



**ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE – 3 JUNE 2021**

**ACTION FOR NATURE – A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO  
BIODIVERSITY, HABITAT AND THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND  
DELIVERY PLAN**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND  
TRANSPORT**

**Purpose of Report**

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

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Environment Strategy 2018-30 (Revised May 2020) was approved by the County Council on 8 July 2020.
3. The County Council declared a climate emergency on 15 May 2019 with unanimous cross-party support. The declaration committed the Council to achieving carbon neutrality for its own emissions by 2030 and to working with others and lobbying government to support delivery of this commitment. There was also a commitment to support the limiting of global warming to less than 1.5°C, in line with the Paris Agreement. This in effect means achieving carbon neutrality for Leicestershire by 2050 or before.
4. In December 2020 the County Council signed up to a UK100 pledge to achieve net zero for Leicestershire by 2045.
5. 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.

**Background**

6. In 2019 both CMT and the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked that work be undertaken to develop a strategic approach to biodiversity to clarify the Council's policy position on biodiversity, and the Council's roles and responsibilities in protecting and enhancing it.
7. 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 UN assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services found that 'nature was declining globally at unprecedented rates' and that around one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction, with human activity being the principle cause of the decline.

8. Biodiversity decline and climate change also work in conjunction 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.
9. The Environment Strategy 2018-30 (Revised May 2020) recognised the significant decline in our 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 draft Action for Nature document and the supporting draft Delivery Plan sets out in more detail the rationale and context of our approach and the initial actions to be taken over the next four years.

### **Document development**

10. A significant amount of work has taken place in preparing the documents in what is a highly complex, evolving and changing environment. In particular the following steps were taken in producing the documents:
  - i. A desk-based assessment was made of the County Council's and County policies, procedures and practices;
  - ii. Meetings were held with key staff to discuss the biodiversity objectives of the Environment Strategy and how they thought these could be delivered;
  - iii. A consultation questionnaire was circulated to all relevant services and key staff relating to the approach;
  - iv. Workshops were held with service areas to present the evidence base, further define opportunities and challenges and outline key actions;
  - v. Service areas were consulted on the suggested Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that could be adopted as part of the approach;
  - vi. Service areas were consulted on the draft document;
  - vii. The results of these discussions and the identified actions from the workshops were incorporated into the Action for Nature document and the supporting Delivery Plan.
11. The following key service areas were consulted in developing the documents:

- Chief Executives – Planning and Historic & Natural Environment
  - Chief Executives - Communities
  - Corporate Resources - Country Parks & Forestry
  - Corporate Resources - Strategic Property
  - Corporate Resources - Operational Services and Facilities Management
  - Environment & Transport - Highways Operations and Major Projects
  - Environment & Transport – Environment & Waste
  - Public Health
12. In addition, engagement with organisations and agencies such as The National Forest, Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency and Natural England, as well as contributing to the ongoing consultation on the forthcoming Environment Bill has also informed the development to the documents.
13. Development of the documents was informed by a set of guiding principles namely:
- 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
14. These principles are 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.
15. The Delivery Plan will evolve over time in order to continue to be fit for purpose and to adapt to developing needs, changes in legislation and changing opportunities and resources.
16. The process of developing the strategic approach for the Action for Nature document and the supporting Delivery Plan has contributed to the:
- Consolidation of the work around meeting the aims and objectives of the Council’s Environment Strategy 2018-30;

- Identification of the areas of direct control and influence within service areas for work that delivers on the aims & objectives;
- Understanding of the external interfaces and support that exist for the services that LCC provides relating to biodiversity, habitat and the local environment;
- 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;
- Setting of the level of ambition and action on biodiversity, habitats and the local environment, based on evidential needs and the resources available;
- Improved preparedness for changes in government policy and legislation;
- The inclusion of biodiversity and natural capital in the planning for the green recovery from the coronavirus pandemic

