



<b>Policy, Finance and Development Committee</b>	<b>Tuesday, 03 December 2024</b>	<b>Matter for Information and Decision</b>
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**Report Title:** **Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

**Report Author(s):** **Peter Heath (Senior Planning Policy Officer)**

<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	This report seeks Committee approval for a response to the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
<b>Report Summary:</b>	<p>To arrest the national decline in biodiversity and then boost biodiversity the previous Government passed the Environment Act 2021. One of the principal ways the Act seeks to do this is via forty-eight local nature recovery strategies (LNRS). Leicestershire County Council are responsible for producing the LNRS for Leicestershire.</p> <p>The County is seeking approval of this current draft by all the partners before releasing the draft for public consultation in January 2025. County hopes to have the strategy adopted by July 2025. Under the LNRS regulations, all local planning authorities falling within the area covered by a LNRS are supporting authorities. A supporting authority has the power to formally object to the draft LNRS at the pre-consultation stage and before final publication.</p> <p>The LNRS is welcomed as it highlights areas of nature conservation importance within the borough and signposts areas within the borough that can be enhanced to boost biodiversity. It is an on-going strategy which should be reviewed every five years.</p>
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	<b>A. That the content of the report be noted; and B. That the comments set out at 1.11 in this report be approved.</b>
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<b>Strategic Objectives:</b>	<p>Our Council (SO1) Our Communities (SO2) Our Environment (SO4)</p>

<b>Vision and Values:</b>	Collaborative & Creative (V3) Resourceful & Resilient (V4)
<b>Report Implications: -</b>	
Legal:	The implications are as set out at paragraphs 1.3 and 1.7 of this report.
Financial:	There are no implications directly arising from this report.
Corporate Risk Management:	No corporate risk(s) identified.
Equalities and Equalities Assessment (EA):	There are no implications directly arising from this report. EA not applicable
Human Rights:	There are no implications directly arising from this report.
Health and Safety:	There are no implications directly arising from this report.
<b>Statutory Officers' Comments: -</b>	
Head of Paid Service:	The report is satisfactory.
Chief Finance Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
Monitoring Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
<b>Consultees:</b>	None.
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None.
<b>Appendices:</b>	1. Equality Assessment

## 1. Information

- 1.1 The abundance and diversity of nature is now in long term decline, which means that our natural environment is becoming less resilient and less able to provide us with the benefits we often take for granted. The recovery of nature is important for everyone who lives and works in Oadby & Wigston. It is fundamental to our prosperity, quality of life and health and wellbeing. It increases our defence against climate change and the extreme weather that we are already experiencing, as nature helps reduce flood risk and the impact of heatwaves in urban areas, and store carbon that would otherwise contribute to climate change.
- 1.2 The landmark 'State of Nature Report' in 2012, an independent report by Professor John Lawton, and published by Government, concluded that the network of sites protected for nature was increasingly fragmented and isolated, and as such, a new 'bigger, better, more joined-up' approach was necessary to help nature recover. This culminated in the Environment Act 2021 which introduced a range of measures to halt and reverse biodiversity decline and help nature recover.
- 1.3 There are 48 strategy areas across England, each with a responsible authority, as determined by the Secretary of State. Leicestershire County is one of the strategy areas and is the responsible authority (also covering the City of Leicester and Rutland). Oadby

& Wigston Borough Council is designated a 'supporting authority'. County is required to obtain agreement from supporting authorities before publication of the draft strategy for consultation and adoption of the final strategy itself. Following adoption, the Council will be required to have regard to the Strategy.

1.4 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is an opportunity to set out a long-term vision for a greener county, where nature is returning, and more people have better access to greenspace. It is non-binding. It does not introduce a new layer of protection and is not a barrier to development. Development proposals will, however, need to have regard to the Strategy and should consider how nature is integrated into the design and operation of new development. The Strategy is a tool to support land management and land use, it consists of:

- A description of the natural and people shaped landscape of the area.
- A Map identifying existing areas of particular importance for biodiversity.
- The setting out of the current state of nature of the area.
- The identification of priority habitats across various landscapes, including woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, farmland, and urban environments.
- The identification of priority species and species which are known indicators of habitat quality. These have been identified by Natural England.
- A focus on nature-based solutions to make space for nature, mitigate climate change impacts, enhance ecosystem services, and improve environmental health.
- A strong emphasis on community involvement through citizen science, partnerships with landowners and farmers, and local biodiversity initiatives.
- A Map identifying areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity. Including specific landscape opportunities for creating and expanding habitats, improving habitat connectivity, and safeguarding key species.
- A roadmap for delivery to ensure long-term success, alongside a monitoring framework to track progress and make the necessary adjustments.

1.5 The Map is based on existing, designated nature sites and uses opportunity areas which together enable the development of a more resilient nature network for the County. The Strategy seeks to improve the quality and extent of existing sites and improve the connectivity and management of land for nature. The core nature sites are the County's existing wildlife sites, including those designated and protected at an international, national and local level. So, areas such as parks, river corridors, the Green Wedge will be the focus of attention.

1.6 The opportunity areas show how these existing wildlife sites can be joined up to create a Nature Network. The County has worked to develop an approach based on sound ecological modelling and mapping, and taking account of land cover types, constraints, and local knowledge. This will result in a final map, setting out the priority areas within which to focus action to create a joined-up Nature Network across the County.

1.7 Under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2016, as a local authority, the Council is required to have regard to the Strategy when performing Council duties and consider what action the Council can take to "further the general biodiversity objective" of conserving and enhancing biodiversity. Regarding its role as a local planning authority, the Council is required to "have regard" to the LNRS in local planning policy and decisions. The Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 included a clause which creates a new requirement on all relevant plan-makers and requires all tiers of planning to take account of the

relevant LNRS.

- 1.8 However, it is important to note that the LNRS (which includes the mapping of opportunity areas) does not introduce any new protections of sites or designations – for example, the opportunity areas do not have any status in planning – nor introduce any new barriers to development. The County and local authorities will continue to work together as to how the LNRS can be reflected in the planning process.
- 1.9 The LNRS will provide a framework for targeted, co-ordinated and collaborative action and is a key tool to help deliver the Council's statutory biodiversity duty. As a tool for land management, the LNRS will help guide action, funding and investment into local priorities to provide benefits for people and wildlife. The Council will consider what action the Council wants to take on its own land and what it wants to achieve in partnership with others. As a tool for planning, the LNRS will determine priorities for statutory biodiversity net gain, inform the design of new development, and align closely with existing planning policies, especially Local Plan Green & Blue Infrastructure policy, to support efficient and effective decision-making by Development Management.
- 1.10 Officers agree that the priority habitats identified in paragraph 1.4 are the appropriate habitats across Leicestershire to focus action upon. Officers believe that the priority species for Leicestershire identified by Natural England are appropriate. Officers agree that for predominantly urban areas like Oadby & Wigston the strategy's approach to boost green and blue infrastructure through promoting green spaces (both formal and informal), wildflower verges, native planting, sustainable urban drainage systems, boosting biodiversity within green wedges are the appropriate way forward.
- 1.11 It is recommended that Committee agrees the draft Strategy for consultation for the following reasons:
  - Officers have been closely involved in its development and it reflects our priorities as set out in several policies in both the adopted and emerging Local Plan.
  - It is an evidence-led strategy for land management; it is not a land-use planning document, although it will inform future Local Plan policy
  - It does not commit the Council to undertake any specified action, however, the Council will be required to have regard to the Strategy when it is adopted
  - It does not create any new areas of protection or designation
  - Committee will be invited to agree the Final Strategy in Spring 2025 prior to adoption (anticipated July 2025).