

THE FRIENDS OF MELTON COUNTRY PARK

Campaign to Protect the Wildlife in Melton Country Park

In April 2017 the Friends of Melton Country Park launched a campaign to establish a substantial buffer zone between Melton Country Park and any future development. The buffer would provide protection for the wildlife that inhabits the Park, by reducing the negative impact of any noise and light pollution arising from residential development. Within just two months, 1281 local residents and other park users showed their support for the campaign by signing the attached petition.

The Friends were formed in 2004 and as well as organising monthly volunteer work groups, they have raised considerable funds towards improvements within the Park. The Park has QEII Fields in Trust status and has recently been designated a Local Wildlife Site, in recognition of its importance for the conservation of wildlife.

The Park is currently surrounded on the north and east by open countryside which provides enhancements to biodiversity and geodiversity. The Friends understand the need for new homes but are gravely concerned that proposed housing development adjacent to the Park will have a severe detrimental impact on the biodiversity and rural nature of the Park, effectively changing it from a country park to another town park. Indeed the Planning Inspector in his Core Strategy recommendations (April 2013) noted, *'the cutting off from the open countryside of the Country Park will also have an adverse effect upon biodiversity.'*

The Friends welcome the latest amendments to Policy SS5 of the Local Plan that describes how, *'development should respond to the local topography and utilise it to define the protection zone.'* However, the Friends feel strongly that the Council should go a step further and specify a minimum width for the protection zone, thereby removing any ambiguity and that this should be mandated by the Council for any future planning applications abutting Melton Country Park. One such example of this is Surrey Heath Borough Council, who have established a 400m buffer around a Special Protection Area within which no new net residential development will be permitted.

In previous representations about the Local Plan, the Friends advocated the creation of a buffer zone of some 500m around the Park's northern and eastern boundaries, this being broadly consistent with the 2km wide strip described in the 2012 Bingham to Melton Wildlife Corridor project. However, should a buffer of this scale not be feasible, the Friends have concluded that a narrower buffer of between 100 to 200m which utilises the

blocks of woodland in between the two SSSIs (see points 7, 8 and 9 on Figure 5.5) would considerably reduce the SSSIs fragmented position in the landscape.

Further specific suggestions for increasing the ecological connectivity between habitats and designated sites from corridors and stepping stones are shown on Figures 5.1 to 5.7 inclusive.

5.2.3 Buffer Zones

Introduction to Ecological 'Buffer Zones'

An ecological 'buffer zone' is an area of land or habitat which usually separates areas of ecologically important habitat from areas of poorer-quality habitats, disturbed/ developed areas, and/or sources of pollution. The aim of the buffer zone is to provide a barrier to potential impacts, and is often important around isolated designated sites. In designing and creating ecological buffer zones, the source of potential impacts and pathway to effect may need to be considered. Buffer zones may also provide connectivity opportunities (see Section 5.2.1) and can enhance the areas they surround since the extent of habitat is increased.

Buffer Zones within Melton Borough

Buffer zones will be most important where valuable or potentially fragile ecosystems lie close to heavily populated or disturbed areas or close to areas where future development is proposed.

Examples of areas which may benefit from the provision of buffer zones include:

- * **Melton Country Park** – the park lies on the north-east edge of Melton Mowbray and is partially surrounded by residential areas. It is recommended that no further development encroaches on the country park and that a buffer zone is established around the north and east of the Park (Figure 3.18);
- **Holwell Works area** - three areas of the southern section of the former Holwell Works site comprise the Asfordby Hill non-statutory designated site (Figure 4.4). The designated site is situated on the outskirts of the town of Asfordby Hill and in close proximity to the western edge of Melton Mowbray. Establishing buffer zones around this designated site (or indeed expanding the designated site to take in more of the Holwell Works site) would increase the contribution this designated site makes to the biodiversity resources of the Borough as well as reducing the risk that the site would be impacted by development;
- **Main watercourses** – these could benefit from establishing suitable riparian corridors such as a margin of ranker grassland, and example include the River Eye and Scalford Brook (Figure 3.18); these watercourses currently reside within intensively managed landscapes.

