



BROOMHAUGH AND RIDING PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND PAPER

January 2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper provides further background to the natural environment of the parish. It informs the policy approach contained within the submission draft Broomhaugh and Riding Neighbourhood Plan.

Strategic planning context

- 1.2 As neighbourhood plans are part of the development plan, they have to meet defined legal requirements. The way in which neighbourhood plans are prepared and the policies they contain are tested by an independent examiner. In order to pass an examination and proceed to referendum, neighbourhood plans must meet a number of 'basic conditions'. To ensure they are legally compliant they must:

- Have regard to national planning policy and guidance;
- Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan;
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development; and
- Be compatible with other obligations.

National planning policy and guidance

- 1.3 National planning policy and guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). The NPPF is clear that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. These roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent.
- 1.4 The NPPF makes a clear commitment to conserving the natural environment through the planning system. The natural environment is regarded as having a key role in achieving sustainable development (paragraph 8).
- 1.5 Section 15 deals with the natural environment and states that local plans should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, by:
- Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
 - Recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
 - Minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
 - Preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and
 - Remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land where appropriate.
- 1.6 The NPPG also contains guidance on the natural environment and is subdivided into sections on landscape, biodiversity, green infrastructure, soils and agricultural land.

Northumberland Local Plan

1.7 The Northumberland Local Plan (NLP) was adopted by Northumberland County Council (NCC) in March 2022. Those policies of relevance to the natural environment elements of the neighbourhood plan are:

- Policy STP2: Presumption in favour of sustainable development (strategic policy) requires a positive approach to the determination of applications in accordance with the presumption contained within the NPPF;
- Policy STP3: Principles of sustainable development (strategic policy) gives guidance on the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development and defines the key economic, social and environmental factors to consider;
- Policy STP4: Climate change mitigation and adaptation (strategic policy) requires new development to both mitigate and adapt to climate change;
- Policy STP6: Green infrastructure (strategic policy) seeks to protect, improve and extend the green infrastructure network across the county;
- Policy ENV1: Approaches to assessing the impact of development on natural, historic and built environment (strategic policy) includes criteria to ensure that the character and significance of the county's distinctive and valued natural, historic and built environments are conserved, protected and enhanced;
- Policy ENV2: Biodiversity and geodiversity (non-strategic policy) requires development proposals that affect biodiversity and geodiversity to minimise their impact and to secure net gains for biodiversity. It also refers to the hierarchy of designated sites and the ecosystem approach;
- Policy ENV3: Landscape (non-strategic policy) identifies the importance of the contribution of the landscape to the county's environment, economy and communities;
- Policy ENV4: Tranquillity, dark skies and a sense of rurality (non-strategic policy) seeks to limit the urbanising effects of development on open countryside landscapes, natural habitats and the settings of historic/ cultural assets and to conserve or enhance tranquillity.

1.8 Figure 1 provides an extract from the local plan policies map which illustrates that the parish includes part of the Tyne River, Corbridge – Stocksfield Local and Geological Site as well as areas of ancient woodland.

