

# Beech Wood, Rotherfield Way Copse and Balmore Walk Woodland

Date (from/to)	2013 – 2023 (reviewed in 2018)
Date of last review [UKWAS 2.1.3]	
Owner/tenant	Reading Borough Council
Agent/contact	Giles Sutton
Signed declaration of tenure rights and agreements to public availability of the plan [UKWAS 1.1.3/1.1.5/2.1.2]	

## 1 Background information

### 1.1 Location

Nearest town, village or feature	Caversham
Grid reference	471200, 176000 (SU712760)
Total area (ha)	6.5

### 1.2 Description of the woodland(s) in the landscape

Three small woodlands within the urban settlement of Caversham:

Beech wood (3.4 ha.) -the largest of the three woodlands on a slope from that runs down from Highdown School to the east to Hemdean Road. Dominated by beech and known locally as Beech Wood, this woodland is a prominent landscape feature from the east. A woodland belt comprising mature oaks with a dense impenetrable shrubby understorey runs from the north of Beech Wood between Morlais and Highdown School to Tredagar Road in the north.

Rotherfield Way Copse (2.3 ha) - a small broadleaved woodland situated in a sheltered

# Woodland Management Plan

dry valley sloping moderately from NE to SW between roads and houses in Emmer Green, Reading.

Baltimore Walk Woodland (0.9 ha.): Baltimore walk is a grassed chalk escarpment sloping up to the west from Hemdean Bottom. The margins of the site contain woodland with the largest council managed area being on the slope up from Rotherfield Way.

## 1.3 History of Management

Apart from tree works for safety reasons there has been very little management of the woodlands in recent years.

## 2 Woodland Information

### 2.1 Areas and features

Designated Areas	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Special areas for conservation (SACs)			
Special Protection Areas (SPAs)			
Ramsar Sites (see note on Guidance)			
National Nature Reserves (NNRs)			
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)			
Other designations (e.g. National Park (NP) / World Heritage Site)		X	
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)			
Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)			
TPO / Conservation Area (CA)			
Details: Beech Wood and Rotherfield way Copse are designated as Local Wildlife Sites through the Local Development Framework.			
Rare and important species	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Red Data Book or BAP species		X	
Rare, threatened, EPS or SAP species			
Details			

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Thirteen ancient woodland indicator species were recorded during the last botanical survey of Beech Wood in 2004 and 8 in Rotherfield Way Copse

Habitats	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW)			
Other semi-natural woodland	3	X	
Plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)			
Semi-natural features in PAWS			
Woodland margins and hedges			
Veteran and other notable trees	3	X	
Breeding sites			
Habitats of notable species			
Unimproved grasslands			
Rides and open ground			
Valuable wildlife communities			
Feeding area			
Lowland heath			
Peatlands			
Others			

Details:

Rotherfield Way Copse and Balmore walk Woodlands can be described as lowland mixed deciduous woodland and

Beech Wood can be described as Lowland beech and yew woodland. These habitats are UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats and are Listed on Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural communities Act.

The oak trees in the woodland belt to the south of Highdown School are very large and could be considered veteran trees.

Water	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Watercourses			
Lakes			
Ponds			
Wetland habitats		x	

Details:

There is a spring in Rotherfield Way copse and in Beech Wood.

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Landscape	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Landscape designated areas			
Landscape features			
Rock exposures			
Historic landscapes			
Areas of the woodland prominent from roads	1	X	
Areas of the woodland prominent from settlements	1	X	
Details: See section 1.2			
Cultural features	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Public rights of way		X	
Prominent viewing points			
Existing permissive footpaths		X	
Proposed permissive footpaths			
Areas managed with traditional management systems			
Details: The woodlands are owned by the council and are accessible by the public at all times. There is a Public Footpath that runs through Balmore Walk.			
Archaeological Features	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Scheduled monument			
Historical feature (Inc. designed landscapes, registered parks and gardens)			
Other			
Details: There are woodbanks within Beech Wood and Rotherfield way Copse. Reading Borough Council's Archaeology service will be consulted on any activities that might impact upon these features.			

### 2.2 Woodland resource characteristics

#### Amenity

All three woodlands are of significant amenity value and well used by the public who have permanent access to the sites.

