

Biodiversity Report

for Leicestershire County Council



Reporting Period: January 2024 to December 2025

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Leicestershire County Council Biodiversity Report

1. Introduction and Background

Leicestershire County Council has created this report to outline how it meets its duties regarding biodiversity conservation and enhancement (the strengthened biodiversity duty) including its role as the responsible authority for the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)¹ and its role as the local planning authority for minerals and waste.

The report describes the Council's policies, objectives and actions to comply with the duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity for the period January 2024 to December 2025, and goes on to describe the policies, objectives and actions which the Council will be using to determine its biodiversity-related work into the longer-term. The reporting period relates to preparation for, and implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) related to the Council's planning (including planning consultancy) functions.

Chapter 2 of the report describes the legal and strategic context in more detail. However, it is also useful to understand the wider implications of a failure to integrate nature, and the benefits that will arise from having robust policies to protect and enhance the environment.

Nature is the foundation of our wellbeing, our economy and our communities. It builds resilience and minimises the impact of the changing climate on our homes, businesses, and infrastructure.

It is essential to growing the economy. In 2022, England's nature services provided [benefits exceeding £37.1 billion](#), more than any single manufacturing sector (Nature at work for people and the economy, Defra, 2024).

(Quote from the 2025 UK Government Environmental Improvement Plan)

The 2025 Environmental Improvement Plan highlights the importance of natural capital to the Government's economic growth agenda. The Office of National Statistics published the following values in 2025²:

- The total annual value of ecosystem services in the UK was £41 billion in 2023, with £34 billion from biotic (living) ecosystem services and £7 billion from abiotic (non-living) services.

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

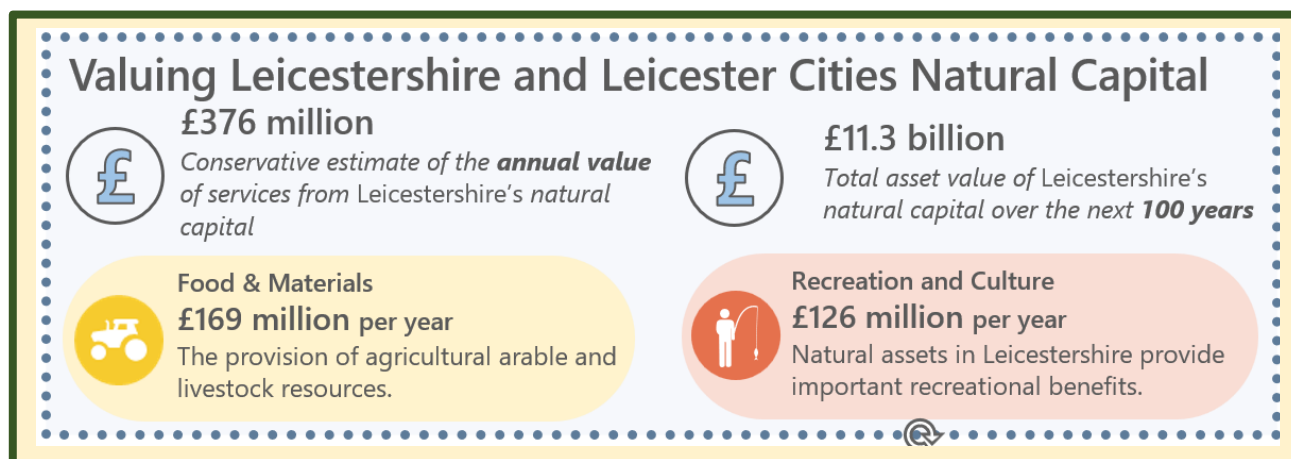
² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/uknaturalcapitalaccounts/2025>

- The total asset value of ecosystem services in the UK was £1.6 trillion in 2023, with £1.4 trillion (90%) of this asset value being from biotic sources and £0.2 trillion (10%) being from abiotic sources.
- Recreation and tourism (expenditure) was the ecosystem service that provided the largest contribution to the total annual value, at £10 billion in 2023.
- The health benefits from recreation ecosystem service provided the largest contribution to the total UK asset value, at £508 billion in 2023.
- The annual value of the renewable electricity provisioning ecosystem service was £3 billion in 2023, which was seven times higher than in 2014 (£0.4 billion).
- The net annual value of the greenhouse gas regulating ecosystem service was negative £330 million in 2023; this is because some habitats emit more greenhouse gases than they remove.
- The urban heat regulating ecosystem service accounted for £1 billion of the total annual value in 2023; this bulletin includes more granularity for this service for local authority areas in Great Britain.
- Enclosed farmland accounted for 52% of the total UK land area in 2024, while urban habitats accounted for 8%.

The County Council, as a major public body and landowner, benefits from its own nature assets. Leicestershire residents also benefit from nature assets owned by other public bodies and on accessible private lands. The Council's primary purpose is to serve the needs of residents and businesses, and it recognises the importance of biodiversity across all of its policies and actions, whether these are directly related to a statutory duty or whether they have been developed to serve specific needs.

A report created for the Leicestershire and Leicester Enterprise Partnership in 2021 aimed to put a value on natural capital for the city and county. The figure below shows the headline results of the process, which attach a high value to natural capital.

Figure 1: Value of Natural Capital Leicestershire (estimated 2021)



In its actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity, the Council is rarely acting alone but is part of a network of organisations working in flexible partnership arrangements to deliver best outcomes. No one single department or body has the combination of expertise and resources needed to restore depleted ecosystems and integrate nature-based solutions into day-to-day service delivery.

The regulatory landscape for nature is constantly evolving. At the time of writing, new policy is under development. The planning system is in flux as planners try to balance BNG with the ever increasing need for housing, and water regulators are trying to keep pace with the rapid climatic and demand changes affecting supply. For this reason, the Council plans to update its Environmental Strategy Action Plan and Action for Nature Action Plan on at least an annual basis to keep pace with changes, with the main body of the policy documents being reviewed at five yearly intervals. This will allow environmental trends to become more apparent and better accounted for.

2. Legal and Strategic Context

Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is the strengthened biodiversity duty that the Environment Act 2021 introduced. This means that public authorities must:

- Consider what can be done to conserve and enhance biodiversity;
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on those considerations;
- Act to deliver those policies and achieve objectives.

Local authorities (excluding parish councils) must write and publish a biodiversity report. For local authorities and local planning authorities, the end date of the first reporting period should be no later than 1 January 2026.

After this, the end date of each reporting period must be within five years of the end date of the previous reporting period. Leicestershire County Council must publish all reports within 12 weeks of the reporting period end date.

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

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

The Council has created an Action for Nature document³, which is supported by an annually updated Action for Nature Action Plan⁴. The Action for Nature document describes how the Council meets its biodiversity duty across its own land and operations with the Action Plan being a living document that can adapt to changing needs and circumstances.

³ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/8/16/action-for-nature-strategic-approach-to-biodiversity.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/8/16/action-for-nature-delivery-plan.pdf>

2.1 Legislative Drivers (Statutes and Statutory Instruments)

2.1.1 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

The County Council and all local authorities (including parish and town councils) have responsibilities to ensure that they comply with the Act⁵ in all areas of relevant activity, including as a landowner and operator of public services. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act expects local authorities to undertake their duty to **conserve and enhance** biodiversity. This is known as the strengthened biodiversity duty, as until amended by the Environment Act 2021, the NERC Act only referred to a duty to **conserve** biodiversity.

2.1.1.a The Biodiversity Duty

The strengthened biodiversity duty applies to all public authorities, including local authorities, Government departments, statutory undertakers, and public bodies. Leicestershire County Council must:

- Consider what actions the Council can take 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 Plan⁶ in December 2024. This was based on a review of the policies and strategies in operation across the Council, at the time, which contributed 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 authorities review their actions at least every five years.

Authorities must consider how their actions align with LNRSs. Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland's 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.

Leicestershire does not currently have the following:

- Species Conservation Strategies,
- Protected Site Strategies.

However, if any future strategies are created within the County or LNRS area (including any redrawn borders due to local government reorganisation), these will need additional consideration. Currently, any issues related to species conservation

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents>

⁶ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/LCC-Biodiversity-Duty-Plan.pdf>

and protected site conservation are integrated into the LNRS, whilst the Council awaits further regulations and guidance.

2.1.2 The Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act 2021⁷ created the requirement for local authorities (i.e. county councils, unitary authorities, and district and borough councils) to engage in the development and delivery of a LNRS. Local authorities under an amended NERC Act 2006 are also now required to 'enhance' biodiversity on their land and the Environment Act 2021 makes 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 LNRSs 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.

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a duty on ministers to have due regard to an Environmental Principles Policy Statement when making policy. This guides ministers and policymakers to prevent environmental damage and enhance the environment through interpreting and proportionately applying the following five principles:

- Integration,
- Prevention of harm,
- Rectification at source,
- Polluter pays,
- Precautionary.

The environmental principles help deliver outcomes for climate and environment, even where it is not the primary policy outcome.

The Environment Act 2021's amendment to the NERC Act 2006 enhancing the biodiversity duty also gives rise to the new requirement for reporting on the actions taken to meet this duty.

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents>

2.1.2.a The Biodiversity Reporting Duty

Also introduced by the Environment Act 2021, this duty⁸ ensures transparency and accountability in how public authorities meet their biodiversity obligations.

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

- The 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 local planning authority function report on:

- The actions carried out to meet BNG obligations;
- Details of BNG 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;
- 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.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reporting-your-biodiversity-duty-actions>

Leicestershire County Council is the determining authority for minerals and waste planning applications, applications under Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992 for its own development e.g. schools, roads and care homes and for the preparation and delivery of the Minerals and Waste Local Plan. The Ecology and Biodiversity Team advise the County Planning Team. The team also provide a contracted advisory service to six of the seven Leicestershire district councils, and to Rutland County Council. This includes a consultation service for planning applications, Local Plans development and the provision of relevant data from the Environmental Records Centre.

There is a statutory requirement to secure and monitor BNG for a period of 30 years. The Ecology and Biodiversity Team have a policy and charging scheme for this purpose, which is offered as a service to the County Planning Team, Rutland County Council and all the Leicestershire district and borough councils (with the exception of Charnwood Borough Council, who have their own Ecology Team).

