

## **Cherwell District Council**

### **Biodiversity Duty Report 2024-2025**

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## **Introduction**

### **What is the Biodiversity Duty?**

Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth, including all living organisms and the ecosystems they form. This includes species diversity – the range of different species, genetic diversity – variation within species, and ecosystem diversity – different habitats and ecological processes.

The Environment Act 2021 amended Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006 to strengthen the existing ‘Biodiversity duty’. This duty requires all public authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This is a corporate responsibility that goes across all Council departments, actions and decision making.

All public authorities must:

- Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on the consideration.
- Act to deliver the policies and achieve the objectives.

The duty will contribute to the government’s Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23) published in January 2023 which set out the nation’s commitments to halt the decline in species abundance and to protect 30% of UK land and sea for nature through the Nature Recovery Network by 2030.

To inform a baseline of the biodiversity duty, public authorities were required to carry out first considerations by January 2024 setting out their current biodiversity policies and identifying what further actions should be taken across all Council functions. This then forms the basis of objectives, policies and actions to be set to meet the biodiversity duty.

### **Aims of the Biodiversity Duty Report**

The Council had to complete its first consideration of what action it can properly take to further the general biodiversity objective by 1 January 2024 (i.e. one year after Section 102 of the Act became effective). It was required to agree the policies and objectives for taking action as soon as practicable after this which might include revising existing policies and objectives. It was then required to take the action to meet the biodiversity objective.

A report was approved by the Council’s Executive in November 2023 which noted the requirements of the Act in respect of biodiversity and the on-going preparation for the introduction of statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

It was determined during the first considerations at the Executive committee that continuing with a commitment to produce a revised Community Biodiversity Plan, to monitor its delivery, and to keep the Plan under review, would be the most appropriate means by which to demonstrate on-going compliance with the biodiversity objective.

The Community Biodiversity Plan for the current period has not yet been produced. However, actions for biodiversity conservation and enhancement have continued with additional objectives and actions set and implemented within different Council services. The purpose of this Biodiversity Duty Report is to report on these actions for the reporting period.

The delivery of the Councils actions for biodiversity and nature recovery would not be possible without working in collaboration and partnership with key organisations as well as the contributions of a network of local conservation and community groups.

## Section 1: Policies, objectives and actions for biodiversity

### 1.1 Policies and objectives for biodiversity

#### 1.1.1 Existing policies, strategies and plans

A key function of the council in terms of the biodiversity duty is its role as a Local Planning Authority. The council has legal obligations relating to important wildlife sites, habitats and species; and requirements under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) relating to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Conserving and enhancing biodiversity is further achieved through the core policies of **The Cherwell Local Plan (Part 1) 2011-2031**. Policy ESD 9 sets out protection of the Oxford Meadows SAC. ESD 10 seeks protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the natural environment which includes an expectation of overall net gains for biodiversity. ESD 11 has detailed requirements for Conservation Target Areas specifically aimed at biodiversity enhancement opportunities.

Additionally, ESD 16 (The Oxford canal) and ESD 17 (Green infrastructure) seek to protect existing and encourage more open spaces and linkages, protecting existing wildlife habitats and facilitating movement between them. ESD1 (Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change) and ESD 6 (Sustainable flood risk management) support biodiversity by addressing climate change and seeking opportunities to restore natural river flows and floodplains.

The **Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2022)** sets out a network of high-quality green spaces and other natural features and identifies strategic opportunities to enhance the districts green and blue infrastructure.

A primary goal of the Council's **Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2028 Everybody's Wellbeing** is Everyone Can Connect with Nature.

The **Council's Corporate Plan 2025 -2026** includes four priorities one of which is Environmental Stewardship. A primary goal for this priority is to Safeguard the Environment and Promote biodiversity with an aim 'to implement sustainable policies and practices, protect natural habitats, and support conservation initiatives that enhance ecosystem health and biodiversity while responding to the climate emergency'.

Environmental sustainability is a key aim within **Cherwell District Councils Business plan 2024-2025** which includes promoting the green economy.

**Climate Action Plan Nov'24 – Apr'26**, goal 12 is to enhance the district's natural capital to support carbon off-setting and biodiversity enhancement. The table below sets out the objectives associated with this goal.

