

Ecological Impact Assessment

Trywoods, Horsham
Rugby Football Club

South
Downs
Ecology

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Summary

South Downs Ecology has been commissioned by Woods for Learning CIC to produce a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) of Trywoods (Heron Copse), an area of ancient woodland adjacent to Horsham Rugby Football Club, Hammerpond Road, Horsham (RH13 6PJ). The assessment has been produced in support of a planning application to Horsham District Council for the continued use of the woodland for outdoor learning, ecological skills and nature-based experiences by the Woods for Learning CIC. The application is partly retrospective, seeking to regularise activities which have already taken place within the woodland, as well as covering the proposed continuation of these activities.

A combined arboricultural and ecological site visit was carried out on 2nd September 2026 by George Sayer (BSc (Hons), PgDip, MCIEEM, MArborA, LANTRA Professional Tree Inspection 2019). The site comprises the area of ancient semi-natural woodland recorded on the Ancient Woodland Inventory, classified under the National Vegetation Classification as W10e (*Quercus robur*–*Pteridium aquilinum*–*Rubus fruticosus* woodland, *Ilex aquifolium* sub-community).

The woodland has not been subject to significant management in recent history other than the activities associated with the current use, which include limited coppicing, halo-thinning, removal of cherry laurel and ash affected by ash dieback, and clearance of historic rubbish and fly-tipped debris. These activities are considered, on balance, to represent a benefit to the woodland, which is otherwise dense, dark and largely lacking in ground flora or structural diversity.

Provided the recommendations of the accompanying Arboricultural and Silvicultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement (AIA) (GS648.Trywoods.AIA.v1) and the general best practice measures set out in this report are followed, the proposals are not considered likely to result in significant harm to the ancient woodland.

Subject to the above, and to the retention of all trees identified as having bat roost suitability, the proposals are not considered to have a significant negative impact on protected or notable species, designated sites, or the wider ancient woodland habitat, and would accord with the relevant national and local planning policy.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Woods for Learning CIC has commissioned a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) of Trywoods (Heron Copse), an area of ancient woodland adjacent to Horsham Rugby Football Club, Hammerpond Road, Horsham, West Sussex (RH13 6PJ), in support of a planning application to Horsham District Council for the continued use of the woodland for outdoor learning, ecological skills and nature-based experiences.
- 1.2 A tree survey and Arboricultural and Silvicultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement (AIA) was carried out on 2nd September 2026 by George Sayer (BScHons, PgDip, MCIEEM, MArborA, LANTRA Professional Tree Inspection 2019), from which a schedule and constraints plan of notable trees on and surrounding the site was produced (GS648.Trywoods.ETS and GS648.Trywoods.TCP) in accordance with BS 5837:2012 – ‘Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations’. An ecological site visit was carried out concurrently, from which this EclA has been produced.
- 1.3 The purpose of the assessment has been to identify whether any potential impacts upon protected species, habitats or designated sites have occurred, or might occur, through the continued use of the woodland, and to propose mitigation or avoidance measures where necessary. Based on the results of the appraisal, recommendations for potential ecological enhancements have also been provided.

Site Description and Surrounding Area

- 1.4 The site comprises the whole of Heron Copse, an area of ancient, semi-natural woodland forming the southern part of a larger, contiguous block of ancient woodland which extends north to include Highland Copse. The site is bounded to the south-east by the pitches, car park and clubhouse of Horsham Rugby Football Club, to the north-west by residential development off Grebe Crescent and Heron Way, and to the north and west by further ancient woodland and the wider countryside beyond.
- 1.5 The site lies to the south-east of Horsham town centre, off Hammerpond Road, within an area characterised by extensive tracts of ancient and semi-natural woodland (including St Leonard’s Forest) to the east, with the built-up area of Horsham to the west.

Proposals

- 1.6 The proposals are for the continued use of Trywoods (Heron Copse) for outdoor learning, ecological skills and nature-based experiences by the Woods for Learning CIC. A number of activities have already taken place within the woodland and the application is partly retrospective, seeking to regularise these activities as well as their continuation.

2.0 Scope of Assessment

- 1. Categorise habitats present on the site;*
- 2. Identify habitat which may have potential for protected species;*
- 3. Identify whether any signs of protected species are present on-site;*
- 4. Identify the impacts of activities which have already taken place within the woodland, and of the proposed continuation of these activities;*
- 5. Recommend whether further surveys are required, or whether there are any relevant constraints with regards to protected species and European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licensing;*
- 6. Set out appropriate avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures;*
- 7. Provide recommendations as to how the site and proposals could be enhanced with regards to protected species and habitats.*

- 2.1 This appraisal and assessment is deemed to be relevant for a maximum of 18 months due to the possibility of changes in the habitats on-site. Should the site or proposals alter, the ecologist should be consulted to confirm that the appraisal remains valid.

3.0 Planning Policy and Legislation

National Planning Policy

- 3.1 Chapter 19 of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026, effective 17 August 2026) sets out the government's policies for conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Its stated objective is "to influence the design and location of new development to help drive nature's recovery and contribute to wider environmental outcomes, safeguarding our most important habitats, species and landscapes and recognising the centrality of natural capital to delivering sustainable growth."
- 3.2 This chapter comprises one plan-making policy and five national decision-making policies:
- 3.3 N1 – Identifying environmental opportunities and safeguards (plan-making): Development plans should draw on Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Protected Landscape Management Plans, River Basin Management Plans and similar evidence to: set out a hierarchy of designated sites and valued landscape/geodiversity/biodiversity features (e.g. chalk streams); identify opportunities for habitat restoration and strengthened ecological networks; steer development toward land of least environmental value (limiting development in Protected Landscapes, avoiding best/most versatile agricultural land, avoiding harm to designated nature sites); and set green infrastructure standards aligned with Natural England's Green Infrastructure Standards. Local biodiversity net gain (BNG) standards above the statutory minimum are only permitted for specific site allocations where fully justified and deliverable and must not apply to development exempt from statutory BNG.
- 3.4 N2 – Improving the natural environment (decision-making): Development proposals should assess and, where possible, conserve or enhance environmental qualities (habitats, landscape character, agricultural land quality — favouring poorer-quality land); connect to wider ecological networks; retain and enhance existing natural features (trees, hedgerows); use green infrastructure/nature-based solutions for multiple benefits (biodiversity, SuDS, climate resilience, recreation); minimise biodiversity harm and support priority species (proposals must incorporate swift bricks unless technically impracticable); and ensure long-term management of green infrastructure. Where significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or compensated as a last resort, the development should be refused. Enhancements beyond statutory BNG can only be required via up-to-date plan policy for specific allocations, not applied generally or to exempt development.
- 3.5 N3 – Trees in new development: New streets should generally be tree-lined, with trees incorporated elsewhere (parks, community orchards) using appropriate species/placement (with arboricultural advice) and secured long-term maintenance.

