

# 1. Parkland Walk

## 1.1. SINC status

- Current status: Metropolitan (part of M116: Highgate Wood, Queen's Wood & Parkland Walk)
- Recommended status: **Retain as Metropolitan - Split into two separate SINCS:**
  - Parkland Walk - retain as Metropolitan.
  - Highgate Wood and Queen's Wood - retain as Metropolitan.
  - Cede easternmost section (east of mainline railway) to HgBII09 – Finsbury Park.
  - Consider review of site boundary: several private properties and gardens thereof appear to fall within the SINC boundary.

## 1.2. Site description

The Parkland Walk is the remnant of the course of the former Finsbury Park to Alexandra Palace Railway Line. It is nearly four kilometres in length, the majority of which is in the London Borough of Haringey, with a short but relatively broad section in the London Borough of Islington. The site is oriented approximately southeast to northwest. The site is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), designated as such in 1990. Two distinct sections are recognised; Parkland Walk North between Muswell Hill and Muswell Hill Road, and Parkland Walk South between Highgate station and Finsbury Park. The latter section is the longer of the two and is further split for the purposes of this report into West, Central and East (see Section 1.4, Maps).

Secondary woodland dominates, particularly along areas where the former line is set within a cutting. Embanked areas support small patches of scrub and grassland, with a larger area of neutral grassland south of the Lancaster Road and a remnant acid grassland area south of Mount View Road. At the time of writing, several of the bridges along the walk are under going restoration work. These present opportunities for biodiversity enhancement which are discussed below.

At the western end of Parkland Walk South is a relatively small area or 'Nature trail' managed by the Friends of Parkland Walk. Whilst still woodland, it contains a diverse, if perhaps eclectic ground flora which has arisen from deliberate introduction, sowing as 'wildflower seed mixes' or were present within the seed bank from the time of railway where gardens of railway employee dwellings once existed (P. Mercer, pers. comm.).

A botanical survey of Parkland Walk was conducted in 2015 recorded 291 species, 46% of which were non-native, 86% of which are classed as neophytes (Bevan, 2015). Species records, and the compartments in which they were found can be accessed via Table 1, Bevan (2015). The present

survey and report do not attempt to supersede the findings of that survey, which still represents the most thorough and up to date botanical survey of Parkland Walk.

The reserve supports a range of breeding birds, predominantly those typically associated with woodland, parks and gardens. Song thrush *Turdus philomelos* sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* and dunnock *Prunella modularis* (all BoCC Amber list; Stanbury 2021), were all seen or heard during the survey. Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (Red list) is a regular breeding species, as too is spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* and the combination of meadow and tall trees has potential to support mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus*. It is understood that tawny owl *Strix aluco* have been recorded during the breeding season in the past, but not in recent years.

### 1.3. Habitat descriptions and conditions

#### Grassland

*UKHabs habitat types present (secondary codes in brackets)*

**g1a - Lowland dry acid grassland**

**g3c - Other neutral grassland (10 - Scattered scrub, 16 - Tall herb, 17 - Ruderal/ephemeral)**

**g4 - Modified grassland (16 - Tall herb, 17 - Ruderal/ephemeral)**

**g4a - Amenity grassland**

#### *Description*

**g1a - Lowland dry acid grassland:** An area of grassland approximately 800m<sup>2</sup> in area occupies a south facing bank on the north side of the track within the L.B. Islington section. Common bent *Agrostis capillaris* was the dominant species, with frequent rye-grass *Lolium*. Typical indicators of acid grassland were present, with sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* locally frequent to the south-west and mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum* rare. Common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* were present in locally dominant clumps. Greater plantain *Plantago major* and white clover *Trifolium repens* were also occasional, but locally abundant.

**g3c - Other neutral grassland:** Neutral grassland is found in two main areas. The first is likely to have arisen from deliberate seeding and is associated with the cutting bank north of Crouch Hill Park. Whilst ruderal and nitrophilous species (broad leaved-dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*) were patchily present, herbaceous species typical of seed-mixes were also present (e.g. common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and meadow vetchling). A more representative area lies to the east of the reserve, occupying a 2,500m<sup>2</sup> area within the embanked section east of Finsbury Park (compartment 3 in TEC, 2010). This is a grass dominated area, with cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* the most frequent, dominating locally. As reported by Bevan (2015), rosebay willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium* was locally abundant, as too was Canadian goldenrod *Solidago canadensis*, particularly on the north slope and at the slope bases. Meadow vetchling, as in other parts of the reserve, was locally dominant. Bramble was also prevalent within the ground layer and was the subject of active management by a The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)

work party at the time of the survey. This area was particularly highlighted by Bevan (2015) as an example of what was more prevalent at the time of the railway and, along with mosaics of scrub, should be a primary object to maintain and potentially expand.

