Meadow School Iffley – Business Plan
(Nov 2026)

Executive Summary

Meadow School Iffley is a proposal by Friends of the Fields Iffley for outdoor education in nature located on 2.5 acres of ancient meadow, known locally as the 'Horse Fields' in the Iffley Village Conservation Area, East Oxford.

Friends of the Fields is a local community group (core group of 11 members, 450 on our mailing list) supported by local councillor and teacher David Henwood to:

- secure the remaining meadow in the Iffley Conservation Area for biodiversity and the wellbeing of current and future generations
- preserve Church Way and Meadow Lane as ancient quiet routes for active travel (walking, cycling, running, horse-riding)
- co-create and establish an outdoor Meadow School on the Horse Fields to meet local needs



Local resource: The meadow is a designated heritage asset (section 2.1) and a rare remnant of Oxford's agricultural past. Never built on or ploughed, it has exceptional biodiversity (section 2.2) consistent with an Oxford City Wildlife Site and included in Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It has a very high multifunctionality score. Meadow School Iffley and community engagement would bring additional benefits (section 2.3)

A*ims (Section1) :* Meadow School Iffley aims to deliver local nature-based education and skills, biodiversity restoration and community stewardship. The focus is to benefit children and young people from areas of high deprivation who recent research shows have currently have limited access to green space. Nature connection is known to improve attainment, physical and mental health, 'green' and 'soft' skills (communication, collaboration, problem solving and resilience) required for future careers.

Ideal location for education in nature (Section 2) : This beautiful meadow is ideal for a dedicated site for outdoor education in nature: teachers from local schools wish for an enclosed and safe site within a 5 - 15 minute walk, students from Greyfriars said they most valued the peace and calm when they visited the meadow. Research shows that the biggest benefits come from nature connection with high biodiversity. Importantly the meadow size (2.5 acres) is of sufficient size to take managed footfall whilst nurturing biodiversity.

Meeting local need (Section 3): Meadow School Iffley supports the needs identified by local schools and research. It extends the provision of other dedicated local nature sites engaging young people, which are working at capacity. It aligns with local strategies for Local Nature Recovery and Green Space, Health and Wellbeing and Thriving Communities, Children and Young People and Child Poverty Report and biodiversity and heritage policies of Oxford's Local Plan 2045.

Partnerships (Section 4) have already been established with Oxford City Farm BBOWT, Greyfriars Catholic School, Oxford Earth Academy.

Pilot study and establishing a Meadow School pedagogy (Section 5): Meadow School Iffley is ran a successful pilot of enrichment sessions for Year 7 students (April - May 2026) with ongoing nature enrichment sessions with Year 7 and 8 students. This informs the feasibility of the Meadow School pedagogy and the emerging Oxford Nature Education Strategy.

Delivery (Section 6): We were approached by BBOWT to be a keystone project for the RBOR Heritage Lottery bid combining education with connection to nature and heritage. RBOR Funding is being sought to establish the site for safe and accessible outdoor education with support for delivery through the RBOR young people's programme. An outline governance structure and a project risk mitigation strategy are being developed.

Site ownership and management (Section 7): The land is owned by Oxford City Council. Security of tenure might be provided through a lease or purchase. Oxford Preservation Trust have expressed interest in managing the heritage and biodiversity in partnership with the community.

1. Vision and Aims

Vision: A flourishing Meadow School for outdoor education on the ‘Horse Fields’ ancient meadow in Iffley, where young people and nature thrive together.

Aims: to support local needs by:

- Providing local education in nature for young people in East Oxford
- Enhancing and protecting the biodiversity and heritage of this ancient meadow
- Building community stewardship of local green space.

2. Ideal location for education in nature

These meadows are an ideal site for local education in nature. They are accessible to local schools (primary, secondary and special needs) along quiet routes for active travel and provide a tranquil, enclosed, safe site with abundant biodiversity and links to Oxford’s rural past.

2.1 Heritage

The meadow is a designated heritage asset as an integral part of the Iffley Conservation Area and a rare remnant of Oxford’s agricultural past in a settlement dating back to at least AD 941.

Meadow School Iffley would make this heritage accessible to young people, both for learning and for the positive impacts that heritage can have on social well-being, health and pride of place (Oxford Green Space Strategy).

See the Heritage Appendix for further information

2.2 Biodiversity

Covering an area of 2.5 acres the Horse Fields meadow is just large enough to nurture the sensitive ecosystem whilst supporting managed footfall for education in nature. They would complement existing initiatives for engaging children and young people in nature.

