



**Leicestershire  
& Rutland**  
Wildlife Trust

## Response to the Regulation 18 Preferred Options draft Local Plan Consultation

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**The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust (LRWT) upholds that development should not come at the expense of our natural environment. All development, be it housing, commercial or mineral extraction must be designed and delivered in a way that contributes to nature's recovery, not its decline.**

### Summary

The draft plan is considered to be an improved version of the previously withdrawn 2018-2036 plan in terms of providing greater clarity and detail of the proposed protections afforded to the natural environment, however the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust (LRWT) strongly believes the plan falls short of what is needed to make development truly sustainable and address the joint Climate Crisis and Ecological Emergency that the Trust and the County Council accept we are facing.

Local Plans should set out a positive vision for their area and a framework for addressing environmental priorities. Whilst the plan offers a number of proactive policies around the natural environment, both in-line with and additional to existing statutory/regulatory requirements - e.g. on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and protections around Trees and Woodlands, it fails to provide a clear vision and ambitious framework for how future development will meaningfully contribute towards nature's recovery.

LRWT believe that Rutland has the potential to show genuine leadership in the face of the Ecological Emergency within our region, and is in a position to put nature's recovery at the heart of its Local Plan for the benefit of both local communities and wildlife. We are very interested in continuing to work closely with Rutland County Council to develop more robust policies and measures to put nature firmly into recovery and bring people closer to nature within our region.

Main concerns:

- Reference to the Leicestershire and Rutland BAP is generally absent from the policy wordings and should be included in order to maximise opportunities for the restoration, enhancement and connection of priority habitats and species.
- The requirement to achieve at least 15% Biodiversity Net Gain is somewhat positive, in that this is beyond the statutory requirement of 10%, however it is disappointing that the

authority’s own viability evidence base shows that up to 20% uplift is viable and deliverable on sites within Rutland. The Wildlife Trusts and other eNGO’s are calling for a minimum of 20% gain, a figure that is evidently shown to be deliverable and achievable in Rutland.

- Both The Wildlife Trusts and the UN have identified the need for 30% of land to be protected for the effective recovery of nature. We strongly believe that the authority has a distinct opportunity to show genuine leadership on this vital agenda by providing bolder, more ambitious targets such as this.
- The long-term management of off-site BNG provisions should be secured in perpetuity, rather than the minimum requirement for 30 years, to support nature’s recovery.
- It is encouraging to see a proactive policy around improving tree cover within development proposals, however there is some concern that other equally valuable and locally scarce habitat types appear to be excluded, namely species-rich Calcareous and Neutral Grassland (both local/national BAP/Priority Habitats) and accounting for only 1.03% and 0.79% of the land cover of the county respectively (Rutland County Biodiversity Assessment, 2023). Other proactive measures and policies aligned with the Leicestershire & Rutland BAP 2016-2026 should therefore be included in the Local Plan in order to directly contribute towards nature’s recovery.
- Weak language used throughout generally and with insufficient vision and measures to adequately address the Climate Crisis and Ecological Emergency that we are facing and has been declared by the authority.
- Inclusion of the whole of St George’s Barracks as an Opportunity Area, without acknowledging the significance of the large areas of the site as a potential Local Wildlife Site due to the extent of Calcareous Grassland present. Significant development of this site is environmentally unsustainable and likely economically unviable in BNG terms, in our view.
- Policies relating to mineral site developments/restoration are weak and do not correspond with other relevant policies (EN1 & EN3), nor provide enough emphasis on the significance of Calcareous Grassland creation opportunities within the county.

