



GASCOYNE
PLACES



A GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

FOR CENTRAL HERTFORDSHIRE

2021





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INTRODUCTION

New development will always be a contentious topic. Change is often unnerving, and can be met with resistance. The release of farm land and green field sites for development is a difficult decision for landowners, and a controversial one for those who enjoy the precious open spaces of the British countryside.

As a long term landowner and local stakeholder, Gascoyne's approach to Green Infrastructure is one of stewardship and permanence. Our aims are simple:

- To enhance our environment and secure the long term prosperity of both the Estate and the wider community.
- To preserve the best of what already exists, supplementing, improving and enhancing it where possible with new homes, high quality public spaces and thriving businesses.

New development does not have to be bad. Careful planning and design can overcome many of the shortcomings of more typical residential developments.

Furthermore, planning should not stop with bricks and mortar. A coherent vision for the development of green infrastructure must go hand-in-hand with building new homes. This is necessary in order to protect central Hertfordshire's network of historic landscapes, parkland, and garden city heritage.

This document presents a coherent plan for green infrastructure and the creation of a consolidated Green Corridor. If carefully and responsibly delivered, it has the potential to ensure that Welwyn Hatfield remains an attractive place in which people aspire to live, raise their families, work and play over the years and decades to come.

This document first sets out the context in which decisions around green infrastructure are made. It looks at the pressures on local government to produce a local plan in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We are confident that this proposal would assist the council's efforts in this regard.

We go on to discuss the Green Belt as a designation of land, and ask whether it needs to be reconsidered in the case of Welwyn Hatfield, and more widely. We believe that redrawing Green Belt boundaries offers an opportunity not only to provide valuable

homes but to enhance and improve access to green space in central Hertfordshire.

We follow by outlining our vision for a Green Corridor, and how it would fit together to form an unbroken green buffer between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield. We demonstrate the opportunities for net gains in biodiversity, increased access for the public and an assurance that our two major towns will not encroach upon each other.

Finally, we will explore the ways in which a Green Corridor could be funded, delivered and managed. Without responsible stewardship, this opportunity would be wasted. It is our intention to ensure that this does not occur.

It is our hope that this document is both interesting to you, and further inspires you to support the establishment of a Green Corridor for central Hertfordshire.



Anthony Downs
Hatfield Estate Director
Gascoyne Estates
January 2021

A NEW APPROACH

The Green Belt has served an important purpose since its inception in 1947. The stated aims of the Green Belt are:

- a) to check the unrestricted urban sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

We have much to thank the Green Belt for, in terms of its role in protecting the countryside of Hertfordshire from the encroachment of the capital. However, it is clear that limited releases from the Green Belt will be necessary if the pressing needs for new housing, employment and community facilities are to be met within Welwyn Hatfield. Furthermore, this can be secured while achieving improvements measured against the aims of the Green Belt.

If carefully planned, and with appropriate stewardship, a Green Corridor for central Hertfordshire can reinforce the boundaries between the larger settlements of the county. This will be achieved through improving and enhancing the existing Green Belt land, increasing access for recreation and providing opportunities for biodiversity to flourish.

By creating a network of strategic green space, we will increase the value of the land as a public amenity, a resource for agriculture, forestry and biodiversity, and ensure its protection indefinitely. Furthermore, we will enhance the setting and special character of our historic towns. In keeping with Garden City traditions, we will provide greater access to beautiful and well designed public spaces, improving the wellbeing of the residents of Welwyn Hatfield. What is currently arable land of limited productivity could become a key aspect of the future character of our county, bringing numerous benefits to residents, wildlife, landowners and the local authority.

Central Hertfordshire also has a significant advantage in securing this aspirational future. Large parts of the proposed land are owned by a relatively small number of organisations. It is therefore feasible that, with negotiation and collaboration, these organisations and the planning authority could deliver a high quality green amenity.

It is an unfortunate reality that, in order to meet the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) for housing in the borough, green field sites will need to be released. Brownfield sites simply do not exist to an extent which would satisfy the OAN. However, if built responsibly, these developments could enhance the character of the countryside rather than detracting from it. Additionally, the council has made clear its commitment to green infrastructure in its draft local plan:

“To compensate for the loss of green field land we will seek improvements and additions to the network of green infrastructure”.

They have since commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to create a green corridor masterplan. It is critical that Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council continues to engage deeply with the community, landowners and local experts in order to ensure the quality of the final corridor.

If carefully considered, the release of green field land has the potential to be of great benefit - both to those who need housing in the local area, but also the wider community which stands to benefit from better and more beautiful green space.

A new approach is needed to ensure we develop responsibly and protect the best of what we have for decades to come.

ESTABLISHING A BASELINE

If our aim is to conserve the best of our green space, enhance its value, increase access to it, and safeguard its future, we must first be aware of what currently exists. Without a baseline from which to measure change, we will have no way of knowing whether we have been successful in improving the quality and value of the Corridor.

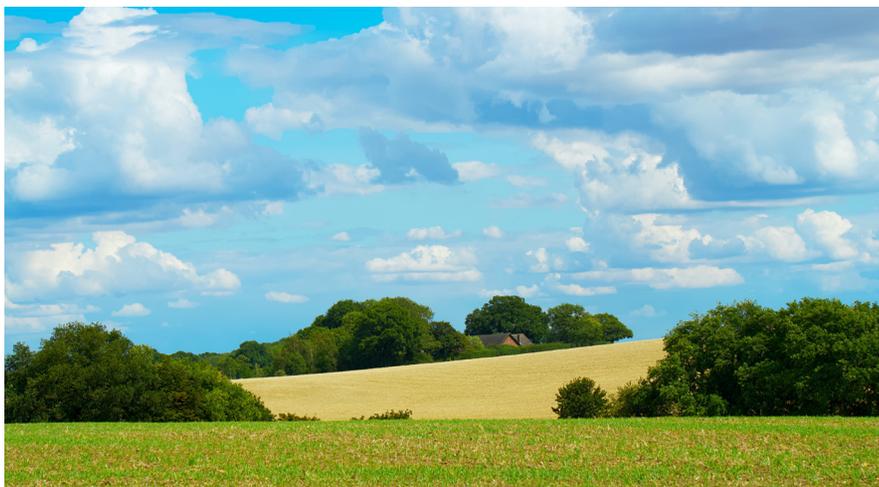
A full environmental and ecological survey is required to formally identify key habitats, ecological hotspots and areas at heightened risk. This will enable us to plan the most appropriate way to grant access to the land, to ensure that access does not come at the expense of the environment. In addition, we will be able to see what should be protected and where biodiversity can be increased - for example, turning low-grade arable land into low intensity grazing and semi-wild meadow.



The River Lea is a key resource and habitat, and it informs the historic setting of the central Hertfordshire area.



The success of smaller species, such as this harvest mouse, is key to the survival of the numerous birds of prey known to live in the Corridor.



Establishing the facts surrounding parcels of land will be critical to the success of the Green Corridor. Agricultural monocultures can be replaced in some places with managed grassland, allowing for low intensity grazing and carbon sequestration.

Enhancing hedgerows and planting more woodland will increase habitats for insects and birds. It is key, however, to ensure that plans are made in communication with farmers whose agricultural business need to remain viable.

THE PLANNING CONTEXT

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council is obliged to produce a local plan. This document sets out the framework for planning decisions over a period lasting usually up to twenty years. There are a number of factors which need to be addressed within it, one of which is the previously mentioned OAN. The purpose of the local plan is to satisfy the inspector that there are enough viable sites put forward for development to meet the OAN, and that the local authority meets the various obligations it is under.

The OAN for Welwyn Hatfield is significant, some 16,000 homes by 2035. The new local plan is currently in draft form, due to the inspector finding that the plan will not satisfactorily address the OAN. A new call for sites occurred in January 2019, with the date for adoption now pushed back to spring 2021. The Inspector's interim report, published in October 2020, provides some insight into the way the plan is developing.

In the broader planning context, the Welwyn Hatfield local plan sits within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The objective of the NPPF is to provide sustainable economic, social and environment development.

For us, the main concerns are:

- Supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of future and present generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services which reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being.
- Contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment. Helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate climate change.

One of the key extracts from the newly updated NPPF is:

'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...
- Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services...
- Minimising impacts on and providing net gains to biodiversity'

Heritage assets are also highlighted in the NPPF. It states that:

'Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk.'

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council have taken this requirement seriously, including policy SP12 in the draft local plan.

The proposed Green Corridor is littered with sites of heritage interest, ranging from historic parkland to the genesis of the Garden City movement. Protecting and increasing access to these areas of historic interest will be increasingly important as the character of the county changes. In doing so, we may be able to inspire the creation of further green corridors, improving the countryside significantly.

It is our belief that the creation of a Green Corridor will enable Welwyn Hatfield to achieve this critical piece of planning policy. The Central Hertfordshire Green Corridor Group's work in highlighting the key areas of vulnerability and opportunities for improvement will be important in informing the council's decision.



Ellenbrook Country Park, at the site of the former Hatfield aerodrome. It would form the western end of the Green Corridor, and holds potential to provide a fantastic public amenity. It is possible to connect Ellenbrook Country Park to the wider network of green space by improving foot and cycle paths.



Bush Hall, pictured here when operational in 2017, is a Grade II listed hotel in the heart of the proposed corridor. Built in the 17th century, it sits on a site with open countryside to the north and west, and a tributary of the River Lea running through it. Bush Hall now sits empty having been mostly refurbished and is awaiting an occupier to re-establish it as a viable business.

