

Countryside and Environment
Working Group

Upper Clatford Parish Council

Neighbourhood
Development Plan –
Evidence Document

**Sites of Importance for Nature
Conservation (SINCs)**

UC12 – Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC's)

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UC12 SINC's (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation)¹

UC12.1 Introduction

A SINC is a non-statutory designation used by Local Authorities to identify areas with some intrinsic ecological or natural value such as wildlife-rich areas. Selection takes into consideration important, distinctive and threatened species and habitats. The presence of non-statutory designations are taken into account with regard to planning and land management decision making. There are 4093 SINC's in Hampshire, representing 9% of the land area².

This chapter will describe why our SINC's have been designated.

UC12.2 Community evidence

Results from the NDP survey showed that 71% of respondents consider SINC's to be very important and 23% fairly important, with only 1% viewing them as slightly unimportant. No comments were submitted that questioned the presence or value of SINC's but numerous comments supported their purpose in delivering conservation of wildlife and rural character ("SINC's are vital to ensure a local character" and "the SINC area should be extended").

UC12.3 Summary of existing SINC's

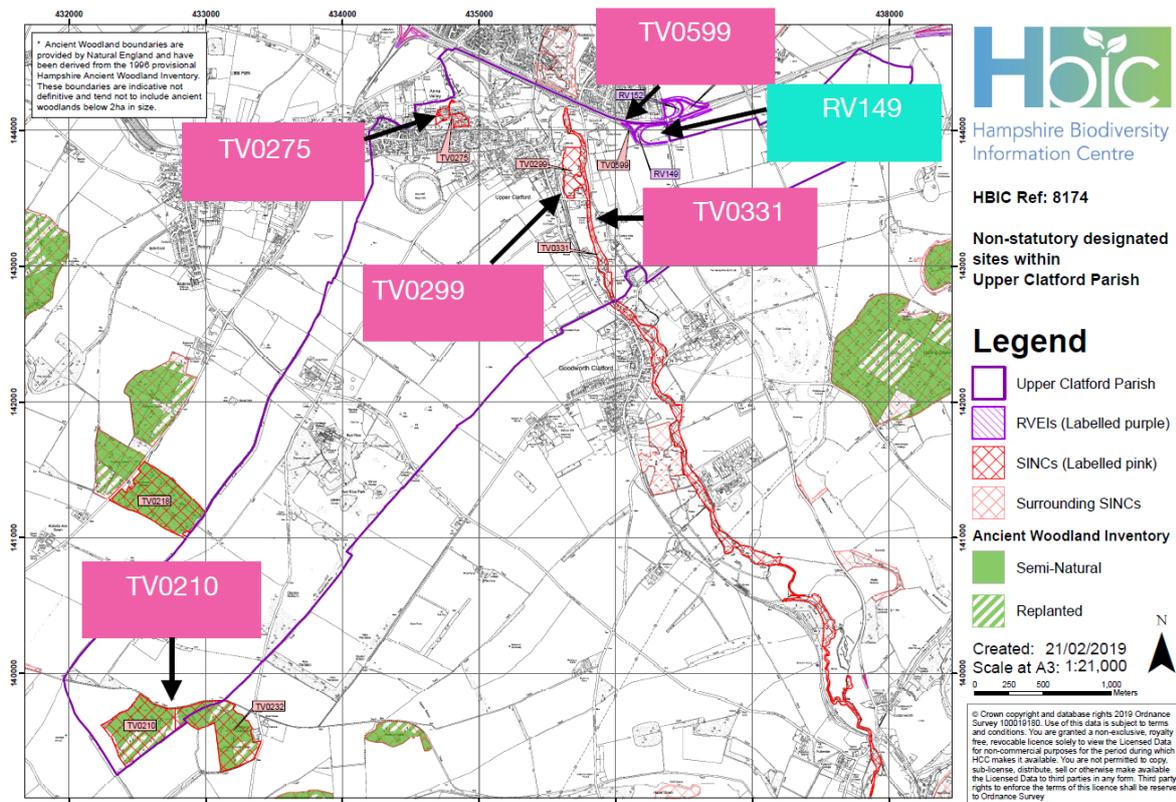
The Parish contains the following SINC's:

