

The Cowsey

Date (from/to)	2013 – 2023 (reviewed in 2018)
Date of last review [UKWAS 2.1.3]	Not applicable
Owner/tenant	Reading Borough Council
Agent/contact	Giles Sutton/ Dave Booth
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	Reading
Grid reference	472833, 170427
Total area (ha)	17.1

1.2 Description of the woodland(s) in the landscape

The Cowsey is a large woodland in Whitley on the outskirts of Reading. The woodland slopes from the Ridgeway Primary School off the A327 Shinfield Road to the east down to Northumberland Road to the west. It is a prominent landscape feature from the west and also from Whitley Wood Road to the south. It lies next to the John Rabson Recreation Ground and forms part of a larger open area.

1.3 History of Management

The Cowsey was bought by Reading Borough in 1949 at that time the site comprised three large fields and a strip of woodland. It was grazed by cattle until the 1960's. When grazing ceased secondary woodland interspersed with rough grassland developed across the site. There has been very little woodland management over the years except the management of trees where they posed a threat to safety and grass and scrub cutting to retain rides and open areas.

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)	Entire site	X	
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)			
Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)			
TPO / Conservation Area (CA)			
Details: The Cowsey is designated as a Local Wildlife Site (through the Local Development Framework) and is afforded some protection from the adverse impacts of development through planning policy			
Rare and important species	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Red Data Book or BAP species		X	
Rare, threatened, EPS or SAP species		X	
Details: The following rare/ notable species have been observed within or adjacent to The Cowsey (based on records held by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre): Bluebell (<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>) Dittander (<i>Lepidium latifolium</i>) Small Heath (<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>) Common Frog (<i>Rana temporaria</i>) Hedge Accentor (<i>Prunella modularis</i>) Common Whitethroat (<i>Sylvia communis</i>) Willow Warbler (<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>) Common Starling (<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>) House Sparrow (<i>Passer domesticus</i>) Common Linnet (<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>) Common Bullfinch (<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>) Noctule Bat (<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>) Common Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>) Brown Long-eared Bat (<i>Plecotus auritus</i>)			

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This list is relatively limited and it is likely that other species inhabit the site. The results of a bird survey undertaken by a Local Ornithologist, John Lerpiniere is given in appendix 3.

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	3	X	
Veteran and other notable trees	3	X	
Breeding sites			
Habitats of notable species			
Unimproved grasslands			
Rides and open ground	3	X	
Valuable wildlife communities			
Feeding area			
Lowland heath			
Peatlands			
Others			

Details: The woodland has developed on previously grazed land and the remnant field boundaries include veteran trees. It has a good network of ride grassland rides and open areas.

Water	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Watercourses	3	X	
Lakes			
Ponds	3	X	
Wetland habitats			

Details: A series of ditches run through the woodland and there are three seasonal ponds on the site

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	1	X	

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settlements			
Details: The woodland slopes downwards from the Ridgeway Primary School off the A327 Shinfield Road to the west to Northumberland Road. it is a prominent landscape feature from the west and also from Whitley Wood Road to the south.			
Cultural features	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Public rights of way	4	X	
Prominent viewing points	4	X	
Existing permissive footpaths			
Proposed permissive footpaths			
Areas managed with traditional management systems			
Details: The entire site is owned by Reading Borough Council and is accessible by the public at all times. There are two prominent viewing points at the site			
Archaeological Features	Map No.	In Woodland	Adjacent to woodland
Scheduled monument			
Historical feature (Inc. designed landscapes, registered parks and gardens)			
Other			
Details: None known			

2.2 Woodland resource characteristics

Amenity

The Cowsey is of significant amenity value and is well used by the public who have permanent access to the site. It has a well-developed network of paths and rides.

Biodiversity

The Cowsey is a large area of lowland mixed deciduous woodland (A UK Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat) and is designated as a Local Wildlife Site. It contains a number of open rank grassland areas and rides and has good woodland edge habitats. It also has at two seasonal ponds and three ditches.

Timber and firewood

There is virtually no valuable timber or firewood within the woodland - the dominant species is hawthorn and blackthorn and where other species such as ash or sycamore occur these are not of sufficient quantity or quality for use as firewood. Longer term (25 – 50 years) there may be opportunities for the harvesting of timber.

