

Thames Valley

Environmental Records Centre



Sharing environmental information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire

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TVERC BUSINESS PLAN

APRIL 2017 – MARCH 2022



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) is the environmental records centre for Berkshire and Oxfordshire. TVERC is a partnership organisation between all twelve local authorities across Berkshire and Oxfordshire and the Environment Agency. TVERC collects, manages, analyses and shares environmental data with a wide range of customers to enable evidenced based decision making about the natural environment.

At present there is a great deal of uncertainty about the future of TVERC. Local government is continuing to make savings in its budgets as well as Oxfordshire looking at unitary options for the county; all local authorities are fundamentally changing the way they function. Development remains buoyant, but negotiations around the UK's exit from the EU could impact the economy. New technologies and ways of working present both opportunities and challenges. However, despite all of the uncertainty, high quality data and information will continue to be vital in the sustainable management of the natural environment.

This business plan sets out both the challenges and opportunities for TVERC over the next five years and details the proposed objectives for achieving a stable and impartial organization. It is an ambitious plan, but one that can be achieved through good governance and leadership.

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VISION

MISSION STATEMENT

TVERC is the only organization in Berkshire and Oxfordshire providing a comprehensive ecological information hub through which critical knowledge can be shared to support scientific research and responsible decision-making.

TVERC is at the centre of a network of recorders and data-users in Berkshire and Oxfordshire and is the regional delivery node of the National Biodiversity Network.

TVERC is a not-for-profit organisation run by a partnership. All those contributing to TVERC help manage our environmental resources sustainably for current and future use.

Data 	<p>We collect wildlife information from a wide variety of sources in a coordinated way; enabling information-sharing between recorders and decision-makers.</p>
Information 	<p>We are a specialist team with the skills, knowledge and dedication to make complex data understandable and available to all who need it.</p>
Knowledge	<p>This constantly improving, high quality resource is accessible by everyone so they have the knowledge they need to carry out scientific research and make responsible decisions.</p>

WHAT IS A LERC?



Local Environmental Record Centres are “*Not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area. LERCs support and collaborate with a network of experts to ensure information is robust, and make information products and services accessible to a range of audiences including decision-makers, the public, and researchers*”

Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC)



FUTURE VISION

TVERC is an independent source of high quality comprehensive environmental information. Our broad customer base means we are financially sustainable and are able to provide strong evidence for environmental issues into the next generation.

TVERC is a leader in its field known for its creative solutions in interpreting the natural environment for a broad range of organisations and individuals who understand and value the work we do. Research and innovation as a result of collaboration drive our development so that we are a respected partner in providing an evidence base for policy.

TVERC is at the centre of a network of recorders and users providing valued support as part of a partnership and engages with a future generation of recorders.

Our team maintains strong connections with volunteers, recorders and partners. Together, we have the skills, expertise and knowledge to promote the recognition and value of local data in decision-making at all levels.

Our environment is better as a result of decisions made using our data and information.

GOALS FOR ACHIEVING OUR VISION

Working towards and ultimately achieving the following goals will ensure we achieve our future vision for TVERC.

1. Be independent
2. Maintain and continue to expand a database of high quality comprehensive environmental information
3. Maintain and engage with a broad customer base
4. Develop and offer creative solutions to interpret natural environment data.
5. Collaborate or lead on research and innovation to drive our development
6. Be a respected partner in providing evidence base for policies.
7. Remain at the centre of a network of recorders
8. Provide valued support to, and engagement with, current and future recorders and partners.
9. Employ valued and respected staff who retain and develop their skills, expertise and knowledge.
10. We live in a better environment in Berks and Oxon as a result of decisions made using our data and information.



OBJECTIVES

Each of the 10 goals are set out below, with relevant objectives then defined. These objectives are considered necessary for the achievement of the long term vision for TVERC. They provide the road map to ensure business management decisions collectively and continuously steer a course towards achieving the long term goals and vision.

1. BE INDEPENDENT

TVERC has reviewed various hosting and governance options and concluded in May 2016 that remaining hosted by Oxfordshire County Council is, currently, the best option. However, circumstances may change in the future, including encouragement by Oxfordshire County Council to become an independent organisation. To ensure we are ready and able to react to this or similar eventually we will set up a Community Interest Company (CiC) or Foundation Charitable Incorporated Organisation (FCIO) which will initially be run in parallel with TVERC as hosted by Oxon CC. By seeking out relevant examples of organisations with experience of this changed status we will learn from their experience to ensure efficient and painless transition if and when necessary.

Objective - Set up a CiC or FCIO by April 2018.

Objective – Write Strategy for Independence (for becoming CiC or FCIO).

Objective – Generate and maintain good relationships with similar independent organisations in Berks and Oxon.



2. HOLD A DATABASE OF HIGH QUALITY COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

We have robust processes for dealing with the vast amounts of data we receive and collect. We have a detailed Data Policies and Procedures document which is updated at least annually. Our IT strategy accompanies this Business Plan.

Objective – Follow recommendations set out in the IT Strategy.

Our Data Policies and Procedures list current data sources. We will be expanding the types of data we hold in future, for example soils, water quality data, landscape information, information on where habitats are being managed for biodiversity outside of designated sites, and areas which could be managed to enhance biodiversity.

Objective – Investigate and catalogue datasets to obtain by April 2018. Review ‘wish-list’ regularly in light of external changes to data management to ensure minimal/no duplication to keep TVERC data catalogue fresh, efficient and uniquely valuable to customers.

Objective – Obtain datasets by April 2019

Objective – Increase supply and quality of data from ecological consultants

3. ENGAGE WITH A BROAD CUSTOMER BASE

Our data are used by a diverse customer base, but within this, TVERC is currently reliant on a small number of customers for the majority of our income. 64% comes from local authorities and central government, 31% from developers and only 5% from other customers (see Table 1). This is a potential point of risk as income from local and central government could decrease if budget cuts are imposed by central government. Income from developers is largely reliant on the house-building market (and Local Authorities requesting appropriate ecological survey to support planning applications, which in turn is reliant on Authorities having appropriate in house ecological advice) so could decrease significantly if the market stalls or shrinks. We are seeking to diversify our income stream by increasing income from other sectors such as community groups, conservation NGOs, university researchers, land management advisors and Parish & Town Councils.

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TABLE 1: CURRENT AND FUTURE CUSTOMERS

Sources of Income	Amount (£) 2016-17	Aim 2017 onwards
Community groups	£2,000	↑↑
Parish & Town Councils	£0	↑↑
Conservation NGOs	£5,000	↑
University Researchers	£0	↑
Land management advisors	£0	↑
Utilities companies	£5,250	-
Central government	£23,000	-
Local authorities	£160,000	-
Developers	£88,000	-
TOTAL	£283,250	

Objective - Achieve funding for at least 150 “project days” in total from non-government and non-developer sources each year from 2017/18 onwards.

