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BASELINE HABITAT CONDITION ASSESSMENT

LAND AT PARKER FARM

HAMSTREET, ASHFORD

Native Ecology, Unit 90, Waterham Business Park, Highstreet Road, Waterham, Faversham, Kent. ME13 9EJ

t: 01227 656757 **e**: info@native-ecology.co.uk **w**: www.native-ecology.co.uk

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Author	Sophie Edmonds BSc(Hons) & Miriam Anderson BSc (Hons)
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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report details a Biodiversity Net Gain Baseline Assessment undertaken in respect of proposed development at Land at Parker Farm, Hamstreet, Ashford, Kent (site centred TQ 99982 33161).

Table 1. Site Location

Site address	Land at Parker Farm, Hamstreet, Ashford, Kent, TN26 2JQ
Grid reference (at centre)	TQ 99982 33161
Local Planning Authority	Ashford LPA
County	Kent
National Character Area	Low Weald, Romney Marsh
Biodiversity Opportunity Area	N/a

COMMISSION

1.2 Native Ecology was commissioned Clarus Solutions Ltd. in September 2024 to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain Baseline Assessment at Parker Farm.

SURVEY SITE

1.3 The Site comprises modified grassland bound by other neutral grassland and developed land, sealed surface, on the eastern boundary. The Site extends to 0.63 ha.

1.4 A Site location plan is provided in Section 2.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.5 The objectives of the report are to:

- Measure and map the habitats present within the Site.
- Provide a Condition Assessment for baseline habitat types;
- Assign each habitat parcel a unique reference ID based on habitat type and condition;
- Present the baseline biodiversity units.
- Inform habitat design, creation and enhancement measures by defining baseline conditions; and,
- Provide a baseline on which to assess future management and maintenance plans associated with the restoration or enhancement of habitats through improvement of condition.

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Site location plan

Land at Parker Farm
Hamstreet, Ashford
Kent

Figure ref:	1708_Figure 1
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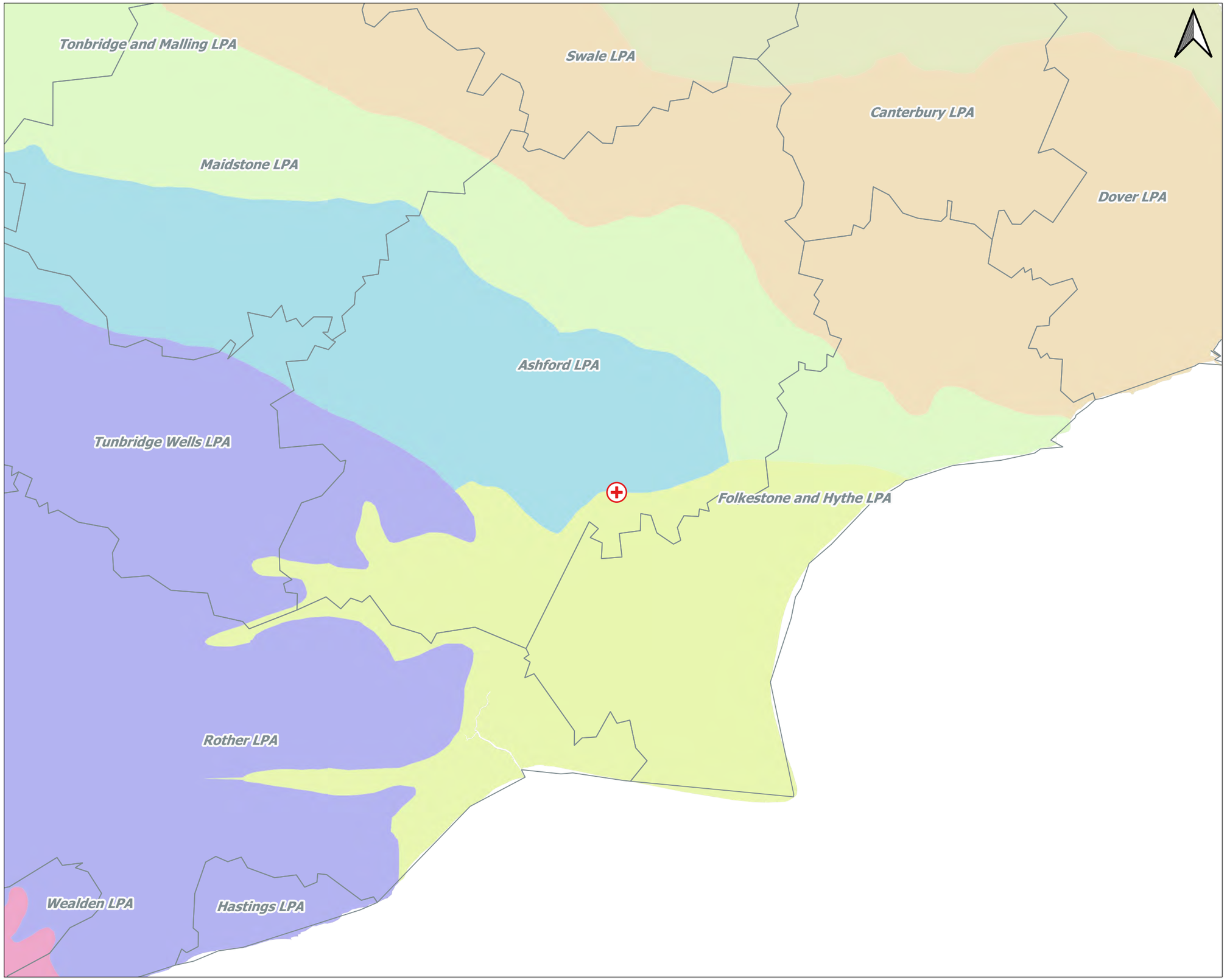
Scale:	1:20000 (Main canvas)
Paper size:	A3



