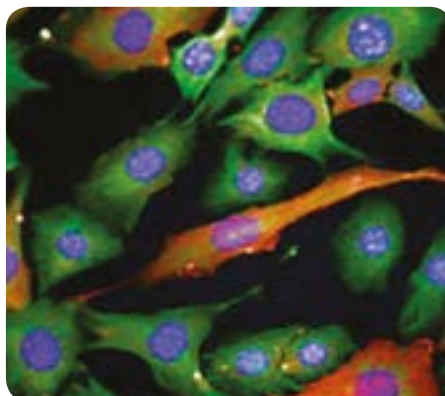
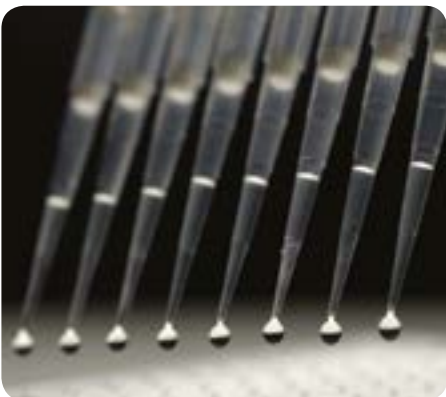


Creating the Environment for Growth

Strategic Environmental and Economic Investment Plan for Oxfordshire





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Foreword

Oxfordshire's economy is strong and diverse, built on solid foundations of academic excellence, globally renowned research and innovative business. These enviable economic assets are fundamental to the knowledge economy on which local and national fortunes increasingly depend. Substantial growth is envisaged over the coming decades, creating many thousands of highly skilled jobs, offering better opportunities for local communities, and attracting more people to live and work in the county.

For Oxfordshire to thrive and prosper in this way, investment in its natural capital will be as important as other forms of investment, if not more so. Oxfordshire's environmental assets, including its parks and open spaces, the River Thames and its tributaries, and three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, make this a fantastic place to live and work, and they provide vital goods and services to the economy, without which it simply could not function. We cannot afford to take these assets for granted.

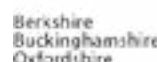
This investment plan demonstrates that not only is environmental investment essential if we are to achieve the full economic potential of this great county, but it will also generate a real financial return in its own right, stimulating further innovation in Oxfordshire's already vibrant green economy. The proposals set out in this plan will spur on the development of new ideas, products and services that solve pressing environmental challenges and meet growing demand in national and international markets. The opportunity is there for the taking. Working with our partners across the county, we intend to make the most of it.



Cllr. David Nimmo Smith
Oxfordshire County
Council Cabinet -
Environment



Nigel Tipple
CEO - Oxfordshire Local
Enterprise Partnership



Summary

Oxfordshire has set itself an ambitious future. This ambition is for substantial economic growth and development in the county, which already contributes an outstanding £15.5 billion per annum¹ to the British economy. The detail of this ambition is described in and driven by a Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), led by Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) and its partners.

The SEP envisages the creation of an additional 85,600 jobs and the development of 100,000 new homes by 2031. This level of growth represents a challenge to, and demand upon, the resources of the county. Securing the human and financial capital needed to achieve these goals will be essential. As this report demonstrates, Oxfordshire's environment – or natural capital - also has an essential role to play.

Oxfordshire's natural capital assets include the rural landscape, the River Thames and its tributaries, parks and urban green spaces. Together these provide vital goods and services, including clean air, fresh water, surface water management and flood alleviation, food and forestry products, carbon capture and storage, and the potential for renewable energy generation. They are also the setting for the City of Oxford and the county's towns and villages, and places for leisure and recreation. Investment is needed to turn around a long-term decline in the condition of these assets, keep pace with the increasing demands placed on them as the economy and population grow, and address emerging challenges including climate change.

Investment in Oxfordshire's environment presents a unique opportunity. Not only will such investment ensure that the county's natural capital assets are able to meet the demands placed on them, but it will also make its own distinctive and very significant additional contribution to growth. This additional contribution must be of two overlapping dimensions: to make Oxfordshire a better place to live and do business, and to generate new environmental products and services with wealth creation and export potential.

'Oxfordshire is a true living laboratory of environmental innovation, with outputs of real economic and social worth as likely to be created in a village hall as a high-tech research centre.'



Fiona Danks, Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2)

1 Gross Value Added (GVA)



Chris Smith, Chilterns Conservation Board

The challenge of placing the environment, or natural capital, at the heart of a developed economy is immense. Few societies anywhere in the world – if indeed any – are achieving it. Oxfordshire could be an exemplar. The county benefits from an extraordinary array of environmental expertise, ranging from the laboratories of its universities and research centres, through the manufacturing lines and offices of its businesses, across local government, to charities, community groups and others. These organisations and individuals are engaged in ground-breaking work to address the environmental challenges that we all face. As such, Oxfordshire is a true living laboratory of environmental innovation, with outputs of real economic and social worth as likely to be created in a village hall as a high-tech research centre.

‘Our vision is for Oxfordshire to benefit from a high quality, resilient environment which supports economic growth, development, health, wellbeing and prosperity for all.

The expertise and activity across the county will be even more effective when harnessed, coordinated and targeted towards common goals. This plan is the first step towards achieving just that. Creating the Environment for Growth is the Strategic Environmental and Economic Investment Plan (SEIIP) for Oxfordshire. The SEIIP sets out the vision and priorities for environmental investment across the county. It is intended to provide clarity and direction on the priorities for investment in Oxfordshire’s environment, maximise the economic benefits of that investment, and establish a framework for on-going coordination and delivery.

The SEIIP is one of a series of plans which support the OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan, and will have a vital role to play in ensuring that the ambitions for economic growth in Oxfordshire are realised. It was developed on behalf of OxLEP by LDA Design and Eftec, with input from a large number of stakeholders, not least Oxfordshire County Council, Wild Oxfordshire, and The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

Our vision is for Oxfordshire to benefit from a high quality, resilient environment which supports economic growth, development, health, wellbeing and prosperity for all. This will be achieved by an innovative, efficient environmental sector working together with other public and private sector partners to:

- Attract and deliver investment in the county
- Ensure sustainable, long-term stewardship of natural capital assets
- Develop new and improved environmental knowledge, goods and services

The plan identifies five strategic priorities for environmental investment, which will support the achievement of this vision. These are:

'OxLEP will take responsibility for overall leadership of the SEEIP, working closely with other stakeholders including the local authorities, Wild Oxfordshire and BBOWT.

- Growing the green economy in Oxfordshire
- Enhancing the quality and resilience of urban areas
- Improving management of land to reduce flood risk, enhance water resources, and promote biodiversity
- Promoting and enabling access to the countryside
- Engaging people in the environment and enabling more sustainable lifestyles

The SEEIP steering group have worked with stakeholders across the county to identify an initial pipeline of investment proposals which have the potential to deliver on those priorities. Amounting to a total investment of £31 million, these proposals include:

- A cluster of projects to promote low carbon energy and transport
- Business support for rural diversification and resilience
- A programme of research, advice, training and direct investment to encourage sustainable woodland management and maximise the value from Oxfordshire's woodlands
- Targeted improvements to walking and cycling routes and green spaces in and around urban areas
- A series of proposals to incentivise economically sustainable improvements in land management
- Development of new sites for leisure and recreation in Oxfordshire's countryside
- Other supporting interventions, including developing more sustainable business models for long-term management and maintenance of green space and the development of an effective strategic framework for sharing knowledge and facilitating high quality, sustainable new development.



In addition, the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is a further major investment proposed in the county. It is being taken forwards via a separate process to other proposals in this investment plan but has the potential to deliver against a number of the SEEIP strategic priorities. Together, these initial projects will reinforce Oxfordshire's impact as a living laboratory of environmental expertise, and catalyse further activity both within the county and beyond as the lessons learned are applied elsewhere.

While a significant amount of work has been undertaken across the environmental sector in Oxfordshire to prepare the SEEIP and the investment proposals within it, this is just the start of the process. Further work will include working up the investment proposals in detail, implementing them, rolling out successful proposals to additional locations where applicable, and identifying and responding to new challenges and opportunities as they emerge.

While much of this work will be done by organisations across Oxfordshire working individually or in partnerships, there will continue to be a need for leadership, governance, coordination, financing and other activity at the strategic level. OxLEP will take responsibility for overall leadership of the SEEIP, working closely with other stakeholders including the local authorities, Wild Oxfordshire and BBOWT. Central to this will be the establishment of a Sustainability and Environment Sub-Group which reports to the OxLEP Board and an environmental investment fund, administered by OxLEP, which will provide match funding to kick start projects, lever in additional investment to Oxfordshire and unlock the benefits set out in the SEEIP.



Fiona Danks, Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2).



1.0 Introduction

Creating the Environment for Growth is the Strategic Environmental and Economic Investment Plan (SEEIP) for Oxfordshire. The SEEIP sets out the vision and priorities for environmental investment across the county. It is intended to harness the considerable local environmental expertise and experience, enable activity to be coordinated, ensure that environmental investment in Oxfordshire is targeted towards common goals, and maximise the economic benefits of that investment.

'Intensive stakeholder engagement has been undertaken to ensure that the SEEIP is informed by the wealth of expertise and experience across the county.



The SEEIP is one of a series of plans which support the OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan, and will have a vital role to play in ensuring that the ambitions for economic growth in Oxfordshire are realised. It was developed on behalf of OxLEP by LDA Design and Eftec, with input from a large number of stakeholders, not least Oxfordshire County Council, Wild Oxfordshire, and Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

To develop the vision and strategic priorities, the natural capital assets in the county were reviewed, to understand their condition and extent, the ecosystem services that they provide, the role that they play in relation to the economy and development, and the challenges and opportunities going forwards. The information set out in the Strategic Economic Plan was also used alongside other documents which describe the context and priorities for economic growth and development across the county over the next 20 years.

Intensive stakeholder engagement has been undertaken to ensure that the SEEIP is informed by the wealth of expertise and experience across the county. This included a series of one-to-one interviews and two workshops. At the first workshop, representatives of local organisations were invited to review the natural capital inventory and agree on the priorities for environmental investment in Oxfordshire. At the second workshop specific proposals for investment were reviewed and discussed.



2.0 Oxfordshire's economy, growth and development

Oxfordshire is a world-leading location for research, education and high tech business, with particular strengths in life sciences, physics, engineering, electronics, telecoms and computing. The rural economy is also strong, including a diverse agricultural sector and renewable energy generation as well as a growing number of small businesses. These strengths, combined with a wealth of cultural, heritage and environmental assets in both urban and rural settings, make Oxfordshire a highly attractive place to live and work and attract increasing numbers of visitors.

The county is home to around 661,000 people and supports around 381,000 jobs. In addition, the county contributes £15.5 billion annually to national output and is one of only three areas in the country that provide positive contributions to the Exchequer. This is mainly through academic excellence including the two universities, the appeal of Oxford's global brand to business and tourism, and high quality economic assets.

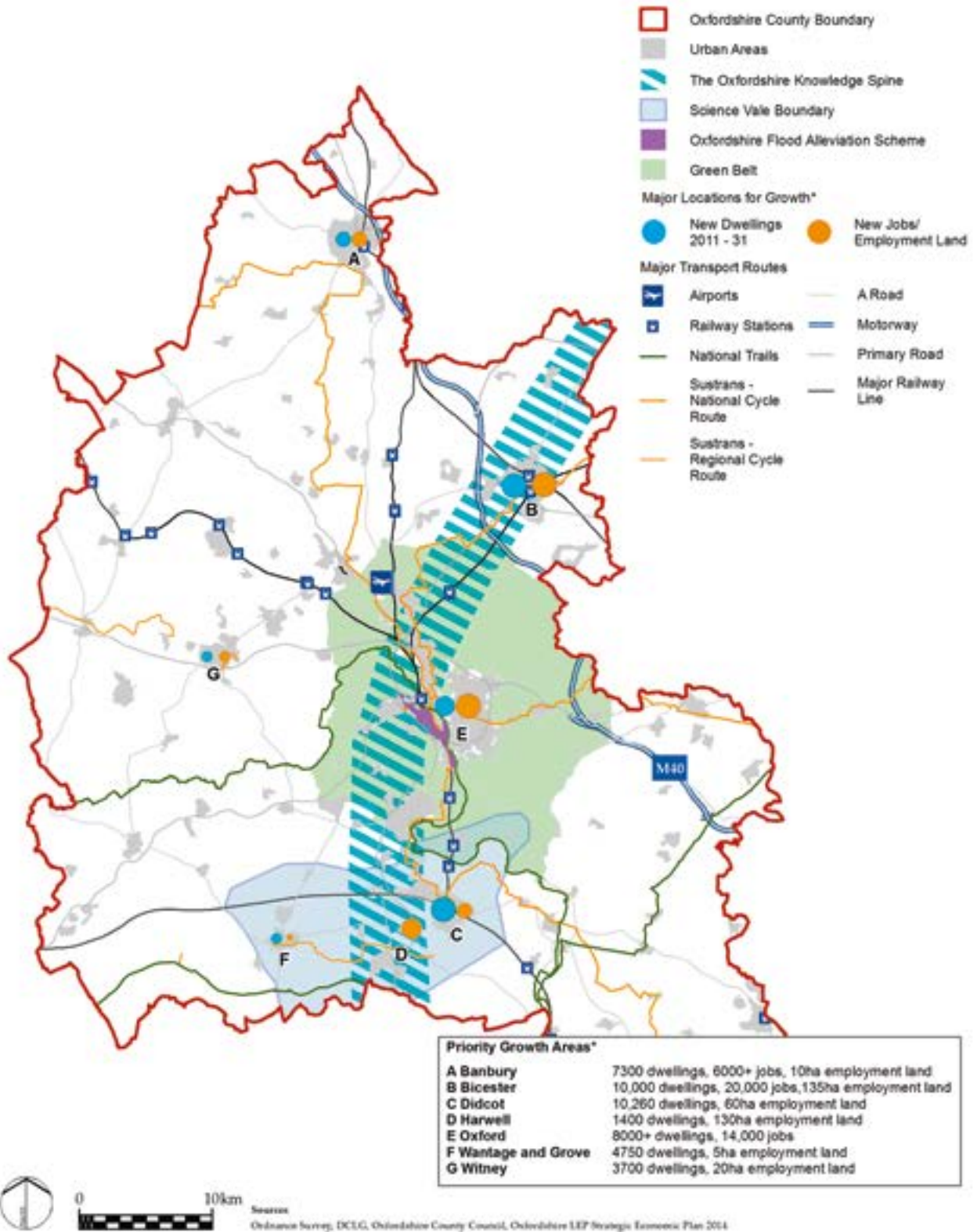
'Oxfordshire is home to around 661,000 people and supports around 381,000 jobs.'

Significant activity is underway to drive further economic growth and development in Oxfordshire, attracting local, national and international investment. This activity is being spearheaded by Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) and the public and private sector organisations which comprise its membership. In addition to capitalising on the clear potential for growth in 'Big Science' the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) emphasises the importance of cultivating the green economy and encouraging tourism. The county's academic excellence and entrepreneurial spirit are reflected in the priorities for the SEP, which are grouped into the themes of innovative people, place, enterprise and connectivity.

Oxford, Bicester and Science Vale to the south of the county are major growth points for research and high tech development. Job creation, estimated at 85,600 new jobs by 2031, will further stimulate a housing market that is already subject to high demand and pressure on affordability. Around 100,000 new homes are needed by 2031 in order to meet this demand. These will need to be developed in locations which provide good access particularly by public transport to employment sites in Oxford and along the Knowledge Spine, and to town centres. Significant development is planned at Bicester, Didcot, Banbury, Wantage, Grove and Witney. Oxford will also see major development, although capacity for growth within its administrative boundaries is limited. Through the Oxfordshire Growth Board the Oxfordshire authorities are undertaking joint work to identify how Oxford's unmet needs can be accommodated, taking account of the capacity of transport networks and other strategic infrastructure, and the environmental and cultural impacts of development.

The SEP sets out an intention to deliver major investment in the infrastructure needed to unlock growth, including £65 million for enhanced broadband connectivity, £500 million of rail investment and £716 million for highways improvements. OxLEP has already secured significant contributions to infrastructure and other measures to support business and growth, including the City Deal (£55.5 million announced in January 2014), Growth Deal (£118.46 million announced July 2014 and January 2015) and European Structural Investment Fund (£13.4 million) and EAFRD (£2.5 million) funding packages.

