

Blaby Green and Blue Infrastructure Study

Blaby District Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

February 2025



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Blaby Green and Blue Infrastructure Study

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 LUC was commissioned by Blaby District Council to prepare a Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Study (herein referred to as the 'Study') to inform the preparation of the new Local Plan. High quality GBI will act as a vital tool in the delivery of successful place-making and multi-functional benefits in the District. The Study will guide the planning of the strategic GBI network, contributing to nature-based climate change solutions and health and wellbeing benefits.

Structure of this report

1.2 The Study is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Outlines the structure of the document. The concept of GBI is introduced, with reference to the local context. Policy context is reviewed and the thematic approach outlined.

- **Chapter 2: GBI in the District**

Provides an overview of the existing GBI baseline context, including an updated understanding of local needs.

- **Chapter 3: A network approach**

Identifies strategic opportunities for GBI in Blaby to strengthen the network in the District.

- **Chapter 4: A vision for GBI in Blaby**

Sets out the overarching vision and supporting objectives for delivery of GBI within the District.

- **Chapter 5: Evaluation and setting of Headline Standards**

Evaluates the current performance of the GBI network against Natural England's Headline Standards and identifies recommendations.

■ **Chapter 6: Policy recommendations**

Provides policy recommendations to embed GBI within the new Local Plan.

■ **Chapter 7: Delivery GBI**

Introduced long list of opportunities and provides guidance on how to deliver opportunities to meet the strategic objectives.

■ **Chapter 8: Action plans**

Outlines GBI opportunities and priority projects within structured action plans to promote the delivery of GBI within the District.

What is GBI?

1.3 In recent years, the concept of green infrastructure (GI) or GBI has become increasingly prevalent in national policy and the wider planning context, including with developers and transport authorities. In addition, GBI has been promoted through the 2018 publication of the 25 Year Environment Plan [See reference 1]. The Landscape Institute, the chartered body for the landscape profession, has also urged that it has 'never been more necessary to invest in GI.....the role of GI in addressing the challenges of the 21st century cannot be underestimated' [See reference 2].

1.4 This Study refers to the concept of 'GBI' rather than 'GI' to ensure consideration is provided to blue infrastructure as part of land use planning. However, reference to 'GI' within quotations or during analysis of the Natural England GI Framework (NEGIF) should assume the inclusion of water elements.

1.5 The term GBI is used to describe the network of natural and semi-natural features as well as 'blue' assets such as rivers, ponds and lakes. GBI is not

limited to traditional greenspaces such as parks and can involve various interventions to thread nature into streetscapes or to increase connectivity between assets at various landscape scales.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024 [See reference 3] defines GI as: 'A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.'

1.6 GBI as a term of reference, encompasses open spaces such as parks and public gardens, but also allotments, woodlands, hedgerows, fields, river corridors and catchments, lakes, ponds, playing fields, footpaths and cycle routes. At the street level, this might include vertical greening, green roofs, soft verges, trees / canopies and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

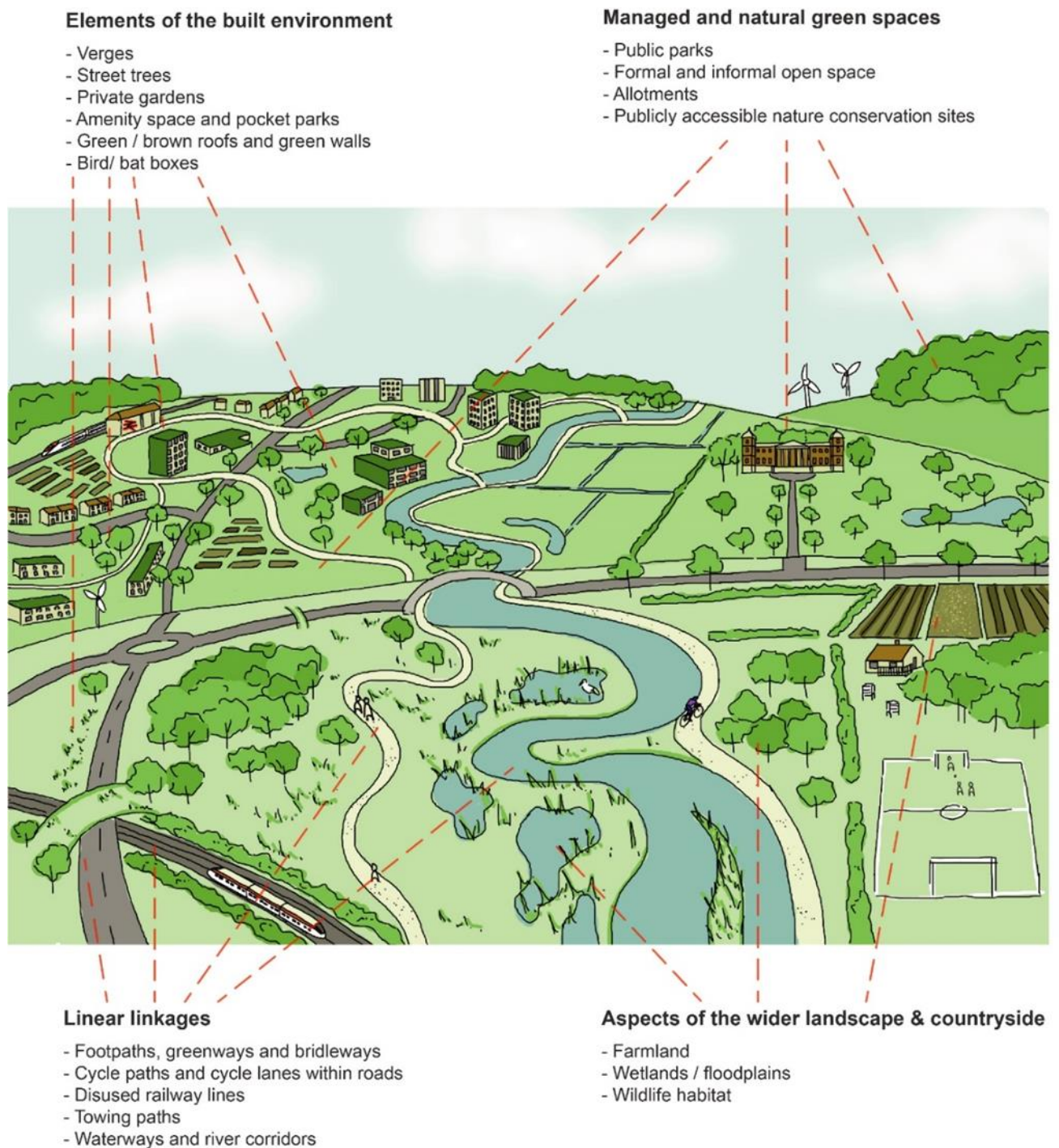
1.7 The GBI assets considered within this Study are listed below and displayed visually in **Figure 1.1**.

- Managed and semi-natural greenspaces:
 - Public parks and gardens;
 - Formal and informal open space, including civic spaces, churchyards, amenity greenspace, play space, orchards and allotments; and
 - Nature conservation sites.
- Linear linkages:
 - Public Rights of Way (PRoW), promoted routes and cycle infrastructure;
 - Wider habitat areas; and
 - Watercourses.
- Elements of the built environment:

Chapter 1 Introduction

- Road verges and street trees;
 - Private gardens; and
 - Vertical greening, green roofs and SuDS.
- Aspects of the wider landscape:
- Forestry and woodland;
 - Farmland; and
 - Hedgerows.

Figure 1.1: Components of GBI



How can GBI benefit the District?

Value of GBI

1.8 Historically, GBI has been treated within the planning system as a cost. However new approaches - such as the 'natural capital' approach - have helped to better understand the tangible value delivered through investment in GBI. A natural capital approach considers the **value** of the natural environment for people and the economy. It is an important part of a wider move to better understand 'inclusive wealth', as set out in the Dasgupta Review commissioned by the government in 2019.

1.9 This value is largely made up of:

- Provisioning services - products from nature such as food, water, energy and materials. This includes agriculture, water extraction, renewable energy and mineral extraction.
- Regulating services - services helping to maintain the quality of our environment, such as carbon sequestration to remove greenhouse gases, parks and blue spaces to cool, and vegetation to remove air pollutants.
- Cultural services - these are non-material benefits people obtain from natural capital, such as tourism, recreation and aesthetic experience.

1.10 These value services are important for maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for communities in the District, as well as contributing to targets to protect nature and address the climate crisis.

1.11 The Office for National Statistics produces a set of Natural Capital accounts. These estimate the financial and societal value of natural resources in the UK. In 2023, it was estimated that the stock of the UK's natural capital is worth £1.5 trillion. Natural England's Natural Capital Atlas (Atlas 22 – Leicestershire Rutland) highlights the natural capital value and ecosystem

services of natural assets for the wider region in which the District is located. [\[See reference 4\]](#).

Benefits of GBI

1.12 The District is located in the south west of Leicestershire and adjoins the southern and western suburbs of the city of Leicester. The northern extent of the District is predominantly urban or suburban in character, comprised of five settlements which exhibit a strong functional relationship with the administrative area of Leicester. Moving south and west, the District becomes increasingly rural, dominated by rolling farmland interspersed with areas of woodland and parkland.

1.13 GBI is defined by its multi-functionality, with a single asset having the ability to provide a number of benefits to people and other environmental functions (see **Figure 1.2**). This can be applied to a variety of components in the urban, suburban and rural environments of the District to provide GBI benefits both at a discrete local level and more widely through strengthened networks and improved connections. It is the variety of societal, environmental and economic benefits that a single asset can bring that plays an important role in the delivery of sustainable growth.

Planning Practice Guidance [\[See reference 5\]](#) states that: 'GI is a natural capital asset that provides multiple benefits, at a range of scales. For communities, these benefits can include enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes, food and energy production, urban cooling, and the management of flood risk. These benefits are also known as ecosystem services.'

1.14 GBI provides a number of functions, of varying weight and importance. This is particularly relevant where differing purposes conflict with each other. For example, the delivery of biodiversity enhancements (favourable status of

statutorily designated sites or species) at select locations should be balanced with the need for active transport or recreation.

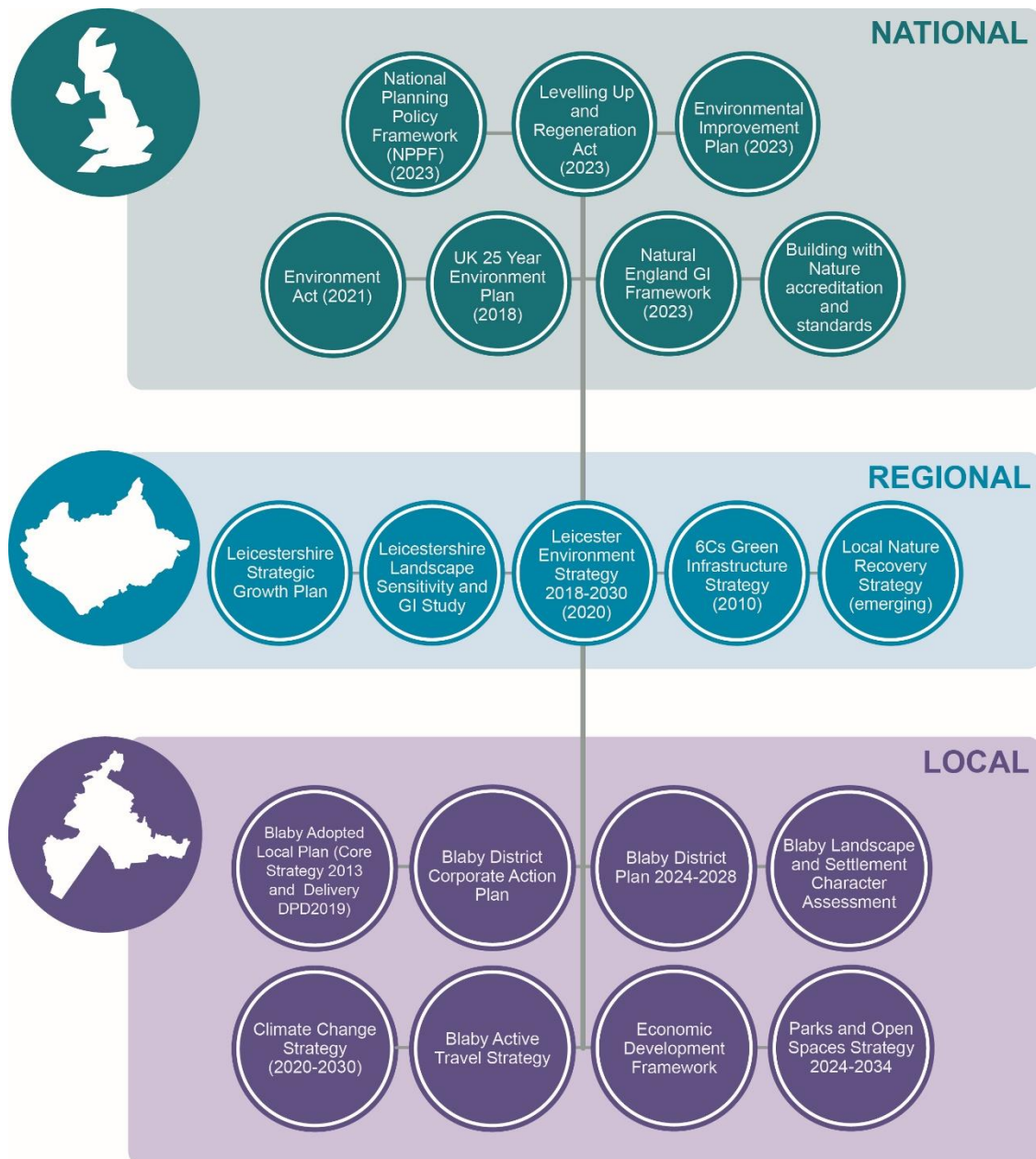
Figure 1.2: Benefits of GBI



Policy Context

1.15 An overview of policy context used to inform the baseline of the Study is shown below in **Figure 1.3**.

Figure 1.3: Policy context



1.16 In addition to priorities set out within the policy context, nationally recognised guidance relating to GBI has also guided the development of the Study. Of particular note are:

- Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework (NEGIF); and
- Building with Nature Standards.

Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework (NEGIF)

1.17 To support the push for GBI up the planning agenda, the NEGIF [See reference 6] was launched in February 2023, a commitment made within the 25 Year Environment Plan [See reference 7]. The tool provides a mechanism to support both local authorities and developers to deliver well planned, designed and maintained GI. Comprised of GI Mapping, Principles, Headline Standards, Design Guide and Process Journeys, the NEGIF is intended to guide decision makers, policy makers and developers into delivering successful and good quality GI.

1.18 The NEGIF also highlights the important role of GI in delivering multiple benefits across health and wellbeing, climate, biodiversity and economic agendas. Furthermore, the NEGIF provides a key link between other ongoing initiatives, including Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), Nature Recovery Plans (NRP) and natural capital.

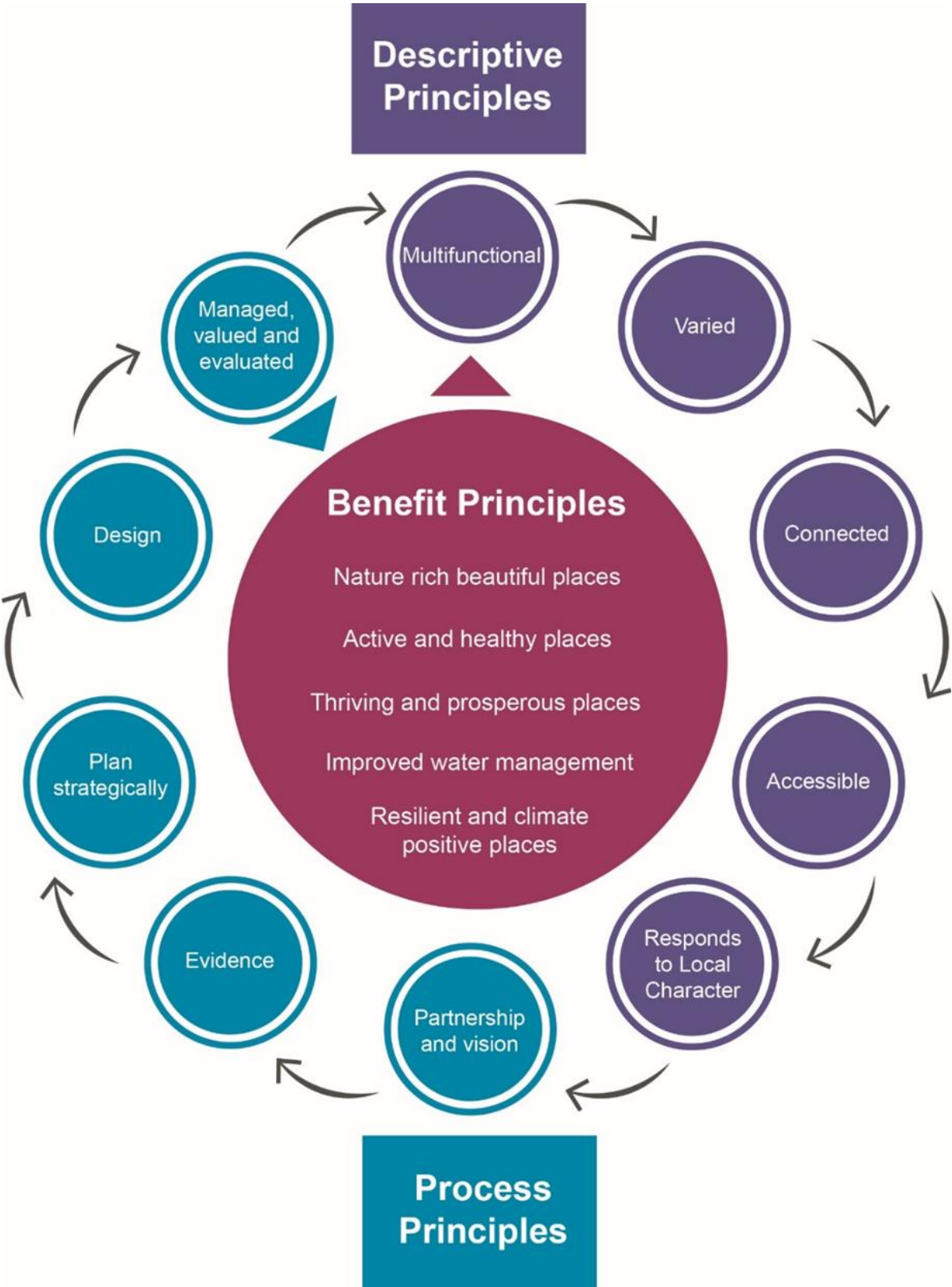
1.19 The GI Headline Standards form a key component of the NEGIF and outline the recommended levels of GI delivery for new development and across a local authority wide context. The five Headline Standards collectively recommend that everyone should have access to good quality green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home. The development of a GI Study / Strategy forms one of the Headline Standards set out in the NEGIF; requiring that local authorities, in partnership with stakeholders, assess and strategically plan GI provision.

1.20 The 'GI Principles Wheel' developed by Natural England (see **Figure 1.4**) outlines 15 principles to promote the successful delivery of GI. These principles are comprised of the following:

- Five 'Benefits of GI':
 - Nature rich beautiful places;
 - Active and healthy places;
 - Thriving and prosperous places;
 - Improved water management; and
 - Resilient and climate positive places.
- Five 'Descriptive Principles':
 - Multifunctional;
 - Varied;
 - Connected;
 - Accessible; and
 - Responds to local character.
- Five 'Process Principles':
 - Partnership and vision;
 - Evidence;
 - Plan strategically;
 - Design; and
 - Managed, valued and evaluated.

1.21 The five 'Benefit Principles' summarise the role GBI can play in the delivery of high quality, nature rich and attractive places which provide a setting for healthy, active day-to-day living.

Figure 1.4: 'GI Principles Wheel' as developed by Natural England



Building with Nature (BwN) Standards

1.22 BwN forms the UK's first GBI benchmark. Implemented through the Building with Nature Standards Framework, the overarching aim of BwN is to mainstream GBI in placemaking to maximise benefits for people and nature.

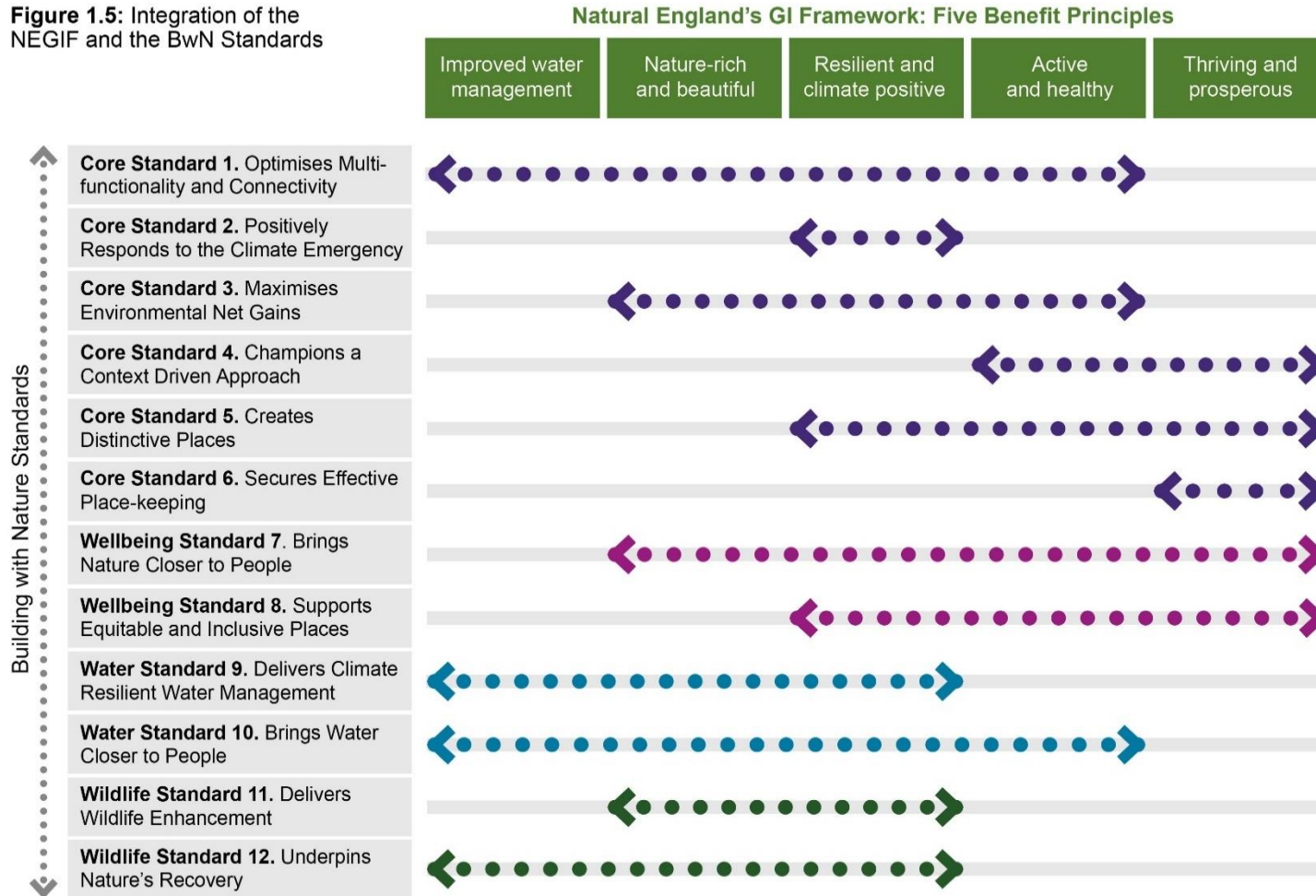
1.23 The BwN Standards Framework provides best-practice guidance which sets out what good GBI looks like at each stage of the planning / development process. Arranged across four categories, BwN is comprised of 12 Standards. These are divided into six Core Standards and three themes, Wellbeing, Water and Wildlife, containing two Standards in each theme.

Introduction to the themed approach

1.24 A 'themed' approach was adopted to explore the existing GBI assets within the District, consider key needs and explore deficiencies within the existing network. The analysis has been organised based on the three themes (Wellbeing, Water and Wildlife) outlined in the BwN Standards Framework. **Figure 1.5** demonstrates the relationship between the NEGIF and the BwN Standards Framework. The details of these are set out in **Chapter 2**.

Figure 1.5: Integration of the NEGIF and the BwN Standards

Figure 1.5: Integration of the NEGIF and the BwN Standards



Chapter 2

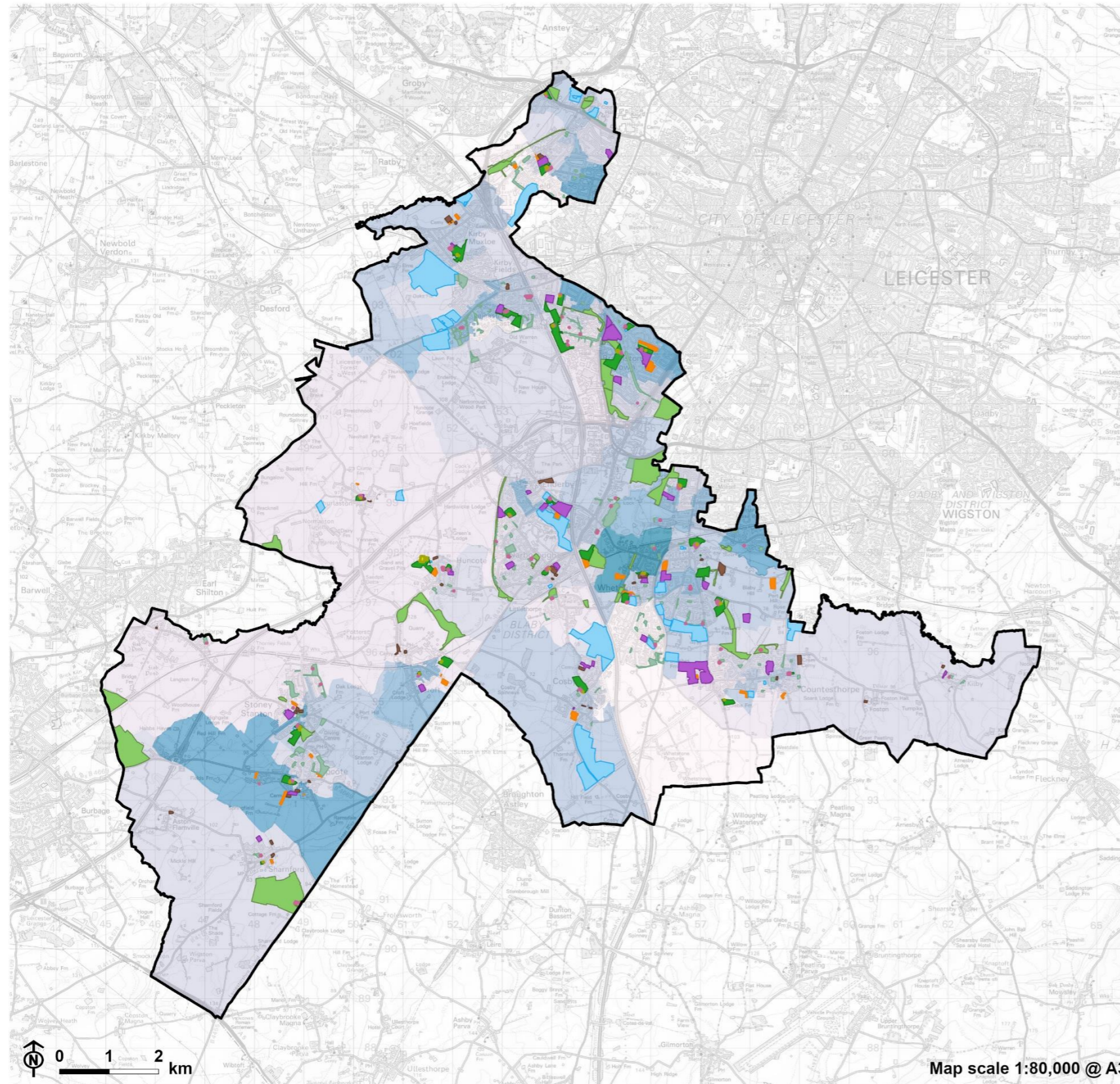
Existing GBI provision in the District

Theme 1: Wellbeing

2.1 Access to greenspace and GBI offers the potential to support the delivery of significant physical and mental health benefits for residents and communities within the District, a key finding of the COVID-19 pandemic [See reference 8]. Several studies have recognised the role of greenspace and active travel networks [See reference 9], two pillars of a successful GBI network, in combating health challenges.

2.2 Public Health England (PHE) highlights that people who have greater exposure to greenspace have a range of more favourable physiological outcomes, although competing demands for space is putting pressure on these resources [See reference 10]. However, access and use of greenspaces is not spread equally across society. Evidence shows that certain groups; including older people, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, women and girls, and disabled people face barriers accessing greenspaces [See reference 11]. These are often groups which already face disproportionate health inequalities [See reference 12].

2.3 This theme explores how GBI can support health and wellbeing for all residents and visitors across the District. An overview of GBI assets relating to this theme are shown on **Figure 2.1**.



Blaby Local Plan Evidence - Green and Blue Infrastructure Study
Blaby District Council



Figure 2.1: Wellbeing context in Blaby

- Blaby District
- Open space typology**
- Accessible natural green space
- Allotments
- Amenity green space
- Churchyards and cemeteries
- Education
- Outdoor sport (private)
- Parks and recreation grounds
- Play space (child)
- Play space (youth)

- Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019: Health deprivation and disability**
- Most deprived
- Least deprived

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12919_Blaby_Local_Plan_Evidence_GBI_Stage_2_Figures/Figure 2.1: Wellbeing context in Blaby 10/10/2024 EB:cooper_h

Key linkages

- The BwN guidance lists two 'Wellbeing Standards': 'bringing nature closer to people'; and 'supporting equitable and inclusive places'.
- This theme aligns with the 'active and healthy places' principle within the NEGIF's benefit principles. There are also connections to the 'thriving and prosperous places' and 'resilient and climate positive' principles, particularly in relation to creating social cohesion, supporting communities, active travel and the delivery of healthy environments.
- The NEGIF also supports this theme through its Accessible Greenspace Standards (AGS) which recommends three hectares of publicly accessible greenspace provision per 1,000 of the population, with a focus on access to green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home.