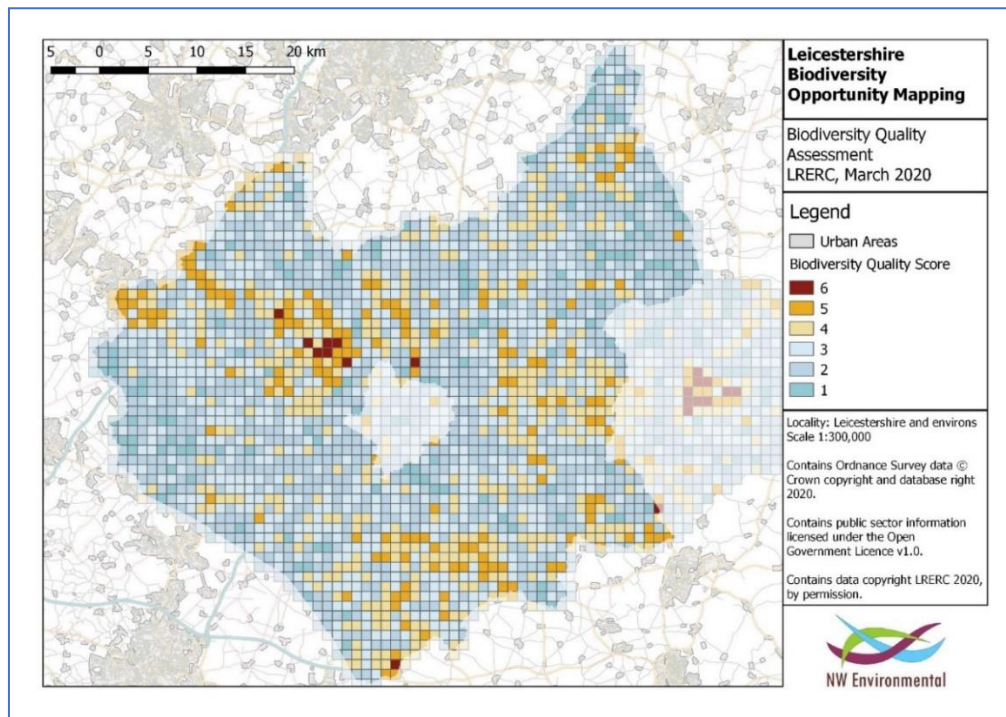
### **Legislative and Policy Context**

17. The Action for Nature document identifies key national, regional and local policies, strategies and plans relevant to this area. This has informed the setting of priorities and the identification of appropriate areas for action.
18. Of particular note is the forthcoming Environment Bill which currently has proposals for the development of local Nature Recovery Strategies and Partnerships, making Biodiversity Net Gain a mandatory requirement under the National Planning Policy Framework and the establishment of national indicators, among others. Once the Bill comes into law the Action for Nature document and the Delivery Plan will be refreshed to account for any implications derived from the Bill.
19. The Action for Nature document and the Delivery Plan will also support and be supported by a number of existing Council strategies and actions plans such as the Strategic Plan, the Tree Management Strategy, the Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and the Air Quality & Health Action Plan.

### **State of Nature in Leicestershire**

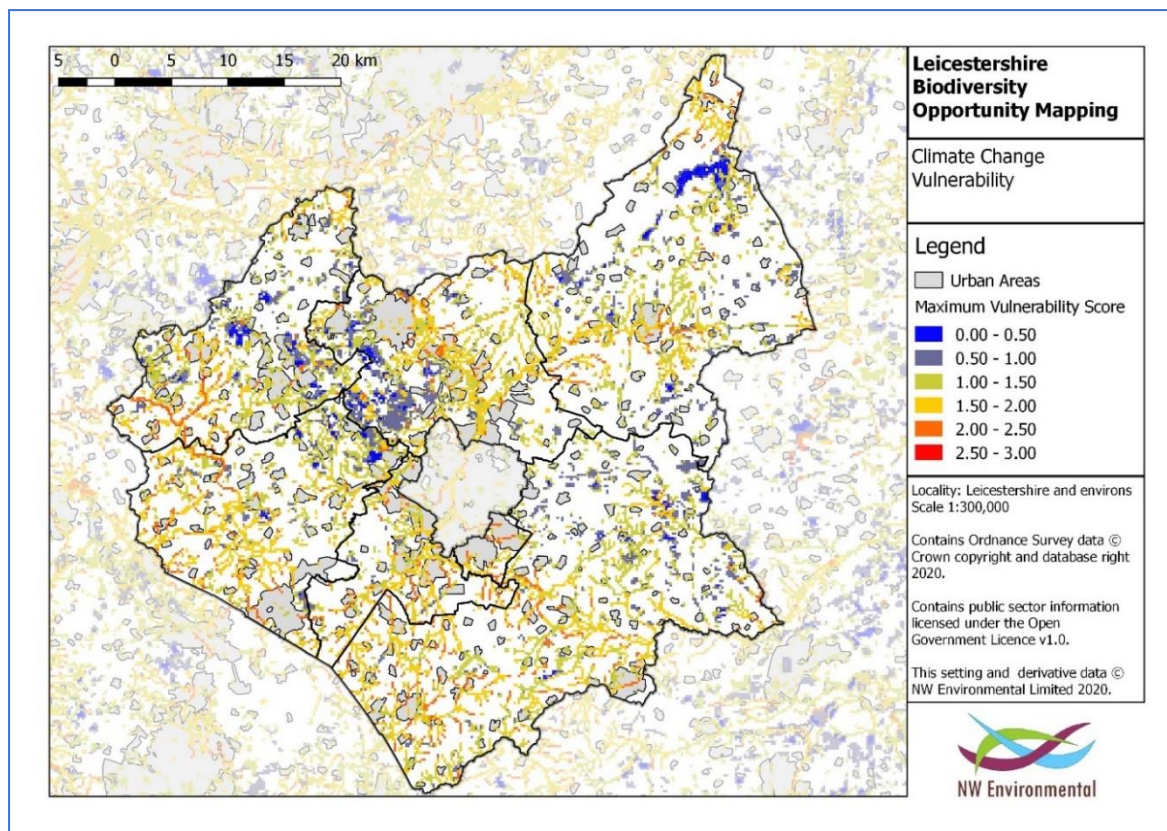
20. The Action for Nature document provides an overview of the state of nature in Leicestershire based on existing and recently collected data and mapping.
21. Some of the key findings include (\*note: some of the figures cover Leicestershire and Rutland as this is how some of the data is compiled):
- 82% of farmland is good to moderate quality farmland, suitable for producing cash crops such as cereal and oil seed rape\*;
  - 66% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are in one of three unfavourable condition categories\*;
  - There is a decline in mature trees, Sphagnum ponds, neutral grasslands, heath grasslands and calcareous grasslands and road verges that are locally designated as Local Wildlife Sites.
22. Work undertaken by the Leicestershire and Rutland Ecological Records Centre (LRERC) to assess habitat quality across the county provided a quality rating for each 1km square in Leicestershire (excluding the City) on a scale of 1 - 6, based on a rapid desk-based assessment of recent aerial photos (2015-2017). A score of 1 is poor and 6 is high. Figure 1 shows the results of the quality scoring exercise. This shows that much of Leicestershire has been given a score of 3 or less with only a small number of areas scoring 6.

