

Appendix 14.9: Peatland Condition Assessment

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1 Introduction

This Peatland Condition Assessment (PCA) has been prepared by Fluid Environmental Consulting (Fluid) on behalf of the Applicant to support the Environmental Statement (ES) for Scout Moor Wind Farm (the 'Project for Assessment'). The assessment has been informed by detailed peat survey data collected by Fluid in April, July, August, October and December 2024, February 2025, March and April 2026, as well as habitat surveys undertaken by Atmos Consulting (Atmos) in 2024.

The Assessment Boundary (**Figure 14.1: Hydrological Setting** of the ES) is located within the South Pennines, between Rawtenstall and Rochdale in Northwest England. Access to the Assessment Boundary is proposed via the A56 / A680, followed by minor roads to the west of the Assessment Boundary.

The Project for Assessment will comprise 12 wind turbines, with a blade tip height typically of 180 m, associated infrastructure and ancillary development.

The Study Area consisted of all areas within the Assessment Boundary mapped by Fluid as having >0.3 m peat depth.

1.1 Objectives

The objectives of this report are to:

- Present the methodology and findings of the PCA survey undertaken by Fluid in February 2025;
- Assess the condition of the peatland vegetation present across the part of the Assessment Boundary considered for infrastructure development;
- Identify any areas of peatland that are likely to be actively peat-forming; and
- Aid in the identification of peatland that may be suitable for peatland restoration and biodiversity enhancement opportunities based on their current condition.

2 Assessment Boundary Description

The Assessment Boundary comprises predominantly upland moorland and grassland over an elevated plateau and north to south ridge reaching an elevation of circa 480 m AOD. The area encompasses the surface water catchments of Prickshaw Brook, Naden Brook, Scout Moor Brook, Cowpe Brook, Well Clough and Cown Brook.

The northwest part of the Assessment Boundary is characterised by wetter peatland habitats including M3 and M20 communities. The remainder of the Assessment Boundary is dominated by drier mire and grassland communities, predominantly M25, U5 and U6 habitats. Historic mining sites are present to the north of the Assessment Boundary and the land is currently used for livestock grazing, as well as being a popular location for walkers and cyclists.

The Peaty Soils Location (England) dataset published by Natural England indicates the presence of Deep Peaty Soils across the majority of the northern part of the Assessment

Boundary, and Shallow Peaty Soils across the entirety of the southern extent. This distribution have been confirmed by peat surveys undertaken by Fluid, which show a similar spatial pattern to the Natural England mapping with peat depths identified up to a maximum depth of 3.7 m. The peat survey results undertaken to date are presented on **Figures 14.8** and **14.9** of the ES.

3 Methodology

3.1 Desk Study

The results of the NVC Survey were imported into QGIS to identify areas containing NVC communities associated with peatland vegetation. These data were overlain with the estimated peat depth information derived from peat surveys undertaken by Fluid to define the extent of peatland to be assessed. Target notes produced as part of the NVC survey were also reviewed to identify potential features or areas of interest relevant to peatland condition.

The following features were identified using available aerial photography as potential indicators of peatland condition:

- Potential peat hags;
- Potential bare peat areas;
- Potential artificial drainage features; and
- Bog pools.

These features were mapped to be verified by the walkover survey and to inform the design of a survey route that was representative of peatland condition across the Assessment Boundary.

3.2 Field Surveys

The following field surveys have been used to inform this assessment:

- Phase 1 Habitat and NVC survey – undertaken by Atmos in 2024 and detailed in **Chapter 9: Ecology** and **Appendix 9.1** of the ES;
- Peat depth surveys – undertaken by Fluid in April, July, August, October and December 2024, and October 2024, and February 2025, March and April 2026 and detailed in **Chapter 14** and **Appendix 14.2** of the ES; and
- Peatland condition walkover survey – undertaken by Fluid in February 2025.

3.2.1 Habitat Survey

The following NVC communities mapped by Atmos habitat surveys underlain by peat deposits within the Assessment Boundary are consistent with peatland vegetation and are considered in this assessment:

- M3 *Eriophorum angustifolium* bog pool community;
- M17 *Trichophorum germanicum* – *Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire community;
- M20 *Eriophorum vaginatum* – *Erica tetralix* blanket mire community; and
- M25 *Molinia caerulea* – *Potentilla erecta* mire.

Other communities were assessed where peat depth surveys indicated the presence of peat deposits. These included MG9, M6, H12, U5 and U4. These were all classified as being either Modified condition or Actively Eroding condition as these habitats are not considered to be actively peat forming. Any peat deposits underlying these communities within the Study Area were formed under historic hydro-ecological conditions.

