

Tender for the supply of an Area Action Plan for the Reconnecting the Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray Initiative

20 March 2025

Introduction

Period: 5 May 2025 – 30 June 2026

You are invited to tender in competition with others to provide the goods and/or services specified above to the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).

Your tender response should be emailed to rbor@bbowt.org.uk by **15 April 2025 at 17:00**.

Only tenders submitted in accordance with BBOWT's Terms and Conditions will be considered. Any tenders that are incomplete or received after the time indicated may be disregarded.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of this tender prior to tendering, please email rbor@bbowt.org.uk. All questions regarding this process will be anonymised and circulated to all tenderers to ensure a fair and transparent procurement process. If you do not wish to tender on this occasion, please let us know.

Yours faithfully

Eliza Ader, RBOR Programme Lead

BBOWT

Instructions and Timetable

1. Timetable

MILESTONE	DATE
ITT published	20 March 2025
Deadline submission	15 April 2025
Short-listing	16-18 April 2025
Presentations by tenderers <i>*** please keep date free</i>	22 April 2025
Award of contract	By 2 May 2025
Work commences	5 May 2025

Interim milestones *** <i>to be established based on submissions and methods</i>	TBC
Contract completion	30 June 2026

BBOWT does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any Tender and reserves the right to accept part only of a Tender. BBOWT reserves the right to procure individual elements of the required solution from one or more supplier as appropriate.

Whilst BBOWT aims to provide feedback on failed submissions this may not always be possible, and BBOWT is under no obligation to do so.

2. Tender Evaluation Process

Tenders that fail to meet essential requirements may be excluded from consideration.

Tenders that fulfil essential requirements will be evaluated on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender, weightings as detailed below.

Criterion	Weighting
Service Delivery and conformity with specification	55%
Relevant experience	20%
Price & Price Related	25%

About Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife (BBOWT)

BBOWT is one of 46 Wildlife Trusts across the UK working to achieve the shared aim of securing a better future for wildlife. BBOWT has a wilder vision of more nature everywhere and aims to put nature into recovery on 30% of land across the three counties by 2030. BBOWT has over 52,000 members. BBOWT brings people and nature together to protect our environment. Our experts work with more than 1,800 volunteers to look after over 80 nature reserves, four education centres and run hundreds of amazing events. We rely on the generosity of individuals, charitable trusts and businesses.

The Bernwood, Otmoor and Ray landscape

The 300km² Bernwood, Otmoor, Ray (BOR) landscape lies across the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire borders. The landscape boundary was first identified by the Doubling Nature Environmental Opportunities Mapping project led by the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership (the "NEP") as one of 35 priority strategic-scale landscapes for nature recovery within the Oxford-Cambridge strategic region. It is defined by a number of important habitats and features. These include: a variety of ancient woodlands, several of which are former Royal hunting forests; ancient hedgerows; freshwater; and nationally rare floodplain meadows. The low-lying River Ray provides an ecological corridor connecting the entire landscape. Key species include hairstreak butterflies, Bechstein's bats, breeding waders (curlew, lapwing and redshank) and great crested newts.

The RBOR Initiative – background and summary

A range of organisations are united in recognising the value and importance of this region and have highlighted its importance in response to numerous damaging developments. Helpfully, the BOR region will form an integral part of the forthcoming statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire County Councils. These strategies, together with the UK Environment Act (2021), and a range of local plans, policies and strategies, create an enabling framework for managing the UK's natural resources collaboratively and at scale.

Against this backdrop, BBOWT led a feasibility study funded by Buckinghamshire Council and consulted over 200 stakeholders to draw out the most immediate priorities and opportunities for nature and people in this region which could be initiated within five years. This process identified core priority project concepts which together form a landscape-scale programme of work to ensure vitally important BOR sites and priority habitats are protected, restored, extended and connected up as part of the Nature Recovery Network for England. A vision for the BOR landscape was created with stakeholders and is summarised in project reports which can be found [here](#).

BBOWT has decided to move forward with a £5 million application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to take forward the key elements of the vision articulated by stakeholders and turn this vision into action. If successful, the programme would be delivered in two phases –initially a two-year development phase followed by a five-year delivery phase.

The RBOR initiative will bring together the collective expertise of a diverse range of people, to help raise the profile of the region with planners, funders, investors and decision-makers. It is an ambitious landscape-scale project to rediscover, restore and enhance the fascinating but threatened BOR landscape and secure a more sustainable future for its wildlife and people.

