

## 4. What is happening in our streams and rivers?

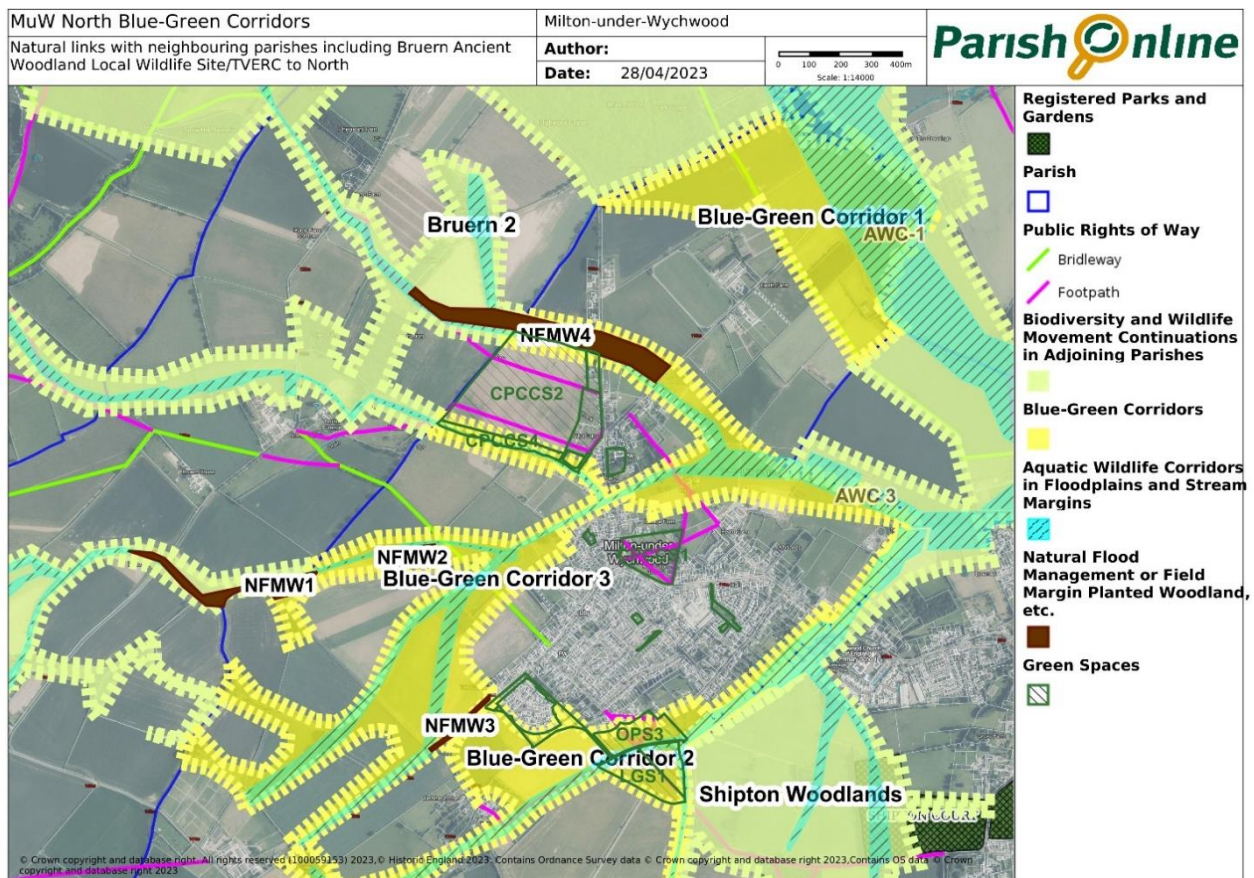
### Water is life

If we are serious about our living world in Milton-under-Wychwood (MuW), then we need to know more and take more action to protect our streams and rivers.

