Milton-under-Wychwood Neighbourhood Plan

Appendix 5
Blue-Green Corridors in Milton-under-Wychwood

Glossary of abbreviations

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CCB	Cotswolds Conservation Board
CPCCS	Charity and/or Parish Council Controlled Spaces
Defra	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
EA	Environment Agency
ELMS	Environmental Land Management Scheme (Defra)
LGS	Local Green Space
LNRS	Local Nature Recovery scheme (Defra)
LRS	Landscape Recovery scheme (Defra)
MuW	Milton-under-Wychwood
MuWNP	Milton-under-Wychwood Neighbourhood Plan
NatEng	Natural England
NFMW	Natural Flood Management or Field Margin Planted Woodland
NP	Neighbourhood Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPSG	Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
NRN	Nature Recovery Network (Defra)
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
PC	Parish Council
PROW	Public Right of Way
SFI	Sustainable Farming Incentive (Defra)
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document (WODC)
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SuW	Shipton-under-Wychwood
TVERC	Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre
UM	Upper Milton
WOLP	West Oxfordshire Local Plan
WOD	West Oxfordshire District
WODC	West Oxfordshire District Council

Introduction

Based on study of existing national, regional and District plans and policies related to support of nature recovery and conservation, this document identifies and commends corridors across farmland and woodlands that in their present form assist biodiversity, its conservation and the free movement of wildlife.

The Milton-under-Wychwood (MuW) Neighbourhood Plan (NP) heeds the West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) Local Plan 2031 Core Objective CO14 to conserve and enhance the character and significance of West Oxfordshire's high quality natural, historic and cultural environment, including its geodiversity, landscape and biodiversity and aims to contribute locally to implementation of the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) emerging Nature Recovery Network (NRN). The Plan will be reviewed in future to align with Local Nature Recovery Strategies that may be devised for a wider area encompassing all or part of the parish.

Particular note has also been taken of

- Cotswold Conservation Board (CCB) plans and Policies for the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which includes the entire parish
- Natural England's (NatEng) contribution to development of national policy for creation of Nature Networks across England
- Defra Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS).

Natural England (NatEng)

In 2010 NatEng coordinated the multi-expert report 'Making Space for Nature', widely known as the Lawton report, shaping both the Natural Environment White Paper and the Biodiversity 2020 strategy. The report proposed a "resilient and coherent ecological network" across England and, having stood the test of time, continues to heavily influence policies of the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) including the development of Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan (2018; updated 2021). In follow-up to the 2010 report, NatEng's 2020 handbook of 'Nature Networks: A Summary for Practitioners' provides guidance for evidence gathering and partner identification towards achieving appropriate vision of goals for each nature network encompassing biodiversity, natural capital, ecosystem services, landscape character, cultural heritage and other societal goals such as countryside access.

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS)

Relevant to the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan and other guidance documentation published by CCB, Defra has recently introduced 3 new schemes that will reward environmental land management. These comprise the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI; introduced in 2021), the Local Nature Recovery scheme (LNRS; piloting during 2022) and the Landscape Recovery scheme (LRS; piloting during 2022) They are intended to support the rural economy while achieving the goals of the 25 year Environment Plan and a commitment to net zero emissions by 2050. Through these schemes, farmers and other land managers may enter into agreements to be paid for delivering clean and plentiful water, clean air, thriving plants and wildlife, protection from environmental hazards, reduction of and adaptation to climate change, and beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment. The ELMS plan to establish a Nature Recovery Network will protect and restore wildlife, as well as providing greater public enjoyment of the countryside, increased carbon capture, and improvements in water quality and flood management.



Long-tailed Tit and Partridge: residents in our countryside

Under coordination by the charity Wild Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire's Biodiversity Advisory Group has proposed policies for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. These include protecting and enhancing habitats of particular importance for nature and strengthening ecological networks. Wild Oxfordshire has stated that a NRN should be used to develop a Nature Recovery Strategy, make strategic land use decisions that help nature's recovery, target activity to generate best outcomes for wildlife, build nature recovery actions into local decision making and target investment into restoring the natural environment.