- 3.6 N4 – Protected Landscapes (National Parks, the Broads, National Landscapes): Development should be limited in scale/extent, sensitively sited/designed, with substantial weight given to conserving natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. Major development within Protected Landscapes should be refused except in exceptional circumstances demonstrated to be in the public interest, assessed against: need (including national considerations such as mineral supply and economic impact of refusal); the cost/scope of siting elsewhere; and environmental/landscape/recreational harm and scope to mitigate it. Where major development is exceptionally approved, mitigation of impacts on special qualities (e.g. tranquillity, dark skies) is required. Development within the setting of Protected Landscapes must avoid/minimise adverse impacts.
- 3.7 N5 – Maintaining the character of the coast: Development should preserve undeveloped coastline character while improving public access, and must not hinder the King Charles III England Coast Path. Heritage Coast development should respect special character, with major development in Heritage Coast areas not supported unless compatible with that character. Sites within Coastal Change Management Areas are also subject to policy F9.
- 3.8 N6 – Areas of particular importance for biodiversity and geodiversity: A tiered protection regime applies:
- 3.9 International sites (Habitats sites): refuse unless an appropriate assessment concludes no adverse effect on site integrity (alone or in-combination), or the derogation tests are met (no feasible less-damaging alternative, imperative reasons of overriding public interest, and compensatory measures secure network coherence) — or the impact is addressed via an Environmental Delivery Plan with the developer paying the nature restoration levy.
- 3.10 National sites (SSSIs): support only if no adverse effect on notified features, or benefits clearly outweigh impacts on those features and the wider SSSI network, or impacts are addressed via an Environmental Delivery Plan with the nature restoration levy.
- 3.11 Local sites (Local Nature Reserves, local wildlife/geological sites): support only if no significant adverse effect on site integrity, or benefits clearly outweigh impacts on the qualifying features. Irreplaceable habitats (e.g. ancient woodland, ancient/veteran trees) must be refused loss/deterioration unless wholly exceptional reasons exist (e.g. certain infrastructure projects) with a suitable compensation strategy. This policy applies to impacts from development both inside and outside designated boundaries.

Local Planning Policy

3.12 The site lies within the Horsham District Council administrative area. The currently adopted development plan is the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015), which includes the following policies of relevance:

- Policy 26 Strategic Policy: Countryside Protection
- Policy 31 – Biodiversity

3.13 Policy 31 seeks to safeguard and enhance the ecology and biodiversity of the District, including its Protected and Priority Species and habitats, and requires development proposals to provide opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. It states that:

1. Development will be supported where it can demonstrate that it maintains or enhances the existing network of green infrastructure. Proposals that would result in the loss of existing green infrastructure will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that new opportunities will be provided that mitigates or compensates for this loss, and ensures that the ecosystem services of the area are retained.

2. Development proposals will be required to contribute to the enhancement of existing biodiversity, and should create and manage new habitats where appropriate. The Council will support new development which retains and /or enhances significant features of nature conservation on development sites. The Council will also support development which makes a positive contribution to biodiversity through the creation of green spaces, and linkages between habitats to create local and regional ecological networks.

3. Where felling of protected trees is necessary, replacement planting with a suitable species will be required.

4. a) Particular consideration will be given to the hierarchy of sites and habitats in the district as follows:

i. Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

ii. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

iii. Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and **any areas of Ancient woodland**, local geodiversity or other irreplaceable habitats not already identified in i & ii above.

b) Where development is anticipated to have a direct or indirect adverse impact on sites or features for biodiversity, development will be refused unless it can be demonstrated that:

i. The reason for the development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site; and,

ii. That appropriate mitigation and compensation measures are provided.

5. Any development with the potential to impact Arun Valley SPA or the Mens SAC will be subject to a HRA to determine the need for an Appropriate Assessment. In addition, development will be required to be in accordance with the necessary mitigation measures for development set out in the HRA of this plan.

- 3.14 Policy 26 is a strategic policy which notes that “Development will be considered acceptable where it does not lead, either individually or cumulatively, to a significant increase in the overall level of activity in the countryside, and protects, and/or conserves, and/or enhances, the key features and characteristics of the landscape character area in which it is located, including;
1. The development pattern of the area, its historical and ecological qualities, tranquillity and sensitivity to change;
 2. The pattern of woodlands, fields, hedgerows, trees, waterbodies and other features; and
 3. The landform of the area.
- 3.15 The emerging Horsham District Local Plan 2023–2040 is at an advanced stage of examination (Schedule of Proposed Main Modifications consulted upon in July–August 2026, with Stage Two examination hearings anticipated in autumn 2026 and adoption expected in early 2027). It therefore carries increasing material weight. Strategic Policy 17 (Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity) is the relevant emerging policy, and the Inspector has recommended that it be strengthened to require regard to be given to Natural England and Forestry Commission guidance on ancient woodland when determining applications affecting such habitat.

Legislation

- 3.16 Legislation relating to wildlife and biodiversity of particular relevance to this EcIA includes:
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017;
 - The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
 - The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006;
 - The Protection of Badgers Act 1992;
 - The Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.
- 3.17 All species of bat and their roosts are protected under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or handle a bat, to possess a bat (live or dead), disturb a roosting bat, or sell or offer a bat for sale without a licence. It is also an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place used by bats for shelter, whether they are present or not.
- 3.18 All UK bird species are protected against disturbance whilst occupying a nest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Developments or activities that could predictably disturb, kill or injure nesting birds could result in an offence. A number of woodland bird species are also targets of UK and Local Biodiversity Action Plans and are listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006, obligating the local authority to have regard to their conservation.

