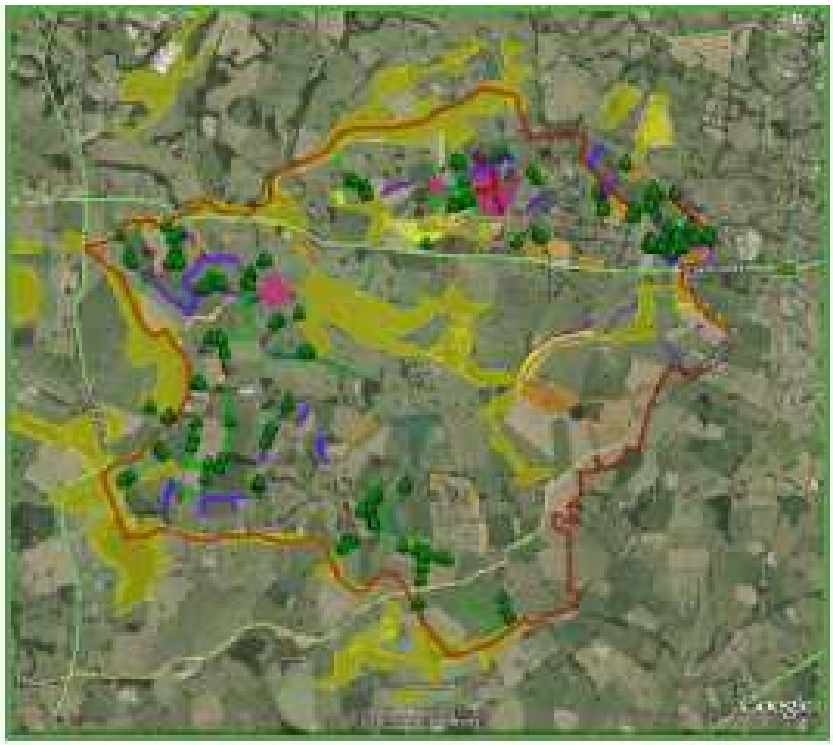
HENBURY PARISH COUNCIL

HENBURY PARISH
ENVIRONMENTAL LANDSCAPE SURVEY
2009



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Henbury Parish Environmental Landscape Survey

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Henbury Parish Environmental Landscape Survey

1 INTRODUCTION

An initial survey was undertaken in spring and summer 2008 across the parish by Simon Browne (Parish Tree Warden) and Ed Pilkington (Cheshire East Council Countryside Ranger). The survey was initiated by Parish Councillor Andrew Fletcher who also arranged the relevant access. Although the main focus was initially on tree and hedgerow status, consideration was given in general to the overall wildlife habitat in the parish, and this is reflected in the content of the report.

Further surveys of the parish have been completed and a preliminary management plan drawn up. This indicates the key habitat areas, the potential improvements that would better link up these areas and those that would generally increase the biodiversity of the parish as a whole while improving the parish landscape.

This report could be used within the environmental component of the parish plan

2 HIGH-LEVEL SUMMARY

Henbury Parish is very rural in nature. It is largely divided into areas of estate parkland, farmland, woodland and the habitation. It measures a little over 10km^2 in area, and lies just to the west of Macclesfield, Cheshire.

2.1 Parkland

The Henbury Estate contains grazed grassland with large numbers of planted trees, woodland and landscaped gardens. It forms approximately 20% of the parish in terms of area.

2.2 Farmland

Grassland dominates the farmland in the parish. The majority of this is improved grassland, however there are areas that are less intensively managed and offer wildlife value. There are many trees distributed around the farmland, mostly mature and in many cases in a state of decline. Hedgerows are well managed in some areas and in others are either very gappy or have largely been removed over the years.

2.3 Woodland

There are several large areas of woodland distributed across the parish. Two of these are classed as Ancient Woodland, that is, having been in existence since 1600 or earlier. There are smaller plantations scattered throughout, some planted as game cover.

2.4 Geology and Soil

The parish generally lies on soils of a slightly acidic nature, according to the data available from the National Soils Research Institute.

The predominant classifications are:

- Slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage (north parish between Whirley Lane and Birtles Lane)
- Freely draining slightly acid sandy soils (Rough Heyes, Henbury Hall Estate and south parish)
- Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils (south parish, interspersed with the above)

The soil types are largely influenced by the underlying geology, which comprises:

- Glacial lake deposits over Lower Keuper Marl in the south
- Alluvium, glacial boulder clay and glacial sand and gravel over stretches of Keuper Waterstones in the north
- Boulder clay over Keuper Sandstone adjoining the above in the north (including Henbury village)

2.5 Habitation

Henbury itself is a small village (around 12 hectares in area) that occupies a very small proportion of the parish. It is surrounded on all sides by farmland, although the eastern side is only a short distance from the western fringe of Macclesfield.

3 LANDSCAPE-SCALE CONSERVATION

It is widely recognised now by conservation bodies that habitat management at a wide-area level is much more beneficial than individually managing smaller islands of habitat. Ideally this will be achieved by linking the already valuable areas together while generally uplifting the conservation value of the whole area.

This approach facilitates the dispersion of flora and fauna across an area, reducing the dependency on a limited number of hot-spot areas. Fortunately this is suitable for the Henbury parish since the existing key habitat areas tend to be of a ribbon form and there is scope for linking them.
Map 1 in the annex shows a marked-up aerial photograph of the parish, the boundary being marked in red. The existing key habitat areas are marked in yellow:

i) Highlees Wood at the northern boundary of the parish. This is made up of ancient woodland and extends down to the Bag Brook via an area of rough, damp grassland. Highlees Wood is classed as a Site of Biological Importance (SBI) in recognition of its habitat value.
ii) Area west of Rough Heyes Farm, including mature woodland and species-rich unimproved grassland.
iii) Central belt extending from Cock Wood (ancient woodland and an SBI) at the east, along Bag Brook through the Henbury Estate and Big Wood (SBI) and further along Bag Brook, finally linking in with the Highlees area.
iv) Redesmere (SBI), its major feed and the Ley Plantation, linking up with the areas i) and iii) on Bag Brook at the north-western fringe of the parish.

4 MANAGEMENT TASKS

The proposed management work is based around the following tasks related to wildlife conservation. Other projects, such as footpath creation, have not been included as they would be more appropriately handled within the more general parish plan.

- Tree planting. Restoration of hedgerow and in-field trees, replacing those that are lost and increasing numbers in some areas. Planting of new belts in appropriate locations.
- Hedgerow maintenance and restoration. Re-planting of a proportion of hedgerows where lost, maintenance of existing hedgerows and restoration of those that are in a state of decline.
- Woodland management. Control of invasive species (especially rhododendron and sycamore where not desired). Thinning work to favour native species. Coppicing where appropriate to increase habitat value.
- Grassland management. Protection of the less-intensively managed grasslands, especially those containing a diverse range of species. Introduction of buffer strips where appropriate to protect hedgerows and watercourses. Wildflower and hay meadow development.
- Water-feature management. Pond, ditch and stream management and creation, including buffering and thinning of tree cover where appropriate.
- Crop management. Spring cereal cropping and wet grassland management to benefit lapwings and other ground-nesting bird species in the two identified hot-spot areas.

5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section explores the parish environmental landscape in detail, and reference is often made to the maps contained in the annex.

It is worth mentioning the mapping method used in the report. This is based on Google Earth which has been found to be very useful for the presentation of the key survey results and the proposed habitat plan. The aerial photographs are of good resolution, allowing for the identification of individual trees, for example, and the ability to define an overlay provides a means of highlighting the areas of interest and of showing where any subsequent work can be targeted. The resulting overlay can easily be shared electronically which is important for the dissemination of the information between interested parties.

The overlay will evolve with time as a result of more extensive survey work being performed, hopefully from the advice of the relevant experts, and after discussions with the respective landowners; it should therefore be considered to be a preliminary version in its current state.

The colour-coding used in the maps in the annex is based on the following key:

Blue – areas suitable for wetland management (ponds, marshes, ditches)
Orange – areas suitable for grassland management (does not include intensive grassland)
Green lines – hedgerow planting
Purple lines – hedgerow gapping up
Yellow areas – existing areas of high habitat value, including the SBIs.
Tree symbol – individual tree planting
Green areas – more extensive tree planting and woodland management
Pink – wild-bird focus areas
Purple/brown lines – beetle banks
Red line – parish boundary

Table 1 shows the approximate breakdown of land areas within the parish. It can be seen that grassland dominates the area; in total, the area of agricultural grassland and estate parkland accounts for almost 80% of the parish, and of this less than one percent can be classed as unimproved grassland offering the highest wildlife value. Of the non-parkland grassland, approximately three quarters is intensively managed improved grassland. Arable land is typically less than 8% of the parish area.

The village of Henbury itself represents only 1.2% of the parish, highlighting the rural nature of the area. Woodland represents over 9%, significantly higher than the Cheshire average of only 4%, but a little below the UK average of 12%.

Land type	Area (ha)	% of Parish
Agricultural (arable)	80	7.8%
Agricultural (grassland - semi-improved/improved)	667	65.4%
Agricultural (grassland - unimproved)	6	0.6%
Estate parkland	130	12.7%
Henbury village	12	1.2%
Other (farms, ponds etc)	30	2.9%
Woodland	95	9.3%

Table 1. Parish land classification

To allow for the presentation of the results the parish has been split geographically, based on convenient features. The split has been made north-south into three sections.

- North. This section lies to the north of the A537 Chelford Road and includes Henbury Village.

- Central. The central area is bounded to the north by the A537 and to the south by the southern extent of School Lane (at Huntley Wood)
- South. The southern section covers the area of the parish south of Huntley Wood.

5.1 North

North and east of Henbury village
The area to the north-east of Henbury village is mostly of partly-improved grassland. The area is lightly grazed outside the winter months and there are several areas of good wildlife habitat. Grass species in this area include sweet vernal grass, crested dog's-tail, meadow foxtail, marsh foxtail, yorkshire fog, common bent, cocksfoot, rough meadow grass and ryegrass.

Of particular note is the old marl pit highlighted on Map 2; this supports a valuable pond (frogs, dragonflies, damselflies and possibly newts) together with a number of plant species associated with unimproved grassland - such as pignut (with associated chimney sweeper moths on sunny days in June), devil's bit scabious, meadow vetchling and bird's foot trefoil. Ideally this will continue to be managed appropriately - perhaps ideally by light grazing in the late autumn - as it is one of the few areas in the parish that supports such species. Furthermore, buffering of this area would be beneficial, which could include perennial wildflower and further tree planting on the adjoining land (some small-scale tree planting has already been done on the southern side, but increased use of fertilisers on that land may also harm the marl pit fauna by run-off).

