

## Promoting Biodiversity in Kingston

### 1. Introduction

Kingston Parish Council's Environmental Policy was formulated in 2021 to provide guidance to the Council in tackling environmental issues within the parish. The policy acknowledges the wider context of climate emergency, environmental destruction and biodiversity loss and reflects strategic policy developments at national and international level.<sup>1</sup> It includes the objective (AP5) – *'Manage the land we own to minimise environmental pollution where possible and promote biodiversity'*.

In the Policy's Action Plan, actions proposed to implement this policy objective include *'Explore the development of green corridors through the village'*. This paper examines the concept of green corridors and their potential development in the village as part of Green Infrastructure.

### 2. What are Green corridors?

The idea of green (land) and blue (water) corridors as a mechanism to maintain and increase biodiversity by linking habitats that have become fragmented by development activities, e.g. road construction, building development, or changes in land use and treatment, is not new. Green and blue corridors have been developed in urban and rural contexts over a number of years. Ecologists agree that habitat fragmentation can lead to reductions in population numbers for plants and animals and subsequent loss of biodiversity. Creating and/or maintaining green/blue corridors can therefore allow for the movement of animals and plants from place to place enabling them to colonise new areas, build genetic resilience and enhance biodiversity. In a local village context like that of Kingston, corridors cross both

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Government's *25 Year Environment Plan* which includes the Nature Recovery Network; the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); the South Downs National Park 's detailed strategy - *The People and Nature Network (PANN)*; Lewes District Council's current *Local Plan* (Core Policy 8 and Core Policy 10.)

residential and agricultural land and include linked fields, hedges, road and track verges, field boundaries, adjacent gardens and footpaths.

### 3. What is Green Infrastructure (GI)?

Green and blue corridors form important linear elements in what is described as Green Infrastructure (GI), forming part of a place's natural capital. Kingston Parish's Green Infrastructure supports a range of habitats, species of flora and fauna and other features that contribute to biodiversity or geodiversity value. The national nature reserve on Castle Hill reflects the parish's importance in this respect.

Understanding the make-up of our Green Infrastructure is a first step in identifying existing green and blue corridors and protecting and enhancing them. Green Infrastructure may cover a range of spaces and assets that provide environmental and wider benefits. It may include:

- Fields
- Woodlands and trees
- Private gardens
- Village Greens
- Open spaces
- Trees and woodland
- Hedges and green boundaries
- Road verges and roundabouts
- Allotments
- Green (living) roofs
- Planted landscaping, including shrubs, wildflowers, etc

### 4. Why is Green Infrastructure important?

From a planning and community perspective, there is a range of benefits derived from GI where it is effectively managed and maintained.

- Kingston's GI exists within a wider landscape context, of particular relevance within the SDNP, and can reinforce and enhance local landscape character, contributing to a better sense of place and natural beauty.

- GI contributes a range of conservation benefits, including ecological connectivity through green/blue corridors, facilitating biodiversity net gain and nature recovery networks.
- GI can enhance the built environment e.g. through proximity to woodland, street trees, gardens, recreational and open spaces, and planting schemes.
- GI can improve the quality of life and mental/physical wellbeing of people in a parish by providing opportunities for experiencing and caring for nature, exercise and recreation, social interaction, conservation work and community gardening. Kingston has many committed nature-friendly gardeners and is developing a new Community Wildlife Garden which reflects local interest in supporting biodiversity.

At the same time, our natural capital assets have a key role to play in tackling the three major environmental crises the country now faces: climate change, environmental destruction and the increasing loss of biodiversity. The care and enhancement of our natural capital assets are thus important for us all.

## 5. What are Green Infrastructure Audits

Methodologies have been developed to enable a place's natural capital to be assessed at different levels of detail. A GI Audit is defined as *'the accurate mapping, description and analysis of all existing green infrastructure (GI) features within a defined study area'*.<sup>2</sup>

A GI Audit also outlines the benefits of GI and identifies opportunities for improving existing GI and for creating new GI. The improvement of existing green/blue corridors and the development of new green/blue corridors are thus outcomes of the initial mapping exercise. An audit and mapping exercise also provides an important benchmark for subsequent auditing and mapping, enabling change and continuity in natural capital and biodiversity to be identified and measured and environmental net gain to be established over time.

In identifying and mapping Green Infrastructure and local ecological networks for Kingston, information gathered might include:

- the geological, geomorphological and bio-geographical character of the parish area;
- key natural systems and processes within the area, including river and marshland;
- the location and extent of nationally and locally designated sites;

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<sup>2</sup> See *Green Infrastructure Audit Best Practice Guide* Victoria BID 2013

- the distribution of protected and priority habitats and species;
- habitats where specific land management practices are required for their conservation;
- main landscape features which, due to their linear or continuous nature, support migration, dispersal and gene flow, including any potential for new habitat corridors to link any isolated sites that hold nature conservation value, and therefore improve species distribution;
- areas identified by national, regional or local partnerships with the potential for habitat enhancement or restoration, including those necessary to help biodiversity adapt to climate change or which could assist with habitat shifts and species' migrations arising from climate change;
- information on the biodiversity and geodiversity value of previously developed land and the opportunities for incorporating this in developments; and
- areas of geological value which would benefit from enhancement and management.

This information provides the basis for understanding how environmental net gain may be achieved. The aim of wider environmental net gain is to reduce pressure on and achieve overall improvements in Green Infrastructure, natural capital, and ecosystem services and the benefits they deliver.

Audits and mapping are therefore a valuable first step in planning for net environmental gain.<sup>3</sup>

## 6. Suggested Next Steps

- seek funding for a Green Infrastructure audit and mapping project
- explore ways of engaging the community in the project (e.g. garden pledge scheme)
- work with SDNPA on nature recovery and put Kingston forward as a 'case study' if possible
- continue to keep abreast of and engage with local developments e.g. CARES<sup>4</sup> and LDC

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<sup>4</sup> The CARES project currently underway in the Lower Ouse Valley is providing templates for Green Infrastructure mapping purposes at parish level.