Biodiversity and the Natural Environment
http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/natural-environment

Oxfordshire County Council's role:
Your district council is the first point of contact. This is important because Neighbourhood Development Plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the relevant district's Local Plan.

However, the ecology planning team provide specialist advice to the county council on minerals and waste planning and help coordinate county work on biodiversity. In addition we contribute to the delivery of the aims of Oxfordshire's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) via two hosted projects (the Wychwood Project and Lower Windrush Valley Project). Information is provided by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC), which is also hosted in the team.

How does this role relate to Neighbourhood Development Plans?

Neighbourhood Development Plans are likely to contain a vision for your area as well as specific planning policies. All plans can affect biodiversity and it is important to consider biodiversity when drawing up your plan:

- Neighbourhood Plans provide an opportunity to enhance wildlife and greenspaces within your neighbourhood.
- Some areas and species are protected by law (see the list linked below). Vital development for your community could be held up or even stopped if biodiversity is not fully considered at an early stage of your plan.
- Your Neighbourhood Development Plan will need to comply with policies set out in your District's Local Plan, which include biodiversity.
- Public authorities, including Parish Councils, have a legal duty to 'have regard' for biodiversity under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006.

You will also need to examine other environmental considerations such as your local landscape, built heritage, archaeology and public access to the countryside and greenspaces.

Your plans should take biodiversity into account by:

- Containing policies that protect important wildlife habitats and species, and enhance the biodiversity in your local area.
- Bringing local people together to discuss what is important – consider helping to start or support community projects and activities.
- Presenting a positive vision for the wildlife in your neighbourhood.

The five steps below can help you to get started. At each stage, try and add local knowledge where possible to ensure your Neighbourhood Development Plan preserves and enhances the biodiversity local to your area:

- **Find out what biodiversity is on your doorstep.** Your local authority may

be able to provide this information. The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC, see contact details below) provides mapping services for a small fee. Some basic information is available in the public domain, such as the Community & Parish Guide to Biodiversity, linked below.

- **Protect designated sites and protected species from new development**. Some species of animals and plants are protected by international and national legislation due to their significance or vulnerability. Harming or disturbing protected species is a criminal offence, so they are also important to consider when allocating sites for development. Sources including the Biodiversity and Planning Guide, the list of protected species and protected species records from TVERC (all linked below) can help you discover if there are designated sites or are records of protected species within your neighbourhood area. If there aren't any protected species recorded, it does not mean that there aren't any within your plan area –they may just never have been recorded there.
- **Protect wildlife already present on sites chosen for development.** The absence of designated sites or protected species records doesn't mean that a potential development area is not sensitive for biodiversity – you'll still need to do further work if allocating sites. As soon as you start thinking about potential development sites to allocate you should arrange for a basic ecological assessment to be undertaken. Find a qualified ecologist to carry out the assessment – you can get quotes from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre and from specialist private consultants (you can access a list here: http://www.cieem.net/members-directory). You should collect this information for all sites to be considered, before making the decision of which to allocate. You need to show that you have weighed up the impact on biodiversity in your choice of sites. This applies to all developments - allocations for housing, commercial, industry, or any other use.
- **Improve habitats for wildlife on development sites.** There are many types of wildlife habitats that can be created or retained on development sites; even small scale development can create habitats. Think about creating policies that require developments to include features such as bird and bat boxes, native local plants in landscaping schemes, green roofs or new habitats such as woodlands, ponds, wildflower meadows or other wildlife habitats.

- **Enhance opportunities for wildlife in your neighbourhood.** A Neighbourhood Development Plan is a great opportunity to enhance biodiversity in your local area, by improving the management of local spaces, creating new habitats or helping people gain better access to wildlife. Your plan should also look at how to link wildlife sites, habitats and areas of greenspace together. Wildlife corridors are areas of habitat that connect wildlife populations, so that animals can move between them. Corridors can include: hedgerows, areas of scrub, drainage ditches or swales, wildflower margins along public rights of way and areas of grass which are not heavily mown. Put specific policies in your plan so developers have to take them into account.

Biodiversity services and resources:

- Biodiversity and Planning Guide: http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/planning-and-biodiversity
- Oxfordshire's Biodiversity Action Plan: https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/oxfordshires-biodiversity-action-plan
- Guide to improving countryside access: Oxfordshire Parish Guide to Countryside Access
- Information on protected species and planning: https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/protected-species-and-planning
- Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS): http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk
- BBOWTs Community & Parish Guide to Biodiversity: http://www.bbowt.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/Community_Doc_FINAL_MEDRES.pdf
- Thames Valley Environment Records Centre (TVERC): http://www.tverc.org/cms/_TVERC may charge for some of their services; please contact them for more details.
- Wild Oxfordshire (formerly the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum): http://oncf.org.uk/

Oxfordshire County Council contact

For further information, in the first instance please contact your district council's Ecologist. The county council's Ecologist Planner is Tamsin Atley:

tamsin.atley@oxfordshire.gov.uk