

Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Plan Minerals and Waste Core Strategy

Background Paper revised April 2012

Environmental and Community Protection and Planning for Mineral Working

Note: This background paper was largely prepared prior to publication of the government's National Planning Policy Framework on 27 March 2012 and it has only been partially updated to reflect this new national policy document.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This background paper is one of a series which together form part of the evidence base for the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy. The Core Strategy is part of the Minerals and Waste Plan that will set out a strategy and policies for where minerals should be worked and where waste should be managed in Oxfordshire over the period to 2030. More information about the plan can be found on the Council's website: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk
- 1.2 The background papers have been used to identify baseline data and inform the preparation of policies for inclusion in the Core Strategy. The papers are intended to present evidence as it stands at this stage. They build on work carried out at the previous preferred options stage, incorporating feedback from that consultation and addressing areas that require further discussion. They also provide an opportunity for stakeholders to check the information to ensure the Council's knowledge and understanding is up to date and robust.
- 1.3 The background papers are 'living draft' documents and may continue to be revised throughout the process of preparing the Core Strategy.
- 1.4 This paper is part of the evidence base for the County Council's Minerals and Waste Core Strategy proposed submission document, which includes policies C3 on environmental and amenity protection and C5 on biodiversity and geodiversity.

2 Executive summary

2.1 This topic paper provides a description of the main sites in Oxfordshire which are designated for their environmental or landscape importance. Section 3 identifies relevant legislation and planning policy on the designation of environmental sites and on protection of the environment and of communities from the impacts of mineral working and of waste management practices. Section 4 of the paper describes the areas which have been designated for their environmental or landscape importance, from those identified at international level to locally designated areas. Section 5 of the paper describes the potential impacts of mineral working and waste management facilities on the natural environment and on the amenity of people living near quarries and discusses the issue of designating buffer zones around quarries to minimise these impacts on local communities. Section 6 identifies issues which have informed the preparation of policies for inclusion in the Mineral and Waste Development Framework Core Strategy.

3 Legislation and Policy

3.1 This section identifies legislation and planning policy which is relevant to the designation of areas for their environmental or landscape importance and the protection of those areas and local communities from minerals and waste development.

3.2 International Legislation

3.2.1 The EC Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna provides for the strict protection of habitats and species identified in the annexes of the Directive. The Directive is transposed into UK law by the Conservation & Habitat Regulations 2010. It includes protection of a network of Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Ramsar Sites which together make up the Natura 2000 network. The European Water Framework Directive seeks to improve protection of surface waters and ground waters and to achieve good ecological status for all waters.

3.3 National Legislation

3.3.1 Sites of Special Scientific Interest are designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). They provide a representative sample of some of the best sites for wildlife and geological interest in the country and are deemed by Natural England to be worthy of preservation. In 1989, the Nature Conservancy Council identified the objective of the SSSIs "to form a national network of areas representing in total those parts of Great Britain in which the features of nature, and especially those of greatest value to wildlife conservation, are most highly concentrated or of highest

quality."... "each site represents a significant fragment of the much-depleted resource of wild nature now remaining in this country".

- 3.3.2 National Nature Reserves are also designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) by Natural England. National Nature Reserves protect sensitive biodiversity or geological features, provide sites for ecological research and offer opportunities for people to experience the natural environment.
- 3.3.3 The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) provides varying levels of protection to protected species: Oxfordshire species receiving protection under this act include the water vole, common lizard, grass snake, slow worm and roman snail.
- 3.3.4 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) were originally designated under the provisions of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, in order to secure their permanent protection against development that would damage their special qualities to conserve a number of the finest landscapes in England for the nation's benefit. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) now empowers Natural England to designate sites as AONB and provides for an increased level of protection for SSSIs and for AONB management by introducing a statutory duty on local authorities and Conservation Boards to produce an AONB management plan.
- 3.3.5 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) lists habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (1994) describes the UK's biodiversity resources and sets out a plan for their protection. This is the UK's response to the Convention of Biological Diversity to which the UK signed up in 1992, committing to a halt in the decline of biodiversity by 2010. Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species correspond to the lists in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act. The Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats are listed at Appendix 1.
- 3.3.6 Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 against killing, injury or taking.
- 3.3.7 River Basin Management Plans transpose the requirements of the European Water Framework Directive into national plans which have been approved by the Secretary of State for [Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#).
- 3.4 National Planning Policy
 - 3.4.1 There are four national planning policy statements which are particularly relevant to areas designated for their environmental importance and for protection of the environment and of communities from minerals and waste development: PPS7 Sustainable

Development in Rural Areas, 2004; PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, 2005; MPS1 Planning and Minerals, 2006; and MPS2 Controlling and Mitigating the Environmental Effects of Mineral Working in England, 2005.

- 3.4.2 MPS 1¹ notes in paragraph 9 that the Government's objectives for minerals planning reflect the requirement to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development through protection of internationally and nationally designated areas of landscape value and nature conservation importance from minerals development.
- 3.4.3 MPS 1 states that Minerals Planning Authorities should prepare their plans in accordance with the policy:
'do not permit major mineral developments in ... Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and World Heritage Sites except in exceptional circumstances. Because of the serious impact that major mineral developments may have on these areas of natural beauty, and taking account of the recreational opportunities that they provide, applications for these developments should be subject to the most rigorous examination'
and paragraph 17 states that policies should:
'seek to protect and enhance the character of surrounding rural and urban areas by careful planning and design of any proposals for minerals development'.
- 3.4.4 Paragraph 21 of PPS 7² states that:
'Nationally designated areas comprising.... Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have been confirmed by the Government as having the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should therefore be given great weight in planning policies and development control decisions in these areas.'
- 3.4.5 PPS 7 also highlights the importance of best and most versatile agricultural land:
'The presence of best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification), should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations (e.g. biodiversity; the quality and character of the landscape; its amenity value or heritage interest; accessibility to infrastructure, workforce and markets; maintaining viable communities; and the protection of natural resources, including soil quality) when determining planning applications. Where significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable,

¹ ODPM (2006) Minerals Policy Statement 1: Planning & Minerals (2006)

² ODPM (2004) Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land (grades 3b, 4 and 5) in preference to that of a higher quality, except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations.'

