A guide to local campaigning on nature restoration and aiding the fight against climate breakdown

How this guide can help you

This guide shows how communities and local authorities can act on nature and at the same time support the fight against climate breakdown. Stabilising our climate *and* restoring our natural world go hand in hand. Nature is a solution to climate breakdown and a natural ally in being resilient to a changing climate.

Allowed to get out of hand, climate breakdown and declining nature spells double trouble. Access to green space and contact with nature also matter for our own physical and mental good health, and action to address the paucity of green space and nature that many communities suffer from can help with action on climate.

Local councils have a central role in both climate action and in protecting and restoring nature. Under the government's Environment Bill this nature role will increase, making local councils (and public bodies) pivotal in leadership on both climate change and nature restoration.

Using this guide you will be able to confidently:

- Make the case for policies and actions to benefit climate and nature together.
- Reinforce how action on one supports the other.
- Advocate for more and better public green and nature space for health, equity, climate, wildlife and ecosystem reasons.
- Explain your local council's role on climate and nature to others, including to council representatives themselves.
- Identify where existing local activities can be scaled up through the nature-climate nexus, and where new interventions can be devised.
- Show how local councils can support local action, overcome barriers including funding, and enable action based on good evidence and practice.
- Strengthen your case for effective local action on climate through the lens of nature, in addition to areas such as energy use, transport and housing.
- Point to examples of other councils and areas acting to protect existing nature and bring nature back with benefits for climate aims, as well as to improve the quality and quantity of local green spaces as part of aiding public access for health, recreation and other reasons.

Section 1 - Climate and nature together

Climate change has tended to dominate public and political discourse - and rightly so - but the urgency of climate action is starting to be matched by evidence on and concern about the erosion of nature and how this is undermining both nature's ability to function and help us deal with climate change.

People are also expressing a desire for more and better local access to quality green space and public parks, for greater contact with and experience of nature, for improved physical and mental health from fitness, recreation, and formal and informal learning. More and better provision of parks and green spaces should be part of action to boost nature, curb carbon and aid public health and well-being.

Because of these clear overlaps between climate and nature (and public health) it makes sense to deal with climate and nature together, rather than regard them as entirely separate issues.

In this guide 'nature' is used as a shorthand for:

- the diversity and abundance of **wild species** – fungi, plants, insects, animals.
- the natural or semi-natural **habitats** species need from hedgerows, woodlands and forests to peatlands, rivers, wetlands, estuaries and oceans.
- the underlying natural **ecosystems** we rely on to regulate our weather systems, temperatures and rainfall, to help hold back floodwaters, and to keep us supplied with fresh air, food, water and materials.

Nature thrives in natural spaces that are as unaltered as possible. Ecosystems function best in unaltered setting. But few parts of the UK are truly wild and altered by human intervention of some kind.

Nature also exists and has adapted to life in semi-natural, altered and even entirely artificial locations. Some wild species have adapted to and are doing well in landscapes that have been reclaimed from human use such as former quarries, industrial 'brownfield' sites and even former farmland re-purposed as flood zones.

Ironically, some wild species are faring better in towns and cities than in rural areas many of which have become inhospitable and too bland for species to thrive. Urban parks, greenspaces and domestic gardens are increasingly recognised for their nature with benefits for people when they experience and have contact with wildlife and spend more time in the great outdoors.

When we talk of 'nature' we do not think just of wildlife in nature 'reserves' and special places such as rural National Parks. We need thriving nature everywhere, across entire landscapes, seascapes and local authority boundaries. There should be no 'no go' zones for nature.

Climate effects on nature

The science shows that climate change is undermining nature's ability to function and its ability to help deal with some of the effects of a changing climate such as excess heat in urban areas and increased flood risk.

