

CABINET
– 21st October 20205

**OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S BIODIVERSITY ACTION
FRAMEWORK AND BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN**

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the Biodiversity Action Framework and Biodiversity Action Plan contained in Annexes 1 and 2.**
2. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to delegate authority for approval of an annual update to the Biodiversity Action Plan to the Director for Environment and Highways in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Place, Environment and Climate Action.**

Executive Summary

3. The Environment Act 2021 (the Act) places a duty on public authorities to;
 - (a) Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
 - (b) Agree policies and specific objectives based on the consideration
 - (c) Act to deliver the policies and achieve the objectives.
4. The initial considerations required by 2(a) above were outlined in the Biodiversity Duty Initial Considerations Report (December 2023) [Biodiversity Duty Initial Considerations Report Summary December 2023](#)
5. To meet the requirements of 2(b) this Biodiversity Action Framework and Biodiversity Action Plan have been developed for adoption by Cabinet.
6. There then follows a requirement under the Act to prepare the first formal Biodiversity Report no later than 1 January 2026, thereafter, being repeated every five years, reporting on progress against the actions and objectives.
7. The requirements relate to the council's own activities for example how land and buildings that are owned by the council are managed. In developing the Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan, regard has been had to [guidance on complying with the biodiversity duty](#) from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) There has been extensive consultation with internal teams in developing both documents.

Purpose of the Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan

8. The Biodiversity Action Framework ('the Framework') sets out the Council's vision, principles, policies and objectives for tackling the ecological emergency and fulfilling our statutory obligations to further the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through two connected roles:
 - Transforming our own organisation through our Biodiversity Action Plan
 - Leading a collaborative approach with partners across Oxfordshire to enable nature's recovery through our role as Responsible Authority for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and through wider partnership working.
9. The Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-26 ('the Action Plan') is presented alongside the Biodiversity Action Framework for approval by Cabinet. It sets out 43 actions aligned to the policies and objectives in the Biodiversity Framework; where appropriate, measures have been identified against these actions as well as headline indicators for each objective. Progress against these will initially be reported against in January 2026 to meet reporting requirements introduced by the Act. It is recommended that the Action Plan is updated annually, with approval delegated to the Director for Environment and Highways in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Place, Environment and Climate Action.

As a related strategy, which sets out a collaborative partnership approach to nature recovery in Oxfordshire, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is also being brought forward for approval by Cabinet as a separate agenda item at the same meeting. The Biodiversity Action Framework has been informed by the LNRS and identifies how the Council will play its part in delivery of the LNRS.

Summary of the Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan

Vision

10. The Biodiversity Action Framework sets out the following vision:
11. By 2030, actions are in place which are minimising the Council's negative impacts on nature and contributing to reversing declines in biodiversity. We are a lead voice in encouraging others to do the same across Oxfordshire. Thriving plants and wildlife are recognised across the Council and our communities as critical and key to our ability to adapt to climate change and support health and wellbeing.
12. By 2050, action within the Council and by partners has reversed declines in biodiversity in Oxfordshire, with at least double the current area of wildlife-rich habitats and increases in indicator species populations. The Council, our partners and communities, are contributing positively to national and global nature recovery.

Objectives

13. To achieve this vision, 5 overarching objectives with associated policies are set out in the Biodiversity Action Framework, and corresponding actions are included within the Biodiversity Action Plan.
14. **Nature positive council:** we will reduce our negative impacts on nature and deliver enhancements to contribute towards reversing local, national, and global biodiversity declines.

This objective is supported by 13 policies covering our internal policies and processes, how we manage our land, and planning (including Biodiversity Net Gain).

The Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-26 identifies 19 actions against this objective to be delivered across teams, including Procurement, GIS and data, Landscape and Nature Recovery, Property and Estates, Climate Action, Highways, Major Infrastructure, and Planning.

15. **A natural capital approach:** we will understand the natural capital value of the Council's natural assets and the ecosystem services provided by nature and take this into account in decision making.

This objective is supported by 6 policies covering land use change, nature-based solutions, multi-functional biodiversity net gain, schools and green infrastructure.

The Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-26 identifies 10 actions against this objective to be delivered across teams including Property and Estates, Flooding, Tree Team, Major Infrastructure, Children's and Family Services and Landscape and Nature Recovery.

16. **Oxfordshire-wide nature recovery:** we will collaborate with private, public and voluntary sectors to enable nature recovery across Oxfordshire, contributing towards an increase in the area of land managed for nature in the County and reversing species declines.

This objective is supported by 7 policies covering Local Nature Recovery Strategy delivery as well as support for organisations who enable nature recovery, National Landscapes, District and City Council planning, the Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project and Community Action Groups.

The Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-26 identifies 10 actions in support of this objective, led primarily by the Landscape and Nature Recovery Team.

17. **Biodiversity awareness:** we will work with partners to improve awareness amongst our communities of why we need to conserve and enhance biodiversity and what action they can take.