- 3.19 In the UK, dormice are legally protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and have further protection as a European Protected Species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Dormice are also a 'Species of Principal Importance' under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or disturb a dormouse or to damage, destroy or block access to areas of suitable habitat. West Sussex, and the Weald in particular, is a national stronghold for this species.
- 3.20 All widespread reptiles are protected against killing and injury under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and must also be given consideration under the NERC Act 2006 as part of the planning process.
- 3.21 Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. It is an offence to harm badgers or to disturb badgers or their setts.
- 3.22 All other mammals receive general protection against cruelty, inhumane killing or injuring under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.

4.0 Methodology

Desktop Study

- 4.1 A desktop study was undertaken using Ordnance Survey mapping and GIS plans produced using Land App. Statutory designated sites were identified within 2.0 km of the site (Figure No. 01 – Designated Sites Plan) and local sites (Sites of Nature Conservation Interest – SNCIs) were identified within 1.0 km of the site using the Horsham District Interactive Map. Ancient Woodland Inventory records were reviewed for the site and surrounding area (Figure No. 02 – Ancient Woodland Map).
- 4.2 A search was also made of Natural England’s national register of granted European Protected Species (EPS) Mitigation Licences for bats and dormice within 2.0 km of the site, accessed via the MAGIC interactive mapping service (magic.gov.uk).

Site Visit

- 4.3 A combined arboricultural and ecological site visit was carried out on 2nd September 2026 by George Sayer. Habitats were recorded according to the closest National Vegetation Classification (NVC) and UK Habitat (UKHab) habitat types, with further detail included. All habitats present on-site were recorded on a Woodland Habitat Plan (Figure No. 03) and the site’s location and boundary is shown on the site location plan (Figure No. 04).
- 4.4 Weather conditions during the survey were suitable for ecological assessment and are not considered to have constrained the results.
- 4.5 During the survey, any constraints with regard to protected species were considered; the site was considered for its potential for protected species even where signs of these species were not noted at the time of survey. Protected and notable species considered as part of this assessment include but are not limited to:
 - Bats – Foraging, Commuting, Roosting and Swarming
 - Dormice – Nesting, Foraging and Commuting
 - Badgers – Sett-building, Commuting and Foraging
 - Reptiles – Terrestrial Active and Hibernation Habitat
 - Nesting and Wintering Birds
 - Rare or Notable Saproxylic and other Invertebrates
 - Rare or Notable Plants and Fungi
- 4.6 Due to the site visit being carried out over one day, it is possible that some signs of protected species may not be apparent within this short timeframe. This is a constraint recognised within current survey guidelines, and all reasonable effort has been made to identify evidence of protected species.

Ecological Impact Assessment

- 4.7 The methodology for EcIA follows best practice guidelines set by the Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management (CIEEM): 'Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland' (CIEEM, 2024). This includes identifying the baseline conditions on the site and subsequently rating the potential effects of the proposals based on the sensitivity and value of the resource affected, combined with the magnitude, duration and scale of the impact (or change). This is initially assessed without mitigation measures, and then assessed again allowing for the proposed mitigation measures; this provides the residual effects.
- 4.8 Each ecological feature within the site has been considered within a defined geographic context such as:
- International and European;
 - National;
 - Regional;
 - County;
 - District;
 - Local;
 - Site Level;
 - Negligible.
- 4.9 Based upon CIEEM guidance, value was determined with reference to the following factors:
- Its inclusion as a Designated Site or other protected area;
 - The presence of habitat types of conservation significance, e.g. Irreplaceable Habitats or Habitats of Principal Importance (NERC 2006);
 - The presence (or potential presence) of species of conservation significance, e.g. Species of Principal Importance (NERC 2006);
 - The presence of other protected species, e.g. those protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981;
 - The site's social and economic value.

5.0 Baseline Ecological Conditions and Protected Species Assessment

Desktop Study

Designated Sites and Habitats

- 5.1 The following is a summary of statutory protected wildlife sites recorded within 2.0 km of the site. This information is included so that the site can be considered within the ecological context of the surrounding area; these sites are not necessarily representative of the habitat on or surrounding the site and would not be directly influenced by the proposals.

Table 1: Statutory Protected Designated Sites

Site Name	Reason for designation	Distance from site
St Leonard's Forest SSSI	An 85.4 ha biological SSSI comprising ancient semi-natural deciduous woodland dominated by pedunculate oak, birch and beech. The humid microclimate of the valley supports mosses and liverworts indicative of continuous woodland cover over several thousand years, and the site supports notable invertebrates including the purple emperor butterfly. The site forms part of the wider St Leonard's Forest, at the western end of the Wealden Forest Ridge within the High Weald National Landscape.	650.0 m East

- 5.2 A search of non-statutory designated sites (e.g. Local Wildlife Sites) within 1.0 km was undertaken using the Horsham District Interactive Map:

Site Name	Reason for designation	Distance from site
St Leonard's Forest SNCI	Large semi natural and plantation woodland with heathland, ponds, ghyll streams and important populations of butterflies and flora	650.0 m East
Leechpool and Owlbeech Woods SNCI	Semi natural and plantation woodland with heathland components, streams and interesting botanical populations.	850.0 m North

- 5.3 The whole of the site is recorded on the Forestry Commission/Natural England Ancient Woodland Inventory as Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland (Figure No. 02 – Ancient Woodland Map), forming the southern part of a larger, contiguous ancient woodland block which extends north to Highland Copse. Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable habitat, reflecting its long ecological continuity and the impossibility of recreating its soil communities, structural complexity and species assemblages within a reasonable timeframe.