What needs does the RBOR Initiative address?

Bisected by HS2 to the North and sitting within the strategic Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership, the BOR landscape has been under enormous pressure from major and incremental developments for housing, industry and transport infrastructure. This has resulted in many important habitats being fragmented and isolated, inhibiting the ability of key species to move through the landscape and making it vulnerable to threats from climate change and disease. Historic agricultural intensification, drainage and poor water quality have also had profound impacts on the ecology and hydrology of the River Ray and the surrounding floodplain.

The BOR landscape encompasses BBOWT's Bernwood Forest and Ray Valley Living Landscape, and an impressive number of nature reserves and protected sites. This includes 24 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), with a 25th currently in the process of notification, and 83 Local Wildlife Sites. There are also a number of [Conservation Target Areas \(CTA\)](#) (Oxfordshire) [Biodiversity Opportunity Areas \(BOA\)](#) (Buckinghamshire)¹. These have been identified by partners as the most important areas for biodiversity in the two counties to focus nature conservation effort. They call in particular for actions to manage and restore important habitats such as floodplain grazing marsh, lowland deciduous woodland, meadows and dry acid grasslands, as well as features such as hedgerows and ponds.

The BOR landscape has long been recognised as having outstanding natural value by local organisations and statutory bodies due to significant concentrations of nationally important species and diverse habitats. However, many important habitats including species-rich grasslands lack adequate

protection and the BOR landscape as a whole is not recognised or designated in the planning system. The lack of a legislative framework and a coordinated approach to nature recovery has meant the majority of efforts have been relatively small, short-term and isolated to date.

The demographics of the BOR are a complex mix of more affluent areas alongside areas of relatively higher deprivation. Oxfordshire is one of the most affluent areas of the country. This hides the astonishing fact that there are 10 wards in Oxfordshire classed as within the 20% most deprived areas in England. One of these, Barton and Sandhill lies wholly within the BOR boundary with a further four of these wards sitting partly within, or immediately adjacent the boundary (Littlemore, Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill and Iffley and Northfield Brook).

Other areas within the BOR boundary with relatively higher levels of deprivation² include:

- Piddington, Lower Arncott and Upper Arncott – all are within the 4th most deprived decile,
- Bicester West Parish Ward - several neighbourhoods are within the 3rd most deprived decile
- Bicester South Parish Ward and East Parish Ward - several neighbourhoods are among the 5th most deprived.

The Oxfordshire Director for Public Health reports that inequalities are getting worse and that identifying and tackling these inequalities will require a collaborative approach with a broad range of partners. To date, BBOWT has had little contact with residents and community groups in these areas so we are starting from a fairly low base in terms of current engagement. However, BBOWT and several programme partners have made strong strategic commitments to increase the participation in nature recovery by more diverse groups.

Development proposed to the North-East of Oxford (Thornhill) and North of Oxford (north of Bayswater Brook) will increase the demand for access to natural spaces, including in places that are currently relatively isolated (i.e. Barton). This would be spreading out from Risinghurst and Shotover towards Bernwood, and from Marston/Barton towards Sydlings Copse. In addition, the development north of Bayswater Brook will be large (around 1400 houses) and could potentially sever links to nature from Oxford or create new ones. With these new communities come new pressures and opportunities that need to be considered if the incoming people are to benefit and contribute to the surrounding landscape.

RBOR initiative – key objectives

The **overarching aim** of the RBOR Initiative is: to build the foundations with key stakeholders, landowners, land managers, businesses and communities to enable landscape and species recovery in Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray over the long-term for the benefit of wildlife and people.

The final list of Initiative objectives will be refined and extended over the course of the Development Phase in discussion with key stakeholders, communities and partners.

Draft objectives for the RBOR Initiative include:

- to coordinate nature and landscape recovery action in BOR in line with local, regional and national policies for nature recovery.
- To enhance the BOR landscape for wildlife and contribute to the National Nature Recovery Network by restoring and connecting up key habitats (species-rich grassland, floodplain meadow, woodland, hedgerows and freshwater) across the landscape.

