

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Ashworth Valley Scout Camp

Ashworth Valley, Rochdale

January 2026 Rev B

Prepared for: Ashworth Valley Scout Camp

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This document is to be read in conjunction with:

- The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool– AV Scouts. Rev B
- The Statutory BNG Habitat Condition Assessment – AV Scouts



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On 15th January 2026 a site visit to inform the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment was undertaken on land at Ashworth Valley Scout Camp.
- The survey area comprises frequently mown modified grassland, tall forb, bare ground and rural trees.
- The proposals include installation of four wooden tents and a round house with access (developed land; sealed surface). The development will result in the loss of 0.025ha of modified grassland and 0.0244ha of bare ground.
- Compensation and enhancement will include the planting of 0.0244ha of other broadleaved woodland and 5 small broadleaved trees.
- There will be a 11.1% increase in Habitat Units. Watercourse Units and Hedgerow Units are not applicable.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Application Site

- 1.1.1 This report details a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment of land at Ashworth Valley Scout Camp, Ashworth Valley, Rochdale, OL11 5UP. Ordnance Survey grid reference (centre of site): SD84811273.
- 1.1.2 Ashworth Valley Scout Camp commissioned Verity Webster Ltd to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment in order to inform the proposals for the site.

1.2 Objectives

- 1.2.1 The objectives of the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment are to determine:
- Potential for enhancement or compensation (offsetting) on the site for protected species, habitats of conservation interest and overall biodiversity with the aim of achieving 10% net gain in biodiversity.

1.3 Proposals

- 1.3.1 The proposals comprise the construction of four wooden tents and a round house on an area of modified grassland.

1.4 Ecologist

- 1.4.1 The Ecological Assessment was undertaken by Verity Webster. Verity is a Chartered Ecologist and a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.
- 1.4.2 Verity has worked as an ecological consultant since 2007. She has undertaken Ecological Assessments and protected species surveys for a large variety of projects and schemes, producing the required impact assessment and subsequent mitigation schemes and method statements when necessary. Verity has botanical skills FISC Level 4 suitable for NVC survey.

1.5 Landscape Design and Ecologist Limitations

- 1.5.1 This document includes recommendations for measures to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). These recommendations do not comprise a landscape design or planting prescriptions as provided by a Landscape Architect and the ecologist has no Design Liability associated with these recommendations. This document includes measures to achieve BNG based upon the Proposed Site Plans provided.



2. Site Location and Description

2.1 Site Location

- 2.1.1 The survey site is located in Ashworth Valley, approximately 900m north of Hooley Bridge on the northern outskirts of Heywood, Rochdale. Bury and Rochdale Old Road runs east to west approximately 660m to the south. Woodland is extensive in the area, running north up Ashworth Valley, splitting into a 'V' along two waterway corridors; Norden Brook, which runs roughly north to south, and Cheesden Brook, which weaves northwest to southeast. The rivers run through steep-sided valleys of woodland. The River Roch weaves east to west approximately 800m to the south and these waterways discharge into the river.
- 2.1.2 Ashworth Road runs north between the woodland plots and lies approximately 200m east of the survey site. Between the areas of woodland in the centre of the 'V' and either side there is open landscape composed largely of grazed pasture.
- 2.1.3 Ashworth Valley lies adjacent to the north of the arm of woodland through which Cheesden Brook runs.
- 2.1.4 The adjacent woodland and the plots of woodland connected through a wider area of the valley and along the River Roch is classified as Ancient Woodland.
- 2.1.5 The survey site is in an area with high suitability for wildlife. See Figures 1 and 2.

2.2 Site Description

- 2.2.1 The survey site is part of the wider Ashworth Valley Scout Camp. The land encompasses a roughly rectangular plot of modified grassland adjacent to an area of ancient woodland that slopes south to Cheesden Brook. The site is continuous with open, managed modified grassland to the east. The north and western boundaries are bounded by hedgerows.
- 2.2.2 There is an area of bare ground, previously disturbed adjacent to the woodland with two small ash and one medium oak present.
- 2.2.3 See UK Habitat Classification Plan, Figure 3.



Looking north across the Site Area



Figure 1: Ordnance survey map showing the location of the proposed development site.

