



Biodiversity Action Framework 2025-2030

Summary



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

This framework sets out Oxfordshire County Council's guiding 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.

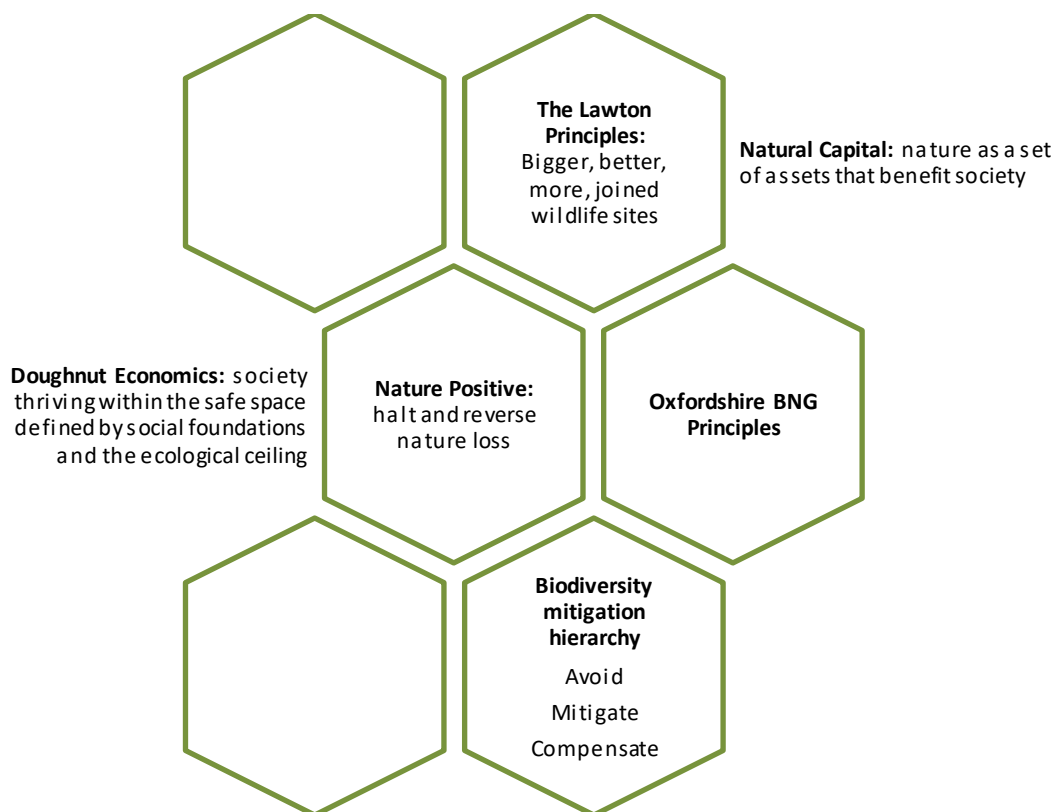
In this summary you can find our vision, principles, policies and objectives, with links to details in the full version of the Framework later in this document.

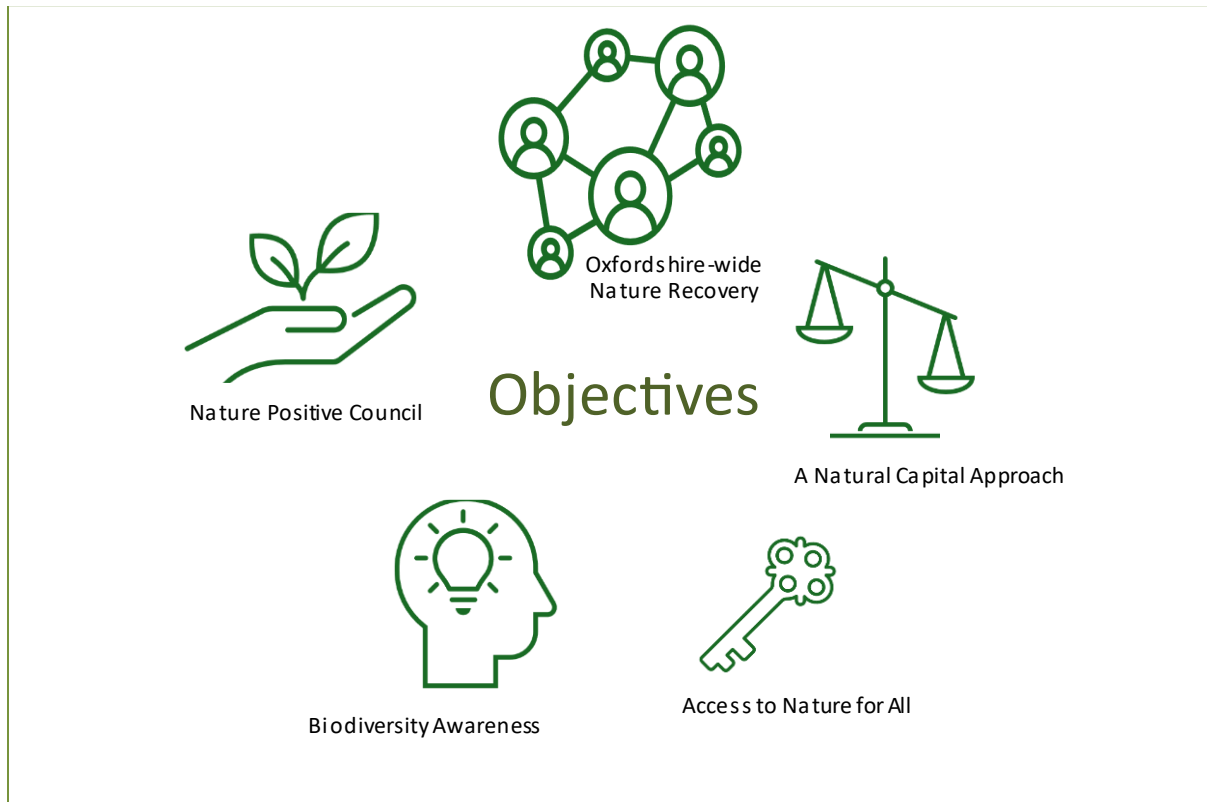
Vision

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.

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.

Principles





Objective 1: Nature positive council

We will reduce our negative impacts on nature and deliver enhancements to contribute towards reversing local, national, and global biodiversity declines.

Objective 2: 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.

Objective 3: 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.

Objective 4: 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.

Objective 5: 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.

Policies

Objective 1: Nature positive council

We will reduce our negative impacts on nature and deliver enhancements to contribute towards reversing local, national, and global biodiversity declines.

Nature Positive Council - Policies

1.1 We will refer to the latest evidence to further understand the impacts on biodiversity from our operations to help prioritise actions towards becoming nature positive

1.2 We will ensure that our decisions are informed by up-to-date natural environment data and monitor the impacts of our actions on biodiversity through our annual Biodiversity Action Report.

1.3 We will seek to conserve and enhance biodiversity through our procurement processes and supply chain. We will focus on the end to end procurement process by enhancing pre-market engagement with potential contractors to embed biodiversity conservation and enhancement, as well as implementing effective contract management with our existing contracts.

1.4 We will look to track the progress of our suppliers contractual commitments through comprehensive reporting including biodiversity net gain and case studies of ongoing projects (amongst other metrics). This will improve our view of progress within our supply chain and allow us to direct resources most efficiently to best implement our Biodiversity Action Framework

1.5 We will embed the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy and consideration of biodiversity conservation and enhancement into decision making.

1.6 We will seek to further embed action for biodiversity across the Council through improving our skills, tools and culture.

1.7 We will manage our own landholdings, and other areas of land we are responsible for, to conserve and enhance biodiversity alongside their core functions, delivering against LNRS priorities and measures. We will encourage our tenants to do the same.

1.8 We will phase out the use of pesticides and herbicides in the course of our work. Exceptions to this will be made only in exceptional circumstances when it is demonstrated that there is a significant social or environment benefit, no alternative is available, and the

technique does not cause significant damage to the environment.

1.9 We will phase out the use of peat as soon as possible.

1.10 We will not permit badger culling on Council-owned land

1.11 We will deliver measurable biodiversity net gain when carrying out projects not subject to planning control, or implemented under permitted development rights.

1.12 In relation to our own developments; we will deliver a minimum 20% biodiversity net gain which supports local nature recovery, wherever possible, and have regard to the Oxfordshire BNG principles. When using Habitat Banks to secure BNG, we will seek to use those which adhere to the Oxfordshire Naturemark Principles. We will plan for BNG that is resilient to climate change.

If delivery of BNG to meet this policy exceeds mandatory or local plan requirements and the additional BNG need generated by this policy cannot be delivered within Oxfordshire then, once reasonable steps to achieve the policy requirement within Oxfordshire have proved insufficient, alternative biodiversity enhancements which meet Oxfordshire LNRS priorities will be provided.

(This policy is subject to a transition period for Council developments for which an Initial Business Case was approved prior to adoption of the policy).

1.13 We will gather evidence on biodiversity and nature recovery to inform development of future minerals and waste planning policies that make a meaningful contribution to local nature recovery.

Objective 2: 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.

A Natural Capital Approach - Policies

2.1 Where we propose land use change on our own land, or land we are responsible for, we will undertake an assessment of natural capital impacts to inform decisions and ensure the best public value, considering the scarcity of some natural resources and trade-offs between objectives.