The Council's Ecology and Biodiversity Team extract data from their recording systems, to meet the reporting requirements of the Biodiversity Duty.

2.1.3 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 Biological Diversity)

Leicestershire County Council has a responsibility to ensure that it complies with the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 in all areas of relevant activity, including as a landowner and operator of public services.

The Act⁹ 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. Sites of Special Scientific Interest are also included within the Act.

2.1.4 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

These Regulations¹⁰ have been amended since their original publication in 2017 as a result of the UK withdrawal from the European Union (EU) and the transposition of requirements into UK law. Further amendments to the regulations are expected in the lifetime of the new Environmental Improvement Plan.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) protect wildlife sites in England and over one hundred rare or vulnerable animal, bird and plant species. The Habitats Regulations cover the sites of greatest significance and international importance for nature, for which the UK has a special responsibility. The Regulations provide these sites with protection through the designations of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), which provide protection to a variety of special species and habitats, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), which provide protection for rare and vulnerable birds and their habitats and give a higher level of legal

⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents>

protection than domestic protections, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), including through a legal requirement to assess potential impacts on protected sites (Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)). Local authorities have key duties under the Habitats Regulations 2017, primarily to conduct HRAs for plans or projects that might significantly affect European sites (SACs/SPAs).

In essence, planning departments act as gatekeepers for development, ensuring that plans and projects, from major developments to certain permitted changes, do not damage protected European wildlife sites, often requiring detailed assessments and consultation with nature bodies like Natural England. In Leicestershire, the River Mease is a SAC and has a restoration plan in place with works being carried out by a range of catchment partners.

2.1.5 The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025¹¹ aims to streamline delivery of infrastructure and clean energy projects and the delivery of a major house-building programme as part of the current Government's Plan for Change¹². The Government is fully committed to an exponential economic growth model, which it believes to be "the only route to delivering the improved prosperity our country needs..."¹³

The objectives of the act are:

- **Delivering a faster and more certain consenting process for critical infrastructure** by making it quicker and easier to deliver critical infrastructure projects including through streamlining Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) consultation requirements, ensuring National Policy Statements are kept up to date, and reducing opportunities for judicial review.
- **Introducing a more strategic approach to nature recovery** by introducing a new Nature Restoration Fund. How this will work in practice has yet to be tested, with concerns from some quarters, that it will remove protections for species and habitats.
- **Improving certainty and decision-making in the planning system.**
- **Unlocking land and securing public value for large scale investment.**
- **Introducing effective new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning** – this will involve production of Spatial Development Strategies.

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 entered into law very close to the time of writing this document and the outcomes and consequences of the Act are yet to be fully realised. However, the Act may have implications for the County Council as a Planning Authority and impact the delivery of some biodiversity and nature recovery initiatives.

¹¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/34/enacted>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/missions>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill/guide-to-the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill>

2.2 National Policy Drivers

2.2.1 UK Environmental Improvement Plan

The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP25)¹⁴, published in December 2025 sets out Government plans for significantly improving the natural environment. It is arranged in five chapters addressing different elements, but the document makes clear that actions relating to one chapter may also create positive outcomes under other headings, as the ecosystem is made up of a complex and dynamic set of interrelating parts. For example, tree planting as an action can fulfil multiple functions such as managing water flow, cooling, providing shade for livestock, tree fodder and food crops, provision of sustainable timber, active health and leisure opportunities etc, depending on the context. The document starts with six commitments (with 90 commitments in total) which are seen as cross-cutting enablers and then describes actions across five themed chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1: Restored nature,
- Chapter 2: Environmental quality,
- Chapter 3: Circular economy,
- Chapter 4: Environmental security,
- Chapter 5: Access to nature.

The chapters describe ten long-term goals for the natural environment. The goals set out:

- Targets and commitments to achieve the UK's long-term goals, monitored and reported on in annual progress reports;
- How each commitment has a key metric and a contribution to the outcomes of the chapter, set out in the EIP Monitoring Plan;
- Key system connections between commitments are signposted in systems connections boxes.

The commitments are delivered through the actions the UK Government is taking to deliver the plan, and names who is responsible for delivering them with an illustrative plan for each goal setting out the key upcoming actions.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has convened the National Estate for Nature (NEN) group¹⁵, including England's most significant landowners who collectively own around 10% of England's land, to accelerate nature's recovery on their estates and lead by example (Defra, 2025). Members include Defra, other Government departments, Government bodies, and private, institutional and third sector landowners.

The cross-cutting commitments are:

¹⁴

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/692d8d9cce50d215cae962a5/Environmental_Improvement_Plan_EIP_2025.pdf

¹⁵ [National Estate for Nature \(NEN\) group](#),

- **Commitment 1:** Mobilise private investment and finance to restore and protect nature in England.
- **Commitment 2:** Publish LNRS to cover the whole of England for use by public, private and voluntary sectors to deliver on nature recovery and wider environmental commitments by the end of 2025 or shortly after.
 - (NB: The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland LNRS was published in August 2025.)
- **Commitment 3:** Use the NEN group to support the delivery of statutory nature targets and “30by30”¹⁶ on members’ estates, trial innovative land management approaches and provide engagement routes to support and replicate action.
- **Commitment 4:** Enable Protected Landscapes Organisations to make land greener, wilder, and more accessible to all.
- **Commitment 5:** Build green skills for the future, including in agriculture, land management and water.
- **Commitment 6:** Address barriers to sustainable choices across society.

The ten environmental goals are:

- **Goal 1:** Restored nature: We will create a network of bigger, better and more resilient habitats to help nature thrive – this replaces the EIP 23 goal 1 of Thriving plants and wildlife.
- **Goal 2:** Air: We will achieve clean air.
- **Goal 3:** Water: We will ensure English waters are clean, resilient and plentiful.
- **Goal 4:** Chemicals and pesticides: We will minimise environmental risks from chemicals and pesticides.
- **Goal 5:** Waste: We will minimise waste by designing it out of the system, reusing and recycling materials wherever possible.
- **Goal 6:** Resources: We will ensure that natural resources are produced, managed and consumed sustainably.
- **Goal 7:** Climate Change: We will reduce greenhouse gas emissions to accelerate to net zero and work to prepare the natural environment for the effects of climate change.
- **Goal 8:** Reducing environmental hazards: We will reduce the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy from natural hazards.
- **Goal 9:** Biosecurity: We will enhance biosecurity to protect our natural environment and boost the health and resilience of plants, animals, ecosystems and people.
- **Goal 10:** Access to Nature: We will ensure inclusive access to nature and protect nature’s beauty and heritage.

¹⁶ “30by30” in the UK context refers to a government commitment to **protect and manage 30% of UK land and sea for nature’s recovery by 2030**. This initiative aims to halt the decline of biodiversity, restore habitats, and contribute to global climate goals, effectively making more space for nature by 2030.

In the Council's Action for Nature document published in December 2025, goals, targets and commitments from the EIP23, which lay behind the Action for Nature Action Plan, were identified. Some of these have been updated in the EIP25.

New targets have been added to the EIP25 relating to farm wildlife and invasive non-native species (INNS):

- By 2030, double the number of farms providing sufficient year-round resources for farm wildlife, compared with 2025;
- Reduce the rate of establishment of INNS by at least 50% by December 2030, compared to 2000 levels.

The EIP sits alongside other provisions in the Environment Act 2021 to ensure there are steps to protect and enhance the environment throughout all of Government policy.

The Biodiversity Duty under the Environment Act 2021 requires all public bodies, including Government departments, to consider what actions can be taken to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This could include actions on estates, in land management, or in policymaking and decision taking. Public bodies then need to set policies and objectives to deliver that action.

Both these duties help ensure that action across government supports delivery of the EIP. For the County Council, relevant duties form part of the Action for Nature programme, which has a guiding document and an annually refreshed Action Plan with work ongoing across multiple departments to fulfil objectives and ensure business as usual meets the biodiversity duty.

Figure 2: Table Comparing Environmental Improvement Targets 2023 and 2025

EIP23 Commitment (as in Action for Nature)	EIP25 Commitment
Halt the decline in species abundance by 2030 and then increase abundance by at least 10% to exceed 2022 levels by 2042.	Effectively conserve and manage 30% of the UK's land by 2030 (30by30). Halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. Increase species abundance so that by 2042 it is greater than in 2022 and at least 10% greater than in 2030.
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.	Restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites by 2042.
New interim target to restore or create 140,000 hectares of wildlife rich habitats outside protected sites by 2028, compared to 2022 levels.	Restore or create a total of 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats outside of protected sites by December 2030.
Improve the Red List Index for England for species extinction by 2042 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.	By December 2030, 50% of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) features to have actions on track to achieve favourable condition.
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.	Increase England's tree canopy and woodland cover by 0.33% of land area by December 2030 from the 2022 baseline of 14.9%. (Equivalent to a net increase of 43,000 hectares).

2.2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

At the time of writing, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹⁷ (February 2025 update) 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.
- Public 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.
- 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.

¹⁷ [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

- 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.

A further revision of the NPPF was released in December 2025 for public consultation to run up to March 2026. The new version aligns with the Government's continued commitment to economic growth in general and housebuilding specifically. Proposed measures include changes to the BNG requirements, potentially removing mandatory BNG from developments under 0.2 ha.

It proposes that the provision of swift bricks in new builds will become a mandatory requirement and that there will be greater protection for chalk streams.

The final text is still subject to consultation at the time of writing this document.

2.2.2.a Note on the Envisaged Interaction of LNRS and BNG 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 (known as ACB areas – Areas that Could Become important 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.

2.2.3 Other relevant National Policy Drivers

The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy (policy paper) June 2025

The Modern Industrial Strategy¹⁸ lays out the plans for the UK's industrial growth strategy including changes to the planning system to remove barriers to growth.

Heritage Statement 2017

This is a policy paper¹⁹ which lays out the Government's vision for heritage and the historic environment, which includes natural heritage such as landscape character, biodiversity and habitats. The Heritage Statement was published by the 2016 to 2019 Conservative Government but is still in use at the time of writing.

River Basin Management Plans

River basin management plans (RBMPs)²⁰ set the legally binding locally specific environmental objectives that underpin water regulation (such as permitting) and planning activities. This includes investment programmes such as the Water Industry National Environment Improvement Programme (WINEP) and the strategic water resources solutions being developed by the Regulators Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID), alongside the Government's environmental land management schemes and England Trees Action Plan.

