

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ROSS-ON-WYE

Overall Policy Context

Herefordshire Council published their Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy in 2010¹ and it now forms part of the Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy². The report defines GI as follows:

".... areas where the provision of green infrastructure is required to create the most sustainable living and working places around the key towns in the county."

Their approach at county level focuses on the identification of '**Local Enhancement Zones**' (LEZs) and '**Local Strategic Corridors**' (LSCs). LEZs are areas "identified ... as options for potential urban expansion". In other words, the LEZs should be viewed as being subject to development pressure. LSCs provide "refined linear infrastructure linking local sites and ensuring connectivity of assets between and within community areas". They are not necessarily all subject to development pressure because "the existing historic and natural assets that make up the Local Strategic Corridors provide the opportunity to increase the sustainability of new and existing development."

Ross-on-Wye Policy Context

The GI Strategy identifies three LEZs and 3 LSCs for Ross-on-Wye as shown on Map 1 below. Full text about each is included in Appendix 1.

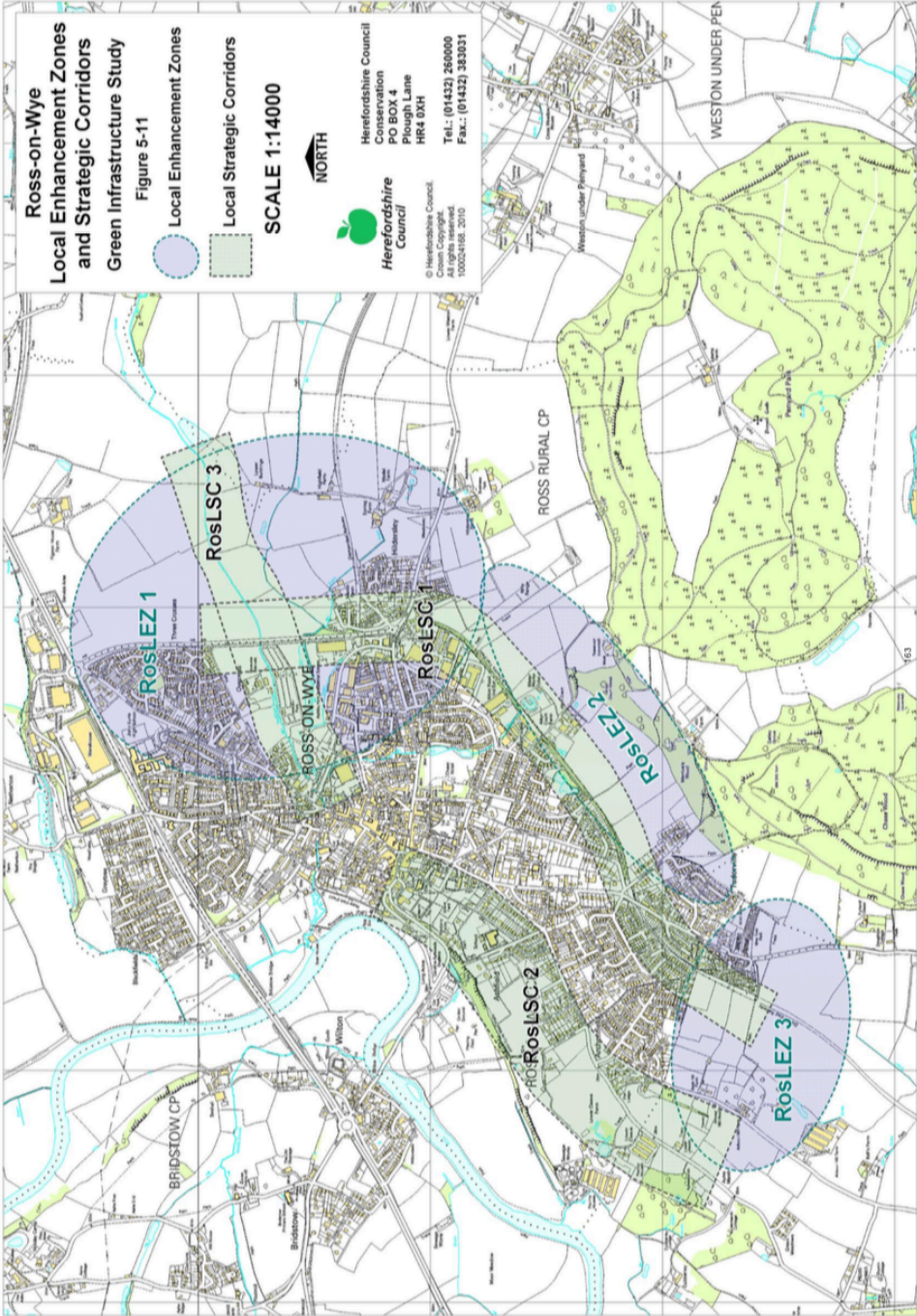
Map 1 overleaf and the descriptions in Appendix 1 date from 2010. Work on the Neighbourhood Plan suggests the following, based on more recent evidence collection and policy development:

- **LEZ 1:** Development on the area west of the A40 (Broadmeadows and Tanyard) is supported in the Neighbourhood Plan. Development to the east of the A40 is likely but probably as a longer term ambition.
- **LEZ 2:** The landscape assessment work for the Neighbourhood Plan concludes that this stretch of land below Penyard Park and Chase Wood is of major importance to the setting of Ross-on-Wye so no development is anticipated there.
- **LEZ 3:** This area is largely outside the boundary of Ross Parish so is not addressed directly by the Neighbourhood Plan, although Herefordshire Council policy as of 2018 is that significant development to the south west of Ross is not supported because of problems of vehicular access into and particularly through the town centre and out to the A40 etc.
- **LSC 1:** The south eastern part of this corridor is also part of the land below Penyard Park and Chase Wood so no development is planned. The eastern part of this corridor relates to developments as outlined above for LEZ 1.
- **LSC 2:** This is an important corridor but is not currently (as of 2018) considered for development.
- **LSC 3:** The eastern part of this corridor is in LEZ 1 and is therefore central to the developments east of the A40. The part of the corridor to the west largely comprises the Broadmeadows/Tanyard area as above.