- 3.4.6 A key reason for preparing this topic paper is to meet a requirement of PPS 9³, the first key principle of which is that:
'Development plan policies should be based upon up-to date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas. These characteristics should include the relevant biodiversity and geological resources of the area. In reviewing environmental characteristics local authorities should assess the potential to sustain and enhance those resources.'
- 3.4.7 Other key principles of PPS 9 are that:
'Plan policies and planning decisions should aim to maintain and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests' and that 'plan policies should promote opportunities for the incorporation of beneficial biodiversity and geological features within the design of the development.'
- 3.4.8 PPS 9 notes that:
'ancient woodland is a valuable biodiversity resource both for its diversity of species and for its longevity as woodland. Once lost it cannot be recreated. Local Planning Authorities should 'not grant planning permission for any development that would result in its loss or deterioration unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location outweigh the loss of the woodland habitat.'
- 3.4.9 There is no legal protection for local sites designated for their environmental importance, although PPS 9 notes that:
'Sites of regional and local biodiversity and geological interest, which include Regionally Important Geological Sites, Local Nature Reserves and Local Sites, have a fundamental role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets; contributing to the quality of life and the well being of the community; and in supporting research and education' and that 'criteria-based policies should be established in local development documents against which proposals for any development on, or affecting, such sites will be judged. These policies should be distinguished from those applied to nationally important sites.'
- 3.4.10 Paragraph 4 of MPS 2⁴ states that:
'MPAs should incorporate the objectives of sustainable development in minerals planning'.

³ ODPM (2005) Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

⁴ ODPM (2005) Minerals Policy Statement 2: Controlling and Mitigating the Environmental Effects of Mineral Extraction in England

These objectives recognise the potential conflict between the exploitation of resources and environmental aims. In order to reconcile such conflicts, MPAs should aim to ensure that the environmental impacts caused by mineral operations and the transport of minerals are kept to an acceptable minimum.

3.4.11 Para 11 of MPS 2 also states that:

‘Development plan policies and proposals for minerals extraction and associated development should take into account the impacts of mineral working, such as visual intrusion, dewatering, water pollution, noise, dust and fine particulates, blasting and traffic’

3.4.12 Para 12 of MPS 2 encourages consideration of individual and cumulative impacts and the surrounding environmental context:

‘Policies and proposals should take into account the level of existing activity and impacts, the duration and nature of proposals for new or further working, and the extent of impacts which a particular site, locality, community, environment or wider area of mineral working can reasonably be expected to tolerate over a particular or proposed period. With respect to an individual site, the effect of all relevant impacts (i.e. of noise, dust, traffic, on landscape etc) should be considered objectively. Impacts that are acceptable individually should not be regarded as unacceptable in combination without a proper assessment. MPAs should also have regard where relevant to cumulative impacts of simultaneous and/or successive working of a number of sites in a wider area of commercially-viable deposits. These may affect communities and localities over an extended period, depending on the nature, age and size of the site(s).’

3.4.13 Para 2B.2 of Appendix 2B to MPS 2⁵ considers the impacts of noise from mineral working and states that:

‘While the location of mineral extraction is clearly dictated by the location of the mineral resource, it may be possible to avoid some impacts on noise-sensitive properties without undue effect on the amount of mineral available for extraction. Incorporation of buffer zones into the design of the site and its environs can help to mitigate noise emissions and is particularly useful in resisting the encroachment of new development towards mineral operations.’

3.4.14 The government’s National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27 March 2012 and has replaced MPS 1, MPS 2, PPS 7 and PPS 9 with immediate effect. The NPPF states that ‘in preparing plans to meet development needs, the aim should be to minimise pollution and other adverse effects on the local and natural environment.’ Planning policies should ‘set out environmental criteria to ensure that mineral operations do not have unacceptable adverse

⁵ ODPM (2005) Minerals Policy Statement 2: Appendix 2B: Examples of Good Practice in Noise Reduction

impacts on the natural and historic environment or human health.’
The government’s Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework, published alongside the NPPF, provides further guidance on noise and dust emissions.

3.5 Regional Planning Policy

3.5.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy, the South East Plan⁶, adopted in May 2009 is part of the statutory development plan for Oxfordshire. The Coalition Government has stated its intention to revoke all regional strategies, and this is provided for in the Localism Act 2011.

3.5.2 Policy C3 of the South East Plan states that:
‘High priority will be given to conservation and enhancement of natural beauty in the region’s Areas of Outstanding Natural beauty and planning decisions should have regards to their setting.’

3.5.3 Policy C4 refers to protection of the wider countryside, not just the designated landscapes:

‘Outside nationally designated landscapes, positive and high quality management of the region’s open countryside will be encouraged and supported by local authorities and other organisations, agencies, land managers, the private sector and local communities, through a combination of planning policies, grant aid and other measures.’

