

Action for Nature

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



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

1. Introduction

Working together for the benefit of everyone: Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2018 to 2022¹ commits the Council to being 'a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, to use natural resources wisely and to contribute to the recovery of nature'.

The Council's Environment Strategy 2018-2030², provides the vision behind this commitment:

'We will minimise the environmental impact of our own activities and will improve the wider environment through local action. We will play our full part to protect the environment of Leicestershire., We will tackle climate change and embed environmental sustainability into what we do.'

This vision is supported by several aims and objectives that directly and indirectly support action on biodiversity, habitat and the local environment.

This contextual document 'Action for Nature' builds on and supports these aims and objectives and seeks to compile into a single document:

- an understanding of the policy and legislative context within which achievement of these aims and objectives is set;
- an understanding of the current state of nature in Leicestershire;
- the guiding principles and rationale of our approach to taking action for nature;
- identification of the key opportunities for action;
- a supporting Delivery Plan that provides more detail of the actions to be taken;
- a foundation on which further action for nature can be taken as greater understanding of future legislative and other changes arise, such as the Environment Bill.

The Environment Strategy recognises the significant decline in our natural environment that has and is taking place and acknowledges the role that Leicestershire County Council plays in contributing to this decline, as well as our contribution to global warming and to climate change. The Environment Strategy also recognises and sets out the role the Council can and will play in addressing this decline in our natural environment.

This document brings together the headlines from the various internal and external strategies and plans that touch on supporting and improving nature in Leicestershire as well providing clarity on the County Councils interactions with nature.

¹ [LCC Strategic Plan 2018-22](#)

² [LCC Environment Strategy 2018-2030 - Delivering-a-better-future](#)

This document is not intended to be used as evidence for local plans, however it does provide insight into the available evidence base being used for decision making in Leicestershire which includes the Leicestershire & Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan (LRBAP)³. This document goes further than the LRBAP by being more specific about how Leicestershire County Council overall can influence change for biodiversity and nature not just through its statutory planning responsibilities within minerals and waste but also through its other functions.

Biological diversity is underpinned by the state of the environment and the habitats that a diversity of species needs to exist and thrive within. Our strategic approach has biodiversity loss as its core concern and many of the actions to protect and enhance biodiversity will need to become integral to the operational processes and procedures of the County Council. To improve biodiversity, there is a need to understand the priorities for intervention and how these are impacted upon by habitat and the local environment such as green and blue infrastructure, i.e. the flora, landscape, rivers and streams etc.

The ambition is to not only avoid, mitigate and compensate for the loss in habitats and species within Leicestershire, but to enhance and create space for nature. This can only be done by working with local people, partners, other public service providers, local businesses and most importantly with nature.

The Council has already committed to delivering the Environment Strategy 2018-2030, this document outlines our framework for action establishing that nature, the environment and our way of life are inextricably linked.

This strategic approach document provides further depth into how activity on delivering the Environment Strategy objectives for 'Biodiversity, Habitats and the Local Environment,' supports wider strategic policies, the supply and demand of natural assets and their contribution to the environment, economy and society/communities. This document explores some of the challenges, opportunities and priorities for the Council and the County in doing this.

This strategic approach document is supported by a Delivery Plan which will evolve over time to continue to be fit for purpose and to adapt to developing needs, changes in legislation and changing opportunities and resources.

A healthy natural environment helps society and the economy flourish. Our natural assets and eco-systems can help us in many ways. We know this as the 'capital' that we derive from those assets, such as, the reduction in the costs of flooding, provision of resilient landscapes against pests and diseases, the sustaining of food production and the supporting of recreation and the production of raw materials for construction. An environment that can sustain our needs, provide us with the benefits we enjoy without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same, is a resilient environment. This document starts to set out how Leicestershire County Council will contribute to the achievement of this.

1.1. Importance of Biodiversity as Natural Capital

There is a wealth of evidence that underpins the consideration of biodiversity as key to our whole existence on planet earth. There are many great examples of how biodiversity plays a crucial part in our world from its' ability to cleanse our atmosphere through habitats such as forests and wetlands, to enabling us to produce a variety of food and medicines. It is often at

³ [Leicestershire & Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan](#)

the centre of our cultural traditions and sustains our health and well-being through our fascination of the natural world and its unexpected curiosities.

Mental Health research from around the world has shown that nature has a restorative impact on people's psychological state and often this is linked to observing beautiful places made up of different types of plants and animal. The ability of nature to restore our spirits and keep us healthy has been particularly prevalent in 2020/21 during the Covid-19 Corona Virus Pandemic. A YouGov poll⁴ at the start of the initial 2020 full nationwide lockdown found that 76% of people felt that nature had provided comfort or relief and 70% felt that rapid economic growth should not be at the expense of nature.

The value we place on biodiversity is very much being questioned in a new government report; The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review, 2020⁵.

The report makes it clear that people need nature as our economies are embedded within it and so we need to recognise the losses of biological diversity and how this will impact upon us. Dasgupta suggests that the central solution to the issue of biodiversity loss is ensuring that our demand for what nature provides does not outstrip the supply and that we reverse the decline we are currently seeing.

⁴ https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report_nature-and-green-recovery_rspbyougov_june-2020.pdf

⁵ [The Dasgupta Review 2020](#)

2. Guiding Principles of our Approach

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

The guiding principles are:

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

2.1 Whole systems approach

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

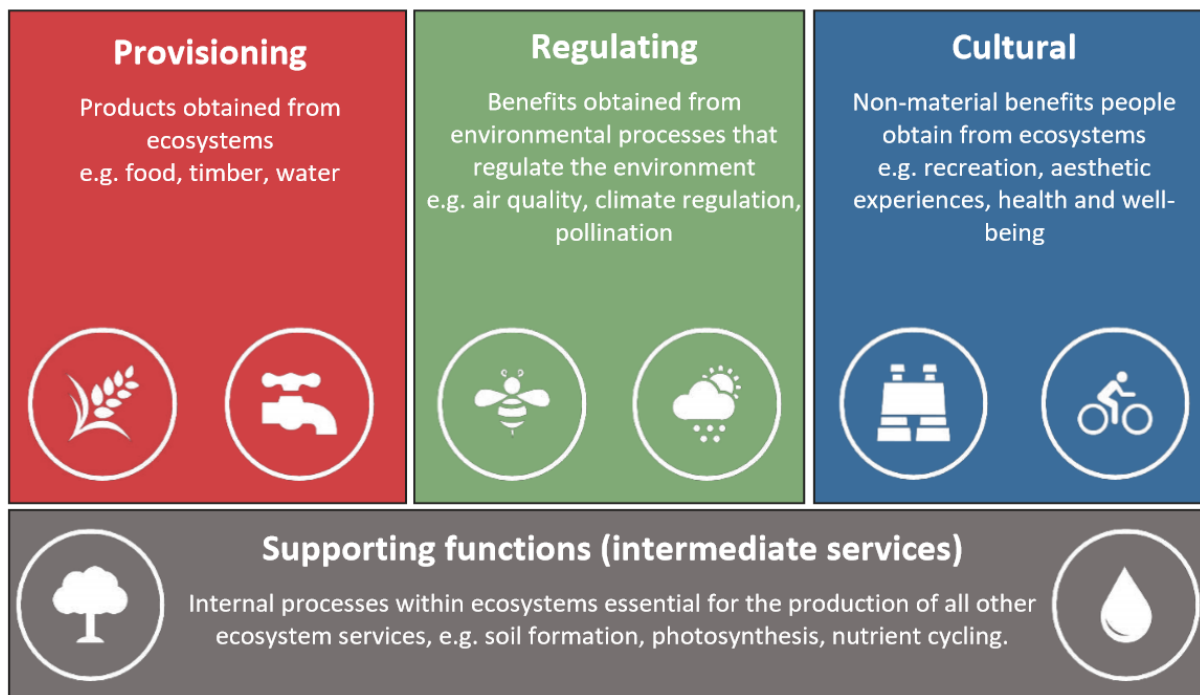
- To tackle the biodiversity crisis as part of an ecological process supporting the recovery of other environmental assets - soils, water, air, mineral sites. We want to improve the quality of these assets too.
- Biodiversity is recognised as a 'Natural Capital' asset that can provide eco-system goods & services to society. We act to protect, mitigate and improve biodiversity and habitats and find ways of demonstrating the eco-system services that they provide such as carbon sequestration or improved productivity of arable crops.

Figure 1 provides more details on the role of biodiversity as an eco-systems service.

2.2 Evidence based approach

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

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



2.3 Meeting legal and statutory obligations as a minimum

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

2.4 Collaborative working both internally and externally

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

2.5 Co-ordinated strategic thinking and delivery

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

2.6 Clear and measurable cross-sectoral outcomes

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

3. Legislative and Policy Context

The development of the strategic approach and Delivery Plan has been considered within the context of National, Regional and Local Policy. These policies help direct the work of the Council. It is important to understand the legal and policy context to set the priorities of the Council in this area and to help inform the development of the appropriate areas for action. The following sections set out the key areas of the legislative and policy context.

3.1 National Policy

3.1.1 Convention on Biological diversity and Aichi Targets

The Convention on Biological Diversity⁶ is an international legal instrument for the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources that has been ratified by 196 nations. The governing body is the Conference of the Parties (COP) which includes the UK government. In October 2010 the COP agreed 20 targets. As this conference took place in Japan, they become known as the 'Aichi Targets'. The Aichi Targets include:

- **Strategic Goal A:** Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society;
- **Strategic Goal B:** Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use;
- **Strategic Goal C:** Improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding eco-systems, species and genetic diversity;
- **Strategic Goal D:** Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and eco-system services;
- **Strategic Goal E:** Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building.

These targets follow through into UK policy in the form of the UK Post 2010 - Biodiversity Framework. The Conference of the Parties Post 2020 - Biodiversity Framework is being developed and the first draft will be discussed in May 2021, prior to submission for adoption at the next Conference of the Parties on the Convention of Biological Diversity, COP15. This is a United Nations Conference like the Conference on Climate Change COP 26 but is dedicated to Biological Diversity.

3.1.2 A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment

The 25 Year Environment Plan⁷ published in 2018 by Government sets the basis for measuring government success in improving the environment. The 25 Year Plan focuses on the creation of habitat and nature recovery, the creation of Sustainable Urban Drainage and bringing nature closer to where people live and work. The Plan seeks to embed Environmental Net Gain into development and the first step in doing this is the production of a 'Net Gain' metric that initially measures the value of biodiversity and attaches monetary value to different habitats.

⁶ <https://www.cbd.int/>

⁷ [25 Year Environment Plan](#)

3.1.3 The Environment Bill

The new Environment Bill⁸ which is currently going through Parliament will transform the opportunities for nature by creating a requirement for higher tier local authorities (i.e. County Councils and Districts) to engage in the development and delivery of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Higher tier authorities under an amended NERC Act will be required to 'enhance' biodiversity on their land and the Act proposes to make Biodiversity Net Gain a mandatory requirement.

The Bill will also strengthen the enabling of resilient measures to cope with flooding and drought. These are likely to be Natural Flood Management measures, an approach that uses nature to help with flood prevention and mitigation, such as creating meanders in rivers higher up stream rather than installing hard engineered barriers downstream.

The development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy is very much 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.

Table 2 provides a summary of the general principles for increasing the resilience of biodiversity which informs thinking in this area.

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

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

The 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 included within the Act.

3.1.5 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations¹⁰ place a duty on local authorities to maintain enough diversity of habitats for wild birds.

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

The County Council and all local authorities (including Parish and Town Councils) have responsibilities to ensure that they comply with the Act¹¹ in all areas of relevant activity including as a landowner and operator of public services. Part 3 of the Act expects local authorities to undertake their Duty to Conserve Biodiversity.

⁸ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2593>

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

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

¹¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents>

Table 1: General principles for increasing the resilience of biodiversity are set out in Natural England Research Report NERR082 - Nature Networks: A Summary for Practitioners (2020)

Better site quality >	Bigger sites >	More sites >	Stepping stones & permeable matrix >	Corridors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage natural processes • Encourage habitat mosaics • Create more niches for more species – use ‘ecosystem engineers’ and welcome ecological disturbance. • Increase messiness (variation of physical structure within sites). • Restore missing biodiversity by increasing niches or by reintroduction • Maintain rare species • Encourage climate colonists • Reduce edge effects by buffering sites and encouraging graded ecotones to ‘soften the edge’ • Buffer sites with at least a 50-100 m buffer strip, possibly up to 500 m wide • Maintain ecological continuity of management to protect soils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big enough to encourage natural processes – include sufficient area to ensure functioning ecosystems • Provide space for ecosystem dynamism, supporting mosaics and to encourage succession • Reduce edge effects by decreasing the edge:area ratio • Join habitat fragments; choose the ones that will create the biggest site • Restore degraded habitat surrounding the site. • Enlarge sites to >40 ha (or >100 ha for wide-ranging species) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add larger sites in preference to many smaller sites • Target areas of unprotected irreplaceable habitat or with a long ecological continuity of un-intensive land management • Target areas with complex or additional topography & geomorphology and with a potential to be climate change refugia • Target areas of important habitat potential in the surrounding area. • Target degraded areas with potential for high ecosystem service delivery. • Ensure connectivity is good for new sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For poorly dispersing species, sites should be < 1 km from each other and < 200 m apart for highly specialised species within a habitat • Expand sites towards existing habitat to reduce space between patches. • Increase the cover of semi-natural habitat in landscape to at least 20% • Reduce the intensity and increase the diversity of landuse in the surrounding countryside • Stepping stones should provide appropriate resources to avoid becoming ecological traps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural corridors are better than human designed corridors • Use linear landscape features • Ensure corridor habitat matches that in core sites • Minimum width of corridors = 100 m, preferably wider

3.1.7 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The existing National Planning Policy Framework¹² places an emphasis on the contribution to be made to green infrastructure, biodiversity and habitats through planning policies and decisions:

- The Green Infrastructure Policy within the NPPF refers to the requirement of planning and decision makers to support the rural economy by enabling sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside, retaining and developing accessible local services and facilities such as open space.
- Planning policies should also seek to address barriers to investment such as poor environment. Promoting safe and healthy lifestyles should be done by aiming to provide safe and accessible green infrastructure.
- Rights of Way should be protected and enhanced and where opportunities are available add links to existing rights of way and national trails.
- Local green spaces can be designated within the Neighbourhood Development Plans providing that they are local in character and near to the communities that they serve. Local Green Spaces can be designated if they are valued by communities for historic, beauty, tranquillity, recreation and / or wildlife.
- Promotion of sustainable transport should be toward an environmental net gain. Cycle and walking routes should be of a high quality.
- Planning policies should make effective use of land by encouraging multiple benefits for rural and urban land and take opportunities to achieve environmental net gain, such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside; recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production.
- Chapter 15 is dedicated to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Overall, the chapter asks planners to identify, protect and enhance biodiversity and habitats designated and non-designated of high value and connect areas of high value through stepping stones and corridors. In areas that are part of the Nature Recovery Networks ensure that suitable development is identified within them.
- Chapter 16 on conserving the historic environment looks to protect landscape character in terms of character and distinctiveness and the protection, conservation and enhancement of the significance of historic designated assets.
- Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

¹² [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

3.1.8 Building back Better: our plan for growth

The National Industrial Strategy has now been superseded by the Build back better: our plan for growth¹³. The plan focuses on a 10 Point Plan for a Green Revolution¹⁴. Point 9 has a focus on protecting our natural environment by creating more national parks and designating more Areas of Outstanding Nature Beauty, creating jobs to help conserve and restore nature, incentivise land management through the Environmental Land Management Scheme, invest in coastal and flood defences.

