Meeting: **Environment, Flooding and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date/Time: **Tuesday, 11 November 2025 at 2.00 pm**

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

Contact: **Mr. A. Sarang (0116 3056844)**

Email: **aqil.sarang@leics.gov.uk**

Membership

Mr. K. Robinson CC (Chairman)

Dr. J. Bloxham CC
Mrs. N. Bottomley CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC
Mr. G. Cooke CC
Ms. B. Gray CC
Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. J. McDonald CC
Mr. J. Melen CC
Mr. P. Morris CC
Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. C. A. Smith CC
Mr. A. Thorp CC

AGENDA

Please note: this meeting will be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's web site at http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk

Item		Report by
1.	Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2025.	(Pages 3 - 6)
2.	Question Time.	
3.	Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).	
4.	To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.	
5.	Declarations of Interest in respect of items on the agenda.	
6.	Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.	
7.	Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.	

8.	Action for Nature - A Strategic Approach to Biodiversity, Habitat and the Local Environment (Document and Action Plan).	Director of Environment and Transport	(Pages 7 - 60)
9.	Tree Management Strategy.	Director of Corporate Resources	(Pages 61 - 100)

10. Dates of Future Meetings.

Future meetings of the Committee are scheduled to take place on the following dates, all starting at 2.00pm:

Monday 26 January 2026
Monday 9 March 2026
Monday 8 June 2026
Wednesday 2 September 2026
Monday 9 November 2026

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

Agenda Item 1

Leicestershire County Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 10 September 2025.

PRESENT

Mr. N Chapman CC(in the Chair)

Mrs. N. Bottomley CC	Mr. P. Morris CC
Mr. G. Cooke CC	Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Ms. B. Gray CC	Mr. B. Piper CC
Dr. S. Hill CC	Mr J. Poland CC
Mr. J. McDonald CC	Mr. C. A. Smith CC

In attendance

Mr. A. Tilbury – Lead Member for Environment and Flooding

13. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

14. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that one questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

Question asked by Mr. Adam Stares
On 15 July, the Cabinet agreed to reallocate £2 million to flood mitigation initiatives.

How will the council decide which projects will be supported with this funding and how will it measure the success in terms of flood mitigation?

Reply by the Chairman

The County Council is currently in the process of shaping proposals for how this reallocated funding is to be spent on flood mitigation initiatives including expected outcomes, the details of which will be presented to Cabinet on 28th October for approval.

15. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

16. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

17. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

18. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

19. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 35.

20. Environment and Climate Change Performance Report to June 2025.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Environment and Transport and the Chief Executive, the purpose of which was to provide a six-monthly performance update to June 2025. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

(i) Members commented that whilst the current rate of tree planting to achieve the Council's commitment of 700,000 trees was to be welcomed, the later proposal of a million trees planted should continue to be the Council's long-term goal. The Lead Member supported this view and whilst he commended the current ambition, he commented that the Council should seek to beat this so far as was possible.

(ii) Members noted that the amount of renewable energy generated by the County Council as a percentage of consumption' had increased to 21% in Quarter Four 2024/25, which indicated an improvement in performance. This had been achieved by utilising sustainable sources of energy such as solar panels installed across the Council's buildings. Members acknowledged that ultimately, all targets were subject to investment and financial viability.

(iii) Members noted that, the Council was installing the very first EV Charging points on the public highway supported through the LEVI funding received from the Government. The funding was welcomed as this had allowed the Council to kick start the initiative on public highways. As part of the scheme, public engagement had been carried out and this had provided some indication as to where there might be demand for charging points. It was noted that the current model was to support the development of the County's EV charging infrastructure although this could potentially change in the future as new technologies came forward.

(iv) A Member raised concerns regarding air quality levels which had exceeded World Health Organisation expectations. It was suggested that joining up walking and cycling routes across the County would be critical in helping to address this. The

Director provided assurance that a considerable amount of work was going into delivering this, utilising funding received through Active Travel England, however this had to be delivered in stages. It was highlighted that the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans supported the case when applying for funding and whenever funding became available the Council took these opportunities where appropriate.

RESOLVED:

That the Performance Update until June 2025 be noted.

21. Annual Review of Leicestershire Country Parks.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources, the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with an annual update on country parks. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

(i) Significant efforts had been made in recent years to develop a commercial strategy for country parks, which had led to a notable increase in income for the service. This progress had been achieved through ongoing reviews of concession and catering arrangements, evaluating car parking options where appropriate, and determining what partners were licensed to use the parks for various activities. The service continued to explore further opportunities and the Director confirmed that the generation of a commercial revenue income stream remained a key area of focus. However, it was acknowledged that a careful balance needed to be struck between protecting biodiversity and whilst supporting public access.

(ii) Members noted the collaborative work being undertaken with a new partner at the Beacon Hill café was to enhance visitor facilities and ensure the long-term sustainability of the park.

(iii) A Member raised concerns regarding flooding at Watermead Country Park, which in recent years had closed access to the park by pedestrians and caused damage to infrastructure. A fellow Member suggested that flooding in county parks should not necessarily be viewed as a problem, but rather as an opportunity. It was noted that flooding in these areas might help prevent flooding in residential areas nearby, the parks acting as a natural form of defence, which should be embraced.

(iv) In response to a Member query about the possibility of installing solar panels on the roof of buildings at Snibston Colliery Park, it was noted that this was a complicated site due to the nature and age of the buildings, some of which had listed status. Such levels of protection restricted what could be done to adapt those buildings.

(v) A Member shared the appreciation they had received from local community groups that supported the improvements to the footpath at Broombriggs and queried whether there would be further improvements at Jubilee Woods. It was noted that there were no current plans to substantially upgrade the access into Jubilee Woods as access needed to be balanced with protecting the site which included some of the most untouched woodland within the country parks estate and so had become a space for nature to thrive.

(vi) Members noted that grassland management took place across a number of parks and that this was something the Team would be seeking to expand on as a priority area within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Director advised that there were some displays of wildflowers at Market Bosworth Country Park, some extensive wildflower meadows managed at Beacon Hill Country Park and a number across some sites within the heart of the National Forest.

The Lead Member for Environment and Flooding noted that if Members were interested in observing how the natural flood defences worked, there was an opportunity to witness this at Beacon Hill Country Park. It was highlighted that the Team were doing substantial work to support flood defences and as a result this was increasing biodiversity in the area and would help to minimise flooding along the Soar Valley, which was commendable.

RESOLVED:

That the annual update on the Country parks update be noted

22. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 12 November 2025 at 2.00 pm.

2.00pm – 2.56pm CHAIRMAN
10 September 2025

Agenda Item 8

Leicestershire County Council

ENVIRONMENT, FLOODING AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 11 NOVEMBER 2025

ACTION FOR NATURE – A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO BIODIVERSITY, HABITAT AND THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT (DOCUMENT AND ACTION PLAN)

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Committee on the refreshed draft Action for Nature – A Strategic Approach to Biodiversity, Habitat and the Local Environment (Appendix A), and on the supporting draft Action Plan (Appendix B).

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Environment Strategy 2018-30 was approved by the Cabinet on 8 July 2020.

3. The Environment Strategy Action Plan included an action to develop a strategic approach to natural capital and biodiversity. The attached documents deliver on this action.

4. The first Action for Nature document and supporting delivery plan was published in June 2021.

5. In compliance with the Environment Act 2021, the Cabinet approved the Biodiversity Duty Plan on 17 December 2024.

6. In compliance with the Environment Act 2021, the Council approved the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland on 2 July 2025.

Background

7. In 2019, the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked that work be undertaken to develop a strategic approach to biodiversity. This came from concerns about the state of biodiversity in Leicestershire, insufficient clarity on the Council's policy position on biodiversity, and on the Council's roles and responsibilities in protecting and enhancing it.

8. This came at a time when there was increasing international, national and local public awareness of, and calls for, action on the significant decline in biodiversity and the risk this is posing to the future of the human economy and society. A 2019 United Nations' assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services found that 'nature was declining globally at unprecedented rates' and that around a million animal and plant species were now threatened with extinction, with human activity being the principal cause of the decline.

9. Biodiversity decline and climate change also work in concert with one another in terms of each contributing to the worsening of the other, but also in how tackling one helps reduce the worsening and impacts of the other.

10. The Environment Strategy 2018-30 recognised the significant decline in local natural environment that has and is taking place. It also acknowledged the role that Leicestershire County Council plays in contributing to this decline as well as what its contribution can be in addressing this decline. The first Action for Nature document and the supporting Delivery Plan published in June 2021, set out the rationale and context of the Council's approach and the initial actions to be taken over the next four years.

11. Since then, the Environment Act 2021 was introduced which placed new or additional statutory duties on local authorities in relation to biodiversity and nature.

Development of Original Document

12. The development of the Council's first Action for Nature document and Delivery Plan involved a systematic and consultative approach, working with officers from across the Council and key service areas that could contribute to, or benefit from, its delivery.

13. In addition, engagement with organisations and agencies, such as The National Forest, Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency and Natural England, also informed the development.

14. Development of the documents was also informed by a set of guiding principles namely:

    a) Whole systems approach;
    b) Evidence based approach;
    c) Meeting legal and statutory obligations as a minimum;
    d) Collaborative working both internally and externally;
    e) Co-ordinated strategic thinking and delivery;
    f) Clear and measurable cross-sectoral outcomes.

15. These principles were designed to ensure that a robust, coherent and sustainable approach to protecting and enhancing Leicestershire's biodiversity, habitats and local environment can be delivered on over time.

16. The process of developing the original Action for Nature document and the supporting Delivery Plan contributed to:

    a) Consolidation of the work around meeting the aims and objectives of the Council's Environment Strategy 2018-30;
    b) Identification of the areas of direct control and influence within service areas for work that delivers on the aims and objectives;
    c) Understanding of the external interfaces and support that exist for the services that the Council provides relating to biodiversity, habitat and the local environment;
    d) Provision of a strategic framework and an evidence base that can support the inclusion of policies and actions on biodiversity in other key Council and Leicestershire wide strategies and plans;
    e) Setting of the level of ambition and action on biodiversity, habitats and the local environment, based on evidential needs and the resources available;
    f) Improved preparedness for changes in Government policy and legislation.

Legislative and Policy Context

17. The refreshed Action for Nature document takes account of the significant legislative and policy changes that have taken place since the original document was published in June 2021.

18. The most significant change was the introduction of the Environment Act in November 2021 which, among other things, established the strengthened Biodiversity Duty on public bodies, including local authorities, requiring them to both conserve and enhance biodiversity. It introduced the Biodiversity Reporting Duty, which requires local authorities to report every five years on how it has and will meet the Biodiversity Duty. It also introduced the statutory requirement for the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and made Biodiversity Net Gain a mandatory requirement under the National Planning Policy Framework, as well as establishing national environmental indicators.

19. The Action for Nature document and the Action Plan are both supporting documents to the Council's Environment Strategy 2018-30, which also supports and is supported by a number of other Council strategies and action plans, such as the Strategic Plan, the Tree Management Strategy, the Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and the Air Quality and Health Action Plan.

20. The Action for Nature document also supports the Council in meeting the requirement to take account of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

Refreshed Action for Nature document

21. The refreshed Action for Nature document sets out:

a) Guiding principles of the approach;
b) Current legislative and policy context nationally, regionally and locally;
c) Importance of biodiversity as natural capital;
d) Opportunities for delivering the biodiversity objectives;
e) Approach to the development and implementation of the Action Plan.

Broad Areas for Action

22. The process of refreshing the Action for Nature document found that the original broad areas for action were still relevant. These were originally based on a review of the available evidence and a consultation with internal and external colleagues and partners. The broad areas for action which could provide significant opportunities for meeting the biodiversity, habitat and local environment objectives are:

    a) Improving the land management practices on land directly owned or managed by the Council;
    b) Supporting the tenants of Council land to better manage this land;
    c) Ensuring biodiversity is included in the development of Council policies, plans and projects;
    d) Influencing or adding value to the policies, plans and projects of others;
    e) Supporting awareness raising and education on biodiversity;
    f) Maintaining and developing local data on the ecology and historic environment of the County;
    g) Identifying opportunities for realising ecosystem service benefits on Council land, including carbon sequestration and storage.

23. Specific actions relevant to these broad areas are included in the Action Plan (Appendix B). Actions have been set out under a number of themes, namely:

    a) Land management;
    b) Monitoring;
    c) Actions to control invasive non-native species;
    d) Partnerships and funding;
    e) Agriculture;
    f) Communities.

24. The Action Plan shows whether the action is internal or external in scope or both, who is leading, who the key partners are in delivery, timeframe and finally which of the key Environment Strategy aims and objectives the action contributes to meeting.

25. The refreshed Action Plan builds on the achievements of the previous Delivery Plan such as the ‘Tree for Every Person’ campaign, the establishment of the Parish Nature Network, and the supporting of volunteers.

26. Some of the challenges of the previous plan have also been considered. For example, the difficulties of embedding consideration of nature into economic development and the food purchased from suppliers.

27. There are also new elements, reflecting the increased emphasis on biodiversity enhancement and nature recovery in current legislation. For example, new requirements for the Council's planning and planning advisory functions to support statutory biodiversity net gain and net gain reporting.

28. The actions range from actions that ensure the Council meets its statutory duties in relation to the strengthened Biodiversity Duty, Biodiversity Net Gain and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for example, to practical actions to improve land management, improve data management, provide support to communities and volunteers and to secure external funding to deliver improvements on the ground.

29. The Action Plan will be a live document and will be updated as required.

Monitoring and Reporting

30. Establishing appropriate and realistic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for biodiversity is notoriously difficult, due to the complex and multi-faceted nature of this subject and the resulting time and cost of gathering and analysing data.

31. In light of this, two KPIs were developed to allow measurement of how the Council is performing in terms of improving biodiversity, habitat and the local environment on land it owns or manages. The KPIs are:

    a) Hectares of LCC land in better management for nature;
    b) Percentage of suitable LCC land in better management for nature.

32. In addition, a suite of Performance Indicators (PIs) have been monitored to support our understanding of the KPIs such as:

    a) Number of trees planted;
    b) Area restored for natural flood management;
    c) Metres of hedges planted;
    d) Number of ponds created or restored;
    e) Number of parishes with site agreements under the Wildlife Verges scheme;
    f) Number of verges in the Wildlife Verge scheme;
    g) Number of wildlife records generated by the Wildlife Verges scheme.

33. As part of the Action Plan, further work will be done on identifying and developing additional KPIs and PIs where practicable. This will be done in collaboration with the Data and Evidence Working Group that will be established as part of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, to develop suitable monitoring mechanisms for measuring the impact of delivering the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It will also utilise any suitable data sets that are developed to measure the national indicators at a local level.

34. Implementation of the Action Plan will be co-ordinated by the Action for Nature Working Group, which will be a sub-group of the Environment

Oversight Board. The Working Group will have representatives from the key service areas involved in the actions included in the Action Plan.

35. Progress on the implementation of the Action Plan will be reported through the existing reporting mechanisms used for reporting on the Environment Strategy. This will include reporting to the Environment Oversight Board, this Committee and Scrutiny Commission where appropriate.

Resource Implications

36. Existing resources will be utilised where possible, with external resources being sought through the submission of funding bids and working with external partners where appropriate.

37. Where appropriate, business cases will be developed for potential projects to assess the biodiversity, environmental, financial and other benefits of proposals to ensure they positively contribute to the Council's objectives.

Background Papers

Environment Strategy 2018-2030 – https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2020/7/13/Environment-Strategy-2018-2030-delivering-a-better-future.pdf

Tree Management Strategy 2020-2025 https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/2/16/Tree-Management-Strategy-2020-2025.pdf

Country Parks and Open Space Strategy 2019-2029 https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s152649/APPENDIX%20Country%20Parks%20and%20Open%20Spaces%20Strategy%202019-2029.pdf

Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2024-28 https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s186308/Appendix%20-%20Draft%20AQ%20and%20Health%20Partnership%20Action%20Plan%202024-28.pdf

Action for Nature Document, June 2021 https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s161375/Appendix%20A%20-%20Action%20for%20Nature%20-%20Strategic%20Approach%20to%20Biodiversity%20DRAFT%200.3docx.pdf

Action for Nature Delivery Plan 2021-2024 https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s161376/Appendix%20B%20-%20Action%20for%20Nature%20Delivery%20Plan%20DRAFT%20v0.3.pdf

Biodiversity Duty Plan, December 2024 https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s187254/Appendix%20Biodiversity%20Duty%20Plan.pdf

Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, July 2025

https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s190582/Appendix%20A%20-%20Final%20Local%20Nature%20Recovery%20Strategy%20for%20Leicestershire%20Leicester%20Rutland%20-%20LNRS%20Cab.pdf

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Equality Implications

38. An outline Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment indicated that overall, the Action for Nature document is likely to have a positive impact. However, individual projects will be assessed for equality implications as they are developed as part of the implementation process.

Human Rights Implications

39. An outline Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment indicated that overall, the Action for Nature document is likely to have a positive impact. However, individual projects will be assessed for human rights implications as they are developed as part of the implementation process.

Environmental Implications

40. The Action for Nature document and the Action Plan both describe how the County Council will fulfil its duties regarding biodiversity conservation and enhancement (the strengthened Biodiversity Duty) and its role as a responsible authority for the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy, with regard to its own landholdings, functions and operations. It is anticipated that the delivery of the Action Plan will have a positive environmental impact.

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Action for Nature – A Strategic Approach to Biodiversity, Habitat and the Local Environment
Appendix B – Action for Nature Action Plan

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Leicestershire County Council

Action for Nature

A Strategic Approach to Biodiversity, Habitat and the Local Environment for Leicestershire County Council 2025 -2030

Published December 2025

Table of Contents

Action for Nature

A Strategic Approach to Biodiversity, Habitat and the Local Environment for Leicestershire County Council

1. Introduction

Originally created in 2021 and refreshed in 2025, 'Action for Nature' describes how the County Council will fulfil its duties regarding biodiversity conservation and enhancement (the strengthened Biodiversity Duty) and its role as a responsible authority for the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)[1], with regard to its own landholdings, functions and operations.

The document outlines the policy and legislative context within which achievement of relevant aims and objectives is set. The strengthened biodiversity duty and requirements to create a LNRS have come into force since the original version of this document was created. The document:

- Links to the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland LNRS which contains details of the state of nature across the strategy area and identifies priorities for action to bring nature into recovery;
- Identifies the guiding principles and rationale of the Council's approach to taking action for nature;
- Identifies the key opportunities for action;
- Has a supporting Action Plan that provides more detail of the actions to be taken.

Action for Nature is a supporting document of the Leicestershire County Council Environment Strategy 2018-2030, which recognises the significant decline in the natural environment that has and is taking place and acknowledges the role that the Council plays in contributing to this decline. The Environment Strategy also recognises and sets out the role the Council can and will play in addressing this decline in the natural environment.

This document brings together the headlines from the various other internal and external strategies and plans that touch on how the Council is supporting and improving nature on the Council's land and through its operations.

