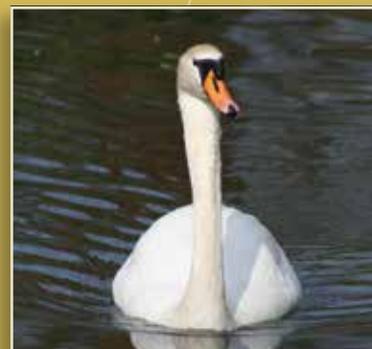


Leicester's Biodiversity Action Plan 2013-2014

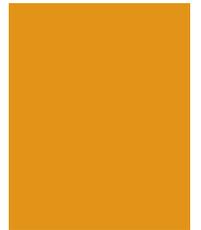


Making Wildlife Count
www.leicester.gov.uk/biodiversity



Leicester
City Council

The Partners



Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust



The Plan 2013-2014

A vision for conserving wildlife and creating green space in an urban environment has been in place for over 20 years commencing with the Leicester Ecology Strategy in 1989. This Biodiversity Action Plan continues to support this legacy by setting out a strategy to identify real targets and objectives for the City Council and partners who are responsible for safeguarding this environment and species particularly associated with the City and its surrounds.

This Plan informs on the great achievements of 2012-13, some of which are highlighted in the report and provide examples of how green space has been enhanced with the help of volunteers to make areas more attractive to visit as well as opportunities to support the wildlife and see it up close. Public events such as the Bioblitz at Evington Park were a resounding success enjoyed by naturalists and visitors alike; the Environment Days saw some real improvements at the City nature reserves by volunteers who were keen to face the freezing temperatures and get stuck in. Habitats were created for otters and badgers near to the City, areas where the

Longhorn cattle graze were extended. This improved floral diversity and new species of lichens and molluscs were identified for the first time in the City.

Information gathering and advice on planning applications have fed into our objectives for next year. As schemes come on stream at several of the schools within the Building Schools for the Future programme ponds, meadows and woodlands will be created and provide outdoor classrooms as well as havens for wildlife for future generations.

The combination of both short and long-term aims, working in partnership and encouraging local residents and volunteers to be involved and take positive action to safeguard the green space for wildlife is central to achieving the aims and objectives of the Plan. It contains realistic and achievable targets for the next year that will create new environments, safeguard others and get people involved.





Highlights



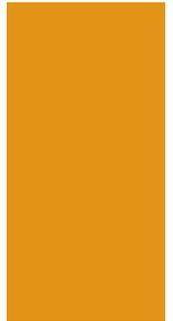
Evington Park Bioblitz

The 3rd Bioblitz event was organised by the City Council in partnership with Groundwork Leicester & Leicestershire at Evington Park during the weekend of 25th -26th May 2012. The Bio Blitz event is a very positive way of providing information on the biodiversity of a site in a concentrated time period. Council staff from Parks and Green Spaces, Nature Conservation, City Wardens and volunteers helped the event be a resounding success.

Despite torrential rain during most of April and the resulting flooding, the weather improved only a few days before the event and we were lucky to have clear skies and high temperatures.

Naturalists, scientists and researchers worked alongside volunteers and visitors to the park to identify species of flora and fauna. A massive 465 species were found overall including 2 firsts never before recorded in the County. A snail (*Hygromia cinctella*) and a lichen (*Xanthoparmelia mougeotii*) puts Evington Park among the top habitats in the county.

The event also encouraged the public to visit the park and take part in guided walks, talks and activities. Over 100 children from local schools also took part in activities to learn about different habitats and the types of wildlife using them. Specialists inspired visitors and gave them the opportunity to handle bugs, insects, molluscs, mammals and amphibians.



Watermead Goose Campaign



Watermead Country Park is famous for its bird life and now thanks to a campaign led by the City Council Parks & Green Spaces and City wardens, the birds and their environment are healthier and happier.

The two lakes at the reserve were created from former gravel pits approximately 20 years ago and have developed into a mosaic of open water, wet woodland, meadows, rough grassland and ruderal vegetation supporting the insectivorous and seed-eating birds and mammals.

The natural habitat is particularly good for water fowl such as our native and migrating geese, swans and smaller species such as coots and ducks. Over the last few years these populations had quadrupled over their natural size due to the feeding of bread and other food stuffs by visitors to the park which encouraged birds to the area. The knock-on effect of such a high population was a decrease in water quality by birds disturbing the sediments, rotting bread and increased excretia both in the water and on surrounding car parks and pathways. The areas had only been laid the previous year and were already difficult to clean despite the regular maintenance.