GBI provision today

Open space

2.4 Open space provision within the District varies in size and primary function. The 2019 Open Space Audit [See reference 13] assessed the provision of different typologies of open space, including allotments, amenity greenspaces, parks and recreation grounds, play (for children and young people), accessible natural greenspace and cemeteries and churchyards. The total provision for each of these typologies is shown in **Table 2.1** below.

Table 2.1: Open space provision in Blaby

Typology	Open space provision (hectares)	Provision per population (hectares per 1,000 of population) (2019 population data)
Allotments	28.79	0.29
Amenity greenspace	90.58	0.90
Parks and recreation grounds	100.70	1.00
Play (child)	6.54	0.07
Play (youth)	1.97	0.02
Accessible natural greenspace	289.21	2.89
Cemeteries and churchyards	20.17	0.20

2.5 The distribution of this provision is not uniform across the District, leading to inequitable access to different types of greenspace. Parks and gardens provide opportunities for formal recreation and are important as community and social spaces to promote physical activity. Provision of this typology is greatest in Huncote (equivalent to 3.15 hectares per 1,000 of the population) and Croft (equivalent to 2.61 hectares per 1,000 of the population).

2.6 Natural greenspace affords local people with access to nature and space for quiet contemplation. The greatest provision of this typology is in Aston Flamville (82.92 hectares per 1,000 of the population) and Sharnford (55.76 hectares per 1,000 of the population). Access to natural greenspace is particularly variable across the District. District wide (greater than 100 hectares) natural greenspace is important for allowing residents to access large natural areas. This size of accessible natural greenspace is only accessible in the west of the District. Burbage Common and Woods provides access to district-wide accessible natural greenspace in the west of the district. Cosby, Leicester Forest East,

Glenfield and the southern portion of Countesthorpe are deficient in access to natural greenspace of any size.

2.7 The findings of the open space audit recommended that parks and recreation grounds should be accessible within a 15 minute walk. Overall, there is good access to this typology of open space. Findings from the open space audit show that the southern edge of Whetstone, eastern corner of Glenfield and the southern extents of Leicester Forest East and Huncote fall outside of this catchment. However, proximity to greenspace at Croft Quarry (not included within this audit) as well as a strong network of Public Rights of Way provide good access to nature in Huncote. The results also indicate that many settlements have access to a high quality parks and gardens. In addition, most settlements have good access to amenity greenspace, with the exception of Croft.

2.8 The audit also surveyed open spaces, and the quality of these audited sites were scored (A-C). The results indicate that approximately 80% of audited accessible greenspace scored good ('A') or average ('B'). Around 20% of audited accessible greenspaces scored poorly ('C'). Overall, the poor sites were more common in the west of the District and within natural greenspaces.

2.9 The Parks and Open Space Strategy for the District [\[See reference 14\]](#) covers Council owned parks and open spaces only. The document identifies weaknesses in the accessibility of existing open spaces, including a lack of parking and a shortage of information and street furniture to support use by all groups. This is exacerbated by anti-social behaviour, litter and dog-fouling which discourage use. However, opportunities to improve the accessibility and quality of open spaces were identified, potentially supported by funding from commercial sources and emerging mechanisms such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

2.10 The 'Strategic Sites' considered in the Parks and Open Space Strategy include Bouskell Park, Countesthorpe Country Park, Crow Mills, Fosse Meadows, Glenhills Nature Area, Jubilee Park, Osiers Nature Area, Whetstone Way North and South and Whistle Way. All ten sites were audited and found to

meet Green Flag Award criteria, the recognised benchmark standard for open space management in the UK and internationally. Quality scores ranged from 'fair' to 'excellent', with Bouskell Park and Glen Hills achieving the highest score at 95% (excellent quality).

2.11 The District's most recent Playing Pitch Strategy identified shortfalls in adult and youth 11-a-side football pitches, 3G football pitches, rugby union pitches, cricket pitches and informal tennis provision. The greatest need was found in the east of the District.

Public access

2.12 The District is comprised of approximately 210 km of PRow. This network provides connections between the settlements and areas of greenspace. However, severance of these routes is also apparent due to busy roads or limited pavement provision (e.g. B4114 between Croft and Littlethorpe, Croft Hill Road, south of Huncote and Cambridge Road, south of Whetstone). The number and safety of road crossings act as further barriers to the use of the overall PRow network.

2.13 The National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 6 provides a north – south connection through the District between Glen Parva in the north to Willoughby Waterleys, lying just south of the District. The route provides both on and off-road sections of cycle provision.

2.14 The Blaby Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Active Travel Strategy [See reference 15] identifies a distinction between the provision of safe cycle connections within the north and south of the District. The proximity between settlements in the north of the District means that active travel is an achievable mode of transport for many everyday journeys, resulting in wider opportunities to connect up with the high-quality active travel network within Leicester. Rural areas in the south and west of the District by comparison are only accessible along high-speed roads with minimal lighting and a lack of

footways, discouraging journeys by active travel and increasing reliance on cars.

2.15 In general, the District benefits from relatively regular topography which reduces barriers to active travel.

Local Needs

Health and wellbeing

2.16 Access to good quality greenspace provides health and wellbeing benefits, promoting healthy lifestyles. Physical health in the District is generally better than the England average **[See reference 16]**. In 2021, 83.8% of the population described their health as ‘good’ or ‘very good’. In addition, research on community wellbeing indicates that all localities in the District are above the average community wellbeing score for the UK **[See reference 17]**.

2.17 Despite this, 68% of adults in the District are overweight **[See reference 18]**, which is higher than the average for England. However, this percentage has been decreasing. In addition, the percentage of the population identifying as ‘active’ (at least 150 minutes of exercise a week) has been increasing since 2019. Between November 2022 - 2023, 63.3% of the population were active – roughly equivalent to the average in England, but slightly lower than the average for Leicestershire **[See reference 19]**.

2.18 Health inequalities are evident within the District and life expectancy is 2.5 years lower for men in the most deprived areas of the District than in the least deprived areas. 20% of adults were also reported to be physically inactive in 2022 / 2023. This highlights a potential need for greenspace in the relatively more deprived areas of the District, which can provide an opportunity for physical activity. In addition, 17.5% of children at year six age within the District were described as obese in 2023. Whilst lower than the English average of 21.8%, this still represents a strong driver for access to greenspace and play for

children and young people to facilitate and promote healthy lifestyles from a young age.

2.19 The findings of the 2021 Census indicate that 15.7% of the population identified themselves as having a disability which limited their activity. Greenspaces provide a wider range of benefits if they have good access for all, and can be used by the elderly, infirm, and people with physical disabilities.

Socio-economic inequalities

2.20 Correlations have been recorded between areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and low access to greenspace. The District borders some of the most deprived areas of the country within the south west of Leicester. Despite this, the District itself has relatively low levels of deprivation. However, there is some variation across the District with areas bordering Leicester to the north east (Braunstone Town, Rowley Fields and the south of Glenfield) identified as the most deprived areas within the District. Pockets of relative deprivation also exist in Whetstone, Blaby, Enderby, Sapcote and Stoney Stanton [See reference 20]. Nationally, these areas are slightly more deprived than the average for England.

2.21 Areas in the south of the District, at Elmesthorpe and Potters Marston are amongst the most deprived for housing in England. The percentage of the population in the social rented sector is higher in the District than in the rest of the East Midlands at 12.8%. The percentage of people who own their own homes has decreased over recent years to 77.9% in 2021. Research has shown that private and social housing tenants are less likely to have access to private greenspace at home and are therefore more reliant on public parks for the associated health and wellbeing benefits.

2.22 The 2021 Census indicates 86.2% of people identified their ethnic group as white, 8.3% as Asian, 1.5% as Black, 2.7% as mixed or multiple and 1.3% as from other ethnic groups. Evidence has shown that 40% of people from ethnic minority backgrounds live in the most greenspace deprived areas [See

reference 21]. Barriers such as low confidence, social inclusion and perceptions of safety can also serve as barriers to open space, and it is important that greenspaces are designed to meet the needs of different groups so that they are inclusive for all. Greenspaces with multiple facilities and opportunities for activities draw a wider range of visitors. A well-visited open space is more likely to be perceived as safe. This encourages their use and facilitates their purpose as a place for communities to come together and improve community cohesion.

Environmental health

2.23 GBI offers the opportunity to deliver air quality enhancement within the District. The District is currently characterised by five Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), where exceedances of the annual mean air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide have been recorded [**See reference 22**]. These are primarily along road corridors in the following locations:

- A5460 Narborough Road South;
- M1 corridor in Enderby and Narborough;
- M1 corridor between Thorpe Astley and Leicester Forest East;
- Enderby Road, Whetstone; and
- Mill Hill, Enderby.

2.24 High levels of road noise particularly impact settlements along the M1 and M69 corridors, the A563 and around Fosse Park shopping centre. GBI, if sited appropriately, has the potential to improve air quality along key transport corridors and reduce impacts from vehicle emissions.

2.25 Contaminated land is evident in parts of the District. In recent years, a series of mitigation works were required on land close to Huncote Leisure Centre due to the high levels of methane associated with historic landfill [**See reference 23**]. The Blaby Contaminated Land Strategy sets out the need to obtain data on potential sites of contaminated land [**See reference 24**].

Current initiatives, projects and policy

- The Blaby District Plan 2024-2028 [See reference 25] commits the Council to the sustainability of parks, ensuring they are high quality, accessible and provide value to the local community.
- Active Blaby [See reference 26] is an initiative to support residents to get active and improve their health and wellbeing. The initiative includes a programme of health walks in local parks and the wider rural area to promote active travel.
- The Canal and River Trust run wellbeing walks along the Grand Union Canal in south Leicestershire. This includes a blue social prescribing programme which include canoe, paddle board and walking sessions [See reference 27].
- Active Together is a partnership which aims to increase physical activity levels and reduce inequality of access to sport within Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland [See reference 28]. The initiative includes a variety of physical activity opportunities for all ages and provide a directory of parks, open spaces, walking and cycling routes in the local area.
- The Council offers a number of supported volunteer opportunities in the District's parks; including litter picking and walking leaders. A Place to Grow, a sustainable community garden, encourages residents to become physically active, grow healthy food and increase community participation as a mechanism to promote positive mental health and wellbeing [See reference 29]. Based in Enderby, the site welcomes those who have a long term health conditions, learning disabilities, are recently bereaved, feeling isolated or would like to become more physically active.

Key findings

Strengths

- Residents enjoy good overall health outcomes in comparison to county and England wide averages, with relatively low deprivation.
- There is a high provision of existing accessible greenspace, particularly areas of accessible natural greenspace.
- The quality of open spaces within the District is generally good, as indicated by the results of the assessment of 'Strategic Sites' within the Parks and Open Space Strategy.
- There are several programmes in place which encourage and support residents to improve their health and run activities to encourage access to local greenspaces and active travel. These programmes also evidence good existing partnership working across the District.

Weaknesses

- The existing PRoW network in the District is fragmented in places, with the number and concerns about safety of road crossings reducing its appeal for active travel. As a consequence, the District has a high reliance on private transport.
- Major roads dissecting the District, including the M1 and M69, are a source of air and noise pollution for populations living within close proximity to these corridors.

Opportunities

- Good partnership working is already apparent in the District, which offers the opportunity to aid the delivery of future GBI projects.
- Novel approaches to the use of the GBI network to improve health and wellbeing for a wider range of people, such as blue social prescribing, are already in progress.
- The relatively level topography of the District, proximity of settlements and adjacent PRoW network within Leicester provide opportunities for enhancing the active travel network.
- New opportunities to fund greenspace are emerging, such as the sale of BNG credits.

Threats

- Facilities such as street furniture and signage are limited and / or in disrepair in many existing open spaces, with instances of anti-social behaviour also discouraging use.
- Changing demographics means that greenspaces must remain flexible to accommodate changing needs.
- Relatively high levels of childhood obesity emphasises the importance of access to greenspaces and play provision for children and young people.

Theme 2: Water

2.26 Well-managed water environments can provide attractive recreational spaces, active travel routes and species-rich habitats. However, the management of the water environment is becoming increasingly challenging due to the impacts of climate change. The Met Office predicts that by 2070 summers will be up to 60% drier in some regions of the UK, whilst winters will be 30% wetter [See reference 30]. GBI can help manage water resources to create multi-functional spaces which improve water quality, reduce flood risk and provide resilience to drought. GBI also has a role in contributing to water and flood risk management in the District by promoting drainage at both the local and catchment scales.

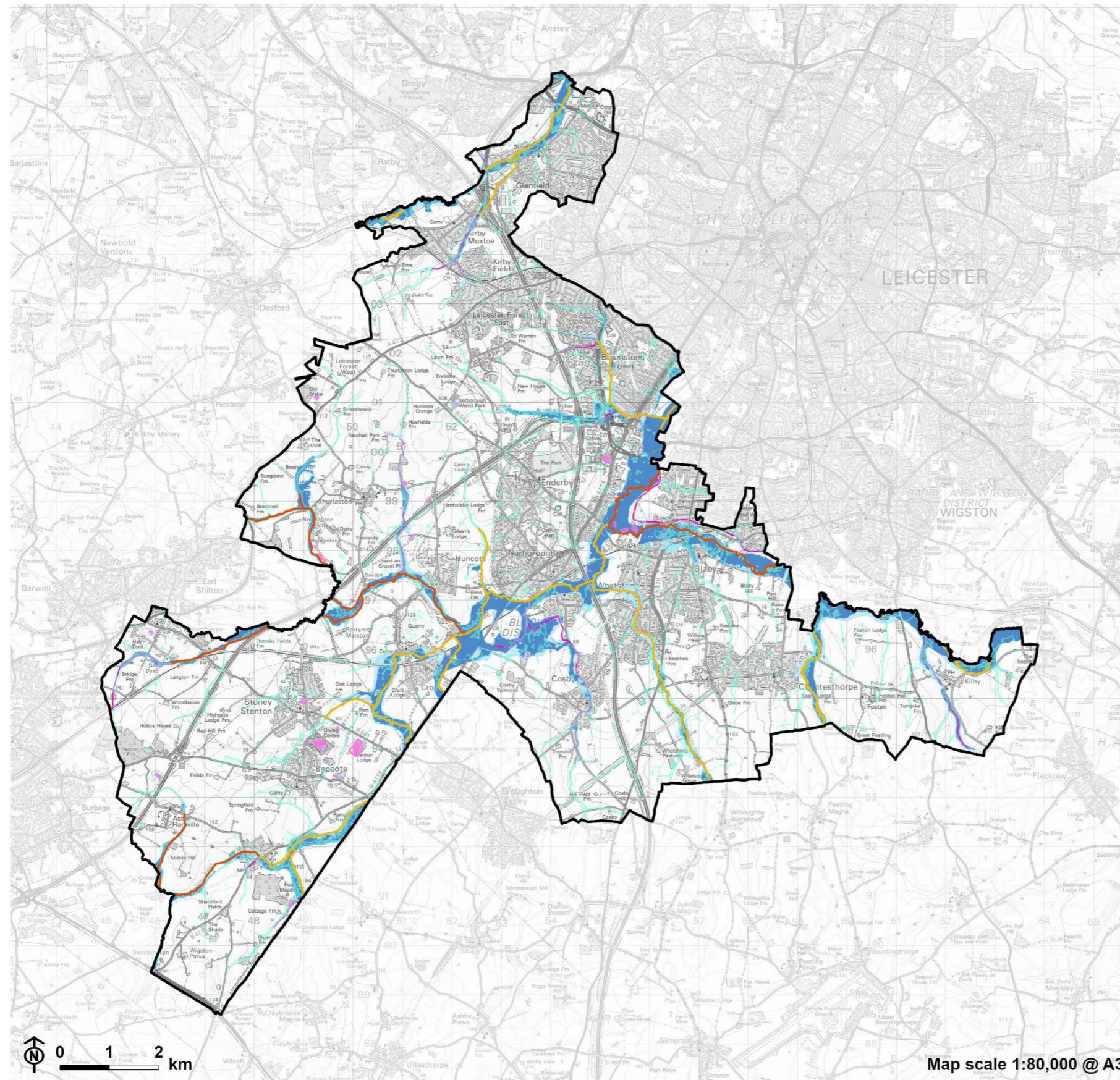
2.27 This theme explores how nature-based GBI can contribute to and provide integrated water management within the District. An overview of GBI assets relating to this theme are shown on **Figure 2.2**.

Key linkages

- The BwN guidance lists two 'Water Standards': 'delivers climate resilient water management'; and 'brings water closer to people'.
- This theme strongly aligns with the 'improved water management' principle within the NEGIF's benefit principles. There are also connections to the 'nature-rich and beautiful', 'resilient and climate positive' and 'active and healthy' principles.
- In accordance with Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (enacted in 2024).



Figure 2.2: Water context in Blaby



- Blaby District
- Rivers and surface water
- Risk of flooding from surface water (3.3% annual chance)
- Flood map for planning: rivers and sea**
- Flood Zone 2
- Flood Zone 3
- Water Framework Directive cycle 3 status**
- Moderate
- Poor

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12919_Blaby_Local_Plan_Evidence_GBI_Stage_2_Figures/Figure 2.2: Water context in Blaby
10/10/2024 EB:cooper_h

GBI provision today

Watercourses

2.28 The principal watercourses in the District are the River Sence and the River Soar. The Grand Union Canal also crosses the District. The River Soar, a tributary of the River Trent and Leicestershire's principal river, flows north easterly though the District and forms a confluence with the River Sence on the outskirts of Leicester. The River Sence flows along the southern edge of Leicester from Kilby in the east to Glen Parva, where it meets the River Soar. The course of the Grand Union Canal runs broadly parallel to the meandering channel of the River Sence within the District.

2.29 The District is dissected by a number of smaller watercourses and tributaries e.g. Thurlaston Brook, Whetstone Brook, Rothley Brook and Lubbesthorpe Brook, which are tributaries of the River Soar. Overall, there are approximately 93km of watercourse running through the District.

2.30 There are no reservoirs in the District, with small waterbodies (lakes / ponds) primarily associated with nature reserves, quarries, farms and water sports provision.

2.31 The water environment in the District supports diverse habitats, including reedbeds, wet meadows, and riparian woodlands. This includes Narborough Bog Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which contains one of the largest reedbeds in Leicestershire, providing habitat for a variety of bird species.

Accessible waterfront

2.32 Publicly accessible waterfronts offer opportunities for recreation, active travel routes and connections with nature. The Grand Union Canal provides an accessible waterfront within the District, accessible by foot and cycle along its towpath. The route provides a connection with the urban area of Leicester towards land to the north east of Blaby. The River Sence flows parallel to the Grand Union Canal and is visible from a number of footbridges, albeit has limited public access along its course. Similarly, the River Soar has no PRoW running parallel along its extent. Jubilee Park, where the River Soar meets the River Sence, offers an accessible waterfront.

2.33 Improved access to the River Soar and River Sence corridors, the Grand Union Canal and Rothley Brook corridor are identified within Blaby's Core Strategy. The opening up and creation of vegetated river corridors through urban areas is identified as a strategy to manage future flood risk. The recent commercial development at Everards Meadow includes improved pedestrian and cycle provision along the River Soar and Grand Union Canal. The scheme also incorporates a new footbridge and wider connection to the National Cycle Network Route 6.

Sustainable Drainage Systems

2.34 Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) mimic natural drainage processes by slowing the rate of surface water run-off and improving infiltration. There is currently no spatial data detailing the coverage of SuDS schemes in the District to inform baseline analysis.

Local Needs

Surface water flood risk

2.35 The pattern of surface water flood risk in the District largely follows the topography of the District as well as those locations where characteristic loamy clay soils impede drainage following high intensity rainfall. Surface water flow paths and areas of ponding are also apparent where water is impounded at road or rail embankments. As identified within the Blaby Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment [See reference 31], the largest surface water flow paths occur in the south west areas of the District (e.g. including Stony Stanton and Sharnford), the edge of Leicester and those affecting Glenfield in the north. Although current risk is managed appropriately and effectively [See reference 32], urban growth and climate change are identified factors likely to increase the extent, frequency and intensity of flooding.

2.36 The Blaby Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment also identifies areas most sensitive to change in surface water extent (all water on the land surface, including permanent water bodies and flooded areas) due to climate change. These areas include land to the west of Glen Parva and to the west of Whetstone due to large areas of low-lying topography. Areas south west of Littlethorpe and south of Thurlaston are also defined as areas sensitive to change. There are currently no surface water management plans for the District. However, there is one for Leicester City, which the District drains into. Collaboration is therefore recommended to promote future surface water management.

2.37 The 'greenness grid' mapping produced as part of the NEGIF provides an overview of the percentage cover of manmade compared to 'green' surfaces on a 250m² grid. These impermeable surfaces reduce water infiltration leading to increased surface-water flow. The greenness grid within the District (see Figure 2.3) indicates that the areas with the highest percentage of impermeable surfaces include industrial / commercial areas at Croft Quarry, the Whittle

Estate in Whetstone, Grove Park, Meridian Business Park, Fosse Park around Junction 21 and Optimus Point at Glenfield.

Fluvial flood risk

2.38 Fluvial flooding occurs when water levels exceed the bank level of a river. In the District, the main rivers associated with fluvial flooding are identified as follows [**See reference 33**]:

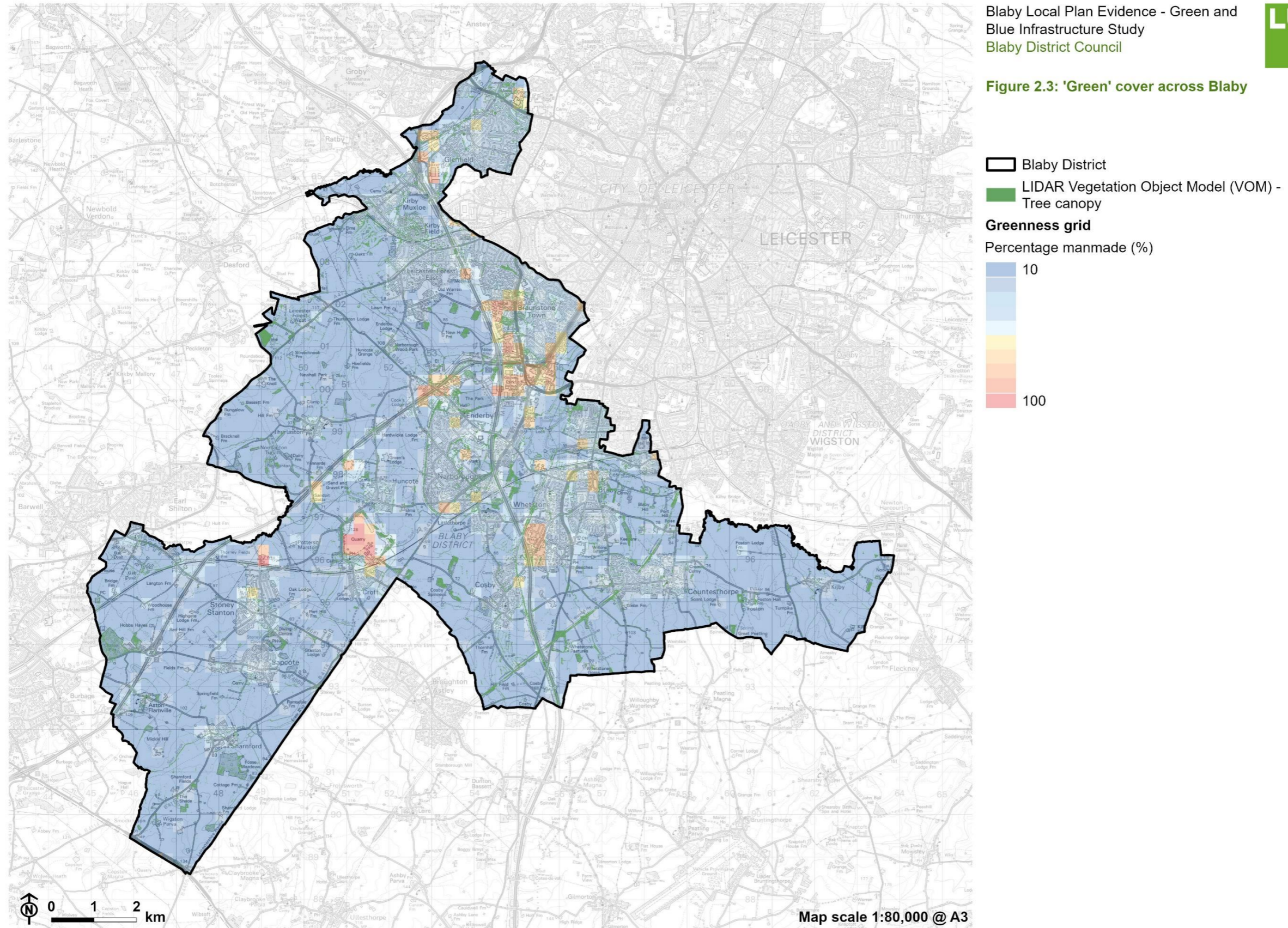
- the River Soar which is a risk to some rural settlements and areas along the banks as it flows through Sharnford, Croft and Littlethorpe;
- the River Sence which poses risk as it flows past Blaby;
- the Rothley Brook as it flows past Glenfield;
- an unnamed watercourse flowing through Cosby; and
- the Thurlaston Brook and the Whetstone Brook which pose a flood risk to more remote rural settlements.

2.39 The River Soar catchment is part of the 'Sub Area 9 Upper Soar and Upper Anker', identified in the River Trent Catchment Flood Management Plan [**See reference 34**]. The document states that the catchment is at a medium risk of flooding due to river channel capacity and floodplain inundation.

2.40 Flooding incidents are recorded in greatest number across northern areas of the District (e.g. Leicester Forest East and Glenfield). Rural villages in the west and south west of the District (including Sharnford and Thurlaston are also susceptible to fluvial flooding. In some places, fluvial and surface water flood risk areas overlap, increasing the overall risk of flooding.



Figure 2.3: 'Green' cover across Blaby



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2.41 Areas of the District most sensitive to fluvial impacts of climate change [See reference 35] are listed below:

- Northern area of the District around the A426;
- Whetstone Brook through Whetstone;
- Northern areas of Croft; and
- Areas to the south west of Littlethorpe due to low-lying topography.

2.42 GBI can help deliver flood mitigation through enhanced water storage, soil absorption capacity and reduced run-off. River catchments cross Local Planning Authority (LPA) boundaries and partnership working between LPAs is essential to fulfil GBI benefits.

Water quality

2.43 The District lies wholly within the River Soar Surface Water Nitrate Vulnerable Zone and agriculture is identified as a key contributor to nitrate pollution [See reference 36]. There are several watercourses within the District which do not have good ecological, hydromorphological or chemical status due to diffuse pollution and phosphate levels [See reference 37]. A summary of the quality of watercourses in the District is outlined below:

- 48% of watercourses are classified as having moderate water quality;
- 24% of watercourses are classified as having poor water quality; and
- 28% of watercourses have no data.

2.44 Changes to land management or new development in the upper flood catchments, outside the District, can potentially impact on the quality of watercourses. GBI has a role in improving water quality in the water cycle by naturally filtering out pollutants. Biodiversity and habitat enhancements can help prevent soil loss and reduce run-off from agricultural land. SuDS can also be used as a mechanism to prevent and control pollutants entering watercourses.

Current initiatives, projects and policy

2.45 Flood risk and water quality are cross boundary issues. The Blaby Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment highlights that the Council should work closely with neighbouring local authorities to develop complementary local planning policies for catchments that drain into and out of the District. Recommendations for managing flood risk relating to GBI include interventions that respond to climate change, the introduction of SuDS and other habitat improvements. No site specific projects are identified.

2.46 The River Trent Flood Catchment Management Plan provides an overview of the flood risk in the River Trent catchment and sets out the Environment Agency's plan for sustainable flood risk management over the next 50 to 100 years. The document recommends actions to investigate upstream storage and opportunities for creating green corridors along watercourses through urban centres. Partnership working with planners and local authorities is identified as the key mechanism for delivery.

2.47 The Blaby Core Strategy recognises the importance of improved access to the River Soar and River Sence corridors, the Grand Union Canal and Rothley Brook corridor.

2.48 The Leicester Waterways Improvement Partnership aims to improve the River Soar and Grand Union Canal corridors through Leicester. Initiated by the Canal and River Trust, the partnership delivers a range of projects along the waterways with the ambition of achieving Green Flag status. Projects include towpath improvements and formation of community adoption groups to aid long-term management.

2.49 The Canal and River Trusts' Waterways Wellbeing project in South Leicestershire started in 2022 and runs in Oadby & Wigston, Blaby and Market Harborough Districts. The scheme encourages activities on or near water; such as paddleboarding, canoeing and walking.

Key Findings

Strengths

- Presence of two main rivers (River Sence and River Soar), Grand Union Canal and numerous tributaries which provide important blue corridors.
- The towpath of the Grand Union Canal provides public access, connecting Leicester with the District.
- Pedestrian footbridges over rivers provide views along river corridors and opportunity for people to connect with nature.
- The Canal and River Trust is actively promoting improvements to river access in the District relating to wellbeing.

Weaknesses

- Given the number of waterbodies, public access to rivers for recreation and active travel is limited.
- Lack of baseline information relating to existing SuDS schemes.
- Agriculture identified as a contributor to watercourse pollution, reducing water quality.

Opportunities

- Potential to increase access to watercourses for recreation, active travel and wellbeing (recognised in Core Strategy).
- The incorporation of vegetation, including retrofitting and integration within new development, to include rain gardens, swales and green roofs will increase permeable surfaces within built areas.

- The proximity of floodplains to settlements offers opportunities for improved access and habitat connections, for example at Jubilee Park.
- Implementation of best practice methods for soil management on agricultural land, crop nutrition and pesticide use to reduce diffuse pollution from farming practices. Planting cover crops and woodland creation offers the opportunity to slow surface water flows and support soil stabilisation.