Habitats

Site Assessment

- 5.4 The site consists entirely of ancient, semi-natural woodland, accessed off a developed area on the corner of the Horsham Rugby Football Club car park.
- 5.5 Overall, the woodland would be classified under the National Vegetation Classification as W10e – *Quercus robur*–*Pteridium aquilinum*–*Rubus fruticosus* woodland, *Ilex aquifolium* sub-community. The oak-dominated canopy with a dense holly understorey is the diagnostic combination for W10e specifically over W10, with sweet chestnut as a frequent associate reflecting its historic management as coppice-with-standards, typical of the High Weald where chestnut was traditionally coppiced under oak standards on the Wealden clay/greensand brown earths that dominate around Horsham. The occasional rowan and birch are consistent with slightly more acid or impoverished patches within the stand.
- 5.6 The woodland consists of mature oak trees and occasional beech, interspersed with dense stands of holly and sweet chestnut that would originally have been coppiced or thinned. The understorey typically consists of dense stands of semi-mature holly, with occasional stands of downy birch and rowan in places. Bluebells are known to be present in places within the woodland, though generally suppressed by the density of the shrub layer.
- 5.7 The woodland does not appear to have been subject to significant recent management other than the activities associated with the current use. The site was known to have been used during the Second World War, with evidence remaining including the brick footings of several buildings, and old bottles. Since that time it would appear little management has occurred and stands of holly have become very dense.
- 5.8 The woodland is generally very dense and dark; a number of the mature oaks display epicormic growth and signs of shading stress due to the density of surrounding trees, and beneath there is generally very little groundcover. As a result, groundcover is generally limited apart from the aforementioned bluebells, with patches of wild currant, bramble, and nettle noted but large areas being effectively bare at the time of survey.

5.9 Under the UK Habitat Classification, the site is recorded predominantly as w1f7 – Other Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland (all within the Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland Inventory boundary), with the following distinct parcels identified on the Woodland Habitat Plan (Figure No. 03):

- An area of woodland dominated by cherry laurel (non-native, low ecological value, recommended for phased removal – see Ecological Enhancements below);
- An area of dense ash trees, felled following ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) for safety reasons, with standing and fallen deadwood retained;
- Areas of woodland previously coppiced, now with dense shrub regrowth;
- An area of recently-cut coppice;
- A small camp area, used for outdoor learning activities, in which the canopy is retained but the understorey and ground flora are more disturbed;
- A small area of developed land/sealed surface (u1b) associated with vehicular access near the site entrance.

5.10 It is noted that there is extensive standing and fallen deadwood remaining throughout the woodland, which is of high value for saproxylic invertebrates, fungi and cavity-nesting or roosting species.

6.0 Protected Species Assessment

Bats

Desktop Study

- 6.1 Within 2.0 km are 3 records of bats, for common pipistrelle and brown long-eared. These are all located to the fringes of Horsham. A lack of licences locally is likely to reflect a lack of development requiring surveys or licences.

Site Assessment

- 6.2 The woodland contains a moderate number of mature oak and beech. Most of these are away from any accessible areas; however, five trees with obvious bat roost suitability were noted:

Tree Number	Species	Features	Suitability
4	Beech	A large dead, rotting stump. Probably too decayed but riddled with holes.	PRF-M
22	Beech	A small suitable occluding cavity.	PRF-M
27	Beech	Large occluding tear-out.	PRF-M
29	Beech	Major deadwood features	PRF-M
50	Oak	Upward cavity at 4.0 m height.	PRF-M

- 6.3 The woodland likely has other roost opportunities and is of moderate to high potential for foraging and commuting. Prior to any activities, the woodland would have presented a very dense continuous block; this would be suitable for certain species such as barbastelle, but suboptimal for many bat species, which prefer wooded rides and other edge-features to navigate over dense woodland.

Birds

Desktop Study

- 6.4 No specific desktop records of notable or priority bird species were sought for this assessment but species such as tawny owl, treecreeper, and nuthatch are present locally.

Site Assessment

- 6.5 The site's ancient woodland character, with a mature canopy, dense holly understorey and extensive deadwood, provides suitable habitat for a range of common and priority woodland bird species. The density might reduce prey availability for species such as tawny owl, with few open areas for small mammals and reptiles.

Dormice

Desktop Study

- 6.6 There are no records of dormice licences within 2.0 km, but records are present to north and south of Horsham.

Site Assessment

- 6.7 The woodland forms part of an interconnected series of ancient semi-natural woodland; these are likely to support dormice at varying densities. The site woodland itself offers some potential; being so dense would allow commuting but, with limited fruit-bearing species, the density of dormice would be low.

Reptiles

Desktop Study

- 6.8 Reptiles including adders are present in the wider surrounds.

Site Assessment

- 6.9 The dense, shaded nature of the woodland floor is not generally optimal for reptiles, although sunnier margins, rides and deadwood accumulations may offer localised suitability, particularly for adders given the woodland's ancient nature.

Amphibians

Desktop Study

- 6.10 Positive survey returns for great crested newt are present around Mannings Heath, just under 2.0 km from the site. There are numerous hammer ponds and farm ponds within the wider surrounds. None lie within 250m but several lie within 500m.

Site Assessment

- 6.11 The dense, shaded nature of the woodland floor is not generally optimal for amphibians, although it may support hibernation habitat.

Badger

Site Assessment

- 6.12 Badgers are fairly ubiquitous in this part of the country; presence locally would be determined by water tables and geology with badgers generally preferring dryer sites. The woodland is largely clay but contains banks and areas which would be suitable for badgers. No setts were noted on or adjacent the woodland; however, commuting and foraging badgers likely would use the site.

Other

Site Assessment

- 6.13 The woodland contains a large quantum of deadwood of varying sizes, providing good opportunities for saproxylic invertebrates. No notable plants associated with the ancient woodland and its deadwood resource were observed; however, bluebells are known to be present in places.

7.0 Evaluation of Impacts and Mitigation

Designated Sites

Potential Impacts

- 7.1 Given the intervening distance to St Leonard's Forest SSSI, the SNCIs and the nature of the proposals (continuation of an existing, low-intensity, non-polluting outdoor education use with no significant built development), any impacts upon this or other designated sites would be of negligible magnitude and highly unlikely to occur.

Mitigation and Compensation

- 7.2 None required.

Residual Impacts

- 7.3 The impacts will be negligible.