- TV0299. Church Meadow
- TV0275. Anna Valley Watercress Beds
- TV0210. Upper Oakcut Copse
- TV0331. River Anton
- TV0599. Adjacent to the A303

In addition, the Parish has a Road Verge of Ecological Importance (RV149). An adjoining SINC **TV0232 Clatford Oakcuts** extends into the neighbouring parish of Goodworth Clatford

¹ All photographs have been taken by John Baxter and Rob Hall who have granted permission to use them in the NDP.

² www.hants.gov.uk



Map 1: Location of currently registered SINCs

Proposal: The Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan states that “the concept of sustainable development embodies the principles of not only preventing destruction or damage, but also taking the opportunity to enhance biodiversity. Also important is the adoption of the precautionary principle: if in doubt about the environmental effects of the development, avoid the development”. All future Parish development, particularly within close proximity of our SINC, should adhere to these principles.

UC12.4 The Church Meadow (TV0299)³

This covers 3.96 acres and is designated under SINC criteria 2A and 5B.

- 2A refers to agriculturally unimproved grassland (composed of a mixed assemblage of indigenous species in essentially semi-natural communities which has been allowed to develop without the major use of herbicides or inorganic fertilisers).
- 5B refers to fens, flushes, seepages, springs, inundation grasslands etc. that support a flora and fauna characteristic of unimproved and waterlogged (seasonal or permanent) conditions.

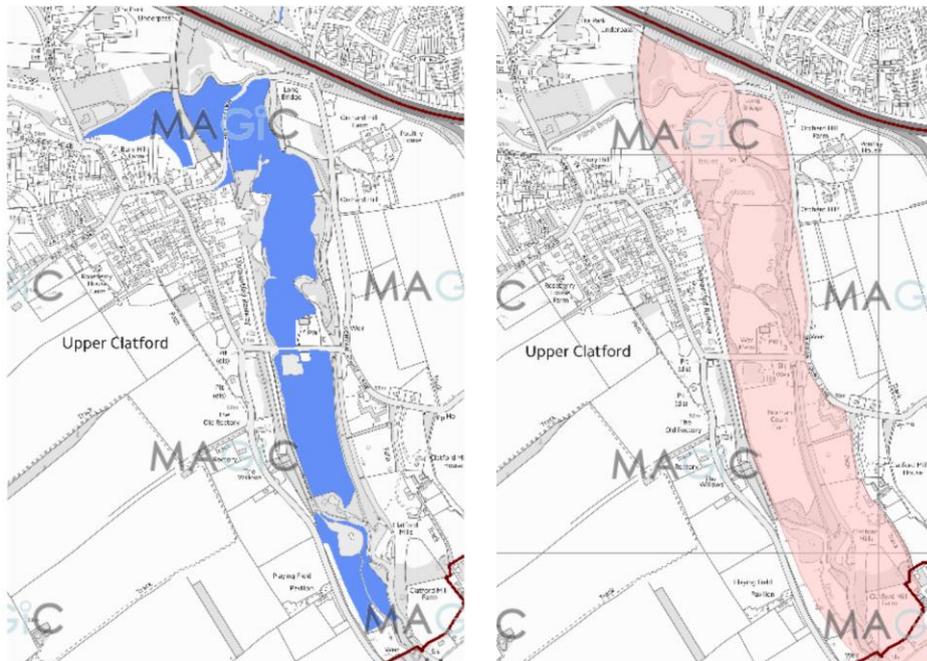
³ OS grid ref: 35704370



Photo 1: Aerial photo from the south, of TV0299 - Church Meadow in Map2 below

The maps below show the Floodplain Grazing Marsh (blue) and an Environmentally Sensitive Area⁴ (pink) which cover large areas of the River Anton and Pillhill Brook valley floors outside of the Church Meadow SINC.

