# UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

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**Town Clerk – Holly Goring**

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Meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** to be held on
**Monday 2 March 2026 at 7.00pm**
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

## AGENDA

Under The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, members of the public are able to film or record during a committee meeting.

**1.0. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members and Officers are reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on this Agenda. Should any Member consider that they require a dispensation in relation to any prejudicial interest that they may have, they are asked to make a written application to the Clerk well in advance of the meeting.

Notice should be given at this part of the meeting of any intended declaration. The nature of the interest should then be declared later at the commencement of the item or when the interest becomes apparent.

**2.0. STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA AT THE CHAIRMAN'S DISCRETION**

**3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**4.0. MINUTES**

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on 19 January 2026
4.2. Action list – for information only
4.3. Project monitoring list – for information only
4.4 Forward plan – for information only

**5.0. FINANCE**

5.1. Bills paid
5.2 To note the income & expenditure report ending 31 December 2025

**6.0. ADMINISTRATION**

6.1 To consider options for a replacement vehicle for the Vauxhall Movano van
6.2 To review the relevant sections of the Draft Wealden Local Plan 2025-2042

**7.0. ENVIRONMENT**

7.1 To note the current position of the Town Council's Estates
7.2 To note Preliminary Ecology Appraisals and Management Recommendations for Local Nature Reserves in Uckfield
7.3 To receive an update on the consecration of the new Y-section and various improvements for Snatts Road Cemetery

**8.0. LEISURE**

8.1 To receive an update on the 3G Pitch application

**9.0. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS**

(Nothing to report)

**10.0. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

10.1 All Weather Pitch Operational Group
10.2 Biodiversity links - Ashdown Forest and Climate Change
10.3 Local Nature Reserve Supporters Group
10.4 Luxford Centre Management Committee
10.5 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee
10.6 Uckfield Youth Club Trust Board
10.8 Wealden Food Partnership Advisory Group
10.9 Uckfield & District Twinning Association – AGM only

**11.0. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**12.0. CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS**

To consider whether to **RESOLVE** to exclude the press and public (pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960) during consideration of the following confidential business to be conducted: -

12.1 To consider a report on the Marketing programme

**Town Clerk**
24 February 2026

# UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** held on
Monday 19th January 2026 at 7.00pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

**PRESENT:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Cllr. Angie Smith (Chair) | Cllr. Bernadette Reed |
| Cllr. Karen Bedwell | Cllr. Duncan Bennett |
| Cllr. Donna French | Cllr. Michael McClafferty |
| Cllr. Chris Macve | Cllr. Spike Mayhew |

**IN ATTENDANCE:**
Councillor Peter Selby

Thomas Woollard – Estates Manager
Rachel Newton – Senior Administrative Officer
Minutes taken by Rachel Newton

**1.0. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members and officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on the agenda.

A declaration of interest was made by Councillor D. Bennett, who declared a prejudicial interest in relation to an amendment to the Allotment Agreement and rent review notice on the agenda at item 5.3. The Chair proposed that this conflict was a personal rather than prejudicial interest, and it was agreed that he would not be excluded from those discussions during the meeting.

**2.0. STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA AT THE CHAIR'S DISCRETION**

None received.

**3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None received. The committee endorsed the absence of Councillor Val Frost due to health reasons, and wished her a full and fast recovery.

**4.0. MINUTES**

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 24 November 2025

**EL.42.01.26** It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on 24 November 2025, be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4.2. Action list

Members noted the report and all ongoing items. No actions to be removed.

4.3. Project Monitoring List – for information only

Members noted the report. No items to be removed.

4.4 Forward plan – for information only
Members noted the report.

**5.0. FINANCE**

5.1. To note bills paid
Members noted the report.

5.2 To note the income and expenditure report ending 30 November 2025
Members noted the report - no comments were received.

5.3 To consider an amendment to the Allotment Agreement and rent review notice

**EL.43.01.26** Members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to agree to the amended report and rental agreement to be revised before issuing a letter to allotment tenants before 6 April 2026, which provides 12 months' notice of the revised charging schedule.

**6.0. ADMINISTRATION**

6.1 To note a new method statement for the dressing of Graves in the X-section and Garden of Remembrance at Snatts Road Cemetery
This item had been raised previously under this committee whilst improvements were being made to the cemetery grounds. Some fly-tipping had been cleared from the woodlands, and some hedging by the north entrance had been reduced, which was a good start.

In some parts of the cemetery, there was an increasing number of small memorials and trinkets on graves, which were not allowed. The X section was meant to remain a lawned area with a headstone only, allowing for the planting of bulbs or placing a vase within the permitted nine inches from the headstone.

Due to the delicate nature of the area, an action plan was set to begin after the Christmas period. This plan involved contacting each deed holder affected, asking them to remove any items made of glass, tin, plastic (including fake grass and artificial aggregates), wire mesh fencing, or other prohibited items, as outlined in the Cemetery Rules and Regulations.

It was acknowledged that this was not an easy task, but if anyone had concerns or needed further information, they could contact Uckfield Town Council directly.

**EL.44.01.26** Members **RESOLVED** to agree to the new standard operating procedures for the dressing of graves in the X-section and Garden of Remembrance at Snatts Road Cemetery.

6.2 To note an update to the Memorial Safety Policy – No. 33

**EL.45.01.26** Members **RESOLVED** to agree to an update to the Memorial Safety Policy – No. 33.

6.3 To note the draft minutes from the Strengthening Local Relations (SLR) meeting held on 15 January 2026
Members noted the report. A separate enquiry was raised by Councillor Reed in relation to the synchronisation of traffic lights since developers were supposed to pay towards updating them. This would be included on the agenda ahead of the next meeting, to be arranged.

**7.0 ENVIRONMENT**

7.1 To note the current position of the Town Council's Estates

Members noted the report. The Chair asked the Estates Manager if there was any method involved for Himalayan Balsam control in the Hempstead Lane Play Area and Hempstead Meadows nature reserve, just to ensure there was an allocation of resources for this.

Himalayan Balsam was easily spread, especially if it reached a nearby water course, so it was important to try to pull it out wherever possible, although this would not eradicate it. They were easy to pull out.

One suggestion was made to look into a bamboo membrane, which may help to suppress any further growth, after pulling it out this year. This material was often used in hot countries like Spain for riverside restoration projects. This was certainly a route being looked at together with Sussex Wildlife Trust and Ecologists for their views on this.

The Estates Manager added that there would be an increased budget set for communications and engagement in that area, and an article had recently been submitted in The Voice with the idea of setting dates for Balsam picking and asking for any volunteers to join us if they wished to help, including Brighter Uckfield..

In relation to a previous request for a kissing gate at the nature reserve, this was considered but was not essential, and a normal wooden gate would only be required as a visual deterrent, going forward.

The Estates Manager announced a five-year plan for playgrounds coming up that would provide a different concept or theme for each one, including an outdoor gym. This was being discussed with the vision of this being available to all residents and age groups.

One member asked if we could speak with Buxted Parish Council in relation to an area of land between Manor Park and Views Wood (opposite 42 Nevill Road), which was not developed on, with a view to looking into using this space as a play area, with more wooden-themed equipment. Members agreed, and even if it was a non-starter, it may be worth having a verbal discussion about this first.

**8.0 LEISURE**

(Nothing to report).

**9.0 REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS**

9.1 To note an update from the Climate Emergency Steering Group

Members noted the report.

Councillor Reed wished to declare that Wealden District Council would soon be announcing its Draft Local Plan Consultation, which was due to launch in February, and would be open to the public for six weeks to provide any feedback.

Councillor Bedwell wished to raise a couple of upcoming events, including the Green Shoots Upcycled Fashion Show on 26th February and The Uckfield Eco Expo on 21st March and requested volunteers who could either assist and/or wished to take part.

The Chair offered to provide an activity for younger children to create 'No Mow May' signs and announced that these events were currently being advertised across social media websites and posters.

**10.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

10.1 All Weather Pitch Operational Group

Members noted the report and thanked Councillor C. Macve for his welcome efforts.

10.2 Conservators of Ashdown Forest
Nothing to report at this time.

10.3 Local Nature Reserve Supporters Group
Nothing to report at this time.

10.4 Luxford Centre Management Committee
Nothing to report at this time.

10.5 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee
Nothing to report at this time.

10.6 Uckfield Youth Club Board
Nothing to report at this time.

10.7 Wealden Bus Alliance/Weald Link
Nothing to report at this time.

10.8 Wealden Food Partnership Advisory Group
Nothing to report at this time.

**11.0 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair had none, although a Councillor had suggested that there were some gaps on the boundary of Victoria Play Area and the new development, that needed to be closed up. A separate walk-through would be arranged for this with the Estates team.

**12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS**

**EL.46.01.26** It was **RESOLVED** that, pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, it was advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded, and they were instructed to withdraw.

12.1 To consider a report on the Marketing programme
Members noted the report and were pleased to see an increase in event ticket sales for all events.

The meeting finished at 7:50 pm.

# UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

**ACTION LIST - FOR INFORMATION ONLY**

## Environment and Leisure Committee

Please note no resolutions can be made from the action list. It is for information only.

| Resolution No. | Details | Date Raised | Action By | Date Complete |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EL.28.09.16 | To consider revised byelaws for the Town Council's Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)<br>Members reviewed the amendments to the byelaws which still require Natural England and DEFRA's approval. It was RESOLVED to accept the revised byelaws. | 05.09.16 | HG | In progress. |
| EL.26.01.19 | It was RESOLVED that the Supporter Groups for both reserves be consulted with a view to shorten the byelaws in accordance with DEFRA's comments and report back to the Environment & Leisure committee. | 28.01.19 | | |
| EL73.05.22 | To consider a number of improvements to direct tourism to Uckfield Members noted the report and RESOLVED to: (i) introduce the following ideas for improvements to direct tourism to Uckfield at the next infrastructure working group meeting: better parking facilities for motorhomes in town and improved signage, and to; (ii) consider if there was anything additional that should be explored to be discussed at that next meeting, and; (iii) for the E&F Manager to explore those initiatives put forward already with the various responsible agencies, including any leverage through ES Highways for proper signage from developers. | 16.05.22 | RN/ HG | In progress. |
| EL.11.07.24 | Climate Change working Group Update<br>Members resolved to agree to request staff to instruct the Town Council's solicitors in relation to the potential purchase of land adjacent to the River Uck and abutting the lane leading to the Sussex Horse Rescue site. | 08.07.24 | HG | In progress. |
| EL.18.09.24 | To initially consider the proposed re-routing of the Public Right of Way from Ridgewood Farm into Boothland Wood as part of the development of this site<br>Members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to initially agree to the proposal from Redrow, to re-route the Public Right of Way from Ridgewood Farm away from Boothland Wood as part of the development of this site but if further consideration of routes needed to be explored. | 02.09.24 | HG | In progress. |

| Resolution no. | Details | Date Raised | Action By | Date Complete |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EL41.03.25 | To consider the consecration of a section of land at Snatts Road Cemetery to be named the new Y section<br>Members resolved to note the report before requesting, that officers:<br>(i) look into those points raised at the meeting before deciding on the consecration of the new Y-section, and bring these points to the next meeting;<br>(ii) seek advice from the Town Clerk in relation to writing a letter to the Head of Planning with a request for additional cemetery land in line with the amount of housing opportunities coming our way. | 03.03.25 | RN | Report being presented to meeting of 2 March 2026. |
| EL20.09.25 | To receive a progress update on water ingress into Ridgewood Village Hall<br>Members **RESOLVED** to agree to:<br>(i) proceed with Quotation 2 from Contractor A to minimise the impact and ensure the safety of our leaseholders, and;<br>(ii) enable leeway of an additional expense of fifteen percent just in case this goes slightly over budget, and;<br>(iii) investigate the suggestions with the company that were raised at the meeting by experienced councillors in this field, and;<br>(iv) continue to look into more radical ideas to fix the car park in the longer term. | 20.09.25 | JH | The works have been completed and the Estates team will monitor, whilst exploring options for the remainder of the car park works.<br><br>The Facilities & Compliance Manager has confirmed that the next stage of works would be advertised on the UK Government procurement portal - 'Find a Tender.'<br><br>Hopefully an update should be available towards the end of the month.<br>**Sections (i) to (iii) have been completed. Can be removed.** |
| EL21.09.25 | Update on the Uckfield Station Car Park and electric charging Members wished to arrange a separate meeting this year with APCOA to explore some questions being raised that needed further clarification:<br>• Would residents have to pay to park in an electric bay, as there was a sign stating an automatic pay to park as you entered?<br>• Would residents be penalised for using an electric parking bay as a normal parking spot?<br>• What were the current rates and subsidising rates?<br>• Was there any security for parking overnight?<br>• Would there be enough spaces to park? | 21.09.25 | | On hold. |

| Resolution no. | Details | Date Raised | Action By | Date Complete |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EL27.10.25 | To receive an update on a management plan for Snatts Road Cemetery<br>Following concerns raised by the Grounds team in relation to grass cutting and health and safety, members resolved to agree to the proposed management plan to remove any items not permitted on graves. This task would involve contacting deed owners where possible, and asking Deed holders to remove any items, or they will be stored for collection.<br><br>Members appreciated that this would need to be handled with care, and our reasons for doing this would need to be clearly communicated. The team were in the process of creating new signs and cards to put on graves and wording to be placed on social media if needed. | 27.10.25 | RN | In progress.<br><br>**NFA** |

**UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL**

**ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE COMMITTEE**

**PROJECT MONITORING FORM 2025-26**

## Projects in 2022/23 Budget – New Initiatives

| **Project Name** | **Speed reduction initiative (already have £3,199.64 in earmarked reserves)** | | **Project Number** | **69** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FC.82.01.22** | Plus £2,000 placed into budget in 2022/23 | 17.01.22 | Will be utilised when further research has been undertaken into the various roadside initiatives available. | |

## Projects in 2025/26 Budget – New Initiatives

| **Project Name** | **Permanent welfare facilities for Harlands Playing Fields** | | **Project Number** | **89** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FC.90.01.25** | £12,000 | 08.04.25 | Temporary toilet provision has been installed and will be revisited in 2027-28. | |

| **Project Name** | **Conservation and wildlife monitoring (longer-term project)** | | **Project Number** | **91** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FC.90.01.25** | £8,000<br>- minus £7,890.<br>= £110. | 08.04.25 | Wildlife appraisals have been commissioned and the reports are now in.<br><br>Within 2025/26 we have spent a total of £7,890.<br>**NFA for this stage of the 2025/26 project.**<br><br>We have incorporated £15k within the budget in April 2026 – March 2027 for further work in this area. | |

# ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN – 2025-26

| STANDING ITEMS FOR GENERAL PURPOSES AGENDA | REPORT LEAD |
|---|---|
| Minutes from the last meeting | Senior Admin |
| Action list | Mgt Team |
| Project list | Mgt Team |
| Bills paid | Senior Admin |
| Income and expenditure reports | TClerk / Asst TC |
| Estates Update | E&F Manager |
| Reports from working groups | Councillor representatives |
| Reports from outside bodies | Councillor representatives |
| Marketing report (confidential business) | Marketing & Comms Assistant |

| DATE OF MEETING | DESCRIPTION OF AGENDA ITEM/REPORT | |
|---|---|---|
| **2 MARCH 2026** | To consider options for replacement vehicle for the Movano van | Estates Mgr |
| | To review the relevant sections of the Draft Wealden Local Plan 2025-2042 | Town Clerk |
| | To note Preliminary Ecology Appraisals and Management recommendations for Local Nature Reserves in Uckfield | SA Officer |
| | To receive an update on the consecration of the new Y-section and various improvements for Snatts Road Cemetery | SA Officer |
| | Update on 3G Pitch application | Town Clerk |
| **CONFIDENTIAL** | Marketing report | |

# ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN – 2025-26

| DATE OF MEETING | DESCRIPTION OF AGENDA ITEM/REPORT | |
|---|---|---|
| **13 APRIL 2026** | Update from the Joint Allotment Working Group meeting on 16th March 2026 | SA Officer |
| | Draft Sports Pitch licence agreements for consideration | SA Officer |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| **CONFIDENTIAL** | Marketing report | |

# Environment and Leisure Committee at 31 December 2025

| Apr 25 Actuals £ | May 25 Actuals £ | Jun 25 Actuals £ | Jul 25 Actuals £ | Aug 25 Actuals £ | Sept 25 Actuals £ | Oct 25 Actuals £ | Nov 25 Actuals £ | Dec 25 Actuals £ | Actuals at 31 Dec 25 £ | Budget at 31 Dec 25 £ | Jan 26 Budget £ | Feb 26 Budget £ | Mar 26 Budget £ | Totals 2025/26 | Budget 2025/26 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 491 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 491 | 610 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 491 | 610 |
| 1,813 | 1,082 | 2,175 | 1,662 | 1,243 | 2,405 | 4,440 | 4,724 | 4,624 | 24,168 | 18,777 | 2,083 | 2,083 | 2,083 | 30,418 | 25,000 |
| 5,894 | 357 | 162 | 102 | 43 | 105 | 0 | 34 | 0 | 6,697 | 8,000 | 0 | 0 | 1,000 | 7,697 | 9,000 |
| 3,345 | 255 | 150 | 45 | 30 | 69 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,894 | 3,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,894 | 3,000 |
| 316 | 104 | 380 | 52 | 52 | 104 | 0 | 52 | 0 | 1,060 | 1,500 | 167 | 167 | 167 | 1,560 | 2,000 |
| 0 | 117 | 325 | 176 | 336 | 136 | 3,697 | 0 | 108 | 4,894 | 5,000 | 0 | 0 | 5,000 | 9,894 | 20,000 |
| 2,795 | (560) | 155 | 10 | 4,874 | 449 | 130 | 0 | 0 | 7,852 | 7,250 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7,852 | 7,250 |
| 0 | 0 | 400 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 400 | 500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 400 | 500 |
| 0 | 0 | 700 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14,000 | 14,700 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14,700 | 0 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 400 | 0 | 400 | 400 | 400 | 1,600 | 0 | 400 | 400 | 400 | 2,800 | 0 |
| 620 | 5,310 | 2,885 | 5,260 | 0 | 862 | 2,235 | 2,865 | 4,190 | 24,227 | 27,750 | 3,083 | 3,083 | 3,083 | 33,477 | 37,000 |
| 424 | 530 | 1,408 | 880 | 0 | 235 | 120 | 415 | 235 | 4,247 | 5,250 | 583 | 583 | 583 | 5,997 | 7,000 |
| 147 | 50 | 150 | 200 | 50 | 0 | 50 | 50 | 100 | 797 | 797 | 0 | 0 | 50 | 847 | 200 |
| 330 | 440 | 220 | 770 | 0 | 220 | 220 | 330 | 220 | 2,750 | 3,300 | 367 | 367 | 367 | 3,850 | 4,400 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 933 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 933 | 2,250 | 0 | 0 | 750 | 1,683 | 3,000 |
| 90 | 75 | 45 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 90 | 90 | 45 | 435 | 480 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 615 | 720 |
| 46 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 57 | 150 | 0 | 0 | 50 | 107 | 200 |
| 0 | 398 | 0 | 0 | 398 | 0 | 0 | 398 | 0 | 1,193 | 1,193 | 0 | 398 | 0 | 1,590 | 1,590 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 450 | 450 | 450 |
| 0 | 0 | 1,900 | 0 | 3,696 | 0 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 5,696 | 5,500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5,696 | 5,500 |
| 0 | 0 | 864 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 864 | 864 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 864 | 864 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 375 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 375 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 375 | 0 |
| **15,819** | **8,157** | **11,919** | **10,090** | **11,997** | **4,584** | **11,482** | **9,358** | **23,924** | **107,330** | **92,170** | **6,743** | **7,141** | **14,043** | **135,258** | **128,284** |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **0** | **0** | **773** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **773** | **0** | **0** | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2,185 | 1,890 | 1,485 | 4,808 | 1,708 | 1,635 | 6,367 | 1,424 | 1,425 | 22,928 | 17,500 | 1,458 | 1,458 | 1,458 | 27,303 | 17,500 |
| 0 | 384 | 110 | 0 | 17 | 574 | 0 | 0 | 680 | 1,765 | 2,000 | 0 | 0 | 500 | 2,265 | 2,500 |
| 0 | 52 | 271 | 458 | 169 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,739 | 4,689 | 6,000 | 0 | 0 | 2,000 | 6,689 | 8,000 |
| 351 | 1,089 | 1,854 | 433 | 366 | 737 | 631 | 583 | 110 | 6,154 | 5,625 | 625 | 625 | 625 | 8,029 | 7,500 |
| 160 | 105 | 170 | 203 | 140 | 415 | 933 | 1,574 | 488 | 4,187 | 5,250 | 583 | 583 | 583 | 5,937 | 7,000 |
| 0 | 854 | 1,101 | 37 | 330 | 1,905 | 574 | 1,847 | 0 | 6,648 | 4,875 | 0 | 0 | 1,625 | 8,273 | 6,500 |
| 327 | 153 | 209 | 188 | 170 | 489 | 0 | 0 | 571 | 2,106 | 1,125 | 0 | 0 | 375 | 2,481 | 1,500 |
| 92 | 224 | 285 | 541 | 65 | 0 | 76 | 65 | 0 | 1,349 | 1,075 | 179 | 179 | 179 | 1,887 | 2,150 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 447 | 0 | 216 | 204 | 0 | 867 | 1,250 | 0 | 0 | 667 | 1,533 | 2,500 |
| 940 | 940 | 940 | 1,410 | 1,410 | 1,410 | 1,410 | 1,410 | 1,410 | 11,279 | 7,500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11,279 | 7,500 |
| 168 | 0 | 1,122 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,422 | 2,712 | 2,400 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,712 | 2,400 |
| 75 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 90 | 1,125 | 0 | 0 | 375 | 465 | 1,500 |
| 101 | 962 | 96 | 1,576 | 130 | 123 | 756 | 2,022 | 278 | 6,044 | 2,625 | 0 | 0 | 875 | 6,919 | 3,500 |
| 85 | 74 | 1,350 | 20 | 28 | 703 | 0 | 1,375 | 0 | 3,635 | 3,000 | 0 | 0 | 1,000 | 4,635 | 4,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 500 | 0 | 0 | 500 | 500 | 1,000 |
| 783 | 881 | 914 | 1,077 | 1,273 | 1,277 | 1,095 | 849 | 800 | 8,949 | 8,250 | 917 | 917 | 917 | 11,699 | 11,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,250 | 0 | 0 | 1,250 | 1,250 | 2,500 |
| 0 | 0 | 456 | 109 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 565 | 750 | 0 | 0 | 250 | 815 | 1,000 |
| 367 | 33 | 0 | 1,768 | 60 | 0 | 0 | 33 | 0 | 2,260 | 2,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,260 | 2,000 |
| 55 | 190 | 110 | 194 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 549 | 2,250 | 0 | 0 | 750 | 1,299 | 3,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 138 | 0 | 31 | 169 | 150 | 0 | 0 | 150 | 319 | 300 |
| 900 | 900 | 900 | 1,650 | 1,000 | 2,745 | 840 | 1,350 | 900 | 11,185 | 8,250 | 917 | 917 | 917 | 13,935 | 11,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 250 | 0 | 0 | 250 | 250 | 500 |
| 1,085 | 1,000 | 1,808 | 5,411 | 0 | 1,774 | 1,300 | 10,912 | 4,906 | 28,195 | 11,250 | 0 | 0 | 3,750 | 31,945 | 15,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 751 | 0 | 0 | 751 | 1,000 | 0 | 0 | 1,000 | 1,751 | 2,000 |
| 1,052 | 158 | 490 | 414 | 568 | 794 | 155 | 154 | 149 | 3,934 | 2,456 | 182 | 182 | 182 | 4,479 | 3,000 |
| 0 | 600 | 300 | 3,727 | 7,665 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12,292 | 11,500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12,292 | 11,500 |
| 1,899 | 178 | 89 | 84 | 88 | 387 | 74 | 77 | 83 | 2,960 | 2,600 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 3,260 | 2,900 |
| 0 | 2,837 | 0 | (215) | 564 | 564 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,750 | 3,250 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,750 | 3,750 |
| 0 | 779 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 779 | 750 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 779 | 750 |
| 0 | 960 | 320 | 1,280 | 320 | 0 | 640 | 0 | 1,040 | 4,560 | 4,500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 6,060 | 6,000 |
| 143 | 115 | 115 | 134 | 115 | 379 | 403 | 378 | 115 | 1,898 | 1,350 | 150 | 0 | 0 | 2,048 | 1,500 |
| 278 | 222 | 222 | 278 | 222 | 296 | 339 | 222 | 259 | 2,339 | 2,250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 3,089 | 3,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 1,088 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,100 | 200 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,100 | 200 |

Funds are available within reserves to cover the additional expen on vehicle PCP. This was factored in when budget setting.

Please note that the Weald Hall Events income and expenditure is due to be broken down further for the Hospitality Review Working Group as figures cross more than one committee area. The expenditure detailed here includes reimbursement of ticket sales, managed by the Town Council for a fee. For example, £8,679.50 of expenditure is reimbursement of ticket sales to external entertainment companies hiring our facilities. Plus a further £1,824 for a percentage deal on shared

# Environment and Leisure Committee at 31 December 2025

| Apr 25 Actuals £ | May 25 Actuals £ | Jun 25 Actuals £ | Jul 25 Actuals £ | Aug 25 Actuals £ | Sept 25 Actuals £ | Oct 25 Actuals £ | Nov 25 Actuals £ | Dec 25 Actuals £ | Actuals at 31 Dec 25 £ | Budget at 31 Dec 25 £ | Jan 26 Budget £ | Feb 26 Budget £ | Mar 26 Budget £ | Totals 2025/26 | Budget 2025/26 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 874 | 0 | 0 | 874 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 874 | 0 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12,000 | 12,000 | 12,000 |
| 1,441 | 4,738 | 0 | 3,163 | 0 | 0 | 669 | 0 | 1,424 | 11,435 | 11,250 | 0 | 0 | 3,750 | 15,185 | 15,000 |
| 0 | 886 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 886 | 1,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 886 | 1,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 13,497 | 12,518 | 12,382 | 13,333 | 15,495 | 13,929 | 13,438 | 13,929 | 16,028 | 124,548 | 146,192 | 16,244 | 16,244 | 16,244 | 173,278 | 194,922 |
| 1,649 | 1,483 | 1,482 | 1,625 | 1,949 | 1,714 | 1,640 | 1,714 | 2,029 | 15,285 | 20,951 | 2,328 | 2,328 | 2,328 | 22,269 | 27,935 |
| 2,801 | 2,788 | 2,801 | 2,801 | 3,310 | 2,891 | 2,891 | 2,975 | 3,222 | 26,481 | 34,105 | 3,789 | 3,789 | 3,789 | 37,849 | 45,473 |
| 2,818 | 2,818 | 2,818 | 2,818 | 3,624 | 2,910 | 2,910 | 3,395 | 2,389 | 26,501 | 23,483 | 2,609 | 2,609 | 2,609 | 34,329 | 31,310 |
| **33,254** | **40,813** | **34,213** | **49,322** | **42,335** | **37,650** | **39,122** | **46,490** | **43,497** | **366,695** | **363,086** | **30,831** | **30,681** | **61,748** | **489,954** | **483,590** |

performances.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6,788 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6,788 | 7,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6,788 | 7,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 10,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10,000 | 10,500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10,000 | 10,500 |
| 0 | 28,983 | 0 | 1,030 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 30,013 | 29,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 30,013 | 29,000 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,144 | 0 | 1,144 | 6,000 | 0 | 0 | 6,000 | 7,144 | 12,000 |
| 100 | 1,029 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,129 | 1,420 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,129 | 1,420 |
| 480 | 480 | 480 | 480 | 480 | 480 | 480 | 480 | 480 | 4,316 | 3,773 | 458 | 458 | 458 | 5,691 | 5,500 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| 1,163 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 10,466 | 9,304 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 1,163 | 13,955 | 15,000 |
| **8,531** | **31,654** | **11,643** | **2,673** | **1,643** | **1,643** | **1,643** | **2,787** | **1,643** | **63,857** | **66,997** | **1,621** | **1,621** | **8,621** | **75,720** | **81,420** |

**enditure (in progress)**

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3,677 | 1,650 | 1,650 | 0 | 300 | 1,200 | 1,030 | 0 | 0 | 9,507 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,570 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,570 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 125,002 | 0 | 0 | 125,002 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,779 |
| 912 | 1,510 | 787 | 787 | 802 | 787 | 787 | 787 | 787 | 6,374 |
| 0 | 0 | 1,251 | 0 | 0 | 1,476 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,728 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,700 | 0 | 3,700 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,487 | 3,487 |

**Meeting of the Environment & Leisure Committee**

**Monday 2 March 2026**

**Agenda Item 6.1**

**TO CONSIDER OPTIONS FOR A REPLACEMENT VEHICLE FOR THE MOVANO VAN**

## 1.0 Overview

1.1 To consider quotations and options for the replacement of the existing flat-bed van currently used for refuse collection and green waste removal, and to seek approval to proceed with procurement during the 2026–27 financial year.

## 2.0 Background

2.1 Members will be aware that two Estates vehicles were replaced in 2024, alongside the addition of a pool vehicle. The remaining vehicle due for replacement is the Vauxhall Movano flat-bed.

2.2 This vehicle is used for refuse collection from 72 town bins three times weekly, green waste removal, the transporting of materials, and general operational tasks. Currently, the vehicle does not conform to the Waste Duty of Care: Code of Practice and would require significant investment.

2.3 The vehicle is now 10 years old. Commercial vehicles are typically replaced within a 5–10year cycle. Increasing maintenance requirements and reduced efficiency indicate that replacement is now appropriate.

2.4 *Maintenance and Running Costs*

| Financial Year | Cost |
|---|---|
| 2021–2022 | £2,289.38 |
| 2022–2023 | £3,163.67 |
| 2023–2024 | £3,251.53 |
| 2024–2025 | £3,737.83 |
| 2025–Current | £2,525.57 |

The upward trend demonstrates increasing financial pressures associated with retaining the vehicle.

## 3.0 Financial Implications

3.1 The Council does not currently hold sufficient funds to purchase a replacement vehicle outright. However, funds have been allocated within the 2025–2026 and 2026–2027 budgets to cover the deposit and first-year of finance payments.

3.2 Previous vehicle procurement utilised a hire purchase agreement to allow flexibility at the end of the term.

## 4.0 Quotations

4.1 Formal quotations have been obtained and will be presented to Members for consideration (see Appendices x 3). Due to coachworks requirements, the lead time is approximately three months from order.

| Replacement Vauxhall Movano | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Make and Model | Supplier | Purchase method | Warranty Period | Contract Period | Mileage per annum | Maintenance included | Deposit | Monthly cost | Total Cost for period | Interest charged | End of term payment |
| a Pro ace EV | | Hire Purchase | 3 years * | 43 months | 10,000 | no | £6,970.96 | £752.75 | £41,958.71 | Yes | N/A |
| a Pro ace Diesel | | Hire Purchase | 3 years * | 43 months | 10,000 | no | £6,214.97 | £765.89 | £42,716.46 | Yes | N/A |
| ransit 350 | | Hire Purchase | 3 years | 36 months | 9,000 | no | £10,000 | £720.02 | £49,166.00 | 0% apr | N/A |
| ransit 350 | | Hire Purchase | 3 years | 36 months | 9,000 | no | £15,000 | £581.13 | £49,166.80 | 0% apr | N/A |

**5.0 Specification requirements**

- One-way tipping back;
- Meshed cage to secure load;
- Reversing sensors and alarm;
- Amber beacon;
- Tow bar;
- Quartix vehicle monitoring system;
- Full coachworks conversion;

**6.0 Sign writing**

6.1 Sign writing will be consistent with existing Council fleet vehicles, including logos on the bonnet and front doors, and standard internal decals where applicable.

**7.0 Preferred option**

7.1 Preference is given to the Proace Diesel due to improved manoeuvrability, load and towing capacity, extended warranty with servicing, and the ability to undertake servicing locally to reduce downtime.

**8.0 Risk implications:**

(i) increased risk of breakdown and service disruption if replacement is delayed;

(ii) higher long-term maintenance expenditure, and;

(iii) potential operational disruption due to extended lead times;

**9.0 Environmental considerations**

9.1 Whilst diesel remains the preferred operational choice at present due to load and towing requirements for this particular vehicle, the hire purchase model provides flexibility to adapt to future vehicle technology developments.

**10.0 Recommendation**

10.1 Members are asked to:

(i) approve the procurement of a replacement flatbed vehicle via hire purchase agreement, and advise the Clerk and Estates Manager of their preference.

Contact Officer: Thomas Woollard

**Meeting of the Environment & Leisure Committee**

**Monday 2 March 2026**

**Agenda Item 7.1**

# TO NOTE THE CURRENT POSITION WITH THE TOWN COUNCIL'S ESTATES

## 1.0 Summary

1.1 This report sets out the current position with the Council's Estates.

A new Ranger was appointed on the 1 January 2026.

Victoria Pleasure Ground and skatepark
Due to the absence of a chain link fence that used to exist between the football pitch and adjacent land owned by developers, there was a potential safety concern as well a Rights of Way issue. Subsequently, the boundary gaps have now been filled in.

Missing or damaged post and rail fencing has also been replaced around the car parking area.

Hempstead Lane Play Area and Hempstead Meadows LNR
Himalayan balsam control will commence again in the Spring in the nature reserve, with a combination of methods to be used. This will give a better understanding of how we can manage it going forward with the resource available.

These methods will include –

- early spring clearance with the use of machinery prior to advanced growth and below the first node;
- hand pulling, and;
- an experimental section to be covered in black sheeting to prevent sunlight;

Findings of the ecological appraisal for the nature reserve have been returned in draft for the Town Council's review. A copy of which has been attached under agenda item 7.2.

A new soak-away has been installed within Hempstead Recreation Ground to protect the adjacent built asset(s).

West Park/Rocks Park Play Area
The play area equipment is coming to the end of its life. The repairs to the double swing were completed in December. This will be the next play area to be upgraded.

Findings of the ecological appraisal for the nature reserve have been returned in draft for the Town Council's review. A copy of which has been attached under agenda item 7.2.

West Park Recreation Ground and West Park LNR
100m of stock fencing has been replaced over winter along the Rocks Road section of West Park Local Nature Reserve, to include a new kissing gate. The bracken control has been carried out and dead hedging.

Snatts Road Cemetery
New signage is currently being designed to reiterate rules and regulations.

Elizabeth Gardens
Nothing to report.

Hughes Way play area
The entrance pathway slabs were damaged due to a homeowner consistently driving over them to park outside their property and are on the maintenance list to be replaced. This may have to be concreted instead for longevity.

Reports of graffiti had to be addressed week beginning 23 February 2026.

Luxford field and play area
Nothing to report.

All Woodlands
Year 3 of the Woodland Management Plan to address ash dieback has been completed.

Boothland Wood
A preliminary ecological appraisal has been prepared for Boothland Wood which is in the process of being reviewed, and attached as part of agenda item 7.2.

It has been acknowledged that the impact of the recent closure of the Public Right of Way across Ridgewood Farm until at least May will increase footfall through Boothland Wood. Councillors are aware that people are already breaking down barriers being put in place.

Equipment & Vehicles
The procurement process is underway for a replacement flatbed type vehicle for 2026/27 to aid in litter collection, as well as green waste removal and material collection. This will include caged sides and a tipping back. Electric alternatives are being considered. This is being considered in agenda item 6.1.

Street Furniture & Lighting
The festive lights were a success with no complaints received.

Harlands Pond
An ongoing second round of Siltex will be applied over winter, and the planting of a wildflower selection is taking place.

Selby Meadows
Nothing to report.

**2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 Members are asked to note the report.

Contact Officer: Thomas Woollard

Co-ecology

# PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

## Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve, Uckfield, East Sussex

A REPORT FOR UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

This report provides an independent assessment of the habitats within the site and their relative ecological value, alongside a determination of likely constraints and opportunities for enhancement

Jess Lewis BSc Hons (MRes) MRSB

Survey undertaken in June 2025 and reporting in December 2025

**Table 0.1** - Document and Version Control

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Author | Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB | | |
| Site | Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve | | |
| Reference | CE25026 | | |
| Type | Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Management Recommendations | | |
| Version | Checked | Approved | Date |
| V1 | Giles Coe BSC (hons) MCIEEM | Draft for Comment | 15/01/2026 |



## Copyright and guidance



The surveys and assessment have been drafted to be in accordance with the British Standard for Biodiversity BS42020:2013, Biodiversity - Code for planning and development and the Code of Professional Conduct published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental management.