The site qualifies for designation as an Oxford City Wildlife Site and supports:

- 636 invertebrate species (including 19 of conservation significance).
- 7 bat species, including rare barbastelle and Nathusius’ pipistrelle.
- A 36 entrance badger sett including leucistic badgers
- Grass snake, common lizard, otter traces, hedgehogs, and a significant breeding bird assemblage.

See the Biodiversity survey for further information

Habitats that are high in biodiversity provide greater benefits for learning and wellbeing and student engagement will in turn support delivery of Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy measures for this site. To this end, the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership is exploring how to bring together a funded strategic youth nature project for Oxfordshire. Meadow School Iffley would aim to link into this opportunity.

2.3 Multifunctionality

The meadow brings multiple benefits: environmental, social and economic, with a multifunctionality score of 15 out of 16 indicators in Oxford City Council's Green Infrastructure Study (2022).

Meadow School Iffley would enhance all of the current benefits and in addition it would:

- support the development of skills and capabilities for young people and the wider local community (social)
- improve employment skills for a more inclusive economy (new economic indicator)

while doing this in a way that supports equitable access for education in nature by serving school catchments with high levels of deprivation. This would bring the multifunctionality score up to 17 out of 17. See multifunctionality appendix



In respect of community access, Friends of the Fields Iffley have organised community scything of the Horse Fields for the last 3 years. initiated to maintain biodiversity due to failure of the landowner to mow the meadow despite repeated requests. Meadow School Iffley can offer further opportunities for community engagement eg: hedge planting and laying, habitat restoration, specific sessions for nature connection and wellbeing.

3. Supporting local need

3.1 Need identified by local schools

Friends of the Fields Iffley has engaged with local schools (primary, secondary and special needs) to find out how outdoor education on the Horse Fields could meet the needs of their students whilst protecting the biodiversity and heritage of these meadows.

Teachers from these local schools are supportive of a local, safe, dedicated site for nature based education saying that many of their students have limited opportunities for nature connection and that Meadow School Iffley could benefit by:

1. Addressing disadvantage
2. Improving mental and physical health
3. Increasing educational attainment and skills
4. Supporting connection
    a. Between communities
    b. With their local landscape
5. Being accessible within walking distance to allow more frequent visits for a wider range of students.
6. Providing a safe, enclosed site

This is what teachers at the local schools said:

“The meadows in Iffley … present the perfect opportunity for children, young people and families to take a short walk to a ‘potential paradise’.”

“We are passionate about our planet and are always considering ways in which we can make a difference.”

“Your plans for the future of the meadows in Iffley resonated fully with the needs of the children in our school”

“Our children have wonderful academic and creative capacity, but often very limited life experiences, including interactions with nature.”

3.2 Need identified by research

Local schools have high levels of disadvantage with 36% of students either receiving pupil premium or having special needs (analysis of 5 schools closest to the meadow) with catchment areas that are in the top and second most deprived deciles in England (e.g. Blackbird Leys, Greater Leys, Littlemore and Rose Hill).

A recent study of [Oxfordshire's Green Space Deprived Neighbourhoods (2024)] shows these areas also have poor access to green space with evidence that 'more deprived communities receive greater benefits from green space, and that not all green space has similar impacts, with more biodiverse areas providing greater benefits.' Meadow School Iffley can help to support high quality access to green space for these neighbourhoods.

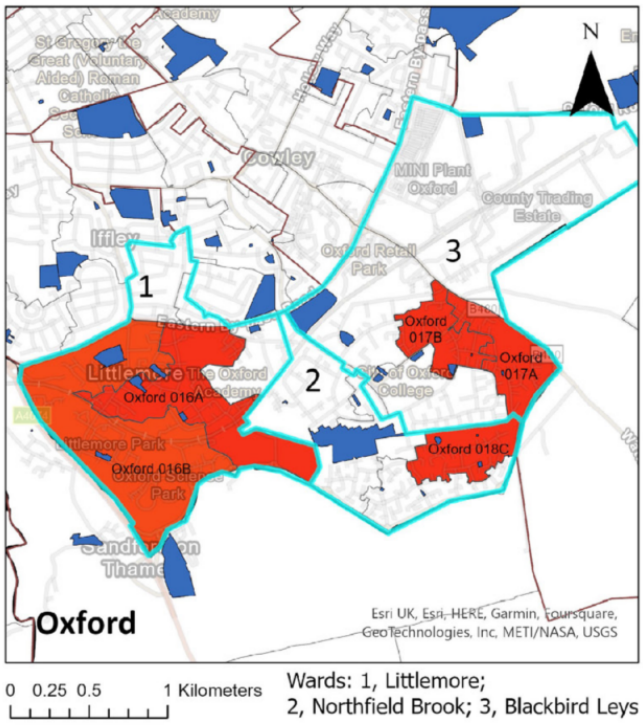
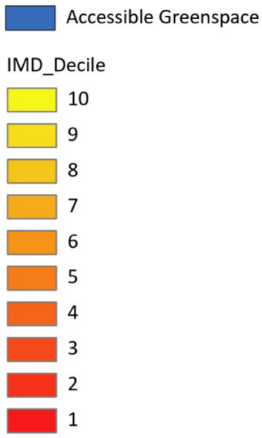