Developers must be particularly mindful of the ecological importance of these areas. A resident commented that “the water meadows to the north of the settlement boundary are very important for a variety of wildlife such as deer”.



Map 2: Floodplain habitat classification: Grazing Marsh (blue) and an Environmentally Sensitive Area (Pink)

⁴ <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/a5b0ccc4-a144-4027-91fa-49084ff07da2/environmentally-sensitive-areas-England>

UC12.5 The Watercress Beds (TV0275)⁵

Located in Anna Valley, this SINC is designated under criteria 5A and 6A. A resident commented that “we note the watercress beds along Foundry Road are included in the SHELAA, we would be strongly



Photo 2: Aerial photo of TV0275 - Anna Valley Watercress Beds

against any development on this site because it would destroy a conservation area and also take away a small local business” 5A designation covers areas of open freshwater (such as lakes, ponds, canals, rivers, streams and ditches) which support outstanding assemblages of floating, submerged, or emergent plant species, invertebrates, birds or amphibians.

6A supports one or more notable species⁶. Of note is the presence of *ranunculus penicillatus* (stream water-crowfoot), a Hants priority species⁷.

UC12.6 Upper Oakcut Copse (TV0210)⁸

Situated in open countryside towards the southern Parish boundary, the copse is designated under SINC criteria 1A/1B. The map below shows Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland (marked green) and Ancient Replanted Woodland (marked brown).

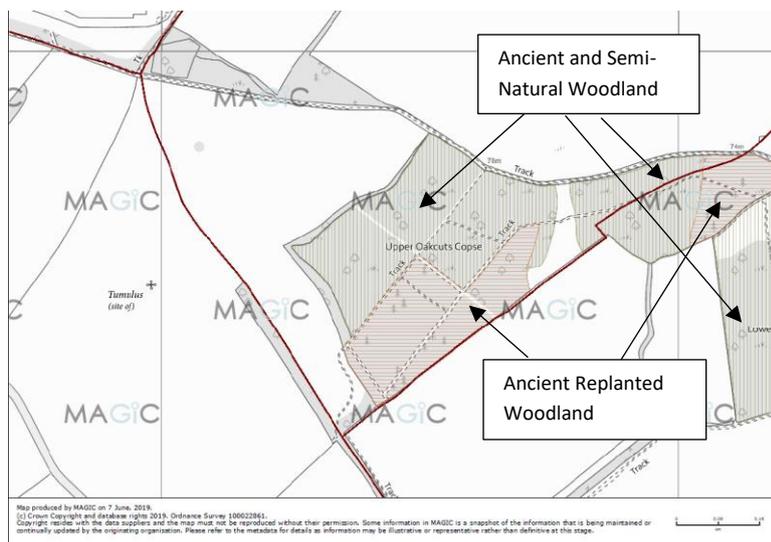
⁵ OS grid ref: 34904410

⁶ Notable species include Red Data Book species, Nationally Scarce species, species covered under Schedules 1,5 and 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Annex 1 of the EC Bird Directive 79/409 and Annex II & 1V of the EC Directive 92/43/EEC 'The Habitats Directive', and those covered by the Bern, Bonn and Ramsar Conventions. Notable species will also include species which are considered 'County Rare' or 'County Scarce'. County Rare = those species recorded in 1% or less tetrads in Hampshire or either of the two vice-counties (11 & 12) separately. County Scarce = 4% or less tetrads.

⁷<http://documents.hants.gov.uk/biodiversity/HampshireBiodiversityActionPlanVolume1.pdf>

Appendix II

⁸ OS grid ref: 32503950



Map 3: Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland (hatched in green) and Ancient Replanted Woodland (hatched in brown). Note – some of the identified woodlands are outside the Designated Area.

Habitat classes:

- 1A: Ancient semi-natural^{9;10} woodlands (ASNW)
- 1B: Other woodland where there is a significant element of ancient semi-natural woodland surviving.

