

Biodiversity Reporting Duty Report

North West Leicestershire District Council

March 2026

Introduction

Under the strengthened 'biodiversity duty' introduced by the Environment Act 2021, public authorities who operate in England are required to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This means that, as a public authority, North West Leicestershire District Council must:

- Consider what it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on its consideration of the biodiversity duty
- Act to deliver Council policies and objectives

This report outlines the Council's approach to protecting biodiversity, the actions carried out and how it intends to meet its biodiversity reporting duties going forward (including in respect of biodiversity net gain which is set out in a separate section of the report), building on existing policies, partnerships and activities to drive biodiversity benefits within the resource and influence of the Council. This is a corporate responsibility that needs to be considered across all Council departments, actions and decision making.

This report covers the period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025. The end date of the Council's next reporting period must be within five years of 31 December 2025.

As the Council is one of many local authorities undergoing Local Government Re-organisation, the next report may represent a wider geography of Leicestershire and Rutland.

North West Leicestershire

North West Leicestershire (NWL) is a largely rural district with the key urban areas of Coalville, Ashby, Measham and Castle Donington. Its landscape is defined by its industrial heritage and extensive reforestation effort, with both the National Forest and Charnwood Forest Regional Park within its boundaries.

There are 17 Sites of Special Interest (SSSIs) within the NWL district. One of these, Charnwood Lodge, is also a National Nature Reserve.

Most of the western half of the NWL district is covered by the River Mease Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is also a SSSI, and is designated due to the importance of the rare species and habitats it supports including rivers with floating vegetation often dominated by water-crowfoot, white-clawed (or Atlantic stream) crayfish, spined loach, bullhead fish and otters.

Policies and Objectives

The [Council Delivery Plan 2023-2028](#), is built around four strategic priorities, one being "Clean, green and Zero carbon" which is "about looking after the environment we live in". This commitment is underpinned by several policies and strategies across the organisation, spread over each of its three directorates: Communities, Place and Resources. Some policies and strategies have direct links to driving biodiversity benefit, whilst others drive indirect co-benefits.

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity. On 25 June 2019, the Council declared a Climate Emergency and appointed specialist environmental consultants to help develop the response to the need to reduce the Council's and the district's carbon emissions. This resulted in the publication of the [Zero Carbon Roadmap](#) in November 2019 which, along with the accompanying [Action Plan](#), was adopted by the Council on 31 March 2020. This sets out key objectives around climate and the environment with an ambition for the Council's operations to be carbon neutral by 2030. Activity is overseen by the Environment, Climate and Zero Carbon Steering Group drawing on an allocated reserve of £1 million to provide resource and help facilitate activity. Biodiversity related activity forms part of this workstream.

The Council signed up to the [Leicestershire Climate and Nature Pact](#) when it launched in February 2023. The core requirements of the pact include the need to act quickly on reducing the impacts of climate change, reducing carbon emissions to net zero, halting ecological decline, supporting nature recovery, and working together to deliver effective action on climate change. On 14 November 2023, the Council passed a [motion](#) to call on Leicestershire Local Government Pension Schemes to divest from fossil fuel investments.

The Council's [Environmental Policy](#), approved in January 2026, references to biodiversity and protecting and enhancing local ecosystems, wildlife habitats, and green spaces along with encouraging the planting of trees and the maintenance of local parks and reserves.

The [Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Strategy](#), approved in 2025, recognises the importance of trees to the environment and outlines how they will be managed and maintained on land owned and managed by the Council, in line with principles of the [Leicestershire Tree Charter](#). The strategy includes responding to pests and diseases, planting new climate resilient trees and hedgerows to support wildlife and encourage natural regeneration and increasing tree canopy cover across the district. It is underpinned by an annual action plan which aims to increase and enhance the availability and maintenance of trees and hedgerows in the district and is integrated within management plans for parks and open spaces.

