Dacorum Local Plan

HRA Desk Study and Site Walkover Survey of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI and Tring Woodlands SSSI components

May 2021

LEPUS CONSULTING
LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY, PLANNING & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

LEPUS CONSULTING
LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY, PLANNING & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Dacorum Local Plan

HRA Desk Study and Site Walkover Survey of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI and Tring Woodlands SSSI components

LC-677	Document Control Box and Quality Assurance
Client	Dacorum Borough Council
Report Title	HRA Desk Study and Site Walkover Survey
Status	Final
Filename	LC-677_Dacorum_HRA_Walkover_Survey_9_190521SC.docx
Date	May 2021
Author	SC
Reviewed	ND
Approved	ND

Photo: Footpaths at Ashridge, Neil Davidson, Lepus Consulting

Contents

Acronyms

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BBOWT	Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust
BMERC	Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
HERC	Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre
LSE	Likely Significant Effect
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
NE	Natural England
NVC	National Vegetation Classification
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SIP	Site Improvement Plan
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Dacorum Borough Council are currently preparing a new Local Plan which will provide a planning strategy for the Borough up to 2038. The new Local Plan will incorporate strategic policies, development management policies and site allocations into a single document, replacing those in the Core Strategy (adopted September 2013)[1], the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted July 2017)[2] and the 'saved' parts of the Dacorum Borough Local Plan 1991-2011 (adopted May 2004)[3].

1.2 Habitats Regulations Assessment

1.2.1 Lepus Consulting has been appointed to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in support of the Local Plan process. This is being prepared in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)[4], known as the Habitats Regulations.

1.2.2 HRA applies to plans or projects which are likely to have a significant effect on a European site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and / or not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site.

1.2.3 The Habitats Regulations notes that a competent authority, before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project, must make an appropriate assessment of the implications of a plan or project in view of a site's conservation objectives. These tests are referred to collectively as a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

1.2.4 The HRA process comprises a number of stages of assessment as outlined below:

- **Stage 1. Screening:** Screening to determine if the Local Plan would be likely to have a significant effect on a European site. This stage comprises the identification of potential effects associated with the Local Plan on European sites and an assessment of the likely significance of these effects.
- **Stage 2. Appropriate Assessment and the 'Integrity Test':** Assessment to ascertain whether or not the Local Plan would have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of any European site to be made by the Competent Authority (in this instance Dacorum Borough Council). This stage comprises an impact assessment and evaluation in view of a European site's conservation objectives.

[1] Dacorum Borough Council. Core Strategy 2006 – 2031. Adopted 25th September 2013.

[2] Dacorum Borough Council. Site Allocation 2006 – 2031. Adopted 12th July 2017.

[3] Dacorum Borough Council. Local Plan 1991 - 2011. Adopted 21st April 2004. As amended by the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPDs.

[4] The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 SI No. 2017/1012, TSO (The Stationery Office), London. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents [Date Accessed: 29/01/21] as amended by The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/9780111176573 [Date Accessed: 29/01/21]

Where adverse impacts on site integrity are identified, consideration is given to alternative options and mitigation measures which are tested.

- **Stage 3. Alternative solutions:** Deciding whether there are alternative solutions which would avoid or have a lesser effect on a European site.
- **Stage 4. Imperative reasons of overriding public interest and compensatory measures:** Considering imperative reasons of overriding public interest and securing compensatory measures.

1.2.5 The first stage of the HRA process is required to determine if the Local Plan will have a Likely Significant Effect (LSE) on a European site (stage 1 - screening). The screening process looks at a range of potential threats and pathways of impact when determining LSEs. One of the threats considered in the Dacorum Local Plan screening exercise is the potential for public access and disturbance impacts upon two components of the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These components lie within and immediately adjacent to Dacorum's administrative area and are coincident with Tring Woodlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI[5].

1.3 Purpose of report

1.3.1 Lepus Consulting has been appointed by Dacorum Borough Council to undertake an HRA desk study and site walkover at these two components of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC to inform the HRA screening process. The purpose of these studies is to also define the scope of any work that may be required in terms of public access and disturbance effects at the appropriate assessment stage of the HRA (stage 2).

1.3.2 As part of this study Lepus has undertaken informal engagement with the National Trust and Natural England. The output of this engagement, the desk study and the HRA walkover survey are presented in this report. This work has been prepared to support the Draft Dacorum Local Plan: Emerging Strategy for Growth 2020 - 2038 (November 2020) HRA Report[6].

1.3.3 The aims of this study are as follows:

- Review baseline data sets provided by Dacorum Borough Council and stakeholders.
- Undertake a desk top review of ecological baseline information.
- Undertake a site visit and desk top review to identify potential likely significant public access and disturbance effects on site as a result of the Local Plan.
- Provide an accompanying photographic inventory and target notes.
- Undertake preliminary consultations with Natural England and the National Trust.
- Consider the requirement for further potential survey work to allow an appropriate assessment of public access and disturbance effects.

[5] Approx. 70% of the SAC at Ashridge lies within Dacorum Borough Council's administrative boundary, with the remaining 30% situated within the former Aylesbury Vale District Council (now part of Buckinghamshire Council).

[6] Lepus Consulting. 2021. Dacorum Local Plan. Habitats Regulations Assessment. Regulation 18 Emerging Strategy for Growth 2020 - 2038.

1.4 Area of study

1.4.1 This study focuses on the two components of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC that lie within and immediately adjacent to the Local Plan area and which are coincident with Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI and Tring Woodlands SSSI.

2 Chilterns Beechwoods SAC

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC comprises a number of components of woodland which represent a range of semi natural woodlands dominated by beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). These sites are scattered throughout the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with the exception of Bisham Woods SSSI.

2.1.2 **Table 2.1** provides a summary of the SSSI components which are coincident with the SAC and their distance from the Plan area, these are also illustrated on **Figure 2.1.**

Table 2.1: *SSSI components which are coincident with the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC*

SSSI sites which are coincident with and together constitute the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC	Distance from Plan area
Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI	
Aston Rowant Woods SSSI	
Bisham Woods SSSI	
Bradenham Woods, Park Wood & The Coppice SSSI	
Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens SSSI	
Hollowhill and Pullingshill Wood SSSI	
Naphill Common SSSI	
Tring Woodlands SSSI	
Windsor Hill SSSI	

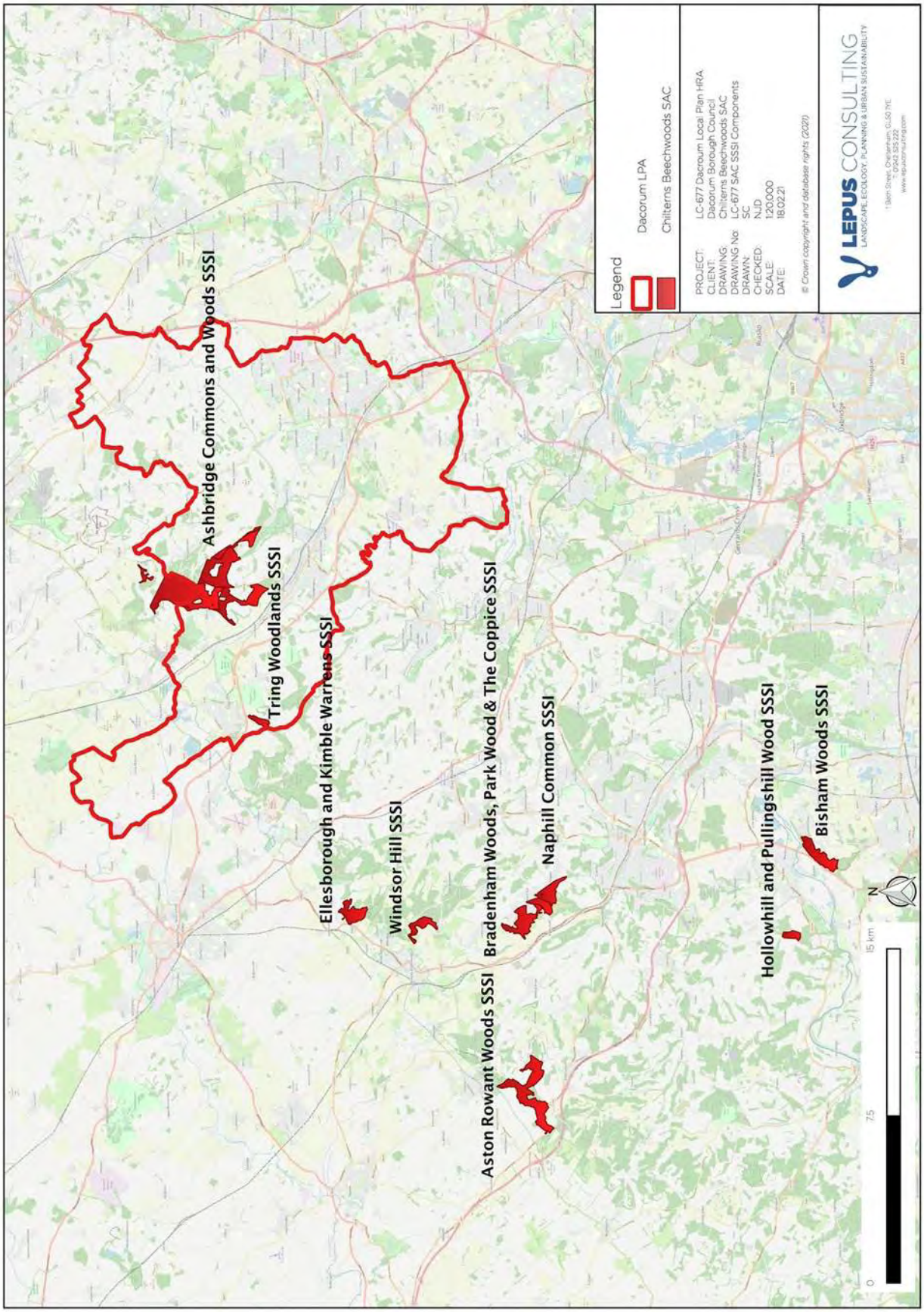


Figure 2.1: *Location of Chilterns Beechwoods SAC and constituent SSSIs*

2.2 Conservation interest

2.2.1 The qualifying features of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC include the following:

1. Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco- Brometalia*); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone
2. *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests; Beech forests on neutral to rich soils
3. *Lucanus cervus*; Stag beetle

2.2.2 Different soil types occur across the SAC designation. This, combined with the historic and more current woodland management effects, has led to different types of woodland community types forming. The following principal National Vegetation Classification (NVC) woodland classification types[7] have been recorded at the SAC. Each classification is a variant of Beech (*Fagus sylvaticus*) woodland:

- W12 Fagus sylvatica – *Mercurialis perennis* woodland;
- W14 Fagus sylvatica – *Rubus fruticosus* woodland; and
- W15 Fagus sylvatica – *Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland.

2.2.3 The SAC also supports a number of rare plants with restricted distribution including coralroot bittercress (*Cardamine bulbifera*), southern woodrush (*Luzula forsteril*), red helleborine (*Cephalanthera rubra*) and lesser hairy-brome (*Bromus benekenii*). The Chilterns Beechwoods represent a stronghold for one of the UK's rarest plants, ghost orchid (*Epipogium aphyllum*)[8].

2.2.4 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone form a qualifying habitat of the SAC. This is associated with thin, well-drained, lime-rich soils with chalk and limestone. Within the SAC this habitat is restricted and only found at the Windsor Hill SSSI and Ellesborough and the Kimble Warrens SSSI components of the SAC. These support a diversity of grasses and scarce invertebrates[9].

2.2.5 The qualifying faunal species of the SAC is the stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*). This species is saproxylic and therefore reliant on dead and decaying wood for the larval stages of its lifecycle. Deadwood habitat is found within the SAC in the form of fallen branches and tree stumps. Records indicate the beetle has been recorded at the Bisham Woods SSSI and Hollowhill and Pullingshill Woods SSSI components of the SAC[10]. This represents the northern range of the beetle.

2.3 Threats and pressures

2.3.1 Natural England's SIP indicates that the SAC is vulnerable to the following threats and pressures.

- Forestry and woodland management;

[7] Rodwell, J.S. (ed.) 1991. *British Plant Communities. Volume 1. Woodlands and scrub*. Cambridge University Press.

[8] Natural England (2019) Chiltern Beechwoods SAC Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice. http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5422856020426752 [Date Accessed: 11/01/21].

[9] Natural England (2019) Chiltern Beechwoods SAC Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice. http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5422856020426752 [Date Accessed: 11/01/21].

[10] Natural England (2019) Chiltern Beechwoods SAC Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice. http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5422856020426752 [Date Accessed: 11/01/21].

- Deer;
- Changes in species distributions;
- Invasive species;
- Disease;
- Public access and disturbance; and
- Air pollution: impact of nitrogen deposition.

2.3.2 Public access and disturbance pressures are noted to be related to increased visitor pressures and disturbance to stag beetle. Natural England's Supplementary Advice notes that, given its location within the Chilterns AONB, the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC has become a popular recreational destination for walking and cycling. Surveys undertaken by the Chilterns AONB indicated that in 2007 just over 55 million leisure visits were made to and within the Chilterns Area of AONB[11], this figure is likely to have risen since these surveys were undertaken.

2.3.3 Public access and disturbance can take a number of forms. Physical disturbance as a result of urbanisation may include damage to habitats through erosion, troubling of grazing stock, causing changes in behaviour to animals such as birds at nesting and feeding sites, spreading invasive species, litter and fly-tipping, tree climbing, wildfire and arson, noise and light pollution and vandalism. Typically, disturbance of habitat and species is the unintentional consequence of people's presence which can impact breeding success and survival[12].

2.3.4 Potential public access and disturbance may have a likely significant effect on the SAC where features for which the site is designated are damaged, lost or the development of successional habitat is hindered. This may occur through increased recreational pressure at the SAC which could cause trampling of young tree saplings and ground flora, loss of vegetation, damage to tree roots and compaction of soil. Other impacts associated with increased public access pressure may include tree climbing, the removal of dead wood (removal of deadwood is a major threat to saproxylic invertebrates), harvesting of fungi, increased contamination from dog fouling (eutrophication), litter and the direct vandalism of trees (fires or graffiti).

2.3.5 Where increased visitor pressure leads to recreational impacts upon the qualifying features of the SAC, this may undermine its conservation objectives. These aim to ensure the site contributes to achieving the favourable conservation status of its qualifying features.

2.3.6 The likelihood and degree to which public access and disturbance impacts will affect the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC will be dependent upon the level of visitor pressure, the management of recreational pressures and alternative recreational resources available in the local area. For instance, the presence of clearly marked and signed footpaths, the location and number of car parking areas and visitor education provided to help achieve habitat management and species protection will affect the number of visitors attracted to the site and the way in which they interact with it.

[11] The Chilterns AONB. 2007. Chilterns AONB Visitor Survey. Available at: https://www.chilternsaonb.org/uploads/files/ConservationBoard/Chilterns_AONB_Visitor_Survey_2007.pdf [Date Accessed: 25/01/21]

[12] Natural England. Public Access and Disturbance Theme Plan A strategic approach to identifying and addressing significant effects on the features of Natura 2000 sites.

2.4 SSSI condition status

2.4.1 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are protected areas in the United Kingdom designated for conservation. SSSIs are the building blocks of site-based nature conservation in the UK. A SSSI will be designated based on the characteristics of its fauna, flora, geology and/or geomorphology. Whilst typically analogous in ecological function, the reasons for its designation can be entirely different to those for which the same area is designated as a European site.

2.4.2 Natural England periodically assesses the conservation conditions of each SSSI unit, assigning it a status. The conservation status of each SSSI highlights any European site that is currently particularly vulnerable to threats/pressures. Conservation status is defined as follows:

- Favourable;
- Unfavourable – recovering;
- Unfavourable – no change; or
- Unfavourable – declining.

2.4.3 SSSI units in either an 'Unfavourable – no change' or 'Unfavourable – declining' condition indicate that the European site may be particularly vulnerable to certain threats or pressures. It is important to remember that the SSSI may be in an unfavourable state due to the condition of features unrelated to its European designation. However, it is considered that the conservation status of SSSI units that overlap with European designated sites offer a useful indicator of habitat health at that location.

3 Methodology

3.1 Early stakeholder engagement

3.1.1 Preliminary informal liaison was undertaken with Natural England and the National Trust to identify key public access and disturbance issues and pressures at the SAC.

3.2 HRA desk study review

3.2.1 Dacorum Borough Council has established a stakeholder working group as part of their Duty to Cooperate and to inform the HRA and plan making process. This group includes the following bodies:

- Natural England;
- The National Trust;
- Historic England;
- Chilterns (AONB) Conservation Board; and
- Hertfordshire Ecology (as ecological advisors to Dacorum Borough Council).

3.2.2 In addition, a number of other stakeholders are kept informed of progress in relation to the HRA. These include the following bodies:

- Buckinghamshire Council;
- Central Bedfordshire Council;
- Woodland Trust;
- Hertfordshire County Council - Historic Environment Team;
- Dacorum Borough Council - Conservation Team, Tree Officer & Parks and Open Spaces Officer;
- Buckinghamshire Council (planning and ecology teams); and
- Central Bedfordshire Council (planning).

3.2.3 The desktop element of this study comprised a review of datasets provided to Lepus by Dacorum Borough Council and other key stakeholders (listed above). This data includes the following:

- Dacorum Borough Council. Topic Paper for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC[13].
- National Trust visitor survey data (surveys undertaken by Arkenford in 2013 and additional survey work undertaken between 2017 – 2020).
- National Trust. Proposed New Car Park, Ashridge Estate. Preliminary Ecological Appraisal[14].
- Forestry Commission. Ashridge Estate Woodland Management Plan[15].

[13] Dacorum Borough Council. November 2020. Topic Paper for the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC. Dacorum Local Plan (2020 – 2038). Emerging Strategy for Growth.

[14] National Trust. October 2017. Proposed New Car Park, Ashridge Estate. Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

[15] Forestry Commission. 2019. Woodland Management Plan Ashridge Estate.

- National Trust. A Conservation Management Plan for the Central Area of the Ashridge Estate[16].
- National Trust. Nature Conservation Evaluation. Ashridge Estate. Monument Drive [17].
- Invertebrate Surveys[18,19].
- Site access and infrastructure information. Drawing on promoted walking, cycling and horse-riding routes provided by the National Trust. This data was supplemented with information obtained on the rights of way and areas of open access as defined under the Countryside Rights of Way (CRoW) Act (2000).
- Land ownership boundaries were provided by the Council (replicating information obtained directly from land registry).
- Key access points were obtained from aerial photography, site promotional material and provided by the National Trust.

3.2.4 In addition, relevant ecological data was obtained for each component of the SAC and immediate surrounding area from the Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC) and the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC). This data was supported by additional information freely obtained from Natural England, Nature on the Map and Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC).

3.3 HRA site walkover

3.3.1 An HRA site walkover was undertaken on Tuesday 16th February 2021 by professionally qualified ecologists Neil Davidson (BSc Hons, MSc, CMLI, CEnv, CIEEM) and Samantha Cheater (BSc, MSc, CEnv, CIEEM).

3.3.2 A range of rights of way coincident with the designated area of the SAC were walked at both components of the SAC (Tring and Ashridge). Where threats and pressures were observed these were recorded through the use of target notes and a photographic inventory (**Appendices C** and **D**). A number of car parks and informal parking locations were also visited.

3.3.3 Quality, frequency and complexity of access signage and information was observed across the SAC survey areas. Records were made of any location that appeared to be in a state of regular recreational use as evidenced by signs of path spread, rutting or braiding. The survey included making records of desire lines in areas designated as open access.

[16] Historic Environment Associates. September 2019. A Conservation Management Plan for the Central Area of the Ashridge Estate.

[17] National Trust National Consultancy. 2016 – 2018 Surveys. Nature Conservation Evaluation.

