

Natural England - National Character Area (NCA) 93

The full NCA Profile is 51 pages long. This appendix extracts only the introductory summary, location map and Statement of Environmental Opportunities. The full document is easily found on the Natural England website.

NCA Profile: 93 High Leicestershire (NE497)

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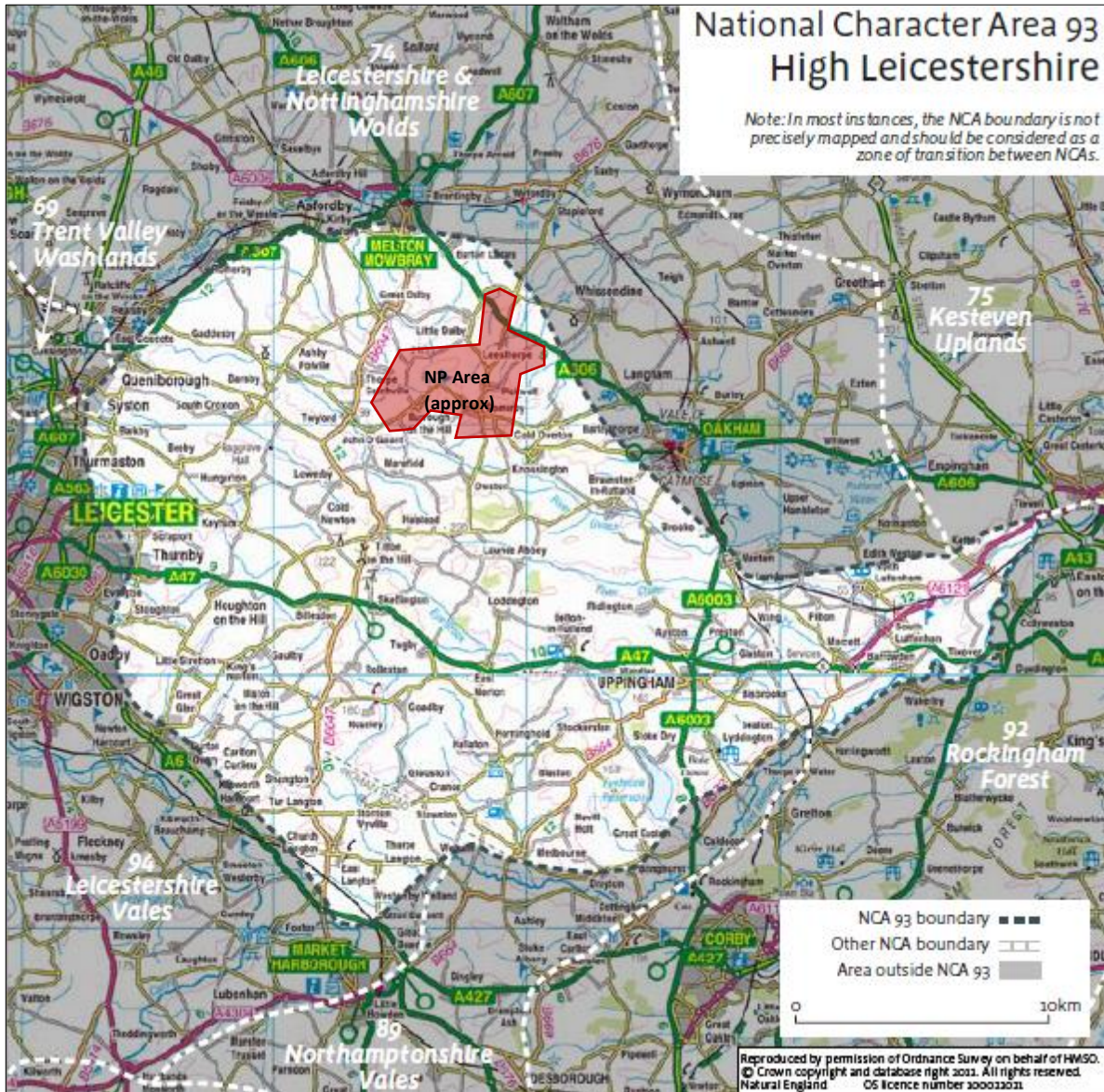
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Summary

