

Sturminster Wildlife Corridor

AKA. WHITCHURCH
RAILWAY PATH –
NORTH END

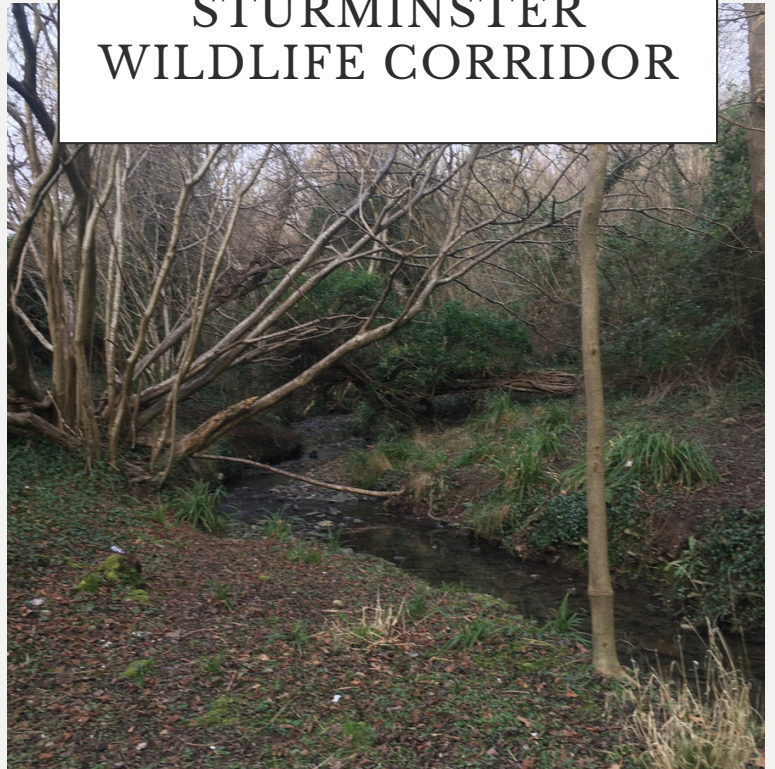
Written by Maria Siepe

Entrance at Manston Close towards
Hazelbury

As you walk up the path facing south there is a patch of woodland on the RHS that borders the back of people's houses. Much of this area is used by young people who have adapted the land into a course for bikes and skateboards. Most walkers do not enter this area, although it's great for wildlife. Locals report regular deer sightings here at night. It is prone to littering, so a great place for a litter pick.



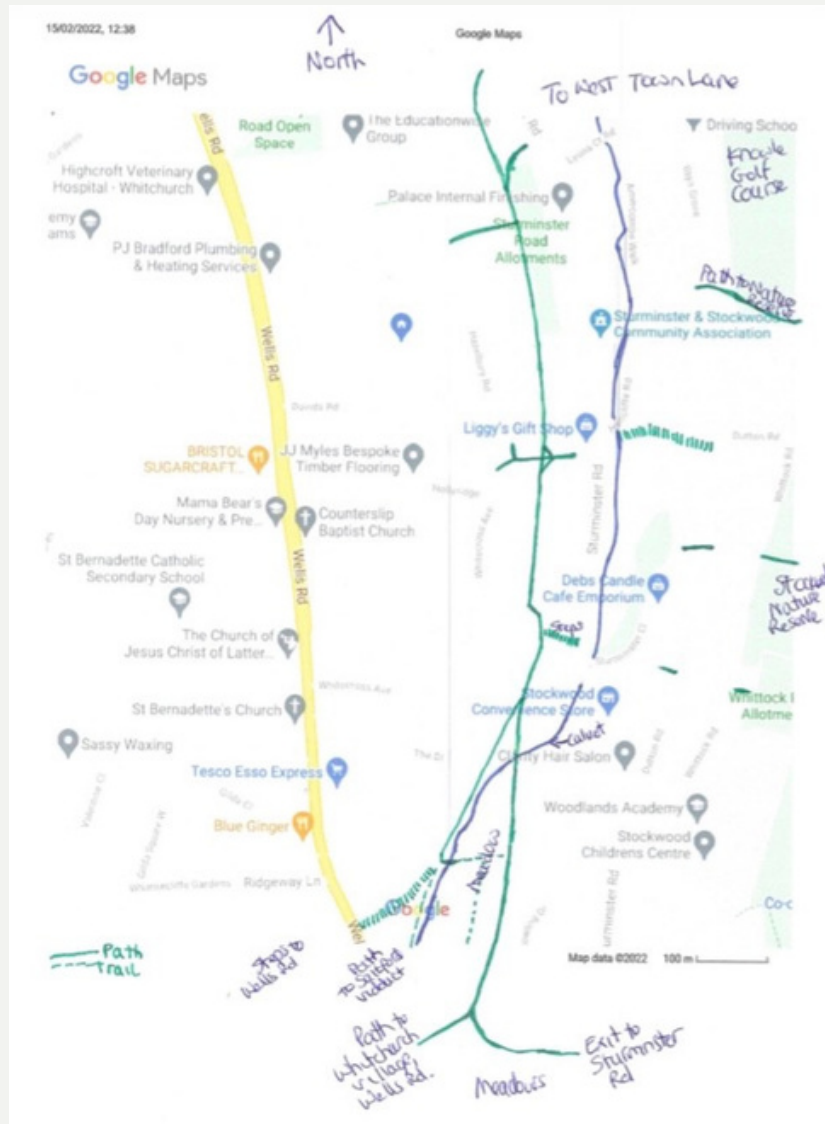
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At the end of this patch there is a path on RHS to Hazelbury Rd. Just off this path is the remains of a field that many years ago was grazed by horses. There are the foundations of some old buildings, but everything is being taken over by nature. The rough field is still walkable but shrinking and gradually being taken over by bramble. There is a trail regularly used by deer and signs of fox and badger. There are a few fruit trees. Not many people visit this area as it no longer connects further on so it has become a dead end. Back to the railway path there is another trail that leads down to Sturminster Rd and the entrance to the allotments. This path is regularly used by people as a cut through to Hazelbury Rd.

