

Agenda



Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board

Wednesday 14 June 2023 at 10.00 am
Via MS Teams

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Members:

Richard Benwell
Dr Prue Addison
Gillian Aitken
Camilla Burrow
Tim Coates
Michelle Leek
Professor David Macdonald CBE
James Price
Councillor David Rouane
Ian Boll
Dr Rosie Rowe
Simon Smith

Chair
Environmental NGO representative
Landowner representative
Environmental NGO representative
Landscape-scale deliver representative
DEFRA family of organisations
University representative
Farming representative
Local Authority member representative
Local Authority officer representative
Health representative
National landscape body representative

In attendance:

Matt Whitney
Becky Chesshyre
Susan Harbour
Kevin Jacob
Tom Curtis
Richard Pearce

Local Nature Partnership Manager
Strategic Partnerships Communications Officer
Strategic Partnerships Manager
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Partner, 3Keel Consulting
Forestry Commission

AGENDA

1 Apologies, conflicts of interest, Chair's announcements, welcome guests 10:00

2 Notes of the previous meeting (Pages 4 - 10) 10:05

To consider the notes of the previous meeting held on 8 March 2023.

3 Oxfordshire's current affairs updates (Verbal Report) 10:10

Members of the Board to update one another on key matters of importance relevant to the LNP arising since the previous meeting.

4 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Manager's update (Pages 11 - 12) 10:20

OLNP Manager shares an update on work he has undertaken which falls outside of the standard working group/forum/board format.

5 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Forum 6 June (Verbal Report) 10:25

LNP Manager presents initial LNRS-related outputs from the LNP Forum.

The Board is asked to provide feedback on the day, and on the outputs, and any additional suggestions to add value.

6 Local Nature Recovery Strategy progress update and ambitions. (Pages 13 - 14) 10:35

Simon Smith to present an update on the progress and plans of the LNRS steering group. The Board is asked to comment whether this progress and plans for next steps feel appropriate.

The OLNP Chair will present some suggested ambitions for LNRS. The Board is asked whether these are the best ways to ensure Oxfordshire' LNRS is as effective as possible.

7 Strategic overview of the workstreams (Pages 15 - 18) 10:50

This paper provides a strategic overview of the progress of the 3 core workstreams of the OLNP – Nature Recovery, Nature Finance and Nature & People.

The Board is asked to reflect on the state of play and challenges, endorse the objectives, and recommend additional solutions or supporting activities to achieve our aims.

8 Nature Finance Strategy (Pages 19 - 27) 11:35

OLNP's draft Nature Finance Strategy is presented to the Board, who are asked to provide comment on the strategy, approve it for publication, and recommend additional ways to fund and deliver it.

9 Appointment to the Local Nature Partnership Board 11:50

The Board is asked to consider and approve the appointment of a new member of the Board.

10 Any other business 11:55

11 Dates of future meetings 12:00

To note the dates of future meetings set out below:

- 13 September 2023
- 13 December 2023

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2023 AT 10.00 AM
VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Members: Richard Benwell (Chair), Dr Prue Addison, Gill Aitken, Ian Boll, Camilla Burrow, Tim Coates, Michelle Leek, Professor David Macdonald, James Price, David Rouane, Rosie Rowe and Simon Smith

Officers: Becky Chesshyre, (Communications Co-ordinator for the Oxfordshire Partnership), Susan Harbour, (Strategic Partnerships Manager, South and Vale Councils), Kevin Jacob (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Matt Whitney, (Local Nature Partnerships Manager).

Guests: Steve Proud

20 Apologies, conflicts of interest, Chair's announcements, welcome guests

There were no apologies for absence.

The Chair opened the meeting which was being held virtually rather than in person as originally planned due to the inclement weather conditions. He commented that it was intended to hold a future meeting at Perdiswell Farm later in the year.

Members of the Board and supporting officers gave brief introductions and the Chair welcomed Tim Coates to the meeting commenting that Gill Aitken would be joining the meeting later.

There were no declarations of interest.

21 Introduction to Perdiswell Farm

Due to the inclement weather conditions, it was noted that this item had been deferred.

22 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the Board meeting held on 7 December 2022 were approved.

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership provided a brief update on actions arising from the meeting. The establishment of the new Policy subgroup was progressing well with the selection of a Chair.

A consultation response to the Botley West Solar Farm proposals had been submitted on behalf of the Partnership. This had taken the form discussed at the previous Board meeting with a focus on the raising of factual questions.

Preparations for the next LNP Forum were moving forward. It would be held on 6 June 2023 at Didcot Civic Hall.

Prue Addison suggested that it would be helpful for all Board members to have shared access to Board and other LNP documents which could be relatively easy to organise through a platform such as Teams.

ACTION: Matt Whitney, Prue Addison and Kevin Jacob to implement.

23 Oxfordshire's current affairs updates

Members of the Board Forum raised and discussed matters of importance and relevance to the work of the LNP.

The Chair commented that a lot of LNP related activity had been held up recently in the absence of HM Government guidance, but this was now changing. Guidance on understanding biodiversity net gain had been published in February and guidance on local nature recovery strategies was expected later in March. In addition, a HM Government response to the Julian Glover landscape review of national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty was expected as was a response to the House of Lords land use framework white paper. All of these policy announcements presented opportunities and potential risks to the Oxfordshire natural environment.

Prue Addison referred to the Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray project being undertaken by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. This was a plan to protect, improve and expand land for nature in an area of land between Buckingham, Bicester, Aylesbury and Oxford. Stakeholder work had been undertaken and an external report produced. Work on an emerging farmer cluster was progressing. Funds were now being sought to take forward the project's work programme forward through the National Lottery or landscape recovery.

The Chair suggested that it might be useful for the Board to focus on a particular nature recovery project per meeting and where appropriate, invite a guest speaker. This would be useful in the context of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

ACTION: Tim Coates to provide an overview of a Natural Environment Investment Fund, (NEIRF), Landscape Recovery project and farmer cluster to the next Board meeting.

ACTION: LNP Manager to draw up a list of potential guest speakers to future Board meetings.

Councillor Rouane referred to the upcoming local elections within a number of the district local authorities within Oxfordshire and it was noted that the pre-election period was due to commence.

Professor Macdonald informed the Board that the University of Oxford had been undertaking an examination of all its estates and how they might contribute to nature recovery. This review was expected to set a 'green estates' direction of the next five years and it was expected there would be a consultation.