Legend

- Site Location
- LPA
- High Weald
- Low Weald
- North Downs
- North Kent Plain
- Pevensey Levels
- Romney Marshes
- Wealden Greensand

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LPA and NCA Plan

Land at Parker Farm
Hamstreet, Ashford

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4. METHODOLOGY

DESK STUDY

Data search

4.1 MAGIC Map was used to identify any pre-assigned habitat types within and adjacent to the Site, including Habitats of Principal Importance and irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodland. In addition the search included any statutory and non-statutory designated sites within and adjacent to the Site.

4.2 Current Google Earth aerial images were used to identify recent and historic land use of the Site, as well as to identify any recent or historic damage to the habitats within and around the Site which might impact the condition of baseline habitats.

DESK STUDY

4.3 The following resources were used to inform the assignment of strategic significance:

- Summary of Interim Strategic Significance Guidance for Biodiversity Net Gain in Kent and Medway (Kent County Council, 2024)
- The Kent Biodiversity Strategy (Kent Nature Partnership, 2020)

FIELD STUDY

4.4 A Site visit was undertaken by Miriam Anderson of Native Ecology on 12th September 2024.

Table 2. Survey details

Survey date	12th September 2024
Surveyor	Miriam Anderson BSc (Hons)
Time on Site	10:00 - 12:00
Weather	12°C, 25% cloud cover, B1 - light air, no rain, ground dry

Habitat Survey

4.5 Habitats within the Site were mapped and classified in accordance with the The Professional Edition of the UK Habitat Classification 2.0. The condition assessment of habitats present was also undertaken during this survey.

4.6 Habitat features were recorded in areas, lines and points, with each feature allocated a single primary habitat from the UKHab hierarchy, along with secondary codes that are used to describe that feature in more depth.

4.7 The UKHab hierarchy comprises of 5 levels, which provide an increasing level of detail. For this Site assessment, habitats have been mapped for Primary Habitats up to Level 4 in line with the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (November 2024). Where the Statutory Biodiversity Metric categories for habitat type go beyond Level 4, these habitats are then used for the baseline condition assessment.

4.8 A detailed botanical species list was recorded for each habitat parcel by an experienced ecologist during the Site visit.

Digital mapping

4.9 All relevant Site data was collated on the digital mapping program 'Merginmap' which was then synchronised to the geographical mapping system 'QGIS' in order to be refined and measure habitat parcels.

4.10 The fine scale Minimum Mapping Unit (MMU) was used to complete the dataset. This includes area habitats from 25m^2 and 5m for linear features. This fine scale method allows subtle habitat differences to be considered.

4.11 Anything smaller than the MMU was mapped as a point and identified with a target note.

Habitat Condition Assessment

4.12 The Habitat Condition Assessment was carried out following the guidance that accompanies the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (November 2024).

