

A Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council 2015 – 2020

*An overview of actions to support biodiversity in the
council's own estate and operations*

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Introduction

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth. This includes all species of plants and animals and the ecosystems that support them. Biodiversity is central to the natural processes that we all rely on, such as food and fuel production, maintenance of air, soil and water quality and the regulation of climate and flooding. Biodiversity also has its own intrinsic value, irrespective of humans, and should be conserved for its own sake. Biodiversity and good quality natural environments contribute to good mental health, cohesive communities and strong local economies and it is vital in our response to climate change. It is an absolute essential element of sustainable development and key to 'Building a World Class City for Everyone'.

Oxford is an exceptional place for wildlife and has an impressive range of diverse and rare species and habitats for a city of its size. It is a key part of what makes Oxford a special place to live. This abundance of wildlife and dedicated people who care for it should be celebrated and others should be inspired to help to protect and enhance this wonderful resource.

The purpose of this action plan is to set out Oxford City Council's commitment to building a world class City by influencing, encouraging and celebrating biodiversity conservation and enhancement in its functions as:

- **Landowner and Manager** (e.g. estates, parks management),
- **Regulator and Policy Maker** (e.g. planning) and as,
- **Advocate and Facilitator** (e.g. volunteering, promotion, partnership working).

The plan will also demonstrate how Oxford City Council is fulfilling its duties as set out in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

The aim of this action plan is not to duplicate existing policies in the Local Development Framework (LDF) or other city council strategies, but it will reflect them and provide a tool for identifying opportunities to complement existing work. The action plan will highlight how the city council contributes to biodiversity enhancement and conservation and commit further action within the remit of the organisation.

The purpose of the action plan is to "get our own house in order" and will form the starting point for assisting in developing a city wide approach to biodiversity conservation and enhancement.

2 Oxford's Biodiversity

Oxford has an abundance of rare and diverse species, which is unique for a city of its size. The overall nature conservation interest of the city is reflected in the fact that there are 12 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) wholly or partially within the city, along with numerous other sites with local nature conservation interest. The city is also home to a number of European protected and notable species including great crested newts, water voles, swifts and bats.

The city plays host to:

- Fenland habitat at the Lye Valley, so rare that only 20 hectares remain in good condition in the whole of England. The site is nationally recognised by being designated a SSSI. Many other rare fen habitats exist in the city such as Chilswell Valley and Rivermead Nature Park. The Lye Valley fen hold the Grass-of-Parnassus, a beautiful flower which is usually associated with the bogs of western Britain rather than a city in SE England.
- Stunning floodplain meadows, which include some of the best examples in the UK of a habitat type of which only 1500 hectares remain in Britain. The high quality of those at Port Meadow and Pixey Mead is such that they are recognised as European importance by a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designation, whilst Iffley Meadows and New Marston Meadows are SSSIs. Oxford hosts the only known UK sites for the rare creeping marshwort, whilst Iffley Meadows and Magdalen College are two of the best sites in the UK for the rare and beautiful snake's-head fritillary, Oxfordshire's "County Flower". In 2015 the annual fritillary count on Iffley Meadows recorded a record number of 89,830 individual flowers, 5000 more than 2014.
- High quality examples of locally rare acid grassland habitat is found in Shotover Country Park recognised through a national level SSSI designation, and playing host to a wealth of solitary bees and wasps amongst many other specially adapted species.
- Majestic ancient woodland, such as at Brasenose Wood in Shotover Country Park, which is yet another SSSI.
- Magical, tucked away areas of reedbed and wet woodland and scrub, such as those at the Trap Grounds.
- Numerous other areas, too many to mention here, with many of the above habitats, all playing host to wildlife, and each and every one special to local people too. The wildlife



value of many of these is recognised through them being designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) or Sites of Local Interest for Nature Conservation (SLINC).

- Importantly, numerous dedicated people live in the city who care for and record the wildlife, some individually, and some as members of the of wealth volunteer groups existing here. These groups carry out regular work parties to enhance the city's wildlife sites, or record the diversity of species. Biodiversity is a really important issue for many of Oxford's residents.

Section 41 of the NERC Act contains a published list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England and for which local authorities have a special responsibility to conserve. Oxford is home to a large number of protected species and priority habitats included in this list.

Oxford also encompasses 4 Conservations Target Areas (CTA's) which has been identified as part of [Oxfordshire's Biodiversity Action Plan](#) (BAP). CTAs were developed in response to achieving "more, bigger, better, joined" habitats as advocated by the [Lawton Review](#).¹ CTAs take a landscape-scale approach and are defined as areas of biodiversity interest where conservation work will achieve the greatest results. The principle aim of the CTAs is to maintain, restore and create BAP priority habitats. However, it is important to note that biodiversity efforts in the City are not limited to CTAs and BAP priority species and habitats.

The following pages provide maps which illustrate the location of Oxford's biodiversity resource:

Map 1 shows CTAs and other areas of importance for wildlife in Oxford including; SACs, SSSIs, Local Wildlife Sites, Ancient Woodland, Local Nature Reserves, Wildlife Corridors and SLINCS.

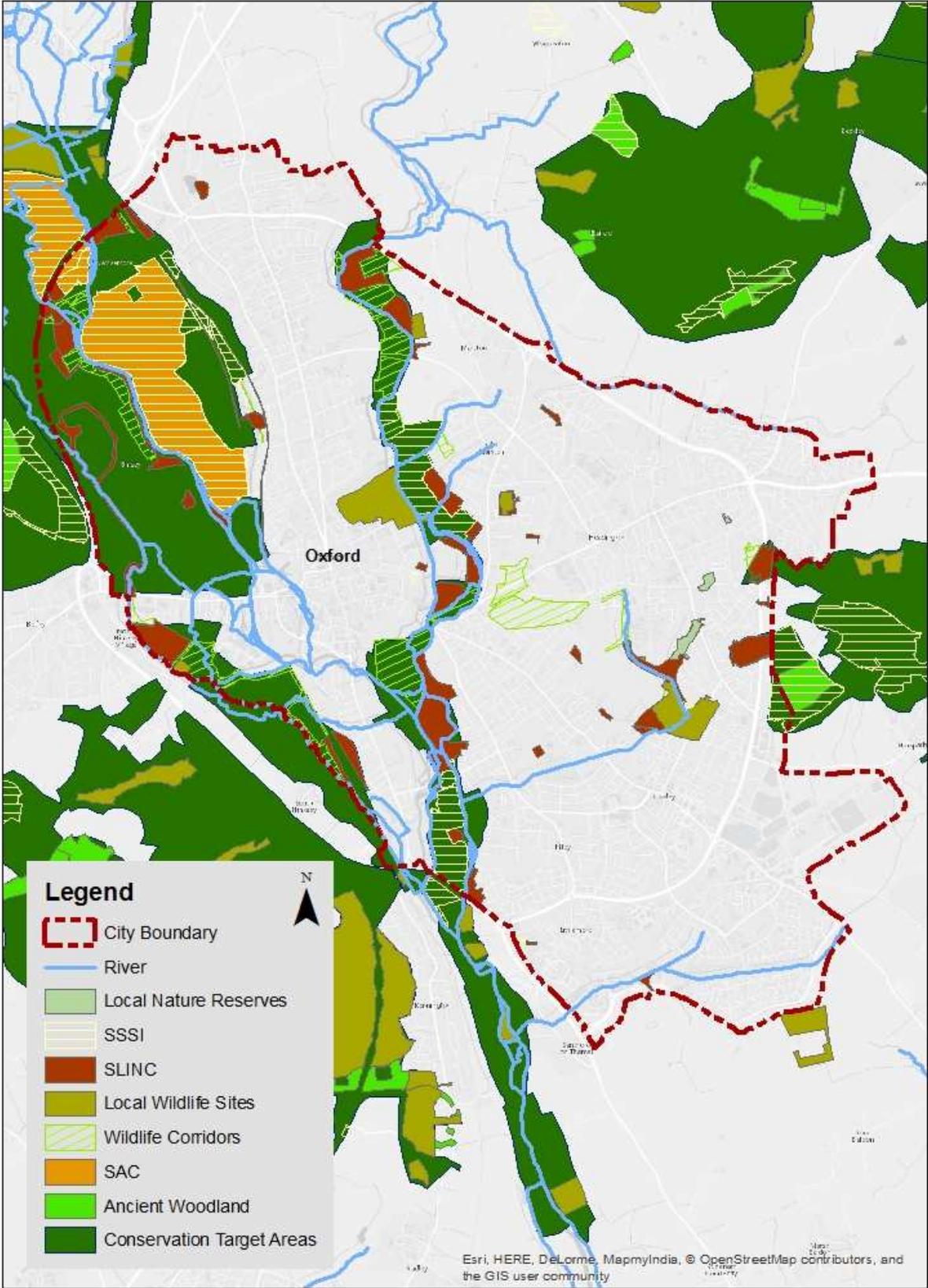
Map 2 illustrates records of protected and notable species in Oxford.

