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## 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Oxford has a rich natural environment with landscapes of great natural beauty, including the Isis and Cherwell river corridors and large areas which are of local, national or international importance for biodiversity. The purpose of this section is to ensure that Oxford's natural environment is protected and enhanced.

## 4.2 Green Belt

4.2.1 Oxford's main built-up areas are separated by extensive belts of open land. The east and west of Oxford benefit from a green backcloth formed by nearby hills. This greenness, combined with the historic City centre, has given Oxford a special character which the City Council wishes to protect. The large areas of open space form part of Oxford's Green Belt. The City Council will retain the Green Belt within Oxford City's administrative boundary, as shown on the Proposals Map, to protect Oxford's special character and its landscape setting.

4.2.2 The Green Belt also has an important role in providing opportunities for access to the open countryside and outdoor sport and recreation activities.

4.2.3 The Urban Potential Study for Oxford (discussed in paragraph 6.6 of Section 6.0, Housing Provision) shows that there is no general need for greenfield development in Oxford in order to meet housing requirements.

### **POLICY NE.1 - PURPOSES OF OXFORD'S GREEN BELT**

The area and boundaries of Oxford's Green Belt are defined on the Proposals Map. The purposes of Oxford's Green Belt are to:

- a. check the unrestricted growth of Oxford by preventing ribbon development and urban sprawl;
- b. prevent settlements from coalescing;
- c. assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d. preserve the setting and special character of Oxford and its landscape setting; and
- e. assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

## **POLICY NE.2 - CONTROL OF DEVELOPMENT WITHIN OXFORD'S GREEN BELT**

Planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development within Oxford's Green Belt. All development will be considered inappropriate unless it maintains the openness and does not conflict with the purposes of Oxford's Green Belt.

Planning permission will only be granted for the construction of new buildings for the following purposes:

- a. agriculture and forestry;
- b. essential facilities for outdoor recreation and other similar uses provided the built element, including floodlighting and car parking, is limited; and
- c. limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings;

A proposal for the change of use of a building will not be permitted if it would have a materially greater impact than the present use on the openness and purposes of the Green Belt.

The City Council will ensure that the visual amenity of the Green Belt is not harmed by development within, or conspicuous from, the Green Belt which, although not prejudicial to the Green Belt's main purposes, might be inappropriate by reason of siting, materials or design.

### **4.3 Safeguarded Land**

4.3.1 To meet possible long-term development needs, yet enable Oxford's Green Belt boundary to remain stable beyond the Plan period, the City Council will keep open some areas of land that do not contribute to Green Belt purposes and that are not covered by other protection policies. These areas are not allocated for development at present but no development that would prejudice later comprehensive development will be permitted. They comprise areas of land between the built-up area and the inner edge of the Green Belt, and are referred to as Safeguarded Land.

## **POLICY NE.3 - SAFEGUARDED LAND**

Safeguarded land will be kept free to fulfil its purpose of meeting possible longer-term development needs. Planning permission will not be granted for development within Safeguarded Land except for agriculture, forestry, outdoor sport or other uses that will preserve the open character of the land. The area and boundaries of Safeguarded Land are defined on the Proposals Map.

### **4.4 Areas of Special Character**

4.4.1 Outside the areas formally protected by the environmental and conservation policies in the Local Plan there are other areas of special character that should be protected. Examples are the "green lanes" at Richard's Lane, Cuckoo Lane and Barracks Lane. The City Council will seek the co-operation of all concerned, particularly the Highway Authority, in trying to protect the special character of such areas.

### **4.5 Agriculture**

4.5.1 Oxford contains several wedges of agricultural land. The best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as Grades 1, 2, and 3A of the Agricultural Land Classification) is a national resource that should not be lost under normal circumstances. Most of the agricultural land in Oxford is not of this quality but there are some parcels of Grade 2 agricultural land north of Binsey and in the Cherwell Valley.

#### **POLICY NE.4 - LOSS OF AGRICULTURAL LAND**

The agricultural value (as determined by the grade) of land will be taken into account in determining relevant applications for planning permission. Where the use of agricultural land is unavoidable, poor-quality land should be used in preference to higher-quality land, except where this would be inconsistent with sustainability considerations.