2.2 We will prioritise the use of nature-based solutions to deliver our services where appropriate to meet service needs, and where this will benefit biodiversity.

2.3 In relation to our own developments or development on our landholdings, where appropriate we will seek to deliver multi-functional benefits through BNG including improved access to greenspace and adaptation to climate change.

2.4 We will support schools to incorporate nature-based learning, provide for biodiversity within school grounds, take action for wildlife, and connect pupils with nature.

2.5 We will develop collaborative ways of working across OCC service areas to realise opportunities to enhance delivery of multi-functional green infrastructure and help address inequalities in greenspace provision in the County.

2.6 In partnership we will develop evidence and support co-ordinated action to ensure provision of sufficient green infrastructure across Oxfordshire to support nature, the health and wellbeing of our current and future communities, adaptation and resilience to our changing climate, and the local economy.

Objective 3: 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.

Oxfordshire-wide nature recovery - Policies

3.1 As Responsible Authority for the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy we will work with, and through, the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership to:

3.1.1 , Promote, co-ordinate and enable delivery of measures towards the priorities of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

3.1.2 , Gather data on implementation of LNRS measures across the County to monitor delivery and inform future refreshes of the LNRS.

3.1.3 , Help ensure that up-to-date natural environment data is available to inform partner and community actions for nature recovery, and to monitor the effectiveness of implementation of the LNRS.

3.1.4 , Develop a pipeline of projects to help deliver the LNRS priorities and measures.

3.1.5 , Help secure investment in projects which deliver the LNRS priorities and measures.

3.2 We will develop, or support, exemplar nature recovery projects which help demonstrate delivery of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

3.3 We will support and proactively engage with the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre and other organisations who enable achievement of nature recovery in Oxfordshire.

3.4 We will support and work with the three National Landscapes in our County on development and delivery of their Management Plans, Nature Recovery Plans and Climate Adaptation Plans. We will ensure that our actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity, complement our obligation to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, special qualities and key characteristics of our National Landscapes. We will also seek for our biodiversity actions to be in keeping with and enhance landscape character when considering types and species of planting, and management actions anywhere in the County.

3.5 We will encourage development of District and City local plan policies which exceed the minimum 10% biodiversity net gain requirement, have regard to the Oxfordshire BNG Principles, and support delivery of the LNRS.

3.6 In partnership we will identify, conserve and enhance Oxfordshire Local Wildlife Sites, seeking to increase the proportion of sites in positive conservation management with an aim to achieve 70% in positive management by 2030.

3.7 We will continue to support Oxfordshire's Community Action Groups to help deliver community level actions for nature recovery

Objective 4: 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.

Biodiversity Awareness - Policies

4.1 We will work with partners to increase engagement and awareness-raising to enable our communities to take action to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Objective 5: 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.

Access to Nature for All - Policies

5.1 We will aim to improve access to high quality natural greenspace through provision on our land for which we have responsibility, where appropriate.

5.2 We will work with partners towards improving biodiversity value of, and access to, greenspace, including reducing inequalities in access to natural greenspace.



Biodiversity Action Framework 2025-2030



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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Introduction

This framework sets out Oxfordshire County Council's guiding 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.

Oxfordshire County Council Biodiversity Action Plan

The Biodiversity Action Plan focusses on own organisation, building on existing good practice and identifying additional specific actions we can take across our services to further conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. The Biodiversity Action Plan will be reviewed and refreshed on an annual basis and we will report on actions taken to meet the reporting requirement of our Biodiversity Duty under the NERC Act.

Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) were introduced in England through the Environment Act 2021. Oxfordshire County Council was appointed Responsible Authority for the Oxfordshire LNRS in 2023; through collaboration with partners and local consultation we created a LNRS which sets out a collective vision for nature recovery across Oxfordshire.

The purpose of the LNRS is to indicate which areas of the county need which targeted actions to create a bigger, better, and more joined up network for biodiversity to recover. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy has four key elements which, together, make up the strategy. These are:

1. **A Statement of Biodiversity Priorities** – a written list of the most important outcomes (priorities) to achieve for biodiversity in Oxfordshire. These include actions that could be taken (potential measures) which would help to achieve the priorities.
2. **A Species Priorities List** – a written list of species which need targeted or specific actions in Oxfordshire to recover. This contains individual and groups of species which need actions over and above those listed on the Statement of Biodiversity Priorities (above).
3. **A Description of the Strategy Area** – a written document designed to :
 - a. Describe biodiversity in Oxfordshire
 - b. Indicate the opportunities for recovering biodiversity
 - c. Describe the pressures on biodiversity in Oxfordshire (the things that are threatening the survival of species and habitats).
4. **A Local Habitat Map** –an online and interactive map tool which shows :
 - a. The existing areas that Defra have agreed are of particular importance for biodiversity
 - b. Priority locations in Oxfordshire where particular LNRS actions are recommended to improve existing habitats, or create new habitats in areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity.

- c. Some select, wider biodiversity information about Oxfordshire to support people and organisations to develop nature recovery projects that can maximise wider benefits too such as natural flood management.

The LNRS is expected to help people and organisations across the county to co-ordinate future nature recovery efforts and funding opportunities. As a Local Authority we have a duty to have regard to the LNRS under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC Act 2006). This Biodiversity Action Framework and associated Biodiversity Action Plan set out how we will play our part in delivering towards the priorities identified in the LNRS.

Biodiversity Action Framework

Vision, Objectives, Guiding Principles and Policies

Biodiversity Duty Initial Considerations Report 2023: identified potential actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity across Council services and informed development of our framework and Action Plan

Oxfordshire County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan

A tabulated plan of actions across Council service areas to fulfil our policies and objectives, refreshed annually

Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

A strategy to achieve a shared ambition for nature recovery in Oxfordshire, produced collaboratively with partners, which identifies biodiversity priorities and maps locations in which to deliver these.

Annual Biodiversity Action Report

An annual report on progress against our Biodiversity Action Plan, meeting our requirement for biodiversity reporting under the Environment Act 2021

Biodiversity

Biodiversity refers to the variety of all life, including plants, animals, fungi, and micro-organisms.

Biodiversity provides us with everything necessary for survival, from fresh water, clean air and climate regulation to food and medicines and much more. These benefits do not come from individual species but from a rich variety of species working together.

Unfortunately, the UK's biodiversity is much depleted – it is estimated that we have less than half of our biodiversity remaining (the global average is 75%), we have seen a 19% loss since 1970 (State of Nature Report 2023). According to the Natural History Museum's Biodiversity Intactness Index, the UK is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries. We are in the bottom 10% globally and last among the G7 group of nations. These declines in biodiversity have been caused by habitat loss and fragmentation through development and farming, as well as pollution and climate change.

Despite these losses, Oxfordshire still supports some valuable wildlife, including rare habitats such as flower-rich floodplain meadows along our river valleys, pockets of fens such as those as Cothill, chalk streams down in the Chilterns, and some of the country's oldest oak trees at Blenheim. We also benefit from strong community interest and action for wildlife. However, having a healthy and biodiverse environment is not just about protecting our rarest wildlife, but also providing an opportunity for commoner species and habitats to thrive.

Fortunately, there is still time for us to act - we can take steps to limit the impact of pressures on the natural environment generated through our work and, through halting declines and increasing biodiversity, we can increase nature's resilience to current and future pressures (such as climate change and pollution). This will help us, and our communities, to benefit from all the things nature provides into the future.

The Biodiversity Duty

In recognition of the importance of biodiversity, its crucial role in supporting life, and the state of the UK's biodiversity, we now have a new, stronger, legal duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity while delivering the Council's work across all service areas. Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is the strengthened 'biodiversity duty' that the Environment Act 2021 introduced through amendments to the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

This means that, as a public authority, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) must:

1. Consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on our consideration.
3. Act to deliver policies and achieve our objectives.

Our initial consideration of what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity was completed in 2023 (see Initial Considerations Report).

This Biodiversity Action Framework sets out policies and objectives based on that initial consideration and ongoing work across Council service areas during 2024/2025. Our Biodiversity Action Plan sets out how we will act to deliver on these policies and achieve our objectives.

As a Local Planning Authority, we are also required to report on the actions we have taken; we will produce annual Biodiversity Action Reports to fulfil this requirement.

Relevant Policies, Objectives and Strategies

The following global, national and local policies and strategies are key to informing the approach taken in this framework document which includes policies and objectives which at a local level will contribute to national and international strategies for biodiversity.

Global

The Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework

The Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework was agreed at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) in 2022. It sets out a vision of a world of living in harmony with nature where “by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.”

