



PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AND BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN ASSESSMENT

Prepared for Ms Sarah Fall

Roam Free Farm, Markfield Lane, Leicester LE9 9FH

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report has been prepared by Cossa Ecology on behalf of Ms Sarah Fall. It presents the findings of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment undertaken at land at Roam Free Farm, Markfield Lane, Leicester LE9 9FH (approximate Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SK 48341 05879).
- 1.2. The purpose of this report is to:
- Establish the baseline ecological conditions of the site;
 - Identify the presence or potential presence of protected and notable species;
 - Assess the ecological value of habitats present;
 - Evaluate potential ecological constraints and opportunities associated with the proposed development; and
 - Demonstrate compliance with the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement.
- 1.3. The assessment has been undertaken in accordance with best practice guidance, including:
- CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal;
 - UK Habitat Classification (UKHabs);
 - DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric.
- 1.4. The findings of this report are intended to inform the Local Planning Authority (LPA) in determining the application and ensuring compliance with relevant planning policy and wildlife legislation, including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Environment Act 2021.

Site Description and Context

- 1.5. The site occupies an area of approximately 1.59 hectares and consists of modified grassland, native hedgerow with tree, and an area of recently cleared bramble and blackthorn scrub.
- 1.6. The site is located just north of the village of Botcheston, approximately 11 km west of Leicester. It lies within a predominantly rural landscape characterised by a mosaic of arable land, pasture, hedgerows, and small field systems.
- 1.7. The surrounding land uses include:
- Forest Hill Golf Club to the northeast;
 - An existing organic horticultural holding to the west;
 - Residential properties and gardens to the south;
 - Woodland to the northwest;

- Agricultural land to the southwest.

- 1.8. The site is well enclosed by native hedgerows which provide connectivity to the wider landscape. See Figure 1 in Appendix A.
- 1.9. A review of historical aerial imagery (Google Earth Pro) indicates that the site has remained largely unchanged since at least 1999, supporting its long-term use as grazed or managed grassland.

Proposed Development

- 1.10. The proposals include:
- Construction of three polytunnels;
 - Construction of a small agricultural storage building;
 - Subdivision of the site into four fields for rotational organic cultivation;
 - Establishment of crops including herbal ley, vegetables, cereal crops, and managed grassland;
 - Planting of two new internal native hedgerows;
 - Planting of a new native hedgerow along the southwestern boundary;
 - Planting of approximately 14 trees (including walnut, wild cherry, weeping willow, and sweet chestnut);
 - Ecological enhancement of retained grassland through improved management.
- 1.11. The proposals aim to transition the site to a small-scale organic agricultural system, increasing habitat diversity and ecological functionality.

2 LEGISLATION SUMMARY

Bats

2.1. In England and Wales, bats and their roosts are protected under the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Taken together, this legislation makes it an offence to:

- Deliberately capture (or take), injure or kill a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a group of bats where the disturbance is likely to significantly affect the ability of the animals to survive, breed, or nurture their young or likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species whether in a roost or not
- Damage or destroy the breeding or resting place of a bat
- Possess a bat (alive or dead) or any part of a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost
- Sell (or offer for sale) or exchange bats (alive or dead) or parts of bats

A roost is defined as being 'any structure or place that is used for shelter or protection' and since bats regularly move roost site throughout the year, a roost retains such designation whether or not bats are present at the time.

Badger

2.2. Badger *Meles meles* is protected in Britain under the *Protection of Badgers Act 1992* and *Schedule 6* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended).

The legislation affords protection to Badgers and Badger setts and makes it a criminal offence to:

- wilfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a Badger, or to attempt to do so;
- interfere with a sett by damaging or destroying it;
- to obstruct access to, or any entrance of, a Badger sett; or
- to disturb a Badger when it is occupying a sett.

Hedgehog

2.3. Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* does have legal protection in the UK.

- they are listed on schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) which makes it illegal to kill or capture wild hedgehogs, with certain methods listed.
- they are also listed under the Wild Mammals Protection Act (1996), which prohibits cruel treatment of hedgehogs.
- a species of 'principal importance' under the NERC Act, which is meant to confer a 'duty of responsibility' to public bodies.

Birds

- 2.4. All common wild birds are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and as amended). Under this legislation it is an offence to:

- Kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built
- Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird

Certain rare breeding birds are listed on Schedule 1 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and as amended). Under this legislation they are afforded the same protection as common wild birds and are also protected against disturbance whilst building a nest or on or near a nest containing eggs/unfledged young.

Reptiles

- 2.5. All native British species of reptile (of which there are 6) are listed in Schedule Five of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and as such are protected from deliberate killing, injury or trade. Therefore, where development is permitted and there will be a significant change in land use, a reasonable effort must be undertaken to remove reptiles off site to avoid committing an offence. The same act makes the trading of native reptile species a criminal offence without an appropriate licence.

Great Crested Newts

- 2.6. Great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* are a European Protected Species, listed on Annex II and IV of the EEC Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora, receiving protection under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. This species is also afforded full protection under the Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (WCA 1981) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994 (Regulation 38). Under such legislation it is an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or capture a great crested newt;
- Possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a great crested newt;
- Intentionally or recklessly* damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a great crested newt; and
- Intentionally or recklessly* disturb a great crested newt while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place.
- Sell, barter, exchange or transport or offer for sale great crested newts or parts of them.

*Reckless offences were added by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which applies only to England and Wales.

3 METHODOLOGY

Desk Study

- 3.1. A search was undertaken using desktop resources including the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside¹ (MAGIC) website. MAGIC was used to search for records of designated sites and ecologically important habitats within a 1km radius of the application site. Google Earth² was also used to study the nearby landscape. See Figure 2 in Appendix A.
- 3.2. Records within a 1km radius of the site for protected species and notable sites were requested from the Leicestershire and Rutland Environment Records Centre (LRERC). Figure 3 showing publicly available records can be found in Appendix A.

UK Habitat (UKHabs) Assessment and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

- 3.3. The field survey was undertaken by ecological consultant N. Cossa BSc (Hons) and Uta Hamzaoui on the 23rd of April 2026. The surveyors carried out a walkover of the application site to carry out a UKHabs Assessment using the guidelines from the UKHabs Classification system.³
- 3.4. Botanical data and diversity was gathered by recording vascular plant species across areas that were visually assessed as relatively homogeneous in vegetation composition and representative of a distinct vegetation community. Results were analysed to determine whether the sampled areas represented separate stands or could be treated as a single homogenous unit based on similarities in species composition.
- 3.5. Key habitats present within the boundaries were mapped and broad habitats were categorised.
- 3.6. During the walkover, consideration was given regarding potential presence of protected species and where possible surveyor searched for evidence of protected species.

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment and calculation

- 3.7. During the field survey, supplementary observations were made regarding the current condition of the habitats in accordance with the criteria set out in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric.
- 3.8. The BNG calculations were undertaken using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric, as published by Natural England on behalf of Defra. The metric provides a standardised framework for quantifying changes in biodiversity value (as biodiversity units) for both the baseline and post-development scenarios. Area-based habitats are assessed in accordance with the metric methodology. The latest statutory version of the metric was used for this assessment.

¹ Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC). Crown Copyright and database rights [2015]. Ordnance Survey 100022861. Available at: <http://www.magic.gov.uk/> [Accessed: 28/04/2026]

² https://www.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/earth/ [Accessed: 28/04/2026]

³ UKHab Ltd (2026) UK Habitat Classification version 2.0 (at <https://www.ukhab.org>)

- 3.9. Habitats were classified using the UK Habitat Classification system, with each habitat parcel defined by its extent, distinctiveness and condition. Survey data were digitised using GIS software to calculate habitat areas and feature lengths accurately, with habitat areas expressed in hectares (ha) and linear features measured in metres (m), in line with metric requirements.
- 3.10. Post-development habitats were determined from the proposed development and landscape plans that were provided by the landowner, with proposed habitat parcels mapped and digitised to calculate their extent. This data was used to inform the post-development metric calculations.
- 3.11. Habitat condition assessments were undertaken in accordance with the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide. Condition criteria were applied to each habitat parcel to inform both the baseline and post-development assessments.
- 3.12. The metric assigns predefined distinctiveness scores to habitats based on their classification and applies standardised multipliers to proposed habitats to account for factors relevant to habitat creation, enhancement or restoration. These include the relative difficulty of creating or enhancing different habitat types, the time required for habitats to reach their target condition and, where applicable, spatial considerations relating to the location of habitat delivery. These multipliers are embedded within the metric and applied consistently in accordance with published guidance.
- 3.13. The strategic significance of habitats was assessed for both the baseline and post-development scenarios in line with the metric guidance, considering the site context and relevant local and strategic priorities, including proximity to existing areas of biodiversity interest and the role of habitats within the wider landscape.
- 3.14. Once habitat types, areas, condition scores and strategic significance had been entered for both scenarios, the metric calculated changes in biodiversity units, for habitats, and the overall percentage change resulting from the proposals. The metric calculations were undertaken by Nathalie Cossa, BSc (Hons).
- 3.15. Full details of the metric methodology, habitat scoring and the application of multipliers are set out within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide and associated annexes⁴.