CAP goal	Objective
12.01	Consider the feasibility of a planning policy to achieve 20% Biodiversity Net Gain from new development
12.03	Produce a management plan for Longford Park to reduce regular mowing activities, improve biodiversity and engage with the community
12.04	Enhancement of Banbury Country Park, Longford Park, Burnehyll Woodland and Graven Hill to support biodiversity and carbon sequestration

12.05	Support key biodiversity partners and local communities to protect, manage and enhance habitats which have biodiversity value and carbon removal/storage functions.
12.06	Support and promote wellbeing initiatives that encourage residents to look after their natural environment, connect them with nature and improve access to local green spaces.
12.07	Develop a comprehensive tree/forest strategy in order to increase tree planting rates within the district and ensure long-term maintenance/stewardship of forests/woodlands
12.08	Supporting the county-wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy process which is being led by Oxfordshire County Council with the support of the Local Nature Partnership.
12.09	Support emergence and facilitation of farmer clusters, boosting their key role in delivery of landscape-scale natural capital enhancement.
12.10	Explore with neighbouring planning authorities, the extent to which the Local Nature Recovery Strategy can be incorporated into the Local Plan and related decision-making processes.
12.11	Enable Planning and Communities officers to integrate elements of Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework into the new Local Plan and other delivery plans.
12.12	Increase the amount of natural capital in Cherwell through additional habitat creation, especially in urban areas.

### 1.1.2 Emerging policy

The Submission Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042 was submitted for Examination on 31 July 2025 and is now at examination. In line with the Biodiversity Duty and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) the proposed biodiversity policies are strengthened with a greater focus on maximising the protection, restoration and expansion of protected sites, habitats and species.

Policy CSD 10 of the draft Plan looks for water quality and hydrological regime of the Oxford SAC to be *improved* rather than maintained. CSD 11 seeks positive contributions to biodiversity with strengthened levels of protection for Local Sites of biodiversity value and Priority habitat and species, an expectation of integrated bat or bird provisions at a ratio of 1:1 for new dwellings and for all biodiversity features to be secured for at least 30 years. CSD 12 sets expectations for biodiversity net gain to be achieved for all development, for 20% biodiversity net gain on relevant sites and for off-site biodiversity gains to be sited in areas where they will have most benefit to nature recovery.

The emerging local plan policies will be used to guide development proposals that will be received by the authority on an ongoing basis. Policies to protect biodiversity and guide nature recovery will therefore have an ongoing contribution to compliance with the biodiversity duty.

## **Section 1.2: Actions for biodiversity**

### **1.2.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

The Environment Act 2021 established the requirement on Local Authorities to publish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Oxfordshire County Council is the Responsible Authority for Oxfordshire and has the duty to prepare and host the LNRS. Cherwell District Council along with the other Oxfordshire Districts, the City Council and Natural England is a supporting authority.

The LNRS is a spatial strategy for nature recovery, the main purpose of which is to identify locations where the creation and/or enhancement of certain habitats would provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment, including reconnecting habitats as part of an ecological network. It encourages the delivery of targeted actions for nature recovery as opportunities for funding and investment arise.

The LNRS is comprised of four key documents/ components:

- Description of the Strategy Area;
- Statement of Biodiversity Priorities;
- Species Priority List;
- Local Habitat Map - an online interactive map tool.

While many species and habitats are identified as priorities at the national level, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy enables these priorities to be specifically identified and linked to local landscapes, ensuring that actions are relevant to the specific ecological needs of Oxfordshire.

The Oxfordshire LNRS was published in November 2025. As a supporting authority the Council has been involved in all stages of its preparation and contributed to its development through representation on the steering group committee, at technical workshops, draft reviews, consultation and advocating for local priorities. The Executive committee endorsed the LNRS in October 2025.

Going forward the LNRS will be a key consideration in the Councils approach to the biodiversity duty and will inform priorities for action in the Community Biodiversity Plan. The Councils Senior Ecologist is part of the LNRS Delivery Advisory Group through which the Council will share expertise, strategic guidance and review work and workplans to help guide the delivery of nature recovery objectives in line with national requirements and local priorities.

### **1.2.2 Local Wildlife Site Project**

Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) are sites of substantive nature conservation value at a County level taking into consideration species composition, habitat type/quality and local/national importance for biodiversity. They form an important network of habitats for animals and plants within Oxfordshire and are vital to conserving biodiversity - receiving some protection within Planning.

