

Biodiversity and Planning in Oxfordshire



Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire



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WHO IS THIS GUIDANCE FOR?

This guidance should be helpful if you are:

- a planning officer in either policy or development management;
- writing a Neighbourhood Plan;
- going to be submitting a planning application;
- wanting to know more about the wildlife of Oxfordshire and its conservation.

There are 2 other documents in this series:

- [Community & Parish Guide to Biodiversity](#)
- [Guide to Biodiversity Action Plan & Oxfordshire's Conservation Target Area approach](#)

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Designed by www.lonelycottage.co.uk

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Back cover images: hazel dormouse by Terry Longley/seeing.org.uk; greater butterfly orchid by Bruce Shortland; curlew by Jon Hawkins/Surrey Hills Photography.

Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Oxfordshire
(Nick Turner)



1a About this guidance

Protecting and enhancing Oxfordshire's biodiversity

Oxfordshire supports a diversity of wildlife habitats and species, ranging from the chalk grasslands and beechwoods in the Chilterns, through pockets of rare fen, to the scarce flood meadows along the Thames. However, less than 10,000 hectares (ha) of Oxfordshire retains any special value for wildlife; around 4% of the total land area. Oxfordshire is also home to around 80 protected species and more than 200 species recognised as being a priority for conservation.

The [Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust \(BBOWT\)](#), [Oxfordshire County Council](#) and the [Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre \(TVERC\)](#) have worked in partnership to produce this guidance document, to help those involved in planning in Oxfordshire ensure that development within the county protects and enhances this valuable local biodiversity.

Some of the important sites and species in Oxfordshire are protected by legislation, others by planning policy. National and local planning policy identifies the need to protect existing biodiversity and deliver enhancements to achieve a net gain in biodiversity. Here we bring together legislation and planning policy, alongside information on the biodiversity of Oxfordshire, to help identify when and where biodiversity will need to be protected by the planning system, as well as how to identify opportunities to deliver biodiversity enhancements in the most effective way.



Amethyst deceiver
(Terry Longley/seeing.org.uk)



Otter (Helen Walsh)



Meadow pipit
(Mike Taylor/seeing.org.uk)

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDANCE

This guidance has been arranged to align with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sections on biodiversity. This guidance has sections dealing with various biodiversity features which should be protected and enhanced through the planning system. In general Sections 2 and 3 outline those features which should be protected, and Section 4 outlines opportunities to deliver biodiversity enhancements.

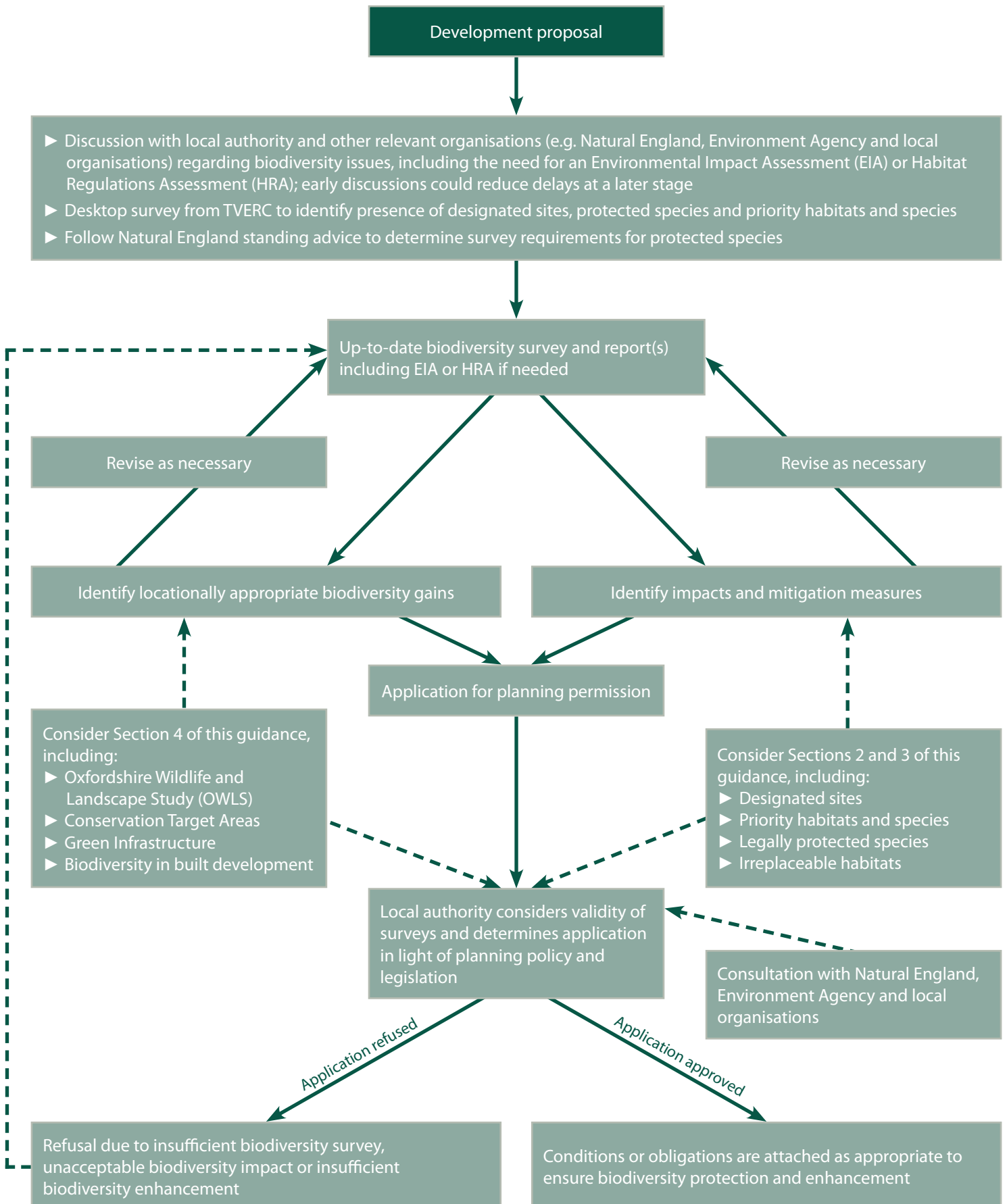
A page of information gives an overview of each feature and locally specific information. The column on the right hand side of the page provides a summary of relevant legislation or planning policy. Boxes on 'Further Information' provide sources of more detailed information and guidance. In the bottom right hand corner you will find 'Key Organisations' who you might wish to contact in relation to a particular issue.