Limitations

- 3.16. The accuracy of habitat area measurements is constrained by the method of baseline data collection and can therefore only be relied upon to a certain level of resolution. The biodiversity calculations are

⁴ Natural England (2024). Statutory Biodiversity Metric: User Guide (Joint Publication JP039). Natural England. Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6049804846366720> (Accessed: April 2026).

based on ecological assessments undertaken in 2026; consequently, if a significant period of time elapses before the project begins, changes may occur that could influence the conclusions of this report.

4 RESULTS

Desk Study

- 3.17. A desk study was undertaken using MAGIC and records obtained from the Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre (LRERC) within a 1km radius of the site.
- 3.18. No statutory or non-statutory designated sites occur within the site boundary or immediately adjacent land. The site does, however, lie within the Impact Risk Zone of Botcheston Bog Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Given the nature of the proposals (small-scale agricultural diversification with no hydrological or atmospheric emissions pathways), no likely significant effects on the SSSI are anticipated.
- 3.19. These records demonstrate that the surrounding landscape supports notable ecological receptors, particularly bats and amphibians. However, the site itself is dominated by improved and semi-improved habitats of limited intrinsic ecological value, and functions primarily as supporting foraging and commuting habitat.

Table 1: Results from LRERC (29th April 2026)

Scientific Name	English Name	Earliest Year	Latest Year	Total Records
<i>Rana temporaria</i>	Common Frog	2018	2018	1
<i>Triturus cristatus</i>	Great Crested Newt	2015	2022	3
<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Kingfisher	2023	2023	1
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Peregrine	2001	2001	1
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing	2007	2020	5
<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Fieldfare	2023	2023	1
<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	Bluebell	2015	2022	21
<i>Satyrus w-album</i>	White-letter Hairstreak	2002	2004	3
<i>Meles meles</i>	Badger	2004	2020	8
<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	Daubenton's Bat	2016	2016	1
<i>Myotis nattereri</i>	Natterer's Bat	2016	2016	1
<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>	Noctule	2016	2016	1
<i>Pipistrellus</i> species	Pipistrelle Bat species	2000	2015	3
<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	Common Pipistrelle	2014	2021	20
<i>Plecotus auritus</i>	Brown Long-eared Bat	2014	2023	7

Weather Conditions during the UKHabs survey

- 4.1. The survey was carried out under suitable weather conditions (warm, dry, sunny, with good visibility), providing optimal conditions for habitat assessment.

Ecological Appraisal

- 4.2. The site comprises a relatively simple habitat mosaic dominated by modified grassland of low botanical diversity. The grassland is characterised by common agricultural species indicative of nutrient enrichment and regular management.
- 4.3. The site is connected to the wider landscape via hedgerows, which represent the most ecologically valuable feature on site.
- 4.4. No habitats of principal importance or high distinctiveness were recorded which will influence the deliverability of BNG.
- 4.5. Photographs of the site can be found in Appendix D.

Strategic Significance

- 4.6. The strategic significance of habitats has been considered in accordance with the Statutory Biodiversity Metric guidance, with reference to the site's location, surrounding ecological context and relevant local designations. No habitats found on site have been mentioned in the adopted LNRS⁵.
- 4.7. No designated sites (statutory or non-statutory) are present within the site or immediately adjacent to it and there are no Habitats of Principal Importance on site.

Description of site using UKHabs Classification Codes

Habitats

Primary codes:

g4 – Grassland: Modified grassland

Essential secondary codes:

10 – Scattered scrub (bramble)

Additional secondary codes:

612 – Fence

⁵ leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/LLR-Local-Nature-Recovery-Strategy.pdf

- 4.8. Most of the site consists of modified grassland which has been grazed by horses and occasionally cut for hay/silage in the past.

Grasslands

Most of the site is species-poor to moderately diverse improved grassland dominated by agriculturally common grasses and forbs. Species composition indicates high nutrient status and historical grazing pressure. The habitat is assessed as low ecological distinctiveness and of poor ecological condition. See Table 5 in Appendix B for condition assessment.

Field G1

- 4.9. This field consists of:

Hairy sedge (*Carex hirta*), tufted vetch (*Vicia cracca*), cut-leaved crane's-bill (*Geranium dissectum*), ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), sweet vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*), creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale* agg.), broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), nettles (*Urtica dioica*), common mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*), meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), bindweed sp. (*Convolvulus* spp.), common vetch (*Vicia sativa*), curled dock (*Rumex crispus*), tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), meadow fescue (*Festuca pratensis*), red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) and creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*).

- 4.10. The middle of the field has a thick, dense sward comprising mainly of meadow foxtail. The southwestern end of the field showed signs of nutrient enrichment with a greater proportion of hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), dandelions and nettles.

Field G2

- 4.11. This field consists of:

Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), creeping buttercup, hogweed, dandelion, ribwort plantain, willowherb sp. (*Epilobium* spp.), nettles, cut-leaved crane's-bill, broad-leaved dock, Yorkshire fog, meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), meadow foxtail, bramble, common mouse-ear, tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*), common bent, red fescue, common vetch and smooth tare (*Vicia tetrasperma*).

- 4.12. The sward length varies in height across the field and there is a large area of bare ground along the northwestern boundary where brambles and suckering blackthorn from the hedgerow has been recently cleared. Signs of nutrient enrichment in the southwestern side of the site is evident.

Access strip G3

- 4.13. The grass track consists of cock's-foot, Yorkshire fog, meadow foxtail, bramble and dandelion. It shows signs of compaction and there are small areas of bare ground.

Hedgerows

Primary codes:

h2a – Native hedgerow with trees

- 4.14. An established native hedgerow runs through the middle of the southern part of the site. There is one tree in this section of hedgerow but outside the red line boundary, the hedgerow with trees carries on to the north and south. The hedgerow is over 1.5m tall and wide and shows little signs of over management such as flailing.
- 4.15. The hedgerow consists predominantly of hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), with occasional elder (*Sambucus nigra*), field maple (*Acer campestre*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), with ground flora of bramble and cleavers (*Galium aparine*).
- 4.16. This section of hedgerow contains a mature ash tree (T1). The tree is native, mature and has ecological niches suitable for wildlife. There are no signs of damage by people however there are signs that it is suffering from ash dieback.
- 4.17. The hedgerow network represents the most ecologically valuable habitat on site. The hedgerow is assessed as **moderate to high ecological distinctiveness**, providing nesting, commuting, and foraging resources for fauna.

Fauna

Mammals – Bats

- 4.18. The site provides limited roosting potential, primarily restricted to mature hedgerow trees and agricultural buildings. Hedgerows provide linear commuting routes and foraging habitat. Overall value is assessed as low roosting potential and moderate foraging/commuting value at site level, with higher value in the surrounding landscape. The hedgerow tree and agricultural buildings will not be affected by the plans for the site. No follow up bat surveys are required.
- 4.19. The creation of an organic small holding on formerly horse grazed modified species poor grassland should create greater foraging opportunities for bats as the insect diversity should improve. The new hedgerows and trees will help with connectivity as well as create sheltered areas suitable for foraging bats.

Mammals – Badger

- 4.20. There is high opportunity for badger *Meles meles* to utilise the application site and may be potentially present in the wider landscape.
- 4.21. The species could commute and forage across the grassland and build setts in fields, hedgerows and woodlands local to the site, however fields G1 and G2 are fenced with rabbit fencing dug into the ground reducing the ability for badgers to enter these two areas. No evidence of badger setts were found during the survey.
- 4.22. The site provides suitable foraging habitat and commuting corridors, although no setts were identified. The site is assessed as low to moderate suitability for badger activity. No follow-up badger surveys are recommended.