¹ https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/directory_record/2083/green_infrastructure_study_2008

² https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200185/local_plan/137/adopted_core_strategy

Map 1: LEZs and LSCs



Ross-on-Wye Green Infrastructure

The Local Plan Core Strategy offers examples of GI assets at the local level as follows:

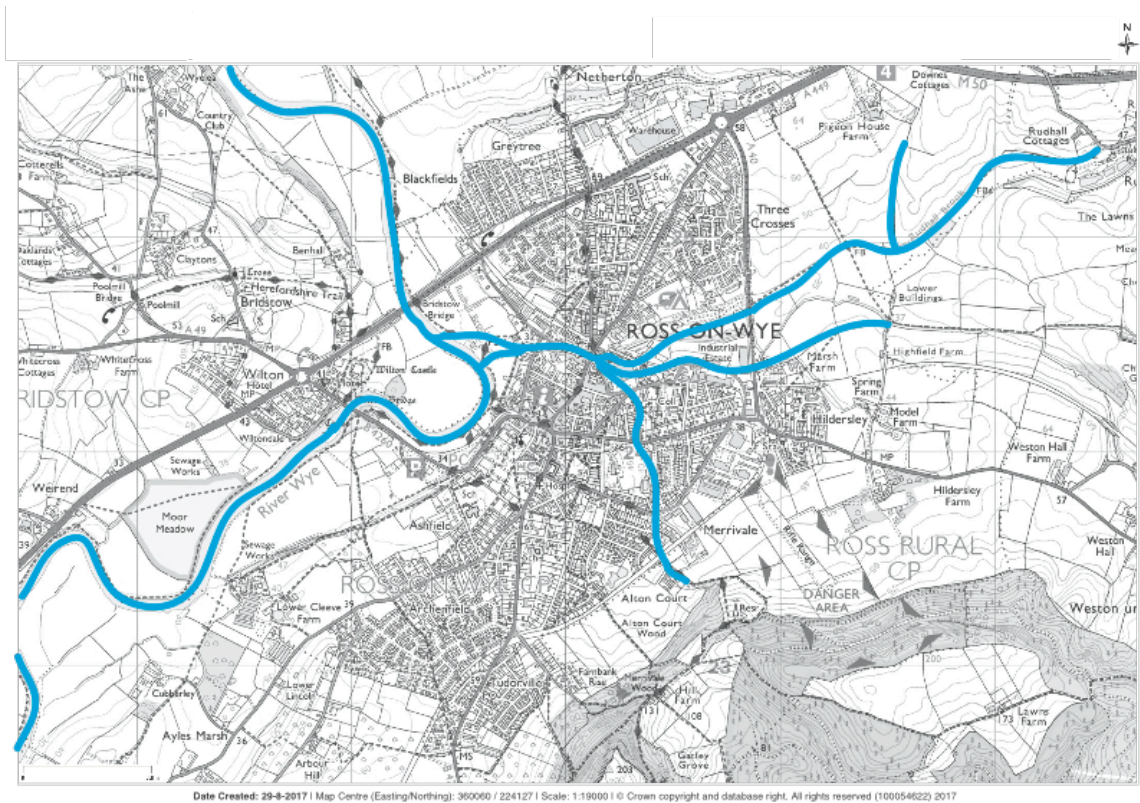
- Public and private parks and gardens.
- Recreational grounds, cemeteries, playing fields and public green spaces.
- Public rights of way and cycle paths.

Map 2 below shows the river and watercourses.