[18] Foster. A. P. 2017. Survey of Saproxylic coleoptera (and other invertebrates) of selected areas of the Ashridge Estate, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

[19] Foster. A. P. 2018. Survey of Saproxylic coleoptera (and other invertebrates) of selected areas of the Ashridge Estate, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

3.4 Limitations and assumptions

3.4.1 It is recognised that the HRA site walkover survey was undertaken outside the optimal botanical survey season. The purpose of the survey was to explore the potential for likely significant public access and disturbance effects upon the SAC to help inform the HRA screening assessment and shape the scope of the HRA going forwards. The timing of the survey allowed a number of recreational threats and pressures to be seen on site clearly, which may not have been visible at other times of the year. Impacts caused by footpath users leaving the promoted routes were more visible in muddy conditions and when the trees were not in leaf. The conditions were also considered optimal to highlight evidence of damage from car parking in designated and non-designated areas.

3.4.2 The site visit has provided essential information on the nature of recreational impacts to inform the current stage of the HRA process. It is acknowledged that all rights of ways across each site were not walked at the time of the site visit.

3.4.3 Further site based recreational assessment surveys during the botanical survey season (April-May) for woodlands would be likely to help understand the precise nature of trampling impacts and their location in relation to species distribution and habitat type. It would also be useful to extend the site visit to ensure that all rights of way are walked so as to have a comprehensive record.

4 Early Stakeholder Engagement

4.1 Early engagement

4.1.1 A phone interview was undertaken with the National Trust's Countryside Manager on 16th December 2020 and an on-site meeting was held as part of the site visit on 16th February 2020. A phone interview was undertaken with Natural England's Ashridge responsible officer on 18th December 2020. A summary of this consultation is provided in **Appendix B**.

4.1.2 Engagement with both Natural England and the National Trust focused on the Ashridge component of the SAC in particular. It highlighted a number of existing public access and disturbance impacts which are currently occurring at this particular component. These can be summarised as follows:

- High levels of footfall, which has increased during the national pandemic, resulting in erosion to footpaths and footpath widening.
- The main area of impact is the area around Monument Drive.
- Compaction of soil and erosion around tree roots, in particular around veteran and ancient trees is a concern.
- Exceedance of parking capacity along Monument Drive and unofficial parking along the verges within the SAC boundary regularly takes place.
- Parking at other more remote car parks has increased during the national pandemic (this is not based on car park counts but was an observation).
- Anti-social behaviour in the form of mountain biking and use of off-road vehicles is a concern.
- The use of the site by large groups for picnics and other family occasions often take place at the base of ancient and veteran trees.
- The use of the site by other groups, who often do not request access permission, such as Duke of Edinburgh Groups, personal trainers, commercial dog walkers, exercise classes and school groups is a concern.
- Pressures were noted to be exacerbated in key periods, specifically the bluebell season where ground flora is often badly trampled in pursuit of photographs.
- Collection of dead wood for den building is an issue.

5 Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI

5.1 Desk study

5.1.1 The area of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC, which is coincident with Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI, broadly corresponds with areas of the Ashridge Estate, for which the National Trust is the main landowner. Approximately 70% of the designated area is located within Dacorum, with the remainder located in Buckinghamshire.

5.1.2 The site lies within the Chilterns AONB. The town of Hemel Hempstead is located approximately 3.2km to the south of this component of the SAC. The market town of Berkhamsted is located approximately 370m to the south of the site and the market town of Tring approximately 2.3km to its north west (**Figure 5.1)**.

5.1.3 A number of areas of woodland within the SSSI comprise ancient woodland. A recent survey by the National Trust in 2020, and data received from the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) in January 2021, indicates that ancient and veteran trees are widespread across the site and within the surrounding area.

5.1.4 The SSSI citation for Ashridge Commons and Woods indicates that the site comprises a mixture of ancient semi-natural and secondary woodland, plantation, scrub, a more open component dominated by bracken, and grassland[20]. The woodland ground flora is noted to be associated with the underlying soils, with sparse flora in areas on the acidic plateau soils and more diverse communities on the more base rich soils. It also notes the diverse range of woodland bird species that are supported on site by the varied woodland stand types, areas of scrub (dominated by bracken and scattered trees) and small areas of unimproved calcareous and acidic grassland.

5.1.5 A review of Natural England SSSI unit condition data for Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI indicates that all units with the exception of one (Unit 004) are in a favourable condition. Unit 004 (known as 'The Hangings') was noted to be in an unfavourable – recovering condition due to deer grazing. It is noted that the conditions surveys were undertaken in 2008, 2009 and 2014.

5.1.6 Ivinghoe Hills SSSI lies to the immediate north of the site, Aldbury Nowers SSSI and Pitstone Hill SSSI approximately 1.5km to its west and Alpine Meadow SSSI approximately 560m to the south. These designations contain areas of chalk downland which support biologically and entomologically rich calcareous grassland. In addition, they contain semi-natural woodland (in parts ancient woodland including ancient beech woodland) and scrub. There are also a number of other SSSIs located in the wider area, beyond 1km.

[20] Natural England. Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI Citation. Available at: https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1000452.pdf

5.1.7 A number of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are located within the footprint of the SAC designation including; Monument Cottage Area, Thunderdell Cottages & Lodge Area and Coldharbour Farm Pond and Meadow. In addition, there are further LWSs located immediate adjacent to the SAC designation boundary and within the wider area. A number of the LWSs located within the surrounding area are designated for the presence of chalk grassland.

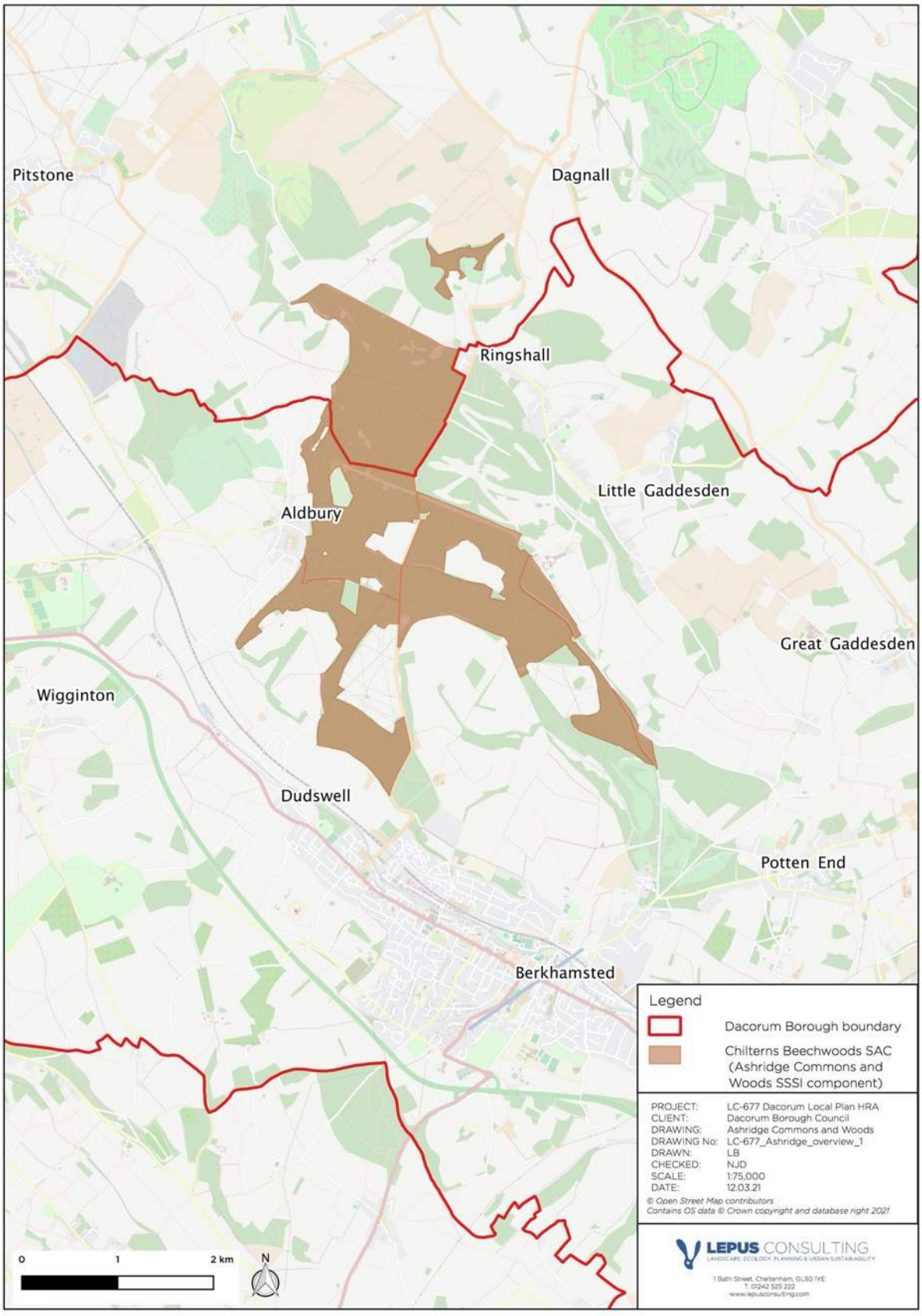


Figure 5.1: *Location of Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Ashridge Wood and Commons SSSI Component*

Accessibility

5.1.8 Ashridge is open to the public with a number of routes for walking, cycling, horse-riding and running promoted by the National Trust across the site. There is a visitor centre, toilets, a shop and a café on site located at the end of Monument Drive, and mobility vehicles are available for advance booking. Dogs are permitted on site on the lead. Free parking is provided along Monument Drive. The site can also be accessed from another 23 car parks which offer free parking in the local area, by foot, bike or horse from neighbouring residential areas and via the rights of way network which links to the site. There are three major trails that cross the site, the Chiltern Way, the Hertfordshire Way and the Icknield Way. In addition, the estate is freely accessible to the public with a substantial portion being designated as 'registered common land' or 'other access land' under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Figures A.1 to A.4 in **Appendix A** illustrate accessibility across the site.

5.1.9 Monument Drive is registered as a byway open to all traffic (BOAT) which is a highway over which the public have a right of way for vehicular and all other kinds of traffic but which is used by the public mainly for the purposes for which footpaths and bridleways are used (i.e. walking, cycling or horse riding)[21]. Dacorum Borough Council placed a Traffic Regulation Order 1991 on the road which restricts access past 10pm and before 7am (except for access). Consultation with the National Trust indicates that parking capacity along Monument Drive is regularly exceeded with people parking on the grass verges and under the trees at peak times.

5.1.10 Organised events at Ashridge are currently on hold due to the national pandemic[22]. In previous years events have included guided nature and education walks, workshops, children focused sessions, camping, organised horse rides and seasonal events, such as the annual Easter egg trail. The National Trust hold a licence for a significant number of permitted events such as running events of various lengths, orienteering clubs, health walks, long distance walks, horse riding clubs, geocaching events, canicross, scout groups, birthday parties and group outings. Consultation with the National Trust indicates that the estate is often also used by a number of groups, many of whom do not request access permission. These can include Duke of Edinburgh Groups, personal trainers, commercial dog walkers, exercise classes and school groups[23].

[21] Land Registry Title Deeds. Available at: https://www.landregistry-titledeeds.co.uk/frequently-asked-questions/information/public-rights-of-way.asp#:~:text=A%20Byway%20Open%20to%20All,%2C%20cycling%20or%20horse%20riding)

[22] National Trust Countryside Manager. *Pers. Comms.* 19/01/21.

[23] National Trust Countryside Manager. *Pers. Comms.* 19/01/21.

Management plan review

5.1.11 The National Trust manage the landscape as a working estate through grazing and woodland management. A Woodland Management Plan covers 956.69ha of woodland across the estate[24]. The long-term vision of the plan is to "provide a biodiverse, species rich and mixed aged woodland environment which maintains the unique character and historic culture of the Estate and provides timber income to fund management and open public access". Conservation management measures include a requirement to manage the woodland in order to achieve a favourable conservation condition at the SAC and SSSI woodland.

5.1.12 The National Trust has a management plan for 250ha of the central area of the site[25]. This corresponds to areas designated as part of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. The management plan notes that Ashridge is one of the National Trust's most visited sites with 500,000 visitors per year. The plan highlights a number of public access and disturbance threats that are experienced within the management plan area (focused around Monument Drive), along with other impacts such as deer and squirrel damage and the effect of a decline in traditional woodland and commoner's management. It notes that during the peak season Monument Drive acts as a linear car park with overspill car parking required at Meadley Meadow. It sets out six actions required to achieve the long-term sustainability and enhancement of the site:

- "*Continue to undertake works to improve the ecological health of the SAC/SSSI most notably by:*
  - *Reinstating wood pasture over significant areas of the historic common land area;*
  - *Reintroducing grazing to manage the wood pasture; Expanding coppicing operations to large areas of Sallow Copse and Old Copse;*
  - *Managing pests reducing overgrazing of woodland floor;*
  - *Control or remove non-native invasive species that are detrimental to ecological health;*
  - *Responding to nationwide tree epidemics.*
- *Manage Monument Drive and existing car parks at Barracks Square and the visitor centre, as the main parking resource in the short to medium term, accepting that it is not ideal, but using it to create sustainable income through the introduction of parking charges that can support significant improvements to the management of the SAC, visitor facilities and main historical / archaeological features. Explore the potential of using Meadleys Meadow for additional parking in combination with the Drive and existing car parks;*
- *Work towards a long-term goal of relocating visitor facilities accepting that this will take time and may not be achievable for many years. In the meantime, facilities should be improved and integrated. In the medium term there is potential to moving facilities to the car park site adjacent to the current buildings;*
- *Manage dispersal of visitors to the heritage core via promotion of a network of surfaced paths and points of interest away from Monument Drive;*

[24] Forestry Commission. 2019. Ashridge Estate Woodland Management Plan.

[25] National Trust. 2019. A Conservation Management Plan for the Central Area of the Ashridge Estate (Part 1).

- *Establish a programme of ecological monitoring to define changes in the wildlife habitats and populations, and the trajectory of the SAC/SSSI, and the effects of visitors and appropriate management on the trajectory;*
- *Continue a programme of visitor / car park surveys to broaden understanding of visitor needs and patterns use."*

Review of ecological datasets

5.1.13 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was undertaken as part of the National Trust's proposed application for a new car park in an area around Monument Drive in 2017[26]. Habitat was mapped using the Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology[27] and signs of recreational impact around Monument Drive in the form of soil compaction, pollution and eutrophication (from dogs) was noted. The appraisal highlighted the importance of the underlying soils and geology alongside management practices (including cessation of grazing on former common land and forestry management) on the distribution of habitats.

5.1.14 A Nature Conservation Evaluation Report was prepared for the whole area of the Ashridge Estate within the National Trust's ownership in 2019[28]. This drew on a number of updated habitat surveys which were carried out in June 2016, August 2017 and June 2018. The 2019 Evaluation Report provides habitat mapping, an assessment of ecological value and sets out a number of management recommendations. It identifies the location of NVC type woodland (NVC W14 and W12) for which the SAC is designated (see Section 6.2). The report states that *"beech-dominated woodland which is present on the plateau areas (where the chalk is covered by clay) falls within the NVC W14 beech–bramble community. Beech-dominated woodland present on the steep scarp slopes is of the NVC W12 beech-dog's mercury type. Both semi-natural examples and long-established plantations of W14 and W12 woodland at Ashridge are covered by the lowland beech and yew woodland Priority Habitat."* The mapping produced to accompany the 2019 Evaluation Report has been reproduced in **Figure 6.6** to show the location of the lowland beech and yew woodland priority habitat mapped at the time of these surveys. This vegetation type falls within the definition of the SAC's qualifying habitat. In addition, the output of National Trust Phase 1 Habitat Mapping across the whole site is also shown[29].

[26] Bernwood ECS. 2017. Proposed New Car Park, Ashridge Estate. Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

[27] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010). Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey.

[28] National Trust National Consultancy. 2016 – 2018 Surveys. Nature Conservation Evaluation.

[29] National Trust. 2015. Nature Conservation Evaluation Ashridge Estate Monument Drive.

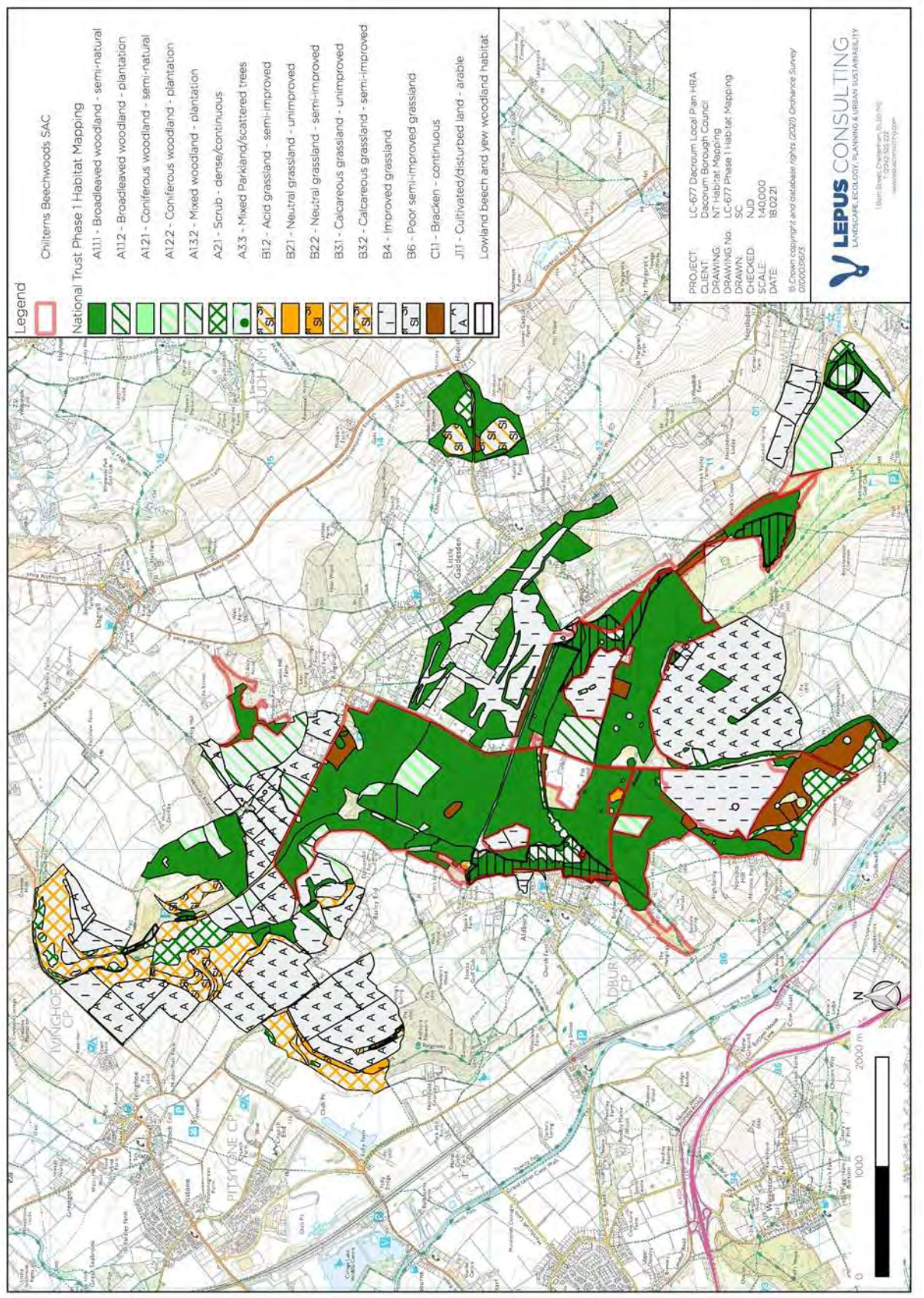


Figure 5.2: *National Trust Phase 1 Habitat Mapping for the whole of the Ashridge Estate, also showing areas mapped as lowland beech and yew woodland Priority Habitat*

5.1.15 Species records were obtained from Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC) and Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) in January 2021. These records were requested for the area of the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC which is coincident with the Ashridge Commons and Wood SSSI and a 1km study area from the designation boundary. The species data provided included three records of stag beetle within the search area[30]. Two surveys for saproxylic coleopteran were undertaken on behalf of the National Trust in 2017 and 2018[31,32]. These highlight the national significance of the Ashridge Estate for saproxylic invertebrates, noting that beech and oak support the most diverse range of invertebrates. The importance of maintaining a continual supply of wood decay habitat is noted within these reports.