There are damp areas – and the area south of Whirley Road, and to the east of Whirley School is named Longmoss, indicating that this is historically a wet area. Extensive drainage work was apparently undertaken in Victorian times, however water levels appear to have increased in the last two years, to the benefit of wetland species. Soft rush is spreading in extent and jointed rushes are also present. Ragged robin is found among the rush, together with marsh bedstraw and lesser spearwort, while cuckoo-flower is distributed more widely throughput the same field in spring and creeping buttercup is extensive. A singing male reed bunting has been present during the springs of 2007, 2008 and now 2009, though the breeding status isn't known.

A number of the hedgerows are in a state of decline and there is great scope for gapping up and for more extensive planting where there has been substantial loss of trees. There are a number of areas that would be suitable for more general tree-planting (where it would not impact on the wet areas and the least improved grassland), adding buffering between Henbury and Broken Cross.

The corner of the field at the very east of the parish north of the A537 is also very wet and more interesting wet grassland species apparently occur including jointed rushes and sedges, including oval sedge and carnation sedge. This adjoins a ditch draining to the east that is of interest, and for which appropriate ditch-management methods would be beneficial. This ditch drains Longmoss, eventually into Cock Wood, and ultimately feeding Bag Brook - it can have substantial water flow in wetter periods.

The field at the very north-east of the village is also wet with extensive soft rush and is attractive to bird-life (lapwing breeding has been attempted in recent years, though its proximity to the village may have been one reason for the apparent failure).

Little owl and tawny owl are regularly seen in the area, as are buzzards (which can in fact now be seen across the whole of the parish). Bat life is also good around the higher hedgerows, with common pipistrelles the most common species.

Henbury Village
Henbury Village consists of quite widely-spaced houses, mostly with gardens of reasonable size. There is a large number of mature trees, including oak, sycamore and birch, many of which are subject to tree preservation orders. As such, it is rather leafy in character, and is of good wildlife value for those species that are found in such areas.
Of particular note is the Millennium Green at the southern edge of the village. The land was purchased by the Millennium Green Trust in 1999 and is open as a green space to the whole of the village community. The extensive tree planting has resulted in sizeable trees, some of which are being

managed as coppice, especially the willow, hazel and alder. A small apple orchard was created which is now producing a large amount of fruit of a number of different species, some local to Cheshire. A wildflower meadow has also been created, including both annual and perennial areas, with the perennial section now being particularly well established – with bird's-foot trefoil, knapweed, vetch and ox-eye daisy dominating.

North-West

This area mostly lies between Chelford Road and Whirley Lane, centred on Rough Heyes Farm. Much of it is intensively managed agricultural land, consisting of grassland and, on rotation, arable cropping. There are some valuable areas of wildlife habitat.

One of the most important areas lies immediately to the west of Rough Heyes Farm, consisting of mature woodland and unimproved grassland, the latter type having suffered serious decline across the country in recent years, which makes this a high value area.

Areas of partly-improved grassland lie around Dark Lane and to the east side of Rough Heyes Farm. Some of these could be managed to enhance the habitat value by restricting nutrient application, planting and a using a limited grazing regime.

The fields highlighted pink are lapwing breeding areas. In 2008/2009 most of this land was planted with maize sown in late May. The breeding success rates of these birds would benefit by management activity that takes better account of the birds' nesting methods and their timing.

The farm track running to the north from the north-west corner of the farm buildings at Rough Heyes could form an excellent green lane with appropriate hedgerow planting, however the presence of lapwing may make this an unsuitable option (the birds preferring an open aspect from their nest sites) and further expert advice is needed in this regard.

There are three excellent ponds in this area of the parish. Two lie to the south-west of the junction between Anderton's Lane and Whirley Lane. Toads appear to be breeding here and newts would be expected to be present. The third pond, labelled on the map, was more recently created as a fishing pond, and is already hosting a range of wildlife – with Daubenton's bats commonly feeding. The tree planting around this pond should be managed to ensure that the light levels reaching the water are not excessively reduced; in particular the young horse chestnut trees should be removed and replaced with species such as rowan that will cast far less shade. Further ponds exist in the small wood mid-way between these two ponds; this wood is managed for game-birds and the ponds here are very heavily shaded by the surrounding trees, although some recent thinning has occurred.

Some of the larger grass/crop fields would benefit from the introduction of 'beetle banks' – tussocky grass strips running across the fields to provide habitat for beneficial species. Those fields on the southern side of Whirley Lane do have excellent grassy buffer strips breaking up the crop/hedgerow boundaries, providing feeding areas for a number of birds, mammals and invertebrates.

In addition to the ponds, several wet grassy areas are found and these are important in encouraging the presence of lapwings whose chicks feed in these areas when hatched. Appropriate management of these areas is important, and the creation of 'wader scrapes' – shallow channels created for the benefit of wading birds - may be considered.

Especially in the more intensively managed areas, substantial hedgerow loss has occurred in the past. Despite this there are some good hedgerows in this area, and one located at the north end of the main lapwing field contains a very diverse range of species suggesting a significant age. The gaps in this hedge would ideally be planted up with appropriate species to assist with its long-term survival, and for the benefit of the bat/small mammal species that prefer to travel along hedgerows and avoid open areas.

The parish boundary crosses Whirley Lane to the north just west of Whirley Hall and then turns west to encompass the southern section of Highlees Wood, ancient woodland that is a registered SBI. The SBI citation mentions that the woodland has been planted up with conifers but that there is a diverse ground

flora, especially around the damp areas and large pond. It also mentions the unimproved/semi-improved grazing meadow with butterfly-encouraging flora. However, it should be noted that in addition to the coniferous plantation, there are substantial areas with mature native broadleaf trees.

Immediately south of the wood the grassland changes from partly improved to improved, heading westwards towards Old Hall – see Map 6. There are two recently introduced hedgerows running southwards from Highlees Wood - the eastern-most one in particular would now be suitable for laying to thicken the base and enhance the wildlife habitat value.

Continuing westwards towards Old Hall the mixture of intensive agriculture with surrounding wildlife habitat continues (Map 6). The land directly west of Rough Heyes continues and opens up into an excellent grassland area, already mentioned. Among the species present are knapweed, devil's bit scabious, pignut, jointed rushes and, in the damper areas, marsh marigold, water mint, ragged robin and bistort. An example photograph taken in June 2008 is Picture 1. It is hoped that this area can be more thoroughly surveyed in the future, with the landowner's permission, and even be proposed for SBI (Site of Biological Importance) status. Buffering of this area would be beneficial and field-corner management of the adjoining land could help with species dispersal and in the avoidance of potential isolation of the site and nutrient run-off.

Picture 1. Unimproved grassland west of Rough Heyes

The land then meets Bathhouse Wood. This has an excellent bluebell population in spring and generally appears to be of good habitat value. Picture 2 was taken in May 2008. Longer-term, the thinning of non-native tree species could be encouraged (larch and sycamore particularly) to favour native species of higher wildlife value, and the ground flora that is already present could be assisted by appropriate canopy management such as localised thinning and coppicing. The stream leaving the wood on its western corner wood is well buffered by fencing through to Old Hall, preventing the encroachment of stock, and thus maintaining its habitat value, being fringed by trees. There is a small area of relatively unimproved grassland immediately to the east of the buildings of Old Hall together with some hawthorn hedging that would benefit from laying. This would form a natural extension to the habitat bordering the stream mentioned above. This area could then join the beech copse in the direction of Highlees Wood and subsequently on to Highlees itself with suitable tree and hedge planting. The linking of Bathhouse Wood to Highlees Wood would certainly be a very worthwhile goal, assuming that this does not impact on the landowner's objectives. There are two clear routes that could be taken – one from the north-western corner of Bathhouse and the other from the north-east corner. In both cases the routes are already partially planted with hedgerow (east) or a cluster of trees (west) assisting with the process. The route mentioned above via Old Hall is a third possibility. All are shown on Map 7.

Picture 2. Bluebells in Bathhouse Wood

Between Bathhouse Wood and Highlees Wood there are several small clusters of trees centred on old marl pits – where these have been fenced off to prevent the intrusion of stock they now are in excellent condition. Picture 3 shows one example, with flowering marsh marigold visible (May 2008).

Picture 3. Old marl pit between Bathhouse Wood and Highlees Wood.

Immediately to the east of Gorse Covert (now mostly a plantation of exotic species) lies a prominent field which is planted with game/wild bird cover and encourages lapwing breeding. As with the fields to the east of that, the timing of mechanical operations would ideally be tailored to suite the birds' nesting activities to encourage successful breeding.

The area north of Old Hall is mostly improved grassland until the stream between Highlees Wood and Birtles Lake is met. The stream is surrounded by rough, marshy grassland that is home to associated wildflower species including marsh marigold in spring. This area would benefit from increased buffering by fencing off from cattle to further increase its habitat value.

The area around Birtles Bowl is largely undisturbed and offers good woodland, grassland and wetland habitat down to Chelford Road. Poolstead Wood contains a mixture of tree species, both broadleaf and coniferous, and Bag Brook runs through, from east to west. As with Bathhouse Wood, appropriate

management would include the favouring of native species and the increase of light-levels at ground-level for the benefit of the ground flora.

5.2 Central Area

Central-West
Crossing the A537, the land at the western section of the parish is dominated by intensive grassland of dairy farms. The key areas for wildlife in this section are the Bag Brook section along the northern parish boundary (see Picture 4) and the Ley Plantation at the west. Alder fringes the brook in this section and this has been coppiced in part – a practice that is worth continuing to control light levels. In between there are a number of ponds formed in old marl pits and now surrounded by trees, typically alder and, in the drier areas, oak. The hedgerow status is generally poor here and the restoration of these would be beneficial for the wildlife and for the landscape generally. Many of the old hedgerow trees are now in a state of decay. Replacement would be worthwhile when trees are finally fall to ground, but in the meantime the ageing trees can offer good wildlife value, including as sites of bird nesting and bat roosting and their place in the landscape should be maintained for as long as possible.

Increased use of wild bird cover/seed mixes and wild flower/pollen mixes in field corners, and in buffer strips, would improve the wildlife value of the area and perhaps encourage the return of farmland bird species including the tree sparrow (recorded elsewhere in the parish and in neighbouring Marton). It would also be of benefit to the insect population.

Lapwing attempt breeding on one damp and elevated field marked pink on Map 9. Hopefully appropriate management practices can be introduced here to assist with this, together with monitoring.

Picture 4. Bag Brook at the north-west corner of Henbury Parish, with coppiced Alder.