3.1.9 Heritage Statement 2017

The report¹⁵ published by the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) identifies the value of heritage to the UK economy, people and places as well as setting the direction of work relating to making heritage resilient and sustainable:

‘In 2016, heritage is estimated to have generated a Gross Value Added (GVA) of £987 million’ - Heritage Statement 2017

This includes natural heritage such as landscape character, biodiversity and habitats.

3.1.10 River Basin Catchment Plans, Sustainable Land Use and the Impact on Water Quality - EU Water Framework Directive¹⁶

The Water Framework Directive has the following key aims:

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

The Directive requires surface water courses to reach ‘Good Ecological’ status as well ‘Good Chemical’ status. With respect to groundwater the status must be a ‘Good Quantity’ as well as ‘Good Chemical’ status.

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

According to Parliamentary discussion, the government has no intention of ‘diluting’ the targets of the current EU Water Framework Directive in a post Brexit Britain and it will continue to commit to the implementation of River Basin Management Plans. The

¹³ [Build back better: our plan for growth](#)

¹⁴ [10 Point Plan: Green Revolution](#)

¹⁵ [The Heritage Statement](#)

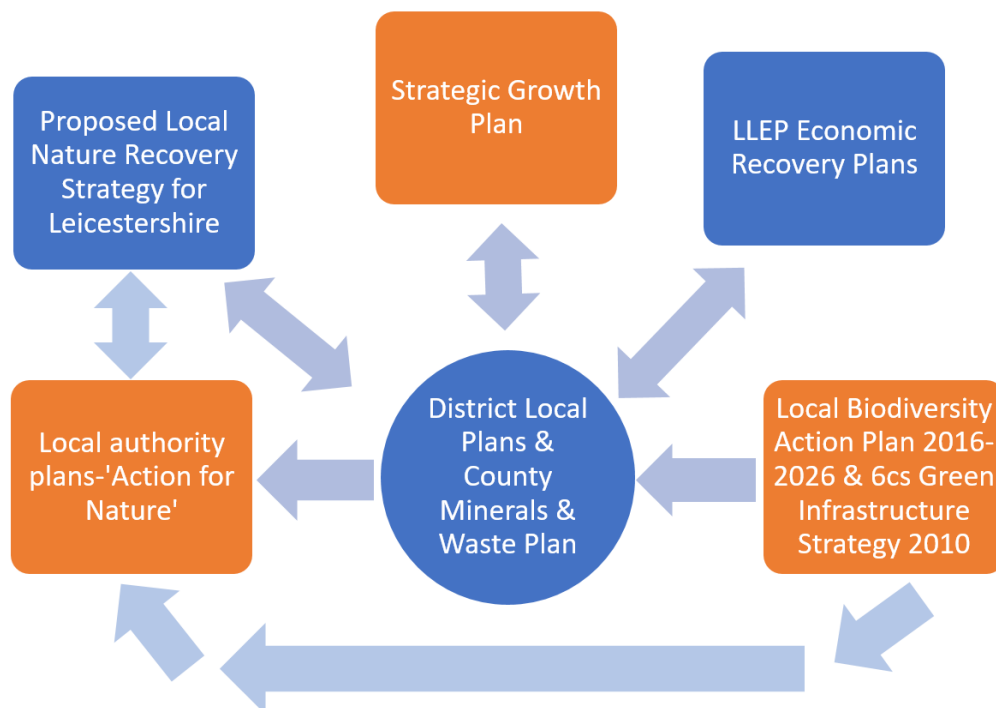
¹⁶ [Water Framework Directive](#)

Framework includes targets for River Basins to achieve good water quality in terms of reducing nitrates and phosphates as well as reducing flood risk, water conservation and improving the ecology of rivers.

3.2 Regional and Local Policies and Plans

The diagram below illustrates the interconnections between statutory policies in blue and non-statutory policies in orange, including this Action for Nature document.

Diagram 1: Interconnection between statutory and non-statutory policies



3.2.1 Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan 2018

The Strategic Growth Plan¹⁷ is the overarching plan which sets out the aspirations for delivering growth (housing, economic, 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, LUC, 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 & biodiversity through Green Infrastructure provision.

The non-statutory Growth Plan has been adopted by all nine local authorities and the LLEP and is currently being updated in line with changing government policy.

¹⁷ [Leicestershire and Leicester Strategic Growth Plan](#)

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’.

3.2.2 Leicestershire & 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 Plan¹⁸ is not a statutory document but is used as a reference document and evidence base by developers and planning authorities to understand the state of nature in Leicestershire and which habitats and species are most important for nature conservation.

3.2.3 6Cs Green Infrastructure Strategy

Our regional policies for addressing green infrastructure have been driven by the need for sustainable growth. Green infrastructure policy can be found in the 6Cs Green Infrastructure Strategy 2010¹⁹ and the Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire²⁰ which was developed as part of the Strategic Growth Plans in 2017. Local planning authorities still refer to the evidence bases from these documents.

The 6Cs Green Infrastructure Strategy found deficiencies in accessible opens space around all the sub-regional centres Loughborough, Melton Mowbray, Hinckley, Coalville, Blaby, North West Leicestershire and Market Harborough. Since the development of the 6Cs Strategy, limited work has been undertaken to see what the extent of the deficiencies are now, this is certainly the case for access to natural green space.

However, the recent Strategic Growth Assessment of green infrastructure found that:

‘there are areas with sparse coverage of green infrastructure, particularly in the north-east, east and south-eastern parts of the study area. This may be linked to the intensively farmed nature of large parts of Leicestershire, particularly for cereal cultivation.’

The study document also goes on to suggest that:

‘Redressing the fragmented nature and often limited extent of areas of semi-natural habitat such as woodlands, wetlands and semi-natural grasslands should be a priority for future GI investment. These habitats play an important role in delivering environmental functions such as flood and water management, climate control, ecological connectivity and resilience.’

Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire, LUC, October 2017

¹⁸ [Space for Wildlife 2016-2026](#)

¹⁹ [6cs Green Infrastructure Strategy](#)

²⁰ [Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study](#)

The Study states that the strategic tourism assets within the County are mainly located in Charnwood and the National Forest. There are few strategic assets in the southern and eastern parts of the County, with the exceptions of Belvoir Castle, Burrough Hill Country Park and Langton Hall. There are other assets in the south of the region such as Foxton Locks, recognised in the Leicestershire and Leicester Local Enterprise Tourism Growth Plan 2020 as an important tourism asset for this region.

3.2.4 Local Plans

Local Plans are 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.

3.2.5 Mineral & Waste Plan

The Mineral & Waste Plan is a key driver for the County Council to influence change for nature through the advice provided on applicant's design plans via our County Archaeologist, Ecologists and Landscape Architects. These sites can also aid nature recovery and support Biodiversity Net Gain.

3.3 Wider Strategies

3.3.1 River Catchment Plans: River Soar Catchment Plan, March 2018

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

The vision for the Soar Catchment Partnership is to have:

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

The Catchment Plan²¹ is a non-statutory document, but it does support the River Basin Management Plans that are statutory requirements of all EU members states. The UK is no

²¹ [River Soar Catchment Plan](#)

longer an EU member state, but the UK law has not changed regarding to our commitment to the Water Framework Directive and the requirement to produce a River Basin Management Plan. Other catchment plans are available and include the Welland²² and the River Mease²³.

3.3.2 River Soar & Grand Union Canal Partnership Strategy 2009 and Strategy Addendum 2020

The Partnership led by the County and City Councils meet regularly to consider how, by working together and with other key partners and stakeholders, it can promote the long-term regeneration and sustainability of the waterway corridor (River Soar is 40km in length from its source near Hinckley to the River Trent). The theme of the 2009 Strategy 'to improving the natural and built environment', is still relevant today.

The 2009 Strategy which is the basis of the work of the partnership has a vision to:

'Maximise the impact of the waterway for the economic benefit of Leicester and Leicestershire'

In 2020 the Partnership agreed a further strategy addendum document²⁴. This document acknowledges that the climate crisis and biodiversity loss are important issues for the Partnership to consider recognising that national priorities for habitat restoration have been identified along the River Soar. It also introduced task and finish groups to drive the development of actions for the River Soar.

3.3.3 National Forest: A Greenprint

The National Forest: A Greenprint Vision²⁵ want woodland and trees to be recognised as a natural capital asset and want to create more woodland, manage it better and use it to help us adapt to change. They have set a woodland creation target of 33% and require a further 12% of the National Forest area to be planted to meet this target. The Greenprint also wishes to see woodlands (both plantations and ancient woodlands) moving into 95% active management, including embracing the management of other priority habitats such as mosaic habitats, which includes grassland, heathland and wetland. The need to adapt to changes in our climate is one that can be supported by the National Forest plans to increase urban tree cover by 20%, thereby reducing the increased temperatures caused by urban warming and removing pollution from the air.

The document highlights the importance of hedgerows and linear habitats to connect habitats such as woodland sites particularly in areas where intensive agriculture is dominant in the landscape with few woodland connections.

3.4 County Council Policies and Countywide Services supporting the strategic approach

3.4.1 Leicestershire County Council Environment Strategy 2018-2030

This strategy sets out the Council's Environment Policy, the scope of which includes the legal and statutory duties it must fulfil regarding the environment and the national response

²² [Welland Catchment Plan](#)

²³ [River Mease Catchment Plan](#)

²⁴ Available by request from Leicestershire County Council, Environment Policy & Strategy Team

²⁵ [Our 25 year Vision for the National Forest; a greenprint for the nation](#)

to climate change, what the Council needs to do to embed environmental sustainability into the effective and efficient running of Council services, and what the Council needs to do to fulfil its leadership role in a way that recognises and minimises environmental impacts, improves the health and well-being of people and contributes to the economic sustainability of the County. The strategy sets out how the vision will be achieved through a series of aims and objectives. Figure 1 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 Delivery Plan provides more detail about how the Council will seek to meet these objectives and support additional objectives contained within the Environment Strategy in relation to the Community and Well-being and the Local Economy.

Figure 2: Biodiversity, Habitats and Local Environment aims and objectives from the County Council Environment Strategy 2018-2030

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

3.4.2 Tree Management Strategy 2019-2025

The Tree Management Strategy 2019-2025²⁶ recognises the importance of trees particularly mature / veteran trees as a habitat for many species such as fungi, lichens, birds, bats and insects. The Strategy makes a commitment to managing and conserving these trees in the landscape wherever possible. In addition, the Strategy calls for an increase in tree planting to improve woodland cover in Leicestershire, as the area is below average at 6% (2020) compared with the national average of 13%. Ash Dieback disease will have a further impact on the loss of trees as the disease takes hold across the County. This will make tree planting even more vital to maintain this important habitat and landscape feature of the County.

3.4.3 Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2019-2029

The Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2019-2029²⁷ recognises ecology and the environment as integral to the function of the parks and open spaces. Priority theme 2 'Ensure that the biodiversity, heritage and landscape values of all sites are conserved and developed', provides commitment to creating and enhancing habitats and species richness within those habitats. The Strategy also recognises that the Council's parks and open spaces contribute to wildlife havens, corridors and stepping stones. As visitor attractions, the Country Parks offer the opportunity for raising awareness and providing environmental education.

3.4.4 Public Health

Part of Public Health's role is to encourage healthier lifestyles and better well-being for the people of Leicestershire. The local environment has an impact on people's quality of life and their health. This impact can be because of poor air quality, inadequate access to sufficient and quality outdoor spaces and facilities and the quality of the built and local environment. These are issues that are intrinsically connected to our natural world.

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

- **Leicestershire Healthy Schools Programme²⁸**, which through a partnership with 'Food for Life' and the Improving Air Quality campaign offers opportunities to encourage the development of habitats and biodiversity within schools. By tree planting and the growing of food in ways that can also encourage a diversity of species on site, while at the same time also producing food for schools and the local community, the programme both improves health and the natural environment
- **Air Quality and Health Action Plan²⁹** – the plan includes actions which offer the opportunity to improve biodiversity and habitat through the planting of trees as a natural means of reducing pollution, such as Nitrogen Oxide, which also has an impact on species.

²⁶ [Tree Management Strategy 2020 -25](#)

²⁷ [Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2019-2029](#)

²⁸ [Leicestershire Healthy Schools Programme](#)

²⁹ [Air Quality and Health Action Plan](#)

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

The LRERC³⁰ provides an important source of local data on the known designated sites, such as local wildlife sites, the presence of protected and vulnerable habitats & 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, Butterfly Conservation, Naturespot and many others.

The service is supported through the County Council and District Councils as well as the income from providing commercial data searches. This important service has contributed data to the Leicestershire & Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan often quoted in Local Plans and continues to be a source of information that feeds into policy around nature conservation.

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

3.4.6 Historic Environment Record (HER) and County Archaeology Service

The Historic Environment Record³¹ is also an important source of local data on the heritage of Leicestershire and is used as a reference point for local plans, policies and community interest.

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 mineral and waste planning. This service ensures that expertise and evidence are considered in the design of new development.

The service offers advice on Countryside Stewardship schemes direct to the Rural Payments Agency. This includes details of where historic assets such as earthworks could be included in land management schemes. Advice is also given to Forestry teams both in the County Council and the National Forest Company.

During the Environmental Impact Assessment consultation undertaken by statutory bodies, the HER and the County Archaeology Service are a statutory consultee.

³⁰ [Leicestershire and Rutland Environment Records Centre](#)

³¹ [Historic Environment Record](#)

4. Biodiversity and Natural Capital

4.1 What is biodiversity and why does it matter?

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

The services provided by biodiversity, such as carbon sequestration, pollination and pest regulation are given for free. We can measure the value biodiversity provides us as 'natural capital' by acting to prevent flooding, supporting our health & well-being and supporting food production.

The underlying geology, geography and hydrology of the County provide the foundations for the eco-systems that our biodiversity relies upon and allows our eco-system services to work. For instance:

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

4.2 State of Nature in Leicestershire

The Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2026 identifies that 84% of Leicestershire and Rutland is farmland, of which 82% is good to moderate quality farmland, suitable for producing cash crops such as cereal and oil seed rape.

