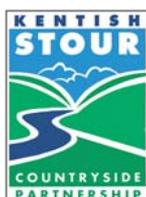


Report on the impacts and opportunities presented by new developments on wildlife habitat in the Ashford Green Corridor

November 2010



Conserving, enhancing and promoting the countryside and urban greenspace of the Stour Valley



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Ashford's Future Company Limited and Interreg 4a - European Regional Development Fund

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Marjan Desmet, Natural England
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Richard Moyse, Conservation Manager, Kent Wildlife Trust
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Author

Diane Comley, Project Officer, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership



Since 1994, the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) has been working with Ashford Borough Council, the Environment Agency and other organisations and landowners to conserve, create and enhance a range of wildlife habitats along the Ashford Green Corridor plus improve access and enjoyment of the Ashford Green Corridor for the public. The Ashford Green Corridor Management Plan was produced in 2000 by KSCP, and subsequently used as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Ashford Borough Local Plan. The Ashford Green Corridor website is run by KSCP.

Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership
Sidelands Farm
Little Olantigh Road
Wye
Ashford
Kent TN25 5DQ

(01233) 813307

kentishstour@kent.gov.uk
www.kentishstour.org.uk

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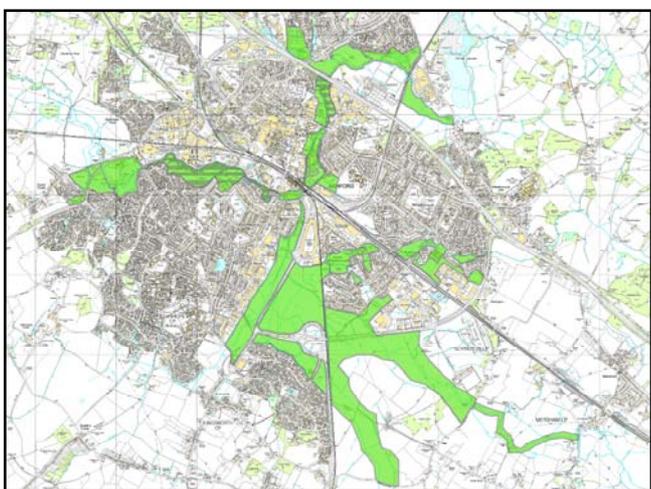
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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2001 Ashford was named as one of the South East's Growth Areas. In their 2010-11 Business Plan, Ashford's Future Company predicted that the population of '70,260 people now living in the Ashford growth area, around the existing town centre, will rise to at least 135,000 by 2031'. 16,770 new dwellings are expected to be built by 2021 and 31,000 by 2031.¹ Some of these new developments will or are likely to take place close to, or within, the Ashford Green Corridor (AGC).

The AGC runs through the centre of Ashford, providing a contiguous connection to the surrounding countryside, and is made up of connecting waterways and green spaces, at the centre of which are the East and Great Stour Rivers (Map 1a). The waterways and wetland areas of the AGC contain UK priority habitats supporting a range of wildlife, including key species such as the white-clawed crayfish and water vole. Almost the entire area was designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in 2002 and parts were designated County / Local Wildlife Sites (Map 2). Footpaths and the National Cycle Route 18 run through the corridor, linking communities and providing green transport links via the town centre. As the AGC is liable to periodic flooding, and its water holding capacity is an important flood control for much of Ashford (Map 1b), the AGC has until recently been mostly protected from development.

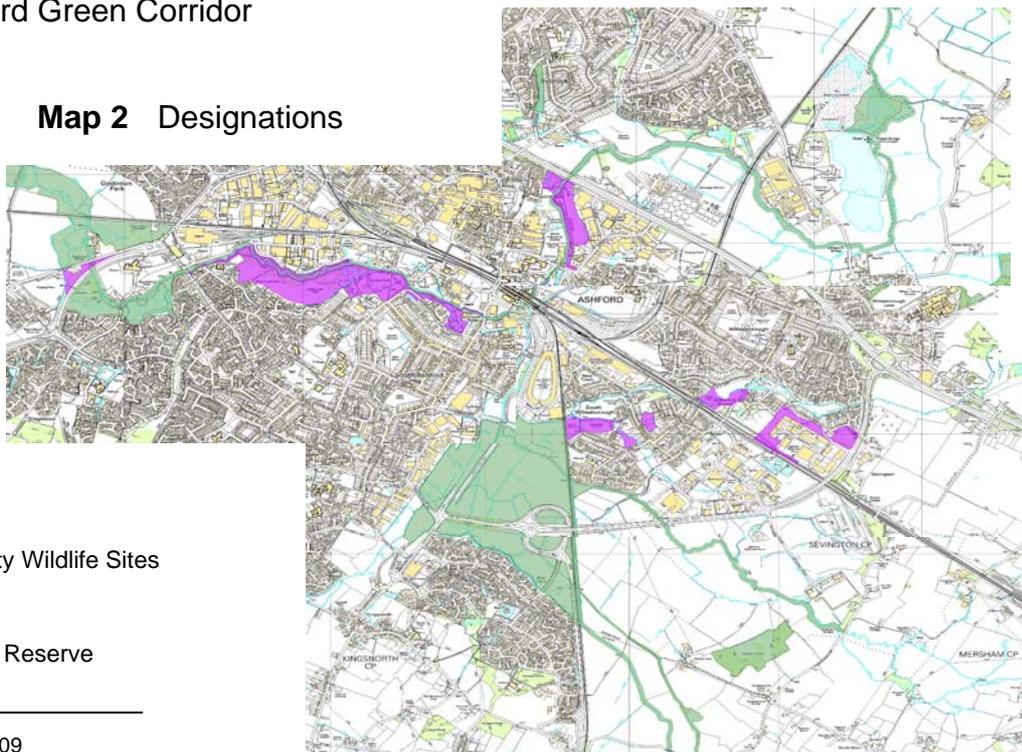


Map 1a Ashford Green Corridor



Map 1b Ashford flood plain
www.maps.environment-agency.gov.uk

Map 2 Designations



-  Local / County Wildlife Sites
-  Local Nature Reserve

¹ Ashford in Numbers, 2009
 Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

Whilst there continues to be broad policy support to protect the AGC, via the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) and the Green Spaces & Water Environment Supplementary Planning Document (currently under consultation), there are also policy pressures to develop within the urban centre, close to or within the AGC. (See Appendix 1 and 2).

Since 1994, the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) has been working with Ashford Borough Council (ABC), the Environment Agency (EA) and other organisations and landowners to successfully conserve, create and enhance wildlife habitats along the AGC, plus improve access and enjoyment for the public. Our main objective for doing this report was to firstly identify all confirmed and potential developments to be built adjacent or close to the AGC, establish the population increase this was likely to engender, and then to propose suitable management strategies and actions to mitigate or minimise the possible negative impacts on wildlife, and to identify opportunities for improvements. This is reflected in the structure of the document.



Fig. 1 The Great Stour within wet woodland at Buxford



Fig. 2 South Willesborough - wildflower meadow

In order to consider what impacts new developments may have, a visual survey was carried out of the identified sites in June-August 2009. This allowed us to review their current condition and issues arising with present day usage. This information has been updated in some cases with subsequent visits. Other areas likely to be affected by population increases were also surveyed.

The report found 16 sites bordering, or within the AGC, which have been identified for future development. Only one development site had planning permission and detailed plans, most of the others were going through public consultation processes, which provided a broad outline of their scale and nature. The population increase from much smaller developments close to the AGC, increased workforce numbers and larger developments further afield, are considered in general terms, as they are also anticipated to have an impact on the public spaces of the AGC.

It should be noted that whilst clearly the water quality of the water courses is both relevant to this report and of enormous importance to wildlife, this report will only touch on it, as it is adequately covered by the Environment Agency's own report - *Ashford's Future - Integrated Water Management Study 2005*.

2 DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Sites that have or may be developed are shown going from east to west on Map 3 and listed on Table 1 below, which summarises the data regarding type of development, number of dwellings, potential population increase and planning status and time period envisaged. A breakdown of each site follows with a summary of the reports findings on development status, site context and status (access, wildlife interest/value and current issues) and the potential impacts and opportunities that developments and related mitigation measures might offer. A summary of these findings is given at the end of this section.

In total 16 residential / commercial development sites close to or adjacent to the AGC were identified, that gave a possible total of 7,403 new dwellings with an estimated increased residential population of 17,767 people. No figure for the increase in the working population close to the AGC was established in this report. Nevertheless, a percentage of this transitory population will no doubt visit the AGC, or use it as a commuting route. The new Learning Campus was estimated to bring a top figure of 14,000 people into the Victoria Park area. However, this now looks as if it will be scaled back due to reduced funding.²

TABLE 1

Site No	Site	Development type # (dwellings)	Population increase Multiplier 2.4 per dwelling ^c	Planning Status (Aug 2010)	Time Scale
1	Godinton Park Ext.	150	360	USIDP	
2	Leacon Road	Mixed use / 150	360	USIDP	
3	Old Powergen Site	1002	2405	Outline PP 2008	Work starts 2010
4	Victoria Road	261	626	PP 2005	Work started 2010
	Western section	Possible development			
5	The Learning Campus	Educational establishment	Max.14,000 students		
6	Beaver Road	Commercial plus 100 homes	240	ATCAAP	
7	Commercial Quarter	Commercial and Residential		USIDP	
8	Civic Quarter	Indoor arena		USIDP	
9	Residential Quarter	(multi-storey car parking)			
10	Lower Queens Rd	40	96	USIDP	
11	Ashford Rugby Club	improvements		USIDP	
12	Canal District	Residential		No PA found	
13	Park Farm South & East	780 ^a	1872	Outline PP 2008	2009 -
14	Park Farm Southeast	500 ^b	1200	USIDPD	
15	Cheesemans Green Local Plan	1100	2640	Outline PP 2006	2008 - 2021
	Extension	1820 ^a	4368	Allocated	2013 - 2021
16	Waterbrook	1200 ^a	2880	CGWAAP	2010 - 2021
Parks	A Conningbrook B Cheesemans Green C Chillmington Green	A - Water sports facilities with proposed 300 residential units and 150 bed hotel	720	USIDP	
	TOTAL	7403	17767		

INDEX

USIDP Ashford Borough Council - Urban Sites and Infrastructure Development Plan (not yet adopted)

Sites on plan identified for potential development – 1 level of public consultation completed.

Full public consultation due to take place April 2010 (Jan 2009)

CGWAAP Cheesemans Green + Waterbrook Area Action Plan (not yet adopted) Sites on the plan identified for development – in public consultation

ATCAAP = Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan (adopted Feb. 2010)

PP = Planning Permission granted

PA = Planning Application

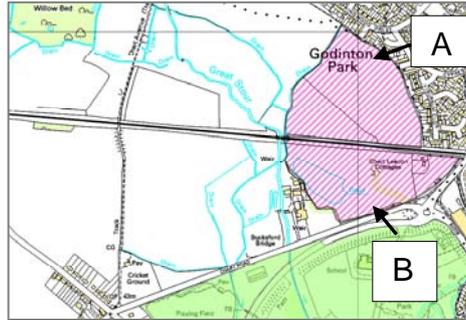
^a = Figures taken from ABC Core Strategy 2008 – Housing Trajectory

^b = Figure taken from previous withdrawn planning application

^c = working on the basis of 2.4 persons per dwelling as per Ashford Futures. (Strategic Growth Model, Section 5. GADF pg 79),

² ABC, Executive from the Head of Planning and Development, September 2009

Site 1 Godinton Park Extension / Great Chart



Homes - 150
Pop. - 306

Maps 4a and 4b

14.28 hectares made up of two parcels of agricultural land divided by railway lines:-

- A US24 - 7.91 hectares of arable land at Godinton House.
- B US27 - 6.37 hectares of agricultural land, including a substantial pond.

Planning status

USIDP January 2010 exhibition of potential development sites appears to have excluded Ref. US27 (Area B). The full process of public consultation is to be concluded by the end 2010, when chosen sites will be incorporated into the Ashford Local Development Framework (LDF).

Site context and status

The sites consist of pasture and arable fields identified as Grade 3 agricultural land. At the time of writing it was unclear whether that was Grade 3a or 3b - the former being 'best and most versatile' and therefore potentially protected for future generations / sustainability³. The sites lie at the western end of the AGC, where it joins the countryside. A network of ditches that border and traverse both sites, connect to the Great Stour River.

The development area is next to part of the AGC which contains a range of wetland habitats all with good public access from the relatively high density residential areas adjacent.

- *Great Chart North* is a small parcel of meadow with a pond that lies between the A28 and Chart Road, and links Great Chart to *Buxford Meadow* via a public footpath and subway.
- *Buxford Meadow* is an area of meadow, pond and wet woodland that is relatively quiet. It is designated a Local Wildlife Site.
- *Singleton Lake* is a man made fishing lake with the Great Stour running through the northern edge of the site (Kingfisher are regularly seen along this stretch), and trees and shrubs surrounding the lake.

Access :-

- Car park at Singleton Lake.
- National Cycle Route 18 and footpath connecting to Ashford town centre.
- Multiple footpaths to, and a circular walk around, the lake.
- Stour Valley Walk PROW connects Buxford Meadow to Great Chart via underpass.

Wildlife interest / value :-

- One of the most valuable wildlife areas of the AGC, with wetland, wet woodland and chalk river habitats, (UK BAP Priority Habitats). KSCP are currently developing a management plan for this site.
- Lake – wildfowl, (occasionally great crested grebe / reed warbler).
- White-clawed crayfish – good population annually evidenced since 1990s (UK BAP species).
- Water vole (UK BAP species).

³ GADF p.36

- A wide range of dragonflies / damselflies (25% of all UK species) and other invertebrates are found at Buxford Meadow, including 54 moth species.
- Reptiles and amphibians such as common frogs, toads and smooth newts.
- Small mammals - field vole and pygmy shrew have been recorded in the grassland, and wood-mouse and bank-vole in the woodland.
- Bats - daubentons, soprano and common pipistrelle (UK BAP species).

Current issues – (relating to human pressures):-

- Vandalism (mostly graffiti) of furniture, underpass walls and interpretation panels.
- Littering, both in the water and in the vegetation – especially close to paths and road.
- Lighting alongside the path comes very close to the river at Singleton Lake.
- Vandals attempts at rerouting the river as it runs through the woods.

Development impacts

Clearly it is impossible to determine what impacts or opportunities any development of this site will have, with so little information, therefore the following are hypothesised.

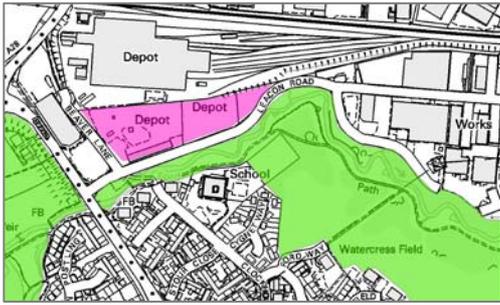
- The flood zone location is likely to restrict development. However, if the sites are built upon, it will raise concerns about increasing the risk of flooding elsewhere.
- Both sites are in close proximity to the Great Stour River and a network of ditches runs from these sites to the river. This is a valuable and diminishing habitat for water vole, plus this stretch of the river is the prime habitat for the white-clawed crayfish population.
- The sites are located at the point where the AGC meets the countryside, an area already relatively narrowed by the existing Great Chart and Godinton developments. Therefore, it raises concerns about further restricting/reducing habitat connectivity for wildlife in and out of the AGC.