4.5.2 Proposals for new agricultural development that require planning permission will be assessed in terms of their visual impact, their impact on residential amenities and any pollution problems they may cause. Intensive livestock or poultry units are unlikely to be suitable within Oxford.

4.5.3 Agriculture is undergoing major changes, including the transfer of agricultural land to other uses. The number of farmers and landowners seeking to diversify their enterprises to include non-farming activities is likely to increase. The City Council will consider diversification projects sympathetically, including farm shops selling goods produced on the farm as a proportion of their stock.

#### **POLICY NE.5 - AGRICULTURAL RELATED DEVELOPMENT**

Planning permission will be granted for agricultural related development provided it would not materially harm the landscape, the character of the Green Belt or the amenities of occupants of any nearby properties, or lead to traffic or highway problems.

## **4.6 Water Environment**

### **Watercourses**

4.6.1 Oxford is braided with watercourses that contribute to its special character. They include the Isis (also known as the Thames), the Cherwell, the Oxford Canal and a number of smaller ones. Much of this network of waterways has high visual, ecological and amenity value. The City Council will seek to conserve and enhance the special character and setting of Oxford's watercourses, as well as including tranquil areas that are to be respected.

4.6.2 Some stretches of watercourse need improvement, particularly where development backs onto the watercourse rather than facing it. A river or canalside setting provides the opportunity for attractive designs that focus on the watercourse, enhancing the area both visually and ecologically. The City Council will require improvements to the waterside setting as part of developments and will refuse permission for developments that would detract from the character of Oxford's watercourses.

4.6.3 New development proposed adjacent to a watercourse should provide a buffer zone. This can enhance the visual appearance of the watercourse, provide public rights of way and valuable wildlife habitats. Buffer zones can be much improved if habitats are created at the edge of the watercourse using native plants, shrubs and trees found elsewhere in the vicinity. The width of the buffer zone will vary, but along undeveloped stretches of watercourse it should be at least 8 metres wide. Within existing built-up areas, where the watercourse already has a hard frontage, exceptions may be made where the overall development proposal complements and enhances the setting of the watercourse.

#### **POLICY NE.6 - OXFORD'S WATERCOURSES**

**Planning permission will only be granted for waterside development proposals that complement and enhance the waterside setting, and protect or, where appropriate, create wildlife habitats and public access along the watercourse.**

### **Flooding**

4.6.4 Large areas of Oxford lie within the flood plains of the rivers Isis and Cherwell. The precise boundary of the flood plain cannot be precisely determined because each flood has different characteristics. The changes that have occurred in the flood plain, both in Oxford and upstream, together with climatic change, are likely to result in future floods having different characteristics to those in the past. Given the serious and irreversible damage that can be caused by building in the flood plain, the Government advises local authorities to adopt a precautionary approach by ensuring that all development will remain safe throughout its lifetime and will not increase flood risk elsewhere. The City Council will use a risk-based sequential test to direct development away from areas with a high risk of flooding. Only when no reasonable options are available in low-risk areas, should land be allocated for development in higher-risk areas.

4.6.5 Other sites, particularly near minor watercourses or drainage channels, may also be at risk, particularly from flash floods after prolonged or intense rainfall. New developments should not take place where they would be subject to an unacceptable risk of flooding, or would significantly increase the risk of flooding elsewhere.

### **Undeveloped Flood Plain**

4.6.6 Much of the flood plain is undeveloped and serves an important function in slowing down the flow of large floods and dispersing their effects, by avoiding a concentration of floodwater. It is therefore very important to protect the undeveloped flood plain. These areas are suitable for some land uses such as amenity open space, habitat conservation measures, sports fields and agriculture, but are not suitable for built development unless a location in the flood plain is essential, such as for water-based recreation uses and utilities infrastructure, and an alternative lower-risk location is not available.

