



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

# Duty bound?

Protecting and enhancing the natural  
environment of West Oxfordshire

# Introduction

- Biodiversity – what is it?
- Statutory duty
- What WODC can do
- Potential projects



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# Firstly, some questions for you

- ***What makes West Oxfordshire a special place?***
  - *Perhaps it is the landscape...*
  - *Or the beautiful countryside?*
  - *Picturesque villages and towns?*
  - *Tranquility?*
  - *History?*
  - *Or perhaps it's the economy?*

## Secondly...

- ***Where do you go to escape the everyday pace of life?***
  - *Perhaps you tend to your allotment?*
  - *Do a bit of gardening?*
  - *Go for a walk in your local park?*
  - *Take your family for a woodland picnic?*
  - *Bike ride around the countryside?*
  - *Birdwatching in a nature reserve?*

# Natural places

- Undervalued resource
- We all rely upon
- Good for our mental and physical health
- Feeling of “well-being”
- Recreation, exercise, fresh air
- Special memories
- Inspiration



# What is “biodiversity”?

- All living things
- Plants and animals
- Places in which they belong (habitats)
- It includes us!
- We breathe air, drink water, eat food, take medicine & wear clothes
- We **need** biodiversity





# National Picture



- **State of Nature 2016 headlines**
- Between 1970 to 2013:
  - 56% of species declined
  - 44% of species increased
- Between 2002 to 2013:
  - 53% of species declined
  - 47% of species increased
- 1,057 species at risk of extinction from Great Britain
- 142 species already extinct
- *“Hedgehogs have declined massively in farmland, so sensitively managed gardens are increasingly important for this much-loved species”*



# Local Picture

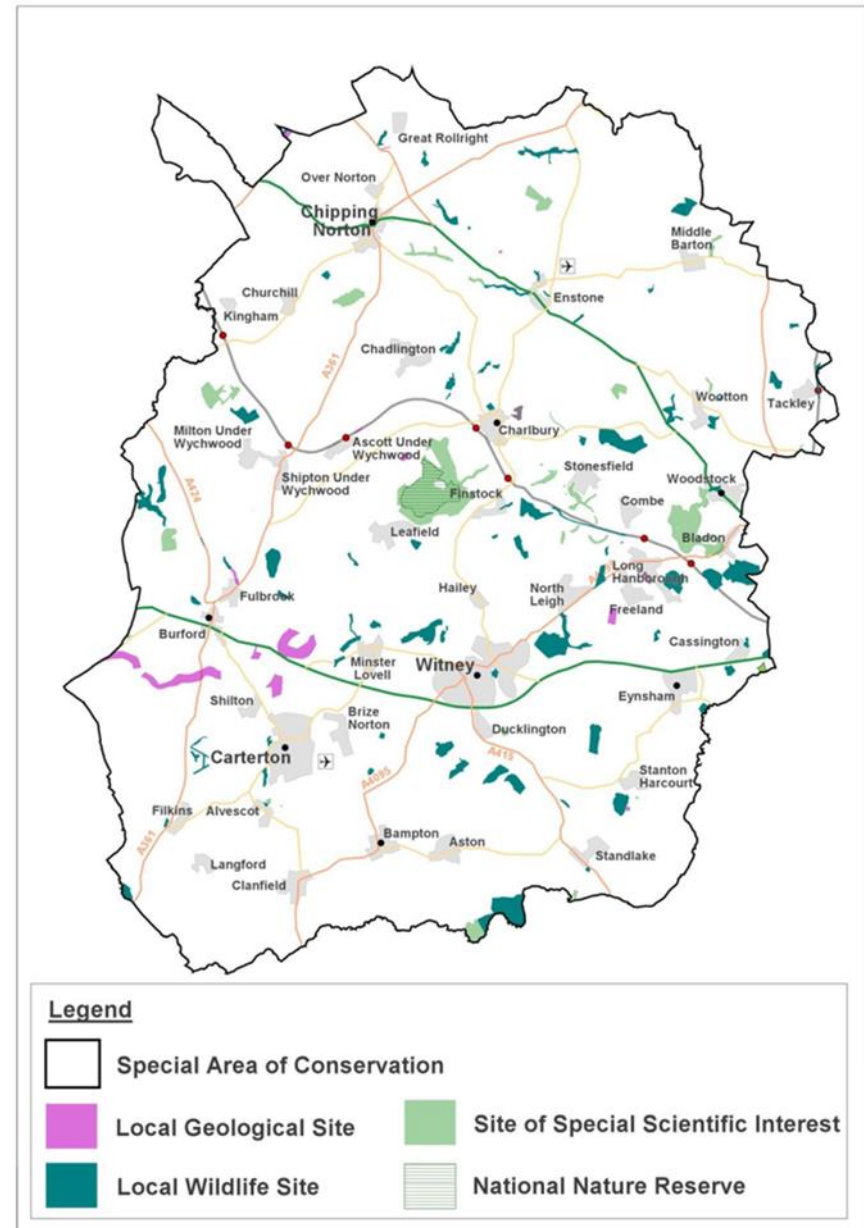
- Rich and diverse landscape = variety of habitats & species
- 4% within designated sites
  - 1 international site, 31 national, 123 local
- Conservation Target Areas – landscape-scale restoration & creation (x 11)
- Cotswold Valleys Nature Improvement Area
- Green Infrastructure (2011)
- Local projects – e.g. Lower Windrush Valley, Wychwood