Threats

- Enhanced risk of flooding due to climate change has the potential to negatively impact fragile ecosystems.
- Availability of funding to deliver projects on the ground and meet recommendations highlighted in Blaby Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Flood Risk Assessment and River Trent Catchment Flood Management Plan.
- Necessity of cross boundary working relies on successful partnering with relevant LPAs to deliver effective GBI.

Theme 3: Wildlife

2.50 Globally, nature is facing an unprecedented decline. Natural ecosystems have reduced by almost half, over 1 million species are threatened with extinction, and the global biomass of wild mammals has decreased by over 80% [See reference 38]. Destruction and fragmentation from development, land-use change, and the impacts of the climate emergency are increasingly threatening local ecological networks. However, the identification of opportunities for habitat protection, creation, enhancement and connection at a local and regional scale will aid in addressing these challenges.

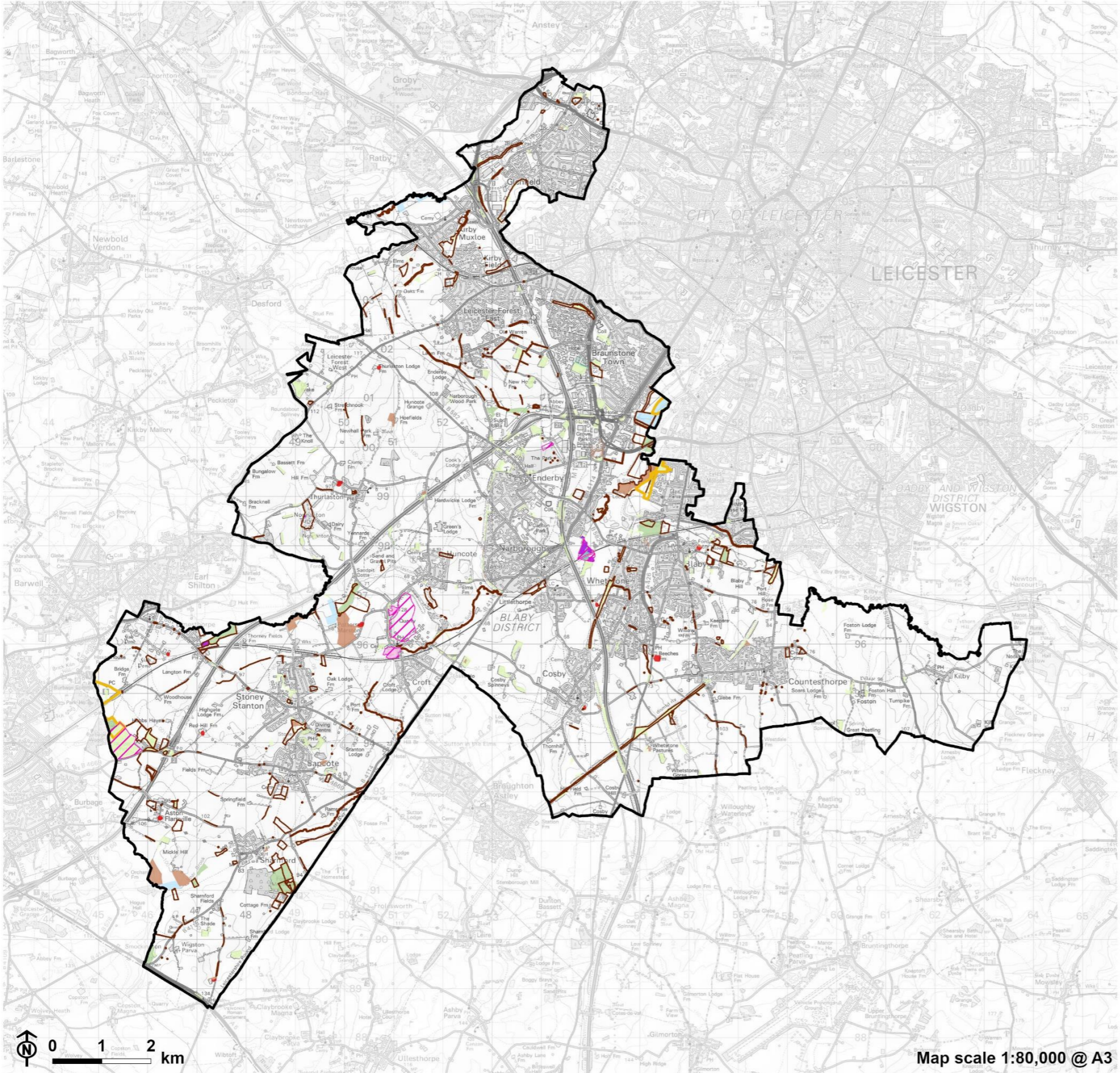
2.51 This theme explores how GBI can be used to accommodate future growth, whilst balancing the need for habitat protection and nature recovery. An overview of GBI assets relating to this theme are shown on **Figure 2.4**.

Key linkages

- The BwN guidance lists two 'Wildlife Standards': 'delivers wildlife enhancement'; and 'underpins nature's recovery'.
- This theme aligns with the 'nature-rich and beautiful' principle within the NEGIF's benefit principles. There are also connections to the 'improved water management' and 'resilient and climate positive' principles.
- The NEGIF also supports this theme through the Urban Nature Recovery Standard which recommends one hectare of local nature reserve (LNR) provision per 1,000 of the population, as well as enhancements to and identification of new local wildlife sites (LWS).
- This theme aligns with the wider emerging Leicestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), led by Leicestershire County Council.
- The Environment Act 2021 requires mandatory BNG requirements for all new developments. This came into force in April 2024.



Figure 2.4: Wildlife context in Blaby



- Blaby District
 - Site of Special Scientific Interest
 - Local Nature Reserve
 - Local Wildlife Site
- Priority Habitat Inventory**
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
 - Deciduous woodland
 - Good quality semi improved grassland
 - Lowland dry acid grassland
 - Lowland fens
 - Lowland meadows
 - Traditional orchard
 - No main habitat but additional habitats present



Map scale 1:80,000 @ A3

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12919_Blaby_Local_Plan_Evidence_GBI_Stage_2_Figures/Figure 2.4: Wildlife context in Blaby
10/10/2024 EB:cooper_h

GBI provision today

Designations

2.52 The District has six SSSIs; including Enderby Warren Quarry and Croft & Huncote Quarry SSSIs which form important geological sites. Croft Hill and Croft Pasture SSSIs are also notable for their rare types of grasslands. Narborough Bog SSSI is characterised by one of the largest reedbeds in Leicestershire and Burbage Wood and Aston Firs SSSI is comprised of semi-natural woodlands on clay soils. Located within Harborough District, the nearby Kilby-Foxton Canal SSSI offers the opportunity for enhancing habitat connectivity across District boundaries.

2.53 The pattern of nature conservation sites is somewhat fragmented. SSSI coverage totals 0.64%, which is below the county average of 2% and nearly ten times lower than the national average of 6%. Of these sites, two are in favourable conditions: Croft and Huncote Quarry SSSI and Croft Hill SSSI. The remaining are in unfavourable condition due to planning issues, encroachment, and low river levels in the River Soar.

2.54 The other statutory designations in the District include three local nature reserves (LNRs): Aylestone Meadows, Burbage Common and Woods, and Glen Hill LNRs. These sites support mosaics of wildflower meadows, grasslands, and woodland. Aylestone Meadows LNR, adjacent to the River Soar, provides the potential for enhanced habitat linkages.

2.55 The local wildlife site (LWS) network within the District is comprised of 402 sites. This includes candidate LWS and Potential LWS. The lack of internationally designated sites and relatively low number of nationally designated sites in the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland means that sites of local importance assume greater importance at a local level.

Priority and important habitats

2.56 The Priority Habitat Inventory (PHI) highlights the distribution of the strategic habitat network which supports and links designated sites. In the District, the majority of the PHI consists of deciduous woodland, covering approximately 262 hectares. This is followed by high quality semi-improved grassland, comprising 75 hectares. A small tract of ancient woodland lies within Burbage Wood and Aston Firs SSSI. Overall, the percentage cover of natural habitats is relatively low, reflecting the arable character of the District.

2.57 As a result of its rurality, almost the entirety of the District has been classified as a priority area for Countryside Stewardship targeting Lapwing and other farmland birds such as Grey Partridge, Tree Sparrow, and Yellow Wagtail. The exception to this is the urban fringe around Leicester in the north-east of the District.

Woodlands

2.58 There are 262 hectares of deciduous woodland (PHI) in the District, covering 2% of landcover. This is slightly above Leicestershire and Rutland, where only 1.8% of the area is covered by mature broadleaved woodland. Of the total deciduous woodland in the District, 14% is found within the LWS network and 37% is within the SSSI network; highlighting the need for improved conservation efforts and connectivity between these woodlands.

Complementing the woodland habitats, traditional orchards (PHI) cover 1.6 hectares within the District. These are found to be very scattered across the District, which suggests that these habitats may be particularly vulnerable and in need of targeted conservation and restoration efforts.

2.59 Ancient woodland, though limited in the District, is present in Burbage Wood and Aston Firs SSSI, offering habitat provision for species dependent on mature woodlands. In addition to this, there are smaller areas of plantation and managed woodland, providing both ecological and recreational value. The District's LWS network also includes some wooded areas.

Hedgerows

2.60 Hedgerows offer important habitats within the District, providing permeability through areas of urban, peri-urban or agricultural land use. By their linear nature, hedgerows provide important connectivity across areas of woodland and, in mosaic with other habitats such as trees, scrub, grassland, ditches and ponds.

2.61 Due to the predominantly agricultural landscape (outside of the urban areas) in the District, hedgerows play a key role in enhancing habitat connectivity, providing essential movement corridors for a wide range of species (including dormice, bats, and insects). For this reason, hedgerows have been highlighted as a key opportunity in the upcoming LNRS. With the forthcoming availability of mapped hedgerow data, it will be possible to identify priority areas for both hedgerow enhancement and creation.

Grasslands

2.62 Grassland habitat in Leicestershire and Rutland has been severely reduced due to agricultural practices such as ploughing, reseeding, and the use of fertilizers and herbicides. Between 1930 and 1984, 97% of this grassland was lost, and its decline has continued over the past two decades [[See reference 39](#)].

2.63 Grassland-related PHI habitats are limited within the District, with only 75 hectares of high-quality semi-improved grassland and four hectares of lowland meadows. These habitats are important for local bird assemblages, yet their protection within designated site networks is minimal. Only 0.05% of lowland meadows and 9% of semi-improved grassland are protected within the LWS network, whilst the SSSI network covers just 3% of lowland meadows and 0.01% of semi-improved grassland. This highlights the need for focused conservation and restoration efforts to safeguard these ecologically significant grasslands.

Local Needs

Land use and fragmentation

2.64 Land use change and habitat fragmentation significantly contribute to the isolation of wildlife populations in the District. The assessment of designated sites and priority habitats indicates a highly fragmented network, particularly across agricultural and urban landscapes. This fragmentation limits species movement and reduces biodiversity resilience.

2.65 Future LNRS and initiatives such as the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan (LLRBAP) offer frameworks for reconnecting habitats through strategic habitat creation, woodland restoration, and the enhancement of hedgerows. Focusing on hedgerow networks, woodlands, and riparian corridors can help mitigate fragmentation and promote species movement, especially in peri-urban and rural settings. The LNRS also highlights linear features such as railways and canals as key opportunities for habitat connectivity, providing multi-functional benefits aligned with the District's GBI goals.

Invasive non-native species

2.66 Invasive non-native species pose a significant threat to local ecosystems in the District by outcompeting native species and altering habitat dynamics. The District's waterways, particularly the River Soar and Grand Union Canal, are heavily affected by species such as Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*), which has been identified as an invasive species.

2.67 Efforts to manage and eradicate invasive species are ongoing. Projects such as the Canal and River Trust's Floating Pennywort Eradication Project (2021–2025) on the River Soar have successfully cleared significant areas of this species. The Trent River Trust's Soar Catchment Plan (2023-2028) also

emphasises collaborative work to address invasive species, combining manual removal, biological control, and public awareness campaigns to reduce their spread.

Current initiatives, projects and policy

2.68 Ongoing collaboration with LNRS partners indicates that linear features such as railways, canals, and hedgerows provide key opportunities for habitat enhancement and connectivity. These corridors are not only beneficial for wildlife but also align with the District's GBI objectives by facilitating multi-functional use. Care must be taken, however, to balance public access with nature recovery, ensuring that interventions, such as raised walkways through floodplains, prioritise ecological benefits.

2.69 The emerging LNRS highlights that grassland interventions, despite less baseline certainty, are critical for the District given its limited woodland cover. Strategic areas such as Flood Zone 3 have been identified for biodiversity enhancement, with a focus on habitat creation that aligns with both nature recovery and sustainable development goals. Additionally, hedgerows have been mapped based on density heatmaps, which identify areas where landowners can be encouraged to create and enhance hedgerow networks following good practice. These interventions will further support species connectivity, particularly in peri-urban areas, linking rural character and woodland landscapes.

2.70 As defined within the Blaby District Plan – Action Plan 2024 / 2025, an evaluation for a potential BNG Habitat Bank will be undertaken in December 2024. This evaluation, which will likely consider the feasibility, ecological benefits, and potential economic impacts of establishing a BNG Habitat Bank, represents a proactive approach to biodiversity conservation in the District. It provides an opportunity for the District to integrate the LNRS nature recovery objectives with new developments, particularly in areas like Flood Zone 3, where conflict with development is minimal. The LNRS's emphasis on low

agricultural value areas, such as floodplains, further supports the District's strategic focus on BNG.

2.71 Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust's work on Living Landscapes includes a Scheme Area for the Soar and Wreake Valley. This scheme has focussed on restoring wildlife and wild places along the river corridors and floodplains, with a goal to enable the floodplain to function naturally. Work has included surveying the floodplain and providing management advice to landowners.

2.72 Blaby's Parks and Open Space Strategy sets out the need to provide multi-functional benefits within these spaces. As part of the action plan, increasingly areas within open spaces are being set aside for nature. For example 'wildlife zones' with wildflower planting have been introduced in Fosse Meadows.

Key Findings

Strengths

- The District hosts a variety of important ecological sites, including six SSSI, three LNRs, and 402 LWS, which contribute to the region's biodiversity and ecological resilience.

Weaknesses

- The District's habitats are highly fragmented, isolating wildlife populations and reducing ecological connectivity, thereby posing a challenge to biodiversity conservation.
- The LLRBAP notes a lack of high-quality nationally important habitats, limiting the ecological value of existing natural areas at the county level.

Opportunities

- Establishing a BNG Habitat Bank offers a major opportunity to enhance biodiversity, whilst supporting sustainable development goals and compliance with the Environment Act 2021.
- Restoration efforts can improve ecological connectivity, support species migration, and enhance the overall resilience of the District's natural habitats. The upcoming LNRS will provide guidance on habitat networks and priorities to address this issue.
- Emerging LNRS data suggests that hedgerow enhancement provides a key opportunity to strengthen habitat connectivity, particularly in peri-urban areas, linking rural and woodland landscapes.

Threats

- Urban expansion and agricultural intensification have led to habitat loss, leading to further fragmentation and loss of biodiversity.
- The spread of invasive non-native species can disrupt local ecosystems, outcompeting native species and altering habitat dynamics.

Chapter 3

A network approach

3.1 GBI functions as a network of blue and greenspaces. This concept helps to understand how all GBI features perform across the District. As outlined in **Chapter 1**, the BwN Standards include six Core Standards which describe what high quality GBI should look like. This chapter identifies key GBI opportunities which align with these Core Standards, with the aim of delivering benefits for both people and nature. These GBI opportunities will also inform the development of the vision and strategic objectives for GBI in **Chapter 4**.

BwN Core Standard 1: Optimises Multi-functionality and Connectivity

3.2 Multi-functionality and connectivity are the two principles that underpin high quality GBI. Both principles recognise that there are a wide range of functions that GBI can fulfil to address the needs of the economy, society and the natural environment. These two principles are also linked, with connected GBI more likely to deliver a greater range of multi-functional benefits. Understanding how GBI provision in the District maximises multi-functionality and connectivity is important to understand where gaps in provision exist.

3.3 The analysis of the baseline and understanding of local context has highlighted a number of opportunities and issues which are important considerations for enhancing the multi-functionality and connectivity of GBI in the District. These are summarised below:

- As identified within the emerging LNRS, flood zones provide opportunities for nature restoration, whilst also managing flood risk. In addition, access to the waterfront is identified as a key principle within the BwN Standards.

- The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy highlights the need to ensure open space provides access for people, whilst also promoting management which offers opportunities for nature and the mitigation of climate change impacts [\[See reference 40\]](#).
- Designated and priority habitats are typically small and unconnected, recognised as a key issue impacting biodiversity in the District.
- The network of major roads, railways and waterways act as barriers to access for people and movement of species, although these linear corridors can also provide continuous green assets if designed and managed appropriately.
- The active travel network is particularly fragmented in the south of the District, characterised by a predominantly rural population [\[See reference 41\]](#). In addition, existing sections of cycle routes are largely accommodated on shared roads with motor vehicles. This reduces opportunities for multi-functionality, including introducing vegetation, permeable paving and healthy spaces away from noise pollution. More than half of residents in the District stated that increased tree coverage and provision of GBI interventions would encourage modes of active travel [\[See reference 42\]](#).
- Trees provide many multi-functional benefits; including carbon sequestration, removal of pollutants, shading, interception of rainfall, increased aesthetic value and provision of habitats for wildlife. High resolution data highlighting tree canopy coverage within the District is not currently available. If obtainable, this data would allow for future enhancements to the existing treescape.

Opportunities and considerations for future GBI provision

- Safeguard and enhance areas within the floodplains to provide multiple benefits for water regulation, including flood resilience, species-rich habitats and sensitive access to the water fronts.

- Design and manage greenspaces to deliver a range of ecosystem services, including providing ecologically-rich habitats, creating areas of shade, sequestering carbon and managing flood risk.
- Design guidance should incorporate guidelines for creating multi-functional SuDS and BNG secured as part of new development. This guidance should set out the additional benefits these features can provide, including creating attractive spaces and affording access to nature.
- Local Plan policies should set out the requirement for new GBI delivered within new development to contribute to the overall network of GBI across the District. This should take the form of adherence to the recommended Headline Standards (see **Chapter 5**) or contribution to the delivery of GBI opportunities (see **Chapter 7**).
- Understand the movement of different species between woodland and grassland habitats and seek to prioritise habitat creation to connect existing habitats. This should be led by opportunity areas identified within the emerging LNRS.
- The incorporation of vegetation along railways, major roads and waterways, particularly between key destinations and origins and along routes identified in the 'Propensity to Cycle' maps within the LCWIP. Dismantled railways also offer opportunities for green active travel corridors, which may also act as bat and bird corridors.
- Improve understanding of connectivity within urban areas through spatial data collection of urban greening features; including street trees, verges, green roofs, vertical greening and SuDS. This could be achieved through the collation of data from consented planning applications to build up an improved understanding of the distribution of GBI assets across the District. Increasing use of digital mapping by grounds maintenance teams could also help map the location of additional small-scale green features including road verges and street trees.

BwN Core Standard 2: Positively Responds to the Climate Emergency

3.4 The climate emergency is recognised as a challenge facing humanity globally. In 2019, the UK government declared a climate emergency. In response to the urgency of the climate crisis, the Council aims to achieve Net Zero in its own actions by 2030 and support the District in reaching Net Zero by 2050. GBI can contribute to these goals by maximising the climate benefits of GBI. GBI helps to mitigate against the causes of climate change, reducing overall CO₂ emissions, for example by supporting active travel or insulating buildings and reducing the need for heating and air conditioning. In addition, GBI can help to adapt to a changing climate, for example by providing shading and regulating water flow.

3.5 Understanding how climate change may impact the District, and how activities in Blaby contribute to climate change is important in defining opportunities for GBI, as defined below:

- The Met Office climate change predictions indicate that the East Midlands Region is expected to experience warmer summers and wetter winters **[See reference 43]**. More extreme weather events are expected to become more common, including storms and periods of drought **[See reference 44]**.
- The effects of climate change can impact survival of habitats and species, the health of populations and economic livelihoods. Climate vulnerability mapping for Leicestershire indicates that watercourses and associated riparian habitats within the county are the most sensitive to future climatic change **[See reference 45]**.
- Climate mapping highlights that the overall vulnerability to increased flooding in the District is lower than the national average **[See reference 46]**. Some areas are slightly higher and fall in line with the national average, including Blaby town centre, land between Whetstone and Countesthorpe, between Enderby and Leicester Forest East, south of Glenfield, and the south western extent of the District.

- Climate mapping shows that the District's population has a relatively low vulnerability to heat exposure [See reference 47].
- Agricultural areas are particularly vulnerable to climate change due to their dependence on stable weather patterns for crop production. Changes in temperature and precipitation can result in reduced crop yields, increased soil erosion, and the proliferation of pests and diseases.
- The 2022 Carbon Footprint Report [See reference 48] indicates that the per capita carbon footprint for residents in the District is greater than the national average. Factors contributing to this include:
 - Consumption of goods and services (9% higher than national average);
 - Resident's car use (6% higher than national average);
 - Consumption of food and drink (5% higher than national average); and
 - Energy use in homes (3% higher than national average).

Opportunities and considerations for future GBI provision

- Protect and maintain mature trees and areas of broadleaved or mixed woodland which hold important stores of carbon. This applies particularly within pockets of ancient woodland, which have higher carbon-stocks per hectare than other woodlands [See reference 49].
- Establish species-rich grasslands, including communities of deep-rooting plant systems which can increase carbon sequestration compared to improved grassland [See reference 50].
- Reduce transport emissions by enhancing footpath and cycle connections into the wider countryside, including between settlements and recreational destinations.
- Promote the inclusion of green roofs and vertical greening to reduce the need for heating and cooling within homes and workplaces.
- Introduce SuDS, including rain gardens and swales into all new developments and seek opportunities to retrofit these into existing built

environments, to address increases in surface run-off during wetter winters and storm events.

- Protect and introduce street trees in areas of high footfall to provide increased shading.
- Ensure species selection is appropriate to the local climate, and resilient to expected future changes in climate.
- Monitor and manage the impact of pests and diseases.

BwN Core Standard 3: Maximises Environmental Net Gains

3.6 New development should maximise environmental net gains to help mitigate harm on the local environment. This harm may include degradation of soils, air and noise pollution and changes to land use cover.

3.7 An understanding of the existing policies within the adopted Local Plan [**See reference 51**] indicate how environmental net gain is currently implemented in Blaby.

- Policy CS2 outlines objectives for the design of new development. This includes a requirement for the design of new development to take account of and enhance the natural and historic environment, as well as promote biodiversity.
- Policy CS10 requires that new development promotes sustainable and accessible transport modes, reducing congestion and pollution associated with increased car journeys.
- Policy CS12 sets out the use for planning obligations and developer contributions to provide additional benefits from development. This includes a contribution to protecting important species, habitats, landscapes and geology, and maximising sport and recreation opportunities.

- Policy CS14 identifies the requirement that maintenance of GBI is considered at the earliest opportunity in the design process.
- Policy CS15 specifies standards for the provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities within new development.
- Policy CS19 discourages development which will adversely affect a designated site. New development in these locations should ensure continued conservation and enhancement of the site's biodiversity or geological interest.
- Policy CS20 similarly identifies the need for development to mitigate any negative impacts on the historic environment and cultural heritage.
- Policy CS21 highlights that climate change considerations should be addressed within development, incorporating design to reduce energy consumption and mitigating adverse impacts on the built and natural environment. The policy also highlights that developments which have a positive impact upon climate change through appropriate shading, planting, water storage and grey-water recycling should be supported.
- Policy CS22 requires that Sustainable Drainage Systems are incorporated in development to ensure that flood risk on-site or elsewhere is not increased, and to minimise the net increase in the amount of surface water entering the public sewer system.
- Policy CS24 sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Opportunities and considerations for future GBI provision

- Policies within the emerging Local Plan should provide guidance on ensuring that GBI is multi-functional. As a minimum, this includes the impact of air and noise pollution as well as water run-off (both quantity and quality) which are current challenges within the District.
- The legal requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) should be embedded within the emerging Local Plan.

- Policies within the new Local Plan should also reinforce the need for GBI and provide greater guidance on the minimum amount and type of GBI intervention required. This includes standards for development in accordance with the five Headline Standards outlined in the NEGIF (see **Chapter 5**).
- GBI should be considered within policies for employment and commercial development and all new road building, in addition to residential development (where the current focus lies within the adopted Local Plan).

BwN Core Standard 4: Champions a Context Driven Approach

3.8 Understanding the local population and key issues in the District will ensure that GBI opportunities are appropriate and driven by the local context. This is important to ensure there is buy-in from communities, businesses and other local stakeholders.

3.9 Key local characteristics and challenges have been identified within the previous analysis. Additional needs identified through policy and baseline study reviews are detailed below:

- The District exhibits a generally low population density, with settlement characterised by dispersed settlements, particularly in the west. As a result, there is a high dependency on the car as a mode of transport. Around 77% of journeys to work are undertaken by private car or van, above the average for Leicestershire and England **[See reference 52]**.
- The 2021 Census records the District's population as 102,900, an increase of almost 10% since the 2011 Census and by a greater percentage than both the East Midlands and England average **[See reference 53]**. The Housing and Economic Needs Assessment also estimates a housing need of 10,985 dwellings between 2020 and 2036 (equivalent to 687 dwellings per year) for the District **[See reference 54]**.

- Housing delivery to meet the demands of a growing population is estimated at 687 homes per year until 2036 [See reference 55]. The emerging Local Plan will consider the period until 2041. The adopted Blaby Local Plan and the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment [See reference 56] identifies a particular challenge in ensuring that affordable housing is delivered. Rising living costs and a surge in homelessness within the District has compounded this issue. Whilst new development offers the opportunity for new GBI to be implemented within new development, maintaining this within affordable housing can impact viability.
- 25% of the population are over 65, and, in line with the national average, Blaby has seen an increasingly elderly population [See reference 57]. These groups may face additional challenges accessing GBI. At the same time, the wellbeing and physical activity benefits provided by GBI are particularly important to elderly populations.
- Blaby is the only settlement in the District with a town centre. Other settlements include District centres, rural centres and local centres (as defined within the emerging Town Centre and Retail Study). This study highlights that overall, centres in Blaby were in good condition, with high pedestrian flows, a lower than average number of vacant units and were generally perceived as safe. However, it was noted that several of the centres could be enhanced by increased greenery and street trees to increase environmental perception and provide shading.
- Budget constraints restrict service delivery across the Council, with budget deficits expected [See reference 58]. Therefore, delivery of new GBI will need to be carefully planned and identified, including for ongoing management.

Opportunities and considerations for future GBI provision

- Introduce greater opportunities for active travel between settlements and rural populations to reduce the reliance on the car. In addition, destination greenspace and GBI should be accessible via footpaths or

public transport. These should focus on connecting the key origin and destination points identified within the LCWIP [See reference 59].

- Introduce and enhance areas of greenspace and high quality public realm within town and village centres to create attractive, safe spaces for socialising, whilst also maintain footfall to local businesses.
- Policies within the new Local Plan should ensure that GBI is planned and integrated as part of the ongoing design process for new housing developments.
- Support landowners / managers to access funding from Environmental Land Management or payment for ecosystem service schemes, particularly for projects that reduce the impact of agricultural run-off on water quality.
- Enhance accessible greenspaces and ensure they offer opportunities for all members of society, particularly the elderly population within the District. Safe spaces for all ethnic groups should also be promoted.
- Explore opportunities to diversify funding for delivering and maintaining GBI. This includes working with local businesses and partnership working to help invest in GBI. This could also include exploring green finance mechanisms, such as the potential for the creation of habitat banks on Council owned land to sell BNG units or other ecosystem service credits.

BwN Core Standard 5: Creates Distinctive Places

3.10 Understanding the unique landscape or townscape character of a place is key to ensuring GBI opportunities and interventions contribute to reinforcing local distinctiveness. This in turn has positive outcomes for the protection and enhancement of built and natural environments, managing sustainable economic growth and improving the health and wellbeing of local communities.

3.11 The 2020 Blaby Landscape and Settlement Assessment (LSA) [See reference 60] provides an evidence base for the landscape and settlement character of the District. The document outlines detailed landscape and settlement character profiles for the entire District, identifying guidelines relating to the management of the landscape and future development. Key features which create the distinctive character of the District are summarised below.

- The landscape of the District is predominantly low-lying, undulating farmland intersected by the floodplains of the River Sence, Soar and Rothley Brook and linear transport routes.
- Mixed agriculture forms a medium and large scale field pattern, often bounded by a network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, in places creating the perception of a well-wooded landscape.
- Croft Hill in the centre of the District and Mickle Hill in the south west are visually prominent landmark features rising above the surrounding land. Croft Hill is a SSSI and particularly distinctive due to granite outcrops. High ground also offers panoramic views across the District.
- Mineral extraction is evident within the landscape between Huncote and Croft. A number of restored quarries offer geological, biodiversity and recreational value.
- Clusters of listed buildings occur within the 12 conservation areas, reflecting the long history of settlement in the District.
- The largest areas of scheduled monument include Lubbethorpe medieval settlement remains at Abbey Farm north of Enderby and the Roman town at High Cross which extends southwards into Warwickshire.
- The District includes 25 individual towns and villages, each with their own distinct identity.

Opportunities and considerations for future GBI provision

- Protect and enhance locally and nationally valued habitats (including woodlands, meadows and former quarries).

- Explore further opportunities to restore former quarries and pits as safe and sustainable recreation / tourism destinations.
- Conserve, enhance and connect woodlands and hedgerows.
- Soften the edges of new development and transport corridors through appropriate planting, including along railway corridors and major roads.
- Incorporate new tree and hedgerow planting to maintain views to and from Croft Hill and Mickle Hill and conserve the varying open and enclosed character.
- Protect the rural setting of settlements and maintain open, undeveloped land between settlements to retain separation. GBI should be tailored to individual settlements to reinforce their distinct character.
- Prioritise species of local provenance in new planting by ensuring diversity to provide resilience resistance against the spread of new pests / diseases.
- Improve access along watercourses, with interventions designed to increase their habitat and aesthetic value.
- Enhance green assets within Blaby town centre to enhance aesthetic interest, increase footfall and boost economic productivity.