The Council's [North West Leicestershire District Regeneration Framework](#) outlines the commitment to making the district an "incredible place to live, work and play". It refers to "conserving and enhancing our Natural Environment" and outlines how the UK Shared Prosperity Fund helped support the National Forest and its [Heart of the Forest Masterplan](#), which sets out the aim to transform the centre of the National Forest over the next 10 years, strengthening its sense of place, improving the visitor experience and encouraging sustainable enterprise and inward investment.

The [Coalville Regeneration Framework](#) sets out a vision for the town and outlines a variety of projects, a desire to move towards Zero Carbon. It aims to make the most of the town's extensive green infrastructure network, encouraging sustainable modes of transport which includes plans for new and improved pedestrian and cycle paths.

The Council has led on the development of a NWL Cycling and Walking Strategy and a NWL Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) with the support of Leicestershire County Council (LCC) and in consultation with numerous local partners. The strategy sets out the approach that the Council and partners intend to take at a local level to deliver on the Government's ambitions to

make England a great walking and cycling nation. LCWIPs are designed to allow local authorities to take a long-term approach to the development of networks of walking and cycling routes that connect places that people need to get to, whether for work, education, shopping or for other reasons and include network plans for walking and cycling which identify preferred routes and core zones for further development, and a prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements for future investment

The Council's [Procurement Strategy](#) supports the Council's environmental goals by prioritising sustainable procurement practices, such as reducing carbon footprints, minimising waste, and promoting the use of eco-friendly products and services, and through embedding social and environmental value into procurement activity, including specifications and tender scoring.

The Council adopted a [hybrid working policy](#) in 2021 which has enabled the move to smaller, more energy efficient offices and driven a reduction in commuting travel for many of its 500+ employees. The policy outlines a move away from traditional working methods, introducing greater flexibility whilst maintaining customer services and references to the Council's zero carbon targets.

The Council is responsible for various licencing activities; in terms of taxi licencing, its [Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy](#) actively encourages the adoption of electric vehicles through a 15% reduction in fees and, since January 2026, has required all vehicles to have at least a Euro 6 compliant engine. Any vehicle not compliant with the required standard will not be licensed at the time of renewal. From an event licencing perspective, North West Leicestershire is the home of the annual Download rock festival with over 75,000 attendees. Lift shares and coach travel are encouraged; £1 from every car parking ticket is donated to Trees for Cities to support local tree planting projects; and a focus on recycling with a deposit scheme on cups and bottles to encourage recycling and reduce litter.

The adopted [North West Leicestershire Local Plan \(2021\)](#) sets out 15 objectives identifying what the Council seeks to achieve through the Local Plan and new development, including Objective 11:

- *Protect and enhance the natural environment including the district's biodiversity, geodiversity and water environment areas identified for their importance.*

Four other objectives relate to biodiversity, covering such areas as climate change, water efficiency and flood risk, waste reduction and green sustainable development.

The adopted Local Plan includes policies to protect and enhance biodiversity and manage impacts from new development on the environment. Policy En1 (Nature Conservation) is the key policy relating to biodiversity. Several other policies in the adopted Local Plan also make reference to biodiversity covering such areas as new housing and employment sites, design, open space, the River Mease Special Area of Conservation, the National Forest, the Charnwood Regional Park, land and air quality, renewable energy and sustainable drainage systems.

All of the Neighbourhood Plans in the district, which have been produced by the relevant Parish or Town Council, include policies relating specifically to biodiversity net gain and biodiversity:

- the made Ashby de la Zouch Neighbourhood Plan (November 2025) – Policy ENV4 (Sites and Features of Natural Environment Significance) and Policy ENV5 (Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity)
- the made Breedon on the Hill Neighbourhood Plan (March 2025) – Policy BotH5 (Ecology and Biodiversity)
- the made Ellistown and Battleflat Neighbourhood Plan (July 2019) – Policy S3 (South East Coalville Development Scheme) and Policy NE2 (Biodiversity)
- the pre-submission Ellistown and Battleflat Neighbourhood Plan (March 2025) - Policy ENV4 (Sites and Features of Natural Environment Significance), Policy ENV5 (Biodiversity Across the Neighbourhood Area)
- the made Hugglescote and Donington le Heath Neighbourhood Plan (November 2021) – Policy ENV6 (Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity)
- the made Blackfordby Neighbourhood Plan (April 2022) – Policy G2 (Design), Policy H1 (Residential Site Allocation) and Policy ENV6 (Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity)
- the made Swannington Neighbourhood Plan (March 2023) – Policy ENV3 (Sites and Features of Natural Environment Significance) and Policy ENV4 (Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity)
- the made Lockington cum Hemington Neighbourhood Plan (February 2024) - Policy ENV4 (Sites and Features of Natural Environment Significance) and Policy ENV5 (Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity)
- the submission Long Whatton and Diseworth Neighbourhood Plan (January 2025) – Policy LE&D5 (Ecology and Biodiversity)

Partnership Working

Effective partnership activity is key, and the Council works collaboratively with the National Forest, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust along with Leicestershire County Council (LCC), parish and town councils and other landowners and relevant stakeholders.

The [Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2-26 \(LLRBAP\)](#) was developed by the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust in partnership with nineteen organisations. The plan, originally published in 1998 and updated several times (most recently in 2016), is now called "Space for Wildlife16". The LLRBAP recognises five areas as having high value for wildlife because of the quality of existing habitats; within the district this includes Charnwood Forest and the adjoining National Forest. These areas form part of the [Wildlife Trusts Living Landscapes initiative](#).

The Council is a partner and collaborated on the development of the [Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland](#), which provides a blueprint for nature recovery, focusing on habitat loss, species decline, flood mitigation, food production, building development, improving air and water quality and climate change. The LNRS outlines priorities for the district in particular relating to the Charnwood Forest, the National Forest and Leicestershire Coalfield areas as well as its urban areas and makes particular reference to the River Mease Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The measures in the LNRS aim to deliver long-term ecological resilience and biodiversity gains for these areas and across the district and

will shape future activity across Leicestershire and Rutland, which the Council will continue to implement.

NWL is the home of The National Forest and there is a strong history of working together. This includes supporting the development of the [Heart of the National Forest Vision](#), which sets out plans to deliver biodiversity enhancements, create connected habitats, wood land management and support the Green Web - a network of footpaths and cycleways linking key attractions.

In developing the Nature Alive site in Coalville, the Council worked together with the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. The site has a large population of great crested newts, and the ponds also support smooth newts, common toads, common frogs and numerous other aquatic invertebrates such as dragonfly larvae and water beetles. Wetland plants including common reed and water forget-me-not provide foraging, egg laying and refuge areas for newts and other wildlife. The surrounding tall grassland and scrub provide excellent hibernation and refuge areas for both amphibians and small mammals. The ponds are managed to ensure that conditions continue to be suitable for the amphibians to breed and regular surveys are carried out to identify and record species found on site.

Another example is the [River Mease Partnership](#); its membership is made up of the Council, Natural England, the Environment Agency, Severn Trent Water, the Trent Rivers Trust, the National Farmers Union, South Derbyshire District Council and Lichfield District Council. The River Mease Special Area of Conservation (SAC) a highly significant watercourse, designated due to the importance of the species and habitats it supports.

The water and associated habitats of the Mease are crucial for the conservation of these species. Additionally, the Mease plays an important role in local agriculture, providing water resources and contributing to the agricultural landscape. The river and its tributaries suffer from poor habitats and water quality problems mainly due to high phosphorous levels, which comes from a variety of sources, including agriculture, and from new development as a result of increased foul water discharge. The River Mease Partnership works on focusing conservation efforts to improve water quality, restore habitats, and protect its unique biodiversity, including by using mitigation measures funded by the two River Mease Developer Contribution Schemes (DCS). The DCS required developers to pay developer contributions (as part of the planning application process) to fund measures to mitigate for the harm to the SAC arising from foul drainage discharge from new developments in the Mease catchment. Efforts to restore riparian habitats along rivers and streams have resulted in the return of species such as otters and water voles to areas where they had once previously disappeared.