The plans are the foundation for delivering the Government's 25-Year Environment Plan 'clean and plentiful water' goal. They are derived from the Water Framework Directive which 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 catchments;
- Combined approach of emission limit values and quality standards;
- Getting the prices right;
- Getting citizens more closely involved;
- 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 Government supports the use of a catchment-based approach to managing rivers and other water bodies.²¹

¹⁸

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

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-heritage-statement-2017>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/river-basin-management-plans-updated-2022>

²¹ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/catchment-management-plans/>

Trent Rivers Trust are the host for the Soar Catchment Partnership and co-ordinate the five-year strategy for the Soar.²² East Mercia Rivers Trust manages the Welland Valley Partnership and its catchment plan.²³

2.3 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 and borough councils are provided in the future. What follows are the key drivers as they currently exist.

Figure 3: Front Cover of the 2025 LNRS



2.3.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

The LNRS²⁴ provides a blueprint for nature recovery across the whole of the strategic area and identifies opportunities for nature recovery within areas that could become of particular importance for conservation. The document outlines habitat

²² https://www.trentriverstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Soar-Catchment-Plan_23-28_final.pdf

²³ <https://eastmercia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/WVP-Five-Year-Catchment-Plan-2022-2027-Final.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-01/LLR-Local-Nature-Recovery-Strategy.pdf>

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 control or via the influence that the Council 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 agreements to ensure the most appropriate management of the land for its long-term ecological wellbeing.

Whilst the Council cannot force tenants to adopt specific land management practices, the Council 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 identified as part of the LNRS creation process. Mapping of opportunities and liaison with tenants is ongoing.²⁵

2.3.2 Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan 2018

The Strategic Growth Plan²⁶ 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 evidence base including, the Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire, October 2017. This strategy 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 in 2018 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 LNRS and

²⁵ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/LLR-Local-Nature-Recovery-Strategy.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.llstrategicgrowthplan.org.uk/>

provide a steer on the interplay between these areas and key infrastructure required to support future growth, the specifics of which will be identified in future Local Plans.

2.3.3 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 Minerals and Waste Plan for Leicestershire. 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.

2.3.4 Minerals and Waste Local Plan

The Minerals and Waste Local Plan²⁷ 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.

2.4 Other Strategic and Policy Influences

2.4.1 River Soar Catchment Plan 2023-2028

The River Soar Catchment Partnership is made up of the County Council, Leicester City Council and the Leicestershire district and borough councils as well as non-Governmental organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, Canal and 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

²⁷ <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>

catchment in good ecological condition with improved resilience to climate change, flooding and pollution events.’

The Catchment Plan²⁸ is a non-statutory document, but it does support the River Basin Management Plans that are statutory requirements of all EU member states. The UK is no longer an EU member state, but the UK law has not changed regarding to the UK’s commitment to the Water Framework Directive and the requirement to produce a River Basin Management Plan. Other catchment plans are available and include the Welland²⁹ and the River Mease³⁰.

2.4.2 Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan: Space for Wildlife 2016-2026

Biodiversity Action Plans were drawn up locally as a response to the UK commitment to produce the first ever Biodiversity Action Plan, a consequence of the Rio Summit Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan 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 Plan³¹ is not a statutory document but has been used as a reference document and evidence base 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 Biodiversity Action Plan is referenced in the LNRS. The future of the Biodiversity Action Plan and its relationship to the LNRS have yet to be decided.

2.4.3 Environmental Land Management Schemes

Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) are 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 Higher Level Stewardship (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. This area of policy is still under development. In the 2026 SFI scheme, smaller farmers will be able to apply in June, and landowners of all sizes will be invited from September.³²

²⁸ https://www.trentriverstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Soar-Catchment-Plan_23-28_final.pdf

²⁹ [Welland Catchment Plan](#)

³⁰ [River Mease Catchment Plan](#)

³¹ [Space for Wildlife 2016-2026](#)

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/future-of-farming-in-england>

Figure 4: Summary of national spend on ELMS in 2024-2025

Table 2: Environmental Land Management scheme spend for 2024 to 2025 (£million)			
Scheme	Total Spend (£million)	Agriculture Act Spend (£million)	Other legislative powers (£million)
Agri-environment schemes (ES and CS)	906	526	380
Sustainable Farming Incentive	305	305	0
Landscape Recovery	15	15	0
Slurry Management Grants	10	10	0
NCF tree grants (including EWCO) and biodiversity	18	0	18
Water management grants (IDBs)	54	0	54
Farming in Protected Landscapes	49	0	49
Pilots and Tests and Trials	19	19	0
Environmental advice and facilitation	18	0	18

3. Summary of Actions for Biodiversity

This section of the document describes how Leicestershire County Council fulfils its duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity through the objectives stated across a range of different strategies. It is illustrated with case studies of good practice. It starts with the Environment Strategy, which is an over-arching document with a linked action plan and describes how the Council meets a variety of environmental policy objectives. The Action for Nature document is a subsidiary of the Environment Strategy which deals more directly with biodiversity and nature recovery matters. Other strategies referring to biodiversity and nature-related matters are also described in this section.

3.1 Leicestershire County Council Environment Strategy 2018-2030

This strategy³³ 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;
- What the Council needs to do to fulfil its leadership role in a way that recognises and minimises environmental impacts;
- How the Council improves the health and wellbeing of people; and
- How the Council contributes to the economic sustainability of the County.

The vision of the strategy is: 'We will minimise the environmental impacts of the council's own activities and will contribute to the improvement of the wider environment through local action. We will continue to play a significant role in protecting and enhancing the environment of Leicestershire, meeting the challenges and opportunities of climate change, and seeking to embed environmental sustainability into both social and economic development in the county.'

The strategy sets out how the vision will be achieved through a series of aims and objectives. Figure 5 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. The 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.

³³ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2020/7/13/Environment-Strategy-2018-2030-delivering-a-better-future.pdf>

Figure 5: Biodiversity, Habitats and Local Environment aims and objectives from the Environment Strategy 2018-2030

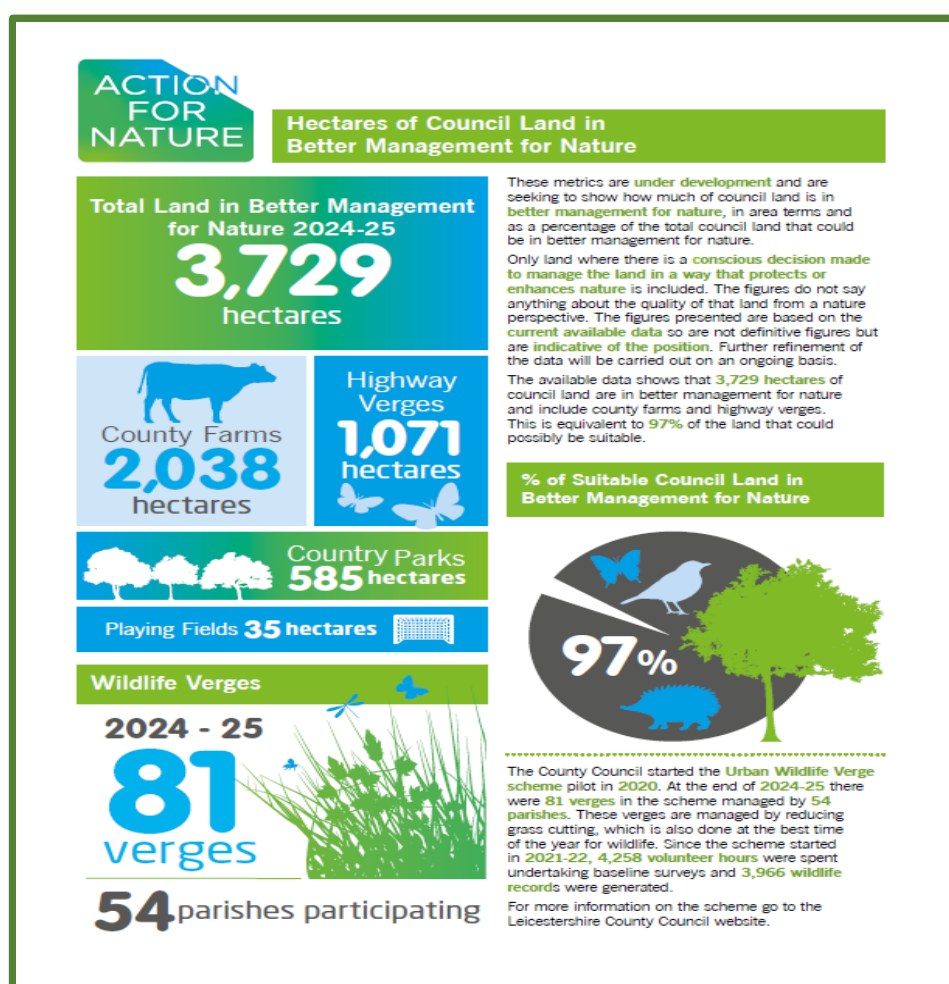
Biodiversity, Habitats and Local Environment		
G. Protect and enhance biodiversity as a natural capital asset throughout all our activities and seek to ensure that we achieve biodiversity net gain on our own land and influence improvements in the wider county	G1. Improve the biodiversity value and condition 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.

3.1.a Action for Nature Document and Action Plan

First developed in 2021 and fully updated in 2025, Action for Nature³⁴ describes the County Council's strategic approach to biodiversity, habitat and local environment for 2025-2030. The accompanying Action Plan is refreshed annually to take account of changing circumstances. Each objective in Action for Nature is related to one or more of the Environmental Strategy objectives. The Action Plan covers both forward looking objectives and any elements of business as usual that have biodiversity benefits, including the partnership working which is vital to achieving nature recovery on a wider scale.

Each year the Council publishes an Environmental Performance Report³⁵ which details progress against environmental objectives and describes the outcomes of funded projects and partnership work.

