

4.10 Achieving the uniquely strategic benefit of an extra –large area of natural habitats and Natural Capital

The RNP is the only opportunity for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to create an area of regional importance for nature and for ecosystem services associated with natural habitats, and landscapes without urban influence and infrastructure. The RNP located here, taken with the low population density, can achieve regional importance by taking advantage of the significant benefits of its size and shape covering a large area –of 270 km² in a block (i.e. not a corridor)¹¹.

The large RNP can support larger populations of rarer wildlife species. All wildlife species populations vary, with environmental changes causing poor breeding years, but larger populations are much less likely to fall to unsustainable levels and become locally extinct. Larger sites will also have less proportion of their area near boundaries where they are degraded by disturbance and pollution.

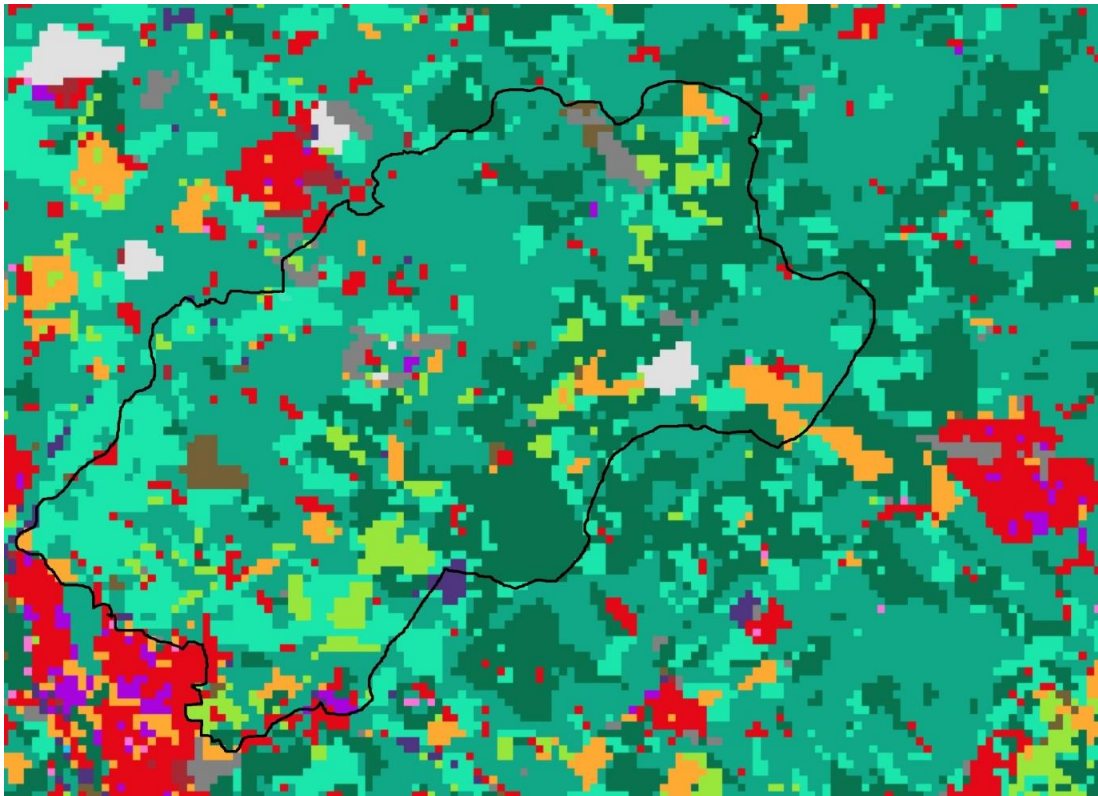
Because the RNP is large and square it can support larger networks of similar habitats, with connections in all directions. The RSPB, the Freshwater Habitats Trust (FWHT) and BBOWT have shown how effective habitats restoration and creation can be at Otmoor, Bernwood and near Oxford at Cutteslowe. The Forestry Commission, working with others (including the Natural History Museum in Oxford) and the FWHT show the potential for increasing rare invertebrates on woodland rides and associated wet meadows .

In addition the RNP is of a size that it can tackle a key problem caused by climate change – the need to store water, from reduced rainfall in more infrequent events, to feed key wetlands –at Shotover, Sydlings Copse (and new calcareous fens in Elsfield) and the Otmoor and Upper Ray wetlands, through reservoirs.

