



# **Review of the proposed Strategic Wildlife Corridors to support the Strategic Wildlife Corridors Policy in the Chichester District Local Plan Review**

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Consultation Document Summer 2021

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# 1. Introduction

1.1 The Preferred Approach version of the Chichester Local Plan Review was published for consultation from 13 December 2018 to 7 February 2019. The document introduced new proposals for strategic wildlife corridors to ensure the connectivity of habitats between and within the South Downs National Park and Chichester and Pagham Harbours.

1.2 The Preferred Approach document included a Strategic Policy on Strategic Wildlife Corridors as follows:

Policy S30: Strategic Wildlife Corridors Development proposals within, or in close proximity to, strategic wildlife corridors will be granted where it can be demonstrated that:

1. There are no sequentially preferable sites available outside the wildlife corridor;
2. The development will not have an adverse impact on the integrity and function of the wildlife corridor; and
3. Development located in close proximity to strategic wildlife corridors protects and enhances its features and habitats.

Minor development within the strategic wildlife corridor will be acceptable where it does not undermine the connectivity and ecological value of the corridor.

1.3 The Council published a Strategic Wildlife Corridors background paper at the same time as the Preferred Approach consultation, which was intended to be read in conjunction with the policy and sets out the methodology used to inform the approach.

1.4 As a result of the consultation, further evidence was submitted to the Council to increase the background data supporting the proposed locations of the Strategic Wildlife Corridors; including updated protected species records and a study undertaken by the Bat Research Unit into the Barbastelle Bat populations within the South Downs National Park (see Appendix 1).

1.5 During Summer 2019, the Council commissioned the Bat Research Unit to undertake additional bat species surveys to provide further data to support the background evidence for the Strategic Wildlife Corridors. The survey is included in Appendix 2. Bat transect surveys were undertaken at Hambrook during 2019 which were supplemented with more detailed surveys during summer 2020. This survey is included in Appendix 3.

1.6 As a result of the additional evidence submitted during the Preferred Approach consultation and these additional surveys, the Council is proposing 3 amendments to the Strategic Wildlife Corridors as follows:

1. Proposed inclusion of the Nutbourne to Hambrook Strategic Wildlife Corridor

2. Proposed amendment to the route of the Pagham to Westhampnett Strategic Wildlife Corridor
3. Proposed amendment to the route of the Aldingbourne and Elbridge Rifes Strategic Wildlife Corridor

These amendments are set out in the following section.

- 1.7 The purpose of this document is to set out the available public evidence which supports the proposed changes as set out above, and invite all parties to consider it, and provide any additional technical evidence which can help to inform a decision on whether the proposed changes can be justified.
- 1.8 There is no need to repeat comments made in response to the *Preferred Approach* consultation, or to make comments on any of the other corridors proposed in the Preferred Approach (namely, the Hermitage to Westbourne corridor, the Chidham/East Nutbourne corridor, the Broadbridge to East Ashling corridor, and the Fishbourne to West of Chichester corridor).
- 1.9 The final position on the planning status of any proposed wildlife corridor will only be confirmed on the adoption of the emerging Local Plan Review.

