

## Ruscombe Parish Neighbourhood Plan

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### Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure elements

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Client: Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan Group

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## 1 Summary

Ruscombe Parish is a predominantly rural parish with arable and livestock farming. A number of areas of woodland are present, and a stream crosses the parish.

Some of these habitats are considered to be 'priority habitats' and four areas are designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

Species records show a historical presence of some now-uncommon farmland birds, and plants associated with woodland and wet-grassland. Species are likely to be significantly under-recorded.

## 2 Introduction

This document provides information about the biodiversity of Ruscombe Parish, for the production of a Neighbourhood Plan.

The following were undertaken to compile this report:

- A desktop study to identify biodiversity data relevant to Ruscombe Parish in the public domain.
- Mapping of relevant features (hedges and woodland) visible on aerial photography.
- A standard Neighbourhood Plan data request from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre.
- Interpretation of the collated data.

## 3 Description of Ruscombe Parish's Biodiversity

### 3.1 General

The protection of biodiversity in the UK is based upon the statutory designation of areas of land (sites) and the identification of vulnerable species, both of which are subject to certain restrictions.

In addition, certain habitats (areas of land with similar vegetation types, and therefore similar fauna) are identified as 'Priority Habitats'. These are not necessarily given any protection, but more effort and resources may be devoted to them.

Biodiversity can also be protected indirectly by other legislation aimed at controlling planning, such as regulations associated with Green Belt.

The parish's geology is diverse. The north of the parish is chalk; the centre, east and south are clay, silt, sand and gravels; and, to the west, the chalk is overlain with riverine sands and gravel.

Ruscombe is a rural parish, with approximately 40 hectares of the 520-hectare parish having been developed. The remainder is predominantly farmland – mostly arable but with pasture on either side of the Twyford Brook.

A number of blocks of woodland are present in the parish. These are mostly relatively recent planting or natural generation, but some woodland is considered ‘ancient’.

The Twyford Brook flows across Ruscombe Parish, adding further potential biodiversity interest.

### 3.2 Protected sites

See appendix 1 for a plan showing protected sites.

Ruscombe Parish does not contain any statutory designated sites (**Sites of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI) or **European Designated Sites**), which would offer legal protection to the area.

The nearest SSSI is ‘Lodge Wood & Sandford Mill’, approximately two kilometres to the southwest.

The nearest European designated site is ‘Windsor Forest and Great Park Special Area of Conservation’ some eight kilometres to the east.

There are no **National Nature Reserves** or **Local Nature Reserves** within the Parish. The nearest Local Nature Reserves are ‘Lavell’s Lake’ and ‘Alder Moors’, two and a half kilometres to the south west.

**Local Wildlife Sites** (LWS) are a local designation, identified and surveyed by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). Although there is no statutory protect for these sites, there may be an assumption against development in the local plan, and resources may be available for proactive habitat management. More detail is available in the TVERC report. There are four LWSs in Ruscombe Parish, covering 17ha of land.

Much of the Parish is included in the ‘Waltham to Binfield Woodland and Parklands’ **Biodiversity Opportunity Area** (BOA). BOAs are landscape scale areas that have been identified as supporting high concentrations of priority habitats and species populations, and have the potential for habitat restoration at a landscape scale. These areas act as a focus for targeting resources into habitat management and restoration.

The whole of the Parish, except the urban area to the west of New Road is designated as **Green Belt**. This is primarily a planning tool, which has little impact on biodiversity apart from influencing the location and scale of development.

### 3.3 Habitats

See appendix 2 for a plan showing relevant habitats.

There are 62 areas of 'Priority Habitat' totalling 45.6ha in Ruscombe Parish. All but two of these are 'Broadleaved Woodland', the remainder being 'Lowland Meadow'. The following habitats are found in Ruscombe Parish:

#### 3.3.1 Farmed land

##### **Arable**

Growing crops is the biggest land use (c50%) in Ruscombe Parish. This is likely to be poor for wildlife. The fields are likely to be plant monocultures with few resources to support a diverse flora or fauna. Arable land can be improved for wildlife with good quality margins and hedgerows.

##### **Pasture**

Grassland for animal pasture covers approximately 40% of the Parish, mostly each side of the Twyford Brook, presumably on the areas that are prone to waterlogging. Good pasture management can be beneficial for wildlife, with a species-rich sward supporting a diverse fauna.

One field within the Parish has been identified as a Priority Habitat: Lowland Meadow. It is likely that this field has not received as many inputs (fertiliser and herbicide) or been ploughed for many years, resulting in a species-rich grassland. This field is also designated as a Local Wildlife Site (Grassland Opposite Blackthorn Farm)

##### **Hedgerows**

Good quality hedges provide a wide range of resources for wildlife throughout the year: cover for nesting and moving through an otherwise open landscape; food in the form of pollen, nectar, berries and foliage; shade and shelter from the wind.

