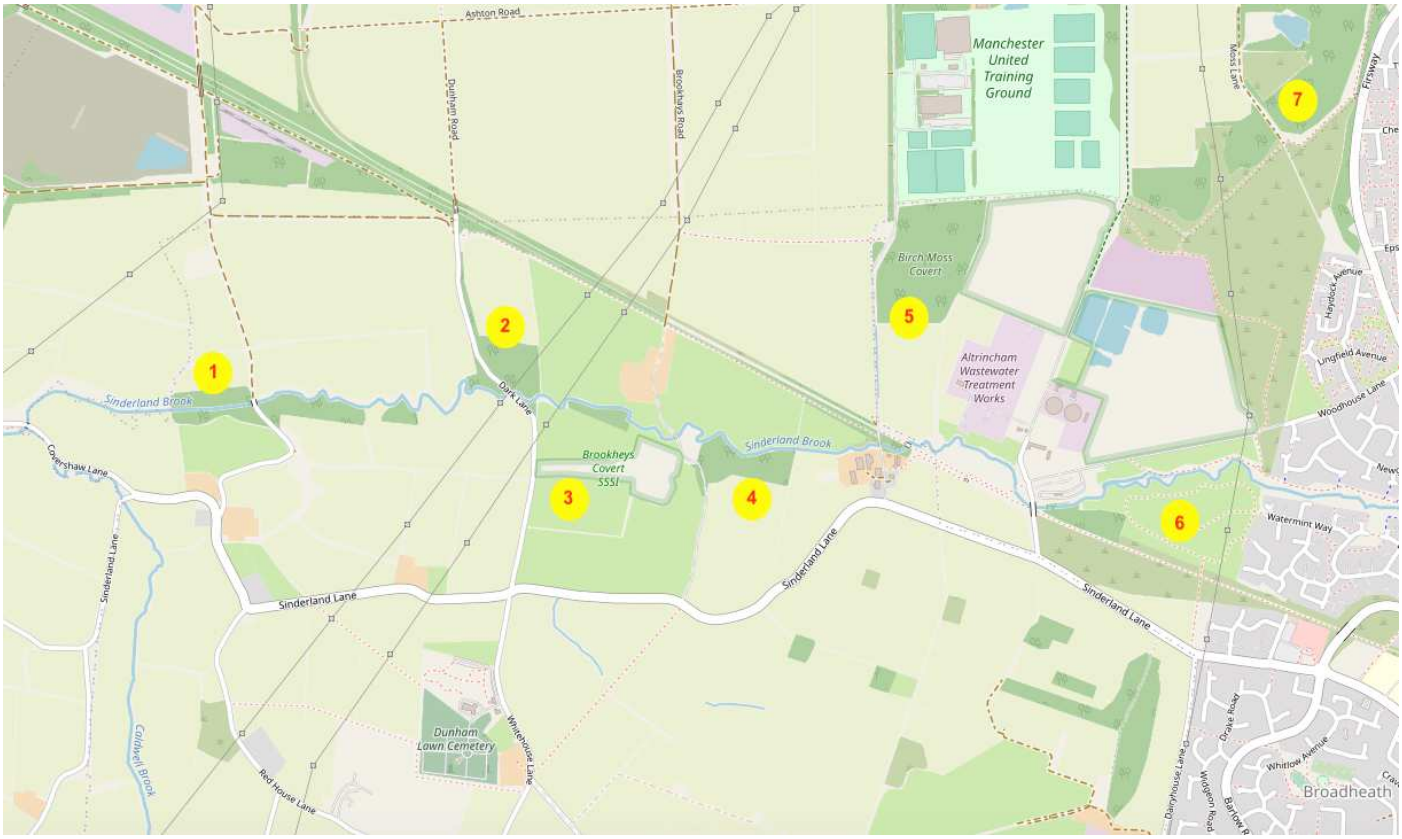
Sinderland Corridor



The Sinderland corridor runs from the Stamford Estate on the edge of Broadheath in the east and flows in a westerly direction to the end of the NT Dunham estate where Sinderland Brook becomes Red Brook and then into the Manchester Ship Canal which, at the point of entry, is also part of the Mersey river. Sinderland Brook is approximately the north edge of the NT Dunham estate and the south edge of the Carrington estate.

The map above shows the current 2020 reserves. From west to east the reserves are:

1 Sinderland Green Covert: Sight of Biological Interest. Habitats: Wetland, Woodland. 3.5 hectare (8.5 acres). There are 3 parts of the wood – south, north and east.

