



Biodiversity Action at Oxfordshire County Council

Report Jan 2023-Dec 2025



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

Table of Contents

About Oxfordshire County Council	3
How we can affect biodiversity	3
Meeting our Biodiversity Duty	3
Biodiversity Action Framework 2025-2030: our policies and objectives	6
Spotlight on: Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy	8
Nature Positive Council	9
Actions we've taken	9
Internal Policies and Processes	9
Spotlight on: Biodiversity in Procurement, Highways Contracting	10
Managing Land to Improve Biodiversity	11
Spotlight on: Road Verge Nature Reserves	11
Planning, including Biodiversity Net Gain Information	12
Future Actions	15
A Natural Capital Approach	17
Actions we've taken	17
Future Actions	18
Spotlight on: working with partners	19
Oxfordshire-wide Nature Recovery	20
Actions we've taken	20
Future Actions	21
Spotlight on: Oxfordshire Local Wildlife Sites Project	22
Biodiversity Awareness	23
Actions we've taken	23
Future Actions	23
Spotlight on: Community Action Groups Oxfordshire.....	24
Access to Nature for All	25
Actions we've taken	25
Future Actions	25
Spotlight on: Lower Windrush Valley Project	27

About Oxfordshire County Council

We're the local authority for Oxfordshire, committed to delivering top quality services and value for money on behalf of the county's 600,000+ residents. We are responsible for providing a wide range of services, including education (schools, libraries and youth services), adult and children's services, highway maintenance, waste disposal, emergency planning, consumer protection and planning for matters to do with minerals, waste, highways and education.

Our vision, as set out in our Strategic Plan 2025-2030 is to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. This is centred around strong and connected communities, healthy places to live, and a thriving local economy that benefits everyone.

How we can affect biodiversity

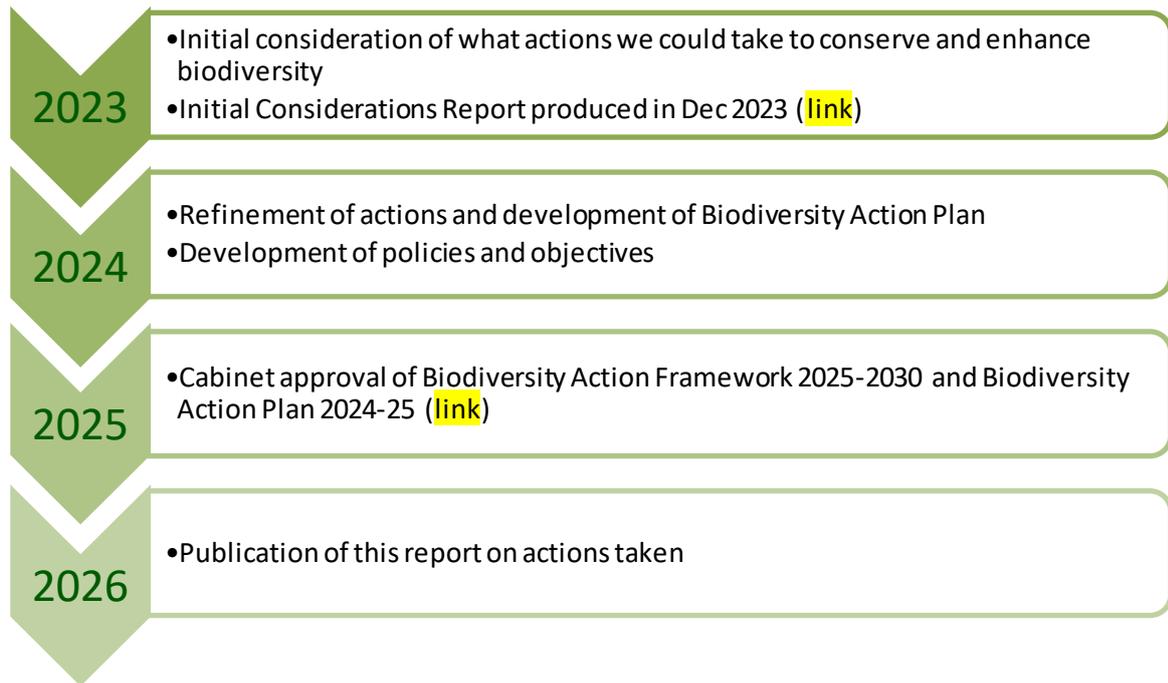
The Council is responsible for a wide range of services, and in providing these has the potential to affect biodiversity both positively and negatively. Through our Biodiversity Action Framework (see page 6) we have committed to be 'Nature Positive' meaning that we will work to reduce our negative impacts on nature and deliver enhancements to contribute towards reversing local, national, and global biodiversity declines.

Effects on biodiversity, both positive and negative, can arise through a range of Council activities including how we manage our land, through our planning applications and decisions, through advice we give, through raising awareness and through impacts of our operations on the environment. Much of what we can achieve towards taking strategic positive action to help nature recover is through the strength of working with our partners across the County towards the priorities identified in our Local Nature Recovery Strategy (see page 8).

Meeting our Biodiversity Duty

This report has been prepared to report on how we are fulfilling our 'strengthened' biodiversity duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended).

