

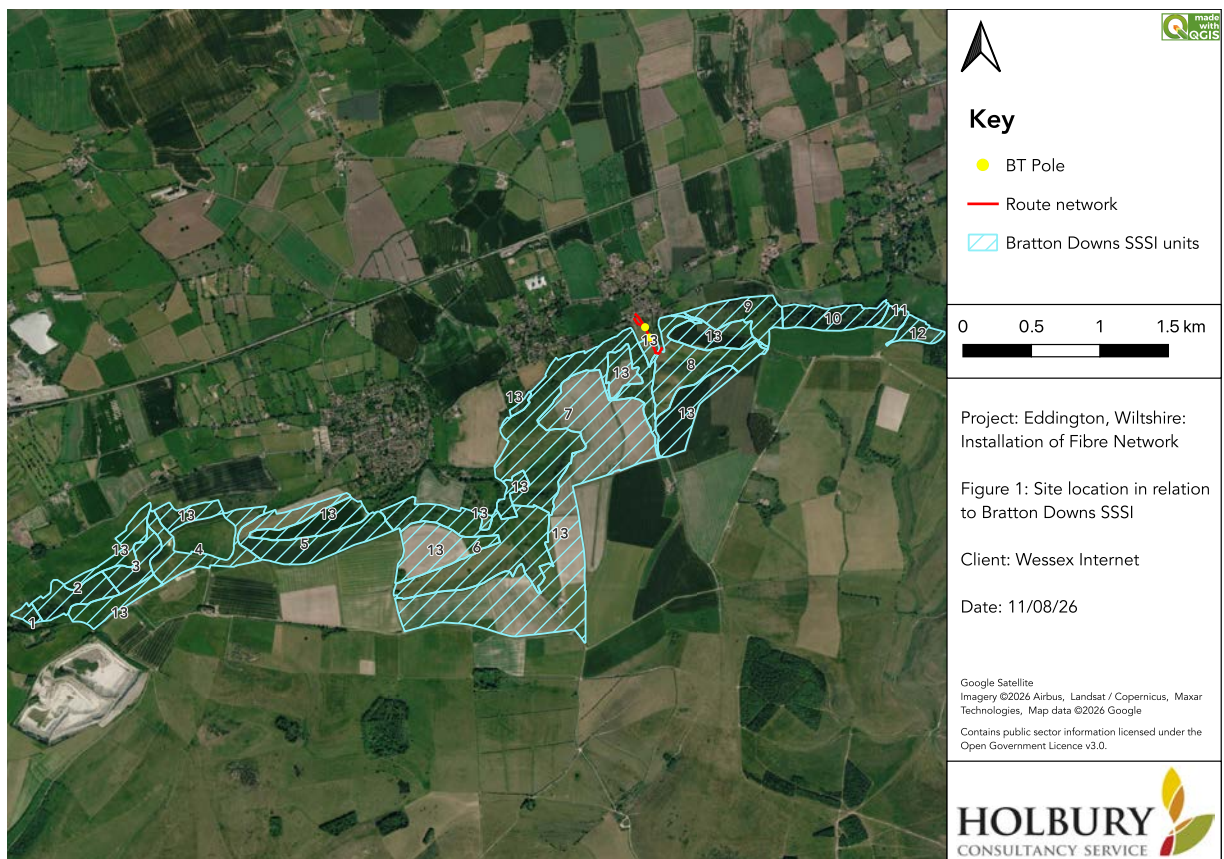
Technical Statement

Project: Bratton Down SSSI **Date:** 11th August 2026

Subject: Ecological impact of fibre installation **Author:** Nicola French

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Holbury Consultancy Services Ltd has been commissioned by Wessex Internet to review the impact of a project to install full fibre broadband infrastructure to rural areas across Wiltshire with sub-standard internet speeds. The project will deliver a live fibre connection to rural properties, requiring cable installation across a small part of Bratton Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (see **Figure 1**).



Bratton Downs SSSI

- 1.2 Bratton Downs is notified as a SSSI for both geomorphological and biological features. The SSSI citation identifies a series of geomorphological features that are linked to an exceptional range of landform features associated with periglacial conditions.

Biological features are linked to calcareous grassland, calcareous scrub and woodland and associated invertebrate communities¹.

- 1.3 The site through which the fibre cable is routed falls under Unit 13 of SSSI, which is notified for geomorphology. The adjacent units 7 & 8 are notified for biological interest (lowland calcareous grassland).

Site visit

- 1.4 Jeff Picksley MIEEM attended site on 7th August 2026 to review the route of the cable where it interfaces directly with the SSSI. This established that the fields impacted by the works have both been subject to agricultural improvement and contain a typical range of grass species associated with commercial pasture.
- 1.5 Species present in the grassland of Unit 13 (currently grazed by a small number of sheep) included crested dog's-tail, Yorkshire fog, perennial rye-grass, cock's-foot, false oat-grass, yarrow, ribwort plantain, field bindweed and fescue sp. Calcareous scrub is present on the banks bordering Long Hollow with hazel, dogwood, bullace, elder, way-faring tree and bramble present. Ground flora includes common nettle, wood false-brome, hogweed, cleavers, ivy and dogs mercury.