THE VISION

A Green Corridor has the potential to dramatically improve the countryside in central Hertfordshire. The map below shows the parcels of land which could be included, and details the way in which they can contribute to the overall value of the landscape. In many cases, what is currently inaccessible and undervalued could become integral to the future of green infrastructure in the area, providing recreation and transport opportunities for all.

1.

Symondshyde

A parcel of land in the Metropolitan Green Belt between Hatfield and St. Albans. The land is subject to mineral extraction, with conveyors transporting the mineral for processing. Opportunities exist for enhancing access to green space once mineral extraction is complete.

Symondshyde Great Wood (12 acres of historic woodland, the rest planted in late C20th) is well used by walkers and horse riders, and is an important habitat for wildlife. This will all be protected, with only arable monocultures being turned into Symondshyde village.

2.

Coopers Green

The proposed Gascoyne development would provide 25% open space, with a network of landscaped lakes in the centre. The development will contain 1,650 homes, with employment space and ample public realm.

These lakes would function as part of the wider Sustainable Urban Drainage Scheme, as well as functioning as recreational space. They will be key to creating a sense of place and lasting satisfaction among residents.

3.

Ellenbrook Country Park

The result of the regeneration of the former Hatfield Aerodrome. The 400 acre site would be integrated into the wider green corridor.

The site is well accessed by a network of footpaths and a bridleway, across hay meadows and woodland. It has good facilities, including information panels and picnic benches. It could, however, still be improved.

4.

Stanborough Park

Stanborough Park, or Stanborough Lakes, is a popular public amenity which would sit at the heart of the Green Corridor. Opened in 1970, it boasts a spring-fed boating lake and a sailing lake, where many watersport activities take place. Opportunities exist to improve screening of the A1(M), and to connect the land either side of the railway through the existing bridges.

6.

Bush Hall & Mill Green

Bush Hall Hotel, a grade II listed building, has been empty since 2009. It has been refurbished to a high standard, in order to reopen soon. The site includes some tree lines and a tributary of the River Lea.

Mill Green, isolated by the road network, houses the popular Mill Green Museum. In September 2011, the Mill Green Charrette produced a series of ideas, which are now being put into place. The Green Man pub is being refurbished, and nine houses will be built in 2021. This will be complemented by a new village green and enhanced access to the river.

9.

Panshanger Country Park

Panshanger Park, designed by Humphry Repton in 1799, is the site of mineral extraction by Tarmac. There are a number of buildings in the area which are listed by English Heritage. Land is being restored as elements of the quarry are extracted, and biodiversity increases are being pursued. Habitats include lakes, grassland, wet woodland, hedgerows and reedbeds. It is also criss-crossed by paths and bridleways, and could be valuable in creating a wider network of green space.

8.

Birchall Garden Suburb

Tarmac has a vision to extend WGC, creating a new suburb of approximately 2,500 homes. It aims for tree-lined streets, wildlife corridors, increased biodiversity and sustainable transport infrastructure. There are concerns around placing communal space on what was previously a highly toxic landfill site. A hearing on this site took place in the Spring of 2020.

Additionally, we hope that the plan to build housing along the A414 is revisited. Relocation of some of this housing would reduce visual intrusion when viewed from Hatfield Park and Essendon conservation areas.

5.

Land and buildings at Woodhall Farm

The area immediately to the east of the railway is largely inaccessible at present. The river corridor and floodplain is a valuable wildlife habitat and flood protection for Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City. There are clear opportunities to increase access, improve management and secure a gain in biodiversity, as well as finding beneficial uses for historic farm buildings.

The Green Corridor would see the surrounding arable land returned to low intensity grazing.

7.

Creswick

GE is proposing a site between the Creswick planation and Ascot Lane. It is envisaged as a high quality extension of 250 houses in the Garden City tradition. The design of the houses will seek to retain existing watercourses and mature trees and improve wildlife habitat links with existing ponds and margins.

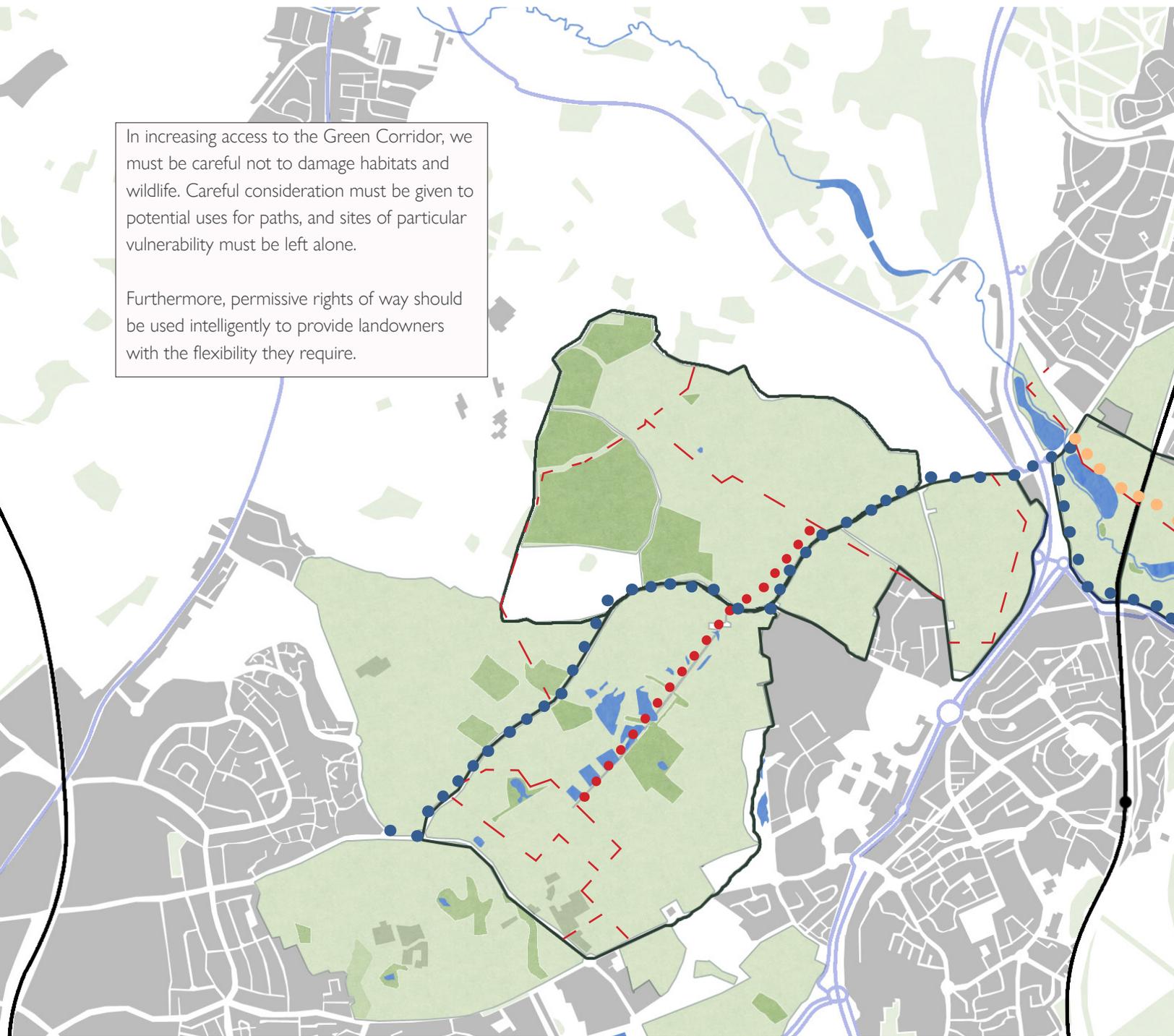
There are opportunities to enhance access through a cricket pitch, accompanied by additional woodland and grassland. Importantly, Commons Wood houses an ancient spring-fed fen, unique in the county.