Opportunities for improvements

The footpath might be extended and upgraded to include a cycle path, so extending a green transport link into this area of Ashford and access to the AGC and town centre.

- Buffer zones could be created on the edge of the development site, to include habitat enhancement work to offset the loss of habitat from the site itself.
- Creating new access / viewing areas for local residents to enjoy and appreciate the nature on their doorstep.
- Enhancement work could also be carried to the river banks and adjacent land, which is currently pasture or arable land, to benefit a range of species and enhance the connectivity to and from the countryside. However the land by the river does not fall within the development site area, so this kind of mitigation may not be possible.

Site 2 Leacon Road



Homes - 150
Pop. - 306
Area - 1.90 ha.

Maps 5a and 5b

Planning status

Identified in USIDP documentation, for public consultation January 2010, as a 'mix of residential, business and general employment uses including around 150 homes'. The full process to be concluded by the end 2010, when chosen sites will be incorporated into the Ashford Local Development Framework (LDF).

Site context and status

The development area lies to the east of an area currently occupied by Matalan, and is used by Bretts, mostly for parking it would appear. The eastern corner was not accessible to ascertain its condition. Aerial photographs suggest it contains a small brownfield site.

This section of the AGC has a lot of human pressures. The river runs under Brookfield Road, at the junction of Leacon Road, itself a busy route into the industrial estate lying close to the river bank. Housing comes close to the southern bank and there is limited cover for wildlife on either side of the river here. The ford which connects Clockhouse to Leacon Road is still accessible and cars have been seen using it. The new Victoria Way will increase traffic to this area substantially. Further downstream, the wide margins and meandering path of the river provide good habitat for a range of species.

Access:-

- National Cycle Route 18 and footpath south of the river connect to Ashford town centre.
- Roads close by.
- Access to the river is easy because of the ford (KSCP has run dipping sessions here).
- Limited parking on Clockhouse.

Wildlife interest / value:-

- White-clawed crayfish habitat (shallow sections of river with a gravel bed) – Crayfish found here repeatedly. (UK BAP species)
- Water vole habitat – one of the better sections in 2003 survey (UK BAP species).
- Bank margins between footpath and road are scalloped and consist of long vegetation - providing good habitat for invertebrates, small mammals and other animals. (See Fig. 3) The section close to Brookfield Rd. is however very narrow.
- A meandering river section, providing different water flow rates and habitat opportunities.
- Riparian vegetation appears healthy and diverse.
- Little or no signs of invasive species.



Fig. 3 Leacon Road from Watercress Fields

Current issues – (relating to human pressures):-

- Littering, particularly in the scrub / wooded margins bordering the industrial estate.
- Section of river with little or no vegetation where the road bridges cross.
- Noise and air born pollution from heavy traffic.
- Past / occasional pollution from Industrial Estate.
- Light pollution from roads and path lighting.
- Some vehicles are still crossing the ford, which may compact the gravel beds and diminish the quality of this habitat for cray-fish and other species.

Development impacts

Clearly it is impossible to determine what impacts or opportunities any development of this site will have, with so little information, therefore the following are hypothesised.

- Increased traffic both pedestrian and vehicular.
- Increased lighting of the area.
- Increased human presence at all times of day and night.
- Increased noise pollution.
- Loss of brownfield area therefore loss of habitat for a range of species in the AGC.

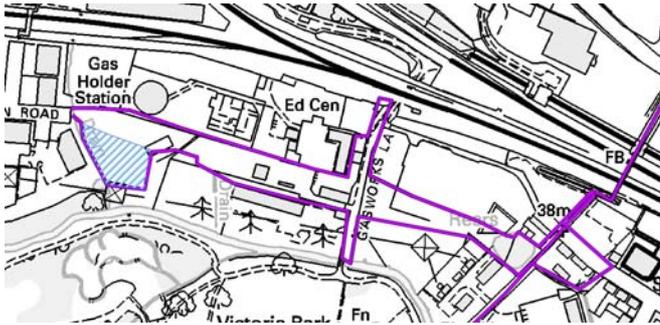
Opportunities for improvements

- Mitigation for loss of brownfield by incorporating a green buffer zone as part of any potential development design.
- Small tree and shrub planting along the northern margins of the river, between the road and river, to screen the development and road plus provide more cover for wildlife. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 4 Leacon Road from the ford crossing - Site of possible new development

Site 3 Old Powergen Site



Maps 6a and 6b

The Old Powergen Site has 2 definite development projects and a 3rd in the pipe line. Therefore this development area is laid out in 3 parts - Victoria Way (VW), ZedHomes (ZH) and Gasworks Lane (GL).

Victoria Way is the new route linking the A28 Chart Road via Brookfield Rd, Leacon Rd and Beaver Rd through to Ashford's International Station. The new route will entail improvements and alterations to existing roads and the construction of a new road - estimated length 580 metres and up to 30 metres width. Sections of this will be built on a raised bund above flood levels, to act both as flood barrier for the ZedHome development to the north and escape route for the area generally⁴.

VW – Planning Status

Work began May/June 2010.

VW – Site Context and Status (see ZH for further analysis)

This is a relatively large brownfield site, consisting of some industrial remains, hard-standing, scrubby growth and a mosaic of vegetation. The new road will create a new transport link running east to west, south of the town centre. Although not directly adjacent to the river corridor, its creation will disturb large areas of the brownfield site and facilitates development of the entire area, which will have a significant impact on the AGC.

Access:-

No public access to the brownfield site or the northern bank of the Great Stour River.

Wildlife interest / value - (see ZH for further analysis)

Surveys and mitigation for Victoria Way were produced by Jacobs Engineering. However as the area they surveyed is also relevant to the ZedHomes development area, their findings are discussed, with the ZedHomes own surveys.

Current issues – (relating to human pressures):-

None known - site has been more or less unoccupied for many years.

Development impacts (see ZH for further analysis)

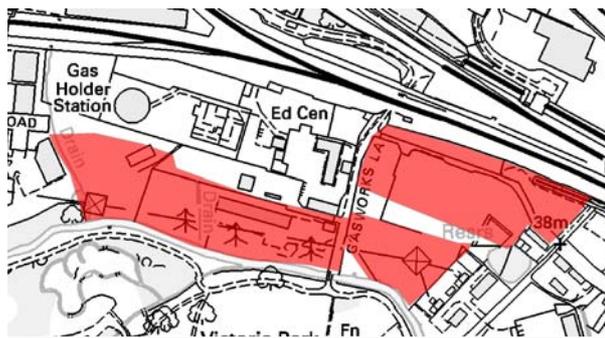
- Increased access, traffic noise, light and air pollution.
- Barrier to flood waters.
- A relatively secluded brownfield site will be lost, affecting a range of species.
- Entire area, including that directly adjacent to the river is made viable for development .

Opportunities for improvements (see ZH for further analysis)

- Mitigation measures could create or enhance some current wildlife areas in the AGC.

⁴ ABC, Report of Development Control Managers Planning Committee, June 2009

ZedHomes development area



Maps 7a and 7b

Residential units - 1002

Pop. - 2044

Area – 4.1 ha

Southern section 634 residential units 4-6 storeys high

Northern section 368 residential units 8-13 storeys high

- 8,229 sq m of commercial floor space.
- 1,204 car parking spaces.
- Combined heat and power plant, ecological water treatment plant, wind turbines.
- Pedestrian and cycle routes down to the river between blocks of housing.
- New footpath route along the north edge of the river.
- 3 new foot bridges across the river connected the site to the park. (vague mention and design views).
- Landscaped - open space.

ZH Planning status

Outline planning permission granted on appeal July 2008 by the Secretary of State.

ZH Site context and status

At present the development area is almost entirely a brownfield site, sandwiched between railway lines and the Great Stour River. To the north of the rail lines on the western half of the site are industrial areas. To the north of the eastern area is the town centre. Watercress Fields and Victoria Park lie to the south of the river, beyond which are high density residential areas.

The parks consist of large open spaces, primarily made up of closely mown amenity grassland with small groups of trees and shrubs that break up the space. (Conservation volunteers planted the trees and shrubs as well as areas of wildflower meadow alongside the river and in the park). There are a number of formal and informal recreation areas, including playgrounds, sports fields and picnic areas. The latter are mostly situated close to the river. From Victoria Park the development site is partly screened from view by trees and shrubs along the northern bank, but there is a substantial section open to view from Watercress Fields. (See Fig. 5)



Fig. 5

Access:-

- There is little or no public access into the development area, or access to the river from this site. However, on one visit, a couple of horses were seen in one section.
- There is no managed access from the industrial site. Wooded areas act as screens between the industrial estate and river. The layout on the estate is such that the areas closest to the river are largely occupied by parking, loading bays and storage areas.
- In the park there are numerous public footpaths and National Cycle Route 18 which runs parallel to the river.
- From the parks, there are a few access points to the river, where people can see and get down to the river. Most created by human activity rather than managed access.
- One footbridge connects to the town at the eastern end of the development site.
- Another footbridge and tunnel connects to an industrial area the other side of the train tracks, through the centre of the development area where the site is divided.

Wildlife Interest:-

The areas close to the river corridor are where most of the wildlife value lies.

- The southern bank, in Watercress Fields and Victoria Park, has an almost continuous buffer strip of tall vegetation approx. 2 – 4 metres deep, including 2 sections of meadow and some wooded patches that have been managed for wildlife over a number of years. They provide cover and food for a range of insects, birds and small mammals.
- The banks of the river have relatively good riparian growth, with meanders and bays to improve habitat conditions.
- There are very few invasive species present on this section due to management.
- Trees along the northern and southern banks provide habitat and connectivity for a range of species.
- The development area is a brownfield site, a type of site which is now understood to be a valuable habitat for a range of wildlife, particularly insects, reptiles and birds.

2 sets of ecological surveys were conducted, one for Victoria Way (Jacobs Engineering – reptile, bird and invertebrate surveys) and one for the ZedHomes sites (Environmental Planning & Assessment Limited and Ecology Consultancy Limited 2007 - Ashford Zed Environmental Statement (AZES). Their findings include:-

- Water vole - some of the highest densities of water vole in the AGC were recorded in the KSCP Water vole survey 2003 on this section of the river. AZES' survey confirmed water vole presence, although in lower numbers.
- Reptile - three species were found in both surveys - common lizard, slow worm and grass snake. Both confirm that there are reasonably good populations of all three species.
- Invertebrate - 114 species - none legally protected or listed as priority species on the UK BAP. However Jacob's survey noted '*.... that the ecologists who conducted the survey point out that the list of invertebrates could not be considered comprehensive given time constraints, a number of invertebrate groups were not surveyed including aquatic invertebrates, spiders and slugs / snails etc.*'⁵
- Amphibians - No great crested newt were found.
- Birds - a total of 34 species were recorded. Of these, 5 are listed as having Red and 8 Amber status (RSPB) - indicating their conservation importance. Furthermore, 7 are listed as species of conservation concern under the NERC Act - Section 41. Most relevant for this urban site were house sparrow, starling, song thrush, bullfinch and dunnock.⁶

Jacob's bird survey found that.. '*The site of the proposed development is relatively quiet and undisturbed and provides a good variety of habitats for breeding birds within an otherwise highly disturbed urban setting. The site contributes a significant area of undisturbed ground adjacent to the Great Stour River corridor that has considerable local value to wildlife in general.Most of these species are likely to breed on the proposed development site..*'

⁵ Jacobs Victoria Way Invertebrate Survey, June 2009

⁶ Jacobs Victoria Way Breeding Birds Survey, June 2009

Mitigation and other measures - the following measures were proposed in these surveys, to comply with current legislation and policy, particularly in regard to water vole and biodiversity:-

- *Reptiles* will largely be translocated to a receptor site owned by KCC at Leybourne, West Malling. Grass snakes to be translocated closer by on the river corridor. (Jacobs, Victoria Way Reptile Survey 2009) Green roofs on the ZedHomes site may be enhanced to accommodate a small percentage. (AZES - Pg 15)
- *Amphibians* - the Leybourne receptor site will be enhanced to provide habitat for amphibians to offset the losses on site. (VWIPS)
- *Water vole* will be removed to adjacent areas and kept off site during construction. After work has finished, damaged banks are supposed to be reinstated and adjacent banks enhanced. New channels or ditches that run off the river are to be created and a wide margin of vegetation / green space left alongside the river. (AZES)
- *Habitat areas* – The ZedHomes Design Statement proposed sustainable drainage systems (SUDS) on the northern river bank to incorporate a drainage ditch running parallel planted with reeds, a wildflower strip, tree planting and further ‘shallow water reed beds’. ‘It is envisaged that complimentary improvements could also be made to the southern bank’. (See Fig. 6 and 7) ‘Creation of shallow water environments were also mentioned, however it is unclear if this refers to the SUDS or the creation of other water bodies such as ponds, as per one of their other illustrations. (See Fig. 9)

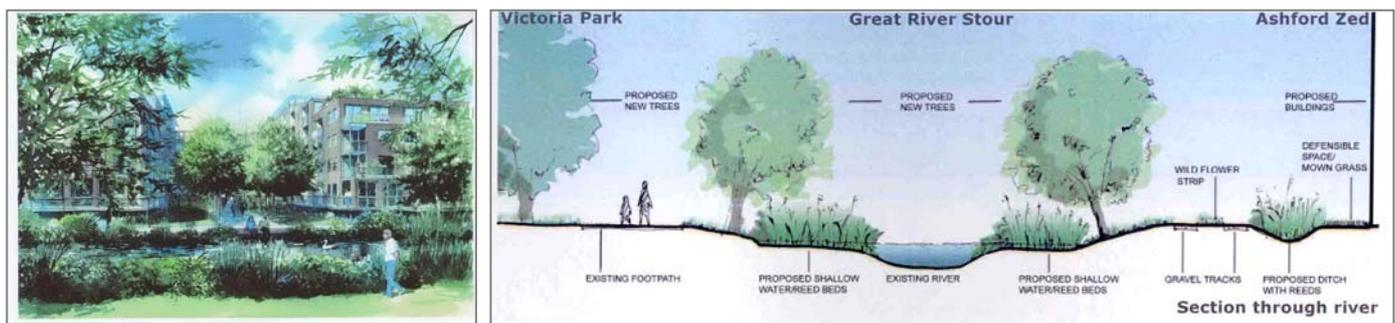


Fig. 6 and 7 (ZedHomes Design Statement / Plans)

Current issues – (relating to human pressures):-

- Vandalism and wear and tear to park furniture (benches / picnic tables) plus some graffiti on panels.
- Littering was particularly bad in the woodland areas by the industrial estates, and in the bank vegetation adjacent to the industrial area. (See Fig. 8)
- At the time of visits the water levels were low and the river bays were quite silted plus there was a lot of river-borne litter collected there.
- Bank damage sustained to a few of the unofficial access points.
- Lighting alongside the path comes very close to the river at various points.



