# Ancient Woodland Buffer Zones

**NPPF**

“Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists”

**Natural England and Forestry Commission Standing Advice**

"You should refuse planning permission if development will result in the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees unless:

- there are wholly exceptional reasons
- there’s a suitable compensation strategy in place"

"For ancient woodlands, you should have a buffer zone of at least 15 metres to avoid root damage. Where assessment shows other impacts are likely to extend beyond this distance, you’re likely to need a larger buffer zone. For example, the effect of air pollution from development that results in a significant increase in traffic.

"It should consist of semi-natural habitats such as woodland, a mix of scrub, grassland, heathland and wetland planting" (Avoid gardens, SUDs)

# Ancient Woodland Buffer Size

**Impacts of Nearby Development on Ecology of Ancient Woodland (Woodland Trust 2008)**

**Many problems stem from unmanaged access**

- Frequency of fly-tipping into woodland
- Dumping of garden waste into woodland leading to local nutrient enrichment.
- Trampling of plants, chronic disturbance negatively impacting on habitat use, foraging opportunities and breeding
- Relocation or removal of timber (Deadwood), vandalism of trees.
- May lead to reductions in species diversity and abundance or elimination from the wood.

**Other issues may include**

- Gardens – beneficial (bird feeding) but also increased predation
- Escape of invasive plants or dumping in woodland. Nutrients and light/shade.

# Ancient Woodland Buffer Size

**Impacts of Nearby Development on Ecology of Ancient Woodland (Woodland Trust 2008)**

**Mitigation: Planted Buffers**

**"**Locating development further away from ancient woodland will reduce associated disturbance. The minimum distance over which this is likely to be effective will depend on the type of development, the nature of disturbance, and the local context, including intervening land use, vegetation and topography."

**“**The scale of woodland buffers should be tailored to individual developments and anticipated levels of disturbance but **should be at least 50-100m wide** (Huisman & Attenborough 1991; Matlack 1993; Thiel et al. 2007). The addition of fencing to exclude access to both the area of new planting and the ancient woodland is likely to enhance the protective nature of this area, if public access is unmanaged. Where public access is granted, path maintenance is recommended, in order to channel access, particularly away from sensitive areas (Matlack 1993)."