Wild species and habitats are also vulnerable to the climate-related extremes which make normally rich habitats inhospitable to many species, for example:

- ***Stress:*** Species being hit by swings between flooding and drought.
- ***Erosion:*** Soils being eroded by drought in one season before being blown by winds and washed by floods in the next, all leading to degraded conditions for plants, insects and other species - and poorer conditions for food production.
- ***Disruption:*** Studies show gradual shifts in seasons and mismatches for species unable to adapt rapidly enough. Mismatches include birds rearing their young without reliable sources of insects for food and some plants flowering before bees and other insects can visit them to feed; also meaning that plants do not get properly pollinated.

Scientists are detecting these changes globally, regionally and locally, including how ongoing harm to nature is now rebounding on humans, such as the quality and quantity of food production being affected by degraded ecosystems (e.g., soil quality, unpredictable availability of water) and nature's demise.

As with climate action there are many ways to act for nature locally and doing should be central to building resilience to the effects of climate change.

Natural climate solutions

Fully functioning nature is one of our best, free / low-cost solutions to climate change. In good condition, species, habitats and ecosystems help build climate resilience, for example:

- ***Water:*** Fully functioning and restored rivers, waterways, wetlands and coasts help avoid and reduce the flood risk and boost wildlife from fish and aquatic species and insects to plants, birds and mammals. They are also great at storing carbon.
- ***Plants:*** Well-located and managed mixed native trees, hedgerows, woodlands and forests and quality green spaces are like a multi-tool because they: capture and store carbon; help cool towns and cities; absorb excess rainfall and help hold back floodwaters and 'slow the flow'; and keep soils intact, healthy and nutritious for food and crop production and to absorb carbon, whereas poor soil quality reduces this role.
- ***Greening:*** Even small-scale greening of urban streets and rural areas helps provide important havens for wildlife. Removing hard paving and non-permeable surfaces to put in street trees, planters and green features in streets supports bees and other vital pollinating or predatory insects such as hoverflies, moths, beetles and ladybirds. It can also bring people and community together to improve their area as well as helping to support wildlife

and reducing flood risk by avoiding excess surface water putting pressure on local sewerage systems.

- ***Health:*** Protecting and maintaining existing natural / semi natural assets such as meadows, moors, hedgerows, parks and open spaces, and even individual features such as trees, supports wildlife and ecosystems. The availability of diverse types of quality green space also supports and boosts people's physical and mental health in ways shopping, watching TV or using digital devices simply cannot.

Parks and green spaces

Local green spaces and public parks are increasingly recognised for their role in public health. Routine use of parks and green spaces has been shown to help reduce health costs and pressures on the National Health Service. Mind's Green Heart of York ecotherapy project is just one example of contact with nature and the great outdoors being used as part of health improvement.

Many people can access local parks and green spaces with ease, but many people either cannot or do not for a variety of reasons including lack of local provision. Many spaces are also increasingly under pressure from reduced funding and spending cuts, and from threats of being developed. For more on the evidence of health and other benefits of quality green space see our *Green Space Gap* report.

Local parks and green spaces should be part of local climate and nature recovery strategies because of their important multi-functional role from: storing carbon in soils; holding back potential flood waters; cooling towns and cities in warmer weather (not just during official heatwaves); and, increasing tree cover and providing more diverse planting of vegetation as part of improving conditions for a range of wild species, and to help with capturing some air pollutants.

Local parks and green spaces may not be in good enough condition to play their full role in double action for climate and nature. If so, they can be re-thought and re-planned so that they start to perform this higher quality and multi-purpose role. Re-purposing can also improve accessibility so that more people can exercise, play, learn, socialise or simply get a break.

Section 2 – the national context

The nation's state of nature

The portrayal of the UK as a green and pleasant land contrasts with the evidence of successive State of Nature reports showing how nature is in trouble in the UK.

A majority (3 out of 5) of wild species in the UK - animals, plants, insects - are in decline and even once common species such as starlings and house sparrows are on danger red lists. Ponds, rivers, wildflower meadows, peatlands and coastal marshes have and are being lost, polluted and degraded despite being the habitats needed to support wild species and to help curb climate change by storing carbon.