The Council has a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The Council is also the responsible authority for publishing the LNRS for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and has a statutory commitment to liaise with the LNRS supporting authorities and neighbouring responsible authorities.

Biological diversity is underpinned by the state of the environment and availability of habitats that species need to exist and thrive. To improve biodiversity, there is a need to establish the priorities for intervention and understand the state of the local environment, including green and blue infrastructure, the flora, fauna, fungi, soils, landscape features, rivers and streams that collectively form our bank of natural capital.

The ambition is to not only avoid, mitigate and compensate for the loss in habitats and species within Leicestershire, but to enhance and create space for nature. This can only be

[1] https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/LLR-Local-Nature-Recovery-Strategy.pdf

done by working with local people, partners, other public service providers, local businesses and most importantly with nature.

The Council has already committed to delivering the Environment Strategy 2018-2030. This document provides a framework for the Council's strategic approach on delivering the Environment Strategy objectives for Biodiversity, Habitats and the Local Environment.

The Action for Nature document is supported by an Action Plan which will evolve over time to continue to be fit for purpose and to adapt to developing needs, changes in legislation and changing opportunities and resources.

A healthy natural environment helps society and the economy flourish. Natural assets and ecosystems provide multiple benefits. They provide a form 'capital' which is derived from those assets, such as, the reduction in the costs of flooding, provision of resilient landscapes, protection against pests and diseases, the sustaining of food production and the supporting of recreation and the production of raw materials for construction. An environment that can sustain human needs, provides benefits that humans enjoy without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same, is a resilient environment. This document sets out how Leicestershire County Council will contribute to the achievement of this.

1.1. Importance of biodiversity as natural capital

There is a wealth of evidence that confirms biodiversity as key to our existence on planet earth. There are many examples of how biodiversity plays a crucial part in our world from its' ability to cleanse our atmosphere through habitats such as forests and wetlands, to enabling us to produce a variety of food and medicines. It is often at the centre of our cultural traditions and sustains our health and well-being through our fascination of the natural world and its unexpected curiosities.

A World Health Organisation document published in June 2023 outlined the relationships between nature, biodiversity and health as follows[2]:

- Nature and ecosystems provide essential products, such as water, energy, food and medicine, and essential services, such as climate regulation, nutrient cycling, carbon storage and oxygen production;
- Up to 1 million species are threatened with extinction – many within decades. Biodiversity loss affects our life-support systems (e.g. food systems) which in turn impacts health and wellbeing;
- Around 70% of cancer drugs are derived from natural products or synthetic compounds inspired by nature.

Researchers at The University of Derby have carried out extensive investigations into the links between nature connectedness and wellbeing. The University has established a Nature Connectedness Network[3] which brings together individuals and organisations working towards enhancing people's relationship with nature.

[2] https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/fact-sheets/item/nature--biodiversity-and-health
[3] https://substack.com/@natureconnectednessnetwork

Non-governmental organisations for both mental health and wellbeing, such as Mind,[4] and conservation charities, such as the RSPB,[5] advocate time in nature as a route to better health.

Green social prescribing is a subset of the use of social prescriptions to reduce reliance on pharmaceutical interventions and reduce pressure on GPs from conditions associated with stress and lifestyle. There is a growing body of evidence that green social proscribing is effective when properly applied and resourced.[6]

[4] https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/#:~:text=Spending%20time%20in%20green%20space,Learn%20more%20about%20ecotherapy%20programmes.
[5] https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-we-do/nature-prescriptions
[6] https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/media/dmzbrff1/nasp-briefing-natural-environment.pdf

2. Guiding Principles

The following set of principles have been taken into account when developing the Council's strategic approach to biodiversity, habitats and the local environment and in the developing of the supporting Action Plan. The documents have also been developed within the broader context of moving towards the innovative and sustainable utilisation of natural resources, the decarbonisation of the atmosphere and the development of a circular economy as set out in the Environment Strategy 2018-30.

The guiding principles are:

- Whole systems approach
- Evidence based approach
- Meeting legal and statutory obligations as a minimum
- Collaborative working both internally and externally
- Co-ordinated strategic thinking and delivery
- Clear and measurable cross-sectoral outcomes

2.1 Whole systems approach

The Council's understanding of the definition of a whole system approach is to see the loss of biodiversity in the context of how it impacts on and is impacted by the other environmental assets and how the natural world interacts with society and the economy. Key points of note are:

- To tackle the biodiversity crisis as part of an ecological process supporting the recovery of other environmental assets - soils, water, air, and mineral sites. The Council wants to improve the quality of these assets too.

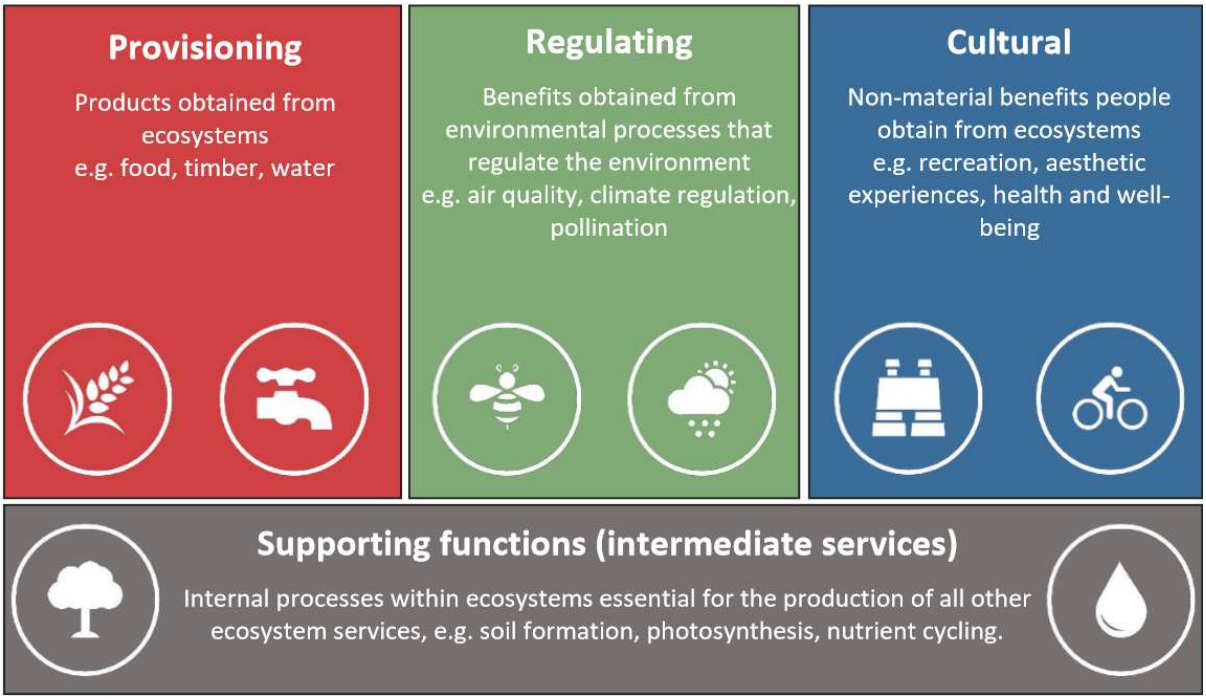
- Biodiversity is recognised as a 'natural capital' asset that can provide ecosystem goods and services to society. The Council will act to protect, mitigate and improve biodiversity and habitats and find ways of demonstrating the ecosystem services that they provide such as carbon sequestration or improved productivity of arable crops.

Figure 1 below provides more details on the role of biodiversity as an ecosystems service.

2.2 Evidence based approach

Evidence will support the decisions made and the interventions the Council invests in. This evidence will be both qualitative and quantitative. Work to develop the strategic approach has produced information and data that strengthens and builds on the evidence base. This will be an ongoing requirement. Some of the actions within the Action Plan will support projects and activity that will continue to inform the evidence base.

Figure 1: Ecosystems Services (courtesy of Natural Capital Solutions Ltd)



2.3 Meeting legal and statutory obligations as a minimum

The County Council already has requirements upon it to meet statutory regulations. Monitoring delivery of this is important for performance management but also to ensure that Leicestershire residents, partners and customers have reassurance about the delivery of these duties.

2.4 Collaborative working both internally and externally

The County Council is constantly looking to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of delivering its services and improving outcomes for its service users. Collaborative working, both internally and externally plays an important role in doing this. It is particularly important for achieving the desired outcomes for biodiversity, habitat and the local environment due to the complex, interconnected and multi-disciplinary nature of this area. Working in partnership adds value and expertise that can improve the quality of the outcomes achieved.

2.5 Co-ordinated strategic thinking and delivery

Co-ordinating planning around the delivery of internal and external policies will enable the Council to deliver the greatest benefits for nature. This will build on collaborative working and be vital to achieving change outside the County Council's direct sphere of influence. This will involve having cross-sectoral discussion and governance as well as cross-departmental thinking and working.

2.6 Clear and measurable cross-sectoral outcomes

To achieve the best support and ensure co-ordination between sectors there needs to be outcomes that are clear and measurable for all sectors involved.

3. Legislative and Policy Context

The development of the strategic approach and supporting Action Plan has been considered within the context of wider strategic and policy drivers. These policies help direct the work of the Council. It is important to understand the legal and policy context to set the priorities of Leicestershire County Council in this area and to help inform the development of the appropriate areas for action. The following sections set out the key areas of the legislative and policy context.

3.1 National policy

3.1.1 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 part 3 and part 4

The County Council and all local authorities (including parish and town councils) have responsibilities to ensure that they comply with the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006[7] in all areas of relevant activity, including as a landowner and operator of public services. Part 3 of the Act expects local authorities to undertake their duty to **conserve and enhance** biodiversity.

3.1.1.1 The Biodiversity Duty

Under Section 40 of the NERC Act as amended by the Environment Act 2021, public authorities in England have a legal duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

This applies to all public authorities, including local authorities, Government departments, statutory undertakers, and public bodies.

What Leicestershire County Council must do:

- Consider what actions can be taken to conserve and enhance biodiversity;
- Agree on policies and specific objectives based on that consideration;
- Act to deliver those policies and achieve the objectives.

Leicestershire County Council published a Biodiversity Duty Plan in December 2024. This was based on a review of the policies and strategies in operation across the Council which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. The plan identified the lifespan of the policies and strategies and how they met or could meet the enhanced biodiversity duty.

The legislation requires that the public authority review their actions at least every 5 years.

Authorities must consider how their actions align with LNRS. The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland LNRS was published in August 2025. The strategy development was underpinned by extensive stakeholder engagement, data analysis and alignment with over 100 existing plans and policies relating to action for biodiversity and nature recovery.

We are awaiting further Government guidance/ regulations relating to:

- Species Conservation Strategies
- Protected Site Strategies

[7] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents

Work related to species conservation and protected site conservation are integrated into the LNRS whilst we await further regulations and guidance.

3.1.2 The Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act 2021[8] created the requirement for local authorities (i.e. county councils and district councils) to engage in the development and delivery of an LNRS. Local authorities under the amended NERC Act are also now required to 'enhance' biodiversity on their land and the Environment Act makes Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) a mandatory requirement.

The Act also strengthens the enabling of resilient measures to cope with flooding and drought, including Natural Flood Management (NFM) measures, an approach that uses nature to reduce flood risk, such as creating meanders in rivers higher up stream rather than installing hard engineered barriers downstream.

The development of LNRS is linked to the Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network Report written by Sir John Lawton in 2010. It identified the need for creating networks for nature to move between good quality protected core habitats and the importance of expanding and protecting these core sites.

More details on the completion and implementation of the County Council's role as the responsible authority for the LNRS are given in section 3.2.1.

3.1.2.1 The Biodiversity Reporting Duty

This duty, which was also introduced by the Environment Act 2021, ensures transparency and accountability in how public authorities meet their biodiversity obligations.

Key requirements:

Public authorities in England that are subject to the biodiversity duty must report on:

- Actions that they have taken to comply with the biodiversity duty;
- How the authority plans to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period;
- Other information deemed appropriate.

The report must also include a planning authority function report on:

- Actions carried out to meet BNG obligations;
- Details of BNGs resulting or expected to result from biodiversity gain plans the authority has approved;
- How the authority plans to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period.

Government guidance issued in September 2025 lays out further the potential format and level of detail which public authorities could include in their BNG reporting:

- Monitored biodiversity gains and the results of this monitoring;
- Use of authority owned land as a biodiversity gain site;

[8] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents

- Authority support for development of a local BNG market.

Quantitative data can add useful detail to the report and could include data showing:

- Number of biodiversity gain plans approved;
- Split between on-site and off-site gains and statutory credits;
- Net gain in number of units and average percentage gain across approved biodiversity gain plans.

This quantitative data will demonstrate how the authority has met the 10% net gain requirement and followed the biodiversity gain hierarchy.

Where possible (e.g. where an authority has access to relevant software), further detail could be included:

- Number of and net change in biodiversity units and area split by habitat type, for example, grassland;
- Number of approved biodiversity gain plans that impact on irreplaceable habitat;
- Location and number of approved offsite biodiversity units;
- Results of monitoring activity at a habitat level.

The reporting frequency is every five years, with the first reports being submitted from January 2026.

Leicestershire County Council is a planning authority for Minerals and Waste Planning applications and the Council's Ecology and Biodiversity team also carry out a role as an approving authority for district councils locally without their own planning ecology teams.

3.1.3 UK Environmental Improvement Plan

In 2023 the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23) was published, in accordance with the Environment Act 2021, as a revision of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) published in 2018. The UK has committed to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (30by30), to support the global 30by30 target agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in 2022.[9]

EIP23 is set out in 10 goals, which are listed below in Figure 2. Each goal has specific targets and commitments that contribute to the goal outcome, including the legally binding targets set under the Environment Act 2021. The Government publishes an annual progress report set out under these goals.

[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criteria-for-30by30-on-land-in-england/30by30-on-land-in-england-confirmed-criteria-and-next-steps

Figure 2: The Ten UK Environmental Improvement Goals

The goals, targets and commitments from the EIP23 which specifically drive Leicestershire County Council's Action for Nature are:

- Halt the decline in species abundance by 2030 and then increase abundance by at least 10% to exceed 2022 levels by 2042;
- Restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat by 2042, alongside the international commitment to protect 30% of the UK's land and ocean by 2030;
- New interim target to restore or create 140,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites by 2028, compared to 2022 levels;
- Improve the Red List Index for England for species extinction by 2042 compared to 2022 levels;
- New interim targets for all sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) to have an up-to-date condition assessment; and for 50% of SSSIs to have actions on track to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028;
- Increase tree canopy and woodland cover from 14.5% to 16.5% of total land area in England by 2050, with a new interim target to increase this by 0.26% (equivalent to 34,000 hectares) by 31 January 2028, in line with the trajectory required to achieve the long-term target.

3.1.4 Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended under the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (which provided a statutory underpinning for biodiversity conservation under the European Convention on Biological Diversity)

Leicestershire County Council has responsibilities to ensure that it complies with the Act in all areas of relevant activity, including as a landowner and operator of public services.

The Act[10] covers the Council's responsibilities around the spread of invasive species, the protection of rare species and the habitats that they rely on, such as nest sites and roosts. SSSIs are included within the Act.

3.1.5 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations[11] place a duty on local authorities to maintain enough diversity of habitats for wild birds.

3.1.6 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The existing National Planning Policy Framework[12] places an emphasis on the contribution to be made to green infrastructure, biodiversity and habitats through planning policies and decisions:

- The Green Infrastructure Policy within the NPPF refers to the requirement of planning and decision makers to support the rural economy by enabling sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside, retaining and developing accessible local services and facilities such as open space;

- Planning policies should also seek to address barriers to investment such as poor environment. Promoting safe and healthy lifestyles should be done by aiming to provide safe and accessible green infrastructure;

- Rights of Way should be protected and enhanced and where opportunities are available add links to existing rights of way and national trails;

- Local green spaces can be designated within the Neighbourhood Development Plans providing that they are local in character and near to the communities that they serve. Local Green Spaces can be designated if they are valued by communities for historic, beauty, tranquillity, recreation and / or wildlife;

- Promotion of sustainable transport should be toward an environmental net gain. Cycle and walking routes should be of a high quality;

- Planning policies should make effective use of land by encouraging multiple benefits for rural and urban land and take opportunities to achieve environmental net gain, such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside; recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production;

[10] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69
[11] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made
[12] National Planning Policy Framework

- Chapter 15 is dedicated to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Overall, the chapter asks planners to identify, protect and enhance biodiversity and habitats designated and non-designated of high value and connect areas of high value through stepping stones and corridors. In areas that are part of the Nature Recovery Networks ensure that suitable development is identified within them;

- Chapter 16 on conserving the historic environment looks to protect landscape character in terms of character and distinctiveness and the protection, conservation and enhancement of the significance of historic designated assets;

- Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

3.1.6.1 Note on envisaged interaction of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Net Gain in planning functions

The LNRS is a strategic tool to guide planning decisions that support biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable development. It identifies priority habitats and species, and maps priority areas for nature recovery, helping planners deliver BNG, align with local plans, and integrate nature-based solutions into spatial planning.

LNRSs can support a strategic approach to off-site BNG delivery, agreeing evidence-based locations to expand and connect existing habitat and provide wider environmental benefits. This will support BNG in creating locally driven, joined-up outcomes for nature.

LNRSs play a role in BNG by determining the 'strategic significance' multiplier within the biodiversity metric. This mechanism means that there is an incentive for developers to align with the LNRS in their area when choosing the location of off-site BNG units.

Understanding the link between the two policies is essential for planning authorities and could be relevant to Leicestershire County Council as a landowner with future potential to sell biodiversity credits. The Council also provides planning ecology services to the district councils (with exception of Charnwood Borough Council).

This is a new area of law and has not been tested in case law locally.

3.1.7 Other relevant national policy drivers

- **The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy (policy paper) - June 2025**[13] lays out the plans for the UK's industrial growth strategy including changes to the planning system to remove barriers to growth;
- **Heritage Statement 2017**[14] includes natural heritage such as landscape character, biodiversity and habitats;

[13] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68595e56db8e139f95652dc6/industrial_strategy_policy_paper.pdf

[14] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-heritage-statement-2017

- **River Basin Catchment Plans[15], Sustainable Land Use and the Impact on Water Quality - EU Water Framework Directive[16]** The Water Framework Directive has the following key aims:

    - Expanding the scope of water protection to all waters, surface waters and groundwater;
    - Achieving "good status" for all waters by a set deadline;
    - Water management based on river basins;
    - "Combined approach" of emission limit values and quality standards;
    - Getting the prices right;
    - Getting the citizen involved more closely;
    - Streamlining legislation.

  The Directive requires surface water courses to reach 'Good Ecological' status as well as 'Good Chemical' status. With respect to groundwater the status must be of 'Good Quality' as well as 'Good Chemical' status.

  The Catchment Based Approach to improving Water Quality was a response by DEFRA to the Water Framework Directive and is led by the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency organises several River Basin committees that are founded on the existence of Catchment Partnerships involving water companies, landowners such as farmers represented by the National Farmers Unions, Local Authorities and NGOs such as the Rivers Trust and Wildlife Trusts.