**g4 - Modified grassland/g4a - Amenity grassland:** Lawns within the grounds of Crouch Hill Park, 'verges' either side of and on St James' Lane Viaduct and Finsbury Park grassland.

#### Condition

**g1a - Lowland dry acid grassland:** Moderate; the grassland is evidently, both from current species composition and from historical records, an acid grassland. However, indicator herbs were rare and 'undesirable' species such as greater plantain and white clover were locally abundant.

**g3c - Other neutral grassland:** The sown area in Crouch Hill Park is Moderate (sown grasslands often do not fill traditional descriptions of many grassland types). The eastern 'meadow' is also Moderate. Here, wildflowers/sedges were not 'clearly and easily visible' throughout the sward, and scrub cover was greater than 5%.

**g4 - Modified grassland/g4a - Amenity grassland:** Moderate. Whilst species poor, these small areas were usually not subject to much damage or scrub incursion.

#### Woodland

*UKHabs habitat types present (secondary codes in brackets)*

**w1g7 - Other broadleaved woodland types**

**w1f7 - Other Lowland mixed deciduous woodland**

**w1g6 - Line of trees**

#### Description

**w1g7 - Other broadleaved woodland types:** Recent secondary woodland is present throughout but there is considerable variation in dominant species. The most frequently occurring tree species along the entire SINC is sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, with other occasional areas dominated by ash *Fraxinus excelsior* (the most prevalent native tree) and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, the former often with extensive arboreal ivy *Hedera helix*. Stands of cherry *Prunus* are also present, most notably close to the entrance on Holmesdale Road, and stands of silver birch *Betula pendula* are occasionally present, including in the area of Parkland Walk North immediately north of Muswell Hill Road. The woodland shrub layer is usually poorly developed but there are some sections where it is dense or species-rich. Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, elder *Sambucus nigra*, cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*, garden privet *Ligustrum ovalifolium*, bay *Laurus nobilis* and English elm *Ulmus procera* (which has supported white-letter hairstreak *Satyrium w-album*) are also present. Ash is present as saplings in some sections, as too are sycamore suckers and elm suckering within the L.B. Islington section. As reported by Bevan (2015), hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* was rare. At the time of survey, the ground flora appeared to mainly species-poor and dominated by ivy, bramble, wood avens *Geum urbanum* and cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*. Ancient woodland indicators were rare

within the ground flora, but included the occasional pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* and a single observation of giant fescue *Schedonorus gigantea*. The former is likely to be present in many cases from garden escape (see Rose, 1999). Coralroot *Cardamine bulbifera* a scarce native woodland plant was also recorded in compartment 7 by Bevan (2015). Whilst many of the conditions and plant distributions appear generally similar to that reported in TEC (2010), two aspects appear notably different: [1] Invasive species such as cherry laurel, *Buddleia* are widespread, as too are an increasing number of invasive bamboos from garden waste tipped over boundary fences. Ground elder *Aegopodium podagraria*, Oregon-grape *Mahonia aquifolium* and tree cotoneaster *Cotoneaster frigidus* were also recorded. [2] The area occupied by the central gravel/bare-ground track has substantially widened within the last two years (pedestrian use and concerns over social distancing have widened paths since March 2020, D.Theakston, pers. comm.).

Secondary woodland also forms the dominant habitat in the Parkland Walk North between Muswell Hill Road and Muswell Hill. Close to Muswell Hill Road the canopy comprises sycamore. The woodland to the north of St. James' viaduct is dominated by sycamore with occasional ash and with a shrub layer comprising largely of elder and a ground flora of ivy.

**w1f7 - Other Lowland mixed deciduous woodland:** The woodland immediately south of St James' Lane is more varied and includes a number of mature pedunculate oak with an understorey of elder, hawthorn, and young specimens of yew and sycamore. Also present are small stands of silver birch, ash and wild cherry.

**w1g6 - Line of trees:** Two lines of immature planted trees are present within Crouch Hill Park.

#### Condition

**w1f7 - Other Lowland mixed deciduous woodland:** Moderate. Whilst this area scores highly for cover and presence of native species, presence of deadwood and veteran features (cf. presence of pedunculate oaks as above), invasive species, the presence of only two size classes (seedlings were not observed), some observations of ash-die back and heavy disturbance (compaction around veteran trees, fly-tipping and a myriad of desire-lines/paths from assumed illegitimate back gates) all contribute to a Moderate score.

**w1g7 - Other broadleaved woodland types:** With the exception of the western most (Holmesdale Road entrance) and eastern most (Finsbury Park) sections, which are in Good condition, all woodland is in either Moderate or Poor condition. Given the woodland is largely comprised of non-native species, invasive species are widespread and mature/veteran trees are largely absent, Moderate condition can be seen as the 'default' condition for a woodland of this type. Where very heavy disturbance is seen, this can result in a near absent ground flora and no obvious signs of regeneration, which contribute to a further lessening of condition to 'Poor'. The areas of Poor condition were largely localised to the Central area. The western half of the L.B. Islington section (that associated with Crouch Hill Park suffers from being heavily disturbed, as well as low in native-species diversity. West of this area and within L.B. Haringey is a section 'high forest' dominated by sycamore, a poor, disturbed understorey. The two areas of Good condition woodland reflect their relatively low levels (west) or

absent disturbance (rail side areas adjacent to Finsbury Park); whilst non-native species are present, woodland regeneration is enabled and damage limited by a lack of footfall.

