

toe | Trust for
Oxfordshire's
Environment

Impact Report 2020

Funding our local environment

Restoring nature,
connecting people



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Chairman's Introduction

I love living in Oxfordshire, with its varied landscapes, rich natural habitats, vibrant communities and thriving environment sector. Yet, like the rest of the world, our precious county faces immense challenges due to changing climate and declining biodiversity. *The 2017 State of Nature in Oxfordshire Report** paints a picture of the natural world on our doorstep under threat from all sides. Habitats lost, species in decline, a climate in crisis.

We as individuals can't fix all the planet's problems, but if we each take action we can make a positive change to the places in which we live and work. I set up TOE as a charity in 2011, to make a difference here, in my patch, a place I care deeply about.

As a local environmental funder, TOE supports inspiring projects which improve nature, make green spaces more accessible and help communities reduce their carbon footprint. This report showcases some of the hundreds of projects funded over the last nine years, with the £3million we have raised, showing what can be achieved when people and organisations come together with energy and commitment.

I thank all those funders, partner organisations and individuals with whom we work. Looking to the future, we will build on what we have achieved to create a Local Environment Fund for the future of Oxfordshire.

Karen Woolley

Karen Woolley, TOE Chairman
**Published by Wild Oxfordshire (2017)*



Who we are and what we do

TOE is an independent county-based environmental funder. We raise funds and allocate grants to support a better future for our local environment.

Since 2011 we have supported more than 320 projects across Oxfordshire and Berkshire, making a significant and positive difference to communities and nature.

Our Vision for Oxfordshire

A county where:

- good quality land, air and water support biodiverse habitats
- nature is at the heart of local life and decision making
- local people feel connected to their environment
- there is a positive response to the climate emergency and ecological crisis
- a high value, invested Local Environment Fund provides long term support for projects.

Our Purpose

- To halt the decline in nature and help restore its richness.
- To fund immediate and long-term investment in projects which enrich nature, connect people with green spaces and enable more sustainable and healthier ways of living in Oxfordshire and neighbouring counties.

Our Values

- **INSPIRE** – Everyone to do whatever they can to secure nature's recovery and improve our countryside and green spaces.
- **INNOVATE** – Find new sources of funds to support current and even more ambitious initiatives.
- **COLLABORATE** – Work with others to manage and fund projects, share ideas and strategic debate.

Our team

TOE is a registered charity with a small team and a network of skilled volunteers including board members, grant panel members and project assessors. Their expertise and sound advice are key to maintaining rigorous and thorough processes, ensuring effective allocation of funds to high quality projects.



Why Oxfordshire needs TOE

Our planet faces a crisis. Our environment's series of interlocking systems holds everything together, yet the climate emergency and humankind's actions deplete nature's health and diversity. More and more people are calling for an urgent need to act now, both globally and locally.

TOE enables people and organisations to improve Oxfordshire's environment by working in partnership and offering a single source of funding support. We raise funds from the private, public and non-profit sectors for innovative local projects.

What difference can funding through TOE make?

CHALLENGES

Biodiversity loss: isolated habitats, decline in species, development pressures (Oxfordshire's population is forecast to grow by up to 76% by 2050, five times the national growth rate, increasing pressure on fragmented green spaces and nature*).

Carbon emissions: carbon levels remain high and rising worldwide. We must find ways to sequester carbon through natural climate solutions both globally and locally.

Poor health and wellbeing: Over 50% of Oxfordshire's adults are overweight, and 3 in 10 don't meet physical activity guidelines. Referrals to mental health services in younger age groups are increasing.**

Lack of funds to deliver a rich and diverse local environment; the environment is constantly underfunded; not seen as the priority that it should be.

EVIDENCE

The State Of Nature in Oxfordshire report 2017 summed up data on local habitat loss, eg: 80% of orchards lost since 1911. Huge loss of species-rich grasslands since the 1930's. 50% of recorded ponds lost from the Upper Thames region since 1945.

Oxfordshire is one of the least wooded counties in southern England. Natural climate solutions play a vital role in carbon sequestration for a range of habitats and farmland.

Areas with more accessible green space are associated with better mental and physical health.***

TOE is oversubscribed with funding applications. The Government aims to match fund public funding with locally based private sector contributions so that local businesses see local benefits.

TOE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure all development delivers biodiversity net gain. Support farms to grow food sustainably and protect nature on the 74% of Oxfordshire that is farmland.

Support new woodlands, hedgerows and orchards, ensure better managed meadows and wetlands and healthier soils.

Increase and improve accessible green spaces in towns and new urban areas. Ensure rights of way are more accessible to all members of the community.

To raise funds to support local projects and work with local people to prioritise needs and actions.