¹¹ Based on Island biographical effects, extended scope for connections between habitat sites and increase diversity of habitats supporting rarer species needing more than one habitat in their life cycle

4.11. Achieving restored landscapes

The map below shows the large continuous area of intact enclosed ancient form landscape in the RNP – this together with the extant ancient woodland is mostly in the ancient Bernwood areas around Oakley and Brill and the upper Bernwood areas between Grendon Underwood and the Claydons. The map highlights the historic (recreated / unimproved) open land at Otmoor. The map also shows the large continuous areas of enclosed pre – modern form landscape in the RNP which dominates the Upper Ray and Aylesbury Vale areas.



Regional Nature Park with large areas of ancient form landscape with ancient woodland, and large areas of pre - modern enclosed farmland, parkland, open land. National Historic Landscape Characterisation 250m grid



Bernwood Forest

The RNP –being a large area of protection with low population density and not narrow –is best placed to deliver restored landscapes big enough to be distinctive and to express their historic nature. We experience landscapes through views and through being immersed in them. In both cases you need to see a large area with enough restored or retained features and with far ranging views. This is possible in the RNP and it delivers that immersive experience on a big scale. It has a largely intact historic landscape: its enclosed wooded farmland character plus flood plain (Otmoor), forest dominated areas around Middle Claydon and Wootton Underwood, the extensive views from the ‘Stowood Hills’ (Elsfield – Beckley –Woodperry –StantonSt John –ForestHill ridge) as well as the panoramic views from Brill and Muswell Hill to both the south Bernwood and to the North to the Upper Ray Meadows and Waddesdon.

The detailed historic landscape analysis by the County Council shows the relatively small gaps of features any restoration can easily fill, while underplaying the impact of having many ancient woodland blocks –a dominant pre 1650 historical landscape feature.

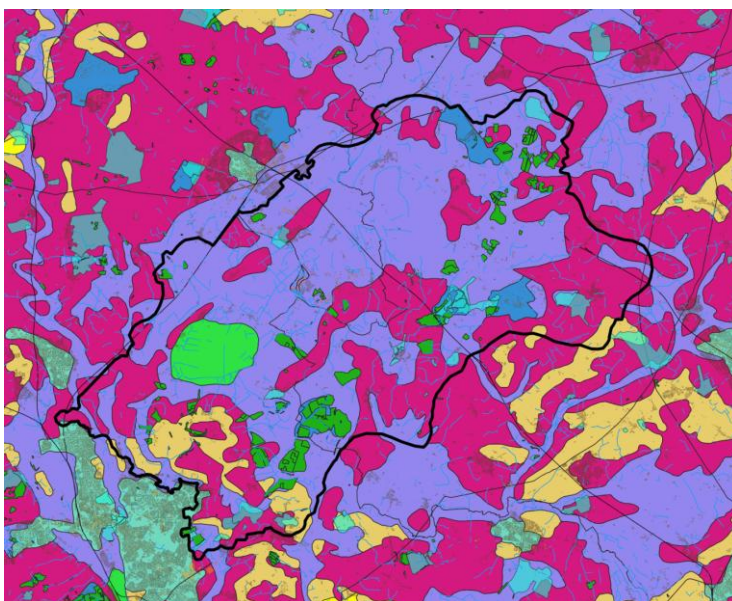
Within the RNP, the size and diversity of natural areas (existing and restorable) and distinctive historic landscape has a direct impact on the experience of visitors –offering varied experiences for recreation and interaction with nature. As a result visitors can get away from the stresses of urban features and traffic, enjoy interaction with nature in the wooded enclosed landscape (screening other visitors from view) and through visits to large natural habitats.










4.12. Unsuitability for major housing, transport or employment development

The BOR landscape, because of its high environmental value, and poor road access, is not suitable for any other strategic development apart from Countryside Leisure and biodiversity. The agricultural land quality is generally low and the topology is a mixture of low flood plains and relatively prominent hills where any development would be highly visible.

Farmland

In the proposed RNP the vast majority of the land is either grade 4 (purple) or grade 3. Otmoor is Grade 5 (Green). There is a small amount of grade 2 land (yellow) in the Southwest of the RNP on the outskirts of Oxford.