Figure 1: Major locations for growth and infrastructure investment in Oxfordshire



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3



3.0 Natural capital in the county

Natural capital has been defined as “the elements of the natural environment which provide valuable goods and services to people”.² Major natural capital assets in Oxfordshire include the Cotswolds, Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Green Belt, seven Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), the rivers and canal which flow through the Thames River Basin (see Figure 2), and parks and other green spaces in urban areas. The ecosystem services that these and other assets provide include clean air, fresh water supplies, surface water management and flood alleviation, food and forestry products, carbon capture and storage, and the potential for renewable energy generation. They also provide an attractive setting for development and offer significant opportunities for recreation and leisure, alongside considerable cultural heritage attractions, not least the City of Oxford and Blenheim Palace.

A number of factors are driving long-term change in the environment, including changes in land use and land management practices, development and industrial activity. The extent and condition of many natural capital assets have been declining over the course of decades, with major challenges including air and water pollution, land contamination, fragmentation of habitats and a decline in biodiversity. Stocks of finite resources, including fossil fuels, are depleting and waste management is still a challenge in spite of recent progress with reduction, reuse and recycling. Perhaps most significantly, evidence shows that our climate is changing as a result of human activity, and the impacts anticipated over the coming century, including rising temperatures, rising sea levels and more extreme weather, are likely to affect all aspects of life and all sectors of the economy.

Significant investment will be required to address these challenges, and maintain and enhance the vital ecosystem services that natural capital assets provide to the economy, both in Oxfordshire and across the country. The Natural Capital Committee was set up in 2012 to provide expert, independent advice to the government on the state of England’s natural capital and how action to protect and improve natural capital should be prioritised. It has recommended that changes in natural capital should be measured, valued, reflected in corporate and national accounts, and taken into account in decision-making processes. The Government has recently committed to produce a 25 year plan for a healthy natural economy, on the basis of a recommendation by the Natural Capital Committee to develop a long-term strategy to maintain and improve natural capital.³

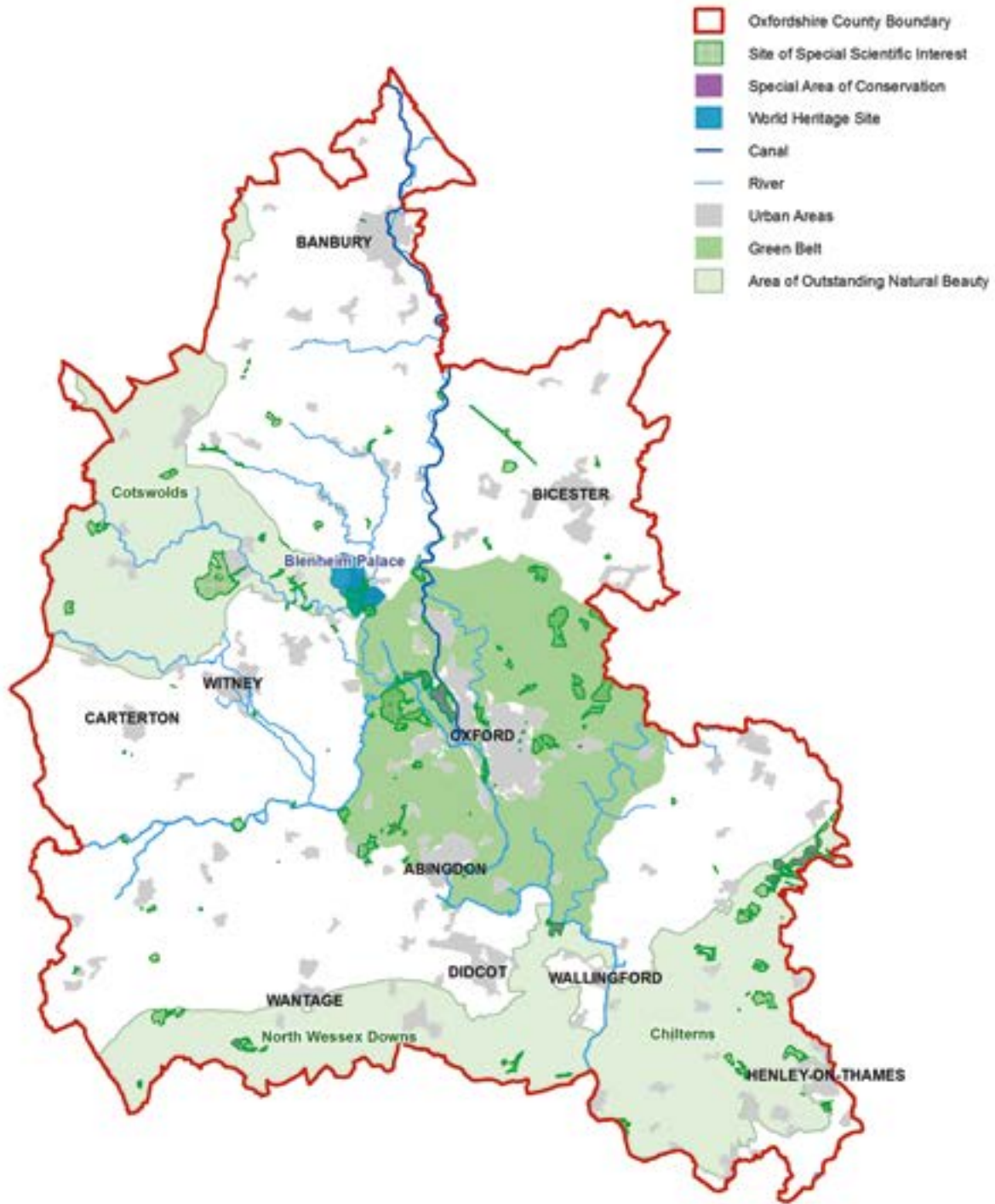
In its third annual report, the Natural Capital Committee presented a series of environmental investments which offer good economic returns. Of these investments, those most relevant to Oxfordshire include woodland planting near towns and cities, wetland creation on low grade agricultural land upstream of settlements, improvements to urban green spaces and air quality, and improving the environmental performance of farming. The economic case for this investment must not be underestimated. The Natural Capital Committee has demonstrated that environmental investment offers economic returns comparable to and even greater than investment in conventional infrastructure. Further to this, the cost of not taking action can be substantial.⁴

² Final Natural Capital Committee Advice to Government, Natural Capital Committee (2015)

³ The Government’s Response to the Natural Capital Committee’s Third State of Natural Capital Report, Defra (2015)

⁴ The State of Natural Capital: Protecting and Improving Natural Capital for Prosperity and Wellbeing. Third report to the Economic Affairs Committee. Natural Capital Committee (2015)

Figure 2: Major natural capital assets in Oxfordshire



Sources
Ordnance Survey, Natural England, Historic England, DCLG, Environment Agency

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4.0 Local expertise and the unique opportunity for environmental investment



Community First Oxfordshire

If the full economic potential of Oxfordshire is to be realised, investment in the environment will be essential to ensure that Oxfordshire's natural capital assets are able to meet the demands placed on them. The construction of tens of thousands of new homes and significant commercial development, together with the delivery of major infrastructure projects and refurbishment of existing assets will also generate a major demand for environmental goods and services within the county.

Environmental investment will be as important as investment in transport, communications and other infrastructure in Oxfordshire, if not more so.

Furthermore, it has the potential to generate significant economic value in its own right. In addition to boosting productivity and innovation across the

wider economy in Oxfordshire, it will result in the development of new environmental products and services with wealth creation and export potential.

The opportunity to generate economic value from environmental investment in Oxfordshire is unique and substantial. Environmental expertise and experience in the county spreads from the laboratories of its universities and research centres, through the manufacturing lines and offices of its businesses, across local government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faiths, and schools, to the myriad community groups across the city, towns and villages. These organisations are already undertaking a diverse range of activity to deliver environmental investment, both within Oxfordshire and beyond.

The University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and other organisations in the county are undertaking world-leading research and education on environmental assets and processes, how they are changing over time, and innovative solutions to some of the challenges that we face, including technologies, behaviour change, and new approaches to policy, governance, economics, investment and business management. Between them, the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes have over 500 energy researchers alone, with many more covering a diverse range of relevant expertise.

Environmental investment will be as important as investment in transport, communications and other infrastructure in Oxfordshire, if not more so.

'Between them, the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes have over 500 energy researchers alone, with many more covering a diverse range of relevant expertise.



James Alyward, Wychwood Project

The local authorities in Oxfordshire are responsible for developing and applying planning and transport policy, running environmental services, implementing local infrastructure improvements and managing their own assets. North West Bicester is home to the UK's first eco-town, while major infrastructure investment proposed in the county includes a new flood relief channel for Oxford led by the Environment Agency.

A broad range of others including businesses, charities, more than 150 environmental community groups and individuals are also taking action to improve the environment in the county, reduce their own environmental impacts, offer new environmental goods and services which meet growing demand in the market, and help to push the boundaries of best practice both locally and further afield.

Such is the quality, enthusiasm and breadth of the human capital enthused by, and engaging with, the environmental challenge that innovation of real economic and social worth is as likely to be created in a village hall as in the research lab. By way of example, on the one hand there is world-leading technology in solar PV; on the other, Oxfordshire has what was, at its creation, the largest community-owned solar farm in the world.

5



5.0 Vision and strategic priorities

Our vision is for Oxfordshire to benefit from a high quality, resilient environment which supports economic growth, development, health, wellbeing and prosperity for all. This will be achieved by an innovative, efficient environmental sector working together with other public and private sector partners to:

- Attract and deliver investment in the county
- Ensure sustainable, long-term stewardship of natural capital assets
- Develop new and improved environmental knowledge, goods and services

The SEEIP steering group have identified five strategic priorities for environmental investment, which will make a significant contribution to driving and enabling economic growth and development in Oxfordshire. These are:

- Growing the green economy in Oxfordshire
- Enhancing the quality and resilience of urban areas
- Improving management of land to reduce flood risk, enhance water resources, and promote biodiversity
- Promoting and enabling access to the countryside
- Engaging people in the environment and enabling more sustainable lifestyles



Clare Mowbray, Wild Oxfordshire

The strategic priorities are described in turn in the following sections, with information on the local context, relevant natural capital assets, challenges and opportunities. The five strategic priorities are of course interrelated. For example improving land management practices to reduce surface water run-off will help to manage flood risk and increase resilience in urban areas, and can also create or enhance opportunities for forestry, carbon sequestration, local food production or leisure and recreation. Where applicable, relationships between the strategic priorities are referred to in the following sections.



5.1. Growing the green economy in Oxfordshire

The green economy refers to the provision of environmental goods and services, which in Oxfordshire includes farming, forestry, renewable or low carbon energy, nature conservation, environmental research, consulting and other professional services. It also refers to action to improve the environmental impacts of the wider economy, for example by reducing pollution and emissions from transport or developing low-impact manufacturing processes.

The UK Government's strategy for green growth⁵ discusses the opportunities and implications for businesses and sets out the range of policies that it is using to support the transition to a green economy. It states that a green economy is "not a sub-set of the economy... - [the UK's] whole economy needs to be green". In addition it states that a "green economy will maximise value and growth across the whole economy, while managing natural assets sustainably".

The green economy in the UK is already substantial and significant growth is taking place year-on-year, with new technologies, knowledge and best practice emerging and demand growing. Low carbon and environmental jobs accounted for almost 1 million (939,600) jobs in the UK in 2011, compared with 1.06m jobs in financial services, 0.5m in motor trade and manufacturing, and 0.2m in telecoms.⁶ In 2011/12 the UK green economy was measured at around £122bn and over a third of the UK's economic growth was estimated to come from green businesses, at a time when overall growth was very low.⁶

Oxfordshire is in prime position to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the green economy, given its reputation for world-class research, innovation and education, and outstanding experience and expertise in the local environmental sector. A number of specific priorities for growing the green economy in Oxfordshire have emerged through the process of preparing this investment plan:

- Promoting low carbon energy and transport
- Supporting rural diversification and resilience
- Maximising the value of Oxfordshire's woodlands
- Enabling innovation and collaboration

Further information on each of these priorities is provided in the following sections.

Promoting low carbon energy and transport

There are substantial opportunities for growth in the low carbon economy in Oxfordshire, driven by a number of interrelated factors. The majority of energy demand in the county is currently met by fossil fuels, with an estimated cost to Oxfordshire's

'The green economy in the UK is already substantial and significant growth is taking place year-on-year, with new technologies, knowledge and best practice emerging and demand growing.'

⁵ HM Government (2011) Enabling the transition to a Green Economy: Government and business working together. A report by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) on to HM Government. London.

⁶ Green Alliance (2012) Green Economy: a UK success story. Online. Available at: <http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/greeneconomy.php> [accessed 06.08.15]

'The majority of energy demand in the county is currently met by fossil fuels, with an estimated cost to Oxfordshire's economy of £1 billion annually.'⁷



economy of £1 billion annually.⁷ Fossil fuel reserves are finite and the majority are imported, with implications for future security and affordability of supplies.

Energy demand could be expected to rise with economic growth and development, however Oxfordshire's existing electricity grid infrastructure is at capacity, resulting in power outages in parts of the county and significantly constraining the potential to connect new power generation. Fuel poverty is also an issue for some households in Oxfordshire, particularly in parts of rural Oxfordshire which are not connected to the gas network, lower income households and older, poorly insulated properties.

There is also an urgent need to address the environmental impacts of fossil fuel use, most notably climate change but also local health impacts associated particularly with air quality. The UK remains committed to its long-term target to reduce carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 compared to 1990 levels, while Oxfordshire's local authorities have jointly committed to halve carbon emissions within the county by 2030.

An extensive programme of action is required to improve energy efficiency, increase renewable and low carbon energy generation, manage the supply and demand balance, promote low or zero carbon forms of transport, and increase infrastructure capacity and resilience; not just in Oxfordshire but across the UK and globally. This presents a huge opportunity for growth in the low carbon economy, which Oxfordshire is poised to take advantage of.

The low carbon economy is already well established in the county, with £1.15 billion per year in sales and 8,800 people employed, amounting to 7% of Oxfordshire's economy.⁷ In addition to research organisations and businesses, an important role is being played in this sector by communities, individuals, the public sector, and other organisations such as Low Carbon Hub and Low Carbon Oxford. A study on Oxfordshire's low carbon economy⁷ identified strengths in several important

⁷ Oxfordshire's Low Carbon Economy, Environmental Change Institute and Low Carbon Oxford (2014)

sectors, including building technologies, alternative fuels and vehicles, and renewable energy technologies, as well as low carbon services such as consultancy, finance, law and accountancy. Activity ranges from early stage research and development to start-up companies and pilot projects to large-scale deployment. With the right investment, the same study estimated that the low carbon economy in Oxfordshire could more than double over the next 15 years, adding an additional £1.35 billion per year and creating over 10,000 new jobs.⁷

Local investment in renewable and low carbon energy generation and energy efficiency has been considerable, including thousands of solar energy installations and award-winning community energy projects. Major renewable energy installations across the county are shown in Figure 3. OxFutures⁸ is spearheading further investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects across the county. The programme, led by a partnership of Low Carbon Hub, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council, aims to attract £400 million of investment in across the county by 2020, secure Oxfordshire's position as a leader in the transition to a sustainable energy future, and enable the county's carbon targets to be met.