4.13 Individual habitat parcels were assessed against the criterion for each indicator of condition and the results recorded as 'pass' or 'fail' for each, or for woodland, a score of 1, 2 or 3 was assigned. These scores were then totalled and the scoring instructions within each condition sheet used to give an outcome for the condition assessment of each habitat parcel as either 'Good', 'Moderate' or 'Poor' condition.

4.14 Certain habitats are allocated a fixed condition score and do not need to be assessed. These are marked 'No assessment required – condition fixed at 'Poor'' for some Low distinctiveness habitats.

4.15 Habitats with very Low distinctiveness are listed as N/A.

4.16 The condition of hedgerows were assessed using the appropriate condition sheets. Condition is assessed against defined attributes and determined according to the number of 'fails' generated from each functional group. Groups are based on key ecological and physical characteristics of hedgerows and trees.

4.17 The location and extent of each habitat parcel and linear feature was digitally mapped in the field to produce a Habitat Condition Assessment Plan (shown in Section 5).

Grassland

4.18 Grassland habitats are assessed according to the grassland type and distinctiveness. The grassland within the Site was assessed against the low distinctiveness condition assessment sheet. The assessment requires a species count per m^2. Counts were obtained for between 4 and 8no. $1m^2$ quadrats per parcel of grassland.

Hedgerow

4.19 The condition of hedgerows is assessed against defined attributes and determined according to the number of 'fails' generated from each functional group. Groups are based on key ecological and physical characteristics of hedgerows and trees.

STATUTORY BIODIVERSITY METRIC

4.20 The Biodiversity Metric calculation tool provides a way to measure the biodiversity value of a site. It is used to inform and guide habitat enhancement and creation plans and decisions on achieving biodiversity net gain within a project.

4.21 The metric uses habitat type as a proxy for the relative biodiversity value of a site. The on-site habitats are converted into measurable biodiversity units, taking into account the habitat type, condition, distinctiveness and strategic significance, which then provide the basis of the calculations.

Calculating the baseline biodiversity units

4.22 To calculate the change in biodiversity unit value of the Site resulting from the proposed habitat measures, the baseline biodiversity value of the Site is first calculated. The output of the Statutory Metric tool gives the existing biodiversity unit value of the Site.

Condition

4.23 The calculations within this assessment have been carried out using an assessment of habitat condition undertaken on 12/09/2024.

Habitat distinctiveness

4.24 Each habitat type (based on the UKHab classification) is pre-assigned a 'distinctiveness' score by the Metric.

Strategic significance

4.25 Each habitat parcel was assigned a level of strategic significance and given a score based on whether it is located within an area that is locally significant for that habitat type.

LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

4.26 There were no limitations to the survey.

Legend

- Application site boundary
- Small tree
- Native hedgerow
- Bare ground
- Bramble scrub
- Developed land; sealed surface
- Modified grassland
- Other neutral grassland

Note:

Habitats mapped based on UK Habitat Classification following habitat condition assessment site visit undertaken on 12/09/2024.

Numbers refer to area parcel references. 'H' numbers refer to hedgerow.

Habitat Condition
* poor habitat condition
** moderate habitat conition
*** good habitat condition
n/a condition assessment not applicable

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Biodiversity Net Gain
Habitat Condition Assessment

Land at Parker Farm
Hamstreet, Ashford
Kent

Figure ref:	1708_Figure 3
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6. RESULTS

GRASSLAND CLASSIFICATION

6.1 The grassland within the Site was assessed against the UKHab (version 2) Criteria to determine grassland type.

6.2 Within the site, there are several parcels of grassland in varying conditions, influenced by both past and current management practices. These areas showcase a range of ecological states, from well-maintained, lush meadows to overgrown or degraded patches. Historical land use, such as grazing, agricultural activity, or lack of proper maintenance, has contributed to the uneven quality of the grasslands.

6.3 The grassland within parcels 4, 6 and 7 was assessed as 'modified grassland' because it did not meet any of the four criteria necessary for classification as 'other neutral grassland' (refer to Table 3).

6.4 In contrast, the grassland in parcels 1 and 9 is classified as 'other neutral grassland', as it meets all four of the required criteria.