LEADING TO:

More robust and resilient wildlife populations. More, bigger, better and joined up habitats.

Better managed land, new wildlife habitats and increased carbon sequestration, reducing the carbon footprint of the county.

More community interaction and contact with nature, healthier population enjoying local green spaces. Increased understanding of the environment and our dependence upon it.

Improved local environment and more environmentally aware communities. Longer term funding, resulting in better and more sustainable projects.

*According to data from the National Infrastructure Commission **Health data from Oxfordshire JSNA 2019

***<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0538/POST-PN-0538.pdf>

Investment snapshot



320+ projects supported

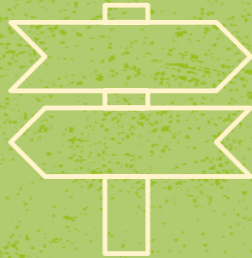


Biodiversity - £1.16 million

supporting creation and management of woodlands, meadows, wetlands and orchards

Access to green spaces - £319,000

supporting better rights of way and more welcoming green spaces



Low Carbon/energy efficiency - £730,500

supporting local food projects and more energy efficient community buildings

200 local communities

benefiting from funding



Network Rail Partnership

The Challenge – Loss of valuable lineside habitat during the electrification of the Greater West Line

Network Rail set a target of achieving no net loss to biodiversity following electrification of the railway line from London to South Wales by making funds available for local habitat offsetting. TOE was chosen as the delivery partner to distribute funds in Oxfordshire and Berkshire, attracting applications for exciting woodland projects which will ensure a net gain for biodiversity as they mature. TOE delivered on time and within budget.

Working with a major infrastructure organisation has illustrated how TOE's strategic, flexible and locally tailored approach could be applied to the delivery of net gain for ALL development including housing and infrastructure. We have already secured funds from development offsets to support net gain for biodiversity in South and Vale Districts.



“Through their local knowledge and network of partners TOE provided Network Rail with the platform to identify, assess, select, fund and monitor projects that would most benefit the natural environment and local communities. It allowed the implementation of a grass-roots approach while delivering great value for money. TOE's passion and professionalism now comes with expertise in delivering biodiversity net gain for a multi-billion pound infrastructure project, a tremendous added value to future environmental funders.” Emmanuel Deschamps, Network Rail

The funded projects will deliver:

53 hectares of better managed woodland

6 hectares of other improved habitats

26 hectares of new woodland

Maximising impact through excellent service delivery

Established, trusted, local network



Independent status - means we remain objective, unbiased and true to our values

Safe pair of hands



Working with our partners

FUNDERS

- We understand our funders' needs.
- We direct funds to make most impact and a tangible difference.
- We have expertise in overseeing projects, ensuring they finish on-time and within budget.

- We know and understand the local context.
- We have good reach to diverse grant applicants.
- We understand where local initiatives sit in the wider context.
- We offer flexibility, supporting large scale partnership schemes and smaller community projects.

What our funders say: "As an Oxfordshire-based company, it's vital that the funds we contribute make a real difference to local communities and the environment. TOE plays an essential role in making that happen; we value their expertise in helping identify good projects. It is always gratifying to receive reports and pictures showing what projects are delivering on the ground." Toni Robinson, Grundon Waste Management Ltd, supporting TOE through the Landfill Communities Fund.

GRANT APPLICANTS

- We are a local 'go-to' funder with local knowledge and connections.
- We are approachable and proactive.
- We provide support and expert advice.

- We assess funding applications thoroughly.
- We support projects from small scale schemes with multi-faceted impacts to landscape scale schemes securing net gain for biodiversity and nature-based solutions.

What our applicants say: "The application process was very clear and straightforward and the support from TOE has been fantastic. The grant was the catalyst to securing the ecological management of these key Chiltern habitats for the future" Kingwood Common project, Chiltern Society.

OTHER PARTNERS

- We work with and support the many organisations which make Oxfordshire a better place for nature and people.
- We work with environmental NGOs, local authorities, voluntary groups, farmers and others.

- Our bespoke programmes with partner organisations address specific issues, such as the recent Bee Healthy project (see page 12).
- We work closely with the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) to support Net Gain for biodiversity.

What our partners say: "We're looking forward to developing our partnership with TOE to deliver Net Gain for biodiversity. It's important to us that we work with a local not-for-profit organisation which takes a collaborative approach to this sort of programme" Camilla Burrow, Director of TVERC.

Connecting People and Communities

The Challenge – To ensure that local rights of way are accessible to more people

The South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers have replaced difficult and broken stiles with 278 gates on public rights of way, funded by TOE with £87,000 from Grundon Waste Management Ltd.

