

West Berkshire Wild Verges

Report for Tilehurst PCNP

by Simon Claybourn

West Berkshire Wild Verges Project Officer



Rural Verges and Connectivity in Tilehurst Parish

The following is a short report on the state of rural verges that sit within West Berkshire Council's Rural Verge Management Contract in Tilehurst Parish, as well as how these connect to the further habitat network of trees and hedges in Tilehurst, and the open greenspace owned or managed by either the Parish or District Council.

Verges

Through the West Berkshire Wild Verges Project, there are some small connectivity gains to be made, despite Tilehurst being mainly urban. The project aims to improve rural verge management for wildlife by changing West Berkshire Council's cutting regime. The rural verges in Tilehurst are found on Sulham Hill and Little Heath Road, and a small section of the A4/Bath Road.

Something the project doesn't deal with is the improvements that can be made to urban verges. Changes that Dorset County Council have already shown to work magnificently by changing management to both reduce costs and increase biodiversity, without making a mess or causing safety issues. It is recommended to [check the document that DCC produced](#) for some pointers. Although it is something that WBC are in control of, it is definitely worth bringing it up with them.

Greenspace

Encouraging more sensitive greenspace management. Both recreation grounds and school fields can have thin strips running down one or two sides to create effective wildlife corridors without getting in the way of use and opening opportunities for outdoor learning. Only being cut twice a year instead of the obligatory 6-10 cuts per year, there is a lot of possibility for money saving and increased biodiversity. There's roughly 256,000m² of school field and public greenspace in Tilehurst Parish. Theale Parish Council have done some really fantastic things down their way, to this effect and more, and are well worth getting in touch with. Both Forest Schools, and BBOWT's Education Team could be good places to point schools for nature-based learning.

Hedgerows

Hedgerows aren't a huge part of the landscape of Tilehurst, but there are a number just over the border into the AONB that are derelict (poor condition) that could do with reinstatement, and some new places where they could be planted. This will require work with local landowners, but I've highlighted some 8km of possible planting opportunities across the edge of the AONB, linking to Tilehurst's greenspaces and Pincents Hill. Offering resources by way of native hedgerow saplings and some community planting efforts through organisations such as CROW (Conserve Reading On Wednesdays), schools, Scouts, etc. is a possible route to improvement.

Consolidation of existing connectivity and mature trees

There are a good number of existing hedgerows and mature trees in Tilehurst. I'd suggest making sure all TPOs and mature trees (check the Woodland Trusts' website [HERE](#)) are recorded and protected. The connectivity remaining in Tilehurst is mainly down to mature trees on roadsides, in gardens, and in public space, along with limited hedgerows. There is no national database of hedgerows, so it is suggested that looking into taking inventory of what lies within Tilehurst Parish is worthwhile. The People's Trust for Endangered Species has a national survey on the go, and they may be a good port-of-call for some guidance on this (<https://hedgerowsurvey.ptes.org/>)