Table 3. Criteria for other neutral grassland (3 of 4 required)

Criteria	Site description	Result Parcels 1 & 9	Results Parcels 4, 6 & 7
>20% cover of broadleaved herbs and sedges.	In parcels 1 and 9, herbs are present in distinct patches across the sward. However, sedges are noticeably absent throughout these areas. In contrast, parcels 4, 6 and 7 show a significant lack of both sedges and herbs, with a lower overall plant diversity.	Pass	Fail
>8 species per m^2 (including forbs, grasses, sedges and rushes and excluding bryophytes).	Parcel 7 had an average of 4 species per square meter, showing relatively low plant diversity. Parcels 4 and 6 had even fewer, with only 3 species per square meter, indicating very low diversity. In contrast, parcels 1 and 9 had a higher average of 9 species per square meter.	Pass	Fail
At least one grass species that is not generally sown for intensive agricultural production is at least abundant.	Parcels 4, 6 and 7 lack grasses that meet the required criteria. In contrast, parcels 1 and 9 each have one species, common bent, that meets the criteria.	Pass	Fail
Cover of rye-grasses and white clover is <30%.	White clover is absent from all parcels. Ryegrass is present in parcels 1 and 9, but it makes up less than 30% of the sward in these areas. However, parcels 4, 6 and 7 are dominated by perennial ryegrass.	Pass	Fail

6.5 Tables 4 and 5 describe the area and liner habitats present in accordance with UKHab / Statutory Biodiversity Metric.

6.6 Condition assessment results for each habitat parcel are provided. Grading criteria are in accordance with the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Condition Assessment Sheets.

6.7 The full Condition Assessment results are provided in the accompanying Habitat Condition Assessment Sheets Proforma.

Table 4. Area (Habitat) Descriptions and Condition Assessment

Parcel No.	Area (Ha)	Statutory Biodiversity Habitat Category	Description	Condition	Biodiversity Unit value
1	0.008	Other neutral grassland	At the rear of the cattle buildings is a small area of overgrown grassland that has been left unmanaged for some time. The lack of maintenance has allowed the vegetation to grow freely, resulting in a denser, less controlled plant community compared to other areas of the site.	Good	0.11
2, 5, 10 & 11	0.008	Bramble scrub	Areas of bramble scrub are scattered throughout the site, typically found along the edges of buildings and grassland areas.	Condition Assessment N/A	0.03
3	0.162	Developed land; sealed surface	The southern section of the site is primarily dominated by concrete flooring and agricultural buildings, which were once used for cattle. Over time, cracks have formed in the concrete, allowing small patches of vegetation to grow through in some areas. Additionally, the cattle buildings have been previously vandalised and damaged by fire. As a result, the roofs and walls of these buildings were removed for safety reasons, leaving behind remnants of the structures.	N/A - Other	0.00
4 & 6	0.01	Modified grassland	The areas along the entry track to the site consist of regularly managed modified grassland. These areas are actively maintained, likely through mowing, resulting in a grassland kept in a controlled, managed condition.	Poor	0.02
7	0.372	Modified grassland	The majority of the site consists of regularly managed modified grassland. These areas are actively maintained through practices such as grazing or mowing.	Moderate	1.49
8	0.015	Bare ground	A small area within parcel 9 has been used for storing materials, resulting in bare ground. The lack of sunlight and the constant weight from the stored materials have prevented vegetation from growing.	Poor	0.03
9	0.055	Other neutral grassland	A small area of grassland between parcel 7 and the hardstanding areas consists of unmanaged grassland. This area features patches of ruderal and ephemeral vegetation, which are typically short-lived plants that grow in disturbed or neglected environments, indicating a lack of regular maintenance or management in this section.	Moderate	0.48
T1-T3	0.0081	Urban trees	There are three small ash trees located around the Site within areas of bramble scrub.	Moderate	0.07

6.9 The size of the site is 0.63ha with a total habitat area of 0.64ha (including individual trees) and a baseline Biodiversity Unit value of 2.23 units.

Table 5. Linear (Hedgerow) Habitat Descriptions and Condition Assessment

Parcel No.	Length (km)	Statutory Biodiversity Habitat Category	Description	Condition	Biodiversity Unit value
H1 **	0.016	Native hedgerow	Located along the eastern boundary of the Site is a small hedgerow of hawthorn and bramble.	Moderate	0.07

6.11 The total linear habitat length is 0.02km, with a baseline Biodiversity Unit value of 0.07.

6.12 The full Condition Assessment results are provided in the accompanying Habitat Condition Assessment Sheets Proforma.

7. PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1. Area of modified grassland representative of parcel 7.

Photograph 2. Area of other neutral grassland representative of parcel 9.

Photograph 3. Area of hardstanding and old cattle buildings.

Photograph 4. Hedgerow H1 located along the eastern boundary.