Map 3 illustrates records of habitats of principal importance in Oxford.²

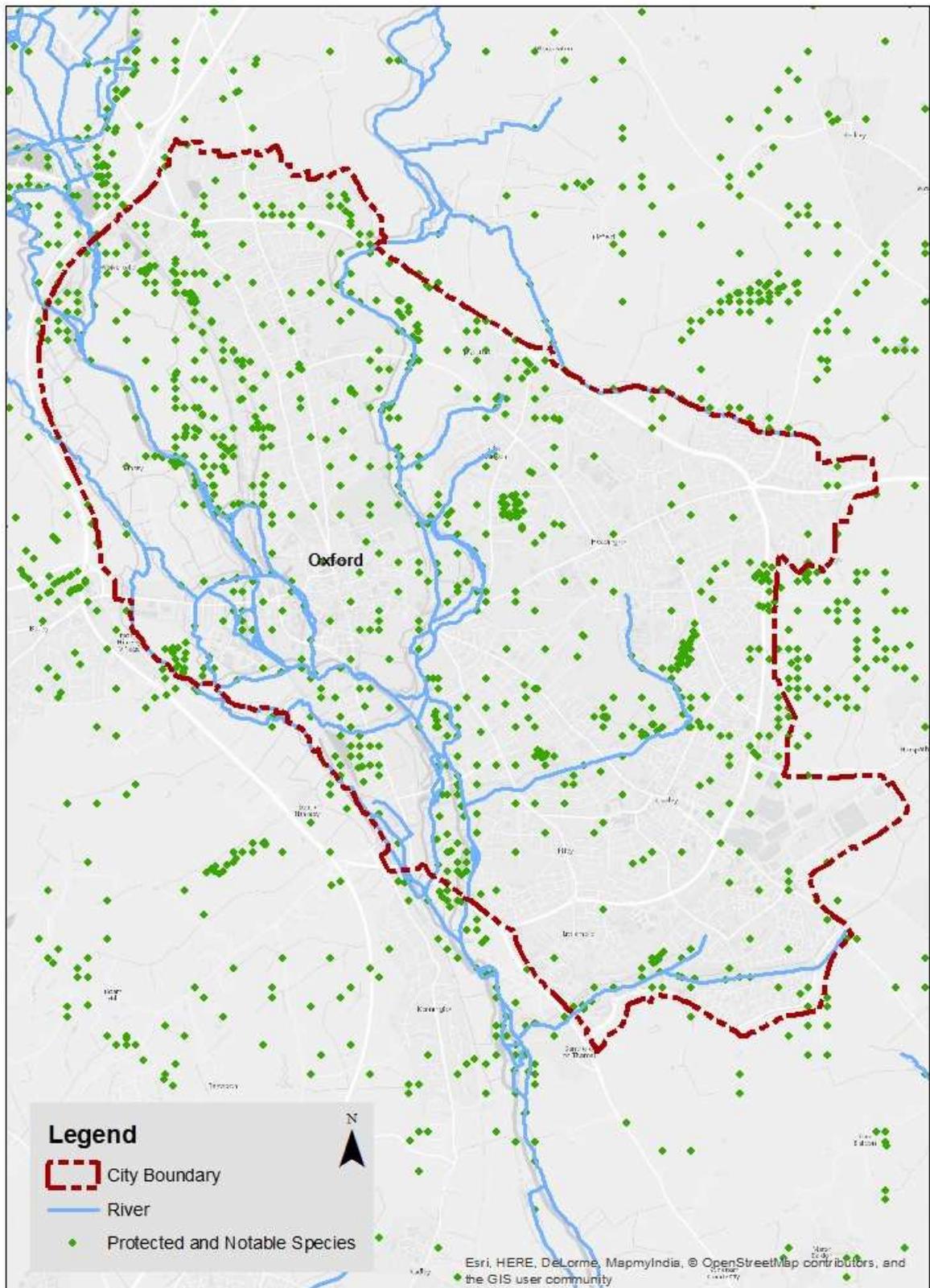
¹ More information on Conservation Target Areas can be found by visiting the Wild Oxfordshire website: <http://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/biodiversity/conservation-target-areas/>