3.5.4 Policy C6 of the South East Plan encourages local authorities to encourage access to the countryside by maintaining, enhancing and promoting the Public Rights of Way system and permissive and longer distance routes, to facilitate access within, to and from the countryside for visitors and all members of the local community.

3.5.5 Policy C7 states that riparian authorities should work together to maintain and enhance the landscapes and waterscapes and nature conservation resources of the River Thames Corridor.

3.5.6 Policy NRM 5 of the South East Plan reflects the principles in PPS 9. It states that local planning authorities should avoid damage to nationally important sites of scientific interest and to county wildlife sites and locally important wildlife sites.

3.5.7 Policy NRM 7 of the South East Plan states that:
‘In the development and implementation of local development documents and other strategies, local authorities and other bodies will support the implementation of the Regional Forestry and Woodland Framework, ensuring the value and character of the region’s woodland are protected and enhanced.’

⁶ Government Office for the South East (2009) The South East Plan: Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East of England

- 3.5.8 Paragraph 10.64 of the South East Plan states that:
'Mineral working and processing can have an adverse impact on the environment and local amenity... Mineral development frameworks should include policies to manage specific impacts such as noise and dust and encourage good site management and effective restoration.'
- 3.6 Local Policy
- 3.6.1 Saved Policy M2 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016⁷ states that the County Council will identify appropriate locations for sand and gravel working and will take into account features of landscape importance such as areas and sites of nature conservation importance, especially Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and best and most versatile agricultural land.
- 3.6.2 Oxfordshire 2030 is the sustainable community strategy for Oxfordshire, produced and agreed by the Oxfordshire Partnership, which includes the districts of South Oxfordshire, Cherwell, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire and Oxford. A priority of the plan is to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the county.
- 3.6.3 A joint publication by Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) 'Biodiversity and Planning in Oxfordshire' provides information on Oxfordshire's biodiversity and on relevant policy and guidance on further more detailed sources of information which are available.
- 3.6.4 Three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Oxfordshire are partly within Oxfordshire; the Cotswolds, Chilterns and North Wessex Downs. Each Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is managed by a conservation board, which produces its own management plan; these are statutory plans and include reference to the conservation and enhancement of landscape and biodiversity as a component of natural beauty. The Chilterns and Cotswolds AONB management plans have been endorsed by Oxfordshire County Council as supplementary guidance for planning purposes.
- 3.6.5 A broad aim of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan⁸ is to 'ensure that the policies within local minerals and waste development frameworks complement the objectives of AONB designation.'
- 3.6.6 Policy NRK1 of the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan⁹ states that the Management Board is opposed to the development of quarries

⁷ Oxfordshire County Council (2005) Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016

⁸ Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2008-2013

⁹ Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2008-2013

predominantly for the winning of crushed limestone (aggregates) within or which affect the setting of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- 3.6.7 The Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan is delivered through the Conservation Target Areas (CTA) approach¹⁰. The 36 CTAs in Oxfordshire are the most important areas for wildlife where targeted conservation action will have the maximum benefit. Their aim is to restore biodiversity at a landscape-scale through the maintenance, restoration and creation of BAP priority habitats (identified under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and protected by PPS9).
- 3.6.8 CTAs provide an important basis on which to meet the requirement in PPS 9 for the identification of areas of opportunity in Local Development Frameworks. There are maps, statements and targets for each CTAs. Active partnerships working in each CTA are coordinated by ONCF's Biodiversity Project Manager and work towards meeting the targets. Restoration and creation targets for specific CTAs are collated across the county and then feed into the delivery of the England Biodiversity Strategy. Figure 1 shows the location of BAP priority habitats in the county.