## 2. Proposed amendments to the Strategic Wildlife Corridors

### Change 1 - Proposed inclusion of the Nutbourne to Hambrook Strategic Wildlife Corridor

- 2.1 The potential additional Nutbourne to Hambrook Strategic Wildlife Corridor has been included following additional information received after the consultation on the Preferred Approach. The route was initially included in the original long-list of potential routes but, at that time, there was insufficient evidence to justify the corridor and concerns that the corridor would be too narrow to act as a suitable functional strategic corridor.
- 2.2 Following the consultation on the Local Plan Review Preferred Approach, additional data was submitted by the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre which indicated the high concentration of protected species and the importance of the chalk stream which forms the central feature of the route. There was also considerable support from the local community and local and regional wildlife groups and organisations, for the inclusion of Hambrook as a Strategic Wildlife Corridor. Therefore further work was undertaken to develop a suitable route that would provide functional connectivity and is detailed below.
- 2.3 The route starts from the Special Protection Area of Chichester Harbour and includes Nutbourne Marshes Local Nature Reserve. It runs northwards, encompassing the protrusion of land south of Farm Lane which is functional habitat for Waders and Brent Geese and water voles. The route then continues up along Ham Brook, adjacent to ancient hedgerow to the parcel of ancient woodland (ID 5054 and 5055), which straddles the railway line. It runs north encompassing the ponds to the West and ancient woodland to the East, at Brook Farm. The route then continues north along the route of Ham Brook, which records indicate supports populations of water voles, bat and barn owls. It also encompasses the areas of boundary woodland and hedgerows at Priors Leaze Farm and Chichester Grain Store where mature English Elm (disease resilient) line the Ham Brook. The route continues along the Ham Brook until it reaches the watercress beds, south of the A27. Recent surveys have indicated a population of water voles at Ham Brook, just south of the watercress beds. To the west it encompasses a parcel of woodland south of Newell Farm and ancient woodland at Wintons Farm House. This connects along ancient hedgerows to Devils Copse, with a farm track bridge over the A27, which as indicated by the results of the bat transect surveys during summer 2019, shows the commuting routes for a number of bat species (figure 2). The Ancient Woodland at Devils Copse is connected via hedgerows and treelines to Jubilee Wood to the North and then North West to Racktonpark Wood which is another ancient woodland remnant.
- 2.4 During summer 2020, bat activity monitoring surveys were undertaken using static bat recorders stationed simultaneously at the southern (Brook Meadows SU 78636 06825) and northern (Farm Lane SU 77791 05433) ends of the

potential corridor. The results of these surveys further support the inclusion of a strategic corridor at Ham Brook (see Appendix 3). The survey report concludes the following:

*“The study showed that the eight species of bat recorded, occurred at both recorder locations. *Barbastella barbastellus*, *Plecotus*, *Nyctalus noctula* and *Myotis* species are all reliant on woodland. *Nyctalus noctula*, *Eptesicus Seortinus* and *Barbastella barbastellus* are known to travel a considerable number of miles on a nightly basis along linear features, such as Ham Brook to access their primary foraging habitat. *Barbastelle barbastellus* are considered to be ‘very rare’ within the UK and across Europe and are listed under Annex II of the EC Habitats Directive. This requires that sites, which contain important populations of these species, are designated as Special Areas of Conservation. The nearest of these sites is located at the Singleton and Cocking Railway Tunnels, 11.2 km to the north-east of Point 10 (Brook Meadows)...*

*The general lack of mature woodland and open water along and near the route of the Ham Brook means that the watercress beds at Hambrook Spring, to the north of Point 10 (Brook Meadows), the woodlands associated with Churcher’s Copse to the west of the same site and the fishing ponds and woodland at Brook Farm, 525 m to the north of P9 (Farm Road) will be fundamental to the integrity of Ham Brook as a functioning corridor for bats travelling between Chichester and Langstone Harbour and the South Downs National Park.*

*Many of the UKs resident species of bat are reluctant to cross open ground or even small breaks in linear features and will also often go some distance to remain within the darkest areas, in an attempt to avoid artificial light. This study has indicated that the Ham Brook is significantly important to bats and appears to function as an important wildlife corridor for these animals. It serves to connect bats to the protected sites of Chichester and Langstone Harbour on the coastal plain, with the wooded downland of the South Downs National Park to the north. The Ham Brook corridor represents a narrow and very vulnerable wildlife artery, which if compromised, even a small way is likely to have a devastating effect upon bats and the wider ecology within the locality. This would be especially damaging for the protected environments of Chichester and Langstone Harbour.”*

2.5 The components of the corridor are illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 1 below.

Figure 1: Proposed Nutbourne to Hambrook and Chidham to East of Nutbourne Strategic Wildlife Corridors

