



## Local Wildlife Sites Project: Citation for Tapster Lane

<b>Site Name:</b> Tapster Lane	<b>Site Ref:</b> SP17Q2	<b>Grid Ref:</b> SP164711 – SP168701
<b>Local Authority Area:</b> Warwick DC		<b>Date Selected:</b> 25/9/20
<b>Ownership:</b> Public road/green lane	<b>Area:</b> 1.3 ha	<b>Management:</b> B
<p><b>1. Summary of importance.</b></p> <p>Tapster Lane is an ancient, winding and part sunken, narrow green lane in the parish of Lapworth, situated within the Arden district of west Warwickshire. The section south of the M40 motorway lies within a 2m deep hollow way, created by centuries of traffic ascending or descending the slope leading down to the Tapster Brook. The hedges are species rich, while the banks contain a high diversity of plants including ancient woodland indicators.</p>		
<p><b>2. Position in the landscape and access.</b></p> <p>Tapster Lane is situated in a rural area in the parish of Lapworth and extends from the parish church (in the heart of the modern village) for 1km south-south-east down to a ford in the Tapster Brook at the junction with Hole House Lane. From here Tapster Lane turns eastwards (and out of the present LWS) towards Yew Tree Farm. The latter section, and the first 400m of the lane from the church southwards is metalled, the rest unsurfaced. The surrounding land comprises mainly of small meadows and grass fields divided by tall hedges, with occasional small spinneys and planted woodlands. Settlement is thinly scattered and the only property on the lane itself is 'Far Croft', which now comprises of two separate houses (Far Croft and Tapster Barn) set within a good deal of private plantation woodland and gardens, situated south of the church at the southern end of the metalled section. The most intrusive feature of the local landscape is the M40 motorway which cuts through the Tapster Valley from north-west to south-east, effectively cutting off the southern quarter of the LWS. The two sections are connected by a bridge over the motorway.</p> <p>The lane is situated in a part of Warwickshire with, so far, a low number of designated sites. The most important of these is the network of streams crossing the area (including the Tapster Brook) which belong to the River Alne LWS. This LWS also includes several local pools and an area of wet woodland and grassland in the stream corridor, which begins 250m east of the ford and extends for 800m to Yew Tree Lane. Apart from the brook only one designated site abuts the lane, and this is Tapster Lane Meadows LWS situated on the east side halfway between the church and Far Crofts. Otherwise the nearest LWSs to the lane include Mountford Farm Meadow (500m north of the church), Packwood Estate (1.2km to the north-east), Turner's End Marsh (1.8km east), High Chimneys Meadows (2km south-east of the ford) and Bush Wood (1.4km south-south-east). In addition, the Stratford Canal pLWS a major wildlife corridor, is situated just 400m north-east from the northern end of the lane.</p> <p>The whole length of the lane has public access, while four further public footpaths cross or radiate off from the lane heading for all corners of the parish.</p>		
<p><b>3. Land Use History*.</b></p> <p>Tapster Lane has a very long history, with its first mention in documents in around 1280 as <i>Toppesford</i>, in other words the ford owned by or administered by a man called Toppa, which is the present ford at the southern end of the site. The lane was still <i>Tapsford Lane</i> in 1791 but by 1814,</p>		



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either reflecting local pronunciation or a mapping error, it had become Tapster Lane. In 1825 it was Tapster's Lane (WWA). The name however is likely to go back much further and date to the Anglo-Saxon period, as the lane was probably one of the main tracks through the area at the time and the ford to be an important crossing point. Lapworth itself was first mentioned as *Hlappawurthin* in a document of 816 and may mean the 'worth' or enclosed farmstead in the border lands. Even as late as the time of the Domesday Book (1086) most of Lapworth parish was still under woodland or waste and it indeed sat on the borders of a vast tract of thinly populated forest country that stretched away to the north and west. It also more anciently still was situated just within the border of the once independent kingdom of the *Hwicce*, that became a client kingdom of Mercia in 628 before being finally subsumed by that kingdom sometime around 700. The open lands of the Alne Valley to the south of Lapworth was occupied by one of the chief tribes of the *Hwicce*, called the *Stoppingas* and Lapworth would also have been on the border of their tribal lands. Lapworth would originally have comprised a single out-lying and isolated farmstead (there was never a nucleated settlement in the parish) and it seems quite likely that this was located on the hill somewhere close to the present parish church (the earliest part of which dates to soon after 1100). Tapster Lane may have been the original road leading from this farmstead to the Anglo-Saxon minster at Wootton Wawen, once probably the chief settlement of the *Stoppingas*.

