

Date: 12/01/2021

Our reference: 4102-1

Helen Lolley
Surrey Heath Borough Council
By email

Dear Helen,

Re: Ecological Walkover

Site Address: Watchmoor Nature Reserve, Camberley, GU15 3YN.

SWT Ecology Services was commissioned on 4th January 2021 by Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC) to undertake an ecological walkover of the above address. SHBC has asked for a walkover to scope for ecological constraints across the site, with particular focus at the northern and southern ends. No proposals have been provided.

More specifically, the scope of works includes:

- A search of publically available mapping and databases for records pertaining to protected habitats and species, and those of conservation concern.
- An ecological walkover survey of the reserve, identifying broad habitats and highlighting any potential nature conservation issues on site.
- A short letter report outlining the ecological constraints and opportunities of the site.

The information and data have been prepared in accordance with current best-practice guidance¹ and BS 42020:2013². Our ecologists are bound by CIEEM's 'Code of Conduct'³.

The survey area (or site), presented in Figure 1, comprises the Watchmoor Nature Reserve in Camberley, which is approximately 3.5ha, and has the approximate central grid reference SU 86492 58533. The site is bounded by Sainsbury's Petrol Station to the north, the A311 (Blackwater Valley Road) to the west and south, and the railway running between Camberley and Frimley to the east.

The surrounding area comprises the town of Camberley to the east and north, the M3 to the south, and the A311 (and Hawley Meadows) to the west. The wider landscape is largely urban and sub-urban comprising Camberley, Farnborough, Frimley and Blackwater. There are a number of reservoirs located to the south-east of the survey area, and a continuous belt of open greenspace and woodland is present westward, from the survey area to Hawley Common and beyond. The survey area is located in Surrey Heath Borough Council.

Legislative and Planning Policy Framework

In order to receive planning approval, development proposals must comply with relevant UK legislation and planning policies. Relevant planning policies and legislation are discussed below.

¹ CIEEM (2017) Guidelines on Ecological Report Writing (2nd Edition). CIEEM, Winchester.

² BSI (2013) BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity. Code of practice for planning and development. BSI, London.

³ CIEEM (2019) Code of Professional Conduct. CIEEM, Winchester.

Methodology

Desk study

The desk study comprised a search of online resources including information present on MAGIC Maps⁴.

The desk study included a search of statutory designated sites within 2 km of the survey area, including ancient woodland. It also included a search of European Protected Species licences granted within 1 km of the survey area, and any great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) Natural England class licence return records and pond survey results within 500m of the survey area.

Waterbodies within 500m of the survey area boundary were identified using aerial photography and publically available mapping.

Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA) maps were also reviewed as part of the desk study.

Ecological walkover

The survey area was systematically walked over by the ecologist, noting the general habitats present in the area, signs of protected species or species of conservation concern, and any key ecological constraints and potential opportunities. Any incidental fauna was noted, as well as any prominent or important flora species. The presence of any non-native invasive species was noted, and their location and distribution mapped.

The survey visit was undertaken on 12th January 2021 by Harriet Fisher BSc (Hons) – Ecologist. Weather conditions were mild and overcast, with no rain.

The information collected during both the desk study and ecological walkover was used to assess how ecological features could be impacted by works to/on the site, as well as how the habitats present can be managed in a way to enhance the area for biodiversity.

Limitations

Ecological walkovers can be undertaken at any time of the year, although the optimal season is between March and September, when most plant species are visible and most invertebrate species are active.

The survey was undertaken outside of the optimal survey period. However, as this is a preliminary walkover survey, this is not considered to be a significant limitation to assigning broad habitat types. Further surveys are recommended below which should be undertaken during the optimal survey period and can more precisely define the habitats within the survey area.

Based on the above, a general appraisal of the broad habitat types and their use by animal species could be undertaken at the time of the survey.

Given that SWT Ecology Services has not been provided with any proposals for the survey area, the recommendations are provided below to account for a variety of scales of clearance. It is known through correspondence with Surrey County Council (on 6th January 2021) that impacts are most likely at the north or south of the survey area, but it is not clear what these impacts may be. Dependent on the scale and nature of the works, the likely impacts, recommendations, and/or enhancement measures may be updated accordingly, in addition to any further survey requirements to inform these. Any updates and changes to the site proposals should be provided to the ecologist who will be managing the further survey work.

