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7884M: BICESTER MOTION, BICESTER

ECOLOGICAL BRIEFING NOTE: AIRFIELD ACTIVITY REGULARISATION

Introduction

1. Ecology Solutions (Manchester) Limited has been commissioned by Bicester Motion to undertake ecological assessment of the proposed experience track regularisation and events usage at Bicester Motion, Bicester, Oxford, hereafter referred to as the Application Site (see Plan ECO1).
2. This technical ecological note serves to support Bicester Motion's planning application for the regularisation of experience track and events usage in support of the ongoing aviation use at the Bicester Motion Site.
3. The location and extent of the site is detailed on Plan ECO1.
4. Specifically, this note serves to consider the potential ecological implications of the existing use of the airfield and the ecological work which has been undertaken to inform the proposals and the intended scope of the planning application.
5. As detailed in subsequent sections of this note, the continuation of activity on the Site are not considered to impact opportunities for protected or notable faunal species.

Background and Consideration of Baseline

6. **Ecological Baseline.** Ecology Solutions has a thorough understanding of the Site, not least with the undertaking of various botanical and species surveys since 2018 to date. The ecological baseline for the Site has been reported in multiple previous submissions to Cherwell District Council (CDC). For completeness, the habitats present are shown on Plan ECO2. The available survey data, which includes for a full suite of ecological surveys across multiple survey seasons, is sufficient to allow robust impact assessment of the proposals for the Application Site.
7. **Planning Proposals and Context.** As detailed in the introduction above, the planning application seek to regularise (in planning terms) the existing use of the airfield. The activities and events to be regularised through this application are detailed below (see also Planning report submitted alongside this report):

- Aviation Use
 - Radio Controlled Aviation
 - Events
 - Vehicle Demonstrations
 - Off Road Trail Use
8. It is important to note that each of these activities have been on-going for several years. Indeed, Ecology Solutions understand these events have been undertaken since the Site was acquired by Bicester Motion in 2013.
9. It is further relevant to note that these activities were ongoing throughout the period during which the Application Site has been subject to ecological assessment by Ecology Solutions. The activities themselves can therefore be viewed as a component of the baseline situation.
10. For clarity, and with reference to the current use of the Site, the proposals do not seek any 'on the ground' changes in land use or site management, simply the continuation of the long-term use and management of the land.
11. Reflecting the above, and that use of the Application Site is proposed to remain unchanged in real terms, the proposals for the regularisation of experience track and events usage are not assessed to result in any impacts of ecological significance. For clarity, and relative to the ecological baseline, the proposals would not give rise to any additional impacts on existing habitats, nor any additional impacts on protected or notable faunal species. The future land use (and any associated impacts) would be comparable to the baseline situation.
12. Whilst no additional biodiversity impacts are anticipated to arise, it is acknowledged that the completion of certain activities could, in the absence of sensitive management, give rise to potential adverse impacts on faunal species. To date, Ecology Solutions have provided advice on an ad-hoc basis in order to ensure that events can proceed in a manner which avoids potential ecological harm. In order to support this regularisation application, appropriate safeguards are identified below, to ensure ongoing use of the Application Site can proceed in accordance with planning policy and legislation of relevance to biodiversity.

Proposed Ecological Safeguards and Sensitive Working Methodologies

13. This section identifies a suite of precautionary working methodologies which will be sufficient to ensure the continued use of the Site can avoid potential adverse impacts on biodiversity. For clarity, and as detailed above, these measures give due regard to the baseline situation for the site, recognising amongst other matters, the presence of Bicester Airfield Local Wildlife Site, notable habitats and notable/protected faunal species.

Aerodrome Use

14. **Context.** The central airfield within the Application Site represents a longstanding airfield, regularly used by light aircraft. This area supports species-poor, regularly mown grassland. It has been identified as short mown throughout the ecological surveys undertaken by Ecology Solutions.

15. **Potential Ecological Receptors.** The intensive management regime for this area greatly tempers its ecological interest, whilst rendering it unsuitable to support faunal species.
16. **Precautionary Measures / Safeguards.** Notwithstanding the absence of suitable opportunities for faunal species at the current time, it is acknowledged that suitable habitat could readily establish should management cease.
17. **Ground Nesting Birds (Skylark).** Subject to maintaining regular use, and regular mowing regime, no additional safeguards are necessary. In the event that the sward remains unmanaged, grass cuts between March to August to be preceded by a pre-commencement inspection by ECoW. Works are only to proceed where ECoW confirms impacts on nesting birds can be avoided.
18. **Reptiles.** Subject to maintain regular use, and a regular mowing regime, no additional safeguards are necessary. In the event that the sward remains unmanaged, grass cuts only to be permitted between mid-March to October, in suitable weather conditions. Cuts to adopt a directional, two stage cut, initially to 10cm sward height and then to ground level.