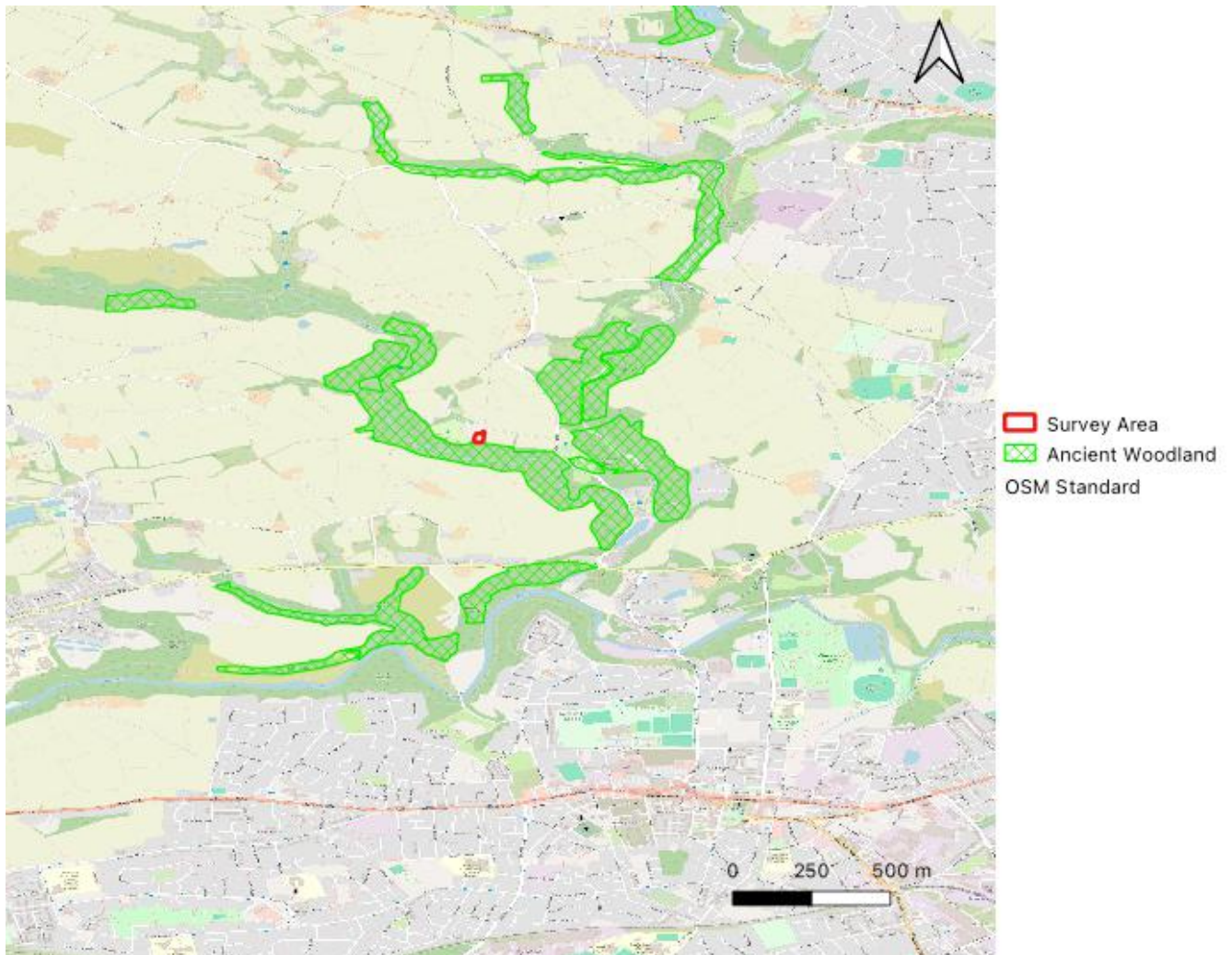
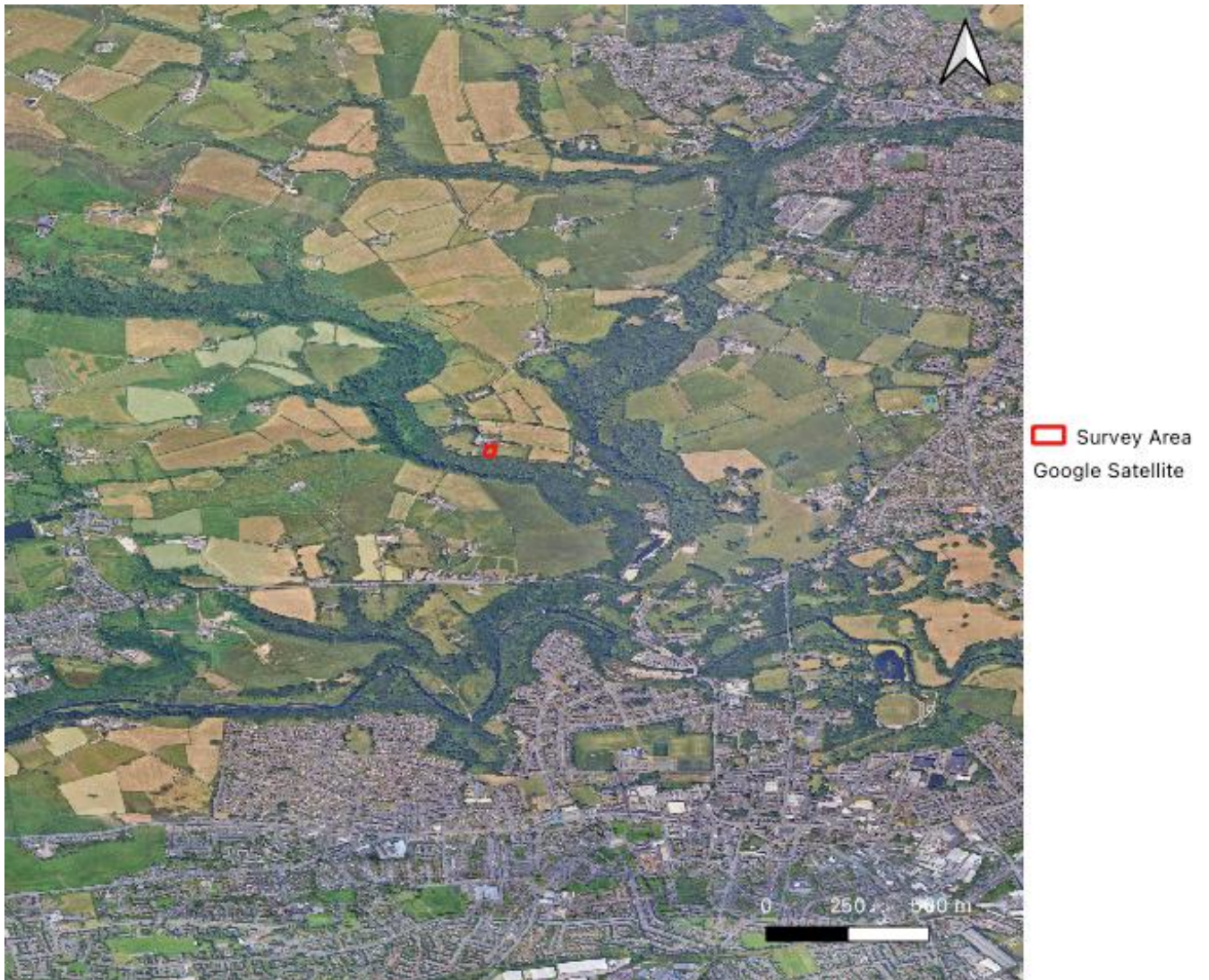