Objective – Develop and promote our services to Parish and Community Groups by April 2018.



4. USE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO INTERPRET NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DATA.

We are aiming make data provision more efficient by automating processes where possible, whilst still retaining the high quality of our data reports and GIS layers (see Table 2). We are aiming to increase the amount of time we spend on data analysis and modelling as this is an area where we are uniquely placed (due to our immense database) to provide these services at a very competitive price. We will also aim to increase our ecological survey and land management services, although this market-place is more saturated with ecological consultancies and some wildlife NGOs so a smaller increase is more likely.

TABLE 2: WORKSTREAMS

Workstreams	Days 2016-17	Percentage 2016-17	Aim 2017 onwards
Data analysis and modelling	265.9	47%	↑↑
Ecological survey and land management advice	119.5	21%	↑
Data provision (GIS datasets and data search reports)	180.1	32%	-
TOTAL	565.5		

We will ensure that that existing customers continue to be happy with the existing products and services we provide. Table 3 highlights the new products/services which we will focus on developing.

Objective – Develop new products/ services outlined in table 3 by April 2018.

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TABLE 3: NEW CUSTOMERS AND PRODUCTS / SERVICES

Sector	Customer	Product / Service
Land Management	Land management advisors	Data reports (based on a search of our database and on-the-ground surveys) tailored to those providing land management advice and to support agri-environment applications. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Woodland / forestry - Grassland / meadows - Wetlands
Development Management	Local Planning Authorities	Bat alert GIS layers
		GCN habitat suitability to inform strategic EPS licensing.
		Green Infrastructure
	Ecological Consultants	Ecological networks and connectivity mapping
Spatial Planning	Parish and Town Councils	Biodiversity accounting – local metric calculation for use in the determination of net loss/gain.
	Community Groups	Data search reports or interactive web-maps tailored to non-experts
	Local Planning Authorities AONBs	Parish-level green infrastructure, wildlife corridor and local green space identification for Neighbourhood Plans. Natural Capital accounting
Research and Education	University researchers and NGOs.	TVERC included in funding bids to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide data for research. - Engage with known recorders to increase participation in citizen-science projects. - Ensure additional data is collected properly so it can be used. - Ensure data is shared with decision-makers in a format they will use.



5. COLLABORATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DRIVES OUR DEVELOPMENT

We have links with Imperial College London (Silwood Park), Oxford University, Oxford Brookes University and Reading University. These links work well for attracting student volunteers to carry out data management and project work, particularly for the 'Consultancy' modules in the MSc courses run by both Reading and Oxford Brookes Universities. Links with researchers are less strong, although we are involved in an Oxford University EIC project on green infrastructure mapping around Bicester.

Objective – Develop links with the researchers at the four universities in Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

6. WE ARE A RESPECTED PARTNER IN PROVIDING AN EVIDENCE BASE FOR POLICIES.

Making policy relies on a robust evidence base. TVERC already provide trusted and scientifically robust evidence on which others base policy. We will continue to do so, as well as developing new products and services, based on sound science, that are trusted and respected by our partners and customers.

Objective – Develop products which provide a sound evidence base for policies.

7. WE REMAIN AT THE CENTRE OF A NETWORK OF RECORDERS

TVERC has good relationships with local recorders and recording groups who are a key source of our data. We will strengthen these relationships so that TVERC remains the hub for biological recording in Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Objective – Actively consult recorders on their requirements and take action.

8. PROVIDE VALUED SUPPORT TO, AND ENGAGEMENT WITH CURRENT AND FUTURE RECORDERS AND PARTNERS.

Biological recorders are essential to the future success of TVERC and to evidence based decision making. TVERC already provides support to recorders, but we will better communicate the support available to recorders. We will also communicate the value of recorders to other TVERC partners and data users. We will actively encourage participation in biological recording to secure the next generation of recorders by providing support and training as necessary.

Objective – Seek secure funding stream for the retention of the Volunteer Coordinator post beyond August 2018.



Objective – Devise a method for collecting data on the amount of volunteer time spent on recording each year.

Objective – Develop online recording website so it better meets TVERC and recorders needs to by April 2019

Objective – Develop training courses and other resources (e.g. website) for future recorders by April 2018.

Objective – Follow recommendations in Communications Strategy.

9. OUR VALUED AND RESPECTED STAFF RETAIN AND DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS, EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE.

Highly skilled and experienced staff are key to TVERC's continued success. Volunteers are also vitally important in helping TVERC to maintain its high standards. We will continue to make our team feel valued.

Objective – Retain existing staff by supporting them through good management and providing in-house training and a budget for external training where appropriate.

Objective – Continue to recruit office volunteers

10. WE LIVE IN A BETTER ENVIRONMENT AS A RESULT OF DECISIONS MADE USING OUR DATA AND INFORMATION.

A healthy functioning natural environment is vital for supporting a healthy and functioning society, as well as being of intrinsic importance. TVERC will monitor the state of the natural environment for the benefit of everyone.

Objective – Monitor the state of our environment in Berkshire and Oxfordshire using current and new indicators.

Objective – Develop a method of collecting data on habitat condition outside of designated sites.

Objective – Develop a method for assessing 'favourable conservation status' of protected species.



OUR DATA

TVERC aims to hold all available information about the plants, animals, wildlife habitats and important wildlife and geological sites in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. This information is not available anywhere else.

TVERC holds a database of almost 2 million species records, of which about 300,000 are protected and notable species. About 80% of our species records are from the last 30 years, and 12% from the last 5 years. All species records received by TVERC are validated and verified before entering them into our database. Full details of our validation and verification processes are contained within our 'Data Policies and Procedures' document which is updated constantly.

We hold Local Wildlife Site and Local Geological Site boundaries and site descriptions for every site. We also hold data for BBOWT and RSPB nature reserves, Woodland Trust Sites, Ancient Woodland, Local Nature Reserves and national sites.

We hold habitat data on NERC Act S41 Habitats of Principal importance (previously called UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats) and other habitat data. Aerial photographs and field surveys are used to identify and map habitats to field level. The data also tells you how certain we are that the habitat has been correctly identified, using determination and interpretation descriptions. We provide data-users with metadata and user-guides to help ensure they are aware of this.

We also hold the boundary data for Conservation Target Areas in Oxfordshire and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Berkshire. These landscape-scale conservation areas are used by the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership and Wild Oxfordshire to coordinate biodiversity work in Berkshire & Oxfordshire.

We will be expanding the types of data we hold in future, for example water quality data, information on where habitats are being managed for biodiversity outside of designated sites, and areas which could be managed to enhance biodiversity.



STAKEHOLDERS / AUDIENCE / MARKET

CUSTOMERS / DATA-USERS

The following sections outline how TVERC data and services are used by customers.

LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES

TVERC data is most frequently used by the in-house ecology / biodiversity officer, but it has many other uses too...