With respect to this duty, which was strengthened under the Environment Act 2021 we have undertaken the following steps:



This report includes:

- a summary of the action OCC have taken to comply with the biodiversity duty;
- how OCC plan to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period;
- the actions OCC have carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations;
- details of biodiversity net gains resulting from biodiversity gain plans OCC have approved; and
- how OCC plan to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period.

Our Top Achievements for Biodiversity

Council Climate Action Scorecards

In 2025 we were assessed as the leading county council in England for climate action and their individual biodiversity score: [County Councils' Climate Action Scorecards | Climate Emergency UK](#).

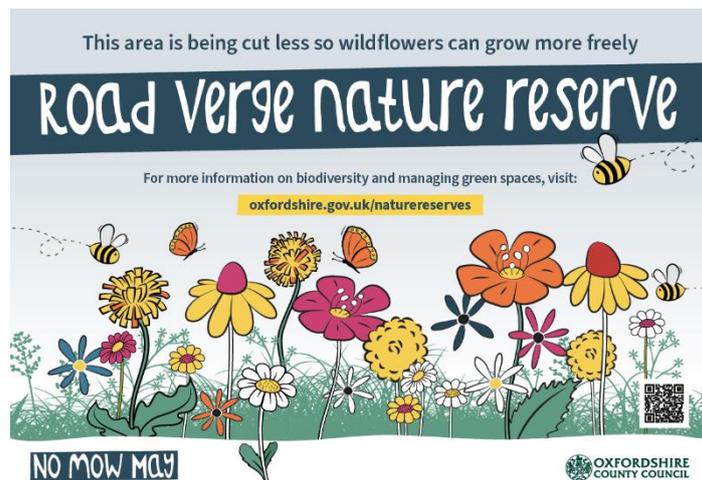


We published the first Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire. The strategy can be found here: [Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) | Oxfordshire County Council](#).



We have recruited **66 biodiversity volunteers** since the launch of the biodiversity volunteer programme in 2024, providing over 350 hours of volunteer time. Further information about this role and how to apply can be found at: [Biodiversity Volunteer](#).

We have designated **25 new Road Verge Nature Reserves (RVNRs)** since 2023 and launched a new online form for proposal of new RVNR sites and other actions to improve the biodiversity value of verges in Oxfordshire.



More information can be found here: [Taking action for the environment | Oxfordshire County Council](#).



Biodiversity Net Gain

Since 2023, through voluntary Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on our own planning applications, we delivered an average of:

17.84% BNG (biodiversity net gain) for area habitat units

135.07% BNG for hedgerow units

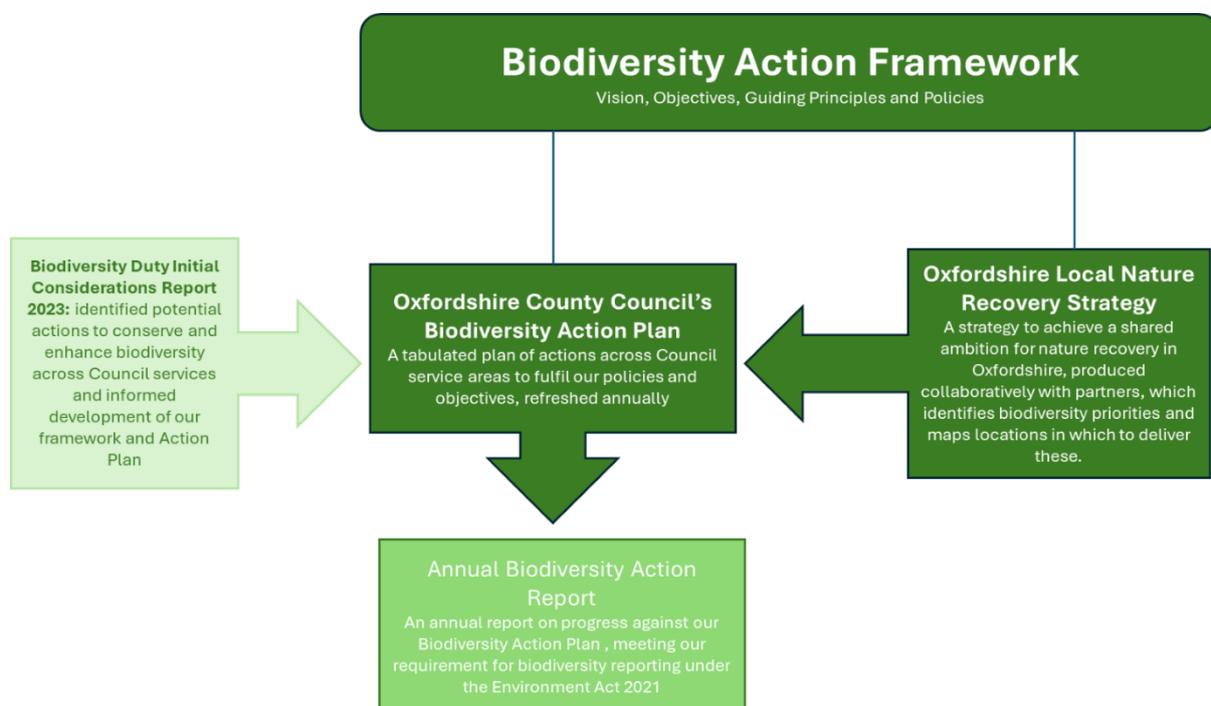
90.03% BNG for watercourse units

Biodiversity Action Framework 2025-2030: our policies and objectives

Our Biodiversity Action Framework 2025-2030 ([link](#)) was approved by our Cabinet in November 2025. It sets out our 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 which focusses on our 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 2006.
- 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.

The Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan help identify how we can help deliver against the priorities set out in the Oxfordshire LNRS. As the two were developed alongside one another, the annual refresh of our Biodiversity Action Plan will allow us to review how we can further align our actions to deliver against the LNRS priorities.



The Biodiversity Action Framework sets out our vision and objectives, which are supported by 31 policies.

Biodiversity Action Framework 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.

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.

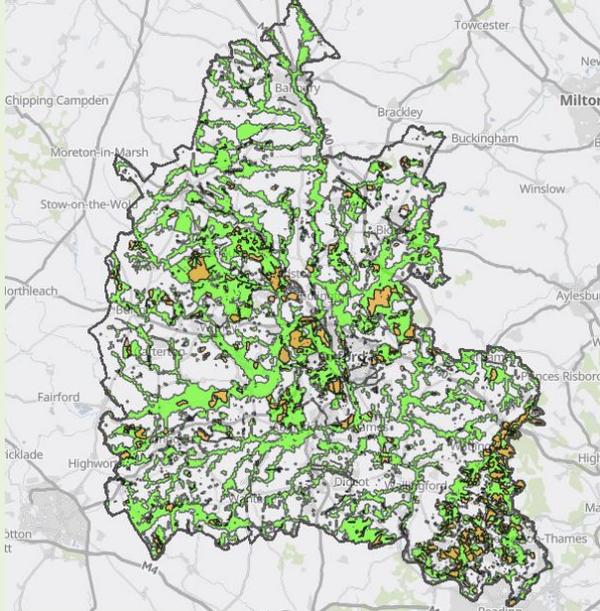
Objective 5: Access to Nature for All

We will work with partners to improve access to nature across the County, tackling inequalities in access, to improve health and wellbeing.

Throughout this document we have aligned our reporting against these five overarching objectives.

Spotlight on: Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

In November 2025 we published the [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#), an ambitious, evidence-led roadmap influenced by local people and organisations.



For 2 years, we worked with organisations spanning nature conservation, farming, local business, local authorities, and community groups to develop the strategy, which is designed to result in a well-connected, biodiversity-rich, network of nature that is resilient into the future, restored for the health and wellbeing of future generations, and for nature's own sake.

The partnership met people, listened to local priorities and crafted a set of targeted actions for priority habitats and species in the County.

The LNRS includes an innovative, interactive map that guides nature recovery efforts to areas that could become particularly important for biodiversity, offering every corner of Oxfordshire the chance to play its part in this collective endeavour.

The LNRS was launched at the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Forum at the Oxford Museum of Natural History, where over 100 attendees heard from key speakers and engaged in workshops to inform how we identify strategic projects that will support LNRS delivery.

As we transition to delivery of the LNRS we will work with and through the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership to convene partners, embed the LNRS into decision making, identify and support strategic projects, and monitor and report on progress.



Nature Positive Council

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

We have included 13 policies against this objective in our Biodiversity Action Framework

Actions we've taken

Internal Policies and Processes

✓ Ethical Procurement

- In September 2024 the Council adopted a new Ethical Procurement Policy which includes conservation and enhancement of biodiversity as a key consideration for the Council's supply chain.
- This was followed by Ethical Procurement Policy Service Area Guidance (August 2025) which integrated consideration of our Biodiversity Action Framework commitments including:
 - The need for pre-market engagement
 - BNG and Biodiversity Mitigation Hierarchy compliance
 - Assessment of supplier capabilities
 - Inclusion of monitoring and reporting on biodiversity outcomes

✓ Up-to-date biodiversity data

We have updated our GIS database with new data from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) relating to:

- Local Wildlife Sites
- Protected and Notable Species
- Priority Habitat
- Invasive non-native species

From April 2023 – April 25 474, 678 new records were added to the TVERC database within Oxfordshire (TVERC Annual Report 23/24 Oxfordshire County Council and TVERC Annual Report 24/25 Oxfordshire County Council), including data relating to great crested newts, harvest mice, swifts, water voles, birds, bats, badgers, habitats and flora.

✓ In-house ecological staff and volunteer capacity

We have increased our ecological staff capacity from 0.7 FTE to 5.7 FTE during the reporting period.

Approximately 390 volunteer hours have supported ecological survey work across Oxfordshire, as well as habitat management work within the Lower Windrush Valley.

✓ Carbon and Circular Economy

As recognised in our Biodiversity Action Framework, action by the Council towards becoming Carbon Neutral by 2030 and to embed a circular economy approach will be beneficial to biodiversity by reducing the pressures on the biodiversity resulting from climate change and over consumption.

Actions relating to climate are reported separately through the Council's Climate Action programme; OCC's corporate operational emissions, including property emissions have reduced by 71% against our baseline in 2010/11. Further information is available [here](#). In 2025 Oxfordshire County Council was assessed as the leading county council in England for climate action: [County Councils' Climate Action Scorecards | Climate Emergency UK](#).

In 2025 we adopted a Circular Economy Plan to design out waste and pollution, keep materials and products in use for longer, and regenerate natural cycles and systems.

