

# 3 Local sites and priority habitats and species



Lowland meadow, Oxfordshire © Andy Fairbairn



Woodland, Oxfordshire  
© Nigel Phillips

## Protection through the planning system

The following biodiversity features do not receive legal protection, but are protected through the planning system:

- ▶ Local Wildlife Sites
- ▶ Ancient Woodland
- ▶ Priority Habitats
- ▶ Priority Species

Normally, development which would adversely affect these features is not acceptable. Only in special cases, where the importance of a development outweighs the impact on the feature, would an adverse affect be permitted. In such cases, planning conditions or obligations would be used to mitigate the impact.

Where a development has the potential to impact on a local site, or a priority habitat or species, a biodiversity survey and report will be required; in some circumstances an Environmental Impact Assessment may be needed.

The following pages give information on these features as they occur in Oxfordshire.

# 3a Local Sites

## Valuable sites for Oxfordshire's local wildlife

Local Sites are sites of substantive nature conservation value or geological interest. In Oxfordshire, Local Sites consist of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS, formerly known as County Wildlife Sites) and Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS). In Oxford City, Sites of Local Interest for Nature Conservation (SLINCs) and wildlife corridors also fall under this category. In total, there are 362 Local Wildlife Sites in the county, these are shown on **Map 3**.

All Local Sites which meet the necessary criteria are designated; this differs significantly from the process of identifying SSSIs, as the latter are a representative sample of sites. Thus, Local Sites can be equal in quality to SSSIs. Local Sites do not have statutory status, but do receive protection through the planning system (see right).

The identification of LWSs is an ongoing process including monitoring and review which is undertaken by the Local Sites Partnership (see below). Lists of LWSs by district are available in [Appendix II](#) on the Oxfordshire County Council website, but as the number of LWSs in any one district is always changing with new site selections and de-designations, TVERC should be contacted for the most up-to-date information.

Before formal selection, proposed Local Wildlife Sites are identified for survey; if a development is likely to affect a proposed Local Wildlife Site ecological surveys will be necessary. Ideally the site should be visited by the Wildlife Sites Survey Officer, and survey information presented to the Local Wildlife Sites Selection Panel before a planning application that is likely to affect a proposed Local Wildlife Site is considered. In any case, a biodiversity survey and report will be necessary to establish any likely impacts.

### Legislation

Local Sites are non-statutory sites: no additional legislation applies

### Planning policy

[Planning Policy Statement 9](#), para 9:

'Sites of regional and local biodiversity and geological interest, which include Regionally Important Geological Sites, Local Nature Reserves and Local Sites, have a fundamental role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets; contributing to the quality of life and the well-being of the community; and in supporting research and education.

Criteria-based policies should be established in local development documents against which proposals for any development on, or affecting, such sites will be judged. These policies should be distinguished from those applied to nationally important sites.'

[South East Plan \(NRM5\)](#):

'ensure that damage to county wildlife sites and locally important wildlife and geological sites is avoided.'

### Oxfordshire's Local Sites Partnership

Local Sites are selected at a county level and the process is overseen by a Local Sites Partnership. The Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project is jointly run by BBOWT and TVERC, with support from Oxfordshire's local authorities. Natural England and the Country Land and Business Association are also partners.

In addition to identifying Local Wildlife Sites, the Project also offers land management advice to the site owners.

The performance of local authorities for biodiversity is measured by assessing the number of Local Sites in positive conservation management; this is known as National Indicator 197 and it is reported on by Oxfordshire County Council.

