

Oxon LNP Board Paper for Approval

Title:	Year One progress report
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Summary:

The Local Nature Partnership is nearing the end of its first year of funding, with one more year’s funding secure. It is appropriate to report progress to date to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. This can be considered the first step in securing continuation funding (which FOP cannot itself decide upon – the decision will be taken by each sovereign local authority). The LNP Manager has produced a DRAFT progress report for FOP, appended to this paper.

This paper also looks at alternative and additional sources of funding.

The Board is asked to:

Comment on progress of the partnership to date.

Suggest ways in which we might better make the case for continuation funding from local authority partners.

Propose ways to diversify and increase funding for the LNP.

In late 2021 Oxfordshire’s councils jointly agreed a funding package to support the county’s strategic partnerships – the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, the Bus Partnership and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership. Two years’ funding was agreed, which commenced in April 2022. Thus, OLNP is nearing the end of its first year of funding, with one more year’s funding secure.

It is therefore considered appropriate to report progress to date to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. This represents the first step in making the case for continuation funding (which FOP cannot itself decide upon – the decision will be taken by each sovereign local authority). The OLNP Manager has produced a DRAFT progress report for FOP, appended to this paper.

The report highlights the successes of OLNP to date. It concludes that Local Authority funding has been the key factor in achieving these successes. It articulates a risk analysis of continuing vs not continuing to fund OLNP.

The Board is asked to consider the detail presented in the report and comment on progress of the partnership to date. Board members are also asked to comment on

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the presentation of the report, suggesting ways in which we might better make our case for continuation funding.

OLNP Manager hopes the report demonstrates good progress. However, it is felt that even more could be achieved with additional resource. Similarly, it is felt that Local Authority partners would like to see a diversified funding settlement.

Resource is being sought to further the aims of the Local Nature Partnership:

- Oxfordshire County Council will recruit a Local Nature Recovery Strategy Manager
- Oxfordshire County Council is seeking funding for a project officer to lead the LNP's Health and Nature work
- South and Vale District Council have submitted a funding bid for a project manager to enable nature-based carbon offsetting in Oxfordshire
- LNP Manager has supported a bid to fund research how equitably accessible greenspace is distributed in Oxfordshire

Additionally, the University is exploring on behalf of the LNP:

- the cost of delivering nature recovery in Oxfordshire
- the estimated potential size of the offsite biodiversity net gain market
- the historic nature losses caused by development in previous local plan periods (to support a policy requiring greater than 10% biodiversity net gain).

The Board is asked to propose ways to diversify and increase OLNP funding, especially core funding.

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Appendix

DRAFT Local Nature Partnership Annual Report

Executive Summary

Oxfordshire has a long history of partnership working in the natural environment sector and good relationships exist between the main environmental charities, the Local Authorities, and other stakeholders such as OxLEP and the universities. However, changes to land management practices, land-use change including from new developments, and climate change have led to continued negative impacts on Oxfordshire's habitats and wildlife.

Nationally, nature is rising up the agenda for a number of reasons:

- increased understanding of the role of nature in supporting climate resilience (both mitigation and adaptation) and a healthy economy
- changes to land use planning legislation
- changes to agricultural funding, moving away from basic payments (via the Common Agricultural Policy) to a system of public money for public goods (Environmental Land Management scheme)
- growing recognition of the positive impact nature has on human health.

In response to this, stakeholders worked together to form the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP). In recognition of the role this Partnership could play in supporting delivery of a number of aspects within the Strategic Vision, the Local Authorities provided funding for a partnership manager, for 22/23 and 23/24.

This report gives an overview of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and highlights progress so far. Of note is the work done to create a framework for natural capital investment in the county; support Local Authorities in preparing for mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain; and establishing six focussed working groups that enable partners to support one another delivering aspects of our aim and purpose.

The report also identifies key stakeholders and assesses the effectiveness of the governance and methods utilised by the partnership. It assesses risks involved with continuing or not continuing to fund the partnership.

We conclude that the partnership is strong and valuable and has successfully leveraged additional resources from a number of sources, but that it is in need of a continued, diversified and enlarged funding settlement in order to support nature's recovery in Oxfordshire.

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National LNP Picture

Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) were conceived by DEFRA in the early 2010s with the aim to:

“Drive positive change in the local natural environment, taking a strategic view of the challenges and opportunities involved and identifying ways to manage it as a system for the benefit of nature, people and the economy.”

In effect, LNPs act to position nature as an enabler rather than a blocker; an asset to be nurtured and enhanced rather than a liability or risk to be managed. LNPs enable consideration of nature within different policy spheres, demonstrating the positive role of the natural environment for planning and development, economic growth, climate resilience and health & wellbeing. They often do this by taking a ‘natural capital’ approach, which values nature for its benefits not only to wildlife, but also for flood risk reduction, carbon sequestration, recreation, air pollutant removal and more.