Off-Road Trail

19. **Context.** The current off-road trail incorporates areas of hardstanding and semi-natural habitats and are subject to occasional use. Tracks within semi-natural habitat predominantly support bareground or short sward habitats.
20. **Potential Ecological Receptors.** The habitats present within the current off-road trail area provide generally limited and sub-optimal opportunities for both Ground Nesting Birds, Reptiles and Great Crested Newts (GCN).
21. **Precautionary Measures / Safeguards.** These habitats within the areas of off-road trail use are predominantly short sward habitats and bareground. As above, should these management cease the taller sward habitats could establish.
22. **Ground Nesting Birds (Skylark).** Subject to maintaining regular use, and regular mowing regime, no additional safeguards are necessary. In the event that the sward remains unmanaged, grass cuts between March to August to be preceded by a pre-commencement inspection by ECoW. Works are only to proceed where ECoW confirms impacts on nesting birds can be avoided. Areas of bareground are deemed unsuitable to support ground nesting birds.
23. **Reptiles & GCN.** Subject to maintain regular use, and a regular mowing regime, no additional safeguards are necessary. In the event that the sward stays unmanaged for an extended period, grass cuts only to be permitted between mid-March to October, in suitable weather conditions. Cuts to adopt a directional, two stage cut, initially to 10cm sward height and then to ground level.
24. Mindful of potential for basking Reptiles within areas of bareground, it is also recommended that a half meter strip of short-mown (ground level) vegetation is maintained on either side of the track.

External User Track Events

25. **Context.** The areas of external user track events comprise of hardstanding of which is subject to regular vehicular use.

26. **Potential Ecological Receptors.** No potential ecological receptors are considered. As above, these areas comprise of existing hardstanding of no potential value to faunal species. Noting the long-standing use of the site, no potential for indirect disturbance such as noise.
27. **Precautionary Measures / Safeguards.** None required.

Whole Site Event Use

28. **Context.** Whole site event use would comprises of the entirety of the current airfield, and areas to the south and west of the airfield. As detailed above, habitats within the airfield supports species-poor, regularly mown grassland. Habitats to the south and west consists of semi-improved calcareous grassland.
29. The perimeter grassland (component of Bicester Airfield LWS) are subject to periodic use during events. Otherwise, grassland is subject to at least annual hay cuts.
30. **Potential Ecological Receptors.** As detailed above (paragraph 16), regarding the main airfield area, notwithstanding the absence of suitable opportunities for faunal species at the current time, it is acknowledged that suitable habitat could readily establish should management cease.
31. Regarding perimeter grassland, these areas provide potentially suitable habitat for ground nesting birds and reptiles. Given the lack of aquatic habitat, and that terrestrial habitat is well distanced from off-site confirmed breeding ponds it is deemed highly unlikely that potential impacts would arise on GCN.
32. **Precautionary Measures / Safeguards.** As above (paragraph 19), regarding the airfield notwithstanding the absence of suitable opportunities for faunal species at the current time, it is acknowledged that suitable habitat could readily establish should management cease.
33. **Perimeter Grassland (component of Bicester Airfield LWS).** Monitoring of habitat condition during events (e.g. parking) to ensure damage is be avoided. If appropriate, rotate car parking area to avoid potential disturbance or degradation of habitat (to be agreed with ECoW). Use of temporary ground protection if required in wet weather.
34. **Ground Nesting Birds (Skylark).** Pre-commencement checks between March and August (within 48 hours of event commencing or commencement of grass cut). Use of area only permitted where nesting confirmed as absent. Grassland habitats to be subject to two-stage cut prior to use for parking (see Reptiles below).
35. **Reptiles / GCN.** Parking only permitted in areas where sward height <10cm. Where sward height is above 10cm, a two-stage cut initially to 10cm should be completed, followed by cut to ground level. These cuts are only permitted in Reptile active season (typically mid-March to early October) and in suitable weather conditions (>10C and dry). Cuts to be direction, with 24-hour delay between first cut and second cut.