The City Council has taken a precautionary approach in identifying the undeveloped flood plain, so there might be particular locations in the area designated as undeveloped flood plain where the actual risk of flooding is low. If there are any instances where a flood-risk assessment in accordance with Policy NE.9 indicates that this is so, these will be taken into account in applying the particular requirements of Policy NE.7.

#### **POLICY NE.7 - DEVELOPMENT IN THE UNDEVELOPED FLOOD PLAIN**

Planning permission will only be granted for development within the undeveloped flood plain where:

- a. the proposed use is appropriate in the flood plain, or a particular location is essential and an alternative lower-risk location is not available;
- b. it is provided with the appropriate standard of flood defence;
- c. it does not impede flood flows; and
- d. it does not result in a net loss of flood water storage.

The area and boundaries of the Undeveloped Flood Plain are defined on the Proposals Map.

#### **Low-Lying Land**

4.6.7 Oxford has low-lying areas close to or within the flood plain which are already extensively developed. These areas may be suitable for residential, commercial and industrial development if the development cannot be located in lower-risk areas. In such cases appropriate flood defences should be designed and constructed to protect against a flood with a 1% chance of occurring each year, and appropriate compensation or mitigation measures will be required to prevent the development leading to an increased risk of flooding elsewhere.

4.6.8 The areas of low-lying land are marked on the Proposals Map. The City Council has taken a precautionary approach in identifying these areas, so the designation does not necessarily mean that individual properties are at risk of flooding. Information about flood risk and advice on appropriate compensation or mitigation measures is available from the Environment Agency.

4.6.9 Household extensions will not normally be expected to have a significant impact on flooding unless they would directly affect a watercourse or its flood defences, or impede access to flood defence and management facilities. In the case of large extensions, the City Council will assess whether the cumulative impact of several such extensions would significantly affect flood storage capacity or flood flows.

#### **POLICY NE.8 - DEVELOPMENT ON LOW-LYING LAND**

Planning permission will only be granted for development within low-lying areas where:

- a. the appropriate standard of flood defence is provided; and
- b. the development will not lead to an increased risk of flooding elsewhere and incorporates, where necessary, appropriate mitigation and compensation measures.

The area and boundaries of low-lying land are defined on the Proposals Map.

#### **Flood Risk Assessment**

4.6.10 The potential consequences of permitting development in the flood plain can be serious in terms of personal safety and damage to property. The City Council will require a Flood Risk Assessment to be undertaken that accords with published government guidance on Flood Risk Assessments for any proposed development that lies partially or wholly within the areas identified as undeveloped flood plain and low-lying land. An assessment will also be required on sites that could be at risk from flash floods or in areas of low risk where proposed development could increase flooding elsewhere by significantly increasing the area covered by

an impermeable surface. The assessment should consider the specific risk of flooding for the proposed development over its expected lifetime and its possible effect on flooding elsewhere in terms of flood flows, flood storage capacity, and run-off.

4.6.11 The scope and content of a flood risk assessment should be appropriate to the scale and nature of the proposed development. Larger developments are likely to require detailed hydrological investigations to determine the risks, inform detailed design and identify appropriate mitigation measures.

#### **POLICY NE.9 - FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT**

**A Flood Risk Assessment must be submitted alongside planning applications for any development within undeveloped flood plain or low-lying land, and developments elsewhere which could significantly increase run-off or are at risk from flash floods. The Flood Risk Assessment must assess the risk of flooding to the proposed development over its expected lifetime, its possible impact on flooding elsewhere, and propose mitigation measures where appropriate.**

#### **Sustainable Drainage**

4.6.12 Most built development involves creating impermeable surfaces causing water to run off rather than percolate into the ground. This can have a significant impact on flooding by increasing flows downstream, as well as creating pollution, damaging watercourse habitats and causing bank erosion. It can also have an adverse ecological impact on habitats that depend on the percolation of ground water.

4.6.13 New developments should incorporate sustainable drainage systems to limit or preferably reduce the existing rate of run-off. Such systems may include surface water storage areas, flow limiting devices, and infiltration areas or soakaways. This will particularly apply to all large-scale residential, commercial or institutional developments, developments such as car parks that would significantly extend the area covered by an impermeable surface and developments close to sensitive wildlife habitats. Sustainable drainage systems may be required for smaller developments where the cumulative effects of run-off would be a material issue.

