



Parish Nature Recovery Strategy and Guidance – Wildlife Corridors

September 2022

Overview

The priorities of the local community related to the protection and enhancement of our green spaces were confirmed in a Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (RNP) consultation¹. Over 80% of respondents viewed Nature Recovery as important.

Geographically, Ringwood Parish has a largely urban area to the north and is largely rural otherwise. From a nature perspective, the parish broadly sits between the New Forest National Park to the east and the River Avon Valley to the west with the heathland areas of Dorset further west. All of these areas enjoy international conservation status but are suffering decline in species variety. Improved connectivity is recognised as a critical part of nature recovery strategies².

The intent of this document is to lay out a strategy for providing connectivity between the protected areas by the identification of putative wildlife corridors based on existing 'stepping-stones' in the rural area. It includes possible conditions on planning that could be made into RNP policies.

This document also gives a general overview of national and regional policies related to nature recovery (Appendix 1).

The RNP team is indebted to the members of the Parish Nature Recovery Plan Steering Group* for their guidance and assistance in drafting this document.

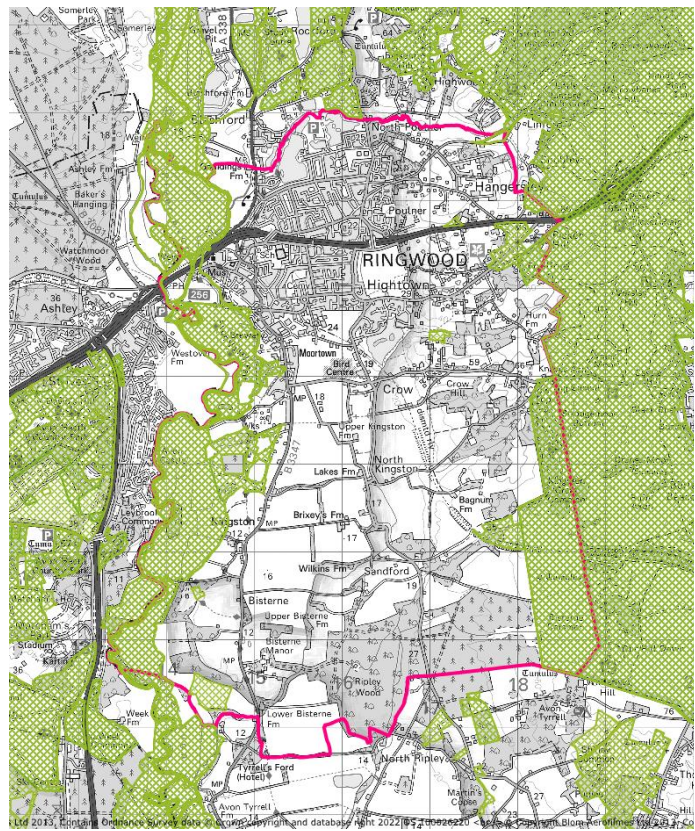
* Steering Group: C. Andrews, R. Chapman, G.DeBoos, D. Illsley and A. Wiseman.

Principles and Intent

Geographical context

Ringwood Parish is bordered on three sides by areas that enjoy international and national conservation status, which are shown in green on the map³. The parish boundary is in red.

Taking the New Forest National Park as an example⁴, *“the New Forest is one of the largest remaining tracts of unenclosed pasture land, heathland and forest in Southern England, covering southwest Hampshire and southeast Wiltshire. It was proclaimed a royal forest by William the Conqueror, featuring in the Domesday Book”*. The area was established as a national park in 2005 and this designation was intended to *“...give this outstanding landscape the highest level of protection and to preserve it for the nation to enjoy for generations to come”*.⁵



It is however in decline (Appendix 2) and this is in part due to a lack of connectivity with other areas rich in biodiversity. According to the ‘State of Nature Report 2019’⁶, the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries on Earth due to centuries of habitat loss, management changes, development and persecution.

The value of connectivity between protected areas is well recognised as a way of protecting biodiversity and genetic diversity, which is reflected at a county level in the Environment Act⁷. HCC have responded and issued a Decision Report which *‘seeks to demonstrate the importance that the County Council places on protecting the natural environment and the fundamental part that this plays in its commitment to tackling climate change’*⁸. For smaller schemes, local landowners can work with expert agencies to find ways to generate connected areas for nature including financial help from, for example, the Countryside Stewardship scheme and Farming in Protected Landscapes grant scheme. An example is the plan to connect areas of West Sussex, including the Knepp Estate, St Leonard’s and Ashdown Forest, into a National Nature Reserve and the surrounding area as a Nature Recovery Area⁹. This strategy seeks to provide a local initiative to support county level initiatives.

In 2018, the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) identified most of the land around the Ringwood urbanised area to be a 'Biodiversity Opportunity Area' with 'Network Opportunities'¹⁰.

The areas that this plan designates as corridors are to the south of the Ringwood urban area. As shown in the map of Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) in Appendix 1, a Green Corridor south of Moortown Lane would be the shortest way of connecting Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) areas and is labelled in this document as the Northern Corridor. In the south of the parish, the IRZ again converge to a shorter distance (the Southern Corridor).

