours, and educational materials.
	GE006	Promote soil conservation practices that enhance fertility, reduce soil erosion, and increase carbon sequestration.
Create and Connect: Transform quarry and mineral sites into thriving natural habitats that enhance biodiversity and support sustainable ecosystems.	GE007	Follow best practices for Phased Restoration.
	GE008	Use native plants, with ability to thrive on existing soils - connectivity to other habitats.
	GE009	Water to be properly managed to fit with character of area and to provide important wetland habitats.

9.4   Species

9.4.1 Introduction

Species are the building blocks of our natural world, each playing a unique and irreplaceable role in the intricate web of life. In Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, our diverse array of species ranging from the smallest invertebrates to the largest mammals contributes not only to the health and functionality of our ecosystems but also to the richness of our cultural and natural heritage.

Every species has intrinsic value, meaning it is valuable in and of itself, regardless of its utility to humans. The mere existence of a species, with its own unique evolutionary history and ecological role, is a testament to the complexity and beauty of life on Earth. Protecting species is an ethical obligation, reflecting our responsibility to conserve the diversity of life for its own sake and for future generations.

Species are deeply intertwined with human culture, art, and inspiration. Throughout history, the natural world has been a source of fascination, creativity, and spiritual fulfilment. From the songs of birds inspiring music to the beauty of wildflowers influencing art and poetry, species have always been integral to human expression. In Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, our local species contribute to a sense of place and identity, connecting communities to the landscapes around them.

Species are not isolated entities; they are integral components of ecosystems, interacting with one another in complex and dynamic ways. These interactions such as pollination, seed dispersal, and predation are vital for the functioning of ecosystems. Healthy, biodiverse ecosystems are more resilient to environmental changes, such as climate shifts and invasive non-native species, and are better able to provide essential natural services like clean air, water purification, and soil fertility. Every species, no matter how small, has a role and contributes to the stability and productivity of the ecosystems that humans depend on for survival.

The presence of a rich variety of species is crucial for maintaining environmental balance. For example, bees and other pollinators are essential for the reproduction of many plants, including those we rely on for food. Trees and plants not only provide habitat for wildlife but also sequester carbon, helping to mitigate climate change. Predator species help control populations of other animals, preventing overgrazing and maintaining vegetation diversity. In this way, species help sustain the environment that sustains us.

Species have inspired countless scientific discoveries and innovations. The study of wildlife behaviour, physiology, and ecology has led to advancements in medicine, agriculture, and technology. Biomimicry, where nature's designs inspire human innovation, is just one example of how species can influence new ways of thinking and problem-solving. Conserving the diversity of species is therefore not only an environmental imperative but also a source of potential future innovations.

Species also provide significant economic and recreational value. Ecotourism, birdwatching, fishing, and other wildlife-related activities generate income and employment for local communities. Moreover, the presence of diverse species enhances the beauty and appeal of natural landscapes, drawing visitors from near and far and contributing to local economies. Additionally, many species play a role in agriculture and horticulture, whether as pollinators, pest controllers, or sources of genetic diversity for crops.

Given their intrinsic and practical values, the protection and restoration of species in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland is a cornerstone of our Local Nature Recovery Strategy. By focusing on species conservation, we not only safeguard the biodiversity that makes our strategy area unique but also ensure the continued health of the ecosystem services that support our own wellbeing. Protecting species is about more than conservation; it is about conserving the fabric of life that sustains our planet and enriches our human experience.

9.4.2 Priority Species and Measures

Priority species refer to species that are identified as being of principal importance for biodiversity conservation. These species are typically selected based on their conservation status, ecological importance, and vulnerability to habitat loss, climate change, and other environmental pressures. The designation of priority species helps focus conservation efforts and resources on those species most in need of protection and recovery.

In developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, we have identified a range of priority species requiring targeted conservation action. However, nature is dynamic, and as ecosystems change due to climate shifts, habitat restoration, and rewilding efforts, we must also recognise the importance of naturally colonising species. Species such as the Eurasian Beaver, once extinct in England, are beginning to re-establish populations through both natural dispersal and reintroduction projects. These species can play a crucial role in ecosystem restoration, enhancing biodiversity, water retention, and flood mitigation. The strategy must therefore take a flexible, forward-looking approach, ensuring that conservation efforts support not only existing priority species but also create resilient landscapes where species can return, thrive, and contribute to ecosystem recovery.

Key rational for selection of the Priority Species:

Legislative Basis: Priority species lists are often derived from statutory designations, such as the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) or the species listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. These species are of principal importance for conserving biodiversity at the national level.

Habitat-Specific Needs: Priority species are typically associated with specific habitats, such as ancient woodlands, wetlands, or grasslands. For example, species like the **Adder**, which depends on undisturbed acid heath grasslands, and the Curlew, which relies on open wet grassland, are often listed as priority species due to their specific habitat requirements.

Vulnerability and Decline: These species are often experiencing significant population declines or are at risk of local extinction due to habitat degradation, pollution, climate change, or other anthropogenic pressures. Protecting and restoring the habitats these species depend on is central to their conservation.

Ecological Importance: Priority species often play critical roles in their ecosystems, such as pollinators (e.g. **Grizzled Skipper Butterfly**) or apex predators. Protecting these species helps to maintain healthy and functional ecosystems.

Targeted Conservation Actions: Local Nature Recovery Strategies typically suggest bespoke measures for priority species, which may include habitat restoration, species reintroduction programs, and specific management practices to improve population resilience. These measures are designed to be locally specific, addressing the unique needs of the species in the context of the surrounding landscape.

The health of priority species populations is often seen as an indicator of the overall health of the ecosystem they inhabit. If priority species are thriving, it is usually a sign that the habitat is in good ecological condition.

Priority species lists help conservation practitioners and policymakers prioritise limited resources. These lists inform decisions on where to focus habitat restoration efforts, species reintroduction projects, and land management practices.

While many priority species are identified at the national level, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy enables these species to be contextualised for local landscapes, ensuring that actions are relevant to the specific ecological needs of Leicestershire, Leicester, Rutland, or any other area under the strategy.

In total 113 species were identified against the criteria. These are species which require bespoke action to protect and enhance their populations. The list is made up of **1 amphibian (Palmate Newt), 1 reptile (Adder), 12 birds (including Turtle Dove), 1 crustacean (White-clawed Crayfish), 6 invertebrates (including Glow worm), 3 fish (Including Brown Trout), 6 mammals (including Hedgehog), 77 rare vascular plants (including Purple Milk Vetch) and 6 lichen (including Lasallia pustulata).**

In summary, priority species within a Local Nature Recovery Strategy framework are those species most in need of focused conservation action due to their ecological importance, vulnerability, and the role they play in maintaining local biodiversity.

The full priority species list, including distribution maps and proposed conservation measures can be accessed in Appendix C.

9.4.3 Indicator Species

The **100 Indicator Species** have been carefully selected to serve as vital tools for monitoring the health of the environment across Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland. Representing a range of taxonomic groups, including mammals, birds, invertebrates, amphibians, plants, and fungi, these species are distributed across all major habitats, from woodlands and grasslands to freshwater ecosystems and urban areas.

The concept behind indicator species is straightforward: they are representatives of habitats in good ecological health. When these species thrive, it suggests that their ecosystems are functioning well, and when their populations decline, it signals environmental stress or degradation. Therefore, tracking the trends in the populations of these species provides valuable insights into the state of biodiversity and ecological balance within the area.

Chosen for their relative ease of identification and their broad appeal to citizen scientists and conservationists, these species are not rare but are known to be in decline. This makes them reliable indicators of changing environmental conditions. Their population trends can help detect issues such as habitat loss, climate change impacts, pollution, and other pressures on biodiversity.

It is our hope that this list will be adopted in future initiatives, helping to create a unified approach to monitoring the state of nature in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland. By tracking these indicator species over time, we can more effectively assess the success of conservation efforts and make informed decisions to support the recovery of local ecosystems.

Species selected are based on the following criteria:

- association with quality habitats (including species found in multiple habitats)

- firmly established in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy area but have declined or maintained a low base level over the last 10 years.

- recorded sufficiently frequently to provide adequate data for analysis.

- can be seen without specialist sampling and be identified without detailed examination.

- Come from a wide range of taxon groups.

The Indicator Species list includes species such as **Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly**, which are found in nettles and gardens; **Lesser Stag Beetle**, the largest beetle found in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and is a good indicator of healthy woodland understorey; and, **Glow-Worm**, found in healthy species rich grassland, and can thrive along roadsides and many local wildlife sites.

Farmland birds such as **Linnet** and **Yellowhammer** have well established but declining populations. These birds are easily identifiable and improvements in their numbers could be attributed to well managed hedgerows and field margins in arable fields.

Swan Mussel is a good indicator for clean flowing water. These are known to be declining but will recover with improvements to water quality and good management.

By monitoring these species, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy aims to create a robust and sustainable framework for biodiversity conservation, ensuring that all species and their habitats are preserved for future generations.

The full indicator species list and supporting selection process documents can be accessed in Appendix C.

68% of respondents very interested in helping wildlife in their garden.

9.5   Landscape Scale Priorities and Measures

9.5.1 Introduction

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy identified several key landscape-scale priorities that are essential for improving biodiversity and ecosystem health. These priorities address issues that affect large areas of the landscape and cannot be confined to specific mapped locations. Instead, they require widespread implementation across different land types and habitats.

A holistic approach to land management considers the ecological, social, and economic aspects of a landscape. It is complex as it often involves working in partnership and across multiple land ownerships. Hedgerow management, roadside grass verge management, woodland management, the control of invasive non-native species (INNS) and pests, nature-friendly farming and natural flood management need to be actioned at a landscape scale because these elements play a critical role in maintaining and enhancing ecological connectivity across large areas. These habitats serve as vital wildlife corridors, linking fragmented habitats and enabling species to move freely, essential for genetic diversity and resilience against environmental changes. Addressing invasive non-native species and pests at a landscape scale is crucial to prevent their spread and to protect native ecosystems. By taking a coordinated, large-scale approach, we can create a more cohesive, biodiverse landscape that supports the recovery and sustainability of priority species and habitats.

The following sections outline the measures associated with each priority, as well as additional landscape-scale initiatives that will contribute to nature recovery.

46% of respondents very interested in growing fruit and vegetables.

9.5.2 Landscape Scale Priorities and Measures

a) Landscape Hedgerow Optimisation

Hedgerows are crucial ecological corridors in the rural and urban landscapes of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland. They provide habitat and movement pathways for a range of species, including birds, mammals, insects, and plants. However, many hedgerows are poorly managed, fragmented, or over-trimmed, reducing their ecological value. Optimising hedgerow management at a landscape scale will support wildlife, enhance connectivity, and contribute to climate resilience.

Hedgerow Priority:

Optimise Hedgerows: Plant new, enhance existing and expand Hedgerows to create continuous habitat corridors that support wildlife movement improve habitat quality, and boost biodiversity across the landscape.

Measures:

- Prioritise planting new hedgerows in areas of low hedgerow density comparable to the strategy area.

- Implement a rotational cutting, planning different sections of hedgerows in different years to allow flowering and fruiting, which benefits pollinators and provides food for wildlife.

- Encourage the growth of wider and thicker hedgerows by planting additional native shrubs and trees, which provide better shelter and nesting opportunities for birds and small mammals.

- Fill in gaps in existing hedgerows with native species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, and hazel to create continuous wildlife corridors.

- Retain and promote the growth of standard trees within hedgerows, which provide habitat diversity and long-term ecological benefits.

- Following best practice guides, prioritise planting a variety of native hedgerow species to enhance biodiversity.

- Establish wildflower margins alongside hedgerows to increase nectar sources and habitat for pollinators.

- Ensure hedgerows are connected to other habitats such as woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands to facilitate wildlife movement across the landscape.

- Identify areas where historical hedgerows have been lost and work towards restoring these to reconnect fragmented habitats.

b) Landscape Roadside Grass Verges

Roadside grass verges across the strategy area represent an extensive but underutilised habitat for wildlife. When managed correctly, they can act as wildflower corridors, support pollinator populations, and provide connectivity across fragmented landscapes. Unfortunately, road verges are often mown too frequently or at inappropriate times, limiting their ecological potential.

Roadside Grass Verge Priority:

Optimise Roadside Grass Verge: Manage and enhance roadside grass verges to create biodiverse corridors that support pollinators, improve habitat connectivity, and contribute to local wildlife conservation.

Measures:

- Implement a reduced mowing regime, cutting verges only once or twice a year, preferably after the flowering season to allow plants to set seed and support pollinators.

- Adopt staggered cutting practices where different sections of verges are mowed at different times, maintaining habitat diversity throughout the growing season.

- Introduce native wildflower species to road verges, focusing on species that are beneficial for pollinators and resilient to roadside conditions.

- Avoid planting non-native or invasive species and instead promote the establishment of native grasses and flowers that support local wildlife.

- Where appropriate, allow for the growth of small patches of scrub and native trees to provide shelter and nesting sites for birds and insects.

- Design road verges to function as pollinator corridors, ensuring they connect with other green spaces such as parks, farmland, woodlands, and nature reserves.

- Create buffer strips between the road and the verge to reduce pollution impacts and protect sensitive plant species from road runoff.

- Manage road verges in a way that balances safety for road users with the needs of wildlife, maintaining clear sightlines while promoting biodiversity.

- Promote pollinator-friendly planting in urban gardens, parks, and road verges by encouraging the use of native wildflowers and reducing chemical use. This will provide essential food sources and nesting habitats for pollinators like bees and butterflies.

c) Landscape Invasive Non-Native Species and Pest Management

Invasive non-native species and pests pose a significant threat to native biodiversity by outcompeting native species, altering habitats, and spreading disease. The control and management of invasive non-native species and pests are essential to protect the ecological integrity of habitats across Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland.

Invasive Non-Native Species Priority:

Invasive Non-Native Species and Pest Management: Implement coordinated efforts to monitor, control, and eradicate invasive non-native species to protect native biodiversity and restore ecological balance.

Measures:

- Establish a comprehensive monitoring program to identify the presence of invasive non-native species early, particularly in sensitive habitats such as wetlands, woodlands, and along waterways.

- Sustainable pest management is essential to maintaining balanced ecosystems and preventing adverse impacts on biodiversity and food production.

- Form rapid response teams that can act quickly to control new infestations before they become widespread.

- Focus on eradicating the most harmful invasive species first, which have the greatest negative impact on native biodiversity.

- Follow best practice guides to choose the correct methods to manage invasive species, ensuring that the methods used are safe for the environment and non-target species.

- After removal of invasive species, promptly revegetate the area with native plants to prevent re-invasion and restore the ecological balance.

- Improve habitat conditions that favour native species over invasive ones, such as enhancing soil health, water management, and light conditions.

- Implement long-term monitoring and management plans to ensure that eradication efforts are sustained and that areas cleared of invasive species do not become reinfested.

d) Landscape Woodland Management

Woodlands play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, and water management. However, many woodlands in Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland suffer from poor management, including overgrazing by deer, lack of structural diversity, and a limited age range of trees. Optimising woodland management at a landscape scale will help create healthier, more resilient woodlands.

Woodland Management Priority:

Woodland Management: Implement sustainable management practices to enhance woodland health and resilience against climate change and pests.

Measures:

- Increase woodland management to bring all woodlands into good ecological condition.

- Encourage active woodland management through coppicing, thinning, and the promotion of structural diversity. This will create varied microhabitats and increase light penetration to support ground flora and invertebrates.

- Implement sustainable deer management practices to reduce browsing pressure on young trees and understorey vegetation. This will allow natural regeneration and enhance the overall biodiversity of woodlands.

- Retain deadwood both standing and, on the ground, as it provides essential habitat for fungi, invertebrates, birds, and mammals.

- Promote the management of woodland edges to create transitional zones between woodland and grassland, which are particularly valuable for species such as butterflies and small mammals.

- Engage local communities in woodland management activities, including volunteering programs to plant trees, control invasive species, and monitor biodiversity.

- Explore the use of trees and woodland as nature-based solutions and increase tree cover throughout the landscape.

- Implement strategic tree planting on non-productive agricultural land to sequester carbon, enhance biodiversity, and improve soil health.

e) Landscape Nature-Friendly Farming

Nature-friendly farming: Nature-friendly farming plays a critical role in supporting biodiversity and promoting sustainable land use. By integrating conservation practices with agricultural production, farmers can help create habitats, support wildlife populations, and contribute to ecosystem health across the landscape. This approach also improves the resilience of farmland to environmental changes, ensuring long-term productivity.

Nature-Friendly Farming Priority:

Encourage farming practices that align with Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) schemes to support wildlife conservation while maintaining productive and viable agriculture. Enhance habitat quality, protect soil health, and boost biodiversity within the agricultural landscape.

Measures:

- Consider adopting diverse planting schedules and crop rotations, which can benefit soil health and support pollinators, as outlined in the relevant SFI standards.

- Explore options to establish field margins, buffer strips, and hedgerows to provide habitats for wildlife, supporting the goals of SFI.

- Review opportunities to reduce pesticide and chemical fertiliser use, focusing on enhancing natural pest control and pollinator-friendly practices through SFI guidance.

- Look into integrating agroforestry or introducing trees and shrubs into farmland to enhance habitat diversity, potentially supported by SFI funding.

- Consider creating or maintaining ponds or wetland features to support amphibians and insects, contributing to SFI priorities for water management and biodiversity.

- Allow for fallow areas or wildflower patches to encourage pollinator populations, in line with SFI options for habitat improvement.

- Explore organic or reduced-input practices as an approach that complements SFI schemes focused on natural ecosystem enhancement.

f) Landscape Grassland Management

Grasslands are vital habitats for a variety of species, including plants, insects, birds, and small mammals. They provide essential ecosystem services such as pollination, soil stabilisation, and carbon storage. However, many grasslands are poorly managed or have been converted to other land uses, leading to a decline in biodiversity. Managing and creating species-rich grasslands at a landscape scale will help restore ecological balance, support pollinator populations, and contribute to climate resilience.

Grassland Management Priority:

Enhance and Create Species-Rich Grasslands: Manage existing grasslands and create new species rich grasslands to increase habitat diversity, support pollinator species, and promote connectivity across fragmented landscapes.

Measures:

- Identify and restore degraded grasslands through re-seeding with native wildflower and grass species that are beneficial to pollinators and other wildlife.

- Promote traditional hay meadow management, including late-season cutting and reduced grazing, to allow wildflowers to set seed and maintain plant diversity.

- Encourage rotational grazing practices that avoid overgrazing and allow for periods of rest and regeneration, supporting diverse plant communities.

- Establish new grassland habitats in areas of low grassland cover to increase landscape connectivity and provide corridors for wildlife movement.

- Introduce conservation grazing using native breeds to maintain grassland structure and prevent scrub encroachment, preserving the diversity of plant and animal species.

- Work with local landowners and farmers to create wildflower strips alongside arable fields, supporting pollinators and creating steppingstones between larger grassland habitats.

- Encourage the use of agri-environment schemes to support the creation and management of species-rich grasslands, particularly in areas of high landscape connectivity. Integrate grassland creation and enhancement with other habitat types, such as woodland edges, to create transitional zones that are valuable for a range of species.

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g) Landscape Freshwater and Wetland Management

Freshwater and wetland habitats such as rivers, ponds, and marshes are essential for supporting diverse aquatic life and providing important ecosystem services like water filtration, flood control, and carbon sequestration. However, these habitats have been significantly reduced and degraded. Managing and creating new freshwater and wetland areas will enhance biodiversity, improve water quality, and contribute to landscape-scale resilience against climate change.

Freshwater and Wetland Management Priority:

Restore and Create Freshwater and Wetland Habitats: Manage existing freshwater systems and create new wetlands, ponds, and riparian areas to support biodiversity, improve water quality, and reduce flood risk.

Measures:

- Restore natural hydrology in existing wetlands by re-establishing water flow regimes, removing artificial barriers, and reconnecting wetlands with floodplains.

- Create new ponds, scrapes, and wetland areas in suitable locations to provide habitats for amphibians, invertebrates, and wetland birds, focusing on areas with low wetland coverage.

- Enhance riparian zones along rivers and streams by planting native vegetation to stabilise banks, filter pollutants, and provide habitat for wildlife.

- Introduce buffer strips along freshwater bodies to reduce runoff from surrounding agricultural fields and improve water quality.

- Re-naturalise river channels through re-meandering and removing hard engineering structures to create more diverse habitats and slow down water flow, reducing downstream flood risks.

- Promote the restoration of ghost ponds and marshes to enhance carbon sequestration and water storage capacity, particularly in areas vulnerable to flooding.

- Work with local communities and landowners to create new wetland features that can act as steppingstones for wildlife, contributing to increased connectivity across the landscape.

- Encourage sustainable land use practices in catchment areas to prevent nutrient loading and improve the overall health of freshwater ecosystems.

h) Landscape Flood Management and Natural Solutions

Natural flood management (NFM) uses processes like tree planting, wetland creation, and river restoration to slow water flow and reduce flooding. These methods not only protect communities but also create habitats for wildlife. However, limited awareness and support often restrict their full potential.

Natural Flood Management Priority:

Natural Flood Management: Implement natural flood management techniques to reduce flood risk, enhance water quality, and support biodiversity.

Measures:

- Collaborate on Catchment-Based Natural Flood Management (NFM): Work within catchment areas to implement NFM measures such as re-meandering rivers, restoring natural floodplains, and creating connected wetland networks. These actions will slow water flow, reduce peak flood levels, and improve water infiltration. These efforts are especially vital in flood-prone areas to reduce the downstream impacts of heavy rainfall.

- Enhance Riparian Vegetation: Establish and maintain riparian buffer zones with native tree and shrub planting. These areas help stabilise riverbanks, filter pollutants, and provide important habitats for wildlife, while also slowing water runoff and reducing erosion.

- Restore and Create Wetlands: Prioritise the restoration of degraded wetlands and create new wetlands where feasible. Restored wetlands can act as natural sponges, absorbing excess water, acting as carbon sinks, and providing critical habitat for various species. Focus on areas where wetland restoration can provide co-benefits, such as carbon sequestration, enhanced biodiversity, and improved water regulation.

- Reconnect Floodplains: Enable natural floodplain connectivity by removing physical barriers where possible. Reconnected floodplains can store excess floodwater, alleviate downstream flooding, and allow sediment deposition, which helps improve soil quality and prevent nutrient loss.

- Soil and Land Management: Encourage sustainable soil management techniques that enhance water retention and reduce surface runoff. Techniques such as cover cropping, reduced tillage, and maintaining permanent grasslands can significantly mitigate flood risks by improving soil structure and organic matter content.

- Promote Woodland Creation: Identify strategic areas where woodland planting can reduce the speed of water flow into rivers and streams. Woodlands enhance water infiltration and act as natural barriers that reduce surface runoff, while also offering valuable habitat for wildlife and sequestering carbon.

- Community Involvement and Monitoring: Engage local landowners, farmers, and communities in NFM initiatives, ensuring they understand the benefits of these measures and are involved in the process. Use citizen science and monitoring programs to track the effectiveness of NFM projects and adapt strategies as necessary.

10. Delivering the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

10.1 Introduction

We do not want the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to gather dust on a shelf, or the electronic equivalent. Instead, we want the strategy to be a catalyst for action. In order for such action to take place there needs to be a number of fundamental elements in place. This chapter sets out what these need to be and the key next steps that will be taken to mobilise the strategy into action.

10.2 Leveraging Partnerships

Collaboration among different stakeholder groups is essential for amplifying the impact of nature recovery efforts. As environmental challenges become more complex and widespread, it is increasingly clear that no single entity be it government, businesses, non-governmental organisations, or local communities can turn around nature's fortunes alone. By working together, diverse stakeholder groups can combine their resources, knowledge, and influence to achieve greater outcomes for nature recovery than any could accomplish independently.

One of the most significant benefits of collaboration is the ability to pool resources and expertise. Different stakeholders bring unique strengths to the table - financial resources, technical skills, local knowledge, and policy influence, which can all complement one another. For example:

- **Farmers and farm clusters** offer intimate knowledge of the land and practical insights into what approaches will work best on the ground.

- **Local communities, Parish Councils and landowners** offer detailed insights of the land and practical experience on what will work in reality.

- **Government agencies** can provide funding, regulatory frameworks, and access to public lands for conservation projects.

- **Businesses** can offer financial investment, innovative technologies, and influence in supply chains to promote sustainable practices.

- **Non-governmental organisations** such as environmental conservation organisations and catchment partnerships often bring expertise in conservation science, project management, and public engagement.

- **Local authorities and neighbouring responsible authorities** should liaise and adopt standard best practice to ensure nature recovery approaches are aligned across political boundaries

> **Good ideas but consistency is important. Because we start and never finish and help nature improve consistently.**
>
> (Young resident)

Through collaboration and formal partnerships, these groups should seek to leverage their collective resources more effectively, leading to more comprehensive and well-funded nature recovery initiatives.

Environmental issues such as habitat fragmentation, climate change, and biodiversity loss are often best addressed at a landscape scale, which requires coordinated efforts across large areas and multiple jurisdictions. Collaboration among stakeholders allows for the development of landscape-scale conservation strategies that are more effective and cost-efficient than isolated, piecemeal efforts.

For instance, farmers, landowners, conservation organisations, and government bodies need to work together to deliver the strategic objectives of the strategy, such as establishing strategic wildlife corridors that span agricultural lands, woodlands, and urban areas.

Collaborative efforts also ensure that conservation actions are strategically aligned, avoiding duplication, and maximising the impact across the entire landscape.

Key stakeholder partnerships should seek to deliver nature recovery projects that involves local communities, farmers, conservationists, and businesses. These initiatives will be seen as more legitimate and inclusive than one led by a single entity. This broad-based support can also lead to more sustainable outcomes, as partners will voluntarily sign up to binding agreements, ensuring they are more likely to remain committed to the project over the long term.

Collaboration fosters the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practices among stakeholders, leading to more innovative and effective solutions. Different groups often approach problems from unique perspectives, and when these perspectives are shared, it can lead to the development of new strategies and technologies that enhance nature recovery efforts.

For example, such a broad, formal but voluntarily entered into partnership could oversee a collaboration between a tech company and a conservation organisation, leading to the development of new monitoring tools that use satellite imagery or drones to track habitat restoration progress. Similarly, farmers working with ecologists might develop new ingenious farming practices that enhance biodiversity while maintaining agricultural productivity.

Collaboration allows successful nature recovery projects to be scaled up and replicated across different regions and contexts. When a collaborative approach proves effective in one area, it can serve as a model for others, and the lessons learned can be applied more broadly. This scalability is essential for addressing the global scale of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.

Nature recovery efforts often require long-term commitment and long-term management to be successful. Collaboration helps ensure that these efforts are more sustainable by distributing responsibilities and creating a network of support that can endure beyond the life of individual projects.

Local authorities, partners and key stakeholders working and investing in projects together are more likely to maintain their involvement over time, providing ongoing support, monitoring, and adaptive management. For example, a conservation easement involving a land trust, local government, and a community group is more likely to be maintained over the long term than a project managed by a single entity.

Working with local communities to develop nature-based tourism can provide economic benefits while also promoting conservation. Similarly, engaging with farmers to implement agri-environment schemes can enhance biodiversity while supporting sustainable livelihoods. Collaboration ensures that the needs and rights of all stakeholders are considered, leading to more holistic and just outcomes.

10.3 Farmers Supporting Biodiversity Through Conservation Initiatives

Farmers, including tenant farmers, land managers and landowners can participate in government-backed agri-environment schemes which provides financial incentives for adopting environmentally friendly practices. These schemes often include measures to enhance wildlife habitats, improve water quality, and reduce carbon emissions, aligning farm management with broader conservation goals.

Formalised partnership working, including farms, farming clusters, conservation organisations, and local communities, could support farmers and land managers to contribute to landscape-scale conservation initiatives. These collaborative efforts are essential for creating large, interconnected habitats that support wide-ranging species and enhance ecosystem resilience. Farmer-led conservation groups and clusters are increasingly recognised as effective vehicles for driving these initiatives, enabling the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices.

Farmers have a unique voice in advocating for sustainable agriculture policies and practices at the local, regional, and national levels. By championing the importance of nature recovery in farming, they can influence policy development, encourage wider adoption of sustainable practices, and help secure the necessary support and resources for conservation efforts.

Farmers have an important role to play in conserving and enhancing nature on their land. Through financial schemes like Environmental Land Management (ELM), Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), and other incentives that aim to support the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, farmers are provided with opportunities and financial benefits to make space for nature, contributing to the recovery of biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable agriculture. These initiatives align with the UK's goals for nature restoration and climate change mitigation.

The integration of agriculture and nature conservation through these schemes not only ensures sustainable and viable food production but also contributes to national and global efforts to tackle the biodiversity and climate crises.

Image courtesy of Charnwood Forest LPS

Farmers and landowners most prepared to contribute to the restoration and management of wetlands, heathland and grassland to protect and enhance nature, with the right support.

Some conservation routes open to farmers and landowners include:

Local Nature Recovery Strategy delivery

- **Targeted nature recovery:** Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies priority habitats and species in specific areas. Farmers can align their land management practices with local nature recovery goals by creating or restoring habitats that support these regional priorities.

- **Collaborative conservation:** Farmers including tenants can work together with other landowners, conservation groups, and local authorities to form landscape-scale conservation projects. These collaborative efforts can focus on restoring wildlife corridors, floodplains, and woodlands, creating connected landscapes that are more resilient to environmental changes.

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Local Nature Recovery Strategies encourage partnerships between the public sector, private landowners, and non-governmental organisations. Farmers can engage with these partnerships to access funding and expertise for large-scale habitat restoration or species recovery initiatives.

- **Tailored approaches:** Local Nature Recovery Strategies aim to be locally relevant, meaning farmers can adopt conservation practices suited to their region's unique landscape and ecological challenges, ensuring that their efforts contribute effectively to biodiversity and climate resilience.

Environmental Land Management

Environmental Land Management (ELM) focuses on paying farmers to deliver "public goods" such as clean air, water, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration. ELM consist of Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship (CS), Landscape Recovery, each offering different opportunities for farmers

to integrate nature into their operations. What follows is a summary of how these schemes can support farmers in delivering for nature recovery. For more information on these schemes: Environmental land management schemes: details of actions and payments - Farming (blog.gov.uk)

Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship

- Farmers are encouraged to adopt practices that improve soil health, such as cover cropping, reduced tillage, and organic farming. Healthy soils store carbon, improve water retention, and support diverse ecosystems, including beneficial invertebrates, fungi, and plant species.

- Integrating trees and shrubs into farming systems (agroforestry) can provide habitats for wildlife while improving soil fertility and carbon sequestration. Agroforestry can also increase resilience to climate change impacts, such as drought.

- Habitat creation and restoration of habitats such as wetlands, meadows, and woodlands. Farmers can establish flower-rich grasslands, ponds, and riparian buffers along watercourses, creating havens for pollinators, birds, and aquatic species.

- Funding is available for linking habitats across farms, helping species to move and disperse. Farmers can plant hedgerows or manage field margins in ways that promote connectivity between fragmented habitats.

- Farmers may be incentivised to implement measures that benefit threatened species, such as providing nesting sites for birds or restoring habitats for amphibians and reptiles.

Landscape Recovery

- Large-Scale Habitat Restoration: Farmers who own larger areas of land may be able to participate in large-scale restoration projects, such as restoring peatlands, wetlands, or forests. These projects contribute significantly to carbon sequestration, flood management, and biodiversity recovery.

- River and Wetland Restoration: There are opportunities to restore natural watercourses and wetland systems on farmland, improving water quality, reducing flooding risk downstream, and creating habitats for aquatic and wetland species.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain requires developers to ensure that any habitat loss due to construction or development is not only compensated but results in an overall measurable net gain in biodiversity. This is achieved by creating or enhancing habitats either on-site or off-site, with the level of compensation influenced by the strategic significance multiplier. This multiplier increases the value of biodiversity units where habitat creation aligns with local nature recovery priorities, ensuring that offsetting contributes to landscape-scale ecological restoration rather than isolated interventions. By directing habitat enhancement towards priority areas identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Biodiversity Net Gain can deliver greater ecological connectivity, resilience, and long-term biodiversity benefits.

This presents benefits and opportunities for farmers and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to make long-term commitments to nature recovery through:

- **Habitat creation as offsetting:** Farmers can create or enhance habitats on their land to sell biodiversity credits to developers who need to offset their environmental impacts. This could involve creating woodlands, wetlands, or species-rich grasslands.

- **Management of existing habitats:** Farmers who manage their land for wildlife can enter agreements to conserve or enhance existing habitats, such as woodlands, ponds, or wildflower meadows, ensuring long-term biodiversity benefits.

- **Financial incentives:** By participating in Biodiversity Net Gain, farmers can access a new revenue stream that commits them to long-term habitat management or creation. This allows them to diversify their income while supporting wildlife recovery.

- **Alignment with Local Nature Recovery Strategy Aims:** Farmers participating in Biodiversity Net Gain can contribute directly to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy by creating or enhancing habitats that align with the conservation priorities identified in their local area. This could help secure additional funding and recognition for their efforts in contributing to regional and national biodiversity targets.

- **Community and Regional Benefits:** By participating in Local Nature Recovery Strategy-aligned schemes, farmers support not only biodiversity on their own land but also contribute to larger, landscape-level conservation initiatives, fostering stronger community ties and regional environmental improvements.

Additional opportunities across these schemes are well suited to less productive areas of farms and may enable farmers to reduce costs and increase efficiencies across the rest of their holdings:

- Carbon sequestration and climate resilience: In addition to biodiversity benefits, many of the habitat creation and enhancement activities under ELMs, BNG, and LNRS also provide opportunities for carbon sequestration. Practices such as tree planting, restoring peatlands, and improving soil health capture carbon, helping farmers contribute to climate change mitigation.

- Water quality and flood management: Restoring wetlands, creating riparian buffers, and planting hedgerows and trees can improve water quality by reducing nutrient runoff and trapping sediments. These features also slow down water flow, reducing the risk of flooding, which benefits both farmers and downstream communities.

- Pollinator support: Farmers can create pollinator habitats through wildflower meadows, field margins, and hedgerows, which are essential for supporting crops that depend on pollination. These actions also benefit a wide range of other wildlife, from birds to insects.

10.4 Individual Actions

Nature recovery is not solely the result of large-scale projects or sweeping policy changes; it is also driven by the cumulative impact of countless individual actions taken by people, communities, and organisations. Each small action, whether it's planting a tree, reducing pesticide use, creating a pond, or restoring a hedgerow, contributes to the larger goal of enhancing biodiversity and restoring ecosystems. When these actions are multiplied across a landscape, they collectively create significant positive change.

The principle behind this cumulative impact is that small, local efforts can add up to large, landscape-scale benefits. For example, if many farmers in a region adopt more sustainable land management practices, such as reducing chemical inputs or establishing wildlife corridors, the overall health of the strategy area's ecosystems can improve dramatically. Similarly, if residents in urban areas collectively increase green spaces, plant native species, and reduce waste, the urban environment can become much more supportive of biodiversity.

This cumulative effect underscores the importance of engaging and empowering individuals and communities to act. When people understand that their contributions matter, they are more likely to participate in and support nature recovery efforts. Moreover, these individual actions can inspire others, creating a ripple effect that amplifies the impact across broader regions.

Opportunities for individual involvement:

- Community-led planning: Parish Councils and neighbourhood planning groups can play a key role in embedding nature recovery within local plans and influencing land use decisions that benefit nature.

- Giving nature a home: Taking action that supports nature in spaces that individuals have control of. For example, private gardens, community spaces, schools and allotments.

- Citizen science: Encouraging individuals to participate in species monitoring and habitat surveys.

- Sustainable living practices: Promoting actions such as reducing pesticide use, planting native species, and supporting local conservation efforts.

- Volunteering: Opportunities for individuals to contribute time and skills to local nature recovery projects.

53% of respondents enjoy or access nature every day.

10.5 Securing Funding and Resources

While individual actions are crucial, the success of this Local Nature Recovery Strategy also hinges on securing adequate funding and resources. Achieving the ambitious goals of nature recovery often requires significant financial investment, access to specialised knowledge, and the deployment of practical tools and technologies. Without sufficient funding and resources, even the most well-intentioned plans can struggle to achieve their full potential.

Securing funding allows for the implementation of large-scale projects, such as habitat restoration, the creation of nature reserves, or the development of green and blue infrastructure. These projects often require capital for land acquisition, restoration activities, and ongoing management. Additionally, resources are needed for research, monitoring, and public engagement, all of which are essential components of a successful nature recovery strategy.

Funding can support capacity building and training for those involved in nature recovery efforts. This includes providing farmers with the tools and knowledge needed to adopt sustainable practices, training volunteers in habitat management, or supporting local authorities in developing and enforcing conservation policies.

The importance of securing funding also extends to ensuring the long-term sustainability of nature recovery efforts. Many environmental initiatives require ongoing maintenance and management to remain effective. For example, reforested areas may need continued protection from invasive species, and restored wetlands may require regular water quality monitoring. Without long-term funding commitments, these efforts may falter, leading to a loss of hard-won gains.

A further benefit of a formal partnership arrangement is the increased ability to leverage collective skills and resources to access public and private investment for those positioned to deliver action for nature.

10.6 Sharing Knowledge and Creating Capacity

One of the most significant challenges in nature recovery is the fragmentation of efforts across different sectors and organisations. Businesses, conservation groups, local authorities, farmers, and community organisations often work independently, each with valuable insights and resources but limited interaction with others engaged in similar work. This can lead to duplication of efforts, inefficient use of resources, and missed opportunities for synergy.

The ability to monitor, support and review nature recovery would be greatly enhanced with a centralised knowledge and resource sharing platform. This would present a transformative opportunity for enhancing nature recovery efforts at the local and regional levels. As environmental challenges grow more complex and interconnected, the need for coordinated action, informed by the latest knowledge and best practices, becomes increasingly critical. Such a platform would not only streamline access to information and resources but also foster collaboration and innovation across diverse sectors involved in conservation.

A centralised platform would address fragmentation by bringing all relevant stakeholders together in a single, accessible digital space. It would enable organisations and volunteer groups to align their efforts, share data, expertise and knowledge, and coordinate actions more effectively. This kind of coordination is essential for tackling complex environmental issues that span multiple jurisdictions and require a landscape-scale approach.

By pooling resources, stakeholders can access a richer and more diverse set of information than they would be able to gather independently. This includes access to the latest research, case studies, management guides, and technical expertise, all of which can significantly improve the effectiveness of nature recovery initiatives.

Innovation often arises from collaboration, especially when diverse perspectives come together to solve common problems. A centralised knowledge and resource sharing platform would foster such collaboration by connecting stakeholders who might not otherwise interact. This could lead to the development of new partnerships, joint ventures, innovation, and collaborative projects that might otherwise remain localised. For example, a farming cluster in one region might develop a novel method for enhancing biodiversity on agricultural land. Through the platform, this method could be shared and adapted by other farmers across the country, amplifying its impact and contributing to wider environmental benefits.

Access to resources whether financial, technical, or information is often a limiting factor in the success of nature recovery projects. A centralised platform would serve as a hub where stakeholders can find the support they need, whether it's through grants and funding opportunities, expert advice, or tools and templates for project management.

For catchment partners, smaller organisations and community groups, in particular, the ability to tap into a broader network of support can be crucial. The platform would provide access to resources, ensuring that all stakeholders, regardless of size or capacity, could contribute effectively to nature recovery efforts.

A centralised platform would build and focus efforts on a shared vision for nature recovery across all sectors. By bringing together stakeholders with diverse interests but common goals, the platform would facilitate the development of a coherent and unified strategy for environmental stewardship. This shared vision is essential for creating the momentum and public support needed to achieve large-scale, lasting change.

The opportunity to create a centralised knowledge and resource sharing platform for nature recovery would represents a significant step forward in addressing the environmental challenges we face. By improving coordination, leveraging collective expertise, enhancing access to resources, promoting collaboration, and building a shared vision, this platform has the potential to transform how we approach conservation and sustainability. It is an opportunity to move beyond isolated efforts and toward a more integrated, effective, and impactful strategy for restoring and protecting our natural environment.

10.7 Next Steps

To effectively deliver the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the immediate next steps involve setting up robust governance structures, developing a delivery plan, developing detailed work plans, and understanding the availability of funding and resources.

- Establish Governance Structures: A formal governance framework will be created to oversee the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, including the evolution of the Steering Group and Strategic Reference Group, setting up working groups, and securing key roles for stakeholders. This governance structure will ensure accountability and provide clear leadership throughout the implementation phase.

- Develop a Delivery Plan: A structured delivery plan will be created to outline the key steps, timelines, and responsibilities necessary for implementing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This plan will provide a clear framework for action, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and milestones are met. It will also establish mechanisms for monitoring progress, adapting to challenges, and maintaining stakeholder engagement throughout the process. By setting out clear deliverables and performance indicators, the delivery plan will support the effective coordination of efforts across all involved parties.

- Develop Work Plans: Work plans will be developed to instruct the specific actions required to achieve the strategies aims. This will include identifying priority areas for habitat restoration, species recovery efforts, and nature-based solutions. The work plans will also allocate responsibilities among partners and stakeholders, ensuring a coordinated approach across sectors.

- Securing Funding and Resources: A critical next step is to assess potential funding streams and resource availability. This will involve identifying funding opportunities, from local or national funding sources, and in-kind support from stakeholders. We will work to ensure a sustainable financial model that supports the long-term delivery of the strategy.

- Partnership Engagement: We will continue engaging with existing partners and identify new stakeholders to broaden the collaborative effort. This includes strengthening ties with local authorities, farmers, land managers and landowners, community groups, government agencies and environmental organisations, ensuring that all relevant parties are involved in the strategy's delivery.

- Monitoring and Reporting Framework: A framework for monitoring and evaluating progress will be developed to track the effectiveness of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This will include setting key performance indicators (KPIs), timelines, and reporting mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability.

- Training and Capacity Building: To ensure the successful implementation of the strategy, we will assess and address any skills gaps among partners and stakeholders. This might involve providing training or facilitating knowledge exchange to build capacity for biodiversity management and restoration activities.