Fig. 8 Leacon Road Industrial Estate

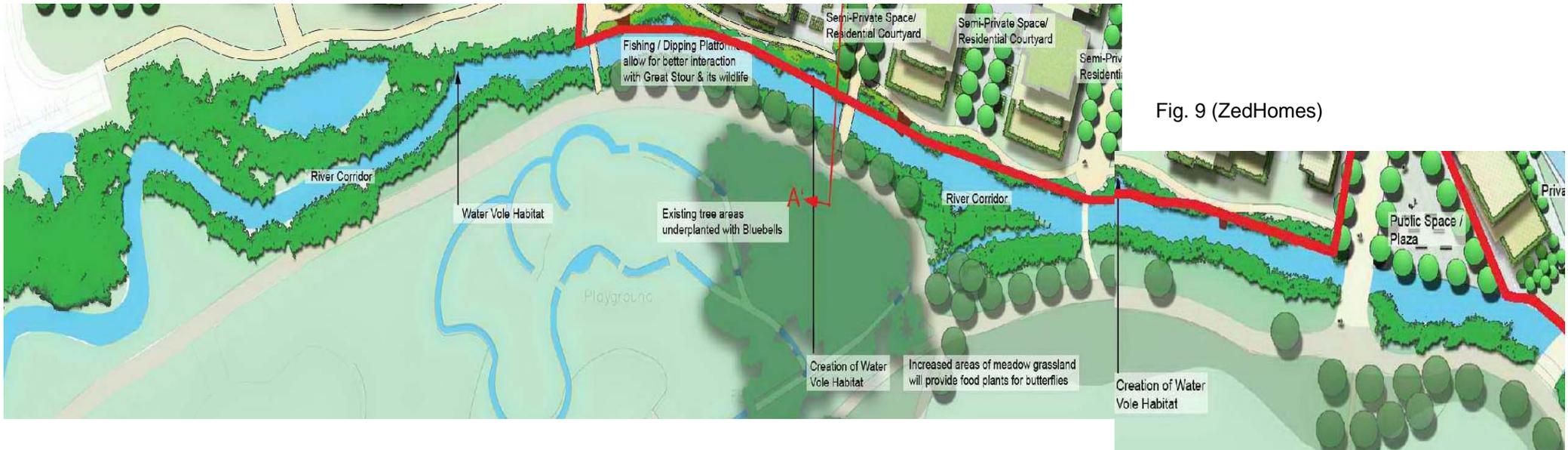


Fig. 9 (ZedHomes)



Map 8

Fig. 10 Current view along the Great Stour River from the white circle indicated on aerial photograph

Development impacts

- This area lies within the flood plain, which extends over 80% of both sites. Flood protection measures therefore have the potential to impact on other areas close to or in the AGC.
- Significant visual impact from the park - in the short term at least. (Fig.10)
- Permanent loss of brownfield site - valuable habitat for birds, reptiles, invertebrates and flora, and risk of breaking habitat connectivity for a range of species.
- Uncertain viability of some plans intended to mitigate, maintain or enhance the biodiversity of the river corridor:-
 - The ZedHomes Design Statement 2006 suggested that there might be considerable alteration of bank profiles for SUDS, with the incorporation of ledges for proposed reed beds on both sides of the river. There is no sense of how this links with their proposals for water vole habitat reinstatement and enhancements. This has implications for water-flow and would therefore presumably require EA agreement. Furthermore, as the plans were only illustrative (Fig. 6, 7 and 9) it was impossible to evaluate it in terms of the scale or length of the proposed reprofiling.
 - The designs for the parallel ditch incorporating reed beds do not indicate how the wetland conditions required will be achieved or maintained.
 - Concerns regarding the viability of using green roofs, as suggested, as part of the translocation programme for reptile populations in the Ashford Zed Environment Statement p15. Most of the buildings are at least 2-3 storeys high and do not connect to the ground or other roofs. Therefore any population that could survive would be isolated, and prone to long term genetic problems.
- Greater human pressure on this area of the AGC. A much greater number of people will be living and accessing areas close to the river, and increased activity from the proposed new bridges linking to the park. Impacts arising:-
 - Disturbance to wildlife.
 - Noise pollution.
 - Light pollution.
 - Water pollution.
 - Littering and dog fouling.
 - Predation of wildlife by pets / cats.
 - Greater wear and tear of park surfaces, furniture and facilities.
- The long term management of proposed environmental enhancements and mitigation measures is in the main unknown. It appears that SUDS management may fall to ABC, and the rest of landscape management to ZedHomes, however this remains fairly vague. The SPD on SUDS adopted in June 2010 sets out that the 'Adoption, ownership and maintenance responsibilities for SUDS in Ashford will be known and agreed by ABC'. The ZedHomes Design Statement noted - 'All public areas / open spaces outside of the development boundary to be maintained by ABC in conjunction with ZedHomes. All public area / open space within the development will be maintained by ZedHomes Management... details will be included in the ZedHomes Management Agreements with ABC'.

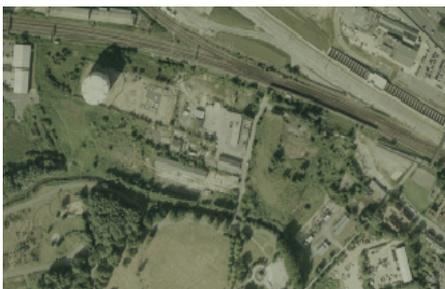
Potential negative impacts:-

- Limited financial input to manage wildlife areas properly.
- Overgrown reed beds / encroaching into the river and blocking ditches.
- Reed dominating marginal growth .
- Invasive species taking over if not removed.
- Litter problems in the reed beds.
- Wildflower strips being lost.
- Management of some off-site mitigation sites is unknown, for long-term health of translocated species.

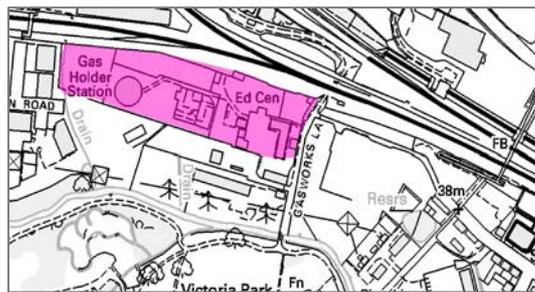
Opportunities for improvements

- Mitigation measures could enhance adjacent wildlife areas – although there would be an overall loss of current habitat area in this section of the AGC.
- The proposed ditch - reed beds and wild flower strip could provide a wildlife friendly green buffer as well as sustainable drainage for the site, as long as management is maintained.
- The creation of inlets along the bank may improve habitat for water vole.
- Improved access via footpaths, dipping platforms and new bridges will enable the public to enjoy the river on the northern bank plus improve access to Victoria Park and Watercross Fields.
- More tree coverage will improve habitat links for birds on the southern bank, well thought out tree and shrub planting on the northern bank could provide a reasonable level of habitat connectivity.
- There is mention of the addition of some shallow water bodies on the northern bank, which along with artists illustrations, suggests ponds may be created along the northern bank. These provide a different wetland habitat from the river and will be valuable additions to that space if water levels can be maintained. However, dried up ponds tend to upset the general public in urban areas, so scrapes might be a valuable alternative.

Old Powergen site - Gasworks Lane



Maps 9a



Maps 9b



Fig. 11 National Grid Properties

Residential units – 610
Pop. - 1244

GL Planning status No planning applications found for this site.

The remaining area of the Old Powergen Site has been flagged up in the ATCAAP as a preferred option site for development. Ashford's Future Action Plan leaflet (undated) outlined a plan for 2,000sq.m. commercial space and 300 residential units. National Grid Properties Ltd produced a 'masterplan document' (Fig. 11) in 2008 for the same site but for a larger development of 610 residential units – with pedestrian and cycle routes which would go through the ZedHomes development and across bridges to Victoria Park.

GL Site context and development impact summary

This land currently contains a gasometer, various commercial / industrial outbuildings, some still in use, and an area of brownfield scrub. Given the developments taking place around it, and its location, it will almost certainly be developed. The scale and kind of development remains to be seen. The National Grid Properties masterplan highlights its potential to have a fairly significant impact on the river corridor, as it could bring an additional population of 1,244 to the area, and to the river corridor.

Site 4 Victoria Road



Maps 10a and 10b

	Area	- 1.4 ha
	Homes	- 261 (5-6 storey, commercial space on ground floor)
	Pop.	- 532 (English Partnerships / Bellway Homes, 2008)

Planning Status

-  Outline planning approval - Jan 2008
-  The ATCAP outlined plans to develop the 'western end' of this area for housing - *'taking advantage of the potential for views over the river, access to its banks and Victoria Park to the south'*



Fig. 12 and 13 - Western area of Victoria Road Autumn 2009

Fig. 14 Bellway Homes site

Site Context and Status

The area in red, north of the river, has outline permission for the Bellway Homes Development, and is already cleared and boarded up. This is a very busy area which lies quite close to the river. The banks here are relatively steep with long vegetation and quite scrubby habitat on the southern bank. (Fig.14)

The south-west corner marked in pink is part wetland and part brownfield and industrial property. Both sites fall within the flood zone, but the predominance of reed in the south-west corner clearly shows that this area is wet for most of the year. (See Figs. 12 and 13) This is a relatively narrow section of the AGC with a fairly straight profile. On the path side the banks are low and narrow, with amenity grass margins and limited riparian growth. There are almost no trees from Vic Park up to where Bowens Field broadens out into the wetland park section to the south, which has a large pond, ditches, willow carr and reed beds running through it.

Access:-

- This is probably one of the busiest sections of the AGC, as it is close to the town centre and links to the train stations, the park and surrounding residential areas.
- The wildlife areas have a lot of public access with the exception of the south-western corner of the development site mentioned above.

Current issues – (relating to human pressures):-

- Litter / objects had been thrown into the ponds.
- Path / cycle route is very close to the river at this section and is well lit – light pollution.
- Gardens coming down to the river test the 8 metre rule. Some dumping of garden waste has taken place right up to the edge of the river bank in between houses.

Wildlife interest / value:-

- Wetland habitat sites, the brownfield site with tall ruderal vegetation, and Bowens Field with ditches, reed beds, pond and a meadow grass area with trees.
- All good habitat for a range of invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds and small mammals.
- Sections of the bank provide cover and habitat for a range of species.

Development-impacts

- Littering.
- Increased light, noise and air pollution.
- Potential loss of brownfield area close to the AGC, therefore loss of habitat for a range of species in the AGC.
- Increased human presence at all times of day and night close to the river.
- An increase of activity along the path and disturbance to wildlife.

Opportunities for improvements

- To create a wider margin along the river bank generally.
- Bank re-profiling to create a meander into the wetland / brownfield area.
- Re-locating the path between the footbridge and Beaver Road to provide a wider buffer zone. Some tree planting alongside the river – increased connectivity with trees remaining.
- A wildlife friendly buffer zone could be incorporated into new residential design.

Site 5 Ashford Learning Campus / The Learning Link Footpath



Fig. 15 and 16 The Learning Campus designs (Shepherd Robson Architects Website 2010)

The Ashford Learning Campus was intended to provide facilities for up to 14,000 full and part time students. However, budget cuts in 2009, has meant that the project is to be scaled back ⁷.



Map 11



Fig. 17 ZedHomes illustration

The Learning Link – is the proposed improvement of a bridge and footpath linking the town, new college and the parks, as well as the parking and amenities provided for in the ZedHomes development.

Planning Status

Ashford Learning Campus - permission granted in April 2007.

Current Status and Context

Although the campus is physically at a distance from the AGC, it is likely to have some impact on it due to the number of people it will bring into the area. Particularly as the campus will have a direct link to the Victoria Park area via the planned Learning Link Footpath. Impacts and Opportunities are therefore considered below.

Development impacts

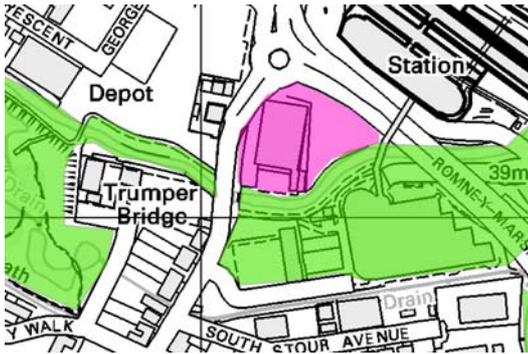
- Increase in visitors and use of this area of the AGC for access.
- Potential negative impacts on some wildlife habitats close to access routes.
- Wear and tear of existing infrastructure / park furniture.
- Increased litter.

Opportunities for improvements

- To encourage more green transport in the area and reduce pollution and noise.
- Better public access and enjoyment of the green spaces.

⁷ ABC, Report to the Executive from the Head of Planning and Development, September 2009
Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership Ashford Green Corridor Developments Report

Site 6 Beaver Road Site



Maps 12a and 12b

'Proposals for the growth of Ashford town centre' leaflet (no date) outlined a large commercial development – 'Size: 4,000sqm retail/leisure, 6,000sqm commercial, 100 residential units'.

Planning Status

ATCAAP - identified for possible 'office led development'.

Site context and status

This area, which previously housed a B&Q, marks the beginning of one of the narrowest and most urban parts of the AGC. There is a narrow strip of vegetation on either side of the river with some small trees and shrubs. The river goes under bridges, through a tunnel and is generally quite canalised along this section before it emerges at the Civic Centre.

Access:-

- National Cycle Route 18 / Public footpath (A busy route)

Wildlife interest / value:-

- Some continuity of shrub and trees, with riparian growth and river habitat for a range of species.

Current issues:-

- The river corridor is quite fragmented along this stretch, riparian growth disappears for long stretches where bridges block light, the river depth increases and the river is canalised. This limits movement of species such as water vole and otter. (See Fig. 18)
- Evidence of invasive species
- Littering and a state of dereliction along some of the boundaries.
- Generally unattractive area for the public as well.

Development impacts - Due to the already poor state of this section impacts are less evident.



Fig. 18 Rail underpass

Opportunities for improvements

- There is an opportunity to improve the habitat quality along this short stretch of river by widening the green margin between new building/s or hard standing.
- Enhancing and creating marginal growth along and in concreted / tunnel sections - by using seeded coir rolls and other marginal growth methods where feasible (sufficient light, depth of water, minimal or no impact on flood levels).
- Planting to soften and screen structures along pathways.

Site 7 Commercial Quarter

Planning and site context and status

Commercial Quarter – The ATCAAP identifies the river frontage of the Commercial Quarter as 'suitable' for residential development 'above ground level' (it lies within the flood plain). No planning application found.



Maps 13a and 13b

Currently this area is occupied by offices and industrial units.

This section of the Great Stour River, highlighted in pink, has fairly good areas of marginal and riparian growth, but the bank margins tend to be quite narrow along the western edge. A number of trees and shrubs grow along the bank, and broken or low branches act as traps for water borne debris. The eastern bank has a foot / cycle path quite close by and the area as a whole has a lot of hardstanding (car parks, roads etc.) with some basic amenity landscaping. The margin between the path and river has some areas of taller vegetation. What seating there was, was facing away from the river. Where the paths go under or close to the rail lines it is quite barren and there is very little softening of the edges aside from what the river banks offer. This may be because of railway bridge maintenance or health and safety issues.