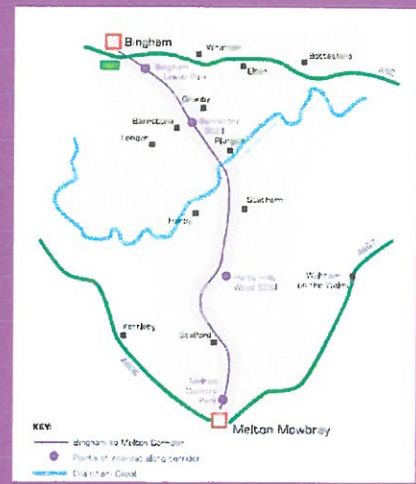
Field margins can also be allowed to become rank where they are adjacent to more valuable areas, providing a buffer from agricultural activities and nutrient/sediment run-off.

Based on the information accessible within the scope of this study¹⁵, it is difficult to assess with certainty in the wider Borough which areas are likely to benefit the most from buffer zones, because some potential threats may be more cryptic than just urban encroachment, e.g.

¹⁵ Freely available OS maps, aerial photographs, and information received from LERC

Bingham to Melton wildlife corridor

Newsletter 2012



Environmental Stewardship

Farmers who's Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) is due for renewal or for those who haven't yet entered the scheme, are advised to consider its advantages. Payments of £30 per ha brings obvious financial advantages and are paid regardless of weather or grain prices. Using a combination of boundary management options and siting in field options on marginal low yielding land can maximise the income potential.

The environmental benefits of the scheme can be increased by the options you select and where you place them. For example a block of wild bird seed mix would provide much needed food for small birds in winter but siting it next to woodland where the birds can dash for shelter when needed, would increase its usage.

Placing 6m buffer strips next to the disused railway line will help to protect this important habitat and also provide a varied height of unimproved grass for the grizzled skipper to use. Six metre margins can have the 3 metres next to the crop cut each summer; helping with weed control in the crop and also provides a more diverse habitat. The cut strips can provide dry spots for game bird chicks whilst the longer growth provides shelter.

Leslie Sharpe – Farm Environment Adviser

Update on Bingham Linear Park



Volunteers at Bingham Linear Park

The Friends of the Bingham Linear Park have continued to carry out the activities required in the site management plan. This plan has the objectives of maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the Local Nature Reserve and

maintaining the park for its users. The path has been kept clear for walkers, with litter removed and scrub encroaching on the species rich grassland has been kept at bay.

During the growing and breeding seasons regular observations of the animals and plants are recorded in order to monitor how the site naturally changes and the impact of the conservation work. Long term changes to the reserve are being monitored using fixed point photography and random sampling.

Jenny Craig – Friends of Bingham Linear Park

Grizzled Skipper



Grizzled Skipper by Jim Asher

The possibility of a substantial grant to help with the plight of the Grizzled Skipper in Nottinghamshire, led to surveying in South Nottinghamshire. Surveys were also required on old

sites from which Dingy and Grizzled Skippers have disappeared, with a view to making them again suitable for recolonisation when funding becomes available. In November it was confirmed funding for work to develop Grizzled Skipper habitats has been obtained by Nottinghamshire County Council.

The survey that took place showed the Grizzled Skipper to be present at sites including Bingham Linear Park, Langar Airfield and Saxondale; very often in small numbers and over a wider area than had previously been realised.

Just a few years ago there was serious danger that the Grizzled Skipper would not survive in Nottinghamshire. This danger has lessened, and encouragement can be had from the discovery in a few places in North Leicestershire that appear to be connected to nearby

colonies in Nottinghamshire. Elsewhere in Leicestershire the Grizzled Skipper is virtually unreported.

Of no less importance is the discovery of a substantial new colony in Lincolnshire, not far from the Kilvington complex. Members of the Lincolnshire branch are continuing their own important initiative with the Grizzled Skipper in the vicinity of their county border with Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland. Continued co-operation between the East Midlands and Lincolnshire branches is key to potential expansion in and around the Vale of Belvoir.

Bill Bacon - Butterfly Conservation, East Midlands Branch

The Bottesford Spur



View from Redmile Station

The majority of the disused rail spur from Plunger to Bottesford in Leicestershire is still owned by Central Network Rail. As with the main Bingham to

Melton line it had a mixture of habitats ranging from marsh to fully enclosed scrub, however the aim for this section of the disused rail line is different to the main route.

Under an agreement with the landowner the track bed has been cleared to a width of 3 metres as part of a plan into the feasibility of creating a permissive bridle route.

The route is now accessible without bending double to get under hawthorn and blackthorn. Areas previously less dominated by scrub have had a flush of wild flowers including St Johns Wort and Knapweed. Higher nutrient levels in areas with more leaf litter, have led to increased nettle growth.