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) at Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) has mapped (May 2022) the NRN defined for the parish of MuW as follows in **Figure 1**:

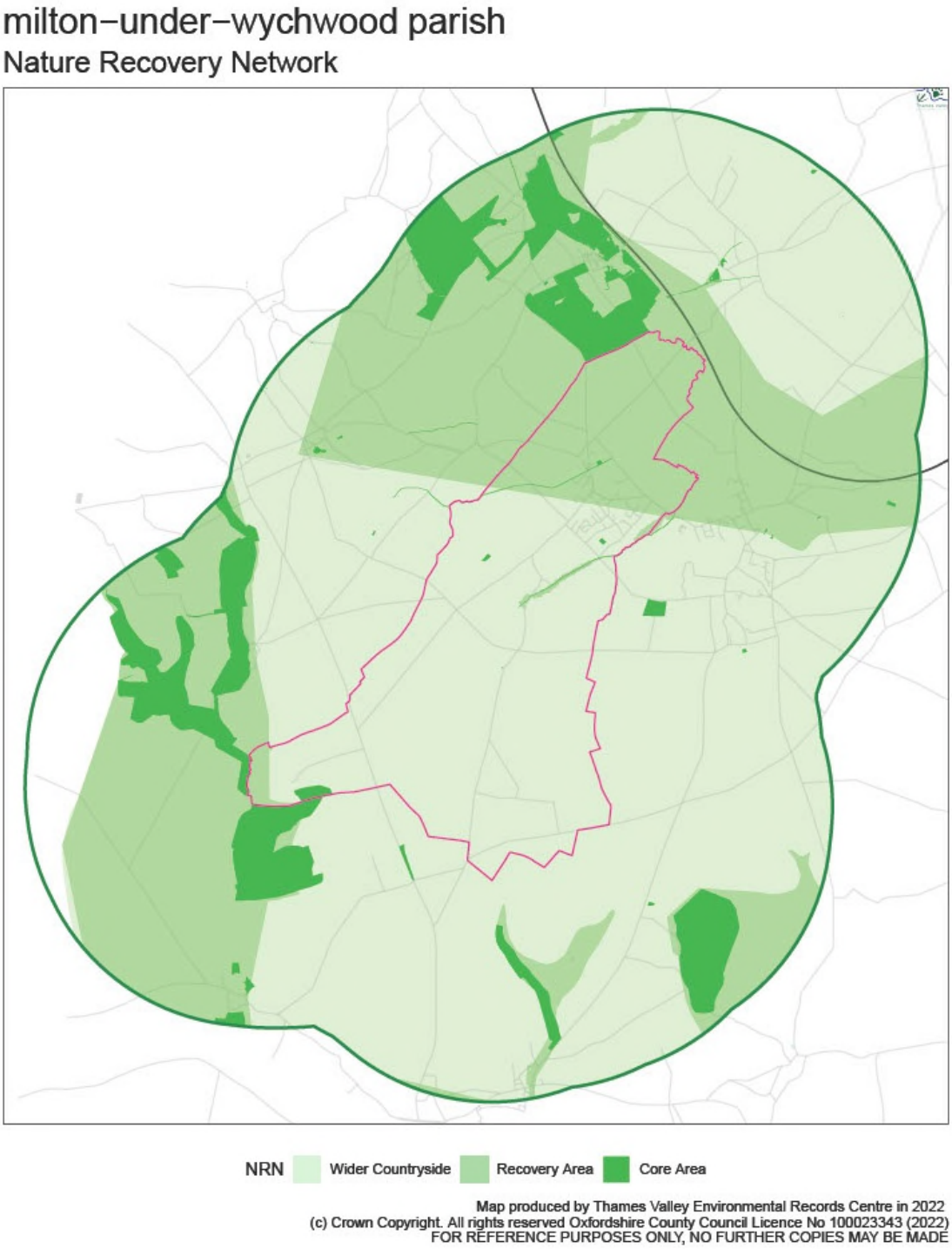


Figure 1: MuW Nature Recovery Network Map

Farmland within the parish that is subject to ongoing Countryside Stewardship Scheme incentives from Defra is shown in **Figure 2** and includes fields abutting Bruern Ancient Woodland to the North of the parish, fields in the Evenlode floodplain to the North East of the main settlement and to the West of the main settlement and several fields around the hamlet of Upper Milton.