✓ **Key Performance Indicators for biodiversity**

We have introduced new key performance indicators relating to biodiversity;

-Publication of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy- Publication of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in Autumn 2025

-Management of Local Wildlife Sites- Percentage of local wildlife sites being actively managed

Spotlight on: Biodiversity in Procurement, Highways Contracting

Our Social Value Policy enables us to look beyond the financial cost of a contract or purchase, we can also consider how it might also improve the county's economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

Through appointment of our Highways Maintenance Contractors, M Group, in 2024 we secured a range of Social Value Commitments including £100,000 towards environmental & biodiversity conservation initiatives through M Groups 'Green and Blue Spaces' Initiative.

M Group have set up a Biodiversity Working Group with OCC officers to help support both consideration of biodiversity in implementation of highways maintenance work, and also to guide how to best deliver against their Social Value Commitment to biodiversity, so that it aligns with the priorities in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and with our commitments in our Biodiversity Action Framework.

Managing Land to Improve Biodiversity

Currently 79.2ha of our landholding is under conservation management. We have reviewed the management of designated wildlife sites we own or manage through baseline habitat surveys and a review of management plans to identify priority areas of improvement. It has been confirmed that Stratfield Brake DWS and Milhamford Field and Quad LWS are in positive conservation management.

Spotlight on: Road Verge Nature Reserves



Road verges rich in biodiversity provide connectivity between wildlife areas, helping maintain and restore a green network through which wildlife can move and survive.

In recognition of the importance of road verges for wildlife, since 1991 the Council has designated verges particularly rich in biodiversity, including scarce and threatened plants and habitats, as Road Verge Nature Reserves (RVNRs).

An additional 25 Road Verge Nature Reserves (RVNRs) have been designated during the reporting period. This brings total RVNRs in Oxfordshire to 57 sites, holding populations of locally or nationally rare plant species, such as Autumn Crocus and Meadow Clary. The verges are protecting valuable remnants of chalk and limestone grassland in the Cotswolds and Chilterns National Landscapes.

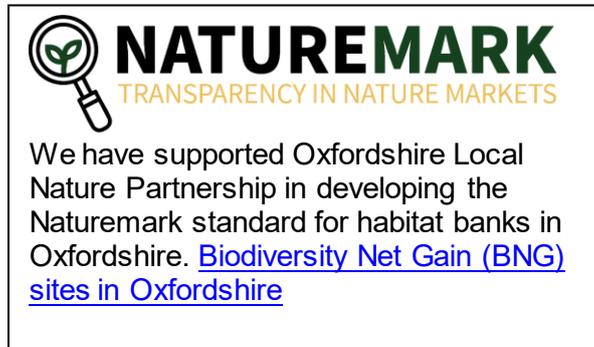
Each RVNR is identified with signage and has a proposed tailored management regime. RVNRs are monitored regularly through a survey visit every 5 years. 16 RVNRs are now in active conservation management, and we have committed to bring an additional 6 RVNRs into active management per year.



Creation and enhancement of Road Verge Nature Reserves have been included as a priority within the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Planning, including Biodiversity Net Gain Information

- ✓ **Developing a habitat bank on Council land:** In 2025, 6 Council owned sites were surveyed by TVERC to produce baseline biodiversity data in relation to developing a Habitat Banking Vehicle for delivery of BNG on Council owned land.



- ✓ **Report on Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Biodiversity Gain Evidence**
We commissioned the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre to provide evidence of biodiversity changes delivered at historic mineral sites across Oxfordshire, using the statutory biodiversity metric. The goal was to determine the potential scale of BNG delivery at similar sites in the future and inform future planning policy. Nine historic mineral extraction and restoration sites in Oxfordshire were assessed for BNG delivery.

Biodiversity Net Gain Data

Minerals and Waste Planning Applications

Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for determining Minerals and Waste planning applications in Oxfordshire. During the reporting period the approved applications with the references MW.0049/23 (Dewars Farm Quarry), MW.0106/22 (Oxford Science Park), MW.0070/23 (Great Tew Quarry) and MW.0057/21(Castle Barn Quarry) had BNG related conditions fully discharged. **These applications were not subject to the mandatory BNG condition as they were submitted before February 12th 2024.** The combined figures from these applications are:

% permissions delivering 10% BNG	25%
% BNG onsite (as a percentage of the total number of all units of each unit type delivered)	Area habitats: 100% (53.40 units) Hedgerow units: 100% (11.20 units) Watercourse units: 100% (11.98 units)
% BNG offsite in Oxfordshire (as a percentage of the total number of all units of each unit type delivered)	0%
% BNG offsite outside Oxfordshire (as a percentage of the total number of all units of each unit type delivered)	0%
% BNG from statutory credits	0%
Average % BNG delivered	Area habitats: 19.43% Hedgerow units: 338.72% Watercourse units: 90.93%
Total BNG units delivered	Area habitats: 53.40 Hedgerow units: 11.20 Watercourse units: 11.98
Total areas/lengths of habitats created in Oxfordshire	Area habitats: 72.33ha Hedgerows: 1.75km Watercourses: 1.94km
Total areas/lengths of habitats enhanced in Oxfordshire	Area habitats: 0.74ha
Area of irreplaceable habitat lost	None

Biodiversity Net Gain Data (cont'd)

Our own planning applications Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for determining applications under Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning Act for which Oxfordshire County Council is the applicant. For applications that fall under Regulation 3, objective 3 of the OxCam Arc Principles ([CA NOV1522R08 Appendix 1 Arc Environment Principles.pdf \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](#)) sets out an aim to achieve and where possible exceed government and local biodiversity net gain targets with an ambition of achieving 20% net gain. This objective has been adopted into the County Council's Oxfordshire Environmental Principles ([mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s62859/CA NOV1522R08 Appendix 1 Arc Environment Principles.pdf](#)) and Climate and Natural Environment Policy Statement ([aebhdfh \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](#)) in 2022 as target for this type of application where Oxfordshire County Council is the applicant. In 2025 we developed more detailed policy around aiming to deliver 20% in our Biodiversity Action Framework.