The **erosion of the UK's underlying natural ecosystems** also has implications for our expectations of clean air and water, reliable quality food from healthy soils, protection from flooding and other natural resilience in a changing climate.

Nature's demise is being driven by a combination of:

- ***Damage:*** Habitats being harmed by or lost to intensive farming practices, and insensitive built development and infrastructure projects;
- ***Pollution:*** Direct and indirect pollution of air, water, soils and seas;
- ***Neglect:*** Poor management and care of land and natural features;
- ***Invasives:*** The effect of non-native invasive plant and animal species; and,
- ***Climate:*** The emerging effects of climate change on species and habitats.

Restoring nature within a generation – the government's plan

Faced with the evidence of significant decline in species, habitats and ecosystems over the past 60-70 years, the government's **25 Year Environment Plan** states its commitment to restoring nature within a generation (by 2042) and to being the first government to leave our environment in better condition than it inherited.

The 25 Year Plan focusses on England but cross references to cooperation with devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to UK action on the global stage.

Having missed its pledges to restore nature by 2020, the government will agree a new *Strategy for Nature* in 2022 for the crucial decade to 2030, alongside action on climate. The 'landmark' **Environment Bill,** set to become law by 2022, will enshrine the 25 Year Plan in law, including these important nature-related measures:

- ***Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS's):*** Local councils in England will be required to draw up LNRS's with their communities to support and implement aspects of the government's Environment Bill targets and its Nature Recovery Network in particular.

The government is counting on council LNRS's to deliver its modest ½ million-hectare *Nature Recovery Network* (modest because England covers 18 million hectares.) The intention is also to improve and link up England's existing designated landscapes such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

(AONBs) which have been found to be too fragmented to act as an ecologically coherent network. The theory of a national network of connected habitats and landscapes both for nature and for public access, health and recreation is fine. But it is highly dependent on local delivery which many local councils have not been properly resourced to do in recent times – and that needs rectifying.

- ***Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):*** the theory of Biodiversity Net Gain is that when housing development occurs on a given site it will lead to an overall increase in habitat area and/or quality. The government says applying BNG will raise the quality of what gets built and will steer development to the least environmentally damaging locations. It also expects proceeds from projects covered by BNG to pay for new habitat creation locally or elsewhere.

That is the theory. There are many risks with pursuing BNG which, it should be remembered, is the latest incarnation of discredited biodiversity offsetting which has not been found to work. Risks of relying on BNG include:

- ***Distraction:*** Given the poor state of nature, BNG distracts from pursuing the proper concerted action needed to protect and to restore nature everywhere.
- ***Chance:*** BNG is also a huge risk because it may be used to justify development schemes of dubious quality, merit and need in inappropriate areas on the presumption that any harm can be 'offset' by the eventual creation of new habitat somewhere else, perhaps many miles away.
- ***Incoherent:*** BNG assessments carried out for / by developers may score individual built developments highly for particular greening measures such as green roofs, tree planting, hedging, ponds etc, but unless the government keeps watch on how they all add up, they could end up as an ecologically incoherent hotch-potch when viewed as a whole, and a new era of development harming nature will have been allowed to happen by design.
- ***Accuracy:*** Ecological surveys properly conducted at the right times of the year will capture all species, and the potential of any location even if it's not currently in good condition. It is not uncommon for developers and their consultants to manage to miss important species and features and declare that a site is unimportant or unpromising for nature.
- ***Competence:*** Funding cuts and government pressure on councils to approve developers' schemes means that many local planning authorities lack the competence and capacity to make proper assessments either of developers' plans or of the natural assets in their area, and what could be improved.

The government says it recognises the need for local councils to have expertise and reliable, verified data and evidence to inform their decisions, plans and policies. Public faith in decision making will depend on this, especially if decisions are being made which involve the loss of nature and the branding of development as green.

The Environment Bill (Act) will make BNG mandatory and local planning authorities will have to apply it when setting planning policies and deciding on developers' planning applications for most housing schemes. Communities will need to understand how the BNG system is meant to work and what to look out for to ensure it is being used properly, and that councils are making good decisions.