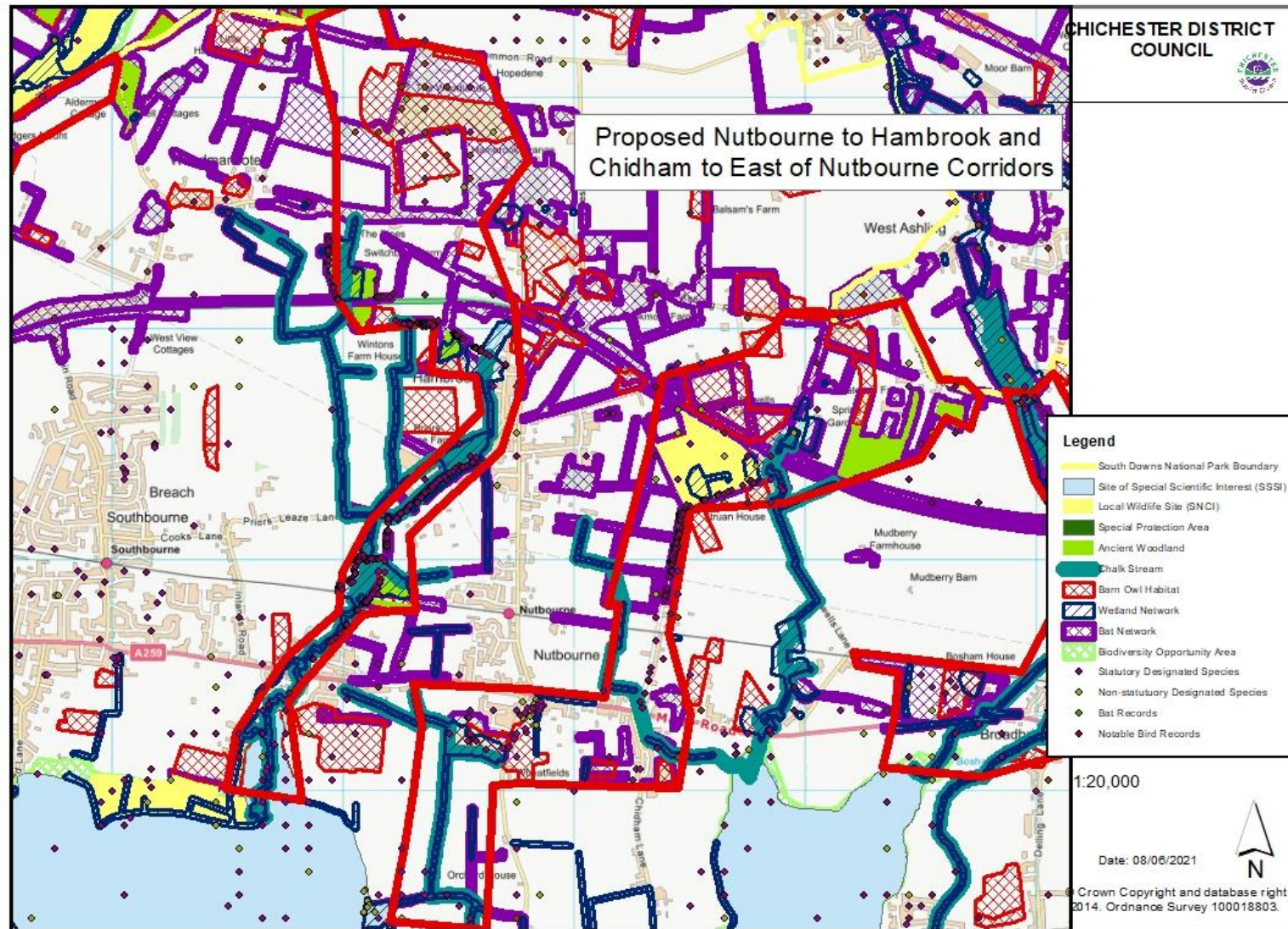
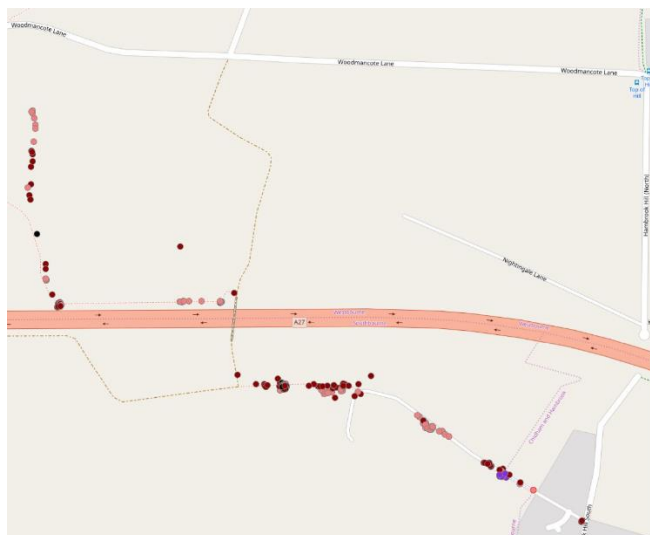