Whether the permissive bridle route will be created is still unclear, but what the clearance work does demonstrate is that some of the dormant wild flower seed bank can still be reactivated with the increased light levels and a bit of ground disturbance. On areas

that were heavily scrubbed it would be worth experimenting in scraping off the built up soil/leaf litter to re expose the aggregate of the track bed just to see what might happen.

This project was done on a large scale, but small scale projects can be equally as effective.

Top tip - it is worth treating any stumps with an approved systemic herbicide to kill the roots and prevent re- growth otherwise all your hard work can soon disappear under scrub again.

Andy Hayes - Leicestershire County Council

Bingham to Melton Wildlife Corridor Project

The object of the project is to promote wildlife friendly management of land along a 2 kilometre wide corridor either side of the line of the disused railway from Bingham to Melton. Starting and ending with the Bingham Linear and Melton Country Park the line encompasses Barnestone SSSI, crosses the Grantham Canal, passes the nearby Harby Hills SSSI, links with the Bottesford Spur line and is adjacent to the Holwell and North Quarry nature reserves. Thus it has the potential to link various important wildlife features. Of particular interest is that the line supports rare colonies of the Grizzled Skipper butterfly on the Linear Park and at Langar Airfield.

A variety of organisations are involved along the line including Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Rushcliffe Borough Council and Leicestershire County Council.

Gordon Dyne - Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy Implementation Group



Rushcliffe Biodiversity Management Grant

A Biodiversity Management Grant is currently available for landowners in Rushcliffe wishing to carry out management work that will improve biodiversity.

Details are available from:

www.rushcliffe.gov.uk/environmentandwaste/countryside/grants



**FLORA AND FAUNA ON UK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN LISTS (THOSE MOST THREATENED IN UK)
RECORDED ON PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT SITE PLUS BIRD RINGING RECORDS FROM CHRIS HUGHES**

Birds ringed and retrapped by Chris Hughes- mainly during winter periods Oct -March - from 1995 onwards

Species	RINGED			RETRAPS			Conservation status
	Site A	Sites B/C	Total	Site A	Sites B/C	Total	
Fieldfare	3	1	4			0	UK BAP, SPEC RED
Swallow	2	0	2			0	SPEC AMBER
Blue Tit	159	604	763	44	1094	1138	SPEC GREEN
Great Tit	80	410	490	8	679	687	SPEC GREEN
Duncock	71	384	455	28	83	111	UK BAP, SPEC AMBER
Robin	27	91	118	16	66	82	SPEC GREEN
Starling	653	0	653	71		71	UK BAP, SPEC RED
Pied Wagtail	10	1	11			0	SPEC GREEN
Blackbird	205	113	318	62	19	81	SPEC GREEN
Yellowhammer	2	356	358		37	37	UK BAP, SPEC RED
Reed Bunting	9	5	14			0	UK BAP, SPEC AMBER
Wren	22	45	67	4	12	16	SPEC GREEN
House Sparrow	207	201	408	10	36	46	UK BAP, SPEC RED
Greenfinch	970	1295	2265	115	203	318	SPEC GREEN
Chaffinch	28	674	702	1	144	145	SPEC GREEN
Long tailed Tit	35	84	119	7	11	18	SPEC GREEN
Goldfinch	45	23	68	6		6	SPEC GREEN
Carrion Crow	7	0	7			0	SPEC GREEN
House Martin	1	0	1			0	SPEC AMBER
Whitethroat	2	5	7			0	SPEC AMBER
Linnet	3	0	3			0	UK BAP, SPEC RED
Black headed Gull	3	1	4			0	SPEC GREEN
Sparrowhawk	2	7	9		1	1	SPEC GREEN
Woodpigeon	13	0	13			0	SPEC GREEN
Magpie	5	1	6			0	SPEC GREEN
Chiffchaff	1	25	26			0	SPEC GREEN
Bullfinch	3	45	48		1	1	UK BAP, SPEC AMBER

Song Thrush	3	40	43
Treecreeper	1	10	11
Coal Tit	6	14	20
Collared Dove	1	7	8
Goldcrest	3	20	23
Blackcap	1	25	26
Willow Tit	1	15	16
Redwing	0	11	11
Tree Sparrow	0	60	60
Brambling	0	3	3
Rook	0	1	1
Great Sp Woodpecker	0	11	11
Marsh Tit	0	14	14