The mission of that Framework for the period up to 2030, towards the 2050 vision is:

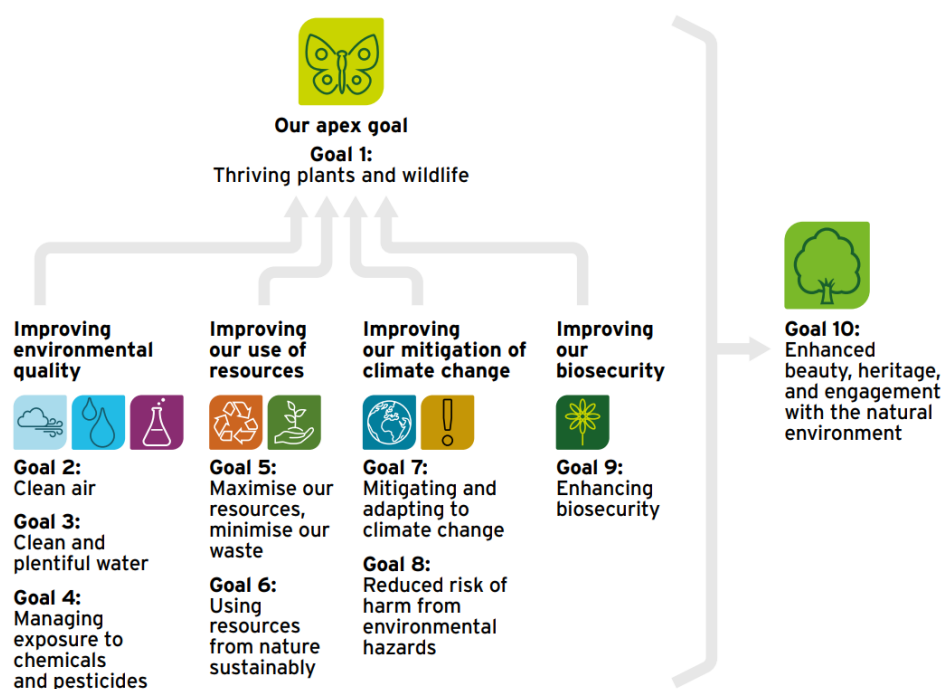
To take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet by conserving and sustainably using biodiversity and by ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources, while providing the necessary means of implementation.

National

The Environmental Improvement Plan

The UK Government’s [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP23\)](#), published in January 2023, places thriving plants and wildlife as its apex goal, setting out how this is underpinned by improvements to the quality of our environment.

Connections between our environmental goals



By 2030, the government has committed to:

- halt the decline in species abundance
- protect 30% of UK land

By 2042, the government has committed to:

- increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels
- restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats
- reduce the risk of species extinction
- restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term

Local

Oxfordshire Strategic Plan 2022-2025

Our Strategic Plan sets out our vision to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county and sets out 9 cross-cutting priorities and commitments:

1. Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
2. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
3. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.
4. Support carers and the social care system.
5. Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network.
6. Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces.
7. Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.
8. Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy.
9. Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Long Term Sustainable Development

Principle 4 of this strategy aims to enhance the natural environment of Oxfordshire and can be found at [CA APR2021R05 Appendix 1 - Strategic Vision.pdf \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](#).

Oxfordshire Climate and Natural Environment Policy Statement

In November 2022 Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet agreed a Climate and Natural Environment Policy Statement to ensure environmental considerations are placed at the heart of policy and decision-making across the County Council. This included re-affirming commitment to shared [environment principles for Oxfordshire](#), grouped into seven strategic objectives as follows:

1. Bring Oxfordshire to net zero carbon as early as possible in the 2040s
2. Adapt to the challenges of climate change
3. Protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets
4. Use natural resources sustainably
5. Be an exemplar for environmental sustainable development
6. Ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from our approach
7. Resource our ambitions, monitor and review regularly

Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Part 1 – Core Strategy

[The Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Part 1 – Core Strategy](#) provides the planning strategies and policies for the development that will be needed for the supply of minerals and management of waste in Oxfordshire over the period to the end of 2031.

The Core Strategy includes the following minerals and waste objectives and policies which are of relevance to the Biodiversity Action Framework:

Minerals Planning Objectives

viii. Protect Oxfordshire's communities and natural and historic environments (including important landscapes and ecological, geological and archaeological and other heritage assets) from the harmful impacts of mineral development (including traffic).

ix. Provide benefits to Oxfordshire's natural environment and local communities through the restoration and aftercare of mineral workings at the earliest opportunity, in particular by contributing to nature conservation, enhancing the quality and extent of Conservation Target Areas, contributing to landscape character, improving access to the countryside, safeguarding local amenity, providing opportunities for local recreation and providing benefit to the local economy.

x. Implement a biodiversity-led restoration strategy that delivers a net gain in biodiversity, and contributes to establishing a coherent and resilient ecological network, through the landscape-scale creation of priority habitat

Waste Planning Objectives

ix. Protect Oxfordshire's communities and natural and historic environments (including important landscapes and ecological, geological and archaeological and other heritage assets) from the harmful impacts of waste management development (including traffic).

Policy C7 sets out details of the need for minerals and waste development to conserve and, where possible, deliver a net gain in biodiversity and Policy M10 sets out the need for minerals workings to be restored to a high standard including delivery of a net gain in biodiversity.

Climate Action Framework

The Climate Action Framework sets out the Councils guiding principles and how we will mobilise to tackle the climate emergency through transformation of our own organisation and through enabling a zero-carbon Oxfordshire. The Climate Action Framework focuses on:

1. Being a Climate Active Council
2. Operating at net-zero Carbon 2030
3. Supporting schools
4. Working with our suppliers
5. Enabling a net-zero Carbon Oxfordshire by 2050.

Climate Change Adaptation Route Map for Oxfordshire 2025-2030

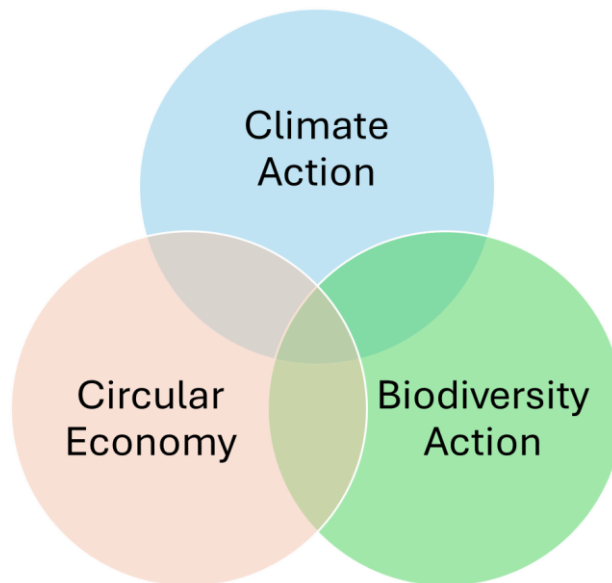
The [Climate Change Adaptation Route Map](#), provides a series of actions that will need to be implemented by decision makers in Oxfordshire to ensure that the county's natural environment, people, infrastructure, buildings and businesses are prepared for the impacts of climate change.

Circular Economy Plan

The Circular economy represents our biggest untapped opportunity to reduce our impact on climate and nature and cut carbon emissions further and faster. At its core the concept is based on three principles:

- ✓ Design out waste and pollution
- ✓ Keep materials and products in use for longer
- ✓ Regenerate natural systems

All of these will reduce costs, grow the economy and kick start the transition to an economy that's fairer and healthier for people, as well as more sustainable. The Council's Circular Economy Plan outlines how we intend to do this



It is intended that the policies and objectives developed through the Biodiversity Action Framework will support and align with these existing and emerging environmental policies, strategies and objectives, which will collectively contribute to improvement in the environment, helping to support biodiversity.

We recognise that measures we take as a Council towards achieving net zero carbon emissions, adapting to climate change and moving towards a circular economy will contribute to our actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity through reducing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity, reducing natural resource use and pollution, and supporting natural regeneration. Whilst the measures we are taking regarding these aspects are set out in separate strategies, they are closely linked, and we will incorporate them within reporting on our actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Our Vision

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.

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.

The need to act:

We are completely dependent on healthy functional ecosystems to provide us with all the basic requirements for life; clean air, water, food and a stable climate. All life on earth is equally dependant on this "natural life support system".

However, the damage caused by human activity has now reached a level that puts this natural life support system under threat. The high levels of biodiversity supported by the planet that made ecosystems resilient to change has declined significantly. The Biodiversity Intactness Index¹ indicates that the world's overall biodiversity intactness is estimated at 75%, significantly lower than the 90% considered to be a safe limit. If this decline continues, whole ecosystems will collapse and with them the natural life support system they provide. We need to take dramatic action now to halt the ongoing declines in biodiversity and recover nature

Objectives

1. Nature positive council: We will reduce our negative impacts on nature and deliver enhancements to contribute towards reversing local, national, and global biodiversity declines.

