

Wyre Forest National Nature Reserve extent

GRAHAM HILL

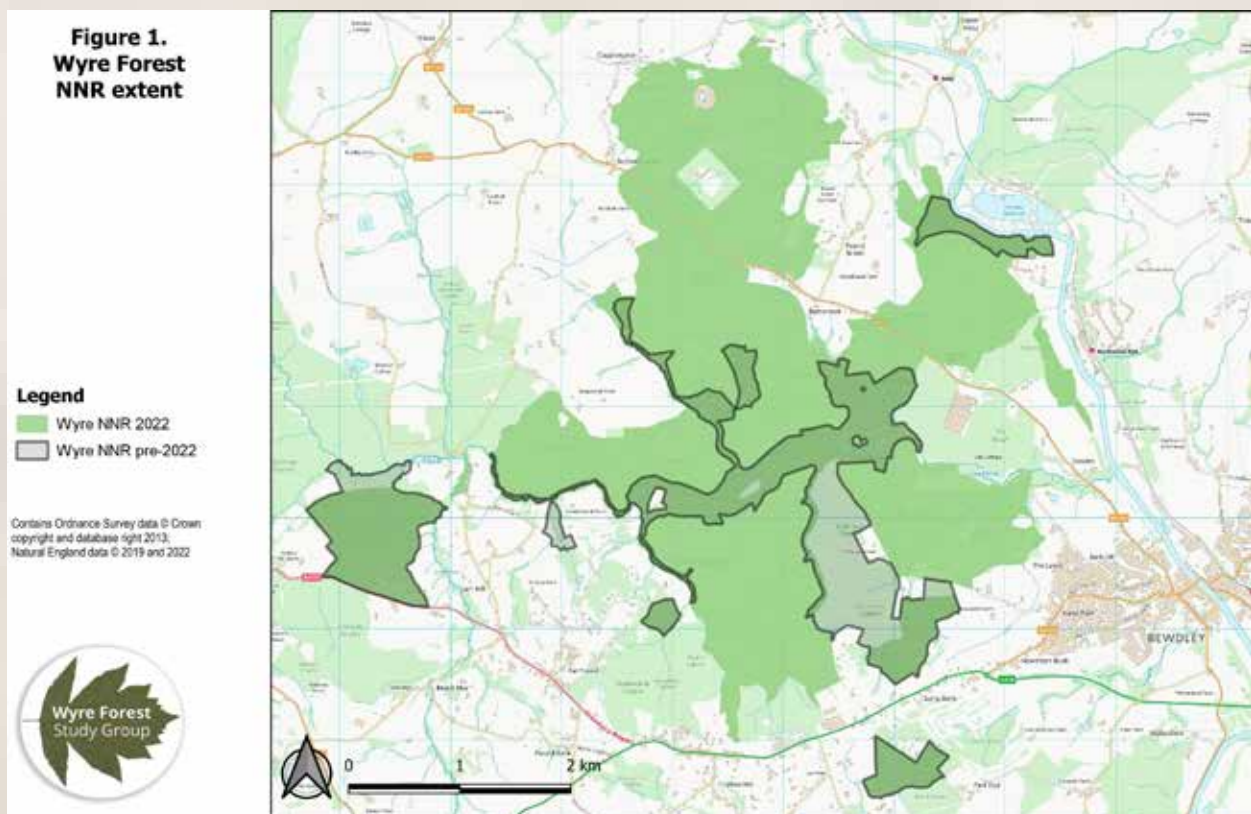
According to the press release from Natural England on 31st January 2022 the Wyre Forest National Nature Reserve (NNR) increased in size from around 555ha to 1,455ha – an increase of some 160%. For those who can only visualise this as the number of football pitches, 1,700 such pitches could be fitted in the new Wyre Forest NNR (which is an idea that I hope no-one thinks sensible). The extended NNR is now the largest woodland NNR in England and needs looking after in the light of this status.

The extents of the old and new Wyre Forest NNR is shown in Figure 1. The pre-2022 NNR boundary is shown as a black cross-hatch with a black outline, the new NNR extent is shown in mid-green. The newly added areas towards the north include (in Shropshire) Hawkbatch, Longdon and Earnwood, Postenplain and Button Oak, whilst in the south, New Parks, Hitterhill and Town Coppice have now been

included. Ruskin Land and Uncllys are not included in the NNR, although I am hope that they will still be well managed.

Large parts of the Wyre Forest are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Figure 2 shows the extent of those SSSIs in, and around Wyre, shaded in red. There is a greater area of land under SSSI designation than under NNR.

Wyre is a special place and its importance has been recognised nationally. In recent years government advice has identified that, to human beings, being out in green spaces is beneficial to both physical and mental well-being; I cannot disagree, it does me the power of good. As a result, the Wyre Forest has become much more popular, placing increasing pressure on its natural state. Those responsible for management have a challenge balancing the competing interests – walkers,



cyclists, timber production and, of course, the fragile natural environment.

More recently (25th November 2022) the BBC reported that the Wyre Forest is to be joined, by a 60-mile-long green corridor of hedgerows and woodlands, with the Forest of Dean. The 'Severn Treescapes' project will be undertaken by Wildlife Trusts in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. An interesting project although, I suspect, it will be a long time before the two forests' NNRs are similarly joined.



Autumn leaves on Dowles Brook

Graham Hill