The Chair commented that if there was an opportunity to input into a consultation this should be considered by the Policy sub-group.

ACTION: The Policy sub-group to respond to the University of Oxford consultation as and when appropriate.

Simon Smith referred to the publishing of the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 which areas of outstanding natural beauty and national parks were under an obligation to prepare. This was a two year period rather than the usual five year period because of expected significant national and local policy announcements. Although it had been hoped that these policy announcements might include adding nature recovery as formal part of the responsibilities of protected landscapes this was now looking less likely.

24 Progress, additional resources and future funding

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager introduced a report setting out the progress of the LNP in year one of two of local authority funding and an attached draft LNP annual report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, (FOP) which it was intended would be presented in September 2023. He informed the Board that it was appropriate time to take stock as a first step to the continuation of local authority funding and to also look at future alternative and additional funding sources.

Over the previous year a significant amount of progress had been made in shaping the LNP as it established itself and undertaking the necessary preparatory work for future delivery. This was consistent with the LNP's three goals and the priorities that underpinned them.

The Board was asked to:

1. consider the detail presented in the report and comment on progress of the partnership to date.
2. comment on the presentation of the report, suggesting ways in which we might better make our case for continuation funding.
3. propose ways to diversify and increase LNP funding, especially core funding.

Members of the Board welcomed the report. In discussion, it was suggested that it would be useful to examine the funding arrangements of more established LNPs to look for best practice.

In making the case for additional funding it was important to seek to demonstrate the positive links between LNP activity and outputs and the wider Oxfordshire agenda

including the voluntary sector. It was also necessary to show what could be delivered in terms LNP activity through a three-five year plan and its benefits to Oxfordshire if funding was available. It was stressed that this should be in addition to existing core funding, (currently provided by the Oxfordshire local authorities) in order to build capacity and not a substitute for the core funding.

In response to these points. Matt Whitney commented the LNPs he was aware of had a range of core funding arrangements. Some were funded entirely from upper tier local authorities whilst some were funded entirely from local wildlife trusts. As an example, the Gloucestershire LNP received funding from the National Trust, the Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, local universities, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England as well as local wildlife trusts and local authorities, but the biggest contributors were local authorities.

Susan Harbour, Strategic Partnership's Manager for South and Vale Councils stated that it was not intended to ask for alternative core funding, a combination of funding sources was needed. It was necessary to make the case of how funding of the LNP would represent value for money by increasing opportunities to leverage in additional funding over and above what would have been possible otherwise. September represented an opportune time to present to the FOP as September usually was the start of the budget planning process. Ian Boll echoed these points and also suggested that major national infrastructure projects such as East West Rail and High Speed Two might provide potential lessons on how funding for nature could be accessed.

Other comments and suggestions for sources of additional funding during the Board's discussion included:

- Planning – contributions to support Biodiversity net gain
- It was important to be transparent that if the LNP did not exist, local authorities would need to set up their own individual arrangements as they would be required to undertake many of its function. But supporting a LNP provided additional opportunities to leverage in more funds.
- Support through contributions in kind or were just as valuable as cash contributions. There other things organisations could do to support the LNP if they could not help financially.
- The majority, if not all local authorities in Oxfordshire had established some kind of climate emergency committee and it was important to establish an ongoing relationship with those committees through regular attendance that could focus on the value added by the LNP how support for the LNP could assist them in delivery of their own climate objectives.
- Drafting of briefing note or summary infographic, or video clip for councillors on the LNP's work, aims and objectives as close to the local elections as possible– although it was noted that a newsletter on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which included a section on the LNP had recently been introduced.
- Exploration of potential private sector funding opportunities including Green Finance – LNP Forum a potential audience. A need to be more transactional in approach rather than seeking more general funding.

ACTION: The LNP manager to investigate opportunities for outreach with the climate emergency committees of the respective Oxfordshire local authorities in order to socialise and share the LNP's plans and ambitions.

25 Towards a Land Use Framework for Oxfordshire

The Board considered a report which set out background information to inform its discussion of the potential importance of a land use framework for Oxfordshire. In introducing the report, the Chair commented that the principle behind a land use framework was that it aimed to enable decisions concerning land to be made in a way that recognised the finite nature of land and which balanced the demands of food production, respiration of nature, housing, and energy production. At the national level it could influence national infrastructure planning. At the Oxfordshire level, a land use framework could be a tool to help inform Local Plans and would have to be delivered and administered locally.

The LNP manager stressed that if taken forward an Oxfordshire land use framework would not be a repeat of the discontinued Oxfordshire Plan 2050 project or curtail sovereignty of district and city councils' Local Plans as it would not be seeking to deal with specific questions around the spatial distribution of housing across the county. Rather it was a process creating and collating a co-designed framework of evidence and principles that could support strategic land-use decisions. It could potentially help the appropriate bodies be better prepared in responding to significant applications affecting land use, such as solar farm applications.

The Board was asked to consider how a land use framework could benefit Oxfordshire and whether such a framework should be proposed to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

A summary of the main points arising from the Board's discussion included:

- Broad support on the potential benefits and value of a land use land use framework within Oxfordshire.
- A range of views were expressed around the advantages and disadvantages of the development of an Oxfordshire land use framework within the overall umbrella of the LNP with collaboration with the Future Oxfordshire Partnership or whether the Future Oxfordshire Partnership should itself lead on the work.
- A land use framework would have the status of an official strategy that local planning authorities would need to have regard to in planning matters.
- Various Board members commented that there was strong link between land use frameworks and local nature recovery strategies. It was felt that land use frameworks flowed from the development of local nature recovery strategies which were broadly an exercise of what was required of nature to deliver positive benefits should be developed first. Timing and coordination of pieces of the work was therefore very important.

After further discussion there was in principle agreement that the development of an Oxfordshire land use framework was a piece of work that the LNP Board would wish to support, but that the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy should be prioritised. Whilst the majority of views expressed in the discussion were that the LNP should not lead on this piece of work, it was not a unanimous position.

26 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Terms of Reference and membership

The Board considered a report setting out revised Board Terms of Reference, appointment of replacement Board members to replace the outgoing landowner representatives and an additional Board member related to Oxfordshire's main landscape scale nature recovery project. The LNP Manager and Senior Democratic Services Officer were thanked for undertaking the review of the Terms of Reference.

It was agreed that:

- 1) the revised Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board Terms of Reference be adopted.
- 2) Tim Coates be appointed to the Board as a representative of Oxfordshire's main landscape-scale nature recovery project.
- 3) Gillian Aitken be appointed to the Board as a landowner representative.
- 4) The vacancy for business representative be noted and filled as soon as possible.

