

# SUTTON POYNTZ NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

## BIODIVERSITY AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT SUB-GROUP.

### CONTEXT FOR ALLOCATION OF GREEN CORRIDOR AND LOCAL GREEN SPACE WITHIN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN.

#### 1. Introduction

This paper places the designation of Local Green Spaces and other biodiversity related measures in the context of the wider planning framework further to a request at the 17th April 2018 Steering Group meeting, as below:

“...the biodiversity group were to address each landowner’s response as appropriate, to consider whether to focus on designation within or outside the development boundary and take into account the impact of designation of local green space on other policies, returning to the SG with specific proposals.”

It should be read in conjunction with the Biodiversity and the Natural Environment section of the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

#### 2. Principles of Green Protection

Current UK Government strategy is outlined in the 25 year Environment Plan which can be accessed at the following link

([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)).

The extract below demonstrates alignment with the strategy and policies proposed within the Biodiversity and Natural Environment section of the draft Neighbourhood Plan for Sutton Poyntz, both generally and in relation to green corridors and local green space.

***“Chapter 2.1. Protecting and recovering nature We will support nature’s recovery and restore losses suffered over the past 50 years. We will develop a strategy for nature to tackle biodiversity loss, develop a Nature Recovery Network to complement and connect our best wildlife sites, and provide opportunities for species conservation and the reintroduction of native species. “***

The concept of green corridors as wildlife transit routes was first reported in detail and in a local context in the following report which has been referred to in the development of biodiversity policy for the Neighbourhood Plan.

**Urban Wildlife Corridors and Stepping Stones -Weymouth & Portland Borough Report for Weymouth and Portland Borough Council by Dorset Environmental Records Centre; September 2010.**

Definitions in the context of this report:

*Wildlife Corridors form links between sites or through urban areas and out to the wider countryside.*

*Stepping Stones may be more isolated, like a small copse in an arable landscape or individual veteran trees.*

**The report identified several important wildlife corridors in the Borough including the River Jordan Floodplain Corridor. It notes – “The River Jordan supports an important water vole colony and provides a further north-south link through the borough. The river corridor is highly modified with relatively little habitat and is particularly restricted by urban development either side of the A252 ”**

This recognises the detrimental impact of development on habitat along the length of the River Jordan including the section that passes through the Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Area and is reflected in the Local Plan Review. It establishes the basis of both preserving and enhancing wildlife habitat within the draft Neighbourhood Plan policies.

The following document develops the concept of green infrastructure in response to national policy requirements - **West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review Background Paper – Green Infrastructure (February 2017)**

It defines green infrastructure and what it can include as follows - "... network of multifunctional green space urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities." As a network it can include parks, **open spaces**, playing fields, **woodlands**, street trees, **allotments**, **private gardens**, **streams**, canals and other **water bodies** and features such as green roofs and walls.

**The report quotes the Natural England view of green infrastructure;**  
***'Green Infrastructure includes established green spaces and new sites and should thread through and surround the built environment and connect the urban area to its wider rural hinterland.'***

It is with this in mind that the Green Corridor built around the River Jordan and its feeder streams as a natural feature of the environment has been proposed. This has been subject to informal public consultation both within the Sutton Poyntz draft Place Appraisal and the Stage Two Survey and has received overwhelming public support. The need to provide connectivity both along the length of the corridor and extended connectivity into the wider countryside in order to allow for the free movement of flora and fauna is central to the policy on biodiversity and aligns with the intent stated above. Unhindered movement along this green corridor as a naturally derived feature necessitates passage through areas both within and outside artificial boundaries such as the Defined Development Boundary (DDB) Measures to protect wildlife over time therefore clearly need to address those areas both within and outside such artificial boundaries, particularly given the tendency for such non-physical artificial boundaries to change over time in response to a variety of human pressures and to become 'porous', as recently evidenced in Sutton Poyntz.

**A key finding in relation to development planning was stated in the Local Plan Review as:**  
***'Local planning policy includes good intentions on the natural environment and resources but we are yet to see if these can be implemented and enforced effectively. Ensuring that new development contributes to environmental enhancement and does not cause undue harm is a key challenge.'***

This aligns with the intent of the Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Plan policies on biodiversity to ensure that these policies do not become a barrier to development but seek to ensure that development takes into account the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in a complementary manner.