Common Nesting Birds

- 4.23. Some of the surrounding landscape provides suitable habitat for nesting birds. At site and local level, the hedgerow, trees and fields would most likely be used for nesting between February and September (inclusive). No hedgerows or trees will be affected by the proposed works. The site is assessed as moderate value for nesting birds at local scale.

Reptiles

- 4.24. The site has limited structural diversity and is dominated by improved grassland. It is assessed as low suitability for reptiles. No further reptile surveys are required.

Amphibians

- 4.25. No on-site waterbodies are present. While multiple ponds occur within 500m, terrestrial habitat suitability is limited. The site is assessed as low suitability for great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*, with no further surveys required.
- 4.26. Nine ponds were located on MAGIC within 500m of the site. Grid references are:
- SK 4880 0596
 - SK 4850 0597
 - SK 4830 0606
 - SK 4864 0581
 - SK 4847 0540
 - SK 4811 0543
 - SK 4788 0598
 - SK 4807 0607
 - SK 4832 0632

Hedgehogs

- 4.27. Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* might use the local area, utilising nearby hedgerows and habitats onsite, where it may commute, forage or shelter. Although no evidence of hedgehogs was seen during the survey the possibility of hedgehogs using the site should not be discounted and the species should be considered while development is taking place and after. The site is assessed as moderate suitability at a local level.

Limitations

- 4.28. There were no limitations in surveying the site.

Ecological Constraints Summary

- 4.29. The principal ecological constraints affecting the site are:
- Retention of native hedgerows (highest ecological value feature)
 - Protection of nesting birds within hedgerows and scrub
 - Retention of mature hedgerow trees where feasible
 - Maintaining connectivity for commuting bats and hedgehogs
- 4.30. No statutory constraints or irreplaceable habitats are present.

5 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN (BNG) ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. The Biodiversity Net Gain assessment has been undertaken using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Defra) in accordance with the Environment Act 2021.

Baseline Summary

- 5.2. Baseline habitats were classified using UK Habs and assessed for area, distinctiveness and condition.
- Total baseline habitat units: 3.24
 - Total hedgerow units: 1.00
- 5.3. The site is dominated by low distinctiveness modified grassland in poor condition, with hedgerows representing the primary ecological feature.
- 5.4. The tree is not to be removed so as per the guidelines, it has not been included in the metric.
- 5.5. The area of cleared brambles measures below 0.4ha so is classed as scattered scrub within UK Habs. This habitat does not have to be condition assessed or entered within the metric due to its size. Cutting back brambles and suckering blackthorn is part of normal agricultural land management and has not occurred where the grassland is being replaced by developed land. Therefore, this area of habitat management should not need to be classed as degraded habitat.
- 5.6. A summary of the baseline habitats and associated condition assessment results is provided in Table 2 below. See Appendix B Table 5 and Table 6 for the condition assessment forms.

Table 2: Summary of baseline habitats and hedgerows

Baseline Habitat	Area (ha)/ Length (km)	Condition	Description	Baseline Units
Grassland - Modified grassland	1.62 ha	Poor	The site is dominated by species poor modified grassland with dense swards in places and signs of nutrient enrichment. Site previously horse grazed.	3.24
Native hedgerow with trees	0.08 km	Good	Established native hedgerow contain a mature ash tree (extends outside of red line boundary area).	1.00

Application of the Mitigation Hierarchy

- 5.7. A core element of BNG is the application of the mitigation hierarchy, whereby impacts on biodiversity are first avoided, then minimised, and only compensated for where residual effects remain. The statutory BNG framework also seeks to avoid losses of biodiversity that cannot be replaced, including

irreplaceable habitats. BNG must result in a measurable and quantifiable gain, calculated using the appropriate statutory metric, and assessments should be undertaken in a consistent and transparent manner.

Mitigation Hierarchy Compliance

5.8. The proposals have been designed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy:

Avoidance

- Retention of existing hedgerows;
- Avoidance of impacts to boundary features and key habitats;
- Limiting built development to a small central footprint.

Minimisation

- Careful siting of polytunnels and infrastructure;
- Small-scale, low-footprint built development;
- Retention of most grassland areas;
- Retention of functional ecological corridors;
- Sensitive siting of infrastructure within existing modified areas.

Restoration and Enhancement

- Enhancement of grassland structure and diversity;
- Reduction in grazing pressure;
- Adoption of organic farming practices;
- Creation of new hedgerows and tree planting;

Compensation

- Not required, as sufficient on-site biodiversity net gain is achieved.

6 PROPOSED DESIGN

- 6.1 The proposals include a mosaic of retained, enhanced and newly created habitats designed to increase ecological diversity and connectivity.
- 6.2 Key measures include:
- Creation of native hedgerows using locally sourced species
 - Planting of approximately 14 native trees to increase structural diversity
 - Conversion of areas of improved grassland to herbal leys and species-rich swards under reduced intensity management
 - Introduction of rotational organic cropping regimes
 - The barn is to be built no closer than 5m from the hedgerow to allow hedgerow maintenance and to protect root structures during construction work.
- 6.3 These measures will increase habitat heterogeneity and improve ecological function across the site.
- 6.4 The proposed habitats are shown in Figure 5 in Appendix A, with details of the habitats to be retained and created, as well as the associated management measures, set out in Table 3. Figure 6 in Appendix A shows the proposed habitat conditions.

Table 3: Summary of habitat management for proposed and post-development habitats

Habitat	Retained/ Enhanced/ Created	Area (ha)	Target Condition	Units	Proposed Habitat Management
Grassland - Modified grassland	Retained	0.5716	Poor	1.14	Remove grazing pressure and mow occasionally
Grassland - Modified grassland	Enhanced	0.4159	Moderate	0.83	Remove grazing pressure, cut and collect grass on an occasionally basis.
Cropland – Horticulture	Created	0.2070	N/A - Other	0.40	Grow a variety of vegetables organically
Cropland – Cereal crops	Created	0.2166	N/A - Other	0.42	Grow either oats or millets organically
Cropland – Temporary grass and clover leys	Created	0.1504	N/A - Other	0.29	Grow grass and clover organically
Urban – Developed land; sealed surface	Created	0.0576	N/A - Other	0.00	Erect 3 polytunnels and agricultural building.
Native hedgerow with trees	Retained	0.083	Good	1.00	Retain and carry out minimal cutting back
Native hedgerow	Created	0.29	Moderate	0.96	Plant mixed native hedgerow using locally sourced whips

7 BNG METRIC

- 7.1 The habitats proposed for retention, enhancement and creation, as set out in this report, have been entered into the metric. Table 4 presents a summary of the key results.

Table 4: Metric headline results

Baseline Habitat Units	3.24
Post Development Habitat Units	3.67
Total Net Unit Change	0.43 (positive)
Total Net Percentage Changes	13.19% (positive)
Baseline Hedgerow Units	1.00
Post Development Hedgerow Units	1.96
Total Net Unit Change	0.96 (positive)
Total Net Percentage Changes	96.45% (positive)

- 7.2 The assessment shows that the proposals will result in a net increase of 0.43 habitat units, equating to an overall gain of 13.19%. No additional habitat units are required as the required BNG percentage has been achieved.
- 7.3 The assessment shows that the proposals will result in a net increase of 0.96 hedgerow units, equating to an overall gain of 96.45%. No additional hedgerow units are required as the required BNG percentage has been achieved.
- 7.4 The headline results can be found in Appendix C. The BNG metric excel spreadsheet should be provided alongside this document.

Habitat Trading

- 7.5 The habitat trading rules embedded within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric have been met. Losses of low distinctiveness modified grassland are offset through:
- Retention and enhancement of existing grassland
 - Creation of new hedgerows
 - Introduction of structurally and botanically diverse habitats
- 7.6 No like-for-like shortfalls occur.

Strategic Significance

- 7.7 The site does not lie within a designated Local Nature Recovery Strategy priority area. However, proposed hedgerow planting and habitat enhancement will improve ecological connectivity within the wider agricultural matrix.