A combined campaign of raising public awareness through publicity leaflets, notices and talking to the public commenced. Visitors were encouraged to not feed the birds and take their bread home or to exchange the bread for bird seed. Although, initially not a popular choice, once visitors realised that more harm was being done to the birds through the excessive feeding, they stopped and used alternatives. City wardens continued to take action and, where necessary, enforcing the feeding requirements and issuing fixed penalty tickets.

This approach successfully controlled the bird populations so they are back to their natural levels. Swans and geese no longer dominate and this enables the smaller water fowl to feed closer to the shore and be seen by visitors.

Helen O'Brien, Snr Nature Conservation officer said, "The issue over the bird populations was a problem that had escalated until it was almost out of control. Thanks to this approach people have been made aware of how harmful it can be to over-feed the birds. Visiting the park now is an even better experience and people are likely to see more species of birds and fish populations are also starting to recover too".

Environment Days

Volunteers Help to Improve Our Green Space

Volunteers are central to improving habitats for wildlife by practically getting things done on the ground. The City council and partners rely on people giving up their time to help make the green spaces cleaner and better for wildlife. This means clearing up litter that accumulates along the river bank or hedgerows so plants can thrive, mammals build their nests and insects feed and pollinate flowers.

On our larger reserves a long-term programme of work is planned and broken down into smaller conservation tasks, but on some of our smaller sites it is possible to really make a difference in just one day.

The assistant nature conservation officer at the City Council, Richard Kelly, got stuck into his new role by organising a winter programme of work at two small nature reserves close to the City. Working with Groundwork and Parks and Green Spaces he organised volunteers from the Council, local schools and residents.

Despite the sub-zero temperatures, volunteers came out and completed conservation work at Montrose Spinney in January and Wash Brook Nature Reserve in February 2013. Volunteers were trained in how to coppice and plant trees, manage ponds and cut-back scrub. By the end of each day volunteers were tired and deserved a well-earned rest, but the improvements made at each site were significant.

Richard said, "One of my favourite parts of the job is getting people involved and teaching them new skills that they can take away and use elsewhere. The work completed by the volunteers has given each site a real kick-start and we will be measuring the improvements. We have made these places better for wildlife and people can come and enjoy them".

If anyone would like to get involved in Conservation tasks organised by the City Council please contact Victoria Hudson through the Green Hat Volunteer Scheme (0116 229 3637) or Richard Kelly (0116 252 7256).



Things are 'Otting Up'

Improvements have been made to habitats at Watermead Country Park south to encourage two important species that are associated with this large area of wetland.

Groundwork were awarded funding from Britvic's Transform Your Patch campaign and working alongside the City Council (Nature Conservation and Parks), they very successfully created habitats for the Otter, *Lutra lutra* and Common tern, *Sterna hirundo*.

Watermead Country Park is perfectly located adjacent to the canalised River Soar that flows out of Leicester, providing a strategically important area of green space in which wildlife seems to be thriving. Otters have been spotted

along the river and canal in recent years and an obvious place to encourage them to stay and breed was at the Park. Groundwork worked with volunteers to carefully choose an area which is less likely to get disturbed by visitors or dogs and create an artificial holt (den). To celebrate the return of this animal to the area, Paul Leadbeate carved a giant wooden sculpture of an otter which has been placed on the riverbank of the south lake near to where otters have been spotted.

Working with local bird specialists from LROS and Council, habitat was specifically designed to improve conditions and encourage Common tern to nest on the island of the main lake at Watermead. Volunteers worked hard with the conservationists taking gravel across the water

by boat to the island to remove the scrub, create gravel beds and dead hedging ready for when the terns return to Watermead in the spring. If any chicks are born, they can hide from predators within the clay pipes inserted into the ground.

Catherine Tregaskes, Conservation officer who led on the project, said, "We hope that the creation of an artificial holt will encourage the otters to stay a while and hopefully start to breed in the area. The terns were circling around the island last year so they obviously like it there. Now that we have improved the conditions they may start to nest here next year too".



UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

PHASE I ECOLOGICAL SURVEYS

In 2010 The University of Leicester set up a unique Biodiversity Forum made up of academics, local authority ecologists and wildlife conservation organisations. The main aim of the Forum is to identify ways in which the University can safeguard and best use its green space whilst protecting the associated wildlife.

The University employed an Ecological Surveyor for a year and set a brief to commence a Phase I survey of the campuses around the city and adjacent districts and gain an understanding of which areas were of most wildlife value.