This objective is supported by 1 policy, and the Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-26 identifies 2 actions in support of this objective, led primarily by the Landscape and Nature Recovery Team.

18. **Access to nature for all:** we will work with partners to improve access to nature across the County, tackling inequalities in access, to improve health and wellbeing.

This objective is supported by 2 policies, addressing the issue on our own land and how we will work with partners to improve access to nature across the County. The Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-26 identifies 1 action in support of this objective led between Landscape and Nature Recovery, Property and Estates and Countryside Access.

Background to the Biodiversity Action Framework and Biodiversity Action Plan

19. The Act introduced a strengthened “biodiversity duty” which requires all public authorities in England to consider how they can take action to conserve and enhance biodiversity. These actions will contribute to the achievement of national goals and targets on biodiversity.

20. The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23) published by central government in 2023 sets out the government plans for significantly improving the natural environment. By 2030 the government has committed to:

- (a) Halt the decline in species abundance
- (b) Protect 30% of UK land for nature

By 2040, the government has committed to:

- (c) Increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels
- (d) Restore or create at least 500k ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats
- (e) Reduce the risk of species extinction
- (f) Restore 75% of the 1m hectare of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition.

21. The Framework and Action Plan also add detail to how the Council is implementing its objectives set out in the [Oxfordshire Environmental Principles](#). In particular, the Framework and Action Plan provide policies and actions that will deliver against the following Environmental Principles:

- Objective 3. Protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets
- Objective 4. Use natural resources sustainably
- Objective 5. Be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development

- Objective 6. Ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from our approach

Developing the Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan

22. As required under the Act, an initial consideration of what the Council can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity was undertaken in 2023 by the Biodiversity Team. This included consideration of what the Council was currently doing, as well as potential future actions. Information was gathered from across Council services through an online 'Lunch and Learn' and an internal survey on Let's Talk; this was collated in the Initial Considerations Report 2023 (provided as a Background Paper to this report). The report was presented to and discussed at Directorate Leadership Team meetings in early 2024 as a first step in informing development of the Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan.
23. Throughout 2024 and 2025 ongoing dialogue with relevant teams and data gathering (see Biodiversity Action Report 2024, provided as a Background Paper to this report) has refined the potential actions identified in the Initial Considerations report to inform development of the Framework and Action Plan. Drafts of the documents were consulted on internally through a Let's Talk survey and direct discussions with relevant teams between April and July 2025.
24. During consultation on the draft documents, specific input was requested from the following teams:
 - Major Infrastructure
 - Property and Estates
 - Planning
 - Procurement
 - Climate
 - Landscape and Nature Recovery
 - Tree Team

This led to refinement of the following policies:

25. Policies 1.1, 1.3 and 1.4: suggested wording from the Sustainable Supply Chain Lead was integrated to ensure alignment with the Ethical Procurement Policy and to reflect advice on use of life cycle assessment tools that integrate biodiversity, which are currently still in development.
26. Policies 1.12 and 1.13: Input from the planning and Major Infrastructure teams led to changes to policy wording to address the following issues:
 - Clarity over the commitment made in the Oxfordshire Environmental Principles for delivery of 20% BNG, specifically that this relates to our own development, and that the Biodiversity Action Framework does not set out planning policy.

- Adding a caveat that 20% BNG will be delivered ‘wherever possible’, and inclusion of wording to focus delivery of BNG which exceeds mandatory requirements within Oxfordshire to support local nature recovery.
 - Addition of a commitment to provide alternative enhancements which meet Oxfordshire LNRS priorities, if mandatory BNG requirements are met, but 20% BNG cannot be achieved within Oxfordshire.
 - Introduction of a transition period where the initial business case for a Council development has been approved prior to adoption of this policy.
27. Liaison with the Landscape and Nature Recovery Team led to the following changes:
- Policy 2.2 a caveat was added to this policy to ensure any nature-based solutions implemented benefit biodiversity.
- Policy 3.1 wording was added to clarify our relationship with the Local Nature Partnership in delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Policy 3.4 wording was added to clarify our approach to landscape character outside of National Landscapes.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

28. The Biodiversity Action Framework will support the Council’s corporate plan, making a significant contribution to the following priorities:

Priority 1: Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.

Action to conserve and enhance biodiversity is closely linked to action to address the climate emergency, it:

- Improves the resilience of nature to the impacts of climate change
- Enables climate adaptation such as improved flood resilience, urban shading, and reduced soil erosion through nature-based approaches.
- Mitigates climate change; semi-natural habitats provide a huge carbon sink, which needs to be maintained and increased through conservation and enhancement.

The Biodiversity Action Framework is closely aligned with the Carbon Action Framework, specific policies have been included in the Biodiversity Action Framework to ensure that biodiversity action also provides climate benefits.

Priority 2: Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.