Figure 2: Aerial image showing the proposed development site and immediate surroundings





3. Legislation

3.1 Planning Policy and Legislation

- 3.1.1 In England, biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). This is referred to as biodiversity net gain in Planning Practice Guidance to distinguish it from other or more general biodiversity gains.
- 3.1.2 Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to a general biodiversity gain condition to secure the biodiversity gain objective. This objective is to deliver at least a 10% increase in relation to the pre-development biodiversity value of the development granted permission. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits (Gov.Uk Biodiversity Net Gain, 2023).
- 3.1.3 Under the NERC Act 2006, planning authorities are obliged to make sure that they have all the information on the presence of protected species on site before they make a decision on the planning permission.
- 3.1.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) encourages Local Planning Authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Chapter 15, Para 180 of NPPF states: *"The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils....*
- d) 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 181 states: *"Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries."*

Para 185 identifies that plans should do the following to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity:

- a) "Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and*
- b) Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and peruse opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity."*

Para 186 states that *"when determining planning applications, local authorities should apply the following principles:*

- a) if significant harm to biodiversity from a development cannot be avoided...,adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort compensated for, then planning permission should be refused"*

- 3.1.5 The local planning authority has a responsibility, therefore, to obtain all information regarding the potential for protected species on a site prior to making a decision about a proposal.