2.3 Site description

A west-facing hillside approximately 17ha in size. The geology is mainly London Clay, with a band of valley gravel at the top of the slope. The site slopes steeply from 55 to 80 metres above sea level over 500m (see map 2).

The site is largely covered by mature scrub and broadleaved woodland which surrounds grassy enclaves. There are natural springs, one supporting a ribbon of wetland plants in a shallow valley, one feeding a small pond and another which drains an area of mature woodland. Some grassland areas are locally damp and support patches of rushes.

There are some significant mature trees on or near old hedgerow boundaries. At the southern end of the site there is a row of old oak and one wild service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) with suckers at its base measuring 1.76m in circumference.

There are three springs on the site and a pond (there are also two damp areas/ seasonal ponds). The Highways Department has plans to construct a flood attenuation basin at the base of the hill in order to store water that would otherwise run into the sewage system.

The site is well used by the public who have unrestricted access to it at all times and there is a good network of paths and rides, however many of these are in a poor state and would benefit from re-surfacing.

The description below is a summary of the 2004 Local Wildlife Site survey undertaken by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre:

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Broadleaved woodland occupies the flanks of a shallow valley along the northern boundary with a remnant coppice with standard structure. Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is dominant in the canopy with some mature pedunculate oaks (*Quercus robur*). Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and wild cherry (*Prunus avium*) are also present. The mixed shrub layer includes hazel (*Corylus avellana*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), willow (*Salix* sp.) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*).

Dense hawthorn and blackthorn scrub occupies much of the site, often with a fringe of blackthorn and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*). Little ground flora occurs because of the dense canopy.

The grassland is generally rank and tussocky and is relatively species-poor. Meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) is locally frequent. There are few herb species and those that are present tend to be widespread and common [e.g. common nettle (*Urtica dioica*) cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), doc (*Rumex* sp.), hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) and cleavers (*Galium aparine*)], however patches of more species rich grassland can be found on the north-western boundary with species including bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), lesser stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*), common knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) and hard rush (*Juncus inflexus*).

2.4 Significant hazards, constraints and threats

Ash is widespread in the woodland. The woodland will therefore need to be managed in accordance with national guidance regarding the ash dieback fungus (*Chalara fraxinea*).

Due to its location in an economically deprived area the woodland can be subject to anti-social behaviour, littering and vandalism of trees and benches.

3 Long term vision, management objectives and strategy

3.1 Long term vision

A maturing woodland highly valued by the local community for its amenity and biodiversity with a good structural and species diversity, with new and existing habitats including woodland, grassland, streams, ponds and wetland areas.

3.2 Management Objectives

1. To facilitate safe public access to and enjoyment of the woodland
2. To manage the rides and open spaces so as to maximise their biodiversity value
3. To enhance the habitat diversity through the construction of two new ponds and wetland habitats in a new flood attenuation basin
4. To facilitate the development of mature woodland

3.3 Strategy

Objective 1 –to cut open areas annually and to install new seats and benches. To re-surface paths through wet areas (only if funds are available)

Objective 2 – to implement a three zone ride management and woodland edge cutting regime for the rides and open spaces

Objective 3 – construct two new ponds in existing wet areas

Objective 4 –trees will be allowed to establish naturally. There are no plans to thin or re-space the woodland over the period of this plan

4 Management prescriptions/operations

4.1 Silvicultural systems

4.1.1 Harvesting

Continuous Cover Forestry. The woodland is to be managed as low intervention forest, there are no plans for significant tree removal within this plan

4.1.2 Phased felling and restructuring of plantations

Not applicable

4.1.3 Establishment, restocking and regeneration

There are no plans to re-stock the woodland. Natural regeneration will continue to occur

4.2 New planting

None planned

4.3 Other operations

Reading Borough Council's highways department have plans to construct a flood attenuation basin at the base of the hill (in order to store ground water run off that overwhelms the nearby sewage system). This basin will be designed to maximise its wildlife and amenity value and a pond /wetland network will be created within it.

4.4 Protection and maintenance

4.4.1 Pest and disease management

There is no planned new planting or re-coppicing. There is therefore no anticipated pest and disease management except management of ash dieback in line with emerging national guidance

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. 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. Fire rendezvous points are shown on Map 1.

4.4.3 Waste disposal and pollution

Regular litter picks will be undertaken.

4.4.4 Protection from unauthorised activities

The woodland has some history of antisocial behaviour including vandalism and litter. The situation will be monitored and managed in line with council policy.