2. Natural Capital Approach: we will understand the natural capital value of natural assets and the ecosystem services provided by nature and take this into account in decision making.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

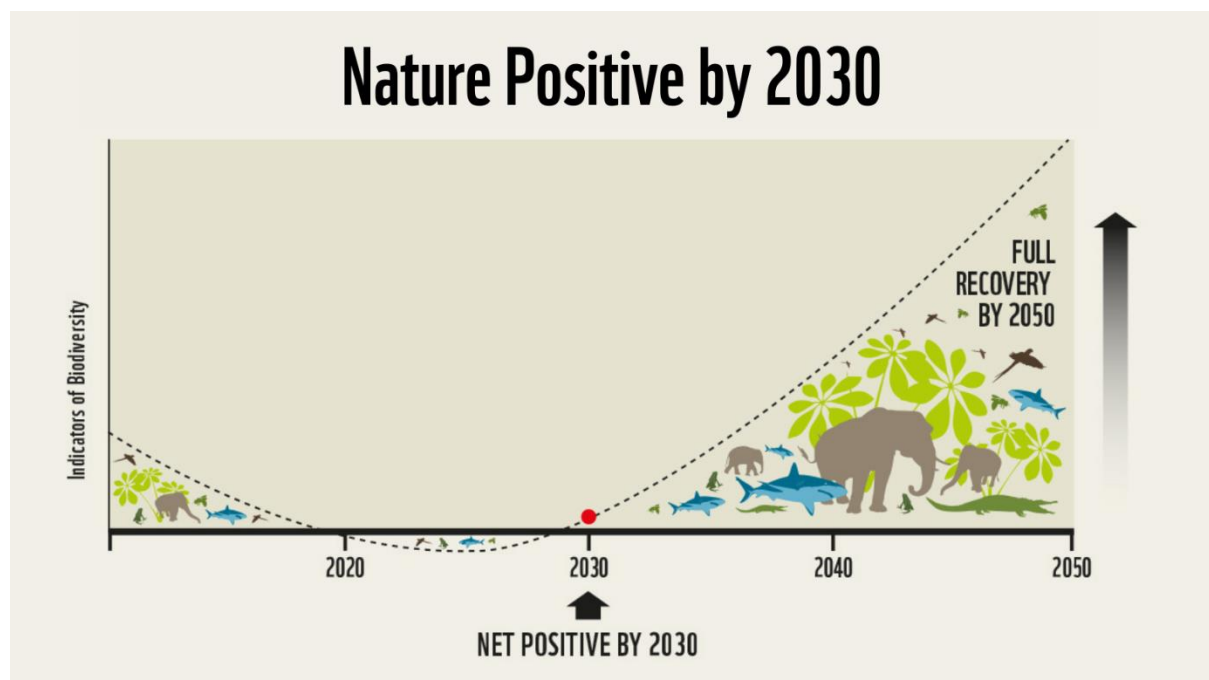
¹ [Biodiversity indicators | Natural History Museum \(nhm.ac.uk\)](https://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-education/biodiversity/indicators/)

Principles

The following principles are integral to the approach the Council will take in achieving its vision and objectives for conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, they are referenced throughout the policies and objectives, and within the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Nature Positive

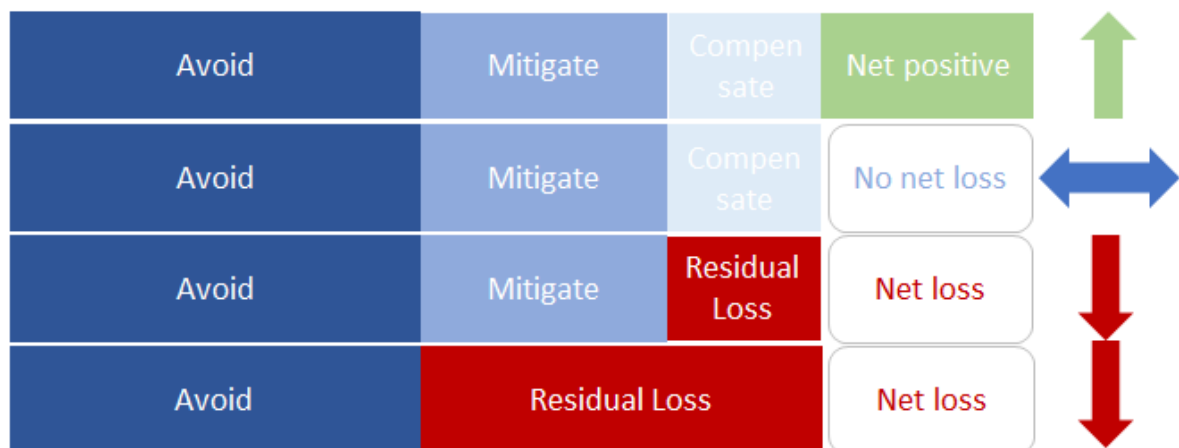
According to the [Nature Positive Initiative](#) (2023) the definition of nature positive is “Halt and reverse nature loss by 2030 on a 2020 baseline and achieve full recovery by 2050”. This level of ambition was adopted at a global level in 2022 by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.



Biodiversity Mitigation Hierarchy

The biodiversity mitigation hierarchy is well established in planning policy (NPPF para 193 a) and is already applied in informing planning decisions but is relevant to all matters that affect biodiversity. It is fundamental to ensuring that biodiversity protection is considered first and foremost.

- I. Negative impacts on biodiversity will be avoided through alternative approaches wherever possible
- II. Where avoidance is not possible negative impacts will be mitigated.
- III. Compensation will only be used as a last resort when residual negative impacts remain following steps I and II.
- IV. Measures will be included to ensure a net positive effect on biodiversity is achieved through decision-making.



The Oxfordshire Biodiversity Net Gain Principles

OCC chair and participate in the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership BNG working group to share best practice in preparing for Biodiversity Net Gain locally. This group has agreed the [Oxfordshire BNG Principles](#), which in summary are:

Oxfordshire BNG Principles

LPAs should aim to adopt a minimum requirement for BNG of 20% or greater in the next iteration of their Local Plans.

Work towards a coordinated approach for the delivery of BNG across all local authorities in Oxfordshire

Local authorities' policies should incentivise local delivery of offsite BNG.

Use offsite BNG to create priority habitats to help meet national and local targets.

Use BNG funds to support the priorities in the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Be precautionary in the application of the metric

Ensure robust verification of BNG monitoring plans by suitably qualified persons organisations at key points in the delivery cycle

Onsite and offsite BNG plans have the same level of scrutiny

Access to the BNG market should be equitable

The Lawton Principles

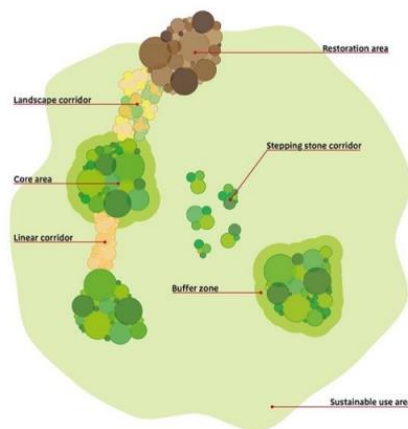
Established by Professor John Lawnton, in 'Making Space for Nature an independent review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network' in 2009, these principles encompass the

essence of what needs to be done to enhance the resilience and coherence of England's ecological network:

- Bigger: increase the size of current wildlife sites
- Better: improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management
- More: Create new sites.
- Joined: Enhance connections between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones'

A key way in which this will be applied at a strategic level is through the Local Habitat Map in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. However, the principles can be applied at any scale when considering where and how to most effectively take biodiversity action.

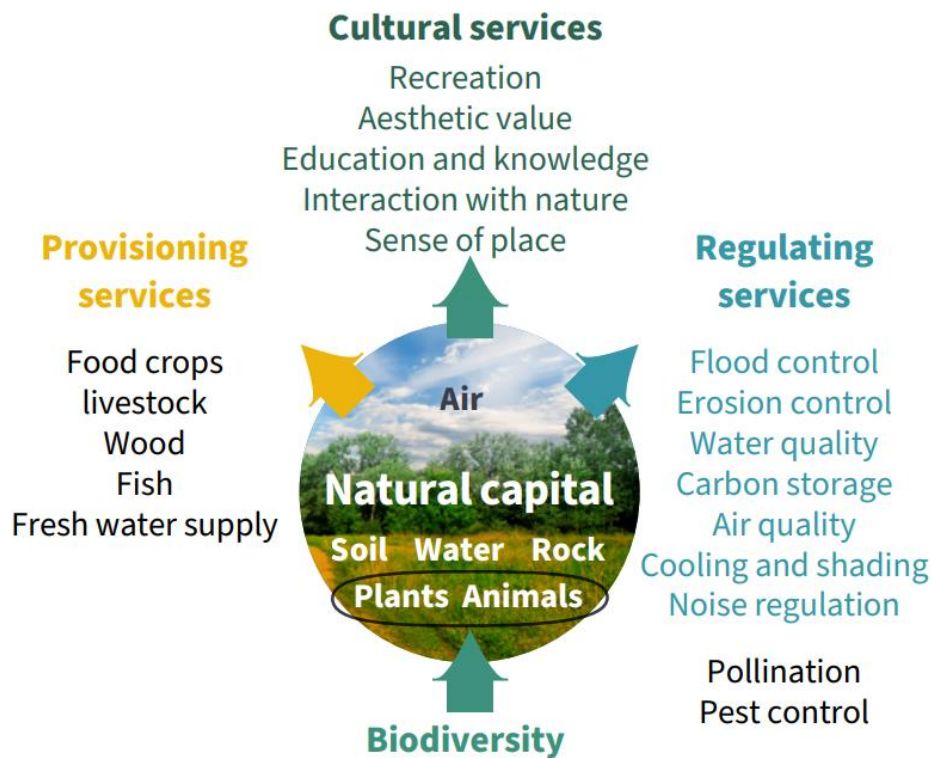
How a Nature Recovery Network is developed



Uses the “Lawton principles”:
bigger, better, more & joined

Illustration from:
Lawton, J.H., Brotherton, P.N.M., Brown, V.K., Elphick, C., Fitter, A.H.,
Forshaw, J., Haddow, R.W., Hilborne, S., Leslie, R.N., Mace, G.M.,
Southgate, M.P., Sutherland, W.J., Tew, T.E., Varley, J., & Wynne,
G.R. (2010) Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife
sites and ecological network. Report to Defra.

