

Thames Valley

Environmental Records Centre



Sharing environmental information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire

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OXFORD CITY WILDLIFE SITE REVIEW

AUGUST 2017



OXFORD CITY WILDLIFE SITES REVIEW

SUMMARY

This project reviewed the data available for 68 sites in Oxford City with potentially significant wildlife value at the City level. These were mainly sites identified as Oxford City SLINCs but also included Local Wildlife Sites, proposed-Local Wildlife Sites and other sites lacking any status.

A knowledge capture exercise was carried out to increase the information available in an accessible format. This sourced an additional 21 datasets which will be processed and incorporated into TVERC data products.

New and existing data sources were combined to identify sites that lacked sufficient information to allow assessment. These sites were prioritised for field survey in discussion with Oxford City Council staff. Field surveys were completed for 26 sites between May and August 2017.

Site selection criteria were created to allow a more transparent process for the selection of sites of local importance for wildlife in Oxford City. These selection criteria were then used by an independent site selection panel during meetings held in August 2017 to assess the sites surveyed as part of this project and a number of additional sites with existing survey data. The panel decided that 29 sites met the criteria for selection as Oxford City Wildlife Sites. Nine sites remain proposed as Oxford City Wildlife Sites pending confirmation of their LWS status and/or additional survey data.

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1. BACKGROUND

Oxford City Council is in the process of creating a new Local Plan to replace the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016, the Oxford Core Strategy 2026 and the Sites and Housing Plan. As part of this process sites that have significant biodiversity value need to be identified.

Sites of importance for wildlife may be protected by law or planning policy due to their international, national or local importance. These include sites of European importance (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). At a more local level some authorities also identify sites that are of significance for wildlife at a district, parish or city level.

Oxford City wishes to create a robust and transparent system for the selection of sites of local importance in Oxford City (currently called SLINCs) in preparation for the Oxford Local Plan 2036. This includes the development of selection criteria, updating the evidence-base, and assessment of potential sites.

This report summarises work carried out by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) to identify sites in Oxford City which have biodiversity value of local significance at the City level.

2. PHASE 1 – DATE REVIEW AND CRITERIA DEVELOPMENT

1.1. DATA REVIEW

At the start of the project a review of the data available for sites identified as potentially important for wildlife in Oxford was completed. Sites important for wildlife at higher geographical scales (i.e. national or European level) are not included as they are outside the scope of this project. The assessment focused on sites listed as SLINCs, Local Wildlife Sites and proposed-LWS but a small number of other sites were also included.

The existing species and habitat data held by TVERC was reviewed for each site and a knowledge capture exercise was completed to source any additional data available. This sourced an additional 21 datasets which will be processed and incorporated into TVERC data products.

Please refer to the 'Oxford City Wildlife Site Data Review 2017' document for further detail on the data available at this stage of the project. It includes a description the main wildlife interest that had been identified for each of the sites assessed and a list of the associated data sources.



1.2. SITE SELECTION CRITERIA DEVELOPMENT

Site selection criteria were developed for locally important wildlife sites in Oxford City. These criteria are based on the 'Ratcliffe approach'¹ which was drawn up in 1977 as a guide for the selection of biological SSSIs published by the Nature Conservancy Council (since succeeded as Natural England). This approach is widely accepted and used for the wildlife site selection at different levels of geographic importance including LWS in Oxfordshire. The criteria developed by Ratcliffe have been modified to ensure that sites of local (not just national) importance will be selected. These include naturalness, rarity, size, diversity, connectivity, fragility, value for appreciation of nature, value for learning, recorded history and cultural associations.

Please refer to the 'Oxford City Wildlife Site Selection Criteria 2017 (Version 1)' document for further detail on the criteria used.

3. PHASE 2 – SURVEY AND SITE SELECTION

3.1 FIELD SURVEY

The second phase of the project used the information collated in Stage 1 to prioritise data deficient sites for survey. Sites were prioritised in discussion with Oxford City Council. Surveys were completed for the 26 sites listed in Appendix 1. Surveys were based on Phase 1 Survey methodology (JNCC, 2010²).

The species data gathered during the field surveys were captured in a Recorder 6 database and is held at Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre.

Individual site survey reports including site descriptions, habitat maps, site photographs and species lists were produced for each site.