**w1g6 - Line of trees:** Poor. Largely non-native and immature, with no adjacent natural vegetation.

### Scrub

*UKHabs habitat types present (secondary codes in brackets)*

**h3a - Blackthorn scrub**

**h3d - Bramble scrub (16 - Tall herb)**

**h3h - Mixed scrub**

#### *Description*

**h3a - Blackthorn scrub/h3d - Bramble scrub/h3h - Mixed scrub.** Scrub is a relatively small component of the SINC, accounting for only 2.5% of the total area. These areas are invariably found around bridges, particularly on Parkland Walk South, forming an ecotone between ruderal tall herbs and/or grassland, and woodland. The dominant species varied, with bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. accounting for 60% of the total scrub area. These areas tended to be large, dense stands.

#### *Condition*

Bramble scrub defaults to Poor condition. Only where mixed scrub (Parkland Walk North), present on a south-east facing cutting had sufficient species diversity (silver birch, hawthorn and elder were all present) and structural diversity with a fringe of grassland was scrub in Moderate condition. Elsewhere, scrub was either uniform in age and structure (which is invariably the case with bramble), was accompanied by 'undesirables' such as common nettle *Urtica dioica* or invasive *Buddleia*.

### Freshwater

*UKHabs habitat types present (secondary codes in brackets)*

**r1a - Eutrophic standing waters (39 - Freshwater - man-made)**

#### *Description*

A pond is present within the 'Nature trail'. Rigid Hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum* dominates the surface waters, with almost no clear water areas present. Bog bean *Menyanthes trifoliata* was also present, with marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, hard rush *Juncus inflexus* and galingale *Cyperus longus*. The pond is man-made, being 'dammed' on the east side, which also provide a seating area. The pond supports smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris* (P. Mercer, pers. comm.) and records of common frog *Rana temporaria* date back to 1999.

#### *Condition*

Moderate. The artificial construction and presence of a 'dam' constrains the pond to a Moderate condition; it is in Good condition in all other respects.

## Urban

*UKHabs habitat types present (secondary codes in brackets)*

**u1b5 – Buildings.**

**u1b6 - Other developed land.**

**u1c - Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface (73 - Bare ground).**

**u1d - Suburban/ mosaic of developed/ natural surface (1160 - Introduced shrub, 231 - Vegetated garden, 232 - Un-vegetated garden)**

*Description*

**u1b5 - Buildings:** Those of Crouch Hill Park and retained railway buildings and bridges.

**u1b6 - Other developed land:** Roads/paths in Crouch Hill Park, retained railway infrastructure (platforms) and tarmacked paths on Finsbury Park. At the time of the survey and throughout 2021, several of the bridges were subject to restoration work. Planning applications for these projects were supported by ecological appraisals within their immediate vicinity (e.g., WSP, 2021; MKA Ecology Ltd., 2021). The Highgate Tunnel (west) is known to support roosting bats at all times of the year. Seven species of bat have been recorded in or near the entrances to these tunnels from either dedicate Bat Conservation Trust or London Bat Group hibernation site surveys or from surveys using automated detectors.

**u1c - Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface:** Six percent of the total area is mapped as such, this being accounted for by the central track. Whilst this might arguably be mapped as a linear feature in places, it was felt appropriate to map it as an area throughout as [a] in many places it is greater than five metres in width and [b] to highlight that, in places, it has become substantially wider due increase pedestrian pressure since March 2020.

**u1d - Suburban/ mosaic of developed/ natural surface:** Vegetated gardens are present within the site boundary. Some of these instances may be due to illegitimate 'land grab' from adjacent properties; The large number of back garden access gates into the reserve was noteworthy, as too was the amount of rubbish thrown over/left from back gardens as fly-tipping.

*Condition*

Urban habitats have a zero condition score ('N/A – other'), with the exception of introduced shrubs and vegetated gardens which default to Poor.