27 Sub-groups update

The Board considered written updates for each of the LNP sub-groups as set out in the Agenda. The following points were highlighted or updated.

Biodiversity Gain group

The LNP Manager commented on the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain considerations in planning and the establishment of a national register for biodiversity. One of the objectives of the group was to assist local planning authorities in their preparation of mandatory biodiversity net gain including the suggestion of principles for biodiversity net gain consideration, and the collation of evidence to support those LPAs wishing to aim for higher than the minimum 10% required by the new legislation. At least two LPAs are strongly considering this. The subgroup contained representatives from all the Oxfordshire local authorities and felt to be adding value.

Nature and Health Group

Rosie Rowe reported that the group was continuing to operate productively and was making good progress. At its most recent meeting it had considered the new Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework.

Another highlight had been an update to the mapping of need and provision of nature-based activities through a soon to be searchable by post code online mapping system. This would allow for the linking of nature based activities to health through social prescribing. It could also play a part in the delivery of outcomes from a local nature recovery strategy and there were also links to national policy around access to green space such as the DEFRA commitment around green space access within 15 minutes of home.

Nature Policy Group

It was noted that this was due to meet on the 21 March and a report would be part of the next meeting agenda.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy steering group

Simon Smith commented that much was happening on the national policy stage over the coming months including the national roll out of local nature recovery strategies, although in the absence of secondary regulations and guidance much detail remained unknown including how strategies would be structured.

Nature Capital Investment group

The LNP Manager reported that one bid was in progress related to land-based carbon sequestration in support of the delivery of the Pathways for Zero Carbon Oxfordshire objectives and it was hoped that it would be possible to update on the status of the bid to the next Board meeting. Further, a Nature Finance Strategy is being created by the group, and should be ready to be shared in draft form at the next Board meeting.

28 Any other business

Communications update

Becky Chesshyre, Communications Co-ordinator for the Oxfordshire Partnerships, updated the Board on matters relating to communications and publicity. Work to progress the provision of a LNP website continued to be a priority and would be undertaken as part of the replacement of a number of other websites linked to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. This was expected to produce some cost savings as well as leading to an improved site. Invitations to tender had been sought and once the tender was awarded it was expected there would be two to three month development timeline.

Finance update

The Board noted the update on finance as set out in the agenda.

29 Dates of future meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting closed at 12.05 pm

Oxon LNP Board Paper for Approval

Title:	LNP Manager Update
Author:	Matt Whitney
Date:	13/06/2023

Summary:

This paper provides an overview of the work of the LNP Manager. The aim is to ensure Board members are kept informed of the variety of different engagement points

The Board is asked to:

- acknowledge the various engagement points of the LNP Manager
- highlight any dependencies or support that might benefit progress.

Important conversations

- Attended **University of Oxford Nature Recovery seminar**, exploring how the University can best support nature recovery efforts in Oxfordshire and beyond.
- Presented at **Floodplain Meadows Partnership** conference at Oxford Natural History Museum, examining whether we can realise the promise of Biodiversity Net Gain, and how floodplain meadows might benefit from the new policy.
- Met Oxford University's new operational nature-focussed team, who sit alongside the University's net zero team and are exploring the best ways for **Oxford University's operations to become nature positive**.

Council/strategic crossover

- Leading on one of the five priority areas of **Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire** route map. Fortnightly update calls with OCC lead.
- Advocating for a stronger nature presence in the next iteration of **Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy**, via a focus on Green Infrastructure
- Convened partners to support **Cherwell District Council** officers in exploring potential nature-related uses of some of their newly acquired sites.
- Supported Oxfordshire County Council in **recruitment of the new LNRS project manager**
- Led conversations with **Councillors at South Oxfordshire DC** to explore potential of creation of new large accessible natural greenspace in the district.
- Engaged with Environment Agency leads on the **Oxfordshire Flood Alleviation Scheme**, which has large impacts on the natural environment.
- Participated in workshop for **OxLEP's Strategic Economic Plan**.

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Organisational support

- Convening and facilitating multi-partner conversations to explore continuation of **Oxfordshire Treescapes Project**, important as a method of engaging communities and landowners with data.
- Supporting **Windrush Catchment Partnership** to become more robust, engaging, positive and financially stable.

Cross-border working

- Leading discussions with **neighbouring authorities on LNRS**, including via existing networks and newly established groupings
- Working with **South East Nature Partnership** on strategic approach, including LNRS and nature finance
- Involvement in the **Pan Regional Partnership** (formerly Ox-Cam Arc), including supporting an approach for funding for a landscape-scale project.
- Led **submission of a letter to Michael Gove**, with signatures from 25 LNP Chairs from across England, calling for LNRS to have real weight within the planning system
- Met with **Rachel Maclean MP** to discuss the above.
- Convened and **chaired the national community of practice on natural capital investment**, including nearly 40 organisations from across England, exploring the barriers to developing a robust pipeline of investment-ready projects.

Project development

- Working with BBOWT and Bucks & MK Natural Environment Partnership to explore **business demand for nature-based solutions** in the Bernwood Otmore Ray region and beyond, possibly via a **Landscape Enterprise Network** approach
- Membership of **Bernwood Otmore Ray project steering group** to explore potential of submitting a Landscape Recovery bid
- Convened conversation with **Triodos Bank** to explore an innovative financing of natural capital enhancement, aligned with our Nature Finance Strategy
- Exploration of cooperation with **Oxford City Council's Area Based Insetting** approach, which has confirmed demand for carbon offsets from large businesses and is seeking a blend of projects, including nature projects.
- **Co-authored a report** with researchers from Oxford University on the cost of nature recovery in Oxfordshire, and the contribution to this that may be provided by biodiversity net gain.

Oxon LNP Board Paper for Approval

Title:	LNRS ambitions
Author:	Matt Whitney
Date:	13/06/2023

Summary:

This paper highlights some suggested ambitions for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. These ambitions would serve to add value to the LNRS process, helping to ensure its effectiveness.

The Board is asked to:

- Comment on the ambitions presented
- Endorse the consideration of this approach by the LNP policy group, and the LNRS steering group

Local nature recovery strategies (LNRS) are a system of spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement required by law under the Env act 2021. The main purpose of the strategies is to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is the authority responsible for producing the LNRS. OCC are working closely with OLNP to this end.