ASNW is land which has been continuously wooded since at least 1600 and is usually of much older origin¹¹. An estimated 50% has been lost in Hampshire in the past 70 years¹². Adjacent land use must be carefully considered. When new housing developments are sited adjacent to ASNW, degradation can be caused by a number of factors: vandalism of trees, encroachment, visitor pressure and damage by pets to ground nesting mammals and birds. Where ASNW is next to farmland, livestock may have regular access, damaging ground flora and the coppice layer, and preventing natural regeneration.

UC12.7 River Anton (TV0331)¹³

Chalk rivers are particularly important for their assemblages of plant species: the clarity of the water provides the light needed to stimulate luxuriant growth. Beds of river water crowfoot, lesser water parsnip and water starwort are host to a variety of invertebrates such as flatworms, snails, water bugs and beetles and are of national and international importance.

⁹ Ancient - refers to woodlands which have developed particular ecological characteristics as a result of their long continuity. Those identified to date which are over 2ha are included on the Hampshire Inventory of Ancient Woodlands (Provisional)

¹⁰ Semi-natural - modified types of vegetation in which the dominant and constant species are accepted natives to Britain and that locality, and the structure of the community conforms to the range of natural vegetation types.

¹¹ Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Test Valley May 2008, para 2.13

¹² Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Test Valley May 2008, para 2.14

¹³ OS grid ref: 36504150

Listed under SINC criteria 5A/6A, described above in UC12.5, the River Anton supports species including *arvicola amphibius* (Northern Water Vole), *austropotamobius pallipes* (White-Clawed Crayfish) and *lutra lutra* (European Otter).

- **Water voles** occur most frequently along the fringe of densely vegetated watercourses. Habitat destruction due to riparian engineering works or development is a continuing threat and guidance is issued in chapter UC8.
- **The white-clawed crayfish** is the only freshwater crayfish indigenous to the British Isles but its future in Hampshire is very uncertain; it is believed to be critically endangered and is unlikely to survive in the county unless factors responsible for its decline can be addressed. The marked decline has occurred since the introduction of several species of North American crayfish into Britain's open waters. The American species have been aggressive competitors and carry a fungal disease lethal to the native species.
- **The otter**, formerly widespread throughout the UK, underwent a rapid decline between the 1950s and 1970s and was considered absent from most of England in the 1980s. Viable populations remained in south-west England, Wales and Scotland, from where natural recovery and expansion is now occurring - very much to be encouraged.

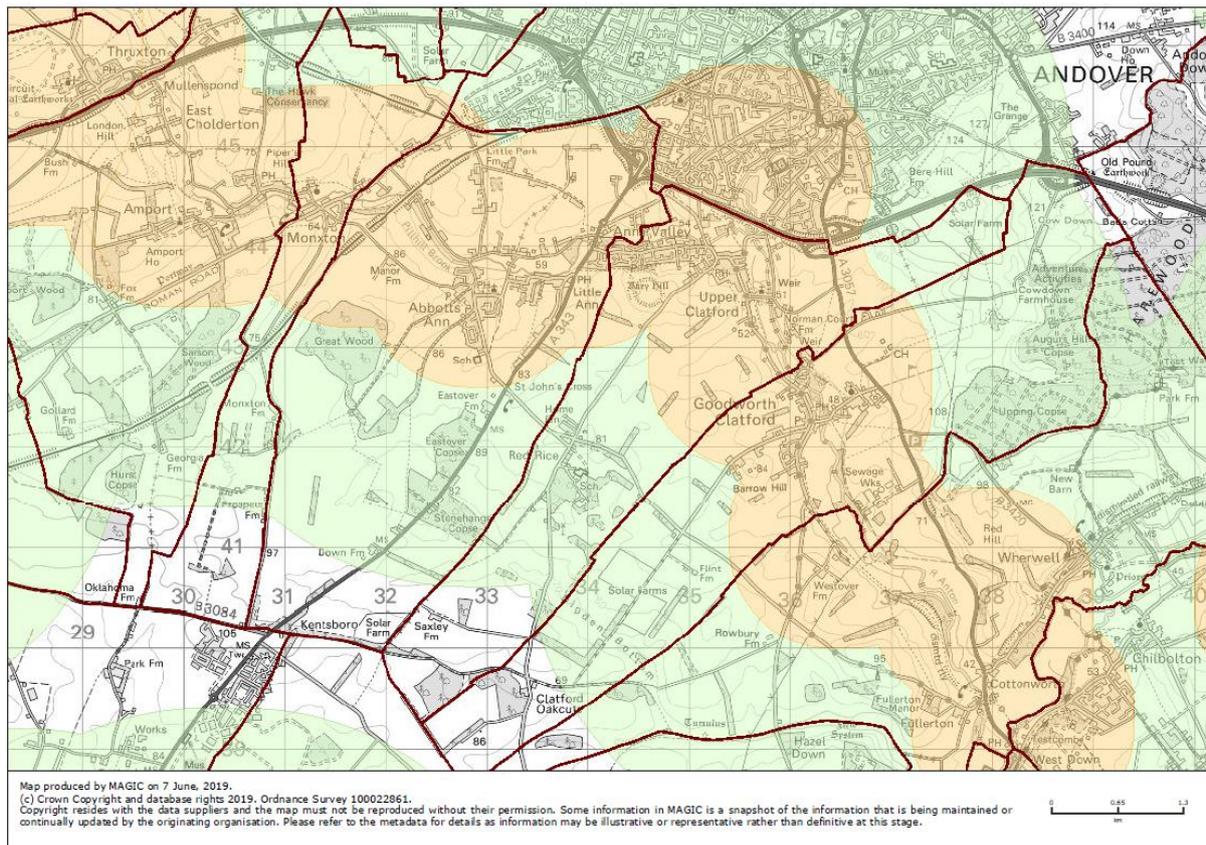
UC12.8 Land adjacent to the A303 (TV0599)