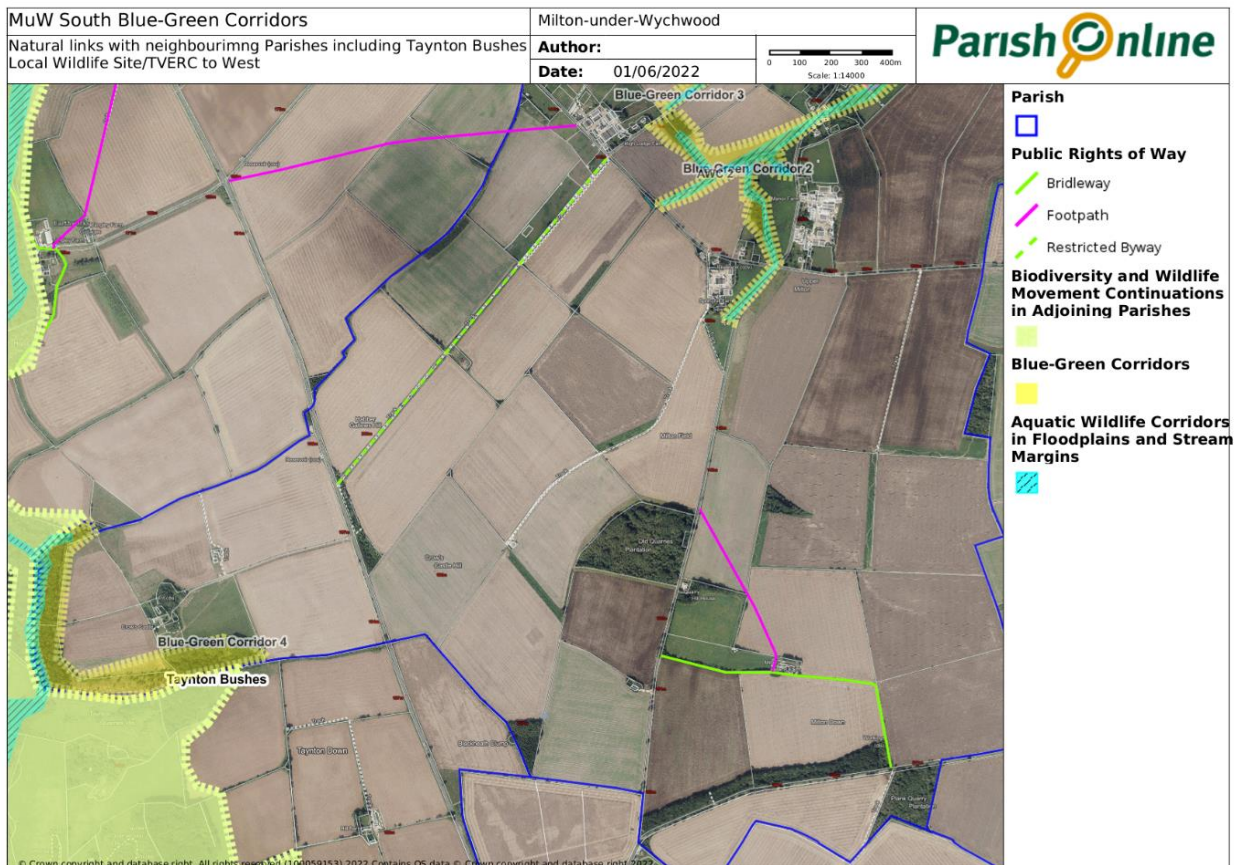
John Pratt has a deep interest in these matters and has written a fuller account of the state of the place in MuW which we have summarized below.

### Why do we need blue-green corridors?

MuW's 2023 Neighbourhood Plan identified 'blue-green' corridors along our watercourses to help maintain and improve their biodiversity. The corridors have natural connections with neighbouring parishes and comprise each watercourse and a reasonable margin of uncultivated land on both sides. Therefore, they act as corridors for animals on land as well as in water. Some of MuW's farmers are protecting these margins, e.g. the Astor and Izod farmers, and others are joining them. So it is still possible, for example, to see snipe (a marshland bird) on these margins (see maps below).



MuW North - map showing Aquatic Wildlife Corridors and MuW Blue-Green Corridors



**MuW South - map showing Aquatic Wildlife Corridors and MuW Blue-Green Corridors**

## Are your children and grandchildren safe in our watercourses?

Appendix 7 of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) demonstrates the health of the brooks rising in the parish or in neighbouring parishes. The Littlestock Brook under Church Road and the smaller tributaries that join it from the West, likewise the Simmons Brook passing Milton Service Station, support good populations of aquatic invertebrates and smaller fishes. It is probably not a coincidence that they have very low concentrations of dissolved phosphate, invariably less than 0.05 mg/l. Our aim is for all watercourses to carry no more than this throughout the year. But...

## The parlous state of the River Evenlode

Sadly, in high summer the low water flows of the River Evenlode in our parish and the Littlestock Brook in Shipton-under-Wychwood, suffer phosphate concentrations 10 to 20 times more than our hoped-for level. This is largely due to the daily discharge of phosphate-rich wastewater from our sewage works into the Brook and the same from works serving upstream populations into the Evenlode.

The impact is dire. When the River Evenlode reaches our parish at Lyneham Bridge in high summer, it is low, turbid and the colour of oxtail soup due to algae nourished by excessive phosphates and other nutrients including nitrates that have come downstream from settlements. The algae shade out larger rooted water plants; waving beds of Ranunculus in gravelly shallows have, sadly, become a rarity and often the riverbed is bare.

## **Why is this - and what is happening about the Sewage Treatment Works?**

Agriculture in our community may be a contributor to phosphate levels but it is a minor one. The Sewage Treatment Works (STW) operator Thames Water recognises the problem of excessive phosphate release from its STW !

## **What is Thames Water doing about it?**

Thames Water is discussing this with the Environment Agency and OFWAT. But the discussions are long winded and lead to unacceptable deferral of investment decisions.

Sadly, discussions are not yet focussed on stripping out phosphates; most are simply about increasing treatment capacity which - since privatisation of the industry - has alarmingly lagged behind expansion of settlements for generations.

## **Then there is the release of raw sewage...**

STWs are permitted to release untreated sewage into watercourses during periods of high rainfall and when their surge storage systems cannot cope. Many of the storage tanks have not been upgraded and expanded in decades and much of the storm surge problem is due to faulty surface drainage pipe connections.

A troubling revelation from the forensic work of Windrush Against Sewage Pollution and other volunteer analysts from the public is the abuse of the Environment Agency's permitting system. Strangely, some STWs have been found to release raw sewage during periods of low rainfall. This is illegal.

## **Your safety...**

It is therefore wise to keep away from rivers and streams when they are, or have recently been, affected in this way.

If you wish to take your children or grandchildren for a summertime paddle, keep them well away from the Evenlode and seek out the healthy headwaters of our little brooks with confidence!

John Pratt, January 2024.

If you want to know more about our blue/green corridors and what you can do to help our mission of purer water for ourselves and wildlife, please email John at [consultjohnp@btinternet.com](mailto:consultjohnp@btinternet.com)