3.2 Regional policy drivers

The Government is currently undertaking a programme of local government reorganisation, which will impact on how services currently delivered by Leicestershire County Council and the district councils are provided in the future. What follows are the key drivers as they currently exist.

3.2.1 LNRS for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

The LNRS (Figure 3) provides a blueprint for nature recovery strategy across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and identifies opportunities for nature recovery within areas that could become of particular importance for conservation. The document outlines habitat priorities and measures, landscape-scale priorities and proposes measures for priority species. It contains a list of indicator species, which will be used to measure the rate and extent of recovery.

The LNRS will be used to leverage further action on County Council owned land, where there are opportunities for nature conservation and enhancement. This may be through direct action on land under the Council's own control or via the influence that it has on partners, tenants or other stakeholders.

For example, some of the Council's County Parks, such as areas of Beacon Hill, are already managed under Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements to ensure the most appropriate management of the land for its long-term ecological wellbeing.

Whilst the Council cannot require tenants to adopt specific land management practices, it aims to work with tenants to encourage ecological land management practices. The Council's tenanted land that has opportunities for habitat and species recovery have been

[15] https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/engaging-with-the-water-framework-directive/
[16] Water Framework Directive

identified as part of the LNRS creation process. Mapping of opportunities and liaison with tenants is ongoing.[17]

Figure 3:

The LNRS documentation creates a blueprint for interventions to conserve and regenerate habitats. It refers to priority species which need specific support and a list of indicator species, to help determine success.

3.2.2 Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan 2018[18]

The Strategic Growth Plan is the overarching plan which sets out the aspirations for delivering growth (housing, economic, and infrastructure) in Leicester and Leicestershire until 2050. The document is underpinned by an evidence base, including the Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire, October 2017. This strategy[19] provides a policy document for reference in local plans, but whilst it is a high-level review of the needs for growth, it is not the only accepted evidence base that is utilised by local plans for the purpose of protecting and enhancing habitats and biodiversity through Green Infrastructure provision.

The non-statutory Growth Plan was adopted by all nine local authorities and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) (the predecessor of the current Leicester and Leicestershire Business and Skills Partnership).

The vision of the Plan touches on the relevance of planning and growth in terms of its impact on nature through:

> "delivery of well-designed and high-quality development, raising the bar in terms of environmental standards, quality of life and local distinctiveness"

The new national planning system will include the preparation of a statutory Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) which will replace the Strategic Growth Plan. Detail on the likely content of SDSs envisaged by the Government is still emerging. However, it is understood it will reflect priority recovery areas identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and provide a steer on the interplay between these areas and key

[17] https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/LLR-Local-Nature-Recovery-Strategy.pdf
[18] https://www.llstrategicgrowthplan.org.uk/
[19] https://www.llstrategicgrowthplan.org.uk/wp-content/documents/pdf_document/Leicester-and-Leicestershire-LSA-and-GI-Study-Report-Low-Res-Part-1.pdf

infrastructure required to support future growth, the specifics of which will be identified in future local plans.

3.2.3 Local Plans

A local plan is a statutory planning document that underpins the parameters for development in an area. Within Leicestershire there are seven district local plans and the Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan. Each plan uses a selected evidence base that is locally relevant and suggests issues and opportunities around biodiversity, habitat and the local environment.

The local plan process offers an opportunity to create a new evidence base and produce adopted plans that suggest interventions for green infrastructure and biodiversity that can achieve quantitative and qualitative improvements. The current local plans have suggested interventions to improve designated sites both local and national, improving the public realm as well as improving the design of non-designated space through development.

Key opportunities identified within most of the current and emerging local plans includes woodland creation, improving the physical connectivity of habitats, such as through the enhancement of fragmented hedgerow, addressing access to the countryside and publicly accessible open spaces, protection and enhancement of greenways and river and canal corridors in terms of water quality and as a corridor for biodiversity.

3.2.4 Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Up to 2031[20]

The Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan is a key driver for the County Council to influence change for nature through the advice provided on applicant's design plans via the County Archaeologist, Ecologists and Landscape Architect advisors. These sites can also aid nature recovery and support BNG.

3.3 Other strategic and policy influences

3.3.1 River Soar Catchment Plan 2023-2028

The River Soar Catchment Partnership is made up of the County Council, City Council and seven district councils as well as non-governmental organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, Canal & River Trust, the Environment Agency and Trent Rivers Trust. The Environment Agency part fund the partnership on an annual basis.

The vision for the Soar Catchment Partnership is to have:

> 'A Soar catchment that has a sustainable and diverse water environment that benefits people, the natural environment and the economy of the local area. A catchment in good ecological condition with improved resilience to climate change, flooding and pollution events.'

The Catchment Plan[21] is a non-statutory document, but it does support the River Basin Management Plans that are statutory requirements of all EU members states. The UK is no longer an EU member state, but the UK law has not changed regarding to its commitment to

[20] https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2019/10/3/Leicestershire-Minerals-and-Waste-Local-Plan-Up-to-2031-Adopted-2019.pdf
[21] https://www.trentriverstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Soar-Catchment-Plan_23-28_final.pdf

the Water Framework Directive and the requirement to produce a River Basin Management Plan. Other catchment plans are available and include the Welland[22] and the River Mease[23].

3.3.2 Leicestershire & Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP): Space for Wildlife 2016-2026

BAPs were drawn up locally as a response to the UK commitment to produce the first ever BAP, a consequence of the Rio Summit Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992. The UK BAP has since been superseded by The UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework which has as one of its' actions a commitment to exploring the mainstreaming of biodiversity into other sectors through a natural resources approach.

The Space for Wildlife Biodiversity Action Plan[24] is not a statutory document but is used as a reference document and evidence base by developers and planning authorities to understand the state of nature in Leicestershire and which habitats and species are most important for nature conservation. Much of the content of the current BAP is referenced in the LNRS and the likelihood is that the BAP will not be fully revised/reissued at the end of its current lifecycle. A final decision on this will rest with Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust who host the current BAP.

3.3.3 Environmental Land Management Schemes

These are schemes managed on behalf of the government by the Rural Payments Agency which pay landowners to manage land for biodiversity and nature recovery. Some schemes also cover nature-based solutions such as natural flood management. These schemes include the Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) and HLS schemes. Some Leicestershire County Council farming tenants are recipients of SFI payments. The Council is also in receipt of HLS on two of its own managed sites.

3.4 Leicestershire County Council policy drivers

3.4.1 Leicestershire County Council Environment Strategy 2018-2030

This strategy sets out Leicestershire County Council's Environment Policy, the scope of which includes the legal and statutory duties it must fulfil regarding the environment and the national response to climate change, what the Council needs to do to embed environmental sustainability into the effective and efficient running of Council services, and what the Council needs to do to fulfil its leadership role in a way that recognises and minimises environmental impacts, improves the health and wellbeing of people and contributes to the economic sustainability of the County. The strategy sets out how the vision will be achieved through a series of aims and objectives. Figure 4 below sets out the aims and objectives for biodiversity, habitats and the local environment.

The Environment Strategy sets out the high-level objectives in this area. The Environment Strategy Action Plan provides more detail about how the Council will seek to meet these objectives. Action for Nature is aligned with the Environment Strategy, and the Action Plan for Action for Nature contains cross-references to one or more Environment Strategy objectives.

[22] Welland Catchment Plan
[23] River Mease Catchment Plan
[24] Space for Wildlife 2016-2026

Figure 4: Biodiversity, habitats and local environment aims and objectives from the County Council Environment Strategy 2018-2030

Biodiversity, Habitats and Local Environment		
G. Protect and enhance biodiversity as a natural capital asset throughout all our activities and seek to ensure that we achieve biodiversity net gain on our own land and influence improvements in the wider county	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets.	G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
	G2. The Council will manage its land with nature conservation designations (SSSIs and LWS) to maintain and enhance their biodiversity value.	
	G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and the condition of natural capital features.	
H. Support the creation, protection, enhancement and management of sustainable green infrastructure	H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate.	H2. The Council will support the creation protection, enhancement and management of sustainable green infrastructure in Leicestershire.
I. Reduce pollution and contamination	I1. The Council reduces polluting emissions and contamination from its operations.	I2. The Council reduces pollution and contamination in Leicestershire through its Trading Standards service and other areas of control and influence.
J. Conserve and enhance the character, diversity and local distinctiveness of Leicestershire landscapes and towns, and provide opportunities for public access and enjoyment of green spaces	J1. The Council will respect, conserve and enhance the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape on its estate.	J2. The Council will work with partners to support action that respects, conserves and enhances the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and towns.

3.4.2. Biodiversity Duty Plan 2024[25]

This document lists and describes all the other Leicestershire County Council strategies which have a bearing on the Council's fulfilment of its statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

The Biodiversity Duty Plan lays the ground for biodiversity conservation and enhancement to be incorporated into each of these strategies as they reach their refresh/rewrite dates. It was published in December 2024 and gives details of multiple other strategies that contain policy or objectives that are relevant to the delivery of biodiversity conservation and enhancement:

- Strategic Plan Refresh 2024-2026
- Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2019-2029
- Tree Management Strategy 2019-2029
- Communities Strategy 2022-2026
- Public Health Strategy 2022-2027
- Investing in Leicestershire Programme, Portfolio Management Strategy 2025-2029
- Highways Asset Management Strategy
- Highways Asset Management Policy
- Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan
- Highways Network Management Plan
- Cycling and Walking Strategy
- Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (written 2024)
- Minerals and Waste Local Plan
- Resources and Waste Strategy 2022-2050

3.4.3 Public Health

Part of Public Health's role is to create conditions that enable people across Leicestershire to make healthy choices and experience improved wellbeing. The local environment has an impact on people's quality of life and their health. This impact can be because of pollution, inadequate access to sufficient and quality outdoor spaces and facilities and the quality of the built and local environment. These are issues that are intrinsically connected to our natural world.

Public Health seeks to tackle these overlapping and interconnected issues through a range of programmes and projects such as the:

- **Leicestershire Healthy Schools Programme**, which through a partnership with 'Food for Life' and the Improving Air Quality campaign offers opportunities to encourage the development of habitats and biodiversity within schools. By tree planting and the growing of food in ways that can also encourage a diversity of species on site, while at the same time also producing food for schools and the local community, the programme both improves health and the natural environment;
- **Air Quality and Health Action Plan**[26] – the plan includes actions to reduce pollution which may offer the opportunity to improve biodiversity and habitat;
- **Sustainable Food Places –** Leicestershire has already achieved bronze and silver awards under the Sustainable Food Places award scheme, and the team are now

[25] https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/LCC-Biodiversity-Duty-Plan.pdf
[26] Air Quality and Health Action Plan

putting in place actions to achieve the gold award. Public Health works with other departments and external partners to look at how improving agricultural practices can benefit health, the wider environment and the local economy. This work dovetails with nature recovery objectives and is key to the roll out of the LNRS, which will require increased collaboration with the farming community across the County.

3.4.4. Leicestershire & Rutland Environmental Records Centre (LRERC) and Leicestershire County Ecology Service

The LRERC[27] provides an important source of local data on the known designated sites, such as local wildlife sites, the presence of protected and vulnerable habitats and species as well as invasive species. This information is compiled through important data-sharing relationships between non-governmental organisations such as Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), Naturespot and many others.

The service is supported through the County Council and district councils as well as the income from providing commercial data searches. This important service has contributed data to the Leicestershire and Rutland BAP and LNRS and continues to be a source of information that feeds into policy around nature conservation and support for planning applications.

The Ecology Service provides scrutiny of major planning applications for the County Council's Minerals and Waste Planning as well as major applications for all districts, except for Charnwood Borough Council. This is to ensure that development can achieve betterment for biodiversity and help achieve policy objectives.

3.4.5 Historic Environment Record and County Archaeology Service

The Historic Environment Record[28] is also an important source of local data on the heritage of Leicestershire and is used as a reference point for development management advice, local plans and policies, as well as other land use planning (e.g. utilities and other infrastructure) and to inform community interest (including neighbourhood plans).

The County Archaeology Service offers access to the data and is asked to comment on major planning applications on behalf of the County Council, such as minerals and waste planning, and planning applications submitted to Rutland Council and Leicestershire district councils. This service ensures that expertise and evidence are considered in the design of new development.

The service offers advice on Countryside Stewardship schemes direct to the Rural Payments Agency. This includes details of where historic assets such as earthworks could be included in land management schemes.

Advice is also given to the Environment Agency and on woodland and forestry grant schemes to the Forestry Commission, County Council and the National Forest Company.

During the Environmental Impact Assessment consultation undertaken by statutory bodies, the Historic Environment Record Service and the County Archaeology Service are statutory consultees.

[27] Leicestershire and Rutland Environment Records Centre
[28] https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/historic-environment-record

4. Biodiversity and Natural Capital

4.1 What is biodiversity and why does it matter?

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth. It includes all living plants and animals, their genetic diversity and the ecosystems that they depend on. Biodiversity is everywhere - gardens, rivers, woodlands, hedgerows, grassland. It represents a quality of life. It gives us pleasure in the world around us and more importantly provides us with food and shelter, controls flooding, cleans the air and water, along with many other ecosystem services.

The services provided by biodiversity, such as carbon sequestration, pollination and pest regulation are given for free. However, the value of biodiversity can be seen in how biodiversity can prevent flooding, promote health and wellbeing and support food production.

The underlying geology, geography and hydrology of the County provide the foundations for the ecosystems that biodiversity relies upon and allows ecosystem services to work. For instance:

- Hedgerow habitats allow woodland species to move between woodland sites enabling them to thrive and help to clean the air, store carbon and produce timber;
- Species rich grassland provides a refuge for pollinators and in turn these varied species pollinate food plants, provide natural food and medicines for livestock and other wildlife.

4.2 State of nature in Leicestershire

The LNRS provides a full analysis of the state of nature in Leicestershire and identifies priority and indicator species and priority habitats along with a range of measures intended to bring about nature recovery in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.[29]

4.3 Resilience to a changing climate

The UK Inter-Agency Climate Change Forum published a report called ‘Biodiversity and Climate Change – a summary of impacts in the UK’, in 2010. The following extracts refer to the impacts on biodiversity:

> *‘*Climate change affects biodiversity in many ways. Impacts on species include changes in distribution and abundance, the timing of seasonal events and habitat use and, as a consequence there are likely to be changes in the composition of plant and animal communities. Habitats and ecosystems are also likely to change character by, for example, showing altered water regimes, increased rates of decomposition in bogs and higher growth rates in forests.
>
> Indirect impacts may become just as significant as a result of climate-induced changes in land use having knock-on effects on biodiversity. For example, growing new crops, increases in summer watering and geographical shifts in arable and livestock production could well occur, but how these indirect changes may affect biodiversity remains less certain.

[29] https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/LLR-Local-Nature-Recovery-Strategy.pdf

> Biodiversity also has an important role in climate change adaptation and mitigation. For example, soils, forests and oceans hold vast stores of carbon. The way managed habitats are used will affect how much of that carbon is released in gaseous form into the atmosphere. How we address climate change and maintain healthy ecosystems so that they provide ecosystem goods and services essential for human well-being is now a key challenge for society.'

Since then, work has been undertaken to gain a deeper insight into how climate change is likely to affect biodiversity and where its impacts will be the greatest.

The National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability Model developed by Natural England aims to provide a spatially explicit assessment of the relative vulnerability of priority habitats. http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5069081749225472

The model looks at the intrinsic sensitivity to climate change, the habitats' capacity to adapt based on measures such as whether it is fragmented, positively managed and its condition and the conservation value of the habitats, such as, whether it is a designated habitat, a nationally designated habitat or internationally designated habitat.

Climate vulnerability scores for habitats across Leicestershire generally show that the County's watercourses and associated habitats are the most vulnerable areas, with some areas in the highest categories of vulnerability.

When looking to invest in mitigation or flood prevention it is important to consider where it will be possible to also achieve gains for people and nature. Natural Flood Management (NFM) is a good example of how this can be achieved. It is important to also consider the extra sensitivity of sites when considering how land management is practised in terms of looking after farms, recreational sites and developing economic sites and housing.

4.4 Pests and diseases

The changing climate will have an impact on the resilience of pests and diseases as well as adding additional stress to the diversity of plants and animals. Ash dieback disease is an example of where additional stress is placed upon native ash trees, already trying to cope with drought, too much water, extreme wind and damage from human activity. The Council protects the most valuable trees in the landscape such as those identified in the Tree Management Strategy by knowing where they are and by being aware of and acting on reducing the pressures that they are under in those locations. This will allow greater opportunity for vulnerable species to thrive and maintain the landscape character that they provide.

Invasive species of plant and animal are often now naturalised into the landscape but in some cases where they 'crowd' out vulnerable natives, it is possible to again act to reduce pressures on the vulnerable species.

5. Opportunities for Delivering the Biodiversity Objectives

Through the engagement and consultation process with service areas and key officers, several broad areas for action were identified which could provide significant opportunities for meeting the biodiversity, habitat and local environment objectives. These were:

- Improving the land management practices on land directly owned or managed by Leicestershire County Council;
- Supporting the tenants of Council land to better manage this land;
- Ensuring biodiversity is included in the development of Leicestershire County Council policies, plans and projects;
- Influencing or adding value to the polices, plans and projects of others;
- Supporting awareness raising and education on biodiversity;
- Maintaining and developing local data on the ecology and historic environment of the County;
- Identifying opportunities for realising ecosystem service benefits on Leicestershire County Council land.

5.1 Improving the land management practices on land directly owned or managed by the Council

The land Leicestershire County Council directly owns and manages includes Country Parks, operational sites, and untenanted land including woodlands, highway verges and hedges. On these sites, the Council will assess how to achieve better management through a change in the specification of contracts or operational plans. The Council will also explore how this work could be supported further through collaboration with other organisations that can provide expertise, or resources or add value to the achievement of benefits for biodiversity.

The Council's Highways Operations aspire to expand the introduction of wildlife friendly maintenance practices within urban areas through the Urban Wildlife Verge scheme as well exploring options to review the maintenance of a number of highways-maintained hedges.

Where sites are also scheduled monuments there is an opportunity to record, interpret and conserve heritage through the advice of the County archaeology service and others.

5.2 Supporting the tenants of Council land to better manage this land

Through relationships with its tenants, Leicestershire County Council could encourage the active improvement of land by making tenants aware of possible grant opportunities, offering advice on how to improve the land holding for biodiversity, habitat and local environment inclusive of heritage assets. This could be done by existing Council resources and support from external agencies such as Natural England, water companies and independent farm advisors.

Leicestershire County Council follows the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Code[30] as a guide to best practice. The Code has three key principles, which are:

[30] https://www.nfuonline.com/media/2znayotx/agricultural-landlord-and-tenant-code-of-practice-for-england.pdf

- Clarity: as to the definition of intentions, expectations and the definition of problems if they do arise;
- Communication: which should be clear and timely, considered, and tailored to the needs and situation of the recipient;
- Collaboration: the code of practice encourages a collaborative and cooperative approach. This is based on the belief that landlords and tenants can achieve much more when they work together in a positive spirit of common endeavour.