### Priority habitats

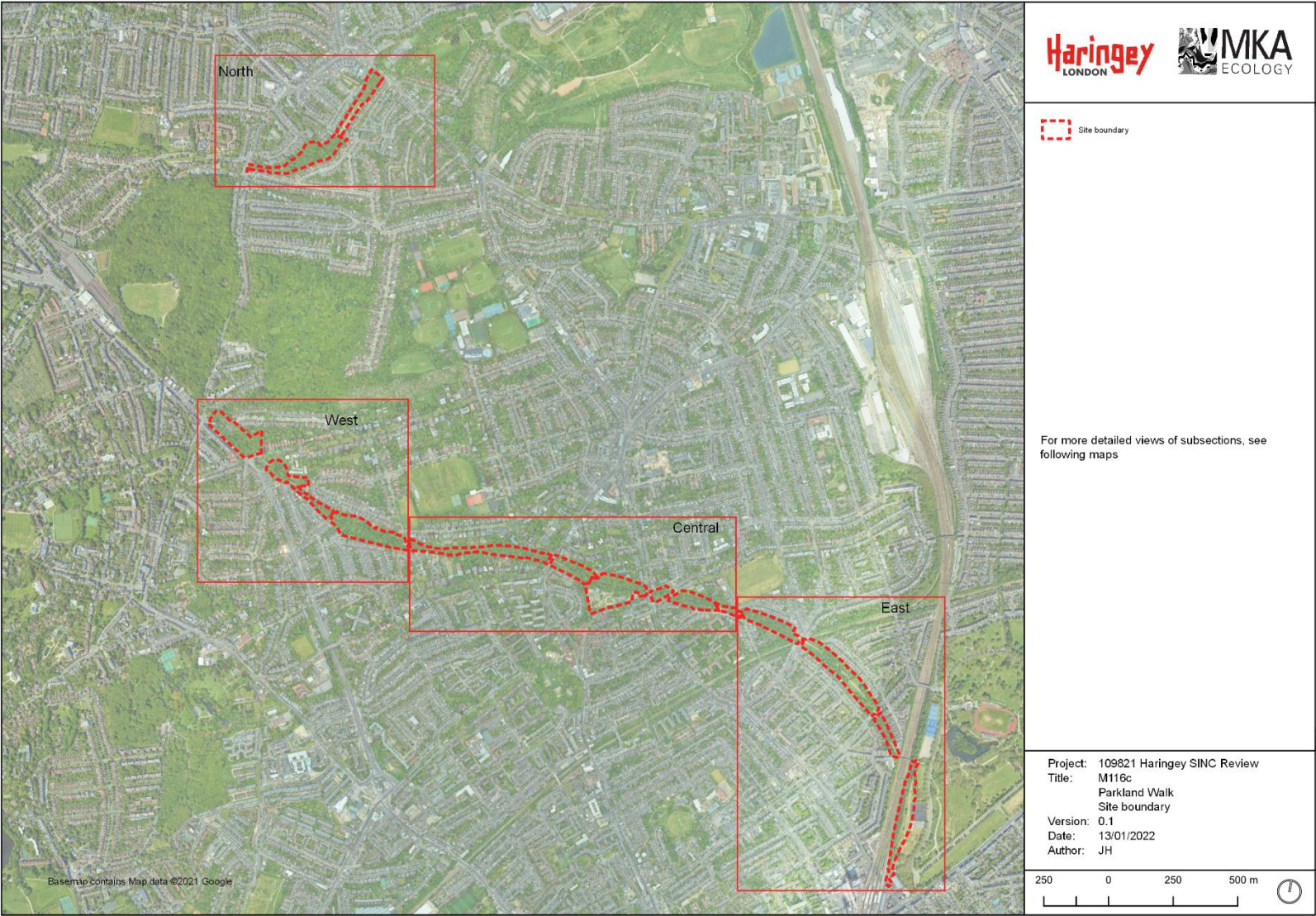
The following Priority Habitats are present at this location;

- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

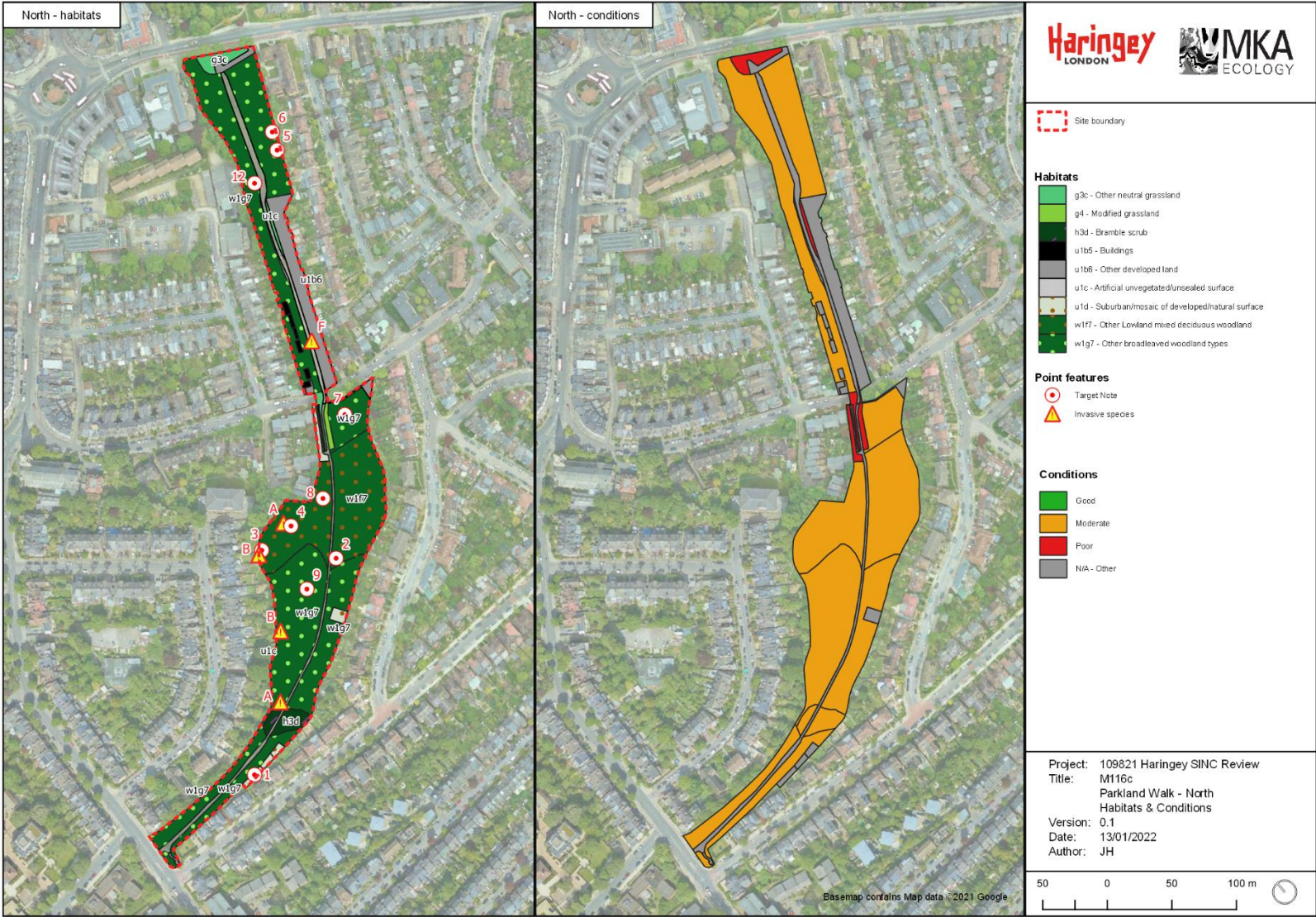
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1.4. Maps