			0
	1		1
	20		20
			0
	1		1
			0
	17		17
			0
	2		2
			0
			0
	19		19
	62		62

UK BAP, SPEC RED
SPEC GREEN
SPEC GREEN
SPEC GREEN
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SPEC GREEN
UK BAP, SPEC RED
UK BAP, SPEC RED
UK BAP, SPEC RED
SPEC GREEN
SPEC GREEN
SPEC GREEN
UK BAP, SPEC RED

Site A - southern boundary of proposed development

Site B - Melton Spinney Wood - 0.8 km from proposed development

Site C - Wold House Farm - 0.1 km from proposed development

NOTE:

UK BAP FLORA AND FAUNA = MOST THREATENED IN THE UK

NOTE:

BIRD SPECIES OF EUROPEAN CONSERVATION CONCERN

RED LIST (those of most concern) - SPECIES WHOSE POPULATIONS HAVE SERIOUSLY DECLINED - BY GREATER THAN 50% IN LAST 25 YEARS

AMBER LIST (those of moderate concern)- SPECIES WHOSE POPULATIONS HAVE DECLINED BETWEEN 25 - 49% IN LAST 25 YEARS

GREEN LIST (those of least concern)

RED LIST - SPECIES ALSO RECORDED BUT NOT CAUGHT FOR RINGING

Lapwing, Cuckoo, Skylark, Grasshopper Warbler, Yellow Wagtail, Lesser Redpoll, Herring Gull

TOTAL RED LIST SPECIES RECORDED = 17/52 (32.7%)

AMBER LIST - SPECIES ALSO RECORDED BUT NOT CAUGHT FOR RINGING

Mallard, Red Kite, Kestrel, Oystercatcher, Golden Plover, Curlew, Redshank, Stock Dove, Barn Owl, Swift, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Sand Martin, Willow Warbler, Mistel Thrush, Wheatear, Meadow Pipit, Osprey, Merlin, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Greater Black-backed Gull

TOTAL AMBER LIST SPECIES RECORDED = 28/126 (22.2%)

GREEN LIST - SPECIES ALSO RECORDED BUT NOT CAUGHT FOR RINGING

Mute Swan, Grey Heron, Buzzard, Peregrine, Moorhen, Coot, Tawny Owl, Jay, Jackdaw, Raven, Lesser Whitethroat, Siskin, Hobby, Cormorant

TOTAL GREEN LIST SPECIES RECORDED = 36/68 (52.9%)

MAMMALS ON UK BAP LIST RECORDED = 4/18 (22.2%)

Hedgehog, Brown Hare, Harvest Mouse, Dormouse

Note: Many other mammals e.g. Fox, Badger etc also are regularly recorded

REPTILES ON UK BAP LIST RECORDED = 3/10 (30%)

Great Crested Newt, Grass Snake, Common Toad

Note: Many other reptiles e.g Smooth Newt, Common Frog are also regularly recorded

MOTHS ON UK BAP LIST RECORDED = 15/138 (10.9%)

Grey Dagger, Garden Tiger, Small square Spot, Dusky Thorn, Ghost Moth,

Rosy Minor, Mullein Wave, White Ermine, Buff Ermine, Blood Vein, Cinnabar, Oak Hook Tip, Ear Moth, Large Nutmeg, Dot Moth

Note: Many other moths e.g. Elephant Hawkmoth, Lime Hawkmoth are regularly recorded

OTHER FLORA AND FAUNA

The above records are just those identified and noted. There are many other species, especially invertebrates (spiders, ants, bugs etc) and plants that are not but which clearly must occur in such a rich, diverse habitat

topography of the surrounding land, would provide some mitigation for the increased noise and light pollution arising from any housing development. This would offer protection to threatened or declining species as detailed in the attached list, including birds, mammals and reptiles that inhabit the Park and its immediate surroundings.

The Friends are passionate that Melton Country Park should remain true to its original vision of a diverse park with open aspects to the countryside, to be enjoyed by people and wildlife, now and into the future. Although there is a requirement to build new homes in Melton, the total land available in the town is considerably greater than required and as such, the Friends believe that there is sufficient capacity to incorporate a protection zone around the Park, of the scale described above.

Melton Mowbray North Sustainable Neighbourhood Concept Map

(copied from Local Plan Pre Submission Draft Nov 2016)