Figure 6: Example page of the 2024-2025 Environmental Performance Summary



³⁴ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/8/16/action-for-nature-strategic-approach-to-biodiversity.pdf>

³⁵ https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-01/Environmental-Performance-2024-2025-summary_0.pdf

3.2 Biodiversity Duty Plan 2024

The Biodiversity Duty Plan³⁶ listed and described all the Leicestershire County Council strategies which have a bearing on the Council's fulfilment of its statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity, as of 2024. It laid 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 gave details of multiple other strategies that contain policies or objectives that are relevant to the delivery of biodiversity conservation and enhancement. This included:

- The Leicestershire Strategic Plan 2022-2026,
- Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2019-2029,
- Delivering good health and prevention services 2022-2027 (A Public Health Strategy),
- Tree Management Strategy 2020-2025 (the strategy is currently being refreshed),
- Communities Strategy - Our Communities Approach 2022-2026,
- Investing in Leicestershire Programme, Portfolio Management Strategy 2023-2027 (current version 2024-2028),
- 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.

3.3 The Leicestershire Strategic Plan Refresh 2024-2026

The Strategic Plan³⁷ sets out the Council's long-term vision and priorities. The vision is based on five strategic outcomes that outline the end results the Council wants to see for Leicestershire. Each outcome has specific aims with corresponding actions which set the areas of focus over the period of the strategy.

The outcome most relevant to the biodiversity duty is the 'clean and green outcome' which highlights the need to protect and enhance the environment and tackle climate change. The outcome includes an aim that nature and the local environment are valued, protected, and enhanced. Some of the other outcomes will also indirectly support biodiversity in particular those in relation to great communities, a strong economy and keeping people safe and well. Delivery of the strategy is supported by

³⁶ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/LCC-Biodiversity-Duty-Plan.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/faq/2022/4/12/Appendix-B-LCC-Strategic-Plan-2022-26.pdf>

other strategies of the Council, such as the Environment Strategy, Communities Strategy and Public Health Strategy.

3.4 Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2019-2029 and Country Parks Management Plans

The County Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2019-2029 describes how the Council's Country Parks and other open spaces will be managed.³⁸ In managing the Council's Country Parks, the Council must comply with laws, such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Specifically, Beacon Hill Country Park, Jubilee Wood and Sheet Hedges Wood all include Sites of Special Scientific Interest, which are covered by the latter.

Through the provision of the Country Parks, the Council creates trails which provide access to residents. This also relieves pressure on habitats and species. The Council also works in partnership with others to manage the sites for nature and works to increase biodiversity by undertaking good land management at key sites such as Broombriggs Farm, Windmill Hill and Watermead Country Park. The Council also works to conserve and improve wildlife corridors, achieve pollinator and species rich habitats, raise awareness of the impact of the work to protect and enhance biodiversity by providing interpretation and offering educational opportunities to schools.

The strategy sets out how the Council will ensure that biodiversity is increased on all its sites through good land management. The Council also seeks to keep in balance the desire for residents and visitors to access the Country Parks and open spaces, alongside conserving often fragile habitats for nature. The Council's rangers raise public awareness of the importance of biodiversity through engagement with the public, holding activities and events. Much of the Council's work is carried out in partnership with others, including with the charity and voluntary sector, as well as being supported by a large cohort of volunteers.

The Council also has specific management plans for a number of its parks. Four of the Council's Country Parks have Green Flags: Beacon Hill Country Park near Loughborough, Market Bosworth Country Park, Snibston Colliery Park in Coalville, and Watermead (North).

The Country Parks service also recently completed a study into the future of Broombrigg's Farm to look at the potential for transitioning the farm to regenerative agricultural practices.

Parts of Beacon Hill are managed under a Higher Level Stewardship agreement, and parts are also managed under Woodland grants, which require active management. The Parks service actively control the grey squirrel population (via a contracted culling service) but to date, do not carry out deer control.

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

In 2024, the Council agreed a policy for controlling American Mink on its sites to protect existing colonies of protected Water Vole.

Much of the day-to-day work of the rangers involves conservation activities, although this must be balanced against the provision of space for sport and recreation, dog-walking and income generation activities, including parking.

Case Study 1: Country Parks



The County Council's Country Parks are home to a wide range of species. Watermead Country Park surveys reveal:

- 208 bird species,
- 24 types of dragonflies and damselflies,
- 32 species of mammal.

Some areas have been left to return to natural regeneration, which has heralded the return of Grasshopper Warblers that had disappeared for over 10 years. Watermead provides a haven for wildlife with its nature reserves and lakes.



Parts of Beacon Hill Country Park are a SSSI, and the site also acts as a demonstration for the benefits of conservation grazing. The ranger teams constantly strive to create new habitats and maintain existing high-quality areas, whilst balancing increasing footfall as people and their pets desire access to green space.

Nearby to Beacon Hill is the farm at Broombriggs which is owned by the County Council and has a new dog-walking area, orchard and other features courtesy of the Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme. The farm is gradually being converted to more conservation minded management with a view to fully regenerative agriculture practices becoming the norm in the future.

3.5 Delivering Good Health and Prevention Services 2022-2027 (A Public Health Strategy)

The Public Health Strategy sets out priorities to protect and improve the health and quality of life of everyone in Leicestershire. It contains actions around sustainable food consumption, which in turn has an impact on land management throughout the County, including land owned and managed by the Council.

The strategy promotes several initiatives that will influence biodiversity and nature including considering health in planning decisions, promoting open spaces, active travel, and collaborative approaches to improve air quality, Good Food Leicestershire and ensuring health is considered in how growth and development is delivered.

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

- **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 schools³⁹. 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** – the plan⁴⁰ 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 scheme⁴¹, and the team are now putting in place actions to achieve the gold award. The Council's Public Health work 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.

³⁹ <https://www.leicestershirehealthyschools.org.uk/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/cb4m4m2b/air-quality-action-plan-leicester-2025-2030.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/members/leicestershire/>

Case Study 2: Good Food Leicestershire



Good Food Leicestershire aims to get nutritious Leicestershire food into Leicestershire bellies.

The County Council's Public Health team recognises the link between healthy food and healthy ecosystems, including the farmland which covers most of the county. The Good Food Leicestershire Charter and activities, such as holding local Food Conversations, help people to understand the importance of combining environmental improvements and improved nutrition.

Leicestershire has already achieved the Silver Award for Sustainable Food Places and now the County is going for gold. The initiative works with producers and suppliers across the County and, to achieve the aims of a Gold Award, this work will need to support a farming transition to lower chemical and energy inputs, with nutritionally dense food as outputs, along with sustainable farm businesses and healthy farmers.

The project tries to limit food waste and links in with the National Food Strategy. It supports new entrants into food growing at home and in community settings, encouraging the inclusion of allotment spaces and orchards in new developments. Some of the outcomes that Good Food Leicestershire would like to become reality are:

- All generations eating more fruit and veg at home and in schools and workplaces,
- Consumers choosing British products to reduce the reliance on imported foods which may be produced with lower standards, especially with regard to animal welfare,
- Seasonal eating and local buying direct from producers.

Good food is vital to our physical and mental health and also impacts the health of our planet.

3.6 Tree Management Strategy 2020-2025

The Tree Management Strategy⁴² sets out how the County Council will manage the trees it has responsibility for. In particular, the strategy says that in managing the Council's tree assets, the Council will adhere to legislation governing works to trees that are designated with Tree Preservation Orders, located within Ancient Woodlands or are Local Wildlife Sites. The Council will also ensure that the work it does to manage safety, under legislation such as the Highway Act 1980, is done in compliance with the laws governing wildlife, species and habitats.

The Council is committed to replacing trees in the rural and urban landscapes and to collect and maintain data on the Council's tree planting and ownership of trees. The Council has been involved in a number of tree-planting initiatives, including its annual tree giveaway run in partnership with the Woodland Trust, which has given away 200 free tree packs in the 2025/26 planting season. The collaboration with the Woodland Trust also allows Leicestershire landowners to access help with planting more woodlands and with hedge-planting. The Council has planted 109,176 trees in the reporting period of this report.

Another long-standing partnership is with the Tree Council, with whom the County Council run joint events to support the Council's Tree Warden Network. The Tree Council's Ash Dieback Action Plan Toolkit for Local Authorities specifically mentions Leicestershire County Council as a case study of good practice.⁴³

The 2020-2025 Tree Management strategy committed the Council to an ambitious programme of tree planting. An update to the strategy and tree planting targets is in progress at the time of writing, with the likelihood of tree planting remaining a central focus of the Council's overall habitat creation work.

⁴² <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/2/16/Tree-Management-Strategy-2020-2025.pdf>

⁴³ <https://treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-Tree-Council-Ash-Dieback-Toolkit-March-2025-FINAL.pdf>

Case Study 3: Tree Planting in Leicestershire



Leicestershire County Council runs a regular tree giveaway in partnership with the Woodland Trust to encourage landowners and community groups to create new hedgerows and woodlands. The County Council is also looking at where new woodlands can be created on its own estate, as well as replacing trees which need removal due to safety issues or diseases.

Well-designed treescapes bring multiple benefits in both urban and rural settings:

- Managing water and reducing flood risk;
- Absorbing pollution and improving air quality;
- Offering shade in a time of rising average temperatures;
- Providing food and shelter to wildlife;
- Creating space for people to enjoy for leisure and health benefits;
- Bringing beauty to our towns, villages and the countryside;
- Creating opportunities for education and employment.

3.7 Community Strategy 2022-2026

The Strategy works on the principles of prevention, participation, and provides support to service providers with community collaboration. The desired outcomes are that people participate in service design and delivery and people support each other through volunteering.

The Council offers support to parish councils concerning action for nature in areas like guidance on biodiversity information for parish councils and advice on what to include in terms of conserving and enhancement biodiversity in neighbourhood plans.

The Communities and Environment and Transport Special Projects Teams also support a range of initiatives which allow parish councils to take on managing community assets such as some urban road verges, signs and street furniture. Participating parishes sign up to licence agreements ensuring that health and safety and quality criteria are met.

These teams also ensure ongoing communications with parish councils and other community groups with regular face-to-face and online meetings, newsletters, a dedicated Communities website and regular social media posts on topics of interest, which include updates on the Council's biodiversity activities and opportunities

available. This provides ongoing two-way communication and the chance for communities to have their say on a range of matters relating to nature recovery and biodiversity.

The Nature Network (formerly the Parish Nature Network) was relaunched in September 2025. The Council also supports the Tree Warden network in the County, which has 66 participating parishes and over 80 individual tree wardens.