4. Methodology

4.1 Site Survey

- 4.1.1 A site visit was undertaken on 15th January 2026 to inform the Biodiversity Net Gain Metric and Assessment. Habitats on site were assessed and described in accordance with UK Habitat Classification (UK Hab Ltd, 2023) and a list of conspicuous species recorded. The condition of the habitats was determined using the condition sheets provided for the Statutory Metric (DEFRA, 2023).
- 4.1.2 The Ecological Assessment was undertaken by Verity Webster BSc MSC CEcol MCIEEM. Verity is a Chartered Ecologist and a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.
- 4.1.3 Verity has worked as an ecological consultant for over 19 years. She has undertaken Ecological Assessments and protected species surveys for a large variety of projects and schemes, producing the required impact assessment and subsequent mitigation schemes and method statements when necessary. Verity has botanical skills FISC Level 4 suitable for NVC survey.

4.2 Mapping

- 4.2.1 Habitats on site were mapped in accordance with UK Hab Classification (UK Hab Ltd, 2023). The minimum mapping unit adopted is 15m².

4.3 Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

- 4.3.1 Biodiversity Offsetting was developed by Defra. The pilots of the study were first published in 2012.
- 4.3.2 The Biodiversity Calculator is a system created by Defra to quantify change in biodiversity of a site in biodiversity units.
- 4.3.3 *The Biodiversity Offsetting Pilots: Guidance for Developers* (Defra, 2012) details the original metric for calculating biodiversity loss or gain as a result of development proposal.
- 4.3.4 *The Statutory Biodiversity Metric* (DEFRA, 2023), *Condition Assessments* (DEFRA, 2023), *The Statutory Metric Use Guide* (DEFRA, 2024) and associated biodiversity metric principles were used to inform the assessment and the habitat condition and calculate potential change in biodiversity within the survey site.
- 4.3.5 For inclusion in the Statutory Metric, habitats below 25m² have been grouped where appropriate, that is, where they have the same distinctiveness level.
- 4.3.6 To determine strategic significance of the habitats at baseline and post-development, the relevant documentation was considered including Local and Neighbourhood Plans, Priority Habitats, Local Biodiversity Action Plans and Local Ecological Networks. When available the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be utilised for this purpose.
- 4.3.7 The Mitigation Hierarchy and the Biodiversity Net Hierarchy and was used to inform recommendations about habitat retention, loss, enhancement and creation as per the Biodiversity Net Gain: Good



Practice principles for development (CIRIA C776a, 2019).

Biodiversity Net Gain Principles (Table 4, p. 19, The Statutory Metric User Guide, 2024)

Principle 1 – The metric assessment should be completed by a competent person.

Principle 2 – The use of this biodiversity metric does not override existing biodiversity protections, statutory obligations, policy requirements, ecological mitigation hierarchy or any other requirements. This includes consenting or licencing processes, for example woodlands.

Principle 3 – This biodiversity metric should be used in accordance with established good practice guidance and professional codes.

Principle 4 – This biodiversity metric is not a complex or comprehensive ecological model and is not a substitute for expert ecological advice.

Principle 5 – Biodiversity units are a proxy for biodiversity and should be treated as relative values.

Principle 6 – This biodiversity metric is designed to inform decisions in conjunction with locally relevant evidence, expert input, or guidance.

Principle 7 – Habitat interventions need to be realistic and deliverable within a relevant project timeframe.

Principle 8 – Created and enhanced habitats should be, where practical and reasonable, local to any impact and deliver strategically important outcomes for nature conservation.

Principle 9 – This biodiversity metric does not enforce a minimum habitat size ration for compensation of losses. Proposals should aim to:

- Maintain habitat extent – supporting more, bigger, better and more joined up ecological networks.
- Ensure that proposed or retained habitat parcels are of sufficient size for ecological function.

