

Background

I am a PhD research scientist specialising in urban greenspace. My research focuses on the importance of urban greenspaces for ecological and environmental services, particularly the connectivity of these landscapes. I therefore have a strong reason to believe that the proposed planning of this work would be detrimental to the wider ecological community here.

The current greenspace, proposed to be replaced with a path, acts as a wildlife corridor. This site allows movement from the large agricultural fields, lakes, and proposed building site to the Colney Heath Common Land. Removal of this land would therefore prevent movement of many species, particularly invertebrate and mammals which I have personally observed using this pathway, leading to fragmentation of the greater habitat.

Habitat Fragmentation and Its Impacts

Habitat fragmentation occurs when large, contiguous areas of habitat are broken into smaller, isolated patches. This process has several detrimental effects on wildlife:

- **Isolation of Populations:** Fragmented habitats limit the movement of species, leading to isolated populations that are vulnerable to genetic bottlenecks, inbreeding, and local extinctions.
- **Disruption of Ecological Processes:** Key ecological processes, such as pollination, seed dispersal, and predator-prey interactions, are disrupted, reducing ecosystem resilience.
- **Restricted Access to Resources:** Wildlife may struggle to find food, mates, and shelter, impacting their survival and reproductive success.

The Role of Wildlife Corridors

Wildlife corridors are linear features of the landscape that facilitate the movement of species between habitat patches. They can take various forms, such as hedgerows, riverbanks, railway embankments, and purpose-built green bridges. The primary functions of wildlife corridors include:

- **Enhancing Connectivity:** Corridors connect fragmented habitats, allowing species to move freely across the landscape. This connectivity is vital for maintaining genetic diversity and reducing the risk of local extinctions.
- **Supporting Migration and Dispersal:** Many species require large territories or need to migrate seasonally. Corridors enable these movements, ensuring access to different habitats necessary for various life stages.
- **Facilitating Adaptation to Climate Change:** As climate change alters habitats, corridors allow species to shift their ranges in response to changing environmental conditions, promoting resilience.

Importance

In this site, the current housing density and the current car park have restricted these processes to this small corridor. Removal would have a wide range of negative effects, and it is vital that an environmental study is conducted to ensure that the full range of the site isolation is understood.