Ongoing development pressures

It is also unclear how the government's aim to restore the UK's diminishing nature and ecosystems within a generation will work with its push for 300,000 new houses a year until 2025, a £27 billion new roads programme, expanded airports and runways, and new rail, energy and utility schemes.

Some of the 600 projects in the National Infrastructure and Construction Pipeline may help shift the UK to being a low carbon and nature-rich society and economy, but many will be speculative development of the kind that has contributed to the UK's poor state of nature. Most schemes will also have considerable demand on natural resources (for sand, gravels, aggregates, water and energy use) and may further dissect already fragmented, degraded landscapes and natural assets.

Better accounting for nature

Just as developments and infrastructure are often justified for their economic value and their effect on the national balance sheet, the evidence is that they can and do also erode the nation's natural assets. The nation's declining 'natural capital' rarely appears in the national accounts or set-piece Budget speeches, but there is growing interest in **valuing nature more and better**.

The idea behind natural capital accounting / valuation is that, used in the right way, better evidence on nature's value can improve how policies and decisions are made. Policy and decision makers rarely have that information in front of them when deciding whether or where to build a road or locate a development, or what the costs may be of a species, habitats or landscape being harmed or lost altogether.

It is not easy capture the true value of nature but measuring and valuing natural assets, what might be lost and / or how nature in good condition contributes to other aims such as health and education, can also be used to raise funds to protect and restore nature. Our *Green Space Gap* report has examples of the value of urban trees and forest canopies being measured for the first time.

Natural capital accounting gets out of hand when it becomes an exercise in **putting price tags on nature** which governments and developers can afford to pay and justify causing harm in order to continue business-as-usual activity.

Green and blue infrastructure

You may come across this as jargon for existing green and watery (blue) space and natural / semi natural features and new **multi-functional infrastructure** that is planned to mitigate climate change, flooding and coastal change, and to protect, conserve and improve nature.

Done well, green and blue infrastructure can be part of serious plans to store carbon (in soils, trees, wetlands), to cool and shade warmer towns and cities, to provide routes for wild species to migrate across landscapes and habitats, to restore local rivers and protect water quality, and to improve drainage and natural flood risk management in streets and developments.

Section 3 - The role of local councils in restoring nature and green space

Local councils and public bodies in England and Wales have legal duties to 'have regard to biodiversity' under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006: "Every public body must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity".

In truth, this **biodiversity duty** is weak, vague and has been poorly observed. The government will strengthen and clarify the duty in its Environment Bill (Act) so that it, councils and other public bodies are clear about what is needed.

Councils also have a role in helping the UK deliver on the UK government's global nature targets just as they should be playing a full role in helping the UK hit its climate change targets under the 2008 Climate Change Act.

What local councils should be doing on climate and nature

The bare minimum...

As a minimum, the Environment Bill (Act) requires local councils to draw up **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** (LNRS's). These can be based on an existing local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and / or similar nature conservation strategy, but will need to be more comprehensive and based on credible, verifiable data and information on the current state of nature in the area and its potential.

The LNRS should be about the whole local authority area because nature needs to thrive (not just survive) everywhere and not just be confined to reserves. A good LNRS will therefore need to be about urban areas, streets, farmland, as well as about the area's parks, green and open spaces, local nature sites and areas of particular nature importance such as National Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). It should also be about the type of species and habitats that exist and the quality and quantity of species and habitats which can be aimed for over time.

A good Local Nature Recovery Strategy should:

- **Map the state of nature:** Set out and map the current state / condition of nature in the area. Councils should have this data and be able to show this in maps and other illustrations as a baseline upon which to improve and play its role in reversing nature's demise – and ensuring others play their part. If it does not have this data / evidence it should rectify this immediately by working with local nature records centres, the local Wildlife Trust / others who will be able to advise and help, resources permitting.
- **Be an action plan:** Then, the LNRS should show how the council and others will address areas and locations where nature is deficient and should be restored. This should cover *both* where restoring and creating new quality natural and semi natural habitat for particular wild species can help those species be in better health in the area (by being more abundant, having

larger, stable populations etc) *and* where landscapes and natural / semi-natural features can be restored to a condition where they are able to play multiple roles such as in urban cooling, reducing flood risk, boosting access to nature to aid public health, and more. This should also particularly include plans to significantly increase and ideally double the area's tree cover.