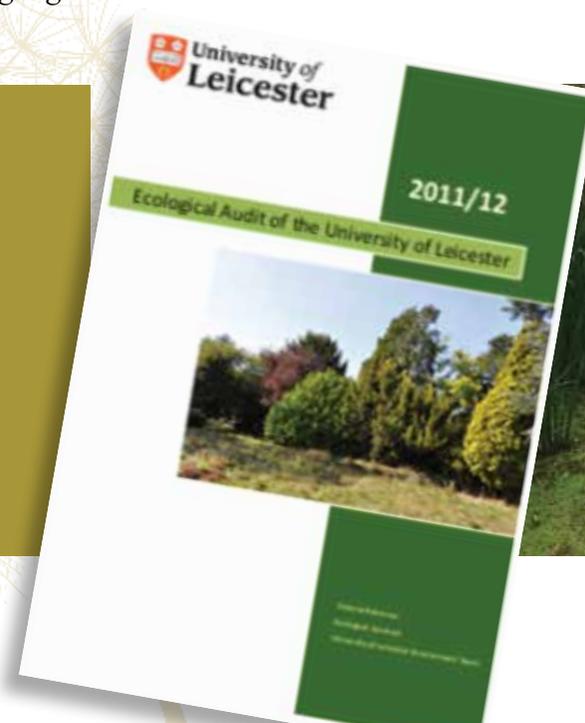
Victoria Robinson completed the surveys over one year. She found a diverse range of habitats ranging from species-rich meadows, veteran

trees, ponds that varied from small highly-diverse ornamental to large, natural water bodies, short amenity and sports areas to rough grassland and scrub – as well as the buildings themselves!

Victoria said, “Doing the surveys over a year gave me the chance to complete them at the best time – when the plants are in flower or the mammals out of hibernation. We have some really special areas that have remained relatively undisturbed despite being a big University with lots of students. The meadow areas are amazing in summer and finding that we had great crested newts, harvest mice, badgers and bats living so close to the City was a real highlight”.

The University have now completed a Phase I report of the study which contains recommendations on how best to manage these areas for wildlife and to increase the diversity of flora in the grasslands.

Already the report has been used to inform on appropriate mitigation and compensation for the loss of habitats resulting from development or emergency works. Artificial badger setts have been created within the grounds of the University to safeguard this important and vulnerable species and plans are in place to encourage peregrine falcons to take up residence on the taller buildings at the main campus.



PROGRESS: 2012-13

PARTICIPATION

Bioblitz and Environmental Events

- Evington Park Bioblitz May 2013 (City Council, GWLL) - **see Highlights 2012-13**;
- University of Leicester Bioblitz June 2013 (University of Leicester, City Council, GWLL)
- Montrose Spinney and Washbrook Nature Reserve Environment Days – habitat improvements by volunteers (City Council, GWLL) (**see Highlights 2012-13**)
- Wildlife and Conservation Days at Belgrave Hall and Newarke Houses (Museums); Watermead CP and Abbey Park (City Council);
- “Friends Of” Groups – conservation work at Knighton Spinney, Highway Spinney, Aylestone Meadows, Watermead CP, Castle Hill CP, Piggies Hollow, Prebend Gardens

Public Participation

- Bird and bat boxes installed at Welford Road Cemetery and Belgrave Cemetery with help from volunteers;
- Aylestone Meadows Park User Group set up (City Council)

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Public Awareness – Guided Walks

- Highway Spinney – fungi and bat walks (Friends of Highway Spinney, Leics County Council)
- Aylestone Meadows – wildflower and bird walks (AMAS, City Council, The Wildlife Trust)
- Welford Road Cemetery – bat and bird walks (City Council, Leics Bat Group, LROS)
- Parks – Abbey, Evington – bug hunts, tree trail and bird walks
- Belgrave Hall – bat walk (City Council, The Wildlife Trust)
- Watermead CP – seasonal leaflet and self-guided walk set up (City Council)

Education

- Progress on City BAP 2012-13 published and webpage set up
- City Council website regularly updated with information on Biodiversity and Planning; Nature Conservation, Parks and Green Spaces, Bioblitz events and reports;
- Annual Bioblitz report published and made available on City Council website www.leicester.gov.uk/bioblitz
- Regular articles on conservation events, wildlife issues and advice in newspapers, Leicester Link, The FACE, partnership publications
- Environment Annual Report on nature conservation achievements and status of areas of local biodiversity importance (Local Wildlife Sites);
- Interpretation Board designed and installed in Parks to raise awareness of Meadow grasslands and their role in biodiversity

Management Plans

- Management Plans completed for Watermead CP, Castle Hill CP, Abbey Park, Evington Park, Washbrook NR, Overdale School Spinney

Promotion

- “Keep Britain Tidy” Award at Watermead CP to reduce the amount fed to birds, control bird populations, improve water quality, biodiversity and bird health & welfare (**see Highlights 2012-2013**)
- Successful prosecution and conviction for interference to a badger sett at a private residence;
- Green Flag designations at 9 parks across the City including a new award at Western Park for the first time.