Review of existing visitor survey data

5.1.16 The National Trust has undertaken a number of surveys at Ashridge to collect visitor numbers and obtain background data on visitors. A survey was undertaken by Arkenford on behalf of the National Trust in March and April 2013 which aimed to identify why people are visiting Ashridge, activities taking place and what would encourage them to visit the site more often. This involved 377 face to face interviews, over 20 consecutive days and covered the Easter weekend. The headline outputs of these surveys are set out below:

- The two most common reasons for visiting Ashridge were for fresh air and exercise. With exercising children another popular reason. This may have been biased due to the occurrence of an Easter egg hunt activity that took place over the Easter weekend.
- The key activities undertaken on site were shown to be walking (29% of respondents), dog walking (27% of respondents) and to entertain children (21% of respondents).
- Almost half the visitors surveyed were present on site with children (45%).
- The data shows that the majority of people stayed on the site for 2 hours, which may have been affected by the cold weather at the time of the survey.
- Dog walkers visit the site more frequently.
- The reasons provided for visiting the site include good walks and scenery, easy parking, convenience, previous knowledge of the site and the facilities provided on site (availability of toilets).

[30] Stag beetle records: one from 2002 located approximately 347m to the north east of the SSSI, one from 2016 within 820m of the SSSI and another from 1998 within the SSSI.

[31] Foster. A. P. 2017. Survey of Saproxylic coleoptera (and other invertebrates) of selected areas of the Ashridge Estate, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

[32] Foster. A. P. 2018. Survey of Saproxylic coleoptera (and other invertebrates) of selected areas of the Ashridge Estate, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

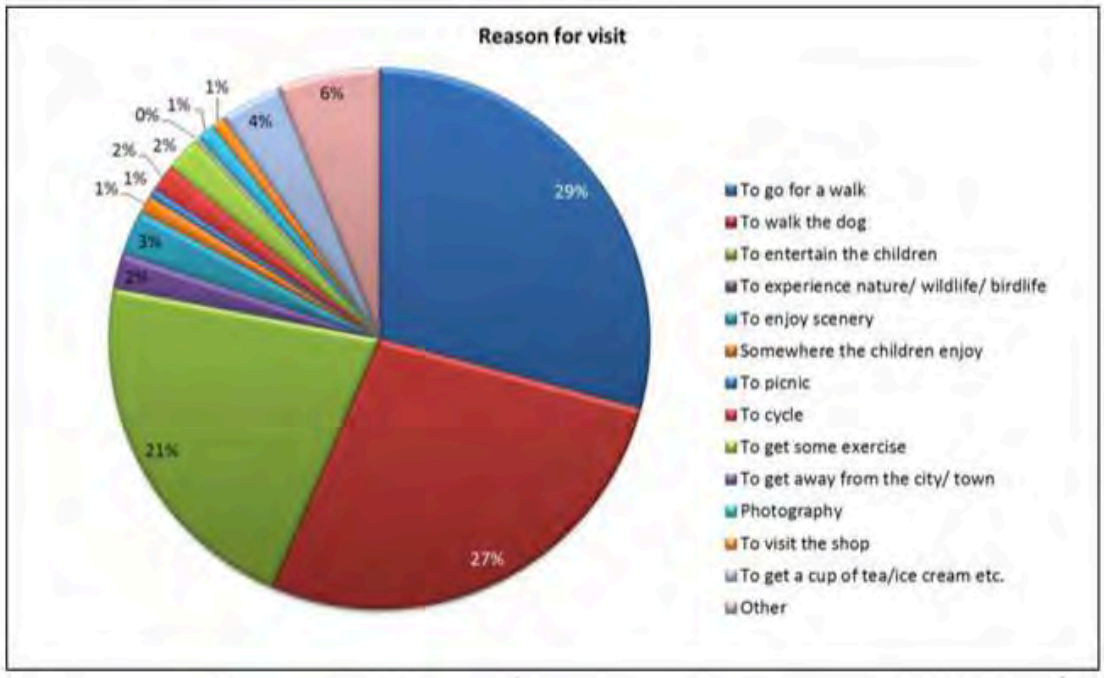


Figure 5.3: *Reasons for visiting the Ashridge Estate (National Trust, prepared by Arkenford 2013)*

5.1.17 In addition, a number of car counts were undertaken by the National Trust between 2014 and 2020[33]. The total number of parked cars on Monument Drive was also recorded by volunteers between June 2017 and September 2019. This data highlighted busier periods throughout the year. Popular periods included weekends (in particularly Sundays) and bank holidays, bluebells in the spring, Easter, school holiday periods (in particular the summer holidays), autumn when the trees are in colour, Christmas holidays and times during organised events. Peak demand for parking was recorded in the range of 400 to 500 on some popular bank holidays (notably August bank holiday 2019). However, this demand was exceeded on the final Saturday before the first national Covid-19 lockdown, and following easing of restrictions in May to June 2020, with demand trending towards 600. An analysis of google data highlights the increased use of parks since Covid-19 with a 25% rise in the use of parks by residents in January 2020 when compared to baseline data[34].

5.1.18 It is noted that there are some gaps in these data sets, with some months not surveyed and other months better surveyed than others. There were also a number of counts undertaken by volunteers at other car parks across the estate, between October 2019 and February 2020. It is noted that a focus on car park locations may not have picked up people being dropped off at the site, or those who have accessed the site via foot, bike or horse. In particular the National Trust notes that visitors from the other 23 car park locations, who are using other areas of the site, may also not have been captured in visitor surveys as these have focused on the Monument Drive area in particular.

[33] This data was obtained from an inductive loop sensor which was installed on Monument Drive in December 2014. A few technical issues were encountered over some months with the sensor crashing and underestimating when cars are parked too close together and slow moving. Full data set 2015 and almost for 2016. The loop was replaced in August 2017 with an extra loop added to count outbound traffic and loop sensor controllers added in September 2018.

[34] Google. Hertfordshire COVID-19 Google Mobility Report. 15 January 2020. Available at: https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/ [Date Accessed: 19/01/21]

5.1.19 The National Trust also undertook visitor surveys at Monument Drive, the shop and visitors centre between April 2017 and February 2020. This data showed that 42% of visitors to this part of Ashridge Estate are resident in Dacorum, with the majority originating from Berkhamsted, Hemel Hempstead, Marsworth, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard. Respondents were also noted to come from London, Milton Keynes, Cambridge and Oxfordshire among other destinations. It is likely that the sites inclusion in the National Trust's portfolio draws visitors from this wider area.

5.1.20 The 2017 – 2020 survey indicated that the majority of respondents were walkers followed by people visiting the cafe. These results may reflect the location of the surveys which were undertaken close to the main site facilities (including the café). Other respondents were visiting the site for dog walking, partaking in activities with children and meeting friends. Again, it is noted that other user groups may not have been picked up in the surveys undertaken at Monument Drive and the main visitor hub. These may include cyclists, horse riders and walkers accessing on foot or from other car parks and using more remote sections of the site. The surveys indicated that the majority of respondents travelled 5-11 miles to reach the site (39%) with the main mode of transport being the car (96.6%). This data is likely to reflect the location in which these surveys were undertaken (i.e. at or close to the car park). On the whole, the data indicates that the length of visit was a couple of hours. The routes that these visitors took during these hours and distanced covered was however not captured during these surveys. Over a quarter of visitors (27%) indicated that they visited the site on a monthly basis, with only 10% and 16% visiting on a daily and weekly basis. This pattern may again reflect the survey location which may not capture more regular visitors entering the site from other access points. It is noted that the data set is not a complete record of the period between April 2017 to February 2020 with some years having been more comprehensively surveyed than others. In addition, it is noted that there are a number of months which are not captured in the surveys, including March, August and September.

5.1.21 It is clear from existing visitor survey data that there are a significant number of visitors now visiting the area designated as the SAC and Ashridge Estate more widely. Consultation with both the National Trust and Natural England and the site visit (below) has indicated that pressures from parking and visitor use (from walking, dogs, picnicking and cycling) are having negative consequences on the ecological value of the landscape, especially the grassland and woodland edge.

5.1.22 The existing visitor survey data provides a good picture of how the central area of the site is being used. However, greater information is required to comprehensively understand how other users are interacting with the site, frequency of visits, origins of all user groups, footfall and routes taken whilst on site along with variations on a seasonal, weekly and daily basis. In addition, it would be useful to understand the site's capacity, both in the central area but also in other areas of the site closer to the peripheral car parks. It is also important to understand how additional visitors likely to arise from growth set out in the Local Plan, in combination with other plans and projects, will change visitor patterns at the site.

5.2 Site visit

5.2.1 **Appendix C** provides target notes and a georeferenced photographic inventory of the HRA walkover survey.

5.2.2 The following threats and pressure were observed during the survey:

- Erosion of rights of way and promoted routes, footpath widening and braiding of footpaths to avoid muddy areas (**Appendix C**, Photos: AC06, AC11, AC14, AC25, AC28, AC29 AC36, AC37, AC38, AC40, AC41);
- Informal paths taken within the woodland (made by walkers or cyclists) (**Appendix C**, Photos: AC5, AC7, AC9, AC12, AC13, AC18, AC20, AC21, AC27, AC32, AC34);
- Compaction and erosion of soil around tree roots (**Appendix C**, Photos: AC13, AC24, AC27, AC36 and AC40);
- Den building (**Appendix C** Photos: AC18 and AC31);
- Fire damage from BBQs or fire pits (**Appendix C** Photo: AC19);
- Grazing by deer and damage by squirrel;
- Ash die back; and
- Damage caused by unofficial car parking on the verges of Monument Drive **Appendix C** Photos: AC42 – AC47).

5.2.3 The site visit indicates that the rights of way network, in particular the promoted and long-distance routes are particularly well used. Recreational use observed whilst on site included walkers, cyclists and people meeting to picnic close to Monument Drive.

6 Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Tring Woodlands SSSI

6.1 Desk study

6.1.1 The part of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC component, which coincides with Tring Woodlands SSSI, is owned by Hertfordshire County Council and leased to Dacorum Borough Council who manage the site. It is located entirely within the Plan area and within the Chilterns AONB. The majority of the SAC contains ancient woodland.

6.1.2 The market town of Tring is located to the north of this component of the SAC, approximately 300m beyond the A41 (**Figure 6.1**). The woodland is located on an escarpment to the south of the town and is linked to Tring via Hastoe Hill road and a PRoW off the A41 underbridge.

6.1.3 The SSSI citation for Tring Woodlands indicates that the site comprises ancient semi-natural beech woodland[35]. It notes that areas of standard ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur)* are associated with the beech woodland. With Holly (*Ilex aquifolium)* and yew (*Taxus baccata)* in its sparse shrub layer on upper slopes, with more variety including dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), field maple (*Acer campestre)*, wayfaring tree (*Viburnum lantana)* and coppiced hazel (*Corylus avellana)* on the lower slopes. It also notes the presence of a small area of mixed larch plantation (*Larix decidua)* and a woodland bird community.

6.1.4 Tring Woodlands SSSI is comprised of one SSSI Unit. This is in an unfavourable – recovering condition due to regeneration targets and canopy cover. It is noted that the condition survey was undertaken in 2009.

6.1.5 Habitat mapping data provided by HERC indicates that the site comprises broadleaved woodland with areas of neutral grassland in the surrounding area. The SSSI unit data indicates the ground flora is representative of NVC W12, with NVC W14 community species also recorded on site[36].

6.1.6 A number of SSSIs are located within 1km of the site. Oddy Hill and Tring Park SSSI is located approximately 500m to its east. This comprises two areas of calcareous grassland situated on a chalk scarp. Dancersend Waterworks SSSI and Dancersend SSSI are located approximately 824m and 988m respectively to its west. These encompass unimproved chalk grassland, scrub, coppiced and regenerating woodland and plantations.

[35] Natural England. Tring Woodlands SSSI Citation. Available at: https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1000452.pdf

[36] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) provide information on the National Classification System which is available at: https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/nvc/

6.1.7 Data received from HERC indicates that the West Leith Farm Fields Front Field LWS, an area of neutral grassland, lies immediately adjacent to the site's north west boundary. A number of other LWSs are located within the immediate surrounding area (within 1km). Pavis Wood lies to its immediate south west and is an area of ancient woodland. Pavis, Northhill and Black Woods, collectively known as Pavis Woods, are managed by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) and comprise 35 hectares of mature beech woodland, scrub and more recently planted woodland, lying on the steep scarp.

Figure 6.1: *Location of Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Tring Woodlands SSSI Component*

Accessibility

6.1.8 The SAC part of the woodlands near Tring can be accessed along public footpaths, bridleways, byways open to all traffic and a restrict byway. The woodland comprises Stubbing's Wood and Groves Wood. There is no open access across the woodland. There are two name boards marking the entrance to the site however it is not well signed beyond the site boundary. With the exception of the byway which runs in a north / south direction between West Leith Farm and Hastoe in a sunken lane, the footpaths which cross the site are not well made. The topography of the site is undulating in nature. There are no interpretation boards or other facilities provided at the site. There are no formal car parks serving the site. There is limited and infrequent informal road verge parking: under the A41 road bridge and to the south of the site off Gadmore Lane. Figure A.5 in **Appendix A** illustrates accessibility across the site.

6.1.9 Tring Woodlands SSSI is located approximately 350m as the crow flies to the west of Tring Park. Tring Park is managed by the Woodland Trust. The Trust promotes the site and organises a number of programmed events; it provides a formal car park for visitors to Tring Park (also used by the Natural History Museum) which could potentially be used to access the SAC woodland. It is noted however that Tring Park is not currently formally linked to the woodland designated as SAC. Access to the SAC from the Tring Park / Natural History Museum car park (to the north of the A41) would require a 500m walk along a right of way. The Woodland Trust were granted planning permission for a new car park in Dawes Field to the east of Hastoe Lane in April 2020. This application also included associated landscaping and the construction of a new welcome structure. This car park, if built, will increase parking provision for 50 additional cars at Tring Park and is closer to the Tring Woodlands component of the SAC. In addition, it is noted that the Woodland Trust are currently considering a formally linked extension to the park. This could potential link the park to the woodland itself, although proposed signage and promotion material is not known at the time of writing.

6.1.10 In 2019 the Woodlands Trust commissioned an assessment of the potential impacts of recreation at Tring Park[37]. It aimed to highlight potential risks from recreational activities, events, and increased promotion of the site. This assessment identified potential issues arising from recreation including the trampling of grassland, damage to trees, nutrient enrichment from dog fouling and disturbance to grazing animals, rare breeding birds and bats. It outlined a number of potential options to mitigate some of these impacts and a package of future survey work. In addition, an assessment of the vulnerable features within Tring Park and a visitor survey was also undertaken[38]. It concluded that the current levels of recreational impact are low and not affecting the site's ecological features. Impacts were shown to be localised and focused along the existing footpath network. The report however recommended a number of beneficial management and monitoring measures. The visitor survey indicated that the most common use of the site was for dog walking and walking with half of interviewees arriving on site by foot. The survey showed that visitors mainly originate from a 5 – 6km radius, from Tring and the neighbouring areas of Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire, but that most originate from within a 2km radius.

[37] Saunders, P., Lake, S. & Liley, D. (2019). Potential Impacts of Recreation on the Woodland Trust's Tring Park Site. Unpublished report by Footprint Ecology.

[38] Saunders, P. & Lake, S. (2019). Ecological Walkover Assessment, Visitors Survey and Identification of Potential Impacts of Recreation on the Woodland Trust's Tring Park Site. Unpublished report by Footprint Ecology.

6.2 Site visit

6.2.1 **Appendix D** provides target notes and a georeferenced photographic inventory of the HRA walkover survey.

6.2.2 The site visit highlighted that opportunities to access the wood by car are limited. The topography makes for challenging walking conditions that limits opportunities for users to leave paths along desire lines (it is noted that the site is not open access). The site visit indicated that the rights of way network which crosses the SAC are clearly defined. There was little evidence of walkers or other users (such as cyclists) having strayed from the paths. During the site visit only one other user (a walker) was observed on site. Evidence of soil compaction caused by footfall was noted to be confined to the rights of way network itself. Trees on the whole are not directly accessible from the rights of way network often due to the site topography and consequently remain free from recreational impacts.

7 Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

7.1 Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI

7.1.1 Ashridge is a key visitor destination with a sub-regional catchment that extends well beyond the limits of Dacorum's administrative boundary. The site is promoted by the National Trust: 'Bring your bike, your dog, your horse or just yourself along to Ashridge Estate - we have trails to suit everyone[39]. Facilities such as the cafe, the promoted routes and the Bridgewater Monument itself serve as a pull for visitors (**Appendix C,** Photo: AC1). The National Trust also organises a range of events which attract high numbers of visitors during certain periods. The seasonal bluebell display has often been promoted in national media[40]. This spring display of bluebells, and the autumn display of trees, act as a further draw to attract people to site.

7.1.2 The town of Hemel Hempstead and market towns of Berkhamsted and Tring are located close to the site, with residential areas of Berkhamstead, at Northchurch and Chiltern Park, located within 500m of the SAC to its south. A number of car parks are located across the site to accommodate visitors, with Monument Drive being used as a primary car parking area (**Appendix C** Photos: AC42 – AC47). There are no parking charges on site and the National Trust does not charge for entry. A voluntary donation box is positioned at the Monument itself (**Appendix C** Photo: AC52).

7.1.3 The site visit highlighted extensive evidence of existing recreational pressure across the SAC at Ashridge. Promoted routes appear to be particularly affected by heavy footfall from the high levels of visitor numbers, with paths noted to be braiding throughout the trees to avoid muddy areas at regular points (example **Appendix C** Photo: AC38). It is noted that the site is open access and desire lines were observed within the woodland across the site. Soil erosion and root damage was also apparent within areas classified as lowland beech and yew woodland priority habitat in the National Trust survey reports. Similar evidence was found at locations comprising broadleaved woodland semi-natural habitat.

7.1.4 Parking is a particular issue on site with erosion clearly visible along the verge of Monument Drive (**Appendix C** Photos: AC42 – AC47). Consultation with both the National Trust and Natural England suggests that visitor numbers are currently affecting the site and also highlights other issues, such as impacts from anti-social behavior (for example but not limited to, mountain bikers and off-road vehicles) and the use of the site by large groups for gatherings.

7.1.5 The effect of soil compaction, root damage, erosion from heavy footfall and inappropriate car parking is likely to affect the beech woodland in the long term, with more immediate local effects observed on the ground flora. Collection of wood and den building is likely to affect the availability of dead wood habitat for the stag beetle. This is a pressure which is specifically highlighted in the SIP which has been prepared for the SAC.

[39] https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ashridge-estate/activities. Site accessed 08/03/21.

[40] *Pers comms*. National Trust's Countryside Manager. 16th February 2021

7.1.6 Consultation with the National Trust indicates that it is working to mitigate recreational effects at Ashridge, with a conservation management plan covering the central area close to Monument Drive where impacts are at their greatest. In addition, evidence of willow fencing was observed during the site visit to protect tree roots and logs had been placed along Monument Drive to restrict unofficial off-road parking within the SAC (**Appendix C** Photos: AC49 – AC51). However, consultation with land managers at the Trust indicated that the sheer number of visitors is making the management of recreational impacts an increasingly difficult task.

7.1.7 Any increase in new development as a result of growth in Local Plan has the potential to increase visitors to the site and add to the existing recreational pressures at the SAC. LSEs of the Local Plan upon this component of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC in terms of public access and disturbance impacts are therefore possible and it is recommended that these be given further consideration in the HRA process through an Appropriate Assessment.

7.2 Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Tring Woodlands SSSI

7.2.1 Tring Woodland is not well signed beyond its boundary, with access restricted to eight linear rights of way which cross the site and no open access. Its location on the Chilterns escarpment means the site's topography is steep, which results in a challenging walk in places for users. The town of Tring is located to its north, approximately 300m beyond the A41. The A41 provides a barrier to the movement of people by foot from Tring, with only two crossing points, at Hastoe Road or via West Leith. Parking is restricted with no formal car park and very few opportunities for informal parking (**Appendix D** Photos: TW14, TW16 and TW18). All potential parking opportunities involve a walk of at least 200m to reach the designated areas of the SAC itself. All these factors limit the accessibility of the woodland to users.