4.4.5 Protection of other identified services and values

Not applicable

4.5 Game management

None anticipated

4.6 Protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and special features

4.6.1 Management of designated areas

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.

Implementation of this management plan will also ensure that one of the indicators used by the council to measure its performance, 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]

Implementation of the management plan will enhance the site for biodiversity

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 significant noticeable impact on the landscape.

4.7 Management of social and cultural values

4.7.1 Archaeology and sites of cultural interest

No sites of archaeological interest or particular cultural have been identified.

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4.7.2 Public access and impacts on local people

There is full public access to the woodland. Where 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
1 - Public access	Feedback	Comments from members of the public	On-going	Park supervisor	To inform the woodland management plan
2 - Three zone ride management	Regrowth of vegetation	Visual check	Annually	Park supervisor	To inform future cutting strategy
3 – Ponds	Monitoring of vegetation in and around ponds	Visual check	Annually early summer	Park supervisor	To decide whether or not any pond management is required
4 – Woodland establishment	Height and diversity of trees	Fixed point photography	Annually	Park supervisor	To inform future management plans (i.e. to decide whether felling or restocking may be appropriate)

7 Work programmes

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

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

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Cpt. Ref or Name	Activity	Year (tick)	
		6-10	11-20
All	Three zone ride management	X	X
All	Annual cut of open areas	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
All	17.1	Hawthorn / Blackthorn			Three zone ride management	X	X	X	X	X
All	17.1				Footpath resurfacing/ restoration (only if funding is available)	X	X	X	X	X
All	17.1				Provision of new benches	X	X			
All	17.1				Restoration of existing and construction of new ponds and flood attenuation basin	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. There is no anticipated income from the sale of timber or firewood from The Cowsey and money to fund and manage the works will be applied for through the EWGS Woodland Management Grant (WMG) and Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) with outstanding costs paid for through income from the sale of timber elsewhere in the Councils woodland estate.

Initial correspondence with the Forestry Commission (FC) suggested that funding would be available for path resurfacing works. However the FC has now stated that there would not be any funding for these works until at least 2016 and even then there would be no guarantee. There is however a desire to still do these works and for this reason they have been included in this management plan and the council will look to implement the works should funding become available in the future.

9 Maps

Map no./Title	Description
1	Location
2	Geology and topography
3	Habitats
4	Prescriptions

10 Thinning, felling and restocking proposals

10.1 Table A is not applicable to this site

10.2 Table B is not applicable to this site as no tree felling is proposed

Appendix 1 – Site Photos

Photo 1 - View point



Photo 2 – Path to south of site that is to be re-surfaced



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Photo 3 – Path along top of site that is to be re-surfaced



