

# Nature matters

Berkshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Oxfordshire



in Berks, Bucks & Oxon

Autumn '19

Newsletter from the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to inform those who can affect nature's position in politics and help inspire community involvement.

## The Time is Now

### *Urgent action needed to protect nature*

In these volatile political times it seems the only certainty is uncertainty. Public concern over the environment has reached a record high. Climate activist Greta Thunberg's interventions, Extinction Rebellion's activities and David Attenborough's surprise appearance at Glastonbury have all contributed to the public mood. In May, Parliament declared a climate emergency and hundreds of councils have followed, including many across our three counties.

In the May local elections, over 100 councillors signed our pledge 'to support the development of a Local Nature Recovery Map for [their] local authority and the embedding of it into local plans for [their] area.'

In June, over 12,000 people from across the UK united to tell MPs that we need them to act NOW to end our contribution to climate change and restore our natural environment. The incredible turnout for this mass lobby illustrates how so many people share our views about the environmental crisis that is upon us.

In July, DEFRA published a policy statement which contains many of the measures we have been asking for and states "The Environment Bill is the centrepiece of our answer to urgent environmental need and a landmark commitment to protecting and improving the environment for future

generations. The measures in the Bill will ensure that environmental ambition and accountability remain at the heart of government after Brexit."

It is clear from all this that our voice has been heard. However, the Parliamentary session has been interrupted leaving the future of the Agriculture and Fisheries Bills unclear. We are also waiting for the Environment Bill to be introduced in Parliament. Given the current political uncertainty and, in particular, the risks to our environment from a no-deal Brexit, we urgently need a clear commitment to the following:

- An ambitious Environment Bill with a statutory requirement for Nature Recovery Networks, legally binding targets, a truly independent environmental watchdog and the environmental principles embedded in domestic law;
- An Agriculture Bill which enables farmers to create and restore natural habitats, with guaranteed long-term funding and stronger regulations and enforcement;
- A Fisheries Bill to ensure sustainability objectives in law and transboundary co-operation to manage shared fish populations.

### What you can do

- Urge the new Secretary of State for the Environment, Theresa Villiers, to make a commitment for legislation as set out above to be introduced in the next Queen's Speech.



# Green development

## Cleaner, greener standards

It is easy to dismiss “green development” as an oxymoron and assume that building on any land must inevitably be bad for wildlife. However, with increasing development a fact of life and the need to protect our environment a requirement for continued life, all development must enhance our natural environment and deliver benefits for both people and wildlife.

The *State of Nature 2016* report found that increased urbanisation has led to a decline in some types of green space, and the accessibility and condition of the green space within urban areas has also declined. Such disconnect between development and our natural environment is unsustainable and unhealthy.

Research shows that engaging with nature can improve one’s mental and physical wellbeing. The best way to bring nature into people’s lives is to have it on their doorstep by creating flowing green and blue corridors through developments, and integrating wildlife habitats into the very fabric of buildings.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that ‘planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment’ and plans should ‘protect and enhance biodiversity.’ Plans should also provide for green infrastructure and take a long term approach to protecting and enhancing our wild spaces. Biodiversity net gain should create a step change in our approach to nature conservation and development, provided it is applied properly, offsets are managed in perpetuity, and it is not used as a ‘license to trash.’ However, even within the scheme of biodiversity net gain, there is the potential for developed areas and green

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areas to remain separate, rather than work symbiotically and complement each other. New building regulations and standards are required to ensure our homes and buildings are zero carbon, sustainable, have a minimum expected life, create new wildlife habitats, and positively contribute to the natural environment around them.

The Oxford to Cambridge Growth Arc is one example of a project where improved standards are needed if the government’s proposal for one million new homes is to lead to anything other than the destruction of huge swathes of our countryside and wildlife habitats. A Nature Recovery Network (see article overleaf) and new standards for development and nature friendly buildings are needed to ensure building homes for people does not mean destroying homes for wildlife.

### What you can do

- Promote green infrastructure in local plans and developments.
- Advocate for improved sustainability regulations and standards for buildings.



# Public land

## Managing our places for people and wildlife

With the UK Parliament and many local authorities recently declaring a climate emergency, it is vital that all public bodies practice what they preach by managing their own land in a way that tackles the climate crisis and supports wildlife.

Public bodies own a diverse portfolio of land including a vast variety of different existing and potential habitats. From offices and roads to parks and lakes, all publicly owned land can be utilised to reverse the trends of wildlife decline and combat the climate crisis, if managed appropriately.

The opportunities with roads are clear to see and are articulated annually. Delaying the cutting of road verges until late in the year enables plants to flower and provide food and homes for wildlife. There are few sights more beautiful than a road verge that has been allowed to grow to its full potential, rather than being razed to the ground. Wild flowers can accompany us on our drives and provide food and homes to butterflies, bees, insects, small mammals and birds. Whilst roads are highways for people, road verges can be highways and homes for wildlife.

Parks and woodland are another obvious place where wildlife can be given an opportunity to thrive, as well as providing flood relief and a means of carbon sequestration, but public bodies should look beyond the obvious and ensure that public assets and infrastructure also contribute to our natural environment. All public buildings should be powered by renewable energy and integrate green features into their fabric. Green roofs should become common and bird boxes and other homes for wildlife a standard feature.

Green spaces for staff should also be provided to improve their health and mental wellbeing. Single use plastics should be banned in public buildings (subject to health needs and other exceptions) and the importance of protecting our environment clearly advocated. Public bodies should also be leading the way in updating their fleets of vehicles to electric.

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In order to tackle the climate crisis and take on the challenge in their own area, local authorities also need the expertise and advice to assist them. For that reason, they need to ensure local environmental record centres are properly funded, and that local authorities have their own fully resourced ecologists. Without such expertise, they cannot hope to tackle the climate crisis they declare.

### What you can do

- Contact us if you would like to arrange a meeting to discuss managing your land for the benefit of wildlife.
- Consider changing to a greener energy supplier and making space for nature in your workplace.





# A vision for nature in Berks, Bucks and Oxon

Imagine it's 2050, and our local landscapes are made up of a rich patchwork of woodland, meadows and hedgerows, humming with bird and insect life. This is the vision that the Wildlife Trust has for nature across our three counties.

A Nature Recovery Network will be just like our road network. At its core will be nature's gems - our existing nature reserves and protected sites that the Wildlife Trust is working hard to protect. From this core, nature will extend into every part of our towns, cities and countryside, giving nature the room it needs to sustain a healthy and happy population of wildlife and people.

By 2050, important habitats and species, such as floodplain meadows, chalk grassland, hedgehogs, and curlew will be showing impressive population expansion and will be far more connected across the counties. Even our common species, like great tits and moorhens, will be thriving alongside booming insect populations, a sign that natural ecosystems are functioning properly.

It's not only nature that will be thriving in 2050 - people will be too. They will feel healthier and happier. The next generation will simply understand that the natural world is fundamental to our very existence; that we depend on it, and it depends on us.

Our proposal for a Nature Recovery Network will place wildlife in the best position to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. An ambitious Environment Act and Agriculture Bill will provide the legislative foundation for the development of a Nature Recovery Network nationwide, helping turn nature's recovery from an aspiration to a reality.

## What you can do

- Read more about Nature Recovery Networks at [bbowt.org.uk/NRNs](http://bbowt.org.uk/NRNs), and from Monday 7 October, watch our film with David Attenborough.
- Advocate for Nature Recovery Networks in your local authorities.

## Contact us



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