Work is ongoing by the Council (on behalf of South Derbyshire District Council and Lichfield District Council) and its River Mease Delivery Partner (the Trent Rivers Trust) to deliver nutrient neutrality mitigation measures for foul drainage discharge from planning applications for new housing development and other developments involving overnight stays in the catchment.

Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) have recently been introduced under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025. EDPs will identify and deliver strategic conservation measures that address specific environmental impacts of development on protected sites (such as SACs) or species. In December 2025 Natural England notified DEFRA of their intention to create an EDP

for the River Mease SAC and the Council will provide information to Natural England about the SAC catchment and the work done to date by the River Mease Partnership and the Council.

In terms of indirect activity, the Council is an active member of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Air Quality Forum and Leicestershire's Air Quality and Health Partnership and reports annually on air quality. It is also a partner in the [Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy 2022-2050](#) and driving recycling rates in the district through trials of food waste and flex film collections. The strategy aims to encourage people to take greater responsibility for consumption choices that lead to waste generation and disposal, through raising awareness of initiatives such as home composting, using less, reuse and recycling. As part of the Leicestershire Waste Partnership, campaigns such as "Litter Lives On" are trying to prevent fly-tipping and littering which can have a detrimental impact on biodiversity, because it can injure or kill wildlife, pollute, destroy and damage habitats and upset ecosystems. In terms of managing Recycling Household Waste Sites (RHWS) there is an objective to protect and increase biodiversity through good practice.

Activities

The Council acknowledges that activities contributing to biodiversity outcomes can result from both direct and indirect actions. These include investments in energy efficiency measures to drive lower energy use in its social housing and use of renewable energies which helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce impact on habitats and species; encouraging active travel, reducing travel, or using electric vehicles which can help reduce air pollution and improve air quality; improving recycling services and responsible waste management to help protect habitats.

The Council adopted a [hybrid working policy](#) in 2021 which has enabled the move to smaller, more energy efficient offices and driven a reduction in commuting travel for many of its 500+ employees. It has added fifteen electric vehicles to its fleet with the rest of the fleet fuelled by hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), which produces lower air pollutants than diesel, and has implemented route optimisation across its services to reduce mileage and drive associated environmental benefits. The Council has installed electric vehicle chargers in seven of its public car parks to help support its residents. It has installed 518 solar panels (194 kwp) on the roof of its Whitwick and Coalville Leisure Centre driving a reduction in energy consumption.

In managing its own land (with two Green Flag Awards) across parks, open spaces, play areas, sports fields, cemeteries and nature sites across the district, the Council remains dedicated to increasing the canopy cover in the district by planting trees in appropriate spaces. It has planted over 680 trees since 2024 and now leaves many grass areas uncut or mown less frequently to help encourage pollinators. One transformation is Coalville Forest Adventure Park which was formerly a landfill site and the area has been transformed into an important habitat for wildlife with over 8,400 trees planted in the last decade.

As part of the redevelopment of the Hermitage recreation grounds in Coalville between 2023-2025, an Eco Park was created increasing biodiversity, with enhancements to improve the ecology and biodiversity of the lake and woodland area, including indigenous tree planting, defined footpaths, boardwalks, activity nodes and lakeside reed and iris planting. The site also includes a

Tiny Forest, delivered in partnership with Earthwatch, which is a dense fast-growing native woodland that brings the benefits of a forest into cities and urban spaces. The aim is that the area reconnects people with nature, enhances wellbeing, helps mitigate the impacts of climate change and provides nature-rich habitat patches to support urban wildlife.

The site of Moira Furnace, a scheduled ancient monument and a key surviving example of a blast furnace from the early Industrial Revolution, was acquired by the Council in 1981 and developed as a museum and country park. Now run by a Trust but supported by the Council, the charity's aim is to preserve and conserve the flora and fauna of the Moira Furnace site for the benefit and education of the public. The site consists of 36 acres and amongst the attractions are woodlands, a pond and a walkway over a boggy area. In addition, the Council provides funding support for the Moira Furnace Woodland Festival which showcases woodland crafts, culture and experiences in the National Forest.