Habitats / Ancient Woodland

Potential Impacts

- 7.4 Of the existing trees, tree removals to date have been limited to: removal of a small number of shrubs (such as hollies) to maintain footpaths and widen existing tracks; coppicing of an area to the south and east, now regrowing; recent coppicing of small areas with initial regrowth; halo-thinning around several mature trees; removal of areas of cherry laurel to allow access around the woods; and removal of several scattered ash trees and discrete areas of ash affected by ash dieback, posing a risk of harm to those using the woodland and footpaths.
- 7.5 Minor impacts on other trees are also noted, such as the installation of security cameras to tree branches and a small tent/swing in a major oak branch. These are considered to have a negligible impact on the trees concerned and, whilst not optimal from a visual perspective for those using the footpaths, are considered an essential part of the current use of the woodland.
- 7.6 There are no permanent structures within the woodland, and temporary structures do not appear to have any form of footing or foundation. The main camp area is fairly worn, with soil slightly denuded and root flares slightly exposed; the existing footpath and some animal tracks have been widened, resulting in minor, localised compaction and some poaching in areas to the north-west where the clay is heaviest. These impacts are limited to discrete areas and the surrounding trees do not appear to be adversely affected.
- 7.7 There is a low risk from fire due to the use of raised fire pits at the camp; forest fires in native woodlands in such condition are rare with the woodland generally being too green unless in severe drought. The fires are self-contained and fire escape from the pits would be highly unlikely but possible.

- 7.8 The coppicing of dense understorey would, in the medium and long term, have a positive impact upon the woodland, which is currently dense and dark with little groundcover or lower shrub layer. Areas known to support bluebells have been the focus of coppicing, allowing light in to enable their release and expansion. The removal of dead ash trees has reduced the standing deadwood component in places, although outside of risk areas deadwood has generally been retained, and extensive deadwood remains throughout the woodland; this removal improves the safety of the woodland and allows light to reach the ground floor, an improvement on the previous, denser condition.
- 7.9 Overall, the use of the woodland as is occurring, and as proposed, is not considered to have a significant negative impact on the woodland. The woodland is currently dense and dark, and opening it up through coppicing, thinning and limited clearance would result in benefits which are likely to outweigh the minor impacts described above.

Mitigation and Compensation

- 7.10 The following measures, drawn from the accompanying Arboricultural and Silvicultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement (GS648.Trywoods.AIA.v1), set out best practice for works within the woodland and are considered to represent the primary ecological mitigation and enhancement strategy for the site:

Prohibited Activities

- 7.11 Within the woodland area, no damaging activities shall be permitted, to include:
- Lighting of fires (other than in contained fire pits);
 - Storage of chemicals or building materials;
 - Dumping of spoil or rubbish;
 - Driving of vehicles;
 - Alteration of soil levels.

Ground Protection

- 7.12 Where regular access is required, for example around the camp, the soil shall be maintained in its current condition. In any areas where compaction or hollows become evident, such areas shall be filled with site-won woodchip, gently tamped-in by foot.
- 7.13 To ensure the ongoing protection of trees and retention of pathways, site-won materials shall continue to be used to delineate paths. No general access outside of these areas shall occur or be permitted.
- 7.14 Fires shall only occur within the raised fire pits, under constant supervision and with fire blankets and water always present.

Ongoing Woodland Management

7.15 The following management measures shall be undertaken to continue to enhance the woodland for the benefit of wildlife:

- Areas of dense sweet chestnut could be coppiced where labour allows, on a 15–25 year rotation in small, discrete areas;
- Areas of dense holly shall be coppiced, in small discrete areas of no more than 500 sqm in any one year, repeated every 5–10 years in a patchwork fashion to create a range of microhabitats and varying shrub densities;
- Areas with known bluebells should be prioritised for coppicing, to allow these to spread;
- Cherry laurel should be removed wherever labour allows, to allow native species to re-establish; new saplings could be grown from acorns and other seed collected from the woodland and replanted following removal;
- Careful halo-thinning should continue around existing mature trees to ensure their survival;
- Rubbish should continue to be removed from the woodland;
- Deadwood, both standing and fallen, should be retained wherever it does not pose a safety risk, given its high value for saproxylic invertebrates, fungi and roosting/nesting species.

7.16 All coppicing, scrub clearance and tree/vegetation works should, as general best practice, be timed to avoid the bird nesting season (March to August inclusive) wherever possible, or be preceded by a check by a suitably experienced person immediately prior to works, in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Residual Impacts

7.17 Provided the above measures are followed, the proposals are supportable from an ecological and arboricultural perspective, and are likely to result in a long-term enhancement of the ancient woodland habitat through improved structural diversity, light penetration and deadwood retention.

Bats

Potential Impacts

- 7.18 The proposed ongoing use of the woodlands generally appears to be restricted to daytime and does not significantly impact on any of the trees with bat roost suitability. The use might result in very minor disturbance through noise and vibration.

Mitigation and Compensation

- 7.19 All trees identified as having bat roost suitability (i.e. recorded with Potential Roost Features on the Bat Roost Suitability Tree Plan) shall be retained, and appropriately protected during any works within the woodland in accordance with the general best practice measures set out under Habitats / Ancient Woodland, above. Should these trees require any works, an ecologist shall be consulted for further advice.
- 7.20 No lighting shall be installed in the woodland, and any nighttime use of the woodland should be restricted to suitable activities such as quiet camping or hiking. Use of lighting systems or loud music shall not occur.

Residual Impacts

- 7.21 Residual impacts would be negligible. The opening-up of the woodland would likely have a positive impact in creating new foraging routes and opportunities.

Birds

Potential Impacts

- 7.22 There is a low risk of disturbing birds' nests during woodland works, and potentially during activities.

Mitigation and Compensation

- 7.23 As set out under Habitats / Ancient Woodland above, all coppicing, scrub clearance and tree works should be timed to avoid the bird nesting season (March to August inclusive) wherever possible, or be preceded by a check by a suitably experienced person immediately prior to works.

Residual Impacts

- 7.24 Residual impacts would be negligible.

Dormice

Potential Impacts

- 7.25 It is highly unlikely that dormice would be disturbed, but coppicing works might disturb individuals and alter their habitat.

Mitigation and Compensation

- 7.26 Should dormice be confirmed or considered likely present, an ecologist shall be contacted for advice as to whether a licence for works would be necessary.
- 7.27 Any coppicing or scrub clearance works should be restricted to the period November to February inclusive (outside both the breeding and hibernation seasons), using a precautionary method of working, in addition to the general best practice measures set out under Habitats / Ancient Woodland above.