Subsequently the following joint publication was produced and provides greater current focus. **Dorset's Ecological Networks: A Dorset Local Nature Partnership Publication October 2017** (supported by Dorset County Council, Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and numerous signatories in the public and private sectors).

**In considering habitat for wildlife the report states:**  
***'When considered together, all sites and areas of wildlife value form a network, some parts of which will be closely interlinked, others less so, which has a value for the natural environment greater than the sum of its parts. This includes all known sites of wildlife importance, together with habitats that may be widespread but are nevertheless valuable for wildlife as part of the ecological function of the landscape, for dispersal (termed corridors and stepping stones) or to cushion wildlife sites from harm (termed buffers).'***

From a biodiversity perspective the Green Corridor and the Local Green Space sites have been proposed in order to align with this concept, the majority of the latter being closely interlinked to the corridor and each other and acting as important wildlife buffer zones against potentially harmful human impact.

**The Dorset Ecological Network paper states ‘*Though designated wildlife sites of local, national and international levels are important in their own right, if each individual site is isolated and surrounded by habitats and land uses which are hostile to wildlife, then they become ‘closed systems’, ever more vulnerable to the impacts of harmful events, either catastrophic (for example extreme weather, disease, fire) or gradual (such as pollution, erosion, invasive species). Sites that are situated within a well-connected and robust network of similar and complementary habitats and with connecting and buffering land will be much more resilient. An effective ecological network will function better not just for wildlife, but at the same time be of greater value for all aspects of life’.***

The biodiversity proposals in the draft Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Plan seek to pursue this objective by reaching out into the wider countryside, the preservation of which is a key part of the community vision. In doing so this provides the capacity to link into other corridors and stepping stones such as Chalbury and Osmington with the potential to form links with other neighbourhood plan zones during the life of the plan.

**The concept of multiple layers of protection is also embodied in the joint publication –‘*Together the national sites, local sites, wildlife corridors, stepping stones and buffer areas create a functioning ecological network. Sites can appear in more than one category, for example a nature reserve (local site) may also be part of a SSSI (national site); in which case the site is mapped as a national site as that takes precedence.***

The Sutton Poyntz Biodiversity policies including those on the designation of Local Green Space aim to provide several layers of protection with precedence being given to those options that give a higher level of protection where this is appropriate and the criteria are met.

At a local level the following hierarchy of biodiversity protection effectiveness seems reasonable: -



↑It is therefore entirely appropriate that the higher level of protection for biodiversity and amenity is sought wherever the relevant criteria can be met whilst being underpinned by other forms of protection where appropriate. With this in mind the Biodiversity sub-group acknowledge the proposals within the independent consultant’s report - Independent Assessment of Candidate Sites for Local Green Space Designation: Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Plan.

Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) established the Sutton Poyntz Ecological Area in October 2017 as part of the Green Infrastructure proposals of Weymouth and Portland Borough Council (see map)

### **3. Basis of Policy Proposals for Inclusion in the Sutton Poyntz Draft Neighbourhood Plan.**

The Green Corridor is formed around the key habitat and transit route of the natural feature of the River Jordan that runs centrally through the Neighbourhood Plan area from north to south and provides a backbone upon which to build. It is enhanced in value by its passage through a wide variety of habitats for such a small area; this includes wet woodland, fen, lowland meadow and pasture. Additionally, this gravel bed chalk stream is fed by a number of tributaries, primarily the silty waters of the Osmington Brook that flows from the east through lowland pasture. This feature has been recognised in terms of the ecological value in the recent past (1).

From a biodiversity and amenity perspective the areas proposed as Local Green Spaces are a logical choice –

- They are mostly sited along or in close proximity to the River Jordan or its feeder streams and thus provide important connectivity as well as acting as buffer zones.
- The majority are sited close to public rights of way or have a public right of way running through or immediately adjacent to them.
- They encompass a wide range of varied and important habitat.
- They will enhance natural interconnectivity.
- They provide a link into the wider countryside and provide a basis for extended connectivity into areas beyond the immediate Neighbourhood Area.