TV0599 qualifies as a SINC under criteria 2A and 6A, agriculturally unimproved grasslands and sites which support one or more notable species. Its 1.18 acres supports Lotus Tenuis (Narrow-leaved Bird's-Foot-Trefoil).

RV149 is home to chalk flora.

Careful evaluation will be required before approval is granted for works such as telecommunications masts, lay-bys and road signage installations.

UC12.9 Climate Change



Map 4: Climate Change Vulnerability Buffer map

Natural England has developed a model¹⁴ that allows non-specialists to assess the vulnerability of areas of priority habitat to climate change based on widely accepted principles of climate change adaptation for biodiversity. The assessment provides a high-level indication of the relative vulnerability of priority habitats to climate change in different places. It identifies why areas are vulnerable and which possible interventions can have the biggest impact in increasing resilience in a changing climate.

The Climate Change Vulnerability Buffer map above shows that Parish SINC's lie largely within the amber medium band. Each priority habitat was assigned with a classification denoting its relative sensitivity to direct climate change impacts, based on an increase in temperature of the order of 2°C to 4 °C and the possibility of both more droughts and more high rainfall events. The medium band largely includes habitats at risk from hydrological changes alongside a wide range of changes from all climate change variables with some loss of extent or increase in unfavourable conditions by 2050.

The UK Biodiversity Partnership adaptation principle of “reduce”¹⁵ sources of harm not linked to climate” could assist in preserving priority habitat and a cautious approach to “harm” should be adopted when considering planning applications.

¹⁴ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5069081749225472>

¹⁵ Hopkins *et al.*, 2007

UC12.10 New SINC opportunities

Meadow, south of All Saints Church.

Access to the meadow located to the south of the Church Meadow was recently granted to EC group volunteers. The landowner has previously reported the presence of water voles within the boundaries of this meadow. There have also been reports of water voles within the boundaries of this SINC. On a site visit on 18th June 2019, a water vole survey was carried out and several signs of vole habitation were identified, including pathways in vegetation and potential burrows in the bank.



Photo 3: Signs of vole habitation – Several possible water vole burrows along the riverbank. Proximity to water and size indicate vole habitation (4-8 cm diameter is ideal).

A resident commented that “the water meadows to the north of the settlement boundary are very important for a variety of wildlife such as deer”. Vegetation includes orchids, water mint, iris.