Appendices

Appendix A
Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Term	Definition
Adaption	In the context of climate change, it is the altering our behaviour, systems, and in some cases ways of life to protect our families, our economies, and the environment in which we live from the impacts of climate change.
Biodiversity Net Gain	BNG is an approach to development. It makes sure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development. In England, BNG is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
Citizen Science	When the public participates voluntarily in the scientific process to address real-world problems.
Ecological Decline	Also called Ecosystem Decline. The process by which an ecosystem suffers a drastic, possibly permanent reduction in the carrying capacity for all organisms. This can often result in mass extinction. This can happen slowly over time but more often occurs over a short timescale.
Ecosystem Services	The direct and indirect contributions ecosystems (known as natural capital) provide for human wellbeing and quality of life e.g. food, water, health benefits.
Green Blue Corridors	The use of waterways, land e.g. disused rail line, as a sustainable design solution to establish an interconnected passageway between natural habitats.

Term	Definition
Flood Zones	Flood zones are based on the likelihood of an area flooding from rivers or the sea with catchments greater than 3km². Flood Zone 1 areas are least likely to flood and Flood Zone 3 areas more likely to flood.
Greenhouse Gases	A group of gases which contribute to global warming and climate change. Includes carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, sulphur hexafluoride, perfluorocarbons, and nitrogen trifluoride.
Green Infrastructure	The network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities. We also include 'blue infrastructure' (landscape elements linked to water) within our use of this phrase.
Hydrology	Is the movement, distribution, and management of water on Earth, including the water cycle, water resources, and drainage basins.
Keystone Species	Any organism - from animals and plants to bacteria and fungi – which is the glue that holds a habitat together.
Lawtonian Principles	Originating from the 2010 Lawton report, it is the principle of creating an ecological network that operates more naturally and effectively, the Lawton report called for some simple measures - more, bigger, better and joined-up sites within the landscape.

Term	Definition
Leaky Dam	Is a dam made of natural woody materials, laid in streams and ditches. They are designed to reduce the downstream flood peak by temporarily storing water by holding it back within the stream's channel or encouraging it to spill onto the banks behind the barrier and slowing the flow.
Local Habitat Map	The Local Habitat Map is a key component of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It maps areas of particular importance for biodiversity, and areas that could become of particular importance.
Mitigation	In the context of climate change, it means avoiding and reducing emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to prevent the planet from warming to more extreme temperatures, e.g. reducing use of fossil fuels, protecting existing woodland.
Natural Capital	The sum of all our ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, soils, minerals air and seas. They provide value by providing us with food, clean air and water, wildlife, energy, wood, recreation and protection from hazards. It is the source of all other types of capital whether it is manufactured, financial human or social.
Natural Capital Features	These are many and varied but include hedgerows, woodlands, semi-natural grasslands, air and water quality.
Natural Flood Management	Natural flood management (NFM) uses natural processes to reduce the risk of flooding. These processes protect, restore, and mimic the natural functions of catchments, floodplains and the coast to slow and store water. NFM measures can include: soil and land management, river and floodplain management.

Term	Definition
Nature Based Solutions	Are approaches that address societal challenges through actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems, benefiting people and nature at the same time e.g. creating a natural floodplain, planting trees to provide shade.
Oolitic Limestone	A type of rock made up of small spheres which were formed when calcium carbonate was deposited on the surface of sand grains rolled by wave action under a shallow sea during the Jurassic period.
Open Mosaic Habitat	Usually located on previously developed land they are complex and diverse habitats that emerge on post-industrial or urban land, such as former quarries, brownfields, or derelict urban areas.
Red List Species	A species that has been assessed as being close to becoming extinct.
Ridge and Furrow	A type of landscape, characterised by parallel ridges and troughs, created by the methodical ploughing of fields with oxen during the medieval period.
Riparian	Relates to the land along the bank of a watercourse such as a river, lake or stream.
Sustainable Drainage Systems	Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) mimic natural drainage processes to reduce the effect on the quality and quantity of run-off from developments and provide amenity and biodiversity benefits.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACB	Area that Could Become of particular importance
AES	Agri-Environment Scheme
APIB	Area of Particular Importance for Biodiversity
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CRoW	Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000
CS	Countryside Stewardship
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
ELMS	Environmental Land Management Schemes
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
INNS	Invasive Non-Native Species
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LNRS	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
LR	Landscape Recovery
LRERC	Leicestershire & Rutland Environmental Records Centre
LRWT	Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust
LWS	Local Wildlife Sites
NBN Atlas	National Biodiversity Network Atlas
NBs	Nature Based Solutions
NCAs	National Character Areas
NERC	Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act

NFC	National Forest Company
NFM	Natural Flood Management
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NIA	Nature Improvement Area
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NO2	Nitrogen Dioxide
PAWS	Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites
PM2.5	Particulate Matter 2.5 (the matter has a size of 2.5 micrometres or smaller)
PM10	Particulate Matter 10 (the matter has a size of 10 micrometres or smaller)
RA	Responsible Authority
RIGs	Regionally Important Geology Sites
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SFI	Sustainable Farming Incentives
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SuDS	Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems
UK CEH	UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
WeBS	Wetland Bird Surveys
°C	Degrees Celsius
mm/day	Millimetres per day
µg m⁻³	The amount of pollutant in one cubic metre of air in micrograms

Appendix B
Methodology and Criteria

1. FPCR Ecological GIS Technical Report

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/what-a-local-nature-recovery-strategy-is

This report summarises the technical details for the creation of the GIS outputs suitable to be used to locate areas of key importance for nature in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland.

The objectives were to:

• Create a habitat map of the project area

• Model habitat connectivity within the project area

• Overlay various data sources suitable for the determination of key areas for nature in a format that can be understood by various stakeholders

2. Species Recovery within Local Nature Recovery Strategies

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/lnrs-resources

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) must describe opportunities, set priorities, and propose potential measures for the recovery and enhancement of species. This document sets out an approach to help responsible authorities (RAs) achieve this goal in a consistent way. The approach involves two broad stages: identifying threatened and other locally significant species relevant to the strategy area and determining which of these species should be prioritised for recovery action. This process is aligned with the LNRS preparation steps described in the LNRS statutory guidance, and it is closely supported by Natural England (NE) and other partners.

3. Indicator Species Selection

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/lnrs-resources

The Indicator Species are intended to offer a means of monitoring progress towards the objectives of the Local Species Recovery Strategy. The selected species should be indicative of good ecological health, particularly in the priority habitats, and offer a representative sample of local species to provide monitorable, broad-based data to assess the changing status of biodiversity in Leicestershire and Rutland.

Appendix C
Species-Specific and Habitat-Specific Information

1. Species Profiles

a. Table of Priority Species and Measures

(The full list of Priority Species including 76 Vascular Plants and 6 Lichens can be accessed in the resource section on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy website.)

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/lnrs-resources

Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
1. Amphibian		Palmate Newt	A small amphibian often found in ponds and slow-moving water bodies. Recognizable by its smooth skin and webbed feet during the breeding season.	Restoration and enhancement of pond networks in underrepresented acid grassland areas, creating fish-free breeding ponds with surrounding scrub and vegetation to prevent drying. Consider translocation efforts to suitable, restored sites in Charnwood Forest. Focus on areas where historical records show Palmate Newt presence but where ponds have deteriorated, e.g. northern Charnwood Forest.
2. Reptile	NT	Adder	The UK's only venomous snake, known for its zigzag pattern along its back. Found in heathlands, grasslands, and woodland edges.	Habitat connectivity improvements by restoring and creating heathland and open mosaic habitats. Use controlled reintroduction from healthy populations to establish Adders in previously occupied sites. Prioritise area specific locations for restoration and reintroduction.

Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
3. Bird	LC	**Osprey**	The Osprey is a large raptor known for its striking plumage and fish-eating habits. It migrates between Europe and Africa, returning to the UK to breed.	Opportunity for national reintroduction / trans-relocation projects stemming from Rutland Osprey Project at Rutland Water. Encourage the establishment and maintenance of artificial nesting platforms near key water bodies to increase suitable breeding opportunities.
4. Bird	CR	**Turtle Dove**	A migratory dove, famous for its soft "purring" call. It breeds in hedgerows and open woodlands and has experienced severe population declines.	Establishment of seed-rich feeding areas and supplementary feeding programs during the breeding season. Partner with landowners to manage hedgerows and restore areas for foraging and nesting. Focus on farmlands in the East Leicestershire and Rutland, Belvoir Vales, Welland Valley and Charnwood Forest for hedgerow restoration and supplementary feeding efforts.
5. Bird	VU	**Nightingale**	Renowned for its powerful and beautiful song, this elusive bird breeds in dense, low vegetation in woodlands and scrub.	Scrub regeneration projects, especially in woodland edges and abandoned farmland. Create dense scrub and thicket habitats specifically managed for nightingales, using grazing or cutting to prevent succession. Focus on the areas near Rutland Water and other woodland fringes where nightingale populations have previously existed.

Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
6. Bird	EN	**Willow Tit**	A small, shy bird of damp woodlands and wetlands, easily confused with the Marsh Tit. It is in serious decline in the UK.	Create decayed wood habitats in wet woodland areas by deliberately felling trees or managing deadwood. Install artificial nesting cavities to increase breeding success. the Soar and Wreake Valleys for re-establishing suitable habitats.
7. Bird	EN	**Swift**	A migratory bird that spends most of its life in the air, catching insects. Swifts breed in cavities, often in buildings, and are known for their fast, scythe-shaped wings.	Swift brick installation programs in urban and semi-urban areas. Swift bricks are a universal nest brick for small bird species and should be installed in new developments including extensions, in accordance with best practice guidance. Promote swift tower installations in parks and near water bodies to provide nesting opportunities. Focus on urban areas like Leicester City and major towns such as Loughborough and Oakham.
8. Bird	VU	**Starling**	Famous for its murmurations, this glossy blackbird-like species is highly social and often found in urban areas, though its population has declined.	Establishment of foraging habitats such as permanent grasslands and wet meadows managed for invertebrates. Encourage the installation of starling nest boxes in urban areas. Engage with farms and urban areas across Leicester and Leicestershire to enhance invertebrate-rich habitats and create nesting opportunities.

Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
9. Bird		**House Sparrow**	A familiar urban bird, found in gardens and farmlands. Its population has dropped significantly in recent decades, making it a priority species.	Urban greening and community garden initiatives that include hedge planting, native shrubs, and wildflower meadows to provide both food and shelter. Promote the installation of sparrow nest boxes in residential areas. Work with housing associations in Leicester City and suburban areas to install nesting boxes and improve urban habitat. Monitor existing populations to find out what makes these populations stable.
10. Bird	VU	**Woodcock**	A wading bird with cryptic plumage, found in woodlands where it probes the soil for invertebrates. It is also known for its nocturnal display flight, called "roding."	Restoration and creation of damp woodland areas with rides, particularly with dense undergrowth for foraging and nesting. Consider trial reintroduction from healthy populations in adjacent counties. Focus on large wooded areas such as the National Forest and areas surrounding Rutland Water.
11. Bird	NT	**Marsh Tit**	A small bird that prefers deciduous woodlands and wetlands. It has a black cap and is closely related to the willow tit.	Maintain deadwood and rotting tree stumps within damp woodland. Create artificial nest sites and enhance woodland structure with low canopy cover. Target woodland around known breeding populations.

Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
12. Bird	EN	**Curlew**	The UK's largest wader, with a distinctive long, curved bill used for probing mudflats and grasslands. Known for its haunting call.	Create and enhance suitable grassland habitats and restore lowland floodplain meadow areas. Predation control and nest protection schemes should be implemented during the breeding season. Prioritise sites like Rutland Water Nature Reserve and the Soar Valley floodplains for nest protection efforts and habitat management.
13. Bird	VU	**Lapwing**	A farmland and wetland bird with a striking black-and-white plumage and an iridescent green back. Known for its aerial displays during the breeding season.	Create wet grassland mosaics and maintain short, open vegetation structure. Encourage rotational grazing in breeding areas and introduce predator control programs during breeding. Focus on agricultural land restoration projects in the Welland Valley and near Rutland Water.
14. Bird	VU	**Tree Pipit**	A small bird of open woodlands and heathlands, often seen performing parachute-like flight displays. Its population is declining due to habitat loss.	Create and manage open, wooded heathland habitats with scattered trees for breeding and foraging. Promote low-level grazing and periodic scrub clearance to maintain suitable habitat. Target heathland restoration in Charnwood Forest.

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Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
15. Crustacean		**White-clawed Crayfish**	A native freshwater crayfish that inhabits clean rivers and streams. It is under threat from habitat degradation and the invasive signal crayfish.	Removal of invasive signal crayfish and reintroduction of white-clawed crayfish to suitable watercourses after invasive species are controlled. Focus on smaller watercourses in rural Rutland and Leicestershire where signal crayfish populations are lower, such as tributaries of the River Soar, and re-naturalised Quarries and Mineral Sites.
16. Insect - Butterfly		**Dingy Skipper**	A small, brownish butterfly that prefers grasslands with patches of bare ground. Its "dingy" appearance provides effective camouflage.	Restoration of chalk and limestone grassland to provide larval food plants, particularly Bird's-foot trefoil. Introduce a grazing regime to create suitable open patches for egg-laying. Focus on limestone quarries and disused railway lines such as those around Ketton Quarry.
17. Insect - Butterfly	VU	**Grizzled Skipper**	A small, fast-flying butterfly, with a checkered black-and-white pattern, often found in sunny grasslands and woodland edges.	Manage grasslands and clear scrub on a rotational basis to promote larval food plants like wild strawberry and creeping cinquefoil. Target railway cuttings and grasslands in Rutland for specific management interventions.
18. Insect - Butterfly	EN	**Black Hairstreak**	A rare and elusive butterfly, confined to blackthorn thickets in ancient woodlands. It is one of the UK's rarest butterflies.	Ensure the continuation of rotational scrub management to maintain blackthorn-rich scrubland. Reintroduce to suitable sites if population surveys indicate local extinction. Focus on blackthorn-rich hedgerows and woodland edges in areas like Charnwood Forest.

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Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
19. Insect - Butterfly	VU	**White-letter Hairstreak**	This butterfly, often overlooked due to its habit of staying high in elm trees, has suffered due to the loss of elm trees to Dutch elm disease.	Elm tree disease resistance programs and planting of disease-resistant elms to support larvae. Promote connectivity between elm populations to support genetic diversity. Focus elm restoration efforts in hedgerows and woodland edges in central Leicestershire.
20. Insect - Butterfly	NT	**Dark Green Fritillary**	A striking orange butterfly with dark spots, typically found in grasslands and woodland clearings, where it feeds on violets.	Restore and manage large, open grassland habitats with plenty of violets, the butterfly's larval food plant. Introduce grazing or cutting regimes to maintain open swards. Identify suitable translocation programmes in Leicestershire from Rutland populations.
21. Insect - Beetle (Coleoptera)		**Glow Worm**	A beetle whose females glow in the dark to attract males. It is most often found in grasslands, hedgerows, and woodland edges.	Restore and maintain species-rich grasslands, avoiding chemical usage and ensuring low-level grazing to support snail populations, the larvae's prey. Implement light pollution control in key glow worm sites. Focus on suitable roadside grass verges, chalk grassland and railway embankments in Rutland and Leicestershire.
22. Bony Fish (Actinopterygii)		**Brown Trout**	Brown trout are a native freshwater fish and important indicators of good water quality. Found in clean fast flowing rivers and streams. It is probable the fast-flowing streams in Charnwood Forest are a site for the pure native breeding population. Wild populations of the species are threatened.	River restoration projects to enhance spawning gravels and increase flow variability, with strict pollution control and habitat improvement for young trout.

Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
23. Bony Fish (Actinopterygii)		**Spined Loach**	A small, bottom-dwelling fish that inhabits slow-flowing rivers and canals. It is easily identified by the small spines beneath its eyes. Located in Rutland Water, River Mease, River Soar- the species is confined to only a select number of sites in Britain therefore the populations with Leicestershire and Rutland are in key locations.	Implement riverbed restoration schemes to reintroduce areas of silt and sand for spawning. Ensure water quality improvements by reducing agricultural runoff.
24. Bony Fish (Actinopterygii)	CR	**European Eel**	A migratory fish that breeds in the Sargasso Sea but spends its adult life in European rivers. It is critically endangered due to overfishing, barriers to migration, and habitat loss.	Remove barriers to migration, such as weirs, by installing eel passes. Improve river connectivity between feeding and spawning grounds.
25. Terrestrial Mammal	VU	**Barbastelle**	A rare and elusive woodland bat species, vulnerable due to loss of main habitat – roost sites in numerous mature trees within a well-structured broadleaved woodland and connecting hedgerows for foraging. This species is sensitive to light pollution and will avoid feeding or commuting near to lit areas.	Increase the coverage of broadleaved woodland and protect and restore old growth woodland. Accelerate maturity of trees through ringbarking and veterenisation to increase natural roosts and install bat boxes specifically designed for Barbastelles within woodlands. Develop and/or enhance the habitat edges to increase the density of moth populations (main food source) with a focus on restoring and increasing wetland and woodland habitats that support a high moth biomass e.g. maintain open rides with scalloped edges in mature woodlands. Retain and enhance hedgerows with mature tree standards to provide roost habitat and foraging corridors between mature woodland sites. Avoid light pollution.

Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
26. Terrestrial Mammal		**Daubenton's Bat**	This Bat is closely associated with water ways and open waters where it feeds on aquatic insects and terrestrial insects alongside riparian habitat edges. The optimal habitat are slow-flowing rivers and canals, and sheltered lakes, reservoirs, and flooded gravel pits.	Avoid light pollution along waterside edges and disturbance of Bat roosts by discouraging access to potential/known roost sites and sensitive management of trees, hedges, and bankside vegetation. Enhance riparian and hedgerow habitat by planting waterside trees, maintain aquatic plants and control fish stocks to encourage freshwater insects. Retain and manage veteran waterside trees and establish trees on both banks of wider water courses. Retain and maintain open water to allow Bats to freely forage over waterbodies.
27. Terrestrial Mammal	NT	**Leisler's Bat**	A fast-flying Bat often found in open woodland and parkland, relying on large, old trees for roosting. They will forage over a range of areas from rivers, lakes, pastures, meadows and hedgerows This bat is locally scarce due to loss of suitable habitat and fragmentation. It will also forage around white light.	Retain and conserve roost sites in buildings and mature trees wherever possible. Install and monitor specified Bat boxes in known locations to mitigate and encourage roost sites in across strategic areas. Avoid felling mature trees, especially parkland trees where roosting opportunities are present.
28. Terrestrial Mammal	EN	**Water Vole**	Once widespread, this semi-aquatic rodent is now in decline due to habitat loss and predation.	Restore and manage riparian habitats with dense vegetation along water margins. Implement predator control measures and reduce pollution to improve water quality.

Taxon and Picture	Status	Common Name	Information	Measures
29. Terrestrial Mammal	VU	**Hedgehog**	A familiar nocturnal mammal found in gardens, hedgerows, and woodlands. Its population has declined due to habitat loss and fragmentation.	Create wildlife-friendly gardens, schools and campuses with hedgehog highways and reduce the use of pesticides. Promote the conservation and connectivity of hedgerows for safe movement.
30. Terrestrial Mammal	VU	**Hazel Dormouse**	A small, arboreal mammal that inhabits dense woodlands and hedgerows. It is a highly endangered species in the UK due to habitat loss.	A priority species for reintroductions. Enhance woodland connectivity through the planting of native hedgerows and the creation of new woodlands. Implement rotational coppicing to maintain dense understorey habitats.
31. Vascular Plant Gene-bank Assemblage		**65 Species**	Rare vascular plants found at 3 or fewer locations across the strategy area.	Vascular plants needing protection and gene-banking (Ex Situ Conservation) Protect existing populations and collect seeds and store them in a seed bank under controlled conditions to preserve genetic diversity for future restoration efforts.
32. Vascular Plant In-situ Conservation Assemblage		**12 Species**	Rare vascular plants found at 3 or fewer locations across the strategy area.	Vascular plants needing In Situ Conservation: Protect and manage the natural habitats where the plants occur, ensuring that the ecological conditions remain suitable for their survival
33. Lichen In-situ Conservation Assemblage		**6 Species**	Rare Lichens found at 3 or fewer locations across the strategy area.	Lichen needing In Situ Conservation: Protect and manage the natural habitats where the plants occur, ensuring that the ecological conditions remain suitable for their survival

b. Priority Species Maps

https://haveyoursay.leicestershire.gov.uk/local-nature-recovery-strategy-local-habitat-map

These maps can be access on the Local habitat Map Website. They show where priority species have been recorded in recent decades and we have confidence these locations could be suitable for measures that protect and enhance their populations. These records are displayed as either 2km squares, landscape areas such as the Soar Valley, or boundary lines. Each of these priority species has a bespoke measure designed to protect and enhance their populations. These measures can be viewed in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Appendix C 1a.

c. Table of 100 Indicator Species and their Habitats

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/lnrs-resource

This table lists 100 indicator species identified for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, along with their associated habitats. This table provides a reference for assessing habitat suitability and biodiversity index across varied landscapes, supporting conservation and habitat management planning. The full table can be accessed in the resource section on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy Website.

2. Habitat Profiles

a. Table of Habitats of Principle Importance in England and the estimate total extent they cover within the strategy area

Habitat of Principle Importance in England		Estimated Total Extent
Arable and Horticultural	**Arable field margins**	No data on extent of overall resource
Boundary and Linear Features	**Hedgerows**	17,000 Km
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland	**Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (all)**	12,300 ha
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland	**Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (Ancient Woodland)**	2679
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland	**Wet woodland**	c. 300 ha
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland	**Wood-pasture and parkland**	4,500 ha

Habitat of Principle Importance in England		Estimated Total Extent
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland	**Traditional orchards**	36 ha
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland	**Mature Trees (all)**	20,000 trees
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland	**Ancient Trees**	1,800 trees
Calcareous Grassland	**Lowland calcareous grassland**	< 200 ha
Neutral Grassland	**Lowland meadows - Neutral**	2,550 ha
Acid Grassland	**Lowland dry acid grassland**	<100 ha
Dwarf Shrub Heath	**Lowland heathland**	<500 ha
Improved Grassland	**Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh**	c. 200 ha
Fen, Marsh and Swamp	**Purple moor-grass and rush pastures**	<20 ha
Fen, Marsh and Swamp	**Lowland fens**	<100 ha
Fen, Marsh and Swamp	**Reedbeds**	c. 30 ha
Rivers and Streams	**Rivers**	TBC
Standing Open Waters	**Eutrophic standing waters (canals, Reservoirs)**	TBC
Standing Open Waters	**Ponds**	c. 13,000

Habitat of Principle Importance in England		Estimated Total Extent
Standing Open Waters	**Ponds (Sphagnum)**	<50 ponds
Inland Rock	**Inland rock outcrop and scree habitats**	TBC
Inland Rock	**Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land**	TBC

Other important habitats

Urban	**Built environment and Gardens**	TBC
Urban	**Railways**	c. 205 km
Urban	**Railways (historic)**	c. 195 km
Roadside verges	**Roadside verges of local wildlife site standard**	104 km
Springs and flushes	**Springs and flushes**	c.500

b. Habitat Description and Distribution Maps

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/lnrs-resources

Detailed habitat description and local distribution maps can be accessed in the resource section of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy website and in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan 2016 - 2026.

Appendix D
Supporting Maps, Figures, and Data Tables

1. Tables

a. Significant Rivers and Waterbodies

Table D1.a: Examples of Significant Waterbodies of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

Name	Location	Importance
Rivers		
River Soar	The River Soar flows northward through central Leicestershire, passing through major urban areas such as Leicester City and the town of Loughborough before joining the River Trent near Ratcliffe on Soar.	The River Soar is the most prominent river in Leicestershire, flowing through the heart of the county. It is central to the region's hydrology, draining a large portion of Leicestershire and ultimately joining the River Trent. The Soar is vital for flood management, particularly in urban areas like Leicester, where it helps mitigate the risk of flooding. Several stretches of the River Soar are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), particularly where it supports rich aquatic habitats and species, including wetland areas and floodplain meadows.
River Mease	The River Mease is located in the northwestern part of Leicestershire, flowing eastward through the rural areas near Measham and joining the River Trent near Croxall.	The River Mease is a highly significant watercourse due to its ecological importance, recognised by its designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It supports rare and protected species, including the spined loach and bullhead fish. The high-quality water and associated habitats of the Mease are crucial for the conservation of these species. Additionally, the Mease plays an important role in local agriculture, providing water resources and contributing to the agricultural landscape in northwestern Leicestershire.

Name	Location	Importance
Rivers		
River Wreake	The River Wreake flows north-eastward from the outskirts of Leicester City, passing through rural areas near Syston and Melton Mowbray, before joining the River Soar.	The River Wreake, meandering through agricultural landscapes in central Leicestershire, is an important tributary of the River Soar It contributes to local floodplains and wetlands, which are vital for maintaining regional biodiversity. The river supports various habitats, including those for fish species like Brown Trout and aquatic plants. It also plays a key role in local water management, particularly in supporting agricultural activities and managing flood risks in its catchment area.
River Trent	The River Trent forms the northern boundary of Leicestershire, although it does not flow extensively through the county itself. It passes close to the towns of Kegworth and Ratcliffe on Soar, where Leicestershire meets Nottinghamshire.	The River Trent is one of the major rivers in England, playing a crucial role in draining a large portion of the Midlands. Its significance to Leicestershire lies in its role as a receiving body for several of Leicestershire's rivers, including the Soar and Mease. The Trent is vital for regional water management, flood control, and it supports a diverse range of habitats along its course, contributing to both local and regional biodiversity.
River Welland	The River Welland flows through the eastern part of Leicestershire and Rutland. It originates near Sibbertoft in Northamptonshire and flows northeast through Market Harborough in Leicestershire and Stamford in Lincolnshire before continuing eastward towards the Wash.	The River Welland is crucial for supporting the wetland habitats along its floodplain, several areas are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Seaton Meadows Nature Reserve. The river provides important ecological connectivity, supporting species such as otters and kingfishers, and plays a key role in regional water management and flood control.
River Eye	The River Eye is a tributary of the River Wreake, flowing through the eastern part of Leicestershire. It originates near the village of Owston and passes through Melton Mowbray before joining the Wreake near Kirby Bellars.	The River Eye is significant for its contribution to the agricultural landscape of Leicestershire, supporting wetland habitats and providing water for irrigation. It also plays a role in local flood management and supports a variety of species, including fish, mammals and birds.

Name	Location	Importance
Rivers		
River Sence (and Hinckley Sence)	The River Sence rises from the village of Billesdon, just east of Leicester City, before flowing westwards until it joins the River Soar to the west of Blaby.	The River Sence is crucial for managing local flood risks, particularly in its lower reaches where it contributes to the floodplain systems of the River Soar. It supports a range of wetland and riparian habitats that are important for biodiversity, including species such as otters, water voles, and various bird species. The Sence also plays a significant role in agricultural drainage and water management in the rural areas through which it flows.
River Tame	The River Tame flows through the northeastern part of Leicestershire and is a major tributary of the River Trent. The Tame originates in the West Midlands, passing through urban areas like Tamworth before it meets the Trent near Alrewas.	The River Tame is one of the key rivers in the Tame and Anker catchment area. It is crucial for flood management, especially in the more urbanised parts of its catchment. It has undergone significant modifications for flood defences and water quality improvements. The river's catchment also supports diverse habitats, particularly in its more rural stretches where wetlands and floodplain meadows are prevalent.
River Anker	The River Anker flows through the western part of Leicestershire, primarily along the boundary with Warwickshire. It originates near the village of Wolvey and flows northeastwards through Nuneaton, eventually joining the River Tame near Tamworth.	The Anker supports a mix of urban and rural environments, with its upper catchment dominated by agricultural land. It plays a key role in local water management and supports important habitats, including those for species like otters and kingfishers. Parts of its floodplain are significant for biodiversity, particularly in terms of wetland conservation.
River Gwash	The River Gwash flows through Rutland, originating near the village of Knossington and passing through the towns of Empingham and Ryhall before feeding into Rutland Water and eventually flowing into the River Welland near Stamford.	The Gwash is particularly important for feeding into Rutland Water, which is a critical water reservoir and a site of international importance for bird conservation. The river supports various aquatic species and helps maintain the water balance of Rutland Water, contributing to the reservoir's ecological health.

Name	Location	Importance
Rivers		
River Chater	The River Chater also flows through Rutland, originating near Whissendine and flowing eastward through villages such as Ketton before joining the River Welland near Tinwell.	The River Chater is important for maintaining local biodiversity in Rutland, providing habitats for aquatic species and contributing to the ecological significance of the Welland catchment. It also plays a role in sustaining the water levels in the surrounding agricultural and rural landscapes.
River Swift	The River Swift is a tributary of the River Avon. It flows through the southern part of Leicestershire, near the town of Lutterworth, before joining the Avon near the village of Rugby in Warwickshire.	The Swift's catchment is primarily rural, with agricultural land dominating the landscape. While not as prominent as the Soar or Welland, it contributes to the local hydrology and supports small-scale wetland habitats.
River Avon	The River Avon flows through southern Leicestershire, near the town of Lutterworth, and eventually joining the River Severn in Warwickshire.	The Leicestershire Avon is significant for its role in regional water management and biodiversity. It drains a predominantly rural catchment and provides essential water resources for agriculture. The river supports a variety of wetland and riparian habitats that are important for species such as otters, water voles, and a range of fish. Additionally, the Avon is part of a broader river system that ultimately flows into the River Severn, playing a role in the hydrological connectivity of the region. The river's natural beauty also makes it a valuable resource for local recreation and tourism.
River Devon	The River Devon flows through north-east Leicestershire, originating near the village of Eastwell. It meanders through rural landscapes, including Belvoir and Bottesford, before crossing into Nottinghamshire and eventually joining the River Trent.	The River Devon is ecologically significant for its contribution to riparian and wetland habitats, supporting species such as kingfishers, otters, and aquatic invertebrates. It plays a key role in local water management, sustaining floodplain meadows and agricultural irrigation. Additionally, the river is important for water quality and hydrological connectivity within the Trent catchment, influencing biodiversity and ecosystem health. The surrounding landscape, including Belvoir Castle's estate and associated parklands, adds heritage and recreational value, making it an asset for both wildlife conservation and public enjoyment.

Name	Location	Importance
Lakes and Reservoirs		
Rutland Water	Situated in the heart of Rutland, near the towns of Oakham and Uppingham, Rutland Water is one of the largest artificial lakes in Europe, centrally located within the county.	Rutland Water is essential for regional water supply and flood management. It is also a key site for bird conservation, particularly for Osprey reintroduction and as a major stopover for migratory birds. The reservoir supports a wide range of recreational activities, including sailing, fishing, and birdwatching, making it a significant ecological and social resource. Specific designations within Rutland Water include: **Ramsar Site:**[7] recognised as a wetland of international significance, particularly for its importance as a habitat for waterfowl. **Special Protection Area (SPA):** Designated due to its critical role in supporting significant populations of overwintering wildfowl, including species like the Tufter Duck and Pochard. **SSSI:** Noted for its rich biodiversity, especially its bird populations, aquatic habitats, and surrounding woodlands.
Eyebrook Reservoir	Straddling the border between Leicestershire and Rutland, Eyebrook Reservoir is located near the villages of Caldecott, Stoke Dry and close to the town of Uppingham.	Eyebrook Reservoir plays a crucial role in water storage for surrounding agricultural areas and is an important site for birdlife. Its tranquil environment supports various recreational activities including birdwatching, and its diverse habitats contribute to the conservation of both local and migratory bird species. It is a SSSI, recognised for its importance to bird populations, particularly for wintering waterfowl and waders like Teal, Wigeon, and Lapwing.
Swithland Reservoir	Located in Charnwood Forest in northwestern Leicestershire, near the village of Swithland and the town of Loughborough.	Swithland Reservoir is vital for local water supply and is part of a larger network of protected areas within Charnwood Forest, which is known for its geological and ecological significance. The reservoir and its surrounding woodlands are home to rare species and provide important recreational opportunities for the local community. SSSI designated for its significant bird populations, including wintering and breeding birds, as well as its diverse aquatic and woodland habitats

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[7] A Ramsar site is a wetland that has been designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention

Name	Location	Importance
Lakes and Reservoirs		
Cropston Reservoir	Situated in Charnwood Forest, near the villages of Cropston and Newtown Linford, adjacent to Swithland Wood.	Cropston Reservoir, along with Swithland Reservoir, contributes to the water supply for the surrounding areas and supports a variety of wildlife habitats. The area is popular for walking, birdwatching, and other outdoor activities, contributing to both ecological conservation and public recreation.
Thornton Reservoir	Located near the village of Thornton in western Leicestershire, close to the town of Coalville.	Thornton Reservoir provides an important habitat for local wildlife, including species of birds, mammals, and aquatic life. The reservoir is also a key site for recreational activities such as fishing and walking, serving as a valuable green space for the local community. It has Local Nature Reserve (LNR) designation for its local importance to biodiversity, particularly for aquatic species and surrounding woodlands.
Blackbrook Reservoir	Situated in the Charnwood Forest area, near the village of Shepshed, Leicestershire.	Blackbrook Reservoir plays a crucial role in the local water supply and supports a variety of habitats that are important for biodiversity. The area is also a popular spot for birdwatching and walking, contributing to both ecological preservation and public enjoyment. It has SSSI recognition for its importance to wildlife, particularly bird species, and its surrounding woodlands.
Canals		
Grand Union Canal (Leicester Line)	This section of the Grand Union Canal runs through the eastern part of Leicestershire, passing through areas such as Market Harborough and Foxton, known for its historic locks.	The Leicester Line of the Grand Union Canal is significant both for its historical importance as a key transportation route and for its ecological value. The canal and its surrounding habitats support a variety of wildlife, including birds, invertebrates, fish, and aquatic plants. The Foxton Locks area is a popular tourist destination, highlighting the canal's role in both cultural heritage and recreation. It includes sections designated as SSSI, particularly around the Foxton Locks, emphasising historical and ecological importance.

Name	Location	Importance
Canals		
Ashby Canal	Runs through western Leicestershire, from Ashby-de-la-Zouch to Moira, moving through Market Bosworth and ending near Bedworth in Warwickshire connecting to the Coventry Canal.	The Ashby Canal is approximately 35 kilometres long and is important for leisure activities and biodiversity, serving as a corridor for various species and offering recreational opportunities like boating and fishing. While not formally designated as a nature reserve, the canal is recognised for its ecological value and is an important feature in the western part of the county.
Oakham Canal	The Oakham Canal was historically located in Rutland, connecting the market town of Oakham to the Melton Mowbray Navigation. Although no longer fully navigable, remnants of the canal still influence the local landscape.	Although the Oakham Canal is no longer in use for navigation, its traces are important for local history and landscape structure. The former canal route contributes to the region's heritage and provides green spaces that support local biodiversity, including various aquatic plants and animals.
Leicester Navigation	The Leicester Navigation is part of the Grand Union Canal, running through Leicester City and connecting to the River Soar.	This section of the Grand Union Canal is particularly important for urban biodiversity, providing a green corridor through Leicester that supports both wildlife and recreational activities.
Melton Mowbray Navigation	This historical canal runs through the town of Melton Mowbray, connecting to the River Wreake.	Although no longer in active use, remnants of the Melton Mowbray Navigation still influence local hydrology and contribute to the cultural heritage of the region. Its historical structures and associated water bodies are important for local wildlife.

b. Examples of Important Priority Woodland and Grassland

Table D1.b: Examples of Important Woodlands and Grasslands of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

Name	Location	Priority Habitat Type	Importance
Charnwood Forest	Northwestern Leicestershire	Ancient woodland, grasslands, and heathland	Charnwood Forest is one of the oldest landscapes in England, characterised by ancient woodlands, heathlands, and rocky outcrops. The area supports rare plant species, ancient trees, and diverse wildlife, including populations of rare invertebrates and birds such as **Tree Pipit** and **Woodcocks**. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Forest.
Rutland Water Nature Reserve	Rutland, near the town of Oakham	Grassland, wetland, and woodland	This reserve is internationally recognised for its importance as a wetland habitat, especially for bird species. The grasslands and surrounding woodlands support a rich diversity of flora and fauna. Rutland Water is especially noted for being a key stopover for migrating birds and has a significant population of breeding **Ospreys**. **Designations:** SSSI, Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site.
The National Forest	Spanning parts of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, and Staffordshire	Woodland, grassland, and reclaimed habitats	The National Forest is a large-scale, multi-use forest project that aims to transform a landscape heavily affected by mining into a mosaic of habitats, including new woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands. It supports a diverse range of wildlife, and provides important recreational, educational, and climate mitigation benefits. It is also key for connecting fragmented woodlands and increasing biodiversity. **Designations:** Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), National Forest.

Name	Location	Priority Habitat Type	Importance
Aylestone Meadows	Situated along the River Soar, just southwest of Leicester City centre	Floodplain grassland, wetland, and woodland	Aylestone Meadows is an important green space within an urban setting, offering a range of habitats, including floodplain meadows, wetland areas, and patches of woodland. It supports a variety of wildlife, including birds, invertebrates, and plant species adapted to wet conditions. The meadows and wetlands are particularly valuable for species such as **Reed buntings**, **Water Voles**, and various amphibians such as **Smooth Newt**. The site plays a crucial role in flood management, acting as a natural buffer that absorbs excess water during periods of heavy rain. **Designations:** Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Local Wildlife Site (LWS), Part of River Soar Green Corridor.
Bardon Hill	Near Coalville, Leicestershire	Woodland and grassland	Bardon Hill is the highest point in Leicestershire and features both woodland and grassland habitats. The hill supports a variety of rare plants and insects, and the quarrying activity in the area has revealed important geological formations. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
Leighfield Forest	East of Oakham, Rutland	Ancient woodland	Leighfield Forest is a large area of ancient woodland that has remained relatively unchanged for centuries. It is significant for its rich ground flora, including **Bluebells** and **Wild Garlic**, and supports a variety of woodland birds and mammals, including **Badgers** and **Bats**. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Name	Location	Priority Habitat Type	Importance
Swithland Wood	Near Loughborough, Leicestershire	Ancient woodland	Swithland Wood is a remnant of the ancient Charnwood Forest and is known for its diverse range of tree species, including **Oak**, **Birch**, and **Ash**. The woodland supports a rich variety of wildlife, including bats, birds, and invertebrates. The site also contains important archaeological features, such as medieval earthworks. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve.
Bradgate Park	Near Leicester, Leicestershire	Ancient Woodland, heathland, grassland	Bradgate Park is a historic parkland with a mix of grassland, heathland, and ancient woodland. It is particularly noted for its veteran trees, which provide habitats for various fungi, insects, and birds. The park is also home to herds of red and fallow deer and is an important site for the study of ancient landscapes and ecology. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve.
Burley and Egleton Meadows	Near Oakham, Rutland	Neutral grassland	These meadows are some of the best remaining examples of neutral grassland in the region. They are rich in wildflowers, including several species of orchid, and support a wide variety of insects, including butterflies and bees. The meadows are traditionally managed by hay cutting and grazing, maintaining their biodiversity. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
Launde Big Wood	East of Leicester, Leicestershire	Ancient woodland	Launde Big Wood is one of the largest ancient woodlands in Leicestershire, with a rich ground flora and a diverse range of tree species. It is particularly important for woodland birds, such as Greater Spotted Woodpeckers and Tawny Owls, and is a haven for invertebrates. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Name	Location	Priority Habitat Type	Importance
Launde Park Wood	East of Leicester, Leicestershire	Ancient woodland	Close to Launde Big Wood, Launde Park Wood is another important ancient woodland with a diverse flora and fauna, including several rare plant species and a variety of woodland birds and mammals. It is managed traditionally, which has helped preserve its rich biodiversity. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
Ketton Quarry	Near Stamford, Rutland	Limestone grassland and scrub	Ketton Quarry is a significant site for limestone grassland, supporting a wide range of plant species, including several rare orchids. The site is also important for its geological features and is a key area for the study of quarry restoration and management for biodiversity. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
Cribbs Meadow	Near Wymondham, Leicestershire	Unimproved neutral grassland	Cribbs Meadow is an excellent example of species-rich unimproved neutral grassland. The site is notable for its array of wildflowers, including **Early Purple Orchids** and **Cowslips**, and supports a variety of invertebrates, particularly butterflies and grasshoppers. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
Prior's Coppice	Near Uppingham, Rutland	Ancient woodland	Prior's Coppice is one of the best-preserved ancient woodlands in Rutland, known for its diverse ground flora and old coppice management regime. The wood supports a rich community of woodland birds, including woodpeckers and Nuthatches, and is home to various protected bat species. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Name	Location	Priority Habitat Type	Importance
Bloody Oaks Quarry	Near Empingham, Rutland	Limestone grassland	This small but botanically rich limestone grassland is significant for its variety of calcareous plants, including several species of orchids. The site also provides habitat for butterflies and other invertebrates and is a good example of how old quarries can become important wildlife habitats. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
Holwell Reserves	Near Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire	Grassland and scrub	The Holwell Reserves comprise several small sites of calcareous grassland and scrub, important for their plant communities which include orchids and other wildflowers. The area is also notable for its invertebrate fauna, particularly butterflies and moths.
Lyndon Nature Reserve	Rutland, along the southern shore of Rutland Water	Grassland, scrub, and woodland	Lyndon Nature Reserve is part of the broader Rutland Water ecosystem. It includes a mix of grassland, scrub, and woodland habitats that support a variety of bird species, particularly those associated with water bodies. The reserve is also important for butterflies and other invertebrates. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), (part of the larger Rutland Water designation).
Goss Meadows	Leicester, just northwest of Leicester City centre	Grassland	Goss Meadows is a locally important site for grassland biodiversity, particularly wildflowers and invertebrates. This area of linear grassland is managed to encourage the growth of native plant species and provide habitat for local wildlife, making it an important green space and valuable green corridor within the urban landscape. **Designations:** Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Local Wildlife Site (LWS).

