West Park Local Nature Reserve

Uckfield

5 year

Management Plan

January 2023 to December 2028

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0. Summary

West Park Local Nature Reserve (WPLNR) is an ecologically diverse and valuable area of semi-natural habitat on the outskirts of Uckfield. Containing almost 10.8 hectares of woodland, marsh, grassland and scrub, the reserve is also of archaeological importance, being the site of a Mesolithic settlement. Situated adjacent to West Park housing development, West Park LNR is of great value, both as a recreational and educational resource for local people and as a wildlife conservation site.

Designation of West Park LNR as a Local Nature Reserve was recommended in 1994 as a matter of urgency. In December 2014, Uckfield Town Council employed a full time Countryside Ranger to manage the nature reserves and ancient woodlands owned by Uckfield Town Council, including WPLNR. Previously ESCC were employed two days a week to carry out the same duties. The Ranger's time is equally divided between managing the site for visitors in the form of maintaining access, education and interpretation and the management of WPLNR for wildlife and habitat conservation

Since designation in Spring 1995, WPLNR has been considerably enhanced, most notably in the areas of conservation management and developing local interest and involvement. The designation ensured the reversal of a trend of gradual decline. Important and fragile wildlife habitats have been enhanced and significant archaeological remains and geological interest have been preserved. Vandalism, erosion and tipping have almost ceased and public access has improved.

1. General Information

This Management Plan has been produced at the invitation of Uckfield Town Council. It is hoped that this Plan provides a realistic vision for the future which fully harnesses the great potential of West Park LNR as a resource for conservation, education and recreation in the Uckfield area.

1.1. Location

SITE NAME: West Park Local Nature Reserve, Uckfield.

COUNTY: East Sussex

DISTRICT: Wealden

GRID REF: TQ 462215

AREA: 10.8 ha (26.7 acres)

OS MAP: 1: 50,000: 198 1: 10,000: TQ42 SE

Aerial Photographic Coverage: 1987, 1991. Both held at ESCC

1.2. Site Status

1. Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
2. Archaeologically Sensitive Area (ASA)

West Park LNR is outside Uckfield Town Development Boundary and is not identified for any land use in the Local Plan.

1.3. Tenure

Owned by Uckfield Town Council.

Address: Town Clerk,
Uckfield Town Council,
Uckfield Civic Centre,
Bell Farm Lane,
Uckfield,
East Sussex, TN22 1AE.

Phone: 01825 762774
Website: www.uckfieldtc.co.uk

1.4. Site Definition and Boundaries (see Map 1 and 2)

West Park LNR is located to the west of Uckfield, bordered to the north by the B2012, to the west by the A22 (Uckfield by-pass), to the south by the B2102 and east by West Park housing estate.

1.5. Legal and Other Official Constraints

Tree Preservation Orders were placed on individual trees and groups of trees within West Park LNR in 1980 (before construction of the Uckfield by-pass) and again in 1988 (before construction of West Park housing estate).

Several of the TPO trees identified in 1980 have since been lost, allegedly as a result of the 1987 storm.

Please refer to TPO 16/4 1988. The maps and TPO list have not been adjusted since the order was mandated and therefore consultation with Wealden planning may be necessary if tree work applications are to be made.

West Park LNR is included within Uckfield Town council's United Kingdom Forestry Standard Woodland Management plan as compartment 6. This document supersedes Tree preservation orders for woodland management conducted by Uckfield Town Council and UTC need not apply for works to be conducted according to this plan. Residents wishing to perform works on protected trees such as the removal of overhanging branches would need to apply to Wealden planning for consent.

2. Environmental Information

2.1 Physical

2.1.1. Hydrology

No detailed hydrological information was available when compiling this plan. West Park LNR contains a number of drainage ditches, which probably date from a time when the land was farmed. Most of these appear to be permanently dry during the summer months.

There are two ditch systems that eventually flow out of the reserve. One drains the sheep field and wet meadow and flows out close to the access point between Calvert Close and Hart Close, the other drains the land either side of the ancient woodland bank and flows out close to the access point at the start of Hart Close. This latter system has a far greater volume of water flowing through it due to extra water coming from a pipe under the A22 bypass to the west. This means that this system runs for much of the year and has the potential to flood.

The sheep field and the wet meadow both have standing water that flows with temporary streams in very wet weather. These streams eventually reach the first of the two drainage systems described above. But even during the summer these areas remain damp. A pond was created 2003 on the edge of compartment 3 (see map 3). This pond is feed by a short stream from a spring at the base of the rocks to the south and has an over flow that runs east, through a culvert and into the sheep field. There is a seasonal pond in a hollow near to the northern end of the gravel path which has a few small trees around it.
There are flooding issues arising from the hydrology of West Park LNR with properties on Hart close being affected in wet weather events.

2.1.2. Geology

A belt of Lower Tunbridge Wells Sandstone predominantly covers the northern two thirds of West Park LNR, but along the length of northern boundary, Ardingly Sandstone in Lower Tunbridge Wells Sand is exposed as sand rock outcrops, measuring up to 4 metres in height from soil surface level. There are 47 known sand rock outcrops in East Sussex, many of them associated with important Cryptogams (plants such as mosses, liverworts and lichens) and archaeological interest. Ardingly Sandstone also underlies the southern tip of the Park but is not exposed here.

2.1.3. Soils

The northern half of the site appears for the most part to be a sandy loam. This changes abruptly into clay in the southern arm of the park, adjacent to the A22. This appears to be a much heavier clay type soil but no detailed information on soils is currently available.

2.2. Biological

Map 3 shows the habitat types found at West Park LNR. The area occupied by each is summarised below:

Habitat Type	Area (Ha)	%
Woodland (with rock outcrops)	2.9	26.8
Scrub	0.4	3.7
Marshy grassland	0.5	4.6
Unimproved grassland	0.7	6.5
Other grassland	3.3	30.6
Bracken	3.0	27.8
Total	10.8	100
Ditch	860m	_
Hedge	475m	_

2.2.1. Woodland

The woodland at West Park LNR can be divided into three categories:

2.2.1.1. Acidic Mixed Woodland

This category covers the woodland found to the north of the Park, which has developed on thin, sandy soils in association with the sand rock outcrops. The dominant tree species here are silver birch (*Betula pendula*) and English oak (*Quercus robur*), but rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) are also common. Some of the trees growing over the sand rock exposures have developed bizarrely contorted growth forms and exposed root systems. There are also a number of 'specimen trees', which are clearly of planted origin, including common lime (*Tilia x europaea*), Corsican pine (*Pinus nigra var. maritima*) and Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*)

Beneath the tree canopy the shrub layer is variable. Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) are occasional, as are young sycamore and birch seedlings in places. Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) is common. Of note is the presence of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) on one rock exposure, perhaps a remnant of a much heathier landscape in the past.

Gideon Mantell described 'heath' growing in the rocks area in 1820 and it is possible that this part of the Park has become more wooded in recent history. However, photographs of the eastern end of the sand rock outcrops, taken in the first half of the 19th Century, show that part of the rocks to be covered with mature woodland, so the history of the vegetation remains unclear. "Heather rock" as it is now known, has been fenced off to prevent trampling and the heather community is now thriving. This area also serves as a safe place for ground nesting birds to breed and rear young.

The Cryptogam flora (species such as mosses, liverworts and lichens) associated with the sand rock outcrops has been well documented (see 2.3.3). Due to recreational pressure, many of the upper rock surfaces are completely bare of vegetation but some vertical faces and overhangs are covered with complex communities of these species.

Most of the woodland has a fairly open structure but the presence of numerous Birch and Sycamore saplings indicates that the current structure cannot be retained without management.

2.2.1.2. Wet Woodland

A significant area of less than 1 ha. of alder carr is located in the central section of the Park (compartment 2). The permanently wet ground flora is species-poor and dominated by bramble. Wet woodland is a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitat.

2.2.1.3. Coppice Woodland

A strip of predominantly hazel (*Corylus avellana*) coppice runs east-west across the southern part of the Park, separating two areas of grassland. Although hazel is the dominant woody species, sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), English oak (Quercus robur), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and cherry (*Prunus avium*) are also present. Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and bramble (*Rubus spp*.) dominate the ground flora in the lighter areas but elsewhere the ground is almost bare of vegetation during the summer. This strip of woodland is probably a remnant of ancient woodland as, during late spring, the ground is dominated by bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and wood anemones (*Anemone nemorosa*). Many of the ash are affected by *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* or ash die back. Several semi mature sweet chestnuts have also died over the last five years which may indicate the presence of potential pathogen.

2.2.2. Scrub

Occasional hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) bushes can be found over most of West Park LNR but there is also a more continuous patch of scrub in the wet meadow (see Map 3). This consists of predominantly sallow (*Salix cinerea*) with scattered bramble.

2.2.3. Grassland

The grassland can be divided into three main categories:

2.2.3.1. Marshy Grassland

Fragmented patches of marshy grassland can be found in the centre of the Park, interspersed with scrub and bracken. In the past, this wet meadow was showing signs of damage through trampling and, at one location, spoil tipping. This has been rectified but scrub and bracken are continuing to encroach. However, typical wet meadow species such as marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*) and soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) can be seen. M Stenning (pers. comm.) noted adder's tongue fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) in this area in 2006, a species which has been absent for several years, but confirmed as present by M. Stenning in 2011. Other species recorded in this area include southern marsh orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*), common spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and heath spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculate*) and hybrids of these. Also,

common twayblade (*Neottia ovata*).