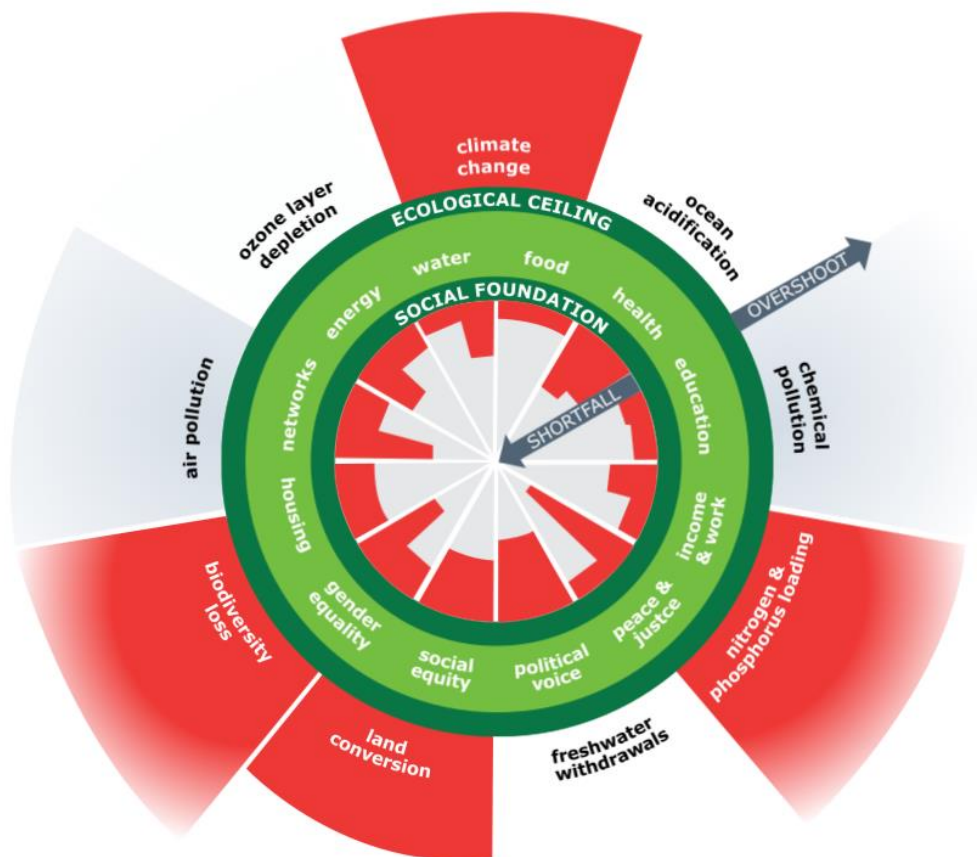
Natural Capital



Source: Natural Capital in Oxfordshire Short [report](#), p3, Alison Smith, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford

Natural Capital involves considering nature as a set of assets that benefit people and society. Viewing nature in this way can support better decision-making by giving best public value, considering the scarcity of some natural resources and trade-offs between objectives. It reduces the risk of the value of the natural environment being ignored in decision making.

Doughnut Economics



The doughnut diagram above identifies the space (the green area) which is ecologically safe and socially just in which humanity can thrive, it is the core concept at the heart of Doughnut Economics. Doughnut Economics proposes an economic mindset that changes the goal from GDP growth to thriving within the social foundation and ecological ceiling. As demonstrated on the diagram, the ecological ceiling has been broken and biodiversity loss is a key aspect of this. Through embedding biodiversity conservation and enhancement, and natural capital considerations, into the Council's decision-making we can contribute towards a society which lives within the planetary boundaries which support Earth's life-supporting systems.

Biodiversity Policies

1. Nature Positive Council

Internal Policies and Processes

Analysis by others of organisational biodiversity footprints (e.g. University of Oxford and Guardian Newspaper) have demonstrated that the largest biodiversity impacts from an organisation are commonly through indirect effects of resource use and waste in external supply chains. Our existing internal policies and processes for staff and facilities have been reviewed in light of our policy commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030 as part of our climate action work. Similar work is planned in relation to moving towards a circular economy. Many of the resulting measures to cut CO₂ and reduce resource use will also help to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Methods to assess organisational impacts on global biodiversity are less well developed than those for carbon, however as these methods become more refined, we will look at evidence to understand where we have the greatest additional impacts on biodiversity to inform future actions.

1.1 We will refer to the latest evidence to further understand the impacts on biodiversity from our operations to help prioritise actions towards becoming nature positive

Local and national data sets relating to the natural environment are critical in supporting action for biodiversity. They help ensure action is focussed where it will have the most benefit, inform our land management activities to ensure we protect rare species and habitats, and are critical in supporting our role as planning authority to make informed decisions and to evidence strategic plans. Natural environment data will be key to understanding the effectiveness of our actions towards becoming nature positive.

1.2 We will ensure that our decisions are informed by up-to-date natural environment data and monitor the impacts of our actions on biodiversity through our annual Biodiversity Action Report.

We spend over £500m a year with contractors and suppliers to deliver critical services for residents. In order to generate additional economic, social or environmental benefits from our activity we have created a social value policy. The policy encourages suppliers to commit to providing additional social value that will benefit local communities. Our policy uses the National Social Value Measurement Framework to set out social value themes, outcomes and measures that can be objectively assessed.

Oxfordshire County Council is committed to working with its supply chain to reduce CO₂ emissions and ensuring they are increasingly aligned to science-based targets for net zero emissions. [Policy Position on Reducing Oxfordshire County Councils Supply Chain Emissions](#). Whilst this approach will help biodiversity by reducing the impacts of climate change, we will identify any additional impacts on biodiversity and work with our supply chain to reduce these impacts and deliver enhancements.

1.3

We will seek to conserve and enhance biodiversity through our procurement processes and supply chain. We will focus on the end to end procurement process by enhancing pre-market engagement with potential contractors to embed biodiversity conservation and enhancement, as well as implementing effective contract management with our existing contracts.

1.4

We will look to track the progress of our suppliers contractual commitments through comprehensive reporting including biodiversity net gain and case studies of ongoing projects (amongst other metrics). This will improve our view of progress within our supply chain and allow us to direct resources most efficiently to best implement our Biodiversity Action Framework

Climate impact assessments are now carried out by the Council to ensure our decision-making is aligned with our climate commitments. This includes some high-level assessment of biodiversity impacts; we will review this process to ensure it effectively applies the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy and embeds biodiversity conservation and enhancement in decision making.

1.5

We will embed the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy and consideration of biodiversity conservation and enhancement into decision making

There is a role for all staff in helping us achieve our objective to become nature positive; we will make sure all staff have the knowledge and tools they need to play their role at a service, team or individual level and to ensure staff are confident ambassadors for a nature positive approach with our partners.

1.6

We will seek to further embed action for biodiversity across the Council through improving our skills, tools and culture

Managing Land to Improve Biodiversity

We own around 900,000 m² of property assets across 909 sites across the county. This includes, corporate buildings and offices, nurseries and schools, leisure centres and field study centres, libraries, fire stations, children and family centres and household waste recycling centres, community-run facilities, residential and care assets and an investment portfolio which includes land and buildings. We own 4.29 hectares (ha) of land located within statutory designated sites and 20.52ha located within non-statutory wildlife sites, we also have several sites managed for nature conservation and have identified 52 Road Verge Nature Reserves within the highways network.

Managing our land to improve biodiversity can range from a complete change in land-use (e.g. from agriculture to nature conservation), to incorporating features for declining species

such as bats, hedgehogs or birds, or changing our land management methods, by adjusting the timing and frequency of grass cutting, for example. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies priorities for nature recovery in Oxfordshire, and the measures needed to achieve these; it will help inform the most appropriate ways to conserve and enhance biodiversity on our different landholdings.

We already have some policies in place which can support delivery against this policy, these include:

As the Highway Authority we are ultimately responsible for the maintenance of grass verges alongside the carriageway network throughout Oxfordshire excluding motorways and trunk roads, we have adopted a [Verge Management Policy](#) which sets out that management of roadside verges (including those areas the county council has identified as Roadside Verge Nature Reserves) will prioritise the promotion of biodiversity where possible.

We also have a separate [Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy](#) which covers all mains powered illuminated assets on the adopted highway. The policy commits to reducing our impact on the environment by using optimised lighting systems. It considers the negative impact of light pollution on nature in assessing where lighting should be added across the transport network, and mitigation measures needed to minimise environmental impacts when new lighting is required for public safety.

We have a [Tree Policy](#) which recognises trees as a critical component of the climate change adaptation infrastructure and a core element of the biodiversity, amenity and landscape of Oxfordshire.

1.7

We will manage our own landholdings, and other areas of land we are responsible for, to conserve and enhance biodiversity alongside their core functions, delivering against LNRS priorities and measures. We will encourage our tenants to do the same.

There is significant evidence that herbicides and pesticides have a detrimental effect on ecosystems and the wildlife they support. Although use of these chemicals is regulated, they are intentionally toxic to target species and put non-target species at risk during application, through seepage into the aquatic environment or through long-term persistence in the soil and build-up within wild animals. In addition, use of herbicides can reduce the diversity of plants in areas they are applied, which in turn impacts the range of animals supported by a habitat. Therefore, avoidance of pesticides and herbicides plays an important role in reversing species declines.