8 LANDOWNER OBLIGATIONS, BNG COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

Statutory requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

- 8.1 The proposed development is subject to the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement under the Environment Act 2021 and associated secondary legislation. Development must deliver a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity value, secured for a minimum duration of 30 years.
- 8.2 The submitted Statutory Biodiversity Metric demonstrates that the proposals achieve an 13.47% net gain in habitat units and a 96.45% net gain in hedgerow units, thereby exceeding the statutory minimum requirement.
- 8.3 Notwithstanding the above, BNG compliance is not achieved solely through metric calculation and must be legally secured, implemented on site, and maintained in perpetuity for the agreed 30-year period.

On-site mitigation hierarchy compliance (BNG delivery)

- 8.4 The development has been designed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy, as required under national planning policy and BNG legislation:

Avoidance

- Retention of existing hedgerows and associated mature trees
- Avoidance of impacts to boundary habitats and ecological corridors
- Limitation of built development to previously modified/low ecological value areas.

Minimisation

- Sensitive siting of polytunnels and agricultural infrastructure
- Retention of the majority of grassland habitats
- Maintenance of habitat connectivity across the site
- Protection of retained ecological features during construction.

Restoration and Enhancement

- Conversion of improved grassland to lower intensity management regimes
- Creation of species-rich and structurally diverse hedgerows
- Planting of native trees to increase vertical habitat structure
- Adoption of organic/low-input agricultural management practices.

Compensation

- Not required, as the scheme delivers a net biodiversity gain on site in excess of statutory requirements.

Legal obligations of the landowner (post-consent requirements)

- 8.5 If planning permission is granted, the landowner will be legally required to ensure that biodiversity gains are delivered, secured, and maintained in accordance with the approved Statutory Biodiversity Metric and supporting plans.
- 8.6 These obligations will typically be secured via planning condition(s) and/or a Section 106 legal agreement.
- 8.7 The landowner will be required to:

Secure BNG for a minimum 30-year period

- All retained, enhanced, and created habitats must be managed and maintained for at least 30 years from completion of development
- No future land use change is permitted that would reduce biodiversity unit value below the approved baseline of delivery
- Habitats must be protected from degradation, neglect, or unapproved alteration.

Deliver habitats in accordance with the approved metric and drawings

- Habitat creation, enhancement, and retention must accord with Figures 5 and 6 and the Statutory Biodiversity Metric
- Any deviation from the approved habitat types, extents, or target conditions may invalidate BNG compliance
- The development must not result in net loss of biodiversity units at any point within the secured period.

Implement a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP)

The development shall not commence until a 30 year Habitat Monitoring and Management Plan (HMMP), prepared in accordance with an approved Biodiversity Gain Plan, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved HMMP shall be strictly adhered to and implemented in full for its duration and shall contain the following:

- a) Description and evaluation of the features to be managed;
- b) Ecological trends and constraints on site that may influence management;
- c) Aims, objectives and targets for management - links with local and national species and habitat action plans;
- d) Description of the management operations necessary to achieving aims and objectives;
- e) Preparation of a works schedule, including annual works schedule;
- f) Details and a timetable of the monitoring needed to measure the effectiveness of management;
- g) Details of the persons responsible for the implementation and monitoring;

- h) mechanisms of adaptive management to account for necessary changes in work schedule to achieve the required targets; and
- i) Details of methodology and frequency of monitoring reports to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority to assess biodiversity gain.

Monitoring and reporting

Where required by condition or agreement, the landowner must:

- Submit ecological monitoring reports at agreed intervals (commonly years 2, 5, 10, 20, and 30)
- Demonstrate progress towards target habitat condition states
- Undertake remedial actions where habitats fail to establish or decline below target condition.

On-site construction and mitigation requirements

- 8.8 The landowner and appointed contractors will be required to implement standard ecological protection measures during construction, including:

Vegetation and nesting bird protection

8.9

- No vegetation clearance during the nesting bird season (March–August inclusive) unless preceded by a check by a suitably qualified ecologist
- If this is not possible a nesting bird check will be required, no more than 24 hours prior to vegetation removal by a suitable qualified ecologist.
- Any active nests identified must be protected with an appropriate buffer until fledging is complete.

Protection of retained habitats

8.10

- Installation of protective fencing or marking prior to construction
- No storage of materials, plant, or machinery within hedgerow buffers or retained habitat areas
- Avoidance of soil compaction within retained ecological features.
- Installing a temporary fence 5m from the existing hedgerows to buffer them from construction vehicles.

Faunal protection (precautionary working methods)

8.11

- All trenches, excavations, or pits to be covered or provided with escape ramps overnight
- Daily checks of excavations for trapped fauna (e.g. hedgehogs, amphibians)
- No uncontrolled lighting spill onto hedgerows or commuting corridors used by bats. External lighting may lead to an increase in disturbance to bat foraging and commuting routes therefore, it is recommended a low impact lighting strategy will be adopted for the site. A detailed lighting scheme is recommended to be approved by a licensed bat ecologist following best practice guidelines outlined in Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night (ILP, 2023).

Pollution prevention

8.12

- No release of pollutants, fuels, or contaminated runoff into soils, drainage features, or boundary habitats
- Works to follow standard pollution prevention good practice (CEMP principles).

Biodiversity enhancement commitments (integral to scheme delivery)

8.13 The following measures form part of the approved development and are required for BNG delivery:

- Establishment of native hedgerows using locally appropriate species
- Planting and successful establishment of approximately 14 native trees
- Conversion of improved grassland to species-rich or low-input management regimes
- Introduction of organic/low-intensity agricultural practices across cropland areas
- Retention and ecological management of orchard habitats
- These measures collectively form the mechanism by which measurable biodiversity net gain is achieved on site.

Compliance summary

8.14 In summary, the landowner will be required to ensure that:

- Biodiversity Net Gain is delivered on site in accordance with the approved Statutory Biodiversity Metric
- Habitats are created, enhanced, and retained exactly as set out in the approved plans
- A 30-year management and monitoring regime is legally secured and implemented
- Construction activities avoid adverse impacts to retained ecological features
- All mitigation and enhancement measures are fully implemented and maintained.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The proposed development represents a low-impact agricultural diversification scheme that delivers a measurable biodiversity net gain, retains the site's key ecological features, and enhances habitat connectivity within the wider landscape. No significant ecological constraints are identified that would preclude development, subject to implementation of the mitigation and enhancement measures outlined above.