⁴ DEFRA (2020) MAGIC Maps. <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx> [Accessed: 12th January 2021]

This report is only valid for a maximum of two years, or until site conditions have significantly changed the habitats on site.

Results

Desk study

Three statutory designated sites were recorded within 2 km of the survey area, including:

- Blackwater Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI.
- Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA).

The survey area falls within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for Blackwater Valley SSSI and Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI.

Four parcels of ancient woodland fall within 2km of the survey area, the closest of which is approximately 55m from the survey area.

Fifteen waterbodies (including those on-site) were identified within 500m of the survey area, but no records of great crested newt (GCN) were identified.

The survey area is located within the Blackwater River (R03) Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA).

Ecological walkover

Five broad habitats were identified during the walkover: These are:

- Grassland (map reference: 1) – A small-to-moderate sized clearing, with scattered trees, running alongside the two northern ponds. Amongst the common grasses and herbaceous perennials identified, a fungus was present in the grassland that was closely similar to a turf bell (*Galerina graminea*), although the identification of this species was not confirmed. Given that turf bell typically grows on calcareous grassland, and due to the time of survey grassland indicator plants would be cryptic, the grassland could not be characterised further with confidence. A small walkthrough was wet, muddy and lacked vegetation due to high levels of trampling.
- Standing water (map references: 3, 6, and 7) – Three large ponds within woodland, each with fallen deadwood within the waterbody, and no signs of fish or pollution.
 - The northern-most waterbody (3) had very little duckweed coverage, and some submerged and emergent plant species within the waterbody. The margins contain species such as bulrush (*Typha* sp.), fool's watercress (*Apium nodiflorum*), soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) and common reed (*Phragmites australis*).
 - The middle of the three waterbodies (6) is marginally smaller than the others. No submerged or emergent vegetation was noted except for some semi-mature trees. Duckweed was abundant at the southern end.
 - The southern-most waterbody (7) had moderate to high duckweed cover on the eastern half. A small amount of emergent vegetation was present, including bulrush and saplings such as alder. Marginal vegetation was spare on the western bank, with soft rush and an area of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*, TN2). On the eastern bank, the vegetation mainly comprised bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), with a stand of rhododendron (*Rhododendron* sp; TN1). A live ramshorn snail (*Planorbis* sp.; Figure 2, Photograph 10) was found at the edge of the water

- Broadleaved woodland (map references: 2, 3, and 4) – continuous broadleaved woodland across most of the area of the reserve, with several piles of brash and fallen dead-wood throughout, and several disused birds' nests found during the walkover. Most types of broadleaved woodland are Habitats of Principle Importance (HPI). Most trees were semi-mature, but seedlings and mature trees were present intermittently across the survey area (e.g. TN3, TN5). The reserve is separated from the wider habitat to the west and from the nearest area of ancient woodland, Gaston Copse, by the A311 dual-carriageway.
 - In the southern half of the site (2), silver birch dominated with a bramble scrub ground layer. A small area at the southern-most corner comprised a dense bramble and bracken scrub of approximately 1m tall (TN4), beneath a silver birch canopy.
 - In the north-eastern area of the site (3), a number of areas of non-native species were identified comprising several stands of Wilson's honeysuckle (*Lonicera nitida*; TN6), a laurel (*Prunus* sp.; TN8 and TN9), and a cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* sp.; TN9; not Schedule 9 WCA due to leaf size). At TN7, a number of ash trees were marked as if proposed for removal.
 - The area at the north-west of the site (4) was established to be wet woodland, with species such as alder and willow. Wet woodland is an HPI, and rare in Surrey.
- Bare ground – A network of footpaths that spans the survey area.
- Hard standing – Car parking area.

Given the scope of the survey, trees were not extensively examined as part of the survey. However, it was noted that most trees within the survey area did not appear to have bat roosting features. However, a small number of mature trees were noted to have thick or dense ivy coverage (eg. TN3 and TN5, respectively), or to have wounds/damage that would require closer inspection prior to any removal works. The survey has high suitability for foraging and commuting bats of a variety of species.

During the survey, direct evidence of breeding birds and deer was identified, consisting of:

- Disused birds' nests in several locations across the site;
- Deer droppings (Figure 2, Photo 9) in the woodland habitat (3). Likely from roe (*Capreolus capreolus*) or muntjac deer (*Muntiacus reevesi*).

No evidence of burrowing mammals (e.g. badgers, foxes, rabbits) was identified within the undergrowth of the woodlands, nor in the adjacent ditch to the west or railway verge to the east.