**N.B** It must be noted that investigations of this sort provide only a snapshot in time of the ecological conditions of a site, are limited in extent and cannot capture the full picture of the biodiversity interests at the given location.

# Contents

# 1 Summary of Assessment

Co-ecology Ltd was commissioned by Uckfield Town Council to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of Hempstead Meadows part of which is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), situated in Uckfield, East Sussex. The aim was to assess current habitats, provide management advice, and identify opportunities for ecological enhancement. Below is a summary of the key findings from the habitat survey.

1.1. Proposed actions will focus on measures to improve habitat condition and structural diversity refine management practices, and increase species diversity, delivering benefits for wildlife, including protected species, while maintaining public access.

1.2. A UKHabs habitat survey and protected species assessment was undertaken on 30th June 2025 by experienced ecologists from Co-ecology Ltd.

1.3. Habitats within the LNR include:

- *g3c8 – Holcus Juncus neutral grassland* – Seasonally wet grassland (known as Phillip's field)
- *f2a – lowland fens* – overgrown with little access
- *r2* - watercourse footprint, wet ditches and associated marginal aquatic habitats
- *h3 - Bramble, willow and mixed scrub* – ecotones along boundaries and patches encroaching into grassland and fen habitats.
- *w1d - Wet woodland* - and boundary tree lines dominated by oak, willow, alder, and occasional ash.

1.4. Current Status of habitats on site:

- Grassland: Overgrown and infrequently cut, with scrub encroachment reducing diversity. Footpaths showing compaction but provide valuable open space for invertebrates.
- Fens: Valuable but vulnerable to succession without intervention. Regular inundation resulting in highly fertile substrate limiting opportunities for improvement.
- Scrub: Dense patches limiting open ground and grassland quality. Dominated by bramble.
- Woodland: Mature trees with some deadwood present; limited structural diversity.
- Boundary tree lines: Provide connectivity but require condition monitoring.

1.5. The following opportunities for improvements were identified:

- Compartment 1 -Grassland areas: Implement a structured mowing regime to reduce rank growth, prevent scrub encroachment, and improve plant diversity. Create open areas for reptile basking and use arisings for habitat piles. Consider low-level fencing and mown paths to guide public access.
- Compartment 1, 2, 3 - Wet grassland and Fens: Maintain hydrology, introduce more regular seasonal cutting to create structural diversity, and control scrub to preserve wetland flora.
- Compartment 1, 2, 3 - Woodland and Trees: Undertake an arboricultural survey of dry woodland, retain standing deadwood, and create log piles for invertebrates and small mammals.

1.6. Additional enhancements could include installing bat and bird boxes on mature trees, creating insect hotels, log piles, and hibernacula. Organising volunteer days for scrub management and wildlife feature creation would not only improve habitats but also foster community engagement and public interest of the site. Monitoring of the site could be encouraged through noticeboards and public events such as bat walks.

1.7. These measures will enhance habitat diversity and ecological resilience, supporting a wide range of wildlife.

# 2 Background

### *Overview of the commission and the proposals*

2.1. Co-ecology Ltd were commissioned by Uckfield Town Council to provide ecological advice including an assessment of the existing habitats present as well as recommendations for improved management practices and opportunities for improvements at Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Hempstead Lane, Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 1XH.

2.2. To provide an additional stage in assessment, this report has been completed and comprises the following elements:

- results of a survey of the on-site habitats following the UK Habitats Classification;
- an initial assessment of the current condition and ecological importance of the habitats present;
- an assessment of the likely presence of legally protected species;
- an evaluation of the relative nature conservation value of the site;
- provide broad measures for improvements and opportunities;
- recommendations for any further surveys or assessments that may be necessary.

### *Objectives of this appraisal*

2.3. To establish a current broad habitat baseline regarding habitat type and condition and to provide broad recommendations for future management with the objective of improving the biodiversity status and condition of habitat types present.

2.4. A Management Plan has been produced for the site covering the period 2022-2027 (Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve Management plan 2022-2027[2]).

2.5. The management plan, valid until December 2027 outlines a number of suitable management measures that could improve conditions on site, while being sympathetic to local residents and ensuring works are carried out in accordance with specific requirements of additional stakeholders particularly for tree works along boundaries with neighbouring residential gardens, and the adjacent train line which requires input and cooperation with National Rail and the UK Power Network high voltage power line present through the centre of the site.

2.6. A review of the measures recommended; assessment of any mitigation or works that have been implemented and some updated recommendations in line with those measures is therefore included.

[2] Hempstead-Meadows-Local-Nature-Reserve-Management-Plan-2022-2027-combined-1.pdf

### *Site context*

2.7. The site comprises an urban fringe type area of open greenspace, part of which is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), and all owned and managed by Uckfield Town Council, measuring approximately 1.6ha in size and centred on Ordnance Survey Grid Reference (OSGR) TQ 47663 21044.

2.8. The site is in an urban location towards the southeast boundary of Uckfield town, East Sussex and located adjacent to the River Uck, a principle tributary of the River Ouse, there are springs and wet ditches present and a spring fed watercourse bisects the site flowing into the River Uck beyond the train line which runs parallel with the southern boundary.

2.9. Residential development primarily stretches north and south with relatively undeveloped land comprising agricultural land, patches of woodland and scattered waterbodies either side. There are larger areas of woodland particularly Lake Wood and nearby West Park LNR (also Uckfield Town Council, see accompanying report – Co-ecology Ltd, 2025a), Butcher's, Fairhazel and Park Woods woodland complex, west and northwest, Paygate Wood north and Views Wood and Buxted Park Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) northeast of the site (for which the site lies within the Impact Risk Zone – IRZ) with good connectivity. A tributary of the River Uck, strip of woodland and associated riparian habitat extends directly south from the site while the River Uck itself more widely flows northeast to southwest around the development associated with the town, cutting through the centre where Hempstead Meadows LNR and train line also bisect the town. The A22 major road bypasses the town to the west.

2.10. Lowland wet grassland is a nationally scarce habitat type due to a lack of, or inappropriate management including intensive drainage schemes or allowing succession to scrub. In addition to grassland, the site contains a mosaic of vegetation types including drier grassland, wet fen, wet ditches, scrub and woodland. Strips of new woodland present have been planted as natural flood mitigation with funding from both the Woodland Trust and the Sussex Flow Initiative.

2.11. Protected species including European eel *Anguilla Anguilla*, three-spined stickleback *Gasterosteus aculeatus*, kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and little egret *Egretta garzetta* have been recorded within permanently wet ditches and streams and the site supports a diverse range of wildlife including foraging and commuting bats, breeding birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians and invertebrates.

2.12. The LNR designation describes the site as:

- *The area is mainly wet grassland with some trees and scrub. The area supports a variety of wildlife typical of undeveloped river corridors; including birds such as snipe and kingfisher and plants such as primrose, bluebell, tussock sedge and ferns.*
- *The meadow also forms a valuable foraging area for the bats that have been recorded from neighbouring properties.*

### *Legislative and policy*

2.13. The following pieces of legislation and National policy are relevant to this appraisal and have been used to inform this appraisal;

- The Environment Act (2021)
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Biodiversity and geological conservation: circular 06/2005

2.14. The following local policies are extracted from the Uckfield Town Councils Strategic Plan 2026 - 2031[4]

*By 2031 the Town Council will have:*

- *Designated areas of Town Council land for wild flowers;*
- *Continued working with Sussex Local Nature Partnership's Green Spaces Project to understand the benefits in Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve and Snatts Road Cemetery;*
- *Commissioned ecological appraisals and wildlife surveys in our woodlands and nature reserves to inform biodiversity action plans*
- *Hosted events such as the Eco Expo to better inform residents of various alternative technologies;*
- *Recorded and mapped the findings of tree surveys to ensure safety from ash dieback and decay;*

*Our community aspirations, by 2031 are to:*

- *Contribute to the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and see the preservation or creation of wetlands and hedgerows, the sustainable management of woodlands and freshwater habitats;*
- *Provide data and information for Uckfield, to central government departments and Weald to Waves to draw down funding to preserve our rich biodiversity;*
- *Have created a 'Wilder Uckfield' plan to address the biodiversity crisis….*

- *Liaised with landowners adjacent to the River Uck to investigate the purchase of land from the end of the footpath in Knights Meadow to Hempstead Lane, by the mill, to create a River Walk.*

- *Maintain, improve and protect all of our natural areas to accommodate the demands of future growth of the town;*

[4] Draft-Strategic-Plan-and-Priorities-2026-31-2.pdf

# 3 Methodology

### *Personnel*

3.1. The UKHabs Survey, undertaken in June 2025, site appraisal and assessment were carried out by Giles Coe BSc (Hons) MCIEEM and Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB, who also compiled the report.

3.2. Giles Coe BSc (Hons) MCIEEM has been a commercial ecologist since 2001. Giles is an ecologist with more than 24 years commercial ecological experience in quantitative field surveys and assessments and with expertise in habitats and plant identification although primarily a specialist in the mitigation of impacts to legally protected species. Giles has acted as named ecologist on Mitigation Licences for bats, badgers, and great crested newts since 2015 and is a Registered Consultant on the low impact class licence scheme for bats and badgers and is a certified drone pilot holding both A2 CofC and GVC qualifications.

3.3. Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB. Jess is an ecologist with over eight years' commercial experience in quantitative field surveys and assessments and with expertise in habitats although primarily a specialist in the mitigation of impacts to legally protected species. She holds a survey class licence for great crested newts (Licence Number: 2022-10399-CL08-GCN) and beavers and is a certified drone pilot holding both A2 CofC and GVC qualifications.

### *Contextual information and data records*

3.4. Contextual information on the site was gathered from freely available on-line resources including a 10km search for internationally important protected sites and 5km for nationally designated sites and records for any European Protected Species mitigation licences for great crested newts, hazel dormice or bats. This was carried out using Magic Map hosted by Defra. On-line aerial imagery was used to make an assessment of the sites position within the wider landscape including connectivity and potential corridors for protected species dispersal.

### *UK Habitats Classification Survey and Condition Assessment*

3.5. The surveyors visited the site on the 30th June 2025 and recorded all identifiable plant species with an indication of their relative abundance following the DAFOR[6] scale. The purpose of the survey was to complete a baseline habitat survey of the developable areas of the site using the UK Habitats Classification system. The UKHabs-Professional system was used as reference with habitats assigned to either Level 3 or to Level 4 where applicable, the minimum mapping unit used was 25m$^2$ and all Secondary Codes were utilised where the relevant conditions pertained.

3.6. The survey results and recommendations are described according to Compartments 1-4 which run from West to East and match the compartments described in the extant 2022-2027 management plan.

### *Evaluation*

3.7. An assessment is provided as to the likely importance of the site judged by the habitats that are present and the species that have been confirmed or are likely to be present. This value is expressed at a geographic scale following criteria set out by CIEEM (2017) in their impact assessment guidance.

[6] Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, Rare

### *Constraints*

3.8. The UK habitat survey was carried out in June and therefore any plants with an earlier or later flowering phenology may have been underreported or missed. Despite the time of year, it was possible to identify species using a vegetative key, determine the habitat types and overall conditions.

3.9. No data search information has been included within the report at this time. As there are no proposals for development and this report aims to provide an outline for management and improvement options, it was not considered necessary to request a formal data search at this time.

3.10. There were no further constraints to the survey or assessment.

# 4 Results

### *Contextual information*

4.1. Hempstead Meadows is owned and operated by Uckfield Town Council who commissioned Co-ecology Ltd to undertake this ecological assessment.

4.2. Uckfield Town Councils Strategic Plan 2026 – 2031 identifies ecological appraisals and wildlife surveys are needed to inform biodiversity action plans. This report provides an assessment of the habitats present as well as an assessment of potentially linked habitats and sites and provides measures to ensure that these habitats remain / become an asset for wildlife, with good connectivity to the wider landscape, enabling the creation and conservation of wildlife corridors and providing good quality green spaces for residents.

4.3. The site is located within the town of Uckfield, located immediately adjacent to the River Uck and forms part of the floodplain. The site is relatively small, measuring 1.6ha in size comprising a mixture of wet grassland, fen, ditches, scrub and woodland habitats and forms part of a wider network of riparian, wet grassland, scrub and woodland habitats extending beyond the site along the river corridor and providing connectivity with the wider landscape.

4.4. The ditch network within the site feeds into the River Uck and is known to support European eel, three-spined stickleback and wetland invertebrates, and likely provides a dispersal corridor for amphibians and semi-aquatic mammals. Overhanging trees, hedgerows and scrub also provide a continuous linear feature likely to represent a good quality foraging and dispersal corridor for bats.

4.5. The site is not subject to any other nature conservation designation. The western portion is designated whereas the eastern compartments form part of the site but are not included within the Local Nature Reserve boundary.

4.6. The site is bordered by residential development to the north, a car park is located immediately beyond the western boundary and Uckfield train station and train line sits parallel to the southern boundary providing functional connectivity with the wider landscape, with further residential development to the south. The site is situated within the town and as such represents an important open green space for residents of the town

### *Site in Relation to Its Surroundings, Habitat Connectivity and Potential Impacts*

4.7. Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve forms an important area of semi-natural habitat within the urban centre of Uckfield, lying immediately adjacent to the River Uck floodplain. Although modest in size (1.6 ha), the LNR sits within a wider network of riparian, wet grassland, scrub and woodland habitats that extend both upstream and downstream along the River Uck corridor and associated tributaries. These surrounding habitats provide a high level of ecological connectivity, enabling movement and dispersal of wildlife species throughout the urban landscape.

4.8. The reserve comprises a mosaic of wet grassland, fen, ditches, willow and alder scrub, scattered trees and damp meadow creating a structurally and botanically diverse site that is tightly integrated with its surroundings. The ditch network feeds into the River Uck and is known to support European eel, three-spined stickleback and wetland invertebrates, and likely provides a dispersal corridor for amphibians and semi-aquatic mammals. Overhanging trees, hedgerows and scrub also provide continuous linear features likely to be used by commuting and foraging bats, with common and soprano pipistrelle known to forage within and around the site.

4.9. Although the reserve is bordered by residential housing, car parks and the railway line, these features do not fully isolate the site; instead, the river system, tree belts and unmanaged wet woodland pockets provide corridors that likely maintain functional connectivity with the wider countryside. Species such as grass snake, slow worm, wetland birds, bats, dragonflies and butterflies utilise these connected habitats for foraging, dispersal and shelter.

4.10. In terms of potential impacts from nearby development, the main sensitivities of Hempstead Meadows relate to its hydrology, nutrient status and disturbance. The wet grassland and fen habitats rely on consistent water levels, regular inundation, and low nutrient inputs to maintain their ecological character.

4.11. No internationally designated sites are located within 10 km of Hempstead Meadows. The wider landscape around Uckfield supports several statutory nature conservation designations, including SSSIs and other protected areas including:

4.12. Hempstead Meadows itself is managed solely as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and does not form part of a larger statutory designation network. The site contributes locally important wetland and riparian habitat within an otherwise urban setting, providing a valuable ecological corridor along the River Uck floodplain.

4.13. See Tables 4.1 below and Figure 4.1 for a representation of location and distance of the site in relation to protected areas.

**Table 4.1** Internationally important and protected sites intersecting a 10km radius of the development site.

| Type | Site | Reason for Citation | Distance and orientation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Special Protection Area (SPA) / Special Area of Conservation (SAC) / Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) | Ashdown Forest | *one of the largest single continuous blocks of lowland heath in south-east England, with both **4030 European dry heaths** and, in a larger proportion, 4010 Northern Atlantic wet heath. Habitats dominated by Heath, Scrub, Maquis and Garrigue, Phygrana (60%); Mixed woodland (40%).*<br><br>*Connectivity to the site is poor.*<br>*7km Zone of Influence buffer around this site with SANGS agreement to protect the site from impacts of development and ensure that there is funding to carry out maintenance and habitat management works.* | 5.2km north |
| SSSI | Rock Wood | *A small ancient woodland lying on Tunbridge Wells sandstone and Wadhurst Clay.* | 4.6km north |
| LNR | West Park | *Another site owned and managed by Uckfield Town Council with some connectivity to site measuring 10.54ha in size. Habitats of mixed woodland, grassland and a sensitive marsh area supporting several Orchids including Southern Marsh Orchid. A population of Dormice have been discovered here.* | 1km northwest |
| SSSI | Buxted Park | *An 83.43ha old deer park consisting of a variety of unimproved grassland communities with parkland trees and areas of woodland which as a whole support a large invertebrate population.* | 1.3km northeast |
| National Landscape (formerly AONB) | High Weald | *A medieval landscape of wooded, rolling hills studded with sandstone outcrops; small, irregular-shaped fields; scattered farmsteads; and ancient routeways. 1,461km$^2$ area covers parts of Kent, Sussex and Surrey.* | Boundary between 4-5km northwest, north and northeast |
| SSSI | Plashett Wood | *154.3ha site comprising ancient woodland (pedunculate oak-hornbeam with birch and hazel, and hazel-sessile oak) on Weald clays supporting a rich community of breeding birds, as well as a number of plants and invertebrates withe a nationally restricted distribution.* | 4.9km southwest |

**Table 4.1** Internationally important and protected sites intersecting a 10km radius of the development site.

| Type | Site | Reason for Citation | Distance and orientation |
|---|---|---|---|
| SSSI | Stockland Farm Meadows | *A small site – 5.8ha comprising two grazed meadows and a hay field (species-rich) managed by traditional methods and pond.* | 6km northeast |
| SSSI | Hastingford Cutting | *Very small site – 0.05ha designated for its geological interest.* | 6.5km northeast |
| SSSI | Scaynes Hill | *Very small site – 0.04ha designated for its geological interest.* | 6.9km northwest |
| SSSI | Park Corner Heath | *A small area of grassy heath, woodland and scrub lying on sand over the Weald Clay supporting rich invertebrate fauna.* | 6.9km south |
| SSSI | Waldron Cutting | *Small site – 0.2ha designated for its geological interest.* | 7.8km southwest |
| SSSI & LNR | Chailey Common | *sub-atlantic English heath habitat. dominated by heathers, predominantly Ling Heather, but two other native species: Bell and Cross-Leaved Heather can also be found.* | 8km west |

*Relationship with statutory and non-statutory designations*

4.14. Looking broadly at the protected sites network in relation to the site, and recent/ ongoing and approved development in and around the town, it is important to identify where possible connectivity exists, and appropriate management is undertaken, to ensure that existing formal and informal green spaces are identified/conserved / enhanced to ensure the viability of wildlife conservation into the future….

4.15. There is limited connectivity in terms of functionally linked land with nearby protected wildlife sites. There is a corridor of relatively undeveloped land extending outwards to east and southeast from the site, the remaining areas comprise the development associated with Uckfield and its southern suburb Ringwood, as well as significant infill developments and large developments that have been approved and/ or are currently being constructed particularly beyond the existing extent of the town into farmland southwest of the town.

4.16. Habitat corridors exist and are likely to persist despite this development as they largely relate to the River Uck and its tributaries.

*Recent Major Developments Approved in/around Uckfield*

4.17. Uckfield Town is currently experiencing rapid expansion, with several major planning applications currently either proposed or being constructed, many of which are located within existing areas of open space or agricultural land. It is likely that future development will continue to infill the relatively undeveloped land either side of the town, especially inside/ east of the A22. These developments will increasingly isolate existing sites of nature conservation value, designated or not and will increase human disturbance impacts which could result in degradation of these sites, if not carefully protected and managed. Some major developments are listed below:

- *Owlsbury Farm (west of A22) – Major development - Application (2025) for up to 1,700 homes, mixed-use centre with retail, commercial and community uses, 2FE primary school, multi-purpose sports hub, community allotments, pedestrian/ cycle links, open space,*

*SUDs, children's play areas, landscaping, and new points of access to the A22 (Reference Number: WD/2025/0922/MEA8).*

- *Ridgewood Farm (west Uckfield) – Major development - Outline permission (2016) for up to 1,000 homes + primary school and community facilities. July 2025 reserved-matters approval for 750 homes + ~1,884 m² industrial unit (Reference Number: WD/2019/1773/MRM9).*
- *Bird-in-Eye Hill (south Uckfield) - Outline appeal approval (Aug 2025) for 190 homes after addressing concerns over ancient woodland, heritage, access (Reference Number: WD/2024/1799/MAO10).*
- *Mockbeggars Farm (north of Ringles Cross) - Nov 2025 reserved matters for 60 homes approved after resolving drainage and layout issues (Reference Number: WD/2022/0648/MAO11).*

4.18. Wealden Draft Local Plan (Reg. 18) identifies 11 potential development sites in Uckfield, with capacities ranging from ~6 to 350 dwellings - all currently under public consultation (closed May 2024).

*Natural England – European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) Licenses*

4.19. Ten European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licences have been granted within 2km of the site boundary. These include three licences relating to bats, three relating to hazel dormice and four licences relating to great crested newts.

4.20. Two licences were granted for destruction of a bat roost (non-maternity) supporting common pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats (EPSM2010-2162, granted on 01/08/2012), located 460m south, and at a site located 1.34km south (EPSM2009-1387, between 28/04/2011 – 31/08/2013); a third licence was granted for destruction of a resting place used by brown long-eared bats only (2019-38790-EPS-MIT, between 22/01/2019 – 31/01/2024) at a site 1.6km north.

4.21. Closest licence for hazel dormice was granted for destruction of a breeding site (EPSM2012-5024) - 09/11/2012 – 31/10/2015 – 690m southeast. The remaining licences were granted for sites south of the site within Ridgewood (suburb to south of main town and railway line) and along the A22 considered to have significant barriers to dispersal/ site.

4.22. Closest licence for great crested newts was for destruction of a resting place only (EPSM2009-829) – 28/11/2012 – 01/07/2016 – 1.1km south, again the remaining licences were located south along the A22 with significant barriers to dispersal from the LNR.

4.23. The majority are located around the outskirts/ edges of Uckfield town with tenuous habitat connectivity however confirms presence of these species within the wider landscape with potential for them to be present on site.

***Priority habitats***

4.24. The site contains the following UK Priority Habitats; deciduous woodland, wet woodland, wet grassland, lowland fen and rivers.

4.25. Priority Habitats in proximity to the site include:

- Deciduous woodland – present on site (northern portion of central section and eastern end) and numerous patches within the wider landscape with continuous canopy cover

[8] Planning Register - Wealden District Council - Owlsbury
[9] Planning Register - Wealden District Council - Ridgewood
[10] Planning Register - Wealden District Council - Bird-in-Eye Farm
[11] Planning Register - Wealden District Council - Mockbeggars Farm

providing arboreal connectivity to the wider landscape. Significant/ larger areas present particularly beyond urban development associated with Uckfield to north, west and east.

- Coastal Floodplain and Grazing Marsh - 1.9km northwest and large wetland area 2.9km west – associated with the River Uck and River Ouse floodplains respectively.
- Much of the woodland is also identified as ancient woodland – Two small patches located 60m and 160m south of the site, as well as larger area approximately 550m northeast with connectivity along the railway line, watercourse and ditch system, as well as a larger woodland complex located approximately 410m south associated with a tributary of the River Uck.
- Most of the deciduous woodland patches surrounding Uckfield are also listed as Ancient Woodland.
- Traditional orchard - small parcels, closest located 315m south of the site.
- Lowland dry acid grassland - large area located 875m northeast associated with Buxted Park SSSI and linked to the site via River Uck.
- Lowland meadows - small patches, closest 1.7km southwest and linked as sits downstream adjacent to the River Uck – map identifies priority river habitat along this parcel.
- Priority ponds – there are priority ponds identified within the wider landscape – 1.3km south but within residential area known as Ringwood – a suburb of Uckfield that is located south of the main town. Also, one 2.2km northeast with some connectivity along watercourse and ditch network and no major barriers or development in between. Although distance is too far for individual GCN to disperse, presence of additional ponds within the landscape could support a viable breeding population.
- Priority River Habitat – watercourses directly linked to the site – River Uck channel located 330m south and 1.3km southwest.
- Priority River Headwater Areas – extends from the coast up to 1.5km northeast or the site includes the River Uck floodplain.
- Hedgerows and Mature Tree Lines present within the wider landscape, mature hedgerows and tree lines present along development lines – road and around field boundaries.

4.26. Figure 4.1 below shows UK Priority Habitats in proximity to the site.

Figure 4.1 – UK Priority Habitats in Proximity to Site

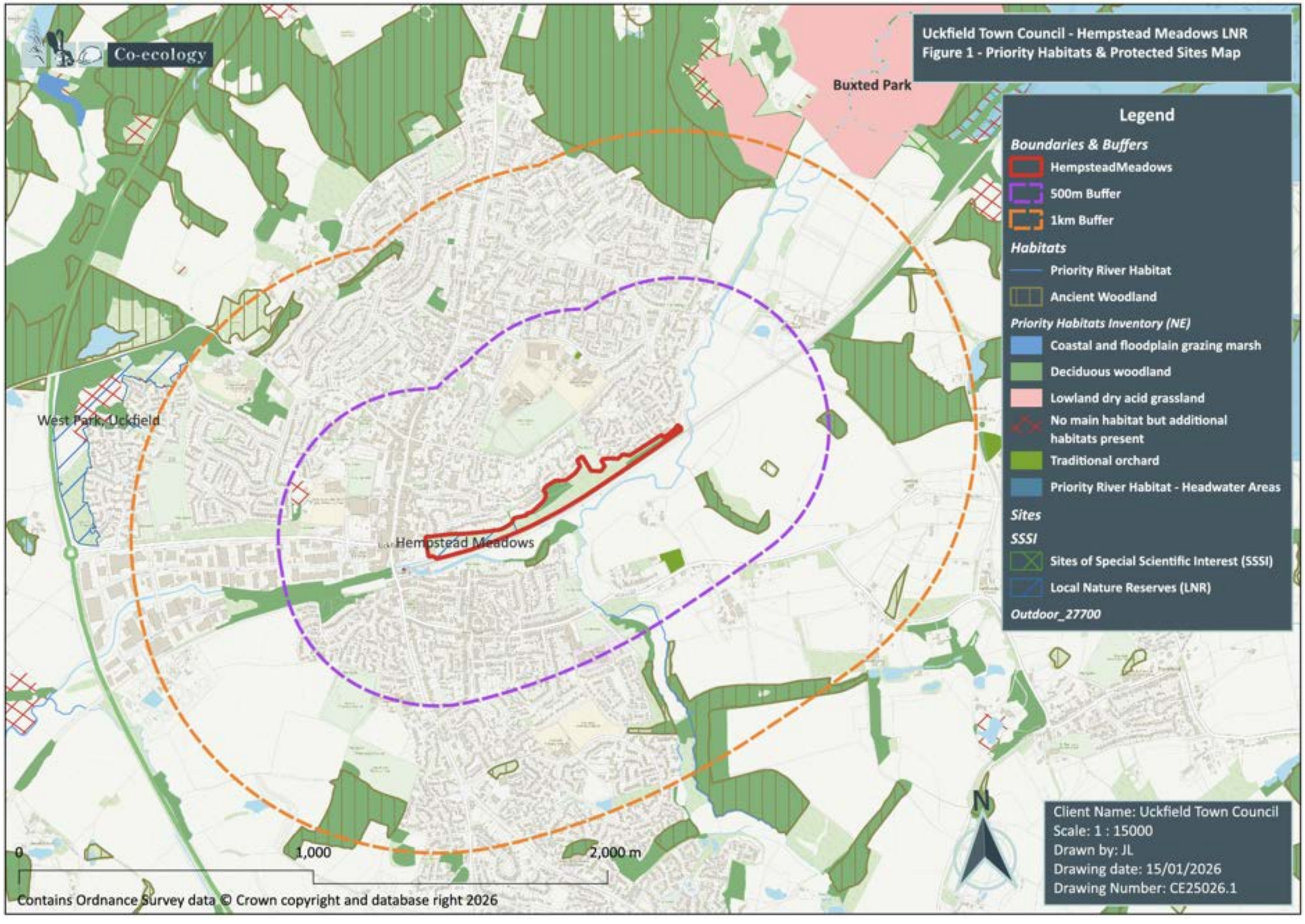


Figure 4.2 – Waterbodies within 500m

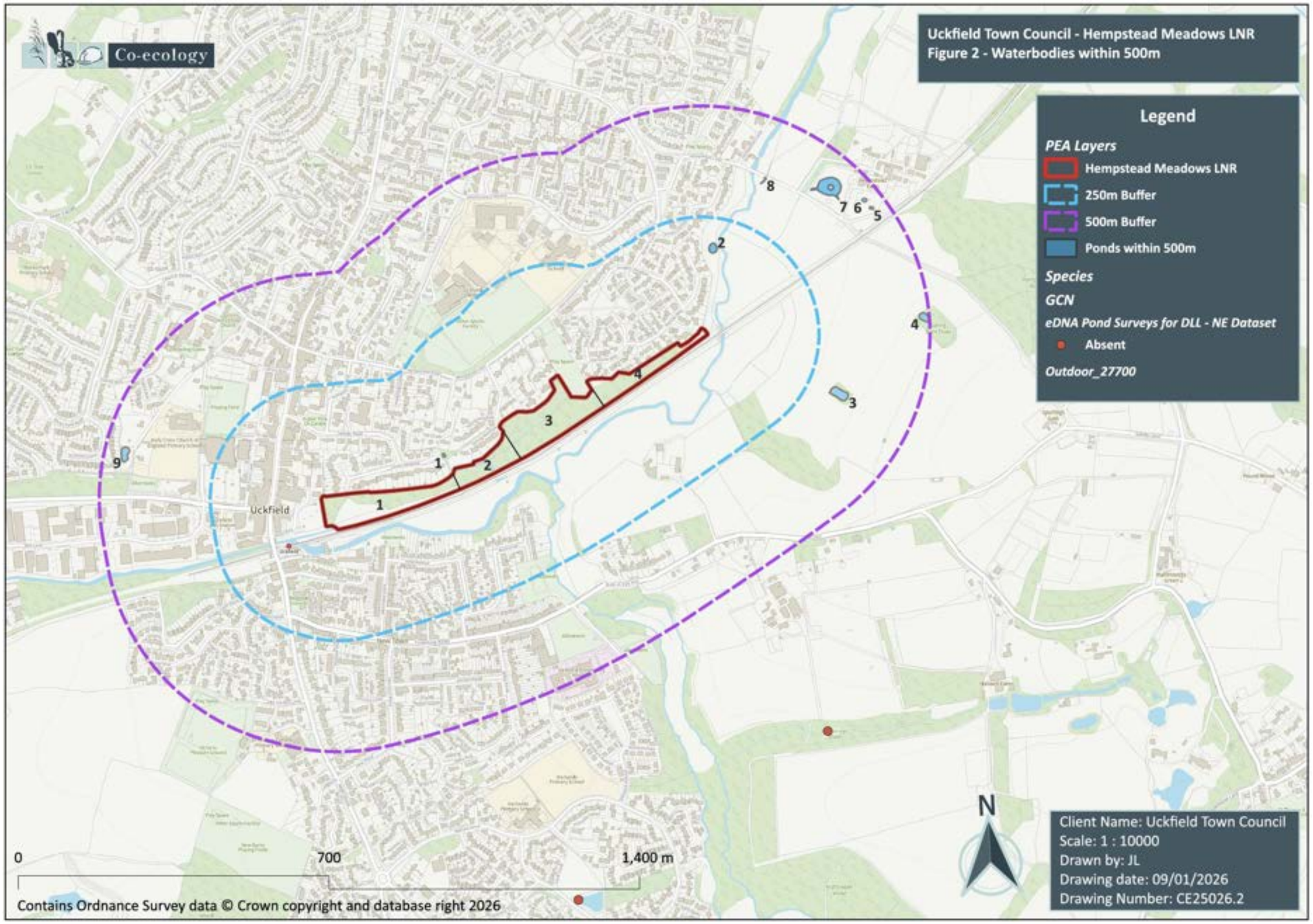
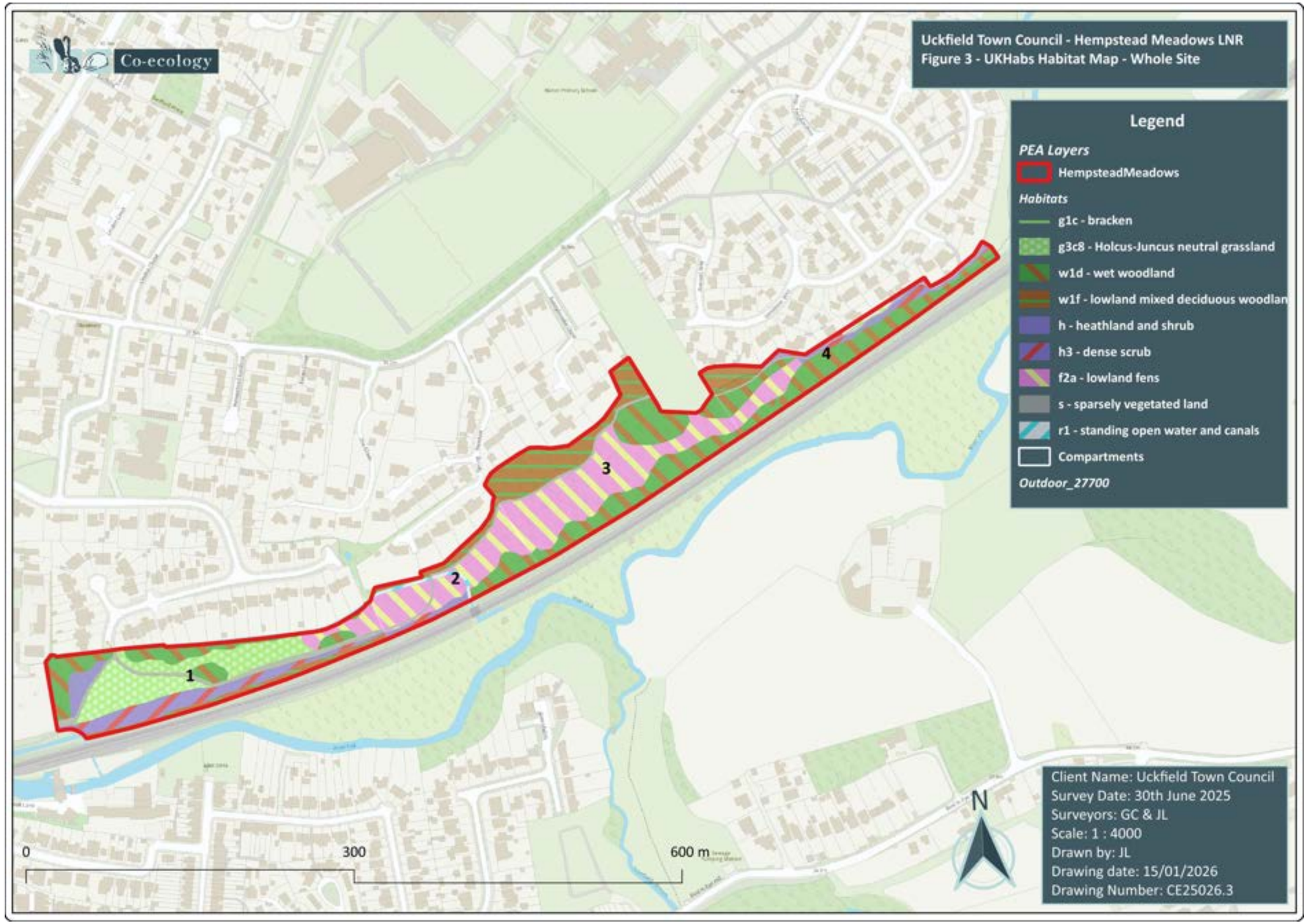


Figure 4.3 – UK Habitats Map




B

### Preliminary Ecological Appraisal - Habitats

4.27. The habitats within the site red line boundary were dominated by a mixture of wet and dry grassland, woodland, scrub and ruderal habitat with a watercourse running through and around the site and footpaths for public access.