4.4 Limitations

- 4.1.1 The survey work was undertaken in January 2026. A proportion of higher plants are visible in January, but some species are more conspicuous or only present at certain times of the year, and some species may have been missed. The species list constructed is not comprehensive, but given the habitat types expected, is sufficient to inform the BNG Assessment in this case.



5. Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

5.1 Baseline condition and potential impacts on Biodiversity

Offsetting and the Biodiversity Calculator

5.1.1 The baseline condition of the habitat and the predicted change as a result of the proposals has been assessed with the use of the Biodiversity Offset principals.

5.1.2 Biodiversity offsetting principal: What is it?

“Using the biodiversity offsetting approach means that an offset provider delivers quantifiable amount of biodiversity benefit to offset the loss of the biodiversity resulting from the development. The losses and gains are measured in the same way, even if the habitats concerned are different. In the biodiversity offsetting pilot, the measurement is done in **‘biodiversity units’**, which are the product of the **size of an area**, the **distinctiveness** and the **condition** of the habitat it comprises. The assessment of biodiversity units lost and gained can be calculated” (Defra, 2012).

5.1.3 The Biodiversity Calculator is a system created by Defra to quantify change in biodiversity of a site in biodiversity units. The current calculator is known as Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Gov.UK Statutory Biodiversity Metric Tool, 2023).

5.1.4 This quantitative assessment will be considered in relation to the other qualitative ecological functions of the site in order to assess the impact (i.e. functionality for protected species), but is a useful tool to show predicted or potential loss of habitat, change in condition and enhancement (net gain).



Habitats at Baseline

5.1.5 The survey site comprises artificial unvegetated unsealed surface on the eastern half with sparsely vegetated land where ruderal plant species have colonised. Immediately outside the site to the east, a row of sycamore trees runs along Bury Old Road, under which there is modified grassland with tall forb.

5.1.6 The western half of the site comprises a footpath (developed land; sealed surface), and modified grassland, the majority of which is frequently mown and a small strip alongside the footpath remains unmanaged. There are three small fruit trees in the grassland to the west, immediately outside the site area.

5.1.7 The UK Habitat classifications are as follows:

- g4 108 Modified grassland; frequently mown
- g4 16 Tall forb
- g4 510 524 Bare ground with invasive non-native species
- w1 200 rural trees

6.1.2 Refer to the UK Habitat Classification Plan (Figure 4) below.

6.1.3 Hedgerows are present along the north and west boundary but are outside the red line boundary for purposes of Biodiversity Net Gain.

Modified grassland g4 108

6.1.4 The grassland is regularly mown and as a result is species poor. The stand comprises rye grass (*Lolium perenne*) with Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and rare creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*).

Tall Forb g4 16

6.1.5 There is a small patch of tall forb so the south comprising Yorkshire fog and common nettle (*Urtica dioica*) with creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), sparse bramble and creeping buttercup. The mosses *Eurinchium praelongum* and *Brachythecium rutabulum* are present but sparse. The area of tall forb is below minimum mapping unit so is included in with modified grassland for the purposes of the calculation.

Bare ground with invasive non-native species g4 510 524

6.1.6 This area is adjacent to the woodland and slopes down a bank from the mown grassland. It has been used to store removed vegetation. The ground is bare aside from patches under 10% cover of creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) and the stems of Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens grandiflora*), which is likely to grow up in spring.

6.1.7 This land could have been classified as sparsely vegetated ruderal/ephemeral if there had been greater cover of creeping buttercup and the Himalayan balsam was emerging, but this habitat is the same distinctiveness as bare ground so there would not be any material difference in the



metric.

Individual trees w1 200

- 6.1.8 Although close to the woodland, three trees are present within the area of bare ground and outside the fence line that denotes the woodland boundary. These comprise two small ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and one medium sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*).



Bare ground covered in debris and stems of Himalayan balsam and showing the small individual rural trees



Small area of tall forb



Regularly mown modified grassland

Figure 3: The Survey Site – UK Habitat Classification Plan



Distinctiveness of the Habitat and Trading Rules

5.1.8 Under the Biodiversity Calculator principals each habitat is categorised into a distinctiveness band.

5.1.9 The distinctiveness of the habitat is based upon parameters such as species richness, diversity, rarity (at local, regional, national and international scales) and the degree to which a habitat supports species rarely found in other habitats (Treweek *et al*, 2010).