The OLNP Forum event on Tuesday 6th June was an early opportunity for partners to engage with the LNRS. At this event, OLNP Chair proposed a number of ambitious steps that could be taken to help ensure LNRS was effective.

1) PLANNING PROCESS

In the absence of strong guidance from central government as to how LNRS will interact with the planning system, it is proposed that Oxfordshire Councils design and implement a process that **writes LNRS into all key decisions and policy areas from the start**. One way of doing this would be to establish a strong link between LNRS and Local Plans.

2) HIGH LEVEL TARGETS

LNRS regulations and guidance from central government failed to establish what targets they expect LNRS to include. It is proposed the Oxfordshire LNRS sets a target

- **30% of land in Oxfordshire to be managed for nature** (currently 12%)
- **Everyone in Oxfordshire has access to nature-rich greenspace within fifteen minutes of their home**

3) CHARACTERISTIC GOALS

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It is proposed that as well as spatially based targets for habitat extent and condition, the LNRS stipulates some goals that are charismatic, such as **bringing back a species that was previously extinct in Oxfordshire** (specific goals to be led by ecological stakeholders).

4) LANDSCAPE SCALE PROJECTS

It is proposed that the LNRS process nominates one or two **flagship landscape-scale delivery projects**, that operate in areas identified by the nature recovery network as priority areas for nature restoration and that can be funnels for early investment to secure effective, early gains towards wider nature recovery in the county.

5) DATA ACCESSIBILITY

A major part of LNRS will be the opportunity maps. To ensure that on-the-ground delivery is guided by our strategic spatial prioritisation, it is key to provide access to the data to as many people as possible. It is proposed that LNRS finds a way to **centrally fund the environmental record centre**, to ensure as many actions and actors as possible are guided by its priorities.

Oxon LNP Board Paper for Approval

Title:	Strategic Overview of the workstreams
Author:	Matt Whitney
Date:	13/06/2023

Summary:

This paper provides a strategic overview of the progress of the 3 core workstreams of the OLNP – Nature Recovery, Nature Finance and Nature & Health.

For each, it outlines the current state of play, the key objectives, key challenges and proposed/in progress solutions.

The Board is asked to:

- Comment on the current state of play for each workstream
- Endorse the key objectives
- Acknowledge the challenges
- Propose additional solutions or supporting activities in achieving our vision

Nature Recovery

Current state of play

In 2017 Wild Oxfordshire, Thames Valley Record Centre (TVERC) and partners produced the [Oxfordshire State of Nature report](#), which provides a vital baseline of the state of Oxfordshire's natural habitats and species. It helps prioritise landscape-wide initiatives such as the 15 Conservation Target Areas (CTAs) in South Oxfordshire where we can direct our efforts to make the biggest impact. Since its production, TVERC has also produced a draft [Nature Recovery Network \(NRN\) map](#), with core zones (of high quality habitat) and opportunity areas (where we might best connect, restore and enhance habitat to the greatest effect).

Objectives

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will develop a clear single vision which encompasses our shared objectives for the county. National targets are for 30% of our land to be managed for nature by 2030, for species decline to be halted and reversed by the same date, for tree canopy cover to be increased to 16.5% nationally (from 15.8%). Targets are yet to be agreed for Oxfordshire.

Challenges

Ensuring that we communicate data, support and advice effectively to multiple stakeholders is key – the natural environment sector organisations cannot 'do' nature recovery on their

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own, but wider stakeholders have described feeling confused and overwhelmed by the variety of different sources of information available.

Funding is always a challenge (recent research conducted for OLNP estimates the cost of achieving 30x30 at £800million, and this doesn't include the costs associated with the infrastructure that is required to support and facilitate delivery, such as around data, landowner engagement, community engagement, managing money, legal agreements etc). Therefore, ensuring we link strategy to delivery methods and funding mechanisms (via Nature Finance workstream) may make the difference between success and failure.

Government have so far only required Local Authorities to 'have regard' for LNRS. If LNRS has no weight in the planning system, it will not influence decision-making in the way or to the extent that is required for nature to recover.

Proposed solutions and work underway

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is being produced by Oxfordshire County Council, with close support from OLNP, and it is under this umbrella that much of the following work has, is and will take place:

- Updating the State of Nature report
- Producing an updated NRN map
- Development of a platform for provision of open-access environmental data to inform actions of all stakeholders, including farmers and community groups.
- Supporting catchment partnerships, farmer clusters and landscape recovery projects
- Supporting Oxford University in the creation of ecosystem service opportunity maps, which will enable spatial prioritisation of habitat creation for delivery of wider environmental benefits

Nature Finance

Current state of play

OLNP's Nature Finance group is a strong asset, bringing together some leading professionals to develop our approach. The research referenced above finds that biodiversity net gain has the potential to contribute c.10% to the cost of delivering nature recovery in Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire is in a strong position, in part due to the existence of an established independent environmental funder ([Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment](#)) which already facilitates offsite BNG payments in some districts. An action plan for [Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire](#) (PAZCO - owned by Oxfordshire County Council) sets out 5 key areas of focus for reaching net zero, including OLNP leading on the land-based carbon sequestration element.

Objectives

The vision outlined in the draft Nature Finance Strategy for Oxfordshire states:

Oxfordshire's natural capital investment framework will scale-up delivery of environmental enhancement projects by leveraging public, private and philanthropic funds to deliver increased biodiversity, natural solutions to climate change, and wider environmental benefits. Markets will function with integrity and transparency and be

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guided by local evidence in alignment with the priorities of the forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Challenges

The main barrier to scaling up nature finance delivery in Oxfordshire is the lack of an 'investment-ready' project pipeline. This is largely down to landowner uncertainty around government policy, government payments, taxation issues, value of benefits generated (eg carbon price), legality of stacking different payments or just confusion about the myriad options for land management.

There are additional challenges related to the enabling environment – around data, facilitation of farmers and community groups, creation of a marketplace and trading rules, an ethical framework and provision of information to stakeholders.

Proposed solutions and work underway

- Oxfordshire's Nature Finance Strategy represents a step forward in our collective understanding of the above situation
- Funding is assigned for a nature-based carbon sequestration project
- We are exploring the integration of our approach with the Zero Carbon Oxford work which has already developed relationships with buyers and a market mechanism
- At least one habitat bank has been created to provide BNG units fulfilling the needs of the new mandatory BNG policy
- OLNP's BNG group is working to support LPA readiness for November's introduction of the mandatory policy requirement

Nature and People

Current state of play

Access to greenspace is an important upstream driver of health equity: socioeconomic-related health inequalities are lower in communities with most access to greenspace, whilst people with higher vulnerability gain the greatest benefits from nature-based interventions. However, there are specific groups that consistently miss out. These include people living in more deprived areas, people with long-term conditions, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and older people¹.