BwN Core Standard 6: Secures Effective Place-keeping

3.12 The appropriate management and maintenance of GBI assets is essential to secure the delivery of long-term multi-functional benefits for people, place, nature and climate. Stewardship requires effective governance (including monitoring and evaluation), ongoing engagement with communities and sufficient revenue funding. However, in the context of diminishing public finances, staffing cuts, silo working and competing pressures for developer contributions, this is often neglected and poses a significant risk for a fully-functioning GBI network.

3.13 A notable proportion of new GBI in Blaby is delivered as part of major developments. It is essential that the planning system incorporates requirements for the management and maintenance of new GBI to be fully planned, costed and funded at the earliest stages of development.

3.14 Policy CS15 of the adopted Blaby Local Plan specifies standards for the provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities within new development. In most cases on-site provision is sought. Where this is not possible or necessary, contributions for off-site provision are specified which include a contribution to capital costs and maintenance costs over a 20 year period. For GBI which is provided on site, Policy CS14 of the adopted Local Plan states that: 'It is important that the subsequent maintenance of GBI is considered at the earliest opportunity and that the bodies and resources responsible for its long term management and maintenance liabilities are identified' [See [reference 61](#)].

3.15 Policy CS3 states that 'The areas of Green Infrastructure (which includes Public Open Space), its phasing and subsequent maintenance will be identified as part of any planning application and shall be agreed with the Local Planning Authority in advance of any development commencing'.

3.16 Currently, there are a number of management and maintenance considerations in the District, as outlined below:

- Blaby's existing GBI network is in varying condition. Some sites designated for nature conservation are well managed and in favourable condition. Recent capital investments have also been made in some of the District's parks, resulting in Green Flag Awards at two sites within 2022.
- The Council currently owns and manages many of the parks and greenspaces in the District. Management and maintenance of these spaces is essential to realise the health and wellbeing benefits of access to good quality greenspaces. The District's Parks and Open Space Strategy identified outdated information, restricted access, redundant street furniture, dog fouling, litter and antisocial behaviour as some of the main threats and weaknesses for the District's greenspaces. The document recognises the challenges of delivering improvements in the

context of decreasing budgets and sets 11 objectives to address key issues. Recent management plans have also been produced for ten of these spaces.

- The Council is exploring direct income generation as a mechanism to enhance the quality of the District's greenspaces. This includes car parking fees or the provision of a catering offer at specific locations (e.g. Bouskell Park).
- The Council is currently exploring relaxed maintenance regimes through the creation of wildlife zones at several greenspaces; including Countesthorpe Park and Glen Hills Nature Area.
- Opportunities to volunteer in the stewardship of GBI can provide multiple benefits for health and wellbeing, education and community cohesion. A programme of community volunteering in greenspaces; including regular litter picks and walking leaders is organised under the umbrella Wombles group.
- The Council recently entered a lease arrangement with Green Circle Nature Regeneration for the management of Fosse Meadows [See [reference 62](#)]. Opportunities to enter similar agreements for other parks, or to transfer the ownership to town or parish councils or a conservation organisation are currently being explored.
- Other partners manage key GBI assets with public access in the District, such as the Canal and River Trust, the Woodland Trust and local parish councils. Sustrans oversee the maintenance of the National Cycle Network.
- Individual landowners have responsibility for the management of nationally and locally designated sites. Natural England has responsibility for overseeing the management of SSSIs. For local wildlife sites, the provision of advice is essential to support landowners to appropriately manage priority habitats on their land.

Opportunities for future GBI provision

- Local Plan policies should be strengthened to ensure that stewardship is considered earlier in the design process and that a fully costed and funded management and maintenance plan is required within planning applications.
- Design guidance and / or a design checklist for developers offers the opportunity to ensure that the multi-functionality of new GBI is optimised and that future maintenance requirements are considered from the earliest design stages.
- Regular reviews of management plans for parks and greenspaces should be undertaken, identifying opportunities to rationalise maintenance regimes where this would bring other benefits.
- Alternative management and funding structures for existing greenspaces should continue to be explored, including the use of community groups and corporate partners.
- Additional opportunities for communities to be involved in the management and maintenance of local parks and open spaces should be created. This includes supported volunteer programmes and/or the creation of friends of groups.
- New sources of grant funding and income generating opportunities within greenspaces should be identified to supplement existing revenue budgets.

Chapter 4

A vision for GBI in Blaby

Development of the vision

4.1 The vision for GBI aims to set the roadmap for the delivery of an integrated GBI network in the District. Developed in close collaboration with the Council, the vision has also been informed by feedback from stakeholder consultation. As part of a stakeholder workshop, participants were asked to select up to three priorities for GBI within Blaby to help inform the vision. The vision also aligns with the themes set out in the Blaby District Plan [See reference 63].

Vision for GBI

GBI in Blaby should promote a network of green and blue spaces which are resilient and help to mitigate the effects of climate change. The multi-functional benefits delivered through GBI should be designed to enhance the natural and built environment in Blaby, as well as support the economy and promote health and well-being. The delivery of GBI should be undertaken by policymakers, developers, community groups and residents to promote the establishment of multi-functional and resilient GBI across the District.

Strategic objectives

4.2 The vision is supported by eight strategic objectives, as listed below and displayed visually in **Figure 4.1**. These have been informed by the study of

existing GBI provision (see **Chapter 2**) and network approach analyses (see **Chapter 3**).

- **Strategic objective 1:** Re-connect rivers with their floodplains, including protecting, enhancing and restoring natural grassland and wetland habitats. Sensitive access opportunities should also be considered to provide water-front access.
- **Strategic objective 2:** Provide a network of green corridors between settlements and rural areas, offering wildlife corridors and opportunities for active travel as an alternative to traditional road and rail corridors.
- **Strategic objective 3:** Enhance the distinct character of individual settlements by enhancing undeveloped land between settlements.
- **Strategic objective 4:** Integrate high quality multi-functional GBI, including SuDS, into all new developments and seek to retrofit these features into existing spaces.
- **Strategic objective 5:** Integrate GBI delivered within new developments into the wider network and ensure new GBI is planned and designed to address existing gaps in provision.
- **Strategic objective 6:** Seek to develop an opportunistic approach to GBI, working closely with highways officers, water companies and other partners to ensure GBI is considered and delivered as part of all relevant infrastructure.
- **Strategic objective 7:** Ensure that responsibility for ongoing high-quality management and maintenance of GBI is identified and budgeted for as part of delivery, helping to maximise benefits in the long term.
- **Strategic objective 8:** Improve data collection (including mapping and monitoring) of all GBI assets, including tree canopy coverage and the location of SuDS to help prioritise future investment.

4.3 Priority projects have been identified to deliver these strategic objectives. Broad locations of these priority projects, mapped against existing GBI are shown in **Figure 4.2**.

Figure 4.1: Illustrated strategic objectives

Landscape level



Strategic objective 1: Re-connect rivers with their floodplains, including protecting, enhancing and restoring natural grassland and wetland habitats. Sensitive access opportunities should also be considered to provide water-front access.

Strategic objective 2: Provide a network of green corridors between settlements and rural areas, offering wildlife corridors and opportunities for active travel as an alternative to traditional road and rail corridors.

Strategic objective 3: Enhance the distinct character of individual settlements by enhancing undeveloped land between settlements.

Development level



Strategic objective 4: Integrate high quality multi-functional GBI, including SuDS, into all new developments and seek to retrofit these features into existing spaces.

Strategic objective 5: Integrate GBI delivered within new developments into the wider network, and ensure new GBI is planned and designed to address existing gaps in provision.

Relationships and management

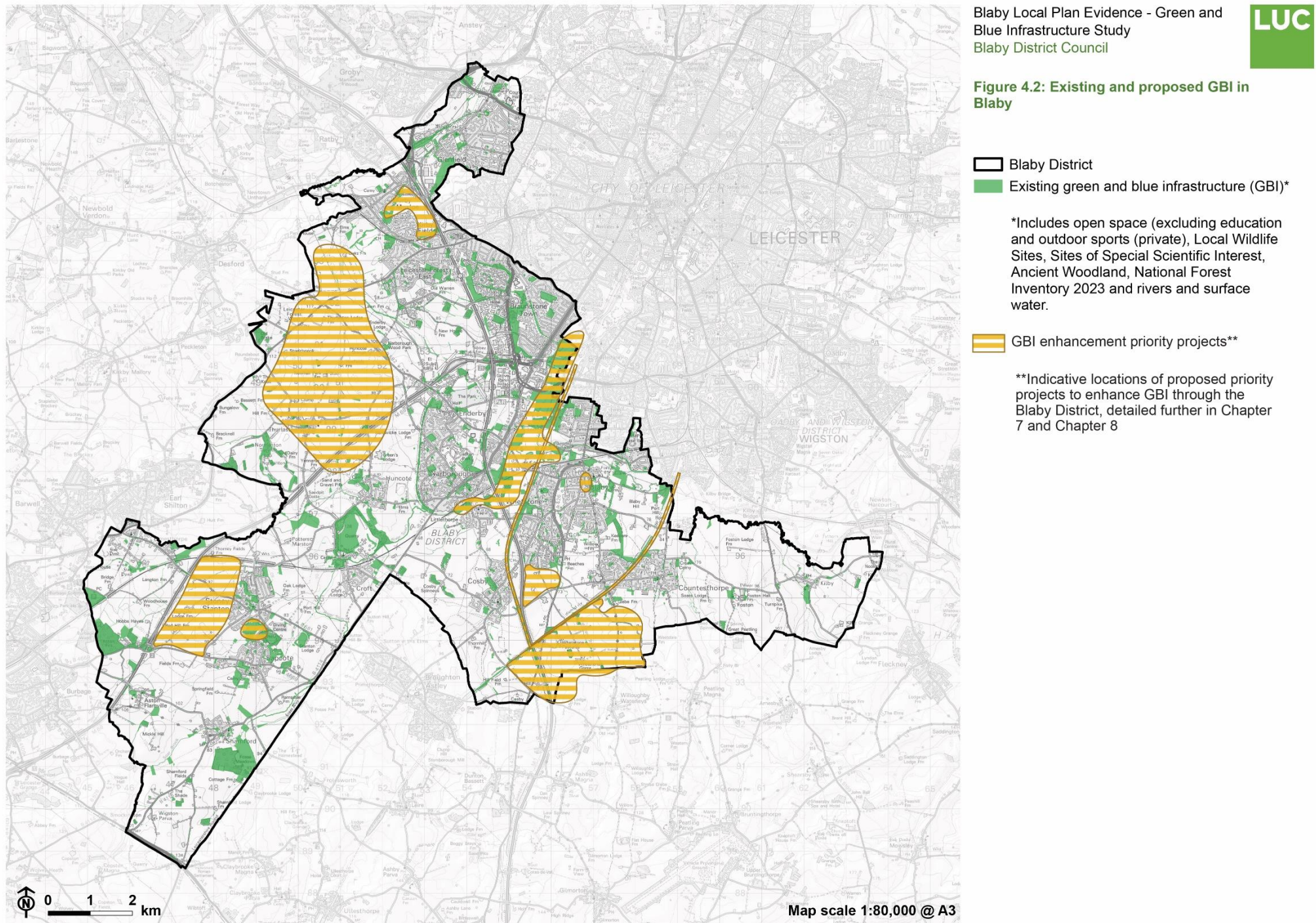


Strategic objective 6: Seek to develop an opportunistic approach to GBI, working closely with highways officers, water companies and other partners to ensure GBI is considered and delivered as part of all relevant infrastructure.

Strategic objective 7: Ensure that responsibility for ongoing high-quality management and maintenance of GBI is identified and budgeted for as part of delivery, helping to maximise benefits in the long term.

Strategic objective 8: Improve data collection (including mapping and monitoring) of all GBI assets, including tree canopy coverage and the location of SuDS to help prioritise future investment.

Figure 4.2: Existing and proposed GBI in Blaby



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Chapter 5

Evaluation and setting of Headline Standards

5.1 This chapter evaluates the current approach within the District regarding the five Headline Standards included within the NEGIF. These include:

- The Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard;
- The Accessible Greenspace Standard;
- The Urban Nature Recovery Standard;
- The Urban Greening Factor Standard; and
- The Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard.

5.2 All of the GBI standards are divided into an area-wide standard and a major development standard.

The Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard

5.3 This Headline Standard aims to ensure that GI is assessed and strategically planned across a local authority area and within new development.

Area-wide standard

The area-wide standard sets out that local authorities, working in partnership with stakeholders and local communities, should assess and strategically plan their GBI provision, through the production of a GBI

Strategy / Study. The GI Strategy / Study should set a vision and objectives for GI in the area and local authorities should set SMART targets which aim to achieve the Headline Standards and local policies over time. This includes ensuring arrangements are in place for the long-term management and maintenance of all GBI. The local authority should plan, monitor and evaluate progress against the delivery of these targets every five years

5.4 The publication of this Study sets out the vision and strategic objectives for GBI in the District. The Council should evaluate progress against the delivery of the action plan, and wider targets set out within this Study every five years.

Major development standard

All new major development should have a GBI Plan, which sets out how GBI delivered within major developments will be managed, maintained and monitored for at least 30 years.

5.5 The Council should incorporate the requirement for the provision of a GBI Plan as part of a planning application for any major development proposal. This could be provided as a standalone document or be provided as part of a Design and Access Statement. The GBI Plan should contain the following information:

- How the development proposal will meet the 15 GI Principles of the NEGIF (see **Chapter 1**);
- How the development proposal meets the Headline Standards of the NEGIF and BwN Standards;
- How the major development proposals align with this Study; and
- A management and maintenance plan which sets out how the multi-functional benefits of GBI in development will be secured for at least 30 years.

Recommendations

- The Council should evaluate progress against the delivery of the action plan, vision and wider objectives set out within this Study every five years.
- All major development should provide a GBI Plan as a standalone document, or as part of the Design and Access Statement. This should demonstrate how the Building with Nature Standards and NEGIF principles have been met, now and in the long term through a management plan detailing the approach to management for at least 30 years.

Accessible Greenspace Standard

5.6 The Accessible Greenspace Standard replaces the previous Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) which set out a target for the provision of natural greenspaces. This Headline Standard has an expanded scope to include all accessible greenspace. For the purposes of this Study, 'accessible greenspace' has been taken to incorporate all parks and recreation grounds, amenity greenspace and natural greenspace captured within the Open Space Assessment (2020) [[See reference 64](#)].

Quantity standard:

The Headline Standard states that LPAs should have at least three hectares of accessible greenspace per 1,000 of the population.

5.7 Overall, the District comprises approximately 4.6 hectares of accessible greenspace per 1,000 of the population (based on open space data from 2019 and updated population data). This consists of approximately 290 hectares of

accessible natural greenspace, 100 hectares of parks and recreation ground and 90 hectares of amenity greenspace. This provision is above the recommended three hectares of accessible greenspace per 1,000 of the population recommended in the NEGIF. In order to ensure there is no net loss in total quantity of accessible greenspace, the larger quantity of 4.6 hectares should be set as the standard for the District.

Accessibility standard:

Local Authorities are encouraged to adopt a Greenspace Close to Home Access target. This includes two criteria:

- A greenspace greater than 10 hectares in size within 1 kilometre of their home (15 minute walk); and
- Either a greenspace greater than two hectares within 300 metres of their home, or a greenspace greater than 0.5 hectares within 200 metres of their home (up to 10 minute walk).

In addition, new development should ensure access to as specified number of categories within the access hierarchy (provided in **Appendix B**) [See **reference 65**].

5.8 Mapping the Greenspace Close to Home Access targets around parks and recreation grounds, natural greenspace and amenity greenspace in the District indicates that many residential areas do not meet the criteria listed above. In contrast, many residential areas are covered by the larger access buffers applied within the 2020 Open Space Assessment (see **Figure 5.1**). Whilst it is challenging to provide large (greater than 10 hectares) new greenspaces outside development, the smaller access catchments from NEGIF should be provided within new development as a mechanism to improve access across the District.

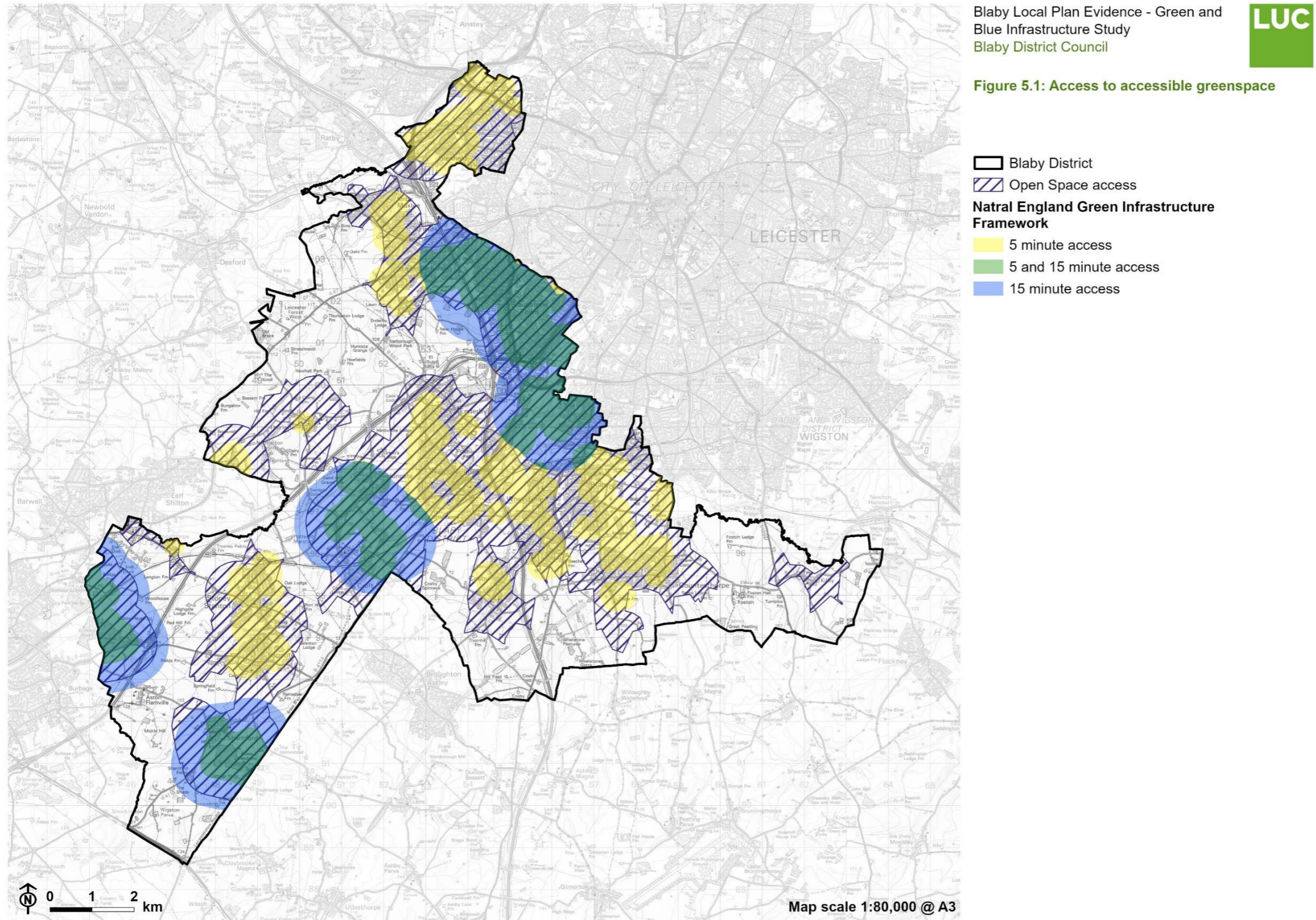
5.9 The full set of size-based access buffers set out within this Headline Standard also includes 2km and 10km buffers around larger accessible greenspace (20 hectares and 100 hectares respectively). Due to the dispersed pattern of settlement across Blaby, ensuring all residents are located within these thresholds is a challenge. In addition, there are alternative ways of accessing and experiencing natural areas, including through the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network within the wider countryside. Therefore it is not always appropriate to ensure all developments provide access to these larger accessible green spaces. However, contributions to enhance existing accessible greenspaces, the creation of strategically placed new accessible greenspaces, or enhancements to the PRoW network should be considered.

Quality standard:

Accessible greenspace should meet Green Flag Award criteria, **[See reference 66]** meet best practice and be accessible to all **[See reference 67]**.

5.10 This Study does not include site audits of open space. However, site audits were undertaken as part of the Open Space Assessment (2020) **[See reference 68]**, based on national benchmarks and good practice (including Green Flag Award criteria). To adhere to the quality standard, greater consideration should be given to access and inclusivity when managing and designing accessible greenspace within the District.

Figure 5.1: Access to accessible greenspace



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Recommendations

- New residential development should provide new accessible greenspace equivalent to 4.6 hectares per 1,000 of the expected population that the new development is due to accommodate. This is equivalent to the current provision of greenspace and will ensure there is no net loss of accessible greenspace. New accessible greenspace should be multi-functional, providing a mix of amenity grass areas, natural habitats (including woodland, wetland, scrub and natural grasses) and more formal areas with good quality paths, benches, litter bins and other facilities.
- All residential, employment and commercial areas within new development should be located within a 5-minute walk of greenspaces at least 0.5 hectares in size.
- All residential areas within new development should be located within a 15-minute walk of a greenspace at least 10 hectares in size. Where development is located adjacent to existing residences currently outside the 15-minute walk buffers, development should provide active travel or public transport links between existing communities and new accessible greenspace.
- Any residential development deficient in access to an existing wider neighbourhood accessible greenspace (site over 20 hectares within 2km) should provide contributions to the creation of a new large open space or enhancement to walking and cycling routes providing access to the wider countryside (as set out in the Action Plans in **Chapter 7**).
- New accessible greenspace should be designed in accordance with the Green Flag Award criteria and best practice accessibility guidelines.

Urban Nature Recovery Standard

5.11 This Headline Standard aims to increase the proportion of GBI that is designed and managed for nature recovery [[See reference 69](#)].

Area-wide standard

- The area-wide standard sets out that in urban and urban fringe areas, local planning authorities are encouraged to set area-wide targets, for a percentage increase of GBI that should be designed and managed for the purpose of urban nature recovery.
- The Headline Standard proposes the provision of one hectare of local nature reserves (LNR) per 1,000 of the population.
- Existing areas that qualify as local wildlife sites (LWS) should be enhanced and new sites identified.

5.12 The District is currently characterised by 0.38 hectares of LNRs per 1,000 of the population. In addition, the existing LNRs within the District are located at the eastern and western extents of the District, away from many of the centres of population. Inclusion of this Headline Standard within the emerging Local Plan would support the creation of new LNRs and improve access to good quality natural greenspace in the District. However, as the designation of LNRs is outside the control of developers, this should be promoted as an area-wide standard, rather than delivery as part of future development.

5.13 There are 402 LWS in the District, covering a total of 470 hectares. Due to this large amount of provision, this Study recommends that GBI proposals should focus on the enhancement of existing LWS rather than the designation of new sites.

Recommendations

- Planning applications, including management plans for new developments should explicitly state which areas or features are designed for biodiversity. Ongoing plans for management of these areas, including who is responsible for management and how this will be funded should be sought.

- Work with landowners, biodiversity officers and Natural England to identify and create new LNRs, with an aim of reaching 0.5 hectares per 1,000 of the population by 2041. Developer contributions from new development should be used to support these proposals.
- Development should be avoided in close proximity to LWS. Any development which is likely to increase pressure on a LWS should contribute to the enhancement of the site.
- In the longer term, work with greenspace managers and external land owners or managers to quantify how different GBI elements within the urban area are managed and designed. This can be used as a starting point for setting a future standard for development.

Urban Greening Factor Standard

5.14 The Urban Greening Factor (UGF) [See reference 70] is a tool which aims to improve the delivery and provision of good quality GBI, based on the assignment of scores to different surface cover types. The scores are broadly based on the ability of a surface to provide multi-functional GBI benefits.

Area-wide standard

The area-wide UGF standard specifies that urban greening is at least 40% average green cover in urban residential neighbourhoods where it does not already meet that standard and that there is no net loss of green cover in urban neighbourhoods.

5.15 Based on the greenness grid mapping in the NEGIF, it is estimated that residential areas within the District include approximately 66% green (or non-man-made surface). This is notably higher than the UGF Standard in the NEGIF. It is recommended that a higher standard of 60% green cover within

residential neighbourhoods is maintained, to retain the green character of settlements in the District.

Major development standard

As defined within the NEGIF, major development should meet the UGF target scores as outlined below:

- 0.3 for commercial development;
- 0.4 for residential development; and
- 0.5 for residential greenfield development.

5.16 The UGF scores are based on the percentage cover of different types of surfaces within development. Each surface cover type has a weighting factor between 0.0 and 1.0 that is used to calculate the UGF score. There is currently limited data on whether consented development in the District meets this standard. However, given that existing built area in the District exceeds the 40% green standard, it is recommended that the target UGF scores are applied to ensure new development continues to promote the delivery of good quality GBI in the District.

Recommendations

- New residential developments should achieve an UGF score of at least 0.4 on brownfield land and 0.5 on greenfield land.
- New commercial development should achieve a UGF score of at least 0.3.

Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

5.17 The Urban Tree Canopy Standard aims to increase tree canopy cover in urban environments.

Area-wide standard

The area-wide standard requires urban tree canopy cover to be increased by an agreed percentage based on a locally defined baseline, whilst taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints.

5.18 LIDAR data for the District has been used to estimate tree canopy coverage (canopies greater than 5m in diameter only). Across Blaby, there is an average of 5.43% tree cover across the whole District. This rises to 6.27% just within the urban areas. Improving the data coverage of tree canopy cover within the District is recommended in order to verify this. Currently the Tree Equity Score tool generally estimates tree canopy cover within Blaby District between 10 and 24% [See reference 71]. This is notably higher than the LIDAR data suggests, but does not include canopy cover estimates for the whole District.

5.19 LIDAR data estimates are notably lower than the 12.8% tree canopy cover in England [See reference 72] and the 16% average for urban areas in England [See reference 73].

Major development standard

The major development standard requires major residential and commercial development to be designed to meet locally set targets within the development site. It also requires new and existing trees to be incorporated

into new developments and that all new streets are tree lined (as per existing requirements within NPPF).

5.20 There is currently limited data on whether consented development in the District meet this standard. Although no target is set out within the NEGIF, the Urban Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee Network recommends a target of 20% for non-coastal towns and cities. Whilst this is notably higher than existing tree cover in Blaby, this is generally lower than the canopy cover goal outlined in the Woodland Trust's Tree Equity Score for LSOAs within Blaby [See reference 74]. Tree Equity Scores within the District range between 24% and 30%.

Recommendations

- In the first instance, new development should prioritise the retention of existing trees wherever possible.
- In addition, tree canopy cover within new development should meet the canopy cover target set out within the Woodland Trust's Tree Equity Score mapping for its 'host' LSOA.
- Development within LSOAs not included within the Tree Equity mapping should provide tree canopy cover of 20%.

Chapter 6

Policy recommendations

6.1 A key mechanism by which the vision and strategic objectives for GBI in Blaby can be delivered is through the provision of good quality, multi-functional GBI in new development. Achieving this is reliant on embedding GBI within Blaby's new Local Plan. When considering new Local Plan policy, it is important to ensure that a robust strategic GBI policy is included but also that GBI is 'mainstreamed' across the Local Plan. Incorporating references to GBI across the Local Plan, increases recognition of the multi-functional benefits it can have and helps to avoid the sidelining of GBI due to competing policy priorities or concerns regarding the viability of development. This also allows GBI to move beyond an environmental policy silo and interact with other agendas including health, economic and social policy areas.

6.2 This chapter sets out policy recommendations for Blaby's emerging Local Plan. These will help to ensure that new development contributes to the delivery of the GBI Study's vision and strategic objectives, whilst also meeting national policy requirements and adherence to wider best practice.

Approach to developing recommendations

6.3 A review of the strategic policy 'CS14 – Green Infrastructure' in Blaby's adopted Local Plan Core Strategy (adopted February 2013) **[See reference 75]** has been undertaken. This analysis provides context of current requirements for GBI and allows the identification of where policy is already meeting best practice standards, as well as where a revised policy could be enhanced.

6.4 A three stage process of analysis was then used to prepare recommendations.

6.5 Firstly, a policy review checklist (see **Appendix C**) prepared by LUC, based on work with LPAs as part of the roll out of the NEGIF was used. The checklist ensures that the NEGIF ‘what’ principles are incorporated into policy and also considers the incorporation of the NEGIF Headline Standards, wider good practice advice on policy development and design guidance. This checklist forms an overarching framework for the review of Blaby’s GBI Policy, ensuring that all recommendations met key criteria.

6.6 The ‘GI Planning Policy Assessment Tool’, developed by NERC, is widely recommended as good practice in GBI policy development **[See reference 76]**. The tool identifies seven key areas to address what is a ‘good’ GBI planning policy (design process, wider context, biodiversity, water management, access networks, greenspace and stewardship). This tool was used to identify specific recommendations for Blaby’s Local Plan policy and the recommendations are presented under the seven key areas within the tool.

6.7 As a final stage of the assessment, the policy recommendations set out below were reviewed against the vision and strategic objectives of this GBI Study (see **Chapter 4**). This ensures that all recommendations are tailored to the Blaby context and are in alignment with the GBI Study, ensuring the documents work together and provide clarity in expectations for developers and planners.

Policy recommendations

6.8 The production of a robust planning policy is reliant on strong policy wording. Therefore, wherever possible, the wording of the policy should be strong, using language such as ‘should’ and ‘must’ to give clear direction to developers and increase adherence to policy. This should be considered for all of the recommendations provided below.