Central
Moving east from Marlheath, back towards Henbury village, the large Henbury Hall estate is met, starting with Big Wood, a registered Site of Biological Importance. This wood contains a mixture of broadleaf and coniferous species, but it is not an old wood, being mostly planted in the 20th century. The SBI citation notes the presence of a relatively diverse ground flora, and that the south-west corner of the wood lies on peat, which can support rare and threatened associated species. The remainder of the estate is characterised by a mixture of attractive woodland and grazed grassland, with the hall and impressive gardens being centrally located. Two large ponds are found in the south-eastern area, along the course of Bag Brook, one of which is shown in Picture 5. Picture 6 shows a typical grassland scene on the Estate.

Picture 5. Henbury Estate pond

Picture 6. Henbury Estate grassland

There is much amenity tree planting throughout the estate with a large variety of both native and non-native species. The hedgerows across the estate are in excellent condition, some have been laid and gaps are routinely planted up.

From a wildlife perspective there would be benefit from restricting the grazing in some grassland areas to increase the rough grassland character, and encouraging/planting wild flower mixes, perhaps in the less visible areas in the estate fringes.

Further surveys of the Estate would be very worthwhile as there is little doubt that such a large area that has been sympathetically managed for many years and that offers some excellent wildlife habitat could be home to an extensive range of species, some possibly scarce in the area.

Huntley Wood, at the south of the estate, contains some fine oak and beech trees. Sycamore is becoming invasive in some of the area to the west of Bearhurst Lane and consideration may be given to controlling this.

Gravelhole Wood, a short distance along School Lane to the east, is excellent for bluebells in the spring, however rhododendron restricts the ground flora particularly at its western side and some management of this would be beneficial.

Central-East

To the east of the estate lies Broomfield Farm. This area (Map 11) forms a corridor from Cock Wood to the east to the Henbury Estate. As well as the more improved grassland there are areas of less intensive management, particularly those areas bordering the streams. Increased buffering of these areas would enhance the grassland species and minimise the access to the stream by cattle, improving the water quality feeding the Henbury Estate and its water features. Picture 7 shows the grassland along the stream south-west of Cock Wood.

Picture 7. Stream and rough grassland near Cock Wood

Further to the east lies Cock Wood, classed as an SBI on account of its ancient woodland status. The wood itself is a steep-sided clough, with oak, beech and sycamore dominating the canopy. The latter could be managed to prevent spreading. The SBI extends to the ponds (example in Picture 8), hedgerows and grassland along the eastern parish boundary, with the grassland noted as containing uncommon species. The area is defined as 'notable for birds and mammals'. Litter is unfortunately a problem in the pond areas. The area is shown on Map 12.

Picture 8. Pond within Cock Wood SBI

At the north-western edge of the wood lies a feature that can be identified from aerial photographs as having a structure of terraced banking, however there are no known historical records of earthworks in this location. Consideration should be given to preserving this feature by minimising any ground disturbance on the farmland.

Moving south-west from the Cock Wood area the parish boundary follows Pexhill Road before heading south-west along hedge-lines. The area is characterised by grassland divided by hedgerows, some in good condition and with mature broadleaf trees – typically oak and ash. The hedgerows linking with the Cock Wood SBI are strategically important and should be maintained accordingly.

South of Broomfield Farm (on Map 13) two streams converge in a circular game covert (coniferous plantation) before joining with the Bag Brook tributary from Cock Wood. Rough land adjoins these streams and should ideally be further buffered to provide valuable habitat, and this includes the field west of the covert that is generally little grazed and would support rough grassland species. More 'improved' grassland, although with good hedgerows, divide this area from Pexhall Wood which forms a southern spur from the Henbury Estate and is predominantly broadleaf.

5.3 Southern Area

South-East

Map 14 continues to the south-west from Map 13 and covers the southern-most part of the parish down to Trevors Close Farm. The area is largely grazing pasture, and is a mixture of improved and partly-improved grassland. There would be scope for increasing the amount of hedgerow and for tree planting here generally. A stream heads west from Trevors Close Farm and this forms the southern parish boundary. The stream is bordered by a belt of broadleaf woodland and feeds Thorneycroft Pool, and it represents valuable habitat.

The parish boundary now moves north-west to meet, and then follow, Fanshawe Brook. The brook is fringed by woodland and is well buffered along the majority of its route to Redesmere at the south-western corner of the parish, a distance of approximately one mile. Maps 15 and 16 cover this area. Excellent habitat can be found along the brook, primarily wet woodland. There are a number of sizeable hybrid black poplar trees along this stretch. More extensive surveys would be beneficial to better understand the area and its resident species. The area between Fanshawe Brook and the Thorneycroft woodland and ponds is particularly important from a habitat linkage perspective and relevant focus might be given to ensuring hedgerow and general habitat management and development here. Generally, habitat development including hedgerow restoration along the full length of Fanshawe Brook would be very beneficial and should be encouraged where possible.

The area south-east of Bearhurst Farm (Map 14) offers some rough grassland and potential meadow habitat, and consideration could be given to developing this. A notable feature in this area is a 'bowl barrow' located by Pexhall Wood on the Henbury Estate. This is understood to be a Neolithic burial mound, dating back to the period 2400-1500BC, and is a scheduled monument.

South-Central

Between Bearhurst and Sandbach farms (Maps 14 and 15) there is good scope for hedgerow management, including the possible creation of a green lane from the track heading ESE from Sandbach Farm, as shown on Map 15. The woodland at the top of the hill south east of Sandbach Farm could be extended via further tree planting and hedgerow restoration thus forming a hub for habitat corridors. One of the most important of these would be a hedgerow along the fence line from the wood to the south-west to join Fanshawe Brook. Otherwise there are some excellent hedgerows on Sandbach Farm which are free of gaps and are allowed to grow to a good height.

To the west of Sandbach Farm there is valuable rough grassland extending to Lodge Farm that has extensive tree planting and a large pond. Some excellent habitat will develop as the land between Lodge Farm and Lindgards Farm, to the north-west, matures.

South-West

The south-west section of the parish, Map 16, includes the grassland of Marlheath Farm and several woodland belts and streams leading to Redesmere. Redesmere itself is an SBI that includes the lake together with the woodland at its north-western corner. It is noted as being of high ornithological value. The habitat value of the land adjoining the lake and its woodland, including the associated hedgerows and streams, will ideally be maintained and enhanced to allow for species dispersion into the parish. Picture 9 shows an example of this, where a hedgerow could be restored along the fence line which leads to Redesmere; this is the hedgerow-line marked for gapping up (blue) on Map 16.

Picture 9. Possible hedgerow restoration towards Redesmere

6 NEIGHBOURING AREAS

From a landscape-scale conservation perspective the features immediately beyond the parish boundary are also important, as they influence the habitat encountered in the peripheries.

Map 1 highlights the fact that many of the boundary areas are in fact valuable habitat. Apart from the eastern edge of the parish, this is typically because water-courses form the parish boundaries and it is along these that the habitat corridors exist, having been protected from the more intensive agriculture in many cases.

Beyond these areas there are several SBIs that are close to the parish and consideration should be given to working with the neighbouring parishes and land-owners - some of whom may have land crossing the parish boundaries anyway - in a co-ordinated manner to ensure good planning and management. The SBIs within 1km of the Henbury parish boundary are listed below with a brief description and a comment on the land between the SBI and the parish.

- Alderley Park, Nether Alderley and Over Alderley parishes.

Extensive area of diverse habitat including ancient woodland and Radnor Mere.
There is good woodland and hedgerow linkage to Henbury and these could be enhanced.

- Capesthorne Meres, Siddington parish.

Artificial waterways and semi-improved grassland. Linked to Redesmere SBI by woodland and a stream.

- Hazelwall Wood, Siddington Parish.

Ancient woodland, though mostly modified to a mixed plantation. Surrounded by intensively managed grassland but two hedgerows do link with Fanshawe Brook. Importance of the quality of these hedgerows is therefore high and the introduction of buffer strips would be beneficial.

- Hocker Lane Farm Grassland, Over Alderley parish.

Valuable area of unimproved grassland. Links to Highlees Wood via other areas of less intensively-managed grassland, hedgerow and Long Highlees Wood. Improvements would be possible.

- Sandy Lane Pit, Macclesfield.

Disused landfill site offering diverse habitat including ponds, woodland and unimproved grassland. Links to Henbury with partly-improved grassland and hedgerows, some of which could have gaps planted.

- Whirleymere, Sandy Lane, Macclesfield

An old sand quarry, now a large fishing pool together with young woodland and semi-improved grassland. Neighbours Sandy Lane Pit and links to Henbury with partly-improved grassland and hedgerows, some of which could have gaps planted.

7 FURTHER WORK

This report covers the results from the initial high level parish survey and highlights a number of potential areas where environmental improvements would be beneficial. It can be considered as the first phase of the parish environmental project. The work that is now required includes the following.

Practical management work

Practical management in the form of limited tree planting has already begun, and more extensive work should be undertaken on an ongoing basis, initially targeting the areas highlighted in this plan, such as hedgerow restoration.

Engagement with the relevant land-owners is essential in order to ascertain the recent history and current/future objectives of the land management within the parish. This will give a clearer view on the most appropriate conservation methods and hopefully achieve commitment to the recommended work.

An initial 'top-ten' list of habitat enhancement tasks include could include the following, all subject to agreement with the land-owners. The timescales required will be dependent on the funding and manpower available, however it is hoped that a minimum of two tasks could be performed per year. The list encompasses a wide range of activities, highlighting the diversity of management that would be beneficial.

- Restore hedgerows in fields between Henbury, Whirley School and Broken Cross. Almost 1km of hedgerow is involved, and half of this could be relatively easily gapped up, though some fencing will be required. This is a part of the parish that is very visible to the residents of Chelford Road and Whirley Road and also surrounds a popular footpath linking Henbury with Whirley Road and Whirley School. The area is also strategically placed to ensure a link between the Cock Wood and Sandy Land SBIs.

- Cock Wood to Bag Brook management. This is a link between the Cock Wood and Big Wood SBIs and would provide valuable grassland and stream-side habitat with appropriate measures put in place.

- Restore/plant hedgerow running north from Lodge Farm towards Marlheath Farm. This would provide a good wildlife corridor in an area dominated by intensive grassland. Approximately 200m of planting to be done and fenced accordingly.

- Conserve lapwing population in identified breeding fields. A process of working with the landowners to establish farming methods suitable for these birds and of monitoring to be undertaken. With land-owners' permission, results could potentially be shared with Whirley School as the basis of a school project.

- Conservation of mature trees. All vulnerable mature in-field and hedgerow trees to be catalogued and necessary remedial action to be identified and put in place, such as appropriate de-limbing and fencing from stock.