The suitability of these areas has been independently and objectively assessed against NPPF criteria and it is suggested that with objectivity in mind the focus should be placed on the land and not the ownership of that land, hence some areas cover more than one landowner. We would therefore propose that the consultant's recommendations of grouping some of the proposed Local Green Spaces has some merit and the following combinations should be considered G1, G2, G3 (and possibly G4); G5 and G6 with inclusion of the connecting land along the Osmington Brook which lies in between, and G9 and G10 (Woodland Area).

**It is recommended that each of these areas along with G7, G8 and G13 be designated as Local Green Spaces.**

Although we believe there is a case for inclusion of some of the areas considered as not entirely suitable for designation by the consultant we are prepared to acknowledge this professional independent view.

### **4. Consultation with Landowners**

Following issue of the report for informal consultation three landowners have raised several points of clarification and requests for specific supporting evidence, one affected landowner having expressed support for the designation of Local Green Spaces on his land and for the overall proposed designation. Detailed responses have been provided to each of the landowners. Wessex Water have also objected to each of their affected areas of land being designated on the basis of a) a higher level of protection already being in place (SSSI relative to G1 and G2) and b) impact on their statutory duties in relation to water supply and operational development. A meeting took place with Wessex Water on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018 in order to better understand the respective parties positions and seek a way forward prior to the formal Regulation 14 consultation process being triggered.

These various consultations have resulted in some modifications to the policy and further clarification of the justification and intent supporting narrative in order to help address these concerns without compromising the intended outcomes of the policy.

### **5. Potential Conflict with Other Neighbourhood Plan Policies**

The designation of Local Green Space under BNE2 is complementary to BNE1.

The only possible direct conflict relates to proposed areas G8 (Village Green) and G13 (Mission Hall Orchard) which lie wholly within the Defined Development Boundary (DDB). The Housing and Planning policy suggests around 20 houses be developed during the life of the plan. It could be argued that designation of areas of open land at G8 and G13 removes these as options for building land and puts even greater pressure on the availability of sites within the DDB. Both these sites are however very small in area and would appear unsuitable for housing in terms of the proximity to other buildings and we therefore conclude that no apparent conflict exists.

## 6. Impact of the Local Plan Review (2) Proposals on Green Infrastructure

It is encouraging to note that the revised policies (2) on Environment and Climate Change have incorporated a commitment to “net gains” and ‘enhancement of biodiversity’ in accordance with UK Government policy and which align with the policy proposals within the draft Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Plan.

Furthermore detailed proposals in respect of ‘Green Infrastructure’ have now been incorporated and their impact considered in relation to relevant policies within the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

The following extracts (2) are particularly relevant:-

**“2.3.21 Green infrastructure is a network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. The local plan review aims to protect, enhance and secure the management of green infrastructure to provide these long-term multifunctional benefits.”**

**“2.3.23 Table 2.2 sets out the different types of green infrastructure, their primary function, and lists the most relevant policies relating to them. Other policies in the local plan review and in neighbourhood plans may also be relevant.”**

**Reference is made to examples of Amenity Green Space, Green Corridors including Rivers and Floodplains and Local Character Areas including Local Green Spaces.**

**“2.3.25 Policies in the local plan review, and in neighbourhood plans, seek to protect (and in some cases enhance) the primary green infrastructure function of all the sites listed. These policies ... will protect these sites from the adverse impacts of development and, where appropriate, seek the enhancement of their primary function.”**

**“2.3.28 Examples of possible links may include:**

**the creation of new wildlife corridors or stepping stones for the movement of species, or securing the long-term retention and management of identified corridors or stepping stones”**

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that the policies contained in the draft Neighbourhood Plan align with the Local Plan policy. In particular the designation of a Green Corridor and Local Green Spaces at a local level will both underpin and complement the achievement and sustainability of these Local Authority strategic objectives in terms of the overall proposed Green Infrastructure development.

Reference

1. Urban Wildlife Corridors and Stepping Stones -Weymouth & Portland Borough Report for Weymouth and Portland Borough Council by *Dorset Environmental Records Centre*; September 2010.

2. West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review: 'Preferred Options' Document for Public Consultation, June 2018.



MAP – Green Infrastructure Area proposed by DERC October 2017.