#### **POLICY NE.10 - SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE**

**Planning permission will only be granted for developments that would not significantly increase surface water run-off. Wherever practicable, this will be through the use of sustainable drainage systems. The City Council will require developers to demonstrate that they have made appropriate provision for surface water drainage and that this would effectively mitigate any potential adverse impact from surface water run-off.**

#### **Land Drainage and River Engineering Works**

4.6.14 Low-lying flood meadows and other wetland habitats are susceptible to activities far beyond their boundaries. This particularly applies to the effect of river engineering, land drainage and flood protection works. These works can sometimes be permitted development under the General Permitted Development Order. Where planning permission is required, or

the works are necessary in connection with development needing planning permission, the City Council will ensure that they would not have an adverse impact on sensitive habitats.

4.6.15 Culverting can be particularly damaging, both visually and ecologically, and can have serious implications for safety, maintenance and flooding. The City Council will not grant planning permission for new proposals that would involve the culverting of watercourses.

#### **POLICY NE.11 - LAND DRAINAGE AND RIVER ENGINEERING WORKS**

Planning permission will only be granted for river management, flood protection works and land drainage schemes that are designed to protect the flora and fauna of Oxford's flood meadows and other wetland habitats.

Planning permission will not be granted for proposals to culvert watercourses or ditches. As part of new development proposals the City Council will, in suitable locations, seek opportunities to remove existing culverts and restore the watercourse to a more natural state.

#### **Groundwater Flow**

4.6.16 Development involving underground structures may adversely affect groundwater flow to springs, base flow to rivers, or both. This can have an adverse impact on wildlife habitats and cause local flooding. In such cases appropriate provision must be made to ensure that groundwater flow is not obstructed.

#### **POLICY NE.12 - GROUNDWATER FLOW**

Planning permission will not be granted for development that would have an adverse impact on groundwater flow. The City Council will, where necessary, require effective preventative measures to be taken to ensure that the flow will not be obstructed.

#### **Water Quality**

4.6.17 The City Council will ensure that new developments do not have a negative impact on surface or groundwater quality. Pollution may arise from disturbance to pollutants already present on site, from landfill, or from contaminants from the development itself. Planning permission will only be granted when appropriate measures are proposed to prevent pollution.

#### **POLICY NE.13 - WATER QUALITY**

Planning permission will only be granted for development that will not cause a deterioration in surface or ground water quality. Appropriate measures to prevent pollution will be required. The applicant may be required to submit details of an investigation of the site and any precautionary measures which are proposed. Precautionary measures will be secured through planning conditions or a planning obligation.

#### **Water and Sewerage Infrastructure**

4.6.18 The City Council will seek to ensure that there is adequate water supply, surface water, foul drainage and sewerage treatment capacity to serve all new developments. Developers will be required to demonstrate that there is adequate capacity both on and off the site to serve the development and that it would not lead to problems for existing users. In some

circumstances it may be necessary for developers to carry out appropriate studies to ascertain whether the proposed development will overload the existing infrastructure.

4.6.19 Section 2.0 Core Policies seeks to minimise the use of natural resources. A Natural Resource Impact Analysis (NRIA) will be required for all major developments and this should take into account the impact on water resources and seek to reduce it through grey water recycling.

#### **POLICY NE.14 - WATER AND SEWERAGE INFRASTRUCTURE**

Planning permission will only be granted for developments that would increase the demand for on and off-site service infrastructure where:

- a. sufficient capacity already exists; or
- b. extra capacity can be provided in time to serve the development that will ensure that the environment and the amenities of local residents are not adversely affected.

## **4.7 Trees and Hedgerows**

4.7.1 Trees contribute a wide range of benefits to the urban environment. Well chosen, appropriately sited and properly managed trees can significantly enhance the visual quality of the built environment. Trees form a significant and important part of Oxford's townscape in many areas, while other parts of Oxford would be greatly enhanced by new tree planting. They also provide important ecological and environmental benefits.