Cherwell District Council, along with the other Oxfordshire Councils, funds the Local Wildlife Sites project and sits on the Project Steering Group. The project team survey proposed Local Wildlife Sites and resurvey designated ones to assess any increase or decrease in biodiversity value against the LWS criteria.

Cherwell district has 84 Local Wildlife Sites, 18 proposed/extensions LWS and 6 overlapping with other districts.

The table below shows the extent of LWS area in Cherwell over the last three years.

Designated Site	Area in ha (2021)	Area in ha (2022)	Area in ha (2023)	Area in ha (2024)	% of district (2024)
Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)	1,460.93	1,457.73	1457.77	1473.69	2.50%

In addition, the LWS project team gives advice to land managers/owners where desired on positive management for biodiversity within the LWS. Site advice, visits and discussions with landowners/managers have been provided during the reporting period for Fields by River Ray LWS, Gavray Drive LWS (East), MOD Otmoor, Various Network Rail sites, Begbroke Wood LWS, Arcott Wood LWS, Noke Wood LWS, Temple Mill Quarries LWS.

The Single Data List 160-00 (SDL160) seeks to measure the performance of Local Authorities at protecting their local biodiversity and geodiversity, by assessing the implementation of conservation management on Local Sites. This is calculated as the percentage of Local Sites that qualify as being in 'positive conservation management'. Positive conservation management, defined as management which contributes to maintaining or enhancing the features of interest for which a site has been selected, serves as a widely accepted proxy for assessing improvements in biodiversity. Across Oxfordshire's Local Wildlife Sites the SDL 160-00 for 2024/2025 is 47% of Local Wildlife Sites in positive conservation management. This compares favourably with the National average of 38%.

### 1.2.3 District Wildlife Site project

The Council funds the Local Wildlife Site project team to additionally run a District Wildlife Site project. These are Cherwell specific sites which contain semi-natural habitat or have a notable species interest but which have no formal designation. Along with biodiversity value they often have a community value also. They include sites that have been de-notified or rejected as Local Wildlife Sites and have potential for restoration and enhancement.

Along with surveys of proposed DWS in 2024, management advice and visits have been carried out to Island Pond Wood Cherwell DWS, Swalcliffe Common DWS (also led a guided walk for the community), Weaveley Furze, Stratfield Brake (and wider area).

### 1.2.4 Great Crested Newt District Licence Scheme

The Council holds a District licence for great crested newts (GCN) which in partnership with Nature Space (the delivery body of the scheme) allows for the compensation of impacts on GCN resulting from development to be off-set by newly created or restored aquatic and terrestrial habitat within the District or County.

Nature Space has also carried out spatial modelling of GCN risk zones which are used in Development Management to ensure the potential presence of GCN is flagged and survey information and mitigation as appropriate is sought.

Compensation is created at a 4:1 ratio for ponds that are lost and are secured for a minimum of 25 years. These ponds aim for high quality habitats and use by GCN is high compared with ponds in the wider countryside. The scheme achieves conservation and enhancement for great crested newts at a landscape scale. Compensatory habitat in turn benefits a wide variety of aquatic and wetland plants, amphibians and invertebrates including Priority species with many ponds attaining Priority status .

The photos below show a newly created compensation pond at Bicester Garrison and the same pond one year later. Six months after creation and restoration on this site all the ponds were found to contain breeding great crested newts, as well as smooth newts, common frog and common toad.



Since 2018 the funds from the scheme have secured within Cherwell nearly 130 ha of terrestrial habitat compensation and 24 compensatory ponds. A full report from Nature Space is within the appendices.

### **1.2.5 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership**

The Council's membership of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) assists in meeting the biodiversity duty. The overall purpose of an LNP is to:

- drive positive change in the local natural environment, taking a strategic view of the challenges and opportunities involved and identifying ways to manage it as a system for the benefit of nature, people and the economy
- contribute to achieving the Government's national environmental objectives locally, including the identification of local ecological networks, alongside addressing local priorities
- become local champions influencing decision-making relating to the natural environment and its value to social and economic outcomes through working closely with local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The Council have representatives in working groups sitting under the LNP which aim to aid nature recovery through collaboration and discussion. This includes the Biodiversity net gain working group and the Biodiversity Advisory Group which seeks to enable the coordinated delivery of nature's recovery in Oxfordshire by providing a forum for professionals to share knowledge, expertise and guidance on the development of strategic plans for Oxfordshire's biodiversity.