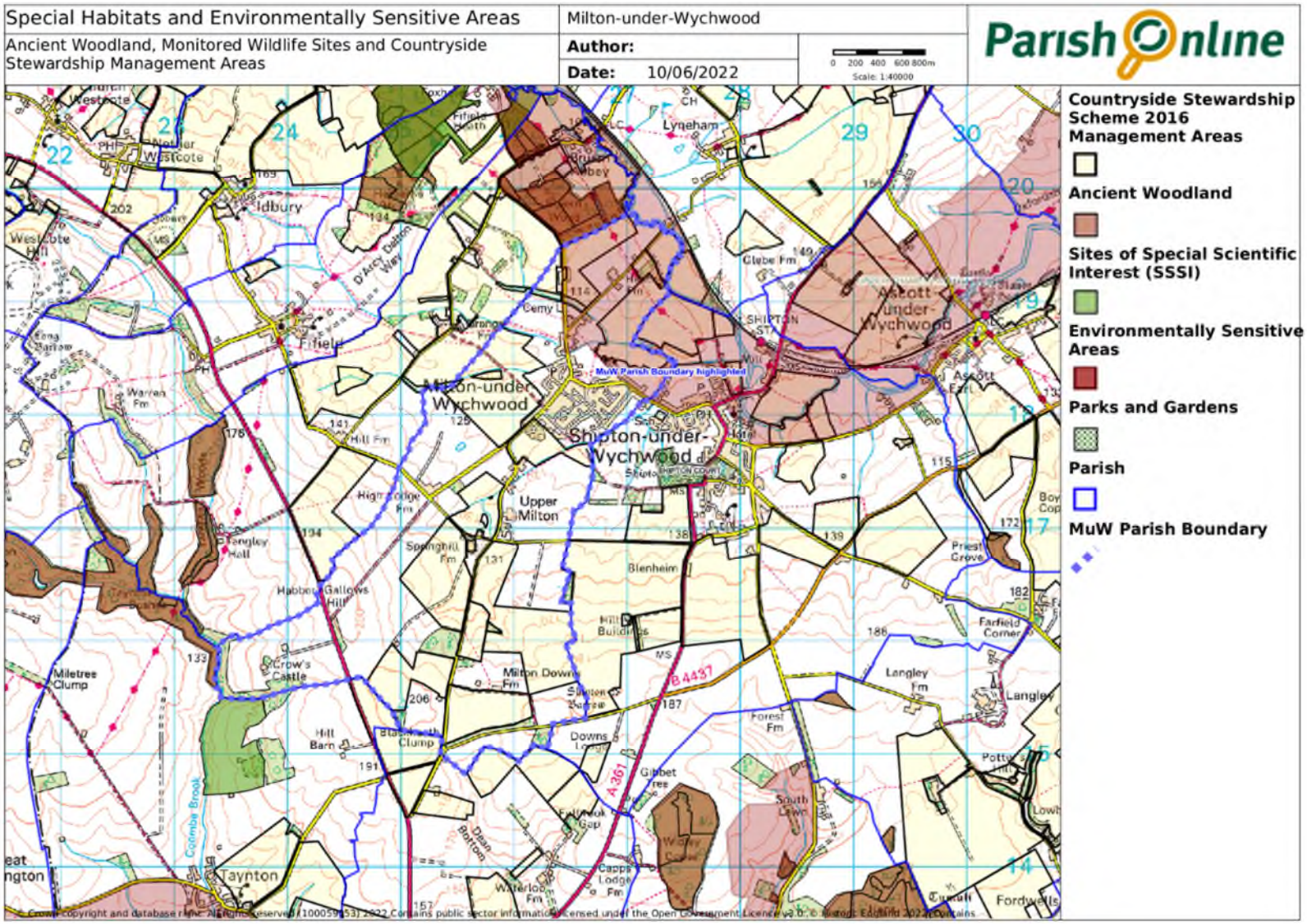


Figure 2: Map showing special habitats and farmland in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme

As presented in **Figures 3 and 4**, four corridors across arable and pasture land and mostly enclosing watercourses, their floodplains and some woodlands have been identified as needing conservation for the purpose of maintaining wildlife protection and movement. The water courses, along with their flood plains, are important corridors for free movement of aquatic fauna. Three of these corridors are close to the main settlement of MuW. The corridors are designated 'Blue-Green' Corridors (BGC) as follows:

BGC1: This embraces part of the Nature Recovery Area presented by TVERC in Figure 1 in the North of the parish. This is a broad continuous corridor of farmland of mixed uses along the Evenlode Valley that adjoins the Bruern Ancient Woodland and includes farmland in Countryside Stewardship that in several cases includes extra wide margins of planted wild flowers. It includes a planted woodland on the eastern side of the Oxfordshire Way. Field hedgerows and riverine tree cover across the area tend to be thick. The overall space proposed for BGC1 is less ambitious in scope than the Recovery Area proposed for the North of the parish by TVERC since the proposed corridor excludes farm buildings and a small ribbon of 20th Century residential development and rising land used for horse training and arable farming. For much of its length the western boundary of this corridor is taken as the Oxfordshire Way, i.e. the Oxfordshire Way will look eastwards over land designated as a blue-green corridor. The largest field of farmland in BGC1 that abuts the River Evenlode has been in a cover crop and no-till trial since 2018 (sponsored by Thames Water) for which the landowner has written: *The farm is now in Countryside Stewardship so we have reintroduced margins back along the water courses… …I am open to ideas on how we can reduce our impact on the environment and increase biodiversity in the area.* Its natural aquatic connection with BGC2 and BGC3 (see below) occurs at the confluence in the neighbouring parish of SuW.

BGC2: This corridor constitutes a narrow band of mostly rough pasture land predominantly along the boundary between the parish and Shipton-under-Wychwood enclosing the Simmonds Brook aquatic corridor from the brook's source in Upper Milton downstream to the confluence with Littlestock Brook at Milton Sewage Treatment Works. It includes the wetland copse of The Homestead and adjoining properties (postal address of all is Frog Lane) along the partly paved unmarked track of Stone Lane off Frog Lane. BGC2 is naturally connected with BGC3 (see below) through Littlestock Brook and its other tributaries which flow from West to East. Through two hedgerow-lined arable fields between the main settlement and Upper Milton, BGC2 abuts BGC3 again at a band of new woodland (mapped as NFMW3). These hedgerow-lined arable fields and the adjacent proposed Local Green Space No 4 (LGS4), including its footpath strip with old hedgerow to the Simmonds Brook footbridge, connect eastwards with a transition into an area of rough pastures and wetlands including old pastures along the southern bank of Simmonds Brook which are to be designated as LGS1 and LGS2 respectively (mapped in Figure 3). In its Western, mid-parish arms this corridor embraces several fields in Countryside Stewardship and the corridor includes all the Nature Recovery Areas presented by TVERC in Figure 1 for the respective strand of the Simmonds Brook from Upper Milton and for the extreme East of the parish.

BGC3: The aquatic sources of this corridor include two streams rising in High Lodge Farm and another stream rising in the adjacent Bruern parish which, alongside the landowner's wildlife conservation wetland, merge near the main settlement into a stream that flows to its confluence with the Littlestock Brook at Church Road. The corridor includes four woodlands comprising more than 3,000 trees planted by the landowner. Two of them (NFMW1 and 2) are alongside the small brook from Bruern that hosts a Natural Flood Management scheme upstream. Another planted woodland (NFMW3) abuts BGC2 in the gap between Upper Milton and the main settlement. The fourth planted woodland (NFMW4) is part of a Natural Flood Management project alongside the stream from Bruern Home Farm which is the natural northern boundary of the Parish Field. BGC3 also includes the 1 ha strip of woodland (mapped as CPCC4) planted along the Littlestock Brook on the southern fringe of the Parish

Field. From Church Road BGC3 continues to enclose the Littlestock Brook and the Home Farm stream from Bruern and the small meadows of rough pasture behind Pebblebrook House before widening across the floodplains and adjacent pasture land continuing to the River Evenlode Floodplain. In its Western, upper arms this corridor embraces several fields in Countryside Stewardship and the Northern arms of the corridor includes part of the Nature Recovery Areas presented by TVERC in **Figure 1** for the North West of the parish.