Development Control Planners: Deciding who to consult, whether to ask applicants for ecological surveys, assessing the impacts of a development and indicating what mitigation or compensation may be required. Ensure planning decisions comply with planning policy and legislation.

Policy Planners: Comparing the benefits and impacts of allocating strategic sites for housing, roads, minerals and waste in different locations. Ensuring plans and policies comply with planning policy and legislation.

Highways Engineers: Avoid breaching wildlife law by checking for legally protected species records before starting maintenance work (e.g. water voles in culverts and bats in bridges). This will help prevent costly delays to maintenance work if they're discovered once work has started.

Tree / Arb. Officers: Avoid breaching wildlife law by including a check for bat roosts and nesting birds in standard risk assessments before tree works/vegetation removal. This will help prevent costly delays to maintenance work if they're discovered once work has started.

Parks Officers: Find out what wildlife is already in the local area, and what could be. Use this information to manage parks to encourage wildlife, which will increase the mental and physical wellbeing of local people and increase community cohesion.

Landscape Officers: Advise that local, native species are used for planting schemes, perhaps even some nationally rare or scarce plants.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY...



“TVERC data is essential to help me and our planning officers in ensuring that we take full account of biodiversity constraints when making planning decisions. The locations of protected species are a particular problem when making planning decisions as they can be found almost anywhere and affect all types of planning application. The records held by TVERC are particularly helpful in guiding us where we should be asking for surveys; to help with this TVERC has developed a buffered species layer as an early warning of where and when certain mobile species may be found. With the help of this data we are able to make better decisions, avoid lengthy delays in decisions (particularly where species are picked up at pre-application stage) and most importantly conserve biodiversity”.

Dominic Lamb
South Oxfordshire and
Vale of White Horse District Councils



NATIONAL GOVERNMENT (ENVIRONMENT AGENCY)

EA ‘in house’ work (e.g. capital and revenue work – Flood risk, Navigation work, physical habitat creation or restoration work e.g. WFD): Data enables a strategic overview on where to prioritise effort for screening to minimise negative impact and, where possible, target increasingly scarce funding to provide the greatest gains.

EA Regulatory work (e.g. EA permits for abstraction, discharge, waste, flood risk activity permits, impoundment licenses, herbicide approvals, fish movement, etc.): Local and National permitting teams use pre-determined screening thresholds relevant to various habitat and species data in order to deliver standard responses or engage expert teams for a more bespoke consideration of the impacts. Also used to help determine the type of permit issued (no priority habitats or species present, amongst other factors, might lead to an ‘exemption’ being registered, rather than a ‘standard rules’ or ‘bespoke’ permit, for example).

Statutory consultee role in development planning: In-house planning teams use data to decide whether to consult teams for bespoke responses to the planning authority or use of a standard response (or ‘no comment’). The EA concentrates on aquatic and riparian species and habitats for which the EA has a particular remit.

Advice and guidance: The EA uses TVERC data to help inform responses to partner organisations and the general public – directing the enquirer back to TVERC where appropriate/necessary.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY...



“Access to quality TVERC data (and that of other LRCs) is vital for us in order to fulfil statutory requirements of our ‘core’ legislation (plus the more recent NERC Act requirement applicable to all public bodies). Access to the priority species and habitats data helps us ensure our responses are risk-based and proportionate.”

Daryl Buck

Environment Agency

UTILITIES (THAMES WATER)

TVERC data is essential for utilities companies when planning maintenance and development work. The data helps reduce the risk of costly impacts on protected species, habitats and wildlife sites.



DEVELOPERS

TVERC data is an essential component of environmental impact assessments carried out by consultants on behalf of developers, and submitted as part of planning applications. Ecological consultants use our data to help them decide which species to survey for, and to make recommendations for mitigation and compensation for the impacts of development.

CONSERVATION ORGANISATIONS

Large and small conservation organisations use TVERC data and expertise for land management, public education, research and citizen science. For example we're working with RSPB on the Oxford Swift City project providing advice to ensure the data is collected in a way it can be used and that there are mechanisms for checking its accuracy. TVERC can ensure that data collected via citizen-science projects is supplied to all of the local planning authorities in Oxfordshire and Berkshire in a format they can easily use for decision-making.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY...



“Being able to call on TVERC as a one-stop-shop repository for reliable species records and designated site information gives a high level of comfort that relevant background data are caught and accounted for early in impact assessment procedures. Without such data, the risk is always there of important information or records jumping out of the woodwork late in the day, which can result in significant and costly delays being caused to development projects”

Dominic Woodfield
BioScan
Ecological Consultancy



RECORDERS AND RECORDING GROUPS

Recorders and Recording Groups use TVERC data for research, planning where to carry out surveys and publishing atlases of species distributions.

RESEARCHERS / UNIVERSITIES

TVERC data and datasets are used for education and research by students, teachers and scientists. We have links with Imperial College London (Silwood Park), Oxford University, Oxford Brookes University and Reading University. These links work well for attracting student volunteers to carry out data management and project work. Links with researchers are less strong.

COMMUNITY & PARISH GROUPS

Community and Parish Groups have been encouraged by central government to produce Neighborhood Development or Community-Led Plans. TVERC can assist communities by providing data and maps to support plans and Local Green Spaces designations, carry out surveys, identify wildlife corridors, manage wildlife data and provide advice on sources of funding for community projects.

LAND-OWNERS AND LAND MANAGERS

We currently provide a small number of data search reports each year to landowners and carry out ecological surveys where the information will be used to inform land management. We do not carry out ecological surveys for proposed developments, as this service is provided by ecological consultants. We could provide data reports (based on a search of our database and on-the-ground surveys) tailored to those providing land management advice and to support agri-environment applications.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY...



“It has always been a pleasure working with the TVERC team. TVERC’s excellent work creating a complete habitat map for Berkshire underpinned much of our bird atlas survey work and has provided a valuable tool in our online presentation of distribution maps.

TVERC has a very important role in informing planning and conservation decisions, which is important to us, so we share our bird records database and we have always had a constructive dialogue on conservation issues, such as the designation of BOAs and LWS.

We have received grants from TVERC for atlas work and have made a grant to them to help support the Be Wild project. Both were handled quickly and without red tape and, I believe, were productive.”

Renton Righelato
Berks Ornithological Club



MARKET

We are in a time of rapid change and uncertainty politically so we will ensure that we keep aware of the wider political landscape. We will work with other organisations that have similar issues and work together where appropriate. We will diversify our income streams to buffer against likely cuts in local government funding, and a possible downturn in the housing market.

There is a push from central government to make all data 'open' and freely accessible to all. There has so far been little acknowledgment of the cost of collating, checking and updating data. The Open Data Institute has stated that 'open' data does not have to be 'open' at full resolution. TVERC will work towards making as much data as we have permission for 'open' in such a way as to not jeopardize our business model e.g. data more than ten years old at reduced resolution. This will also have the benefit of promoting the data TVERC holds, as data-users will be invited to contact TVERC and arrange a data search or data license for access to all of the most recent data at full resolution.