There are approximately 17km of hedges in Ruscombe Parish. These are likely to be of varying quality, with the best ones being continuous, bushy and allowed to grow flowers and fruit.

Funding is available to encourage landowners to manage their land to benefit the environment. The primary scheme for this is Environmental Stewardship (ES). There are currently no ES schemes running in Ruscombe Parish.

#### 3.3.2 Streams

Watercourses can be valuable places for wildlife, depending on their 'naturalness', water quality and adjacent land management.

The Twyford Brook is the main watercourse in Ruscombe Parish, with a length of 3700m within the boundary. This watercourse is likely to be affected by runoff of pollution from nearby urban and arable landscapes, but it appears

to be 'buffered' by pasture and scrub land, which can act to reduce the impact.

### 3.3.3 Parkland

Stanlake Park, in the south west of the Parish has been identified as Parkland on the 'Wood Pasture and Parkland' register. Parkland an area that is managed by grazing but allowing the survival of multiple generations of trees, with at least some veteran trees or shrubs, and being associated with a stately home and 'designed' landscape.

This habitat is normally associated with veteran trees and may have species-rich grassland. There is 30.6ha of registered parkland in Ruscombe Parish.

### 3.3.4 Woodland

#### **Ancient Woodland**

Good-quality woodlands are likely to support more wildlife than any other habitat, and Ancient Woodland (older than 1600) being the most diverse, is likely to support a significant variety of fungi, birds, wild flowers and mammals.

There are four areas of Ancient Woodland, mapped on the national register, within Ruscombe Parish, totalling 14ha. They are Botany Bay Copse, Middle Copse and Wingwood Copse to the south of the Parish and an unnamed wood on Castle End Farm to the north.

#### **Plantation and recent woodland**

The remainder of the woodland in the Parish is likely to be more recent than 1600, having been either planted or allowed to generate naturally since then. This woodland is unlikely to be as species-rich as the Ancient Woodland.

There are about 35 blocks of non-ancient woodland within the Parish, covering an area of 53ha. Some of these are considered Priority Habitat, as they are broadleaved woodland.

#### **Urban habitats**

Approximately 40ha of Ruscombe Parish is taken with urban land, a combination of residential, industrial and farm units.

Although seemingly less important for wildlife than undeveloped areas, urban habitats like gardens and parks can provide important spaces for wildlife, often better than intensively farmed agricultural land.

Gardens and parks can be home to widespread, but increasingly uncommon mammals like hedgehogs and shrews, amphibians and reptiles like slow worms and frogs, and garden birds. If allowed to have wilder areas, parks can provide niches for wildlife that may be absent from the wider countryside.

### Summary of habitats in Ruscombe Parish:

	Count	Area or length
Ruscombe Parish	1	523 ha
Ancient Woodland	4	14ha
Agriculture – arable		Approx. 250ha
Agriculture – pasture		Approx 200ha
Non-ancient woodland	35	53ha
Watercourses	1	3700m
Priority Habitat – Broadleaved Woodland (includes ancient and non-ancient)	61	45ha
Priority Habitat – Lowland Meadow	1	1ha
Hedgerow	Approx. 70	1700m
Parkland	1	30ha
Urban area		Approx 40ha

### 3.4 Species

See the separate report from TVERC for complete species records.

The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) collects and distributes records of wild species in the area. Its records are by no means exhaustive, but they do provide an indication of the types of plant and animal that are present in an area.

Four species of amphibian and two species of reptiles have been recorded, of a possible seven amphibians and six reptiles native to the UK. Those recorded in Ruscombe are considered to be 'widespread' (although suffering national declines in recent years) except the Great Crested Newt, which is a European Protected Species.

48 species of bird have been recorded, although this is likely to be considerably higher in actuality. TVERC do not provide an indication of whether the birds were breeding or not, so it is difficult to specify the significance of a sighting. Of particular note, because of their recent declines, are Cuckoo (most recent sighting 2005), Grey Partridge (1984), Tree Sparrow (1984) and Turtle Dove (2005). The latter three are considered 'farmland birds' and have suffered considerable declines through changes to farming practices.

15 species of higher plant have been recorded which, again, is a gross underestimate of the likely number of species. The plants that have been recorded

are mostly either woodland plants, such as Bluebell, or wet grassland plants like Ragged Robin.

Three species of invertebrate are recorded, including the UK's largest species of beetle, the Stag Beetle.

7 species of bat have been recorded in the parish, out of a possible 17 UK species. All of the species in Ruscombe are relatively widespread.