**Comments on Regulation 18 draft Local Plan:**

Component	Support/Object	Comments
Vision	Object	<p>The bullet point <i>“protection and preservation of heritage assets and natural environment”</i> is weak and insufficient for tackling the joint Climate Crisis and Ecological Emergency that we are facing and has been declared by the authority.</p> <p>In order for the vision to align with the aims of the Environment Act, 2021 - much greater emphasis must be placed on the need for biodiversity enhancement and nature restoration at scale, through the development of a robust Nature Recovery Network.</p> <p>The role of high quality and accessible natural habitats in providing a wide range of health and wellbeing benefits to local communities must also be included as a key visionary element.</p>

Strategic Objective 1	Support	The role of nature-based solutions is clearly identified and supported, along with the need to increase biodiversity and put nature into recovery in order to mitigate/adapt to climate change.
Strategic Objective 11	Object	Wording is weak in relation to avoiding and mitigating for potential adverse impacts on the natural environment. “... <i>taking account of impacts...</i> ” should be amended to “avoiding and minimising impacts on...”.
Policy CC8 - Renewable Energy	Object	Provisions for biodiversity, geodiversity and nature recovery/Local Nature Recovery Strategies within this policy are welcomed. However, adequate protection for protected species, namely for bats and migratory birds should also be included in relation to wind-based energy proposals. This is a particularly significant issue given the proximity of any proposed sites within the vicinity of Rutland Water SSSI/Ramsar Site, which is designated for its nationally/internationally important bird assemblages.
Policy CC11 - Carbon Sinks / Policy CC12 - Carbon Sequestration	Support	Policies welcomed and offer a level of protection for existing valuable carbon sinks, along with supporting nature-based solutions within new development proposals.
Policy SS5 – St. George's Barracks Opportunity Area	Object	<p>Point f. refers to “...<i>ensuring a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain...</i>” within the site masterplan. This is inconsistent with the proposed Policy EN3 – Biodiversity Net Gain which states that a net gain of at least 15% would be required for all qualifying developments.</p> <p>Note that a large area of the former airfield on the St George’s Barracks site has been identified as a potential Local Wildlife Site due to the extent of Calcareous Grassland, a local and national Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat and Habitat of Principle Importance under the NERC Act, 2006. Any development in and around this area should therefore be firstly avoided in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy.</p>
Policy H2 – Cross-boundary development opportunity – Stamford North	Object	Point c. refers to a “ <i>country park incorporating the appropriate mitigation of potential harm to biodiversity and wildlife assets, including the appropriate translocation of notable species</i> ”. There are concerns over the potential viability of habitats capable of supporting translocated notable species within this context. The point should be amended to focus on the need for a clear spatial mitigation strategy for habitat losses, in-line with both the Mitigation Hierarchy and new Biodiversity Net Gain Hierarchy, with an assessment of the viability of species translocations alongside this. The strategy should favour on-site provision over off-site provision to mitigate any losses.

Policy SC7 - Creation of New Open Space	Support	Policy supported, specifically point e., which relates to maximising ecological benefits/networks and delivering Biodiversity Net Gains.
Policy EN1 - Protection of Sites, Habitats and Species	Object	<p>The policy is generally supported; however no mention is made to spatial mitigation – i.e. the need to mitigate for habitat/species losses in close to proximity to where they occur, or within existing nearby ecological networks within emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies.</p> <p>The inclusion of priority grasslands is welcomed but would be stronger by detailing the specific habitat types within the county, namely Calcareous Grassland and Neutral Grassland.</p> <p>Reference to the Leicestershire and Rutland BAP is absent from the policy wordings and should be included in order to maximise opportunities for the restoration, enhancement and connection of priority habitats and species.</p> <p>The undertaking and publication of the supporting evidence documents - Biodiversity Assessment (May 2023) and Rutland GBI Strategy is welcomed and are considered to be an important resource for planning nature’s recovery.</p>
Policy EN2 - Local Nature Recovery Strategy	Support	<p>The Leicestershire &amp; Rutland Wildlife Trust (LRWT) welcomes the inclusion of this policy, however is disappointed to see the lack of information provided to explain why this policy is needed beyond the listed legislative requirements alone.</p> <p>Given that the authority has declared an Ecological Emergency, further information should be provided to outline the intrinsic and economic need for spatial strategies for nature’s recovery.</p> <p>A Local Plan should provide a positive vision for the future of the county whilst addressing serious environmental priorities, therefore great weight should be given to LNRS’s – both for appropriate development site allocation and biodiversity offsetting/enhancement purposes.</p>
Policy EN3 – Biodiversity Net Gain	Object	<p>LRWT welcomes this policy along with the comprehensive guidance included.</p> <p>The requirement to achieve at least 15% net gain is somewhat positive, in that this is beyond the statutory requirement of 10%, however it is disappointing that the authority’s own viability evidence base shows that up to 20% uplift is viable and deliverable on sites within Rutland.</p> <p>There is serious concern with the environmental sector that a 10% gain figure is insufficient to contribute towards the recovery of nature in a meaningful way. Instead, the Wildlife Trusts and other eNGO’s are calling for a minimum of 20% gain, a figure that is evidently shown to be deliverable and achievable in Rutland.</p>