Internet tools for identifying and recording wildlife sightings are increasingly popular, as are 'citizen-science' projects where the general public are encouraged by conservation organisations to help record wildlife. These are great ways of getting more people involved in conservation, which is a very important aim. However, the resulting data is often not shared with the LERC, and not collected in a way which means it can be properly checked, and therefore used by decision-makers.



COMPETITORS

No other organisation has a database which matches ours in terms of quality or quantity of data. We hold a database of 1.7 million species records, and habitats mapped to field level.

However, the NBN-Gateway (soon to be re-launched as the Living Atlas) is seen by some of our current and potential customers as a suitable alternative source of species data, and datasets from DEFRA as suitable alternatives for sites and habitat data. We need to ensure that customers are aware of the lower quality of these datasets.

There are also commercial companies springing up offering data analysis and modelling services (e.g. <http://www.jubilee-computing.co.uk/index.html>) in addition to many ecological consultancies who are branching out into this area (e.g. <http://www.thomsonecology.com/geospatial>). None of these companies will have access to our data unless they pay for a data license, but they may be able to persuade their customers that they don't need it, or they may be able to undercut our prices if they consider such work a loss-leader. We will emphasize the value of our data, and also the collaborative approach we take with customers which ensures they get the results they want, rather than what we think they want.

Other Local Environmental Records Centre are NOT competitors, as we have agreements through the Association of Local Environmental Records Centre not to overlap geographically.



PRICING, PRODUCTS & PROMOTION

CHARGING POLICY

WHAT SERVICES DO TVERC CHARGE FOR?

TVERC charges customers for carrying out data searches, habitat surveys, digital mapping of sites and habitats, species surveys and data analysis projects. TVERC charges for the time involved in managing, processing and extracting the data and producing presentable results and not for the data itself.

TVERC may also make a charge for time taken to provide information and advice, though this can be waived in some cases, for local groups or students for instance. In these cases we will invite a donation to cover the time taken to collate the data. This is not compulsory but will help TVERC to continue to provide our services.

WHY DO TVERC CHARGE?

The data TVERC hold in our database takes time to collect and manage. This work is carried out by both volunteers and paid staff to ensure the data we hold and provide to you is of a high quality and we can keep our charges as low as possible. Our funding partners (local authorities and the Environment Agency) cover the cost of part of this work through annual funding agreements. Currently the only way for private sector organisations, individuals or community groups to contribute is by paying for data services at the point of use, when they request a data search. As a non-profit organisation, TVERC uses our income to sustain the services we provide to the local recording community, who in turn share their data with us, so we can share it with everyone. The cost of collating and managing the TVERC database is spread between all our funding sources, which results in economies of scale for everyone.

TABLE 4: SOURCES OF INCOME

Sources of Income	Amount (£)	Percentage
Local authorities	£160,000	56%
Developers	£88,000	31%
Central government (Environment Agency)	£23,000	8%
Utilities companies	£5,250	2%
Conservation NGOs	£5,000	2%
Community groups	£2,000	1%
TOTAL	£283,250	100%



CHARGING STRUCTURE

TVERC has charges set out for the provision, gathering and analysis of data. All fees will be subject to a 5% increase on 1st April 2017 and an additional 5% increase in 1st April 2020. These increases are to ensure that TVERC continues to cover the costs of collating and managing the TVERC database.

TABLE 5: DATA SEARCH CHARGES

The charges below are prior to the addition of VAT, currently 20%.

Standard charges for data searches (for commercial companies and governmental bodies)	2017/18 - 2019/20	2020/12 - 2022/23
Single species (or bats) up to 2km buffer	£80	£85
All species up to 1km buffer	£110	£120
All species up to 2km buffer	£110	£120
Species up to 2km & sites 1km buffer	£155	£165
Species up to 2km & sites 2km buffer	£200	£215
Species up to 2km; sites & habitats 1km buffer	£250	£270
Species up to 2km; sites & habitats 2km buffer	£300	£320
Hourly rate for bespoke searches	£110	£120

Reduced rate charges for data searches*	2017/18 - 2019/20	2020/12 - 2022/23
Single species (or bats) up to 2km buffer	£40	£45
All species up to 2km buffer	£55	£60
All species up to 2km buffer	£55	£60
Species up to 2km & sites 1km buffer	£80	£85
Species up to 2km & sites 2km buffer	£100	£110
Species up to 2km; sites & habitats 1km buffer	£125	£135
Species up to 2km; sites & habitats 2km buffer	£150	£160
Hourly rate for bespoke searches	£55	£60

TABLE 6: DATA LICENCE CHARGES

The charges below are prior to the addition of VAT, currently 20%. These charges apply for data covering more than a 10km square or a 5km buffer. For smaller areas, a data search should be requested.

* Total charge = cost per ha multiplied by no. hectare PLUS flat rate per dataset

Standard charges for data licences (for commercial companies and governmental bodies)	2017-18 to 2019-20			2020-21 to 2022-23		
	Annual cost	Cost for smaller areas*		Annual cost	Cost for smaller areas*	
		Cost per hectare	Flat rate per dataset		Cost per hectare	Flat rate per dataset
Invasive species	£1,065	£0.02	£105	£1,135	£0.02	£115
Protected & notable species	£5,325	£0.06	£105	£5,670	£0.07	£115
Local Wildlife and Geological Sites	£5,325	£0.06	£105	£5,670	£0.07	£115
Habitats	£5,325	£0.06	£105	£5,670	£0.07	£115
Conservation Target Areas / Biodiversity Opportunity Areas	£110			£120		
Reduced rate charges for data licences (Charities and Community Interest Companies)	2017-18 to 2019-20			2020-21 to 2022-23		
	Annual cost	Cost for smaller areas*		Annual cost	Cost for smaller areas*	
		Cost per hectare	Flat rate per dataset		Cost per hectare	Flat rate per dataset
Invasive species	£270	£0.01	£35	£290	£0.01	£40
Protected & notable species	£1,330	£0.02	£35	£1,420	£0.02	£40
Local Wildlife and Geological Sites	£1,330	£0.02	£35	£1,420	£0.02	£40
Habitats	£1,330	£0.02	£35	£1,420	£0.02	£40
Conservation Target Areas / Biodiversity Opportunity Areas	£35			£40		

**TABLE 7: DATA ANALYSIS & MODELLING AND ECOLOGICAL SURVEY & LAND MANAGEMENT
ADVICE CHARGES**

Previous to April 2017, the 'reduced rate' charges for project work were £350 per day. However, as we are seeking to increase our income from the customers who would qualify for the reduced rate, it was decided to reduce this rate to help encourage these customers to use TVERC services.

