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9786: IMPERIAL COLLEGE SPORTS GROUND

BRIEFING NOTE: ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

Introduction

1. Ecology Solutions was commissioned in April 2021 by Freeths on behalf of Imperial College London (ICL) to undertake an ecological appraisal of the land associated with Imperial College Training Ground, Sipson Lane, Hillingdon (see Plan ECO1).
2. The site consists an existing area of amenity grassland with the proposals for a new multi-use games area (MUGA) with perimeter fencing and floodlights.
3. Pre-application consultation has been held between the applicant and Hillingdon London Borough Council, where in respect of ecology, potential impact on bats was raised and sought to be addressed in the formal application.

Survey Methodology

4. Information on designated sites from a wider search area was obtained from the online Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)¹ database, which uses information held by Natural England and other organisations (see Plan ECO1 and Appendix 1). Further information was obtained from Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL) to allow the site to be placed in the local ecological context.
5. The site was surveyed based around extended Phase 1 survey methodology² in April 2021 in order to ascertain the general ecological value of the site, and to identify the main habitats and associated plant species.
6. The building and structures were subject to an external appraisal for their suitability for roosting bats.

¹ <http://www.magic.gov.uk>

² Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey – a Technique for Environmental Audit*. England Field Unit, Nature Conservancy Council, reprinted JNCC, Peterborough.

Designated Sites

Statutory Sites

7. There are no statutory designations of nature conservation value within the site or immediately adjacent to it. The nearest statutory designation is Cranebank Local Nature Reserve (LNR) located approximately 2.3km south-east of the site and separated by existing built form and farmland. Yeading Meadow LNR, is located approximately 4.2km to the north of the site, separately by existing built form and principal road infrastructure. South West London Waterbodies Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site, and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies approximately 5.5km south-west of the site and is separated by significant existing built form including Heathrow Airport and the M25 motorway.

Non-statutory Sites

8. There are no non-statutory designated sites within or immediately adjacent to the site.
9. The closest such site is Wall Garden Farm Sand Heaps Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLI), located approximately 0.4 km to the north-west of the site. The SLI, which remains partially active for sand extraction, is designated on account of the population of Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* present. The site is separated from this non-statutory designated site by open and managed sports fields together with field boundaries and tree belts.
10. On account of the spatial separation, together with the designation criteria and nature of the proposals it is not considered likely that the importance of the SLI would be affected by the proposed development.
11. A number of additional statutory and non-statutory sites are located within the data search area as identified on Plan ECO1, but no significant adverse effects are anticipated given their separation from the site.

Habitats

12. Ecology Solutions visited the site on 21 April 2021 to carry out an extended Phase 1 habitat survey. The main habitats were identified and are considered below. The location of these habitats is shown on Plan ECO2.
13. The site comprises a block of amenity grassland. The wider area comprises further extents of amenity grassland, building / structure (pavilion and containers) and the adjacent artificial sports pitch with floodlighting. Boundary features in the wider area include hedgerows and lines of trees but are largely removed from the site area.

Amenity Grassland

14. The main development site is situated on improved grassland that has been well managed for sport purposes. This area consists of Perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne* which has been cut very short. There is no sign of any other species in this area.

15. To the east of this area is a sport ground that is concrete and surrounded by six tall floodlight towers that point towards the existing artificial grass pitch. A single portable light is also present facing this area from the north side of the pavilion.
16. The loss of the areas of amenity grassland to accommodate the proposed development is of negligible ecological significance. The habitat supports no notable or scarce species and is dominated by species that are both common and widespread in both the local and national context.

Buildings / Structures

17. The pavilion building (B1) is situated south of the development area along with a modern single-story extension.
18. The closest part of the building (B1b) to the site is the single story steel-clad building with a flat roof. The more removed and older proportion of the pavilion building (B1a) is a brick built two-storey building with a flat roof. A small area of the building supports a raised brick clock / bell column supporting clay tiles.
19. The building is in good condition with no signs of roosting bats or nesting birds. Overall, the building has negligible bat roosting opportunities.
20. There are several steel shipping style containers (B2) situated south of the proposed development site on the east side of the pavilion. There are no signs of roosting bats or nesting birds around these containers.