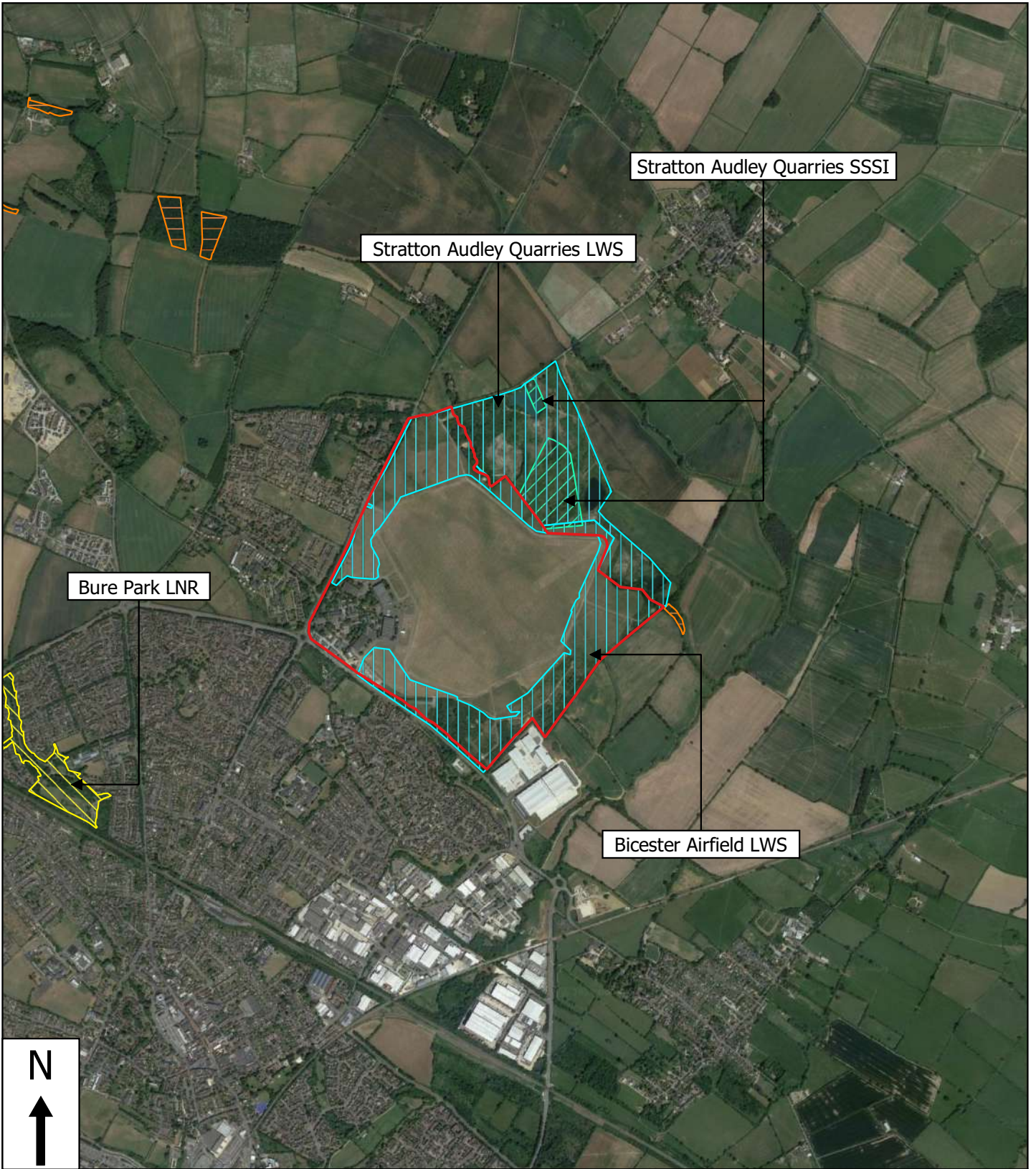
Summary and Conclusion

36. In summary, given the current use of the Site for event use including off-road track use, aviation use, radio-controlled aviation and vehicle demonstrations, and with the adoption of the above safeguards and sensitive working methodologies, no impacts are considered to arise to designated statutory and non-statutory sites, Flora or Fauna from the proposals which seek to formalise regularisation of experience track and events usage.
37. Noting the above, and subject to the adoption of measures as set out in this note, it is considered that proposals may come forward in accordance with adopted legislation and planning policy insofar as this concerns matters of nature conservation.

