

Development proposals

T8 Proposals for development should be permitted only if they provide adequate access and mitigation of adverse transport impacts.

- 4.27 Traffic generated by development can place a strain on the surrounding transport networks in terms of safety, capacity and environmental considerations. The policy aims to minimise the transport impact of new development. Developers should have regard to all the policies of the development plan relevant to the development of their site. On transport matters they should in particular consider the design of their development so as to maximise the access potential by walking, cycling and by public transport and to reduce car dependency (policy T1). Travel plans will be required with development proposals in accordance with PPG13.
- 4.28 Development proposals will be expected to be compatible with the transport infrastructure and traffic management arrangements in the area, the aims of a wider area transport strategy and car parking requirements. Highway access and servicing arrangements must be adequate and not detrimental to the safety of other highway users. Developers will be expected to contribute to measures identified in Integrated Transport Strategies, other transport strategies relevant to the area, Local Plans or Local Development Frameworks as well as localised measures required as the result of the development. Contributions to a range of measures, including subsidy or pump-priming of transport services, may be considered to be necessary.
- 4.29 Where the development or the traffic generated would have an adverse effect on the environment, would adversely affect other travellers or have resource implications for the highway authority, the proposal should include measures sufficient to mitigate the adverse effects. Proposals that generate a significant number of trips by all modes of transport must be supported by a transport assessment.

5. Protecting and enhancing the environment

- 5.1 The protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment has always been a priority of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. The policies in this chapter continue to protect and enhance the county's environmental assets in both urban and rural areas, as well as setting out a framework for its effective management.

Landscape character

EN1 Local planning authorities will ensure that proposals for development contribute to the protection, maintenance and, where possible, enhancement of Oxfordshire's landscape character, and in particular the natural beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to reflect their national importance. Development will be permitted only if it does not unacceptably damage the local landscape.

- 5.2 Oxfordshire has an attractive and diverse landscape. Government policy in PPS7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) is to protect the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty and diversity of its landscape, heritage and wildlife, and that development plans should seek to protect, and where possible, enhance the character of the landscape.
- 5.3 In line with the character based approach to landscape protection, the County Council has undertaken work on the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS)¹⁷, which provides local planning authorities, developers and other organisations with greater understanding of Oxfordshire's landscape and biodiversity resource, from joint countryside character areas at national level, down to information on wildlife habitats and landscape character at a parish level. Landscape character assessments have also been carried out by the district councils in Oxfordshire and should be taken into account in preparing development plans and considering development proposals.
- 5.4 There are three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in Oxfordshire: the Cotswolds, the Chilterns, and the North Wessex Downs. The primary objective of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, which includes wildlife, archaeological and cultural heritage. In considering proposals for development, priority will be given to conserving and enhancing the beauty of the landscape within AONBs in accordance with PPG7.

¹⁷ This is a national pilot project sponsored by the County Council, English Nature, Countryside Agency and the Northmoor Trust. OWLS is a combined landscape character assessment and biodiversity appraisal of the county which provides strategic and detailed information to better enable the protection, management and expansion of Oxfordshire's landscape and biodiversity resource.

- 5.5 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act placed a statutory duty on local authorities to produce management plans for AONBs. Management plans have been produced for the Chilterns, Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs AONBs.



Biodiversity

EN2 The following sites of at least national importance will be protected from damaging development:

- Special Areas of Conservation;
- National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest; and
- sites which support specially protected species.

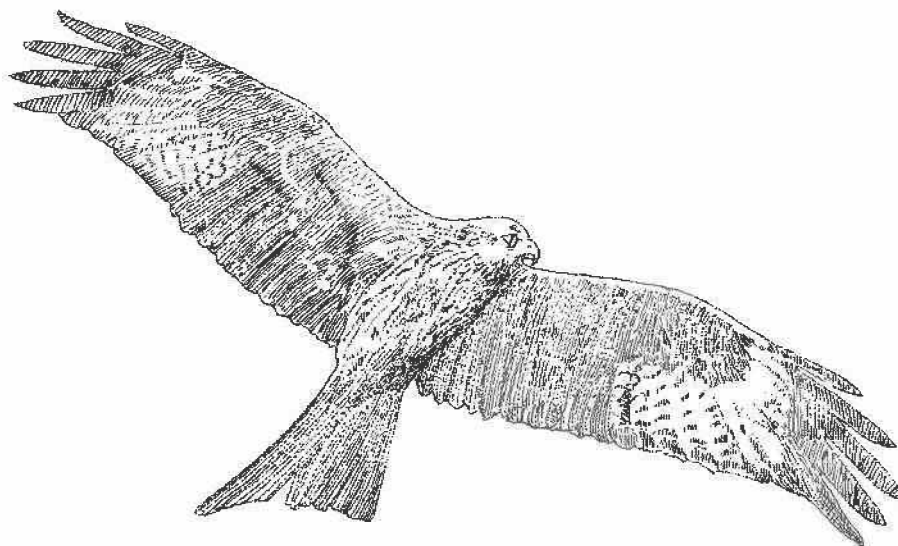
On other sites of acknowledged nature conservation importance development will be permitted only if there is an overriding need or if damage to the ecological interest can be prevented by the use of conditions or planning obligations.