Fig 5 Neighbourhoods in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in England that have poor local provision of accessible green space.



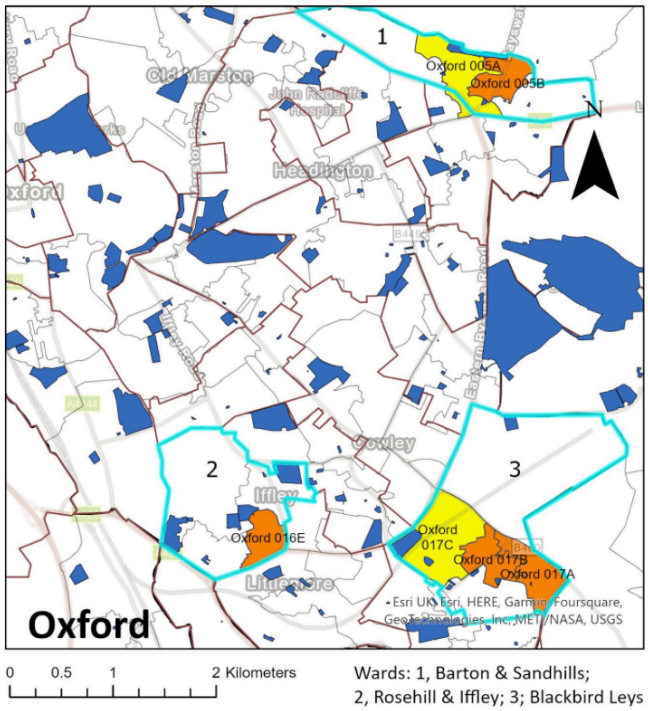


Figure 7: Neighbourhoods with high population density and poor provision of local greenspace

Reproduced with permission from Oxfordshire's Green Space Deprived Neighbourhoods, Martha Crockatt, 2024

3.3 Delivering local and national priorities

Meadow School Iffley aligns with the ambition and delivery of a wide range of local policies covering education and wellbeing, green spaces and heritage, child poverty and deprivation as well as Oxford's draft new Local Plan:

- Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Oxford City Council Local Plan (green infrastructure, heritage)
- Oxford Child Poverty Report
- Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Oxfordshire Education Plan and SEND Strategy
- Oxford City Council Education Strategy
- Oxford Thriving Communities Strategy
- The emerging Oxford Nature Education Strategy
- RBOR landscape-scale habitat connectivity goals

In particular the Meadow School aligns strongly with the priorities for:

1. Improving access to green spaces local to areas of deprivation

Oxford's Child Poverty report (2022) strongly supports improved access to local green space to address deprivation and states that "*it is necessary that parks and public spaces – play areas and nature reserves – must be explicitly protected, particularly in less affluent areas. These are where they are needed most, and where residents have the least capacity to transfer elsewhere. The forthcoming Local Plan provides an excellent opportunity to embed this policy.*"

Taking a school catchment area approach allows Meadow School Iffley to support students from neighbouring areas of deprivation and improve access to green space.