Hazelbury Rd to Longreach Rd.

Continuing south from the Hazelbury path entrance, the verge on LHS borders the allotments and is only a few feet wide and overgrown. In the past there has been flytipping along this border, but most is now half buried by vegetation and soil. There are several mature fruit trees on this side (apples, plums, bullaces). The RHS side is a steep embankment that borders the overgrown field up above and there are several clear animal trails down to the railway path from above. A large section of this has been taken over by Cotoneaster-a Garden escapee. About 20-30 feet alongside the path there is a muddy patch which in winter, if there has been enough rain, becomes a small brook that flows north but ends at the Hazelbury path. In summer it is just a muddy patch. The ditch can become silted over and the brook may flow onto the railway path when there has been a lot of rain. Parks have been asked to dig out this ditch to enable the flow.



Further on, just before the Longreach Grove path entrance, the RHS embankment levels off and the woodland there backs onto gardens. The back end of this patch used to connect with the overgrown field off Hazelbury but animals are still able to get through. There has been some serious flytipping at the back, probably from one of the houses. Parks have been asked to clear this especially because of the environmental hazards.

The path along the exits to Longreach grove on the LHS is narrower here with a path to Whitecross Avenue on the RHS and an underpass to Sturminster Rd.

Longreach Grove to Sturminster Steps

Past these pathways the woodland on the LHS widens out and the bank starts to rise both sides creating a woodland tunnel effect. Animal trails have made it just about possible to walk through parts of this woodland but people rarely walk here keeping to the main path. This woodland is used by children in the summer. It has been used as a cut through by some in the past from the Sturminster steps up ahead.

The path continues through these high banks until it bends round West to continue on. Just after this bend are steps leading down to Sturminster Road on LHS. There is a rail to help cyclists move their bikes up and down which is used. There are two benches on the steps to help walkers rest if needed up the steep steps. It is from one of these benches that it is possible to walk through the woods back towards Longreach Grove path.

The woodland from the path slopes down on LHS to Sturminster Rd. Not many people go into this area. This part of the wood is more overgrown and is where Brislington Brook emerges from the culvert in the hill. The Environment Agency maintains the brook from this side because it is a 'substantial flow'.



Sturminster Wood

At the bottom of the steps, it is possible to cross the road to Sturminster Close. This is where Brislington Brook has crossed underneath Sturminster Road and emerges from its culvert. I have a suspicion that animals are using this culvert to cross the road as the culvert has a raised concrete bank and water is not too deep or fast. Dead animals are rarely seen on the main road so this may be a safer passage and acts as a wildlife corridor between the two spaces. There has previously been otter spraint found near here and we've recently been checking this section of the river for otter signs.