### **1.2.6 Priority species off setting pilot scheme**

In November 2025 the Council joined a pilot of the NatureSpace Priority Species Scheme. This is a new method for assessing development impacts to Priority Species (defined under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006, as amended) and to allow for the provision of viable and proportionate compensation to be secured as part of the planning process.

The scheme is designed to facilitate the protection and recovery of populations of locally important Priority Species. Currently, it addresses impacts on linnet, Skylark, hedgehog and

yellowhammer for major development but it is intended to roll it out to other species following the pilot period. It offers an integrated approach to off-site compensation by linking with off-site BNG compensation. One aim of this scheme is to enable the provision of BNG habitat that can also deliver effective species compensation.

Given the nascent nature of the pilot, no developments are yet entered into the scheme.

### 1.2.7 Biodiversity checklist

A biodiversity checklist has been developed and approved at Executive committee in March 2024. This sits as an appendix to the Local Validation list on the CDC Planning webpages and aims to assist those submitting planning applications with determining whether their development is likely to impact biodiversity. This ensures that impacts on biodiversity are flagged, the correct ecological surveys are carried out and information submitted and it encourages development proposals to take biodiversity into account from the earliest stage to improve outcomes for nature within developments.

### 1.2.8 Wellbeing, communication and engagement

Goal 4 of the Council’s Strategy ‘Everybody’s Wellbeing’ is ‘Everyone Can Connect with Nature’. The ambition is that nature is accessible and valued by everyone in the District.

This is being actioned through a number of projects either delivered by the Council directly or via funded partnerships with experienced organisations. CDC has and is funding a range of projects with partners to increase people’s connection to nature and enable actions to enhance biodiversity within the district.

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Partners/funding</b>	<b>actions</b>
RSPB Otmoor Nature Reserve	RSPB	Funding is given to the RPSB towards management of the flagship Otmoor Nature Reserve
Wild projects	BBOWT	Delivered in Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington. Connecting local residents and groups with each other and to nature and green spaces. Monthly nature connection sessions held at Hanwell Fields throughout 2025.
Nature hour/Wildlife gardening	Wild Oxfordshire	Funding continued from April 2025, for nature hour and wildlife friendly gardening sessions across Kidlington
Habitat improvement objective as a result of green space review	Rural England Prosperity Funding secured	Creation of a wet feature at Park Hill recreation ground to benefit biodiversity and people. Funding to be implemented in 2026.
Bridge Street Community Garden	Banbury Community Action Group, UK shared prosperity fund	Community growing spaces in Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington
Various rural community gardens	Harvest at Home (COMF funding)*	Community growing spaces in rural areas
Nature website Resources and flyer		CDC ‘Connect with Nature’ webpages updated monthly with a seasonal theme. Regular social media posts, nature flyer and

		notes in the Parish bulletin, community link and other publications direct to local people with information on enhancing biodiversity and engaging with nature.
Farm visits	Warriner School Farm	Primary school and youth groups visits on importance of the natural environment and as a food source and its intrinsic value.
Care Farming Project	Warriner School Farm	Farming and nature-based activities to improve mental health and wellbeing
Walking app	Go Jauntly (COMF funding)*	The council has funded the digitisation of health routes and countryside walks in the district with 'green routes' designed to connect people with nature.
Park Ranger project in schools	Peoples Theatre Collective	A program in schools focusing on outdoor exploration, conservation and environmental stewardship

\*COMF – Containing Outbreak Management Fund

### 1.2.9 Biodiversity enhancement on CDC managed land

Project	Funding /partners	Actions
Trow Pool LWS		Willow trees 'veteranised' to create standing deadwood as biodiversity habitat
Kirtlington quarry		Ash removals stacked as deadwood piles to create natural life cycles and support biodiversity
Cassington Road Open Space		Investigating fencing off mature/veteran trees to allow maturity and full life cycle without public risk
Burnehyll Community woodland	Coronation Living heritage fund	Implementation of funding to plant 2 micro-woodlands on site
Burnehyll community woodland	Coronation Living heritage fund	Community orchard creation
Banbury Country Park	Wild Oxfordshire Hedgerow Heroes	exploring options for existing hedgerow supplementation
Dukes Meadow Drive (verge), Banbury	Wild Oxfordshire Hedgerow Heroes/ Wild Banbury volunteers	hedgerow creation and supplementation
Banbury Country Park	Oxfordshire Amphibians and Reptiles Group	Surveys for reptiles with a view to carrying out habitat enhancement/hibernacula creation
Banbury Country Park		10 swift bricks and bat boxes installed in flood alleviation tunnel

