

#### 4.13. Economic benefits



In spite of the area's unsuitability for development there will nonetheless be considerable economic benefits.

- Attracting businesses and skilled workers because it is a more desirable place to live because of easy access to high quality countryside
- More holiday and travel expenditure by residents staying in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire through providing nearby Countryside accessible by sustainable transport
- New jobs and investment in tourism businesses as Countryside recreation increases
- New employment away from city / town centres

More viable rural businesses including farms through diversifying and increasing turnover

#### 4.14. Able to significantly contribute to climate change CO2 targets

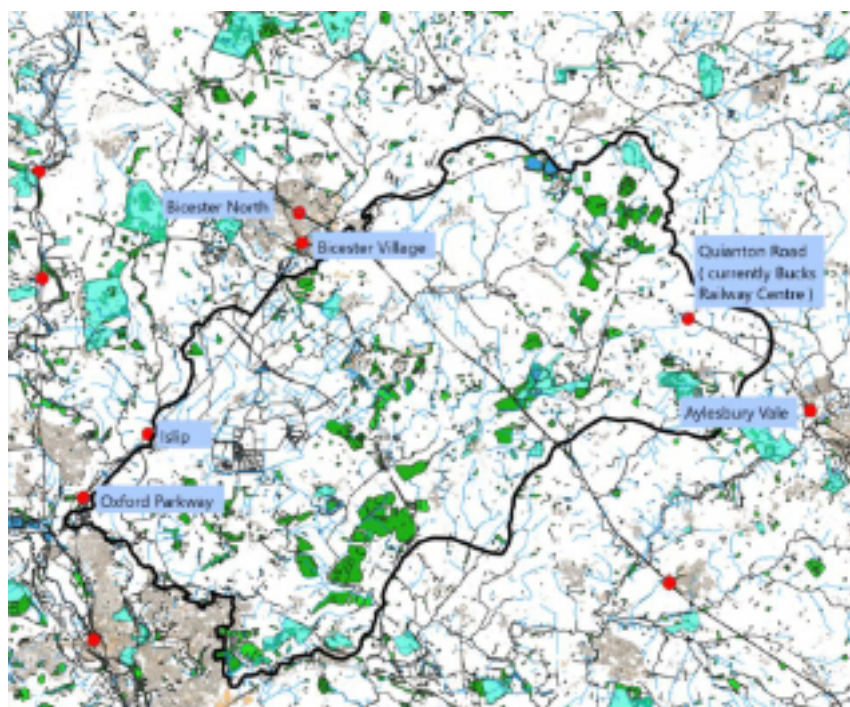
The RNP represents the best opportunity within Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to provide sustainable transport access to countryside leisure

Countryside recreation and walks, mostly accessed by car, is the single most popular recreational activity in England and any reduction in car use to meet this demand will help us achieve our Climate Change targets. .

The RNP would make a significant contribution to reducing travel distances by providing areas of deep attractive Countryside near where people live as an alternative to longer car journeys to AONBs and National Parks.

The RNP is the closest deeply rural area to the much of the urban population of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire with 500,000 people living within 10 miles of the proposed Area. This makes it ideal for day-trips by electric bike, rail (at Islip, Bicester and the possibility of re-opening Quainton Road Station – currently the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre) and bus for the less fit, and by cycle and foot for the more active, and therefore likely to prompt a travel mode change from cars.

In contrast the AONBs are at the periphery of Oxfordshire, away from population centres, and therefore involving more car travel, and more difficult to give sustainable transport access, and achieve mode change from cars.



#### Train stations in the RNP area

#### CO2 capture through Biodiversity action

The BOR landscape has many opportunities to return land to uses that capture carbon (in contrast to current modern farming techniques); restoration of woodland, wetland and peat, hay meadow, and the putting down of land to permanent pasture for horses. Recent research shows that the amount of CO2 captured is considerable.