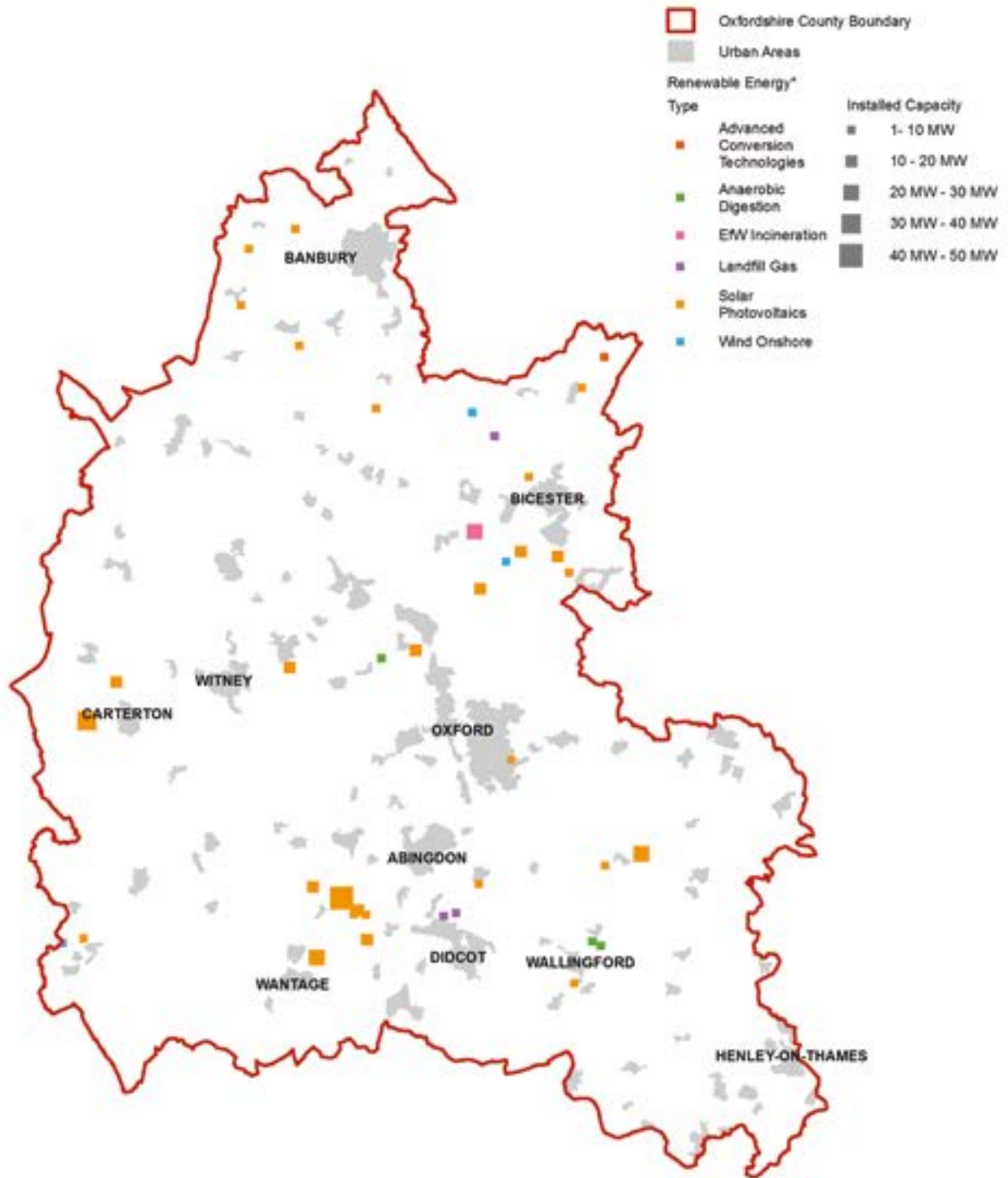
Sustainable woodland management (see below) and land management practices (see Section 5.3) also have an important role to play in retaining carbon storage and producing low carbon fuel, while full success in the low carbon economy relies on engaging people and encouraging more sustainable lifestyles (see Section 5.5). Innovation and collaboration has also been identified as an important priority to enable future growth in the low carbon economy (see below).

While impressive progress is being made, further investment is required to secure the economic benefits of growth in the low carbon economy. Some specific opportunities for investment in the low carbon economy are highlighted in Section 6.

the low carbon economy in Oxfordshire could more than double over the next 15 years, adding an additional £1.35 billion per year and creating over 10,000 new jobs.⁷



Figure 3: Major renewable energy projects in Oxfordshire



Source: Ordnance Survey, DECC

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*All Oxfordshire entries from the DECC Renewable Energy Planning Database for June 2013, which have the status 'Operational' or 'Awaiting Construction.'

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Supporting rural diversification and resilience

Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural county and agriculture has long been important to its economy, as reflected in the character of the landscape and the historic market towns. Over 70% of the landscape is in use as farmland (see Figure 4), with agricultural goods and services worth £91 million per year⁹ and employing around 2,300 people.¹⁰ The majority of activity is large scale meat, poultry or arable farming, and the products are sold in bulk to large processors or grain merchants outside of the county.



Farming will continue to be important, with long-term employment growth of 4.2% per annum forecast in the agricultural sector over the next 20 years, the highest growth rate of any sector in Oxfordshire.¹⁰ However, there are a number of challenges which must be faced including rising costs of production, downward pressure on prices, climate change, loss of biodiversity and other environmental challenges.

Rural diversification is important for the economic sustainability of farming and rural communities, to obtain the maximum value from rural assets, benefit from multiple income streams and reduce exposure to risk. Many farmers who are looking to diversify are already doing so. The EU LEADER funding, distributed by Defra via local LEADER programmes,

is designed to support small businesses in rural areas, while Earth Trust's FarmStep programme supports new start-up rural, land-based businesses.

Farm shops, farmers markets and other initiatives to promote local food sourcing have the potential to add value to farm produce, and this would have a strong connection with the county's rural heritage and the identity of the market towns. The scale of most of the agricultural operations in Oxfordshire and the lack of a local supply chain for processing and distributing food limits the potential at present, although there are some local success stories and Good Food Oxford and other local organisations are working to explore the potential for future progress.

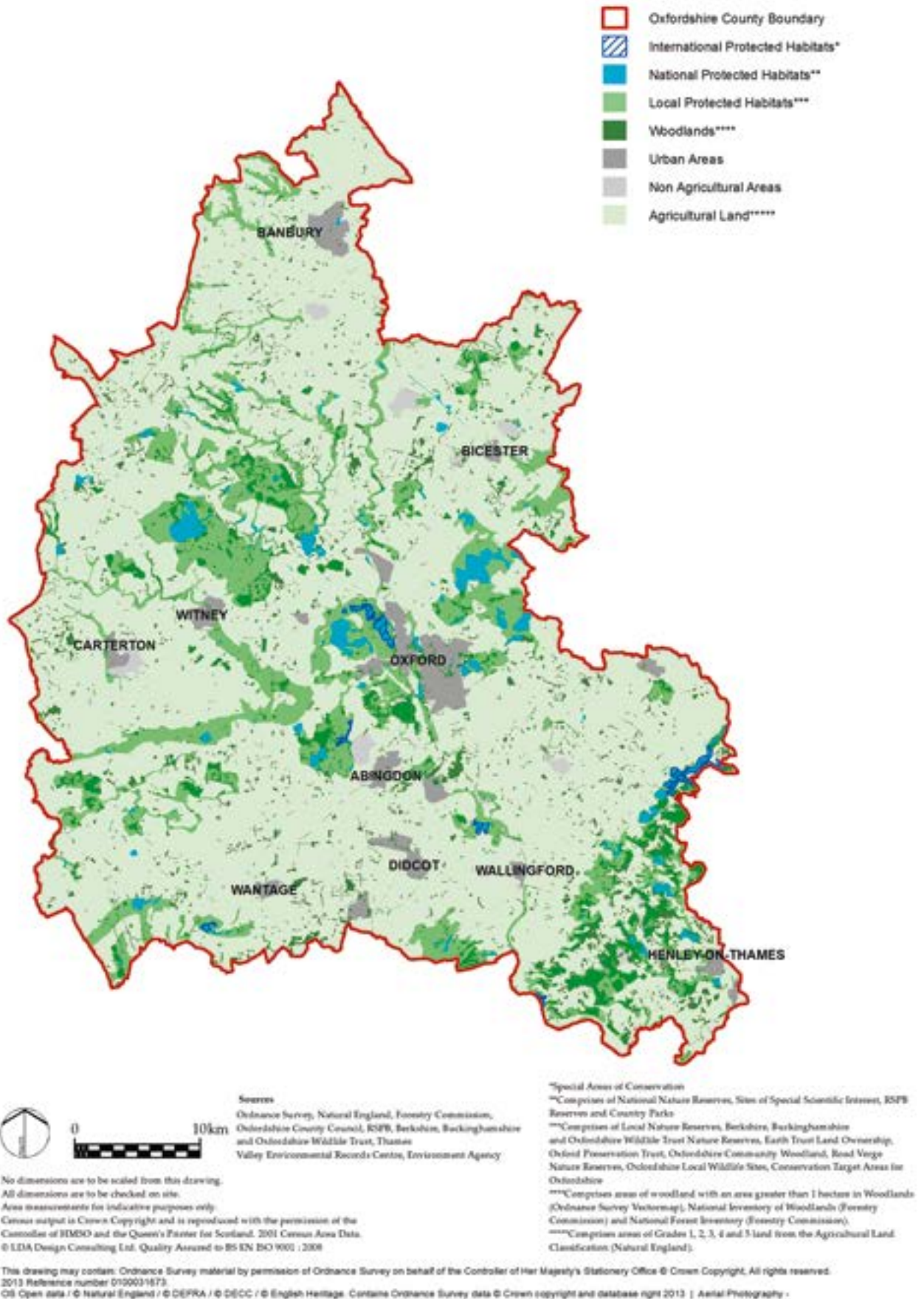
Renewable and low carbon energy is another option for generating additional income in rural areas, as well as reducing energy bills and environmental impacts; further information on this is provided above. Related to this, woodfuel and other products from sustainable woodland management offer potential for further growth, as described below. Countryside recreation, leisure and tourism also offer significant opportunities for rural businesses, as described in Section 5.4.

'Over 70% of Oxfordshire's landscape is in use as farmland, with agricultural goods and services worth £91 million per year and employing around 2,300 people

⁹ Driving Economic Growth Through Innovation: Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan, OxLEP (2014)

¹⁰ Economic Forecasting to Inform the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan and Strategic Housing Market Assessment: Final report for Vale of White Horse District Council and partners, Cambridge Econometrics and SQW (2014)

Figure 4: Extent of agricultural land in Oxfordshire



'Earth Trust offers training, qualifications and apprenticeships in land management, horticulture, food growing, and the business of farming from its 490 hectare farm at Little Wittenham

In addition to securing new income streams in rural areas, there is a need to reduce the environmental impacts of farming, promote resilience to climate change and introduce more sustainable land management practices. Subsidies or other payments to incentivise farmers and landowners to make these improvements provide a further income stream to support rural diversification. Further information on these issues and the potential solutions is provided in Section 5.3.

The right knowledge and skills will be essential to enable diversification and resilience in Oxfordshire's rural economy. Agriculture has the third highest skills deficit of all sectors in the UK economy, with 13% of all establishments identifying a skills gap and, in regional terms, the skills gaps being highest in the South East, South West and West Midlands.¹¹ FAI Farms is a local organisation which conducts research and development on sustainable farming practices, and provides training and advice to farmers, both within Oxfordshire and further afield. Earth Trust offers training, qualifications and apprenticeships in land management, horticulture, food growing, and the business of farming from its 490 hectare farm at Little Wittenham, while Abingdon and Witney College's 24 hectare Common Leys campus provides practical facilities for land-based courses including countryside conservation and horticulture.

Significant investment is planned by OxLEP to enhance skills, with a focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.¹² Proposals to provide high speed broadband across the county will also be beneficial by boosting connectivity in rural areas.⁹

While progress is being made, there is a need for further investment to support rural diversification and resilience. A series of investment proposals have been put forwards by stakeholders which have the potential to contribute to this, as described in Section 6.0.

Maximising the value of Oxfordshire's woodlands

Sustainably managed woodlands have the potential to contribute significant value to the economy, due to the broad range of the ecosystem services that they provide. Of most direct relevance to the green economy is the production and sale of forestry products including wood fuel and timber. In addition to reducing carbon emissions, wood fuel can offer significant savings particularly compared to heating oil and other fuels used in rural areas which are off the gas grid, while timber is increasingly in demand as a sustainable construction material.

Woodlands are also an important contributor to landscape character and setting where they are a feature, and accessible woodlands are a significant attraction for leisure and recreation. Residents in suburban settings have been reported to be willing to pay £7,680 per household for views of broad leaved forests.¹³ In addition, woodlands and trees also play an important role in flood and water management, climate regulation, air quality, carbon storage and biodiversity, both at the local and regional scale.¹⁴ The Natural Capital Committee recommended woodland planting

11 Skills for Jobs: Today and Tomorrow, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2010)

12 Oxfordshire Skills Strategy to 2020: Building a responsive skills support system, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (2014)

13 Landscape Values of Forests. Social & Environmental Benefits of Forestry Phase 2, Report to the Forestry Commission, Edinburgh. Centre for Research in Environmental Appraisal and Management, University of Newcastle upon Tyne (2002)

14 The Economic Benefits of Woodland, Europe Economics on behalf of the Woodland Trust (2015)

'A thriving forestry sector could create additional value to Oxfordshire's economy of £10 - £15 million



near towns and cities to maximise the social benefits¹⁵.

Woodlands occupy around 7% of all land in Oxfordshire (see Figure 4), which is below the national average for England and significantly lower than the average in Europe of 37%.^{16,17} These woodlands are fragmented, with mainly small pockets of woodland scattered across the county in private ownership. The greatest density of woodland cover can be found in the Chilterns AONB in the south east corner of the county.

The forestry sector in Oxfordshire has declined in recent decades with the closure of sawmills, leaving a legacy of undermanaged woodlands with limited financial, ecological and amenity value. Further challenges to woodlands include climate change, which has the potential to affect growth and health of key species and could result in increased damage due to storms, heatwaves and drought. If this situation can be turned around, the Sylva Foundation and the Forestry Commission estimate the additional value of a thriving forestry sector to Oxfordshire's economy at £10 to £15 million, with the market for woodfuel and timber products helping to bring woodlands back into sustainable management and reducing reliance on subsidies.

In addition to woodland owners and managers, there are a number of organisations based in the county with a keen interest in promoting the sustainable management of woodlands and trees, including the Sylva Foundation (a national organisation focused on promoting wood culture and products), Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2), Earth Trust, Forestry Commission South East, Low Carbon Hub, private sector forestry contractor Nicholsons, Oxfordshire County Council, and Wild Oxfordshire. The organisations responsible for managing the Cotswolds, Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs also have an interest in the sustainable management of woodlands within their boundaries, which represent some of the most heavily wooded areas of the county.

¹⁵ The State of Natural Capital: Protecting and Improving Natural Capital for Prosperity and Wellbeing. Third report to the Economic Affairs Committee. Natural Capital Committee (2015)

¹⁶ The National Inventory of Woodland and Trees – England: County Report for Oxfordshire, Forestry Commission (2002)

¹⁷ The Woodland Trust (www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)

Action to date in Oxfordshire includes the TOE2 Oxfordshire Woodfuel programme, which has established the OxLogs quality standard for local firewood suppliers, setting up a Logs for Labour scheme for people to help with woodland management in exchange for firewood, and providing advice on biomass boilers. Earth Trust runs Paradise Wood, a national research woodland focusing on hardwood species and the environmental and economic aspects of broadleaved forestry. The Woodland Trust owns or is involved in sites across the county. Numerous other woodlands have been created or improved through the Woodland Grant Scheme, recently replaced by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, and benefited from advice provided by organisations including Sylva Foundation and the Forestry Commission. Progress has also been made with the installation of biomass boilers by various organisations, including Blenheim Palace which has two boilers fuelled by woodchip from the Estate woodlands.

As part of the preparation of this investment plan, representatives of several organisations met to draft the Oxfordshire Forestry Accord, which sets out how they will work together to maximise the value of Oxfordshire's woodlands. This includes a number of initial, short-term outcomes to ensure that future work to maximise the value of Oxfordshire's woodlands is targeted, efficient and effective. Analysis of data held by the Forestry Commission will establish the current extent and condition of

woodlands in Oxfordshire in more detail and enable an estimate to be made of the theoretical extent of the timber resources which could be produced in the county. Further work will then be undertaken with a wider group of stakeholders including woodland owners and managers to identify realistic opportunities for increasing productivity from Oxfordshire's woodlands and adding value to woodland products and services within the county.

