

Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and Ray



Dear Matt,

I am writing to request a letter of support from the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership for a forthcoming application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund that the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) is preparing in partnership with others.¹ Details of the application including background work, outline timescales and scope of the proposed work are provided below for consideration by the LNP Board. An appendix lists key objectives and projects in development.

Background

The 300km² Bernwood Otmoor Ray (BOR) landscape lies between the large urban centres of Oxford, Bicester and Aylesbury. It contains nationally important but increasingly fragmented habitats such as ancient woodland, species-rich grassland and floodplain meadows. Rare species supported by these habitats include black and brown hairstreak butterflies, curlew, Bechstein's bats and great crested newts.

Bisected by HS2 to the North and sitting within the strategic Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership, the landscape has been under enormous pressure from major and incremental developments for housing, industry and transport infrastructure. A range of organisations are united in recognising the value and importance of this region and have highlighted its importance in response to numerous damaging developments. Helpfully, the BOR region will form an integral part of the forthcoming statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire County Councils. These strategies, together with the UK Environment Act (2021), and a range of local plans, policies and strategies, create an enabling framework for managing the UK's natural resources collaboratively and at scale.

Against this backdrop, BBOWT led a feasibility study funded by Buckinghamshire Council and consulted over 200 stakeholders to draw out the most immediate priorities and opportunities for nature and people in this region which could be initiated within five years. This process identified core priority concepts which together form a landscape-scale programme of work to ensure vitally important BOR sites and priority habitats are protected, restored, extended and connected up as part of the Nature Recovery Network for England. A vision for the BOR landscape was created with stakeholders and is summarised in project reports which can be found [here](#).

¹Current partners include Freshwater Habitat's Trust, Wild Oxfordshire, Butterfly Conservation, the MOD and Community Impact Bucks – we are in discussion with several others, including community groups and more are expected to join the scheme at later stages of development.

Application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund

BBOWT has decided to move forward with a £5million application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to take forward the key elements of the vision articulated by stakeholders and turn this vision into action. If successful, the programme would be delivered in two phases – a two year development phase followed by a five year delivery phase, commencing in later 2024. We are currently working up a series of projects alongside a diverse range of organisations and partners (see appendix for details). We are keen to work closely with both the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership and have had several discussions already about mutual benefits to that end. Given the range of organisations represented within both the Board and working groups of the LNP, we see huge potential for the RBOR programme to support LNP priorities for nature recovery within the BOR landscape.

Role for Oxfordshire LNP - request for letter of support

During the Development phase we would like to explore more formally how the LNP working groups can best be leveraged to advise and steer elements of the programme pertaining to their specific areas of expertise. We would like to invite a representative from the LNP to sit on an overall programme Steering Group to ensure the LNP has a key voice in the delivery of key programme outcomes. We would also like to periodically seek feedback and advice from relevant working groups as well as to communicate impact and learnings from the programme to your interested stakeholders.

In your letter of support we would ideally like you to set out how the RBOR initiative would deliver against key policy priorities supported by the LNP including the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Conservation Target Areas and Green Infrastructure strategies. We would also like the letter to set out how the programme would benefit from the local and technical expertise of members the LNP Board and working groups.

We are working to submit our round one application to NLHF by 29th May 2024. We would therefore like to request letters of support are received by the end of February 2024 to allow us time to consolidate the application and all supporting documents. If you would like any further information about the programme or to refine what could be included in the letter of support I'm more than happy to meet with you again.

With many thanks in advance for your consideration and best wishes,

Alison Offord

Landscape Recovery Lead, BBOWT

Appendix – RBOR Programme summary

Programme objectives

The overall aim of the Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and Ray initiative is to conserve important heritage and create a nature-rich “green lung” between Oxford, Bicester, Aylesbury and Milton Keynes.

Other key objectives include:

- To build trusting relationships with key stakeholders, landowners, land managers, businesses and communities to enable landscape and species recovery in BOR over the long-term
- To coordinate nature and landscape recovery action in BOR in line with local, regional and national policies for nature recovery by restoring and connecting up key habitats
- To explore how different communities interact with the BOR landscape and heritage and co-create projects to nurture, strengthen and repair their sense of connection with nature and their local environment.
- To enthuse and empower a diverse range of people who live, work or study in BOR to enjoy and contribute to nature recovery in this landscape.
- To enable communities to enhance their greenspaces for wildlife and reduce recreational impacts on wildlife