Case Study 4: Leicestershire Tree Wardens



A Tree Warden is a volunteer who champions local trees, acting as the "eyes and ears" for their community by monitoring tree health, identifying potential problems like disease or damage, and alerting authorities to threats. They engage in hands-on tree care, such as planting, watering, and pruning, and educate the community through tree walks and other local initiatives.

Tree Wardens can also assist with broader conservation efforts, such as protecting mature trees or helping manage woodland.

The Council supports Tree Wardens through regular training and workshops and works closely with its partner, the Tree Council, to ensure that Tree Wardens have access to

resources to keep them up to date with best practice.

The Council is aiming to grow as many trees as possible locally, including taking seed from well-established stands that have proved themselves resilient.

Tree Wardens have an important role in helping to gather and propagate trees from seed.

In 2025, there was a Tree Warden Event during National Tree week which included a guided walk around Beacon Hill Country Park to look at how the new natural flood management features have been integrated into the woodland. This was followed by an updating session led by the Tree Council and the Council's Tree Officer.

3.8 Investing in Leicestershire Programme Strategy 2023-2027

The Council owns and manages property and other investments, some of which are generating income to support front line services whilst contributing to the wider strategic objectives of the Council and the economic wellbeing of the area.

The Portfolio Management Strategy for 2023 to 2027⁴⁴ was aimed at supporting the development of the portfolio to further enhance its contribution to the delivery of the strategic goals whilst continuing to improve the Council's financial resilience, and demand on services as operating costs continue to rise. It outlines how the Council will look to direct investments during this period, developing the portfolio to address areas of specific economic or social market failure, and how it will manage these to help achieve the strategic priorities of the Council.

Through the development of Council owned land, the Council has an obligation in planning law to provide a net gain in biodiversity, this can be delivered through good design in developments and or through contributions of funding to other locations within the County as stipulated in the relevant Local Plans and the LNRS. Any land developed outside of the planning process would also be subject to compliance with existing laws.

An update to this strategy has been released⁴⁵ since the writing of the Biodiversity Plan in 2024.

Any land developed outside of the planning process would also be subject to compliance with existing laws.

3.8.1 Rural Estates Strategy

The Investing in Leicestershire Programme Rural Estate Strategy 2026-2036 is part of the Investing in Leicestershire Programme, which deals specifically with the county farms and other rural estate. This is in draft form and under consultation at the time of writing. This Strategy will influence progress on conserving and enhancing biodiversity and takes into account the LNRS and the importance of supporting tenants who apply for environmental land management grants.

3.9 Highways Policies and Strategies

The Highway Asset Management Strategy⁴⁶ is committed to the ambition to achieve better design and management of the Council's highway assets with reduced pollution and waste. In doing this, the Council is reducing the pressures on the natural world. In terms of adapting to climate change the Council is committed to nature through nature-based solutions that primarily address flooding, pollution, the consequences of extreme weather such as high winds, urban heating, and drought.

⁴⁴ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-09/MTFS23-Appendix-H-IILP-Strategic-Report.pdf>

⁴⁵ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/MTFS25-Appendix-H-IILP-Strategy.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/highways-asset-management-strategy.pdf>

This policy articulates the priorities for managing highway assets. The supporting principles include a reference to taking account of environmental impact.

The Highways Asset Management Strategy outlines the way the Council will deliver the priorities identified in the Highways Asset Management Policy for the Council's management of highways. This document is the overarching policy that guides the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan and Highways Network Management Plan.

The strategy commits to meeting legal requirements affecting biodiversity, and it does this through the sub-policy and plans. There is a Highways Assets Infrastructure Management Plan⁴⁷ which directs the work involving the management and maintenance of the highway assets, for example structures, drainage, roads, footways and gullies. The most recent version of this was published in October 2025 and includes a commitment to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to climate change and support biodiversity through sustainable maintenance practices.

Highways include approximately 4,341 hectares of “soft estate” including trees, verges, visibility splays and hedgerows. The management of these is evolving gradually to reduce spraying and hard cutting of hedges as new methods become economically viable. This will be an ongoing challenge.

The Highways Team also implement the Highways Network Management Policy and Strategy and the Network Management Plan which guide departmental business plans and service specific plans. Other strategies such as the Transport Policy Strategy and the Cycling and Walking Strategy also derive from this overarching policy.

The Cycling and Walking Strategy sets out the commitment of the Council to increasing walking and cycling in Leicestershire, which is currently below the national average for these activities. To support this, the three core objectives are:

- To enhance the infrastructure that supports cycling and walking in Leicestershire by upgrading existing and providing high quality new segregated infrastructure, cycle parking, pedestrian crossings, and traffic reduction measures to create healthy streets and spaces.
 - To enable people to cycle and walk in Leicestershire by providing cycle training, working with schools and workplaces to provide people with the required skills and information.
 - To inspire a step change in cycling and walking in Leicestershire.
- Leicestershire County Council is committed to increase levels of active travel in the County and is setting ambitious targets to meet the challenges of improving public health, air quality and congestion.

The objective of enhancing infrastructure provides an opportunity to act in the interest of conserving and enhancing biodiversity. The strategy does not mention the

⁴⁷ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Highway-Infrastructure-Asset-Management-Plan-HIAMP.pdf>

legislation impacting biodiversity in design, but it does commit to reducing traffic, pollution, and putting green infrastructure in place such as planting along routes. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans commit to biodiversity by encouraging pocket parks and rainwater gardens in design.

Case Study 5: Quiet Lanes

North West Leicestershire District Council is working in partnership with Leicestershire County Council and Kegworth Parish Council to transform Long Lane and Ratcliffe Lane in Kegworth into a Quiet Lane.

This initiative is being delivered with support from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and aims to enhance road safety, promote active travel, and preserve the peaceful character of this rural route.

The improvements will make Long Lane and Ratcliffe Lane more accessible and enjoyable for everyone, whether walking, cycling, or simply enjoying the countryside. The improvements include:

- New Quiet Lane signs;
- Passing places to help vehicles navigate safely and reduce conflict;
- New bins to help keep the area clean and litter-free;
- Benches for rest and relaxation, making the lane more welcoming for all.

3.10 Leicestershire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

The Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) with responsibility for developing, maintaining, and monitoring the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS)⁴⁸ for Leicestershire.

In developing the strategy, the Council had to undertake a Habitat Regulations Assessment and meet the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species (amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. It considers the impacts of the strategy upon European designated sites. In Leicestershire this applies to Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) such as the Mease Special Area of Conservation.

The LFRMS has five principles, of which one is ‘delivering multiple benefits. The LFRMS details how each of the objectives deliver multiple benefits, which often includes environmental benefits.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment⁴⁹ found all measures would either have neutral or positive environmental effects.

⁴⁸ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/Local-Flood-Risk-Management-Strategy-for-Leicestershire.pdf>

⁴⁹ [Strategic Environmental Assessment](#)

The LLFA has some responsibility for ordinary watercourse regulation (consenting, enforcement) and environmental impacts is one of five regulation criteria set out in the Ordinary Watercourse Regulation and Culvert Policy⁵⁰ within the LFRMS.

The LLFA engagement with communities educates and brings forth actions to support the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. This includes working with local flood wardens and community resilience groups and holding flood awareness events. Natural flood management schemes improve biodiversity by increasing green-blue infrastructure and reducing reliance on hard surfaced flood defences. They also enhance areas aesthetically and, if well-designed, can add amenity value alongside flood risk reduction.

Case Study 6: Integrating Biodiversity and Natural Flood Management

Leicestershire County Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority for Leicestershire. The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for Leicestershire was published in 2024. The County Council is a member of the Soar Catchment Partnership and works alongside partners, such as Trent Rivers Trust to integrate nature-based solutions such as natural flood management into flood risk reduction projects, such as this example from the Wood Brook near Loughborough.



These interventions help to slow the flow of water across the landscape during heavy rainfall, reducing the fast flows which are most likely to cause flooding. Trent Rivers Trust has also been involved with the restoration of the River Mease, which is an important conservation site in Leicestershire and with an Environment Agency funded programme to introduce natural flood management in the Willowbrook Catchment with interventions in Harborough and Oadby, which will help to protect properties.

⁵⁰ [Ordinary Watercourse Regulation and Culvert Policy](#)

3.11 Minerals and Waste Local Plan

The Minerals and Waste Local Plan⁵¹ includes a spatial vision, spatial strategy, strategic objectives, and core policies which set out the key principles to guide the future mining and working of minerals and the form of waste management development in Leicestershire over the period to the end of 2031. The Development Management Policies set out the criteria against which planning applications for minerals and waste development will be considered. The environmental considerations within the Minerals and Waste Plan refer to the Green Infrastructure Strategy for the 6C's area.

The 6Cs Green Infrastructure Strategy⁵² was a collaborative plan for the Derby, Derby, Leicester, Nottingham (3Cs) sub-region in the East Midlands, UK, aiming to create a connected network of green spaces to support major housing growth by providing environmental, economic, and social benefits like flood management, biodiversity, health, and recreation. It identifies strategic corridors, opportunities for habitat connectivity, urban fringe enhancements, and integrates green assets with grey infrastructure for sustainable development, ensuring multi-functional green spaces for climate resilience and community wellbeing.

3.12 Resources and Waste Strategy 2022-2050

The Resources and Waste Strategy was produced by the Leicestershire Waste Partnership (LWP)⁵³. The partnership comprises of Leicestershire County Council (the Waste Disposal Authority) and the seven Leicestershire Waste Collection Authorities (the district and borough councils).

This strategy is an update of the Leicestershire Municipal Waste Management Strategy which had been in place since 2002 and subsequently reviewed and updated in 2006 and 2011. The strategy describes the recycling and waste management services which will be delivered by the LWP up to 2050. The strategy sets out:

- The policy framework - the current and future context for resources and waste management, considering local issues e.g., air quality, and global issues, including greenhouse gas reduction and climate change.
- The vision, aims, and objectives - what the LWP wants to achieve in terms of resources and waste management.

⁵¹ <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>

⁵²

https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/files/documents/6_cs_gi_volume_5_strategic_gi_network_leicester_pua_and_sub_regional_centres/6C%27s%20GI%20Volume%205%20-%20Strategic%20GI%20Network%20%28Leicester%20PUA%20and%20Sub-Regional%20Centres%29.pdf

⁵³ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/Leicestershire-Resources-and-Waste-Strategy-2022-2050.pdf>

- Strategy delivery - how resources and waste will be managed to achieve the aims and objectives, through the services provided by the LWP to its residents and communities.