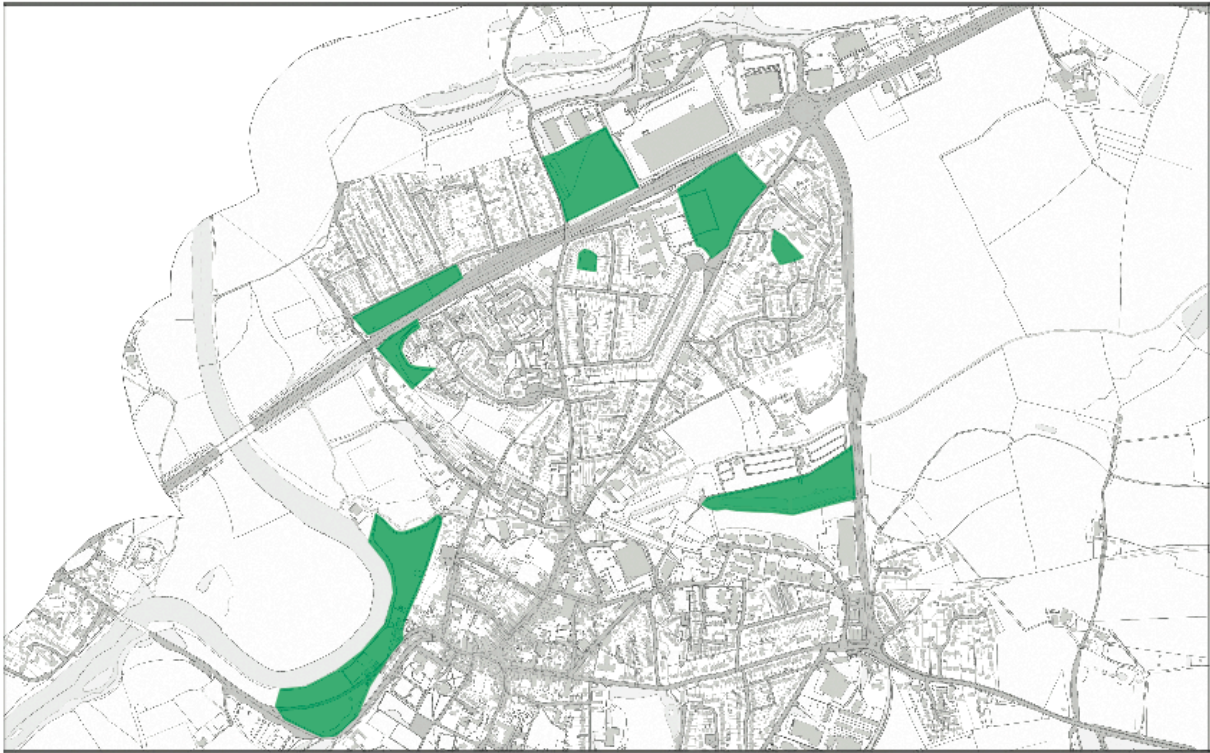
Maps 3 & 4 below show the open spaces, parks, gardens, recreational grounds etc. in Ross.

Map 5 below shows public rights of way and cycle paths.

