



Benson Parish Council  
Serving Our Community

# Benson Neighbourhood Plan Plan Revision 2022-2035 Submission Version - Sept 2022

## Appendix K - Benson's Green Infrastructure Assets

Appendix K has been updated in this Plan Revision to reflect the greater understanding we now have of the parish's green infrastructure assets, following work by many members of the community. The Local Green Space Designation table has been updated, notably to reflect our proposal to designate the two riverside meadows as Local Green Space. The appendix also includes a map showing important/priority habitats provided by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre - Full report available on request



## Appendix K

### Part I Audit of Benson's Green Infrastructure Assets

1. This document contains:
  - An audit of key nature conservation assets in Benson parish, reflecting the hierarchy and requirements described in para 175 and 179-182 of the NPPF, from the highest levels of legally protected habitats and landscapes through to unprotected but nonetheless valuable habitat. It also provides brief notes capturing ideas for some site-specific enhancements. Our green spaces not only cater for the needs of wildlife locally, but they are also critical to the health and happiness of our community.
  - Assessment of sites designated as (or proposed as such) Local Green Space against the criteria listed in the NPPF.
  - Report on biodiversity records from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre for the area, 2016 and 2022.
2. Tailored advice from Butterfly Conservation on opportunities to plan for for butterflies in the parish is available here <https://www.benson-naturegroup.com/butterfly-conservation-advice>. Other locally compiled and analysed records for the parish are available under the survey tab at <https://www.bensonnaturegroup.com>.
3. The [South and Vale GI Strategy](#) sets out the following Green Infrastructure Opportunities for Benson which have informed delivery so far and our forward plans:
  - Retain, enhance and manage the existing green infrastructure assets in and around the village, such as Benson Recreation Ground.
  - Create and maintain new accessible natural greenspace sites of 2-20ha to the east of the village, for example alongside the Benson brook, and of greater than 100ha within 5km of the village, to address deficits in provision.
  - Create and maintain new accessible natural greenspaces to meet the needs of the communities in planned new developments to the north and south of the village, for example along rights of way and incorporating existing features such as hedgerows and trees.
  - Create and maintain new accessible natural greenspace sites to mitigate potential impacts of residential development on European Sites, especially Little Wittenham SAC.
  - Develop and enhance recreational access links between existing and new green infrastructure assets, including from new planned developments, for example into the village and to the Thames Path National Trail and the wider rights of way network.
  - Explore opportunities for positive management, restoration and creation of relevant habitats, for example improved sensitive management of lowland meadows and enhancement of the network of important waterbodies within the CTA to meet Oxfordshire BAP Targets.
  - Protect, restore and enhance habitat for wildlife and people along the Benson Brook Corridor.
  - Planned new development should include landscape planting, for example along boundaries, to integrate the development into the wider landscape and to soften its visual impact.

4. Since delivery against this strategy commenced in March 2018, the parish has made good progress with an array of practical projects to enhance its green assets and the way that people enjoy them. Appreciation of the benefits that people derive from access to nature-rich green spaces has grown considerably over this period but this document is not limited to places with high biodiversity interest. Further information is available on our work to take forward enhancements in Benson's Strategy for People & Nature (Appendix L of Benson Neighbourhood Plan), which is a companion to this summary of assets.
5. On the back of development planned for in the Benson Neighbourhood Plan, the village's green spaces are set to increase in number, more than doubling in scale, and the PC is setting out to take ownership of those. Progress has been made with formalising arrangements for managing the village's green spaces in a way that maximises the multiple benefits for the community and fosters public engagement. The Parish Council has signed up to a Green Spaces Strategy that sets out a framework of principles to guide its decisions about how it manages its network of green spaces. Largely it is focused on those spaces in PC ownership or control, but the principles may also be applied in informing the PC approach to situations where it may exert influence over and support activities that others undertake. It has established a Green Spaces Working Group to support delivery.

## **What Benson has: a summary**

### **Statement on statutory and other designations**

6. **Protected Sites** There are no sites with statutory wildlife protection (Sites of Special Scientific Interest /European sites) in Benson Parish. There are however a number of important Conservation Target Areas nearby. These are biodiversity hotspots and important connecting areas that are a priority for funding of nature recovery projects - they are identified by Oxfordshire County Council in collaboration with statutory agencies and local conservation partners. Locally, these include a string of sites along the Chilterns Scarp including chalk downland SSSIs (e.g. Swyncombe Downs) to the east, and a number of areas adjacent to the River Thames north of Benson, notably the 'River of Life' wetland restoration project in Shillingford. These provide context for our longer term biodiversity aims as we consider how Benson's green spaces can act as stepping stones/connections between high quality nature conservation target areas.
7. **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty:** The south-east of Benson Parish lies within the Chiltern Hills AONB, and the parish borders the eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB, with a small pocket of the parish, the Mill at Preston Crowmarsh, lying within the AONB. Whilst Benson village is not within the statutory designated landscape, the AONB management plans indicate that neighbouring settlements are important in terms of the setting and views into and out of the protected landscapes, so they provide context for our actions.
8. **National Trails:** The Thames Path, a long distance public access route of national importance, runs through the western edge of the parish. Zooming out from the parish, there are a number of other nationally and regionally important walking routes/trails in the area, including the Ridgeway and Chiltern Way. The Thames Path National Trail team (Steve Tabbitt, National Trails Office, OCC; pers comm) supports promotion of a connection between the Thames Path and the Chiltern Way through the village, along Benson Brook and up through Ewelme.