**Figure 1: LRERC Biodiversity Quality Score for Leicestershire**



23. An assessment of the vulnerability of habitats in Leicestershire from Climate Change using the National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability Model developed by Natural England shows that the County's watercourses and associated habitats are the most vulnerable areas, with some areas in the highest categories of vulnerability. Most notably is the River Anker, which scores highly along most of its length, and wetlands on the River Soar near Quorn. Figure 2 shows the results of the climate change vulnerability modelling for Leicestershire.

**Figure 2: Climate Change Habitat Vulnerability**



24. The results of this and other assessments carried out in developing the Action for Nature document will be used to inform what action is needed where, in order to protect and enhance biodiversity and nature in Leicestershire while also achieving gains for people.

### **Broad Areas for Action**

25. The review of evidence and consultation process identified a number of broad areas for action 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 the Council;

- Supporting the tenants of Council land to better manage this land;
  - Ensuring biodiversity is included in the development of Council policies, plans and projects;
  - Influencing or adding value to the policies, 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 Council land, including carbon sequestration and storage.
26. Specific actions under these broad areas are and will be included in the Delivery Plan (Appendix B).

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

27. 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.
28. In light of this, initial KPIs have been developed that will 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 LCC land in better management for nature
  - Percentage of suitable LCC land in better management for nature
29. Different thresholds and criteria will be set for different types of land use to determine what is meant by 'in better management for nature'. The threshold for a car park will be different from that of an agricultural field or a country park. Any thresholds are expected to be based on doing more than the minimum and may be based on meeting specific criteria as appropriate.
30. In addition, a suite of Performance Indicators (PIs) have been agreed that will support our understanding of the KPIs such as:
- Number of trees planted
  - Area of woodland created
  - Area restored for natural flood management,
  - Metres of hedges planted
  - Area of ponds created or restored
31. As part of the Delivery Plan there are actions to identify and develop additional KPIs and PIs where valuable, as more data is gathered, and robust and sustainable data collection and analysis mechanisms are put in place.

This work will also be informed and influenced by what happens at a national level particularly in relation to the Environment Bill and the setting of any national indicators and how the measuring of such indicators is carried out at a local level.

32. Implementation of the Delivery Plan will be co-ordinated by the Action for Nature Working Group, which is a sub-group of the Environment Strategy Delivery Board. The Working Group will have representatives from the key service areas involved in the actions included in the Delivery Plan.
33. Progress on the implementation of the actions within the Delivery Plan will be reported through the existing reporting mechanisms used for reporting on the Environment Strategy. This will include reporting to the Environment Strategy Delivery Board, CMT, relevant Lead Members, Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Commission where appropriate.

### **Resource Implications**

34. Existing resources will be utilised where possible with external resources being sought through the submission of funding bids and by working with external partners where appropriate.
35. Where appropriate businesses cases will be developed for potential projects to assess the biodiversity, carbon, financial and other benefits of proposals to ensure they positively contribute to the Council's objectives.

### **Background Papers**

Link to [Environment Strategy 2018-30](#)

Link to [Tree Management Strategy](#)

Link to [Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2019- 2029](#)

Link to [Air Quality and Health Action Plan 2020-2024](#)

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

None.

### **Equal Opportunities Implications**

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

### **List of Appendices**



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

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