BGC4: Essentially matching the Core Area proposed by TVERC for the Taynton Bushes on the western fringe of the parish below the disused quarries at Crow's Castle and embracing fields in Countryside Stewardship, this corridor includes the aquatic habitat of the Coombe Brook that rises in Upper Rissington and the adjacent natural woodlands which continue extensively in Tayton parish. There is no public right of way in the area designated BGC4.



Wild flowers in summer

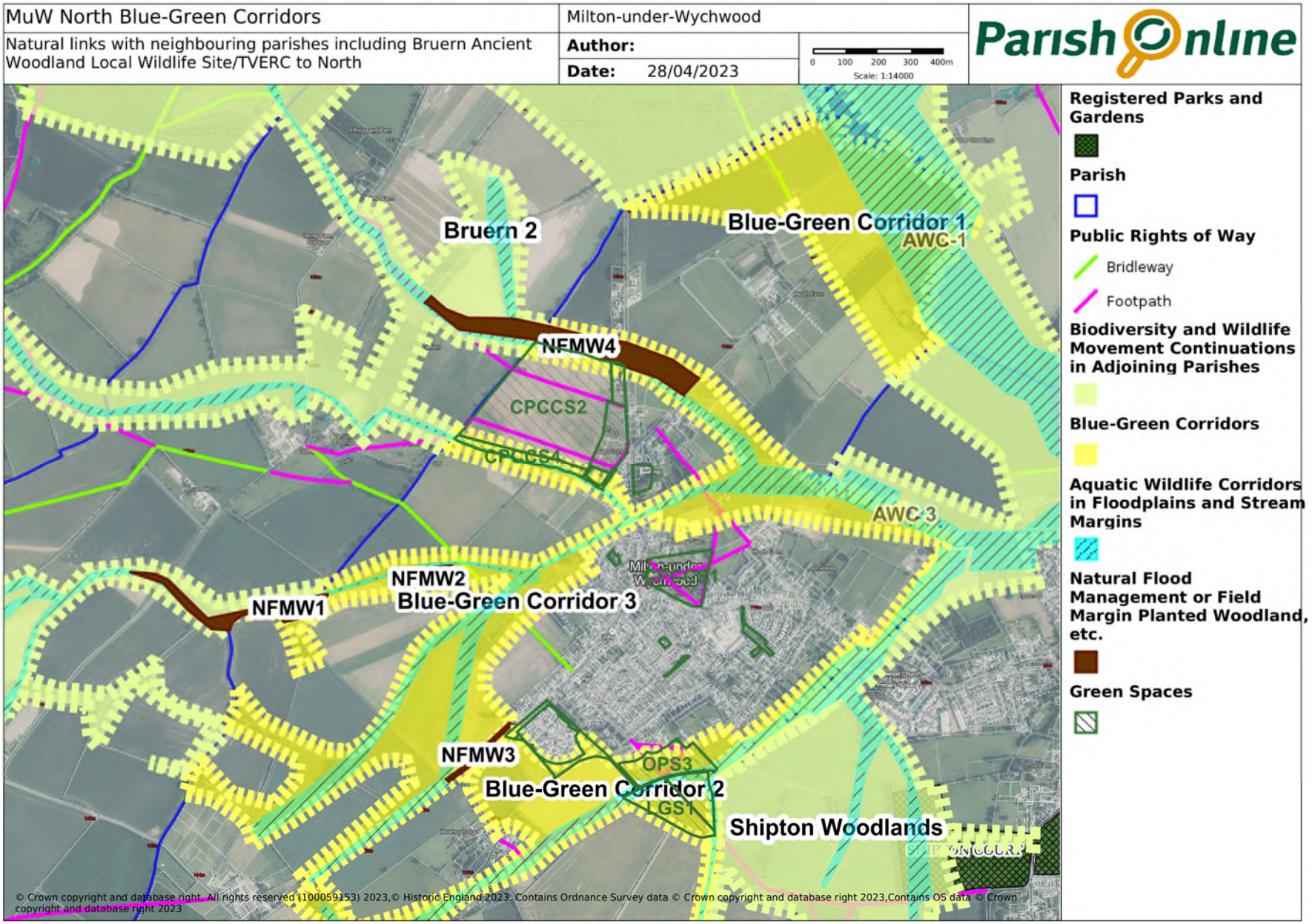


Figure 3:_ MuW North map showing Aquatic Wildlife Corridors and Blue-Green Corridors