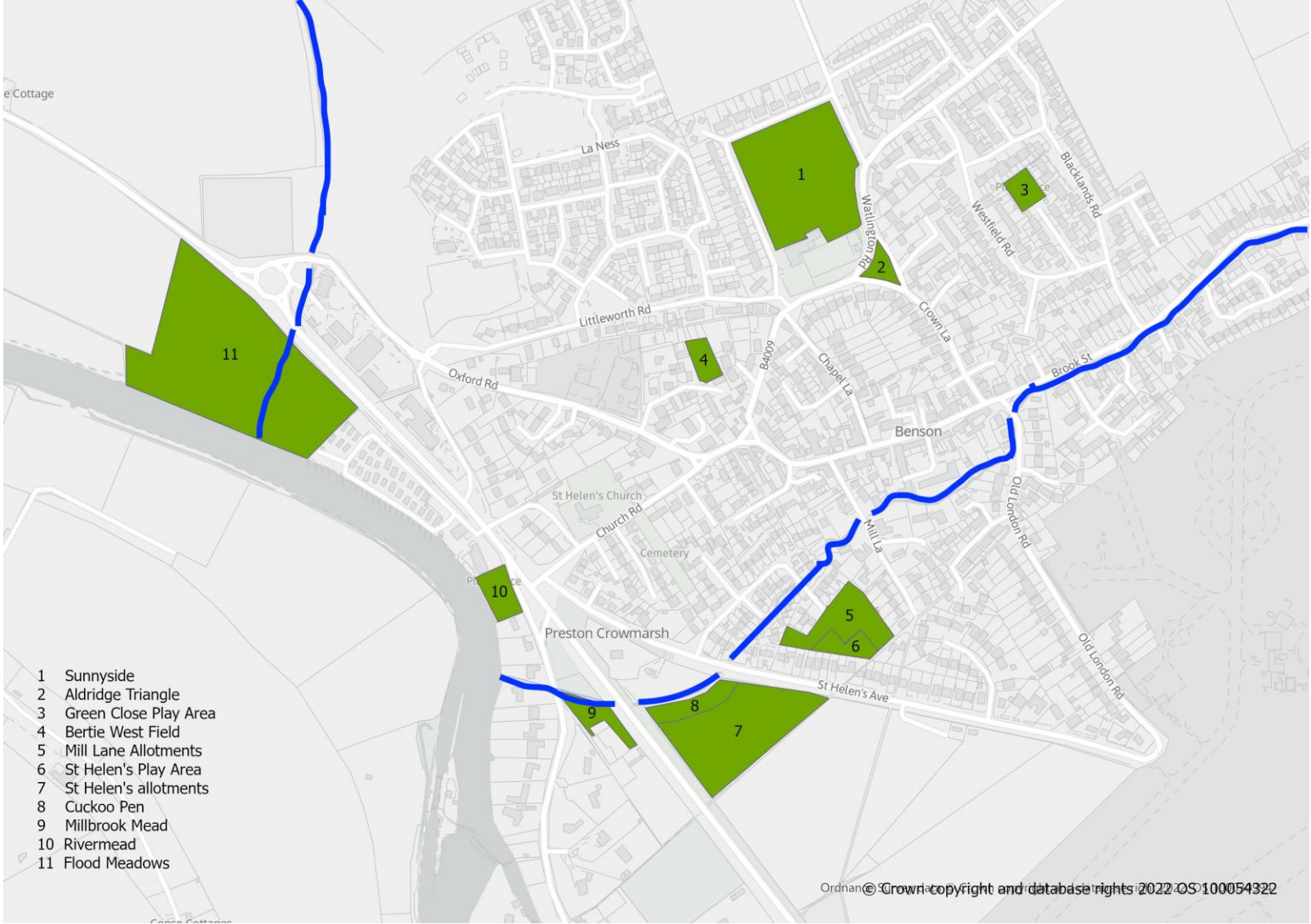
9. **Local Nature Reserves & County/Local Wildlife Sites:** There are none in Benson, but the Watercress Beds at Ewelme is located in the adjacent parish, upstream of the village along Benson/Ewelme Brook. This is an asset that provides access and engagement opportunities for the community within easy cycling and walking distance of Benson.
10. **Other designations:** The Aldridge Triangle is a small (0.16 ha) meadow, protected as a Jubilee Meadow through Fields in Trust. It is located in the built settlement of Benson opposite Sunnyside, the main open green space providing amenity grassland for the community and other parish facilities. The meadow contains grasses and a number of mature trees. <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/Aldridge-Triangle>
11. **Other valuable wildlife habitat:** These include the wildlife corridors and stepping stones that wildlife now relies on as the wider countryside has become less favourable in meeting its needs. A number of places stand out in Benson as follows (though a more comprehensive summary follows):
  - Benson Brook (also known as Ewelme Stream), a chalk stream forming the spine of the village and a globally important habitat - this is a key biodiversity asset, with both aesthetic appeal and cultural value;
  - Millbrook Mead, a nature reserve adjacent to the village comprising a wildflower meadow and remnant area of fen habitat;
  - Flood meadows listed as Riverside Flood Meadows and running north towards Shillingford. A report commissioned from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre indicate that this area may constitute potential 'priority habitat', which, if confirmed, places specific obligations on statutory decisions makers to have regard to their value. See below for further detail including on birds using the site.
  - St Helen's Churchyard in Benson is also identified by TVERC as possible priority grassland habitat – this is not an unusual situation as churchyards can often be species rich as they have not been exposed to the same intensification and application of pesticides and fertilisers as other grassland.
  - The grasslands at RAF Benson, an operational battlefield helicopter airfield, lying immediately south-east of Benson village and dominating the centre of the parish. Much of this was fenced off from the public in 1937, with an expansion incorporated in the 50s to accommodate a runway extension. Initial surveys suggest this area is of significant local nature conservation interest, partly because of the scarce species found there but also because of its scale (c175 ha) in an area dominated by intensive agriculture. The ecological role of the site is not yet fully understood, but it may prove an important connection between the Conservation Target Areas to the north and south-east of the parish. Records show that curlew are present occasionally in the summer months.
  - The south eastern part of the parish, which runs up onto the Chilterns scarp, has some areas of woodland and areas of wildflower meadow including a number of former landfill sites (in Oxfordshire County Council ownership) that have been restored as chalk grassland, a habitat type identified by government as a priority for conservation action.