Residual Impacts

- 7.28 Residual impacts would be negligible. The opening-up of habitats would likely result in an increase in flowering/fruitlet by certain shrub species such as hazel and hawthorn, resulting in an improvement for dormice.

Reptiles

Potential Impacts

- 7.29 There is a very low risk of individual adders being disturbed during activities and coppicing.

Mitigation and Compensation

- 7.30 A precautionary method of working should be adopted for any works affecting sunnier margins, rides or deadwood accumulations, in addition to the general best practice measures set out under Habitats / Ancient Woodland above.
- 7.31 Any such clearance should be undertaken in a slow, deliberate manner, checking for reptiles prior to any activities. Established stumps, piles of logs and deadwood should not be moved between November-February inclusive, when reptiles would be hibernating.

Residual Impacts

- 7.32 The residual impacts would be negligible. The opening-up of habitats through coppicing would create sunny areas more suitable for reptiles than the existing.

Badger

Potential Impacts

- 7.33 No significant impacts are predicted at present; badgers may use the woodland in the future and subsequently be disturbed by activities such as tree removal.

Mitigation and Compensation

- 7.34 Any ground-disturbing works should be preceded by a check for badger setts, in addition to the general best practice measures set out under Habitats / Ancient Woodland above.

Residual Impacts

- 7.35 Negligible.

Other

- 7.36 The works to manage the woodland would likely result in an increase in notable ancient woodland indicator species such as bluebells. Retention of deadwood would maximise opportunities for invertebrates and fungi.

8.0 Ecological Enhancements

8.1 In accordance with national and local planning policy, the proposals should aim to achieve a gain for biodiversity.

8.2 The proposals would not constitute any loss of habitat, but would have the potential to impact the condition of the woodland overall (e.g. negatively by impacting the amount of open space and damage, or positively by increasing structure). The proposals have been assessed against the Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain Condition Assessment Criteria for woodlands (see Appendix B). It is considered that the proposals would not materially affect the woodland, with no loss of habitat, or decrease in habitat condition. The proposed management would potentially result in a minor net gain. Whilst the habitat on-site is all priority habitat, it would not be 'impacted' as per the gov.uk definition. As such, the *de minimis* exemption would apply here and achieving a Biodiversity Net Gain would not be necessary. The condition assessment is provided to evidence this.

8.3 The following ecological enhancements, drawn from the ongoing woodland management measures set out above, are considered suited to the site and proposals:

- A long-term, patchwork coppice rotation for sweet chestnut and holly, to create a mosaic of structural diversity, age classes and microhabitats across the woodland;
- Phased removal of cherry laurel, with replanting from locally-sourced native seed, to allow native ground flora and shrub species to re-establish;
- Retention of standing and fallen deadwood wherever safe to do so, to benefit saproxylic invertebrates, fungi and cavity-nesting or roosting species;
- Continued removal of historic rubbish and fly-tipped debris from the woodland;
- Prioritisation of coppicing around known bluebell colonies, to allow these to spread;
- Continued education of woodland users through the CIC of the importance of the woodland habitat and ecology.

9.0 Conclusions

- 9.1 The site comprises Trywoods (Heron Copse), an area of ancient, semi-natural woodland currently used, and proposed to continue to be used, by Woods for Learning CIC for outdoor learning, ecological skills and nature-based experiences. The application is partly retrospective.
- 9.2 The activities which have taken place, and are proposed to continue, are not considered to represent a significant negative impact upon the ancient woodland habitat, provided the recommendations of the accompanying AIA and the general best practice measures set out in this report are followed. The coppicing, thinning and limited clearance which has occurred is, on balance, considered likely to result in a long-term enhancement of a woodland which is otherwise dense, dark and lacking in structural diversity.
- 9.3 No significant impacts upon designated sites are anticipated. The appropriate management of the woodland would result in positive impacts upon this as well as protected species.
- 9.4 Subject to the above, and to the retention of all trees identified as having bat roost suitability, the proposals are considered to accord with the relevant national and local planning policy, including the NPPF and Policy 31 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).

10.0 References

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11.0 Species List

Common Name	Scientific Name	DAFOR
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	O
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	O
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	O
Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	LF
Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	O
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>	LA
Cherry laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>	LA
Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	O
Downy birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>	O
Goat Willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>	O
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	O
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	F
Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	LF
Pedunculate oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>	D
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	O
Sweet chestnut	<i>Castanea sativa</i>	F
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	LF
Wild Currant	<i>Ribes sanguineum</i>	O

DAFOR: D = Dominant; A = Abundant; LA = Locally Abundant; F = Frequent; LF = Locally Frequent; O = Occasional; R = Rare.

12.0 Appendix A – Site Photographs

12.1 A selection of representative photographs is included below.



Photo 1 – The camp area, where impacts are most apparent.



Photo 2 – Existing paths and tracks have been widened and lined with wood from the site.



Photo 3 – Some areas have recently been coppiced.



Photo 4 – Areas previously coppiced are regrowing.