- Policy mainstreaming

- The policy should include a statement upfront, highlighting and positioning the importance of GBI in meeting the overall objectives of the Local Plan.
- The policy should provide direct reference to this GBI Study. The policy should require that developments should contribute to meeting the vision and strategies objectives of the GBI Study.
- The policy should clearly signpost other guidance available for developers to assist them in meeting the requirements for GBI provision.
- The value of GBI should be recognised and clearly stated ('mainstreamed') beyond the GBI-specific strategic policy. GBI benefits should be explicitly stated within other policies in the Local Plan including those related to economy and high streets, climate change adaptation and mitigation, environmental quality, well-designed places, healthy places, biodiversity, heritage, landscape and infrastructure delivery.
- Development integration
 - The policy should state that GBI proposals should be evidenced-based, referring to baseline evidence in the GBI Study as well as detailed analysis of existing GBI network on site. GBI should also be designed based on an assessment of local needs and taking into account the views of key stakeholders.
 - The policy should state that GBI should be a key consideration early in the design process and be well-integrated into development proposals at pre-application stage.
 - The policy should require GBI proposals to be 'landscape-led' and should respond to the area's character and context. This should include responding to the distinct character of individual settlements in Blaby.
 - The policy should emphasise a requirement for developers to consider and maximise the delivery of multi-functional benefits from GBI.

- GBI requirements should also be well integrated into settlement specific policies and policies for site allocations, providing additional guidance for specific local contexts and site-specific requirements recognising the features of the site and surroundings.
- Biodiversity and habitats
 - GBI should deliver on-site habitat enhancements and strengthen / expand habitat networks.
 - A cross-reference to biodiversity net gain (BNG) policy should be included, advising the role that GBI should play in contributing to delivering benefits for biodiversity and nature restoration.
- Physical environment
 - A direct reference to Blaby's water environment should be integrated into the policy and all development should be required to consider and integrate existing watercourses into the design of development.
 - Where relevant, most likely for some strategic site allocation policies, proposals should be encouraged to meet strategic objective 1 of this GBI Study by encouraging proposals which restore natural wetland habitats and provide sensitive access opportunities for water-front access.
 - A direct reference to the inclusion of SuDS should be integrated into the policy. This should include the requirement for these to achieve multi-functional benefits for biodiversity, recreation and aesthetic / amenity value as well as their use in reducing flood risk.
- Access networks
 - The policy should highlight the importance of delivering GBI that is accessible for all.
 - The policy should require developers to consider the connectivity of site based GBI into the wider GBI network. This should a direct requirement for the incorporation and enhancement of active travel routes, including the incorporation of vegetation along these routes.

Chapter 6 Policy recommendations

- The policy should provide support for proposals which contribute to the development of a network of green corridors between Blaby's settlements and rural areas.
- Greenspace
 - The policy should include reference to Blaby's open space standards and the accessible greenspace standards set out in **Chapter 5** of this Study, with a requirement that these are adhered to.
- Stewardship
 - The strategic policy should include a requirement for developers to submit documentation detailing how maintenance will be funded in the long-term and multi-functional benefits retained for a minimum of 30 years.
- Woodlands, hedgerows and trees
 - Policy should explicitly set out the need to protect existing trees and hedgerows, in line with existing policy including Hedgerow Regulations 1997, Sections 9 – 17 of the Forestry Act 1967 and Sections 1 and 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 **[See reference 77]**.
 - The policy should highlight the need to undertake an accurate assessment by a competent arboriculturist where proposed development might affect trees.
 - The policy should encourage developers to increase tree cover in line with the guidance set out in **Chapter 5** using a mix of native species to that are resilient to pests, diseases and climate change and support biodiversity.

6.9 Beyond these categorised recommendations, the policy should also include the requirement for major development to meet all of the GBI Standards adopted based on the guidance provided in the previous chapter.

6.10 Finally, the policy should require major developments to submit an evidence-based GBI Plan with a planning application, or a masterplan for strategic sites. This should evidence how all policy requirements have been

met. The Council could require this to be submitted as a separate document or be suitably incorporated into a Design and Access Statement. A management and maintenance plan is required to ensure the benefits of GBI are delivered in the long-term.

Integration of other guidance and policy agendas

Building with Nature

6.11 Major development should be encouraged to obtain Building with Nature accreditation, to improve the quality of development across the District. The standard (introduced in **Chapter 1**) includes 12 standards which will ensure new development raises the bar for GBI within the District.

Alignment with the emerging Leicestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

6.12 The emerging Leicestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is due to be completed in summer 2025. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will play a major role in identifying and mapping the best locations to create, enhance and restore nature and provide wider environmental benefits in Blaby, helping to shape the Nature Recovery Network and meet the government's wider commitments and targets. Once completed, there will be an expectation that developers consult the Local Nature Recovery Strategy as well as this Study in detail to ensure that spatial nature recovery priorities are fully met in forthcoming development. It is important that the Local Plan policy is written so that developers have clear guidance on how these documents should work together to promote GBI and nature recovery through planning policy.

6.13 It is therefore recommended that specific reference to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is included within the strategic GBI policy. This should state that GBI should be multi-functional and designed to meet local needs and priorities for nature as identified within this Study and the Leicestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Biodiversity Net Gain

6.14 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) was introduced in February 2024 and requires all major development to deliver an uplift of at least 10% in biodiversity. This must be delivered on-site unless it can be evidenced that this is not possible. Where this is the case, it is possible to deliver off-site through buying and providing off-site biodiversity 'units'. Blaby will be providing a BNG policy in its Local Plan. The Department for Farming and Rural Affairs have confirmed that planning policy can be used to set additional local requirements for BNG, reducing the risk of BNG being delivered far from a development site. Planning policy could therefore refer to this Study to assist developers in identifying appropriate locations for the delivery of off-site BNG units.

6.15 Ensuring alignment between this Study and the LNRS will further support this through the use of the strategic significance multiplier which allows developers to create 1.15x more units by creating or enhancing habitat identified within the LNRS. The Strategic Significance Multiplier is a means by which additional weighting can be given within the biodiversity metric for BNG provision which contributes to the provision of habitat which are of local strategic significance based on the habitat type and its location. This strategic significance should be determined by the LNRS when published. In the interim alternative documents may be used to identify this such as draft LNRS, biodiversity actions plans or green infrastructure strategies. Pages 27-29 of the BNG metric guidance provide a full explanation of the strategic significance multiplier for BNG and how it should be applied **[See reference 78]**.

Policy best practice

6.16 Below is a selection of examples of GBI policies which represent best practice.

6.17 Core Policy 9 in the Uttlesford Local Plan (2021 – 2041) [[See reference 79](#)]. The policy itself is short, but signposts to the accompanying GBI Strategy which provides greater detail how developments proposals can enhance GBI.

*“All development proposals will protect and enhance Green and Blue Infrastructure and assets in the North Uttlesford Area as shown by maps in **Appendices 9-12** and as shown on the Policies Map.*

Contributions will be sought towards the relevant strategic projects (including their enhancement and on-going management costs) identified in the Uttlesford Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, including:

i. creation of an area of open space that has the potential to inform a wider Country Park in the longer-term, and serve residents in north Uttlesford within the area identified in the Area Strategy map and in Appendix 2”

6.18 Within Shropshire’s Local Plan [[See reference 80](#)], **Development Policy (DP) 14** sets out the key policy on Green Infrastructure. This is a more extensive policy, which includes links to other policies within the plan, helping to integrate GBI throughout the local plan, rather than being treated as something to tag on afterwards.

“1. Development in Shropshire will be accompanied by an improved and expanded green infrastructure network as an integral part of open space provision. This will be achieved by ensuring that all new development:

a. Avoids the loss of, or harm to, existing green infrastructure assets in accordance with Policy DP12 and the disruption or fragmentation of the

existing green infrastructure network (which includes the Shropshire environmental and ecological networks). Proposals should be accompanied by a proportionate assessment (a Green Infrastructure Assessment) of existing green infrastructure assets and the green infrastructure network on and in the vicinity of the site and address the quality and quantity of such features;

b. Enhance the existing green infrastructure assets and extends the green infrastructure network in accordance with the Shropshire Green Infrastructure Strategy. Proposals should also have regard to Neighbourhood Plans and other relevant local strategies such as the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan, where these are available;

c. Delivers good quality new green infrastructure on site which can be accessed by people of any age, gender and ability, as an integral part of the open space provision and which provides as many of the following benefits as possible:

i. Enhances and enables greater connectivity of the existing green infrastructure network and individual green infrastructure assets;

ii. Conserves and enhances biodiversity in accordance with biodiversity net gain requirements and Policy DP12;

iii. Supports the delivery of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures in line with Policies SP3 and DP11.

iv. Improves air quality; and

v. Addresses identified local health and wellbeing needs and encourages active and healthy lifestyles in line with Policy SP6.

2. Where on site green infrastructure provision is demonstrably not possible or practical, there will be an onus on the delivery of good quality open space in line with the requirements of Policy DP15.

3. For significant new development, including the strategic sites and the settlements identified in Policies S1-21, green infrastructure should be an integral part of a masterplan showing good quality and appropriate on-site provision which:

a. Delivers a green infrastructure network which links existing and new green infrastructure assets in a coherent manner and maximises the benefits outlined in (1(c)) above; and

b. Connects to the green infrastructure network in the surrounding area and improves that network's accessibility and linkages where possible.

4. Where a site delivers green infrastructure as part of its open space provision, its future management and maintenance will be secured through a planning obligation.

5. Development proposals that result in a significant fragmentation or loss to the green infrastructure network will be resisted. In such instances mitigation and compensatory measures will be expected with the aim of delivering a net gain in provision.”

6.19 The Islington Local Plan [[See reference 81](#)] includes a suite of policies under the Green Infrastructure theme. This includes:

- **Policy G1: Green Infrastructure**, which sets out requirements for GI within new developments, including setting out requirements for Urban Greening Factor scores.
- **Policy G2: Protecting open space** which sets out the need to protect public and significant private open space from development.
- **Policy G3: New Public Open Space** sets out the need for additional public open space to be delivered alongside new development and identifies what this new open space should look like.
- **Policy G4: Biodiversity, landscape design and trees** which identifies the need for a landscape approach to development, the importance of protecting trees, hedgerows and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.
- **Policy G5: Green roofs and vertical greening** which sets out the requirements for all roof spaces to be considered for green roofs providing biodiversity benefits and water storage (with links to Policy S9 on

Sustainable Drainage) as well as the need for new builds to include vertical greening.

6.20 Within the Bath and NE Somerset Local Plan Partial Update [See reference 82], policy **NE6: Trees and Woodland Conservation** explicitly sets out development requirements to protect existing tree and woodland stocks.

1) Development will only be permitted where:

a) it seeks to avoid any adverse impact on trees and woodlands of wildlife, landscape, historic, amenity, productive or cultural value; and

b) it includes the appropriate retention and new planting of trees and woodlands; and

2) If it is demonstrated that an adverse impact on trees is unavoidable to allow for appropriate development, compensatory provision will be made in accordance with guidance in the Planning Obligations SPD (or successor publication) on replacement tree planting.

3) Development proposals directly or indirectly affecting ancient woodland and ancient trees or veteran trees will not be permitted.

Developer Checklist

6.21 The following checklist for development provides a concise set of questions related to GBI provision within new development. These can act as a guide for developers to ensure that GBI is considered from the start of the design process.

1. Has the landscape led the production of the masterplan?

6.22 High quality placemaking should take the landscape context as the starting point, drawing on relevant landscape character assessments, and should “work with” the landscape to create distinctive places. This means that features such as drainage patterns, topography, field boundaries and existing woodland and hedgerows should guide the earliest design stages.

2. How has the masterplan considered water and drainage?

6.23 The layout of the development should be led by the opportunities and constraints proposed by existing waterways and water bodies, as well as surface-water and ground-water flow. Development should seek to boost the amenity and biodiversity benefit from blue-infrastructure, as well as minimise flood risk and contribute to improved water quality. Opportunities for SuDS, as well as capturing and storing water for irrigation within green features within the development should be maximised.

3. How will the masterplan relate to wider ecological networks?

6.24 Proposals for new development should include a map of local habitat connectivity opportunities, including those identified within the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Proposals should include evidence of how the development strengthens those connections, and how access to nature is improved.

4. How will the masterplan relate to wider active travel routes?

6.25 Proposals should include a clear context map that illustrates how the proposed development will link into the wider active travel network (e.g. walking and cycling routes) and identify ways the development can strengthen the network. These should take into account key destinations (e.g. schools, workplaces, public transport) that people will want to travel to both within the existing area and within the new development.

5. Does the development meet the Natural England GBI standards?

6.26 Development should meet the criteria set out below:

- Adherence to the quantity, quality and accessibility standards outlined in **Chapter 5**;
- Provision of defined areas managed for nature conservation.
- An Urban Greening Factor score of at least 0.3 for commercial development, 0.4 for residential development, and 0.5 for residential development on greenfield land.
- Tree canopy cover of at least 20%, or the canopy cover goal set out for the corresponding LSOA within the Tree Equity mapping.

6. How does the masterplan use GBI to meet wider needs?

6.27 Opportunities to meet any wider needs beyond those outlined above should be considered. This includes, for example, maximising environmental net gains including reducing noise and air pollution through woodland and hedgerows. This may also include supplying an unmet local need, for example a food growing space if there is current deficiency in this type of open space.

7. How will the site be maintained in the long-term?

6.28 Long-term stewardship of GBI should be discussed at the earliest stages of design, to ensure stewardship in perpetuity. Models such as partnerships with charitable or community-led bodies should be explored. Maintenance arrangements, responsibilities and long-term funding arrangements must be clearly defined as part of all planning applications.

Chapter 7

Strategic projects

7.1 Using the baseline analysis, vision and strategic objectives as a guide, a series of actions plans for strategic opportunities have been identified. Although the GBI Study is strategic and district-wide, these individual action plans provide a focus for introducing initial GBI project in key locations throughout the District.

7.2 In order to identify a range of projects across the District, four different focus areas were identified.

- **Large Villages:** This focus area comprised the large settlements of Blaby, Whetstone, Enderby, Narborough, Littlethorpe, Cosby and Countesthorpe, located in the centre-east of the District. This area was characterised by the presence of the River Soar and River Sence which provide key natural corridors and separating groups of villages and the urban edge of Leicester.
- **Leicester Urban Edge:** This focus area is located along the northern and eastern edge of the District. It includes the suburbs and villages on the urban edge of Leicester, including Glen Parva, Leicester Forest East and Braunstone Town. Population density is relatively high and there are areas of higher deprivation compared to the majority of the District. Large road and motorway corridors are often associated with air and noise pollution and small, often channelised water courses are associated with flood risk.
- **South West Villages:** This focus area primarily includes the centre and west of the District. It comprises primarily agricultural land, with a number of dispersed villages, including Sapcote, Huncote, Croft, and Stony Stanton. Watercourses including Thurlaston Brook dissect the area, often forming wooded corridors. There are a number active and disused quarries. The largest of these is croft quarry, which has recently applied to extent extraction of granite in the area.
- **Rural Hinterland:** This focus area encompasses all other parts of the District, often comprising agricultural land, crossed by large road corridors.

There are a number of potential strategic and large development allocations within this area. Opportunities which can be applied District-wide have also been identified within this focus area.

7.3 These zones were used as a starting point for identifying a long list of opportunities for GBI in Blaby. From this long list, seven projects were identified as priority projects, incorporating at least one from each of the identified zones. A brief description of these opportunities is included below, and full action plans for the priority projects are provided in **Chapter 8**. **Table 7.1** sets out how each of the identified projects contributes to the Strategic Objectives 1 - 5 outlined in **Chapter 4**. At the end of this chapter, guidance on project delivery, including funding mechanisms and how to integrate Strategic Objectives 6 - 8 are set out.

Opportunities in Focus Area 1: Large Villages

LV1: Narborough to Aylestone Wetlands

7.4 There is the opportunity to create a continuous natural and semi-natural corridor along the River Soar and part of the River Sence between Narborough Bog Nature Reserve and Aylestone Meadows Local Nature Reserve.

7.5 This opportunity has been identified as a priority project. More detail is provided in **Priority Project 1: Narborough to Aylestone Wetland**.

LV2: Blaby Town Centre Greening

7.6 There is the opportunity to improve urban greening within the Town Centre in Blaby, including through retrofitting green roofs, raingardens and street trees.

The successful roll-out of this project could be followed by similar schemes on other high streets within settlements in the District.

7.7 This opportunity has been identified as a priority project. More detail is provided in **Priority Project 2: Blaby Town Centre Greening**.

LV3: Glen Parva, Whetstone and Countesthorpe Green Routes

7.8 There is the opportunity to utilise the route of existing dismantled rail corridors to create wildlife-friendly traffic-free active travel routes between a number of settlements. Wider connections can also be provided to South Wigston and Broughton Astley.

7.9 This opportunity has been identified as a priority project. More detail is provided in **Priority Project 3: Glen Parva, Whetstone and Countesthorpe Green Routes**.

LV4: Enderby St John's Greening

7.10 There is the opportunity to retrofit street trees to improve shading and tree canopy cover within the residential area between Narborough Bog Nature Reserve and the M1.

7.11 This built area is within an area with one of the lowest tree equity scores in the District. The lack of sufficient tree canopy cover contributes to reduced biodiversity and limited shading in the area. Therefore, introducing additional tree cover, as well as other greening opportunities could help improve biodiversity in the area and serve as a stepping stones for pollinators and birds. This opportunity would also help increase climate resilience, providing shading and intercepting rainfall.

LV5: Inter-village footpath network

7.12 There is the opportunity to improve high-quality active travel links between Enderby, Narborough, Whetstone and Littlethorpe. These multi-functional links could also provide habitat corridors.

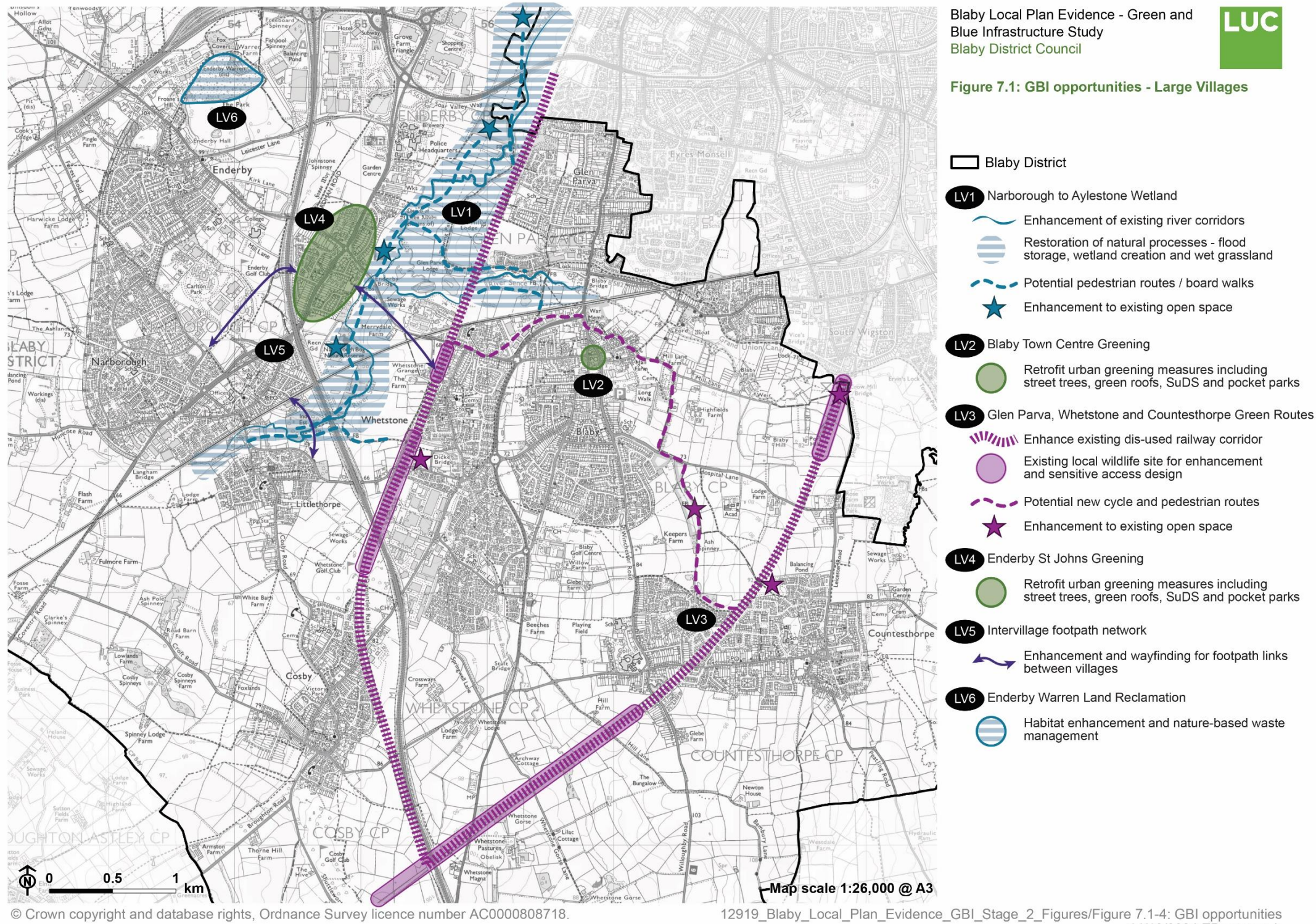
7.13 There are a number of existing footpaths between these settlements, but many of these are hard surfaces with limited natural features and often affected by flood risk associated with the River Soar. Introducing a greater diversity of vegetation, including native hedgerows, tree-belts and wildflower rich verges could help increase the multi-functionality of these routes. Introduction of SuDS features could help reduce surface water flooding issues which prevent use of these routes within winter months. Additionally, the use of board walks or other surfaced options should be explored in places where path quality is currently poor.

LV6: Enderby Warren Land Reclamation

7.14 There is the opportunity to harness nature-based solutions to sustainably deal with waste and potential contamination on the previous landfill site at Enderby Warren.

7.15 Currently, there is a risk of contamination for development close to this site. Natural land remediation, such as reed beds to remove water pollutants from water and sequester methane emissions offer an alternative way to deal with contamination. In the longer term, this could also offer the potential for a geo-ecological reserve, protecting the nationally important geological site due to the presence of palygorskite. There are also wider opportunities to combine this with opportunities identified in Blaby District Council's Active Travel Strategy to link this site to Everards Meadows through a green walking and cycling route.

Figure 7.1: GBI opportunities - Large Villages



Opportunities in Focus Area 2: Leicester Urban Edge

LUE1: Kirby Muxloe Country Park

7.16 There is the opportunity to create a natural open space between Kirby Muxloe and Leicester Forest East. This would provide access to a larger-scale natural space for the north-east part of the District and the suburban edge of Leicester.

7.17 This opportunity has been identified as a priority project. More detail is provided in **Priority Project 4: Kirby Muxloe Country Park**.

LUE2: Greening Braunstone Town

7.18 There is the opportunity to introduce street trees and other green features between the carriageways of the A5460 and Narborough Road South to provide screening, sequester pollutants and reduce noise associated with the road corridors.

7.19 This small-scale opportunity has been identified to address the air quality issues along the road corridors and subsequent designation of an AQMA. In addition, there is a relatively low tree equity score here compared to other parts of the District. Creation of pollinator strips could also be explored and form linear corridors on road verges. These could form part of the wider B-Line in this area, part of the designated strategic corridors for pollinator enhancement identified by Buglife [\[See reference 83\]](#).

LUE3: SuDS retrofit at Meridian Business Park

7.20 There is the opportunity to retrofit SuDS with native wetland plants to reduce surface water flooding within existing large scale development at Meridian Business Park.

7.21 This opportunity would address the surface water flood risk across the business park. In addition, this opportunity can improve biodiversity, in the existing hard infrastructure with a very low greenness grid score.

LUE4: Brookside Meadow and Ivanhoe Trail

7.22 There is the opportunity to introduce constructed wetlands, reedbeds and other natural features within industrial estates and provide multi-functional benefits. The Working With Natural Processes data identifies a number of runoff attenuation features on the floodplain in this location. These indicate areas which have the potential to store water and reduce flooding.

7.23 Rothley Brook does not currently meet a 'Good' ecological status, as well as experiencing fluvial and surface water flooding, which affects built infrastructure to the south of the site and Ivanhoe Trail / National Cycle Network route 63. The use of reed beds, constructed wetlands and SuDS features could be introduced to more sustainably manage surface water run-off, reducing flood risk and improving water quality. In addition, these features could improve the biodiversity offer and enhance recreational spaces along the brook at Brookside Meadow.

LUE5: Green Lubbesthorpe Brook and Holmfield Park

7.24 There is the opportunity to work with local communities to enhance the local environment along Lubbesthorpe Brook and Holmfield Park, in one of the more deprived parts of Blaby.

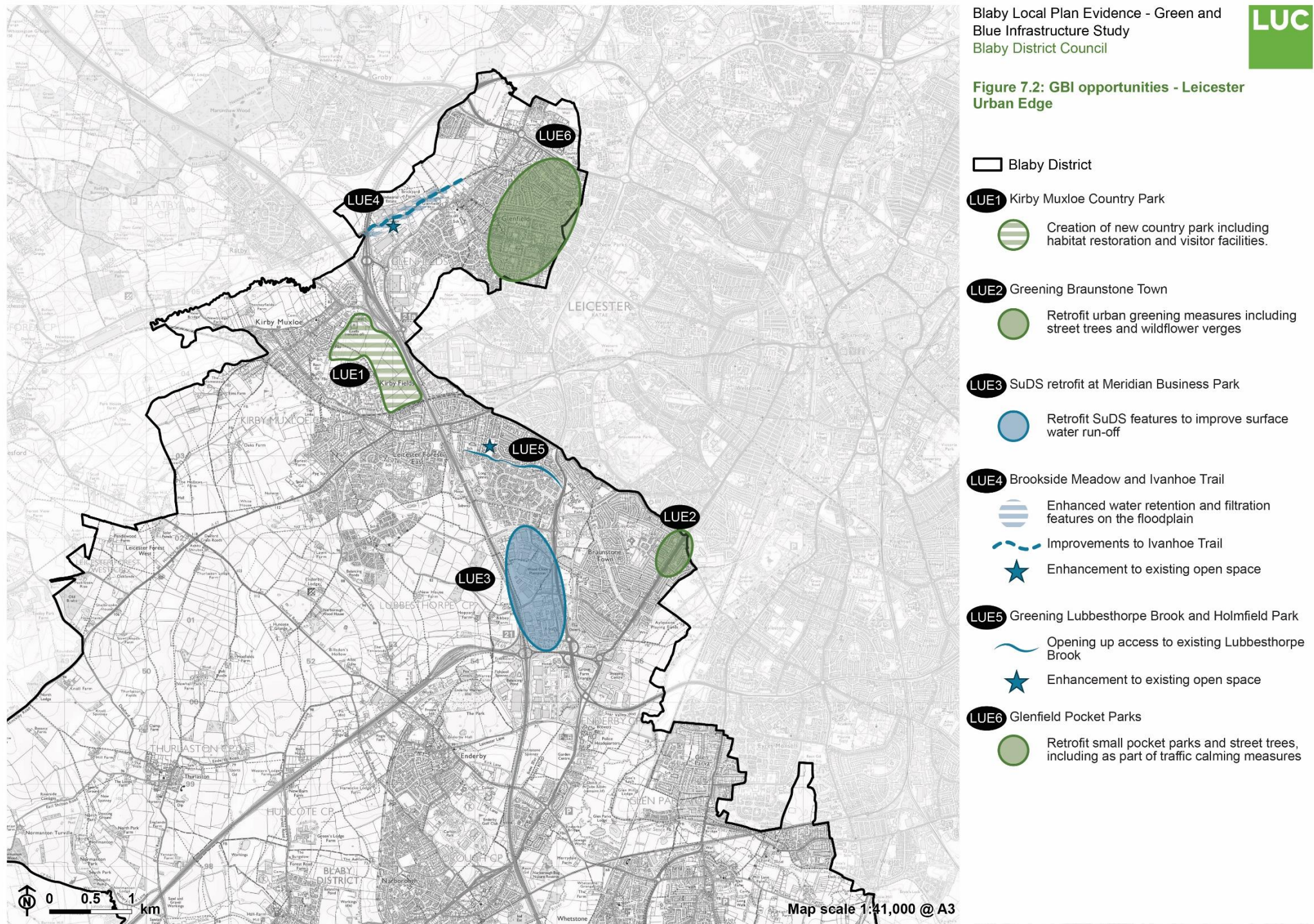
7.25 Lubbesthorpe Brook is a channelised stream running between residential areas in Leicester Forest East and Braunstone Town. The watercourse does not meet 'good' ecological status and is associated with fluvial flooding. Holmfield Park, adjacent to the brook provides open space for local residents but predominantly comprises amenity grassland, offering few multifunctional benefits. There is an opportunity to introduce habitat diversity and rain gardens into Holmfield Park and open up connections to Lubbesthorpe Brook and provide additional storage areas for the stream. If space allows, exploring opportunities of creating a brook-side walkway along the watercourse to increase access to the park could also be explored. This opportunity also offers the potential for working with local communities.

LUE6: Glenfield Pocket Parks

7.26 There is the opportunity to create small greenspaces within the built footprint of Glenfield. These will provide small areas of amenity, add aesthetic benefits and could be used as means of calming traffic in key locations.

7.27 There is currently a lack of greenspace provision within the south-east of Glenfield. Due to existing built development there would be limited opportunities for creation of an open space of at least 0.5ha, but smaller 'pockets' of greenspace could be introduced. There is the opportunity to work with transport planners and active travel teams to explore the use of these in key locations to also act as traffic calming measures. In addition, there may be the opportunity of working with local residents to take ownership for the management and design of these.

Figure 7.2: GBI Opportunities - Leicester Urban Edge



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12919_Blaby_Local_Plan_Evidence_GBI_Stage_2_Figures/Figure 7.1-4: GBI opportunities 14/10/2024 EB:cooper_h

Opportunities in Focus Area 3: South West Villages

SWV1: Stoney Stanton Park

7.28 There is the opportunity to create a destination park by rejuvenating and joining the existing natural greenspace site and Stoney Stanton War Memorial Playfields between Stoney Stanton and Sapcote.