Hedgerows

21. Outside the proposed development site, and in the wider study area, are two hedgerows labelled H1 and H2 on Plan ECO2.
22. Hedgerow H1 is a small hedge situated to the north east of the development area, approximately 15m in length and 5m tall, and shows little signs of recent management. The principal species is Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, with more occasional Elder *Sambucus nigra*. The ground layer is dominated by Hemlock *Conium maculatum*.
23. Hedgerow H2 is present to the east of hedgerow H1, the hedgerow is similar in species and character to hedgerow H1 with Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, Nettle *Urtica dioica*, and Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* also being present.
24. The hedgerows are considered to be species-poor and would not qualify as important under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.
25. Elements of scrub are tied to self-seeded specimens that are present around the hedgerows. A further area of scrub / amenity planting is present to the south of the pavilion building.

Trees

26. A London Plane *Platanus x hispanica* tree is present to the south-east of the pavilion building (B1a). A line of Poplar trees *Populus* sp. are present along the boundary with Sipson Lane.

Species

27. No protected or notable species were recorded during the survey undertaken. The habitat present within the site is considered to have negligible potential to support protected and notable species. The wider area is considered to have elevated but nonetheless limited opportunities.

Bats

28. All bats are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and included on Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended; "the Habitats Regulations"). These include provisions making it an offence to:
- Deliberately to kill, injure or take (capture) bats;
 - Deliberately to disturb bats in such a way as to:-
 - (i) be likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or rear or nurture their young; or to hibernate or migrate; or
 - (ii) affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
 - Damage or destroy any breeding or resting place used by bats;
 - Intentionally or recklessly to obstruct access to any place used by bats for shelter or protection (even if bats are not in residence).
29. The words deliberately and intentionally include actions where a court can infer that the defendant knew that the action taken would almost inevitably result in an offence, even if that was not the primary purpose of the act.
30. The offence of damaging (making worse for the bat) or destroying a breeding site or resting place is an absolute offence. Such actions do not have to be deliberate for an offence to be committed.
31. In accordance with the Habitats Regulations the licensing authority (Natural England) must apply the three derogation tests as part of the process of considering a licence application. These tests are that:
1. the activity to be licensed must be for imperative reasons of overriding public interest or for public health and safety;
 2. there must be no satisfactory alternative; and
 3. the favourable conservation status of the species concerned must be maintained.
32. Licences can usually only be granted if the development is in receipt of full planning permission.
33. The proposed development site does not hold any suitability for either roosting or foraging bats comprising amenity grassland of negligible value.
34. The habitats in the vicinity of the site had been considered for the potential value to bats to ascertain any likely indirect effects. The hedgerows are considered to offer some limited foraging and dispersal opportunities but lack any mature tree specimens that could harbour potential roosting opportunities. The pavilion building (B1a and B1b) and containers (B2) do not provide suitable bat roosting opportunities.

35. In the unlikely event that any roosting bats were present it is considered the likely dispersal corridors would be to the Poplar *Populus* sp. tree line along Sipson Lane rather than across the featureless sport fields. The line of trees adjacent to Sipson Lane provide connectivity to the belt of trees to the west of the site and connects to the wider countryside.
36. There are local levels of existing artificial lighting associated with the present floodlit pitches to the east of the site which needs to be considered against the proposed scheme and its illumination.
37. The proposed lighting design for the scheme is detailed in Halliday Lighting's plans (dwg no. HLS2191) which shows that the proposed lighting, whilst meeting the necessary levels of illumination for the proposed use of the MUGA, shall limit light spill. The use of LED lighting has a limited spill compared to other lighting types and is considered to be preferable. The lighting contour plan shows the principal lighting will be centred on the MUGA with reduced spill beyond its perimeter, and where spill is present this falls away sharply and is at a nugatory level (below 1 Lux) at the existing hedgerows in the wider area. Furthermore, it is noted that lighting will be restricted in hours of use; it is understood lighting will only be on between September to April and Monday, Tuesday, Thursday between 18:00 and 22:00, Wednesday 14:00 to 22:00, Saturday 16:00 to 22:00 and occasionally on a Sunday between 16:00 and 22:00. As such, during the main bat active season of May to September due to daylight hours and proposed use, lighting will be off or restricted to only limited periods. The lighting design and operational use will reduce any potential impact on locally present foraging and dispersing bats.
38. Overall, on the basis of the site conditions, with negligible roosting opportunities and the general paucity of the site together with the limited nature of the artificial lighting (both in terms of spill and duration) it is not considered the scheme would result in a likely significant effect on any local bat populations.

