

Oxon LNP Board Paper for Approval

Title:	Enhancing Inclusive Nature Recovery in Oxfordshire
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Summary:

This paper outlines a proposal for actions to explore what 'Inclusive Nature Recovery' means for Oxfordshire and OLNP and how to progress this agenda.

Actions for the Board:

- Review comment on proposed actions.
- Consider implications for your work, including where progress is already being made.
- Consider what support could be provided to progress this agenda.

Background

Access to the natural environment varies significantly between groups. Those that consistently miss out on opportunities to engage and connect with nature include people from lower income households, minoritised ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities or long-term conditions, older people, and other socially marginalised groups.¹ It is not a coincidence that these groups, and particularly individuals within them who experience intersectionality, are most likely to be affected by the climate and nature crisis.

Whilst flourishing natural environments underpin everyone's health, it is unsurprising that unequal access to greenspace is associated with unequal health outcomes in the UK. The impact of health inequality on nature is devastating: our National Health Service, which invests heavily in treating preventable disease, is responsible for 4% of the total carbon emissions in England.² Conversely, 'healthy' human behaviours enabled by a healthy environment, such as active travel and diets low in processed foods, tend to have positive feedback effects on nature. Furthermore, higher levels of nature connection are associated with both mental wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour³.

¹ [Improving Access to Greenspace PHE 2020; Mapping Access to Nature in England WCL 2023](#)

² <https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs/publication/delivering-a-net-zero-national-health-service/>

³ [Natural England Evidence Information Note EIN068](#)

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Unequal access to nature is also reflected in significant lack of diversity in the environment sector. For example, just 4.81% of UK environment professionals identify as Black, Asian, or from other minority ethnic groups⁴. It is now generally recognised that lack of diversity, and the range of perspectives that this brings, is simply bad for business. Indeed, it is arguable that long-term sustainability of nature recovery can only be realised through more diverse engagement and participation.⁵

This means that rather than viewing socioeconomic considerations as ‘add-ons’ to or ‘co-benefits’ of nature recovery, a more integrated and equity-informed approach is likely to offer much greater long-term returns for both people and nature. We already know from research conducted by the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery that there is a strong association between higher levels of deprivation and low access to greenspace within Oxfordshire neighbourhoods. Whilst availability and distribution of greenspace is key, we also need to understand and address more fundamental barriers to nature connection – such as perceptions of ownership and belonging, access to environmental education and careers, representation in policy and strategy discussions, or even the way that we conceptualise and talk about ‘nature recovery’ (e.g. to balance the science-led ecocentrism of the global north with people-centred conservation that is more commonplace in other cultures).⁶

There are multiple examples of successful organisations across the UK whose main aim is to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the conservation and outdoors sectors⁷. EDI is increasingly a concern of larger environmental organisations and partnerships,⁸ including Gloucestershire LNP, which is collaborating with a local charity to deliver a comprehensive EDI learning and development programme.⁹ In Oxfordshire, there are excellent examples of cross sectoral relationships where people from all backgrounds are working with nature, to restore the environment, their relationship with it, and their own health.

Enhancing these social value benefits of nature recovery is clearly recognised in OLNP’s mission, *‘to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate, and the priority it’s given, helping to make Oxfordshire a county where people and nature thrive.’* However, it is fair to say that although the issue of inclusion is on most people’s radar, we don’t yet have good collective insight into the range of issues in

⁴ [Racial diversity in environment professions - Research | SOS-UK](#)

⁵ [Diversity and inclusivity are critical for tackling the nature and climate crises say The Wildlife Trusts | The Wildlife Trusts](#)

⁶ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/oryx/article/global-conservation-movement-is-divided-but-not-diverse-reflections-on-2020/1BE6D50C0B18DE1BF0898C9FF212104D>

⁷ For example: [All the Elements](#), [Black Environment Network](#), [Black Girls Hike](#)

⁸ [Ethnic Diversity Route Map Resources \(wcl.org.uk\)](#)

⁹ [Barnwood Trust Access to Nature programme](#)

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Oxfordshire, including what types of ‘gatekeeping’ influence lack of diversity in our local environment sector (both professionals and volunteers).

Whilst efforts are being made to ensure that opportunities to input into the Local Nature Recovery Strategy are accessible, as a spatial strategy, the LNRS is not broad enough in scope to consider a range of social issues around access and engagement. Similarly, whilst OLNP’s workstream is aiming to scale up initiatives like green social prescribing that support the most vulnerable, this is not sufficient to meet wider inclusivity goals.

We are therefore proposing some steps to kickstart a collective conversation about what is needed for inclusive nature recovery in Oxfordshire. The aim is not necessarily for this to lead to a defined strategy or action plan (although this might emerge as a desirable step), but to enhance collective thinking in a way that informs actions across the partnership. This could include changes to project planning or delivery, influencing how we use the LNRS as a communication tool, or addressing organisational learning and development needs. We are also aware that various partners are planning or considering other nature recovery public engagement approaches. We hope that initial activities led by OLNP will complement or help to inform these.

Proposed steps to explore inclusive nature recovery approaches in Oxfordshire

1) Introductory OLNP board session

- 13th March 2024
- Aim: to briefly introduce the concept of ‘inclusive nature recovery’ and plans for future work in this space.
- The ask of board members is to comment on planned activities and reflect on what their respective organisations are already doing or how they might be involved.

2) Workshop on inclusive access to greenspace and nature recovery in Oxfordshire (‘Nature Recovery for All’)

- May/June 2024
- Aim: to invite a range of stakeholders to participate in deliberative conversations relating to access and inclusion in nature-based activities in Oxfordshire and build a shared vision for the most impactful solutions.
- This will be coordinated by OLNP and Oxfordshire Community Action Groups, with input from organisations representing groups who are often overlooked in nature recovery conversations.

3) Informal insights gathering with community groups

- April/May 2024
- Aim: to use informal conversations with community groups/representatives to capture a wider range of perspectives, based on some key questions.

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These will be held opportunistically with existing contacts by the OLNP health and nature lead, rather than part of a formal consultation/research.

4) Board discussion on Inclusive Nature Recovery

- Proposed for 12th June 2024 as longer session, e.g. 30 mins
- Aim: to report on key findings and recommendations from the inclusive nature recovery event and related conversations with groups in community settings.
- Board members will be invited to reflect on findings and identify actions that their organisation or sector could take forward, including those that can be delivered collaboratively.
- One possible outcome at this stage is for this discussion to feed into a framework for inclusive nature recovery, with actions that individual organisations can sign up to or joint initiatives to take forward within the OLNP health and nature workstream.