Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Old Common, Brampton

May 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Brown & Co was commissioned by Lenton Bros Ltd in November 2024 to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment at Old Common, Brampton, Huntingdon, PE28 4RN—hereafter referred to as 'the Site'.

The Site is a flat parcel of land that contains an arable field parcel.

This report sets out the results of a site survey undertaken 15 November 2024 and a subsequent desk-based assessment. The information, assessment and discussion set out in this report aim to inform the potential for Biodiversity Net Gain on the Site in the context of plans to establish a new dog walking paddock.

1.2 Site Description

The Site is a 1.11 ha parcel of land comprising an existing arable field parcel (See Figure 1). No other habitats are present.



Figure 1 – Site location (redline), showing the wider local landscape (© 2024 Microsoft Corporation, © 2024 Maxar, ©CNES (2024) Distribution Airbus DS).

Imagery taken from Bing Aerial December 2024.

The wider landscape around the Site was dominated by agricultural field parcels, chiefly arable, and the urban area of Brampton and Huntingdon. Various hedgerows, woodland blocks, and waterbodies also present. A small stream runs south-north directly west of the Site.

A Statutory Designated Main Rivers is present 300 m north of the Site.

2. Methods

2.1 Objectives

The aim of this report is to provide an initial assessment of the habitats present within the Site and those included in proposals for the Site with regard to the potential of achieving Biodiversity Net Gain. Plans showing all onsite habitats will be generated.

This report was produced following current best practice guidance, including that set out in BS 8683:2021 Process for designing and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain (British Standards 2021).

2.2 Legislation and Policy

Appendix A sets out the national and local planning policy, as well as environmental and wildlife legislation relevant to the Site. The project must adhere to these documents at all times. The contents of this report are written in part to avoid an offence being committed in regard to this policy and legislation.

2.3 Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation

A survey of the Site was conducted on 15 November 2024 by Senior Ecologist Ryan Clark BSc (Hons) MSc ACIEEM. Ryan is a qualified ecologist, having worked within ecology and the wider environmental sector for the last 14 years.

The survey area was subject to a walkover by the attending ecologist, where in the onsite habitats were identified and assessed in accordance with the UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0 (UKHab Ltd 2023). Flora species lists were compiled for each habitat and assigned positions on the DAFOR (Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, or Rare) scale as laid out in Walker *et al*. (2010). Additionally, the Site was assessed for its suitability

for protected and notable species. Any evidence of such species, e.g. Badger setts and signs, was recorded and geo-referenced onsite.

The Statutory Biodiversity metric (Defra 2023) was employed to input the results of the Site survey and the proposed new onsite habitats, thereby generating the value difference between the pre-project and post-project habitats—relative Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

The Statutory Biodiversity Metric requires the following site condition data points to generate the BNG associated with the Site and proposed works:

Habitat Type: both the broad habitat, e.g. woodland, and the specific habitat type, e.g. lowland mixed deciduous woodland, as outlined in UKHab Ltd. (2023).

Area: an aerial measurement of total land cover area (in hectares) for each habitat parcel. Recording of habitat extents, both pre and post-works, was conducted using the onsite survey results, readily available online mapping and aerial imagery, and verified land use records. The minimal mapping unit (MMU) was taken at 0.01 ha.

Condition: a measure within Defra's BNG guidance and assessment tools that quantified the relative 'condition' of a habitat parcel based on various physical, composition, and landscape variables dependant on the habitat type, e.g. number of vascular plant species present per square metre. The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Condition Assessment sheets (Defra 2023) were used to assign condition scores to the habitat parcels identified in the onsite survey.

Strategic Significance: a category ascribed to the geographical location of the Site in regard to its position in the context of Local Planning Authority areas and National Character Area profiles.

2.4 Modular River Physical Survey

The Modular River Physical (MoRPh) field survey technique is a citizen science developed methodology that takes a catchment-based and scaled hydromorphological approach to watercourse assessment. The MoRPh survey employed here records general physical habitat availability to highly mobile organisms and typical morphological units within watercourses, as well as contemporary hydro morphological processes and pressures.

The MoRPh survey utilises data gathered at three habitat and landscape levels, reach, sub-reach, and module, from a single watercourse channel and its immediate margins—watercourse banks and the associated bank-top habitat corridor. An assessment of river type is also made on an internationally accepted set of criteria drawn from the abundance of certain physical features and if the survey watercourse is functioning in a near-natural way.

