

Dorchester Nature and Environment Action Plan

February 2026

Summary

- Nature and the local environment are priorities for the people of Dorchester as evidenced by the Dorchester 2030 survey undertaken in 2023.
- The 2017 Neighbourhood (Development) Plan laid out the wider environmental context of the Parish and in Section 4.2 details the nature and environment assets of the parish and the high-level priorities for the maintenance and improvement of our environment.
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- Dorchester is already a great place for nature and a variety of local landowners do a great job encouraging nature and the environment to flourish.
- But there is scope for Dorchester, as a community, to do more.
- This plan lays out an initial set of practical actions the Parish Council is prepared to support in order to deliver on the high-level priorities and, if necessary, to allocate funds to enable us to do more to further improve our assets.
- Further actions will be added to this plan where there is resident appetite to lead them and funding to support them.

Introduction

Dorchester Parish Council and the residents are passionate about protecting and enhancing nature and our local environment.

Dorchester is a thriving community lying entirely within the green belt, 8 miles south of Oxford with the parish dominated by its two rivers, extensive farmland and an archaeologically rich central built up area. Protection of the rural nature of the parish was a top priority for residents in the D2030 survey.

The 2017 Neighbourhood (Development) Plan made the following high level commitment:

“To nurture and protect the natural and built environment of the village for future generations to enjoy.”

This Dorchester Nature and Environment Action Plan (DNEAP) sets out the first phase of an Action Plan to deliver on this high level goal by creating, maintaining and improving nature-rich habitats in Dorchester and encouraging Dorchester residents and other community groups to play their part.

Background

As background to the DNEAP we have identified 3 key documents:

1. The Dorchester Neighbourhood Plan

The Dorchester Neighbourhood Development Plan (now known as a Neighbourhood Plan - NP) in 2017 laid out the overall plan for Dorchester including its environmental assets.

This plan can be viewed on the Parish Council website at <https://dorchesteronthames-pc.gov.uk/dorchester-on-thames-parish-council-neighbourhood-plan/>

Since the NP was created there are a number of significant changes to the background it laid out:

- The Conservation Area has been formally extended to include a stretch of land to the east of the village – See Appendix 1
- A number of Village Greens have been registered to preserve the character and access of the Dyke Hills and the land near Days Lock.
- A major landowner, Bishops Court Farm, has been begun a significant transformation into a more diverse business with a strong focus on nature and sustainability and bringing jobs and visitors, but also more traffic, to the community

2. The Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

OCC has developing a county wide nature recovery strategy that was published in November 2025. It lays out the current state of nature in the county and priorities and plans to promote nature.

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/lhrs-phase3-consultation>

3. Dorchester Species Survey

With the support of Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre we have a documented understanding of species present in Dorchester over the past 10 years - See Appendix 2.

Neighbourhood Plan

Section 4.2 of the Dorchester NP laid out a broad objective for the environment and biodiversity:

To nurture and protect the natural and built environment of the village for future generations to enjoy.

The NP also laid out some more detailed objectives:

- *To preserve, conserve and protect the terrestrial and aquatic life in the River Thames and River Thame flood meadows.*
- *To preserve, protect and enhance the footpaths, Thames path and green lanes, green spaces and verges throughout the village and surrounding countryside.*
- *To ensure that developments on land adjoining the Community Meadows owned by the Hurst Water Meadow Trust does not adversely impact on the biodiversity of these areas.*
- *To retain the highest category of agricultural land for employment and the rural character of the village.*

Our Habitats

Dorchester has a number of key habitats which can be broadly understood as:

- Farmland – the parish contains 4 farms, the two largest being Bishops Court Farm and Shillingford Farm which jointly make up the majority of land in the parish.
- Rivers and water meadows – The Thames and Thame and Hurst Trust water meadows.
- Lakes – the parish contains a number of gravel pits now used for sailing, fishing and wildlife.
- Communal areas – including the recreation ground and allotments owned by the Parish Council and Abbey land.
- Footpaths – a large number of footpaths throughout the village, many registered but also permissive paths and informal footpaths.
- Houses and Gardens – collectively a significant area of land with opportunities to provide more support for nature.

A number of organisations have their own nature and environment plans that operate in these habitat types. The DNEAP does not seek to oversee the actions of these organisations but we are willing to work with them where there is common interest for the collective good and will do our best to encourage active nature management.

Our Aims

The main aims of this DNEAP are to make Dorchester an even better place for residents and visitors to help preserve and enjoy our natural assets through:

1. Preserving access to nature through footpaths and working with local landowners to ensure access.
2. Supporting the creation of new or enhanced habitats where they can add to the natural environment.
3. Working with the relevant authorities, particularly EA and Thames Water, to ensure high quality water environments and projects that support nature in the river environments.
4. Informing, inspiring and encouraging understanding of our environment in the parish and participation of the community in helping nature to flourish and biodiversity to increase in the parish.
5. Identifying practical ways in which residents of all ages and knowledge can do 'their bit' for nature in the parish.