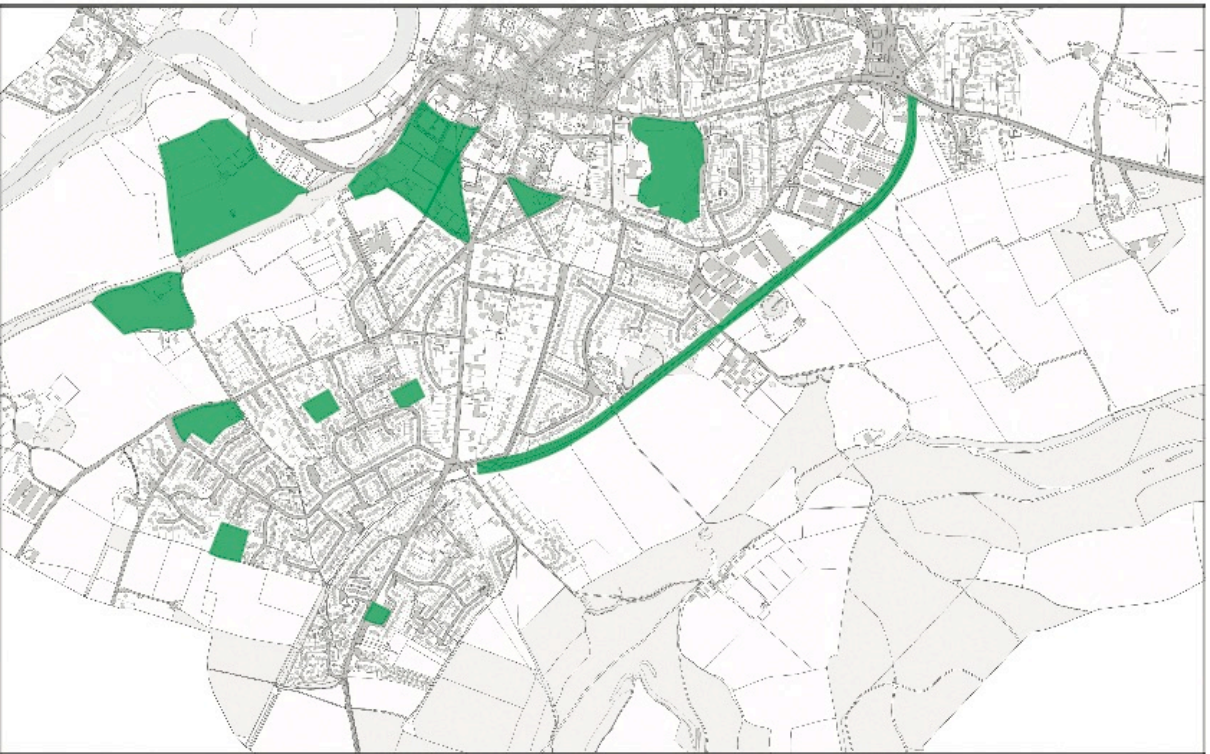
Map 2: River and Watercourses



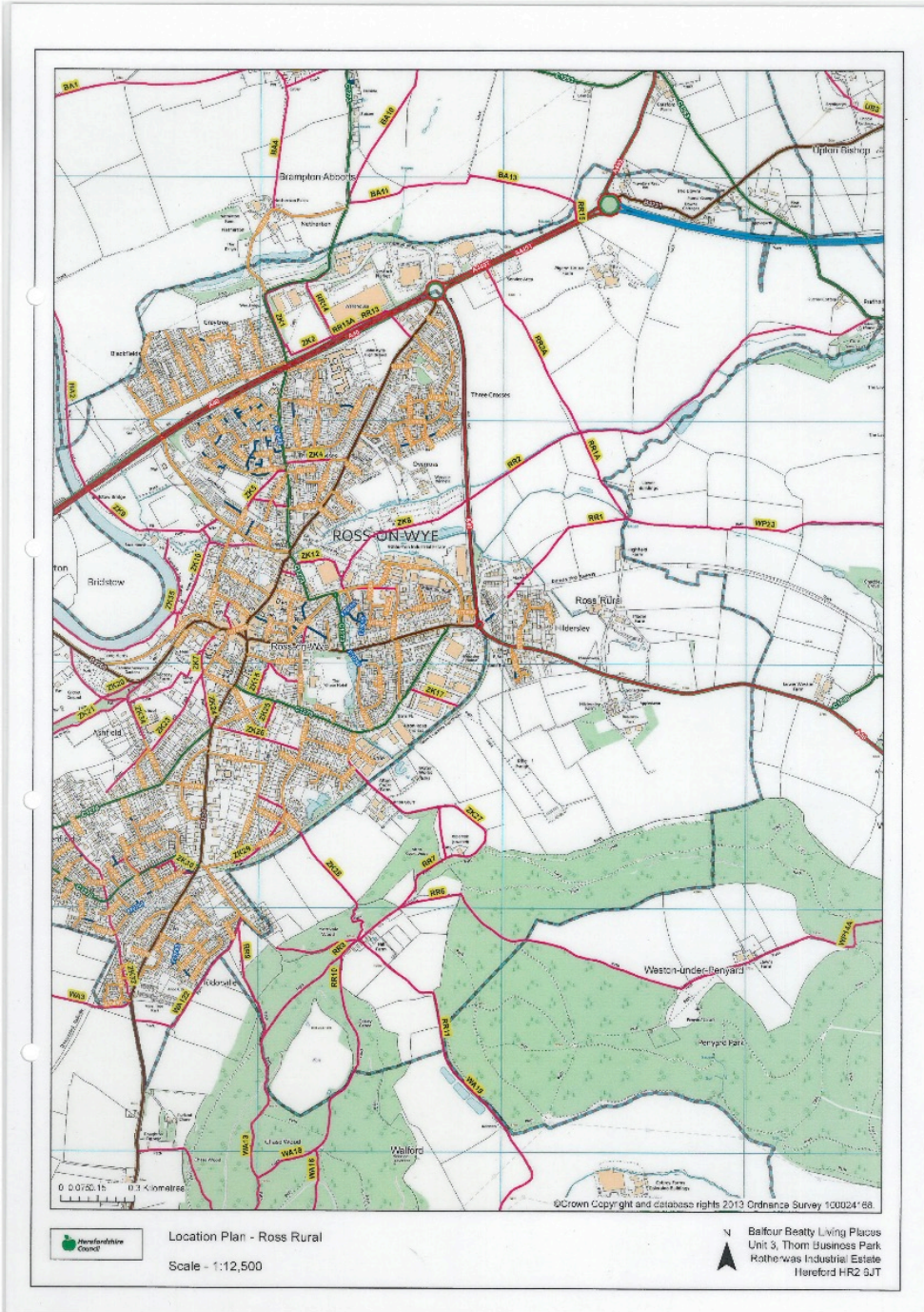
Map 3: Parks, gardens, recreational grounds etc. in Ross (North)



Map 4: Parks, gardens, recreational grounds etc. in Ross (South)



Map 5: Public Rights of Way and Cycle Paths



The above maps do not show wildlife corridors because of a lack of detailed local evidence. These will certainly exist, if to different degrees, within all areas of the landscape setting of Ross. They may or may not exist within the built area, although this is where such routes that may have existed or could exist are seriously fragmented as a result of developments over the years.

There are, however, the following areas within the built part of the town which, using data compiled in 2017 by the Wye Valley AONB's Phase 1 Habitat Surveys and local assessments, have been identified as being of moderate to good wildlife value (areas of close geographical proximity have been grouped together):

1. St Mary's churchyard, the Prospect and park by the tennis courts, Ashfield Park Primary school grounds (pond and playing fields).
2. Cleeve Orchard, the adjacent John Kyle Walk (escarpment) and the overall Ashfield area (fields and hedgerows between the edge of the town and the escarpment).
3. Fields/flood meadows between the end of Cleeve Lane and the River Wye.
4. Long Acres and Caroline Symonds Gardens.
5. Tudorville Allotments and the fields surrounding the mobile home site, going up to Chase Woods.
6. The green area with balancing ponds to the south of the Broadmeadow Caravan and Camping Park and the main Tanyard Lane field.
7. The area between Greytrees (the road) and the A40.
8. The open areas of John Kyle High School grounds.
9. The field to the north of the A40 and east of Brampton Road (owned by John Kyle School).

In addition, the following areas are judged to be of moderate wildlife value (or have potential wildlife value) but need improving and/or connecting to larger sites to fulfill their potential:

- Roman Way park.
- Green spaces off Falaise Close and Duxmere Drive.
- Ross Community Gardens.
- Grounds of Chase Hotel.
- The green area off Orchard Close and the almost adjacent lands off Cawdor Arch Road*.
- The grounds of Brampton Abbotts Primary School.
- Green space behind Mayhill Road/Springfield Road.
- Green space off Over Ross Close.