- Linking Bathhouse Wood to Highlees Wood. Tree/hedgerow planting to be undertaken to better join these woodlands - between 100m and 200m to be planted, depending on the route chosen.

- Establishment of traditionally managed unimproved/semi-improved grassland in Henbury/Broken Cross area. As with the hedgerow restoration in this area it will help to conserve the habitat between Cock Wood and Sandy Lane.

- Buffer strip and field-corner management in improved grassland area. Appropriate location is to be agreed with relevant land-owner in south or west of the parish.

- Hedgerow planting in the Redesmere to Ley Plantation belt. Depending on route approximately 300m-500m on new planting would be required.

- Management of invasive species in Gravelhole Wood. This will allow the restoration of the woodland and improvement of the ground flora, largely by removing rhododendron.

Longer term, a total of around 10km of hedgerow (including the above) has been marked for restoration and planting. The split is approximately half of gapping up and half of new planting, so around 6km of actual planting is proposed. It is also hoped that tree planting can be performed each year to a level of 100 trees, split between hedgerow and in-field tree replacement, and also small-scale field-corner planting. Larger-scale planting of half-an-acre or more in appropriate locations would also be beneficial and could involve the parish community.

More detailed habitat and wildlife surveys

In addition to the practical management work there is much to be done to better understand the Henbury parish environment and the wildlife that it supports.

Species recording should be encouraged and coordinated activities considered. Existing records have been obtained from rECOrd, the database for Cheshire wildlife recording, but recording in Henbury parish has generally been very limited, perhaps partly as a result of the lack of public access to most of the parish. While there is perhaps sufficient knowledge within the parish community to be able to identify and record certain groups, with wild flowers, birds, butterflies and dragonflies the more obvious, it may be that either external help is needed with other wildlife, or that training of parish members may be appropriate. An example could be the case of identifying whether water voles are present along the parish waterways – this requires knowledge in specific survey techniques that may not be locally available, a situation that could be remedied by some limited training.

All existing and forthcoming data should be used to build up species lists and document the habitat generally. Such work can be used to highlight the presence of unusual or rare species that would benefit from protection and habitat enhancement, and more generally to allow for the trending of species populations. For example, all unimproved and semi-improved grasslands should be surveyed to determine the flora present, as this may not have been done for many. Such information will be fundamental in the steering of any decision-making affecting the parish landscape.

8 GENERAL MANAGAMENT CONSIDERATIONS

This section touches on some of the key principles behind the wildlife-friendly management of trees and woodland, hedgerows, grassland and ponds – which should be considered where possible across the parish as part of any ongoing management. These represent the majority of wildlife habitat within the area. More detailed information can be found in the data sources listed in the bibliography.

8.1 Trees and Woodland

Trees are very valuable both from the perspective of wildlife habitat and from that of general landscape character. Generally, the older the tree the more wildlife it will support. Many rare species of invertebrates, lichen and fungi are dependent on old and decaying timber associated with veteran trees, and they also offer nesting and roosting sites for a number of bird and bat species. It is therefore important that, where possible - that is, where not posing a threat to people - trees are encouraged to grow to an old age, even if signs of decay are present. Measures can be taken to prolong the life of

decaying trees, such as by removing any large limbs causing excessive stress on the trunk, and fencing around the base of the trunk to prevent disturbance and damage from stock.

Trees are being lost from the hedgerows and farmland of Henbury for natural reasons, and, in some cases by neglect and poor agricultural practice, such as ploughing very close to the trunk and damaging the root system. Agri-environment options are available to assist financially with the preservation of in-field trees. Where trees are lost they are not commonly replaced, except on the Henbury Hall and Whirley estates. This can be easily rectified by new planting where loss does occur. Where old trees do fall, the old timber should be left in situ where possible, offering valuable dead-wood habitat. Fortunately, it is now very easy to keep track of the tree population since aerial photographs are available from several sources – such as Google and Cheshire East Council – and since these cover the parish back to the 1970s the losses are readily visible, and hence can be effectively targeted.

There are valuable woodlands in the parish, including some with ancient status and SBI designation. Management of these should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, taking account of past management practices, but the following principles should be considered when any management work is undertaken:

Favour native species. The parish woodlands generally contain a significant proportion of non-native species of the local area, with sycamore, beech and coniferous trees being the most common examples. These trees support less wildlife than many native species, with oak, birch and willow species being the most valuable in this regard. As such, where the native species can be favoured at the expense of the non-natives the wildlife value of the woodland will increase. Another non-native threat to woodland habitat is rhododendron that is present in a number of the parish woodlands. This causes heavy degradation of the woodland floor by shading out and poisoning, thereby restricting the native ground flora. It is therefore recommended that, where not desired for ornamental reasons, it is managed to avoid further spreading, or ideally by complete removal.

Vary the woodland structure. The original wildwoods of Britain would have shown much structural diversity as a result of the natural life cycle of the trees. Where older trees fell there would have been a temporary increase in light to the woodland floor encouraging the ground flora to develop before this is once again shaded out by the subsequent tree regeneration. As such, the woodland would have been very varied in nature with trees of different ages and occasional open patches supporting light demanding wildlife. Depending on the history of the woodlands, there can be a strong case for encouraging this structure by limited felling, preferably of non-native trees, allowing natural regeneration of native species and an associated increased in ground flora. Small-scale coppicing may also be undertaken in some cases, especially where this may have been performed in the past as part of the historic woodland management. The introduction of an understory can be beneficial – such as by planting, or encouraging regeneration of, small trees such as hazel and hawthorn.

Management of ivy on trees is often a cause of confusion. It actually very rarely damages trees, and the benefit that it provides to the natural environment tends to far outweigh any limited risks. It provides nesting and hibernation habitat, and valuable nectar when in flower. Therefore, it is recommended that ivy should not be removed from the trees in the parish.

8.2 Hedgerows

Many of the hedgerows in the parish would benefit from a change in management. Away from the large estates, a high proportion of the hedgerows are in a state of decline. Gaps have opened up where the hedgerow shrubs and trees have died and were not replaced. Also, there has been loss as a result of agricultural intensification, especially prior to the 1980s.

Contemporary advice is to cut hedgerows every 2-3 years rather than yearly. This encourages a bushier and taller growth, providing better habitat for birds, invertebrates and other wildlife. In Henbury the majority of hedgerows are cut yearly. Where road visibility may be affected then clearly more regular cutting is required of the road facing side, but otherwise hedgerows would be better left for less frequent cutting. Also, when cutting is performed, and in order to maximise the lifetime of the hedgerow trees, the new growth should not be fully cut back to the previous cut – ideally the hedge should grow, on average

by 5-10cm every 2-3 years. Apart from the case of roadside or footpath hedges, cutting should not be performed between March 1st and July 31st to avoid disturbance to wildlife, and this is a condition of certain government funding. Hedgerow height should be at least 1.5m, preferably 2m, and to remain in-keeping with the local landscape, trees should be allowed to grow, or introduced if not already present, approximately every 50m.

Where the base of the hedgerow is thin, laying can be performed to encourage a denser structure and better nesting habitat. Examples of laid hedges can be seen around the Millennium Green and in sections of School Lane.

8.3 Grassland

The great majority of Henbury parish is managed as grassland. This varies from the rare unimproved grassland areas to semi-improved grassland associated with non-intensive grazing to the improved grassland of the dairy farms. It also includes the parkland of the large estates.

It is estimated that 99% of unimproved grassland has been lost from Cheshire, a picture only marginally worse than that for UK as a whole, and therefore any remaining grassland of this type is important at both a local and a national level. Every effort should be taken to assist landowners to conserve this valuable habitat and appropriate management may be necessary to ensure its continued health. As noted elsewhere in this report this is likely to take the form of carefully-timed and limited grazing to prevent the encroachment of invasive species and scrub, without causing any sudden changes in profile that could affect the existing fauna. Typically this might include grazing by cattle in the autumn, however expert advice would be required on the most important sites.

Partly-improved grassland covers a far greater proportion of the parish, particularly in the north and east, and this can also offer good wildlife value and a varied flora. If possible, increased use of fertilisers on this land should be avoided, and agri-environment schemes can offer support in this regard. Where intensification does take place it can take many years at least from the cessation of fertiliser application before fertility levels can reduce to a level at which the non-aggressive flora can return: this may not occur while a seed-bank remains viable in the soil and hence the process is typically one-way in the medium term. Intensification of such grassland has occurred in several areas across the parish in the last year or so. Where management as hay meadow has been performed in recent years, this could be resumed by cutting in July/August and followed by cattle grazing to prevent the encroachment of aggressive weeds.

The improved grassland associated with intensive dairy farming offers only limited wildlife value in comparison to the above. The introduction of buffer strips of wild flowers and grasses into these areas can considerably increase their wildlife value, and perhaps encourage a limited return of some of the wildlife species that have vacated these areas. Encouraging the development of wild areas in less productive field corners can also be very beneficial.

8.4 Ponds

The majority of ponds within the parish have formed in old marl pits. In most cases they are now enclosed by tall trees and the light levels at water level are low. It is tempting to increase light levels by thinning/removing the surrounding trees but the conservation advice in this regard is not to change the situation especially where these conditions will have existed for many years. The ecosystem will have evolved into one that is suited to the shaded conditions and there is risk to disturbing this if radical changes are made.

Where ponds have generally had high light levels then these conditions can be maintained by periodic thinning of surrounding tree cover to suit the wildlife that thrives in this environment – such as dragonfly species. Coppicing should be performed here every few years, though some shade conditions should be maintained to support a greater diversity of wildlife.

Floating and marginal vegetation can be important for wildlife and should be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the pond condition, light levels and history. In addition, the presence of some dead wood in the water can be very beneficial.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This phase of the project has benefit greatly from the help, advice and data received from a number of people.

Ed Pilkington, countryside ranger with Macclesfield Borough Council (now Cheshire East Council) was instrumental in the initial survey work, providing extensive knowledge of landscape conservation and land management, and steering the project. His employers are thanked for allowing Ed to contribute.

Parish Councillor Andrew Fletcher hosted a number of meetings at Marlheath Farm with members of relevant advisory bodies and has provided a valuable insight into the factors driving modern farming practices, helping to highlight where landscape conservation is most likely to succeed in the farm environment.

Charlotte Harris, Head of Conservation at Cheshire Wildlife Trust, provided valuable steering on the survey report and general advice on the project as a whole. Mark Ambrose, also of Cheshire Wildlife Trust, and Elizabeth Snead of Cheshire County Council have been very helpful in providing the catalogued information on the local Sites of Biological Importance.

James Baggaley, Nature Conservation Officer with Cheshire East Council provided steering and contact information of a number of specialist wildlife groups in Cheshire.