² Data for all maps provided by TVERC

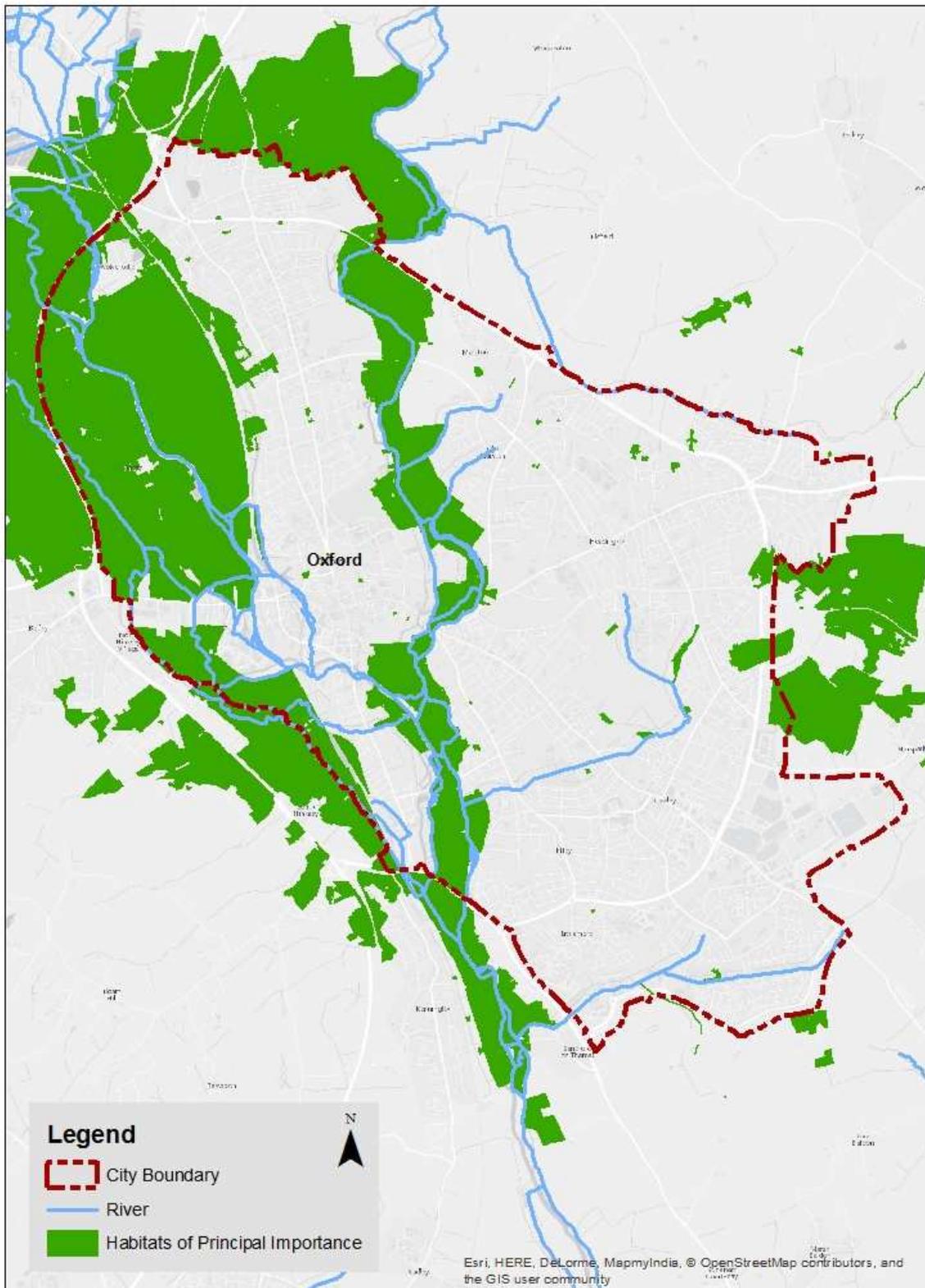
Map 1 - Designated Areas



Map 2 - Protected and Notable Species Records



Map 3 - Habitats of Principal Importance



2.1 Threats to Oxford's Biodiversity

Biodiversity is under threat as a result of human activities around the globe. The main threats to biodiversity globally include: habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution, invasive non- native species and climate change. Such impacts are not just felt at a global level but can be evident locally too.

Habitat Loss and Fragmentation

Habitat loss results from the destruction, fragmentation or degradation of habitat. Habitat fragmentation occurs when areas of continuous habitat are broken up into smaller patches of habitat that are isolated from each other. Protecting habitat from damaging land use change, creating and maintaining wildlife corridors and creating new habitat are required in order to reduce habitat loss and fragmentation.

Pollution

The use of pesticides and fertilisers are common in today's intensive farming practice. Excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus in natural ecosystems is causing damage when they concentrate in soil and water systems and make it difficult for fish and other wildlife to survive. Furthermore, poor air quality, resulting in the deposition of nitrogen on land, can affect biodiversity. Managing land sustainably by reducing the use of fertilisers and pesticides and improving air quality will reduce the impact of pollution on biodiversity.

Invasive Non-Native Species

Non-native species can become invasive and spread quickly leading to a destabilised ecosystem by altering habitats and food chains. An example of an invasive non-native species found in Oxford is the North American Signal Crayfish which is causing the UK's only native crayfish, the White-clawed crayfish, to rapidly decline in number. The invasive crayfish spread a disease which kills the native White-claw crayfish and they compete for food and shelter. Managing land to favour native wildlife and raising awareness of the threats of invasive species can contribute to reducing their impact.

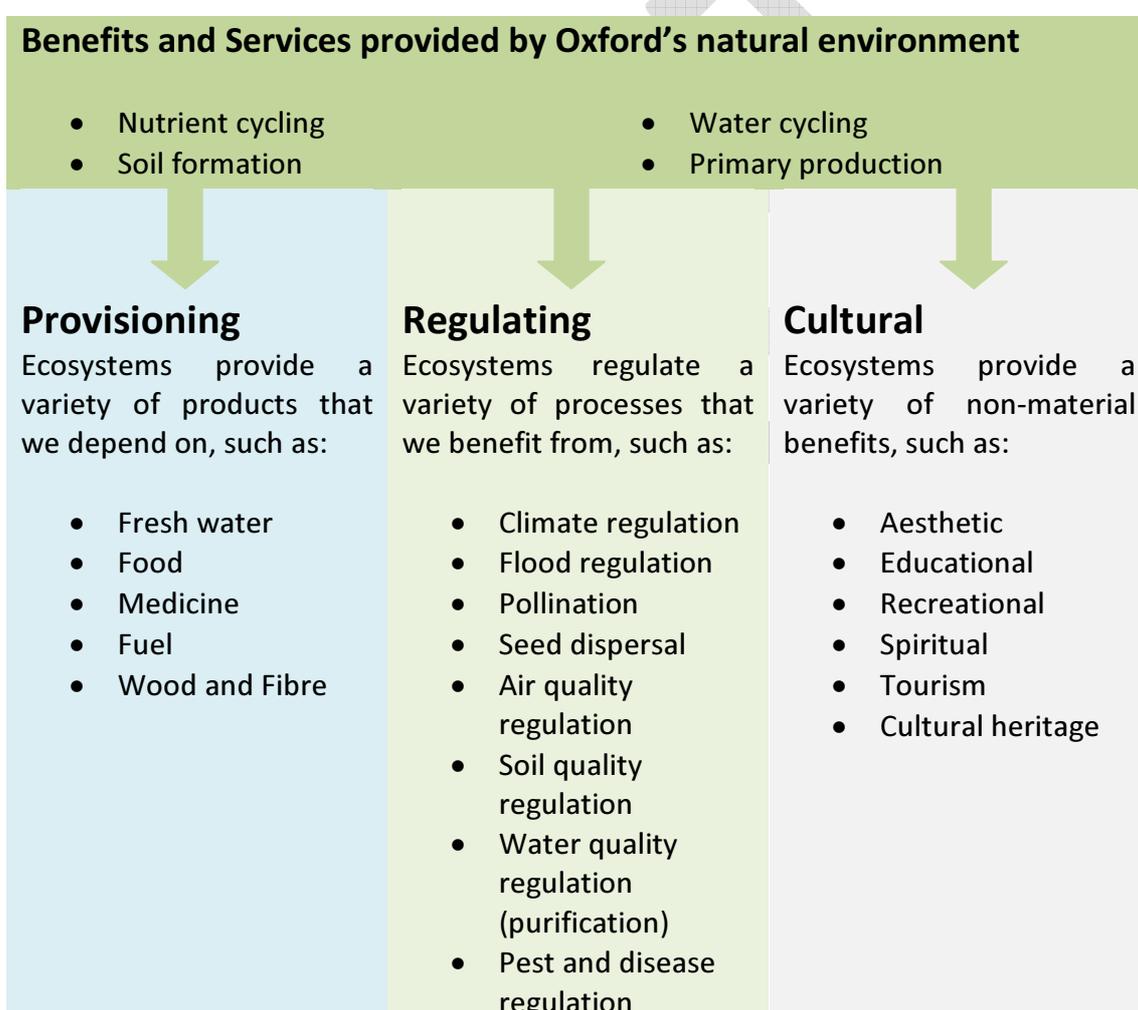
Climate Change

Climate change in the UK is predicted to lead to warmer and drier summers and milder and wetter winters with an increase in extreme weather events, such as flooding. Climatic changes such as this are likely to disrupt our natural environment. Warmer weather is likely to lead to changes in the life cycles of many wildlife species and disrupt growing conditions for plants and trees. Changes in weather patterns may lead to behavioural change of pollinator species that could disrupt the delicate balance of our ecosystems. Climatic changes may also create conditions that favour non-native invasive species. Working to reduce our carbon emissions and planting climate resilient species will help the natural environment adapt to our changing climate.