For the purposes of this assessment the section of watercourse adjacent to the Site was split into five 10 m modules to complete a MoRPh5 sub-reach survey area. Each module was walked by the surveyor on at least one of the adjacent banks. During these surveys, various ecological and morphological features were recorded and georeferenced from the bank top, bank face, and main river channel.

The data collected from the MoRPh5 sub-reach survey were input into the online platform Cartographer.io. A further desk-based assessment of river type was conducted on this platform that analysed at the reach level, taking into account additional features along a greater, landscape-level length of the watercourse than captured in the MoRPh5 sub-reach surveys.

From these data entries a condition score was generated for the length of river adjacent to the Site. Values for various factors that determined the final condition score were extracted from the Cartographer.io platform to draw conclusions on the underlying causal factors for

this condition score and to inform the potential need for uplift and/or enhancement of the watercourse.

2.5 Limitations

The survey of the Site was conducted in November 2024, outside of the optimal botanical assessment period and habitat survey season (April-September inclusive). Thus, it is considered there was moderate risk of notable plant species, such as invasive non-natives, habitat characteristic species, and protected species, being missed by this survey. However, onsite habitats were common and widespread in Britain and were not considered to present complex ecological communities, such as flora-rich woodland floors or lowland meadow, that would be misidentified outside of the optimal botanical assessment period. Thus, it is estimated that a full and complete habitat assessment of the Site was conducted.

Habitat mapping is subject to seasonal variations, where in, ecotones—transitional zones between biological communities—may drift or be relocated at different periods of the year. This can be a natural shift owing to abiotic factors, or a consequence of management, either within the habitat itself or within adjacent communities.

3. Baseline Conditions

3.1 UK Habitat Classification Survey

This section outlines all habitats recorded within the Site on 15 November 2024. A plan depicting the onsite habitats, their extent and location, and relevant target notes are shown in Appendix B; photographs of the Site are shown in Appendix C.

UKHab baseline habitats present:

- Other cereal crops – c1c7.
- Other rivers and streams – r2b.

3.1.1 Other Cereal Crops

Existing section of arable field parcel that dominated the Site (Photograph 1).

3.1.2 Other Rivers and Streams

The Site lay <5 m from the top of the bank of a small tributary of the Great Ouse river (Photograph 2). Therefore, the Site fell within the riparian zone of this watercourse and its habitat type and condition forms part of the baseline assessment of the Site.

The section of the tributary that ran adjacent to the Site was a small stream with an approximate channel width of 1.8 m. Banks were relatively steep with little vegetation. Banktops were dominated by arable fields and a public roadway.

The Modular River Physical Survey returned a result of Fairly Poor condition for the tributary. Indicators that contributed to the lowering of the condition score included were chiefly associated with B5 – bank top managed ground cover, but other indicators scored relatively low owing to the uniform geomorphological features of the channel.

4. Feasibility of Biodiversity Net Gain

4.1 Irreplicable Habitat and Other Important Ecological Features Evaluation

No irreplaceable or Priority habitats are present within the Site. Various hedgerows and freshwater ponds within the local area are considered likely to meet criteria of Priority habitats.

It is estimated that adjacent trees may provide habitat for some invertebrates that would qualify as Priority Species by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended). Local ponds may provide habitat for great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*).

4.2 Proposed Habitats

This section outlines all UKHab habitats proposed to be present on the Site post development; as shown in the indicative Site plan (Appendix B).

UKHab habitats proposed to be present after project delivery:

- Modified grassland – g4
- Other developed land – u1b6
- Other native hedgerow – h2a.
- Other rivers and streams – r2b.

4.2.1 Modified Grassland

An area of previous arable is proposed to be established as a new grassland habitat that will be sown with Emorsgate's EM1 Basic General Purpose Meadow Mixture. Habitat is anticipated to pass condition criteria A, C, E, F, and G; therefore, achieving Moderate condition.

4.2.2 *Other Developed Land*

Proposed new hardstanding for access and carparking bays.

4.2.3 *Other Native Hedgerow*

A new boundary hedgerow is proposed. Hedgerow is anticipated to fail condition criteria C1, C2, and D2; therefore, achieving Moderate condition.