Discussion and Recommendations

A discussion of species and relevant recommendations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of recommendations

| Species/ Habitat | Evidence/Suitability | Recommendation |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Ancient woodland | Ancient woodland was present within 55m of the survey area, which is separated from the site by the A311. | Given that the A311 provides a significant boundary between the survey area and A311, and the survey area is outside of the 15m buffer for ancient woodland, significant impacts are unlikely and no further action is required regarding ancient woodland. |
| HPIs | At least one HPI was identified within the survey area (wet woodland). Given the sub-optimal survey timing, it is possible that indicators for other HPIs may not have been identified during the survey. Under the NERC ⁵ Act (2006), and the local planning authority must demonstrate that HPIs are being appropriately conserved, through enhancement, restoration and protection. | A further UK Habitat Classification Survey of the survey area must be undertaken during the optimal survey period , in order to fully classify the habitats in the area, and ensure that all HPIs within the survey area are fully acknowledged. |
| Bats | Given the scope of the survey, these were only broadly assessed. Most semi-mature trees did not clearly have suitable roosting features present, there is potential for some trees to have roosting suitability within the survey area. The area had high suitability for foraging and commuting bats, with a variety of habitats to support different species. | Any trees which are proposed for removal should be formally assessed for bat roosting suitability , and any further surveys and recommendations undertaken and any ecological advice followed. Dependent on the scale of proposed clearance, and post-works landscape character, further bat activity surveys may be required to inform the works . Any lighting proposals regarding the works period or final project design should be prepared in consultation with a suitably experienced ecologist, in order to minimise impacts to bats. |
| Badgers | No signs of burrowing mammals, including badgers were identified on site. Given that suitable habitats were present on site and in the wider area (particularly to the east), it is not possible to conclude that badgers are likely absent. | It is recommended that pre-works check of the proposed works area and a 30m buffer is undertaken within 24 hours prior to works commencing. This should be conducted by a suitably experienced ecologist. |

⁵ Natural Environment and Rural Communities

| Species/ Habitat | Evidence/Suitability | Recommendation |
|---------------------|--|--|
| GCN | <p>Suitable terrestrial and aquatic habitat was present on site. Given that GCN are often under-recorded in many areas, one cannot conclude a likely absence of GCN within the survey area.</p> <p>The site is geographically isolated from the wider surrounding area, by the A331 dual carriageway, a railway and the Sainsbury's car park.</p> | <p>As terrestrial or aquatic habitat could be affected by any proposed works on the site, a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment and presence/likely survey are recommended for all ponds within the survey area. This may be followed by further recommended surveys, as appropriate.</p> |
| Reptiles | <p>Suitable habitat was present on site, such as grassland, brash piles and woodland edge. This is suitable for reptiles such as grass snake and slow worm. All British reptiles are Species of Principle Importance (SPIs) under the NERC Act (2006).</p> | <p>In the event that the proposed works affect suitable reptile habitat, then further reptile presence/likely absence surveys are recommended.</p> |
| Breeding birds | <p>Bird activity was high throughout the survey, with birds seen and heard throughout. Species seen included magpie (<i>Pica pica</i>), wren (<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>), mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>) and blackbird (<i>Turdus merula</i>).</p> <p>Additionally, several disused birds' nests were identified across the survey area, which shows that the site is widely used by breeding birds.</p> | <p>The consulting ecologist should be informed of the project details when they are available. Dependent on the scale and nature of the proposed works, further breeding bird surveys are recommended, to better understand how the site is used by birds.</p> <p>Any clearance of vegetation should occur outside the breeding bird season, namely between March and August, inclusive.</p> <p>Should any active birds' nests be identified in the proposed clearance area, the surrounding vegetation and nest must be retained, with a suitable buffer, until after the young have fledged.</p> <p>Any vegetation clearance required between March and August (inclusive) should be undertaken under the supervision of a suitably experienced ecologist.</p> |
| Invertebrates | <p>Given the time of year, invertebrates were not noted in abundance during the survey. However, the habitats are highly suitable for invertebrates, which will also support other protected species.</p> | <p>Dependent on the scale of clearance and/or cleared habitats within the survey area, invertebrate populations in the area may be significantly affected by the works proposal.</p> <p>Therefore, ecologists should be advised on the scale of clearance required. Should significant clearance be required for the works proposal, further invertebrate surveys are recommended.</p> |