4.28. Overall site condition summary – The western portion of the site is subject to high levels of human disturbance as well as scrub encroachment and successional processes whilst the eastern portion of the site is not as accessible and appears to be in relatively good condition. The lowland fen across the site is at risk from poor/ lack of management as it will naturally progress into woodland without ongoing intervention.

4.29. Each habitat is described below by compartment using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (SBM) condition sheets approach (the standard now used alongside UKHab), selecting the appropriate sheets for Neutral/Wet Grassland, Fen/Marsh/Swamp (Wetland), Scrub, and Wet Woodland.

**Compartment 1 - West - seasonally wet grassland (Phillip's Field), boundary tree lines, a scrape with ruderal vegetation dominant, scrub, newly planted trees and small patch of wet woodland.**

**Compartment 2 – Central, west - watercourse crosses from north to south, area dominated by overgrown seasonally wet grassland and lowland fens which become dominant eastward, boundary habitats of wet woodland and dry broadleaved woodland to the north.**

**Compartment 3 – Central, east – dry woodland towards northern boundary woodland dominated by oak and black alder with some young regeneration, wet woodland to the south and east and good stands of greater tussock sedge.**

**Compartment 4 – East - Wet woodland, lowland fen, blackthorn scrub and bracken habitats in narrow strip between footpath and residential gardens to north.**

*g3c5 – Holcus Juncus neutral grassland - (Marshy grassland mosaic within the floodplain)*

4.30. Secondary codes: 504 - waterlogged (*with water table at the surface with standing water for 50-70% of the year or with the soil completely saturated. Only small patches remain 'wet' in mid-summer*).

4.31. Grassland meadow experiencing regular inundation with lush sward typical of fertile soils including dominant false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius,* Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus,* frequent tufted hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa,* broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius,* abundant smooth meadow grass *Poa pretensis,* meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris,* locally abundant white clover *Trifolium repens,* occasional timothy *Phleum pratense*, greater willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum,* curled dock *Rumex crispus,* hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, common nettle *Urtica dioica,* rare occurrence of tufted forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides,* meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria,* ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, cut-leaved cranesbill *Geranium dissectum.* Occasional patches dominated by bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.* present.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

4.32. Sward structure & variation: Heterogeneous with wet-loving herbs and rush/sedge; passes structural diversity (not a uniform amenity sward).

4.33. Botanical composition: Several positive wet grassland indicators present (meadowsweet, rushes, sedges); however, coarse graminoids locally dominant and tall herbs (e.g., *Epilobium hirsutum*) can be vigorous; moderate.

4.34. Invasive non-native species (INNS): Himalayan balsam present although low abundance within Phillips field at present; pass within this habitat parcel as <5% cover at present.

4.35. Evidence of appropriate management: Irregular cutting and public access pressures, partial (some areas unmanaged and/ or compacted).

4.36. Hydrological integrity: Largely intact floodplain hydrology; ditches present; passes where no artificial drainage into fen. Small site with off-site pressures beyond control.

4.37. Outcome: Moderate condition (close to Good where coarse grass/tall herb dominance is lower and trampling minimal).

*f2a – Lowland Fens (wet fen/tussock sedge areas*

4.38. Extending from the eastern side of Compartment 2 with the bulk located within Compartment 3. This area was damp at the time of survey, and some paths had become very overgrown hindering easy access.

4.39. A rush/sedge mosaic, with frequent inundation, no public access to the wettest fen core. Locally dominant and abundant greater willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera.* Other species included abundant grasses including false oat-grass, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum,* meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, occasional hemlock water dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, hogweed, locally dominant greater tussock sedge *Carex paniculata,* occasional milk thistle *Silybum marianum,* rare occurrence of jointed rush *Juncus articulatus,* Jacob's ladder *Polemonium caeruleum,* crosswort *Cruciata laevipes*, hedge bindweed *Calystegia sepium,* lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* and field horsetail *Equisetum arvense.*

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

4.40. Hydrology: Permanently/seasonally waterlogged; passes (essential criterion).

4.41. Characteristic fen species: Multiple positives (tussock sedge, rushes, meadowsweet), passes.

4.42. Vegetation structure: Good microtopography (tussocks, hollows); passes (heterogeneity).

4.43. Scrub/shading pressure: Increasing willow/alder at margins; some risk of succession to carr, moderate.

4.44. INNS: Himalayan balsam risk in floodplain, fail

4.45. Outcome: Good to Moderate condition (core fen likely Good; margins trending Moderate where scrub shade is increasing).

*h3 - Scrub (including h3a – blackthorn / h3d – bramble / h3f – hawthorn / h3h – mixed / h3j - willow mosaics on fen margins and banks)*

4.46. Expanding wet scrub (willow predominating) along railway boundary (all compartments) and northern bank (compartment 1); patches of bramble scrub emerging within western grassland field (compartment 1). Occasional garden escapees and non-native species including sweet mock orange *Philadelphus coronarius* and Himalayan honeysuckle *Leycesteria Formosa* (primarily within Compartments 1 & 2). Scattered patches of ruderal merge into scrub; now cover scrape at western boundary (Compartment 1) and located within fen habitat (Compartments 2 and 3).

4.47. h3a/ h3f – concentrated along northern boundary within Compartment 4 either side of the footpath. Dense growth dominated by blackthorn with stands of hazel locally dominant Adjoins bracken to the west and woodland dominated by black alder with mature trees present.

4.48. h3d/ h3h – Compartment 1 primarily, species include areas of dominant bramble plus extensive tall ruderals including locally dominant Rosebay willowherb *Chamaenerion angustifolium,* locally abundant Himalayan balsam, and occasional to frequent common hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*.

4.49. h3j – Located along southern boundary within compartments 2 and 3 and encroaching into fen habitat in places. Patches present along northern boundary associated with watercourse footprint.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

4.50. Structural diversity: Mixed ages/heights; edges abrupt in places, moderate.

4.51. Native species dominance: Predominantly native (willow/hawthorn/bramble); passes.

4.52. Scrub ratio / mosaic context: Encroaching into priority wet habitats, moderate (ecological function good, but location reduces fen/grassland condition).

4.53. INNS: Himalayan Balsam present.

4.54. Outcome: Moderate condition with functional habitat biodiversity value for nesting birds, cover for reptiles, but requires control to protect adjacent fen/wet grassland.

*w1d - Wet Woodland / Willow–Alder Carr (edge & hollows)*

4.55. Willow/alder carr pockets in seasonally wet hollows; varying age structure; deadwood present; potential overshading of fen margins.

4.56. All three age classes present, although patch within compartment 2 is still young so no mature trees, many mature trees around boundaries within larger woodland patches. Both standing and deadwood present. No invasive rhododendron recorded. Waterlogged hollows present.

4.57. Browsing damage / understorey: Some bramble; browsing not excessive, passes/moderate.

4.58. Fen interface shading: Overshading risk but considered moderate overall.

*w1f – Lowland mixed deciduous woodland*

4.59. Largely oak dominated patches of woodland with rare Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris,* with occasional mature Black alder to the east, limited ground layer and shrub layer tending to bramble where present.

4.60. All three age classes present and regeneration noted throughout. Both standing and deadwood present.

4.61. Browsing damage / understorey: Some bramble; browsing not excessive, passes/moderate.

*r1g - Ditches & Spring Lines (linear wetland features)*

4.62. Channel bisect the site – flowing along the northern boundary within Compartment 1, then crossing over to the southern edge within Compartment 2. Main river channel then flows beyond the railway beyond the southern boundary before meandering northeast. The direction of flow within the site is northwest to southeast with the main River Uck flowing east to west.

4.63. Within Compartment 2 the channel is overgrown in summer months. Overshaded by mature trees along northern boundary. Locally abundant hemlock water dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and Himalayam balsam recorded, common reed *Phragmites australis* and meadowsweet present occasionally.

4.64. Hydrology & continuity: Flowing/standing sections; passes where not deepened.

4.65. Aquatic/riparian flora/fauna: Eel, three-spined stickleback, dragonflies/damselflies; passes.

*u1c - Access Routes / Bare earth footpaths*

4.66. Footpaths for public access have been cut around the site; there is a circular walkway around the western field then the footpath extends along the southern edge of the site before cutting diagonally across to the northern edge with a footbridge over the watercourse located centrally. These comprise compacted bare ground. Some of the footpaths were more worn than others and

they have created localised open spaces or rides within otherwise overgrown grassland where flowering plant species diversity was generally higher.

4.67. This area has abundant greater willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, reed sweet grass, tufted hair grass, hedge bindweed, common nettle, locally frequent patches with wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, occasional occurrence of meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria,* marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre.*

4.68. Willow scrub is encroaching from the boundaries in this area.

4.69. These footpaths are likely to be an important feature of the site for supporting invertebrate pollinator species.

### Legally protected species - likelihood of occurrence

4.70. The table below provides a simple assessment of the relative likelihood of any legally protected species being present within the site.

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within the Local Nature Reserve

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Bats | Roosts: Highly Likely<br><br>Foraging and commuting: Highly Suitable | Although within an urban setting, the site contains mature boundary trees and woodland with mature trees which are likely to provide good roosting resource for bats locally. The mosaic of habitats present are likely to provide good opportunities and represents good quality foraging habitat and the site is well-connected to the wider landscape.<br>Species composition using the site is currently unknown however common and soprano pipistrelle have been recorded foraging on site.<br>The relatively small size of the site, urban setting, with potential negative impacts form lighting associated with the adjacent railway and residential development as well as highway lighting on adjacent roadways means it is unlikely that the site supports significant numbers of rare or light averse species such as brown long-eared bats *Plecotus auritus* and bats within the *Myotis* species genera.<br>Three granted EPSM licences relating to bats within 2km – these relate to three house roosts of low conservation significance for common pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats, both common and widespread species.<br>Possible that the site could support less common species - Wetland habitats are highly favoured by species such as Daubenton's bats *Myotis daubentonii.*<br>Roosting resource is mainly concentrated around site boundaries and within area of woodland habitats as these contain the vast majority of the mature specimens on site. Mature alder with potential roost features were noted in Compartment 4. |
| Badgers Act (1992) | Badger | Sett building: Low risk due to inundation<br><br>Foraging and dispersal: Highly likely | Although no signs of badger sett building were recorded during the site visit, a thorough search of all areas was not possible due to overgrown vegetation around site boundaries.<br>The site is largely flat with regular inundation with water; therefore, most of the site is not considered suitable for sett building.<br>The adjacent railway and residential gardens surrounding the site could provide suitable sett building opportunities and there is good connectivity with the wider landscape, badgers are likely to use the railway for dispersal and woodland buffer for sett building.<br>The survey recorded mammal pathways leading across the site and into adjacent habitats, although it was not possible to determine species and some of these are likely the result of foxes, deer, cats and other wildlife. |
| WCA Schedule 1 | Breeding birds | Highly suitable | Mature trees around the site boundary, dense patches of scrub and woodland habitats are highly likely to support a diverse range of breeding birds within the site.<br>The watercourse and wetland habitats as well as connectivity to nearby River Uck could provide opportunities for species such as kingfisher. |

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within the Local Nature Reserve

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Great crested newt | Likely present | Four granted EPSM licences within 2km of site, closest 1.1km south. Two ponds are located within 250m of the site, seven ponds are located between 250-500m, with some connectivity although urban development surrounding the site with major roads including the A22 likely to represent significant barriers to dispersal.<br>There is a good corridor of relatively undeveloped mainly agricultural land extending out east - south from the site containing numerous ponds that could support a breeding population.<br>Sussex sits **inside the NatureSpace District Level Licensing area who produce Impact Risk Zone Maps. The site falls within an XX risk zone.**<br>The site itself holds significant amounts of water much of which has very low flow rates and standing water present for much of the year and could therefore offer suitable opportunities for this species during their reproductive aquatic stage.<br>Due to regular inundation with water, good availability of vegetation within wetland habitats that could provide suitable egg-laying opportunities, connectivity with wider landscape and suitable terrestrial habitat including scrub, woodland and rough grassland could support a breeding population with a good availability of wet ditches and ponds in the wider landscape that could support a breeding population. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Hazel dormouse | Likely present within boundary habitats | The site has good connectivity with the wider landscape including continuous canopy cover with adjacent railway line habitat corridor and River Uck which extend off-site into the wider landscape. There are numerous patches of woodland in the wider landscape likely to offer good opportunities for this species and as such they are likely to be present using boundary features. |
| Bern-A3 | European hedgehog | Likely present | Habitats on site offer some suitable foraging, shelter and dispersal opportunities although the regular inundation/ waterlogged nature makes it unlikely that they will be found within wetter areas of the site. Perhaps likely during summer months as they are likely to be present within the surrounding residential gardens and could easily disperse onto site from neighbouring residential gardens and use it as a summer foraging resource, shelter and dispersal route. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Otter | Possible | Woodland and scrub habitats adjacent to the watercourse provide potential **haul-out sites** and cover for otters. Suitable shelter and holt locations can occur up to several hundred metres from a watercourse. The eastern portion of the site is relatively inaccessible, which reduces disturbance risk despite regular use of other areas by dog walkers.<br>The watercourse within the site is unlikely to support significant fish populations; however, it is hydrologically connected to the wider river network and offers a stretch of undisturbed semi-natural habitat. This connectivity, combined with the presence of riparian cover, means the site is likely to provide suitable conditions for otters.<br>Records from the NBN Atlas confirm otter presence within the wider river system. As a highly mobile species, otters could utilise the site, particularly if habitat enhancements and sensitive management are implemented. To achieve meaningful improvements for otters, any enhancements should be coordinated with wider river network initiatives. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Water Vole | Possible within wet ditches and watercourse habitats | Data available from the NBN atlas indicates that this species has been confirmed present within the River Ouse – record states present recorded at Piltdown Pond approximately 3km northwest (recorded 19/05/2019)[12] |

[12] Record: 87191 | Occurrence record | NBN Atlas

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within the Local Nature Reserve

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | National Water Vole Database[13] Identifies the area / grid square as having possible water vole presence within the period 2013 – 2022.<br>This species has experienced rapid population declines in recent years so presence is perhaps unlikely, however the combination of habitats present, and in the wider river network could certainly support this species and efforts should be made to restore and reintroduce populations wherever appropriate. |
| WCA Schedule 5 | Reptiles | Likely present | The mix of habitat types present within the site including grassland, woodland, wetland, riparian and scrub, footpath clearings providing opportunities for basking and connectivity with surrounding residential and riparian habitats is likely to provide a complex mosaic of habitat types required by reptiles.<br>It is considered highly likely that the site is likely to support common and widespread reptiles with a particular likelihood of grass snake *Natrix helvetica*. |
| WCA Schedule 9 | Invasive Non-Native Species | Present | Himalayan Balsam was recorded on site within the mixed scrub to the east and wet grassland areas, along footpaths and within ditches and watercourses. Identified on the National Water Vole Database as an area with possible mink presence and/ or a control program in place. |

[13] National Water Vole Database - The National Water Vole Database Project | The Wildlife Trusts

### *Evaluation*

4.71. Current Conditions – At present the site appears to be undergoing a process of natural succession with encroachment of scrub into grassland habitats and boundary woodland and trees that require management. The nature of the site with regular inundation means that it is highly fertile and this results in a lush sward with highly competitive species, which can limit species diversity or ability of less common species to survive/ persist.

4.72. The wet woodland and fen areas adjacent provide a significant biodiversity resource and further environmental benefits from water retention and management. Of particular note are the stands of greater tussock sedge and mature Black alder throughout the central and eastern compartments.

4.73. Himalayan Balsam an Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) is present on site and has become quite prevalent within grassland, ditch and fen areas, and there is a risk that it could begin to outcompete the native plant communities.

4.74. There is presence of INNS throughout the site which appears to be a result of the sites connectivity with statutory main river River Uck. This represents a problem as efforts to eradicate these species are unlikely to be successful due to re-establishment from upstream habitats.

4.75. There was some evidence of plants colonising or escaping from adjacent residential areas although they did not appear to be invasive in nature or a major cause for concern.

4.76. There was some evidence of tree disease with semi-mature ash trees showing likely signs of ash dieback recorded although these were largely located within boundary habitats and as such there are additional considerations to undertaking works as it will require coordination and cooperation with National Rail, UK Power Network and neighbouring residential development with garden boundaries that directly abut the site.

4.77. The young woodland block located central on site (compartment 2) lacks understorey or shrub layer and could be enhanced.

4.78. Overall, the site is only partially available as an open green space for members of the public – with large areas of the site not currently accessible. While this is probably a benefit to wildlife, it does limit the scope of the site as a public amenity. There is a mosaic of habitats present, which are highly suitable for a wide range of protected species and includes priority habitat types that are nationally scarce. Any management should be carefully designed to ensure that valuable habitats are carefully protected, ensuring their long-term viability.

# 5 Management Recommendations and Opportunities

### *Aims and Objectives*

5.1. The purpose of this section of the report is to set out some broad management suggestions for the dominant habitat types across the site. The aim of these recommendations is to provide a base for the council to manage the site in the next period after the cessation of the extant management plan and allow that plan to be updated accordingly.

5.2. The objectives of these recommendations are to allow the council to carry out straightforward set of management works that are realistic in scope and aims to increase the biodiversity value of the site by increasing structural complexity and species richness.

5.3. For grassland and fen areas it is not thought expedient or appropriate to provide recommendations and prescriptions that aim to increase plant species diversity through the reduction of nutrient loading.

5.4. Compartment 1 - Grassland - To create a greater degree of structural complexity whilst reducing the period in which the sward is of maximum height. Removal of Himalayan balsam.

5.5. Compartments 2&3 - Fen areas - To undertake hydrological surveys to understand the quantities and locations of inflow, outflows and current water retention rates over dry months in order to better inform appropriate management aims for this habitat. To manage scrub encroachment and successional processes to ensure habitat is retained long-term, potentially reducing stands of bramble, notably between Compartments 2 and 3. Management should primarily be focused on improving condition within Compartments 2&3 although relevant throughout. Removal of Himalayan balsam.

5.6. Compartment 1&2 - Wet woodland – Wet woodland within the eastern portion of the site, Compartment 4 is in good condition and management or absence of should be continued with light touch management recommended where necessary to maintain current status. Woodland (dry) management should be focused on increasing structural diversity within Compartments 1 and 2 although relevant throughout

5.7. Compartment 1&2 - Scrub – To undertake ongoing scrub management to prevent excessive encroachment and the successional degradation of existing grassland, fen, woodland and watercourse habitats. Efforts should be focused within Compartments 1&2 although relevant throughout.

### *Maintain and enhance wet grassland & fen habitats (of core biodiversity value)*

5.8. The site contains wet grassland, tussocky fen, springs and a ditch network, identified as high-value habitat supporting species such as tussock sedge, meadowsweet, rushes, dragonflies, and wetland birds.

### *Recommendations*

*Grassland (Compartment 1)*

- Initial two-year period of heavy and regular cuts to reduce overall sward height for longer periods through the year, give consideration to creating smaller compartments to allow a varied sward height, and/or the creation of mown pathways with scalloped edges and open areas.

- Thereafter, 2-3 annual rotational cuts (Final in October) to maintain structural diversity with more regular mowing of pathways and open areas.

*Fen habitats (Compartments 2-4)*

- Create "refuge strips" (20–30% uncut each year) to maintain habitat for invertebrates, reptiles, small mammals and overwintering species.
- Selective reduction of vigorous tall herbs (e.g., hemlock water-dropwort, where spreading excessively) to maintain structural variation.
- Maintain stability of hydrology by avoiding any drainage changes, soil compaction or trenching near wetter fen areas.
- No public access (already the case in management plan). Continue restricting access to prevent trampling and soil damage or scarify and alternate pathway routing through habitats to limit damage.
- Targeted scrub/willow coppicing at fen edges every 3–5 years to prevent succession into alder carr.
- Retain isolated willow shrubs for structural heterogeneity and wetland bird perches but prevent them coalescing into continuous canopy.

*Scrub and willow management — maintain open habitat & structural variation (Compartment 2 & 3)*

5.9. The management plan notes dense willow and wet scrub spreading along edges, especially near the railway line and northern bank. This was primarily noted within compartments 1 and 2 although is relevant across the site along boundaries.

***Recommendations***

- Targeted winter scrub reduction in areas where scrub encroaches into open wet grassland or fen.
- Use a “scalloping” approach: create irregular, curved scrub edges rather than straight cuts to increase ecotone diversity.
- Coppice willow stools rather than remove entirely — this maintains habitat complexity while preventing canopy domination.
- Where scrub is cleared, create brash hedges along woodland edges to:
    - protect sensitive areas
    - create cover for small mammals, amphibians and invertebrates
    - discourage off-path access

5.10. This aligns closely with the plan’s aims to maintain open wet grassland while preserving wildlife-rich scrub mosaics.

*Woodland, edge management & veteran trees (all compartments)*

5.11. The LNR contains wet woodland, dry lowland mixed woodland and tree belts that provide habitat for bats, birds and invertebrates. Management activities should be primarily focused on ensuring long-term tree health though active monitoring and management of boundary trees and increasing the structural diversity of woodland.

***Recommendations***

- Light-touch management: retain deadwood, create log piles, and allow natural regeneration in less sensitive areas.
- Where trees overshade fen areas, remove selected stems (staged over multiple years) to prevent drying and encourage ground flora.

- Increase structural diversity through creation/ use of brash hedging with continued/ additional planting to create mixed age stands.
- Install additional raptor boxes within woodland areas.
- Install bat boxes on mature trees — supports bat monitoring and public engagement.

*Path management, compaction prevention & visitor access (all compartments)*

5.12. The site is used heavily by local residents, and the management plan notes parts of the reserve are prone to seasonal flooding and difficult access.

5.13. According to the management plan - It is the Ranger's responsibility to cut back vegetation away from footpaths and to ensure that grass foot paths are mowed with the DR hand tractor over summer months. Upkeep of mown paths will help ease the spread of ground compaction issues in open areas by ensuring an easier, clearly demarcated path to walk upon.

5.14. Hand tractors are currently recommended/ used to maintain footpath access (cut over summer months). Use of hand tractors is advisable due to reduced impact/ footprint and increased manoeuvrability to create curved or naturalised pathways.

***Recommendations***

5.15. Rotate or re-route soft footpaths every 3–5 years where feasible to reduce long-term compaction in sensitive wet grassland.

- Maintain narrow desire-line paths while discouraging widening — use brash hedges or subtle dead hedging to guide footfall.
- No new access into sensitive fen areas.
- Install small interpretation signs explaining why paths shift or are seasonally closed.

*Ditch & hydrology management*

5.16. The ditch network, springs and wet hollows support eels, sticklebacks, amphibians and dragonflies.

***Recommendations***

5.17. Avoid deepening or re-profiling ditches, which may drain the fen or alter hydrology.

- Only clear 1/3 of ditch length per year, alternating sections to maintain refuge habitat for aquatic fauna.
- Leave cleared vegetation beside the ditch for 48 hours to allow aquatic organisms to return.

*Invasive species control — especially Himalayan balsam*

5.18. Himalayan balsam is common in many floodplain wetlands; although not explicitly stated in the management plan, it is frequently present in similar Sussex sites.

***Recommendations***

5.19. Hand-pulling programme each June–July before seeding.

- Prioritise upstream areas of the ditch network first (logical hydrological progression).
- Community volunteer sessions (very effective for balsam):
    - "Balsam Bashing Days" with local groups
    - Provide ID sheets and gloves
    - Simple training by ranger or ecologist
- Avoid strimming or cutting late, which spreads seeds.

*Community engagement & citizen science*

5.20. The management plan emphasises the importance of bringing people into the reserve and raising awareness of its wildlife value, the site is bordered by residential development to the north and is well used by local community as an open space.

***Recommendations***

5.21. Annual Bioblitz with Sussex Wildlife Trust, local schools, Lewes/Wealden community groups.

- Bat walks with Sussex Bat Group (given the site is noted as bat foraging habitat).
- Pollinator transects (could be done by volunteers using UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme protocols).
- Seasonal guided walks on wetland plants, dragonflies, birds and invertebrates.
- Install an interpretive board about the fen and its rare wetland features (e.g., tussock sedge, eels, dragonfly assemblage).
- Social media platforms and groups to encourage community engagement with wildlife recording and monitoring.

*Climate resilience & long-term habitat condition*

5.22. Given flooding frequency is rising (as noted in management plan), long-term resilience measures would include:

- Resist drainage interventions that could alter floodplain function.
- Expand damp meadow buffer zones around fen to reduce fragmentation.
- Encourage natural regeneration in wetter zones while preventing excessive scrub succession.

***Conclusions***

5.23. Hempstead Meadows LNR contains a diverse wetland mosaic of wet grassland, fen, scrub and wet woodland. The western compartments of wet grassland, scrub and fen are overstood and undergoing a process of succession, they are well-used by dog walkers. The eastern compartments 3 and 4 comprising wet woodland and fen are in good condition and access to these areas should be limited.

5.24. Management should prioritise maintaining open wet grassland and fen within Compartments 1 and 2 (and to a lesser extent within 3) through rotational cutting, targeted scrub and willow coppicing, and sensitive hydrological management. Brash hedging and path rotation can help prevent trampling and compaction, while invasive plant control—particularly Himalayan balsam—should be delivered through annual volunteer events. Enhancing community engagement through Bioblitz days, wildlife monitoring, bat walks and interpretation boards will strengthen local stewardship and support long-term biodiversity recovery.

***Opportunities***

5.25. Deadwood - Larger diameter wood (firewood according to UKPWR) is left on site by utilities contractors; this should be removed as it presents a flooding risk. Ideally felled trees will be left intact on the floor of the woodland/reserve. Large diameter deadwood has high ecological value, and such wood should resist flow of water in flooding incidents

5.26. Tree Management – Monitor disease, retain standing deadwood where possible.

5.27. Structural Diversity - Varying vegetation layers can improve structural diversity; introduce scrub patches among grassland for vertical complexity, plant native shrubs and small trees in clusters rather than uniform rows, use of brash hedging, allow natural regeneration in selected areas for mixed-age growth.

5.28. Add deadwood features and habitat piles - Create log piles, brash piles, hibernacula and standing deadwood for invertebrates, reptile and amphibians, fungi, and birds; position some in shaded spots and others in sunny areas for microhabitat variation.

5.29. Consider microhabitat creation measures - Scatter rocks, rubble, or sandy patches for thermoregulation and nesting sites and include bare soil strips for ground-nesting bees and wildflowers.

***Protected Species -***

5.30. Possible enhancements for European eel and three-spined sticklebacks, as well as aquatic invertebrates.

- Install eel passes or ramps on weirs, sluices, and culverts to allow upstream migration.
- Ensure low-velocity bypass channels or brush/rope ladders for safe passage.
- Add woody debris and root wads in watercourses for shelter.
- Place submerged structures (e.g., bundles of branches or coir rolls) in slow-flow areas.
- Maintain vegetated banks and overhanging cover for shade and protection.
- Create shallow margins with emergent plants for juvenile eels (elvers).
- Remove or notch small redundant weirs where feasible.
- Fit fish-friendly screens on abstraction points to prevent entrainment.
- Reduce siltation and pollutants by adding buffer strips and controlling runoff.
- Maintain base flows and avoid sudden drawdowns in ditches or ponds.

5.31. Bat monitoring - See what is there – good for conservation, could set up annual monitoring – opportunity for community engagement and/ or volunteering days – also ties in nicely as enhancement for bats often focused on improving invertebrate diversity so good for wide range of species – as well as invertebrates.

5.32. There are opportunities to provide enhancements to the site through inclusion of artificial bat roosts and bird boxes to be installed on suitable mature trees throughout the site.

5.33. Creating hibernation opportunities for reptiles including log piles around the perimeter of the site or in areas of higher ground not prone to flooding.

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# Photographs

**Picture 1**

View looking east from southwest corner of site showing drier grassland area with footpath, train line just visible beyond southern boundary on right.

**Picture 2**

Northwest corner of the site showing grassland with footpath becoming overgrown and northern oak dominated tree line with residential development beyond. View looking northwest.

**Picture 3**

View looking east along southern edge of the site around centre point. Ash with ADB along southern boundary with trainline.

**Picture 4**

Central woodland area with footpath along southern edge of the site. Trees in this area are young/ semi-mature species include dominant sycamore

**Picture 5**

Wet grassland area – view looking east from edge of main footpath – there is an informal footpath that leads into this area however it has become overgrown and impassable. Himalayan balsam present.

**Picture 6**

Where watercourse footprint crosses N-S showing bridge beyond southern boundary with low water levels and high proportion of bare ground indicating regular inundation.

**Picture 7**

Wet woodland within compartment 4 dominated by common alder with mature stands present and fen area distant.

**Picture 8**

Looking west from footpath in compartment 4 showing lowland fen in good condition with greater tussock sedge locally dominant.

**Picture 9**

Footpath along Northern boundary within compartment 4 showing bracken scrub dominant.

# Plant Species List

| English name | Scientific name | gc35 - Western Grassland area - Phillips' Field Compartment 1 | g3c5 - Compartment 1 NE | f2a - lowland fens - Primarily C2, relevant in all Compartments | Ruderal / Ephemeral - ecotones - Compartment 1 and 2 | r1 / r1g - Compartment 2 | w1d - Woodland Compartments 2, 3, 4 | s - sparsely vegetated - footpaths - All | Boundaries inc. ruderal/ ephemeral, bramble and willow scrub - All | w1f - Northern boundary Compartment 1 and 2 | h3 - Compartment 1 W boundary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alexanders | *Smyrnium olusatrum* | | | | | | LD | | LD | | |
| Alder | *Alnus glutinosa* | | | | | | LD | | | | R |
| Annual meadow grass | *Poa annua* | F | | | | | | | | | |
| Ash | *Fraxinus excelsior* | | F | | | | R | | | O | |
| Bird's foot trefoil | *Lotus corniculatus* | | | | R | | R | | | | |
| Black poplar hybrid | *Populus nigra x canadensis* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bramble | *Rubus fruticosus agg.* | LA | LD | O | F | | LA | | D / LD / F | F | D |
| Bristly oxtongue | *Helminthotheca echoides* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Broad-leaved dock | *Rumex obtusifolius* | F | | | | | R | | | F | F |
| Broad-leaved plantain | *Plantago major* | F | A | | | | | A | F | | F |
| Cherry | *Prunus avium* | | | | | | | | | F | D |
| Cleavers | *Galium aparine* | O | O | | | | O | | F | | O |
| Clustered dock | *Rumex conglomeratus* | | | O | R | O | | | | | |
| Cocks foot | *Dactylis glomerata* | A | | | | O | | | | F | F |
| Common hogweed | *Heracleum sphondylium* | O | F | | O | F | | | | F | O |
| Common knapweed | *Centaurea nigra* | O | | | | | R | | | | |
| Common knotgrass | *Polygonum aviculare* | | | | | | | O | | | |
| Common nettle | *Urtica dioica* | O | A | | LA | | O | | A | | F |
| Common reed | *Phragmites australis* | | | | | LF | | | | | |
| Corkscrew willow | *Salix bablyonica var. pekinensis 'Tortuosa'* | | | | R | | | | | | |
| Couch | *Curulis lectus* | | R | | | | | | | | |
| Creeping buttercup | *Ranunculus repens* | | R | | LA | | R | | A | | |
| Creeping thistle | *Cirsium aervense* | | | | | | | | | LD | F |
| Crosswort | *Cruciata laevipes* | | | | R | | | | | | |
| Curled dock | *Rumex crispus* | O | | | | | | | | | |
| Cut-leaved cranesbill | *Geranium dissectum* | R | | | | | | | | | |
| Elm | *Ulmus sp.* | | O - Dead | | | | | | | | |
| Dog rose | *Rosa canina* | R | | | | | | | | | R |
| English oak | *Quercus robur* | | O | | | | D | | | R | |
| False brome | *Brachypodium sylvaticum* | O | | | | | O | | | | |
| False oat-grass | *Arrhenatherum elatius* | F | F | | | | | | | O | O |
| Field bindweed | *Convolvulus arvensis* | | | | | | | | | O | |
| Field horsetail | *Equisetum aervense* | | | R | | O | | | R | | R |
| Goat willow | *Salic caprea* | LA | | LF | LF | | O | | | | |
| Greater willowherb | *Epilobium hirsutum* | LA | | | | | | | LF | | R |
| Greater tussock sedge | *Carex paniculata* | | LA | | | | | | | | |
| Green dock | *Rumex obtusifolius* | | | | R | | | | | | |
| Grey willow | *Salix alba 'Tristis'* | | | LA | | | F | | | | |

| English name | Scientific name | gc35 - Western Grassland area - Phillips' Field Compartment 1 | g3c5 - Compartment 1 NE | f2a - lowland fens - Primarily C2, relevant in all Compartments | Ruderal / Ephemeral - ecotones - Compartment 1 and 2 | r1 / r1g - Compartment 2 | w1d - Woodland Compartments 2, 3, 4 | s - sparsely vegetated - footpaths - All | Boundaries inc. ruderal/ ephemeral, bramble and willow scrub - All | w1f - Northern boundary Compartment 1 and 2 | h3 - Compartment 1 W boundary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ground ivy | *Glechoma hederacea* | | | | | | A | | | | |
| Guelder rose | *Viburnum opulus* | | | | | | | | | R | |
| Hawthorn | *Crataegus monogyna* | | R | | O - saplings | | | | | | R |
| Hazel | *Corylus avellana* | | | | | | | | | F | |
| Hedge bindweed | *Calystegia sepium* | LA | A | | LA | | | | | O | LA |
| Hemlock water dropwort | *Oenanthe crocata* | | | | LA | LA | | | | | |
| Himalayan Balsam | *Impatiens glandulifera* | LD | R | LA | LA | | LA/ LD | | | | A |
| Himalayan honeysuckle | *Leycesteria formosa* | | | | R | | | | | | |
| Horsetail | *Equisetum arvense* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hybrid black poplar | *Populus x euramericana / Populus x canadensis* | | R | | | | | | | | |
| Ivy | *Hedera helix* | | | | A | | A | | | | |
| Jacob's ladder | *Polemonium caeruleum* | | | R | | | | R | | | |
| Jointed rush | *Juncus articulatus* | | | R | | | | | | | |
| Knott grass | *Polygonum aviculare* | | | | | | | | | O | R |
| Lesser stitchwort | *Stellaria graminea* | | | R | | | O | | | | |
| Male fern | *Dryopteris filix-mas* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Meadow buttercup | *myosotis scorpioides* | LA / O | | | | | | | A | | |
| Meadow cranesbill | *Geranium pratense* | | | | | | | | | R | |
| Meadow foxtail | *Alopecurus pratensis* | O | | | O | | | | | | R |
| Meadow vetchling | *Lathyrus pratensis* | | R | | | | | | | | |
| Meadowsweet | *Filipendula ulmaria* | R | LA | O | | | LA | | | R | |
| Milk thistle | *Silybum marianum* | | | | | | O | | | | |
| Osiers - basket willow | *Salix viminalis* | | | | | | | | | F | |
| Ox-eye daisy | *Leucanthemum vulgare* | R | | | | | LF | F | | | |
| Perennial rye grass | *Lolium perenne* | A | | | | | | D | | A | O |
| Pineapple mayweed | *Matricaria discoidea* | | O | | | | | | | O | R |
| Red fescue | *Festuca rubra* | | | | | | | | | O | O |
| Rosebay willowherb | *Chamerion angustifolium* | | LD | | LD | | LA/LD | LF | | LD | |
| Rough meadow grass | *Poa trivialis* | A | | | | | | | | | |
| Rowan | *Sorbus aucuparia* | | | | | | | | | R | |
| Scots pine | *Pinus sylvestris* | | | | | | R | | | | |
| Silver birch | *Betula pendula* | | | | | | O | | | | |
| Smooth meadow grass | *Poa pretensis* | A | | | | | | | | O | |
| Sweet mock orange | *Philadelphus coronarius* | | | | R | | | | | | |
| Sycamore | *Acer pseudoplatanus* | | R | | | | R | | F | | |
| Tansy | *Tanacetum vulgare* | | | | | | | | | R | |
| Timothy | *Phleum pratense* | O | R | | R | | | | | | |
| Tufted forget-me-not | *Myosotis scorpioides* | R | | | | | | | | | |
| Tufted hair grass | *Deschampsia cespitosa* | F | | | | | | | | | |
| Wavy hairgrass | *Avenella flexuosa* | | R | | | | | | | | |
| White clover | *Trifolium repens* | LA / O | | | | | | | | | |
| Wild cherry | *Prunus avium* | | | | | | O | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wood dock | *Rumex sanguineus* | | | | | | | | | | R |
| Yorkshire fog | *Holcus lanatus* | LA | F | | | | | | | O | |

Co-ecology

# PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

West Park Local Nature Reserve, Uckfield, East Sussex

## A REPORT FOR UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

This report provides an independent assessment of the habitats within the site and their relative ecological value, alongside a determination of likely constraints and opportunities for enhancement


## Jess Lewis BSc Hons (MRes) MRSB


Survey undertaken in May/June 2025 with an update visit in January 2026, reporting undertaken in January/February 2026

**Table 0.1** - Document and Version Control

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Author | Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB | | |
| Site | West Park Local Nature Reserve | | |
| Reference | CE25034 | | |
| Type | Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Management Recommendations | | |
| Version | Checked | Approved | Date |
| V1 | Giles Coe BSc (hons) MCIEEM | Draft for Comment | 13/02/2026 |



## Copyright and guidance



The surveys and assessment have been drafted to be in accordance with the British Standard for Biodiversity BS42020:2013, Biodiversity - Code for planning and development and the Code of Professional Conduct published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental management.