✓		Exclusion	Exclusion
✓		Grade 1	Grade 1
✓		Grade 2	Grade 2
✓		Grade 3	Grade 3
✓		Grade 4	Grade 4
✓		Grade 5	Grade 5
✓		Non Agricultural	Non Agricultural
✓		Urban	Urban
✓		<i>all other values</i>	

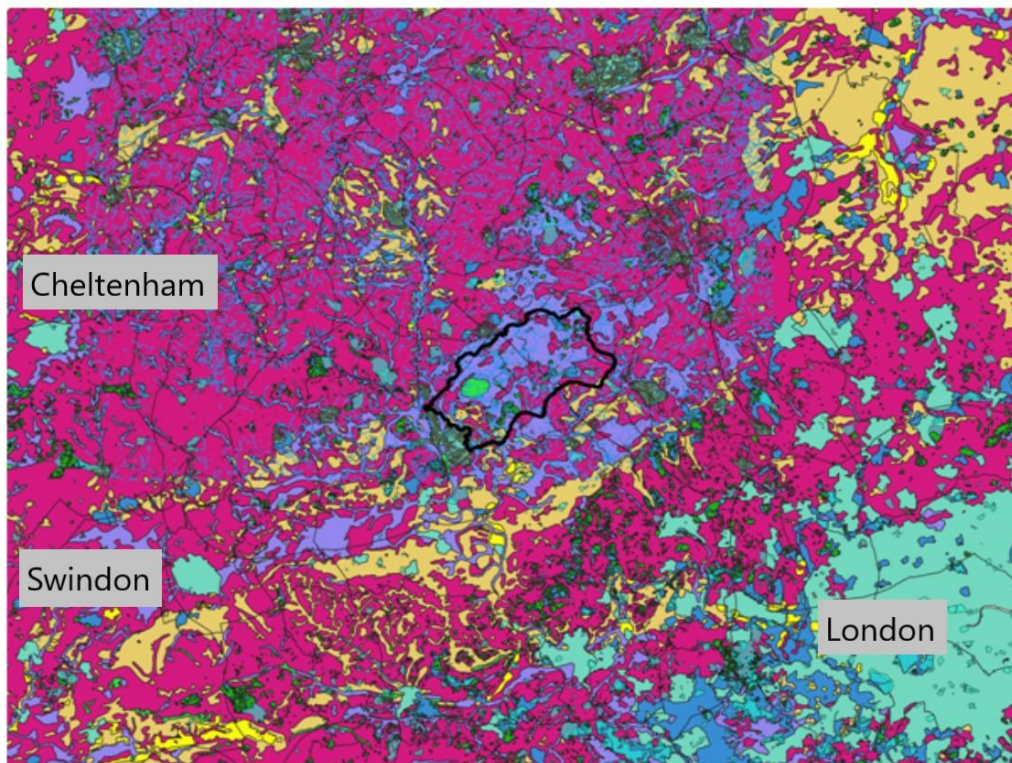
Grade 4- Poor quality agricultural land

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.

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.