Opportunities

- This western bank of the Great Stour could be improved by increasing the depth of the bank, widening the margin of green space between the river and any new buildings with suitable planting and sowing, to create better vegetative habitat.
- If bank work was to take place as part of development, there would be an opportunity for the bank to be reprofiled to create one or two small meanders – improving flow and habitat variety. On the eastern bank margins of taller vegetation could be allowed to grow, to improve habitat.
- Mowed access / viewing points sited with benches facing the views of the river.
- Planting to soften and screen structures along pathways.



Fig. 19 Western Bank



Fig. 20 View north along the river and eastern bank

Site 8 The Civic Quarter



Map 13a and 13b



Map 14

Planning & Site context and status

The Civic Quarter – (Map 13a) has the Great Stour to the west and the East Stour to the east. The Ashford Borough Council buildings and the Stour Centre are situated in the middle. Civic Centre North Park is a large open area of predominantly amenity grassland with taller vegetative margins beside the rivers. Civic Centre South Park consists of a lot of hard standing with parking and a skate board park, and amenity grassland up to the river bank. Foot and cycle paths parallel the rivers on either side of the Quarter. Water voles have been recorded on the East Stour.

Land south of the Stour Centre, below the car park, has been identified as a potential site for a 'substantial indoor arena'. However there are no planning applications lodged as far as we are aware.

Land southeast of the site marked in orange on Map 14, has been mentioned in informal discussions with colleagues, as a site that is intended for development, but no planning application or official confirmation has been found. As a wetland site within the flood plain, it would be a great loss to the AGC if it were to be developed. There are a number of actions that could enhance this valuable habitat.

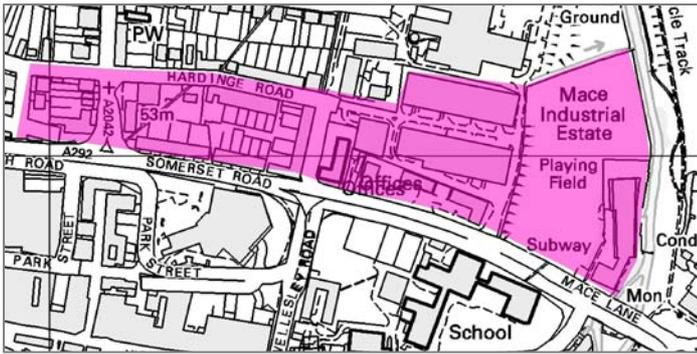
Opportunities



Fig. 21 Stour Centre / East Bank

- The western area beside the car park and close to the East Stour is entirely amenity grassland. The river edge (marked in pink on the map) is open with a narrow margin and limited riparian growth. This could be improved with trees, shrubs and meadow planting that would expand upon the existing habitat on the Eastern bank. (Fig.21)
- Shelves or berms in the bank would also provide a greater range of marginal growth and habitat for invertebrates.

Site 9 The Residential Quarter



Maps 15a and 15b

Planning status

Identified in the ATCAAP the Residential Quarter lies to the west of the Great Stour. Although highlighted for potential development, there does not appear to be any specific plans for the area which borders the river. The ATCAAP does however outline that there may be a need for a 400 space multi-storey car park in the Mace Lane area in the long-term. Perhaps this is the site they have in mind? No planning applications found.

Current Status and Context

Currently it is mostly open amenity grassland (noted as a playing field) surrounded by trees and shrubs with an area of industrial units in the South East Corner.

Wildlife Value:-

- Connectivity and continuation of river corridor habitat.

Development impacts

- Potential loss of green space adjacent to the AGC therefore reducing green space.
- Of particular concern would be the loss of trees and the area alongside the river, which currently provides a wildlife corridor and a buffer zone for the river habitat.

Development opportunities

- Some access to this side of the river.
- Potential to create wildlife areas and enhance the riparian growth and habitat on this side of the river.

Site 10 Lower Queens Road



Area – 1.99 ha Homes – 40 Pop. - 82

Maps 16a and 16b

Planning Status

This site has gone through part of the public consultation process and was included in the public exhibition - Jan 2010. The full process is to be concluded by the end 2010, when sites may be incorporated into the Ashford Local Development Framework (LDF).

Site context and status

This site lies directly adjacent to the north of the Great Stour and within the flood zone. This is a privately owned site consisting of mature woodland with scrubby undergrowth. The trees come down to the river, joining trees which line this section of the Great Stour next to the M20.

Opposite is Queen Mothers Park, with open amenity grassland at its centre, and areas of trees, shrubs, tall vegetation and wildflower meadow breaking up the space and providing a margin and barrier around its edges. Trees screen the park from the Henwood industrial area. Trees also line the southern bank of the river too, with a few open areas offering views down to the river. Benches are dotted along the paths and there is an area with public art sculptures. The noise of the nearby M20 is evident, making it a less peaceful location for people.

Access:-

- National Cycle Route 18 and footpaths – a relatively busy section of the AGC.
- Some informal, non managed access points have been made through the long vegetation which borders the river – possibly for fishing.

Wildlife interest / value:-

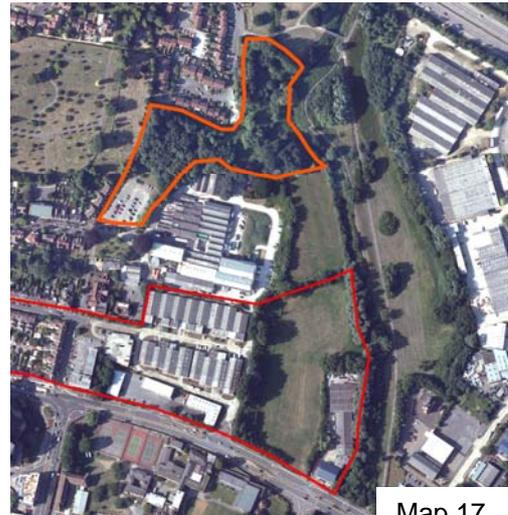
- The river banks adjacent to and either side of the development site have relatively rich riparian growth (Fig. 23), (patches of Himalayan balsam are found here and need management). The steep banks make the river less accessible along this stretch and thus more valuable for wildlife.
- The AGC Management Plan 2002 recommended bank reprofiling, which was carried out by the EA in 2009, improving the water flow and diversity of habitat.
- The wide margins of long vegetation along the eastern bank provide food and cover for a range of species, including grass snake. The large areas of wildflower and grassland meadow also provide habitat for a range of flora and fauna.
- The proposed site is one of a few blocks of woodland in the AGC (which is in need of management). It provides connectivity as it links to trees lining the riverside to the end of the park southwards, those alongside and screening the M20, and the run of quite mature alders that line the river to the north. Although this is not an uninterrupted connection, as there are roads at either end of Queen Mothers Park, many species will benefit from the substantial wildlife corridor that the trees and river provide in conjunction and in their own right.

Current issues – (relating to human pressures)

- Un-managed trampling of margins and bank erosion in a few areas.
- Some littering along the banks and in river.
- Noise of the M20 quite intrusive to humans.
- Woods need management.

Development impacts

- The permanent loss of a block of woodland, and green space within a very urbanised section of the AGC, also resulting in a loss of habitat connectivity.
- The new housing is likely to bring higher light levels to the river corridor, plus increased noise and traffic to this area
- The visual impact has the potential to be quite significant, as at present the park is screened from existing housing and vice – versa. (Fig. 22)
- Both parts of the Residential Quarter and Lower Queens Road development sites lie within the AGC area. Collectively the amount of green space lost will have a significant impact in reducing and fragmenting current wildlife habitat. Permanently reducing the AGC area, and its actual and potential biodiversity.



Map 17

Opportunities for improvements

- Woodland management beside the river, including pollarding which will open up views of the river, and of the block of woodland to improve habitat conditions.
- Strimming and cutting back of bank vegetation in places to provide river views.
- Coir rolls to be installed on the eastern side of the M20 underpass – providing habitat connectivity for a range of species, particularly water vole and possibly otter.
-

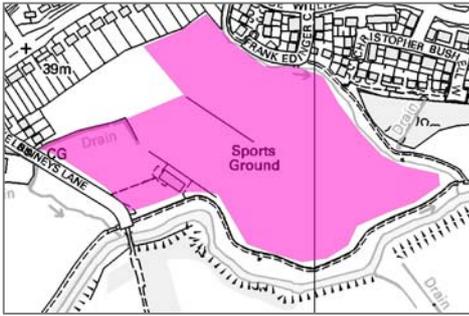


Fig. 22 View of site from QMP



Fig. 23 View of the footbridge with rich bank vegetation

Site 11 Ashford Rugby Club



Area 7.15 ha

Maps 18a 18b and 18c,

Planning Status

Unknown – does not appear to be part of the public consultation process as not listed in the Proposals for the growth of Ashford - published for public consultation in January 2010. Extract from USIDP - 'Limited development to improve the sports facilities'

Site context and status

The rugby club lies close to the river and consists of playing fields, club house / changing rooms and car park. This part of AGC continues to provide good river corridor habitat.

Access:-

- National Cycle Route 18 and foot paths.
- Access road to club and on to Bybrook Sewage Treatment Works.

Wildlife interest / value:-

- A continuation of generally good river corridor habitat.
- A berm (shelf in the bank) has been put in along this relatively meandering stretch of the river to improve the diversity of marginal plant growth and water flow speeds and depths. Providing a richer and more diverse habitat for a range of species.
- Bybrook Wastewater Treatment Works south of the river raises serious concerns regarding its impact on river water quality. However its irrigation areas provide a wet grassland habitat, significant for wildlife, in a largely undisturbed area close to the AGC.

Current issues – (relating to human pressures):-

- Invasive species – particularly Himalayan Balsam along the southern bank.
- The area between the club and the river is relatively narrow.
- Light pollution from path lights and existing club lights.
- Relatively high activity area. The foot/cycle path lying quite close to the river.
- Informal access to the river has caused some bank damage.
- Littering in the river can be quite obvious here, particularly when water levels drop.

Development impacts

- The scale of improvements are unknown, therefore impacts are hard to evaluate. Improved facilities may result in more usage and evening fixtures. Lighting (possibly improved itself) could then have a greater detrimental impact on this section of the corridor – particularly for nocturnal wildlife such as bats.
- At present the facilities are located in the area closest to the river, if these are substantially improved it will bring more activity and noise too.

Opportunities for improvements

- In channel works to improve habitat.
- Mown viewing and picnic areas.

Site 12 Canal District



Maps 19a and 19b

Planning Status

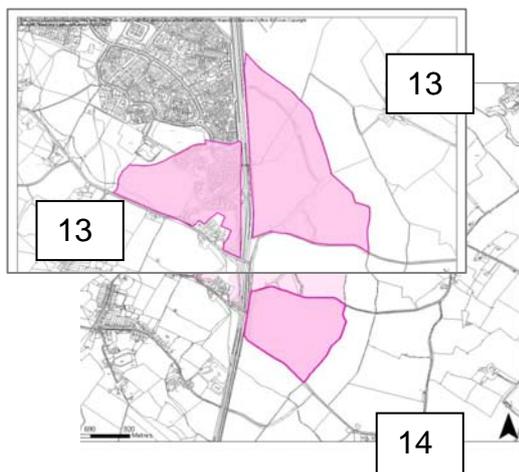
No planning application found. The Canal District has been identified in the Core Strategy and GADF as a desirable area for development. However the flood plain constraints have so far meant that no specific development plan has been put forward, although it is likely that some level of development is likely to take place soon.

The Core Strategy states ...“Floodplain constraints may restrict the ability to bring forward large amounts of new development here within the LDF period but there are opportunities pre 2021 to redevelop the existing industrial land outside the 100 year floodplain to provide a more intensified, higher quality entrance to the town from the south”.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The following development sites fall outside the area that this report is covering, but basic details have been included here because of their proximity to South Willesborough Dykes, an extremely valuable part of the Ashford Green Corridor area as a whole, and because of their proximity to the East Stour corridor and related waterways which connect the AGC habitats to the countryside. The developments are potentially large in scale, which along with related infrastructure, may pose significant challenges for the wildlife in these areas.

Sites 13 - Park Farm South and East / Site 14 - Park Farm Southeast



Maps 20a, 20b and 20c

Area 13 South: 17.93ha Area 13 East: 32.04ha Area 14 Southeast 23.34 ha

Planning Status:

Park Farm South & East planning permission granted April 2010 – combined total of 780 houses plus amenities. This included a rail-halt on the Ashford to Hastings railway line, roundabout on the A2070, access roads, a pub restaurant and play area and changing rooms.⁸

Park Farm Southeast site identified for development as part of the Core Strategy. An application, which included 500 residential units and a primary school, was withdrawn.⁹

Site context and status

Park Farm South construction underway – 288 dwelling complete on Taylor Woodrow site
Park Farm East construction started for the first 202 dwellings.

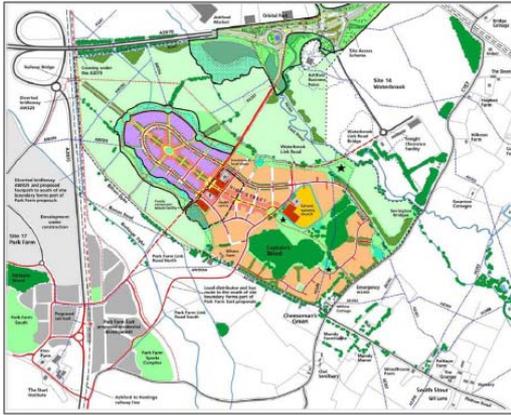
Both areas east of the A2070 are partly within the flood zone on their eastern borders. The Ruckinge Dyke demarks this border. The dyke is a tributary of the East Stour River which connects with a network of ditches draining land in the development area and farmland to the east. Ruckinge Dyke forms part of the South Willesborough Dykes County Wildlife Site

The Park Farm South East Environmental Statement produced by Barton Wilmore for Taylor Woodrow in 2007 stated that – *'The mature hedgerows with associated ditch features, particularly along the eastern Application Site boundary, and the woodland belt along the western boundary are the habitats of highest value. Protected species which may be using the Application Site include badgers; bats; water voles; otter; common but protected reptiles such as grass snake and slow worm; a range of birds typical of farmland, hedgerows and scrub and wetland features, including some species of conservation concern; and two specially protected species, i.e. barn owl and kingfisher. Additional species of conservation concern which are or may be using the Application Site include brown hare, harvest mouse and water shrew. The Application Site is not considered likely to support great crested newts or dormice.*

⁸ ABC Planning and Building Control website 2009

⁹ ABC Planning and Building Control website 2009

Site 15 Cheesemans Green (Local Plan and Extension)



Maps 21a and 21b



Homes 1,100
Population 2,244

180 live/work units / 70,000m² commercial floor space / plus mixed-use community facilities.

Planning Status

Outline planning permission was granted in January 2006.