Local Wildlife Site, Oxfordshire  
© BBOWT

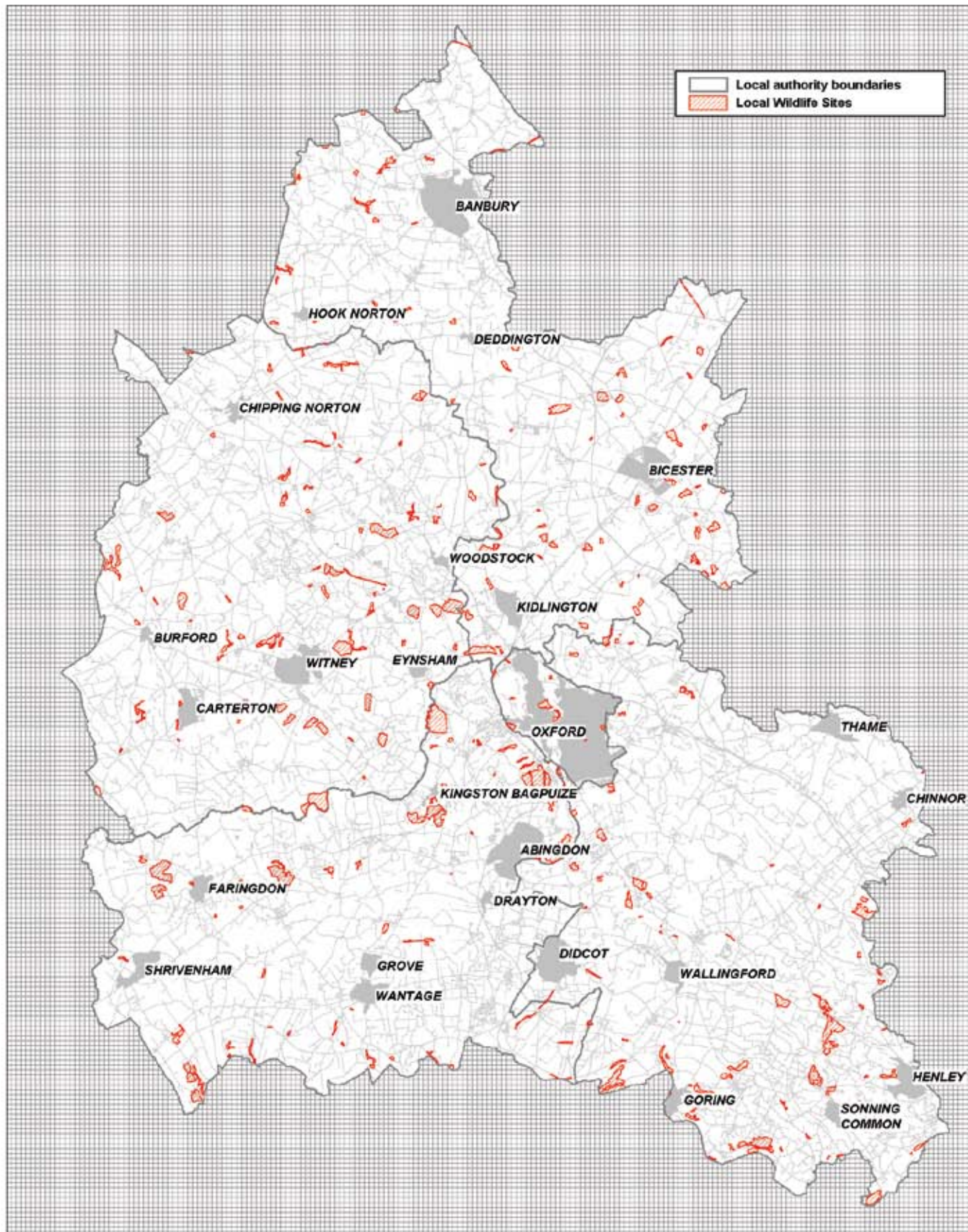


### Further information

- ▶ [Local Sites, Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management \(DEFRA\)](#)
- ▶ [NI 197 — Improved Biodiversity — proportion of Local Sites where active conservation management is being achieved](#)

### Key organisations

[Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust](#)  
Local authorities  
[Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre](#)



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# 3b Ancient Woodland

## Trees and woodlands

Ancient woods are those that are known to have had continuous tree cover since at least 1600 AD. They are found throughout Oxfordshire, although there are particular concentrations in the Chilterns in south Oxfordshire, Wychwood in west Oxfordshire and the edge of the Bernwood area in the east of Oxfordshire. Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory maps ancient woods over 2 ha in size. There are 7,059 ha of these woodlands mapped in Oxfordshire — these are identified on **Map 4**.

Ancient and veteran trees are old trees, they may be associated with woodlands, wood pasture and parkland, traditional orchard Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats or may stand alone, for example, old trees are often found on old parish boundaries. Ancient trees are often in the third and final stage of their life and are old relative to other trees of the same species. Veteran trees on the other hand are usually in the second or mature stage of their life and contain important wildlife features such as holes, deadwood and wounds.

Ancient woodlands, and ancient and veteran trees, are likely to have biodiversity interest, as well as cultural and historical significance. Ancient woodlands, and ancient and veteran trees, may be protected by tree preservation orders, but they are also protected by planning policy (see right).

When assessing the potential impact of a development on trees and woodlands, potential impacts on tree roots, as well as the above ground features, must be taken into account as issues such as compaction or alterations to drainage could have significant impacts on trees.



Beech woodland at Warburg Nature Reserve, Oxfordshire © Nigel Phillips

## Legislation

[Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#): Tree Preservation Orders

## Planning policy

[Planning Policy Statement 9](#), para 10:

'Ancient woodland is a valuable biodiversity resource both for its diversity of species and for its longevity as woodland. Once lost it cannot be recreated. Local planning authorities should identify any areas of ancient woodland in their areas that do not have statutory protection (e.g. as a SSSI). They should not grant planning permission for any development that would result in its loss or deterioration unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location outweigh the loss of the woodland habitat. Aged or 'veteran' trees found outside ancient woodland are also particularly valuable for biodiversity and their loss should be avoided. Planning authorities should encourage the conservation of such trees as part of development proposals.'

