Herdwick Ecology

Luccombe Mill, Bratton, Wiltshire

Habitat Management Plan

A report for and on behalf of Pelly Developments

October 2023

Report Reference: 137/R4/2023/V1

Rev No.	Status	Author	Date
1	Draft for Review	CG	20/11/2022
1	Final	CG	20/11/2023

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Full planning consent (PL/2021/04036) was granted by Wiltshire Council on 24th April 2023 for the change of use from 'Industrial processes' to holiday let and associated conversion works at disused pump houses at Luccombe Mill, Bratton. Condition 5 of this consent states:

No development shall commence on site until a habitat management plan for the compound (and the proposed new woodland and 3m wide managed grassland strip to the edge of the SSSI) to ensure the ongoing protection of the woodland features has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The holiday let operation shall then be carried out in full accordance with the approved details of the habitat management plan.

REASON: In the interests of protecting the SSSI and woodland features

Aims and Purpose of this Report

1.2 As stated in above, this management plan has been produced to discharge Condition 5 of the planning consent. It provides a site-specific approach with recommendations for long-term management of the site to conserve and protect the woodland (SSSI). No site compound is proposed so that the Habitat Management Plan focuses on the proposed woodland and grassland strip, together with the enhancement measures around the pumphouses (within the chain link fence line).

1.3 This report should be read in conjunction with the Ecological Impact Assessment, which will provide further detail on the site.

1.4 This report does not address any mitigation during the construction period. All environmental protection measures during construction that is detailed within the CEMP.

2.0 KEY RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONNEL

Client

2.1 The Client (Henry Pelly, Pelly Developments) will be responsible for the implementation of this Habitat Management Plan.

3.0 BASELINE CONDITIONS – BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION ZONES

3.1 The baseline conditions were identified during the Preliminary Roost Assessment and Ecological Impact Assessment. The site lies within an rural, wooded location on the edge of the village of Bratton at the foot of Salisbury Plain (grid reference ST9229 5204). The site comprises two disused Wessex Water Pumping Station buildings, surrounded by a high chain lined security fence. Broadleaved woodland immediately surrounds the site, with grazed calcareous grassland, meadows

and scrub forming the slopes of the Plain. A chalk stream runs through the woodland that feeds the mill pond.

3.2 The site lies within the Bratton Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This site is notified for both its geomorphological and biological features, comprising species-rich calcareous grassland and ancient broadleaved. It supports a diverse range of invertebrate and bird species. The site sits within Unit 13, listed as 'Earth Heritage' and is in a favourable condition with no identified threats to this unit. Unit 7 encompasses the nearby lowland calcareous grassland and is currently in an unfavourable condition with a low threat level identified.

3.3 No protected or notable species were noted within the application area- that encompasses the chain lined fence line. However, old nests were noted on the pumphouses and the surrounding habitat does offer excellent habitat for numerous species. An active badger sett is present offsite but close to the boundary fence line.

4.0 PROPOSED HABITAT MITIGATION, ENHANCEMENT AND COMPENSATION MEASURES

4.1 The proposals will include the enhancement of the woodland to the rear of the pumphouses, within the existing chain line fence. The additional planting within include one *Quercus robur* and one *Acer campestre*, species which are present within the adjacent woodland. The area of grassland to the front of the pumphouse will be overseeded with a woodland mix, such as the Emorsgate Seeds mix 'EW1'.

4.2 In addition to the enhancements within the fence line, a compensatory area of woodland is to be planted along the woodland edge, with a 3m wide grassland strip that is to be enhanced to improve species diversity.

General Recommendations

4.3 The following general recommendations are made:

- Tree planting operations should be in accordance with British Standard (BS 8545:2014) Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape
- Planting material is to be sourced from reputable nurseries to avoid the spread of potential pests and plant disease which may threaten the health of proposed or existing planting material. Plants should conform to BS 3936-1 (1992), and be in accordance with the National Plant Specification. Nurseries supplying plant stock should be registered under the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) Nursery Certification Scheme
- Landscape operations should be in accordance with British Standard (BS 4428:1989) Code of practice for general landscape operations (excluding hard surfaces)

- Cultivation and spreading of topsoil should take place when soil is reasonably dry and workable. Soil operations, planting and seeding should not take place in frozen weather conditions or in periods when the soil is waterlogged.
- Trees should not be planted during periods of high winds.
- Bare-root planting stock should be kept covered until it is due to be planted to minimise water loss.
- New planting should be adequately protected from grazing. using appropriately sized protective shelters supported by canes and/or wooden stakes.
- Where there is animal grazing on land adjacent, a secure stock-proof fence or protective shelter should be erected to protect new planting stock. If there is evidence of rabbits in the area, fencing should be made rabbit-proof.
- New planting should be watered at the end of each day of planting.
- Should plant or tree deaths be the result of specific site conditions, this is be investigated and resolved where possible, before replanting.