High Leicestershire National Character Area (NCA) rises out of the clay of the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Vales on the western and southern sides and above the lowland plains of the Soar, Wreake and Welland valleys and the Vale of Belvoir. To the north and east the area abuts the Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds NCA, rising steeply out of the Wreake Valley, but with a more gradual transition towards the Vale of Catmose and Rutland Water towards the east over limestone lowlands. This landscape of broad, rolling ridges and secluded valleys has a quiet, remote and rural character with small villages and scattered farms. The predominantly rural character of the area comprises undulating fields with a mix of pasture on the higher, sloping land and arable farming on the lower, flatter land. Fields are divided by well-established hedgerows, with occasional mature hedgerow trees. A network of narrow country lanes, tracks and footpaths connect across the landscape interspersed by small thickets, copses and woodlands. Extensive views from the higher ground reveal a pattern of small attractive villages, hamlets and farm buildings set within an agricultural landscape, with traditional churches acting as distinctive features of the settlements.

Only a very small percentage of the NCA is classified as 'urban': the eastern edge of Leicester (including the suburbs of Thurmaston, Syston and Queniborough) and Uppingham, the only market town in the area, located close to the A47 which cuts horizontally across the middle of the NCA. The A6003 and B6047 provide the major north-south routes.

Location: NCA 93 and Neighbourhood Plan area



Statement of Environmental Opportunities:

National Character
Area profile:

93: High Leicestershire

Supporting documents

Introduction & Summary

Description

Opportunities

Key facts
and data

Landscape
change

Analysis

Statements of Environmental Opportunity

SEO 1: Protect and appropriately manage the strong visual and historic character of this varied and sparsely settled rural landscape of broad rolling ridges and wide secluded valleys – maintaining the settlement pattern and features of High Leicestershire, in particular its areas and features of archaeological and heritage interest, including the field patterns, ridge and furrow, ancient woodlands, country houses and village churches – to enhance sense of place and history so that the area can be enjoyed by all for its tranquillity.

For example by:

- Protecting and maintaining the long-distance views of historic villages and their prominent church spires and the panoramic vistas across the NCA, enjoyed from the prominent ramparts of Burrough Hill and the centrally elevated plateau around Billesdon and Tilton on the Hill.
- Protecting and maintaining the overall remote, empty, sparsely settled, dispersed rural sense of place, particularly the characteristic small historic villages, hamlets and farmsteads, their setting and their distinctive local vernacular.
- Maintaining and enhancing the strong hedgerow-bounded field pattern and mixed farming regime; the network of quiet green lanes, tracks and gated roads; the distinctive parklands and their veteran trees, ancient and semi-natural woodlands; and the pattern of the many streams and rivers carving through the landscape.
- Conserving more remote areas from inappropriate development by working to ensure that the historic settlement pattern is retained and the relatively high levels of tranquillity are maintained.
- Protecting and maintaining the remnant clusters of medieval woodland within Leighfield Forest at Launde, Knossington and Cold Overton for their significant contribution to nature conservation, historic landscape character and sense of place.
- Protecting and maintaining the fine examples of country houses such as Quenby Hall and Noseley Hall and ensuring sustainable management of their parkland settings, veteran trees and associated medieval features.
- Protecting remaining ridge and furrow, especially where it forms part of almost complete Midland open field systems, which are nationally rare.
- Conserving the character and views from and into historic villages by putting in place or following existing conservation and design guidance which ensures that the locally distinctive vernacular is respected and reflected in new development.
- Maintaining the abundant hedgerow networks and strength of historic and varied field patterns.
- Protecting and enhancing the rural network of quiet, ancient green lanes and often gated rural roads, lanes, deep hedgerows and verges.