Kidlington Open Spaces	Kidlington Parish Council	Selected areas of grassland changed from close mown to 'wildflower cut', with some areas left uncut to provide biodiversity enhancement and connectivity for wildlife
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*Swift bricks in the top of tunnel wall, Banbury*



### 1.2.10 Actions relating to Climate adaptation and resilience

Many of the actions taken to support the Council's climate and carbon goals have clear co-benefits for the enhancement of biodiversity. The table below outlines actions taken since 2024 under the Climate Action Plan goal 12 all of which are ongoing.

Climate Action Plan: Actions taken toward Biodiversity Conservation & Enhancement

Action	Objective Supported	Progress / Outcome
12.01 – Feasibility of 20% BNG policy	Achieve higher BNG than mandatory 10%	Policy in LP review submission
12.02 – Explore Oxfordshire carbon offsetting scheme	Support nature-based carbon sequestration	Engagement with Local Nature Partnership ongoing.
12.04 – Enhance parks & woodlands (Banbury Country Park, etc.)	Increase habitat quality and carbon sinks	Active habitat management and community engagement.
12.05 – Support biodiversity partners and communities	Protect and enhance habitats	Collaboration with local environmental groups.
12.08 – Support Oxfordshire LNRS process	Align district with county nature recovery	LNRS published
12.09 – Support farmer	Promote landscape-scale natural capital	Engagement with Cherwell Farmers Cluster on soil carbon

clusters	projects	and flood management.
12.11 – Integrate Green Infrastructure Framework	Embed GI into planning and delivery	Training and policy integration in progress
12.15 – Secure BNG offset sites in Cherwell	Retain biodiversity gains within district	Working with partners to identify and register sites.

### ***Nature Based Carbon sequestration project***

In partnership with the LNP and other Oxfordshire district councils the ‘Enabling Nature-Based Carbon Sequestration in Oxfordshire’ project ran from April 2024 to November 2025 funded by Innovate UK. This explored how to generate new finance for nature recovery and provide local carbon offsetting opportunities.

This is in line with the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map & Action Plan (Final Report) 2023 action (12) to ‘explore opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration through land use change, including targeted habitat restoration and creation.’

To date, reports:

- 1) A review of nature-based carbon methodologies and routes to market
- 2) Developing a High Integrity Nature-based Carbon Market Framework for Oxfordshire
- 3) Implementation of nature-based markets in Oxfordshire

have been developed including an updated Inventory of Carbon Sequestration for the County and Cherwell.

A study (Cherwell AGILE) has looked at carbon sequestered and stored in Cherwell habitats and completed a case study at Burnehyll Community Woodland to assess the potential for a carbon sequestration and woodland carbon scheme.

### **Biodiversity and Climate Resilience Service**

In 2025 the Council restructured services in a new Place and Regeneration Directorate. This included the creation of a Biodiversity and Climate Resilience service. A new Head of Service position has been created, and the position has been filled. The creation of this service will enable more resource and focus for addressing biodiversity and climate change priorities and will result in their integration where appropriate to achieve common objectives. The production of the new Community Biodiversity Plan will a priority for the new service.

## **Section 2: Biodiversity net gain**

## **2.1 Biodiversity net gain 2024-2025**

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a requirement to secure at least a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) from the grant of planning permission for development. This is achieved using a biodiversity metric to measure biodiversity value, and provision by the applicant of a Biodiversity Gain Plan for delivery. Except for limited exemptions every planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that the development may not be begun unless a biodiversity gain plan has been submitted to and approved by the planning authority.

A Biodiversity Gain Plan includes how adverse impacts on habitats have been minimised; the pre-development biodiversity value of the on-site habitat; the post development biodiversity value of the on-site habitat; the biodiversity value of any off-site habitat provided in relation to the development; and any statutory biodiversity credits purchased for the development.