[South East Plan \(NRM7\)](#):

'In the development and implementation of local development documents and other strategies, local authorities and other bodies will support the implementation of the Regional Forestry and Woodland Framework, ensuring the value and character of the region's woodland are protected and enhanced.'

## Biodiversity of ancient woodlands and veteran trees

Ancient woodlands are likely to have greater biodiversity interest than more recently planted woodlands; some ancient woodlands will also be Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats. Many woodland plants with limited dispersal abilities are associated with ancient woodlands — some of these are used to help identify the presence of an ancient woodland and are known as ancient woodland indicators. In addition to ground flora interest, ancient woodlands are likely to support protected species, such as bats and dormice, as well as woodland birds and butterflies.

It has been estimated that Britain supports 80% of Europe's veteran trees, veteran trees are particularly important for the invertebrate communities they support, as well as providing good roosting habitat for bats and nesting sites for birds. Old trees are also likely to support a rich variety of lichens and mosses.

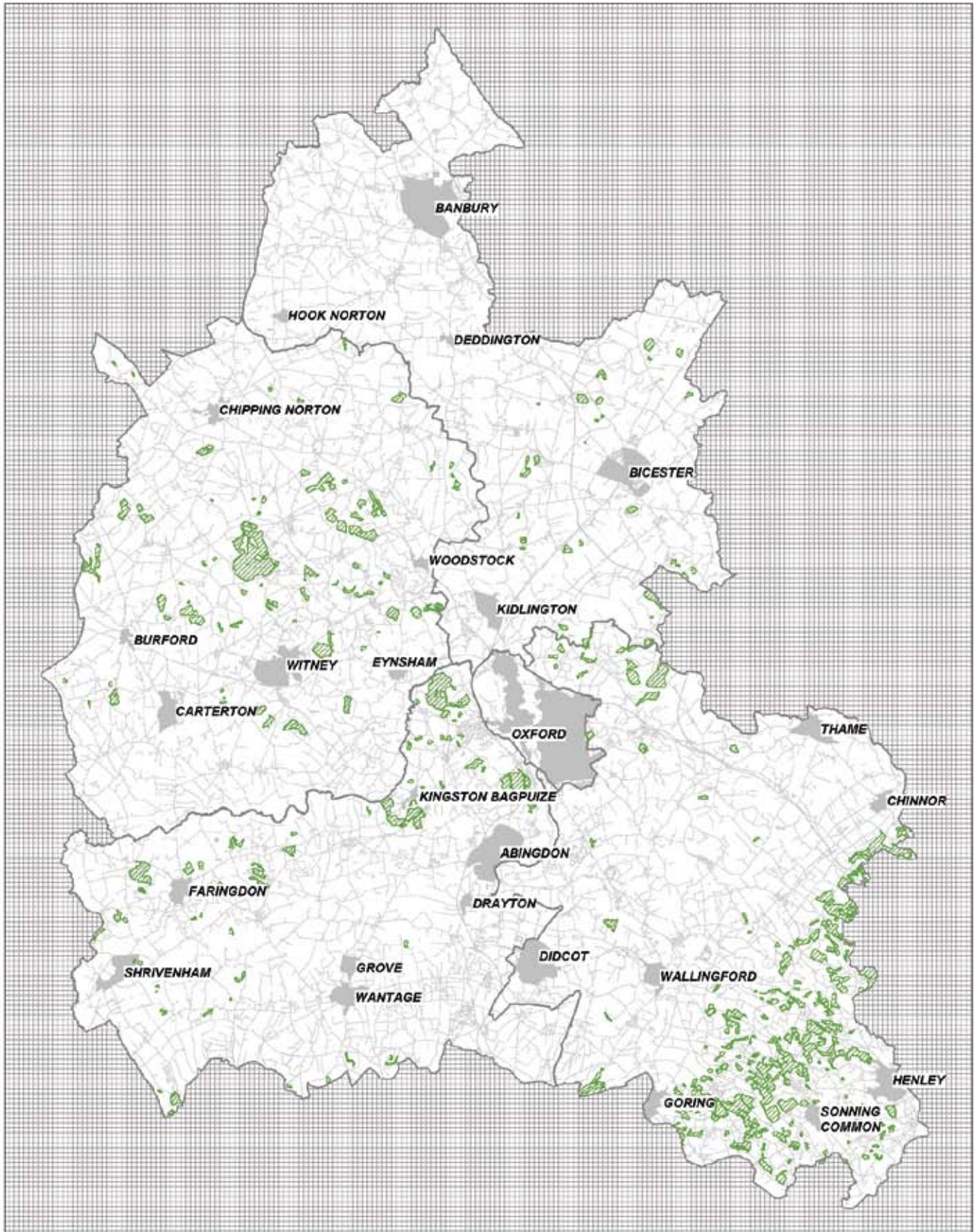
## Further information

► [Natural England Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland](#)

## Key organisations

[Chilterns Woodland Project](#)  
[Local authorities](#)  
[Natural England](#)  
[Oxfordshire Woodland Project](#)  
[Woodland Trust](#)  
[Wychwood Project](#)

Ancient Woodland in Oxfordshire



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# 3c Priority Habitats

## Habitats of principle importance

The [UK Biodiversity Action Plan \(UK BAP\)](#) describes the UK's biological resources and sets out a plan for their protection. This is the UK's response to the Convention of Biological Diversity to which the UK signed up in 1992, committing to halt the decline of biodiversity by 2010.