The Council is proud of its annual free tree scheme which was launched in 2008 and is a partnership with the National Forest. In 2025 over 14,000 trees and hedging plants were provided to residents and its bulb scheme has provided thousands of bulbs to local groups to plant around their communities. Grant funding has included support for the creation of a community garden; improved planting within a local park to enable visitors to view plants at close range; provided protective clothing to support the removal of invasive plants from waterways; and educating young people to get involved in growing their own food and planting to attract nature and wildlife. One element of the Council's "[Love Your Neighbourhood](#)" scheme focused on bringing residents together to create cleaner, greener neighbourhoods, funding has been provided to support litter picking and the installation of bug houses and bird and bat boxes.

Air quality affects biodiversity as plants, animals and ecosystems depend on clean air to survive and function properly. The Council produces an annual report outlining what air quality monitoring has been done in the district - and if anything is likely to impact air quality that is not currently being monitored (such as planning applications, new roads, junction alterations, etc.).

. One example under the NWL Cycling and Walking Strategy and the NWL Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is in Kegworth where, working in a partnership with LCC and Kegworth Parish Council and funded by the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Long Lane and Ratcliffe Lane have been transformed into a quiet lane, enhancing road safety, promoting active travel, and preserving the peaceful character of this rural route, with bins to help keep the area litter free.

Planning applications are assessed against the policies in the adopted Local Plan and made Neighbourhood Plans, alongside other material considerations. This includes the Council's adopted Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), some of which relate to biodiversity. The Good Design SPD was adopted in April 2017 and includes a chapter relating to 'A greener footprint', which relates to new development being designed and located in such a way to reduce its environmental impact and offer people opportunities to live lower carbon lifestyles. The Cycling Strategies SPDs (Part 1 - Coalville and Part 2 – Ashby de la Zouch) assist with zero carbon as cycling has zero emissions. The Council adopted an Air Quality SPD in October 2023

which sets out the circumstances in which the Council requires planning applications to be supported by an air quality assessment.

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland LNRS is a key evidence base for planning decisions, used to ensure that decisions support local biodiversity objectives and contribute to regional and national nature recovery targets.

The National Forest Company's Guide for Developers and Planners sets out the planting guidelines for development in the National Forest, where applications for sites over specific size thresholds must include Forest green infrastructure on-site or in exceptional circumstances through a contribution towards off-site planting. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the national Planning Practice Guidance both set out policies and guidance in respect of biodiversity (including biodiversity net gain).

LCC provides the Council with specialist ecological advice on planning application submissions in respect of BNG and other ecological matters including protected species.

The Council is currently producing a new [North West Leicestershire Local Plan](#) which will shape future developments across NWL. The Council consulted on the Proposed Policies, Proposed Housing and Employment Allocations, Proposed Limits to Development Review and draft Policies Maps from 5 February to 17 March 2024. Further consultation took place from 21 March to 2 May 2025 on Additional Proposed Housing and Employment Allocations. The Local Development Scheme (February 2025) sets out that the Consultation Publication Local Plan will be consulted on for six weeks in May/June 2026, with submission and examination later in 2026 and adoption in summer 2027.

The plan objectives describe, in overall terms, what the new Local Plan aims to achieve and provides a guiding framework for the Plan's policies and proposals, including Objective 9:

- *Conserve and enhance the district's natural environment, including its biodiversity, geodiversity, water environments and landscape character, notably the River Mease Special Area of Conservation, the National Forest and Charnwood Forest as well as its other valued landscapes and pursue opportunities for biodiversity net gains. [Conserving and enhancing our natural environment].*

Two other objectives relate to biodiversity, covering such areas as climate change, the efficient use of natural resources and controlling pollution.