4.2.4 *Other Rivers and Streams*

It is proposed that at least 125 m of the bank top and bank face of the right bank (looking downstream) of the tributary is enhanced via a targeted planting regime that will seek to establish long grasses/herbs, scrub/shrubs, and tree communities that reach a minimum of 33% cover respectively. The River Condition Assessment retuned a post-works condition score of Moderate. This was achieved via the reduction of artificial land cover on the left bank, reducing the deficit of B5.

4.3 Summary of Habitat Change

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 detail summary changes in UKHab habitats associated with the proposed project prior to and after the proposed development.

Table 4.1 – summary of UKHab habitat change pre-development

Habitat	Total area	Area retained	Area enhanced	Description
Non-linear habitats (ha)				
Other cereal crops – c1c7	1.11	0	0	Existing section of arable field.
Linear habitats (m)				
Other rivers and streams – r2b	225	100	125	Existing offsite tributary proposed to be enhanced from Fairly Good to Moderate condition.

Table 4.2 - summary of non-linear UKHab habitat change post-development

Habitat	Total area	Description
Non-linear habitat creation (ha)		
Modified grassland – g4	1.1	Proposed new Moderate condition grassland.
Building – u1b5	0.01	Proposed new carparking bays.
Linear habitat creation (m)		
Other native hedgerow – h2a	238	Proposed new hedgerow.

Figure 2 presents an extract from the completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric completed for the Site.

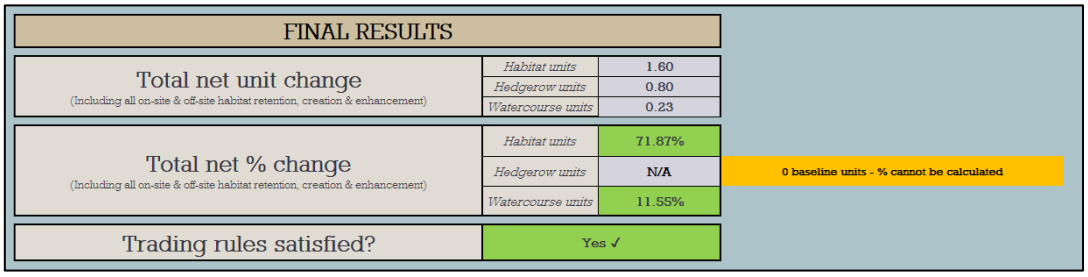


Figure 2 – extract from a completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric for the Site.

The proposed changes of habitats within the Site result in an increase of habitat units from 2.22 to 3.82—equating to a **Biodiversity Net Gain of 71.87%.**

The proposed changes of habitats within the Site result in an increase of hedgerow units from 0 to 0.8.

The proposed changes of watercourse habitat within the Site result in an increase of watercourse units from 2.03 to 2.26—equating to a **Biodiversity Net Gain of 11.55%.**

5. Conclusion

This report has been produced to support an application to establish a new dog walking paddock. A baseline dominated by an existing arable field is proposed to be replaced by a new modified grassland field and small area of hardstanding. An offsite watercourse is proposed to be enhanced via bank face and a bank top planting regime. A new hedgerow is proposed to be planted.

The onsite habitat change is estimated to result in a habitat unit uplift of 71.87%, hedgerow unit uplift of 100% and a watercourse unit uplift of 11.55%. Thus, the project is considered to meet the legal obligation to achieve a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in England.

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APPENDIX A: Planning Policy & Legislation

Relevant Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2023

The NPPF states that:

Para 8

Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives).

Para 32

Local plans and spatial development strategies should be informed throughout their preparation by a sustainability appraisal that meets the relevant legal requirements17. This should demonstrate how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives (including opportunities for net gains).

Para 180

Planning policies and decisions should contribute and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

Para 185

To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

- Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity

Para 186

When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principle:

- development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be

supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018)

Papworth Everard, that the Site falls within, is designated as a minor rural centre within this document.

Policy NH/4: Biodiversity states that:

- New development must aim to maintain, enhance, restore or add to biodiversity. Opportunities should be taken to achieve positive gain through the form and design of development. Measures may include creating, enhancing and managing wildlife habitats and networks, and natural landscape. The built environment should be viewed as an opportunity to fully integrate biodiversity within new development through innovation.

- If significant harm to the population or conservation status of a Protected Species, Priority Species1 or Priority Habitat resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission will be refused.