A local BAP has also been produced for Oxfordshire, identifying priorities at a county level, and some districts, such as Cherwell, have identified district priorities in their own BAP.

The distribution of known UK BAP priority habitats in Oxfordshire is identified on **Map 5**. These habitats do not receive statutory protection, but are protected by planning policy (see right). They will be found both within and outside designated sites, and may occur in areas outside of those identified on Map 5. BAP habitats correspond to those identified under Section 41 of the NERC Act as habitats of principle importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England and are, therefore, protected by planning policy (see below).

### UK BAP Habitats in Oxfordshire

#### Grasslands

- ▶ **Lowland Meadow:** a key habitat, important for flowers, invertebrates and ground-nesting birds. Sensitive to changes in hydrology, nutrients and management.
- ▶ **Lowland Calcareous Grassland:** a key habitat, associated with areas of chalk and limestone geology such as in the Chilterns and Cotswolds. Flower-rich, important for invertebrates (particularly butterflies). Sensitive to nutrient changes.
- ▶ **Lowland Dry Acid Grassland:** associated with sandy soils like those on the Mid-vale Ridge. Important for rare plants and invertebrates. Sensitive to nutrient changes.

#### Woodlands

- ▶ **Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland:** important for veteran trees, invertebrates and bats. Found mainly on old estates.
- ▶ **Lowland Beech and Yew Woodland:** a key habitat, mainly in the Chilterns.
- ▶ **Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland:** can have rich ground flora. Also important for bats, woodland birds and butterflies, occasionally support dormice.
- ▶ **Wet Woodland:** restricted distribution, likely to be adjacent to waterbodies or part of a mosaic of wetland habitats. May support otter or rare invertebrates.
- ▶ **Traditional Orchards:** restricted distribution, dependent on traditional management methods. Important for bats, invertebrates, mosses, lichens.

#### Wetlands

- ▶ **Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh:** a key habitat associated with river floodplains. Sometimes flower-rich, important for wading birds. Particularly sensitive to changes in hydrology and nutrients.
- ▶ **Fens:** a key habitat, particularly in the Cothill area. Important for rare invertebrates and plants, water vole and otter. Sensitive to changes in hydrology and nutrients.
- ▶ **Eutrophic Standing Waters:** likely to be found in old gravel pits and reservoirs, often important for waterbirds.
- ▶ **Ponds:** may be rich in plants and invertebrates. Likely to be breeding sites for amphibians. Sensitive to changes in hydrology and nutrient status.
- ▶ **Reedbeds:** restricted distribution. Important for birds, may support water voles or rare plants. Sensitive to changes in hydrology.
- ▶ **Rivers:** provide important wildlife corridors. Likely to support water vole, otter, and a variety of invertebrates. Chalk streams in Chilterns are a local specialty.

#### Other

- ▶ **Hedgerows:** an important linking habitat used by foraging birds and bats, dormice and a range of invertebrates. (Subject to the Hedgerow Regulations 1997).
- ▶ **Open mosaic habitats:** on previously developed land; examples include former quarries and ash lagoons — important for birds, invertebrates and specialist plants.
- ▶ **Arable Field Margins:** strips around field edges managed to provide benefits for wildlife — can provide important food sources for birds and invertebrates.
- ▶ **Lowland Heathland:** of restricted distribution, important for reptiles and invertebrates.

### Legislation

[Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#), Section 41 lists habitats of principle importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (this replaces the list under Section 74 of the CRoW Act 2000)

### Planning policy

[Planning Policy Statement 9](#), para 10:

'Through policies in plans, local authorities should also conserve other important natural habitat types that have been identified in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Section 74 list, as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England and identify opportunities to enhance and add to them.'