A second, small area of marshy grassland can be found within the sand rock outcrops (see Map 3). This is sheltered by trees and rocks on all sides. It is fenced off as part of the "heather rock" area and needs regular clearance to control scrub. Three black poplars (*Populus nigra*) were planted with two surviving to the south of the wet meadow. This was part of a county wide species recovery programme

2.2.3.2 Unimproved/Semi-improved Grassland

The grassland classified as "unimproved" in this report is confined to the north-eastern end of the Reserve. There are also some scattered patches in the southern field. Both are neutral/acidic in nature. In the northern field, species include self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*), musk mallow (*Malva moschata*) and common centaury (*Centaurium erythraea*). In the southern field, ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), common vetch (*Vicia sativa*) and tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) can be seen.

2.2.3.3 Improved Grassland

The strip of coppice woodland described in 2.2.1.3 separates two fields to the south of the Park. The central field is of low botanical diversity. The grass is kept short by the local rabbit population. This field also contains isolated patches of scrub and natural regeneration of hazel and oak, mainly adjacent to the hawthorn hedge adjoining the bypass. The field features a large numbers of ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*) plants, which in the past have been controlled by annual pulling as they are a notifiable weed and toxic, especially to horses. However, this plant also supports up to 117 insect species (source Natural England) such as the cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*). Ragwort seems to be ignored by the local rabbits.

The southern field is of mixed botanical diversity. It contains a good mosaic of scrub, hedge, planted and self-seeded trees, long and short grass and small area of wildflower rich grassland. Species include red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and red bartsia (*Odontites verna*) as well as those mentioned in 2.2.3.2. More dominant species include stinging nettle (*Urtica* dioica) and creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*). Pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) has been recorded in this area.

2.2.4 Bracken

Bracken is an abundant over much of the sand rock outcrop area and can be found throughout West Park LNR, other than in the southern field. It is the dominant plant over the north-eastern and much of the central areas, outside patches of grassland and scrub. However, the dense mat of decomposing bracken fronds normally associated with the plant does not appear to have developed in many areas as yet, suggesting that its spread may have been relatively recent. Bracken is a major threat to the diversity of the grassland ecosystems on this reserve.

2.2.5 Sand Exposure

A very small (4 x 4m) patch of exposed sand on a hummock in the centre of the Park supports a fragment of acidic grassland (National Vegetation Classification type U1 *Festuca ovina* - *Rumex acetosella* grassland) of sufficient interest to be noted by English Nature (now Natural England). This habitat was probably created about 60 years ago as a World War 2 rifle butt (Hemingway, pers. comm.). Although rabbits graze it, bracken continues to colonise this mound, which also supports a population of bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).

2.2.6 Ditch

All the ditches at West Park LNR are dry for most of the year. They are not known to support any species of note.

2.2.7 Hedge

A hawthorn (*Cretaegus monogyna*) hedge extends along the length of the Park adjacent to the Uckfield by-pass. It was probably planted when the road was built and was laid in 1998 by the South of England Hedge laying Society. Since this time, it has not been flailed/cut and although it became very dense, is now become spindly and overgrown and no longer offers stock proofing. It is still reasonable habitat potential for birds and small mammals. There were frequent gaps and longer bare sections towards the southern boundary, but in 2002, these were planted up with a hedgerow mix of hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), alder buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), hazel (*Coryllus avellana*), spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) and dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*). There may be a case for some management of this hedgerow.

2.2.8 Sandstone outcrops

The sand rock outcrop was included in a lower plant survey by Pentecost and Rose, published in 1985. This reviewed 15 sand rock outcrops in East Sussex, considering the rocks at West Park LNR and those at Lake Wood to the north, as one site. 58 species of bryophyte (mosses and liverworts) were identified at the West Park LNR/Lake Wood site, together with 27 species of lichen and 4 species of fern. The survey noted a number of notable and rare species, such as hay-scented buckler-fern (*Dryopteris aemula*) and Tunbridge filmy-fern (*Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*). Malcolm McFarlane (management committee member) has undertaken a detailed survey in 1998 (records held by ESCC).

2.3 Flora

The only vascular plant survey of West Park LNR that has been carried out to date was carried out in June 2015 by the Wealden District Council ecologist Ben Rainbow as part of a series of surveys of local sites including **Lake Wood** next door. Dolphin Ecological Surveys compiled a species list as part of a management plan in the early 1990's. There is a species list for the southern field (2003) and orchid records dating to 1998.

The following areas are particularly noteworthy in terms of flora:

2.3.1. The **sandy hummock** (see 2.2.5), which supports the noteworthy species least bird's foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*), sand spurrey (*Spergularia rubra*) and parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvenis*).

2.3.2. The **marshy grassland** (see 2.2.3.1) periodically supports southern marsh orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) and leopard orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa var. junialis*, a hybrid between the southern marsh and common spotted orchid), common spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and common twayblade (*Listera ovata*) and heath spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*). Hemingway reports seeing bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) during archaeological excavations in the early 1980's (surprising on this acidic soil).

Over the last few years' southern marsh orchid has not been found. This is still true in 2023.

The introduced small balsam (*Impatiens parviflora*) is abundant in the damp areas surrounding the rocks.

2.3.3. Several **trees** on the Park are protected by TPOs. They are mainly veteran oaks and other notable trees of venerable character.

New planting (within the last 20 years) has taken place along the western boundary of the Park and within the coppice woodland belt. The pine clump in the NW corner of the reserve was augmented with scot's pines from Ashdown Forest in 1993. Natural regeneration can be seen over much of the Reserve.

2.4. Fauna

Information on the fauna of West Park LNR is sparse and for the most part restricted to casual observation. Birds in particular, deserve study. (A list of bird species noted in May 2006 is held by ESCC). Slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*), common lizard *(Zootoca vivipara*) and grass snake (*Natrix natrix*) have been observed sunning themselves on the sand rock exposures, on and around the old boardwalk (now removed) and in the wet meadow area. There are numerous rabbit warrens within the Reserve and foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) have been seen on site. Badgers (*Meles meles*)and small mammals including wood mice (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), water voles (*Arvicola amphibius)* and dormice (*Muscardina avellana*) have been sighted. Periodic basic surveys of moths, invertebrates and butterfly species have also been carried out but written records are not available. A biological survey conducted in June 2015 by the Wealden district council ecologist Ben rainbow included fauna like invertabrates.

The tunnel linking West Park LNR with Lake Wood, beneath the B2012, is bricked up at the West Park end but has potential as a future bat roosting site, if correctly managed. Link holes for the passage of small animals up to the size of a badger or fox have been punched through this wall. A game camera set up in summer 2021 confirmed mammals using these holes for travel. To the east of the Park, a second tunnel under the B2012 has been used as a bat roosting site in the past.

2.4.1Bats. Thirteen roosting noctule bats (*Nyctalus noctula*) were disturbed in a hollow tree by a tree surgeon during December 1989, who was probably carrying out the recommendations of the 1988 tree survey. Any remaining hollow trees may support a roost but no roost sites are known. Six bat boxes were put up on the Reserve but to date, no evidence of roosting bats has been seen (specimen trees in Northern field surveyed in 2006). These boxes have since fallen into disrepair and are not used. A full survey should ideally be carried out to establish baseline data.

2.4.2. Invertebrates: No detailed records are available. West Park LNR was briefly assessed for invertebrate interest in 1994. A brief survey of moth and invertebrate species seen in 1998 and grasshopper and cricket species noted in the wet meadow in 2007 (all held by ESCC). There was a further survey done by Ben Rainbow in 2015 (see above).

Dragonflies and damselflies are commonly sighted over the Park. Meadow ant *(Lasius flavus*) nests are present under bracken in the northern part of the Park and larger mounds are frequently seen in the southern field. Invertebrates deserve further study.

2.5. Cultural

2.5.1. Historical

Archaeological excavations of West Park LNR were carried out in 1979 and the early 1980's by M. F. Hemingway. It is believed that at least one early Mesolithic settlement was located at the sand rock outcrops and meadows and these areas have yielded over 1000 artefacts, principally stone tools and flake fragments. The stratigraphy of the soils in West Park meadows may prove to be important in this respect but further information is required.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries West Park formed part of a large estate owned by the Streatfeild family, who lived at Rocks House, now the Buckswood Grange housing development. The estate was progressively sold off during the first half of the 20th century.

The last member of the Streatfeild family to own West Park was Mrs S. Brocklebank who has emigrated to New Zealand. Her daughter still lives and works in Sussex. She may hold family records of the estate at least from the beginning of the 19th century. Land which including that which is now the nature reserve was bought by developers who built West Park housing estate and donated the remaining land to Uckfield Town Council as "open space". The land was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1996 and an SNCI (Site of Nature Conservation Interest) in 1997.