- **Require roles and action of others:** Councils have statutory powers as well as the ability to convene and influence others such as other local councils' plans / strategies, the standards they expect so that others – whether households, developers, landowners and users and community groups - actively contribute to delivering the Strategy. Even if a council does not have much land of its own (and many have or are looking to sell off land to refill their coffers and / or to comply with the government's planning reforms to permit development), the acid test is whether a plan / strategy lifts off the page and people and organisations see and play their role in making it work.
- **Inform your area's Local Plan:** Your council may also be a Local Planning Authority meaning that it has statutory responsibilities to shape the overall look and feel of its area through strategic planning and making decisions on planning applications. LNRS should inform and be reflected in your area's statutory Local Plan. Get to know your Local Plan both because it is the strategic policy document for your area, and should be very clear about the state of nature in the area and how policies will be enacted through planning decisions, and because it carries statutory / legal weight. For example:
    - when a developer proposes a scheme for a plot of land, is the Local Plan strong enough to ensure that it will oppose development on nature areas and other areas of value or potential value for nature, access to nature and public recreation?
    - when new development takes place, is the policy strong enough to ensure the development takes place with strong nature content, and not just trees stuck in concrete and amenity grass and planting of low nature value? That matters because too many developers propose, and too many councils end up permitting, low quality planting and measures, instead of requiring quality spaces and high quality areas for nature to recover and thrive.
    - The Local Plan should also set minimum standards for greening of all new and retrofitted development such as including well designed and maintained sustainable drainage, green walls and brown or green roofing, and the removal of hard surfacing for more porous and planted areas to help avoid surface water run-off and to aid plant and insect and creature diversity.
- **Support cooperation across areas:** As nature crosses administrative boundaries, with wild species moving across landscapes and rivers and waterbodies flowing and existing across borders, neighbouring councils should liaise with and push strong policies and actions for nature with each other and with partners such as Local Nature and Economic Partnerships (LNPs and LEPs).

What good looks like - examples of rural and urban local authority action

Devon: Devon County Council produced several parish biodiversity audits to provide basic information on each parish's wildlife and geology and plans for local action aimed at supporting nature conservation more widely, from local to county, county to national and beyond.

The audits include: a description of parish wildlife – information drawing on existing records of habitats and species plus fieldwork and knowledge held within the community; and, links with Devon's Biodiversity and Geodiversity Action Plan (BAP) – Initial ideas for local action for wildlife to prompt further ideas from communities.

Hertfordshire: The Herts Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan covers a number of different ecological areas, and links with wider green infrastructure networks in neighbouring counties.

Produced alongside more detailed district-scale green infrastructure plans, the Plan has been adopted by authorities in Dacorum, Watford and Welwyn and Hatfield.

Greater Manchester: The Greater Manchester Spatial Strategy (GMSF) covers 10 local authority areas and sets out how the city regions should develop up to 2037 in keeping with climate and nature imperatives.

A natural capital account has been drawn up to measure the benefits provided by the city region's natural assets. The value of the city region's natural capital has been estimated to be at least £24bn over the next 60 years with the annual value of services provided by these 'ecosystem services' put at £860m.

Managed properly, the natural assets support life as the city region develops. Where assets are degraded or deficient the natural capital account will be used to inform decision making and including a natural capital investment plan to explore opportunities for financial ways to maintain and extend the natural assets.

Exeter, Devon: Exeter City Council requires developers to incorporate biodiversity enhancement, such as nesting for bats, sparrows and swifts. In its Residential Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) the Council guides developers on how they can meet Exeter's standards for housing design, protection of green spaces and improvement of those that have fallen into abeyance.