Table 1: Components and their sources for the proposed Nutbourne to Hambrook Strategic Wildlife Corridor

Component of Proposed Strategic Wildlife Corridor/GIS Layer	Source
Chichester Harbour Special Protection Area	Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (SxBRC) or Defra Magic Mapping (magic.defra.gov.uk)
Ham Brook Chalk Stream	SxBRC
Ancient Woodland	SxBRC
Bat Records	SxBRC, Transect Surveys, Gray's Ecology Survey (appendix 3)
Protected Species Records including Water Voles	SxBRC
Rare Species Records	SxBRC
Notable Bird Records	SxBRC
Bat Network (including treelines, hedgerows and parcels of woodland used by bats)	Forest Research UK report and data layers
Wetland/Water vole Network (watercourse, ditches and rifes)	Forest Research UK report and data layers
Barn Owl Habitat	Forest Research UK report and data layers

Figure 2. Results of bat transect survey at Hambrook (summer 2019)



Change 2- Proposed amendment to the route of the Westhampnett to Pagham Harbour Strategic Wildlife Corridor

2.6 It is proposed that the northern section of the route of the Westhampnett to Pagham Harbour corridor, be amended following the consultation on the Local Plan Preferred Approach as further evidence was submitted, including the



Barbastelle Bats in the South Downs National Park report (included in Appendix 1). As demonstrated by Figure 3 below, it is considered that the commuting route for the Barbastelle Bats is along Drayton Lane and therefore it is proposed that this part of the route should be moved to the west. The amended route also encompasses the sites previously known as Drayton Lakes North and South, which as well as supporting a number of notable bird species, also includes one of the few remaining parcels of woodland to the East of the City and within the Plan area.

Figure 3: Route of Radio Tracked Barbastelle Bats



2.7 These sites previously known as Drayton Lakes North and Drayton Lakes South and now known as the Drayton Gravel Pits were formerly two wet gravel pits utilised for mineral extraction. The planning permissions for the mineral extraction, required the restoration of the wet lakes for nature conservation after use and the restoration involved the profiling of the lakes to create deep water areas and shallow, irregular margins; the planting of

marginal vegetation; sowing of wildflower meadow adjacent to the lakes and hedge planting along the site boundaries<sup>1</sup>. A 10-year aftercare period was negotiated on cessation of the mineral extraction to ensure maximum biodiversity gain following the site restoration.

- 2.8 The sites support a considerable number of notable bird species and were nominated by the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre as a potential Local Wildlife Site (LWS) on the basis that they met the following Sussex LWS selection criteria for birds:
- Sites with records during the last 10 years of at least 25% of all species ever recorded in Sussex, i.e., more than 100 species, using the site in question;
  - Sites with breeding records of 0.5% or more of the national population of any species on the current Rare Breeding Bird Panel list. This criteria needs to have been met in at least 4 of the last 10 years.
- 2.9 The two Drayton House Gravel Pits met both of these criteria. Nearly 5000 records of 116 species of bird were recorded actually using (as distinct from flying over) these pits between 2010 and 2019. According to Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS), the Common Pochard is particularly important in this second respect, as these sites hold 0.625% of the national breeding population. As detailed within Appendix 4, there are nearly 5000 records of protected and designated species recorded at the site (all taxa not just birds), including 676 records comprising of 33 internationally designated species. Above the northern lake, is also one of the few remaining parcels of woodland to the east of the City within the plan area and the woodland is known to support commuting bats.
- 2.10 The entire route of the corridor begins at Pagham Harbour SPA in the south, connecting to Pagham Rife, and then along the watercourses on the district boundary with Arun and incorporating an area of ancient woodland, close to Saltham House. It continues north along the watercourse and hedgerows, east of Chichester City, incorporating the lakes at Springfield lakes, and then the lakes and woodland at the former Drayton Gravel Pits.
- 2.11 From the site at Drayton Gravel Pits, the corridor connects to Shopwhyke Lakes. It then runs northwards along the hedgerows and treelines along Claypit Lane before heading north-east along the hedgerow and watercourse within the Goodwood Estate before meeting the boundary with the National Park. This corridor also encompasses part of the Chichester Coastal Plain BOA, as identified by the Sussex Biodiversity Partnership. The corridor is illustrated in Figures 4a and 4b, with the components identified in Table 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by West Sussex County Council Ecologist in May 2021.