During the reporting period the approved applications with the references R3.0135/24 (A40/B4022 Shores Green Junction), R3.0013/25 (Lodge Hill Interchange) and Tramway Road (R3.0062/25) had BNG related conditions fully discharged. **These applications were not subject to the mandatory BNG condition as they were submitted before February 12th 2024.** The combined figures from these applications are:

% Reg 3 planning applications delivering 20% BNG	66%
% BNG onsite (as a percentage of the total number of all units of each unit type delivered)	Area habitats: -150.81% (-25.23 units) Hedgerow units: 92.14% (17.11 units) Watercourse units: 134.11% (3.46 units)
% BNG offsite in Oxfordshire (as a percentage of the total number of all units of each unit type delivered)	Area habitats: 161.51% (27.02 units) Hedgerow units: 7.86% (1.46 units) Watercourse units: -34.11% (-0.88 units)
% BNG offsite outside Oxfordshire (as a percentage of the total number of all units of each unit type delivered)	Area habitats: 89.30% (14.94 units)
% BNG from statutory credits	0%
Average % BNG delivered	Area habitat units: 17.84% Hedgerow units: 135.07% Watercourse units: 90.03%
Total BNG units delivered	Area habitat units: 16.73 Hedgerow units: 18.57 Watercourse units: 2.58
Total areas/lengths of habitats created in Oxfordshire	Area habitats: 20.81ha Hedgerows: 3.63km Watercourses: 0.91km
Total areas/lengths of habitats enhanced in Oxfordshire	Area habitats: 9.04ha Hedgerows: 1.32km
Area of irreplaceable habitat lost	None

Future Actions

- We will continue to collaborate with Oxford University around emerging techniques we could use to develop a biodiversity footprint for the Council, helping us to understand where we have the greatest impacts on global biodiversity to help us focus future actions.
- We will look to include biodiversity aspects within the development of standard clauses in contracts below threshold spend
- We will keep our environmental data up-to-date, including ensuring the newly published LNRS Local Habitat Map is integrated appropriately.
- We will continue to integrate our Biodiversity Action Framework objectives into a new Impact Assessment Tool based around Doughnut Economics Principles and use the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to inform this. We will support teams in implementing the biodiversity-related requirements of this tool.
- We will refresh our Carbon Action Framework, integrating the role of nature recovery in climate mitigation and adaptation through nature-based solutions.
- We will continue to implement our Carbon Management Plan, including retrofitting of Council buildings to reduce carbon emissions, working with communities to dim, or switch off street lighting, phase out Council petrol and diesel fleet vehicles, roll-out carbon literacy training to staff and undertake climate impact assessments to inform decision making. In line with our Residual Carbon and Offsetting Policy, we will work with partners to develop an Oxfordshire-wide carbon offsetting credit scheme with local nature-based projects aligned to our LNRS.
- We will use the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Biodiversity Gain Evidence Report (February 2025) to inform development of future mineral and waste policy. In the meantime we will share lessons learned from the report.
- We will develop and implement an internal communication and engagement plan including development of biodiversity champions, tailored biodiversity and landscape training for officers and Councillors, and work to embed LNRS delivery across Council Service areas.
- We will review the need for further biodiversity related Key Performance Indicators across Council teams.
- We will continue to progress the development of a biodiversity net gain habitat bank using Oxfordshire County Council estates, using the LNRS to help ensure the habitat banks deliver against local nature recovery priorities.
- We will continue to monitor our Road Verge Nature Reserves and increase the number of sites in active management by 6 annually.
- We will continue to monitor the management status of all designated wildlife sites under the responsibility of OCC and explore opportunities for sites not yet in positive conservation management.
- We will continue to reduce use of peat, herbicides and pesticides and will provide guidance to operational teams with regards this.

- We will identify opportunities to deliver against LNRS priorities through service delivery
- We will continue to collect and report on data relating to BNG secured through the planning process for the next reporting period.
- We will explore and where possible implement a mechanism for tracking the delivery of BNG regarding developments undertaken on OCC landholdings, projects undertaken by OCC not subject to planning control, or implemented under OCC's permitted development rights.

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.

