

Nature matters

Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire



in Berks, Bucks & Oxon

Summer '21

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.

Working together for nature's recovery

Welcome to the new edition of *Nature Matters*, which focuses on how we work with local councils for nature's recovery, and how you can become part of this too. We can help you to achieve biodiversity and climate change goals and commitments within environmental strategies, which benefits local residents too. A win for people and wildlife.

We seek not only to enhance the natural world ourselves, but also to help others do the same. We work with many local authorities and councilors both directly and through partnership forums, sharing our experience and expertise.

Wild road verges are one way we can help make more space for nature, and that aim is also at the heart of the Government's Local Nature Recovery Strategies included in the Environment Bill. In this edition, read about how we are working with West Berkshire Council on an exciting project to create wildlife friendly road verges, and with Abundance to provide local investors with an opportunity to support the project directly.

We have been working closely with Buckinghamshire Council to deliver a pilot strategy to put nature into recovery. We hope to use the expertise we have gained to help colleagues

“ achieve your biodiversity
and climate change goals
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in Oxfordshire and Berkshire to create their own strategies once the Environment Bill becomes law.

In Oxfordshire, we are working closely with local authorities to establish a Local Nature Partnership for the county, and we worked with the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre, Wild Oxfordshire, and Oxfordshire local authorities on the development of Oxfordshire's draft nature recovery network.

We also work with local authority colleagues on planning matters and environmental strategies. In this edition you can read about new guidance we are offering to councilors on protecting habitats during the planning process.

This is a key time for nature's recovery and I encourage you to get in touch with us to learn more about how we can work together to help wildlife across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

Estelle Bailey
Chief Executive



Local Nature Recovery Strategies

by Annie Ottaway
Senior Biodiversity & Planning Officer (Buckinghamshire)

a pilot scheme in Buckinghamshire

The forthcoming Environment Act will set out how Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) will be a key measure to drive more coordinated, practical and focused action to help put nature into recovery and allow people and nature to flourish together.

Buckinghamshire was chosen as one of five areas to pilot the production of a LNRS, and BBOWT contributed to the team directing the work, alongside the council and representatives from the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership, Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and Chilterns Conservation Board.

Buckinghamshire has a history of strong partnership working and a wealth of background information already compiled including an up-to-date Biodiversity Action Plan, Natural Capital Mapping, Green Infrastructure Strategy and a Biodiversity Accounting Scheme. These have been built upon to create the pilot LNRS.

Stakeholder engagement has been key to creating the pilot LNRS. The strategy will be co-owned and co-created by stakeholders in Buckinghamshire. Between January and May 2021 local stakeholders were engaged through webinars, online workshops and surveys. They answered questions such as What do you like about nature in Buckinghamshire? Why is nature in Buckinghamshire important to you? What parts of nature would you like to see recovered or improved over the next 25 years? As well as provided feedback on some of the draft outcomes.

Following a step-by-step process set out by Defra, the stakeholder feedback was combined with expert knowledge and the background information to create the following outputs for the pilot LNRS:

- A Statement of Biodiversity Priorities, which reflect stakeholder priorities for environmental outcomes, and the activities (measures) that need to be undertaken to achieve these outcomes.
- A Local Habitat Map, which identifies the existing distribution of habitats and the location of areas already important for biodiversity, overlaid by locations considered suitable for delivering the outcomes and activities identified by stakeholders.

The learnings from the pilot have now been provided in a report to Defra, and will feed into guidance for the national roll-out of LNRSs with the idea that each local strategy contributes to a national nature recovery network.

Buckinghamshire has a lot more work to do to produce a final LNRS. However key learnings identified from the pilot LNRS process can help feed into forthcoming local plans and strategies such as the updated Biodiversity Action Plan and the developing Buckinghamshire Local Plan.

At BBOWT, we will use what we have learned from this process to help with the delivery of strategies for Oxfordshire

bbowt.org.uk

“ a key measure to allow people and nature to flourish together ”



and Berkshire, and will help finalise the Buckinghamshire LNRS too. It is important that local authorities start working together now, through their local nature partnerships, so they are ready for when the new obligations of the Environment Bill arrive.

For more information see: bucks.mknep.co.uk/nature-strategy

What you can do

- If you work in Berkshire or Oxfordshire, contact us to find out how we can help you to produce your own LNRS, publicaffairs@bbowt.org.uk

Partnerships for nature

by Nicky Warden
Public Affairs and Planning Officer

bring people and wildlife together

We need more space for wildlife to thrive, and we know that restoring nature and our connection to it can help solve many of our most pressing environmental, economic and social problems. We must see nature recovering - for the sake of wild plants and animals, and for everything it brings us: better health, climate control, flood management, enjoyment, employment and more, with wild places linked up into a vast, rich nature network.

As part of that network we need wilder neighbourhoods, villages and towns. Wild urban patches and green spaces are crucial, offering essential habitat, connecting wild places and bringing wildlife, and the benefits of a healthy natural world, into our lives.