Not all greenspaces are created equal, and evidence shows that greenspace that is more nature-rich has greater health benefits than greenspaces with lower nature value². At the same time, nature recovery requires collective action, and science shows that if just 1 in 4 people take action for nature, it can be enough to change the actions of the majority³. Furthermore, evidence also seems to show that people who take action for nature, rather than simply visiting it, are likely to generate even higher rates of social return⁴.

¹ Cracknell D, Lovell, R, Wheeler, B and White, M.,. Demystifying Health Metrics, Valuing Nature Paper VNP19 2019.

² Houlden et al. Is biodiversity of greenspace important for human health and wellbeing? A bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review. Urban Forestry and Urban Greening. 2021; 66.

³ <https://derbyshirewildlifetrustimpact.co.uk/maps/1-in-4-people/>

⁴ https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/SROI%20Summary%20Document%20-%20DIGITAL_0.pdf

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All this points towards the importance of prioritising high levels of biodiversity in the greenspaces considered within the access to nature programme, whilst also encouraging activities in which participants engage in nature-related volunteering activities.

Objectives

- Promote Green Social Prescribing
- Promote high quality green infrastructure that works for people and nature
- Build Environmental (E)VCS capacity to improve access for underserved populations via training sessions
- Identify and address local and national gaps in data, evidence and insight

Challenges

Decades of poor planning decisions and profiteering by developers has led to many nature-depleted communities, especially in the urban environment. In the rural environment, surrounding land is often privately owned with limited permitted access. In both urban and rural environments, accessible greenspaces are often not nature rich.

Oxfordshire has no accessible greenspaces larger than 500ha, therefore no communities meet the Accessible Nature Greenspace Standards (ANGSt).

The planning system is not equipped to monitor the implementation of natural habitats in new developments – plans often feature high proportions of nature on new housing sites which are not achieved in reality. This is a risk for the new flagship policy of Biodiversity Net Gain.

Proposed solutions and work underway

- Oxfordshire County Council has provided £75,000 to fund a new OLNP Access to Nature project officer.
- Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery is funding research on behalf of OLNP into the equitable distribution of accessible greenspace
- We are supporting a number of Local Authorities to assess their landholdings and opportunities for improving existing, and creating new, accessible greenspaces.

Financing nature-based solutions in Oxfordshire

A strategic plan to catalyse a framework of natural capital investment

Our Vision

Oxfordshire's natural capital investment framework will radically enhance nature, delivering natural solutions to climate change and wider benefits for communities, health, water and the environment. It will enable the development of a project pipeline and fund delivery of environmental enhancement projects by leveraging public, private, third sector and philanthropic funds. The market will function with high integrity and transparency and be guided by local evidence in alignment with the priorities of the forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Achieving our vision would bring a number of co-benefits, including:

- Enabling delivery of elements of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, through the development of funding and income streams
- Contribute towards funding nature's role in mitigating and adapting to climate change, thereby increasing the resilience of Oxfordshire's wildlife, people and economy
- Enhance Oxfordshire's natural environment, maximising benefits for people's health and wellbeing
- Establish Oxfordshire's natural capital as a cornerstone of the economy whilst also supporting diversification of income streams for farmers and landowners and the development of green skills and green jobs
- Support delivery of the [Oxfordshire Strategic Vision](#) and [Pathways to Net Zero Carbon Oxfordshire](#)
- Contribute towards delivery of the UK Government's nature recovery, net zero and wider environmental targets

State of Nature in Oxfordshire

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, and the worst in the G7¹. Nationally, the government have set targets that 30% of England will be managed for nature by 2030², and that tree cover will be increased by 1 million hectares by 2050³. However, there exists a £6bn per annum gap in funding to achieve these targets nationally⁴.

¹ <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/data/biodiversity-indicators/what-is-the-biodiversity-intactness-index.html>

² DEFRA, Outcome Indicator Framework for the 25 Year Environment Plan: 2022 update (May 2022)

³ DEFRA, England Tree Action Plan 2021-2024 (May 2021)

⁴ <https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk/news-and-insights/finance-gap-for-uk-nature-report/>

Locally, the Oxfordshire State of Nature Review 2017⁵ shows a continuation of long term declines in farmland and woodland biodiversity, and continued fragmentation and loss of connectivity across the county’s landscapes, effecting the future viability of habitats and species.

Nature is vital not just for wildlife and biodiversity, but also provides a number of services, known as ecosystem services, that benefit society and the economy. Natural Capital is a frame through which these wider environmental benefits can be understood (see figure 1).

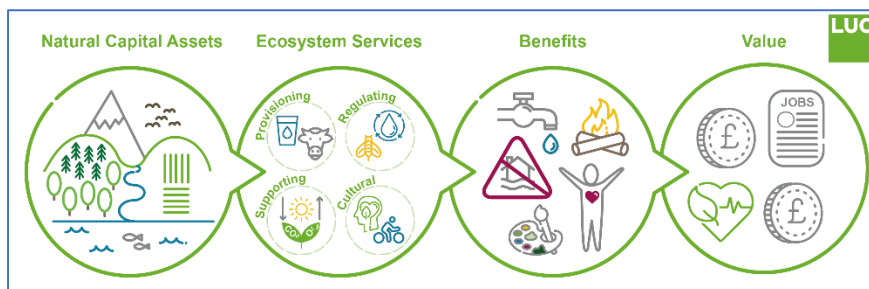


Figure 1 – About natural capital and Ecosystem Services (c/o Land Use Consultants)

Using the Environment Agency’s Natural Capital Register and Accounts Tool (NCRAT), we can attribute a partial value to the ecosystem services generated by Oxfordshire’s natural capital of at least £0.5bn per annum (see Figure 2).