¹ Ratcliffe, D.A. (Ed). 1977. *A Nature Conservation Review*. 2 vols. Cambridge University Press.

² JNCC (2010) Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit



3.2 SITE SELECTION PANELS

A site selection panel was formed to assess potential sites against the criteria. The panel comprised representatives from organisations including BBOWT, Natural England, TVERC, Oxford City Council and Oxford Ornithological Society.

Site selection panel forms were produced for each of the sites assessed by the panel (with the exclusion of some waterway and waterbody sites that were considered collectively). These forms indicate how site features relate to the each of the selection criteria.

The sites considered by the panel were those surveyed as part of this project but also included other sites identified as having sufficient existing survey data to allow assessment. A list of the sites accepted by the panel as Oxford City Wildlife Sites is provided in Appendix 2.

3.3 OXFORD CITY WILDLIFE SITE BOUNDARY DATA AND DESCRIPTION

A GIS layer of the site boundaries for Oxford City Wildlife Sites was produced (incorporating the boundary amendments recommended by the selection panel). This is available in both MapInfo (tab file) and ArcView (shape file) formats.

For each site accepted as an Oxford City Wildlife Site, a citation (brief site description) has been produced, giving a short summary of the sites key wildlife interest.

4. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 SUMMARY

The project reviewed the data available for 68 sites in Oxford City with potentially significant wildlife value at the City level. These were mainly sites identified as Oxford City SLINCs but also included Local Wildlife Sites, proposed-Local Wildlife Sites and other sites lacking any status. Additional data was sourced through a knowledge capture exercise and by completing field surveys for 26 sites between May and August 2017.



Site selection criteria were created for the selection of sites of local importance for wildlife in Oxford City. These selection criteria were then used by an independent site selection panel during meetings held in August 2017 to assess the sites surveyed as part of this project and a number of additional sites with existing survey data. 41 sites were considered by the site selection panel.

The panel decided that 29 sites met the criteria for selection as Oxford City Wildlife Sites. Nine sites remain proposed as Oxford City Wildlife Site pending confirmation of their LWS status and/or additional survey data.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

The following work is recommended to allow assessment of sites that could not be processed based on the information currently available. Additional surveys are also recommended where interest for particular species groups has been identified but surveys for these species have not been completed in recent years.

- The additional surveys described in Table 1 were requested by the site selection panel and should be completed to allow assessment of any deferred Oxford City Wildlife Sites and/or to provide supporting evidence for the inclusion of sites where species interest for particular groups has been previously identified.
- Source information for the remaining data deficient LWS, proposed-LWS and SLINCs to allow consideration by the LWS selection panel and/or Oxford City Wildlife Sites selection panel. This is likely to involve the need for additional surveys of the sites listed in Table 2.

To keep site information up to date and help improve the accuracy of the data used to define the site selection parameters, the follow is recommended:

- Set up ongoing system for regular survey and site assessment to keep Local Wildlife Site and Oxford City Wildlife site information and mapping up to date to accurately reflect their current wildlife value and condition. This would also provide a means of assessing additional sites that are identified as potentially important (including sites where more sympathetic management and/or habitat restoration or creation have resulted in increased wildlife value)
- Citations and GIS layers will become out of date over time and a system should be created for updating this information on a regular basis.
- The size thresholds suggested in the Oxford City Wildlife Site Selection Criteria are based primarily on the areas of habitat mapped on the TVERC Habitats and Land Use GIS layer. The mapping of habitats in the Oxford City area is incomplete and the accuracy could be improved by achieving

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more complete coverage and updating with the more recent survey data that is now available. The habitat mapping for Oxford City should be updated to allow more accurate assessment of the priority habitat resource. This could then be used to revise the size thresholds suggested in the Oxford City Wildlife Site selection criteria.

In order to identify other sites of potential wildlife interest including the key wildlife corridors the following is recommended:

- Survey or source survey data for all areas of habitat highlighted as potentially priority grassland habitat that has not yet been surveyed and assessed. This may identify additional sites that should be considered for inclusion as Oxford City Wildlife Sites.
- Complete assessments of woodland and other semi-natural habitats that have not yet been categorised on the TVERC habitat and land use mapping to identify potential areas of priority habitat or other interest.
- Complete an assessment of the Oxford City Network sites and identify the key wildlife corridors within the City. This could then be used to recommend changes to Oxfordshire Conservation Target Area boundaries and/or update Oxford City Network site boundaries.