7.29 This opportunity has been identified as a priority project. More detail is provided in **Priority Project 5: Stoney Stanton Park**.

SWV2: Croft Quarry Nature Park

7.30 There is the opportunity to create a natural greenspace, with the potential to obtain Local Nature Reserve designation, on the restored Croft Quarry. This would include integrating restoration of dry acid heath, wildflower meadows and scrub habitats with sensitive access and education.

7.31 Due to disused quarry workings, this site currently has a very low greenness grid score compared to other parts of the District. There is some access to parts of the quarry and existing priority habitats adjoining the site, offering the potential to create a larger natural space of interest. In addition to habitat reinstatement and management, access to parts of the restored quarry should be included. Interpretation signage would allow visitors to engage with the natural habitats and increase connectivity with nature.

7.32 Blasting at Croft Quarry has currently ceased, but proposals to resume blasting on a new part of the site have been approved. Delivery of this

opportunity should consider potential impacts of quarry workings on the nature park. Full delivery of this may be a longer term delivery aim, to coincide with restoration of the whole quarry once works have ended,

SWV3: Sapcote – Stoney Stanton – Croft Loop

7.33 There is the opportunity to improve bridleways and introduce new walking and cycling routes to improve active travel connections between Sapcote, Stoney Stanton and Croft.

7.34 Active travel in the south-west of the District has been identified as being limited. This opportunity builds on the identified opportunity Route 8 and 8a within the Active Travel Strategy to connect Sharnford and Croft to Narborough. The opportunity includes improvements to existing bridleways between the settlements, such as enhanced management, re-surfacing or improved signage. In addition, new routes to join up existing bridleways should be explored. Across all routes there is the opportunity to incorporate appropriate vegetation management, including creating wildflower verges and tree belts. 'Resting points' along the routes could also be considered. There is the opportunity for an additional leg of the route to connect to Fosse Meadows, providing better walking and cycling connections to this open space.

SWV4: Thurlaston Brook wetlands

7.35 There is the opportunity to enhance the wet grassland and grazing marsh along Thurlaston Brook from Earl Shilton Road to Huncote.

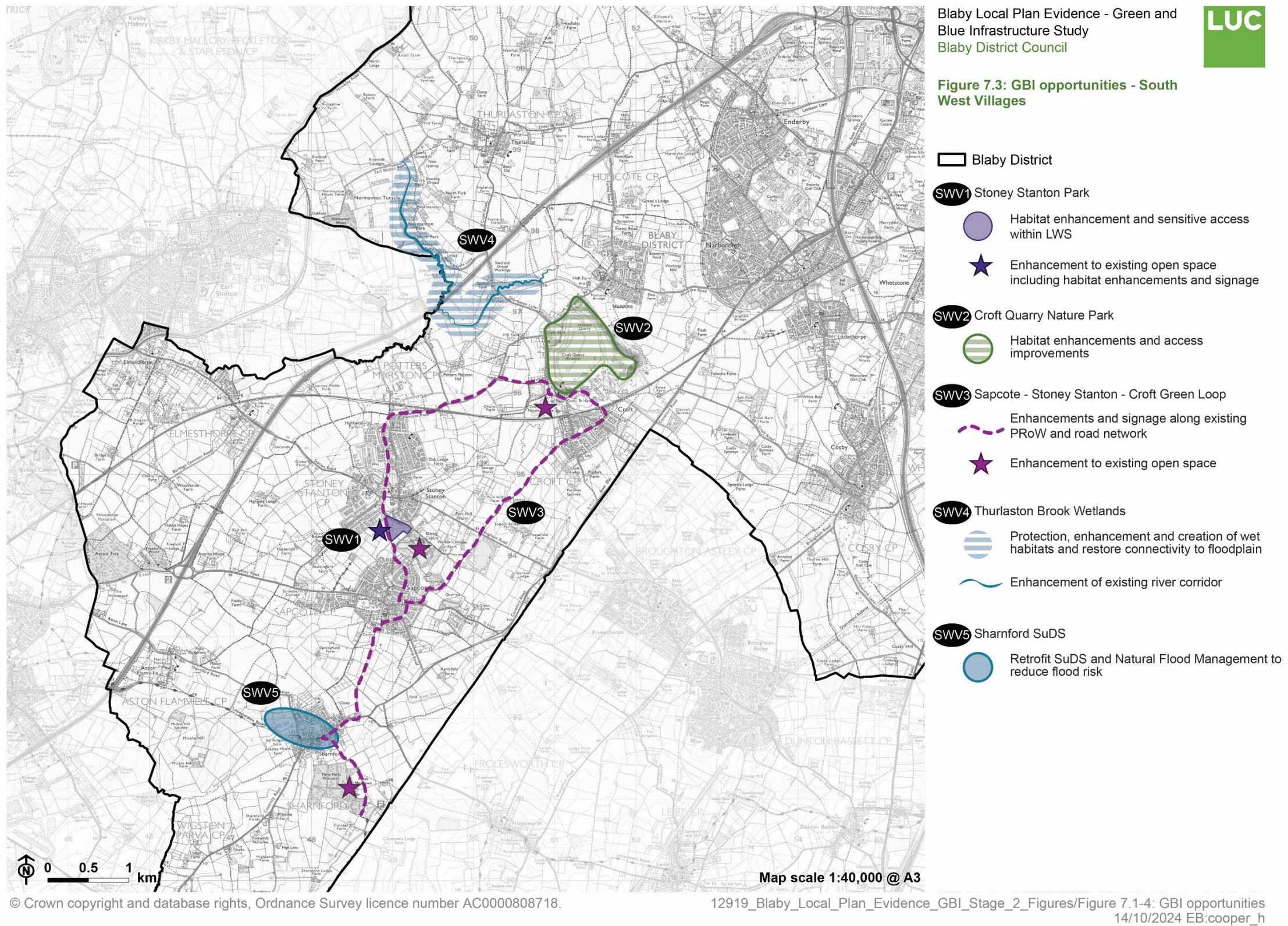
7.36 This existing priority habitat including coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and good quality semi-improved grassland. Enhancing the grassland condition between these habitats will help enhance connectivity. Natural wet grassland and wetland habitats can be created to help reconnect Thurlaston Brook to its floodplain and help to filter water runoff entering the brook (which currently has a poor ecological status).

SVW5: Sharnford SuDS

7.37 There is the opportunity to retrofit rain gardens and swales within Sharnford to reduce flood risk in the settlement.

7.38 There are areas of high surface water and fluvial flood risk within the centre of Sharnford along the Soar Brook. Retrofitting rain gardens and swales along impacted streets offers the opportunity to reduce this flood risk and provide additional biodiversity and aesthetic benefits to the village. Retention of wetlands upstream of the settlement could also help reduce flooding in Sharnford.

Figure 7.3: GBI opportunities - South West Villages



Opportunities in Focus Area 4: Rural Hinterland and district-wide

RH1: Hedgerow network enhancement

7.39 There is the opportunity to enhance the hedgerow network through the District, including within the rural hinterland. This includes protecting, creating and enhancing hedgerows with a focus on species-rich native hedgerows.

7.40 This opportunity has been identified as a priority project. More detail is provided in **Priority Project 6: Hedgerow network enhancement**.

RH2: Developer guidelines for employment proposals

7.41 There is the opportunity to provide more detailed guidance on integrating GBI within new employment proposals, particularly where these are large-scale developments. Many of these are outside of existing settlements on greenfield land. This opportunity focusses on landscape-led development, which provides multifunctional benefits for people and wildlife.

7.42 This opportunity has been identified as a priority project. More detail is provided in **Priority Project 7: Greening employment proposals**.

RH3: Kilby Park

7.43 There is the opportunity to create a new park for residents of Kilby, including areas of social seating, opportunities for physical recreation, natural play and opportunities to connect with nature.

7.44 There is currently no access to greenspace close to home within Kilby. Creation of a park for this settlement would reduce this gap and offer the opportunity for health and wellbeing benefits for local residents. Design of the park could include natural planting, including with scrubs, tree belts and wildflower meadows. Recreational facilities including good quality paths, benches, bins and signage should be included to enhance the value for visitors.

RH4: Aston Firs, Burbage Wood and Burbage Common connections

7.45 There is the opportunity to enhance active travel green links in the west of the District to provide connectivity to large open space provision at Aston Firs, Burbage Wood and Burbage Common.

7.46 The large natural greenspaces on the western edge of Blaby District provide an important large-scale open space within the District, providing access to nature. Improving non-vehicular access to these spaces will increase use of these open spaces. In addition, the green routes themselves would offer opportunities for active recreation and provide habitat connectivity.

Figure 7.4: GBI opportunities – Rural Hinterland and District Wide

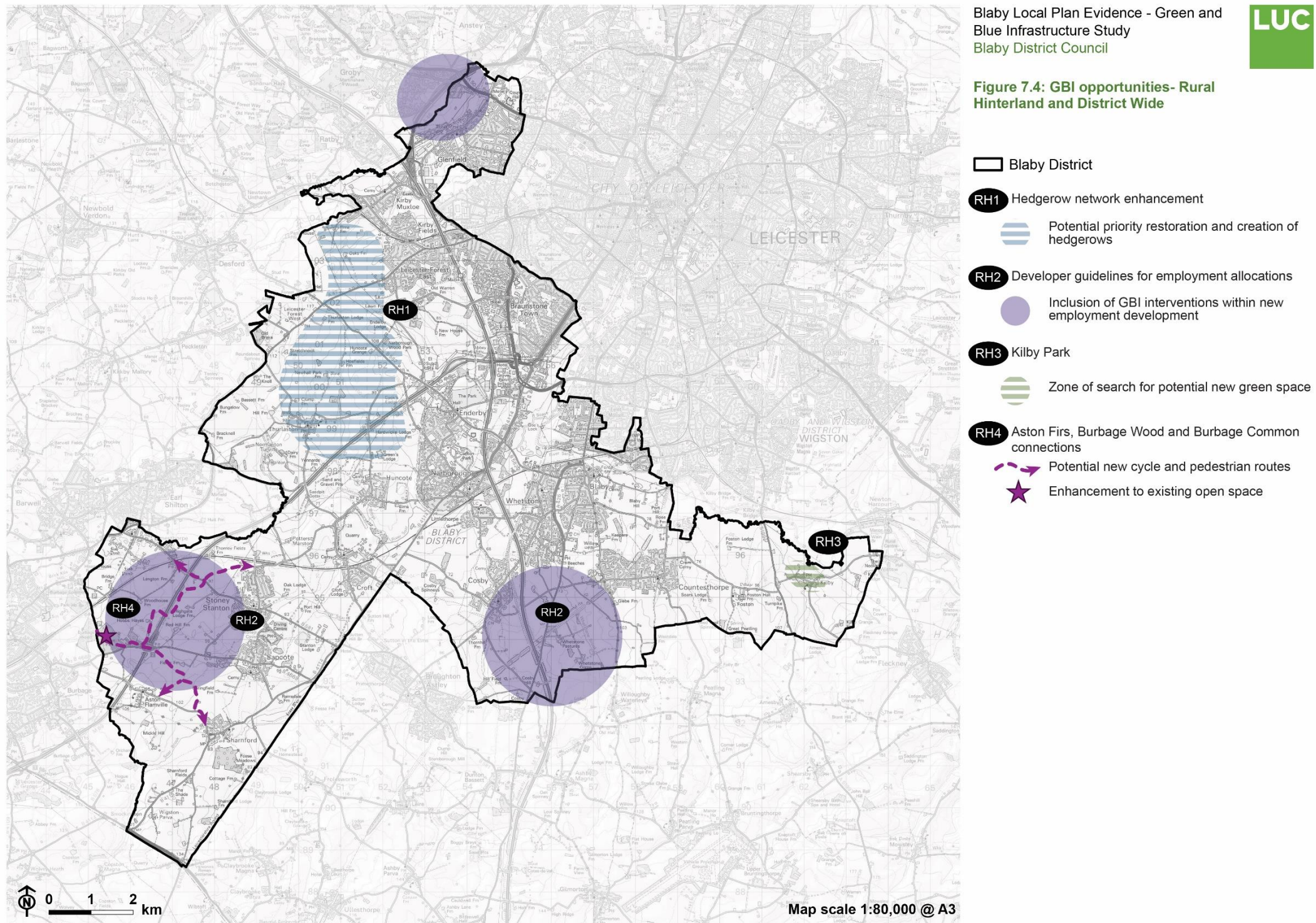


Table 7.1: Delivery of the strategic objectives through identified opportunities

Identified opportunities	1. Re-connect rivers to their floodplains	2. Establish a network of green corridors	3. Enhance the distinct character of individual settlements	5. Integrate multifunctional GBI into all new developments and retrofit	6. Integrate GBI within new developments into the wider network
LV1: Narborough to Aylestone Wetland	+	+	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
LV2: Blaby Town Centre Greening	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	+	Not applicable
LV3: Glen Parva, Whetstone and Countesthorpe Green Routes	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
LV4: Enderby St Johns greening	Not applicable	xNot applicable	+	+	Not applicable
LV5: Inter-village footpath network	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable	+
LV6: Enderby Warren Land Reclamation	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable
LUE1: Kirby Muxloe Country Park	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable
LUE2: Greening Braunstone Town	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	Not applicable
LUE3: SuDS retrofit at Meridian Business Park	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	Not applicable
LUE 4: Brookside Meadow and Ivanhoe Trail	+	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
LU5: Greening Lubbesthorpe Brook and Holmfield Park	+	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable
LU6: Glenfield Pocket Parks	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	Not applicable
SWV1: Stoney Stanton Park	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable
SWV2: Croft Quarry Nature Park	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
SWV3: Sapcote-Stoney Stanton-Croft Green Loop:	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

Identified opportunities	1. Re-connect rivers to their floodplains	2. Establish a network of green corridors	3. Enhance the distinct character of individual settlements	5. Integrate multifunctional GBI into all new developments and retrofit	6. Integrate GBI within new developments into the wider network
SWV4: Thurlaston Brook wetlands	+	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
SWV5: Sharnford SuDS	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	Not applicable
RH1: Hedgerow network enhancements	Not applicable	+	+	Not applicable	+
RH2: Developer guidelines for employment allocations	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	+
RH3: Kilby Park	Not applicable	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable
RH4: Aston Firs, Burbage Wood and Burbage Common Connections	Not applicable	+	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

Delivering the strategic projects

An opportunistic approach to GBI

7.2 The projects identified here highlight crucial wins to secure delivery of GBI within the District. However, a key challenge within all of these will be securing land owner investment and buy-in. At times, opportunities may arise for additional GBI projects to be delivered. In these cases, the delivery guidance and actions set out in the actions plans in **Chapter 8** can still be considered.

7.3 Ongoing dialogue and cross team communications across Blaby District Council and partner organisations should be encouraged to identify opportunities for delivery GBI. Examples include:

- **Highways works:** Traffic calming measures and/or road crossings to improve safety could include areas of green space or pocket parks. Planned highways upgrades should consider opportunities to also include multifunctional GBI elements, including SuDS.
- **Active travel:** Active travel schemes such as new bike lanes could be designed to include new planters or street trees to divide bike lanes from vehicle carriageways.
- **Public realm:** Any emerging projects to enhance or create areas of public realm should ensure that high quality GBI is delivered as part of this, increasing the multiple benefits provided by such schemes.
- **Parking:** Works to parking areas should aim to incorporate areas of shading and planting, or use of permeable surfaces.

Ongoing high-quality management and maintenance

7.4 The success of each project will depend on securing on going management and maintenance to ensure GBI provides benefits in the long term. The following guidance on management and maintenance of GBI can also be applied to existing GBI assets within the District.

- Agreeing who will take on management and maintenance for any GBI features. This may include in-house maintenance teams within the council, third party landscape management contractors or community groups. Guidance on transferring management of assets from local authorities to community groups identifies key considerations for this process **[See reference 84]**.
- There may be a need to upskill and retrain maintenance teams within the council to meet the maintenance needs of different habitats and features. This includes maintenance to establish new street trees and care for a range of SuDS features.
- With any GBI project, there is a need to ensure that funding for ongoing management and maintenance is budgeted for and considered within costings for the outset. Whilst all GBI needs some maintenance, careful design can reduce the maintenance requirements for GBI.

Improved data collection

7.5 There is currently limited data on number and location of smaller scale urban GBI features, such as street trees, green roofs or green walls. Delivery of the priority projects should ensure that spatial data on these interventions is collected and available for use in future related studies. A complete evidence base will be helpful for prioritising future interventions.

Delivery mechanisms

Partnership-based approach

7.6 The planning system, local authority resources and environmental funding cannot be relied upon alone to deliver the requirements and aspirations of this GBI Strategy. Key risks include increasing significant fiscal constraints, reductions in public funding and the need to avoid undermining the viability of development. Much of the new and improved GBI will be taken forward, funded and maintained by a range of partners external to the Council, working in multi-partner arrangements. The below provides a brief overview of some of the types of delivery mechanisms which might be considered when considering options for delivering the opportunities highlighted by the Strategy.

- Successful delivery is likely to involve a combination of grant funding from national government or other Trusts or organisations, together with a range of wider financing mechanisms, as set out below.
- Ensuring resources for the delivery, ongoing maintenance and ultimate replacement (if necessary) of GBI are secured before implementation begins is vital to ensure the successful delivery of these projects. In addition to capital funding, this also includes investing in recruitments and training for officers. This will ensure the longevity of GBI assets.

Grant Funding

7.7 Several public bodies and third sector organisations provide grant funding for natural capital, local and cultural heritage, and community benefit investment opportunities. Grants vary significantly by value and criteria and often they are only available to public or third-sector organisations. Grant funding opportunities are usually competitively allocated and often several grant funds can be stacked to fund larger scale projects.

7.8 The range of grant funding available at any one time is a constantly shifting picture, and each will have different eligibility criteria. To give a few examples:

- GBI projects with significant heritage impact can often draw on funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund or other similar charitable trusts.
- There are a range of grants accessible to various stakeholders for tree planting initiatives – either directly from the government agencies or via third parties like the Woodland Trust.
- There is also an evolving funding landscape related to opportunities for natural flood management (NFM), such as DEFRA's Natural Flood Management programme. The Environment Agency is likely to be a key partner in any such initiative. Water company investment programmes are also likely to provide opportunities to deliver GBI which offers flood resilience, such as SuDS.

Environmental land management schemes (ELMS)

7.9 Some of the enhancements required to the GBI network within the more rural areas of Blaby will rely on the new environmental land management scheme which replaces the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

7.10 Progress on ELMS lies fully outside of the planning system and under the governance of Defra. However, uptake of ELMS funding for environmental measures by farmers/land owners will be central to achieving the vision for the GBI network set out in this Strategy, particularly in addressing challenges raised by this Strategy of habitat fragmentation within agricultural areas and river water quality challenges as a result of agricultural runoff.

Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF)

7.11 The NEIRF is a competitive grant scheme and UK government fund that aligns with the government's goals as laid out in the Environment Improvement Plan, Green Finance Strategy, Nature Markets Framework and Agricultural Transition Plan. It provides grants to support the development of nature projects in England to a point where they can attract private investment.

7.12 Subject to future rollout, enhancements to the GBI network, particularly across more rural areas of Blaby, could be funded through NEIRF grants. These grants are available to a wide range of organisations including environmental groups, local authorities, businesses and farmers. The grants can also be used to cover a variety of costs relating to GBI enhancement such as feasibility studies, business planning, and project development.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

7.13 As discussed in **Chapter 6**, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is the requirement for development to provide a 10% uplift in biodiversity compared to the baseline habitats. Private sector contributions through offsite Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) offsets can help fund GBI interventions. The Council could also consider creating 'habitat banks' on its own land as part of GBI interventions. These BNG units could then be sold to developers, providing a further way of funding ecological enhancements to some spaces.

Other payment for ecosystem services (including carbon markets)

7.14 Payment for ecosystem services or schemes (PES) involve financial payments to land managers to voluntarily maintain or improve ecosystems (above and beyond what is required by regulatory compliance) so that

ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration or water filtration are provided/maintained. Buyers of these services may be public bodies or private companies that benefit from these ecosystem services (e.g. businesses needed to offset carbon emissions).

7.15 Currently, payment for ecosystem services in the UK generally focuses on regulating services, with a particular focus on carbon sequestration and storage. The voluntary carbon market includes two accredited schemes: the Woodland Carbon Code and the Peatland Carbon Code. However, at a regional scale, a number of water quality markets have been established based on water companies paying farmers within specific catchments to change land management practices to reduce diffuse water pollution. Trials of this type of market have taken place in Severn-Trent, Derbyshire and Poole Harbour [See reference 85]. Various voluntary 'Carbon+' schemes are also emerging that offer carbon offsetting bundled with wider benefits such as biodiversity – such as the Wilder Carbon standard from the Wildlife Trusts. Wider uptake of such low volume, high quality credit schemes may be driven by increasing corporate interest in setting (and monitoring performance against) net zero carbon.

7.16 If large scale tree planting were proposed, then the possibility of selling Woodland Carbon Code credits or similar could also be explored. However, the Council may wish to 'bank' any carbon savings for its own carbon accounting.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

7.17 The Council may also wish to explore other opportunities with local businesses. Some organisations may be willing to sponsor improvements to existing greenspaces as part of their corporate social responsibility strategy rather than paying for a specific ecosystem service benefit.

Chapter 8

Action plans

Priority Project 1: Narborough to Aylestone Wetland

Vision

Establish a connected, wildlife-rich wetland habitat along the River Soar and River Sence corridors; stretching from Narborough Bog Nature Reserve in the east towards Aylestone Meadows Local Nature Reserve in Leicester. The restoration of wet grassland, grazing marsh, reedbeds and riparian habitat will support populations of amphibians, birds and aquatic species. Raised boardwalks across the wetland offer the opportunity to provide safe, recreational access whilst reducing the potential for habitat disturbance.

Scale: Long-term (10+ years)

Indicative cost: High (>£1 million), however the large-scale nature of the project means it would likely be delivered in stages, offering the opportunity to deliver the work incrementally.

Why is this intervention needed?

- Offers the opportunity to contribute to integrate SuDS interventions and catchment-scale nature-based solutions to improve resilience and adaptation to flooding within a changing climate;
- Aligns with the aims of the emerging LNRS and has the potential to support important wetland habitats, enhancing an important blue corridor within the District; and
- Existing open spaces within the river corridors and settlements surround the floodplain. This offers the potential to create accessible spaces for people and provide educational opportunities to connect local people to restored wetlands and the benefits they provide.

Key actions:

- Monitor and eradicate invasive species along the river corridor, working at a catchment scale to control their spread upstream.
- Create naturalised spaces for water retention alongside the existing River Soar and River Sence. This includes ponds and scrapes, with a variety of depths, sizes and level of shading to supports diverse flora and fauna. Marginal reedbeds and other vegetation can help filter surface water and improve water quality.
- Introduce riparian planting, particularly in areas identified as exhibiting the potential for riparian woodland within the Working with Natural Processes (WWNP) dataset, and where this would not impact existing valuable wetland habitat.
- Introduce multi-user access routes and provide space for different recreational users to access the wetlands. This should primarily include raised boardwalks to avoid habitat disturbance.
- Introduce viewing platforms with seating, wildlife watching hides and educational signage to offer opportunities to reconnect people with their local biodiversity and cultural heritage associated with the river valleys.

- Provide links to existing greenspaces; including Leicester Road Recreation Ground, Jubilee Park and Northfield Park. Seek enhancements to integrate these spaces into the wider floodplain landscape, whilst retaining their recreational purpose.

Potential delivery partners

- Canal and Rivers Trust;
- Trent Rivers Trust;
- Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust;
- Environment Agency;
- Blaby District Council
- Leicestershire County Council;
- Natural England;
- Landowners; and
- Community ‘Wombles’ groups.

Delivery mechanisms

- Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (subject to future rollouts);
- Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs);
- DEFRA’s Natural Flood Management programme;
- Woodland Trust funding;
- Private sector engagement;
- Developer contributions, including through offsite Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Charitable trusts (e.g., National Lottery Heritage Fund);
- Woodland Carbon Code grants; and

- Local authority environmental funding.

Best practice guidance

- There is a wealth of guidance available relating to the creation and management of wetland features, including those listed below:
 - As part of the Million Ponds Project, guidance on pond creation within the floodplain was produced [\[See reference 86\]](#), including the best-practice design for different land-use and soil types and guidance on where to locate ponds.
 - The Manual of river Restoration Techniques [\[See reference 87\]](#) also offers guidance on the types of wetland features which can be incorporated into floodplains.
 - University College London and the Freshwater Habitats Trust [\[See reference 88\]](#) has produced a guide to restore, create and manage ponds. In particular this provides guidance on the different types of ponds needed for different purposes and contexts.
- Both the Woodland Trust [\[See reference 89\]](#) and UK Forest Research [\[See reference 90\]](#) provide detailed guidance on introducing riparian woodland, including identifying appropriate locations for this.
- Guidance on ongoing management and creation of grazing marsh is provided by Buglife [\[See reference 91\]](#), including ditch cleaning and maintaining ditch profiles and grazing seasons.
- Access features should be designed to be inclusive and accessible to all. Guidance for creating accessible spaces and routes is included below, which should be balanced with the need to protect the most sensitive ecological spaces.
 - Sustrans [\[See reference 92\]](#) provide guidance on designing and delivering traffic free routes and greenways, including guidance on signage and wayfinding, space requirements, and ongoing maintenance and management.

- Guidance for ensuring access is suitable for all users is provided by the Sensory Trust and Paths For All [\[See reference 93\]](#). This includes guidance on path surfaces, width, camber and other facilities.
- In addition, the National Association of Wetland Managers (for the USA) provides guidance specifically on the practicalities of construction of wetland boardwalks and trails [\[See reference 94\]](#) which also includes useful guidance for the UK context.
- The Heritage Trust [\[See reference 95\]](#) provides information on good practice for interpretation of heritage, which can also be extended to natural heritage, and creating an interpretation plan.
- All infrastructure within this project, including boardwalks, benches and other visitor facilities should maximise sustainability. Where possible, re-used or recycled local materials should be used.

Best practice examples

- Wendling Beck [\[See reference 96\]](#), in Norfolk, is a nature restoration project working at a large scale to restore nearly 2000 acres of farmland through river restoration and grassland, wetland and woodland creation. Landowners, Natural England and environmental NGOs have worked together in partnership to adapt a new system of land use management and transform the landscape from an intensively farmed arable farming into a healthy functioning flood plain, with an important role in storing carbon. Offsite Biodiversity Net Gain credits are a key mechanism for ongoing delivery of the project.
- In Glasgow, the recent project at Hamiltonhill Claypits [\[See reference 97\]](#) has created an important, local greenspace offering opportunities for running, cycling, fishing and social interactions. This is located within the Local Nature Reserve, which features species such as roe deer, dragonflies and finches. A new bridge and walkway within the site help connect communities to the canal and associated wetland habitats.

Next steps

- Conduct hydrological and ecological assessments to identify priority areas for riparian restoration and wetland creation to maximise the benefits for flood resilience, water quality and biodiversity.
- Ecological surveys to understand existing species, including presence of any invasive species. Impact of wetland creation on any existing species (including farmland birds) should be understood.
- Identify routes for raised boardwalks to connect Glen Parva, Whetstone and Narborough and existing outdoor spaces; including Leicester Road Recreation Ground, Jubilee Park, Northfield Park and Ratby Meadows and Everards Meadow.
- Liaise with landowners to gauge interest in their involvement in this project.
- Undertake public engagement and collaborate with local community groups to identify priority areas for floodplain restoration and retrofit SuDS installation.
- Funding applications should be prepared, targeting SuDS, and nature-based solutions funding streams.

Incorporation in Local Plan

- This project can be incorporated into development close to the River Soar corridor. These sites include:
 - Site reference LIT022;
 - Site reference LIT023 and
 - Site reference NAR033.

Priority Project 2: Blaby Town Centre Greening

Vision

Use urban greening initiatives to shape an attractive and thriving town centre, encouraging dwell time in Blaby's central high street and increasing biodiversity in an urban context. A variety of multifunctional GBI assets within Blaby town centre will include shade-providing street trees, colourful and pollinator friendly planters, raingardens, green lampposts, bird boxes, insect hotels, and statement green walls and roofs retrofitted onto commercial buildings and bus shelters.

Scale: Medium (5 -10 years)

Indicative cost: Medium (£250,000 - £1 million) (For implementation in Blaby town centre alone).

Why is this intervention needed?

- Blaby's town centre has the most prominent high street in the District, though has limited existing green provision. Focusing works within this key location to boost biodiversity and improve connectivity has the potential to also create a basis for similar interventions in the wider District.
- The project offers an opportunity to identify and enhance the management of existing, though limited, green features within the town centre to ensure a locally relevant and sustainable approach to greening. Addressing issues relating to condition of existing street furniture will also lower levels of anti-social behaviour which is a current threat (identified in **Chapter 2**).

- Careful design of the greening interventions will deliver multi-functional benefits, including biodiversity enhancement, improved air quality (mitigating effects of air and noise pollution from nearby major roads, including the M1 and A426), reduced urban heat island effect, reduced storm and surface water runoff, increased property value, and improved mental wellbeing.
- Diverse approaches to urban greening create opportunity to engage people in the design and implementation of key interventions locally, generating interest and understanding of the importance of green features in urban settings, whilst fostering a sense of shared ownership.

Key actions

- Introduce green roofs and walls on buildings and bus shelters in order to appropriately increase green features throughout the town centre where space is limited. Emphasis should be on improving air quality and energy efficiency, reducing storm and surface water runoff, increasing biodiversity, and enhancing aesthetic value on major high streets.
- Introduce raingardens that link to existing waterbodies, considering soil type, slope, drainage and plants tolerant to both wet and dry conditions. Seek to integrate these spaces into the wider floodplain landscape, whilst retaining their recreational value. New and existing developments should prioritise permeable paving over traditional paved surfaces in order to create an increased boost climate resilience.
- Introduce pollinator friendly flowering and berry bearing species and street trees to reduce the effects of urban heat islands and create important habitat pockets. Street tree and plant species should be carefully selected based on climate adaptation / drought tolerance, ability to filter air pollution, suitability in relation to existing species within the area, pavement width, underground utilities and maintenance requirement considerations.
- Create opportunity for community and business engagement in the design, planning, implementation and maintenance of planters, bird boxes and

insect hotels to support biodiversity and foster a sense of ownership for local people.