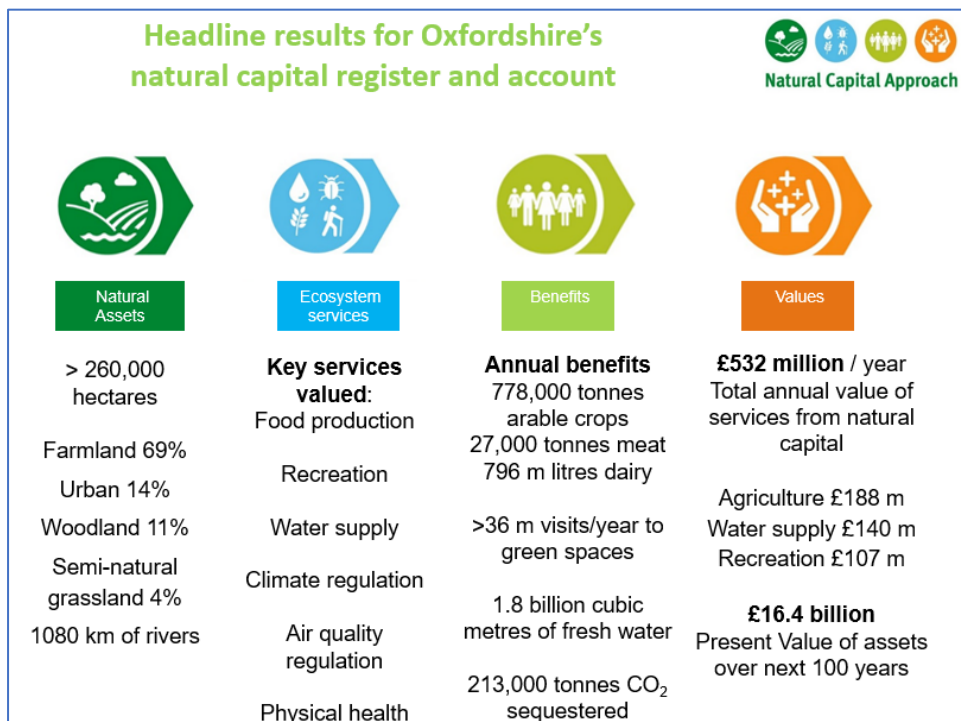


Figure 2 – Oxfordshire Natural Capital Register and Account

⁵ State of Nature in Oxfordshire 2017, Wild Oxfordshire, 2017

So Oxfordshire's nature is important, but in decline. The Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership exists to radically enhance nature and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be a spatial strategy for nature and environmental improvement. Working with Oxford University, we have calculated the cost of delivering Oxfordshire's nature recovery ambitions at an estimated £800 million⁶ by 2030.

DEFRA's Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs) is likely to continue to be the main source of environmental funding from government for farmers. As over 70% of the county is managed by farmers, this is a key method of delivering nature-related outcomes, but the methods for ensuring ELMs funds deliver local environmental priorities are as yet unclear.

Oxfordshire has a strong evidence base showing where environmental funding could best be targeted to deliver maximum benefits. TVERC's Draft Nature Recovery Network demonstrates the most important places for nature restoration in order to ensure habitat connectivity for biodiversity. The Environmental Change Institute's ecosystem service mapping shows where different habitat types are delivering ecosystem services currently, and to what extent, and they are currently extending this to create opportunity maps to show the best locations for nature-based solutions. This mapping, along with the local expertise within groups like the Biodiversity Advisory Group, HERO initiative and Local Nature Partnership, represents a wealth of understanding of the best places to take action for nature. It will be important to ensure that projects contribute to this strategy, with the right actions in the right place, as connected as possible, and with a good mix of large and small-scale projects.

Demand for nature-based solutions

More than half of UK businesses have net zero targets⁷, and many of these involve offsetting residual emissions. We want to provide local businesses with high quality, high integrity options to buy carbon credits locally (See **Box 1**).

Emissions in Oxfordshire are estimated to be in the region of 4.2Mte/year⁸. If 90% mitigation is achieved by emissions reduction, there could be up to 400Kte/year to be offset. Using the current EU ETS carbon price, this is a total of £27million per annum.

As laid out in the Environment Act, housing and infrastructure developers need to demonstrate to Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) that their projects will deliver at least a 10% biodiversity net gain⁹, and Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership is supporting Oxfordshire LPAs to push for greater than 10%. In many cases this will involve offsetting, and this offsetting needs to be local and ready at the point of planning consent being sought

⁶ Hawkins et al. (2023) The potential contribution of revenue from Biodiversity Net Gain offsets towards nature recovery ambitions in Oxfordshire. Report by Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and University of Oxford.

⁷ <https://www.edie.net/more-than-half-of-uk-businesses-have-net-zero-plans-but-how-can-these-targets-be-reached/>

⁸ <https://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/publications/downloads/PazCo-final.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/biodiversity-net-gain-local-authorities#:~:text=Resources-,What%20is%20biodiversity%20net%20gain%3F,the%20term%20'biological%20diversity'>

(See **Box 2**). It is estimated that the local demand for offsite biodiversity units could be worth up to £18.9million per annum over the next 10 years¹⁰. Based on existing offsets delivering biodiversity units, we estimate this could require 190ha across Oxfordshire to meet this annual demand¹¹.

Businesses are increasingly recognising both their reliance and their impact on the natural environment, with a growing number wanting to become 'Nature Positive'. This is catalysed by approaches like Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) which has developed a framework for businesses to identify their nature-related risks, enabling nature to be incorporated into decision-making. Approaches like Landscape Enterprise Networks enable businesses to invest directly into their local landscape to improve financial sustainability such as by reducing flood risk and improving soil and water quality.

As a result of these demand-side factors, there is an emerging market for credits, or offsets, resulting from environmental enhancement projects. Businesses want and need to pay for environmental enhancement. But on the supply side, there is a problem. The transaction cost of delivering projects that provide these credits is high, and the process is complicated and time consuming, requiring expertise which is in short supply.

Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership is working to resolve this problem, by developing a framework and market for natural capital investment. This adaptive framework will attract upfront investment in landscape-scale nature recovery and natural capital projects, projects which will produce saleable 'credits', generating revenue to repay the investment.

The funding will be across two phases:

- 1) **Investment Readiness Funding.** This preliminary funding will support landowner engagement, baselining, management plans, business case development, matchmaking with potential buyers. This can also be characterised as 'developing the project pipeline', and will likely require the establishment of a revolving fund.
- 2) **Capital Investment.** This funding pays for delivery of on-the-ground works, with associated costs, delivering the actual environmental enhancement.

It is anticipated that not all projects will require both phases of funding.