Badgers

39. Badgers *Meles meles* are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, for reasons of animal welfare rather than on account of their intrinsic rarity or nature conservation significance.
40. No evidence of Badger was recorded within or adjacent to the site. The site offers some limited opportunities for dispersing Badgers and some foraging opportunities. The site is situated in a mostly urban environment and it is considered unlikely that any significant use by this species would occur.

Other Mammals

41. Given the habitats present it is unlikely that small mammal species would make use of the site. Opportunities remain beyond the site and are associated with the hedgerows albeit it is noted these opportunities are considered to be restricted.

Birds

42. Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) is concerned with the protection of wild birds. With certain exceptions all wild birds and their eggs are protected from intentional killing, injuring and taking, and their nests, whilst being built or in use, cannot be taken, damaged or destroyed.

43. Schedule 1 part 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 is a list of the nationally rarer and uncommon breeding birds for which all offences carry special (i.e. greater) penalties. These species also enjoy additional protection whilst breeding, as it is also an offence to disturb adults or their dependant young when at the nest.
44. The site area to be affected by the proposal offers no opportunities for nesting birds and is considered to offer very limited opportunities for foraging.
45. The proposed development is not considered likely to affect any locally present bird populations.

Reptiles

46. Rare, endangered or declining species receive full protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) as well as protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Species that are fully protected are Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca* and Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis*. It is illegal to:
 - Deliberately kill, injure or take (capture) these reptiles;
 - Deliberately disturb these reptiles in such a way as to be likely:–
 - (i) to impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young, or to hibernate; or
 - (ii) to affect significantly their local distribution or abundance;
 - Damage or destroy any breeding or resting place used by these reptiles;
 - Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place used by these reptiles for shelter or protection (even if the reptiles are not present at the time);
 - Sell, offer for sale, possess or transport for purposes of sale these reptiles (live or dead animal, part or derivative).
47. Given their limited geographical distribution and the nature of the habitats present, neither of these species would be present within the site.
48. Owing to their abundance in Britain, Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis*, Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica* and Adder *Vipera berus* are 'partially protected' under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and as such only receive protection from:
 - Intentional killing and injuring; and
 - Being sold or other forms of trading.
49. The habitat of common reptiles is therefore not directly protected. However, because of their partial protection, disturbing or destroying their habitat while they are present may lead to an offence.
50. All reptile species are listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. The NERC Act places responsibility upon public bodies to have regard for the conservation of biodiversity in England.
51. The site is considered to offer negligible opportunities for reptiles and this group is unlikely to be present. It is not considered that further consideration to this group is required given the paucity of the habitats present for reptiles.

Amphibians (Great Crested Newts)

52. Great Crested Newts are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and included on Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (“the Habitats Regulations”). These include provisions making it an offence to:
 - Deliberately kill, injure or take (capture) Great Crested Newts;
 - Deliberately disturb Great Crested Newts in such a way as to:-
 - (i) be likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young, or to hibernate or migrate; or
 - (ii) affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
 - Damage or destroy any breeding or resting place used by Great Crested Newts;
 - Intentionally or recklessly to obstruct access to any place used by Great Crested Newts for shelter or protection.
53. European Protected Species licences are available from Natural England in certain circumstances, and permit activities that would otherwise be considered an offence.
54. The site is devoid of any suitable aquatic habitat with none located within the local vicinity. Furthermore, the habitats within the site offer negligible opportunities for amphibians during their terrestrial phase. No further regard to this group is required.