The strategy intends to encourage people to take individual responsibility for consumption that generates waste and results in waste disposal, by educating people about initiatives such as home composting, using less, reuse and recycling.

Working with the LWP, work is being done to try and prevent fly-tipping which has a detrimental impact on biodiversity.

During updating of the strategy document, work is undertaken to align the LRWS with environmental and social issues, such as climate change, community strategies, air quality management, biodiversity and transport.

4. Consideration of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Protected Site and Species Conservation Strategies

In meeting its Biodiversity Duty, Leicestershire County Council is required to take into account relevant strategies as detailed below.

4.1 Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The County Council is the responsible authority for the LNRS for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and has a dedicated LNRS Project Manager. Following the publication of the LNRS in August 2025, the County Council has been working with partners and stakeholders to develop the governance structure and delivery mechanisms for the LNRS. This includes a range of toolkits and FAQs, creation of a project pipeline and regular developmental meetings.

The County Council is the Planning Authority for Minerals and Waste for Leicestershire and as such refers to the LNRS in making planning decisions.

The County Council acts on behalf of six of the local districts and Rutland County Council to provide an ecology and biodiversity service which includes collating BNG data and providing planning advice, including how the LNRS is taken into account in planning decisions.

4.2 Protected Site Strategies

There are no protected site strategies for Leicestershire at the time of writing. The County Council works closely with Natural England and any strategies developed in the lifecycle of this report will be included in updates to Action for Nature.

4.3 Species Conservation Strategies

There are no formal species conservation strategies in operation in Leicestershire at the time of writing. The County Council works closely with Natural England and any strategies developed in the lifecycle of this report will be included in updates to Action for Nature.

5. How the Council will Meet the Biodiversity Duty in the Future

The Council will continue to deliver actions related to the policy drivers and strategies as outlined above. There will be a range of annual actions (see below) which will keep actions in line with any changes to key drivers and ongoing actions to deliver against the duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

The next formal reporting period will cover the years 2026-2031. However, the Council will be reviewing and refreshing its Action for Nature Action Plan annually and continue to publish an annual Environmental Performance report, which will give interim progress reports on specific elements related to the Biodiversity Duty.

5.1 Annual Actions

The County Council shall:

- Review the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to measure compliance with the duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity to ensure their continuing suitability and / or develop new indicators.
- Deliver an Annual Environmental Performance and Progress Report⁵⁴ and infographic which shall detail progress against KPIs, including achievement of strategic objectives, and summarise progress in relation to overall environmental performance (including meeting the duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity), and show case studies of good practice and top achievements.
- Review and update the Action for Nature Action Plan⁵⁵. This contains detailed actions under the headings:
 - a. Land Management Actions,
 - b. Monitoring Actions,
 - c. Actions to control Invasive and non-native species,
 - d. Partnership and Funding Actions,
 - e. Agriculture Actions,
 - f. Communities Actions.
- Compile data relating to the actions taken to meet its BNG obligations.
- Compile data relating to the BNG resulting from or expected to result from BNG plans the Council has approved.
- Review and update the biodiversity goals and obligations in any strategy named in the Biodiversity Duty Plan which is being refreshed or revised in the current year.

⁵⁴ https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-01/Environmental-Performance-2024-2025-summary_0.pdf

⁵⁵ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/8/16/action-for-nature-delivery-plan.pdf>

5.2 Ongoing Actions

The County Council shall:

- Fulfil its role as the responsible authority for the LNRS for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland including monitoring of progress towards nature recovery.
- Provide services to other local authorities, non-Governmental and statutory organisations via the Council's Ecology and Biodiversity Team and the Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre to aid with the monitoring of biodiversity, including BNG and achievement of nature recovery.
- Strive to update Council policies in a timely fashion when changes to legislation or national policy have impacts on the Council's biodiversity obligations.
- Participate in a range of external and internal partnership working, aimed at developing and delivering good practice with regard to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, including ways to fund biodiversity gain.
- Seek funding to support the Council's biodiversity objectives, including working in partnership, to reduce pressure on the public purse.

5.3 Longer-term Outcomes

Through these annual and ongoing actions, the Council seeks to:

- Contribute to the aspirations of the Lawton Report⁵⁶ of having more space for nature by making our protected areas bigger, better protected and the aim of having 30% of land and sea protected by 2030.
- Develop and share replicable models of good practice.
- Integrate consideration of the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity into relevant policies and practices.

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<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130402170324/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

6. Opportunities for Delivering the Biodiversity Objectives

The Council has identified a range of opportunities for delivering biodiversity objectives as set out in the Action for Nature document. These are:

- 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, including use of nature-based solutions as a primary option.

6.1 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, 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 include wildlife friendly maintenance practice 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 Council's archaeology service and others.

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

The Draft Rural Estate Strategy encourages 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.

Leicestershire County Council follows the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Code⁵⁷ as a guide to best practice. The Code has three key principles, which are:

- 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 says 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.

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

Following the publication of the refreshed Action for Nature document and Action for Nature Action Plan in December 2025, an Action for Nature working group will be established in 2026 to explore ways of integrating and embedding biodiversity considerations into the Council's policies, plans and projects. In some cases, this is already well-embedded, but the size and complexity of the Council's operations mean that some services either have not prioritised biodiversity or are unaware of the benefits of considering nature-based solutions. Whilst key policies have biodiversity fully integrated, there is room for more creative thinking around, for example, maximising the public health benefits of an integrated food production and nature recovery system.

In some cases, there is an element of conflict between policies, for example, maintaining sight lines on highways or in parks for safety reasons can conflict with allowing unfettered growth of vegetation. Cross-departmental working and creative thinking will be used to balance existing of options and remain open to new solutions as they become available.

6.4 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. The Council uses these opportunities to offer insight, knowledge or expertise to ensure biodiversity is considered and improved.

⁵⁷ <https://www.nfuonline.com/media/2znayotx/agricultural-landlord-and-tenant-code-of-practice-for-england.pdf>

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 (on behalf of the district councils), and minerals/ quarry workings. This provides an opportunity to influence the design quality of development. Applicants should refer to the LNRS as a supporting document and utilise the priority measures within the LNRS 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 design⁵⁸ and ecology can influence projects and development that require planning permission. Part 3e of the Highways Design Guide relates to Green Infrastructure and reducing impacts on wildlife.

The Council also provides support to other projects, such as 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.

6.5 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 for Nature Action Plan outlines the actions required to unlock these opportunities and delivers on the objectives of the Environment Strategy for biodiversity.

The awareness raising and education currently include:

- Facilitating six weekly online Nature Network meetings with talks on a range of ecology and biodiversity policy topics.

⁵⁸ <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/leicestershire-highway-design-guide>

- Posting relevant presentations and webinars on the Leicestershire Communities website.⁵⁹
- Responding to biodiversity related customer enquiries.
- Training and supporting Environmental Action Volunteers (EAVs), Country Parks volunteers and Tree Wardens.
- Hosting the Swift Partnership.
- Providing training and support to parish councils adopting urban verges for wildlife and advising on site licence agreements for groups managing Council-owned public spaces.
- Delivering training courses and events directly or with partners relating to biodiversity and nature recovery.
- Developing FAQs for specific groups related to nature recovery and providing toolkits for nature recovery projects (currently in development).
- Supporting independent citizen science groups and groups tackling invasive species in their neighbourhoods.
- Encouraging individuals and groups to submit biodiversity records and demonstrating use of relevant apps.
- Hosting and supporting events with partners on a range of relevant topics to share learnings and good practice.
- Signposting partners including community groups and individuals to relevant information and updates.
- Encouraging staff to attend relevant continuing professional development, conferences and webinars to stay up to date and cascade learning.

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

The Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre (LRERC) collects and processes data from a range of sources. Work is ongoing to improve data collection and time lag between data collection and data processing and analysis. The Council also works closely with other agencies who collect, analyse and disseminate data.

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.

The LRERC⁶⁰ 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.

⁵⁹ <https://www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/communities-network/>

⁶⁰ [Leicestershire and Rutland Environment Records Centre](#)

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 Biodiversity Action Plan 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 district councils, except for Charnwood Borough Council. This is to ensure that development can achieve betterment for biodiversity and help achieve policy objectives.

The Historic Environment Record⁶¹ 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, planning applications submitted to Rutland County Council and the district and borough councils of Leicestershire. 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.

6.7 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, the Council 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.

⁶¹ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/historic-environment-record>

7. Challenges to Enhancing and Conserving Biodiversity and Nature Recovery

This section looks at some of the challenges that will affect the achievement of national targets (such as 30by30), which will, in turn, have implications for local policies to conserve and enhance biodiversity and ensure nature recovery at scale.

7.1 Focus on Economic Growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product

Current Government policy is highly focused on housebuilding and removing barriers to large scale infrastructure developments, including protections for species and habitats. The Government states it is aiming to remove red tape and create a win-win situation for nature and development. However, serious concerns have been raised by expert organisations in the fields of wildlife and nature recovery that plans within the EIP and the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 will remove protections for nature and act contrary to commitments to bring about nature recovery.

Government statements that the economy has been held back because of concern for bats and newts have been widely reported.

Figure 7: Quote from ENDS Article about the Planning and Infrastructure

The Planning and Infrastructure Act is set to upend how we as a country assess, and try and mitigate against, the impact of development on the natural environment. Developers wanting to build in areas (we don't know which ones) designated as being covered by an Environmental Delivery Plan (we haven't seen an example) will not have to worry about things like abiding by the Habitats Regulations, or assessing what nature is there before they build. They will be able to pay a one-off amount to Natural England, which in turn – despite having been cut down to the bone over the years from budget cuts – will sort some nature recovery out elsewhere.

To boot, the Act also limits the number of legal challenge attempts the public can make against government decisions on major infrastructure projects.

Today, the government has published its [implementation plan](#) for the Nature Restoration Fund, and Natural England will begin consultation on the first Environmental Delivery Plans sometime next year – the first will cover off nutrient neutrality issues. But in the years ahead, the impact of the legislation – rushed through with only a veneer of public consultation – will need to be closely watched.