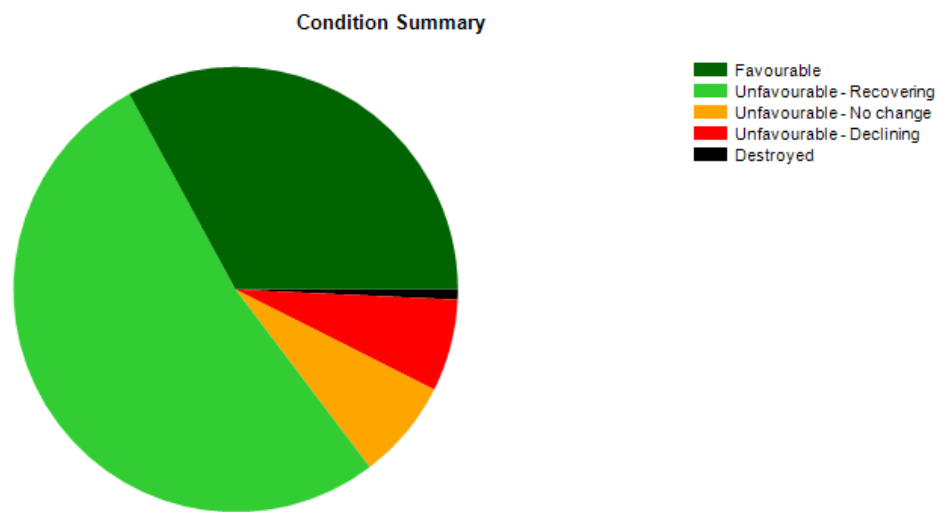
A review of Local Wildlife Sites on County Council land undertaken in 2015 identified that out of the 143 LWS sites, the condition 39 was unknown.

Across Leicestershire & Rutland there are a total of 33 Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust Reserves, that cover nearly 3,000 acres (1,214 hectares). 20 of the reserves are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Seaton Meadows SSSI is a Plantlife reserve. The Woodland Trust manages c. 20 sites covering c. 315 hectares.

Natural England's 2019 assessment of 76 SSSIs in Leicestershire showed that:

- 52.38% were in Unfavourable recovering condition
- 7.27% were in Unfavourable condition - no change
- 6.69% were in Unfavourable condition - declining

Figure 3: Condition summary of SSSIs in Leicestershire

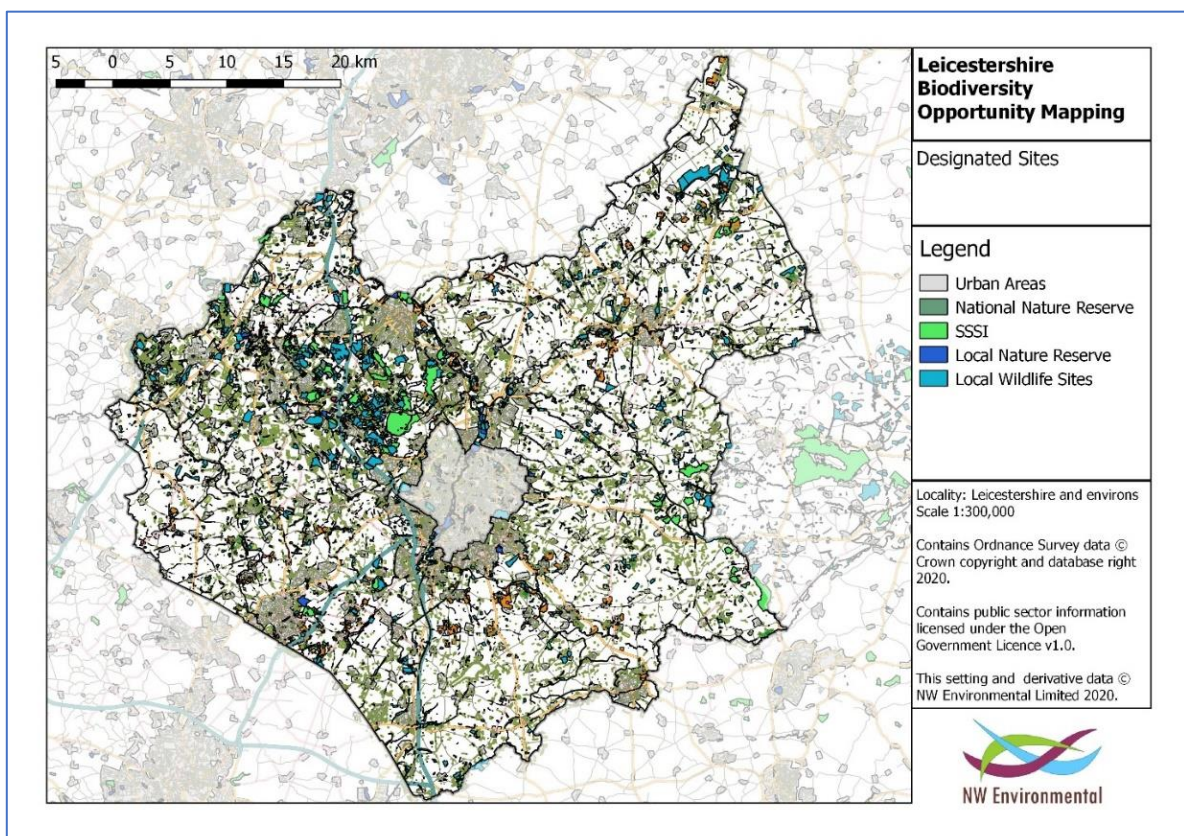


Source: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk> June 2019

The Natural England data above is derived from monitoring undertaken prior to 2019. Due to investment by the Council into some of the SSSI sites on its land it is possible that a re-surveying of some of the SSSI sites may significantly change the Natural England dataset and move some of the Council sites into the 'favourable recovering' status.

Site designations are an important way of protecting the most important sites for diversity (and geodiversity). Figure 3 shows the location of designated sites in Leicestershire.

Figure 4: Designated Sites in Leicestershire - Ecology



Nationally designated nature conservation sites are recognised as key elements of the County's natural capital.

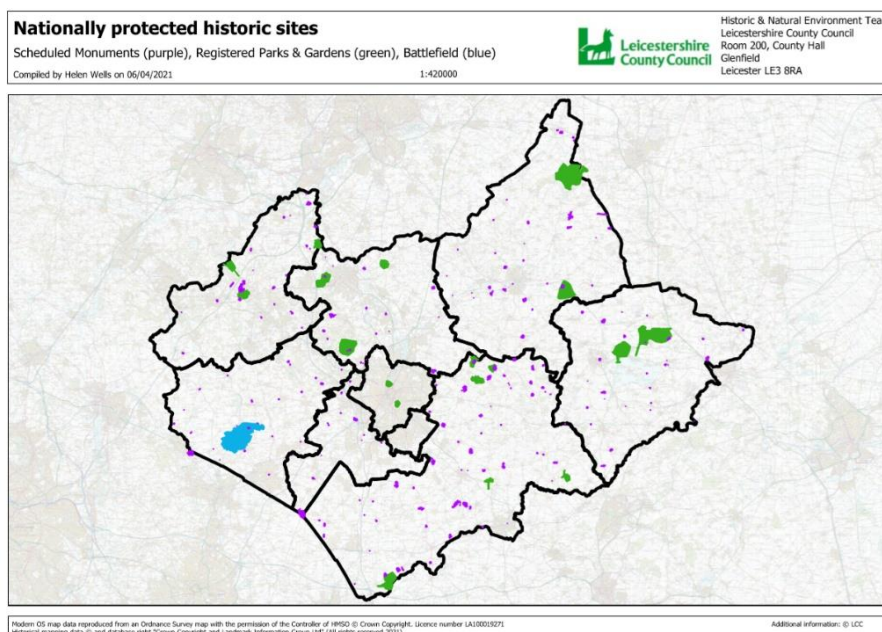
The County Council have very few Sites of Special Scientific Interest on its land. The Council are responsible for three SSSIs, namely:

- **Misterton Marshes** is classified as being in unfavourable-recovering condition based on the last assessment by Natural England in 2011. The site has been under Countryside Stewardship Higher Level Stewardship (CS HLS) granted by Natural England. Misterton Marshes comprises of one of the largest remaining blocks of unimproved wetland habitat in Leicestershire. Such areas are now scarce in the English lowlands because of drainage and changes in land use.
- **Sheet Hedges Wood** has five sections of land within it and three of the five are in unfavourable-recovering condition, one section is favourable, and one section is unfavourable declining. Section 1 was assessed in 2014 and the others in 2013. The site that is unfavourable declining is suffering from cover of non-native trees and scrub. The section comprises one of the best remaining examples of ash and alder woodland in Leicestershire and is representative of ancient woodland developed on clay soils in Central and Eastern England. Citation, Natural England (DEFRA 1981). The management plan for the site is delivered by Country Parks and is now expired. Opportunities to undertake woodland management are being explored in-conjunction with applications to the Rural Payments Agency Countryside Stewardship scheme.

Beacon Hill, Hangingstone and the Outwoods. They are designated for fossil formations, breeding birds, acidic grasslands, breeding sites for Palmate newts, ancient semi-natural woodland, bogs and ponds. Beacon Hill is owned by Leicestershire County Council.

These Natural England designated sites also include sites of national heritage importance such as the Iron Age Hill Fort a Historic England scheduled monument and Burrough Hill Iron Age Fort.

Figure 5: Designated Sites in Leicestershire - Historic Environment



4.3 Locally Important Sites

Local Wildlife Sites are sites with substantive nature conservation value. They are defined areas, identified and selected for their nature conservation value based on important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species within a nation or region. Within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland there were 1,167 notified sites, 1,108 candidate sites and 1,013 potential sites, covering in total 12,350 hectares, or c.4.8% of the area. (Source: Leicestershire & Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan 2016).

More recent 2019 data for Local Wildlife Sites from the Leicestershire & Rutland Environmental Records Centre found that within Leicestershire there were 894 notified sites, 1,133 candidate sites and 1,189 potential sites.

The key areas of declining habitats within the county are outlined within the Leicestershire & Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2026 (BAP) and include a decline in the number of mature trees, Sphagnum ponds, Neutral grasslands that exist outside the protected sites, Heath Grasslands mainly in Charnwood Forest and Calcareous Grasslands road verges and quarries in Rutland and road verges that are locally designated as Local Wildlife Sites. The BAP lacks data on the status of field margins, lowland woods and pasture, fast-flowing water, springs and flushes.

The BAP has identified some key actions for creating new habitat within the County, however, some of the guidelines are still to be completed or started to enable the strategic allocation of resources. The key actions include:

- Create new habitat corresponding to one of three broad categories throughout Leicestershire and Rutland:
 - Wetland (open water and/or land which has impeded drainage and retains water for part or all the year or which floods regularly)
 - Woodland (land covered with trees or scrub – either planted or naturally regenerating)
 - Open land (land with no or low intensity management with little or no agricultural inputs. Includes unmown rough grassland, regenerating natural vegetation and sown or planted vegetation)
- Create new habitat on intensively managed land to increase habitat diversity;
- Create new habitat on former mineral extraction sites. Minimise intervention to allow these sites to develop new plant communities and species assemblages;
- Create new habitat in areas of current high wildlife value (Charnwood Forest, Soar Valley, Leighfield Forest, Rutland Limestone, Rutland Water) to increase landscape connectivity;
- In areas where historic habitats remain, use new habitat creation to buffer or link sites if possible. The nature of the buffering habitat is immaterial provided it does not compromise the wildlife value of the existing habitat;
- Where ecological conditions and resources allow create UK BAP Priority Habitats to buffer and extend existing Priority habitat;
- Provide advice on habitat creation and management;
- Record details of habitat creation projects and maintain on a GIS database;
- Publish examples of good habitat creation schemes in an annual report;

- Investigate the use of remote sensing data such as Land Cover Map 2007 as the basis for a baseline habitat survey of Leicestershire and Rutland and for monitoring change at a landscape scale when repeat surveys become available.

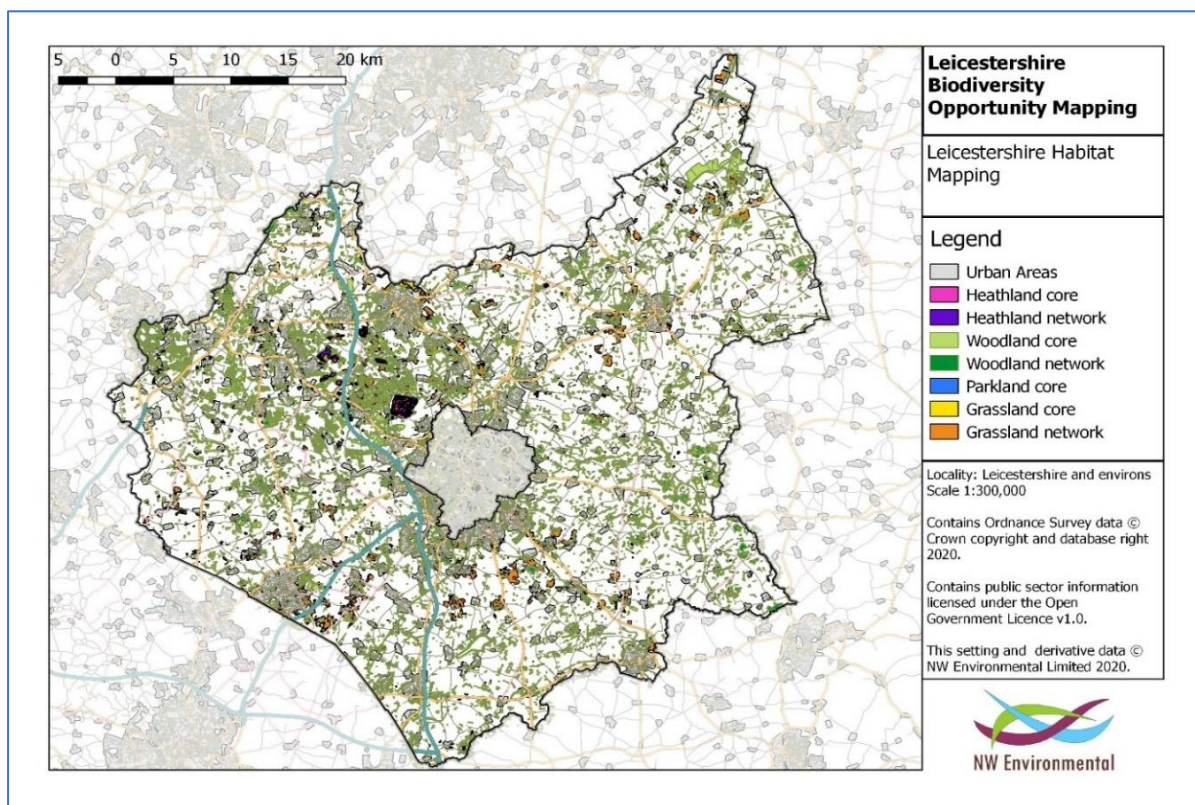
4.4 Habitat Diversity

The main habitats of importance in Leicestershire are woodland, grassland and wetlands. There are also valuable areas of heathland and open mosaic habitats. In addition, there are also linear habitats such as rivers and streams, hedgerows, canals, railways and roads. The contribution to biodiversity of habitats such as gardens, allotments and parks is not clearly demonstrated by this mapping, but their value must not be discounted, particularly in urban areas.