Toggle full screen

« Prev

16

Next »

SEO 2: Sustainably manage the moderately fertile soils, arable crops, livestock, grassland, woodlands, coverts and spinneys that contribute to sense of place while maintaining viable food production, enhancing biodiversity networks and encouraging farmland birds and mammals and rarer arable plants.

For example by:

- Managing soils to allow continued sustainable agricultural production by increasing soil organic content and water infiltration, for example use of grass buffers along watercourses and inclusion of fallow in crop rotation.
- Seeking to work with farmers to manage viable food production while encouraging rarer arable plants, farmland birds and mammals and creating grass margins around arable fields.
- Working with landowners and managers to maintain and enhance the woodlands, coverts and spinneys so that there is good provision of local game.
- Encouraging best farming practices to improve soil structure.
- Working with farmers and landowners to encourage well-timed cultivations and access onto land by low pressure machinery and stock to prevent compaction and poaching.
- Working with farmers and landowners to increase the population of pollinators, enabling a more diverse range of crops to be grown in the future and potentially expanding the range of food provision.
- Enhancing and expanding the network of semi-natural habitats that aid the movement of predatory species and bring benefits for pest regulation within food crops, as well as pollination and biodiversity.
- Managing unimproved species-rich grasslands and retaining ridge and furrow for their many functions, including their educational value.



Ridge and furrow with mixed grazing at Hungarton.

Toggle full screen

« Prev

17

Next »

SEO 3: Manage and enhance the recreational assets, such as the rights of way network, country parks such as Burrough Hill and waterbodies such as Eyebrook Reservoir, and improve access to these assets and the open countryside from the city of Leicester and surrounding rural communities, to maintain a sense of place, enhance soil and water quality and have a beneficial effect on people's health and wellbeing.

For example by:

- Extending opportunities for access and recreation along the rights of way network and the quiet green lanes, for example by improving the fragmented bridleway network and through maintaining the integrity of the relatively extensive network of short- and long-distance trails, such as the Leicestershire Round and Macmillan Way.
- Continuing to work with stakeholders to manage Eyebrook Reservoir in a sustainable way so that people can enjoy the site while the benefits for biodiversity, soil and water quality are maintained and enhanced.
- Recognising the recreational use of the landscape and appropriate waterbodies for equestrian and country sports and seeking opportunities to enhance the infrastructure used to support the recreational use of the landscape.
- Maintaining and enhancing the attractiveness of country parks such as Burrough Hill and local nature sites such as Launde Big Wood, offering visitors and local communities opportunities to learn more and get involved with these sites, while enjoying the health and wellbeing benefits afforded by contact with the natural environment.
- Raising awareness of the recreational resources and increasing the number of recreational opportunities by implementing the local green infrastructure strategy to link the city of Leicester with the wider countryside.

SEO 4: Manage, conserve and enhance the woodlands, hedgerows, streams, rivers and field ponds – including the rivers Chater, Gwash and Eye Brook, their tributaries and the Eyebrook Reservoir – to enhance biodiversity and soil quality and improve water quality, flow and availability.

For example by:

- Expanding and managing – in favourable condition and in continuity with watercourses – wetland habitats and semi-natural flood plain habitats and promoting grassland management of flood plains where appropriate.
- Protecting watercourse banks from erosion by preventing direct access by livestock, particularly along the River Chater, and buffering where appropriate with permanent grassland margins.
- Strengthening the density of hedgerows, coppices, coverts and small woodlands and other semi-natural habitats to help impede cross-land flows of floodwaters and enable water infiltration.
- Using the River Welland Catchment Flood Management Plan in order to put in place a more sustainable approach to flood risk management.
- Re-establishing and restoring the characteristic field ponds which traditionally provide secluded wooded wetlands which are focal points in the corners of many clayland fields, particularly in the central and western parts of the NCA.

Toggle full screen

« Prev

18

Next »