(* This area is currently subject to a planning application, though that leaves much of the south western strip as open space.)

Potential Corridors

The following – shown on Map 6 that follows later - are existing and potential human corridors (footpaths) and wildlife corridors combined, connecting parts of the built area to the wider landscape (and vice-versa). They should be retained in any future developments (ideally also to any changes in the use of agricultural land) and also enhanced where possible; if appropriate funded on and off site by related development.

(NB. This is summary text only. One local surveyor added more detail on some of these routes. That fuller detail is included in Appendix 2.)

1. The old railway line/Betzdorf Walk/Town and Country Trail. This includes the park on the corner of Walford Road and Fernbank Road. It has considerable overlap with LSC 1 from the 2010 GI Strategy.

2. The path which runs from the end of Frome Valley Way across Roman Way, Archenfield Road and on down Cleeve Lane towards the river.

3. The stream which runs from the small ponds to the east of the Town and Country Trail, through the Alton Road Industrial Estate, the grounds of the Chase Hotel, parallel to Smallbrook Road and then around the back of Morrisons.

4. The path which runs from Caroline Symonds Gardens, over Wilton Road, up the embankment and along the western end of Redhill Road. This corresponds in part to LSC 2 from the 2010 GI Strategy.

5. The path which runs from Hawthorn Lane, along Middleton Avenue and up Ashfield Park Road towards the churchyard. This corresponds in part to LSC 2 from the 2010 GI Strategy.

6. The path that runs from Marsh Farm down Hildersley Rise and across/around the A40 roundabout, into Gloucester Road. This corresponds in part to LSC 1 in the 2010 GI Strategy.

7. The path which follows the line of the Rudhall Brook from the east, over the A40 and across Broadmeadows virtually to the town centre. This corresponds directly to LSC 3 in the 2010 GI Strategy.

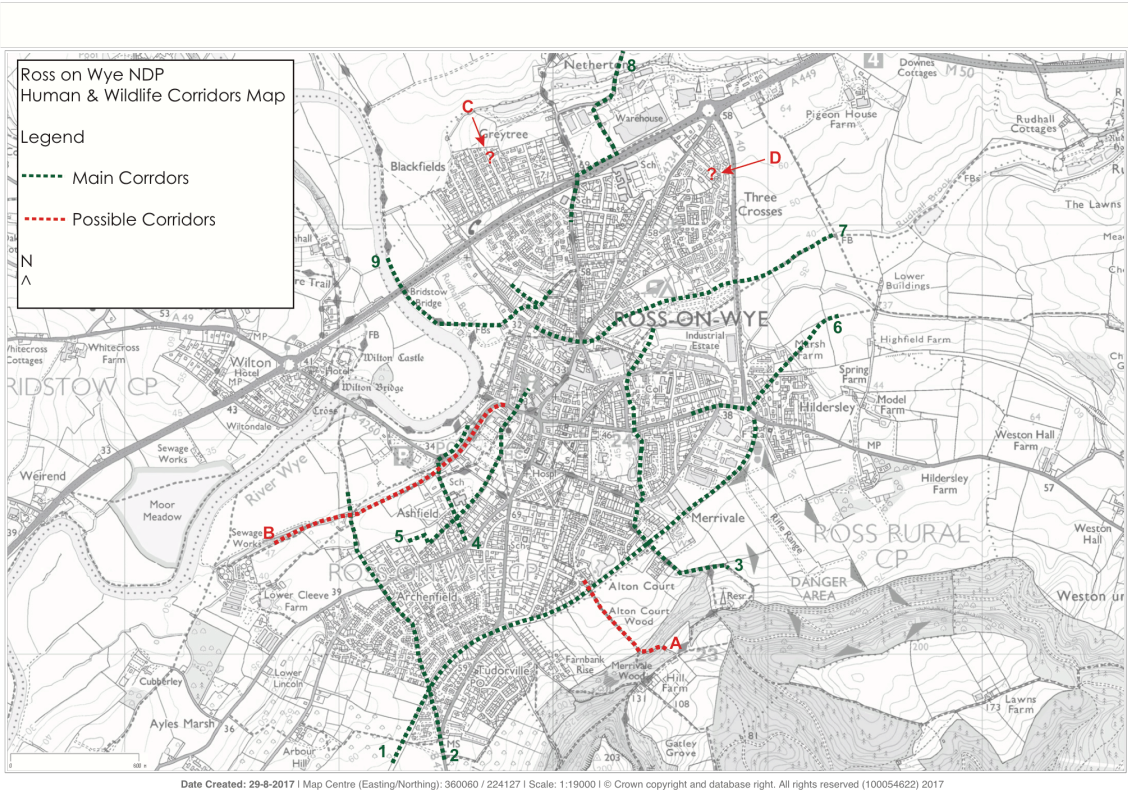
8. The path which comes into Ross from the north but then has to turn to avoid the A40 before coming under the main road towards Brampton Abbotts Primary School.

9. The path which follows the Riverside Walk up across Homs Road to Cawdor Arch Road, alongside the edge of the (current) Cawdor Arch Road field towards Brampton Road.

Consideration should be given to (A) public footpaths ZK28 and ZK27 and to (B) the John Kyrle Walk, and to currently poor access for walkers and wildlife into and out of (C) the Greytree area and from the existing hedgerow line to the north of the Pigeon House area (D) into the town close to Court Road. (A to D are also shown on the maps below.)

