YOUR PLACE


2009 2013 2017 2021 2024 2028

YOUR FUTURE

South Oxfordshire
Green Infrastructure Strategy

Consultation Draft

December 2009
South Oxfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy

CONSULTATION DRAFT

South Oxfordshire District Council
December 2009
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1.0 Introduction

What is green infrastructure?

1.1 Green infrastructure is a collective term for open green spaces which can include amongst other things parks and gardens, woodlands, commons, playing fields, outdoor sports facilities, recreation spaces and river corridors.

1.2 Green infrastructure planning involves the active planning and management of substantial networks of accessible multi-functional open space. Our work on this is the context of government and regional policies which aim to achieve more sustainable development, protect the environment and combat climate change. The South East Plan\(^1\) states that networks should include both existing and new green infrastructure. It explains that these networks need to be planned and managed to deliver the widest range of linked environmental and social benefits including conserving and enhancing biodiversity as well as landscape, recreation, water, management, social and cultural benefits to underpin community health and well being. The Plan states that these networks ‘should be managed and designed to support biodiversity and wider quality of life, particularly in areas undergoing large scale change’.

Why do we need a green infrastructure strategy?

1.3 This strategy will contribute towards effective spatial planning and place shaping by ensuring that proposals for new development take account of their relationship to existing and proposed green spaces within the district and their connections to it.

1.4 The Green Infrastructure Strategy is underpinned by our Sustainable Community Strategy\(^2\). This strategy sets out that South Oxfordshire should continue to be recognised for its high quality and well managed environment both in terms of its countryside and natural environment, and its built and historic environment. Accordingly, key objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy are to improve the quality of our natural environment and support biodiversity and improve the quality of access to our public open space and green spaces.

1.5 Our emerging Core Strategy, part of the South Oxfordshire Local Development Framework, seeks to deliver these aims. Policy CSG1 ‘Green Infrastructure and biodiversity’ states that:

\(^1\) South East Plan, May 2009, Policy CC8: Green Infrastructure

\(^2\) Our Place, Our Future – The Sustainable Community Strategy for South Oxfordshire 2009-2026.
“A net gain in green infrastructure including biodiversity will be sought through developer works, developer contributions and the targeted use of other funding sources. Proposals for new development must demonstrate that they have taken into account the relationship of the proposed development to existing green infrastructure. Where appropriate, proposals will be required to contribute to the delivery of green infrastructure and/or the improvement of existing assets including conservation target areas in accordance with the standards in the South Oxfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy and Didcot Natural Greenspaces Study”.

1.6 This overall district wide green infrastructure strategy will ensure that this is carried out in a planned and coordinated manner.

1.7 In addition to informing and supporting the policies contained within our Core Strategy, this strategy also satisfies the requirements of Policy CC8 in the South East Plan 2009 which instructs local authorities and partners to work together to plan, provide and manage connected and substantial networks of existing and new accessible multi-functional green space.

What are the benefits of green infrastructure?

1.8 When planned and managed properly, green infrastructure networks can deliver significant and wide ranging environmental, social and quality of life benefits for local communities. These include:

- the protection and enhancement of biodiversity resources;
- the conservation and enhancement of cultural and landscape heritage and the creation of a sense of place and identity;
- improved access to recreational opportunities to support healthy living;
- helping to deliver sustainable water management and reduce the risk of flooding;
- assisting with adaptation to and mitigation of the effects of climate change;
- promoting sustainable transport through green routes for walking and cycling; and
- providing a resource for education and learning;

1.9 These benefits contribute significantly towards the social, economic and environmental objectives contained within our Sustainable Community Strategy and this demonstrated in more detail in the table contained within Appendix 1.

1.10 This strategy will also contribute towards effective spatial planning and place shaping by ensuring that proposals for new development take account of their relationship to existing and proposed green spaces within the district and their connections to it.
Aims of this strategy

1.11 The overall aims and objectives of this strategy are as follows:

- Preserve and enhance the condition, extent and connectivity of wildlife habitats;
- Protect and enhance existing natural and historic assets and provide new green infrastructure assets to meet identified needs;
- Reflect and enhance the area’s locally distinctive character, including local landscapes and habitats;
- Provide a varied, widely distributed, strategically planned, interconnected and multi-functional green space network; and
- Provide a green space network that is accessible to local people, offers recreational opportunities, provides alternative means of transport and promotes healthy lifestyles.
2.0 Methodology

What to include as green infrastructure

2.1 Green infrastructure includes a variety of different types of land including parks and gardens, woodland and grassland, outdoor sports facilities, amenity green space, allotments, churchyards, skateboards parks and green roofs. This strategy aims to deliver primarily the following types of green infrastructure in South Oxfordshire:

- Parks and gardens
- Accessible natural and semi natural green space
- Greenways
- Accessible countryside
- Registered Common Land
- Nature reserves (national / local / private)

2.2 Our approach excludes playing pitches, children’s play areas, allotments, cemeteries and church yards and amenity greenspace. This is because it will be more appropriate for playing pitches and play areas to be addressed in the Council’s forthcoming sport and recreation strategy. By its nature, amenity green space generally exists within existing housing areas. It is therefore extremely difficult, if not impossible, to retrofit new provision to make up any identified shortfall. We will therefore expect new provision to be incorporated as part of new development and it is not appropriate to include standards and deficits for amenity green space as part of this strategy. Allotments, cemeteries and church yards generally have one predominant use and do not lend themselves well to the multifunctional requirements of green infrastructure open space.