Table 1. Oxford City Wildlife Site selection panel recommendations for additional survey

Site Code	Site Name	Panel decision	Panel Comment
50I10	Headington Hill Viewpoint	Accept	Borderline for 1E. Bird and invertebrate surveys would be useful.
50G02	Littlemoor Railway Cutting	Defer	Needs complete survey including SSSI area
50N07	Old Road Land	Accept	Needs Great Crested Newt survey and survey for western section of the site that was not accessible
40Z09	Wolvercote Mill Swamp	Defer	More survey data required. Survey with Duke's meadow and process as proposed-LWS
41V12	Duke's Meadow	Accept	Site accepted but should be proposed as a LWS; 1D for full range of species interest not just plants. Survey with Wolvercote Mill Swamp.
40Z14	Godstow Holt	Accept	Site accepted. 1D not met; requires further survey
50I12	Park Farm Meadows	Accept	Site accepted. Mainly based on 2009 records. Resurvey desirable
	Waterbodies and waterway sites	Accept	Wytham and Seacourt Stream, Littlemore Brook, Bayswater Brook, Oxford Canal, Linkside lake and Hinksey pools all have limited recent information available and additional survey data would be beneficial

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Table 2. Data deficient sites not considered by the selection panel in 2017

Site code	Site name	Status	Comment
50H05	St Hilda's College Meadow	LWS	No recent survey data - last survey 1992. Recent survey information required to allow assessment
50H04	Long Meadow	LWS	The last survey (2002) indicated large population of grass snake. Recent reptile survey required to assess significance of the population
50C03	Hinksey Lake	p-LWS	Identified as valuable for birds with some survey data from 2009. Additional survey required to assess level of interest.
50E16	Line Ditch	p-LWS	This site has not been surveyed. Permission to access the site, which is along an active railway line, would be needed to allow survey and assessment.
50I06	Marston Brook Meadow	p-LWS	This site is grassland thought likely to have lowland meadow habitat. There are some records from 2009 but more information on the grassland habitat type and the extent of any priority habitat present is needed in order of the site to be assessed.
50G03	Meadow next to Iffley Meadows	pLWS EXT	This area is believed to include reed bed but has not been surveyed. Survey required to allow assessment
50E11	Burnt Mill Meadows (northern field)	SLINC	This area was included in a 2009 survey but data is combined with that recorded for the LWS to the south. Survey required to identify the wildlife interest located in this northern field.



4. ABOUT TVERC

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) is a 'not for profit' organisation covering Berkshire and Oxfordshire. We are run by a partnership and are one of a national network of local records centres. We are a member of the Association of Local Records Centres (ALERC) and the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). Our funding partners include all the local authorities in Oxfordshire & Berkshire plus the Environment Agency. We also work closely with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

WHAT WE DO

We provide our funding partners with annually updated species and sites information as GIS tables, and undertake surveys of local wildlife sites. We also carry out data analysis for the monitoring of local authority Local Plans. We provide information to parish councils, local people, conservation bodies, land-owners, students and commercial organisations such as ecological consultants and utilities companies via data searches, data licensing and data exchanges. We provide other services such as ecological surveys, data analysis & presentation and training.

OUR RECORDS

We hold around 1.8 million records of flora and fauna in Berkshire and Oxfordshire plus information about Local Wildlife and Geological Sites, NERC Act S41 Habitats of Principal Importance (previously called UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats) and Ecological Networks (Conservation Target Areas and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas). We collect this data from the general public, skilled volunteer /amateur recorders, professionals working for wildlife charities (BBOWT and RSPB), professionals working for government agencies (the Environment Agency & local authorities) and ecological consultants. This information is used:

- by planning authorities and developers to make informed decisions on the design and location of sustainable development
- to help farmers, land-owners and conservation organisations manage land in the best way to enhance biodiversity
- by nature partnerships to direct wildlife conservation work
- by teachers, students and scientists for education and scientific research.