#### Biodiversity

Beech Wood and Rotherfield Way Copse are designated Local Wildlife Sites and are of importance at a local level for biodiversity. See 2.3 for further details.

#### Timber

The wood is and will be primarily managed for amenity and biodiversity purposes. There will be some opportunities to sell timber for firewood, however beech and sycamore, which are the main species to be removed are likely to be of limited monetary value.

### 2.3 Site description

#### Beech Wood

This mature, broadleaved woodland is situated on a chalk slope with mostly free-draining soils. The canopy is almost entirely dominated by beech with small amounts of pedunculate oak, wild cherry, ash, sycamore and horse chestnut. The understorey varies in density, some areas, particularly the south-western edge, have thickets of holly, other areas have a mixture of hawthorn, English elm, privet, hazel and young ash and beech with, rarely, dogwood. In the centre of the site particularly, there is limited structural diversity or species except where the canopy has opened up as a result of wind-thrown trees; where this has occurred there is good beech regeneration.

The field layer is patchy with wood anemone, wood melick and sanicle at the southern end with bluebells at the eastern end on a bank and more bare areas with beech mast in the central part. The NVC closely resembles the calcareous W12 beech – dogs mercury woodland type. Thirteen ancient woodland indicators were noted during the survey in 2004.

Springs and seepages arise in the northern part of the wood. Paths cross the wood to and from the school and east west across the woodland and these are in a poor condition. There are some localised problems of garden waste dumping.

A woodland belt comprising a line of mature oaks with a dense impenetrable mixed shrubby understorey runs from the north of the Beech Wood between Morlais and Highdown School to Tredagar Road in the north. The belt is a prominent feature from the houses and the school. It is likely that this area a boundary feature, possibly an old hedgerow. This area was described as chalk grassland in 1985 and the understorey has

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developed, unmanaged since then.

Research using oldest published maps for this area (Rocque 1761 onwards) shows that Beech Wood has been continuously wooded for centuries and should be regarded as Semi Natural Ancient Woodland (SNAW).

An area of dense native bluebells is found between the northernmost path and the metal fence of Highdown School. The bluebells grow on and around a medieval woodbank.

### Rotherfield Way Copse

This small broadleaved woodland is situated in a sheltered dry valley sloping moderately from NE to SW between roads and houses in Emmer Green, Reading. The wood is entirely surrounded by housing apart from a wide mown grass verge to Rotherfield Way. The woodland has affinities to NVC W8.

This woodland structure is relatively diverse (although there is a risk that without management in the very near future the canopy layer will begin to dominate as it is now almost closed). The canopy is dominated by mature ash, some multi-stemmed and sycamore, with frequent pedunculate oak, wild cherry and more locally beech. Other canopy trees include lime at the southern end.

The shrub layer is quite varied, English elm, elder, young ash and sycamore saplings are noticeably frequent in the south-eastern part where the ground is disturbed and there are occasional outgrown hazel stools. Holly is beginning to dominate the understorey at the southern end of the woodland limiting its species diversity.

The paths through the woodland are well used and in poor condition.

### Baltimore walk Woodland

Recently planted mixed broadleaved woodland (planted approximately 20 years ago). The woodland has not been thinned or managed since this time. There is a spring adjacent to the northern of the two main paths. The two paths have been recently re-surfaced.

## 2.4 Significant hazards, constraints and threats

### All sites

### Constraints

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Public use of the woodland: areas where trees are being felled will need to be cordoned off

As with all old woodland sites there is a risk that bats may be present within mature trees and badgers are known to inhabit the woodland. As such operations will need to be assessed in order to ensure that these protected species are not harmed.

The approach to the protection of bat roosts will be as follows:

- Trees to be felled will be checked from ground level, using binoculars if appropriate, for features potentially suitable for use by roosting bats and categorised according to the Bat Conservation Trust's Bat Survey Guidelines.
- Category 1\* Trees (that is trees with multiple, highly suitable features capable of supporting larger roosts) and Category 1 Trees (that is trees with definite bat potential, supporting fewer suitable features than category 1\* trees or with potential for use by single bats) will be retained unless it is unsafe to do so.
- If trees cannot be retained further inspections (e.g. if they represent a significant hazard to the public), comprising either climbing inspections and or emergence or dawn surveys will be undertaken and as a last resort the relevant licence from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation will be obtained (NB it is not anticipated that this step will be necessary as the majority of Category 1 and 1\* trees will be retained.)
- Care will be taken when felling Category 2 trees (that is Trees with no obvious potential, although the tree is of a size and age whereby features may not be visible from ground level; or trees that support some features which may have limited potential to support bats) will be felled with care and if at any point bats or signs of bats are found works will stop until expert ecological advice has been obtained and if necessary the relevant licences obtained.