7.2.2 The site visit indicated that the rights of way network which crosses the SAC is not signed from the wider area, however paths are well defined and well-trodden on the site itself (**Appendix D** Photos: TW2 to TW13). There was little evidence of walkers and/or cyclists having strayed from the marked paths. This is likely to be a symptom of the restricted accessibility at the site and also the site's steep topography on the Chilterns escarpment.

7.2.3 Tring Park to the east of the woodland is set up to cater for recreational users, with well-marked footpaths and a good car park provided (**Appendix D** Photo: TW19). The Woodland Trust organise a range of annual events at Tring Park, including the 'Festival of Light' which attract visitors. It is likely that this facility has a greater draw for local people than the woodland itself. Given the nature of the woodland it is anticipated that it has a relatively local patronage.

7.2.4 Any increase in new development as a result of growth in the draft Local Plan has the potential to increase visitors to the site. Whilst this review suggests that existing recreational patronage appears to not be adversely affecting the woodland, new growth proposals in the draft Local Plan may change this baseline. There is the potential for public access and disturbance LSEs to arise in association with the draft Local Plan. It is therefore recommended that this be given further consideration in the HRA process through an Appropriate Assessment.

8 Further work

8.1 Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI

8.1.1 Given the evidence of recreational effects which are currently taking place at this component of the SAC, further, more detailed work is now required to better define these impacts and obtain a better understanding of how the site is being used. It will also be necessary to quantify the impact the Local Plan will have upon the qualifying features of the SAC through increased recreational pressure. If required, it will be necessary to design an appropriate mitigation strategy to ensure no adverse effects occur on the integrity of the SAC. It is recommended that a recreational pressure survey (including condition assessment) and visitor survey be undertaken to inform the next stage of the HRA process – Stage 2 appropriate assessment.

8.1.2 A visitor survey will provide a good picture of visitor behaviour, help to understand how all users are interacting with the site and appreciate where people (of all user groups) are coming from. It will also be important to understand how growth set out in the Local Plan will affect access / visitor levels at the site over the Plan period (alone and in-combination). It would be useful to understand the site's current carrying capacity to determine whether capacity has been reached.

8.1.3 The output of this work will help to define whether increased recreational pressure as a result of growth set out in the Local Plan will cause an adverse impact on site integrity at the SAC. Should adverse impacts be identified this work will also help to design any recreational mitigation which may be required.

8.2 Chilterns Beechwoods SAC: Tring Woodlands SSSI

8.2.1 Whilst evidence of recreational impact on the woodland habitat is considered to be negligible, it will also be necessary to quantify the impact the Local Plan will have upon the qualifying features of the SAC through increased recreational pressure. If required, it will be necessary to design an appropriate mitigation strategy to ensure no adverse effects occur on the integrity of the SAC. Quantification of such impacts through the Appropriate Assessment process is likely to also inform the potential or otherwise for a successful mitigation strategy to be prepared, if appropriate. It is therefore recommended that a recreational pressure survey (including condition assessment) and visitor survey be undertaken to inform the next stage of the HRA process: Stage 2 appropriate assessment.

8.2.2 It is recommended that a visitor survey be undertaken to provide a good picture of user groups and indicate where visitors are coming from. This should include access via land which links Tring Park and the Tring Woodlands areas of the SAC. It is important to understand how growth set out in the Local Plan will affect access / visitor levels at the site over the Plan period (alone and in-combination).

8.2.3 The output of this work will help to define whether increased recreational pressure as a result of growth set out in the Local Plan will cause an adverse impact on site integrity at the SAC. Should adverse impacts be identified this work will also help to design any recreational mitigation which may be required.

9 Conclusions

9.1 Summary

9.1.1 It can be concluded from this study that impacts associated with recreation and high visitor numbers are leading to effects on the Ashridge component of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. The walkover has identified a range of possible causes. Factors include, but are not limited to: land management, promotion of the site, distribution of the paths, demand for recreation, types of recreational use, signage, restrictions (or lack of them), local population growth and environmental conditions. Each of these factors needs to be appreciated in order to understand the nature of impacts affecting the SAC.

9.1.2 It has been possible to quantify some of the impacts associated with recreation at Ashridge as well as other impacts on habitat that were observed during the walkover survey. These include:

- Erosion of rights of way and promoted routes, footpath widening and braiding of footpaths to avoid muddy areas;
- Informal paths taken within the woodland (made by walkers or cyclists);
- Compaction and erosion of soil around tree roots;
- Den building;
- Fire damage from BBQs or fire pits;
- Grazing by deer and damage by squirrel;
- Ash die back; and
- Damage caused by unofficial car parking on the verges of Monument Drive.

9.1.3 The Tring Woodlands SSSI component of the SAC is much less accessible with limited formal parking options and poor signage. Its location on the Chilterns escarpment means that the site's topography is steep, which results in a challenging walk in places for users. As a result, the walkover survey indicated that signs of recreational impact are limited.

9.1.4 It is not possible to quantify the effects of recreation from the walkover survey alone. The effects need to be determined in terms of timescale (short or medium long term impacts), reversibility (can the impacts be reversed or are they permanent), whether or not they are primary or secondary effects, and magnitude of effect (how big are the effects). Specifically, for the HRA process, the evaluation of effects on the qualifying features of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC must be undertaken as part of an appropriate assessment (stage 2 of the HRA process). The features of the SAC are as follows:

1. Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco- Brometalia*); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone
2. *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests; Beech forests on neutral to rich soils
3. *Lucanus cervus*; Stag beetle

9.2 Recommendations

9.2.1 Further work is required to quantify public access and disturbance effects of the Local Plan upon the qualifying features of the SAC as part of the HRA appropriate assessment. If required, this work will inform a potential package of recreational mitigation to ensure no adverse impacts on the integrity of the SAC occur as a result of the Local Plan (alone or in-combination). Further work includes:

- Visitor surveys;
- Understanding of Local Plan growth on future visitor numbers;
- Recreational pressure survey (condition assessment); and
- Where required, further survey work (which may include botanical surveys) to inform and identify mitigation that may be required to address adverse impacts on site integrity.

Appendix A: Accessibility

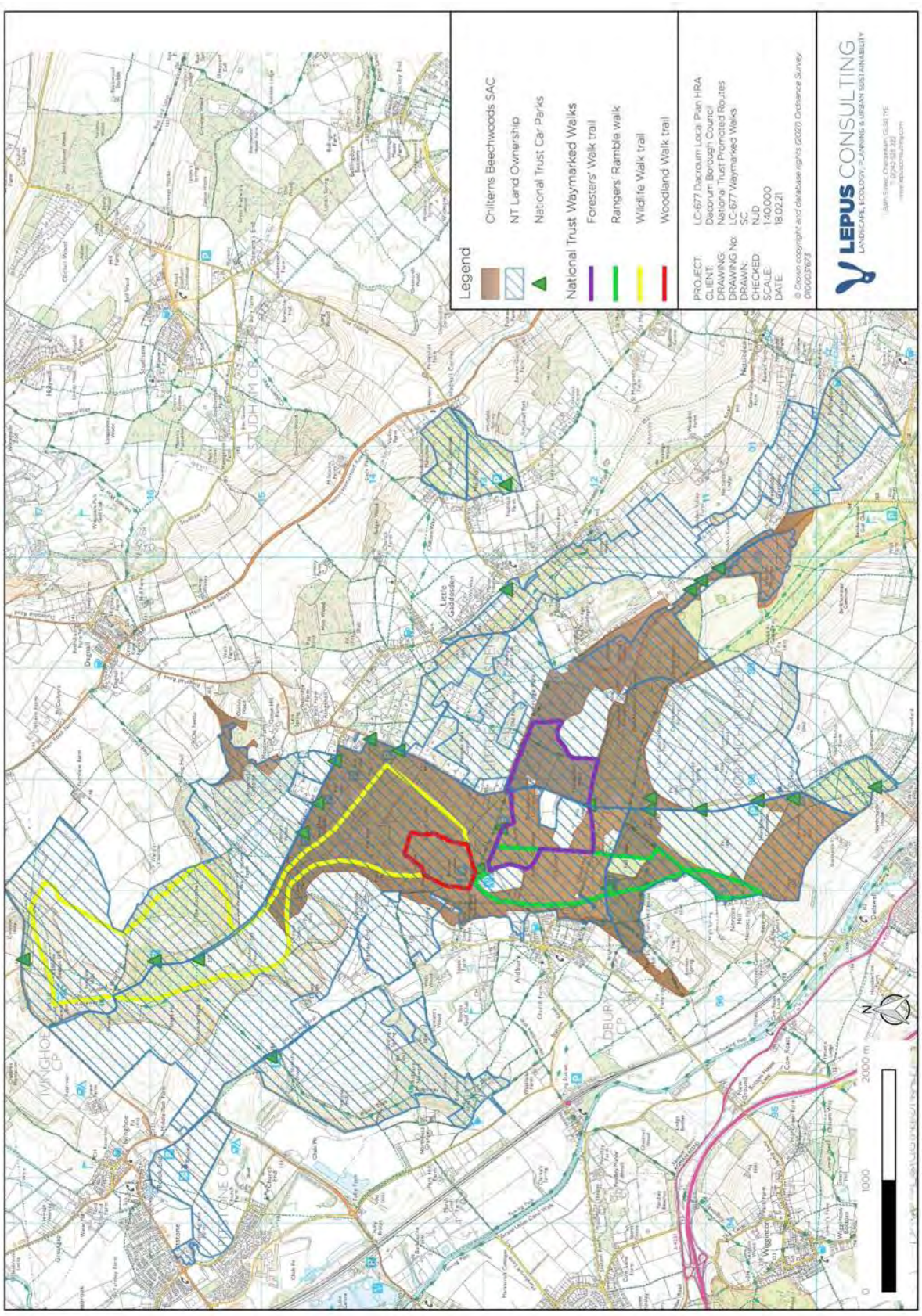


Figure A.1: *National Trust promoted waymarked routes and car park locations at Ashridge*

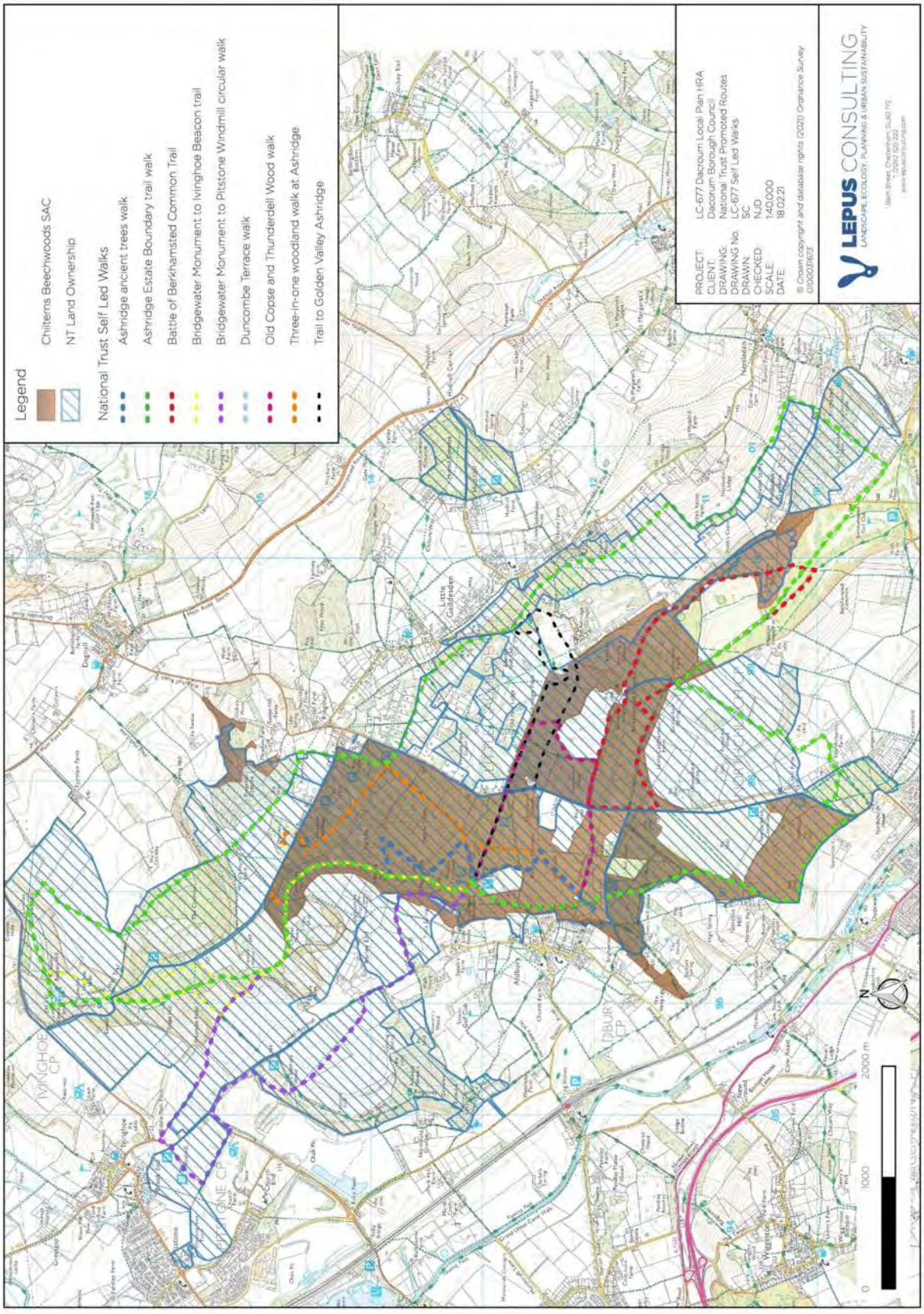


Figure A.2: *National Trust promoted self-led routes at Ashridge*

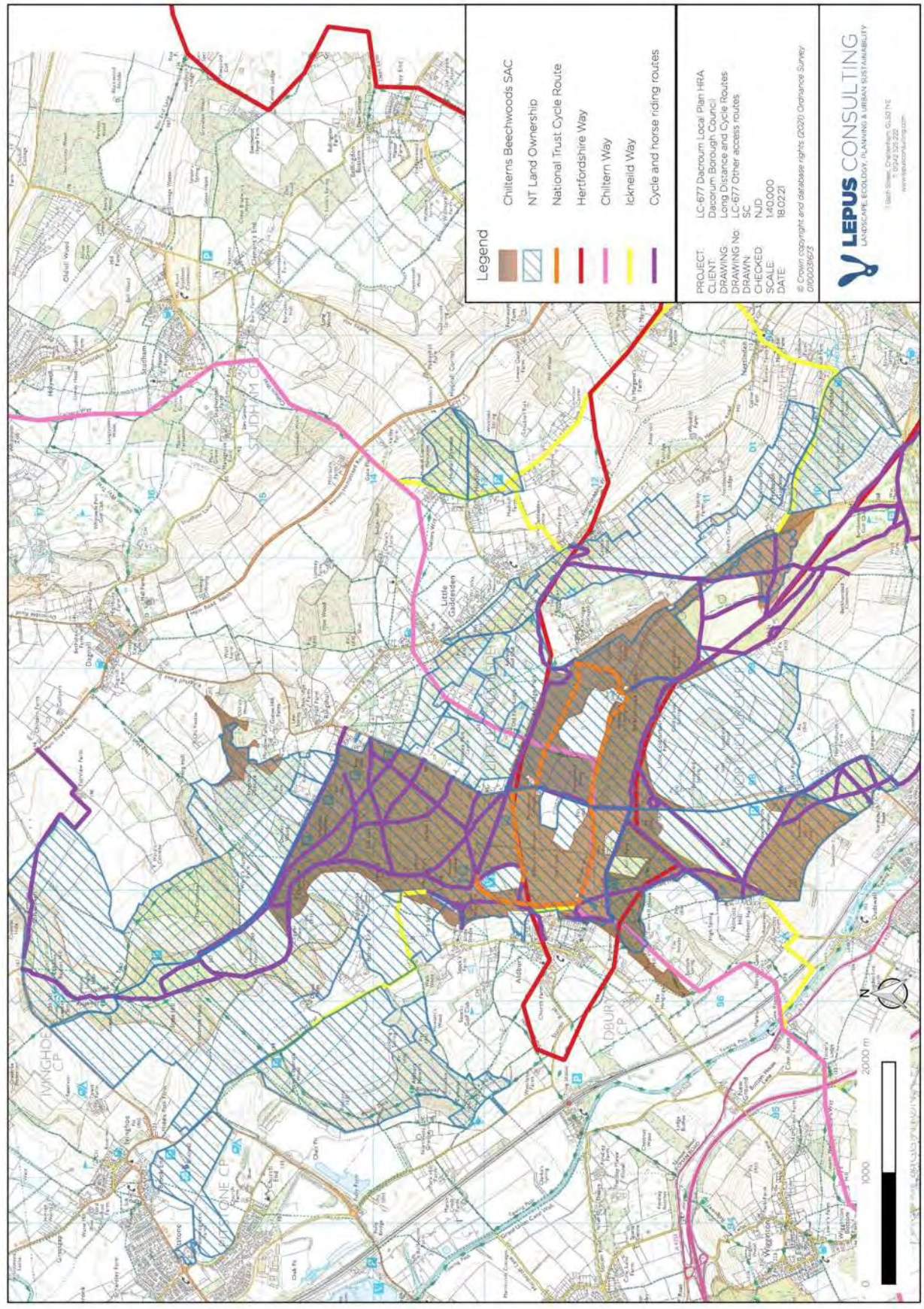


Figure A.3: *Long distance routes, cycle and horse-riding routes crossing Ashridge*

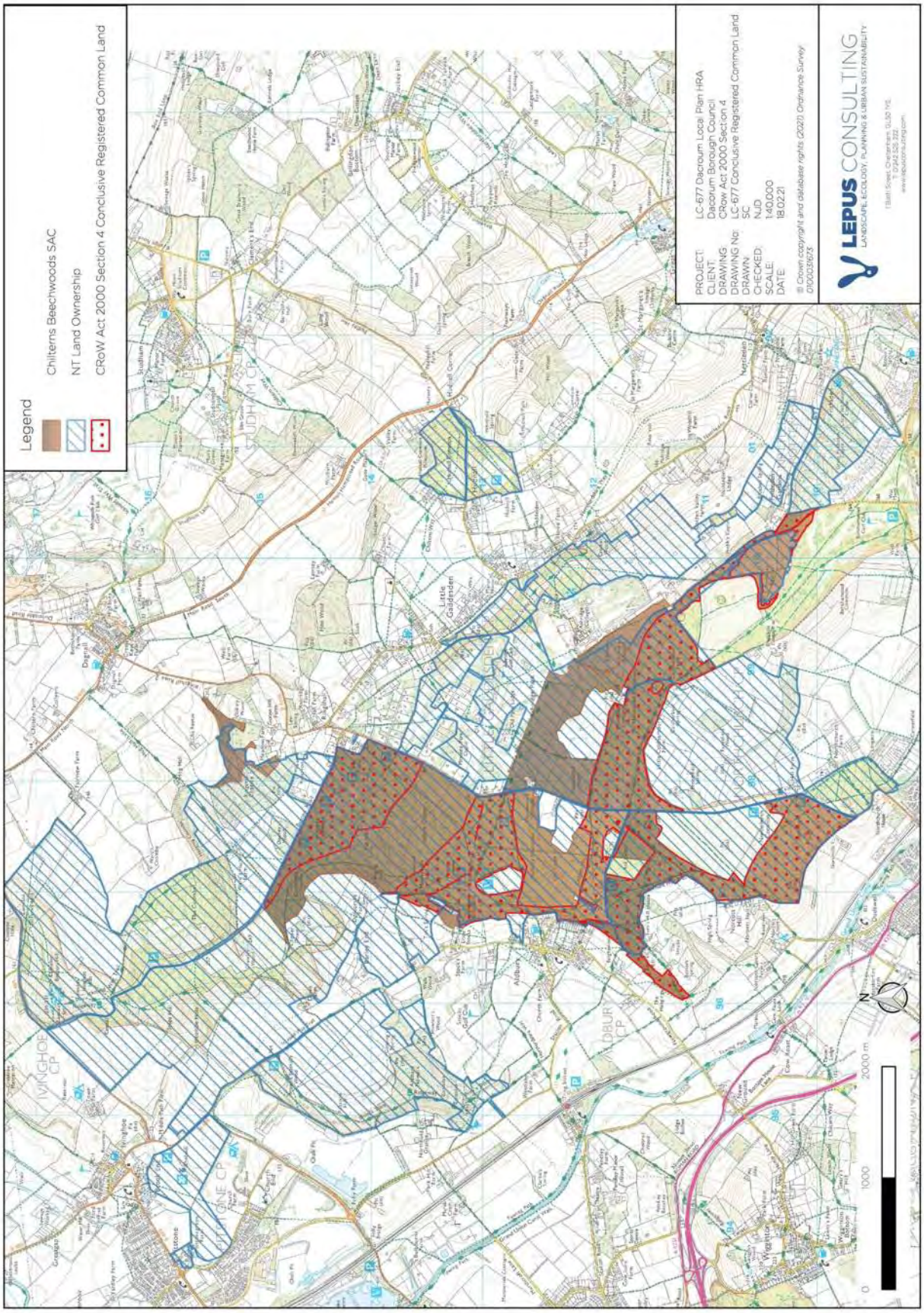


Figure A.4: *Land designated under the CRoW Act 2000 Section 4 as Conclusive Registered Common Land*