Name	Location	Priority Habitat Type	Importance
Great Merrible Wood	Near Market Harborough, Leicestershire	Ancient woodland	Great Merrible Wood is a fine example of ancient woodland with a diverse flora, including many woodland indicator species. The wood is also significant for its birdlife, including various warblers and woodpeckers, as well as for its populations of bats. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
Clipsham Old Quarry and Pickworth Great Wood	Near Clipsham, Rutland	Woodland and limestone grassland	This area combines ancient woodland with limestone grassland, creating a unique habitat mosaic. The site is important for its diverse plant communities, including rare orchids, and supports a variety of wildlife, including butterflies, bats, and woodland birds. **Designations:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
Knighton Spinney	Leicester, within Knighton Park south of Leicester City centre.	Woodland	This small but significant area of woodland set within the wider urban park includes several mature trees, including numerous impressive oak specimens and well-developed woody understory. Ground flora includes some ancient woodland indicator species. Standing deadwood and mature trees provide roosting and nesting sites for birds and bats. **Designation:** Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Local Wildlife Site (LWS).

2. Maps

a. Air Quality NOx: This map shows nitrogen oxide (NOx) concentrations across the area, highlighting areas affected by vehicle emissions and industrial activities impacting air quality.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
Air Quality - NOx

Air quality - NOx
6 - 10
10 - 15
15 - 20
20 - 25
25 - 30
30 - 35
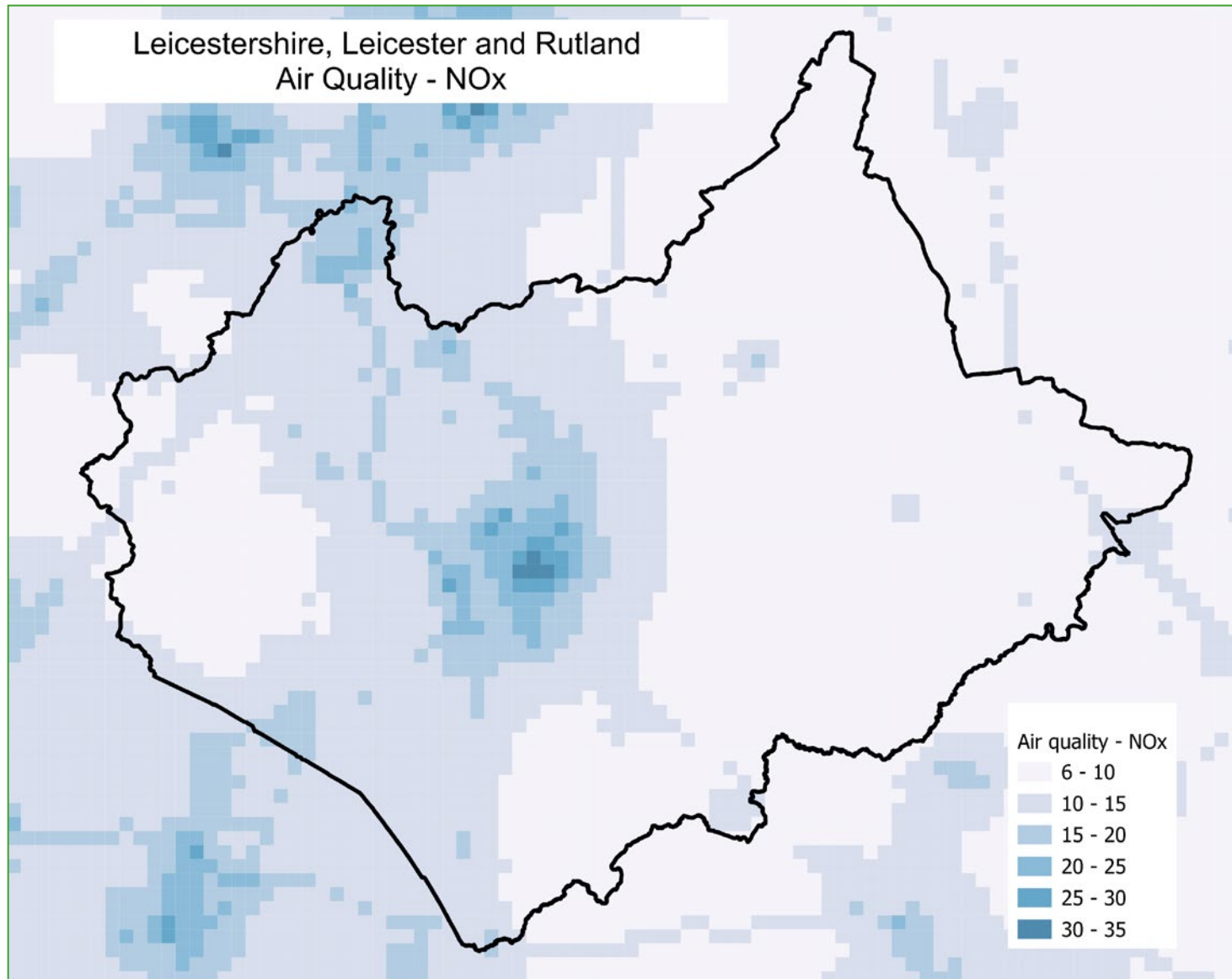
b. Air Quality PM10: This map displays the distribution of PM10 particulate matter,
indicating areas with elevated coarse particles due to sources like construction and traffic.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
Air Quality - PM10

Air quality - PM10

- 10 - 12
- 12 - 14
- 14 - 16
- 16 - 18
- 18 - 19
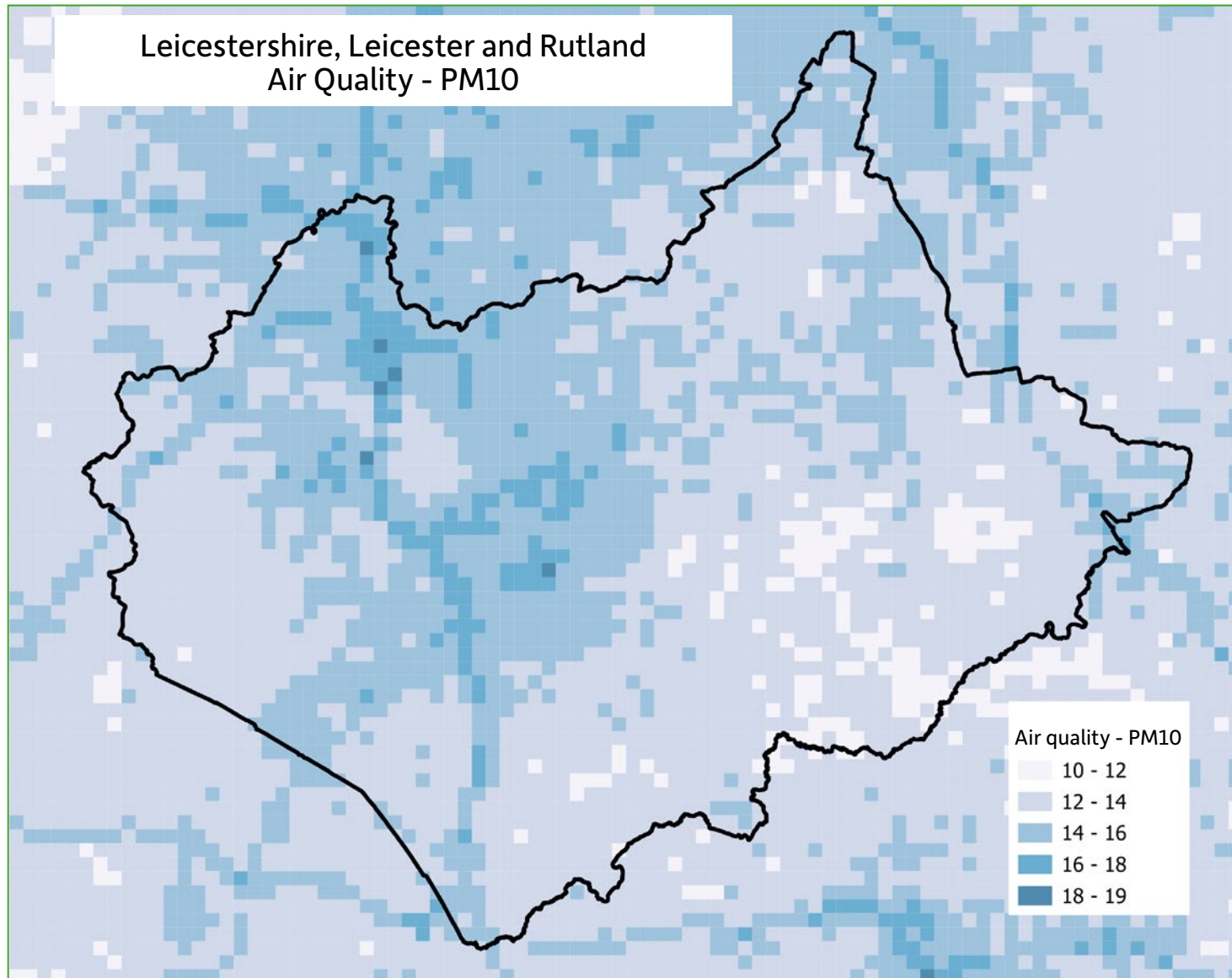
c. Air Quality PM2.5: This map presents PM2.5 levels, reflecting fine particulate pollution from sources such as combustion, affecting respiratory health.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
Air Quality - PM2.5

Air quality - PM2.5
- 5 - 6
- 6 - 7
- 7 - 8
- 8 - 9
- 9 - 10
- 10 - 11
- 11 - 12
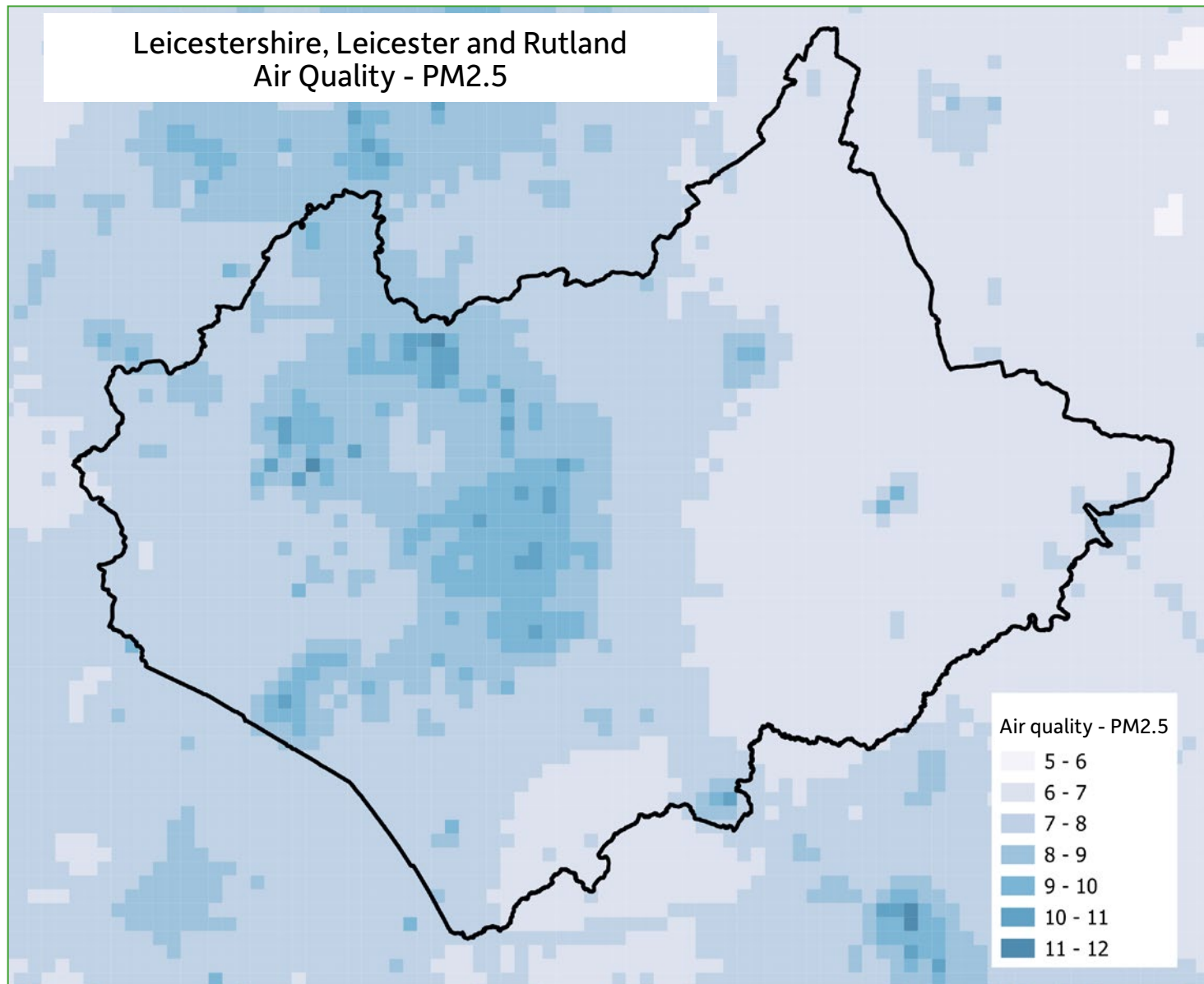
d. Ecological Status of Catchment Areas: This map illustrates the ecological health of water catchments, based on assessments of water quality and biodiversity.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
Ecological Status of Operational Catchments

Ecological status of operational catchments
- Good
- Moderate
- Poor
- Bad
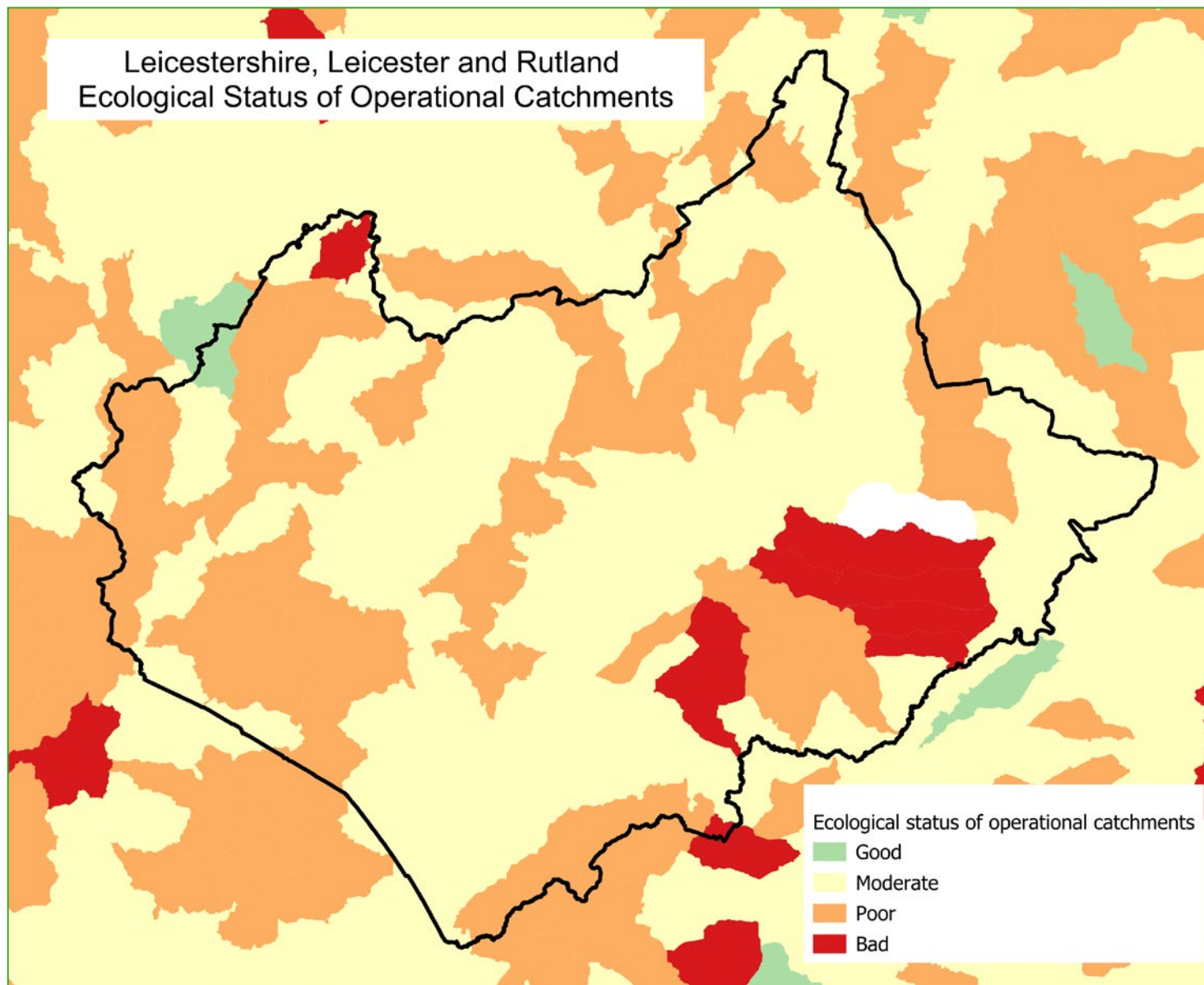
Source: Environment Agency.

e. Natural Flood Management: This map identifies potential areas for natural flood management, including reconnecting rivers and streams to their floodplains, floodplain woodland and riparian woodland enhancement and creation.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
Natural Flood Management
Working With Natural Processes (WWNP)

Working with Natural Processes (WWNP)
- WWNP_Floodplain_Reconnection_Potential
- WWNP_Floodplain_Woodland_Potential
- WWNP_Riparian_Woodland_Potential
- WWNP_Wider_Catchment_Woodland_Potential
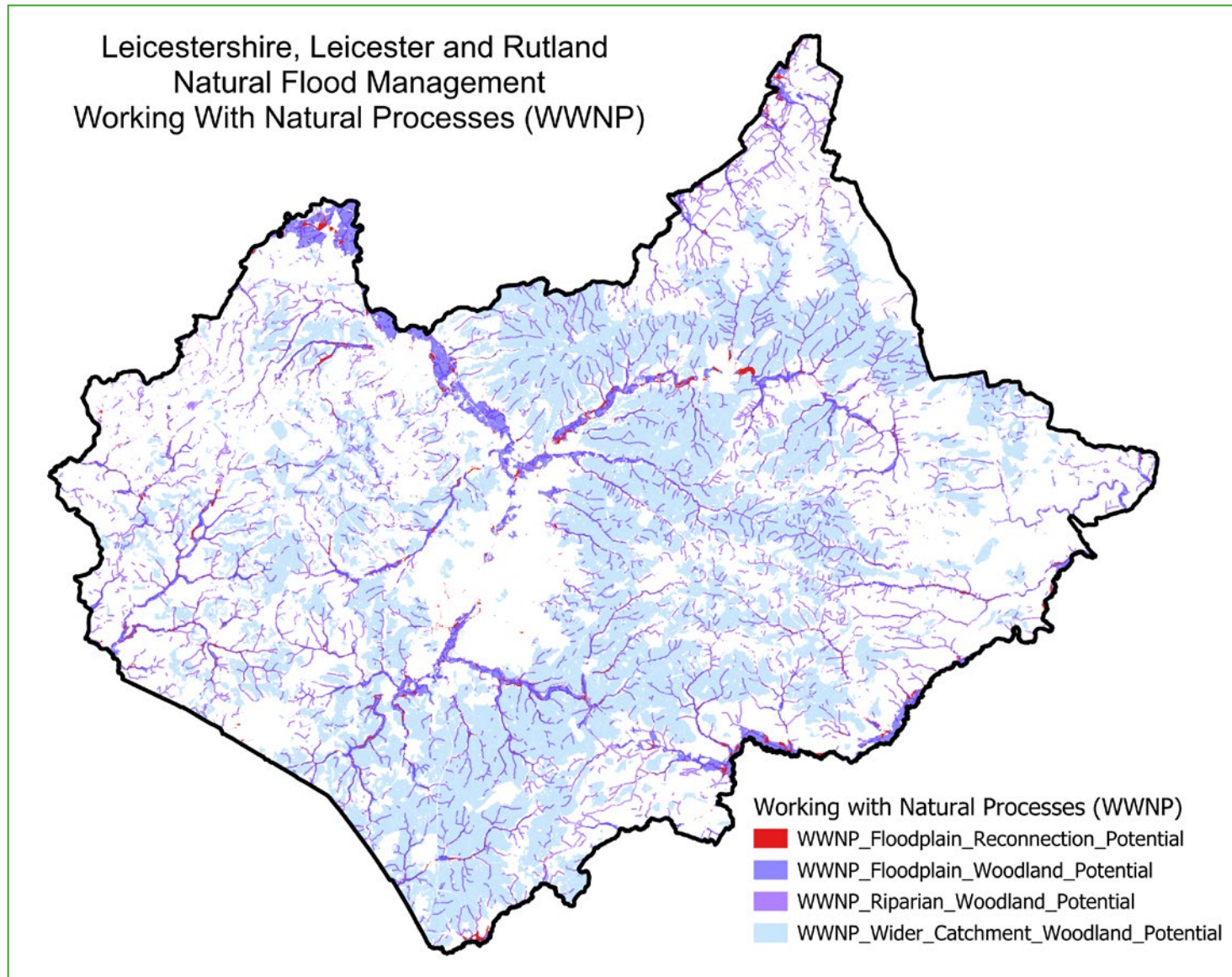
Source: Environment Agency.

f. Woodland and Tree Canopy Cover: This map shows the extent of woodland and tree canopy cover, emphasising areas contributing to biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and ecosystem resilience.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
Woodland and Tree Canopy Cover

Woodland and Trees

Broadleaved   Mixed mainly broadleaved
Conifer   Mixed mainly conifer
Felled   Shrub
Low density   Young trees
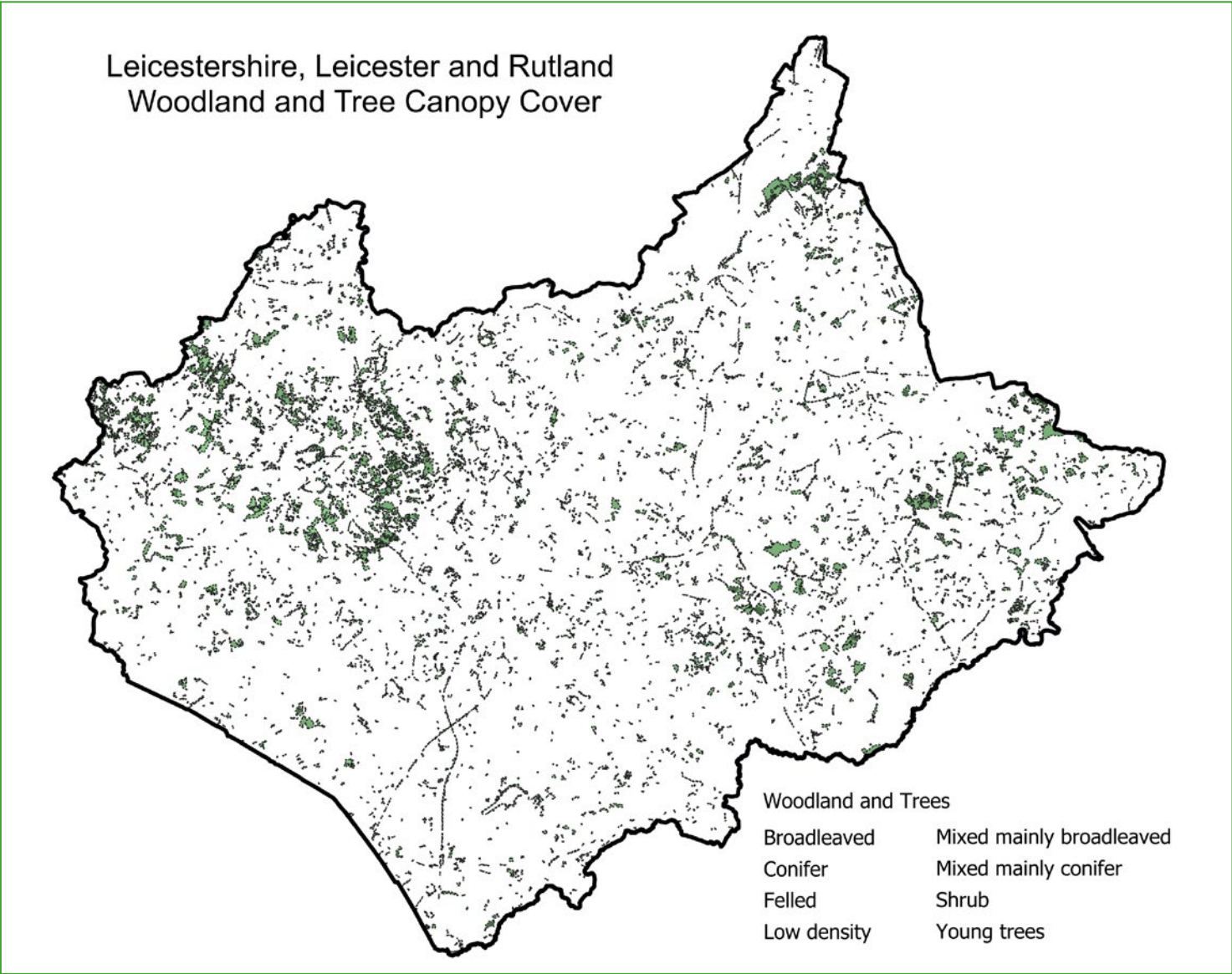
Source: National Forest Inventory 2021.

g. Accessible Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) Map: This map shows the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) developed by Natural England. This is a framework for evaluating and improving access to natural spaces within communities.

The ANGSt guidelines suggest that people should have:

- A green space of at least 2 hectares within 300 meters (about a 5-minute walk) from their home.

- At least one accessible 20-hectare site within 2 kilometres.

- A larger natural area (100 hectares) within 5 kilometres.

- One very large site of at least 500 hectares within 10 kilometres.

These standards aim to ensure that everyone has adequate access to green spaces for recreation, mental well-being, and connection to nature, which is increasingly recognised as essential for health and quality of life.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
Accessible Greenspace Standards (ANGSt)

Accessible Greenspace Standards
- Poor
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- Very Good
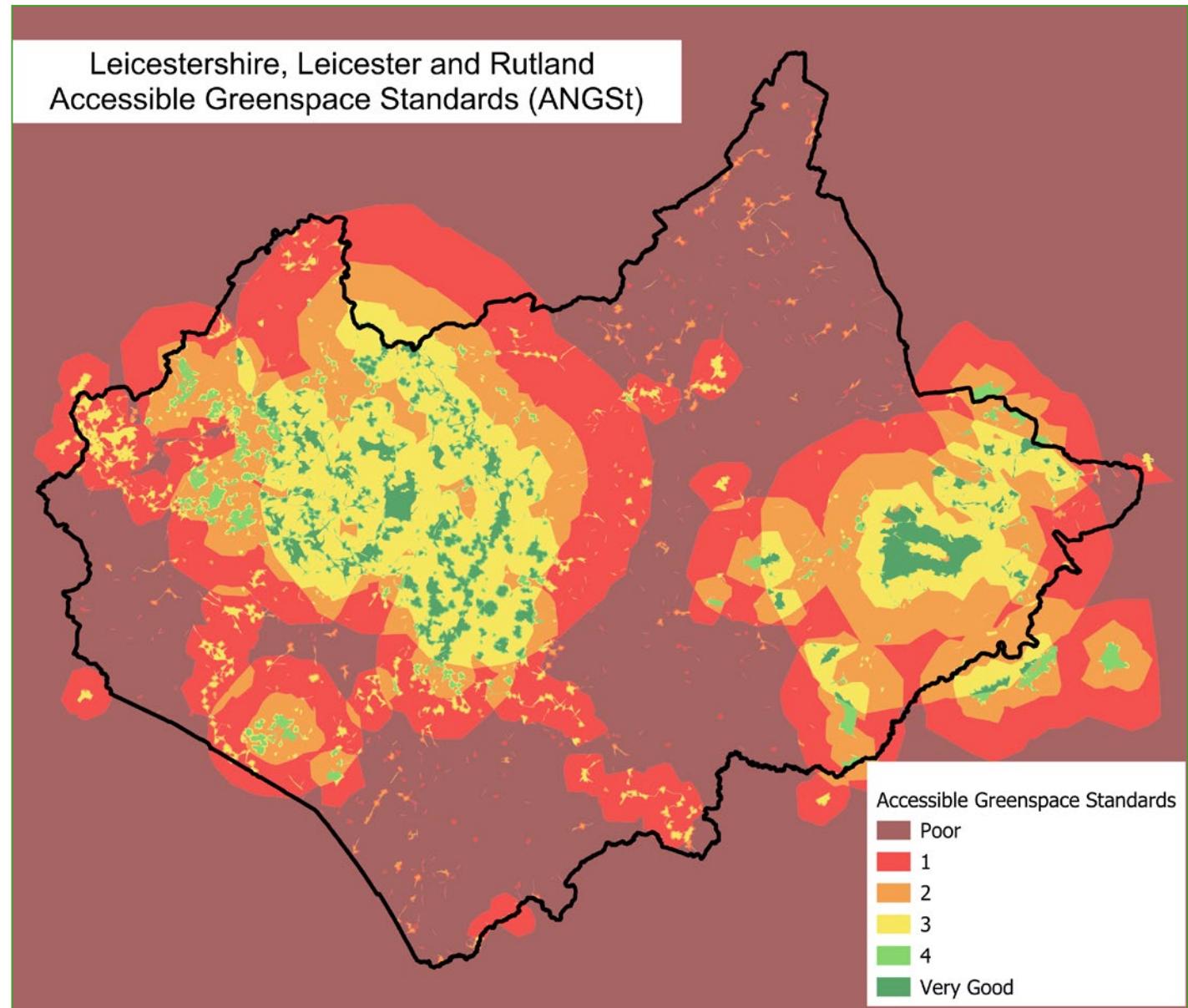
h. Hedgerows: This map shows the distribution and density of hedgerows in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, including how many kilometres of hedgerow are in each kilometre square.

Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Hedgerows Per Kilometre Square

Hedgerow KM2
- 0 - 3km
- 3km - 4.5km
- 4.5km - 5.5km
- 5.5km - 6.5km
- 6.5km - 10km

0   7.5   15 km
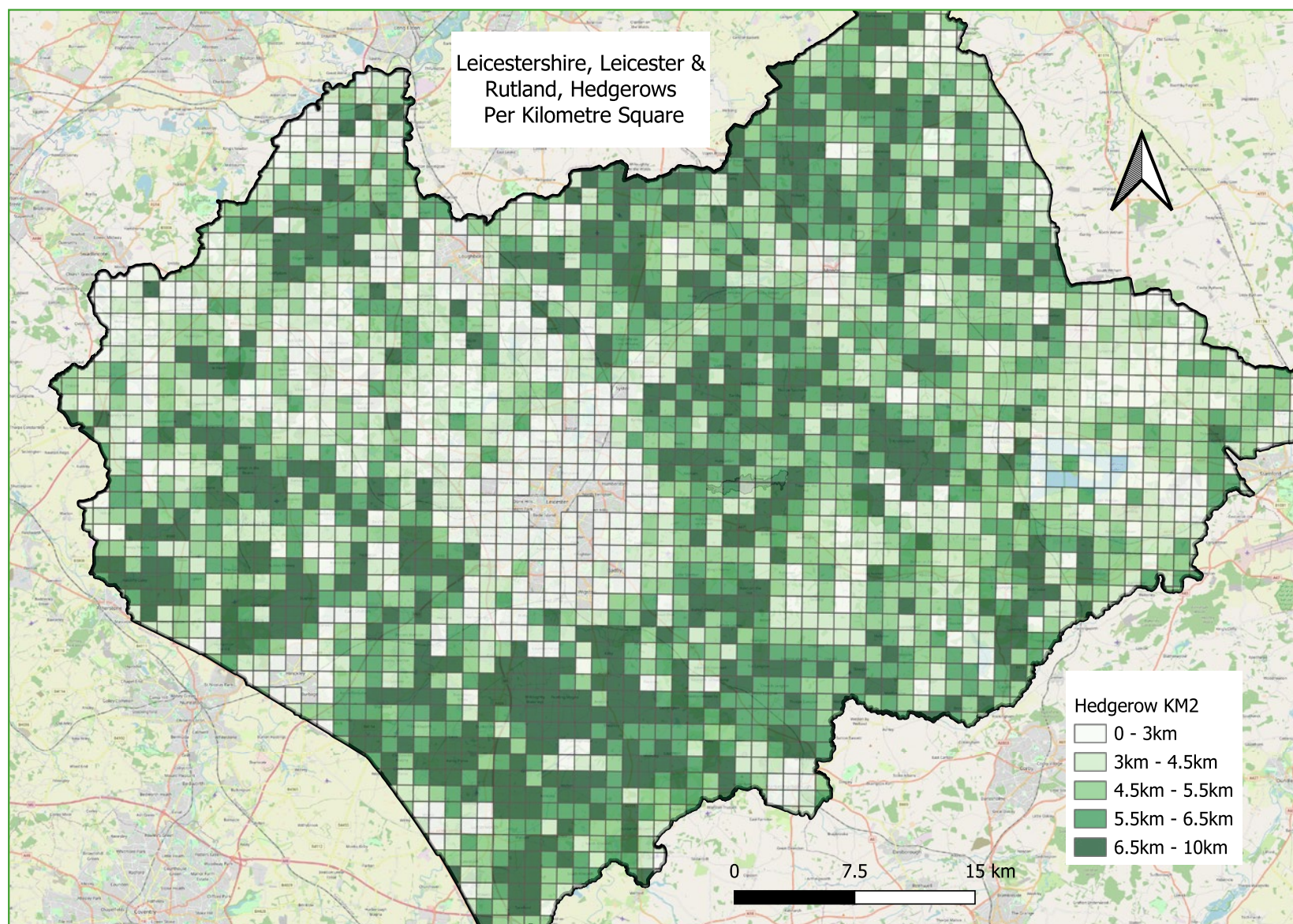
Source: UKCEH Land Cover Map & Hedgerows.

Appendix E
Stakeholder Engagement Records

1. Stakeholder Engagement Report

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/lnrs-resources

Trueman Change was engaged through a competitive quotation process by Leicestershire County Council, as the responsible authority. Their role was to support and facilitate comprehensive engagement with the public and key stakeholder groups, achieving valuable input of opinions and perspectives to inform the creation of the draft strategy, in readiness for full public consultation prior to adoption. The full engagement report can be accessed in the resources section of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy Website.

Appendix F
Relevant Legislation and Policies

The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategy) (procedure) Regulations 2023: www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/341/made

Environment Act 2021: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006:
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents

Biodiversity Net Gain: www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-net-gain

Biodiversity Duty: www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty

HMSO (Her Majesty's Stationery Office) 1981:
The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, HMSO, London.

Appendix G
References and Further Reading

1. Bibliography

All sources referenced in the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy are available in the resources section of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy webpages. This can be accessed here: www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy/lnrs-resources

These sources are organised into two main tables for easy reference:

a. Table of existing strategies and plans assessed in the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

This table includes all the 100 strategic documents assessed and referenced to establish the aims, priorities, and measures that underpin the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

b. Management plans and good practice guidance documents

This table lists the management and best practice resources that inform effective strategies for delivering the Local Nature Recovery Strategy measures, priorities and aims.

2. Further Reading

JNCC (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) (2019).
UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) Priority Species and Habitats.
Available at: https://jncc.gov.uk

Natural England. (2020).
Building Partnerships for Nature Recovery: Local Nature Recovery Strategy Pilot.
Natural England Report.
Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications

Clarke, S., White, S., Harris, J. (2014).
Restoration of Biodiversity in Lowland Farmland: A Nature Recovery Approach.
British Ecological Society Journal.

Cox, P., Trew, J., & Nicolson, T. (2016).
Ecological Networks and Nature Recovery Strategies in the East Midlands.
Ecological Journal of the Midlands.

Rothero, G., Lake, S., & Gowing, D.J. (2016).
Floodplain Meadows - Restoration and Management of a Forgotten Habitat.
Floodplain Meadows Partnership.

Natural Capital Committee. (2021).
Advice on Using Natural Capital to Inform Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
DEFRA.
Available at: www.naturalcapitalcommittee.gov.uk

White, P.J.C., Harris, S. (2021).
Managing Habitats for Species: The UK Experience.
Cambridge University Press.

Wildlife Trusts. (2020).
Nature Recovery Network – A National Framework for Action.
Wildlife Trusts.
Available at: www.wildlifetrusts.org

DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs). (2022).
Nature Recovery Green Paper: Protected Sites and Species.
DEFRA.
Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications

Butterfly Conservation Trust. (2017).
Conservation of Leicestershire and Rutland Butterflies.
Butterfly Conservation Trust.

RSPB. (2020).
Birds of Conservation Concern 5 (BOCC5).
RSPB.
Available at: www.rspb.org.uk

Froglife. (2021).
Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Strategy for the East Midlands.
Froglife Trust.
Available at: www.froglife.org

Stoate, C. (2022).
Farming with the Environment: Thirty Years of Allerton Project Research.
Available at: www.gwctshop.org.uk/products/farming-with-the-environment-thirty-years-of-allerton-project-research

Leicestershire County Council

Leicester City Council

Rutland County Council

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Blaby District Council
the heart of Leicestershire

Charnwood

DISTRICT OF HARBOROUGH

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Melton Borough Council

North West Leicestershire District Council

Oadby & Wigston BOROUGH COUNCIL
STRONGER TOGETHER

NATURAL ENGLAND

Environment Agency

THE NATIONAL FOREST

Forestry Commission

SEVERN TRENT

love every drop anglianwater

WOODLAND TRUST

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Welland Valley Partnership

CLA

GWCT THE ALLERTON PROJECT

Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust

NFU

NatureSpot

River Soar Catchment Partnership

CHARNWOOD FOREST GEOPARK

MIDLANDS ENGINE

Making Space For Nature in Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland

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Appendix B: LNRS Local Habitat map
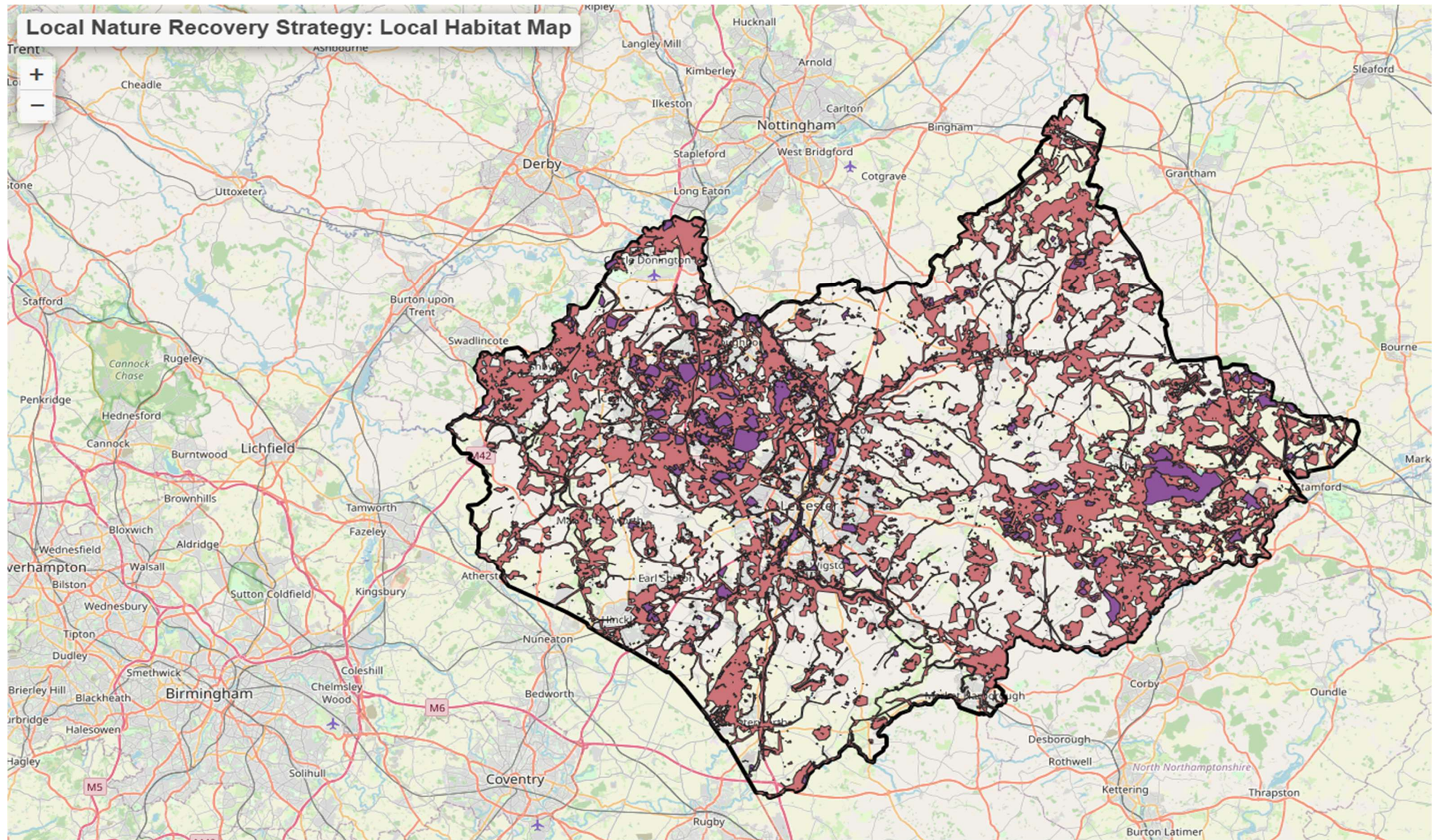
Link to interactive map: https://llrlnrs.github.io/Local-Habitat-Map/#9/52.6850/-1.0095

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Equality Impact Assessment

Please see details below. When ready, approve or reject the request using the link below.