**Full statement of green infrastructure assets with site-specific details:**

10. The remainder of this document describes in greater depth these and other green infrastructure assets in the village and beyond, covering the following:

- Benson Brook
- Millbrook Mead Nature Reserve and adjacent fen habitat
- The Salt Store aka The Materials Store
- Berrick Stream & Lady Brook aka Elmbrook
- Riverside Flood Meadows
- Warwick Spinney
- Other Public Green Spaces such as the Cuckoo Pen
- Gardens
- Road Verges, Footpaths and Bridleways
- Hedges and Trees
- On proposed development sites
- Wider Parish Assets incl Agricultural Land

A map showing many of these sites is embedded here and further information can be viewed at <https://www.bensonnaturegroup.com/copy-of-ewelme-brook>



- 1 Sunnyside
- 2 Aldridge Triangle
- 3 Green Close Play Area
- 4 Bertie West Field
- 5 Mill Lane Allotments
- 6 St Helen's Play Area
- 7 St Helen's allotments
- 8 Cuckoo Pen
- 9 Millbrook Mead
- 10 Rivermead
- 11 Flood Meadows

### **Benson Brook (or Ewelme Stream)**

11. The brook is a chalk stream, a globally endangered Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitat. It is a 'blue infrastructure' asset for multiple reasons: for its biodiversity value; for the connection it provides between the River Thames and surrounding countryside; and as a feature of cultural significance, bringing a spine of natural beauty right into the village. Locally, it also provides informal recreation for children.
12. Although the channel and surroundings in the village have been modified over the years by development, the area between St Helen's Ave and Preston Crowmarsh Lane/ the Thames provides an area of semi-natural vegetation, which is of local nature conservation value (see Millbrook Mead entry below), and access infrastructure, offering a safe (permissive) pedestrian route under the A4074, connecting the village and the Thames National Trail. The area is under Parish Council control.
13. Herons and Kingfishers are seen along the brook, including within the built settlement of Benson, and bats are very likely to forage along it (this is an aspect that requires survey). Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust recognises Benson Brook as a key area for Water Voles with the species generally recorded at the Ewelme Watercress beds, and a single record (from 2008) within the village. The 2015 and 2016 surveys however have proved negative for the species. The reason is unknown, although BBOWT speculate that it may be because of mink presence on the watercourse. The Environment Agency has recorded signal crayfish, an invasive non-native species, presence in the Brook.
14. An EA Fisheries survey completed in 2015 at Brook Street found good numbers of brown trout (over 70) and a few bullhead in a 100m stretch. A fisheries classification for this waterbody is expected in due course. Some of the features built into the watercourse may represent barriers to fish movement. Monthly invertebrate surveys are conducted by Benson Nature Group (with results submitted to the Environment Agency) - these suggest sustained good levels of key invertebrate species.
15. The Environment Agency identifies the Brook (and the River Thames within the catchment) to have a current ecological status of 'Moderate Potential'. Levels of phosphate in the watercourse are the reason for failure to achieve 'good' status. For the period 2017-2021, the Brook has been designated a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone on the basis of a sample taken in Benson; EA attributes the issue to agricultural practices in the catchment, and the designation puts in place requirements on landowners to adapt their farming practices to address the pollution. Water samples taken on a twice yearly basis as part of Earthwatch UK's Thames Water Blitz project show that levels of nitrate remain consistently high.