The presence of ancient woodland indicator plants along its banks would suggest that the present narrow and meandering lane once wound its way through woodland, which may not have been finally cleared until after 1600. Certainly, by the time of the First Edition of the One Inch OS map (1831) the surrounding land is shown as all open, probably mostly pasture and hay meadow. It was also by this time illustrated as a minor cart road enclosed between hedges. Earlier, in 1825, another road which joined it on the south side of the church and known as Back Lane, was stopped up, and this road is now a public footpath from where the LWS begins. By the inter-war years when local roads were beginning to be tarred for motor car usage, it was left unsurfaced as no doubt it was considered too narrow and insignificant to warrant the expense. In later (post-1945) years, the first section of lane between the church and Far Croft was tarred but the rest was left in its natural state, being deemed by then unsuitable for motor vehicles. Its days as a through route for four-wheeled traffic was effectively ended by the construction of the M40 motorway through the Tapster valley in the late 1980's (with this section opening to traffic in December 1989). Previously to this, in around 1972-74, a Tapster Valley Preservation Society had been set up with much publicity to try and convince the authorities to re-route the proposed motorway, but to no avail. During construction of the deep cutting a large chunk of the lane was removed and the surviving section south of the new fenced bridge has deteriorated into little better than a footpath. There has also been some bad fly-tipping on this section by the bridge.

The lane and connecting footpaths were always very popular with walkers in years gone by, but since the motorway was built the area has lost some of its attractiveness, although the lane is still used by local people for recreation.

\*History derived from the VCH, Place Names of Warwickshire (EPNS, 1936), the Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser (1825) and Birmingham Daily Post (1972), and the Local History Group website.

### 4. Topography and Geology.

Tapster Lane has an undulating topography with altitudes varying mainly between 125 and 135m ASL, but south of the motorway dropping down to around 105m ASL into the valley along the Tapster Brook. Both this brook and its tributary stream, which crosses the lane 150m from its



northern end before descending to the valley, are headwater streams of the River Alne LWS. The under-lying geology consists of moderately acidic clays belonging to the Mercia Mudstone group, together with outcropping bands of Arden Sandstone.

### 5. Habitat Description.

The lane comprises of the boundary hedges together with the infrequently managed, or in some cases, unmanaged verges and their attendant ditches. The lane has been split into two section, to the north and to the south of the motorway, which crosses the area in a deep cutting.

#### 1) Tapster Lane North.

The hedges along this section are very variable in height, with some being tall and over-grown, while others are more managed and are shorter, having been either laid or regularly trimmed by the adjoining landowners. They are mainly rich in woody species, with Hawthorn being abundant and often locally dominant throughout this section, but with frequent to locally abundant Field Maple, Hazel, Blackthorn and Field Rose also prominent. Other shrubs noted include occasional to locally frequent Sycamore, Ash, Holly, Wild Plum, Pedunculate Oak, Dog Rose, Elder and English Elm, with rare Midland Hawthorn, Goat Sallow, Yew and Wych Elm. The old hedge bordering the Far Croft property has been removed and the boundary replanted with pure Holly which is kept trimmed low. There are also a few species of garden origin in the hedges around the vicinity of this property, including locally frequent Cherry Laurel and Rhododendron, with some of the former also near the church. Mature trees are scattered to the north of Far Croft, but from here southwards there are frequent Pedunculate Oaks. There is also a small grove of mature oaks covering a small wayside pit on the east side, between Far Croft and the stream to the north. Other trees present along the lane include occasional Sycamore, Beech (near the motorway bridge), Ash, Hybrid Black Poplar and Turkey Oak, with rare Alder (by the side stream below the church), Crack Willow and Small-leaved Lime (by the side stream).

The hedge banks are generally well-vegetated with frequent to locally abundant False Brome, Red Fescue, Cleavers, Ground-ivy, Herb Robert, Ivy, Dog's Mercury and Bramble, together with locally frequent to frequent Garlic Mustard, Cow Parsley, Hedge Bindweed, Foxglove, Common Male-fern, Broad-leaved Willowherb, Herb Bennet, Bluebell, Nipplewort, Honeysuckle, Three-nerved Sandwort, Green Alkanet, Bracken, Wood Dock, Common Figwort, Red Campion, Hedge Woundwort, Greater Stitchwort, Germander Speedwell, Wood Speedwell, Common Nettle and Common Dog-violet, together with many common grasses such as Common Bent, False Oat-grass, Cocksfoot and Yorkshire Fog. The banks also support occasional to very locally frequent Lesser Burdock, Hairy Brome, Wood Sedge, Scaly Male-fern, Broad Buckler-fern, Giant Fescue, Wild Strawberry, Wall Lettuce, Hard Shield-fern, Barren Strawberry, Black Bryony, Upright Hedge-parsley and Thyme-leaved Speedwell, with rare Black Horehound, a tall leafy Hawkweed sp., Hartstongue, Common Polypody, Soft Shield-fern, Cowslip and Wood Sage. Grass verges where present tend to be unmanaged and have the same vegetation, but where there are still some shorter swards there are still some meadow herbs. These include occasional to very locally frequent Common Mouse-ear, Common Catsear, Perforate St. John's-wort, Black Medick, Ribwort Plantain, Creeping Cinquefoil, Meadow Buttercup, White Clover and Tufted Vetch.