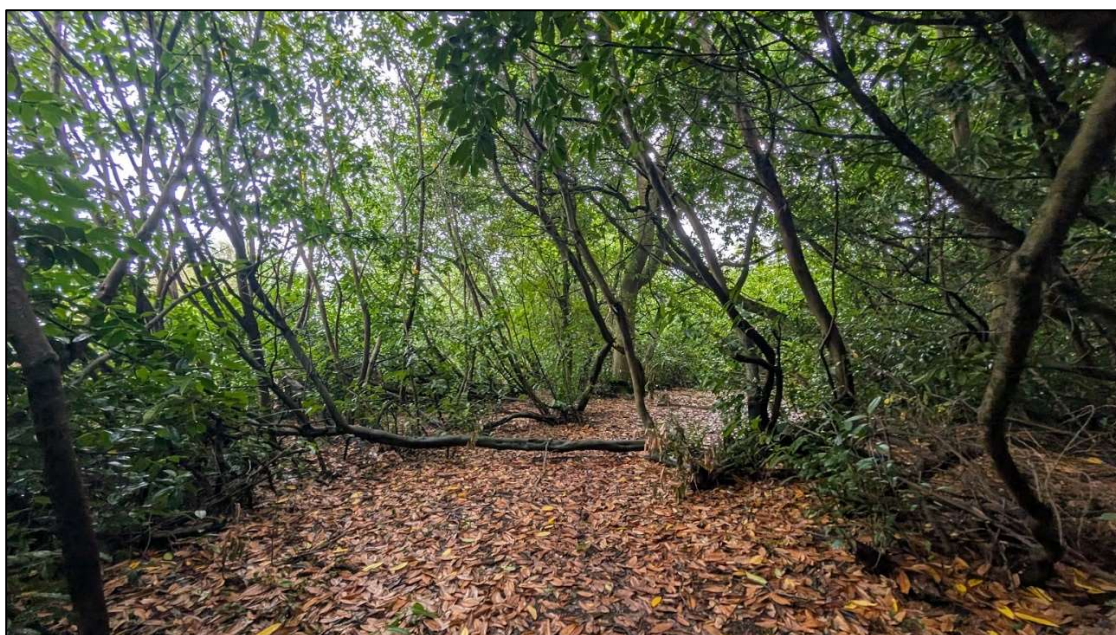


Photo 5 – Dense areas of cherry laurel exist and smother other habitats.



Photo 6 – Much of the woodland contains dense holly understorey.

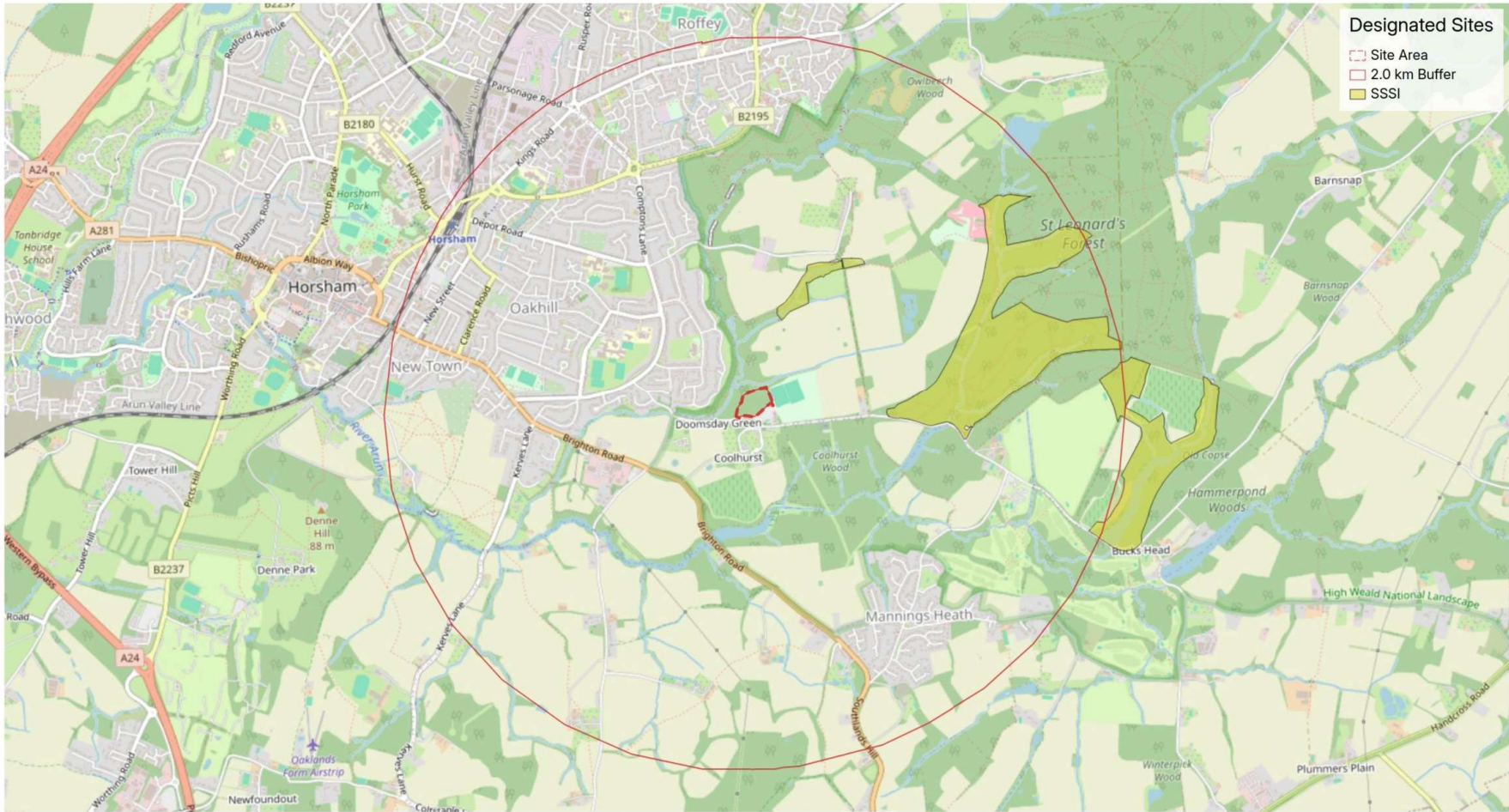


Photo 7 – Deadwood of multiple types is present throughout the woodland.