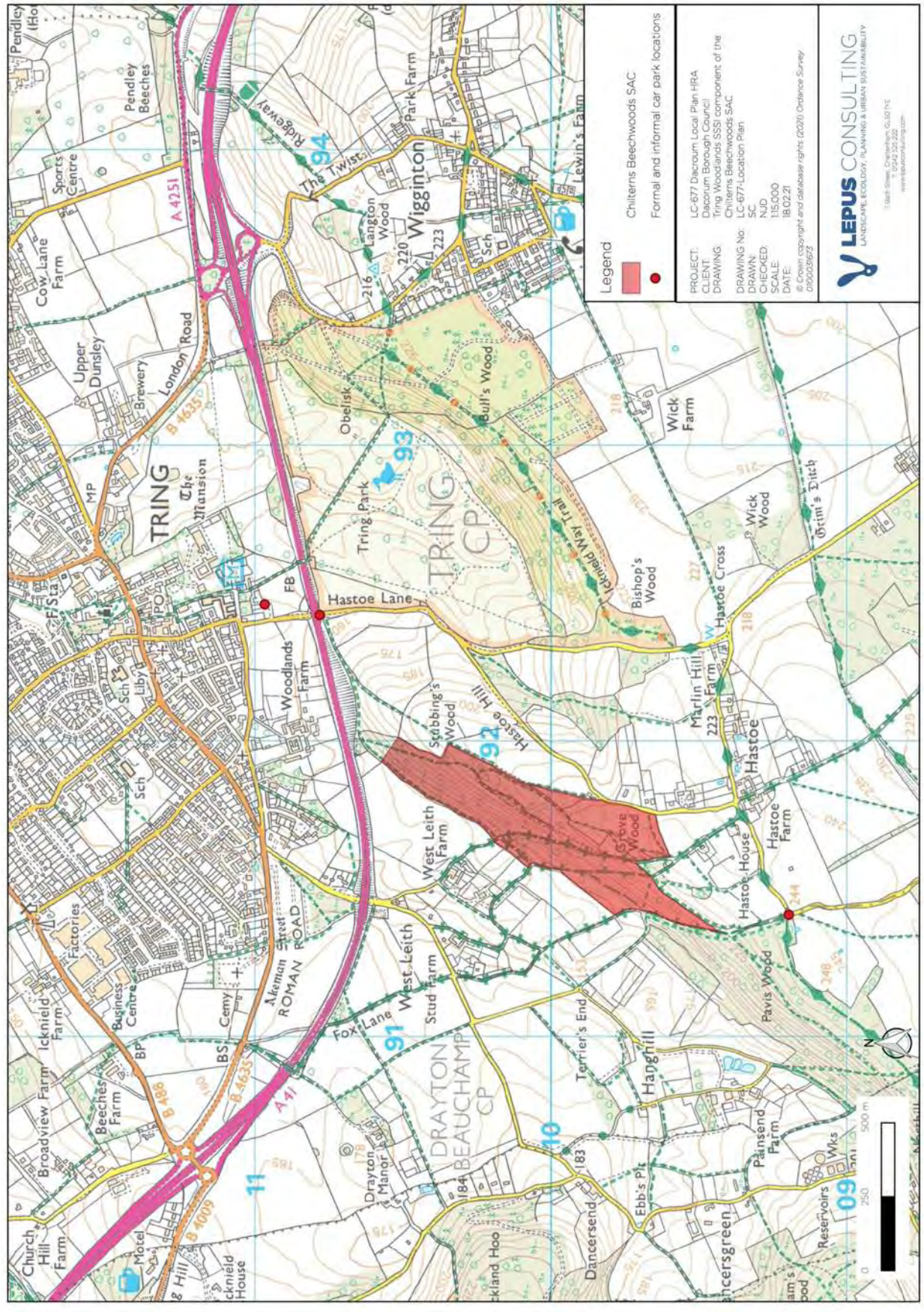


Figure A.5: *Rights of Way at Tring Woodlands SSSI*

Appendix B: Records of Conversation

Record of Conversation: Overview **National Trust's Countryside Manager** **Phone call 16th December 2020** **Meeting 16th February 2021**
Key recreation impacts at the site include: - Parking at Monument Drive and along verges within the SAC. - Dog walking pressures on footpaths and eutrophication. - Eroded and braided footpaths. - Soil compaction. - Impacts on veteran tree roots. - Use of the site by larger groups who have often not requested permission to use the site. - Den building. - No control over visitor numbers – no gate. - Deer and squirrel damage. - Ash die back. - Grid lock on local roads during busy periods. - Dog walking pressures include disturbance to breeding birds. - Anti-social behaviour – cycling off promoted routes, off-road vehicles, fires and BBQs.
Promotion of the site in the national media during the bluebell season can often increase visitor numbers. Footfall across bluebell areas in search of photos results in them becoming badly trodden.
At peak times Monument Drive is closed. People who are turned away park informally on the verges and the roads become grid locked.
The site is above its carrying capacity.
There are conflicts between nature conservation, recreational provision, protection of cultural heritage features and setting and woodland management.
The café is a big draw for visitors. This is leased and therefore there is no ability for the National Trust to change the offering here.
Visitors have often visited the site for generations and remember coming here when they were younger. It is a popular place for families and friends to meet in large groups for picnics and other large social gatherings.
There is no off-site car park. Alternative car park options have been considered, however there have been issues associated with ownership, accessibility etc.
Alternative local recreational destinations include: Wendover Woods, Coombe Hill and Tring Park.

Record of Conversation: Overview **Natural England's Ashridge Responsible Officer** **Phone call 18th December 2020**
Main recreational impacts include the following: - Parking at Monument Drive and along its verges within the SAC is a big issue. - Root compaction of tree caused by high levels of footfall. - There are extensive impacts on semi-improved grassland. - Routes are getting wider, eroded and showing signs of braiding between trees. - Walking and mountain biking are both a particular issue. - Night biking is taking place with head lamps. Bikers do not keep to the marked paths.
Impacts on the key features will be long term but may already be showing in the health of trees.
Monument Drive is the focal point for visitor parking with people walking from this point.
Parking at the satellite car parks has also increased since the onset of the pandemic as visitor numbers have increased. This was an observation and not the result of any official counting.
Ad-hoc parking along the verges of the SAC is a problem during busy periods. The National Trust has since implemented measures to deal with this issue by placing tree trunks along the verges in the places where parking has been problematic. This has gone some way to dealing with that particular issue, however, the management of this issue long term is not known at this point.
Recreational use is high, with impacts outlined above. There is potential for recreational use to increase as more housing development takes place in the wider area.
The National Trust has considered alternative parking options in the past, but nothing has been taken forward as yet.
Wendover Woods provides an alternative mountain biking destination locally.
There may be opportunities to work with local bike shops in the area through an outreach scheme to address cycling impacts e.g. a cycle shop in Berkhamsted.

Appendix C: Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI: Target Notes and Georeferenced Photographic Inventory

Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI HRA Site Walkover Target Notes

Number	Target Note
1	Visitor café. Toilets. Main car park at the top of Monument Drive. Grassland protected to the front of the monument from visitor pressure at time of survey with the use of rope and signage.
2	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). Evidence of tracks (walking, animal and bike tracks) through trees at various points. The main footpath runs through an area of beech woodland. Tracks are muddy in places with evidence of path widening at points. The path is however well made along this stretch with stones at its base. Logs are used to mark the path in places to prevent access into the woodland. Deadwood habitat is noted in the woodland.
3	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). The path narrows along this stretch. The path is crossed by Tom's Hill Road. A car park is located at this intersect.
4	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). Evidence of den building noted in woodland. Evidence of a fire / BBQ noted in grassland off the path between trees. Other tree species now present including oak and silver birch. It is noted that the walkover is outside the optimum survey season.
5	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). Path runs along a field boundary to its south west with woodland to the north east. Paths into the woodland are noted. The footpath is less well made and widening of footpath is noted where people have tried to avoid muddy areas. The path braids into the woodland at points. Footpath is very muddy underfoot. Evidence of tracks into woodland on both sides.
6	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). More evidence of footpath widening and braiding to avoid muddy areas is present. Footpath is very muddy underfoot. Evidence of tracks into woodland on both sides.
7	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). More evidence of footpath widening and braiding to avoid muddy areas. Footpath is very muddy underfoot. Evidence of tracks into woodland on both sides. Tree roots exposed, eroded and trampled.
8	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). Path is better made at this point with stones within track base. Young planted beech trees are present at this point.
9	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). Replanted area of silver birch woodland outside SAC designated area to west of path. Wet. Evidence of woodland clearance of spruce. Signage provided to indicate purpose of work.
10	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). Logs placed along the road verges to prevent informal parking on woodland verges.
11	Ranger's Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts) and Foresters' Walk Trail (marked clearly with purple signposts). Ancient and veteran trees noted within woodland. Path is very wide, muddy underfoot. Evidence of path widening, and braiding noted. Tree roots exposed and trampled. Evidence of bluebell shoots noted within trampled areas along footpath edges.
12	Cleared area of trees noted to east of path outside SAC designation.
13	Foresters' Walk Trail (marked clearly with purple signposts). Ancient and veteran trees noted within woodland. Path is very wide, muddy underfoot. Evidence of path widening, and braiding noted. Tree roots exposed and trampled.
14	Monument Drive. Verges protected by logs laid along verges. Car parking pockets marked through use of laid logs. Significant evidence of car parking erosion in these areas

Number	Target Note
	with bare muddy soil. Significant signs of erosion, soil compaction, widening on footpaths either side of Monument Drive with bare muddy soil.
15	Ancient and veteran trees around main visitor hub protected through the use of natural fencing to protect visitor erosion by restricting access.

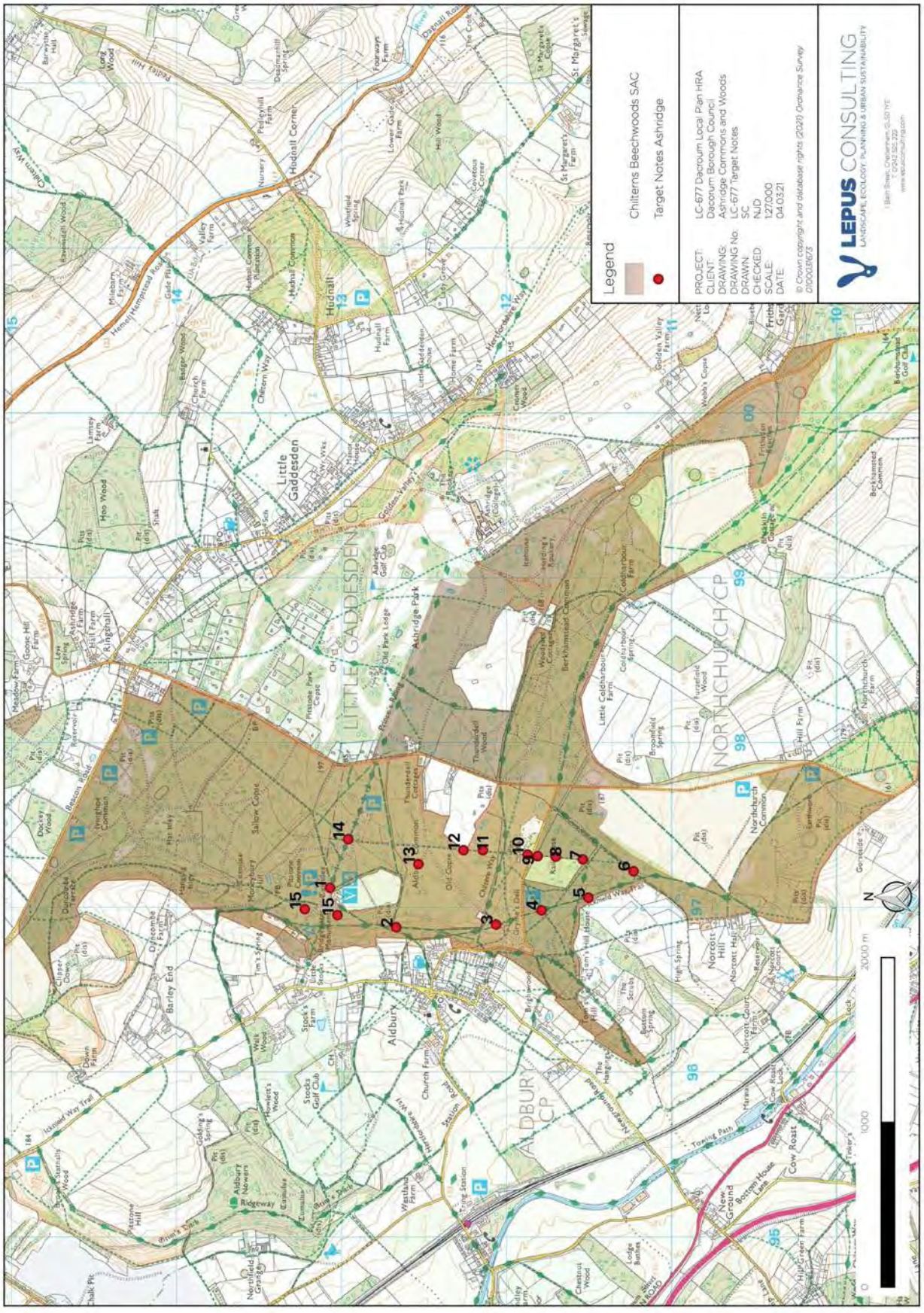


Figure C.1: *HRA Site Walkover Target Notes – Ashridge Common and Woods SSSI*

PHOTO AC1

Visitor café. Toilets. Main car park at the top of Monument Drive. Grassland protected to the front of the monument from visitor pressure at time of survey with the use of rope and signage.

SP 97064 13074

PHOTO AC2

National Trust interpretation board showing routes promoted by the National Trust.

SP 97128 13044

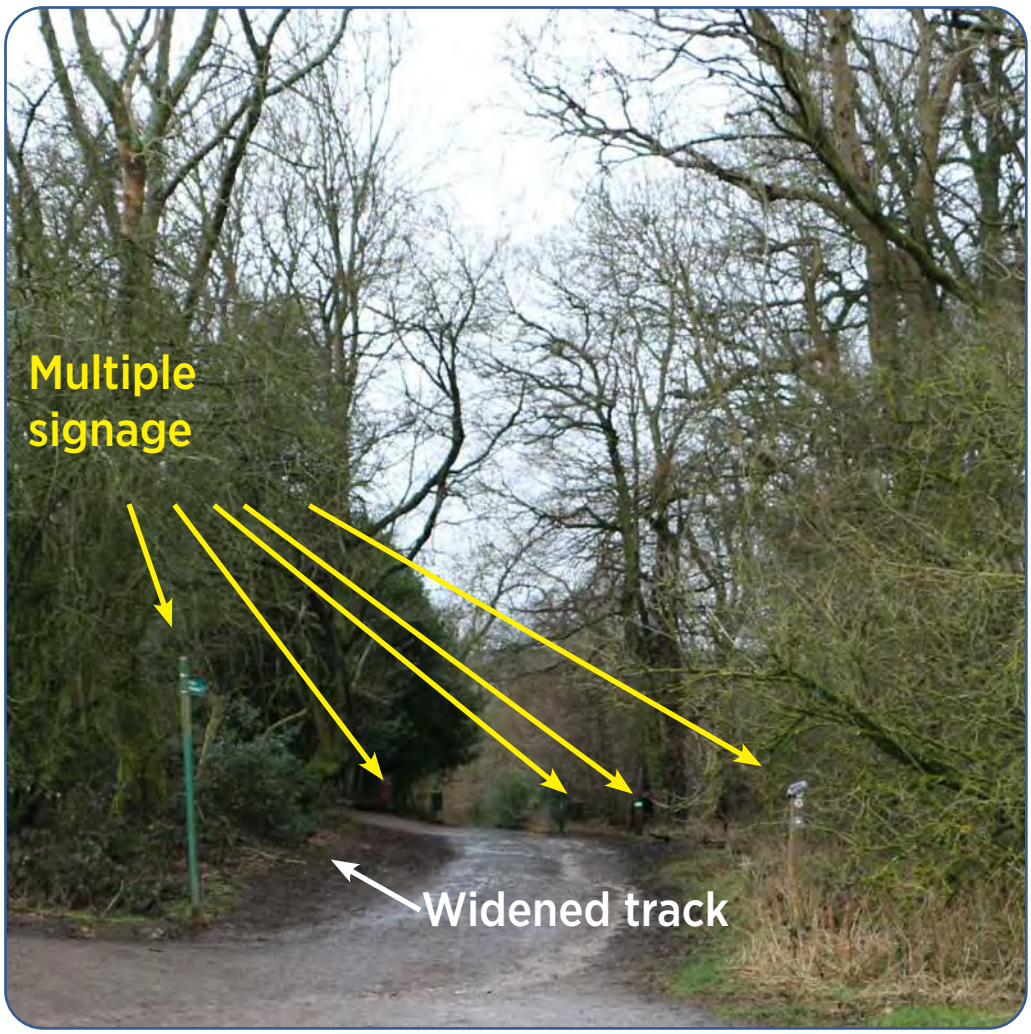


PHOTO AC3

Entrance to the woodlands south of the visitor centre. There are numerous different signs for various routes. There is also evidence of path widening and receeding vegetation.

SP 96980 12972

PHOTO AC4

The Boundary Trail complete with waymarker. Picture illustrates a desire line into SAC qualifying habitat and evidence of route widening through high levels of visitor use.

SP 96974 12965

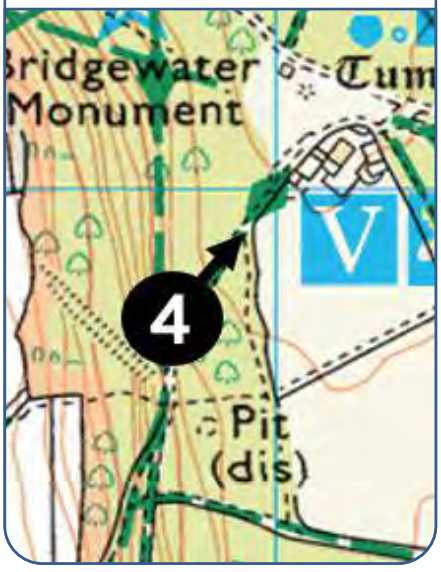


PHOTO AC5

Desire line directly into SAC woodland habitat.