The SPD also provides guidance on how to cater for the needs of key species that rely on nesting affected by onshore wind farm development. Once a broad agreement is reached, developers are committed to producing and implementing a more detailed management plan for the development site and vicinity, pursuant to the signing of a planning obligation and/or a set of planning conditions.

Section 4 – campaigning on nature and green space

Friends of the Earth has produced generic guides on the basics of campaigning. Fields in Trust also produce a guide on safeguarding green spaces. In this section we suggest some questions that you could ask your council or local councillor. We also share Leicester Friends of the Earth's local nature manifesto.

Good nature and climate questions to raise with councillors and officers:

- How is the council acting on climate change in ways that also protect and restore nature? For example, **how thoroughly is it protecting, restoring and extending nature as part of climate action**?
- What is the **state of nature** in this local authority area?
- Does the council have an **accurate, up to date assessment of the state of nature**? If an assessment has been conducted it is recent and who carried it out, what data, mapping and evidence was used and was it peer reviewed? If not, how will it ensure its baseline evidence is accurate?
- Which **trusted sources of data, evidence and mapping** are being used to inform the assessments and how will these be kept up to date (because planning decision and land use changes occur all of the time so the picture, the evidence and the data will change all of the time as well)?
- How will the **assessment be used to inform decisions and actions** on climate action, land use planning and more? For example, are impacts and/or opportunities being included as standard in decision-making by councillors, as with climate in the Climate Action Plan?
- Nature needs to thrive everywhere, not just in zoned nature reserves. Has the council identified **all areas of nature potential** in the area - not just designated reserves but streets, play areas, parks, green and blue corridors (rivers, water courses and waterbodies), and informal spaces?
- What is the **assessment of current parks and greens spaces** and how is this being used to ensure parks and open spaces play a full role in action on climate, for nature and for public health?
- Are any areas particularly important **'hotspots' for nature**, biodiversity and ecosystems? If so, how can their benefits be extended across a wider area (because we need nature everywhere) for example by improving green corridors, connecting to nearby or neighbouring green / blue spaces?
- What about land, sites and **areas regarded as unimportant for nature** but which might be of value at some point in the future is retained and invested in (e.g. as a green corridor or improved space for nature), especially given the loss of and pressure on other areas and sites, and which could be improved?
- Are any **nature / biodiverse locations at risk** due to proposed site allocations for housing, roads or other development locally, and will any proposals be decided only once full action for nature has been ensured?
- How will the council **create and / or restore enough high quality habitat** especially if there are local plans for pressures on land and spaces in the area - whether for housing, retail development etc?

- How is the council applying Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace ANGSt standard for **accessing quality green space** locally? NE is updating ANGSt which currently recommends everyone has accessible greenspace:
    - of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes' walk) from home;
    - at least one accessible 20 ha site within two kilometres of home;
    - one accessible 100 ha site within 5 kms of home;
    - one accessible 500 ha site within 10 kms of home; plus,
    - a minimum of 1 ha of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.
- How is the local council establishing **nature routes / green corridors** so that spaces for nature are linked and able to serve as routes for wildlife?
- How well is the council using its planning policies and powers to ensure that **new development maximises the opportunities for nature?** As shown in this guide, local councils will have stronger and updated duties and roles to protect, restore and increase nature under the Environment Bill. Council's planning and land use policies also allow them to set standards for development, for example by requiring the provision and creation of:
    - Nest boxes, including for bats, swifts and other birds;
    - The creation, natural restoration and ongoing management of rivers, waterways, ponds, wetlands and watercourses;
    - Retention of existing trees and vegetation and features on site and the planting and aftercare of new native tree and plant species; and,
    - Retention of and creation of new mixed and biodiverse hedging and other planting that will support diverse wild species.
    - Increasing the connectivity between existing green, open spaces and dedicated nature areas to increase their functionality and ability for species to move between spaces, and for people to explore them.
    - See London's Greening Factor for clear expectations of schemes.
- How is the council ensuring that **new amenity landscaping and planting good enough to support a diverse range of wild species** and that the way in which it is managed and maintained (e.g. grass mowing, hedge clipping, tree maintenance) meets minimum standards for nature / biodiversity.
- How is the council ensuring that new development is both **resilient to projected climatic change and is designed and fully incorporated with multifunctional green and open space** that is appropriate, not identikit.
- Will the council ensure provision of well designed, installed and maintained **green walls, green or brown roofing and sustainable drainage** as essential for new development where flat or slated roofing permits (even alongside solar energy installations) to support wild plant and animal species as well as to help in local flood prevention and reduce surface water run-off?
- How will the council lead action to **double tree, woodland and forest cover** where this is viable in its area? Councils can use mapping tools to assess how much land could be suitably allocated to doubling tree cover.