ACCESS

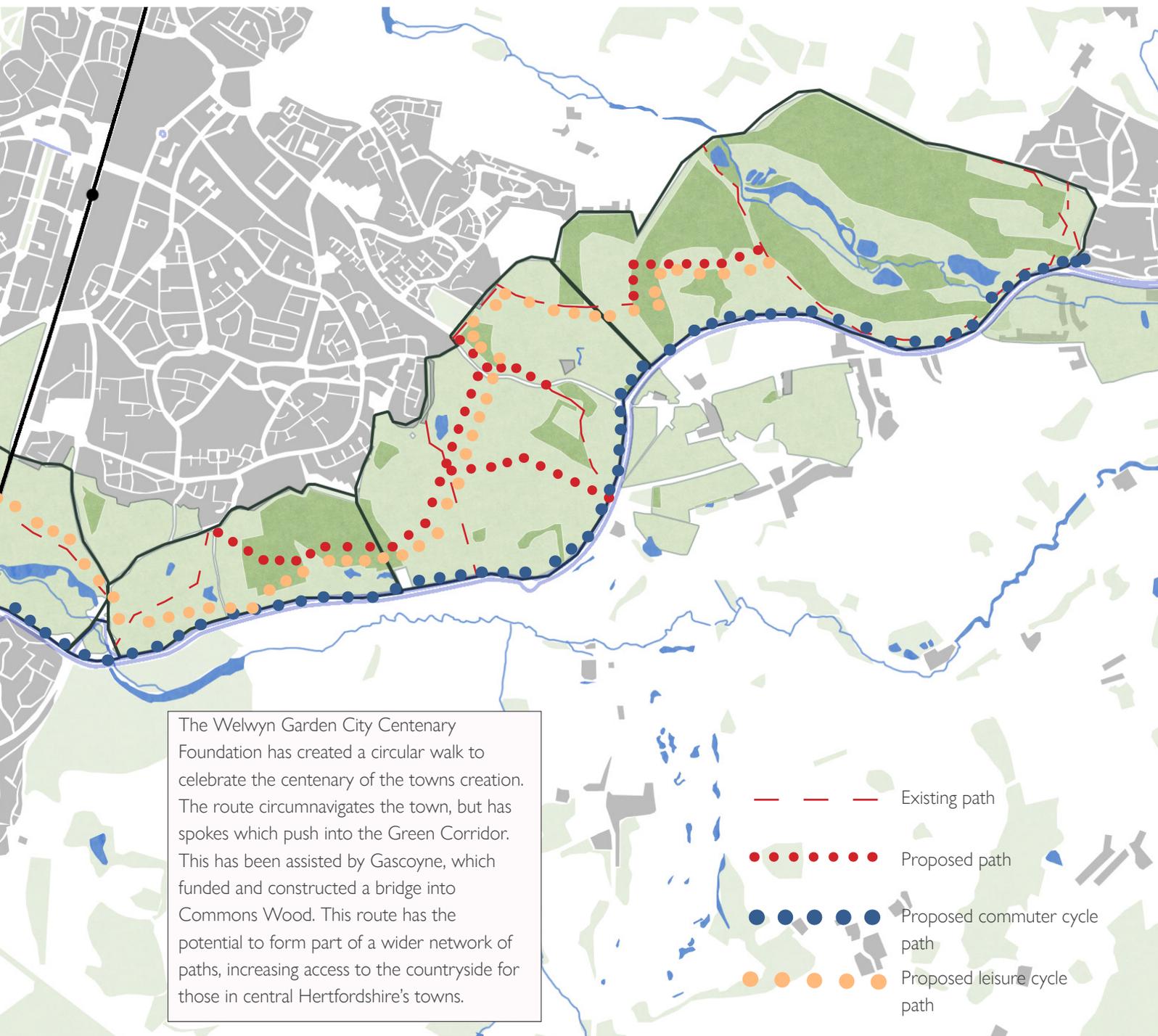
Opportunities for access and recreation are key benefits which could be delivered by a Green Corridor. Our ambition would be to see the existing network of footpaths and bridleways connected, enabling people to walk the length and breadth of the corridor with minimal exposure to traffic. This would dramatically improve access to green space for residents of Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City, as well as the new communities at Symondshyde and Stanboroughbury. The paths shown here are a mix of permissive and designated rights of way. Clear and thoughtful signage and waymarking throughout the corridor would provide users with clarity and understanding, whilst lending heightened opportunities for education. Proposed paths are not intended to be definitive proposals, but rather an indication of opportunities to connect the network. Such footpaths would give the opportunity to connect heritage assets and access key viewing locations in the surrounding landscape.

In increasing access to the Green Corridor, we must be careful not to damage habitats and wildlife. Careful consideration must be given to potential uses for paths, and sites of particular vulnerability must be left alone.

Furthermore, permissive rights of way should be used intelligently to provide landowners with the flexibility they require.



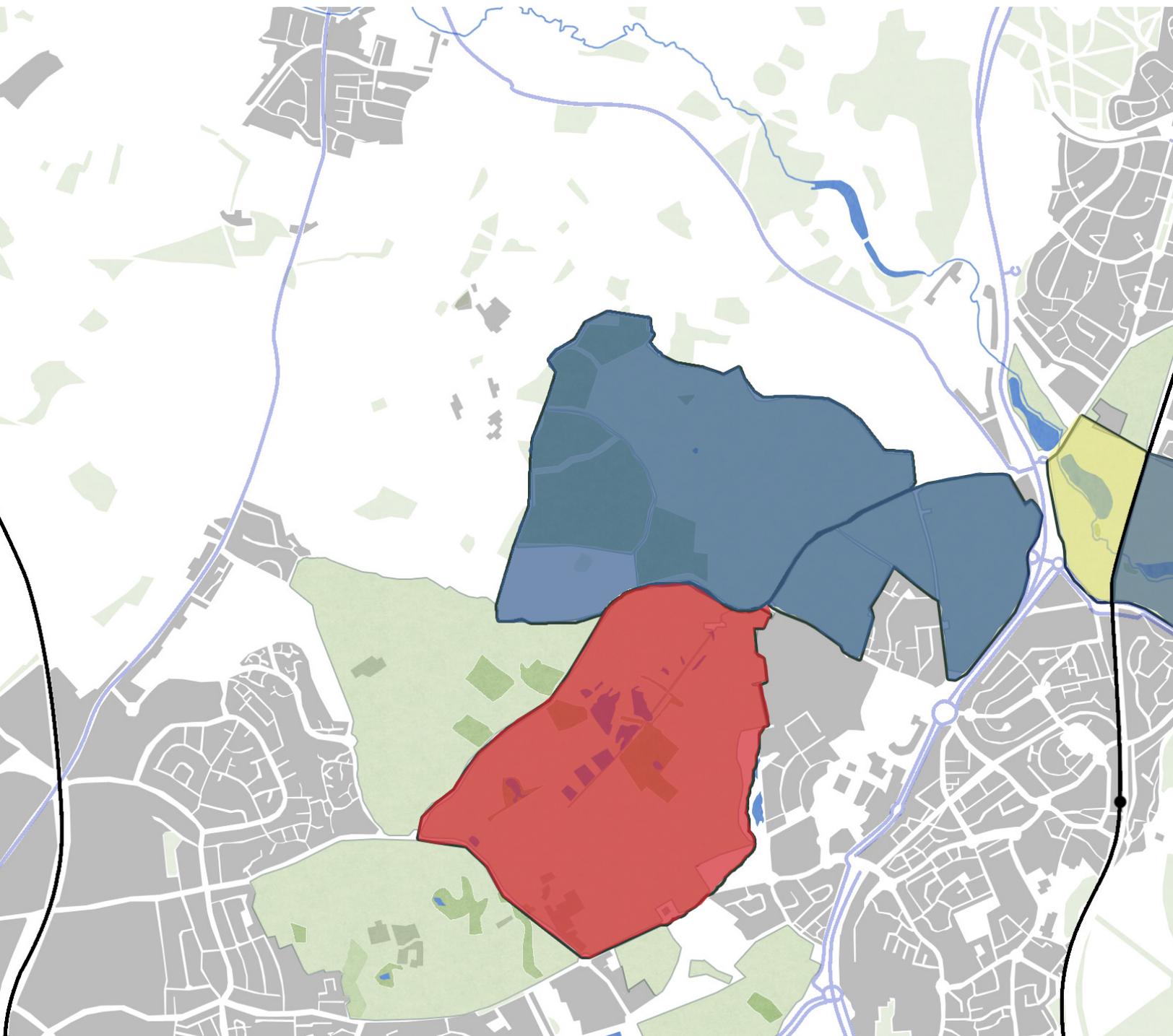
WelHat Cycling have a vision for the future of cycling infrastructure in the corridor. Their plan would allow convenient commuting across the corridor, as well as a family route for leisure. A hierarchy of paths would allow bicycle traffic of different speeds to feel comfortable and safe. Crossing points on routes from St Albans to Hertford would make cycling more appealing to commuters. Paths should be built to the highest standards, with solar studs in rural zones, providing safe travel options and dark skies. Increasing uptake of cycling can help alleviate concerns around infrastructure associated with new developments and an increasing population. Encouraging active travel is of significant public health, mental health and community benefit. Modal shift is a key aspect of HCC's transport strategy: achieving this will only be possible if the cycling infrastructure is safe, convenient, and connects people to the places they want to go to.