Photograph 5. Area of other neutral and ruder / ephemeral grassland, representative of parcel 1.

Photograph 6. Area of modified grassland representative of parcels 4 & 6.

8. REFERENCES

- CIEEM (2019). Biodiversity net gain. Good practice principles for development. A practical guide.
- CIEEM (2021). Biodiversity Net Gain Report & Audit Templates. Version 1.
- Defra (2024). Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation tool. August 2024
- Defra (2024). Statutory Biodiversity Metric Condition Assessments. August 2024.
- Defra (2024). The Statutory Biodiversity Metric. User Guide. August 2024.
- Native Ecology (2024). Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. 1708_R01.

9. APPENDIX 1: GRASSLAND QUADRATS & TREE CONDITION ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Table 6. Grassland quadrats species list for Parcel 1

		Grid reference: TR	Q01	Q02	Q03	Q4
			00035 33158	00039 33164	00046 33164	00042 33159
Species recorded	*Lolium perenne*	Perennial rye-grass	X	X	X	
	Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire fog	X	X	X	
	Agrostis capillaris	Common bent	X	X	X	
	Dactylis glomerata	Cocksfoot	X	X	X	
	Epilobium hirsutum	Greater willowherb	X	X		X
	Potentilla sp.	Cinquefoil	X	X		
	Sonchus oleraceus	Sowthistle	X	X	X	
	Cirsium vulgare	Spiny thistle	X	X		X
	Taraxacum officinale	Common dandelion		X	X	
	Ranunculus repens	Creeping buttercup	X	X	X	
	Rubus fruticosus	Bramble	X	X		X
	Rumex obtusifolius	Common dock	X	X	X	
	Urtica dioica	Common nettle	X			X
		Total	**12**	**12**	**8**	**4**

Table 7. Grassland quadrats species list for Parcel 4/6

		Grid reference: TQ	Q01	Q02	Q03	Q04	Q05
			99983 33203	99975 33195	99977 33211	99969 33206	99962 33198
Species recorded	*Lolium perenne*	Perennial rye-grass	X	X	X	X	X
	Dactylis glomerata	Cocksfoot					X
	Rubus fruticosus	Blackberry bramble	X				
	Urtica dioica	Common nettle	X		X		X
	Taraxacum officinale	Common dandelion	X	X	X		X
		Total	**4**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**4**

Table 8. Grassland quadrats species list for Parcel 7

		Grid reference: TQ	Q01	Q02	Q03	Q04	Q05	Q06	Q07	Q08
			99966 33182	99960 33162	99936 33144	99950 33123	99966 33146	99982 33135	00014 33147	99986 33160
Species recorded	*Lolium perenne*	Perennial rye-grass	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire fog		X						
	Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort plantain	X							X
	Cirsium vulgare	Spiny thistle	X						X	
	Heracleum sphondylium	Hogweed	X					X	X	
	Taraxacum officinale	Common dandelion	X		X	X			X	X
	Ranunculus repens	Creeping buttercup	X							
	Ranunculus acris	Meadow buttercup	X			X			X	
	Trifolium sp.	Clover								X
	Rumex obtusifolius	Common dock		X	X	X		X	X	X
	Urtica dioica	Common nettle		X						
		Total	**7**	**4**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**3**	**6**	**5**

Table 9. Grassland quadrats species list for Parcel 9

		Grid reference: TR	Q01	Q02	Q03	Q04
			00023 33156	00013 33167	00003 33175	00002 33168
Species recorded	*Lolium perenne*	Perennial rye-grass	X	X	X	X
	Dactylis glomerata	Cocksfoot	X	X	X	X
	Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire fog	X	X	X	X
	Agrostis capillaris	Common bent		X		
	Phleum pratense	Timothy	X	X	X	
	Agrostis gigantea	Redtop	X	X		
	Rumex obtusifolius	Common dock			X	X
	Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort plantain		X		X
	Cirsium vulgare	Spiny thistle	X		X	
	Taraxacum officinale	Common dandelion				X
	Rubus fruticosus	Blackberry bramble	X	X	X	
	Urtica dioica	Common nettle	X	X	X	
	Heracleum sphondylium	Hogweed	X	X	X	X
	Viola sp.	Violets				X
		Total	**9**	**10**	**9**	**8**

Table 10. Tree species, size and condition.

Tree no. T#	Species (Common Name)	Species (Latin name)	Size	Condition
T1-T3	Ash	*Fraxinus excelsior*	Small	Moderate