¹⁰ <http://www.oncf.org.uk/biodiversity/cta.html>

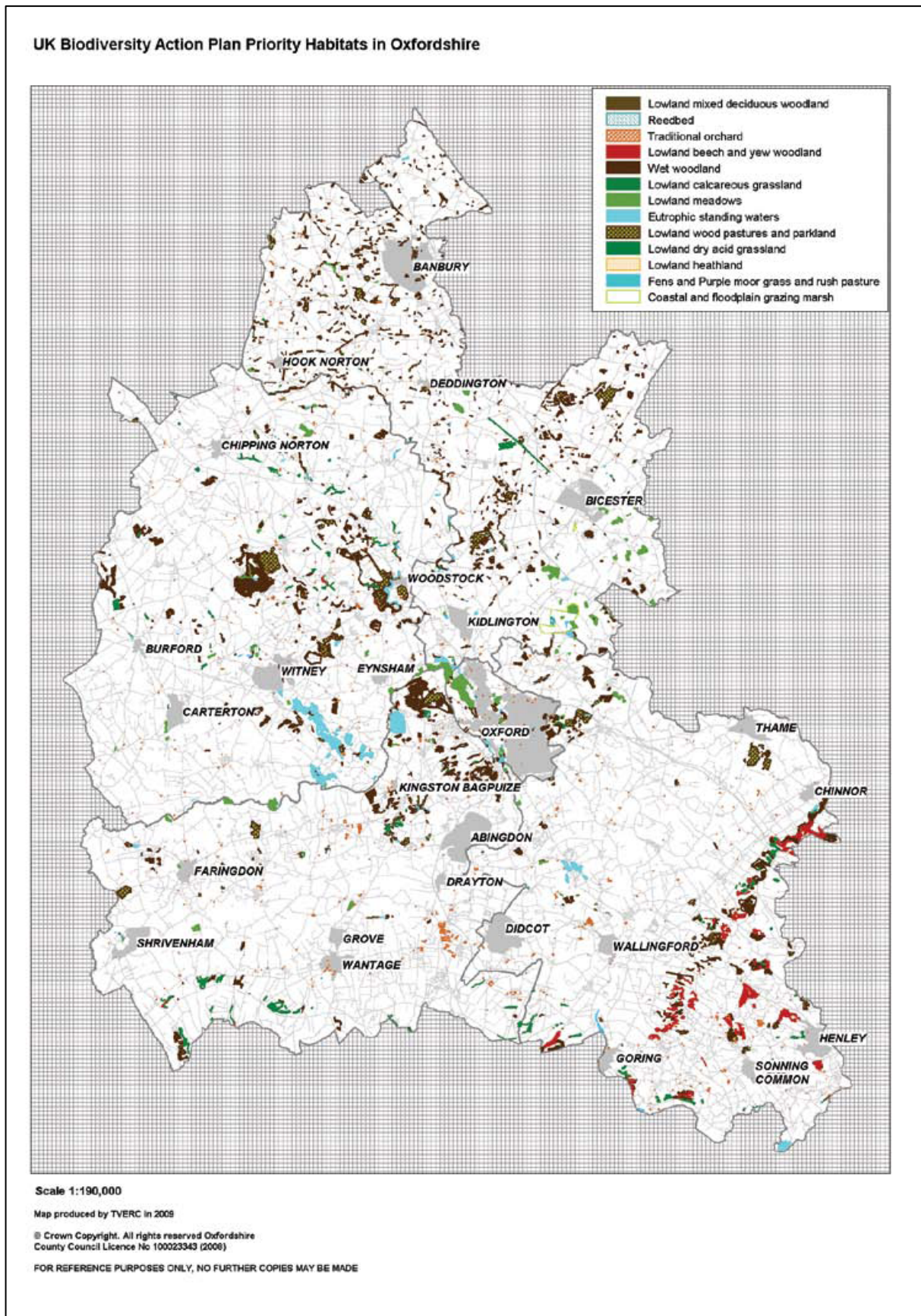


Figure 1: UK BAP habitats in Oxfordshire

4 Sites in Oxfordshire designated for their environmental importance

- 4.1 The Natura 2000 network comprises Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Ramsar Sites; sites are designated for their international environmental importance. These are areas designated under the European Union's Habitats Directive because of their very important habitats and the species they support. The precautionary principle is applied to Natura 2000 sites; if proposed development is likely to have an impact on these sites, the county council, as the competent authority must carry out an appropriate assessment to identify the full range of impacts, and the developer must provide the information to enable the council to undertake this assessment. If the competent authority cannot conclude that there will be no significant effect on a European site from a project, taking into account any mitigation measures, then that project should be refused. The project can only proceed if there are no alternative solutions or if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, in which case compensation would be required.
- 4.2 There are seven Special Areas of Conservation in the county, as shown in red on figure 2:
- ▶ Oxford Meadows: Lowland hay meadows including the larger of only two known sites in the UK for creeping marshwort.
 - ▶ Cothill Fen: Largest surviving example of alkaline fen in central England.
 - ▶ Little Wittenham: One of the best studied great crested newt sites in the UK.
 - ▶ Aston Rowant: One of the best remaining examples in the UK of lowland juniper scrub on chalk.
 - ▶ Chilterns Beechwoods: Extensive tract of beech forest in the centre of the UK range of this habitat.
 - ▶ Hackpen Hill: Significant population of early gentian.
 - ▶ Hartslock Wood: Yew woodland and chalk grassland supporting one of only three UK populations of monkey orchid.
- There are no Special Protection Areas or Ramsar sites in the county.
- 4.3 Sites of Special Scientific Interest are designated for their national environmental importance. There are 102 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Oxfordshire, covering a total of 4,012ha¹¹. They are shown in blue on figure 2. Normally development which would adversely affect a SSSI is not acceptable. Only in special cases, where the importance of a development outweighs the impact on the SSSI, would an adverse affect be permitted. In such cases, planning conditions or obligations would be used to mitigate the impact. The conservation interest defined by the SSSIs has to co-exist with other land uses such as agriculture or woodland.