A medium sized broadleaved wood for the south Manchester fringe with 32 species of bird recorded. The wood extends to both sides of the Sinderland brook in part and has a small number of marl pit ponds through it. The canopy has poplar which has reached maturity. Also of note is a stand of bamboo that requires eradication. The ponds hold species such as marsh marigold and the long thin nature of the site next to a stream makes the site good for woodland birds. Invasive Himalayan balsam has affected the woods and is being brought under control. The brook that flows through the middle of the wood brings in balsam seeds from upstream areas so eradication is a continuous process. There is no public entry to the wood.

The 1839 Cheshire tithe map shows only the south wood. The north and east woods were planted around 1910. The brook between the north and south wood was 'canalised' i.e. straightened after 1910. The brook along the north side of the east wood retains its original meandering nature.

Black Poplars

Around the turn of the 19th century massive unplanned urbanisation was brought on by a boom in textile manufacture. Manchester became the first industrial city in the world and alongside the expanded manufacturing, the city became one of the most polluted. By 1913 many trees had died, suffocated by a layer of soot, sulphur-dioxide and other air pollutants, created by burning vast amounts of coal. Native black poplars tolerated these difficult conditions and thrived. They became a tree that championed the industrial landscape while giving people a green escape. In the 1930's, following the Wall Street Crash, Britain entered the Great Depression and unemployment soared. The Government and Manchester Parks and Cemeteries Committee collaborated on a project termed 'Unemployment Relief Works'. Men were hired to go out every day on bicycles with a bunch of poplar saplings and a small iron bar to create holes in the ground. This led to Manchester Poplars popping up in parks, towpaths and fields across the city region (aka Tree men on a bike!). Unfortunately this most Mancunian of trees is now a rare sight. In 2000 a virulent disease hit the Manchester Poplar and many died out. A number of mature black poplars exist on Sinderland Green and there are several fallen trees that provide dead wood habitats. There has been some discussion as to whether these are pure black poplars or hybrids. The pure black poplar tends to be less straight than the hybridised version. The straighter version provides a more valuable timber product and is more resistant to disease. To reproduce, male and female black poplars need to be sited close to each other. The fertilised seeds need to fall on damp ground, making river valleys perfect places for this species. But the drainage of the land for agricultural has made it difficult for these wetland trees and they have slowly disappeared from the landscape.

People

About a third of the way down on the south side of the east reserve is a crab apple tree planted in memory of Brian Tetlow (died 2009). Brian who came from a plant nursery background was a member of Cheshire Wildlife Trust (North Group) where he was an active member from the 80's up until 2006. He was a dedicated Reserves Coordinator and Recording Group member. He managed the planting of 1,000 trees near Dairy House Farm in the 80's. In the 90's he managed Dark Lane Woods (knotweed and balsam!) From 2003 he managed Sinderland Green. Brian, as did many local people, gave decades of voluntary service to maintaining the diversity of the local nature reserves.

2 Dark Lane Woods. 2 hectare (5 acres)

This area was originally a Victorian rubbish dump and many parts of the wood have been turned over by prospectors searching for Victoriana over the decades. The dump eventually regenerated to a natural condition with scrub and deciduous trees. The wood once had a circular path.

Dark Lane on the west side of the wood was originally a tramway used for the dumping of Manchester Corporation waste in the latter part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries.

3 Brookheyes Covert: Site of Special Scientific Interest. Habitats: Wetland, Woodland. 3 hectare (7.5 acre)

An ancient semi-natural woodland dominated by oaks, with frequent ash, birch and rowan with a large number of bird species. Canopy cover varies throughout the reserve and is at its most dense to the centre of the wood, away from the surrounding farmland. The understory is dense in places and is dominated by hazel, with frequent holly elder. Areas of bare ground and leaf litter are found throughout, and are associated with the most shaded parts of the wood. There are several inter-connected marl pit ponds present throughout the woodland. Some hold water while others remain as damp depressions, only holding water seasonally. Aquatic vegetation is limited to a small number of ponds, and includes common duckweed, iris and water violet. Most ponds are heavily shaded and are subject to fluctuating water levels, however, recent ditch and woodland management has helped improve their wildlife value.

The marl pits have a rich invertebrate fauna and the covert is well used by birds, some of which nest. Grey heron, kingfisher, kestrel, little owl, treecreeper, blackcap, spotted flycatcher, sparrowhawk, jay, and both great spotted and green woodpeckers are amongst the 57 species recorded.