| Species/ Habitat | Evidence/Suitability | Recommendation |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Hazel dormouse | <p>Suitable habitat for hazel dormouse is present across the site, within the scrub and arboreal habitats.</p> <p>No signs of hazel dormouse (e.g. feeding signs, summer or winter nests, individuals) were identified during the survey.</p> | <p>Although it is acknowledged the arboreal habitats are significantly isolated from the wider area, it is possible that hazel dormouse is present within the survey area, given the habitat suitability. Potential impact would be strongly dependent on the proposed scale of clearance.</p> <p>Therefore, ecologists should be advised on the scale of clearance required. Should significant clearance be required for the works proposal, further hazel dormouse presence/likely absence surveys are recommended.</p> |
| Hedgehog | <p>Given the woodland habitats, along with large numbers of brash piles for shelter and an abundance of moist habitat in which to forage, the survey area is suitable for hedgehog. Hedgehog is an SPI.</p> | <p>Log and brash piles should be retained if possible. If removal/moving is required, log piles should be dismantled by hand under an ecological watching brief (by a suitably experienced ecologist). Additionally, care should be taken when clearing dense areas of understorey to minimise risk of injury to hedgehog by machinery.</p> <p>If significant amounts of habitat will be affected by the works, then off-site conservation efforts should be undertaken off-site, to benefit hedgehog. These should be designed in consultation with a suitably experienced ecologist.</p> |
| Invasive species | <p>A number of invasive non-native species (some not listed under Schedule 9 WCA, 1981) were identified within the survey area, such as a laurel, a cotoneaster, rhododendron and Wilson's honeysuckle. These were all identified within the north-eastern segment of woodland.</p> <p>Given that muntjac presence is known in the area, and droppings were found on site that resemble muntjac droppings, based on size and shape, it is assumed that muntjac are present on site.</p> | <p>Measures should be put in place to prevent the spread of these invasive non-native plant species.</p> |

Opportunities for enhancements

Given that it is not clear what the project will entail, general enhancements are provided below, which can be considered and implemented where possible:

- One or more bat boxes could be positioned within the adjacent woodland. Ideally, these would be positioned with the openings towards the woodland, to reduce light levels within the box.

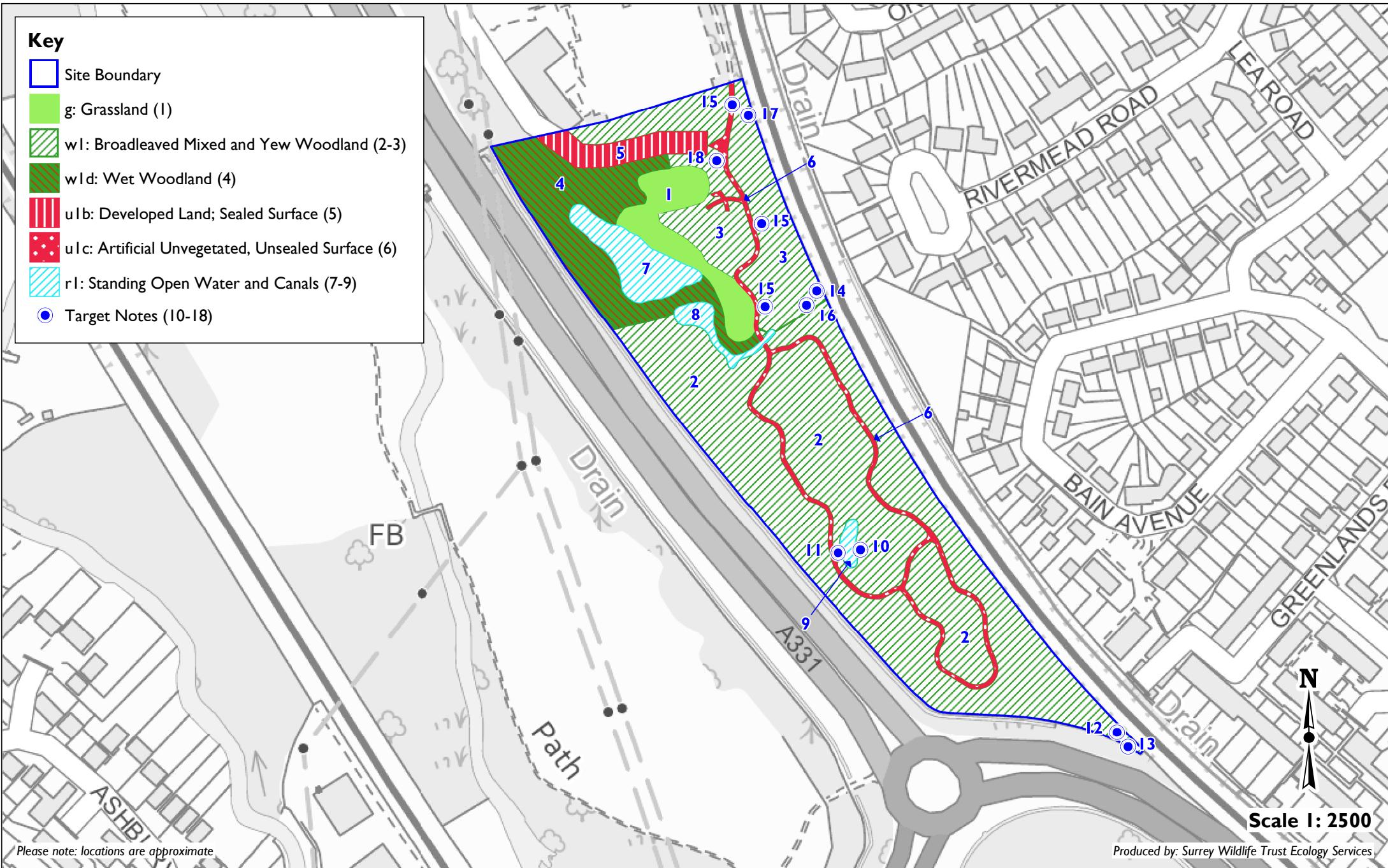
- A small clearing could be created in the southern area of woodland, in order to increase the diversity of habitats in the survey area. The increased light to the ground layer will enable a diverse range of flora to flourish and provide benefit to other species.
- Reduce the regularity of mowing in the grassland within the survey area, particularly during the summer months. This will allow plants to flower and provide food for a variety of invertebrates, while reducing maintenance costs.