Some small amount of seed funding was provided by central government to help establish LNPs but this quickly ran out in 2013. As such, there is now a patchy network across the country. Some counties have strong LNPs, fully funded and established for nearly a decade, whereas others have no LNP or a voluntary one managed entirely from within one partner organisation with no dedicated resource. In 2016 partners established an LNP in Oxfordshire but it was short lived. We consider this failure to be a result of a lack of support and backing from Local Authorities and an absence of strategic prioritisation.

Oxfordshire LNP establishment and governance

In 2020 partners began work in earnest to re-establish an LNP and, following much stakeholder engagement, funding was secured for 22/23 and 23/24 from the Local Authorities. In July 2022 Matt Whitney was appointed as LNP Manager and Richard Benwell as voluntary chair of the LNP board.



Figure 1 – Timeline to establishment of Oxford Local Nature Partnership

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OLNP is not constituted. Its informal governance structure can be seen in Figure 2. Hosting the OLN Manager within the Strategic Partnerships Team at South and Vale District Council enables good partnership working between and amongst the Local Authorities, as well as with the non-council partners. Whilst OLN doesn't formally report into the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP), good two-way communication has been establishing meaning FOP keeps abreast of LNP activities, and LNP can support FOP activities. The LNP manager is supported by a comms colleague and a democratic services colleague both of whom also support the FOP Manager and OIEP Manager.

Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership

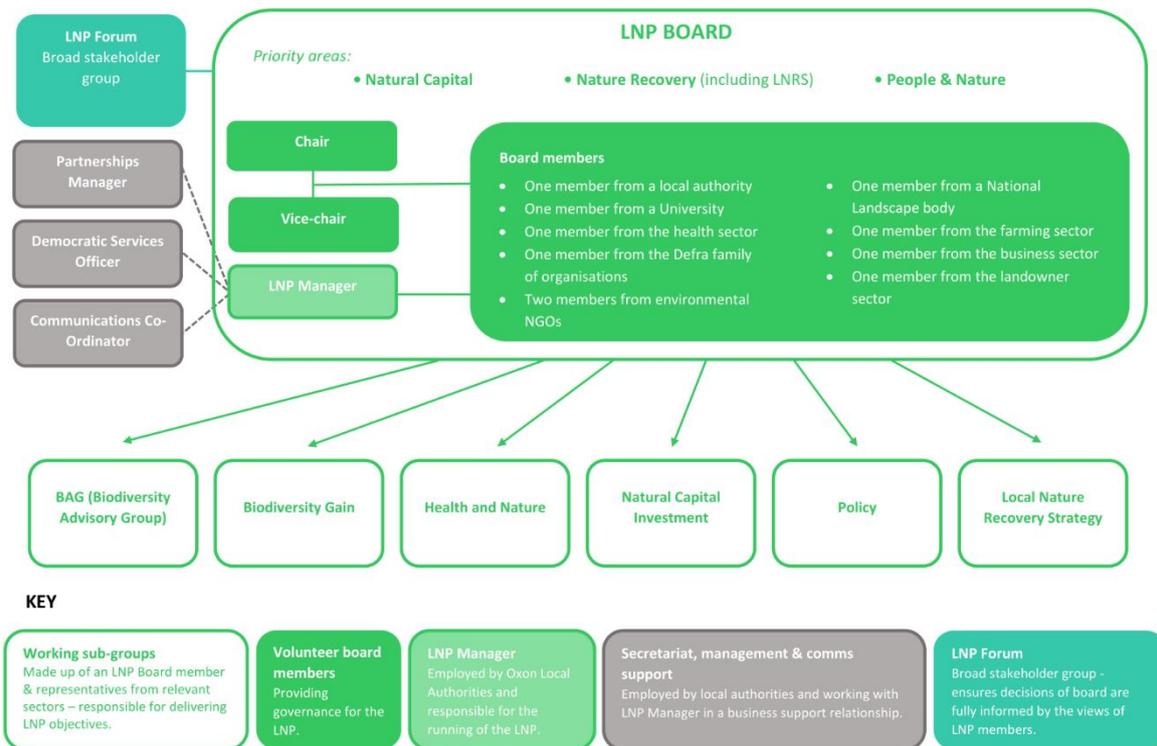


Figure 2 – Oxford Local Nature Partnership governance structure

The LNP's strategic approach is simple and clear, with three main areas of focus:

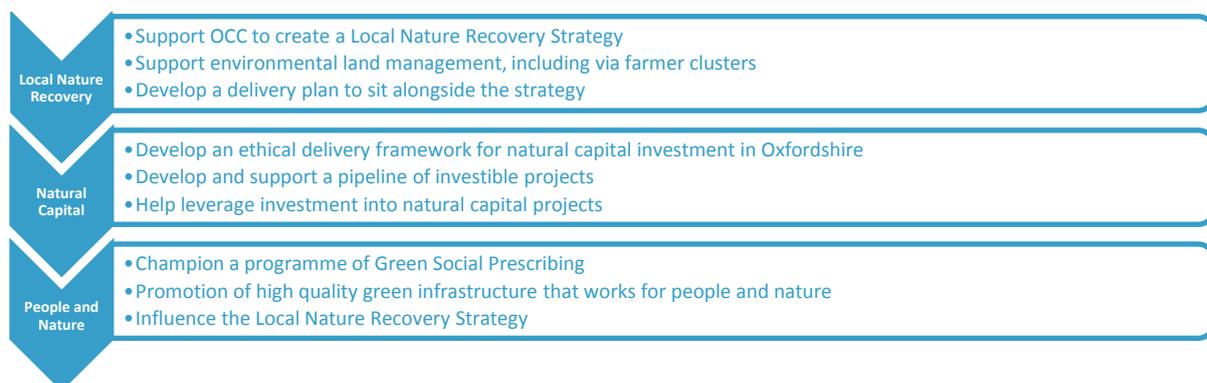


Figure 3 – Oxford Local Nature Partnership strategic approach

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Stakeholders

OLNP aims to be as inclusive as possible. The natural environment sector has previously been accused of being too inward looking and exclusive. By engaging broadly and working across society and the different sectors of the economy, we hope to

- engage more people in nature recovery
- ensure nature is considered earlier in decision-making
- ensure that it is prioritised within all work, from farming to housebuilding, from private enterprise to local communities.

The Board of OLNP is deliberately representative, to ensure those voices are heard in our decision-making, so that we can engage appropriately and design policy, strategy and advocacy in the most effective way. Board members are listed below:

Richard Benwell	Chair
Dr Prue Addison	Environmental NGO representative
Camilla Burrow	Environmental NGO representative
Michelle Leek	DEFRA family of organisations
Professor David Macdonald CBE	University representative
James Price	Farming representative
Councillor David Rouane	Local Authority representative
Ian Boll	Local Authority representative
Dr Rosie Rowe	Health representative
Simon Smith	National landscape body representative
	Business representative
	Landowner representative

Oxfordshire has a strong history of partnership working. Organisations like Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, the Earth Trust, and Wild Oxfordshire have been working closely with each other, local communities, farmers, landowners and local authorities for many years. OLNP has been mindful to complement rather than compete with existing relationships and not to duplicate effort but focus on where we can enhance existing efforts or fill any gaps.

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Figure 4 - Some of the key partners of Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership

Resources

As described above, local authority funding was provided to the Strategic Partnerships team to employ a Partnership Manager and part-cover the cost of communications and democratic services support colleagues. A total budget of £13,000 was made available to the LNP Manager to cover event costs and expenses for April 2022 – March 2024.

OLNP has hugely benefited from significant support and in-kind contributions from most of the organisations above. Meetings are chaired and attended voluntarily by wildlife NGO employees, council colleagues and statutory agency representatives. Many are committed to working in partnership and the LNP offers the ability to do so in a facilitated, strategic and proactive manner.

OLNP benefits from direct research support provided by University of Oxford. A number of researchers have been paid to compile evidence and conduct analysis that helps guide the LNP approach to issues such as nature finance and biodiversity net gain.

It is clear that financial support from the local authorities has been the key factor in the success of the LNP in 22/23, and this report shows that the same progress and impact is expected for 23/24. The report recommends that commitment is made to continuing to fund the LNP at the same level for the three following years, at least up until March 2027.

OLNP is working hard to diversify its funding. OLNP Manager is exploring a national approach to DEFRA and DHLUC to seek a level of central funding for all LNPs across

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England. The relationships developed with University of Oxford, especially following a meeting with the Vice Chancellor, is expected to continue and grow. Furthermore, it is hoped that our work on nature finance, such as with Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment, BBOWT’s habitat banking and the North-East Cotswold’s Farmer Cluster will see increasing flows of private capital into Oxfordshire to be targeted on nature recovery and natural capital enhancement according to the priorities of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

