

# Southbourne Parish Neighbourhood Plan Review 2019 – 2037

## Policy SB14 Biodiversity

### Supporting Evidence Report SB14.EV1

#### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Southbourne Environment Group (SEG) was set up in February 2016 following the approval of the SPNP (2015). It includes both District Councillors, a number of Parish Councillors and some 20 volunteers. It receives an annual grant from the Parish Council and technical support from the Chichester District Council Community Wildlife Officer and other experts. The Group undertakes a regular programme of practical work including tree planting and maintenance, ditch clearing, hedge laying, nature walks and courses, and wildlife recording. It assists the County Council with its programme of footpath monitoring, and carries out litter picks parish wide several times a year.

1.2 The Group was aware that policy 7 in the SPNP (2015) added little to the policies set out in the Local Plan. While the parish contains extensive areas where landscape and wildlife are protected by international, national and local designations, most of these are based on the Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Beauty and the Harbour itself. While Natural England and the Sussex Biodiversity Centre had some records relating to the rest of the parish, few additional areas benefited from any statutory protection. There had been instances in the parish where trees had been felled without consent, despite being the subject of Tree Preservation Orders, and some ditches had been stripped by landowners although identified as water vole habitat.

1.3 The proximity of the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and the passage of wildlife between the Park and the Harbour was also an issue that it was considered needed addressing. This was highlighted in meetings held with officers from SDNP and the Chichester Harbour Conservancy, CDC officers and representatives from Chidham and Hambrook Parish Council early in 2019. The meetings also covered other issues including landscape protection and “dark skies”. The Environment Group was aware that the District Council (CDC) was proposing to designate Wildlife Corridors in Lumley and in nearby Chidham and Hambrook Parish in its Local Plan Review 2035 (Preferred Approach December 2018) to facilitate the movement of wildlife north/south/north.

1.4 However, information about other parts of the parish was sketchy and it was not known whether there were other areas that might merit protection. As a result, it was decided to embark on an extensive survey programme, along the lines of those already undertaken by CDC in relation to the Wildlife Corridors, to record local flora and fauna and help formulate protection policies if and where necessary. It was considered important to validate these surveys by commissioning assistance from experts to supervise the ground work done by local volunteers.

1.5 One of the most important discoveries was that the Ham Brook has been designated a Chalk Stream by the Environment Agency. This is a rare habitat with only about 200 examples still surviving on the planet. Most examples are in Southern England with a few in France. Southbourne Parish has two, the second being at Lumley. It should be noted that Southern Water has a Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) at the south western corner of the new Meadow View housing development. To cope with “exceptional storm water” levels, this CSO discharges primary treated

sewage (simple screening) into the Ham Brook and thence to Chichester Harbour. These discharges are now a relatively common occurrence and their frequency and impact requires addressing by Southern Water. Additional discharges of primary treated sewage into the Ham Brook have also originated from Nutbourne Pumping Station. It has been suggested by Operation Watershed (a County Council/Parish Council initiative set up to address local flooding issues) that 4 hectares of land should be set aside to accommodate flood water from the Ham Brook during periods of high rainfall, thereby reducing the local flooding established in the old centre of Nutbourne West lying downstream south of the A259.

1.6 The Parish Council/SEG commissioned and was involved in a number of Bat Transect Surveys. Bat detector transect activity surveys were carried out in accordance with the standard methodology (Bat Conservation Trust, 2012). Transects are designed so that they can be completed at least once within three hours on foot at a steady pace. The level of survey is determined by several factors, including: the area of the site and the potential value of its habitats for bats; the regional location of the site; the quality or designation of adjacent habitats; the sites' connectivity with adjacent habitats; and the species of bat known in the area. All surveys were subject to the weather at the time, as high winds or rain can affect bat activity. Point counts, where the surveyor remains stationary for five minutes, were chosen strategically along the transect route to incorporate potentially good bat foraging habitats with areas where commuting bats were likely to be detected.