Themes and projects in development

Project Title	Core Aims	Target Audience	Partners
Theme 1 – Nature Recovery. Core aim: to restore and create habitat to tackle fragmentation, revive threatened species, and enhance rural communities.			
Ray Farmer Cluster	Supporting the new Ray Farmer cluster to deliver more and better quality wildlife habitats for priority BOR species alongside farming operations	Farmers and landowners	Ray Farmer Cluster; Future Nature
Reviving and Reconnecting Royal Forests	To support the new Bernwood SSSI designation and improve the connectivity of woodland habitats between Finemere and Grendon and Doddershall woods to benefit hairstreak butterflies and Bechstein's bats as key target species; To reduce the impacts of deer on key woodland habitats in BOR.	Farmers and landowners; woodland owners; contractors and gamekeepers; local food businesses	TBC Forestry England
Fantastic Floodplains	To improve the quality and extent of floodplain meadow habitat in BOR; To improve the breeding success of curlews and other wading birds in the Upper Ray area. To enhance the freshwater landscape between Otmoor and Upper Ray	Farmers and landowners; volunteers	Wild Oxfordshire, Floodplain Meadows Partnership, Freshwater Habitats Trust
Hedges and Edges	To improve the connectivity of key linear habitats such as hedges and road verges throughout the BOR landscape; To celebrate the 5 hairstreaks heritage of BOR and increase favourable habitat for hairstreaks	Farmers and landowners; volunteers; Parish and Town Councils; community groups; contractor	Butterfly Conservation; Wild Oxfordshire



	to build more sustainable populations over the longer-term.		
Enhancing Designated Sites	To support land managers to enhance the condition of reserves and designated sites; to create volunteer work parties to carry out practical improvement works on Local Wildlife Sites, MOD land and nature reserves	Farmers and landowners; volunteers	MOD; RSPB
Theme 2 – People and Nature Connections. Core aim is to engage the diverse communities living in the area with nature, strengthening social bonds and building skills.			
Citizen Science	To engage more people in wildlife recording; to train more specialist recorders and help fill data gaps; to celebrate the biodiversity value of a network of key sites in BOR.	Entry level ecologists (untrained but interested adults and families) Species specialists/ experienced recorders	TBC Earth Watch/TVERC
Military Heritage	To enhance management of grassland and woodland areas within Arncott site, create volunteer opportunities on-site, tell the story of the site and share its heritage with local people.	MOD command and personnel; communities local to the site; volunteers; specialist recorders and environmental groups	MOD
Urban Connections	To understand how local urban communities value their local greenspace, nature and wider landscape and promote accessible nature connection opportunities in the area.	Underserved communities of local towns of Bicester and Oxford, (e.g. Barton, Wood Farm farms)	TBC – Wild Bicester, Community Impact Bucks
Next Gen Nature	To empower and provide work experience for young people 13-17 and students; to provide opportunities and support for young people wanting to take practical steps for nature's recovery across the region; to provide traineeship and early career mentoring opportunities.	Young people living in region aged 13-17; students and people in early careers	TBC – Secondary Schools, Oxford University, Bucks University, Community Colleges
Community Activism: past, present, future	To understand how local activism has enabled changes in the landscape over years and support local communities to do more for biodiversity at a community scale.	Residents of local villages; visitors to BOR - this will include community groups, parish councils, community hubs such as schools, centres	TBC – Historical societies, Oxford University
Archaeology: ridges and furrows	To promote understanding of how the geology and archaeology of the area has influenced land use and communities in the region through the ages and looking forward.	Residents & visitors of region; volunteers; community/interest groups	TBC – museums/bucks Archaeology

Intergenerational Stories and Memories	To provide a story of the landscape through recent past - using people's memories - stories could include the shifting baselines of biodiversity through generations, how land was used and impact on people.	People living & working in the BOR area, community/interest groups, volunteers	TBC – Story Museum
Theme 3- Enhancing Greenspaces. Core aim is to enhance the management of existing greenspaces for the benefit of wildlife and people.			
Accessible and engaging spaces	To help visitors at key sites to better understand, interpret and appreciate the key heritage at the site and throughout the BOR landscape; to ensure more diverse values of communities accessing the sites are reflected in the visitor experience.	Visitors, residents local to sites and volunteers	Wild Oxfordshire
Making Space for People and Wildlife	To understand and act to reduce key recreational impacts at sites with high visitor pressure while ensuring a good visitor experience and welcome.	Visitors, residents local to sites and volunteers	BBOWT Reserves