**N.B** It must be noted that investigations of this sort provide only a snapshot in time of the ecological conditions of a site, are limited in extent and cannot capture the full picture of the biodiversity interests at the given location.

# Contents

# 1 Summary of Assessment

Co-ecology Ltd was commissioned by Uckfield Town Council to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of West Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR), situated in Uckfield, East Sussex. The aim was to assess current habitats, provide management advice, and identify opportunities for ecological enhancement. Below is a summary of the key findings from the habitat survey.

1.1. Proposed actions will focus on measures to improve habitat condition and structural diversity refine management practices, and increase species diversity, delivering benefits for wildlife, including protected species, while maintaining public access.

1.2. A UKHabs habitat survey and protected species assessment was undertaken on 23rd May and 30th June 2025 and an update visit carried out on 21st January 2026 by experienced ecologists from Co-ecology Ltd.

1.3. The site is designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). It is not subject to any other nature conservation designation but has good connectivity with the wider landscape and falls within Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Schemes such as Weald to Waves highlight the importance of landscape connectivity, of which this site has potential to enhance.

1.4. Habitats and their current status include:

- *Woodland - w1d – wet woodland; w1f – lowland mixed deciduous woodland (ancient woodland); w1f5 – dry oak-dominated woodland (H9190) including many mature/ ancient specimens;*
- *Grassland – g3c – other neutral grassland, g4 – modified grassland and wet meadow*
- *g1c – bracken and bracken/ bramble scrub complexes*
- *Scrub – h3a – blackthorn scrub, h3d – bramble scrub, h3h – mixed scrub and h3j – willow scrub*
- *A small area of h1a – lowland heathland (h1a5 – Dry heaths; lowland (H4030))*
- *S1a – inland rock outcrop and scree habitats*; Sandstone outcrops
- *r1 – standing open water and canals (pond) and a series of r2b – other rivers and streams – ditches, seasonally wet.*

1.5. The following opportunities for improvements were identified:

- Bracken Control – ongoing bracken control required. Long-term / repeated management.
- Grassland areas: Implement a structured mowing regime to reduce rank growth, prevent scrub encroachment, and improve plant diversity. Create open areas for reptile basking and use arisings for habitat piles. Consider low-level fencing, brash hedging and mown paths to guide public access and carry out targeted control using repeated cut and removal of arisings to create areas with greater plant species diversity.
- Wet grassland and ditches: Continue to seasonally restrict access, maintain hydrology, introduce more regular seasonal cutting to create structural diversity, and control scrub to preserve wetland flora. Maintain hydrology with rotational ditch clearance.
- Woodland and Trees: Ongoing careful management of mature/ ancient trees, thinning of alder carr and wet woodland, coppicing where present, brash hedging around selective areas to prevent access. Create canopy gaps to encourage diverse ground flora assemblages.
- Heather – Small existing area with limited potential for expansion into woodland open space and areas where sycamore/ silver birch colonising.

1.6. Additional enhancements could include installing bat, bird and dormouse boxes on suitable vegetation, creating insect hotels, log piles, and hibernacula. Organising volunteer days for habitat management and wildlife feature creation, improving habitats and helping foster community engagement and public interest of the site. Monitoring could be encouraged through further engagement with local wildlife groups and citizen science events. These measures will enhance habitat diversity and ecological resilience, supporting a wide range of wildlife.

# 2 Background

### *Overview of the commission and the proposals*

2.1. Co-ecology Ltd were commissioned by Uckfield Town Council to provide ecological advice including an assessment of the existing habitats present as well as recommendations for improved management practices and opportunities for improvements at West Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Rocks Road, Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 2BX.

2.2. To provide an additional stage in assessment, this report has been completed and comprises the following elements:

- results of a survey of the on-site habitats following the UK Habitats Classification;
- an initial assessment of the current condition and ecological importance of the habitats present;
- an assessment of the likely presence of legally protected species;
- an evaluation of the relative nature conservation value of the site;
- provide broad measures for improvements and opportunities;
- recommendations for any further surveys or assessments that may be necessary.

### *Objectives of this appraisal*

2.3. To establish a current broad habitat baseline regarding habitat type and condition and to provide broad recommendations for future management with the objective of improving the biodiversity status and condition of habitat types present.

2.4. A Management Plan has been produced for the site covering the period 2023 – 2028 (West Park Local Nature Reserve, Uckfield, 5-year Management Plan January 2023 to December 2028)[2]. The management plan, valid until December 2028 outlines suitable management prescriptions and operations that should be carried out, and monitoring required to establish the effectiveness of the management plan. In addition, the plan makes reference to protected species groups which are currently lacking baseline survey information and should therefore be the subject of future survey works. The management plan describes the various habitat types and relevant management aims for each.

2.5. The overarching aims of the existing plan are to conserve and enhance biodiversity on site, while balancing visitor access, recreation, education/ community engagement and long-term ecological resilience.

2.6. A review of the measures recommended; assessment of any mitigation or works that have been implemented and some updated recommendations in line with those measures is therefore included.

[2] Management-Plan-for-West-Park-Local-Nature-Reserve-2023-28.pdf

### *Site context*

2.7. West Park is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Archaeologically Sensitive Area located at the western edge of the built form of Uckfield town and is owned and managed by Uckfield Town Council. West Park LNR is a small site, measuring approximately 10.8ha in size and centred on Ordnance Survey Grid Reference (OSGR) TQ 46200 21477.

2.8. The site is an irregular, long narrow shape and bordered along its western side by the A22, a major road, north by Lake Wood and east and west by residential development. A mosaic of habitats are present including, mature/ ancient trees, a range of woodland from ancient to young colonising silver birch, planted dry oak and alder carr, wet and dry grassland areas of varying diversity, scrub, acidic conditions with bracken, a pond, ditch system and rocky outcrops. The site supports a good diversity of wildlife including legally protected and notable species.

2.9. Lake Wood site comprises ancient woodland with stone outcrops and an original spring-fed pond which was enlarged by construction of a dam as well as carving of various features from stone outcrops which various physical landscape features in the style of Capability Brown.

2.10. West Park provides some buffer between the new development directly east and south and Lake Wood to the north, although not designated, an important ancient woodland site. There is good habitat connectivity with the wider landscape via deciduous woodland, much of it ancient parcels and habitats associated with Shortbridge Stream and the River Uck southwest to northeast.

### *Legislative and policy*

2.11. The following pieces of legislation and National policy are relevant to this appraisal and have been used to inform this appraisal;

- The Environment Act (2021)
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Biodiversity and geological conservation: circular 06/2005

2.12. The following local policies are extracted from the Uckfield Town Councils Strategic Plan 2026 - 2031[3]

*By 2031 the Town Council will have:*

- *Designated areas of Town Council land for wild flowers;*
- *Commissioned ecological appraisals and wildlife surveys in our woodlands and nature reserves to inform biodiversity action plans*
- *Hosted events such as the Eco Expo to better inform residents of various alternative technologies;*
- *Recorded and mapped the findings of tree surveys to ensure safety from ash dieback and decay;*

*Our community aspirations, by 2031 are to:*

[3] Draft-Strategic-Plan-and-Priorities-2026-31-2.pdf

- *Contribute to the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and see the preservation or creation of wetlands and hedgerows, the sustainable management of woodlands and freshwater habitats;*
- *Provide data and information for Uckfield, to central government departments and Weald to Waves to draw down funding to preserve our rich biodiversity;*
- *Have created a 'Wilder Uckfield' plan to address the biodiversity crisis….*
- *Maintain, improve and protect all of our natural areas to accommodate the demands of future growth of the town;*

# 3 Methodology

### *Personnel*

3.1. The UKHabs Survey, undertaken in May and June 2025, with an update visit in January 2026, site appraisal and assessment were carried out by Giles Coe BSc (Hons) MCIEEM and Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB, who also compiled the report.

3.2. Giles Coe BSc (Hons) MCIEEM has been a commercial ecologist since 2001. Giles is an ecologist with more than 24 years commercial ecological experience in quantitative field surveys and assessments and with expertise in habitats and plant identification although primarily a specialist in the mitigation of impacts to legally protected species. Giles has acted as named ecologist on Mitigation Licences for bats, badgers, and great crested newts since 2015 and is a Registered Consultant on the low impact class licence scheme for bats and badgers and is a certified drone pilot holding both A2 CofC and GVC qualifications.

3.3. Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB. Jess is an ecologist with over eight years' commercial experience in quantitative field surveys and assessments and with expertise in habitats although primarily a specialist in the mitigation of impacts to legally protected species. She holds a survey class licence for great crested newts (Licence Number: 2022-10399-CL08-GCN) and beavers and is also a certified drone pilot holding both A2 CofC and GVC qualifications.

### *Contextual information and data records*

3.4. Contextual information on the site was gathered from freely available on-line resources including a 10km search for internationally important protected sites and 5km for nationally designated sites and records for any European Protected Species mitigation licences for great crested newts, hazel dormice or bats. This was carried out using Magic Map hosted by Defra. On-line aerial imagery was used to make an assessment of the sites position within the wider landscape including connectivity and potential corridors for protected species dispersal.

### *UK Habitats Classification Survey and Condition Assessment*

3.5. The surveyors visited the site on the 23rd May, 30th June 2025 and 21st January 2026 recorded the majority of identifiable plant species with an indication of their relative abundance following the DAFOR[5] scale. The purpose of the survey was to complete a baseline habitat survey of the developable areas of the site using the UK Habitats Classification system. The UKHabs-Professional system was used as reference with habitats assigned to either Level 3 or to Level 4 where applicable, the minimum mapping unit used was 25m$^2$ and all Secondary Codes were utilised where the relevant conditions pertained.

3.6. The survey results and recommendations are described according to habitat parcel, as per the existing Management Plan to remain consistent.

### *Evaluation*

3.7. An assessment is provided as to the likely importance of the site judged by the habitats that are present and the species that have been confirmed or are likely to be present. This value is expressed at a geographic scale following criteria set out by CIEEM (2017) in their impact assessment guidance.

[5] Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, Rare

### *Constraints*

3.8. The UK habitat survey was carried out in May/June with an update visit undertaken in January 2026 and therefore any plants with an earlier or later flowering phenology may have been underreported or missed. Despite the time of year, it was possible to identify species using a vegetative key, determine the habitat types and overall conditions.

3.9. The surveyors concentrated primarily on the open grassland areas and stands of younger woodland as the old growth woodland is well recorded and a full woodland survey of these areas would have been disproportionate to the objectives.

3.10. No data search information has been included within the report at this time. As there are no proposals for development and this report aims to provide an outline for management and improvement options, it was not considered necessary to request a formal data search at this time.

3.11. There were no further constraints to the survey or assessment.

# 4 Results

### *Contextual information*

4.1. West Park LNR is owned and operated by Uckfield Town Council who commissioned Co-ecology Ltd to undertake this ecological assessment.

4.2. Uckfield Town Councils Strategic Plan 2026 – 2031 identifies ecological appraisals and wildlife surveys are needed to inform biodiversity action plans. This report provides an assessment of the habitats present as well as an assessment of potentially linked habitats and sites and provides measures to ensure that these habitats remain / become an asset for wildlife, with good connectivity to the wider landscape, enabling the creation and conservation of wildlife corridors and providing good quality green spaces for residents.

4.3. The whole site is designated at a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) but is not subject to any other nature conservation designation. There are a diverse mix of habitats present on site with several woodland types including ancient woodland, younger oak dominated, alder carr and silver birch woodland parcels, amenity and semi-improved grassland, blackthorn and bracken/ bramble mixed scrub, sandstone outcrops, heather a pond and small stream.

4.4. The 10.5ha irregular-shape site lies at the northwest corner of the built form of Uckfield Town and is bordered by the A22 bypass along its western boundary, with Snatt's Road directly beyond the north and Lake Wood Ancient woodland site directly beyond. There is a wide band of relatively undeveloped land containing a high proportion of deciduous, including Ancient, woodland and riparian habitats associated with Shortbridge Stream, a tributary of the River Uck extending southwest, west, north and northeast out from the site with potential for wildlife corridors, despite several roads. South and southeast comprises residential development, industrial estate, a water treatment works and grassland habitat due to be developed into housing.

### *Existing Management Plans*

4.5. An existing 5-year Management Plan is in place for West Park[6] covering the period January 2023 – December 2028. The Plan demonstrates that West Park LNR is actively managed for biodiversity conservation with prescribed actions that benefit local wildlife and habitats. The presence of semi-natural grassland, marshy areas, diverse woodland, and notable species highlights the ecological value of the site within the local landscape.

4.6. Due to the diversity of habitats within the LNR, the existing management plan provides tailored prescriptions for each habitat compartment to address the unique needs of each (e.g. bracken control, scrub clearance, enhancement of marshy grassland, protection of sandstone outcrops).

4.7. Lake Wood – Woodland Trust Site has a high volume of visitation and subject to its own active management plan covering the period 2021-2026[7].

4.8. Other relevant schemes currently being explored, or already signed up to include Weald to Waves[8]; potential to be a District Level Licensing provider via pond creation through the Newt Partnership; the Uckfield Green Project[9] set up to coordinate green initiatives and boost public involvement; the potentially Wilder Wealden[10] a district-wide programme directly affecting Uckfield and encouraging

[6] Management-Plan-for-West-Park-Local-Nature-Reserve-2023-28.pdf
[7] InternalManagementPlan
[8] Update on Weald to Waves Ashdown Forest Conservators 01.09.25
[9] UGP - About
[10] Partnership with Sussex Wildlife Trust aims to enhance Wealden district - Wealden District Council

participation by local groups, and others which are also likely to be relevant. It is important that the aims and objectives of these various schemes align in relation to management aims and objectives for the site.

### *Site in Relation to Its Surroundings, Habitat Connectivity and Potential Impacts*

4.9. West Park LNR forms a significant block of semi-natural habitat on the western edge of the built form of Uckfield, covering approximately 10.5ha and comprising woodland, marshy grassland, scrub and sandstone outcrops. Despite being bordered by residential areas and local roads, the reserve sits within a wider ecological network that includes nearby woodland blocks, wetland pockets and green corridors extending along Uckfield's western fringe. These adjacent habitats contribute to strong ecological connectivity, supporting the movement of woodland, scrub and marsh-associated species through and around the urban landscape.

4.10. Although the reserve is tightly bounded by housing and the A22, it remains functionally connected to the wider countryside. The combination of woodlands, hedgerows, sandstone outcrops, marshy zones and informal green corridors provides dispersal routes for species such as dormice, bats, woodland birds, invertebrates and reptiles. Boardwalks installed in wetter areas demonstrate the site's naturally damp conditions and highlight continuing hydrological links across the reserve. Despite surrounding development, the site contributes meaningfully to the green corridor running along Uckfield's west side.

4.11. Potential ecological sensitivities at West Park include hydrological changes, nutrient enrichment, disturbance to ground flora and the spread of bracken or invasive species. The marshy grassland and wet woodland areas depend on seasonal waterlogging and stable hydrology, while the sandstone outcrop ecology and orchid populations require low-nutrient, minimally disturbed conditions. Targeted management such as bracken control and ongoing scrub management is currently helping to maintain these habitat features.

4.12. One internationally designated site – Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and SSSI, occurs within 10km of West Park, located approximately 4.2km north at its closest point. There is some habitat connectivity via woodland parcels and riparian habits associated with Shortbridge Stream that could allow movement of more mobile species between the sites and form part of a wider corridor of connectivity. The A22 and A272 major roads are present however the majority of major housing developments identified on the planning portal have been approved to the south of the site.

4.13. No other internationally designated wildlife sites occur within 10km of West Park LNR. However, Uckfield and the wider Wealden district support numerous statutory designations, including nearby SSSIs, ancient woodland sites and regionally important wildlife corridors.

4.14. See Tables 4.1 below and Figure 4.1 for a representation of location and distance of the site in relation to protected areas.

**Table 4.1** Internationally important and protected sites intersecting a 10km radius of the development site.

| Type | Site | Reason for Citation | Distance and orientation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Special Protection Area (SPA) / Special Area of Conservation (SAC) / | Ashdown Forest | *One of the largest single continuous blocks of lowland heath in south-east England, with both **4030 European dry heaths** and, in a larger proportion, 4010 Northern Atlantic wet heath. Habitats dominated by Heath, Scrub, Maquis and Garrigue, Phygrana (60%); Mixed woodland (40%).*<br><br>*Connectivity to the site is poor.*<br>*7km Zone of Influence buffer around this site with SANGS agreement to protect the site from impacts of development and ensure that there is funding to carry out maintenance and habitat management works.* | 4.2km north at closest point |

**Table 4.1** Internationally important and protected sites intersecting a 10km radius of the development site.

| Type | Site | Reason for Citation | Distance and orientation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) | | | |
| SSSI | Rock Wood | *A small ancient woodland lying on Tunbridge Wells sandstone and Wadhurst Clay.* | 4km north |
| LNR | Hempstead Meadows | *Another site owned and managed by Uckfield Town Council located within Uckfield town but with habitat corridors along the railway line and River Uck providing connectivity with the wider landscape.* | 1km east |
| SSSI | Buxted Park | *An 83.43ha old deer park consisting of a variety of unimproved grassland communities with parkland trees and areas of woodland which as a whole support a large invertebrate population.* | 1.3km northeast |
| National Landscape (formerly AONB) | High Weald | *A medieval landscape of wooded, rolling hills studded with sandstone outcrops; small, irregular-shaped fields; scattered farmsteads; and ancient routeways. 1,461km² area covers parts of Kent, Sussex and Surrey.* | Boundary between 4-5km northwest, north and northeast |
| SSSI | Plashett Wood | *154.3ha site comprising ancient woodland (pedunculate oak-hornbeam with birch and hazel, and hazel-sessile oak) on Weald clays supporting a rich community of breeding birds, as well as a number of plants and invertebrates withe a nationally restricted distribution.* | 4.9km southwest |
| SSSI | Stockland Farm Meadows | *A small site – 5.8ha comprising two grazed meadows and a hay field (species-rich) managed by traditional methods and pond.* | 6km northeast |
| SSSI | Hastingford Cutting | *Very small site – 0.05ha designated for its geological interest.* | 6.5km northeast |
| SSSI | Scaynes Hill | *Very small site – 0.04ha designated for its geological interest.* | 6.9km northwest |
| SSSI | Park Corner Heath | *A small area of grassy heath, woodland and scrub lying on sand over the Weald Clay supporting rich invertebrate fauna.* | 6.9km south |
| SSSI | Waldron Cutting | *Small site – 0.2ha designated for its geological interest.* | 7.8km southwest |
| SSSI & LNR | Chailey Common | *sub-atlantic English heath habitat. dominated by heathers, predominantly Ling Heather, but two other native species: Bell and Cross-Leaved Heather can also be found.* | 8km west |

*Relationship with statutory and non-statutory designations*

4.15. Looking broadly at the protected sites network in relation to the site, and recent/ ongoing and approved development in and around the town, it is important to identify where possible connectivity exists, and appropriate management is undertaken, to ensure that existing formal and

informal green spaces are identified, conserved and, where possible, enhanced to ensure the viability of wildlife conservation into the future.

4.16. There is good connectivity off-site northwards across Rocks Road with adjacent Lake Wood. The site lies at the northwest extent of the built form of Uckfield town with undisturbed land to the north and west including larger patches of woodland providing connectivity with Butchers, Round, Fairhazel and Park Woods northwest, Pierpoint's and Darvel wood southwest and around Uckfield north to northeast via Thirty Acre Wood, Budlett's Wood, Paygate Wood and Views Wood with habitats associated with Shortbridge Stream, a tributary of the River Ouse extending northeast to southwest beyond the town. The A22 bypasses Uckfield to the west and represents a major barrier to dispersal for many species of wildlife.

4.17. While significant infill development has been approved to develop existing agricultural fields directly south, with major housing developments underway particularly west of Ridgewood, east of the A22 the majority of existing habitat corridors are likely to persist despite this development as they largely relate the woodland parcels, Shortbridge Stream and associated habitats listed above.

*Recent Major Developments Approved in/around Uckfield*

4.18. Uckfield Town is currently experiencing rapid expansion, with several major planning applications currently either proposed or being constructed, many of which are located within existing areas of open space or agricultural land. It is likely that future development will continue to infill the relatively undeveloped land either side of the town, especially inside/ east of the A22. These developments will increasingly isolate existing sites of nature conservation value, designated or not and will increase human disturbance impacts which could result in degradation of these sites, if not carefully protected and managed. Some major developments are listed below:

- *Owlsbury Farm (west of A22) – Major development - Application (2025) for up to 1,700 homes, mixed-use centre with retail, commercial and community uses, 2FE primary school, multi-purpose sports hub, community allotments, pedestrian/ cycle links, open space, SUDs, children's play areas, landscaping, and new points of access to the A22 (Reference Number: WD/2025/0922/MEA*12*).*
- *Ridgewood Farm (west Uckfield) – Major development - Outline permission (2016) for up to 1,000 homes + primary school and community facilities. July 2025 reserved-matters approval for 750 homes + ~1,884 m² industrial unit (Reference Number: WD/2019/1773/MRM*13*).*
- *Bird-in-Eye Hill (south Uckfield) - Outline appeal approval (Aug 2025) for 190 homes after addressing concerns over ancient woodland, heritage, access (Reference Number: WD/2024/1799/MAO14).*
- *Mockbeggars Farm (north of Ringles Cross) - Nov 2025 reserved matters for 60 homes approved after resolving drainage and layout issues (Reference Number: WD/2022/0648/MAO*15*).*

4.19. Wealden Draft Local Plan (Reg. 18) identifies 11 potential development sites in Uckfield, with capacities ranging from ~6 to 350 dwellings - all currently under public consultation (closed May 2024).

*Natural England – European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) Licenses*

[12] Planning Register - Wealden District Council - Owlsbury
[13] Planning Register - Wealden District Council - Ridgewood
[14] Planning Register - Wealden District Council - Bird-in-Eye Farm
[15] Planning Register - Wealden District Council - Mockbeggars Farm

4.20. Six European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licences have been granted within 2km of the site boundary. These include two relating to bats, three relating to great crested newt and one relating to hazel dormice.

4.21. Bat licences were granted for the destruction of a bat roost (non-maternity) supporting common pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats (EPSM2010-2162, granted on 01/08/2012) located 1.15km southeast. A second licence was granted for destruction of a resting place used by brown long-eared bats (2019-38790-EPS-MIT, granted on 22/01/2019), 1.9km northeast.

4.22. Closest licence for great crested newts was 1.2km southeast (2018-33141-EPS-MIT granted 06/03/2018 – 31/12/2018) for the destruction of a resting place only. One was located within the residential suburb Ridgewood and one at the northeast extent of the town within Views Wood. There are no pond survey or class survey licence returns for great crested newts to the north, northeast or west, possibly due to a lack of surveys carried out in this area.

4.23. The licence relating to hazel dormice was for the destruction of a breeding site (2019-39789-EPS-MIT and two amendments -1 and -2, dating between 17/05/2019 – 31/12/2023) 1.4km south, just beyond the A22 bypass with potential connectivity along wooded banks associated with the road.

4.24. The majority are located around the outskirts/ edges of Uckfield town with tenuous habitat connectivity however confirms presence of these species within the wider landscape with potential for them to be present on site.

### *Priority habitats*

4.25. The site contains the following UK Priority Habitats, deciduous woodland, wet woodland, ancient and veteran trees and ponds.

4.26. Priority Habitats in proximity to the site include:

- Deciduous woodland including Ancient Woodland – dominant habitat present around the site with a band present southwest around to northeast. Numerous patches within the wider landscape, continuous canopy cover off-site north across Snatt's Road providing arboreal connectivity to the wider landscape. Significant/ larger patches present particularly beyond urban development associated with Uckfield to north, west and east.
- Most of the deciduous woodland patches surrounding Uckfield are also listed as Ancient Woodland.
- Priority ponds – there are priority ponds identified within the wider landscape however they are located significant distance from the site, closest being 1.9km southeast within residential suburb Ridgewood. Non-priority ponds present on site and within in the wider landscape (10 within 500m including on-site pond) but not identified as priority, could still provide good opportunities for protected species including GCN.
- Good quality semi-improved grassland – large area 560m northeast with good connectivity via woodland and undeveloped agricultural land.
- Coastal Floodplain and Grazing Marsh – 785m north and 1.7km southwest associated with Shortbridge Stream and the River Uck respectively.
- Lowland meadows – isolated, small patches. closest patch 750m southwest beyond A22 adjacent to and with connectivity along a tributary of the River Uck.
- Lowland heathland – 1.3km west and northwest around Piltdown.
- Traditional orchard - small parcels, insignificant due to limited extent - closest located 1.8km southeast north of Bird-In-Eye Hill.
- Lowland dry acid grassland - large area located 1.9km northeast associated with Buxted Park SSSI and linked to the site via woodland and agricultural field boundaries forming an undeveloped band around Uckfield to the north.

- Priority River Habitat – watercourses with limited connectivity Shortbridge Stream, tributary of the River Uck flows around Uckfield northeast to southwest closest point 315m northwest.
- Hedgerows and Mature Tree Lines present within the wider landscape, mature hedgerows and tree lines present along development lines – road and around field boundaries.

4.27. Figure 4.1 below shows UK Priority Habitats in proximity to the site.

Figure 4.1 – UK Priority Habitats in Proximity to Site

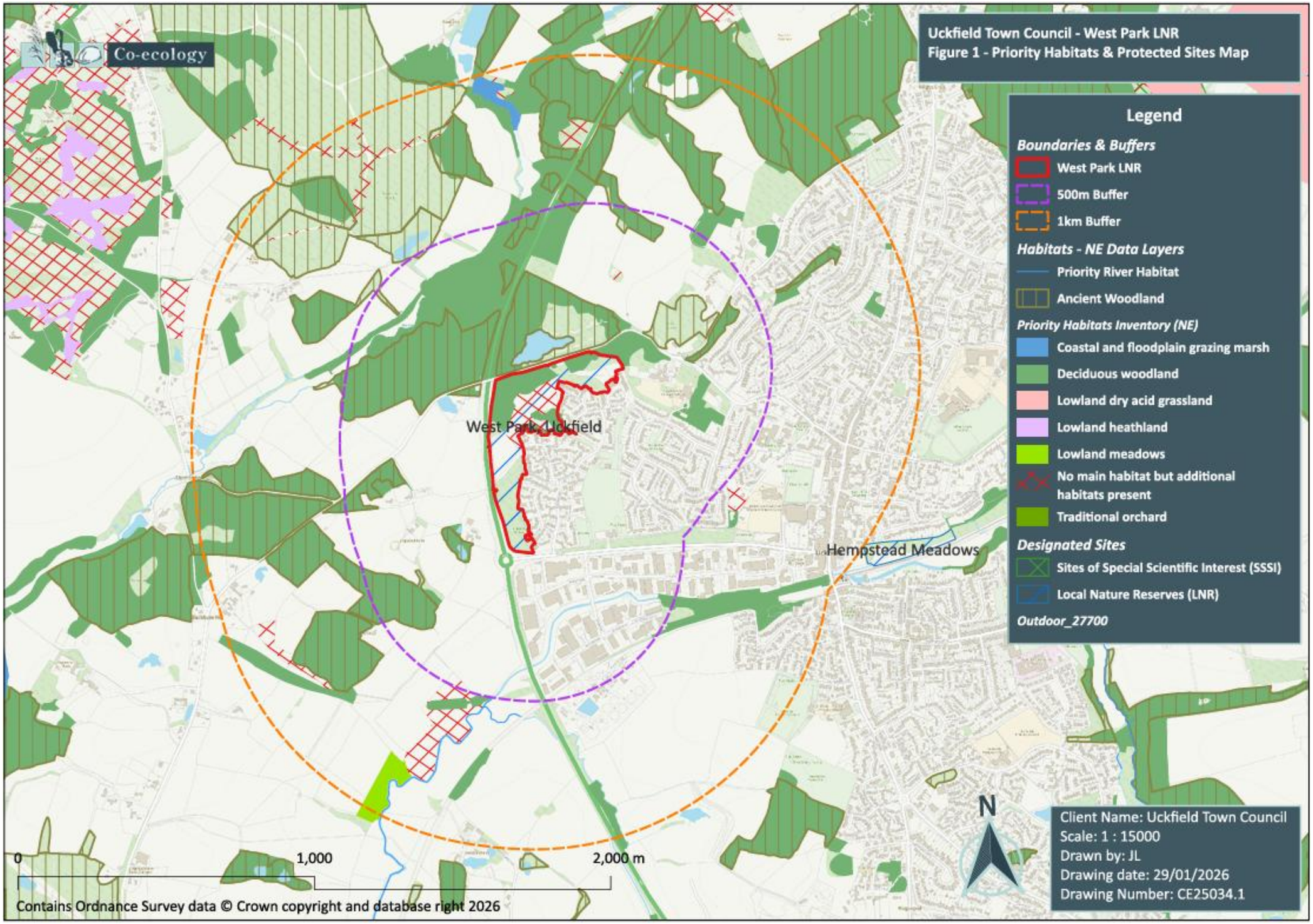

Figure 4.2 – Waterbodies within 500m

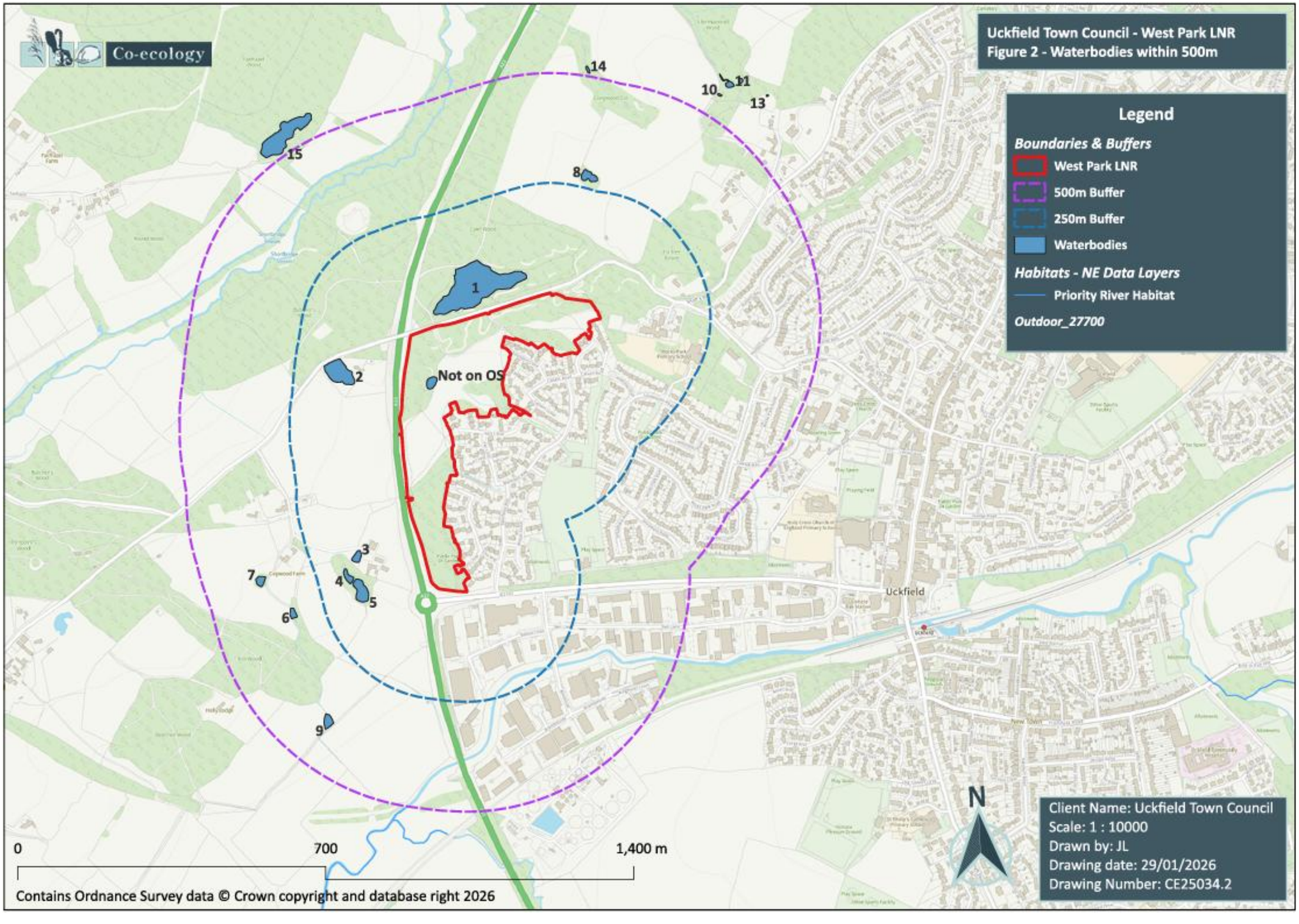

Figure 4.3 – UK Habitats Map

### Preliminary Ecological Appraisal - Habitats

4.28. Habitats within the site boundary comprise a mosaic of woodland types including ancient, alder carr, silver birch dominated patches and dry oak woodland comprising more recently created southern portion, dense scrub patches dominated by blackthorn, bracken and bramble, grassland areas including improved grassland, wet meadow and semi-improved patches with higher species diversity, sandstone outcrops, a small area of dry heathland and a ditch system and pond. The site contains many mature and ancient trees generally within the northern and northeast parcels.

4.29. Each habitat is described below by habitat type using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (SBM) condition sheets approach (the standard now used alongside UKHab), selecting the appropriate sheets for the relevant habitat type. Described as per compartments within the existing Management Plan.

#### *Woodland – Compartments 1, 2, 3, 5 & 6*

*w1d – wet woodland - block along eastern boundary, north of Hart Close - Compartment 2*

4.30. Dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosa* growing in a dense sward characterised by tall, thin stems with little/ no features. There is a lack of sunlight within this woodland parcel, and the ground flora is dominated by bramble. This area is seasonally waterlogged; there is limited access into this area in terms of footpaths however evidence of some informal desire lines. There is a good availability of fallen deadwood in these areas as well as presence of rabbit warrens. During the site visits, this area was generally noisy with garden birds.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Dense, even-aged alder stand with tall, thin stems resulting in poor vertical structure and limited understorey development (overshaded – fail, native species dominant – pass; additional criteria – evidence of natural regeneration and age/ size diversity – fails both)*

- *Low light penetration producing a bramble-dominated ground layer with sparse herb diversity (understorey <20% cover, semi-natural and not dominated by competitive species – fails both)*

- *Seasonally waterlogged conditions (winter flooding noted) restricting ground flora and access; informal desire lines causing local soil disturbance (No excessive disturbance / no major negative pressures – fails; additional criteria – passes hydrological regime appropriate for woodland type, low occurrence/ absence of INNS)*

- *Presence of fallen deadwood and rabbit warrens, adding some structural and microhabitat diversity – pass; minimum three woodland structural features present;*

- *Overall structure and species composition reflect unmanaged alder carr in sub-optimal condition, with limited habitat complexity and limited functional connectivity to adjacent woodland parcels*

*w1f – lowland mixed deciduous woodland - Compartments 1, 3 & 5*

*Compartments 1 & 3 - w1f - Acidic mixed woodland*

4.31. The majority of the ancient woodland parcel is contained within Compartment 3 which runs around the northern boundary including the northwest corner, adjacent to Rocks Road. This woodland parcel also contains stone outcrops, and the ground flora is dominated by bracken in places with a dense cover of mosses, liverworts and lichens. A dense network of paths and desire lines runs throughout this parcel giving access to the stone faces and leaving some of the upper rock faces completely bare of vegetation, with overhanging and vertical faces exhibiting more diverse communities.