2.5.2. Recreational

A majority of West Park LNR is currently used for informal recreation and access is free with only certain areas having restricted access either permanently or at particular times of the year. There is no access to heather rock and periodically to the wet meadow in order to protect sensitive flora and fauna and allow ground nesting birds to breed and rear young and for autumn grazing. There are 12 access points and a good network of paths (see map 4). There are no public rights of way over the site. Most of the paths are kept open all year round however due to the nature of the site, some have a tendency to become very muddy after periods of heavy rain. There was a run of three sections of boardwalk along the main, central path, totalling a length of approximately 130m this has been replaced by a metalled path due to the high cost of maintenance on the boardwalk.

2.5.3. Current Management

The site is currently managed by Uckfield Town Council who employ a full time Countryside Ranger (currently Mr. Neal Matheson) to carry out a variety of duties working in conjunction with Grounds staff colleagues and officers of the Council. Typical jobs include path clearance and access work, coppicing, surveying, livestock management, invasive species removal, writing management plans and applying for grant funding.

3. Evaluation

3.1 Size

West Park LNR is one of the smaller urban wildlife sites in East Sussex. At nearly 11 ha, it is about two-thirds of the size of the Lewes Railway Land (16 ha) and a third of the size of St Helens Wood Local Nature Reserve, Hastings (33 ha).

Within West Park LNR, the sand rock exposures measure about 400m in length. Detailed information is not available on all the other 45 known rock exposures in East Sussex, but West Park LNR rates 6th in the list of 15 sand rock outcrops studied by Pentecost & Rose (1985), the longest being Penns Rocks at 1,300m and the shortest being Cow Wood at 50m[1].

The tiny sand exposure (see 2.2.7), which measures just 16 square meters, nevertheless represents 1.6% of the total known area of NVC type U1 (*Festuca ovina* - *Rumex acetosella* grassland) in East Sussex. Outside West Park LNR, this community is known only from Buxted Park, where about 0.1 ha occurs (Steven, 1990).

The exact extent of the archaeological remains is unknown. Limited excavation has produced rich deposits both near to the rocks and spreading southwards cannot be ruled out.

3.2 Diversity

West Park LNR is noteworthy for its diversity of habitat in a relatively small area. Marshy grassland, unimproved grassland, bracken and sallow scrub are intermixed in a complex mosaic over much of the northern part of the Park. The 'woodland edge' habitat, which follows the base of the sand rock outcrops, is also an important element of this area. The dry, middle field has little diversity, however the southern field shows good and increasing species richness in parts.

Species diversity within particular habitats is difficult to assess accurately because of the lack of comprehensive survey information. Nevertheless, the sand rock outcrops have been of considerable interest as a habitat for Cryptogams in recent times (see 2.2.8), and the marshy grassland is also important as is the alder carr wet woodland. The exact archaeological nature of the site and range of activities carried out cannot presently be determined without excavation. This destructive process is seen as undesirable at this point.

3.3 Naturalness

Like the overwhelming majority of habitat in East Sussex, man to some extent has modified the entire Park. Nevertheless, the Cryptogam flora of the sand rock outcrops is of interest in that it retains species largely restricted to a warm, damp microclimate, more typical of the western seaboard of Britain. These are probably relics of the East Sussex flora of over 5,000 years ago. Scrub and Rhododendron invasion is a constant threat to the outcrops though and must be controlled.

[1] Further information can be obtained from: R B G Williams and D A Robinson, 'The Landforms of Sussex', in Geography Editorial Committee (eds.), Sussex: Environment, Landscape and Society (1983), pp. 33-49. and: Classic Landforms of the Weald by R.B.G. Williams, D.A. Robinson (Paperback, 1984)

3.4. Rarity

The sand rock outcrops, marshy grassland, unimproved grassland and sand exposure are all uncommon habitats in East Sussex. The rocks may also be of some national significance, known to support, at least until recently, a flora otherwise known only from the oceanic western parts of Britain. The site is one of a small group of known rock-shelter sites in East Sussex and Kent. Occupation in the Mesolithic has been confirmed at this site. Very little is known about life in the earlier prehistoric periods.

Least bird's-foot, *(lotus Ssp)* sand spurrey, (*Spergularia Ssp*) southern marsh orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa)* and adder's tongue fern (*Ophioglossum vulgare)* are all considered 'occasional' in Sussex (Sussex Plant Atlas, 1980). It is possible that the sand rock outcrops still support scarce or rare Cryptogams.

The presence of the Nationally Notable beetle *Agrilus viridis* on sallow in the 1990's indicates that other parts of the Park may also be of invertebrate interest, but further survey is required. Buxted Park SSSI, just 2km northwest of West Park, is of considerable invertebrate interest, but much of this is associated with dead wood. All dead and rotting wood is left on site to aid invertebrate diversity.

3.5. Fragility

The Cryptogam habitats associated with the sand rock outcrops, marshy and unimproved grassland areas and heather rock are fragile habitats, susceptible to environmental change. Cryptogams in particular, have very poor powers of dispersal and most species would probably not re-establish if lost from the Park.

Much of the archaeological interest of the Park may be dependent upon the stable nature of the thin, sandy soils, which may never have been ploughed and could not be recreated. The nature of the archaeological deposits makes them particularly vulnerable to disturbance. It is desirable that any artefacts are preserved in their original context and that palaeo-environmental deposits remain uncontaminated. This is especially important on sites of this age where the range of surviving evidence is so narrow.

3.6. Typicalness

The areas of unimproved and marshy grassland are typical of the species-rich swards, which would have covered much of the Weald of Sussex before agricultural 'improvements' began. Similarly, the sand rocks are known to have (and may still) support a lower plant flora typical of the Wealden sand rocks and ancient, humid ghyll woods of northern and central Sussex.

Whilst rock shelter sites are fairly common, those with such a richness of surviving flint work are quite rare. The site should, therefore, be regarded as of high archaeological conservation value.

3.7. Recorded History

No detailed survey records are available but West Park was managed as part of a country estate until the second half of the 20th Century. Photographs dating from the mid-19th Century show hay cutting in the fields and mature woodland over at least part of the sand rock outcrops. A land survey of "the Rocks Estate" by William Figg, dated 1829, includes a map, which also shows the sand rock outcrops as being wooded.

There were limited excavations at the site in 1979 and 1980 by M.F. Hemingway of Cambridge University

(details held by ESCC).

3.8. Position in an Ecological Unit

To the south and east, West Park LNR adjoins urban development. It is also somewhat isolated to the west by the Uckfield by-pass, beyond which is improved pasture. To the north, the Park is separated by the B2012 from Lake Wood, an ancient woodland with sand rock outcrops and immediately to the northeast the West Park sand rock outcrop continues for about 200m into the grounds of Buckswood Grange housing development, the natural areas of which are being managed in sympathy with WPLNR.

Further afield to the north and west are Butchers Wood, Park Wood, Thirty Acre Wood and several other blocks of ancient woodland. About 2km to the northeast lies Buxted Park SSSI, which includes the nearest sizeable area of unimproved grassland.

3.9. Potential Value

West Park LNR has fulfilled its potential for habitat creation. The southern field has been allowed to revert to a more species-rich meadow, hedge and trees rather than just receiving a blanket mowing during the Summer months. A pond has been created in the middle of the Reserve and the wet meadow and heather rock habitats are managed specifically to maximise their potential value for wildlife.

In the past, dumping of waste, trampling, erosion, fire lighting, dog mess, disturbance and vandalism all appear to have contributed to a gradual degradation of the wildlife interest of the Park. With careful management, all these effects have been reduced to sustainable levels and the value of the site enhanced by encouraging visitors to volunteer and help with conservation management.

The recreational value of the site has been enhanced by regular maintenance of the paths, installation of bridges, easier-access gates interpretation boards and a notice board.

The limited excavations at the site suggest that the archaeological potential of this area is high. The site has the potential to shed light not only on patterns of activity and behaviour at this group of rock shelters but also at others in the Sussex and Kentish Weald. The site has potential for archaeological interpretation to the general public.

3.10. Landscape/Intrinsic Appeal

The diversity of habitats and landforms within West Park LNR give it a naturally attractive appearance, which persists despite its proximity to the urban fringe. Indeed, the visual appearance of the site, with its juxtaposition of exposed sand rocks, parkland, woodland and open fields within this setting is probably one of its strongest assets.

Since designation, there has been a steady improvement, particularly related to the presentation of the Park, in terms of interpretation, access, screening of unsightly views and control of invasive species. The hedge lines on the western and southern boundaries have been extended to screen the by-pass and nearby industrial, and housing developments. A small section of hedging has also been planted by the Egles[2] Grove entrance.

[2] Named after Mary Egles whose memorial plaque may be seen at Holy Cross Church

3.11. Potentially Damaging Operations

The following operations, if not carried out in a controlled way, could damage the wildlife interest of the Park and should be carefully monitored:

1. Application of herbicides and pesticides
2. Burning
3. Cultivation, (ploughing, motivating, harrowing and reseeding).
4. Excessive grassland cutting or grazing.
5. Drainage and changing water levels
6. Tipping of waste
7. Engineering works, Inc. the maintenance of underground pipes and cables
8. Grading of rock surfaces or other modification of the sand rock outcrop.
9. Infilling of marshy grassland, Inc. the construction of paths and tracks
10. Removal of geological, archaeological and biological specimens
11. Trampling, erosion and vandalism
12. Inappropriate tree and woodland management
13. Use of off-road vehicles and other inappropriate recreational activity
14. Digging for whatever purpose in the vicinity of the rock overhangs.