M3 *Eriophorum angustifolium* bog pool community

M3 is a bog pool community typically found in wetter areas of blanket bog or raised mire systems, often forming part of a complex with other mire types. It is characterised by shallow, open pools dominated by *Eriophorum angustifolium*, with an assemblage of Sphagnum mosses and aquatic or semi-aquatic species. These communities play an important role in peat formation and hydrological regulation within the mire system.

M3 is considered a Priority Peatland Habitat impacts may raise issues of national interest, depending on its function and condition. The habitat should be avoided by construction activities (JNCC, 2011).

M17 *Trichophorum germanicum* – *Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire community

M17 is a typically wetter peatland community, with species including *Molinia caerulea*, and peat forming bog-mosses *Sphagnum papillosum* and *Sphagnum capillifolium*. In higher quality and wetter M17, species such as *Drosera rotundifolia*, *Dactylorhiza maculata*, *Narthecium ossifragum* and *Potentilla erecta* may be common.

It is considered a Priority peatland community where impacts have the potential to raise issues of national interest, dependent on the function and condition of the habitat (JNCC, 2011).

M20 *Eriophorum vaginatum* – *Erica tetralix* blanket mire community

M20 is considered a degraded form of M19 (*Calluna vulgaris*–*Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire), typically resulting from pressures including intensive grazing, repeated burning, and atmospheric pollution, which lead to the loss of *Calluna vulgaris* and most *Sphagnum* species (NatureScot, 2023). These pressures reduce vegetation complexity as well as the presence of peat-forming species, and as such this community is not typically considered actively peat forming.

M20 considered a Priority peatland community, although it is typically regarded as being of local or regional importance and unlikely to raise issues of national interest (JNCC, 2011). This classification stems from its degradation and reduced biodiversity compared to M19.

M25 *Molinia caerulea* – *Potentilla erecta* mire

M25 is classed as blanket bog when found on deep peat and is also typically considered a replacement for the original bog vegetation following unfavourable management such as burning on too short a rotation followed by heavy grazing, following mechanisms similar to those described under M20 (NatureScot, 2023). It is considered priority peatland habitat however like M20 is considered unlikely to raise issues of national interest (JNCC, 2011).

3.3 Peatland Condition Walkover Survey

The walkover survey visited all proposed infrastructure elements as well as features of interest identified from the desk study. Notes were taken on the condition of areas of peatland using target notes and polygons mapped using QField software to aid in later mapping of features. Georeferenced photographs were taken to produce a record of peat conditions across the Study Area.

Methods pertaining to the categorisation of peat conditions encountered on-site are discussed in **Section 3.3.1** below.

3.3.1 Peatland Condition Assessment

Assessment of peatland condition was undertaken in accordance with NatureScot's 2016 guidance on peatland condition assessment and informed by Natural England's Peatland Habitat Guidance (2010), the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) SSSI selection criteria (2016), the UK Peatland Strategy (2023) and recent NatureScot guidance published in 2023.

The PCA survey bases the condition of blanket bog on indicators such as bog-moss cover, extent of bare peat and evidence of grazing and burning (Peatland Action, 2016). The PCA recognises four categories of peatland condition:

1. Near-Natural – peat-forming bog-mosses dominant, with no recent fires, little or no grazing pressure and little or no bare peat, heather is not dominant.
2. Modified – Bare peat is in small patches, fires may be recent, grazing impacts are evident, bog-mosses are absent or rare, extensive cover of heather or purple moor-grass.
3. Drained – within 30m either side of an artificial drain or a revegetated hagg or gully system.
4. Actively Eroding – actively eroding hagg/gully system, extensive continuous bare peat surfaces.

Table 1 presents a set of criteria for the assessment of peatland condition based on the categories defined in NatureScot's 2016 guidance, along with descriptors of peatland function outlined in the JNCC's SSSI selection criteria, relating them to the NatureScot categories of Near-Natural, Modified and Actively Eroding.

Modified habitats have been further divided into Modified with Near-Natural features retained and Modified, to delineate habitats where some Near-Natural features are present with active peat-forming properties however remain an overall Modified condition.

Indicators used to assess the condition of peatland within the Assessment Boundary are discussed in more detail below.