A sample local nature manifesto - thanks to Leicester Friends of the Earth

1) **Take more of a whole city approach.** Leicester's existing biodiversity action plan is very focused on protecting sites of particularly high wildlife value and on identifying and improving other sites with high potential. The rest of the City is also important can support more wildlife than several separate areas. The more that we can connect up areas of prime habitat, the better. This could be achieved by a drastic reduction in both the frequency and degree of pruning of street trees and a further reduction in the frequency of cutting of roadside verges, particularly with the City Council's recently announced plans to start seeding verges with wild flowers.

- Notes: This important role for urban areas is recognised in the IPBES report. A People's Manifesto for Wildlife have also produced a list of policies that they would like to see adopted by towns and cities in the UK to allow nature to flourish. www.leicester.gov.uk/media/113637/leicesters-biodiversity-action-plan-2011-21.pdf

2) **Plant more trees.** The Council's current policy is to replace any tree felled with a newly planted sapling, but this does not replace like with like, in terms of providing wildlife habitat or mitigating climate change. Mature trees contribute far more to both than newly planted saplings. The Council should acknowledge this and adopt a policy of replacing any tree it fells with, say, 20 saplings. This would come much closer to replacing what has been lost and would allow for more informed decisions to fell mature trees.

- Notes: A recent report has the role of trees in mitigating climate change: https://science.sciencemag.org/content/365/6448/76

3) **Become a pesticide and herbicide-free town.** Recent years have seen a massive decline in insect populations, with knock-on effects for other species. Alongside habitat loss, a major driver of this decline has been the use of pesticides. We would like to see Leicester sign up to become a pesticide-free town.

The Council should not only avoid the use of pesticides, but also adopt a policy of making sure that any seeds or plants purchased from external suppliers do not contain pesticide residues.

- Notes: www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free/

4) **Plan to make space for wildlife.** The Council should review its planning policies to check that it makes maximum use of the powers available to prevent environmentally damaging developments and to ensure that developments protect and enhance biodiversity. This can be done with green spaces, sustainable urban drainage, nesting boxes, hedgehog holes in new walls and fences, restrictions on paving over of gardens and requirements to incorporate green roofs and walls. In addition, the Council should review whether it has sufficiently robust procedures in place for monitoring whether planning requirements are actually complied with.

5) **Incorporate green roofs and walls into Council properties**. The Council should consider incorporating green roofs and walls into the new council housing that it is hoping to build and its existing buildings. Green roofs can also be added to bus shelters.

- Notes: This has been done in Utrecht: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/bus-stop-plants-green-roof-bees-holland-utrecht-a8997581.html

6) **Reduce light pollution to protect wildlife**. The Council's current policy makes no mention of reducing the impact of light pollution on nocturnal wildlife; something needs to be added to the strategy on this issue.