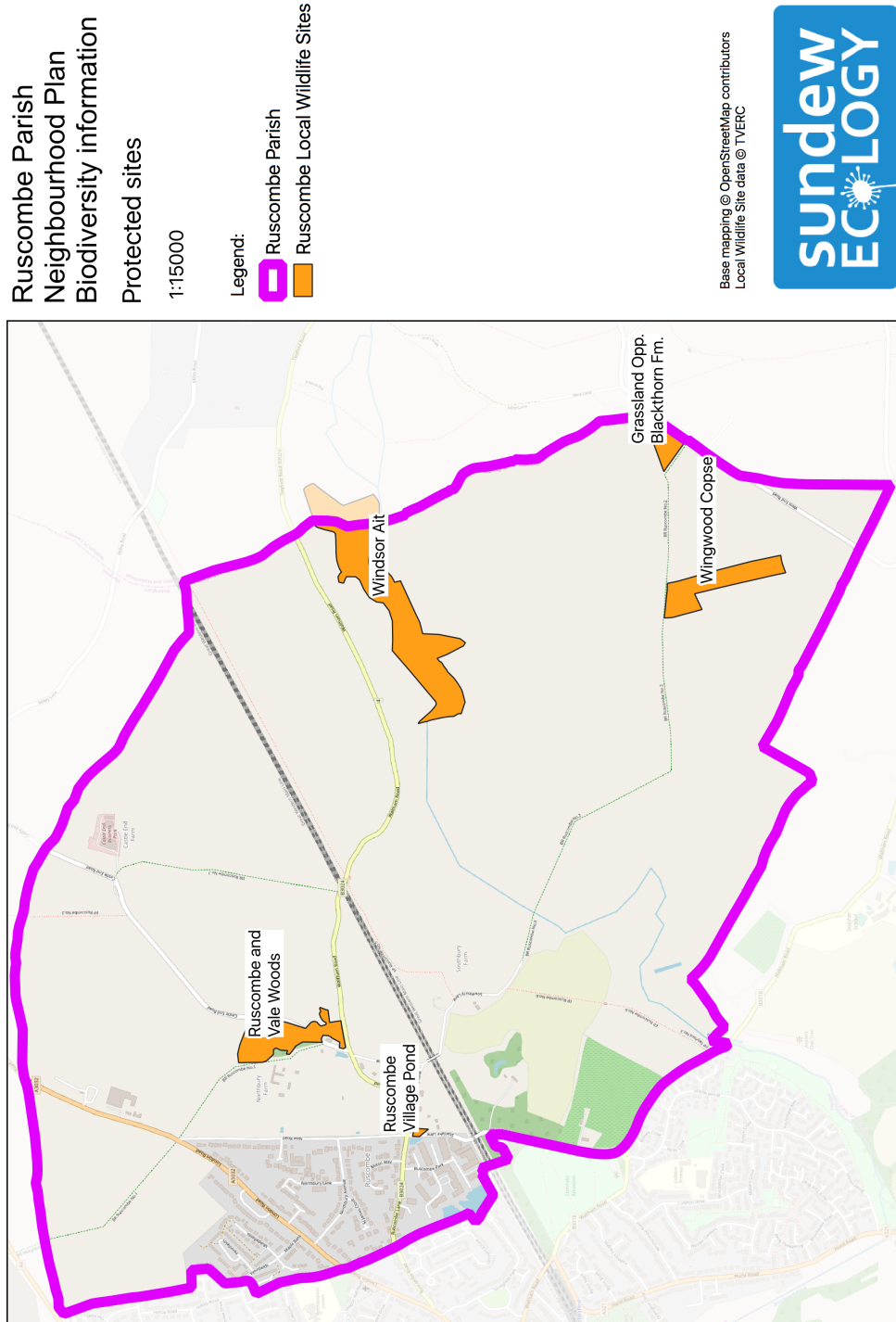
There are records of four species of mammal, including the heavily protected Badger and the European protected Water Vole (last recorded in 2003).

In summary, the TVERC records show a fairly standard rural flora and fauna, with a few exceptional records – Water Vole and Turtle Dove, especially. If these species, and others, are present and breeding then their conservation will be a positive contribution to the biodiversity of the UK.



## 4 Appendices

### 4.1 Plan of Protected Sites











## 4.2 Plan of Habitats

### Ruscombe Parish Neighbourhood Plan Biodiversity information

#### Habitats

1:15000

Legend:

-  Ruscombe Parish
-  Ruscombe Ancient Woodland
-  Ruscombe woodland
-  Ruscombe Parkland
-  Ruscombe Watercourses
-  Ruscombe hedges
- Ruscombe Priority Habitats:**
-  Deciduous woodland
-  Lowland meadows

Base mapping © OpenStreetMap contributors  
Local Wildlife Site data © TVERC