Name of policy: Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Department: Environment & Transport

Who has been involved in completing the Equality Impact Assessment: Vicky Cormie

Relevant contact information for those involved: vicky.cormie@leics.gov.uk

Who is completing the EIA:

First name	Surname
Vicky	Cormie

Email:

Email address
Vicky.Cormie@leics.gov.uk

What is the proposal?: Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are new statutory duty placed on local authorities as a result of the Environment Act 2021. They are a new mandatory system of spatial strategies that will map the most valuable existing areas for nature, establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and wider environmental benefits. The LNRS covers Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

What change and impact is intended by the proposal?: They will support the delivery of international, national, and local targets and commitments on nature and the wider environment. They are intended to support the recovery of nature, address environmental issues such as climate change and pollution, improve access to nature and result in improvements in health and wellbeing.

What is the rationale for this proposal?: To comply with the requirements of the new statutory duty and to develop a LNRS that achieves the intended outcomes.

What equalities information or data has been gathered so far?: As the development of the LNRS is part of an England-wide Government policy to recover nature, data from Natural England was received on a range of equality aspects in relation to nature. These include: areas of high deprivation and low access to nature; combined green space and public rights of way inequalities; socio-economic statistics; sports play and active recreation; proximity to land with permissive access; accessible natural green space inequalities (pop density) (IMD); access to nature close2home; access to greenspaces standard (ANGSt); green blue infrastructure assets including access points and

private gardens.

In addition, the Council utilised the overall demographic data for the LNRS area (Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland) to inform which demographic groups are to be targeted for the communications and engagement plan.

What does it show?: The data showed that the LNRS area (Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland) has a very diverse demographic profile with higher densities of demographic diversity in Leicester City and in some of the Market Towns.

The data also showed that there was a correlation between deprivation and poor access to green spaces as well as increased exposure to environmental factors such air pollution, litter and noise pollution.

In addition, it was noted that aging populations in rural areas are becoming more isolated. Also, it was noted that people with disabilities, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups and young people in particular on average access nature less.

What engagement has been undertaken so far?: The Council has procured professional engagement consultants and works closely with Natural England's Senior Adviser on Inclusion. The specification for the engagement contract included the requirement to be able to engage effectively with a wide range of audiences including those from different demographic backgrounds.

The engagement has been divided in to two broad categories namely engagement with key stakeholders such as farmers, environmental groups and public sector organisations, and engagement with a wider audience including, residents, businesses, faith and BAME groups as well as people from the other protected characteristics.

The Council's Environment team, Engagement team and the Business Intelligence team worked closely in designing and developing the LNRS' engagement plan and mechanisms. All Communications teams form the 10 local authorities within the LNRS area collaborate closely to ensure effective delivery of the communications and engagement for the LNRS across the area. Further cooperation is undertaken with the communications teams of partner organisations such as parish and town councils, National Farmers Union, Coutryside Landowners Association, Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust, National Forest Company, Forestry Commission, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

The Council is also part of the East Midlands Inclusions Hub which brings together the responsible authorities developing the LNRSs across the East Midlands with equality and inclusion groups from the area to discuss and learn about the issues that the group members have in relation to accessing etc nature and how best to engage and involved the group members in the development of the various LNRSs.

So far, online briefing sessions have been undertaken with key stakeholders and some of the community groups with engagement with equality and inclusion groups due to take place during June and July 2024. This will take the form of several community group workshops led by the consultants reaching inner city and rural residents, young people, faith, BAME and other minority groups and nine resident workshops in each of the local authority areas, several awareness events such as the Riverside Festival and Harborough Carnival. In addition, there will be at least three workshops with farmers, landowners and land managers with one designed specifically for young farmers.

Additionally, stakeholders and residents have been engaged through an online survey and a Social PinPoint interactive map which allows residents to add comments and suggestions.

What does it show?: As part of the surveys demographic data is being gathered. To date, over 700 responses have been received. In early May 2024 an assessment of the respondents showed that the following groups were under represented: parents under 18; people aged 18-34; under 18's; people of non-white heritage; residents from Leicester, Oadby & Wigston, North West Leicestershire and Hinckley and Bosworth. Following this, there has been a greater emphasis to address this under representation through the respective communications teams and partner organisations.

Evidence documents upload (optional): FINAL Report to Steering Group 8th February 2024.pdf, LNRS - Inclusive Engagement with Communities 011223.pdf

Age:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities.	No

Disability:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities. An improved access to nature for people with disabilities is sought.	No

Race:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new	No

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
employment opportunities. An improved access to nature for BAME groups is sought.	

Sex:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities. It is hoped that women will feel safer in the countryside and in green spaces.	No

Gender Reassignment:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities. It is hoped that gender reassigned people will feel safer in the countryside and in green spaces.	No

Marriage and Civil Partnership:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities.	No

Sexual Orientation:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities. It is hoped that people of different sexual orientations will feel safer in the countryside and in green spaces.	No

Pregnancy and Maternity:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities.	No

Religion or Belief:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities. It is hoped that people of different religions and beliefs will feel safer in the countryside and in green spaces and improving their access to nature.	No

Armed Forces:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be	No

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities.	

Other groups: e.g., rural isolation, deprivation, health inequality, carers, asylum seeker and refugee communities, looked after children, deprived, armed forced, or disadvantaged communities:

What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	Is there any specific risks or concerns?
Overall, the Council is seeking to increase understanding, appreciation, access and enjoyment of nature. This group will benefit from improvements to the environment, reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding, heat stress, resulting in improvements in health and wellbeing. There will be increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature as well as new employment opportunities. It is hoped that the LNRS would, to some extent, address issues of rural isolation, deprivation and health inequality as well as addressing some of the needs of deprived or disadvantaged communities.	No

Action Plan:

What concerns were identified?	What action is planned?	Who is responsible for the action?	Timescale
While there have been no specific concerns identified for any of the protected characteristics, it is recognised that the existing data did not identify the specific concerns, issues and reasons behind these for the various groups. The Council is seeking to gather this information through the residents LNRS survey and the Social PinPoint interactive map.	The planned actions include the residents survey, Social PinPoint interactive map, focused groups, tailored briefings, targeted workshops, awareness events, community group workshops (including with groups representing many of the protected characteristics). There will also be a formal public consultation exercise.	These actions will be delivered by a range of people including Council officers form the Environment team, Engagement team, Trueman Change (engagement consultants), supporting authorities and partner organisations.	The communications and engagement phase is planned to take place between 14 March - 11 July 2025. The public consultation exercise will take place for 8 weeks during January-February 2025.

Action plan document (optional): LNRS Project Workbook (LIVE).xlsx

How will the action plan and recommendations of this assessment be built into decision making and implementation of this proposal?: The input and contributions from the various organisations, groups, residents etc will play a vital part in the development of the LNRS and the identification of

the nature priorities and measures that will be taken to support the recovery of nature, achievement of wider environmental benefits and improvements in health and wellbeing across the LNRS area.

How would you monitor the impact of your proposal and keep the EIA refreshed?: As part of developing the LNRS, a consider how the LNRS will be monitored is needed. This will include considering how equality data will be gathered, analysed and used to inform changes to the LNRS. While some of this will be done as part of developing the LNRS, it is likely that there will be an action within the delivery plan to develop this aspect more fully.

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Agenda Item 5

Leicestershire County Council

CABINET – 17 JUNE 2025

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2025-2028

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the outcome of the consultation on the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy and to seek approval of the Strategy, attached as Appendix A to this report. The Strategy is a key partnership document to support the education, health and care needs of children and young people in Leicestershire with special educational needs and disabilities.

2. The refreshed Strategy has been produced by the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board. The Board comprises partners working across Leicestershire on behalf of children and young people with SEND and is made up of education, health and social care senior managers, schools, and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Cabinet:

    (a) Notes the outcome of consultation on the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy;

    (b) Approves the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028.

    (Key Decision)

Reasons for Recommendation

4. To note the consultation feedback which has informed the final Strategy.

5. The revised Strategy will provide a framework for planning, commissioning and delivering SEND services and support by the Council and its partners for children and young people living in Leicestershire.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6.   The refreshed draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy was considered by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board in November 2024.

7.   The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on 21st January 2025 and its comments were reported to the Cabinet on 7th February 2025, when the draft Strategy was approved for consultation.

8.   An 8-week public consultation exercise on the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy was held from 12th February 2025 until 8th April 2025.

9.   The Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board agreed the final version of the Strategy on 23rd May 2025.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

10.   One of the primary pieces of legislation regarding children and young people with SEND is the Children and Families Act 2014. This sets out the duties that local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (NHS bodies) must fulfil. Leicestershire's SEND arrangements were inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in 2020 and reinspected in 2022, resulting in a Written Statement of Action and an Accelerated Progress Plan setting out action needed to improve services. A revised SEND local area inspection framework was introduced by the Government in April 2024 and Leicestershire is awaiting an inspection under the new framework. The refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy outlines local priorities and sets out how the SEND and Inclusion Partnership will improve services and outcomes over the next three years. The Local Area SEND and Inclusion Development Plan in section 5 of the Strategy identifies five priority areas of activity, incorporating ongoing improvements to deliver the required outcomes from the Accelerated Progress Plan.

11.   In September 2020, the Cabinet agreed the current SEND and Inclusion Strategy.

12.   On 23rd June 2023 the Cabinet authorised the Director of Children and Family Services to move to the next phase of the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme, to improve the service offer and help address the budget deficit.

13.   The refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025-28 supports the ambitions set out in the Children and Family Services Department Plan 2024-26 and the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26.

14.   The SEND and Inclusion Strategy is distinct from, but aligned to, the SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR). The latter focuses on opportunities for jointly commissioning specific partnership services across LLR whereas the SEND and Inclusion Strategy has a wider focus on improving the experience of children and young people

with SEND and their families within Leicestershire. Work has commenced to refresh this LLR Strategy during 2025 and this will seek to align with the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Strategy.

15.   On 7 February 2025 the Cabinet agreed the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy for consultation.

Resource Implications

16.   The Strategy is set at a time of unprecedented and growing demand for High Needs support across the SEND system nationally. Funding from the Department for Education given to Local Authorities to support children and young people with more complex SEND through the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has not kept pace with demand which has led to significant and growing budget deficits. The High Needs DSG in Leicestershire is forecast to have a financial deficit of £117.5m in 2028/29.

17.   Since 2020, Councils have been allowed to accumulate deficits in their High Needs DSG budgets without this impacting their wider Council budgets through a Statutory Accounts override. The accounts override legislation is due to end in March 2026. Unless further legislation changes this, from April 2026 local authorities will be required to make financial provision for the deficit. The lack of clarity from government on the future of the statutory override, or any alternatives, presents a significant risk to the Council's financial sustainability.

18.   The refreshed Strategy sets out a shared commitment from the SEND and Inclusion Partnership to improvement outcomes for children and young people with additional needs, including a specific focus on improving inclusion within mainstream educational settings. The Strategy will support the SEND and Inclusion Partnership to respond more efficiently and effectively to the increasing demand for SEND services and engage with children and young people, their parents and carers to enable early identification of SEND and provide the right support at the right time.

19.   The Strategy will be implemented within existing resources, supplemented where available by any additional grant funding such as through the Department for Education sponsored Change Partnership Programme.

20.   The Director of Law and Governance and the Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

21.   This report has been circulated to all Members of the County Council.

<u>Officer(s) to Contact</u>

Jane Moore, Director of Children and Families Services
Telephone: 0116 305 2649
Email: Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk

Tim Browne, Assistant Director Education and SEND
Telephone: 0116 305 0546
Email: Tim.Browne@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Background

22. The refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025 to 2028 sets out the vision and priorities for the County Council and its partners delivering education, health and social care services to children and young people aged 0-25 in Leicestershire with SEND. It will provide the overarching framework for service development in SEND and Inclusion Services across the County.

23. Over the period of the previous Strategy, the local area SEND and Inclusion Partnership has considered what works well and current barriers to achieving its vision for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire. The Partnership has used performance and outcome data and feedback from children and young people and their parents and carers to co-produce priority areas for further development over the next 3 years.

24. The SEND principles that will drive the work of the SEND and Inclusion Partnership, and which provided a focus for the development of the Strategy, include:

    - The child and family are at the heart of what we all do
    - We will have an accurate understanding of the needs and lived experiences of children and young people with SEND
    - Children and young people with SEND are prepared for successful transition throughout their life
    - Leaders across the SEND and Inclusion Partnership will work together to plan, deliver and quality assure Leicestershire's offer
    - We will provide timely and effective support to enable children and young people with SEND to thrive and belong in their communities.

25. The number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has grown annually at a national and local level since the introduction of the SEN Code of Practice changes in 2014. Based on the latest published data, the number of EHCPs in England rose 125% between 2016 and 2024; Leicestershire saw a 113% increase from 2,995 to 6,377 EHCPs over the same time period.

26. Despite substantial increases in government funding for high needs, funding has not kept pace with the increase in children and young people with EHCPs. The Institute for Fiscal Studies in their report of December 2024 noted that nationally, per-EHCP funding has fallen by around a third in real terms between 2015/16 and 2024/25.

Engagement and Consultation

27. The SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board co-produced five overarching SEND principles which have been used to shape the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy for 2025-2028. These are included in paragraph 24 above.

28. Feedback from parents and carers of children and young people with SEND has been crucial to shaping the Strategy: Section 3 of the Strategy sets out key themes from engagement and consultation which highlights areas for improvement. In addition to feedback captured and shared by the Parent and Carer Forum, responses have been received directly from parents and carers of children and young people with SEND through a variety of surveys and engagement events during 2023 and 2024 including the Council's regular Local Offer Roadshows. In addition to children and young people's views included in their Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), their opinions have been captured through work with the Young Researchers Young Voices project and a separately commissioned Student Voices Project in January and February 2024.

29. Public consultation on the refreshed Strategy took place between 12th February 2025 and 8th April 2025. This sought to confirm support for the proposed SEND principles, ensure the Strategy reflected what works well and the barriers and challenges for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire, and that the priorities identified provided the right focus for improvement activity over the next 3 years (to be overseen by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board). The full consultation report setting out both the activity undertaken and the findings is attached as Appendix B and a summary is given below. An Easy Read version of the Strategy was also available to support the consultation.

Consultation Feedback

30. There were 1,362 views of the consultation web page during the consultation period. Following closure of the formal consultation, 60 responses had been submitted.

31. Overall, 92% of responses were from Leicestershire residents, with 84% a parent/carer of a child or young person aged 18 or under. Parents or carers of children with SEND made up 57% of responses. Teachers, governors, trustees and other school staff were 25% of respondents.

32. Table 1 below sets out support for the SEND principles, a key component of the Strategy ("Overall to what extent do you agree or disagree with our SEND principles?"), and support for the Strategy as a whole ("Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy?").

    Table 1: Support for the SEND Principles and overall Strategy.

    "Support" includes responses that strongly agree, tend to agree, and neither agree nor disagree.

Respondent type	Number of responses	Support for the SEND Principles	Number of responses	Support for the Overall Strategy
All respondents	59	91%	58	89%
Parents and carers of a child or children with SEND	33	88%	34	85%
Teachers, governors, trustees or other school employees	15	93%	13	92%

There were less than 5 responses from the following respondent types, and responses are incorporated into the total for "all respondents" in Table 1 to avoid identifying individuals:
- Interested members of the public
- Representatives of voluntary and community organisations
- Other stakeholders
- Leicestershire County Council employees
- Other

33.   Table 2 sets out the agreement to the improvement priorities ("To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?"). Respondents were overwhelmingly positive.

Table 2 - Agreement with the improvement priorities set out in the Strategy.

"Support" includes responses that strongly agree, tend to agree, and neither agree nor disagree.

Improvement priority	Number of responses	Support for each priority
Transitions	54	100%
Engagement, coproduction, feedback and voice	58	97%
Identification and assessment of needs	60	92%
Outcomes for children and young people with SEND	59	95%
Commissioned services	58	95%
Attendance and inclusion	57	88%
Strategic leadership and improvement	58	95%

34.   A majority of all respondents agreed that "the draft strategy describes what currently works well for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire" (68% strongly agreed, tended to agree or neither agreed nor disagreed).

35. A majority of respondents also agreed that "the draft strategy describes the barriers and challenges that children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire currently face" (77% strongly agreed, tended to agree or neither agreed nor disagreed).

36. In addition to the responses to the survey, a range of comments was provided by respondents; key trends from this feedback have been reviewed and are included in the detailed consultation analysis (Appendix B).

37. Themes from the comments received are summarised below:
    - General agreement with the SEND principles, although some qualified this with concerns around the ability to implement and uphold the principles in practice.
    - Respondents gave feedback on existing barriers and challenges with personal examples of inclusion in mainstream settings not working well for all and of the system not working effectively, including performance issues across partners and difficulty for families navigating across partner services.
    - Broad agreement to the improvement themes with some feedback reflecting personal experiences of challenges relevant to specific themes.
    - Overall agreement with the Strategy including ambition and areas of focus, with some reflections on the challenge of implementation within the context of demand and funding.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

38. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report as part of the consultation process at its meeting on 21st January 2025 and supported the refreshed Strategy.

Amendments made to the Draft Strategy

39. Following a review of the feedback received during the consultation, some amendments have been made to the draft Strategy, as follows:

    (a) The Strategy will cover the period from 2025 to 2028, in recognition of feedback on the ambitious nature of the Strategy and consultation being concluded in 2025.

    (b) In Section 2, Leicestershire Context, Health – Information on the Teen Health service has been added to this section.

    (c) In Section 3, What our children, young people and families tell us:

        i. Joint working across Education, Health and Social Care to develop an easier to navigate system – A sentence added to acknowledge the challenges of current waiting times across partner agencies and the difficulty families report in finding

information to identify the right services to support their children and young people.

ii. Support for inclusion of children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools – This section has been reworded to acknowledge that whilst mainstream educational provision works well for many children and young people with SEND, this is not universally the case. A continued focus is required to ensure all mainstream schools in Leicestershire are able to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND where this is a suitable educational setting.

Implementation of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy

40. Implementation of the refreshed Strategy will be monitored by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board (the composition of which is outlined in the introduction to this report). This Board reports to the Children and Families Partnership which comprises representatives from the Council's Children and Family Services, Adults and Communities, and Public Health Departments, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Commissioning Board, the Leicestershire Partnership Trust, Special, Primary and Secondary Schools, Further Education and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum.

41. The refreshed Strategy is underpinned by a detailed Partnership Improvement Plan with workstreams that will deliver the priorities. Progress will be monitored by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board and each workstream will include reporting against outcomes and performance measures. Progress will be published on the Local Offer website (the Local Offer brings together in one place all information about health, education, and social care for SEND services).

Equality Implications

42. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on the refreshed Strategy and consultation approach (attached as Appendix C). It concluded that the Strategy should have a positive impact for all protected groups and other communities which are of special interest to the Council. Improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with identified SEND aged 0-25 in Leicestershire. This Strategy aims to deliver the Council's vision for all children, including those with SEND to thrive, fulfil their potential, belong, and live their best lives within their communities. Improvements to service provision should also benefit the parents, carers and families of children and young people with SEND.

Human Rights Implications

43. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Other Implications and Impact Assessments

44. The partnership implications of the refreshed Strategy are set out in paragraphs 40 to 41 of this report.

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet on 7 February 2025 "Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27"
https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&Mld=7873

Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 January 2025 "SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027"
https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&Mld=7889

Report to the Cabinet on 22 November 2024 "Proposed Transfer of Funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant"
https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&Mld=7511

Report to the County Council on 18 May 2022 "Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026"
https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&Mld=6482

Appendices

Appendix A – Refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024 to 2027
Appendix B – SEND and Inclusion Strategy Consultation Report
Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

NHS

Leicestershire
SEND Hub

Leicestershire
County Council

SEND and Inclusion Strategy

▶ **2025 - 2028**

Leicestershire
SEND

Foreword

We are incredibly proud that we have taken the opportunity to work together to redesign how Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) in Leicestershire will be, as this is a subject that is truly close to our hearts.

Children are our future, and they deserve the very best that we can give them. We know that we have to get it right so that all children can flourish, thrive and live their best lives. We are committed to working with all our partners to improve outcomes; children, young people and their families, those across education, health, social care, the voluntary sector and our local employers.

We are all here because we care. We are all here because we are determined to make positive change happen.

We will all work with transparency, honesty, and openness and we will hold each other to account. We will all deliver the changes that need to be made to improve the lived experiences of our children, young people and their families.

We are committed to developing and evolving detailed plans for each of the six priorities identified through co-production. This will be done together and will focus on the positive impact we have on children and young people's lives.

We want to personally thank everyone who has been part of developing this strategy and for your ongoing commitment to supporting our journey of improvement.

We look forward to working with you all in "Shaping the Future" for SEND in Leicestershire.

Jane Moore,
Director of Children & Family Services, Leicestershire County Council

Caroline Trevithick,
Chief Executive, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board

Contents

1. Introduction

In Leicestershire, SEND is everyone's responsibility. Children and young people achieve better outcomes when we have a clear focus on working together. Whilst there is significant pressure and challenge, our vision is for all children, including those with SEND to thrive, fulfil their potential, belong, and live their best lives within their communities.

This Strategy is set at a time of unprecedented and growing demand for support across the SEND system which exceeds funded capacity across all local area partners. This is clearly an unsustainable position. The draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy sets out a shared commitment from the SEND and Inclusion Partnership for partners to work together to tackle the challenges facing the SEND system, including a specific focus on improving inclusion within mainstream educational settings.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out the vision and priorities in Leicestershire for developing support and provision for children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND. Our strategy will be delivered through our five overarching SEND principles which have been co-produced by the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership following an evaluation of what is working well and current barriers to achieving our vision for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire.

Building trust and strong relationships with parents and carers and children and young people with SEND will run as a theme through everything we do

Principle 1

The child and family are at the heart of what we all do

Principle 2

We will have an accurate understanding of the needs and lived experiences of children and young people with SEND

Principle 3

Children and young people with SEND are prepared for successful transition throughout their life

Principle 4

Leaders across the SEND partnership will work together to plan, deliver and quality assure Leicestershire's offer

Principle 5

We will provide timely and effective support to enable children and young people with SEND to thrive and belong in their communities

We are committed to making positive change happen. We know there is history where children and families have felt let down and feel that promises have not been fulfilled. We are determined to change this. We also know that this will take time, but we will work diligently, co-produce quickly and effectively to make positive change happen.

Our SEND strategy demonstrates the collective commitment and responsibility between our parents, community, Local Authority (LA) education and social care support services and settings, including health services across the spectrum of health provision. Parents and the voluntary sector have a shared commitment to the strategy and are partners in ensuring that it meets the needs of our children and young people.

Co-production and partnership working with families is at the core of SEND service development and delivery across education, social care and health.

This strategy sets out our ambitious vision, aims and priorities to ensure that we effectively identify and meet the needs of the children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) age 0 to 25.

Children and young people achieve better outcomes when we have a clear focus on working together.

This strategy for 2025-2028 sets out our commitment to delivering consistently better outcomes for children and young people with SEND. We will ensure children with SEND across Leicestershire have access to the right support at the right time enabling them to thrive and succeed.

2. Leicestershire context

The following sections provide a high-level summary of the numbers of children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire, support provided from partners across the County and the impact this is having. More information is available through the Leicestershire Local Area Inclusion Plan.

Children and Young People in Leicestershire

Leicestershire is a large urban/rural County located within the East Midlands region of England which surrounds the city of Leicester. Leicestershire's population was 712,336 at the latest census in 2021, a 9.5% increase to the county's population over the last 10 years. This makes Leicestershire one of the fastest growing areas in the country in terms of population (national average 6.6%). Understandably, this has placed added pressures on services for Children and Young People in the County. The County has approx. 201,250 children and young people aged under 26 years (29% of the total population). This is expected to grow to 234,329 by 2033.

Population of Leicestershire	2023 estimate	2033 estimate
Total population for Leicestershire	722,155	806,906
Total number of children and young people aged under 26 years	210,255	234,329
Percentage of children and young people aged below 26 against the total population	29.1%	29%
Split across SEN2 age bandings:		
0 to 4	36,160	39,982
5 to 10	48,762	51,466
11 to 15	41,981	44,661
16 to 18	24,470	29,340
19 to 25	58,882	68,880

There are 107,413 children and young people educated in Leicestershire schools (aged 3-18). Children and Young People from minority ethnic groups account for 23.6% of all children living in Leicestershire, compared with 37% in the country as a whole. The largest minority ethnic groups are Asian or Asian British and Mixed. Many children and young people with EHCPs are educated in mainstream schools or special schools. It is the Local Area's ambition that the majority of children with EHCPs can be included and educated in mainstream schools, or resourced provisions within a mainstream context, where they can learn in their local communities and with their peers.

From our School Census in January 2024, we know that:

Total number of pupils in Leicestershire schools **107,413**

Percentage of Black Asian and other ethnic communities of the total school population (excluding unclassified) **23.6%**

Total number and percentage of EHCP's for Black, Asian and Ethnic groups

Asian/Asian British
3%

Black/African/ Caribbean/ Black British
0.8%

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups
4.7%

Other ethnic groups
0.5%

Percentage of pupils that have English as an additional language **8.6%**

Total number of looked after children (March 2023 903 return) **681**

Total number of looked after children as a percentage of the total population aged 0 to 17 years **0.48%**

All pupils eligible for free school meals **15.5%**

SEN support pupils eligible for free school meals **12.9%**

EHCP pupils eligible for free school meals **32.5%**

As at August 2024, Leicestershire has 317 schools across the County, which include 252 mainstream Primary, 80 mainstream Secondary and 8 Special Schools. The County also has 32 SEN Units or Resource Bases, most of which are attached to mainstream schools.

In terms of Early Years provision, Leicestershire has 4 specialist EY settings within the County.

There are 7 mainstream and 1 specialist Post 16 education providers supporting young people with EHCPs in Leicestershire.

Children and Young People in Leicestershire with Special Educational Needs

The latest School Census, which includes all pupils on roll at a school within Leicestershire (aged 4 to 16 years), reports that there are now 13,983 pupils on a SEN Support plan and 6,377 with an Education, Health and Care Plan. SEND pupils account for 17.2% of the Leicestershire school population.

During the last few years Leicestershire has faced significant challenges in responding to the increasing demand for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) like many Local Authorities nationally. We know that within Leicestershire there is an increasing trend for requests for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) resulting in Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) which increased 18% between 2022 and 2023, however growth in EHCPs issued, while still significant, has slowed somewhat in comparison to national and regional trends since 2020 after a period of considerable growth between 2016 and 2020. As a result of increased demand, capacity of services, and national shortages of Educational Psychologists, Leicestershire has been unable to keep within statutory timeframes of 20 weeks. As a result this has impacted on children, young people and families who have had to wait longer for an EHCP, and subsequently any additional support required or a specialist school placement where this is needed.

Number of EHCP's						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Aug 2024
England	390,109	430,697	473,255	517,049	575,963	
	47.6% increase between 2020 – 2024					
East Midlands	27,104	30,500	33,402	36,950	41,806	
	54.2% increase between 2020 – 2024					
Leicestershire	4,751	5,288	5,813	6,201	6,377	6,887
	34% increase between 2020 – 2024 and 45% increase between 2020 and August 2024					

> The age differences for intervention to support pupils amongst health, social care and education appears to create some barriers which need addressing within EHC Plans and when ensuring effective earlier SEND support
> **School Leader 2024**

> It is difficult to hear the same message around national issues when this has been known for some time
> **School Leader 2024**

Education

Education attainment and progress for children and young people with an EHCP is generally good and is just under or around the national average across most key stages but is above the national average for KS4 (GCSE). For those pupils on SEN support, attainment and progress are below the national average except at KS4. A high proportion of children and young people with SEN go on to higher and further education. The Local Area recognises the need to make improvements across all reported attainment years.

Longer term outcomes for adults with SEND in Leicestershire are good, with the proportion of those living in the own home or with family significantly higher in Leicestershire than the national average. They are also significantly more likely to be in paid employment, at nearly double the national average rate.

School attendance rates for children and young people with SEN in Leicestershire are generally good, with data from the Autumn term for 23/24 better than national average for Primary and Special Schools and the Oakfield Pupil Referral Unit across all attendance indicators. Attendance at Special schools and Oakfield are particularly good as compared to the national attendance picture for similar settings. Secondary attendance rates are slightly above the national average.

Permanent exclusions for children and young people with SEN in Leicestershire are significantly lower than national average and fixed term exclusions are also below national average, especially for those with EHCPs, which demonstrate the Local Area's commitment to inclusive education for all children and young people. This work with schools continues to be a key focus for the Local Area, with a focus on building capacity in schools, additional support, advice and guidance from the Local Authority to further strengthen early identification and offer excellent SEN Support through the provision of new tools such as the recently developed Inclusive Practice Toolkit and training for staff in school settings. This is continually being improved based on feedback from schools.

Children at risk of exclusion receive support through Leicestershire's Secondary Education and Inclusion Partnerships (SEIPs) which provide multi-agency inclusion forums and also provide support and reassurance around transition to secondary settings, or from Oakfield Short Stay School which provides support for primary school age children prior to starting at a new school. The Specialist Teaching Service works closely with

> The inclusive practice toolkit has been really helpful in supporting teachers
> **SENCo 2024**

Health, Social Care and other services such as CAMHS. The Autism Outreach team also offer all schools a support package as well as pupil-specific support. The attendance team works with individual schools and pupils to prevent suspensions and permanent exclusions and support children and young people back to regular school attendance.

Setting specific planning from the Inclusion team ensures support for schools is targeted to those in greatest need.

Support for early intervention and efficacy of SEND provision by Early Years settings, mainstream schools and colleges is generally good. Additional support is in place to improve consistency of inclusive practice in ordinarily available Early Years settings.

The proportion of Electively Home Educated (EHE) children with EHCPs is slowly increasing, in contrast to the national position, although numbers are still small. Support for EHE children is in place from the Inclusion service of the Local Authority. Partners do not have consistent knowledge of children who do not access education at all or who access on a part time basis. We need to work together better, to address the underlying reasons behind this and build inclusive communities that can support their reintegration holistically.

Despite the number of children and young people with SEN accessing transport to educational settings increasing 87% since 2015/16, the local authority does not have any specific challenges with sufficiency. However, 55% of pupils in transport use taxis and there are some localised difficulties commissioning private transport services.

Health

Most children and young people benefit from early and effective identification of additional needs. Health visitors consistently deliver mandated checks through the Healthy Child programme which provides a universal support offer for 0-19 year olds. Health services to meet children's physical and mental health needs are provided through a range of targeted and specialist services. Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust health services work in close partnership with Early Years settings, schools and local authority specialist services to jointly assess and meet identified needs. The timeliness of health advice going into EHCPs is good and is consistently meeting the 6-week target.

Consistent with the national picture across England, some children and young people are waiting too long for specialist health assessments against national guidelines, leading to delay in appropriately assessing and supporting needs. This is particularly for those waiting on the neurodevelopmental pathway, child and adolescent mental health services, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy which all have demand exceeding funded capacity and considerable waiting lists.

Children, young people and families in Leicestershire can expect to wait more than 2 years for an assessment as part of the neurodevelopmental pathway. Whilst waiting for an assessment, families are directed to a range of digital, charitable sector and system support, including LPT's Health for Kids and Health for Teens websites, Autism Space, ChatAutism, the National Autistic Society and ADHD Solutions. Pre and post diagnosis, children and young people are referred to any other relevant health service to support and

meet needs such as Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Community Paediatrics, Mental Health Support Teams and CAMHS for assessment and intervention.

The Teen Health 11-19 service provides preventive early intervention support, as part of the universal service for young people of secondary school age and up to the age of 25 years for young people with SEND. Teen Health is a Public Health commissioned service integrated within Leicestershire County Council's Family Help service. Based within schools and the community, the service promotes healthier lifestyles and supports children and young people to grow up to be healthy, stay safe and be able to achieve their potential.

Demand for health advice and support for children and young people with SEND continues to increase. In April 2024, 2,954 children and young people were registered with the Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Unit with an active plan. The breakdown by age is shown in the table below. The children that are supported have a variety of often complex physical and mental health needs.

Age group	0 - 5	6 - 11	12 - 16	17-20	21-25	Total
Number of children registered	296	1042	962	564	90	2954

Care navigators help in coordinating a child's health care and provide information around local support networks available in the area. Requests for care navigation in Leicestershire increased substantially in 2022/23 to 2,036, up 37% on the previous year.

Social care

There were 726 children and young people looked after by Leicestershire County Council as at 31st March 2024. This represents 0.5% of the overall Leicestershire population under the age of 18.

27.5% looked after children in 2022/23 in Leicestershire were on SEN support

In Leicestershire, 27.5% of looked after children in 2022/23 (the latest published figures) were on SEN support, compared to 27.3% nationally. 33.2% of looked after children in Leicestershire have an EHC Plan, compared to 30.8% nationally. Nationally, 21.8% of Children in Need are on SEN support and 28.2% have an EHC plan. In Leicestershire, 23.7% of children in need are on SEN support and 23.8% of children in need have an EHC plan.

33.2% looked after children in 2022/23 in Leicestershire have an EHC plan

The proportion of children in need with a disability recorded has fallen over the last 6 years in Leicestershire and is now below both regional and national averages. In 2023/24, 8.8% of children in need also had a recorded disability.

A dedicated team for children who are disabled provides specialist intervention for children with complex needs relating to their disability, undertakes assessments and provides support to families to develop a plan that will assist the child or young person. The team also work with children with disabilities where there are safeguarding concerns or where they are in the care of the local authority. Children's social care works closely with the young adult's disability team to consider transitions and ensures young people moving into adult services have the right support at the right time.

Social workers provide support to parents and carers about how to support emerging needs. Social Care is working hard to improve the advice and support provided for children and young people with SEND through 2 recently appointed Dedicated Social Care Officers (DSCOs). The DSCO role is focused on improving the quality of Social Care advice for EHCPs and providing training for Social Care staff to improve the consistency of support offered.

Due to capacity, there are sometimes long waiting times and limited access to overnight short breaks. Work is underway to develop a number of creative opportunities to grow short breaks provision in coproduction with parents, carers and children. This includes piloting a short breaks scheme which aims to give parents more choice and independence and give opportunity for families to acquire a payment to purchase local offer services themselves for short breaks. Further exploration of other opportunities to jointly commission overnight breaks with Health for children with complex health care needs. For residential provision, we will be utilising our partnership with Barnados and have been successful in a funding bid for the DFE to open a residential home for complex care.

Our Local Offer

Awareness and engagement with the Leicestershire Local Offer is good, and increasing over time. There is excellent engagement through the Local Offer Facebook page which in July 2024 had 4.3k followers. The Local Offer webpage regularly features in the top 5 search items and most visited pages on the Local Authority's website. The Local Offer is constantly being improved through coproduction with the SEND Hub and incorporating survey findings. We are using feedback from those attending to continuously improvement of our Local Offer, improving navigation and ensuring it meets the needs of children and young people and their families. Regular Local Offer Roadshows are well attended and receive good feedback from attendees. Children and young people's voices have also contributed to the review of the local offer.

4.3k followers
on the Local Offer Facebook page in July 2024

Local Area SEND Inspection

Leicestershire's Education, Health and Social Care services are jointly inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to see how well they meet their responsibilities towards children and young people with SEN and disabilities. In February 2020 following the most recent Local Area SEND Inspection, Leicestershire received a Written Statement of Action. We are currently working with the Department for Education (DfE) to monitor improvement progress through an Accelerated Progress Plan.

The Leicestershire local area was subject to a SEND re-inspection in November 2022 to consider the progress made by the local area on the two areas included within Leicestershire's Written Statement of Action:

▶ Lack of a joint commissioning strategy
▶ Quality of EHC plans

A joint commissioning strategy is now in place, and the report highlighted the significant progress we have made and recognised improvements that have been made since the initial inspection in 2020. However, local partners accept findings that identified that whilst EHCP quality has improved and includes the views of parents and carers, improvements still need to be made, including the implementation of quality assurance of EHCPs which is now in place through a multiagency audit panel.

This is something that we are working on – inspectors acknowledged we have made a focused plan to bring about the necessary improvements to EHCPs. We aim to make the improvements as quickly as possible and have developed a recovery plan which targets the timeliness of EHCNAs and EHCP reviews, and improvements in the quality of EHCPs through targeted multiagency quality audits and training. The most recent update on our progress can be found here **www.leicestershire.gov.uk/ education-and-children/special-educational-needs-and-disability/send-service-developments/local-area-send-inspection.**

Improving local services for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire

This strategy has been developed when there is a lot of change happening both locally and nationally. The Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership is committed to improving services for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire and a number of change initiatives are in progress along with our Accelerated Progress Plan and recovery plan set out above.

Changes in demand, for example, increasing numbers of children with anxiety related non-attendance, emotionally based school absence (EBSA); increasing numbers of children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs across our services, as well as an increase in need for much younger children, have led to increasing numbers of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) and underperformance against our statutory timeframes. In response to this increased demand, Leicestershire has invested significantly

in a change programme, Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) which has been pivotal to change across the system.

The TSIL Programme was established with partners across the SEND system in recognition of the rising demand for SEND support through Education, Health and Care plans and specialist provision; with the aim of ensuring we have a sustainable system for the future. The diagnostic evidence gathering and work with partners identified four key areas where positive improvements can be made: Inclusive practice, Service transformation, Accurate data and information and Communication and engagement. The Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire programme has reshaped the SEND services within the Local Authority and introduced improvements to processes, support inclusive practice and ensure more joined up working across the system.

The TSIL programme has now moved into a Continuous Improvement phase, supporting embedding of the changes made during the programme and continuing to work with system partners to improve the experience for children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers. In order to support continuous improvement of SEND services, Leicestershire County Council have introduced a new Education Quality & Performance team who will monitor the sustained improvements in performance and drive through new areas of improvement, the DSCO role within Social Care, and a Children and Young Person SEND and Personalisation team has been introduced through the ICB.

The Specialist Provision in Leicestershire (SPIL) document co-produced with the Leicestershire SEND hub through the TSIL programme sets out available education provisions for children and young people with SEND, supporting parents to make informed choices on suitable placements.

Leicestershire is part of the Leicester City, Leicestershire and Rutland local area partnership who are collectively taking part in the national Change Programme Partnership for SEND and Alternative Provision reforms. The Change Programme Partnership was launched by the Department for Education (DfE) in September 2023 to test and deliver reforms to SEND and Alternative Provision with a small group of local area partnerships (add appropriate link for more information)

Leicestershire is also an early adopter for the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) program (now also part of CPP) and has commenced engagement with a selection of local primary schools to test models of support to enable neurodivergent children and young people to remain in mainstream education.

The Early Language and Support for Every Child programme (ELSEC) also being managed through the CPP is focusing on early identification and support for children and young people with Speech, Language and Communication needs, with the aim of reducing the rate of referrals, increasing workforce capacity and improving the join up between Health and Education

In addition, Leicestershire is also part of "Delivering Better Value in SEND programme" aiming to support local authorities to improve the delivery of SEND services for children and young people while ensuring services are sustainable. **www.dbvinsend.com/participating-local-authorities**

Through our innovative work within localities, we have been listening to children, young people, families and our partners across Education, Health, and Social Care through co-production events, to find out exactly what needs to change. The Shaping SEND futures project (#ShapingSENDFutures) is piloting this approach across two areas of Leicestershire – Hinckley & Bosworth and North West Leicestershire. The project is working to bring the SEND strategy to life, building on the voice of children and young people and their families to pilot improvements across system partners.

3. What our children, young people and families tell us

Our Parent Carer Forum – Leicestershire SEND Hub

The SEND Hub is well established and provides on-going feedback from families on their experiences of having a child or young person with Special Educational Needs and/or a Disability into local partners through their role on the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Board. This role is formalised through a partnership agreement. The Leicestershire SEND Hub Youth Forum is developing, partnering with Children's Social Care and Family Hubs.

Partners work closely with the SEND Hub to co-produce changes to processes and service offers, for example through the Transforming SEND and Inclusion programme, Shaping SEND Futures project and PINS programme. SEND Hub representatives are valued members of working groups on a wide range of change and improvement initiatives, such as ongoing work on development of needs descriptors and CPP workstreams focused on EHCP moderation and quality assurance. Regular survey and feedback work with parents, carers and children and young people is coordinated through the SEND Hub.

Feedback is helping us to improve our services

Improving the capture and use of the voice of children and young people is an ambition for the partnership, particularly ensuring this is consistently included in EHCPs and annual reviews.

Key themes from engagement and consultation with children and young people and their families highlights the areas we need to improve:

Joint working across Education, Health and Social Care to develop an easier to navigate system

Partners understand that many parents and carers feel powerless and feel they do not have a voice in a complex and hard to navigate system. We do not offer joined up solutions and approaches across the Local Area Partnership resulting in age becoming a barrier to accessing services, and processes and systems are not clear enough. Families tell us of performance issues across partners, particularly with waiting times, and of difficulty finding information to help them identify the right services to support their children and young people. We acknowledge that while we actively seek feedback, we could do more to capture views about experiences of the system as a whole, and to use the feedback we are receiving to improve our services and the journey of children and young people with SEND through the system.

> Since changing to the new ways of working for SENA it has made everything much harder we don't have a person to call we did before
> **Carer 2024**

Delays in assessing and supporting children and young people's needs

Parents and carers note that waiting times for assessments and specialist services are an area of dissatisfaction and frustration, including a lack of communication around progress. The waiting times for EHC needs assessments and for allocation of a caseworker are a concern; there are also often very long waits once a referral has been made to an initial appointment, and between appointments for specialist support services. Parents and carers also report that it takes a long time to be able to receive a diagnosis and that more information needs to be made available whilst waiting for an assessment and services to support whilst awaiting diagnosis. As noted earlier this is an area of focus for partners through the recovery plan associated with the Accelerated Progress Plan. We know when we get these right partners are able to provide the right support at an early stage for children and young people and their families. We note the ongoing pressures on the SEND system and long waiting times for some specialist services makes this challenging. Parents and carers report there are barriers with the capacity and criteria for access for these services meaning some children and young people do not qualify as their needs are too high or not high enough.