Project work - daily rates	2017/18 - 2019/20	2020/12 - 2022/23
Standard charge*	£420	£440
Reduced rate**	£275	£285
Funding Partners***	£275	£285
* For commercial companies		
** For Parish & Town Councils, Charities, Community Interest Companies, landowners using the data for conservation purposes		
*** For Partners signed up to the MoU		

TABLE 8: LOCAL AUTHORITIES CHARGES

TVERC is funded by all of the local authorities in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. As each TVERC funding partner contributes to the overall collection, processing and distribution of environmental information, there are efficiencies of scale which provide excellent value-for-money for funding partners. Authority contributions towards the annual cost of collating and managing the TVERC database are based on the geographic area and population size of their administrative area. Local authorities with a larger geographic area are likely to have more data associated with them so get a greater benefit of TVERC's services. However, local authorities with a higher population are likely to have more pressure for competing land-uses and therefore more potential conflicts between development and the natural environment so have a greater need of TVERC's services.

	2017-18 to 2019-20				2020-21 to 2022-23			
	Data	AMR	SDL160	TOTAL	Data	AMR	SDL160	TOTAL
Bracknell Forest	£6,815	£955	£446	£8,216	£7,155	£1,005	£470	£8,630
Cherwell DC	£7,088	£1,148		£8,236	£7,445	£1,205		£8,650
Oxford City C	£2,798			£2,798	£2,940			£2,940
RB Windsor & Maidenhead	£10,374		£578	£10,952	£10,895		£610	£11,505
Reading BC	£4,242		£284	£4,526	£4,455		£300	£4,755
Slough BC	£3,079		£215	£3,294	£3,235		£230	£3,465
South Oxon	£6,623	£955		£7,578	£6,955	£1,005		£7,960
Vale DC	£6,623	£955		£7,578	£6,955	£1,005		£7,960
West Berks DC	£22,921	£955	£2,148	£26,024	£24,070	£1,005	£2,255	£27,330
West Oxon DC	£7,644	£955		£8,599	£8,025	£1,005		£9,030
Wokingham BC	£9,508		£709	£10,217	£9,985	£1,005	£744	£11,735
Oxfordshire CC	£33,075			£33,075*	£34,730			£34,730

* Oxfordshire County Council's contribution includes an 'in kind' contribution of £16,500 for hosting costs.

COMMUNICATION & PROMOTION

TVERC has a Communication Strategy which supports our business plan by retaining existing customers, attracting new customers and supporting our recorder network. TVERC communicates with a wide range of audiences from local authority planners and Councilors to environmental consultants working on behalf of developers to local recorders and conservation groups to nature conservation professionals. Our communication needs to be tailored to this wide range of audiences, as all are essential to the successful functioning of TVERC. Our key messages include:

- Who are TVERC and what do we do
- Why are TVERC important to customers, partners, recorders etc.
- Why come to TVERC? What is our USP?
- What services can we provide to customers?
- How we support recorders, how we use their data?
- Messages around data ownership, management and sharing
- Knowledge and skills of the TVERC team

PRODUCTS & SERVICES

TVERC staff have a great deal of ecological expertise and we have carried out numerous projects for a variety of organisations. The extensive information that TVERC holds on species, habitats and sites and the expertise of TVERC staff in ecology, planning and surveying can be used for such projects. TVERC also works with other Local Records Centres to undertake projects on a regional basis in the South East.

TABLE 9: TIME SPENT ON SERVICES

Service	Days	Percentage
Data analysis and presentation	265.9	39%
Data provision (GIS datasets and data search reports)	180.1	26%
Survey and land management advice	119.5	17%
Supporting recorders and recording groups	63.5	9%
Training and education	57.1	8%
TOTAL	686.1	100%



RAW OPEN DATA

Where we have permission from the data owners, we upload species data over 10 years old onto the NBN-Gateway at the reduced resolution of 2km square. Data-users are encouraged to contact TVERC for more recent data, and for access to the data at full resolution.

GIS DATASETS AND PDF REPORTS

TVERC aims to hold all available information about the plants, animals, wildlife habitats and important wildlife and geological sites in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. TVERC holds a database of over 1.7 million species records plus Local Wildlife Site and Local Geological Site boundaries and information and NERC Act S41 Habitats of Principal importance (previously called UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats) and other habitat data.

We also hold the boundary data for Conservation Target Areas in Oxfordshire and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Berkshire. These landscape-scale conservation areas are used by the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership and Wild Oxfordshire to coordinate biodiversity work in Berkshire & Oxfordshire.

Our standard format for providing biodiversity data is a desktop biodiversity report, supplied as a pdf document, along with an Excel spreadsheet for species data. We can provide GIS datasets for habitats and sites if required. The biodiversity report is suitable for requests about information on sites with up to a 5km buffer. For data covering more than a 10km square or a 5km buffer, data is provided in GIS layers. The supply of data in this form is subject to a digital licensing agreement which is usually valid for 1 year.



DATA ANALYSIS & MODELLING

Using existing TVERC data, or data collected specifically for the purpose, TVERC can carry out data analysis and interpretation projects. These include:

- Assessing habitat connectivity for protected species, to identify core areas, important corridors, barriers to dispersal and opportunities for improving connectivity
- Identifying ecological networks and opportunity mapping to focus landscape scale conservation efforts
- Carrying out green infrastructure audits and identifying GI opportunities
- Assessing the value of the natural environment and identifying opportunities for enhancement, such as the assessing the value of trees to urban populations and securing investment in their protection and enhancement

ECOLOGICAL SURVEY & LAND MANAGEMENT ADVICE

TVERC's highly qualified and experienced ecologists can carry out ecological surveys for land management or nature conservation purposes. We can provide the following:

- Surveys, assessments and data to support Countryside Stewardship applications, such as Farm Environment records maps, building wildlife assessments, grassland assessments or pond assessments
- Hedgerow surveys to assess against Hedgerow Regulations criteria for Important Hedgerows
- Woodland surveys to support English Woodland Grant Scheme applications
- Species surveys to inform conservation strategies or action
- Monitoring of habitats or species against agreed or proposed conservation action

TVERC do not carry out surveys for development applications. We also provide advice to landowners on how to manage their land to protect and enhance the natural environment. The survey results and other datasets are used to update the digital habitat mapping of the area.



TRAINING & EDUCATION

TVERC can provide training for habitat and species surveys, biological recording and identification and in using GIS. TVERC run a training programme offering courses to teach survey skills, which are primarily aimed at beginners. In 2016 these included courses on otters, water vole surveying, bumblebee ID, winter tree ID, woodland plant and grass ID. TVERC can also offer bespoke training for organisations and projects to train people in biological recording and surveys skills.

SUPPORTING RECORDERS AND RECORDING GROUPS

Much of the data in the TVERC database originates as raw data from volunteer recorders and so supporting them is an essential part of the work TVERC carry out. We provide technical support for recording groups who are collecting and analysing data across Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Working with other wildlife organisations, TVERC organise a local Recorders Conference to share information amongst volunteer recorders and increase their knowledge so they can provide us with even better data. We also provide training courses and talks to local groups.