The code encourages constructive discussion between tenants and landlords with regard to opportunities such as environmental schemes and say the landlord should not withhold consent unreasonably with an explanation of when it is reasonable to withhold consent. It requires tenants to consider the owner's interest when applying for schemes.

5.3 Ensuring biodiversity is included in the development of Council policies, plans and projects

The Council has a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity under the enhanced Biodiversity Duty introduced by the Environment Act 2021, which amended the NERC Act as detailed previously. The Council also has a statutory duty to report on how the Biodiversity Duty has been met and on its plans for future actions.

There is an opportunity through many of the policies, plans and projects of the Council to support action that protects and enhances biodiversity, habitats and the local environment. The Council's Biodiversity Duty Plan (2024) requires that a range of policies incorporate biodiversity conservation and enhancement both in their current application and any future amendments or revisions.

The Council is also subject to mandatory net gain for biodiversity for any planning applications on its own land and is the planning authority for Waste and Minerals. The Council is also the approving body for net gain assessments submitted to the district councils (other than Charnwood).

5.4 Influencing or adding value to the policies, plans and projects of others

Leicestershire County Council is involved in developing or influencing the policies, plans and projects of other organisations either directly through being part of a partnership or indirectly through being a consultee, for example. The Council uses these opportunities to offer insight, knowledge or expertise to ensure biodiversity is considered and improved.

Working groups will be established as part of the LNRS delivery process and some of the outputs from these working groups could influence future project design.

Through the planning system, the Council engages with planning applications for housing and economic site development, and minerals / quarry workings. This provides an opportunity to influence the design quality of development. In the future, applicants will be able to refer to the LNRS as a supporting document if their development meets the LNRS objectives and utilise the priority measures to help guide best practice for achieving BNG. Details of how this will occur in practice are still evolving.

The guidance the Council produces around Highway Design[31] and ecology can influence projects and development that require planning permission. The online Highways Design

[31] https://www.leicestershirehighwaydesignguide.uk/

Guide now contains a specific link to a toolkit for Green Infrastructure[32] and links to help with modelling the value of trees.[33]

The Council also advises projects not impacted by the Town & Country Planning Act such as advice accompanying the Free Tree scheme, which allows individuals, landowners and community groups to plant trees on their land.

Partnership working both internally and externally will help realise multiple benefits to biodiversity, habitat and the local environment, such as the example of natural flood management reducing the risk of local flooding and providing more wetland habitat.

5.5 Supporting awareness raising and education on biodiversity

Leicestershire County Council has multiple channels for raising awareness on how different groups and individuals can conserve and enhance biodiversity. These include the Council website, the Leicestershire Communities website and various social media channels. Specific support is given to the Tree Warden Network. The Council also trains and supports Environment Action Volunteers, including citizen scientists and groups who manage land. The Country Parks also have a volunteering offer for those who want to do practical conservation tasks. Leicestershire County Council publishes the Environment Matters newsletter.

Leicestershire County Council relaunched the Nature Network (formerly Parish Nature Network) in September 2025, and it is planned to use this as a vehicle for encouraging best practice across the whole range of stakeholders in the nature recovery sphere.

The Action Plan outlines actions required to unlock these opportunities and deliver on the objectives of the Environment Strategy for biodiversity.

For example, the Council offers advice to communities on the development of Neighbourhood Plans and has developed information and continued training for parish councils around biodiversity, including specific habitats such as trees through the Tree Warden Initiative.

5.6 Maintaining and developing local data on the ecology and historic environment of the County

This involves updating and maintaining the records, working with local communities to access new sources of data. Through the town and country planning system, ensuring advice and comment is given to policy and planning applications.

In implementing the LNRS, it is planned to improve how biodiversity data is collected, managed and reported, as this will be needed to provide the periodic reporting to the Government on progress in delivering the LNRS. This should help improve the quality and effectiveness of the data available.

[32] https://www.leicestershirehighwaydesignguide.uk/highway-layouts-and-design/green-infrastructure
[33] https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/tree-for-every-person/tree-charter-and-our-tree-management-strategy

5.7 Identifying opportunities for realising ecosystem service benefits on Leicestershire County Council land

Many of the interventions which benefit biodiversity and nature recovery have additional benefits; for example, through careful choice of the species type and mix of trees planted in urban and rural settings, we can increase biodiversity, whilst also reducing air pollution and flood risk, and providing helpful shade and cooling.

Similarly, many nature-based solutions and natural flood management techniques will have biodiversity benefits; for example, reconnection of flood plains restores ecological cycles that have been broken through drainage of land and other interventions. This approach is called stacking benefits. As the Council seeks to take action on climate adaptation, it will present opportunities to realise ecological benefits but also wider environmental, economic and social benefits, through reducing flood risk and the economic costs that arise as well as the health and wellbeing impacts on residents.

6. Development and Implementation of the Action Plan

6.1 Introduction

The Action for Nature document provides the strategic framework for the Action for Nature Action Plan. The Action Plan is held as a separate document, so that it can be refreshed annually in line with changing circumstances. The Action for Nature document will be fully reviewed in 2030.

The strengthened Biodiversity Duty applies to the entirety of Leicestershire County Council's operations. The Action for Nature Action Plan details how the duty will be carried out in practice, alongside the Council's other related statutory duties with regard to its planning functions and BNG, and its role as the responsible authority for the LNRS.

The original version of Action for Nature, including the 2021 version of the Action Plan, was created through consultation and collaboration with a range of departments with specific responsibilities relating to biodiversity, nature-based solutions and nature recovery.

Departments who contributed to the original document have been contacted for updates to create this refreshed version of the document.

The key service areas who will play an important part in delivering the actions are:

- Chief Executives - Planning and Historic and Natural Environment
- Chief Executives - Communities
- Corporate Resources - Country Parks and Forestry
- Corporate Resources - Strategic Property
- Corporate Resources - Operational Services and Facilities Management
- Environment & Transport - Highways Operations and Major Projects
- Environment & Transport - Environment and Waste Commissioning
- Public Health

6.2 Monitoring and reporting the Action Plan

Progress on the implementation of the actions within the Action Plan will be reported through the existing reporting mechanisms used for reporting on the Environment Strategy. This will include reporting to the Environment Oversight Board, relevant Lead Members, Environment, Climate Change and Flooding Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Commission as appropriate.

Establishing appropriate and realistic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for biodiversity is notoriously difficult, due the complex and multi-faceted nature of this topic and the resulting time and cost of gathering and analysing data.

Considering this, two KPIs were developed to allow measurement of how the Council is performing in terms of improving biodiversity, habitat and the local environment on land it owns or manages. The KPIs are:

- Hectares of Leicestershire County Council land in better management for nature;
- Percentage of suitable Leicestershire County Council land in better management for nature.

‘Land in better management for nature’ is assessed against the management practices being employed within the area of land. The current management of sites will be assessed to understand if improvement could be made to protect and enhance habitats and to encourage biological diversity. The amount of land impacted by any change to management practices will then contribute towards the KPI.

The ‘Percentage of suitable Council land in better management for nature’ is based on the total amount of land owned by the Council less land that is not and will not be able to provide a diversity of habitat and species, such as paved surfaces or poor quality arable farmland that is being farmed to provide single crop species or industrial units that offer little or no habitat for wildlife. The percentage of suitable land in better management for nature is calculated against this figure.

In addition, a suite of Performance Indicators (PIs) are monitored to support the Council’s understanding of the KPIs such as:

- Number of trees planted;
- Area restored for natural flood management;
- Metres of hedges planted;
- Number of ponds created or restored;
- Number of parishes with site agreements under the Wildlife Verges scheme;
- Number of verges in the Wildlife Verge scheme;
- Number of wildlife records generated by the Wildlife Verges scheme.

Where practicable, the Council maintains performance data in relation to land under its ownership and the wider County. However, there is an inherent difficulty in accessing and maintaining such data, due to a number of reasons, including the cost and resources required to collect and maintain such data, and the time lags between data being collected and it being available. For example, national indicators for air and water quality are released intermittently and may be several years old. Submission of species records is also notoriously patchy as it relies on a mixture of paid staff (including planning consultants) and volunteer recorders, and there is no guarantee that any specific site will have been surveyed in any specific time period. Condition reports on protected sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, may also be out of date.

It is the Council’s intention to collaborate with other LNRS partners to develop a suite of indicators which will record the progress towards nature recovery. These indicators will also be applied to the Council’s own land and operations if this is appropriate and practicable.

Leicestershire County Council has a statutory duty to report on how it has met the strengthened Biodiversity Duty, including reporting on its role as a planning authority. More details on these requirements are covered in section 3.1.2.1.

6.3 Implementation of the Action Plan

Implementation of the Action Plan will be overseen by the Environment Oversight Board, a cross-departmental board that provides oversight on the Environment Strategy and the Clean and Green Outcome within the Council’s Strategic Plan.

Day-to-day implementation of the Action Plan will be led by the Environment Policy & Strategy Team, working closely with the relevant service areas and external partners and stakeholders. An Action for Nature Working Group will be established to support implementation.

6.4 Collaboration & partnership working

The Action for Nature Action Plan includes a set of objectives relating to partnership working. The Council is active in a range of formal and informal partnerships and collaborates with a changing array of stakeholders. For example, umbrella partnerships such as the Soar Catchment Partnership include members from other statutory authorities, non-governmental organisations and private interests, such as the water companies.

7. Final Remarks

The Government has set ambitious targets to make more space for nature, halt the decline of species and drive actions which will put nature into recovery. The target to have 30% of land protected for nature by 2030 is unlikely to be reached, despite some impressive progress at local and regional level in establishing landscape recovery and rewilding initiatives.[34] Progress on the global 30by30 nature target (protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030) is slow, with the UK, for example, having only effectively protected 2.93% of land and 9.92% of its waters as of October 2024[35], and reports showing a lack of Government evidence to support claims of being on track to meet the rapidly approaching 2030 target.

Many protected areas lack the necessary enforcement, funding, and management measures to be truly effective in conserving nature. Landowners, such as Leicestershire County Council, whose land is part of a designated protected area are dependent on Natural England to monitor and share condition assessments. Natural England currently has limited staff resources for this. This makes effective management of existing protected areas difficult as data available may not reflect the actual ground conditions. Similarly, although the Council is committed to supporting regenerative and nature friendly agriculture on the Council's landholdings, including tenanted farms, there is a lack of capacity at Natural England to support new entrants to Higher Tier schemes. In 2025, the Sustainable Farming Initiative was oversubscribed and was closed down at short notice, creating financial uncertainty for farmers wishing to transition to less harmful practices.

The planned measures for nature recovery (as described in the LNRS) are ambitious and rely on multiple partners and agencies to work effectively together to bring about the necessary changes. Within the LNRS area, strong partnerships and clear willingness to creatively design solutions despite the financial constraints faced by all the partners are clearly visible.

In spite of these constraints, Leicestershire County Council has been recognised as an exemplar in developing and publishing the LNRS, and the Council is committed to implementing Action for Nature, conserving and enhancing biodiversity and integrating best practice into land management and other operational functions.

[34] https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2025/10/02/nature-recovery-projects-next-steps-for-growing-collaborative-action-that-drives-nature-recovery/
[35] https://wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_30x30_Progress_Report_2024.pdf

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Ash dieback	Ash dieback is a highly destructive disease of ash trees (*Fraxinus* species), especially the United Kingdom's native ash species, common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). It is caused by a fungus named *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (*H. fraxineus*), which is of eastern Asian origin.
Biodiversity	Biodiversity for short or biological diversity means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, among other things, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.
Blue infrastructure	Similar to green infrastructure (see below) but refers specifically to water bodies and waterways.
Corridor for biodiversity	A biological corridor consists of all the habitats needed during the various stages of a species' life cycle (reproduction, growth, shelter). These habitats are functionally linked to one another
Stepping stone	Ecological stepping stones are unconnected areas of semi-natural habitat close to corridors, allowing more mobile species to move through the landscape.
Ecosystems	Biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.
Ecosystem services	Ecosystem services are the direct and indirect contributions ecosystems (known as natural capital) provide for human wellbeing and quality of life. This can be in a practical sense, providing food and water and regulating the climate, as well as cultural aspects such as reducing stress and anxiety. These services provided by ecosystems lead to benefits received by humans in the form of security, goods and materials, health and wellbeing.
Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS)	Environmental Land Management Scheme is replacing the European Common Agricultural Policy that provides subsidies to the agricultural sector.
Geodiversity	Geodiversity refers to the variety of the geological and physical elements of nature, such as minerals, rocks, soils, fossils and landforms, and active geological and geomorphological processes. Together with biodiversity, geodiversity constitutes the natural diversity of planet Earth
Green infrastructure	Green infrastructure is a network of multi-functional green space and other green features, urban and rural, which can deliver quality of life and environmental benefits for communities.
Habitats	The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.
Landscape Character Area	These are single unique areas which are discrete geographical areas with a landscape type. Each have its own character and identity.
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	Local Nature Reserves are a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside

	Act 1949 by principal local authorities. Parish and Town Councils can also declare LNRs, but they must have the powers to do so delegated to them by a principal local authority. LNRs are for people and wildlife.
Local plan	Local planning authorities must prepare a local plan which sets planning policies in a local authority area.
Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	Local Wildlife Sites are wildlife-rich sites selected for their local nature conservation value. They vary in shape and size and can contain important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species. In many parts of the UK, they are the principal wildlife resource, but their designation is non-statutory, and their only protection comes via the planning system.
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	National Nature Reserves were established to protect some of our most important habitats, species and geology, and to provide ‘outdoor laboratories’ for research.
Natural Capital	Part of nature which directly or indirectly underpins value to people.
Nature	The phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth.
NERC Act	Natural Environment Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty to conserve biodiversity on public authorities in England. It requires local authorities and government departments to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity in a manner that is consistent with the exercise of their normal functions such as policy and decision-making. 'Conserving biodiversity' may include enhancing, restoring or protecting a population or a habitat.
Net-Gain (Biodiversity) (BNG)	BNG is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before.
Net-Gain (Environment)	Environmental Net Gain is an approach for improving the condition of, and ecosystems services that flow from, our natural assets in the context of development.
Protected species	A species of animal or plant which it is forbidden by law to harm or destroy.
River Catchment	A catchment is an area of land where water collects when it rains, often bounded by hills. As the water flows over the landscape, it finds its way into streams and down into the soil, eventually feeding the river. Some of this water stays underground and continues to slowly feed the river in times of low rainfall.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	A Site of Special Scientific Interest is a formal conservation designation. Usually, it describes an area that's of interest to science due to the rare species of fauna or flora it contains - or even important geological or physiological features that may lie in its boundaries.
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	A Special Area of Conservation is the land designated under Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Appendix 2: List of abbreviations

BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
COP	Conference of the Parties
DEFRA	Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs
EIP	Environmental Improvement Plan
ELMS	Environmental Land Management Scheme
EU	European Union
GP	General Practice
HLS	Higher Level Stewardship
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LLEP	Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LNRS	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
LRERC	Leicestershire & Rutland Environmental Records Centre
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
NERC Act	Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
PI	Performance Indicator
PTES	People's Trust for Endangered Species
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAC	Special Areas of Conservation
SFI	Sustainable Farming Initiative
SSSI	Sites of Special Scientific Importance

Action for Nature

A Strategic Approach to Biodiversity, Habitat and the Local Environment for Leicestershire County Council

Published December 2025

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Action for Nature - A Strategic Approach to Biodiversity, Habitat and the Local Environment for Leicestershire County Council Action Plan

2025 - 2030

This Action Plan supports the Action for Nature document and the Environment Strategy 2018-2030:

Revision	Revision Description	Date	Author
0	Published Version	Decemeber 25	James O'Brien / Sam Wood
1			

Leicestershire County Council

Land Management Actions	Scope (Internal / External / Both)	Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Key Environment Strategy Aims / Objectives
Deliver the Biodiversity Duty Plan.	Internal	All depts	All depts	Ongoing	G. Protect and enhance biodiversity as a natural capital asset throughout all our activities and seek to ensure that we achieve biodiversity net gain on our own land and influence improvements in the wider county.
Undertake responsible authority function and support delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.	Both	Environment	All depts External partners	Apr 25-Mar 30	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G2. The Council will manage its land with nature conservation designations to maintain and enhance their biodiversity value. G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and the condition of natural capital features. G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate. H2.greensinstructure in Leicestershire. J1. The Council will respect and enhance the character, heritage and accessibility of the landscape on its estate. J2. The Council will respect and enhance the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and towns.
Support delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain in Leicestershire.	Both	Ecology & Biodiversity	Environment Districts Developers Land Owners	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and the condition of natural capital features. G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate. H2.The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure in Leicestershire. J1. The Council will respect and enhance the character, heritage and accessibility of the landscape on its estate. J2.The Council will respect and enhance the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and towns.

Deliver Urban Wildlife Verge Scheme.	Both	Highways	Environment Parishes Naturespot	Annual recruitment	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G2. Manage land with nature conservation designations to maintain and enhance their value. G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate .
Improve grassland management, especially mowing regimes.	Internal	Highways Country Parks	Contactors	Annual Review	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G2. Manage land with nature conservation designations to maintain and enhance their value. G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate. H2.The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure in Leicestershire.
Deliver the Ash Dieback Action Plan.	Both	Forestry	Highways Comms Environment	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G4: Work with partners to support wider Biodiversity improvements across Leicestershire. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate. H2.The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure in Leicestershire.
Implement the Tree Management Strategy	Both	Forestry	Environment Woodland Trust	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H1/H2. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate / Leicestershire. I. Reduce pollution and contamination.
Manage trees outside of woodland, including along the highway.	Both	Forestry Highways	Environment Woodland Trust	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. H1/H2. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate / Leicestershire. G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Administer and improve the Tree Protection Order service	Both	Environment	Landowners Districts	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.

Implement Country Parks Management Plans.	Internal	Country Parks	Forestry Flooding	Annual Review of Green Flags	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G2. Manage land with nature conservation designations to maintain and enhance their biodiversity value. G4. Work with partners to support wider Biodiversity improvements across Leicestershire. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate. J1.The Council will respect, conserve and enhance the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape on its estate
Provide support to parishes, districts and other stakeholders to take on responsibility for civic spaces.	Internal	Special Projects	Highways Comms Environment	Ongoing	G4: Work with partners to support wider Biodiversity improvements across Leicestershire. H1/H2. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate/Leicestershire. J2. The Council will work with partners to support action that respects/ conserves and enhances the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and towns. K. Support the Leicestershire community in reducing environmental impacts and in enhancing green infrastructure for health and wellbeing benefits.
Provide comments on Neighbourhood Plans.	Internal	Communities Team	All depts	As needed.	G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H2.The Council will support the creation, protection, enhancement and management of sustainable green infrastructure in Leicestershire. J2. The Council will work with partners to support action that respects, conserves and enhances the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and town. K. Support the Leicestershire community in reducing environmental impacts and in enhancing green infrastructure for and wellbeing benefits.
Publicise and support a network of Tree Wardens engaged by parishes to assist with tree management across the County.	Both	Environment	Parishes Tree Council Comms	Ongoing	G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H2.The Council will support the creation, protection, enhancement and management of sustainable green infrastructure in Leicestershire. J2. The Council will work with partners to support action that respects, conserves and enhances the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and town. K. Support the Leicestershire community in reducing environmental impacts and in enhancing green infrastructure for and wellbeing benefits.