In determining proposals for development local planning authorities will seek environmental measures and promote the use of conditions and management agreements to help protect, manage and expand the biodiversity resource of the county, in particular priority habitats and species.

5.6 The Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)¹⁸ was prepared in response to the 1992 Earth Summit, at which a convention on biological diversity was signed by the UK and 150 other countries. In 1994 the UK produced a report Biodiversity, The UK Action Plan¹⁹, which identified a range of priority habitats and species of international importance. The plan also recognised that "biodiversity is ultimately lost or conserved at the local level" and that local BAPs are an essential part of the process. Oxfordshire's BAP was published in 1998 and it was subsequently followed by a series of more detailed habitat action plans (HAPs) focussing on the protection, management and expansion of the local biodiversity resource. In particular it highlighted those priority habitats relevant to Oxfordshire which fall within the UK action plan. They include:

- woodland;
- neutral meadows and pastures;
- chalk and limestone grassland;
- heathland;
- wetlands.

5.7 At present, much of the biodiversity resource associated with these priority habitats is closely linked to designated sites such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)²⁰ and county wildlife sites. Appendix 3 shows the distribution of sites of different levels of designation across Oxfordshire. In addition some local authorities have also designated sites of local importance for nature conservation. Their combined total area represents a very small area of the county, probably less than 4%, and it is essential that the planning process includes policies which help to safeguard, maintain and expand this limited resource. The underlying principle should be that there is no further net loss of priority habitats or species within the county.



¹⁸ Action for Wildlife, Oxfordshire's Biodiversity Plan, Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum, July 1998.

¹⁹ Biodiversity, The UK Action Plan, DOE, HMSO 1994.

²⁰ SSSIs include nationally important geological sites as well as those which are valuable for their habitats or species. All SSSIs including those of geological importance, are protected by policy EN2.

- 5.8 Local authorities and land managers have a key role to play in relation to the implementation of Oxfordshire's BAP. Joint support of the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre will provide effective definition and monitoring of biodiversity, and through support for the county wildlife sites project, organisations like the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and landowners will be provided with expert guidance on the protection and appropriate management of key habitats. Planning authorities can also make significant contribution to the BAP process through the appropriate use of conditions and management agreements. The restoration and subsequent management of mineral workings can specifically strengthen the status of priority habitats such as heathland, calcareous grassland and wetlands such as reedbeds.

Agricultural land quality and soil

EN3 Development on the best and most versatile agricultural land shall have a regard to the quality and productiveness of such land alongside other sustainability considerations. Where significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable, areas of poorer quality land shall be used in preference to that of a higher quality, except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations. Where undeveloped agricultural land is to be developed, any adverse effects on the environment shall be minimised.

- 5.9 Regional Planning Guidance (RPG9) says that valuable characteristics of soil and land should be protected. Government policy in PPS7 is that the presence of best and most versatile agricultural land (defined by DEFRA as land within grades 1, 2 and 3a) should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations such as biodiversity, landscape character, amenity or heritage interest, access to jobs or services, and protection of natural resources. The decision as to whether best and most versatile land should be used for development rests with local planning authorities taking into account relevant factors.
- 5.10 Soil fulfils a wide range of interrelated functions. It is a growing medium for food and fuel crops and for providing animal pasture, a key factor in landscape and habitat diversity, and a source of geological and historical evidence. The Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has published a national strategy for moving towards more sustainable soil use and protection²¹.

²¹

In March 2001 the then Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions published for consultation the Draft Soil Strategy for England. DEFRA published the first Soil Action Plan for England: 2004-2006 in May 2004.

Historic and cultural heritage

EN4 The fabric and setting of listed buildings including Blenheim Palace and Park, a World Heritage Site, will be preserved and the character or appearance of conservation areas and their settings will be preserved or enhanced. Other elements of the historic environment, including historic parks and gardens, battlefields and historic landscapes will also be protected from harmful development.

- 5.11 Oxfordshire contains many buildings, areas, gardens and landscapes which are an irreplaceable part of the county's heritage which should be conserved. There are nearly 13,000 listed buildings and structures in Oxfordshire and over 220 conservation areas, and Blenheim Palace and Park is designated as a world heritage site. World heritage site status reflects the outstanding international importance of sites. Proposals for development that affect the world heritage site or its setting are not precluded but will be carefully scrutinised. The contribution that development might make to saving historic buildings and their grounds may exceptionally be an additional and significant factor in the consideration of proposals which would otherwise be unacceptable. Where demolition or alteration of listed buildings is to be permitted, local planning authorities should consider the need to ensure recording of features which would be affected or lost. There is not currently an historic landscape character assessment of the county. However, work has been carried out for the Cotswolds AONB, and assessments for the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs are underway in conjunction with the Conservation Board and Council of Partners.

EN5 The conservation of Oxford's architectural and historic heritage, including its green spaces and its landscape setting, will take priority in considering proposals for development in and around the city.