Highly structured riparian zones and riverbeds are most important for the conservation of specialist species, requiring structures such as woody-debris, large areas of stone and gravel beds, undercuts and extension of tree roots into the channel, overhanging vegetation as hiding places, and high natural in-stream debris content. These features can be seen in the river channel at this site (Photo 4 and 6 below).



Photo 4: Upstream view of river south of Church Meadow showing ideal habitat for aquatic vertebrates and invertebrates

The organism present in a river can be used to provide an indication of river quality. The Biological Monitoring Working Party (BMWP) recommends a biological classification system for use in national surveys, to assess the biological condition of the river. The BMWP scoring system¹⁶ is a method of assessing water quality using the families of aquatic micro-invertebrates present in the river as indicator species. Species are allotted points from 1-10 to rank their importance in the ecosystem, the less tolerant a group of insects is to pollution, the higher the ranking and the points allotted if they are present. Finding high ranking invertebrates in a river therefore reflects the biological health, and lower levels, organic pollution.

On a single site visit, the following invertebrate species were found in the river by wading downstream and overturning stones (Photo 4 below).



Cased Caddisfly Larva (Score 7, BMWP)

¹⁶ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/rra.2686>



Stonefly Nymph
(Score 10 BWMP)



Freshwater Shrimp
(Score 6 BWMP)



Mayfly nymph
(Score 10 BWMP)

Photo 5: Invertebrates found in river on 18th June 2019

In addition to in the above vertebrates found, bullhead fish were seen in the river.



Photo 6: Bullhead fish (Cottus gobio), seen 18th June 2019

This species is an indicator of good water quality, as they prefer well-oxygenated, fast flowing streams with stony substrates. The Bullhead is a good indicator of the general health of the system and of limited channel modification.

Photo 7: Bullhead fish (Cottus gobio), seen 18th June 2019

The photos that follow provide an indication of the abundance of life within this area.

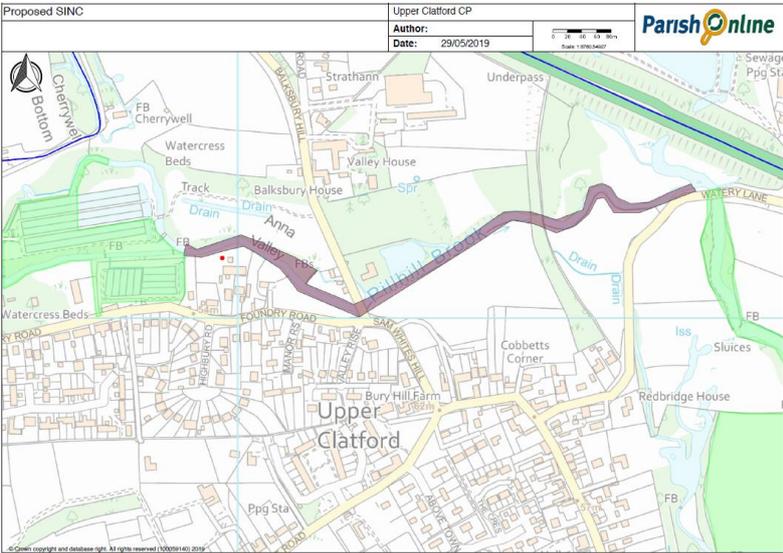




Photo 8: The field study group and examples of flora and fauna

Proposal: although this area is not considered to be at risk of development, a formal application to HBIC for SINC status will be considered by the Parish Council.

The Pillhill Brook



An application for SINC designation has been made for the stretch of the brook and bankside habitat (marked in grey in Map 5) located between the Anna Valley watercress beds and the confluence of the brook with the River Anton.

Map 5: Location of the proposed SINC along the Pillhill Brook above and below Balksbury bridge

The Pillhill Brook is of local ecological interest and is known to support a range of species including otter and water vole. Middle reaches of the Pillhill Brook are characterised by riverside vegetation and public access is available via the Balksbury Bridge playing field or the footpath to Andover.



Photo 9: Photo taken from Watery Lane, looking west.