4.32. Dominant tree species is silver birch *Betula pendula* and English oak *Quercus robur* with ancient/ mature specimens present. Other tree species include rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*, sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and hornbeam *Carpinus*

*betulus* were also recorded. Rare occurrence of planted/ specimen trees including common lime *Tilia x europea*, Corsican pine *Pinus nigra var. maritima* and Monterey Pine *Pinus radiata* as well as Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and NNIS species *Rhododendron ponticium* and Cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* were also recorded within this woodland parcel.

4.33. The shrub layer is patchy with occasional presence of holly *Ilex aquifolium* and gorse *Ulex europaeus* but otherwise a dense cover of bracken and bramble with seedlings, mainly, sycamore, silver birch and ash.

4.34. Due to having grown in association with the stone outcrops, some of the mature tree specimens have developed unusual and contorted growth forms with exposed roots.

*Compartment 5 – w1f - Coppice woodland strip and ancient woodland bank with mature trees*

4.35. Across the centre of the site is an ancient embankment with mature trees including ancient coppice stools with large hollows at the base. This area is dominated by hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice with sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*, field maple *Acer campestre*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus,* which elm *Ulmus glabra*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, English oak *Quercus robur*, elder *Sambucus nigra*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and cherry *Prunus avium* present.

4.36. There is an old vehicular access point along the boundary fence at this point, however it is not currently accessible, and bramble scrub is encroaching.

4.37. A raised footpath runs centrally through the compartment, and a seasonally wet ditch runs parallel along the southern edge of the bank. The trees along this bank exhibit buttress roots and there is a high proportion of bare ground from regular use by visitors. Ground flora consists of dominant nettle *Urtica dioica* and bramble *Rubus fruticose agg*. where sunlight reaches the woodland floor and contains ancient woodland indicators - bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and wood anemones *Anemone nemorosa* during spring.

*Compartment 6 – w1f – oak dominated woodland/ blackthorn scrub mosaic*

4.38. Not considered ancient, the southern portion of the site appears younger/ less established and more exposed, being located on an open south-easterly facing slope along the southeast boundary with the A22 beyond with a steep, earth embankment that rises from south-north. Footpaths run through this habitat parcel.

4.39. The woodland here is dominated by low-growing oak, with occasional blackthorn and hawthorn scrub. There was little to no shrub layer present except for bramble with bracken dominating in more open areas. The woodland has a scalloped/ curved edge that transitions into dense blackthorn stands encroaching into adjacent grassland areas.

4.40. Although this woodland appears young compared to the mature trees dominating within Compartment 3, there was a good cover of mosses and lichens on the branches.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Passes/ Good - Mixed canopy cover across compartments; some dense patches but not consistently >80%; Native species dominant - birch, oak, rowan, hazel, chestnut etc. INNS present but not canopy-dominant; at least three structural features present including ancient trees, coppice stools including ancient coppice earth bank, exposed roots, deadwood, ancient woodland ground flora indicators in places.*
- *Fails/ poor – understorey considered patchy across compartments, generally dominated by bramble/ bracken, presence although not abundant of INNS, ground flora lacking – bare ground/ rock faces due to high footfall, soil compaction and dominance of competitive species – bramble and bracken elsewhere; also consistent with fail for disturbance – significant degrading pressures*

- *Presence of disease – ash trees with ash dieback and sweet chestnuts recorded with disease/ decay*

*Grassland Habitats - Compartment 1, 2, 4 and 6*

*g3c – neutral grassland – Compartments 1, 2 and 6*

4.41. Four patches of other neutral grassland were mapped - southern end, northwest of car park at Princes Close – partially mapped as improved on Management Plan map, north and west of Hart's Close and east of Egles Grove, northeast corner.

4.42. The southern field is experiencing blackthorn scrub encroachment and contained a number of newly planted trees. Although there are obvious benefits, this area contains a good grassland species diversity and future growth of these trees could overshadow some of the grassland area. Contained waxcaps and further survey across seasons could be beneficial / allow a more complete fungal species list as well as possible identification of/ or enhancement as a waxcap rich grassland.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Low species diversity recorded (8-15 frequent grassland indicators required to achieve good condition), dominated by competitively rigorous species including bracken/ bramble patches. Presence of characteristic grassland forbes although not considered a species-rich assemblage.*

- *Sward height variation and structural mosaic - grassland does occur as a habitat mosaic across the nature reserve which includes microclimates and patches of bare ground adjacent to longer sward grassland, although becoming overgrown/ outcompeted by bracken/ bramble scrub in places.*

- *Presence of rabbit warrens recorded throughout with some localised heavily impacted areas, as well as uneven use of path network with localised muddy/ bare earth patches particularly during winter months when regular use by dog walkers can result in >10% bare ground. Scattered tree planting and seasonal waterlogging in areas with rushes locally abundant.*

*Wet meadow – Compartment 1*

4.43. Located northeast of marshy grassland and north of Hart Close northwest corner / west of Saunders Close.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Indicator species present – Fail. Low species diversity; orchids only periodic, recent declines observed.*
- *Varied sward structure (tussocks, wet features, microtopography) – Pass. Seasonal waterlogging present; wet meadow hydrology intact.*
- *Not dominated by competitive species (e.g., rushes/bramble/bracken) – Fail. Dominance by limited wet-tolerant grasses and rushes; low diversity.*
- *Evidence of appropriate hydrology (waterlogged in winter / early spring) – Pass. Seasonally waterlogged — hydrologically functional.*
- *Excessive disturbance (poaching, overgrazing, burrowing damage) – Fail. Poaching around footpaths, presence of mole, rabbit and possible badger activity constituting significant soil disturbance.*

*Marshy grassland – Compartment 2*

4.44. Located west of Hart Close southeast of woodland and stoney outcrop at northwest corner.

4.45. Periodically supports orchid population with several species recorded, although some reported absences in recent years ….

*g4 – Modified grassland – Compartments 4 & 6*

4.46. Two distinct areas including a narrow band along eastern side of southern portion and large central field.

4.47. Low species diversity dominated by Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus.* Longer sward areas with ruderal/ ephemeral growth including soft rush *Juncus effusus* forming dense scattered tussocks

4.48. The main central field is of low diversity, and the grassland sward is kept low by local rabbit population and there are numerous burrows within scrub around the edges. This field is dominated by Yorkshire fog and perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne*, with occasional white clover *Trifolium repens*, self-heal *Prunella vulgaris*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and frequent ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris.*

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Sward species-poor and dominated by 1–2 grasses - Pass (correct for type) - Yorkshire fog dominance matches modified grassland definition.*
- *Evidence of agricultural improvement (nutrient input, disturbance) - Pass. High footfall, dog walking, rabbit & badger foraging all typical of modified sward.*
- *Limited forb interest (few nectar sources) - Fail (for higher conditions). Low species diversity, condition cannot be "Moderate".*
- *Invasive species absent or minimal – Pass. No INNS noted in modified areas.*
- *Structural uniformity (consistent with "Modified" baseline) – Pass. Uniform sward, rabbit grazing, and bare patches match expected condition.*
- *Overall fail due to low diversity, high disturbance, dominant competitive grass, limited flowering species.*

*g1c – bracken - Compartment 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6*

4.49. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* is extensive and locally dominant across the parcel, forming large continuous stands with active encroachment into semi-natural woodland, grassland, and scrub habitats. The substrate appears slightly acidic, and bracken dominance is greatest on south-easterly facing open slopes, where conditions favour vigorous expansion.

4.50. Dominating in some areas with obvious encroachment into woodland, grassland and scrub habitats. The site appears to have a slightly acidic base substrate and particularly where there are open areas with slightly southeastern facing slopes bracken development appears to be dominant and expanding. Mixed scrub and bracken habitats are present, and these are now dominating around edges and forming ecotones between existing grassland and woodland habitats. Generally dominating where mapped, with bramble present, creating dense scattered stands as well as connected boundaries. Containing many rabbit warrens/ tunnels. Evidence of mole hills also recorded within Compartment 4.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Dominance: exceeding 75% cover in several of the mapped areas, forming dense competitive stands.*
- *Vertical structure: stands very from dense, shoulder height fronds to lower scattered patches along ecotone edges and around field boundaries.*
- *Associated scrub: bramble is frequent and co-dominant in places, contributing to dense, mixed scrub-bracken mosaics.*
- *Ecotones: Bracken is actively forming transitional zones between open grassland and woodland edges, reducing grassland openness and altering structural diversity.*

- *Encroachment: the cover of bracken suggests a successional trajectory toward denser scrub cover, especially where it occurs alongside dense bramble.*
- *Species richness: the deep litter layer in areas where there is dense bracken growth is highly competitive and supressing ground flora development/ growth in places. Some localised bare ground is maintained through the dense network of footpaths, occasional informal desire lines (within compartment 6) which may be slowing successional processes and provides valuable open space including basking opportunities for reptiles, with potential to support adders.*
- *Overall, bracken-dominated areas can be assessed as sub-optimal – poor due to high structural dominance, ongoing encroachments into priority woodland and grassland habitats, suppression of floristic diversity in heavily affected areas and reduced habitat heterogeneity, except where this is maintained by rabbit disturbance.*

*h3 - Scrub (including h3a – blackthorn / h3d – bramble / h3h – mixed/ h3j – willow scrub) - All Compartments*

4.51. Blackthorn scrub and patches of bramble and bracken dominated scrub within grassland areas and centrally and along eastern boundary beyond wet ditch. A large area had been cut/ mown at the time of the January 2026 survey.

4.52. *h3a – blackthorn scrub* dominated by dense, suckering blackthorn growth with occasional presence of hawthorn and scrub was present around the western boundary and expanding across the centre of the southern portion (Compartment 6).

4.53. h3d / h3h - Bramble / bracken mixed scrub was present as an ecotone around patches of grassland. Patches of hawthorn dominated scrub are present throughout the reserve, particularly around grassland areas.

4.54. h3j - Continuous patch present within the wet meadow area dominated by grey willow *Salix cinerea.*

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Structural diversity: Mixed ages/heights; edges abrupt in places, moderate.*
- *Native species dominance: Predominantly native (blackthorn/ willow/ hawthorn/ bramble); passes.*
- *Scrub ratio / mosaic context: Encroaching into priority wet grassland habitats, moderate (ecological function good, but location reduces woodland/ grassland condition).*
- *INNS: generally absent, passes.*
- *Outcome: Moderate condition with functional habitat biodiversity value for nesting birds, cover for reptiles, but requires control to protect adjacent woodland and grassland habitats and prevent from dominating. Blackthorn within Compartment 6 has spread into grassland areas and reduced the cover of this habitat type. Ongoing management is carried out over winter.*

*Heather – 'Heather Rock' Compartment 3*

4.55. There is a small area of heather *Calluna vulgaris* located at the top of a stoney outcrop along the northern boundary within the mature woodland parcel dominating Compartment 3. The canopy is more open in this area with sunlight penetrating to ground layer and bracken is present; sycamore saplings are present. This area is currently closed off to visitors to conserve this valuable habitat - the last remaining example of this habitat type within the site.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Open canopy conditions above the outcrop allow sufficient light penetration; however, bracken and sycamore saplings are present and pose a risk of future shading and competitive encroachment.*

- *Area is fenced off to prevent trampling, successfully protecting the heather from visitor pressure and enabling visible recent regeneration and recovery.*
- *The habitat supports ground-nesting birds (Uckfield Town Council, 2023), providing additional ecological value and justifying continued disturbance-prevention measures.*
- *Historic records (including 19th-century accounts) suggest this feature is a relict heath community, with woodland expansion over time reducing the extent of heath; current management appears to have stabilised/ improved condition.*
- *Overall, the heather stands are considered in improving but vulnerable condition, dependent on ongoing suppression of bracken and tree seedlings and continued exclusion of public access to maintain structure and prevent further loss.*

*r1 – standing open water and canals - Compartment 3*

4.56. The existing pond is located at the bottom of an area of sandstone outcrop present to the west and north, surrounded by mature trees, but slightly more open to the east – with silver birch woodland present to the southeast and some over-mature oak trees. This area forms a natural hollow within the stone outcrop and is quite sheltered, with oversailing vegetation resulting in heavy shading and a thick cover of leaflitter.

4.57. Most of the ditches present on site appear to be dry for the majority of the year and do not support wetland/ riparian associated flora with the exception of occasional Pendulous sedge and soft rush.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *The pond sits within a natural hollow in the sandstone outcrop, sheltered by mature woodland and over-mature oak, resulting in heavy shading and a dense accumulation of leaf litter across much of the basin. This shading significantly limits macrophyte growth and reduces structural complexity.*
- *Oversailing branches and dense canopy cover restrict light penetration, limiting the pond's productivity and contributing to organic enrichment as annual leaf fall accumulates in the water column.*
- *Pond margins are partially open to the east and southeast, where silver birch woodland creates slightly increased light levels; however, this is insufficient to offset the overall shaded, low-diversity character of the waterbody.*
- *The pond represents one of the site's main created wetland features, established as part of wider habitat enhancement within the LNR, designed to complement wet meadow and heath restoration efforts. Its structure and placement reflect past management aimed at maximising wildlife value.*
- *Overall condition is assessed as moderate but constrained, with habitat value limited by excessive shading, low plant diversity, and limited hydrological connectivity. Potential remains for biodiversity enhancement through canopy thinning, leaf-litter management, and promotion of marginal/emergent vegetation.*

*s1a – inland rock and scree habitats – Compartment 3*

4.58. These comprise rocky outcrops present along the northern boundary which adjoins Rocks Road. These features give the site its geological interest but also support numerous species of lichen and moss. There are mature trees with buttress roots growing into cracks and engulfing areas of rock including oak, silver birch and pine species. Some of the rocks have pathways running through them with scars from human marking, as well as deep natural fissures, that could provide opportunities for invertebrates but also species such as hibernating bats.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

- *Outcome: Mature oak, birch and pine are rooted into crevices and fissures, with pronounced buttress roots engulfing rock surfaces, adding structural complexity but also gradually increasing shading pressure on rock-specialist communities.*
- *The outcrops contain deep natural fissures and variable microclimates, providing potential refuges for invertebrates and suitable features for hibernating bats, enhancing faunal value.*
- *Historic and recent human impacts are evident: pathways run between exposed rocks and some surfaces show scarring and marking, indicating localised wear and loss of bryophyte/lichen cover in high-access points.*
- *Despite these pressures, the fenced-off areas and rugged topography provide natural protection for large portions of the rock habitat, helping maintain relatively intact lichen and moss communities.*
- *Overall condition assessed as moderate, with strong geological and bryophyte value but ongoing risk from shading, trampling, and gradual woodland encroachment. Active management to maintain open structure and minimise disturbance would support improvement toward "good" condition.*

*u1c - Access Routes / Bare earth footpaths*

4.59. A dense network of footpaths criss-crosses the site with high proportion of bare ground present. Over winter many of the footpaths become waterlogged and the high volume of visitors to the site results in muddy footpaths which expand into adjacent grassland and scrub. There are a number of raised walkways within the site as well as bridges over ditches, and these require ongoing maintenance.

4.60. These comprise compacted bare ground. Some of the footpaths were more worn than others and they have created localised open spaces or rides within otherwise overgrown grassland where flowering plant species diversity was generally higher.

### Legally protected species - likelihood of occurrence

4.61. The table below provides a simple assessment of the relative likelihood of any legally protected species being present within the site.

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within the Local Nature Reserve

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Bats | Roosts: Highly Likely<br><br>Foraging and commuting: Highly Suitable | The sites' location relative to its surroundings means it is highly likely to act as a commuting and dispersal corridor between larger patches of woodland surrounding the site and into the wider landscape. It lies inside the A22 and so is considered semi-urban, however Snatt's Road is minor and unlikely to act as a significant barrier to movement of highly mobile species such as bats.<br>The diverse mix of habitats present is likely to provide suitable opportunities for a diverse insect prey assemblage and as such the site could support a high diversity of foraging and commuting bat species. Although in an urban setting there is good connectivity and boundary vegetation is likely to provide some screening from adjacent residential development and road – there is likely to be some light spill from these developments and as the site is quote long and thin, this could deter more light averse species/ those more sensitive to disturbance from using the site.<br>The site contained many mature/ ancient tree specimens supporting stem and branch cavities, lifted bark, woodpecker holes and other ecological niches that could support roosting bats including roosts of higher conservation significance and sandstone outcrops also support deep crevices that could support roosting bats. Adjacent Lake Wood |

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within the Local Nature Reserve

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | forms a continuous habitat corridor suitable for roosting, foraging and commuting bats with good connectivity to the wider landscape.<br>Schemes such as Weald to Waves will work to conserve and strengthen this connectivity in the future.<br>The younger woodland and trees within the southern portion of the site were generally low growing, younger and lacking suitable roost features. |
| Badgers Act (1992) | Badger | Sett building: Present<br><br>Foraging and dispersal: Highly likely | Signs of badger sett building were recorded along the northern boundary of the site, within an area of ancient woodland and associated with sandstone outcrops with mammal pathways leading north across Snatt's / Rocks Road to adjacent Lake Wood.<br>The western boundary with the A22 rises to a steep bank and could support badger setts beyond the fence line.<br>The eastern portion of the site and much of the low-lying ground is too flat and seasonally waterlogged, no setts were identified in these areas although a high density of rabbit warrens was recorded throughout the site so badgers could make seasonal use of these habitats.<br>The irregular, narrow shape of the site and adjacent residential development means it is highly likely that badgers use the site for foraging and dispersal into the wider landscape. |
| WCA Schedule 1 | Breeding birds | Highly suitable | Mature trees around the site boundary, dense patches of scrub and woodland habitats are highly likely to support a diverse range of breeding birds within the site. Bird boxes have been installed on some of the mature trees within the site. A raptor/ owl box has been installed within compartment 3 – northern boundary, although the current placement/ citing is not considered optimal.<br>During the site walkover a good garden bird assemblage was recorded using scrub habitats including house sparrow, long-tailed tit, blackbird, blue tit, great tit and song thrush. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Great crested newt | Likely present | Within the immediate landscape, one pond is present on site, with five ponds located within 250 m (including the on-site pond) and ten ponds within 500 m. Beyond 500 m, numerous further ponds occur—particularly to the south-west, west and north-east—forming a relatively pond-rich landscape. These features provide potentially suitable breeding and dispersal habitat across much of the local area.<br>However, the A22, located immediately beyond the western boundary, is likely to act as a major barrier dispersal, reducing connectivity toward ponds situated west. Elsewhere, woodland, scrub and rough grassland within and surrounding the site provide suitable terrestrial habitat for foraging, shelter and dispersal.<br>The on-site pond and areas of wet woodland and seasonally inundated ground may provide suitable aquatic opportunities during the breeding season, while terrestrial opportunities are present throughout the site. GCN could also occur over-wintering within deep crevices, root plates of mature trees, or subterranean voids associated with sandstone outcrops and woodland structure.<br>Current survey work is underway by the Newt Partnership to identify potential for new pond creation on site, enhancing the site for this species in the future. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Hazel dormouse | Possible within boundary habitats | The site has only limited connectivity with the wider landscape due to the presence of the A22 beyond the western boundary and Snatt's / Rocks Road beyond the northern boundary. While Snatt's/ Rocks Road is minor, there is a lack of continuous canopy cover and dispersal of hazel dormice across this road is perhaps unlikely/ very low.<br>South and east the site is surrounded by relatively new residential development with only very limited linear habitat continuity via hedgerows.<br>Suitable habitat includes boundary vegetation, woodland parcels and scrub. If dispersal is possible north via Lake Wood, then the site has good connectivity with the wider landscape. There are numerous patches of |

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within the Local Nature Reserve

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | woodland in the wider landscape likely to offer good opportunities for this species and as such they could be present within the mature woodland dominating the northern portion of the site and using boundary features. |
| Bern-A3 | European hedgehog | Likely present | Habitats on site offer some suitable foraging, shelter and dispersal opportunities although the regular inundation/ waterlogged nature makes it unlikely that they will be found within wetter areas of the site. Perhaps likely during summer months as they are likely to be present within the surrounding residential gardens and could easily disperse onto site from neighbouring residential gardens and use it as a summer foraging resource, shelter and dispersal route. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Otter | Unlikely but Possible | Although West Park LNR does not contain a watercourse and is therefore unlikely to offer core otter habitat, otters are known to travel considerable distances over land between water bodies. They routinely move between small ponds, marshes and wetland features, especially where minor ditches or surface-water pathways connect habitats. Otters are known to make use of *any small ditch, creek or stream that links water bodies*, using such features as travel routes between feeding areas.<br>The River Uck, the nearest significant watercourse, flows directly through Uckfield and into the River Ouse, forming the principal otter habitat in the local landscape. Although there is no direct evidence of otters specifically at West Park, the proximity of the River Uck and its connected water systems suggests a *low but plausible* likelihood of occasional otter passage, particularly at night or when dispersing.<br>Given the reserve's wet woodland, seasonally inundated ground, and on-site pond, these features may provide temporary shelter or resting areas during overland movements, though they are unlikely to support regular use or territorial behaviour due to the absence of a running water source and high visitation rates could result in disturbance.<br>Records from the NBN Atlas confirm otter presence within the wider river system. As a highly mobile species, otters could utilise the site, particularly if habitat enhancements and sensitive management are implemented. To achieve meaningful improvements for otters, any enhancements should be coordinated with wider river network initiatives. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Water Vole | Unlikely but possible | Water voles have undergone severe, county-wide decline, with Sussex having lost over 90% of its populations. The remaining key populations are concentrated in Chichester Coastal Plain and Pett and Rye Levels, with only *small, isolated, and often unviable* populations elsewhere in Sussex. Uckfield and the River Uck are not identified as supporting major surviving water vole populations, nor as part of recent reintroduction zones, which have been focused on the River We[16]y catchment in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire.<br>West Park LNR contains one pond, wet woodland and seasonally wet areas, but lacks the extensive, low-flow, earth-banked ditch systems typically required to support long-term water vole occupancy. The reserve does not meet the minimum habitat scale typically required for viable water vole populations (approx. 6 km of connected watercourse within 100–600 ha of wetland).<br>Data available from the NBN atlas indicates that this species has been confirmed present within the River Ouse – record states present recorded at Piltdown Pond approximately 1.75km northwest (recorded 19/05/2019)[17]. |

[16] Water voles return to the River Wey | National Trust
[17] Record: 87191 | Occurrence record | NBN Atlas

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within the Local Nature Reserve

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | National Water Vole Database[18] Identifies the area / grid square as having possible water vole presence within the period 2013 – 2022.<br>This species has experienced rapid population declines in recent years so presence is perhaps unlikely, however the combination of habitats present, and in the wider river network could certainly support this species and efforts should be made to restore and reintroduce populations wherever appropriate.<br>Populations of water vole have been discovered adapting to non-wetland habitats[19] and as such this species should still be considered. |
| WCA Schedule 5 | Reptiles | Highly Likely | West Park LNR provides a high-quality mosaic of reptile habitat, with its long, narrow layout creating natural transitions between open basking areas, scrub cover, acidic grassland, bracken and bramble thickets, stony sandstone outcrops, and slightly south-facing sloping ground. These varied microhabitats offer warm refuges, hunting areas, and secure shelter essential for reptile species.<br>The presence of bracken, bramble scrub, heathy acidic vegetation, and extensive edge habitat makes the site particularly suitable for adder *Vipera berus*, which favours structurally diverse mosaics with sunny openings adjacent to cover. Habitat piles, footpath edges and glades further enhance basking opportunities.<br>The mix of grassland, woodland, wetland, scrub and riparian habitat connectivity creates the structural complexity required to support a healthy reptile assemblage. Given the availability of wetland features, rough grassland and sheltered refuges, the site is highly likely to support common and widespread species, with a particularly strong likelihood for grass snake *Natrix helvetica*, which utilises both wetland areas for foraging and adjacent terrestrial habitat for basking and egg-laying.<br>Overall, the site is considered highly suitable for reptiles, with a strong likelihood of supporting adder, grass snake, slow worm and common lizard. The walkover did not identify many habitat piles and clearance was carried out over a large area, without leaving small islands of retained vegetation. Enhancements measures could include creation of habitat piles that could provide egg-laying and/ or overwintering opportunities. |
| WCA Schedule 9 | Invasive Non-Native Species | Possible | Identified on the National Water Vole Database as an area with possible mink presence and/ or a control program in place.<br>Sites proximity to residential development along the southeastern boundaries could allow garden escapees to enter the site, however this does not appear to be a major occurrence. |

### *Evaluation*

4.62. Overall site condition summary – The site is situated immediately adjacent to residential development and receives a high volume of visitors, both locally and from visitors to Lake Wood adjacent which is a popular destination for dog walkers and visitors generally. The network of paths traverses the site and provides access throughout; pathways appear largely formal with few obvious desire lines crossing intended pathways.

4.63. Compared to the mapped habitat compartments in the existing management plan, bracken scrub appears to be more widespread, and patches of blackthorn scrub are also starting to dominate within the southern portion. Current management of mature and ancient trees, particularly within the northern portion of the site appears to be carefully planned and many good specimens were present during the site visits, with evidence of active, conservative management retaining natural

[18] National Water Vole Database - The National Water Vole Database Project | The Wildlife Trusts

[19] Grassland Water Voles in Gardens- Guidance

ecological features wherever possible. Scrub areas, although appear to be encroaching, support a diversity of bird species.

4.64. Large-scale removal by cutting of bracken areas was carried out over winter 2025, however bracken/ bramble scrub appears to be spreading and is likely to represent one of the major challenges to maintaining a diverse habitat assemblage on site. Alder carr woodland parcel at the southeast boundary does not appear to have been subject to any management and comprises a tall, thin, dense patch. Rabbit warrens recorded throughout grassland and scrub habitats and high human footfall within grassland fields has led to a high browsing pressure and impact.

4.65. Ancient woodland dominating the northern portion of the site is in good condition. A small area of heather is present, and access is currently restricted in an effort to conserve and increase this habitat within the site. Seasonal access to the wet meadow is used to maintain this habitat and fenced areas seem effectively excluded from visitors. The woodland along the western boundary was dominated by low growing oak, blackthorn and bracken but was otherwise low in diversity and structure and could be improved, however currently provides and will continue to develop as a buffer between the adjacent A22. Situated as it is on a steep slope, there is a nice southern facing grassland slope towards the southern portion of the site that could be enhanced. Recent tree planting within the more diverse grassland areas could result in shading and reduced condition over time.

4.66. Overall, the site is being managed to maintain access to visitors and maintain a diverse mix of habitat types. Bracken control could be carried out more sensitively for reptiles, creating habitat piles that could provide hibernation opportunities. Large scale clearance carried out over winter could have designed small pockets of suitable reptile refuge to encourage movement throughout the site. There is scope for and the site is currently being investigated by the Newt Partnership to understand hydrology and the potential to create additional ponds that could provide multiple benefits to wildlife including great crested newts.

4.67. Ongoing management of the site will be required to prevent uncontrolled bracken expansion and ensure long-term persistence of woodland and wet grassland habitats. Any management should be carefully designed to ensure that valuable habitats are carefully protected, ensuring their long-term viability.

# 5 Management Recommendations and Opportunities

### *Aims and Objectives*

5.1. The purpose of this section of the report is to set out some broad management suggestions for the dominant habitat types across the site. The aim of these recommendations is to provide a base for the council to manage the site in the next period after the cessation of the extant management plan and allow that plan to be updated accordingly.

5.2. The objectives of these recommendations are to allow the council to carry out straightforward set of management works that are realistic in scope and aims to increase the biodiversity value of the site by increasing structural complexity and species richness.

5.3. The following section is structured to present management prescriptions as general considerations, followed by compartment-specific objectives and then habitat-specific measures.

5.4. *Monitoring and Review* – it is recommended that regular monitoring of the site is conducted by rangers and wherever possible, respective wildlife specialists. Regular monitoring and review will enable effective application of proposed management activities for the site and allow effective species reporting, ideally including those species groups for which existing baseline data is identified as missing or limited including birds, invertebrates, dragonflies and damselflies, bats, and fungi.

### *General and Widespread Recommendations*

*Improved connectivity with Lake Wood - Crossing Point Creation / Enhancement*

5.5. There is no functional underpass beneath Rocks Road linking West Park and Lake Wood that wildlife can use as a corridor today. Historical features (e.g., tunnels carved into sandstone for estate access) are now blocked and not part of the public footpath network.

5.6. Rocks Road (B2012) acts as the key barrier between the two sites — causing a hard edge between habitats. This road alignment means wildlife attempting to move between West Park and Lake Wood would have to cross a busy road without formal crossing infrastructure. Existing walking routes linking the two sites are also limited to crossing Rocks Road on foot. The site could therefore be enhanced through various measures to improve connectivity with Lake Wood.

5.7. Because the existing under-road tunnel is not accessible, consider feasibility of design and install for new culvert and/ or wildlife underpass features.

- Retrofitting existing drainage pipes that run beneath Rocks Road (if present) as amphibian/reptile crossings — this would require survey/mapping with highways and drainage authorities.
- Guiding vegetation on both sides of the road - Dense scrub corridors on the verge of Rocks Road leading to any crossing point could improve guidance and reduce randomness of road crossing attempts. Include scrub reinforcement zones, arboreal connectivity features, targeted wildlife guidance/ fencing.
- Safe crossing design - Fencing (guidance structures) that channels animals toward the new crossing point (not simply fencing the roadside) as well as warning signs for drivers.

5.8. Arboreal ladders across the road/s could also enhance connectivity. - Feasible only where mature trees already align on both sides of Rocks Road. Intended for arboreal mammals (e.g. squirrel; dormouse if present/colonising) and should tie into continuous scrub or woodland, not isolated trees.

*Use of signage*

5.9. The current boards could be improved. Educating visitors about the value of the different habitats present and helping to direct and guide their interaction with the site could deliver multiple benefits.

- Temporary signs can be used to inform visitors why certain areas have seasonal access.
- Better signage that includes locations of nearby services, any access, parking and bins as well as other information boards, or things to look out for all help encourage proper use of the site.

*Littering and dog poo – Ongoing issue*

- Volunteer/ community clean up days to encourage local community to engage. This could be organised through social media platforms and on signs at site entrances.
- Use of clear signage including additional information about the dangers of dog poo in particular and increase availability of bins including marking of bins on any maps of the site.
- Consider penalty charges if situation is considered out of hand or worsening.

*Informal pathways and managing access*

- Use of brash hedging wherever habitats are generally excluded from pathways such as alder carr woodland, permanent areas of scrub and boundary habitats. Along the western boundary this could improve screening and reduce noise from the adjacent road.
- Elsewhere, trampling effects can be managed less formally through use of temporary fencing such as rope and marker with signage.

*Wildlife Groups and Collaboration*

*Community engagement & citizen science*

5.10. There are numerous opportunities to engage further with local wildlife groups. This could improve baseline information about the site, as well as encourage better local community engagement with the site through citizen science projects, volunteering days, wildlife walks and potentially enable long-term monitoring for specific species groups such as invertebrates[20] and bats[21] while requiring minimal financial input.

5.11. The management plan emphasises the importance of bringing people into the reserve and raising awareness of its wildlife value, the site is bordered by residential development east and south and is well used by the local community as an open space.

- Annual Bioblitz with Sussex Wildlife Trust, local schools, Lewes/Wealden community groups.
- Bat walks with Sussex Bat Group (given the site is noted as bat foraging habitat).
- Pollinator transects (could be done by volunteers using UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme protocols).
- Seasonal guided walks on wetland plants, dragonflies, birds and invertebrates.
- Provide more information about the habitats and protected species present to visitors.
- Social media platforms and groups to encourage community engagement with wildlife recording and monitoring.

[20] Introducing the Buzz Club! | Weald to Waves

[21] Sunset Survey - Getting started - Bat Conservation Trust

### *Management Recommendations by Compartment*

5.12. Below is a review of the measures recommended within the existing management plan in relation to conditions on site with updated management prescriptions, detailed by habitat type and compartment. Figure 3 shows the site by compartment (Compartments 1-6), consistent with Map 3 of the existing Management Plan.

#### *Compartment 1*

5.13. North-eastern part of the park, from the eastern boundary to the path crossing north-south to Saunders Close.

- Existing – littering and path cutting, bracken control.
- Future - Focus on increasing plant diversity in targeted grassland areas, use of seasonal/ temporary fencing, increased bracken control, retain islands and create habitat piles to enhance site for reptile and invertebrates, and dormice, if present. See general for litter and signage.

#### *Compartment 2*

5.14. Located in the centre of the LNR,, from Compartment 1 to the east running southwards to the smaller species-poor field and composed of the fenced off wet meadow, marshy grassland, willow and alder carr and the sand mound exposure.

- Existing – monitor scrub, bracken and litter, ditch maintenance – re-digging cycle maintained, willow scrub control via coppicing, tree safety inspections/ monitoring,
- Future – Focus on improving condition of Alder carr woodland through selective thinning, increase light levels, continue to limit access to wet meadow, maintain hydrology, progress with investigation and potential for new pond creation, ditch maintenance and use of brash hedging in targeted areas for wildlife.

5.15. *Alder carr Woodland Management –* Selective thinning of approximately 20–30% of alder stems, combined with access management and deadwood retention, will improve structural diversity, light availability and biodiversity within the alder carr while protecting sensitive wet soils and adjacent wet meadow habitats.

5.16. *Bracken control*[22,23] - Dense stands can suppress ground flora, reduce botanical diversity and inhibit desired habitat mosaics (grassland/heathland) if left unmanaged. Research and guidance available[24]. Encourage cutting/ flailing, bruising/ rolling and manual whipping and hand cutting efforts are increased with grazing and ploughing of selective areas where want to focus on conserving grassland and increasing plant species diversity. Integrated approaches include low-intensity cattle grazing or winter trampling to suppress regrowth when combined with cutting. With follow-up management, switching to lighter mosaic management (e.g., rotational mowing, grazing) as bracken cover reduces to establish diverse vegetation.

#### *Reptile and Protected species considerations*[25]

5.17. Creating a varied sward with structural diversity – avoiding uniformly tall or dense swards as this will limit basking opportunities. Want basking opportunities away from human disturbance and in sunny spots where possible. Aim to retain patches of bracken rather than complete removal as reptiles favour edges and dense tussocks for cover and hibernation, avoiding broad, open areas without any cover – ensure large grassland areas have good edge/ boundary habitat.

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[22] UK best practice guidance - bracken managment

[23] Bracken Control

[24] M. G. Le Duc, R. J. Pakeman, P. D. Putwain, R. H. Marrs, The Variable Responses of Bracken Fronds to Control Treatments in Great Britain, *Annals of Botany*, Volume 85, Issue suppl_2, 1 April 2000, Pages 17–29, https://doi.org/10.1006/anbo.1999.1052

[25] Reptiles: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK

- Reptile and ecological surveys to identify key areas and mapping of sensitive zones including reptile features such as vegetation piles and hibernacula, nesting bird areas, sensitive grassland areas, any sensitive plants such as heather or orchids, dormice (bracken/ bramble management ensuring continuous connectivity). Adaptive management methods include fixed point photos and bracken cover mapping to quantify any reductions and inform where additional efforts are required.
- Avoid cutting or using machinery in reptile hotspots and during active period (April – October) – phased management may be required. Consider hand removal with supervision in high value areas to minimise disturbance/ risk (depending on populations found to be present, where existing population is low, more focus should be placed on enhancing the site through measures above).