5.0 Habitat Management

5.1 Management will be the responsibility of the current or any subsequent owner of the Luccombe Mill. All works associated with the implementation of the Habitat Management Plan will be undertaken by experienced contractors. The costs of any such works will be borne by the owner or any subsequent owner of the solar farm. Monitoring and reporting will be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist and the costs associated with monitoring reporting and any rectification works will be borne by the owner or any subsequent owner.3errr

Woodland Management

5.2 During the establishment period (the first five years), all dead, dying or diseased stock will be replaced with stock of similar size and species by the appointed contractor at their own cost. If the failure of the plant is due to disease and the disease is considered likely to re-occur then an alternative native species of local provenance may be used as a replacement. The exact timing of the planting of replacement trees is dependent on the ground conditions; however, planting should ideally take place between the months of December and February inclusive, this will allow the plants more time to establish a network of feeder roots before the onset of spring. The planting areas will be kept weed-free during the establishment period, using approved hand-weeding.

5.3 During the establishment period, the planted trees should be inspected during periods of warm weather and drought. If it is considered that the ground conditions are too dry, the planted areas will be watered on a regular basis until weather conditions are considered suitable for watering to cease.

5.4 The grassland within the woodland will be managed initially to prevent scrub encroachment that may effect the establishment of the woodland. This management would be undertaken using hand held power tools to minimise impacts and prevent soil compaction.

Grassland Strip

5.5 A grassland strip is to be created along the woodland edge, to act as a buffer once the woodland has established. It will also be managed to provide a varied habitat structure providing nesting and foraging opportunities for species.

Initial Management

5.6 Grassland management will be carried out in accordance with the seed suppliers technical advice during the establishment phase. Most of the sown meadow species are perennial and will be slow to germinate and grow and will not usually flower in the first growing season. There will often be a vigorous initial growth and a flush of annual weeds during the first season. This should be managed across all of the seeded areas by topping and mowing throughout the first year at regular intervals. Regular cutting to establish the grassland will take place during Year 1 after seeding and possibly also in Year 2 if growth is particularly vigorous on the high nutrient land. In the unlikely event that the grassland/meadow planting fails and the area of bare ground is greater than 20%, these areas will be re-seeded.

5.7 Problem perennial weeds will be controlled by hand pulling or if necessary managed by topping and mowing prior to setting seed which will encourage lateral development of the grasses. Specific attention should be paid to the potential presence of the species such as creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense* curled dock *Rumex crispus* and broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius.* Any topping undertaken between April and July should be no lower than 200mm to prevent harm to any ground nesting birds.

5.8 Any cut material will be either removed from the site or heaped in designated areas within the site in order to prevent nutrient build-up within the soil. Heaped material will provide suitable habitat for a number of species including small mammals, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates.

On-going Management

5.9 The grassland strip should be cut once a year in late summer, with the arisings collected. A compost heap can be created within one section of the site to provide on-going habitat for species.

5.10 The grassland within the fence line to the front of the pumphouse will receive more regular mowing. All arisings will be removed and taken off site to avoid an increase in nutrient levels. The areas to the rear and side of the pumphouse will be maintained as woodland.

6.0 Monitoring

Woodland

6.1 The woodland would be monitored in years 1-5 following planting, to assess and to monitor damage (e.g. browsing), disease or weed suppression impacts on trees. Failed specimens should be replaced in the subsequent winter-spring (i.e. between November and June) and required maintenance measures identified (bracken cutting, weeding etc).