Figure 4a: Proposed Westhampnett to Pagham Harbour Strategic Wildlife Corridor (southern part)

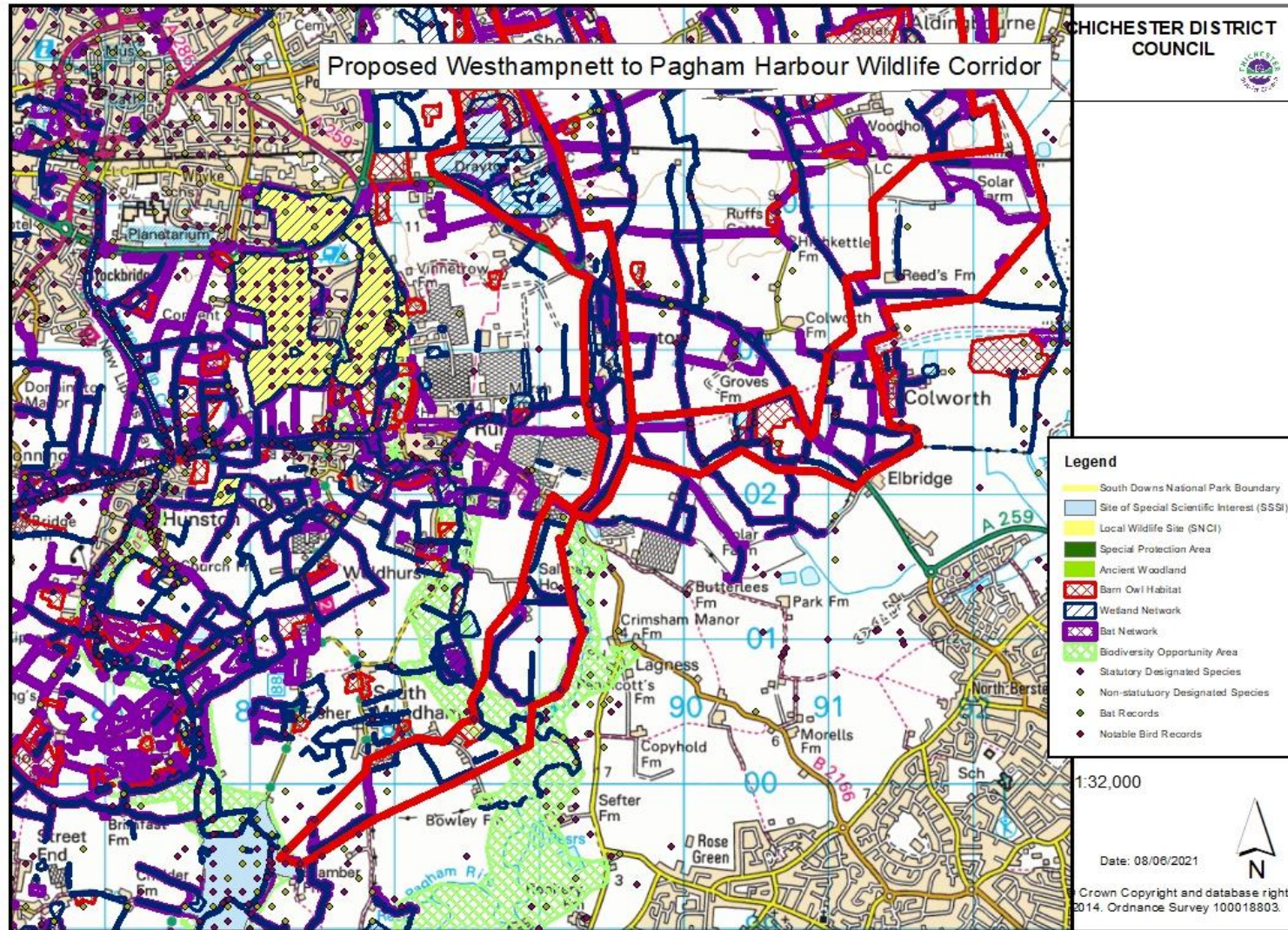


Figure 4b: Proposed Westhampnett to Pagham Harbour Strategic Wildlife Corridor (northern part)