Bog Moss

Bog-mosses such as *Sphagnum* species cover is a critical indicator of peatland health and is used in PCA methodology to determine the degree of peatland modification. The abundance of *Sphagnum* directly reflects the water table level and *Sphagnum* decomposition under anaerobic conditions leads directly to the formation of peat.

Bare Peat

The presence of exposed bare peat is a sign of a declining water table, indicating that the peatland's functionality is compromised. Where bare peat is exposed, it is subject to a greatly increased rate of erosion through weathering processes.

Drainage

Both artificial drainage channels and those related to erosional gullies that provide preferential pathways for surface water flow artificially lower the water table, restricting or preventing peat formation.

Grazing Pressure

Excessive grazing pressure on peatlands can lead indirectly to the removal of *Sphagnum* mosses and other peat-forming vegetation. Selective grazing may alter the vegetation structure of peatland habitats by promoting the growth of tussock-forming grasses such as *Molinia caerulea* through numerous mechanisms. Tussocks create microtopography that increases water flow over the peat surface, leading to localized drying and erosion, which inhibits the growth of key peat-forming species including *Sphagnum* mosses (Brown et al., 2021).

Herbivore trampling may also contribute to the removal of bog-mosses, exposing bare peat to further erosion. Indicators of grazing pressure include the presence of tussock formations, physical breakage of vegetation stems, 'poaching' and the presence of deer or sheep dung in peatland habitats.

Burning

Burning of peatland habitat removes vegetation, leaving the soil surface exposed and vulnerable to erosion. Burning often promotes the growth of grass species, leading to an increase in tussock formation and contributing to a reduction in peat formation and increased erosion of existing peat deposits.

Table 1: Criteria for assessment of peatland condition (NatureScot, 2016; JNCC 2011)

Indicator	Near-Natural	Modified	Actively Eroding
Hydrology	High water table, saturated year-round, potential bog pool formation in wetter peatlands.	Minor signs of drying or past drainage, but largely saturated.	Obvious drainage via dry surfaces and gullies or artificial drainage.
Vegetation	Dominated by peat-forming species (e.g. <i>Sphagnum</i> spp.) with high cover. Heather not dominant.	Some peat-forming species present but mixed with drier or invasive species. More likely to be graminoid or heather dominated.	Extensive areas of bare peat; vegetation that is present largely graminoid or heather dominant; <i>Sphagnum</i> species only present in wettest hollows of erosional features.
Microtopography/structure	Well-developed microtopography (hummocks/pools), no erosion.	Bare peat may be present in small patches (micro-erosion); tussock formation contributing to drying of habitats in graminoid-dominated habitats.	Extensive erosion, bare peat including peat pans, haggings, and/or erosional gullies.
Damage	No evidence of cutting, burning, trampling, or vehicle damage	Isolated signs of disturbance including trampling, burning and vehicle damage.	Frequent or widespread damage leading to exposure of extensive bare peat surfaces and ongoing peat erosion.
Peat-forming Processes	Active peat accumulation evident (<i>Sphagnum</i> growth, wet hollows)	Limited accumulation, sporadic active features	No evidence of peat accumulation, oxidised/dry surface, no <i>Sphagnum</i> species present

4 Results

The results of the PCA are shown on **Figure 14.11** with associated target notes provided in **Annex 1** of this report. An overview of the mapped PCA categories is provided in **Table 2**.

The condition of peatland habitats within the Study Area were consistently heavily modified with the exception of some isolated areas within the north west of the Assessment Boundary.

The northwest portion of the Assessment Boundary featured an area of relatively intact M20 blanket bog in mosaic with M3 bog pool communities, covering the plateau which encompasses Hail Storm Hill. In the dry conditions encountered on the day of the survey, much of what may have been historic M3 pools were visible as bare peat patches and ongoing micro erosion. *Sphagnum* species were generally rare, and the habitat dominated by tussock-forming *Eriophorum vaginatum*. In flatter and drier areas of the plateau this formed a species poor carpet with little structural variation. Clear modifying influences were present in these areas.

Several areas of the plateau were observed where Near-Natural features were retained as M3 pools with hummock-hollow formations and *Sphagnum* species including *S. capillifolium*, *S. rubellum*, *S. subnitens* and *S. papillosum*. These were mostly limited to a flat area north of the summit of Hail Storm Hill and other areas on the plateau where local topography has

contributed to the retention of water in these systems. In one location a Near-Natural bog pool feature was located immediately beside an actively eroding peat hag that was likely a similar quality feature in the past; therefore these areas of intact peatland are likely highly vulnerable to impacts from construction activities and should be avoided.