*Compartment 3*

5.18. Northern boundary and some of the western boundary encompassing all the sandstone rock outcrops and associated woodland.

- Existing: occasional fly tipping, tree inspections and health inspections (birch dominant/ present), presence of Invasive and Non-Native Species (INNS) including *Rhododendron ponticum* and cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* to be identified and removed between October – February, stumps to be treated. Sycamore re-growth suppression and control to prevent becoming dominant. Hand pulling of bracken from Heather Rock – May/June. Mentions high mortality of animals along Rocks Road – see improved connectivity.
- Future: badger sett building identified, good to monitor this as adjacent to the road, could undermine trees/ create H&S concerns on/ adjacent to footpaths. Ancient/ mature trees to be carefully managed to conserve health and retain any ecological features/ natural forms wherever possible, standing and deadwood habitat piles could be created and protected using brash/ placement within scrub. Further specialist survey to understand species present such as mosses and bryohpytes due to sensitivity to climate change/ pollution.

*Compartment 4*

5.19. 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

- Existing: High amenity value of this field means significant improvements to habitat condition are unlikely. Monitor the area for the encroachment of scrub into the open area. Muddy path constraints/ issues, informal path creation…
- 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.
- Future: Area has value simply as open space and given likely difficulties in enhancing the grassland is likely just best left as such, other option would be the creation of scrub mosaic or woodland, but the site has plenty of these features already.

*Compartment 5*

5.20. 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 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.

- Existing – twice annual tree health inspection of over mature ash tress in east of compartment overstanding residential development. The leaf litter under the over-mature ashes should be cleared with leaf blower in autumn to disperse the spores of *H. fraxineus*. Re-laying of hedging along the A22.

- Ash trees in this compartment are affected to varying degrees with ash die back and Honey fungus *Armillaria mellea*. Trees are felled as required if they present a threat to internal footpaths.
- 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.
- Future – Hazel dormouse enhancements. Consider introducing a more structured shrub layer including introducing honeysuckle whilst increasing understorey density to improve low level arboreal connectivity. Timber nest boxes could provide further enhancement although the open access nature of the area may increase risk of human disturbance or encourage predation from cats likely to be resident in neighbouring properties.

*Compartment 6*

5.21. Compartment 6 comprising the southern portion of the site, contains a high-value mosaic of different grassland communities, each with different ecological value and management needs, as well as dense hawthorn and blackthorn-dominated scrub, mixed native trees, bramble and ruderal and ephemeral collectively providing important foraging, nesting and dispersal habitat. Due to younger growth/ less established, this area is quite exposed during winter and road traffic noise is prevalent.

5.22. Existing – Annual tree health check currently undertaken due to presence of ash dieback affecting trees in this area which could potentially fall over the A22. The southern wildflower meadow is monitored for scrub, creeping thistle and ragwort encroachment, subject to an annual cut and removal of arisings after plants have set seed. Paths are currently cleared with vegetation cut back over summer and the eastern boundary gully is subject to annual clearance over winter.

5.23. Future: To maintain a structurally diverse scrub–grassland mosaic that supports birds, invertebrates, reptiles and potential dormouse connectivity, while retaining species-rich grassland and safe access.

*General Recommendations for Compartment 6*

- Further tree planting / expanding tree cover is not recommended, as this would compromise grassland interest; management should instead focus on maintaining a balanced scrub–grassland mosaic. Selective scrub control may be required to prevent further encroachment into species-rich grassland and to encourage greater scrub species diversity.
- Grassland areas should be cut and arisings removed, with cut material reused locally to form habitat piles for invertebrates and reptiles. South-east facing slopes should retain varied sward heights/ tussocks with adjacent scrub cover to support reptiles.
- Ruderal and ephemeral vegetation should be tolerated where it does not impede access, due to its high invertebrate value.
- Boundary trees should continue to be monitored for ash dieback and safety, retaining non-hazardous deadwood and lichen-rich features. The eastern boundary ditch should be managed to prevent excessive scrub growth while maintaining marginal vegetation and water flow.

*Scrub -* Dense blackthorn scrub and patches of bramble and bracken dominated scrub within grassland areas and centrally and along eastern boundary beyond wet ditch. A large area had been cut/ mown at the time of the January 2026 survey.

5.24. High prevalence of garden birds including long-tailed tits, scattered patches dominated by blackthorn, bramble and scrub – mosaic and larger patches present within wet meadow northern portion west of Saunders Close. Quite a lot of clearance with tracked machinery. Had taken place Jan 26 leaving scattered patches.

5.25. The current extent of scrub is ecologically beneficial and should be retained in discrete patches to strengthen site-wide habitat connectivity, including potential enhancement of scrub-edge habitat suitable for dormouse in line with PTES and Natural England guidance including increasing species

diversity to provide foraging opportunities, continuous arboreal connectivity and installing dormouse nestboxes as trees in this area are lacking suitable features.

5.26. *Grassland –* Species-rich neutral grassland (two patches) - Located at the southern end of the compartment 6 and northeast of the Princes Close car park. These neutral–acidic grasslands support diverse wildflower assemblages and provide valuable foraging and refuge for invertebrates, reptiles and small mammals.

## SITE-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS BY HABITAT

5.27. As with accompanying reports produced for Hempstead Meadows LNR (Co-ecology Ltd 2026a) and Boothland Wood (Co-ecology Ltd, 2026b) the site has been divided into habitat types in order to prescribe management aims and objectives for each and these are described below:

### *Woodland Habitats*

5.28. The ancient woodland strip in Compartment 5 and mature woodland along the northern boundary should be managed according to recognised best-practice, including BS 3998: Tree Work – Recommendations, UK Forestry Standard (UKFS)[26], Forestry Commission "Managing Ancient & Native Woodland[27]", and the Woodland Trust Ancient Woodland Restoration Guide.

#### *Woodland Management Plan[28]*

5.29. It is recommended that the existing woodland management plan is reviewed and that a full new plan is implemented at the end of the current cycle to ensure the long-term viability of this irreplaceable habitat. The revised plan should set out clear, medium- to long-term objectives for maintaining and enhancing ancient and semi-natural woodland features, while addressing future resilience.

5.30. The updated woodland management plan should set out clear long-term objectives for ancient and semi-natural woodland, incorporating appropriate cycles of coppicing and thinning, glade and ride management, INNS control, veteran tree care in line with BS 3998 and UKFS, and monitoring of pests and diseases such as deer browsing, grey squirrel damage, ash dieback and other emerging threats.

#### *Management Principles*

- Retain ancient woodland character: avoid practices that alter soil profile, canopy structure or hydrology.
- Avoid new planting within the ancient woodland footprint, except occasional enrichment planting with local-provenance native species where structural gaps exist.
- Minimise soil disturbance: avoid machinery within root protection areas (RPAs), keep works to dry periods, and use hand tools where feasible.
- Retain all standing and fallen deadwood unless presenting an immediate safety risk.
- Favour natural regeneration over planting wherever possible.
- Control INNS (rhododendron, cherry laurel) through winter removal and stump treatment.

#### *Veteran and Mature Tree Care*

- Manage in accordance with BS3998, prioritising:
    - Minimal intervention
    - Retaining hollows, cavities, rot holes and decaying limbs
    - Crown reduction only where required for safety

[26] The UK Forestry Standard
[27] FCPG201.pdf
[28] Create a woodland management plan - GOV.UK

- Avoiding complete limb removal unless absolutely necessary
- Leave felled non-hazardous material in situ to enhance deadwood habitat.

*Structural Diversification*

- Introduce selective thinning of suppressed, poor-form or closely spaced stems to:
  - Allow ageing trees to expand crowns
  - Increase light levels
  - Promote diverse ground flora and shrub layer
- Maintain mixed-age structure by encouraging natural regeneration of hazel, holly, field maple and oak.

*Dormouse Habitat Enhancements*

- Promote continuous understory connectivity through hazel, honeysuckle and bramble.
- Retain scrub edges adjacent to woodland.
- Install nest boxes only in areas with low human disturbance risk.

*Woodland Hydrology and Ground Conditions*

- Avoid creating drainage changes.
- Prevent compaction (particularly near alder carr transitions).
- Monitor wet areas for soil poaching.

*Work Timing*

- Undertake woodland works outside bird breeding season (Sept–Feb).
- Avoid dormouse disturbance (consult NE standing advice where applicable).
- Avoid heavy cutting in bat roost potential trees without appropriate checks/licensing.

*Alder carr woodland Management*

5.31. Aim to restore structural and ecological diversity within the alder carr while maintaining its wet woodland function. Ideally aim to create small canopy gaps, gradually increasing light levels to promote diverse ground flora (sedges, rushes, ferns, mosses), develop a more varied age structure and size within the canopy, enhance for invertebrates, birds, amphibians and mammals, reduce trampling and disturbance and improve ecological transition between alder carr and adjacent wet grassland / wet meadow.

- Implement selective thinning of approximately 20% of alder stems, in line with UK wet woodland best practice (e.g. Forestry Commission / Natural England guidance).
- Focus removal on removing poor-form, suppressed or closely spaced stems and areas where trees are uniformly tall and thin.
- Retain well-formed mature trees, trees with cavities, cracks, dead limbs or bat potential and naturally fallen deadwood where safe to do so.
- Timing - Works to be undertaken outside the bird breeding season (ideally late autumn–winter) and during drier ground conditions where possible to avoid soil compaction.
- Monitor and review 2-3 years following thinning activities. Repeated thinning may be required.
- Consider access management through use of brash hedging to discourage informal access and ground compaction and protect regeneration after thinning. Use signage as recommended above.
- Maintain a soft, graded edge between grassland and woodland habitats.

5.32. Noting that a Forestry Commission thinning licence may be required if more than $5m^3$ is removed every calendar quarter.

### *Grassland Habitats*[29]

5.33. The reserve contains a varied assemblage of grassland types, including species-rich neutral–acidic grassland, semi-improved grassland within BAP wood pasture, marshy grassland, wet meadow, and modified/amenity areas. Management should aim to maintain botanical diversity, create structural complexity, and support key species groups while accommodating existing recreational use where relevant.

5.34. Aim to maintain and enhance species diversity across all grassland types. - Reduce nutrient enrichment to favour wildflowers over coarse grasses. - Provide a mosaic of sward heights, tussocks and open patches. - Support reptiles, pollinators and invertebrates through structural and microhabitat variation. - Strengthen connectivity with adjacent scrub and woodland habitats

*General Management (not Compartment 4)*

- Cut and remove arisings to reduce soil fertility and favour wildflowers.
- Use temporary rope/marker fencing and signage to protect sensitive patches during summer.
- Introduce green hay (from local provenance) where suitable to increase plant diversity.
- Maintain varied sward heights, tussocks and mosaic structure, especially around margins.

*Species-rich Grassland*

- Regular cut-and-remove management to maintain botanical diversity.
- Use arisings to create reptile habitat piles along boundaries.
- Cordoning small areas in summer to promote flowering and seed set.

*Semi-improved Grassland / BAP Wood Pasture*

- Careful bracken management to maintain reptile habitat without allowing bracken dominance.
- Consider reinstating seasonal grazing if feasible, or continue with rotational cutting.
- Prevent encroachment from scrub and avoid tree planting.

*Southern Grassland (Ellis Way Area)*

- Avoid tree planting to prevent shading and loss of species diversity.
- Continue bracken control and remove arisings to maintain low nutrient status.
- Use small fenced islands for recovery and enhancement trials.

*Marshy Grassland & Wet Meadow*

- Maintain hydrology and protect soil structure.
- Encourage species diversification compatible with seasonal inundation.
- Avoid disturbance during wet periods; focus management on drier windows.

*Modified / Amenity Grassland*

- Retain recreational access but enhance biodiversity through reduced mowing at margins.

[29] Grassland Management - How to Rewild

- Maintain buffer strips and refugia.
- Use arisings to create habitat features away from areas prone to flooding.

*Proposed Grassland Management Plan*

*Cutting Regime*

- Undertake rotational cutting with removal of arisings to progressively reduce soil fertility.
- Avoid uniform mowing; retain uncut refugia, tussocks and structural variability.
- Prioritise late-season cutting (Aug–Sept) on semi-improved and species-rich grassland to support flowering and seed set.

*Enhancement Measures*

- Use green hay from local donor sites on prepared receptor areas to increase native plant diversity.
- Trial plug planting and small-scale scarification in targeted areas where diversity remains low.
- Establish temporary rope or post-and-twine enclosures around enhancement patches during summer.

*Bracken and Scrub Interactions*

- Manage bracken through selective cutting/rolling as per bracken guidance, retaining some patches for reptiles.
- Control scrub encroachment into species-rich or semi-improved grassland while retaining scattered scrub for structure.

*Hydrology and Wet Grasslands*

- Maintain natural water regimes within wet meadow and marshy grassland.
- Carry out works during dry periods to minimise compaction.
- Enhance species diversity through low-intensity management compatible with periodic inundation.

*Modified and Amenity Grasslands*

- Retain recreational function while improving biodiversity via:
    - reduced mowing intensity at margins;
    - buffer strips;
    - varied sward heights;
    - targeted removal of arisings.
    - Use arisings to create habitat piles for reptiles and invertebrates in dry, suitable locations.

***Scrub Habitats***

5.35. A patchwork of grassland, scattered scrub, and bracken supports a wide range of invertebrates, birds, mammals and reptiles (including adders). Aim to maintain scrub and bracken habitat mosaics, while preventing bracken dominance.

*Recommendations*

5.36. Aim for:

- Mixed scrub cover between ~10–60 % of the area.
- Varied heights & species composition to ensure structural complexity.
- Open patches interspersed with cover for basking and shelter edges.

- To achieve this, carry out patchy cutting or light grazing (e.g., cattle at low stocking) to prevent dominance but retain structure.

5.37. Allow natural regeneration of scrub in places to maintain complexity.

*Scrub Management – Achieving a Careful Balance*

5.38. Objective: Maintain scattered native scrub as part of the mosaic, not a closed canopy.

5.39. Good practice:

- Light browsing/grazing (e.g., by cattle or deer at controlled numbers) creates gaps and varied structure.
- Targeted cutting of areas too dense to restore mosaic balance.
- Rotation of cutting patches staggered annually, so some older scrub remains for insects and cover.
- Avoid cutting during breeding season (typically 1 Mar–31 Aug) to protect nesting birds and invertebrates.
- Retain tall scrub edges transitioning gradually into open vegetation.

***Bracken Habitats***

5.40. Open bracken patches in a mosaic can provide important microhabitats for adders and reptiles, including thermal refuge and hibernation cover on south-facing slopes. Balanced management can be achieved through:

- Avoid removing all bracken; retain scattered patches for reptiles and insects.
- Control dense bracken that smothers species-rich ground flora with phased reduction over years.
- Methods include frequent cutting during growth season, bracken rolling to bend and weaken fronds, or livestock trampling, ideally timed outside reptile active season.
- Be aware that bracken litter build-up can suppress diverse vegetation; disturbance and follow-up treatments help recovery.

*Proposed Bracken Management Plan:*

*Short-term (1–2 years):*

- Begin with mechanical control only (cutting/rolling/bruising) focused on priority areas where bracken suppresses key habitat or threatens biodiversity.
- Establish grazing or light mowing in treated areas to encourage diverse ground flora. – there is discussion about this in the existing plan but think still not fully utilised or delayed.

*Medium-term (3–5 years):*

- Develop a bracken management plan with maps of current distribution, sensitive zones (reptile/bird use), and proposed annual treatment cycles.
- Engage an ecologist to advise on seasonal timing to avoid reptile disturbance and nesting bird conflicts.

*Long-term:*

- Aim to create a mosaic of vegetation heights and structures, integrating bracken patches, species-rich grassland, and scrub edge to support a wide range of wildlife.

*Bracken/ Scrub/ Habitat Mosaics - Structural Features Beneficial to Reptiles (Including Adders)*

5.41. For the habitat mosaic found on site including bracken/ bramble dominated scrub patches, relevant guidance was sourced from the Reptile Habitat Management Handbook (2010)[30]

- *Reptile hibernation sites include root systems in mature tree clumps, rotting tree stumps and roots, dense tussocks, rocky crevices, rabbit warrens (on dry banks), compost and rubbish heaps, amongst building rubble.*

- *Reptiles need a cover of vegetation which must be near to basking spots in order to avoid predation/ lower disturbance from dog walkers etc. – A mosaic of open basking areas and vegetation cover is provided by creating and maintaining a diverse vegetation structure. Windbreaks provided by woodland edges and open, sunny glades can create warm microhabitats important for reptiles.*

- *Grass snakes need access to decomposing material in which they lay their eggs. Sites include manure heaps, compost heaps, grass clippings, sawdust, cut reed and, in coastal areas, seaweed heaps.*

- *Reptiles require sufficiently large areas of habitat to support viable populations in the long term. The relatively short distances over which they can disperse mean that they are dependent either on large areas of continuous habitat, or closely spaced patches, ideally linked by favourable intervening terrain.*

- *Habitat connectivity is important not only at a landscape level, but also within a site. Reptile distribution within most habitats is generally not uniform. Sites should, therefore, be managed so as to enhance the connectivity of habitat patches favoured by reptiles.*

- *Surveys will help to identify key areas or 'hotspots'' on site and these should be the focus of enhancement and management actions. A site survey should: • Determine the presence/likely absence of reptiles. • Identify general areas of the site used by reptiles. • Identify significant features used by reptiles, such as habitat interfaces, favoured microhabitats and major hibernation sites.*

5.42. Adders and other common and widespread reptile species benefit from fine-scale habitat features that a scrub/bracken mosaic provides:

*Recommendations*

- Shelter patches (scrub edges, tussocks, bracken clumps) for protection from predators and extreme weather.
- Open, warm basking spots with unobstructed sun exposure.
- Stable seasonal refugia such as log/brash piles or hibernacula near cover.
- Ensuring vegetation gap dynamics (bare ground adjacent to cover) enhances thermoregulation opportunities.

*Timing & Sequencing of Work*

- Avoid heavy cutting/grazing during breeding season for birds and reptiles.
- Schedule bracken control early season before frond expansion for best knock-down effect.
- Integrate management over multi-season cycles — annual low-impact treatments are usually more effective than infrequent heavy cuts.
- Avoid burning or chemical application in bracken/heath mosaics due to risk to reptiles and broader habitat damage unless specifically planned and justified.

[30] Edgar, P., Foster, J. and Baker, J. (2010) Reptile_Habitat_Management_Handbook.pdf

*Monitoring & Adaptive Management*

- Track vegetation structure changes (e.g., scrub cover %, bracken density) annually.
- Link monitoring to reptile surveys to check how adders and other species respond to management.
- Use an adaptive approach — adjust grazing intensity, cutting frequency, or spatial patterning as needed based on ecological feedback.

***Conclusions***

5.43. It is clear that the extant habitat management plan for West Park is achieving it's stated aims and objectives. There is a wide diversity of habitat types and sub types across the area and there is little damage being caused whilst the balance of access against habitat protection would appear to be well met. The chief issue for management would appear to be the control of aggressive stands of bracken in Compartments C1 and C2 as well as localised dominance of tall ruderals particularly notable in C6. Whilst the extant plan is still operational for a few years this report has provided a few suggestions above those already being pursued.

5.44. West Park LNR contains a valuable habitat mosaic with Priority Habitat types and is well used by local residents and visitors as a public open space. There is inevitable ongoing conflict between over-use of the site and managing the site for conservation and biodiversity purposes. Ongoing and continued efforts to preserve valuable existing features including mature/ ancient trees, sandstone outcrops, heathland and sensitive grassland habitats are required. Due to the sites location bordered by busy roads means it is very close to but physically cut off from adjacent semi-natural habitat corridors that extend into the wider landscape southwest to northeast.

5.45. Future management should focus on better understanding of baseline conditions and species composition, long-term monitoring of specific species and or habitat groups where possible and creating and maintaining a diverse and high-quality wildlife site that is fully enjoyed by the local community, better connected to adjacent Lake Wood and the wider landscape and resilient to future climate and development pressures.

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# Plant Species List

| English name | *Scientific name* | *Compartment 6* | *Compartment 5* | *Compartment 4* | *Compartment 4 inaccessible* | *Compartment 3* | *Compartment 2* | *Compartment 1* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alder | *Alnus glutinosa* | | | | | | *LD* | |
| Annual meadow grass | *Poa annua* | *O* | | | | | | |
| Ash | *Fraxinus excelsior* | *F* | | | | | *R* | |
| Beech | *Fagus sylvatica* | | | | | *R* | | |
| Bird's foot trefoil | *Lotus corniculatus* | | | | | | | |
| Blackthorn | *Prunus spinosa* | | | | *F* | *O* | *R* | *LD suckering* |
| Bluebell | *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* | *A* | | | | | | |
| Bracken | *Pteridium aquilinum* | *D* | *LD* | | | | | |
| Bramble | *Rubus fruticosus agg.* | | | *F* | *LD* | *F* | *A* | *O establishing* |
| Bristly oxtongue | *Helminthotheca echiodes* | *R* | | | | | | |
| Broad-leaved dock | *Rumex obtusifolius* | | | | | | | *R* |
| Broad-leaved plantain | *Plantago major* | *R* | | | | | | |
| Bugle | *Ajuga reptans* | | | | | | | *O* |
| Centuary | *Centaurium erythraea* | | | | | | *R* | |
| Cherry | *Prunus avium* | | | | *O* | *R* | *R* | |
| Cleavers | *Galium aparine* | | | *A* | | | | |
| Clustered dock | *Rumex conglomeratus* | | | | | | | |
| Cocks foot | *Dactylis glomerata* | | | | | *O* | *LF* | *O* |
| Common birds foot | *Lotus corniculatus* | | *R* | | | | | *R* |
| Common hogweed | *Heracleum sphondylium* | | | *O* | | *R* | | |
| Common knapweed | *Centaurea nigra* | | | | | | *O* | *F* |
| Common knotgrass | *Polygonum aviculare* | | | | | | | |
| Common lime | *Tilia x europaea* | | | | | *R* | | |
| Common mouse-ear | *Cerastium fontanum* | | | | | | *R* | |
| Common nettle | *Urtica dioica* | | | *A* | | *F* | *O* | *R* |
| Common reed | *Phragmites australis* | | | | | | | |
| Common sorel | *Rumex acetosa* | *O* | | | | *O* | | *O* |
| Common vetch | *Vicia sativa* | | | | | *R* | | |
| Corsican pine | *Pinus nigra var. maritima* | | | | | *R* | | |
| Couch | *Curulis lectus* | | | | | | | |
| Cow parsely | *Anthriscus sylvestris* | | | | | | | *R* |
| Creeping buttercup | *Ranunculus repens* | *F* | | | | | | |
| Creeping cinquefoil | *Potentilla reptans* | *F* | | | | | *A* | *D* |
| Creeping thistle | *Cirsium aervense* | *O* | *O* | *A* | | | *O* | |
| Crosswort | *Cruciata laevipes* | | | | | | *R* | |
| Curled dock | *Rumex crispus* | | | | | | | |
| Cut-leaved cranesbill | *Geranium dissectum* | | | | | | | |
| Daisy | *Bellis perennis* | | | | | | *R* | |
| Dog rose | *Rosa canina* | | | | *O* | *O* | *R* | *R* |
| Elm | *Ulmus sp.* | | | | | | | |
| English oak | *Quercus robur* | *LD* | *R* | | *D* | *F* | *O* | *O* |

| English name | *Scientific name* | *Compartment 6* | *Compartment 5* | *Compartment 4* | *Compartment 4 inaccessible* | *Compartment 3* | *Compartment 2* | *Compartment 1* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| False brome | *Brachypodium sylvaticum* | | | | | | | |
| False oat grass | *Arrhenatherum elatius* | | | | | | | *R* |
| False oat-grass | *Arrhenatherum elatius* | | | | | | | |
| Field bindweed | *Convolvulus arvensis* | | | | | | | |
| Field horsetail | *Equisetum aervense* | | | | | | | |
| Fleabane | *Pulicaria dysenterica* | | | | | | | |
| Germander speedwell | *Veronica chamaedrys* | *O* | | | | | *F* | *F* |
| Goat willow | *Salic caprea* | | | | | | | |
| Gorse | *Ulex europaeus* | | | | | | *O* | |
| Greater birds foot trefoil | *Lotus pedunculatus* | | | | | | *O* | |
| Greater knapweed | *Centaurea scabiosa* | | | | | | | *O* |
| Greater willowherb | *Epilobium hirsutum* | | | | | | | |
| Green dock | *Rumex obtusifolius* | | | | | | | |
| Grey willow | *Salix alba 'Tristis'* | | | | | | | |
| Ground ivy | *Glechoma hederacea* | *LD* | | | | | | |
| Guelder rose | *Viburnum opulus* | | | | | | | |
| Hairy tare | *Ervilla hirsuta* | | | | | | | *R* |
| Hawthorn | *Crataegus monogyna* | | | | *F* | *F* | | |
| Hazel | *Corylus avellana* | *R* | *A* | | | *R* | | |
| Heather | *Calluna vulgaris* | | | | | *O* | | |
| Hedge bindweed | *Calystegia sepium* | | | | | | | |
| Hemlock water dropwort | *Oenanthe crocata* | | | | | | | |
| Himalayam Balsam | *Impatiens glandulifera* | | | | | | | |
| Himalayan honeysuckle | *Leycesteria formosa* | | | | | | | |
| Holly | *Ilex aquifolium* | *R* | | | | *R* | *R* | |
| Horsetail | *Equisetum arvense* | | | | | | | |
| Hybrid black poplar | *Populus x euramericana / Populus x canadensis* | | | | | | | |
| Imperforate st John's Wort | *Hypericum maculatum* | | | | | | | *R* |
| Ivy | *Hedera helix* | | | | | | *A* | |
| Jacob's ladder | *Polemonium caeruleum* | | | | | | | |
| Jointed rush | *Juncus articulatus* | | | | | | | |
| Knott grass | *Polygonum aviculare* | | | | | | | |
| Lesser stitchwort | *Stellaria graminea* | | | | | | *O* | *F* |
| Lichen (various) | | *A - southeast facing / edges* | | | | | | |
| Marsh thistle | *Cirsium palustre* | | | | | | *O* | |
| Meadow buttercup | *myosotis scorpioides* | | | *R* | | *R* | | *Occ* |
| Meadow cranesbill | *Geranium pratense* | *R* | | | | | *R* | |
| Meadow thistle | *Cirsium dissectum* | | | | | | *R* | |
| Meadow vetchling | *Lathyrus pratensis* | *O* | | | | | | *O* |
| Meadowsweet | *Filipendula ulmaria* | | | | *D* | | | |
| Monterey Pine | *Pinus radiata* | | | | | *R* | | |

| English name | *Scientific name* | *Compartment 6* | *Compartment 5* | *Compartment 4* | *Compartment 4 inaccessible* | *Compartment 3* | *Compartment 2* | *Compartment 1* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mosses (various) | | *A- ground cover/ within grass* | | | | | | |
| Musk mallow | *Malva moschata* | | | | | | | *O* |
| Ox-eye daisy | *Leucanthemum vulgare* | *O* | | | | | *LA* | *LA* |
| Pendulous sedge | *Carex pendula* | *R* | *R* | | | | | |
| Perennial rye grass | *Lolium perenne* | *O* | | *F* | | | | |
| Perforate st John's wort | *Hypericum perforatum* | | | | | *R* | | *LF* |
| Lichen (various) | *Ramalina farinacea* | *on Hawthorn hedges* | | | | | | |
| Ragwort common | *Senecio jacobaea* | | *F* | | | *O* | *O* | *F establihing* |
| Red dead nettle | *Lamium purpureum* | *O* | | | | | *O* | *O* |
| Red clover | *Trifolium pratense* | *R* | | *F* | | | | |
| Red fescue | *Festuca rubra* | *O* | | | | | | |
| Ribwort plantain | *Plantago lanceolata* | *R* | | *O* | | *O* | | *F* |
| Rough meadow grass | *Poa trivialis* | | | *F* | | *R* | | |
| Rowan | *Sorbus aucuparia* | *R* | | | | *O* | | |
| Scots pine | *Pinus sylvestris* | | | | | *O* | | |
| Selfheal | *Prunella vulgaris* | | | | | | | |
| Silver birch | *Betula pendula* | | | | | *LD* | | |
| Soft brome | *Bromus hordeaceus* | | | | | *O* | | *LF* |
| Soft rush | *Juncus effusus* | *LF / O* | | | | | *LA* | *LF* |
| Spear thistle | *Cirsium vulage* | *R* | *O* | | | *R* | *R* | |
| Sterile brone | *Bromus sterilis* | | | | | *O* | | |
| Sweet vernal grass | *Anthoxanthum odoratum* | | | | | *R* | | |
| Sweet chestnut | *Castanea sativa* | | *O* | | | | | |
| Sycamore | *Acer pseudoplatanus* | | | | | *LF / O* | *R* | *O* |
| Tormentil | *Potentilla erecta* | | | | | | *R* | |
| Teasle | *Dipsacus fullonum* | *O* | | *R* | | | | |
| White clover | *Trifolium repens* | *R* | | | | | | *R* |
| Wood dock | *Rumex sanguineus* | | | *R* | | | | |
| Yarrow | *Achillea millefolium* | *R* | | | | *O* | | *R* |
| Yew | *Taxus baccata* | *R* | | | | *R* | *R* | |
| Yorkshire fog | *Holcus lanatus* | *A* | *F* | *LD* | *LD* | *O* | *A* | *F* |
| Lichen (various) | *Xanthoria parietina* | *O - Crustose on Hawthorn* | | | | | | |

Co-ecology

Co-ecology

# PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Boothland Wood, Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 5EL

## A REPORT FOR UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

This report provides an independent assessment of the habitats within the site and their relative ecological value, alongside a determination of likely constraints and opportunities for enhancement

Jess Lewis BSc Hons (MRes) MRSB

Survey undertaken in May & June 2025 and reporting in January 2026

**Table 0.1** - Document and Version Control

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Author | Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB | | |
| Site | Boothland Wood | | |
| Reference | CE25027 | | |
| Type | Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Management Recommendations | | |
| Version | Checked | Approved | Date |
| V1 | Linda Kerrison ACIEEM | DRAFT FOR COMMENTS | 30/01/2026 |



## Copyright and guidance



The surveys and assessment have been drafted to be in accordance with the British Standard for Biodiversity BS42020:2013, Biodiversity - Code for planning and development and the Code of Professional Conduct published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental management.

**N.B** It must be noted that investigations of this sort provide only a snapshot in time of the ecological conditions of a site, are limited in extent and cannot capture the full picture of the biodiversity interests at the given location.

# Contents

# 1 Summary of Assessment

Co-ecology Ltd was commissioned by Uckfield Town Council to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of Boothlands Wood, situated in Uckfield, East Sussex. The aim was to assess current habitats, review existing management practices, provide updated management advise and identify opportunities for ecological enhancement. Below is a summary of the key findings from the habitat survey.

1.1. Proposed actions focus on improving habitat condition, maintaining ancient woodland features, and enhancing biodiversity through targeted management interventions. Recommendations aim to support protected and priority species including woodland birds, bats, amphibians and invertebrates while accommodating continued public access through the site.

1.2. A UKHabs habitat survey and protected species assessment was undertaken on 6th May and 30th June 2025 by experienced ecologists from Co-ecology Ltd. Supplementary information was collected in January 2026.

1.3. The woodland comprises an area of ancient semi-natural woodland located beyond the southwestern built form of Uckfield town with mature and veteran oak trees and coppice stands of hornbeam, hazel and ash. The woodland supports ground flora typical of ancient woodland in the High Weald including bluebells. A narrow stream flows around the northwest boundary and wet ditches dissect the woodland supporting pockets of wetter habitat. Ancient mine pits, sunken tracks and boundary banks indicate at the ancient nature of the site.

1.4. The far western block forms a more structurally uniform hornbeam stand with a dense bluebell carpet and visible trampling pressure.

1.5. Habitats within the site include:

- *w1f – Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (main habitat)*
- *r2 – Wet ditch / watercourse*

1.6. Current Status of habitats within the site:

- Woodland: Good ancient woodland indicators present but uneven structure. Laurel locally present. Deadwood present but could be increased. Trampling and informal pathways from visitors causing some degradation, some localised instance of garden dumping from neighbouring residential areas, coppice woodland no longer being actively coppiced, visitor pressure – well-used by residents and future development risk.
- Ground flora: Good abundance and diversity of ancient woodland indicator species. Locally sensitive; trampling affecting bluebell-dominated western block.
- Wet areas: Functioning ditch and wet woodland pockets but at risk of gradual scrub closure.
- Boundaries: existing connectivity with wider landscape via mature tree lines and hedgerows limited and at risk from future development pressure. Existing field boundaries to south, west and north likely to represent important wildlife feature, at risk from enclosure from development.

1.7. A number of targeted enhancement measures are recommended to strengthen the ecological value of Boothland Wood, improve habitat resilience, and support known or potential protected species. These measures also help limit public impact and align with Uckfield Town Council's wider woodland management objectives.

1.8. Measures include:

- Reinstate rotational coppicing to diversify structure.

- Increase deadwood (standing and fallen) for invertebrates, fungi and small mammals.
- Manage/ remove cherry laurel to protect ground flora.
- Define and manage footpaths to reduce trampling on bluebells; consider low-level barriers or dead hedging.
- Maintain hydrology of the wet ditch and prevent excessive scrub shading.
- Create log piles, habitat piles and insect refuges throughout the site.
- Install bird boxes, dormouse nestboxes, bat boxes, and interpretation boards to support wildlife and public engagement.
- Work alongside surrounding development to ensure a network of connective habitat is retained and/ or created to limit isolation of this site.
- Along with other open green spaces around Uckfield, work with local conservation and wildlife groups to deliver a programme of activities for members of the public to improve engagement and interest in these sites, encouraging long term conservation.

1.9. Community Opportunities - Volunteer tasks could include coppicing, laurel removal, deadwood creation and scrub management. Public events such as bat walks or bluebell walks would support community involvement.

1.10. Additional enhancements could include installing bird, dormouse and bat boxes on mature trees, creating insect hotels, log piles, and hibernacula. Organising volunteer days for scrub management and wildlife feature creation would not only improve habitats but also foster community engagement and public interest of the site. Monitoring of the site could be encouraged through noticeboards and public events such as bat walks.

1.11. Boothland Wood is a valuable ancient woodland in generally good ecological condition, with opportunities to enhance structural diversity, protect sensitive ground flora and improve wet woodland features. Implementing the above measures will enhance habitat diversity and ecological resilience, supporting a wide range of wildlife.

# 2 Background

### *Overview of the commission and the proposals*

2.1. Co-ecology Ltd were commissioned by Uckfield Town Council to provide ecological advice including an assessment of the existing habitats present as well as recommendations for improved management practices and opportunities for improvements at Boothland Wood, Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 5EL.

2.2. To provide an additional stage in assessment, this report has been completed and comprises the following elements:

- results of a survey of the on-site habitats following the UK Habitats Classification;
- an initial assessment of the current condition and ecological importance of the habitats present;
- an assessment of the likely presence of legally protected species;
- an evaluation of the relative nature conservation value of the site;
- provide broad measures for improvements and opportunities;
- recommendations for any further surveys or assessments that may be necessary.

### *Objectives of this appraisal*

2.3. To establish a current broad habitat baseline regarding habitat type and condition and to provide broad recommendations for future management with the objective of improving the biodiversity status and condition of habitat types present.

2.4. Uckfield Town Council have an existing Tree Policy[1] and a Woodland Management Plan (produced by the Forestry Commission)[2] that currently covers council-owned woodlands, including Boothland Wood.

2.5. The Woodland Management Plan describes the long-term vision for the site is *"To manage the woodlands to ensure a sustainable, diverse and resilient tree canopy cover for future generations. To attempt to balance the current and future increase in recreational use that the woodlands provide to the local community, whilst limiting the impact of that use on the woodlands, and to conserve and where possible, improve their wildlife and habitat value."*

2.6. A review of the measures recommended; assessment of any mitigation or works that have been implemented and some updated recommendations in line with those measures is therefore included.