Collaborate with partners to design land management that can support both nature and local food production.	Both	Environment Public Health	Statutory and non-governmental external partners	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and the condition of natural capital features. G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. J2. The Council will work with partners to support action that respects, conserves and enhances the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and towns. K. Support the Leicestershire community in reducing environmental impacts and in enhancing green infrastructure for and wellbeing benefits.
Work with Natural England on District Level Licensing and with other partners on enhancement of strategic sites for protected species.	Both	Environment	Country Parks External partners	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G4: Work with partners to support wider Biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Design mitigation measures to reduce pollution from our roads via planting of trees and hedges.	Both	Highways	External partners	As required	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. I. Reduce pollution and contamination.

Monitoring Actions	Scope (Internal / External / Both)	Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Key Environment Strategy Aims / Objectives
Monitor and record County Council land in better management for nature.	Internal	Environment	All depts	Annual	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G2. The Council will manage its land with nature conservation designations to maintain their biodiversity G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate.
Encourage Environmental Action Volunteers, Tree Wardens and other citizen science groups to submit records.	Both	Environment	Non-governmental organisations LRERC	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G2. The Council will manage its land with nature conservation designations to maintain their biodiversity/G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate. K. Support the Leicestershire community in reducing environmental impacts and in enhancing green infrastructure for and wellbeing benefits.
Respond to enquiries from other services and the public.	Internal	Environment	All depts	As required	G4. Work with partners to support wider Biodiversity improvements across Leicestershire. H1/H2. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate/Leicestershire. J2. The Council will work with partners to support action that respects, conserves and enhances the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and towns.
Monitor actions to meet Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) objectives and details of BNG resulting or expected from approved plans.	Both	Ecology and Biodiversity	District Planning authorities Planning applicants	Annual	G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Support and participate in the LNRS Data & Evidence Working Group.	Both	Environment	External partners	Group set up by March 2026	G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. H1/H2. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate / Leicestershire. J1/J2.The Council will respect, conserve and enhance the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape on its estate / on the Leicestershire landscape and towns.
Review updated Natural England SSSI site assessments and take necessary action to enable implementation of recommendations.	Both	Property County Parks	Natural England	As required	G4: Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. J2. The Council will work with partners to support action that respects, conserves and enhances the character, heritage and accessibility of the Leicestershire landscape and town.

Actions to control invasive species (INNS)	Scope (Internal / External / Both)	Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Key Environment Strategy Aims / Objectives
Implement the American Mink Control Policy for Water Vole recovery on County Council land.	Internal	Environment	Country Parks External partners	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Co-ordinate and support partnership working to tackle invasive species.	Both	Environment	External partners	Quarterly meetings	G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Align INNS work with the LNRS.	Both	Environment	All depts External partners	Ongoing	G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Participate in Mammal Species Recovery initiatives.	Both	Environment	External partners	As required	G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Provide appropriate support, tools or training to INNS volunteer groups.	Both	Environment	External partners	Ongoing	G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.

Partnerships and Funding Actions	Scope (Internal / External / Both)	Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Key Environment Strategy Aims/ Objectives
Seek and apply for appropriate funding to implement actions related to biodiversity conservation and enhancement and nature recovery.	Both	All depts	External partners	As opportunities arise	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Receive, disseminate and act upon regular funding updates, looking for opportunities for the Council and LNRS partners.	Internal	Environment	External partners	As opportunities arise	G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Support County Farm tenants to access environmental grant schemes and other financial support to implement positive changes in practice.	Internal	Property	Environment Flood Team Climate Resilience	As opportunities arise	G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of Biodiversity and the condition of Natural Capital Assets. G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Participate in the Action for Nature Working Group.	Internal	Environment	All depts	Quarterly	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.
Participate in external partnerships relevant to LNRS, biodiversity, conservation and enhancement and opportunities for stacked benefits.	Both	All depts	Partnerships e.g. Soar Catchment Partnership	As needed	G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire.

Agriculture Actions	Scope (Internal / External / Both)	Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Key Environment Strategy Aims / Objectives
Support nature friendly farming and promote regenerative agriculture for biodiversity conservation and enhancement and nature recovery.	Both	Property Public Health Environment	External partners	As opportunities arise	G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of Biodiversity and the condition of Natural Capital Assets. G4. Work with partners to support wider biodiversity and natural capital feature improvements across Leicestershire. I. Reduce pollution and contamination. M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.
Work with County Farm tenants to develop nature-friendly farming practices.	Internal	Property	Flood team Forestry Environment Climate Resilience	Linked to funding opportunities	G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of Biodiversity and the condition of Natural Capital Assets. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate. I. Reduce pollution and contamination. M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.
Maintain existing higher level stewardship commitments on County Parks.	Internal	Country Parks	Natural England	Ongoing	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate. I. Reduce pollution and contamination. M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.
Work closely with relevant bodies to support and develop environmental land management schemes on Council land.	Both	Property	Environment	Linked to funding opportunities	G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of Biodiversity and the condition of Natural Capital Assets. H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate I. Reduce pollution and contamination. M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.

Develop opportunities for river restoration and natural flood management where biodiversity benefits are possible and appropriate.	Both	Flood	Environment External Partners	Linked to funding opportunities	H1. The Council will create, protect, enhance and manage sustainable green infrastructure on its estate I. Reduce pollution and contamination. M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.
Develop opportunities for habitat creation on County farms where possible and appropriate especially where this would support recovery of priority species.	Internal	Property	Environment Forestry	Linked to funding opportunities	G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of Biodiversity and the condition of Natural Capital Assets. I. Reduce pollution and contamination. M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.
Apply for the Gold Award for Sustainable Food Places.	Internal	Public Health Environment	Sustainable Food Places External partners	See Public Health Strategy	G3. The Council seeks to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices on its farms that support the maintenance and enhancement of Biodiversity and the condition of Natural Capital Assets. I. Reduce pollution and contamination. M3. Work with others to increase awareness of the need to take action on climate change an ecological decline and support residents and communities to take required actions N2. Work with partners to advance opportunities that support a low carbon circular economy in Leicestershire.
Use procurement to support producers using sustainable farming practices.	Internal	Public Health Environment	Suppliers Producers	As opportunities arise	I. Reduce pollution and contamination M3. Work with others to increase awareness of the need to take action on climate change an ecological decline and support residents and communities to take required actions. N2. Work with partners to advance opportunities that support a low carbon circular economy in Leicestershire.

Communities Actions	Scope (Internal / External / Both)	Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Key Environment Strategy Aims / Objectives
Ensure that opportunities to take action to conserve habitats and biodiversity are an option of choice as part of supporting active lifestyles.	Internal	Public Health	All depts	Ongoing	K. Support the Leicestershire community in reducing environmental impacts and in enhancing green infrastructure for and wellbeing benefits. L1. Use Councils duties to protect people from harm caused by Climate Change and ensure effective communications.
Encourage active volunteering within Country Park sites.	Internal	Country Parks	Volunteers	Ongoing	L3.Work with partners to address issues of climate change and health inequalities.
Provide biodiversity training to Environmental Action Volunteers.	Internal	Communities Team	Environment	Ongoing	L3.Work with partners to address issues of climate change and health inequalities.
Provide information and support to local areas, such as parishes regarding biodiversity and the LNRS.	Both	Environment	All depts	Ongoing	M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.
Facilitate the Nature Network for parishes, community groups and other stakeholders.	Both	Environment	All depts/external partners	Every 4-6 weeks	M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.
Provide co-ordination and support to parish Tree Wardens including liaison with the Tree Council.	Both	Environment	External partners	At least one event annually	M. Demonstrate and promote environmental good practice and show community leadership.
Seek to use Social Value to achieve biodiversity conservation and enhancement.	Internal	Public Health Environment	All depts	As opportunities arise	I. Reduce pollution and contamination M3. Work with others to increase awareness of the need to take action on climate change an ecological decline and support residents and communities to take required actions. N2. Work with partners to advance opportunities that support a low carbon circular economy in Leicestershire.

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Agenda Item 9

Leicestershire County Council

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 11 NOVEMBER 2025

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to invite members of the Committee to comment on the refreshed draft Tree Management Strategy which sets out the approach for the management of the County Council's trees and woodlands.

2. The draft Strategy will continue to raise the profile and appreciation of trees under the custodianship of the Council, help manage the impact of Ash Dieback, and ensure we continue to see the wide-ranging benefit of trees and woodland by continuing our initiative to plant more trees across Leicestershire.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

3. The County Council's Strategic Plan recognises the importance of the natural environment and the countryside which makes Leicestershire an attractive place to live and work in. The Tree Management Strategy establishes a clear vision for ensuring that Leicestershire's trees and woodlands can provide multiple benefits that improve the quality of life for citizens and local communities.

4. The Tree Management Strategy also accords with the Council's Environment Strategy. Set within this context, the underlying principle of the Tree Management Strategy is to use the Authority's tree assets to improve the quality of life for the citizens and communities and support the Council in delivering its wider ecological and environmental strategic objectives.

5. The current Tree Management Strategy was approved by Cabinet in March 2020 and runs for the period of 2020 to 2025.

6. In July 2018 the Cabinet agreed the Ash Dieback Action Plan, which was aligned with the above iteration of the Tree Management Strategy.

Background

7. The County Council has a legal duty to manage and maintain all trees on County Council-owned land, in parks and open spaces and on the public highway.

8. The County Council produced its first Tree Management Strategy in 2008 and this was later revised in 2013 & 2020. The current revision of the Strategy will

refresh tree management practice and procedure in line with best practice and everchanging legislation and to also align work with the Authority's strategic priorities.

9. The County Council is responsible for managing an estimated 321,000 trees comprising of individual specimens, tree groups and woodlands. This includes over 400 hectares of woodland on its land holdings with approximately 37% of trees on country parks, 35% of trees on highways, 12% of trees on county farms, 10% of trees on schools and 6% of trees located across other properties.

10. The County Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure tree safety under the Occupiers' Liability Acts, Health and Safety at Work Act and Highways Act. The responsibility requires the County Council to carry out an inspection programme undertaking works as appropriate to control the risk of injury to council staff, visitors to council premises, or users of the council's adopted public highway.

11. The County Council also has a duty under the Highways Act to ensure that an estimated population of over 420,000 privately owned trees adjacent to the highway, do not pose a danger to its users.

12. The County Council receives an average of 2,000 enquiries each year regarding tree management. Many of these relate to safety and nuisance issues (e.g. branches overhanging the highway) but also include requests for specialist advice and guidance from residents and landowners.

13. Additionally, the County Council has a wider responsibility to provide leadership in tackling climate change and to mitigate against the social, economic and environmental problems that are exacerbated by it. It also has a broader strategic role to provide leadership as an exemplar and to influence the behaviours of private landowners, schools, communities, and individuals to create a sustainable place, so that future generations enjoy a great quality of life.

14. In 2021 the County COuncil launched the Leicestershire Tree Charter in conjunction with the National Forest. The Charter calls for a collective vision and partnership working across Leicestershire to enhance the treescape and identifies three key drivers for action: to support a secure and safe future, to enhance the wellbeing of communities and to facilitate sustainable enterprise.

Value of Trees

15. The amenity value of Council trees is calculated using the CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) system. This system, developed by the London Tree Officers Association, is now recognised as a principal methodology for evaluating the amenity value of trees by expressing a trees' relative contribution to public amenity and its prominence in the urban landscape. This system and has been successfully used by the County Council in recouping the value of individual trees lost from development or in litigation cases. In 2018 an external assessment of Councils individual trees was made using CAVAT. This assessed 82,599 trees, giving a replacement cost of £99,522,000 and amenity valuation of £428,678,777.

16. i-Tree Eco is a specialist software tools developed by the USDA Forest service and

adapted for use in the UK. It is designed to use complete or sample plot inventories from a study area along with other local environmental data to: Characterise the structure of the tree population, quantify some of the environmental functions it performs in relation to air quality improvement, carbon dioxide reduction, and stormwater control. Headline figures from the 2018 assessment calculated that our trees prevented 32,000m3 per annum of stormwater from entering the sewerage system and removed 9.25 tonnes per annum of pollutants from the air.

17. Significant details of the study are included in the Tree Management Strategy to demonstrate the value of our trees. Further assessment of the Council tree stock and its value is ongoing as the tree inventory for all Council land is updated.

18. In 2023 the Value of Trees toolkit was produced. This report was commissioned by the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and funded by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, The Value of Trees report was led by Leicestershire County Council, together with specialist consultants Treeconomics. The report provides information on species selection and latest guidance on tree planting and the costs and benefits of trees.

Ash Dieback

19. Ash dieback presents a significant public safety risk on our road corridors and public open spaces. The long-term effect of ash dieback on the county's rural landscape will be substantial with many areas potentially becoming devoid of mature trees.

20. To monitor and manage the effects of the disease, Leicestershire County Council developed an ash dieback action plan to inform and steer the authority's response to managing the disease and decline in our tree stock. The Tree management Strategy will ensure that it provides an overarching framework to spearhead the replanting of trees across the County in response to the disease.

Revised Draft Strategy

21. The purpose of the Tree Management Strategy is to recognise the importance of the tree resource under the stewardship of the County Council and identify standards for its management setting out standards which comply with nationally recognised codes of practice.

22. The Tree Management Strategy provides a framework within which the County Council can discharge its obligations to safeguard the trees under its stewardship. Adhering to the guidance contained within the Strategy will enable officers and Members to meet the Council's legal obligations and to provide leadership in tackling climate change. This ensures the County Council mitigates the risk (e.g. of insurance claims) as well as helping to protect trees and woodlands as a valuable natural asset to Leicestershire. This ensures the long-term conservation and development of the tree resource for the people of Leicestershire and future generations.

23. In developing a tree strategy, there is a need to strike a balance between

incorporating both native and non-native species into a programme of tree planting. Work undertaken on the Value of Trees project in particular, highlighted the need for the use of an appropriate range of naturalised and non-native species to create resilience to climate change. However, the council will be mindful that a healthy variety of native trees is essential to make a significant contribution towards biodiversity.

24. The strategic aims of the Tree Management Strategy are to:

I. Conserve and enhance the tree resource in terms of quality and numbers;

II. Promote public safety through appropriately resourced tree inspection and maintenance programmes;

III. Fulfil the council's legal obligations as a tree owner by addressing safety and major nuisance issues effectively;

IV. Inform customers of our legal obligations relating to trees and manage enquiries and expectations appropriately;

V. Establish sustainable management programmes for council woodland utilising external funding from central government agencies;

VI. Promote and increase the current level of tree planting on public and private land to address the recent decline of individual trees and mitigate the potential effects of ash dieback and other potentially harmful diseases.

VII. Establish sustainable management programmes for council woodland utilising external funding from central government agencies;

VIII. Promote and increase the current level of tree planting on public and private land to address the recent decline of individual trees and mitigate the potential effects of ash dieback and other potentially harmful diseases.

25. A Tree Management and Planting Action Plan will be developed which will identify key annual actions and the timescale required for the County Council to manage and enhance tree and woodland assets under its stewardship. In particular, the planting plan will enable the Council to focus on ongoing targets and aspirations for new tree planting.

26. An annual review of the actions contained within the Action Plan will be provided to the Environment, Flooding and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

27. Consultation is in progress both with internal and external partners which will inform the final strategy as will comments received from the members of the Committee.

28. The final revision of the Tree Management Strategy will be submitted to Cabinet in 2026 for approval.

Resource Implications

29. There are no resource implications arising from this report. Tree planting initiatives are currently funded through external grants which have been sourced and also finances have been allocated through the MTFS to support delivery of the Ash Dieback Action Plan and the forestry programme.

30. Any future funding requirements that might emerge from the implementation of the Tree Management Strategy or measures to respond to the spread of ash dieback will require individual business cases to be developed and approved by the Director of Corporate Resources or by Members as appropriate.

Conclusions

31. Our trees make a valuable contribution to what makes Leicestershire a great place to live. As well as their aesthetic value, they provide enormous ecological and environmental benefits and make a huge contribution to the health and wellbeing of residents. The Tree Management Strategy enables the Council to preserve and develop its tree stock and to maximise the associated benefits.

32. The revised draft Strategy defines clear standards for the Authority to continue to manage its trees in accordance with relevant national guidelines.

33. The draft Strategy considers the key activities required to manage an extensive tree population effectively, aims to guide future planning and ensure that a consistent, high-quality approach is taken across the County.

Background papers

Tree Management Strategy 2020-2025
https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/2/16/Tree-Management-Strategy-2020-2025.pdf

Environment Strategy 2018 – 2030
https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2018/7/19/LCC-Environment-Strategy-2018-2030-June-18.pdf

Ash Dieback Action Plan
https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2019/6/4/Ash-Dieback-Action-Plan.pdf

Leicestershire Tree Charter
https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/11/30/Leicestershire-tree-charter.pdf

Report to Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee November 2023https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/g7646/Public%20reports%20pack%20Monday%2011-Nov-2024%2014.00%20Environment%20and%20Climate%20Change%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny.pdf?T=10

Value of Trees toolkit https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/documents/value-trees-report

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

34. None.

Equality Implications

35. There are no equality implications arising from this report. Although any future change to the Council's policies, procedures, functions and services because of the Strategy or associated action plans will be the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment as appropriate.

Human Rights Implications

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

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Tree Management Strategy 2025-2030

DRAFT

Part 1 - Strategy overview

Introduction

Trees provide a significant contribution to the quality of our lives. In addition to the visual beauty they bring to our parks, gardens, road corridors, towns and villages they provide huge, but often unnoticed environmental benefits. They improve air quality and reduce air pollution, giving off oxygen as part of their natural growing process. They absorb carbon dioxide and contribute significantly to mitigating climate change, they retain water and stabilise soils, thereby reducing flood risk. Trees are very important for wildlife, hosting and providing food for a wide range of flora and fauna. They are the major components of forest eco-systems both locally and worldwide. Scientific research has now proven that trees provide huge benefits to physical, mental and social human health, providing calming and peaceful environments and promoting general well-being. Our trees are a very valuable and essential resource providing multiple benefits to the people of Leicestershire.

In 1994, the government first published 'Sustainable Development, the UK Strategy and Urban Tree Strategies'. This recognised the value of trees and the wide-ranging contribution they make to public well-being and our living environment. Following the publication of A Green Future: Our 25-year plan to improve the environment in 2018 and its objective to achieve 12% tree cover by 2060, the Government launched the England Trees Action Plan (ETAP), setting out the actions Government and its partners will take to support unprecedented levels of tree planting, creating diverse treescapes across the country which benefit the environment, people and the economy. The ETAP highlights the need to protect and improve our trees and woodlands and connect people with trees so they can enjoy the many benefits they provide.