APPENDIX A: MAPS & SITE PLANS

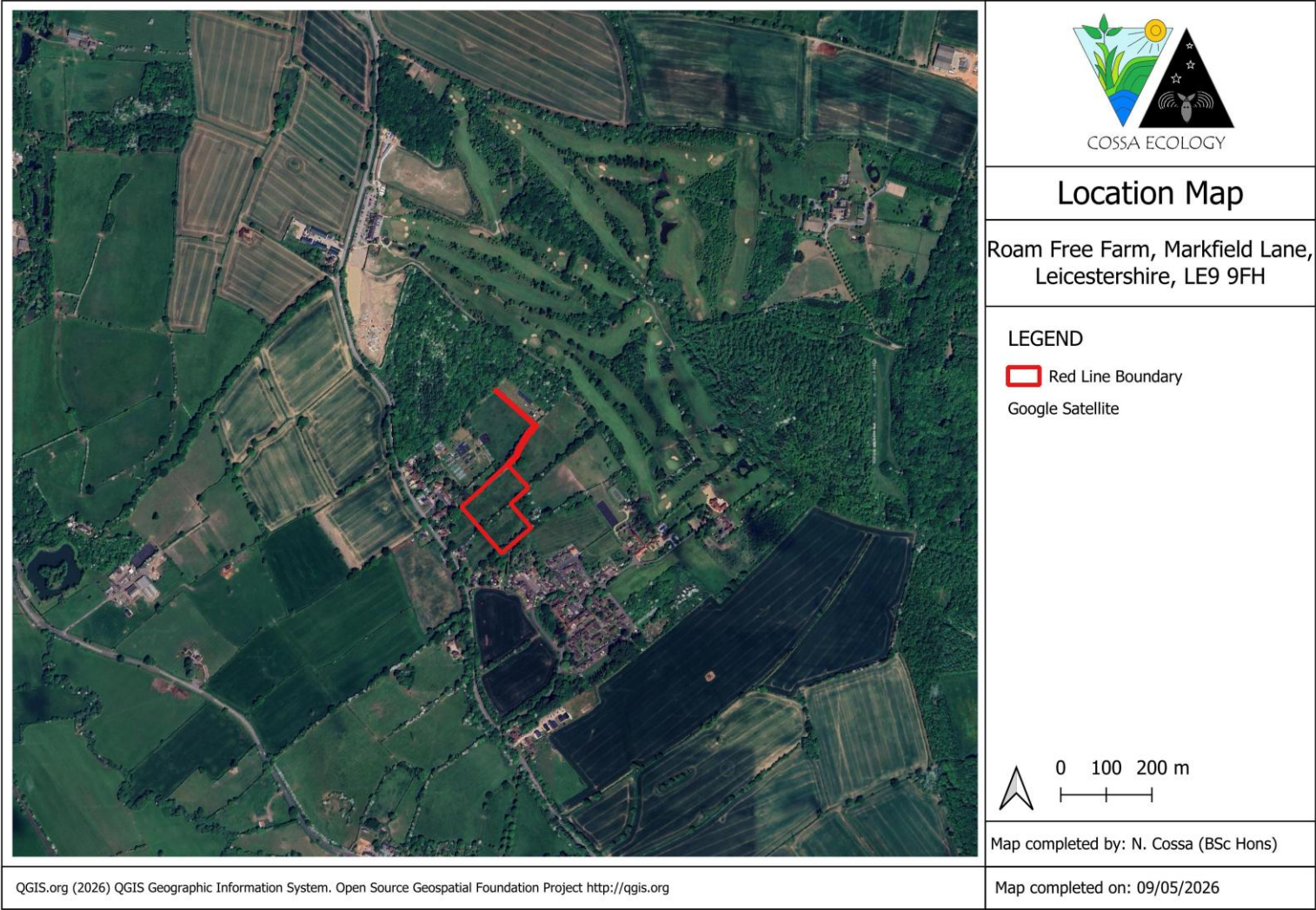


Figure 1: Site Location Map

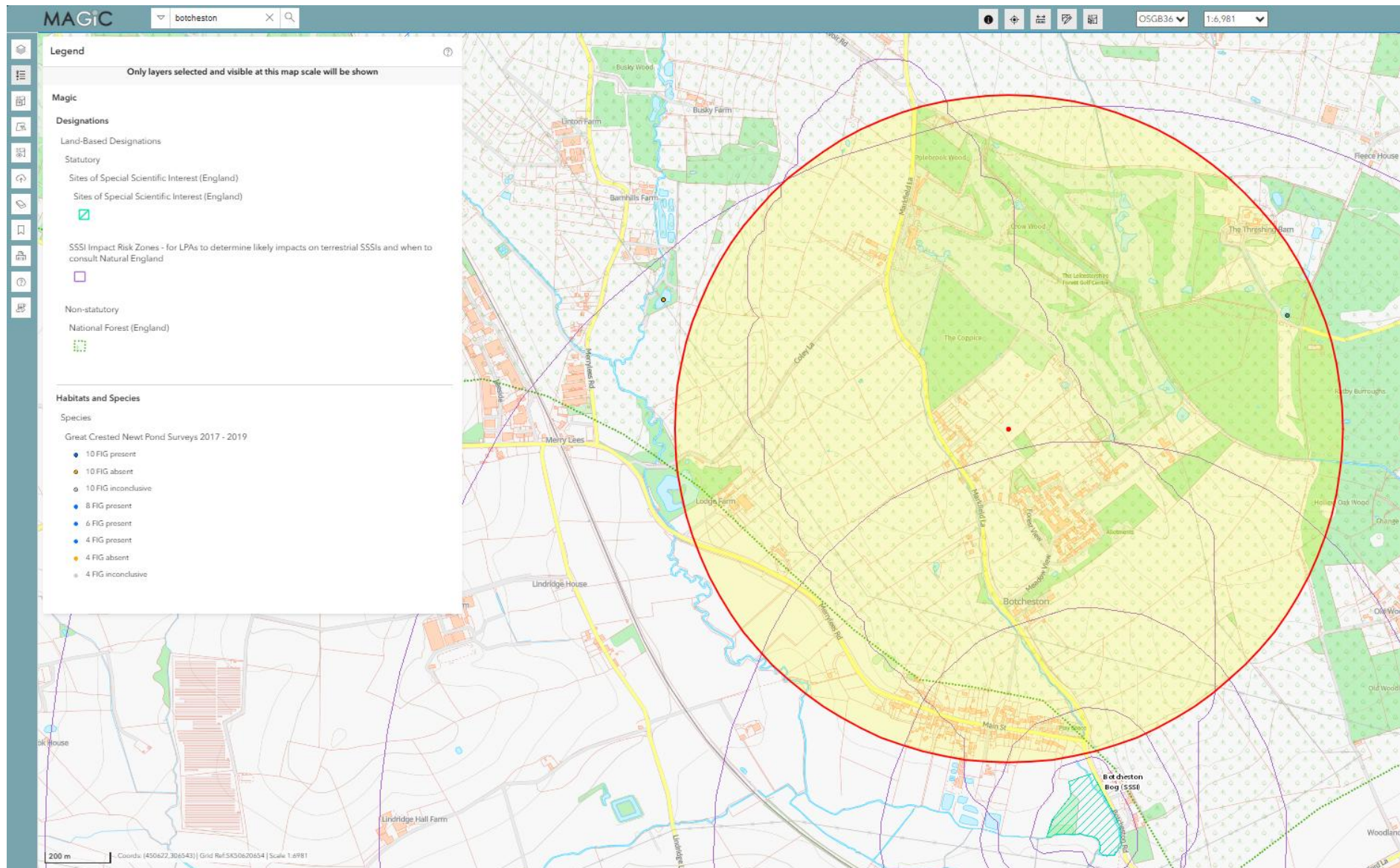


Figure 2: MAGIC map [accessed 29/04/2026]

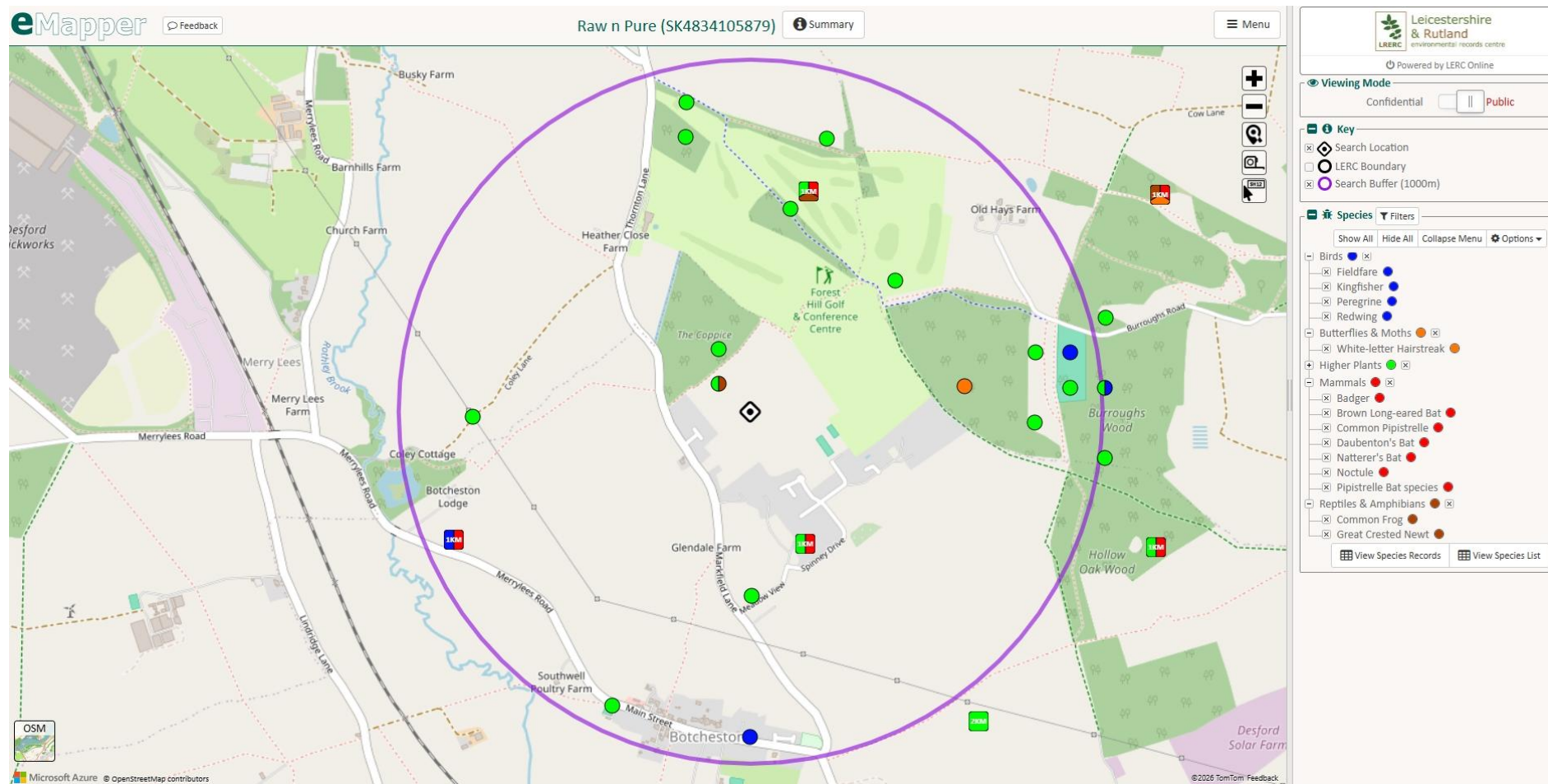


Figure 3: Protected Species Results map from LRERC [29/04/2026] Public records only

