

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

	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. Guiding Principles	4
3. Legislative and Policy Context	6
4. Biodiversity and Natural Capital	19
5. Opportunities for Delivering the Biodiversity Objectives	21
6. Development and Implementation of the Action Plan	25
7. Final Remarks	28
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms	29

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 follows²:

- 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 Network³ 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 prescribing 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

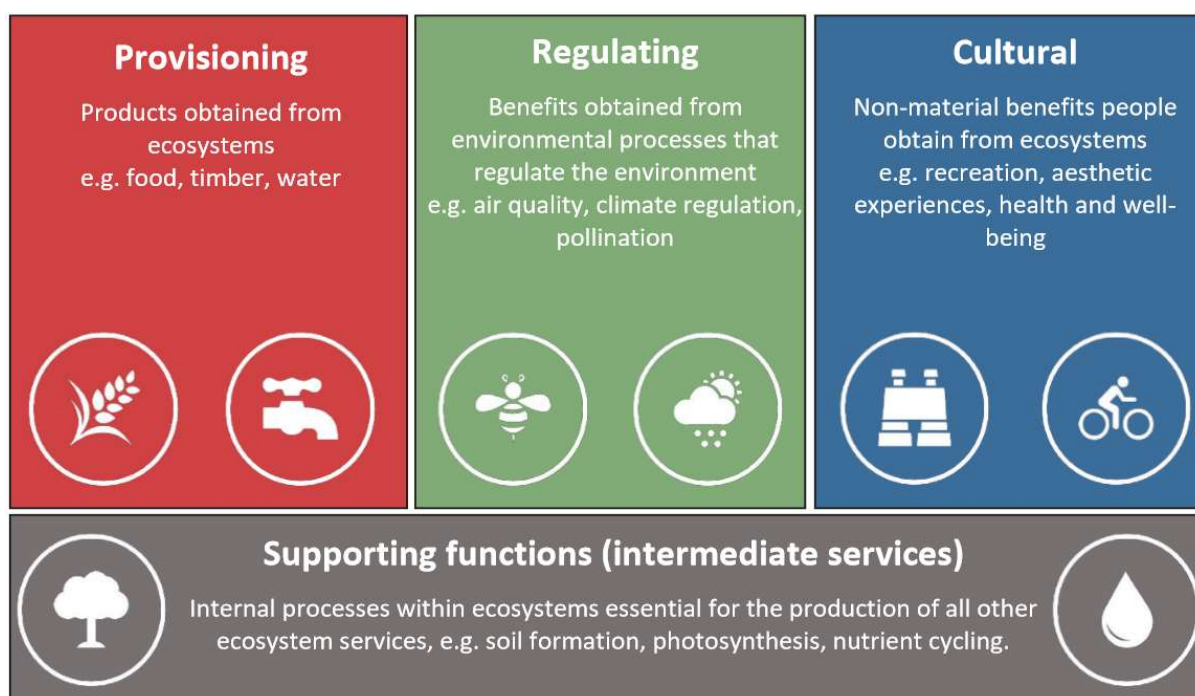
The Council's understanding of the definition of a whole system approach is to see the loss of biodiversity in the context of how it impacts on and is impacted by the other environmental assets and how the natural world interacts with society and the economy. Key points of note are:

- 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 2006⁷ 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 2021⁸ 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 Act¹⁰ 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 Regulations¹¹ 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 Framework¹² 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 2025¹³** lays out the plans for the UK’s industrial growth strategy including changes to the planning system to remove barriers to growth;
- **Heritage Statement 2017¹⁴** 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 Plans¹⁵, Sustainable Land Use and the Impact on Water Quality - EU Water Framework Directive¹⁶** 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 2018¹⁸

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 strategy¹⁹ 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 2031²⁰

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 Plan²¹ 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 Welland²² and the River Mease²³.

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 Plan²⁴ 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 2024²⁵

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 LRERC²⁷ 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 Record²⁸ 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 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 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 Code³⁰ 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 Design³¹ 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 Infrastructure³² 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 2024³⁵, 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 (<i>Fraxinus</i> species), especially the United Kingdom's native ash species, common ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>). It is caused by a fungus named <i>Hymenoscyphus fraxineus</i> (<i>H. fraxineus</i>), 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

This page is intentionally left blank