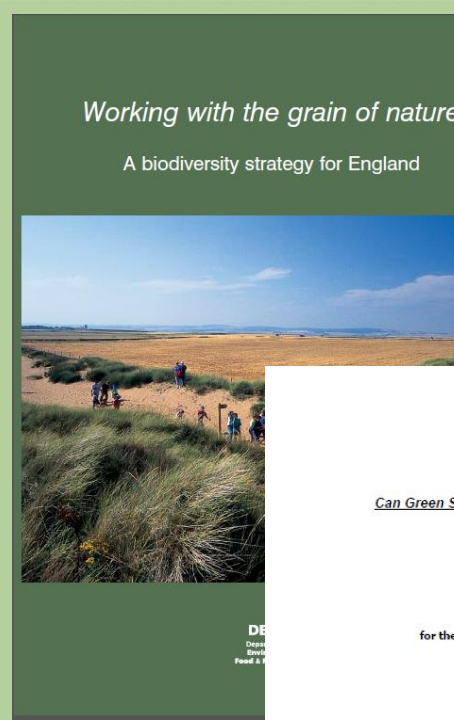
# 'Making space for nature'

- 2010 report by Sir John Lawton
  - *More, Bigger, Better and Joined*
- 2011 government Natural Environment White Paper
- “... from **net biodiversity loss to net gain**; by supporting healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and coherent ecological networks”



# Health benefits

- *“Objective research is confirming what many people already intuitively know: contact with ‘nature’ is good for us, and enhances our quality of life as a whole”* DEFRA, Working with the Grain of Nature – A Biodiversity Strategy for England 2002
- Recovery from illness
- Alleviate stress & mental health
- Improve community cohesion
- Opportunities for ‘natural play’



Natural England Commissioned Report NECR204

## A review of nature-based interventions for mental health care

### NATURAL FIT

#### Can Green Space and Biodiversity Increase Levels of Physical Activity?

A Report by Dr William Bird  
for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds



Endorsed by the  
**Faculty of Public Health**  
of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

October 2004



# Statutory duty

*“Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”*





# What does it mean?

- Conserving biodiversity includes restoring and enhancing species and habitats
- Raise the profile and visibility
- Clarify existing commitments – UK targets
- Make it a natural and integral part of policy and decision-making
- Partnership working