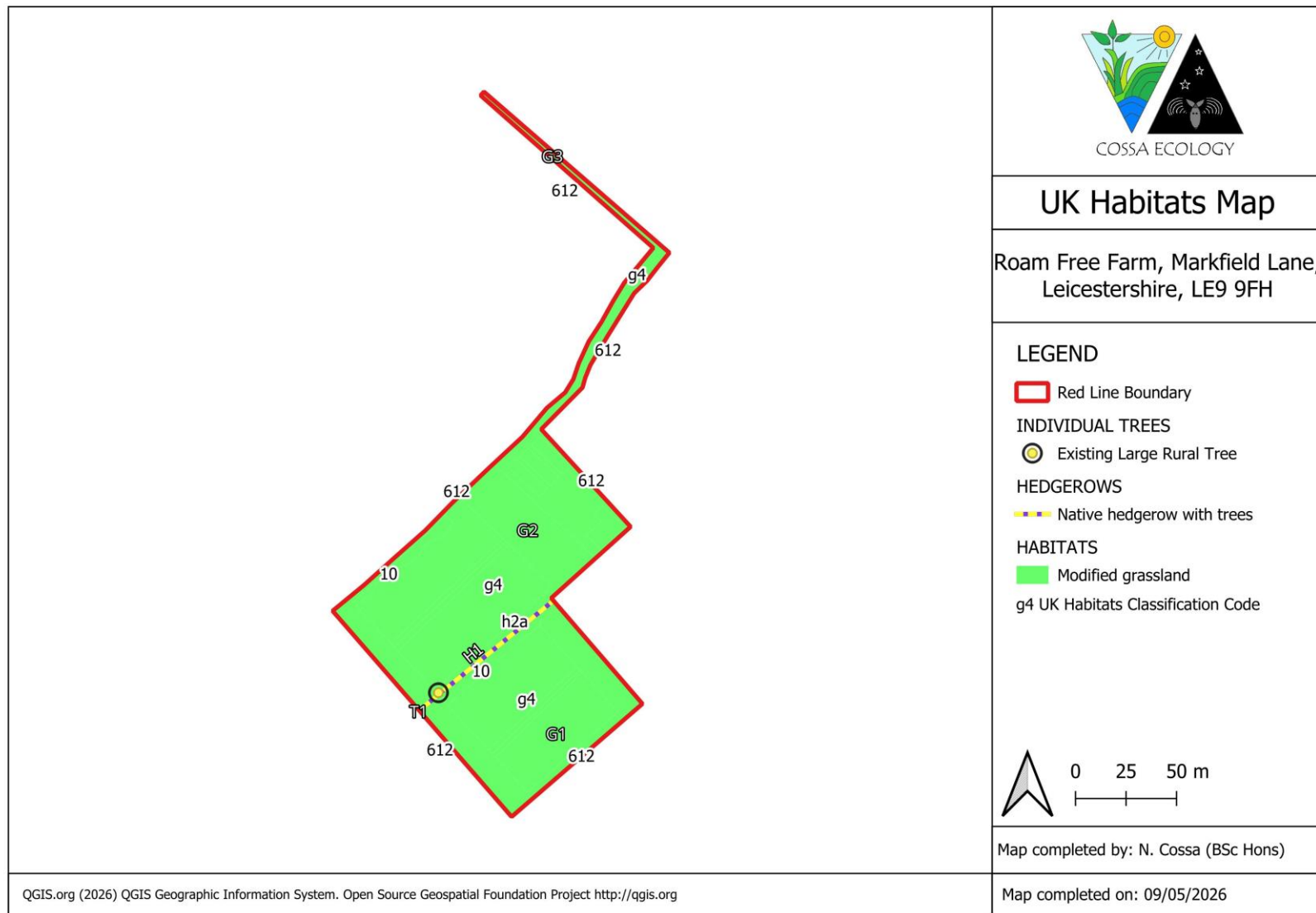


Figure 4: UKHabs assessed Site Map (NOTE* HABITATS MAY NOT BE PRECISELY MAPPED)

