



**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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