Developments must follow the Biodiversity Gain hierarchy where net gains are achieved on site as first preference. Where on-site gains cannot be achieved, developers must create habitat off-site or purchase 'biodiversity units' for doing so from a registered gain site. If developers cannot secure the requisite BNG on or off-site, they must buy statutory credits from the Government as a last resort. Generally, developments which can't achieve BNG on site will use a combination of on and off site.

Until mandatory BNG came forward in 2024, the Council had been seeking 10% net gain on development sites of 0.5 hectares or more on a non-statutory basis in accordance with the Executive's decision on 7 October 2019 and ESD10 *Protection and Conservation of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment* of the Local Plan which sought a net gain. This was calculated using earlier iterations of the DEFRA metric. Measurable net gains were therefore secured both on and off site for numerous developments.

From 12 February 2024, we have been applying the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain pre-commencement Condition to all non-exempt planning applications coming forward. Biodiversity metric data has been entered into BNG software (Verna's Mycelia) which the Council has invested in to track, monitor and report effectively on BNG, as well as being contained through the corporate Planning software (DEF). BNG guidance for developers and applicants has been developed and made accessible on CDC Planning webpages.

During 2024-2025 eleven Biodiversity Gain Plans have been approved, with more than 70 biodiversity net gain metrics assessed. These eleven gain plans show that an average of 15.51% net gain in 'area' habitats has been achieved and a 63.95% net gain in hedgerow habitats.

Of the 11 sites, nine developments achieved net gain on site with two buying off site units from habitat banks (one from inside the LPA boundary and one from a unit provider in an adjacent LPA).

Further information on the composition of habitat types for gains and losses is set out in the appendices.

## **2.2 Biodiversity gain sites/Habitat banks**

The Council has agreed Cherwell specific criteria and set up the processes and procedures to enter agreements with landowners to facilitate the registration of biodiversity gain sites/ habitat banks in Cherwell.

In July 2025 the council completed a s.106 agreement to secure the first biodiversity gain site in Cherwell at Ells Farm, Bloxham in partnership with the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment. The site is providing 14.67 hectares of created and enhanced habitats and 1.86km of hedgerow.

A further biodiversity gain site at RSPB Otmoor has also been secured and registered providing 21.07 hectares of habitat adjacent to the Otmoor nature reserve, which is of also of high value to Priority species. A table of the composition of habitat types to be created at these sites is included in the appendices.

The development of gain sites within the district has allowed developers who are unable to deliver net gain on site to buy off site units from within Cherwell, thus ensuring biodiversity value and gains are not lost from the district. The Council will review monitoring reports from habitat banks it has secured over 30 years to ensure proposed habitat types and conditions are achieved.

Two studies have also been carried out on Council owned land to assess their potential to function as habitat banks/gain sites - with an Ecological baseline assessment at Burnehyll Community Woodland and a cost analysis report for habitat creation and enhancement at Banbury Country Park.

## **Section 3: Future actions**

### **3.1 Actions to be implemented in the next reporting period**

Many of the actions outlined in this report are ongoing and therefore will continue to be actioned into the next reporting period.

The key action ongoing is to develop the 'Community Biodiversity Plan' and to set objectives and actions to enhance biodiversity across all Council services. The Community Biodiversity Plan will align with the habitat and species priorities within the Oxfordshire LNRS.

Other areas of focus will be:

- Monitoring of ecological enhancements within developments
- Embedding the LNRS within Council decisions on nature recovery and land use
- Considering any implications arising from any government review of the Environmental Improvement Plan
- The integration into local policy and development management decisions of species conservation strategies and protected site strategies as and when progressed by the national government

### **3.2 Biodiversity net gain - future actions**

- The continued implementation and monitoring of mandatory BNG:  
The Council will continue to support applicants through the planning system with the provision of advice from in-house ecologists and the systems and process now in place to record and report on BNG. The specialist software package, (Verna's Mycelia), will be used to provide greater detail of BNG delivery and ensure the ongoing effective monitoring of biodiversity net gain delivery within the district.
- The service for landowners wishing to secure habitat banks within the district will be continued and refined
- The Council will continue to assess whether any Council owned land has the potential to be managed effectively as a gain site.