### South East Plan:

'Biodiversity protection and enhancement in the region will be achieved by: conserving and enhancing the diversity and distribution of habitats and species, as designated sites only represent the best examples of their kind'

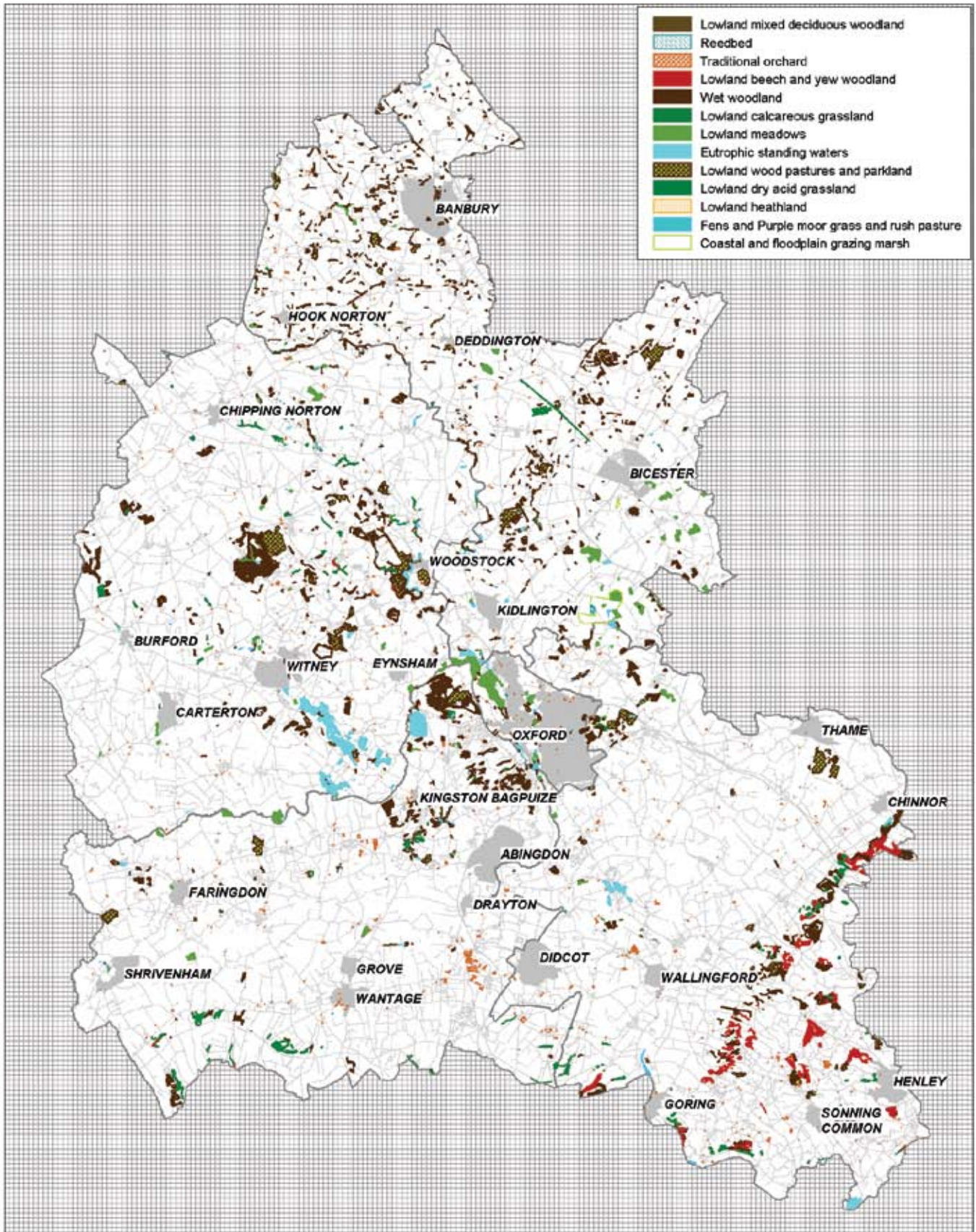
### Further information

- ▶ [Ponds — A Priority Habitat: best practice guidance for development control planning officers \(Pond Conservation\)](#)
- ▶ [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)

### Key organisations

[Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum](#)

UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats in Oxfordshire



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# 3d Priority Species

## Species of principle importance

In addition to listing priority habitats (see Section 3c) the [UK BAP](#) also identifies species of priority for conservation in the UK. There are 1,149 BAP species; locations where BAP species have been recorded in Oxfordshire are identified on **Map 6**. BAP species are likely to be found both within and outside of designated sites, many BAP species will be associated with BAP habitats, but not exclusively so.

BAP species include rare and declining species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, plants, mosses, lichens and liverworts.

Inclusion on the list of BAP species does not imply legal protection although some BAP species are also protected under law (see Section 2b). The BAP species list has informed the identification, under Section 41 of the NERC Act, of species of principle importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, which are protected by planning policy (see right).

### BAP Species in Oxfordshire

A full list of BAP species occurring in Oxfordshire can be found in [Appendix II](#) online; examples of BAP species that could be protected or enhanced through the planning system in Oxfordshire include:

► **Brown hairstreak butterfly:** a small species, not easily seen as it spends much of its time in the tree canopy, or hidden in hedgerows. This species is rare in the UK; its distribution is restricted to localities in southern Britain and mid-west Ireland. The brown hairstreak has undergone severe declines due to hedgerow removal and annual flailing, which removes their eggs.