OWNERSHIP

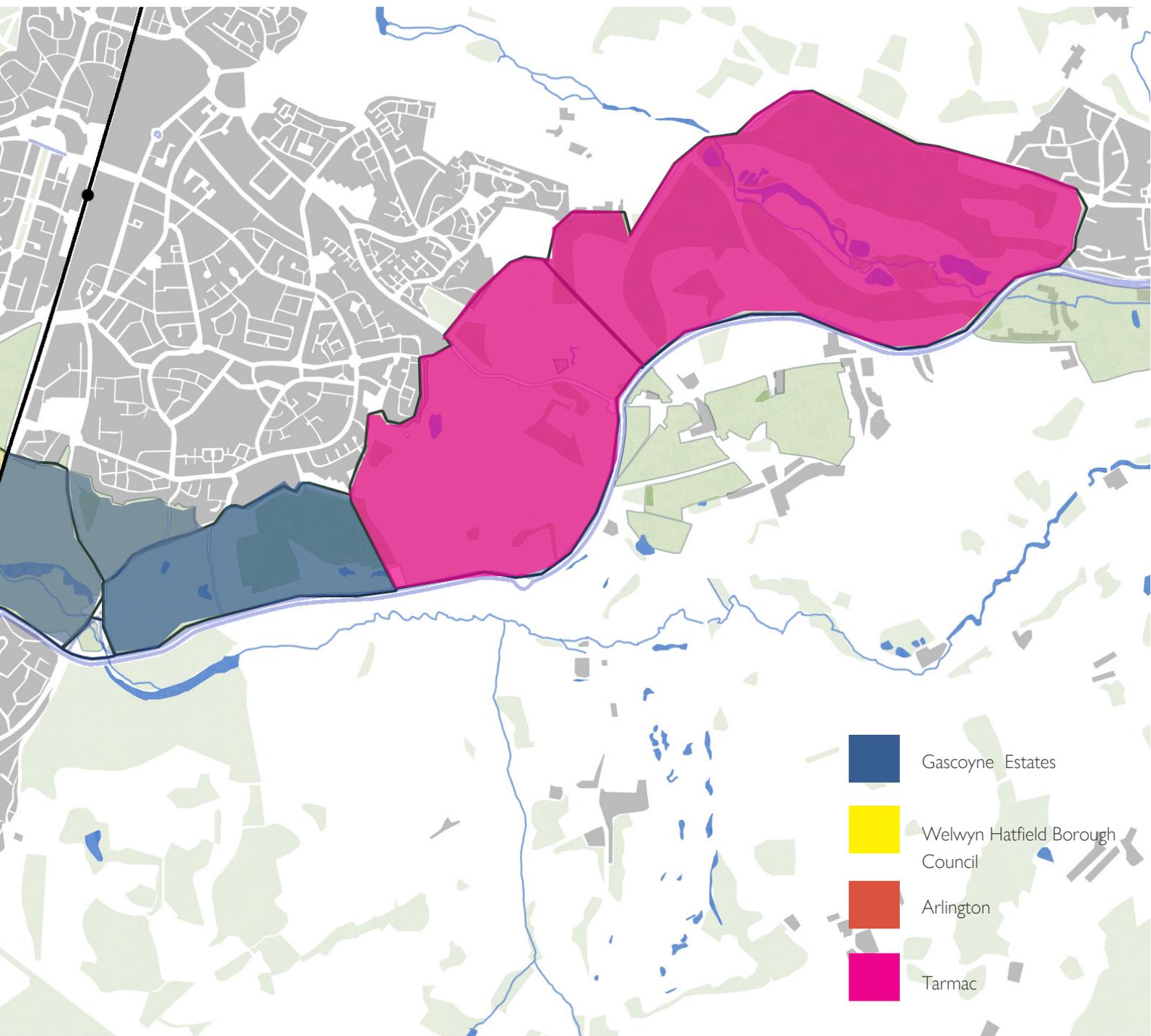
The creation of a Green Corridor should be made significantly easier by the limited number of landowners involved. As illustrated below, the proposed corridor is spread between four principal land owners. This will make coordination significantly easier, allowing for the creation of a coherent and accessible tract of green infrastructure.

In creating a Green Corridor and enhancing its value, we would be protecting central Hertfordshire from further convergence. By improving the amenity value, biodiversity and access, we can ensure that we protect the integrity of our towns and villages while providing a substantial community asset for generations to come.



The small number of owners should also make ongoing support of the scheme easier. There are numerous stewardship models - detailed later in this report - which could be utilised to ensure that infrastructure is maintained and improved over time. Gascoyne's historic stewardship of the central Hertfordshire landscape, and our work with local stakeholders, puts us in a strong position to help create an exemplar green infrastructure network.

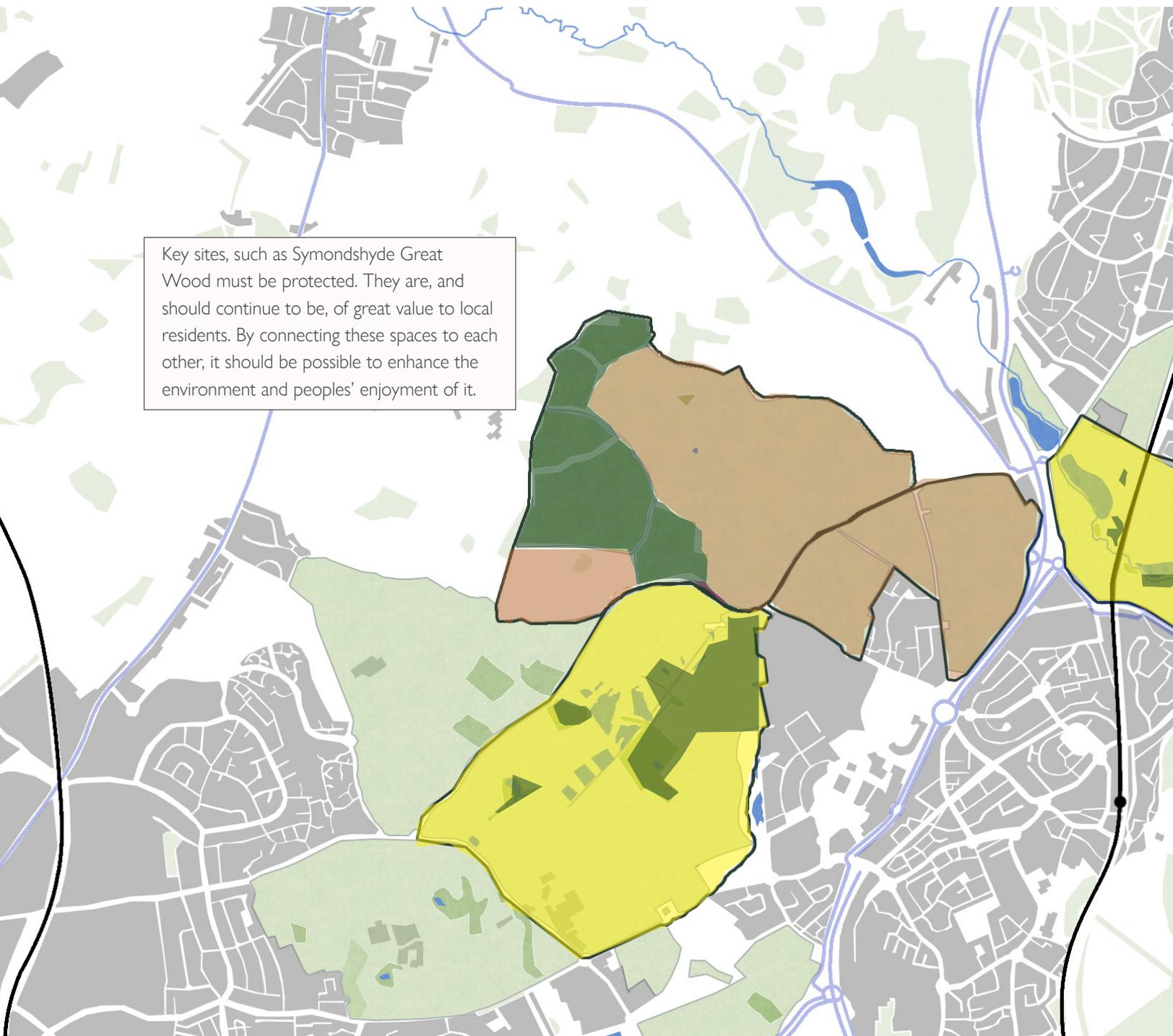
Furthermore, a small number of landowners reduces the likelihood of an individual withdrawing from the project, jeopardising the broad intentions and integrity of the corridor.



HABITATS

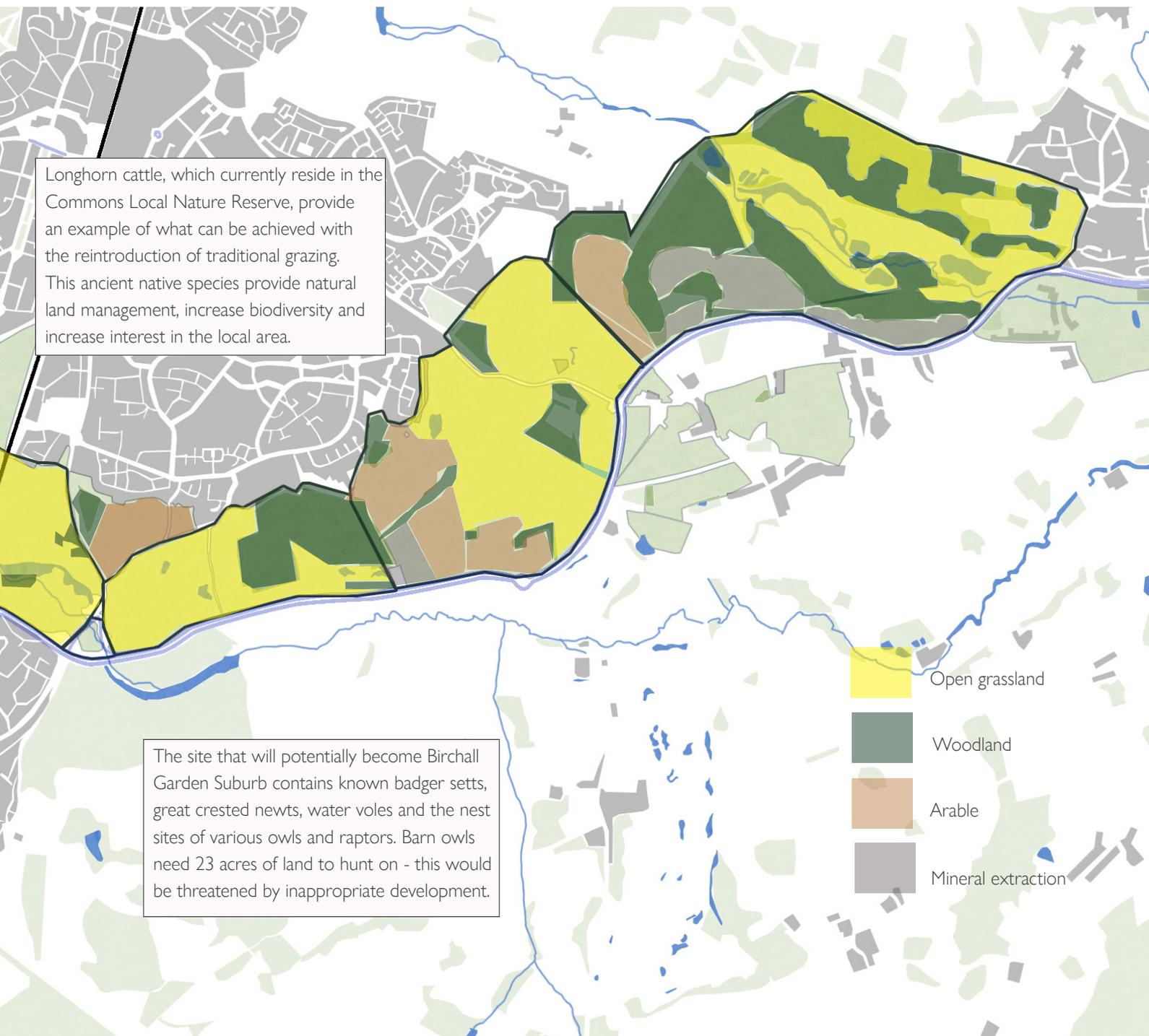
Environmental concerns are rightly at the top of the present political agenda. If we are to develop responsibly, we must take into account the value of the ecosystem that surrounds us. The map below shows the different types of habitat which can be identified along the corridor. Any development taking place in the corridor must result in a net gain to biodiversity, and view the corridor as a connected strategic system rather than a series of disparate land holdings.