I needn't remind ENDS' readers of the rhetorical descent into lazy swipes at small animals that the new government launched itself into this year, and which set the soundtrack to the Planning and Infrastructure Act. (Tess Colley ENDS Report Dec 2025).

The Nature Restoration Fund establishes an alternative approach for developers to meet environmental responsibilities relating to certain protected sites and species.

Under the Nature Restoration Fund, Natural England will submit draft Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) to the Secretary of State. If the Secretary of State, then decides to make the EDP, this will allow developers to discharge their relevant responsibilities by paying a levy.

Where an EDP is in place, developers who use it will not be required to offset their impact on the relevant environmental feature of a protected site or a protected species on a development-by-development basis, as required in current legislation. These obligations will be fulfilled by Natural England on a strategic level funded by the levy.

It is too early to say whether this approach will deliver the win-win for development and nature recovery that is hoped for.

The impact of this on land in Leicestershire is not yet known but potentially the push towards economic growth could adversely affect LNRS priority areas and/or result in harm to species and/or habitats. Alternatively, if the County Council or local partners/partnerships can access nature restoration funds, then there may be funding available for more ambitious nature restoration projects.

7.2 Reliance on development of Green Finance Markets

Much of UK Nature Recovery policy is closely linked to the need to generate private investment rather than relying on central Government funds.

The UK nature finance market is developing but faces a significant funding gap, with private investment needed to meet nature recovery goals, driven by emerging compliance markets like BNG and voluntary carbon markets, alongside growing corporate interest and financial product innovation.

Finance for nature has been steadily climbing year on year between 2019 and 2023, drawing from public bilateral, multilateral, philanthropic and some private finance sources. There is progress from the private sector with around US\$23 billion globally in private finance flowing to nature-based solutions in 2023, according to soon to be released United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) data.⁶² More businesses are recognising their impact – and dependence – on the natural world, with many joining initiatives like the UK-supported Taskforce for Nature-related Finance Disclosures (TNFD) to better understand and report on nature-related risks.

Despite these positive trends, many indicators show a finance gap of US\$700 billion annually needed to meet the UK's 2030 targets. Public finance budgets are increasingly constrained, and private sector investment leveraged by public development finance in nature has been inconsistent.

⁶² <https://defraenvironment.blog.gov.uk/2025/10/10/nature-by-the-numbers-what-the-2025-biodiversity-finance-trends-dashboard-reveals/>

Data availability and quality remain a significant hurdle. Getting timely, accurate, and transparent information across biodiversity finance indicators is challenging, and many indicators face a two-year time lag. Private sector finance data and information about reforming harmful subsidies remain incomplete.

More can be done to harness the connection between biodiversity and climate. While around 90% of bilateral biodiversity finance already contributes to climate goals, there is less evidence that climate finance will support biodiversity outcomes.

The UK Government has released a Biodiversity Finance Trends Dashboard⁶³ which links protecting nature to economic necessity on the global scale. The kind of instruments and drivers at play in the market are:

- **Biodiversity Net Gain:** A key compliance market in England, BNG mandates developers to improve biodiversity, creating demand for nature restoration projects.
- **Nature Markets Framework:** The Government's strategy to scale private investment, setting goals for annual private investment in nature recovery.
- **Voluntary Carbon and Nature Markets:** Growing interest in high-integrity credits for carbon and water neutrality, though integrity and measurement remain key focus areas.
- **Business and Finance Engagement: Financial institutions** (e.g., Barclays, Aviva) are launching nature-related products, and companies are investing in nature-positive solutions, driven by resource pressures and Environment and Sustainability (ESG) goals.
- **Disclosure and Standards:** Initiatives like the TNFD⁶⁴ and consultations on Sustainability Reporting Standards aim to improve transparency and investor confidence.

Currently public spending remains the largest source, but private finance, landowners, and water companies contribute substantially, with water company investment alone estimated at £22.1 billion (2025-2030)⁶⁵. Despite progress, the rate of investment is below the scale needed to meet UK biodiversity targets.

In essence, the UK nature finance market is experiencing significant growth and innovation, propelled by policy and market demand, but it is still in the early stages, requiring sustained Government direction and private capital to bridge a substantial funding deficit and to fully realise its potential.

Uncertainty in nature markets affects the County Council in its role as a planning authority (as rules regarding BNG are in flux) and make it difficult to predict where net gains might occur. It also affects the role of the County Council as a landowner

⁶³ [the Biodiversity Finance Trends Dashboard](#)

⁶⁴ <https://tnfd.global/>

⁶⁵ <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2025/01/29/natural-england-welcomes-22-1bn-investment-in-water-industry-national-environment-programme/>

and when acting in partnership with others. The level of uncertainty makes long-term investment at the levels needed less likely to be forthcoming from private sources.

7.3 Integrating Nature Recovery and Food Production

Leicestershire is a largely rural county and the Council itself owns a considerable amount of farmland. Balancing the needs of land managers to create sustainable businesses and have food production systems that are healthy for both people and nature are challenges that require both innovation and investment.

The County Council is committed to supporting both its own tenants and farmers and landowners in the wider county with the transition to more nature friendly farming and to developing local markets and sustainable supply chains.

Government policy for funding the farming transition is reliant on the award of payments to farmers for Environmental Land Management (ELM) grants including Sustainable Farming Initiatives (SFI). The early closure of the SFI programme in 2025 led to disappointment and uncertainty amongst farmers who missed out on potential payments. The SFI scheme is due to relaunch in 2026, but how budget will be allocated is yet to be revealed.

The new Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier, which is replacing the pre-Brexit payments system, was only open to invitees in 2025. Despite promises during its design phase that the new system would benefit smaller landowners, in practice, the Government is relying heavily on larger landed estates. The National Estate for Nature (NEN) group, whose members own 10% of England's land set to play a key role in both nature recovery and the roll out of the expected Land Use Framework. As stated elsewhere this group's activities will focus on the Government's house-building and clean energy priorities with nature recovery cited as a 'concomitant aim'.

7.4 Uncertainty in Environmental Regulation and Regulator Funding

There is a high degree of uncertainty around how environmental regulation will take place in the longer-term. Relatively new policies, such as the introduction of mandatory BNG in 2024, are already being altered with no guarantee that there will not be further changes.

Defra as a ministry has had six different ministers since 2020, with a new incumbent being appointed as the seventh in September 2025.

Despite having increased responsibilities, the Defra family, including Natural England, has had funding cuts, although additional funding has been given to Government priority areas such as the Landscape Recovery Scheme, Protected Sites Strategies and the Nature Restoration Fund. The regulator's total planned funding for 2025-26 is £333.6 million.⁶⁶ As stated elsewhere, the Government is

⁶⁶ <https://www.endsreport.com/article/1924257/natural-england-spending-increase-despite-12-core-funding-cut#:~:text=Natural%20England's%20'core%20funding'%20will,26%20is%20%C2%A3333.6m.>

expecting private finance to play a major role in conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

For the County Council, there are potential positives, particularly proposed changes to flood risk management funding from April 2026, which will see greater emphasis on natural flood management.

The latest Natural England Strategy: Nature for Growth, Health and Security⁶⁷ again emphasises the Government's view that nature is vital to economic growth. The strategy refers to four outcomes:

- Recovering Nature,
- Building Better Places,
- Improving Health and Wellbeing,
- Delivering Security through Nature.

The Strategy does not contain any costed options. There is reference to targeted support, for example, for green social prescribing but no details on whether this includes financial support or how this will be targeted. This makes it difficult for local authorities and non-Governmental organisations to plan interventions. The degree of uncertainty around investment in nature and other potentially competing priorities presents a considerable challenge to biodiversity conservation and enhancement across all areas.

It is with this rapidly evolving regulatory landscape in mind that the County Council has set its longer-term proactive goals out in the Action for Nature document but has allowed for reactive changes in the Action for Nature Action Plan.

7.5 Data Availability, Quality and Accessibility

High quality biodiversity data is paramount to understanding both where and how to focus actions, and to understanding and evaluating the impact of those actions. Data management is a challenge from commissioning and completing surveys, through data collection, data analysis, storage, access and distribution, accessibility to different audiences, and how data is used in practice. There has been a proliferation of apps and campaigns that have opened the doors to increase in citizen science data being collected, alongside improvements to monitoring and data management by professional bodies. Nevertheless, having resources to collect and analyse data, or access data from elsewhere is a challenge.

Leicestershire County Council and LRERC are working to improve biodiversity data management across the Council and the LNRS area.

⁶⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-englands-strategy-recovering-nature-for-growth-health-and-security/natural-englands-strategy-recovering-nature-for-growth-health-and-security>

7.6 Ecosystem Complexity and Climatic Changes

Climatic changes are occurring rapidly with the predicted warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers becoming apparent, alongside other less predictable extreme climatic events. These changes are impacting ecosystem dynamics with species changing ranges or becoming extinct, and non-naturalised species becoming more prevalent.

Where a species has not had time to naturalise (for example, not having a predator to keep numbers in check), it may spread rapidly and replace native and naturalised species. In this case human land managers have to take on the role which would otherwise have been played by a natural predator or adapted plant species. Control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) is an ongoing challenge which also creates some levels of conflicting views. For example, Himalayan Balsam is seen as an INNS as it spreads widely in riparian ecosystems and much time and energy is dedicated to its removal. However, the plant has value for pollinating insects and potential medicinal/food properties. Beavers will eat invasive species such as Elodea, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

To date, there are no beavers in Leicestershire, but this illustrates the challenge of keeping pace with rapid ecosystem changes and finding nature-friendly solutions to fast growth of unwelcome species, alongside efforts to prevent and reverse decline of valued species.

Extreme weather events impact wildlife as well as humans and, whilst there are innovations in predicting trends and monitoring actual conditions (such as the use of satellites or drones to monitor changes over wide areas), it remains a challenge to keep pace with changes to species and habitats.

8. Actions to Meet the Council's Biodiversity Net Gain Obligations

Mandatory BNG has been in place for major developments since February 2024 and small developments since April 2024. Policy regarding BNG is still evolving with refinements to the system coming through the Planning and Infrastructure Act and changes to the NPPF. Leicestershire County Council is not currently directly responsible for housing developments. In the future, local government reorganisation will create new planning authorities with redefined roles and responsibilities.