The brook then continues north along Sturminster Road past a small wood on RHS and then through housing, then the back of Imperial Sports fields before crossing West Town lane in Brislington. Some evidence that the path is litter picked behind the sports fields. There are several bridges over the brook connecting houses with Sturminster Rd which is prone to littering and fly tipping. This area is neglected and not litter picked.



The wood on Sturminster Road is on a hill and bordered below by the brook between Hencliffe Rd and Sturminster Close. It is not visited by many though littering does show there are visitors. There is a green on Sturminster Close which leads to one entrance to the woods. From the green there are several paths that take you to the upper streets which connect with the Stockwood Nature Reserve. This wood does not seem to be managed and seems to have many mature trees including Oak.

There are steep steps up the other side of the wood on Hencliffe Rd which lead to a short road to the nature reserve. I have also found a trail in a gap on Lanesborough Rise that leads past the golf course and backs of houses straight into the woods of the Nature Reserve. This is used by locals but not known by many. The steps on Hencliffe Rd are badly littered. Someone told me they used to litter pick on these steps when Stockwood Litter picking group was more active but this seems to have been disbanded.

There is potential to connect paths from railway path woods through Sturminster Wood and Green with the nature reserve as a trail.



Sturminster Road

The lower ends of the woods between Sturminster steps and Cowling Drive backs onto Sturminster Rd where there is a bus stop and small greens with wood. The stream emerges from its culvert and travels down Sturminster Rd north until it crosses under the road. This area of woodland is prone to a lot of littering and flytipping which is rarely cleared.

Lower path from Sturminster Steps to the Meadows.

Back at Whitchurch railway path at the top of the steps to Sturminster Rd there are several sweet chestnut trees and several oaks have become established. Few people venture into the woods that slope down on LHS but this leads down to the culvert that emerges from the hill and follows the flow of the brook to along to the Sturminster Rd culvert. This wood is largely untouched and isolated with small amounts of littering thrown from the path above. It is overgrown but there are animal trails in several places up to the main path above.

Further along the railway path there is a newly constructed path on the RHS that follows the course of the stream to the meadows ahead. This path used to get overgrown every year but can now be kept clear to use. This has become very popular to use. There are 1-2 trails up to Whitecross Ave that locals use. The path ends at the lower end of the meadows and there is a bridge across the brook to return to the railway path- this can become very muddy at this point.

The stream on this lower path has Himalayan balsam along its banks. It might be useful to teach volunteers about 'Balsam bashing'. The culvert can be seen from the path and can sometimes get blocked by fallen branches and logs. It could benefit from a large mesh to prevent bigger stuff going through. The stream from this culvert is the responsibility of the parks department as it is considered by Environmental Health to have 'insubstantial' flow.

As the tunnel is quite high at this point I have wondered if it might be used by bats but I have no evidence of this.

Sturminster Steps to Cowling Drive

Back on the railway path, there are also several rough trails between the lower brookside path and the upper railway path which are only known and used by locals. It is possible to walk through the woods on the RHS of the Railway path down to the stream and cross over several bridges to the lower path. Some of these wooded areas still have the remnants of wire fences and barbed wire of the fields that used to enclose livestock.



The Railway path continues south towards paths that lead to Cowlin Drive on the LHS and the upper entrance to the meadow on RHS. This meadow is maintained by the parks department. There is a path down the meadow across the bridge which connects up some steps to Wells Rd, or right (north) with the lower brook path, or left (south) with a path through woods to the Salford viaduct. The steps up to Wells Rd have benches and can become very littered - another good spot for a litter pick. The bench at the top of the meadow is also prone to littering.

I have noticed Hemp Agrimony growing in the meadow edges and a large patch of pineapple weed at the entrance.

From the middle of the meadow there is a path south (LHS) that connects with Whitchurch village and is used by locals. Someone has placed paving slabs in muddier areas.

The path from Cowling Rd is badly prone to flytipping and they have bashed back bramble to dump it deeper in the woods where it lies thickly in places. The parks dept have been asked to remove this but it is likely this problem will continue unless the entrance into the woods is blocked. In summer and autumn when the brambles have grown thick and high people cannot access the woods here so they flytip on the path or the bin nearby.

Cowling Drive to Brislington Nursing Home

The next part of the railway path is bordered by trees and then bends left towards more meadows in front of Brislington Nursing Home. There is a path on RHS that connects with Wells Rd in Whitchurch Village and an exit from the path onto Cranbrook Rd in Stockwood. The meadows are maintained by parks department. The path then continues into BANES boundaries.