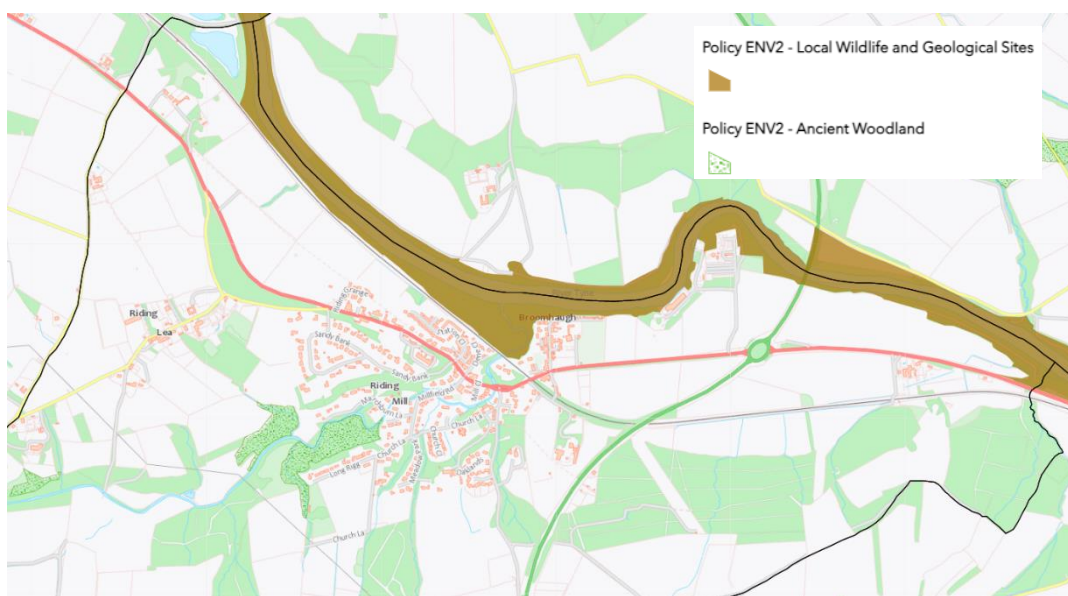


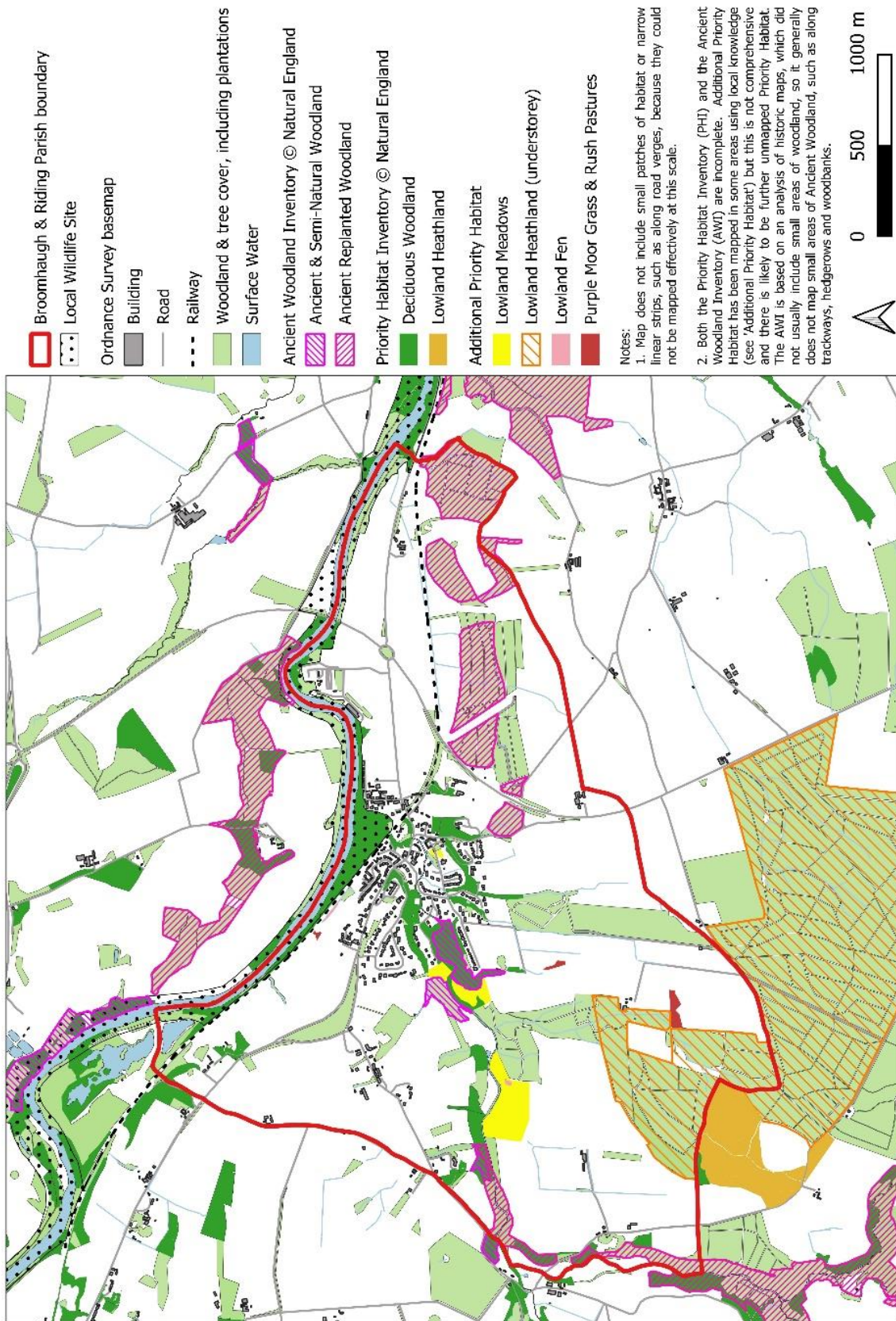
Figure 1 - Extract from local plan policies map