Our approach to biodiversity improvements

2.3 A key function of green infrastructure is the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity including the need to mitigate the impacts of new development\(^3\). The most effective way to conserve and enhance biodiversity using green infrastructure is to create an ecological network that extends and links existing areas of high biodiversity value, facilitating the colonisation of new areas in response to new opportunities or changing conditions. This approach is supported in the Government’s Planning Policy Statement 9.

2.4 Our approach is targeted by focussing on the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in the Conservation Target Areas as indicated on Map 1. The Conservation Target Areass identify the most important

\(^3\) South East Plan Green Infrastructure Framework – From Policy into Practice, June 2009
Methodology

areas for wildlife conservation in Oxfordshire, where targeted conservation action will have the greatest benefit. The main aim within Conservation Target Areas is to restore biodiversity at a landscape scale through the maintenance, restoration and creation of Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats.

2.5 The Conservation Target Areas were mapped by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre in consultation with local authorities, the statutory agencies and conservation organisations in Oxfordshire. They were identified by taking into account existing concentrations of Biodiversity Action Plan habitat and important areas for priority species. The potential for habitat restoration was also considered and took into account geology, topography and hydrology. Archaeological interest and public access. A statement has been produced for each of the Conservation Target Area identifying the features of biodiversity importance and targets for maintenance, restoration and creation of habitats. The Conservation Target Areas provide a focus for co-ordinated biodiversity action in the County including biodiversity project work by a range of organisations, delivery of agri-environment schemes and provision of biodiversity enhancements through the planning system. Delivery of Conservation Target Area aims is co-ordinated by the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum (ONCF).
Map 1. Conservation target areas with South Oxfordshire.
Our approach to the delivery of new green infrastructure

2.6 We have used the adopted standards for open space contained within our Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facility Assessment\(^4\) to determine the deficiencies in green infrastructure provision. These relate to natural and semi-natural green space and parks and gardens. We used these standards to calculate the deficiency in provision in the period to 2026.

2.7 A key feature of this strategy is that it is focussed on the actual delivery of new green infrastructure. It has an emphasis on what can reasonably be delivered within the period to 2026, as opposed to being more aspirational in nature. The strategy therefore distinguishes between the existing deficiency in green infrastructure that exists within the district, and the need specifically created through planned new development as part of the Local Development Framework. The emphasis for the delivery of new green infrastructure will be on meeting the need created as a consequence of new development. The existing deficiency in green infrastructure within the district is also identified within this strategy. The measures to deliver new green infrastructure to meet the backlog of need will form part of a longer term strategy, involving wider partnership working.

2.8 We have chosen new green infrastructure sites to coincide with where new development, particularly housing development, is planned to take place. The Local Development Framework directs new development to the four main towns and the larger villages within the district. This is set out in table 1 below. It is reasonable to expect that the delivery of new green infrastructure will primarily be funded through developer contributions, because this demand for additional green infrastructure will be created as a direct result of planned new development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Towns</th>
<th>Larger Villages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Didcot</td>
<td>Benson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thame</td>
<td>Chalgrove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henley</td>
<td>Cholsey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wallingford</td>
<td>Goring on Thames</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sonning Common</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Watlington</td>
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<td>Chinnor</td>
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<td>Crowmarsh Gifford</td>
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<td>Nettlebed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woodcote</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wheatley</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The locations for new development identified in the Core Strategy

2.9 For each settlement in Table 1 where a deficiency in parks and gardens and natural and semi-natural green space has been identified, we have provided a selection of alternative site options to address the deficiency.

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\(^4\) SODC Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facility Assessment, November 2008 (also known as the PPG17 Assessment)
Methodology

The selection of sites was informed by the following factors:

- Existing landscape features and biodiversity interest,
- Potential to create more interesting landscape features,
- The potential deliverability of the site,
- The proximity to the preferred strategic housing contained in the Core Strategy,
- The potential to link to the preferred strategic housing contained in the Core Strategy,
- The proximity to the Conservation Target Areas and other nature conservation areas

Our approach to the identification and delivery of greenways

2.10 An important element of this strategy is to promote access for people to green space and provide inter linkages between areas of green infrastructure. This brings significant benefits both in terms of improving opportunities for recreational activity and consequently promoting more healthy lifestyles and providing valuable wildlife corridors which will help animals adapt to the effects of climate change. Greenways are linear green spaces which are also known as green links or green corridors.

2.11 Such linkages should also be used to provide sustainable modes of travel e.g. walking and cycling, particularly links to employment sites. This accords with the objectives contained within our emerging Core Strategy which seek to build on opportunities for sustainable travel and particularly Policies CSM1 and CSM2.