Joe Winstanley of Agri-Environment Advice Ltd offered expertise on the government stewardship schemes supporting environmental enhancements on farms, as did Mark Stubbs of Natural England.

Ray Evans of Macclesfield RSPB has provided information on bird records within the parish and has co-ordinated the installation of several barn owl boxes. David Kitching, county recorder for Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies) has also provided local records for this insect group and has helped with surveying.

The rECOrd team have provided all the available wildlife records for Henbury parish which form an excellent starting point for species monitoring.

Henbury Parish Council have been very supportive of the work, with Sir Francis Graham-Smith in particular supporting with advice and document reviews.

Simon Browne, July 2009

10 BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following publications have been found useful in the preparation of this report. They contain a wealth of information relevant to landscape conservation.

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The following we sites contain useful information on wildlife and conservation and many have been used as reference for this project.

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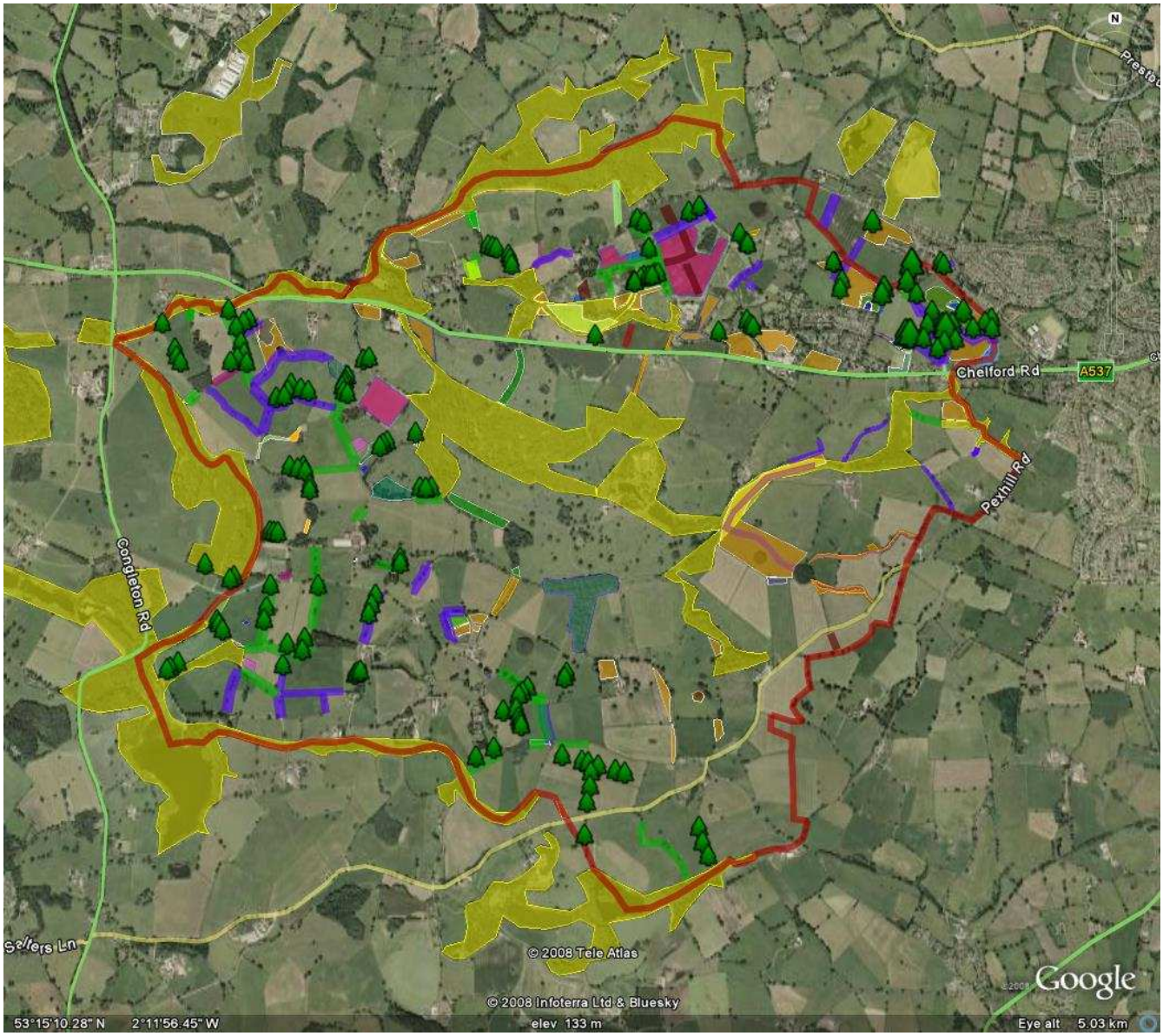
http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/