Invertebrates

55. Given the habitats present it is considered highly unlikely any assemblage would be present within the site. The scheme is not considered likely to affect any local assemblage that may be present in the immediate vicinity.

Summary

56. Ecology Solutions was commissioned in April 2021 by Freeths on behalf of Imperial College London (ICL) to undertake an ecological appraisal of the land associated with Imperial College Training Ground, Sipson Lane, Hillingdon.
57. The site consists of an existing area of amenity grassland forming part of the extant sports fields. In relatively close proximity lie the pavilion building and its extension, together with further storage containers. An AstroTurf pitch with floodlights lies to the east of the site.
58. The site is proposed for a new multi-use games area (MUGA) with fencing and floodlighting.
59. **Designated Sites.** The site is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory designations. Furthermore, the nearest such sites are considered to be sufficiently removed and buffered from the site to be unaffected by the proposed development.
60. **Habitats** The site comprises amenity grassland which is subject to frequent management and is of negligible ecological value. Habitats in the vicinity of the

site include species-poor hedgerows, hardstanding, AstroTurf sport pitch with floodlights and the pavilion building with modern prefabricated extension.

61. **Bats.** The site offers no suitable roosting opportunities whilst foraging and dispersal opportunities are considered to be extremely limited. Consideration to the potential for the pavilion building to support roosting bats has been completed with the building assessed as offering negligible opportunities with no evidence of any roost identified. The proposals including the floodlighting are not considered likely to give rise to any significant effect to any locally present bat populations due to the sensitive design and light spill (nor affects any habitats of considered value) and limited proposed durations.
62. **Badgers.** The habitat present is unlikely to offer significant opportunities for this species. No evidence of the presence of this species was recorded during the course of the survey either with the site or adjacent environs.
63. **Other Mammals.** Given the paucity of the site and regular management it is unlikely any other mammals would be supported. Very occasional dispersal across the site could not be fully dismissed but it certainly would be of any elevated importance for any locally present populations.
64. **Birds.** The site offers no nesting suitability whilst opportunities for foraging are minimal.
65. **Reptiles.** The site is not considered suitable for reptiles and no further work is considered necessary for this group.
66. **Amphibians.** The site is not considered suitable for amphibians and no further work is considered necessary for this group.
67. **Invertebrates.** The site likely supports a very limited assemblage of common invertebrate species.
68. Overall, on the basis of the current information there is no overriding ecological reason why the site could not be developed in line with the proposed MUGA.

Plans

- Plan ECO1 Site Location and Ecological Designations
- Plan ECO2 Ecological Features