2. Supporting students with high need

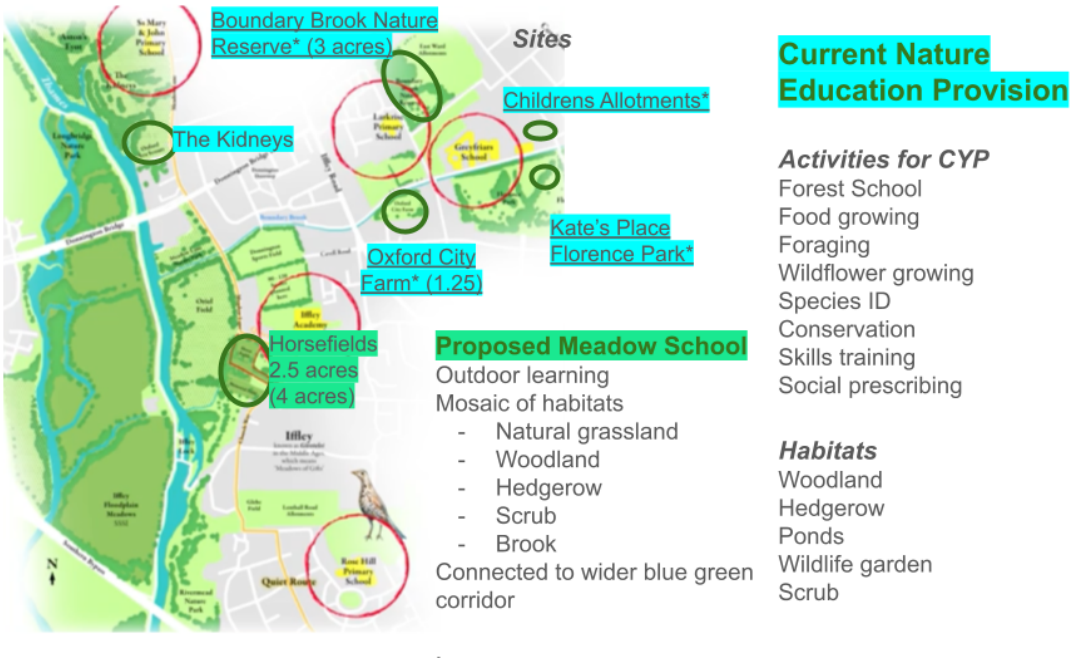
This is rising demand and increased complexity of need as shown from the results of the SEND Oxfordshire Consultation' (personal communication David Henwood, County Councillor) and the data shows our county has consistently underperformed in terms of the outcomes achieved for SEND children across all age groups relative to peer authorities and the England average.(Oxford City Council response to Oxfordshire County Council consultations –Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Draft Strategy 2022-2027)

Given the close proximity of Iffley Academy, Meadow School Iffley could become an ideal safe site to extend school provision and support skills for transition.

Detailed mapping of the project against these policies is set out in the Meadow School Iffley Alignment with Oxfordshire's Strategies document.

3.4 Complement provision at other local sites

Meadow School Iffley (highlighted on the map in green) would complement and extend nature connection at other sites in East Oxford (blue highlight).
Local schools are circled in red; CYP: Children and Young People



The largest dedicated sites providing nature connection are:

Boundary Brook Nature reserve (3 acres) provides a wide range of opportunities for community nature engagement and has a dedicated Forest School.

Oxford City Farm (1.25 acres) has a focus on food, farming and education as well as wellbeing and is engaging with many local schools.

Both are working at capacity. The Meadow School site (2.5 acres) can extend capacity, increase the opportunities for studying and restoring a variety of habitats whilst managing demand / footfall. It is working to evolve a pedagogy for nature based learning and skills in collaboration with the Oxford Earth Academy, Oxford City Farm, BBOWT and local schools (see below).