Photo 1: Route of cable through Bretton Down SSSI Unit 13 to show improved pasture

¹ English Nature, 1992. Bratton Down SSSI citation.

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1005598.pdf>

- 1.6 The other field is grazed by cattle and shows similar signs of improvement through the sowing of commercial grass species for forage in the area affected by the works.

Impact assessment

Method of placement

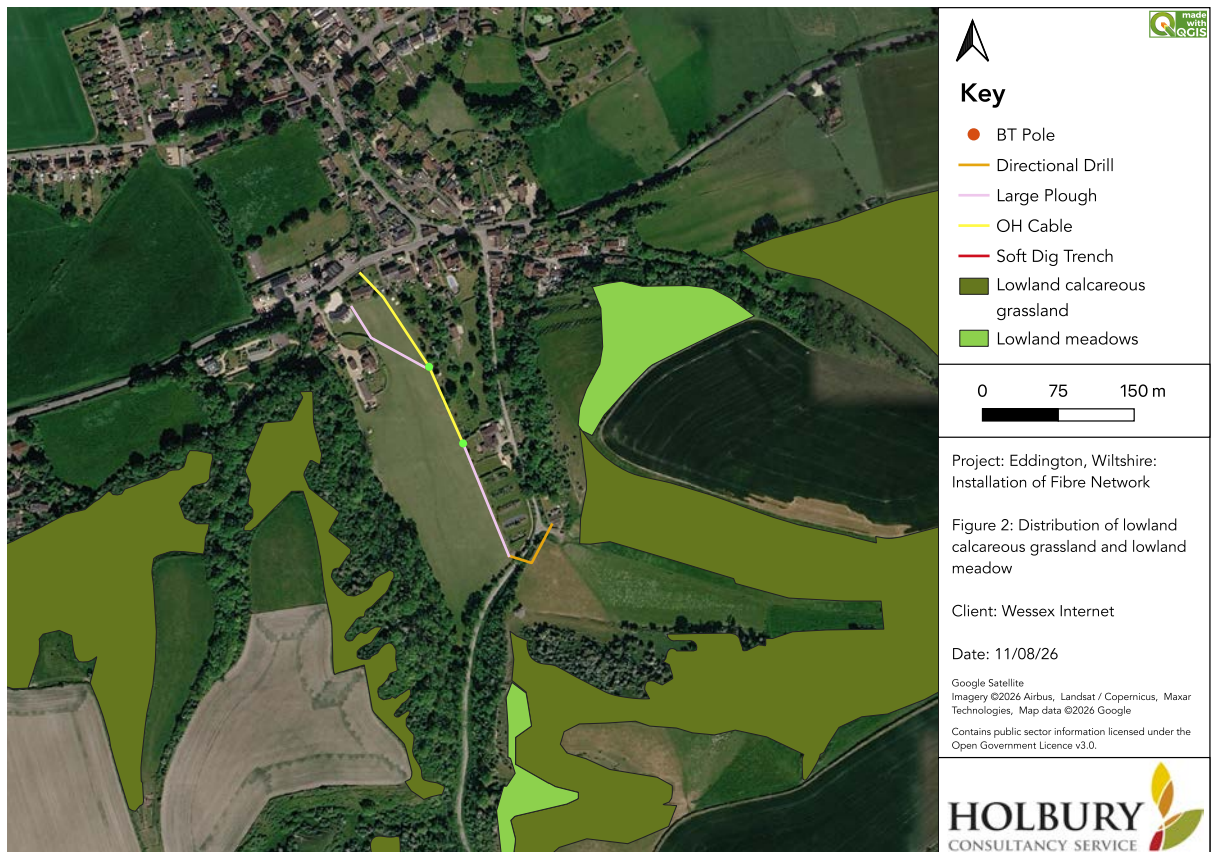
- 1.7 The fibre will be laid across the two fields within Unit 13 using a mole plough, which places the cable in the ground without the need for open cut trenching. Mole ploughing is carried out during dry conditions and requires the cut of a slot trench, the placement of the cable within and immediate closure thereafter. A single machine, moving at walking pace, completes all operations in a single pass.
- 1.8 Directional drill will be used to lay the fibre cable below hedgerows and scrub at the field margins, avoiding damage to root structures.

Impact on SSSI citation features



- 1.9 Mole plough across the SSSI and directional drill of the fibre cable into the designated land will generate temporary, short-term impacts on an improved grassland community of low ecological value.

- 1.10 **Figure 3** shows the distribution of lowland calcareous grassland and lowland meadow within the SSSI relative to the route of the fibre cable. The mapping confirms that the biological features for which the SSSI is designated are spatially separate. No areas of calcareous grassland are shown within the area of works and the field visit confirmed this to be the case.



- 1.11 From this it follows that the work will not result in direct or indirect impacts to the biological interests for which the Bratton Down SSSI is designated.

Conclusion

- 1.12 Wessex Internet works across part of Bratton Down SSSI will not affect any of the biological features for which the site is designated. This Technical Note does not assess the impact of the route on any geomorphological features that may be present.