Mapping of dominant habitats across the county makes it clear that, outside urban areas, the landscape of the county is dominated by arable and pastoral farming. Some small areas in Charnwood and the north-east are dominated by broadleaved woodland.

Since the development of the BAP in 2016 the most comprehensive mapping of existing key habitats has been prepared recently by the Leicestershire Wildlife Trust and the National Forest Company supported by Leicestershire County Council, LRERC, Leicester City Council and Charnwood Borough Council. Figure 5 shows the location of the main habitats in Leicestershire.

Figure 6: Dominant Existing Habitats in Leicestershire



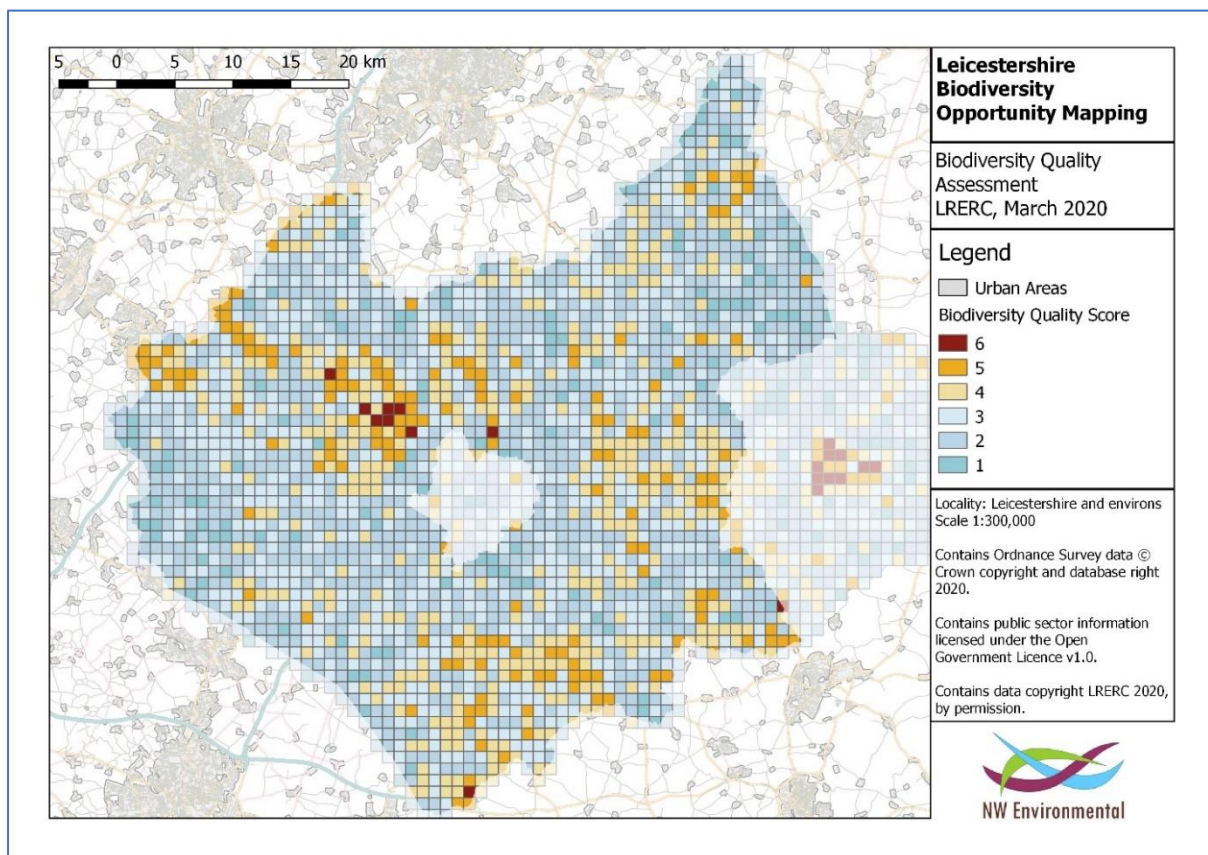
4.5 Biodiversity Quality Score

Further work was undertaken by the Leicestershire and Rutland Ecological Records Centre to assess habitat quality across the county.

Each 1km square in Leicestershire (excluding the City) has been given a quality rating on a scale of 1 - 6, based on a rapid desk-based assessment of recent aerial photos (2015-2017). As a narrow time-range has been used, this will provide a true baseline 'snapshot' in time that can be used for monitoring in future. A score of 1 is poor and 6 is high. Figure 6 shows the results of the quality scoring exercise.

It can be clearly seen that the habitat quality scores reflect the habitat mapping closely, but with some exceptions. For example, in the National Forest where many areas score relatively low as recently planted woodland has not scored highly in the quality mapping.

Figure 7: LRERC Biodiversity Quality Score for Leicestershire

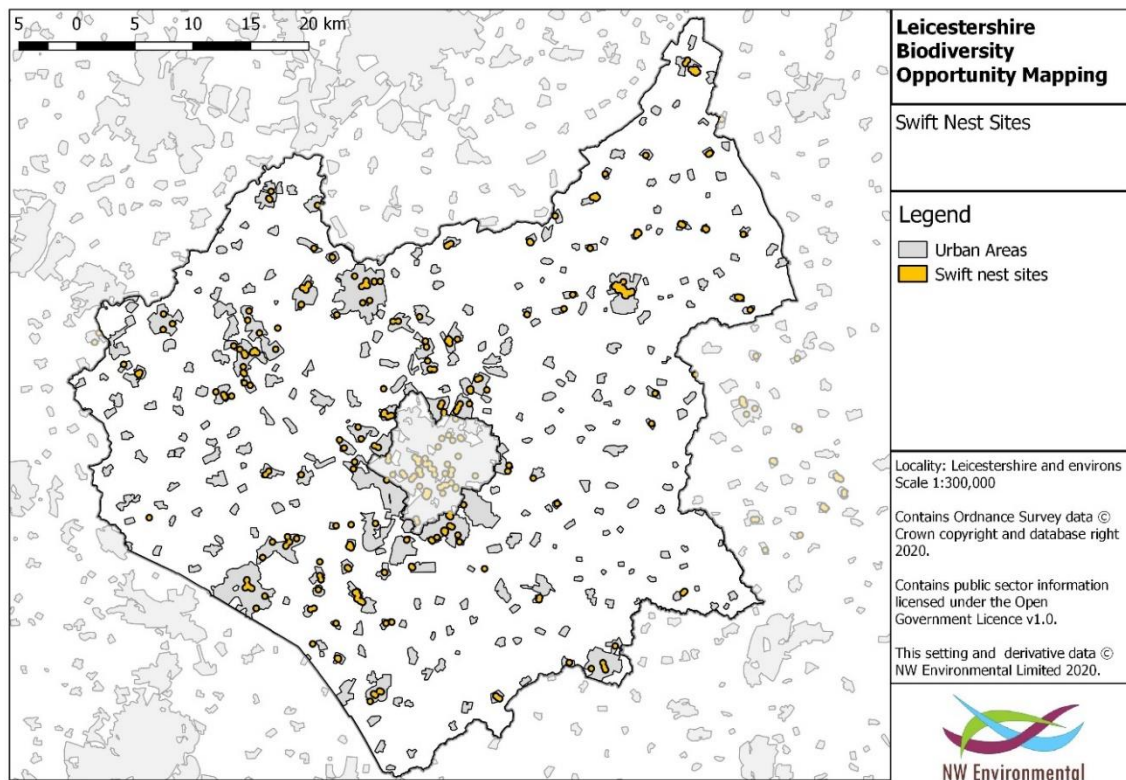


4.6 Species Diversity

The BAP identifies the species important to conserve in Leicestershire. (See Appendix 2)

It is important to note that protecting semi-natural and natural habitats alone, is not enough to ensure the future of many species. One example is Swifts which, in the UK, nest in buildings and primarily in urban areas. Figure 7 shows the location of swift nesting sites across Leicestershire.

Figure 8: Swift nesting sites in Leicestershire



4.7 Climate Change

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

'Climate change affects biodiversity in many ways. Impacts on species include changes in distribution and abundance, the timing of seasonal events and habitat use and, as a consequence there are likely to be changes in the composition of plant and animal communities. Habitats and ecosystems are also likely to change character by, for example, showing altered water regimes, increased rates of decomposition in bogs and higher growth rates in forests.'

'Indirect impacts may become just as significant as a result of climate-induced changes in land use having knock-on effects on biodiversity. For example, growing new crops, increases in summer watering and geographical shifts in arable and livestock production could well occur, but how these indirect changes may affect biodiversity remains less certain.'

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

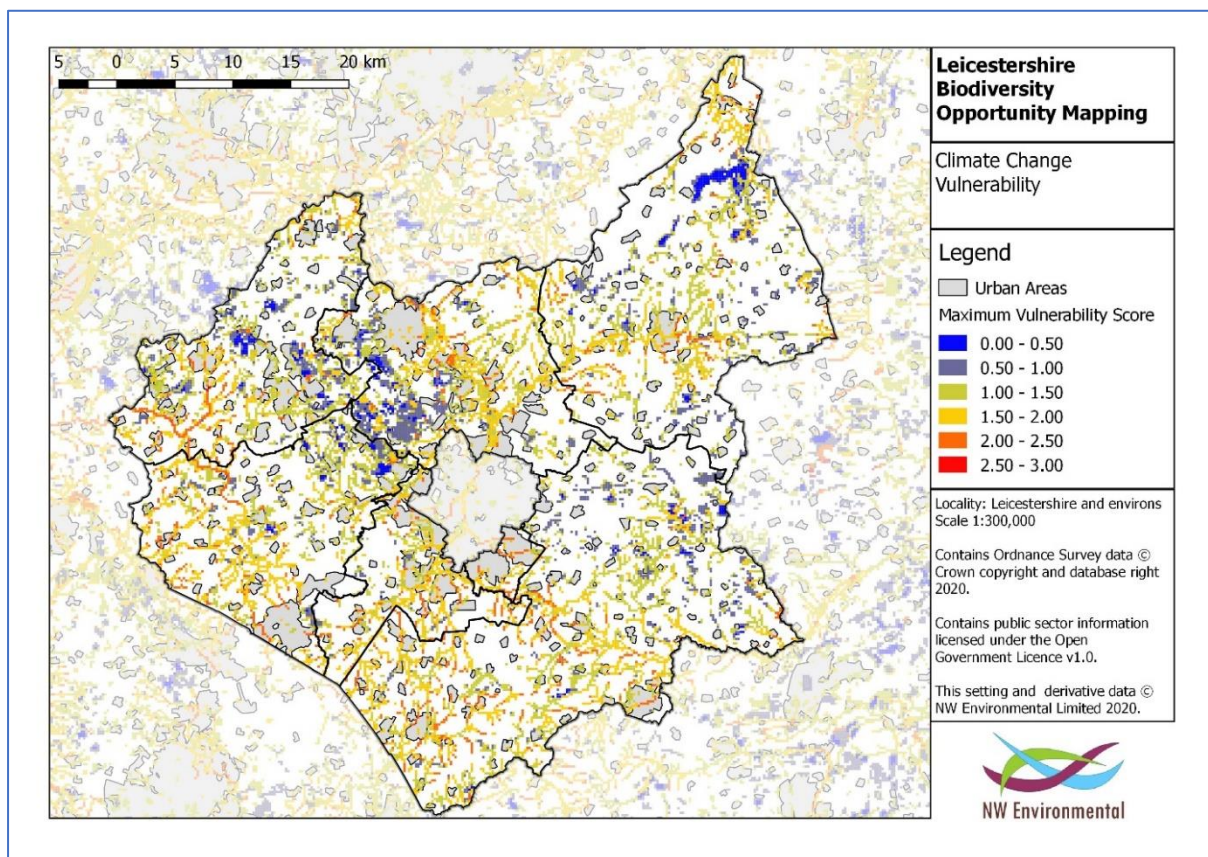
Since then, work has been undertaken to gain a deeper insight into how climate change is likely to affect biodiversity and where its impacts will be greatest.

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

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

Climate vulnerability scores for habitats across Leicestershire generally show that the County's watercourses and associated habitats are the most vulnerable areas, with some areas in the highest categories of vulnerability. Most notably is the River Anker, which scores highly along most of its length, and wetlands on the River Soar near Quorn. Figure 8 shows the results of the climate change vulnerability modelling for Leicestershire.

Figure 9: Climate Change Habitat Vulnerability



Lower scores elsewhere reflect the relative scarcity of semi-natural habitats in the county.

Nonetheless, climate change is a significant threat to the County's biodiversity alongside other issues such as loss of habitat due to development and inappropriate management.

Key issues identified include:

- There are individual sites and species which are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including extreme weather events such as drought, flooding and storms;
- Even where climate impacts are relatively modest, they still act in concert with other pressures on biodiversity;
- Climate change needs to be considered when planning habitat creation and restoration;
- Leicestershire has a role to play in developing a national Nature Recovery Network, as part of a country-wide strategy to improve climate resilience.

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

4.8 Landscape Character and Sensitivity

Across Leicestershire the landscape is strongly influenced by geo-diversity and the underlying solid and drift geology. The richest soils are in the northeast associated with the underlying limestone. In the north-west are acidic soils over mudstones and sandstones including the coalfield areas, these are associated with habitats such as the heathland and acid grasslands of Charnwood.

Across most of the rest of the County soils are more neutral and variable and depend largely on the local drift geology. They are associated with much arable farming and local drainage patterns are a strong influence of land use and habitats.

Appendix 3 shows all the Nationally recognised Landscape Character Areas within Leicestershire³².

Landscape character and the historic environment have a role to play in helping to protect biodiversity and habitat as well as providing important green infrastructure and creating a sense of place for those that live, work and play within these areas.

For instance, ancient hedgerows often provide an assortment of native mature vegetation including Veteran and Ancient Trees. These features offer insight into Leicestershire's past such as the old agricultural field systems and the remnants of old 'ways', such as medieval green lanes.

Ridge and furrow grasslands also provide an insight into Leicestershire's agricultural past, but they can also be places harbouring ecologically important grassland species such as those found within our Local Wildlife Sites or SSSIs.

Whilst the County has no Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or National Parks, it does have landscapes that are valued for attracting visitors such as the National Forest, Charnwood Forest Regional Park and the Vale of Belvoir.