Evidence indicates that the most deprived communities tend to have least access to greenspace, that more deprived communities receive greater benefits from greenspace and that more biodiverse areas provide greater benefits. Policies have therefore been included to address inequalities in access to nature in the County, alongside improving the biodiversity value of green spaces.

Priority 3: Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.

The Framework introduces a natural capital approach, which ensures consideration of the ecosystem services provided by nature which underpin health and human wellbeing.

Priority 5: Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network. The Framework commits to delivery of 20% BNG when delivering projects and developments, including highways infrastructure. The Framework also includes land management policies which apply to management of the transport network, improving sustainability through seeking to manage land for biodiversity, and phasing out use of pesticides, herbicides and peat.

Priority 6 : Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces.

The Biodiversity Action Framework will be a core strategy by which the Council will achieve this priority, both in terms of increasing the biodiversity of Council landholdings, partnership work to recover nature across the County, and by improving access to nature.

Priority 7: Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. The Framework recognises the benefits of improved connection with nature for children including improved school attendance, behaviour, academic achievement and social skills. Policy has been included to support schools to realise these benefits.

Policy 9: Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit. The Framework sets out specifically how we will work with partners to achieve Oxfordshire-wide Nature Recovery.

Financial Implications

29. There are no new financial implications of adopting the Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan. The financial implications of introducing policies have been discussed with relevant teams where flagged through consultation. This has resulted in a caveat to policy 1.12 for Major Infrastructure Projects, where an IBC has already been approved prior to adoption of the Biodiversity Action Framework, so no new unplanned expenditure is introduced from additional BNG requirements. Noting that the policy to 'aim for 20% BNG' has been in place since 2022.
30. The work outlined in policy 3.1 for co-ordination of delivery of the LNRS is supported by a grant of £135,000 from Defra.
31. With regard to policies 3.3, 3.4, 3.6 and 3.7, which outline support for the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, the National Landscapes, Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project and Community Action Groups already receive financial support from OCC.

Comments checked by: Rob Finlayson, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
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Legal Implications

The legal implications section should be completed by a member of the legal service

32. Under Section 102 of the Environment Act 2021, public authorities must consider what action the authority can properly take, which is consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective. The Council must determine policies and objectives in that regard and act to further that general biodiversity objective. As set out at paragraphs 1 to 4 above, the proposed Framework and Action Plan are in response to those requirements.
33. This recommendations of this report will enable the Council to comply with the legislative timetable in the Environment Act 2021.

Comments checked by:

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Staff Implications

34. The policies and actions have been identified in consultation with Council teams involved in delivery and are intended to be delivered within existing programmes; lead officers have been identified for each action within the Biodiversity Action Plan.
35. The Biodiversity Action Plan 25/26 does include an action to increase in-house ecological staff and volunteer capacity. However, this is already budgeted for, and new staff have been appointed.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

36. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) accompanies this report. The EIA concludes that the policies do not bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community. Positive impacts are identified in relation to addressing inequalities in access to nature, particularly in relation to areas of deprivation. In relation to wider impacts; policies are introduced which apply across Council services; positive impacts are identified in relation to staff, through policies to improve skills, tools and culture in relation to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

Sustainability Implications

37. A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed – all impacts are in relation to climate are positive.

Risk Management

38. Risks involved in developing the Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan include:

- a. Potential limitation in resources and time to produce the documents, with a risk that the timescales indicated within the legislation and guidance would not be met.

Limited resources have meant that the documents were delayed, but if approved in October it should be possible to report on actions taken by January 2006 as required. The revised timescales for production have meant that the Framework and Action Plan can align, and be informed by, the final version of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

- b. The potential for new policies to have unintended, negative consequences.

The policies and actions in the Framework and Action Plan have been developed in consultation with the Council teams involved in delivery. Therefore, risk of unforeseen impacts of policy introduction have been reduced through ensuring that the consequences of the policy for those services responsible for delivery are well understood. For example, policy to stop use of herbicides and pesticides has been refined to allow use in exceptional circumstances where there is social or environmental benefit, and there is no alternative. This might allow, for example, for use of pesticides to control invasive species.

- c. Potential that not all service areas will have engaged with and shaped the policies, resulting in inappropriate policies or missed opportunities.

Several methods of internal consultation have been used during development of the Framework to raise awareness across service areas. This has included a lunch and learn in November 2023 followed by a 'Let's Talk' survey to inform the 'initial consideration', presentation of the initial considerations report to Directorate Leadership Teams in early 2024, ongoing engagement through direct discussions with teams and a consultation on the draft Framework and Action Plan in April- July.

Paul Fermer Director of Environment and Highways

Annex: Annex 1: Biodiversity Action Framework 2025-2030
Annex 2: Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-26

Background papers: Biodiversity Duty Initial Considerations Report Summary
December 2023

Biodiversity Action Report 2024

Other Documents: [Guidance on complying with the biodiversity duty](#)

[Section 102 and 103 of the Environment Act 2021:
Biodiversity Objective and Reporting](#)

[Oxfordshire Environmental Principles](#)

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