The Upper Clatford section of the HBIC network opportunities map shows that the Pillhill Brook provides an *unbroken* corridor linking the east and west of the parish, plus SINCs TV0331 and TV0275.



Map 6: HBIC map showing core non-statutory networks (orange) and network opportunities (pink) between existing SINCs

Ecological networks can provide a connected collection of refuges for wildlife. Establishing a network will enable biodiversity to recover from recent declines and create a more resilient natural environment¹⁷. Network aims include the enhancement of connections between sites, either through physical corridors or through 'stepping stones', and the *creation of new sites*.

Pillhill Brook and its banks should be included in policies encouraging its management within a planning context. Designation as a SINC would recognise its value for allowing migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of the priority species it supports, both within the boundaries of the proposed SINC and between those existing.

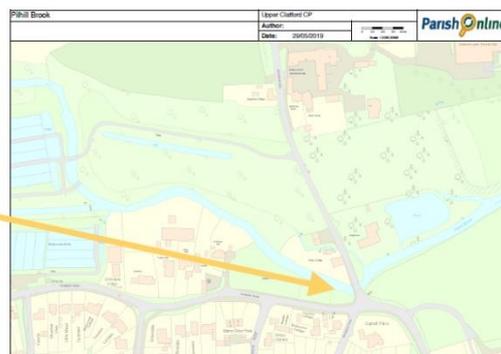
¹⁷ paragraph source

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/environment/biodiversity/informationcentre/information>

Access to a short stretch of the brook is available through the Parish-owned Balksbury Bridge playing field; despite regular human activity, this area has revealed the presence of important species. The remaining stretch of brook is inaccessible to the general public and currently offers quieter, darker and more remote habitat; it would be entirely reasonable to suggest that this offers benefits at least equal to the public-access stretch.

Local evidence that justifies an application for SINC status is as follows:

- *Otter*. Protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), they are a European Protected Species under Annex IV of the European Habitats Directive, are listed as a Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and a Near Threatened species on the global IUCN Red List. The TVBC Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2008) states ‘further survey of the River Test, and other watercourses in the Borough, is required to gain a better understanding of the local otter population. Once this is known, potential barriers to re-colonisation can be identified, and steps can be taken (e.g. habitat enhancement works), to encourage re-colonisation.’ Designating the Pillhill Brook as a SINC could protect a known population of otters within the Borough by considering important bankside vegetation and habitat in the planning process and would align with the intentions stated in the LBAP.



Map 7: Showing location that photographs above were taken from the Balksbury Bridge playing field at 11:15am on 9th May 2019.

- Water Vole.** Reported as “present throughout”¹⁸ this stretch of the Pillhill Brook, this species is protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and is listed as a Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. The National Water Vole Database and Mapping Project (March 2019) ran from 2008 to 2017 and found that water vole distribution across England and Wales had declined by 26% between January 2006 and December 2017. The species needs urgent help to survive in the UK following huge declines as a result of habitat loss, pollution of waterways, industrialisation of agriculture, housing development and predation by American mink. The Pillhill Brook is no less susceptible and designation as a SINC would aid in reducing such pressures. The Test Valley Biodiversity Action Plan declares that water voles are known to occur on a number of watercourses including the River Anton, of which the Pillhill Brook is a tributary, however the full extent of their distribution is not known. Water vole presence in this stream could therefore comprise a significant part of the population within the Borough. The BAP then advises that in locations where water voles are found, the habitat needs to be managed sympathetically. It also notes that it would be helpful to target advice to the owners of land (and stretches of riverbank) between existing populations in order to encourage the restoration of suitable habitat and re-colonisation. SINC designation would assist with these aims.
- White Clawed Crayfish.** The UK’s only native freshwater crayfish, *austropotamobius pallipes*, is listed in Appendix III of the Bern Convention and Annexes II and IV of the EC Habitats Directive. In the UK it is protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and is categorised as “Endangered” on the global IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Due to conservation concerns, reports of white-clawed crayfish cannot be provided but the largest population in Hampshire is reportedly in the Upper Itchen, though individuals can be found in the Test. As the Pillhill Brook is a tributary of the Anton and in turn the Test, maintaining any crayfish sub-population here safeguards genetic diversity. The precautionary principle must be applied in light of the existential threat facing white-clawed crayfish.
- Stream Water-Crowfoot.** *Ranunculus penicillatus* is a Priority Species in the Biodiversity Action Plan for Hampshire. The county is classified as a ‘National Stronghold’ for the species, where the threats are low and the population stable but uncommon. Nationally, it is listed in the UK BAP as a ‘species of national conservation concern’. The primary habitat of water-crowfoot (as described in the Hampshire BAP) is chalk streams. Other stretches of the Pillhill Brook have been designated as SINC’s due to the presence of stream water-crowfoot, under Criteria 6A, “supports one or more notable species.”