7) **Consider potential biodiversity and climate change impacts of all Council decisions**. While one part of the Council may be striving to act in an environmentally sustainable way, this may be undermined by the actions of other parts of the Council with different priorities. We would like to see the Council declare a "biodiversity emergency", in addition to its recent declaration of a "climate emergency". It should adopt a policy of assessing both the biodiversity and climate change impact of all Council decisions and these assessments should play a major role in guiding decision-making. (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES) https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment)

8) **Green up the Council's purchasing and investment policies.** Beyond the boundaries of Leicester, the Council's purchasing and investment decisions can have a major impact on biodiversity. For example, the City Council has recently established Fosse Energy, a not-for-profit energy company that aims to source all the electricity it provides from renewable sources. This is a very welcome initiative, but they count electricity produced by burning biomass as renewable. In fact, electricity generation from burning biomass is leading to large-scale felling of forests, with severe negative implications for nature and the climate. The Council should avoid using biofuels for similar reasons.

9) **Engage all citizens of Leicester in helping to promote biodiversity and wildlife.** In an era of financial constraints, one avenue for reaching people is schools, not just in terms of educating and involving a new generation, but also as a way of reaching families. Relevant teaching materials and lesson plans could be provided for teachers and the Council could consult with the Young People's Council. Local media outlets, such as the Leicester Mercury and Radio Leicester, could help get messages out. As allotments can play a potentially important role in supporting urban wildlife; the Council could provide allotment holders with advice on how to best manage their plot to enhance biodiversity.

10) **Organise a biodiversity conference.** Finally, to help catalyse a wider conversation, the Council could consider organizing a conference to look at further developing local policy. As well as involving environmental organisations such as Leicester Friends of the Earth, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, etc., this could involve schools (with teacher and student reps); youth organisations; trades unions; the Chamber of Commerce; the universities; community and faith organisations. To help organise this and to research what is happening elsewhere, the Council might look at appointing one or more graduate trainees.

Section 5 – Conclusion and summary

Action on climate change requires joined up thinking, policies and action and local councils are pivotal in acting, and enabling others to act on, climate change and the protection and restoration of nature.

We acknowledge the challenges councils face with funding cuts and loss of expertise, but without councils playing their full role, the government's intentions to take urgent action and to create step changes for nature's recovery will be another broken promise.

With others we are campaigning for the powers and resources local authorities need to deliver on nature and climate.

If your local council is also local planning authority it has planning and development control duties and powers which present it and its community with opportunities to:

- Protect, maintain and improve conditions for nature and biodiversity;
- Improve quality of life such as through better access to quality nature and green and blue space;
- Build resilience through enhanced nature, ecosystems and public green space as part of curbing and preparing for and adapting to climate change.

In short, your council should be able to answer, without ambiguity:

- How it is delivering on the UK's nature and natural environment commitments both globally and for the UK
- How it is ensuring all its population has local access to quality green space
- How it is performing in this role and how others are contributing and where progress is lacking and why
- How it is addressing nature across its entire area and through all of its policies and decisions.

At an operational level, good local councils taking both climate change and nature seriously will be willing to show how:

● nature conservation and action for nature, biodiversity and ecosystems is integrated throughout all departmental policies and activities

● all staff, managers and elected members (Councillors) understand how nature relates to their own decisions and actions, even if it is not their main concern or brief

● it provides sustained support for local action for nature including Local Biodiversity Action Plans, Biological Records Centres and Local Site systems

It should also be clear how it is using its influence to ensure that Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), Health and Wellbeing Boards and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are acting in the right way.

A local council actively implementing either the existing or the updated biodiversity duty on public bodies will also be able to show how:

● particular species and habitats of prime importance are being properly protected and enhanced

● it is using independent professional nature and ecological expertise and up-to-date biodiversity data

● its reports on how it is progressing towards national and local biodiversity actions and targets.

Further reading

Environment Bill (Act): UK government policy statement on the Environment Bill

Biodiversity Net Gain: Biodiversity offsetting and net gain - license to trash nature

25 Year Environment Plan: 25 Year Environment plan falls short

The state of nature: How well are the UK and EU protecting nature?

Natural Capital: The Natural Capital Committee's How to do it workbook

England's Green Space Gap: https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/englands-green-space-gap