4. Partnerships and Networks

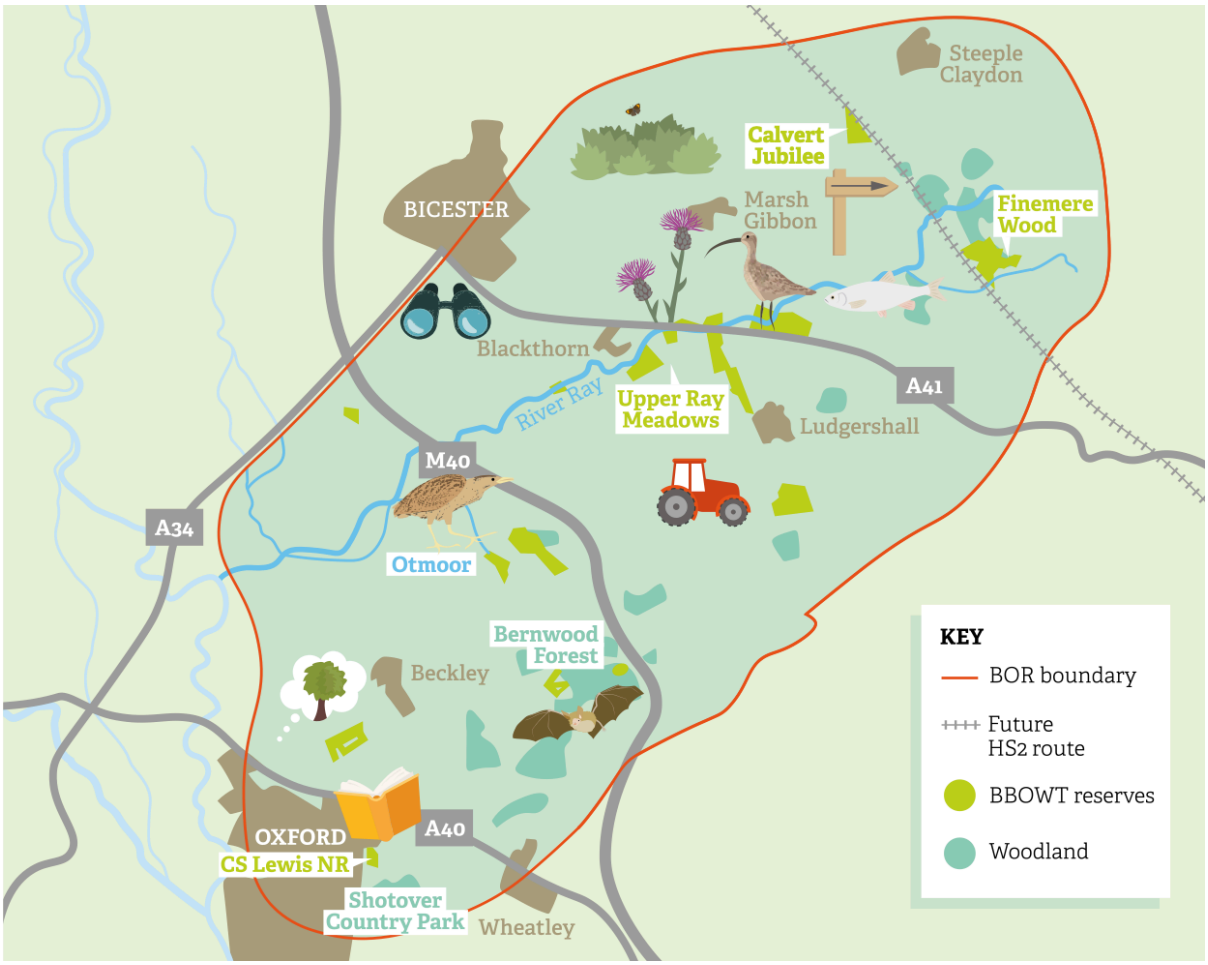
Meadow School Iffley has identified and established a range of partnerships across the NGOs and local government to bring valuable experience and expertise as well as connection to relevant local networks.

4.1 BBOWT and the RBOR project, Oxford City Farm, and potentially Oxfordshire Preservation Trust

This collaboration is precisely the aspiration for the Oxford Green Spaces Strategy education objective to: *Support community projects in biodiversity, archaeology and history working with organisations such as Oxford Preservation Trust and Berkshire,Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.'*

BBOWT Wildlife Trust (Reconnecting Bernwood Otmoor and Ray Programme lead)

We were approached by BBOWT to be a keystone project for inclusion in the RBOR Heritage Lottery bid, by combining education with connection to nature and heritage. In addition to funding for capital setup and 5 years start up running costs, BBOWT and their RBOR partners bring expertise and networks covering a wide range of resources including biodiversity, community organising, education, heritage and landscape scale conservation.



The Reconnecting Brentwood Otmoor and Ray project reaches into East Oxford connecting it to the to nature and community projects in North East Oxford and to the wider landscape beyond.

Oxford City Farm

Oxford City Farm is keen to partner with us. Now at capacity on their current site, Meadow School (situated just a 5 min walk away) would provide a “wilder companion site” to expand their work with community food growing and the Thriving in Nature project. In turn they bring a strong track record in school engagement and learning and wider community networks, and expertise in fundraising.

Oxford Preservation Trust

Meadow School Iffley is exploring with Oxford Preservation Trust the potential for future land ownership, management and community partnership. This would be in keeping with their well-established model for land acquisition, active site management, collaboration with BBOWT and community engagement locally.
The details of this collaboration would need to be discussed to best meet the needs of all the relevant parties.

4.2 Oxford Earth Academy and Greyfriars School

We are delivering nature connection enrichment sessions with these partners, along with expertise from BBOWT.