Site summary

No work has yet taken place on the site due to the site requiring significant upfront investment and occupation is constrained by the completion of junction 10a on the M20 (now expected in 2013). (Ref: *Jan 2008 development updates*) The vast majority of residential development looks set to take place to the south of Captains Wood. (Fig. 25 and Map 21b viewpoints)

The Cheesemans Green and Waterbrook Area Action Plan – Issues and Options Report 2009 (CGWAAP) stated ‘GADF....recommended that the piece of land at the north-western end of the Cheeseman’s Green site, which was allocated and has planning permission for employment uses in the Local Plan, should remain free from any development. This area known as the ‘nib’ (see Map 21a , shown in purple) was also considered in the Core Strategy examination where the Inspector recommended that, although it could be developed, it should not be designated for a particular use at that time

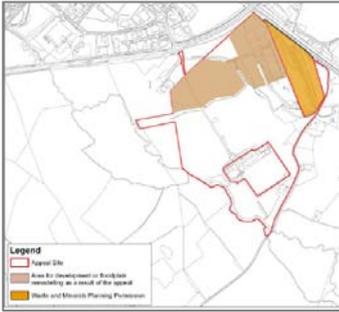


Fig. 24 East Stour River from Highfield Lane



Fig. 25 Captains Wood from Highfield Lane

Site 16 Waterbrook



Homes 1,200
Population 2,448

Maps 22a and 22b

Site summary

No specific planning applications found regarding this sites development for residential units - mostly employment, commercial usage. However the *CGWAAP* Issues and Options Report noted:-

3.3.2 The future mix of uses at Waterbrook has been the subject of recent debate at a Planning inquiry into outline proposals for around 100,000 sq metres of B1-8 business development, a hotel and petrol filling station to the north of the Waterbrook area. The outcome of the Inquiry confirmed the policy approach established in the Core Strategy by dismissing the appeal and it is now clear that the site should come forward for a suitable mix of uses, including residential and employment development, and as established in the Core Strategy Policy CS15, a Park & Ride site’.

The indicated development area at Waterbrook goes to the edge of the river corridor – which raises some concerns for this habitat. (See Maps 22a and 22b)

Furthermore, the amount of housing noted for Cheesemans Green and Waterbrook, were taken as referenced from the Core Strategies Housing Trajectory Annex (2008). However, in the *CGWAAP* Issues and Options Report a much greater figure was mentioned:-

‘The Core Strategy identifies the broad area of Cheeseman's Green and Waterbrook to accommodate some 6,500 dwellings, 2,225 jobs and associated infrastructure and community facilities. Existing planning consents give an indication of the distribution of some of this development but there remains potential flexibility in how the whole site may best be arranged’.

DEVELOPMENTS AS A WHOLE

This report only looked at the relatively major residential developments likely to take place in, adjacent or very close to the AGC. However, there are also numerous much smaller scale projects taking place or planned for the same area. When the potential effects of each development are added together, the overall impact on the AGC will inevitably be greater.

The report identified sites that may accommodate up to 1703 residential units close to the AGC and town centre area. The recently adopted ATCAAP lists sites in the town centre area that can accommodate 3100. It should also be noted that there are many residential and commercial developments outside of this town centre area which we would expect to increase traffic and movement of people through AGC areas, as the nearest green public space. For example, identified in the USIDP, is the development of an existing commercial site at Orbital Park, close to South Willesborough Dykes, that will increase the working population in that area. However little information was available at the time of writing so it has not been included in the reports' analysis.

The population increase and growth of Ashford overall, will inevitably put pressure on current AGC habitats, and in some cases reduce it. Access and use of the foot and cycle-paths is also set to increase and put a burden on current park infrastructure such as paths, signs, benches, litter services etc. The river corridor is the attraction for so many of the potential developments, and whilst access to and enjoyment of the rivers and waterways is an understandable aim, careful consideration of how this is achieved and managed is very important. If not, that which makes the waterways and surrounding habitats such lovely places to visit will be undermined and lost.

The AGC has been much improved over the years, and progress can be seen in the rich riparian habitat found almost all along the corridor waterways. The continuing presence of key species such as water vole and white-clawed crayfish, is testimony to the work that continues to be done to protect the corridor habitats for all to enjoy. Clearly all those concerned in managing these areas would like to see these improvements protected and enhanced.

Major activities close to the waterways will pose the initial threat to wildlife – particularly the disruption that major building works can bring. Joined up thinking is of great importance, so that any loss of habitat over the short term does not compromise the long term. For example if developments nearby come on line at the same time there will be a lack of habitat for displaced wildlife to move to. Furthermore nearby habitat areas may be inhabited already, or do not provide the right conditions. Inevitably some species are likely to move away or be translocated off site, which of course means that there is a loss to the AGC in the short-term, and potentially in the long term if replacement habitat is not successfully established. The permanent loss of relatively green areas, including brownfield sites, in and close to the AGC will reduce wildlife habitat. However, some developments and the new parks that are planned could enhance and / or mitigate for these losses.

The report would particularly like to highlight the need for long-term management planning for all the wildlife habitats of the AGC. This would include many new development areas where habitat such as SUDS, are created to comply with environmental concerns. There are many opportunities for developments to make a positive contribution to the AGC and for all the new and older communities to enjoy the benefits of looking after the wildlife areas which enrich the parks so much. In these cash strapped times, budgets and financial support for many of the organisations currently doing this work, including KSCP, is dwindling. This also needs to be considered in the planning stage, and perhaps new developments need to support this kind of work?

3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following summarises the reports' findings that were presented in Section 2 by individual development sites. Part A identifies the main types of concern for wildlife and the positive opportunities. Part B lists the sites which raise particular concern.

In Section 4, the Management Strategy uses the ' findings, (general and site specific), with KSCP's knowledge of the AGC, to propose practical solutions intended to protect and enhance habitats where possible, and to promote public appreciation of and access to these areas.

PART A – Identification of main types of concern and opportunity

Potentially negative impacts on wildlife:-

- Loss of habitat and habitat connectivity. ^a
- Conflict between public access and wildlife. ^b
- Lack of long-term planning for management of habitats (existing, new and translocation sites).
- Increased light (and noise) pollution. ^c
- Water quality and management.

a 'Habitat fragmentation is the process whereby natural and semi-natural habitats are separated into a number of smaller patches, through land use change and urban development. Habitat loss and fragmentation reduces the size of populations and hinders the movement of individuals among increasingly isolated populations, threatening their long-term viability. The process can be cumulative over time, but may be reversed through habitat management, restoration and recreation

The effects of habitat fragmentation can be compounded by changes in land use between the patches. The importance of these changes depends on which habitats are next to each other (edge effects) and the ease with which species can move through the intervening landscape (permeability).

Habitat loss and fragmentation was identified by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment as one of five direct drivers of biodiversity loss. The impacts of habitat loss and fragmentation are recognised within the Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Union Habitats Directive' (The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (the statutory adviser to the UK Government on national and international nature conservation, 2010)

b 'Human disturbance can damage birds in many ways, including disrupting foraging or social behaviour, increasing nest predation, interfering with parent-offspring and pair bonds, increasing nesting failures, and reducing the viability of fledglings. Additionally, birds may perceive humans as predators and leave an area, and the resulting decline in species abundance resembles the effects of habitat loss'. (Marcum, Heidi Ann, 2006)

c Illuminating a bat roost creates disturbance and may cause the bats to desert the roost. Light falling on a roost access point will at least delay bats from emerging and this shortens the amount of time available to them for foraging. As the main peak of nocturnal insect abundance occurs at and soon after dusk, a delay in emergence means this vital time for feeding is missed.it is also thought that insects are attracted to lit areas from further afield. This is thought to result in adjacent habitats supporting reduced numbers of insects. This is a further impact on the ability of the light avoiding bats to be able to feed. It is noticeable that most of Britain's rarest bats are among those species listed as avoiding light. Plus artificial lighting can increase the chances of bats being preyed upon. (Bat Conservation Trust, Jan 2008)

Analysis of evaluations completed as part of the AGC Summer Events programme indicated that an average percentage of approximately 35% of participants hadn't heard of the AGC before. Where as 75% of the same people had used some of the cycle/footpaths nearby. Plus many had not previously visited the area of the corridor where the events were taking place. This demonstrates whilst people use these public spaces they frequently do not have an overview of the area as a whole, usually just having a familiarity with the nearest part of the AGC.

Opportunities that may arise via new developments or other growth area work:-

- Re-profiling of waterways as part of development work.
- Some areas where there could be an improvement of existing habitat conditions.
- Some areas where new habitats could be created.
- New parks offering the potential for new habitat, expansion of the AGC and increased connectivity to the countryside.
- Better managed public access to appreciate the wildlife / river corridor.

PART B - Summary by theme

Loss of habitat and habitat connectivity

- a) **All developments** beside the river have the potential to permanently reduce river corridor habitat and biodiversity, if the waterways, banks and buffer zones (margins) are not protected or reinstated correctly. Fences/walls constructed for health + safety concerns may create barriers to species movement.
- b) **Godinton / Great Chart** – Narrowing of green space where AGC connects to the countryside, in a particularly sensitive and important habitat area of the Great Stour River.
- c) **Victoria Way / ZedHomes** - Loss of brownfield site habitat. Mitigation measures may not adequately compensate for this. Replacement riverside landscaping may be inadequate and / or inappropriate.
- d) **Victoria Road** - Loss of wetland habitat.
- e) **Residential Quarter** and **Lower Queens Road** - Loss of green space and woodland habitat adjacent to the river. The impact of both sites being developed would make this loss significant.
- f) **Cheesemans Green** - Reduction of green space narrowing corridors from **South Willesborough Dykes** out to the countryside.

Opportunity

Discovery Parks have the potential to extend wildlife corridors and enhance / create new wildlife habitats. Developments could create new ponds or scrapes. However, scrapes may not be valued by the public unless there is interpretation.

Conflict between public access and wildlife

- a) **All developments** close to the AGC have the potential to increase activity, including littering / pollution around and in the river system. Increased predation from domestic pets. Unmanaged access could also damage banks and bank flora, and create opportunities for dumping.
- b) **ZedHomes** - Planned new pedestrian bridges could significantly disturb wildlife if not designed with sensitivity. Similarly new footpaths and cycle paths close to the river.

Opportunity

To create new and improved areas of public access that will engage local communities and visitors, and allow for a greater appreciation of the wildlife of the AGC.

Lack of long-term planning for management of habitats

- a) **All developments** - The incorporation of SUDS in all new developments is a stated aim of the Ashford Integrated Water Management Strategy (AIWMS). The SPD on SUDS adopted in June 2010 sets out that the 'Adoption, ownership and maintenance responsibilities for SUDS in Ashford will be known and agreed by ABC'¹⁰ SUDS often incorporate ditches and reed beds, which also function as habitat for a number of species, and require a particular type of long term maintenance to be effective. Therefore clarity of maintenance, long term planning is essential.
- b) **All developments** - the long term management of translocation / mitigation sites also need to be considered and provided for, in order for it to be meaningful.
- c) **ZedHomes** – No clear feasibility study or management plan for landscape / habitat enhancements and SUDS proposed and illustrated in the ZedHomes design statement and planning application.

Increased light (and noise) pollution

- a) **All developments** and associated amenities close to the river corridor:- Lighting from housing, businesses, sports facilities, foot paths and cycle paths close to waterways and woodland - adversely affecting nocturnal wildlife such as bats. Lighting also brings people into areas that might otherwise remain quiet at night - creating greater disturbance for wildlife in general.

Opportunity

To have this factored into new plans, and to consider changing existing lighting in sections of the AGC where it is too close to the rivers and other sensitive habitats.

Water quality and management

Although water quality is not covered by this report, it is clearly a fundamental issue for biodiversity within and connecting to the river corridors and waterways of the AGC.

- a) Capacity of the sewage treatment works at Bybrook.
- b) Private sewage treatment – accountability and scrutiny (ZedHomes).
- c) Water supply demands may decrease river flow in the summer.
- d) Burden on groundwater resources and quality.
- e) Run-off from industrial /residential developments (domestic misconnections / grey water run-off).

¹⁰ AIWMS update September 2010.
Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

4 MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The broad aim of this management strategy is to protect, maintain and enhance the wildlife habitats that currently exist, and to propose enhancements where opportunities arise via development work within or close to the Ashford Green Corridor, plus improving public access and experience of many areas. Within this context, maintaining or improving connectivity of habitats / wildlife corridors over the long term is an important goal.

AGC - GENERAL

1 Riparian and bank margin (top of bank) habitat for all waterways

River corridor habitat which provides cover, food and breeding areas for a very wide range of species including water vole. Also acts as a protective buffer between the waterways and potentially harmful activities.

- 3-5 year rotational cuts (winter) along alternative sections of banks and top of banks – preventing scrub encroachment. Vegetative cover to remain on the opposite bank to that cut, to maintain habitat continuity.
- Some existing scrub areas to be left for diversity of habitat.
- Monitoring and removal of invasive species (Himalayan Balsam / Japanese Knotweed)
- Creating wide and contiguous tall vegetation strips, from the edge of the bank where none exist.
- Regular mowing of existing and new access areas. (see Access and Amenities)
- Marginal planting as required –where berms are created and river works done.

2 Tree and shrub management

Habitat for birds, insects and many other species, plus screening and landscape interest.

Pollarding in areas to open up the banks and provide views. Otherwise minimal management except where health & safety or visibility issues arise.

3 Meadow areas

Wildflower Meadows form the basis of a rich food web and a complex ecological system.

Annual late autumn cut and removal of arisings, thistle management in spring.

4 Wetland and Ponds

Habitat for insects, reptiles, amphibians, as well as supporting bird + mammal populations.

Monitoring for invasive species, littering and silting.

Scrub management and management of vegetation such as reeds, in wetland areas and ponds within the AGC.

5 Bird / Bat boxes / Otter holts

To provide breeding areas in locations that will benefit existing and potential wildlife populations.

Monitoring, maintenance and replacement of boxes and holt/s.

6 Management planning for new habitat areas

Long term management of all habitat areas is essential for their purpose to be meaningful.

- Within the AGC - habitats created as part of new developments to have long term management plans, with an identified body to carry out the work.
- Outside of the AGC - translocation / mitigation sites will similarly need commitments and long term management plans agreed with the host site owners/managers.

Examples:- SUDS - De-silting of ditches / removal of invasive species / reducing reed cover as necessary
Green roofs Replacing significant plant loss / Removal of dead vegetation / occasional nutrients and watering in extreme drought (see below)

The proposal to use green roofs in the ZedHomes North Site area for some reptile mitigation raises concerns regarding viability for such purposes. Not only would the green roofs need to then include hibernacula and shelter, but given the limited space and disconnection from other habitat areas, there would long term problems for maintaining a healthy reptile population.

7 General maintenance of seating / benches

The condition of park furniture needs to be monitored - as numbers of people using AGC areas increase. Broken furniture is both a health and safety issue and gives out the wrong message about valuing these spaces. Seating and picnic areas steer people away from areas we would wish to protect into areas where access is managed.

8 Lighting, fencing and barriers

Lighting of can be detrimental for nocturnal species. Barriers can hinder movement of wildlife.

- Restricting or minimising new lighting close to the river corridor.
- Reduce, remove or change height and direction of existing lighting where close to waterways.
- Replace ugly barriers with more appropriate alternative (hedges / wooden fencing).
- Have some design standards as reference /guidance for developers.
- Ensure barriers, both new and old do not block important wildlife corridors.

9 Access/ viewing points and picnic areas

Public access is important and there are many opportunities where this can be improved, whilst at the same time protecting wildlife.

- Access / viewing points can be simply created and maintained by the regularly clearing and mowing sections of taller vegetation beside the rivers / waterways.
- If heavily used and bank damage begins to occur, then there may be a need for viewing platforms to be created.

