

**CABINET**  
**25 February 2025**

**Badger Culling**

**Report by Director of Environment and Highways**

**RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
  - a) Re-affirm the Council's opposition to badger culling
  - b) Note that a specific policy about badger culling not being permitted on Council-owned land will be presented for adoption in due course
  - c) Note that the Leader has written to DEFRA making clear the council's continued opposition to the badger cull and any extension in size and scope.

**Executive Summary**

2. A motion was passed at Council on 10 December 2024 as follows;
  - (a) Re-affirm the Councils opposition to badger culling which has been shown to be an ineffective control measure for bovine Tuberculosis.
  - (b) Asks the Cabinet to consider a specific policy that badger culling will not be permitted on Council-owned land.
  - (c) Requests that the Leader writes to DEFRA making clear our continued opposition to the cull and any extension of it in size and scope

The constitution requires that Cabinet respond to the motion.

3. Council passed the motion on 10 December 2024 which effectively reaffirms the opposition to badger culling.
4. A policy is in development and will be presented to Cabinet for agreement in the spring 2025.
5. The Leader has written to DEFRA stating the continued opposition of the Council to the UK Governments strategy of culling badgers.

## Background

6. The current UK Government policy regarding badger culling has been in place since 2012. The policy is for badgers to be culled within a given area in order to reduce bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) in cattle. The aim is to remove 70-90% of badgers in each cull area and Oxfordshire is one of these cull areas.
7. In August 2024 the new UK Government [released a statement](#) saying that they plan to end badger culling with the introduction of a new strategy which will gather badger population data, undertake surveillance to provide up to date understanding of the disease in the badger and other wildlife populations and establish a system of vaccinating.
8. The Government have indicated an aim to eliminate culling by the end of this parliament (2029) and DEFRA have stated that existing cull processes will be honoured while new measures are rolled out and take effect.
9. In July 2018 the then leader of the council, Councillor Ian Hudspeth, wrote to the then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Michael Gove MP, opposing the UK governments proposal that the badger cull be extended to “areas of lower risk including Oxfordshire”.

## Oxfordshire badger population

10. The exact number of badgers in Oxfordshire is not currently known, however following analysis of records provided by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC), a total of 362 badger records (records include badger setts, field signs and sightings) were available in 2023. This is a decrease from 2022 (Figure 1) and a general decrease over the past 5 years can be observed. It is important to note that ecological records are observations that have been recorded by individuals, therefore they can only provide an indication of the badger population size in Oxfordshire.

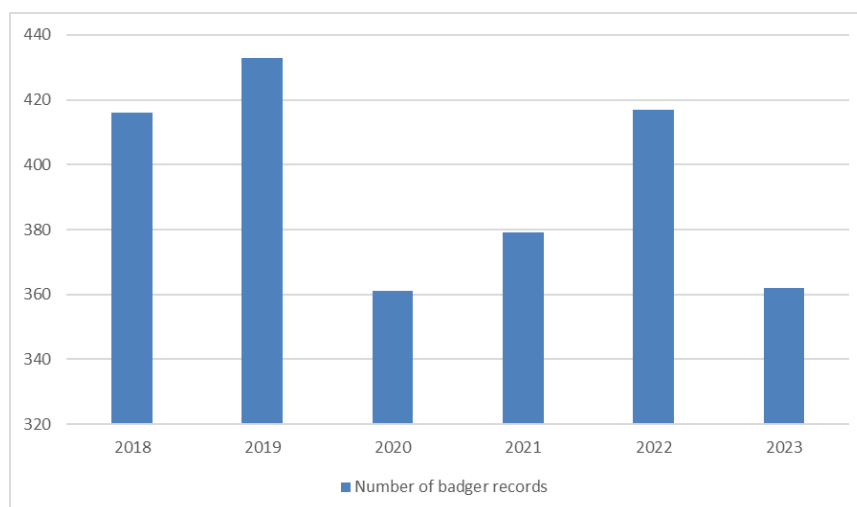


Figure 1. Number of badger records provided by TVERC between 2018 and 2023 in Oxfordshire

11. A study is currently underway to understand the population health of badgers in Britain ([STATE OF THE BADGER | Badger Trust](#)). The aim of this study is to produce a comprehensive report that answers some of the questions regarding badger population, threats, and recovery. The report will be used to assess density and distribution estimates, historical and current population changes, and badger crime statistics.
12. DEFRA reported that 33,627 badgers were culled in 2022, 1,371 of these were from within Oxfordshire which is more than 3 times the number of badger records held by TVERC for this year.

### **Council owned land**

13. The council owns land around its operational portfolio which it has full control over and is highly unlikely to be targeted during a cull. Additionally, highways are council owned land as are some schools although officers do not consider it likely that these would be targeted during a cull.
14. The council also owns or leases an agricultural portfolio that is managed by the Estates team. There are over 1,100 acres which form a mix of arable, pasture, woodland and other areas such as allotments. Of the pastureland there is no dairy farming, but there are three tenants who keep beef cattle.

### **Development of the policy**

15. The policy will be developed by the Landscape and Nature Recovery team in conjunction with the Estates team. It is not intended that there will be public consultation but there will be consideration during the policy development stage of how this should be communicated and managed with tenant farmers on council owned land, and clauses to be included in any future or existing tenancy agreements, leases and licences.

### **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

16. The policy once developed will support the Council's strategic plan objective of taking action to protect and increase biodiversity, supporting nature recovery, in rural and urban environments.
17. Reducing badger culls increases biodiversity which is a strategic aim of the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy due for publication in summer 2025.

### **Financial Implications**

18. There are no financial implications at this stage.

Comments checked by: Filipp Skiffins - Assistant Finance Business Partner  
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## **Legal Implications**

19. Any opposition to badger culling on Council owned land will need to comply with the relevant legislation, including the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and associated regulations.
20. Advice from the legal team will need to be obtained prior to making any amendments to, or granting, tenancy agreements, leases or licences on land that may be affected.

Comments checked by: Karen Jordan, Senior Solicitor and Team  
Leader (Environment Team, Legal), [Karen.Jordan@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Karen.Jordan@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

## **Staff Implications**

21. Development of the policy will be undertaken by existing employees.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

22. There are no equality and inclusion implications at this stage. An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed for the policy during drafting.

## **Sustainability Implications**

23. The proposed policy will have a positive impact on biodiversity by preventing as far as is within the control of the Council, the culling of a protected species which is an integral part of England's ecosystem.
24. There are no climate action implications to this report.

## **Risk Management**

25. There are no risks at this stage, and this will be further considered during the development of the policy.

Paul Fermer

Director of Environment & Highways.

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil

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