- Modified grassland is considered to have very low distinctiveness.
- Rural trees are considered to have medium distinctiveness.
- Bare ground is considered to have low distinctiveness.

Trading Rules

5.1.10 Habitats of low distinctiveness, if lost, must be compensated for with the same distinctiveness or better habitat. Habitats of medium distinctiveness, if lost, must be compensated for by the same broad habitat or a higher distinctiveness habitat.

Habitat Condition Assessment

5.1.11 The condition the habitat on site can be categorised as low, moderate or good and is based upon the Habitat Condition Assessment Sheets within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric.

5.1.12 The modified, maintained grassland is considered to be of poor condition because there are fewer than 6 vascular plant species per m² and the sward height is uniform.

5.1.13 The bare ground is considered to be of poor condition because it does not support much vegetation and supports non-native invasive species.

5.1.14 The rural trees are considered to be of moderate condition as they are young, but are native species and undamaged.

Strategic Significance

5.1.15 The strategic significance of the habitat present is based upon the value of the habitat in the wider landscape. Consideration is given to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, neighbourhood plans and local ecological networks.

5.1.16 Modified grassland, small and medium rural trees and bare ground are not in the local policy. For this reason, at baseline these habitats have been recorded as 'not in local strategy/no local strategy'.

5.1.17 However, other broadleaved woodland, which will be created as part of the proposals, will extend the existing ancient woodland and Ashworth Valley Site of Biological Interest, supporting the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. For this reason, this habitat creation and the rural trees to be planted are included as 'formally identified in local strategy'.



5.2 Achieving Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.2.1 The EU is committed to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services by 2020. The Biodiversity Strategy sets out 6 targets and 20 specific actions geared towards this overall objective. Action 7 is to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- 5.2.2 The 'mitigation hierarchy' is included with current planning policy, aiming to halt the loss of biodiversity. The National Planning Policy Framework, consolidating planning guidance states that *'if significant harm cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or as a last resort, compensated for, planning permission should be refused'*.
- 5.2.3 Defra's biodiversity offsetting pilot was developed to address this requirement and ensure development, economic growth and biodiversity conservation are compatible (British Ecological Society, 2013).
- 5.2.4 Biodiversity net gain, as a good practice principal, has been developed by Ciria, CIEEM and IEMA (BNG, 2016). At the very least developments should aim for no net loss as part of the proposals.
- 5.2.5 The Headline Results in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric show the overall net change in Biodiversity Units as a result of the development and creation of new habitat.

Habitat Lost and Trading Rules

- 5.2.6 As a result of the proposals 0.025ha of modified grassland and 0.0244ha of bare ground will be lost.
- 5.2.7 Due to the loss of the modified grassland and bare ground, habitat of the same distinctiveness or better habitat is required.



Area habitats to be created

5.2.8 The following habitats are to be created on site:

- **0.0244ha of Other broadleaved woodland**
- **5 small native broadleaved trees will be planted.**

5.3 Habitat Creation

Other broadleaved woodland

5.3.1 An area of 0.0244ha of other broadleaved woodland will be created on the area of bare ground adjacent to the existing woodland.

5.3.2 Species planted will include those that complement the existing woodland structure; sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*), pendulous birch (*Betula pendula*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and smaller understorey species including rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*).

5.3.3 A Habitat Monitoring and Management Plan will be required to detail the planting and management of the habitat.

Broadleaved Trees

5.3.4 Five small native trees will be planted. These could include rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), hazel (*Cotylus avellana*), crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*), cherry (*Prunus avium*) or birch (*Betula pendula*).

5.3.5 To achieve moderate condition, these trees must be cared for, and not pruned unless necessary.

5.3.6 Trees that die in the first couple of years must be replaced.



Planted Rowan



Planted Pendulous Birch



Planted crab apple

Figure 5: The Survey Site – Proposed Habitat Creation



5.4 Percentage Change in Biodiversity Units

Baseline Habitat Units: 0.56

Habitat Units Change: 0.06

Total percentage change in Habitat Units: 11.1%

- 5.4.1 The Statutory Biodiversity Metric shows there will be an increase of 11.1% biodiversity net gain in Habitat Units as a result of the proposals. There is no requirement for watercourse or hedgerow units as there are no linear habitats on site at baseline.



6. References

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