- Where space allows, inclusion of pocket parks and areas of social seating within shaded and vegetated areas to create attractive spaces for people to dwell in the town centre.

Potential delivery partners

- Blaby District Council;
- Leicestershire County Council;
- Environment Agency;
- Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust;
- Trees for Cities;
- Groundwork UK;
- Buglife;
- Transition Leicester; and
- Community 'Wombles' Groups.

Delivery mechanisms

- GBI-led design and masterplanning (including Section 106 monies) **[See reference 98]**;
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions **[See reference 99]**;
- Woodland Trust funding (e.g. Leicestershire Tree Giveaway) **[See reference 100]**;
- Charitable trusts (e.g. National Lottery Community and Heritage Funds) **[See reference 101]**;
- Local community schemes and funding **[See reference 102]**; and

- Local authority environmental funding.

Best practice guidance

- The National Planning Policy Framework includes policies that support the use of green infrastructure to improve environmental quality in urban areas. It includes guidance on achieving well-designed places, mitigating the effects of climate change and conserving and enhancing the natural environment including landscapes and green infrastructure **[See reference 103]**.
- Urban greening features, particularly street trees, can require careful planning for ongoing maintenance within an urban landscape.
 - The urban greening feature should be selected to suit the budget and stewardship options. The Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) have developed a range of useful guides to inform decision-making on urban trees **[See reference 104]**.
 - In addition, the Forest Research's Urban Tree Manual **[See reference 105]** provides guidance on establishing urban trees; from initial location, through to planting, establishment and management.
- Retrofitting green roofs and walls requires particular care and consideration, including understanding structural integrity, weight capacity, access for maintenance and potential for sustainable drainage systems to be installed.
 - Guidance on different types of green roofs and the delivery of these is provided in the GRO Green Roof Code **[See reference 106]**.
 - Additional recommendations based on lessons learnt from the installation of green roofs and walls in Greater London is provided in Living Roofs and Walls from Policy to Practice **[See reference 107]**,
- Guidance on managing urban areas for pollinators is provided by Buglife **[See reference 108]**, including suitable urban habitats and management techniques in relation to several pollinator species.

- CIRIA's SuDS manual [See reference 109] is available provides the best practice guidance on SuDS, offering support for the most cost-effective SuDS solution to delivery multiple benefits. High level guidance on the importance of managing water within urban environments is also provided by the Trees Design and Action Group [See reference 110].

Best practice examples

- Sheffield's 'Grey to Green' scheme [See reference 111] has embraced urban greening and transformed uninspired areas of the road network into biodiverse and multifunctional pocket parks, wildflower verges and active travel routes along the River Don. Sustainable Drainage Systems including rain gardens are a key part of the design and help to reconnect residents with the city's waterways. In addition to reducing surface water flow, the project has had a positive economic impact as a catalyst for development and the food and drink offer in the neighbourhood has increased.
- In Sherwood, Nottingham, a project was undertaken to retrofit a raingarden on a grass verge on a residential road adjacent to the Day Brook watercourse [See reference 112]. The project was developed to address flooding issues in the area and to maximise surface water interception, attenuation and infiltration. Local resident participation was encouraged for the design and ongoing management of the raingarden. Plants were selected based on tolerance to wet and dry conditions, size (smaller plants were selected to ensure sight lines of drivers and pedestrians were not obstructed), aesthetics, and evergreens to reduce leaf litter and other green debris.

Next Steps

- Conduct an audit to assess existing features and characteristics within the project area. Identify key issues based on findings and plan how these could be addressed through enhancements and/or replacement.
- Prepare funding applications, targeting SuDS, and nature-based solutions funding streams.

- Identify and engage with potential commercial partners, groups and stakeholders.
- Undertake public engagement and collaborate with local community groups to identify suitable priority areas for street trees, planters and green walls and roofs.
- Deliver early pilot projects to generate momentum around the delivery of the town centre scale greening in Blaby, delivering quick win benefits, whilst also testing potential funding mechanisms that might be applied to additional town centres throughout the wider District.
- A long-term management / maintenance plan should be prepared to promote successful establishment of interventions.

Incorporation in Local Plan

- This project can be incorporated into development within and adjoining Blaby settlement. These sites include
 - Site reference BLA032; and
 - Site reference BLA033.

Priority Project 3: Glen Parva, Whetstone and Countesthorpe Green Routes

Vision

Establish a vibrant, biodiverse green active travel corridor connecting communities and nature. Develop a traffic-free, green route that prioritises safe, active travel for walkers, cyclists, and other users, while doubling as a vital wildlife corridor. The route will be enhanced with wildflower verges, native hedgerows, and native woodlands, creating a mosaic of habitats that support species like birds, bats, and butterflies. Habitat features such as bat boxes, small ponds, and scrubland will be incorporated to further boost biodiversity. This green corridor will seek to integrate with the National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 6 near Blaby, creating opportunities for sustainable, connected travel. The route will offer recreational access while protecting and enriching habitats, showcasing how transport and ecology can thrive together.

Scale: Medium (5 -10 years), some sections of the project, like creating cycling and walking routes, could be developed earlier while elements such as hedgerows and trees may take longer to mature fully

Indicative cost: Medium (£250,000 - £1 million)

Why is this intervention needed?

- The existing dismantled railway has been identified in the LNRS as a key opportunity to create and enhance wildlife corridors. While the dismantled railway currently functions as a natural corridor for wildlife, it lacks the diverse habitats needed to fully support a range of species. Enhancements such as wildflower meadows, hedgerows, and native woodlands will improve ecological connectivity.
- Protecting the sensitive habitats in the section northwest of Whetstone, designated as a LWS underscores the importance of carefully managing recreational access to balance public use with habitat protection.
- This intervention also addresses the over-reliance on cars as the main mode of transport by offering a safe, green, and traffic-free active travel route, connecting settlements and promoting sustainable, low-carbon travel.

Key actions:

- Establish a multi-user surfaced route along the whole length of the disused railway between key settlements, exploring options for permeable surfacing. Design of these access requirements should allow coexistence between nature and people.
- Enhance ecological value by protecting, enhancing and creating wildflower margins, native hedgerows, small woodlands, and scrub and installing biodiversity features including bat boxes, bird boxes, small ponds and bug hotels. These features will help to enhance habitat diversity along the route, supporting species such as birds, bats, and butterflies.
- Implement sensitive access management for the section northwest of Whetstone, designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS), ensuring minimal habitat disturbance while allowing limited access for nature observation. Interpretation signage can help educate visitors about the important habitats, fostering a sense of connectivity to nature.

- Promote sustainable transport by developing connections to National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 6 and other local greenways, encouraging low-carbon travel between settlements.
- Establish a programme for monitoring biodiversity along the route, assessing habitat health, and adapting management strategies as needed to maximise long-term ecological benefits.
- Introduce seating areas, wildlife-watching hides, and educational signage to provide opportunities for people to reconnect with local biodiversity and learn about the area's cultural heritage.
- Seek enhancements to integrate the corridor into the wider landscape while retaining its recreational purpose.

Potential delivery partners

- Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust;
- Environment Agency;
- Blaby District Council;
- Leicestershire County Council;
- Natural England;
- Landowners;
- Community 'Wombles' groups;
- Sustrans;
- The Woodland Trust; and
- Heart of England Forest.

Delivery mechanisms

- Private sector contributions through offsite Biodiversity Net Gain offsets;
- Charitable trusts (e.g., Heritage Lottery Fund);

- Local authority environmental funding
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions
- Green Recovery Challenge Fund
- Big Nature Impact Fund

Best practice guidance

- There is a wealth of guidance available relating to the creation and management of wildlife corridors, including those listed below:
 - The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust provides specific guidance on habitat creation for local species and how to manage corridors to maximise biodiversity (e.g., for hedgerows, wildflower meadows, and small woodlands).[\[See reference 113\]](#)
 - Natural England's handbook on creating a Nature Network offers guidance on enhancing ecological networks that allow wildlife to thrive and cope with climate change.[\[See reference 114\]](#)
 - The Hedgerow Regulations outline best practices for hedgerow management and creation, which is key for maintaining connectivity between habitats. [\[See reference 115\]](#)
- Access features should be designed to be inclusive and accessible to all. Guidance for creating accessible spaces and routes is included below, which should be balanced with the need to protect the most sensitive ecological spaces.
 - Sustrans [\[See reference 116\]](#) provide guidance on designing and delivering traffic free routes and greenways, including guidance on signage and wayfinding, space requirements, and ongoing maintenance and management.
 - Guidance for ensuring access is suitable for all users is provided by the Sensory Trust and Paths For All [\[See reference 117\]](#). This includes guidance on path surfaces, width, camber and other facilities.

- A key consideration will be construction of a surfaced path. This should be designed to increase accessibility for a range of users, including wheelchair and cyclists, whilst limiting the amount of impermeable surfaces. Paths for All provides specific guidance on path surfaces [\[See reference 118\]](#).
- Access within Local Wildlife Sites identified along the disused railways will need to be particularly sensitively designed. Where possible, access should be discouraged within these locations, without fragmenting the loop.
- The Heritage Trust [\[See reference 119\]](#) provides information on good practice for interpretation of heritage, which can also be extended to natural heritage, and creating an interpretation plan.
- All infrastructure within this project, including path surfaces, benches and other visitor facilities should maximise sustainability. Where possible local, reclaimed or recycled materials should be used.

Best practice examples

- The Fallowfield Loop is a 14-kilometer traffic-free path in Manchester [\[See reference 120\]](#) that repurposes a disused railway line as a green active travel route. Managed by Sustrans, the route supports both biodiversity and active travel, featuring wildflower meadows, tree-lined paths, and hedgerow restoration. It provides habitat connectivity for urban wildlife, including birds, bats, and pollinators, while offering a safe and enjoyable cycling and walking path for residents.
- In Lôn Las Cefni, Anglesey, Wales [\[See reference 121\]](#) a greenway that transforms disused railway corridors into traffic-free cycling and walking routes, this project enhances biodiversity by incorporating wildflower planting, hedgerow creation, and small woodland areas along its length. It is part of the National Cycle Network (NCN Route 566), designed to promote sustainable travel and improve ecological connectivity in rural Wales.

Next steps

- Audit the existing route of dismantled railways to identify where there is existing access, where rail infrastructure is still in place, and any gaps in the route (for example missing bridges over rivers).
- Survey the existing corridor to assess current habitats, species present (including birds, bats, and pollinators), and the presence of invasive species. Use this data to prioritise areas for habitat enhancement, including hedgerow restoration, wildflower meadow creation, and tree planting.
- Evaluate potential routes for the green active travel corridor, identifying the best alignments for safe, traffic-free pathways. This will include engaging with local communities to understand priorities locations for providing connectivity between settlements. This should also consider connections to and through green spaces like Glen Parva Nature Reserve and Countesthorpe Country Park.
- Collaborate with Sustrans and local transport planners to ensure the route aligns with the wider active travel network, including potential connections to the NCN Route 6, which could also help create a circular route.
- Work with ecological experts to identify sensitive habitats along the corridor (e.g., Local Wildlife Sites near South Wigston and Whetstone) and develop strategies to minimise disturbance, such as implementing access restrictions or low-impact pathways.
- Create a long-term management plan for the corridor, including guidelines for hedgerow cutting, wildflower meadow reseeding, and monitoring of installed biodiversity features like bat boxes and ponds.
- Establish a monitoring framework to track biodiversity gains, active travel use, and community engagement over time. Use feedback to adjust plans and ensure long-term success.

Incorporation in Local Plan

- This opportunity could be integrated as part of development along the route of (or within close proximity) of the existing dismantled railway. This includes:
 - Site reference WHE027;
 - Site reference WHE031; and
 - Site reference COU042.

Priority Project 4: Kirby Muxloe Country Park

Vision

Create a country park in the east of the District, offering a large area of accessible natural greenspace for residents of Blaby and the western suburbs of Leicester. Natural habitats including grasslands, woodlands, and scrub will offer space for visitors to connect with nature, as well as create space for a range of habitats. Planting along the M1 will mitigate noise and air pollution whilst and water attenuation features in the north will reduce flood risks.

Scale: Medium (5 -10 years) (Although new wooded areas within the country park to mature may go beyond this 10 year period)

Indicative cost: Medium (£250,000 - £1 million)

Why is this intervention needed?

- Access to larger scale natural greenspace across Blaby is limited, particularly in the north and east of the District. This project offers the opportunity to provide a wider neighbourhood greenspace to residents in the north of Blaby. Inclusion of areas of community gardens or allotments could also fill a gap into this type of open space within Leicester Forest East.
- Open space here would also maintain the sense of openness between Leicester Forest East and development east of the M1.

- Additional ecosystem services could be provided by reducing flood risk along the brook to the north of the site and providing a buffer to noise and air pollution along the M1.

Key actions

- Create and enhance natural habitats, including natural grasslands, scrub, woodland and wetland. Where possible, design habitats that provide connectivity for species and increase biodiversity across new and existing greenspaces.
- Design circular routes and pathways, as well as picnic areas that allow for recreation and sustainable access to nature. Paths should also promote connections between the settlements of Leicester Forest East, Kirby Muxloe, Glenfield, and Braunstone Firth to help promote active travel. Include features for people with disabilities, allowing access into parts of the country park for all visitors. Signage to educate visitors about local ecology and history should be included to help connect visitors to the local natural heritage.
- Develop planting designs with multi-row hedges and ground covers tailored to absorb noise and improve air quality along the M1. This may include evergreen plants, which tend to absorb noise and air pollution better year round.
- Explore opportunities to integrate areas of community growing, including allotment areas or orchards within the wider country park.
- In the north of the site, along the brook, wetland and riparian enhancement could provide biodiverse habitats, reduce flood risk and help improve water quality. This could include creating space for small ponds to temporarily store excess rainwater during heavy rainfall as well as enhancing riparian vegetation.
- Explore opportunities for providing connections, or interpretation of, Kirby Muxloe Castle, increasing the historic interest of the site.

Potential delivery partners

- Blaby District Council;
- Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust;
- Historic England;
- The Land Trust;
- Leicestershire County Council;
- Natural England;
- Landowners;
- Community ‘Wombles’ groups;
- The Woodland Trust;
- Heart of England Forest; and
- The Land Trust

Delivery mechanisms

- Private sector contributions through offsite Biodiversity Net Gain offsets;
- Charitable trusts (e.g., Heritage Lottery Fund);
- Local authority environmental funding
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions
- DEFRA’s Natural Flood Management programme (subject to future rollouts)
- Big Nature Impact Fund [\[See reference 122\]](#)
- Countryside Stewardship BN11: Planting new hedges (subject to future rollouts) [\[See reference 123\]](#)

Best practice guidance

- Natural England provides information on the requirements for designating a country park which can be used as a checklist for creating this site [\[See reference 124\]](#). In addition, the guidance on provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), whilst not a requirement here, these guidelines provide a useful start point for the best provision of accessible natural greenspace. This includes the requirement for:
 - Provision of a choice of circular routes, including one of around 2.5km and one of at least 5km.
 - Paths should be perceived as safe, including areas which are more open, with trees or scrub set back from the path.
 - Provision of adequate car parking with information about the site and the routes available.
 - Semi-natural looking landscape with woodland or a semi-wooded landscape are desirable.
 - Access should be mostly unrestricted (i.e. not just restricted to footpaths).
- The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust provides specific guidance on habitat creation for local species and how to manage corridors to maximise biodiversity (e.g., for hedgerows, wildflower meadows, and small woodlands).[\[See reference 125\]](#)
- The Royal Horticultural Society provides guidance on the design and implementation of natural vegetation to manage noise and air pollution [\[See reference 126\]](#).
- Ongoing management and maintenance may best be secured through engaging with an experienced third party, such as the Land Trust.

Best practice examples

- Hogmoor Inclosure [\[See reference 127\]](#) was established in 2017 to provide a natural recreational open space to reduce pressure on the

nearby Wealdon Heaths Special Protection Area. The site, which was formerly an off-road tracked vehicle training ground, was transformed into 54 ha of woodland and heathland, as well as ponds. Visitor facilities include numerous footpaths, three circular signed routes, a café, a community space for hire, picnic areas and seating, a dog training area, and a play area. To increase the accessibility of the site, some surfaced routes are provided, and mobility scooters are available to hire.

Next Steps

- Identify landholders and explore potential for creation of a country park on parts of the undeveloped land between the M1 and Kirby Muxloe.
- Conduct geological, hydrological and ecological surveys to understand the site's current conditions and identify the most appropriate habitat types and water features solutions are and where would they go best.
- Engage with Historic England to understand the potential impacts on Kirby Muxloe Castle Scheduled Monument.
- Carry out public consultation to ensure community input about recreational opportunities and access improvements.

Incorporation in Local Plan

- This opportunity could be integrated as part of development within the appropriate catchment (2km for a site over 20ha). This includes:
 - Site reference KMU025;
 - Site reference LFE19; and
 - Site reference LFE20.

Priority Project 5: Stoney Stanton Park

Vision

Opportunity to create destination park on the existing Stoney Stanton War Memorial Playing Fields and the adjoining natural greenspace. This opportunity would introduce facilities which encourage use for all users, such as benches, good quality paths, play equipment and social spaces. In addition, this project includes opportunities for habitat creation, including wetlands, ponds and wooded areas. The new park should naturalise Nature-based Solutions, including creating areas of shade, water storage and carbon sequestration.

Scale: Medium-term (5-10 years)

Indicative cost: Medium (£250,000-£1 million),

Why is this intervention needed?

- There is currently limited access to large-scale formal greenspace in Sapcote and Stoney Stanton.
- This project would help maintain a sense of separation between the two settlements, enhancing a sense of place and maintaining settlement character.
- The project should include features to help reduce the surface water flood risk along the south of the site.
- Land west of Sapcote has higher levels of overall deprivation and deprivation related to health and wellbeing within the District. Research

shows that the health and wellbeing benefits are greater in areas of lower deprivation [See reference 128].

Key actions:

- Improve physical connectivity between the two open space areas offering a coherent visitor destination. The sense of connection between the two open spaces could be enhanced through a unified set of branded welcome, wayfinding and education signage throughout the open spaces.
- Additional physical connections between this site and potential new open spaces delivered through the potential strategic site on Land West of Stoney Stanton.
- Introduce habitat diversity, including shelter belts, woodland copses, hedgerows, areas of wildflower and ponds. These should be located away from important sports pitches within the existing open space.
- Improve the recreational value of the site, including planning circular, accessible routes, basic amenity facilities including benches and bins, and other facilities such as green gyms, social seating and sensory or community gardens.
- Establish a 'Friends of' group for the park, offering a chance for local communities to have a level of ownership in the planning and management of the park.
- Offer additional habitat interest and opportunities for connection to nature within parts of the park away from the Local Wildlife Site to reduce access pressure on the more sensitive parts of the site.

Potential delivery partners

- Blaby District Council;
- Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust;
- Landowners; and

- Community ‘Wombles’ groups.

Delivery mechanisms

- Private sector contributions through offsite Biodiversity Net Gain offsets;
- Charitable trusts (e.g., Heritage Lottery Fund [\[See reference 129\]](#));
- Parks Community provides funding to support ‘Friends of’ groups; and
- Local authority environmental funding.

Best practice guidance

- Best practice guidance on the quality of parks and open spaces is provided by the Green Flag Award [\[See reference 130\]](#). Criteria for the award can be used as guidance for how parks should be designed and managed. Key themes include being welcoming for all; healthy, safe and secure; well maintained and clean; sustainably managed; supports biodiversity, landscape and heritage; and includes community involvement.
- Parks Community [\[See reference 131\]](#) provides support and guidance to ‘Friends of’ groups, including on how to set up a group, promoting group activities and the help with appropriate policies and constitutions.
- The Safer Parks guidance [\[See reference 132\]](#) offers practical steps for designing and delivering safer parks, particularly to support women and girls within outdoor spaces. This includes features such as lighting, perimeter paths and clear signage.
- Cambridge City Council have produced a toolkit for introducing biodiversity into public open spaces [\[See reference 133\]](#). It incorporates an A-Z of features which can be designed into open spaces, which are also applicable to the Blaby context.

Best practice examples

- Zetland Park [See reference 134] is an important open space serving the community of Grangemouth, incorporating sports provision, a pavilion, cycle paths, historical features and orchard and a café. Work to restore the park finished in 2022 following funding from the National Lottery. As part of this project, new features including an inclusive play area, naturalised pond, performance stage and human sundial were introduced. Tree planting, wildflower meadows, resurfaced benches and a restored historic fountain were also included.

Next steps

- Undertake appropriate surveys, including of ecological, hydrological and geological baseline conditions to understand existing species and any sensitivities or constraints on the existing sites.
- Undertake public engagement and collaborate with local community groups to identify a vision for the future park. This should include a broad range of participants, including of different ages and backgrounds.
- Explore opportunities to work with local businesses to identify opportunities for commercial activities within the park, to improve the financial sustainability of the project.

Incorporation in Local Plan

- This opportunity could be integrated as part of development adjacent to, or in proximity of, the proposed park. This includes:
 - Site reference STO025; and
 - Site reference STO026

Priority Project 6: Hedgerow network enhancement

Vision

In conjunction with site-specific hedgerow creation, launch a district-wide programme to restore and enhance hedgerow networks. Hedgerow networks within the District will be appropriately connected and will boast native species such as hawthorn, blackthorn and field maple. Hedgerow trees will be dispersed throughout lines of hedgerow where possible and appropriate, to provide additional habitat for species like bats and birds. Strategic hedgerow planting will connect isolated woodlands, wetlands and grasslands, reducing the effects of habitat fragmentation and increasing overall ecological resilience across the rural landscape. Development of the hedgerow network will increase the provision of historic field boundaries, celebrating and enhancing landscape character across the project area. Long term management practices will focus on traditional coppicing or hedge laying to promote natural regrowth and provide suitable habitat for a wide range of species. As an initial step, focus on the project could start within Thurlaston Rolling Hills LCT.

Scale: Medium (5 -10 years)

Indicative cost: Medium (£250,000 - £1 million) to high (>£1 million) dependent on number of hedgerow trees and extent of new planting.

Why is this intervention needed?

- Hedgerows are critical linear habitats that connect fragmented landscapes and provide important resources for a wide range of species, from birds and bats to pollinators and small mammals. However, the UK has seen significant declines in hedgerow length and quality due to agricultural intensification and urban development.
- Restoring and extending hedgerows is a key opportunity for enhancing landscape-scale connectivity in Blaby, particularly in peri-urban and agricultural areas where habitat fragmentation is a major issue.
- Some opportunities proposed (e.g. intervillage footpath network, Glen Parva to Cosby green route, Aston Firs, Burbage Wood and Burbage Common connections) include hedgerow restoration or creation.
- The Thurlaston Rolling Hills LCA has been identified as a priority location for this opportunity as GBI mapping suggests there is a gap in GBI provision in this part of the District. The District's Landscape Character Assessment identifies that loss of field boundaries and hedgerows is a key threat within this LCA.

Key actions

- Strategic planting of hedgerow within agricultural land to improve habitat connectivity between wooded areas, grassland and wetlands, particularly in areas visible from settlement edges. The project should target locations where vegetation cover is minimal and/or loss is evident, subject to the results of a site audit. Consider potential synergies with the proposed use of GI outlined in other projects to mitigate air pollution.
- Encourage a varied age range of planting, including young (1.5 – 4.0m tall) and middle aged (4.0-10.0m tall) trees to ensure a range of developmental stages and improve resiliency as well as reduce noise pollution in high traffic areas.
- Species selection should create diverse hedgerows, offering a longer blossom sequence and supporting pollinators from early spring until

autumn. Native species should be prioritised, whilst considering the requirement for species to be resilient within changing climates.

Potential delivery partners

- Leicestershire County Council;
- Site developers;
- District Councils;
- Environment Agency;
- Woodland Trust;
- Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust;
- Landowners and stakeholders; and
- Local community and Community 'Wombles' Groups.

Delivery mechanisms

- DEFRA Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) **[See reference 135]**:
 - Countryside Stewardship programme;
 - Natural Flood Management programme;
 - Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI); and
 - Landscape Recovery.
- Integrated within masterplanning for new developments, as well as Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Charitable trusts (e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund) **[See reference 136]**;
- Woodland Trust funding (e.g. MOREhedges funding scheme) **[See reference 137]**; and
- Local authority environmental funding.

Best practice guidance

- The Blaby Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment [\[See reference 138\]](#) sets out key characteristics of different character areas. These key characteristics, and accompanying guidance on development and forces for change. This should be used as a starting point for identifying key areas where hedgerow restoration is the biggest priority and where a sense of openness should be maintained.
- More detailed guidance specific to hedgerow creation and management is provided by a number of sources:
 - The Hedgerow Regulations outline best practices for hedgerow management and creation, which is key for maintaining connectivity between habitats [\[See reference 139\]](#).
 - DEFRA's Hedgerow Survey Handbook provides detailed guidance on undertaking hedgerow surveys including why surveying is valuable, approaches to surveying, what surveys should focus on recording, and how to analyse findings [\[See reference 140\]](#).
- The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 – A Guide to the Law and Good Practice published by DEFRA also provides valuable guidance on the protection, removal and replacement of hedgerows [\[See reference 141\]](#). Guidance on the creation of ecological corridors should help guide hedgerow restoration to maximise the ecological benefits associated with this project.
 - The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust provides specific guidance on habitat creation for local species and how to manage corridors to maximise biodiversity including for hedgerows [\[See reference 142\]](#).
 - Natural England's handbook on creating a Nature Network offers guidance on enhancing ecological networks, including hedgerows, that allow wildlife to thrive and cope with climate change [\[See reference 143\]](#).
- For ensuring the long term success of hedgerow creation, the Forestry Commission has produced a resource for identifying specific pests and

diseases. It outlines the types of pests and diseases, the damage they create and ways to mitigate these issues [See reference 144].

Best practice examples

- In Horden, a recent project at White Lea Farm, Easington and Cotsford Fields [See reference 145] successfully diversified the landscape through hedgerow enhancement initiatives. Over 40,000 mixed hedgerow trees and shrub species were planted across 8.2km of rural land to support SSSI connectivity, increase biodiversity and carbon sequestration, and prevent soil erosion. Stock proof fencing was used, and local context was considered when planning planting locations to ensure important views towards the Durham SSSI coastline were retained.
- The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) *Hedgerow Havens* project [See reference 146] aided conservation efforts for wildlife across Aylesbury and supported a site-specific scale project at The Field at Rectory Farm in Weedon. The project was focussed on improving the quality of linear habitats, including planting of 260m of new hedgerow within the one-hectare farm. Mechanical hedge-laying of existing hedgerow was carried out to mitigate the effects of Dutch Elm disease. This technique was favoured over traditional hedge-laying for the project to ensure woody material was retained *in situ*, creating a protective barrier for wildlife living within the hedges. Other linear habitats, such as street verges, were considered in conjunction with hedgerows when choosing planting locations, to provide a diverse and well-connected landscape.

Next Steps

- Identify landholders and commercial partners and engage with potential stakeholders and undertake comprehensive engagement with landowners, stakeholders, the local community and potential delivery partners to generate support for the project and secure any necessary permissions.

- Conduct an audit of existing provision to identify priority areas and presence of any diseased or stressed trees that require removal and replacement.
- Consideration should be given to whether any permissions or consents should be acquired.
- Feasibility and ecological surveys should be undertaken to ascertain areas best suited for intervention, including appropriate species selection. This should include the extent and condition of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- A management / maintenance plan (60 months) should be prepared to promote successful establishment.

Incorporation in Local Plan

- This project can be incorporated into development, particularly around Kirby Muxloe, Leicester Forest East, and Huncote within the Thurlaston Rolling Hills LCT. This includes:
 - Site reference KMU025;
 - Site reference LFE020;
 - Site reference LUB002; and
 - Site reference HUN019.

Priority Project 7: Greening employment proposals

Vision

Large-scale employment sites within the District are integrated into the wider landscape and support the healthy functioning of the environment, including carbon sequestration and water storage. Green features within these sites provide important ecological corridors to support the movement of species through the wider landscape. Open spaces offer opportunities for employees to access nature and create shaded, quiet areas of rest away from noise and air pollution.

Scale: Medium-term (10+ years)

Indicative cost: Low cost (up to £250,000). This includes the additional cost incurred by the developer to integrate green solutions as part of the large scale developments.

Why is this intervention needed?

- This intervention builds on some of the criteria set out in the Checklist for Development (**Chapter 6**), with an explicit focus on the needs of larger scale, development, including for employment.
- Offers the opportunity to mitigate some of the impacts of large-scale development. Guidance provided in this opportunity will help employment development meet the proposed Standards, including the Urban Greening Factor standard set out in this Strategy.

Key actions:

- Understand the existing ecological, hydrological and cultural baseline of the site, as well as wider environmental, social and economic challenges of the surrounding area. These should feed into a vision for GBI within the development and underpin the masterplan. New development should be well integrated into the landscape and reflects the local context.
- Explore options for integrating key building blocks of GBI into the development. This can include green roofs, green walls, sustainable drainage systems, street trees, ecological corridors, including dark corridors, green spaces, historic features and natural habitats. These should be planned to integrate the development within the landscape and provide connectivity through the site.
- Consider movement of people through the development as well as access to the site. Provision for active travel options should be considered, including traffic free routes and provision of cycle parking. Car parking should include areas of vegetation to provide shading and, where appropriate, permeable paving should be considered.

Potential delivery partners

- Developers;
- Blaby District Council; and
- Businesses and employers (particularly for ongoing management and maintenance).

Delivery mechanisms

- On-site Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Developer contributions;
- Contributions to ongoing management and maintenance from businesses and employers.