Prior to mandatory BNG, ecology and biodiversity was (and remains) a material consideration when determining planning applications. This means that planning authorities must take impacts on wildlife into account when making planning decisions. They can refuse applications that cause significant harm to biodiversity or, when permission is granted can impose planning conditions that mitigate or compensate for the harm, for example, by creating new habitats.

The NPPF states that “opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate”. The Environment Act 2021 states that the development must provide 10% BNG above the baseline habitats value recorded on site. If a developer cannot do this on the development site, they will have to provide off-site BNG, either on their own land or on third-party land.

The baseline habitat condition is determined by carrying out surveys using the Biodiversity Metric.⁶⁸

Leicestershire County Council has BNG obligations in the following contexts:

- Leicestershire County Council is a landowner and developer and responsible for ensuring mandatory BNG requirements are met (where applicable) through the planning process when undertaking its own development;
- Leicestershire County Council is the planning authority for minerals and waste and its own development for Leicestershire;
- The Council's Ecology and Biodiversity Team provide BNG, species and habitat advice to the planning services at:
 - Leicestershire County Council,
 - Blaby District Council,
 - Harborough District Council,
 - Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council,

⁶⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-biodiversity-metric-tools-and-guides>

- Melton Borough Council,
- North-West Leicestershire District Council,
- Oadby and Wigston Borough Council,
- Rutland County Council.

The service comments on planning applications when consulted by the local planning authority and advises the planners on biodiversity matters (including BNG, species and habitats) and makes recommendations for how they determine the application but does not have the final say about the decision made by the planning authority.

8.1 The Actions Leicestershire County Council has taken for BNG

Over 2022-2023, Leicestershire County Council led a partnership of eight authorities (Blaby, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Melton, North West Leicestershire, Oadby & Wigston, Rutland and Leicestershire) in jointly commissioning a piece of work to review the resource and capacity and most appropriate delivery model for ecological planning advice across all authorities in light of the introduction of mandatory BNG. The outcome of the work was an expanded, centralised Ecological and Biodiversity Team hosted by Leicestershire County Council to deliver advice to all the partner authorities. This model has been adopted with the team growing over the course of the monitoring period to meet the modelled demand from across the partner authorities as well as Leicestershire County Council itself in its role as the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority.

The Ecology and Biodiversity Team sit alongside Leicestershire County Council's Planning Team in a Planning, Historic and Natural Environment service area. This conscious structural set-up ensures close collaboration across the Planning and the Ecology and Biodiversity Teams.

A Memorandum of Agreement between the County Council Ecology Team and the determining authorities lays out the terms of County Council advice on planning policy, casework advice and the provision of constraint layers for protected species, habitat and BNG. These services should discharge the legal duties of each partner determining authority with respect to statutory BNG within these areas of work.

Leicestershire County Council has led a range of BNG related training events including:

- Internal all-member briefing on BNG for Leicestershire County Council elected members;
- Joint Leicestershire and Rutland training session commissioned and hosted by Leicestershire County Council, with over 140 officers from nine authorities attending in-person and online;
- Joint Leicestershire and Rutland training session commissioned and hosted by Leicestershire County Council with around 60 councillors from nine authorities attending in-person and online;

- Ongoing internal BNG training for staff across the Authority, particularly those in planning, property, and highways;
- BNG training for parish council members through the Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC).

Across the Planning and Ecology and Biodiversity Teams, there have been systems and process put in place to manage the introduction of BNG, including:

- Development of a specific module within the County Council's planning application and consultation database system, to manage the planning application consultations on ecological matters (including BNG) from the partnership authorities and itself;
- Building advice on BNG matters as part of the County Council's pre-application advice offering;
- Updating of decision notice templates to take account of mandatory BNG conditions.

8.2 Details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans that Leicestershire County Council has consulted on or approved

The Council's Ecology and Biodiversity Team use the MasterGov system for uploading and processing of planning applications that they advise on.

Only baseline habitat value must be confirmed at determination stage under the BNG legislation. This means that the actual BNG that will be achieved can only be estimated and it is only when the planning conditions have been fulfilled that the actual BNG can be determined. Furthermore, the relationship between this and nature recovery is even harder to determine as there will be a time lag between the actions taken to improve habitats and the impacts of those improvements.

Each successful application will have a Biodiversity Gain Plan, but this may differ from what happens in practice. The development cannot begin until the plan is approved but the gain can only be counted if the local planning authority is satisfied that it will be maintained for 30 years following completion of the development.

For the reporting period of this report, eight planning permissions were granted subject to mandatory BNG of which, five applications have discharged their BNG planning conditions. This has resulted in a net unit habitat increase of 0.9713 and a combined net unit change in hedgerow of 1.2208.

8.3 How the Council will meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period

In order to meet BNG obligations over the next five years, Leicestershire County Council will:

- Undertake ongoing monitoring and review of BNG requirements to ensure that legislative requirements are met – in relation to itself as a planning authority and developer, and in the planning advice it provides to other partner authorities;
- Maintain close working relationship across the Planning and Ecology and Biodiversity Teams;

- Ensure that the Ecology and Biodiversity Team is resourced to meet the modelled capacity necessary to delivery ecological planning (including BNG) advice to itself and across the partner authorities; and that demand and capacity is kept under review particularly as monitoring and enforcement requirements increase;
- Ensure that the delivery of ecological planning advice (including in relation to BNG) and the services necessary to support it (e.g. the Leicestershire and Rutland Ecological Records Centre) is considered as part of the process of local government reorganisation;
- Will consider BNG as part of any new Minerals and Waste Local Plan developed in the new planning system;
- Consider further updates to its local validation list and whether to include a guidance section on BNG submission content, which can be shared and used as a good practice template for other authorities across Leicestershire.

8.3.1. Proposed Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework

In December 2025, the Government launched a major consultation on planning reform⁶⁹.

These reforms propose a clearer, more rules-based planning system, where developments that meet requirements can move forward with greater certainty. The intention is to make the system easier to navigate for communities, local authorities and developers, while unlocking growth, supporting rural communities and protecting nature at scale.

Early evidence suggests BNG is working well for larger developments. More developers are seeking ecological advice earlier in the planning process and designing site layouts to avoid impacts on biodiversity and deliver more habitat onsite⁷⁰.

However, the Government recognises that while the policy is effective overall, some smaller developments and specific types of sites - in particular on brownfield land - are finding BNG more challenging and proportionately more expensive to deliver. The new system became mandatory in 2024, and early lessons learnt from implementation are making adjustments necessary as the policy beds in.

Smaller developments on sites below 0.2 hectares will be exempted from BNG requirements, reducing costs for small and medium sized enterprise developers and saving local planning authorities time and money.

The Government will consult on an additional targeted exemption for brownfield residential development, testing appropriate definitions of brownfield and a range of potential exemption sizes up to 2.5 hectares. By focusing specifically on

⁶⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/housing-sec-pledges-to-go-further-than-ever-before-to-hit-15-million-homes>

⁷⁰ <https://defraenvironment.blog.gov.uk/2025/12/17/planning-reforms-delivering-homes-supporting-farmers-and-protecting-nature/>

residential development and on brownfield land of lower ecological value, the Government hopes to support housing while protecting the delivery of BNG elsewhere.

There are also proposals to introduce measures to make it easier, quicker, and cheaper to deliver BNG offsite.

A full consultation response and implementation timeline is expected to be published in 2026, alongside a consultation response on implementing BNG for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), which will go live in May 2026. Until changes are officially implemented, which will require secondary legislation in some cases, BNG continues to apply in its current form.

This will be supported by the rollout of LNRs, which will be able to map areas of importance for biodiversity and identify measures to enhance and improve them.

These changes complement the new Nature Restoration Fund announced in the Planning and Infrastructure Act, which will pool funding from developers to deliver strategic, landscape-scale solutions to protect and restore nature.

The changes will make clear that development needed by the farming industry should be supported by local councils. This means boosting support for on-farm reservoirs, greenhouses, polytunnels and farm shops.

8.3.2. Impact of Local Government Reorganisation

At the time of writing, there is no definite decision on how administrative boundaries across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland will change over the coming years. However, as the County Council currently provides services (as detailed above) to most of the current districts (with the exception of Charnwood), continuity of service should be assured.

Currently the County Council is only reporting on BNG gains relating to its own direct planning functions to avoid double-counting in other authorities' Biodiversity Reports, but it would be relatively straightforward to integrate data once the reporting boundaries change.

Appendix 1: Information about Leicestershire County Council

At the time of writing, the Government is considering proposals for local government reorganisation, which may come into effect during the lifecycle of this report. The information below is correct at the time of writing.

Leicestershire County Council is the upper-tier local authority for the non-metropolitan county of Leicestershire, England. It is responsible for delivering key public services of which these have the most impact on biodiversity and the Council's actions to support nature:

- Public Health, Law and Governance - Communities Team,
- Public Health, Law and Governance - Health Improvement Systems Team,
- Corporate Resources - Country Parks and Forestry,
- Corporate Resources - Strategic Property including Rural Estate,
- Corporate Resources - Operational Services and Facilities Management,
- Environment and Transport - Highways Operations and Major Projects,
- Environment and Transport - Environment and Waste Commissioning,
- Environment and Transport - Planning and Historic and Natural Environment.

These functions are distinct from those of the seven district and borough councils, which manage local services like bin collections, housing, and local parks. The County Council also plays a leadership role in partnerships for health, community safety, and economic development.

The Council operates under a Leader and a Cabinet system and consist of 55 elected councillors representing 53 electoral divisions. Councillors serve four-year terms and meet at County Council sessions to approve budgets, major plans, and constitutional changes.

The Cabinet is led by the Council Leader, who appoints Cabinet members responsible for executive decisions and policy implementation supported by Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees include holding the Executive to account, putting forward proposals to develop and improve policy, and review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area

Regulatory Committees carry out non-executive functions such as planning, licensing, and governance.

The Council's Chief Executive oversees the administration and staff. The current minority administration, as of May 2025, is led by Reform, who have the largest number of Councillors of any party but not a majority of seats.

The Council collaborates on environmental matters with the district councils via the Greener Living Leicestershire initiative, which includes representatives from all the districts and borough councils.

Other than Charnwood, all the district level planning authorities use the County Council's Ecology and Biodiversity Team for services related to planning and BNG.