3 Natural Benefits and Services

The benefits provided by the natural environment and biodiversity are essential to making human life possible and it is therefore important we invest in it. Oxford's natural environment provides a range of benefits and services to its residents and visitors. Access to green space is vital for health and wellbeing and a healthy natural environment provides us with food, clean air and fuel.

The table below shows some examples of the range of services and benefits provided to us and highlight why it is so important to maintain healthy ecosystems.



3.1 The Natural Benefits of Oxford's Biodiversity

The benefits provided to residents by a healthy environment rich in biodiversity are vast. They include:

- Contributing to making Oxford a beautiful and inspiring city, encouraging people and businesses to locate in and visit Oxford, thus boosting the city's economy;
- Providing space in both rural and urban areas where people can exercise and be inspired by nature, gaining mental and physical refreshment with positive benefits for health and well-being; in turn people are more likely to take pride in, and care for their local area;
- The work needed to maintain and enhance biodiversity supports employment, and encourages people to volunteer and gain associated health benefits;
- Green spaces and trees within urban areas help to reduce temperatures on hot days and nights, and reduce levels of air pollution;
- Holding up the flow of water resulting in a reduced risk of flooding, and buffering waterways to reduce the inflow of nutrients, pesticides and silt into rivers, thus reducing the costs of water purification;
- Providing a habitat for insects that pollinate crops in farms, gardens and allotments;
- Long-term storage of carbon in soil and vegetation in order to reduce the speed of climate change.

A large part of Oxford is covered by flood plain. Oxford is susceptible to flooding and we are dependent on our flood plains during these flood events. Flood plains retain many nutrients and often provide good quality agricultural land. They also provide recreational opportunities and support key habitats and endangered species. It is, therefore, important that we do not lose floodplain in Oxford and that we support biodiversity focused flood plain management.

Oxford has a large number of allotment sites and has a higher ratio of plots to population than most places. Many of Oxford's allotments are on flood plain land. Not only do they provide flood capacity and provide food but they are important for biodiversity. Equally, allotments are dependent on a healthy environment to encourage pollinators as well as good soil and water quality in order to produce quality food. They also provide recreational opportunities and help to reduce our impact on climate change by reducing food miles.

In 2010 all of Oxford was declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) due to high nitrogen dioxide levels in the city. Urban green spaces and trees are important for helping to improve air quality and reducing long term impacts. Recognising the contribution that our green spaces and trees make to improving air quality is important, particularly in Oxford.

Tourism is extremely important to Oxford with approximately 9.5 million visitors a year. This is largely due to Oxford University who, as well as maintaining the

spectacular architectural heritage of the city also manage a large number of college gardens and parks that contribute to the city's green spaces. The Thames provides an important attraction for visitors to the city as well as recreational space for residents and vital habitats for a large variety of species.

4 The Policy Context

There are numerous legislative and policy controls that establish the importance of the natural environment and afford protection to it. These range from European legislation to protect habitats and species, to conservation objectives set out in local planning policies.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

Oxford City Council has a duty to conserve biodiversity under the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities \(NERC\) Act 2006](#). Section 40 of the Act states that:

"Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity".

The duty recognises that local authorities have a key role to play in the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and requires them to consider and action ways in which it can contribute to its conservation.

Habitats Directive

The European directive was transposed into UK law in 1994 and subsequently consolidated into the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010](#). Under the 2010 regulations local authorities in the UK have a duty, in the exercise of any of their functions, to have regard to the Habitats Directive.

The main aim of the Habitats Directive is to ensure the protection of habitats and species that are of European importance and listed in the Annexes to the Directive.

The Regulations make it a criminal offence to deliberately capture, injure, kill, disturb, trade, or destroy the eggs or breeding site of the animals listed in the regulations or to pick, collect, cut, uproot, destroy, or trade in any of the plants listed.

The regulations also provide for the designation and protection of "European Sites" such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in order to protect rare habitats. Planning and other controls have been adapted through these regulations in order to protect such sites.

National Planning Policy Framework

The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) requires planning policies and decisions to ensure that impacts on biodiversity are minimised and that net gains to biodiversity are achieved through development wherever possible. It obliges planning authorities to seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity in and around development and seek to ensure the wider benefits of ecosystem services are recognised. Importantly, the framework sets out that planning permission should be refused if significant harm cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for. Planning permission should also be refused where a development would have an adverse impact on a SSSI or would result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh the loss. In this instance, mitigation or compensation must be provided.

[Planning Practice Guidance](#), supporting the NPPF, makes clear that neighbouring planning bodies should work together to “consider the opportunities that individual development proposals may provide to enhance biodiversity and contribute to wildlife and habitat connectivity in the wider area.”

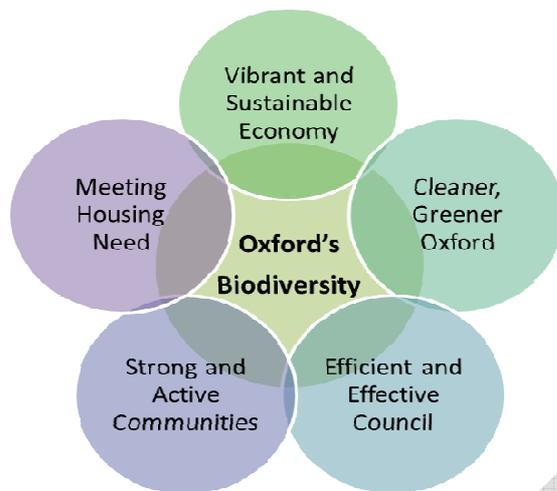
Oxford City Council’s Core Strategy 2026 sets out local planning policies for protecting and enhancing biodiversity in line with the NPPF.

4.1 Local Policy

The Corporate Plan 2015 - 2019

There are strong links between biodiversity and the range of services that the city council provides. Efforts to conserve and enhance biodiversity links to a variety of objectives and activities such as promoting wellbeing, recreation and social inclusion.

Oxford City Council Corporate Plan 2015 – 2019 sets out the corporate priorities for the city in order to achieve its ambition of building a world class city for everyone. Conserving and improving Oxford’s biodiversity contributes to all of the city council’s core priorities.



Vibrant and Sustainable Economy	Ensuring that biodiversity conservation and enhancement is taken into account into all development decisions enables Oxford to develop sustainably.
Meeting Housing Need	The council is committed to providing sustainable houses that are designed to respect the environment and enhance residents overall quality of life.
Strong and Active Communities	Engaging with communities and the volunteering sector in local conservation helps develop strong local communities.
Cleaner, Greener Oxford	The council is committed to sustainability and carbon reduction, to which biodiversity is key.
Efficient and Effective Council	Improving knowledge on biodiversity in the city will enable better quality decisions to be made and contribute to improving the quality of life for everyone.

Green Spaces Strategy 2013 – 2027

The city council’s adopted [Green Spaces Strategy](#) seeks to provide a set of objectives that provide a strategic framework for the planning and management of Oxford City Council owned parks and open spaces in Oxford. A principal aim of this action plan is to promote the central role that green spaces play in contributing to the city’s biodiversity, sustainability and heritage.