Photo 4 – recently cut grassland area



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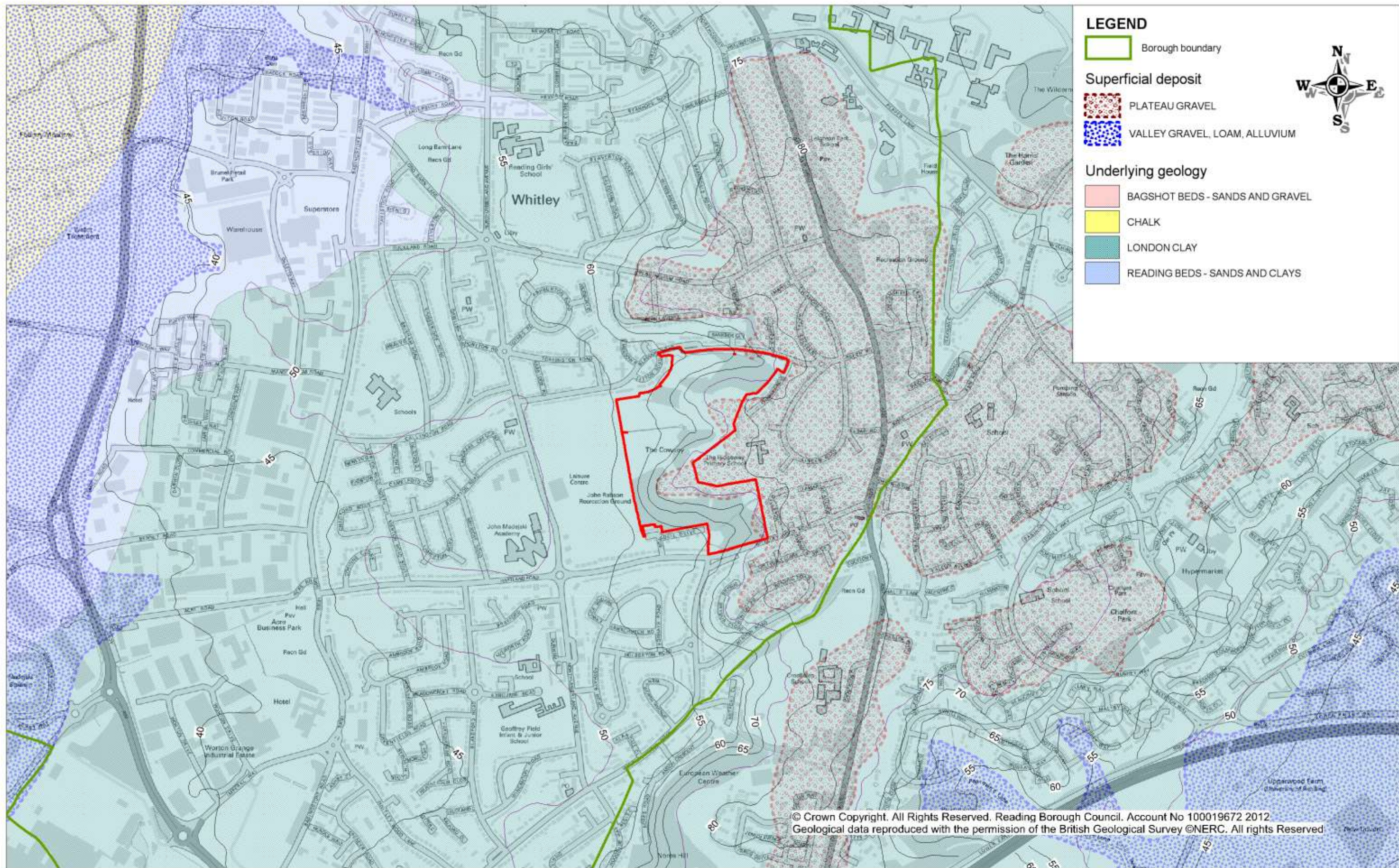
Photo 5 – Existing pond to be enhanced



