

Oxon LNP Board Paper for Approval

Title:	Strategic Overview of the workstreams
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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.