¹¹ OCC et al (2010) Biodiversity & Planning in Oxfordshire

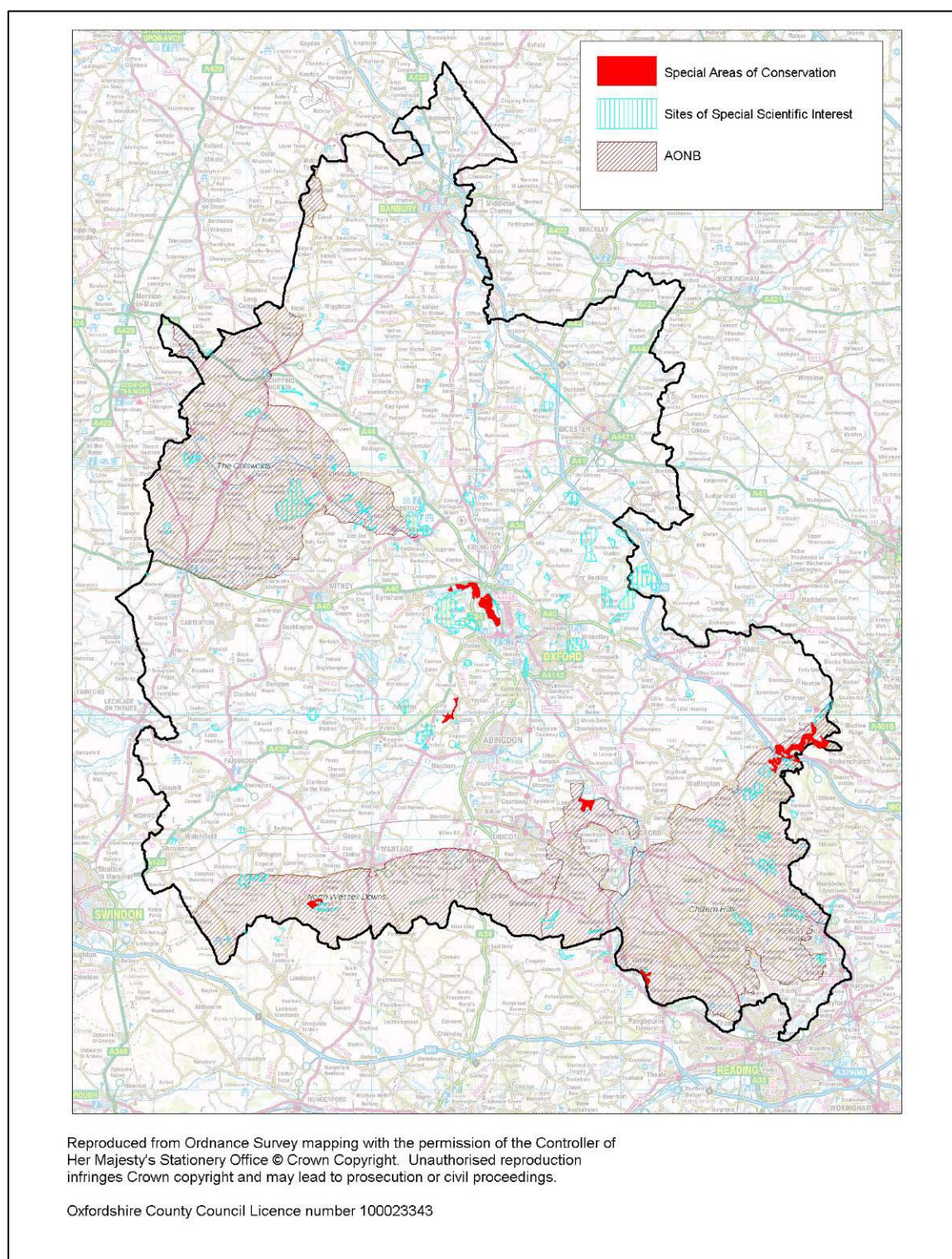


Figure 2: Special Areas of Conservation, SSSIs and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 4.4 The term 'nature reserve' is used to describe a range of different types of site important for wildlife and people. Some of these nature reserves have a statutory designation in their own right; in other cases, the term 'nature reserve' does not in itself imply special protection. National Nature Reserves are Sites of Special Scientific Interest which are managed by or on behalf of Natural England. Many provide sites for ecological research and offer opportunities for people to experience the natural environment. Oxfordshire has four National Nature Reserves, as shown on figure 5:
- ▶ Aston Rowant is also a SAC and SSSI and is owned and managed by Natural England.
 - ▶ Chimney Meadows is also a SSSI and is owned by Natural England and managed by BBOWT.
 - ▶ Cothill Fen is also a SAC and SSSI, it is owned by Natural England and managed by the National Trust and BBOWT.
 - ▶ Wychwood is also a SSSI and is in private ownership.
- 4.5 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of an area. The Chilterns, Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs AONBs support a large number of designated nature conservation sites and priority habitats. AONBs are shown on figure 2.
- 4.6 There are a number of sites designated for their local environmental importance¹². There are 362 Local Wildlife Sites (formerly known as County Wildlife Sites); they are designated by the Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project and are sites of substantive nature conservation value of County importance.
- 4.7 Local Geology Sites (formerly known as Regionally Important Geological Sites – RIGS) are designated by the Oxfordshire Geology Trust. These sites are all shown on figure 3.
- 4.8 There are also sites of district importance which are designated by the City and District Councils. These include:
- Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCS) within Oxford City;
 - Windrush in Witney project area in West Oxfordshire;
 - Various small sites owned and / or managed by parish councils.