16. Hydraulic modelling for the area is under consideration by the Environment Agency, with a view to considering whether a flood risk management scheme for the brook's catchment is required and/or feasible. This analysis will include consideration of a range of options which include natural flood management solutions and watercourse enhancements.
17. Opportunities for Enhancement: Environment Agency representatives have indicated verbally that channel modifications above and through Benson village may have resulted in impoverished ecology. It would be supportive of enhancements, especially if consideration is being given to changes anyway as part of a flood risk management strategy for the catchment. Such a strategy is under consideration by EA, including looking at upstream flood storage measures. Opportunities for enhancements could include providing a more natural channel where appropriate and agreed, removing impediments to fish movements. Dealing with under-capacity culverts could also help to address flood risk in the village. There may be scope to create additional structural diversity (small riffles and pools) in the watercourse to improve opportunities for fish spawning.
18. Some riparian owners consulted informally (during Neighbourhood Plan development) indicated that they would be sympathetic to proposals to adapt the bank-side vegetation to improve the suitability for wildlife particularly for water voles. The stretch between Preston Crowmarsh Lane and St Helen's Avenue with its semi-natural vegetation and access infrastructure has come to be regarded as the 'crown jewels' in Benson's ecological network because of its mix of aesthetic appeal and function as a green thoroughfare for pedestrians, and it is a priority for investment in habitat management and enhancement. (See entry below for Millbrook Mead)
19. Benson and Ewelme Parish Councils have signed up to work together to define a catchment management plan for the brook, and a joint working group has been established. A first step of a walk over survey by a consultant appointed by the Wild Trout Trust has been carried out, and a comprehensive assessment of the opportunities for restoration is ongoing. This is being undertaken with the support of the Chilterns Conservation Board which has successfully secured government investment in an extensive chalk stream restoration project for the Chilterns.

#### **Millbrook Mead Nature Reserve and adjacent fen habitat**

20. This Parish Council-owned area of land comprises a wildflower meadow and fen habitat bordering Benson Brook. This area is publicised as a nature conservation site and used for community engagement activities such as the annual moth count, and visits by Benson guides and scouts for nature activities.
21. Records of the species present in the meadow indicate it is of conservation value. One hundred and thirty (130) species of wild flower have been recorded including two species of orchid and, with only limited recording effort, close to 200 species of moth. Consideration is being given to exploring whether the complex of habitats at this site should be formally designated by the local authority as a Local Wildlife Site.



22. An area of Pendulous Sedge fen/wet woodland between Benson Brook and the Cuckoo Pen nursery may be a focus for management and enhancement. Fen habitats are generally scarce in the landscape (typically having been improved or drained), although there are other Thames-side wet meadows with high sedge cover locally (e.g. between Benson and Shillingford).
23. Recent spot checks by volunteers from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology identified the presence of Striped Lychnis, a nationally scarce species of moth, for which there are very few other records in Oxfordshire. Caterpillars were identified on Dark Mullein plants on the edge of allotments adjacent to Benson Brook just north of the Millbrook Mead complex beside the A4074. This species has very specific habitat requirements for its larval stages, and there is scope to frame some of the village's biodiversity enhancement planning around providing opportunities for this species.

### **The Salt store aka Benson Materials Store**

24. This is an OCC-owned brownfield site bounded by the A4074, Benson Brook and St Helen's Avenue. This gravel area surrounded by scrub habitat provides a good scrub mosaic<sup>1</sup> with a range of successional stages, including bare areas and gravel patches that provide basking opportunities for insects and potentially reptiles. Off-season surveys indicate that the area is species-rich at a level that would be expected for an area like this, providing a good range of nectar sources for insects/pollinators.
25. Discussions are underway about a long-term Parish Council lease of the area for management as a nature conservation asset and potentially for other community activity eg adventure play opportunities for older children. Scrub management to maintain a structurally diverse mosaic of habitats, and the creation of resting/nesting habitat for reptiles and insects could increase its biodiversity value.

### **St Helen's Churchyard**

26. In recent years, records of [botanical surveys](#) carried out in the 1990s (by Roy Maycock) emerged from the archives of Caring for God's Acre a charity devoted to recognizing the natural and other heritage value of churchyards. This data suggests that the area could be important for wildflowers, and it contains very old yews. The site is notable also for the tranquility it offers for those seeking space for quiet reflection. Through partnership work between BNG and the churchyard maintenance team, discussions have been held about instigating a more relaxed mowing regime during the summer months for parts of the churchyard. Ideally, this would be extended across the whole grassland area for the flowering season, with paths maintained to ensure that the area does not appear unkempt. Signage would also help engage parishioners. There is a wild area at the back underneath the lime trees, known as the Dr Anne area in memory of a local GP who was a passionate supporter of looking after wildlife. It would help to periodically clear this area to allow light in.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#brownfield-land-soils-and-agricultural-land>

### **Berrick Stream and Ladybrook (Elm Brook)**

27. This watercourse forms the north-western boundary of the parish. It will border the western edge of the nature area proposed as part of the Littleworth Road development which has been the subject of an application for planning permission (currently subject to discussions of a S106 agreement).
28. It joins the River Thames adjacent to the last remaining patches of wet meadow in the parish, just north of Benson marina - see entry below for West Benson Riverside. This reach of the brook is very overgrown. The Environment Agency classifies this watercourse (which bounds the parish to the north) as having a Water Framework Directive status of 'Moderate', meaning that the water quality does not fully meet regulatory standards. EA verbal advice is that the watercourse could benefit from ensuring there is a balance of light and shade, and putting in place measures that ensure agricultural nutrients are kept low.

