

Oxon LNP Board Paper for Approval

Title:	OLNP Sub groups update
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Summary:

The Local Nature Partnership currently has five active sub-groups, with a sixth, the policy group, still in development. This paper gives an update on activity from each group, provides Board members with insight into key decisions taken by each group, and poses some questions to the Board.

The Board is asked to:

Consider ways in which BNG might be linked to LNRS.

Consider and endorse the priorities presented by the Health and Nature group.

Endorse BAG’s consideration of recognition of the River Thame Valley as an additional Conservation Target Area.

Comment on the potential evolution of Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment towards a more public-private partnership model.

Suggest ways in which the LNRS steering group can begin work on this process, especially perhaps around engaging farmers during this relatively quieter period of winter.

Biodiversity Gain group

UPDATE:

Purpose of BG Task and Finish Group

- Advise the LNP and other key stakeholders on ways in which the benefits of Biodiversity Gain (BG) can be maximised in support of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Explore the feasibility of a cohesive county strategy for Biodiversity Gain.

Update from last meeting (5th Oct 22)

1. The **Planning Advisory Service**, Beccy Moberly (role is in supporting LPAs to implement BNG) and Krista Patrick (helping local authorities to deliver the Nature

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Recovery Network) attended October's BG Task and Finish Group meeting to share their expertise and communicate the support they have available for LPAs.

- Support and resources for LPAs
<https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/biodiversity-net-gain-local-authorities>
(PAS website has some links to well written BNG policies e.g. Plymouth)
 - Nature recovery info on PAS website
<https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/nature-recovery-local-authorities>
 - Useful diagram on how the introduction of BNG will impact the work stream of LPAs relating to planning applications
<https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/biodiversity-net-gain-local-authorities/biodiversity-net-gain-development>
 - Still not clear whether Defra will allow a local credit scheme, but many are communicating the implications to Defra.
 - Hard to see how government could legislate that BNG could not be in S106 when this is the mechanism for other schemes such as nutrient neutrality.
 - Lots of local schemes currently implementing, or setting up local credit schemes, as otherwise what is the mechanism to enable the units to be spent in the local area.
 - Legislation not expected to provide support for local first (relying on weak mechanism in metric). Could mean that if a unit costs £20k locally and £5k up north Oxon will lose out unless local policy specifies otherwise.
 - Members want impact to be addressed locally.
2. Broad agreement that this group should pursue the ambition of 20% BNG. All supported this in principle. In practice, it was felt that LPAs required a better evidence base to set policy. Some developers already saying that current BNG requirements are impacting on viability. Due to the local plan review schedules there is some urgency for this.
- There is a growing body of evidence to support increasing the requirement. The most notable one from the Kent Nature Partnership <https://kentnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Viability-Assessment-of-Biodiversity-Net-Gain-in-Kent-June-2022.pdf>

Next meeting

The next meeting will look at another aspect taken from the BG Guiding Principles discussion paper (shared with last update): namely that there are two important pillars of the Environment Act that are of particular relevance to this group, Biodiversity Gain and LNRS; they are not linked by current / proposed legislation. There should be an ambition to link the two, to lever funds to the priority areas in the county. (Although, quality biodiversity projects not in the nature recovery zones should not automatically be discounted.)

KEY DECISIONS:

To provide evidence to the LPAs supporting a policy of 20%, notably around the need for such a policy, and its negligible impact on viability.

QUESTIONS for the Board:

Consider ways in which Biodiversity Net Gain might be linked to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

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Nature and Health group

UPDATE:

The LNP Health and Nature subgroup held its second meeting on 3 November 2022, attended by 32 members. The focus of the meeting was a review of the feedback from the Forum regarding priority areas for action for the people and nature theme; it was noted that there was close alignment between the Forum's ideas and those proposed by sub-group members. Following these discussions, the following objectives and proposed outputs of the group were agreed:

Priority No	Sub-Group Proposed Objectives	Alignment with Forum Proposals	Specific Forum ideas	Deliverable outputs	Timescale
1	Input into the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to ensure that it is a key thread throughout the strategy	X	People and nature needs to be a thread running through the LNRS not just a chapter	An LNRS which fully considers the needs of people and the importance of human connectivity with nature	Linked to LNRS delivery timetable -
2	Promote Green Social Prescribing	X	Link eNGOs with health Increase skills in engaging with seldom heard	A social prescribing strategy for Oxfordshire which recognises the role of 'green prescribing' Training to share best practice in reaching groups who do not usually access nature Inclusion of nature activities on the Livewell website – social prescribers' directory Engagement with the NHS – to maximise uptake of nature based activities and to influence 'greening' of the NHS estate	2023 – linked to Oxfordshire social prescribing strategy timetable
3	Promotion of high quality green infrastructure that works for people and nature that works for people and nature,	X Make access to nature easy	Focus on active travel, influencing planning policy, design guides, improving the quality of our existing green	Develop definitions of what we mean by high quality, accessible green spaces Identify	2023

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	maximising the quality and use of existing green spaces		spaces so that they are multifunctional and enable access for all	opportunities for increasing biodiversity – check use of One Public Estate and engage with the Universities to influence their land management activities Review and provide feedback on existing Local Authority Design Guides	
Enablers					
1	Networking and collaboration	X	Understand what is happening and where so we can identify the gaps	Share case studies of good practice and promote them on the LNP web site Share good practice re: sustainability of projects	
2	Mapping of need and service provision	X Focus on equality, diversity and inclusion.	Development of case studies.	Detailed, accessible map of nature activities which also shows the gaps and under-utilised green spaces. (Link with existing work including HERO, sustainable healthcare, Wild Oxfordshire and District maps)	By May 2023
3	Mapping funding and free training opportunities	X Bring together research, evidence and local data	Layer priority areas of need with funding opportunities	Create a directory of funding and training opportunities	By March 2023

KEY DECISIONS:

To focus work around the items in the table above.

QUESTIONS for the Board:

To consider, comment on and endorse the priorities in the table above.

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Biodiversity Advisory Group

UPDATE:

Our most recent BAG meeting was on 23rd September. It was agreed that we should gather the evidence to support the case for the designation of some or all of the River Thames Valley as a Conservation Target Area (CTA).

- This area is acknowledged as being important for wildlife where targeted conservation action will have the greatest benefit but has, until relatively recently, been under recorded. Therefore, there hasn't been enough evidence to support CTA status.
- Between the work of the River Thames Conservation Trust, Freshwater Habitats Trust and others we think it is time to have a closer look at the area.
- We have no a priori expectations of exactly where the boundaries will be as this will need to be evidence led, so the starting point is the whole River Thames Corridor in Oxfordshire.
- Most of the evidence will need to come from TVERC and they will cross check with RTCT & FHT to make sure that TVERC have the most up to date data.
- South and Vale are currently working on their 'Joint Local Plan 2040' and if this area is to become a CTA we need to get it into the plan during the creation phase.
- Steve Wilkes is bringing together the data into a form that can be presented to the BAG before our next meeting in January.
- The background, governance & process for CTA creation can be found here: <https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CTA-Governance-FINAL-JUL2017-1.pdf>

KEY DECISIONS: To consider the designation of the River Thames Valley as an additional CTA.

QUESTIONS for Board: Endorse the move towards recognition of the River Thames Valley as an additional CTA

Natural Capital Investment group

UPDATE:

The group has met twice since the last LNP Board meeting and is working within the context of the areas considered and prioritised at the OLNP Forum event. Both meetings focussed discussion around four key areas:

- Evidence
- Project pipeline
- Investment
- Natural Capital Investment Plan

Evidence

The group has recruited an intern, paid by University of Oxford's Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery, to research 1) the cost of delivering our nature recovery ambitions in

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Oxfordshire and 2) the likely size of the offsite BNG market in Oxfordshire. This work requires significant assumptions, and should be completed by early in the new year.

Project Pipeline

The group has begun collecting case studies of projects. Some are projects that have been delivered, to demonstrate to potential investors that we have a track record of successful delivery. Others are pipeline projects, to show investors the sorts of things their investment might fund. There is a dearth of 'shovel-ready' (or investment-ready) projects and a small group is meeting to consider a funding application to develop this pipeline.

Investment

The group is fortunate to include Ben Caldecott, a senior figure at the Leverhulme centre with a background and strong professional network in the investment world, especially around green finance. We are looking forward to discussing with Ben the opportunities that exist, and the best way to ready ourselves to take advantage of these.

Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment is a key player in this space, and is well placed to provide 'hub' functions to support both natural capital investment projects and a healthy natural capital marketplace across the county. TOE cannot grow without evolving – this represents an opportunity to rethink the model of Oxfordshire's premier environmental funder, to one more aligned with social enterprise and public-private partnership. The group is considering the most appropriate way for this evolution to take place, so as to benefit the county as a whole. This is a key piece of the Natural Capital Investment Framework that was discussed at the OLNP Forum.

Natural Capital Investment Plan

Work has begun on a natural capital investment plan. This will be shared with the Board once a working draft has been agreed and commented on by the group, prior to wider consultation and socialisation.

KEY DECISIONS:

- 1) To engage an intern to develop evidence which we hope will support our approach.
- 2) To collate and stimulate a pipeline of investible projects
- 3) To develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan
- 4) To support TOE in considering the most appropriate form

QUESTIONS for the Board: Comment on the potential evolution of Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment towards a more public-private partnership model.

LNRS technical steering group

UPDATE:

Whilst originally expected in Spring 2022, we have recently been informed by DEFRA that they are now aiming to roll out LNRS from April 2023. We still await the publication of secondary legislation and guidance on LNRS, and information on associated funding, and as such DEFRA do not expect LNRS preparation to begin at this stage. We have been informed that Responsible Authorities can expect to receive a £32,500 further seed corn funding ahead of April 2023 to allow for capacity building and / or preparatory work ahead of the roll-out.

We held a meeting of partners on 28th September to discuss governance structure, briefing of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP), influences on the timeline, and data. We have provided information on the proposed LNRS governance and structure to the Future

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Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) which has been presented to the Executive Officers Group and Scrutiny Panel and was considered by FOP on 29th November. This paper gained FOPs endorsement for:

- Oxfordshire County Council to continue in the provisional role of responsible authority.
- Proceeding with work on an Oxfordshire LNRS where we can (e.g. revising baseline data)
- The proposed governance arrangement, which sees the formation of an interim LNRS steering group which is a Local Nature Partnership group led by Oxfordshire County Council (as provisional Responsible authority).

We have invited representatives to form an 'interim' steering group as follows:

- Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership – Matt Whitney
- Oxfordshire County Council -Beccy Micklem
- The LPAs – Dominic Lamb (South and Vale DCs)
- eNGOs – Prue Addison (BBOWT)
- Defra Group – Paul Candlin/Graham Scholey
- The farming community -??? (suggestions welcome)
- Designated landscapes – Simon Smith (Cotswolds Conservation Board)
- Comms & engagement/community groups – Camilla Burrow (Wild Oxfordshire)

We have met with Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) to discuss initial data needs and requested a quote for a review of the DEFRA LNRS pilots in terms of the data requirements, as well as a review/update of the Oxfordshire State of Nature Report, with a view to using some of the DEFRA seed corn funding on this work.

We have met with Local Authority officers to discuss the needs arising from Local Plan production, which runs ahead of the LNRS timeline. This has flagged the need to revise the draft NRN map which was produced to inform OP2050, in order that it can effectively inform development of Local Plan policy on nature recovery. TVERC have been asked to quote for this work (which will likely be funded by LPAs). The need for Local Plan policy to be worded so that a future LNRS can be accommodated was flagged and discussed.

OCC are currently recruiting to two additional biodiversity roles in order to increase capacity ahead of LNRS roll-out.

We have engaged with NFU to consider the best approach to engaging with farmers. We had hoped to attend NFU Branch meetings but have been advised that this is best conducted following release of further information regarding ELM.

KEY DECISIONS:

QUESTIONS for the Board: Suggest ways in which the LNRS steering group can begin work on this process, especially perhaps around engaging farmers during this relatively quieter period of winter.

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Nature Policy group

UPDATE:

There is appetite for this group from some partners, and the need to ensure Local and Strategic Plans have strong environmental policies within them has never been stronger. We have now established a timeline for all Oxfordshire-based plans that the LNP may wish to influence. We have also completed our first response to a Local Plan Consultation, that of Oxford City. A Chair is yet to be identified but the group will form with LNP Manager as temporary Chairperson as soon as possible.

The group may decide to focus on developing position papers on a number of key topics and issues, and indeed we are fortunate to have those created by Bucks and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership at our disposal to inform our approach.

KEY DECISIONS: To establish the group as soon as possible.

QUESTIONS for Board: Consideration of the 'Influencing Policy' item on December's Board agenda will inform our approach.