The benefits of greening towns and villages are far-reaching and even small actions, such as leaving road verges uncut, can help nature's recovery. Gardens, parks, allotments, school grounds, churchyards and community spaces can all offer something for nature and, in doing so, can bring people together, creating healthier and more socially connected communities.

BBOWT has a long track record of working on projects with councils, at parish, town and district level, providing support, guidance and resources. These projects enable councils to achieve biodiversity and climate change goals and commitments within environmental strategies whilst giving residents the chance to engage with the environment around them, offering an easy way to boost their physical and mental wellbeing.

What you can do

- Visit bbowt.org.uk/wildparishes for information and advice about how you can manage areas and green spaces for wildlife.
- Learn more about the Wild Bicester project visit: bbowt.org.uk/wild-bicester
- Contact us to find out how BBOWT can help you take similar positive steps for wildlife in your parish or district: community@bbowt.org.uk

Case Study 1 - Creating wilder verges in West Berkshire

“ a network of wildlife-friendly habitat along roadsides ”

The Wild Verges project is a partnership between BBOWT and West Berkshire Council which will run from 2020-2023, and will create a network of wildlife-friendly habitat along roadsides that will support crucial pollinators like bees and butterflies.

This network of verges will also act as corridors allowing birds and small mammals to move and thrive, contributing to the future Nature Recovery Network.

Working closely with the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC), BBOWT will first undertake a rapid assessment of West Berkshire's 1100km road network to identify priority road verges for wildlife.

From 2021-2023, comprehensive road verge surveys will be carried out, with the help of local volunteers, to ascertain whether greater plant and animal diversity can be supported on these potential priority verges.

The verges will be monitored to help West Berkshire Council achieve a gain in biodiversity along its road network in the future. Innovative and cost-effective road verge management techniques will also be trialled.

Case Study 2 - Wild Bicester

“ creating a greener, healthier and wilder Bicester ”

Wild Bicester is a new, collaborative, project between the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, Bicester Garden Town, Cherwell District Council and Bicester Town Council to bring people and nature together creating a greener, healthier and wilder Bicester. The project, to run for 18 months, will encourage and enable residents of all ages and backgrounds to get involved and turn their homes and communities into wildlife rich spaces.

The project will offer a series of events, activities and resources, and create opportunities in community spaces, across the town to inspire and support people who want to act for nature in their gardens or their community.



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Planning for nature

by sharing our expertise

by **Matthew Stanton**
Head of Planning & Advocacy

The planning system has a huge impact on our natural environment and, with development pressure ever increasing, it is of vital importance that all planning decisions fully consider the impact of proposals on nature.

At BBOWT we have planning and biodiversity expertise that can help councilors ensure their decisions are fully informed and protect biodiversity. We all know that nature is important for our health and wellbeing, as well as helping tackle climate change and providing the clean air that we need. We also know that there is a need for new housing, however, these two priorities do not always need to be in conflict.

By locating developments in areas that avoid harm to existing precious habitats, integrating space for wildlife into designs and using sustainable approaches to building, we can restore nature whilst providing the housing we need. However, the planning process needs to weed out the applications that fail to deliver this and improve all others.

Reasons for a planning committee to refuse permission on ecological grounds include the applicant providing an insufficient biodiversity survey, an unacceptable impact on biodiversity, an impact on designated sites or insufficient biodiversity enhancement.

Once the Environment Bill becomes law, biodiversity net gain will be mandatory, but it is already included in some local policies and biodiversity offsetting schemes can be achieved through section 106 agreements.

Where planning committees do grant permission, they can apply conditions and obligations in order to protect or enhance nature. For example, they can require ecological management plans to be submitted prior to the commencement of development, require a wildlife sensitive lighting strategy, limit the hours of operation or types of use of the development, require tree protection plans and require plans for ecological features. There are a huge range of conditions and obligations committees can apply to ensure development in their area meets the highest standards.

We review hundreds of planning applications and use our expertise to respond in order to speak up for nature. If you sit on a planning committee and would like further guidance on how to protect nature, please get in touch with us.

Development should not come at the expense of our natural environment. All development, be it housing, commercial or infrastructure, must be designed and delivered in a way that contributes to nature's recovery, not its decline.

What you can do

- Contact us to arrange a biodiversity and planning session: publicaffairs@bbowt.org.uk
- View our planning for nature guidance online: bbowt.org.uk/planning-nature

Contact us



Estelle Bailey
Chief Executive
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Estelle leads the team of Directors who are delivering the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust's *Strategic Plan 2016-2021: Be part of nature's recovery*.



Matthew Stanton
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Matthew leads on BBOWT's planning work and legal and political engagement. If you would like more information on BBOWT's advocacy work or our detailed positions please get in touch.



Annie Ottaway
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Annie engages with planning and policy across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes to best protect and enhance the natural environment for wildlife.



Nicky Warden
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To arrange a presentation on BBOWT's work, or on the topics covered here, please contact Nicky. We'd welcome feedback on this newsletter, or let us know if you wish to be removed from the list.

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