## 4.15. High potential for new leisure projects



### Countryside leisure

Countryside based leisure is both popular (Sports Council 2018 survey –walking most popular ‘active recreational activity’) and beneficial for mental health. Walks and working on wildlife sites and access projects are now prescribed by Doctors. Implementing the vision for the Countryside Leisure and Wildlife Area will improve the access, facilities and experience of the area, while enhancing local businesses.

The Area Action Plan can co-ordinate initiatives to improve the Countryside leisure on offer. It can co-ordinate the Transport Plan, planning policies, the Countryside Service and Highways, District Council facilities (Toilets) provision, the work of DEFRA on Farm Support, the Environment Agency and the work of the major biodiversity organisations with visitors (RSPB, Forestry Commission, and BBOWT).

Planning policies can support the work of other agencies (for example DEFRA and its farm support payments scheme) and local authorities to support improved facilities. Examples include toilet provision, information boards, cafes, existing and new pubs serving food, farm tourism businesses, bed and breakfast, holiday lets, pick-your-own, cycle hire, electric bicycle charging posts, boat and canoe hire, biodiversity attractions like wetland and wildfowl areas and bird hides. The proposals for a new regime for farmer support is to link payments to activities that improve visitor experience, particularly landscape and foot and bridlepaths.

## Improving access to countryside leisure opportunities

Sustainable access to Otmoor and Bernwood is an issue as currently car access is limited by parking and access roads through narrow village streets. This could be provided by Recreational trip bus services (weekends, holidays and summer evenings) linking to the railway stations on the periphery of the park and the bus network at Oxford, Aylesbury, Bicester and Thame or extension of the 'Dial-a-ride service' could transform car overuse.

Improved cycle access, and electric cycle charging could significantly improve the cycling experience. Examples of road changes would be provision of cycle friendly speed reduction in the villages, changed junctions to help cyclists, better warning signs for motorised users of cyclists crossing the road, signposting circular routes and destinations (such as the Otmoor reserve) for cyclists, and designations of 'Quiet Lanes'. Where suitable lanes are absent, Cycle-only paths from the main population centres would also have a significant impact on leisure cycle access.



Footpath to Woodeaton

Pedestrian access could be improved with walking leaflet trails, signage to destinations with walking time, improved surfacing on key access routes, and the designation of 'Quiet Lanes'. New footpaths could be created – either designated or permissive, to create circular walks of different length and grade (of effort). New more direct footpaths from Park and Rides and Oxford Parkway would be desirable.

### Some local examples from the Oxford Border area

There is scope to create better and more circular routes for cyclists and horse riders. Examples include bridging the small gap in the Bridleway between Marston and Elsfield via Sescut Farm, and the short gap in the route from Woodeaton to Beckley.

A more ambitious scheme would be to create cycle access from the Water Eaton Park and Ride and Oxford Parkway railway Station via Sparsey Bridge across the Cherwell River, to Woodeaton. This would give access to the proposed RNP Area from Cutteslowe, Kidlington (with its new housing areas by Yarnton) and the new housing areas of Oxford's Northern Gateway, and the frequent rail services from the Station.