Providing seating and picnic areas in specific areas promotes the peaceful enjoyment of the river and its surroundings and protects more sensitive areas from intrusion.

- Installation, monitoring and maintenance of benches and interpretation panels.
- Scrub clearance, path maintenance and potential siting / maintenance of litter bins located close by.

10 Community

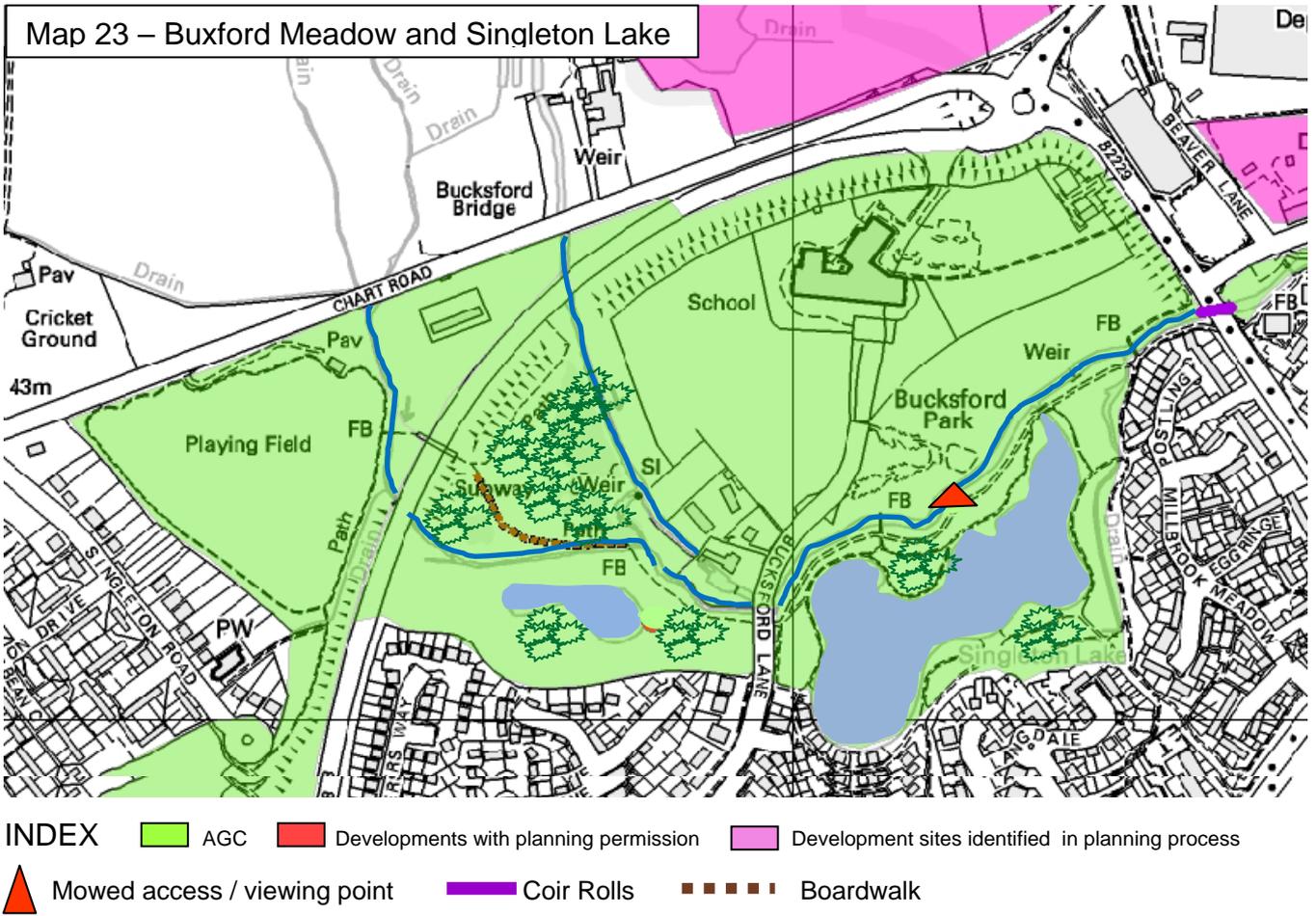
Involving the community in the creation and enhancement of local wildlife areas would help in educating people about the importance of wildlife habitat , especially in their own area. Plus it would give the community a sense of ownership and pride in their area. This could be done via organised activities and tasks.

- a) **Setting up of Friends of the AGC Group / or Friends of the Great Stour River Group** that would link with similar group/s from say Canterbury and other villages.
- b) **Volunteer tasks** to support KSCP and ABC with work on the wildlife habitat areas.
- c) **Working with local schools / community groups.**

The following pages look at work that is proposed by area.

Buxford Meadow and Singleton Lake Area

One of the most diverse habitat areas in the AGC. Manmade lake, wet woodland, pond and wetland meadow. Site where AGC connects to the countryside. Developments potentially affecting this area:- Godinton/Great Chart and Leacon Road



Access – To construct a boardwalk inside this rare piece of wet woodland, improving public access all year round and protecting flora. (Fig. 26 and 27)

Mowed access / viewing point beside the Great Stour. (Kingfisher spotted on site visits).

Fig. 26 and 27 Buxford wet woodland and path

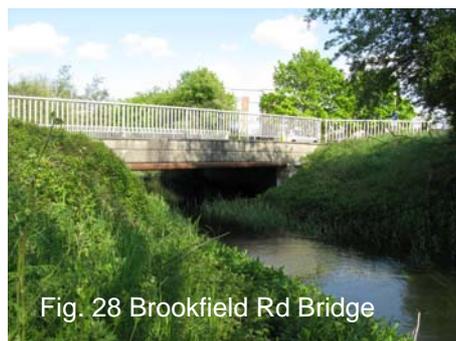


Fig. 28 Brookfield Rd Bridge
Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

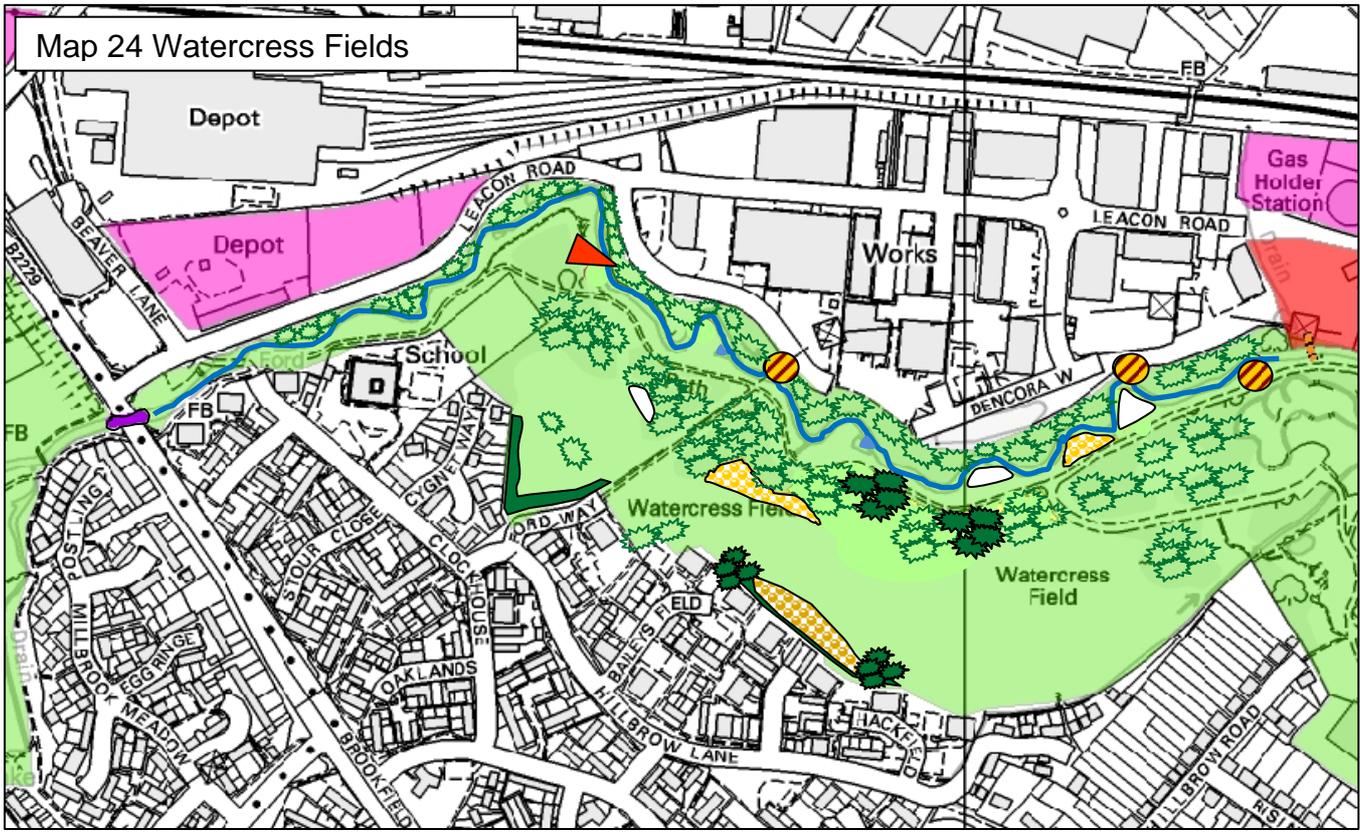
Habitat - Coir rolls to be installed under Brookfield Rd Bridge to connect and improve marginal plant growth along this section of the river. (Fig. 28 and 29)



Fig. 29 Example of coir rolls
www.willowbankservices.co.uk

Watercress Fields Area

Large park with excellent river corridor habitat - meanders and tall vegetation on the bank margin. 3 meadow areas planted by KSCP, plus the northern bank is wooded providing a buffer zone, wildlife corridor and screen between the industrial estate and the park. Large open recreation areas with trees breaking up the space, and providing more habitat areas. Leacon Road, Victoria Way and ZedHomes developments border this area.



- INDEX**
- AGC
 - Developments with planning permission
 - Development sites identified in planning process
 - Mowed access / viewing point
 - Coir Rolls
 - Hedge planting
 - Meadow creation
 - Tree / Shrub planting
 - New picnic area
 - Existing meadow

Habitat

Tree / shrub planting and meadow creation to extend habitat areas as mitigation for the loss of brownfield site for ZedHomes / and Victoria Way developments. Areas at the edge of the park to be planted to increase habitat areas too but also to enhance these open public areas for local residents and visitors. (Fig. 30, 31, 32)

Bat and Bird boxes to be sited throughout also to help mitigate for the loss of habitat.



Fig. 30 Tree planting site



Fig. 31 Hedge planting on urban edge



Fig. 32 Potential meadow area



Fig. 33 possible access / picnic site

Access

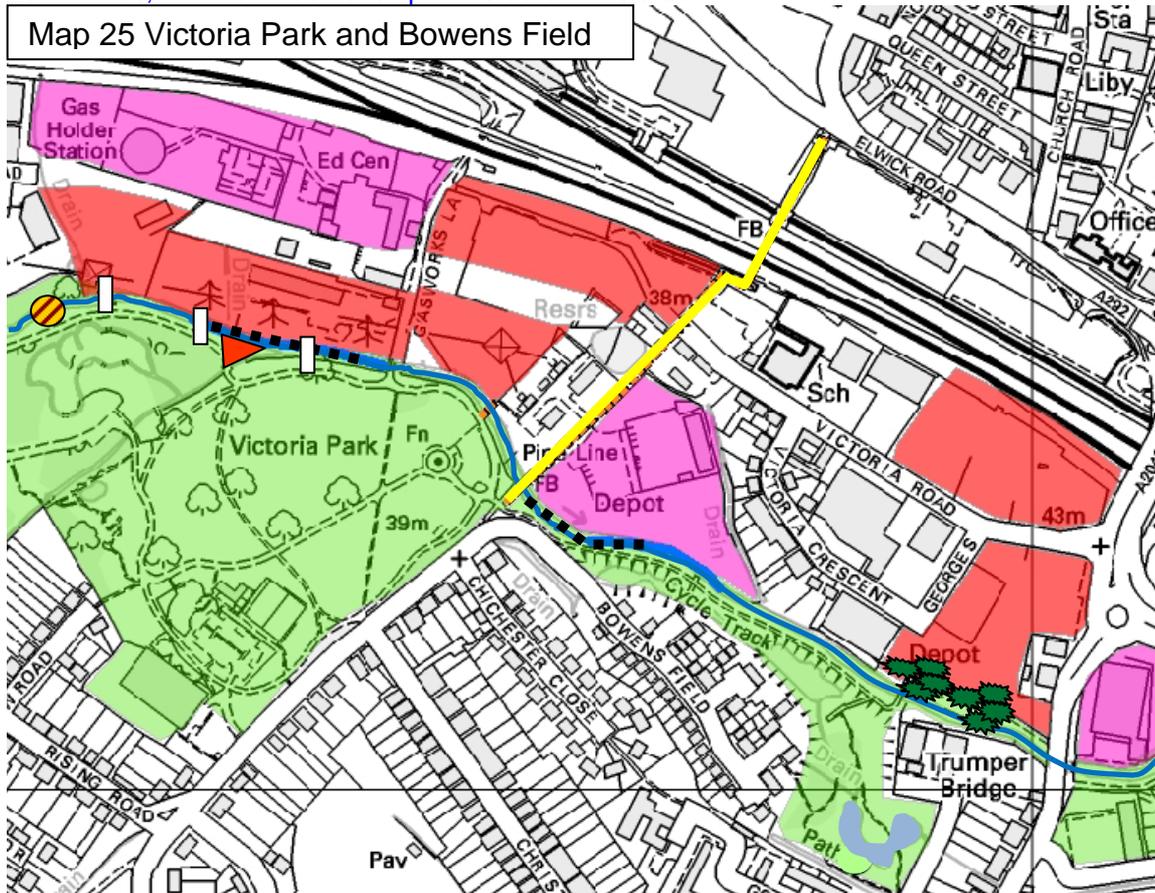
Picnic areas – 2 new access points to be created for the northern bank / industrial estate area. Pedestrian only access, with the possible inclusion of an interpretation panel to promote the AGC to this new audience. (Fig. 33)

A further picnic area suggested close to the playground but with views of the river.

Access / viewing point new mowed access point to open up view of the river.

Victoria Park and Bowens Field Area

This is one of the busiest areas of the AGC, lying close to the town centre. Victoria Park has some good habitat areas along the river corridor. Bowens Field consists of a wetland habitat / park area, with reeds, a pond and tall vegetation. Victoria Road West site, the pink area to the right of the Learning Link, is also a small wetland site. Zed Homes, Victoria Road developments border this area.



- INDEX
- AGC
 - Developments with planning permission
 - Development sites identified in planning process
 - Mowed access /viewing point
 - New/improved access
 - New footbridges (proposed)
 - River/Bank re-profiling
 - Tree / Shrub planting

Habitat

River re-profiling to create meanders and ditches during potential development work. This will provide a greater diversity of habitat, and take advantage of the disturbance that is inevitable.



Fig. 34 Victoria Road West site



Fig. 35 Victoria Park access/view point
Also stretch of river for potential re-profiling



Tree / shrub planting (Fig. 36) To provide a green buffer between the Victoria Road development and river corridor, plus extending and connecting habitat.