13.0 Appendix B – Woodland Condition Assessment, Before and After Works

Condition Sheet: WOODLAND Habitat Type															
UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) Habitat Types															
Woodland and forest - Lowland beech and yew woodland															
Woodland and forest - Lowland mixed deciduous woodland															
Woodland and forest - Native pine woodlands															
Woodland and forest - Other coniferous woodland															
Woodland and forest - Other Scot's pine woodland															
Woodland and forest - Other woodland; broadleaved															
Woodland and forest - Other woodland; mixed															
Woodland and forest - Upland birchwoods															
Woodland and forest - Upland mixed ashwoods															
Woodland and forest - Upland oakwood															
Woodland and forest - Wet woodland															
Habitat Description															
Trywoods woodland - before and after management															
ukhab - UK Habitat Classification															
This condition sheet is based on the England Woodland Biodiversity Group (EWBG) Woodland Condition Survey Method, available here:															
Woodland Wildlife Toolkit (syvla.org.uk)															
IMPORTANT: This biodiversity metric woodland condition assessment must be used to assess woodland being input into the biodiversity metric. The outputs of this condition assessment are not equivalent to, nor are they comparable with the scores from the EWBG condition assessment, because the EWBG assessment has been adapted for the biodiversity metric, including the removal of EWBG Indicator 7 (Proportion of favourable land cover around woodland) and Indicator 14 (Size of woodland), and minor changes to other indicators.															
On-site or off-site, site name and location	On-site	Survey date and Surveyor name	02/09/2026 - George Sayer MCIEEM MABorA	Habitat parcel reference											
Limitations (if applicable)		Survey reference (if relating to a wider survey)		Grid reference											
Condition Assessment Criteria															
Indicator	Good (3 points)	Moderate (2 points)	Poor (1 point)	Score per indicator										Notes (such as justification)	
A Age distribution of trees	Three age-classes ¹ present.	Two age-classes ¹ present.	One age-class ¹ present.	2	2										Semi-mature and mature trees will be present throughout
B Wild, domestic and feral herbivore damage	No significant browsing damage evident in woodland ² .	Evidence of significant browsing pressure is present in less than 40% of whole woodland ² .	Evidence of significant browsing pressure is present in 40% or more of whole woodland ² .	2	2										Some damage is currently present and this will not change
C Invasive plant species	No invasive species ³ present in woodland.	Rhododendron <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> or cherry laurel <i>Prunus laurocerasus</i> not present, and other invasive species ³ <10% cover.	Rhododendron or cherry laurel present, or other invasive species ³ ≥10% cover.	1	1										Cherry laurel will probably not be fully eradicated
D Number of native tree species	Five or more native tree or shrub species ⁴ found across woodland parcel.	Three to four native tree or shrub species ⁴ found across woodland parcel.	Two or less native tree or shrub species ⁴ across woodland parcel.	3	3										There are at least 5 dominant tree species
E Cover of native tree and shrub species	>80% of canopy trees and >80% of understorey shrubs are native ⁵ .	50 - 80% of canopy trees and 50 - 80% of understorey shrubs are native ⁵ .	<50% of canopy trees and <50% of understorey shrubs are native ⁵ .	2	2										Cherry laurel, sycamore and sweet chestnut is likely to remain
F Open space within woodland	10 - 20% of woodland has areas of temporary open space ⁶ . Unless woodland is <10ha, in which case 0 - 20% temporary open space is permitted ⁷ .	21 - 40% of woodland has areas of temporary open space ⁶ .	<10% or >40% of woodland has areas of temporary open space ⁶ . But if woodland <10ha has <10% temporary open space, please see Good category ⁷ .	3	3										Open space will be increased but given the size this is already in good condition
G Woodland regeneration	All three classes present in woodland ⁸ ; trees 4 - 7 cm Diameter at Breast Height (DBH), saplings and seedlings or advanced coppice regrowth.	One or two classes only present in woodland ⁸ .	No classes or coppice regrowth present in woodland ⁸ .	1	2										Very little regeneration is occurring other than where coppicing is being undertaken
H Tree health	Tree mortality 10% or less, no pests or diseases, and no crown dieback ⁹ .	11% to 25% tree mortality and/or crown dieback or low-risk pest or disease present ⁹ .	Greater than 25% tree mortality and/or any high-risk pest or disease present ⁹ .	1	2										Significant mortality due to ash dieback will be reduced by removal
I Vegetation and ground flora	Recognisable NVC plant community ¹⁰ at ground layer present, strongly characterised by ancient woodland flora specialists.	Recognisable woodland NVC plant community ¹⁰ at ground layer present.	No recognisable woodland NVC plant community ¹⁰ at ground layer present.	1	1										No real community and this might slightly improve but only in limited areas
J Woodland vertical structure	Three or more storeys across all survey plots, or a complex woodland ¹¹ .	Two storeys across all survey plots ¹¹ .	One or less storey across all survey plots ¹¹ .	2	2										Two main storeys are likely to remain
K Veteran trees	Two or more veteran trees ¹² per hectare.	One veteran tree ¹² per hectare.	No veteran trees ¹² present in woodland.	1	1										No veteran trees noted
L Amount of deadwood	50% of all survey plots within the woodland parcel have deadwood, such as standing and fallen deadwood, large dead branches and or stems, stubs and stumps, or an abundance of small cavities ¹³ .	Between 25% and 50% of all survey plots within the woodland parcel have deadwood, such as standing and fallen deadwood, large dead branches and or stems, stubs and stumps, or an abundance of small cavities ¹³ .	Less than 25% of all survey plots within the woodland parcel have deadwood, such as standing and fallen deadwood, large dead branches and or stems, stubs and stumps, or an abundance of small cavities ¹³ .	3	3										Extensive deadwood is present and would remain. This may have increased since activities started
M Woodland disturbance	No nutrient enrichment or damaged ground evident ¹⁴ .	Less than 1 hectare in total of nutrient enrichment across woodland area, and or less than 20% of woodland area has damaged ground ¹⁴ .	1 hectare or more of nutrient enrichment, and or 20% or more of woodland area has damaged ground ¹⁴ .	3	3										Only in very localised areas. The main camp area covers less than 5% of the woodland area.
Total Score (out of a possible 39)				25	27										
Condition Assessment Result		Condition Assessment Score		Result Achieved											
Total score >32 (33 to 39)		Good (3)													
Total score 26 to 32		Moderate (2)		x											
Total score <26 (13 to 25)		Poor (1)		x											
Suggested enhancement interventions to improve condition score															
The management of the woodland would likely result in an improvement of the woodland condition.															

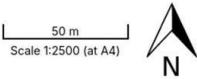
14.0 Figure No. 01 – Designated Sites Plan



15.0 Figure No. 02 – Ancient Woodland Map



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16.0 Figure No. 03 – Woodland Habitat Plan



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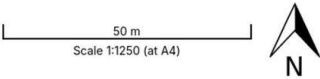
50 m
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17.0 Figure No. 04 – Site Location / Redline Plan



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18.0 Figure No. 05 – Bat Roost Suitability Tree Plan



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