2.12 Map 2 shows the existing and proposed greenways that are included as part of this strategy. We chose these links because of their ability and potential to:

- provide access to employment sites
- provide access to popular ‘honey pot’ sites (see appendix 4)
- provide linkages between green infrastructure assets

2.13 As part of this consultation, we would be interested to receive any suggestions for other existing or potential green links to be incorporated within this strategy.
Map 2. Existing and proposed greenways for South Oxfordshire.
2.14 In accordance with Policy CSG1: ‘Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity’ of the emerging Core Strategy, proposals for new development will be required, where appropriate, to contribute towards the delivery of new green links to meet identified needs and / or contribute towards the enhancement and improvement of existing green links.

2.15 New development within the vicinity of existing green links that need improvement or proposed new green links will be required to make a financial contribution.

2.16 Green links, if properly designed can help with the movement of species through the countryside, particularly within areas of intensively farmed landscape. By creating habitat corridors using native hedgerows and species rich grass margins alongside green links it is possible to create new movement corridors, especially where they link existing green infrastructure assets.

2.17 The overall green infrastructure strategy for the district is show in Map 3.
Map 3. The green infrastructure strategy for South Oxfordshire.
3.0 **Funding the delivery of new green infrastructure**

3.1 As set out in paragraph 2.7 this strategy differentiates between the existing backlog of need for green infrastructure within the district and the need created as direct result of planned new development contained within the Core Strategy. For the latter, it is intended that funding for the delivery of the new green infrastructure is provided through developer contributions to offset the impact of these developments.

3.2 The provision of new greenspaces to meet the existing deficits in green infrastructure is an integral part of this strategy. Whilst it is possible to justify asking for developer contributions to fund the provision of new green infrastructure which arises as a direct result of planned new development it would not be reasonable to ask developers to fund existing deficiencies.

3.3 The Council will work in partnership with a variety of organisations to develop innovative methods to deliver the existing greenspace requirements using a variety of funding mechanisms, including:

- Landfill tax schemes
- Aggregates Levy scheme
- Lottery funding
- Private Trusts
- Leader funding (a European Union fund)
- Environmental Stewardship Schemes (where it is possible to negotiate access agreements)

3.4 Delivery will be dependant on successful partnership working and the availability of appropriate funding therefore, the delivery of these deficits will necessarily be a longer term objective.
4.0 How we will deliver measures to conserve and enhance biodiversity

4.1 This section sets out how we will deliver measures to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

4.2 South Oxfordshire is rich in biodiversity resources with good examples of a variety of habitats which are important at local, national and international levels. The work which has been done to identify the Conservation Target Areas has identified those areas in which, due to a variety of environmental factors there are particular concentrations of important habitats and species and therefore where sustained effort is most likely to have the greatest benefits. There are areas which are important to biodiversity which fall outside the Conservation Target Areas which are equally important for biodiversity but it is considered that targeting investment of the limited resources available on the Conservation Target Areas is most likely to bring the greatest benefits.

4.3 The creation and enhancement of natural habitats is a key aim of this Green Infrastructure Strategy. Some biodiversity enhancements can be delivered on sites which have been identified for the delivery of new green infrastructure in the following chapters. These new sites will include the creation and enhancement of habitats alongside the creation of other more formal park type facilities and will contribute to our overall target.

4.4 The biggest potential gains for biodiversity will be by investment of time, resources and expertise within the Conservation Target Areas which will enable the creation, restoration, enhancement and linking of habitats within these areas.

4.5 Oxfordshire has a well established reputation for effective partnership working through its Biodiversity Action Plan. The Conservation Target Areas work is being coordinated through the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum who employ a Biodiversity Project Manager whose primary role is to deliver biodiversity enhancements within the Conservation Target Areas. The key to delivering this change is to work closely to coordinate the activities of a variety of partners such as Natural England, The Environment Agency, the farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust to deliver the change.

4.6 The various partners have all signed up to the Conservation Target Area approach and are able to work pro-actively with farmers and landowners within the Conservation Target Areas to enhance biodiversity on their landholdings. The mechanisms for delivering this change are many and varied and some of the key tools are identified below:
Delivery of measures to conserve and enhance biodiversity

- Encouraging landowners and farmers to enter into EU funded agri-environment schemes such as the Entry and Higher Level environmental Schemes. This provides them with annual and capital payments for managing their land for the benefit of biodiversity (and other environmental benefits)
- Promoting large area based projects which aim to restore key habitats such as the RSPB’s work at Otmoor and BBOWT’s project on the River Ray and Chimney Meadows. This may involve direct land acquisition or working in partnership with other landowners
- Encouraging landowners to enter into Woodland Grant Schemes in target areas such as the Chilterns where woodland is a key habitat

4.7 Our contribution to the delivery of biodiversity gains is set out in Chapter 11 of the Core Strategy and Policy CSG1: ‘Green infrastructure and biodiversity’ as described earlier at paragraph 1.5.

4.8 Green infrastructure and biodiversity gains may be delivered through one of the existing delivery mechanisms or through other mechanisms which are developed specifically to enable change. The level of contributions required is set out in the Councils Interim Planning Guidance - Services and Facilities for New Development (September 2008).