# Ancient Woodland Buffer Size

## Impacts of Nearby Development on Ecology of Ancient Woodland (Woodland Trust ADDENDUM 2012)

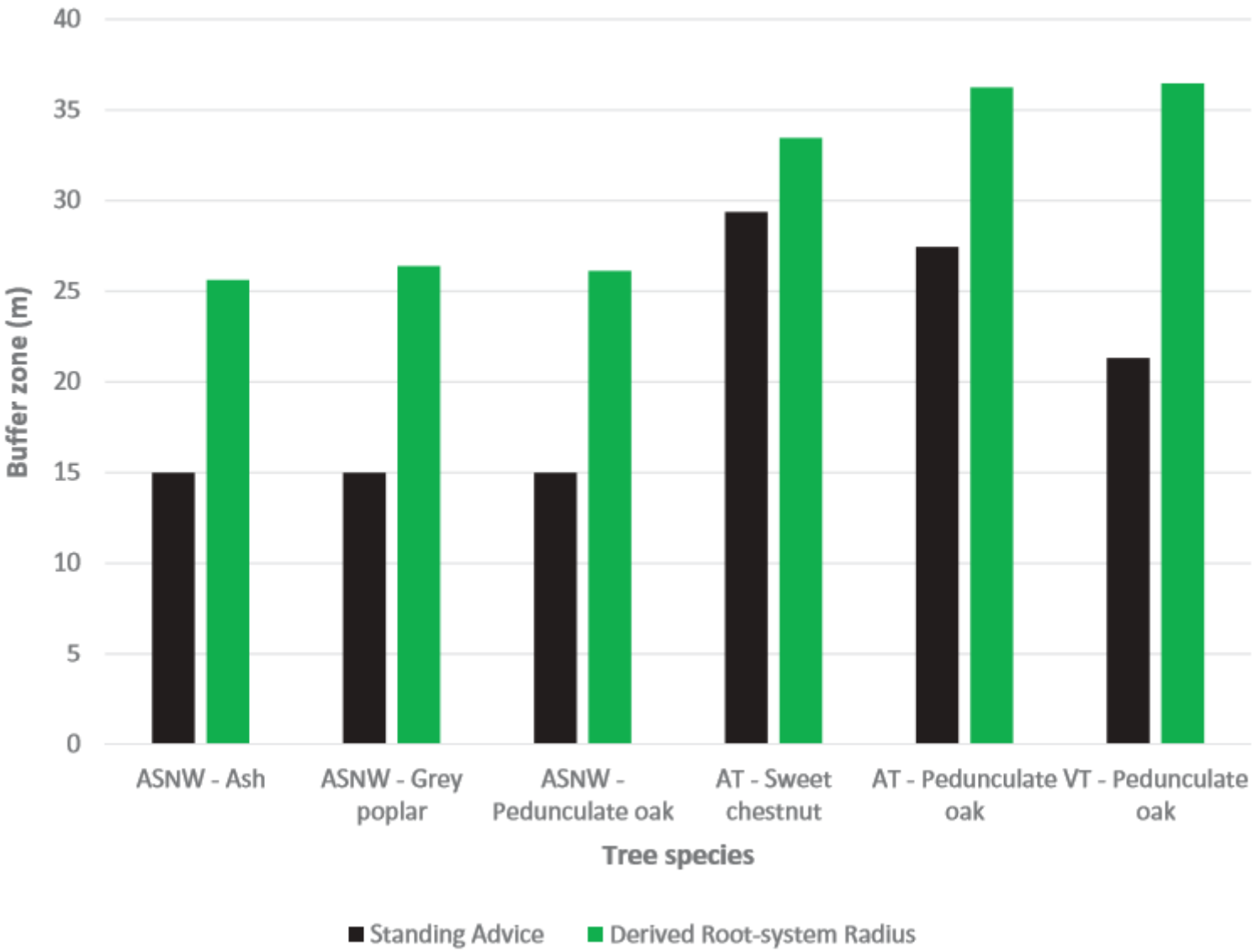
**Table 3 Buffer Zones**

| Size of buffer | Reason for buffer | Reference |
|---|---|---|
| 15m (minimum) | To protect woodland from the effects of development such as run-off, noise, damage to tree roots etc. There is no discussion about how the figure of 15m was reached. (UK) | Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland, Natural England, 30 May 2012 (taken from Bolnore Village appeal decision 2007) |
| 50m | To protect woodland from encroachment activities from adjacent housing, such as waste disposal, garden extension. This paper specifies that the buffer should be wooded. (Canada) | McWilliam *et al.* (2010) |
| 100 – 200m | To protect plant species from the effects of vehicle emissions from roads (UK). | Keely *et al.* (2008) |
| 300m | To protect woodland bird species from the effects of roads (Spain). | Palomino and Carrascal (2007) |
| 400m | To protect woodland bird species from the effects of urban development (Spain). | Palomino and Carrascal (2007) |
| ? | Lightly wooded buffer around existing woodland to protect the core from impacts of development (UK) | Merkx *et al.* (2012) |

# Ancient Woodland Buffer Size

**Andrews et al 2019 (Arboricultural Journal)**

Compares standing advice buffer zones to actual root system size



# Ancient Woodland Buffer Size

**Planner's Manual for Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees (2019)**

"Impacts on irreplaceable habitat always results in net loss. These impacts cannot be offset elsewhere. Where ancient woodland or veteran trees are lost or damaged there will always be net loss of biodiversity and it is impossible to secure net gain"

Mitigation to include:

• Implementation of an appropriate monitoring plan to ensure that proposed measures are effective over the long term and accompanied by contingencies should any conservation objectives not be met"

## Provide adequate buffers

A buffer is a landscape feature used to protect a sensitive area from the impact of disturbance both during and after construction. A buffer may:

- Go around the whole area to be protected, or just along one edge
- Be planted with trees or shrubs, or it could be an area of land that the development is not allowed to encroach upon, e.g. a grassy strip
- Also contain man-made structures such as fences, walls and earthworks (though it must not contain Sustainable Drainage Systems which could impact on the hydrology of the ancient woodland)

Although there is no *'one size fits all'* with buffer design, each one should be designed to fulfil the specific requirements of its location and the type of proposed development.

