

# Summary of Biodiversity Activity

November 2021



# Purpose

**North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) recognises that it has a role to protect and support action on biodiversity in order to improve local environments. It has built biodiversity into many aspects of its operations and works with a variety of partners.**

The purpose of this document is to provide insight as to why biodiversity is important and outline the activities that the council is involved with, or supporting, to improve biodiversity across the district. It is not intended to be considered a biodiversity strategy.



## What is biodiversity? Why does it matter?

The loss of biodiversity is a recognised, global environmental issue and can be directly linked to human action.

Biodiversity has three levels – the biological composition of different species, their variety and abundance and the environments in which they live and interact. They are all inter-connected.

There are five major causes of biodiversity loss:

- **Habitat loss and degradation**

when part of an ecosystem's environment changes or disappears

- **Over-exploitation**

when we use or extract natural resources with little or no consideration for their future availability and quality

- **Climate change**

changing global temperatures affect the stability of an ecosystem; unreliable temperatures and weather patterns disrupt the lifecycles and habitats of species

- **Excessive nutrient load and pollution**

when harmful substances, such as chemicals and gases, are added to the environment faster than they can be removed, resulting in poor quality water, food and habitat

- **Invasive species**

a non-native species that colonises an ecosystem, creating a threat to native species through competition for food and

habitat and may even prey on native species

### Drawing directly from Leicestershire County Council's "Action for Nature"

*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.*



## What are the links between biodiversity and net zero/zero carbon ?

Biodiversity and net zero/zero carbon both recognise the negative impact of the loss of biodiversity. "Net zero" is where the amount of greenhouse gases added to the atmosphere are equal to the amount removed. Biodiversity can help remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, and if unprotected, can increase the amount of greenhouse gases.

At the 2021 G7 summit, a forum of seven member countries to co-ordinate global policy, G7 leaders agreed commitments to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. An extract from the G7 2030 Nature Compact binding agreement provides an insight as to the importance of action:

*"Global system-wide change is required: our world must not only become net zero, but also nature positive, for the benefit of both people and the planet, with a focus on promoting sustainable and inclusive development. Nature, and the biodiversity that underpins it, ultimately sustains our economies, livelihoods and well-being – our decisions must take into account the true value of the goods and services we derive from it. The lives and livelihoods of today's youth and future generations rely on this."*

Historically, addressing biodiversity has been about reducing the impact that people have on the world's climate, but a "nature positive" approach goes further and is about action which will enrich biodiversity.

It is generally accepted that a "ground up" approach is required to tackle global environmental issues, recognising the importance of local action.

## What are the links between biodiversity and our Zero Carbon Roadmap?

As a council we declared a climate emergency on 25 June 2019 and adopted our Zero Carbon Roadmap and Action Plan on 31 March 2020. Our ambition is to be a net zero carbon council by 2030 and district by 2050.

“Forestry and land use” is one of the eight key sectors within our Zero Carbon Action Plan. The Zero Carbon Roadmap extract below outlines the proposed actions:

### Forestry, land use and agriculture

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| Forestry                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tree planting schemes on District Council owned land</li> <li>• Devise and implement plans for every green space owed by the council to enrich carbon capture and storage</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight, adjust and actively pursue polices on minimum areas and quality of green space required in new housing developments, projection of green infrastructure on private land and increase in afforestation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with NGOs, local and national charities on conservation and biodiversity and support grant and other funding applications by these organisations for improvements to Green Infrastructure in the district</li> <li>• Encourage local landowners to increase tree planting</li> </ul> |
| Wetlands and heathlands |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement planning polices to reinforce protection of the existing areas</li> <li>Engagement with NGOs to enrich the existing and reinstate or enhance where possible</li> </ul>  |  |

In the Zero Carbon Action Plan for council operations, by 2030, the following activities have been identified to be explored:

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Forestry, land use and agriculture

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| <b>3y</b> | <b>Tree planting scheme and National Forest</b><br>Plant at least 110 to 440 hectares of new woodlands to absorb enough carbon dioxide to offset the council's residual GHG emissions.<br><br>Accelerate tree planting on council owned land and parks; carry out surveys to establish where trees can be planted safely and develop an overall plan of how many trees can be accommodated and where, then allocate annual resources and work with the Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission to procure and plant the trees. |
| <b>3y</b> | <b>Change Diets</b><br>Reduce the meat content and increase vegetarian choices of foods served on council owned premises, including council offices and leisure centres.  |
| <b>3y</b> | Set up a pilot <b>Agroforestry project</b> on council owned land to raise awareness of the principles, especially among allotment users and small farms   |
|           | <b>Protect Heathlands and wetlands</b><br>Liaise with RSPB and local wildlife partnerships to seek support for enhancement and management of the River Mease SAC. The Developer Contribution Schemes (DCS1 and 2 referred to in the Local Adopted Plan) provide a funding resource to implement such improvements.  |

# What is North West Leicestershire District Council doing to support biodiversity?

This section outlines some of the activities and support we are providing to promote and champion biodiversity.

## 1. Provision of Grants

We provide or promote a number of biodiversity related grants including:

- **Green Shoot Grants**

The Green Shoot scheme offers bulbs to parish and town councils and community groups to brighten their communities, encouraging biodiversity and bringing communities together for when they get planted. This year's scheme closed on 27 August 2021.