¹² OCC et al (2010) Biodiversity & Planning in Oxfordshire

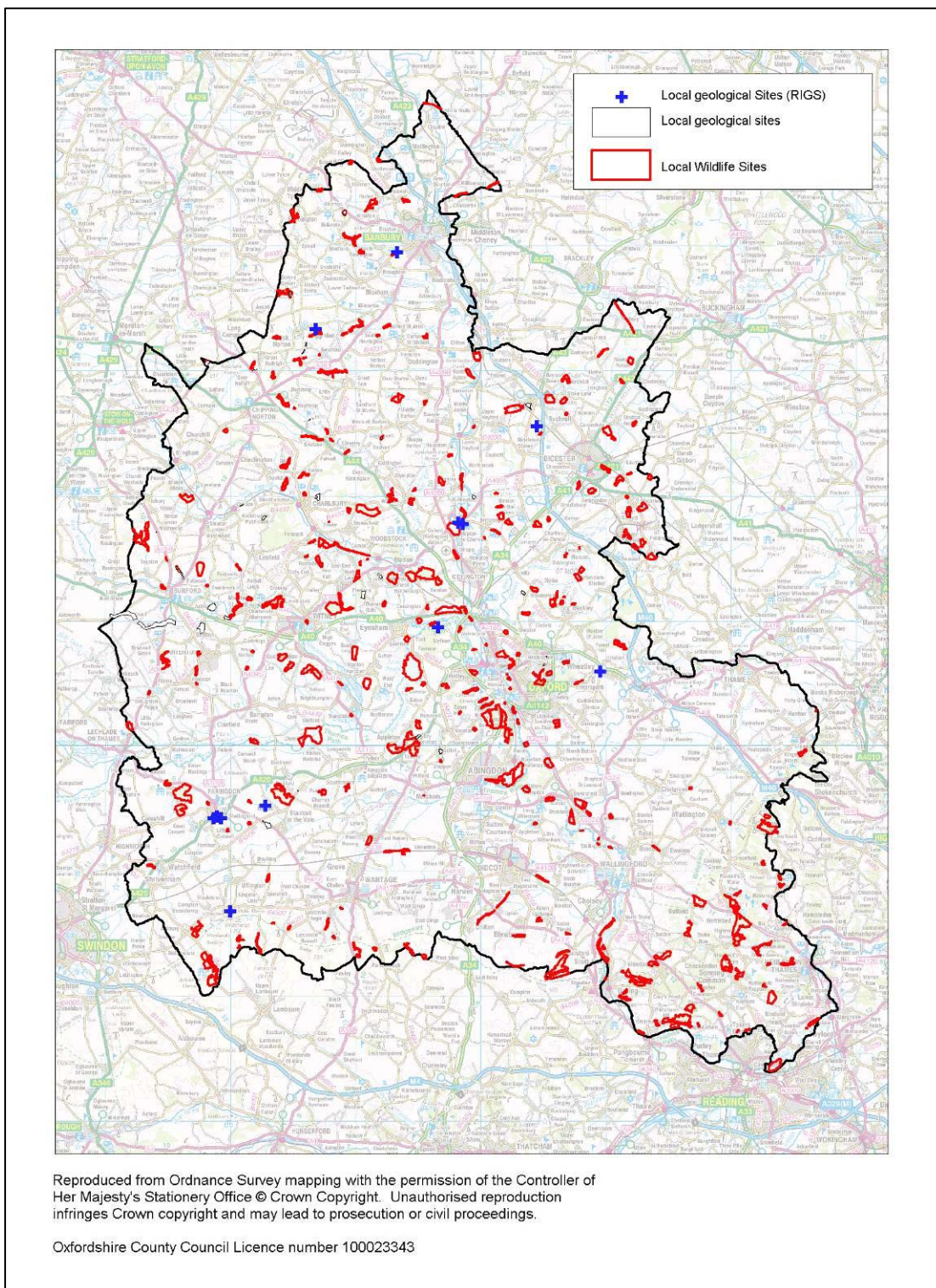
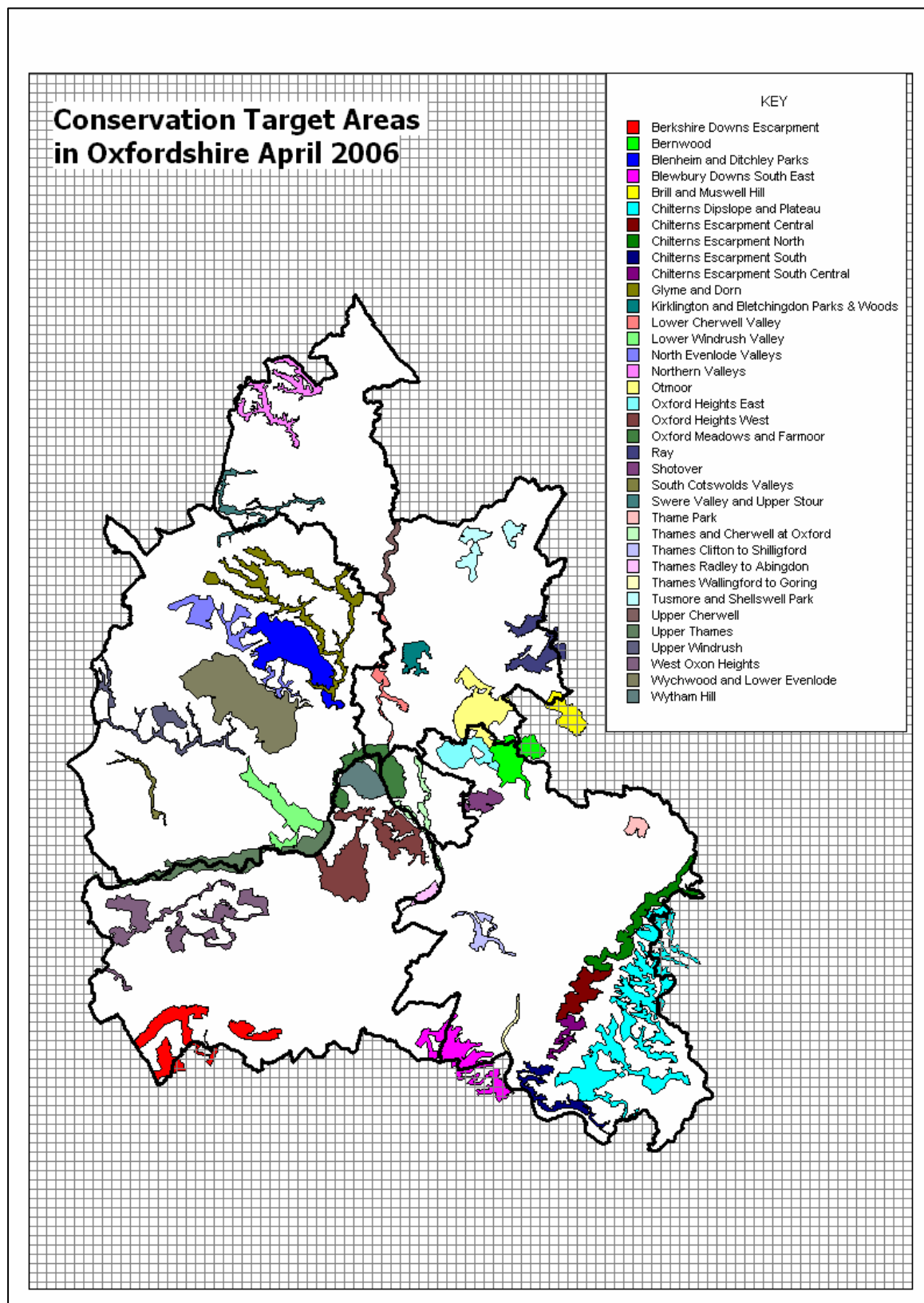