This will culminate in the publication of a document setting out the business case, opportunities, benefits and required actions to achieve a vibrant, low carbon forestry sector in Oxfordshire, and establishing a sound framework for further action. This initial programme of work will be coordinated by Sylva Foundation and supported by the other signatories to the Oxfordshire Forestry Accord, with a view to completion by the end of 2015. The outcomes of this initial programme of work will help to target further investment, which could include some of the specific proposals submitted by local stakeholders set out in Section 6.0.



Enabling innovation and collaboration

Progress in greening the wider economy is being driven by a combination of policy, regulation and voluntary industry action, with advice and support provided by organisations such as WRAP and the Carbon Trust. By enhancing their environmental performance, businesses and other organisations are cutting costs, meeting their obligations, reducing risk and liabilities, and realising benefits to their brand and reputation.

The key to adding significant value is innovation, identifying opportunities for new or enhanced products and services driven by environmental objectives, with national or international markets. Collaboration enables organisations to share ideas, pool resources and increase efficiency for example economies of scale in purchasing or meeting common objectives through shared investment. It also enables complex issues to be resolved and connections to be made between different areas of activity, essential for addressing challenges such as climate change and resource use. For example, collaboration has an important role to play in the circular economy, enabling organisations to make connections with others who are able to reuse or recycle their waste or by-products, creating value from something which would otherwise be a cost burden and reducing environmental impacts in the process.

The UK Government’s Ecosystems Markets Task Force identified environmental enterprise as a major opportunity for the knowledge economy, recommending better collaboration between business and universities in particular. Few locations could match the scale of opportunity that exists for such collaboration in Oxfordshire, given the strength of environmental research and development activity in the Universities and major research centres combined with its combination of businesses including advanced engineering, life sciences, energy and environmental firms.

A significant amount of collaboration is already underway between these organisations in Oxfordshire, with the Universities and research centres partnering with business for research projects, providing consultancy advice, commercialising new technologies, establishing start-up businesses and sharing resources. For example,

Oxford Brookes undertakes significant consultancy activity for motorsport and road going original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), including work on composite materials for Bentley and electric vehicle development for BMW.

Innovation is the cornerstone of the OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan. Enabling innovation and collaboration is also core to the SEEIP, and the majority of the proposals set out in this document bring together numerous partners from the public and private sectors to undertake research, work together on pilot and demonstration projects, and promote new knowledge and skills (see Section 6.0).

‘By enhancing their environmental performance, businesses and other organisations are cutting costs, meeting their obligations, reducing risk and liabilities, and realising benefits to their brand and reputation.



5.2. Enhancing the quality and resilience of urban areas

The growth proposals outlined in the Strategic Economic Plan are expected to create 85,600 new jobs in Oxfordshire by 2031. Many of these jobs will be highly skilled, and such people tend to be mobile and flexible about where they live and work, looking for locations which offer a high quality of life in addition to career opportunities. Factors which contribute to a high quality of life include affordable housing in an attractive setting, good schools, efficient transport connections, a manageable journey to work, and opportunities for leisure and recreation. In addition to commercial development, around 100,000 new homes will be needed in Oxfordshire by 2031 to support this growth. In addition to meeting housing needs and alleviating pressure on affordability, some of this development will support the regeneration of deprived areas and deliver improvements to local infrastructure and services.

'Bicester, in North Oxfordshire, has been designated a Garden Town and is home to the UK's first Eco-town.



In order to enable and encourage this development, there is a need to invest in the quality and resilience of the urban areas where growth will take place. There is also a need to improve the environmental performance of new development and maximise the benefits that it provides to a local area. Priorities of particular relevance to the SEEIP include creating and maintaining parks and open spaces, improving walking and cycling connections, providing sustainable drainage systems and flood risk management where needed and promoting climate resilience. Improving links to the surrounding rural hinterland, and respecting local landscape character and heritage will also contribute to a strong and positive sense of place. These measures will in turn improve the setting for development, increase land and property values, encourage investment, attract people and businesses to the area, and improve health and wellbeing and labour force productivity both for new and existing residents and employees. Setting is also a significant feature of many heritage assets including the City of Oxford and Blenheim Palace and Park, which contributes to the value and interest they attract from local residents and tourists.

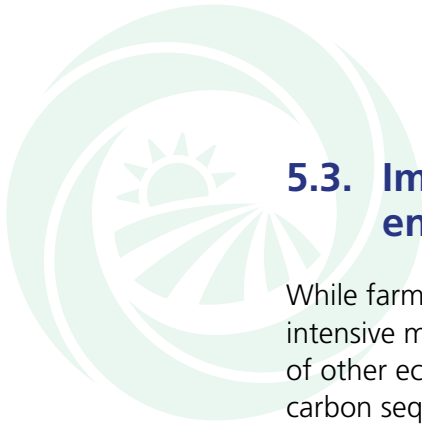
'The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme aims to reduce flood risk to at least 1,000 homes and businesses in the city

Much activity is already underway to deliver improvements to the main urban areas in Oxfordshire, driven by local authorities, developers and a variety of other stakeholders. The Government has made a strong commitment to planning more sustainable forms of development in the National Planning Policy Framework. This is reflected in the Local Plans of the local planning authorities within Oxfordshire, which set out a strategy and policies for development and priorities for investment in local infrastructure. Bicester, which has been designated a Garden Town and is home to the UK's first Eco-town at North West Bicester, has particularly aspirational objectives for sustainability, and is a national and international example of best practice. Planned infrastructure investment in support of this includes improvements to public transport and highways, walking and cycling routes, and new community facilities such as schools.

The Environment Agency is taking forward plans for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. This is a major investment to create a new flood relief channel west of Oxford which will increase capacity in the western floodplain, reduce flood risk to at least 1,000 homes and businesses in the city which are already at risk, reduce the risk of disruption to infrastructure and utilities, and enable future growth and development. The flood relief channel will be designed to be as natural as possible, with harder reinforced sections limited to essential locations such as narrow strips of land and bridges. The scheme presents an exciting opportunity to create and maintain new recreational amenities and wildlife habitat accessible by walking and cycling from the centre of Oxford. The total cost of the scheme is estimated at £216million, including design, construction and maintenance over a hundred year period. It is hoped that the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme will also be able to deliver on a number of the other priorities and investment proposals set out in this document.

Improving walking and cycling routes in key locations has been identified as a priority by local stakeholders, to benefit health and wellbeing and reduce transport impacts and congestion. This is strongly supported by proposals in the Local Transport Plan for Oxfordshire. Parks, the rivers and canal, and other open spaces are also extremely important to leisure, recreation and the character and setting of the built environment. These spaces bring communities together, help to create a comfortable microclimate, improve air quality, support biodiversity, aid drainage and flood risk management, and they are often an important part of walking and cycling networks.

While there is a strong case for investment in walking, cycling and green infrastructure, funding is limited. Local stakeholders have identified a number of opportunities where additional funding could deliver significant benefits, focusing on areas which are a priority for growth and development (see Section 6.0). An emphasis will be placed on delivering infrastructure which has multiple uses, for example combining walking and cycle routes with habitat corridors and sustainable drainage systems. Such multi-functional infrastructure maximises the results for each pound invested, and the Sustainability and Environment Sub-Group will continue to work with stakeholders to identify opportunities to streamline and combine complementary investment proposals as the SEEIP is implemented. This will include looking at opportunities for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme to deliver on some of these objectives in appropriate locations. In addition to capital funding to improve or create new green infrastructure, it is vital that sustainable ways of managing and maintaining them in perpetuity are secured.



5.3. Improving management of land to reduce flood risk, enhance water resources, and promote biodiversity

While farmland is essential for food production and the agricultural economy, intensive management of the land over decades has been to the detriment of a range of other ecosystem services which the land provides including flood risk management, carbon sequestration and water quality regulation. While these services are not usually paid for by those who benefit or traded in markets, some of them can be reliably valued, and they are essential to long-term economic growth, development, health and wellbeing in Oxfordshire and elsewhere.¹⁸



Andrew Calendar. River Thame Restoration Trust

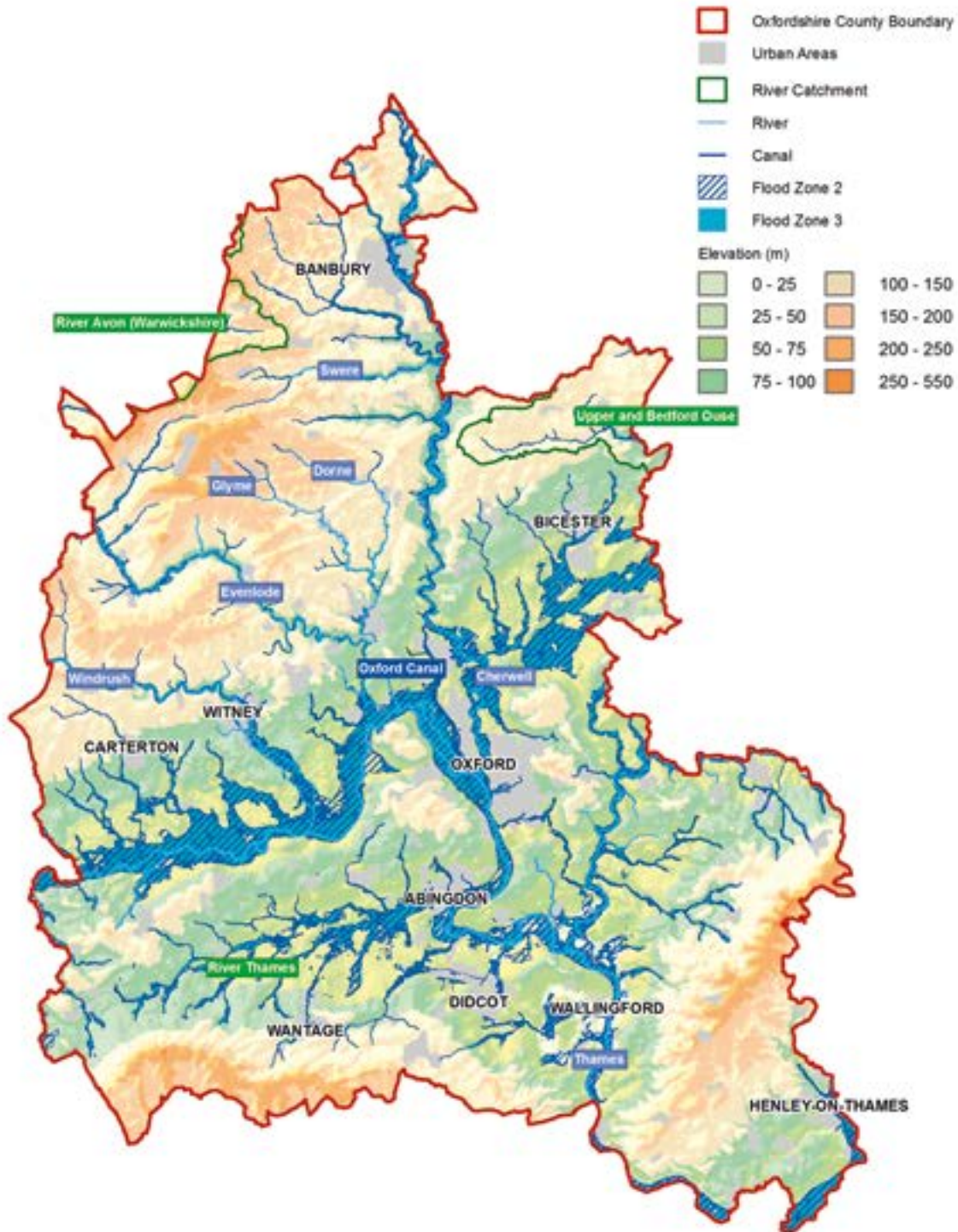
Flood risk is a significant issue along many parts of the River Thames and its tributaries. 12% of land in the county is in the floodplain, including parts of Oxford (see Figure 5). Flood risk has been exacerbated by changes in land use and land management in the past and could increase in future due to climate change and increasing incidences of intense rainfall. In Oxfordshire the lead local flood authority is Oxfordshire County Council, which works with the Environment Agency and other local stakeholders to develop and implement the flood risk management strategy for the county. While traditional approaches to flood management, including the proposed new Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, play an important role in reducing the risk to homes, businesses and infrastructure there is also a need to improve the management of land to slow

surface water run-off, increase infiltration into the ground and reduce the pressure on watercourses as part of a catchment-wide approach to flood risk management.

The availability and quality of water supplies in Oxfordshire is also affected by land management practices, with soil and pollution from the land being washed off into watercourses. Climate change has the potential to increase the risk of drought and heatwaves, with adverse effects on water quality and temperature, and growing demand from new development could place further pressure on water resources even where efficiency is designed in from the outset. The EU Water Framework Directive is driving action to improve management of water resources across catchments, and pilot work is already underway to implement this in Oxfordshire through Catchment Partnerships for each of the rivers. In addition to playing a role in these Catchment Partnerships alongside the Environment Agency and other local stakeholders, water companies are also required to produce long term resource management plans which include a combination of supply and demand-side management measures.

¹⁸ The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Technical Report. UK National Ecosystem Assessment, UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge (2014)

Figure 5: Watercourses and areas of flood risk in Oxfordshire



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Fiona Danks, Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2).

A further feature which has suffered a protracted decline in Oxfordshire is biodiversity, with natural or semi-natural habitats fragmented and the vast majority of land in use for intensive farming or development (see Figure 6). Climate change will place further pressure on habitats as rising temperatures and changes in the seasons affect the health, viability and geographical distribution of species, while extreme weather raises the risk of damage. In addition to being of value in its own right, diversity of habitats and species is essential to the healthy functioning of ecosystems and contributes directly to our economy in a number of ways, including pollination of crops and other plant species, attenuation of surface and groundwater flows, and the added attraction that wildlife brings to parks, open spaces and the countryside for leisure and recreation.

'Oxfordshire has some habitats which are covered by nature conservation designations and maintained by local conservation groups, but the area that these sites cover is relatively low.

Oxfordshire has some habitats which are covered by nature conservation designations and maintained by local conservation groups, but the area that these sites cover is relatively low. For example, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the county occupy less than 2% of total land cover, compared to the England average of 8% and UK average of 12%.¹⁹ In addition to protecting priority habitats and species, more could be done to improve the quality of habitat and biodiversity of land across Oxfordshire and make bigger, better, and more connected networks of habitats across the county which have greater resilience and enable species to adapt to changing conditions.

There are a range of options for improving land management to address these issues, such as wetland creation or restoration, tree planting, changes in the way land is cultivated, planting wildflower field margins, improving hedgerows and changing the way that road verges, infrastructure corridors and other green spaces are maintained. For example, if located in the right place, shelter belts of trees can reduce peak flows in rivers by as much as 40% as early as two years after planting.²⁰ In addition to reducing flood risk, enhancing water resources and promoting biodiversity, these interventions can offer other benefits, for example woodfuel and forestry products from additional tree cover, or new attractions for visitors to the countryside. To maximise the benefits and avoid any unintended negative consequences, it is important that these interventions are targeted to the locations where they will be most effective and where the impact on existing activities is minimised, for example on low grade agricultural land.

19 Data provided by Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, September 2015.

20 Keenlyside C (2013) The Pontbren Project. A farmer-led approach to sustainable land management in the uplands. Coed Cadw/ The Woodland Trust after Jackson et al. (2008)



Farmers and others who are responsible for managing significant land-holdings clearly have an essential role to play in implementing more sustainable approaches to land management in future, with a view to maximising their value in terms of flood risk management, water resources and biodiversity as well as agricultural output. Almost half of the farmland in Oxfordshire is covered by an Environmental Stewardship Agreement, which funds farmers to implement environmental management on their land, and the new Countryside Stewardship Agreements will provide an incentive for further improvements. However, there is scope for further improvement and development of a strategic approach which coordinates action across landholdings and adds greater value for the landowners. A coordinated approach demonstrated significant benefits in the Taw and Torridge catchments of Cornwall, where the West Country Rivers Project provided 340 farmers responsible for 21,000 hectares of land with management plans that integrate profitability with environmental improvement. Economic evaluation revealed that the net direct benefit of the project was £2,700 per farm business per year, or £918,184 per annum for the whole project.²¹

A number of organisations have been working closely together to explore ways of driving improvements in land management in Oxfordshire, including the Environment Agency, Thames Water, BBOWT, Wild Oxfordshire, and NFU. They have developed several complementary proposals for further work, each with a distinct area of focus and clear leadership (see Section 6.0). Further work will be undertaken to coordinate and streamline these proposals as the SEEIP is implemented.