4.7.2 When determining planning applications, the impact of development on existing trees will be carefully considered. Existing trees should be retained and protected where they make a significant contribution to public amenity or have ecological value. Shrubs and hedges can be valuable landscape features, improving the appearance of the environment or providing low to mid-level screening. When granting planning permission, conditions will be applied to secure the protection of trees, shrubs, hedgerows and other valuable landscape features. Tree Preservation Orders will be made as appropriate to reinforce such conditions.

4.7.3 The City Council will consider the opportunity for new tree planting when granting planning permission. Landscape design, which includes tree planting, is an integral part of urban design. Planning conditions will be used to secure new soft landscaping, including tree planting, to enhance the appearance of new development or where it is needed for screening or ecological purposes. Landscaping schemes should maintain and enhance local character and biodiversity, and should include planting mainly indigenous species, where appropriate, and, where practicable, using nursery stock of local origin. Where significant new landscaping is proposed, a long-term management plan including details of responsibility for management and appropriate maintenance schedules for landscape management, will be required.

4.7.4 Planning applications for the development of land containing trees must include a tree survey showing the size, spread, situation and species of all trees on site. All trees that are proposed for removal should be clearly marked on the submitted plans. An arboricultural impact statement should be included for development proposals with a significant impact on existing trees. Planning applications for development land that do not include adequate information about existing trees will be refused.

#### **POLICY NE.15 - LOSS OF TREES AND HEDGEROWS**

Planning permission will not be granted for development proposals which include the removal of trees, hedgerows and other valuable landscape features that form part of a development site, where this would have a significant adverse impact upon public amenity or ecological interest.

Planning permission will be granted subject to soft landscaping, including tree planting, being undertaken whenever appropriate. Landscaping schemes should take account of local landscape character and should include the planting of indigenous species where appropriate. Where necessary, the City Council will seek long-term management plans, which will be secured through planning conditions or a planning obligation.

4.7.5 The City Council is able to make Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) to protect threatened trees that make a valuable contribution to public amenity and where appropriate, to secure the replacement of such trees that have to be felled. Trees within a conservation area also receive statutory protection. The City Council will seek to ensure that protected trees are managed in accordance with good arboricultural practice and with full regard to public amenity, ecological and historic interests.

#### **POLICY NE.16 - PROTECTED TREES**

Planning permission will not be granted for any proposal that destroys or involves major surgery to protected trees if it will have a significant adverse effect upon public amenity, unless such action can be shown to be good arboricultural practice.

Any protected tree that is destroyed must be replaced by a tree, or trees, suitable for the location. Tree surgery work needing consent must be undertaken in accordance with best arboricultural practice.

## **4.8 Biodiversity**

4.8.1 Oxford is probably unique among the cities of Britain in having such a concentration of high quality, ecologically important sites. It is especially important for its agriculturally unimproved wet meadows in the flood plains of the rivers Isis and Cherwell, and the nationally rare fen habitat in the Lye Valley, which are important not only nationally, but at a European level. English Nature has identified Oxford and the surrounding area as a Prime Biodiversity Area as it considers that there is a particular opportunity to create links between the extensive areas of semi-natural habitat that already exist.

4.8.2 The national Biodiversity Action Plan has identified a range of priority habitats / species and species of conservation concern. A number of these habitats/species are found within Oxford. It is important for there to be ongoing survey work in order to ensure that there is accurate and up-to-date information on the distribution of these habitats/species, together with an assessment of habitat condition and the population size of the species. A local Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxfordshire has been produced which highlights seven important types of habitat: woodland; neutral meadows and pastures; chalk and limestone grassland; farmland; heathland; wetlands; and towns and villages. More detailed Action Plans have been produced that outline the action necessary to conserve, enhance and, where appropriate, expand each of these habitat types. The City Council will try to help achieve these objectives through the planning process where possible.

4.8.3 There are features of biodiversity interest throughout Oxford so it is not appropriate to focus solely on protected sites. Individually these features are often not of particular importance but collectively they contribute to the richness of Oxford's wildlife. Where possible they should be conserved and incorporated within developments. Often there will be the opportunity to enhance or add to these features.