About the markets – Carbon

Carbon credits are a way that a company can account for carbon that has been sequestered by others, offsetting it against their own emissions¹². Currently, the only verified standard that is applicable in Oxfordshire is the Woodland Carbon Code. There is currently a huge shortage of English credits available – this is due, in part, to the time lag between planting

¹⁰ Using the medium scenario from Hawkins et al. (2023) The potential contribution of revenue from Biodiversity Net Gain offsets towards nature recovery ambitions in Oxfordshire. Report by Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and University of Oxford.

¹¹ Figures from Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment's historic offsite biodiversity net gain projects = 4 biodiversity units/hectare

¹² Carbon offsetting should never be a substitute for emissions reduction, but a last case option for only those residual emissions which cannot be avoided.

and sequestration. Firstly, those schemes which have been planted are still not producing units. Secondly, because of the time lag between expenditure and income generation, there are very few landowners willing and able to take this long-term view of investment, leading to a lack of tree planting projects. Box 1 gives an example one of the very few large scale carbon credit projects in Oxfordshire.

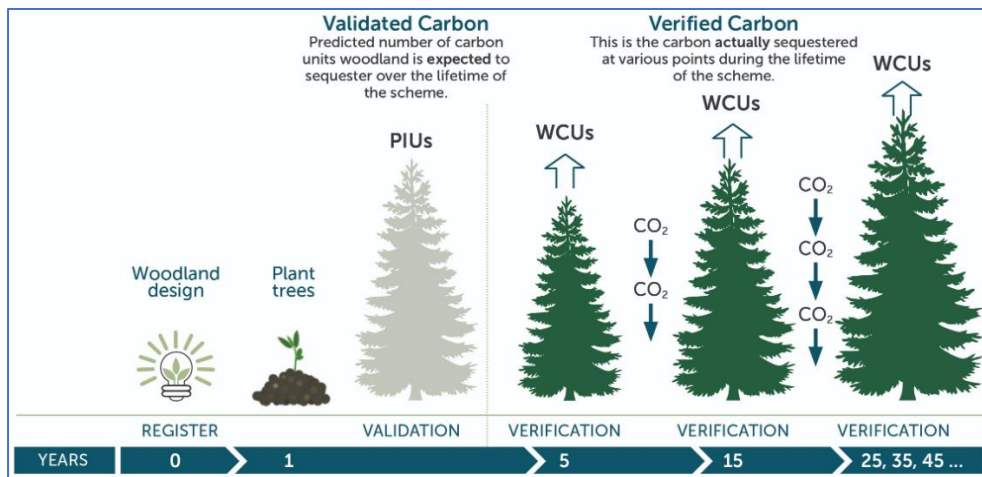


Figure 3 – The carbon credit process for Woodland Carbon Code

Box 1 – Tree Planting at Blenheim

A partnership between Morgan Sindall and Blenheim Estate planting more than a quarter of a million trees to transform the land as part of an ambitious series of sustainability initiatives. 22,000 tonnes of carbon will be sequestered over the next twenty five years. It is expected that an unregulated, unsupported market would generate carbon credits from woodlands that fail to maximise delivery of additional ecosystem services. The Blenheim project takes a different approach, creating a diverse and self-sustaining ecosystem that provides measurable, demonstrable gains in terms of soil, air and water quality, not to mention the wellbeing benefits for all those who can come and enjoy the forest as it grows. Oxfordshire’s natural capital investment framework will seek to support more projects like Blenheim, while supporting development of carbon credits from other habitat types, such as soil.

About the markets – Biodiversity Net Gain

Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) becomes law in late November 2023, and parts of Oxfordshire have a long history of delivering BNG through the planning system. Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment (TOE) has been central in enabling this via facilitation of the offsite credits market.

TOE works with landowners to design and accredit projects that provide credits to be sold to developers. Previously, funds were collected, and projects then delivered using those funds. However, from November 2023, projects need to be prepared in advance of offering credits to developers. This creates a dilemma – funds are required to plan projects, but funds are

not available until credit sale. This dilemma has the potential to cause long delays to the planning system.

What is needed is a pipeline of projects ready to address developer demands for biodiversity units immediately. One type of site that will be important to include in a project pipeline will be habitat banks, for which up-front investment ensures projects are able to create habitat prior to developers requiring the credits. Box 2 provides an example of a habitat banking model that has been developed in Oxfordshire.

BOX 2 – Biodiversity Net Gain at Duxford (or habitat banking)

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) acquired Duxford Old River, a site adjacent to their existing Chimney Meadows nature reserve. The site had been managed previously as commercial pasture for cattle and so had a very low value of biodiversity. The opportunity for long term investment into this site to improve the biodiversity presented the ideal platform to achieve this through Biodiversity Net Gain as a new Habitat Bank.

Over 30 years of nature-led management, a mosaic of key floodplain habitats will be created, such as floodplain wetland mosaic, other neutral grassland, broad-leaved woodland, and mixed scrub. These habitats will support species of wildfowl, waders, songbirds and specialist wetland invertebrates. An Environment Benefits From Nature assessment revealed that in 30 years we predict to see increases in a range of services, such as flood regulation, erosion protection, carbon storage, and interaction with nature.

As part of a project funded by the Natural Environment Investment Readiness scheme (NEIRF) and in partnership with Finance Earth, a financial model was developed to evaluate the commercial viability of the habitat bank. The sales strategy employed will be to see some biodiversity units prior to habitat restoration work commencing, and some post-enhancement. BBOWT have now sold a first batch of units from the site to Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment.

Duxford Habitat Bank has a large volume of units still to sell, ready for the expansion of the local market when BNG becomes regulated in November. The creation of Duxford Old River as a habitat bank will generate over £1m of new incremental revenue for BBOWT with a positive gross operating margin which will be required to fund the management, monitoring and reporting requirements for the delivery of biodiversity net gain throughout remaining term of the 30 year project.

What will Oxfordshire's natural capital investment framework look like?

As demonstrated in Boxes 1 and 2, private finance is already being deployed in Oxfordshire to deliver environmental benefits. However, to achieve the scale and pace of activity needed to address our twin climate and ecological emergencies, we need a framework to facilitate the market in a fair, high-integrity, evidence-backed and consistent way. One way of doing this could be through the creation of an Oxfordshire Environment Fund.

Our natural capital investment framework will demonstrate the following characteristics:

Gold standard We aim to achieve excellence in all projects funded by private finance in Oxfordshire. This will require the creation of a set of ethics for project delivery, along the lines of the Lawton principles¹³ (bigger, better, more and joined) and including a set of criteria that investors and buyers of ecosystem services must meet. All projects will be designed to deliver measurable biodiversity benefits in line with Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It will be distributive by design, accessible to all farmers and landowners and with benefits to rural communities.

