

Earley Environmental Group

Earley Green Corridor Network

Making Space for Nature in Earley

The Earley Environmental Group (EEG) has developed a Green Corridor Network for Earley. The network combines Earley's green spaces and green links to create a series of linear corridors that can be protected and enhanced as a comprehensive body of ecological sites and natural habitats. Within each corridor, each green space and link has a role to play in providing local wildlife with natural habitats and routes. Many of them also provide Earley's residents with valued leisure space. The green corridors will provide a basis for helping to ensure that "green infrastructure" (the green space and links) is preserved for the benefit of wildlife and protected from the adverse impacts of development.

The green corridor concept is based on the findings of a report published in 2010; **Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network**; otherwise known as the "Lawton Report", named after Professor Sir John Lawton, who chaired the group that produced the report. The report looked at ways of better connecting England's wildlife to strengthen ecological networks and encourage nature to thrive against the pressures of climate change and increased development.

The Lawton Report stated that ecological networks generally have five components; Core Areas, Corridors and Stepping Stones, Restoration Areas, Buffer Zones, and Sustainable Use areas. The EEG has adapted this concept in developing the green corridor network for Earley; linking its established core green spaces with the Local Green Spaces recently proposed both by the EEG and Earley Town Council, and the EEG's proposal for a Lower Earley Local Nature Reserve. 'Stepping-stones'; comprising smaller parks and green spaces; as well as green pathways and natural green routes, have then been identified as green links both within and neighbouring Earley.

Defining the Network

Using the Lawton Report's five components as a starting point, and adjusting for Earley's urban environment, the Earley Green Corridor Network has been defined using the following components:

- i) **Core Green Space (Natural)**: areas of high nature conservation value which form the heart of the network. They contain habitats that are important to Earley because of the wildlife they support or the ecosystem services they provide.
- ii) **Core Green Space (Horticultural/Cultivated)**: areas such as parks, mown open grassland and allotments that provide ecosystems for wildlife as well as leisure facilities for local residents.
- iii) **Green Links**: linear green connectors, such as pathways and lines of trees and shrubs, that link core green spaces and stepping stones, thereby improving the functional connectivity between core areas and enabling species to move between them to feed, disperse, migrate or reproduce.

(iv) **'Stepping-Stones'**: small parks and green spaces that provide intermediate habitats for wildlife to move between core areas, enabling them to feed, disperse, migrate or reproduce.

(v) **Green Transport Corridors**: green connectors that follow main road and rail routes through Earley, enabling species to move between them to feed, disperse, migrate or reproduce.

(vi) **Agricultural Buffer Zones**: areas that surround Earley, forming a buffer between Earley and neighbouring largescale developments.

Two types of core area have been identified to enable horticultural and cultivated parks, mown grass areas and allotments to be defined separately from natural woodlands, nature reserves and general countryside. Green links, stepping stones and the agricultural buffer zone have been defined on a similar basis to the Lawton Report. Green Transport Corridors have been added to take account of their role in providing habitats and routes for wildlife within and through Earley.

Corridor Development

Figure 1 shows the core green spaces, stepping stones and green links that have been identified when developing the area's green corridors. Green Corridors were created by linking the green spaces that, when brought together, provide natural routes and habitats for wildlife. Green links connecting the corridors and linking to nearby green spaces were also identified. It was recognised that there are many other natural links in the local area, such as those that run along the backs of gardens and local streams that could be added to the network. Where possible, to ensure continuity with neighbouring areas, each of the corridors has been connected with key green spaces beyond Earley, such as Bulmershe Fields, Dinton Pastures, Palmer Park and green areas in Whitley. Transport routes that follow the two rail routes running through Earley (the Great Western and South Western railways) and the M4 motorway running along its southern edge were identified as Transport Green Corridors. The resulting Earley Green Corridor Network includes four main green corridors and three transport corridors, as well as a group of connecting Green Links, as listed below.

Green Corridors

Earley's four Green Corridors are:

- **The Thames Green Corridor** + Kennet Green Link
- **The Whiteknights to Bulmershe Green Corridor** + Palmer Park, South Lake and The Cowsey Green Links
- **Maiden Erlegh Green Corridor** + Chalfont Park Green Link
- **Loddon and Lower Earley Green Corridor** + South Loddon Green Link.