The above approach will ensure that individual bats are not harmed, that their conservation status is not affected, and that legislation is complied with.

The approach to badgers will be as follows:

- Prior to commencement of felling works all areas will be checked for badger setts.
- If a badger sett is present works adjacent to the sett will not occur unless expert ecological advice has been sought and it has been confirmed that works are unlikely to result in disturbance to the sett
- If it is concluded that works might disturb the sett then if at all possible trees will not be removed.
- If disturbance cannot be avoided (e.g. if trees to be felled represent a significant hazard to the public) the relevant licence will be obtained from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation

The above approach will ensure that individual badgers are not harmed and that legislation is complied with.

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Notable and veteran trees will be identified on site and will not be felled unless it cannot be avoided (e.g. if they represent a significant hazard to the public). Where appropriate thinning and felling operations will aim to free up notable and veteran trees by, for example, creating a halo around them aiming to increase their longevity.

### Beech Wood

#### Hazards

- None identified

#### Threats

- Long term there is a threat that dominance by beech may leave the woodland vulnerable to a changing climate (Forestry Commission models predict that climate change is likely to result in the "climate space" for beech disappearing in south and east England by the 2050s).
- Without management and opening up of the canopy there will be very little regeneration and the woodlands value for wildlife and people will be limited.
- There are some local issues of litter and vandalism due to the site's proximity to the school
- There is limited access for timber lorries and this may be a constraint to harvesting operations. Smaller vehicles will need to be used (see Map 1 for location of access points).

### Rotherfield Way Copse

- The most significant threat to the woodland is ongoing under management. If this continues the structural and species diversity of the woodland will decline (sycamore is likely to start to dominate) and hence its amenity and wildlife value. There is a need to undertake thinning and felling works to allow more light into the woodland and to reduce the dominance of holly and sycamore.
- There is a threat to the woodland's amenity value due to the poor state of the paths.

### Baltimore Walk

- If the plantation woodland is not thinned its wildlife and amenity value is likely to be reduced.



### 3 Long term vision, management objectives and strategy

#### 3.1 Long term vision

Three woodlands with significant biodiversity and amenity value, valued and used by the local community, with good structural and species diversity resilient to the effects of a changing climate.

#### 3.2 Management Objectives

- 1 To ensure the longevity of the woodlands
- 2 To enhance the structural diversity of the woodlands
- 3 To increase species diversity within Beech Wood by decreasing the dominance of beech
- 4 To have a coherent network of paths well used by the public and facilitate public access to and enjoyment of the woodland

#### 3.3 Strategy

##### **Objective 1 – longevity of woodland**

Implementation of this management plan will increase the longevity of the woodland ensuring that it is available for future generations

##### **Objective 2 - structural diversity**

###### Beech wood

Within Beech Wood the objective will be to fell 6 of the beech trees and open up the canopy thereby allowing light to reach the woodland floor enabling regeneration with non-beech species (see objective 3 below).

###### Rotherfield way Copse

Ride improvements and selective felling will increase the structural diversity by allowing more light into the woodland floor and allowing the development of the understorey layer.

Holly will be removed from the understorey at the southern end of the site (no holly to be removed with 10 metres of residential properties) and, in order to reduce over-dominance, sycamore will be selected in preference to other species during felling operations.

The woodland edge will be allowed to develop adjacent to Southdown Road, thereby

increasing its wildlife value.

### Baltimore walk

Up to 30% of the planted trees will be thinned thereby allowing the development of a structurally diverse woodland. This area was planted in memory of a local journalist who passed away at a young age. Council staff will agree which trees will be felled with members of the family.

Flail the edge of the woodland boundary on a rotational basis

### **Objective 3 - to increase species diversity within Beech Wood**

Following the opening up of the canopy a mix of other species will be planted within the woodland. These will be a mix of, oak, hornbeam, cherry and lime (ash has not been included as there is some natural regeneration of this species within the woodland).

