

Green and Blue Infrastructure Background Paper

1. Introduction

1.1 A survey of residents showed that there is strong support for the natural environment within the parish. 95% of respondents said that they wanted to protect the natural landscapes, open views, natural environment, trees and hedgerows. 93% wanted to protect and enhance biodiversity. 86% wanted to plant more trees and hedgerows and 83% wanted to create more wildlife corridors.

2. Landscape

2.1 The Parish consists of the two villages of Newton on the Moor and Swarland, together with the hamlets of Hazon, Hartlaw and Old Swarland. Although the parish is bisected by the A1, all the settlements are situated in the open countryside

2.2 The area is characterised by rolling or undulating farmland, in which the key features are open, medium-scale farmland but where hedgerows and hedgerow trees have to some extent declined arising from past agricultural intensification¹.

2.3 The parish benefits from its rural location, views towards the coast and a large number of woodland areas both within and adjacent to the parish boundary. There are several wooded denes, often following the course of a burn. All of these provide valuable wildlife corridors.

2.4 Sitting as they do within open countryside, the setting of the villages in the landscape is important, with views of Newton on the Moor from the east and north east (when viewed from the A1), and from the north when viewed from Low Steads and from the east when viewed from across the A1 in Hazon. Similarly, the view of Swarland from the south and the location of Nile Park provide the setting for Swarland.

3. Habitat

3.1 Using information from the MAGIC database², the Parish consists of a mix of habitats including:

- a) Arable and improved grassland
- b) Pockets of ancient woodland
- c) Deciduous woodland
- d) Coniferous forest
- e) Open mosaic habitat.

¹ Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010)

² www.MAGIC.defra.gov.uk

3.2 There are numerous of areas of Woodland Priority Habitat and Woodland Improvement areas (Countryside Stewardship Layers), plus English Woodland Grant Scheme areas.

3.3 Swarland Wood covers an area of approximately 390 acres and is managed by Forestry England as a community wood. It is adjacent to the golf course at Percy Wood Holiday Park which, together with part of Swarland Wood is adjacent to the western edge of the Swarland settlement boundary.

4. Biodiversity

4.1 There are no protected sites within the Parish.

4.2 The Parish is a Priority Area for Countryside Stewardship targeting lapwing and curlew (around Newton on the Moor and west of Swarland). It is also an arable assemblage area for farmland birds and an assemblage area for grassland birds such as curlew, grey partridge, lapwing, snipe and tree sparrows². The entire parish is a Great Crested Newt Strategic Opportunity area.

4.3 There is a small population of red squirrels in Swarland Wood – sightings have also been made in Newton on the Moor.

4.4 There have been sightings of otters near the Mere Burn in Swarland, and of kingfishers and dippers on the Hazon Burn. The Hazon Burn is a tributary of the Coquet River and is the subject of monthly water quality testing by the Coquet River Action Group.

4.5 Brown hare and roe deer are common on agricultural land and the periphery of settlements and there are also populations of badgers and foxes.

4.6 A local group (Swarland and Newton Action on Climate) has been active in encouraging biodiversity through workshops to build bug hotels, promoting the wildflower meadow in Vyner Park and encouraging local residents to improve the biodiversity in their gardens.

5. Green/Blue Infrastructure

5.1 The term ‘green/blue infrastructure’ can embrace a range of spaces and assets that provide environmental and wider benefits. It can, for example, include parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and ‘blue infrastructure’ such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies³.

5.2 Green/blue infrastructure is a natural capital asset that provides multiple benefits. For communities, these benefits can include enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes, food and energy production, urban cooling, and the

³National Planning Practice Guidance (2019) Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 8-004-20190721

management of flood risk⁴.

5.3 Within the parish a number of areas have been identified which can be considered to be part of the green/blue infrastructure. These include (but are not limited to):

- a) Former grounds of Swarland Hall including Swarland Wood and Percy Wood Holiday Park golf course;
- b) Vyner Park;
- c) Woodland plantations surrounding Newton Hall;
- d) Woodland on the south side of the road from Newton on the Moor to Overgrass;
- e) The Hazon, Swarland Newton Burns and the associated woodland habitat;
- f) The disused railway line running from Whittle Colliery to Hartlaw;
- g) The tree lined areas in Swarland including The Avenue and Leamington Lane;
- h) The network of footpaths and bridle ways which cross the parish;
- i) The general network of hedgerows and mature gardens.

