



Botanical Survey and Assessment of meadow at Bishopstone, Wiltshire

Client: Enims Date: May 2026

Summary

A Botanical Survey was undertaken of an area of grassland in Bishopstone, Wiltshire. The survey was undertaken in May 2026.

The survey was required in connection with proposed development to the north of the road, and aimed to quantify the vegetation type and look at potential for biodiversity enhancement.

The land comprised of species-poor grassland and neutral grassland, overwhelmingly dominated by grasses with a limited variety of forbs.

The grassland is currently classified as Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh, and due to its location (on the edge of a shallow sloping river valley) and proximity to a ditch, this classification is considered to be correct. However, the habitat is currently in poor condition and some proposals are outlined to attempt to reduce the density and grass-domination of the sward.





Introduction

Ecological Context

The site lies in the Ebbble Valley, just north of the River Ebbble in the Cranborne Chase National Landscape Area. It is bordered to the north by a main road, and to the south by the river valley with a series of other grasslands.

Constraints

The grassland was surveyed at the optimal time of year, although it may have missed some late summer species.

Methodology

Botanical Survey

A UK Habitat survey was carried out on the site, mapping habitat type and recording species composition in each discrete area. The habitats were assessed using the UKHAB Key and Habitat descriptions, then assessed using the DEFRA Metric Habitat Condition Assessment forms.

Full Latin names are provided in Appendix 1.

A brief walkover and examination of the areas of surrounding grassland were also carried out for comparison.

Results

Main grassland

The grassland comprised of a heavily grass-rich sward, largely dominated by **Perennial Rye-grass**, **Smooth Meadow-grass**, **Yorkshire-fog** and **Cock's-foot**.

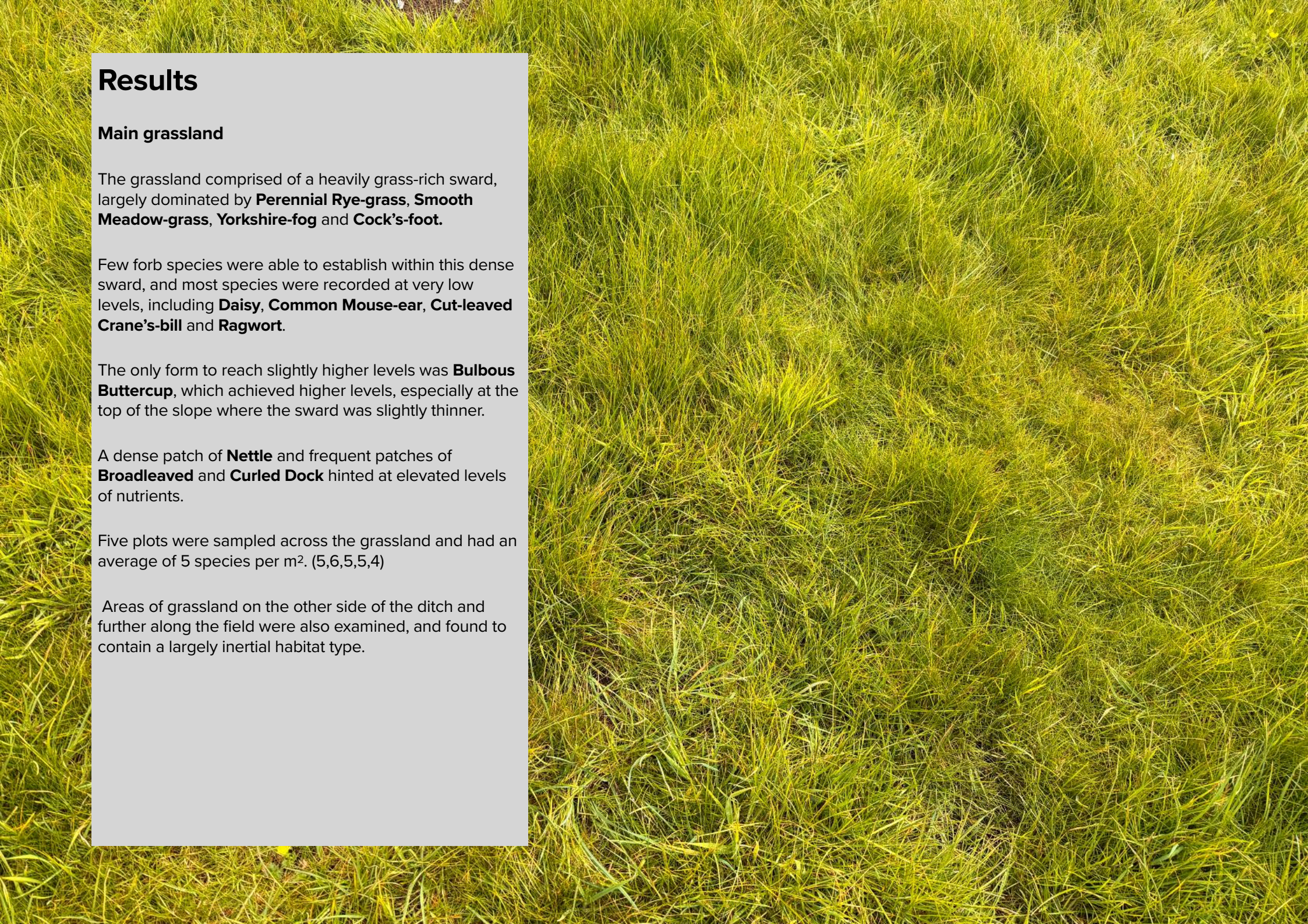
Few forb species were able to establish within this dense sward, and most species were recorded at very low levels, including **Daisy**, **Common Mouse-ear**, **Cut-leaved Crane's-bill** and **Ragwort**.