Best practice guidance

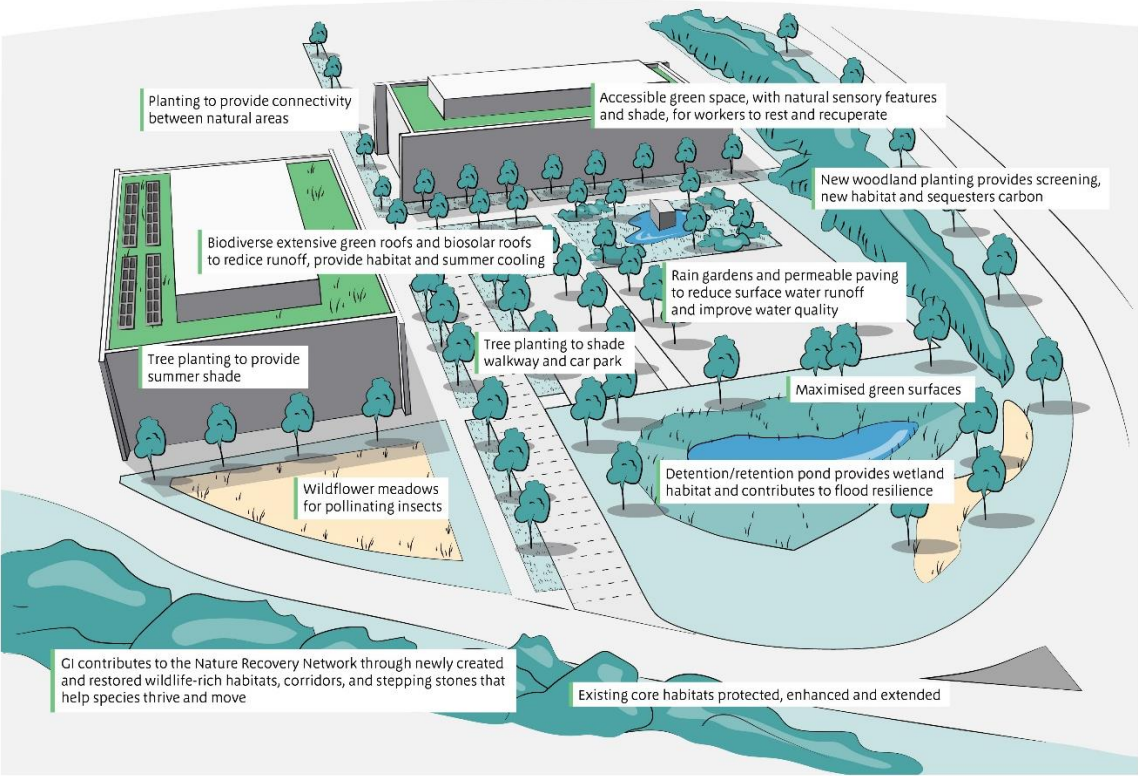
- The start point for any development should consider the guidance set out in the Blaby Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment [\[See reference 147\]](#). This provides guidance and opportunities for development within each of the different character areas. This includes guidance on setting in relation to topography and elevation, impact on key views, and integration with existing vegetation.
- The Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide [\[See reference 148\]](#) provides advice on how to plan, design, deliver and manage good quality green infrastructure within development. It identifies 10 key components of place: context, identity, built form, movement, nature, public spaces, uses, homes and buildings, resources, and lifespan. In addition, it provides summaries of the different building blocks of GBI and how these can be incorporated into development. Pages 115 – 188 are specifically tailored for delivering GBI within commercial, business and industrial sites.
- Building with Nature [\[See reference 149\]](#) offers an accreditation to verify where high-quality green infrastructure has been delivered. The accreditation process also helps developers and other stakeholders move through the planning process. The guidance includes the standards as set out in this Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- The GRO Green Roof Code [\[See reference 150\]](#) provides information on the different types of green roof, management and delivery considerations for each, and the different types of benefits they supply. This guide also provides information on good design to ensure delivery of high quality green roofs.
- Guidance on urban tree planting includes the Forest Research’s Urban Tree Manual [\[See reference 151\]](#). This manual provides guidance through the process from initial locating of trees, through to planting, establishment and management. In addition, the Tree Design and Action Group also provides guidance, including high level guidance on urban trees [\[See reference 152\]](#) and guidance on species selection [\[See reference 153\]](#). In addition, there is dedicated guidance to providing trees within new developments, including the importance of retaining existing trees [\[See reference 154\]](#).

- CIRIA's SuDS manual [See reference 155] is available provides the best practice guidance on SuDS, offering support for the most cost-effective SuDS solution to delivery multiple benefits. High level guidance on the importance of managing water within urban environments is also provided by the Trees Design and Action Group [See reference 156].
- In addition to the guidance also provided here, the Trees Design and Action Group provide introductory guidance on managing urban environments for a range of features including air quality and urban heat [See reference 157].

Best practice examples

- Integrating high quality GBI into employment proposals is still an emerging practice, and there are few best practice examples. The GI Planning and Design Guide provides an illustration of how this kind of development might look. This is shown in **Figure 8.1** can be used as inspiration for this project.

Figure 8.1: Example GBI within commercial, business and industrial sites



- The mixed use ‘World of Water’ development in Romsey, Hampshire achieved a Building with Nature Full Award [See reference 158]. The project involved a redevelopment of a former aquarium and pond supplies business, adjacent to Fishlake Meadows Nature Reserve and the River Test SSSI. The development aimed to reconnect the development both physically and visually to the surrounding landscape, as well as improve accessibility for local communities to the nature reserve. GBI features within the development include vegetated green roofs and walls, permeable surfaces, rain gardens, dark corridors, multi-use species habitats and a Kitchen Garden with fruit trees for the onsite café.

Next steps

- Engage with viability consultants to understand the implication of these interventions on employment development in Blaby. Following from this, identify appropriate funding mechanisms to deliver high-quality, biodiverse and sustainable development.
- Create a Design Guide for the local authority as a means of harnessing high-quality developments which are sensitive to the landscape, ecological and hydrological settings and create a strong sense of place.

Incorporation in Local Plan

- This project can be incorporated into a number of large scale developments. These sites include
 - Site reference WHE027;
 - Site reference WHE031;
 - Site reference STO026;
 - Site reference GLE032;
 - GLE031; and
 - EAST001.

Appendix A

Policy context

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024)

A.1 The NPPF (updated December 2024) [See reference 159] emphasises the importance of placing GBI at the heart of plan making, reinforcing the value of taking a strategic approach to maintain and enhance networks of GI, and planning for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries (Paragraph 188). GI is identified as a tool to help meet the challenge of climate change, notably in relation to incorporating GI and sustainable drainage within new development (Paragraph 164) and to promote healthy, inclusive and safe communities (Paragraph 96).

A.2 Paragraph 103 of the NPPF states that ‘access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and wellbeing of communities and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative and qualitative deficits and surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.

Appendix A Policy context

A.3 Paragraph 104 states that: 'existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields and formal play spaces, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use'.

A.4 The NPPF also provides a mechanism by which local authorities can protect some open spaces through 'Local Green Space' designations (Paragraph 107). These areas should be managed by policies which are consistent with those for Green Belt.

Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023)

A.5 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act received Royal Assent in October 2023, resulting in significant changes to the planning system, as outlined below:

- Requirements for design codes to accompany Local Plans;
- Strengthening protection of the historic environment through the planning system, including giving registered parks and gardens the same statutory protection as conservation areas; and
- Placing more weight on neighbourhood plans in decision making.

Environment Improvement Plan (EIP) (2023)

A.6 The EIP builds on the 25 Year Environment Plan vision and sets out how government, landowners, communities and businesses can deliver goals for improving the environment, aligned with interim targets to measure progress.

A.7 The delivery of GBI contributes to the delivery of several of the updated targets set out in the EIP. These include:

- Restoring and enhancing habitats;
- Improving air quality by tackling NO₂ hotspots;
- Contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- Reducing flood risk;
- Meeting greenspace access targets ensuring everyone has access to greenspace within a 15-minute walk of their home; and
- Improving active travel and increasing the number of journeys cycled or walked to 50%.

Environment Act (2021)

A.8 The Environment Act requires the development of targets by government to enact change, and drive a landscape-scale, network-led response. The Act addresses four 'priority areas' of air quality, water, biodiversity and resource efficiency / waste reduction. The legislation also outlines the requirement for a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (Biodiversity Net Gain). In addition, the Act includes a duty on local authorities to review every five years all policies regarding nature conservation.

UK 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) (2018)

A.9 The 2018 25YEP sets the direction for the Environment Act, including long-term targets for environmental improvement. It includes a commitment to a national GI framework, a network of ‘nature recovery areas’ and to embed the principle of ‘environmental net gain’ to development (see later subheadings). These emerging approaches will become established during the lifespan of this Strategy. The 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan builds on the 25YEP vision, setting out how government, landowners, communities and businesses should deliver each goal for improving the environment. This is matched with interim targets to measure progress.

Regional Policy

Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan

A.10 The Strategic Growth Plan is the overarching non-statutory plan which sets out the aspirations for delivering growth in Leicester and Leicestershire until 2050. This document also includes priorities for the protection of Leicester and Leicestershire’s environmental assets.

A.11 Specific guidelines relating to GBI include:

- Balancing the need for new housing and jobs with protection of environment and built heritage;
- Maintaining the distinctive qualities of Leicester and Leicestershire and delivering high quality development; and
- Focusing of development in strategic locations to ensure improved planning for infrastructure, including integrated open space and GBI.

Leicestershire Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study

A.12 This Study highlights Leicestershire's green assets, including opportunities to protect and enhance GBI within the county.

A.13 The following opportunities for GBI in the District are identified:

- Advocates for an attractive accessible pedestrian / cycle route from Blaby along the Whetstone Brook and south to join the Leicester Round footpath at Willoughby Waterleys;
- Notes opportunities to project and enhance ecological corridors through woodland and wetland creation, strengthening the hedgerow network; and
- Provides a landscape character assessment for Lutterworth Lowlands and Upper Soar.

Leicestershire Environment Strategy 2018 – 2030: Delivering a better future (2020)

A.14 This Strategy sets out Leicestershire County Council's vision, aims, objectives and targets for driving improved environmental performance in response to the current climate emergency. The scope of the document covers both the Council's own operations and also where it has control and influence within the county of Leicestershire.

A.15 There are specific aims, objectives and outcomes related to the creation, protection, enhancement and management of GBI in Leicestershire. These include:

- Projects aimed at increasing green spaces in urban areas and improving biodiversity on Council managed land;
- Aims to enhance GBI for improved health and wellbeing benefits;

Appendix A Policy context

- Seeks to manage water pollution and commits to the Council's legal responsibility to do so;
- Strategies to enhance resilience to climate change through GBI; and
- Seeks to protect and enhance Leicestershire's natural assets including the National Forest and Charnwood Forest.

6Cs Green Infrastructure Strategy (2010)

A.16 This Strategy provides an evidence base of data and information for the regional context. The document is comprised of a strategic framework and action plan.

A.17 The '6Cs' refer to the 3 cities and 3 counties that make up the study area:

- Derby;
- Leicester;
- Nottingham;
- Derbyshire;
- Leicestershire; and
- Nottinghamshire.

A.18 The document identifies existing GBI assets and the strategic infrastructure needs of Blaby, including for several typologies of open space. In addition, it identifies opportunities for enhancing connectivity of the natural greenspace network across Leicestershire to create a Strategic GBI Network.

A.19 Particular targets set out which GBI can help achieve are detailed below:

- Restoring 100 hectares of plantation on ancient woodland Sites (PAWS);
- Creating 100 hectares of new broadleaved ancient woodland;

Appendix A Policy context

- Encouraging the use of green spaces and natural areas to enhance community cohesion and physical and mental health;
- Delivery of the National Forest Biodiversity Action Plan which aims to restore wood pasture and parkland;
- Creating opportunities for local employment in conservation and management;
- Promoting initiatives to restore water quality in existing lakes and the creation / restoration of 100 ponds; and
- Enhancing the management of existing habitats and creating new habitats that can withstand climate change.

Leicestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (emerging)

A.20 Recent policy developments highlight the critical role of resilient ecosystems in both facilitating nature recovery and supporting economic well-being. The introduction of the Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), align with the goals set out in the 2021 Environment Act. These initiatives will bring together various LPAs to collectively address the biodiversity duty and foster a cohesive approach to nature recovery. LNRSs will play a central role in shaping the policies of the emerging Local Plan, thereby ensuring that nature conservation is deeply embedded in development planning.

A.21 Leicestershire County Council is the Responsible Authority for the Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland LNRS. Due to the cross-boundary nature of the strategy and network, it is expected that the District will play a significant role in the joined-up effort to create an interconnected landscape that is ecologically resilient, connected and species-rich. Key strategies, such as catchment management and Living Landscape initiatives, are already in progress through collaborative efforts by the lead partners, further reinforcing the foundation for comprehensive nature recovery.

A.22 Emerging LNRS data, particularly the areas identified through species connectivity modelling, will inform future actions in Blaby. These areas, once ground-truthed, will be key to overcoming barriers to species movement and should be incorporated into this Study. Additionally, climate resilience is a key consideration in the LNRS. Nature-based solutions (NbS), such as woodland planting and sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS), will be prioritised in target areas to address both flood risk and air quality issues. These interventions align with existing climate and flood strategies, helping to mitigate climate change impacts in the District.

A.23 The public consultation for the LNRS will end by March 2025, with final approval expected by July 2025. This evolving timeline means that the data used in this Study should be treated as emerging and subject to potential adjustments, particularly after public consultation feedback. As the LNRS evolves, further detailed guidance on habitat enhancement measures, particularly for grasslands and hedgerows, will be provided. This Study should be adaptable to reflect these updates, particularly in areas where opportunities for species movement and habitat creation align with LNRS priorities. In future reviews of this Study, the published LNRS should be fully integrated to ensure a cohesive approach to nature recovery across the District

Local Policy

Blaby Adopted Local Plan – Core Strategy (2013) and Delivery Development Plan Document (2019)

A.24 The current adopted Local Plan sets out the ‘spatial plan’ for the District. The following policies of relevance to GBI are listed below:

Appendix A Policy context

- CS1: Strategy for Locating New Development. This ensures that new developments create high-quality environments that are attractive to businesses and investors.
- CS14: Green Infrastructure (GI). This promotes the provision and enhancement of green spaces and routes that support active lifestyles and community cohesion, as well as including provision for sustainable water management practices.
- CS15: Open Space, Sport and Recreation. This ensures the protection and provision of open spaces, sport and recreational facilities to promote physical and mental well-being.
- CS18: Countryside. This seeks to limit development that would significantly adversely affect the appearance or character of the landscape in the designated area.
- CS 19: Biodiversity and geodiversity. This aims to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, supporting the recovery of nature across the District.
- CS21: Climate Change. This focuses on adapting to climate change, meeting zero carbon targets and ensuring resilient GBI.
- CS22: Flood Risk Management. This addresses the reduction of flood risk and promotes Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

Blaby District Corporate Action Plan

A.25 This Plan is an internal document that sets out the Council's future priorities and objectives. The Plan actively promotes the enhancement and maintenance of Blaby's natural environment through the integration and promotion of GBI principles. This includes preparation for the implementation of national legislation on BNG, evaluating Council land for the feasibility of delivering BNG opportunities and assessing viability of BNG habitat bank potential.

A.26 There are a number of aims and ambitions set out within this that can help deliver GBI. These are listed below:

- Seeks to ensure the delivery of a new strategy, with the vision of ensuring that parks and open spaces are sustainable, high quality, accessible and continue to provide value to people, place and nature.
- Aims to develop a 'walk and ride strategy' and a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which provides evidence of routes for improvement, promoting opportunities for active travel in the District.
- Aims to develop a programme of initiatives to support businesses within the green economy sector.
- States that the Council aims to reduce its carbon emissions to 'Net Zero' by 31st March 2030.

Blaby District Plan 2024- 2028

A.27 This Plan acts as a roadmap for future planning of the District. It is an inclusive document that involves residents, businesses, the voluntary sector, communities and partner organisations.

A.28 This outlines five strategic themes that will guide all the Council's work. These are listed below:

- Enabling our communities and supporting our vulnerable residents;
- Enhancing and maintaining our natural and built environment;
- Growing and supporting our economy;
- Keeping you self and healthy; and
- Ambitious and well managed council, valuing our people.

Blaby Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment

A.29 This Assessment provides the context for policies and allocations within the emerging Local Plan (at the time of publishing) and acts as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. Understanding the character of place is a key part of ensuring the protection and enhancement of the built and natural environments, managing sustainable economic growth and improving the health and wellbeing of local communities.

A.30 Within the document, areas of GBI are highlighted, which provide a number of benefits. These are listed below:

- Fosse Meadows Nature Area and Soar Meadows are noted as areas with significant ecological value, featuring wetland species;
- Mossdale Meadows, Osiers Nature Area and Shakespeare Park provide facilities for sports and recreation promoting physical activity;
- Green spaces in urban settings, such as at Thorpe Astley provide a suite of multi-functional benefits; and
- The River Soar and its tributaries contribute to local flood management.

A.31 In addition, the assessment sets out a number of recommendations and opportunities for future GBI, as listed below:

- Native species should be used to improve connectivity between habitats;
- Integration of GBI within new developments;
- Enhancement of existing wetland habitats through the creation of wetlands and reed beds which improve water quality and provide natural filtration.
- Deliver climate adaptation strategies, such as promoting native woodland species that are resilient to climate change and ensuring that GBI is designed for long-term resilience.

Climate Change Strategy (2022 – 2030)

A.32 This document sets out the Council’s response to the climate emergency by promoting climate change mitigation and adaptation.

A.33 The report contains a number of aims of relevance to GBI, as listed below:

- Aim 2: Protecting the Environment. This includes creating space for nature and improving biodiversity, as well as providing community benefits through natural solutions.
- Aim 3: Travel and Transport. This includes an aim to promote a sustainable travel network, including active travel opportunities.
- Aim 5: Sustainable Communities. This includes providing access to greenspace close to homes, mitigating the impacts of development and encouraging communities to create, protect and manage local GI and biodiversity.

A.34 In particular, the following actions and considerations are of relevance to GBI:

- Relationship between climate emergency and ecological emergency;
- Promotion of active travel and improving air quality to make walking and cycling for travel more attractive options.
- Improvements to parks, open spaces and public rights of way are included within aims to protect the natural environment.
- Need for sustainable communities, including neighbourhoods which offer good access to promote local services and businesses.
- Identified risks to the water environment associated with flooding.

Blaby Active Travel Strategy

A.35 This document sets out a vision for active travel within the district to transform the transport network and focus on created safe, direct, attractive and coherent routes between places. Within this, there is a vision to end the dominance of the car and provide real opportunities for mass active travel. Whilst not explicitly mentioned, there is a clear opportunity for GBI to be integrated within new active travel routes.

Economic Development Framework

A.36 This is a strategic framework which sets out the vision, overarching objectives and priority areas to provide a strong and prosperous local economy which supports residents, businesses and communities, as well as attracting new investments. The vision within this framework highlights the need to create a great place to live and work, with a strong economy. The need for this to be delivered in a green and environmentally friendly manner is highlighted.

A.37 In particular, two of the five priority themes emphasise GBI:

- Building Pride in Place. This highlights the role of tourism and the need to improve sense of place. GBI can be important in contributing to this sense of pride in place.
- Supporting the Green Economy. This includes initiatives to meet the demand for low carbon, including through carbon credits.

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (POSS) 2024 – 2034

A.38 This document sets out guidance on the provision and management of parks and open spaces across Blaby. There is a particular emphasis on the

Appendix A Policy context

multiple functions and benefits that parks and open spaces can provide. This embodies the key principle of multi-functionality within GBI.

A.39 A number of the objectives within the document align with provision of GBI within Blaby, as listed below:

- Objective 3 outlines how open spaces should be considered for future BNG, as needed;
- Objective 5 highlights that management of parks and open spaces should contribute to the Council's 2030 net zero target;
- Objective 6 notes that parks and open spaces should be easily accessible, including by walking and riding, providing links to active travel;
- Objective 7 sets out the need to consider how parks and open spaces can be managed to enhance biodiversity and wildlife;
- Objective 8 aims to maximise the use of community spaces for recreational and commercial opportunities; and
- Objective 9 seeks to ensure that parks are financially sustaining.

Neighbourhood Policy

A.40 Several communities within the District have adopted neighbourhood plans. These documents reflect community wide views, comments, observations, concerns and ambitions about the future of the individual settlement, in the context of local and national planning requirements.

Blaby Neighbourhood Plan (2018)

A.41 The document considers the important issue of maintaining and enhancing existing areas of green space, such as land adjoining Hospital Lane and the Green Wedge. It also states that Bouskell Park, which is a public park owned by the Council is highlighted as an important green space in Blaby.

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A.42 The importance of GBI in sustaining Blaby's rural heritage is also highlighted, stating that the green environment, especially the open areas, parks and the Green Wedge, are key to ensuring the heritage's protection and enhancement.

A.43 Design objectives for new development set out the need for new open space with provision for pond creation and tree planting.

A.44 The following policies are particularly relevant to the provision of GBI in Blaby:

- BNP4: Local Green Space, which highlights the importance of Bouskell Park, the Long Walk and their immediate surroundings for recreation.
- BNP5: Development in Blaby Town Centre, which sets out an objective to integrate open spaces with the town centre and develop a distinctive and marketing image for the town centre, as well as reduce reliance on vehicles and improve provision for pedestrians.

Glenfield Neighbourhood Plan (2022 – 2029)

A.45 The document outlines the benefits and importance of GBI in Glenfield. The community places priority on creating environments that offer green spaces which provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and informal social opportunities. The Plan emphasises the need for such spaces to be acquired or secured for the community and managed to maintain their functions and benefits. This approach is highlighted in the policies contained within the document.

A.46 Of particular relevance to GBI are the policies listed below:

- Policy ENV1: Air Quality. This encourages improvements in air quality, supporting the overall resilience and health of the community by mitigating pollution from transportation.

Appendix A Policy context

- Policy ENV2: Important Open Spaces. This protects 27 open spaces in Glenfield for their value in sport, recreation, amenity and biodiversity. It ensures spaces are not lost or adversely affected by development unless replaced by equivalent or better provision.
- Policy CF7: Walking for Recreation and Amenity. This aims to protect and enhance the network of walking routes in Glenfield, supporting active lifestyles and recreational opportunities. Development proposals affecting these routes must include appropriate mitigation.
- Policy CC1: Flood Risk Resilience. This includes the incorporation of SuDS to manage water sustainably.

Cosby Neighbourhood Plan (2023-2029)

A.47 This document recognises the benefits of GBI in Cosby. Notably, it highlights the role that new development has in encouraging the enhancement of biodiversity, including how GBI can promote habitat enhancement. The Plan also seeks to safeguard important community facilities, including parks and areas for recreation. This approach is highlighted in the policies contained within the document.

A.48 Of particular relevance to GBI are the policies listed below:

- Policy CNDP3: Design Principles. This encourages development proposals to maintain and enhance biodiversity. It includes the incorporation of bird nest boxes, bat roosting sites, and the retention of trees and hedgerows. In addition this policy encourages the use of SuDS to manage water sustainably.
- Policy CNDP 6: Protection of Existing Community Facilities and Local Shops. This emphasises safeguarding and improving community facilities such as parks and recreation areas, promoting physical and mental health.

Fosse Villages Neighbourhood Plan (2018-2029)

A.49 This document recognises the benefits of GBI in Fosse Villages. It highlights the role of GBI in enhancing the local environment and promoting biodiversity. The plan discusses the role of GBI in supporting active lifestyles by providing green spaces and opportunities for informal recreation. This approach is highlighted in the policies contained within the document.

A.50 Of particular relevance to GBI are the policies listed below:

- Policy FV4: Biodiversity: This promotes biodiversity by protecting and enhancing wildlife corridors, maintaining natural habitats and supporting species diversity.
- Policy FV5: Local Green Spaces: This designates and protects local green spaces for their beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity and richness of wildlife.

Leicester Forest East Neighbourhood Plan

A.51 This document recognises the benefits of GBI in Leicester Forest East. It highlights the role of GBI in enhancing the local environment and promoting biodiversity through the creation and safeguarding of important habitats. The Plan discusses the role of GBI in supporting active lifestyles by providing green spaces and opportunities for informal recreation, including new footpaths and cycleways.

A.52 Of particular relevance to GBI are the policies listed below:

- Policy ENV3 Biodiversity and Wildlife Corridors: This seeks to safeguard locally significant habitats and species and where possible seeks to create new habitats for wildlife.

Appendix A Policy context

- Policy CF2: New or Improved Community Facilities: This advocates for community facilities and a network of footpaths and cycle ways to link facilities together and make them more accessible. This also promotes active travel, improving opportunities for residents and visitors to lead active and healthy lifestyles.

Appendix B

Natural England GI Standards - additional detail

Table B.1: Size - proximity accessible greenspace standards

No.	Category of Accessible Greenspace	Actual walking distance	Name of criterion	Accessible Natural Greenspace	Size criteria (minimum)	Approximate walking / cycling time
1a	Small greenspace close to home: either a Doorstep or Local Greenspace	200m	Doorstep Greenspace	No	0.5 hectares	Less than 5 minutes
1b	As above	300m	Local Natural Greenspace	Yes	2 hectares	5 minutes
2	Medium sized greenspace within 1km	1km	Neighbourhood Natural Greenspace	Yes	10 hectares	15 minutes
3	Medium large Greenspace within 2km	2km	Wider Neighbourhood Natural Greenspace	Yes	20 hectares	35 minutes
4	Large greenspace within 5km from home	5km	District Natural Greenspace	Yes	100 hectares	15 – 20 minutes cycling from home
5	Very large greenspace within 10km from home	10km	Sub-regional Natural Greenspace	Yes	500 hectares	30 – 40 minutes cycling from home

Overview of Headline Standards in the NEGIF

Tier 1

Description: Headline Standards

Purpose

- The five Headline Standards in the NEGIF guide the quantity, accessibility / proximity, capacity, function and quality of GI. Used together, they help to deliver the five 'What' Principles, which in turn will help the resulting GI to deliver the main five 'Why' Principles (benefits).
- The Headline Standards are for use by local planning authorities and other stakeholders informed by local knowledge and evidence to:
 - undertake initial GI planning exercises, e.g. develop a vision for local GI and understanding of current GI provision, needs and priorities;
 - set key local GI targets; and
 - monitor and evaluate GI provision.

Appendix C

Policy review checklist

C.1 This policy review is based on work with Local Planning Authorities as part of the rollout of the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework (NEGIF). The checklist should be consulted to ensure policies incorporate the principles and standards of the NEGIF.

Context

C.2 Has the LPA assembled evidence of key local GBI deficiencies and needs (e.g. access to greenspace, support active travel, flood risk reduction, nature recovery) and opportunities? What are these?

NEGIF principles

C.3 Are the 'What' principles listed in the NEGIF covered in policy (Multi-functional, varied, connected, accessible and responsive to an area's landscape / character)?

NEGIF standards

C.4 Has use of the five Headline Standards in the NEGIF been considered? Make clear these are voluntary and that targets should be set based on local evidence. Different targets may be appropriate for different geographical areas due to considerations such as character and feasibility of delivery.

- GBI Strategy Standard;
- Accessible Greenspace Standard;

Appendix C Policy review checklist

- Urban Nature Recovery Standard;
- Urban Greening Factor Standard; and
- Urban Tree Canopy Standard.

C.5 Has long-term stewardship of GBI been covered in the policy? This should be discussed at the earliest stages of design, to ensure GBI benefits are maintained. Maintenance arrangements, responsibilities and long-term funding arrangements must be clearly defined as part of planning applications. The GI Strategy Standard indicates that GI delivered within (or associated with) major new developments should be managed, maintained and monitored for a minimum of 30 years. Using management companies and service charge levies as a way of funding is a common way of delivering ongoing maintenance. Models such as partnerships with the Land Trust or other charitable or community-led body could also be explored.

Wider good practice advice regarding policy development

C.6 Has GBI policy been ‘mainstreamed’ through vision / objectives and wider policies in the Local Plan (e.g. regeneration, climate change and health and wellbeing)? This will allow GBI to move outside any environmental policy ‘silo’ and interact with other agendas - including health, economic, and social policy areas.

C.7 Has the LPA considered the balance between strategic area-wide policies and more site specific policies? Ideally site allocation policies would provide more detail on site-specific GBI requirements. It may also be appropriate to define different requirements or targets for different character areas within a strategic policy.

C.8 Has the LPA defined a clear process for considering GBI as part of scheme design (including engagement with key expert stakeholders) and what

information should be submitted as part of the planning application process, taking into account linked policies such as BNG, SuDS, trees, landscape proposals and open space. The NEGIF suggests a 'GBI plan' is submitted for all major developments, potentially integrated into their design and access statement. However, it will be important to align information requirements for related issues e.g. Biodiversity Gain Plans (which will be required for those developments having to deliver BNG); local requirements for landscaping plans etc – to avoid requiring overlapping and duplicative documentation.

Design guidance

C.9 Has the LPA considered developing design guidance on GBI to supplement the GBI policy and make clear 'what good looks like' and how GBI can help to meet wider policy requirements. Inevitably, there may be some tensions between designing for different GBI functions (e.g. access vs biodiversity), but the combination of policy and guidance can encourage design teams to seek synergies where possible and identify trade-offs where necessary.

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Bristol

12th Floor, Beacon Tower, Colston Street, Bristol BS1 4XE
0117 929 1997
bristol@landuse.co.uk

Cardiff

16A, 15th Floor, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Rd, Cardiff CF24 0EB
0292 032 9006
cardiff@landuse.co.uk

Edinburgh

Atholl Exchange, 6 Canning Street, Edinburgh EH3 8EG
0131 202 1616
edinburgh@landuse.co.uk

Glasgow

37 Otago Street, Glasgow G12 8JJ
0141 334 9595
glasgow@landuse.co.uk

London

250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD
020 7383 5784
london@landuse.co.uk

Manchester

6th Floor, 55 King Street, Manchester M2 4LQ
0161 537 5960
manchester@landuse.co.uk

Sheffield

32 Eyre Street, Sheffield, S1 4QZ
0114 392 2366
sheffield@landuse.co.uk

landuse.co.uk

Landscape Design / Strategic Planning & Assessment / Transport Planning
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