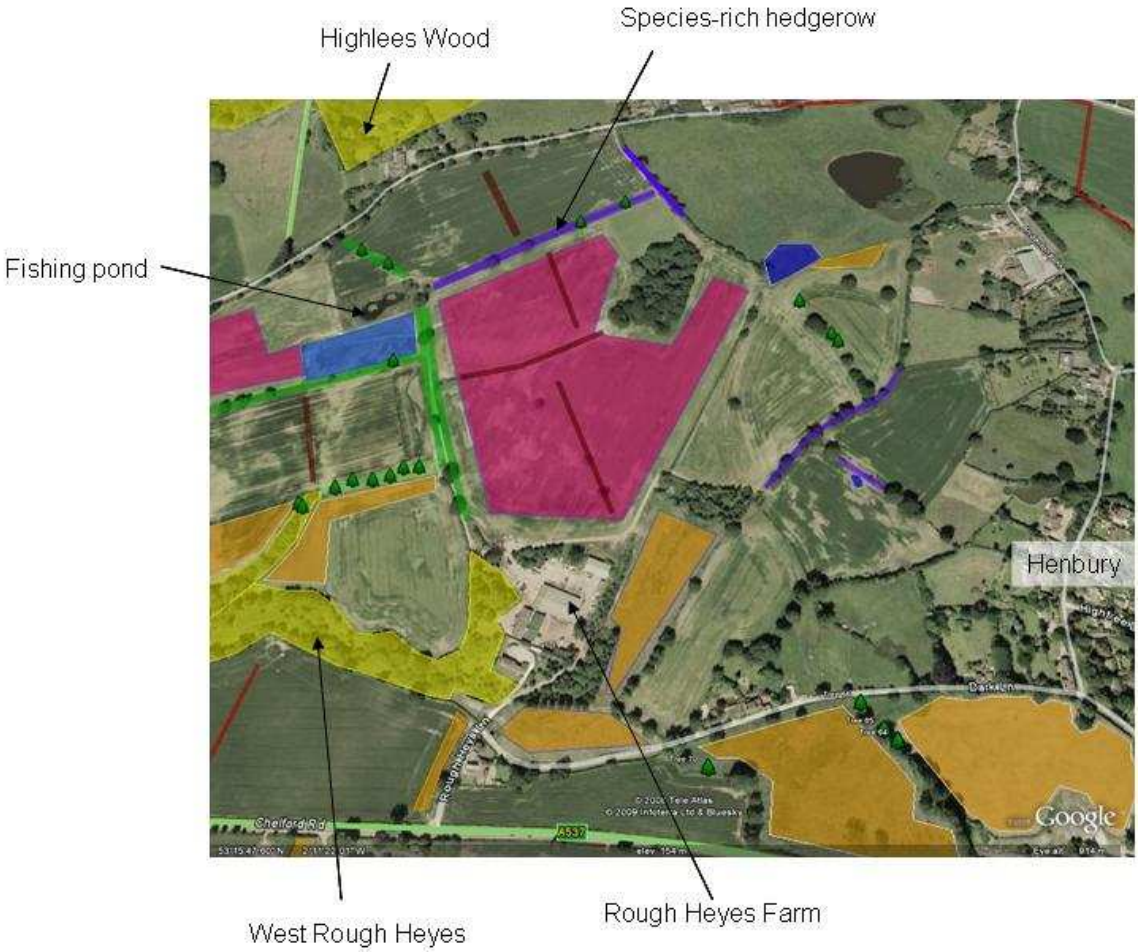
ANNEX: MAPS



1 Henbury Parish with initial habitat management overlay

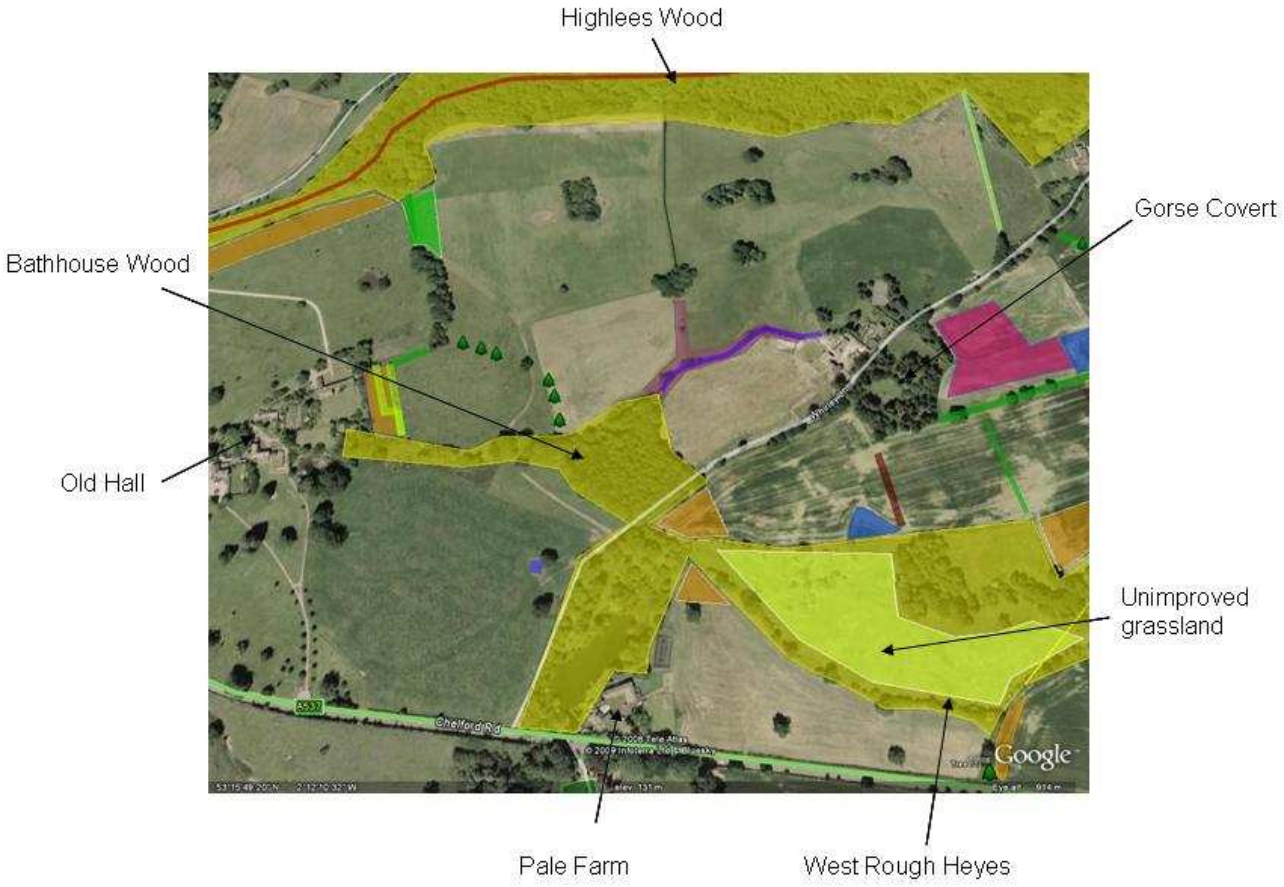
2 The north and east of Henbury village

3 Henbury village



4 North-West (1)

5 Highlees



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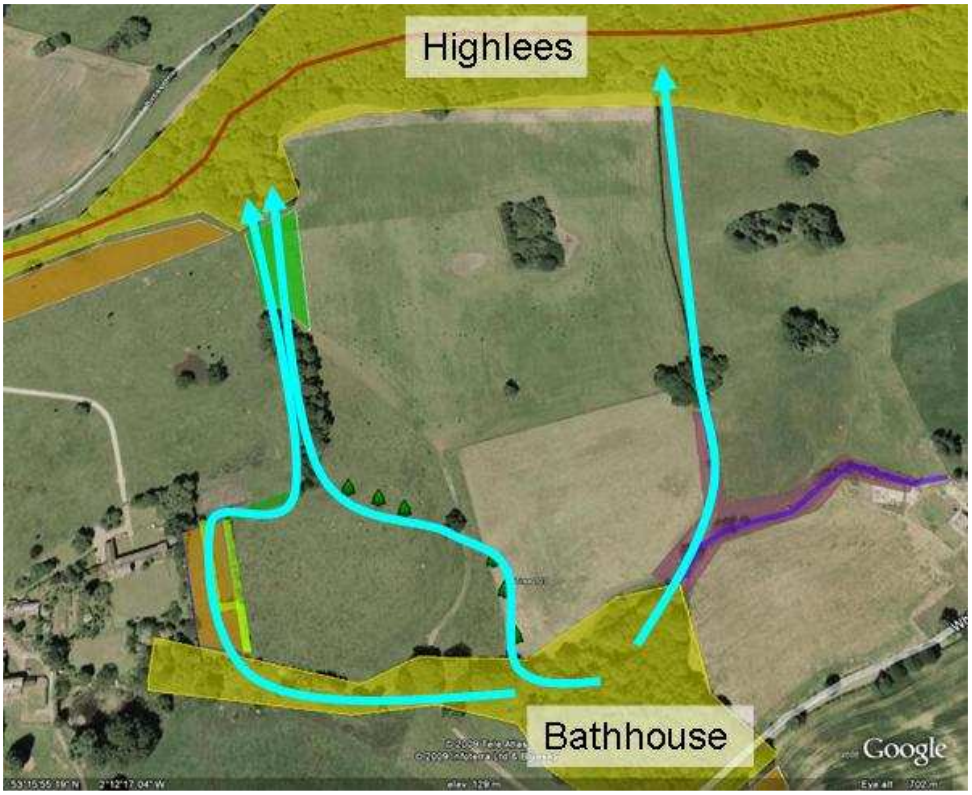
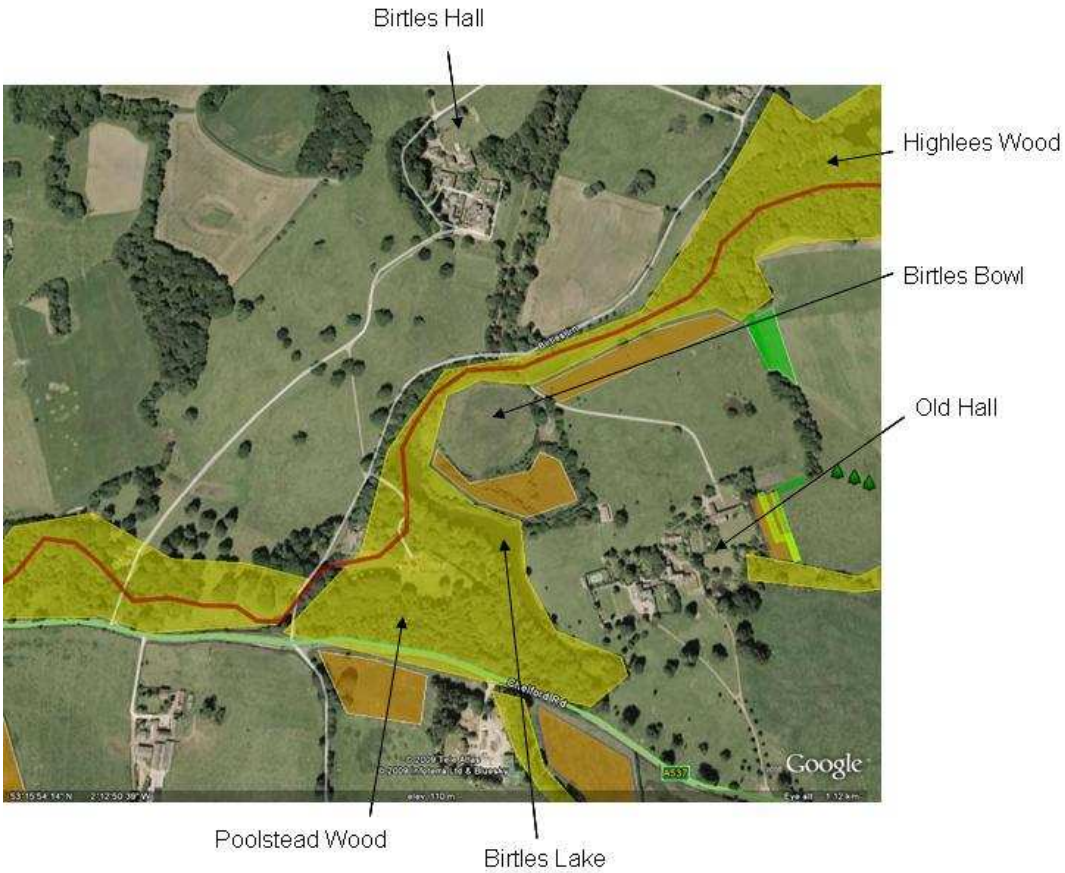
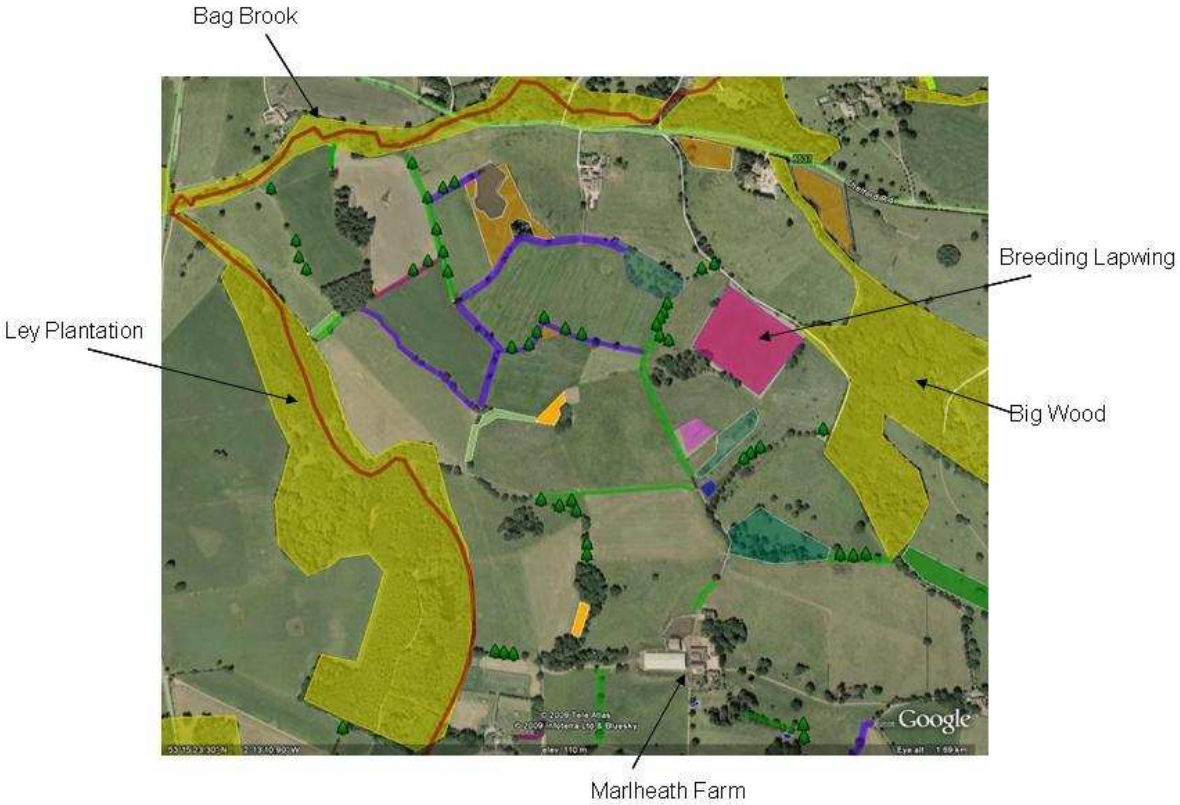