4.8.4 To ensure that Oxford's biodiversity is not gradually diminished the City Council will protect Oxford's collective ecological resource and ensure that compensation is made for any features lost. Where a site contains an important feature of ecological interest, the City Council will only grant planning permission where it is satisfied that adequate provision is made for its long-term conservation.

4.8.5 Oxford contains several interesting geological features, particularly the exposed rock strata in former quarries in the Headington Quarry area. The impact of proposed development on geological features will be carefully assessed.

#### **POLICY NE.17 - BIODIVERSITY**

Planning permission will not be granted for development that fails to safeguard, maintain or enhance features of ecological and geological importance, in particular priority habitats/species and species of conservation concern. In exceptional circumstances where this is not possible and the proposed development would have a significant adverse impact on local biodiversity, planning permission will only be granted subject to the creation of a new replacement habitat on site or the creation/enhancement of a similar ecological feature of an appropriate scale and kind on a nearby site.

Developers will be required to take measures during the development process to prevent the disturbance of wildlife and to make provision for the protection and subsequent retention of natural features such as ponds, hedgerows, ditches and trees which are to be retained. Where necessary, the City Council will seek long-term management plans, which will be secured by planning conditions or a planning obligation.

## **4.9 Site Protection**

### **Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

4.9.1 Port Meadow, Wolvercote Common, Wolvercote Meadows, and Pixey Mead, have been designated by the European Commission as part of the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Community Habitats Directive 1992. This overrides permitted development rights and any proposed development in or close to this area will be subjected to rigorous examination. Development that is likely to have a significant negative

effect on the area will only be allowed if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

4.9.2 English Nature has designated 12 Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs) that are wholly or partly within Oxford, on account of their national ecological or geological importance. They are:

- Brasenose Wood and Shotover Hill;
- Hook Meadow and The Trap Grounds;
- Iffley Meadows;
- Littlemore Railway Cutting (Geological);
- Lye Valley;
- Magdalen Grove (Geological);
- Magdalen Quarry (Geological)
- New Marston Meadows;
- Pixey and Yarnton Meads;
- Port Meadow with Wolvercote Common and Green;
- Rock Edge (Geological);
- Wolvercote Meadows.

4.9.3 They are designated and protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). When proposed development requiring planning permission affects an SSSI directly or indirectly, the City Council will carefully assess it to ensure that it will not have an adverse impact.

4.9.4 Merely protecting the designated sites is not always enough. SSSIs (and other protected sites) can be extremely sensitive to even minor changes in the conditions on adjacent land.

**POLICY NE.18 - SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION AND SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**

Planning permission will not be granted for development that will have a significant adverse impact, either directly or indirectly, upon a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). SACs and SSSIs are identified on the Proposals Map.

**Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)**

4.9.5 Only a relatively small proportion of the sites that are rich in wildlife have SAC or SSSI status. Other important areas that are not protected under these designations are therefore more vulnerable to development or other damaging operations because they do not receive statutory protection. The City Council is committed to protecting this wider ecological resource and has identified a number of sites that contain semi-natural habitats and are important for the quality of their flora and fauna. These sites have been designated as Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs).

4.9.6 SLINCs are important in ecological terms to Oxford, and some are of regional significance. Often they also act as a buffer zone around SACs and SSSIs, or a link between two such sites, so they help to ensure that plants and animals do not become confined to isolated sites, which would increase the risk of extinction for some species.

4.9.7 Local Nature Reserves are designated by local authorities under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The sites should be of at least local importance for nature conservation and should provide opportunities for education and research or for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public. There are currently three designated Local Nature Reserves in Oxford at Magdalen Quarry, Rock Edge and Lye Valley. The City Council will encourage the declaration of additional Local Nature Reserves.

#### **POLICY NE.19 - SITES OF LOCAL IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND LOCAL NATURE RESERVES**

Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would have a significant adverse impact on a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC) or Local Nature Reserve (LNR) either directly or indirectly, unless it is possible to compensate for the damage caused so there is no overall loss of ecological value. SLINCs and LNRs are identified on the Proposals Map.