Sparsey Bridge over the Cherwell, adequate to take a cycleway

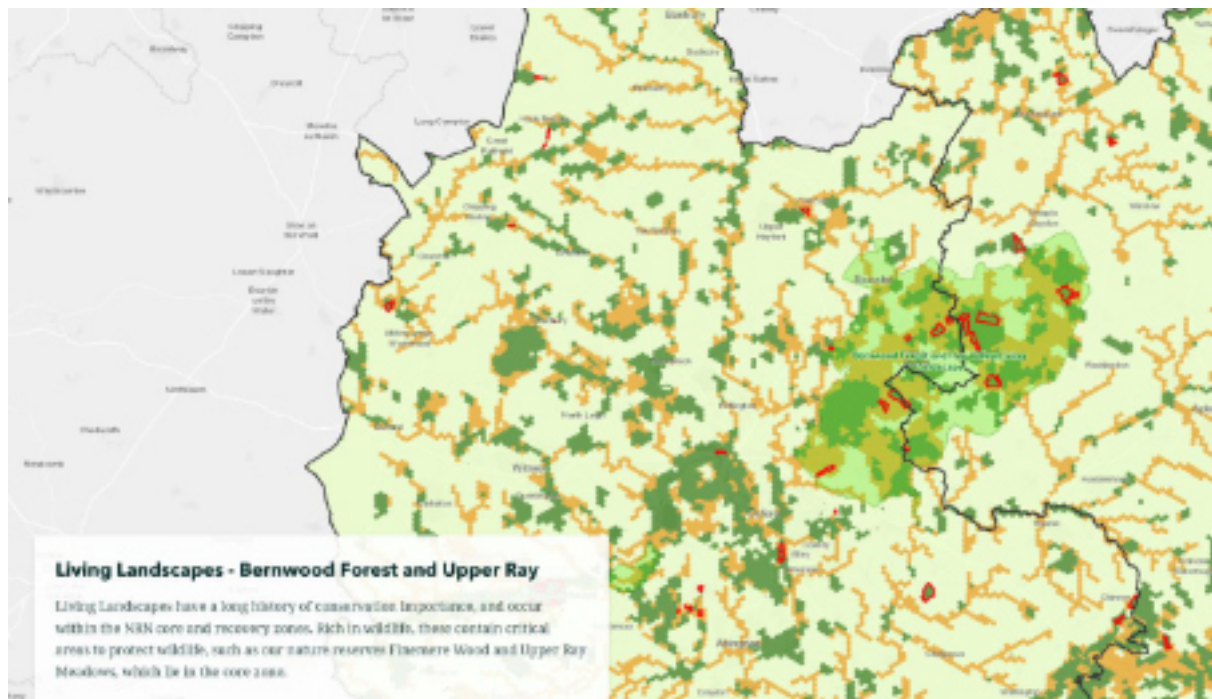
The benefit of a co-ordinated plan of improvements concentrated in one compact varied area is that there is positive feedback loop –as better facilities are developed, more people will visit and spend more time in the area, further improving the viability of services and prompting further investment.

We would aim to get input from local groups on how access and amenity can be improved in their areas of the RNP.

## 4.16 Can secure resilience to Climate Change and significant increase in biodiversity of the area

Because of the unique high concentration of larger habitat blocks close to each other, and the low level of settlement and traffic with high levels of darkness, the area is very suitable for delivering significant improvements to biodiversity and providing resilience to Climate Change.

Concentrating on reserves has failed to halt the alarming decline in Biodiversity in England, and Biodiversity conservation action now aims to save wildlife at a landscape scale. The RNP is ideal to achieve this aim. This has been acknowledged by Local Authorities, the RSPB and the local wildlife Trust BBOWT.



BBOWT has identified the RNP area as key to nature recovery and has a number of reserves in the area.

The RSPB have a similar initiative 'Futurescapes' which covers Otmoor and the Ray and Cherwell Valley. Improvements would be to existing habitats, restoration and creation of lost habitat, and linking habitats to help more mobile species with large feeding areas, such as bats or insects that need more than one habitat for their life cycle.

This landscape-scale work can be through improved management, for example of the ancient woodland and former ancient woodland and semi-improved grassland meadow, and of the hedgerows.

The restoration and creation of habitats in this area has a much higher chance of success than elsewhere because it can be adjacent to existing priority habitats, making it more likely they share

soil and water regime conditions, and making it possible for the invertebrates to extend their range over the new habitat.

Larger wildlife reserves have larger populations of wild species which are more resilient to environmental variability likely with Climate Change. The RNP has many opportunities to link nature reserves into larger units and the reserves and priority habitats are close together.



BBOWT reserves in the Upper Ray Meadows.