Active peat erosion was ongoing at the peripheries of the plateau where bare peat and deep erosional gullies were frequent. This community generally transitioned to grassland communities U5 and U6 below the actively eroding peat layer. The areas of Actively-Eroding peatland here featured wide gully systems and expansive bare peat areas.



(Clockwise from top left): Plate 1 – Bare peat surfaces common across M3/M20 mosaic; Plate 2 – Tussocky *Eriophorum vaginatum* growth in drier area of the M3/M20 mosaic; Plate 3 – Actively eroding peat hags at peripheries of blanket bog habitat in north of Site; Plate 4 – Actively peat-forming M3 bog pool with *Sphagnum* hummocks observed.

The majority of the Assessment Boundary centred on a north to south ridgeline encompassing several gentle summits to the east of the M3/M20 plateau. This area was much drier, with mostly M25, U5 and U6 habitats. The M25 habitats present were dominated by *Molinia caerulea*, with little *Sphagnum* presence and lacking microtopographical features typically associated with active or near-natural peatland systems. It has therefore all been classified as being in a Modified condition. Some erosional features were noted where areas of bare peat and peat hags were visible however these were generally of a size too small to be mapped as Actively Eroding polygons.

Two small areas of quaking bog within M25 communities were observed during the site walkover. These indicate intact hydrological conditions however are both species-poor and

located within areas of modified and graminoid dominated M25. They are noted as target notes 40 and 69 and should be avoided by the development.

No Near-Natural peatland habitat was encountered in this section of the Assessment Boundary with all other communities being in a Modified condition



(Clockwise from top left): Plate 5 – dry M25 habitat within base of stabilised historic erosional gully; Plate 6 – patch of *Juncus effusus* within wetter drainage line within wider M25 habitat; Plate 7 – small area of quaking bog (ca. 3 m x 3 m) within M25 habitat with some *Sphagnum* growth; Plate 8 – Small peat pipe within M25 habitat.

Table 2: Areas and Percentages of PCA Categories within the Study Area

PCA Category	Area (Ha)	% of Study Area
Modified with Near-Natural features retained	0.21	0.04
Modified	499.16	91.41
Actively Eroding	46.69	8.55
Total	546.06	100

5 Conclusion

The results of the PCA indicate that most of the peatland habitats within the Study Area are in a heavily modified condition, with significant areas showing evidence of grazing, erosion and past land use practices. While some small patches of Modified peatland were observed to retain Near-Natural features, particularly within the north-western portion of the Assessment Boundary; these areas are vulnerable to disturbance from construction activities and should be avoided during development.

Actively eroding peatlands were observed at the peripheries of the plateau in the northwest of the Assessment Boundary, particularly within M20 habitats. These featured expansive bare peat patches and erosional gullies. Patterns of bare peat micro erosion were also common within Modified M25 habitats due to ongoing degradation of peatland conditions and a resulting low water table.

6 References

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Annexes

Scout Moor PCA May 2026 Annex 1.docx

Annex 1

Observations from Site Walkover

Table 1 – Observations from Walkover Survey

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
1	SD 84640 19784	Some Sphagnum species. Heavily modified, tussocky grass, not actively peat forming. Rushes are within natural diffuse flow path.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
2	SD 84341 19313	Bare peat common across area	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
3	SD 84306 19293	Actively Eroding in lower reaches of gully, bare peat and haggling.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
4	SD 84127 19182	Actively Eroding with bare peat.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
5	SD 84095 19175	More actively eroding patches – dark patches of historic M3 visible on aerial photography.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
6	SD 84021 19246	Gully is actively eroding, bare peat patches present south of gully.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
7	SD 84002 19215	Early stages of erosion, bare peat in M3 bog pools	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
8	SD 83970 19213	Patches of bare peat frequent across plateau.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
9	SD 83846 19260	Modified, graminoid dominated tussocky M20 habitat.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
10	SD 83804 19314	Actively eroding around gully peripheries.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
11	SD 83588 19192	Peat eroded to mineral soil driving transition to U5 habitat. Actively eroding condition.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
12	SD 83534 19179	Photo shows peat eroded to mineral soil with U5 colonising.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
13	SD 83482 19284	Frequent bare peat patches.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
14	SD 83518 19331	Pool with <i>Sphagnum</i> and <i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
15	SD 83533 19260	Hagging immediately adjacent to bog pool with Near-Natural features retained.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
16	SD 83546 19300	Tussocky <i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i> growth adjacent to Near-Natural bog pool features.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
17	SD 83586 19368	Modified M20.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
18	SD 83516 19394	Actively Eroding peatland at peripheries of plateau.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
19	SD 83424 19420	Modified condition M20.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
20	SD 83337 19616	M20 habitat on summit of small rise. Actively eroding at peripheries modified condition in centre. Elevated with rock outcrops and peat hags at edges.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
21	SD 83260 19611	Better condition to west of rise, still eroding at edges.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
22	SD 83119 19467	Area actively eroding with poaching from livestock.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
23	SD 83061 19349	Modified, some bare peat, heavily grazed. Eroding into gullies at periphery.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
24	SD 83158 19044	Small area of M20, eroding at edges, heavily modified condition.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
25	SD 83334 19093	Modified west, Actively Eroding in areas to east and beneath turbine.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
26	SD 83406 19095	Widespread peat haggging.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
27	SD 83597 18956	Extensive bare peat.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
28	SD 83636 19017	Small area of modified condition between gullies.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
29	SD 83792 19029	Small patch modified condition with bare peat surrounding shallow gully features.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
30	SD 83818 19022	Peat-forming M3 pool adjacent to bare peat erosional features.	 A photograph showing a peat-forming M3 pool, which is a small, shallow body of water surrounded by peat vegetation. The pool is situated in a landscape with wind turbines visible in the background, indicating a rural or agricultural setting. The peat vegetation is brown and appears to be in a state of erosion or degradation.