THE PROGRAMME 2013-2014

Public Participation

- Establish at least 1 x new Friends Group at a LNR and encourage involvement in the active management to maintain or enhance the reserve;
- City-wide Hedgehog Survey to be co-ordinated by City Council;
- Bat and bird boxes to be installed at Montrose Spinney.

Bioblitz and Environmental Events

- Parks & GS/Planning with partners to organise 1 x Bioblitz event (at Aylestone Meadows) and 2 x Environment/Conservation Day events to encourage public involvement in recording biodiversity and positive management of sites;

Training

- Staff and volunteers to be trained in Hedgerow classification to identify those sites where the diversity and structure of hedgerows can be enhanced and/or designated as LWS;
- Staff and volunteers to be trained in effective Pond conservation techniques and management to conserve aquatic wildlife and combat impacts of climate change.

Public Awareness

- 6x guided walks at Parks or LNRs by City Council and partners;
- Parks & GS to retain Green Flag status at designated parks through appropriate maintenance schedules and management and submit 1 x new site for designation Humberstone Park;
- All partners to maintain websites and links to partner organisations;
- Organise 3 x press releases promoting biodiversity and nature conservation.
- Planning to co-ordinate 2 x exemplar case studies that incorporate biodiversity and nature conservation to promote at an international, national and local level

Education

- Partners team to promote nature conservation in 5 x schools and set up conservation projects;
- Interpretation Boards relating to Woodlands to be installed in Parks and woodlands around the City to raise awareness of their importance for wildlife.

Invasive Species

- Campaign for Floating Pennywort – annual monitoring by EA to continue; partnership event to clear pondweed in the City along Soar and GUC.

LOOKING FORWARD 2015-2018

Public Participation: A key part of the Plan is to involve the local communities with nature conservation and wildlife and encourage people to get actively involved in observing the diversity of flora and fauna found in Leicester. We will continue to find new and varied ways to reach different groups and help them engage and conserve the green space and biodiversity associated with the City.

Bioblitz Events & Environmental Events: A programme of Bioblitz events has been identified for urban and semi-urban green space and efforts to continue to support local naturalists, the public and volunteers will be prioritised.

Training: Staff and volunteers will be trained in identification and recording techniques to monitor sites and species effectively and encourage further involvement from local communities.

Public Awareness: There is a need to raise awareness of biodiversity and nature conservation issues across a range of groups. Increased protection of rare species of flora and fauna require awareness by the public, planners and developers as legislation is made more prescriptive.

Education: Appreciation of wildlife and green space to reduce the risk of damage or disturbance through inappropriate actions or management is also required through a range of programmes to raise awareness.

Management Plans: for all areas of green space should be reviewed and plans for all LNRs will contain specific targets for biodiversity and nature conservation enhancement. Parks prioritising Plans for City, County, District and Green Flag sites with Plans for local Parks completed if dependent on funding bids.

Invasive species: Raising awareness of the presence and appropriate treatment of invasive non-native species of vegetation and fauna will assist in their control and eradication from areas of Leicester.

PROGRESS: 2012-13

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE & POLICY

Green Infrastructure Mapping

- A digitised “Green Network” map of green space has been updated to provide an evidence base for the Green Infrastructure Strategy which will identify and prioritise areas of green space for creation, enhancement and conservation;
- GI Working Group set up to develop GI priorities and adoption process;

Links to Other Strategies

- Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) has identified “hotspots” for flooding and methods of alleviation which will incorporate biodiversity enhancements.
- Review of River Soar & GUC Strategy has commenced to develop a relevant strategy to reflect economy and partnership needs;
- Local Nature Partnership (LNP) approved by Natural England for Leicester and Leicestershire to identify ecological networks and support landscape-scale improvements with support of partners;

Planning

- Site Allocation mapping process has identified areas of green space in Leicester for formal adoption;
- Mitigation and compensation schemes related to planning have resulted in ponds, wetland, grassland and tree planting schemes across the City. Examples include pond, meadow and tree planting on Building Schools for the Future (schemes in 10 x schools across Leicester); 2 x artificial badger setts to compensate for closures. Exemplar schemes - Glenfield Hospital; Wet meadow, bat and bird boxes at Persimmon Homes – wetland habitat creation, ditches and woodland planting;
- Advise on appropriate design of SuDs to incorporate features that will benefit wildlife in terms of size, gradients, materials as well as the use of native aquatic species have been provided in a series of presentations nationally, regionally and locally to highways staff, engineers and conservationists to encourage implementation of appropriate design and quality;
- Advise on major schemes – Hamilton East, Thurcaston SUE and Ashton Green.

Funding

- EA funding for MURCI Project awarded to GWLL for environmental and biodiversity works along Wash Brook and GUC.