- **Zero Carbon Grant**

This grant was new in 2021 and offers funding of between £50 and £500 to environmentally-focussed community projects. Five grants have been awarded to date, including one to support a town council complete a botanical survey.

- **LCC SHIRE Environment Grant**

We promote this Leicestershire County Council grant. One of its main purposes is "to improve biodiversity and support the creation, protection, enhancement and management of sustainable green spaces".

- **LCC Wildflower Scheme**

This project is not yet live but when it returns it will be promoted to groups and parishes across the district.



## 2. Tree planting

In partnership with the National Forest Company, we run the **annual free tree scheme** to encourage biodiversity. In 2021 more than 17,500 trees and hedging trees were distributed to people across the district. Although the scheme couldn't run in 2020 because of COVID-19 restrictions, since the scheme launched in 2008, more than 14,200 individual trees have been planted and over 97,500 trees within the hedge scheme.

Since 2016/17, 248 trees have been planted on council-owned land, including Scotlands Recreation Ground and Sharpley Avenue. A joint bid between North West Leicestershire and Leicestershire County Council has been submitted to the Local Authority Treescape fund to allow for further trees to be planted. The funding would be used for trees predominantly on highway verges in the district, possibly including Bardon Road, Meadow Lane, Greenhill Road, Abbots Oak Drive,

Blackwood and Coalville Park.

In addition, a tree survey is planned for early 2022 which will review tree planting opportunities on council-owned land.



## 3. Wildflowers and Gardens

At Coalville Park, in partnership with the Royal British Legion, a community garden has been developed which includes the growing of fruit and vegetables, a sensory garden, and wildflowers. Wildflower beds have also been established in the park.

In our social housing, the Tenants' Association has received an £8,000 grant from Bardon Quarry to deliver a 2021 project to "grow your own garden" at Greenhill. Wildflower planting at Greenhill and Willesley in Ashby is also being explored.

## 4. Site Development Opportunities

### • Hermitage Leisure Centre

The opening of the new Whitwick and Coalville Leisure Centre in 2022 provides an opportunity to develop plans for Hermitage Leisure Centre site and recreation ground. The ambition is to create a visitor destination linking the two venues with a focus on improving biodiversity. Ideas include the possibility of an eco-garden, the planting of trees, an orchard, wildflower planted areas and improvements to the lake habitat.

Work to improve the habitat for wildlife at the lake, including managing the reeds and retaining the banks, has also taken place.





#### • Whitwick and Coalville Leisure Centre

As part of the new leisure centre development, the **ecological statement** recognises that whilst some trees were removed, the new landscape plans feature planting a total area of 8075m<sup>2</sup> with trees, providing a woodland net gain of 2880m<sup>2</sup>. This includes the replacement of ash which will likely be lost due to the progression of Ash Die Back.

The report recognises that although there will be a moderately negative impact on the trees within this site, the effects will be short term. With the strong replanting and landscape management plan proposed across a greater area, the long term effects will be positive as new trees will improve the quality and diversity of the tree population on the site.

#### • Coalville Park

Options for extending Coalville Park into the field at the rear have been consulted on. The options include an element of biodiversity such as tree planting, natural habitats, and wildflower planting schemes.

### 5. Health associated links

Working with the Integrated Neighbourhood Team and Exercise Referral Scheme, we are working with surgeries who will refer patients into outdoor projects. There are three exciting projects due to start in Spring 2022.

- Woodland Management through Heartwood Fuel - a local organisation that manages the woodland in the National Forest. Although the management process includes the removal of trees, this is an essential part of maintaining the woodland otherwise the woodland floor gets no light, affecting biodiversity. The group builds bat and bird boxes, piles up the twigs to create homes for wildlife, however, they also make charcoal and members are allowed to take some of the wood home with them. Heartwood is accepting members from surgeries to be active in the outdoors.
- Our allotment plot at Swannington is suitable for people of all abilities. Surgeries can refer into this scheme and The Conservation Volunteers will be providing tuition on growing.
- Long Lane Surgery has leased three allotment plots at Broom Leys Allotments. Heartwood is going in to clear an area that is taken up by non-native trees and brambles etc. The National Forest Company is planning to support with the planting of up to 50 fruit trees. The Conservation Volunteers will also offer some support on growing/pruning at these three plots.

## 6. Planning

Our **local plan** is based on a number of policies including nature conservation, the National Forest, Charnwood Forest Regional Park and considers areas of separation.

It recognises 17 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within the district, of which two have further designations; Charnwood Lodge, which is also a National Nature Reserve, and the river Mease, which is also a Special Area of Conservation.

Our local plan is currently under review and will further consider the impact of biodiversity.

In addition, wider legislation including the Environment Bill currently going through Parliament will include a requirement for developments to include provision for net gain in terms of biodiversity.

## 7. Partners and Sponsorship

We are a supporter of **Moira Furnace**. One of the charity's aims 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.

For the last three years, we have sponsored **Timber festival**, held at Feanedock in the heart of the National Forest. Timber is a weekend festival of celebration, debate and reflection and encourages us to rethink our relationship with trees and forests.