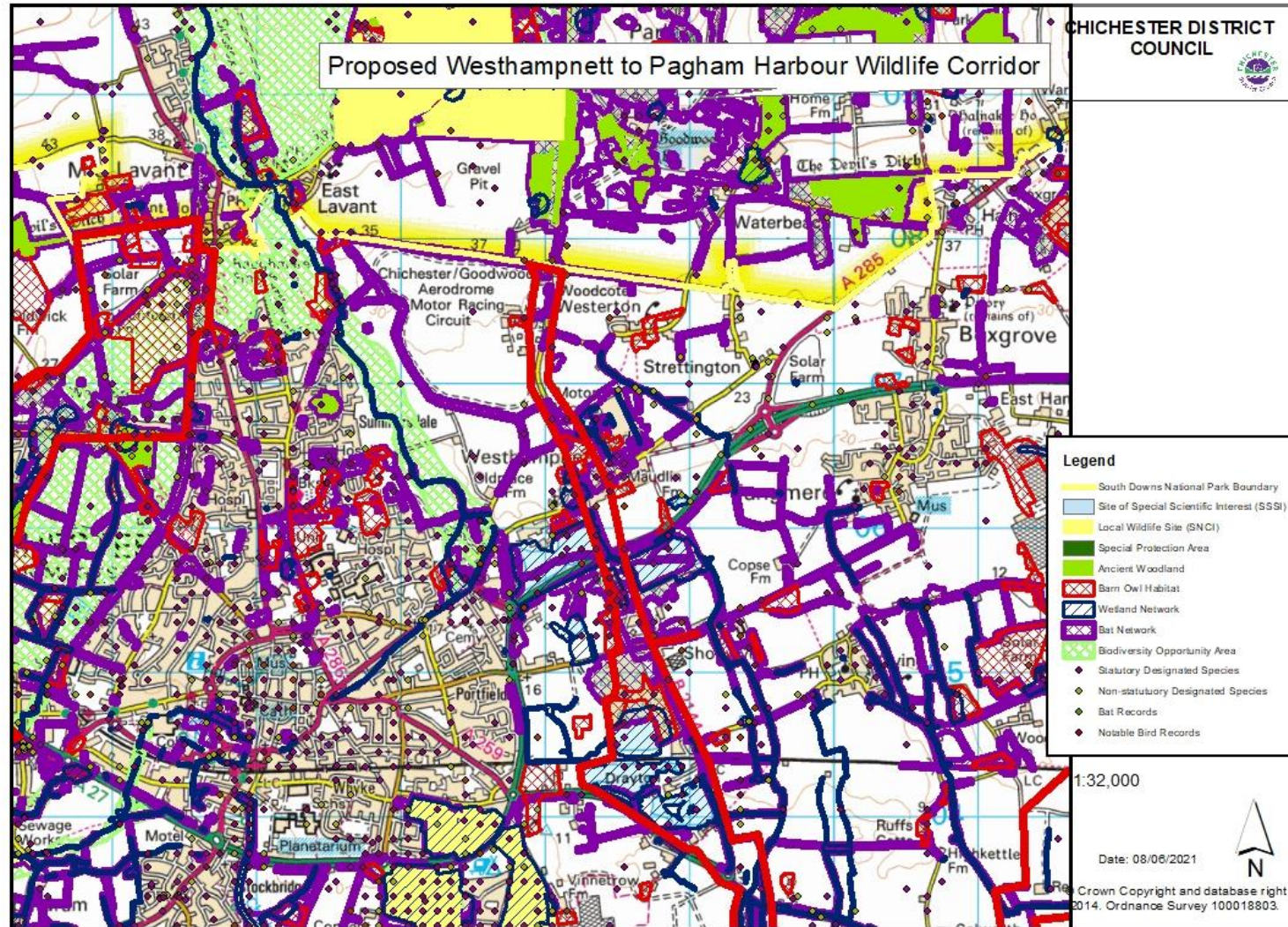


Table 2: Components and their sources for the proposed Westhampnett to Pagham Harbour Strategic Wildlife Corridor

<b>Component of Proposed Strategic Wildlife Corridor/GIS Layer</b>	<b>Source</b>
Pagham Harbour Special Protection Area	Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (SxBRC) or Defra Magic Mapping (magic.defra.gov.uk)
Bat Records	SxBRC
Protected Species Records	SxBRC
Rare Species Records	SxBRC
Notable Bird Records	SxBRC
Ancient Woodland	SxBRC
Chichester Coastal Plain Biodiversity Opportunity Areas	Sussex Biodiversity Partnership
Bat Network (including treelines, hedgerows and partials of woodland used by bats)	Forest Research UK report and data layers
Wetland/Water vole Network (watercourse, ditches and rifes)	Forest Research UK report and data layers
Barn Owl Habitat	Forest Research UK report and data layers

Change 3 - Proposed amendment to the route of the Aldingbourne and Elbridge Rifes Strategic Wildlife Corridor

2.12 It is proposed that the route of the Aldingbourne and Elbridge Rifes is amended following the consultation on the Local Plan Preferred Approach as further evidence was submitted in the form of the Barbastelle Bats in the South Downs National Park report (included in Appendix 1). As demonstrated by Figure 5 below, it is considered that there are high concentrations of Barbastelle records at Reed's Farmland and south of Decoy Farmhouse. Therefore it is proposed that rather the corridor head directly west along Elbridge Rife to meet Aldingbourne Rife at the District boundary, it heads north at Colworth to encompass Reed's Farm. It is also proposed that the corridor is widened where it crosses the A27 to encompass increased bat network (including the woodland north of Marsh Lane) at this point.

Figure 5: Route of Radio Tracked Barbastelle Bat



2.13 The amended full route of the corridor is as follows: it continues eastwards from the Westhampnett to Pagham corridor along the Elbridge Rife, incorporating bat network, wetland/water vole network and barn owl habitat. It then heads north at Colworth, encompassing land at Reed's Farm which supports a healthy population of water voles (see Appendix 5) before heading north along Aldingbourne Rife, incorporating bat network, barn owl habitat and ancient woodland, east of Decoy Lane. The corridor continues north along the bat network and encompassing bat habitat including patches of woodland such as Dyer's Copse. The corridor meets the National Park Boundary at Thicket Lane. The corridor is illustrated in Figure 6, with the components identified in Table 3.

