

# Kingfisher Quest

LOWER  
WINDRUSH  
VALLEY  
PROJECT



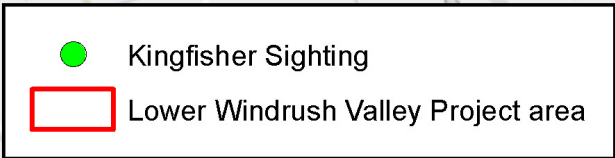
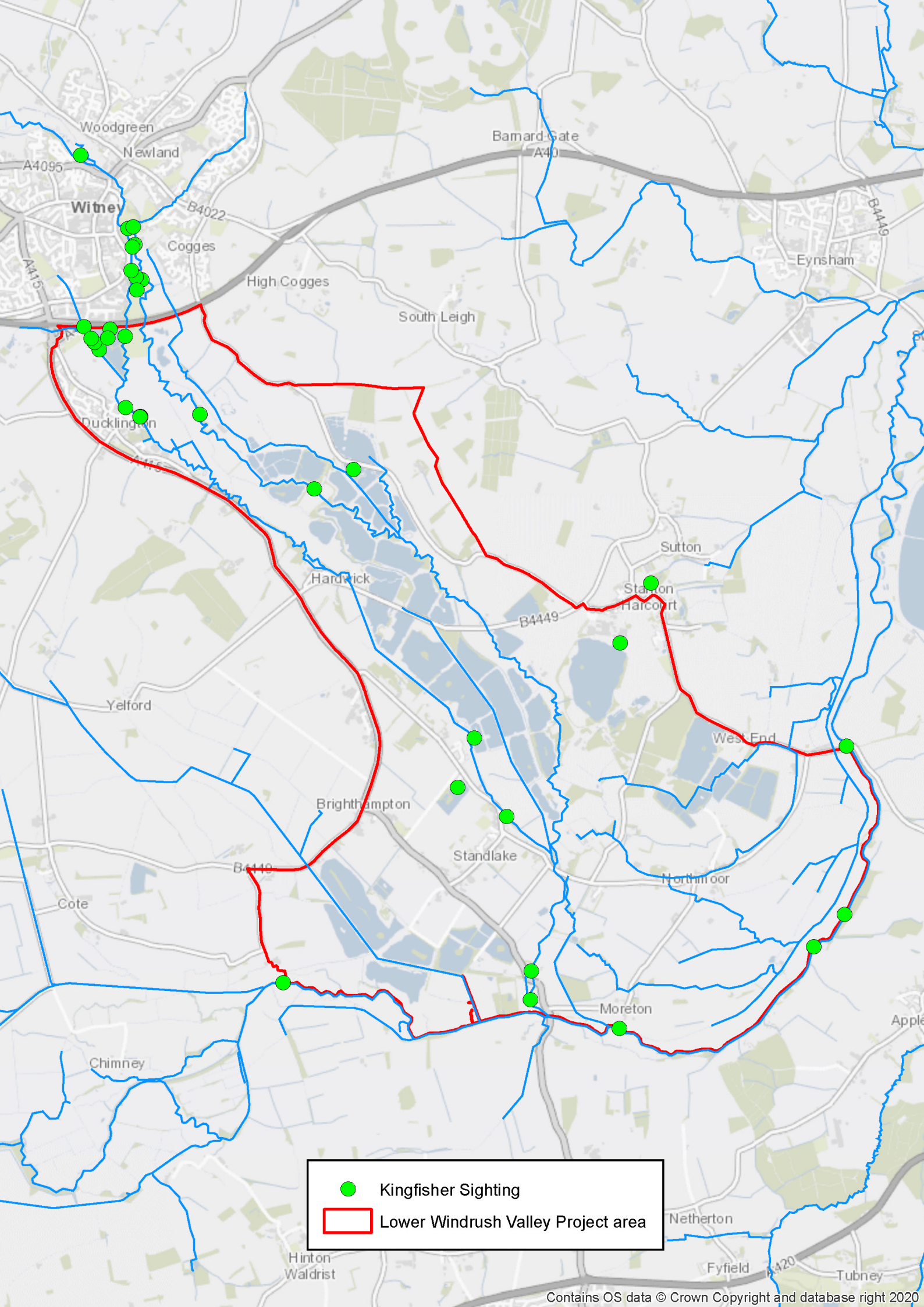
## Project Summary