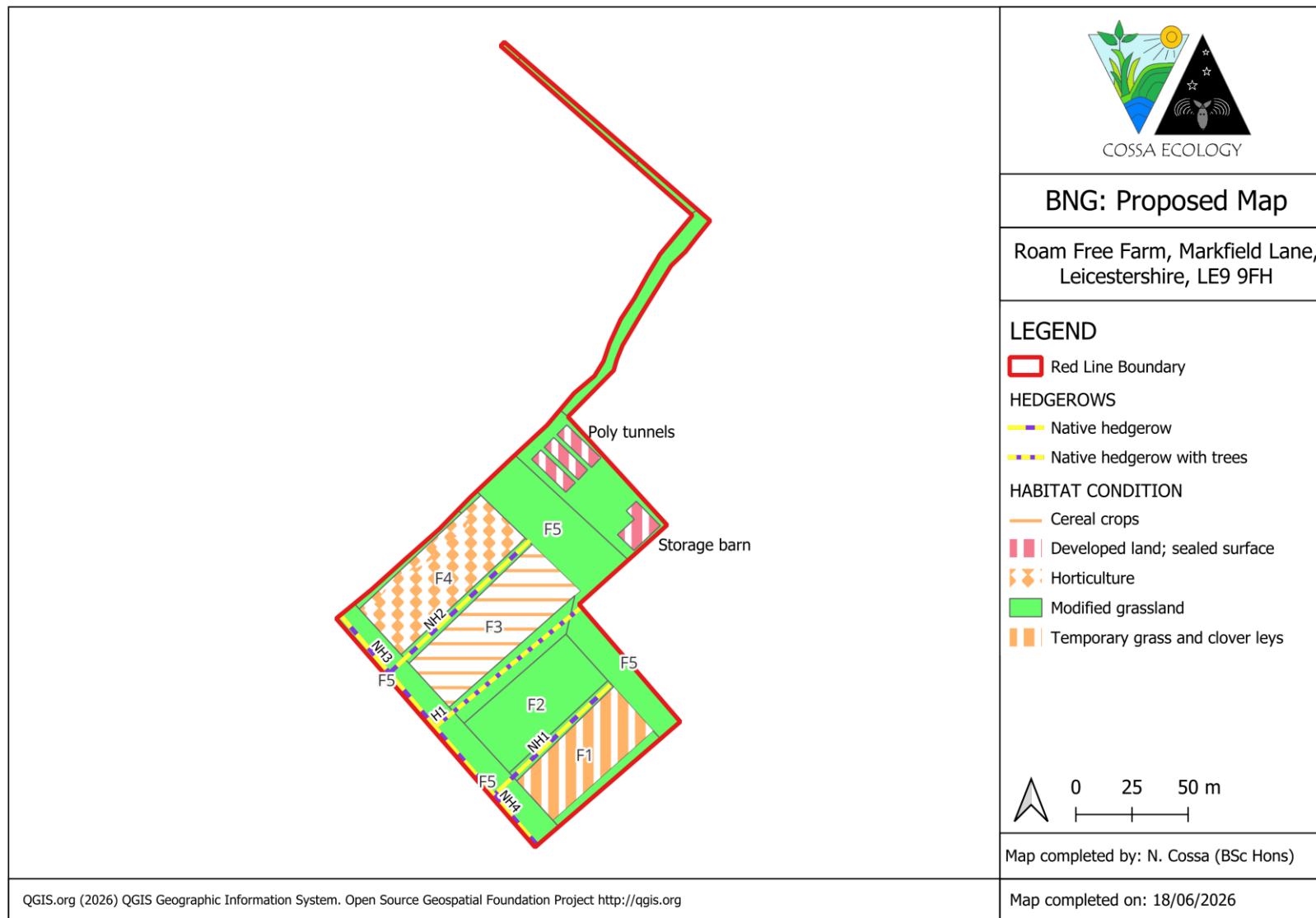


Figure 5: BNG Proposed Map

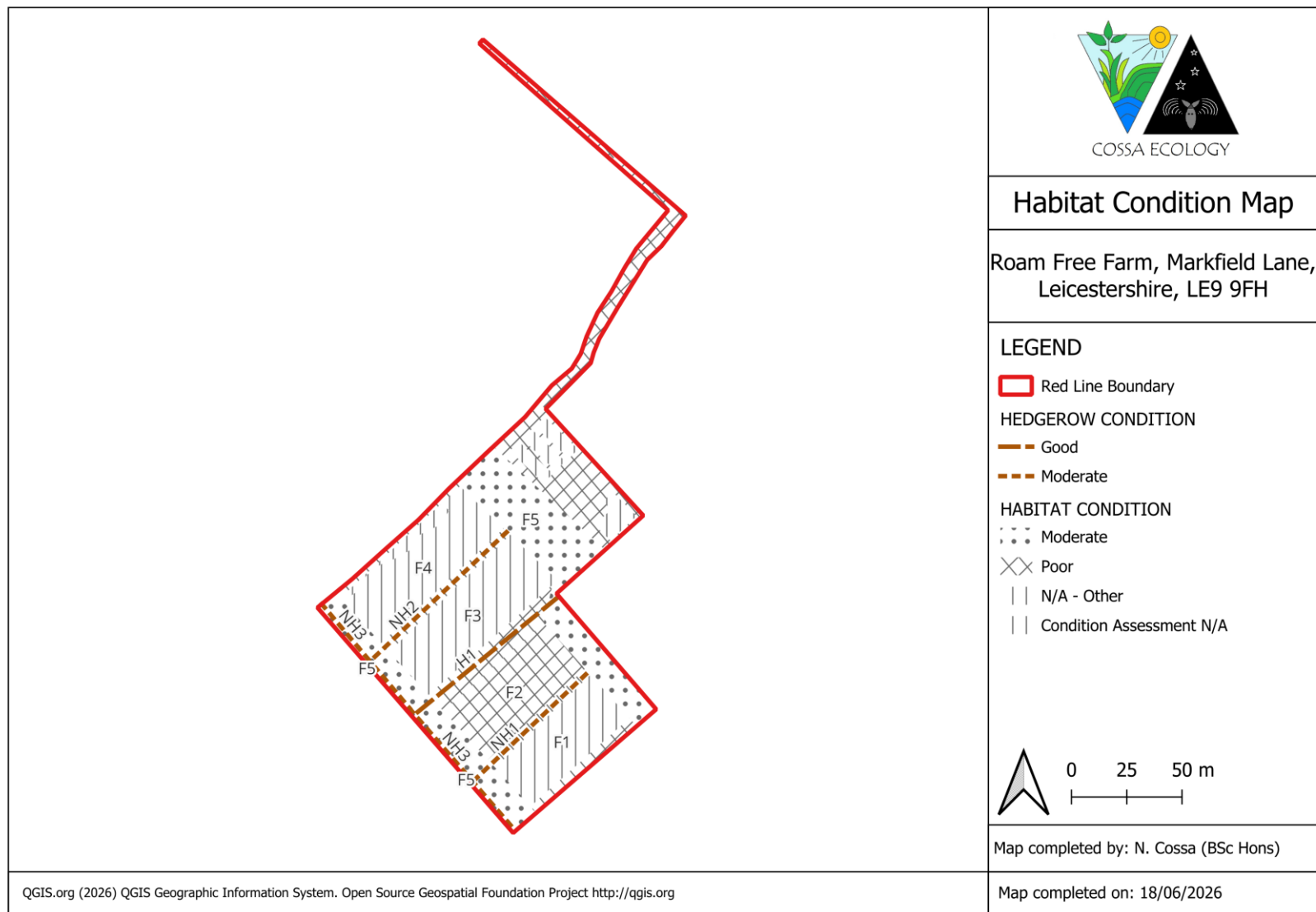


Figure 6: BNG: Proposed habitat condition Map

APPENDIX B: BNG CONDITION ASSESSMENT

Table 5: Condition Sheet: GRASSLAND Habitat Type (low distinctiveness) (edited)

Condition Assessment Criteria		Criterion passed		
		G1	G2	G3
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.	NO	NO	NO
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.	NO	YES	NO
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).	YES	YES	YES
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.	YES	YES	YES
E	Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 10%, including localised areas (for example, a concentration of rabbit warrens) ² .	YES	NO	YES
F	Cover of bracken <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> is less than 20%.	YES	YES	YES
G	There is an absence of invasive non-native plant species ³ (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA ⁴).	YES	YES	YES
Essential criterion achieved (Yes or No)		NO	NO	NO
Number of criteria passed		5	5	5
Condition Assessment Result (out of 7 criteria)		Condition Assessment Score		
Passes 6 or 7 criteria including passing essential criterion A		Score Achieved ×/✓		
Passes 4 or 5 criteria including passing essential criterion A		Good (3)		
Passes 3 or fewer criteria; OR Passes 4 - 6 criteria (excluding criterion A)		Moderate (2)		
		Poor (1)	✓	✓

BNG Condition assessment of grassland (low distinctiveness)

Table 6: Condition Sheet: HEDGEROW Habitat Type (with trees) (edited)

Attributes and functional groupings (A, B, C, D and E)			Criteria - the minimum requirements for 'favourable condition'	Criterion passed (Yes or No)
Core groups - applicable to all hedgerow types				H1
A1	Height	>1.5 m average along length	The average height of woody growth estimated from base of stem to the top of the shoots, excluding any bank beneath the hedgerow, any gaps or isolated trees.	YES
A2	Width	>1.5 m average along length	The average width of woody growth estimated at the widest point of the canopy, excluding gaps and isolated trees.	YES
B1	Gap - hedge base	Gap between ground and base of canopy <0.5 m for >90% of length	This is the vertical 'gappiness' of the woody component of the hedgerow, and its distance from the ground to the lowest leafy growth.	YES
B2	Gap - hedge canopy continuity	Gaps make up <10% of total length; and No canopy gaps >5 m	This is the horizontal 'gappiness' of the woody component of the hedgerow. Gaps are complete breaks in the woody canopy (no matter how small).	YES
C1	Undisturbed ground and perennial vegetation	>1 m width of undisturbed ground with perennial herbaceous vegetation for >90% of length:	This is the level of disturbance (excluding wildlife disturbance) at the base of the hedgerow. Undisturbed ground is present for at least 90% of the hedgerow length, greater than 1 m in width	YES
C2	Nutrient-enriched perennial vegetation	Plant species indicative of nutrient enrichment of soils dominate <20% cover of the area of undisturbed ground.	The indicator species used are nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i> <i>Urtica dioica</i> <i>Urtica</i> spp., cleavers <i>Galium aparine</i> <i>Galium aparine</i> and docks <i>Rumex</i> spp. Their presence, either singly or together, does not exceed the 20% cover threshold.	NO
D1	Invasive and neophyte species	>90% of the hedgerow and undisturbed ground is free of invasive non-native plant species	Recently introduced species refer to plants that have naturalised in the UK since AD 1500 (neophytes). Archaeophytes count as natives.	YES
D2	Current damage	>90% of the hedgerow or undisturbed ground is free of damage caused by human activities.	This criterion addresses damaging activities that may have led to or lead to deterioration in other attributes.	YES
E1	Tree class	There is more than one age-class (or morphology) of tree present.	This criterion addresses if there are a range of age-classes or morphologies which allow for replacement of trees and provide opportunities for different species.	YES
E2	Tree health	At least 95% of hedgerow trees are in a healthy condition (excluding veteran features valuable for wildlife).	This criterion identifies if the trees are subject to damage which compromises the survival and health of the individual specimens.	NO
Number of fails				2
Good - 3	No more than 2 failures in total; AND No more than 1 failure in any functional group.			✓
Moderate - 2	No more than 5 failures in total; AND <u>Does not fail both attributes</u> in more than one functional group (for example, fails attributes A1, A2, B1, C2 and E1 = Moderate condition).			
Poor - 1	Fails a total of more than 5 attributes; OR <u>Fails both attributes</u> in more than one functional group (for example, fails attributes A1, A2, B1 and B2 = Poor condition).			