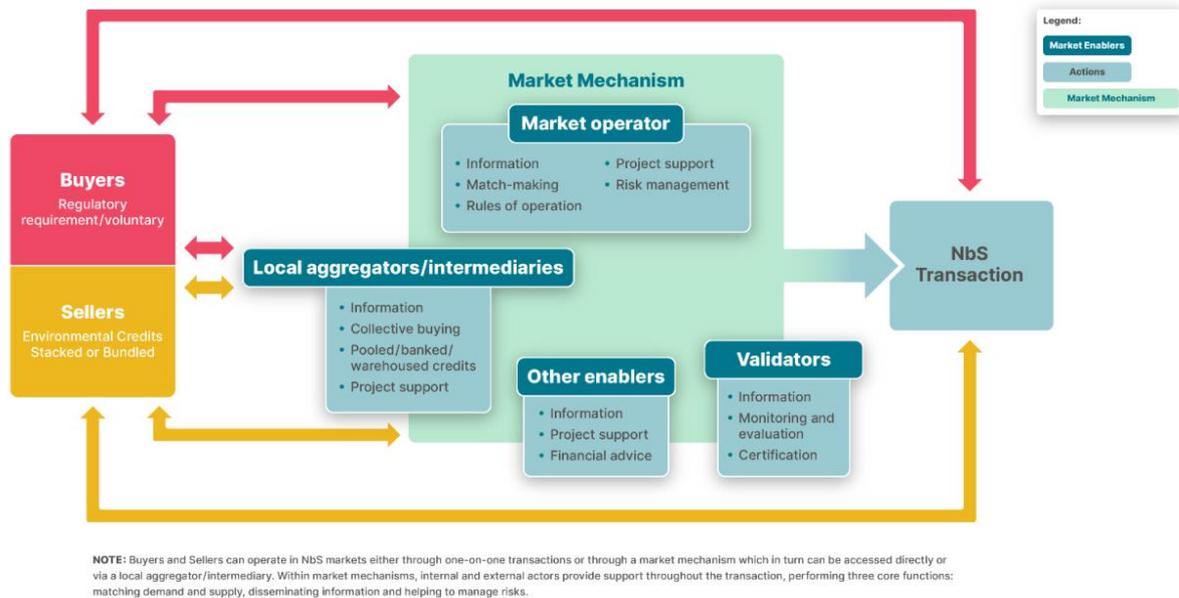


Figure 5 – diagram from the Draft Oxfordshire NCI strategy showing our proposed framework for the nature finance market

Progress to date

Much of the early part of this financial year was spent structuring the governance of the partnership and developing key relationship and programmes of work. However, OLNP has delivered a number of tangible outcomes. We have:

- convened a meeting of the key University of Oxford colleges to review strategic opportunities for delivering nature recovery via some of the biggest land-owners in the county
- supported development of the strategic county-wide approach to zero carbon and climate adaptation
- formed a policy subgroup to provide a single, positive voice in influencing strategic policy and local plans
- developed a draft Oxfordshire Natural Capital Investment Strategy
- co-led preparatory work for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- facilitated multi-county collaboration on Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- informed project criteria, project selection and governance for the landscape-scale nature recovery project Reconnecting the Bernwood, Otmoor and Ray
- supported governance of other large landscape-scale nature recovery projects (the North East Cotswolds Farmer Cluster and the Windrush Catchment Partnership)

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- created draft Natural Capital Accounts for Oxfordshire, showing in monetary terms the value of the environmental benefits society receives from nature.

Plans for 23/24

We anticipate one of the largest tasks for the coming year will be supporting OCC as the responsible authority to work with partners and stakeholders to create the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This key environmental strategy will hopefully be incorporated into the planning system to guide decisions on spatial prioritisation. OLNP will continue to host the steering group for this project. We will also lead on ensuring cross border alignment (ie with neighbouring counties), and enable engagement with key sectors like business and farming.

The Biodiversity Advisory Group anticipates changes to the draft nature recovery network map to make it more fit for the planning system and more representative of the areas of land which are nature rich, currently known as Conservation Target Areas.

The people and nature group hopes to expand its resource to include a part-time project officer. Outputs are expected to include a county-wide map of accessible greenspace, highlighting areas to target investment and action.

The Biodiversity Gain group expects to continue its work in supporting the LPAs in readiness for mandatory biodiversity net gain. We will support LPAs to require more than the mandatory 10% gain and establish a mechanism for aligning offsite delivery with the emergency Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The Natural Capital Investment group will create a natural capital investment strategy for Oxfordshire. We will develop a framework for biodiversity and carbon offsetting that supports a mix of habitats and land management practices, in alignment with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. We will support delivery of at least one demonstrator project, with an ambition to raise £500,000 to support development of a project pipeline.

Risk Register

Top three risks associated with continuing the fund the LNP

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Severity	Mitigation
LNPs are overtaken by another form of strategic nature partnership	Low	Medium	Low	None required
LNP loses goodwill of key partners	Low	High	Medium	Continued strong stakeholder engagement

Top three risks associated with NOT continuing to fund the LNP

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Severity
Central resource no longer employed leads to delayed progress of nature recovery	High	High	High

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Unsupported planning system struggles to implement environmental legislation	Low	High	Medium
Lack of coordinating resource for nature finance leads to reduced ability to leverage funds	Medium	High	Medium