Figure 3: Oxfordshire Local Wildlife Sites and RIGS

4.9 Conservation Target Areas (CTAs)

4.10 Figure 4 shows the location of conservation target areas in the county. The main aim of CTAs is to restore biodiversity at a landscape-scale through the maintenance, restoration and creation of BAP priority habitats.

Figure 4: Conservation Target Areas in Oxfordshire



- 4.11 Local Nature Reserves are important for people and wildlife; they have features of local biodiversity or geological interest and offer opportunities for learning. LNRs are a statutory designation made by local authorities; there are 11 in Oxfordshire.
- 4.12 Road Verge Nature Reserves have been identified by Oxfordshire County Council; there are 28 across the county which are species-rich and characteristic of the area.
- 4.13 Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) manages 31 nature reserves within Oxfordshire to protect important biodiversity, and to provide opportunities for people to enjoy local wildlife. Many BBOWT nature reserves have SAC, SSSI or LWS status.
- 4.14 The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) owns and manages the Otmoor nature reserve in the east of Oxfordshire.
- 4.15 Banbury Ornithological Society (BOS) owns or leases five nature reserves in the north of the county; many of these have LWS status.
- 4.16 The Woodland Trust owns and manages 20 woods in Oxfordshire, some have SSSI or LWS status, and most are ancient woodland.
- 4.17 All the above local sites are shown below on Figure 5.
- 4.18 Landscape
- 4.19 The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape study was carried out by Oxfordshire County Council, English Nature, the Northmoor Trust and the Countryside Agency and was completed in 2004. The study sought to improve information about the biodiversity and landscape character areas of Oxfordshire. It identified 24 landscape types in the county. Further information on the characteristics of each of the landscape types can be found at <http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/OWLS/Home/Oxfordshire+Landscape+Types/>