The corridor is a mix of open grassland, arable land, semi-wild meadow and forest. Several key sites have been identified as important habitats for barn owls, badgers and raptors - most notably at the site of the proposed Birchall Garden Suburb.



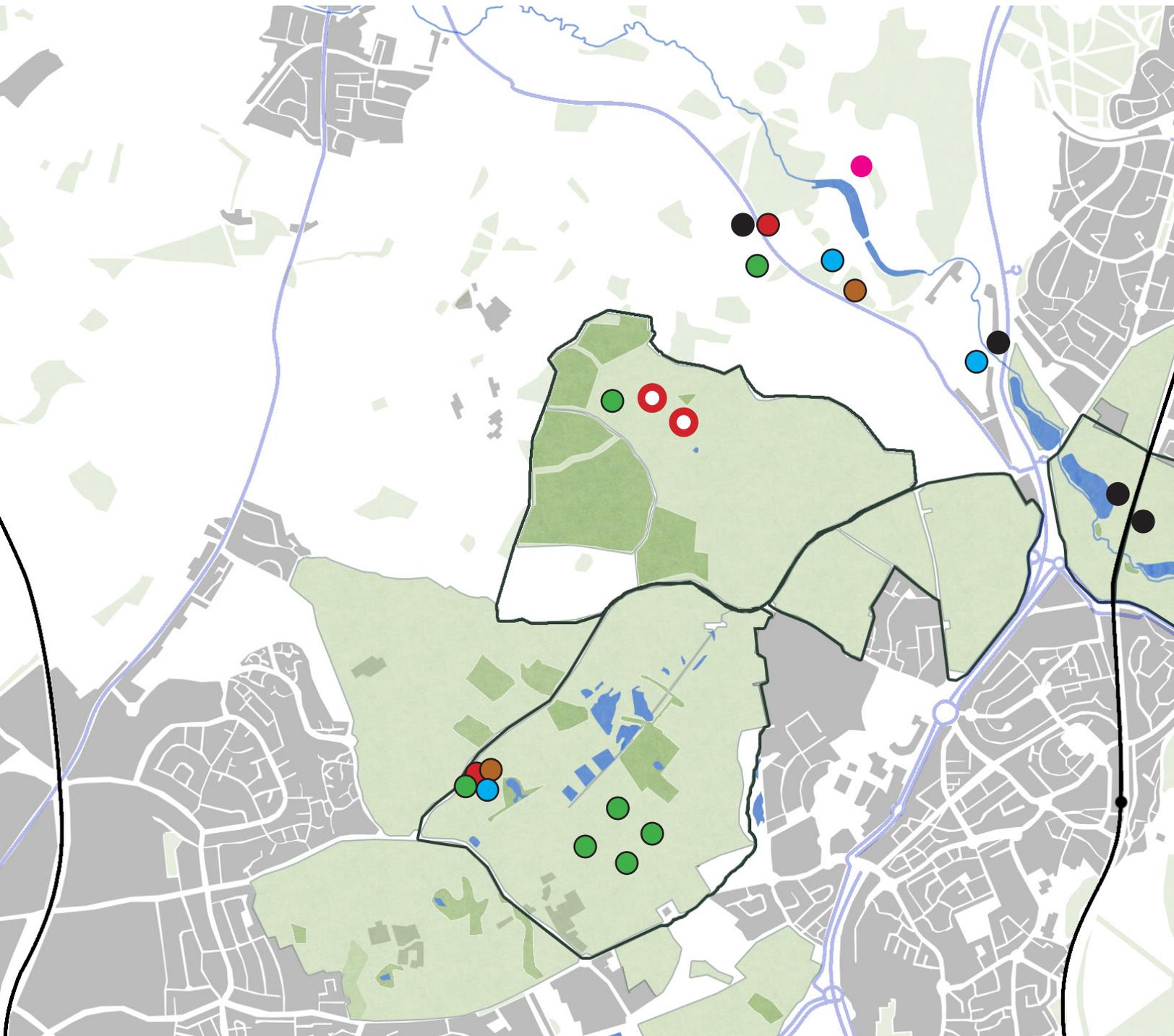
A proper ecosystem services audit must be undertaken to establish the value of certain habitats. Steps must be taken to ensure that any areas of particular importance are protected and enhanced, securing them for future generations. Pinch points and excessive narrowing must be avoided to maintain the usefulness of the space for residents and wildlife.

Another consideration is the effect of adverse development on flood risk, aquifer replenishment and the effect on ecosystems of narrowing the corridor. Hertfordshire already struggles with water supply, and protecting the rivers Mimram and Lea is critical to the wellbeing of key fish and insect species.