> We have had to wait over 3 years to be seen by CAMHs how is this fair?
> **Parent 2024**

> The school really helped me to understand my son's needs following his diagnosis. They talked me through each process and I felt really supported –
> **Parent 2024**

EHCP review timeliness and plan updates

Parents and carers report they are concerned that annual reviews of their child or young person's EHCP are not always being reflected in an updated plan, with plans becoming increasingly out of date where reviews have not been processed and concerns around unmet needs leading to children out of school. This is a clear priority for parents and carers, particularly for those whose children are due to transition to a new key stage or setting to ensure that needs are appropriately understood and documented. We know there is a significant task to recover timeliness and performance around annual reviews due to the number of EHCPs but are committed to making significant improvements in both areas. This area is also being addressed through the recovery plan associated with the Accelerated Progress Plan.

> A lot of reviews are out of date and on old formats, some are 4 years out of date
> **SEND Hub 2024**

Transitions between educational settings

Feedback from children and young people and their families suggests that transitions between settings and services could be made smoother with additional support required to manage and reduce the impact of change. During the design phase of the TSIL programme, partners engaged with parent/carers and young people around their experience of transitions and how these may differ at different transition points. What was consistent was the concerns around managing change and how we can reduce the impact of the change on the children and young people. This was felt by parents/carers and CYP at all key stage changes. The parents and carers were able to draw out examples of where school experiences had worked particularly well. This included examples of good provision in mainstream schools and where their child's needs were being met, especially in the primary phase. What was apparent was how some schools/provisions approach transition differently, and how this can drastically affect the experience and engagement in transition. TSIL has worked to improve the consistency of transitions for those children moving from early years settings into Primary Schools. Ongoing work is planned through the Shaping SEND futures project to identify and consider how to overcome transition barriers that exist at other key stage transition points. Support for Transitions is a key priority for the partnership

Support for inclusion of children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools

Feedback from children and young people and their families suggests that whilst mainstream educational provision is working well for many children and young people, this is not universally the case. A continued focus is required to ensure all mainstream schools in Leicestershire are able to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND where this is a suitable educational setting. Significant support for inclusion has been developed, but a shared understanding and additional capacity building is crucial to further improvements. Feedback suggests that early support is not effective for all children and young people and there is more support we can offer to support children and young people back into school.

My teachers really struggled to help and understand me
pupil Y9 2024

Availability of school places for children and young people with SEND

We know that there are insufficient special school places available within communities, and this results in our children and young people being transported across the county or outside, sometimes being placed in an expensive independent educational provision or offered Education Other Than at School (EOTAS). We hear from parents and carers that this can cause stress for children and young people who spend considerable time travelling and can mean they are not ready/fit to learn on arrival at school. These families would like their child to be able to attend an educational setting closer to their home. Access to specialist educational provisions that meet complex needs can be challenging due to a lack of places and securing an appropriate place can feel daunting.

Young Researchers Young Voices

We are supporting the Young Researchers Young Voices Project, an innovative three-year project that investigates the views and experiences of children and young people with SEND across the East Midlands **www.derby.ac.uk/research/centres-groups/educational-research-and-innovation/inclusion-and-special-educational-needs-research-cluster/action-research-and-lesson-study-for-isend/**. The project team have recently published their year 2 findings which we will use to help shape practice improvements across the local area partnership:

▶ Children and young people find their SEND support suitable and beneficial.

▶ Their SEND support meets their needs and fosters important learning and development.

▶ They feel their opinions are valued and listened to.

▶ Many of them are consulted or involved in decisions about their support.

▶ Some were hesitant to ask for changes to their support in case the support is removed or the changes they ask for had a detrimental effect on their support.

▶ They want the support to be given only if they need it, recognising the importance of independence.

▶ They place value in the community around them and strive to support others to achieve their goals.

▶ They stress the importance of good relationships with staff and the support of their families.

▶ They often have a plan for what they want to do next. Some are not clear how they will get there.

▶ In many cases, EHCPs are not that important to them. They prioritise day-to-day support from key people over formal plans.

Recent voice work can be added here ie captured through Local Offer Roadshows
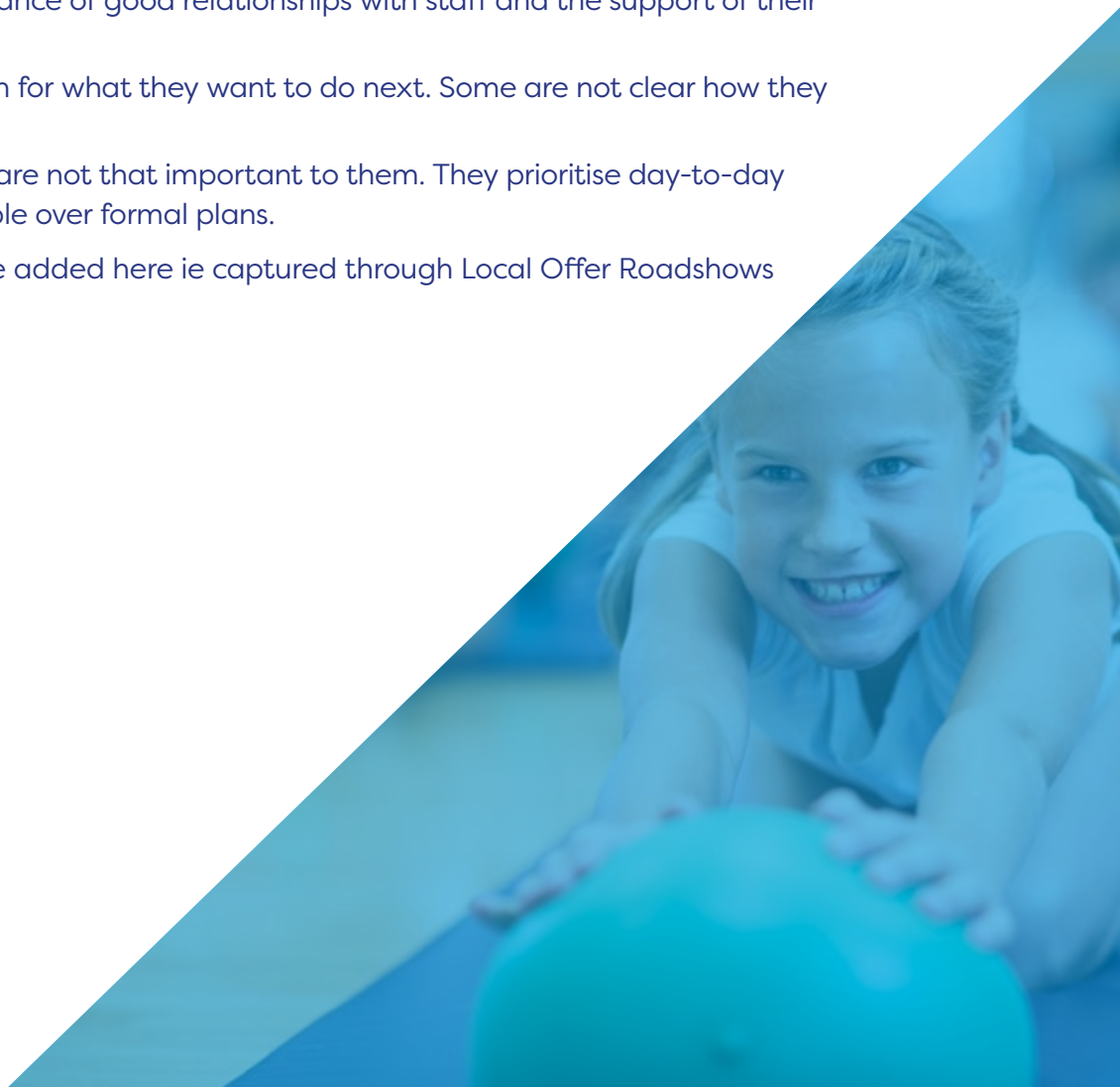
4. Our strategy for ensuring sufficient appropriate educational places for children and young people with SEND

Current position

The demand for SEND educational provision continues to grow through increases in EHCPs and demand for specialist school places, which continues to rise faster than capacity. Leicestershire has 5 maintained special schools and 3 specialist academies within the County offering 1,768 places in September 2024. There are also 304 primary places and 224 secondary places in SEN units or resourced provisions attached to mainstream schools. In addition, 48 primary and 219 secondary aged children and young people were in a placement at an Independent Special School (ISP) in November 2023.

The local area is currently unable to meet the demand for Special School places despite a significant increase in places during the last academic year. A capital programme overseen by Leicestershire County Council is working to develop provision across the local area.

In 2023/24, 217 specialist places have been created as well as additional support for mainstream schools. In addition, informal provision has been developed for at least 28 pupils in four primary schools where children who might otherwise have taken a specialist place have been supported in a mainstream setting. A new SEMH provision (Bowman Academy) opened in September 2024. The DfE has also agreed a free school with a further 80 places.
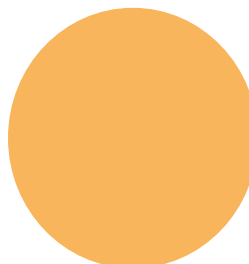
We know that there is a deficit of around 430 specialist placements at November 2023, based on pupils placed in independent special schools, those without a placement and those with EHCP issues who were awaiting a placement. In addition, we anticipate an additional 470 places will be required by 2028 based on projected population growth and housing needs assessments. There is a clear growing demand for specialist places in Leicestershire overall, and many children who do have a specialist place attend a specialist provision that is not local to them.

Sufficiency planning principles

In planning to meet the needs of children with SEND we are committed to the following principles:

- We aim to meet all children and young people's needs through an inclusive approach, embracing, supporting and treating all children and young people equally and ensuring all children and young people have equality of opportunity.

- We aim to meet the significant majority (almost all) of children and young people's needs within their locality

- We will ensure schools and settings are fully supported and resourced to meet the needs of children with additional, challenging needs

- We will utilise data insights to inform sufficiency planning and organise provision based on evidence, educational principles and a strategic understanding of demand.

- Proactively set up a diverse range of provisions at all key stages to maximise children and young people's chances of positive educational and social development

- Understand and promote the offer from state funded provisions and proactively collaborate with them to develop and adapt their offer to close identified gaps and meet needs.

- We recognise that each child or young person is different and will benefit from unique interventions. We will work with each to find the most suitable level of support for them

- We recognise and plan provision around the four areas of SEND (Communication and Interaction; Cognition and Learning; Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties; Physical and/or Sensory Needs) mindful of the co-concurrence and complexity of need.

- We will aim to ensure a sufficient and sustainable childcare (0-14) and market is operating with a high-quality workforce enabling all children to have access to an inclusive provision

Future priorities for school place development

Future priorities set out in the SEND capital programme include expansion of existing special schools (especially at Secondary level where there are less places but high demand across the County); new accommodation for the Oakfield South Short Stay School; phase 1 of an area special school in the Harborough district where there are very few specialist places to meet demand from local children and young people; development of informal specialist provision in mainstream schools and an unallocated capital sum to respond to new and emerging needs.

Additional places will not address the issue of sufficiency in isolation; there is insufficient resource to create enough places to meet the rising demand and there is finite capacity within the Local Authority to deliver additional projects quickly. A partnership approach focusing on improving early assessment and support for children and young people with SEND along with our ongoing work with schools and families to improve inclusive practice in mainstream educational settings and support for attendance will also be important as part of an overall plan for ensuring sufficiency.

The proposed priorities for school place development set out below targets resources to local areas and provision types where there is highest demand and highest likelihood of meeting a wide range of needs.

Expanding Special Schools

A number of schemes to increase the capacity of existing special schools have already been progressed. Due to constrained sites there are limited opportunities to expand these schools further. Further scoping work around special school satellite provision is underway.

Oakfield Short Stay School (South)

Oakfield (South) is currently operating from a temporary base at Newlands in Earl Shilton but a longer-term location with opportunity to expand provision is required. Negotiations are taking place in regard to a site and alternative options.

Phase 1 of a new Area Special School in Harborough district

There is insufficient capital currently available to deliver a full area special school, however it is proposed to deliver the first phase of what will later become a larger area special school in the Harborough area. This will initially focus on secondary aged (with potentially some upper Key Stage 2 provision), ambulant children with communication and interaction and/or cognition and learning primary needs. Phase 1 will work to accommodate around 100 children and young people without complex physical needs, which will be the focus of future phases of school development. A potential site has been identified and negotiations with property services are underway. Once this is confirmed, feasibility and then design work can take place and the school can be established under the free school presumption process, which means that the LA will recommend a MAT sponsor to the DfE.

Identification of and support for informal specialist support in primary schools including informal specialist bases and SEN inclusion adaptations

Special Schools are already beyond capacity, meaning limited ability to offer additional places for early years children with SEND starting school. We are working closely with schools to enable informal (not designated as specialist) provision to be established at some primary schools. From a capital perspective this involves minor adaptation and refurbishment to existing accommodation. We are working to identify a number of schools where this can be achieved with limited wider capacity impact for future basic need cohorts. This allocation can also be used for improvement of SEN and nurture provision with the ambition of keeping children in mainstream provision longer where budgets allow.

Responding to opportunities that arise

The SEND capital programme will ensure on an annual basis that an unallocated amount of capital is held back to respond to needs and opportunities as they arise. This may include taking advantage of opportunities such as vacant property, unused primary classrooms, bids etc, particularly where this would allow a new school to open early. We will also pursue any opportunities for additional capital allocations or grants that are made by central government which would enable faster capacity development.

5. Our Local Area SEND and Inclusion Development Plan

In Leicestershire, inclusion means that all children and young people are welcomed and accepted in their local communities, schools and other services that support them. True inclusivity is where differences are seen as a benefit, and where perspectives and differences are shared, leading to better decisions, services and life experiences for children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities and their families. At the heart of inclusion is being and feeling included, ensuring everyone is treated with equity and dignity and has fair access to resources and opportunities.

Work on our improvement journey has already begun. We know we need to make changes that will have lasting effects, and we are committed to working in partnership to provide high quality services that achieve positive outcomes and improve the lives of our children and young people with SEND and their families. We have set out how we intend to achieve the improvement priorities within the strategy below. A detailed plan setting out responsibilities and timelines for delivery will support us to plan and implement changes over the life of the strategy.

Improvement Theme	Actions
Principle	
We will provide timely and effective support to enable children and young people with SEND to thrive and belong in their communities	
Identification and assessment of needs	▶ Improve the timeliness of EHCNA assessments and EHCP reviews in line with statutory requirements. This is a key focus for the partnership and subject to a recovery plan focusing on clearing backlogs and ensuring sustainable processes and staffing arrangements to meet the need from a high and increasing number of EHCNAs and EHCPs. ▶ Improve the quality of EHC plan writing through robust moderation and quality assurance of EHCPs to ensure consistent good quality ▶ Reducing waiting times for services across the partnership so that early interventions and universal support are enablers not barriers for outcomes
Attendance and Inclusion	▶ Co-produce and implement an Alternative Provision strategy with transparent decision-making, funding, planning, purchasing and monitoring of provision. The Strategy will ensure that needs are met for young people in Alternative Provision and support reintegration into mainstream schools where possible. ▶ Consider additional support that can be offered to manage social, emotional and mental health and neurodevelopmental needs across the partnership, particularly for children and young people waiting for services and focusing on inclusion in mainstream educational settings. ▶ Trial new ways of working to better identify and support children with speech, language and communication needs in early years and primary schools. ▶ Develop a shared understanding of inclusion across all partners and share good practice of inclusion through ordinarily available provision across settings within Leicestershire so that all children and young people can thrive and achieve in their community. ▶ Work with provisions to reduce the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions for pupils with SEND.
Commissioned services	▶ A school place Sufficiency Strategy set out within this document will identify current and future needs for school placements and ensure more access to appropriate provisions are available. ▶ More work is being undertaken around commissioning of sufficient short break provision to meet service demand. ▶ Making best use of joint commissioning arrangements across the partnership.

Improvement Theme	Actions
Principle	
We will have an accurate understanding of the needs and lived experiences of children and young people with SEND	
Engagement, coproduction, feedback and voice	▶ Continue to improve our Local Offer to ensure it is easy to use, accessible for all and meets the needs and wants of local communities. This will ensure that young people and their families can access clear information about services and support available, including post-16 education options along with building independence, housing, good health, developing friends and family relationships and participating in society. ▶ Co-produce multi-disciplinary training across the partnership to ensure quality and consistency for children and families so that services know the child, and their voice is represented in EHCPs. ▶ Consider how to capture feedback from a wider group of children and young people, and their parents and carers, particularly around their experiences and journey across the system and how we can best support transitions and preparation for adulthood.
Principle	
The child and family are at the heart of what we all do **Leaders across the SEND partnership will work together to plan, deliver and quality assure Leicestershire's offer**	
Strategic Leadership and Improvement	▶ Ensure all local partners have an accurate and shared understanding of SEND. Ongoing activity through TSIL CI and CPP to develop needs descriptors will ensure more consistent understanding and application. ▶ Continue to develop banding and funding aligned to needs descriptors in order to ensure funding is used efficiently in a needs-led way with a transparent process for allocation. ▶ Develop a new SEND data dashboard to share performance information across the system, enabling system leaders to support and challenge, and to monitor the impact of improvement activity to ensure it is making a difference ▶ Review, develop and refine processes together openly and honestly, to make sure local services are consistent and the offer to children and young people and their families is more cohesive and easier to navigate ▶ Ensure there is capacity within services and provisions, which are jointly planned, and deliver high quality provision, so children and young people can stay within their local communities wherever possible. ▶ Identify, invest, and provide a rolling program of evidence-based training for everyone, including practitioners, families and carers, so that children and young people with SEND receive the right support, in the right place and at the right time within their community. ▶ Improve the coordination of support for children and young people who have had traumatic experiences.

Improvement Theme Principle	Actions
Children and young people with SEND are prepared for successful transition throughout their life	
Transitions	▶ Support successful well-planned transitions from the earliest stages through to transitioning to adult services, working collaboratively to provide joined up support across partners ▶ Developing robust processes and support for transitions across the local partnership through the Shaping SEND Futures project so that children and families know what to expect and the support they can receive
Outcomes for children and young people with SEND	▶ Ensure all partners have a rolling programme of evidence-based training to secure a shared understanding of what is needed for young people as they prepare for adulthood. ▶ Ensure that Preparation for Adulthood pathways are clear and accessible and that planning for this starts from Y9. ▶ Support young people to successfully prepare for employment by developing and delivering Supported Internships, Traineeships and improving accessibility of Apprenticeships. ▶ Develop Preparation for Adulthood (PFA) and the Supported Internship (SI) project

6. How will we know we are making a difference?

▶ Parents and carers will report high levels of satisfaction throughout the process. This will include timeliness for statutory assessment, a reduction in waiting times across services and children feel safe and heard. Families know what services are available and how to access them - the right services are in place at the right time and this reduces frustration within the system.

▶ Our families will feel empowered to meet their children's needs independently and in their local community wherever possible.

▶ Children and young people will have a clear pathway to achieving their goals and who will help them on this journey. They feel safe, valued and equal to their peers and belong and are educated within their communities.

▶ Children and young people will have the right support, will not be disadvantaged by age or locality and will have an active voice in their education, health and care.

▶ A shared system that stores information in one place will be available across the partnership that informs the commissioning of provision and services.

▶ Our workforce across education, health, and care is committed to local area partnership "team around the family" approach, with the right skillset to deliver services to our children and young people at the right stage of their development.

▶ The % of CYP whose needs are met locally (for both EHCP and SEN Support)

▶ The % of CYP views are recorded effectively in the EHCP Plan

▶ Learning is taken from complaints and these are reduced across the partnership

▶ The average time children and young people wait to access health care services across CAMHS, Therapies, Diagnostic Pathways eg ASD/ADHD is below 12 months

▶ Overall absence levels and absence for pupils with SEND remains below national levels including fixed and permanent exclusions

▶ The gap between pupils with SEND and those without working at the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2 is reduced, more pupils achieve expected outcomes

▶ There will be an increase in % of pupils with SEND attaining a standard pass at the end of Key Stage 4 and those attaining a strong pass (Attainment 8) and an increase in % of pupils with SEND making expected progress at the end of Key Stage 4 (Progress 8)

▶ An increase in successful post 16 transitions into Further Education and a reduction in NEET (not in employment education or training) for children and young people with SEND

▶ Through our innovative approaches "Shaping the Future" programme there will be established local SEND communities of practice and local strategic plans in place to implement local SEND priorities.

7. Who will monitor our progress?

The SEND and Inclusion Strategy will be monitored by the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion and Health and Well-Being Boards. This will ensure accountability across the Local Area Partnerships and drive improvements.

Updates around our progress will be provided twice a year on our Local Offer page so that everyone can be kept up to date with our progress.

This strategy will be formally reviewed in 18 months from publication to ensure that our priorities are on track, progress is being made and is having a positive impact on children and young people with SEND across Leicestershire.

SEND system governance

Leicestershire Health and Wellbeing Board

Children and Families Partnership Board

Legend:
- → Accountable to
- - - → Reports to
- ◄- - → Information shared with
- Key decision groups
- Delivery groups
- Strategic partners consultation groups
- Local Consultation groups

Integrated Care Board (ICB)
Senior Management Team

General Practitioners

Leicestershire Partnership Trust
• SEND Delivery Group

University Hospitals of Leicester

Leicestershire SEND & Inclusion Board
Key responsibilities – deliver the vision and the SEND & Inclusion Strategy, communication, monitor and deliver on the Accelerated Progress Plan

Leicestershire County Council
• Children & Family Service Departmental Team

Maintained Schools

Academies

Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum

Local consultation groups of parents/carers and children/young people

Local area projects and boards to support SEND development

SEND and Inclusion Strategy – Formal Consultation Report

May 2025

Purpose of the Report

To share the results and feedback from the SEND and Inclusion Strategy consultation.

Contents

1. Purpose of the consultation

2. Method of engagement

3. Findings from engagement

Purpose of the consultation

To engage with local people, communities and partners to understand their views on the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy for 2024-27, and to use these views to help shape the final Strategy. This included confirming agreement to the draft SEND principles, ensuring the Strategy reflects what works well and the barriers and challenges for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire, and that the priorities identified within the Strategy are the right focus for improvement activity to be overseen by the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board over the next 3 years.

Method of engagement

Who

The consultation aimed to seek the views of local people, communities and partners working with children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

How

Online: All visitors to the council's website during February to April 2025 were invited to complete the consultation survey which was visible on the 'have your say' page of the Council's website.

Paper: A paper copy of the survey was made available upon request to ensure all local people wishing to take part in the consultation were able to.

The media: Multiple media releases were sent out which were picked up by a number of media outlets (via television, radio, and newspapers) to encourage local people to provide their views.

Social media: Messages encouraging people to take part in the consultation were sent out via the Council's Local Offer and County Council's Facebook pages

Targeted communications were sent to:

- The SEND Hub, Leicestershire's SEND Parent and Carer Forum
- Head Teachers across Leicestershire for onward circulation to parents and carers via school newsletters
- Health and Social Care partners for onward circulation to colleagues working with children and young people with SEND
- Elected Members. All elected members received an email on 12 February 2025 advising them of the start of the consultation. In additional the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee received a report as part of the consultation exercise at its meeting on 21 January 2025 inviting them to comment on the Strategy.
- Internal staff. Employees of the County Council were made aware of the consultation through the March 2025 edition of the Director of Children and Families Update e-newsletter
- All were invited to comment on the Strategy via the survey link or to request a paper copy of the survey.

Questions asked within the survey:

Q1 Which of the following best describes the role you are replying to this consultation? (list of options)

Q2 Do you have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)?

Q3 Are you a parent / carer of children aged 0-25 with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) in any of the following settings? Please tick all that apply (list of settings)

Q4 In which setting are you a teacher/ governor/ trustee/ or other employee of a school? (list of options)

Q5 If you indicated that you represent an organisation, business, community group, school/other educational establishment, please provide your details.

Q6 Are you providing your organisation's official response to the consultation?

Q7 Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our SEND principles?

Q7a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider within our SEND principles?

Q8 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Q8a The draft strategy describes what currently works well for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire

Q8b The draft strategy describes the barriers and challenges that children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire currently face

Q8c Why do you say this? Is there anything missing from what works well or the from the barriers and challenges?

Q9 To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Improvement theme – Identification and assessment of needs. We will improve early identification and timeliness of needs assessments across partners)

Q9a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority?

Q10 To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Improvement theme – Attendance and inclusion. We will focus on supporting attendance and inclusion, particularly in mainstream settings.)

Q10a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority?

Q11 To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Improvement theme - Commissioned services. We will focus on commissioning the most appropriate educational places and short breaks, as well as making best use of joint commissioning arrangements.)

Q11a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority?

Q12 To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Improvement theme - Engagement, coproduction, feedback and voice. We will improve how we capture and use the voice of children, young people and their families to help shape and improve services.)

Q12a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority?

Q13 To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Improvement theme - Strategic Leadership and Improvement. We will work more closely with partners

across the system to improve join up between services, sharing data and making the system easier to navigate.)

Q13a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority?

Q14 To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Improvement theme – Transitions. We will focus on supporting successful well-planned transitions between educational settings and through to adult services.)

Q14a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority?

Q15 To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Improvement theme - Outcomes for children and young people with SEND. We will focus on helping children to achieve good outcomes and support their preparation for adulthood.)

Q15a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority?

Q16 Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27?

Q16a Why do you say this?

Q17 Do you have any other comments about the draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy?

Q18 What is your gender?

Q19 Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth? If you're aged under 16, please skip this question.

Q20 What was your age on your last birthday?

Q21 In which local authority area do you live?

Q22 Are you a parent or carer of a young person aged 17 or under?

Q23 If yes, what are the ages of the children in your care?

Q24 Are you a carer of a person aged 18 or over?

Q25 Do you have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?

Q26 What is your ethnic group?

Q27 What is your religion?

Q28 What is your sexual orientation? If you're aged under 16, please skip this question.

When

The opportunity for local people, communities and partners to share their views on the SEND and Inclusion Strategy was available from Wednesday 12 February 2025 until Tuesday 8 April 2025, via the method outlined above.

Findings from the Consultation

60 surveys were returned during the consultation period. All were submitted online. During the consultation period, there were no requests for paper versions of the survey or for the Easy Read version of the Strategy document.

About respondents

The majority of respondents were:

- Female (84%)
- Aged 25-64 (97%)
- A Leicestershire resident (92%)
- A parent or carer of a child or young person aged 18 or under (84%)
- Had children aged 11-15 in their care (66%)
- Not a carer of a person aged 18 or older (79%)
- Did not have a long-standing illness or disability (53%)
- White ethnicity (95%)
- No religion (62%)
- Straight/heterosexual (91%)

13 respondents provided their organisation's official response to the consultation.

Responses to 'Your role' questions

Q1: Which of the following best describes the role you are replying to this consultation?

Select a response in this chart to filter the other charts in the dashboard

Q1	#	%
I am a parent / carer of a child or children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)	34	57%
I am a teacher/ governor/ trustee/ or other employee of a school	15	25%
I am an interested member of the public	4	7%
Other (please specify below)	2	3%
I work for Leicestershire County Council	2	3%
I represent a voluntary and community services (VCS) organisation	2	3%
I represent another stakeholder e.g. district/borough/parish council, police, national agency/body etc.	1	2%

Q3: Are you a parent / carer of children aged 0-25 with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) in any of the following settings?

Response	#	%
Mainstream school (not attending specialist provision)	22	65%
Other (including alternative provision - please specify below)	13	38%
Local Authority Specialist School or Academy	2	6%
Home schooled	2	6%
Mainstream early years setting	1	3%
In a special unit in a mainstream school	1	3%

Q4: In which setting are you a teacher/ governor/ trustee/ or other employee of a school?

Response	#	%
Mainstream (no specialist provision)	9	60%
Mainstream (with a specialist unit/provision)	3	20%
Independent Specialist School	2	13%
Local Authority Specialist School or Academy	1	7%

Q6: Are you providing your organisation's official response to the consultation?

Response	#	%	
No	13	65%	65%
Yes	7	35%	35%

Responses to 'About you' questions

			No. of responses	% of total responses to question
Q18	Gender	Female	31	84%
		Male	6	16%
Q19	Gender identified with the same as sex registered at birth	Yes	36	100%
Q20	Age	25 - 44	18	53%
		45 - 64	15	44%
		65 and above	1	3%
Q21	Local authority area	Blaby District Council	6	16%
		Charnwood Borough Council	8	21%
		Harborough District Council	5	13%
		Hinckley and Bosworth District Council	2	5%
		Melton Borough Council	10	26%
		North West Leicestershire District Council	4	11%
		Rutland County Council	3	8%
Q22	Parent or carer of a young person aged 17 or under	Yes	32	84%
		No	6	16%
Q23	Ages of the children in your care	0-4	1	3%
		5-10	15	47%
		11-15	21	66%
		16-17	2	6%
Q24	Carer of a person aged 18 or over	Yes	8	21%
		No	30	79%
Q25	Illness or disability	Yes	18	47%
		No	20	53%
Q26	Ethnic group	White	35	95%
		Other ethnic group	2	5%
Q27	Religion	Christian (all denominations)	14	38%
		No religion	23	62%

Q28	Sexual orientation	Gay or Lesbian	1	3%
		Straight/ Heterosexual	32	91%
		I use another term	2	6%

Responses to questions around the draft Strategy based on respondent profile

Support for our SEND Principles:

All respondents

Q7: Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our SEND principles?

| 7% | 3% | 7% | 53% | 31% |

Base: 59

Response ■ Strongly disagree   ■ Tend to disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Tend to agree   ■ Strongly agree

Parents and carers of a child or children with SEND

Q7: Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our SEND principles?

| 6% | 6% | 12% | 61% | 15% |

Base: 33

Response ■ Strongly disagree   ■ Tend to disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Tend to agree   ■ Strongly agree

Teachers, governors, trustees or other school employees

Q7: Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our SEND principles?

| 7% | 40% | 53% |

Base: 15

Response ■ Strongly disagree   ■ Tend to disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Tend to agree   ■ Strongly agree

Interested members of the public

Less than 5 responses

Representatives of voluntary and community organisations

Less than 5 responses

Other stakeholders

Less than 5 responses

Leicestershire County Council employees

Less than 5 responses

Other

Less than 5 responses

The strategy describes what currently works well and the barriers and challenges for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire

All respondents

Parents and carers of a child or children with SEND

Teachers, governors, trustees or other school employees

Interested members of the public

Less than 5 responses

Representatives of voluntary and community organisations

Less than 5 responses

Other stakeholders

Less than 5 responses
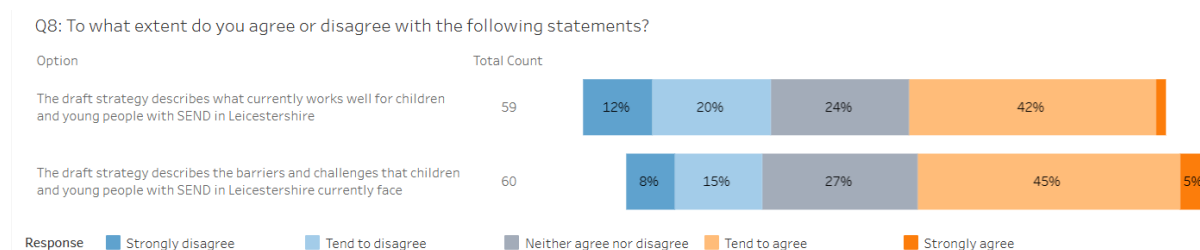
Leicestershire County Council employees
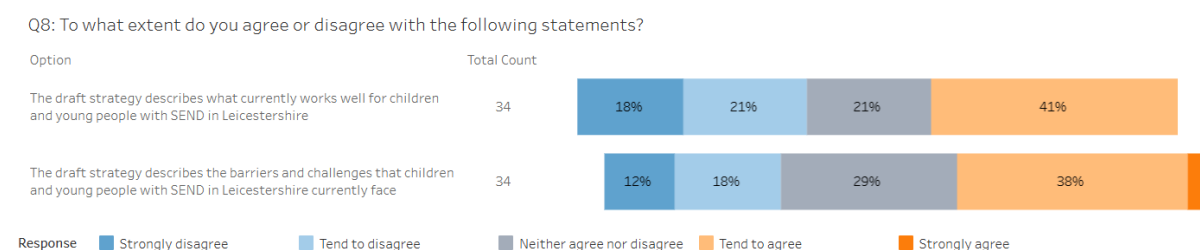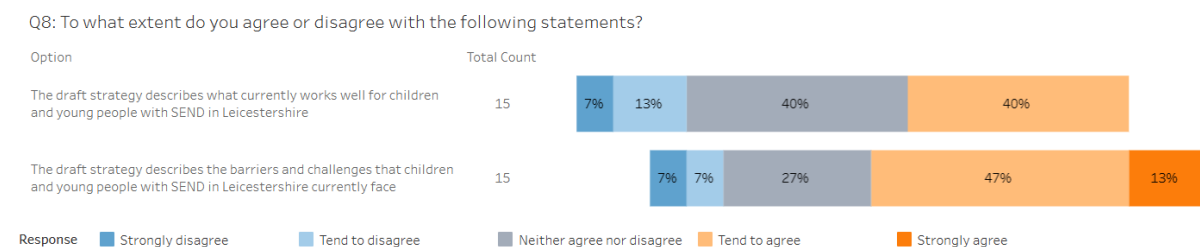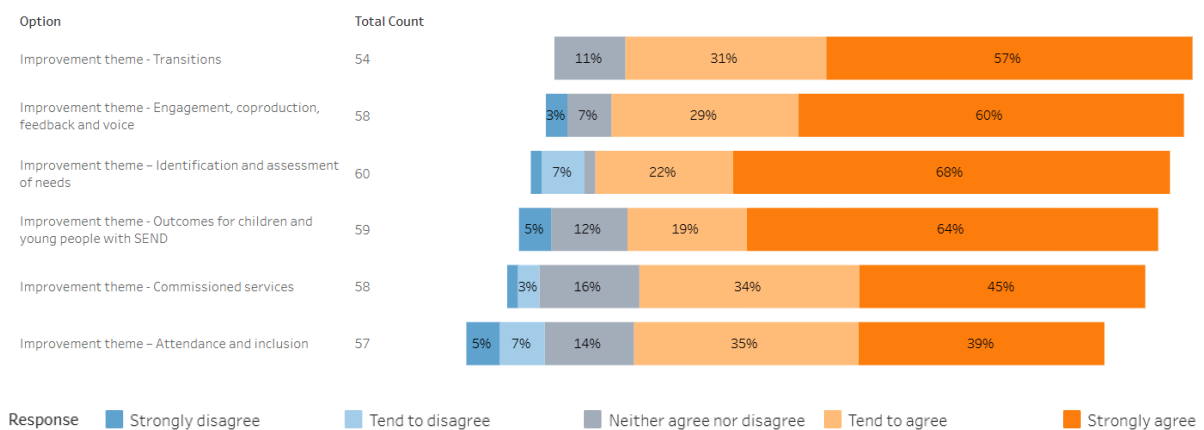
Less than 5 responses

Other

Less than 5 responses

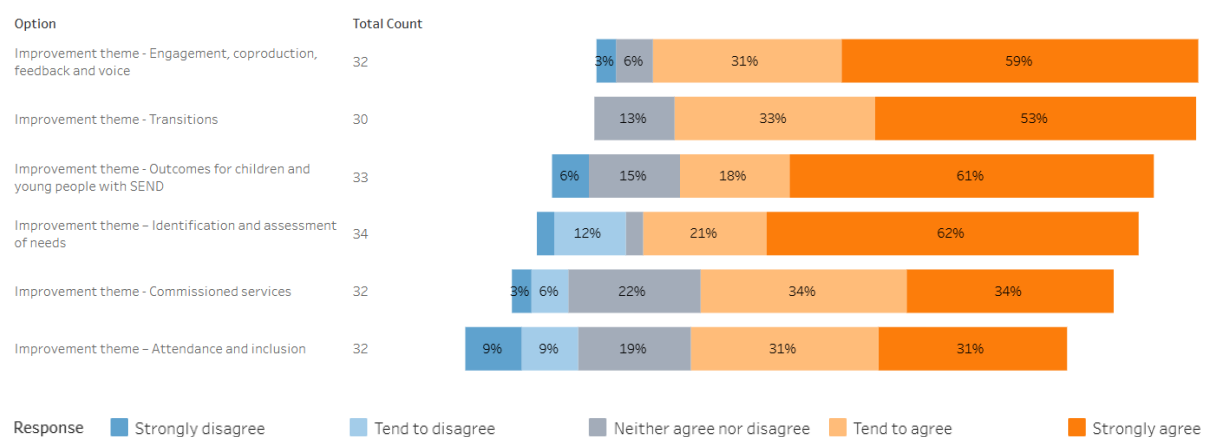## Agreement with the improvement priorities set out in the Strategy

All respondents

Q9 - Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?

Option	Total Count	
Improvement theme - Transitions	54	11% · 31% · 57%
Improvement theme - Engagement, coproduction, feedback and voice	58	3% · 7% · 29% · 60%
Improvement theme – Identification and assessment of needs	60	7% · 22% · 68%
Improvement theme - Outcomes for children and young people with SEND	59	5% · 12% · 19% · 64%
Improvement theme - Commissioned services	58	3% · 16% · 34% · 45%
Improvement theme – Attendance and inclusion	57	5% · 7% · 14% · 35% · 39%

Response: Strongly disagree · Tend to disagree · Neither agree nor disagree · Tend to agree · Strongly agree

Parents and carers of a child or children with SEND

Q9 - Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?

Option	Total Count	
Improvement theme - Engagement, coproduction, feedback and voice	32	3% · 6% · 31% · 59%
Improvement theme - Transitions	30	13% · 33% · 53%
Improvement theme - Outcomes for children and young people with SEND	33	6% · 15% · 18% · 61%
Improvement theme – Identification and assessment of needs	34	12% · 21% · 62%
Improvement theme - Commissioned services	32	3% · 6% · 22% · 34% · 34%
Improvement theme – Attendance and inclusion	32	9% · 9% · 19% · 31% · 31%

Response: Strongly disagree · Tend to disagree · Neither agree nor disagree · Tend to agree · Strongly agree

Teachers, governors, trustees or other school employees

Q9 - Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?
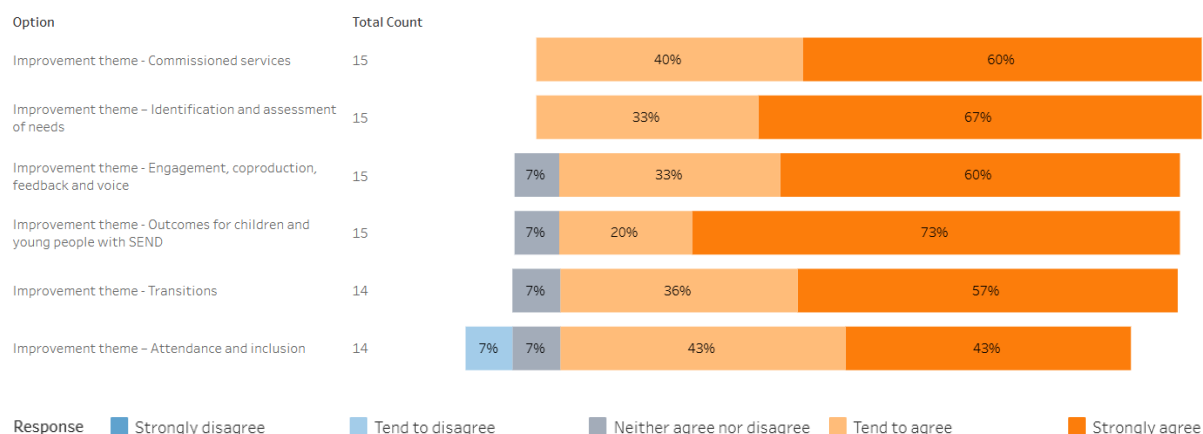
Option	Total Count	
Improvement theme - Commissioned services	15	40% / 60%
Improvement theme – Identification and assessment of needs	15	33% / 67%
Improvement theme - Engagement, coproduction, feedback and voice	15	7% / 33% / 60%
Improvement theme - Outcomes for children and young people with SEND	15	7% / 20% / 73%
Improvement theme - Transitions	14	7% / 36% / 57%
Improvement theme – Attendance and inclusion	14	7% / 7% / 43% / 43%

Response: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to agree ■ Strongly agree

Interested members of the public

Less than 5 responses

Representatives of voluntary and community organisations

Less than 5 responses

Other stakeholders

Less than 5 responses

Leicestershire County Council employees

Less than 5 responses

Other

Less than 5 responses

Overall agreement with the draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27

All respondents

Q16: Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27?

5% | 5% | 19% | 53% | 17%

Base: 58

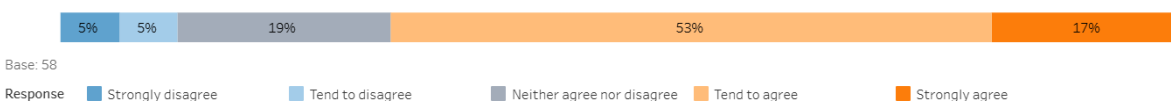Response: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to agree ■ Strongly agree

Parents and carers of a child or children with SEND

Q16: Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27?

9%	6%	26%	47%	12%

Base: 34

Response ■ Strongly disagree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to agree ■ Strongly agree

Teachers, governors, trustees or other school employees

Q16: Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27?

8%	77%	15%

Base: 13

Response ■ Tend to disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to agree ■ Strongly agree

Interested members of the public

Less than 5 responses

Representatives of voluntary and community organisations

Less than 5 responses

Other stakeholders

Less than 5 responses

Leicestershire County Council employees

Less than 5 responses

Other

Less than 5 responses

Summary of themes from open comment questions

Below is a summary of themes observed from responses to open comment questions within the survey.