21 The Environment, Economic Growth and Competitiveness: The Environment as an Economic Driver, Natural England (2000)

Figure 6: Major land uses and habitats across Oxfordshire

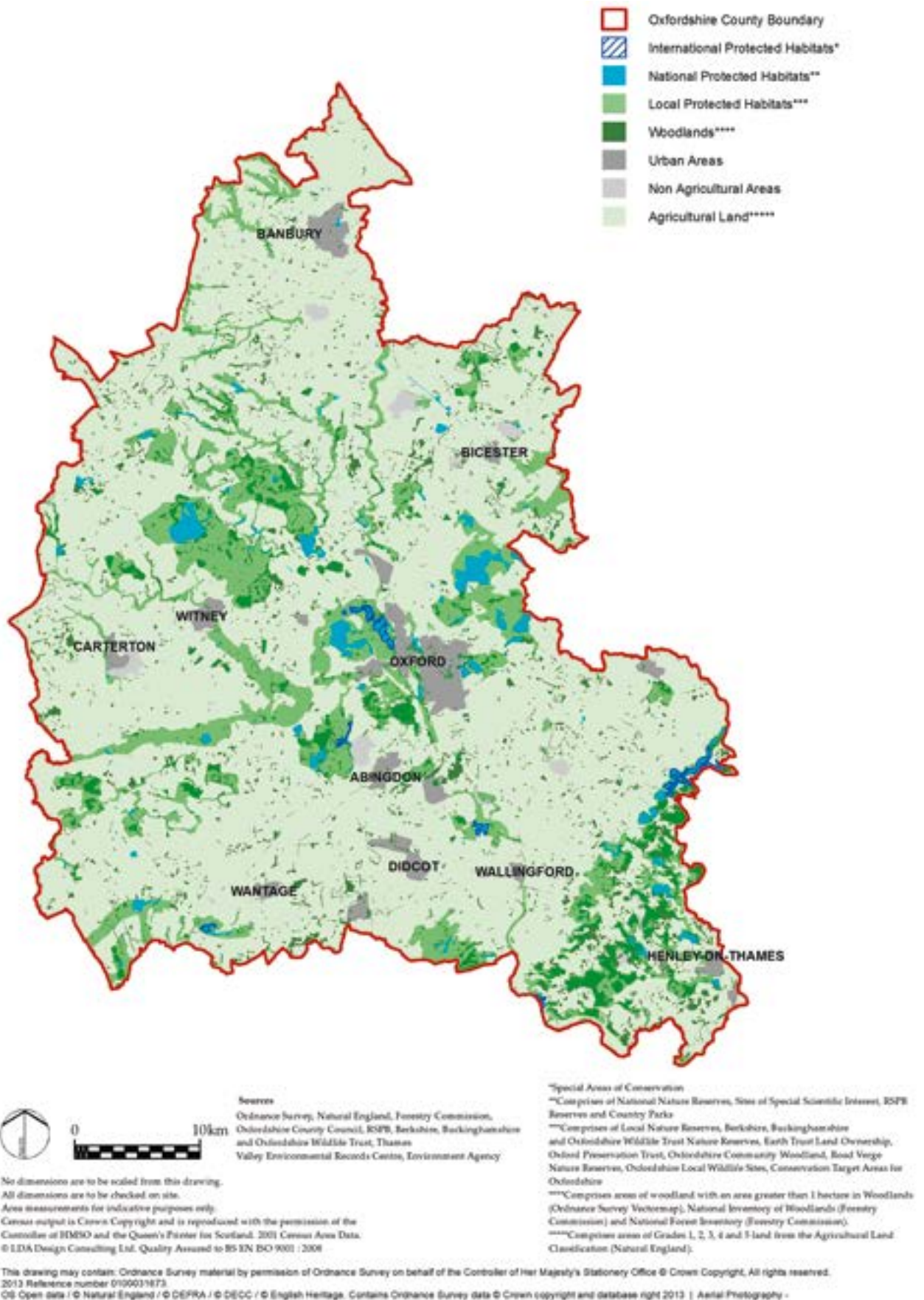
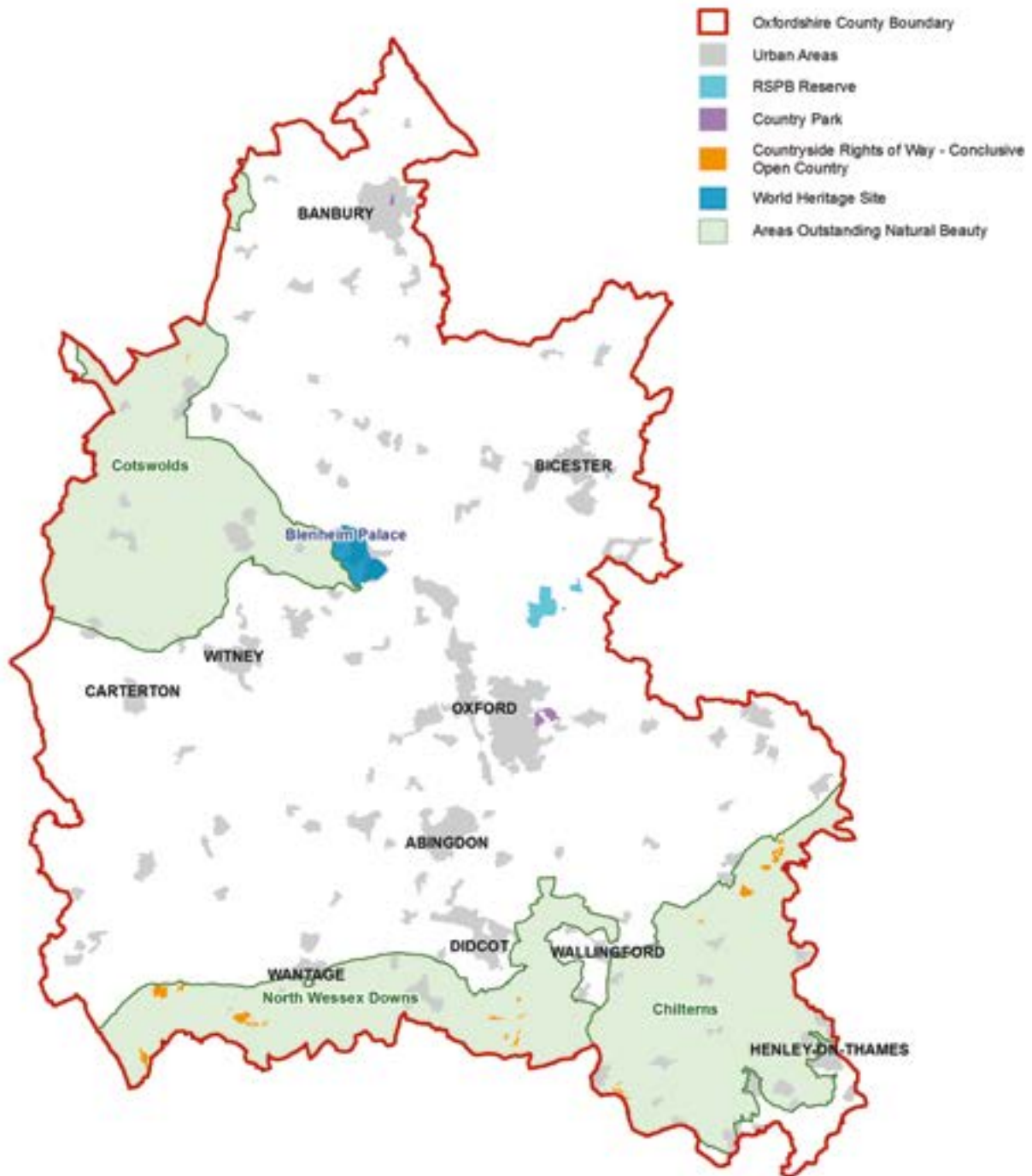


Figure 7: Major leisure and recreation attractions in Oxfordshire



Sources:
Ordnance Survey, Natural England, Oxfordshire County Council, Historic England

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5.4. Promoting and enabling access to the countryside

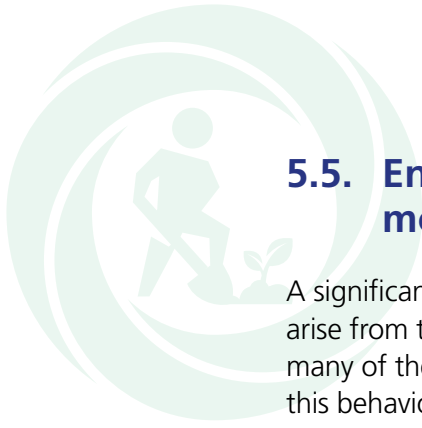
Access to good quality locations for leisure and recreation makes a vital contribution to health and wellbeing, encourages people to live and work locally, and attracts visitors from further afield. Oxfordshire has a number of significant assets which attract people from around the world, including Oxford's historic centre and Blenheim Palace. Other places of interest including heritage and wildlife sites can be found across the county, in and around the market towns and rural areas.

The rich and varied landscape of the county is itself a significant asset, not least the areas included within the Cotswolds, Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs (see Figure 7). 96.6% of the county is within the Thames River Basin, and the Thames, its tributaries and the Oxford canal have played a significant role in defining Oxfordshire's identity and character, shaping the landform, communities and economy over time and providing an important part of the setting for living, working, leisure and recreation across the county both now and in the future.

'With limited, targeted investment, there is potential to significantly improve access to the countryside



While the agricultural heritage of the county has helped to define its character and provides an attractive rural setting for urban areas, much of this land is not accessible to members of the public and some routes that are publicly accessible could be improved to enable access for all. Furthermore, a significant proportion of tourist visits to Oxfordshire are to the main attractions of Oxford, Blenheim and the AONBs. With limited, targeted investment, there is potential to significantly improve access to the countryside and maximise the value generated by the assets that are already in the county. See Section 6.0 for some examples of proposals put forwards by stakeholders.



5.5. Engaging people in the environment and enabling more sustainable lifestyles

A significant number of the challenges to the environment and economy of Oxfordshire arise from the choices and actions of individuals living and working in the county, and many of the opportunities such as in the low carbon economy will rely on changes in this behaviour. Unless people are engaged in the environment and feel able to adopt more sustainable lifestyles, many of the proposals in this plan will not be effective.

Various national and local public campaigns have been run to raise awareness of environmental issues and the links with the economy, health and wellbeing. Advice and support is available from the local authorities and a number of national organisations. In Oxfordshire, various organisations actively engage members of the public in volunteering for nature conservation, such as BBOWT and the Earth Trust, while others such as Good Food Oxford and Low Carbon Hub provide targeted support on local, healthy food and low carbon energy respectively. In addition to environmental improvements and the knock-on effects of these for the economy, benefits of these activities include improving skills and educational attainment, improved health and wellbeing and being involved in a community.

Oxfordshire has a strong starting point with the large number of people dedicated to the advancement of environmental knowledge and practice in organisations across the county, from the universities and businesses to community groups and schools. The general public are also increasingly aware of some of the challenges and opportunities that they face, however there is still some way to go to achieve the step change in behaviour that is needed. Some proposals which could drive further progress in this important area are described in Section 6.0.

'Unless people are engaged in the environment and feel able to adopt more sustainable lifestyles, many of the proposals in this plan will not be effective.'



6



6.0 Investment proposals

In addition to having clearly defined strategic priorities for the county, OxLEP have identified a strong pipeline of investment proposals which have the potential to deliver on those priorities. These are highlighted in Figure 8.

An open call was issued to all organisations in Oxfordshire for investment proposals which respond to one or more of the strategic priorities and have the potential to contribute to the objectives of the Strategic Economic Plan. A total of 35 proposals were submitted, plus a further 6 considered which were originally submitted for the Strategic Economic Plan or Local Growth Fund. The proposals were reviewed for relevance against the five strategic priorities at a second workshop with stakeholders and where appropriate selected for inclusion in the SEEIP. Some proposals were revised following further discussions between relevant organisations to align complementary proposals, ensure efficiency, and look for opportunities to deliver additional benefits and strengthen the economic case.

A summary of each of the investment proposals included in the SEEIP is provided in the Appendix to this investment plan. They include:

- A cluster of proposals aimed at promoting low carbon energy and transport, including development of an Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, an Oxfordshire Allowable Solutions Fund to collect and distribute carbon offset payments from new developments, a study to specify a micro-grid for Bicester to help alleviate constraints on the existing electricity distribution network, and investment in electric vehicle charging and car clubs between Bicester and Oxford.
- A range of business support, including training, apprenticeships, collaboration and business incubation for farming and land-based activities at a new EarthLab centre at Earth Trust's farm at Little Wittenham, and a project to encourage networking and collaboration between Oxfordshire's universities and businesses in the food, energy and water sectors. A programme of support is proposed for businesses in the Lower Windrush Valley to enable them to benefit from tourism and leisure opportunities around newly created freshwater habitats in former mineral extraction sites, while a further proposal will promote six market towns and villages within Oxfordshire as gateways to the three AONBs, encouraging day visits and short breaks and maximising visitor spend.
- A programme of research, advice, training and direct investment to encourage sustainable woodland management, increase woodland planting, support the production of timber products and woodfuel, and capture value from the wider benefits they provide including flood alleviation. Strengthening links between consumers and producers is an important feature of the proposals, to maximise value and efficiency across the whole supply chain.
- Targeted improvements to walking and cycling routes and green spaces in and around urban areas. In addition to investment in physical infrastructure, the proposals include creating green health routes and working with GPs to offer patients green prescriptions for physical activity. The majority of proposed activity

'The total cost of all proposals included in the SEEIP would be around £31 million.

Project Locations

1. The Natural Capital of Woodlands; Bringing woods in the Oxfordshire AONB's in to sustainable management.
7. Bicester Micro-Grid Specification Study
8. Emission and congestion minimisation of transport along the northern section of the Knowledge Spine from Bicester to Oxford
9. EarthLab
11. Supporting Business Development in the Lower Windrush Valley
12. Cotswolds Choice Bran
13. Burnehyll Community Woodland
14. Cherwell Country Park
15. OxCan cycle path
16. Promoting the Tourism offer in Oxford's rural hinterland
17. River Evenlode Catchment Restoration and Land Management Enhancement Partnership
18. Upper Thames Floodplain Restoration Project
21. Oxford Cycle City Plan 2017 – 20
22. Oxford City Centre West End Natural Access and Quality Space Scheme
23. Oxonbike Cycle Hire Scheme
24. Bicester Walking & Cycling Connectivity Project
25. Green Infastructure for Healthier Lives in Oxford
26. Greening Bicester – Growing the Garden Town
28. Knowledge Sharing: NW Bicester – the UK's first Eco Town
31. Wychwood Centre
32. Bicester Live: Integrated Information Platform
34. Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme

County Wide Projects

2. The Oxfordshire Forestry Programme (OFP) encompassing the TOE2 Oxfordshire Woodfuel Programme
3. Woodshare Oxfordshire
4. Wood Stations and Biomass Trade Centres
5. Oxfordshire Energy Strategy
6. Oxfordshire Allowable Solutions Fund
10. FEW4allOX: mobilising Oxfordshire's expertise for food, energy and water systems.
19. A self-funded water management and access organisation in the Upper Thames – locations to be confirmed through feasibility study.
20. Oxfordshire's Road Verges – Benefit Not Burden
27. Green Infastructure Implementation Officer for Oxfordshire
29. One Planet Oxfordshire – A Sustainability Framework and Action Plan
30. My Oxfordshire: a Landscape and Townscape Strategy
33. Oxfordshire in our hands: 4 Big Steps for Economic Growth

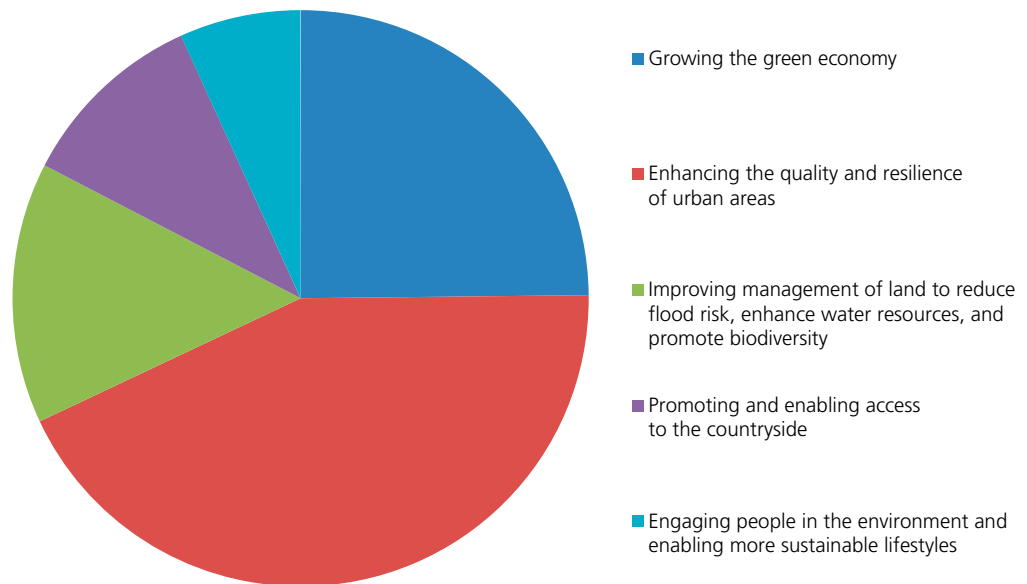
in the short term is in Bicester and Oxford. In the longer term similar improvements are likely to be needed in other locations for growth and development including Banbury, Didcot, Harwell, Wantage and Grove.