We have included 6 policies against this objective in our Biodiversity Action Framework

Actions we've taken

- ✓ Kept schools up to date with opportunities and provided bespoke ecological advice. We have contacted schools via the schools newsletter to highlight the support they have available from OCC's Landscape and Nature Recovery Team as well as national initiatives such as the Education Nature Park ([Home | Education Nature Park](#)). During the reporting period we have provided bespoke site specific ecological advice to school sites regarding legally protected species and opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of their site in order to connect pupils and nature.
- ✓ We have set up internal systems and a network of staff involved in planning delivery of Green Infrastructure.
- ✓ We have helped shape a new research project with the Leverhulme Centre of Nature Recovery to investigate whether local and national government policies are working together effectively to support greenspace and access to it in ways that improve health, social equity and climate resilience.
- ✓ **Natural Flood Management** has been integrated into our responses to local flooding, with 32 natural flood management schemes recommended in Section 19 reports by the flood risk management team. During the reporting period two natural flood management schemes have been implemented and an additional 4 are in development. We are currently forecasting to spend £93,700 with partners across 4 projects from our own OCC Priority Action funding in 2025/26. 2 of these same projects we have also successfully supported with applications of £50k each to the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) Natural Flood Management programme.
- ✓ **Trees:** over the reporting period we have planted 1714 highway trees, achieving a 94% survival rate. Through the Coronation Living Heritage Fund we have also worked on approximately 20 different orchard projects planting a total of 247 orchard trees.

- ✓ **Health and Nature:** Growing evidence shows that contact and connectedness with nature improve health and wellbeing, reduce stress, build resilience, and support recovery from poor health.

We have funded a People and Nature Post based within the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, we co-chair the OLNP People and Nature Subgroup which champions opportunities for everyone to spend time in nature, connect with nature, and benefit from all of nature's gifts that support our wellbeing. We also support the Inclusive Nature Recovery working group.

Our Public Health Team has worked with the OLNP and Greener Practice Oxfordshire to offer a menu of free training options on nature-based practice for people working with adults or children in a health, care, or support capacity. This project began October 2025 and will run for one year with funding from Oxfordshire County Council Public Health. More information is available [here](#).

Future Actions

- We will provide internal training and guidance to colleagues on assessing natural capital implications of proposals for land-use change, building on the work of the Oxford University Environmental Change Institute which provides a natural capital baseline for the County, as well the potential use of the Environmental Benefits of Nature Tool.
- We will produce design guidelines for infrastructure and schools projects to ensure good design of biodiversity net gain and to inform consideration of biodiversity on already existing school sites.
- We will continue to collect information regarding opportunities that support connecting pupils with nature and share them with schools via the schools newsletter.
- We will continue to undertake school site visits as required to help improve opportunities for connecting pupils with nature across the school sites.
- We will continue to co-ordinate work on Green Infrastructure across Council Service areas to seek to maximise multifunctional benefits alongside biodiversity enhancement

Spotlight on: working with partners



The Council supports, funds and participates in the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP), 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
- Nature and Health

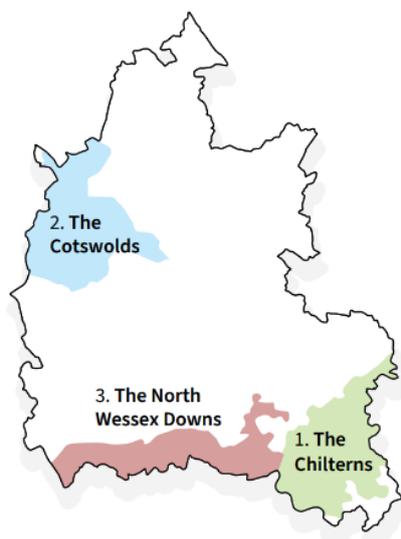
Involvement in these areas supports the Council's delivery of biodiversity conservation and enhancement across a range of services including planning, public health, climate adaptation and production and delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, allowing us to extend reach and impact and enabling collaboration with a wide range of partners.



We support, fund and host the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC), alongside all Oxfordshire and Berkshire Local Authorities and the Environment Agency.

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. They collect 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 taking action for 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.



National Landscapes

There are 3 National Landscapes falling partially within Oxfordshire; the Cotswolds, the North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns. We support all three National Landscapes, we have Councillor Link Members on the board of the Chilterns and Cotswolds National Landscapes and are part of the North Wessex Downs Council of Partners. During the reporting period we have supported the updating of management plans for all three national landscapes and staff from the National Landscapes have been instrumental in shaping the Oxfordshire LNRS.

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.

We have included 7 policies against this objective in our Biodiversity Action Framework

Actions we've taken

- ✓ In November 2025 we published the [Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) (see page 8). We are now working with and through the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership to ensure we convene a suitable range of partners to support delivery of the strategy, to put in place processes and systems to monitor LNRS delivery, to embed the LNRS into local decision making and to support strategic projects which will help deliver against the LNRS.
- ✓ [Oxon Green Futures](#)
In 2025 we launched [Oxon Green Futures](#) at the 100 Together Conference. Oxon Green Futures has identified an initial suite of investment-ready opportunities focused on the current priority investment areas of Nature Recovery & Biodiversity Net Gain and Green Construction. It has also created a Green Investment Pipeline which reflects upcoming opportunities for impactful investment in high-impact, scalable projects that will accelerate Oxfordshire's transition to a net-zero, nature-positive economy
- ✓ We have continued to fund and support the [Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project](#), in partnership with the District Councils (see page 22). There are currently 401 Local Wildlife Sites in Oxfordshire; during the reporting period, the TVERC LWS project officers surveyed 115 Local Wildlife Sites to ensure we have access to up-to-date information about the wildlife value of these sites, and ensure all sites selected continue to meet the LWS Selection Criteria. As a result of this rolling programme of survey 66.7% Local Wildlife Sites have relatively up-to-date survey data (<10 years old). BBOWT LWS Project Officers provided management advice visits to the owners or managers of more than 75 sites. In 2023/24 45% Local Wildlife Sites were reported as being in positive conservation management, rising to 47% in 2024/25.
- ✓ [Local Plan consultation responses](#): during 2025 the following Local Plan consultation responses were provided to encourage development of Local Plan policies which exceed the minimum 10% biodiversity net gain requirement, have regard to the Oxfordshire BNG Principles and support delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy:
 - Cherwell District Council Regulation 19
 - West Oxfordshire District Council Regulation 18
 - Oxford City Regulation 18