As a precautionary principle, a minimum 50 metre buffer should be maintained between a development and the ancient woodland, including through the construction phase, unless the applicant can demonstrate very clearly how a smaller buffer would suffice. A larger buffer may be required for particularly significant engineering operations, or for after-uses that generate significant disturbance.

The preferred approach is to create new habitat, including native woodland, around existing ancient woodland. This will help reverse the historic fragmentation of this important habitat. The consequent increase in ecological connectivity between areas of ancient woodland will create the resilient landscapes recommended in *Making Space for Nature* published by Defra (2010)[21].

# Ancient Woodland Buffer Size

## Case study

### Provide 50 metre buffers

Reffley Wood – *King's Lynn and West Norfolk Council Site Allocations and Development Management Policies* (2016).

During the consultation process on their Local Plan, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Councils agreed that a 50 metre buffer was needed to protect ancient Reffley Wood from the impacts of future housing development. They continued this approach in their site allocations and development management policies (see Policy 4.1) when they allocated the neighbouring Knights Hill site.

This policy was applied in a subsequent planning application for a major housing scheme (reference: 16/02231/OM) that accepted and included a 50 metre buffer in its proposals. This shows the value of strong, effective planning policies in delivering real protection for ancient woodland and providing improved biodiversity and recreational opportunities as part of a scheme.

## Case study

### Provide 100 metre buffers

The *Wiltshire Core Strategy*[22], adopted in January 2015, sets out various requirements for proposed development for the Ashton Park Urban Extension, south east of Trowbridge. On page 354, at the beginning of the section on ecology, it identifies the need for:

*"100m woodland/parkland buffer between all ancient woodland, including Biss Wood and Green Lane Wood, and built development."*

22 Wiltshire Council. (2015). *Wiltshire Core Strategy*. Available at: www.wiltshire.gov.uk/adopted-local-plan-jan16-low-res.pdf

# Ancient Woodland Buffer Size

**Comments on 2018 application from Bloor:**

**<u>Natural England</u>:**

"Although the minimum size of a buffer zone should be at least 15 metres, **Natural England would expect this to be significantly larger for a development of this nature and size.** The proposed design of the development in surrounding the ancient woodland, would also make a larger buffer suitable…….management of the ancient woodland, including monitoring for potential damage, should be included in the proposals."

<u>Proposed buffer remains at 15 metres in the new application</u>

# Ancient Woodland Buffer Size

**Comments on 2018 application from Bloor:**

**BBOWT:**

"It is considered that a **buffer of greater than 15m would be appropriate for the ancient woodland on this site and that a buffer of 30m would be appropriate in areas where the ancient woodland is immediately adjacent to the built development**.....