### **Riverside flood meadows**

29. Of particular interest is a pair of fields to the north of the riverside lodges at Benson Marina. In private ownership, the area is crossed by a public footpath, and Elm Brook (see above) flows between the two fields to join the Thames. The meadows are an important remnant of Benson's landscape and cultural heritage, recalling its position as a historic riverside village. The Landscape Character Assessments in Appendix E expand further on this dimension.
30. The fields are special for wildlife, providing habitat for a wide variety of breeding birds - Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Reed Bunting - plus visiting Cetti's Warbler, Snipe and Water Rail. These include red list and priority species (for whom conservation action is a priority). The meadows have been identified by TVERC as possible priority habitat - floodplain grazing - as identified in the NERC Act 2006. A professional bird survey, augmented by volunteer surveys, was carried out in Spring/summer 2022, and this confirmed the importance for their birds species of the strip of meadows running between Benson and Shillingford. The survey is available to view at <https://www.bensonnaturegroup.com/sightings>.
31. They connect physically to meadows that stretch upstream towards Shillingford, with the complex an important stepping stone linking the Thames Clifton to Shillingford CTA to the Thames Wallingford to Goring CTA. Riverside meadows have been identified as an important habitat in Oxfordshire's Nature Recovery Network, a key policy initiative set out in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. Habitats like this are likely to be critical to the achievement of the government's ambition to halt the declines in species abundance by 2030, legislated for as a legally binding target in the Environment Act 2021.

32. The draft Nature Recovery Network map for Oxfordshire has been adopted by the Oxfordshire Environment Board, with this area marked as a recovery zone. <https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/biodiversity/draft-map-of-oxfordshires-nature-recovery-network/> Thus it may be an important Benson-level contribution feeding into the government's national targets. Crossed by a public right of way, the meadows provide an opportunity for the community to engage with wildlife, seen as an important enabler in the 25 Year Env Plan. The meadows are the last remaining flood meadows in Benson that are publicly accessible. The meadows lie adjacent to the Thames Path National Trail.
33. The natural capital value of the fields also includes their role in providing flood attenuation locally, and as floodplain meadows, they also provide a carbon store. The watercourse, Elmbrook, also known as Berrick Stream and Ladybrook, flows between these two riverside meadows to join the Thames. Nitrate and phosphate levels are monitored twice a year as part of Earthwatch UK's Thames WaterBlitz, a citizen science project. Recent records suggest a deterioration in water quality, and it is important that future management does not cause further deterioration.
34. Because of the value of these fields and the array of services they offer, they are proposed to be designated in the 2022 update of the Neighbourhood Plan as Local Green Spaces.

### **Warwick Spinney**

35. This site lies immediately outside the parish boundary, but is included in this list because it is a Benson community-owned asset bought to mark the Millennium and is managed for its wildlife interest by the Benson Community Green Space Trust. It represents a key connection/stepping stone between the remaining riverside meadows and proposed new green space associated with development.
36. The site is within walking distance of the village but pedestrian access is hazardous, involving crossing a road at a dangerous corner that has limited visibility. Through the Neighbourhood Plan, we will take forward a plan to improve access by the community in collaboration with a local landowner and a developer, creating a connection for wildlife and pedestrians between the site and the proposed nature area on the Littleworth Road development site (subject to planning permission being granted).
37. Through work undertaken as part of Benson's People & Nature Strategy, (see Appendix L of Benson Neighbourhood Plan), grant funding from an array of partners (Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, SODC District Councillors, Benson Bulletin) has been used to improve the nature conservation value and access infrastructure at the site.

### **Other Public Green Spaces**

38. Benson has a number of public open green spaces generally comprising amenity grassland (Sunnyside, Rivermead) and/or play areas (both formal (Sunnyside, St Helen's Ave and Green Close) and natural (Bertie West's Field)). Bertie West Field has particular value as a place in the heart of the village dedicated to unsupervised outdoor play in a natural setting for children. Considerable investment has been

made in enhancing the village's play facilities recently, with a full revamp of equipment at Sunnyside, new additions at St Helen's play-ground, and installation of a ramp at Bertie West Field to improve disabled access (as well as making it easier to access with equipment for maintenance.)

39. The village has 2.43 ha of allotments, with most located in two distinct areas on either side of St Helen's Avenue. A number of allotment holders are already providing nectar bars on their plots to the benefit of populations of pollinating insects. An area that is of renewed interest as a public green space is the Cuckoo Pen, which lies adjacent to the St Helen's allotments and has been let as a small private nursery until summer 2021. This is an important space given its proximity to the Brook and the much loved green pedestrian route that runs along it to the river. The commercial arrangement came to an end, and the Parish Council is now working with others in the community to develop a plan to bring the space into community use; proposals include improvement of public access, planting of fruit trees, management of over-grown willows, conversion of a small area to create additional allotments, installation of natural seating and enhancement of existing timber structures to create a space for people to come together for community events.
40. There is scope to consider biodiversity enhancements on all of these areas, in a way that is compatible with both their primary use and our priority theme, Action for Butterflies and Bees. Progress has been made since 2018, creating a wildflower garden on a disused allotment at the entrance to Bertie West Field, and new hedging has been planted on the boundary of the field - this is dual purpose; over time, it will provide a shield for the site's residential neighbours, and it will also provide more foraging and nesting habitat for wildlife.