Alternative approaches to use of pesticides can include:

- 'Do-nothing': identifying where vegetation can be left alone and potentially provide habitat for wildlife
- Hand-weeding: can be applied in smaller areas and where volunteers can help manage a greenspace
- Mowing/strimming
- Mulching of newly planted areas
- Thermal control with hot water
- Brushing of hard surfaces

In some exceptional circumstances, for example, control of invasive plant species, herbicide application may be considered the only viable option. In this case stem injection of

herbicides reduces the amount of herbicide needed and its potential to contaminate the wider environment.

1.8 We will phase out the use of pesticides and herbicides in the course of our work. Exceptions to this will be made only in exceptional circumstances when it is demonstrated that there is a significant social or environment benefit, no alternative is available, and the technique does not cause significant damage to the environment.

Extraction of peat is harmful both to the rich diversity of plants and animals supported by peatlands and to the climate, as deep peat is a significant carbon store. It is estimated that peat extracted for horticulture since 1990 has released up to 31 million tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere. Whilst sale of peat in the retail horticultural sector has been banned, it is still used in the professional horticultural sector. There are government ambitions to phase out use of peat completely in horticulture by 2030.

The government's phased approach allows for horticultural businesses to identify suitable alternative growing media, replace commercial growing systems and allow plants already started in peat growing media to work their way through the supply chain. Whilst we recognise the need to stop all use of peat, a complete ban might limit our ability to achieve other aims, such as tree planting, if we can only source plants grown in peat media that are still working their way through the supply chain. We have therefore committed to phase out use of peat as soon as possible, with an aim to eliminate use of peat before 2030. This policy links to policy 1.3 to work with our suppliers to eliminate peat in our supply chain.

1.9 We will phase out the use of peat as soon as possible.

The UK supports 25% of the European population of badgers, whilst rarely seen, badgers are widely found in both urban and rural areas of Oxfordshire and are likely to be present across the Council's property portfolio.

Since 2012 it has been government policy for badgers to be culled in defined areas to reduce the spread of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) in cattle, with an aim to remove 70-90% of the badger population in each cull area. In 2018 the badger cull areas were extended to include Oxfordshire. A Defra report indicated that 1,371 badgers were culled in Oxfordshire in 2022 to prevent the spread of bTB.

In August 2024 the government released a statement that they plan to end badger culling with the introduction of a new strategy which will gather population data, undertake surveillance to provide up to date understanding of the disease in badger and other wildlife populations and establish a system of vaccination. It is indicated that the aim is to eliminate culling by the end of 2029. Existing cull processes will remain in place while new measures are rolled out and take effect.

The badger cull intentionally dramatically reduces the badger population, resulting in a reduction in biodiversity which is not consistent with our objective to be nature positive. Therefore, we will not permit badger culling for the purposes of preventing the spread of bTB on Council-owned land.

There may be other circumstances where we need to relocate badgers on Council property which is not prevented under this policy; we will in most cases avoid disturbance of damage to setts, but where this is unavoidable, we may have to close setts and relocate badgers under the appropriate licence from Natural England.

1.10 We will not permit badger culling on Council-owned land

We undertake a range of land use and infrastructure projects in the course of our work, some of which are implemented under permitted development rights, or fall outside of the scope of the planning process. As such, these projects are not required under the Biodiversity Net Gain regulations to deliver a measurable net gain in biodiversity, however many will provide the opportunity to do so and therefore an opportunity to fulfil our legal duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

When planning projects, we will implement the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy to avoid, mitigate and compensate for impacts. Where projects have a significant impact either in area (>25 m² of habitat) or biodiversity value (e.g. impact a priority habitat), then we will apply the statutory biodiversity metric or small sites metric, and seek to deliver 20% BNG that supports local nature recovery wherever possible, in a similar way as would be required if the project was taken through the planning process.

For less significant projects, where application of the small sites metric would be overly onerous, then we will seek to deliver a measurable net gain in biodiversity through other means, in a way which meets Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities and is appropriate to the ecological impacts of the project. This could include incorporating features for biodiversity such as wildlife habitats or nesting, roosting or hibernation features within the project site, or if this is not possible, delivering such gains elsewhere.

1.11 We will deliver measurable biodiversity net gain when carrying out projects not subject to planning control, or implemented under permitted development rights.

Planning including Biodiversity Net Gain

The Council has roles in planning both as Local Planning Authority in determining minerals and waste planning applications, and for Regulation 3 developments (planning applications made by the Council such as those for highways and schools).

The policies and text relating to planning presented in this document apply to County-led (Regulation 3) developments, unless specific reference is made to Local Plans. The delivery of statutory policies within Oxfordshire for conserving and enhancing biodiversity on Minerals and Waste Development is through the Minerals and Waste Local Plan.

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development or land management that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. Since February 2024 development projects (apart from exempt developments) have been subject to a mandatory minimum 10% BNG.

Objective 3 of the Oxfordshire Environment Principles (see page 19) makes a commitment to achieve and where possible exceed government and local BNG targets with an ambition

of achieving 20% BNG. As an adopted OCC Strategy, this policy statement is a material consideration in the consideration of Regulation 3 planning applications, and all OCC led developments should therefore already seek to achieve 20% BNG. The Biodiversity Action Framework builds on Objective 3 of the Oxfordshire Environment Principles to introduce a commitment by the Council to delivering a minimum 20% BNG which supports local nature recovery wherever possible through its own developments.

When planning and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain on Council-led developments we will have regard to the Oxfordshire BNG Principles (see page 23).

To help ensure that Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in Oxfordshire truly delivers outcomes for nature, the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership has developed the [Oxfordshire NatureMark](#) – a local standard of high integrity for habitat banks. This recognition is designed to give developers confidence that the BNG units they are investing in meet rigorous criteria for ecological quality and long-term sustainability. By setting a clear benchmark for what ‘good’ looks like, the NatureMark helps align development with nature recovery.

Oxfordshire NatureMark Principles

Principle 1	Transparency
Principle 2	Third Party Verification
Principle 3	Quantification / Anti Greenwashing
Principle 4	Additionality
Principle 5	Avoiding Negative Impacts
Principle 6	Lasting Impact / Permanence
Principle 7	Governance and Local Engagement

When delivering offsite BNG through habitat banks for its own development, the Council will seek to use habitat banks which adhere to these principles.

The Council recognises the importance of planning for a changing climate; we will therefore plan to deliver biodiversity net gain which will be resilient in a changing climate. This could include considering the source and variety of native species used to create habitats, the appropriateness of habitats to be created considering climate change predictions, and building in contingency to the amount of BNG we plan to ensure we can still deliver on commitments.

It is recognised that in introducing a policy to exceed 20% BNG there might be scenarios where the appropriate Biodiversity Net Gain units cannot be delivered within Oxfordshire to achieve $\geq 20\%$ BNG across all unit types (watercourse, area and hedgerow units). The aim of the policy is to support local nature recovery, therefore if it is not possible to deliver the additional BNG need generated by this policy within Oxfordshire, alternative biodiversity enhancements that align to the priorities identified in the Oxfordshire LNRS will be provided. This approach can only be applied if mandatory and local plan BNG requirements have been met, and it has been demonstrated that reasonable steps have been taken to deliver the policy requirement for $\geq 20\%$ BNG within Oxfordshire.

Biodiversity enhancements provided in lieu of the shortfall to meet $\geq 20\%$ BNG in Oxfordshire should be as closely related to the type of BNG shortfall as possible. For example, if enough watercourse units cannot be delivered within Oxfordshire, then appropriate alternative enhancements might include measures for priority aquatic species. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to deliver such enhancements through contributions to projects and work

of partner organisations, contributions generated in this way might be pooled to deliver viable projects which support LNRS priorities.

There is a risk that the introduction of this policy for a minimum 20% BNG could introduce unforeseen budget pressures for some Council-led development projects where the new requirement has been introduced after the Initial Business Case for a project has been approved. A transition period therefore applies to this policy, whereby any Council-led development project for which the Initial Business Case was approved prior to the adoption date of the Biodiversity Action Framework will not be subject to the requirement for a minimum 20% BNG, however such developments will still be expected to aim for 20% BNG in line with the Climate and Natural Environment Statement, and comply with mandatory BNG and Local Plan BNG policies.

In relation to our own developments; we will deliver a minimum 20% biodiversity net gain which supports local nature recovery, wherever possible, and have regard to the Oxfordshire BNG principles. When using Habitat Banks to secure BNG, we will seek to use those which adhere to the Oxfordshire Naturemark Principles. We will plan for BNG that is resilient to climate change.

1.12 If delivery of BNG to meet this policy exceeds mandatory or local plan requirements and the additional BNG need generated by this policy cannot be delivered within Oxfordshire then, once reasonable steps to achieve the policy requirement within Oxfordshire have proved insufficient, alternative biodiversity enhancements which meet Oxfordshire LNRS priorities will be provided.

(This policy is subject to a transition period for Council developments for which an Initial Business Case was approved prior to adoption of the policy).