As indicated in the evidence base for the Strategic Growth Plan, the features that make up our landscape character and their associated important ecology are under pressure from

³² [National Character Area Profiles](#)

development, agriculture, disease and our changing climate. There is a need to redress the fragmentation and the sparseness of green infrastructure particularly in the east of the County.

4.9 Woodland creation, implementation of tree planting and woodland management

There is a challenge to ensure that the creation of certain types of woodland does not displace other important habitats, or indeed reduce opportunities, such as the development of lowland heath in Charnwood or species rich grassland or reduce connectivity between these habitat types and species. However, native mixed woodland and hedgerows that can naturally develop or be sensitively planted provide important corridors for woodland species.

Presently there are no clearly defined priority areas for future woodland creation outside the National Forest. Rather, there is a presumption that woodland creation in general is good (providing other habitats are protected).

There are opportunities to create woodland in areas that helps provide green space access for communities, provides carbon offsetting or in-setting that can be measured as part of the nationally recognised 'Woodland Carbon code' as well as offering buffers to slow the flow of water directly into main rivers or provide protection to areas susceptible to surface water flooding.

Once planted woodlands require management to ensure that they thrive and offer maximum benefit, such as the economic opportunities that can be derived from them.

4.10 Pests & Diseases

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

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

5. Opportunities for delivering the Biodiversity objectives

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

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

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

The land the Council directly owns and manage includes Country Parks, operational sites, untenanted land including woodlands, highway verges & 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.

Our Highways operations aspire to expand the change of wildlife friendly maintenance practice within urban areas through the Urban Wildlife Verge initiative as well as explore the review the specification of maintenance contracts on rural roads.

Country Parks are setting areas of land that would benefit from biodiversity net gain at site such as Snibston and Bagworth Heath Country Park.

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

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

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

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

There is an opportunity through many of the policies, plans and projects of the Council to support action that protects and enhances biodiversity, habitats and the local environment. The most effective way of achieving this will be to make sure that biodiversity is considered throughout the process of developing relevant policies, plans and projects. For example,

there are opportunities in relation to the design and maintenance of our highways, the management of our Country Parks, the disposal and acquisition of strategic land and property, and any new development on Council land. Biodiversity will be included in the Environmental Implications Screening Tool(s) that are being developed to support delivery of the Council's Environment Strategy objectives.

As a minimum the council will ensure a net gain for biodiversity through any planning application that is submitted by Leicestershire County Council. Through operational activities in partnership with other will explore net gain on our estate, this comes through the advice offered and given by planning and environment to our operational managers relating to roadside verges, land around council properties, and design of flood management. This advice is sought as part of the process of reviewing Environmental implications using our Environmental Implications Tool.

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

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

Engaging with the applicants for housing and economic site development or quarry workings through the planning system is an opportunity to influence high-quality design of sites. This can be influenced through the role of expertise in landscape, ecology and historic environment.

The guidance that we produce around Highway Design and ecology can influence projects and development that require planning permission. We would also extend this advice to projects not impacted by the Town & Country Planning Act such as through the influence we have through the design of projects applying for Council grants such as through Free Tree scheme, Shire Environment Grant and others.

Collaboration with other organisations such as the Environment Agency, Trent Rivers Trust on the integration of natural flood management into dealing with local flooding will help realise multiple benefits to biodiversity, habitat and the local environment.

5.5 Supporting awareness raising and education on biodiversity

Through the process of developing this document and consulting with both internal and external stakeholders it is apparent that there is a need for more guidance, information and knowledge around the issues that biodiversity faces and what can and needs to be done to deliver action to address these issues. The Council could play a role in meeting this need both internally and externally to help achieve the improvement needed in Leicestershire biodiversity, habitats and local environment.

The Delivery Plan starts to outline the actions required to unlock these opportunities and deliver on the objectives of the Environment Strategy for biodiversity.

By way of example, we offer advice to communities on the development of Neighbourhood plans and have developed information and continued training for Parish Councils around Biodiversity including specific habitats such as Trees through the Tree Warden Initiative.

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

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

5.7 Identifying opportunities for realising ecosystem service benefits on Council land, including carbon sequestration and storage

From the Climate Change Emergency Declaration, the Council has committed to being carbon neutrality 2030. Natural carbon sequestration and storage will play a role in achieving this target as appropriate.

6. Development and Implementation of the Delivery Plan

The process of developing this Action for Nature document and the supporting Delivery Plan has contributed to the:

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

6.1 Key steps in developing the strategic approach and Delivery Plan

The following key steps were undertaken:

- i. A desk-based assessment was made of the County Council's and County policies, procedures and practices;
- ii. Meetings were held with key staff to discuss specific objectives of the Environment Strategy and how they thought these could be delivered;
- iii. A consultation questionnaire was circulated to all relevant services and key staff relating to the approach;
- iv. Workshops were held with service areas to present the evidence base and further define opportunities and challenges and outline key actions;
- v. Service areas were consulted on suggested KPIs that could be adopted as part of the approach;
- vi. Service areas were consulted on a draft report;
- vii. The results of these discussions and the identified actions from the workshops were incorporated into this strategic approach document and the supporting Delivery Plan.

The key service areas involved in developing this document and who will play an important part in delivering the actions are:

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

6.2 Monitoring and Reporting the Delivery Plan

Progress on the implementation of the actions within the Delivery Plan will be reported through the existing reporting mechanisms used for reporting on the Environment Strategy. This will include reporting to the Environment Strategy Delivery Board, CMT, relevant Lead Members, Environment & Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Commission as appropriate.

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

Considering this initial KPIs have been developed and agreed that will allow measurement of how the Council is performing in terms of improving biodiversity, habitat and the local environment on land it owns or manages. The KPIs are:

- Hectares of LCC land in better management for nature
- Percentage of suitable LCC land in better management for nature

'Land in better management for nature' will be assessed against the management practices being employed within the area of land. The current management of sites will be assessed to understand if improvement could be made to protect and enhance habitats and to encourage biological diversity. The amount of land impacted by any change to management practices will then contribute towards the KPI. A condition assessment of the land can be made by measuring the abundance of indicator species within or using the area. This can be done by sampling sites.

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

In addition, a suite of Performance Indicators (PIs) have been agreed that will support the Council's understanding of the KPIs such as:

- Number of trees planted
- Area of woodland created
- Area restored for natural flood management
- Metres of hedges planted
- Area of ponds created or restored

At a minimum the Council will calculate these PIs for activity undertaken or supported by the Council. In addition, the Council will seek to understand the level of activity taking place within the county for each of the PIs. Figures will be sought from relevant partners and organisations on an annual basis.

These will be in addition to existing biodiversity indicators collected for Leicestershire such as river quality.

As part of the Delivery Plan there are actions to identify and develop additional KPIs and PIs as more data is gathered and robust and sustainable data collection and analysis mechanisms are put in place. This work will also be informed and influenced by what happens at a national level particularly in relation to the Environment Bill and the setting of any national indicators and how the measuring of such indicators is carried out at a local level.

6.3 Implementation of the Delivery Plan

The Environment Strategy Delivery Board have approved the formation of a Biodiversity Delivery Plan Working Group that will co-ordinate the implementation of the Plan. The Working Group will consist of representatives from those service areas involved in the development of the Plan and will be led by the Senior Environmental Partnership Officer. Actions in the Plan include the continuation of existing activities and the development of new ones. Where possible existing resources will be utilised with external resources being sought through submission of funding bids and working with external partners. Implementation of the Plan will be supported by the Environment Policy and Strategy Team by connecting with partners, bid-writing and shaping the development of projects.

6.4 Collaboration & Partnership Working

Implementation of the Delivery Plan and achievement of the biodiversity, habitat and local environment objectives will not be realised without collaborating with a wide range of national, regional and local organisations. These include but are not limited to:

- The National Forest
- Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust
- Leicester City Council
- Trent Rivers Trust
- Welland Rivers Trust
- Environment Agency
- Canal & Rivers Trust
- Natural England
- Naturespot
- Leicestershire & Rutland Ornithological Society
- Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Parish Councils and Parish Councils
- District and Borough Councils
- The Tree Council

This collaboration and partnership working will become increasingly important as the Government provides clarity on the establishment of Nature Recovery Strategies and Partnerships as set out in the draft Environment Bill.

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Ancient Woodland	An area that has been woodland since 1600 AD, important for soils, wildlife, recreation and cultural, historic and landscape value (this can include plantations where soil, fungi and flora have remained undisturbed since 1600 AD)
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	An area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) is land protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act). It protects the land to conserve and enhance its natural beauty
Ash Dieback Disease	Ash dieback is a highly destructive disease of ash trees (<i>Fraxinus</i> species), especially the United Kingdom's native ash species, common ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>). It is caused by a fungus named <i>Hymenoscyphus fraxineus</i> (<i>H. fraxineus</i>), which is of eastern Asian origin
Biodiversity	Biodiversity for short or Biological diversity means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.
Corridor for Biodiversity	A biological corridor consists of all the habitats needed during the various stages of a species' life cycle (reproduction, growth, shelter). These habitats are functionally linked to one another
Carbon in-setting	A carbon inset is where a company compensates for emissions within the business or value chain.
Carbon off-setting	A carbon offset is a reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases made to compensate for emissions made elsewhere. Offsets are measured in tonnes of carbon dioxide-equivalent
Stepping Stone	Ecological Stepping stones - unconnected areas of semi-natural habitat close to corridors, allowing more mobile species to move through the landscape.
Ecosystems	Biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.
Environmental Land Management Scheme	Environmental Land Management Scheme is replacing the European Common Agricultural Policy that provides subsidies to the agricultural sector.
Geo-diversity	Geodiversity refers to the variety of the geological and physical elements of nature, such as minerals, rocks, soils, fossils and landforms, and active geological and geomorphological processes. Together with biodiversity, geodiversity constitutes the natural diversity of planet Earth
Green Infrastructure	Green infrastructure or blue-green infrastructure is a network providing the “ingredients” for solving urban and climatic challenges by building with nature
Habitats	The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism
Landscape Character Area	These are single unique areas which are discrete geographical areas with a landscape type. Each have its own character and identity

Local Nature Reserve	Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by principal local authorities. Parish and Town Councils can also declare LNRs, but they must have the powers to do so delegated to them by a principal local authority. LNRs are for people and wildlife.
Local Plan	Local planning authorities must prepare a local plan which sets planning policies in a local authority area.
Local Wildlife Site	Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) are wildlife-rich sites selected for their local nature conservation value. They vary in shape and size and can contain important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species. In many parts of the UK, they are the principal wildlife resource, but their designation is non-statutory, and their only protection comes via the planning system.
Mosaic Habitats	An area or site that contains multiple habitats such as a mix of woodland and grassland.
National Nature Reserve	National Nature Reserves (NNRs) were established to protect some of our most important habitats, species and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research.
Natural Capital	Part of nature which directly or indirectly underpins value to people.
Nature	The phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth.
NERC Act	Natural Environment Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty to conserve biodiversity on public authorities in England. It requires local authorities and government departments to have regard to the purposes of conserving biodiversity in a manner that is consistent with the exercise of their normal functions such as policy and decision-making. 'Conserving biodiversity' may include enhancing, restoring or protecting a population or a habitat.
Net-Gain (Biodiversity)	Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before.
Net-Gain (Environment)	Environmental Net Gain is an approach for improving the condition of, and ecosystems services that flow from, our natural assets in the context of development.
Protected Species	Protected species definition: a species of animal or plant which it is forbidden by law to harm or destroy.
River Catchment	A catchment is an area of land where water collects when it rains, often bounded by hills. As the water flows over the landscape it finds its way into streams and down into the soil, eventually feeding the river. Some of this water stays underground and continues to slowly feed the river in times of low rainfall.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a formal conservation designation. Usually, it describes an area that's of interest to science due to the rare species of fauna or flora it contains - or even important geological or physiological features that may lie in its boundaries.
Special Areas of Conservation	A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is the land designated under Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Urban Warming	Urban warming or urban heat island is a phenomenon that occurs in urban areas changing the temperature significantly of the urban environment by comparison to surrounding rural areas. This is often caused by absorption of heat by buildings and manufactured surfaces such as macadam.
Veteran Tree	Ancient or veteran trees are defined by the Local Wildlife Site criteria. This habitat is susceptible to slow and un-noticed loss of individuals, but it is known that veteran trees are exceptionally rich in invertebrate life, as well as supporting fungi, lichens and many species of birds and mammals such as bats.

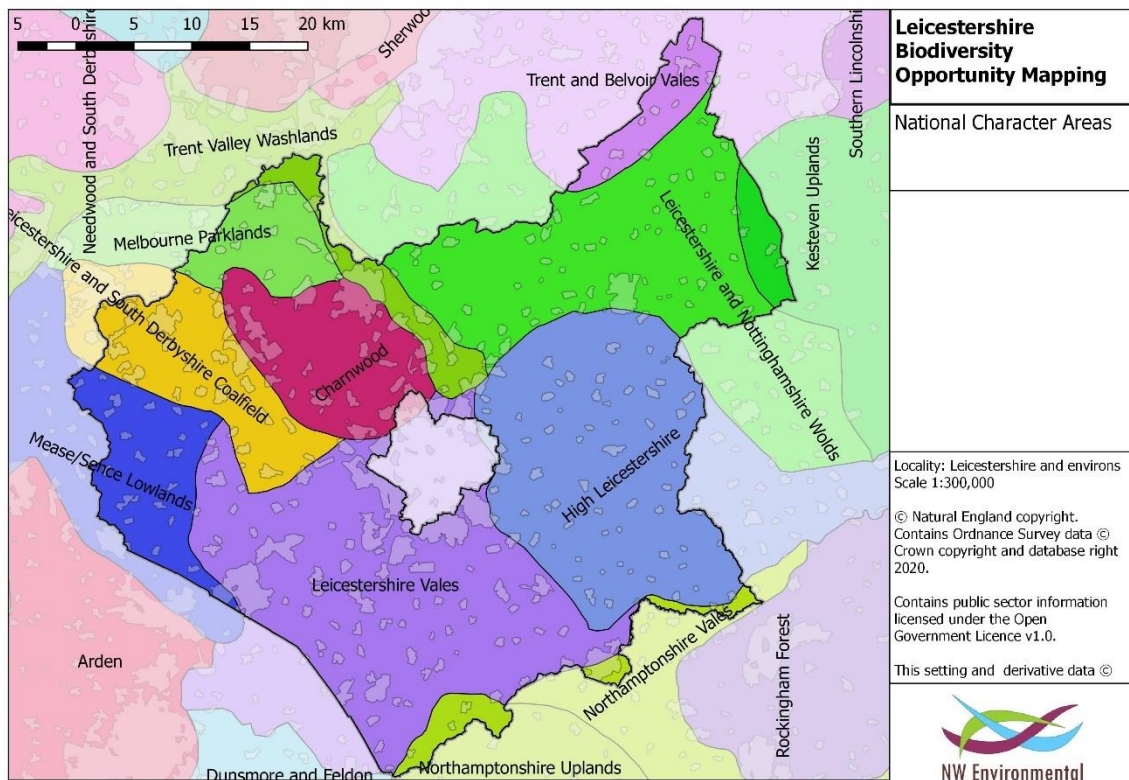
Appendix 2: Priority Habitats and Species in Leicestershire

The Priority Habitats and Species of Leicestershire as identified in the Leicestershire & Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan can be found in the document links below:

https://www.lrwt.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/space_for_wildlife_llrbap_2016-26_part_1.pdf

https://www.lrwt.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/space_for_wildlife_llrbap_2016-26_part_2.pdf

Appendix 3: National Character Areas of Leicestershire



National Character Area (NCA) 48: Trent and Belvoir Vales (NE429)

The Trent and Belvoir Vales National Character Area (NCA) is characterised by undulating, strongly rural and predominantly arable farmland, centred on the River Trent. A low-lying rural landscape with relatively little woodland cover, the NCA offers long, open views. Newark-on-Trent (generally referred to as Newark) lies at the centre with Grantham, Nottingham, Lincoln and Gainsborough on the peripheries. The southern and eastern edges of the Vales are defined by the adjoining escarpments of the Lincolnshire Edge and the Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds NCA. To the west, the escarpment of a broad ridge of rolling landscape defines the boundary with the neighbouring Sherwood and Humber head Levels NCAs. The area’s generally fertile soils and good quality agricultural land have supported a diversity of farming over a long period but, because of this, little semi-natural habitat remains. The powerful River Trent and its flood plain provide a strong feature running through the landscape. It is the greatest biodiversity resource, being a major corridor for wildlife moving through the area and supporting a variety of wetland habitats. It also provides flood storage as well as large amounts of cooling water for local power stations.