Damage to important habitat has elevated Parish Council concern to such an extent that an application for SINC protection has already been initiated. Supportive community evidence includes a survey comment that “the SINC area should be extended to cover the fields and the whole wood bordering the Pillhill Brook which provides a wildlife corridor”. Recent activity includes:

- Historic Landfill site disturbance.** This site is located to the western end of the proposed SINC and adjacent to SINC TV0275. It was licensed (4/98 FTV41) from 1991 to 1993 for Inert Waste. Aerial footage shown below was taken in April 2019 and indicates activity within this

¹⁸ Vice-chair of The Anton River Conservation Association, TARCA

landfill area with no known assessment of possible adverse effects upon the brook or existing SINC TV0275.

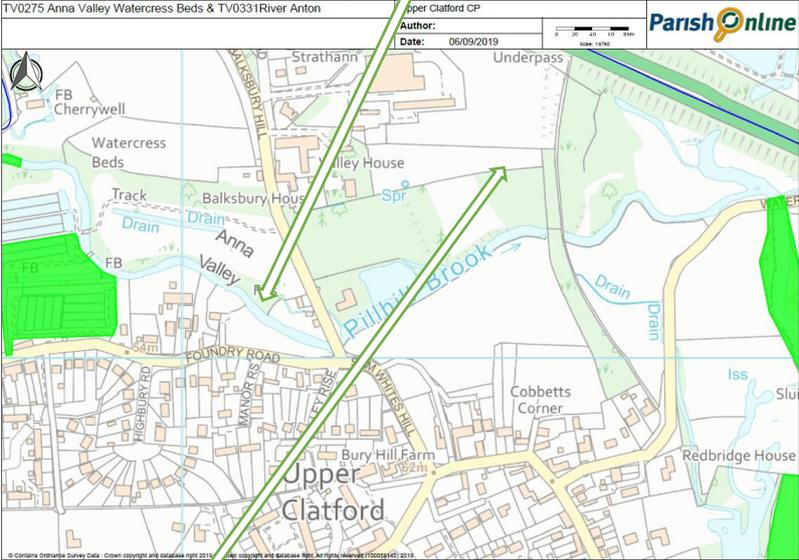


Map 8: Location of land disturbance near to the SINC TV0275 and proposed SINC "The Pillhill Brook"

In Spring 2018 the northern bank of the Pillhill Brook was stripped clear of trees and vegetation. Previously an impenetrable area highlighted on HBIC's priority habitat map as an area of probable habitat, an open space now exists.



Photo 10: In Spring 2018 the northern bank of the Pillhill Brook was stripped clear of trees and vegetation. Previously an impenetrable area highlighted on HBIC's priority habitat map as an area of probable habitat, an open space now exists.



Map 9: Area map showing location of SINC in relation to disturbances



Photo 11: Ditches were recently 'cleared' to the east of the Balksbury Hill road with the assistance of heavy machinery, potentially creating a risk of sediment and siltation reaching the brook.

Proposal: SINC status for the Pillhill Brook will provide modest support in the planning process that will aim to benefit protected species and the fragile habitat and water quality on which they rely. In advance of any decision on SINC status, a precautionary principle will be adopted in determining planning decisions