Greyfriars Catholic School

Greyfriars Catholic School (formerly St Gregory’s School) is a 15 minute walk from the meadow. The school catchment area covers Blackbird Leys which has high levels of deprivation, high population density and poor provision of local green space. The Head of Greyfriars Catholic School, has been key in supporting Meadow School Iffley and providing the opportunity to pilot nature connection enrichment sessions to Year 7 and 8 students (from April 2026 ongoing).

Oxford Earth Academy

The Oxford Earth Academy, is providing pedagogical leadership, engaging with young people and their adults about climate solutions, nature recovery, green careers and human wellbeing, focusing on Oxfordshire. This input has been key in the planning and delivery of the pilot sessions with Greyfriars School.

Meadow School Iffley will benefit from their links with Oxford University and Schools Sustainability Network, their work with teenagers at the Cherwell School and recent research into the impact of nature on the mental health and wellbeing of secondary age young people.

4.3 Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council

We are working with the active support of our local councillor David Henwood (City and County Council) who is a teacher. He says: *‘At a time when many young people face barriers to engagement and access to green space is limited, this proposal*

offers a practical, community-led way to make better use of public land for education, wellbeing, and environmental awareness.'

Oxford City Council's Locality Manager for Rose Hill, Littlemore and East Oxford is very supportive of Meadow School plans with recognition of the potential benefits for schools and community groups, including initiatives such as Youth Ambition.and linking up with wider wellbeing initiatives through the Rose Hill & Littlemore Health and Wellbeing Partnership.

We are working with the Oxford Local Nature Partnership, People & Nature division to support the new proposal for a strategic People and Nature project focusing on children and young people.

5. Meadow School aims, pilot study and establishing a pedagogy

Current nature education provision is predominantly for Forest School, which is targeted at Key Stage 1 (children aged 3 to 7). Forest School is a well-established part of primary school education with a focus on play and exploration in a natural setting. Currently, nature connection for Key Stage 2 children and teens is mostly limited to school trips. There are increasing barriers to providing these with costs for transport, staff and accommodation and time pressures.

Meadow School Iffley aims to help address this gap in outdoor education in nature to older children and teens will the multiple advantages this would bring to support learning, health and wellbeing, stewardship and community, practical and soft skills (such as relational, team working, problem solving) that are needed for the economy.

The Oxford Earth Academy are pioneering this type of nature engagement with young people in Oxford. This input, along with experts at Oxford City Farm, BBOWT and Greyfriars school Year 7 teacher have been central to the co-design and delivery of our pilot project of enrichment sessions for year 7 students at Greyfriars Catholic School (April-May 2026) with a focus on supporting nature connection and skills.This has led on to further sessions (June 2026 and ongoing).

The outcomes will inform the development of the Meadow School pedagogy and the emerging Oxford Nature Education Strategy and the delivery of Natural History GCSE.



Visit to the Horse Fields during Meadow School Iffley Year 7 pilot project

6. Delivery

Meadow School Iffley is being included in the RBOR Lottery Bid to establish the site for safe and accessible outdoor education.

Friends of the Fields Iffley will incorporate as a Community Interest Company (CIC). A Steering Group will include representative from local schools and the local community, partner organisations and education, ecology and heritage experts.

The land is currently allocated for housing in Oxford's draft Local Plan 2045 with a zero housing allocation due to site sensitivity. Expert surveys show it is unsuitable for any development (biodiversity, heritage, flooding, difficult vehicle access along designated Principal Quiet Route for Active Travel). Friends of the Fields continue to work to have the allocation of this meadow removed from Oxford's draft Local Plan.

There is considerable support from the local community (450 person mailing list; 1000+ objections to development) for saving the meadow for education in nature.

Offers of partnerships with local organisations (Oxford City Farm, Oxford Preservation Trust) and continued inclusion in the application for Heritage Lottery Funding despite the current allocation in the draft Local Plan 2045 indicate Meadow School's strong alignment with local community and heritage lottery objectives.

Summary

The evidence base set out in this proposal demonstrates that Meadow School Iffley is a deliverable project which would be effective at meeting local needs for education in nature for young people from neighbouring areas of high deprivation with poor access to green space. The Meadow School proposal would preserve and making more accessible the meadow's biodiversity and heritage whilst maintaining the current resource that this ancient meadow provides to thousands of active travel users of the rural Meadow Lane Quiet Route.



Friends of the Fields Iffley
November 2026