### **Gardens**

34. Domestic gardens play an important role in providing green space for people and wildlife. The total area of garden space in Benson has not been quantified, but Office for National Statistics analysis shows that England has over 450,000 ha of private garden, around 30% of built up areas. Benson aims to be a village that is permeable to wildlife, and with the right planting, gardens can play a significant role in supporting wildlife as well as providing pleasure for people.

### **Road Verges, Footpaths and Bridleways**

36. The road verges along the A4074 are substantial in width and are a local hotspot for butterflies. There are other road verges in the parish with similar characteristics that provide habitat for wildlife. Benson Nature Group has undertaken an assessment of valuable verges around the village. Particular highlights include the wide verge underneath the RAF Benson runway approach on the road to Ewelme which provides valuable tussocky grassland habitat; Braze Lane verges where the rare plant Knapweed Broomrape occurs; the verge at the top of Brook Street where Wild Clary has been recorded, and the verges adjacent to McDonalds by the Elm Brook roundabout where two species of Orchid have been recorded. For further information, see [www.bensonnaturegroup.com](http://www.bensonnaturegroup.com)

37. The role of road verges as a nature conservation asset holding a high diversity of plant species is recognised by Highways England nationally. Oxfordshire County Council has identified a series of Road Verge Nature Reserves across the county, one of which is located in Dorchester, a short distance north of Benson parish. There may be scope for targeted management to build on the existing value of these areas, particularly where they are substantial in size.
38. The OCC Rights of Way Improvement Plan recognises the scope for footpaths etc to act as corridors for wildlife. Our Neighbourhood Plan policies require footpaths to be designed so that they perform as corridors for wildlife as well as people.

### **Hedges and Trees**

39. Our existing hedges, trees and scrub margins currently provide good habitat for wildlife. The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study and South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment both note the scope for improvements in the hedge structure in the landscape. Our Neighbourhood Plan sets policies such that hedges and trees are maintained along with suitable margins adjacent to ensure their wildlife interest is sustained. We have included locally relevant planting guidelines in our Neighbourhood Plan Design Statement, which should be followed by developers planting new or replacement hedges. Benson Nature Group has established a project working within the village and beyond with local landowners to assess the quality of our hedges, identify opportunities for enhancement and lead volunteer effort to support that.

### **On proposed development sites**

40. Part of the site known as Ben 7 (north of the public footpath crossing the field and the area adjacent to the A4074) is of particular value for countryside species of butterflies. Any proposals brought forward for development in this area (which is not currently located in this plan) must be accompanied by adequate high quality habitat creation as compensation for any losses.
41. Roman snails, a protected species occur on the edge of the site known as Ben 4. Mitigation has been constructed by the developers at the site to safeguard the population.

### **Wider Parish Assets and Beyond**

42. Woodland and Chalk Grassland - The south eastern part of the parish, which runs up onto the Chilterns scarp, has some areas of woodland and a number of former landfill sites (in Oxfordshire County Council ownership) that have been restored as chalk grassland, a habitat type identified by government as a priority for conservation action. We aim to build a better understanding of enhancement opportunities in the wider parish. The woods are likely to be important for bats given the connection with larger expanses of woodland beyond the parish.
43. Agricultural land - Agricultural land in the area is put to a range of uses, with cereal growing dominating; a number of landowners have land under agri-environment scheme agreements through which hedgerows and wildflower margins have been created, benefitting pollinators and other farm wildlife. Following EU Exit, the government is introducing an array of new environmental land management schemes to

replace subsidy schemes. The new schemes based around the principle of 'public payments for public goods' will incentivise farmers to manage their land in ways that provide greater environmental benefits, so the agricultural landscape in the parish may become more enriched ecologically over the coming decades.

44. The fields around Benson are particularly known for populations of farmland birds with yellowhammer, corn bunting and skylark. The area of former set aside in the field to the east of Braze Lane and on the runway approach is species-rich with records of plants such as grass vetchling, pyramid orchid, lady's bedstraw, and of butterflies.