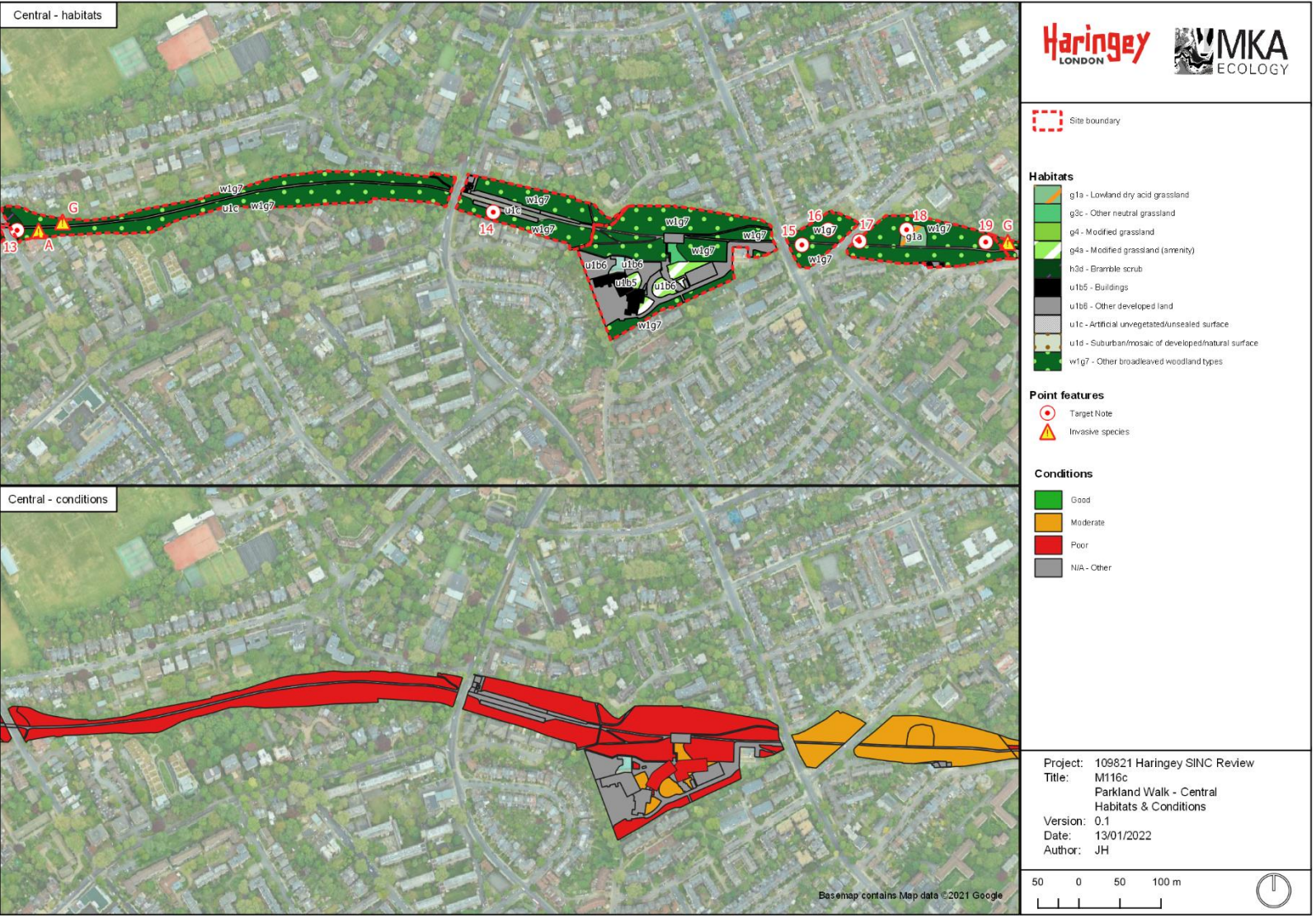




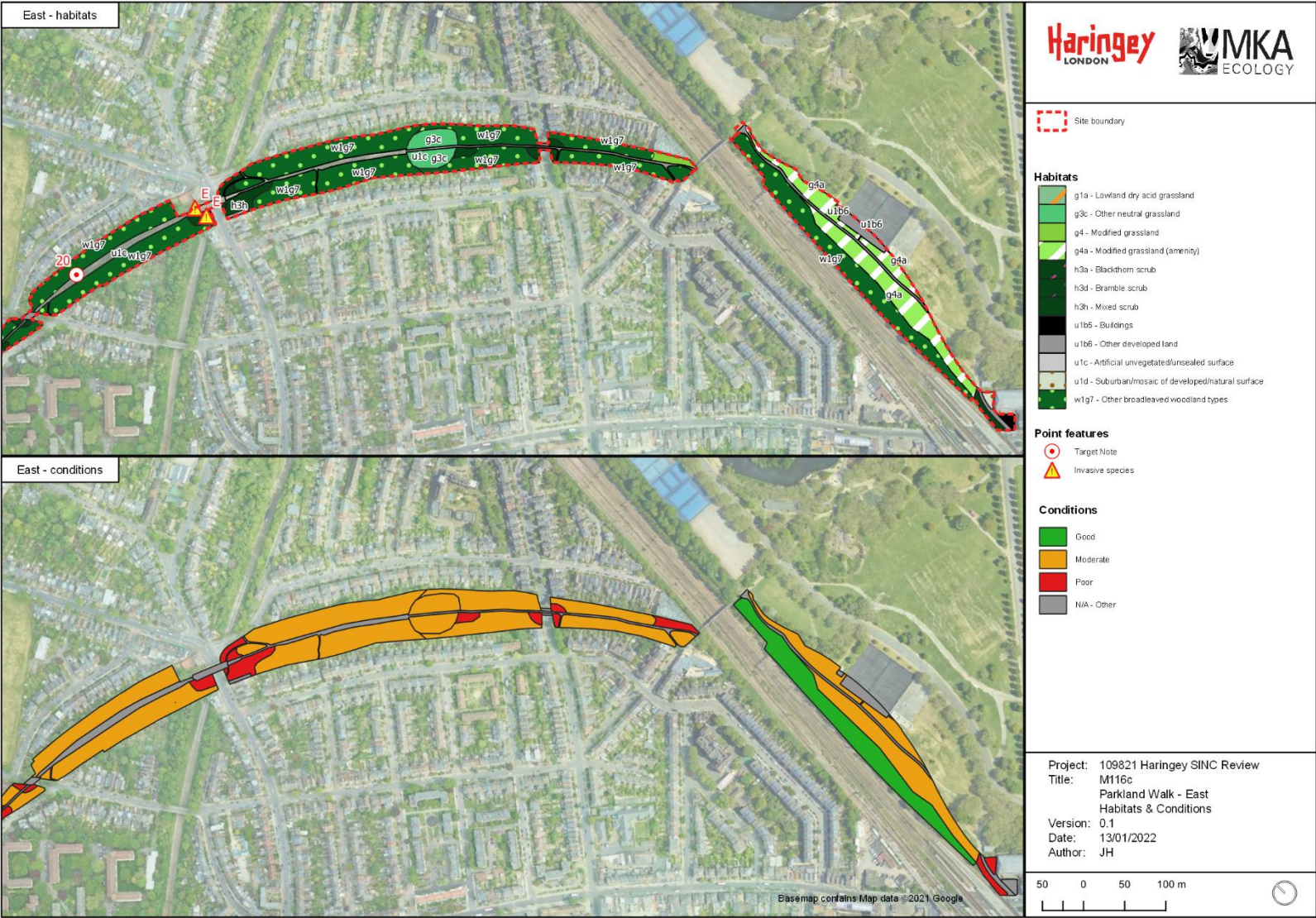












## Target Notes:

Ref	Target note
1	Many gardens within site boundary. Consider change to SINC boundary.
2	'Beetle tower' stumperies.
3	Damage & rubbish.
4	Tawny owl box.
5	Former pond.
6	Rubbish/cuttings from gardens.
7	Potential location for pond.
8	Bramble dominated understorey.
9	Area of sycamore that may be targeted for canopy reduction.
10	Bat roost in tunnel.
11	Dumped garden waste.
12	Tree management works with no attempt to create appropriate enhancements.
13	Opportunity for opening out to create scrub/mosaic
14	Ash regeneration.
15	Elm suckering visible.
16	Existing glade from fallen tree - opportunity to further open.
17	Opportunity for brick bat boxes on bridge refacing.
18	Strimming activity.
19	Fox earth.
20	Bat boxes.

## 1.5. Invasive non-native species

Ref	Species	Notes
A	Cherry laurel	Widespread.
B	Bamboo indet	Unidentified bamboos from back gardens.
C	Rhododendron	Unable to identify whether <i>R.ponticum</i> or sterile cultivar.
D	A variegated Laurel	-
E	<i>Buddliea</i>	Widespread
F	Virginia creeper	-
G	Robinia	-

A number of other Schedule 9 (Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981, as amended) and LISI species were recorded by Bevan (2015). They include, but are not limited to Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica*, over four species of *Cotoneaster*, montbretia *Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora* and Highclere holly *Ilex x altaclerensis*.



**1.6. Assessment against selection criteria**

The reserve is approximately four kilometres in length and is either directly connected to or within close proximity to six other SINC's within and beyond the borough boundary. This 'green corridor' provides a vital resource to wildlife within the city. Even if split from the ancient woodland sites with which Parkland Walk currently shares this SINC status, the role it plays, both in supporting sometimes rare species (especially for London) and in its ability to connect people to nature warrants it being retained as a Metropolitan grade SINC.

**1.7. Constraints and opportunities**

*Constraints:*

- Presence of nesting birds.
- Confirmed bat roost of multiple species in Highgate tunnels.