Figure 6: Proposed Aldingbourne and Elbridge Rifes Strategic Wildlife Corridor

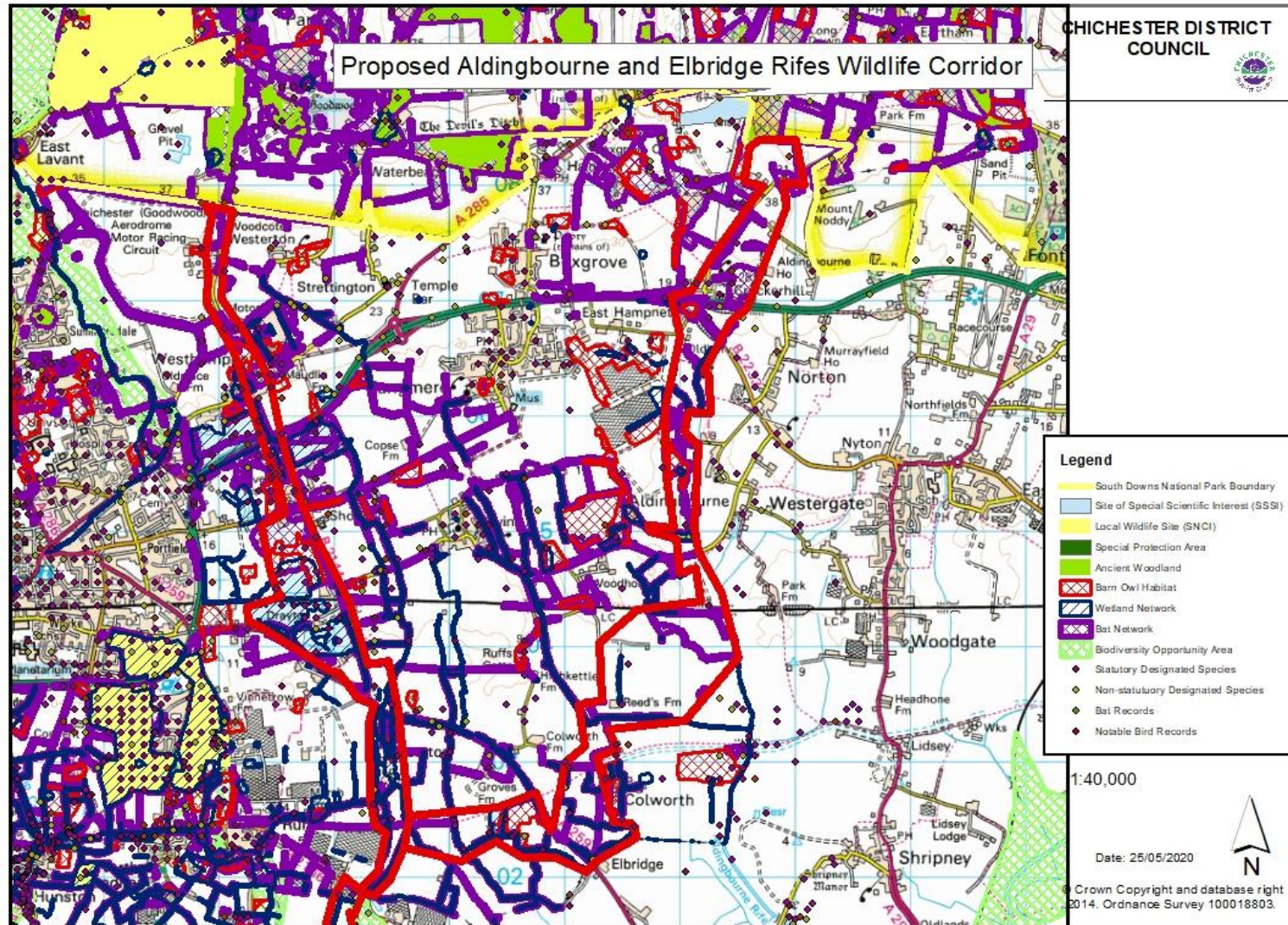


Table 3: Components and their sources for the proposed Aldingbourne and Elbridge Rifes Strategic Wildlife Corridor

<b>Component of Proposed Strategic Wildlife Corridor/GIS Layer</b>	<b>Source</b>
Ancient Woodland	SxBRC
Bat Records	SxBRC
Protected Species Records	SxBRC
Rare Species Records	SxBRC
Notable Bird Records	SxBRC
Bat Network (including treelines, hedgerows and partials of woodland used by bats)	Forest Research UK report and data layers
Wetland/Water vole Network (watercourse, ditches and rifes)	Forest Research UK report and data layers
Barn Owl Habitat	Forest Research UK report and data layers

## 3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 Following the consultation on the Preferred Approach version of the Chichester Local Plan Review in 2018, including the background evidence to support the proposed policy on Strategic Wildlife Corridors, further data and evidence has been provided which has indicated that proposed amendments to the corridors as detailed within this report may be appropriate. With regards to the proposed amendments, the Council considers it appropriate to re-consult stakeholders to seek their views on the amendments, and in particular to request any remaining evidence and data that may be held by stakeholders which might further inform the background evidence to the policy.