Fig. 36 Victoria Road East Site



Bowens Field- continuing scrub management of existing wetland area, plus removal of crassula and reed cover from pond. (Fig. 37)

Fig.37 Bowens Field – KSCP Reed and Crassula clearance task

Access / amenities – seating area for public enjoyment of the wetland area - (log bench installed by KSCP in August).

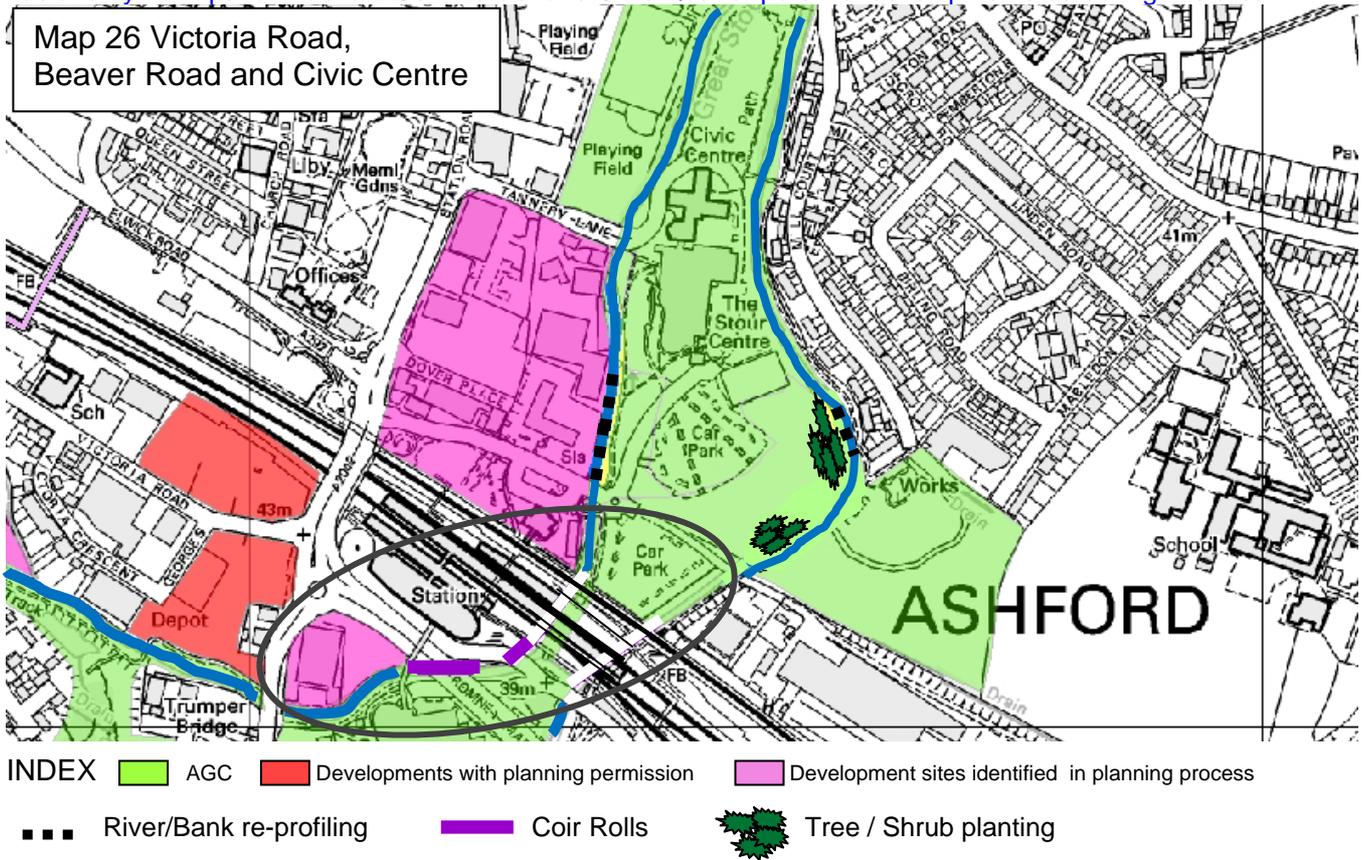
Lighting – reduction in height and/or direction of lighting to minimise light pollution of the river corridor. (Fig. 38)



Fig. 38 Bowens Field - Lighting

Victoria Road, Beaver Road and Civic Centre Area

These three areas are 3 of the most urban areas of the AGC. However, there are water vole in the rivers which has a fairly rich riparian habitat. Commercial and Civic Quarter potential developments bordering this area.



Habitat

River and bank re-profiling

The proposed removal of the sluice at Pledges Mill, to the north of the Civic Centre, would create a more natural river system. EA are currently looking at options and funding for this project. The East Stour River bank beside the Stour Centre is fairly steep and uniform (Fig. 39). Berms (a shelf created in the bank) and bays would provide a variable flow rate, increase marginal and bank vegetation, and provide better invertebrate habitat. (Fig. 40)

A straight section on the Great Stour beside the Stour Centre (Fig. 41) could be re-profiled for meanders during development work, to create greater diversity of habitat.



Fig. 39 East Stour – Civic / Stour Centre



Fig. 40 Berm on the Great Stour



Fig. 41 Great Stour / Stour Centre



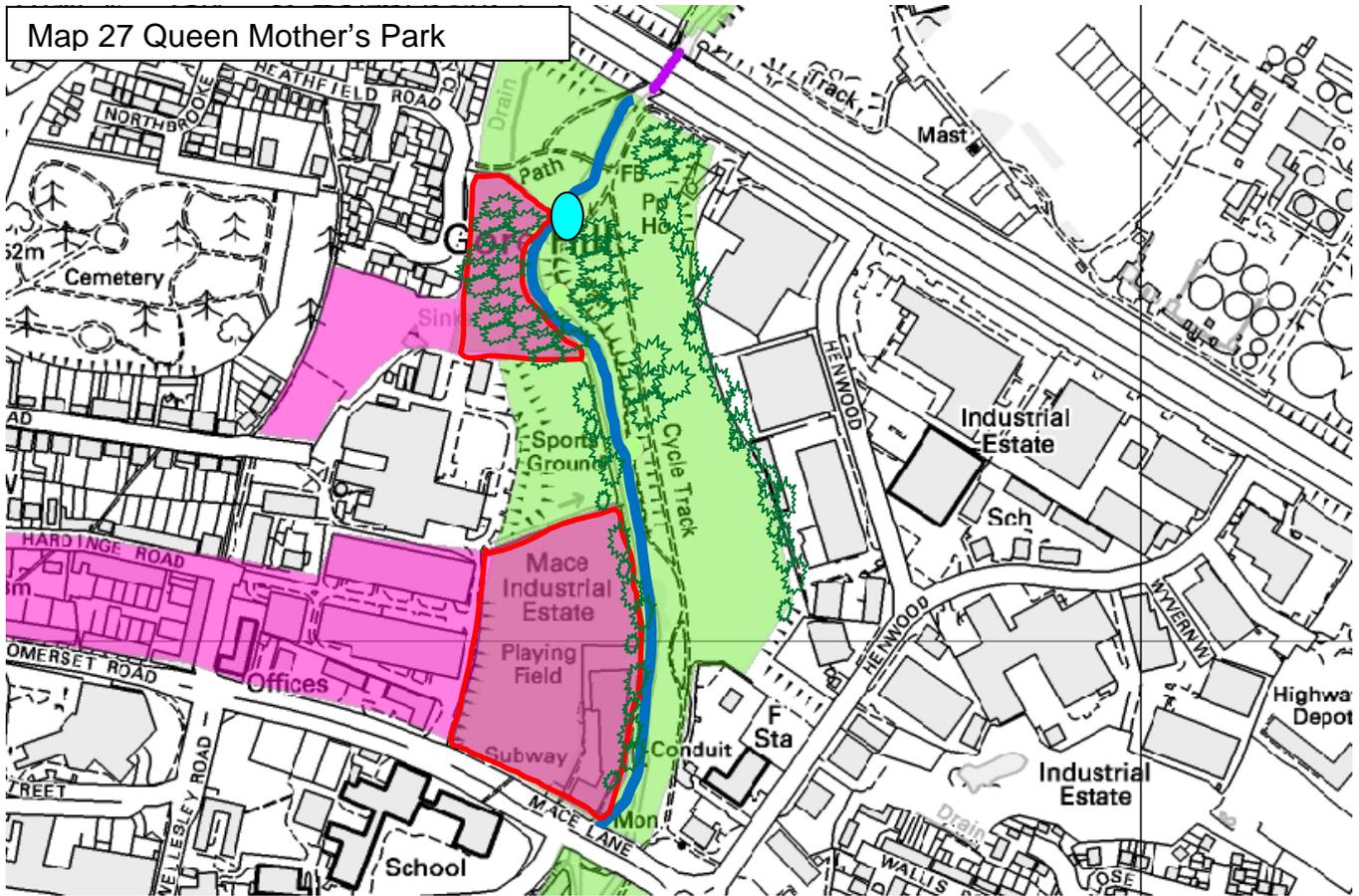
Fig. 42 Great Stour under Romney Marsh Road

Tree / shrub planting Civic Centre - South Park, on the western bank beside the river (Fig. 40) Creating and connecting wildlife habitat (to the opposite bank), plus adding visual interest and screening. Circled area Map 26 - Planting to soften and screen the structures and buildings which make this busy part of the AGC less appealing.

Coir rolls to be installed in sections of the East and Great Stour where they go under bridges and short tunnels (road and rail lines). Connecting and improving marginal plant growth. (Fig. 42)

Queen Mother's Park Area

There is a range of good habitat in this AGC area, with wildflower meadows, very good riparian vegetation, improved with recent re-profiling work carried out by EA. A very wooded section of the AGC with a continuous strip along the western bank, around the site and block breaking up the site. As a relatively noisy section of the AGC, this site tends to be less visited, although busy as a transit route. Residential Quarter and Lower Queens Road developments to potentially border this area.



INDEX ■ AGC ■ Developments with planning permission ■ Development sites identified in planning process
● Otter Chamber Holt ■ Coir Rolls □ Potential development sites within AGC

Habitat

Otter chamber holt installation - Providing habitat for a rare species.

Coir rolls to be installed on the Eastern edge of the Great Stour under the M20. Connecting and improving marginal plant growth.

(Fig. 43)

Fig. 43 M20 Bridge



Access / amenities

Existing access / viewing points to be kept open.

Pollarding mature willow and sycamore beside the river (Fig. 44) Pollarding opens up the area to light and improves the views – also of cultural value.

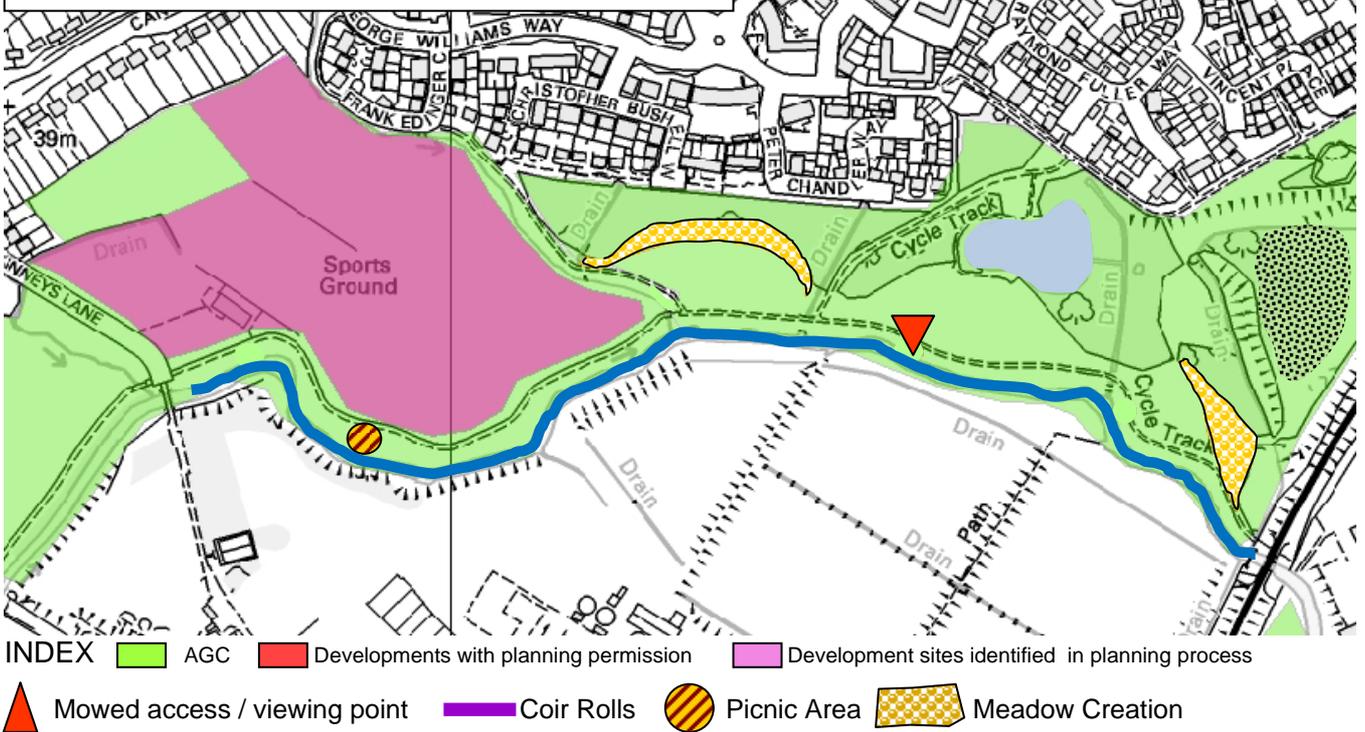


Fig. 44 Pollarding beside the Great Stour

Little Burton Area

Large amenity areas and wetland, lake, woodland and river corridor habitats. Ditches run down to the Great Stour extending riparian vegetation. Bybrook's filter beds extend habitat for a variety of species. A fairly quiet section of the AGC, at the Eastern extreme, joining the countryside beyond. The Foot and cycle paths ends here.

Map 28 Ashford Rugby Club – Little Burton



Habitat

Meadow creation in 2 areas, currently managed for amenity grassland. (Fig. 45, 46)

Scrub management of wet meadow area (● on map) to protect valuable habitat (Fig. 47)

Invasive management along the banks, particularly the southern bank belonging to Bybrook.

Access / amenities

Mowed access/viewing point to be created in a section where it is difficult to see the river.

Bench at excellent existing viewing point. (log bench installed by KSCP in August) (Fig. 49)

Picnic area beside the river, to encourage an appreciation of the AGC by the community and visitors.

Fencing removed / replaced with hedge / fence more in keeping with its surroundings. (Fig. 48)

Lighting to be adjusted where it lies too close to the river.



Fig. 45 Little Burton - Meadow creation area



Fig.46 Floodplain Meadow created by KSCP at Givaudan



Fig.47 view over wetland area



Fig. 48 Barrier beside the Ashford Rugby Club

Fig. 49 Log bench



New Green / wildlife spaces

Securing existing green spaces and new areas, such as those listed below, will present many opportunities for substantial ecological enhancement work to take place, and new habitat areas to be created that will increase connectivity throughout the AGC and beyond. The long-term management of these areas will determine the quality and longevity of such habitat creations / enhancements.