Photo 6 – Area where new southern pond will be created



Appendix 2 – Maps

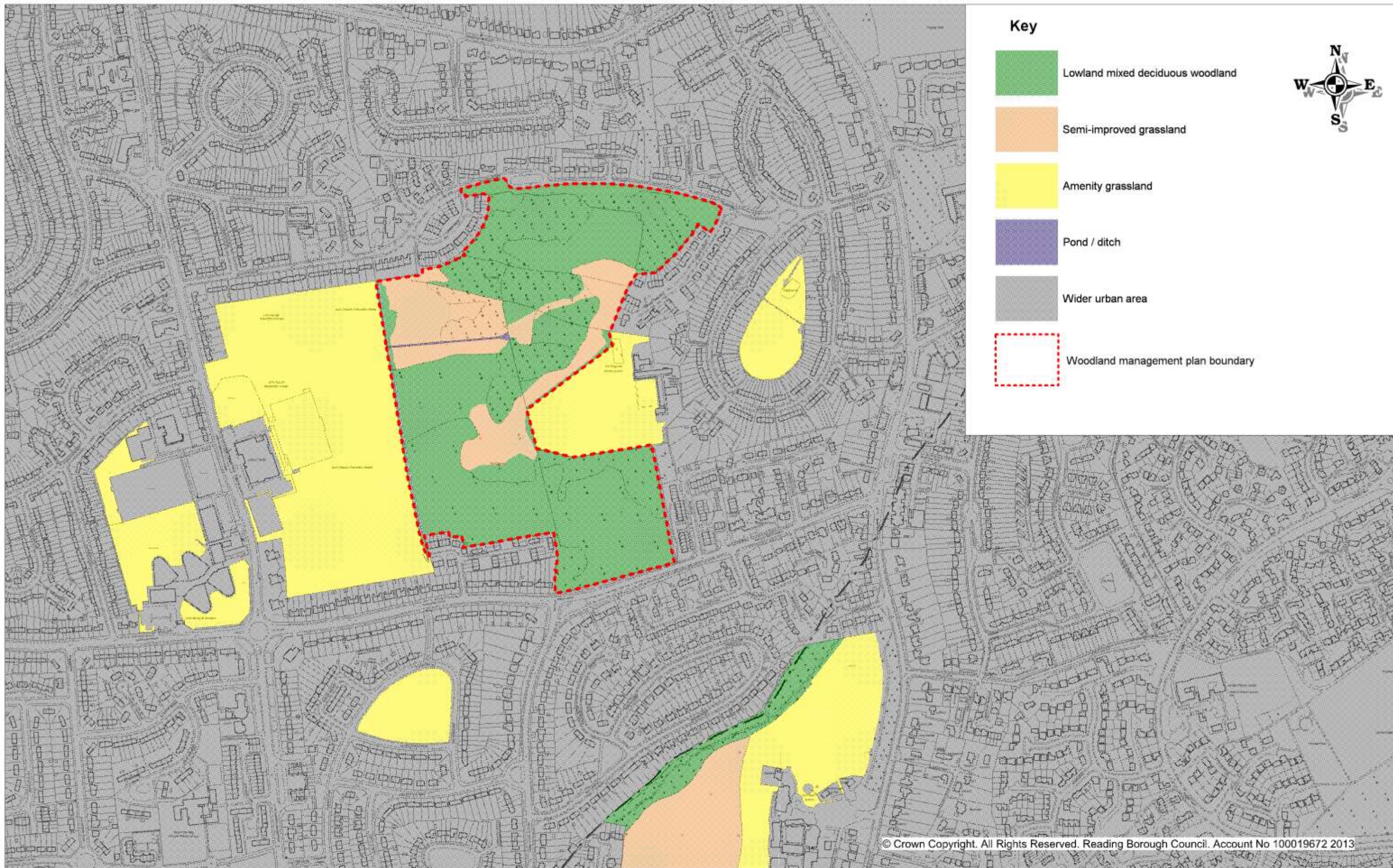


TITLE

THE COWSEY WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN
FIGURE 2 - GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