#### **Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites**

4.9.8 Oxford has several geological SSSIs but no non-statutory sites of geological interest. English Nature is promoting the identification of Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGs). RIGs are non-statutory sites similar in status to SLINCs. Any sites identified in Oxford will be given the same protection as SLINCs.

#### **Wildlife Corridors**

4.9.9 Isolated sites tend to support fewer species of plants and animals than sites that are connected to other areas that are important for wildlife. To encourage viable populations of wild plants and animals, it is important to protect corridors to enable species to spread or move between areas of suitable habitat. These corridors include features such as water courses (including ditches) and adjacent banks, untreated roadside verges, railway embankments, linear areas of unimproved meadow, and hedgerows. This may include areas of land designated under other policies, such as SACs, SSSIs, SLINCs and LNRs. Other areas of open space, including parks and domestic gardens, can also play their part.

#### **POLICY NE.20 - WILDLIFE CORRIDORS**

Planning permission will not be granted for developments that would sever or harm the viability of wildlife corridors unless it is possible to create an equivalent corridor of equal or greater ecological value which can be secured as part of the proposal. Wildlife Corridors are identified on the Proposals Map.

### **4.10 Species Protection**

4.10.1 Some species of plants and animals are specifically protected by law. They include those species listed in Schedules 1 and 8 and those without qualification in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and those mentioned in the EC Habitats

Directive 1992. Where protected species are suspected to be present on a proposed development site, appropriate surveys should be undertaken before the planning application is determined in accordance with Policy NE.22. These surveys should identify what species are present and how they will be affected by the development.

#### **POLICY NE.21 - SPECIES PROTECTION**

Planning permission will not be granted for developments that would harm plant and animal species specially protected by law unless the harm can be overcome by appropriate mitigation through compliance with planning conditions or planning obligations.

### **4.11 Independent Assessment**

4.11.1 The City Council will require an independent biodiversity survey and an appraisal of the likely impact of development, together with details of mitigation measures, before determining a planning application relating to a SAC, SSSI, SLINC or LNR or likely to affect one indirectly. This requirement will also apply to undesignated sites which contain or are likely to contain protected species, or UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats/species and species of conservation concern. The biodiversity survey should be carried out using recognised methodology for the types of organism likely to be found on the site.

#### **POLICY NE.22 - INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT**

Where a planning application relates to a SAC, SSSI, SLINC or LNR or could have an adverse impact on such a site, or relates to a site that contains or is likely to contain a protected species or a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat/species or species of conservation concern, the City Council will require the submission of:

- a. an independent ecological survey;
- b. an assessment of the likely impact of the proposed development;
- c. details of any measures the developers propose to mitigate any harmful effects (including the protection of part of the site or, where appropriate, the provision of a replacement habitat elsewhere); and
- d. details of any measures to create or enhance habitats which the developers propose.

### **4.12 Habitat Creation in New Developments**

4.12.1 Developers should seek opportunities to create or improve habitats as part of new developments. The provision of hedgerows, the use in landscaping schemes of native species derived from local stock and the minimisation of stress caused by noise and lighting will be particularly important. In certain cases, the creation of more substantial areas of open space would be appropriate. The provision of bird and bat boxes can also attract wildlife to newly created areas. The City Council will encourage habitat creation particularly on larger scale developments, including those involving residential, business, industrial and institutional uses, wherever a practical opportunity arises. The creation of new habitats can, where appropriate, form part of the open space provision. Further guidance on these matters will be produced, from time to time, as a Supplementary Planning Document.

**POLICY NE.23 - HABITAT CREATION IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS**

The City Council will seek the creation of new habitats and habitat enhancement measures as part of new development proposals, particularly:

- a. in parts of Oxford where there is a shortage of ecologically important habitats;
- b. where sites abut an area designated as being of ecological importance; or
- c. on sites that have the potential to extend Oxford's wildlife corridors and in relation to the Biodiversity Action Plan, protect priority habitats/ species and species of conservation concern.

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