For each biodiversity feature, a map identifies the distribution of that feature in Oxfordshire. It should be noted that these maps (produced by TVERC) are intended to provide a strategic overview and only show the situation at time of publication. More detailed and updated site-specific information is available directly from TVERC or, for those working in local authorities, much of this information will be available on GIS layers within your authority.

An online version is provided on the [Oxfordshire County Council website](#), which will be updated as regularly as possible to keep up-to-date with changes in legislation and policy. Legislation and policy change frequently. Please contact the Ecologist Planner at Oxfordshire County Council to check whether there have been any major changes since publication. The online version provides links to the documents, websites and key legislation highlighted.

1b Biodiversity in the planning process

This flow diagram illustrates the importance of taking biodiversity into consideration at all stages of the planning application process, highlighting the key features to take into account.



1c Information requirements

The importance of up-to-date information and assessment

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that development plan policies and planning decisions are based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas, including the relevant biodiversity resources of the area (see right).

In submitting a planning application, the standard planning application form requires that applicants identify any protected or priority species, designated sites, important habitats, or other biodiversity features on, or adjacent to, the application site. This guidance document gives an overview of these features in Oxfordshire; more detailed site level information is available from TVERC. TVERC provide necessary local data that is not available from national data searches.

Where it is likely that a proposal will impact on any of these features, up-to-date biodiversity information will need to be provided with a planning application. The type of assessment needed will vary from a biodiversity survey and report to Environmental Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment if a European Site is involved. Adequate surveys and reports must be provided. Surveys must be undertaken to recognised standards (e.g. CIEEM methodology, at the correct time of year). For detailed advice on how to undertake these, see Further Information.

It is not within the scope of this guidance to explain how or when to undertake such assessments, there is other national and regional guidance available on this – see the 'Further Information' box. It is important to bear in mind that the survey work needed to inform such assessments will be seasonally restricted.

Discussion of biodiversity survey needs at pre-application stage can help reduce the likelihood of delays resulting from requirements for survey being identified at a late stage. Without this information it is unlikely that an application will be validated.

All ecological reports should include the following to demonstrate how the mitigation hierarchy outlined in paragraph 118 of the NPPF has been applied:

- a) What biodiversity is present
- b) How biodiversity impacts can be avoided
- c) If it is not possible to avoid impacts, how they can be mitigated
- d) If there is no way of mitigating impacts, compensation measures should be identified
- e) The report should demonstrate how the application can result in an overall enhancement in biodiversity

Avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures must be clearly stated to enable report recommendations to be conditioned and enforced.

Dry Sandford Pit Nature Reserve, Oxfordshire
(Jim Asher)



PLANNING POLICY

The National Planning Policy Framework states that:

'165. Planning policies and decisions should be based on up-to date information about the natural environment and other characteristics of the area ... Working with Local Nature Partnerships where appropriate, this should include an assessment of existing and potential components of ecological networks ...

'121. Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that: ... – adequate site investigation information, prepared by a competent person, is present'

Check the relevant District Council's Local Plan for local policy.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- [ALGE Biodiversity Toolkit](#)
- [Ecological Impact Assessment Guidelines \(CIEEM\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal \(CIEEM\)](#)
- [The Habitats Regulations Assessment Handbook](#)
- [The British Standard on Biodiversity: 'Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development' \(BS 42020:2013\)](#)
- [Working with Wildlife Guidance for the Construction Industry, CIRIA](#)
- [Natural England Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland](#)
- [Natural England Standing Advice on Protected Species](#)