- A series of proposals to incentivise economically sustainable improvements in land management. Strategic coordination of activity between multiple stakeholders is a focus of these proposals, bringing together those who manage land across the county, including farmers and landowners, with others responsible for flood risk management, water resources and biodiversity such as the Environment Agency, Thames Water, the local authorities and wildlife organisations, through catchment partnerships. Action would include joint investment in physical improvements including habitat restoration and creation, access improvements, and watercourse maintenance.
- Development of new sites for leisure and recreation in Oxfordshire's countryside including a new country park north of Banbury, a new community woodland at Burnehyll near Bicester, and new recreational cycle routes along sections of the Oxford Canal. New visitor centres are also proposed for the Wychwood Forest and the Earth Trust at Little Wittenham.
- A number of supporting interventions, including working with owners of green spaces to develop more sustainable business models for long-term management and maintenance; the development of an effective strategic framework for sharing knowledge and facilitating high quality, sustainable new development; and enabling networking and communication across the environmental sector through the activities of the Local Nature Partnership.

The total cost of all proposals included in the SEEIP would be around £31 million. This does not include the proposed Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, which is being taken forwards via a separate process to other proposals in this investment plan. The Oxford Flood Alleviation would of course be a significant environmental investment in its own right and offers an opportunity to deliver wider benefits which could include some of the proposals outlined above, such as walking and cycle routes and habitat creation.

Most of the investment proposals would contribute to more than one of the SEEIP strategic priorities, and this is to be encouraged. However, most proposals place a clear emphasis on one particular priority and for the purposes of comparison a rough breakdown has been made of the amount of investment proposed in support of each strategic priority (see Figure 9). The majority of investment is proposed to be targeted at enhancing the quality and resilience of urban areas and growing the green economy, an appropriate balance given these interventions are likely to make the most significant direct contribution to enabling economic growth and development across the county.

Figure 9: Approximate amount of investment proposed by strategic priority



Most of the investment proposals included in this plan have identified at least one source of funding although the status of this funding varies and much of it depends on the ability of the organisations proposing these projects to secure match funding. Establishing a central fund which can be used to provide this match funding could unleash significant potential in the sector and secure the range of benefits that these proposals offer. Further information on how finance could be secured for environmental investment in Oxfordshire is provided in Section 8.4.

Partnership working is also an important feature of these proposals. A process will be established to encourage further partnership working in the implementation of the SEEIP and ensure that the proposals which offer the greatest contribution in terms of the strategic priorities and the maximum benefit per pound of investment can be delivered. This process will also maintain a pipeline of new investment proposals, and ensure that Oxfordshire is in a position to respond rapidly to new challenges and opportunities as they emerge. The delivery strategy for the SEEIP is described in further detail in Section 8.0.



7.0 Economic benefits

Environmental investment has the potential to make a valuable contribution to economic growth and development in Oxfordshire. If taken forwards, the investment proposals set out in the SEEIP will play a role in the delivery of all four of the priorities of the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP); People, Place, Enterprise and Connectivity.

The investment proposals outlined in the SEEIP will contribute to the SEP priorities in a number of ways:



People: A more productive workforce, achieved by improving health and well-being of the population through improvements to accessible green spaces and sustainable transport options, and increasing knowledge and skills.



Place: Enhanced quality and resilience of the urban and rural environment. This in turn will make Oxfordshire more attractive to workers, businesses, investors, developers and visitors.



Enterprise: New business opportunities, such as in low-carbon technologies and rural land management. More stable business conditions (e.g. absence of flooding) with reduced environmental risk and costs.



Connectivity: Improved sustainable transport options, increased use of information technologies to manage energy and other resources more efficiently, and stronger links between organisations. Better connection between urban and rural areas, both in terms of maximising the ecosystem services provided by Oxfordshire's natural capital assets to communities, and enabling people to access the countryside. Enhanced connectivity of habitats, essential to maintaining biodiversity and related ecosystem services.

While quantification of the specific impacts of the SEEIP on the Oxfordshire economy is not feasible without detailed economic modelling that is beyond the scope of this study, the qualitative case for environmental investment in order to support the economy is strong.

Some of the investment proposals outlined in this plan would directly generate expenditure and jobs. In particular, ambitious investment in the low carbon economy has been estimated to have the potential to generate additional investment of about £250 million a year and 8,700 jobs in Oxfordshire, adding economic value (GVA) of about £1 billion a year by 2030.⁷ The low carbon proposals in the SEEIP could make



a small contribution to this, alongside a range of other investments in the low carbon economy which are outside the scope of this plan.

Some investments would also create business opportunities in other sectors. For example, the proposal to create a company delivering water management services on farmland would be a direct source of rural employment. Others would create or strengthen demand for goods and services, for example stakeholders proposing to enhance the market for wood fuel and other timber products have estimated the additional value of a thriving forestry sector to the Oxfordshire economy at between £10 million - £15 million per annum. Other proposals could create a few permanent or temporary jobs per project, such as project officer roles or jobs constructing proposed infrastructure (e.g. cycle paths).

In most cases however, direct expenditure and employment are not the primary reason for undertaking environmental investment. More important is how they would contribute to sustaining and supporting activity across the wider economy in Oxfordshire. This could arise in three main ways:

- **Workforce mobility, efficiency and productivity:** proposals that provide different transport options will allow workers to reach their place of employment more efficiently. This may be more quickly, cheaply (e.g. through car sharing) or in a manner that allows them to maintain a healthy lifestyle and therefore supports their productivity. Productivity will also be boosted by benefits to health and wellbeing relating to improvements in environmental quality and opportunities for outdoor leisure and recreation.
- **Skills:** a number of the projects focus on raising awareness and developing skills for members of the public and/or parts of the workforce. Some are focused directly on skills which will enable people to access employment, improve the way that their business is managed, or pursue new opportunities. Others will improve people's environmental awareness and ability to achieve energy, resource and other environmental savings (see below).
- **Avoided costs:** several investments would lead to more efficient use of resources, thereby reducing costs (e.g. energy or water bills). These cost savings can arise for both business and households. There is a synergy between these, in that progress on both the business and domestic fronts will rely on individuals' awareness and knowledge of resource use issues and how they can be addressed. Therefore, proposals in the SEIIP to promote more sustainable lifestyles to households and members of the public would also increase awareness of these issues amongst the workforce, increasing the ability of businesses in Oxfordshire to gain competitive advantage.
- Similarly improved catchment and floodplain management can reduce risk and direct costs associated with flood events or insurance, and of treating water for public water supply. Finally, investments that increase access to the natural

environment can stimulate physical activity, enabling reductions in healthcare costs (as well as supporting workforce productivity). The annual health cost associated physical inactivity to Oxfordshire's economy has been estimated at around £90 million per annum.

Each of these factors would be expected to support a small, direct increase in GVA per capita in Oxfordshire. The £31m of environmental investment proposed as part of the SEEIP is just a fraction of Oxfordshire's annual GVA of £15.5bn, and the £billions of other types of investment which are envisaged in the county over the period covered by the Strategic Economic Plan; for example, investment in approximately 100,000 new homes will require at least £10bn of construction activity. Environmental investment of the type proposed is therefore a relatively small ask in funding terms and is expected to represent good value for money due to the range of benefits it offers. However, even with the high benefit to cost ratio anticipated, the direct impact on Oxfordshire's GVA will still be relatively small because the amount of investment proposed is small. In relation to this, it is worth noting that a number of the investment proposals are pilot activities or feasibility studies which could pave the way for larger investments in future (e.g. in low-carbon technologies).

A further significant aspect of the economic case for environmental investment is its role in increasing the quality of the environment, making it a more attractive setting for business and development. Valuation of this impact includes consideration of certain ecosystem services (such as landscape quality and biodiversity) that are not widely traded in markets (referred to as non-market goods). However, these non-market goods are a valid consideration for policy makers, for example because they can play an indirect role in attracting investment from businesses of all sizes to the county, as follows:



- Environmental quality is known to be a factor in the investment decisions of larger businesses, affecting where they choose to locate and the value of commercial properties.²²
- One of the main reasons that the quality of the environment is a key factor in choice of location for business is because it helps them to attract and retain a good quality workforce. The quality of the environment is known to be an influence on house prices, reflecting how increased environmental quality raises demand for housing.
- A specific part of this workforce is self-employed home-workers, which are an important part of the rural economy, as they often have some flexibility in choosing a location to live and work. Transport links (e.g. to London, which are good for Oxfordshire) and broadband connectivity is usually vital to their location decisions. However, the quality of the local environment can also be an important factor.
- Finally, the same environmental quality factors that attract business and workers to locate in particular communities in Oxfordshire will also attract people from outside those communities to visit for leisure purposes. This creates economic opportunities for businesses offering services to visitors (e.g. catering, accommodation, recreational activities). It is estimated that Oxfordshire's cultural, visitor and heritage economy is worth around £3.1 billion per year, and there are opportunities to grow markets and further distribute their activity into rural areas.

Providing communities with a higher quality environment can therefore make a large contribution to Oxfordshire being a more attractive location to live and work. This is true both for improving the immediate surroundings in urban areas (including new and existing urban and urban-edge green space), and to increasing connection to the rural environment, by improving access and leisure attractions (e.g. new visitor centres). Complimentary to delivering a higher quality environment is the potential to enhance the image of Oxfordshire by promoting more sustainable lifestyles and increasing the uptake of new environmental technologies, such as low-carbon energy technologies and energy efficiency measures.

Assessment of the impact of the proposed investments must allow for the possibility that they fund things that would have happened anyway, or that they displace other likely investments. However, overall the investments proposed in the SEEIP are considered to have a high level of additionality, given the existing low level of similar investments and the large extent of the opportunities involved (see Appendix for further discussion).

A further factor in the economic impacts is their distribution in Oxfordshire. For example, a number of investments would increase economic activity in the rural areas of Oxfordshire, serving to diversify the economy in rural areas without altering the existing balance of agricultural and cultural-heritage based economic activities. Other investment proposals target priority locations for growth, development and regeneration, increasing their potential economic impact as result.

²² A survey of real estate developers and consultants across Europe found that 95% of respondents believe that open space adds value to commercial property and that they would be willing to pay at least 3% more to be in close proximity to open space. Respondents rated access to open space as the 5th most important criterion when selecting commercial property, after location, cost, public transport links and amenities, but before prestige of address and building aesthetics. (Gensler, 2011) – Source: It's the economy, naturally. The relationship between the environment and the economy in the South East Midlands (SEMLEP, 2014).



8.0 Delivery strategy

While a significant amount of work has been undertaken across the environmental sector in Oxfordshire to prepare the SEEIP and the investment proposals within it, this is just the start of the process. Further work will be undertaken to drive progress on each of our five environmental investment priorities. This will include working up the investment proposals in further detail, implementing them, rolling out successful proposals to additional locations where applicable, and identifying and responding to new challenges and opportunities as they emerge.

While much of this work will be done by organisations across Oxfordshire working individually or in partnerships, there will continue to be a need for leadership, governance, coordination, financing and other activity at the strategic level. This overarching strategy for delivering the SEEIP is described below.



The Sylva Foundation

8.1. Leadership and governance

Leadership of the SEEIP will be the responsibility of OxLEP. A Sustainability and Environment Sub-Group of the LEP Board will be established, with responsibility for steering the delivery of the SEEIP, reviewing progress, and strategic decision-making. Detailed terms of reference for the Sustainability and Environment Sub-Group are to be agreed by its members, however our initial proposal is that it will:

- Meet on a regular basis, for example quarterly
- Have up to 15 members, including at least one member of the LEP Board plus representatives of activity across the environmental sector in Oxfordshire and members with a role in economic strategy and development planning, including appropriate people from public and private sector organisations, education, research and local government
- Initial appointment of members will be by application to OxLEP
- The Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected by the members



8.2. Cross-sector engagement, coordination and capacity building

The success of the SEEIP lies in the actions of organisations across Oxfordshire and their future interactions. Stakeholders for the SEEIP include any organisation operating within Oxfordshire with an interest in and ability to deliver against one or more of the strategic priorities. Their continued involvement and willingness to work together to achieve shared goals will be essential if the efficiencies, economic impacts and environmental outcomes set out in this plan are to be achieved.

To facilitate this, OxLEP will work with its partners and their networks, including the local authorities the Local Nature Partnership, to continue a process of regular engagement with the wider stakeholder group. In addition to tracking and coordinating activity across the sector, this engagement will continue to build capacity amongst stakeholder organisations to make stronger connections between environmental investment and economic outcomes, innovate, secure funding and deliver their projects. It will include issuing news and progress updates, organising occasional networking events or workshops, and establishing communications channels whereby stakeholders can provide updates or ask questions.

8.3. Reinforcing the strategic framework and evidence base

In order to facilitate an efficient, joined up approach to environmental investment, it will be important to have an effective strategic framework that guides action across the county and access to a shared evidence base to inform the work of different stakeholders. While OxLEP is responsible for the Strategic Economic Plan, the SEEIP and other county-wide strategies, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council



Annette Venters, Chilterns Conservation Board

and the four District Councils have responsibilities in this area. These include setting and implementing planning policy and the Local Transport Plan, undertaking evidence base studies, and holding other useful data including geographical information.

As part of the delivery of the SEEIP, OxLEP will work with the local authorities to reinforce the strategic framework and evidence base for future environmental investment, and share this information more effectively with the relevant organisations. This will include using the SEEIP and the leadership, governance and engagement processes which the SEEIP is establishing to inform future updates of the Strategic Economic Plan, other county-wide strategies and future work by the local authorities. It will also include reviewing and where appropriate updating the SEEIP in future in line with other strategies, policies and emerging challenges and opportunities to ensure it remains relevant, current and useful.

8.4. Financing

Although pressure on public sector spending persists, there are a variety of options available for financing the environmental investment set out in the SEEIP. These include:

- Government spending by relevant departments and their agencies. The investment proposals set out in the SEEIP are of relevance to a wide range of departments, including the Department for Transport, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health, the Department for Education, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Department for Energy and Climate Change.
- Private sector business contributions. These could include for example a Payment for Ecosystem Services model, whereby organisations that stand to benefit pay an agreed fee to those responsible for managing and maintaining ecosystem

services.²³ An alternative to this, particularly where the investment delivers clear benefits to town centres or other business locations, would be establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID).²⁴ A BID is a defined geographical area in which local businesses have voted to invest collectively in local environmental improvements. There are not currently any BIDs in Oxfordshire.