APPENDIX C: METRIC SPREADSHEET

Roam Free Farm, Botcheston

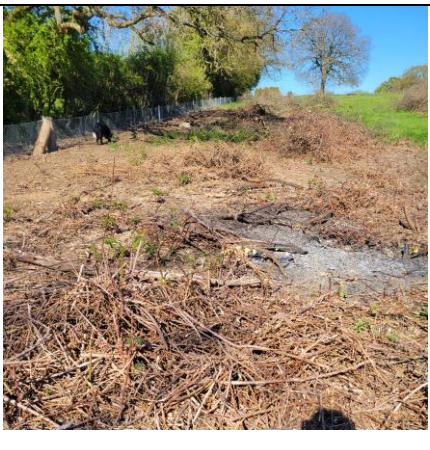
Headline Results

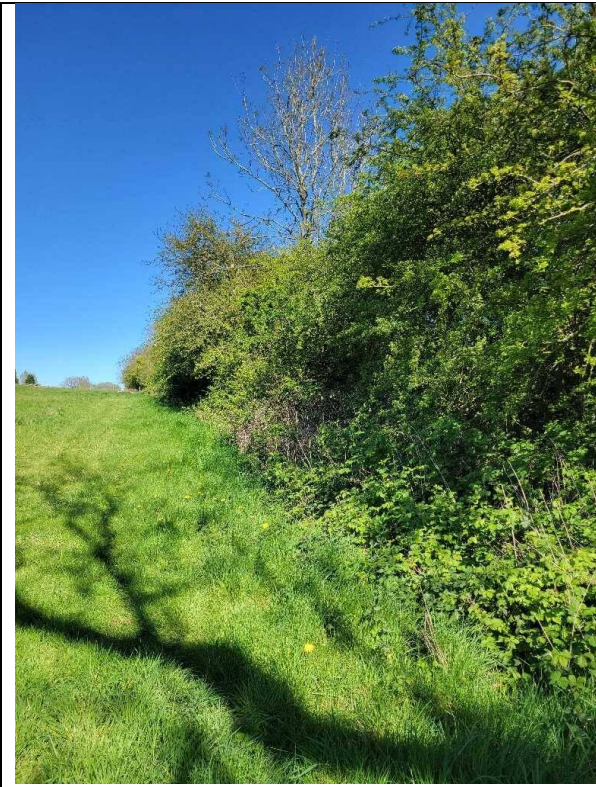
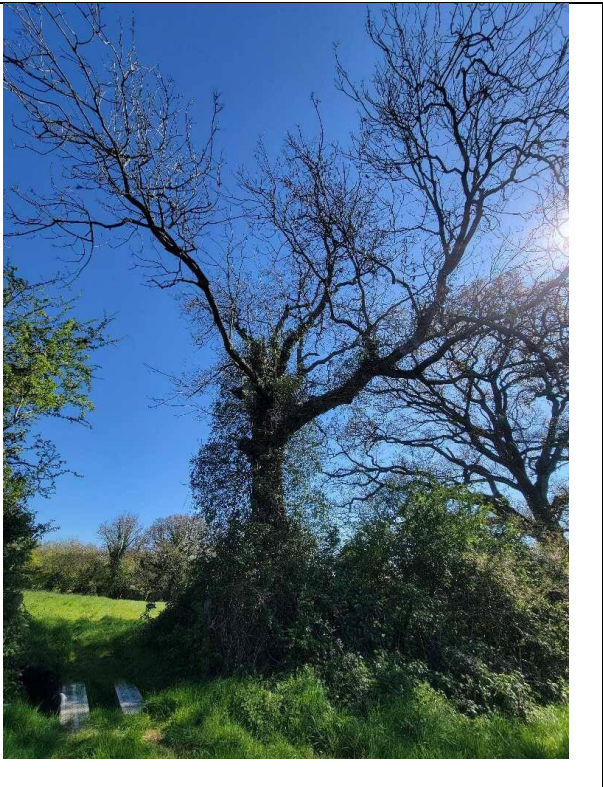
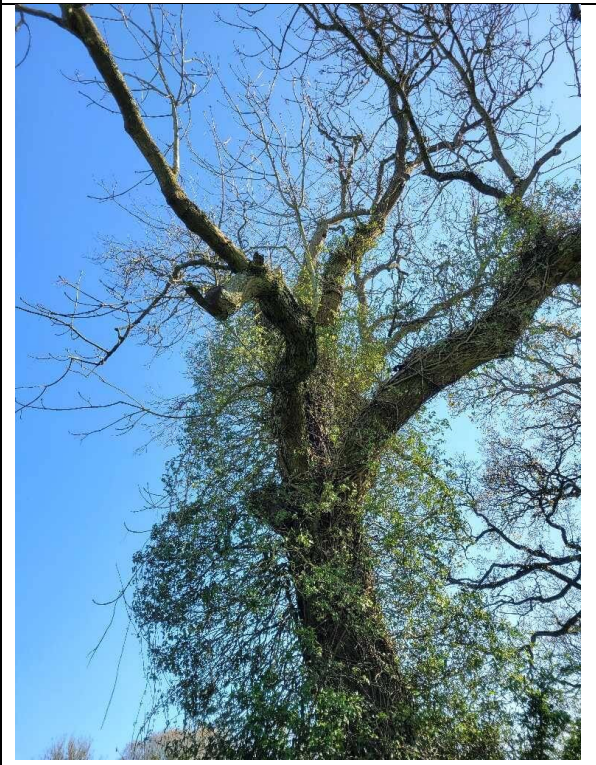
Scroll down for final results ▲

Return to results menu

On-site baseline	Area habitat units	3.24			
	Hedgerow units	1.00			
	Watercourse units	0.00			
On-site post-intervention (Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Area habitat units	3.67			
	Hedgerow units	1.96			
	Watercourse units	0.00			
On-site net change (units & percentage)	Area habitat units	0.43	13.19%		
	Hedgerow units	0.96	96.45%		
	Watercourse units	0.00	0.00%		
Off-site baseline	Area habitat units	0.00			
	Hedgerow units	0.00			
	Watercourse units	0.00			
Off-site post-intervention (Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Area habitat units	0.00			
	Hedgerow units	0.00			
	Watercourse units	0.00			
Off-site net change (units & percentage)	Area habitat units	0.00	0.00%		
	Hedgerow units	0.00	0.00%		
	Watercourse units	0.00	0.00%		
Combined net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Area habitat units	0.43			
	Hedgerow units	0.96			
	Watercourse units	0.00			
Spatial risk multiplier (SRM) deductions	Area habitat units	0.00			
	Hedgerow units	0.00			
	Watercourse units	0.00			
FINAL RESULTS					
Total net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Area habitat units	0.43			
	Hedgerow units	0.96			
	Watercourse units	0.00			
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Area habitat units	13.19%			
	Hedgerow units	96.45%			
	Watercourse units	0.00%			
Trading rules satisfied?	Yes ✓				
Unit Type	Target	Baseline Units	Units Required	Unit Deficit	
Area habitat units	10.00%	3.24	3.56	0.00	No additional area habitat units required to meet target ✓
Hedgerow units	10.00%	1.00	1.10	0.00	No additional hedgerow units required to meet target ✓
Watercourse units	10.00%	0.00	0.00	0.00	No additional watercourse units required to meet target ✓

APPENDIX D: SITE IMAGES

	
Photo 1: G1 modified grassland looking to SW	Photo 2: G1 looking to the N
	
Photo 3: G2 modified grassland looking to N	Photo 4: G2 looking to SW
	
Photo 5: G2 Area where poly tunnels and agricultural storage building will be, looking from W to E	Photo 6: G2, area where bramble and blackthorn suckers spreading from hedgerow have been removed

	
Photo 7: H1 – native hedgerow with trees	Photo 8: T1
	
Photo 7: T1	