Marl pits are a mixture of clay and calcium carbonate in use as a fertilizer from Roman times up to the middle of the 19th century when artificial fertilisers became available. The digging of the pits left uneven ground unusable for crops so the areas were abandoned. These areas, left undisturbed, became the wildlife havens we have today.

The woods are generally free of balsam and contains a permissive path.

The 1839 Cheshire tithe map shows both Brookheyes and the adjacent Hogswood.

4 Hogswood Covert: Ancient Woodland & Sight of Biological Interest. Habitats: Wetland, Woodland. 2 hectare (5 acres)

A damp, broadleaved woodland with several marl pits ponds, wet ditches & a rich ground flora. The canopy is dominated by oak, alder and crack willow, with a locally dense understory of hawthorn, holly and hazel. Tall herbs are associated with the wetter regions of the wood, and dominate the areas where fallen crack willow has opened up the canopy. Common nettle, bramble and bracken are frequent throughout.

The site is very similar to Brookheyes and could have been a SSSI but the rules state that there is a minimum distance between SSSi's and the separation here is only about 30m. There is no public entry to the wood.

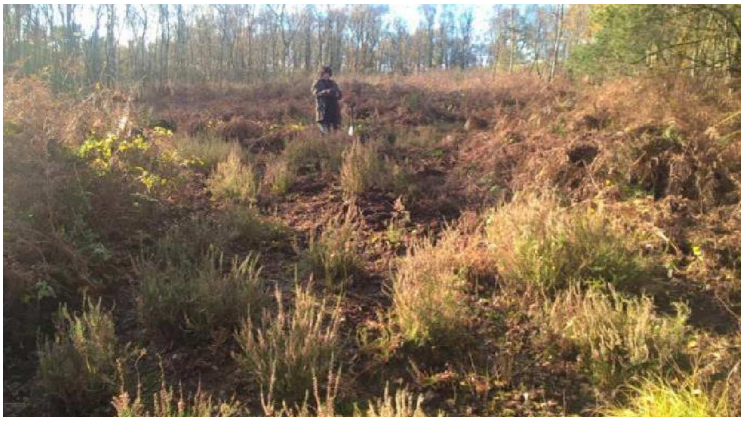
The brook to the north east corner was 'canalised' after 1910.

5 Birch Moss Covert 6 hectare (15 acres)

A large block of woodland for this area of south Manchester, the covert lies on a remnant of the peaty soil that once made up the extensive Carrington Moss. As the name implies, the wood is dominated by birch, with rowan and young sapling oak starting to establish. The stand is relatively even-aged with some glades and rides cut into it to try to break up the canopy and provide edge for species such as speckled wood butterfly. In places small patches of heather still occur where more light can penetrate through the leaf. The site is very good for birds such as long-tailed tits and for many varied species of fungus.

Although the name is Birch Moss Covert it is understood that the area was once a pine plantation which caught fire in the late 1970's. Birch, an early coloniser of such damaged areas, was quickly re-established.

In 2000 when the Aon training complex was under construction the east and south margins of the covert were 'bunded' with a waterproof membrane to raise the water level. Drainage schemes over the years have lowered the summer water levels of Carrington Moss. The north is already bunded by the training complex and the west is 'bunded' by Birch Road.



6 Stamford Community Woodland (incorporates Maljurs Covert):

Maljurs Covert Habitats: Wetland, Woodland. 1 hectare (2.5 acres).

A small mixed woodland bordering Sinderland Brook. The canopy is dominated by oak, alder and crack willow, with several ponds.