To support these aims we will need the involvement of residents and occasionally funds from the Parish Council and grant funders. These factors will determine how far and how fast we can move.

Action Plans by Habitat

Habitat	Farmland
Current status	Active engagement with two largest farms. Active nature plans and access for resident on Bishops Court Farm. Early life plans at Shillingford Farm.
Current actions	Green DoTs active in hedgerow management with the support of c20 volunteers. Workplan includes hedging bordering Shillingford Farm land. Active standalone nature and environment plans are in place at Bishops Court Farm.
Short term (0-2 years actions)	Continue to support Green DoTs with funding.
Longer term (2 years +) actions	Identify possible location for a Community Orchard.

Habitat	Rivers and Water Meadows
Current status	Variable water quality - Thames Water discharges into Thame cause occasional problem. Flooding from Thame causing problems for c10 houses largely in Bridge End and Overy. The Hurst Water Meadow Trust has an active land management strategy under its own governance.
Current actions	Thame Conservation Trust have their own plans in place. Fish bypass at Buck's Pool designed but understood to be awaiting funding. Mink control plans in place.
Short term (0-2 years actions)	Represent community as fish bypass project is progressed.
Longer term (2 years +) actions	Identify possible opportunities for increasing amenity for residents and visitors.

Habitat	Lakes
Current status	Limited engagement (from good down to none) with various owners which cover a variety of, predominantly leisure, activities.
Current actions	Unknown.
Short term (0-2 years actions	Seek better engagement with owners on their environmental management plans.
Longer term (2 years +) actions	Identify opportunities where landowners wish to work together with the Parish Council and residents.

Habitat	Communal areas
Current status	New Parish Council Grounds Maintenance contract commenced with emphasis on protecting the natural environment balanced with approach to control of verges and hedgerow agreed with Grounds Maintenance contractors to support nature. Parish Council has active management of its trees. Village Greens recently registered to guarantee access in perpetuity. Abbey has launched the 'River of Life' initiative which offers the opportunity to work together with the Parish Council and residents. Green DoTs active from time to time in a number of these areas as agreed with the landowners (eg Abbey, Cemetery), creating nature variety and wildlife corridors etc.
Current actions	Financial support for Green DoTs. Space identified for more (memorial) trees on the recreation ground where residents want to fund a tree.
Short term (0-2 years actions	Approach St Birinus School to identify other initiatives that we can work on with the school in addition to their current engagement with the Hurst Trust and Bishops Court Farm. Identify practical ways of working with Abbey as a key stakeholder and landowner
Longer term (2 years +) actions	

Habitat	Footpaths
Current status	Formal footpaths are generally well maintained by the variety of landowners. There are a number of permissive paths and other unregistered footpaths in the parish.
Current actions	Litter picking by key individuals
Short term (0-2 years actions	Instigate an annual Dorchester autumn litter clear building on the success of the 2022 initiative – PC funds of c£150 required to purchase c20 litter pickers.
Longer term (2 years +) actions	Document non-registered paths and seek to get them registered.

Habitat	Houses and gardens
Current status	Good nature management by many residents but no joined up initiatives in place.
Current actions	None coordinated by PC or other groups.
Short term (0-2 years actions	Launch a bird box initiative supported by PC funds of c£1000 to 50% subsidise 100 bird boxes for residents. Seek to share practical advice for householders help to encourage wildlife through Dorchester News etc – needs a ‘lead contributor’.
Longer term (2 years +) actions	Assess viability of a bat box initiative supported with PC funds. Identify other similar initiatives that there is evidence that residents will support.

Summary of short term actions

Area	Action	PC financial support required
Farms	Continue to support Green DoTs with funding	Funding already in PC budget
Rivers	Represent community as fish bypass project is progressed	None
Lakes	Seek better engagement with all owners on their environmental management plans	None
Communal areas	Approach St Birinus School to identify other initiatives that we can work on with the school in addition to their current engagement with the Hurst Trust and Bishops Court Farm	None
Communal areas	Identify practical ways of working with Abbey as a key stakeholder and landowner	None
Footpaths	Instigate an annual Dorchester autumn litter clear building on the success of the 2022 initiative – PC funds of c£150 required to purchase c20 litter pickers	c£200 pa
Houses and gardens	Launch a bird box initiative supported by PC funds of c£1000 to 50% subsidise 100 bird boxes for residents.	c£1000
Houses and gardens	Seek to share practical advice for householders help to encourage wildlife through Dorchester News etc	None