7 Possible corridors joining Bathhouse Wood and Highlees Wood



8 North-West (3)



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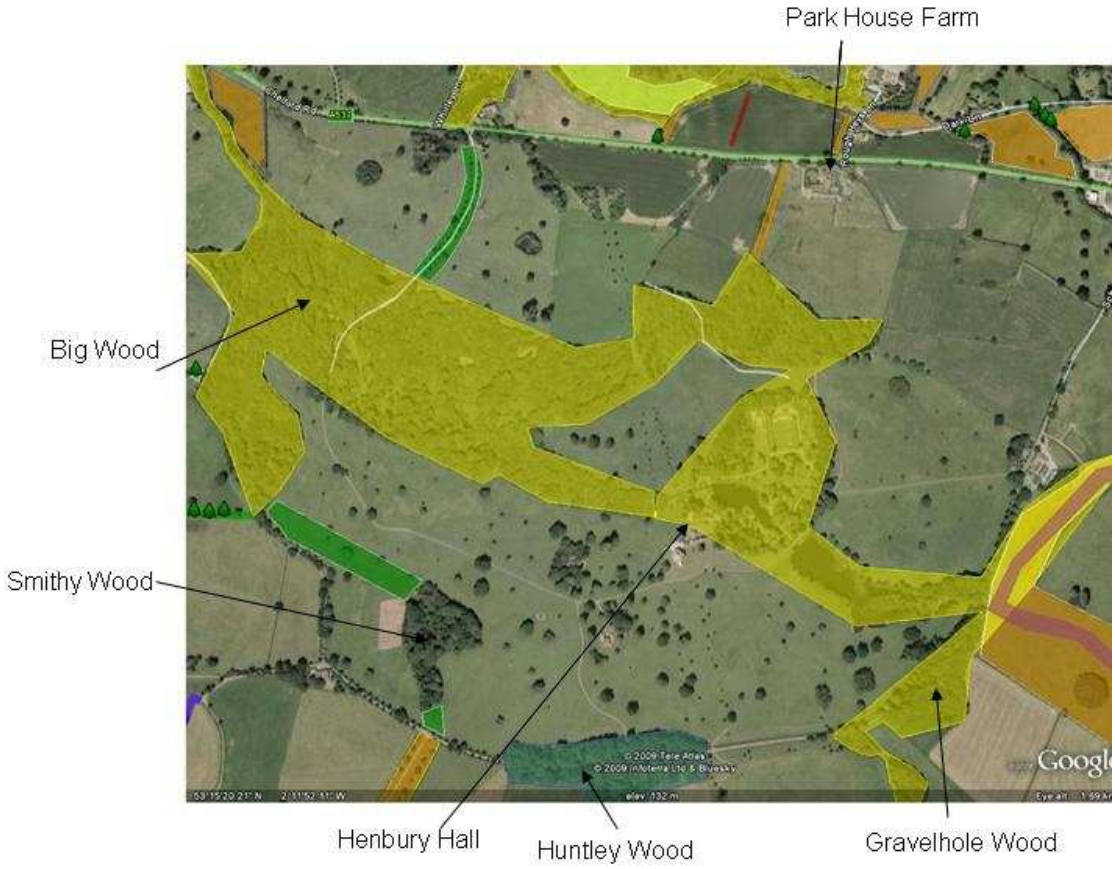
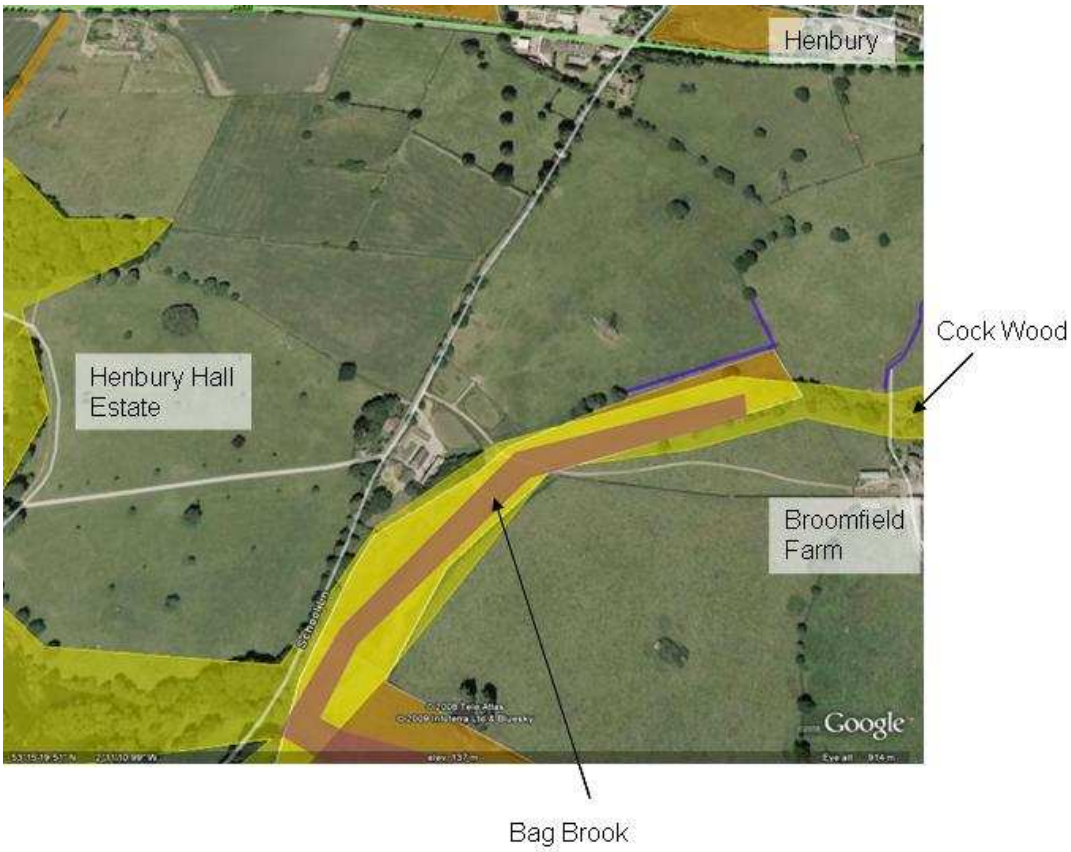
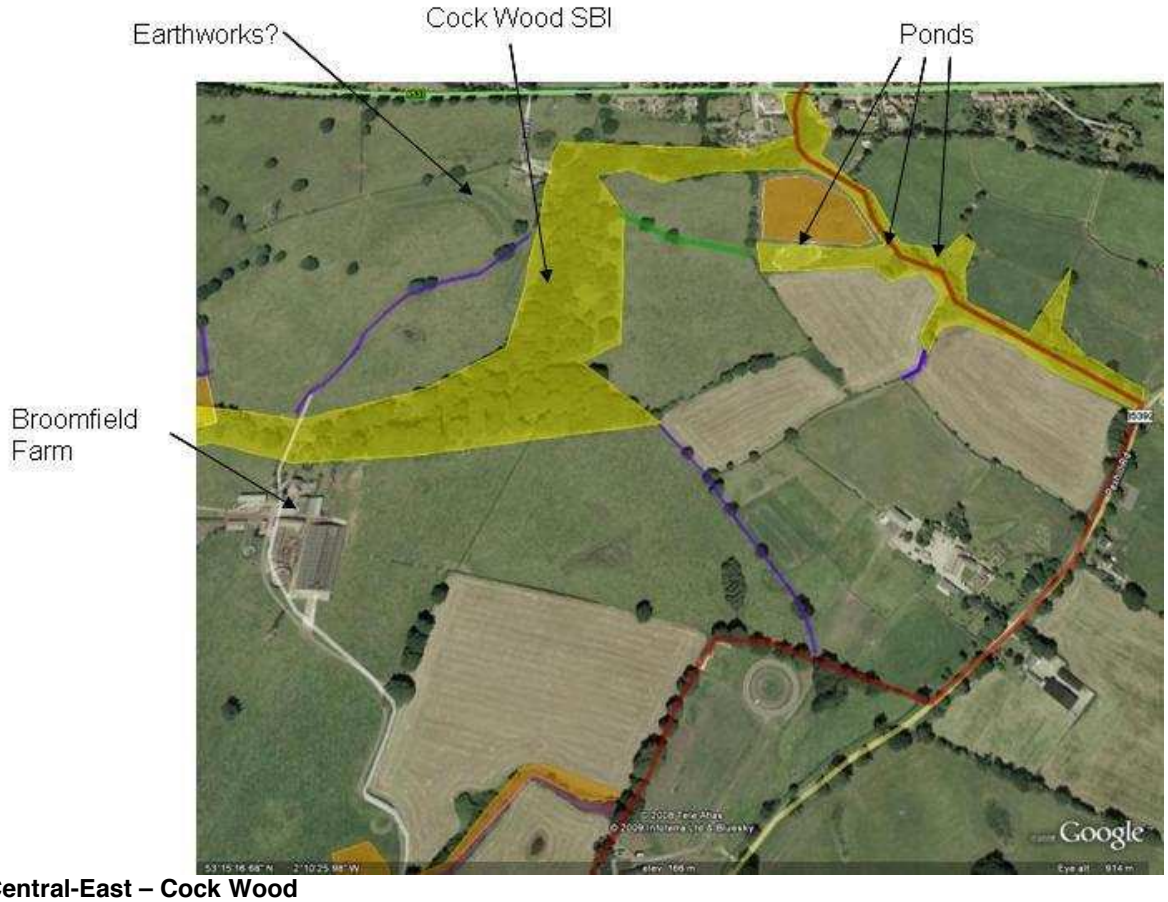


10 Central area – the Henbury Hall Estate



11 Central-East (1)



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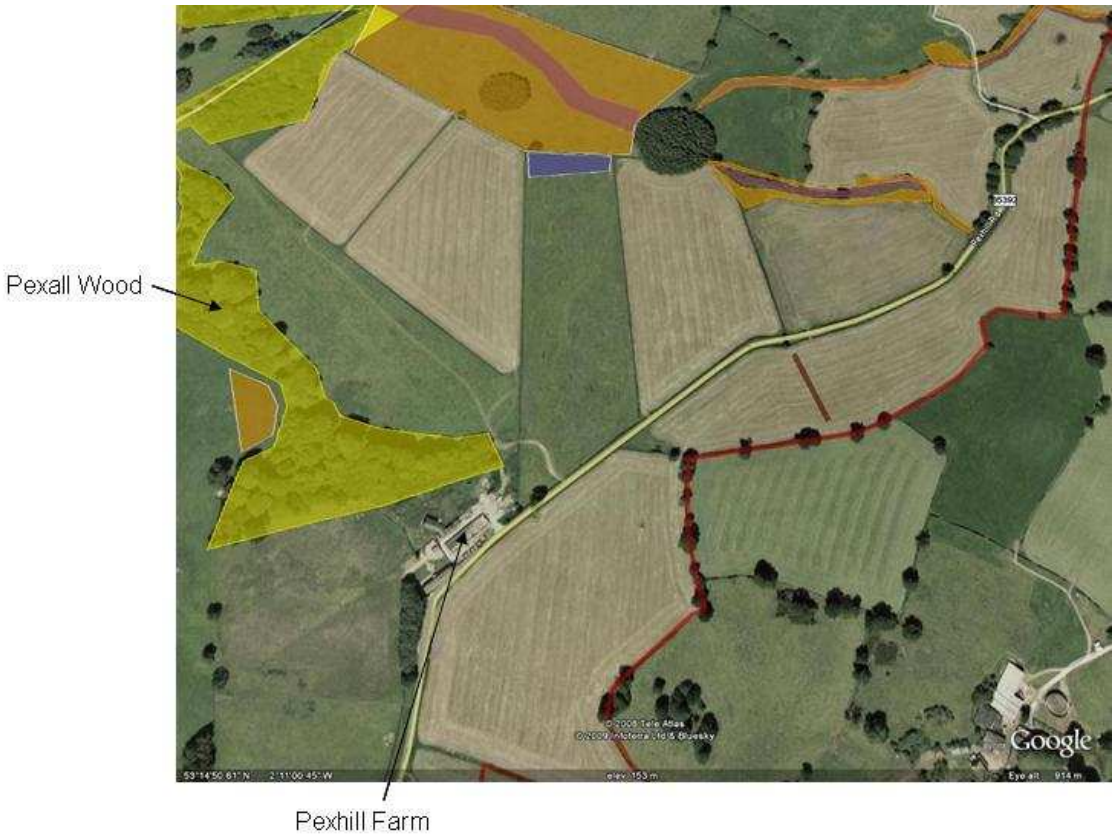