### **Objective 4 - a coherent network of paths**

The canopy above paths within Beech and Rotherfield way Copse will be opened up and existing semi-formal and desire line paths will be re-surfaced.

Resurfacing works will only be undertaken if monies, such as through the Woodland Improvement Grant, become available.

## 4 Management prescriptions/operations

### 4.1 Silvicultural systems

#### 4.1.1 Harvesting

Continuous Cover Forestry. The majority of the wood is to be managed as low intervention forest with trees thinned and selectively felled to allow greater structural diversity.

#### 4.1.2 Phased felling and restructuring of plantations

Not applicable

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### 4.1.3 Establishment, restocking and regeneration

In order to decrease the dominance of beech there will be some re-stocking at Beech Wood. Restocking will be with a mix of oak, hornbeam, cherry and lime (ash has not been included as it already exists in the woodland and ash regeneration is occurring in places).

There are no plans to re-stock the woodland. It is anticipated that natural regeneration will occur at an increased rate once the canopy has been opened up. If natural regeneration does not occur re-planting will be considered when this management plan is reviewed

## 4.2 New planting

See section 4.1.3

## 4.3 Other operations

Not applicable

## 4.4 Protection and maintenance

### 4.4.1 Pest and disease management

As with most of lowland Britain, muntjac and roe deer are likely to be present. If regeneration is poor deer fencing may be considered and new tree planting at Beech Wood will be protected by tree guards.

### 4.4.2 Fire plan

In general this wood represents a low fire risk, and as with most broadleaved woodlands arson is the most likely cause of fire, however there is no history of serious fires in this wood. In the event of a fire being reported the fire brigade will be contacted immediately.

Bottles, broken glass, illegal fly tipping etc. can all add to the risk that a fire can be started accidentally. Litter will be removed regularly.

Map 1 shows fire rendezvous points

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### 4.4.3 Waste disposal and pollution

With the exception of Beech Wood which is located adjacent to the school there are few litter problems. Bins and dog bins are emptied regularly.

### 4.4.4 Protection from unauthorised activities

Unauthorised activities have not historically been a major issue in these woodlands

### 4.4.5 Protection of other identified services and values

Regular safety inspection of trees adjacent to paths and property will be undertaken by the council, remedial action will be undertaken as required.

## 4.5 Game management

No game management

## 4.6 Protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and special features

### 4.6.1 Management of designated areas

Implementation of this management plan will also ensure that one of the indicators used by the council to measure its success, that is the proportion of Local Wildlife Sites under positive conservation management, known as Single Data List 160, will be increased.

### 4.6.2 Measures to enhance biodiversity and other special features [UKWAS 2.1.1/6.1.1]

A major objective of this woodland management plan is to enhance the woodland for biodiversity. This will contribute to Local, Regional and National Biodiversity Action Plan targets.

Standing deadwood will be left wherever it is safe to do so and trees with features suitable for bats will be fully assessed prior to the commencement of works.

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### 4.6.3 Special measures for ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) and semi-natural woodland (SNW)

Not applicable

### 4.6.4 Special measures for plantation on ancient woodland site (PAWS)

Not applicable

### 4.6.5 Measures to mitigate impacts on landscape and neighbouring land [UKWAS 3.1.2]

The woodland will be managed as continuous cover forestry and as such there should be no noticeable impact on the landscape.

## 4.7 Management of social and cultural values

### 4.7.1 Archaeology and sites of cultural interest

There are some woodbanks within the woodlands and works that would impact upon these areas will be avoided or advice will be sought from the Council's archaeological service at Reading Museum.

### 4.7.2 Public access and impacts on local people

There is full public access to the woodland. Where tree felling or woodland work could represent a safety risk, signs will be erected and access prohibited during works

## 5 Consultation

A series of public consultation events were held over the summer of 2013 and modifications to the plans were made. For more information on the consultation and the changes that were made please contact the council.