High integrity We are alive to the risks of greenwash associated with nature finance. Our framework will only accept investment and funding where it meets strict standards, including around transparency and monitoring, covering biodiversity and climate.

Flexible and sensitive, with multiple providers, but a central body providing degrees of service to a diversity of actors. For some, this may be a complete package from project conception to completion. For others, it may simply be verification and validation, or access to the Oxfordshire register.

County-wide Key to a successful roll out of mandatory biodiversity net gain is a spread of offset sites throughout the county, crucially with at least one in each Local Planning Authority area. The proposed framework will have this as a key consideration, to ensure that any biodiversity lost is compensated for in a proximate location.

Aggregation, including via habitat banking, is important to meet the scale demanded by investors. There should be facility for pooling credits offered by multiple projects. A central mechanism may also be required to aggregate funds from multiple sources (public, private and philanthropic).

Multiple ecosystem services, aspiring towards multi-functionality whilst ensuring additionality. For instance, Carbon Credit projects should also seek to maximise biodiversity, access and water management benefits (as in Box 1).

Market Design

Key to the success of the framework is that it meets the needs of the various actors, including those relating to integrity and ethics, whilst ensuring the market can operate as effectively and efficiently as possible. We are clear that a central environmental fund organisation is required in order to manage a variety of functions, but the model illustrated in Figure 4 will be deliberately flexible. In some instances, the operations performed by the market mechanism might all be managed by the central funding body, but in others a variety of actors (landowners, buyers, aggregators) may fulfil some of these roles.

¹³ Lawton et al. (2010) [Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network](#). Report to Defra.

Enabling such a dynamic market is crucial in driving competition and bringing down price, whilst the existence of a central validating body will ensure this is not at the expense of ecological integrity, or to the detriment of fairness for different types of landowner.

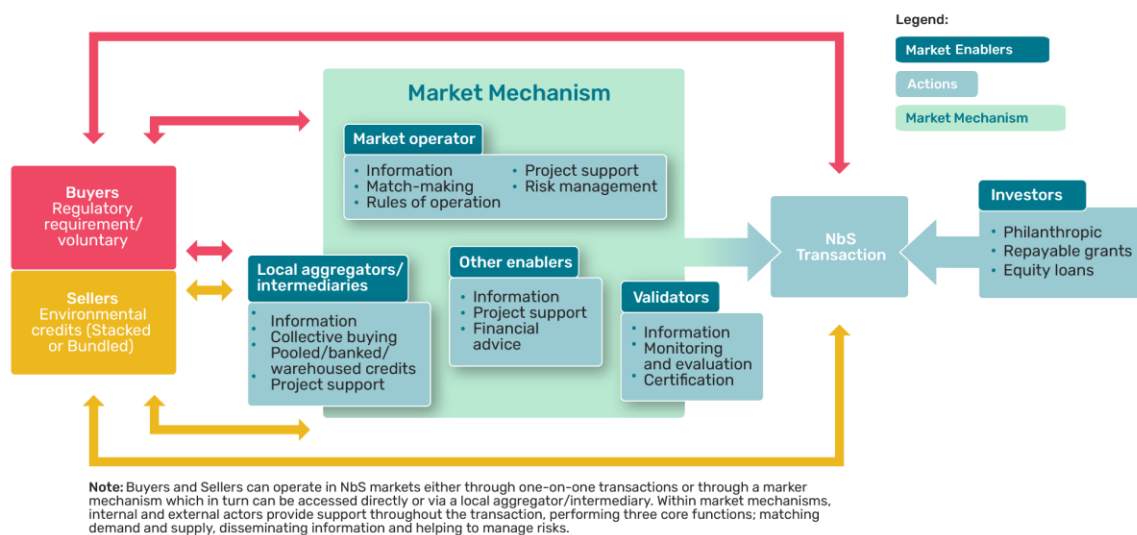


Figure 4 Proposed operating model for Oxfordshire's Carbon Market (credit – edited from Accelerating Nature Based Climate Solutions: Review of Market Enablers Report prepared for East Sussex County Council by EFTEC)

Funding the enablers

Although Oxfordshire is already in a great place to facilitate private investment in natural capital, OLNPN recognises the need for creating or enhancing the market enablers required to meet the aims outlined above. The following four points represent an opportunity for an individual, organisation, funder or anchor institution to demonstrate commitment to enabling this programme of natural capital investment. The level of funding required is estimated to be £1,000,000 over 2 years for this work.

- 1) Generate a **pipeline of projects** which are 'investment ready' (e.g. baseline, management plan, value calculation) using the Green Finance Initiative's Investment Readiness Toolkit¹⁴. This will include supporting coordinators/facilitators of landscape-scale delivery partnerships (such as farmer clusters and Catchment Partnerships) to develop projects, plus a quantitative assessment of Local Authority-owned sites. This would also include a comprehensive programme of community, land-owner and stakeholder **engagement and consultation**. The result would be a set of multiple investment ready projects across all LPAs that will meet the

¹⁴ <https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk/qfihive/toolkit/>

projected demand for biodiversity, carbon, and other emerging natural capital markets.

- 2) Develop a set of operating **ethics for buyers and investors** in the Oxfordshire market. This should include ensuring companies wishing to purchase carbon offsets have developed a verified pathway to net zero plan, and ideally a Taskforce for Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)-aligned nature positive plan.
- 3) Design and establish a **central environmental fund vehicle** and **self-sustaining operating model**, to manage aspects of the market to varying degrees depending on the needs of the actors (investors, buyers, landowners, other enablers/aggregators). This could include receipt and distribution of funds, supporting project developers (i.e. landowners), validation and verification of credits, data management, and monitoring and evaluation.
- 4) Attract **investment** in a revolving fund to finance delivery of projects, generating credits that repay investment.

The benefits of delivering this Strategy are enormous, and Oxfordshire already has a number of projects underway that are implementing various aspects of it, ready for investment. One of these is the North-East Cotswolds Farmer Cluster, where 100+ farmers are working together across 40,000 hectare on a Landscape Recovery Project. Tony Juniper noted the importance of leveraging private finance to deliver this project, linking to Oxfordshire's emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy. There are over

For more details, or to register your interest for supporting this strategy, please contact localnaturepartnershipoxfordshire@southandvale.gov.uk