SP 96899 12820

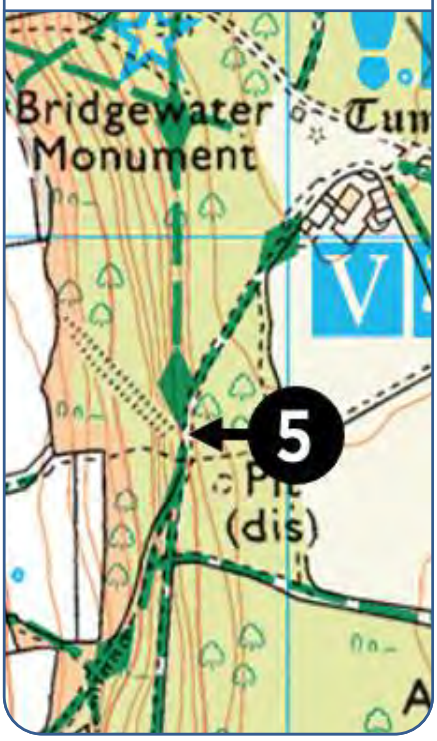


PHOTO AC6

Rangers' Ramble waymarked route (marked clearly with green signposts). More evidence of footpath widening and braiding to avoid muddy areas. Footpath is very muddy underfoot. Evidence of tracks into woodland on both sides.
SP 96899 12820

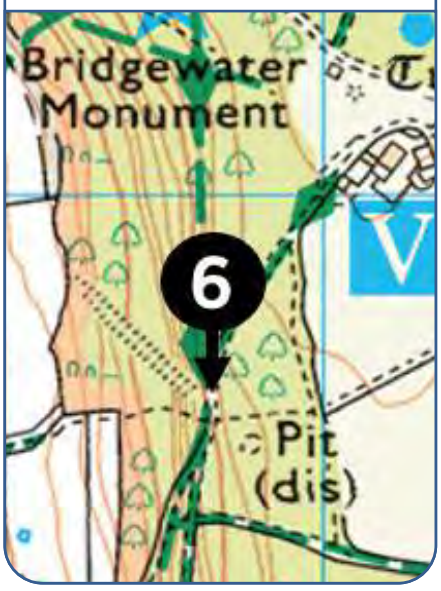


PHOTO AC7

Large desire line path established amongst other uses, by cycling.

SP 96901 12775

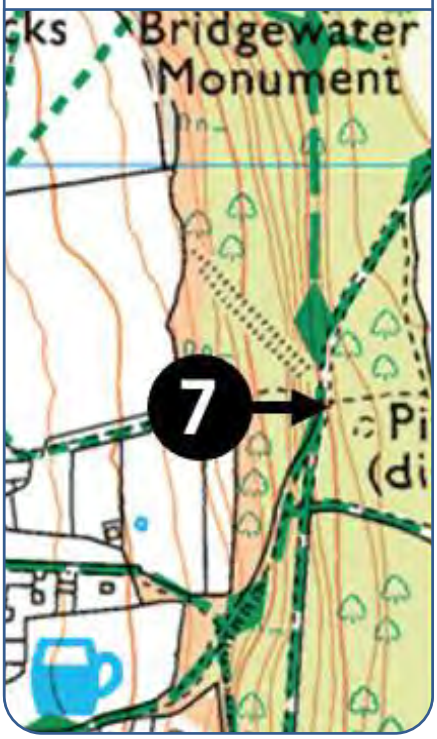


PHOTO AC8

Bridleway interchange.

SP 96901 12775

PHOTO AC9

Desire line into SAC beech woodland (qualifying feature).

SP 96871 12475

PHOTO AC10

Footpath and bridleway interchange with associated path and habitat erosion.

SP 96866 12425

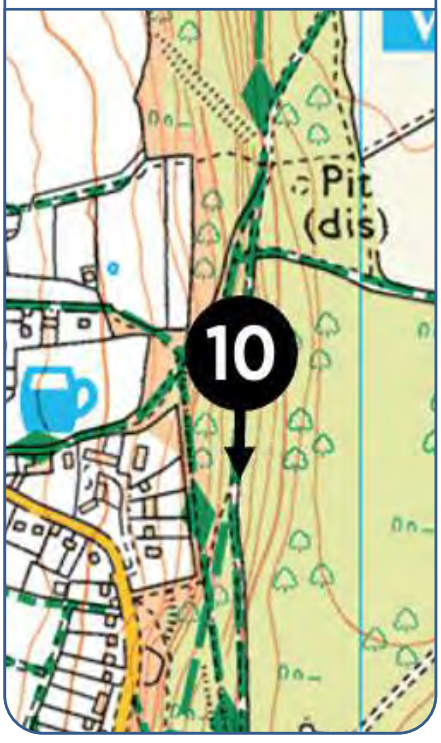


PHOTO AC11

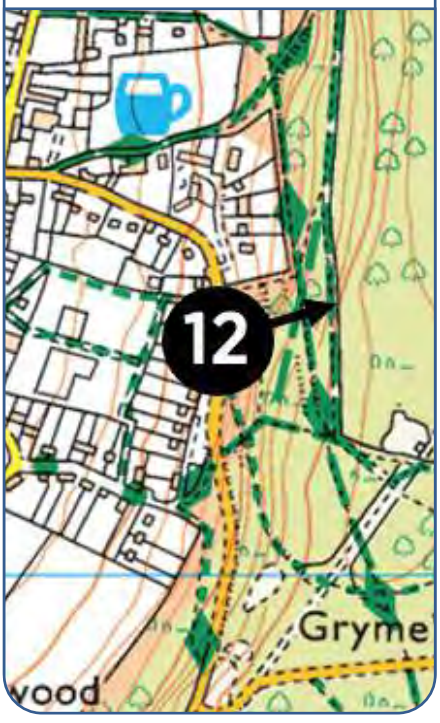
Path widening and habitat loss.

SP 96871 12345

PHOTO AC12

Desire line winds through the SAC qualifying feature of beech woodland.

SP 96876 12278



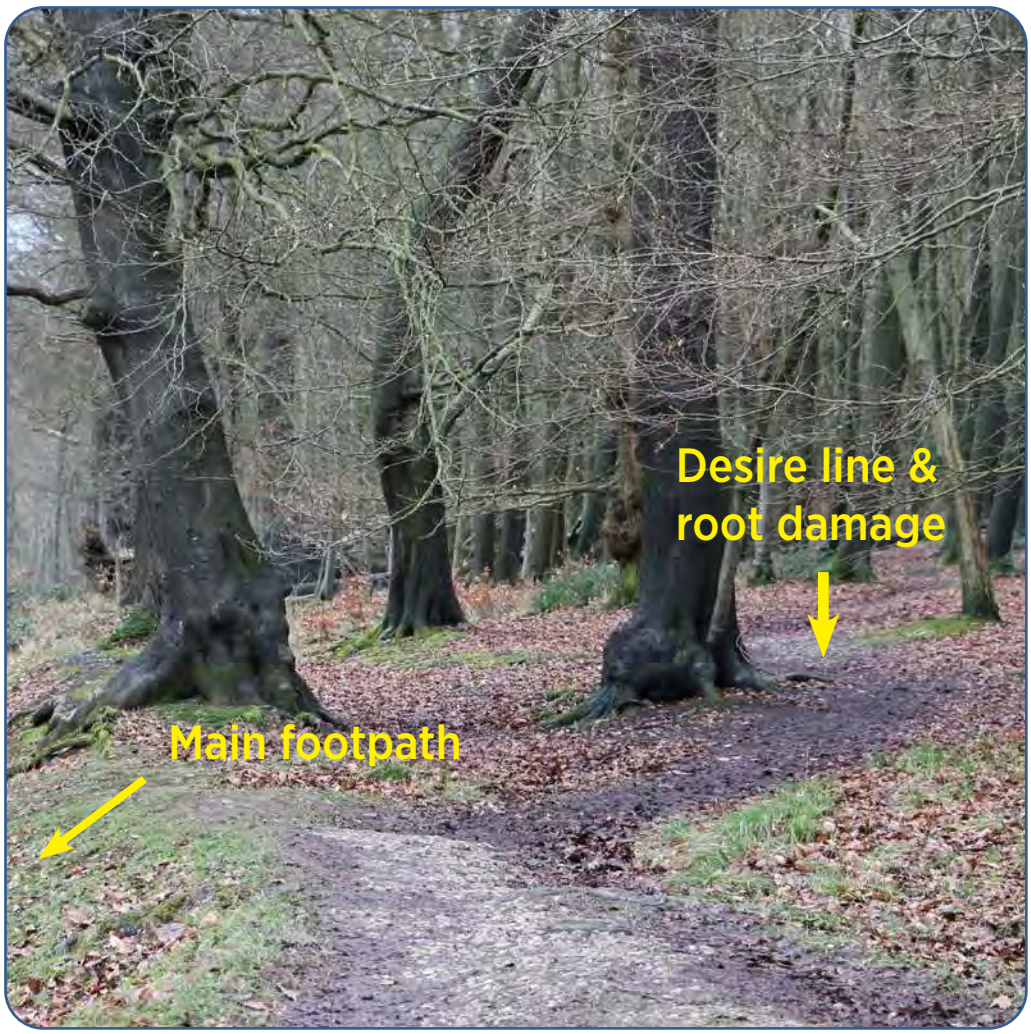


PHOTO AC13

Desire line winds through the SAC qualifying feature of beech woodland.

SP 96878 12223

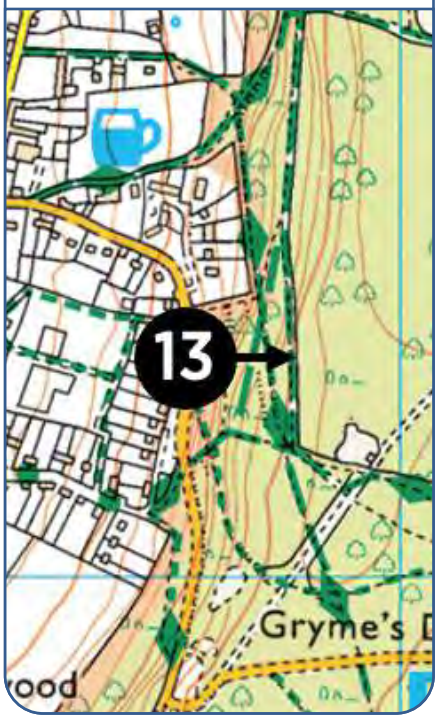


PHOTO AC14

Chiltern Way intersection used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Path erosion and habitat loss is evident.

SP 96874 12155

PHOTO AC15

Rangers' Ramble signage raising awareness of woodland habitat. No advice to keep to paths or avoid damange to habitat.

SP 96904 12025

PHOTO AC16

Footpath through woodland which appears to transition from beech to oak and birch.

SP 96931 11972

PHOTO AC17

Tom's Hill Car Park.
SP 96958 11897

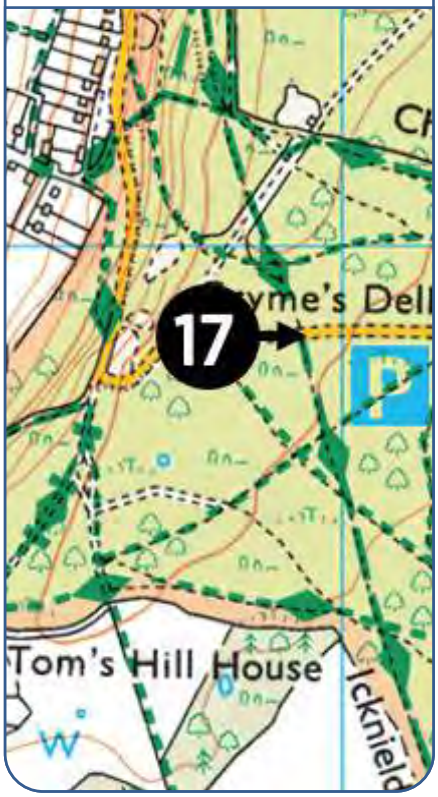


PHOTO AC18

Bivouac and desire lines.
SP 96988 11674

PHOTO AC19

Evidence of a fire and desire lines into the birch woodland of the SAC.

SP 97036 11616

PHOTO AC20

Desire line and main route of the Icknield Way. Departure leads to habitat impacts and the creation of an island. Loss of flora due to trampling.

SP 97143 11281

PHOTO AC21

Desire line through bracken.
SP 97153 11246

PHOTO AC22

Path spread evident along the left hand path.

SP 97181 11176

PHOTO AC23

Many routes pass through the woodland. Each are signed in a different style.

SP 97206 11226

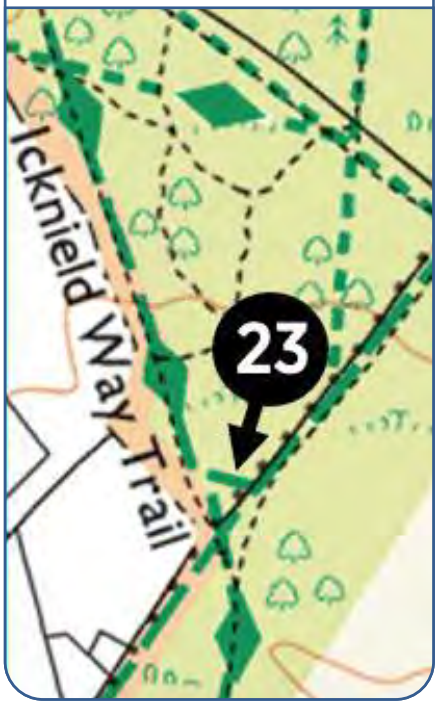


PHOTO AC24

Vehicle tracks along the main track to the left; another main route has developed to the right. The two routes (one bridleway) have created a wide ride associated with extensive trampling and compaction from vehicles. The trampling impacts the ground flora and tree roots.

SP 97248 11274

PHOTO AC25

Bridleway linking the Hertfordshire Way and Icknield Way long distance paths is encroahing on SAC woodland and ground flora.

SP 97348 11401

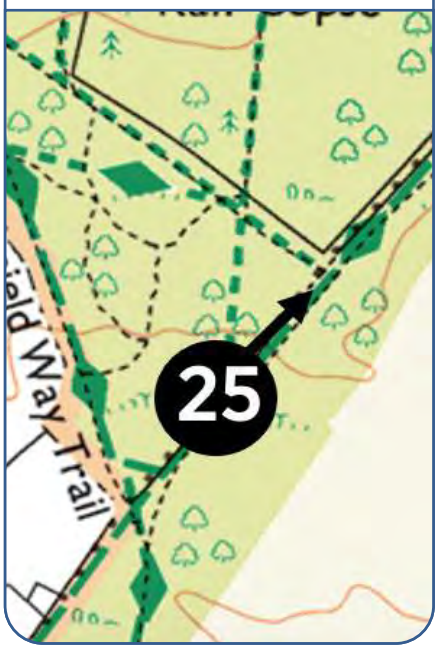


PHOTO AC26

National Trust information, health and safety notice about ancient woodland and its management.

SP 97341 11379

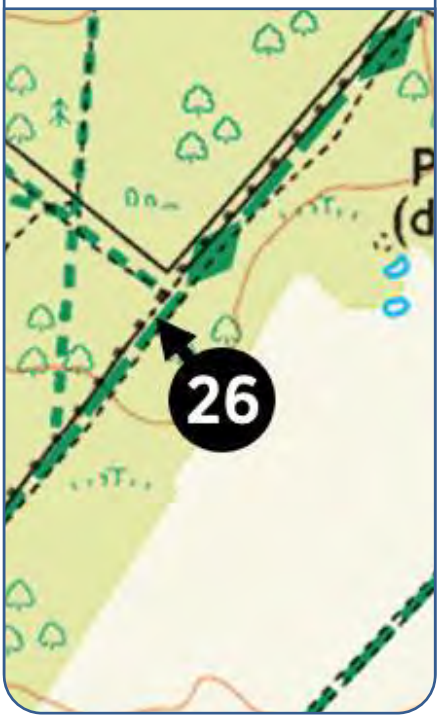


PHOTO AC27

Desire lines are a frequent occurrence. This particular desire line crosses tree roots and ground flora as it leads away from the Hertfordshire Way.

SP 97341 11379

PHOTO AC28

Soil compaction associated with the paths across clay soils leads to surface water retention.

SP 97389 11458

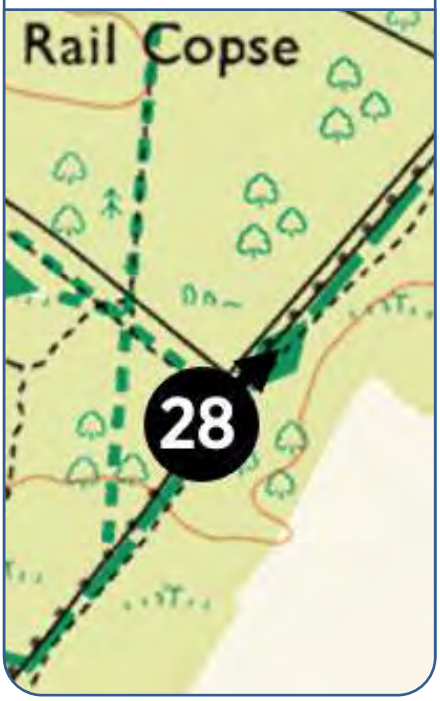


PHOTO AC29

Path interchange and extensive impact of trampling.

SP 97284 11483

PHOTO AC30

Long ride with path encroachment.

SP 97303 11614

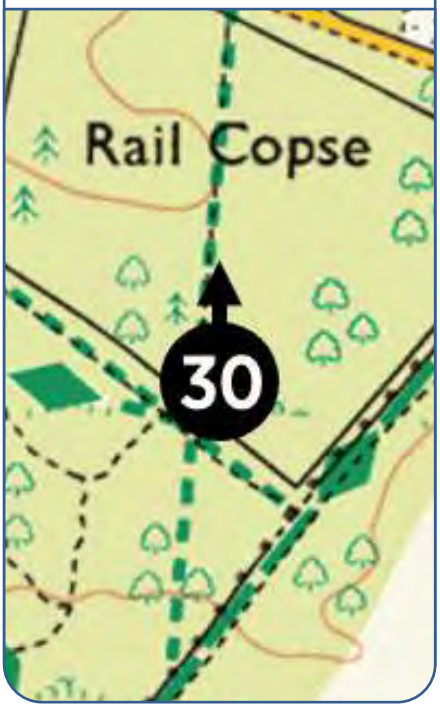


PHOTO AC31

Bivouac in a woodland area that contains young trees including pine.

SP 97303 11662

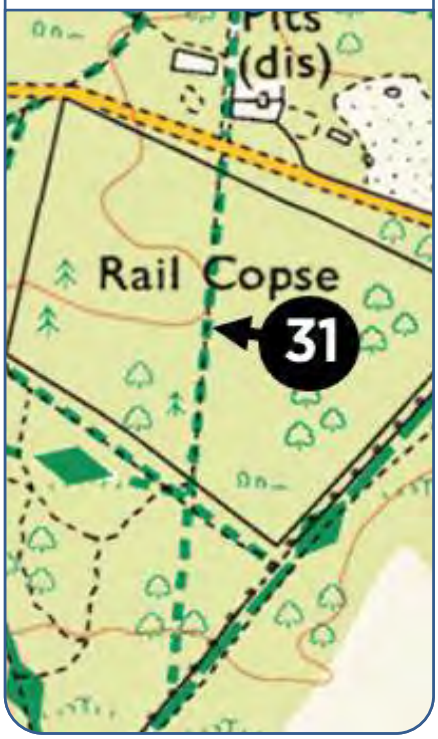


PHOTO AC32

Desire lines permeate the woodland.

SP 97308 11719

PHOTO AC33

Hard surfaced paths are unusual but could play an important role in resolving path spread.

SP 97315 11816

PHOTO AC34

Desire line through bracken dominated scrub.

SP 97341 12122

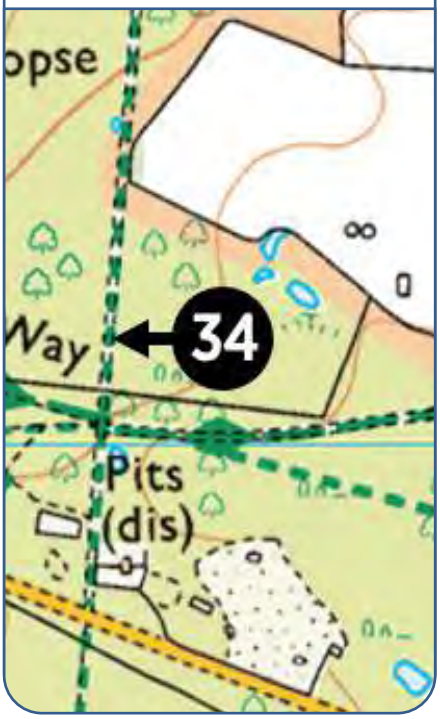


PHOTO AC35

'No horses' sign post which once stood at the edge of the path. The path has since stretched and impacts the woodland.