There are additionally occasional damp areas in the hollows along the lane and by the stream below the church, but more extensively where a minor stream crosses the lane by the Far Croft woodland and has been widened to form a small pond. Here the lane regularly floods and supports a flora which includes locally abundant Field Horsetail and Common Marsh-bedstraw, frequent Creeping Bent, Enchanter's Nightshade, Great Willowherb, Selfheal, Creeping Buttercup and



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Common Chickweed, together with occasional to very locally frequent Wild Angelica, Wavy Bittercress, Brown Sedge, Pendulous Sedge, Remote Sedge, Tufted Hair-grass, American Willowherb, Imperforate and Square-stalked St. John's-worts, Soft Rush, Least Duckweed, Gipsywort, Redshank, Butterbur, Water Figwort, Bittersweet and a stand of Common Reedmace. Species of rare frequency include Bugle, Meadowsweet, Marsh Cudweed, Compact and Hard Rushes, Dotted Loosestrife, Pale Persicaria and Clustered Dock. Ditches and the other minor flushes to the north also have a similar but more limited flora.

### 2) Tapster Lane South

This section of lane extends for about 350m south of the motorway bridge and descends the slope down to Hole House Lane and the Tapster Brook through a deep hollow way. The trackway at the bottom is sandy and contains many glacial pebbles, which are also present in the bank. The hedges have been left unmanaged for many years and have spread out to form a corridor of dense scrub on either side. Hazel, Hawthorn and Blackthorn are most abundant, but with locally frequent Field Maple, Holly, Field Rose and English Elm, with rare Norway Maple, Grey Sallow (at the southern end) and Wych Elm. There are frequent mature Ashes and Pedunculate Oaks along the old hedge boundaries, as well as a few examples of Sycamore, Beech and Small-leaved Lime. The steep hedge banks are rich in woodland plants, with abundant False Brome, Cleavers, Ground-ivy, Ivy, Herb Bennet, Dog's Mercury, Wood Meadow-grass, Red Campion and Common Dog-violet present. There is also frequent Garlic Mustard, Bearded Couch, Herb Robert, Bluebell, Nipplewort, Three-nerved Sandwort, Wood Dock, Bramble, Greater Stitchwort and Wood Speedwell, with more occasional Hairy Brome, Wood Sedge, Common Male-fern, Giant Fescue, Wood Millet, Barren Strawberry, Black Bryony and Tufted Vetch. Minor wet flushes along the track contain occasional Wavy Bittercress, Brown Sedge, Remote Sedge, Shining Cranesbill, Hard Rush and Selfheal.

The motorway bridge, although artificial, does hold some interest as a linking feature and includes strips of pioneer grassland that has colonised patches of thin accumulated soil. Both Autumn Hawkbit and Oxeye Daisy are abundant here, together with frequent Common Mouse-ear, Common Catsear and Common Groundsel. There is also occasional to very locally frequent Scarlet Pimpernel, Creeping Cinquefoil, Common Ragwort and notably, Bog Stitchwort. Other plants noted were rare Common Knapweed and the localised newcomer, Narrow-leaved Ragwort which is colonising the county via the motorways.

### **6. Other Faunal, Floral and Fungal groups.**

Although the survey took place out of the breeding season, a good range of woodland birds were noted along the lane. These included Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Rook, Jackdaw, Jay, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Goldcrest. The surveyor saw a migrant Marsh Harrier over the lane in October 2017. The only insect of note were Speckled Wood butterflies. A *Polytrichum* moss is present locally on the banks, while in 2015 a fine display of the Orange Peel fungus was noted.

### **7. Phase 1 Habitats present (with Phase 1 codes in brackets)\***

Linear scrub (A21), Native species-rich hedgerows with trees (J231).