- Where there are grounds to believe that a proposal may affect a Protected Species, Priority Species or Priority Habitat, applicants will be expected to provide an adequate level of survey information and site assessment to establish the extent of a potential impact. This survey information and site assessment shall be provided prior to the determination of an application.

Previously developed land (brownfield sites) will not be considered to be devoid of biodiversity. The reuse of such sites must be undertaken carefully with regard to existing features of biodiversity interest. Development proposals on such sites will be expected to include measures that maintain and enhance important features and appropriately incorporate them within any development of the site.

Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document - Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (2022)

This document sets out a variety of biodiversity principles relevant to potential works in the Greater Cambridge area, including an assessment of planning policy obligations in the context of current wildlife and environmental legislation, access to biodiversity resources produced by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning, and analysis of NPPF policies and how to discharge such commitments.

Section 5.2 states that:

- To meet national and local policy requirements (NH/4 Item 3 and Policy 70), submitted ecological reports are expected to explain how the hierarchy of mitigation measures (Avoid, Mitigate, Compensate) has been embedded into the design of the development. Where impacts on habitats and species cannot be avoided, a clear explanation of why alternative sites are not feasible, and what proposed mitigation, and compensation measures are necessary to address all likely significant adverse effects is needed.

Section 5.5 states that:

- Proposals that contain or that will affect a habitat of importance for biodiversity will be expected to include measures to protect any existing value and to improve their condition by appropriate enhancement or management measures. Retaining existing biodiversity features on sites might make it easier to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain. Management should be sustainable for the longterm, with clear objectives guided by the site's existing habitat features and species, as appropriate to location and environmental conditions.

- Design of new developments should retain habitats of value to biodiversity wherever possible. Even for small scale developments, this would include boundary hedgerows, trees and any pond on site and these can provide the framework for the setting of the scheme layout as well as contributing to the post development network for nature and people.

Environment Act 2021

Schedule 14 of The Environment Act 2021 makes it mandatory for all new developments (with some limited exceptions) to achieve a biodiversity net gain (BNG) of at least 10% by the time the development is completed compared to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat.

The outputs and statutory instruments of this legislation may be amended in the future by the Secretary of State.

Conservation of Habitats and Species regulations 2017 (as amended).

Section 43 of Part 3 of this legislation makes it an offence to do any of the following with regards to European Protected Species (animals) as listed on Schedule 2:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of a European protected species.
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of any such species.
- Deliberately takes or destroy the eggs of such an animal.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal. (*Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute this activity*).

Section 43 of Part 3 of this legislation makes it an offence to do any of the following with regards to European Protected Species (plants) as listed on Schedule 5:

- Deliberately pick, collect, cut, uproot or destroy a wild plant of a European Protected Species.
- Be in position of or to transport said plant.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (as amended).

Section 40 of Part 3 of this act compels public bodies (local authorities, police, fire and health authorities, and utility companies) with exercisable functions within England to consider actions to be taken to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England—in particular to have regard to the United Nations Environmental Programme Convention on Biological Diversity of 1992, any relevant local nature recovery strategies, and any relevant species conservation strategy or protected site strategy (prepared by Natural England).

Section 41 of Part 3 of this Act ensures the publishing of a list containing species and habitat types that are of principle importance for the purpose of conserving or enhancing biodiversity in England.

Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.

Under this legislation it is an offence to mutilate, kick, beat, nail or otherwise impale, stab, burn, stone, crush, drown, drag or asphyxiate any wild mammal with the intent to inflict unnecessary suffering.

Protection of Badgers Act 1992

Under this legislation it is an offence to (or intend to, or to be reckless as to whether your actions would have these consequences):

- Wilfully kill, injure or take a badger (or attempts to do so).
- Damage or destroy any part of a badger sett. (*Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute these activities*).
- Obstruct access to a badger sett. (Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute these activities).
- Disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett. (Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute these activities).

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Part 1 of this act makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take any wild bird, to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built, and/or to take or destroy an egg of any wild bird.

Part 1 also makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bird included in Schedule 1 of the act, and to take, damage, or destroy the nest of any wild bid included in Schedule ZA1.

Schedule 5 list non-avian species that are afforded various protections under Sections 9.1a, 9.1b, 9.2, 9.4a, 9.4a (Whales), 9.4b, 9.4c, 9.5a and 9.5b.