- To encourage, advise and support landowners, land managers and farmers to manage their land more effectively for nature and landscape recovery alongside commercial farming operations.
- To explore how different communities interact with the BOR landscape and heritage and co-create projects to nurture, strengthen and repair a sense of connection with nature and the local environment.
- To enthuse and empower a diverse range of people who live, work or study in BOR to enjoy and contribute to nature recovery in this landscape.
- To deliver opportunities for public engagement with the landscape throughout the Green Infrastructure network
- To reduce recreational impacts on key wildlife sites
- To enable communities to enhance their greenspaces for wildlife

We are currently working up a series of projects and intervention logic alongside a diverse range of organisations and partners which meet the programme need and will deliver scheme objectives (see Appendix 1 for details of draft projects).

Following completion of the Development Phase, it is the intention that partners will then submit a Round 2 application to NLHF which would unlock a further 5 years of delivery funding (up to £4.2 million). The Delivery Phase activities and commitments to be made in the Round 2 application will not form part of this contract for services.

Area Action Plan

BBOWT is looking to contract a consultant or agency to build on work already undertaken by the RBOR Initiative partners to scope and plan key projects. This piece of work will be submitted as part of the phase II funding application to the programme's funder, the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Scope of Services required

The purpose of this contract is to create an Area Action Plan to bring together all elements of the RBOR programme into a coherent document outlining the vision for the area, its importance and the aspirations of all the project strands. This contract will also involve the design of user surveys to understand barriers to use of local greenspaces to inform future activities.

Specifically, we anticipate the consultants will:

- **Review the draft area appraisal** and work with partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries and the data generated in the development phase to finalise this document describing the area's heritage, threats and opportunities and who it is important to;
- **Review the existing strategy and objectives** and work with partners to **create an overarching vision** for the landscape that addresses the needs of local people;
- Work with the Programme Lead and partners to **create a robust Project Plan for all capital and people engagement activities** throughout the delivery phase of the programme;
- Work with the Community Engagement officer to **incorporate conversations with local communities** into all project plans;
- Work with the Community Engagement officer to **understand which audiences are missing from engagement and develop a plan to address the gaps**;

- **Work with the monitoring and evaluation consultant** to ensure proposed activities have relevant evaluation criteria;
- **Design of and analyse data from a user survey**, working with the Nature and Greenspaces Officer to ensure barriers to access are understood and that we access non-users;
- Desk based **research into accessibility of key sites** across the region.

Outputs and deliverables

- A detailed **Area Appraisal**, developed with stakeholders and intended beneficiaries;
- A **Vision and Strategy** embedded in projects, agreed on by the Partnership;
- A detailed **Project Plan** outlining activities, responsibilities, beneficiaries, costs, risks and evaluation criteria;
- A **Management Plan** to be agreed on by the Partnership outlining how benefits will be maintained for 10 years post-project;
- A **user survey** that can be completed in multiple ways by both users and non-users of greenspace across the region;
- **Analysis of user survey data** clearly outlining its limitations and any recommendations for future surveys;
- **An accessibility summary for key sites in the RBOR** outlining public transport links, rights of way and permissive path networks, facilities, car park capacities and condition.

Budget and Schedule

- Up to £50,000 inclusive of VAT is available for this contract.
- Payments will be agreed according to a set of **milestones** achieved.
- This contract is to be completed by **30th June 2026**

Available materials

- General information about the RBOR Initiative
- All draft project plans, application documents and information on target audiences, including anticipated outputs and outcomes;
- The Draft RBOR Area Appraisal
- NLHF guidance on Area Action Plans and Activity Plans
- NLHF strategic plan and NLHF application guidance for Heritage Grants

Contract management

This contract will be managed by the RBOR Programme Lead, BBOWT. This contract will involve working closely with other members of the RBOR delivery team and project partners, building on their strong understanding of the projects, experience of the landscape and knowledge of what lessons have been learnt from past projects. It is critical that the Area Action Plan is realistic in its scope and resource requirements in the project plan section and is owned by the RBOR delivery team and wider Partnership. As this contract will involve stakeholder engagement it is envisaged

that the contractor would be able to visit the area on a frequent basis and therefore we will take into account locality of the contractor when assessing bids.

The work will take place between 5 May 2025 and 30 June 2026.

Expertise and Experience

It is expected that the successful consultant will meet the following criteria.

Mandatory

- Previous experience creating project plans or area actions plans.
- Previous experience in research and data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative
- Good writing skills
- Experience using MS Office

Desirable

- Knowledge of the RBOR area
- Experience of monitoring and evaluation
- Experience of community engagement