- a) **Willesborough Dykes** – securing this site as a wetland reserve would allow for substantial enhancement work to be done on an important habitat area within the AGC.
- b) **Cheesemans Green and Park Farm** developments have the opportunity to protect and enhance the valuable habitat of the river corridor and other waterways in and on their borders. The land for the developments is or was primarily arable land with a relatively low wildlife value.
- c) **Discovery Parks – Cheesemans Green / Conningbrook / Chilmington** (Fig. 50) offer an opportunity for enhancing existing wildlife habitat, and indeed creating new wildlife sites.
- d) **Agri-land management schemes**, promotions and implementation of these schemes in the wider catchment area will promote and protect wildlife in its wider context.

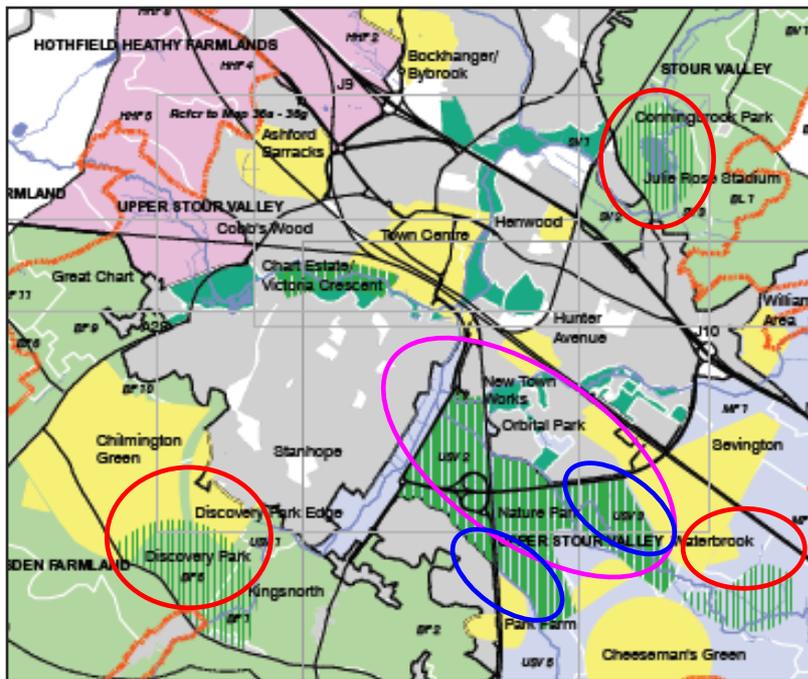


Fig.50 – Extract Ashford Green and Blue Grid Strategy.

- Willesborough Dykes
- Park Farm / Cheesemans Green
- Proposed Discovery Parks

APPENDIX 1

Development and planning documents (relevant to this report)

Local Development Framework (LDF)

The Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) 2006-21 Masterplan Report published 2005
Policy approach for a Borough, made up of a series of individual documents:-

Development Plan Documents (DPDs) – which are geographical or issue specific
Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) – detail core policy issues included in DPDs

Development Plan Documents (DPDs) set out the policy of the LDF.

Principal DPD - The Core Strategy – Adopted July 2009.

The strategic vision for development in the Borough between 2006 -21, which outlines the guiding principals by which the borough will deliver the LDF reflecting key national, regional and local strategies. Does NOT make site specific allocations or set out policies for individual sites – these are set out in other DPDs or Area Action Plans (AAPs)
More detailed policies will be provided through subsequent parts of the LDF or in Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

Relevant SPDs

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) SPD
Green Spaces and Water Environment (GSWE) SPD

Other DPDs / AAPs Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan (ATCAAP)

Adopted February 2010

Urban Sites and Infrastructure Development Plan (USIDP)

Awaiting published report – has gone through first stage of consultation

Cheesemans Green and Waterbrook Area Action Plan (CGAWAP)

Issues and Options Report completed June 2009 in consultation phase

Key Housing and Population figures

Ashford identified as one of the South East's Growth Areas in 2001. Subsequent study in 2002 concluded that Ashford had the capacity to grow by 31,000 homes and 28,000 jobs by 2031.^(a)

By April 2009, 4878 houses had been built^(b). This total is planned to rise to 16,770 dwellings by 2021^(c) the remaining 14,230, presumably, may follow.

A report produced by Halcrow in 2002 estimated an average of 2.06 persons per dwelling, Ashford Futures are working on the basis of 2.4 persons per dwelling.^(d) This equates to a potential population increase of up to 40,248 by 2021 and 74,400 by 2031, which represents approx a 72% increase in the population from 2001, when the last census put it at 102,661.^(e)

2008 Mid-year population estimates, published by the Office for National Statistics on 27 August 2009, showed Ashford with a population of 113,500, a 10.5% population increase thus far.

- a) www.ashford.gov.uk - About the Borough
- b) Ashford Gov UK, Ashford in Numbers site up dated 6th April 2009
- c) www.ashford.gov.uk – Executive Summary
- d) Strategic Growth Model, Section 5. GADF - pg 79
- e) www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/pop2001/ashford.asp

APPENDIX 2

Protections and designation relevant to the AGC and its key species / habitats

The value of the AGC has been recognised by ABC, Ashford Futures and others, within established and more recent policy objectives. The Great Stour River corridor from Ashford to Fordwich, has been designated a Kent Local Wildlife Site. Almost the entire AGC was designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in December 2002 by ABC, plus Buxford Meadow has been designated a Local Wildlife Site and South Willesborough Dykes a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and County Wildlife Site (CWS). (See Map 2).

LNRs and SNCIs can be given protection against damaging operations and protection against development on and around them. This protection is usually given via the Local Plan (now the Local Development Framework), (produced by the planning authority), and often supplemented by local by-laws. www.naturenet.net/status/lnr.html

In April 2000, the Council commissioned an extensive document entitled the Green Corridor Action Plan, which set out proposals for protecting and improving the riverside environment, which was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to the Local Plan policies EN13 & EN14. The Local Plan has now been superseded by The Core Strategy - adopted July 2008, which is the principal document within the set of development plan documents (DPDs) which make up the Local Development Framework (LDF).

The Ashford Green and Blue Grid Strategy published in October 2008, formed the basis of the above mentioned Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The *Green Spaces and Water Environment SPD* is due go through a consultation period in January to April 2011. However, until it is adopted the SPG remains extant.¹¹

Broadly speaking the new planning documents outline two main areas for protection that are relevant for the Ashford Green Corridor:-

Strategic Recreational Open Spaces (Policy CS18a)

The Council will seek to protect and enhance Victoria Park and to establish new strategic recreational open spaces at Conningbrook, Discovery Park, South Willesborough Dykes and Cheeseman's Green. The required size and detailed boundaries of the new strategic open spaces will be determined in the relevant site allocations DPDs in the context of a local assessment of the existing and future need and demand for open space, sports and recreational facilities. The strategic spaces will be linked by a green 'necklace' that will make use of the existing 'green corridors' through Ashford and the proposed 'blue infrastructure' of floodplain and water management features in accordance with an overall 'green and blue grid' strategy that is intended to be adopted as SPD.

Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (Policy CS11)

'Development proposals should avoid harm to biodiversity and geological conservation interests, and seek to maintain and, where practicable, enhance and expand biodiversity by restoring or creating suitable semi-natural habitats and ecological networks to sustain wildlife in accordance with the aims of the National and Kent Biodiversity Action Plans. If, exceptionally, there are circumstances in which other considerations justify permitting development that causes harm to such interests, appropriate mitigation or compensation measures will be required'.

The above policies to be embedded in relevant local area action and development plans:-

- Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan (ATCAAP) -TC1H 'Protect and enhance the Town Centre's existing green open spaces, and the river corridors by enhancing their wildlife, biodiversity and landscape value'
- Urban Sites and Infrastructure Development Plan (USIDP) - in public consultation (at the time of writing).
- Cheesemans Green / Waterbrook Area Action Plan (CGWAAP) – early stages of consultation.

¹¹ Ashford Green and Blue Grid Strategy, 2009
Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

KEY SPECIES:-

There are a number of key species that are known to inhabit areas of the AGC that are afforded particular legal protections, recognised within the Core Strategy, which must be observed and taken into account when planning applications are considered and / or awarded:-

Reptiles

Common reptile species are listed under Section 41 of The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC 2006), and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (WCA 81) protects all British native reptiles under Schedule 5, prohibiting:-

- Intentionally or deliberately capture, kill or injure a common reptile species.
- Sell, barter, exchange, transport or offer for sale reptiles or any part of them.

Mitigation:-

Capturing and translocating the animals away from the affected area, and erecting exclusion systems to prevent repopulation during the construction phases. The best time to undertake translocations is between April and late June and between August and late September.

A permanent receptor site may be required if there will be insufficient habitat left after construction is completed. Enhancement of translocation sites may well be necessary, and permanent receptor sites may require a long term habitat management commitment.

Water Vole

A National and Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and NERC 2006 Section 41 species, the water vole is also protected under Section 9 of the WCA 81.

If it can be demonstrated that any action that would otherwise have been an offence was the 'incidental result of a lawful operation and could not reasonably have been avoided', this constitutes a defence against prosecution under the Act. This defence thus provides for the carrying out of works that intentionally but incidentally commit offences, such as damaging water vole burrows, but requires that reasonable steps are taken to avoid any unnecessary damage..... Developers, or other riparian owners, who wish to maintain, build on or alter areas used by water voles must also ensure that unnecessary damage is avoided and all reasonable steps are taken to minimise impacts on water voles or their burrows. This can best be achieved by undertaking a water vole survey at an appropriate time prior to planning any work and ensuring that appropriate avoidance or mitigation measures are included in the proposals. (Natural England, Water voles – the law in practice Guidance for planners and developers – 2008)

Mitigation:-

When planning for any works that will significantly disturb the bank and/or bank toe, regardless of size or length, water voles will need to be considered. Firstly a survey of the site will need to take place to identify whether water voles are present and the locations of burrows. Before any works take place this site should be cleared of water voles, by manually checking and closing empty burrows and erecting exclusion barriers. The best time to do this being March – April prior to them having young and after the winter when they have a greater need for their burrows and underground food stores. No work should take place in the summer when they will be raising young in the burrows.

There must be sufficient suitable habitat adjacent to the site to allow the voles to retreat to safe havens for the duration of the work. After work has been completed, the affected banks should be reinstated, ensuring that any re-profiling and replanting is done to return it to a good habitat condition¹².

¹² National Guidance for Internal Drainage Boards, June 2007

Trapping and translocation of water voles away from the area requires special permission. If this is agreed, it can only be carried out under licence and will need to fulfil criteria ensuring the conservation of the water vole populations.¹³

White-clawed crayfish

Habitat modification and management of watercourses and water bodies has led to the reduction of habitat features required by crayfish. Crayfish also suffer from water pollution particularly urban and agricultural run-off, domestic sewage and increased levels of sediment.

Listed in Appendix III of the Bern Convention and Annexes II and IV of the EC Habitats Directive. It is classed as globally threatened by IUCN/WCMC. A National and Kent BAP and NERC Section 41 species, the white-clawed crayfish is also protected under Section 5 and 9 of the WCA 81.

- Intentionally, or recklessly, kill or injure any of the above species, and/or;
- Sell, or attempt to sell, any part of the species, alive or dead. Advertises that he buys or sells, or intends to buy or sell.

Mitigation:-

In some circumstances Local Planning Authorities may grant planning permission for works where white-clawed crayfish are present; in these cases a licence will be required from Natural England. The crayfish may be trapped or areas drained and emerging white-clawed crayfish caught by hand, these animals to be moved to habitat close to the original which is suitable to be re colonised. Enhancement work may be required, including installation of stone walls and improving bank side vegetation to provide both food and shelter for the crayfish.¹⁴

Bats

Over the last century bat populations have suffered serious declines and are currently under threat from factors such as the loss of feeding habitats and flight paths e.g. hedgerows, woodlands and ponds; loss of prey and through building and developments destroying and damaging roost sites. Recent research has also highlighted the negative impacts of lighting on some bats flight paths and foraging areas, which compromises their ability to survive and thrive.¹⁵

Bats are protected under NERC Section 41, Section 9 of the WCA 81 and Regulation 39 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) (Amendment) Regulations 2007. Taken together it is illegal to:

- Deliberately kill, injure or capture them
- Recklessly disturb roosting bats or obstruct access to their roosts
- Damage or destroys roosting sites
- Deliberately disturb bats in such a way to be likely to significantly affect the ability of any the bats to survive, breed, rear or nurture their young

Mitigation:-

Mitigation strategies vary but most successful examples are focussed around how the developer can minimise harm towards bats by timing construction to avoid sensitive times such as May to

¹³ Natural England, 2008

¹⁴ Southern Ecological Solutions, 2010

¹⁵ Stone, Emma, 2009

late August when bats are breeding or from November to late May during hibernation; as disturbance during this period can damage survival rates.

A constant in bat mitigation is the provision of bat roosting areas and/ or commuting and foraging grounds. This may range from the installation of bat boxes to the construction of a purpose built bat attic; commuting and foraging grounds can be satisfied with retention of specific vegetation and/or a replanting schemes. A licence is required from Natural England for and direct work with these animals.¹⁶

Birds

All wild bird species in the UK are protected from killing, injury and taking under the WCA 1981 (as amended). In addition this legislation makes it an offence to take, damage or destroy a nest while in use or being built, and to take or destroy the eggs of any nesting bird. Certain species are listed on Schedule 1 of the WCA 81. This makes it an additional offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb the adults while they are in and around their nest or intentionally or recklessly disturb their dependent young.

Birds of conservation concern are listed on the RSPB Red and Amber lists, and may be priority species on the UK BAP list. Priority species in the UK BAP are also Species of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biodiversity in England under Section 41 of NERC 2006.

Mitigation:-

Typical mitigation measures are erecting suitable bird boxes in nearby areas to encourage nesting, as well as tree and shrub planting in nearby or other suitable area to provide compensatory habitat.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 requires every public body in the exercising of its functions 'have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity (all biodiversity and not just section 41 species and habitats)' ; therefore making a whole range of wildlife and their habitats a material consideration in the planning process and requiring a detailed ecological survey before planning permission can be granted. In addition, local authority planning departments must use have due regard for the species of principal importance listed in section 41 of the Planning Policy Statement 9 to ensure all of these species are maintained in favourable conservation status when considering planning applications.

Finding a protected species on a development site does not necessarily mean that the development must stop. However, developers must demonstrate that they have taken reasonable measures to prevent damage and harm, and provided suitable mitigation as necessary.

KEY HABITATS:-

All of the waterways in the AGC provide invaluable habitat for plants, insects, birds and many other animals, as well as humans. Key habitats are listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) and Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (Kent BAP). From these lists, the following Priority Habitats are found in the Ashford Green Corridor:-

Wet Woodland	(UK BAP / Kent BAP)
Chalk rivers	(UK BAP / Kent BAP)
Lowland Meadows	(UK BAP / Kent BAP)
Native Woodland	(Kent BAP)

¹⁶ Southern Ecological Solutions, 2010
Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

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