

Protected Sites

Sites that are important to nature conservation can have either statutory or non-statutory protection:

'Statutory Protection' means a site has received legal protection from damage or mismanagement, in recognition of its high biodiversity and/or geological value. A non-statutory site does not have the same level of protection as a statutory-protected site, but receives some limited protection from development or damage, in recognition of the importance of conserving and/or enhancing the site.

See the [Wildlife Trusts' guide to different types of protected sites](#). You can also find details of all protected areas of countryside including Ramsar Sites, SACs, SPAs and SSSIs, via the Government's [MAGIC interactive mapping site](#).

However, it should be noted that even if a site is not designated as 'protected', there are a number of laws and policies giving both broad and specific protection to wildlife species and habitats. For further information see the **Wildlife and the Law** and **Protected Species** leaflets in this series.

Statutory protected sites

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are the country's very best wildlife and geological sites and are irreplaceable parts of our national heritage. Some of these are also internationally important for their wildlife, and are thus designated as SACs or SPAs.

England's first SSSIs were formed under an Act of Parliament in 1949. Since then the legislation has been strengthened and SSSIs are now afforded protection through the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) also provides a certain level of protection by giving guidance for determining planning applications. See **the Commenting on Planning Applications** leaflet in this series for more information.

Owners of SSSIs have a responsibility to manage these sites in accordance with the 'Notification'; the Notification is the process by which the site was designated, and the document which sets out the reasons for designation. Natural England has produced advice on management of SSSIs and they can, if necessary, bring about prosecutions if land on SSSIs is not managed to support the features identified in its Notification.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated to support internationally important habitats and/or species listed in the EC Habitats Directive. SACs are usually also designated as SSSIs.

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are areas identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within European Union countries. They are designated under the European 'Birds Directive 1979'. SPAs are also usually designated as SSSI.

Ramsar Sites

The Ramsar Convention is an international agreement which provides “the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources”. It was signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971 and the UK Government ratified the Convention and designated the first Ramsar sites in 1976. The only Ramsar site in Leicestershire and Rutland is Rutland Water.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

Section 35 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 allows the designation of National Nature Reserves. These are designated for their habitats, species and geology. There are 224 NNRs in the UK, two thirds of which are owned by Natural England (NE); others are owned and managed by organisations approved by Natural England and managed via formal agreement. The NNRs in Leicestershire and Rutland are: Chamwood Lodge (LRWT), Cribbs Meadow (LRWT) and Muston Meadows.

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

All District and County Councils have powers to acquire, declare and manage LNRs through the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Town and Parish Councils can create LNRs if the District Council has given them the power to do this. To qualify for LNR status, a site must be of importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment. LNRs must be controlled by the local authority through ownership, lease or agreement with the owner. The local authority can apply local by-laws to manage and protect LNRs.

A list of Local Nature Reserves can be found on the [Natural England](#) website.

Non-statutory sites

Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs)

LWS are identified and selected locally, by local authorities, nature conservation charities, ecologists and local nature experts, using robust, scientifically-determined criteria and detailed ecological surveys. Their selection is based on the most important, distinctive and threatened species and habitats within a national, regional and local context. LWSs are some of the most important sites in Leicestershire and Rutland for wildlife, but they are not afforded legal protection and are reliant on appropriate management to remain in good condition.

The County Council has two other designations for Local Wildlife Sites which are used in the planning system: pLWS (potential Local Wildlife Sites) are likely to meet LWS criteria, but further survey work is needed to confirm; cLWS (candidate Local Wildlife Sites) are known through survey data to already meet the LWS criteria.

LWSs will be flagged-up during planning searches and developers should avoid damage to these. If an ecologist carrying out a survey on behalf of a developer finds a site that meets LWS criteria, for planning purposes it should be considered to be a LWS.

Country Parks

Country Parks are designated under the Countryside Act 1968 as places with a natural, rural and informal atmosphere for visitors who do not necessarily want to go out into the wider countryside.

Here is [a list of Leicestershire's Country Parks](#).

Nature Reserves

There are a number of organisations which own or manage nature reserves in the area. The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust owns or manages [35 nature reserves](#).

Further information and advice

Summary of protected wildlife sites in the UK

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-and-wild-places/protecting-wildlife-sites/different-types-protected-wildlife-sites>

Find protected areas of countryside

<https://www.gov.uk/check-your-business-protected-area>

MAGIC - interactive mapping

<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protected-areas-sites-of-special-scientific-interest>

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

<https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/special-areas-of-conservation-overview/>

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

<https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/special-protection-areas-overview/>

Ramsar Sites

<https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/ramsar-sites/>

National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-nature-reserves-in-england>

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in England

<https://data.gov.uk/dataset/acdf4a9e-a115-41fb-bbe9-603c819aa7f7/local-nature-reserves-england>

The Wildlife Trusts' Guide to Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs)

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/local-wildlife-sites>

Guidelines for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites - Leicestershire and Rutland

https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2016/8/22/Guidelines_LWS.pdf

Leicestershire Country Parks

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/parks-and-outdoor-activities/country-parks-in-leicestershire>

Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves

<https://www.lrwildlife.org.uk/nature-reserves>

Find protected areas of countryside

<https://www.gov.uk/check-your-business-protected-area>

EU Habitats Directive

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/rep_habitats/index_en.htm