Schedule 8 lists plant species that are protected from intentionally picking, uprooting or destroying under Section 13.

Schedule 9 lists non-native invasive plants for which it is an offence under Section 14 to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any part of said plants. (Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute these activities).

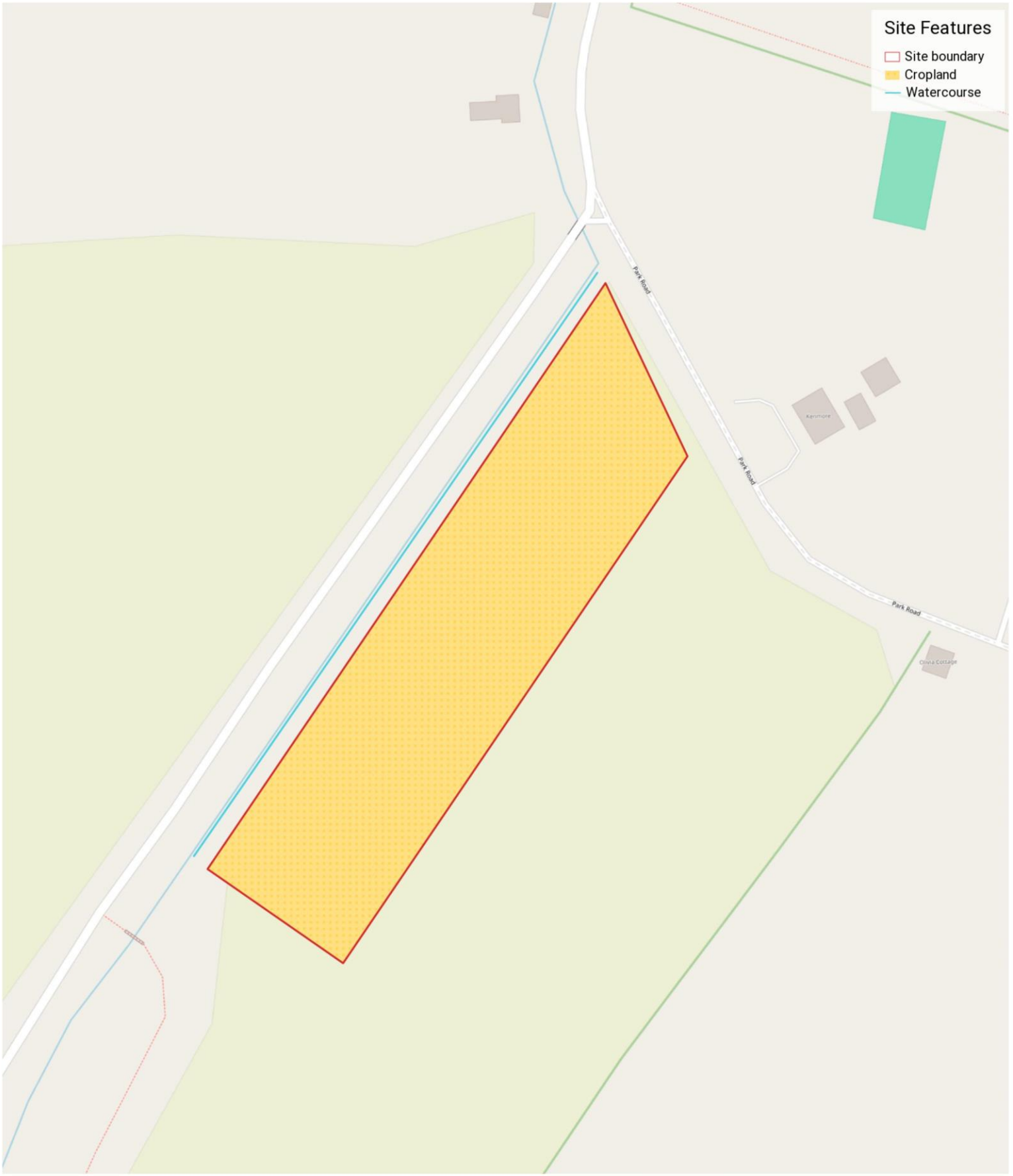
Other Legislation (England)

- **The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations 2017**
- **Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003** (as amended).
- **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**
- **Hedgerows Regulations 1997.**
- **Weeds Act 1959.**

APPENDIX B: Baseline Habitat Plan & Proposed Habitats Plans

See overleaf.