## 6 Monitoring plan summary

Objective number, issue or UKWAS Requirement	Indicator	Method of assessment	Monitoring period	Responsibility	How will information be used
To enhance the structural diversity of the woodlands	Structure and regeneration following thinning operations	Fixed point photography	Photos to be taken every year, assessment every 3 years	Parks supervisor	Feedback into management plan prescriptions for individual compartments
To increase species diversity within Beech Wood by decreasing the dominance of beech	Survival of planted trees	Regular monitoring	Annually for 5 years	Parks supervisor	Replacement planting if required
A coherent network of paths well used by the public and facilitate public access to and enjoyment of the woodland	Condition of paths	Annual monitoring	Annually	Parks supervisor	Management of problem areas

## 7 Work programmes

### 7.1 Outline long-term work programme (2018 - 2033)

(Use this table to outline medium to long term areas of work)

Cpt. Ref or Name	Activity	Year ( <i>tick</i> )	
		6-10	11-20
All	Selective felling / thinning		X
All	Path maintenance	X	X

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### 7.2 Short-term work programme (2013 - 2018)

(Use this table to collect basic inventory data for the woodland areas you propose to work during the next 5 years)

Cpt. Ref / Name	Area (ha)	Main Species	P. Year	Yield Class	Activity	Year				
						1	2	3	4	5
Beech	0.6	Oak	NA	NA	Safety inspection and management of oak trees adjacent to houses	X	X			
Beech	2.1	Beech	NA	NA	Selectively fell 6 beech trees and restock with oak, lime, hornbeam and cherry	X	X	X		
Beech	NA	NA	3	NA	Construct footpaths – 710m total ( <b>only if funding is available</b> )		X	X	X	X
Rotherfield Way	1.3	Holly	3	2	Remove holly in understorey. No work to be carried out within 10 metres of residents properties	X	X	X		
Rotherfield Way	NA	NA	3	NA	Construct footpaths – 550m total ( <b>only if funding is available</b> )		X	X	X	X
Rotherfield Way	0.2	NA	NA	NA	Allow development of the woodland edge habitat adjacent to Rotherfield Way, then on-going management	X	X	X	X	X
Baltimore	0.7	Mixed broadleaf	NA	2	Selectively thin young plantation woodland up to 30%	X	X	X		
Baltimore	NA	Scrub/vegetation	2	NA	Flail woodland edge	X	X	X	X	X

### 8 Costing Operations

The strategy for Reading's woodlands is to use volunteers, council staff and contractors to undertake management tasks throughout the woodland, following the detailed prescriptions given in table 7.2. Money to fund and manage these works will be applied for through the EWGS Woodland Management Grant (WMG) and Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) and income will be sought from the sale of timber. The management of the woodlands should therefore be cost neutral to the council.

In this instance the harvesting of beech at Beech Wood is expected to be self funding, whereas the remaining operations will be funded through a woodland improvement grant.

Footpath improvements will only be carried-out if funding is available

### 9 Maps

Map no./Title	Description
1	Location and access
2	Geology
3	Key features
4	Prescriptions

### 10 Thinning, felling and restocking proposals

#### 10.1 Table A- not applicable to this application



## Woodland Management Plan

### 10.2 Table B

This section must be fully completed by the applicant if they wish to gain felling licence approval from the Forestry Commission. The work detailed below must match the proposals set out in the plan. For details on how to complete this table, please refer to **EWGS4 – Woodland Regeneration** for guidance and Tree Felling guidance.

4. Cpt. / Sub Cpt.	5. Area (ha)	6. % area to be worked	7. Type of felling	8. % of felled area comprising:		9. Felling licence type	10. Change in woodland type		11. Preferred claim year	13. Restock mixture		14. % Estab. by natural regen	Standard proposals	12. Notes / Details
				BL	CON		From	To		Species	%			
Beech	3.4	70	T	100	0	C	Nat	Nat	NA	Mixed native	100	50		
Rotherfield Way	2.3	60	T	100	0	C	Nat	Nat	15/16	0	0	100		
Baltimore Walk	0.9	90	T	100	0	C	Nat	Nat	15/16	0	0	100		

### Photos

Plantation woodland at Balmore Walk to be thinned by 30%



Rotherfield way copse – verge adjacent to road: 6m to be allowed to develop as a woodland edge