1.7 These surveys were conducted and led by Ecological Consultant, Nick Gray BSc (Hons) and Chichester District Council Community Wildlife Officer Sarah Hughes. The data collected and verified is now included in the Sussex Biodiversity Record in the appendices of the SPNP Review. The area close to the Ham Brook Chalk Stream was surveyed on 21 & 27 June 2019. There were 8064 different calls recorded and most notably a number from *Plecotus Auritus* (Brown Long Eared Bat). The survey done to the west of the parish near the Lumley Corridor site (12 September 2019) recorded 11000 calls and most notably a point count, conducted in the middle of the bridge over the A27. Three different species were recorded including *Myotis* (4 recordings in this short period, also proving that bats cross the A27 following and flying over the bridges.) This data has proved that Southbourne's wooded areas and hedgerows are Bat superhighways and have contributed to the evidence base supporting the inclusion of both the Lumley Wildlife Corridor and the Ham Brook Chalk Stream Wildlife Corridor in the Reviewed Neighbourhood Plan.

1.8 A number of Southbourne's hedgerows were surveyed between March and May 2019 using the survey method created by Sussex Hedgerows for the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre. They were led by Chichester District Council Community Wildlife Officer Sarah Hughes. A number of them were classified as "ancient" (see map). Ancient hedgerows, which tend to be those supporting the greatest diversity of plants and animals, are generally defined as those which were in existence before the Enclosure Acts, passed mainly between 1720 and 1840 in Britain. Species-rich hedgerows are those which contain 5 or more native woody species on average in a 30 metre length, such as field maple, oak, ash, hawthorn, black thorn and Butchers Broom). Hedges which contain fewer woody species but a rich basal flora of herbaceous plants including native bluebells, wood anemone, dog mercury are also included. Where boundary lines of trees or shrubs are associated with features such as banks, ditches, trees or verges, these features are considered to form part of the hedgerow. Some of the Parish's hedges also form the historic boundaries between medieval estates and former Parishes, and also define the original lanes and tracks that separated them.

1.9 Surveys of ditches were undertaken under expert supervision to record for example, plant species on the banks and evidence of water vole activity. This involved climbing down into the ditches checking for recent water vole runs in the bankside vegetation and locating the small entrances to burrows. The presence of water voles, themselves a protected species, indicates a healthy habitat capable of making an important contribution to the survival of a wider range of birds and animals, many of whom predate on the unfortunate voles. The results of these surveys are shown on the Biodiversity Maps.

1.10 Some of the hedges, ditches and wilder spaces in the parish although substantial appear unremarkable at first glance, but the surveys undertaken revealed a surprisingly rich habitat where flora and fauna thrive. Responsible recording of species by local residents has been encouraged by the SEG and in one year alone (2019) 5500 recordings were received and verified by the Sussex Biodiversity Centre, and are now on the data base. Of course, not all these are rare or protected species, but collectively they provide a picture of local wildlife and make a contribution to ever shrinking habitat.

1.11 The designation of the Wildlife Corridor at Lumley proposed by CDC is fully supported. While a further Wildlife Corridor is proposed by CDC in Chidham and Hambrook, it is considered that there is sufficient evidence to designate a second Wildlife Corridor within Southbourne Parish along the Ham Brook. In addition, it is proposed to add a 50 metre protective “buffer zone” within the parish alongside both corridors due to the pressure likely to be arise from the substantial quantity of new development being proposed (at least 1250 dwellings).

1.11 It is important to note that wildlife and habitat, does not correspond to administrative boundaries. However, the Reviewed Neighbourhood Plan can only designate areas within Southbourne Parish and therefore the Reviewed Plan proposals are confined within the Southbourne Parish boundary. At Lumley, the Wildlife Corridor is proposed not only on its own merits, but also to complement the Local Nature Reserve at Brook Meadow which lies on the Hampshire/Havant side of the parish boundary. Similarly, the proposed Ham Brook Chalk Stream Wildlife Corridor is intended to recognise and protect the high quality habitat present in Southbourne Parish but to complement wildlife networks present in Chidham and Hambrook Parish.

(August 2020)