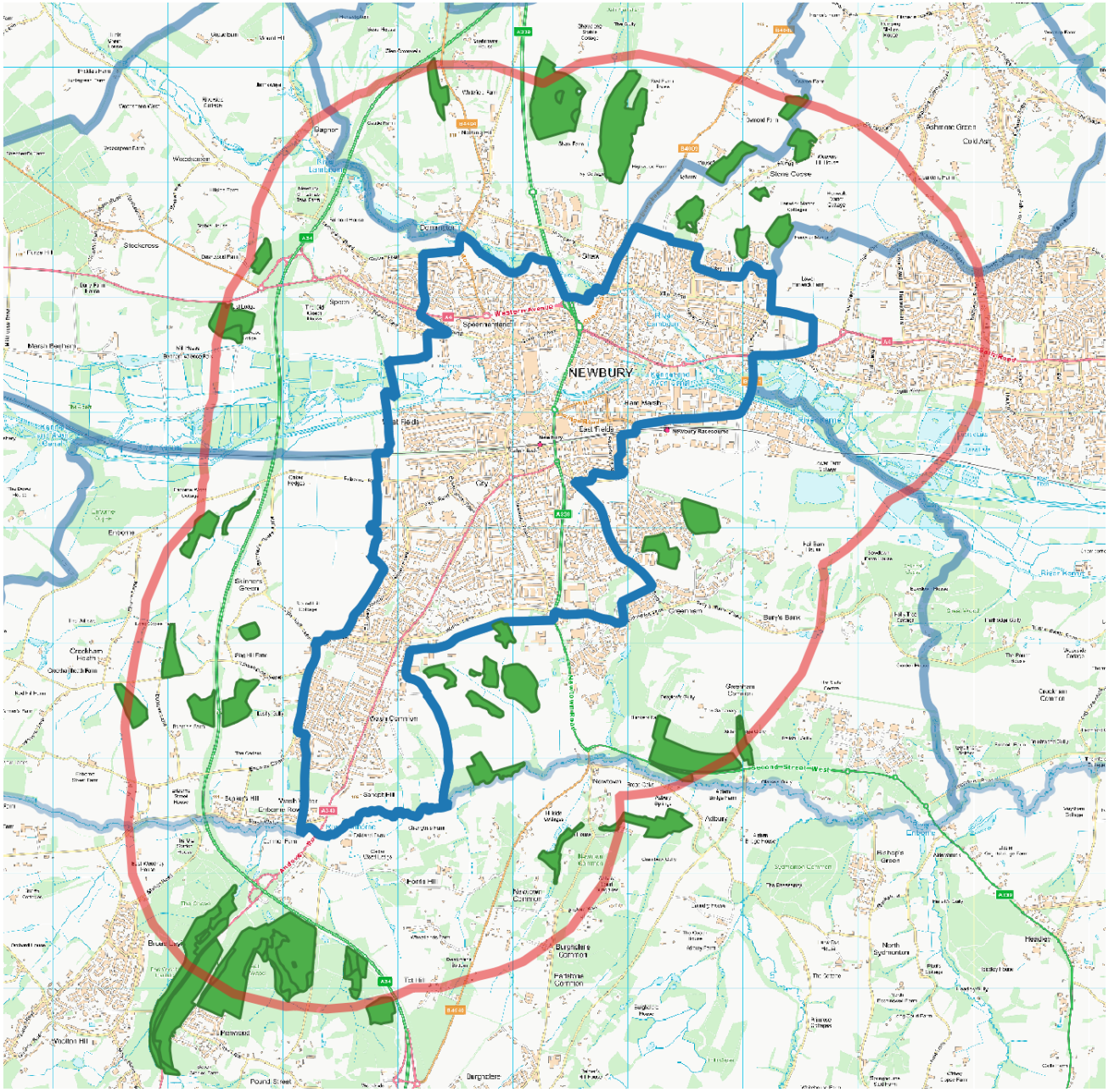
We therefore recommend that a buffer zone of greater than 15m should encompass all ancient woodlands within this site and **a buffer zone of 30m should be imposed at points where the ancient woodland is immediately adjacent to built development**.

If this development were to proceed **with the currently proposed 15m buffer zone**, it is likely that these ancient woodlands will deteriorate for the reasons stated above **and the Council will fail to meet its statutory obligations under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)* and will fail to meet the policy objectives of both the NPPF and West Berkshire Core Strategy.**"