The only form to reach slightly higher levels was **Bulbous Buttercup**, which achieved higher levels, especially at the top of the slope where the sward was slightly thinner.

A dense patch of **Nettle** and frequent patches of **Broadleaved** and **Curled Dock** hinted at elevated levels of nutrients.

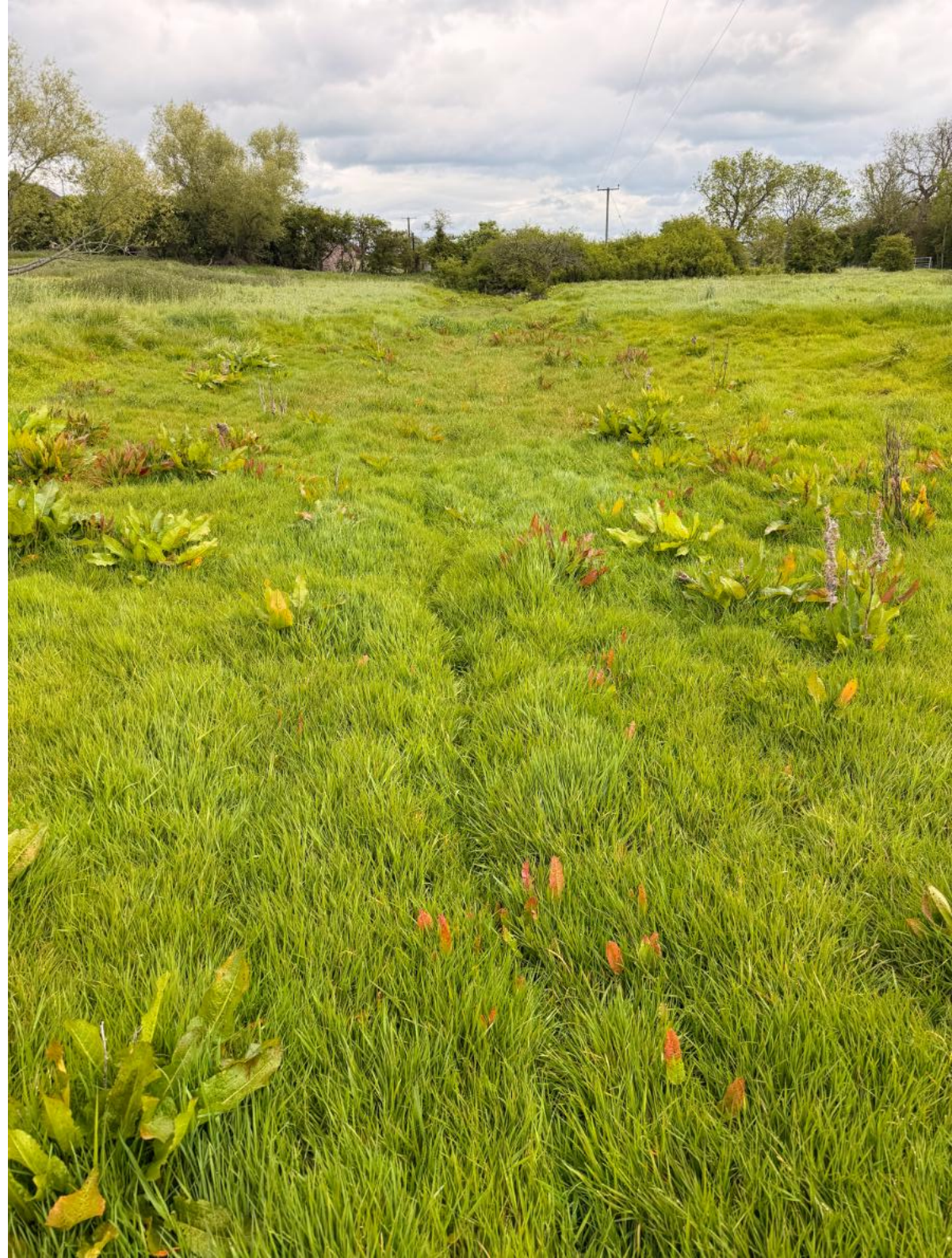
Five plots were sampled across the grassland and had an average of 5 species per m². (5,6,5,5,4)

Areas of grassland on the other side of the ditch and further along the field were also examined, and found to contain a largely inertial habitat type.



Ditch

The ditch was dry at the time of the survey, and is likely to remain dry in all but the heaviest period of inundation due to the lack of any tangible aquatic flora. The species composition was largely the same as the main grassland, although with larger numbers of **Curled Dock** plants. One species associated with aquatic/damp grassland was recorded, **Blue Water-speedwell**.



Assessment

Vegetation type

The grassland would be classed as **g4 Modified grassland** under the UKHAB. It was a close match to this category, with an average of five species per m², an abundance of **Perennial Rye-grass** and the presence of species associated with high fertility.

Condition assessment

The habitat was assessed under the categories of Low distinctiveness grassland and Wetlands; full results are given in Appendix 2.