The current Minerals and Waste Core Strategy 2017 sets out a vision for minerals planning in Oxfordshire in 2031 including the requirement for restored mineral workings to enhance the quality of Oxfordshire's natural environment and the quality of life for Oxfordshire residents by:

- Delivering a net gain in biodiversity, and making a significant contribution to establishing a coherent and resilient ecological network, through the creation of priority habitats at a landscape scale;
- enhancing the green infrastructure within Oxfordshire, providing opportunity for access to the countryside and recreation activity; and
- helping to reduce the risk of flooding and adding to flood storage capacity.

Minerals Planning Objective X is: Implement a biodiversity-led restoration strategy that delivers a net gain in biodiversity, and contributes to establishing a coherent and resilient ecological network, through the landscape-scale creation of priority habitat.

In coming years, the current Core Strategy will be replaced by new policy in a Minerals and Waste Local Plan; this is the process by which we can develop planning policies that support our obligations to conserve and enhance biodiversity. To inform development of BNG and local nature recovery policies within the next round of Minerals and Waste strategic plans, we will gather evidence to inform our policy development.

1.13 We will gather evidence on biodiversity and nature recovery to inform development of future minerals and waste planning policies that make a meaningful contribution to local nature recovery.

2. A Natural Capital Approach

The life-support services provided by ecosystems, which underpin health and human wellbeing, are referred to as ecosystem services. They are derived from Natural Capital, that part of nature which directly or indirectly underpins value to people, including ecosystems, species, freshwater, soils, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions².

These ecosystem services can be considered in 3 categories;

- **provisioning services** which include food crops, livestock, wood, fish and fresh water supply;
- **cultural services** including recreation, aesthetic value, education and knowledge, interaction with nature, and sense of place;
- **regulating services** including flood control, erosion control, water quality, carbon storage, air quality, cooling and shading, noise regulation, pollination and pest control.

The ability of natural assets to provide goods and services is determined by their quality, quantity and location. Baseline mapping of natural capital, in terms of its ability to deliver these 18 ecosystem services in Oxfordshire, has been produced by the Environmental Change Institute, Oxford University³, as well as opportunity mapping for a subset of ecosystem services for which effective delivery is location specific.

This mapping, and tools such as the [Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool](#), can help us to understand the natural capital impacts of proposals for land-use change and inform our decisions. The policy approach below does not apply to site allocations or restoration policies being considered through our role as LPA for minerals and waste planning, unless any of those sites are owned by the Council.

2.1 Where we propose land use change on our own land, or land we are responsible for, we will undertake an assessment of natural capital impacts to inform decisions and ensure the best public value, considering the scarcity of some natural resources and trade-offs between objectives.

In several areas of the Council's work the outcomes we seek can be achieved through nature-based solutions – these use the ecosystem services provided by nature to achieve outcomes.

Examples include:

² [Natural Capital Terminology \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [bicester-Natural-capital-mapping-in-Oxfordshire-Short-report-V3.pdf](#)

- Natural flood management, which can support our roles and responsibilities as Lead Local Flood Authority and our ambitions for climate resilience and adaptation
- Carbon sequestration which can support our Net Zero and beyond Net Zero commitments
- Natural shading and reduced surface run-off, which also support climate adaptation,
- Improved health and wellbeing which can support our role as Public Health Authority.

In many cases nature-based solutions will provide multiple benefits.

In our role as Highways Authority we already seek to increase canopy cover and deliver climate adaptation, as per our Tree Policy, and through our work as Lead Local Flood Authority we support and recommend use of Natural Flood Management solutions.

As above, the Oxford University Natural Capital maps, and the Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool (EBNT) can help us understand which nature-based solutions could be delivered through different actions, and in some cases, where they would be best located. The analysis of the [Current and Future Climate Vulnerability of Oxfordshire](#) can also be referenced to understand where future vulnerability in Oxfordshire may be greatest. It is possible for nature-based solutions to have a negative impact on biodiversity if delivered in areas of biodiversity value. The Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool is based on biodiversity net gain data and can therefore be used to ensure that nature-based solutions deliver benefit whilst providing ecosystem services.

2.2 We will prioritise the use of nature-based solutions to deliver our services where appropriate to meet service needs, and where this will benefit biodiversity.

Where we have a requirement to provide biodiversity net gain, we have an opportunity to help deliver against other Council priorities, where this is compatible with achieving nature recovery. When designing BNG we will seek to deliver multi-functional benefits appropriate to the location, including access to greenspace, natural flood management and climate adaptation. This approach can be aided by tools such the natural capital mapping and Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool.

2.3 In relation to our own developments, where appropriate we will seek to deliver multi-functional benefits through BNG including improved access to greenspace and adaptation to climate change.

There is a wealth of evidence that shows that the profound effects of improved connections with nature on children; those who spend time outside connecting with nature see improvements in school attendance, behaviours, academic achievement and social skills.

There is a range of support through partners for schools to improve young people's connectedness with nature including from the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, Earth Trust, Science Oxford, Oxfordshire Schools Sustainability Network, and the National Education Nature Park.

Through our Children's and Families Service we can support and encourage schools to improve children's opportunities to connect with nature, through promoting and disseminating information and sharing best practice.

2.4 We will support schools to incorporate nature-based learning, provide for biodiversity within school grounds, take action for wildlife, and connect pupils with nature.

Green Infrastructure (GI) is a term often used in Town and Country Planning to refer to a network of multifunctional 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 (National Planning Policy Framework).

A report commissioned by the Council '[Making the Case for Investment in Green Infrastructure for Oxfordshire](#)' sets out evidence to demonstrate Green Infrastructure's contribution to economic development, sustainable housing provision and social wellbeing. It provides direct evidence to show how Green Infrastructure helps achieve Oxfordshire's strategic objectives for Local Authorities, businesses, organisations and communities in Oxfordshire.

Due to its multi-functional nature there are a range of service areas within the Council that have a role in planning and delivering Green Infrastructure, these include Countryside and Rights of Way, the Tree Team, Climate Action, Archaeology, Landscape and Nature Recovery, Public Health, Active Travel, Highways, Property and Estates, Planning and more. Through enhancing collaborative working across service areas that have a role in Green Infrastructure we can help ensure a strategic and co-ordinated approach.

2.4 We will develop collaborative ways of working across OCC service areas to realise opportunities to enhance delivery of multi-functional green infrastructure and help address inequalities in greenspace provision in the County.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework identifies principles and standards for Green Infrastructure in England. Whilst much of this guidance is most relevant to 2nd Tier Authorities in Oxfordshire, as it relates to provision of residential development and Local Plans, we can play a role at a strategic level in support of co-ordinated action toward achieving the Green Infrastructure Standards in Oxfordshire

The Districts and City have Green Infrastructure strategies in place to support their Local Plan processes, and many of our wider partners manage green infrastructure assets. At a County level we can play an important role in developing evidence and supporting co-ordinated action to support an increase in provision of Green Infrastructure in such a way to meet local needs.

2.5 In partnership we will develop evidence and support co-ordinated action to ensure provision of sufficient green infrastructure across Oxfordshire to support nature, the health and wellbeing of our current and future communities, adaptation and resilience to our changing climate, and the local economy.

3. Oxfordshire-wide Nature Recovery

Oxfordshire County Council was appointed Responsible Authority for the Oxfordshire LNRS in 2023; through collaboration with partners and local consultation we created a LNRS which sets out a collective vision for nature recovery across Oxfordshire.

The purpose of the LNRS is to indicate which areas of the county need which targeted actions to create a bigger, better, and more joined up network for biodiversity to recover. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy has four key elements which, together, make up the strategy:

- Statement of Biodiversity Priorities
- Species Priorities List
- Description of the Strategy Area
- Local Habitat Map

We will seek to ensure that the priorities and measures identified in the LNRS are implemented across the County in partnership with a wide range of communities, landowners, eNGOs, businesses and public sector organisations. This will be key in achieving our vision for nature recovery in the County, and achieving a network of habitats that deliver against the Lawton Principles, to ensure nature is more resilient to pressures.

We will need to re-publish the LNRS every 3-10 years when instructed to do so by the Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs. We will need to monitor actions taken and gather evidence to support this refresh of the strategy.

Working with OXLEP on the Green Prospectus, and the Local Nature Partnership, we are starting work to identify a pipeline of projects which will deliver against LNRS priorities and measures, with an aim to secure investment for their delivery.

We will also seek to deliver Local Nature Recovery priorities and measures through our own work, when implementing policies in this framework, as well as seeking new opportunities to develop or support exemplar nature recovery projects which help demonstrate delivery of the Oxfordshire LNRS.

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 3.1 | As Responsible Authority for the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy we will work with, and through, the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership to: |
| 3.1.1 | Promote, co-ordinate and enable delivery of measures towards the priorities of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. |
| 3.1.2 | Gather data on implementation of LNRS measures across the County to monitor delivery and inform future refreshes of the LNRS. |
| 3.1.3 | Help ensure that up-to-date natural environment data is available to inform partner and community actions for nature recovery, and to monitor the effectiveness of implementation of the LNRS. |

3.1.4 Support development of a pipeline of projects to help deliver the LNRS priorities and measures.

3.1.5 Help secure funding and investment of projects which deliver the LNRS priorities and measures.

The Lower Windrush Valley covers 28 square kilometres of West Oxfordshire, incorporating the floodplain of the River Windrush from Witney to where it joins the River Thames at Newbridge. Over the last 60 years the landscape character of the valley has been transformed by mineral extraction with large areas of the riverside pasture transformed into a mosaic of open water. With mineral extraction set to continue for many years to come the Lower Windrush Valley Project (LWVP) was created in 2001 by Oxfordshire County Council to create and implement an environmental strategy for this area and is still running to this day. We will be reviewing the project's strategy to ensure it continues to deliver against its objectives whilst also meeting the new priorities published in the LNRS.