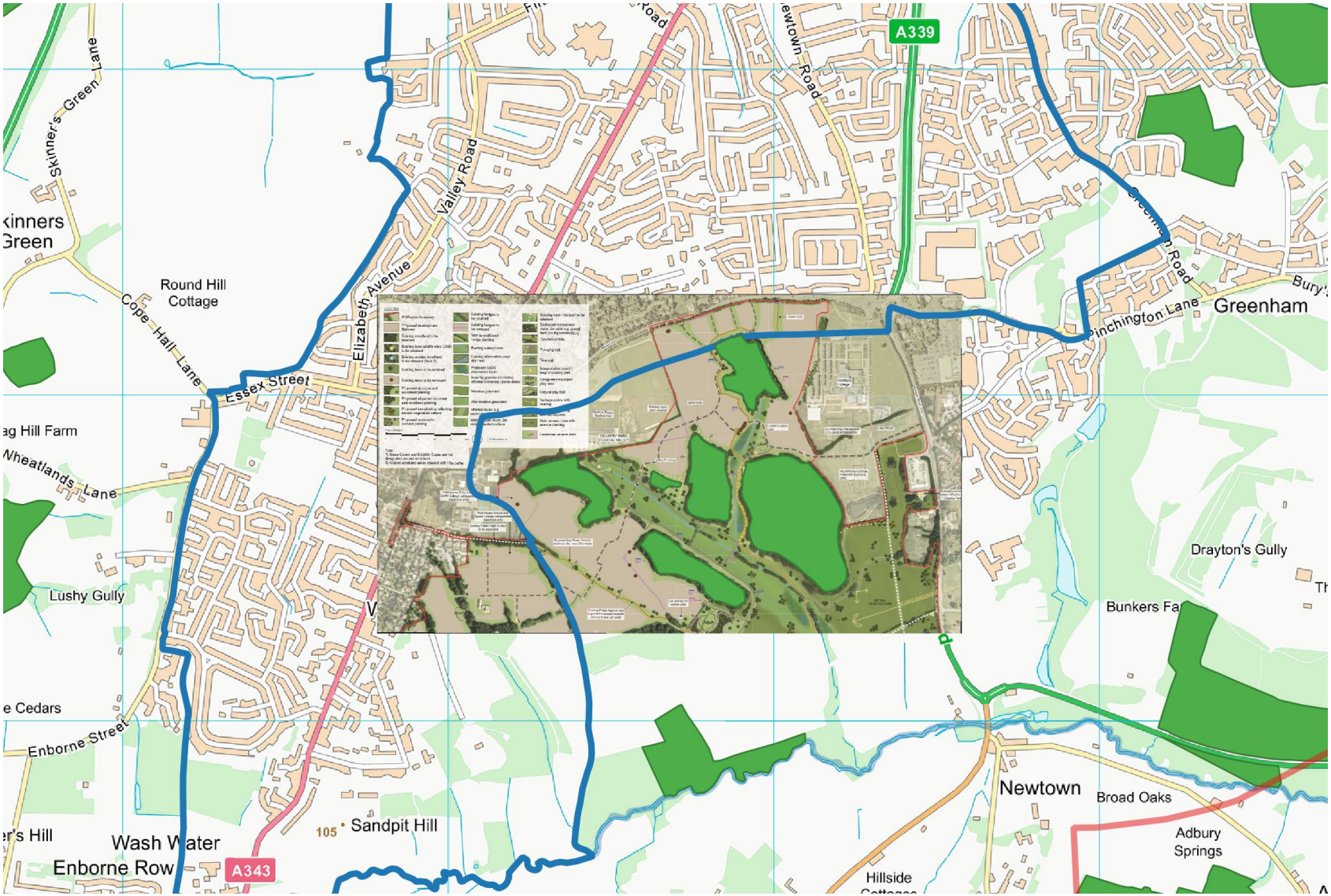
**West Wood, Greenham**

The adjacent new development borders ancient woodland with a 15 metre buffer of apparently poor quality.

# Newbury ancient woodland network (dark green)



# Sandleford ‘Green Infrastructure’ plan (submitted by Bloor) in context



**Sandleford Ancient Woodlands**

Ancient Woodland circled in green, additional woodlands on site in pink.

# Indicative Green Infrastructure Plan

# 15 metre buffer (NE standing advice minimum)

# 30 metres (BBOWT)

# 50 metres (Woodland Trust)

# 100 metres


LEGEND
Application boundary
Proposed development footprint
Existing woodland to be retained.
Existing local wildlife sites (LWS) to be retained
Existing ancient woodland to be retained (Note 2)
Existing trees to be retained
Existing trees to be removed
Proposed structure and woodland planting
Proposed advanced structure and woodland planting
Proposed tree planting reflecting historic vegetation pattern
Proposed community orchard planting
Existing hedges to be retained
Existing hedges to be removed
New or reinforced hedge planting
Existing watercourse
Existing attenuation pond dry / wet
Proposed SuDS attenuation basin
Amenity grassland including informal kickabout / picnic areas
Meadow grassland
Wet meadow grassland
Informal route: e.g. mown grass path
Main footpath route: 2m wide hoggin/sealed surface
Existing track / footpath to be retained.
Dedicated recreational route: 2m wide e.g. gravel/ bark (no dig construction)
Sandleford Mile
Foraging trail
Trim trail
Interpretation board / map of country park
Designated equipped play area
Natural play trail
Vantage points with seating
Main access route with avenue planting
Note:
1) Gorse Covert and Brickkiln Copse are not designated ancient woodland.
2) Ancient woodland areas retained with 15m buffer.
COUNTRY PARK: CENTRAL VALLEY
COUNTRY PARK: NORTHERN VALLEY
CROOK'S COPSE
BARN COPSE
SLOCKETT'S COPSE
HIGH WOOD
DIRTY GROUND COPSE
Green Link
Newbury College
CONSENTED NEWBURY COLLEGE EXTENSION
LINK ROAD
Newbury Rugby Football Club
Existing rugby pitch retained
Park House School and Sports College: safeguarded expansion area
Existing Public Right of Way to be upgraded
Existing Public Right of Way upgraded to shared footpath and cycle link: 3m width
REPTILE RECEPTOR SITE
LEAP