DRG NO
DRAWN BY G5

DATE 7th December 2012
SCALE 1:10000 at A3



TITLE
THE COWSEY WOODLAND WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN
MAP 3 - BROAD HABITAT TYPES

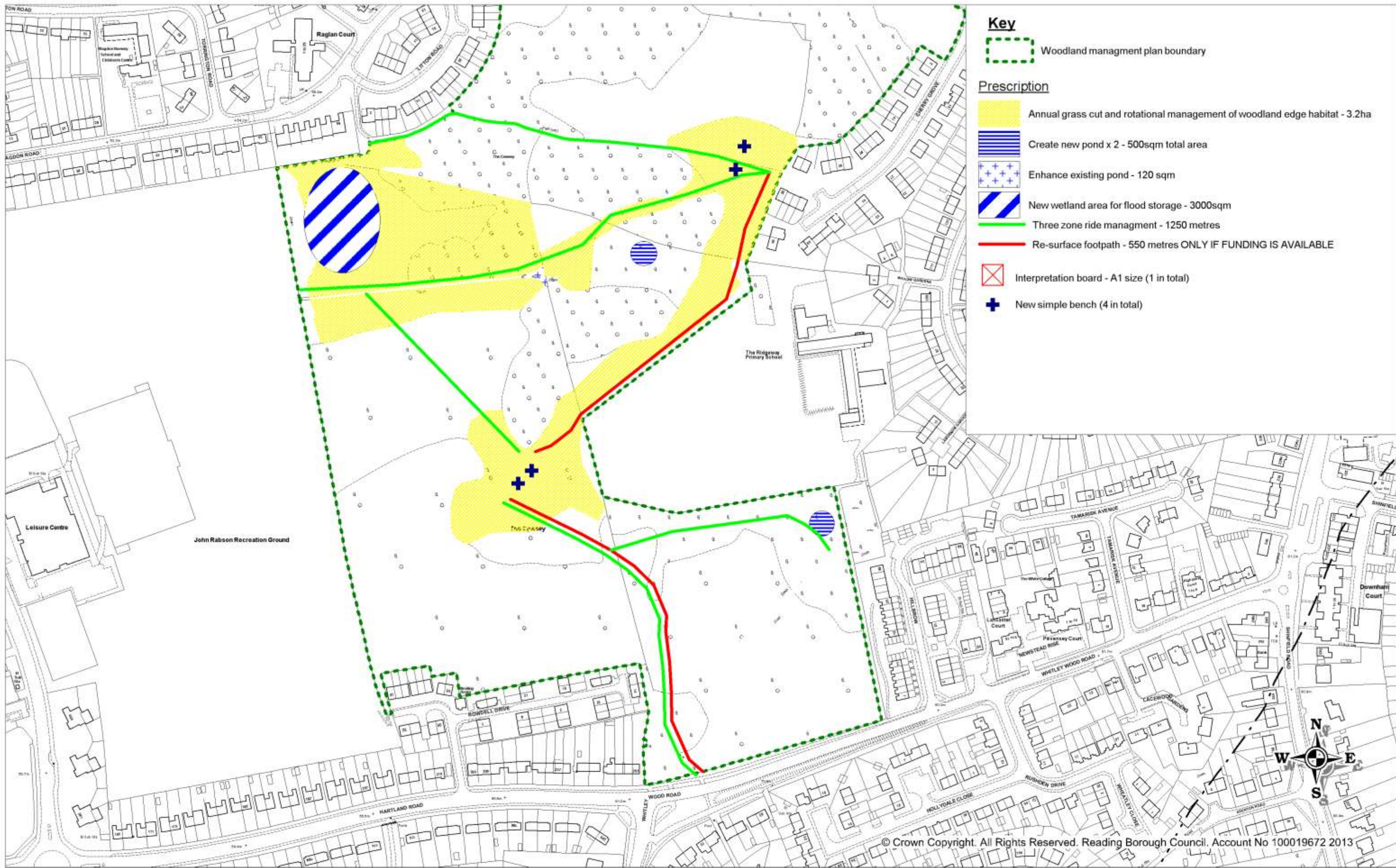
DRG NO 01

DATE 15th Jan 2013

DRAWN BY Giles Sutton

SCALE 1:5000 at A3

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TITLE THE COWSEY WOODLAND WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN
MAP 4 - PRESCRIPTIONS

DRG NO 01

DATE 15th Jan 2013

DRAWN BY Giles Sutton

SCALE 1:2500 at A3

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Appendix 3 - Bird Survey of the The Cowsey undertaken by John Lerpiniere on the 7 April 2010

Methodology

A 30 minute walk through the centre of The Cowsey and return near the top edge recorded sixteen species.

All were common residents except Blackcap and Chiffchaff which, although a few over-winter, are likely to be returned summer migrants. A later survey will discover other summer migrants but April is a suitable time to find resident species that have either begun to breed or are establishing territory. Hence many birds are heard rather than seen that at other times of the year would escape detection.

Only a small proportion of the birds are discovered during such a survey as (a) not every part of The Cowsey was visited (b) the great majority of the singing birds are males and an equivalent number of females will not be discovered. However, a rough total population can be estimated from such results.

Results

Species	Number	Status	Population estimate	Breeding code
Blackbird	5		28	S
		red		
Song Thrush	3	listed	6	S
Robin	23		50	S
Dunnoek	2	amber	10	S
Wren	3		12	S
Greenfinch	2		8	H
Great Tit	9		30	S
Blue Tit	2		16	H
Chiffchaff	8		20	S
Blackcap	2		6	S
Woodpigeon	43		50	H
Magpie	8		10	H
Jay	2		6	H
Jackdaw	4		10	
Carrion Crow	1		4	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1			
	4			H

Species found after the survey include: Long-tailed Tit (H), Green Woodpecker (H) and Red Kite

Bullfinches (red listed) have been heard on every previous visit and so are likely to be present as the habitat is particularly suitable.

Population estimate is very approximate and concludes birds likely to be breeding or regularly using the site. A small number of species will have been missed and later summer migrants are yet to arrive.

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Red and amber listing refers to RSPB classification of high and medium conservation concern. The main criteria in this case are a decline of 50% or 25% in the last 25 years.

Breeding Evidence code:

Possible breeder:

S – Singing male

H – Observed in suitable habitat

Probable breeder:

No evidence

Confirmed breeder:

No evidence

Conclusion

Numbers found indicate a dense population and a particularly good breeding area. The mix of habitat is an important factor the main ones being dense scrub, for cover and nest sites, open patches and grassland, for feeding opportunities, and mature woodland. Nearby gardens present further opportunities as do two adjacent large mown fields