# What is WODC doing?

- Working in partnership – groups and volunteers, e.g. Witney Woodland Volunteers
- Managing land – e.g. Langel Common
- Implementing local planning policies and encouraging biodiversity enhancements
- Reviewing the soft landscape around council offices in Witney
- Raising the profile of biodiversity



# Corporate strategies

- **Shaping Futures – sustainable community strategy:**
  - Aim EC.1 to maintain and enhance the natural environment
  - Includes effective land and estate management and improved access to natural green space
- **Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2009 – 2012:**
  - no mention of the benefits of biodiversity or green infrastructure
- **Climate Change Policy 2008 – 2012:**
  - biodiversity section – conserve and enhance priority habitats and species, support organisations, implement a Conservation Target Area approach, encourage more people to become involved with the Green Gym Project
- **Council Plan 2016 – 2019:**
  - Priority: protect the environment while supporting the local economy
  - Protect the natural and built environment
  - **No key tasks for the natural environment**

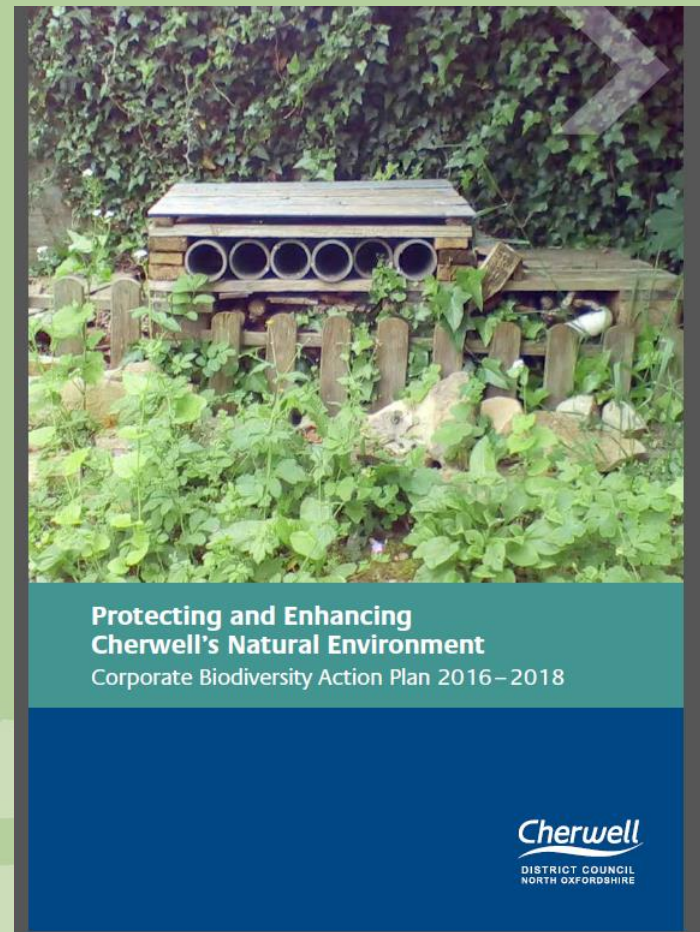
# What could WODC achieve?

- Biodiversity at the heart of all decisions
- Demonstrate strong leadership
- Joined-up thinking – biodiversity a part of all council policies and decisions
- ‘Key tasks’ identified in the council plan
- Active appropriate land management
- Support for Wild Oxfordshire and TVERC
- Support for local biodiversity projects
- Biodiversity Audit – all departments



# Corporate Biodiversity Action Plan?

- For example, Cherwell District 2016-2018
- **Vision:** *to work with partners to protect and enhance Cherwell's natural environment for its intrinsic value; the services it provides; the wellbeing and enjoyment of people; and the economic prosperity it brings*
- Actions relating to:
  - Planning policy
  - Development management
  - Land and building management
  - Green infrastructure
  - Health and wellbeing
  - Economy
  - Education





# Any Questions?



*The question is, are we happy to suppose that our grandchildren may never be able to see an elephant except in a picture book?*

*David Attenborough*