3.12 Main Factors Influencing Management

The following general factors will influence the conservation management of West Park LNR:

* Archaeological interest.
* Areas of low wildlife interest that maybe suitable for habitat recreation.
* Presence of bats and/or their roosts and areas where birds are breeding
* Presence of notable or rare species
* Dead and dying trees (hazard to the public).
* Position of footpath network in relation fragile habitats.
* Fragmentation of fragile habitats.
* Invasive species.
* Water levels.
* Proximity to housing estate.
* Successional processes (e.g. scrub invasion)
* Results of surveys.
* Vandalism, disturbance and trampling.
* Wildlife interest.
* Finances/grant applications
*Management plan and work programme
*Availability of volunteers and other members of staff to assist the Ranger with practical projects.

4. Management Policy

4.1. Habitat & Species Management

Three general aims should be pursued:

1. Safeguard and maintain remaining areas of habitat and archaeological interest from damage.
2. Enhance areas of important habitat where appropriate
3. Removal of invasive species where necessary

4.2. Visitor Services

Three general aims should be pursued:

1. Remove or make safe any hazards posing a threat to the health and safety of the visitor.
2. Manage public access to conserve areas of fragile habitat.
3. Improve appreciation of the site through interpretation and education.

4.3 Research, Survey and Monitoring

The aims of further research should be:

1. To ensure that the Park is safe for public access (tree safety surveys, furniture inspections etc.)
2. To monitor plant and animal species and habitats for subsequent review of the management plan.
3. To monitor habitats for rare or notable species to ensure appropriate management

5. Management Prescriptions and Operations

5.1 Applicable to Whole Site:

5.1.2. Visitor Services/ site security

ACCESS POINTS. These are shown on the maps below and need to be maintained, replacing damaged or worn out gates and stiles and associated fencing and carrying out work to maintain the surface of the path in and immediately around

FENCING: Maintain stock-proof fencing where required (for the safety of livestock and dogs and to aid habitat management) This includes stock fencing, chestnut paling and traditional post and rail. Ensure boundary fencing is secure, particularly bordering the A22 and Rocks Road

FOOTPATHS: Maintain a simplified footpath network. Wherever possible, footpaths should be kept between 1.5 and 2m wide for easy access. Surfaces may need some low-key improvement (levelling, infilling of puddles) in places but a 'suburban park' appearance should be avoided. Footpaths through grassland should be clearly delineated by regular mowing/strimming to dissuade the use of unofficial paths, especially through the wet meadow.

FOOTBRIDGES:
Other footbridges are to be found on the reserve these are to be monitored and any remedial work carried out to ensure they remain safe and will last.

INTERPRETATION: Maintain the three interpretation boards installed at the Princes Close entrance, along the main path and on the Egles grove entrance. These provide a map of West Park LNR and describe its geology, archaeology, ecology, main habitat types and conservation management objectives. Maintain the noticeboard installed near the Saunders Close entrance to display notices that should regularly update people on what they may see around the Reserve at certain times of the year and advertise guided walks and task days etc.

BINS: There are three multi-purpose bins at the access points to the Reserve, one at Princes Close, one at Egles Grove and one on Markland Way by the middle access to the Reserve. These can be used to dispose of general litter and dog waste. Maintain as necessary. The bins are emptied twice weekly by the grounds staff.

5.1.3 Research and Survey

TREES:
A continual process of tree surveying should be part of normal ranger visits and task days with formal written surveys made (bi) annually in areas noted in the individual compartment prescriptions. These surveys to be undertaken by a suitable credentialed surveyor. Veteran and notable trees are to be identified and confirmed with the Ancient Tree Forum. Note the woodland management plan and tree

works in the management prescription section.

ARCHAEOLOGY: Local Archaeological societies should be invited to contribute to WPLNR management.

HABITATS: Each habitat identified in this management plan should be monitored as a measure of the success of the management recommendations. Important species should be identified and their distribution monitored. Fixed point photography, fixed quadrats and other on-going monitoring could be introduced as a measure of the success of this Plan.

SPECIES GROUPS: A number of species groups are under recorded and further 'baseline' information is required. These include birds, invertebrates, dragonflies and damselflies, bats, and fungi. The requirements of any noteworthy species should be taken into account when reviewing the habitat management proposals.

5.2 Management Prescriptions & Operations: Specific compartments

For the purposes of this plan, West Park LNR has been divided into 6 Compartments, as illustrated on the map below.

Management prescriptions are laid out under five sub headings

Monitor: Things for the ranger to monitor such as localised erosion, tree health, fly tipping etc.
Routines: Routine tasks to be completed such as removing vegetation or cutting paths
Specific tasks: Tasks which are specific to the unique character of the compartment such as hedgelaying or bracken pulling. Some tasks may already be being undertaken while others may be aspirational.
Constraints: Features of the site which may impede management and need to be factored into management prescriptions.
Opportunities: Opportunities to improve the compartment in accordance with the management principles.

5.2.1. Compartment 1: 1.6 ha

Located in the north-eastern part of the Park, from the eastern boundary to the path crossing north-south to Saunders Close, at least 40% of this compartment is dominated by bracken during the summer months, the remainder being semi-improved grassland with occasional parkland trees and small patches of species-rich grassland and scrub. The area is designated as wood pasture and is a Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat.

Management prescriptions:

Monitor: Littering.
Routines: Cutting paths with DR hand tractor in the growth season.
Specific tasks: Bracken in the compartment should be controlled. A grazing cycle should be re implement as soon as possible. The hedge at Egles grove to be re-laid and the oak saplings there thinned.
Constraints: This is a high use area which could lead to possible grazing conflicts with dog walkers.
Opportunities: New interpretation boards could be sited in this compartment. The BAP designation for the habitat could be a source of grant funding.

5.2.2 Compartment 2: 2.8 ha

Located in the centre of the Park, from Compartment 1 to the east running southwards to include the old but recently replanted hedge line adjacent to the smaller species-poor field, it is composed of the fenced off wet meadow, marshy grassland, willow and alder carr and the sand mound exposure. A large proportion of this compartment is dominated by bracken. The areas is designated as wood pasture and wet woodland are Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats.

Management prescriptions:

Monitor: Monitor encroachment of scrub and bracken. Monitor littering. On the boundary with Hart close

conduct a yearly tree safety survey. An area of the Hart close boundary (the Alder carr) is included in the three yearly town-wide inspections. Unauthorised tracks are often created in this compartment which should be monitored and fenced/blocked as appropriate. The ash veteran is to be monitored for crown vitality yearly, a decline will result in management such as a crown reduction being required. The metalled path is to inspected for erosion from water runoff.
Routines: Cut vegetation back from paths**.** Bracken is to be controlled across the compartment. The ditch behind 41-43Hart close is to be re-dug (by machine) in year three of this management plan, budget must be set aside for this operation. Willow within the sheep meadow and sycamore across the compartment to be cyclically cleared by coppicing.
Specific tasks: Grazing should be re- implemented as soon as is feasible, the sheep meadow is to be closed from March 1st to July 31st to protect ground nesting birds. Flooding affecting the property at 48 Hart close is to be investigated in liaison with East Sussex County Council. The woody vegetation around the pond is to be coppiced in stages to increase light levels in the pond.
Constraints: Hart close is the source of numerous enquiries in regards to trees and drainage; there are ongoing issues with amateurish tree pruning under common law right. Some exchanges have become heated with solicitors being involved. There are several TPOs on trees in the area including a group TPO on the alder carr. The compartment becomes wet, almost boggy in wet weather and access restricted. The area around the veteran ash is restricted to the public for safety reasons.
Opportunities: The area is designated as wood pasture and wet woodland and are Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats. There is excellent woodland succession with multiple upcoming veteran oak trees. These factors may be a source of future grant funding. The closing of the sheep meadow creates an excellent source habitat ensuring wider ecosystem stability.

5.2.3 Compartment 3: 2.8 ha

Located along the northern boundary and some of the western boundary of West Park LNR, this compartment encompasses all the sandstone rock outcrops and associated woodland.

Monitor: Flytipping is an occasional problem on Rocks road. An ongoing cycle of tree inspections should be conducted, especially within falling distance of Rocks road due to the high mortality and rapid destabilising of birch trees (the predominant species). Monitor for occasional anti-social behaviour and littering. NNIS[3] chiefly Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) must be identified and their location noted for later removal between October and February, this is easiest in early spring.
Routines: Vegetation should be cut back from the paths during the spring and summer months. Sycamore control to be undertaken over the winter. Rhododendron and cherry laurel are to be removed and the stumps treated. Bracken is to be hand pulled from Heather Rock in May or June.
Specific tasks: The hedge along the western boundary to be re-laid in this management cycle.
Constraints: Access across the compartment is restricted. The Rocks road restricts free movement of terrestrial and arboreal animals between West Park and the lake Wood/Downlands farm ecosystems. Ecosystem denudation by sycamore and rhododendron colonisation is possible if these species are not controlled.
Opportunities: There is a possibility of creating more wildlife corridors across the Rocks road using grant funding from organisations such as the Sussex Lund. Traffic speed restrictions should be pursued with

[3] Non Native Invasive Species

ESCC Highways department as dead animals are often found on the road between the wildlife sites.