There are many existing and emerging projects from local to landscape scale across the County which will help deliver the LNRS. We will seek to support and develop exemplar projects to help deliver the LNRS and encourage others to take action.

3.2 We will develop, or support, exemplar nature recovery projects which help demonstrate delivery of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

County-wide nature recovery is dependent on actions across the public, private and voluntary sectors, including communities, landowners, businesses and local authorities. We recognise the importance of 'enablers' that put in place, and support, the mechanisms necessary for achievement of nature recovery on-the-ground. Key 'enablers' in Oxfordshire include the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP).

TVERC holds over 3 million records of flora and fauna across Berkshire and Oxfordshire, as well as information about Local Wildlife and Geological Sites, NERC Act S41 Habitats of Principal Importance, Conservation Target Areas, and Nature Recovery Networks. It collects this data from the general public, skilled volunteers/amateur recorders, professionals working for wildlife charities and government agencies, and ecological consultants.

The information is critical in supporting Oxfordshire County Council in meeting our duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. It helps ensure action is focussed where it will have the most benefit, informs our land management activities to ensure we protect rare species and habitats, and is critical in supporting our role as planning authority to make informed decisions and to evidence strategic plans. TVERCs data is just as important in informing the decisions of the public, private and voluntary sectors across Oxfordshire.

The Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership is an organisation of key partners working together to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate and the priority it is given, helping to make Oxfordshire a county where people and nature thrive. The OLNP has three key focus areas: Nature Finance, Nature Recovery, and Nature and Health.

Involvement in these areas supports OCC's delivery of biodiversity conservation and enhancement across a range of services including planning, public health, climate adaptation and delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, as well as extending this approach through partnership working.

3.3 We will support and proactively engage with the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre and other organisations who enable achievement of nature recovery in Oxfordshire.

Three National Landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty): the Chilterns, the Cotswolds and the North Wessex Downs extend into Oxfordshire covering approximately 25% of the county's area. They are primarily designated to conserve and enhance their natural beauty but they also seek to further education and enjoyment of the area.

National Landscapes are seen as one of the key delivery areas for achieving 30% of biodiversity-rich land by 2030, and as such efforts to further nature recovery work in these areas is only going to increase through Management Plan policies, project work and partnership working.

Oxfordshire County Council supports and works with the National Landscapes on their statutory Management Plans, which are a material consideration to the Council's Planning function. In addition, under S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and the recent amendments of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, Oxfordshire County Council 'must seek to further' the statutory purposes of the National Landscapes when exercising or performing any of its functions. This includes seeking to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, special qualities, and key characteristics of the National Landscapes.

The [Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscapes Study](#) was produced in partnership with Natural England and the Earth Trust, to investigate landscape character and biodiversity across the County, in conjunction with Landscape Character Assessments it provides a useful reference to ensure that our biodiversity actions are in keeping with local landscape character.

3.4 We will support and work with the three National Landscapes in our County on development and delivery of their Management Plans, Nature Recovery Plans and Climate Adaptation Plans. We will ensure that our actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity, complement our obligation to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, special qualities and key characteristics of our National Landscapes. We will also seek for our biodiversity actions to be in keeping with and enhance landscape character when considering types and species of planting, and management actions anywhere in the County.

As a statutory consultee on Local Plans in Oxfordshire, we will encourage policies which support delivery of the LNRS, exceed minimum requirements for mandatory BNG, promote use of the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Net Gain Principles and the Oxfordshire NatureMark.

3.5 We will encourage development of District and City local plan policies which exceed the minimum 10% biodiversity net gain requirement, have regard to

the Oxfordshire BNG Principles, and support delivery of the LNRS.

Alongside the Districts, we fund and support the Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project, which is a partnership project led by the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) and the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) on behalf of the Oxfordshire Local Authorities. The project undertakes a rolling programme of survey and selection of Local Wildlife Sites according to agreed selection criteria. Local Wildlife Sites are sites of importance to wildlife at a County level. The Project liaises with the owners of Local Wildlife Sites to arrange access for survey and provide advice on conservation management of their sites.

Support of the Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project enables us to deliver biodiversity actions across a range of Council service areas:

- Alongside nationally designated sites and irreplaceable habitats, Local Wildlife Sites form the core areas of existing importance for biodiversity from which the Local Nature Recovery Strategy seeks to buffer, extend and join up habitat to create a nature recovery network. Achieving positive nature conservation management of Local Wildlife Sites will be critical in delivering the LNRS.
- The selection of Local Wildlife Sites, and maintenance of up-to-date data relating to them is key to informing our planning policy and development management functions, ensuring that we appropriately identify Local Wildlife Sites through the planning process, and can correctly apply the planning policies which protect them.
- The identification of Local Wildlife Sites also helps inform our own land management where they fall within our ownership
- The project plays an important role in ensuring that Local Wildlife Site owners have good awareness of the importance of their land for biodiversity and receive good advice on appropriate land management.

[Data](#) on the proportion of Local Sites in positive conservation management in England is collected by Defra. The latest data from 23/24 indicates that 45% of Local Wildlife Sites are considered to be in positive conservation management in Oxfordshire, compared to 35% in positive conservation management across England.

3.6

Working in partnership we will identify, conserve and enhance Oxfordshire Local Wildlife Sites, seeking to increase the proportion of sites in positive conservation management with an aim to achieve 70% in positive management by 2030.

[Community Action Groups \(CAG\) Oxfordshire](#) is a network of over 100 community action groups working across Oxfordshire to make it a safer, fairer, greener, more sustainable place to live, work and visit. Together, CAG are working towards a vision for an Oxfordshire with resilient and empowered communities, so that people and planet can thrive within ecological limits.

Work by CAGs Oxfordshire particularly aligned to conservation and enhancement of biodiversity include a communities and nature project which has awarded grants of £5000 (over 5 years) to groups around Oxfordshire to deliver projects that deepen people's connection to nature, and the Oxfordshire Nature Project which works with parishes and communities to help develop plans for nature recovery.

3.7 We will continue to support Oxfordshire's Community Action Groups to help deliver community level actions for nature recovery

4. Biodiversity awareness

Government statistics relating to public awareness, understanding and support for conservation in England show that in 2023, 39% of people were highly engaged with the issue of biodiversity loss – these are people who are aware of the threat to biodiversity and are concerned about biodiversity loss. They take actions to support and protect biodiversity. 14% of people showed some engagement with the issue, 15% were not engaged, and 33% said they were not aware of the threat to biodiversity in England.

Early Phase 1 engagement on the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy indicated strong interest in taking action for nature, with 97% of 650 survey participants indicating they would like to do more to increase nature in Oxfordshire or are already doing this to their best capacity. However, the survey also identified the top 5 barriers that prevent people doing more for nature as: lack of, or extent of, landownership; lack of time; lack of knowledge of what could be done and/or where.

Oxfordshire County Council provides input to the following services within Oxfordshire which provide scope for focussed awareness raising of biodiversity:

- Schools – 304 (168 academies and 136 maintained schools)
- Care homes – 123 sites
- Community support service centres – 6 sites
- Museums – 42 sites
- Libraries – 45 sites

There is also scope to do much more awareness raising through our website and with our partners, particularly in connection with promotion of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

We have a good track record in improving environmental awareness in our communities particularly in relation to waste and recycling and climate action; we will look to extend this approach to local biodiversity issues, identifying where we can best support or enhance the work of the many local groups and wildlife organisations already doing much to raise awareness in our communities.

4.1 We will work with partners to increase engagement and awareness-raising to enable our communities to take action to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

5. Access to nature for all

Access and engagement with greenspaces are increasingly recognised as playing a key role in improving health and wellbeing. However, 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.

Within the Council's own landholding there may be opportunities to provide high quality accessible greenspace, in particular through reviewing opportunities to help meet the Green Infrastructure Standards for Accessible Greenspace and for Urban Nature Recovery in the Green Infrastructure Framework, by identifying opportunities to provide high quality public access on our landholdings (with reference to Green Flag standard) and increase biodiversity on our landholdings with public access (including designation of Local Nature Reserves to contribute toward the standard of 1ha LNR per 1000 population).

5.1 We will aim to improve access to high quality natural greenspace through provision on land for which we have responsibility, where appropriate.

An [analysis of accessible nature greenspace provision in Oxfordshire in 2017](#) demonstrated that large numbers of residencies in Oxfordshire do not meet one of the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt). In 2024, a study into [Oxfordshire's greenspace-deprived neighbourhoods](#) by Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery, University of Oxford, identified 16 priority neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire which are in the lowest 30% of socio-economic deprivation in England and lack access to greenspace according to multiple metrics; these are all in urban areas with clusters in Banbury and Oxford. These neighbourhoods should be prioritised in terms of planning, funding and effort to improve quality and quantity of accessible greenspace.

5.2 We will work with partners towards improving biodiversity value of, and access to, greenspace, including reducing inequalities in access to natural greenspace.