\*Please refer to Appendix I Habitat Map



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### 8. Evaluation against the criteria<sup>3</sup>

Habitat criteria applied: Hedgerows

SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site						COMMUNITY CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site				
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5
Diversity	√	√		√			Physical & Visual Access	√			√	
Rarity	√	√					Educational Value					
Size							Community & Amenity Value	√	√	√		
Naturalness	√	√	√	√			Aesthetic Appeal & Landscape	√	√	√		
Fragility							Geographical Position		√			
Typicalness	√						Recorded History					
Ecological Position	√	√	√				Continuity of Land Use	√		√		
Significant Populations												
Potential Value												

### 9. Why this site qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site: summary of assessment

Tapster Lane qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site with 13 scientific and 11 community criteria applying, of which the following are considered the most important.

#### Diversity

The hedgerows bordering Tapster Lane are very species diverse with 164 species of vascular plants noted during the survey, including many of woodland origin such as False Brome, Wood Sedge, Bluebell, Dog's Mercury, Red Campion, Greater Stitchwort and eight species of fern. There are also six species which are indicative of ancient woodland in Warwickshire, with Remote Sedge, long-established Hazel, Wood Millet, Wood Meadow-grass, Small-leaved Lime and Wood Speedwell. It is likely that one or two more that flower in spring were missed, due to the late survey date. Although some short sections of hedge are species poor due to replanting, most are rich in woody shrubs and trees with an average of around eight species per 30m length.

#### Rarity

Ancient sunken green lanes with their original hedges are scarce in the county and are also important historical features, both locally and nationally. The hedge banks and areas of impeded drainage and flushes support several county notable<sup>7</sup> or uncommon<sup>1</sup> plants, including Brown Sedge, Scaly Male-fern, Wood Millet, Wall Lettuce, Wood Meadow-grass, Common Polypody, Soft Shield-fern, Bog Stitchwort, Small-leaved Lime and Wood Speedwell.



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### Naturalness

Most stretches of hedgerow are believed to be of considerable age, with the oldest possibly dating back 7-800 years or more, although some may have arisen as woodland boundaries hence the high number of ancient woodland indicators. A large block of semi-improved grassland (Tapster Lane Meadows LWS) adjoins the lane to the north of Far Croft.

### Ecological Position

Being a linear site and connecting to similar wooded lanes to the south, as well as the Tapster Brook valley, the site forms a significant wildlife corridor. Unfortunately, this has been severely curtailed by the building of the M40, though the bridge does enable mammals, butterflies etc to cross the cutting.

### Physical and Visual Access

The lane is an unclassified public road, also known as a county road or BOAT. It is rather hidden in the landscape, at least in summer, by the local topography and the abundance of trees.

### Community and Amenity Value

Tapster Lane is important as a recreational facility for local people and as a through route to the south for rambling groups. It is important in Lapworth local history as one of the original routes through the parish, as is evident by the winding nature and sunken sections of lane (on the slopes) heading towards an anciently named ford.

### Aesthetic Appeal and Landscape Character

The winding and narrow lane bounded by often tall tree-studded hedges is very characteristic of the Arden Natural Area.

### Continuity of Land Use

The hedgerows are ancient in date, with some sections at least dating back to the medieval period. They sit on often very pronounced hedge banks.

### Sources of information:

Ecosite No: 97/17

### Survey Details:

#### Date:

27/09/2019  
06/08/1998

#### Survey Type:

Phase 2  
Phase 1

#### Surveyors:

J J Bowley, C Newton  
LS/SR

#### Location of records

HBA  
HBA

### Any Other Information:



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### Management

<u>Category</u>	<u>Current management</u>	<u>Management recommendation</u>
A	Good	Maintain current regime
<b>B</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Enhance current regime</b>
C	Minimal	Enhance as necessary
D	Inappropriate	Change management regime

### Recommendations:

The section south of the motorway bridge needs to be better cared for and kept free from fly-tipping. Some coppicing of the scrub away from the hedgerow banks would be beneficial.

Completed by: J J Bowley

Date: 16/06/2020

Passed by Sites Selection Panel: Yes / No / Deferred (Further survey required).

Signed by the Chair:

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020

On behalf of the LWS panel.

### References

1. Falk S. J. (2009). *Warwickshire's Wildflowers*. Studley.
2. JNCC. (1993 repr.). *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey: a technique for environmental audit*. Peterborough: JNCC.
3. Local Wildlife Sites Project. (2015). *The Green Book: Guidance for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull*. Warwick: Habitat Biodiversity Audit office.
4. Rodwell J. S. et al (2003 repr.) *British Plant Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. RSPB/BTO. (2015). *BoCC4: Birds of Conservation Concern*. RSPB/BTO.
6. Stroh et al. (2014). *Red Data List of Vascular Plants in England*. Peterborough: JNCC.
7. Walton J. and M. (2018). *Rare Plant Register for Warwickshire*.





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### Appendix 1