5.2.4 Compartment 4: 1.2 ha

Located in the centre of the Reserve, this compartment encompasses the dry middle field. The meadow is species-poor at present but, as it is currently used for informal recreation, it is not deemed necessary to improve the habitat in this area. The area features a memorial bench to ranger Geoff Pollard.

Monitor: Monitor the area for the encroachment of scrub into the open area. Some encroachment may be deemed acceptable if it provides needed habitat the vehicle gate at the North of the compartment to be monitored and maintained.
Routines: Paths require vegetation removal in the spring and summer. Remove bracken from the area surrounding Geoff's bench.
Specific tasks: Consideration given to managing the hedge (Martyn's Hedge) which serves at the boundary between compartments 3 and 4. The hedge to be extended up to the extant veteran trees. The hedging along the A22 which forms the western boundary of the compartment to be re-laid in this management cycle.
Constraints: There is often conflict between reserve users and residents particularly in late winter when many paths become muddy and reserve users begin to forge new unauthorised trails.
Opportunities: There is opportunity to improve path conditions using sleepers to form steps on the boundary between compartments 4 and 5 using Woodland development grants.

.**5.2.5 Compartment 5**: 0.3 ha

This compartment encompasses the coppice woodland strip, south of C4 that is set on an embankment. The vernal ground flora suggests that this area is almost certainly a remnant of ancient woodland. There are some elm stools and ancient hazel (*Corylus avellana*) stools and a variety of mature trees including sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*). The vehicle gate on the western boundary is now defunct and no there are no plans to bring it back into use.

Monitor: A twice annual tree health inspection should be conducted on the over mature ash trees in the east of the compartment. These trees appear to be in relatively good health but should be inspected for crown vitality in summer months and inspected for pathogenic fungal fruiting bodies in September-October. These trees are within reach of residential properties if they become structurally weakened.
Routines: The leaf litter under the over-mature ashes should be cleared with leaf blower in autumn to disperse the spores of *H. fraxineus.*
Specific tasks: The hedging along the A22 which forms the western boundary of the compartment to be re-laid in this management cycle.
Constraints: Ash trees in this compartment are affected to varying degrees with ash die back and *Armillaria mellea.* Trees are felled as required if they present a threat to internal footpaths.
Opportunities: The area is inhabited by dormice and is a good candidate for further dormouse surveying. Removal of moribund mature ash is providing succession opportunities to other woodland species.

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5.2.6. Compartment 6: 2.1 ha

This compartment encompasses the field on the southern edge of the LNR.

The field is now of quite high wildlife value due to its diversity of habitats. It incorporates a thick hawthorn boundary hedge, a variety of mixed native trees, dense bramble scrub, varied sward grassland, some semi-improved grassland and a nettle bed.

Monitor: The planted trees on the western boundary require an annual tree safety inspection as they are now large enough to potentially impact the A22. Ash dieback affects close to 100% of ash in this compartment, the trees are young enough to be succumbing to this pathogen alone and should be identified and removed where they threaten internal paths and infrastructure. The wildflower meadow in the south of the compartment should be monitored for the encroachment of scrub, creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and ragwort.
Routines: Vegetation needs to be cut away from internal paths throughout summer months. The gully along the eastern boundary is to be cleared of vegetation annually in the winter months. The wildflower meadow is to be cut and cleared annually after the plants have set seed.
Specific tasks: The hedging along the A22 and B2102 which forms the western and southern boundaries of the compartment to be re-laid in this management cycle.
Constraints:
Opportunities: The compartment offers an increasingly biodiverse area increasing "good" scrub is preventing access to areas of the site offering a good source habitat for the overall ecosystem. There may be scope to add a notice board to the Prince's close entrance.

6 Management prescriptions:

Objectives and methodologies

6.1 Bracken control.

Objective: To further reduce the prevalence and domination of bracken fronds and litter in grassland areas. Bracken has (as in much of Britain and Ireland) begun to dominate in many ecosystems. Early records of West Park[4] clearly demonstrate bracken encroachment on site. Bracken does provide some cover for smaller animals however it is invasive and rapidly dominates ecosystems reducing biodiversity. Bracken is carcinogenic and the range of non-chemical controls are of limited effectiveness.

Method:
On sensitive areas or areas with poor access such as the sandy hummock and heather rock bracken should be pulled by hand in early summer. This is a physically difficult task but frees non target species from domination for the remainder of the growing year.

[4] Photographic evidence supplied by D.Baldock of the Recerves Supporters group

The previous regimen of cutting by hand has not been successful in curbing the bracken and should be discontinued as a widespread treatment. A cycle of bracken rolling taking place in late summer should implement over a cycle lasting at least the length of this management plan. By late summer most natural processes have been completed and the noise of the machinery involved will sufficiently disturb fauna to avoid accidental damage to animal and bird populations. The entire site which can be accessed by machines may be rolled in one to two days. A contractor has been engaged to begin this process in 2023 but this could be taken in house at a future date.

Herbicide spraying (Asulox) is not presently available to sites with a Local Nature Reserve designation (2022). If this changes treatment by Asulox should be considered perhaps with public consultation. Glyphosate treatment unacceptably affects non target species.

Traditional controls using pigs and cattle are not considered suitable for local site conditions.

6.2 Scrub control or clearance.

Objective: Where the scrub has become overgrown and gappy, management is required to encourage it to regrow as dense bushy scrub (bramble, hawthorn, blackthorn). This provides opportunities for birds to nest, breed and roost, for invertebrates to thrive and small mammals to shelter. Scrub of low value which is invading grassland areas should not be allowed to take hold.

Method: Encroaching scrub to be removed using machinery and hand tools during the autumn and winter months (1st October to 1st March) to avoid disturbing nesting birds.

Objective: Completely cut down scrub where it is invading and threatening a neighbouring important habitat, like grassland.

Method: Most scrub can be cut using hand saws, brash hooks or using the shredder blade on the powerful FS461 brushcutters. Some areas may be controlled with the DR and BCS hand tractors. The DR and shredder will reduce scrub to small diameter mulch while the BCS and hand tools will require scrub to be processed into brash piles.

Public relations problems are often associated with scrub clearance and good pre-publicity for the work, with a full explanation, is essential. Scrub clearance should take place in autumn/winter, when the leaves have fallen, but before the sap begins to rise and birds begin to nest.

6.3 Grazing.

Objective: To maintain and enhance populations of orchids and wild flowers in the marsh conservation area and reduce the prevalence of bracken which competes with less dominant species. Grazing also encourage tussocks for invertebrate benefit.

Method: Grazing should commence in late Summer/to mid-winter on an annual basis. This should be done with tough, hardy sheep such as Herdwick, which graze very close to the ground, creating a tight sward and minimize poaching. The animals should be contained within the fenced off field with the

gates shut to prevent public access. Signs posted at each access point explain what is happening and why. Local residents act as “Lookerers” allowing the animals to be checked at least once per day and at further intervals by the Ranger and the Grazier.

Sourcing suitable animals has proven challenging and there has been no grazing on site since January 2021.

6.4 Coppicing.

Objective: Coppicing has a number of conservation benefits. It creates a diverse age structure of trees with a variety of habitats for as many different species as possible. It ensures large willows do not dominant the wet meadow, sucking up moisture and shading out wild flowers and also helps to prevent sycamores from dominating the site.

Method: Coppicing should be carried out when the tree is not in active growth to minimise damage and avoid the bird nesting season. Any time from the beginning of October to the beginning of March is suitable. Most coppicing can be undertaken with hand tools, and makes a suitable volunteer task, but some needs to be undertaken by a qualified chainsaw operative. Brash and logs can be used in dead hedging, or stacked in an area of low habitat value to provide nesting opportunities for birds and habitat for insects and small mammals. Alternatively, it could be chipped, where access allows and the material added to paths with a solid base to soak up excess moisture in the winter.

6.5 Heather regeneration.

Objective: To maintain and enhance the heather population on “heather rock”, the last fragment of heather remaining on the Reserve.

Method: Hand pull bracken while it is in active growth to prevent it smothering the heather seedlings. Periodically remove bramble on the edge of the site to allow set heather seed to germinate. Remove/prune selected trees in this area which overshadow the heather during Autumn/Winter, particularly sycamore which has a tendency to self-seed very prolifically. Check regularly for rhododendron seedlings/re-growth and remove as necessary. Make repairs to chestnut paling or dead hedge as necessary. Scrape back leaf and/or bracken litter as necessary to maintain bare soil/sand areas for heather. Collect heather seeds from existing plants in late October and scatter on bare ground.

6.6 Sycamore control.

Objective: To prevent the spread and encroachment of sycamore on the Reserve. This is a possibly non native, invasive species that sets a lot of seed and casts dense shade whilst supporting few native species. Saplings should be removed, especially when they grow in relatively dense clumps in the woodland areas. There is however a dilemma, in that the mature specimens tend to harbour many aphids and interesting species of lichen and bryophytes, so it could be argued that these should be retained. Despite such trees being the source of the unwanted saplings.