- High potential for roosting bats (bat boxes and/or suitable features on mature trees, and buildings and bridges).
- Presence of Schedule 9 (Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981, as amended) and LISI species.
- Potential presence of reptiles (historical records of slow-worm recorded to south of Northwood Road bridge and suitable habitat present).
- Potential for a range of Priority Species (e.g., white-letter hairstreak).

*Opportunities*

Parkland Walk will be subject to a new Habitat Management Plan and detailed opportunities for restoration and enhancement will be included therein. Below represents a summary and encompasses features of the existing management plan as well as recommendations made subsequent to this (Bevan, 2015).

<i>Creation of features</i>	
Habitats	<p><i>Ponds</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That present within the Nature trail is testament to the ease and value that ponds can bring. Identification of suitable sites.</li> </ul>
Species	<p><i>Bats:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bat roosting features on trees, buildings and bridges. Restoration of bridge works provide an opportunity for the integration of such features within brick fascias.</li> </ul> <p><i>Birds:</i></p>

- Bird nesting boxes/features. The following types are recommended:
  - 'Standard' hole/cavity nest boxes on trees (e.g., tits).
  - Treecreeper boxes (side facing slot mimicking peeling bark/cracks on trees).
  - Open fronted cavity boxes on trees (spotted flycatcher).
  - Swift boxes. Where height is afforded on Parkland Walk bridges, including St James' Lane viaduct, swift box installation in clusters. A range of products are available to mimic bricks and so brick fascias of bridge supports, if being restored may present an additional opportunity.
  - House martin: A bespoke 'primer' nest cup mimicking natural mud-made nest sites. Under bridges, as per swift.
  - Tawny owl. Nest cavity box in mature woodland trees.
  - Grey wagtail. Open fronted boxes under bridges.

*Hedgehog:*

- Provision of hedgehog hibernation structures ('hedgehog domes').
- Creation of fence base-board gaps ('hedgehog highways') to enable access to more garden habitats along Parkland Walk's boundaries.