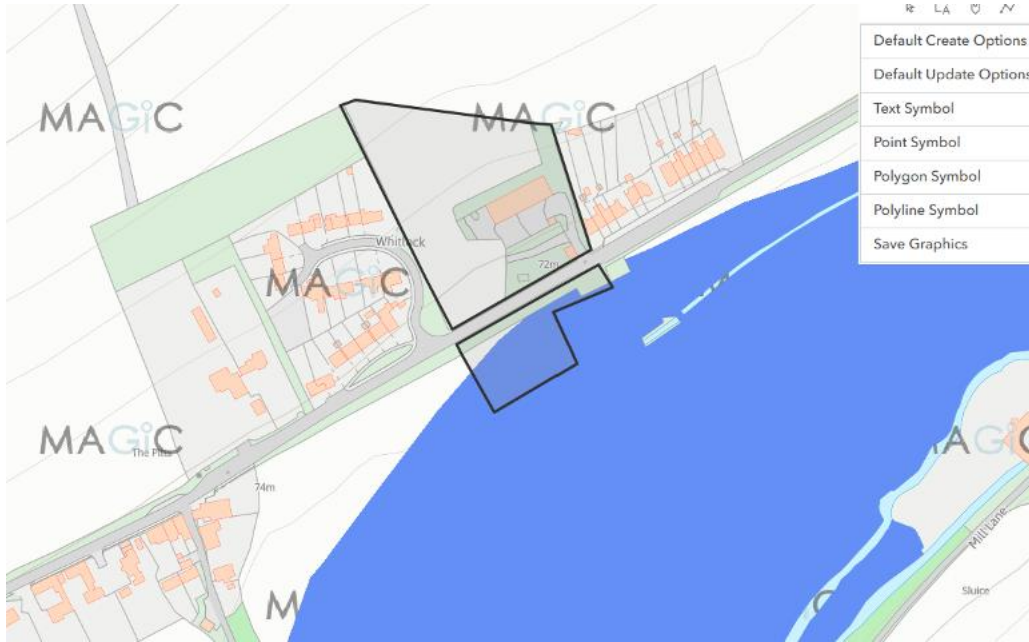
In the grassland category, it was found to be in **Poor** condition, predominantly due to the lack of species diversity.

In the Wetland category, it was found to be in **Poor** condition, largely due to the lack of water table and specific indicator species.

Habitat

All but the very top section of the site is currently listed as Coastal Floodplain and Grazing Marsh, and it is considered that this classification is accurate, due to the topography and location of the site and the presence of a ditch, although this has clearly been largely dry for some length of time.

Floodplain meadows often support high nutrient, low diversity grasslands due to the inherent richness of the alluvial soils, and only tend to support diverse flora in exceptional cases. The grassland here was definitely at the drier end of the spectrum of this habitat, with an almost total absence of aquatic and damp grassland species, but it did not deviate far enough from the habitat type to be considered for de-listing.



Location of land classified as Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh
(© Defra Magic Maps)



Evaluation and potential

Vegetation type

At present, this field supports a very low-diversity grassland. It is unknown whether this is due to natural factors, high nutrients in the soil, inundation with nutrient-loaded floodwaters, or application of fertilisers. A detailed habitat management plan would need to ascertain the current and historical management to see what adjustments could be made.

However, the emphasis should be on reducing the thickness and grass dominance of the sward to allow a more diverse assemblage of plants to develop.

This is most likely to be achieved by a combination of hay cuts and grazing during the winter months (if moisture/water levels permit this). Consideration should be given to carrying out a spring hay cut in order to reduce the thickness of the sward before the growing season.

With this management, nutrient levels in the soil should eventually drop and lead to the formation of a less dense sward, allowing a more diverse range of wildflowers to establish. However, due to the nature of the soil (rich alluvial earth), any changes are likely to occur relatively slowly.

Appendix 1 - Species List

FORBS			GRASSES		
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy	R	<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent	O
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	Common Mouse-ear	R	<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>	Meadow Foxtail	O
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping Thistle	O	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False Oat-grass	R
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle	R	<i>Bromus hordeaceus</i>	Soft-brome	R
<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	Field Bindweed	R	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot	O
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	Cut-leaved Crane's-bill	R	<i>Festuca rubra</i>	Red Fescue	F
<i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>	Common Ragwort	R	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire-fog	A
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow Buttercup	R	<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial Ryegrass	A
<i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i>	Bulbous Buttercup	OLF	<i>Poa pratensis</i>	Smooth Meadow-grass	O
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup	R	<i>Schedonorus arundaceae</i>	Tall Fescue	R
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	Curled Dock	FLA	<i>Schedonorus pratensis</i>	Meadow Fescue	R
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock	R			
<i>Taraxacum officinalis agg</i>	Dandelion	R			
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red Clover	R			
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle	OLA			
<i>Veronica anagallis-aquatica</i>	Blue Water-Speedwell	O			