NCA 69 Trent Valley Washlands (NE475)

The Trent Valley Washlands National Character Area (NCA) comprises the river flood plain corridors of the middle reaches of the River Trent’s catchment in the heart of England. It is a distinctly narrow, linear and low-lying landscape, often clearly delineated at its edges by higher ground, and it is largely comprised of the flat flood plains and gravel terraces of the rivers.

A washland is described as an area of flood plain that can flood or is deliberately flooded for flood management purposes. Thus, the Trent Valley Washlands are strongly defined by the riverine

environment and periodic inundation. The key ecosystem services provided are related to water, its availability and regulation of flow. Thick superficial deposits of alluvium and river terrace gravels dominate the Washlands' geology. Variations in these, the resultant soils and the differences in elevation above and below flood levels have determined both settlement pattern and agricultural land use. Arable crops are by and large located on the freely draining soils of the river terraces and on the higher ground where fields are big, and hedgerows are small with few trees. Pastoral farming generally takes place on the river flood plains, where soils are subject to frequent flooding or are naturally wet. Here fields are usually smaller and the hedgerows fuller with more tree cover. Overall woodland cover in the Washlands is very limited, although riparian trees, especially willows, provide an important component of the landscape.

[NCA 70. Melbourne Parklands \(NE384\)](#)

The Melbourne Parklands NCA is located between the ancient forests of Needwood and Charnwood. The Trent Valley forms its northern and western boundary, in a wide arc sweeping round from its confluence with the River Soar in the north-east, to Burton-upon-Trent in the south-west.

It is a landscape of rolling farmland, ancient and plantation woodland and, as the name suggests, a cluster of landscaped parklands with grand country houses, one of which, Calke Abbey, boasts a Grade II* listed historic park and garden. The park has also been designated a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and contains many notable ancient and veteran trees. One-quarter of the NCA is within The National Forest and 10 per cent is woodland.

The NCA is predominantly rural, although there are strong and often abrupt contrasts with the urban areas on its peripheries. The M1 and A42 cross the NCA and East Midlands Airport is sited on the central plateau in an otherwise undulating area.

[NCA 71 Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield \(NE535\)](#)

The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield landform consists of a plateau with unrestricted views of shallow valleys and gentle ridges that become less pronounced in the south due to a layer of glacial till. To the east the land rises steeply, affording views of the Charnwood National Character Area (NCA). Ancient woodland straddles part of the boundary in the north, where the land falls away affording views of the wooded rolling landscape of the Melbourne Parklands NCA. The River Mease Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) forms part of the boundary with the Mease/Sence Lowlands NCA in the south-west and the Leicestershire Vales NCA forms a less visually defined border in the south.

The area has a developing woodland character, heavily influenced by work of The National Forest that covers the majority of the NCA and which aims to link the remnant ancient forest landscapes of Melbourne Parklands NCA in the north with those of Charnwood NCA in the east and Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands NCA in the west.

The landscape is in continuing transition, from an unenclosed rolling landform that was extensively scarred by abandoned collieries, spoil tips and clay pits, to a matrix of new woodland, restored colliery sites, active brick pits and commercial developments that are woven into an essentially rural, agricultural landscape. Settlements consist of a mix of small hamlets, enlarged market towns and former mining settlements.

[NCA 72: Mease/Sence Lowlands \(NE421\)](#)

The Mease/Sence Lowlands are a gently rolling agricultural landscape centred around the rivers Mease, Sence and Anker. The area extends across: Derbyshire in the north, Warwickshire in the south, Leicestershire in the east and Staffordshire in the west. With its towns lying on the fringes of the National Character Area (NCA), only a very small percentage of it is urban. These lowlands retain a rural, remote character, with small villages, red brick farmsteads and occasional historic parkland and country houses. The National Forest extends into the area north of the River Mease.

The NCA contains one Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – the River Mease, which is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – and has 139 ha of nationally designated SSSI, including the Ashby Canal SSSI. Important habitats include neutral grasslands, wet meadows, parkland, wet woodlands, rivers and streams, all of which support characteristic and rare species of international importance, including the White-Clawed Crayfish, the Spined loach and the bullhead fish.

[NCA 74 Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds \(NE341\)](#)

The Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds form part of a belt of Wold landscapes formed by gently dipping Jurassic rocks which stretch from the Cotswolds to Lincolnshire. The character area extends eastwards between Nottingham and Leicester and includes the large market town of Melton Mowbray. Further south, Rutland Water is a significant feature in this rural, open, mixed farmland landscape with long views from the summits of undulating hills.

[NCA 75 Kesteven Uplands \(NE560\)](#)

The Kesteven Uplands National Character Area (NCA) is a gently rolling, mixed farming landscape dissected by the rivers Witham and the East and West Glen. The area lies at the junction of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Rutland. However, the majority falls within the historic Kesteven district of Lincolnshire which extends south to the impressive stone town of Stamford. This is a deeply rural landscape which has only a very small urban area.

This area is geologically varied with a wide range of soil types, from limestone through to heavy clays. The area's well-drained calcareous loam soils support the cultivation of cereals, oilseeds and root crops. Wide road verges with herbs and wildflowers characterise the area, and individual hedgerow trees provide important woodland character. The origin of the word 'Kesteven' comes partly from the Celtic word 'coed' meaning woods, and much scattered woodland survives throughout the area with some important semi-natural and ancient woodlands.

[NCA 89 Northamptonshire Vales \(NE527\)](#)

The Northamptonshire Vales National Character Area (NCA) consists of a series of low-lying clay vales and river valleys, including the valleys of the rivers Nene and Welland and their tributaries. The area is 10 per cent urban, and settlement is often visually dominant. Major road networks that traverse the area include the M1, A45, A6 and A5. This area adjoins the Leicestershire Vales NCA to the north-west and has many similar characteristics.

[NCA 93 High Leicestershire \(NE497\)](#)

High Leicestershire National Character Area (NCA) rises out of the clay of the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Vales on the western and southern sides and above the lowland plains of the Soar, Wreake and Welland valleys and the Vale of Belvoir. To the north and east the area abuts the

Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds NCA, rising steeply out of the Wreake Valley, but with a more gradual transition towards the Vale of Catmose and Rutland Water towards the east over limestone lowlands. This landscape of broad, rolling ridges and secluded valleys has a quiet, remote and rural character with small villages and scattered farms. The predominantly rural character of the area comprises undulating fields with a mix of pasture on the higher, sloping land and arable farming on the lower, flatter land. Fields are divided by well-established hedgerows, with occasional mature hedgerow trees. A network of narrow country lanes, tracks and footpaths connect across the landscape interspersed by small thickets, copses and woodlands. Extensive views from the higher ground reveal a pattern of small attractive villages, hamlets and farm buildings set within an agricultural landscape, with traditional churches acting as distinctive features of the settlements.

Only a very small percentage of the NCA is classified as 'urban': the eastern edge of Leicester (including the suburbs of Thurmaston, Syston and Queniborough) and Uppingham, the only market town in the area, located close to the A47 which cuts horizontally across the middle of the NCA. The A6003 and B6047 provide the major north–south routes.

[NCA 94 Leicestershire Vales \(NE532\)](#)

Leicestershire Vales National Character Area (NCA) shares many characteristics with the neighbouring Northamptonshire Vales NCA. The Leicestershire Vales extend between the town of Hinckley in the west to Leicester in the northeast and southwards towards Market Harborough and Lutterworth. This is a large, relatively open, uniform landscape composed of low-lying clay vales interrupted by a range of varied river valleys. Its sense of place comes less from its overall landform and more from its visually dominant settlements and views towards surrounding higher ground. The city of Leicester dominates the north-eastern corner of the NCA.

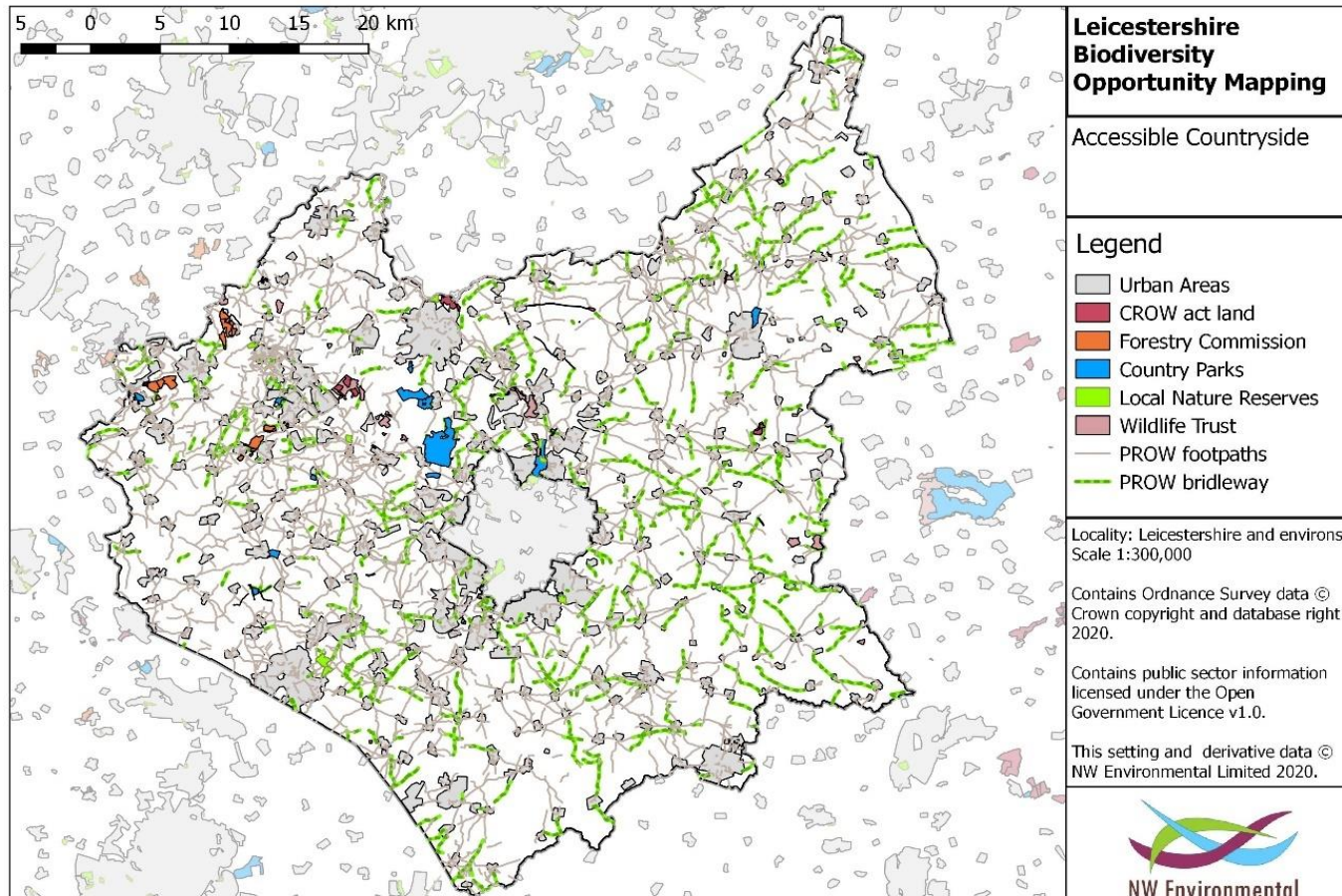
Other large- to medium-sized settlements include the towns of Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Hinckley, with many attractive small towns, villages and buildings and features of historic interest in between. The north of the area has a predominance of settlements and a general lack of tranquillity; this contrasts strongly with the distinctly more rural feel in the southern part of the area, where a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland is found.