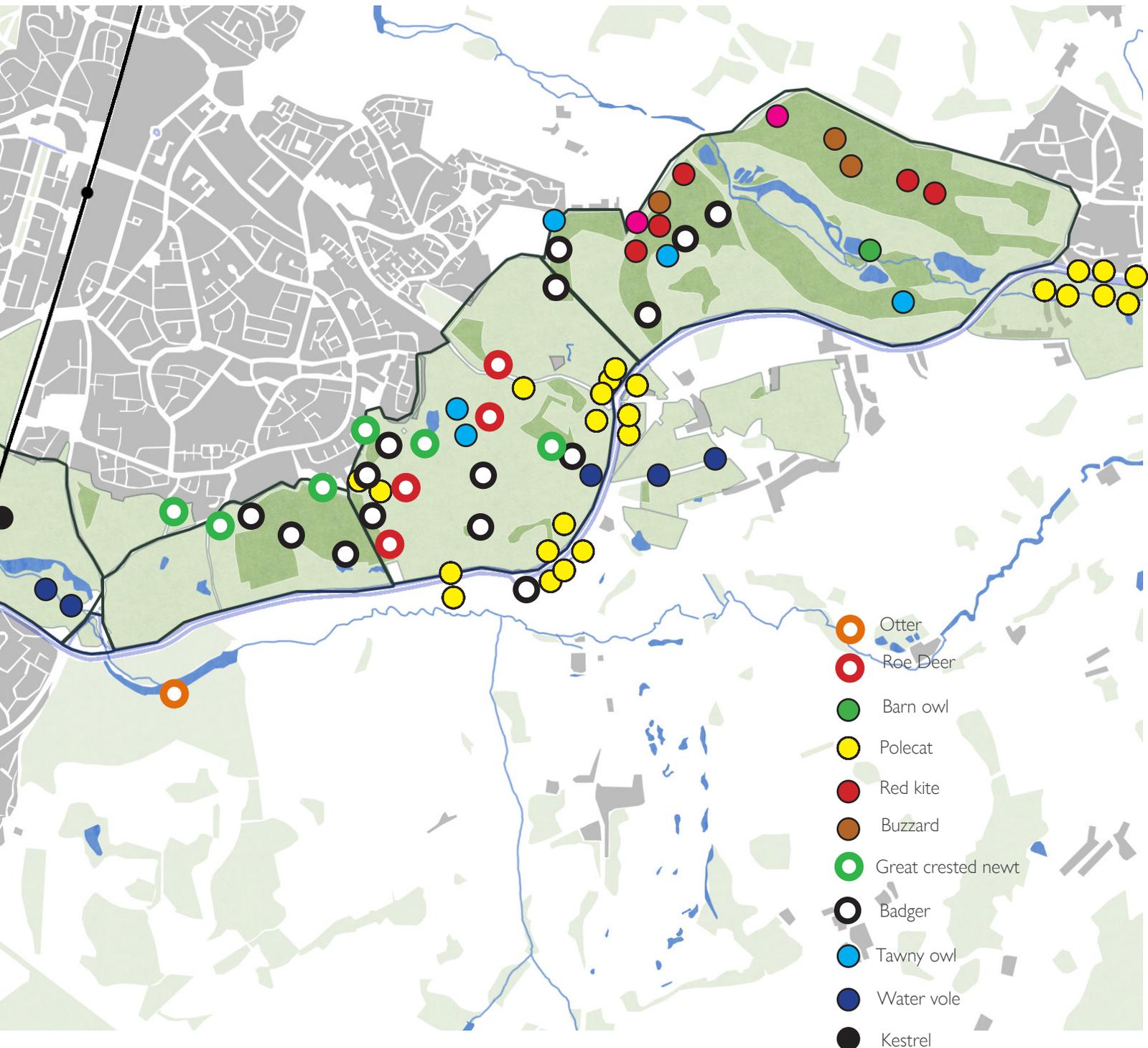


WILDLIFE

Extensive wildlife surveys have been undertaken by local ecologists, identifying the locations of species in the corridor. The image below maps out the sites for protected species, including raptors, badgers, great crested newts and water voles. What is made clear by this is the manner in which the corridor changes from east to west. In the eastern end of the corridor, the landscape is mostly arable and has been subject to extensive mineral extraction. The monocultures of these arable parcels of land are not conducive to extensive biodiversity. There are undoubtedly opportunities to improve the biodiversity of this area, while protecting and enhancing sites such as Symondshyde Great Wood.



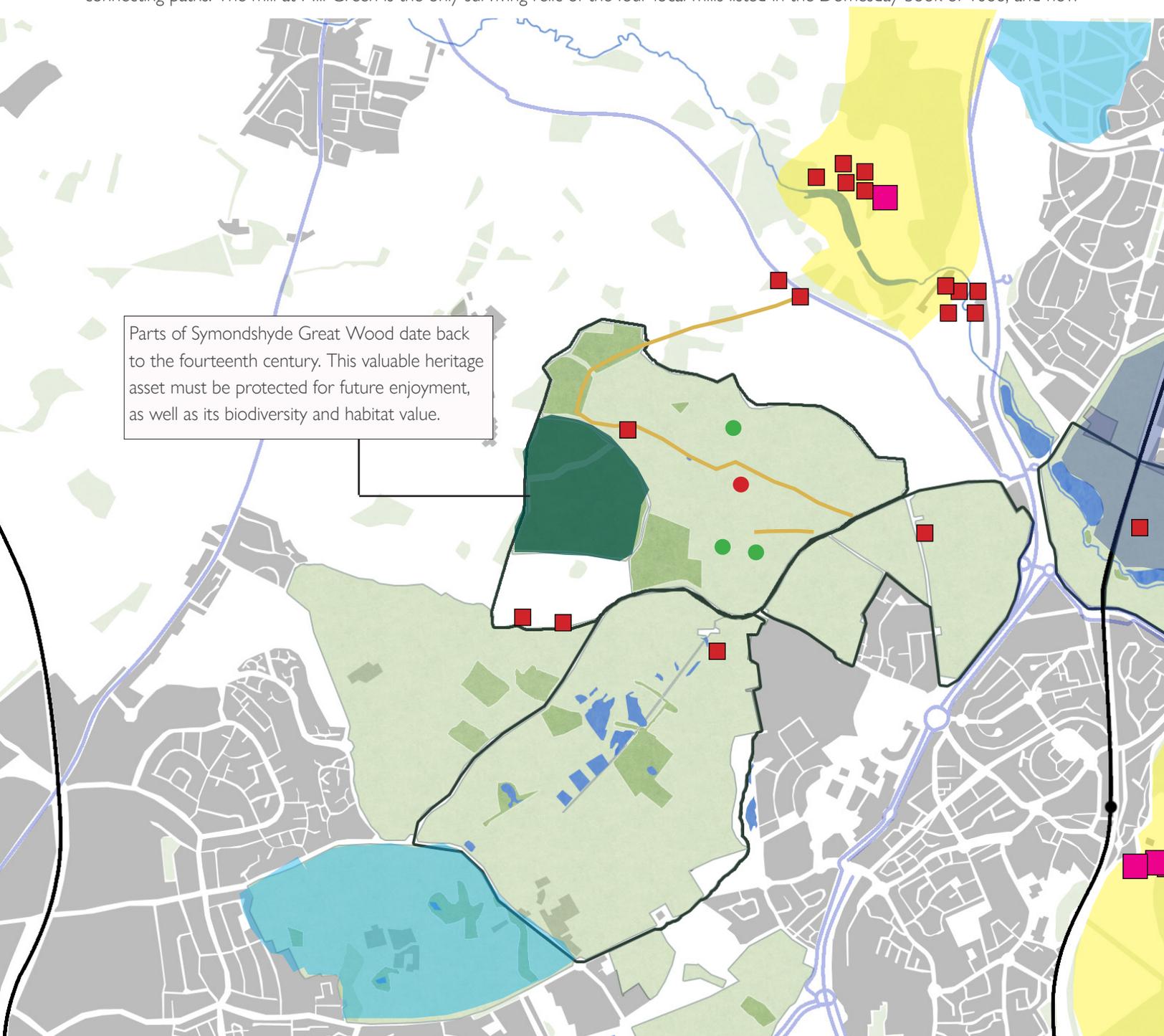
In contrast, the more natural and ancient landscapes in the west of the corridor are richer in wildlife. This diversity must in the first instance be maintained. The corridor functions for wildlife in its present state, and this must not be sacrificed. In addition, the greatest density of wildlife is found along the northern edge of the western half. This is the natural route for corridor enhancements, as a wildlife corridor along the A14 would result in large numbers of deaths for species such as badger and polecat. This must be a consideration for any development within the corridor. Finally, the large grassland sites are vital for feeding raptors. Ellenbrook fields and Cole Green are regularly used as winter feeding grounds for short eared owls, and ten species of raptor have been identified hunting along the corridor. To think only about where these species nest, and not where they hunt, is to ignore a key function of the corridor.



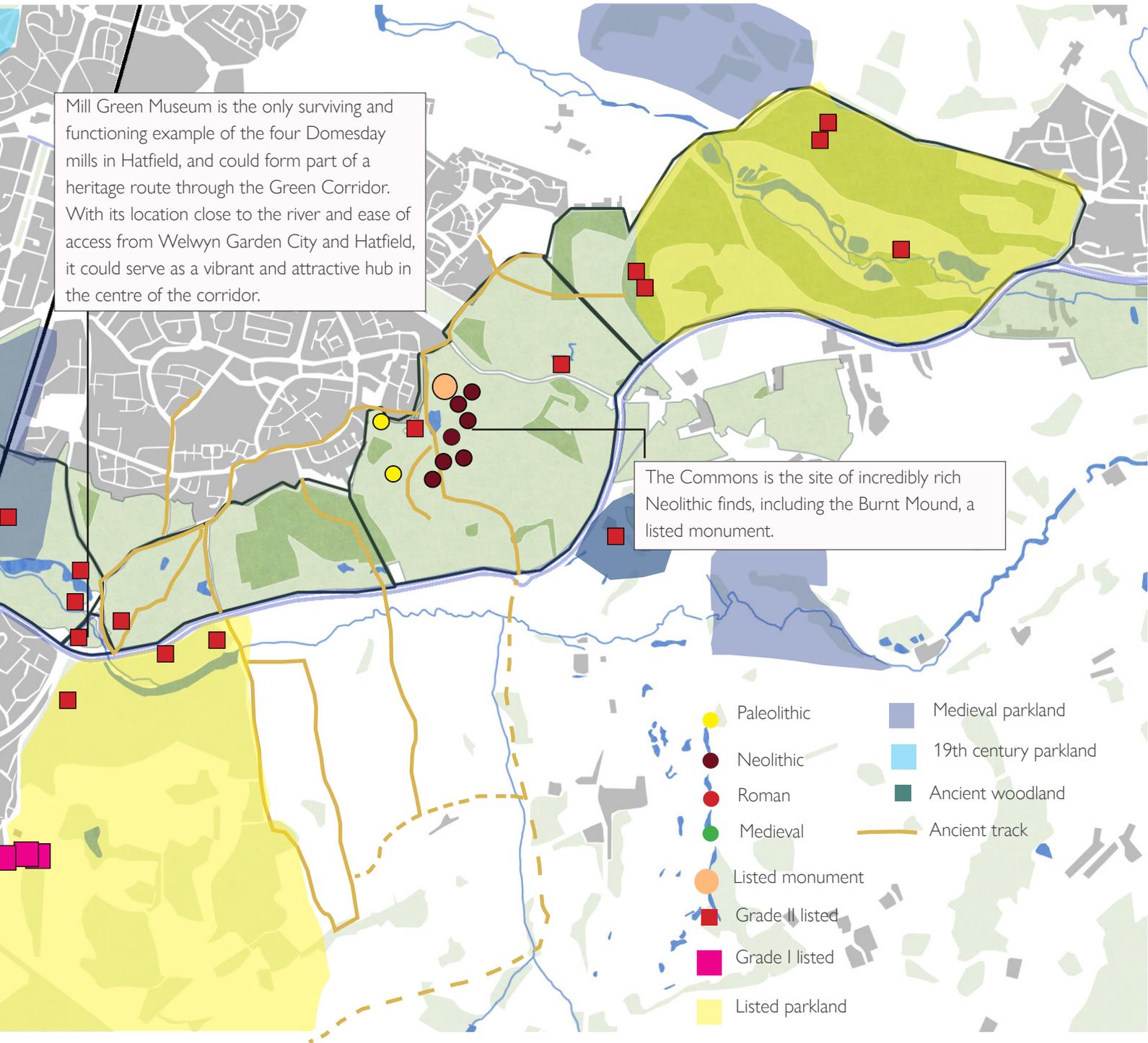
HERITAGE

The past has shaped the present and should inform our future. The character and landscape of the Green Corridor is the product of thousands of years of evolution, and must be preserved and enhanced. Where efforts have been made to highlight these assets - as at the Mill Green Museum - we can bring the past to life and educate people on their precious surroundings and opportunities for the future.