DATA RECORDING

Digitisation of Records

- City Council has started to digitise paper records and update maps to analyse and evaluate distribution and inform on planning constraints;
- Data exchange between LRERC and City Council continued;
- Data review at LRERC and records updated;

Monitoring and Surveys

- Botanical surveys of sites completed by volunteers of the Botanical Society of the British Institute (BSBI) at Welford Rd Cemetery, Abbey Meadows, Aylestone Meadows;
- Great Crested Newt surveys completed in North Leicester to determine population size and advise on management strategy;
- Habitat mapping of Aylestone Meadows Central and Northern sections and report completed by Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust;
- Monitoring of 35 LWS by City Council found 66.5% to be under positive management – contributes to Single-status national indicator and EMAS monitoring – both achieved targets set.

THE PROGRAMME 2013-2014

Green Infrastructure

- Planning/NCO to develop GI priorities for the City and have the strategy formally adopted.
- Regional Local Nature Partnership (LNP) to determine programming of monitoring, analysing and prioritising actions to support landscape scale improvements required and promotion and consideration of ecosystem services in its works and projects;
- Complete review of The River Soar & GUC Strategic Action Plan and identify targets linked to biodiversity, regeneration and public amenity/access. Update websites.

Planning

- City Council to continue to respond to planning consultation where potential nature conservation constraints and provide expert advice and support during pre-application negotiations;
- Identify and complete 1 x GI/Biodiversity project to create or improve a habitat or green space for wildlife on LA land.

LOOKING FORWARD 2015-2018

GI mapping: The Green Infrastructure and mapping will be regularly reviewed to ensure biodiversity opportunities are identified in accordance with changes in site allocations, development and funding. This will help to inform developers on the requirements associated with schemes and identify and prioritise projects.

Ecosystem Services: Awareness of the associated multiple benefits of green space such as health and well-being, climate change resilience, flood alleviation, public amenity and visual aesthetics will help promote the need for more and better quality green space in the City.

Links to Other Strategies: Co-ordinate Highways Strategy for implementation of Green Infrastructure and appropriate management through grassland and tree planting of suitable roadside verges

SuDs: Flood & Water Management Act (2010) will make the implementation of SuDs on new development compulsory. A SuDs strategy will promote the implementation of schemes that control water flow and improve water quality and biodiversity.

Digitisation of Records

- 10% of paper records held at City Council to be digitised and forwarded to County Record Office.
- Ensure results of surveys and data are forwarded to the record office quarterly.

Monitoring and Surveys

- 1 x City-wide species survey (Hedgehog) to be set up to determine population and distribution in Leicester
- Hedgehog records to be collated, digitised and forwarded to LRERC on completion of project.
- NCO to work with universities to establish at least 1 x monitoring site for long-term data collection and research.
- 1 x allotment site for long-term monitoring and send data to the Record Office.

Review of resourcing the Local Record Centre may result in a change from local authority to conservation organisations being responsible for the collation and digitisation of data in the future.

Monitoring: Developing a strategy for protected and/or notable species of flora and fauna will determine changes in populations and their associated impacts from loss/increase of green space; improved air quality etc.

A methodology for conservation projects to provide baseline and post-completion data to quantify improvements to biodiversity will be required for medium to large funded projects.

Designated Sites: Local and national monitoring for specific targets related to biodiversity will be maintained to inform on single status and EMAS. Currently this relates to the status of LWS only

PROGRESS: 2012 – 2013

LOWLAND MIXED BROADLEAVED WOODLAND AND WET WOODLAND MATURE URBAN TREES

Tree Plans and Mapping

- Surveys and assessments; digitised mapping of trees on parks and green spaces/highways across Leicester updated records on database;
- An Inventory of Ancient Trees in Leicester and Leicestershire was produced by LRERC;
- A review of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) with those most at risk across the City has commenced;

Practical Conservation

- Groundwork successfully reached the target of 1500 trees planted across Leicester during 2010-2013 as part of the “Big Tree Plant”. In addition to orchards planted at Castle Hill CP and The Orchards and an edible tree trail at Western Park, further tree planting has taken place at over 20 sites including the Emerald Centre, Outdoor Pursuit Centre and Spinney Hill Park;
- City Council NCO worked with Overdale School to plant approximately 20 trees within the school spinney;
- Volunteers completed conservation works and planted over 50 trees at Montrose Spinney – **see Highlights 2012-13**;
- Supervised works at Bendbow Spinney improved the nature conservation value and provided training in forestry techniques to young people;

Designation

- 5 x mature trees were designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) at Wash Brook NR, Western, Knighton, and Humberstone Parks

Training

- Partnership between Trees & Woodlands and Planning delivered training on the benefits of tree planting – particularly relating to biodiversity, SuDs and public amenity;
- Forest Schools worked with Parks at Aylestone Meadows plantations to train young people in forestry techniques;
- A willow-coppice area was created at Watermead CP containing a range of species and will be used as an educational tool and example of sustainable resources.

