

EXPANDED BACKGROUND /JUSTIFICATION FOR: APNP Policy HDNE 6:

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The Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment

A healthy natural environment, where farmland is producing food using sustainable farming systems that enable wildlife to thrive and flourish, and our woodlands, wetlands and wildlife sites are protected and enhanced is what this neighbourhood plan is encouraging. Therefore development proposals that adversely affect the natural environment will be strongly resisted.

Alvechurch Parish is enclosed by escarpments or synclines, forming an undulating topographical 'bowl' of Triassic Mercia Mudstone with glacial deposits. Newbourne Hill, a terminal moraine, rising to more than 165 metres, stands in the centre of the parish and is surrounded by several drumlins, low lying glacial elongated hills. The slowly permeable loamy and clayey soils have slightly impeded drainage so helping to protect areas downstream from excessive flooding (WCC HEAP).

Many springs, originating from the gravels which cap the hills, create wet flush sites which have developed layers of acid peat. Some of these have been colonised by alder trees making an unusual type of valley side woodland with several rare species known only at one or two sites in the county, as well as a wide variety of other less unusual species. The parish is also an important area for wet and dry acid grassland representing some of the most valuable sites of this type in the county. Development well away from these areas could change the water system in the hills and damage ancient woodland, ancient wood pasture and unimproved grassland. (*Worcestershire Wildlife Trust*)

The appearance of the natural environment across the disparked medieval Bordesley and Alvechurch Parks should be especially protected. Alvechurch Park, which lies across the western hillside of Newbourne Hill, is considered to be a very good example of "the recently-recognised concept of medieval 'aesthetically-modified landscapes'". (Letter from CJ Bond dated 26th January, 1994 Appendix A)

The old ponds near to historic farmsteads and the many ponds formed by the historic clay, marl and gravel extraction pits contribute significantly to biodiversity in the parish and are known to support wild fowl and great crested newts as well as other aquatic species. The dry pits provide food and shelter for terrestrial wildlife such as deer, foxes, badgers, grass snakes and sloe worms. These are all important assets and should be protected (WCC HEAP).

The River Arrow, its main tributary Dagnell Brook, their tributary streams, riverside and canal side meadows, a fishery, the canal, the Bittell reservoirs and watercourses related to the historic moat, mills and fish ponds all contribute to the high importance of the wildlife corridors through the parish. The headwaters of the Arrow and the Dagnell Brook drain fields where land also drains to the River Cole and north to the River Trent while the Arrow flows through Redditch and south to the River Severn. Flocks of migrating birds are seasonally recorded, one notable record being that of Logie, the BBC satellite-tagged Osprey, who sheltered in Peck Wood and at Bittell reservoirs during

inclement weather for two days while on her migration from Guinea-Bissau in Africa to the highlands of Scotland in the spring of 2008. (Appendix A)

The variety of wildlife habitats present in the parish is shown by the bird records noted by BTO recorders (Appendix A). These include nesting kingfishers, ravens, buzzards and other raptors, owls, all three species of woodpecker, bullfinches, tree creepers and many others. The WMRSS Sustainability Appraisal by URSUS Consulting Ltd (2008 Page 6) stated that "Bird species provide a good indication of the state of the wildlife in the countryside". The once common breeding curlews and skylarks have not been heard recently which may be due to predation of their eggs by foxes. (email -Curlew breeding survey in the Severn and Avon Dales).

The hedgerows and veteran trees lining the ancient route ways and bounding the disparked medieval parks form more valuable wildlife corridors. It is recommended that these hedges are cut only once every three years, providing more food for wildlife and saving money for owners. These veteran trees and the many other veteran oaks in the parish need to be protected as even decaying veteran trees are very important for biodiversity while the badger tunnel into Peck Wood, constructed under the Alvechurch bypass when it was built so that the badgers could roam safely to their territory, should be kept free from blockages.

The once common hedgehog is now under threat from development and habitat loss caused by the reduction of hedgerows and an increase in the intensification of our agricultural landscapes. In the last 10 years, the hedgehog population has declined by 30%; there are thought to be less than one million left in the UK. "Hedgehogs particularly like big crunchy beetles, earthworms and slugs, making them a gardener's best friend." (Source the Wildlife Trust). Gardens, hedgerows, woodlands, grasslands, parkland and cemeteries are all important hedgehog habitats. Adult hedgehogs travel between 1-2km per night and over home ranges between 10 to 20 hectares in size. In suburban areas, this means they range over entire housing estates and neighbourhoods.

Therefore, this Neighbourhood Plan encourages the creation of hedgehog highways because the hedgehogs need to be able to roam far and wide in search of food, mates and nesting sites. By cutting a 13 cm (5 inch) hole in fences and boundary treatments or digging channels beneath garden boundaries to connect gardens up will create the much needed hedgehog highways.

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