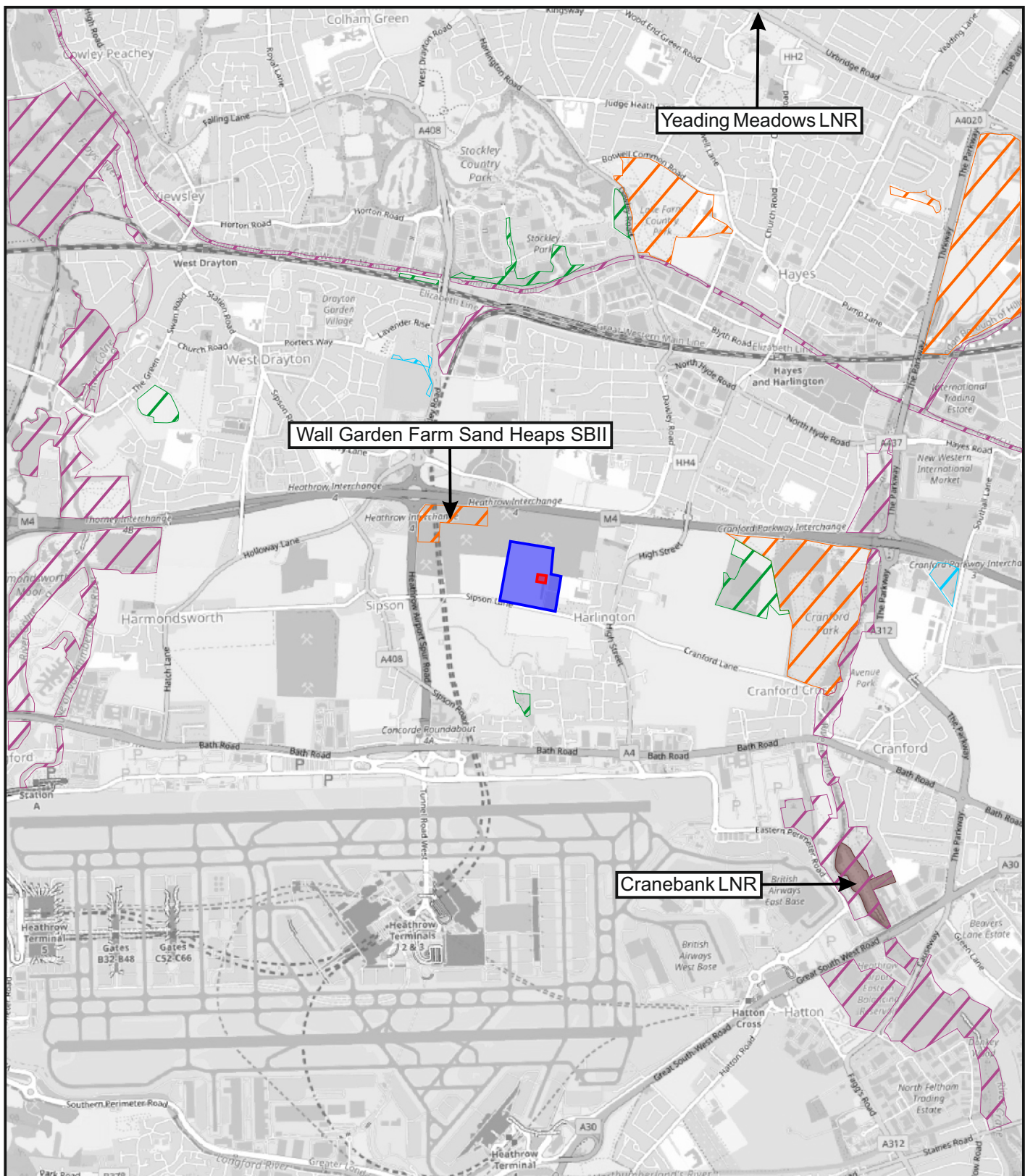
Appendices

- Appendix 1 Information downloaded from Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)

PLANS

PLAN ECO1

Site Location and Ecological Designations



KEY:

- SITE LOCATION
- LAND UNDER CONTROL OF APPLICANT
- LOCAL NATURE RESERVE (LNR)
- SITE OF METROPOLITAN IMPORTANCE (SMI)
- SITE OF BOROUGH IMPORTANCE GRADE 1 (SBII)
- SITE OF BOROUGH IMPORTANCE GRADE 2 (SBIII)
- SITE OF LOCAL IMPORTANCE (SLI)



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PLAN ECO1: SITE LOCATION AND
ECOLOGICAL DESIGNATIONS

Rev: A
May 2021

PLAN ECO2

Ecological Features



- KEY:**
- SITE BOUNDARY
 - OWNERSHIP BOUNDARY
 - BUILDING / STRUCTURE
 - ASTROTURF / HARDSTANDING
 - HEDGEROW
 - SCRUB
 - AMENITY GRASSLAND
 - TREE
 - FLOODLIGHT TOWER

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	9786: IMPERIAL COLLEGE SPORTS GROUND
PLAN ECO2: ECOLOGICAL FEATURES	Rev: A May 2021

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Information downloaded from Multi-Agency
Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)
website



Legend

-  Local Nature Reserves (England)
-  National Nature Reserves (England)
-  Ramsar Sites (England)
-  Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)
-  Special Areas of Conservation (England)
-  Special Protection Areas (England)

Ancient Woodland (England)

-  Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland
-  Ancient Replanted Woodland

Projection = OSGB36

xmin = 497000

ymin = 173700

xmax = 518500

ymax = 184600

Map produced by MAGIC on 13 May, 2021.

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