WETLANDS (RIVERS, STREAMS, PONDS)

Management Plans and Strategies

- The Aylestone Meadows Task Group set up to identify the main issues and constraints on the Meadows through stakeholder consultation as a precursor to completion of the Management Plan and formation of the Aylestone Meadows Park User Group during 2012. Management Plan is in progress

Practical Conservation

- An otter holt and habitat improvements specifically for terns were completed at Watermead CP (partnership between GWLL, Parks and NCO) **see Highlights 2012-13**
- Habitat and water quality improvements at Watermead CP resulted from the Goose Campaign to actively discourage excessive bird feeding (**see Highlights 2012-13**).
- Pond restoration projects completed at Prebend Gardens, Montrose Spinney, Washbrook NR, Victoria Park

Survey and Monitoring

- Monitoring and control of floating pennywort in the Soar catchment in partnership with the EA, Canal & River Trust and City Council. Conditions hampered by frequency and severity of flood events but volunteers still able to clear the weed during organised events;
- Himalayan Balsam controlled through physical removal working with volunteers and Green Life Boat scheme arranged specifically through the Riverside Team.
- A great crested newt survey confirmed status to inform on appropriate management of sites to conserve the status of the species.

THE PROGRAMME 2013-2014

Management Plans & Strategies

- Trees & Woodlands to update the TPO review and incorporate biodiversity and nature conservation objectives into the management of trees;
- Strategy/guidance on protection of native trees from recently identified diseases affecting Ash etc. to be produced;
- Knighton Spinney Management Plan to be reviewed by Trees & Woodlands

Practical Conservation

- Identify 2 x woodlands and plant under-storey trees and supplement/replace top-canopy trees to enhance physical and species diversity of woodlands
- Friends Group to be set up at Coalpit Spinney and conservation tasks completed to improve the structure and diversity of the woodland.

Designation

- Declare Highway Spinney/Meynells Gorse as a LNR
- Identify and declare 5 x mature trees as LWS and/or Veteran Status for protection and nature conservation

Training

- Organise training regarding identification and appropriate management of mature trees;

Management Plans & Strategies

- Complete the Riverside and Aylestone Meadows Management Plans and identify priority areas for biodiversity
- Surface Water Management Plan to be formally adopted
- Identify potential sites for flood alleviation and biodiversity improvements linked to external funding EA Accelerated Funding

Practical Conservation

- Create 2 x wetland areas at Aylestone Meadows and the Playing Fields to alleviate flooding and support biodiversity

Survey & Monitoring

- Monitor great crested newt populations in south of Leicester to identify presence and population size;

Training

- Organise training with schools on appropriate management of ponds and SuDs areas created under BSF programme;

LOOKING FORWARD 2015-2018

Climate change and increased temperatures caused by the urban heat island effect highlight the contribution trees can have to reducing temperatures in cities and combating the impacts of climate change through carbon storage. There is a need to research and implement planting techniques to combat the effects of severe drought and flood, and plant stress-tolerant street trees.

Tree Planting: The “10 000 trees” and “Big Tree Plant” projects have provided opportunities to increase the number of trees in Leicester over recent years, but there is a limit to the area of green space available and the number of uses it must provide for recreation and public amenity as well as for nature conservation. Existing and newly planted woodland areas require a long-term management programme to promote quality woodland.

Opportunities to create a new community woodland to be explored.

Disease: Fungal and parasitic diseases have made our native trees increasingly vulnerable. Susceptible trees and woodlands need to be identified and mapped to reduce potential loss and reduce the risk of fungi and disease spreading

The strategic routes of the Soar and Canal together with the smaller brooks are the main arteries which connect green space and enable wildlife to disperse across the City. Conservation and improvements to these watercourses is a priority.

Non-native species of flora and fauna will require control at a strategic level to conserve native species and prevent them becoming dominant in areas difficult to manage.

PROGRESS: 2012 – 2013

GRASSLAND & MEADOWS

Management Plans and Strategies

- Management advice was provided for Wash Brook NR to maintain and enhance the nature conservation value of the grassland;
- A review of grassland management in LNRs and LWSs and adoption of the Grassland Strategy to prescribe management through meadow, amenity/mowing or grazing regimes resulted in re-assessment of maintenance schedules for sites and an increase in areas of land managed as meadows across the City. Several sites now have positive conservation management which has contributed to achievement of the national and local targets for biodiversity.