Objective 21 of the Green Spaces Strategy sets out the council’s commitment to protect and enhance biodiversity in our parks and open spaces:

- To ensure the protection of internationally, nationally and locally important sites of biodiversity interest (Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation)
- To encourage delivery of the conservation objectives of the Conservation Target Areas within the City.
- To identify areas to create new habitats, enlarge existing ones, improve the management of sites so that they may become designated and joined up in line with the Lawton review
- To ensure wildlife corridors are protected, enhanced or created
- Protection of important and prosaic species in all sites.

5 Aims and Objectives

5.1 Action Plan Vision

To ensure that Oxford City Council enables a future, rich in wildlife, where people can enjoy climate resilient, healthy and species rich ecosystems which contribute to the conservation of biodiversity in all its forms.

5.2 Action Plan Aim

To ensure that Oxford City Councils responsibilities to conserve and enhance biodiversity are integrated into all Council policies and service areas and that there is a clear understanding across all staff of the importance of biodiversity and how it relate to their own decisions and actions.

5.3 Action Plan Objectives

Objective 1: To act as a responsible **landowner and manager** for the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

Objective 2: To undertake our duties as a **regulator and policy maker** to ensure the continued protection of biodiversity resources in accordance with legislation and to ensure that new policies are formulated to promote new development that allows biodiversity to flourish.

Objective 3: To promote the benefits of conserving and enhancing our biodiversity resource to local communities through our role as an **advocate and facilitator**.

6 Action Plan - Landowner and Manager

The city council maintains a substantial housing stock, a number of offices and depots and manages extensive areas of green space including parks, woodland and countryside. A good understanding of our biodiversity resource and our responsibilities for it are essential for effective management.

This section outlines how the council will manage its responsibility and realise opportunities.

6.1 What have we achieved to date?

Awareness of our impact on the environment is growing and some great initiatives have been undertaken by the city council for the benefit of biodiversity and the wider environment, particularly with regard to how we manage our parks and open spaces. Labour intensive, water thirsty bedding plants have been replaced with low maintenance, perennial plants in many of our parks and landscaped areas. This not only benefits biodiversity but provides a cost saving to the council. Furthermore, changes to parks maintenance regimes to reduce the amount of close mown grass have resulted in larger areas of tall grass which is particularly beneficial for invertebrates. We have also installed 'insect hotels' in several parks. However, the City Council recognises that more could be done to increase the biodiversity of our open spaces, parks and road verges.

The city council has helped to facilitate the production of a Hedgehog Action Plan for Florence Park following the discovery of a surprisingly healthy population of these threatened animals by local residents. We are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of bees and other pollinators to our local environment and the city council are taking steps to help protect these vital animals. See box 1 for more information on why bees and other pollinators are important and what the council is doing. An insect lodge has been installed at Wolvercote Cemetery and if it proves successful, more will be introduced at other city council managed cemeteries.

All of our Green Flag status parks have comprehensive management plans that incorporate actions for biodiversity enhancement and protection. There are also management plans in development for sites such as Shotover and Port Meadow. In September 2014, Oxford was awarded gold for the city category of the Thames and Chilterns in Bloom Association, part of the Britain in Bloom campaign. Judging takes into account all round horticultural achievement including biodiversity conservation and enhancement and community involvement. The city council is keen to ensure biodiversity is encouraged outside the council's own green spaces. The city council's cleaner greener campaign in Cutteslowe therefore sought to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators and provided a free wildflower seed giveaway.

Box 1 – Pollinator Action Plan

Bees are vitally important for pollination and they are in grave danger! About two thirds of our food crops are dependent on pollinating insects. They pollinate the crops that we feed to our livestock and which provide natural food sources for wild animals. They maintain the biodiversity of our flowering plants and bees produce important products such as wax and honey.

Numbers of bees and other pollinators are declining at an alarming rate due to the use of pesticides, loss of habitat and diseases. It is essential that we take steps to halt their loss.

The city council's Leisure, Parks and Communities Department is working together with Oxfordshire Friends of the Earth and local volunteers to improve our city parks and countryside sites for pollinators.

The Pollinator Action Plan below sets out what the Leisure, Parks and Communities Department are doing for the benefit of pollinators.

- Identifying areas for reseeded which will provide a species rich grassland area.
- Managing specific areas as traditional meadows which will provide a range of plants and prolong the season for pollinating species as well as provide food and nesting material for birds.
- Diversifying the formally planted areas in our parks. The aim is to achieve the same aesthetics but increase the range of pollen producing plants. This work will benefit a wide range of pollinators but especially bees.
- Working with local beekeepers to establish more bee hives on our land. The department has already established hives at Cutteslowe Park.
- Managing boundary hedges around the parks in order to ensure the hedges are not cut prior to fruiting which provides a valuable food source.
- Undertaking rotational staggered cut of hedgerows which also provides food and nesting habitat for a range of birds.
- Working with volunteers to monitor sites to ascertain if management practices are meeting the desired aims. This also allows the department to target resources on species and habitats that are most in need of conservation work.
- Using our sites as a key educational resource to enable visitors to learn about the importance of pollinators and to encourage people to plant for pollinators in their own gardens.
- Reducing the amount of close mown grass in our parks and countryside sites to allow wild flowers to establish.
- Strictly managing the use and type of any pesticides.
- Incorporating action for pollinators into local events. In 2015 the department introduced a pollinator theme to the Oxford in Bloom.

These local actions will build on [The National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England](#) that was published by Defra in November 2014 and will be managed by the Leisure, Parks and Communities Department.

Progress has also been made in raising awareness amongst staff of protecting bird species. During recent routine roof maintenance works to a row of council houses, a nesting swift colony was discovered. Our housing team worked in partnership with the RSPB to ensure that the swifts were not disturbed and to encourage them to continue to nest there in the future. See Box 2 below for more information on swifts.

Box 2 - The Swift –an amazing bird!

Swifts have seen huge declines in cities and towns across the UK, with around 40% of the population lost over the past 15 years. One of the reasons for the decline is due to a reduction in nesting sites in buildings as they are renovated and replaced.

Swifts use the same nest site throughout their lives and will fly directly from Africa to a nesting site in Oxford, year after year! Swifts pair for life, meeting up each spring at the same site. The nest is located high up in the roof space under the eaves of houses and churches where the birds are able to drop into the air from the nest entrance. If the nest site is blocked off or destroyed they will still try and enter and can kill or hurt themselves in the effort to gain access. This is why it is so important we consider swifts when we make repairs or build new houses.

A range of swift bricks and boxes are available which makes it easy and cheap to accommodate swifts into our building design and the City Council is committed to considering such options in its own development.

We are also working with the RSPB to develop an annual swift survey in the City. This will ensure we know where the birds breed so we can effectively protect their breeding spaces.

6.2 What the council will do

The council are committed to facilitating the following actions:

- Ensure that our staff awareness of biodiversity continues to grow and that we continue to improve our knowledge of the impacts that our services have on the natural environment. We will do this by introducing a 'Biodiversity Champion Scheme' which seeks to identify champions in each service who will become a central source of knowledge, advice and staff engagement.
- Ensure that notable habitats and sites containing protected and priority species within our land ownership are appropriately identified, signage displayed (where possible) and managed in partnership with Natural England, BBOWT and other organisations where appropriate.
- Implement the biodiversity actions identified in the council's Green Spaces Strategy 2013 -2027.