The development of Tree and Woodland Strategies are key actions to ensure that trees and woodlands are planted and protected. Most authorities have now produced their own tree management strategies and developed management systems to enable them to manage their tree assets.

Leicestershire County Council produced its first Tree Management Strategy in 2008, and this was later revised in 2013 & 2020. The County Council has also established an inventory of trees across its land holdings and the adopted highway network. This further revision of the tree management strategy, along with ongoing work to develop/maintain/widen a tree inventory, outlines the County Council's tree management procedures and policies and, provides a framework to enable the council to sustainably manage its trees in the long term

Executive summary

The purpose of the Tree Management Strategy is to recognise the importance of the tree resource under the stewardship of the county council and identify standards for its management. This will ensure its long-term conservation and development for the people of Leicestershire and future generations.

The Tree Management Strategy for Leicestershire County Council will:

- **provide a framework to establish a healthy, balanced and sustainable tree population capable of withstanding predicted climatic changes and the impact of diseases such as ash dieback**
- **reduce the risk to the public from potentially hazardous trees**
- **specify the authority's policy on levels and standards of tree management**
- **ensure the most efficient use of resources**
- **increase public awareness of the value of trees in the environment**

Trees in Leicestershire

The trees in Leicestershire are a valuable and essential element of urban and rural landscapes, contributing significantly to the character of the county. They provide social, environmental, aesthetic, ecological and landscape benefits all of which enhance quality of life.

All trees in the county are situated on land affected by human activities. These activities often impact and encroach onto their living environment and therefore some form of management is required during a tree's life span.

Tree management encompasses a range of different activities which:

- **ensures the safety of the public**
- **resolves conflicts between the tree and its immediate environment**
- **promotes desirable growth characteristics and enhances amenity value**
- **benefits ecology and wildlife**
- **maximises the longevity of trees and the benefits they provide**

The National Inventory of Woodland and Trees (Leicestershire) compiled by the Forestry Commission in 2002 recorded a tree population of between 5.5 and 6 million.

This is made up of 87% broad-leaved species and 13% coniferous species with 49% of the population being older than 50 years.

Many older mature trees, particularly in rural hedgerows are now in decline and have a limited life expectancy. Dutch elm disease and other disorders have had a significant detrimental effect on the county's landscape, and the impact of these diseases is still evident today. This effect is illustrated in the above census which records a 52% reduction in individual trees in Leicestershire between 1980 and 1998.

The potential adverse effects of climate change and invasive pests and diseases is likely to result in the further decline of some of our common native and naturalised tree species. Over the past two decades there have been a number of invasive pests and diseases introduced into the UK. The most significant of these is ash dieback.

Ash dieback

Since the decline of the elm tree in the late 1970s, the ash has become the most common native tree in Leicestershire. It is the main component of our rural landscapes, being found commonly in woodlands, field hedges and along our road corridors. Much of the ash population is mature, the health of this species has been declining for many years due to a number of factors contributing to a syndrome known as ash decline.

Ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) was first reported in Britain in 2012 on imported nursery stock and was first observed in the wider environment in 2013. The disease has now spread extensively across the country, and the advanced effects of the disease are now evident in southern and eastern counties. The disease has been noted in Leicestershire for a number of years and ongoing monitoring is showing that it is now well established in the county's ash population. Ash dieback was first recorded in Europe in 1992 and many countries have now suffered up to 90 percent mortality in their ash trees.

The council is working closely with the Tree Council to support their work on managing the disease nationally

Ash dieback will present a significant public safety risk on our road corridors and public open spaces and the council's ash dieback action plan will help to address these issues. The long-term effect of ash dieback on the county's rural landscape will, however, be substantial with many areas potentially becoming devoid of mature trees.

To monitor and manage the effects of the disease, Leicestershire County Council developed an action plan to inform and steer the authority's response to managing the disease and decline in our tree stock.

Tree planting

In order to mitigate the effects of the current decline in the county's trees, a substantial and sustained programme of tree planting is essential. Not only will this help to minimise the effect on the county's landscape, it would also contribute to mitigating the effects of climate change and help to achieve many of the objectives outlined in the council's Environmental Strategy. A significant change in the character of the county's tree population is inevitable in the short term, before newly planted, young and middle-aged trees develop to maturity and impact fully on the landscape.

The beneficial effect of the National Forest is now very evident and demonstrates what can be achieved through a sustained tree planting programme. Since the impact of Dutch elm disease in the late 1970s, the council has introduced a number of tree planting initiatives and has supported the National Forest converting over 200 hectares of farmland and derelict land within Leicestershire into new woodland.

Since 2021 the Council has stepped up its tree planting initiatives, increasing its offer of free trees for landowners and conservation projects in partnership with organisations such as the Woodland Trust. It is clear however that more needs to be done to increase woodland cover and the number of trees generally across Leicestershire and therefore the County Council launched the Leicestershire Tree Charter in conjunction with the National Forest. The Charter calls for a collective vision and partnership working across Leicestershire to enhance the treescape and identifies three key drivers for action: to support a secure and safe future, to enhance the wellbeing of communities and to facilitate sustainable enterprise.

The council's trees

The county council manages approximately 321,000 trees comprising of individual specimens, tree groups and woodlands. This includes 404 hectares of established woodland on its land holdings. Percentage breakdown of trees on specific sites are as follows:

- **trees on country parks - 37%**
- **trees on highways - 35%**
- **trees on county farms - 12%**
- **trees on schools - 10%**
- **trees on other properties - 6%**

As the highway authority, the county council also has a duty to prevent the stopping up of the highway. The council also has powers to take action in respect of privately owned trees which overhang, or are a danger to, roads or footpaths. Consequently, the council monitors an estimated additional population of 420,000 privately owned trees adjacent to the highway.

The council's tree assets are managed by specialist technical staff with tree works undertaken by operational operational staff and supplemented by an external tree work contractor.

The Tree Management Strategy identifies the major activities and considerations required for the council to effectively manage its tree resource. It considers each activity in detail, identifying the main technical, operational, environmental, social and strategic elements associated with tree management. It identifies appropriate standards for each activity by reference to industry recommendations and codes of practice. Such standards form the basis of the council's tree management policy, which is stated in part 3 of the strategy. Tree management policy details are summarised on the council's website at www.leicestershire.gov.uk

The Tree Management Strategy also provides a basis for the council to manage its tree resource in the future. An increasing need for new housing and other developments, alongside the expansion of Leicestershire's Road network and the effects of disease and climate change will put increasing pressure on the county's trees. The Tree Management Strategy aims to ensure that the council's tree resource is sustained and enhanced during these challenges, to protect it for future generations.

The management policies and procedures detailed in the tree management strategy accord with all relevant legislation and national codes of practice relating to the management of trees. As such these procedures could apply to any landholding containing trees within Leicestershire. The tree management strategy can therefore be used as a guide for all landowners across Leicestershire and is particularly relevant to any organisations who invite the public and employees onto its land and property as part of everyday business.

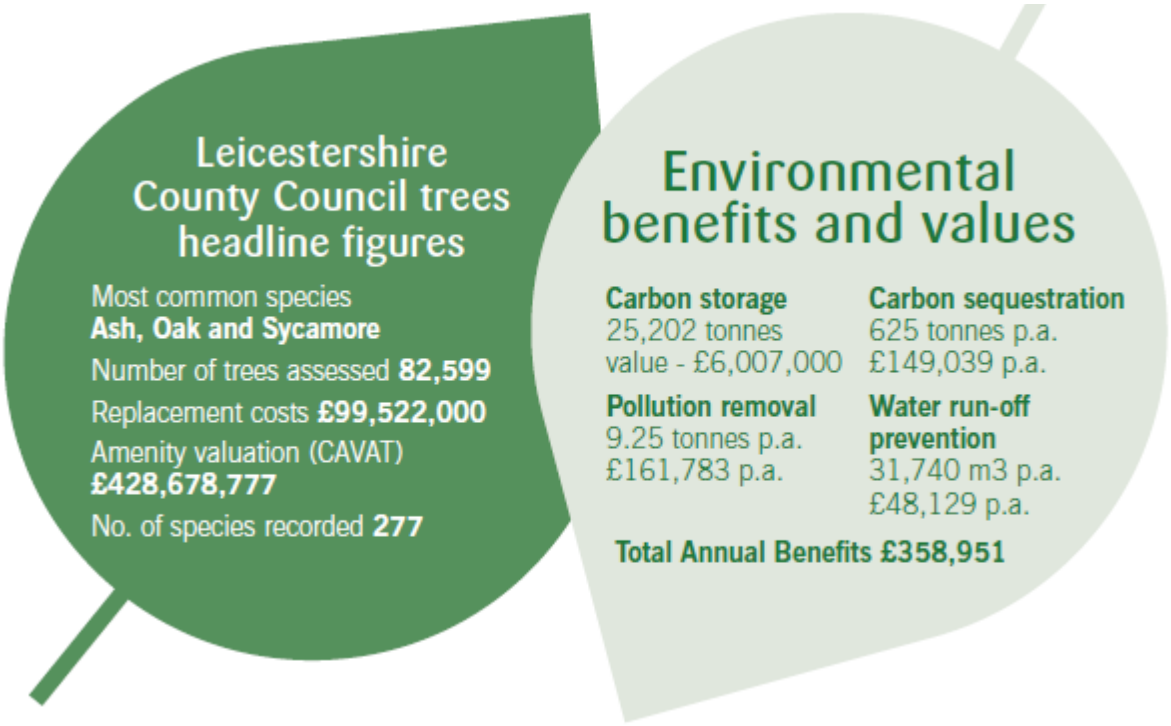
i-Tree study and CAVAT assessment

In 2018, a study of council's trees was commissioned using an internationally recognised tree resource assessment system, i-Tree. This study covered the individually recorded trees across council owned land including schools, highways, etc. but excluded the 404 ha of woodlands on country parks and farmland. The study calculates and evaluates the benefits the tree population provides in environmental terms.

In addition to the above i-Tree study, the council's individual trees have been assessed to calculate their current amenity value using the CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) system. This system, developed by the London Tree Officers Association, is now recognised as

a principal methodology for evaluating the amenity value of trees and has been used in a number of litigation cases.

The significant findings of these studies are as follows:



Carbon storage - Equates to emissions from 19,700 cars/8060 homes

Carbon sequestration - Equates to emissions from 500 cars/134 homes per annum

Pollution removal - Equates to removal of sulphur dioxide from 9560 cars/25 homes and nitrogen dioxide from 298 cars/134 homes per annum

Avoided run-off (flood attenuation) - Preventing 32,000m3 of storm-water entering the sewerage system - value £48K p.a.

The findings of the i-Tree survey demonstrate the environmental and social value of the council's tree asset to the people of Leicestershire and the ongoing benefits they provide. It also highlights the importance the council's trees in light of the government's new Clean Air Strategy and the Public Health Agenda.

The CAVAT survey illustrates the value of the authority's tree asset in financial terms and demonstrates the need for a proactive and sustainable system of management to ensure the asset is maintained and enhanced in the future.

Ecology and trees

In addition to the multiple environmental benefits trees provide, they are the major components of woodland and forest ecosystems both locally and worldwide. Trees support and host a vast range of flora and fauna. A single oak tree in Britain may host over 280 species of insect and support up to 30 species of birds including nuthatches, woodpeckers, warblers and flycatchers. Additionally, the oak can be associated with up to 300 species of lichen.

Trees also have a wide-ranging association with fungi and, whilst some fungal species are pathogenic, many have a symbiotic relationship with trees. Soil fungi such as mycorrhiza, in particular are vital for the tree's survival and well-being, converting organic matter into nutrients which the tree can absorb. These fungi form complex webs of fungal tissue (i.e. mycelium) in the soil which can transfer nutrients for considerable distances to specific areas of the forest. This highly sensitive fungal network has been termed the 'wood wide web' due to it's ability to react to the changes and requirements of the forest eco-system.

Health and wellbeing

Trees provide multiple benefits which can improve health, wellbeing and overall quality of life. These include:

Improving air quality - Trees, woodland and other green infrastructure improve air quality by intercepting up to 24 percent of harmful particulates, which are a contributing factor to respiratory conditions such as asthma.

Reducing stress - Urban residents suffering from stress experience less anxiety when they live in the vicinity of trees. Physical signs of stress such as muscle tension and pulse rate are also measurably reduced when living in green surroundings.

Aiding recovery - Hospital patients with a view of trees and vegetation have been shown to recover more rapidly, and require less pain relief medication than those who are restricted to views of buildings

Alleviating depression - Taking part in nature-based activities helps people who are suffering from mental ill-health and can contribute to a reduction in levels of anxiety and depression.

Shading us from the sun - Thinning of the protective ozone layer coupled with more extreme weather patterns is being linked to the increase in skin melanomas, the most rapidly increasing form of cancer in the UK. Dappled shade from trees provides a useful barrier to harmful ultra-violet radiation and a 40 percent tree cover can reduce peak temperatures by 6˚C.

Encouraging physical activity - Green spaces provide a place to exercise which improves memory and cognitive function. People who use parks and other green spaces are three times more likely to achieve a suitable level of physical activity compared with non-users.

Reducing obesity - Children living in areas with good access to green spaces have been shown to spend less time in front of television screens, computers and smart phones and to have between 11 and 19 percent lower prevalence of obesity compared with children with limited or no access to green spaces.

Bringing people together - Trees and woods can help to promote social integration bringing people together and strengthening communities, thereby reducing loneliness and isolation.

Strategic aims and objectives

The Tree Management Strategy provides the council with a framework to manage its tree assets and to achieve the following objectives:

1) Conserve and enhance the tree resource in terms of quality and numbers

2) Promote public safety through appropriately resourced tree inspection and maintenance programmes

3) Fulfil the council's legal obligations as a tree owner by addressing safety and major nuisance issues effectively

4) Inform customers of our legal obligations relating to trees and manage enquiries and expectations appropriately

5) Establish sustainable management programmes for council woodland utilising external funding from central government agencies.

6) Promote and increase the current level of tree planting on public and private land to address the recent decline of individual trees and mitigate the potential effects of ash dieback and other potentially harmful diseases

Policy background

Leicestershire County Council's responsibilities

The council as a tree owner has a direct responsibility to ensure that its trees do not pose a danger to the public or property and are managed appropriately.

The National Tree Safety Group (NTSG), a multi-disciplinary body, has produced national guidelines for tree safety management entitled 'Common Sense Risk Management of Trees'. The guidelines are proportionate to the actual risk posed by trees and recognise the benefits trees provide to society and the wider environment. The NTSG guidelines are now recognised as an industry benchmark and have been referred to in a number of recent litigation cases.

All landowners are responsible for trees growing on their property. They should arrange for their trees to be inspected regularly and should maintain an inventory of the trees under their responsibility.

Inspection intervals should be proportionate to the degree of risk posed by trees according to the level of use on each site. Any recommended maintenance work resulting from the inspections should be implemented and recorded. The above measures are a necessary requirement to provide the council with a basis for defence if proceedings were brought as a result of a tree failure.

The council also has a duty of care under the Highways Act 1980 to ensure the safe use of the highway. The Highway Authority must have systems in place which ensure that all roads are inspected at reasonable intervals. Whilst the responsibility for privately owned trees adjacent to the highway lies with the landowner, defective trees may be identified during routine road inspections. As a result, tree owners may be contacted and requested to remove noted hazards.

Trees and development

When a Local Planning Authority (LPA) is determining a planning application, trees are regarded as a material consideration and their integration in a new development is guided by the British Standard 5837:2012 'Trees in Relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations'. This standard provides guidance to both planning authorities and developers on the effective retention and integration of existing trees within new development. It has regard to the development potential of the site and to the value of integrating suitable trees. It provides guidelines to ensure that trees are adequately and effectively protected during the construction process.

Where development activities are likely to impact on council owned trees, the above standard should be applied to ensure they are adequately protected.

When it is agreed that a council tree has to be removed as a result of development, adequate compensation will be sought to cover historic maintenance costs, replacements costs and/or the amenity value of the removed tree.The Council will use Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees (CAVAT) methodology for valuing its trees in relation to any removal of trees as a result of development. CAVAT is a tool used in the UK to assign a monetary value to amenity trees.

Where the council agrees to adopt trees on highway verges, sufficient space must be provided to accommodate large growing trees adjacent to development in accordance with National House Building Council Chapter 4.2 Building near trees 2018.

Other statutory considerations

A Local Planning Authority (LPA) has power to make new tree preservation orders (TPOs) if a tree has significant amenity value and/or is deemed to be under threat. The law on Tree Preservation Orders is in Part VIII of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended and in the Town and Country Planning (Tree

Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012 which came into force on 6 April 2012. Guidance on the administration and application of TPOs is provided by the National Planning Policy Framework in the Planning Practice Guidance document 'Tree Preservation Orders and Trees in Conservation Areas' - March 2014.

Trees in a conservation area that are not protected by a TPO are protected by the provisions in section 211 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. That provision creates an offence of damaging trees in conservation areas.

Felling trees in woodlands requires a felling licence which is issued by the Forestry Commission under Section 9 of the Forestry Act 1967 (as amended). A licence is required for the felling of growing trees where more than five cubic metres of wood are to be felled in any calendar quarter.

Landscape and ecological considerations

The contribution of trees and woodlands to the county's landscape is addressed in the council's Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy, as amended in 2006. Similarly, the ecological value of trees and woodlands is documented in the Space for Wildlife - Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Bio-diversity Action Plan, 2016.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that development should provide measurable net gains for biodiversity by creating or enhancing habitats to compensate for those that have been lost as a result of the proposed development. The Environment Act 2021 states

that the development must provide a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in addition to the baseline habitats recorded on site.

The council, when undertaking management work on its trees, has due regard to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) (Amendment) Regulations 200, which provide protection for bats and nesting birds. All appropriate pre-works checks are carried out to avoid disturbance to protected species and wherever possible works are postponed if bats and nesting birds are present. In such cases specialist advice will be sought.

Veteran trees (defined by Natural England as 'trees which are of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of age, size or condition'), are a valuable and increasingly scarce ecological resource. These should be managed and conserved, wherever possible, to maximise their habitat value and life span.

Trees and climate change

Climate change is one of 'the greatest long-term challenge facing the world today'. Globally, trees and forest eco-systems play a key role in addressing our changing climate by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, intercepting harmful pollutants, producing oxygen, retaining water and mitigating against flooding.

The changing climate presents a challenge for the management of our trees and woodlands with projected increases in temperature, changes in the seasonality of rainfall, and an increased frequency of extreme events.

On a local level, trees and woodlands have an important role to play in mitigating climate change and it is essential that tree managers sustain and enhance this vital resource.

Trees counter the effects of climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide and other pollutants from the atmosphere and will play an important role in our environment, if temperatures rise as expected. In towns and cities, where temperatures are exacerbated by heat and light reflection from buildings, there will be an increasing need for effective areas of shade. Carefully positioned tree planting can provide effective cooling to buildings, decreasing the need for air cooling. Areas of shade will also be vital adjacent to outdoor facilities such as shopping precincts, roads and pavements, bus stops and car parks. Shade will benefit school playgrounds and the grounds of care establishments, providing a degree of protection to more vulnerable members of the population.