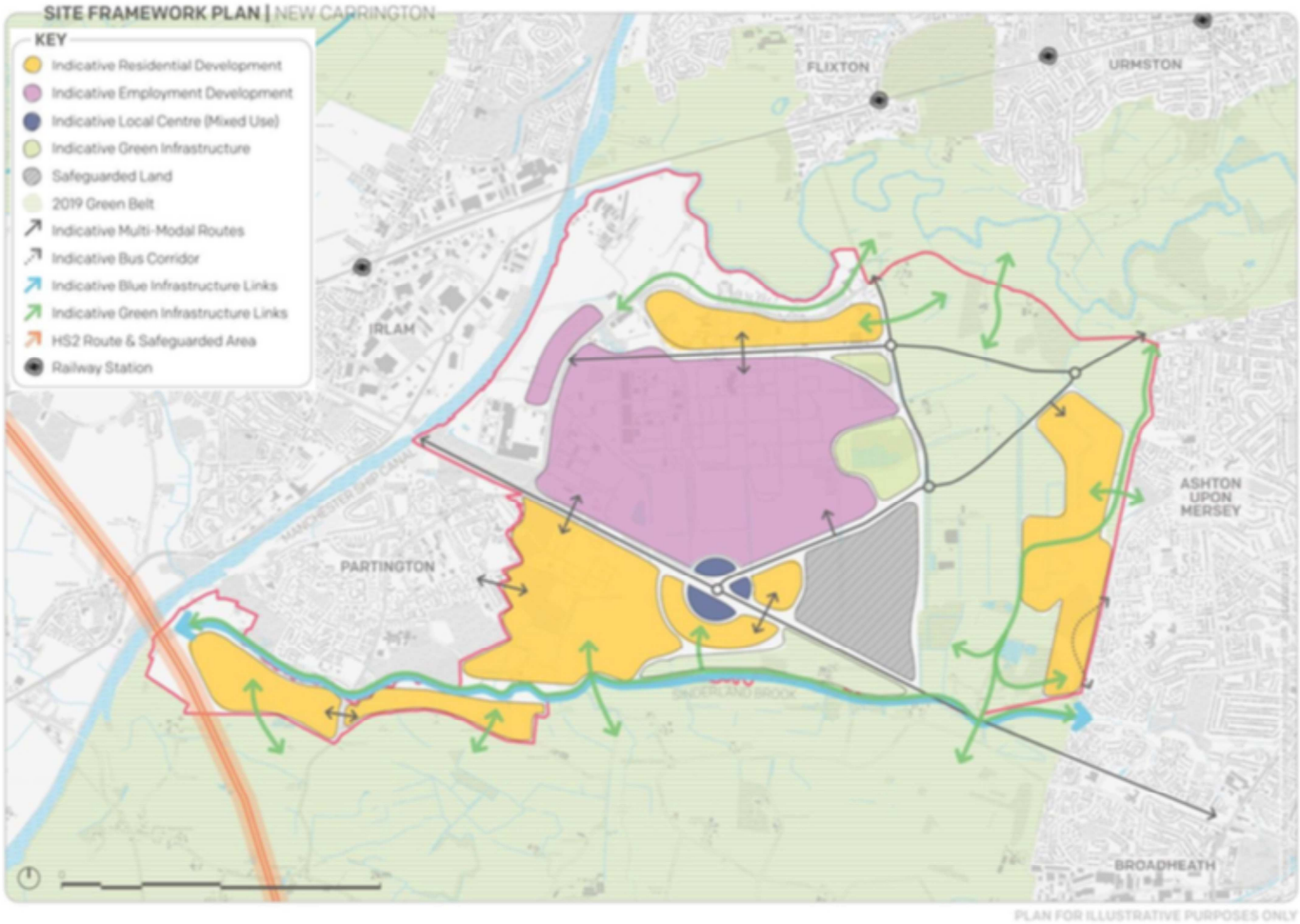
Stamford Brook Community Woodland 7 hectare (17.5 acres) A new plantation of oak, alder, willow, birch, with understorey species of hawthorn, hazel, field maple and rowan. There is considerable open amenity space with accessible footpaths.

7 Training Ground Woods and Ponds

Forming part of the Aon training complex which covers 44 hectares (108 acres). The part of the complex not used for training is 9.5 hectare (23 acres). A nature reserve of 4 hectare (10 acres) contains two ponds which are used as part of the waste water treatment system.

The Future?

To the north of the Sinderland corridor is Carrington Moss where much of the industrialised part the Moss has been vacated and the natural environment of the Moss has been left greatly degraded. The remaining green parts of the Moss are under threat from housing, commercial schemes and road developments (the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework).



However, this also brings some conservation opportunities. In response to the global Climate Crisis, planning laws are changing to require new developments to result in a "biodiversity net gain", meaning that any environmental loss must be compensated for through provision of greater environmental benefits. Discussions are ongoing around mitigation of the impact of future development on the Moss: some exciting possibilities are the potential to expand and join up the remaining reserves into wildlife corridors that extend across the Sinderland corridor, and creation of more natural wetland and river features that can help reduce risk of flooding.

Geoff Densham 18 August 2020