- Management Plans for all Countryside and City Parks will be updated with an assessment given to the importance of biodiversity. Management plans will be produced in partnership with key stakeholders.
- Ensure that biodiversity is incorporated into staff training programmes and that clear guidance is available for relevant service areas.
- Ensure legally protected species and priority species, their habitats and priority habitats are not harmed during repairs to housing stock/management of land and/or property. This includes undertaking ecological surveys where necessary.
- Ensure consideration is given to the timing of work, to take into account breeding seasons to avoid harm to breeding animals such as swifts.
- Ensure biodiversity is considered in the early stages of any council new build or regeneration programmes and seek to realise opportunities for incorporating priority habitats, wildlife rich green spaces and green roofs/walls. This will include early engagement with the planning department on proposals that might affect biodiversity.
- Assess opportunities to introduce deciduous hedging instead of fencing or walls in council developments, not only to provide wildlife habitat, but to reduce air and noise pollution and opportunities for graffiti.
- Provide bird and bat boxes in existing and new council buildings wherever possible. As far as possible these should be incorporated within the fabric of the building.
- Identify opportunities for increased biodiversity provision across the city. For example, through creation of additional wildlife habitat on council land, such as wildflower meadows and areas for annual seeding of arable wildflowers to enrich biodiversity, feed pollinators and for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. Any opportunities realised will be tied into management plans.
- Ensure a programme for the management of road verge cutting is in place for the benefit of biodiversity. Specifically, the council will avoid cutting until flowers have set seed wherever possible (e.g. unless there is a clear safety implication). Altering road verge management to incorporate removing cuttings from the site as well as spreading freshly cut hay from species-rich meadows will be assessed as a potential action in the longer-term.
- The council will consider the following priorities when choosing species for new planting schemes – native provenance, enhancing biodiversity, attracting pollinating insects, resilience and contributions to the environment.
- Identify opportunities to provide more interpretation boards in our nature reserves and parks.
- Introduce a Biosecurity Policy – including sourcing UK grown trees and seed for use in parks and green spaces, where possible, to reduce the risk of tree disease and transport impacts.
- Continue to recycle all green waste and look at methods of recycling in situ.
- Continue to identify opportunities for managing city council cemeteries to benefit biodiversity.
- Work in partnership with Friends of the Earth and other organisations to further improve our parks and open spaces for pollinating insects.

7 Action Plan - Regulator and Policy Maker

Development can have significant positive or negative impacts on biodiversity depending on how it is managed. Robust planning policies and decisions relating to biodiversity will create higher quality developments with improved quality of life for its residents.

As a local planning authority we have a key role to play in ensuring that biodiversity conservation and enhancement is taken into account in policy making and the development control process.

7.1 What have we achieved to date?

Policy CS12 of the city council's Core Strategy 2026 sets out detail of sites which are protected for their biodiversity interest. It also details how the city council seeks to secure biodiversity enhancements through new development.

Policy CS12 explicitly states that sites with a national or international designation must be protected from any development which may have an adverse impact on it. Development which would have a significant adverse impact on a locally designated site will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances and where it is possible to secure compensation for any loss or damage. The policy also recognises that species and habitats of importance exist outside of designated sites and that these must be protected from harm.

Policy CS12 states that opportunities will be taken to enhance Oxford's biodiversity resource by improving the network of unimproved flood meadows within the Thames and Cherwell Flood Plains, contribute to meeting Biodiversity Action Plan targets and meet the objectives of Conservation Target Areas; create links between natural habitats and identify a strategic Oxford habitat network; and ensure the inclusion of features beneficial to biodiversity within new developments.

The efficacy of policy CS12 is monitored through the annual monitoring report process. The change in areas of biodiversity importance is recorded with a target of no net reduction in areas designated for their intrinsic environmental value, i.e. SAC, SSSI's, Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) and locally designated sites.

The full wording of Policy CS12 can be viewed in the [Core Strategy 2026](#) document which is available on the city council's website. ["Background Paper C\(iii\): Oxford's Biodiversity"](#) explains the background to the development of CS12 and is also available to download on the city council's website. The Core Strategy is due to be reviewed within the next 5 years and this is likely to require assessment and mapping of ecologically important areas, biodiversity and green infrastructure. Evidence will need to be collected on a rolling basis to inform this review of the core strategy.

Having a strong evidence base and sound knowledge of our biodiversity resource is essential for good planning. It helps develop policy and enables robust decisions to be made through development control. It is also essential as a way to monitor our impacts on biodiversity and develop indicators for its health. The council supports the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) who collect, analyse and share biodiversity information with us. Furthermore, survey information undertaken in our parks or countryside and nature reserves is shared with TVERC. However, there is more we could do, such as ensuring that all ecological surveys submitted as part of the planning process are shared with TVERC.

Trees are vital for a healthy and high quality environment and contribute to Oxford's unique landscape character. The city council has the power to issue Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). TPOs can be made to protect specific trees, groups of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity. Amenity value includes criteria such as its size and form, its historic value, its contribution to the local landscape character, nature conservation or response to climate change. A TPO makes it illegal to damage or destroy a tree.

The city council also has a duty to ensure that planning conditions are imposed on planning permissions to preserve existing trees or to provide for the planting of new trees.

The planning department screens all planning applications for their biodiversity impact. Ecological surveys submitted with applications are scrutinised by a professional ecologist and conditions are used to secure mitigation or enhancement where this is appropriate. The council uses GIS to flag up key biodiversity information such as designated sites and protected and notable species and habitats. Data is supplied by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). The mitigation hierarchy (set out below) is always used to assess how any impacts should be managed.

The mitigation hierarchy is a method for ensuring activities do not have unnecessary impacts on the environment:

- In the first instance harm should be **avoided**, for instance by locating development at a different site;
- Where this is not possible the impacts should be **mitigated**, for instance through the detailed design of the development;
- Lastly any residual impacts should be **compensated** for, for instance by restoring or recreating habitat elsewhere.

The city council is committed to improving air quality in the city and declared the entire city an Air Quality Management Area in 2010 specifically for the management of nitrogen dioxide. The city council has an [Air Quality Action Plan 2013](#) which sets out the measures needed to improve air quality in Oxford and reduce carbon

emissions primarily from road transport. Air quality is monitored in the city and in general monitoring shows that the city's air quality has improved in recent years.

Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 4 (Draft) also acknowledges the impact of poor air quality on the natural environment and commits to working to reduce the negative impacts on biodiversity.

7.2 What the council will do

The council are committed to facilitating the following actions:

- Technical Advice Note on biodiversity to be developed and published in order to provide advice to developers on how to conserve and encourage biodiversity. Developers will also be signposted to the [Biodiversity and Planning in Oxfordshire](#) document produced by TVERC, BBOWT and Oxfordshire County Council. This document provides guidance to developers on how to comply with biodiversity legislation and realise opportunities for biodiversity through development.
- Continue to support the development and maintenance of a good evidence base managed by TVERC.
- Undertake a comprehensive assessment of our biodiversity resource in preparation for the review of the Core Strategy.
- Ensure that all ecological surveys submitted through the planning process are shared with TVERC.
- Continue to ensure that all planning applications are screened for impact on trees and biodiversity and appropriate conditions and obligations imposed where relevant.
- Prepare a comprehensive Tree Strategy for trees in the city which includes an assessment of the nature and extent of the existing tree population, providing information about the structure and composition of the urban forest and quantifying the benefits it currently provides in terms of carbon storage, carbon sequestration and pollution removal. The Tree Strategy will include an Action Plan which will help ensure long term sustainable delivery of the ecosystem services that trees provide. The Tree Strategy will also include measures to retain street trees, incorporate them in new developments, and include them in existing residential areas wherever reasonably possible.
- Assess the potential for adopting BS 42020:2013 "Biodiversity. Code of practice for planning and development". This is the first British Standard on Biodiversity Management and has been developed to help local authorities integrate biodiversity into all stages of the planning process.
- Identify opportunities for improving wildlife and habitat connectivity, including cross-boundary networks in line with Planning Practice Guidance.
- Assess opportunities for formalising the use of biodiversity offsetting in Oxford following the completion of the national pilot project. Should any offsetting approach be adopted, the Council will ensure that the mitigation hierarchy is not changed and that a system is put in place to ensure that offsets are maintained.