An area in the north-east of Oxfordshire and over the border into Buckinghamshire is a hotspot for this species, which lays its eggs in the blackthorn hedges found here. Planning applications should avoid the removal or fragmentation of hedgerows where brown hairstreak occur, and existing and new hedgerows should be incorporated into the design of developments and managed to maintain and enhance brown hairstreak populations.

► **Farmland birds,** including skylark, linnet, yellowhammer, reed-bunting, curlew, tree sparrow, grey partridge, bullfinch, starling, song thrush and turtle dove, have shown dramatic declines within the last 30 years. All individual birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, however, opportunities should be taken to maintain and enhance the populations of these farmland birds wherever possible.

Development could impact on these species by direct loss of habitat, but also through increased recreational disturbance, especially associated with residential developments. Ground-nesting birds, such as skylark, can be protected by restricting access to areas they use during the breeding season. Species such as tree sparrow can benefit from the provision of suitable nest sites.

Wet grasslands along river valleys such as the Cherwell, Windrush and Ray provide important remnant habitat for curlew and other wetland birds such as snipe, lapwing and redshank. Development should avoid habitat fragmentation and impacts on the hydrology of these areas. Opportunities should be taken to improve and extend suitable habitat; this may be combined with areas needed to provide flood protection.



Yellowhammer © Sherie New/  
seeing.org.uk

## Legislation

[Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Section 41](#) lists species of principle importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (this replaces the list under Section 74 of the CRoW Act 2000)

## Planning policy

[Planning Policy Statement 9](#), para 16:

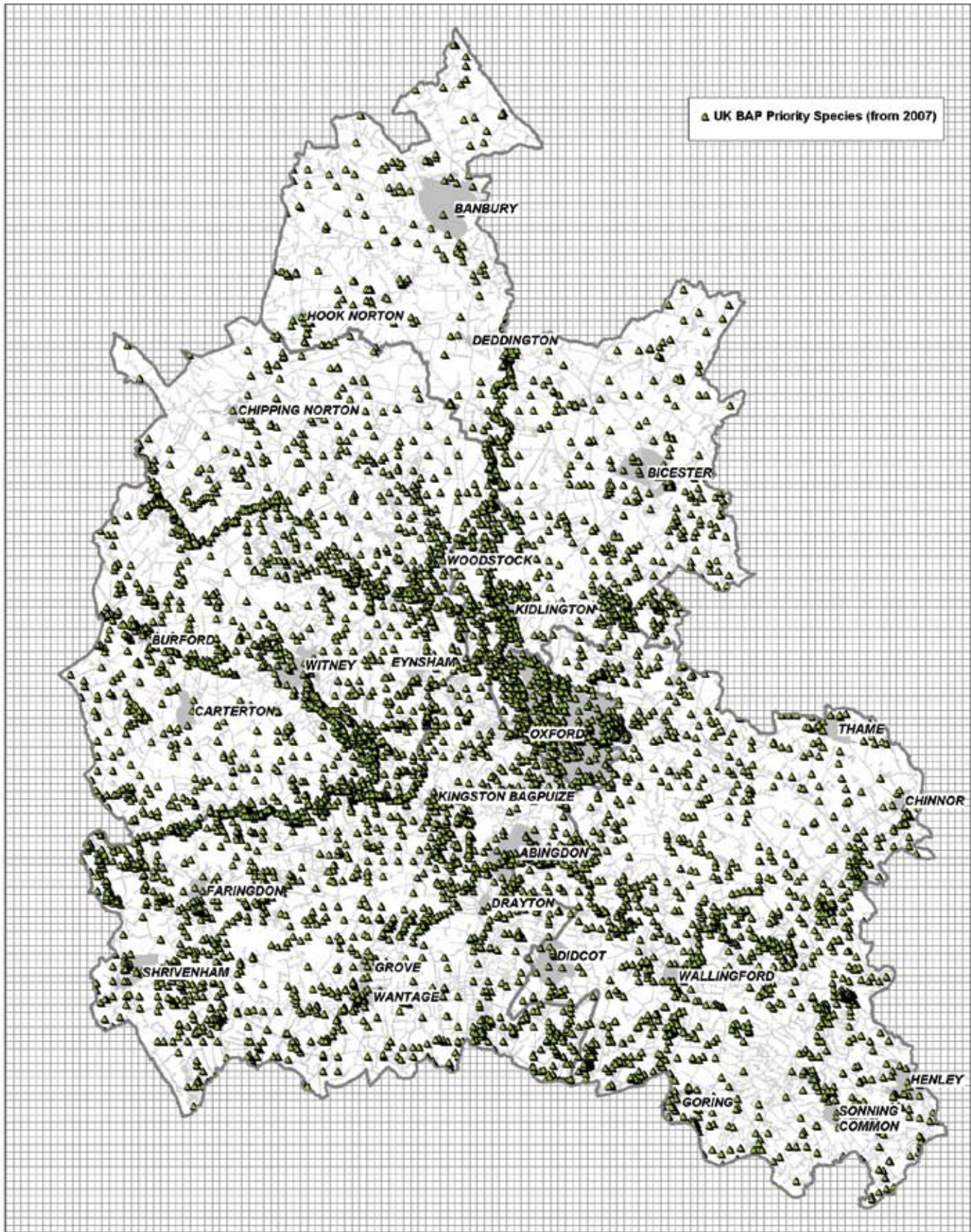
‘Other species have been identified as requiring conservation action as species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. Local authorities should take measures to protect the habitats of these species from further decline through policies in local development documents. Planning authorities should ensure that these species are protected from the adverse effects of development, where appropriate, by using planning conditions or obligations. Planning authorities should refuse permission where harm to the species or their habitats would result unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh that harm.’