For more information please visit our website: www.tverc.org

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5. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SITES SURVEYED 2017

Name	Site Code	Status at time of survey	Comment
Aston's Eyot and The Kidneys	50H03	SLINC	
Bypass meadows	50E11	p-LWS	South field only
Canalside Meadow/ Oxford Canal	41V14	LWS	
Cripley Island Allotment	50D16	SLINC	
Fiddler's Island	50D16	SLINC	
Headington Hill View Point	50I10	SLINC	
Littlemore Railway Cutting SLINC	50G02	SLINC	Only part of site seen
Lye Valley and Cowley Marsh	50M06	p-LWS extension	Churchill Hospital Field
Lye Valley and Cowley Marsh	50M05	p-LWS extension	Mileway Gardens/Boundary Brook Corridor
Meadow north of Goose Green	41V24	LWS	
Medley Manor Wood	40Y04	SLINC	
Minchery Farm	50L02	SLINC	
Old Road Land	50N07	SLINC	Only part of site accessible
Oriel Wood	SLINC 28	SLINC	Likely to require bird survey data
Field North of Osney Mead	40X06	SLINC	
Godstow Bridge Meadow	40Z17	SLINC	
Spindleberry Nature Park	50L05	Other	Suggested for inclusion - likely to have invertebrate interest
University Parks	50D02	LWS	
Victoria Arms Spinney	50J04	SLINC	
Warneford Hospital meadow	50M04	Other	
Bullstake Stream	40Y06	SLINC	
Littlemore and Northfield Brook	40L04	SLINC	Partial survey only
Field between Long Meadow LWS and St. Hilda's College meadow LWS	50H04	SLINC	
Magdalen Meadow	50I03	LWS	Surveyed from field edge only
Great meadow	50I02	LWS	
Longbridges Nature Park (area excluded from LWS)	50H06	SLINC	

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APPENDIX 2: SITES ACCEPTED AS OXFORD CITY WILDLIFE SITES 2017

SITE	NAME
50H03	Aston's Eyot and The Kidneys
50H09	Barrack Lane Meadow
50N08	Bayswater Brook
50H08	Boundary Brook Nature Reserve
40Y06	Bullstake Stream
50D16	Cripley Island & Fiddler's Island
41V12	Duke's Meadow
40X06	Field North of Osney mead
40Z08	Godstow Abbey Meadow
40Z17	Godstow Bridge Meadow
40Z14	Godstow Holt
50I10	Headington Hill View Point
50C09	Hinksey Pools
41V25	Linkside Lake
50L04	Littlemore and Northfields Brook
50G21	Littlemore Brook
50H06	Longbridges Nature Park
40Y04	Medley Manor Wood
50L02	Michery Farm
50N07	Old Road Land
50E16	Oxford Canal
50I12	Park Farm Meadows
50J05	Peasmoor Piece
50G20	Rivermead Nature Park
50L05	Spindleberry Park
50I13	St Cross Cemetery (part)
50J04	Victoria Arms Spinney
50M04	Warneford Meadow and Orchard
40Y01	Wytham Stream / Seacourt Stream

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APPENDIX 3: SITES PROPOSED AS OXFORD CITY WILDLIFE SITES 2017

Site name	Site Code	Type	Details
Littlemore Railway Cutting	50G02	SLINC	Includes Geological SSSI. Scrub with patches of calcareous grassland: full survey required
SLINC east of New Marston Meadows	50I12	SLINC	Semi-improved grassland with reports of fritillary: survey data required
Meadow between St. Hilda's & Long Meadow	50H04	SLINC	Rough wet grassland with potential reptile interest: survey data required
University Parks	50D02	LWS	Parkland likely to be deselected as LWS; pending LWS panel
Stansfeld Field Study Centre	50N04	pLWS	pLWS likely to be rejected; pending LWS panel
Churchill Hospital field	50M06	pLWS EXT	pLWS EXT likely to be rejected; pending LWS panel
Boundary Brook corridor - Mileway Gardens	50M05	pLWS EXT	pLWS EXT likely to be rejected; pending LWS panel
Burnt Mill Meadows	50E18	SLINC	Part not included in LWS: Likely to support pond sedge fen -survey data required
Henry Stephen/ C S Lewis Nature Reserve (Part only)	50T11	SLINC	Northern end of BBOWT reserve; Most of site is outside of Oxford City