### *Site context*

2.7. Boothland Wood is a 5-hectare (ha) ancient semi-natural woodland owned by Uckfield Town Council centred on Ordnance Survey Grid Reference (OSGR) TQ 47124 20093. The site supports mature/ ancient oak standards with areas of coppiced hornbeam, hazel and ash and characteristic ancient woodland ground flora including bluebell carpets, with boundary features, including earth-banked tree lines, wet ditches and ancient mining pits. Small patches of grassland and off-site treelines occur around the northwest boundary, forming part of the wider historic woodland framework of the town.

[1] Revised Tree Policy - Feb 2021

[2] Woodland Management Plan - Uckfield Town Council Woodlands

2.8. The site occupies one of the last undeveloped parcels of land between Uckfield's built-up area and the A22 bypass. Approved and proposed development in the surrounding landscape is expected to sever habitat connectivity, leaving the woodland increasingly isolated and vulnerable to degradation. Boothland Wood is already heavily used by local residents, and future development to the west is likely to increase recreational pressure and associated disturbance. Hydrologically, the site lies close to the River Uck and contains springs, wet ditches and a spring-fed watercourse running southwards across the woodland before passing under the adjacent railway line.

2.9. Although urban-fringe in character, the site remains linked—currently—into a wider semi-natural habitat network, with nearby ancient and semi-natural woodlands including Lake Wood, West Park LNR, Butcher's, Fairhazel and Park Woods, Paygate Wood, and the nationally important Buxted Park SSSI. The River Uck and its tributaries provide additional riparian connectivity through the town. Within this context, Boothland Wood supports habitat suitable for a range of protected species, including bats, breeding birds, badgers, small mammals including hazel dormice, common and widespread reptile and amphibians and invertebrates.

### *Legislative and policy*

2.10. The following pieces of legislation and National policy are relevant to this appraisal and have been used to inform this appraisal;

- The Environment Act (2021)
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Biodiversity and geological conservation: circular 06/2005

2.11. The following local policies are extracted from the Uckfield Town Councils Strategic Plan 2026 - 2031[3]

*By 2031 the Town Council will have:*

- *Designated areas of Town Council land for wild flowers;*
- *Continued working with Sussex Local Nature Partnership's Green Spaces Project to understand the benefits in Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve and Snatts Road Cemetery;*
- *Commissioned ecological appraisals and wildlife surveys in our woodlands and nature reserves to inform biodiversity action plans*
- *Hosted events such as the Eco Expo to better inform residents of various alternative technologies;*
- *Recorded and mapped the findings of tree surveys to ensure safety from ash dieback and decay;*

*Our community aspirations, by 2031 are to:*

- *Contribute to the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and see the preservation or creation of wetlands and hedgerows, the sustainable management of woodlands and freshwater habitats;*
- *Provide data and information for Uckfield, to central government departments and Weald to Waves to draw down funding to preserve our rich biodiversity;*
- *Have created a 'Wilder Uckfield' plan to address the biodiversity crisis….*

[3] Draft-Strategic-Plan-and-Priorities-2026-31-2.pdf

- *Liaised with landowners adjacent to the River Uck to investigate the purchase of land from the end of the footpath in Knights Meadow to Hempstead Lane, by the mill, to create a River Walk.*
- *Maintain, improve and protect all of our natural areas to accommodate the demands of future growth of the town;*

2.12. Uckfield Town Council also published an official pdf "Key Objectives of Uckfield Town Council's Strategic Plan: 2025-2030" Document[4]. The following policies are extracted from this document:

*Our Strategic Priorities – Conservation*

*East Sussex County Council Corporate Priorities: Making best use of resources now and for the future Driving Sustainable Economic Growth*

*Wealden District Council's Corporate Priorities: Climate Change and our Environment: Protecting our environment and leading the district towards carbon neutrality.*

*Uckfield Town Council's Strategic Priority: Environment and health*

*By 2030, the Town Council will Have: …*

- *Commissioned ecological appraisals and specific/specialised wildlife surveys to fully understand the species within our woodlands and nature reserves;*
- *Recorded and mapped the findings of frequent tree surveying programmes to ensure safety from ash dieback, and other decay;*
- *Continued to deliver important tree planting schemes so that for every tree that has been removed, another tree has been planted. We will have also identified suitable sites where additional trees can be planted to restock from felling or coppicing, or to create new community orchards;*
- *Liaised with landowners adjacent to the River Uck to investigate the purchase of land from the end of the footpath in Knights Meadow to Hempstead Lane by the mill, rugby field and Buxted Park and create the first section of a River Walk;*



[4] Key-Objectives-of-UTC-Strategic-Plan-2025-30.pdf

# 3 Methodology

### *Personnel*

3.1. The UKHabs Survey, undertaken in May and June 2025, site appraisal and assessment were carried out by Giles Coe BSc (Hons) MCIEEM and Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB, who also compiled the report.

3.2. Giles Coe BSc (Hons) MCIEEM has been a commercial ecologist since 2001. Giles is an ecologist with more than 24 years commercial ecological experience in quantitative field surveys and assessments and with expertise in habitats and plant identification although primarily a specialist in the mitigation of impacts to legally protected species. Giles has acted as named ecologist on Mitigation Licences for bats, badgers, and great crested newts since 2015 and is a Registered Consultant on the low impact class licence scheme for bats and badgers and is a certified drone pilot holding both A2 CofC and GVC qualifications.

3.3. Jess Lewis BSc (Hons) MRes MRSB. Jess is an ecologist with over eight years' commercial experience in quantitative field surveys and assessments and with expertise in habitats although primarily a specialist in the mitigation of impacts to legally protected species. She holds a survey class licence for great crested newts (Licence Number: 2022-10399-CL08-GCN) and beavers and is a certified drone pilot holding both A2 CofC and GVC qualifications.

### *Contextual information and data records*

3.4. Contextual information on the site was gathered from freely available on-line resources including a 10km search for internationally important protected sites and 5km for nationally designated sites and records for any European Protected Species mitigation licences for great crested newts, hazel dormice or bats. This was carried out using Magic Map hosted by Defra. On-line aerial imagery was used to make an assessment of the sites position within the wider landscape including connectivity and potential corridors for protected species dispersal.

### *UK Habitats Classification Survey and Condition Assessment*

3.5. The surveyors visited the site on the 6th May and 23rd June 2025 and recorded all identifiable plant species with an indication of their relative abundance following the DAFOR[5] scale. The purpose of the survey was to complete a baseline habitat survey of the developable areas of the site using the UK Habitats Classification system. The UKHabs-Professional system was used as reference with habitats assigned to either Level 3 or to Level 4 where applicable, the minimum mapping unit used was 25m$^2$ and all Secondary Codes were utilised where the relevant conditions pertained. A follow up visit was also made in January 2026.

### *Evaluation*

3.6. An assessment is provided as to the likely importance of the site judged by the habitats that are present and the species that have been confirmed or are likely to be present. This value is expressed at a geographic scale following criteria set out by CIEEM (2017) in their impact assessment guidance.

### *Constraints*

3.7. The UK habitat survey was carried out in May/June and therefore any plants with an earlier or later flowering phenology may have been underreported or missed. Despite the time of year, it was

[5] Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, Rare

possible to identify species using a vegetative key, determine the habitat types and overall conditions.

3.8. No data search information has been included within the report at this time. As there are no proposals for development and this report aims to provide an outline for management and improvement options, it was not considered necessary to request a formal data search at this time.

3.9. There were no further constraints to the survey or assessment.

# 4 Results

### *Contextual information*

4.1. Boothland Wood is owned and managed by Uckfield Town Council who commissioned Co-ecology Ltd to undertake this ecological assessment.

4.2. Uckfield Town Councils Strategic Plan 2026 – 2031 identifies ecological appraisals and wildlife surveys are needed to inform biodiversity action plans. This report provides an assessment of the habitats present as well as an assessment of potentially linked habitats and sites and provides measures to ensure that these habitats remain / become an asset for wildlife, with good connectivity to the wider landscape, enabling the creation and conservation of wildlife corridors and providing good quality green spaces for residents.

4.3. The site itself is not designated as a local site of importance for nature conservation however it is included on the Priority Habitats Inventory as deciduous woodland and Natural England Ancient Woodland Inventory as Ancient and Semi Natural Woodland.

4.4. Two nearby wildlife sites, both Local Nature Reserve (LNR), are located around the town and form part of the local wildlife network but have limited connectivity to Boothland Wood via hedgerows, tree lines and riparian habitats associated with the River Uck and tributaries.

4.5. West Park LNR is located 1.2km northwest separated by agricultural fields, a small industrial estate and water treatment works from Boothland, with some connectivity along the A22 embankment.

4.6. West Park lies at the northwestern extent of Uckfield and is parcelled between the major A22 Uckfield bypass west and relatively new residential development east and south. Rock Wood/ Lake Wood lies directly north.

4.7. Lake Wood – 8.5ha site located at the northwestern extent of the built form of Uckfield, separated from West Park LNR by Rocks Road comprises and 8.5ha Woodland Trust site containing ancient woodland and lake habitats with stone outcrops.

4.8. Hempstead Meadows LNR is located 755m northeast from Boothland Wood with some connectivity via woodland strip associated with the Uckfield – London railway line and grassland fields located southwest of Uckfield/ west of Ringwood suburb.

4.9. The site is bordered by residential development to the east, grassland fields to the west and south and New Barns Playing Fields leading to Victoria Pleasure Grounds immediately north. Significant new residential developments have been approved within the currently undeveloped grassland surrounding the site and this represents a considerable risk to the future status of the site. The site is well-used by residents and as such represents an important open green space locally.

#### *Disease*

4.10. Information about the site on the .gov website indicates that ash dieback was first recorded in Uckfield in 2020[6]. Since 2022 Uckfield Town Council have been commissioning surveys, working alongside the Forestry Commission, Arboricultural Association and independent specialists to identify diseased trees, assess health and consider possible works required in order to protect the woodland as a whole.

[6] Open Spaces

4.11. Large-scale works have been undertaken during winters 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 within Boothalnd Wood and nearby Nightingale Wood located 945m east beyond Ridgewood suburban development.

4.12. There is an existing woodland management plan in place. The long-term vision for the woodland defined within the extant woodland management plan is: "*To manage the woodlands to ensure a sustainable, diverse and resilient tree canopy cover for future generations. To attempt to balance the current and future increase in recreational use that the woodlands provide to the local community, whilst limiting the impact of that use on the woodlands, and to conserve and where possible, improve their wildlife and habitat value."*

4.13. The Woodland Trust – Ancient Tree Inventory does not identify any notable trees within Boothland Wood – the closest is a Pedunculate oak (T14 WILLIAMS TREE ID: 275915) recorded on Ridgewood Farm which borders the site to the south and is located approximately 200m south.

4.14. The site also notes a hybrid black poplar 'regenerata' (Tree ID: 28865) located approximately 250m north within the boundary tree line west of the recreation ground present to the north of the site and a common ash (Tree ID: 227838) located within a small patch of woodland southeast of Bellbrook Industrial Estate 565m north.

### *Site in Relation to Its Surroundings, Habitat Connectivity and Potential Impacts*

4.15. Boothland Wood is located at the southwest extent of Ringwood, a residential suburb of Uckfield located south of the main town and railway line.

4.16. The site is currently bordered to the north by Improved grassland and scrubby field margin, transitioning to residential housing with garden boundaries backing onto the woodland edge. Small patches of treeline and scattered trees provide partial connectivity.

4.17. Moving west is currently open pastoral farmland and rough grassland fields with hedgerows and tree lines creating moderate habitat connectivity to wider countryside. More intact semi-natural landscape compared with the eastern side. South lies semi-improved grassland and wooded strips, merging into denser tree belts leading towards the railway corridor and A22 major road beyond. The railway/ A22 forms a significant barrier but retains some riparian/veg cover along sections.

4.18. East of the site is continuous residential development of Ridgewood suburb south of the main development of Uckfield town, with roads, gardens and fragmented tree cover. This edge represents the strongest urban interface, with limited but not absent habitat connectivity via scattered mature trees and small greenspaces.

4.19. Future and approved developments are due to completely enclose this patch of woodland and surveys have been commissioned to better understand current conditions as well as measures to conserve this habitat in the future and protect it from surrounding developments.

4.20. See Tables 4.1 below and Figure 4.1 for a representation of location and distance of the site in relation to protected areas.

**Table 4.1** Internationally important and protected sites intersecting a 10km radius of the development site.

| Type | Site | Reason for Citation | Distance and orientation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Special Protection Area (SPA) / Special Area of Conservation (SAC) / Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) | Ashdown Forest | *One of the largest single continuous blocks of lowland heath in south-east England, with both **4030 European dry heaths** and, in a larger proportion, **4010 Northern Atlantic wet heath**.*<br><br>*Habitats dominated by Heath, Scrub, Maquis and Garrigue, Phygrana (60%); Mixed woodland (40%).*<br><br>*7km Zone of Influence (ZOI) buffer around this site with SANGS agreement to protect from impacts of development and ensure funding to carry out maintenance and habitat management works.* | 5.5km north at closest point |
| SSSI | Rock Wood | *A small ancient woodland lying on Tunbridge Wells sandstone and Wadhurst Clay.* | 5.5km north |
| Local Nature Reserve (LNR) | West Park | *Another site owned and managed by Uckfield Town Council with some connectivity to site measuring 10.54ha in size. Habitats of mixed woodland, grassland and a sensitive marsh area supporting several Orchids including Southern Marsh Orchid. A population of Dormice have been discovered here.* | 1.2km northwest |
| LNR | Hempstead Meadows | *1.6ha site owned and managed by Uckfield Town Council. Habitats include regularly inundated tussocky damp grassland, ditches, scrub, established trees including willow, alder, and black poplars and mixed grassland.* | 755m northeast |
| SSSI | Buxted Park | *An 83.43ha old deer park consisting of a variety of unimproved grassland communities with parkland trees and areas of woodland which as a whole support a large invertebrate population.* | 2.4km northeast |
| National Landscape (formerly AONB) | High Weald | *A medieval landscape of wooded, rolling hills studded with sandstone outcrops; small, irregular-shaped fields; scattered farmsteads; and ancient routeways. The 1,461km2 area covers parts of Kent, Sussex and Surrey at the heart of Southeast England.* | Boundary between 4-5km to east, north and west |
| SSSI | Plashett Wood | *154.3ha site comprising ancient woodland (pedunculate oak hornbeam with birch and hazel, and hazel-sessile oak) on Weald clays supporting a rich community of breeding birds, as well as a number of plants and invertebrates with a nationally restricted distribution.* | 3.9km southwest |
| SSSI | Stockland Farm Meadows | *A small site – 5.8ha comprising two grazed meadows and a hay field (species-rich) managed by traditional methods and pond.* | 7.1km northeast |
| SSSI | Hastingford Cutting | *A very small site – 0.05ha designated for its geological interest.* | 7.6km northeast |
| SSSI | Scaynes Hill | *A very small site – 0.04ha designated for its geological interest.* | 8.25km northwest |
| SSSI | Park Corner Heath | *A 6.9km northwest A small area of grassy heath, woodland and scrub lying on sand over the Weald Clay supporting rich invertebrate fauna.* | 6.3km southeast |
| SSSI | Waldron Cutting | *A small site – 0.2ha designated for its geological interest.* | 8km southeast |

**Table 4.1** Internationally important and protected sites intersecting a 10km radius of the development site.

| Type | Site | Reason for Citation | Distance and orientation |
|---|---|---|---|
| SSSI & LNR | Chailey Common | *Sub-atlantic English heath habitat. dominated by heathers, predominantly Ling Heather, but two other native species: Bell and Cross-Leaved Heather can also be found.* | 6.8km northwest at closest point |

*Relationship with statutory and non-statutory designations*

4.21. Looking broadly at the protected sites network in relation to the site, and recent/ ongoing and approved development in and around the town, it is important to identify where possible connectivity exists, and appropriate management is undertaken, to ensure that existing formal and informal green spaces are identified/conserved / enhanced to ensure the viability of wildlife conservation into the future.

4.22. Boothland Wood sits within a mosaic of designated sites in and around Uckfield. The nearest non-statutory sites of local importance include West Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Lake Wood (Woodland Trust), both supporting ancient/semi-natural woodland, marshy grassland and sandstone outcrops that underpin local connectivity and biodiversity value. These sites function as ecological "anchors" on the town's western side and retain notable species and ancient-woodland assemblages. [uckfieldtc.gov.uk], [en.wikipedia.org], [woodlandtrust.org.uk]

4.23. At the wider scale, the Buxted Park SSSI lies to the northeast and contributes unimproved neutral grassland, wood-pasture and parkland features of national importance; landscape analyses for Uckfield regularly reference ecological linkages between West Park/Lake Wood and Buxted Park via intervening woods and riparian corridors. Boothland Wood also lies within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for Buxted Park SSSI, so proposals should consider potential pathways of effect even where direct habitat continuity is limited.

4.24. Internationally, Ashdown Forest (designated SAC for wet/dry heath and SPA for breeding nightjar and Dartford warbler) is within the wider ecological locality of Uckfield (5.5km north at closest point). While Boothland Wood's largely broadleaved woodland character and urban-edge setting mean limited functional linkage to the heathland interest features, plan-making and project screening locally still recognise Ashdown Forest's sensitivities (notably air quality and recreation/urbanisation effects) when assessing cumulative development.

4.25. The River Uck and its tributaries provide the most robust, persistent corridors for species movement through Uckfield and the surrounding landscape, reflected in the River Uck & Headwaters Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA). For Boothland Wood, practical connectivity is primarily via local treelines, hedgerows, and riparian strips rather than direct, continuous woodland; these routes should be maintained and enhanced to sustain landscape-scale permeability as development proceeds

*Recent Major Developments Approved in/around Uckfield*

4.26. Uckfield Town is currently experiencing rapid expansion, with several major planning applications currently either proposed or being constructed, many of which are located within existing areas of open space or agricultural land. It is likely that future development will continue to infill the relatively undeveloped land either side of the town, especially inside/ east of the A22. These developments will increasingly isolate existing sites of nature conservation value, designated or not and will increase human disturbance impacts which could result in degradation of these sites, if not carefully protected and managed. Some major developments are listed below:

- *Ridgewood Farm (west Uckfield) – Major development - Outline permission (2016) for up to 1,000 homes + primary school and community facilities. July 2025 reserved-matters approval for 750 homes + ~1,884 m² industrial unit (Reference Number: WD/2019/1773/MRM9).*

- *Ridgewood Farm (West Uckfield) – Major Development*
    - This development appears to be currently under construction with new houses currently being constructed just 275m south.
- *Application Reference: WD/2023/2939/MRM; Approved 29/07/2025) – Outline permission for 750 homes, local neighbourhood centre, strategic open space, child play provision, residential parking, +10,000m2 commercial/ business floorspace, parking/ associated infrastructure and a new school.*
- *Site SD1 – Land West of Uckfield (Application Reference: WD/2015/0209/MEA; Approved 24/03/2016) – Outline application for demolition of existing and construction of a residential-led, mixed-use urban extension to deliver up to 1000 additional dwellings, up to a two form entry primary school and early years facilities, retail, community, health, leisure and up to 13,495m2 employment uses; ancillary and associated development; new and enhanced pedestrian/ cycle routes and open spaces, car parking and vehicular access.*
- *Owlsbury Farm (west of A22) – Major development - Application (2025) for up to 1,700 homes, mixed-use centre with retail, commercial and community uses, 2FE primary school, multi-purpose sports hub, community allotments, pedestrian/ cycle links, open space, SUDs, children's play areas, landscaping, and new points of access to the A22 (Reference Number: WD/2025/0922/MEA8).*
- *Bird-in-Eye Hill (south Uckfield) - Outline appeal approval (Aug 2025) for 190 homes after addressing concerns over ancient woodland, heritage, access (Reference Number: WD/2024/1799/MAO10).*
- *Mockbeggars Farm (north of Ringles Cross) - Nov 2025 reserved matters for 60 homes approved after resolving drainage and layout issues (Reference Number: WD/2022/0648/MAO11).*

4.27. Wealden Draft Local Plan (Reg. 18) identifies 11 potential development sites in Uckfield, with capacities ranging from ~6 to 350 dwellings, plus a possible allocation west of Owlsbury Farm outside the current boundary—all currently under public consultation (closed May 2024).

4.28. Already approved future developments will enclose the currently open grassland fields that bound the west and southern boundaries of Boothland Wood with potential for significant impacts to connectivity and potentially leading to isolation of the wildlife populations that it currently supports leaving small, isolated populations of less mobile species at greater risk of extinction.

4.29. As with all major developments, this will be subject to biodiversity net gains and therefore will need to ensure that the biodiversity value of the site is increased. This may leave some scope for cooperation on final designs to ensure that connectivity with the wider landscape is retained and potentially improved.

4.30. At the very least, the approved developments that are due to completely encompass the site will lead to increased visitation pressure from new residents.

*Natural England – European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) Licenses*

4.31. Eight European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licences have been granted within 2km of the site boundary. These include two licences relating to bats, three relating to hazel dormice and three licences relating to great crested newts.

4.32. Two licences were granted for destruction of a bat roost (non-maternity) supporting common pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats (EPSM2010-2162, granted on 01/08/2012), located 375m north, and at a site located 440m southeast (EPSM2009-1387, between 28/04/2011 – 31/08/2013).

4.33. The closest licence for hazel dormice was granted for the destruction of a breeding site (comprising initial application and two subsequent amendments - 2019-39789-EPS-MIT, -1 and -2; first approved 17/05/2019 – final end date of 31/12/2023) located 350m southwest, beyond the A22

major road/ Uckfield bypass. Next, a licence was granted 760m southwest for the destruction of a resting place only (2017-31265-EPS-MIT-1, between 06/10/2017 and 30/09/2022) at the southwest extent of Ridgewood suburb but with some potential for connectivity around residential gardens and along street hedgerows and tree lines. The final licence granted for hazel dormice was for the destruction of a resting place only (EPSM2012-5024, between 09/11/2012 – 31/10/2015) located 900m northeast associated with Bird-in-eye Shaw woodland east of Ridgewood with no real connectivity to Boothland Wood.

4.34. Three licences for great crested newts were identified within 2km of the site boundary including approximately 125m southwest - 2018-33141-EPS-MIT for damage to a resting place only (activities between 06/03/2018 – 31/12/2018); approximately 630m southwest - 2018-33133-EPS-MIT for damage and destruction of a resting place only (between 06/03/2018 – 31/12/2022). – both of which are relevant as they relate to licensable activities carried out within the grassland fields surrounding the site which are due to be developed over the coming years.

4.35. The third licence relating to great crested newts - EPSM2009-829, for the destruction of a resting place only (28/11/2012 – 01/07/2016) located approximately 280m southeast within the suburb Ridgewood.

4.36. In addition to the granted EPSM licence applications within 2km – a number of GCN Class Survey Licence Returns confirm presence of this species in proximity to the site; closest 140m and 220m southeast (both 08/05/2017).

***Priority habitats***

4.37. The site contains the following UK Priority Habitats, lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

4.38. Priority Habitats in proximity to the site include:

- Deciduous woodland – Dominates the site, numerous patches present in wider landscape, small patch directly southeast (Ridgewood) with continuous canopy cover providing arboreal connectivity to the wider landscape. Significant/ larger areas present particularly beyond urban development associated with Uckfield to north, west and east. Wider connectivity via mature hedgerows and tree lines as well as along linear habitat associated with the River Uck and associated tributaries.
- Most of the deciduous woodland patches surrounding Uckfield town are also listed as Ancient Woodland.
- Traditional orchard - small parcels, closest located 750m southwest of the site.
- Coastal Floodplain and Grazing Marsh – large area 2.5km west comprising river corridor associated with the River Ouse, extends all the way to the coast.
- Lowland dry acid grassland - large area located 2.4km northeast associated with Buxted Park SSSI and linked to the site via River Uck.
- Lowland meadows - small patches, closest 1.1km southwest with limited connectivity due to A22 major road.
- Lowland heathland – Patchy distribution, several small patches present 2.7km northwest around Piltdown.
- Priority ponds – there are priority ponds identified within the wider landscape, the closest is located 540m southeast but surrounded by residential development of Ridgewood. None within 500m and only two ponds within 250m, although with good connectivity via wet ditches, hedgerows and tree lines. The A22 major road located approximately 260m southwest likely to represent a significant barrier to dispersal. However, presence of additional ponds within the wider landscape could support a viable breeding population.
- Priority River Habitat – Located either side of the site with associated riparian habitats/ river corridors, tributary of the River Uck flows to east of site, closest point approximately 950m east (Chalybeate Spring) beyond residential development of Ridgewood/ New

Town with a good woodland corridor and numerous waterbodies. The River Uck flows around about 600m north of the northern boundary then south approximately 1km west and joins the River Ouse further downstream. There is a good availability of adjacent semi-natural habitat including woodland and waterbodies associated with this River habitat.

- Priority River Headwater Areas – extends from the coast up to 3.4km northeast of the site includes the River Uck floodplain.
- Hedgerows and Mature Tree Lines present within the wider landscape, mature hedgerows and tree lines present along development lines – road and around field boundaries.

4.39. Figure 4.1 below shows Protected Sites and UK Priority Habitats in proximity to the site.

Figure 4.1 – UK Priority Habitats in Proximity to Site

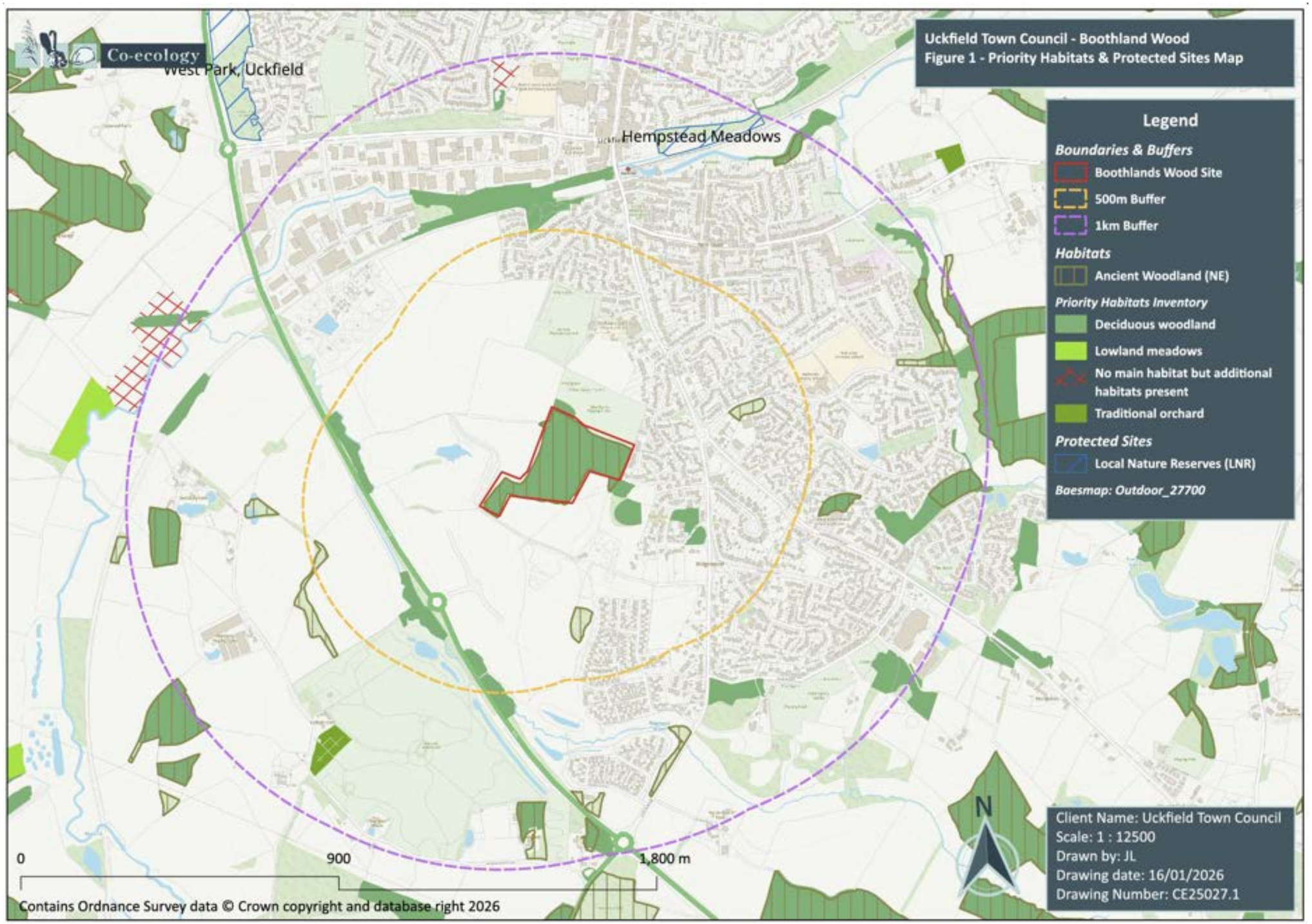
Co-ecology
West Park, Uckfield
Hempstead Meadows
Uckfield Town Council - Boothland Wood
Figure 1 - Priority Habitats & Protected Sites Map
Legend
Boundaries & Buffers
Boothlands Wood Site
500m Buffer
1km Buffer
Habitats
Ancient Woodland (NE)
Priority Habitats Inventory
Deciduous woodland
Lowland meadows
No main habitat but additional habitats present
Traditional orchard
Protected Sites
Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
Baesmap: Outdoor_27700
0
900
1,800 m
N
Client Name: Uckfield Town Council
Scale: 1 : 12500
Drawn by: JL
Drawing date: 16/01/2026
Drawing Number: CE25027.1
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026

Figure 4.2 – Waterbodies within 500m

Figure 4.3 –UK Habitats Map


Co-ecology
Uckfield Town Council - Hempstead Meadows LNR
Figure 3 - UKHabs Habitat Survey Map
Legend
Boundaries
Boothland Wood Boundary
UKHabs Habitats
w1f - lowland mixed deciduous woodland
r2 - wet ditch
Basemap: Google Satellite
UK Habitats - Secondary codes
28 - Ancient Woodland Site
30 - Semi-natural woodland
50 - Ditch
203 - Mature Tree
205 - Ancient Tree
207 - Forest Brash
209 - Avenue
210 - Coppice
211 - Coppice with standards
213 - Complex woody structure
214 - Fallen dead wood abundant
215 - Standing dead wood abundant
216 - Large hollows or cavities
217 - Woodland open space
50, 213, 216
28, 30, 203, 205
216
209
213
217
28, 30, 203, 205
50
210
210, 217
0
100
200 m
Client Name: Uckfield Town Council
Scale: 1 : 2500
Drawn by: JL
Drawing date: 20/01/2026
Drawing Number: CE25027.3
Base map: Google Satellite imagery © Google, Maxar Technologies, 2026.

### Preliminary Ecological Appraisal - Habitats

4.40. Boothland Wood comprises a 5ha site with ancient woodland containing a high proportion of mature oak and ash trees and coppice of hornbeam, sweet chestnut and hazel. The woodland contains a number of ancient boundary banks, sunken tracks and old mine pits, some of which now hold water for much of the year.

#### *Description*

4.41. The habitats within the site red line boundary were dominated by type *w1f – lowland mixed deciduous woodland,* patches of h3d – bramble scrub, historical mine pits now seasonally waterlogged and shallow wet ditches around the northern / northwest corner, with footpaths for public access. The habitats are described below and in Figure 3, with photographs of the site provided at the end of the report.

*w1f – lowland mixed deciduous woodland – May meet criteria for w1f5 dry oak-dominated woodland (H9190)*

4.42. Tree stock comprised of abundant – locally dominant hornbeam, frequent Pedunculate oak and alder, locally dominant holly and hazel coppice stands, occasional ash, and hawthorn, rare occurrence of Scots pine, Lawson cypress, and aspen.

4.43. Ground flora was rich in places, however excessive trampling was recorded in areas, especially where pathways converge and at the various points of entrance into the woodland. There was a main roughly circular pathway that followed the boundary, with numerous less well marked and informal routes through the northern portion.

4.44. The main ditches ran along inside the northern portion of the northern block, and around the northwest corner leading off-site west. There was also a ditch that cut east – west across the northern portion of the southern block however this was bare, with little vegetation, consistent with a general lack of ground flora and shrub layer in this southern/ western block.

4.45. The shrub layer was patchy with an almost complete absence within the southwestern block but patchy presence elsewhere. There was a dense band along the northeast boundary that adjoined neighbouring residential properties beyond. The boundary fence marking the separation between the residential gardens and the woodland was often open allowing the gardens to expand slightly into the woodland. Within the main northern block there was very little access into the southeast corner due to dense scrub and lack of path management/ regular use (not on main throughfare and bramble scrub likely discouraging leading to further scrub development). Shrub comprised dominant – occasional bramble, frequent hazel coppice, locally abundant stands with cherry laurel and rare occurrence of yew and elder.

4.46. Where present ground flora contained a good diversity of ancient woodland indicator species including carpets of dominant bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, locally dominant dogs mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and ivy *Hedera helix*, abundant lesser celandine *Ficaria verna* and wild garlic *Allium ursinum*, locally abundant greater stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, common nettle *Urtica dioca,* frequent cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestri*s, occasional wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, wood speedwell *Veronica montana*, cleavers *Galium aparine*, wood avens *Geum urbanum*, wood sedge *Carex sylvatica*, pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*, early dog violet *Viola reichenbachiana*, wood melick *Melica uniflora* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*. Rare occurrence of garlic mustard *Alliaria petiolata*, male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, lords and ladies *Arum maculatum*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, wood dock *Rumex sanguineus*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, red campion *Silene dioica*, hedge woundwort *Stachys sylvatica*, soft rush *Juncus effusus* and yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*.

4.47. A note on fungal community – During site visit, and during subsequent visits carried out during 2025 to survey for hazel dormice, a number of fungal fruiting bodies were also recorded including turkeytail *Trametes versicolor,* chicken-of-the-woods *Laetiporus sulphureus,* King Alfred's cakes *Daldinia concentrica* and fruiting bodies within the genus *Ganoderma.*

4.48. The southwestern block sat by itself and was dominated by hornbeam with abundant hazel coppices occasional oak. This area had a very different character to the rest of the woodland with little to no shrub layer, dominant carpet of bluebells with very little other ground flora. Human activity was extensive with a lot of trampling present, construction of some shelters also present. Except for boundary fence line it is possible to see right through this parcel due to lack of vertical structure/ relative homogeneity.

4.49. There were deep impressions present within the wood forming natural pools of water thought to be inundated old mining pits. One of these had a very large crater with two main pooling areas with steep/ high sides and bramble to north but open with footpath extending around located towards the southwest corner of main/ central block. There was a wet ditch that ran parallel inside the northern edge, a narrow, steep sided watercourse ruan along the northwest corner of the northern block and a dry ditch cut the southwest corner from the rest of the wood.

***Compartments***

4.50. The woodland has been roughly divided into compartments based on habitat characteristics and these are described below and locations of each is shown in Figure 4.3.

*Compartment 1 — Southwestern Block: Wet Woodland & Low Structure*

- Dominated by hornbeam with abundant hazel coppice and occasional oak; very little to no shrub layer. Much higher proportion of silver birch in this area than elsewhere.
- Extremely open — clear sightlines through entire parcel due to lack of vertical structure, boundaries lacking in dense vegetation and open.
- Wet woodland character, with seasonal flooding and a dry ditch dividing this area from the main wood to the north.
- Ground flora almost exclusively bluebell, with heavy trampling and signs of shelter construction.
- Old mining pits / deep depressions creating natural pools and uneven microtopography.
- Access from the south field very open; no boundary scrub around this parcel, footfall high including informal desire lines, shelter building and cycling.

*Compartment 2 — Western & Central-Southern Depression Complex*

- Includes the large central depression/hollow containing patchy scrub islands, scattered mature oak, and seasonal inundation.
- Transitional zone between SW block and central woodland, retaining open structure with low shrub and little ground flora.
- Mining-pit-related topography continues here, producing two main pooled areas with steep, high sides, larger of which stays damp throughout most of the year.
- East–west ditch through this part remains largely bare, consistent with general lack of understorey.
- High levels of trampling and multiple informal paths feeding into this section.