D	Dominant
A	Abundant
F	Frequent
O	Occasional
R	Rare
L-	Locally, indicating clumpy distribution

Appendix 2 - Habitat Condition Assessment (Grassland)

A	There are 6-8 vascular plant species per m ² present, including at least 2 forbs (these may include those listed in Footnote 1). Note - this criterion is essential for achieving Moderate or Good condition.	N
B	Sward height is varied (at least 20% of the sward is less than 7 cm and at least 20% is more than 7 cm) creating microclimates which provide opportunities for vertebrates and invertebrates to live and breed.	N
C	Any scrub present accounts for less than 20% of the total grassland area. (Some scattered scrub such as bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg. may be present). Note - patches of scrub with continuous (more than 90%) cover should be classified as the relevant scrub habitat type.	Y
D	Physical damage is evident in less than 5% of total grassland area. Examples of physical damage include excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, erosion caused by high levels of access, or any other damaging management activities.	Y
E	Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 10%, including localised areas (for example, a concentration of rabbit warrens).	N
F	Cover of bracken <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> is less than 20%.	Y
G	There is an absence of invasive non-native plant species ³ (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA ⁴).	Y
Essential criterion achieved (Yes or No)		
Number of criteria passed		
Condition Assessment Result (out of 7 criteria)	Condition Assessment Score	Score Achieved x/✓
Passes 6 or 7 criteria including passing essential criterion A	Good (3)	
Passes 4 or 5 criteria including passing essential criterion A	Moderate (2)	
Passes 3 or fewer criteria; OR Passes 4 - 6 criteria (excluding criterion A)	Poor (1)	Y

Appendix 2 - Habitat Condition Assessment (Wetland)

A	The water table is at, or near the surface throughout the year - this could be open water or saturation of soil at the surface. There is no artificial drainage, unless specifically to maintain water levels as specified above.				N
	Note - this criterion is essential for achieving Good condition.				
B	The parcel represents a good example of its specific habitat type - the appearance and composition of the vegetation closely matches its UKHAB description, with vascular and non-vascular characteristic indicator species consistently present.				N
C	The water supplies (groundwater, surface water and or rainwater) to the wetland are of good water quality, with clear water (low turbidity) indicating no obvious signs of pollution.				N
D	Cover of scrub and scattered trees are less than 10%.				Y
E	Cover of bare ground is less than 5%.				Y
F	There is an absence of invasive non-native plant species (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA) and species indicative of suboptimal condition make up less than 5% of ground cover.				Y
Additional Criterion - must be assessed for Floodplain wetland mosaic and CFGM only:					
J	All ditches recorded within the habitat achieve Good condition as assessed using the Ditch condition sheet.				N
Essential criterion achieved (required for Good condition) Yes or No:					
Number of criteria passed					
- Passes 5 or 6 core criteria including criterion A; AND - Passes additional criterion G, H, I or J (choose the one specified for the habitat type).		Good (3)			
- Passes 4 or 5 of 7 criteria; OR - Passes 6 of 7 criteria but fails criterion A or additional criterion G, H, I or J (choose the one specified for the habitat type).		Moderate (2)			
Passes 3 or fewer criteria.		Poor (1)			Y

References

UK Habitat Classification. Habitat Definition and. Field Key Version 2.1 (September 2020). UKHAB

Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey is: JNCC. (2010). Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey – a Technique for Environmental Audit. JNCC, Peterborough

Price, D (2017) A Field Guide to Grasses, Rushes and Sedges.

Rodwell, JS, ed (1992) British plant communities Volume 3: Grasslands and montane communities. Cambridge University Press

UK DEFRA METRIC <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-metric-calculate-the-biodiversity-net-gain-of-a-project-or-development>