GOVERNANCE, TEAM & PARTNERSHIP

STAFF & OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

We are a team of ten people, but as many of us work part-time, this is equivalent to 6.6 full-time staff.

TVERC staff have a great deal of ecological, data management and data modelling expertise.

OFFICE STAFF

Camilla Burrow, Director - Development and delivery of the TVERC service.

Dan Carpenter, Projects Manager – Delivering services to our local authority partners in Berkshire and Oxfordshire and managing project work.

Caroline Coleman, Volunteer Co-ordinator - Working with TVERC volunteers and recording groups to increase the quality and quantity of wildlife records.

Graham Hawker and Ellen Lee, Biodiversity Data Services Officers – Data management, analysing and presenting data for commercial customers and project work.

Katherine Holmes, Berkshire Biodiversity Officer and Julie Kerans, Oxfordshire Biodiversity Officer - Surveying local wildlife sites with the help of volunteers, analysing and presenting data for project work and developing links with the local groups and recorders.

Rachael Clemson and Yolanda Vazquez, Biodiversity Data Assistants - Assisting the team with data management and project work.

Kate Prudden, Administration Officer - Administrative, promotional and financial tasks to ensure the smooth running of a busy office.

TVERC Business Plan

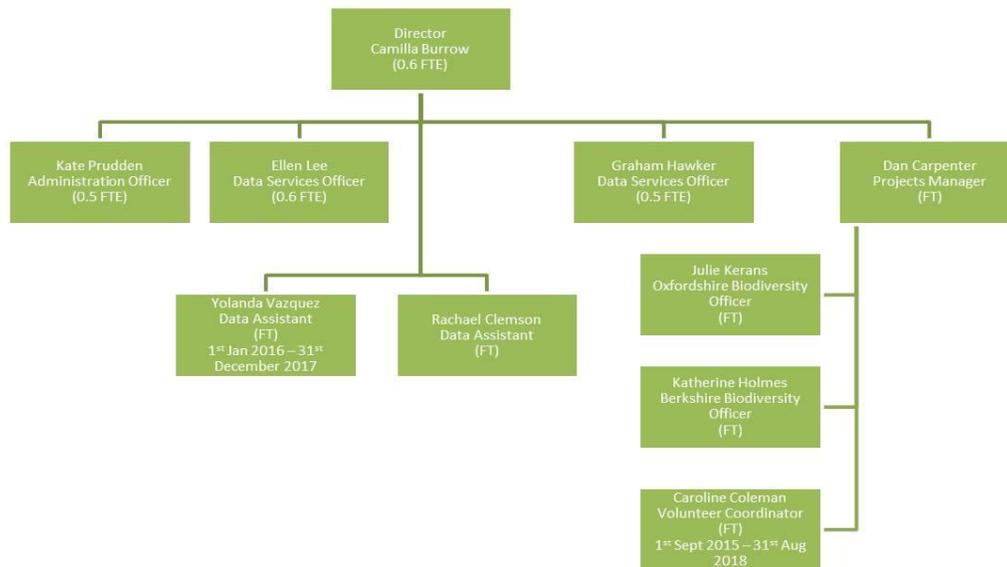


FIGURE 1: TEAM ORGANOGRAM

EXTERNAL CONTRACTORS

TVERC employ contractors with specialist expertise where necessary. Currently, we engage a technical IT consultant 5 days a month to assist with automating our data management and provision services. We may also need to engage consultants to develop and IT strategy, and a designer and a website designer to help with promotional and marketing.



OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

We are lucky to have the help of office volunteers, usually have about five office volunteers at any one time, and up to 15 a year. This equates to about 200 days per year. These volunteers carry out tasks such as:

- Data validation to make sure records contain accurate information
- Digital mapping, using MapInfo GIS
- Preparation of datasets for import into our Recorder 6 database

Volunteering with TVERC provides opportunities to:

- Learn more about how biodiversity and geodiversity data are collected, managed and used.
- Develop skills in using software such as Excel and MapInfo GIS.
- Increase knowledge of local biodiversity.

WHAT OUR VOLUNTEERS SAY



“Volunteering at TVERC has strengthened my CV and made me more confident to apply for jobs I thought I wouldn’t have a chance at.”

“Whether you are seeking to establish a career within the ecology sector, or you simply have an interest in the natural world in general, then I would certainly recommend TVERC as a great place to volunteer.”

PREMISES AND HOSTING

We are currently hosted by Oxfordshire County Council and are located at their offices in Eynsham. Hosting costs from Oxfordshire County Council are included as part of their financial contribution towards the services TVERC provides.

TVERC has reviewed various hosting options and governance options and concluded in May 2016 that remaining hosted by Oxfordshire County Council is currently, the best option. However, this may change in the future, or TVERC may be encouraged by Oxfordshire County Council to become an independent organisation. To ensure we are ready for this and prepared to move quickly, we will set up a Community Interest Company (CiC) or Foundation Charitable Incorporated Organisation (FCIO) which will initially be run in parallel with TVERC as hosted by OxonCC.



GOVERNANCE, PARTNERSHIP AND STEERING GROUP

Our funding partners include all the local authorities in Oxfordshire & Berkshire plus the Environment Agency. These partners contribute to the overall collection, processing and distribution of environmental information so there are efficiencies of scale which provide excellent value-for-money. We also work closely with Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

TVERC is managed by the TVERC Director and guided by the TVERC Steering Group consisting of representatives from the Partners, data users and data providers. The TVERC Steering Group has agreed Terms of Reference under which it operates. It comprises the key sponsors and main suppliers/users of data.

The TVERC Steering Group aims to operate on a consensus basis and each Partner has representation on the TVERC Steering Group. This representation may be either directly by a representative from that Partner or indirectly by another Partner who is expected to consult and feedback to the Partners they represent. All Partners agree to support the group and to use all reasonable endeavours to ensure it functions effectively and decisions are made expediently. All decisions will be recorded in the minutes of TVERC Steering Group meetings.

The TVERC Director undertakes work as guided by the TVERC Steering Group. The TVERC Director reports on progress to the Steering Group at each meeting. The TVERC Director is responsible for ensuring all products and services are delivered on time, within budget and outputs are achieved. The TVERC Steering Group monitors progress by meeting no less than three times in each year (usually May, September and January).



DATA SUPPLIERS

Biological species are recorded for many reasons and by many groups and individuals and so TVERC obtains data from a wide variety of sources (see box opposite).

