

CONSERVATION TARGET AREAS: GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

How should Conservation Target Area (CTA) maps and statements be used?

1. The CTAs can be seen as the spatial component of Oxfordshire's strategic approach to biodiversity, as referenced in Oxfordshire's [State of Nature Report 2017](#). They are some of the most important areas for wildlife where targeted conservation action can secure the maximum biodiversity benefits. Currently 36 CTAs cover just over 20 % of the county by area (526.2 km²) and contain 95% of the SSSI land area in Oxfordshire. They provide a focus for coordinated delivery of biodiversity work, agri-environment schemes and biodiversity enhancements through the planning system.
2. Consideration should in all cases be given to ensuring that any development within a CTA increases connectivity of wildlife habitats within target areas and results in a net gain for biodiversity. Biodiversity targets identified in the CTA statements incorporate, where appropriate, targets for Priority Habitat in Oxfordshire. However, not all targets are easily defined spatially, and the CTA maps and statements should be read alongside relevant action plans that exist at a local and county level (this may include Local Authority Biodiversity and/or Green Infrastructure strategies, conservation strategies such as BBOWT Living Landscapes¹ and RSPB Futurescapes² or AONB management plans, or Local Plans for specific strategic site policies relating to CTAs).
3. Where development does take place it should do so in such a way that delivers significant net gains for biodiversity. Local Authorities need to be certain that any development proposal will not damage existing designated sites (including Local Wildlife Sites), but wherever possible enhance them and the wider area of ecological interest by protecting key features and taking opportunities to restore and enhance biodiversity. This needs to be set out clearly in the ecological appraisal via robust ecological accounting of existing value and showing how the proposed development delivers a net gain.
4. CTA boundaries are not absolute. They have been drawn to follow mapped boundaries wherever possible in order to facilitate spatial planning and decision-making. However, a project immediately outside the mapped boundary should not be immediately dismissed if it would help to deliver the targets identified for the CTA concerned. It is also not the case that all land within a CTA offers the same opportunities for habitat restoration or creation.
5. Areas outside the identified CTAs still have substantial biodiversity interest, and include a number of nature reserves, Local Wildlife Sites, Ancient Woodlands and other areas of Priority Habitat. Although the focus of any biodiversity action should be on the CTAs, it will still be necessary to maintain, enhance, buffer and extend areas of wildlife habitat outside the mapped areas in order to maintain the wildlife interest and richness of the wider countryside.

¹ <http://www.bbowt.org.uk/what-we-do/living-landscapes>

² <http://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/landscape-scale-conservation/upperthames/>

6. Information provided on the habitats and species associated with each CTA is not definitive. Rather, it identifies those priority habitats for which the area is known to be most important, and provides a range of examples of priority species for which the area is known to be important. It is likely that each CTA will support additional habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity, and reference should be made to the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) to support decision-making.

7. Some biodiversity interest is not well served by the CTA mapping process, and action for ponds, traditional orchards, wildlife associated with arable farmland, and widely dispersed species such as great crested newt, otter and water vole will need to focus across the whole of Oxfordshire and not just within identified CTAs.