SP 97364 12380

PHOTO AC36

Panoramic perspective of the 'no horses' route. Horses appear to be the least of the problem here; the path has spread into the habitat, roots and soil are compacted, ground flora is lost or transformed as the balance of species changes in response to the disturbed conditions.

SP 97364 12380

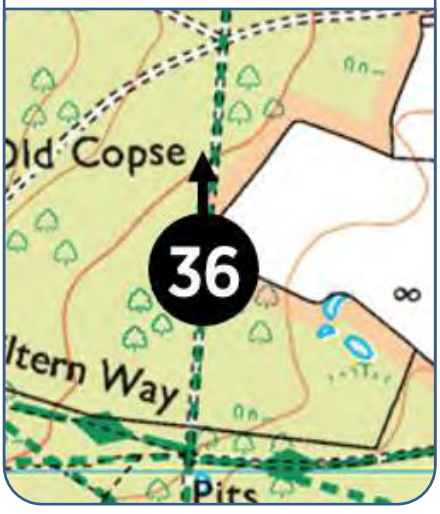


PHOTO AC37

Visitors walk off the Chiltern Way bridleway.

SP 97376 12007

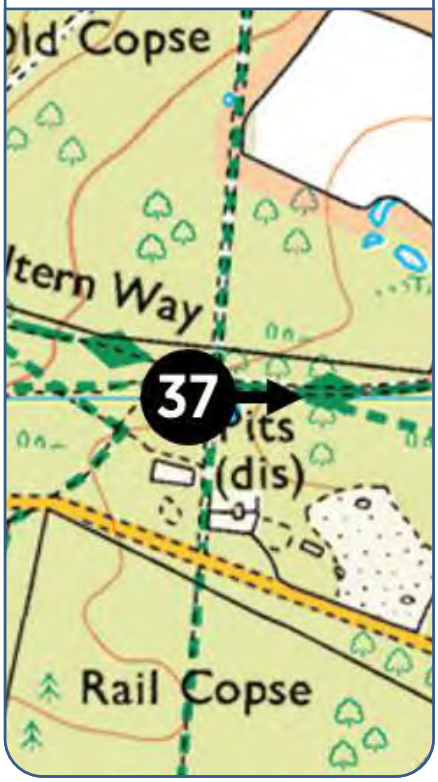


PHOTO AC38

Route damage around a tree which has become isolated within the expanded path.

SP 97339 12107

PHOTO AC39

Bluebells, an ancient woodland indicator species that is not associated with disturbed habitats, are trampled at the edge of the path.

SP 97344 12155

PHOTO AC40

Root damage. The path has widened and now encroaches into the woodland habitat.

SP 97354 12265

PHOTO AC41

Widened path; coppice woodland with evidence of desire lines.

SP 97374 12510

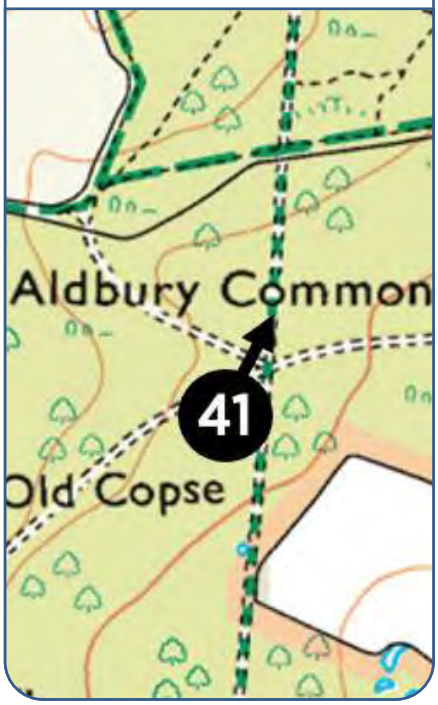


PHOTO AC42

This photo shows the location and placement of felled trees to create car parking bays in and around Monument Drive.

SP 97409 12937

PHOTO AC43

Logs are used to manage car parking.

SP 97284 13010

PHOTO AC44

Parking stretches along the entire length of Monument Drive.

SP 97394 12962

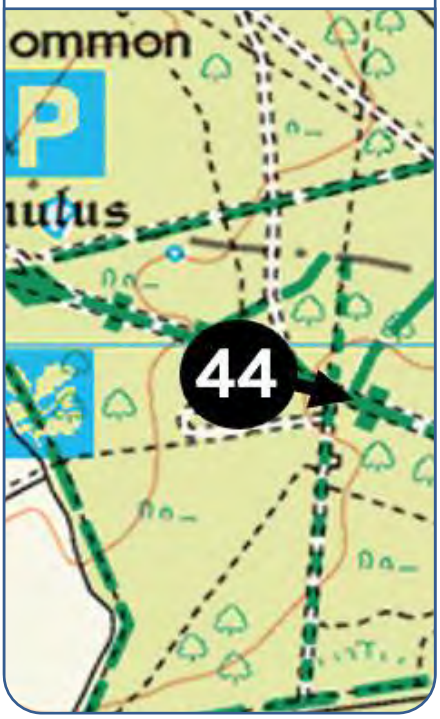


PHOTO AC45

The Bridgewater Monument, car parking and road infrastructure.

SP 97164 13057

PHOTO AC46

Ashridge College at the end of the avenue.

SP 97129 13082

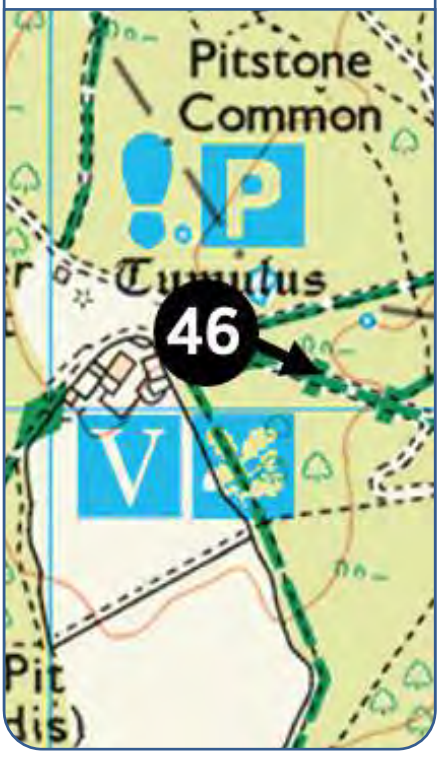


PHOTO AC47

Parking bays on Monument Drive (BOAT).

SP 97434 12945

PHOTO AC48

Bridleway entrance to the northern part of the SAC.

SP 97006 13140

PHOTO AC49

Tree protection.
SP 97056 13072

PHOTO AC50

Positive message about access management over amenity grassland.
SP 97039 13065

PHOTO AC51

Grassland protected to the front of the monument from visitor pressure at time of survey with the use of rope, brash barriers and signage.

SP 97039 13065

PHOTO AC52

'Everyone needs nature' donation box in the car park.

SP 97126 13055

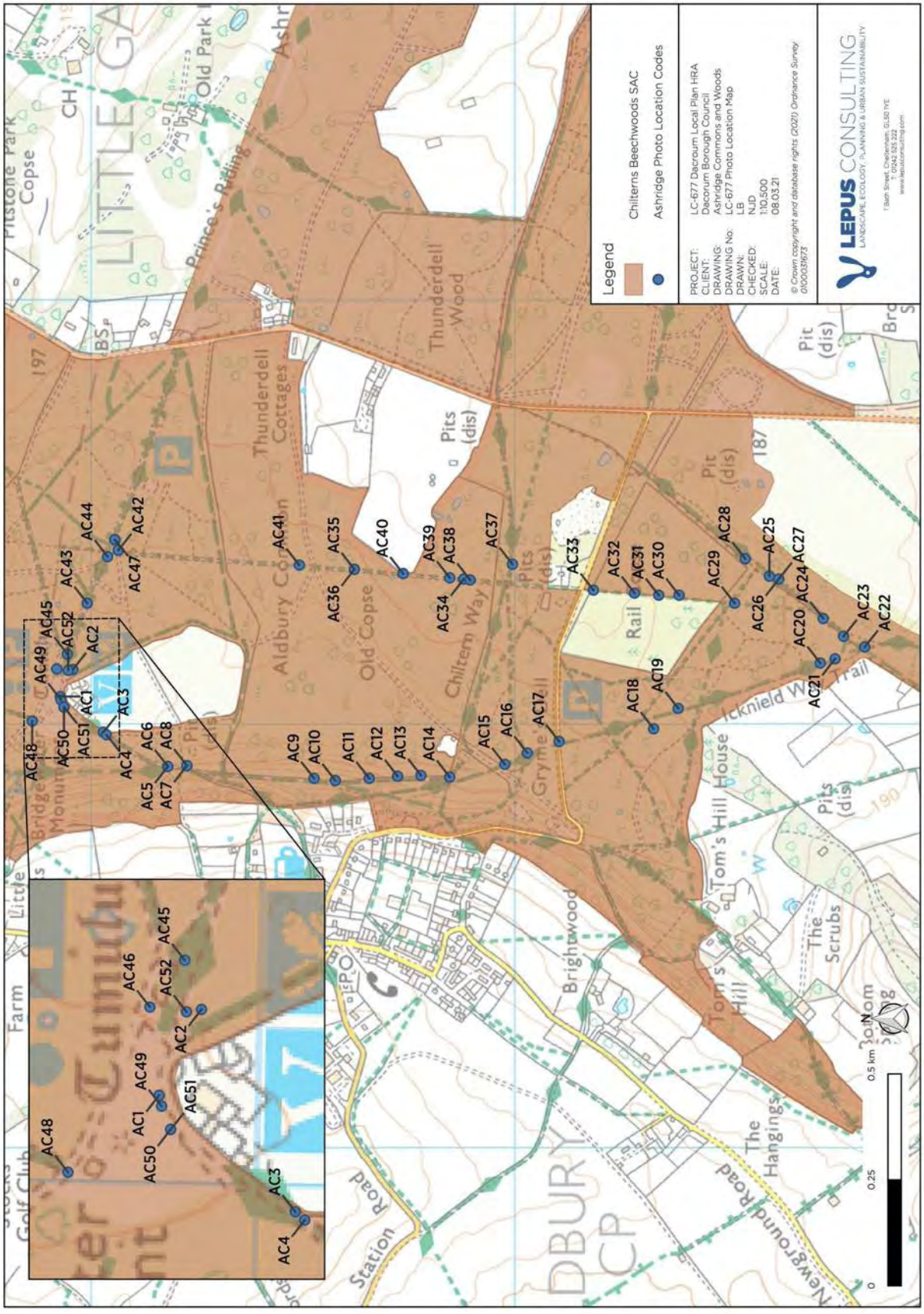


Figure C.2: *HRA Photographic Inventory Photo Location Map – Ashridge Common and Woods SSSI*

Appendix D: Tring Woodlands SSSI: Target Notes and Georeferenced Photographic Inventory

Tring Woodlands SSSI HRA Site Walkover Target Notes

Number	Target Note
1	Grove Wood entrance to Tring Woodlands SSSI. No parking permitted. Access only on foot.
2	Parking point off Hastoe Hill road. Footpath and bridleway signage toward Tring Woodlands SSSI and also to adjacent nature reserve Pavis Wood.
3	Paths into the SAC well marked, signed and trodden.
4	Paths follow western SAC boundary along bottom of escarpment. Footpath within well defined sunken right of way. No evidence of people straying off the marked path at this location – predominantly due to the topography of the site at this location with the steep embankment rising to the east of the path and dropping to the west of the path.
5	Path is made with stone base along the length of the sunken lane. One visitor recorded on site walking.
6	Steep path north east / south west direction into SAC. Less well made although well marked and well-trodden. Woodland on both sides of path making the extent of the path. No evidence of people straying into woodland.
7	Path heads in a north / south direction towards West Leith. Path well signed and marked.
8	Path heads in a north / south direction towards Hastoe House and parking area. Again, the path is well marked with no evidence of people straying into the woodland. Coppice woodland noted.
9	Path runs along the south eastern boundary of the SAC at this point. A grass field is located on one side (outside the SAC) and the woodland on the other. The woodland boundary is well defined with hawthorn and blackthorn. Access off the path into the SAC would be difficult and no evidence of access into the SAC from this path is noted.
10	Evidence of off-road informal parking noted. Damage to verge. Outside of SAC.
11	Evidence of off-road informal parking noted. Damage to verge. Outside of SAC.
12	Evidence of off-road informal parking noted under A41 bridge. A footpath extends from this location across a field (approx. 230m) into the SAC.
13	Woodland Trust Tring Park car park. Well managed. Good surface. Marked bays. Bus stop. Cycling storage facilities. Routes signed into Tring Park.

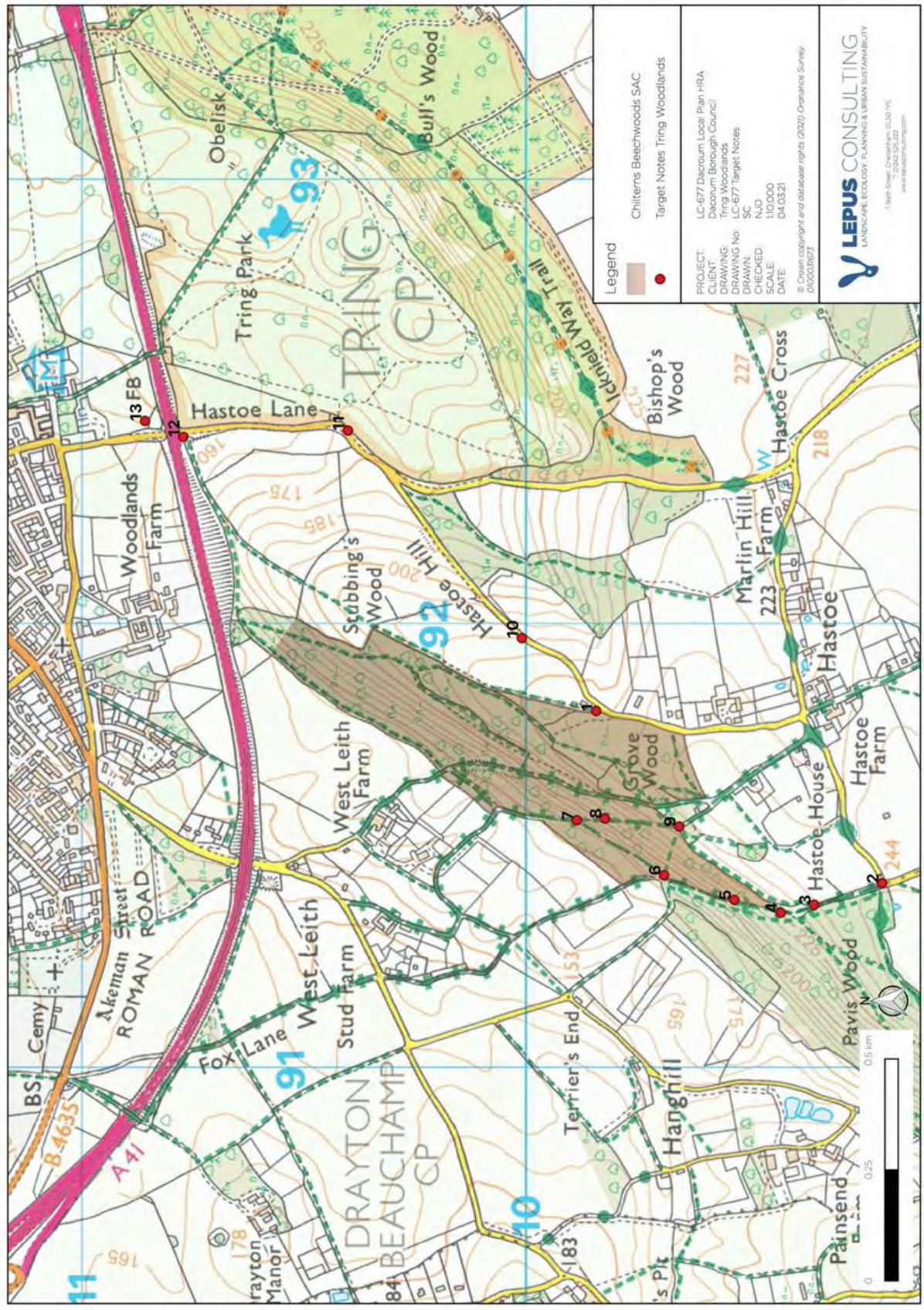


Figure D.1: *HRA Site Walkover Target Notes – Tring Woodlands SSSI*

PHOTO TW1

Parking point off Shire Lane and Gadmore Lane. Access to the Ridgeway National Trail which runs east to west. Also access to a Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) which runs north through SAC woodland to Duckmore Lane.

SP 91419 09186

PHOTO TW2

The BOAT follows a clearly defined path through a deep 'sunken' track and follows the edge of the SAC boundary. Topographic conditions, i.e. the steep valley sides, make access into the SAC woodland very difficult.

SP 91385 09575

PHOTO TW3

Interchange of access routes. All highway routes are clearly defined which suggests they are regularly used. No evidence of straying from the access routes is evident.

SP 91422 09677

PHOTO TW4

Clearly defined bridleway passes through the SAC Woodland.

SP 91503 09802

PHOTO TW5

The route of a restricted byway runs in a northerly direction with the SAC on either side of the established track.

SP 91558 09886

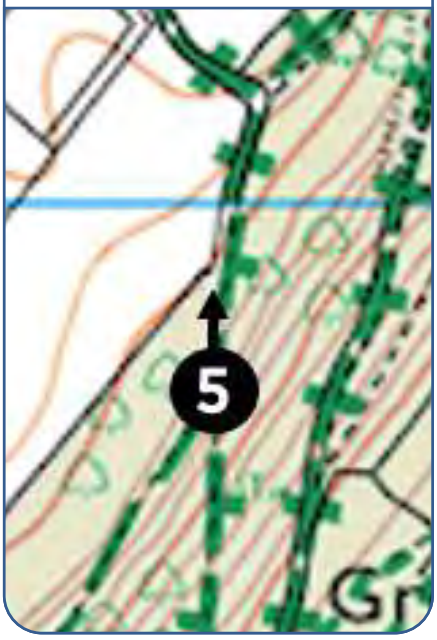


PHOTO TW6

The restricted byway runs in a southerly direction at this point. The track is well defined and passes through the SAC woodland which can be seen on either side.

SP 91558 09864

PHOTO TW7

Hazel coppice stools in the SAC. No evidence of recreational impact was observed.

SP 91552 09749

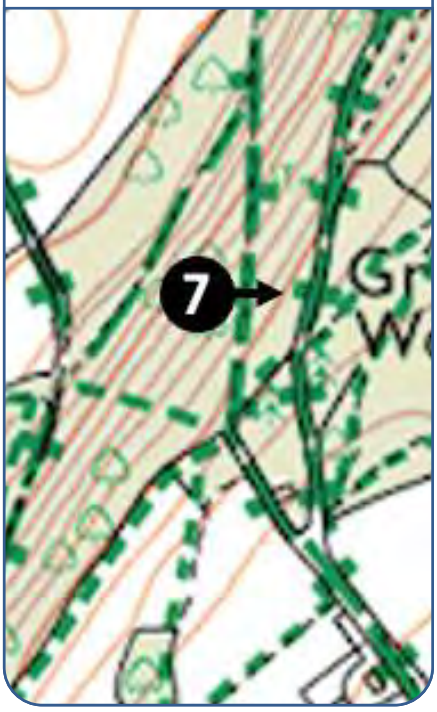
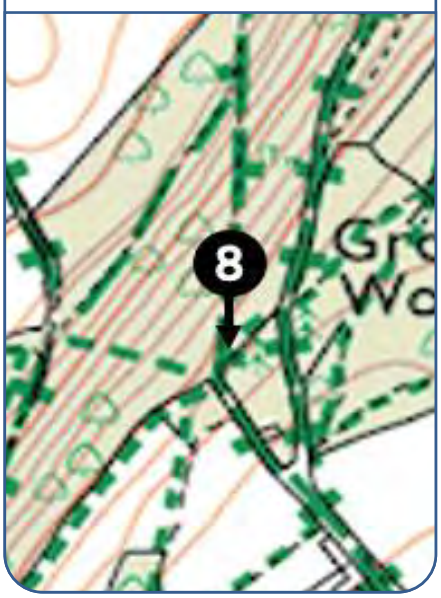


PHOTO TW8

The restricted byway leads south through the SAC woodland. Access follows the well defined track.