Data is collated into datasets, which range from one individual sighting to several thousand records within one set. In 2015, almost two thirds (61.9%) of the datasets we received were owned by ecological consultancies. However, only a third of those datasets came directly from the consultancies themselves, the majority were either downloaded from planning portals by TVERC volunteers or sent to us by Local Authorities as part of their Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with us. Other pronounced sources were those owned by individual voluntary recorders (17%) and local recording groups (10%). Looking at individual records produces a different picture. The pie chart below shows that almost half (46%) of the records we have on our database for 2015 came from TVERC staff. This data comes largely from that collected as part of the Local Wildlife Site survey process carried out in Berkshire and Oxfordshire every year and entered directly into our database. The second largest source of records for 2015 came from NGOs (39%); the majority of which were from BBOWT, with whom we work closely.

Our Volunteer Coordinator supports local recorders and conservation organisations to help them to continue to share data with TVERC, preferably in a format we can easily add into our database.

Data Suppliers



- Local natural historians & local wildlife groups
- Ecological Consultancies (often via local authorities)
- Local Wildlife Site surveys
- Landowning NGOs & charities (e.g. BBOWT, RSPB, NT etc)
- Government Bodies (e.g. EA, NE etc)
- Private landowners (e.g. for agri-environment schemes)
- Other businesses (e.g. Thames Water)
- Members of the public (incidental records)
- Other TVERC run recording schemes (Otter Spotters, crayfish surveys)

TVERC Business Plan

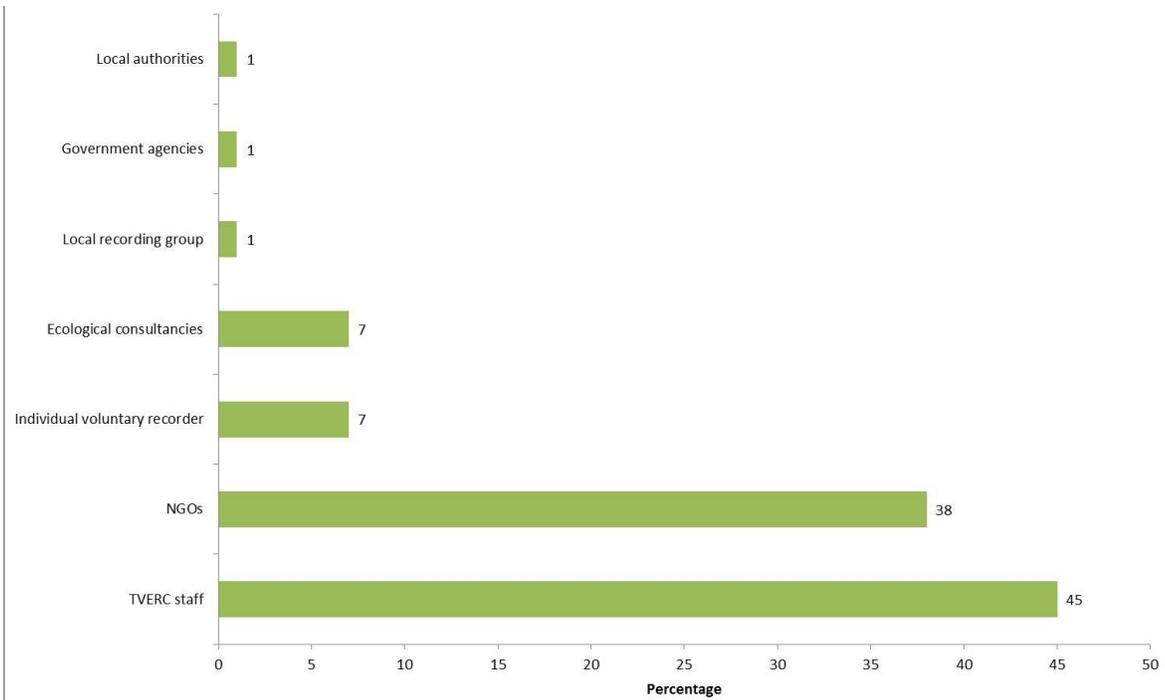


CHART 1: SOURCES OF RECORDS IN THE DATABASE

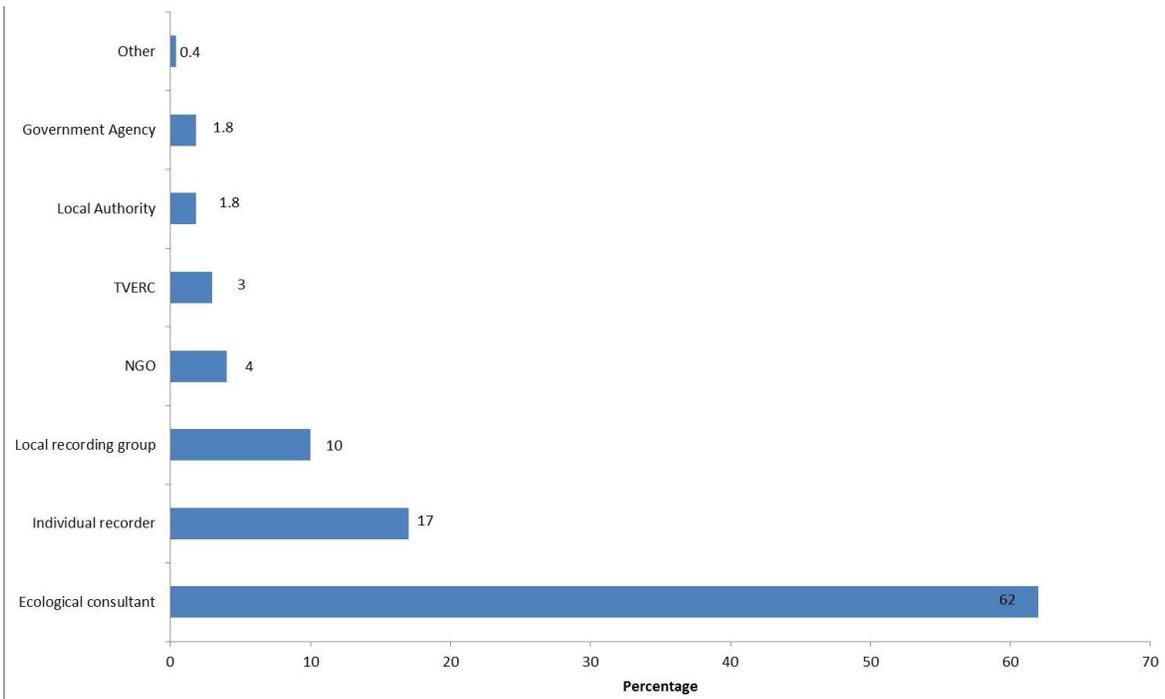


CHART 2: SOURCES OF DATASETS RECEIVED IN 2015



ASSETS

DATABASE

TVERC is the only organization in Berkshire and Oxfordshire providing a comprehensive ecological information hub. Our database is therefore our main asset, and very valuable. We currently hold 1.7 million species records, information on over 1,000 local sites, plus detailed habitat information covering all of Berkshire and Oxfordshire. We ensure this database is kept up-to-date with the most recently available information to ensure it retains its value. We do this by proactively seeking out relevant data, including data we have not previously held, such as soils, water quality and landscape information.