Method: Incorporate sycamores into the coppicing regime and possibly treat with herbicide in sensitive locations where re-growth is not desirable. Standing deadwood habitats may be created with localised glyphosyte capsules, ring barking or treatment with blowtorches. These habitats will need to be removed when they become unstable if near trails. Brush cut or hand cut the saplings whilst small to avoid labour intensive coppicing in the future. Efforts should be concentrated in the wet meadow and along the woodland strip on the northern boundary as this is most sensitive to encroachment. Brash and logs should be made into separate habitat piles.

6.7 Invasive Species Control.

Objective: To reduce or eradicate clumps of invasive weeds in grassland.
Method:
Only compartment four is within distance of adjacent improved grassland And is therefore the only area where control of ragwort may be deemed necessary. This area will need to be controlled if a request to do so is made by the land owner/tenant. This would be best affected by a mechanical puller operator by a contractor.
Localised control of ragwort or thistle in compartment six can be effectively conducted by hand where deemed necessary.

6.8 Hedge laying or Maintenance.

Objective: Several hedges on the reserve are in need of management. Some need the traditional method of hedge-laying to drastically improve their structure and wildlife value, whilst others are too young may just need trimming and protective shelters to improve them.

Method: Hedge-laying requires the hedge to be cleared of obstacles like fencing and dead wood and then trimmed so that the main stems can be partially cut into and then laid over, domino style. The laid pleachers are supported by a line of hazel stakes and binders and then tied up.
Young hedge-row saplings are susceptible to being grazed by rabbits and deer so need protection in the form of either plastic spirals or tubes. If they were not put on when the saplings were planted they should be fitted retrospectively. If they have disappeared they should be put back. Saplings that have got long and lanky or have grown into neighbouring ones should be trimmed so they grow more densely. Such hedges are likely to need laying after a few years.
Contact has been made with local hedge laying societies with an eye to hosting training days for volunteers on the many metres of hedging present on site.

6.9 Vegetation cut.

Objective: To create a diverse range of habitats to maximise wildlife potential, including trees, hedges, dense scrub, long grass and closely mown turf. But particularly to encourage species-rich grassland by removing nutrients and preventing scrub invasion.

Method: A “hay cut” should be made in in selected areas of C6 after wild flowers have set their seed.

This will create a short turf, check the growth of nettles and thistles (desirable but not in large quantities) and prevent bramble from becoming too vigorous. This is to be conducted by BCS hand tractor fitted with a reciprocating bar. Cutting should take place in September. All cuttings should be raked up and deposited in the fenced areas on site. This will reduce the vigour of dominant species and prevent nutrient enrichment. These grass piles will provide excellent habitat for slow worms and grass snakes.

6.10 Water Course Maintenance.

Objective: To keep water courses like ditches and streams open and free flowing so they do a job of draining excess water away from land and they are a habitat in their own right.

Methods: Ditches need to be kept clear of obstacles like dense mats of leaves or fallen branches and of growing plants, particularly thorn scrub and willow and alder trees. Most obstacles can be simply lifted out and the debris dumped well away so it can't just get back in again, whilst plants usually need to be cut first.

The size and shape of ditches need to be maintained. Monitoring will show up any problems. Restructuring ditches can be conducted by hand tools or by contractors.

6.11 Access Point Maintenance.

Objective; Access point structures like kissing gates, field gates and stiles need to be maintained to ensure the function safely and effectively.

Methods: Access points need to be monitored on a regular basis and when problems are spotted remedial work carried out.
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6.12 Visitor Facilities Maintenance.

Objectives. Visitor facilities include seats, bins, interpretation boards and notice boards; all of which are to be found at West Park and need to be maintained to be safe and useful.

Methods. The state of these features needs to be monitored on a regular basis and if any problems are found then remedial action should be taken. The prioritization of action depends on the consequences of not acting. For example, if the bins are not kept in good repair rubbish will soon be found on the reserve. The two types of information board (mentioned above) can deteriorate without any immediate effect on their safety or function. Good public relations is usually the main reason for catching up with this type of work.

6.13 Trees (felling thinning and planting):

Objectives: To maintain the continued existence of a healthy tree population, with an excellent diversity of species, woodland structure and age, and also to maintain the local genetics of the site. In the woodland areas succession must be protected, including veteran succession across the site.
The default decision will be to retain trees where it is optimum to do so.
Method: In line with the Uckfield Town Council's tree policy, trees will not be removed or cut for reasons of simple expedience or inconvenience. If paths need to be re directed or closed in order to retain notable or veteran trees they should be. If a compelling safety reason is evident or to prevent the spread of pathogens, trees may be removed in accordance with Forestry commission tree health guidance. Standing dead wood (snags) must be retained where practical as should large diameter stems and logs. Brash may be stacked or chipped. Where practicable diseased trees should be retained as snags or monoliths.
While tree planting has been conducted on site this practice should be discontinued. There is ample natural regeneration in site which provides higher rates of success, genetic continuity, mitigates exposure to pathogens and obviates the need for foreign materials being brought onto site. Only the alder carr (compartment 6e in the woodland management plan) contains any stipulation to replant felled trees under the woodland management plan. It is generally accepted that the only species of tree that should be planted in ancient woodland is the rare black poplar (*Populus nigra*).
Veteran trees may require special management plans drawn up for their continued protection. It should be noted that compartments 1 and 2 contain woodland pasture and wet woodland and are Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats.

7 Future considerations

7.1 Future requirements:

- Funding allocations: Funding should be set aside for the repeat ditching works behind Hart close proposed for 2026 and thereafter;
- Funding should also be allocated for the replacement of the fence line along Rocks Road. It is understood that the original fence line was a very difficult undertaking given the closeness of the underlying sandstone to the surface and that the replacement of the fence would be best undertaken by a specialist contractor. The fence line is presently sound and, while old, is not showing signs of undue wear and tear;
- The drainage/flooding issue near to 48 Hart Close needs to be investigated in conjunction with East Sussex County Council;

7.2 Future aspirations:

- A baseline ecological survey should be undertaken on the nature reserve to help better inform future management prescriptions. Only tentative recommendations can be given for areas such as the sand stone outcrops as there is no complete understanding of the species present. Ecological records are sparse and species present are often inferred from thorough surveys conducted on adjacent sites.
- Consideration should be given to extending grazing by large ruminants (cattle or horses) across the site. This has been discussed with Sussex Wildlife Trust who have agreed that it is feasible. One of the ecological processes missing from the site is the presence of large herbivores. This would require consultation with local users and with the forestry commission.

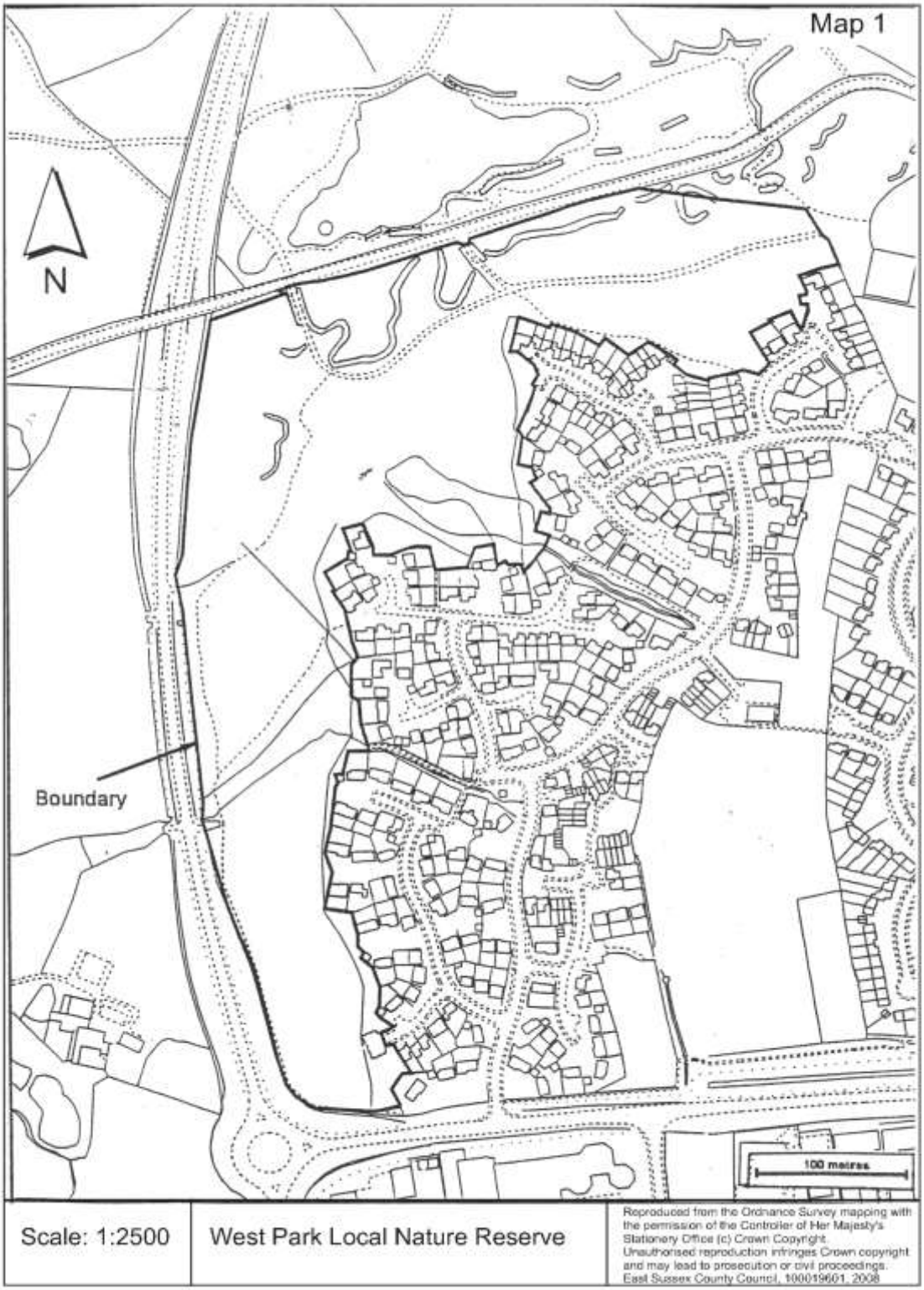
- Local cub and scout groups use the site for nature walks, outreach to local schools and nature groups should be sought to increase community engagement with the site.