Q7a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider within our SEND principles? (Following Q7 - Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our SEND principles?)
34 responses

- Overall general agreement with the principles although many qualified this sentiment with concerns e.g.:
  - Ability to implement and uphold the principles in practice

- o Communication - with parents/carers, schools and other stakeholders including not feeling listened to, understood, or receiving timely updates
- Other concerns:
  - o Criticism regarding the ability to meet statutory obligations aside from principles
  - o Support available for parents/carers and children (particularly whilst awaiting further action)
  - o Need to recognise the unique and independent needs of each child.
  - o Negative experiences – current or past, with several references to delays within in the service.
- Suggestions / missing elements:
  - o Open communication with education settings and other stakeholders.
  - o Improved collaboration with partners.
  - o Trust, understanding, empathy and relationship building highlighted as key qualities for consideration alongside principles
  - o The view that the principles could go further
- Other comments:
  - o Concern and/or suggestions regarding the priority order of the principles

Q8c Why do you say this? Is there anything missing from what works well or the from the barriers and challenges? (Following Q8a and Q8b)
37 responses

- References to challenges related to mainstream provision including:
  - o Concern about a focus on meeting needs in mainstream schools and that some children may be negatively impacted by this
  - o Need for further training, resources, support, and funding for mainstream providers
  - o Concern over the wider impacts of an increased focus on mainstream settings e.g. mental health of children and staff
  - o Concern that the strategy is not representative of a mainstream setting
- Other barriers and concerns:
  - o Delays at various points e.g. assessments, diagnosis, annual reviews, mental health support
  - o Issues specifically related to the system, including the length of assessment documents, appeals, closed panel hearings, lack of SENA involvement in reviews, lack of joint working, joined up thinking and/or communication.
- Criticism of the local authority and its ability to deliver the service
- In referencing the above points, several respondents including parents / carers and other professional stakeholders mentioned specific examples and personal experiences
- Some support for how the strategy reflects barriers and challenges but a couple of comments suggesting that it was not clear what is working well
- Other comments and suggestions on aspects missing from the strategy:
  - o Health challenges and what has been done to address these
  - o Gaps in support for specialities e.g. sight loss
  - o Mental health – more of a barrier
  - o Recognition of the wider impacts on children and families
  - o Support for young people transitioning from compulsory education
  - o The need to be more realistic whilst recognising the positives

- o The need to highlight that schools offer SEND provision but address funding and delays

Improvement theme – Identification and assessment of needs
Q9a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority? (Following Q9 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?)
34 responses

- Many in agreement with this priority and reflecting the view that this is essential.
- Several comments expressing concerns over delays with reference to personal experiences, including those related to collaboration with the council, schools and the NHS
- Concern as to whether the priority can be delivered and sustained given the challenges, including the need for additional support and funding
- Other concerns include:
  - o Universal support dilutes specialisms
  - o Language used is not motivating enough
- Suggestions include:
  - o Need for early identification
  - o Increasing awareness and improving communication channels
  - o Accept findings of Educational Psychologists employed by school trusts
  - o Improvements in the assessment process to ensure it is empowering for children

Improvement theme – Attendance and inclusion
Q10a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority? (Following Q10 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?)
39 responses

- Concern about whether this priority can be met along with comments highlighting the need to address current issues around capacity, resourcing (including wider support such as CAMHS) and funding.
- Concern over a focus on mainstream settings and that they are not always suitable or have sufficient resources.
- The need for a shift in focus from penalising parents/carers to supporting them
- Suggestions include:
  - o Adjust to and celebrate diverse environmental learning needs of children
  - o More training and support - for schools, parents and those educated at home
  - o Improved coordination, partnership working, including attendance partnerships
  - o Share good practice between schools / settings
  - o Embed emotional literacy in the curriculum

Improvement theme - Commissioned services
Q11a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority? (Following Q11 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?)
22 responses

- Several comments highlighting the need to meet needs in the right setting along with appropriate support
- Other concerns regarding delays and funding the delivery of this priority
- System issues including consistency with placements and the high expense of independent specialist providers.
- Suggestion that there is a lack of awareness and understanding around this priority
- General criticism of the priority
- Suggestions for further consideration include:
  - More places in local communities
  - Hybrid model of SEND units and mainstream provision
  - More therapeutic provision
  - Include timeframes e.g. for when sufficient places will be available in the county
  - Widen participation for activities / breaks outside of school term

Improvement theme - Engagement, coproduction, feedback and voice
Q12a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority? (Following Q12 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?)
31 responses

- Overall agreement with priority
- Concerns regarding how voice is captured (including approaches used), also whether voice is captured and used effectively
- Need to consider schools views also
- Value of both the children's and particularly the parents/carer's voice highlighted
- View that there are bigger issues
- View that the statement is not challenging enough

Improvement theme - Strategic Leadership and Improvement
Q13a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority? (Following Q13 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?)
29 responses

- General agreement that improvement in this area is necessary, with several comments referencing benefits of working to this priority along with the view that it is obvious and should be expected.
- General concern over how it will be delivered in practice
- Issues with the current service highlighted include:
  - Data quality
  - System is confusing
  - Delays and communications, particularly responses to queries and messages
  - Funding and lack of resources
- Other areas highlighted as needing particular focus for progress in this priority:
  - Schools as key partners to work with and listen to

- o Transition to adulthood
- o Working environment for staff

Improvement theme - Transitions
Q14a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority? (Following Q14 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?)
28 responses

- Agreement with priority, although some concern about the details and how it will be delivered.
- Several consequences / risks of not meeting this priority highlighted, including:
  - o Settings unable to meet need
  - o Distress for families
  - o Lack of progress for the child / young person
  - o Young people not in education, employment or training and vulnerability to wider risks e.g. exploitation
- Issues with current service highlighted include:
  - o Support and funding for settings
  - o Communication and consultation during the transitions process
  - o Scope of the current transition offer for neurodivergent and post-16
  - o Timescales
- Suggestions include:
  - o Re-direct funding where needed
  - o Create more employment opportunities
  - o Review requirements for post-16, including eligibility for home education and further funding
  - o Increased support from specialists during transition period
  - o Re-word priority e.g. we will ensure every child transitioning will be supported
- Other responses included the view that there are bigger issues for the local authority to focus on

Improvement theme - Outcomes for children and young people with SEND
Q15a Why do you say this? Is there anything else we should consider about the detail in the strategy for this priority? (Following Q15 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?)
26 responses

- Uncertainty regarding the reality of delivering the priority, whether it can be achieved and how it will be measured
- Concerns and issues raised about current experiences related to this priority e.g.:
  - o Quality of EHCP and inclusion of this priority
  - o Insufficient funding and annual funding cycle
  - o Local authority involvement, delays, and inconsistencies
  - o The need to be in the right setting
- Concern that support will be reduced or that focus will not be on longer term outcomes
- Suggestions include:

- o Widen the curriculum, provide support with further education and training, including more vocational courses
- o Include further detail in the strategy such as the number of supporter traineeships, timescales, funding sources, and accessibility improvements
- o Ensure staff are skilled and knowledgeable about opportunities
- o Review how this priority is reflected in EHCP wording

Q16a Why do you say this? (Following Q16 - Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27?)
34 responses

- Positive / overall agreement with the strategy including areas of focus and anticipation for its delivery
- Some doubts expressed around whether it can be implemented successfully
- Concerns regarding funding and support available to deliver the strategy
- Other concerns include delays within the service and the focus of the strategy on inclusion within mainstream settings
- Suggestions for inclusion within the strategy and / or views on missing elements e.g.:
  - o Transparency about timeliness and likelihood of improvements
  - o Further detail about how aims will be achieved e.g. action plan
  - o Increase in support needed, including outside of school
  - o More accountability - both for schools and for the delivery of the strategy overall
  - o Capture more feedback and share good practice

Q17 Do you have any other comments about the draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy?
19 responses

- Suggestions for further consideration within the strategy include:
  - o Sharing learning and good practice
  - o Focus on the individual and transition into adulthood
  - o Support needed for schools to be inclusive, including training
  - o Further investment in early intervention
  - o More local authority SEND placements
  - o Focus on communication with parents and continuous consultation on the strategy
- Doubts around whether the strategy can be implemented successfully in practice
- Criticism of strategy document e.g. corporate language used, insufficient detail, accuracy of current position, outdated data.
- Negative personal experiences of the service, including delays

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Equality Impact Assessment Form

APPENDIX C

1- Policy details	
Name of policy	Leicestershire Local Area SEND and Inclusion Strategy
Department and service	Children and Family Services, Education Quality & Performance
Who has been involved in completing the Equality Impact Assessment?	Renata Chantrill, Head of Service Education Quality, Performance and Business Support
Contact numbers	01163050356
Date of completion	6th December 2024

2- Objectives and background of policy or practice change	
Use this section to describe the policy or practice change What is the purpose, expected outcomes and rationale? Include the background information and context	
What is the proposal? **What change and impact is intended by the proposal?**	A refreshed partnership strategy for SEND and Inclusion across the Leicestershire local area for 2024-27 which replaces the previous SEND and Inclusion strategy 2020-23. The purpose of this strategy is to set out the vision and priorities in Leicestershire for developing support and provision for children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND.

Our strategy will be delivered through our five overarching SEND principles which have been co-produced by the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership following an evaluation of what is working well and current barriers to achieving our vision for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire.

- **The child and family are at the heart of what we all do**
- **We will have an accurate understanding of the needs and lived experiences of children and young people with SEND**
- **Children and young people with SEND are prepared for successful transition throughout their life**
- **Leaders across the SEND partnership will work together to plan, deliver and quality assure Leicestershire's offer**
- **We will provide timely and effective support to enable children and young people with SEND to thrive and belong in their communities**

We are committed to making positive change happen. We know there is history where children and families have felt let down and feel that promises have not been fulfilled. We are determined to change this. We also know that this will take time, but we will work diligently, co-produce quickly and effectively to make positive change happen.

This strategy sets out our ambitious vision, aims and priorities to ensure that we effectively identify and meet the needs of the children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) age 0 to 25. It also demonstrates our commitment to delivering consistently better outcomes for children and young people with SEND. We will ensure children with SEND across Leicestershire have access to the right support at the right time enabling them to thrive and succeed.

| **What is the rationale for this proposal?** | Our SEND strategy demonstrates the collective commitment and responsibility between our parents, community, Local Authority (LA) education and social care support services and settings, including health services across the spectrum of health provision. Parents and the voluntary sector have a shared commitment to the strategy and are partners in ensuring that it meets the needs of our children and young people. |

Children and young people achieve better outcomes when we have a clear focus on working together. Whilst there is significant pressure and challenge, our vision is for all children, including those with SEND to thrive, fulfil their potential, belong, and live their best lives within their communities.

The strategy builds on data and evidence from across Leicestershire partners captured within our Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP) about what is working well and what could be improved to ensure children and young people with SEND are supported to thrive and succeed. The areas identified for improvement within the LAIP are cross-referenced against the key principles within the strategy and incorporated development plan.

Leicestershire has been subject to an Accelerated Progress Plan following the last Local Area SEND inspection in 2020 and revisit in 2022. The learning from this inspection and ongoing support from the DfE has also been included both within the LAIP and as areas for improvement where not yet achieved within the strategy.

3- Evidence gathered on equality implications - Data and engagement

What evidence about potential equality impacts is already available?

This could come from research, service analysis, questionnaires, and engagement with protected characteristics groups

What equalities information or data has been gathered so far? **What does it show?**	The SEND and Inclusion Strategy itself contains a summary of the key equalities information around children and young people in Leicestershire, particularly those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Key points from the strategy are included below. Additional information has been taken from the LAIP. Leicestershire's population was 712,336 at the latest census in 2021, a 9.5% increase to the county's population over the last 10 years. This makes Leicestershire one of the fastest growing areas in the country in terms of population (national average 6.6%). Understandably, this has placed added pressures on services for Children and Young People in the County. The County has approx. 201,250 children and young people aged under 26 years (29% of the total population). This is expected to grow to 234,329 by 2033.

Population of Leicestershire	2023 estimate	2033 estimate
Total population for Leicestershire	722,155	806,906
Total number of children and young people aged under 26 years	210,255	234,329
Percentage of children and young people aged below 26 against the total population	29.1%	29%
Split across SEN2 age bandings:		
0 to 4	36,160	39,982
5 to 10	48,762	51,466
11 to 15	41,981	44,661
16 to 18	24,470	29,340
19 to 25	58,882	68,880

There are 107,413 children and young people educated in Leicestershire schools (aged 3-18). Children and Young People from minority ethnic groups account for 23.6% of all children living in Leicestershire, compared with 37% in the country as a whole. The largest minority ethnic groups are Asian or Asian British and Mixed.

From our School Census in January 2024, we know that		
Total number of pupils in Leicestershire schools	107,413	
Percentage of Black Asian and other ethnic communities of the total school population (excluding unclassified)	23.6%	
Total number and percentage of EHCP's for Black, Asian and Ethnic groups	Number	Percentage

Asian/Asian British	19	3%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	5	0.8%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	30	4.7%
Other ethnic groups	3	0.5%
Percentage of pupils that have English as an additional language	8.6%	
Total number of looked after children (March 2023 903 return)	681	
Total number of looked after children as a percentage of the total population aged 0 to 17 years	0.48%	
All pupils eligible for free school meals	15.5%	
SEN support pupils eligible for free school meals	12.9%	
EHCP pupils eligible for free school meals	32.5%	

The latest School Census, which includes all pupils on roll at a school within Leicestershire (aged 4 to 16 years), reports that there are now 13,983 pupils on a SEN Support plan and 6,377 with an Education, Health and Care Plan. SEND pupils account for 17.2% of the Leicestershire school population. Leicestershire has a proportion of children and young people with SEND (identified through EHCPs and SEN support) broadly in line with the English average.
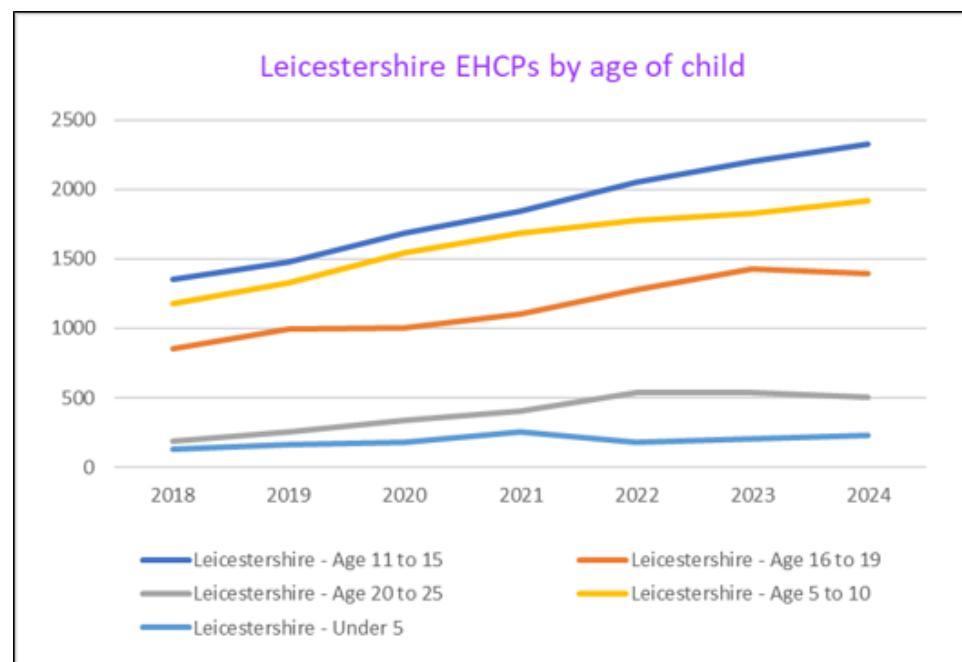
In 2024, the annual school census (Spring term) reported that 12.9% of children and young people were identified at SEN Support level in the County, just below the England average. Previous longer-term trends had indicated a lower-than-average level in Leicestershire, but this gap has now largely closed.
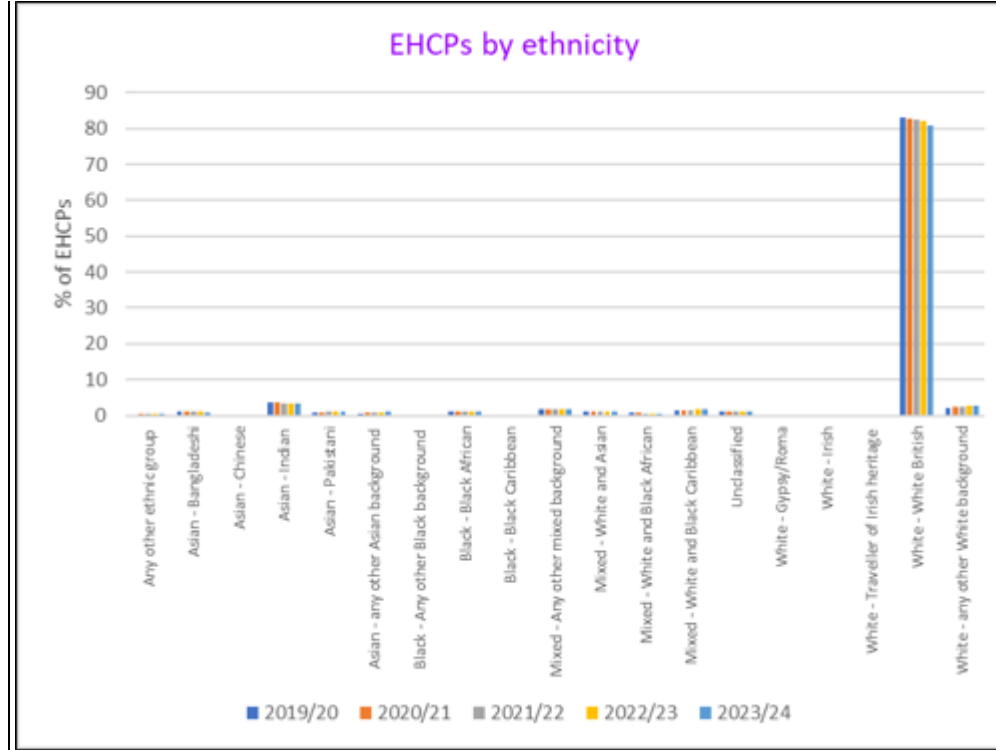
Within SEN Support assessment, most schools identify Moderate Learning Difficulties (28%) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (21%). These exceed the regional and national averages, with a lower number of children and young people identified with Speech, Language and Communication needs than average regional and national trends, particularly at Primary school.
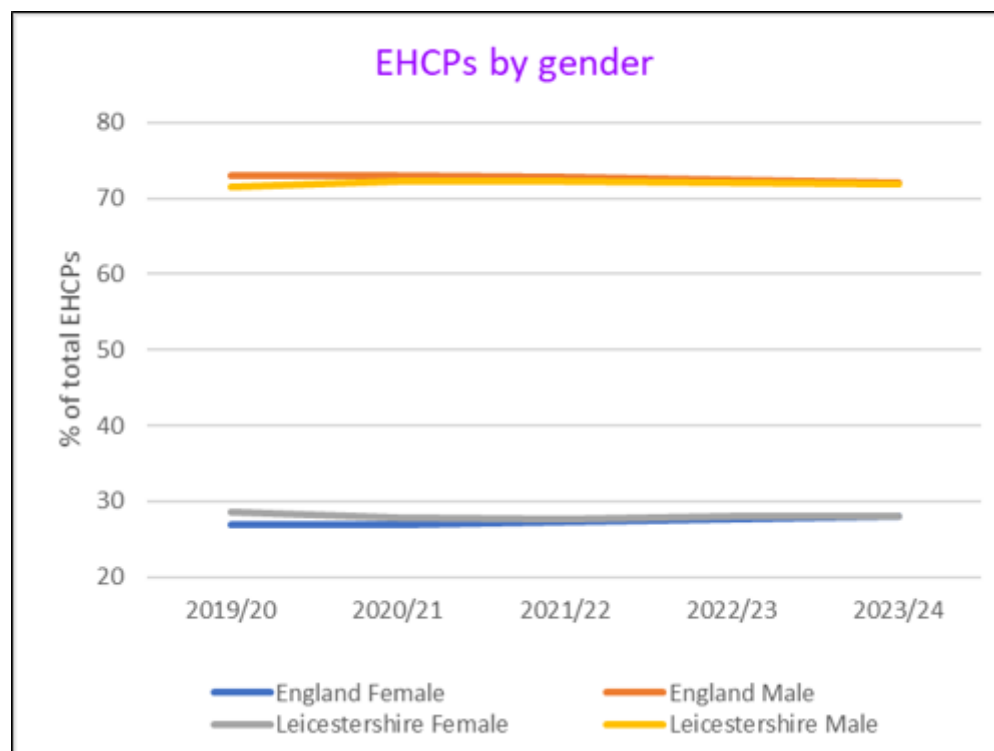
It is notable that the identification of Speech, Language and Communication needs is rising for SEN support and aligning more closely to national trends, reflecting work across the County to appropriately identify. The Code of Practice SEND 2015 identifies Cognition & Learning as a category rather than MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty, which is identified most at Key Stages 2/3/4 in Leicestershire.

Primary needs (most prominent presenting need of the child or young person) within EHCPs in Leicestershire in 2023 were 23.5% of children/young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder; 18.4% with Speech, Communication and Language needs. At EHCP level, there is little change from the five-year trend of Autism Spectrum Disorder being the most likely source of assessments resulting in an EHCP which aligns with the national picture.

The following charts set out the cohort of Leicestershire children and young people with EHCPs and how this has changed over time by age, ethnicity and gender.

Leicestershire EHCPs by age of child

Legend:
- Leicestershire - Age 11 to 15
- Leicestershire - Age 16 to 19
- Leicestershire - Age 20 to 25
- Leicestershire - Age 5 to 10
- Leicestershire - Under 5

EHCPs by ethnicity

EHCPs by gender

Over a third of children with EHCPs with a primary need identified as Moderate Learning Difficulty, Social Emotional and Mental Health, Severe Learning Difficulty and Specific Learning Disability were also eligible for free school meals compared to 15.7% of those without SEND. These figures reduced for SEN support where just under a third of Social Emotional and Mental Health needs were made up of children eligible for free school meals.

In terms of gender, more male children were identified with a predominant need in every type of SEND need category aside from Hearing Impairment where males make up 44% of EHCP and 47.1% of SEN support. We

know that Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty needs are up significantly for male children across both EHCPs and SEN support, and males now make up 100% of children with this as a primary need identified for SEN support. Male children made up more than 70% of EHCPs for needs identified as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Severe Learning Difficulty, Social Emotional and Mental Health, and Speech Language and Communication needs.

By ethnicity, more than three quarters of children identified with SEND/LDD needs across all categories were White British. Of particular note, a higher proportion of White British children had a predominant need of Moderate Learning Difficulty, Physical Disability, Social Emotional and Mental Health, Specific Learning Difficulty and Speech Language and Communication needs across EHCPs, and over 90% of children with SEN support for Multi-sensory impairment and Specific Learning Difficulty were White British.

As with the previous strategy, the Leicestershire Local Area SEND and Inclusion Strategy will be applied across all children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND in Leicestershire.

What engagement has been undertaken so far? **What does it show?**	The strategy has been co-produced with the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board, which includes representatives from Health, Social Care, Education, Schools and Parent/Carers for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire. The key principles and actions driving the plan have been agreed by the Board and the strategy builds on the data we have collected around the experience of services for children and young people with SEND, both in terms of outcomes, and satisfaction with services including hearing directly from children and young people and their families around what needs to be improved. The strategy incorporates the voice of those experiences of services and the impact when we get it right as well as understanding how we can do more. We have used this feedback to help us to shape the strategy and to set out improvement actions within the strategy.

4- Benefits, concerns and mitigating action

Please specify if any individuals or community groups who identify with any of the 'protected characteristics' may *potentially* be affected by the policy and describe any benefits and concerns including any barriers. Use this section to demonstrate how risks would be mitigated for each affected group. If a group will not be affected by the proposal please state so.

Group	What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	What are the concerns identified and how will these affect those from the following groups?	How will the known concerns be mitigated?
Age	Improvements to partner services will support all children and young people aged 0-25 with identified SEND in Leicestershire.	The strategy does not consider services for people aged over 25 with identified SEND in Leicestershire although does seek to improve outcomes for children and young people under 25 with SEND including the pathway to adulthood.	Adults with SEND in Leicestershire can seek support where eligible from Adult Social Care.
Disability	Improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with identified SEND in Leicestershire. . This strategy aims to deliver our vision for all children, including those with SEND to thrive, fulfil their potential, belong, and live their best lives within their communities. Improvements to service provision should also benefit the parents,	The strategy seeks to improve services for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire. Current challenges of funding against demand for assessment and support across partner services mean some improvements will need to be prioritised where the biggest improvements can be made for	Partners acknowledge that resource challenges mean a bespoke improvement offer on an individual child basis is not possible however the actions proposed will deliver measurable benefits in the areas prioritised within the strategy. Alternative approaches to existing offers as well as new service offers will be

	carers and families of children and young people with SEND.	the greatest number of children and young people. Consequently the strategy proposes how partners will prioritise improvement activity. It should be noted that improvements are being planned on a cohort basis which will result in improvements being felt by individuals in different ways depending on their needs (ie improvement of the neurodevelopmental pathway will directly impact those children and young people with neurodevelopmental needs). The strategy is a comprehensive document that may be difficult for some people with SEND to access.	trialled which could prove more effective at addressing existing challenges and barriers experienced by children and young people with SEND and their families. A public consultation on the new strategy will seek to agree that the priorities identified are the right focus for improvement activity over the next 3 years. An easy read version of the strategy will be produced to ensure it is accessible for more people with SEND. Visual ways of explaining the proposals will also be developed.
Race	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND. A higher proportion of children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire are White British compared to other ethnicities (aligned with national trends)	None identified.	Not required.

	who are likely to experience a higher positive impact of the strategy as a result.		
Sex	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND. A higher proportion of boys than girls are identified with SEND in Leicestershire (aligned with national trends) who are likely to experience a higher positive impact of the strategy as a result.	None identified.	Not required.
Gender Reassignment	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND.	None identified.	Not required.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND.	None identified.	Not required.
Sexual Orientation	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND.	None identified.	Not required.

Pregnancy and Maternity	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND.	None identified.	Not required.
Religion or Belief	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND.	None identified.	Not required.
Armed Forces (including veterans)	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND.	None identified.	Not required.
People with lived care experience	The strategy proposes to improve the coordination of support for children and young people who have had traumatic experiences and is therefore likely to have a direct benefit for children and young people with lived care experience where this is a concern.	None identified.	Not required.
Other groups: e.g., rural isolation, deprivation, health inequality, carers, asylum	No direct impact identified, improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with SEND.	None identified.	Not required.

seeker and refugee communities, looked after children, deprived or disadvantaged communities	Children and young people with SEND who are eligible for free school meals have a higher likelihood of having an EHCP and associated support for SEND and are likely to experience a higher positive impact of the strategy as a result.		

5- Action Plan

Produce a framework to outline how identified risks/concerns identified in section 4 will be mitigated.

What action is planned?	Who is responsible for the action?	Timescale	Expected outcome
Seek approval to consult on the SEND and Inclusion Strategy	Education Quality & Performance Service	C&FS Scrutiny Committee – 21/1/25 Cabinet – 7/2/25	Ensuring priorities for partnership improvement activity are agreed with elected members prior to wider consultation.
Public consultation on the SEND and Inclusion Strategy following approval to consult by Cabinet	Education Quality & Performance Service	February-May 2025	Feedback on proposed strategy to ensure priorities and direction of partnership improvement activity for children and young people with SEND is understood and agreed.

Produce easy-read version of the SEND and Inclusion strategy and consider visual ways of explaining the proposals	Communications team	Jan-Feb 2025	Ensure strategy can be more accessible to a wider group of people including those with SEND.

6- Approval Process

Departmental Equalities Group	Agreed electronically by Chair of C&FS DEG on 27/12/25 noting the EIA indicates a positive overall impact.
Corporate Policy Team	Please set out comments from the Corporate Policy Team
Sign off by the Senior Responsible Officer for the Project.	

Leicestershire County Council

CABINET - 17 JUNE 2025

ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT STRATEGY 2025-2029 DELIVERING WELLBEING AND OPPORTUNITY IN LEICESTERSHIRE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1.   The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the consultation on the draft Adults and Communities Department Strategy 2025-2029 "Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire" and ask the Cabinet to approve the Strategy. The Strategy and consultation findings are attached respectively as Appendix A and Appendix B to this report.

2.   The Adults and Communities Department includes Adult Social Care, Culture Leicestershire (libraries, museums, heritage sites, cultural participation, collections and learning), and Leicestershire's Adult Learning Service (LALS).

Recommendations

3.   It is recommended that:

   a)   The outcome of the consultation on the Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029 "Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire 2025-2029" be noted;

   b)   The Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029 "Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire 2025-2029" be approved.

(Key Decision)

Reasons for Recommendation

4.   The Strategy provides a framework for policy, process and ways of working for the Adults and Communities Department and supports the delivery of the County Council's statutory duties, national policy and statutory guidance. The consultation feedback has informed the final Strategy.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5.   The Health and Wellbeing Board considered the draft Strategy at its meeting on 29 May 2025. The Board noted the aims within the Strategy.

6.   The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the findings of the consultation and the draft Strategy at its meeting on 2 June 2025. The Committee's comments are set out in paragraph 39 of this report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7.   The Strategy builds on the Adults and Communities Department Ambitions and Strategy 2020–2024 and provides a framework for policy, process and ways of working for the Adults and Communities Department.

8.   All services operate within the County Council's frameworks and corporate strategies such as the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022–2026, the People Strategy 2024–2028, and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028.

9.   The Strategy aims to support the Council to meet its statutory duties including those cited within the Care Act 2014; The Mental Health Act 1983; Mental Capacity Act 2005; Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964; Health and Social Care Act 2012.

10.   There are also different regulatory frameworks which govern Departmental activity. These include:

- *Adult Social Care* – Care Quality Commission;
- *Culture Leicestershire* – Arts Council England and The National Archives;
- *Leicestershire Adult Learning Service* – Ofsted.

11.   On 17 December 2024, the Cabinet approved an eight-week public consultation on the refreshed, draft Strategy.

Resource Implications

12.   There are no resource implications arising from the Strategy. The costs associated with its production are being met from the existing departmental budget.

13.   The Strategy references the cost and demand pressures that the County Council is facing, and the effective use of available budgets and resources required for it to be successful.

14.   The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

15.   This report will be circulated to all Members of the County Council.

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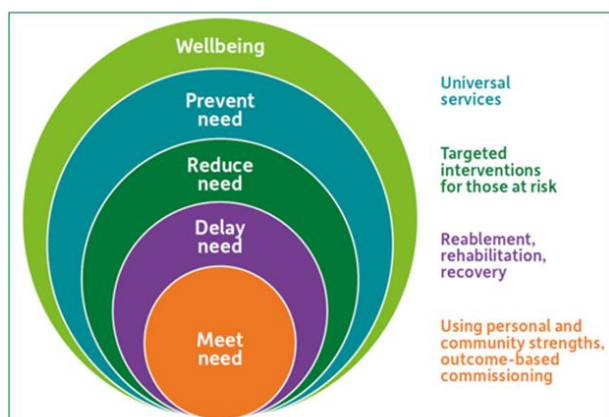Email: inderjit.lahel@leics.gov.uk

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PART B

Background

16. The 2020-2024 Strategy reached its conclusion at the end of the 2024-2025 financial year. It covered the period of the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Changes since then, for example in how people access services and how some of those services are managed, are reflected in the new Strategy.

17. The refreshed Strategy focuses on how the Department will work on key themes around promoting independence, community cohesion, and increased opportunities for the people of Leicestershire.

18. As indicated previously, the Strategy applies to all service areas within the Adults and Communities Department. With regard to adult social care services, representing approximately 97% of the Department's spend, the approach of the previous Strategy is continued: focussing on the model of Wellbeing, Preventing need, Delaying need, Reducing need and Meeting need (see diagram below).

19. The draft Strategy highlights the commitment to strength-based approaches (i.e. focusing on the strengths of the person seeking services and helping them take an active role in deciding what is provided) and promoting independence. It contains new sections to provide areas for aims and actions in relation to *People and Communication, Engagement and Supporting Delivery.* These sections bring together the aims for engagement; adult social care finance and accessible information, alongside aims for the internal and external workforce, carers and equalities, diversity and inclusion.

A&C Strategic Model

Leicestershire County Council

- **Wellbeing**
- **Prevent need** — Universal services
- **Reduce need** — Targeted interventions for those at risk
- **Delay need** — Reablement, rehabilitation, recovery
- **Meet need** — Using personal and community strengths, outcome-based commissioning

Strength-based approach

When we work with someone, we are committed to putting the person at the centre and focussing on their strengths to enable them to take an active role in co-producing what is required to meet their needs.

Promoting independence

Promoting independence should be embedded in all that we do. Our short-term care services (enablement and reablement) can offer support to someone to gain, regain or maintain their independence.

Wellbeing – Surrounds the model of support and is the experience of happiness and prosperity and feeling well.

Prevent Need – We will work with our partners to prevent people developing the need for specialist health and social care.

Reduce Need – If we identify people at risk of needing support and intervene early in their wellbeing journey, it may reduce the need for more long term, formal services.

Delay Need – This focuses on support for people who may have experienced a crisis or who have a defined illness or disability. We will work with partners to provide targeted intervention and reablement.

Meet Need – There may come a time when a person is using all strengths available to them, but they still require some additional support. If this happens, Adult Social Care can work with the person and their support, to meet identified, eligible needs.

20. Ambitions embedded within the previous Strategy remain valid and are retained with new, updated descriptors as to how they will be realised. These include:

- Improving customer experience and satisfaction;
- Providing high quality information and advice;
- Promoting wellbeing through universal services;
- Building a flexible, talented, motivated workforce including apprentices;
- Developing and supporting inward investment for new social care accommodation;
- Enabling a seamless transition from children to adult services;
- Promoting independence;
- Improving use of technology;
- Working effectively with partners including co-production, co-design and engagement.

21. The Strategy's aims and the consultation feedback will inform business planning for the Adults and Communities Department and its service areas, for 2025-2029. Progress against aims and business planning will be reported back to the departmental management team.

Consultation

22. The refreshed Strategy has been created through engagement and co-production with people who draw on the different service areas in Adults and Communities and interested members of the public, officers and managers within the Department and wider Council, and care providers.

23. This included an event attended by members of the public who drew upon services that the Department provides (from Culture Leicestershire, Adult Learning and Adult Social Care services), interested members of the public, representatives from seldom heard communities, parish clerk, external committee members and volunteers.

24. Other engagement activities involved external social care providers and through the Adults and Communities Engagement Panel. This comprises of people with lived experience (for example, carers or people with long term conditions who may draw upon services provided by the County Council) who reviewed the Strategy and the language and readability.

25. The public consultation exercise took place from 18 February to 14 April 2025. This comprised a dedicated web page with the draft Strategy and an adapted version (easy read) along with an online and adapted version of the survey.

26. The communications team used a variety of means to promote the consultation, including:

- Social media;
- Newsletters and provider communications within various organisations;
- Emails;

- Public website;

27. Emails detailing the consultation and how to take part, were sent on behalf of the Director of Adults and Communities to:

- Chief Executives of District Councils in Leicestershire;
- Volunteer and carer services (Voluntary Action South Leicestershire and Voluntary Action Leicestershire);
- Director of Public Health;
- Health and Wellbeing Board and sub-group leads.

28. A presentation was given to providers of social care services via the scheduled (four-monthly) provider briefings.

29. All departmental staff were invited to take part through the following:

- Weekly Care Pathway update;
- Publicising on Viva Engage (an internal social media style platform);
- Staff roadshows which took place in January and February 2025;
- Departmental staff newsletter;
- Digital screens in staff offices.

30. A video presentation for staff about the draft Strategy and the consultation was shared with all departmental staff via the Learning Hub (Thrive). Team managers were encouraged to show it in team meetings and remind staff they could view it independently.

31. Adapted (easy read) versions of the draft Strategy and survey were distributed to members of the Learning Disability Partnership Board.

Consultation Results

32. The survey consisted of a number of questions including:

a) Role of person completing the survey (member of public, professional etc.)

b) A range of questions with a scaled response (strongly agree to strongly disagree), followed by a space to add reasons for their answers, on the following areas:

i. ambitions to meet wellbeing needs;
ii. ways of working;
iii. strategic model to meet wellbeing;
iv. aims of the Department;
v. aims for wellbeing;
vi. aims for prevent need;
vii. aims for reduce need;
viii. aims for delay need;

        ix.   aims for meet need;
        x.   impact of the Strategy;
        xi.   any other comments.

   c)   Demographic data on the person completing.

33.   Google Analytics showed that the Have Your Say page with the embedded consultation survey link was viewed 406 times; 56 people opened the consultation survey, and 40 people completed it (39 online and one person via the adapted survey).

34.   Due to the pre-election period starting on the 17 March 2025, all promotion of the consultation (communications, public facing advertising and engagement events with external/partner agencies) drew to a planned close.

Key Findings

35.   The key findings are set out in Appendix B and are summarised below. The results were positive. For all questions with a scaled response, at least 80% of respondents chose Strongly agree or Tend to agree for questions set out in the paragraph 32, b) above.

36.   The consultation survey identified some areas for further focus, summarised below.

   i)   Those where responses of 'Tend to disagree' 'Strongly disagree' or 'Neither agree or disagree' were given in the survey:

      a)   Demonstrating how the person and or their carer's voice and needs are best captured – including how the Department engages with the public.
      b)   Informing against progress made with of the Strategy's aims, including providing details relating to the strategic model for the public to access.
      c)   Make contacting the right person within Adult Social Care as quick and easy as possible.
      d)   Continuing to work with partners, whether they are internal, health, social care providers or the voluntary and charity sector, to meet the Strategy's aims.

   ii)   Those where the survey received responses indicating Strongly agree' or 'Tend to agree':

      a)   Placing a focus on partnership working with Health partners to achieve aims;
      b)   Recognising carers and ensure they are supported;
      c)   Tackling digital exclusion;
      d)   Ensuring that the Department's aims are followed through and there is clear planning and a review of progress;

e)   Utilising the Department's strengths (such as Adult Learning and Culture Leicestershire services) to meet aims within other service areas (such as Adult Social Care);

f)   Making it clear who to contact within Adult Social Care;

g)   Utilising volunteer and specialist agencies.

37.   Two additions have been made to the Strategy arising from the feedback (these can be found within the "Aims of our strategy – we will" sections on pages 19 and 21 of the Strategy):

- To refer explicitly to joined up working with local community health resources such as Local Area Coordinators and Social Prescribers;
- To include reference to Creative Learning Services, part of Culture Leicestershire.

38.   The areas for the Department to address (detailed within paragraph 36) and the aims contained within the refreshed Strategy, will form part of the Adults and Communities departmental business planning. Progress and achievements against these aims will be reported to the Department's Management Team.

Comments from the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

39.   The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the findings of the consultation and the draft Strategy at its meeting on 2 June 2025. Arising from discussion the following points were made:

a)   A Member questioned the low number of responses received from the public consultation. It was noted that the consultation had been made available on the Council's website and therefore accessible to all. It had been promoted by the Communications team which had ensured responses were encouraged and promoted to carers. The Director advised that a prior consultation had taken place from late 2019 to July 2020 during the Covid pandemic which similarly yielded 61 formal responses. It was suggested that other forms of direct consultation with the public should be explored for future consultations to try and encourage a greater response.

b)   Members were reassured that prior to the public consultation direct engagement with service users had been undertaken and their feedback had helped to shape the draft Strategy now put forward for consideration.

c)   A Member pointed out a response to the survey, emphasising the necessity for clarity regarding whom to contact within Adult Social Care, and underscored the importance of effective communication across social care services. The Director indicated that the initial point of contact for individuals was the Customer Service Centre (CSC). Significant efforts had been made to improve process within the CSC which had resulted in an increased response rate and reduced call durations. Furthermore, it was noted that a new tool had been implemented, enabling individuals to locate their

assigned social worker on the Council's website if they had been given a named worker and reference number.

Equality Implications

40.   An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), was undertaken which covered the broad impact of the draft Strategy and is attached to this report as Appendix C. The EIA identified mainly positive impacts upon people with protected characteristics as follows:

- Reference to the County Council's People Strategy and its commitment to ensuring EDI remain a strong focus.
- Within the Culture Leicestershire and Adult Learning services, reference to bringing communities together; providing learning to overcome barriers; offering courses in a range of formats and venues to suit learning needs.
- That Culture Leicestershire aims to reach more diverse communities.
- References to tackling digital exclusion (i.e. providing information in a way that all can access).
- Support for vulnerable people and people living with disabilities.

41.   The following mitigations will be put in place:

- To work with partners to provide people with the skills needed to tackle digital exclusion.
- To produce an adapted (easy read) version of the Strategy.
- To monitor demographic data and feedback received to ensure services are accessible and inclusive and offer good outcomes for all.

42.   The Strategy covers the aims and outcomes of a wide range of services that form the Adults and Communities Department. If there are any changes to the delivery of these services or how the public will engage with these services, these should be subject to individual, Impact Assessments.

Human Rights Implications

43.   The Strategy aims to have a positive impact on a person's Human Rights through delivery of statutory provision, meeting legislative duties, a focus on rights-based practice and the promotion of family life and independent living.

Environmental implications

44.   The work to deliver the Strategy will have potential impacts on the environment and climate, in terms of both the Departmental activities and those of its service providers. The Department supports the County Council's Strategic Plan and the Clean and Green outcomes cited within it.

Partnership Working

45. The Strategy references partnership working with agencies such as the emergency services, the Integrated Care Board and the charity and voluntary sector.

Health Implications

46. The Strategy aims to have a positive impact on seven of the identified 12 Health Impact domains. The remaining five have been assessed as neutral.

Background Papers

- Care Act 2014 - https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents
- Mental Health Act 1983 - https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/20/contents
- Mental Capacity Act 2005 - https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/9/contents
- Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 - https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75
- Health and Social Care Act 2012 - https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/contents
- Delivering Wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire – Adults and Communities Department Ambitions and Strategy for 2020-24
- Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-26
- Leicestershire County Council People Strategy 2024-2028
- Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Strategy-2024-2028
- Report to Cabinet: 17 December 2024 - Draft Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029
- Report to Health and Wellbeing Board: 29 May 2025 – Refresh of Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-29 – Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire
- Report to Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 2 June 2025 - Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-29 – Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire

Appendices

Appendix A – Adults and Communities Strategy 2024-2029 - Delivering wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire
Appendix B – Key Findings of Consultation Survey
Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

Leicestershire County Council

Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029

Delivering wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire

DRAFT

Foreword

We are delighted to present Leicestershire County Council's Adult and Communities strategy. We are ambitious in our vision to deliver wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire and ensure that all adults living in Leicestershire, lead active, independent, and fulfilling lives.