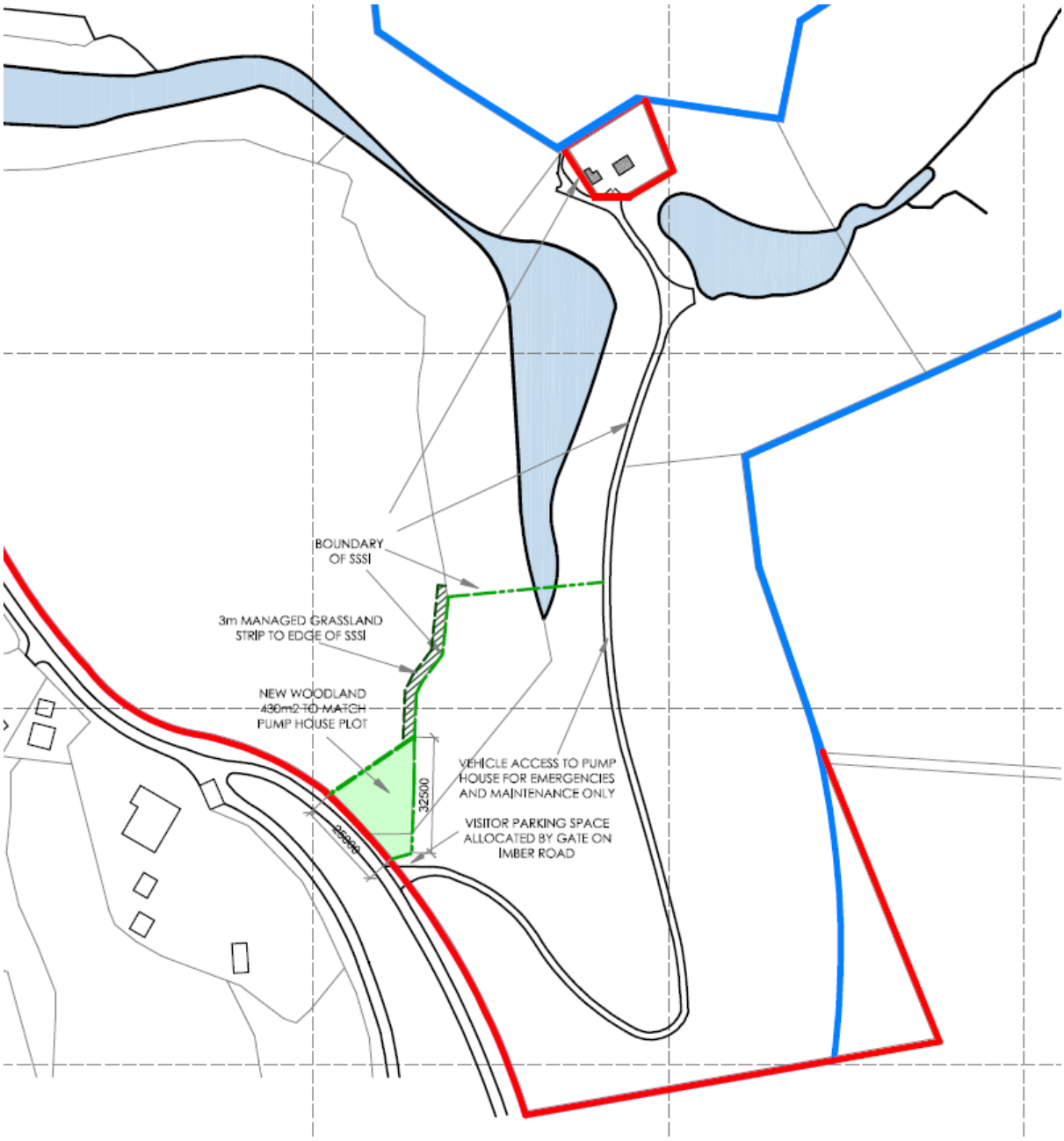
6.2 If browsing and damage by deer or livestock becomes apparent, then additional measures would be identified to protect the trees.

6.3 Once established, the woodland will be managed appropriately to ensure resilience and to maximise benefits to wildlife, for example, following the principles set out within the following guidance Woodland Wildlife Toolkit (sylva.org.uk). The woodland should be monitored at Year 10 to assess for any issues with disease or invasive species and to determine if any thinning at this stage would beneficial. Monitoring would be undertaken again in Year 20 when some thinning operations may be required in order to encourage growth of better trees and create more open woodland, further new planting may also be considered. This will aid regeneration of seedlings and begin the process of establishing a mixed age structure.

Grassland

6.4 Once the grassland has established, it is anticipated that minimise maintenance and monitoring will be required, providing the annual later summer cut is undertaken with the arisings collected and removed.

Appendix 1


BOUNDARY OF SSSI
3m MANAGED GRASSLAND STRIP TO EDGE OF SSSI
NEW WOODLAND 430m2 TO MATCH PUMP HOUSE PLOT
VEHICLE ACCESS TO PUMP HOUSE FOR EMERGENCIES AND MAINTENANCE ONLY
VISITOR PARKING SPACE ALLOCATED BY GATE ON IMBER ROAD
32500
25000