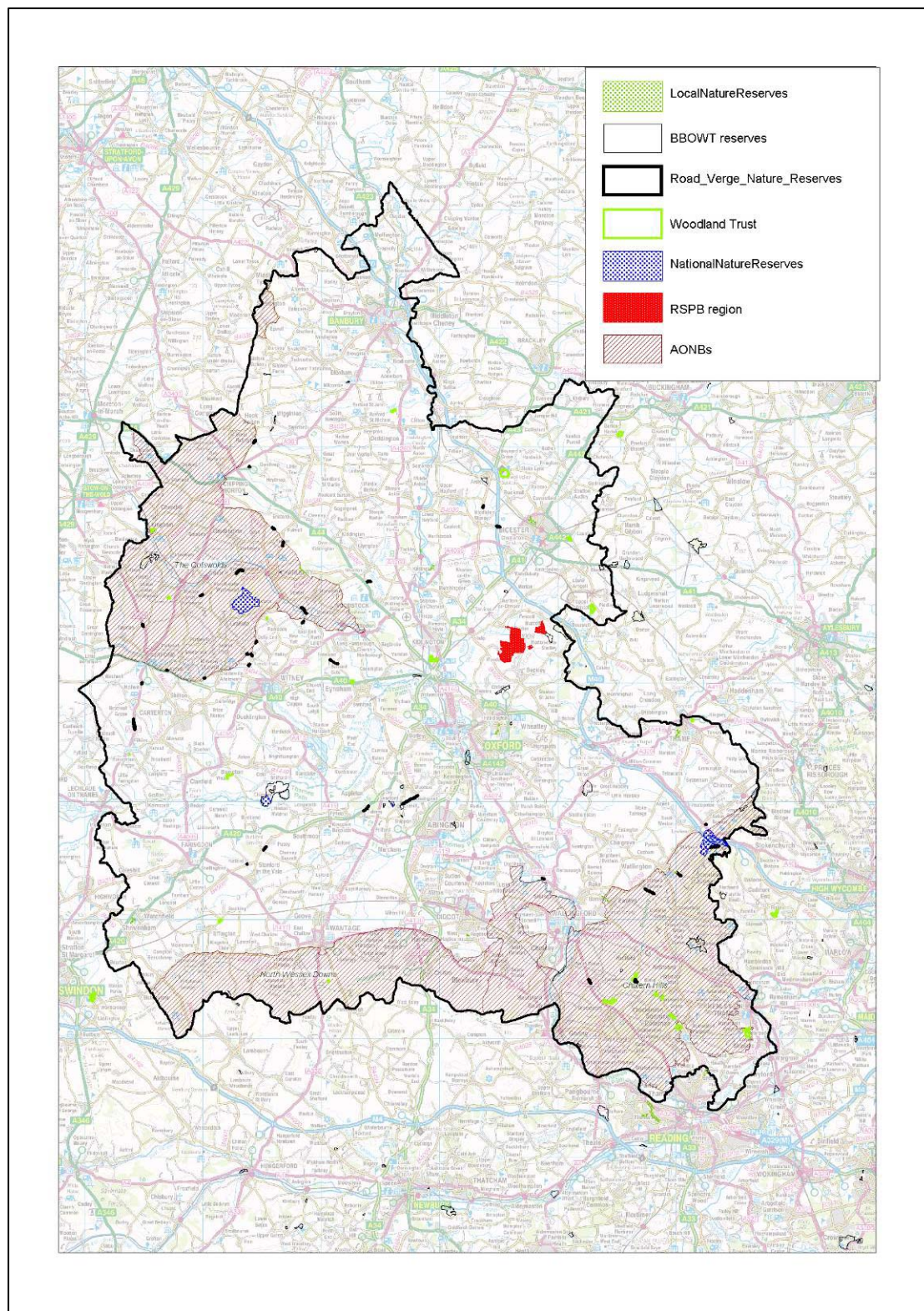


Figure 5: Oxfordshire Nature Reserves

5 Impacts of mineral working and waste management facilities and buffer zones

- 5.1 The source-pathway-receptor model provides a useful way to determine potential impacts of one land use on another. The source in this case is the mineral working or waste disposal facility, which may have the following impacts:
- Noise;
 - Releases to atmosphere: dust and gases;
 - Releases to surface water eg leachate breakout;
 - Releases to sub surface environment into groundwater;
 - Hydrological change;
 - Visual impact;
 - Odours;
 - Vermin;
 - Loss of irreplaceable habitat.
- 5.2 The pathway may be the wind, carrying dust and noise and odour, the topography which increases or reduces visual impact or rivers and groundwater which carry water pollution.
- 5.3 The receptors are other sensitive land uses. A number of land uses are potentially sensitive to the impacts of mineral working; these include housing, other built development (e.g. schools, hospitals and offices), nature conservation sites, sites of historic conservation interest and some recreational land uses.
- 5.4 Impacts can often be mitigated against. One possible way of doing this is through buffer zones. The designation of buffer zones between sensitive land uses and mineral working aims to reduce or remove altogether the pathway of impacts from minerals or waste facilities to sensitive land uses. The width and nature of buffer zones should be determined depending on:
- wind direction;
 - topography and any intervening features (eg buildings or trees);
 - the nature and arrangement of the operations on the minerals or waste site;
 - the type of machinery used;
 - the depth of excavation and the location of the plant site in a quarry;
 - the nature and sensitivity of the receptor land use, eg: residential, which may be affected by noise, dust, smell and visual impact; fauna, which may be affected by noise; flora, which may be affected by dust.
- 5.5 Within the buffer zone, planting trees or hedges may help to provide visual screening, or vegetated bunding may also help to reduce noise and visual impact.

- 5.6 The Minerals and Waste Local Plan (1996) includes policy PE3 on buffer zones:

‘Appropriate buffer zones will be safeguarded around mineral working or waste disposal sites for protection against unacceptable losses of residential or natural amenity.’

Previously, Oxfordshire County Council operated a buffer zone policy based on set distances (350 metres for towns, villages and hamlets; 100 metres for individual dwellings or small groups of dwellings). The Minerals and Waste Local Plan says that, when determining planning applications, the County Council will have regard to these established standards, together with the individual circumstances of the site and the measures which may be used to mitigate the effects of the development.

- 5.7 In line with the Minerals and Waste Local Plan, more recent practice has been to consider the requirement for buffer zone distances on an individual basis for each proposal for mineral working or waste management depending on the characteristics of the application and site, taking into account the above factors. Planning applications should identify all likely impacts of the proposed development, and should provide sufficient information to enable an informed decision on the appropriate width of buffer zones to be made. If appropriate, this should be included in the Environmental Statement accompanying the application.

6 Issues for consideration

- 6.1 The proximity of mineral working to AONBs and the potential impact of working on the setting of the AONBs needs to be considered.
- 6.2 Agricultural land can be restored to an amenity or nature conservation after-use but, where ‘best and most versatile’ land is involved, policy is that the methods used in the restoration and aftercare should as far as possible aim to preserve the long term agricultural potential of the land for the future.
- 6.3 Buffer zones are decided on a case by case basis, in line with national policy guidance. Buffer distances are determined based on relevant environmental information and the predicted impacts. However, there are some cases where a definitive buffer distance has been set; operators proposals to work within 16m of a main river require consent from the Environment Agency.
- 6.4 There should be no direct impacts on protected habitats and species and designated sites should be protected. Non-designated sites should also be given an appropriate level of protection.
- 6.5 The conservation target areas afford opportunities to enhance and increase biodiversity in the long term through restoration to nature conservation.

Appendix 1

Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats

Habitat Sector	Priority Habitat
Agricultural	Arable Field Margins
Agricultural	Hedgerows
Agricultural	Lowland Calcareous Grassland
Agricultural	Lowland Dry Acid Grassland
Agricultural	Lowland Heathland
Agricultural	Lowland Meadows
Water and Wetlands	Eutrophic Standing Waters
Water and Wetlands	Fens
Water and Wetlands	Floodplain Grazing Marsh
Water and Wetlands	Ponds
Water and Wetlands	Reedbeds
Water and Wetlands	Rivers
Woodland and Forestry	Lowland Beech and Yew Woodland
Woodland and Forestry	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland
Woodland and Forestry	Wet Woodland
Woodland and Forestry	Traditional Orchards
Woodland and Forestry	Wood-Pasture and Parkland