4.5 All of these contribute to an extensive and valuable network of green/blue infrastructure and wildlife corridors supporting a wide range of wildlife.

4.6 Each of these areas is examined in more detail in Table 1 for designation as a Green/Blue Infrastructure and Wildlife Corridor.

Name	Description	Designate as Green/Blue corridor (Y/N)
Former grounds of Swarland Hall including Swarland Wood and Holiday Park Golf Course	<p>This covers a substantial area within Swarland and contains a variety of habitats, from the Forestry England owned Swarland Wood to the more open areas of Percy Wood Holiday Park golf course.</p> <p>Swarland Wood is managed as a community wood and has an increasing proportion of broadleaf trees in addition to conifers. It is home to a small population of red squirrels which are actively supported by the Lower Coquetdale Red Squirrel group.</p> <p>The wood also contains the remains of the former Swarland Hall Boating Lake which has now transitioned into an area of wet woodland. Work is planned with Northumberland Wildlife Trust to invasive species.</p> <p>The golf course is a mature parkland course which contains a number of woodland areas and ponds.</p> <p>These areas provide a valuable link between Newton on the Moor and the Swarland Burn.</p>	Y
Vyner Park	Vyner Park contains a variety of different habitats, including an area of managed unimproved neutral grassland meadow, scrub, broadleaved woodland and tall ruderal. A number of	Y

⁴ National Planning Practice Guidance (2019) Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 8-005-2019721

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	bat and bird boxes have been installed, together with a bug hotel and hibernaculum.	
Woodland plantations surrounding Newton Hall	The woodland areas surrounding Newton Hall sit in an area which runs between the A1 and XXX. It contain a mix of broadleaf trees and conifers. There has been a small population of red squirrels in the area.	
Woodland to the south of the road from Newton on the Moor to Overgrass	This is an area of woodland and scrub which runs from the edge of the village towards Overgrass. It provides a corridor which connects with the Swarland Burn.	Y
The Hazon, Swarland and Newton Burns and their associated woodland	These burns, which are tributaries of the River Coquet, run through the parish providing valuable habitat for a range of species. Monitoring of the Hazon Burn (as part of the Coquet River Action Group's water quality monitoring project) shows it to be in relatively good condition. Dippers and kingfishers have been seen in its vicinity and an otter spotted nearby. The burns frequently have steeply sided woodland adjoining them and the lack of footpaths mean that these are largely undisturbed areas for wildlife.	Y
The disused railway line running from Whittle Colliery to Hartlaw	This disused railway line runs for approximately 3km from the site of the former Whittle Quarry to the hamlet of Hartlaw. It provides a green corridor for wildlife including deer, foxes and badgers. There are a number of settling ponds along its route which provide additional habitat. There is no public access along the railway line and it therefore provides a valuable wildlife corridor through the surrounding farmland.	Y
The tree lined areas in Swarland including The Avenue and Leamington Lane	The Avenue and Leamington Lane are well known locally for the extent of their tree cover, and provide a natural green corridor along these routes through Swarland. They provide a link at one end with Vyner Park and protection provided by a Woodland Tree Protection order.	Y
Footpaths and bridle ways	There are a number of footpaths and bridleways throughout the parish. These have not been individually identified as part of the green infrastructure, although they provide valuable connectivity for wildlife.	N
The general network of hedgerows and mature gardens	Both villages of Swarland and Newton on the Moor benefit from mature gardens. Swarland and Newton Action on Climate (SNAC) is actively encouraging residents to leave an area of their garden 'wild' to increase biodiversity and green infrastructure. Whilst many hedgerows have been removed in the past, many farmers in the area are now seeking to re-establish these which will once again add to the overall green infrastructure within the parish.	N