On 1st June 2020, the Lower Windrush Valley Project (LWVP) launched Kingfisher Quest, a project aiming to:

- increase our understanding of Kingfishers in Lower Windrush Valley
- encourage the public to engage with their local water environments and promote interest in local wildlife
- identify locations for potential Kingfisher habitat enhancements

During June, July and August we asked the public to notify us if they saw a Kingfisher in the local area, including the date and location of any sightings.

Kingfishers are small, distinctive birds, usually found near slow-moving, shallow rivers or streams. Their diet mostly consists of fish but they will also eat aquatic insects, freshwater shrimps and tadpoles. They are often seen hunting from a perch overlooking the water and will dive to catch their prey.



# The results

During the survey, there were 39 reported sightings and a total of 46 birds as two or three were sometimes spotted together. These results do not indicate the presence of 46 individual Kingfishers within the Lower Windrush Valley as it's likely the same birds will have been recorded on multiple occasions. Territory is extremely important for Kingfishers and typically will cover 1-5km of river, including any nearby waterbodies with good fishing potential. Looking at the distribution of sightings, we can assume that there are several pairs within the Lower Windrush Valley.

Nearly 50% of the reported sightings were in the relatively small area between and including Langel Common and Witney Lake and Country Park. This is likely to be a reflection of the well-used footpaths in this area as well as the presence of Kingfishers. The remainder of sightings were dispersed across the project area, mostly along the River Windrush and River Thames.

Data held by the LWVP and the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre show that historically Kingfishers have been recorded across the valley. Records from the LWVP bird hides at Standlake Common and Rushy Common nature reserves show that Kingfishers are frequent visitors to both sites, however the hides were closed throughout the survey period due to the Coronavirus pandemic so there were no sightings recorded at these sites.



## Kingfishers and water quality in the Lower Windrush Valley

[Previous studies](#) have indicated that water quality in the gravel pit lakes and ponds in the Lower Windrush Valley is generally high. However, as with much of lowland England, the majority of rivers and streams in the area suffer with nutrient pollution and there is growing concern about poor water quality in the River Windrush and the impacts on people and wildlife.

We know from this project that there are Kingfishers present across the Lower Windrush Valley despite these reported issues. This may be in part due to their ability to take advantage of food sources in nearby lakes and ponds and therefore not rely entirely on the rivers and streams.

During the survey period we received several communications suggesting that Kingfishers have been seen less frequently in the Lower Windrush Valley in recent years. Our survey does not enable us to make conclusions on this however there is anecdotal evidence of a decline in numbers which is likely due to pollution and loss of suitable habitat.

# Next steps

- Kingfisher records will be shared with the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre
- A webinar sharing the results and celebrating Kingfishers with a guest presentation 'A season with Kingfishers'
- Seek opportunities for Kingfisher habitat enhancements such as nesting banks and feeding perches



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the 28 members of the public who sent in details of their sightings and the many more who took part but weren't lucky enough to see a Kingfisher during the survey period.

LWVP would also like to thank Oxfordshire County Council's Councillor Priority Fund which provided funding for the project.

## The Lower Windrush Valley Project

The Lower Windrush Valley incorporates the floodplain of the River Windrush from the town of Witney to its confluence with the River Thames at Newbridge. The area has been extensively modified by mineral extraction and there are now over 60 gravel pit lakes in the valley.

The Lower Windrush Valley Project was established by Oxfordshire County Council in 2001. We work closely with mineral operators, landowners and the local community to implement initiatives that aim to strengthen the landscape, protect and enhance biodiversity and improve public access in the valley.

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/lowerwindrushvalleyproject](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/lowerwindrushvalleyproject)

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