It is also important not to overlook the two Long Distance Walks that pass through Ross parish and town: the **Herefordshire Trail** and the **Wye Valley Walk**. These connect in places to routes described above. It is also important not to overlook the current and potential future significance of the **Town and Country Trail** (part of corridor 1 above). This serves as a very important walking and cycling route from north to south of the town and, despite some losses of continuity along the old railways line south west of Ross, it is a local and sub-regional aspiration to open up the full route again, linking to a national Sustrans route towards Goodrich.

Map 6: Existing and Potential Footpaths and Wildlife Corridors



APPENDIX 1

The Local Enhancement Zones are described in the Herefordshire report as follows:

LEZ 1: The eastern edge of the town has been influenced by recent development and the M50/A40 road corridor to the north. The land in this enhancement zone is closely associated with the course of the Rudhall Brook and is generally low-lying. Although the land has a degree of sensitivity, it has been degraded to an extent by agricultural intensification. Within this zone the priorities for green infrastructure are:

- Introduce extensive woodland and shrub planting along the length of the A40 forming the eastern edge of the settlement to reduce the negative visual impact of the road and the 'hard' edge to the town.
- Enhance the course of the Rudhall Brook by planting riparian trees and bushes.
- Increase the number of wetland features in the landscape, particularly ditches, side streams and ponds and connect them with areas of species-rich wet grassland.
- With reference to historic maps, reinstate the pattern of field enclosure by planting new hedgerows.
- Introduce new orchards using local tree varieties where they historically existed and where they make connections between other new and existing habitats.
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LEZ 2: The south-eastern edge of the town is formed by the route of the former Hereford to Monmouth railway line, now providing a corridor for biodiversity and people (as identified above LSC 1) and a 'soft' edge to the settlement. Beyond and between the wooded hilltop of Penyard Park and Chase Wood the rising ground provides an opportunity for increasing green infrastructure through the following measures:

- Encourage the establishment and positive management of grasslands to establish species-rich sites.
- Introduce traditional orchard planting to appropriate fields.
- Improve the condition of hedgerows through conservation management and gap planting, introducing hedgerow trees where appropriate.
- Promote, protect and enhance the network of public rights of way and paths both along the former railway (the Town Trail) and extending into open countryside.
- Develop new access points to the Town Trail where possible and appropriate.

LEZ 3: The south-western end of the settlement is again marked by an abrupt transition to open countryside. The railway corridor extends into open countryside and a network of traditional hedgerows and field parcels remain. Enhancement in this zone should include the following:

- Reinforce and improve the condition of hedgerows through conservation management and gap planting, introducing hedgerow trees where appropriate.
- Encourage the establishment and positive management of grasslands to establish species-rich sites.
- Introduce new tree planting, both in-field and along hedgerows to further soften the transition from the settlement to open countryside, particularly to the east of the zone.

The Local Strategic Corridors are described as follows:

- **LSC 1: The Town Trail**, following the line of the former Ross to Monmouth railway line, provides a substantial and valuable component of green infrastructure to the south-east and south of the town. The path forms the southern boundary of the town and provides alternative transport and recreational links.
- **LSC 2:** A broad corridor of green infrastructure extends from the town centre, south-westward along **high ground above the River Wye gorge**. It incorporates St Mary's

churchyard and the grounds of the Royal Hotel, 'The Prospect' and burial ground extensions, the primary school grounds and John Kyrle Walk.

- **LSC 3: The course of the Rudhall brook through the centre of the town**, flowing from east to west into the River Wye, forms a significant, although broken corridor. The course of the brook also coincides with a short length of former railway line, east of the town centre, extending a spur of this corridor to the south-east.

APPENDIX 2

More detailed studies of routes 1 to 5.

1. Old railway line/Betzdorf Walk/ Town and Country Trail

- Includes the park on the corner of Walford Road and Fernbank Road
- Has considerable overlap with LSC 1 from the 2010 GIS

This is 2.4 km. in total length (starting from the intersection of the WA3 public footpath and old railway line and running north-east to the A40). The most significant gap is where the Betzdorf Walk meets the Walford Road. There is a pedestrian crossing here to aid safe passage of people, but no equivalent for wildlife.

The short section of old railway line is densely vegetated and little used (as it is in effect a dead end). There is a short open section with no tree or bush cover where the path becomes the Betzdorf walk (at the intersection of several footpaths). The Betzdorf walk is wide, with strips of grass on either sides of the path and beyond that some nice sections of hedging and small- to medium-sized trees. However, the cover is patchy and inconsistent.

There are some sections where all plant/shrub/tree growth above grass height seems to have been removed (perhaps at the request of householders whose properties back onto this walk?). Apart from one section, which has the back of a garage block adjacent to the path, on both sides of the walk are the back gardens of houses. Some of these have fences which would allow the movement of mammals such as hedgehogs through (small holes/gaps). Others are fully sealed.

Betzdorf Walk ends at Walford Road, where there is a pedestrian crossing over this A-road and the path continues for a short section with the Walford Road play park on the left-hand side before reaching Fernbank Road. Over this road is a small unmetalled car park marking the start of the 'Town and Country Trail'.

Here the path (still following the bed of the old railway line) is wide, with vegetation along both sides (mostly young trees and sections of informal hedging/shrubs) and ponds in a couple of the gardens which back onto the trail. This section of the path runs for one mile, with a short break where it crosses over Penyard Lane. The section of path immediately north of Penyard Lane is narrow and subject to flooding in the winter. The vegetation on either side is patchy and there are fences on one side which curtail access by wildlife.