An additional consequence of climate change is the increasing possibility of flash flooding, the devastating effects of which are witnessed regularly around the world. In such cases, the presence of trees and woodlands retain large quantities of water, attenuating run-off and having a stabilising effect on the soil, thereby limiting erosion damage and reducing the possibility of landslides.

Climate change will inevitably have a detrimental effect on the present tree population. Shallow rooting species such as beech and hornbeam often suffer drought stress during hot periods. Trees can recover from drought conditions particularly if they occur as single one-off events, but if such conditions are repeated year on year, they can easily succumb to damage. Increased high winds, particularly when soils are waterlogged, and deciduous trees are in leaf, can have a very damaging effect on the local tree population. Warm summers and milder winters can favour the existence of harmful tree pathogens, which become more prevalent in such conditions.

It is important for tree owners to protect the current tree resource, ensure that it is sustained and where possible expanded. It is also important that landscape architects and tree managers have regard to the effects of climate change, particularly when selecting new trees for planting schemes

i-tree appraisal and the positive impact of Council managed trees

I-tree is a widely recognised method of evaluating the benefits and values of trees across a large area. Using a combination of science and tools i-tree can establish the financial and environmental benefit of trees and woodlands.

The i-tree appraisal of 82,599 Leicestershire County Council managed trees indicates their benefit in tackling climate change, addressing airborne pollution and managing water run-off.

Carbon storage - 25,202 tonnes, at a value of £6,007,000

Carbon sequestration - 625 tonnes per year, at a value of £149,039 annually

Pollution removal - 9.25 tonnes per year, at a value of £161,783 annually

Water run-off prevention - 31,740m3, at a value of £48,129 annually

Total Annual Benefit £358,951

Increasing the Council's tree population could then be expected to improve and increase annual benefits in the long-term and as newly planted trees reach maturity.

Total Annual Benefit of £394,846 if tree cover is increased by 10%

Total Annual Benefit of £538,426 if tree cover is increased by 50%

Total Annual Benefit of £717,902 if tree cover is increased by 100%

The need for tree planting

The tree population of Leicestershire changed significantly in the late 1970s when Dutch elm disease accounted for the loss of more than 200,000 mature trees in the county's landscape. An ageing mature tree population and the incidence of other disorders such as ash decline in rural hedgerows have resulted in a continuing decline in our mature trees. The consequences of ash dieback will potentially have a further devastating effect on the county's rural landscape given that a high proportion of remaining hedgerow trees are ash. Additionally, mature trees continue to be lost through residential and commercial development.

Leicestershire County Council supports small scale tree planting through various tree planting initiatives. On Council land larger capital schemes have been implemented. These include several National Forest schemes and intensive landscape schemes on newly constructed roads. A substantial and sustained programme of planting is now required in Leicestershire to address the current long-term decline of our landscape trees and the potentially significant impact of ash dieback

The County Council will continue to increase its tree planting activities to meet the objectives of the tree management strategy and the targets detailed in the tree management action plan. To ensure that the requisite numbers of trees are available, the Council has developed its own tree nursery, as well as continued engagement with nursery suppliers regarding production methods, stock requirements and availability.

Native, naturalised and non-native trees

The County Council currently plant a wide range of native, naturalised and non-native species. Where practical and appropriate the County Council will favour the use of native and naturalised trees. However, it is accepted that the use of non-native tree species may, on occasion, be required.

A diverse range of tree species and the avoidance of mono-culture planting will help to create a more resilient and robust tree stock, which is then better placed to withstand the predicted impact of climate change. The Council produced the Value of Trees matrix to assist with identifying and specifying trees suitable for a range of planting sites across the Couty

Tree Nursery

To meets the demands of increased tree planting and to ensure trees are grown to meet the requirements of the Council, a new tree nursery has been developed. Whilst in its infancy the nursery will continue to develop to meet the needs of the Council and its partners. The nursery will have a particular focus on local genotypes and conservation of local trees.

The County Council will also continue to engage with nursery suppliers and explore a range of procurement and partnership options to ensure that sufficient quantities of healthy stock are available each year to support the council's tree planting programme.

The Council nursery and any suppliers will be required to grow stock produced from British origin seed sources. With adaptability to climate change in mind, there may be a preference with some species to select seed from European provenance zones. In such cases, demonstrable bio-security measures will have to be in place involving effective quarantine procedures and certification of imported material.

Design and aftercare

The design of new tree planting should ensure that it complements the local landscape character and enhances the immediate environment. Planting density and species selection should be guided by available space to ensure that each tree is compatible with its new site and has every opportunity to develop into a healthy, mature specimen. Appropriate levels of aftercare need to be employed to ensure that the tree can fully establish and develop. A new tree will only reach its potential as a mature specimen if adequate resources are available to maintain it through its life (Ref. BS 8545: 2014. Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape – Recommendations).

National and regional policy

Leicestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)was launched in August 2025. LNRS are a mandatory requirement under the Environment Act 2021. The LNRS brings together landscape scale, multifaceted approaches focused on preserving, conserving and enhancing nature and meeting other environmental objectives such as climate change, flood mitigation and improved air and water quality".

The Environment Act 2021 sets out plans to protect and improve the natural environment in the UK and is one of the key vehicles for delivering the vision set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan. Section 115 of the Act places a duty of local highway authorities in England to consult before felling street trees within certain streets.

In 2018 the government published A Green Future: Our 25-year plan to improve the Environment. A key objective within this plan is to increase woodland in England to achieve 12% tree cover by 2060.

In 2018 the Urban Tree Manual was released by The Environment Secretary and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Created by Sir William Worsley, as the government's appointed "Tree Champion", the manual promotes the government's 25-year Environment Plan. This includes influencing and challenging decision makers to commit to planting 1 million urban trees.

In 2013, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs produced a forestry policy statement which sets clear priorities for future policy making relating to woodlands and trees. This document is focused on protecting, improving and sustainably expanding our public and private woodland resource.

In February 2008, Trees in Towns II was published. This document was commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to provide up-to-date information on the national urban tree stock and urban tree management by local authorities. The report recognises that local authority tree management programmes have a vital role to play in promoting the government's agenda for cleaner, greener, safer cities and the development of sustainable communities.

In 2017, the Charter for Trees, Woods and People was produced by a steering group led by the Woodland Trust and incorporating over 70 cross-sector organisations. This again promotes the sustainable management of trees and woodlands and recognises the cultural, social, environmental and economic benefits they provide.

In 2016 the UK Roads Liaison Group produced a new code of practice entitled 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure' to provide guidance to highway authorities on condition, inspection and maintenance procedures, including those applying to trees.

Part 2 – Tree management actions

1. Tree inspection

1.1 Inspection criteria

Appropriate and effective tree inspection procedures should ensure that changes in tree condition are noted and, if necessary, acted upon before the tree becomes hazardous and injury to persons or damage to property occurs. The council's tree inspection procedures take into account a range of criteria including species, age, size, health and condition, location, site usage, hazard risk and landscape and ecological value.

Our tree inspection programme aims to balance the management of trees for public safety with the ecological and landscape value of trees. Both management objectives are important, but the nature and use of each site normally dictates which one should take precedence. Different management prescriptions may therefore be applied depending on the tree's location. When managing trees for public safety reasons, only the minimum work required to remove the danger should be undertaken to ensure that the trees' multiple benefits are retained.

Trees are best inspected when in full leaf, from mid-summer through to autumn, before leaf fall. However, the scale of the council's tree resource dictates that inspections should continue throughout the year.

There are other factors which should be considered when formulating tree inspection procedures. For example, extremes of weather or construction work in a tree's immediate vicinity may necessitate a responsive inspection to monitor the effects on the stability of the tree.

1.2 Inspection procedures

1.2.1 The council has adopted tree inspection procedures which provide information to minimise risk to the public and property.

Such procedures are considered reasonable; proportionate to the level of risk at a particular location, recognise the benefits of the trees and are acceptable in legal terms meaning they follow industry recommendations and codes of practice.

1.2.2 In addition to informal observations put forward by members of the public, site officers and other organisations, the county council provides the following two-tier approach to tree inspection:

Basic Inspections - carried out periodically by council staff who regularly frequent sites as part of their routine work or as part of routine road inspections by Highways inspectors. Basic tree inspection training is provided for such staff to ensure a grounding in tree awareness and hazard identification.

Detailed Inspections - carried out by appropriately qualified and knowledgeable arboricultural specialists. Such inspections are carried out at regular intervals which dovetail with the programme of basic inspections and are commensurate with the level of risk identified at a given location.

Detailed inspections will take into account the biological, pathological and bio-mechanical aspects of tree health and stability along with other considerations such as the effects of weather and site disturbance.

1.2.3 The nature and frequency of such inspections have regard to the criteria detailed at 1.1 and the size and distribution of the council's tree assets.

1.2.4 All detailed inspections and resulting maintenance/remedial works carried out are recorded on a dedicated tree asset management system to enable the council to maintain appropriate records relating to tree management.

1.3 Assessment of risk and inspection targeting

The Leicestershire Road Hierarchy produced by the Environment and Transportation Department is based on levels of traffic use and classifies the county's roads as follows:

- **strategic routes**
- **main distributor roads**
- **secondary distributor roads**
- **locally important roads**
- **all other metalled roads**

This provides useful information for targeting priority areas when planning tree inspections and ensuring that procedures are commensurate with the level of risk posed by trees. On other sites such as country parks, areas of high usage are identified (e.g. pedestrian routes, car parks etc) to target tree inspections.

In addition to targeting inspection regimes around the above priority areas, arboricultural officers also note high risk trees as part of detailed cyclical inspections. The assessment of risk is based on a range of data held on the council's tree asset management system which holds current and historic data relating to the authority's trees. This assessment takes into account factors such as age and condition, tree size, species, location and site usage. These trees are flagged and a more frequent inspection cycle is then applied.

The council's tree inspection and maintenance procedures are designed to ensure that:

i) dangerous trees are identified

ii) appropriate remedial measures are employed promptly to minimise the risk of injury to persons and/or damage to property

iii) maintenance works safeguard the life expectancy, ecological value and amenity potential of the council's tree stock

iv) private tree owners adopt appropriate standards of management

1.4 Privately owned trees adjacent to the highway

The council, as the highway authority, has a duty of care to ensure the safety of the road user. The council carries out a cyclic programme of routine inspections on the road network in Leicestershire. Where obvious hazards are identified on privately owned roadside trees the council would notify the tree owner and ensure that appropriate remedial work is carried out. The tree owner is always urged to carry out the minimum work necessary to remove the hazard.

The council is committed to promoting a responsible approach to tree management, particularly adjacent to the county's highways, and will ensure that:

i) tree owners will be contacted only if a tree poses a risk of obstructing the highway or endangering the public

ii) tree owners are advised to adopt best arboricultural practice

iii) tree owners are advised not to undertake unnecessary work

iv) tree owners are encouraged to replant when dangerous trees have to be felled

2. Tree maintenance operations

2.1 Identification and generation of work

Tree maintenance work originates from the following internal and external sources:

a) Programmed detailed inspections by specialist arboricultural staff – as part of the inspection procedures outlined in Section 1.

b) Ad-hoc inspections by specialist arboricultural staff – as a result of enquiries received from the general public and members relating to tree safety and actionable nuisance issues.

c) Enquiries from other Leicestershire County Council officers

d) Reports from the Customer Service Centres

e) Reports from the Highways Management System (HMS)

f) Enquiries from other local authorities

g) Cyclical maintenance (e.g. re-pollarding of street trees)

h) Emergency Works (e.g. resulting from high winds)

2.2 Tree management priorities

An assessment is made of all incoming enquiries relating to trees before appropriate maintenance work is specified and ordered. Such an assessment takes into account factors such as tree safety implications, risk of potential claims relating to actionable nuisance, proposed remedial work, the effects of any proposals on long term tree health, the nature of the enquiry and the most efficient and cost-effective courses of action. To ensure that current resources are utilised most effectively and work programmes are effectively targeted, the different types of tree enquiry are prioritised in accordance with the following criteria:

Category 1 - Matters of safety where there is an imminent, significant danger to the public and property – i.e. urgent works

Category 2 - Remedial and preventative work which removes potential hazards – i.e. high priority works

Category 3 – Remedial and preventative work which removes potential hazards or annual schedules maintenance – i.e. low priority works

Category 4 – Proactive but non-essential works and works which address minor nuisance.

Works to remove or alleviate a nuisance to property which could potentially cause damage and/or result in action against the council will be placed in the categories above depending on the severity of the issue.

The significance of tree nuisance issues is often dictated by personal perception. For example, an issue of shade to a garden may be regarded as a significant nuisance by one individual and a significant benefit by another. Some nuisance issues may only be effectively resolved by either:

a) substantial tree work (e.g. heavy crown reductions) which is potentially detrimental to tree health, safety and amenity

b) tree removal

The council will only consider such issues against the benefits of the tree to the immediate locality, the nature of the enquiry, the significance to the public/property and the extent of potential remedial work.

The prioritisation of incoming enquiries aims to ensure that:

i) all high priority work identified or requested is undertaken promptly

ii) existing resources are utilised efficiently and most effectively

iii) the council respond to appropriate requests for work to be carried out

iv) council staff are empowered to refuse unreasonable requests to carry out work on trees

v) the council's tree maintenance operations meet high standards of arboricultural practice (e.g. BS 3998 :2010 Tree Work - Recommendations)

2.3 Duty to consult

The duty to consult on felling street trees ("Duty to Consult') has been introduced to ensure local people can express their views over the proposed management of street trees in their locality. The duty will ensure the decision-making process is more transparent and considers the views of local people. In this respect S115 of the Environment Act 2021 inserted S96A into the Highways Act 1980 to ensure that local highways authorities consult members of the public ("Duty to Consult") before felling any tree on an urban road (a "street tree") pursuant to certain exceptions.

2.4 Procurement

Leicestershire County Council provides tree maintenance contracting services through the following arrangements:

a) internal team based in Highways Operations undertaking works on the adopted highway network

b) External tree work contractors undertaking works on Highways, schools, country parks and other county council property

c) partnership working between the in-house team and the appointed external contractors

Regardless of the source of provision, such arrangements will be periodically scrutinised through market testing and regular procurement to ensure value for money.

3. Standards of work

Modern arboricultural practice

Modern arboricultural practice is based on the most recent scientific research into tree biology, pathology and physiology. This research has concentrated on a number of specific areas including:

- effects of maintenance works on tree biology and functioning
- the tree's response to wounding (i.e. pruning)
- timing of maintenance operations in relation to seasonal fluctuations in tree energy reserves
- structural/mechanical properties of trees

Modern tree maintenance techniques have been formulated to minimise any possible adverse effects on the tree and promote its healthy development.

Perceptions of tree management

Tree maintenance is often judged purely on the visual effect of the work rather than the effects of the work on long term tree health. There is, therefore, sometimes a conflict between good practice and what is perceived as "a good job". The county council provide advice on tree management and refer members of the public to industry advisory literature, where appropriate.

3.1 Leicestershire County Council specifications

The county council undertakes all tree maintenance work in accordance with its own forestry and arboricultural works specifications. These require a high standard of forestry and arboricultural practice which takes into account the principles of modern arboriculture and embraces the findings of recent and current arboricultural research.

3.2 British Standard 3998: 2010 'tree work - recommendations'

The national standard for tree surgery work is defined in British Standard 3998: 2010 'Tree Work - Recommendations'. This standard is regularly quoted by the council and should be the basic standard followed by all tree work contractors.

3.3 British Standard 5837: 2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction' - recommendations

There is often a conflict between maximising the development potential of a site and retaining existing trees. Consequently, construction activities throughout the country account for the loss of many trees each year. The retention of suitable existing trees is highly desirable, often enhancing the quality of the development and facilitating its integration into the surrounding landscape. It is important to ensure that retained trees and new dwellings exist compatibly, well beyond the completion of the development. If trees are to be retained effectively, measures to protect them need to be thorough and should be understood by all parties involved in the

construction process from architect to site operative. B.S. 5837: 2012 forms the basis of advice the council provides to its own planning officers and other planning authorities. The council is committed to promoting best practice when managing and integrating trees in association with new development.

3.4 Highway works and trees

Highway maintenance and improvement works can have a damaging impact on highway and roadside trees. It is often very difficult to accommodate the space required for a tree to be retained within highway improvements because of the linear nature of road corridors.

The council has produced the Leicestershire Highway Design Guide to provide guidelines to developers on highway matters. Information is given at Part 7 Appendix F on the 'Preservation of Trees'. Many trees on or adjacent to highway verges suffer significant damage due to the excavation of trenches to accommodate services and highway drainage. This can seriously impair stability and normal biological function and can have a direct effect on the safety of a tree and the hazard it poses to passing traffic. The appropriate working methods to successfully install a trench through a tree's rooting zone are detailed in the National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) Guidance Volume 4.

The use and storage of road salt can have a significant toxic effect on trees particularly if concentrations leach into the soil within a tree's root system. Road salt should only be stored on highway verges in sealed containers well away from the potential rooting zones of nearby trees.

3.5 Tree planting

The council undertakes all tree planting work in accordance with the relevant section of its own work specifications. These specifications include the following standards:

i. B.S. 8545: 2014 Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape - Recommendations
ii. Leicestershire Highway Design Guide – Part 7 Appendix G Landscaping on new developments and in highway-improvement schemes
iii. The Value of Trees Project report

When designing new native tree planting, the council will specify stock produced from seed collected and grown on the British mainland. Where the primary aim of a new tree planting scheme is to conserve or enhance nature conservation nursery stock should be produced from seed collected from local sources, if such seed is available.

4. Sustainability

4.1 Environmental sustainability

Any tree population, regardless of size and character, should be managed sustainably to conserve or enhance its status. As a minimum standard, any losses should be replaced with at least a one for one basis. Failure to achieve this will result in the decline and deterioration of the tree population. The importance of this principle has been recognised on a global scale because of indiscriminate logging of primary forests in various parts of the world which do not include plans to conserve, protect or regenerate the forest environment. The impact of non-sustainable forest management continues to be a major concern today and consequently, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has been set up

as an international non-governmental organisation with the aim of developing an independent system for the certification of timber and timber products from sustainable sources. This provides a market mechanism to reward sustainable forest management and allows consumers of wood products to make a choice and influence the management of forests.

The UK Forestry Standard was published in 1998 and sets out the government's approach to sustainable forestry. This encourages woodland owners to achieve woodland certification in accordance with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) 2018. This is an independent certification standard for verifying sustainable forest and woodland management in the United Kingdom. The UKWAS standard is currently the central component of the forest certification programme operated in the UK by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Sustainable woodland management plans are now a pre-requisite to obtaining woodland management grants through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, administered by the Forestry Commission. Sustainable management is therefore essential both on a global and local scale and should be adopted by all local authorities responsible for managing both individual tree populations and woodlands.