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
31	SD 83922 19032	Modified condition.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
32	SD 83913 18993	M3 pools with Sphagnum species present.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
33	SD 83686 18771	Turbine base is Actively eroding in places, areas of modified peatland between gullies.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
34	SD 84821 18835	Modified	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
35	SD 85021 18913	M17 in hollow. Modified.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
36	SD 85151 18859	Actively eroding here, photo taken from NW.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
37	SD 85228 18971	M25 heavily modified graminoid dominated with dense tussock formation.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
38	SD 85121 19093	AE photo from south.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
39	SD 85463 18984	Habitat modified and heavily grazed, graminoid dominated.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
40	SD 85419 19002	Small area of quaking bog.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
41	SD 85279 19152	Erosional features within wider modified habitat.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
42	SD 85333 19716	Two small erosional features within wider modified habitat.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
43	SD 85100 20393	Modified	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
44	SD 85550 18379	Dense and tussocky M25 habitat with erosional feature.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
45	SD 85423 18271	Peat pipe/sink in M25 habitat.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
46	SD 85418 18253	Outflow and additional pipe.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
47	SD 85402 18202	<i>Juncus effusus</i> within underground flow path near peat pipe.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
48	SD 85333 18175	Wet here with <i>Juncus effusus</i> , still granimoid dominated with dense tussocks	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
49	SD 85257 18209	Gully somewhat stabilised from here under well-established M25 that is a response to heavy grazing. Some bare peat upgradient but looks to be stabilising. Upgradient erosion due to vehicle tracks	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
50	SD 84973 18050	Modified, graminoid dominated, some heather, tussocky	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
51	SD 84879 18223	Small patch modified, sphagnum common tussocky	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
52	SD 84860 18399	AE extensive bare peat eroded to mineral soil in places	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
53	SD 85128 17997	Small hag in dry modified habitat.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
54	SD 85121 17982	M25b on WC valley slope, tussocky M	[no photo]

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
55	SD 85273 17760	M very heavily grazed short vegetation grassy	[no photo]

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
56	SD 85754 17922	Modified condition, Sphagna absent.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
57	SD 85821 17619	Drain	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
58	SD 85901 17382	Modified, very minor haggling at Western edge	[no photo]

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
59	SD 86465 16517	Livestock poaching	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
60	SD 86491 16514	Drain within heavily modified habitat.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
61	SD 86717 16555	Modified, dry condition.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
62	SD 86606 16633	Modified, dry condition.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
63	SD 86510 17393	Modified	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
64	SD 86672 17545	Modified vegetation.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
65	SD 86658 17556	Patch of <i>Juncus effusus</i> , <i>Sphagnum</i> absent	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
66	SD 86674 17636	M6c habitat in natural drainage line.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
67	SD 86694 17665	Dry strip adjacent to M6c	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
68	SD 86419 17858	Modified condition tussocky grass growth.	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
69	SD 86378 17946	Spring with small patch of quaking bog ca 3x3m	

Target note ID	Location	Target Note	Photo
70	SD 86655 18236	Vehicle disturbance - bare peat exposed on track	