- Major infrastructure and development projects, which invest directly in environmental infrastructure including parks, open spaces, walking and cycling connections and habitat creation to complement their scheme or meet other planning or regulatory requirements. The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is one example of a major opportunity to deliver other forms of environmental infrastructure along its route.
- Developer contributions, whereby developers contribute financially to environmental investment delivered outside of their own site boundaries through Community Infrastructure Levy or Section 106 agreements. Section 106 contributions are negotiated on a project by project basis and must fund investments which are directly related to that development and necessary to make it acceptable in planning terms. CIL contributions are calculated using the local authority charging schedule and are able to fund a wider range of infrastructure required to support growth and development. Oxford City Council has an adopted CIL charging schedule, while the district councils were all progressing draft schedules through the required process at the time the SEEIP was being prepared.
- Direct investment by landowners, businesses and individuals in their own estates and assets.

Wychwood Project



²³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/payments-for-ecosystem-services-pes-best-practice-guide

²⁴ www.gov.uk/guidance/business-improvement-districts

- Local authority budgets cover a range of environmental investment, for example the management and maintenance of some parks, open spaces and other public sector land holdings, and support for walking, cycling and other sustainable transport measures. In some cases, upfront environmental investment will lead to long term savings in local authority budgets or additional revenue streams for local authorities.
- EU funding is available for projects which meet given criteria. These include the LIFE programme which is focused on environmental improvements, the LEADER programme for rural development and the European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF). Often there is a research, demonstration and dissemination component to EU projects. Some funds are awarded by direct application to the EU, others are distributed on a regional and local basis by relevant agencies including OxLEP and the LEADER programmes within Oxfordshire.
- Charities and other bodies continue to support environmental projects through direct investment or grants, with major national sources including the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund, and organisations active locally including TOE2, BBOWT and the local authorities which offer small grants for a range of local projects. TOE2 is working with the Oxfordshire Community Fund to establish the TOE2 Environment Fund, which will seek to generate investment in Oxfordshire through donations or endowments from high net worth individuals.
- Equity or debt finance, either from the private sector, public sector or individuals, may be available for environmental investments which are able to deliver a direct financial return. The ability to secure such finance and the conditions and costs attached, will depend on the level of risk, the expected scale of the return and the duration over which that return would be realised.
- Crowd funding or other community investment models, whereby a large number of individuals from the local community contribute financially to projects, either by donation, lending money or buying shares. Oxfordshire is already home to the Low Carbon Hub, based in Oxfordshire, which is a pioneering organisation in promoting community investment in renewable energy.



Fiona Danks, Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2).

The appropriate approach to financing will depend on the nature of each investment proposal. In particular, it will depend on whether the proposed investment will generate direct revenues or financial savings, who these benefits accrue to, whether and how

they can be capitalised on, and whether they represent an attractive return on that investment. For investments where there is a sufficient cash return on the proposed investment within an acceptable timescale, the preferred approach may be to secure equity or debt finance. For other investments where the benefits justify the cost, but these benefits are dispersed, realised over the long-term or otherwise difficult to capture in cash terms, alternative arrangements might be more appropriate.

As highlighted earlier, the total cost of all SEEIP proposals (capital and revenue costs combined), would be around £31 million, excluding the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. Most of the proposals identify at least one potential source of finance, which the proposing organisations will take responsibility for securing directly from the source. However, the sources of finance identified are in most cases only partial, they are not yet confirmed, and many projects will require additional match funding from another source before they are able to go ahead.

There is therefore a crucial role for OxLEP to assist by establishing a central environmental investment fund that can be used as match funding to kick start projects, lever in additional investment to Oxfordshire and unlock the potential benefits set out in the SEEIP. This fund would be established from a combination of the above sources, and then topped up over time using a portion of the proceeds from the growth and development which has been enabled as a result of environmental investment, for example CIL or rising business rates. An amount of £15 million is recommended as a starting fund to catalyse the activity set out in this investment plan, in addition to providing an incentive for further investment to come forwards in future.

Funding would be allocated to projects by application, determined by the Sustainability and Environment Sub-Group, on the basis of their ability to contribute to the SEEIP and SEP priorities and the scale of projected impact on economic growth and development. Natural capital analysis and accounting should be used where feasible to assess the benefits of projects.

The criteria for funding will be used to drive innovation, efficiency, value for money, multiple benefits, collaboration and partnership working. Where appropriate, some of the investment proposals set out in this plan will be incorporated into other LEP strategies which relate to specific government funding sources, such as the Skills Strategy.

A number of issues will require consideration in the establishment of such an environmental investment fund. These include ensuring that it does not compromise or compete with the fundraising activities of individual stakeholders but supports them. Some



funding sources may require ring-fencing, have different criteria for how they are allocated and administered, and require transparency in accounting, auditing and monitoring of results which could affect the ability of the LEP to pool funding sources. There are also restrictions on the eligibility of match funding sources. These issues will need to be considered by OxLEP and the Sustainability and Environment Sub-Group in the establishment and administration of the fund.

8.5. Monitoring and review

Monitoring and reviewing progress will be an essential role of the Sustainability and Environment Sub-Group in ensuring the long-term success of the SEEIP. It is recommended that a number of key performance indicators are measured to facilitate this, including both output and outcome measures, for example:

- Output measures could include amount of funding secured, number of investment proposals funded, progress with implementing specific interventions such as amount of green infrastructure completed, advice or training courses delivered or low carbon technologies installed
- Outcomes could include economic, social and environmental outcomes such as number of jobs created, number of people with improved skills, number of visitors to new or improved green spaces, energy or carbon savings achieved.

What indicators are measured and how frequently they are reviewed will depend on the availability and reporting cycles agreed for relevant data. Whereas output measures are relatively straightforward to collect information on from the relevant parties, measurement of some of the outcomes of the environmental investment and establishing a causal link can be challenging, particularly for indirect outcomes.

However, monitoring and assessment methods are improving continually particularly with the development of advanced datasets and digital technologies. It is recommended that OxLEP work with stakeholders across Oxfordshire, including the local authorities, environmental organisations, the Universities and other research centres to agree on an approach to monitoring which makes the best use of the available data and expertise in the county and supports innovation where appropriate.

The SEEIP is intended to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, following a cycle that is coordinated with and feeds into the process for the SEP. These reviews will be essential to ensure that it is meeting its objectives and delivering on the vision and strategic priorities, and also to enable new opportunities to be identified and incorporated.

Chilterns Conservation Board



Appendix: Summary of investment proposals

The following investment proposals have been put forwards by stakeholders across Oxfordshire in response to a call for input to the SEEIP. In considering these proposals it should be recognised that some proportion of the expenditure would be likely to have occurred anyway. However, given the objective to attract investment from sources external to the county, a substantial proportion of the spending would be expected to be additional. The additional spending attracted would be expected to increase total GVA in the county. It must be borne in mind that some of this increased spend could displace increases that would have arisen from other sources in the absence of the SEEIP. However, this displacement is not considered significant given that existing rates of similar environmental investments are relatively low, and the green economy and other areas of activity being invested in are relatively new and expanding markets (see Section 5.1).

- **Oxfordshire Energy Strategy:** An energy strategy will be developed for Oxfordshire, to ensure that the infrastructure in the county is fit for purpose to enable strategic objectives to be met for economic growth, development, carbon reduction and fuel poverty alleviation.

The project will be led by Low Carbon Hub, working with stakeholders including the local authorities and the DNO. Preparation of the strategy would cost around £150,000 and could be complete within a year. The project will objectively assess energy supply and demand in each district and Oxfordshire as a whole, identify resources, opportunities, and constraints, highlight specific investments in energy and grid infrastructure necessary to achieve growth plans, coordinate activity in areas such as district heating, energy storage and fuel poverty, and ensure that the wider economic, social and environmental benefits are captured.

- **Oxfordshire Allowable Solutions Fund:** Although the government has moved away from introducing zero carbon standards for new buildings from 2016, the EU is looking to introduce requirements for new buildings to be near zero energy, which will need to be transcribed into UK law. As requirements for the energy and carbon performance of buildings are tightened, it is likely that off-site solutions – or allowable solutions – will be needed for some sites where there are constraints on the amount of renewable or low carbon energy that can be generated on-site.

This proposal will establish an Oxfordshire-wide fund to collect allowable solution payments from new developments and allocate them to appropriate local carbon abatement projects, such as retrofit of existing buildings for energy efficiency and renewable energy installations. This will be designed to enable development to meet its obligations in an affordable manner while ensuring that the benefits are captured within the county in terms of energy and carbon savings, revenues from energy generation, and opportunities for local suppliers within the low carbon economy.

Led by Cherwell District Council, the initial one year project would comprise a feasibility stage followed by an implementation stage, with a total approximate

cost of £100,000. Beyond this, the operation of the fund would aim to be self-financing, using a portion of the allowable solutions payments from developers.

- **Bicester Micro-grid Specification Study:** Considerable growth is planned in Bicester, which has been identified as a Garden Town and is home to the UK's first Eco-town. Strong commitments have been made to ensure that this development meets ambitious standards of sustainability and serves as an exemplar both nationally and internationally. Bicester. Local renewable energy generation will be an essential part of this, however capacity constraints in the electricity distribution network and the connection to the national grid are preventing new renewables from being connected to the grid.

A micro-grid owned by local households and businesses is proposed as a solution which would enable use of locally generated renewable energy and savings on energy bills. The micro grid, once demonstrated in Bicester, could provide a practical model for other locations in Oxfordshire and elsewhere which face similar challenges.

The technical and commercial viability of a micro-grid for a housing development has already been demonstrated in an earlier study. The specification study, led by Cherwell District Council at a cost of around £50,000, will develop a detailed regulatory, commercial, engineering and economic specification for the micro-grid together with an implementation plan.

- **Reducing vehicle emissions and congestion along the northern section of the Knowledge Spine from Bicester to Oxford:** This proposal will provide electric vehicle charging points at major employment sites and promote car clubs and workplace travel plans, focusing the main commuting route between Bicester and Oxford.

While the Local Transport Plan 2015-2031 seeks significant improvements in public transport, walking and cycling, it recognises that the private car will still be a dominant mode of travel throughout the county. A survey by Cherwell District Council indicated that 87% of residents would consider buying an electric vehicle if there were more charging points. Installing charging points will help stimulate the local market for electric vehicles, in turn enabling individuals and businesses to reduce their carbon emissions. Over the longer term if uptake is secured, there will be more significant benefits for congestion, carbon emissions and local air pollution.

The project, led by Oxford City Council with a number of local partners, has a total estimated cost of £660,000, of which the majority would be capital spending on infrastructure. Charging infrastructure would be delivered and maintained through a contract with a commercial provider. Once proven, similar action could be taken on other commuting routes and major employment sites.

- **EarthLab:** EarthLab will be a new centre on the Earth Trust farm at Little Wittenham, offering a broad spectrum of activities for businesses, researchers, schools and members of the public. Its activities will include the Skills for Tomorrow programme of training and apprenticeships across a number of sectors including agriculture, and opportunities are being explored for elements of this to be delivered in partnership with Abingdon and Witney College and relevant



departments of the University of Oxford. The centre will also include an extension to the existing Farm Step agricultural incubator programme and new office space for collaboration and incubation of rural businesses focused on agriculture and land management.

Through EarthLab, Earth Trust also aims to accelerate its internationally renowned forestry research programme and extend its practical research to include agriculture, food production, and agri-tech data analytics alongside a number of other subjects. EarthLab will also provide enhanced visitor facilities for members of the public (see Section 3.4) and a knowledge and learning hub for low carbon living (see Section 3.5).

Another important part of the EarthLab project will be the creation of a new knowledge and learning hub for low carbon living, improvements to the visitor centre at Wittenham Clumps and an Earth School designed to enable and encourage outdoor learning across the curriculum, equipping the school children of Oxfordshire with environmental understanding and low carbon knowledge.

The new centre, with a total cost of around £6.5 million for capital and initial revenue funding, will be located just to the east of Didcot, close to Milton Park and Science Vale, and will be constructed by the end of 2018, subject to funding and planning permission. By 2020 it aims to create 350 apprenticeships and work placements and facilitate 200 new employment opportunities, working with around 200 local businesses. By 2025, creation of an additional 10 agricultural start-up tenancies is proposed.

- **Supporting Business Development in the Lower Windrush Valley:** The Lower Windrush Valley is a unique part of Oxfordshire where a history of gravel extraction in recent decades has transformed the landscape and created opportunities for a diverse range of businesses in an otherwise remote rural area. Led by Oxfordshire County Council, this £200,000 project will provide research, advice, and marketing support to businesses in the Lower Windrush Valley over an initial three year period, with a view to ensuring that elements of the programme are financially self-sustaining thereafter. The focus of this activity will be to enable businesses in the area to engage with and benefit from the natural environment, primarily through tourism and leisure opportunities around newly created freshwater habitats in former mineral extraction sites.
- **Cotswolds Choice:** This proposal will launch the Cotswolds Choice brand in the Oxfordshire area of the Cotswolds AONB. The brand will be awarded to farmers, producers and rural businesses undertaking land management activities that contribute to conserving and enhancing the environment of the AONB. In addition to enhancing the marketability and value of local products, it would also provide an incentive for more sustainable land management practices (see Section 3.3).

Led by the Cotswolds Conservation Board, the initial project with an estimated cost of £140,000, will work with farmers, food producers and other rural businesses to refresh the Cotswold Choice proposal, launch and administer the brand locally, and seek to make it self-financing.

- **The Oxfordshire Forestry Programme (OFFP):** This will advance all aspects of sustainable forest management, encompassing and building on the TOE2 Oxfordshire Woodfuel Programme. It will increase the production of timber products and uses ranging from planting for flood alleviation and woodfuel through to construction timber and furniture. Actions will include training through Forest Schools, support for community woodlands, and networking for woodlands and wood-using businesses. Led by the Sylva Foundation, working closely with TOE2, Oxfordshire County Council, this has an estimated cost of £500,000.
- **Bringing woods in the Oxfordshire AONBs into sustainable management:** This would fund staff to coordinate and support woodland management in the three AONBs, with a view to maximising their natural capital value. Led by the Chilterns Woodlands Project and working with the three AONBs and other partners, this has an estimated cost of £250,000 over a three year period.
- **Woodshare Oxfordshire:** This is a new social enterprise concept to support local woodfuel consumption and production. It will provide a service to domestic and business 'Wood Shareholders', enabling them to have greater ownership and control of local woodfuel supplies and support local community woodlands in the process. This will include securing local woodland resources and working with their managers to sell woodfuel, helping shareholders to source wood heat systems, and enabling communities to establish and manage their own woodlands for woodfuel, with a focus on communities off the gas grid. Led by the Low Carbon Hub, this project would require funding of around £350,000 in order to leverage further investment estimated at £6million over a three year period.
- **Wood Stations:** This project would look to establish wood stations across Oxfordshire, which would process arisings from managed woodland and recycled waste wood to produce woodchip and/or pellets. Starting with a feasibility study for Oxfordshire, and two pilot wood stations in West Oxfordshire, this project would be led by the Cotswolds Conservation Board and cost £600,000 for the initial three year pilot project.
- **FEW4AllIOx:** FEW4allIOx will help put environmental innovation at the heart of economic growth, by making use of the considerable knowledge and expertise in Oxfordshire and using the county as a living laboratory to stimulate further research and development. The project will encourage collaboration between Oxfordshire's universities, research centres and businesses in the food, energy and water (FEW) sectors through networking, knowledge-sharing and events. The FEW sectors are major consumer markets providing essential goods and services, which are subject to increasing demand. At the same time the natural capital assets that they rely on are under threat from various challenges, not least climate change. Efficiency, innovation and collaboration across sectors will all be essential to meet demand in future and address these challenges.

Market research by the University of Oxford is already identifying research needs are amongst local businesses in the food, energy and water sectors through the Local Nexus Network project. One example of a valuable collaboration which could be facilitated through FEW4AllIOx is the use of university expertise to model water

resources at the catchment scale and inform decision-making (see Section 3.3). FEW4AlLOx would also support other proposals in the SEIP for supporting rural diversification and resilience, promoting low carbon energy and transport (see above), and improving management of land to reduce flood risk, enhance water resources, and promote biodiversity (see Section 3.3).