*Compartment 3 — Northwestern Corner: Recently Felled, Low Canopy, Developing Regeneration*

- Very open canopy — trees felled in Jan 2026 for brash; not a true coppice system.
- Little regrowth yet; structural diversity is very low.
- Wet ditch along the NW boundary corner; watercourse narrow and steep sided.
- Scattered young tree planting with plastic guards, many pushed over or exposed.
- Recommended: surround new plantings with brash hedging to prevent trampling.

*Compartment 4 — Northern Central Block: Well-Structured Mixed Deciduous Woodland*

- Higher structural complexity: more understorey, hazel coppice, and patchy but present shrub layer.
- Species include dominant hornbeam, frequent oak and alder, plus locally dominant holly; pockets of hazel coppice.
- Ancient woodland ground flora strong (bluebell, dog's mercury, wild garlic, stitchwort, sedges, violets, primrose, etc.).
- Ditches run along the northern edge, including a steep sided watercourse in NW corner.
- Dense scrub zone along the northeast boundary against residential properties.
- Limited access at SE corner due to unmanaged dense scrub and low footfall.
- Multiple informal desire lines throughout this central-northern section.

*Compartment 5 — Eastern Boundary & Northeast Corner*

- Good existing boundary structure in most places.
- Reduced canopy cover in northeastern corner, allowing bramble dominance.
- Several large fallen trees remain in situ, providing deadwood habitat.
- Boundary fence open or expanding into woodland in places due to dense scrub.
- Adjacent to new planting beyond the N boundary on scalloped playing field edge — young trees present but not significantly browsed.
- Recommendation: use brash hedging around new plantings to reduce trampling and damage.

*Footpath & Disturbance Network (Cross cutting Feature)*

- Series of main perimeter path, multiple well used informal paths, and unofficial desire lines, especially within northern and southern blocks.
- Excessive trampling reducing ground flora diversity in affected locations and this location lacking shrub layer to provide shelter for wildlife including birds and dormice.
- Brash hedging recently introduced (Jan 2026) to discourage path proliferation.

*Condition assessment (criteria summary):*

4.51. The Statutory Biodiversity Metric – Condition Assessments July 2025 and Woodland Condition Assessment[7], developed by the Forestry Commission, Natural England, the Woodland Trust, and the English Woodland Biodiversity Group, with a digital tool hosted by the Sylva Foundation was used to assess current conditions at Boothland Wood and a summary is provided below.

- *Age structure:* all three age classes present (mature oak/hornbeam; mid-age stems; young saplings/coppice regrowth). Significant browsing pressure evident in some areas with very little natural regrowth but cohorts still evident.
- *Native species richness:* >5 native tree/shrub taxa across the parcel (oak, hornbeam, hazel, holly, alder, ash, hawthorn). Western block more uniform (hornbeam-heavy). Assessed as good, with five or more native tree or shrub species recorded, western block assessed separately and given a poor score as generally / away from edge dominated by hornbeam with no ground flora.
- *Invasive/non-native presence:* Low cover, localised at boundaries (e.g., cherry laurel/garden escapees). <10% overall. Management feasible. Generally low occurrence

[7] WCA6.pdf

recorded concentrated and around boundary habitats so likely to be associated with garden escapees. Moderate score as present but low, <10% cover across woodland.

- *Native cover dominance:* Canopy and shrub layers predominantly native; non-natives occasional and not structuring the stand.
- *Open space & glades:* Patchy temporary openness from ditches, pits and overstood coppice; uneven distribution across the parcel.
- *Regeneration:* Natural regeneration and advanced coppice present; browsing and footfall depress establishment in high-use zones.
- *Tree health:* Generally good; ash dieback monitored since first recorded in Uckfield in 2020 but current mortality and dieback below thresholds for widespread poor condition.
- *Ground flora:* Recognisable ancient-woodland assemblage (e.g., bluebell, wood anemone, dog's-mercury, early dog-violet, wood melick) indicating long continuity.
- *Vertical structure:* Multi-layered (canopy, sub-canopy/shrub, field layer). Coppice legacy adds structural diversity.
- *Veterans/large old trees:* No ATI-listed veterans within parcel, but several mature trees on/near boundaries contribute structure and continuity.
- *Deadwood resource:* Standing and fallen deadwood is present across much of the parcel; volume and sizes variable by compartment with some areas very bare.
- *Disturbance & pressures:* Footpath network and informal desire lines create local trampling; minor garden-waste tipping at SE edge; nutrient enrichment not widespread.
    - Generally, the understorey and shrub layer is quite open, there are patches of dense bramble scrub with limited access but a dense network of footpaths bisects the site with regular trespassing off pathways apparent.
    - A small section along the southeast boundary that abuts neighbouring residential properties is showing some signs of garden waste dumping. This boundary is currently very dense with bramble scrub and contains hazel coppice. This area of woodland appears to be unmanaged, and the footpaths are becoming impassable due to dense thorny growth.
- *Edge connectivity & fauna context:* Continuous canopy and shrubby edges link to adjacent habitats; dormouse confirmed immediately SE of site boundary in 2025 however conditions on site currently sub-optimal for this species; roosting and foraging bats using riparian/edge zones.

### Legally protected species - likelihood of occurrence

4.52. The table below provides a simple assessment of the relative likelihood of any legally protected species being present within the site.

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within Boothland Wood

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Bats | Roosts: Highly Likely<br><br>Foraging and commuting: Highly Suitable | Mature trees with cavities, splits and loose bark offer moderate–high potential roost features for bats.<br>Woodland structure and adjacent grassland create good quality foraging habitat and commuting routes along paths and edges.<br>Overall, moderate–high likelihood of use by multiple bat species, though roost confirmation would require further survey. |
| Badgers Act (1992) | Badger | Sett building: Low risk due to disturbance | Woodland edges and banks provide potential sett locations, although none recorded during walkover. Possible presence within dense habitats at northeast corner, adjacent woodland and field boundaries along watercourses and adjacent residential gardens east. |

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within Boothland Wood

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Foraging and dispersal: Highly likely | Foraging habitat (earthworms, beetles, soft ground) is widespread, indicating moderate likelihood of occasional use even if a sett is not present onsite. |
| WCA Schedule 1 | Breeding birds | Highly suitable | Mature trees with suitable features or suitably dense canopy growth, dense patches of scrub particularly around boundaries and northeast corner are highly likely to support a diverse range of breeding birds within the site.<br>There is potential for the site to support nests for birds of prey who could use the adjacent grassland fields for hunting, although this habitat is due to be lost to development. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Great crested newt | Likely present | Three granted EPSM licences within 2km of site, two relate to licensable activities carried out within the grassland fields surrounding the site which are due to be developed over the coming years.<br>Urban development currently and soon to be surrounding the site with major roads including the A22 south likely to represent significant barriers to dispersal.<br>Currently good corridor of relatively undeveloped agricultural land extending off-site south and west containing numerous ponds that could support a breeding population although A22 bypass to south likely to limit dispersal.<br>Sussex sits **inside the NatureSpace District Level Licensing area who produce Impact Risk Zone Maps. The site falls within an XX risk zone.**<br>The site itself has scrub, flooded historical mining pits and deep hollows as well as shallow damp hollows and shaded leaf litter providing suitable terrestrial refuge and connectivity to the wider landscape via wet ditches and boundary tree lines and hedgerows.<br>No current availability of breeding ponds within the site, therefore unlikely to support a breeding population however good availability of wet ditches and ponds in the wider landscape that could support a breeding population so likely to provide foraging, shelter and dispersal opportunities. Deadwood piles and deep hollows present for hibernation. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Hazel dormouse | Present<br><br>Population unknown | Presence of hazel coppice, bramble, honeysuckle and structurally diverse shrub layers indicates moderate potential for dormouse.<br>The site has good connectivity with the wider landscape including continuous canopy cover with adjacent Ridgeview development and woodland east with mature hedgerows and tree lines providing suitable connectivity with the wider landscape.<br>Surveys of adjacent Ridgeview development site (Co-ecology, 2025, unpublished) with continuous connectivity to Boothland Wood and adjacent residential development to northeast, have confirmed presence although current population sie is unknown and given current open nature and levels of disturbance, unlikely to be high. Nest tube presence/ absence surveys of Boothalnd wood (Co-ecology, 2025) did not record any evidence of dormice, however there were significant constraints due to removal of inserts and major tree fall following a storm event in April/May 2025. |
| Bern-A3 | European hedgehog | Likely present | Habitats on site offer suitable foraging, shelter and dispersal opportunities. Likely to be present within the surrounding residential gardens and could easily disperse onto site from neighbouring residential gardens and use it as a summer foraging resource, shelter and dispersal route. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2<br>WCA Schedule 5 | Otter | Possible – unlikely | No watercourses or suitable aquatic habitat are present within the woodland; therefore, the site does not offer potential for resting or holt building opportunities for otter.<br>Terrestrial habitat is suitable for occasional passage, but in the absence of linked waterbodies and the level of human activity, the likelihood of otter using the site is very low. |
| Habs Regs Annex 2 | Water Vole | Unlikely | Data available from the NBN atlas indicates that this species has been confirmed present within the River Ouse – record states present recorded |

**Table 4.4.** The likelihood of occurrence of any legally protected species within Boothland Wood

| Status | Species | Likelihood | Narrative |
|---|---|---|---|
| WCA Schedule 5 | | | at Piltdown Pond approximately 3.3km northwest (recorded 19/05/2019)[8]. National Water Vole Database[9] Identifies the area / grid square as having possible water vole presence within the period 2013 – 2022. The site does have a small shallow stream with steep-sided banks along the northwest corner.<br>There is a limited resource of streams, ditches, ponds or slow-flowing water with suitable bankside vegetation, connectivity to the wider river network is limited and this species has undergone rapid population declines in recent years, presence is therefore unlikely. |
| WCA Schedule 5 | Reptiles | Likely present | The mix of habitat types present within the site including grassland, woodland, wetland, riparian and scrub, footpath clearings providing opportunities for basking and connectivity with surrounding residential and riparian habitats is likely to provide a complex mosaic of habitat types required by reptiles.<br>Shaded woodland interior is generally suboptimal; however, sunny glades, edges, log piles and adjacent grassland may support common species (slow worm, grass snake).<br>Overall considered low–moderate likelihood of occurrence, concentrated on margins and ride edges and potentially impacted by current levels of disturbance including use by dog walkers. |
| WCA Schedule 9 | Invasive Non-Native Species | Low risk | No Schedule 9 INNS were identified during the walkover; woodland ground flora appears largely native with strong ancient-woodland indicators. Low occurrence of cherry laurel recorded in northern portion. Occasional garden-escape species present along boundaries, but no evidence of invasive plants such as *Rhododendron ponticum*, Japanese knotweed, or Himalayan balsam observed.<br>Woodland is considered low although ongoing risk for INNS establishment due to limited light penetration and lack of disturbance, though periodic checks along paths and edges are recommended. |



[8] Record: 87191 | Occurrence record | NBN Atlas

[9] National Water Vole Database - The National Water Vole Database Project | The Wildlife Trusts

### *Evaluation*

4.53. The whole site is listed as a UK BAP Priority Habitat type – Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland assessed as in moderate condition. In general, much of the woodland is lacking in structure or dense understorey and shrub layer and this could be enhanced. Conversely areas of the woodland are well-structured with healthy mature/ ancient specimens and deadwood abundant, and management of these areas should focus on monitoring and light touch management where required.

4.54. At present the site displays clear ancient woodland indicators, alongside evidence of significant recreational pressure from being well-used by local residents. The site provides a small, but important part of the current open green space surrounding the town and has continuous canopy extending off-site linking nearby woodland sites and potentially providing connectivity/ forming part of an important wildlife dispersal corridor around the built form of Uckfield town.

4.55. As future development is due to enclose this site to the west and south there is a risk that additional disturbance and damage could result in a cessation of already struggling natural regeneration processes, and that wildlife populations currently present may die out or be cut off and cease to persist, threatening the long-term health and resilience of the site.

4.56. Dedicated protected species surveys, as have been commissioned/ are underway for hazel dormice and foraging and commuting bats are needed to fully understand what wildlife communities are currently supported on site and to design specific management and enhancements.

4.57. There was some evidence of plants colonising or escaping from adjacent residential areas although they did not appear to be invasive in nature or a major cause for concern. Localised occurrence of cherry laurel was recorded and this should be removed.

4.58. There was some evidence of tree disease with semi-mature/ mature ash trees showing likely signs of ash dieback present and due to health and safety concerns, monitoring must remain a priority.

4.59. Existing and ongoing works at the site should focus on directing access and allowing natural processes to take place. New tree planting has been carried out but many of the specimens have been trampled and are unlikely to succeed. Brash hedging (Jan 2026) effectively cuts of certain areas of the woodland and could reduce informal desire lines over time. Some areas of the woodland are experiencing mature tree loss with little / no high canopy left – these areas should be the focus of targeted scrub management and additional planting, with groups of newly planted trees to be fully protected from trampling effects.

4.60. Overall, the site is well-used by members of the public – with major housing developments due to increase this pressure significantly in the future, putting pressure on this relatively small site to deliver while also supporting wildlife. The habitat is highly valuable with intrinsic value for biodiversity and human wellbeing, and these two pressures seem to be conflicting at this site, with an expected decline in condition, if appropriate management measures are not implemented. Any management should be carefully designed to ensure that valuable habitats are carefully protected, ensuring their long-term viability.

# 5 Management Recommendations and Opportunities

### *Aims and Objectives*

5.1. The purpose of this section of the report is to set out some broad management suggestions for the dominant habitat types across the site. The aim of these recommendations is to provide a base for the council to manage the site in the next period after the cessation of the extant management plan and allow that plan to be updated accordingly.

5.2. The objectives of these recommendations are to allow the council to carry out straightforward set of management works that are realistic in scope and aims to increase the biodiversity value of the site by increasing structural complexity and species richness.

5.3. Due to the future development pressure around the site, it is not thought expedient to aim for fully restored woodland habitat, however restricting current trampling effects, reducing browsing pressure and carrying out some regular management and monitoring of the site could limit negative impacts and allow natural regeneration to take place. Public amenity value and monitoring efforts can be enhanced through a number of nature-based initiatives delivered through collaboration with local wildlife groups.

5.4. A number of targeted enhancement measures are recommended to strengthen the ecological value of Boothland Wood, improve habitat resilience, and support known or potential protected species. These measures also help limit public impact and align with Uckfield Town Council's wider woodland management objectives.

### *Bluebell protection & access management*

5.5. Bluebell carpets are a rare and declining habitat. There is trampling and damage associated with regular use of the woodland by members of the public which risks permanent damage to this habitat.

- Brash hedging (using cut brash from coppicing or scrub works) should be installed along key desire lines where trampling is affecting dense bluebell carpets, particularly in the western hornbeam block. Brash hedging naturally decays, is visually unobtrusive, and reinforces path lines without formal fencing.
- Brash hedging can also be used to shield sensitive ground flora (violet, anemone, stitchwort) where trampling pressure is greatest.
- Ensure no new access into sensitive bluebell/ wildflower areas.
- Install small interpretation signs explaining the importance of protecting this valuable habitat.

### *Rotational coppicing & restoring the understorey*

5.6. Several parts of Boothland Wood show a reduced shrub layer, especially in the western hornbeam block. There is a wealth of published practical guidance on ancient woodland restoration available from Natural England, the Forestry Commission[10] , DEFRA[11], Woodland Trust[12] and the Forestry Commission. Restoration should primarily focus on a gradual adjustment of light levels through slow, phased thinning, careful coppicing allowing surviving plants, trees and fungi to adapt slowly.

5.7. To reinstate understorey structure:

- Coppice hazel and hornbeam on a 7 and 15-year rotation respectively, working in small blocks/coupes to create dappled light and encourage natural regeneration. Some well-formed trees can be left in each coupe to establish a 'coppice with standards' system.
- Protect new shoots / regrowth from browsing pressure either by 'lop and top' method of using branches from cut material to pile on top of the stool or build dead hedges around groups of stools.
- Where the understorey fails to return naturally, consider:
    - plug planting of native woodland shrubs such as hazel, holly, spindle, dogwood, guelder rose, and hawthorn;
    - creating temporary exclusions with brash hedges to protect regrowth from trampling;
    - reducing canopy density through selective removal of suppressed or unstable individuals.
- Coppice regrowth also supports early-successional flowers (violets, stitchwort), which in turn benefit dormice and invertebrates.

### *Wet ditch monitoring & potential District Level Licensing (DLL) pond creation opportunities*

5.8. The wet ditch is central to Boothland's hydrology.

- Install a simple seasonal water-level monitoring regime (e.g., photos and depth rods) to understand variability.
- Monitoring will help assess whether the site could form part of any District Level Licensing (DLL) opportunities with NatureSpace, particularly where ephemeral or semi-permanent ponds could be sympathetically created. – potential for collaboration with the Newt Partnership would provide ongoing funding for pond maintenance on site.
- If hydrology is viable, targeted collaboration could deliver breeding ponds for great crested newts, with minimal disturbance to the woodland.
- The council may be able to secure additional funding or collaborate to design a functional habitat corridor through the proposed new developments surrounding the site to ensure that wet ditch functionality with the wider landscape can be retained.
- Protect wet features from overshadowing or infill by managing encroaching scrub.



[10] FCPG201.pdf
[11] Keepers of time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England
[12] wood-wise-ancient-woodland-restoration.pdf

### *Mature / Ancient / Veteran tree protection — Mature oak and ash*

5.9. Boothland Wood contains a good stock of mature oak and surviving ash specimens.

5.10. Recommended actions:

- Retain mature oaks as long-term veteranisation candidates; avoid disturbance to root zones.
- For ash: retain stable individuals showing tolerance to ash dieback, as they are important genetic reservoirs.
- Map these trees and manage surrounding vegetation to maintain open crowns and good airflow.
- Use brash hedging or low-level barriers to prevent root compaction where footfall is high.

### *Deadwood & structural habitat creation*

5.11. Deadwood is currently present but could be expanded to support saproxylic invertebrates, fungi, amphibians and small mammals.

5.12. Recommended actions:

- Standing deadwood: retain standing trunks wherever safe. Brash hedging can be positioned to discourage public access around unstable stems.
- Fallen deadwood: retain all windblown timber unless obstructing paths.
- Deadwood piles / hibernacula: create in shaded areas, using large logs as the core and brash around the exterior. These benefit newts, toads, grass snakes, overwintering hedgehogs (if present) and invertebrates.

### *Black poplar planting*

5.13. Uckfield Town Council has planted native black poplar (*Populus nigra ssp. betulifolia*) at some of its sites.

- Protect them from deer browsing using guards or brash enclosures.
- Ensure they have adequate light levels by selectively managing surrounding scrub.
- Consider further planting in wetter marginal areas if space allows, as black poplar is a UK priority species.

### *Dormouse considerations*

5.14. Dormouse presence has been confirmed adjacent to the SE boundary (Ridgewood Care Home survey, 2025), although no evidence was recorded within Boothland Wood during last year's survey.

*Recommendations*

- Maintain and enhance continuous canopy and shrub connectivity along the SE boundary.
- Improve the understorey through coppicing, planting hazel/honeysuckle/bramble patches.
- Avoid large-scale tree removal that would sever canopy links.
- Install a small dormouse footprint tunnel transect or nest tubes for ongoing monitoring (if appropriate under licence).

### *Roosting, Foraging and Commuting Bats*

5.15. The woodland provides opportunities for roosting bats in the form of multiple mature trees with suitable bat roosting features. There was a good amount of standing deadwood and live trees with suitable features including woodpecker holes and branch and stem cavities that could lead to deep cavities and potentially support maternity and/ or hibernation roosts.

5.16. While urban development associated with Uckfield is unlikely to provide significant resource for bats locally, there are larger pockets of woodland as well as riparian habitats associated with the River Uck floodplain present in the wider surroundings which represent good quality foraging, roosting and commuting habitats for bats, and it is likely that a high diversity of bat species is present surrounding the site.

5.17. There are granted licences relating to roosting bats surrounding the site, and it is likely to provide an important resource for bats locally, particularly species such as common and soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared. The site is however relatively isolated, and this is due to worsen as construction for approved schemes progresses. It is unknown at present whether the site supports rare species of bat as these are typically associated with less disturbed / more rural locations.

*Recommendations*

- Static monitoring surveys have been commissioned to understand what bat species are currently present within the woods. Further survey effort in the form of bat box monitoring or activity surveys could help build a better understanding of the bats currently present as well as monitor how they respond to future developments due to surround the site.
- Ongoing bat monitoring will help build a clearer picture of species and activity. To strengthen roosting and foraging habitats.
- Install bat boxes on mature oak and other suitable trees, using a mix of crevice and cavity types.
- Maintain open flight corridors around rides, glades, and the watercourse.
- Enhance foraging by promoting insect-rich zones: wet margins, coppice coupes, deadwood piles, and native flowering shrubs.
- Retain and expand wet woodland features as these support high invertebrate abundance.
- Meeting with developers of adjacent fields to secure dark corridors or suitable woodland buffers/ ecotones around the site to limit negative impacts of Artificial Lighting At Night (ALAN).

***Community engagement & citizen science***

5.18. The site is bordered by residential development to the east and is well used by the local community as an open space. Future development will add to this pressure. The management plan emphasises the importance of bringing people into the reserve and raising awareness of its wildlife value.

*Recommendations*

- Annual Bioblitz with Sussex Wildlife Trust, local schools, Lewes/Wealden community groups.
- Bat walks with Sussex Bat Group (given the site is noted as bat foraging habitat).
- Pollinator transects (could be done by volunteers using UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme protocols).
- Seasonal guided walks on woodland trees, fungi, birds and invertebrates.
- Social media platforms and groups to encourage community engagement with wildlife recording and monitoring.

***Climate resilience & long-term habitat condition***

5.19. One of the stated management objectives of the existing woodland management plan is to increase resilience to climate change and extreme weather events. Some measures could include:

- Ongoing, regular monitoring of tree health to identify possible decay fungus or other signs of weakness early where possible. – Annually and after extreme weather events/ storms.

- Encouraging natural regeneration and improving woodland condition in accordance with the woodland condition assessment, the site would be more able to withstand severe fluctuations including drought conditions.

### *Conclusions*

5.20. Structural woodland management objectives - The existing Woodland Management Plan emphasises maintaining a diverse woodland structure, including the use of coppicing and selective management interventions to enhance habitat complexity and long-term resilience. The proposed Boothland Wood measures such as rotational hazel coppicing, increasing deadwood, and managing cherry laurel, are fully in line with these objectives and reinforce long-term structural goals.

5.21. Tree safety and disease response work - Uckfield Town Council has been undertaking phased works across Boothland Wood and Nightingale Wood in response to ash dieback, with surveys carried out in collaboration with the Forestry Commission and other experts. The proposed management actions including regular condition monitoring, retention of stable deadwood, and strategic planting where needed, complement this ongoing work.

5.22. Council's priorities for habitat protection and biodiversity - The Council's strategic priorities include protecting local woodlands, maintaining healthy ecosystems, and improving green spaces for public wellbeing. The Boothland Wood recommendations such as protecting bluebell areas, managing trampling, enhancing wet woodland, and creating wildlife features directly support these aims and help deliver the longer-term biodiversity targets identified in the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.

5.23. Boothland Wood is recognised by the Council as a public site with ecological and heritage significance, and they have already improved access routes, steps and bridges. Recommendations to line pathways, reducing trampling, and developing volunteer days build on this by ensuring public access is balanced with conservation objectives, consistent with the approach advocated in the existing management plan.

5.24. The recommended management actions for Boothland Wood are fully in line with the existing Uckfield Town Council Woodland Management Plan (2021), which sets out long-term priorities for ecological resilience, ancient woodland protection, disease management and habitat enhancement. Recent Council works addressing ash dieback and woodland safety are complemented by proposals for coppicing, ground-flora protection, increased deadwood, and wet-habitat enhancement. These recommendations also support the Council's 2025–2030 strategic objectives for green space conservation, biodiversity improvement, and community engagement. As such, the Boothland Wood management proposals build directly on, and strengthen, the existing management framework already in place for Uckfield's woodland estate.

### *Opportunities*

5.25. Where new tree planting has already taken place, additional efforts to ensure that they are successful are needed. It is recommended to extend the dead hedging/ brash hedging works to encircle new planting – preventing any access to these areas by pedestrians and/ or dogs.

5.26. Deadwood - Ideally felled trees will be left intact on the floor of the woodland/reserve. Large diameter deadwood has high ecological value, and such wood should resist flow of water in flooding incidents

5.27. Tree Management – Monitor disease, retain standing deadwood where possible.

5.28. Structural Diversity - Varying vegetation layers can improve structural diversity; introduce scrub patches among grassland for vertical complexity, plant native shrubs and small trees in clusters rather than uniform rows, allow natural regeneration in selected areas for mixed-age growth.

5.29. Add deadwood features - Create log piles, brash piles, and standing deadwood for invertebrates, fungi, and birds; position some in shaded spots and others in sunny areas for microhabitat variation.

5.30. Consider microhabitat creation measures - Scatter rocks, rubble, or sandy patches for thermoregulation and nesting sites and include bare soil strips for ground-nesting bees and wildflowers.

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# Photographs

**Picture 1**

Mature coppice woodland with multiple-stemmed trees in dappled shade with large areas of bare ground which is compacted with high footfall – area where two pathways converge. Towards eastern edge of central portion.

**Picture 2**

Footbridge over wet ditch within main northern block showing tree fall and access constraints with existing pathways.

**Picture 3**

Mature woodland canopy but lacking understorey or shrub layer – conditions for much of the southern and central block.

**Picture 4**

Over-stood hazel coppice with scattered standards, species-rich bluebell ground layer and localised deadwood piles but lacking vertical structure and cover for wildlife. Showing informal trampling off pathways. Woodland open space present centrally to central block.

**Picture 5**

Northern portion of woodland looking west. Mature hornbeam, oak and ash dominated woodland. Understorey lacking structure – patchy bramble scrub present but generally open.

**Picture 6**

Eastern boundary of main/ northern block that currently has connectivity with Ridgewood development site and small woodland pocket with hazel dormouse presence confirmed. Area is unmanaged and footpath in this small area is barely used and becoming impassable with bramble scrub/ fallen deadwood. Overstood hazel coppice with dappled sunlight. Boundary fencelines with dense scrub provides suitable cover for protected species.

**Picture 7**

Wet ditch present around northern boundary of woodland, dry during summer months. Photo taken on 23rd June 2025 following strong winds – several mature trees came down.

**Picture 8**

Veteran / over mature ash tree located towards northwest corner of woodland – following storm conditions during summer 2025 several large trees and limbs came down. This tree was then subject to heavy pruning to leave a monolith. Logs cut to small size and left in situ, some timber chipped on site.

Above - Ganoderma sp. Decay fungus at base of tree.

# Plant Species List

| English name | Scientific name | Woodland - Western block | Tree composition | Ground flora | Shrub |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alder | *Alnus glutinosa* | | F | | |
| Aspen | *Populus tremula* | | R | | |
| Ash | *Fraxinus excelsior* | | F | | |
| Black poplar | *Populus nigra* | | | | |
| Blackthorn | *Prunus spinosa* | | | | *LD* |
| Bluebell | *Hyaconthoides non-scripta* | LA | | *D* | |
| Bracken | *Pteridium aquilinum* | | | *O* | *LA* |
| Bramble | *Rubus fruticosus agg.* | D | | *LD / F* | *LD - F* |
| Cherry laurel | *Prunus laurocerasus* | | | | *LF* |
| Chicken of the woods | *Laetiporus sulphureus* | | R | | |
| Cleavers | *Galium aparine* | | | *R* | |
| Common nettle | *Urtica dioica* | | | | |
| Common rush | *Juncus effusus* | | | | |
| Cow parsley | *Anthriscus sylvestris* | | | | |
| Creeping buttercup | *Ranunculus repens* | | | | |
| Cypress, leyland | *Cupressus x leylandii* | | R | | |
| Dog's mercury | *Mercurialis perennis* | | | *LD* | |
| Dog rose | *Rosa canina* | | | | *R* |
| Early dog violet | *Viola reichenbachiana* | | | *O* | |
| Elder | *Sambucus nigra* | | | *R* | |
| English oak | *Quercus robur* | O | F | | |
| Foxglove | *Digitalis purpurea* | | | *R* | |
| Ganoderma sp. | *Ganoderma spp.* | | R | | |
| Garlic mustard | *Alliaria petiolata* | | | *R* | |
| Greater stitchwort | *Stellaria holostea* | | | *LA* | |
| Hawthorn | *Crataegus monogyna* | | O | | |
| Hazel | *Corylus avellana* | A - coppice | LD | | |
| Hedge woundwort | *Stachys sylvatica* | | | *R* | |
| Herb robert | *Geranium robertianum* | | | *R* | |
| Holly | *Ilex aquifolium* | | LD | | |
| Honeysuckle | *Lonicera periclymenum* | | | *O* | |
| Hornbeam | *Carpinus betulus* | D | AB/ LD | | |
| Hogweed | *Heracleum sphondylium* | | | *O* | |
| Ivy | *Hedera helix* | | | *LD - O* | |
| Jelly ear | *Auricularia auricula-judae* | | R | | |
| Lesser celandine | *Ficaria verna* | | | *A* | |
| Lord's and ladies | *Arum maculatum* | | | *R* | |
| Male fern | *Dryopteris fililx-mas* | | | | |

| English name | Scientific name | Woodland - Western block | Tree composition | Ground flora | Shrub |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pendulous sedge | *Carex pendula* | | | *O* | |
| Primrose | *Primula vulgaris* | | | *R* | |
| Red campion | *Silene dioica* | | | *R* | |
| Rough meadowgrass | *Poa trivialis* | | | *R* | |
| Scots pine | *Pinus sylvestris* | | R | | |
| Silver birch | *Betula pendula* | | R | | |
| Soft rush | *Juncus effusus* | | | *R* | |
| Sycamore | *Acer pseudoplatanus* | | R | | |
| Turkeytail | *Trametes versicolor* | | R | | |
| Wild garlic | *Allium ursinum* | | | *R* | |
| Wild cherry | *Prunus avium* | | | | *R* |
| Wood anemone | *Anemonoides nemorosa* | | | *LA* | |
| Wood avens | *Geum urbanum* | | | *O* | |
| Wood dock | *Rumex sanguineus* | | | *O* | |
| Wood melick | *Melica uniflora* | | | *R* | |
| Wood sedge | *Carex slyvatica* | | | *O* | |
| Wood speedwell | *Veronica montana* | | | *R* | |
| Yellow pimpernel | *Lysimachia nemorum* | | | *R* | |
| Yew | *Taxus baccata* | | R | | |

Co-ecology

**Meeting of the Environment & Leisure Committee**

**Monday 2 March 2026**
**Agenda Item 7.3**

**TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE CONSECRATION OF THE NEW Y- SECTION AND VARIOUS IMPROVEMENTS FOR SNATTS ROAD CEMETERY**

## 1.0 Overview

1.1 Further to the initial mapping of the new Y-section at Snatts Road Cemetery, we have set apart the areas for consecration and applied to the Bishop of the Diocese in which Snatts Road Cemetery is situated, to arrange a date for the consecration service with their solicitors. Once the legal preliminaries are completed, a short ceremony will be arranged with the Bishop and Registrar.

1.2 The new layout will provide for 253 burial plots (previously 301) and 827 plots for ashes (previously 976), with fifty per cent of those areas being allocated for secular and non-secular traditions. This now includes the incorporation of a fifteen-metre buffer zone to avoid any root damage in the root protection area. The Estates Manager has advised that some trees surveyed in the Y- section would also need to be removed due to oak decline.

1.3 The burial ground has already been levelled and bordered, and the new ashes plots are adjacent to the Cloistered Memorial Wall, creating a natural extension to the space for remembering loved ones.

1.4 We will need to update the burial regulations and align the current rules with the requirements of the new section. Members should also note, that once this area is fully occupied, there will be no further areas left to consecrate within this cemetery, *unless* individuals make a formal request for a plot within non-consecrated land to be blessed in the future.

1.5 The specific date and time will be communicated to members once confirmed.

## 2.0 Improvements to the north of the cemetery

2.1 On the north side of the cemetery, grass areas are currently being mowed, and pathways are being cleared, widening access for visitors and wheelchair users. New cemetery signs are due to be installed.

2.2 We have also begun to write to deed owners who have items on graves that are not safe for grass cutting or maintenance, and which may cause injury to staff, visitors, or damage to machinery.

2.3 At a recent Cemetery Forum hosted by Uckfield Town Council, the Senior Administrative Officer was joined by representatives from local burial authorities and our Estates Team to compare any local issues and to share any ideas for improvement. A couple of ideas we liked included a Cemetery Service clock and a new watering can station, for visitors to care for graves (see images below for reference purposes only).

## 3.0 Recommendations

3.1 Members are asked to note the report.

Contact Officer: Rachel Newton


App A - Cemetery Service clock – example


App B – Watering can station - example

**Meeting of the Environment & Leisure Committee**

**Monday 2 March 2026**

**Agenda Item 8.1**

## TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE 3G PITCH APPLICATION

### 1.0 Brief update

1.1 With funds secured by Wealden District Council and Uckfield Town Council to contribute to the delivery of a new 3G Football pitch on Town Council owned land, work is underway to prepare the full application to the Football Foundation for the remaining grant funding and support for this project.

1.2 The extent of the wet weather experienced during the past two winter seasons, has confirmed the need for a pitch, that can be accessed all year round, with usage of the existing 3G pitch at the Uckfield College, oversubscribed.

1.3 Two workstreams are currently underway to progress the full application:
(i) SSL (Sports Pitch Consultants) – are working on the technical assessments and surveys for the site, which includes consideration of the location, geology, and ecological impacts, as part of their preparations for drawing up a planning application.

It is hoped the planning application will be submitted to the local planning authority Spring 2026;

(ii) SLPC Consulting Ltd are working on:
- stakeholder engagement with local community and potential users;
- business, management and maintenance arrangements for the site;
- project plan with clear indication of pricing, income and expenditure forecasts, and targets for usage;
- ensuring we meet a range of local needs, and address inequalities;
- developing service level agreements for the Town Council with key clubs/users;
- preparing the full application to the Football Foundation;

It is hoped that the full application can be submitted to the Football Foundation by December 2026, if not before.

### 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the report.

Contact Officer: Holly Goring/Thomas Woollard

**Meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee**

**Monday 2 March 2026**

**Agenda Item 10.5**

**REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES:**
**UCKFIELD RAILWAY LINE PARISHES COMMITTEE UPDATE**

**1.0 Summary report**

The Chair opened the meeting by thanking Uckfield Town Council for allowing them to meet in The Civic Centre, as the normal venue was unavailable.

Members were welcomed, especially Messrs Borman and Darby from GTR. It was good to have input from the operating company again after a prolonged absence, and Brian Hart from the BML2 campaign.

Following the contact by the committee with Oxted School, the situation regarding the behaviour of the school children between Oxted and Edenbridge had improved. This might in part be as a result of the reduction in numbers from around 150 to 100 currently.

There was extensive discussion on the current service levels, which were generally considered to be acceptable excepting following major incidents on the infrastructure. The level of cancellations had reduced from 4.2% to 3.2%, and part cancellations remain at 2.0%. Members expressed the desire to see an increase in service levels, but accepted the constraints imposed by a single-line system. The 3-car unit, which is due to transfer to EMR for refurbishment, will be replaced by a similar unit from the Marsh Line, so our current service levels will be unaffected.

There was no information currently on the possible effect of the termination of the GTR franchise in May 2026.

The current rolling stock was approximately 20 years old and could have a further 10 years of anticipated life. The possibility of bi-mode units was further discussed in view of concerns about extending the third rail system for health and safety reasons.

The question of ticketing, particularly when purchasing from the conductor on the train, raises queries, as it is illegal to board the train without a ticket. If the booking office is closed and the station machine is not working, passengers have been fined for travelling without a ticket. Tap in and Tap out provision is being extended on the system, but not currently on our line.

Requests for an improved system of replacement buses should be investigated when rail service is not available.

The next meeting was scheduled for 13th May 2026 at 2.30 pm at The Buxted Inn.

Councillor C. Macve

**2.0 Recommendation**

2.1 Members are asked to note the report and provide comments.

Contact Officer: Rachel Newton