EQUIPMENT

TVERC have an asset list of equipment and books, which is available on our website to allow local recorders to borrow them as required. This is maintained by our Admin Officer. ICT equipment and licenses are owned and maintained by Oxfordshire County Council. They would not be transferred to TVERC if we should become independent of OxonCC so are not considered to be TVERC assets.

MANAGING OPERATIONAL RISKS

TVERC has a Business Continuity Plan which is updated annually. The BCP action plan is designed for worst case situations such as:

- a) where evacuation from normal workplace has occurred and access is denied with no prospect of early return e.g. building fire, localised flood, infrastructure damage to the building
- b) where an unplanned absence of some 50% of staff has occurred e.g. flu pandemic, county flooding incident, snow disruption.



FINANCE

TVERC is a 'not-for-profit' organisation so any surplus income over expenditure is re-invested into the service, except for that which is held in the Reserve.

TVERC is an internal trading unit within OxonCC meaning that our budget must balance to zero each financial year, but we can hold funds in a separate Reserve account.

The Director is responsible for ensuring that sufficient income is obtained each year to cover the costs of running the TVERC service. Financial forecasts are reviewed monthly, with reports to the Steering Group every three months. Charges may be increased or decreased differently than is forecast here, depending on the future situation. TVERC will work to ensure that any fee increases are kept to a minimum for all our customers by ensuring our processes are as efficient as possible

INCOME

TVERC is funded via a number of ways, as shown in the table below, resulting in an annual income of up to about £325k. All of these funding streams contribute to the annual cost of collating and managing the TVERC database, resulting in economies of scale for our customers.

The forecasts in table 10 are based on the following assumptions:

- Carrying out 810 data searches each year (based on the numbers for 2016/17).
- Achieving funding for 200 "project days"; 50 funded by LAs or the EA, and 150 from others.
- Environment Agency income stable.
- LA fees increasing as already agreed for 1st April 2017.

The financial forecasts for income include increases in charges on 1st April 2017 and 1st April 2020. These increases are to ensure that TVERC continues to cover the costs of collating and managing the TVERC database. Table 11 sets out the percentage changes.

TABLE 10: FORECAST INCOME 2017 - 2023

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Local authorities SLA	-£120,789	-£120,789	-£120,789	-£126,845	-£126,845	-£126,845
EA SLA	-£17,280	-£17,280	-£17,280	-£17,280	-£17,280	-£17,280
Commercial data searches	-£106,500	-£106,500	-£106,500	-£113,423	-£113,423	-£113,423
Commercial data licences	-£5,250	-£5,250	-£5,250	-£5,250	-£5,250	-£5,250
Projects - LA funded	-£15,382	-£15,382	-£15,382	-£16,120	-£16,120	-£16,120
Projects - EA funded	-£5,500	-£5,500	-£5,500	-£5,700	-£5,700	-£5,700
Projects - other funded (incl. training)	-£41,250	-£41,250	-£41,250	-£42,750	-£42,750	-£42,750
Donations (for data searches)	-£200	-£200	-£200	-£200	-£200	-£200
Donations (for Conferences)	-£500	-£500	-£500	-£500	-£500	-£500
TOTAL	-£312,651	-£312,651	-£312,651	-£328,067	-£328,067	-£328,067

TABLE 11: PERCENTAGE CHANGES IN CHARGES 2017 AND 2020

Customer	Date	
	1 st April 2017	1 st April 2012
Funding partners	5% increase	5% increase
Developers	6.5% increase	6.5% increase
Community Groups	14% reduction	5% increase

TVERC Business Plan



EXPENDITURE

The majority of TVERC’s income is spent on staff (including volunteer expenses). Our staff and volunteers are the biggest asset TVERC has, as it’s the staff time spent on projects, data searches and data licenses which bring in the income. Our staff and volunteers also work continuously to improve the TVERC service and data products we can offer our funders. The forecast shows a decrease in staff costs in 2018/19 and 2019/2020 due to fixed term contracts of one of the Data Assistants and the Volunteer Coordinator ending.

There is likely to be an increase in premises costs over the period of this plan. This increase has been forecast to take place in 2020-21 but may occur sooner. The increased costs would take place either if OxonCC reviewed their premises charge to TVERC, or if TVERC moved to independent premises. Overheads costs would increase significantly in the year prior to TVERC moving to independent premises as new ICT equipment would need to be bought (OxonCC ICT equipment cannot be used outside of OxonCC premises. Overheads would subsequently be higher due to the costs of ICT licenses etc. which are currently covered by OxonCC hosting of TVERC.

TABLE 12: FORECAST EXPENDITURE 2017 - 2023

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Staff (salaries, expenses, training)	£282,290	£285,018	£237,485	£239,775	£242,087	£244,423
Project expenses	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000
Overheads (equipment, printing, postage, subscriptions)	£8,700	£8,700	£49,076	£27,376	£27,376	£27,376
Premises (paid 'in kind' by OCC)	£16,500	£16,500	£16,500	£35,000	£35,000	£35,000
Recorders Conferences & Recording Fund	£3,650	£3,650	£3,650	£3,650	£3,650	£3,650
Investment in service (data tools, website etc)	£16,980	£11,130	£31,130	£11,000	£11,000	£11,000
TOTAL	£330,120	£326,998	£339,841	£318,801	£321,113	£323,449

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director
March 2017

TVERC Business Plan



MANAGING FINANCIAL RISK AND CASH FLOW

Due to Oxon CC accounting rules, the Business account must balance to £0 at the end of each financial year, but ‘surplus’ monies or deficits can be moved into or out of a Balancing account. The TVERC Reserve is also kept in the Balancing account.

The TVERC Reserve mitigates TVERC from financial risk. The policy that the Reserve covers the costs of staff redundancies plus three months running costs was agreed by the Steering Group in the September 2012 meeting.

Cash-flow is not currently an issue whilst TVERC remains hosted by OxonCC. However it could become an issue if TVERC became fully independent. This could be mitigated by requesting that funding partners pay upfront for their annual services, as is currently the case for data licenses and project work.

Reserve	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
TW data licence 2017/18 and 2018/19 and 2019/20	£10,500	£5,250	0	0	0	0
Oxon Habitat Mapping 2016/17	£0	£0	0	0	0	0
Redundancy costs	£17,469	£14,347	£27,189	£-9,267	£-6,954	£-4,618
3 months running costs	£65,078.73	£50,246.32	£20,110.80	£26,842.40	£24,849.87	£21,664.12
Balancing figure for current year	£17,469	£14,347	£27,189	£-9,267	£-6,954	£-4,618
Unallocated £ in Reserve	£65,078.73	£50,246.32	£20,110.80	£26,842.40	£24,849.87	£21,664.12

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director
March 2017