Practical Conservation

- The Longhorn cattle have continued to graze the fields at Aylestone Meadows, resulting in an increased diversity of plants and associated wildlife. A further 6 x calves were born this winter; new fencing has been installed and areas grazed by cattle extended to improve grassland;
- Meadow areas were created at Castle Hill CP and parts of the new Hamilton Park;
- New areas of meadow grassland were identified and approved in the new BSF programmes at 5 x schools;
- Practical conservation works at Piggies Hollow with local volunteers and Groundwork has continued to reduce scrub and improve grasslands

Funding

- Higher Level Stewardship awarded March 2013 by NE to City Council for works at Aylestone Meadows and Kirby Frith LNRs

Survey and Monitoring

- LRWT completed second phase of detailed botanical surveys at Aylestone Meadows and the BSBI Group completed surveys across the City including Gipsy Lane SSSI, Abbey Meadows and Ethel Rd verge, Evington.

Designation

- New meadow areas designated as Local Wildlife Sites at Highway Spinney, Washbrook NR

HEDGEROWS

Hedgerow Assessment & Evaluation

- Many hedgerows were assessed and their condition evaluated during the 2006-08 Phase I survey. This information has now been digitised onto the green network map which shows areas of connectivity and linkages across Leicester.
- Further assessment of some hedgerows has taken place with potential for enhancements of species poor or gapped hedgerows. Advice and information has been provided to Parks & GS on appropriate management of hedgerows to maintain their wildlife value.

Practical Conservation

- Improvements to hedgerow and planting of standards on Parks Open Space adjacent to the Towers;
- Planting of trees and improvements in boundary habitats at The Emerald Centre

Potential Loss and Compensation

- Development on green field sites threatens the loss of hedgerows and their connectivity. Advice and guidance during the masterplanning and design process at The Towers, Ashton Green and East Hamilton schemes have incorporated these wildlife corridors into development scheme proposals or enhanced connectivity through effective hedgerow creation and planting.
- New hedgerows containing native species have been created and linked to new development e.g. Aylestone Football facilities

THE PROGRAMME 2013-2014

Management Plans & Strategies

- Update 3 x 5-year Management Plans for LNR/LWS grasslands – The Orchards, Humberstone Park and The Rally Park;

Practical Conservation

- Fencing, ditch management and improvements to grazing fields at Aylestone Meadows (part of HLS)
- Aylestone Playing Fields – creation of wet grassland areas
- Trial meadow area to be created on Troon Way in partnership between City Council and Friends of the Earth (FoE) as part of the Bee-Friendly project

Designation

- Identify 2 x grassland sites for designation as LWS following survey work
- Declare Castle Hill CP as a LNR

Survey & Monitoring

- Continue annual monitoring of LWS and EMAS/single status reporting on site condition

LOOKING FORWARD 2015-2018

The loss of grasslands across the region has been substantial in the last 50 years. Continued pressure of development on green space and the new National Planning Policy Framework may make areas more vulnerable. The planning system will continue to play an important role in determining appropriate use of land and ensuring compensation and enhancements are made where required.

Appropriate management of sites will help their long-term diversity and be reviewed to make appropriate changes

- Review Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Conservation Organisations and City Council and sites managed.
- Review Grassland Strategy and extend grazing to additional sites across the City.
- Organise training and events on grassland management for Parks & GS, Conservation Groups and volunteers

Sustainable long-term management and maintenance costs will be sought from external sources such as Higher Level Stewardship to implement appropriate management regimes to benefit biodiversity.

Survey & Monitoring

- Identify the extent of linear hedgerows across the City through the Green Network mapping system;
- Train conservation officers, parks staff and volunteers in hedgerow evaluation and identify programme of improvements to hedgerows within the City.

Practical Conservation

- Enhance the connectivity and biodiversity value of 2 x hedgerows through supplementary planting of trees and hedgerow species;

Designation

- Prioritise and assess 5 x hedgerows to identify those of high wildlife value and designate those that meet LWS criteria;

Hedgerows across the City form important habitats for bats, birds and invertebrates. Often, they are important corridors for wildlife within areas of intensively managed land. Where development or change of use of this land is required, it will be important to conserve and enhance hedgerows and incorporate them appropriately.