Those mapped below are only some of the heritage assets present in the corridor. The wealth of worked flints found across the interfluvium - the land between the rivers Lea and Mimram - and the river banks attest to Neolithic and Paleolithic activity. Many of the fields and farms in the corridor are bounded by original Saxon ditches, unchanged for centuries, with ancient hedgerows lining connecting paths. The mill at Mill Green is the only surviving relic of the four local mills listed in the Domesday book of 1086, and now



serves a vital function in educating visitors about our local history. Closer to the present day, a rich tapestry of medieval, Tudor and Stuart parkland is blended with significant landscape parks from the 18th and 19th centuries. The network of parkland from Panshanger in the east, through Hatfield and up to Brocket Hall in the north demonstrates the significance of Hertfordshire during this period. Most recently, Ebenezer Howard's vision for the Garden City was key in the past century and a precursor to Hertfordshire's pioneering approach to town planning. On land sold, by the then Lord Salisbury, at agricultural rates he established the second garden city, changing the landscape of central Hertfordshire forever. However, the Salisbury Line was established at this time, ensuring that Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City would never converge. We draw inspiration from the Salisbury Line today, and hold its purpose of maintaining the character of central Hertfordshire at the core of our plans for a Green Corridor.



WATER

Water is crucial to all land ecosystems yet is often treated as a problem to be managed. Open watercourses sustain incredible plant and animal biodiversity as well as providing essential drainage and flood attenuation. Riparian zone vegetation - that is, vegetation found on the banks of rivers and streams - is often the most critical linear landscape feature linking areas of high biodiversity.

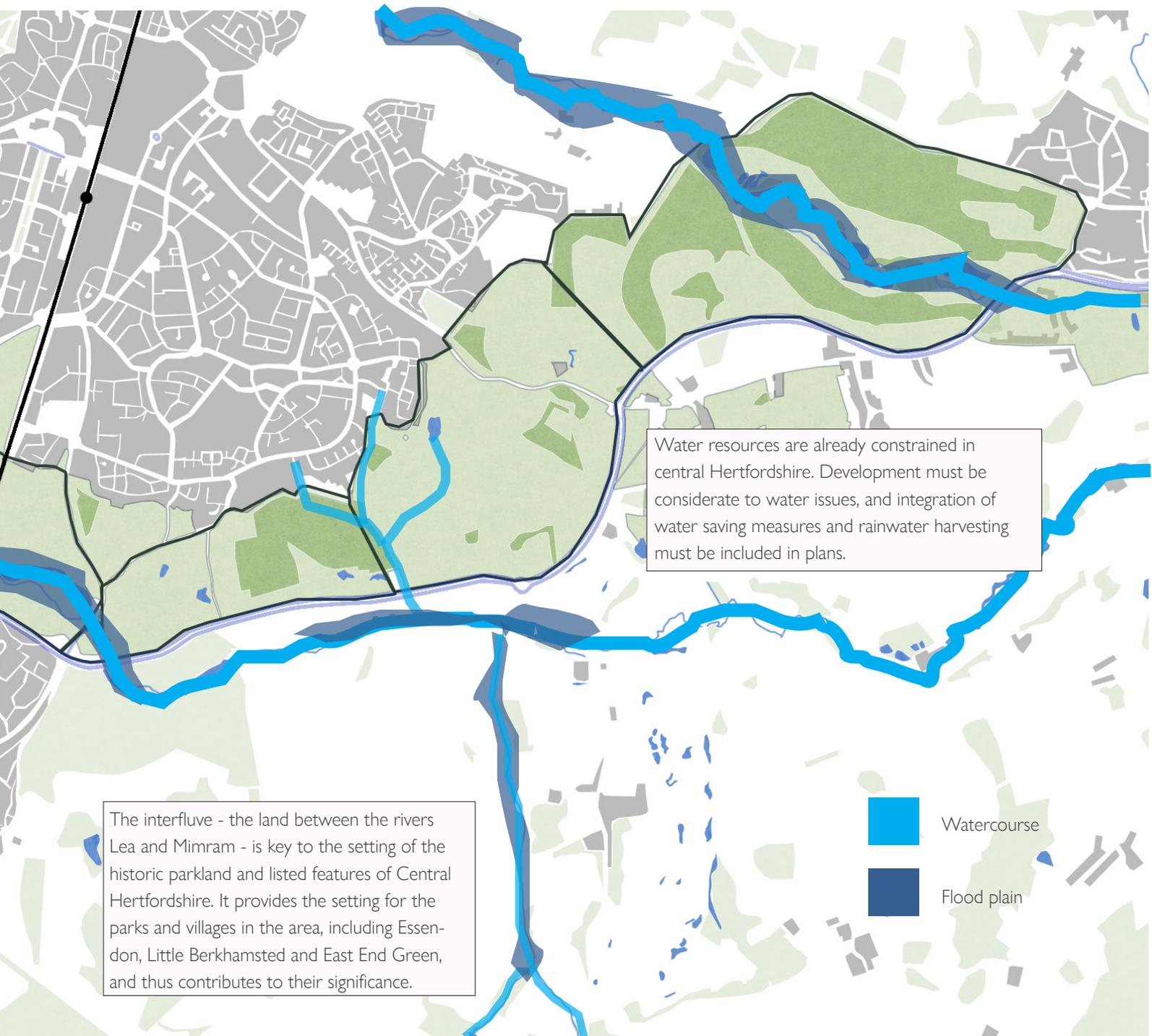
There are many watercourses and ponds within the green corridor and more open water could be created within sensitive new development. Wet swales and balancing ponds linked to the existing watercourse network can enhance and protect critical wildlife corridors, as well as lowering the risk of flooding. Wide buffer zones between watercourses and land with other uses can maximise



If implemented with care, as proposed at Coopers Green, sustainable urban drainage schemes (SUDS) can enhance the natural environment and provide habitats for aquatic wildlife. They can also be a valuable community asset, contributing to the quality of public open space, providing opportunities for relaxation and wellbeing.

the natural potential of these landscape features whilst also bringing opportunities for areas for relaxation and quiet contemplation. Water quality often suffers where urban development takes place. Too often pollution prevention and control is only implemented as required by minimum legal standards. There should be clear and obvious separation between wastewater and surface water systems. Surface water drains should be clearly identified and natural pollution buffering with reed beds can add critically scarce habitat whilst addressing pollution issues.

Any development within the Green Corridor which risks the quality or integrity of water sources must be carefully considered.





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AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is, and should continue to be, an intrinsic part of the British countryside. Hertfordshire is an intensively farmed landscape, and people's experience of the Green Corridor will continue to be informed by crops, livestock and farmers.

However, times are changing. The future of agriculture in the UK has never been more uncertain. With subsidies at risk, responsible farming will become increasingly hard to maintain. Despite this, farmers will continue to play a vital role in the management of our countryside.

Environmental concerns must be placed at the top of the agricultural agenda. British farming is already among the most sustainable in the world, but there is always room for improvement. Gascoyne has been experimenting with sustainable methods of production on its farms. Seeds are now drilled directly into the soil, rather than through the use of a plough. This reduces soil disruption, keeps carbon dioxide locked in the ground, and reduces soil erosion. In addition, we have enhanced hedgerows and beetle banks across our farms, supporting vital invertebrate and bird life.

We are also willing - and planning - to assess our use of land. We are returning parts of our land holdings to grassland and hosting low intensity grazing. The land surrounding Woodhall Farm, in the centre of the corridor, will become pasture as part of our long term land management strategy. This is a proven way to increase biodiversity, as a monoculture is replaced with improved grassland. Insects and flowers flourish as grazing imitates the natural, low intensity land management of years gone by.

We encourage other landowners to take their stewardship responsibilities seriously, and start taking similar steps. We are also actively engaging with debates around land management, farming practices and sustainability, and learn from others in tackling these vital problems. Making farming more wildlife friendly will be central to future policy, and we must start now.

We cannot, however, endorse changes to land use, access or boundaries, which would hamper the viability of our agricultural business. Farming is already a challenging task, and to increase the pressure on British agriculture is an intensely risky endeavour.

Replanting woodland, for example, is a project Gascoyne could support - indeed, we manage a number of large woodlands and routinely plant to create wildlife corridors. However, if such planting were to sever an agricultural operation in two, it would cause more damage than good. A sensible compromise might be found, where farmers, landowners and the local authority collaborate to establish the most appropriate way to look after the countryside.