Kind regards,

Harriet Fisher BSc (Hons) – Ecologist

Key

- [Blue Box] Site Boundary
- [Light Green Box] g: Grassland (1)
- [Hatched Box] wl: Broadleaved Mixed and Yew Woodland (2-3)
- [Dark Green Box] wld: Wet Woodland (4)
- [Red Box] ulb: Developed Land; Sealed Surface (5)
- [Dotted Box] ulc: Artificial Unvegetated, Unsealed Surface (6)
- [Cyan Box] rl: Standing Open Water and Canals (7-9)
- [Blue Circle] Target Notes (10-18)



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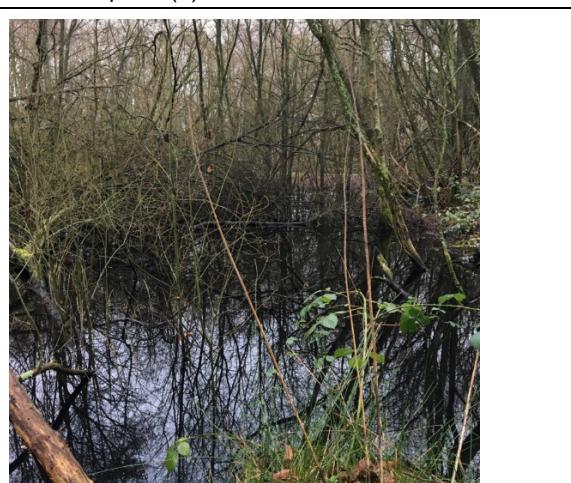
4102-1, January 2021

**Figure 1: Watchmoor Nature Reserve
Camberley, GU15 3YN
Walkover Survey Results**



Ecology
Services

Figure 2: Site photographs

| | |
|---|--|
|  |  |
| Photograph 1 Grassland (1) | Photograph 2 Worn footpath through wet woodland (4) |
|  |  |
| Photograph 3 Northern pond (7) | Photograph 4 Broadleaved woodland (2), silver birch dominant. |
|  |  |
| Photograph 5 Central pond (8) – northern end | Photograph 6 Central pond (8) – southern end |



Photograph 7

Southern pond (9), with rhododendron (TN1) present on eastern (right) bank.



Photograph 8

Mature oak with dense holly at the base (TN5) in broadleaved woodland (8).



Photograph 9

Deer droppings - likely roe or muntjac.



Photograph 10

Ramshorn snail