However, the path later widens out again and the adjacent vegetation and cover increases and remains fairly consistent until the path ends at the A40. To the east of the path are some further ponds, from which flows a small stream which continues through the town before joining the Rudhall Brook.

Summary of benefits

- Path is wide enough to accommodate a variety of users - cyclists, pushchairs, dog walkers, people walking side by side - whilst still maintaining enough width for a decent amount of vegetation on either side. The path doesn't feel narrow or overgrown, except in some very localised spots.
- The route is long enough to provide a decent off-road, traffic-free route for people who want to travel between the south and the east of the town.
- In addition, several access points increase the usability of the path for this purpose.
- Being bordered by fields along a significant proportion of its length from where there is direct access to a variety of habitats (hedgerows, woods, grasslands, several ponds and waterways) increases the potential value of this linear space for wildlife/biodiversity.

- Potential for the path to be extended south on the old railway line to Walford, Bishopswood and beyond. It could then be developed as a proper multi-use, off-road route for commuters and leisure users alike.

Summary of problems/issues

- There is no access for humans from the end of the old railway line up onto the WA3 public footpath (which runs from Walford Road to Lincoln Hill). However, gaps/tunnels in the vegetation suggest that this route is used by wildlife.
- The vegetation/cover along the Betzdorf Walk section of this linear space is patchy and needs improving if this is to be beneficial for the movement of wildlife.
- Too much development to the east of the Town and Country Trail (in the LEZ 2) could mean that this corridor loses its potential connectivity, becoming a 'road to nowhere' in wildlife terms unless efforts are made at the planning stages to retain adequate linkages. It would still be useful for human transit, of course.

2. The public footpath which runs from the end of Frome Valley Way across Roman Way, Archenfield Road and on down Cleeve Lane towards the river.

This path is approx. 1 km. in length. It has the potential to link two areas of medium/good quality wildlife habitat; the old railway line and adjacent fields at one end, to Cleeve Orchard, the wooded escarpment and the meadows and hedgerows leading to the River Wye at the other end. However, its ability to do so is compromised by some very poor quality sections. The section of pathway between Danum Road and Roman Way is narrow, fully tarmacked and has solid fences or concrete walls on either side. There is no grass, undergrowth or plant cover of any kind (apart from sporadic weeds growing through the concrete). It seems highly unlikely that wildlife would choose use this connection on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the narrowness of the path makes it unlikely that the path could have its potential as a wildlife corridor improved. Any introduced plants or vegetation would have to be extremely restricted in terms of their widthways growth in order to avoid encroachment onto the footpath.

The section of pathway between Corinium Road and Danum Road is barely any better. One of the gardens to the side of the path looks well vegetated so it is possible that some wildlife could travel through this, although there were few if any gaps in the fence, which will curtail their movement of several species.

The section of pathway between Roman Way and Archenfield Road is wider than the aforementioned sections and has vegetation on both sides of the path along its entirety, although this is extremely poor quality in places and is marred by litter, dog fouling and use by some local residents as a dumping ground for their garden waste (grass clippings, unwanted plants, tree branches etc.).

Across Archenfield Road and along Cleeve Lane the path is formed by the road itself. There is no adjoining pavement, but the road is quiet (privately owned and a dead end) and has a wide grass verge to one side and a substantial hedgerow running along most of the length. At the bottom end of Cleeve Lane, the path becomes a wide muddy track, which has an orchard to one side and agricultural fields to the other, criss-crossed by several public footpaths (including the John Kryle Walk).

Summary of benefits

- The path is easily accessible to a large number of residents of the immediate surrounding area (primarily the Roman Way estate) and is well used as a short-cut for

people travelling to the local primary school (Ashfield Park) as well as a direct way to the river and the numerous local walks that criss-cross this part of the town.

- The section between Roman Way and Archenfield Road is relatively long and has the potential to be a safe short-cut for residents in the cul-de-sacs which back directly onto this section of path.

Summary of problems/issues

- The poor quality sections of this route, described above, severely reduce its potential as a wildlife corridor. Unless the corridor can adequately link two (or more) areas of wildlife habitat, then it is arguably not a wildlife corridor at all, so the lack of proper connectivity here is definitely an issue.
- The lack of potential for improving the above situation makes the chance of this route serving as an effective wildlife corridor in the future unlikely.
- The section of path between Roman Way and Archenfield Road has been poorly managed in recent years. Although cut back annually, the amount taken off the undergrowth has been insufficient over a period of time, which means that the vegetation is overgrown, straggly and over-dominant in many places. As a result, the path is dark and uninviting and the hard surface is covered in decomposed leaf litter. Dog fouling and litter is also an issue on this section. This entire section would benefit from being replanted with both human users and biodiversity in mind (opening it up to make it lighter, more inviting and planting with species that provide adequate cover for wildlife but whose growth can be kept in check). A more inviting and better-used path would probably also have a positive knock-on effect on the dog fouling/littering/garden waste dumping issues.

3. The stream which runs from the small ponds to the east of the Town and Country trail through the Alton Road Industrial Estate, the grounds of the Chase Hotel, parallel to Smallbrook Road and then around the back of Morrisons.

A possible water corridor (or "riparian ribbon"), this linear space has limited potential for the movement of humans, due to a lack of public access along most of its length, but still has potential for the movement of water-based species such as toads, newts and fish as well as invertebrates and birds to and from the town centre and connecting with the other potential water corridor (along the course of the Rudhall Brook).