For more information on agricultural land grades see Appendix 2

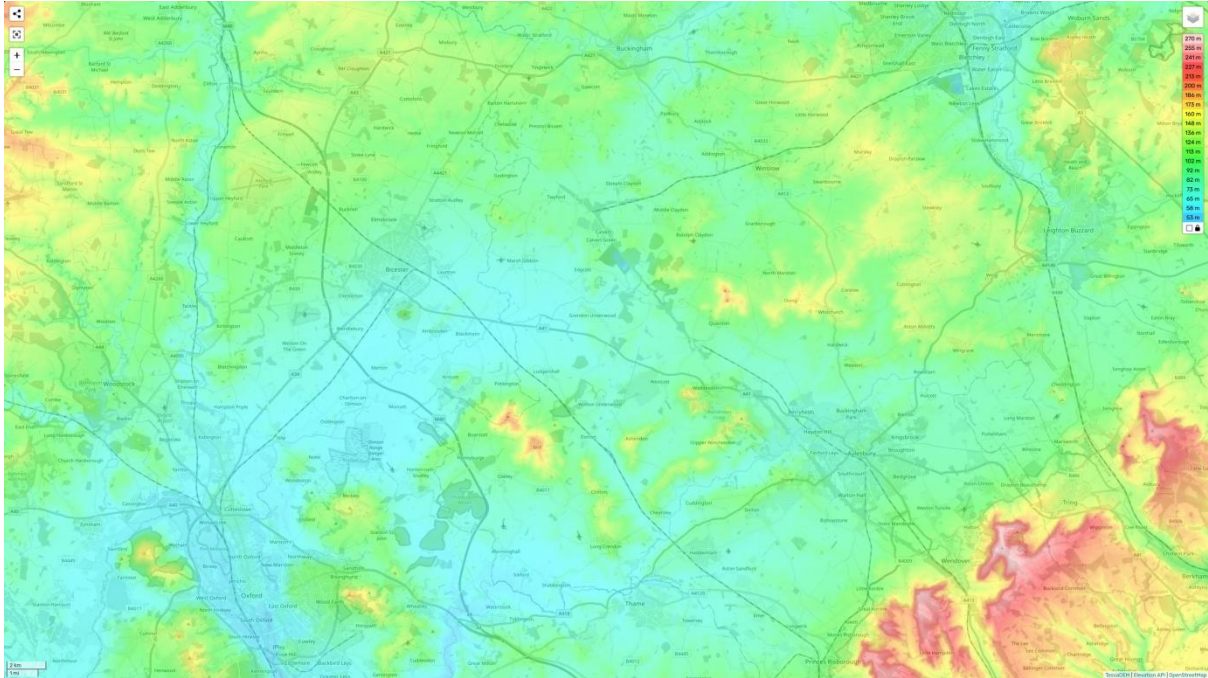


In the wider Southeast the suitability of the area from an agricultural impact perspective is quite striking. The RNP is the only extensive area of grade 4 / grade 5 land in central southern England.

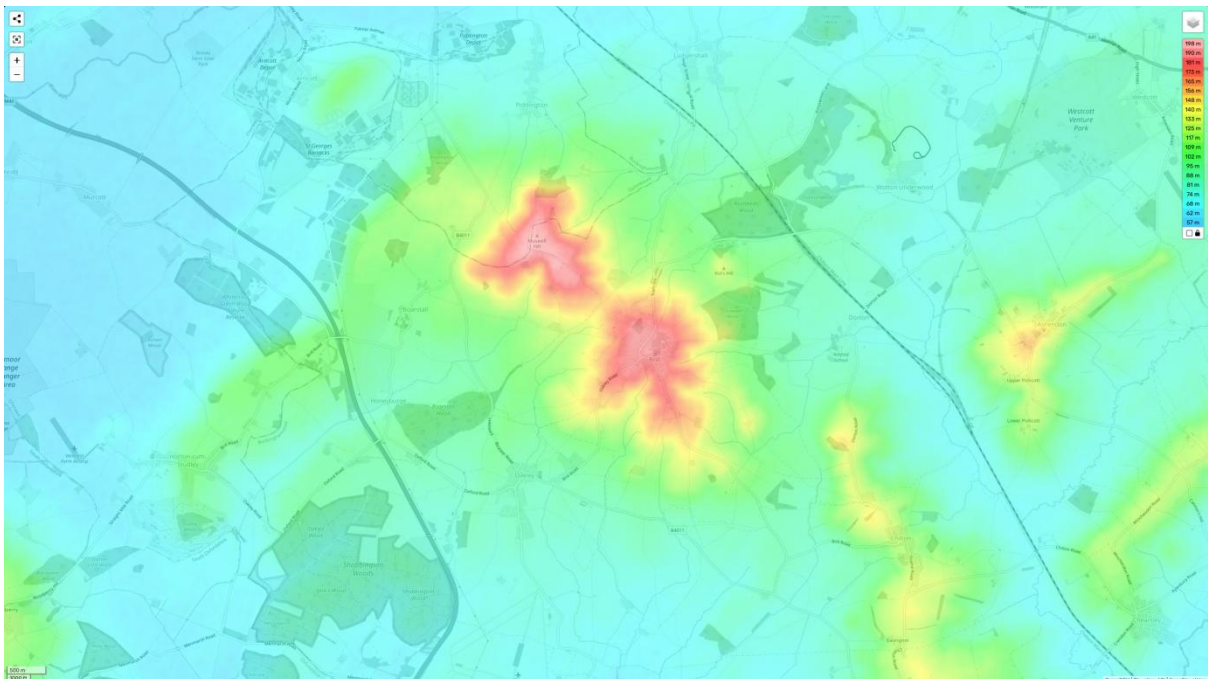
✓	Red	Exclusion	Exclusion
✓	Yellow	Grade 1	Grade 1
✓	Orange	Grade 2	Grade 2
✓	Pink	Grade 3	Grade 3
✓	Purple	Grade 4	Grade 4
✓	Red	Grade 5	Grade 5
✓	Blue	Non Agricultural	Non Agricultural
✓	Light Blue	Urban	Urban
✓	Green	<i>all other values</i>	

Topology

Topological map of the RNP area. This shows the generally low and flat land of Otmoor, Menmarsh, the Cherwell valley and the Upper Ray. This landscape picture is punctuated by the hills of Shotover, the land around Beckley (Oxford Heights East) and the Brill and Muswell Hill area.



The Brill and Muswell Hill area stands out from the wooded plain providing a focal point from the surrounding area. Any development in this area would be highly visible from a great distance.



Flood risk maps of Otmoor and the Upper Ray showing significant flood risk in these low lying areas.