PLANS

PLAN ECO1

Site Location and Ecological Designations

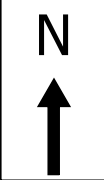


Bure Park LNR






Stratton Audley Quarries LWS

Stratton Audley Quarries SSSI

Bicester Airfield LWS



Key:

-  Site Boundary
-  Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
-  Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW)
-  Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)



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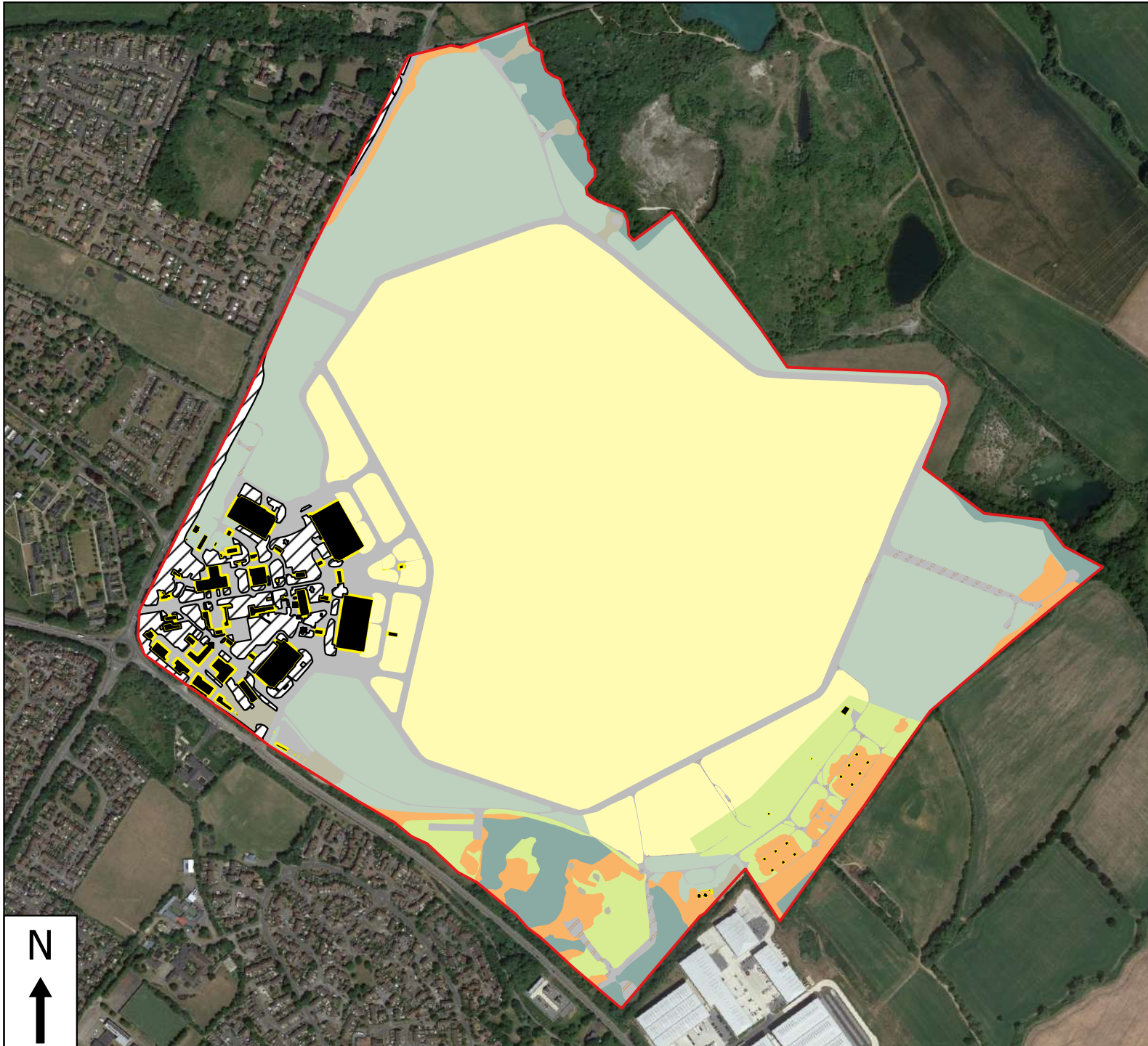
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PLAN ECO1: SITE LOCATION &
ECOLOGICAL DESIGNATIONS

Rev: A
Mar 23

PLAN ECO2

Baseline Habitats



Key:

-  Site Boundary
-  Bareground
-  Building
-  Dense Scrub
-  Hardstanding
-  Recolonising Hardstanding
-  Semi-improved Calcareous Grassland
-  Semi-improved Neutral & Calcareous Grassland
-  Species-poor Semi-improved Calcareous Grassland
-  Broadleaved Semi-natural Woodland
-  Area Not Surveyed



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PLAN ECO2: ECOLOGICAL
FEATURES

Rev: A
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