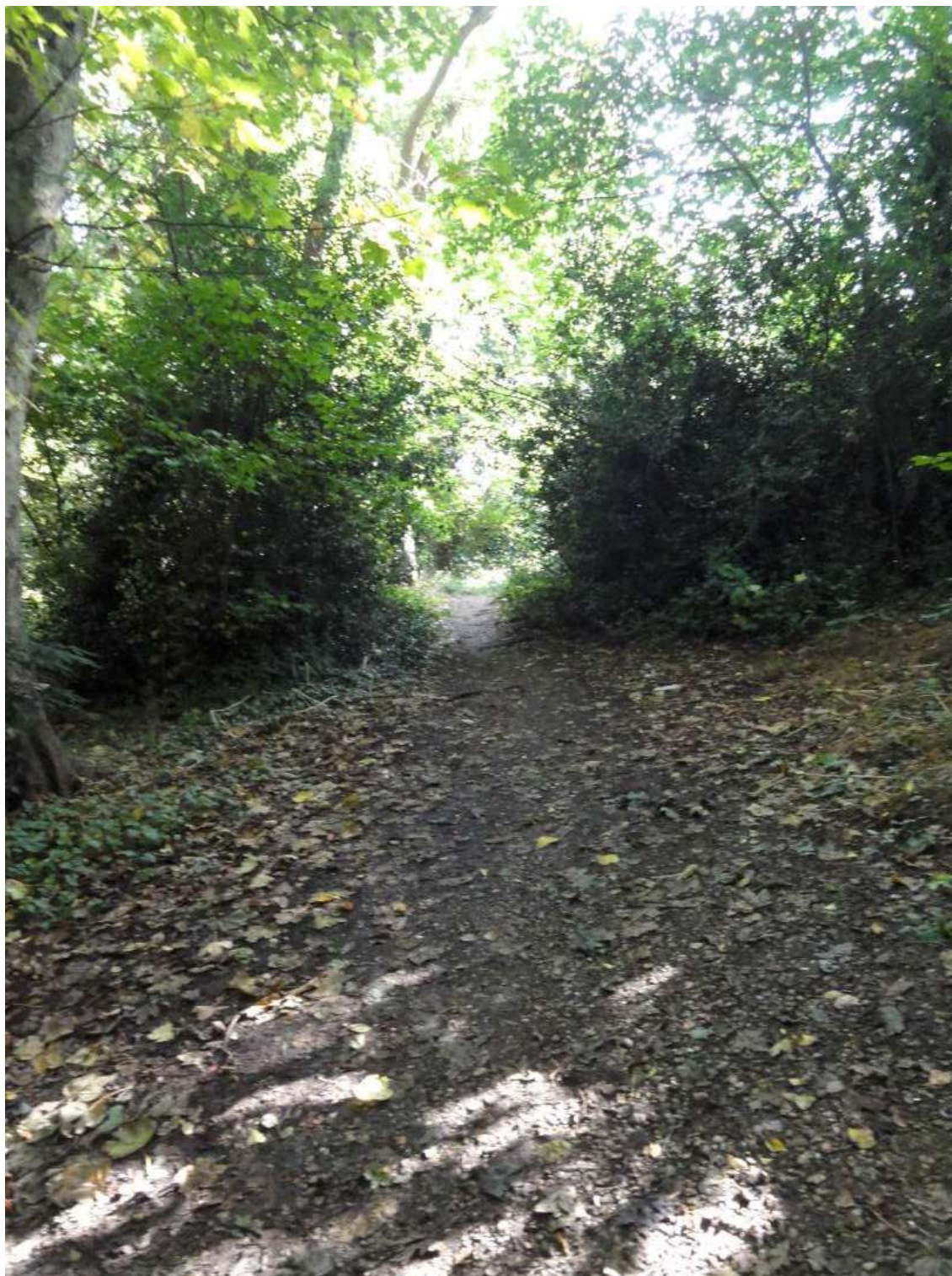




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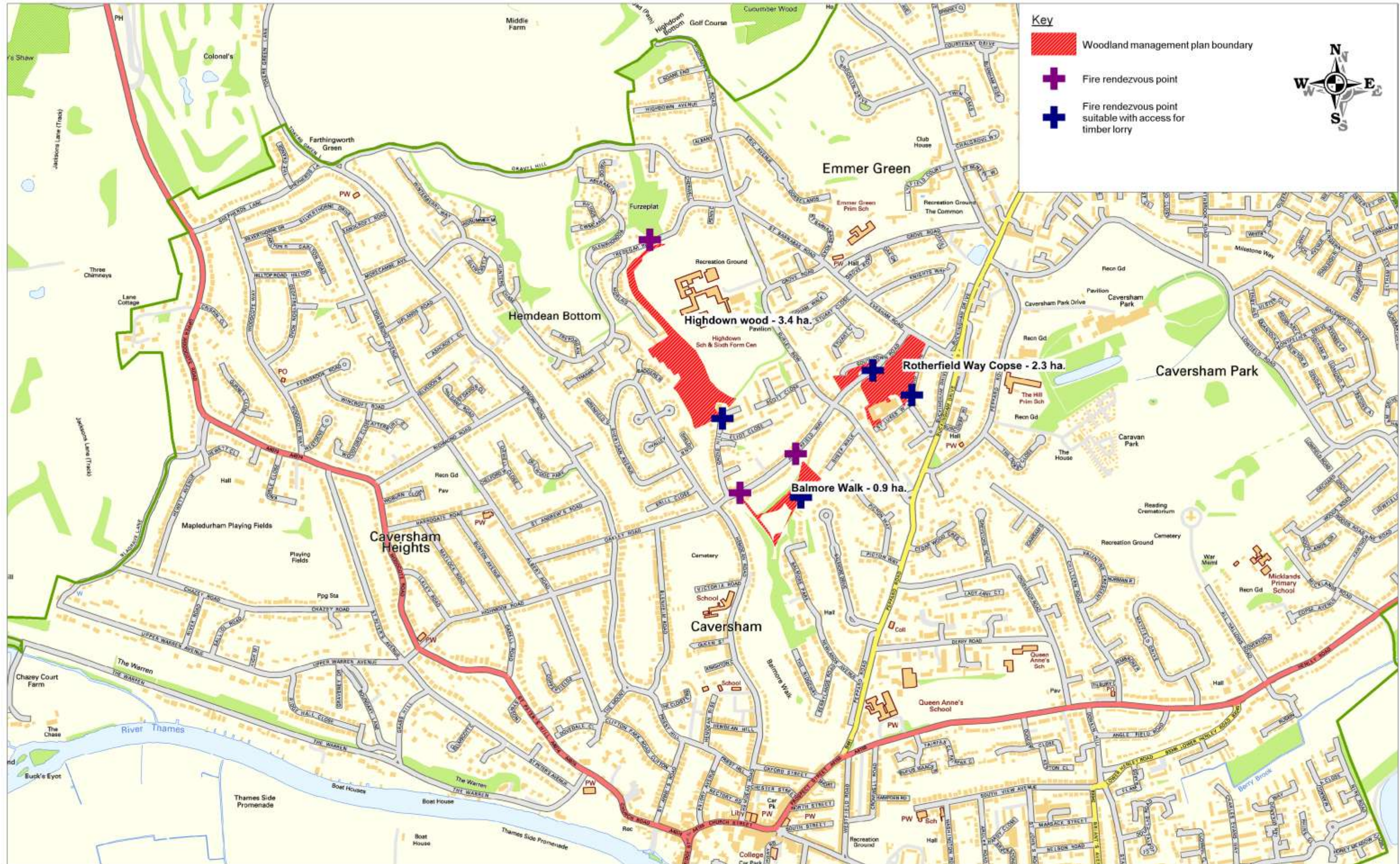
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Rotherfield way copse – holly in southern section