## Conclusion

A Regional Nature Park in the Bernwood Otmoor and Ray area is a golden opportunity to increase biodiversity and habitat restoration in Central Southern England. It is an area with a large number of ancient woods, grasslands and meadows and a high number of already established nature reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

It has a generally low population density and a low number of roads although it is close to a population of 500,000 with easy access from the surrounding towns of Oxford, Aylesbury, Bicester and Thame. The quality of the farmland is relatively low meaning that top quality agricultural land will not be impacted. It is, however, not suitable for development with ancient woodlands and nature reserves and large areas of flood plain and prominent higher ground. A lot of the landscape is of pre-modern or ancient form lending itself to landscape restoration.

As it is close to a large population it will drive down CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from those seeking countryside recreation and contribute to reducing travel distances by providing areas of deep attractive countryside near where people live. Restoration of woodland, wetland and hay meadow, and the putting down of land to permanent pasture will all aid carbon storage.

It would be an invaluable resource to the local population in terms of both physical and mental health.

The whole area could comparatively easily be turned into an extremely valuable green infrastructure that would benefit the whole community.



## Appendix 1

### Further Notes on Zoning ( from Natural England )

Network Zones:

#### Network Enhancement Zone 1

Land within close proximity to the existing habitat components that is more likely to be suitable for habitat re-creation for the particular habitat. These areas are primarily based on soils but in many cases has been refined by also using other data such as hydrology, altitude and proximity to the coast. This is termed the 'Network Enhancement Zone 1'. -

#### Network Enhancement Zone 2

Land within close proximity to the existing habitat components that are unlikely to be suitable for habitat re-creation but where other types of habitat may be created or land management may be enhanced including delivery of suitable Green Infrastructure. This is termed the 'Network Enhancement Zone 2'.

#### Fragmentation Action Zone

Land immediately adjoining existing habitat patches that are small or have excessive edge to area ratio where habitat creation is likely to help reduce the effects of habitat fragmentation. This is termed the 'Fragmentation Action Zone'.

#### Network Expansion Zone

Land within relatively close proximity to the Network Enhancement Zones 1 & 2 that are more likely to be suitable for habitat creation for the particular habitat and identifying possible locations for connecting and linking up networks across a landscape. This is termed the 'Network Expansion Zone'

## Appendix 2

### About Agricultural Land Classification grades

ALC is graded from 1 to 5.

The highest grade goes to land that:

- gives a high yield or output
- has the widest range and versatility of use
- produces the most consistent yield
- requires less input

BMV agricultural land is graded 1 to 3a.

#### 4.1 Grade 1 – excellent quality agricultural land

Land with no or very minor limitations. A very wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown and commonly includes:

- top fruit, for example tree fruit such as apples and pears
- soft fruit, such as raspberries and blackberries
- salad crops
- winter harvested vegetables

Yields are high and less variable than on land of lower quality.

#### 4.2 Grade 2 – very good quality agricultural land

Land with minor limitations that affect crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. A wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can usually be grown. On some land in the grade there may be reduced flexibility due to difficulties with the production of the more demanding crops, such as winter harvested vegetables and arable root crops. The level of yield is generally high but may be lower or more variable than grade 1.

#### 4.3 Grade 3 – good to moderate quality agricultural land

Land with moderate limitations that affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield. Where more demanding crops are grown yields are generally lower or more variable than on land in grades 1 and 2.

#### 4.4 Subgrade 3a – good quality agricultural land

Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of crops including:

- cereals
- grass
- oilseed rape
- potatoes

- sugar beet
- less demanding horticultural crops

#### 4.5 Subgrade 3b – moderate quality agricultural land

Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops, principally:

- cereals and grass
- lower yields of a wider range of crops
- high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year

#### 4.6 Grade 4 – poor quality agricultural land

Land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops or level of yields. It is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops (for example cereals and forage crops) the yields of which are variable. In moist climates, yields of grass may be moderate to high but there may be difficulties using the land. The grade also includes arable land that is very dry because of drought.

#### 4.7 Grade 5 – very poor quality agricultural land

Land with very severe limitations that restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing, except for occasional pioneer forage crops.

## Credits

### Pictures

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Page 11 –Sightings board from RSPB Otmoor – Jon Floyd  
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Picture Research – Alison Floyd

### Maps

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