END

## Part II - Local Green Space Designation Statement - assessment against NPPF criteria

### Benson Local Green Space Designation - Assessment against NPPF criteria

NPPF Criterion  Site	Reasonably close proximity to the community	Demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife	Where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.	Community survey reactive usage % (number of responses) 551 responses <i>[Where blank not included survey]</i>
<b>Sunnyside</b>	This multi-functional amenity grassed area lies within the built area of Benson village close to the current northern perimeter. It was created in 1946.	Recreational value - currently the only publicly accessible playing/sports field in Benson and the venue for many outdoor community activities. The site is also the location for the Parish Hall, the main indoor community venue in the village. A newly refurbished playground has been added in response to community demand.	Limited defined boundary constrained by existing housing. Size = 2.2 ha	70% (359)
<b>Aldridge Triangle</b>	Roadside triangle of meadow, opposite Sunnyside (see above) and within built area.	Designated as a Diamond Jubilee Meadow under a Deed of Dedication by Fields in Trust. Managed for nature conservation interest as a meadow by Benson Nature Group.	Limited boundary - bound on all 3 sides by roads. Size = 0.19 ha	
<b>Green Close play area</b>	This children's play area lies within the built area of Benson village, close to the eastern perimeter.	Recreational value for children living on eastern edge of settlement. Investment underway in update of equipment by Parish Council.	Small area with limited defined boundary. Size = 0.17 ha	26% (109)
<b>Bertie West's Field</b>	Land-locked green space within the built area of Benson village (in the Littleworth Road conservation area). Pedestrian access only.	Covenanted in a will in 1980 to be held in trust for the benefit of the children of the village. Recreational value, with particularly strong usage by the Benson Scouts, whose hut is adjacent, for outdoor activities. The space has been enhanced through the installation of a ramp to increase access for all and enable access to maintain open plays space for children, and a new hedge has been planted,	Locally important, defined boundary. Size = 0.17 ha	18% (71)





Benson Local Green Space Designation - Assessment against NPPF criteria-1

<b>St Helen's Avenue Play area</b>	This children's play area lies within the built area of Benson on the western edge and adjacent to an allotment area.	Recreational value. Some scope for enhancement of equipment to increase variety of play opportunities.	limited defined boundary, Size = 0.57 ha	42% (186)
<b>Allotments - Mill Lane and St Helens Ave/Cuckoo Pen.</b>	Two areas on either side of St Helen's Avenue, one within the built area of Benson, and the second close by, adjacent to road and Benson Brook	Allotments of value for food production, recreation and creating pockets of space and tranquility within the village. Parish Council allotment usage data indicates high level of uptake. A small area previously managed as a nursery under a lease is returning to PC management, with a vision for community convening space and further allotments.	Bounded by either built development or the A4074. Mill Lane Allotments Size = 0.57 ha; St Helen's Ave/Cuckoo Pen Allotments Size = 1.86 ha. Total is 2.43 ha.	26% (105)
<b>Land surrounding Benson Brook adjacent to Cuckoo Pen Nursery including path under A4074</b>	Benson Brook forms the spine of the village, with development historically spread along the length of the watercourse. The proposed section for designation lies on the western fringe of the village in one of the main areas of open green space.	Chalk stream of high nature conservation value (a globally scarce habitat type) and of significant cultural value and aesthetic appeal. The permissive path (Parish Council controlled) adjacent provides safe pedestrian access beneath the busy A road to Millbrook Mead, the village's nature reserve and the Thames Path National Trail.	Approx 150m section (Total length is 2.4 miles) of the Brook flowing through one of the village's main open/green space assets.	77% (381) - applies to whole brook, which flows through the v
<b>Millbrook Mead (the marsh and meadow by A4074)</b>	Lies between the built areas of Benson village and the settlement of Preston Crowmarsh	Meadow managed by Benson Nature Group, providing significant local nature conservation interest and a community environmental education asset. Natural beauty.	Local in character, and limited defined boundary Size = 0.36 ha	60% (272)
<b>Rivermead</b>	Adjacent to River Thames and A4074 road on edge of Benson village.	Small area of river-side amenity grassland of recreational value. This provides parish council-owned river frontage for the village's use and contains bench seating and a paddling pool for children.	Limited defined boundary. Size = 0.25 ha	76% (374)