SP 91552 09749



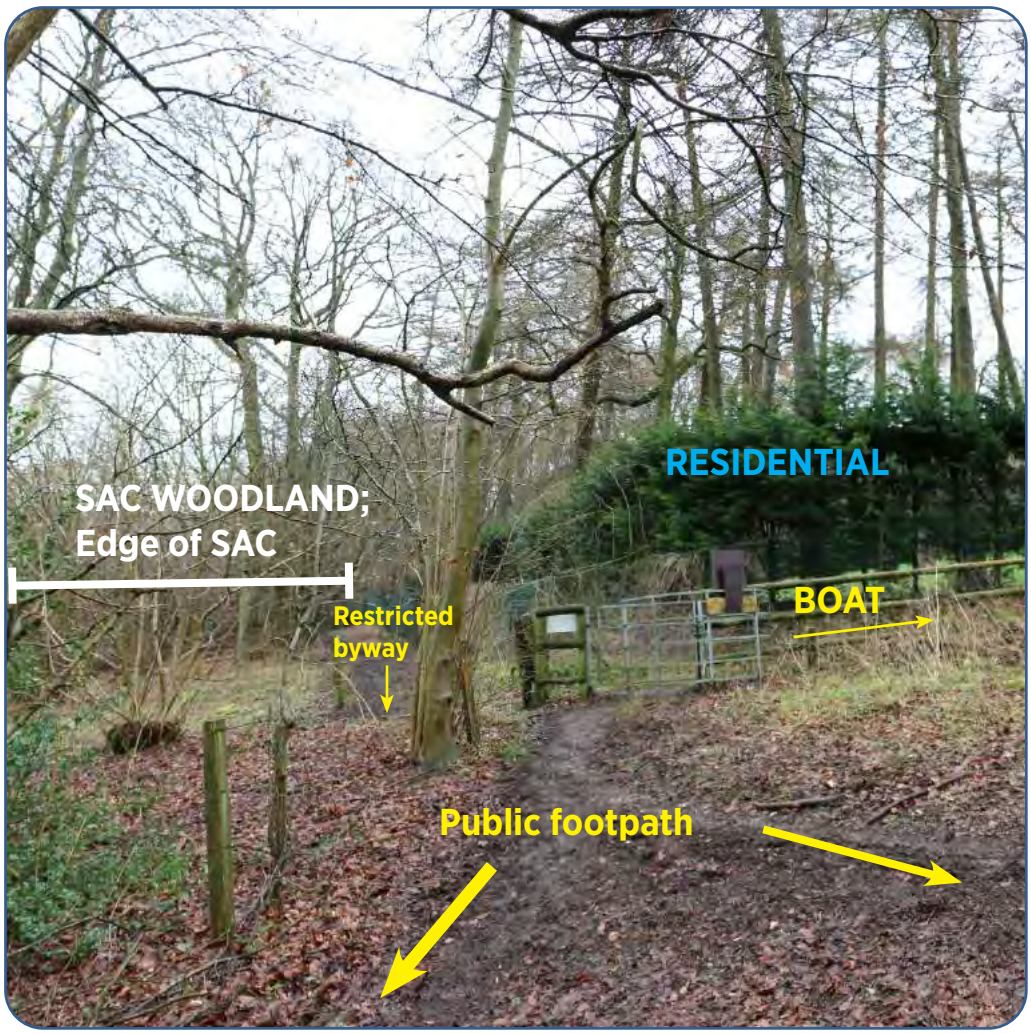


PHOTO TW9

Interchange of paths at the eastern edge of the SAC. All access follows clearly defined tracks.

SP 91532 09646

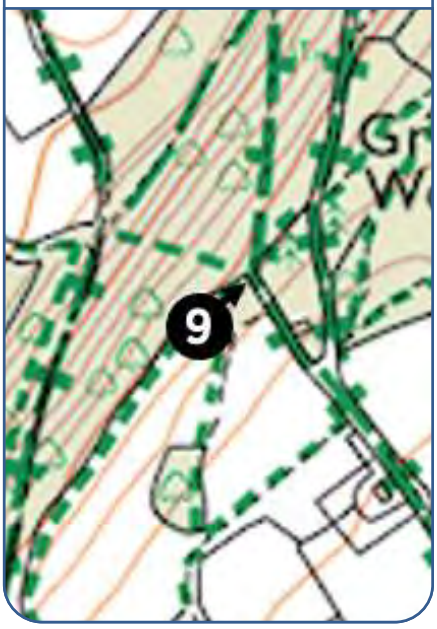


PHOTO TW10

Footpath management and behavioural control signs.

SP 91543 09654

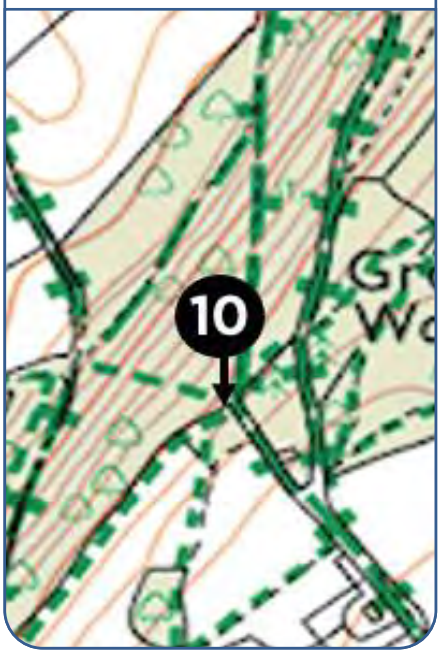


PHOTO TW11

Well defined exit/entrance public footpath to the SAC. This view is located on the edge of the SAC. Roots are exposed on the path.

SP 91524 09639

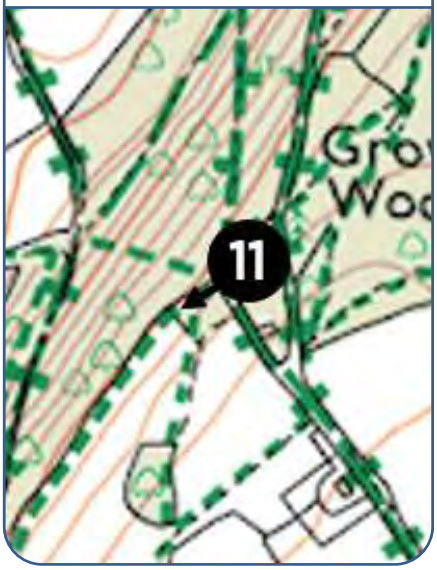


PHOTO TW12

Path runs along the south eastern boundary of the SAC. A grass field is located on one side (outside the SAC) and the woodland on the other. The woodland boundary is well defined with hawthorn and blackthorn. Access off the path into the SAC would be difficult and no evidence of access into the SAC from this path is noted.

SP 91500 09626

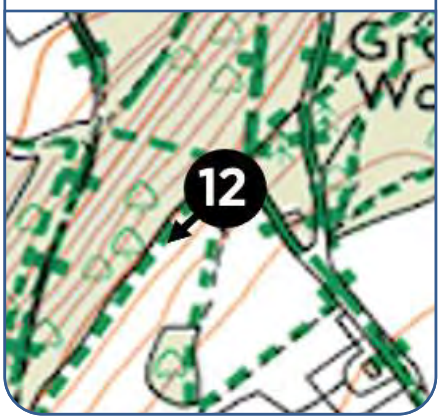


PHOTO TW13

Path runs along the south eastern boundary of the SAC. The woodland boundary is well defined with mature beech and oak with an understorey of holly, hawthorn and blackthorn.

SP 91402 09489

PHOTO TW14

Entrance and access to the SAC (Grove Wood) from Hastoe Hill. Layby parking for a small number of cars.

SP 91749 09645

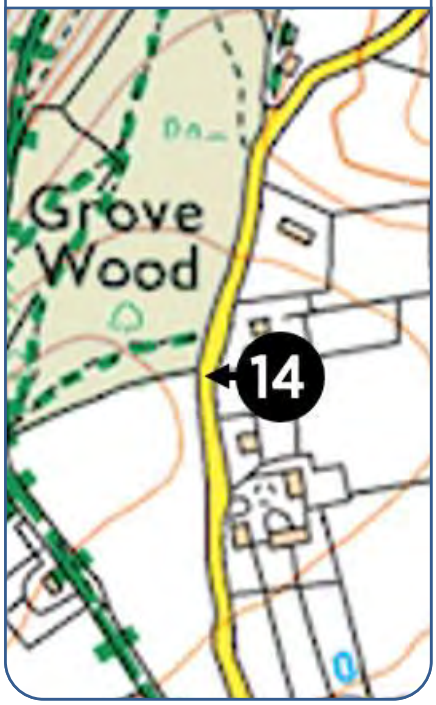


PHOTO TW15

Entrance to Grove Wood from Hastoe Hill.

SP 91807 09835

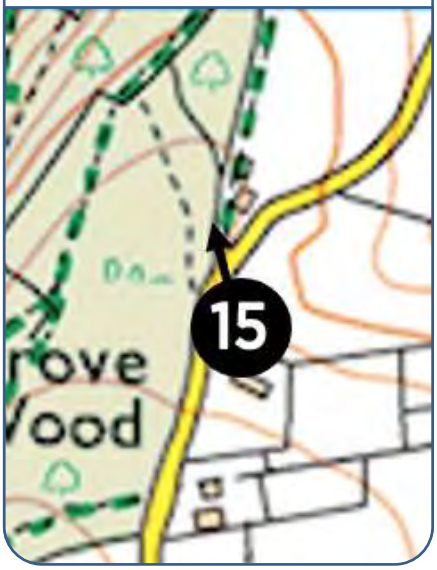


PHOTO TW16

Limited car parking opportunity on Hastoe Lane with no direct line of access to the SAC.

SP 92439 10429

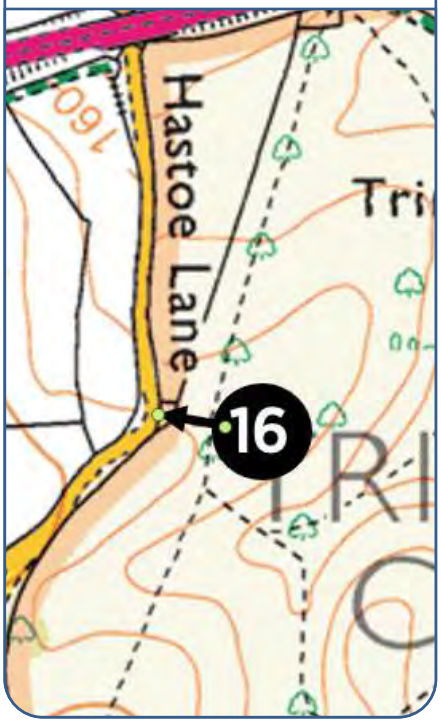


PHOTO TW17

Hard surfaced public footpath adjacent to the A41. The nearest point of the SAC is less than 500m away from here.

SP 92420 10764

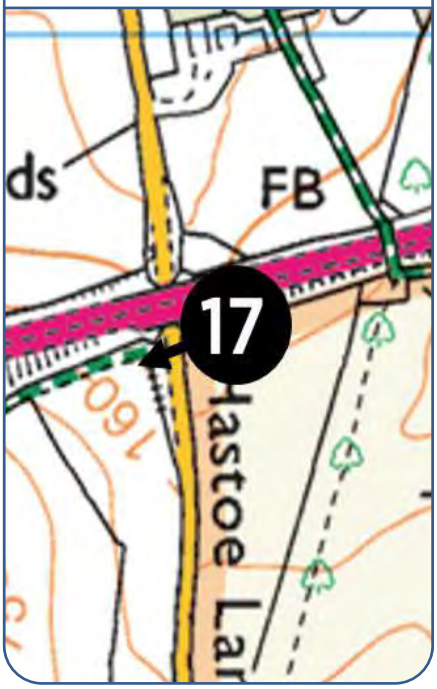


PHOTO TW18

Parking under the A41 Bridge over Hastoe Lane. The nearest point of the SAC is less than 500m away from here.

SP 92420 10764

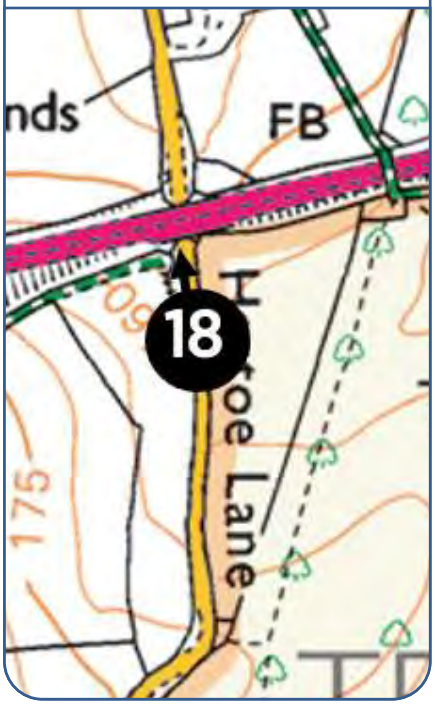


PHOTO TW19

Car Park for the Natural History Museum. It also provides parking for walkers wishing to use the wider countryside from the southern edge of Tring.

SP 92444 10944

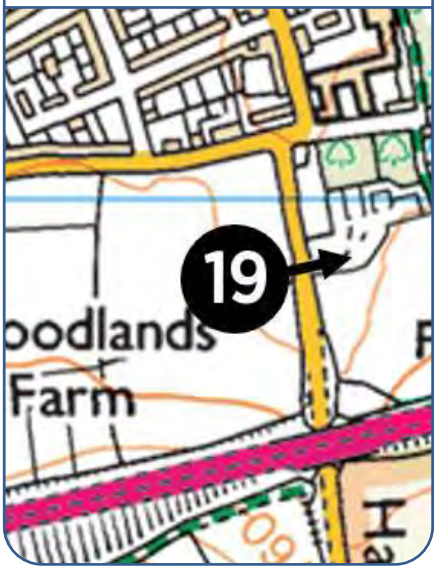
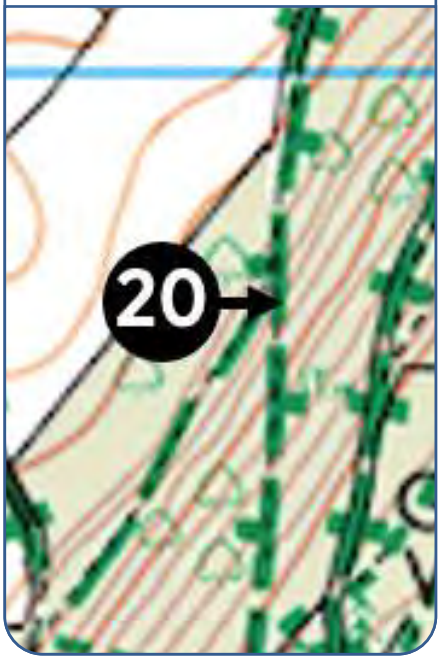


PHOTO TW20

Where present, signage throughout the SAC is clear. This picture shows some of the different types of access classification in the woodland.

SP 91558 09868



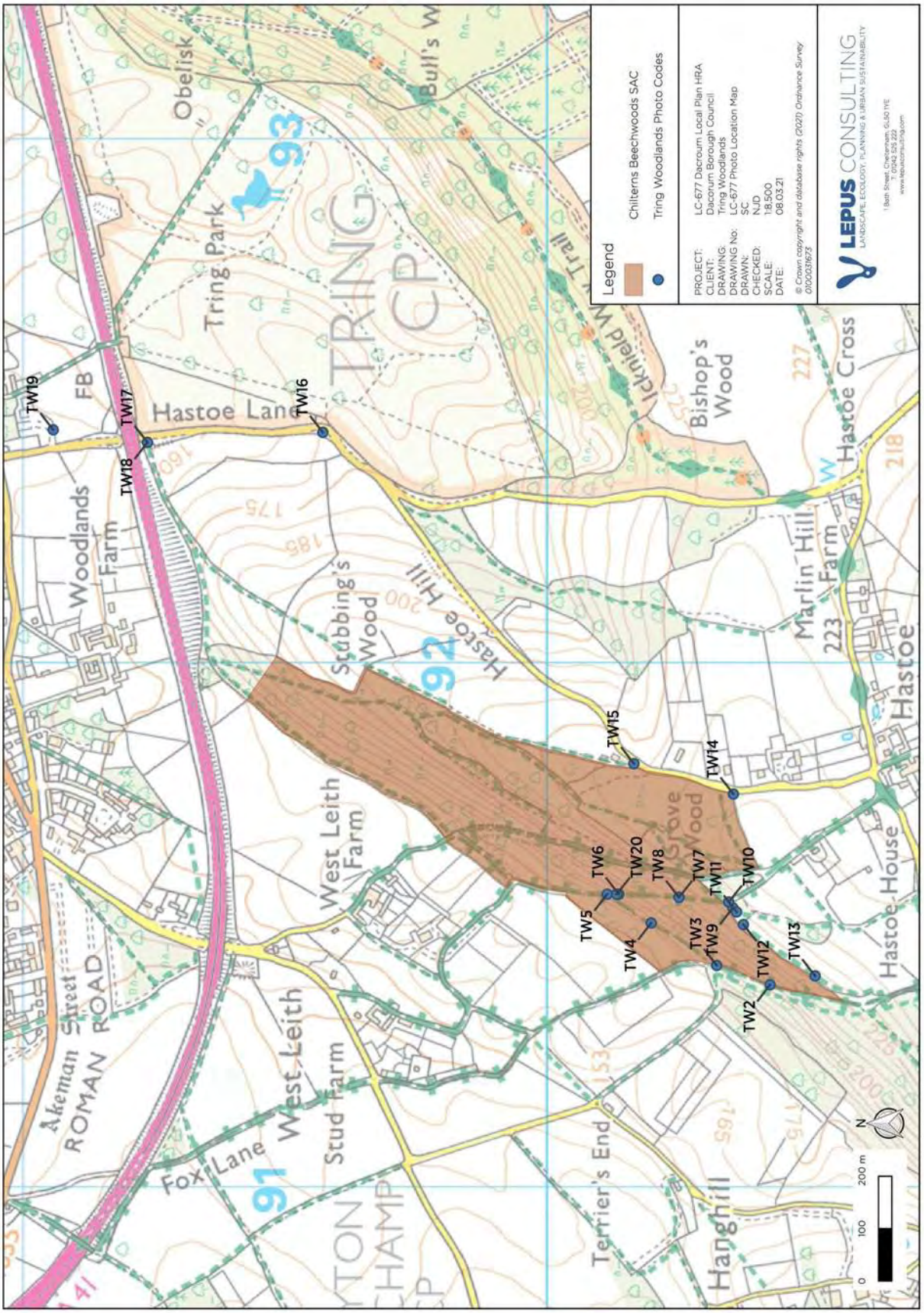


Figure D.2: *HRA Photographic Inventory Photo Location Map – Tring Woodlands SSSI*

Ecological Services

Green Infrastructure

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Sustainability Appraisal

LEPUS CONSULTING

LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY, PLANNING & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

1 Bath Street
Cheltenham
GL50 1YE

T: 01242 525222
E: enquiries@lepusconsulting.com
W: www.lepusconsulting.com
CHELTENHAM
United Kingdom

Lepus Consulting
1 Bath Street
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire GL50 1YE

t: 01242 525222
w: www.lepusconsulting.com
e: enquiries@lepusconsulting.com