Draft Policy En1 (Nature Conservation/Biodiversity Net Gain) is the new Local Plan policy that relates specifically to nature conservation and biodiversity net gain. Many of the other policies in the draft new Local Plan relate to biodiversity covering similar areas to the adopted Local Plan such as new housing and employment sites, design, open space, the River Mease Special Area of Conservation, the National Forest, the Charnwood Regional Park, land and air quality, renewable energy and sustainable drainage systems, and also adding in policies relating to reducing carbon emissions, water efficiency, green and blue infrastructure.

The [evidence base](#) to the new Local Plan includes the following studies and assessments relating to biodiversity and related matters:

- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (March 2024) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Update (February 2026) – the update includes guidance on surface water management for new development
- Green & Blue Infrastructure Study (June 2022) identifies and maps the existing Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) assets in the district and outline the key challenges faced by the GBI network locally. It also identifies opportunities for enhancing and creating GBI within seven selected settlements.
- Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Study (February 2021) This study provides evidence on the likely technical potential for different forms of renewable and low carbon energy in the district.

Two [Sustainability Appraisals](#) (November 2025 and January 2024) of the draft policies for the new Local Plan assess them against 17 Sustainability Appraisal objectives, including SA12 which relates to ‘Protect and enhance the district’s biodiversity and protect areas identified for their nature conservation and geological importance.’ Other Sustainability Appraisals have been undertaken in the reporting period, including the Site Assessments Findings Report (November 2024 and September 2025).

The Council has produced a [Draft North West Leicestershire Good Design Guide](#) to replace the adopted Good Design SPD. Consultation on the draft Good Design Guide took place in July to September 2025 and the responses to the consultation are currently being considered. The draft Good Design Guide includes a chapter called ‘Embraces nature’ which sets out that embracing nature is critical to habitats and ecosystems and their development and survival, and that providing pathways, networks and systems that knit together offers the best way for wildlife to thrive. This chapter sets out how this can be delivered through five components:

- Network of spaces
- Open space design
- Sustainable drainage
- Balancing ponds and detention basins
- Street trees

Future Actions

North West Leicestershire District Council, under its Environmental Policy, is committed to protecting and enhancing local ecosystems, wildlife habitats, and green spaces. This includes promoting tree planting and supporting the effective management of local parks and reserves.

The Council is further committed to strengthening biodiversity by delivering strategic actions to restore and reconnect habitats and embedding nature-based solutions across planning, development and regeneration activity and wider decision-making processes.

Future initiatives will include continued working with communities and partners to ensure long-term resilience of local ecosystems and support for the Leicester and Leicestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Activities will include the redevelopment of Stenson Square in Coalville, incorporating climate resilient planting to create a more welcoming and sustainable green space;

ongoing tree and wildflower planting; encouraging gardening activity with social housing tenants; and progressing the new Local Plan and Good Design Guide through to adoption.

As the Council is one of many local authorities undergoing Local Government Re-organisation, the next report may represent a wider geography of Leicestershire and Rutland.

Biodiversity Net Gain

As part of the biodiversity duty requirements, the Environment Act 2021 requires local planning authorities to report on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as follows:

- The actions carried out to meet BNG obligations
- Details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans approved
- How the biodiversity net gain obligations are planned to be met in the next reporting period.

The Government's National Planning Policy Guidance at www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain sets out that:

Biodiversity net gain is a way of creating and improving biodiversity by requiring development to have a positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity. Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, subject to some exceptions, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met ("the biodiversity gain condition"). This objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits. The biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition: once planning permission has been granted, a Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted and approved by the planning authority before commencement of the development.

BNG is a mandatory requirement for planning applications introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). Achieving 10% BNG for applications for major development was introduced on 12 February 2024, and for applications on small sites on 2 April 2024. A government consultation on changes to BNG requirements for small sites was undertaken in May-July 2025. The government announced in December 2025 that it will introduce an area-based exemption for smaller sites along with measures to streamline off-site BNG delivery, however, this has not yet been introduced.