- Ensure that air quality management work seeks to reduce impact on biodiversity, especially sites of particular importance.
- Ensure that the hydrological impacts of development on biodiversity are appropriately addressed through SUDS schemes.
- Assess opportunities for introducing controls for the paving over of land which result in a loss of biodiversity and reducing existing paved areas.
- Raise awareness of and encourage local people, businesses and organisations to create wildlife habitats, such as wildflower meadows, wetlands, trees and green roofs/walls, and to incorporate bat and bird boxes wherever possible.

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8 Action Plan - Advocate and Facilitator

The city council is committed to protecting and enhancing local biodiversity, but we need help from the community. The city council has an important role to play as advocate and facilitator of biodiversity conservation and enhancement in the city. The council has opportunities for partnership working and for influencing a range of stakeholders including local community groups, businesses, land managers, third sector organisations and the general public.

8.1 What have we achieved to date?

The city council works in partnership with a range of organisations for the benefit of biodiversity. The city council and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) have been working in partnership on a long-standing project at Iffley Meadows nature reserve which has led to the restoration of rare habitat in the heart of the city. BBOWT is also currently working in partnership with Oxford City Council to deliver the “Wild Oxford” project. See Box 3 for more information on this project. The council’s involvement in projects like this helps to increase participation and understanding of biodiversity conservation in local communities.

Box 3 – The Wild Oxford Project

The Wild Oxford Project is run in partnership between BBOWT, Oxford City Council and local “Friends Of” groups. Over two years, the project seeks to bring together communities and nature in three of the city’s nature reserves: Lye Valley in Headington, Rivermead Nature Park in Rose Hill and Chilswell Valley in South Hinksey. All three sites are important for their rare fenland habitats.

Alongside undertaking practical conservation and maintenance work at the sites, the project will include various family events, walks and talks, volunteer group support and workshops on traditional conservation skills including coppicing, hedgelaying and scything.

The Wild Oxford project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) through a grant of £54,800, and a grant of £7,100 from TOE2 the Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment with funds from Grundon Waste Management.

For more information on the Wild Oxford Project, visit the website at:
<http://www.bbowt.org.uk/wildoxford>

Other examples of partnership working include the Oxford Green and Blue Spaces Networking Group. This was initiated by the council’s Leisure, Parks & Communities service and focuses on enabling partners to work more collaboratively to improve accessibility, volunteering and awareness of Oxford’s green spaces and blue

corridors. The network is attended by a representative group of agencies and land owners from across Oxford.

The city council has supported the Oxford Festival of Nature since its inception in 2012. This family event attracts over 1500 local people each year and provides fun activities whilst collecting important environmental data. The event incorporates a 24 hour “bio-blitz” where as many species as possible are identified and counted and the collected data is provided to TVERC. Oxford City Council is working with BBOWT to grow this event further.

At the council’s Cleaner Greener Campaign, Cutteslowe in spring 2015, Oxford City Council gave away pollinator friendly wildflower seed packets for local residents to plant in their gardens. Many residents were grateful for the seeds and more seed give-aways as part of other council run community events are planned.

The council has a small grant aid programme supporting voluntary and community groups in the city. Promoting and protecting the natural environment and biodiversity is one of the selection criteria for the funding. In recent years the council has supported the Oxford Festival of Nature and the Oxford Urban Wildlife Group through this fund.

The [biodiversity pages](#) on the council’s website have some simple suggestions of things that you can do as an individual, a local business, school or landowner to contribute to improving our natural environment.

There are many volunteer groups across the city that provides an outstanding contribution to the protection and enhancement of the city’s wildlife. Without these volunteers much of the valuable management work would not get done. The Leisure, Parks & Communities service has a network of volunteers who undertake wildlife management work in our green spaces as well as surveying. Other vital volunteering activities are the Friends of Parks Groups. These groups are independent but are supported by the city council. There are over 15 such groups in Oxford that help to manage our parks for the benefit of the community and biodiversity.

The city council acknowledge the exceptional work of the volunteering groups across the city and will identify opportunities to provide additional support to expand this work further wherever possible. There is also more that the council, could do to make the most of our position to raise awareness and provide advice on biodiversity through our interaction with local businesses, local land owners, developers and the general public.

8.2 What the council will do

The council are committed to facilitating the following actions:

- Continue to expand our network of volunteering programmes and groups in our nature reserves and countryside parks.

- Continue to ensure that the council's grants for community and voluntary groups benefits local biodiversity initiatives.
- Incorporate a biodiversity theme into the council's successful Cleaner Greener Campaign programme, by for example advising the public on how to encourage wildlife into their gardens and having wildflower seed giveaways.
- Take opportunities through tenancy management work and resident involvement to raise awareness and encourage biodiversity through the "Tenants in Touch" newsletter, a council publication reaching around 7,000 households.
- Improve staff engagement with biodiversity by introducing a "biodiversity champions" scheme that influences all departments in the council.
- Raise awareness of and encourage local people, businesses and organisations to create wildlife habitats, such as wildflower meadows, wetlands, trees and green roofs/walls, and to incorporate bat and bird boxes wherever possible.
- Ensure the city council engages proactively with the Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire.
- Ensure that the city council's departments work together effectively to protect and enhance biodiversity.
- Identify opportunities for more partnership working with local organisations and businesses, such as Oxford University, for the benefit of biodiversity.
- Identify opportunities for incorporating biodiversity into more local events.

9 Next Steps

This action plan sets out a realistic and achievable set of actions and provides a starting point for developing a more detailed programme of actions, owned by individual service areas. Actions have been allocated to specific service areas and they are responsible for their implementation. Where longer term actions require work, individual service areas are responsible for developing the detail and implementation. The city council's Environmental Policy Team will provide support and advice to service areas and will monitor progress of the actions. Please see Annex 1 for a breakdown of actions by service area.

A tracker document, managed by the Environmental Policy Team, sits behind the action plan in order to monitor progress. The overall action plan will be reviewed every 5 years.

We will continue to develop relationships with stakeholders and partners and to identify potential funding opportunities and extend actions beyond those identified in this document if opportunities arise.

It is hoped that ultimately, the action plan will form the starting point to provide a joined up approach to natural asset management in the city with the view to working towards producing a wider Natural Assets Strategy.

Annex 1

Actions by Service Area

Service Area	Actions	Timescale
City Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Advice Note on biodiversity to be developed and published in order to provide advice to developers on how to conserve and encourage biodiversity. Developers will also be signposted to the Biodiversity and Planning in Oxfordshire document produced by TVERC, BBOWT and Oxfordshire County Council. This document provides guidance to developers on how to comply with biodiversity legislation and realise opportunities for biodiversity through development. 	Short
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that biodiversity is incorporated into staff training programmes. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support the development and maintenance of a good evidence base managed by TVERC. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all ecological surveys submitted through the planning process are shared with TVERC. 	Short
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to ensure that all planning applications are screened for impact on trees and biodiversity and appropriate conditions and obligations imposed where relevant. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the potential for adopting BS 42020:2013 “Biodiversity. Code of practice for planning and development”. 	Medium/Long
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess opportunities for formalising the use of biodiversity offsetting in Oxford following the completion of the national pilot project. Should any offsetting approach be adopted, the Council will ensure that the mitigation hierarchy is not changed and that a system is put in place to ensure that offsets are maintained. 	Medium/Long
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of and encourage local people, businesses and organisations to create wildlife habitats, such as wildflower meadows, wetlands, trees and green roofs/walls, and to incorporate bat and bird boxes wherever possible. 	Short
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify opportunities for improving wildlife and habitat connectivity, including cross-boundary networks in line with Planning Practice Guidance. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a comprehensive Tree Strategy for trees in the city which includes an assessment of the nature and extent of the existing tree population, providing information about the structure and composition of the urban forest and quantifying the benefits it currently provides in terms of carbon storage, carbon sequestration and pollution removal. The Tree Strategy will include an Action Plan 	Medium

	which will help ensure long term sustainable delivery of the ecosystem services that trees provide. The Tree Strategy will also include measures to retain street trees, incorporate them in new developments, and include them in existing residential areas wherever reasonably possible.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a comprehensive assessment of our biodiversity resource in preparation for the review of the Core Strategy. 	Medium/Long
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the hydrological impacts of development on biodiversity are appropriately addressed through SUDS schemes. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess opportunities for introducing controls for the paving over of land and reducing existing paved areas. 	On-going