## Key organisations

[Amphibian and Reptile Group](#)  
[Ashmolean Natural History Society](#)  
[Rare Plants Group](#)  
[Bat Conservation Trust](#)  
[Butterfly Conservation](#)  
[Chilterns Conservation Board](#)  
[Cotswolds Conservation Board](#)  
[Environment Agency](#)  
Local authorities  
[Mammal Society](#)  
[North Wessex Downs AONB](#)  
[Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum](#)  
[Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#)  
[Water Vole Recovery Project, c/o BBOWT](#)



UK BAP Priority Species in Oxfordshire



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# 3e Other areas of importance to biodiversity

There are a number of areas and sites of importance to biodiversity within the county which are identified in addition to (and via other mechanisms to) the biodiversity planning policy and legislation covered by this document. These include nature reserves and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## Nature Reserves

The term 'nature reserve' is used to describe a range of different types of site important for wildlife and people. Some of these nature reserves have a statutory designation in their own right; in other cases, the term 'nature reserve' does not in itself imply any special protection. However, most of these sites will receive another form of designation (SAC, SSSI, LWS) and most, if not all, support protected species or priority habitats or species. See **Map 7** for the range of nature reserves found in Oxfordshire.

**National Nature Reserves (NNRs)** protect sensitive biodiversity or geological features, provide sites for ecological research and offer opportunities for people to experience the natural environment. NNRs are a statutory designation made by Natural England. Oxfordshire has four NNRs:

- ▶ [Aston Rowant](#) is also a SAC and SSSI and is owned and managed by Natural England
- ▶ [Chimney Meadows](#) is also a SSSI and is owned by Natural England and managed by BBOWT
- ▶ [Cothill Fen](#) is also a SAC and SSSI, it is owned by Natural England and managed by the National Trust and BBOWT
- ▶ [Wychwood](#) is also a SSSI and is in private ownership

**Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)** are important for people and wildlife; they have features of local biodiversity or geological interest and offer opportunities for learning. LNRs are a statutory designation made by local authorities. There are 11 LNRs in Oxfordshire.

**Road Verge Nature Reserves** have been identified by Oxfordshire County Council; there are 28 across the county which are species-rich and characteristic of the area.

**Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) Nature Reserves:** BBOWT manages 31 nature reserves within Oxfordshire to protect important biodiversity, and to provide opportunities for people to enjoy local wildlife. Many BBOWT nature reserves have SAC, SSSI or LWS status.

**Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Otmoor:** The RSPB owns and manages this nature reserve in the east of Oxfordshire.

**Northmoor Trust Reserves:** The Northmoor Trust owns and manages Little Wittenham Clumps which includes a SAC and SSSI. They also manage Mowbray Fields (a Local Nature Reserve), Thrupp Lake and Clifton Hampden Meadow.

**Banbury Ornithological Society (BOS) Reserves:** BOS owns or leases five nature reserves in the north of the county; many of these have LWS status.

**Woodland Trust Woods:** There are 20 woods owned and managed by the Woodland Trust in Oxfordshire, some have SSSI or LWS status, and most are ancient woodland.

## Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

AONBs are landscapes designated for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty (including conservation of flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features) of an area. There are three AONBs which fall partly within Oxfordshire: the [Chilterns](#), the [Cotswolds](#) and the [North Wessex Downs](#).

AONBs support a large number of designated nature conservation sites and priority habitats. A significant proportion of Oxfordshire's Conservation Target Areas are within AONBs, as are many of the most biodiverse landscape areas (see Sections 4a and 4b).

All three AONBs have AONB Management Plans which are statutory plans and include reference to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity as a component of natural beauty. The Chilterns and Cotswolds AONB management plans have been endorsed by Oxfordshire County Council as supplementary guidance for planning purposes. The management plan for the North Wessex Downs AONB has been adopted by all constituent authorities.