Principles and intent underlying the Green Corridors

The RNP team acknowledges the contribution from HBIC in this section, including provision of maps. Specific details about the broad habitats, protected areas and existing green areas are shown in Appendix 3 along with plans for reinforcement and improved connectivity of the Green Corridors. It is intended that these plans will be used to guide the location, layout and design of new development, ensuring the essential components of Green Corridors are protected and enhanced.

Wildlife habitats are subject to a range of pressures, including those from development. Apart from direct loss and degradation of wildlife habitat, new development can cause fragmentation of ecological networks and lead to narrowing or severance of corridors (which includes the semi-natural habitats next to them) by the introduction or enlargement of barriers such as buildings, roads, hard or inappropriate landscaping, artificial lighting, and by the culverting or re-direction of watercourses.

The principle vision underlying the Green Corridors is that a mosaic of increased connectivity will be established based on:

- existing protected area stepping-stones;
- linked hedgerows¹¹ and water courses; and
- an aim to enhance and connect when feasible with additional stepping-stones and connectivity based on guidance from expert organisations.

Note that enhancements will be based on using appropriate flora species for the location and purpose. Ideally features would have a >10m buffer of semi natural vegetation around a stepping-stone or either side of a hedge/water course as a buffer strip, although in places where there is already built form or hardstanding this width may be reduced.

In terms of the Defra Biodiversity Metric 3.1¹² baseline calculation, all planned Green Corridor features shall be considered of very high baseline habitat distinctiveness, requiring a bespoke assessment. In that assessment, the features will be considered of high strategic significance and in good condition on the basis that they are being improved as part of this plan even if currently not in good condition.

Green Corridors will also require 'dark skies' (Appendix 4) for targeted fauna species, such as bats. In the Green Corridor areas, light pollution and negative impacts on the mosaic will be minimised by restrictions on new planning consent within:

- 400m of protected area stepping-stones; and
- 100m of hedgerows or water courses.

Opportunities will be sought to improve the area and quality of the Green Corridor areas by working with organisations that can provide resources, be they financial or otherwise. It is recognised that the Tree Council, working with landowners and local voluntary groups within the parish, have already begun strengthening hedgerows, particularly in the Northern Corridor area.

Opportunities will also be sought for provision of areas to be enjoyed as Accessible Natural Green Space¹³. It is expressly not the vision of this Plan to create 'no go' areas for people. Evidence shows access to natural green space for fresh air, exercise and quiet contemplation benefits the physical and mental health of people. However, the protected areas need to be nature friendly and will mostly be on private land, so public access is likely to be restricted.

Maps of Green Corridors

Updated maps of the proposed Green Corridors are shown below. These are Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) map¹⁴ of hedgerows overlaid on Parish Maps³, as detailed and referenced in Appendix 3. The yellow lines are the limit of the proposed Green Corridors.

The first map shows the Northern Corridor stretching across from the Avon Valley SSSI to The New Forest SSSI. It includes three SINC areas to the east, two of which are categorised as 'ancient semi-natural woodlands' and the third is an 'area of heathland vegetation including matrices of dwarf shrub, acid grassland, valley mires and scrub'. There are also 'Woodland Priority Habitat Network' sites in the vicinity of the SINCs. Note that many of the hedgerows within the area have been or are shortly to be reinforced as part of work being carried out by the Tree Council and others. The planting plans will be informed by a hedgerow survey of the area planned to commence in November 2022, subject to permission being obtained from landowners¹⁵.



The second map shows the Southern Corridor, again linking the SSSI areas to the east and west. The yellow line marks the northern boundary and the southern boundary follows the Ringwood Parish Boundary. This area includes parts of three SINC areas which are all categorised as 'ancient semi-natural woodlands'. A large portion of the corridor area includes 'Woodland Priority Habitat Network' sites.



Proposed policies

Policy – Protection and Enhancement of Green Corridor Features

Development proposals requiring planning permission from the LPA should be designed to enhance and not harm the Green Corridors by:

- Improving the number, size and/or connectivity of Green Corridor features, such as stepping-stone SINC areas or hedgerows;
- Considering Green Corridor features to have very high baseline habitat distinctiveness, requiring a bespoke assessment for biodiversity assessments; and
- Cause no direct harm to Green Corridor features or indirect harm by, for example, interrupting potential connectivity.

Note that the policy refers not only to the final developed area but also during all phases of construction.

Policy – Dark Skies

Development proposals requiring planning permission from the LPA should be designed to minimise the effect of external lighting by:

- Meeting or exceeding the Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance for E1 zones¹⁶ within 400 metres of any Green Corridor feature, such as a stepping-stone SINC areas or hedgerow;
- Avoiding the installation of additional lighting where possible;
- Where lighting is necessary for a development purpose, using the lowest practical lumens value installation and in a manner that minimises or mitigates adverse impacts, including consideration of the imposition of curfew hours; and
- Using building designs that minimise light spill from internal lighting.

Note that the policy refers not only to the final developed area but also during all phases of construction and also will likely be part of a raft of policies related to nature recovery.

Appendix 5 shows the outline planning process and where these policies might be considered.