Service Area	Actions	Timescale
Direct Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that notable habitats and sites containing protected and priority species within our land ownership are appropriately identified, signage displayed (where possible) and managed in partnership with Natural England and BBOWT and other organisations where appropriate. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that biodiversity is incorporated into staff training programmes. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure legally protected species and priority species, their habitats and priority habitats are not harmed during repairs to housing stock/management of land and/or property. This includes undertaking ecological surveys where necessary. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure consideration is given to the timing of building work, to take into account breeding seasons to avoid harm to breeding animals such as swifts. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure biodiversity is considered in the early stages of any council new build or regeneration programmes and seek to realise opportunities for incorporating priority habitats, wildlife rich green spaces and green roofs/walls. This will include early engagement with the planning department on proposals that might affect biodiversity. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess opportunities to introduce deciduous hedging instead of fencing or walls in council developments to not only provide wildlife habitat, but to reduce air and noise pollution and opportunities for graffiti. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure a programme for the management of road verge cutting is in place for the benefit of biodiversity. Specifically, the council will avoid cutting until flowers have set seed wherever possible (e.g. unless there is a clear safety implication). Altering road verge management to incorporate removing cuttings from the site as well as spreading freshly cut hay from species-rich meadows will be assessed as a potential action in the longer-term. 	Short

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council will consider the following priorities when choosing species for new planting schemes – native provenance, enhancing biodiversity, attracting pollinating insects, resilience and contributions to the environment. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities for increased biodiversity provision across the city. For example, through creation of additional wildlife habitat on council land, such as wildflower meadows and areas for annual seeding of arable wildflowers to enrich biodiversity, feed pollinators and for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. 	On-going

Service Area	Actions	Timescale
Environmental Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that our staff awareness of biodiversity continues to grow and that we continue to improve our knowledge of the impacts that our services have on the natural environment. We will do this by introducing a 'Biodiversity Champion Scheme' which seeks to identify champions in each service who will become a central source of knowledge, advice and staff engagement. 	Short
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure biodiversity is incorporated into staff training programmes and that clear guidance is available for relevant service areas. 	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the city council's departments work together effectively to protect and enhance biodiversity. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to ensure that the council's grants for community and voluntary groups benefits local biodiversity initiatives. 	Short
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate a biodiversity theme into the council's successful Cleaner Greener Campaign programme, by for example advising the public on how to encourage wildlife into their gardens and having wildflower seed giveaways. 	Short
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of and encourage local people, businesses and organisations to create wildlife habitats, such as wildflower meadows, wetlands, trees and green roofs/walls, and to incorporate bat and bird boxes wherever possible. 	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the City Council engages proactively with the Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire. 	Short
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that air quality management work seeks to reduce impact on biodiversity, especially sites of particular importance. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities for more partnership working with local organisations and businesses, such as Oxford University, for the benefit of biodiversity. 	On-going

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities for incorporating biodiversity into more local events. 	On-going
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Service Area	Actions	Timescale
Housing and Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that biodiversity is incorporated into staff training programmes. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure legally protected species and priority species, their habitats and priority habitats are not harmed during repairs to housing stock/management of land and/or property. This includes undertaking ecological surveys where necessary. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure consideration is given to the timing of work to take into account breeding seasons to avoid harm to breeding animals such as swifts. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure biodiversity is considered in the early stages of any council new build or regeneration programmes and seek to realise opportunities for incorporating priority habitats, wildlife rich green spaces and green roofs/walls. This will include early engagement with the planning department on proposals that might affect biodiversity. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide bird and bat boxes in existing and new council buildings wherever possible. As far as possible these should be incorporated within the fabric of the building. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities for increased biodiversity provision across the city. For example, through creation of additional wildlife habitat on council land, such as wildflower meadows and areas for annual seeding of arable wildflowers to enrich biodiversity, feed pollinators and for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council will consider the following priorities when choosing species for new planting schemes – native provenance, enhancing biodiversity, attracting pollinating insects, resilience and contributions to the environment. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take opportunities through tenancy management work and resident involvement to raise awareness and encourage biodiversity through the “Tenants in Touch” newsletter, (with support from Environmental Sustainability). 	Short
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess opportunities for introducing controls for the paving over of land and reducing existing paved areas. 	On-going

Service Area	Actions	Timescale
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Leisure, Parks & Communities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management Plans for all Countryside and City Parks will be updated with an assessment given to the importance of biodiversity. Management plans will be produced in partnership with key stakeholders. 	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure consideration is given to the timing of work, to take into account breeding seasons to avoid harm to breeding animals such as swifts. 	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that biodiversity is incorporated into staff training within the parks department programmes. In-house training and external courses. 	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council will consider the following priorities when choosing species for new planting schemes – native provenance, enhancing biodiversity, attracting pollinating insects, resilience and contributions to the environment. 	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to identify opportunities for managing city council cemeteries to benefit biodiversity. 	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities to provide more interpretation boards in our nature reserves and parks. 	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce a Biosecurity Policy – including sourcing UK grown trees and seed for use in parks and green spaces, where possible, to reduce the risk of tree disease and transport impacts. 	Short
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to recycle all green waste and look at methods of recycling in situ. 	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work in partnership with Friends of the Earth and other organisations to further improve our parks and open spaces for pollinating insects. 	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to expand our network of volunteering programmes and groups in our nature reserves and countryside parks. 	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that notable habitats and sites housing protected and priority species within our land ownership are appropriately identified, signage displayed (where possible) and managed in partnership with Natural England, BBOWT and other groups, where appropriate. 	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure legally protected species and priority species, their habitats and priority habitats are not harmed during management of parks & open spaces. This includes undertaking ecological surveys where necessary. 	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the biodiversity actions identified in the council's Green Spaces Strategy 2013 -2027. 	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities for increased biodiversity provision across the city. For example, through creation of additional wildlife habitat on 	On-going

	council land, such as wildflower meadows and areas for annual seeding of arable wildflowers to enrich biodiversity, feed pollinators and for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. Any opportunities realised will be tied into management plans.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess opportunities to introduce deciduous hedging instead of fencing or walls in council developments to not only provide wildlife habitat, but to reduce air and noise pollution and opportunities for graffiti. Taking into account species choice criteria above. 	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities for improving wildlife and habitat connectivity, including cross-boundary networks in line with Planning Practice Guidance. 	Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities for incorporating biodiversity into more local events. 	On-going

The timescales are defined as:

- Short Term: Delivery within 1 year
Medium Term: Delivery within 3 years
Long Term: Delivery within 5 years