Baseline Habitats



Produced on Land App, Dec 5, 2024

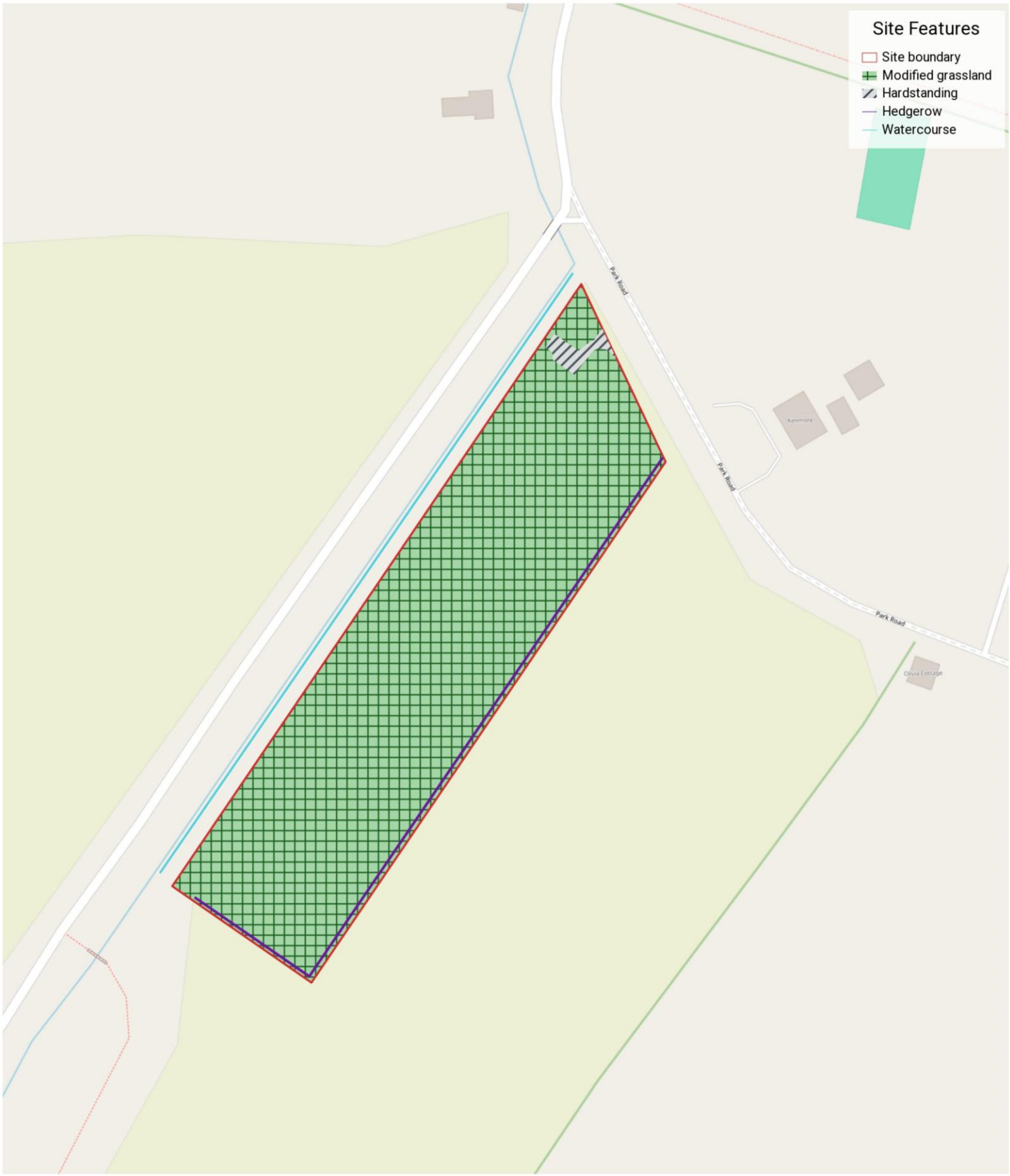
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50 m

Scale 1:1592 (at A4)

N

Proposed Habitats



Produced on Land App, May 20, 2025.
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50 m
Scale 1:1549 (at A4)

N

APPENDIX C: Photographs



Photograph 1: arable in the centre of the Site.



Photograph 2: adjacent tributary.