## Appendix 1

### Biodiversity Net Gain

The information below is from all biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period (up to 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026)

<b>Overall expected gains and losses</b>	<b>Area habitat</b>	<b>Hedgerow</b>	<b>Watercourse</b>
Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site	9.38	1.03	0.00
Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site	8.75	1.63	0.00
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site	-0.63	0.60	0.00
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, on-site	-6.71	58.11	0.00
Total number of baseline biodiversity units approved off-site	0.75	0.00	0.00
Total number of post-intervention biodiversity units approved off-site	2.95	0.06	0.00
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, off-site	2.20	0.06	0.00
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, off-site	294.30	0.00	0.00
Total number of biodiversity units offset using statutory credits	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits)	1.57	0.66	0.00
Average percentage (%) change (including statutory credits)	15.51	63.95	0.00



J	Coastal saltmarsh	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
K	Rocky shore	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
L	Coastal lagoons	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
M	Intertidal hard structures	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
N	Watercourse footprint	Not applicable	0.00	Not applicable	0.00	Not applicable	0.00
O	Individual trees	1.91	0.21	2.11	0.50	0.21	0.29
Total		10.12	5.06	11.70	5.37	1.57	0.30

### Composition of Biodiversity gains for hedgerows and tree lines

Habitat type - hedgerows and lines of trees	Total biodiversity units at baseline	Total kilometres at baseline	Total biodiversity units post - development	Total kilometres post - development	Net change in biodiversity units	Net change in kilometres
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Species-rich native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Species-rich native hedgerow	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.02	0.12	0.02
Native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Native hedgerow with trees	0.24	0.02	0.24	0.02	0.00	0.00

Ecologically valuable line of trees	0.36	0.09	0.36	0.09	0.00	0.00
Ecologically valuable line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Native hedgerow	0.32	0.08	0.81	0.26	0.49	0.18
Line of trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.11	0.11	0.16	0.17	0.05	0.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.03</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>1.69</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>0.26</b>

**Biodiversity gain sites in Cherwell secured by the Council**  
**Composition and amount of habitat creation and enhancement**

**Ells Farm, Bloxham gain site**

**Area**

	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
Grassland - Other neutral grassland	Good	4.3424
Grassland - Other neutral grassland	Moderate	1.9668
Lakes - Ponds (non-priority habitat)	Moderate	0.1
Grassland - Other neutral grassland	Moderate	3.2167
Woodland and forest - Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	Good	0.1044
Heathland and shrub - Mixed scrub	Moderate	0.9894
Grassland - Other neutral grassland	Good	3.2132
Lakes - Ponds (non-priority habitat)	Moderate	0.2
Woodland and forest - Other woodland; broadleaved	Moderate	0.3168

## Ells Farm, Bloxham gain site

### Area

	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
Woodland and forest - Other woodland; broadleaved	Moderate	0.2166
<b>Total</b>		<b>14.67</b>

<b>Hedgerow</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Length (km)</b>
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	Good	0.062
Species-rich native hedgerow	Good	0.282
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	Good	0.177
Species-rich native hedgerow	Good	0.2
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	Good	0.187
Species-rich native hedgerow	Good	0.214

<b>Hedgerow</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Length (km)</b>
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	Good	0.329
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	Good	0.064
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	Good	0.146
Species-rich native hedgerow	Good	0.203
<b>Total</b>		<b>1.86</b>

**RSPB, Otmoor gain site**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
Grassland - Floodplain wetland mosaic and CFGM	Moderate	9.4675
Grassland - Floodplain wetland mosaic and CFGM	Moderate	6.1621
Grassland - Other neutral grassland	Good	5.4448

<b>Area</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
Total		21.07



### Great Crested Newt District Licensing Scheme

Cherwell District holds an Organisational Licence (also known as a District Licence) for great crested newts, for which NatureSpace are the named Delivery Partner. NatureSpace's District Licensing Scheme provides an alternative licensing route to the traditional European Protected Species Mitigation Licence (EPSML) when great crested newts are impacted by development. The scheme is designed to allow developers to pay for high-quality, strategically located off-site compensation that benefit great crested newt populations, whilst allowing construction to proceed on-site with fewer mitigation requirements. The District Licensing Scheme provides Cherwell District Council with a working example of a species conservation strategy (for great crested newts) and is helping to meet the requirements set out in Local Plan policy (ESD10) on nature conservation.