### Legislation

National Nature Reserves are designated under the [Wildlife and Countryside Act \(Section 35\)](#) and the [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#)

Local Nature Reserves are designated under the [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#)

### Planning policy

Policies described in Sections 2 and 3 should be applied according to the wildlife interest and any statutory designation that applies to the nature reserve, and biodiversity enhancements should be sought in line with PPS9 and the South East Plan, as described in Section 4.

### Further information

- ▶ [Chilterns AONB Management Plan](#)
- ▶ [Cotswolds AONB Management Plan](#)
- ▶ [Cotswolds Conservation Board Position Statement on Biodiversity and Planning in the Cotswolds AONB](#)
- ▶ [North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan](#)

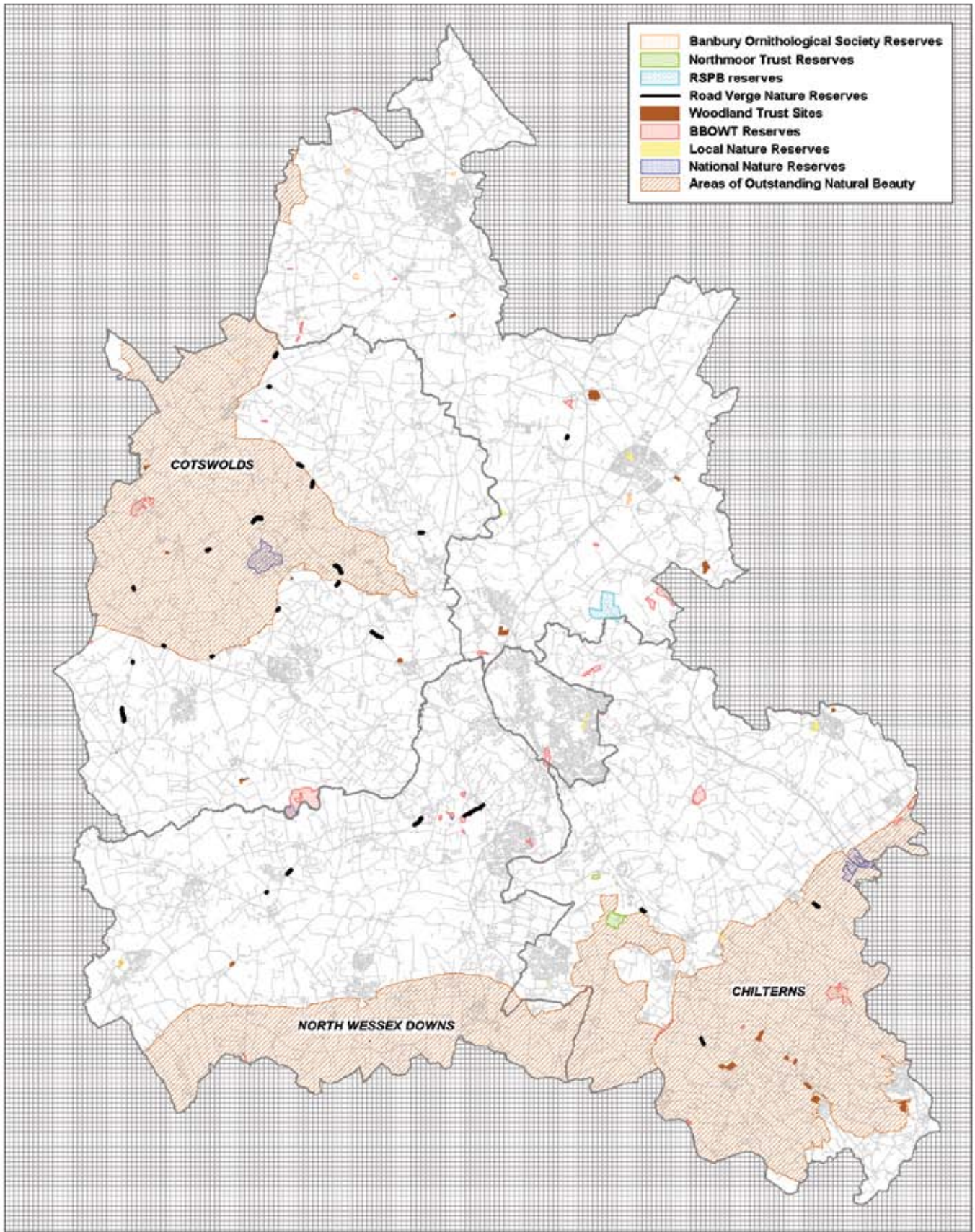
### Legislation

AONBs are designated under the [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000](#) and the [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#)

### Planning policy

Policies described in Sections 2 and 3 should be applied according to the wildlife interest and any statutory designation that applies to land within an AONB, and biodiversity enhancements should be sought in line with PPS9 and the South East Plan, as described in Section 4.

Oxfordshire Nature Reserves and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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