[NCA 95 Northamptonshire Uplands \(NE565\)](#)

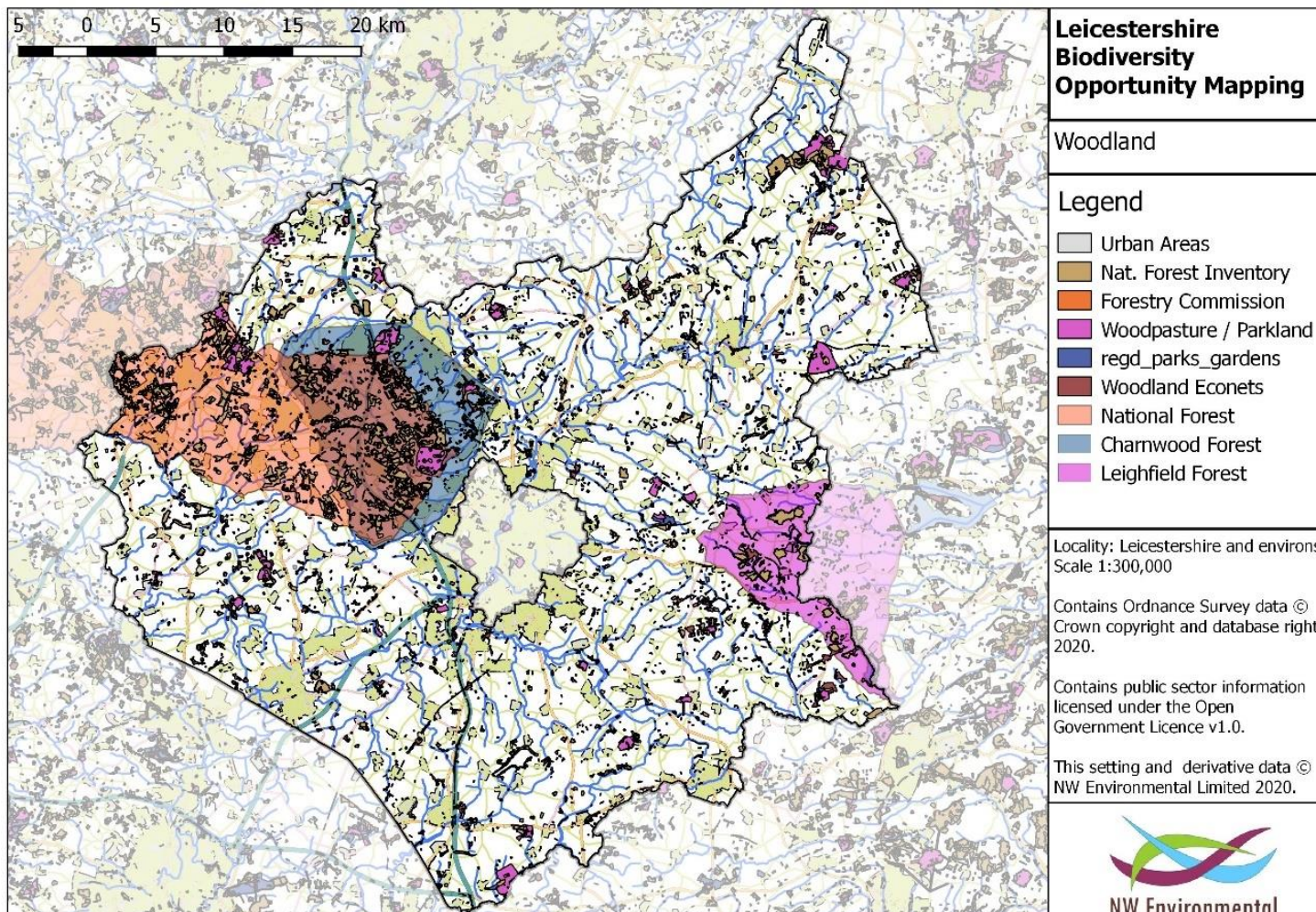
The Northamptonshire Uplands National Character Area (NCA) is an area of gently rolling, limestone hills and valleys capped by ironstone-bearing sandstone and clay Lias, with many long, low ridgelines. Rivers flow out from the NCA in all directions, including several major rivers – the Cherwell, Avon, Welland, Tove, Ouse, Nene and Ise. While there are areas of differing character, there are strong unifying landscape features across the Northamptonshire Uplands, most importantly the extensive areas of open field systems with ridge and furrow and the earthworks of deserted and shrunken settlements which occur throughout. Other features include the strong, mostly Parliamentary enclosure pattern with high, wide, A-shaped hedgerows bounding the largely rectilinear fields with their frequent mature ash and oak trees; the many country houses and their associated extensive areas of historic and nationally important designed parkland landscapes; the distinctive ironstone, cob and brick nucleated settlements with their large stone churches, often with prominent steeples; the narrow lanes with very wide grassy verges; and the small, scattered but prominent broadleaved woods and coverts. There are also wide, long-distance views from the edges and across the ridgetops throughout the area.

Appendix 4: Accessible Countryside & Woodland in Leicestershire

Accessible Countryside in Leicestershire

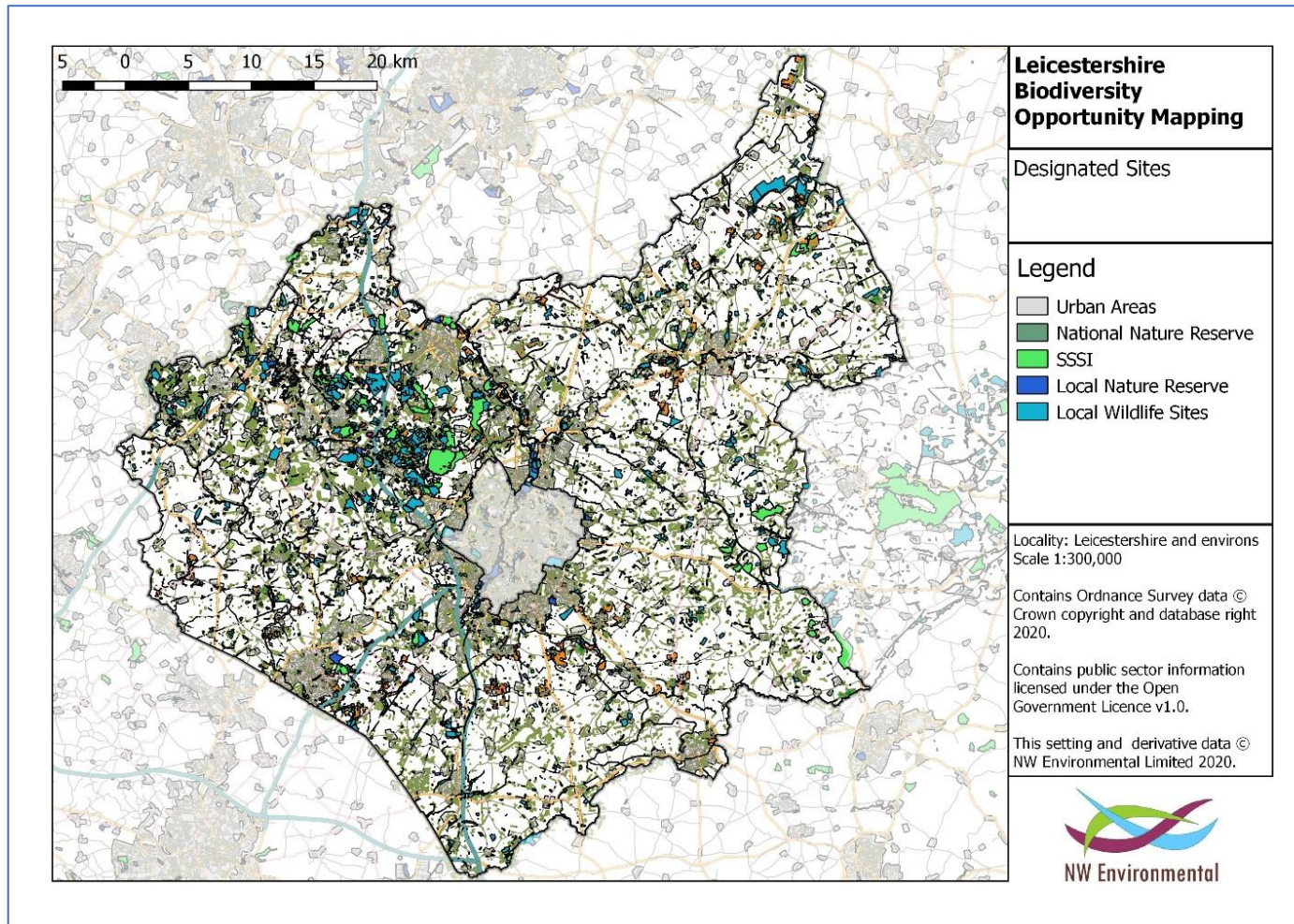


Woodland in Leicestershire



Appendix 5: Larger versions of maps used in the document

Designated sites in Leicestershire - Ecology



Designated Sites in Leicestershire - Historic Environment

Nationally protected historic sites

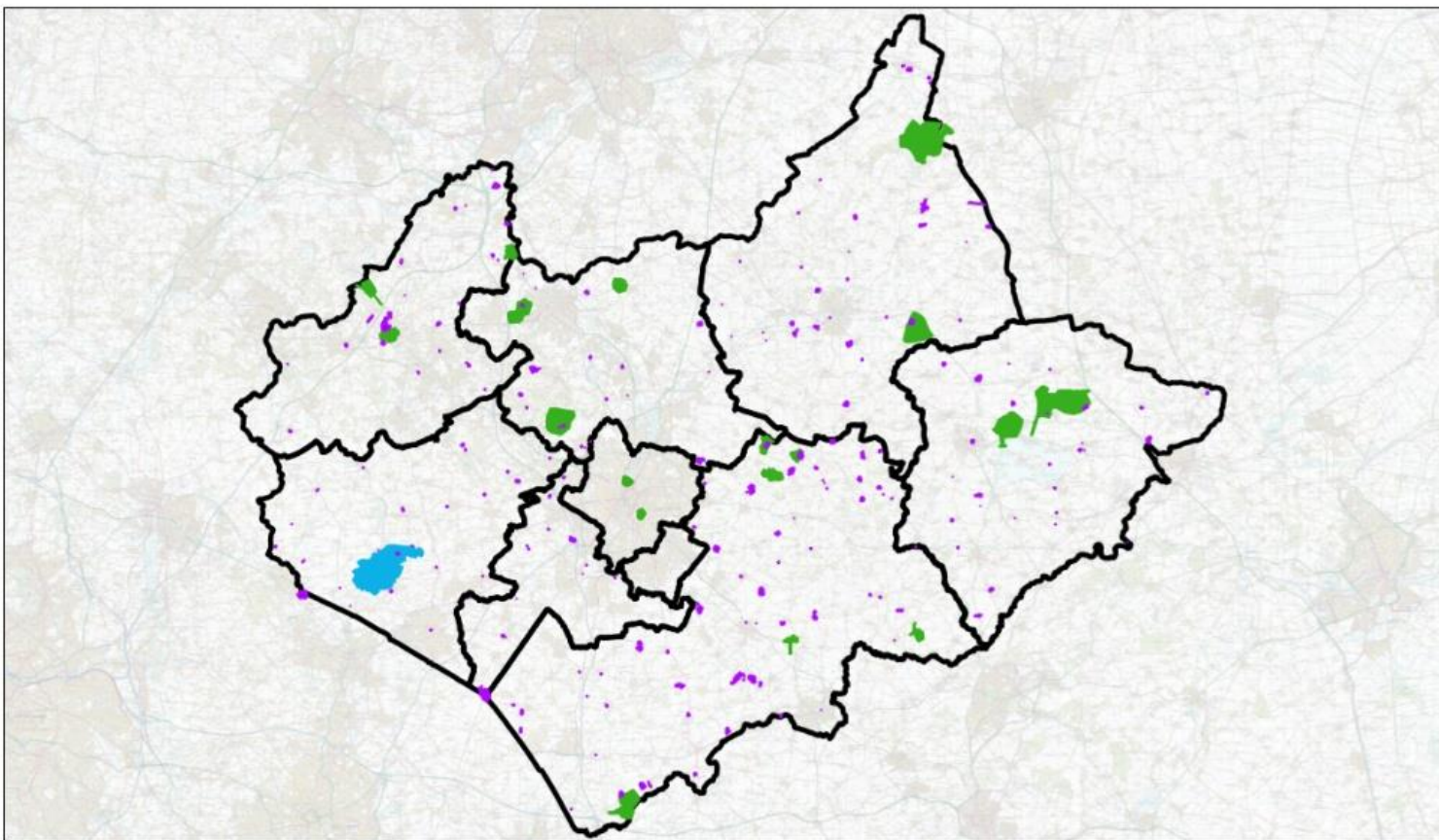
Scheduled Monuments (purple), Registered Parks & Gardens (green), Battlefield (blue)

Compiled by Helen Wells on 06/04/2021

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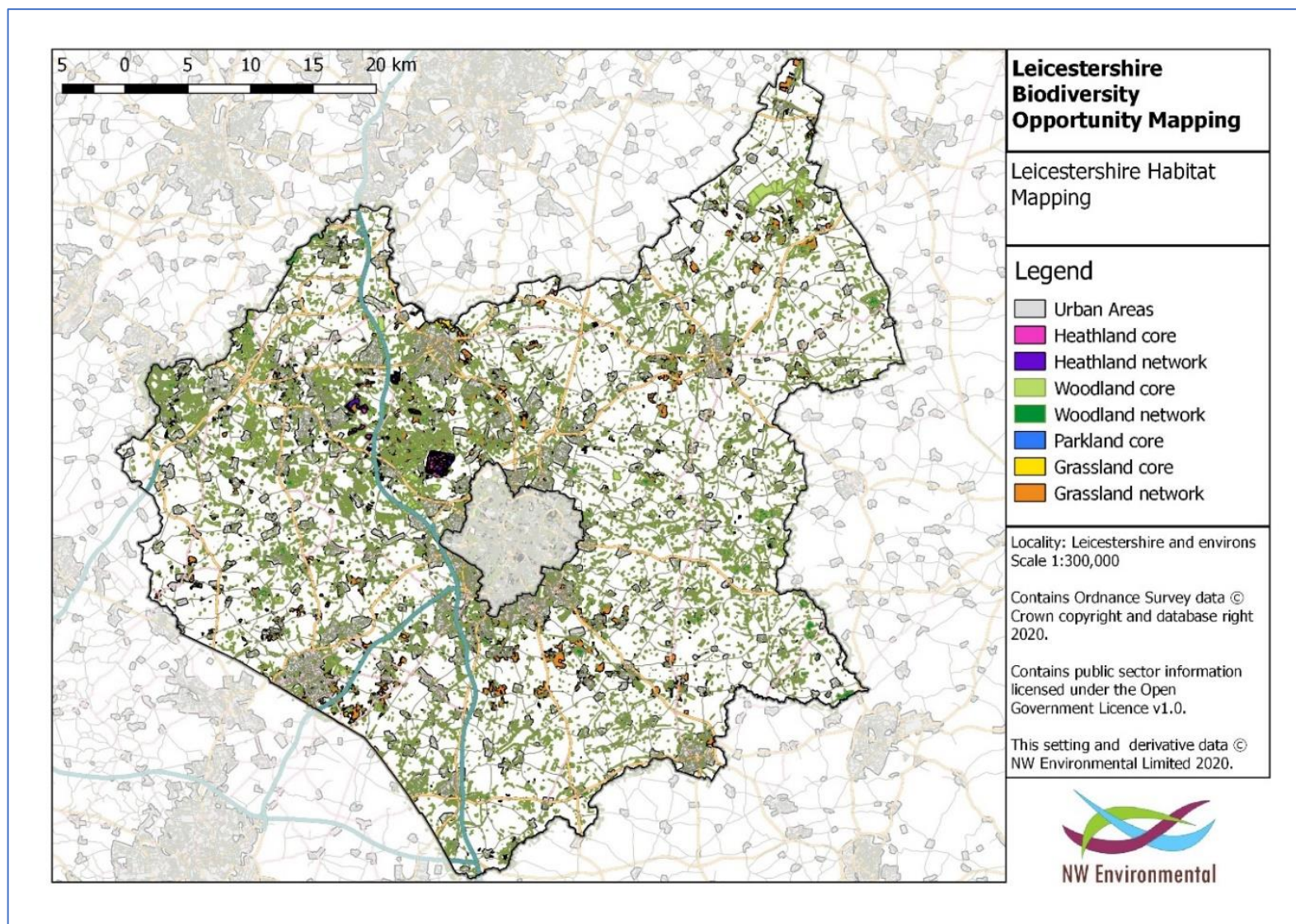
Historic & Natural Environment Team
Leicestershire County Council
Room 200, County Hall
Glenfield
Leicester LE3 8RA