# 100 metres for all woodland

# Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan (Appendix F18)

**Ancient Woodland Mitigation**

- Fenced 15 metre buffer zones
- Holly management to improve habitat
- Dead wood left in situ ‘minimum amount removed concordant with public safety’
- Footpaths ‘largely follow existing tracks’ and to be mapped for reserved matters apps
- Boardwalks in wet areas (see next slide/page)
- ‘Not considered that ancient woodland indicators will be impacted as they are located along existing tracks’
- ‘Areas cleared of bramble and sycamore’ (some bramble is beneficial for nesting and nectar)
- Information boards and possibly fencing
- Monitoring of bluebell populatons. **“No further monitoring is proposed”.**

**Wykery Copse Bracknell**

Woodland with low fence and 15 metre buffer to development. One path across is boardwalk for the complete length. Discourages access to the remainder of the wood.

# Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan (Appendix F18)

**CF Additional Comments**

- A long grass meadow will be established in the country park primarily to benefit reptiles, considers deterring birds during establishment, possibly including netting:
- Two skylark plots in arable field – but they will try to nest in meadow!
- Currently 4 + skylark territories on development fields (personal observation) and other ground nesting species such as lapwing vulnerable to disturbance.

- "New buildings will provide additional nesting locations for species, such as swifts"

New builds would require nest boxes to attract swifts. Proposed nest box provision is extraordinarily small considering the number of proposed houses for humans….

#### 4.7.4 Post-construction Enhancements

Additional enhancements for nesting birds will include the following (refer to Appendix C for specifications). Illustrative locations are provided within Figure 3.

- Installation of two skylark plots (16-24m$^2$) which will be left unsown in winter cereals to boost the nesting opportunities and food available for skylarks.
- Installation of 25 starling nest boxes and 10 house sparrow nesting boxes / terraces incorporated onto proposed buildings.
- Installation of eight nesting boxes with a variety of hole sizes from 25mm to 35mm – these will be suitable for a range of bird species.
- Installation of eight open fronted bird boxes, which will be used for species such as robins, spotted flycatchers and pied wagtails.
- Installation of eight wedge shaped nest boxes, which will be used for species such as treecreeper.

# Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan (Appendix F18)

**Positive Commitments:**

- There is general recognition in the management plan of the importance of rank vegetation (often seen as undesirable) as invertebrate habitat, allowing herbaceous vegetation to grow around planted hedges and shrubs etc
- (But how long will this last before residents put pressure on management company to keep the place ‘tidy’?)

- Maintenance of good quality wet grassland habitat in the valley with adjacent woodland edges

**Queries**

- Some targeted management for invertebrates is proposed but **no monitoring recommended**, including of species associated with the ancient woodland, so it will not be possible to determine whether mitigation has worked.

# Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan (Appendix F18)

"Mitigation to include: Implementation of an appropriate monitoring plan to ensure that proposed measures are effective over the long term and accompanied by contingencies should any conservation objectives not be met"
(Woodland Trust Planners Manual)

## 6.0 Monitoring

**Table 3: Monitoring summary**

| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 10 | Year 15 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monitoring of reptile population if required (October) | | | | | | | |
| Monitoring of dormouse population (twice a year) | | | | | | | |
| Monitoring to confirm absence of invasive species | | | | | | | |
| Monitoring of the existing bluebell populations (April to early May) | | | | | | | |
| Monitor the establishment of the orchard for 15 years | | | | | | | |
| Meadow habitat – monitored once a year in July | | | | | | | |
| Monitoring of Himalayan balsam stands | | | | | | | |

An annual monitoring summary will be compiled and will include suggestions and justification for proposed modifications for monitoring if necessary.

At the end of the 15 year period, a reassessment of the management plan will be made.