FEW4alLOX will be a two year, £160,000 programme of work led by the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford, with partners including Community Action Groups Oxfordshire, Good Food Oxford and the University's Local Nexus Network on re-distributed manufacturing of FEW systems. The intention is to secure sustainable sources of funding for ongoing work, for example membership subscriptions, sponsorship and advertising. Intended outcomes from the project include stimulating new businesses and social enterprises, and enhancing skills. Several enterprises have emerged recently from the local interface between research and business, including Yasa Motors and Cultivate.

- **Oxford City Centre West End Natural Access and Quality Space Scheme:** Oxford's West End will comprise shops, restaurants and offices alongside homes, public squares and leisure facilities. The unprecedented level of urban regeneration planned for the West End includes Oxford Station, Westgate Centre, Oxpens, and Osney Mead Industrial Estate. Collectively, these sites will create around 175,000 sq. m. of commercial space, over 6,000 jobs, and potentially 800 residential units in the next 5-10 years.

Sustainability is at the core of the vision for the West End, and achieving the full potential of the proposed development depends on creating an environment worthy of a world class city. To realise this ambition, an inner network of cycle paths and pedestrian routes, heritage interpretation and on-going improvements to Oxford's central waterway are proposed. Led by Oxford City Council, this four year programme of work is estimated to cost £1.1million, of which some is expected to be funded by developer contributions.

- **Oxford Cycle City Plan 2017-20:** This proposal will provide much needed improvements to strategic connectivity between transport hubs, employment and residential areas, creating a more joined up network of cycle routes aligned to commuting flows, in line with the principles of the emerging Oxford Transport Strategy. It will also create an environment and culture that encourages cycling at all levels, through promotion and engagement.

Oxford City Council has devised a three-year programme of priority capital measures, working with Oxfordshire County Council, Sustrans and Cyclox. The estimated total cost is £1.45 million.

- **Oxonbike Cycle Hire Scheme:** The proposal is for a major expansion of the existing pilot scheme into a city-wide network of up to 100 hire stations and 400 bikes. This will include some electric bikes, so that it becomes a viable low carbon, low emission alternative for travel across the city for residents and visitors.

Led by Oxford City Council, this project has an estimated set-up cost of £1.2million, over a period of five years, after which operating costs would be

covered by sponsorship, membership and hire income with limited public subsidy from the local authorities. The project would create a permanent asset, the operation of which would include allowance for periodic replacement of cycles and station infrastructure.

- **Green Infrastructure for Healthier Lives in Oxford:** Six new Green Health Routes will be established throughout Oxford over three years, where possible taking in local landmarks and natural heritage. Regular organised walks along the routes will encourage community members and employees in businesses near to the routes to exercise more.

This will be the initial phase of a county-wide programme to link outdoor activities to healthcare support. The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare's long-term vision is for all GPs in Oxfordshire to be offering their patients 'green prescriptions' by 2025. The benefits of this will include reducing lost productivity and absenteeism caused by illness such as obesity, physical infirmity, mental health issues and stress; alleviating healthcare costs; and reducing health inequalities by making green space more accessible for all and promoting freely available opportunities for outdoor exercise and relaxation.

Led by the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, the initial phase of work in Oxford is estimated to cost £235,000 and take three years to deliver. By comparison, the annual cost of physical inactivity to Oxfordshire's economy has been estimated at around £90million per annum based on national average figures per capita, or £20million in Oxford alone.

The project will make links with other relevant proposals included in the SEEIP and also CSH will also build on existing health walks, such as those run by local authorities and the Green Belt Way run by the CPRE.

- **Bicester Walking and Cycling Connectivity Project:** This will deliver improved walking and cycling provision on key routes in order to create an integrated, sustainable transport network, which increases connectivity, reduces congestion and improves productivity, health and the environment. Links will also be made to the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare to promote walking and cycling for health purposes.

The level of growth proposed in Bicester is such that the increase in traffic, particularly in the historic core of the town where streets are narrower, means accommodating increasing numbers of cars is extremely challenging and the Local Transport Strategy indicates that a shift away from the car towards walking, cycling and public transport is necessary if growth is to be delivered. The town is ideal for walking and cycling, as it is relatively flat and compact with most journeys within the town under 3km.

Led by Cherwell District Council, the total cost of this project is estimated at £8million, of which £4.5million will be secured through developer contributions.

- **Greening Bicester - Growing the Garden Town:** This programme will support local groups and organisations to find innovative solutions to maximise the value of



their green spaces, for example by increasing community participation, developing local skills in green infrastructure management, and improving connectivity and access. Opportunities for commercial enterprises linked to green spaces will be considered where they support the aims and functions of the green space, for example the use of green space for exercise classes or the provision of ancillary facilities such as cafes.

Led by Cherwell District Council, this programme of work has an estimated cost of £600,000 over five years. It will build on the Green Infrastructure Strategy for the town and establish sustainable approaches to managing existing green space and new green spaces provided through property development in and around the town, which are expected to amount to a total value of £29,226,055.

- **Oxfordshire in our Hands:** This proposal will work with those responsible for managing accessible green spaces across the county to support them in maximising the value of these spaces, cutting management and maintenance costs, generating revenue streams and developing other more sustainable approaches to their long-term management. This will include networking, sharing knowledge and skills, and providing small grants. Led by Earth Trust, this is estimated to cost £350,000 over a three year period including money for grant funding.
- **My Oxfordshire:** This proposal will create a landscape and townscape strategy for Oxfordshire which clearly defines the features that make Oxfordshire special, defines distinct character areas, evaluates and describes each of these areas, and contains guidelines for sustainable growth and landscape change. This would help to strengthen the strategic framework for environmental investment and enable higher quality outcomes for new development. Led by Oxfordshire County Council, the cost of this work is estimated at £100,000.
- **One Planet Oxfordshire:** This proposal would build on the work undertaken already in Bicester to develop a One Planet sustainability framework and action plan for the whole county. This would involve bringing together partners from business, local authorities, faith groups, youth, education and NGOs to identify great practice and case studies for each of the One Planet principles; highlight where these could be scaled up or replicated; identify gaps and potential for new business opportunities. Led by Bioregional, this would cost £25,000 for the initial development of the framework, with further expenses for communications including a website.
- **Green Infrastructure Implementation Officer for Oxfordshire:** This project will help to ensure that green infrastructure is embedded in new and existing housing and commercial development and designed to maximise socio-economic benefits and facilitate sustainable growth. Proposed by Wild Oxfordshire, this would create a new post of Green Infrastructure Implementation Officer to provide advice to Local Authorities, developers, organisations and communities. The estimated cost for a three year temporary post is £140,000, which will leave a permanent legacy of improved knowledge and approaches to green infrastructure planning amongst relevant partner organisations together with examples of good practice on the ground.

- **Sharing the Knowledge from NW Bicester:** This proposal is to create a website to share knowledge and lessons learnt from North West Bicester, to benefit new development sites across the county and enable them to achieve higher standards. This will also help to raise the national and international profile of Bicester as a hub of innovation for sustainable development, making the most of the considerable investment that has been made there to date and helping to meet demand for information which is frequently requested. Led by Cherwell District Council, the estimated cost of this would be £100,000.

- **River Evenlode Catchment Restoration and Land Management Enhancement Partnership:** this will promote partnership working to deliver direct soft engineering projects to make physical improvements within the catchment and economically sustainable changes in land management. The Evenlode catchment is in the headwaters of the River Thames, upstream of Oxford. A legacy of dredging, intensive agricultural production and increasing volumes of wastewater has resulted in a river system with degraded habitat and poor water quality.

This catchment-wide proposal will build on a number of site specific projects within the Evenlode catchment that have already secured Water Framework Directive Grant In Aid funding from Defra and match funding from other organisations. From 2016 through to 2022 the projects' objectives will seek to create, enhance and maintain 122 km of the Evenlode catchment, including new accessible green space and recreational amenities; wildlife habitat, naturalised watercourses and additional flood storage; better fish passage; and improved water quality through changes in land use management.

Led by the Environment Agency, the total cost of all proposals through to 2020 is £950,000, of which 30% is expected to come from Defra grant-in-aid funding and a further 20% from project partners.

- **Upper Thames Floodplain Restoration Project:** Floodplain habitats in the Upper Thames, such as meadows, wetlands and wet woodlands, have been reduced to a fraction of their former extent. Some fragments of these habitats remain and are protected by legislation, but because of their isolation they remain threatened. Restoration of these habitats is expected to have significant benefits in terms of reducing flood risk downstream, enhancing water resources and promoting biodiversity.

This project will develop an innovative business model that makes habitat restoration economically viable, and implement pilot projects that will demonstrate wider feasibility within the Thames Basin, and generate commercial and political support for further action. The project will cover the floodplain of the Thames and tributaries within and upstream from Oxford. While some of this area extends beyond Oxfordshire, it is recognised that upstream natural processes closer to the source of the river affect downstream locations such as Oxford. Therefore the project will develop partnerships and coordinate activities with parallel organisations working in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

Led by BBOWT, this four year project is estimated to have a cost of £2million, of which over half will be for capital investment.

- **A Self-Funded Water Management and Access Organisation in the Upper Thames:** The creation of a self-funded professional water management organisation that would enable delivery of targeted and functional flood risk management, in a manner that is sensitive to environmental receptors, delivered by technically expert practitioners with access to appropriate machinery.

Work programmes would be agreed with stakeholders at a catchment scale, avoiding impacts on and where practical enhancing the quality, extent and enjoyment of ecological, heritage and recreational assets. In addition to supporting farmers and other riparian owners in meeting their obligations for water course maintenance, this proposal will help to reduce and actively manage flooding in Oxfordshire, reduce risks to the environment from maintenance activities by creating a professional, technically expert delivery organisation with a mandate to deliver environmental enhancements alongside, and improve recreational access along the Thames and tributaries, to improve revenue from boating and tourism. Over time, development of a strong relationship with riparian owners offers a potential route in to broader improvements in catchment management.

Led by NFU, it is estimated that the water management and access organisation could be established to the point which it is self-funding within five years, with start-up costs of around £820,000 including £500,000 for capital equipment. Market mechanisms will be established for generating revenue funding e.g. through sale of timber from riparian tree management; or through establishing a formalised system of payments through local levies and drainage rates.

- **Oxfordshire's Road Verges - Benefit not Burden:** If appropriately managed, Oxfordshire's roadside verges have the potential to make a significant contribution to the environment. In particular road verges have the potential to provide a network of habitat for wildlife including pollinators, improve the character of the landscape and setting for development, as well as generating woody biomass for use as fuel, thereby increasing the overall value of ecosystem services provided by these areas of land across the county.

Led by Oxfordshire County Council and delivered through its existing operational framework, this project would have a two year research phase followed by development and implementation of management plans at an estimated cost of £750,000, of which £300,000 would be for capital expenditure on equipment.

- **Promoting the Tourism offer in Oxford's Rural Hinterland:** This project will make it easy for visitors to access and enjoy Oxford's rural hinterland, dispersing visitors to lesser-known destinations. This will include promoting the three AONBs as places to discover, explore and stay, focusing on six market towns/villages within Oxfordshire as gateways to the AONBs. Day visits and short breaks will also be promoted for the Ridgeway and the Thames Path National Trails and other named trails in the three AONBs, along with leisure days out from Oxford by public transport.

The project will be led jointly by the Cotswolds Conservation Board, Chilterns Conservation Board, the Canal & River Trust and the North Wessex Downs AONB, and has an estimated cost of £1.65 million. This activity is expected to deliver significant

benefits for local businesses to benefit from increased visitor spend, as well as supporting rural diversification and encouraging outdoor leisure and recreation for health and wellbeing.

- **Cherwell Country Park:** This proposal will create a new country park for the benefit of both people and nature just north of Banbury, a town in which substantial new development is planned. The site is approximately three miles from the town centre and is in close proximity to the Banbury Gateway retail development near the M40 junction.

Planning permission was secured in 2012 for a proposed country park for a 27ha area of woodland and unused pasture which includes the Environment Agency's flood alleviation scheme for Banbury. An additional adjoining land parcel has since come into the Council's ownership as a result of an adjacent development expanding the site to 35.66ha.

Led by Cherwell District Council, the phased programme of works over 10 years is expected to cost £1.1 million.

- **Burnehyll Community Woodland:** To plan the layout, plant trees, prepare rides, create open spaces and provide associated facilities for a community woodland on most of 108 acres of grade 3 arable farmland south-west of Bicester. When completed, it will be the largest newly created and publically owned woodland in Oxfordshire. The primary benefits will be in terms of access to the woodlands for leisure and recreation, supporting health and wellbeing for local residents and also strengthening the appeal of new development locally.

The land for the community woodland has been acquired by Cherwell District Council as a result of a nearby development and the works required to create the woodland will be led by Burnehyll Community Woodland Association with costs yet to be determined.

- **Reconnecting Communities with Woodlands:** Oxfordshire has 56 existing community woodlands, which were predominantly planted in the 1990s. Over time the community structures and people have often changed; very few of these woodlands are used by local people who often don't know they exist or that they are allowed to use them

Led by Oxfordshire County Council, this would fund a community officer to liaise with parish and town councils, local wildlife or community action groups to make access or management improvements, identify additional sources of income such as wood fuel, develop permanent links to these potentially important local spaces. Limited capital investment would be needed for access improvements, signage, parking.

- **OxCan Cycle Path:** This project will upgrade 6.3 km of the Oxford Canal's towpath, to create two circular cycle routes incorporating existing minor roads or well surfaced tracks, together with signposts and initial marketing and promotion. This recreational cycle path will form an attractive rural 'greenway' between the villages of Lower Heyford, Tackley and Kirtlington and two mainline railway stations.



- Led by the Canal & River Trust, the estimated cost of the works and promotion amounts to £507,000. The path could be completed within a year.
- **Wychwood Centre:** A new centre for conservation, landscape and historical learning will be created, focusing on the Wychwood Forest area and based in the north of Oxfordshire. The centre, a physical building with adjoining land, will create opportunities to learn, explore and celebrate the landscapes, wildlife, habitats and historical context, including rural crafts, of the once royal hunting forest of Wychwood. The forest area encompasses 120 square miles inside the Cotswolds AONB.

A range of courses, events, training, provision of advice, and formal educational materials and site visits will be provided to address all ages and abilities and both local people and visitors.

Led by the Wychwood Project, the location and timing for completion of the centre is yet to be confirmed and costs could range from £250,000 to £2 million depending on whether it is new build or retrofit of an existing building.

- **Bicester Live:** This proposal is to create an integrated data and information platform which will enable residents, businesses and public bodies within Bicester to collaborate and communicate with each other and share best practice to support sustainable lifestyles and the reduction of their carbon footprints. This also has the added benefit of enabling growth in the green economy by making connections between businesses and consumers.

Bicester Live will also be used by the local authority to inform decision making processes and policies, providing evidence and insight into economic, social and environmental issues and enabling smarter, cost effective planning and town centre management.

Led by Cherwell District Council, development of a prototype website is expected to take around 12 months and cost in the region of £100,000. Similar systems could be delivered for other parts of Oxfordshire if this proves successful.

- **SEEIP Plus - Strengthening the Environmental Dimension of the LEP Strategy:** This proposal would enable the continued activity of the Local Nature Partnership in facilitating networking and communication across the environmental sector in the county, and to contribute to the implementation of the SEEIP, working alongside the LEP and other partners. Led by Wild Oxfordshire, the cost of this proposal is £102,000 for a three year initial period.



Our Priorities



people

Deliver and attract specialist and flexible skills at all levels, across all sectors, as required by our businesses, with full, inclusive employment and fulfilling jobs.



place

Provide the quality environment and choice of homes needed to support growth and capitalise upon the exceptional quality of life, vibrant economy and the dynamic urban and rural communities of our county.



enterprise

Encourage innovation led growth, underpinned by Oxfordshire's strengths in University research and development, business collaboration and supply chain potential.



connectivity

Allow people to move freely, connect easily and provide the services, environment and facilities needed by a dynamic, growing and dispersed economy.

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