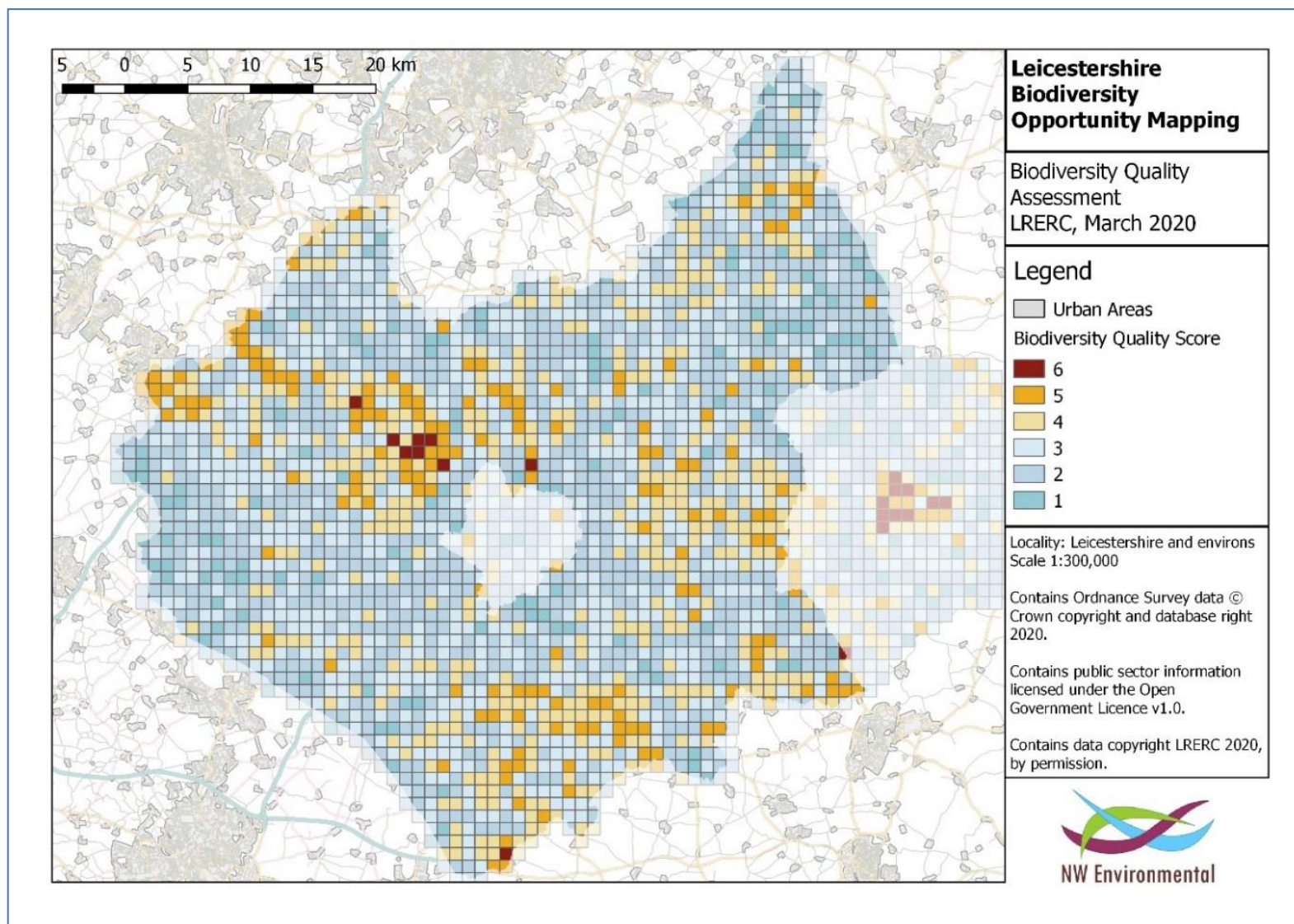
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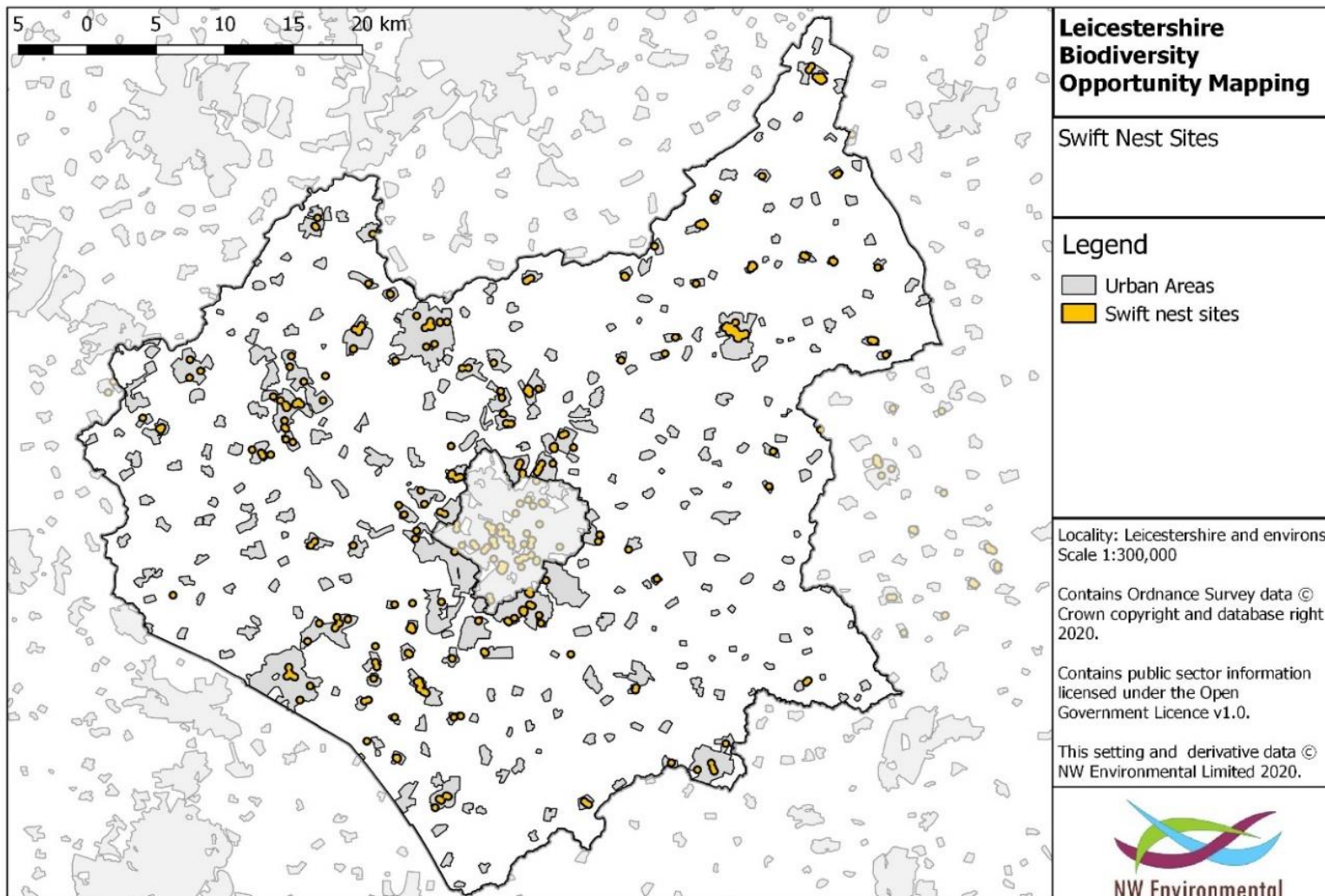
Dominant Existing Habitats in Leicestershire



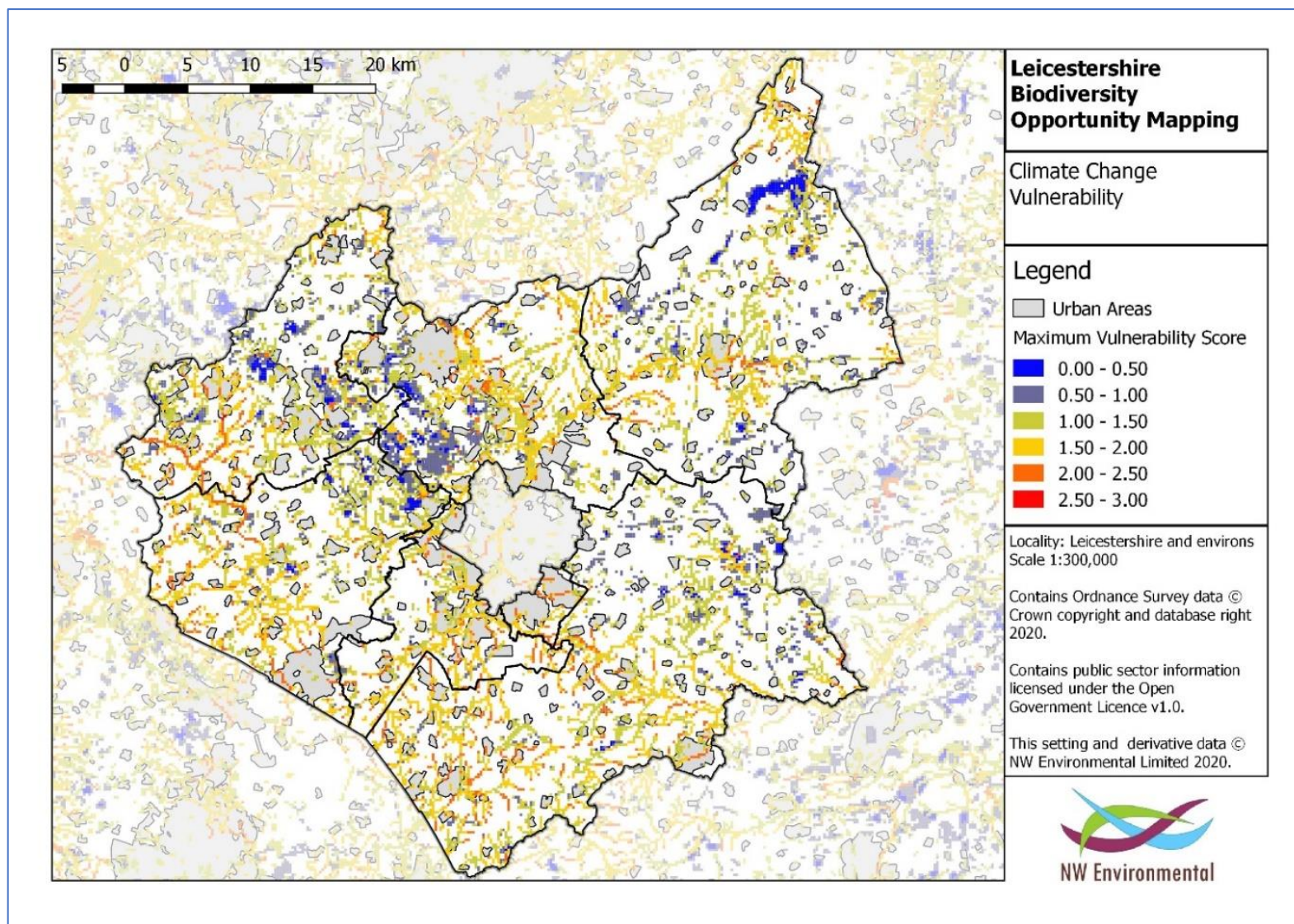
Biodiversity Quality Score – Leicestershire



Swift nesting sites in Leicestershire



Climate Change Habitat Vulnerability



Appendix 6: Sources of Data

Data	Source	Date published	Constraints
Leicestershire & Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan	Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust & Leicestershire Environmental Records Centre	2016	Data is from 2016 and prior to 2016.
YouGov	RSPBhttps://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report_nature-and-green-recovery_rspbyougov_june-2020.pdf	2020	1 Fieldwork undertaken on 14-15 May 2020 by YouGov on behalf of the RSPB. Total sample size for the UK was 2155, and the net sample size for England was 1,812 adults. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). 2 Figures representative of responses from adults in England unless otherwise stated. 3 Data for UK households has been used for the section on income inequality. 4 Calculations by RSPB. 5 Data for UK households has been used for the section on income inequality to enable comparison with ONS data on household incomes by decile group. 6 The ONS dataset, "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income, disposable income estimate: 2019" reports the top 10% of UK households have an income of £59,130 or more. The lowest 10% of UK households have an income of £13,960 or less. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/datasets/householddisposableincomeandincomeequality
Figure 2 Natural England Condition Summary of Leicestershire Sites of Special	https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk	2019	Data is varied in age and pre-dates 2019

Scientific Interest			
Figure 3 Designated sites -Ecology	Public sector information Licenced under the Open Government Licence version 1	2020	Data is varied in age and pre-dates 2020
Figure 4 Nationally Protected Historic Sites	Leicestershire Heritage Environment Record	2021	Up to date as of 06/04/2021
Figure 5 Dominant existing habitats within Leicestershire	Leicestershire Environment Records, Leicester City Council, Charnwood Borough Council Phase 1 mapping, Mastermap and Remote sensing data Leicester University	2020	Phase 1 Data is varied in age and some is older than 10 years. Habitat Networks are based on the movement of Generic Focal species within permeable and less permeable habitats they are associated with. This is not a map showing where opportunities are for expanding, creating habitats.
Figure 6 LERC Biodiversity Quality Score	Leicestershire Environment Records Centre Biodiversity Quality Score	2020	This data is based on Phase 1 habitat mapping, known national & local designations and aerial photography 2016-2018. However, Phase 1 data used may not indicate the condition of designated sites as photographed within the timescale of aerial photography.
Figure 7 LERC Wildlife Alert maps (Swifts)	Leicestershire Environment Records Centre	2020	Varied data on the location of recorded Swift nest sites collect up to 2020.
Figure 8 Climate Change Vulnerability Mapping	Public sector information Licenced under the Open Government Licence version 1	2019	Data is based on nationally designated sites for ecology and areas within government land management schemes

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

June 2021