*Invertebrates:*

- As well as the general benefits of leaving dead wood *in situ*, the following actions are recommended as to provide additional benefits to invertebrates and other taxa, many of which are specialists and rely on specific conditions/micro habitats to breed.
  - *Veteranisation of non-veteran trees*: Measures to increase the volume of deadwood habitat in living trees is particularly appropriate in cases where there are large generation gaps, as often present in 'high forest' with little understorey, e.g. (Woodland Trust, 2014):
    - *Ring-barking*
    - *Branch breaks*
    - *'Horse – damage'*
    - *Pollarding*
  - *'Monolith stumps'*: Soft/selective felling of limbs where necessary (i.e., for safety) to leave tall trunks in situ. Unless a tree has to be felled to its base for some reason, this should be seen as the default option.
  - *Standing deadwood piles*: Seen in other parts of the Borough (e.g. Parkland Walk), the creation of 'stumperies' with large volume wood (as generated by coppicing) dug into the soil (eg: PTES, 2016)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Artificial rot-holes:</i> Cavities cut into stumps to mimic rot holes. These often fill with water and provide habitat for the larvae of a range of specialist invertebrates.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Management/restoration of existing features</i></p>	
<p>Habitats</p>	<p><i>General:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of woodland from recreational disturbance. Narrowing of paths and return to ‘pre-Covid’ path extents. This may require the installation of wooden bollards to dissuade cyclists from taking ‘desire lines’ along the path edge where ground is less stony, horizontally placed tree trunks/branches or semi-permanent hurdle style fencing, with use of dead-hedging throughout.</li> <li>• Measures to reduce fly-tipping and unwarranted access from adjoining properties. In the case of the latter, this may not necessarily require removing and policing access, but instead channelling existing access along dedicated paths.</li> </ul> <p><i>Woodland:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures to reduce the density and cover of areas of ‘high forest’. Selective thinning or coppicing. Bevan (2015) recommends the selective removal of sycamore across the reserve where it is shading out native species.</li> <li>• Previous reports from ancient woodlands (e.g. Bevan 1992, 2011) highlight the benefits to overall plant diversity by the introduction of coppicing regimes. These too will lead to an increase in the availability of deadwood and a greater diversity of habitat, especially for invertebrates.</li> </ul> <p><i>Grassland:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing open areas of grassland and tall herb (e.g. compartment 1, east; compartment 10 or ‘Highgate Bowl’, west) to remain open.</li> <li>• Removal of scrub within compartment 3 and other grassland areas (both current and created), with an objective to restore ‘lost native species’, as per Bevan (2015).</li> <li>• Development of a rough grassland along St James’ Lane viaduct. This open area has recently been subject to clearance of holm oak and other woody species due to the needs to reduce the impact of tree roots on bridge structures. Management as grassland of value to invertebrates (encouraging nectar/pollen rich herbaceous species and tussock forming grasses).</li> </ul> <p><i>Scrub:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction of dense bramble stands (to ~30% of current cover) to increase opportunities for ground flora and increase structural diversity for invertebrates by providing a mosaic of sunny and shady aspects within a small scale.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where bridge restoration work demands the clearance of trees, the expansion of these felled areas should be considered, thus providing many 'stepping stones' of rough grassland and scrub. Where such existing areas are dominated by single species, the planting of individual trees of hawthorn, elder or similar is encouraged.</li> </ul> <p><i>Nature trail:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retention of the Nature trail and defining its role as one of a 'demonstration area' for wildlife gardening.</li> </ul>
Species	<p><i>Invasive species</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued control of Schedule 9 invasive non-native species.</li> </ul>

### 1.8. Further monitoring work/other activities

The above recommendations and management plan that is to be drafted in the early part of 2022 may involve some substantial changes to habitat types, particularly the greater extent of scrub/grassland mosaics at the expense of woodland, and the introduction of woodland thinning/coppicing measures. Many of the monitoring activities proposed are

- A repeated botanical survey as per Bevan (2015). Identification of a full inventory as a baseline prior to introduction of scrub/grassland expansion and woodland thinning. Repeated at regular intervals.
- Breeding bird survey of the reserve. Identification of a breeding bird baseline, prior to habitat changes and installation of any additional nest box features.
- Reptile surveys. To establish presence or absence of slow-worm along the reserve.
- Butterfly surveys. Several of the management recommendations should favour a range of butterflies (as well as other invertebrates), particularly those associated with woodlands and their clearings.
- Invasive species monitoring and control.

### 1.9. Future risks to condition

- Continued and potentially increased levels of recreational pressure.
- Tree disease. e.g. Acute Oak Decline – AOD; particularly where this results in the rapid loss of several trees and where few individuals exist for replacement.
- Continued secondary growth of woody species, particularly non-natives such as sycamore and holm oak to the exclusion of native trees and/or ground flora.
- Loss of sites for cavity nesting birds and roosting bats due from ring-necked parakeet *Psittacula kramera*

- Introduction and continued spread of invasive, non-native species.

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