Jon Wilson
Director of Adults and Communities

Our focus on wellbeing and prevention is reflected in how we plan and deliver flexible and responsive adult social care and community wellbeing services. We endeavour to deliver person-centred and strength-based care, and have a strong commitment to equalities, diversity, and inclusion, striving to improve outcomes for people who are likely to experience inequalities.

Partnership-working is integral to the delivery of our priorities and as such we collaborate with partner agencies, including to jointly-commission services where this improves outcomes for people. We regularly communicate with and support providers to identify and mitigate any risks, assure the sufficiency of the care market, and continuously improve the quality of care.

Co-production is imperative to ensuring that our services reflect and address the views and experiences of our residents, and we are keen to embed it as an integral part of our service design and delivery.

Feedback from people who receive our services tells us what we are doing well, and where, and how services could improve. We will continue to adopt new ways to engage with people in our communities and those who draw on our services.

We want people to be able to live their best lives and will support people through participation in their communities; through spiritual and cultural activities; through learning and skill development; and through the provision of services to gain, regain and maintain people's independence.

Key to this ambition is to ensure we deliver the right services, in the right place, at the right time, and to ensure we deliver the best value to local people through cost effective support and continuous improvement.

As leaders, we continue to champion our culture, heritage, learning and adult social care services to ensure that services support the best outcomes for people in Leicestershire.

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Contents

Introduction

This Leicestershire County Council Adults and Communities strategy details the ambitions, aims and goals of the department over the next four years (2025 – 2029).

The Adults and Communities department covers a wide range of service areas who work collectively to deliver wellbeing and opportunity to the people of Leicestershire. These are:

Culture Leicestershire

This covers Leicestershire's Libraries; Museums and Heritage; Collections and Learning and Cultural Participation services.

These are delivered across the county from over 50 venues, community spaces and people's homes or care settings. Where services are provided, the commitment is to be as cost and energy efficient as possible, using renewable energy sources and supporting biodiversity.

Services are delivered by a paid workforce and a range of volunteers that enhance and extend the offer. Together they provide services that contribute significantly to improving people's health and wellbeing, whilst supporting community cohesion and building resilience.

Culture Leicestershire aims to create space to spark imagination, celebrate communities and enhance wellbeing. They also work to the Investment Principles set by Arts Council England: Dynamism, Ambition & Quality; Environmental Responsibility; Inclusivity & Relevance.

DRAFT

Adult Learning Service

The Adult Learning Service uses education to improve life chances.

Our adult learning courses are not only designed to improve adults' educational attainment, they also support the development of skills required for work and career progression and the skills and knowledge required to support self-care and resilience. The service contributes to the local economy through income generated when providing its courses and from recent learners who have gone on to secure paid employment.

Working alongside our regional partners, including voluntary organisations and further education colleges, the service offers learning around the following key themes:

- Equipping parents/carers to support children's learning
- English and English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL)
- Mathematics
- Digital
- Engagement and/or building confidence

- Preparation for employment
- Career progression
- Preparing for further learning
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Improving essential skills
- Developing stronger communities

Our Adult Learning Service is guided by the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework. All their programmes are learner centred and can be tailored to individual needs.

Adult Social Care

Promotes, supports and maintains wellbeing and the independence of people in Leicestershire.

Our **Adult Social Care vision** has been adapted from the Social Care Future vision:

> **Adult Social Care wants every person in Leicestershire to live in the place they call home, with the people and things that they love, in communities where they look out for one another, doing the things that matter to them.**

To achieve this, the department will provide:

Quality information provision – providing access to guidance, advice and support to enable people to live well and make best use of their local resources.

Assessments and support – assessing need, working together with the person, their family, friends and networks to build the best support possible.

Independent living – this could be through adaptations, short-term care, care technology equipment or paid and non-paid support.

Supported accommodation – this could be a Care Home, Supported Living or Extra-Care and Shared Lives providing an environment suitable to meet someone's ongoing care and support needs.

Support to carers – assessing the needs of those in a caring role and providing information, guidance and support.

Protection to adults at risk – through our functions of Safeguarding; Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS); Advocacy and Voluntary services; Mental Capacity Act and Mental Health Act duties, we will work to keep people safe and well. We will improve practice and outcomes by seeking feedback from people who have received our services or received safeguarding interventions.

Commissioning and quality – ensuring Adult Social Care services are safe and meet the needs of the public.

Adult social care finance – provide a consistent framework for everyone receiving adult care services

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Our Values

As a Local Authority, we have adopted the following core values and are committed to delivering these in all that we do.

Positivity

We find the best way to get things done, and aspire to be the best we can. We deliver quality services and inspire others to deliver results.

Flexibility

We adapt to support the needs of the business. We work creatively, collaboratively and support our colleagues.

Trust and respect

We take ownership and accountability for our actions. We value diversity. We're inclusive and listen to the views of others.

Openness and transparency

We are honest with the people we work with and serve. We share information and communicate clearly.

Delivering the aims and outcomes of this strategy will also support the delivery of Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan.

How we have come to the outcomes in this strategy

This strategy has been developed

- through the process of co-production and engagement with the public we serve, our providers of services, the people we work with and our partners

- by reviewing the progress made in our previous strategy and using local data and our statutory requirements

- with learning from the challenges of the last strategy period and recognising some may be on-going. We aim for this strategy to be responsive to the current and future challenges whilst driving progress and success

- following the review of Leicestershire's demographic data. The population of Leicestershire aged 18 or over is expected to reach 621,352 by 2029, an increase of 5.5% from the mid-year estimate in 2023. This includes a 13% increase of people aged 65 or over - an additional 20,130 people compared with 2023. Furthermore, the population aged 85 or over is also expected to grow by 15.8% by 2029 and by 44.7% by 2033 (an extra 8,900 people in this age-group).

With the increases in population and the expected impact this will have on service demand, we will ensure we use all available resources to meet the outcomes of our communities and this strategy, whilst ensuring services are good value for money.

Mission statement

As a department and with people who use our services, we concluded that the following statement still identifies what our department is striving to achieve:

Adults and Communities – Delivering wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire

Ambitions

Our overall ambition is to promote the wellbeing and independence of the people of Leicestershire. This may be through our universal service offer which includes our libraries, museums and cultural participation, or through our Adult Learning Service and Adult Social Care services.

Partnership working is the key to success in promoting wellbeing and independence within Leicestershire. We will work with people, their support networks and local communities, alongside our partners, including Public Health, NHS and local authority partners, adult social care providers and charity and voluntary organisations.

Through learning provided by our Adult Learning Service and information from our libraries, people can learn to overcome personal barriers to maintain their independence. Those with a sudden need for adult social care can be supported by our short-term care (reablement) teams.

The key to promoting independence is understanding what people need. Across the department, we will focus on co-production, co-design and engagement with the people of Leicestershire and our partners to design and deliver the most effective services to meet people's needs.

We will review and make improvements around our customer experience and satisfaction. When people feedback to us, whether this is through our annual adult social care surveys or through our comments, compliments and complaints procedures, we will address areas where we can make improvements.

As digital advancements become more accessible, we will make improvements to how people access information and interact with our services. This includes, where appropriate, the use of new and improved technology to meet a care need. We will also offer support around digital exclusion (where people are not able to use the internet or devices) so that we are still inclusive and accessible.

We will encourage developers and providers to build new accommodation in the county for people who draw on care and support.

As young adults with disabilities transition into adulthood, we will work with Children and Family Services through our Preparing for Adulthood pathway. For those who will transition with our YAD service, we aim to develop independence where appropriate.

To achieve the outcomes of this strategy, we will continue to develop our flexible, talented and motivated workforce. This includes offering apprenticeships to develop the skills and knowledge required to succeed in our services, whilst providing our team members with a valued qualification.

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Strength-based approach

Promoting independence, using a person's strengths or assets, or being strength-based will be referred to throughout the aims of this strategy.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) details a strength-based approach to be "a collaborative process between the person supported by services and those supporting them, allowing them to work together to determine an outcome that draws on the person's strengths and assets."

A person's strengths can come from themselves, their families and friends, professionals involved in their care and their local communities. When we work with someone, we are committed to putting the person at the centre and focussing on their strengths. This enables them to take an active role in co-producing what is required to meet their needs, with the people and communities they have around them and being as independent as possible.

This means we will understand what is important to a person and what they are able to do for themselves, identify who supports them or who could support them (for example a family member, a community group/ charity or a health led service) and promote independence by using their strengths.

Promoting independence

When working with our communities, promoting and maximising independence should be embedded in all that we do.

The potential for independence will be different from one person to another and will be dependent on their current situation. We have a range of short-term care services (enablement and reablement) which can offer support at the point of a crisis, or sudden change in circumstance, to enable someone to gain, regain or maintain their independence.

These currently include the Homecare Assessment and Reablement Team (HART) and our Community Reablement Workers.
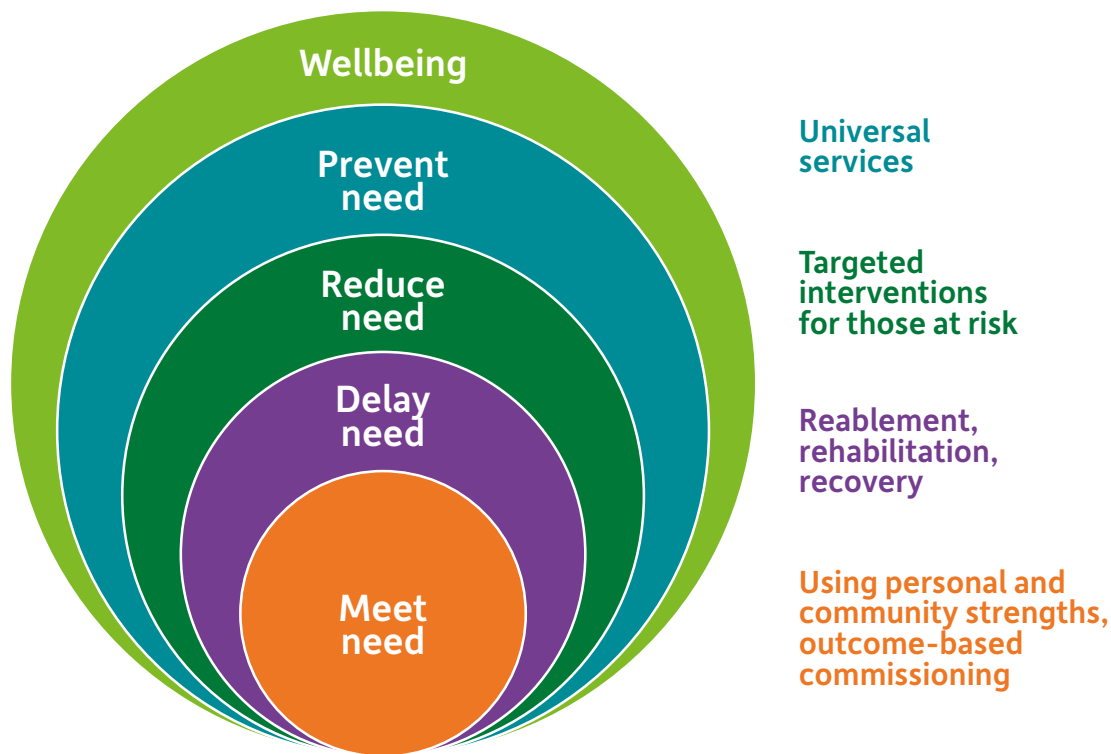
Aims of our strategy

We will

- Build upon the HART service and the strong outcomes it achieves for people by working with our health partners to grow the service offer

- Refocus our mental health reablement teams to work with individuals, linking them into local communities and reducing the need for formal care services

- Develop new pathways for people of a working age, focussing on short-term interventions

- Create and commission new progression services for people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health challenges as part of their life journey towards maximising independence

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Our strategic approach

To deliver our aims and goals, we have developed a layered model that is designed to maximise a person's independence whilst promoting their wellbeing.

This strategic approach has four key areas which are surrounded by a person's wellbeing. These key areas are designed to offer the right support, at the right time and will vary in the amount of intervention needed by services to promote wellbeing and independence.

Wellbeing

Prevent need — Universal services

Reduce need — Targeted interventions for those at risk

Delay need — Reablement, rehabilitation, recovery

Meet need — Using personal and community strengths, outcome-based commissioning

Wellbeing - this surrounds the model of support, services and opportunities that our Adults and Communities department provides.

Wellbeing is about 'how we are doing' as individuals and communities. Wellbeing is the experience of happiness and prosperity. It includes life satisfaction and a sense of meaning or purpose. More generally, wellbeing is just feeling well.

The Care Act 2014 sets out wellbeing in relation to a set of outcomes for people. Local Authorities must promote wellbeing when carrying out any of their care and support functions in respect of a person.

As wellbeing will differ from one person to the next, Leicestershire County Council offers a wide range of services and opportunities to support wellbeing within our communities. These could be services from Culture Leicestershire, a course from our Adult Learning Service or services from Adult Social Care.

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Prevent need – We will work with our partners to prevent people developing the need for specialist health and social care services. We will provide information and advice which is accessible and co-produced. We will offer services that are accessible and open to all. These include libraries, museums and heritage services and adult learning services for people over 18 years of age.

Through working with local communities, volunteer groups and charities, we will respond better to what matters to our communities to keep people safe and well. We will continue to reach out to our seldom heard communities, ensuring that we provide information and services that are accessible to all.

Reduce need – If we identify people at risk of needing social care support in the future and intervene early in their wellbeing journey, it may reduce the need for more long-term, formal services.

This targeted intervention aims to keep people as independent as possible and reduce further needs developing. Our Occupational Therapy and Care Technology teams along with our adaptations offer may provide the level of support needed to maintain someone's independence without anything more. Attending an adult learning course may support to develop positive behaviours that help sustain good mental health.

Delay need – This focuses on support for people who may have experienced a crisis or who have a defined illness or disability. It may be support for someone following a life event such as a hospital admission or accident or when an illness or condition causes a deterioration in a person's ability to care for themselves.

To delay need, someone might access the Homecare Assessment and Reablement Team (HART) for targeted intervention or may be referred for short-term, goal setting support to recover from mental health challenges. Our services will work together with the individual, their families, support networks and our partners (such as the NHS) to ensure that people experience the best outcomes through the most cost-effective support.

Meet need – There may come a time when a person is using all of their available strengths but they still require some additional support. If this happens, Adult Social Care can work with the person and their support to meet identified, eligible needs.

If care and support services are required, these could be provided through the provision of a personal budget. This personal budget can be taken as a Direct Payment or can be managed by the council. The council will work with people to provide choice and control around how their care and support is met, seeking the best value for money, whilst maintaining a person's independence, health, safety and promoting wellbeing.

Setting clear progression outcomes with the person, whilst using their strengths and support, will mean people can become as independent as possible, as quickly as possible. This supports a person's wellbeing and allows Adult Social Care to ensure that any required support goes to the right person, at the right time.

To deliver our strength-based approach, we put the person at the centre of what we do and work with others involved in the care and support of the person. The following demonstrates this approach to doing what is 'right' for the person, to maximise their independence and wellbeing.

The right person: people who may need help or support are identified and prioritised

The right time: to prevent matters worsening for a person, increase resilience through a focus on strengths and maximise their independence

The right place: information, care and support provided at home, in the community or in a specialist setting, according to need and cost-effectiveness

The right support: to prevent, reduce or delay longer term need, without creating dependence, delivered by the right people with the right skills

The right partner: working more effectively with individuals, their friends and families and in partnership with other relevant organisations, to achieve more joined up or aligned and efficient support.
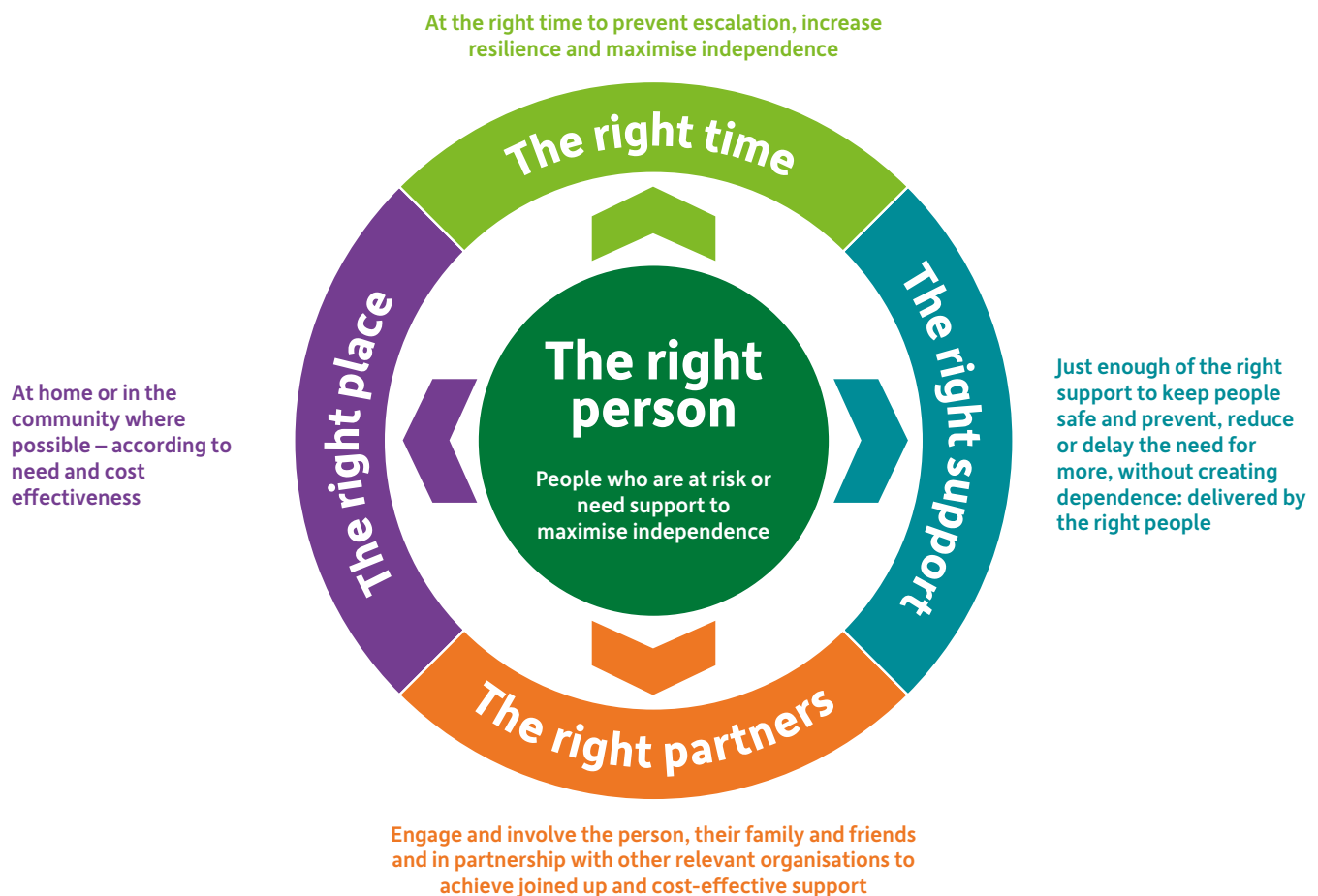
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"Setting clear progression outcomes with the person, whilst using their strengths and support…

…will mean people can become as independent as possible, as quickly as possible…"

We have listened to what our communities have told us and we will ensure that when we are working with a person, we will use words and language that supports them and their strengths.

At the right time to prevent escalation, increase resilience and maximise independence

The right time

The right support

The right person

People who are at risk or need support to maximise independence

The right place

The right partners

At home or in the community where possible – according to need and cost effectiveness

Just enough of the right support to keep people safe and prevent, reduce or delay the need for more, without creating dependence: delivered by the right people

Engage and involve the person, their family and friends and in partnership with other relevant organisations to achieve joined up and cost-effective support

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How we will deliver this 2025 – 2029 strategy

People

What happens now

Leicestershire County Council is a values-led organisation and we are committed for this strategy to be delivered by a competent, skilled and supported workforce. This includes staff employed directly by the Council but also those who work in the wider social care workforce across Leicestershire. A competent, skilled workforce not only delivers quality and efficiency in what they do, it enables our valuable staff resource to be directed to where it is needed, at the right time.

In addition to our paid workforce, some of our Communities and Wellbeing services are delivered and supported by our skilled, volunteer workforce. Our volunteers support these services to run effectively and enable us to reach more people. During 2023 – 2024, volunteers provided 19,600 hours of their time to support our Culture Leicestershire services.

The care provided by Leicestershire's unpaid carers (families, friends, neighbours etc) to the cared for person also supports the wellbeing of our communities. During 2023 to 2024, the council supported 3,722 carers to maintain their caring role by commissioning services or providing information and advice, following a carers assessment.

Aims of our strategy - we will

- Continue to offer our volunteers a volunteer manager and specialist training for their role
- Have a strong recruitment and retention programme, minimising the amount of people leaving their roles
- Invest in training and development, providing the opportunities, knowledge and skills people need to be highly skilled in their role
- Maximise the apprenticeship offer to develop future talent and leaders
- Ensure our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) remains strong
- Strengthen the role of the Department Equalities Group in promoting equality actions for all
- Monitor staff wellbeing and through our wellbeing and support services, reduce absence and work-related impact on our teams
- Be adaptable to the recruitment needs of our care providers. This includes attracting a high-quality workforce, promoting opportunities for career development, piloting new cross sector initiatives and continuing to develop positive perceptions of adult social care careers

- Enable the adult social care sector to diversify in digital (where appropriate), complex care and mental health care to meet the needs of the county. This will be achieved by promoting specialised roles, providing courses to upskill and resources to support wellbeing
- Align our care providers recruitment strategies with the Skills for Care workforce strategy. This will unify a regional approach to support our external workforce recruitment
- Have reviewed the progress made against the current Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Carers' Strategy (2022-2025) and we will work closely with Leicestershire's carers and partners, to complete the follow up Carers' Strategy
- Support carers through stronger, early identification of their caring role. This will include improving how we signpost carers to what they need without them having to make contact with the Adult Social Care team
- Have completed our contingency planning project to support carers and their cared for person, should the carer not be able to fulfill their role

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Communication, engagement and supporting delivery

What happens now

We regularly meet with people in Leicestershire who support the department to shape what we do and how we do it. We have a well-established Engagement Panel and Learning Disability Partnership Board. With our people, we co-produce and engage on topics that will impact on those who may use our services.

We provide social care provider forums and updates, offering support and guidance on a regular basis, including training and quality improvement.

Aims of our strategy - we will

- Further develop the council's Engagement Panel to increase the diversity of its members, including connecting with groups who may not usually have contact with the council

- Deliver a commissioning programme to develop the adult social care provider market, aiming to increase choice and availability of quality services, provide new models of support and contracting, whilst delivering value for money

- Engage providers in developing services, allowing them to respond better to the commissioning needs of the county and department

- Support improvements in the quality of care of our provider market through training, quality support for adult social care providers, recruitment and retention service and positive behaviour support

- Make it easier for people to understand their care costs and what support is available to them

- Develop our self-serve financial assessment information, allowing the public to complete their own assessments, saving time and resources

- Enable people who receive adult social care support to plan for their financial future. By developing resources to help people plan early, they can identify who they may want to support them with their finances, if the time arises

- Provide the public with more accessible information about what the Adults and Communities department can offer

"I am part of a collective voice with the other members of the Engagement Panel and together we try to make a positive difference for the people of Leicestershire. This gives me great satisfaction and purpose."

Martyn found out about the Adults and Communities Engagement Panel when receiving support from the Alzheimer's Society. Through the experiences Martyn had following his diagnosis and the impact this had on his life, he knew he wanted to make a difference to how statutory services are provided to the public.

Martyn found the Engagement Panel to be a friendly and open place, where all voices were heard. He soon settled into being a member and is currently the elected Chair.

The Engagement Panel has directly influenced many new service delivery changes, ranging from the development of new factsheets explaining Direct Payments, to commissioners seeking how unpaid carers could be better supported. The panel members offer their experience, oversight and comment to support changes that will impact on the people of Leicestershire.

Martyn feels it is vitally important for people who access services (now or may do so in the future) to be part of this process to ensure that the needs of the public are heard and being met, saying: "I am part of a collective voice with the other members of the Engagement Panel and together we try to make a positive difference for the people of Leicestershire. This gives me great satisfaction and purpose."

Martyn also says that the panel's voice is heard by senior leaders and a County Councillor, who attend the panel meetings.

Through his role in the panel, Martyn has visited other local authorities to share best practice and positive experiences.

Martyn is passionate about the next steps for the Engagement Panel and is keen to attract more members, from diverse backgrounds, whether these are cultural or linked to the condition a person is living with, so that the panel continues to have such a positive impact.

If you would like to be involved, please make contact **A&C-Strategy@leics.gov.uk**

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Wellbeing

What happens now

Our libraries, archive, museums, collections and learning resources are part of the glue that binds communities together and contributes to making them resilient and stronger. They allow people to develop, grow and feel connected to their local community. They can support people to realise their own potential and experience improved wellbeing.

Culture Leicestershire works with people of all ages, including children and families, to educate, build community cohesion and provide places, activities and resources to promote wellbeing. This could be supporting the development of literacy, language and social skills in early years children, to providing those aged 5 to 18 with access to a wide range of creative resources in school. Culture Leicestershire engages with individuals, families and communities to come together, celebrate, learn and have fun.

The Cultural Participation team co-create cultural activity and resources by supporting local people to shape how culture is interpreted, experienced and enjoyed. This community empowerment influences our heritage and library services and enhances wellbeing and community cohesion.

Culture Leicestershire also provides initiatives to support wellbeing through different activities and offers. These include the home library service; various projects which are community inspired and led; cultural services and volunteering opportunities.

Our Adult Learning Service supports wellbeing by providing our communities with the learning and skills needed to overcome barriers, gain employment and for self and family support. Through their programmes, learners will become empowered to take greater control of their lives and develop a greater appreciation about how they can influence things that have an impact on their own quality of life.

Being accessible is a fundamental principle for everything the Adult Learning Service provides. They understand the value of providing learning locally in the community and believe programmes should not be limited to large centres. To provide accessible programmes across the county, they aim to maintain a good range of courses in community venues such as libraries, schools and village halls. Where appropriate, online courses will be provided to support those that require additional flexibility to tailor learning around their busy lives.

The Adult Learning Service is also committed to removing barriers to success and will provide resources and support for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN). A core element of the learning offer is a programme to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, supporting approximately 350 people per year.

The service offers bespoke courses around promoting independence, resilience and wellbeing. These include the knowledge, skills and behaviours associated with good health and wellbeing along with how to recover from poor mental health.

The Adult Learning Service also delivers a range of vocational programmes and in 2024, delivered training to over 80 apprentices, in a range of subject areas. Other workforce development programmes include the Care Certificate in collaboration with Adult Social Care, and British Sign Language and Digital Skills for the wider council workforce.

The service provides Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to help adults find courses, volunteering and work experience opportunities.

Adult Social Care works with people and partners (such as the emergency services, adult social care providers, district councils and health and wellbeing services) to keep those most at risk, safe from harm and abuse. If someone has needs for care and support, and due to these needs is unable to protect themselves from harm and abuse (or the threat of harm or abuse) then Adult Social Care can support under its Safeguarding duties.

Adult Social Care also exercises its statutory responsibilities under other legislation, such as the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Mental Health Act 1983; 2007; 2022; to promote a person's legal rights and support their wellbeing.

Aims of our strategy - we will

- Continue to develop and deliver learning to meet the needs of the local economy, in co-production with people who may access the Adult Learning Service

- Raise the profile of our Adult Learning Service and adult education offer and show how they deliver wellbeing within our communities

- Provide resources, activities and opportunities through Culture Leicestershire, that enable communities and individuals to come together to share and celebrate culture, heritage and identity

- Develop future Culture Leicestershire services with the people of Leicestershire. A focus will be to engage with people who experience barriers in accessing these services

- Provide an archive space for our museum and collections services

- Promote 'Nothing About you Without You' within our Adult Social Care teams, ensuring that when we are working with a person, they are involved and at the heart throughout

- Develop our focus on 'rights-based' practice. This covers our Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), Mental Health Act Assessments, Safeguarding and our responsibilities to the Court of Protection

- Continue to learn from Safeguarding Adults Reviews and any other significant events that may occur. We will work with our partners to improve practice and implement change to keep those most in need, safe and well

- Creative Learning services to support pupils and teachers to develop cultural knowledge & skills through the provision of engaging learning opportunities

Russell is a 43 year old man with a learning disability. He is a very active person and is always keen to develop his skills to increase his independence.

Russell enjoys gardening and growing fruits and vegetables, keeping chickens and collecting their eggs and wanted to learn new skills in the kitchen to be able to cook a nutritious meal from scratch. This would support Russell to be more independent, leading to improved wellbeing.

Russell enrolled onto a (slow cooker) cooking course provided by the Adult Learning Service. The course was free and open to all learners. The providers of the learning contacted Russell before he was due to start to understand his learning needs and support was provided to enable him to fully participate.

During the learning, Russell prepared and cooked different dishes and learnt new skills to maximise his independence. At the end of the six weeks, all learners were presented with their own slow cooker to put their new skills into practice at home.

At home, Russell prepares and cooks meals using the slow cooker. He said the following about the course, "I liked meeting new people and all of it gave me a mental boost. I would have liked the course to have been longer... I really enjoyed it."

Prevent need

What happens now

Our libraries offer a safe space and act as family hubs for communities. They have reached more people with the support of volunteers, different library formats and their digital offer. Libraries can reduce isolation and improve people's mental health and wellbeing.

With bespoke collections and initiatives, libraries promote self-help through their health and wellbeing collections. These cover health related themes, such as dementia and mental health and also learning opportunities for community growth, with their events programme on areas such as LGBTQ+ and Black History Month.

Within the museum sites in Bosworth, Donington-Le-Heath, Market Harborough, Melton Mowbray and Loughborough, collections are displayed that are reflective of the local communities being served or national events. These not only support tourism into the local areas but offer educational value on key elements such as preserving natural life and the impacts of climate change.

Our Adult Learning Service prevents the need for more formal services by offering courses designed to improve people's health and wellbeing whilst supporting what is needed to succeed in the employment market.

Adult Social Care works alongside partners, including Public Health, who provide different preventative and support services to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Leicestershire. Through access to their resources, such as Local Area Co-ordination, First Contact Plus and Community Timebank, people are supported to access their communities' strengths or universal support, to support their independence and promote their wellbeing.

Aims of our strategy - we will

- Increase the number of people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods attending our adult learning courses
- Achieve higher graded outcomes of adult learners, whilst narrowing the gap in achievement across different learner groups
- Make our adult learning courses as accessible as possible through a developed, remote, online learning offer
- Develop Culture Leicestershire's portfolio of services to reach more diverse communities across the county
- Engage with our communities to co-create relevant cultural activities that celebrate communities, heritage and culture
- Coordinate community registers of local groups, charities, volunteer agencies, faith groups and others. People can reach out to their community before needing formal, paid services
- Develop our quality advice and information offer as technology becomes more accessible to more people
- Make contacting the right person within Adult Social Care (ASC) as quick and easy as possible. We know that people contact ASC for enquiries, information and guidance as well as seeking formal support. We will redesign this contact process to be quick and efficient, using a range of channels
- Better understand the benefits of Care Technology (where appropriate) to promote a person's independence
- Tackle digital exclusion with our partners (where a person cannot access some of our offer as they cannot use technology-based means)
- Continue to work with Local Areas Coordinators and Social Prescribers to support a person's wellbeing through an enhanced network in their local area

Culture Leicestershire's Creative Expression in Libraries (CEIL) programme offered children and young people at Birstall, Oadby, Shepshed and Melton Mowbray libraries a rich experience of working in partnership with highly-skilled creative practitioners.

In Birstall, pupils from Hallam Fields Primary School co-created a comic book project that inspired new ways to explore storytelling.

In Shepshed, pupils from Iveshead School created a BookTok video that encouraged other young people to pursue their own reading journeys. Separately, other young people within Shepshed engaged in street art workshops which resulted in two pieces of their artwork now on display at Shepshed Library.

In Melton Mowbray, young people with special educational needs worked with a professional photographer to develop their photographic and creative skills. The outcome was a film which showcased the unique character of the town.

In Oadby, families with children under the age of five were the focus of eight interactive workshops to promote an increased use of the library. Following this, the library space was adapted to create an interactive area that supports families with young children with special educational needs.

In many cases, the impact of the work was profound, with one young man returning to college to pursue a qualification in photography specifically because of his involvement in the Melton Mowbray project. His parent said, "it has given him a purpose for moving on."

Over 85% of those involved in the projects reported they will engage with future cultural activities and informed they felt more connected with their local library.

Reduce need

What happens now

We have developed the use of technology and digital information in our services. This reduces the need for formal paid support to meet the independence outcomes of people.

Using Care Technology, when appropriate, is one way to keep a person at home for longer. This can lead to fewer hospital admissions whilst reducing the need for a person to provide the same, or similar support.

As of September 2024, our Care Technology team has received nearly 3000 referrals into the service. Of these referrals, nearly 2500 Care Technology installations have been made, which covers over 5,100 pieces of equipment. Feedback from those who have received Care Technology showed a 100% 'very satisfied' response with the service installation.

Our Occupational Therapy (OT) team promotes independence and can reduce the need for formal care services. Occupation in Occupational Therapy refers to any daily tasks that a person needs to complete. If a person is restricted in completing these 'occupations' through illness, disability, changing life circumstances or barriers within the environment, OTs can support.

Our OTs give advice and strategies for successful completion of tasks, moving and handling techniques and recommend equipment and adaptations. This all works towards maximising a person's independence whilst supporting the provision of the least restrictive, care delivery.

In 2024, our Occupational Therapy team were supporting on average 464 people per month. Following this, an average of 309 minor adaptation referrals per month were made, supporting people to be as independent as possible and reducing the need for long term support.

If a person experiences an immediate need for social care and without intervention could be at risk of needing commissioned support or even a hospital or care home admission, then our Homecare Assessment and Reablement Team (HART) can be referred to. HART will focus on a person's aims and goals whilst working in partnership with teams such as NHS Community Therapy, OTs and Care Technology, to produce a reablement plan to help the person maximise their independence.

Following this short-term intervention, a large majority of people do not need long-term support, reducing the need for formal commissioned services. In 2023 – 2024 our HART team worked through 4,300 referrals. Of these, only 10 % required ongoing long-term support or an increase to their previous care package before HART's intervention.

Community Reablement Workers in our Mental Health and Learning Disability and Autism services provide outcome focused, short-term support to re-able or enable people to be more independent.

If someone is supported by a council commissioned service (or jointly alongside the Integrated Care Board) and are experiencing behaviours of concern, our Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) team can support. The PBS service offers a person-centred approach to support which involves understanding the reasons for behaviour and supporting staff teams to create physical and social environments in which people can thrive. The PBS service currently works to reduce restrictive practice when supporting a person with behaviours of concern.

Aims of our strategy - we will

- Continue to commit to working with our health partners, developing and providing services that support wellbeing and independence
- Target those most at risk of needing formal services and working with the person and our partners to reduce this risk
- Deliver our coordinated HART reablement and HART urgent response offer to maximise independence potential
- Offer reablement opportunities within our social care teams (through our Community Reablement Workers) to support people to achieve independence outcomes and skills they have not previously had or are currently unable to achieve

- Through an integrated approach with our health partners, reduce health inequalities for people with a Learning Disability
- Continue to develop and offer our Positive Behaviour Support service to reduce restrictive practice for people who have commissioned support from the council (or jointly with the ICB) and are experiencing behaviours of concern
- Increase the use of Care Technology to meet a person's needs, where appropriate. This will be in partnership with those involved in providing care and in settings beyond a person's home
- Continue to provide OT assessments and interventions which enable people to undertake tasks that are important to them and their wellbeing

Alex is a 27 year old man who was referred to the Learning Disability and Autism Community Reablement Worker (CRW) to support him to meet new people for social activities and look for paid employment.

Over the course of a few meetings, the CRW got to understand what was important to Alex and how best to engage him with services and organisations in his local community to maximise his independence.

The CRW supported Alex to attend a gaming group at a local community centre and provided him with travel training, using local public transport with support until Alex was confident to travel independently.

The CRW also recommended that Alex attend the Prince's Trust, to gain skills that could support him into paid employment. Alex signed up to their 12-week programme and through this, applied to a national retail chain and secured a permanent, paid job.

Alex wrote to the CRW with the following: "Hi Graeme, I am very pleased to be able to tell you that I have been offered a permanent contract, working 16 hours a week minimum. My family are so pleased for me. I have to say a huge thank you to you Graeme, without you telling me about the Prince's Trust programme I wouldn't have had the opportunities that have been given to me. I could never have thought that I would have been offered a job after going on the programme – it was too much to hope for."

Delay need

What happens now

The Home First service provides short-term targeted intervention, supports hospital discharges, prevents admissions to hospital or long-term building-based care, responds to people in the community experiencing a social care crisis and supports recovery to maximise independence.

By working closely with partners and working within the community, including acute and non-acute hospitals, the service can delay a person needing long term support.

Our Care Co-Ordinators in the Integrated Care Team work within Leicestershire's Primary Care Networks (PCNs), which are groups of GP practices across the county. For people identified through a risk review process, the service can delay the need for more intensive health and social care support. This is achieved through early intervention and prevention, the completion of holistic assessments and multi-disciplinary team working.

The Occupational Therapy Lightbulb Team works closely in partnership with our district councils across the county, to provide complex, major adaptations for adults and children. This supports people to remain in their own home, promotes independence and delays the need for a permanent residential or nursing stay.

If someone has had a hospital stay, our teams can refer to the Housing Enablement Team (HET). This is made up of expert housing professionals who can tackle housing related issues to reduce the risk of readmission to hospital due to poor or unsuitable housing conditions.

Avoiding permanent residential or nursing placements is another indicator of delaying dependency. Our long-stay nursing or care home admission rates for people aged 65+ during 2023 – 2024, compared to 2022 – 2023, demonstrated a reduction in placements made.

Aims of our strategy - we will

- Support the Home First agenda of keeping people in their home for as long as possible
- Continue to work alongside our health partners, such as Community Therapy, to support people to their new independence as quickly as possible
- Have a HART (Homecare Assessment and Reablement Team) service that maximises the independence of those who access the service, which will delay the need for long term care

- Have an OT service that will continue to assess for adaptations in people's homes to allow them to live at home for longer, delaying the need for specific care accommodation
- Further understand how our universal services can support with delaying the need for formal health and care services
- Expand on our Extra Care offer, enabling the schemes to meet more complex needs and growing the number of schemes across the county

James is a fiercely independent gentleman, living with Muscular Dystrophy since the age of 21. His home has been adapted, through a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and this allows him to meet his care and support needs independently.

Due to difficulties with standing from a seated position, James was unable to use a standard toilet without support and this meant he was unable to use it when alone. This had a significant impact on his wellbeing and led to him needing the toilet more frequently than usual.

A referral was made to our Occupational Therapy (OT) team who completed an OT assessment and identified that a Closomat, wash and dry toilet with a vertical, toilet seat raiser would allow James to toilet independently.

An urgent DFG application was made and approved and this facilitated the installation of James' new toilet and toilet seat raiser. James is independent again and can toilet with dignity. He is able to manage the transfer on and off the toilet independently and the equipment reduces the risk of James falling whilst trying to use his facilities.

James was very happy with the outcomes of his OT referral and said the following to his Occupational Therapist. "Thank you, you have gone out of your way to get me the help I have needed. You have gone above and beyond to do all this for me, you have given me back my life and I will always be grateful."

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Meet need

What happens now

When a person's strengths, assets and available resources are working together to keep them independent but there is a still a need for support, Adult Social Care works with the person and those supporting them, to meet eligible needs.

At any given time during 2024 our Adult Social Care services were working with over 1000 people.

Everyone in receipt of long-term, community-based support should be provided with a personal budget, preferably as a Direct Payment to promote choice and control for the person. During 2023 -2024, a third of people with a personal budget took this as a Direct Payment. If there is a need for formal, paid support, the department aims to maximise all opportunities to deliver this within its available budget.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) rating of Good or Outstanding for Leicestershire's Adult Social Care providers is in line with the national average. The department will work with providers and the CQC to maintain the quality of local provision.

The number of people that were supported with care in their home grew during, and since, the Covid-19 pandemic. In Leicestershire, we have seen a large increase in the number of people receiving home care. In response to this, we have increased the number of providers that we commission directly with, supporting the reduction of waiting lists for care and supporting a growing, home care market.

Our Young Adults with Disabilities (YAD) team supports the transition of identified young adults, living with a disability, from children's education and children's social care into adulthood.

Aims of our strategy - we will

- Continue to listen to people's experiences of Adult Social Care and make improvements to what matters to our communities
- Further develop our engagement activities to co-produce services and information with the public
- Develop new commissioning approaches which aim to develop the local care market whilst finding new models of care. Services will be affordable, of a good quality, and will keep people safe whilst delivering best value
- Engage with providers to understand the challenges that our care market faces, seeking to reduce provider instability where possible
- Work with our providers to maximise people's opportunities for independence, health and wellbeing, recognising the importance of progression for independence

- Always promote independence through our strength-based assessments and practice and creating outcome focussed support plans. For those in receipt of services, we will identify areas for progression to seek the most independent outcome for the person
- Support our Adult Social Care teams to understand what makes a good life for the person
- Work in partnership with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and partners to develop pathways and services to meet needs of the people in the County
- Provide commissioned services to meet eligible needs when all other support assets have been used, that are within our available budget

- Develop a sustainable approach to the ways we work whilst recognising the financial challenges the department experiences
- Continue to promote independence and improved outcomes for the people we support whilst managing the demand of our services
- Develop our personal assistant market for people of all ages, who require care
- Develop efficient and effective social care pathways to adulthood and work together with partners to deliver high quality services for eligible young adults

Karen's world was turned upside down when an accident at work resulted in a broken back, leading to her being unable to continue her career and requiring care and support to meet her social and daily living outcomes.