Sustainable systems of management should:

- **maintain or enhance the tree population**
- **facilitate the removal of dangerous or potentially hazardous trees**
- **promote biodiversity and conserve the tree/forest eco-system**
- **conserve veteran trees with significant ecological, historical and amenity value**
- **establish a tree population with a balanced diversity of age-classes**
- **optimise the use of timber and other products of tree management**

4.2 Economic sustainability

Utilisation of timber

The council will continue to maximise the financial value of timber harvested as part of its woodland management operations. All timber harvesting will be part of an approved management plan which will be scrutinised by the Forestry Commission as part of the

assessment process when the council applies for felling licences or grants under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This assessment process will include consultation with district councils and other bodies such as Natural England, when appropriate. The council will also continue to identify a wide range of potential markets to maximise the economic value of its woodlands.

Use and re-cycling of wood waste

The council produces 3 - 5 cubic metres of wood waste each day from its tree surgery and maintenance operations. This equates to an

annual total of approximately 1,000 cubic metres (approx. 600 tonnes), 800 cubic metres of which is wood chipped during clearance operations.

The remainder takes the form of tree trunks, large logs and tree roots. If this material were to be disposed of at a refuse tip, costs in excess of £30,000 would be incurred each year. These costs are currently saved as the council processes all its wood waste into wood chip and supplies this material as wood fuel.

4.3 Social sustainability

The county council manages its trees and woodlands to provide a positive influence on public well-being and the local community. This can be achieved by the following:

i) Effective tree inspection/maintenance procedures to maximise public safety

ii) Well planned tree planting design to maximise landscape benefits, minimise potential conflicts and enhance the local environment

iii) Careful selection and retention of established trees on new developments to maximise aesthetic benefits and minimise potential conflicts with new residents.

4.4 Bio-security

The council recognises and follows all national guidelines relating to the control and prevention of invasive pathogens which affect tree health. All works recommended and undertaken will have regard to these guidelines and all necessary measure will be implemented to prevent and restrict the spread of such pathogens.

5. Woodland Management

Trees in woodland areas have traditionally been, and continue to be, planted at close spacing. This enables the new woodland to dominate surrounding vegetation and establish much quicker. Initially the young trees provide shelter for each other, but eventually start to compete for light, space, soil moisture and nutrients. This triggers a natural selection process where the stronger trees start to dominate. At this point the forester will start thinning works to provide the space for the best trees to continue to develop. If management works are not implemented at this stage, competition between trees forces them to become tall and drawn. This ultimately will cause the trees to become unstable and dangerous, particularly in windy conditions. There is a significant public safety implication if woodlands/plantations are not managed through their life, particular if public access is provided through the woodland or it adjoins an area of high public use for example a plantation on a highway verge.

The council therefore adopts a policy of ongoing management in all its woodland areas. If these woodlands are to be retained in the county's landscape in the long term, such management should include periodic re-stocking in order to accord with the sustainability policy detailed in the sustainability section of this strategy. This form of management will eventually provide a wide diversity of age-structure within the council's woodlands. This will enable the council's tree managers in the future to adopt management systems which provide a high proportion of mature tree cover at any one time.

Perceptions of woodland management

Systems of woodland management are designed to secure the long-term retention of the woodland and enhance its landscape and nature conservation value. These long-term objectives will only be achieved if there is an ongoing programme of woodland management. This may require works which drastically change the appearance of the woodland in the short term. Woodland management works particularly involving harvesting can appear devastating. However, these works are often judged on the initial visual impact of the work rather than its long-term benefits to the woodland.

Highways - There are approximately 10 ha of woodland plantations in highway verges in Leicestershire. Much of these woodland areas are young or semi-mature and are a result of planting initiatives implemented during the last 25 years including verge planting in the National Forest, the Young Persons Forest at Wymeswold and various by-pass schemes. Many of these areas are now in need of thinning to allow retained trees to develop into well formed, stable specimens.

Country Parks - There are 300 ha of established woodland on the council's country parks estate. The country parks maintenance budget provides some funding for woodland management. This is supplemented by grants from relevant organisations such as the Forestry Commission, Countryside Stewardship Scheme and occasionally from timber sales, when there is sufficient demand from the timber market.

Consequently, there is a periodic programme of woodland management on country parks which covers health and safety work, harvesting, thinning, re-stocking and other desirable operations such as coppicing. Much of this work is carried out in accordance with documented management plans, which form part of grant applications to the Forestry Commission and as such, are subject to a thorough consultation process.

Farms - There are 104 ha of woodland on the council's county farms estate. The county farms estate budget provides some funding for tree management which is mostly utilised undertaking health and safety related work on estate trees adjacent to roads.

Schools and other council sites - There are many small, dispersed areas of woodland on schools and other council sites amounting to approximately 15 ha in area. On schools, works may be recommended for woodland areas as part of the on-going inspection programme for schools. In such cases, the costs of any recommended work would be met by the school from devolved budgets. On other sites, woodland management work would be funded from site maintenance budgets held by the managing department such as plantation areas on industrial estates.

6. Tree related subsidence

The incidence of tree related subsidence damage to buildings has increased significantly during the last 30 years. This is partly due to an increased understanding of the complex interactions between the tree, the soil, the building, and more significantly, an increasing litigious approach to these occurrences.

Subsidence damage associated with trees occurs when a tree extracts moisture from a shrinkable soil such as clay, through its root system, causing the clay to shrink and/or subside. If the foundations of a building are constructed on such a soil, subsidence damage can occur to the fabric of the building. When assessing subsidence risk or considering tree related subsidence cases, the following factors are taken into account:

- size and age of tree
- typical water demand
- time of year
- seasonal climatic conditions - (e.g. drought periods)
- type of soil - (e.g. clay)
- reaction to water (i.e. hydrology)
- capacity to shrink/swell (i.e. plasticity)
- age and quality of the building
- depth and type of foundation
- distance from tree to building
- tree/building site history

Cases of alleged subsidence damage implicating trees are often complicated and require a wide range of information to be properly considered.

Case law has established that in managing subsidence risks councils are entitled to take into account the risk of damage, the seriousness of the potential damage, the cost of removing the risk and social value that trees provide.

Trees have a high amenity value and, unless or until there is reason to believe that a particular tree is likely to be causing damage, it is not considered to be reasonable or appropriate to deal with subsidence risks simply by felling healthy trees.

Accordingly, it is not the policy of the council to fell healthy trees on a precautionary basis because they stand in close proximity to residential or commercial property and there is a theoretical risk that they may during their natural lives cause damage to adjacent properties.

Enquiries

The council receives approximately 20 enquiries each year relating specifically to trees and potential damage to adjoining property structures. Each enquiry is followed by a site inspection and when appropriate, preventative tree maintenance may be carried out where the potential for further damage exists. If actual damage to an adjoining property exists which could possibly be associated with a council tree, the property owner is at liberty to submit a formal insurance claim to the council's insurance section.

Insurance claims

At a pre-action stage, the council is obliged to deal with all civil claims in accordance with a practice direction on pre-action conduct and protocol. This practice direction provides a timetable which allows the claim to be investigated and identifies when responses should be given.

In order for each case to be considered, claimants should provide evidence to suggest a linkage between trees and property damage. When evidence indicating subsidence issues likely to be connected with council owned or controlled trees is received, the council's forestry group will visit the site, assess the evidence provided and advise the insurance section accordingly.

Subsidence risk

There has recently been an increasing demand from mortgage lenders, insurance companies and others for standardised assessments of the risk of subsidence damage to structures from nearby trees.

Attempts have been made to produce subsidence risk formulae, but these have been unsuccessful due to the high range of variables, the lack of scientific data and the probability of unnecessary tree loss. The council does, however, refer to industry recognised published data when assessing a likely case of subsidence.

7. Response to emergencies

In line with other areas of service delivery, the council has procedures and arrangements in place to deal with emergency situations relating to its own trees. During and after seasonal gales, the council's forestry and highways operations teams receive large numbers of calls reporting fallen trees and branches. Many of these may be causing an obstruction and some could possibly have caused damage or injury. These are dealt with during working hours, but a considerable number are also received at night, by duty officers at, for example, divisional highway offices. These calls are often received from the police who require a swift response, particularly if a road is blocked or the tree in question is associated with a road traffic accident

Photo

Call out procedures

During periods of extreme weather, a suitably equipped and skilled tree surgery response team should be available outside working hours to deal with any tree related emergency situations. This enables the council to deal with any incident promptly after it is reported. When weather conditions are severe, a high number of incidences can be reported in a short period of time. In such circumstances, a means of assessing and prioritising work can be extremely beneficial. It may also be too hazardous to deal with some situations during the night and a temporary road closure should therefore be established until conditions allow the clearance work to be undertaken. During these circumstances, procedures should also allow for a 'night scout' to be available to pre-assess emergency incidences and prioritise work with response teams.

8. Review and monitoring

After the introduction of the Tree Management Strategy, the implementation of the specified policies will be regularly monitored to ensure that the objectives of the strategy, detailed in the Executive Summary, are met. Monitoring should consider the appropriateness of each policy to ensure that it maintains appropriate standards of tree care, whilst also considering the needs and concerns of the public. The work the council undertakes in implementing the strategy should raise the council's profile as a tree manager.

There will also be a need to periodically review the strategy itself to take into account the development of the county's tree population, changes in research, work techniques and codes of practice, public opinion on the council's tree management, tree health issues and the progress of climate change. A major review of the strategy will therefore be undertaken every five years.

Part 3 – Tree management policy

The council has adopted the following policy in order to achieve the stated strategic aims and objectives included in the Tree Management Strategy.

Tree inspection

The council's tree inspection programme takes into account the criteria and procedures detailed in Section 1 – 'Actions and Policy'

The county council will target the following tree inspection frequencies:

Trees in the adopted highway

Road Hierarchy Description	Highways Inspectors – Routine Inspections	Tree Inspector – Specialist Inspections
Strategic routes (road hierarchy)	Inspected as part of driven survey	Every three years
Main distributor roads (road hierarchy)	Inspected as part of driven survey	Every three years
Secondary distributor roads (road hierarchy)	Inspected as part of driven survey	Every three years
Locally important roads including residential streets (including towns and villages)	Inspected as part of driven survey	Every three years
All other metalled roads rural roads	Inspected as part of driven survey	Every six years
High risk trees (i.e. flagged)	Inspected as part of driven survey	Every 18 months

Trees on schools, country parks and other council properties

Premises	Basic Inspections	Tree Inspector – Specialist Inspections
School Tree Management Package		
All trees	Annual basic inspections by School Premises Officers	Every three years
High risk trees	Annual basic inspections	Every 18 months
Country Parks		
Area of high public use	Zoned inspection by Ranger staff around main car parks and paths	Every three years
Area of low public use	Zoned inspection frequency by Ranger staff around main car parks and paths	None programmed – responsive inspections only
High risk trees	Zoned inspection frequency by Ranger staff around main car parks and paths	Every 18 months
Corporate Properties		
All trees	No formal basic inspections – observations reported by site staff	Every three years
High risk trees	Annual basic inspections	Every 18 months
County Farms		
Areas of highest risk (e.g. roadside & premises)	No formal basic inspections – observations reported by tenants	Currently being quantified. Target for a cycle of every three years by 2027
Areas of lowest risk (e.g. internal to farm site)	No formal basic inspections – observations reported by tenants	None programmed – responsive inspections only
High risk trees	Annual basic inspections	Currently being quantified. Target for a cycle of every 18 months by 2027

Tree maintenance

The council has adopted the following tree maintenance policy which takes into account the following priority issues detailed in Section 2 – 'Actions and Policy'

Public safety

The council will undertake all work which, remove actual hazards to safeguard the public and property

Duty to consult

The council will comply with the requirements of S115 of the Environment Act 2021 to consult on felling highway trees with certain exemptions

Remedial/preventative works

The council will undertake all work which:

a) remove potential hazards that may subsequently threaten public safety or property

b) prevent or minimise the effects of a tree on the structure of a property

Management of veteran trees

The council will, where public safety is not compromised, undertake all work which will:

a) conserves trees with high ecological value

b) preserves trees with significant local historical and/or aesthetic value

Young tree maintenance

The council will undertake all work which

a) assists the establishment of young trees with significant life expectancy

b) enables new tree planting to reach its full potential

Nuisance management

i) The council will undertake remedial work where it is considered that its trees are causing an actionable nuisance to a neighbouring property.

For example:
Root/branch encroachment over property boundaries where damage has occurred or is likely to do so imminently.

ii) When a tree is thought to be causing a nuisance which does not require immediate remedial action, the council will consider appropriate remedial works during the next programmed detailed inspection of that tree.

The county council will not undertake one-off, reactive inspections to deal with minor inconveniences such as:

- **shade onto a garden or property**
- **deposits of seed/leaf/fruit/blossom**
- **tree is considered 'too large'**
- **summer honeydew deposits**
- **droppings from roosting birds**
- **TV reception interference**

- **shading of solar panels**
- **contact with telephone wires**
- **pollinating insects**

The council will aim to undertake works expediently through its procurement arrangements and will execute work in accordance with the following response times relating to the priority categories detailed in paragraph 2.2.

Category 1 – urgent works to be completed as soon as possible within 24
Category 2 – high priority works to be completed within 6 months
Category 3 – low priority or annually programmed works to be completed within12 months
Category 4 – Pro-active but non-essential works to be completed as budgets allow.

Standards of work

The council has adopted the following policy relating to standards of work to ensure that it achieves high standards of forestry and arboricultural maintenance.

1) The council follows the requirements of all appropriate British standards and industry codes of practice relating to tree maintenance and other works which affect trees.
2) The council has provided its own work specifications relating to forestry and arboriculture. These are revised and updated, when appropriate, to take into account the findings of current research and advances in modern arboricultural practice.
3) The council promotes good tree management practice with the general public, based on the latest research in tree biology, pathology, and biomechanics.

Sustainability

The council will aim to achieve the following sustainability targets:

a) Woodlands
The council will adopt standards of woodland management in all its woodlands commensurate with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS).

b) Tree planting

i) The council will, as a minimum standard, replace all individual, non-woodland trees which are felled on a one for one basis on all its sites.
ii) The council will seek to increase its tree population by implementing appropriate tree planting schemes on suitable sites. Such planting will include landscaping on capital schemes and woodland establishment in target areas such as the National Forest.
iii) The council will encourage private tree owners to plant new trees and provide replacements when mature trees adjacent to the highway have to be removed for safety reasons.
iv) The council will continue to support and encourage other authorities and developers to implement well planned tree planting schemes which promote sustainable tree management.

c) Long term maintenance and aftercare

The council will provide appropriate long-term maintenance to new tree planting on its land holdings to ensure that these features reach their full potential in environmental terms and maximise initial investment.

d) Recycling of wood waste and utilisation of timber

The county council shall continue to explore various options relating to the utilisation of timber and the recycling of wood waste. Possible partnerships with other producers will be investigated to identify future viable markets for timber and other by-products of tree maintenance operations.

Woodland management

The county council will manage its woodlands to achieve the following management objectives:

1) Produce management plans for all main woodland areas.
2) Aim to diversify the age-class of trees within woodlands by adopting a policy of periodic thinning, harvesting and restocking which in the long term will create diverse, uneven aged tree populations.
3) Continue to carry out low key operations such as coppicing as part of long term management systems to conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of woodlands.
4) Ensure that sufficient funding is available from revenue budgets, external grants and timber sales to ensure that appropriate on-going woodland management can be undertaken on all council woodlands.

Tree related subsidence

When enquiries are made regarding the possibility of subsidence damage, the council will:

1) Respond by inspecting the site and perceived damage, liaising directly with the property owner or their specialist representatives and when appropriate, arranging for work to be carried out.
2) Deal with all subsidence related insurance claims through its own insurance section in accordance the requirements of the Civil Procedure Rules and associated Pre-Action Protocols.
3) Consider subsidence related insurance claims only when sufficient evidence has been provided to accurately assess the legitimacy of the case.

Response to emergencies

1) The council will provide a call out procedure to deal with tree related highway emergencies which will involve a tree surgery response team, available during periods when high winds are predicted. The response team will be located to ensure that they can deal with any tree-related emergency in Leicestershire within two hours.
2) Enquiries will be prioritised to ensure that high priority situations are dealt with immediately and lower priority situations are dealt with during daylight when working conditions are safer.
3) Follow-up inspections will be undertaken by a forestry officer in emergency situations involving personal injury, damage to property or where only part of a tree has failed and the remaining part requires a safety assessment.

Appendices

Appendix A – References

1) Government Forestry and Woodlands Statement - A Green Future: Our 25-year plan to improve the Environment
www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan
2) Urban Tree Manual - The Environment Secretary and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/urban-tree-manual/
3) 2013 Forestry Policy Statement - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-forestry-policy-statement
4) 2008 - Trees in Towns II
https://committeeadmin.lancaster.gov.uk/documents/s21579/Appx2_TreesInTowns.pdf
5) 2017 - Charter for Trees
https://treecharter.uk/
6) UK Roads Liaison Group - 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure'
www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org/en/codes/
7) NTSG – Common Sense Risk Management of Trees
www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCMS024.pdf/$FILE/FCMS024.pdf
8) Space for Wildlife - Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Bio-diversity Action Plan (amended 2016)
www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2017/1/25/LLR_BAP_Space_for_Wildlife_2016-26
9) Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy
10) Leicestershire Environmental Strategy 2018 - 2030: delivering a better future
www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/environmental-policies-and-reports
11) Leicestershire County Council's Ash Die-back Action Plan
https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/tree-for-every-person/ash-dieback-and-other-threats
12) Forestry Commission (England) Biosecurity guidance - August 2012
https://www.forestryengland.uk/biosecurity

Appendix B - Useful contacts

If you have an enquiry relating to trees, please contact the appropriate section of the County Council as detailed below:

Management of trees on highways, schools and other County Council sites Forestry and Arboricultural Group Operational Property Services
Corporate Resources Department
Tel: 0116 305 5000
Email: Forestry@leics.gov.uk

The Forestry Group in the Corporate Resources Department are responsible for tree management planning, inspection, specification and supervision of works and the provision of technical advice to all LCC Departments, external authorities and the general public

Forestry/arboricultural contracting services
Forestry Section
Leicestershire Operational Highways Environment and Transport
Tel: 0116 305 7300

The Forestry Contracting Unit in the Environmental and Transport Department are responsible for providing arboricultural contracting services on the highway network

Management of county tree preservation orders and landscape design/management
The Environmental Policy & Strategy team TPOs :
Tel: 0116 305 0001
Email: leicestershiretpo@leics.gov.uk

The Environmental Policy & Strategy team are responsible for managing and advising on tree preservation orders, landscape design and management, and the provision of technical advice on all landscape matters.

Document management
The tree management strategy will be reviewed at a maximum frequency of 5 years. Additional reviews may be undertaken to take account of changing circumstances or changes in national policy. For example, the progress of Ash die back and/or the publication of national tree strategy guidelines may necessitate a revision of the County Council's tree management policy and procedures.

Author	Team	Department	Date Created	Approved by	Target Review Date
Nick Fell	Forestry Group	Corporate Resources	Mar-20		Mar-25
Adam Goodall	Forestry Group	Corporate Resources	Nov-25		Nov-30