One section of this linear space, where the stream runs round the back of Morrisons supermarket, could once have been an attractive route for use by pedestrians (as successful public paths are often alongside some sort of water feature - river, stream etc). However, it is severely compromised in this by the lack of space between the imposing Morrisons building, the unwelcoming look of the nearby security fence and the litter problem in this area, which often also includes fly tipping into the stream itself. Again, better priorities for this path at the planning stages of the Morrisons development could have avoided these issues.

Summary of benefits

- A rare means for (certain) wildlife to transit between the edge of the town and the centre and out towards the river (via Rudhall Brook).
- Would need expert analysis to find out what enhancements could or should be made of this route to improve its potential.

Summary of problems/issues

- This route passes under a road in several places. This could be off-putting to certain species and/or make transit impossible if the species requires a vegetated bank, for example.

- Poor planning and inconsiderate development has meant that what was probably an attractive feature of this route some time ago (the section of public footpath running alongside this brook) is no longer so.

4. Path which runs from Caroline Symonds Gardens, over Wilton Road, up the embankment and along the western end of Redhill Road

- Corresponds in part to LSC 2 from the 2010 GIS

A fairly short section of path which runs diagonally up the slope to connect the lower ground by the river with the higher ground on top of the escarpment.

Summary of benefits

- A direct way for residents in the south of the town to access many of the riverside or river based amenities in this area (canoe launch, bandstand, skate park, riverside pub, rope walk, etc.).
- For wildlife, this route (potentially) connects some fairly good areas of habitat: the long grass that is now being left uncut in the Caroline Symonds gardens, Long Acres, trees along escarpment, school playing fields and adjoining trees.

Summary of problems/issues

- Pedestrian crossing of the Wilton Road is very hazardous due to various geographical features at the point where the footpath leads across the road (e.g. the bend in the road, the poor placement of the 30/40 mph signs, the straight downhill section for traffic leaving town, vegetation blocking the view of oncoming traffic) and probably means this route isn't as well used as it could be.
- Because of the busyness of Wilton Road and the long section of wall bordering the top of the Caroline Symonds Gardens, wildlife is probably more likely to travel through the tunnels under Wilton Road instead as a means of moving between the areas of habitat (the seasonal ponds/wooded habitat along bottom and sides of the escarpment and the network of fields/hedgerows on top of the escarpment). Humans can also use the tunnels and then take the public footpath to the top of the escarpment from the skate park, although this stepped route is very steep.

5. Path which runs from Hawthorn Lane, along Middleton Avenue and up Ashfield Park Road towards the churchyard

- Corresponds in part to LSC 2 from the 2010 GIS

This route provides connectivity between several moderate to good areas of wildlife habitat and open space: the churchyard, the Prospect, Crossfields park, the primary school playing fields, and the network of fields and hedgerows in the Ashfield area.

Summary of benefits

- Potential link to several areas which have been identified as beneficial to wildlife/biodiversity.
- A mainly off-road/quiet road route for pedestrians that connects the south west of the town with the church and town centre via the primary school.

Summary of problems/issues

- Middle section of this route (along Middleton Avenue) is along pavement/road. Possibility for wildlife to travel through gardens in this area instead, but if any one garden along this route has an impenetrable border, wildlife will be forced to turn back/travel via the road instead.

- Arguably, while this corridor is functional for human use, wildlife will encounter far fewer obstacles and better quality habitat and cover by travelling along the strip of vegetation that covers the escarpment (2-300m west of this route) instead.

6. Other potential routes: rights of way ZK28 and ZK27

The following routes were marked on the map with a question mark with regard to their potential as wildlife corridors:

ZK 28 - public footpath which runs from Merrivale Wood into Merrivale itself

- In the event of parts of LEZ 2 being developed in the future, it would be important to maintain/improve this route as a link between Merrivale/Chase/Penyard woods and the Town and Country Trail. However, there are no obvious areas within Merrivale itself where a wildlife corridor might feasibly go so its potential as a green corridor into the town itself is limited (although see note about improving gardens in the Conclusion below). The hedgerow that runs alongside this footpath through the field has several gaps and is thin and patchy in other places, but this situation could be remedied.

ZK 27 - public footpath which runs from the top of 'Tank Meadow', past PGL and along Penyard Lane.

- Although the woods of Penyard Park and the Tank Meadow area have good (potential) ecological/habitat value, from the bottom of the hill and on into town the vegetation and tree/shrub cover dwindles significantly. The hedgerows in this area are patchy or ecologically defunct. To the west of the Town and Country Trail, there are few areas of habitat or potential habitat in the area surrounding Penyard Lane that are likely to appeal to wildlife and little cover for travel/foraging. However, as explored in Route 3 (above) one potential green corridor in this area is the brook which runs from the ponds near the Town and Country Trail through to the town centre via the grounds of the Chase Hotel (there joining Rudhall Brook). Therefore one way to create a green corridor in this area might be to enhance the links between Penyard Park woods/Tank Meadow and the brook, for example by restoring hedgerows and introducing grassland management schemes for the fields to the east of the Town and Country Trail, as well as making any necessary improvements to the brook itself. However, this would need expert analysis to confirm its potential. It is possible that the brook is not suitable or is already permanently impaired by the surrounding development.

REFERENCES

Herefordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/directory_record/2082/green_infrastructure_strategy_2010

Herefordshire Core Strategy:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200185/local_plan/137/local_plan_-_core_strategy/2