7.3 Threats

- There may be loss of focus among users that the site is a nature reserve and not a recreation area. There are frequent calls to improve footing and impediments to access are often received poorly with barriers having been removed and hedging trampled.
- Recent large developments and the imposition of parking charges on Ashdown forest are likely to increase use of the reserve with increased erosion, disturbance, littering and eutrophication from fouling.
- Diseases and pathogens have become an ever bigger part of the biological "landscape" of the United Kingdom, especially plant pathogens. Acute oak decline, ash dieback and *Dothistroma septosporum* to name a few all have the potential to make widespread landscape level changes to the ecology at West Park LNR. This is expected to intensify over the near future
- West Park LNR is a largely isolated ecological unit for terrestrial and arborial fauna. The A22 and Rock's road cut the site off from the larger intact areas of countryside adjacent. This has the potential to reduce long term genetic viability of some present species such as dormice and , if present, adders. It should be noted that this may be protecting the site somewhat from browsing pressure from locally numerous deer species.
- Proposed development of Downland farm which is contiguous to Lake wood would, if it goes ahead, cause widespread eco system disturbance across the whole of north Uckfield including West Park.

7.4 Opportunities:

- A baseline ecological survey has the possibility to identify key species and confirm the presence of other notable and protected species. This can help inform future management and may well help with future designations, protections and possible grant funding.
- Non-governmental organisations have expressed interest in helping fund or part fund the creation of wildlife corridors to and from West Park to increase ecological connectivity.
- The woodland management plan presence of numerous veteran trees and the woodland pasture ecosystem represent good opportunities to secure future grant funding.



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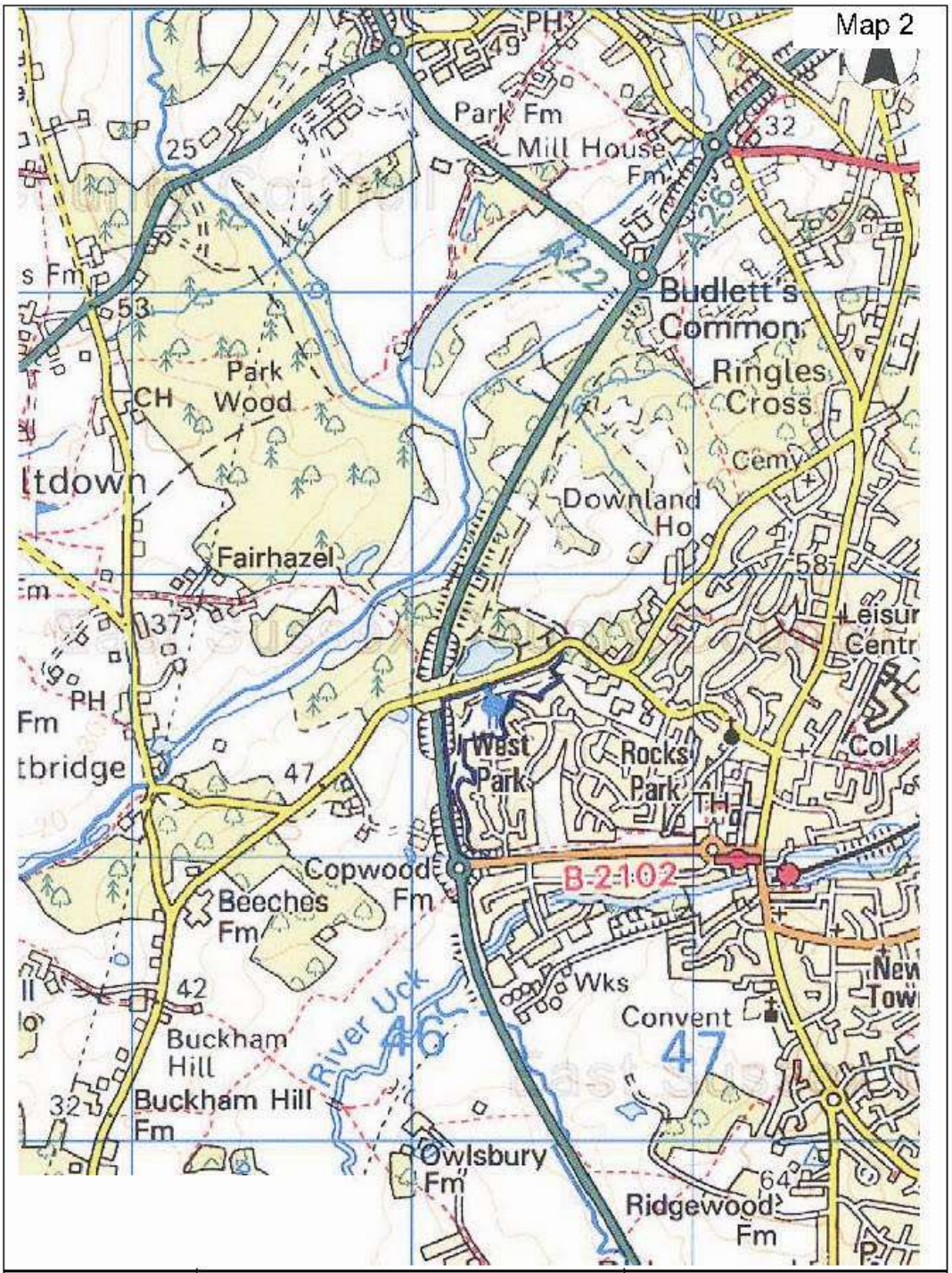
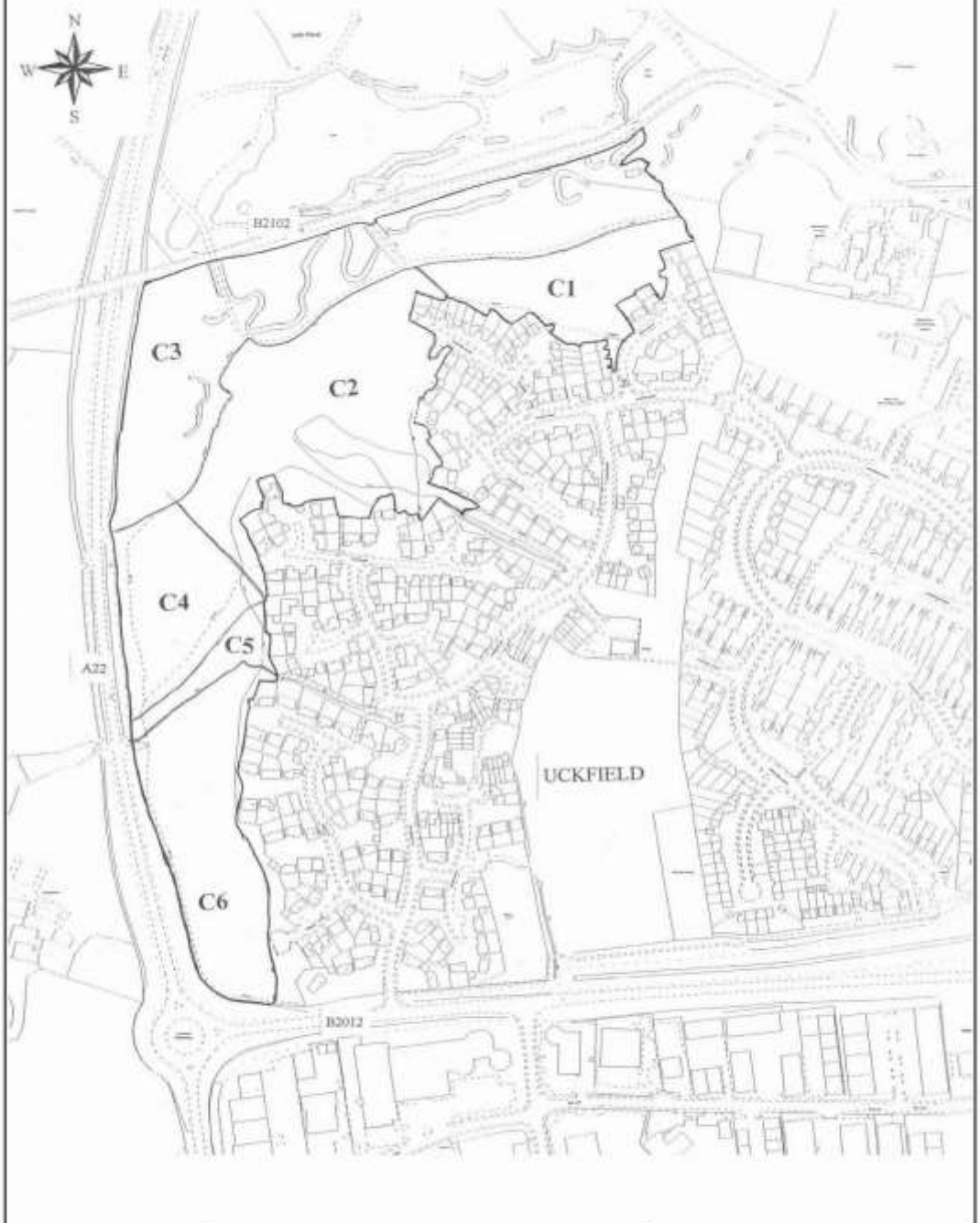