- Continue assessment of 5 x hedgerows each year to identify those of high wildlife value and designate as LWS. Provide management advice to landowner on appropriate management of the hedgerow;
- Get 1 x site into Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement

PROGRESS: 2012 – 2013

GREEN SPACE (ALLOTMENTS, GARDENS, PARKS, GOLF COURSES)

Management Plans and Strategies

- Western Park Management Plan was updated and the Park awarded Green Flag status for the first time in 2012. A change in grassland management with re-instatement of meadow management in appropriate areas; relaxation of grass cutting along woodland edges increased the biodiversity value of grassland and public amenity value of the Park;
- Management advice and a Plan were produced for the brownfield cycle track within Western Park, providing a diverse range of pioneer species of vegetation in contrast to the short amenity and sports areas whilst maintaining a popular biking area;
- Detailed Plans at Castle Hill CP and Watermead CP were completed and identify potential projects for the future and include specific advice and prescriptions for managing areas for biodiversity
- A Management Plan for Belgrave Cemetery was completed in preparation for Green Flag application;

Practical Conservation

- Bee-friendly annual and perennial planting introduced into Parks planting schemes around Leicester and is to be used as an exemplar case study by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust;

Designation

- Green Flag awarded to 9 parks and cemeteries
- 4 x sites re-notified as Local Wildlife Sites and still meet the criteria set;
- 2 x new LWS designated for their local wildlife value as grassland meadow, broad-leaved woodland and community use.

Monitoring and Survey

- 35 x LWS monitored and 66.5% found to be in positive management where the site is in good status or advice has been provided to improve the condition and enhance biodiversity

BUILDINGS & BUILT STRUCTURE

Training

- Information, training and advice on Sustainable Urban Drainage systems (SuDs) was provided to planners, developers, parks and conservationists at a series of workshops, site visits and presentations to inform on opportunities and statutory requirements of local authorities to implement suitable schemes with biodiversity wherever possible
- Training and workshops on green roofs were provided for councillors, landowners, planners, developers and conservation organisations to encourage installation on new builds or retrofit.

Brownfield Site Monitoring

- Vegetation and biodiversity data have been collected at the Wolsey Island brownfield site and the Western Park BMX track which sees regular disturbance from users. A management plan for the BMX track has been completed with specific advice on appropriate management of the site for biodiversity.

Incorporation of Features into Built Design

- Several of the “Building Schools for the Future” sites and other major developments provided bat tiles and bricks within the built structure for bat roosts; bird boxes and tiles have also been incorporated into built structures where possible.

Protected Species

- A review of Peregrine Falcon sites and sightings was completed by the NCO following sightings around the City. Areas of activity and potential nesting sites have been identified to safeguard and encourage the species

THE PROGRAMME 2013-2014

Practical Conservation

- Design and implement wildlife-friendly border at Abbey Park to particularly attract bees and other pollinating insects;
- Incorporate biodiversity enhancements into proposals at St Georges Churchyard

Monitor and Survey

- Monitor all LWS sites, report back through EMAS and provide advice on appropriate management to those sites not in good condition;

Training

- Set up Allotments Project with partners and volunteers to commence monitoring at Rowley Fields and promote through creation of webpage and media;
- Set up a Wildlife Gardening Project to raise awareness of the value of gardens within an urban environment and the benefits to wildlife;

Management Plans and Strategies

- Develop policy and guidance on actions to conserve buildings whilst enhancing structures for wildlife;
- Complete Management Plan and guidance for Abbey Park walls (in partnership with building control);

Practical Conservation

- Identify 2 x sites in the City for installation of Peregrine Boxes and commencement of monitoring programme

LOOKING FORWARD 2015-2018

The grassland sites across the City are made up of a range of sizes and uses that make up an important element of the green network which assist with connectivity and dispersal for wildlife.

Priority will be given to maintaining this network by identifying and promoting the value of gardens and allotments for wildlife; and identifying the rate of loss of this green space.

Parks provide an integral role in the promotion of biodiversity and have been used for Bioblitz and other Environmental events. Opportunities for the creation of and enhancement of wildlife areas will be pursued whilst balancing the needs of public amenity.

Creation and management of bee-friendly sites to conserve pollinating insects and enhance their biodiversity value will be identified. Continued work with FoE and Bee Conservation to support schemes.

The Flood & Water Management Act (2010) will enforce the implementation of SuDs on all new development. The Surface Water Management Plan and Flood Risk Catchment Assessment will identify and implement appropriate SuDs with biodiversity which will include:

- The creation of 3 x green/brown roof or green wall designs into City development including the new University of Leicester Medical Building
- Identify areas suitable for wildlife verges and adopt 2 x sites into favourable management

Acronyms

BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BES	Biodiversity Enhancement Site
BW	British Waterways
EA	Environment Agency
FOGS	Friends of Groups
GUC	Grand Union Canal
GWLL	Groundwork Leicester and Leicestershire
HLS	Higher Level Stewardship
IA	Natural Improvement Area

LCC	Leicester City Council
Leics CC	Leicestershire County Council
LNP	Local Nature Partnership
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
LRWT	Leicester and Rutland Wildlife Trust
NE	Natural England
NCO	Nature Conservation Officer
SLA	Service Level Agreement



Leicester's biodiversity action plan

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