The Council is responsible for:

- Processing applications to ensure they meet the 10% BNG target
- Securing BNG through legal agreements and conditions
- Monitoring compliance over a minimum of 30 years.

Some applications are exempt from having to provide 10% BNG under national legislation. Some of the circumstances where applications are exempt from mandatory 10% BNG include householder applications, those applications that are below specific thresholds (known as 'de minimis', and where less than 25 sqm of on-site non-priority habitat or 5 metres of on-site linear

habitats are affected), applications for self/custom-builds subject to set criteria, some applications to vary or remove conditions on planning permissions, applications for reserved matters, retrospective applications and applications that are granted planning permission by a development order (including permitted development rights).

All planning applications that are subject to BNG must be accompanied by information about the existing habitats on the site, including a calculation of the pre-development biodiversity on-site habitat using DEFRA's biodiversity metric, a description of any irreplaceable habitat and a plan showing existing on-site habitat.

Each application is checked against an internal validation sheet which sets out the mandatory requirements for applications in relation to BNG and the list of exemptions.

A minimum of 10% BNG on each relevant application is achieved by requiring local planning authorities to only grant permission subject to the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition to ensure that the biodiversity net gain objective is met. This is a pre-commencement condition that requires submission of the Biodiversity Gain Plan to the Council for its approval before development commences on site.

Biodiversity Net Gain Mitigation

2024/2025

333 planning applications¹ were determined between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. Of these, 6.3% (21) were subject to mandatory 10% BNG, with 93.7% (312) being exempt from BNG.

During this period, one discharge of condition application was determined that relates to the mandatory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition, other details relating to BNG or a mix of both, which was approved.

Q1 & Q2 2025/2026

254 planning applications were determined in Q1 and Q2. Of these, 17.4% (44) were subject to mandatory 10% BNG, with 82.6% (210) being exempt from BNG.

One of the applications subject to BNG was refused due to not satisfactorily demonstrating that 10% BNG could be provided.

In Q1 and Q2 of 2025/2026, 11 discharge of condition applications were determined that relate to the mandatory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition, other details relating to BNG or a mix of both. All of these applications were approved.

Q3 2025/2026

118 planning applications were determined in Q3. Of these, 10.2% (12) were subject to mandatory 10% BNG, with 89.8% (106) being exempt from BNG.

¹ Only planning applications are included, as other types of applications are not subject to mandatory BNG, e.g. permission in principle, advertisements, discharge of conditions, prior notifications/prior approvals for permitted development and listed building consent.

None of the applications subject to BNG were refused due to not satisfactorily demonstrating that 10% BNG could be provided.

In Q3 of 2025/2026, eight discharge of condition applications have also been determined that relate to the mandatory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition, other details relating to BNG or a mix of both. All of these applications were approved.

Biodiversity Gain Plans

A net gain has been achieved on-site in the majority of the approved Biodiversity Gain Plans, with one site achieving it through a mix of on-site and purchased off-site biodiversity units, and two sites solely purchasing off-site units. One of the approved Biodiversity Gain Plans includes solely providing the net gain via the purchase of national statutory biodiversity credits.

For the sites where on-site BNG will be provided, there will be an increase in on-site habitat ranging from 10.21% to 58.16%. Where off-site BNG will be provided, the increase in habitat ranges from 12.58% to 328.43%.

BNG Monitoring

Where 'significant' on-site habitat will be provided, the legislation requires a detailed habitat management and monitoring plan (HMMP) to be submitted, to explain how the habitat will be managed over 30 years and how it will reach the target condition stated in the metric.

At this stage, one of the approved Gain Plans has included off-site habitat on land within the applicant's ownership. In this case, the applicant has entered into a Section 106 Agreement to cover the costs of checking their monitoring reports throughout the 30-year period as well as submitting a woodland/habitat management and monitoring plan.

Actions the Council has undertaken to meet its BNG obligations

During the Council's reporting period, the Council has undertaken various actions to meet its BNG obligations on all relevant applications. The section above outlines the process and actions that officers undertake when dealing with planning applications and applications to discharge conditions.