Map Legend Explanation

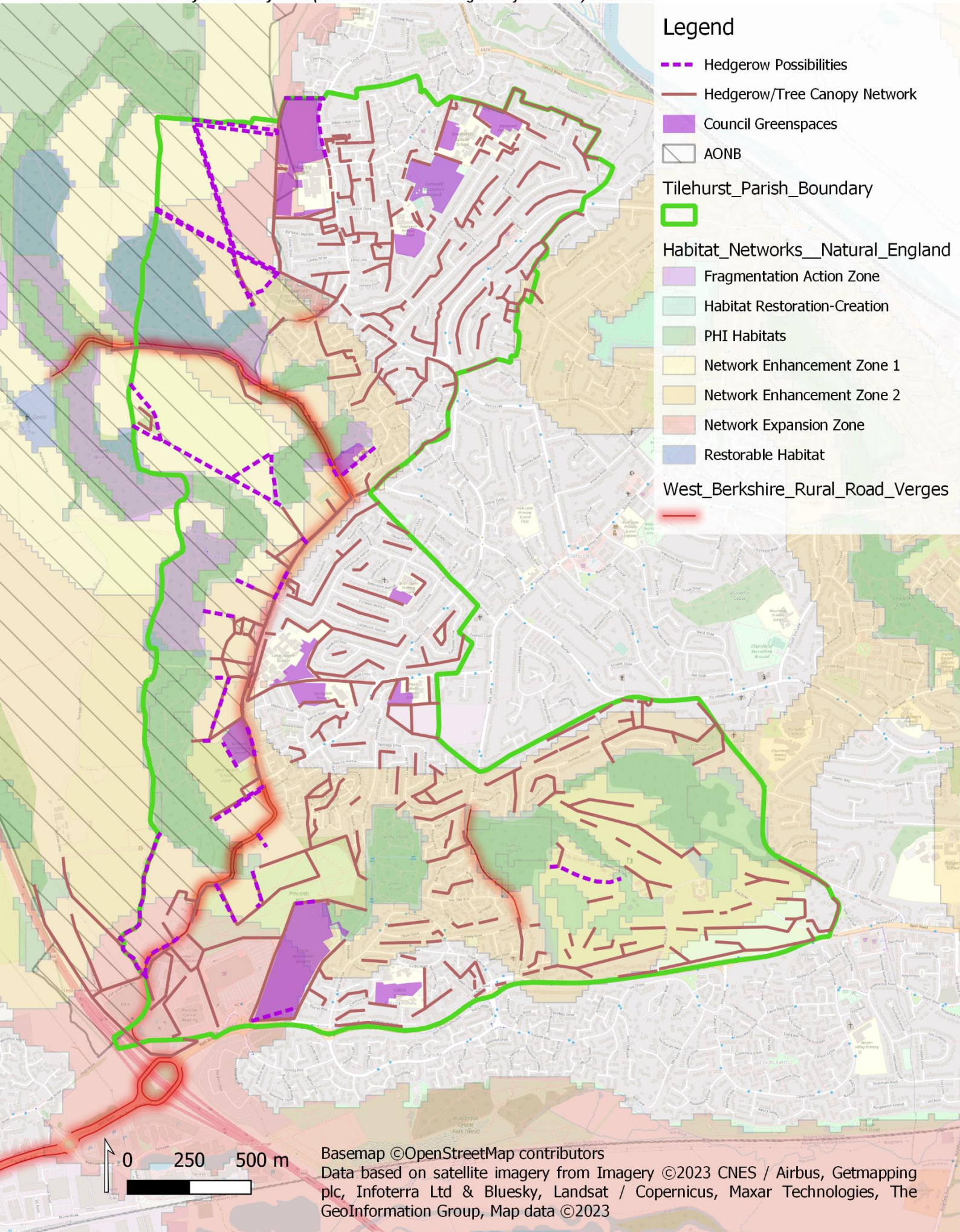
The attached map shows a lot of information, so let's break it down layer by layer:

- Hedgerow Possibilities - areas I've highlighted as possible targets for hedgerow establishment, or reinstatement of existing derelict or thin hedges that would bolster connectivity, particularly into the AONB.
- Hedgerow/Tree Canopy Network - a simple representation of unbroken tree and hedge networks in Tilehurst. Shows where existing safe corridors for wildlife (mainly bats) exist, some of which are effective links between areas of PHI Habitat (see below).
- Council Greenspaces - a rough estimation of where school playing field and recreational grounds are in Tilehurst, as referenced in the 'Greenspace' section above.
- North Wessex Downs AONB - simply that.
- Tilehurst Parish Boundary - simply that.
- Habitat_Networks_Natural_England - produced by Natural England a couple of years back, these national maps aim to show areas of priority habitat and the areas between these that should be targets for improvement and protection.
- Fragmentation Action Zone - areas of habitat that are becoming fragmented by land-use change or development
- Habitat Restoration-Creation - areas highlighted as being targets for restoration of previously present habitats, or habitats that could/should be present
- PHI Habitats - Priority Habitats Inventory. Basically, important habitats that are a priority for statutory protections. These are the 'good' bits of the network; the bits wildlife corridors run between.
- Network Enhancement Zone 1 - areas to be enhanced "Action in this zone to expand and join up existing habitat patches and improve the connections between them can be targeted here."
- Network Enhancement Zone 2 - areas to be enhanced "Action in this zone that improves the biodiversity value through land management changes and/or green infrastructure provision can be targeted here."
- Network Expansion Zone - areas where habitats and corridors should be expanded to fill gaps and build the network.
- Restorable Habitat - habitat in poor condition that can still be restored.
- WestBerkshire_RuralRoadVerges - part of the project's remit, and part of WBC's rural verge management plan. I'm aiming to try to improve these verges for wildlife. Just so you can see where the Project's targets are.

West Berkshire Wild Verges - Tilehurst rural verge coverage, Natural England Habitat Networks, habitat connectivity, and possible connectivity gains



Created for Tilehurst PCNP by Simon Claybourn (West Berkshire Wild Verges Project Officer) 26/01/2023



Legend

- Hedgerow Possibilities
- Hedgerow/Tree Canopy Network
- Council Greenspaces
- AONB
- Tilehurst_Parish_Boundary
- Habitat_Networks__Natural_England
Fragmentation Action Zone
- Habitat Restoration-Creation
- PHI Habitats
- Network Enhancement Zone 1
- Network Enhancement Zone 2
- Network Expansion Zone
- Restorable Habitat
- West_Berkshire_Rural_Road_Verges



Basemap ©OpenStreetMap contributors
Data based on satellite imagery from Imagery ©2023 CNES / Airbus, Getmapping plc, Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky, Landsat / Copernicus, Maxar Technologies, The GeoInformation Group, Map data ©2023