- Swindon Borough Council Regulation 18
- Buckinghamshire County Council Regulation 18
- South Warwickshire Preferred Options

Future Actions

- We will update the 'Biodiversity and Planning in Oxfordshire' document to reflect current policy and legislation, including biodiversity net gain and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- We will continue to respond to local plan consultations to promote policies that exceed minimum 10% biodiversity net gain requirement, embed the Oxfordshire BNG Principles, and support delivery of the LNRS.
- We will seek to further the work of the Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project to reach more site owners and align advice to delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- We will work with and through the OLNP to ensure we convene a suitable range of partners to support delivery of the strategy, to put in place processes and systems to monitor LNRS delivery, to embed the LNRS into local decision making and to support strategic projects which will help deliver against the LNRS.
- We will work with Oxfordshire LNP and through Oxon Green Futures to support projects which support LNRS priorities to become investment ready.
- We will continue to work with our National Landscapes, Lower Windrush Valley Project, Community Action Groups and other relevant partners to support action that delivers against the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Spotlight on: Oxfordshire Local Wildlife Sites Project



Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are areas of land recognised for having significant value for the conservation of wildlife. There are currently 401 Local Wildlife Sites in Oxfordshire which support rare or threatened habitat and species from ancient woodlands to pockets of fen and wildflower-rich meadows. These sites have a central role to play in meeting local and national targets for biodiversity conservation. Found on both public and mainly private land, they are of county, and even national, importance.

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 has been running for over 20 years. It involves a rolling programme of survey and selection of Local Wildlife Sites according to agreed selection criteria, and provision of conservation management advice to the owners and managers of Local Wildlife Sites.



Support of the Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project enables us to deliver against a range of our responsibilities in relation to biodiversity:

- 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 sets out a blueprint to buffer, extend and join up habitat to create a nature recovery network.
- 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, a priority within our LNRS.
- The percentage of Local Sites in positive management is a key government statistic in relation local authority performance with regards to local nature conservation.

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.

We have included 1 policy against this objective in our Biodiversity Action Framework

Actions we've taken

Improving awareness of the need to conserve and enhance biodiversity has been integral to much of our work both within the Council and with partners this has included:

- ✓ Recognising the importance of early and ongoing engagement during development of the Oxfordshire LNRS. This was supported by creation of a Communications and Engagement partnership group which helped develop and deliver against an engagement plan. Our engagement included 14 workshops and an online survey, a public consultation which received a national record high of 2100 responses and was supported by attendance at over 50 meetings and events with over 700 local people. We went through all these responses to inform changes to the strategy. In total we received around 3500 responses during the creation of our strategy.
- ✓ Developing LNRS user guides for a range of groups, including residents and community groups.
- ✓ Ran a community capacity building workshop on climate adaptation, linking this to local nature recovery
- ✓ Launching our biodiversity volunteer programme which includes training in ecological survey and assessment techniques.
- ✓ Engaging internally with colleagues to inform development of our Biodiversity Action Framework, including running a 'Lunch and Learn session', running an internal staff survey and meeting with all Directorate Leadership Teams at an early stage to inform our policies and action plan.
- ✓ Contributing biodiversity related actions of the Climate Action Oxfordshire website

Future Actions

- Continue the work of the Communications and Engagement Group developed for the LNRS through a new Local Nature Partnership Communications Group; we will engage with partners through this group to co-ordinate work to raise biodiversity awareness, and help maintain oversight to ensure this raises awareness of the LNRS and the priorities it identifies for habitats and species.
- Complete a review of our webpages to ensure they are up-to-date and signpost communities to information to improve biodiversity awareness

- Continue to work with Climate Action Oxfordshire to raise awareness of biodiversity actions within the community that can increase climate resilience

Spotlight on: Community Action Groups Oxfordshire

- Our ongoing support and funding of [Community Action Groups Oxfordshire](#) helps deliver across the full range of our Biodiversity Action Framework objectives from nature recovery, to improving biodiversity awareness.
- Many groups focus on increasing biodiversity and supporting nature recovery in their local areas. Tree and hedgerow planting and maintenance, management of greens and verges for wildflowers, bulb planting and litter picking are some of the primary activities.
- CAGs host the Oxfordshire Nature Project, ensuring communities can access opportunity reports in collaboration with TVERC as well as other resources and guides that support the LNRS.
- Groups also include community growing projects and orchards that provide space for people to learn practical food-growing skills that employ climate and nature friendly methods.
- Community gardens have partnered with an impressive range of organisations to enable a variety of people to attend and benefit from the gardens. These include families, refugees, elderly people, faith groups, school-aged children, adults and children with physical and learning disabilities and young people experiencing social exclusion.
- A Connecting Communities with Nature grant scheme focused on supporting opportunities for communities experiencing health inequalities in Oxfordshire to connect with the outdoors, green spaces, and nature.
- In partnership with the Earth Trust, Wild Oxfordshire, Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership the CAGs helped to share Oxfordshire's commitment to the Nature 2030 campaign through co-ordinated press releases, social media posts, newsletter items and speakers at events.