The Ecology team at LCC provides advice to the Council in respect of planning matters relating to BNG and also on other ecological matters, including protected species. Where relating to BNG and other ecological matters, this includes advice during the production of policy and guidance, support in the production of validation lists, assistance with pre-application advice queries, the assessment of ecological reports and BNG information and metrics submitted with planning applications and at discharge of condition stage and making recommendations on planning applications. LCC will also provide support at appeals which have been refused on BNG or other ecological grounds. LCC will also monitor BNG compliance through site visits and reports where a monitoring fee has been secured in a legal agreement.

The Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Record Centre (LRERC) also provides key ecological data to the Council, including in respect of local wildlife sites and records of protected species, and provides updated information in respect of these matters twice a year.

The LNRS can be a material planning consideration and identifies strategic locations where biodiversity enhancements should be targeted, with the provision of off-site BNG at these locations being given a higher weight in terms of value in the biodiversity metric. This means that more BNG units can be delivered if the location has been identified in the LNRS for the relevant habitat to be created or enhanced, incentivising the location of off-site BNG in places where it will have the biggest impact for nature recovery.

Officers are working on a BNG validation checklist which will form part of the local planning authority's local list of requirements for planning applications.

Details of BNG for each application are recorded in the Council's existing planning application software. A specialist database has also been purchased for the details of Biodiversity Gain Plans to assist with future monitoring.

Enforcement of BNG conditions is undertaken in accordance with the Council's Local Enforcement Plan (2024). Discussions, including with the other Leicestershire and Rutland local planning authorities, are ongoing about long-term monitoring of developments subject to BNG conditions and legal agreements.

A corporate key performance indicator also tracks BNG progress, with quarterly performance reporting in place.

Planning and enforcement officers have continued to attend training sessions relating to BNG, including an in-person event hosted by LCC in January 2024 that included colleagues from other local planning authorities across Leicestershire and Rutland. Officers have also attended online webinars including those run by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), DEFRA and Natural England. Training has also been provided to officers by a local habitat bank provider.

The Leicestershire and Rutland local planning authorities have proactively worked together to discuss BNG matters, through regular forums attended by the Head of Planning and Infrastructure and the Planning and Development Team Manager.

Officers have also run internal training sessions for the Planning and Development team, in particular, in the first year after the implementation of BNG, including validation training and working through examples of applications to understand how to deal with BNG in different scenarios.

Officers are actively involved in the BNG Forum, which has been set up by PAS to support local planning authorities with the implementation of BNG, including providing a forum to ask questions, training sessions and regular forum meetings to share experiences and provide updates.

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

The Council will continue to ensure a minimum 10% BNG is achieved on relevant applications at planning application and discharge of condition stage.

The enforcement of the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition will be essential to enable the Council to carry out its statutory duty in relation to BNG in the next reporting period.

Robust mechanisms for achieving this are being explored and it is recognised that there may be resourcing implications for this. As set out earlier in this report, discussions, including with the other Leicestershire and Rutland local planning authorities, are ongoing about the long-term monitoring of developments subject to BNG conditions and legal agreements. The use of the Council's existing planning software and its specialist database will assist with future monitoring.

Greater levels of data relating to biodiversity outcomes as a result of new developments will become available as more information is submitted to the Council under the Biodiversity Gain Plans. This will enable the Council to identify gains or losses in specific habitats and identify where off-site gains are being provided.

Through the new local plan, new and up-to-date policies will be in place to help secure increased and better local biodiversity net gains. Continued consideration of the LNRS will assist with helping to deliver the wider biodiversity objectives set out in the LNRS

Work will continue on the BNG validation checklist. Further detailed training will be provided on BNG to take account of any changes to BNG legislation and national guidance. Officers will continue to take an active role in the Planning Advisory Service Forum, to share knowledge and best practice to ensure securing a minimum of 10% BNG.