		<p>Both The Wildlife Trusts and the UN have identified the need for 30% of land to be protected for the effective recovery of nature. We strongly believe that the authority has a distinct opportunity to show genuine leadership on this vital agenda by providing bolder, more ambitious targets such as this.</p> <p>It is strongly recommended that long-term management of off-site BNG be secured in perpetuity (as stated for on-site delivery), rather than for 30 years to support nature’s recovery.</p> <p>(Please note the typo “...biodiversity New Gain...” on the last line of the policy web version)</p>
Policy EN4 – Trees, woodland, and hedgerows	Object	<p>Whilst the policy is generally very welcomed, we are concerned about point e. which infers that both native and non-native tree species should be used in all new planting schemes. The Trust recognises the role that non-native trees can play in e.g. climate adaptation, however to say that they should be used in all new schemes is a mistake and over-generalisation. It is widely accepted that for the purposes of nature conservation, the right kind of trees should be selected for the right place/conditions and that the use of non-native trees should be limited to prevent e.g. the spread of new pests and diseases.</p> <p>It is therefore recommended that the wording be changed to “... primarily using native tree species and, only non-native tree species where appropriate...”.</p> <p>It is encouraging to see a proactive policy around improving tree cover within development proposals, however there is some concern that other equally valuable and locally scarce habitat types appear to be excluded, namely species-rich Calcareous and Neutral Grassland (both local/national BAP/Priority Habitats) and accounting for only 1.03% and 0.79% of the land cover of the county respectively (Rutland County Biodiversity Assessment, 2023). Other proactive measures and policies aligned with the Leicestershire &amp; Rutland BAP 2016-2026 should therefore be included in the Local Plan in order to directly contribute towards nature’s recovery.</p>
Policy EN5- Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees	Support	We welcome this policy and would not like to see compromised in any way.
Policy EN7: Green and Blue Infrastructure Network	Support	Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust supports this policy and strongly recommends that long-term management of GBI should be secured in perpetuity rather than for 30 years to support nature’s recovery.
Policy EN10 - Rutland Water Area	Support	Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust supports this policy as it clearly emphasizes the importance of the designated nature conservation features of Rutland Water and the valuable assemblages of species within it.

Policy EN11 - Eyebrook Reservoir Area	Support	Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust supports this policy as it clearly emphasizes the importance of the designated nature conservation/geological features of the Eyebrook Reservoir Area.
Policy MIN4 - Development criteria for mineral extraction	Object	Policy is weak and does not correspond with Policy EN1: Protection of Sites, Habitats and Species to ensure that designated sites for nature conservation/irreplaceable habitats are appropriately protected. This should be extended to Priority Habitats as mineral extraction as significantly contributed to losses historically. Mineral developments must also align with Policy EN3 – Biodiversity Net Gain, ensuring that BNG can be achieved in principle and in perpetuity.
Policy MIN9 - Restoration and aftercare.	Object	The policy is generally welcomed, however the significance of mineral site restoration for Calcareous Grassland enhancement/creation is lost. It is acknowledged that by definition this could be included within point b., however much greater emphasis must be placed on this habitat type as a priority for limestone mineral site restoration in order for the scale of restoration needed to be realised (Leicestershire and Rutland BAP, 2016-2026).

End.