Following her Care Act assessment, Karen met with her social care worker to build a personalised care plan. Through her assessment, Karen informed what was important to her, what makes her happy, what strengths she can draw upon (herself and friends and family) and areas where she required some support.

Karen received support from a care agency to meet her needs, through a council managed budget but found their support not quite right for her. Karen wanted more flexibility with how her care was delivered and decided to have a Direct Payment instead. With support from Adult Social Care, she utilised her personal budget to employ her own Personal Assistants (PAs) which she would manage alongside her Direct Payment.

This works very well for Karen and she said "my care gives me freedom and my PAs enable this. Having care needs can be quite isolating and friends can dwindle away. My Direct Payment gives me freedom of choice of how to use my personal budget, enables me to function and stops me being isolated. My PAs have built my confidence, increased my independence and opened up my world to a new normal following my accident. This gave me the motivation to get going again."

"My Direct Payment gives me freedom of choice of how to use my personal budget..."

Next steps

This strategy has been developed to provide the aims, ambitions and direction for the Adults and Communities department and will form part of the department's business planning.

Whilst delivering this strategy, we recognise this will be through a period when cost and demand pressures are being experienced across the country. The department will need to be efficient when providing services so that we are sustainable and meet the needs of the county. We are committed to keeping a focus on our finances and will maximise the effective use of our available budgets to support people in line with the aims of the strategy.

How we will monitor our success

We will use a range of measures to track our progress over the course of this strategy. Some of these will be ones we report nationally along with other local authorities and some will be local targets and measures that we will develop with those who support the delivery of this strategy.

These include:

- The invaluable feedback we receive from the public and people we work with
- The outcomes for people receiving services across the department
- Our performance relating to the statutory duties
- The Care Quality Commission's (CQC) assessment of our Adult Social Care service
- Arts Council England and The National Archives accreditation schemes
- The Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme
- Ofsted's assessment of our Adult Learning Service

The authority will continue to submit statutory national datasets, including the new Client Level Data and make use of the developing publications of this data by the Department of Health and Social Care. Furthermore, Leicestershire County Council will play an active role in regional benchmarking to help understand and improve our outcomes for people who approach the authority for advice and support.

Leicestershire County Council is also host to a National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) funded Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC). This collaboration aims to embed research and evidenced-based decision making into the council. The Department will work with the HDRC where possible and will aim to adopt learning from the research to ensure findings are shared in a meaningful and useful way for the wider service.

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Glossary

Word or phrase	Meaning
Adaptations	(In someone's home) Making changes or adding equipment to the home to make it easier for a person to complete their daily tasks
Adult Learning	Adult Learning means any educational activity undertaken after the age of 18
Adult Social Care	Adult social care is a system of support designed to maintain and promote the independence and wellbeing of disabled and older people, and informal carers. While often associated with the provision of personal care and support, it also includes keeping people safe, supporting people to perform parenting roles, participate in their communities and manage other day-to-day activities
Adults and Communities	This is the name of the Department within Leicestershire County Council that is responsible for adult social care, library, museum, heritage and adult learning services
Advocacy	Supporting a person to understand information, express their needs and wishes, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain the care and support they need
Apprenticeship	Combines real work with training and study
Assessment of Need	Used to identify an individual's social care and support needs and their eligibility for care and support
Assets	With reference to this strategy, assets are people, organisations, services or places that people can use to support them in their daily life. An asset-based approach refers to an individual using resources available to them in the community. This includes links to family, friends and other
Attainment	With reference to Adult Learning, attainment is the reaching of a grade when completing or finishing a course. A higher level of attainment means that the person has reached a higher grade
Bespoke	Tailored to meet an individual's needs
Biodiversity	Biodiversity is the variety of plant and animal life in the world or in a particular habitat. A high level of biodiversity is usually considered to be important and desirable.
Care Technology	This refers to technology that can assist people to do everyday activities and help them to maintain independence such as clocks that can speak the time
Charity and Voluntary Sector	In relation to public services, these are organisations who are separate from local and national government. They do not operate to just make a profit and usually focus on providing a service to solve a social need.
Collaboration	Working together with others to achieve a shared goal
Commissioning	The process of specifying, securing and monitoring services to meet people's needs. This can be done at an individual, group and strategic level. This applies to all services, whether they are provided by a local authority, NHS, other public agencies or by the private or voluntary sectors

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Word or phrase	Meaning
Community Cohesion	A term referring to communities having a sense of belonging, where: • diversity is viewed positively • there are equal opportunities for people from all backgrounds • strong, positive relationships are developed between people living in the community and local workplaces, centres, schools and neighbourhoods (LGA https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/equalities-hub/community-cohesion-inclusion-and-equality)
Contingency	Preparing for an alternative in case a service or support that is usually in place, is not available. Or a provision for a possible event or circumstance which is possible but cannot be predicted with certainty
Co-production	When an individual/groups are involved as an equal partner(s) in designing the support and services they receive.
Criteria	A set of rules or principles that help to decide how, when or if something is completed
Cultural Participation Team	The outreach team for our Libraries and Heritage services who support local people to shape how culture is interpreted, experienced and enjoyed, by working with them to create and deliver cultural activity and resources
Demographic	How the population is made up
Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)	Restriction of a person's liberty to the extent that they may be deprived of their liberty – provisions of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 must be applied.
Dynamic or Dynamism	Showing progress and the ability to change if required to be successful
Economy	The productions and consumption of goods and services and supply of money within a country
Enable	To support someone to be able to complete a task
Enablement	To support someone to be able to learn a new skill, one they have not learnt before
Ethos	A set of beliefs
Family Hubs	A place where families can get advice, information and resources to support them from pregnancy, through a child's early years, later childhood and into young adulthood
HART – Home Assessment Reablement Team	The HART service help individuals to return home from hospital or prevent them from being admitted into the hospital and regain their independence, by providing urgent short-term support and intensive reablement and on behalf of the County Council by working collaboratively with service users, carers, health partners and other agencies involved in their care.
Health and Social Care integration	A programme to change how health and social care are delivered. It refers to joining services up to avoid duplication for people receiving care and support.
Heritage	Our heritage is what we have inherited from the past to value and enjoy in the present, and to preserve and pass on to future generations. It includes things we can store or physically touch, e.g. traditional clothing, buildings, artworks, tools, modes of transportation; or forms of culture without a physical form, e.g. music, dance, drama, skills, cuisine, sport, crafts, and festivals
Holistic	Including all that is important to the person. This includes their social needs, health needs, family, friends and communities
Inclusivity	Being accessible and available to all people, regardless of age, gender, race
Independence	This means being able to have autonomy to make choices and do the things you want in life. In the context of social care this can mean making decisions on where you live and the support you receive

Word or phrase	Meaning
Information Provision	Providing information to the public about what the council can provide. This could be information about any of the services provided by the department. This information may be a leaflet but could also be a web page or an electronic document
Interpreted	How something is understood by a person
Leicestershire County Council	Leicestershire County Council is the name of the local Council
Literacy	The ability to read and write, speak and listen to communicate (https://literacytrust.org.uk)
Occupational Therapy Lightbulb Team	The Lightbulb programme is a collaboration between the County Council, district councils and other partners designed to help older and vulnerable people stay safe and well in their own home for as long as possible.
Outcomes	The benefits to an organisation or individual that result from a service or activity
Partners	Other services or organisations who work with the council to help achieve our vision and goals
Perceptions	The way that things are thought about or viewed
Prevention	Actions to prevent people's wellbeing from deteriorating by enabling them to help themselves through information and advice and community led groups.
Primary Care Networks (PCN)	GP practices are working together with community, mental health, social care, pharmacy, hospital and voluntary services in their local areas in groups of practices known as primary care networks (PCNs) (NHS England)
Reablement	Reablement is a short and intensive service, usually delivered in the home, which is offered to people with disabilities and those who are frail or recovering from an illness or injury to support them to regain their independence and maximum wellbeing.
Resilience	Being able to withstand difficulties
Safeguarding	The process of ensuring that adults at risk are not being abused, neglected, or exploited, and ensuring that people who are deemed "unsuitable" do not work with them.
Seldom Heard	With references to communities, these are groups where they may not usually interact with the council or services provided by the council.
Short term care	Care that is not long term and usually to help a person reach reablement goals. This covers our reablement services
Social Prescribing	Social Prescribing is when a GP, other health or social care professional refers or signposts an individual to local non-clinical activities or support which will help with their health and wellbeing.
Statutory	Means that there has been a law made by the UK Parliament and that there are parts of that law that need to be delivered or controlled
Strengths based approach	Strengths-based approaches focus on an individuals' strengths (including personal strengths and capital) and not on their weaknesses. (Please also see 'Assets')
Targeted Intervention	Specific support to meet a specific need
Universal Services	Universal services are those services provided to all adults, children, young people and their families from health, education and other community services
Viability	The ability for something to work successfully
Vocational	A course that focuses more on practical learning over exams

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Leicestershire County Council

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ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT

ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY 2025-2029
'DELIVERING WELLBEING AND OPPORTUNITY IN LEICESTERSHIRE'

KEY FINDINGS OF CONSULTATION SURVEY

Introduction

1. A public consultation on the Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029 commenced on 18 February 2025 and concluded following an eight-week period on 14 April 2025.

2. Part of the eight-week consultation period fell within the pre-election restrictions that were applied from the 17 March 2025, and formally from the 24 March 2025. During this period all communications, public facing advertising and engagement events with external/partner agencies ceased.

3. The aim of the consultation was to gather feedback on the aims, outcomes and actions set out in the draft Strategy. The consultation was specifically interested in:

   - views on our ambitions as detailed within the Strategy;
   - views on aims detailed within the elements of our strategic model (Wellbeing, Prevent need, Delay need, Reduce need, Meet need);
   - views on aims detailed to meet priorities for People and Communication, engagement and supporting delivery;
   - views on the impact of the strategy and any other comments.

Consultation

4. The consultation commenced on the 18 February 2025, until 14 April 2025 and was supported by the Communications team, Business Intelligence, Business Support and the corporate Policy and Engagement team.

5. The consultation consisted of a dedicated Have Your Say webpage. The webpage detailed a summary script of the Strategy and consultation and provided a dedicated phone line and email, which were monitored by the Department's Business Support team.

6. The Have Your Say page also contained the following documents for review electronically, or they could be requested (via the dedicated phone/email) to be printed, posted with a postage paid return envelope:

   - the draft Strategy;
   - an adapted (easy read) version of the draft Strategy;

- an adapted (easy read) version of the consultation survey;
- the consultation survey (via an electronic link).

7. To publicise the consultation and the draft Strategy, the Communications team used a variety of media releases, newsletters, social media and email/messages:

- **Media**
  Launch release:
  https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-on-the-draft-adults-and-communities-strategy-for-2025-29

- **Newsletters:**
  Digital Leicestershire Matters – 21 February 2025
  Communities Newsletter - issue February 2025
  Wellbeing and Communities Newsletter - issue February 2025
  Parish Councils Newsletter - issue March 2025
  Five for Friday: 7 March 2025 https://us10.campaign-archive.com/?u=23297bdcae3ba9bf4ad336a94&id=44927cca83

- **Social media (via LCC accounts)**
  Various County Council accounts (activity suspended from 17 March due to pre-election period)

- **Internal messages (LCC only)**
  Corporate News (published 14 March)
  https://leics.sharepoint.com/sites/whatsnew/SitePages/Have-your-say-on-the-draft-Adults-and-Communities-Strategy-2025-29.aspx
  Viva Engage – posted by Stephen Shippey
  A&C Staff News - February 2025
  https://leics.sharepoint.com/sites/adultsandcommunities/SitePages/ac-staff-news-february-2025.aspx
  A&C digital screens (County Hall and locality offices) – February 2025

- **Other**
  Provider Bulletin – Issue 71 – 24 February 2025
  https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/2025-02/E-bulletin-Issue71-24-February-2025.pdf
  Email to comms officers within (Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust/University Hospitals of Leicester/Integrated Care Board)

8. Emails were sent on behalf of the Director of Adults and Communities to:

- Chief Executives of District Councils
- Volunteer and carer services (Voluntary Action South Leicestershire and Voluntary Action Leicestershire)
- Director of Public Health
- Health and Wellbeing Board and sub-group leads

9. A consultation presentation was developed and presented to the providers of social care services via the four monthly provider briefings which took place on:

    - 3 March – Care home providers;
    - 3 March – Home care providers;
    - 5 March – Supported living providers;
    - 6 March – Community Life Choices forum.

10. The consultation information was distributed within the Provider Bulletin.

11. Departmental staff were updated about the consultation and invited to take part in the consultation through the following:

    - Weekly Care Pathway update;
    - Publicising on Viva Engage (an internal social media style platform);
    - Staff roadshows which took place during January and February 2025;
    - Departmental staff newsletter;
    - Digital screens in staff offices.

12. To inform staff about the Strategy, a video presentation about the draft Strategy and the consultation was shared with all departmental staff via the Learning Hub (Thrive).

13. The video presentation was viewed 237 times and Team Managers were encouraged to use it as part of team meetings or staff could view independently.

14. Adapted (easy read) versions of the draft Strategy and survey were distributed to members of the Learning Disability Partnership Board.

Consultation Results

15. The consultation survey consisted of a number of questions, including the following:

    a) Role of person completing the survey (member of public, professional etc.)
    b) A range of questions, on the following areas, with a scaled response (strongly agree to strongly disagree), followed by a comment box to explain the response further:
        i.   ambitions to meet wellbeing needs
        ii.   ways of working
        iii. strategic model to meet wellbeing
        iv.   aims of the department
        v.   aims for wellbeing
        vi.   aims for prevent need

      vii. aims for reduce need

     viii. aims for delay need

      ix. aims for meet need

       x. impact of the Strategy

      xi. any other comments

   c) Demographic data on the person completing

16. Google Analytics showed that the Have Your Say page with the embedded consultation survey link was viewed 406 times; 56 people opened the consultation survey, a total of 40 people completed the consultation survey (39 online and one person via the adapted survey).

Key findings

17. The key findings of the consultation survey show that for all questions with a scaled response, at least 80% of respondents chose *Strongly agree* or *Tend to agree* for questions in i to x (15b above).

18. The following is a summary of responses taken from respondents who choose, Neither agree or disagree; Tend to disagree or Strongly Disagree, along with recommendations for the Department to address.

Question 4: What extent do you agree/disagree with our ambitions to meet wellbeing?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
So few libraries are fully run by Leicestershire County Council , you are asking a great deal of the volunteers who run the community libraries.	We will continue to support all our community managed libraries which are highly valued by their local communities.
When one person moves from one category to another will it be a case of starting over again or will there be an effective handover of service lead?	Capturing the persons voice, needs and strengths is part of strength-based practice – promoted in this Strategy.
I have first-hand experience of not being able to get help whilst being a full time career to my partner. Where is the help for me?	Capturing carers' needs is a focus of this Strategy. All carers have the right to an assessment of their needs and where required provision of services to support them in their caring role.
I have known adults in the past who have had trials at day services and wanted to go there and progress has been demonstrated but they have been push towards non-purposeful activities as they were cheaper and are regarded as just adult minded services	The Strategy refers to promoting choice and control and supports Direct Payments to encourage this. Where people do not feel their needs are being met they are entitled to a review of their support plan.

Question 5:	
What extent do you agree/disagree with our ways of working?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
I have known adults who it has taken far too long to arrange finance, have been lied to and even after complaints nothing speeded up.	Adult Social Care Finance have recently undergone a Financial Improvement Programme to reduce waiting time for financial assessments.

Question 6:	
What extent do you agree/disagree with the strategic model to meet wellbeing?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
Nebulous statement and hard to quantity. It really depends on where you live, what team you are in/supported by and local service provision.	This to be a focus in operational teams' business planning and fed back to the commissioning service.
What about actually speaking to the people you are trying to help?	We consult with the public and complete 'experience' surveys with the public. We are developing our customer feedback process to be rolled out later in 2025. We have an established Engagement Panel and the Strategy provides aims around listening to people's experiences and co-producing with members of the public.
Some cases take far too long to get arranged and cause stress and anxiety to those involved	Our Adult Social Care teams are conducting focus work on waiting times and this forms part of current business planning and risk identification.
The model would work if actually applied. My experience of Adult Social Care is that the Care and Wellbeing of patients (my wife suffers from dementia) and carers are largely ignored. I have a medical problem myself but all that Adult Social Care seem to be concerned about is following arbitrary guidelines and saving money. Time is not relevant; someone can suffer while they do nothing.	Keeping people updated whilst receiving or waiting for adult social care is part of our Waiting Well Policy. As per previous comment, waiting times are being reviewed as part of current business planning.
This sounds great but there needs to be more staff to carry it through as in some cases the journey starts but for some reason is delayed due to staff shortages and young adults lose their confidence in all that has gone before.	Our Pathway to Adulthood is being reviewed and timeframes for the service forms part of this.

Question 7:	
What extent do you agree/disagree with the aims of strategy?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
How can you decide how care providers will recruit staff? They are independent organisations. *You rely too much on volunteers and care givers.* *Information about what is available is not known to the public, which makes planning future care needs very, very difficult.*	Care providers are supported through the Inspired to Care team and this includes support for recruitment if required. An aim of the Strategy is to develop our quality advice and information offer.
Question 8:	
What extent do you agree/disagree with our aims for wellbeing?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
Let people know what the council is doing to support the wellbeing of the people of Leicestershire. Make it easy to find out.	Proposals for letting the public know how well we are meeting the wellbeing needs of Leicestershire to be considered within senior management teams and business planning.
Question 9:	
What extent do you agree/disagree with our aims for prevent need?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
Make sure you deliver on your previous aims before you try to expand them even further.	We have delivered on previous aims but this may not have been communicated as effectively as it could be with the public.
Absolutely agree but contacting the right person within Adult Social Care and getting a response as quickly as possible is something that doesn't often happen, this would need to be looked at for a good outcome.	We recognise this is an area we can make improvements and it has been added as an aim. This will form part of business planning.
Question 10:	
What extent do you agree or disagree with our aims for reduce need?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
Isn't this the same model that has so far failed on so many levels?	Our reablement services have been shown to promote independence.
I found the HART Team to be useless in my situation - as I had said they would be. I haven't seen any evidence of any of the other points actually happening. As my wife's primary carer, I am in the best position to identify and quantify her needs - but I am consistently ignored. Most of the points would not apply to my wife's situation in any case.	We will review any individual where the support plan is not meeting their needs.

Question 11:	
What extent do you agree or disagree with our aims for delay need?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
It is important to maintain independence but to be solely focused on home care and not to enable assisting living and care homes to assist with vulnerable adults who require assessment and extra support	The Strategy has aims to develop different commissioning approaches and this will cover all types of care needs for a person. This will form part of business planning.

Question 12:	
What extent do you agree or disagree with our aims for meet need?	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
I'm afraid it's just words. People in the community need to see real progress	As per Q8 response - Proposals for letting the public know how well we are meeting the needs of Leicestershire to be considered within senior management teams and business planning.
There is a demand for young people to move into independence within their own community but not the availability, there are waiting lists for this type of service which seems to be getting longer.	This to be fed into our commissioning teams who review demand for supported living.

Question 13:	
Impact of the strategy statements (focussing on non-agree statements)	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
I don't think it will make any significant difference at all. Too many resources and money spent on producing a document, the content of which will fall short of actual delivery of services	Aims within the Strategy form part of the departmental business plans with progress being regularly reviewed.
It's all very well non-paper but when promises are made and are not delivered and Social workers don't return calls or emails, it makes a mockery of everything.	The theme of communication will be a focus within business planning.
It won't unless it is actually put into practice. The feedback I have been given by several people is that Children's Social Care is reasonably good but as soon as someone reaches adulthood and is transferred to Adult Social Care, the standard drops dramatically.	This comment will be fed into the current review of our Pathway to Adulthood.
If volunteers are trained for their role and more training was available for staff to understand the needs of people they serve in the community, and the time scale wasn't so long then I feel it would be a very positive move. From what is observed at the beginning of an assessment to when the actual service starts can be very different so I feel the time scale is very important.	In many circumstances, service delivery can be within a couple of days (quicker if urgent care required). However this comment will be fed back into our operational teams for review.

Question 14:	
Any other comments (focussing on improvements to be made statements)	
Response	**Recommendation for Department to address**
I work for Creative Learning Services. Part of the Culture Leicestershire Offer. We are not mentioned once in this draft strategy and the word 'school' appears only once but not in relation to our service. i realise we don't warrant a separate article but we are very much part of and work across collections, libraries and heritage. Please explain.	This will be fed back to the Culture Leicestershire lead and an amendment made to the strategy to include this service area.
While the strategy broadly aims to deliver wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire and promote independence, it could be strengthened by more explicitly addressing the challenges faced by the homeless population, particularly those with care and support needs. The strategy details support through Adult Social Care, including assessments, independent living support, and supported accommodation. However, feedback should emphasize the need for clarity on how these services will be effectively accessed and tailored for individuals experiencing homelessness, who may have complex needs and lack a stable address or support network. We would be happy to share our experiences with case studies to help learning and understanding of homeless supported accommodation and the specific needs of this group.	A recommendation will be made to reach out to Homelessness Services regarding this area.
There must have been many opportunities in the past to improve the standard of service. These either have not occurred or been ignored. What makes anyone think that a lofty set of ideals will be followed unless someone is making it happen. That is the first requirement - get the right people in place at the top.	This is overseen by the Director and Assistant Directors. Progress will be reported regularly against the aims.
There is no mention of Local Area Coordinators or the need for the joined up working of Social Prescribers in GP surgeries. The work of these two organisations is vital in the support of individuals. Lack of Communication between these two areas results in duplication. Out dated computer systems are not helping with this essential process. I think that some reference needs to be made as to how these outcomes are to be achieved. Outlined in Question 7	A recommendation will be made to explicitly refer to joined up working within Local Area Co-ordinators and Social Prescribers within the strategy.
I have a feeling that you may have difficulty in reaching out to all the people who may benefit	We do receive referrals from our Health partners and external services (such as Age UK)

from your strategy. I cared for my wife, who had Mixed Dementia, for 10 years and the only support I received was from the Memory Clinic and Age UK in the last couple of years of her life.	but if we are not reaching people as expected this can be reviewed as part of the departmental business plan

19. The following is a summary of key themes from the table above, graded 'Tend to disagree' 'Strongly disagree' or 'Neither agree or disagree'.

   a) Demonstrate how the person and or their carer's voice and needs are best captured – including with how the Department engages with the public.
   b) Inform against progress made within the aims of the Strategy, including providing information relating to the strategic model for the public to access.
   c) Make contacting the right person within Adult Social Care as quick and easy as possible.
   d) Continue to work with partners, whether they are internal, health, social care providers or the voluntary and charity sector, to meet the aims within the Strategy.

20. The following is a summary of responses for the Department to address to questions within the consultation survey that were scored 'Strongly agree' or 'Tend to agree'.

   a) Place a focus on partnership working with Health partners to achieve aims;
   b) Recognise our carers and ensure they are supported;
   c) Tackle digital exclusion;
   d) Ensure that the Department's aims are followed through and there is clear planning and a review of progress;
   e) Utilise the Department's strengths (such as Adult Learning and Culture Leicestershire services) to meet aims within other service areas (such as Adult Social Care);
   f) Make it clear and easy to know who to contact within Adult Social Care;
   g) Utilise volunteer and specialist agencies within the Department's commissioning intentions.

21. Within the survey responses, there were two comments which led to additions being made to the draft Strategy. These comments are summarised within the bullet points below. The additions to the draft Strategy can be found within the "Aims of our strategy – we will" sections on pages 19 and 21.

   • To explicitly refer to joined up working with local community health resources such as Local Area Coordinators and Social Prescribers;
   • To include reference to Creative Learning Services which form part of Culture Leicestershire.

22. In addition to these two amendments, the summary of responses for the Department to address (detailed within paragraphs 19 and 20) and the aims contained within the refreshed, draft Strategy, will form part of the Adults and Communities departmental business planning. Progress and achievements

against these aims will be monitored and reported to the Department's Management Team.

Equality Impact Assessment Form

Before completing this form, please refer to the supporting guidance document

The purpose of this form is to aid the Council in meeting the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in the Equality Act 2010. This requires the Council to have "due regard" of the impact of its actions on the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

The assessment is used to identify and record any concerns and potential risks. The following actions can then be taken to address these issues.

- Remove risks: abandon the proposed policy or practice
- Mitigate risks – amend the proposed policy or practice so that risks are reduced
- Justify policy or practice in terms of other objectives

Once the EIA has been approved by the Senior Responsible Officer, please ensure that a copy is placed on the SharePoint folder: "Equalities Board, EIAs"

1- Policy details

Name of policy	Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029
Department and service	Adults and Communities
Who has been involved in completing the Equality Impact Assessment?	Stephen Shippey – Improvement Manager
Contact numbers	0116 3053194
Date of completion	October 2024

2- Objectives and background of policy or practice change

Use this section to describe the policy or practice change
What is the purpose, expected outcomes and rationale?
Include the background information and context

What is the proposal? **What change and impact is intended by the proposal?**	Leicestershire County Council's (LCC's) Adults and Communities Department delivers library, heritage, culture services, adult learning and adult social care services to people in Leicestershire. We aim to provide and commission high quality services which enrich the lives of individual people, families and their communities – promoting independence and wellbeing.

The strategy outlines the Department's way of working which is a focus on using individual strengths and meeting individual goals in order to deliver wellbeing and opportunity and to promote independence.

The strategy focuses on the model of Wellbeing; Prevent; Delay; Reduce; Meet need and how the department's different service areas will work together to deliver wellbeing over the next 4 years.

Following engagement and co-production of the current strategy with people who access the different services of the department, new sections were included to provide clear direction and enhance understanding of how different departmental teams contribute to meeting the wellbeing and independence of the people of Leicestershire.

These additions are:
- A description of the department and the service areas that make up Adults and Communities
- LCC's current Values framework
- Our internal and external workforce, our volunteers and (unpaid) carers
- Sections on Strengths-based approach Promoting Independence
- Section on our Support Service teams and how they work to deliver wellbeing with the front-line teams

The impact that the strategy has can be summarised as follows:

- For A&C teams - It will provide aims and outcomes to meet over the next 4 years
- For external workforce and providers of social care – There are aims linked to how we will support our external workforce and how we will review our commissioning offer which impacts on providers of social care and also the people it is delivered to

	- Volunteers – It references how we recognise the invaluable contribution they make to delivering services and enhancing and extending provision - Unpaid Carers – this does not seek to duplicate the new carers strategy and instead focuses on how we will support our carers - The public – Will make it clearer what the public and residents of Leicestershire can expect from the services delivered by Adults and Communities and how these services will be delivered and how we have meaningful dialogues to engage and co-produce with a range of communities
What is the rationale for this proposal?	The current strategy ends in 2024 therefore requires updating. The strategy needs to provide direction to the department and this will inform business planning for the A&C teams.

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3- Evidence gathered on equality implications - Data and engagement
What evidence about potential equality impacts is already available? This could come from research, service analysis, questionnaires, and engagement with protected characteristics groups

What equalities information or data has been gathered so far?	Information from the 2021 census data on ONS for Leicestershire is as follows: Age:
	Age (6 categories) Observation

What does it show?

Aged 15 years and under	124933
Aged 16 to 24 years	75483
Aged 25 to 34 years	85196
Aged 35 to 49 years	132106
Aged 50 to 64 years	146569
Aged 65 years and over	148079

LCC data shows that for all of the people currently in receipt of services:

91 or 1% ae 18-19
691 or 7% are 20-29
802 or 8% are 30-39
834 or 8% are 40-49
1,239 or 12% are 50-59
706 or 7% are 60-64
642 or 6% are 65-69
1676 or 17% are 70-79
2,302 or 23% are 80-89
1,028 or 10% are 90-99
52 or 1% are 100+

Disability:

Disability (3 categories)	Observation
Does not apply	0
Disabled under the Equality Act	118062
Not disabled under the Equality Act	594304

Of 118,062 people classified as disabled under the Equality Act in Leicestershire – our data for the people we support demonstrates that we support 8,331 or about 7%. Of these
1,592 or 16% have a Learning Disability as their primary need

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1,943 or 19% have a Mental Health need as their primary need

4,796 or 48% have a Physical need as their primary need

This shows against Leicestershire's data there are people that we may not know about or support and that could be because they can meet their own need, their support networks are meeting their needs with them or they are funding privately.

Sex – the data only presented as male and female

Sex (2 categories)	Observation
Female	360613
Male	351753

LCC data shows that for all of the people currently in receipt of services:

5,888 or 59% are female – against Leicestershire data = 1.63% of the female population of Leicestershire

4,144 or 41% are male – against Leicestershire data = 1.18% of the male population of Leicestershire

Whilst females make up a greater proportion of our current users of services within the physical and social support primary reason, Males make up a larger proportion in Learning Disability services. The split between male and female in the Mental Health primary support reason is virtually the same.

Ethnicity:

Ethnic group (20 categories)	Observation
Does not apply	0
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Bangladeshi	3238
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Chinese	3570
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Indian	42152
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Pakistani	3936
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Other Asian	5170
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African	5147
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Caribbean	1950
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Other Black	816

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	5566
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	1637
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	4925
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	3415
White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	595796
White: Irish	3790
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	598
White: Roma	389
White: Other White	22856
Other ethnic group: Arab	1442
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	5973

LCC data shows that for all of the people currently in receipt of services:

Asian or Asian British – 667 or 7%

Black or Black British – 80

Mixed Race – 52

Unknown – 56

Other – 89

Non-recorded or refused – 153

White – 8,935 or 89%

Religion:

Religion (10 categories)	Observation
Does not apply	0
No religion	287394
Christian	325889
Buddhist	1981
Hindu	26256

Jewish	530
Muslim	16071
Sikh	11892
Other religion	3275
Not answered	39078

Marital status:

Marital and civil partnership status (6 categories)	Observation
Does not apply	124933
Never married and never registered a civil partnership	197796
Married or in a registered civil partnership	286440
Separated, but still legally married or still legally in a civil partnership	12065
Divorced or civil partnership dissolved	53477
Widowed or surviving civil partnership partner	37655

LCC data shows that for all of the people currently in receipt of services:
18% are married
18% are widowed
33% where there is no data recorded in this category
4% divorced
27% single

According to the 2021 Census – for Sexual Orientation for Leicestershire:
535,084 identified as straight (91.3%)
14,292 identified as LGBTQ+ (2.7%)
38,058 did not answer (6%)

What engagement has been undertaken so far?	Engagement has been via people who may or do use the services within A&C and the providers of social care services. There will be full consultation in 2025 and the impact assessment will go to DEG for review by the group and the representatives from the workers groups we have in LCC.
What does it show?	The data shows that whilst White is the most common race within Leicestershire, we are a diverse county and our other identified races make up nearly 89,000 people which is 12.5% of the population in our county. This is similar to the internal data we hold of people using our services.
	We have more females accessing our services than males, but there are specific primary need areas (such as Learning Disability) where there are more males.
	Our internal marriage data may not accurately reflect the reality of the people using our services as there is approximately 34% where this information is not recorded.

4- Benefits, concerns and mitigating action

Please specify if any individuals or community groups who identify with any of the 'protected characteristics' may *potentially* be affected by the policy and describe any benefits and concerns including any barriers.   Use this section to demonstrate how risks would be mitigated for each affected group. If a group will not be affected by the proposal please state so.

Group	What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	What are the concerns identified and how will these affect those from the following groups?	How will the known concerns be mitigated?

Age	Culture Leicestershire's offer reaches from pre-birth, early years through to old age. This offer is planning to remain over this strategy and grow with the population growth. Their services can bring together people of all ages and positively impact on family and community cohesion Adult Learning offers courses for 18+ suitable for school leavers, those wishing to gain employment, those wishing to understand digital and technology better. They offer courses over different formats which might suit people of different ages being able to access them from home so travel is not required if they cannot travel due to age related reasons. This strategy will help manage growing demand by aligning the activities of service areas within the department with an increased emphasis on preventing need. For example, Communities and Wellbeing services	Digital exclusion is a reality for some people and may impact the elder generation to a greater extent, where they do not have digital resources or lack the confidence to utilise them to support their needs. The population demographic data we hold for all service users indicates that 51% are over the age of 70. This could impact upon advancements in technology and whether all generations have access to the technology or skills required to use it. As the population ages, the demand for adult social care services for the aging population may increase and this could impact on service availability, financial impact, quality of service delivery.	There is an aim within the strategy to tackle digital exclusion with partners to provide the skills needed. When the redesign of information provision is progressed, allowance needs to be made to have information in other accessible formats above digital and to be translated As technology advances, training to those who use it will be required New commissioning approaches are being considered in the strategy to meet need and demand for now and in the future. This includes being sustainable and efficient. The strategy also includes that support will be available for quality improvements within the care market.

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	will promote independence and self-reliance keeping adults in their own homes. Adult Social care supports people aged 18 onwards. The strategy details how their services will promote independence and support their wellbeing. There is recognition within the strategy that the population of Leicestershire is growing. The population of Leicestershire aged 18 or over is expected to reach 614,970 by 2028, an increase of 4.4% from the mid-year estimate in 2023. This includes a 10.6% increase of people aged 65 or over - an additional 16,300 people compared with 2023. Furthermore, the population aged 85 or over is also expected to grow by 10.4% by 2028 and by 33.3% by 2032 (an extra 6,650 people in this age-group).		Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive.

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The strategy will inform business planning that as people age, the demand for services is likely to increase and ASC can start working towards meeting this demand.

In addition, as people age they may contract health conditions which require ongoing treatment by the NHS. The strategy informs that working in partnership with the Integrated Care Boards ICB is important to holistically meet the populations needs.

Within information provision, the strategy informs that tackling digital exclusion (where someone without the digital means or knowledge of how to use digital media is negatively impacted) is an aim.

LCC has young adults with disabilities who are known to Children's services and the strategy demonstrates that there will be a review of this pathway (from children's services into adulthood) to maximise the independence of these young adults

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	The strategy includes the work of the Care Co-ordination or Integrated care team at high risk (as identified through their Risk Stratification Tool) to provide a holistic assessment and MDT working with the ICB partners (such as GP, Social Prescribers). This work will cover people who are aging or disabled.		
Disability	The strategy details that the Adult Learning Service will remove barriers and will provide appropriate resources and support to learners with Special Educational Needs. LCC has young people with disabilities who are known to Children's services and the strategy demonstrates that there will be a review of this pathway (from children's services into adulthood) to maximise the independence of these young adults To promote independence and reduce the need for people with a disability to require a person to support them, where appropriate, the strategy details	Census 2021 data shows that Leicestershire has a much higher proportion of people classed as disabled under the equalities Act than we currently support. If they later require support, this could lead to a demand that is not expected. Digital exclusion can impact on people with a disability. The strategy will be a written document that might not be	The strategy details how there are reablement services across physical disability, learning disability and mental health and how these support independence. They will aim to work with people, including new referrals wherever possible, before more formal, long term support may be required. There is an aim within the strategy to tackle digital exclusion with partners to provide the skills needed.

	how the use of Assistive Technology and Occupational Therapy or reablement and enablement will lead to maximising potential and independence. If someone with long term condition and or disability is displaying behaviours of concern (which are not due to clinical reasons) the strategy informs of the aim for these to be supported (where LCC commission support) through the Positive Behaviour Support team. The strategy includes an aim to work with health partners to reduce health inequalities for people with a Learning Disability. The strategy includes the work of the Care Co-ordination or Integrated care team at high risk (as identified through their Risk Stratification Tool) to provide a holistic assessment and MDT working with the ICB partners (such as GP, Social Prescribers). This work will include working with people, identified as disabled.	accessible to a person with a disability	There will be an easy read document to accompany the main strategy. Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive.

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	The People and Workforce section of the strategy includes an aim to ensuring that the commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion remains strong, with higher training rates and strengthening the role of the Departmental Equalities Group. The Home Library Service supports permanently or temporarily housebound residents who wish to access the library services, within their own home. Through our adult education programmes carers and staff will have access to specialist courses such as British Sign Language giving them the skills they need to support individuals and the delivery of services		
Race	The strategy focuses on individual outcomes, aims and goals and these should be supported within holistic assessments. The strategy also details	In Leicestershire we have diverse areas of population and our services need to demonstrate good outcomes for all who access them	Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure

	how a person's assets need to be considered when LCC assess needs. The People and Workforce section of the strategy includes an aim to ensuring that the commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion remains strong, with higher training rates and strengthening of the role of the Departmental Equalities Group in supporting this. The department promotes the use of Direct Payments which supports people to have more choice and control about how they chose to commission their services. This can include staff or services suited to a person's race and identity. The strategy details how Culture Leicestershire will develop how they will celebrate the culture, identity and heritage within a local area/county. This includes event programmes such as Black History month and work to develop collections and resources which	Our services need to support a diverse and possibly changing demographic. Language translation and interpretation for ethnic minority groups and newer emerging communities i.e. Ukrainian needs to be considered as information may not be readily accessible to these groups	services are accessible and inclusive. The museum service Collections Development and Access Policies have clear statements which seek to address under representation, including black and minority ethnic heritage and LGBTQ+ people.

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	reflect people who are currently under-represented The strategy references that Services should be co-designed with the public to meet race and cultural needs		
Sex	Our Culture Leicestershire services offer 'safe spaces' and these can make a positive impact if a person, of either sex, is feeling vulnerable. Services provided by the A&C department are accessible by male and female	Currently there are 9% more females in receipt of services from Adult Social Care. This could be that more females need services or they are more likely to seek support. This should be recognised that Males may not seek support until they are in crisis, or not at all. The current strategy and some of the data used refers to male and female only. Some people do not identify within these categories and therefore there is a risk that they may feel discriminated against.	The strategy focuses on a person's strengths which includes what is available to them in their communities. Males may engage with their communities better and these assets may be able to support men before going into crisis. It can also lead to more information about what men are engaging with to support future service design. The department is committed to supporting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and provides learning to its workforce to support this. Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure

| Gender Reassignment | The Strategy is not specifically intended to address any needs associated with this group.

However, there is growing evidence to suggest that the number of gender reassignment surgeries is increasing each year as are reported incidents of bullying and hate crime towards this group. Therefore, the strategy is equally targeted to this group as with any other. Eligible social care needs will be addressed through a personalised plan. Universal services will be sensitive to the needs of this group for example offering appropriate literature in libraries, considering the use of accessible toilets

The People and Workforce section of the strategy includes an aim to ensuring that the commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion remains strong, with higher training rates and | People who have transitioned want to be identified as either a man or woman and may not want to disclose their transition. It is therefore difficult to obtain extensive statistics. There is no data available to determine how many Leicestershire social care service users this may affect as this is not recorded. | services are accessible and inclusive.

Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive. |

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	strengthening the role of the Departmental Equalities Group.		
Marriage and Civil Partnership	The Strategy is not specifically intended to address any needs associated with this group. Marital status is not part of the adult social care eligibility criteria and is irrelevant to any service they may receive. Where meeting a need may involve a residential placement, accessibility to a spouse will be considered in the personalised support plan.		
Sexual Orientation	The strategy details how our Culture Leicestershire services provide events programmes on areas such as LGBTQ+ to promote and educate around this. All the services in this strategy are aimed to be accessible and open to all or to people who meet specific		Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive. Culture Leicestershire is working with organisations that are leaders

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	eligibility criteria and sexual orientation is not a factor in determining this. The People and Workforce section of the strategy includes an aim to ensuring that the commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion remains strong, with higher training rates and strengthening the role of the Departmental Equalities Group.		in this field to help ensure this work supports the needs of these groups and staff are confident to deliver and respond to potential challenge and to better understand the changing landscape of the LGBTQ+ terminology
Pregnancy and Maternity	All the services in this strategy are aimed to be accessible and open to all or to people who meet specific eligibility criteria and pregnancy and maternity is not a factor in determining this.		Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive.
Religion or Belief	The strategy focuses on a person's strengths and these can be through religious or faith groups.		Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive.

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Armed Forces (including veterans)	All the services in this strategy are aimed to be accessible and open to all or to people who meet specific eligibility criteria and being a veteran or in the armed forces is not a factor in determining this.		Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive.
People with lived care experience	People with lived care experience may have come though our Young Adults with Disabilities team. The strategy makes an aim to review this pathway from children's to adult services to maximise their independence.		Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive.
Other groups: e.g., rural isolation, deprivation, health inequality, carers, asylum seeker and refugee communities, looked after children, deprived or disadvantaged communities	Culture Leicestershire is developing how they can continue to increase the reach of their services within this strategy – including to areas where there is not a current library or museum Adult Learning are aiming to develop the reach of their courses and over mediums that support access from remote locations.		Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive. Technologies will be exploited to support accessibility for example remote learning programmes for those unable to travel and engage in classes at centres.

<table>
<tr><td>364</td><td>Adult Social Care will work with partners to reduce health inequalities for people with an LD and also those with long term health conditions.
In addition, integration between ASC and health services is referred to within the document to address health inequalities across the remaining population of the county.

The strategy refers to the support of unpaid carers and details aims over the next 4 years to provide support.</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

5- Action Plan

Produce a framework to outline how identified risks/concerns identified in section 4 will be mitigated.

What action is planned?	Who is responsible for the action?	Timescale	Expected outcome

Ongoing monitoring of data, feedback received and through current and future commissioning programmes, we will ensure services are accessible and inclusive.	Business Intelligence, Adults and Communities Service Area Leads, Quality, Commissioning and Contracts	Ongoing throughout the strategy	That services will meet the needs of the people they are designed for, that they are inclusive and accessible to all who need them
Create an easy read document for the public consultation and an easy read document of the strategy	Strategy team alongside design and communications team	Dec 2024	An easy read consultation document re the strategy and then an easy read strategy document once strategy consulted on

6- Approval Process

Departmental Equalities Group	(please post any comments from the Departmental Equalities Group here) Set out the date when the EIA was considered
Corporate Policy Team	Please set out comments from the Corporate Policy Team
Sign off by the Senior Responsible Officer for the Project.	