Scale: 1:20000	West Park Local Nature Reserve	

Map 3



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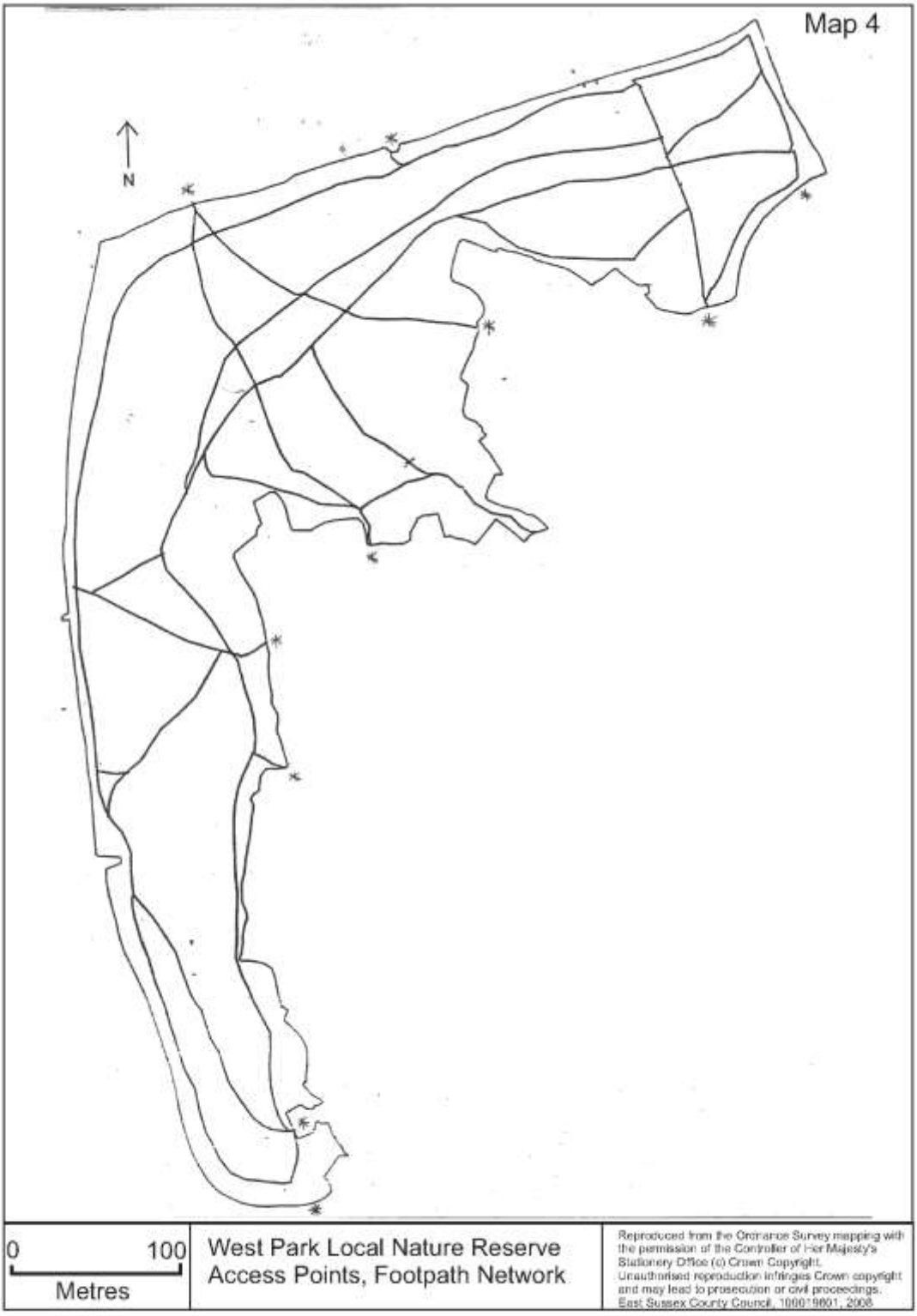
Map 4
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Metres
West Park Local Nature Reserve
Access Points, Footpath Network
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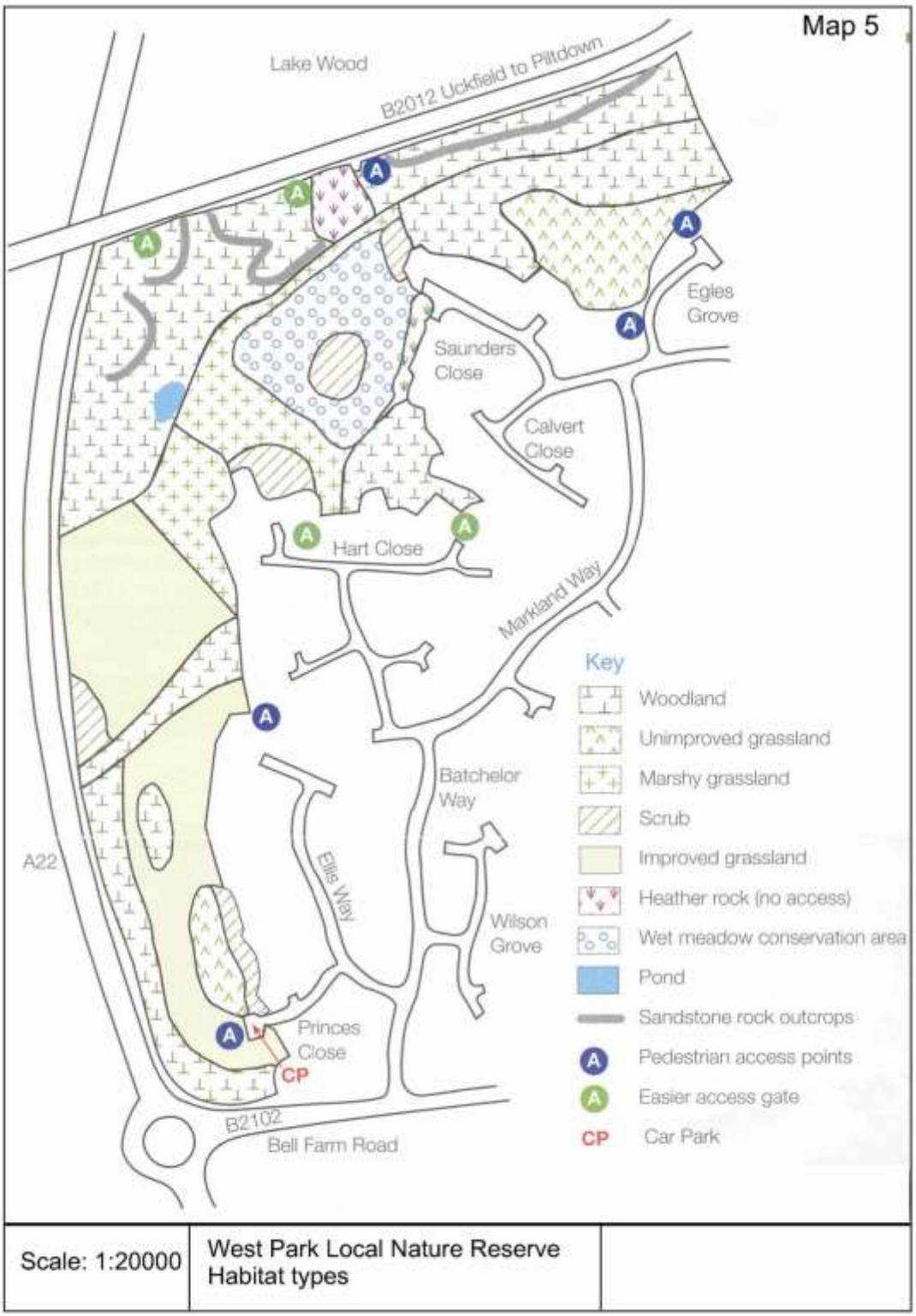

Scale: 1:20000	West Park Local Nature Reserve Habitat types	