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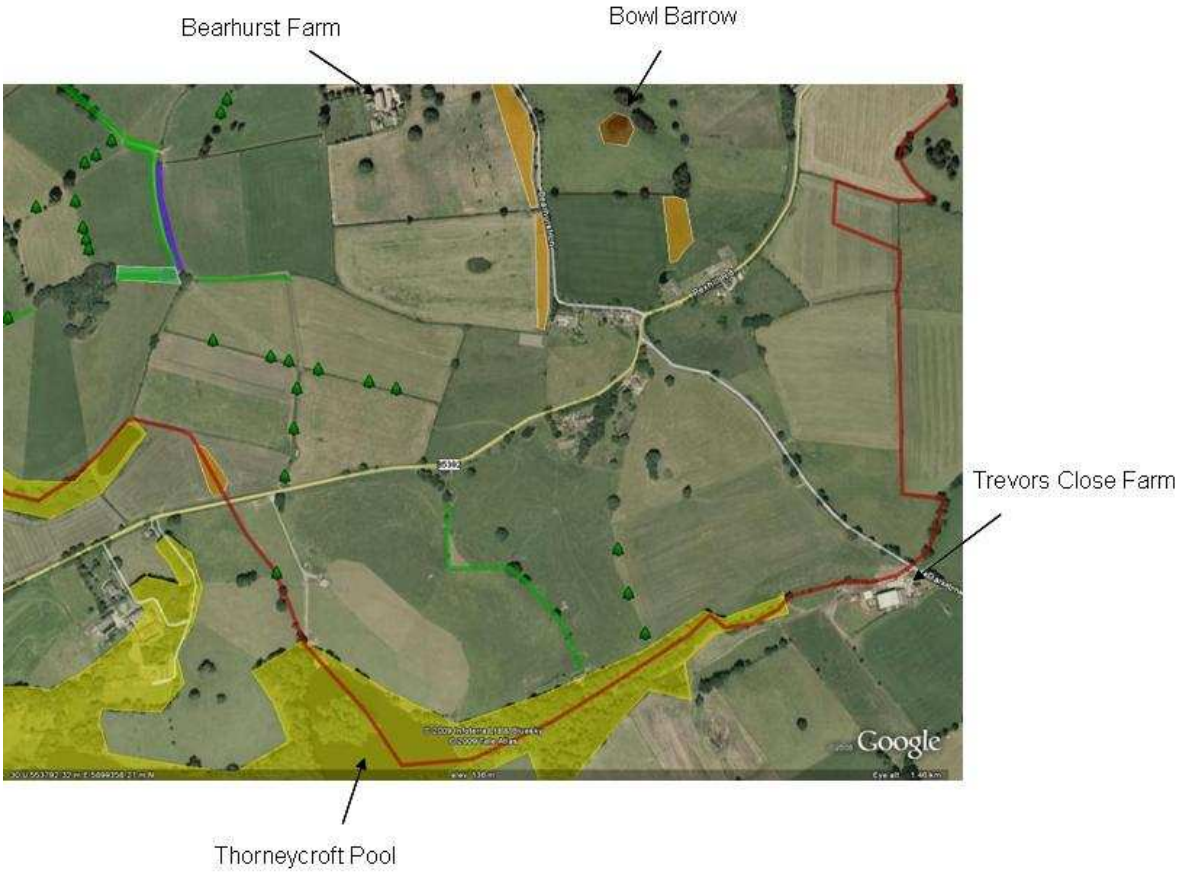

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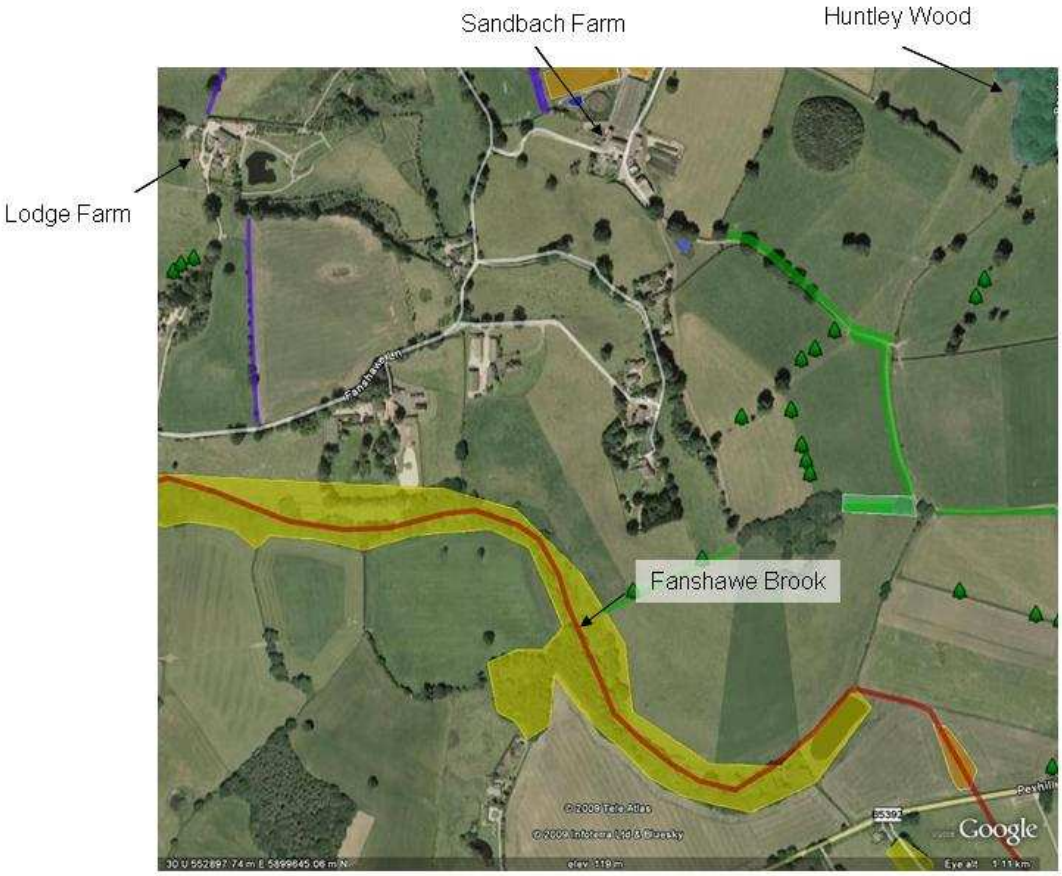
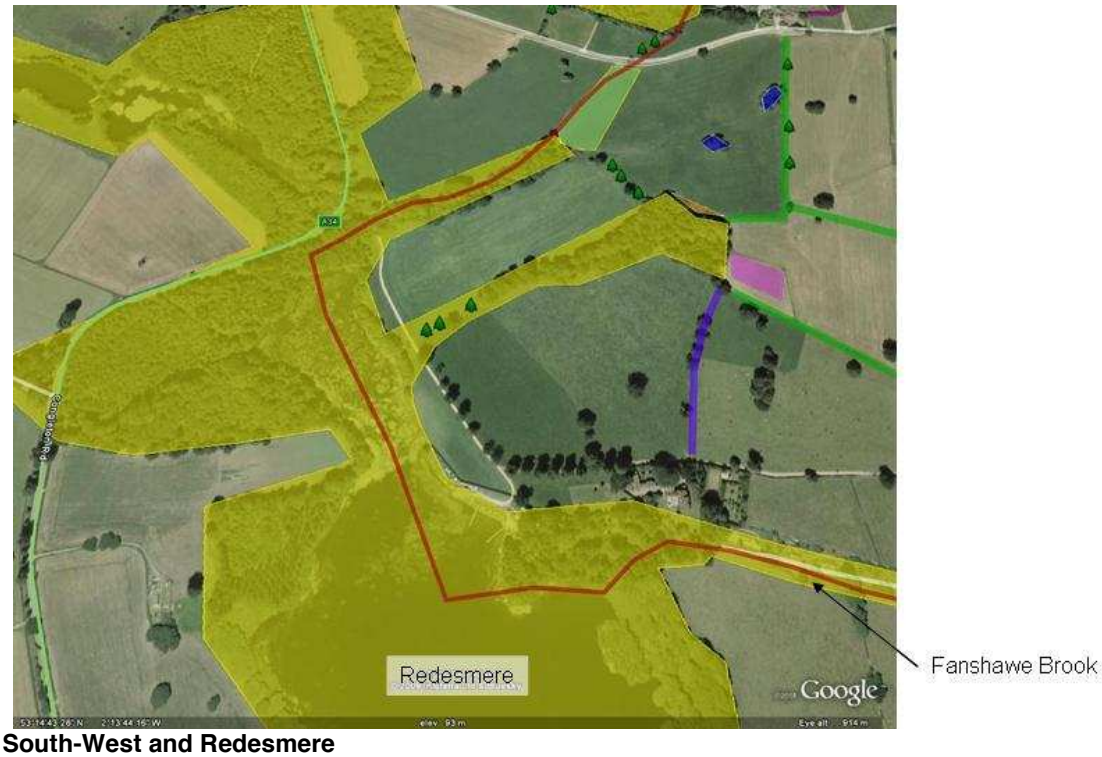


15 South-Central



16 South-West and Redesmere

NAV