There are also practical considerations in the short and medium term. Tenant farmers have rights enshrined in the law, and cannot be required to change their land use without extensive justification. We cannot simply enforce changes to land in the corridor without a broad period of engagement and the consent of those affected by it.



Farming will continue to inform the landscape of the Green Corridor, and any changes to land use must be well considered and appropriate to the requirements of landowners.

FUNDING, MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

Gascoyne is acutely aware that the creation of a Green Corridor will be a challenging undertaking. We are not ignoring the practical challenges associated with such a project, but strongly believe that the long term benefits will vastly outweigh any short term difficulty. It is important to have a clear understanding of the practicalities of such an endeavour from the outset, and we look forward to discussing this in greater depth with potential partners.

Funding

It will be necessary to design the Green Corridor in detail before generating specific and accurate costs. It is anticipated that works would be undertaken in a phased programme. It is clear that there already exist several avenues of funding for the improvement of our green infrastructure.

Community Infrastructure Levy

A charge the local authority can raise from a developer in order to improve local facilities.

Section 106 contributions

A similar mechanism for ensuring developers contribute to mitigating the impact of the new homes. Unlike CIL, these contributions are typically linked to vicinity of the development.

Park charges

Utilising a fraction of the existing parks income, and that of those opening on the phased basis, to invest in the wider Green Corridor. This would have to be balanced so as to ensure that existing parks such as Panshanger would not lose any income.

Endowments

It would be possible to endow a trust with some assets, such that it would become a self-sustaining enterprise. Gascoyne has historically established such a trust in Liverpool during the 1950s.

Commercial opportunities

The increasing need for carbon offsetting present opportunities to enhance the Green Corridor whilst facilitating development. Whether through carbon credits or offsetting in order to deliver a net gain to biodiversity, a joined up approach across the Corridor would deliver benefits in a relatively short timeframe.

Management

Millions of pounds could be spent on green infrastructure, only for the investment to be wasted by poor management. We aim to address this problem with a long-term model, based on stewardship.

Gascoyne Estates has extensive experience managing green space, in its management of Hatfield Park Estate. Its spectrum of operations ranges from conservation of the built environment to agriculture and forestry. We are aware of, and carefully consider, the impact of our agricultural practices on the environment, and strive to minimise our impact on the land. The park includes a 1200 year old oak tree amongst an array of diverse woodland habitats. This is testament to the sense of responsibility we have to the land under our care, and the skill with which we have managed it for generations. We have a good working relationship with many local interest groups, and aim to generate consensus around this issue. All of our expertise would be brought to bear in the creation and maintenance of a Green Corridor which would serve as a source of pride for the community.

The Milton Keynes Parks Trust

The Milton Keynes Parks Trust represents an interesting case study. Established by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, it took a 999 year lease on 4,500 acres and was endowed with twenty million pounds. The endowment consisted mainly of commercial property in the new town, the rental income of which funds the Trust. Since then, the Trust has diversified its portfolio and now owns property in a variety of locations, not limited to Milton Keynes. The Trust's holdings now consist of 6,000 acres of varied land, and approximately 25% of the area of Milton Keynes.

A key part of the Trust's operation is flexibility - aware that the town would change in the years to come, there is a need to 'future-proof' the green spaces of the town. This has been highly successful, with the Trust receiving prestigious Green Flag awards for three consecutive years.

While this model may not be the most appropriate for the Central Hertfordshire Green Corridor, it demonstrates that with long term vision and carefully considered governance, green infrastructure can be provided, enhanced over time, and secured for future generations.

Hertfordshire Open Spaces Trust

We believe that the sorts of spaces discussed in this document are crucial to the future social landscape of Hertfordshire. They will deliver a wide range of significant benefits for residents and businesses. This is why Gascoyne Estates advocates a Hertfordshire Open Spaces Trust.

This trust would be founded to hold land for charitable purposes, to the benefit of the residents of Hertfordshire. It will be able to hold land as urban public realm, green spaces, wildlife habitats, and for public access. Most importantly, the Trust will have an ability to provide long-term sustainable management of public spaces across the county.

The role of landowners

The role of landowners in a project such as this cannot be overstated. Local landowners should have a right to exercise control over their assets, and any green corridor should be produced through the collaboration and express agreement of all parties.

This is also to the benefit of the public. Long term control and stewardship will be key to ensuring that funding persists and that management is of high quality. Rather than being perceived as barriers to public access, landowners should rather be seen as an insurance policy against the degradation of green space in the decades to come.

Aspiring to collaboration

The Green Corridor is more than just a series of connected fields. It is a varied and important tract of land which is home to rare and interesting habitats, heritage assets and watercourses. What's more, it can be enhanced to become exemplar green infrastructure, connecting central Hertfordshire and increasing access to well maintained landscapes. The value of what exists is already strong - the value of what could exist in its place is even more compelling.

Furthermore, the opportunity to create a net-gain in biodiversity presents itself at numerous points along the corridor. Some sites have already been allowed to return to a semi-natural state, with the commensurate uplift in insect and plant life. If agricultural monocultures in some areas were allowed to return to a more natural state, with low intensity grazing, it would be possible for the local authority to meet their obligations under the NPPF.

Gascoyne Estates intends to work closely with the local authority, the Central Hertfordshire Green Corridor Group, landowners, local interest groups and stakeholders, to ensure that we deliver green infrastructure that will stand the test of time.

This will require collaboration from landowners and tenants. It is our intention to open a dialogue with the critical stakeholders in order to begin working on a detailed proposal, in line with the local plan.

We are invested in the future of central Hertfordshire's landscape, and commit to securing its quality and integrity for future generations.

THE BENEFITS

It is our aim to formalise the Green Corridor as a network of valuable green space. It will serve as a high value public amenity which adds to a sense of place and improves the quality of life in Welwyn Hatfield.

In doing so, we will:

Safeguard against coalescence between Hertford, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and St Albans.

Retain the best of the existing green space and increase access to it.

Strengthen the existing network of cycle paths in order to encourage sustainable travel and opportunities for outdoor leisure.

Empower local communities by improving the scope for children's independent mobility and reduce car dependency. Increase active travel and help to combat health problems in the local area.

Establish a site survey and an improved understanding of local ecology.

Initiate woodland management schemes.

Provide controlled access to the River Lea.

Provide opportunities for education on the environment, local history and ecology.

This list will serve as the criteria against which the Green Corridor is measured. Green infrastructure is inherently long term, so the management of such assets must be planned for from the very beginning. Due to the unique landownership arrangements in the corridor, this is eminently achievable.

Establish an agri-environmental management policy, designed to improve soil quality and look into the introduction of grazing where appropriate.

Improve access to all identified areas of the Green Corridor, in line with HCC's Rights of Way improvement plan.

Explore the enhancement and connectivity of bridle paths.

Establish a protection regime in order to preserve and enhance the River Lea and flood meadows.

Protect and enhance important habitats for specific species.

Provide opportunities for additional woodland planting and screening.

Preserve heritage assets and listed buildings within the corridor.

Integrate the existing management policies in place for Ellenbrook Country Park and Panshanger Park.

We have an opportunity to vastly improve the quality of, and access to, our countryside. With a compelling vision, the Green Corridor will be an asset to the county, the borough and the community for many decades to come.

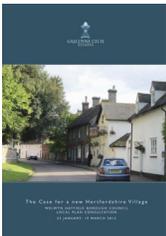
OTHER GASCOYNE PUBLICATIONS

A Vision for Hatfield in Central Hertfordshire



A Vision for Hatfield proposes a bold, exciting vision for the future of the town as part of a Central Hertfordshire economic hub. After tracing Hatfield's historic association with aerospace and manufacturing expertise, this brochure lays out the economic and social benefits of agglomeration, integrated transport networks, green infrastructure, carefully designed housing, and pedestrian-focused improvements to the public realm as part of a long-term plan to bring more strength and diversity to the local economy.

The Case for a New Hertfordshire Village



The Case for a New Hertfordshire Village puts forward the case for new villages as a viable approach to tackling the housing crisis. Given that villages housed a huge majority of the British population for much of the last millennium and that the English rural idyll still pulls people out of cities today, this brochure suggests that - as one of several housing delivery models offering answers to the present housing crisis - it is time for a rebirth of the English village.

Transport for Hatfield



Hertfordshire needs a step-change in public transport provision. In order to drive modal shift, a convenient, efficient and attractive mode of transport is required which connects the major settlements of the county from East to West. In this document, we propose a light rail system fit for the future.

A Strategic Overview



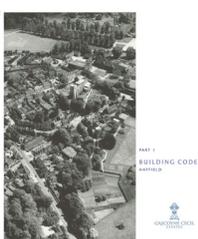
A Strategic Overview to the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan, provides a concise overview of representations made by Gascoyne Cecil Estates. The summary includes details of each of Gascoyne Cecil Estates sites together with proposals for green infrastructure and a sound long-term plan

The Pattern Book



The Pattern Book provides greater detail on each of Gascoyne Cecil Estates' strategic development sites. Clear analysis is provided of design principles including densities, road hierarchies and landscaping.

Building Codes



A series of four books published to lay out design guidance and codes for building and development across the Estates. This series of books highlights the importance of sound architectural detailing, materials and landscaping, and ensures our partners adhere to similarly high standards of both design and construction.



GASCOYNE PLACES

Further advice and Information can be obtained from:

Anthony Downs

Hatfield Estate Director

Hatfield Park Estate Office, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL9 5NB