2. The rich natural environment of Broomhaugh and Riding Parish

- 2.1 The parish supports a fantastic range of species and habitats (see figure 2). It is underlain by sedimentary carboniferous rocks, comprising a repetitive succession of limestones, sandstones and shales. However, these are rarely visible due to a thick covering of fluvial and glacial deposits. The best exposures of bedrock are along the March Burn where the stream has removed this covering and eroded small cliffs and gullies, such as the fine rock wall on the outside bend of the March Burn, just below the footbridge at the Weir. In the south-east of the parish the carboniferous rocks include layers of coal (and are known as the 'coal measures'). There are signs of exploitation of these deposits in Shilford West Wood (also known locally as the Pit Woods), but nothing like the extensive mining further east such as at Mickley. The parish rises to 160m in the south at Eastwoodhouse Fell and its lowest point is around 20m above sea level as the Tyne exits on the eastern boundary.
- 2.2 It is a rural parish dominated by farmland with blocks of plantation forestry and scattered smaller fragments of other habitats such as ancient woodland, species-rich grassland, heathland, and various wetlands. The River Tyne forms the northern boundary of the parish, while the March Burn (the Tyne's main tributary in the parish), broadly bisects the parish south-west to north-east. The parish spans two landscape national character Areas: the Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall National Character Area¹ to the north and the North Pennines National Character Area² to the south.
- 2.3 The parish only has one designated local wildlife site – part of the Tyne River, Corbridge – Stocksfield Local Wildlife Site (LWS). However, it is a large and important one, encompassing the entire River Tyne corridor as it meanders across the parish. The River Tyne provides its core interest, supporting important populations of salmon, sea and brown trout and a number of special species, such as otter, kingfisher, goosander, dipper, common sandpiper, grey wagtail and the strikingly patterned banded demoiselle. The LWS also includes the fringing woodland on its southern bank.
- 2.4 The diverse soils, ranging from deep brown earths to sandy river sediments are reflected in a rich ground flora. Probably most striking is the springtime show of fantastic stands of wild garlic, bluebells and bird cherry, but there are also scarcer plants such as broad-leaved helleborine and wood stitchwort. The mature trees provide nest sites for some charismatic tree nesters – great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch and starling as well as more widespread tits and finches. Perhaps noisiest of all is the grey heron, which utters a range of grunts and 'clicks' (by snapping its bill together) from a small heronry beneath Station Close. The area used to be a haunt of hawfinch, now sadly extinct in the parish. The declining marsh tit retains a toehold along the river. The LWS, together with the adjoining farmland to the south, acts as a wildlife corridor, enabling mobile species, such as Bats and Roe Deer to travel up and down the valley.
- 2.5 The eastern most gravel pit at Farnley Haughs is the only sizeable area of standing water in the parish. It is still relatively young, but supports a range of common wildfowl such as moorhen, dabchick and tufted duck.
- 2.6 The March Burn together with its fringing woodlands, wetlands and grasslands provides another critical wildlife corridor. It strikes out south west from the Tyne at the railway station and then heads due south at Dipton Foot (forming the western boundary of the parish), linking the north

¹ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6734181715410944?category=587130>

² <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5682293?category=587130>



and south of the parish. The March Burn supports a similar fauna to the Tyne, with otter, dipper, grey wagtail and various bat species feeding along its course. The shallower rocky streambed also provides additional opportunities and is used for spawning by salmon, sea and brown trout and brook lamprey and supports abundant caddisfly larvae and other aquatic invertebrates.