Cherwell District Council forms part of the scheme's Oxfordshire region. This means that funds secured via development in Cherwell District Council are used to create a "pool" of compensation throughout the Oxfordshire region, albeit with a preference to deliver compensation within each of the LPAs wherever possible.

To date (2018-2025), the scheme has generated £1,310,985.60 for great crested newt conservation in Oxfordshire. These funds have secured 129.920ha of terrestrial habitat compensation within Cherwell District Council, and 292.470ha across Oxfordshire; 24 created/restored ponds in Cherwell and 77 created/restored ponds across Oxfordshire.

The legal requirements set out in the District Licence include occupancy multipliers for ponds (depending on location within the scheme's modelled impact risk zones) and different compensation ratios depending on the type of impact and year of the scheme's operation. The compensation delivery meets and exceeds the legal licensing requirements (see table 1 below for details) and provides a clear net gain for the species.

When we look simply at hectares of loss versus gain and numbers of ponds lost and gained, we are also able to demonstrate net gain for aquatic and terrestrial habitats (for great crested newts) at both the LPA and regional levels. Aside from numbers, we are also gaining in quality – the habitats being lost are usually of poorer quality and lower suitability than those being created, and the new habitats are secured under long-term beneficial management plans for newts, with funding secured for at least 25 years.

Approximately 60 - 65% of funding goes directly to the Newt Conservation Partnership to find compensation sites, create highly quality habitats, and monitor great crested newt populations at the local and landscape scale. 20% is spent directly on habitat creation/restoration, 20% is ring fenced in a fund to ensure the management of compensation ponds is secured in perpetuity and 25% is for monitoring. All created and restored ponds and habitats are monitored and managed for a minimum 25-year period.

Table 1: District Licensing Scheme funding from development, impacts and compensation delivery summary in Cherwell and Oxfordshire (ha – hectares)

	<b>Cherwell District Council</b>	<b>Oxfordshire</b>
<b>Compensation requirements (no. of ponds)</b>	5.04	25.99
<b>Compensation delivery (no. of ponds)</b>	24	77
<b>Terrestrial impacts (ha)</b>	75.779ha	165.946ha
<b>Terrestrial compensation delivery (ha)</b>	129.920ha	292.470ha

The remaining contributions are allocated to the administration of the District Licence, including funding District Licensing Officer positions, undertaking site assessments, supporting developers, ecological consultants, and LPAs through the licensing process, increasing the coverage of the scheme to benefit a wider group of developers and planning authorities, annual reporting to Natural England, as well re-modelling, scheme evaluation and licence renewals every 5 years.

Compensation sites have been created throughout Cherwell District Council within land owned by private landowners (see Figure 1). The Newt Conservation Partnership continue to work closely to identify future compensation sites, supporting landowners and Parish Councils to create new high quality great crested newt habitats as part of the scheme.

The District Licensing Scheme is a species conservation strategy at its core. The mitigation hierarchy is fully integrated into the assessments undertaken by NatureSpace; this includes a consideration of whether a development site can be included under the District Licence or whether impacts to newt populations would be so severe as to warrant site avoidance (in whole or in part). Development sites which are authorised under the District Licence benefit from streamlining of licensing requirements, greater flexibility and reduced on-site mitigation requirements when compared to ‘traditional’ mitigation licensing, whilst at the same time delivering better conservation outcomes for the species. Monitoring reports are available to download here: [Resource Hub - NatureSpace Partnership \(naturespaceuk.com\)](https://naturespaceuk.com).

Tailored mitigation requirements are applied to high-risk sites in the Red Impact Risk Zone based on the fine-scale considerations of individual developments. This could take the form of timing restrictions on impacting sensitive habitats, requiring searches of suitable features by ecological consultants or a requirement for limited fencing and trapping of favourable habitats prior to clearance. Whilst only sites in the Red Zone may be subject to these specific requirements, every development authorised is able to move any great crested newts discovered to suitable habitat, and out of harm’s way. Regardless of risk zone every development is provided best practice guidance at the time of authorisation and supported throughout the lifespan of their project to increase the level of safeguarding great crested newts receive.

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