Green Transport Corridors

Earley's three Green Transport Corridors are:

- **The Great Western Railway Transport Corridor**
- **The South Western Rail/A3290 Transport Corridor**
- **The M4 Transport Corridor.**

Network Development

The Green Corridor Network was initially developed by linking the four Green Corridors and three Transport Corridors in schematic form, as shown in **Figure 2**. Each corridor was then expanded to show its broad 'footprint' and connecting links in relation to the local environment, as shown in **Figure 3**. Each of the Green Corridors is shown separately in **Figures 4 to 7**. **Appendix A** lists the key green spaces and green links that form each corridor.

Using the Green Corridor Network

The overall purpose of the Earley Green Corridor Network is to help protect and enhance Earley's natural environment and wildlife. The EEG will use the network to support schemes and programmes that benefit green infrastructure, ecological sites and conditions for wildlife. It will also be used in assessing the network-wide impact of development proposals on the natural environment and wildlife. It is intended that the Earley Green Corridor Network be used to:

- form the basis for Earley Town Council's Green Infrastructure Plan;
- increase awareness and appreciation of Earley's green infrastructure;
- encourage a more wildlife-friendly approach to the management of Earley's green infrastructure;
- be a reference document for planning applications submitted to Wokingham Borough Council;
- be a reference document for planning applications submitted for assessment to Earley Town Council from Wokingham Borough Council; and
- encourage the designation of linear nature reserves across Earley, including the Lower Earley Local Nature Reserve.

Adoption of the Network

The principle of the Earley Green Corridor Network has already been adopted by Earley Town Council within its **Interim Earley Green Infrastructure Action Plan**, updated in April 2022, which states that "A Green Corridor Map being prepared by the Earley Environmental Group will be the hub of all Green Infrastructure policies". This is a major step forward in protecting Earley's green environment. Wokingham Borough Council's support for the network will also be sought, specifically for its adoption as a tool for assessing how individual planning developments will impact on Earley's environmental network. Neighbouring local authorities, such as Wokingham and Reading Borough Councils could also take forward the concept to form an extended network that would protect green corridors on a wider scale. **Figure 8** shows the wider corridors that could potentially form the basis of such an extended network.

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Appendix A

Green Corridor Formation – Key Green Spaces and Links

The Thames Green Corridor + Kennet Green Link

Green Spaces

- Sonning Playing Fields
- Holme Park
- Big Gogs/Little Gogs/ Scotchman's Knob Area
- Thames Valley Park Nature Reserve
- Thames Valley Park Cultivated Grass Areas
- Caversham Lakes
- Kings Meadow
- Christchurch Meadow

Green Links

- Thames River and Path
- Kennet River Path

The Whiteknights to Bulmershe Green Corridor + Palmer Park and South Lake Green Links

Green Spaces

- Whiteknights Campus/The Wilderness/Harris Gardens
- Palmer Park
- Alfred Sutton Playing Fields
- Leighton Park School Playing Fields and Woodland
- Sol Joel Playing Field
- East Reading (Earley) Allotments
- Highwood
- Bulmershe Playing Fields/Bulmershe Park/Bulmershe Allotments
- South Lake

Green Links

- Whiteknights Road Trees and Verge

Maiden Erlegh Green Corridor + Chalfont Park Green Link

Green Spaces

- Hillside School Playing Field
- Chalfont Park
- Whiteknights School Playing Field
- Redhatch Copse

- Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve
- Laurel Park Playing Fields

Green Links

- Pedestrian Route between Halls Lane and Collins Redhatch Drive via Durand Road and Collins Drive
- Green Triangle Area off Beech Lane
- Pedestrian Route between Moor Copse and Riverside Park via Gipsy Lane and Toseland Way

Loddon and Lower Earley Green Corridor + South Loddon Green Link.

Green Spaces

- Nores Hill/Shinfield Park
- The Grove south of Whitley Wood Lane
- Pearman's Copse Local Nature Reserve and adjacent green spaces
- Woodland and Green Space north of Lower Earley Way (West) between Pearman's Copse and Danehill
- Woodland at Danehill
- Woodland and Green Space north of Lower Earley Way between Danehill and Swallows Meadow
- Swallows Meadow
- Green Areas and Woodland between Meldreth Way and Rushey Way
- Riverside Park/Lower Earley Meadows (Rushey Way to Wokingham Road)
- Hatch Farm Green Space
- Meadow land south of the River Loddon at Sindlesham
- Dinton Pastures

Green Links

- Pedestrian Route between Riverside Park and Dinton Pastures
- River Loddon south of the M4 motorway