- 2.7 A number of woodlands along the course of the March Burn are mapped as ancient woodland on the current Ancient Woodland Inventory (Natural England 2021), and many linking sections, while not mapped as ancient, also support a ground flora indicative of a long continuity of woodland cover. A few sections have been planted with conifers, some of them recognised as Ancient Replanted Woodland (Natural England 2021).
- 2.8 The considerable age of the March Burn's broadleaved woodlands compared with those along the Tyne, combined with their more varied aspect, topography and ground conditions result in them being even richer than those along the river. They share the stunning carpets of wild garlic and bluebells, but include an even wider range of other plants, fungi, mosses and liverworts. There are also some very rare species: The March Burn woodlands hold the only population of a small brown and buff moth (*pseudatemelia flavifrontella*) in Northumberland as well as a significant population of the white-letter hairstreak butterfly whose caterpillars feed on elm. There is a small colony of bird's-nest orchid near Shepherd's Dene. The bird assemblage is very similar, but occasionally enriched by breeding pied flycatcher. The woodlands at the weir provide the most readily accessible ancient woodland in the parish. Away from the March Burn other small pockets of rich broadleaved woodland occur along old routeways, such as the lonnen above Long Rigg.
- 2.9 The March Burn corridor also holds some species-rich grassland. The largest and richest site is a Northumberland Wildlife Trust nature reserve (access can be arranged by permit), just upstream of the Weir on the northern bank. It is a fantastic meadow with abundant wildflowers providing a riot of colour all through the growing season, from yellow bird's-foot trefoil (or eggs and bacon) in the spring to purple knapweed in late summer. This plentiful supply of nectar and pollen attracts a wide range of butterflies and other insects. It is one of few recent sites in the county for the small yellow underwing moth.
- 2.10 Semi-natural grassland is rare elsewhere in the parish, and the remaining fragments are mostly found on road verges, such as along the A695 between Broomhaugh and Low Shilford. Small sections of these road verges can be like mini hay meadows, with fine shows of great burnet, wood crane's-bill and lady's mantles. Some of the verges within the village hint at their antiquity in spring when the nodding flowerheads of Good Friday grass (not a grass at all but related to rushes) show that the grassland is a remnant of former habitats rather than being a sown amenity grassland. The graveyards at James's Church, particularly the 'old' graveyard, also hold a lovely area of species-rich grassland.
- 2.11 The largest woodlands in the parish are plantations with two main blocks: Shilford East and West Woods dominating the valley side above Low Shilford and the collection of plantations around High Plains Farm. The Shilfords are mostly ancient replanted woodlands (Natural England 2021) and pockets of a rich ground flora including bluebells and moschatel can still be found. Scots pine and larch cast a lighter shade than other conifers (in particular Norway and sitka spruce) and this has enabled a varied ground flora to persist.
- 2.12 The plantations to the west of High Plains stand above a wonderfully extensive area of heathland, with abundant heather and bilberry as well as smaller areas of bell heather, purple moor grass and even some patches of sphagnum bog moss, hare's-tail cotton grass and

cranberry. This understorey of heathland is contiguous with the open area of heath just over the parish boundary on Eastwoodhouse Fell, which in turn links to heathy habitats in Healey and beyond. As in the Shilfords, the sparser shade of Scots pine enables the heathy understorey to persist. Blocks of heathland truly come to life in the years following felling of the conifer crop when the canopy cover is completely removed. The patchwork mosaic of different aged stands of pine and heath in the area provides habitat for some specialist birds with nightjar, tree pipit, woodcock and long-eared owl all breeding in the area.

- 2.13 The most widespread habitat in the parish is farmland, with roughly equal areas of arable and pasture. The arable generally grows a rotation of oilseed rape, wheat and barley, with occasional strips of game cover crops while the grasslands are grazed predominantly by sheep with smaller numbers of cattle and horses. Brown hares occur across the parish as do a number of farmland birds, such as rook, skylark and meadow pipit, but scarcer species like yellowhammer, tree sparrow, barn owl, yellow wagtail and lapwing are found in some places. Curlew, sadly now a severely declining species across the UK, just hangs on in the south of the parish.
- 2.14 One final habitat to mention is the extensive area of gardens in the village. They are extremely varied and in combination provide a wide range of resources for wildlife, from mature trees to abundant pollen and nectar. Bird feeders are used across the village and attract a wide range of common tits and finches as well as more occasional visitors such as siskin and brambling. The large number of ponds scattered through the village probably support higher densities of frogs than in the wider countryside as well as a large proportion of the parish's dragonflies and damselflies, such as the southern hawkler, common darter and large red damselfly.