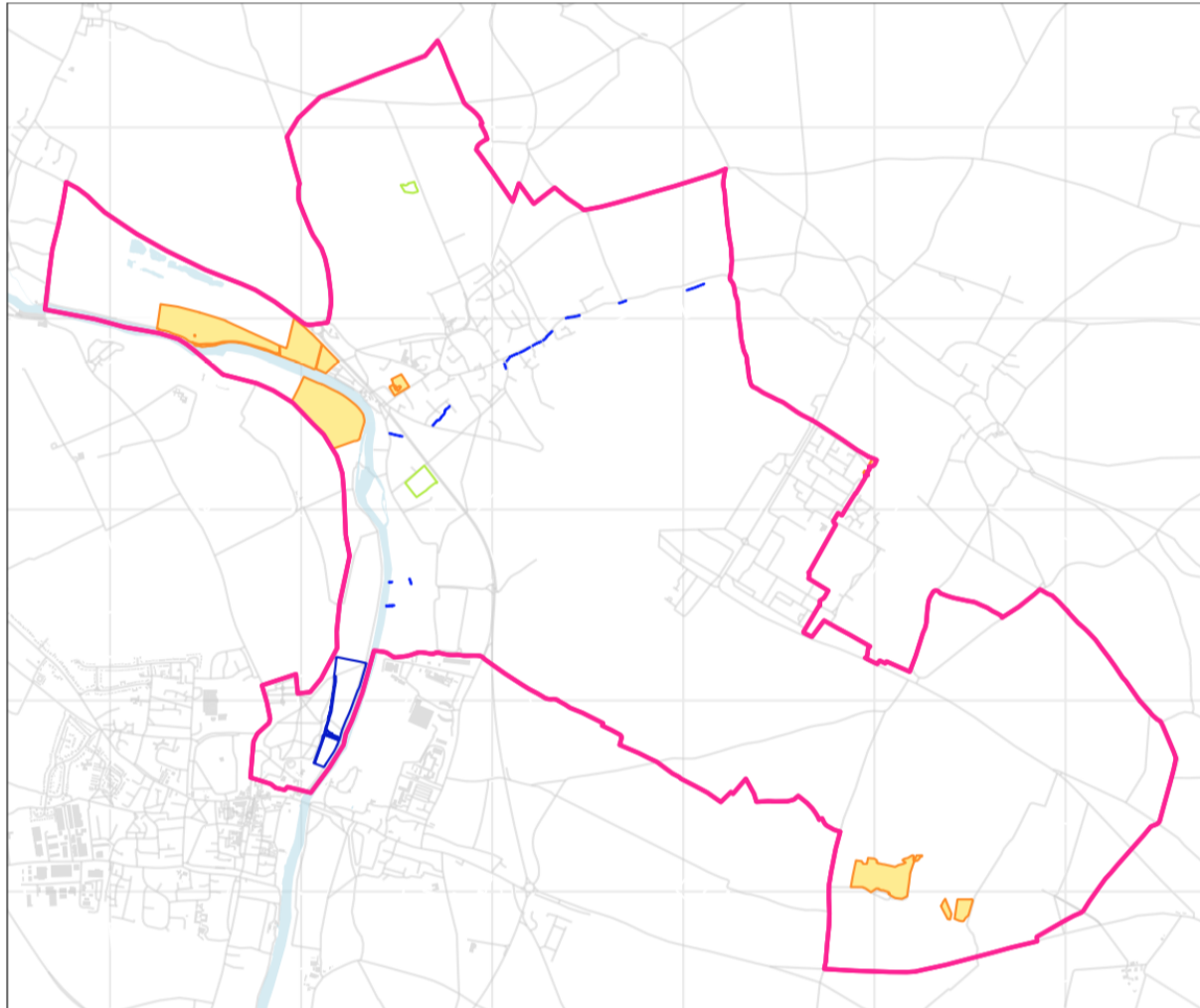
Benson Local Green Space Designation - Assessment against NPPF criteria-2

<p><b>Riverside Meadows</b></p>	<p>A pair of meadows on the banks of the River Thames to the north of Benson marina - a popular footpath to the river traverses one of the meadows.</p>	<p>The meadows are an important remnant of Benson's landscape and cultural heritage, recalling its position as a historic riverside village. The Landscape Character Assessments in Appendix E expand further on this dimension. The fields are special for wildlife, providing habitat for a wide variety of breeding birds - Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Reed Bunting - plus visiting Cetti's Warbler, Snipe and Water Rail. These include red list and priority species (for whom conservation action is a priority). Professional surveys in Spring /summer 2022 confirmed the areas importance for these species.</p> <p>The meadows have been identified by TVERC as possible priority habitat - floodplain grazing - as identified in the NERC Act 2006.</p> <p>Crossed by a public right of way, the meadows provide an opportunity for the community to engage with wildlife, seen as an important enabler in the 25 Year Env Plan. The meadows are the last remaining flood meadows in Benson that are publicly accessible. The meadows lie adjacent to the Thames Path National Trail. Note, it is not proposed that LGS designation change the amount or means of public access through the site.</p> <p>They connect physically to meadows that stretch upstream towards Shillingford, with the complex an important stepping stone linking the <a href="#">Thames Clifton to Shillingford CTA</a> to the <a href="#">Thames Wallingford to Goring CTA</a>. Riverside meadows have been identified as an important habitat in Oxfordshire's Nature Recovery Network, a key policy initiative set out in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan/. Habitats like this are likely to be critical to the achievement of the government's ambition to halt the declines in species abundance by 2030, legislated for as a legally binding target in the Environment Act 2021.</p> <p>The draft Nature Recovery Network map for Oxfordshire has been adopted by the Oxfordshire Environment Board, with this area marked as a recovery zone. <a href="https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/biodiversity/draft-map-of-oxfordshires-nature-recovery-network/">https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/biodiversity/draft-map-of-oxfordshires-nature-recovery-network/</a> Thus it may be an important Benson-level contribution feeding into the government's national targets.</p> <p>The natural capital value of the fields also includes their role in providing flood attenuation locally, and as floodplain meadows, they also provide a carbon store.</p>	<p>Limited defined boundary. Size = 4.12 ha total, or 1 ha +3.1 ha.</p>	<p>Consul derway</p>
---------------------------------	---	---	---	--------------------------

**TVERCs Benson Map of Priority habitats (in the meaning of NERC Act 2006)**

# Benson

## Priority Habitat Map



- Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh
- Possible Priority Grassland Habitat
- Rivers
- Traditional Orchards

What approach would GOC take to restoration? Could a specialist