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.

We have included 2 policies against this objective in our Biodiversity Action Framework

Actions we've taken

- ✓ **Integrating access to nature in the LNRS:** We have included mapping of 16 priority neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire which are in the lowest 30% of socio-economic deprivation in England and lack access to greenspace alongside our LNRS Local Habitat Map and have directed people considering delivering biodiversity actions or tree planting in urban areas towards these areas within our Statement of Biodiversity Priorities.
- ✓ **Community Transport Pilot:** Our Public Health team funded a pilot to test the feasibility and impact of subsidised community transport for greenspace access through the Oxfordshire Comet minibus service. Over Spring/Summer 2025 the OLNP worked with three Voluntary, Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations on this pilot project to understand the impact on wellbeing, and what would be needed to set up a longer-term fund, whilst developing local information resources.
- ✓ **Nature buddies:** Our Public Health team have funded work by the OLNP with BBOWT, OCVA, Wild Oxfordshire, and The Nature Effect, to develop a Nature Buddies scheme in Oxfordshire.

Nature Buddies are specially-trained volunteers who enable a person, on a one-to-one basis or as part of a small group, to overcome barriers to accessing nature, based on individual needs. People may face a range of barriers to participation, from physical (transport, physical access, etc), to personal (lack of confidence or generalised anxiety), to socio-cultural (lack of feeling of belonging or welcome in nature spaces).

Following an initial stakeholder workshop in September 2024, in spring 2025 the project moved into a co-design phase for a 2-3 year pilot study that will help to develop a network of organisations hosting Nature Buddies across Oxfordshire.

- ✓ **Rights of Way and National Trails:** we maintain a rights of way network of 2,639 miles and host the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails; we have supported chalk grassland restoration trials on Bury Down with Oxford University and the National Trails Volunteers.

Future Actions

- An independent evaluation of the Community Transport Pilot will be produced and reviewed. Our Public Health team have committed £7k/y for the next 3 years to continue delivery of community transport to greenspaces with other partners.

- We will continue to support the 2-3 year pilot study to develop a network of organisations hosting Nature Buddies across Oxfordshire
- We will work with North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes to support project development in the Ridgeway Landscape Connections Focus Area.

Spotlight on: Lower Windrush Valley Project

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 by Oxfordshire County Council to create and implement an environmental strategy for this area.

LWVP has worked with many environmental organisations, mineral operators, landowners and the local community to co-ordinate, deliver and help manage a wide range of initiatives that aim to:

- strengthen and develop the evolving landscape of the valley protect and enhance the biodiversity it supports
- improve opportunities for people to access and enjoy the countryside
- raise awareness, understanding and involvement in the diverse issues that influence the environment in the valley.



Recent activities have included rejuvenating the bird hide and bird viewing screen at the two Nature Reserves in the Lower Windrush area, Rushy Common and Standlake Common.

The old roof on the Rushy Common bird hide had started to leak and we have replaced them with metal sheets to allow the continued use of the bird hide.

The old hazel hurdle bird screen at Rushy Common has been replaced by a much stronger and larger screen, giving a much better view over the lake. This viewing screen is now open to all visitors to Rushy Common Nature Reserve. Funding for both works were kindly funded by Smiths of Bletchington.



At Standlake Common, we re-roofed the bird hides and also took advantage of the dry weather to cut the reed and vegetation along the north and east side of the reserve, using a new remote controlled flail mower. We hope that bird hide key holders will enjoy the drier conditions and better views out onto the lake.

The extremes of the weather

From winter floods in 2024/25, that started off in mid September and seemed to carry on until April, to the low rainfall of the summer, the full range of weather conditions has been experienced in recent years.



New roof and vegetation cleared in front of hide.

The floods brought in lots of pintails and wigeon to Standlake Common and the low water levels exposed large areas of gravel, which the lapwing, oystercatchers and terns took full advantage of. We also had some rarities that dropped into Standlake Common, including Marsh Sandpiper that breeds on the Russian steppe, which is a rare, but annual, visitor to our shores and the Pectoral Sandpiper, again a rare visitor from arctic America and eastern Siberia.



Photo credit: Denis Kennedy

There was also one of the highest ever count of Great white Egrets recorded in Oxfordshire on Standlake Common gravel pit, with numbers reaching a peak of 30 birds.

Circular Walks in the Lower Windrush Valley

The Project has created three circular paths in the project area. We continue to highlight these great walks to the general public, to allow better access to nature. [Gill Mill Circular Walk](#), [Northmoor Circular Walk](#)

Lower Windrush Valley Volunteer Group.

The volunteer work party have been clearing the picnic area and paths around Standlake Common, maintaining the bird hides and cutting and raking the wildflower bank at Standlake Village Hall. This autumn we have been working on clearing viewing points to the lakes for public to get views across the lake and widening the path to allow better access.



Reptile surveys

The Lower Windrush Project volunteers undertook a Reptile survey at Rushy Common, which is part of the national reptile survey run by Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC). It hasn't been the best year for grass snake numbers, but with some changes to habitat management and creating grass snake egg laying heaps, hopefully next year will be better.