“The TOE schemes near Whitchurch Hill were of the greatest benefit for the Blind/Partially Sighted group, and we were also thanked by BP Technology because we had made their exercise routine of doing a lunchtime walk so much easier.” Alan Futter, Chiltern Society.

Project outcomes

- Hundreds of miles of more accessible and better-connected rights of way.
- Footfall has increased by an estimated 25%.
- Chiltern footpaths are widely recognised as offering the easiest access in the country.



The Challenge – How to make community buildings more energy efficient and welcoming

Thanks to the ENRICH Programme, many local community buildings are warmer and cheaper to run. The Environmental Information Exchange (EiE) at Oxford Brookes University delivered 134 energy audits from 2013-2016, funded by the Patsy Wood Trust. Many buildings also received grants from Grundon Waste Management Ltd to implement audit recommendations such as insulation, double glazing and more efficient heating.

Project outcomes

- Saved an estimated 1,679 tonnes of carbon (CO₂e) and over £358,000 in energy costs.
- 166 projects supported, approximately 50% of all community buildings in Oxfordshire.
- TOE has also supported energy audits for 30 faith buildings.

“Normally the hall is cold all year. On election days the polling officers used around £20 of electricity but this time they only used £9. Improving energy efficiency will considerably increase building use and provide massive energy savings.” (Kelmescott Memorial Hall)



Working in partnership to support nature's recovery

The Challenge – To provide habitats for threatened bumblebees and more welcoming urban green spaces for people

TOE worked with Wild Oxfordshire and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare to develop Bee Healthy gardens with staff and volunteers at four health centres, funded by a donation, the Postcode Local Trust and Smiths of Bletchingdon. Volunteers benefitted from working outdoors and enjoying the plants, and pollinating insects have significantly increased to a happy hum!

“Bee healthy has been a great thing for the practice as well as the bees” – Dr Dave Triffett, Summertown Health Centre

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The Challenge – To provide a more sustainable local woodfuel supply chain

TOE, the Sylva Foundation and other partners created the Oxfordshire Woodfuel Programme to support better woodland management for woodfuel and wildlife. It engaged volunteers and landowners to raise the profile of forestry in Oxfordshire. TOE secured over £81,000 from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Oxfordshire County Council and the Forestry Commission.

- Free advice and support for communities managing local woodlands, leading to a greater understanding of the importance of our woodlands.
- Developing a quality standard of “OXlogs” to promote local dry seasoned logs for domestic use.
- Promoting the installation of locally fuelled woodfuel boilers, which increased the woodfuel market and helped reduce the county's carbon footprint.
- Logs for Labour, matching 'log offers' from woodland owners with 'labour offers' from people willing to gather firewood. More local volunteers engaged with local woodlands.
- The development of “In a Nutshell - a Strategy for the sustainable management of Oxfordshire's woodlands and trees”, acknowledged by the Forestry Commission as an 'excellent example of a comprehensive forestry strategy'.



Geographical reach

TOE supports projects across Oxfordshire, benefiting many local communities and a wide range of habitats and species. We also support some projects in neighbouring counties; the environment doesn't stop at the county boundary.

Distribution of projects across five Oxfordshire districts, 2011 to 2020. Main programme projects and Network Rail No Net Loss projects

West Oxfordshire



Vale of White Horse



- Biodiversity
- Access
- Energy
- Network Rail No Net Loss

Other projects:

7 Oxfordshire-wide biodiversity projects. Of the 18 Network Rail funded biodiversity projects, 8 are in Berkshire

Total number of projects: 320

Cherwell



Oxford City



South Oxfordshire



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Looking Forward - TOE's Strategy 2020-2023

TOE began as an organisation specialising in small grants for grassroots community-led projects, but the growing bank of successful projects has increased our ambition to provide a bigger, more sustainable fund. The focus of our Strategy 2020-2023 is to support a landscape-scale approach to nature's recovery, bringing people together to invest in Oxfordshire's natural environment to:

- Create and restore woodlands, meadows and wetlands to support nature's recovery and lock up carbon.
- Help communities make streets, parks and other public spaces rich in wildlife, better for people, and part of climate solutions.
- Support local farmers and land managers to restore and protect the countryside.

A high value invested Local Environment Fund will ensure we CAN deliver these ambitious aims, both for us and for future generations.

If you or your organisation wishes to see a better future for Oxfordshire's environment, please get behind us. By working as one, we can achieve far more.



“The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it.”

– Robert Swan. OBE.

The power of partnership

Many thanks to all of our generous supporters, inspiring partners and the committed volunteers delivering projects on the ground.

GRUNDON



Whittard
CHELSEA 1886



Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire



toe Trust for
Oxfordshire's
Environment

If you are interested in working with us as a funder or partner we would be delighted to start a conversation; 01865 407003
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