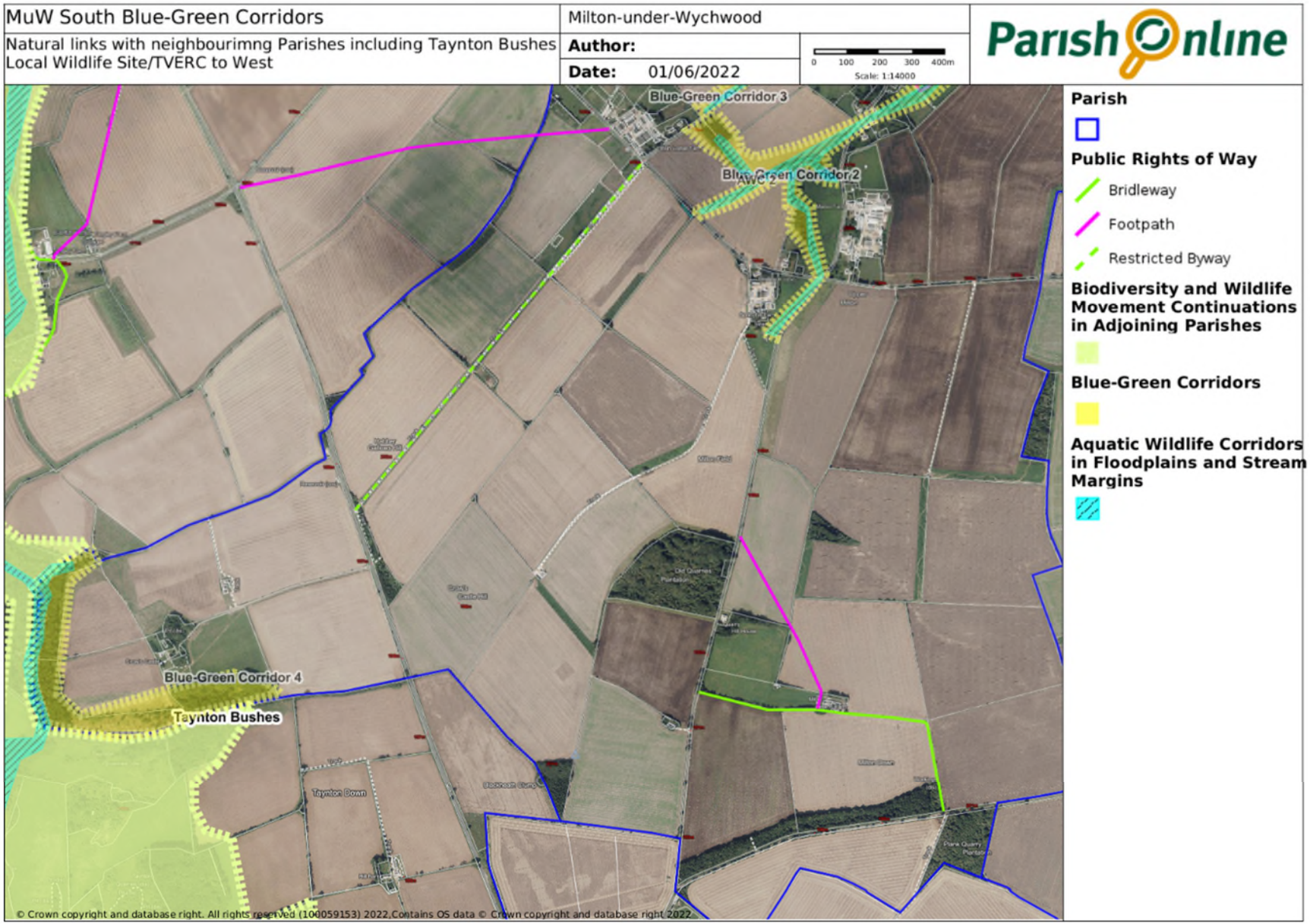


Figure 4: MuW South map showing Aquatic Wildlife Corridors and Blue-Green Corridors