Maps





**TITLE**

HIGHDOWN WOOD, BALMORE WALK AND ROTHERFIELD WAY COPSE MANAGEMENT PLAN  
MAP 1 - LOCATION AND FIRE POINTS

DRG NO 01

DRAWN BY Giles Sutton

DATE 8th June 2012

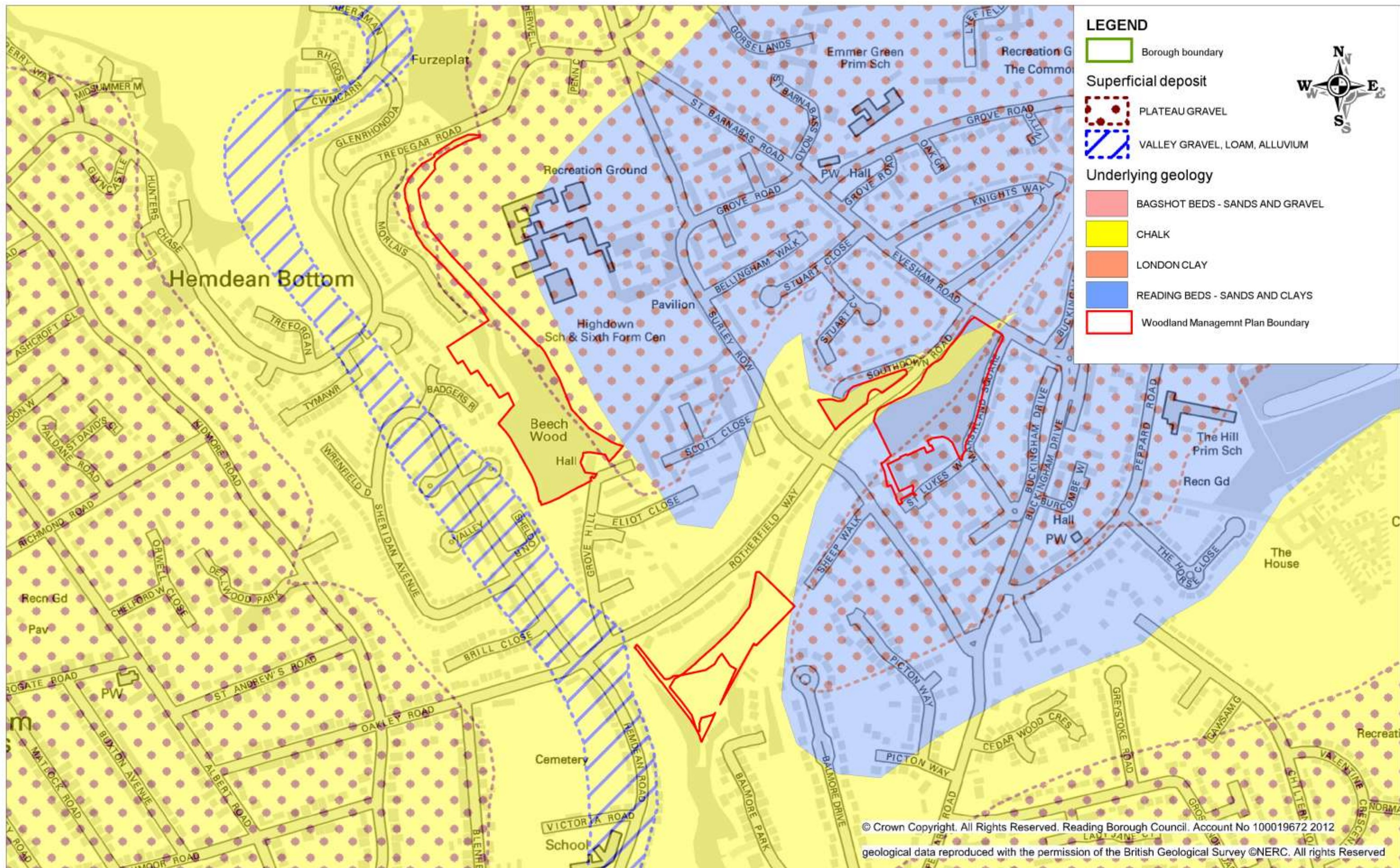
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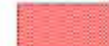

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## Legend

-  Management Plan Boundary
-  Woodland management prescription and area
-  Footpath construction and length

## Key

NB - Footpath construction and resurfacing will only occur if funding becomes available

Safety inspection and management of large oaks (years = 1) (0.6 ha.)

Footpath construction/restoration 710 m

Selective felling of beech followed by restock with oak, lime and hornbeam (years = 1-3) (2.1 ha.)

Allow development of woodland edge habitat (years = Ongoing) (0.2 ha.)

Footpath construction/restoration 550 m

Holly control (years = 1-3) (0.6 ha.)

30% thin of plantation woodland (years = 1-3) (0.7 ha.)

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TITLE

HIGHDOWN WOOD, BALMORE WALK WOODLAND AND  
ROTHERFIELD WAY COPSE MANAGEMENT PLAN  
MAP 4 - PRESCRIPTIONS

DRG NO 01

DATE 20 October 2012

DRAWN BY Giles Sutton

SCALE Not to scale

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