

AN ECOLOGICAL SURVEY
of
LAND AT
WOODSFORD FIELDS, CROSSWAYS
[CRS05]

for
Dorset Council
November 2021

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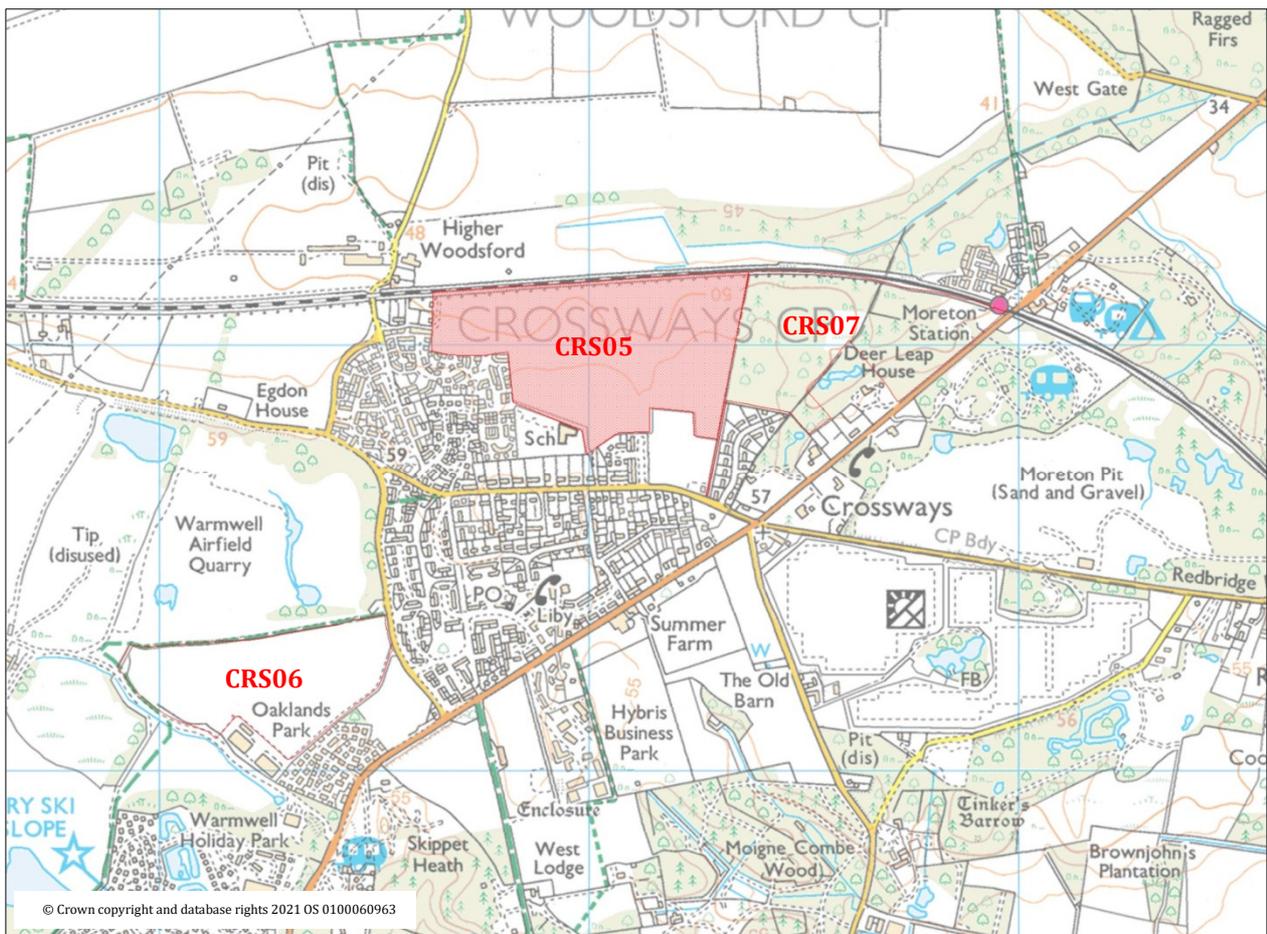
SUMMARY

- This report forms part of a suite of ecological surveys commissioned by Dorset Council's Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Teams. Together the survey reports form part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, containing extended Phase 1 survey information for the potential allocated sites, highlighting important habitats and the likelihood of protected species being present.
- The field is regularly cultivated and used for arable crops and is considered to be of **Low Ecological Interest** at the current time.
- Of most ecological interest is the narrow band of scrub and planted trees along the northern boundary of the field bordering the railway line.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report forms part of a suite of ecological surveys commissioned by Dorset Council's Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Teams. Together the survey reports form part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, containing extended Phase 1 survey information for the potential allocated sites, highlighting important habitats and the likelihood of protected species being present. The surveys have been carried out by Dorset Environmental Records Centre who are working with Dorset Council to ensure that ecological data for the Local Plan process is up to date.

MAP 1. Site location



2.0 METHODS

The survey was undertaken on the 2nd September 2021 in fine weather. The area was walked and a plant species list compiled with frequencies assigned to each species using the DAFOR scale¹. Particular attention was paid to the presence of any Section 41 or Red Listed species, and any that are on the Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) lists of Dorset Notable species (DERC, 2012). Habitats present were assessed for their potential to support protected species (see Section 6.1), and visible signs for Badger such as setts, latrines and paths were looked for. Each habitat type present and any species or features of particular note were described using target notes (see Section 5.2.2).

A habitat map was produced in the field by drawing boundaries of the different vegetation types over a print out of the latest aerial photograph. This was then digitized using DERCs Integrated Habitat System (IHS) mapping process.

The sites are assessed for their ecological interest at the time of the survey (see Section 6.0). Those sites assessed as being of **Low Ecological Interest** have very little interest and are generally improved grasslands or arable fields. Those of **Moderate Ecological Interest** may support some interest such as one or more Dorset Notable plant species, but do not qualify as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). Those of **High Ecological Interest** are of SNCI quality and are therefore an important wildlife site within a county context.

Nomenclature for plants follows Stace (2019).

¹ The DAFOR scale records species according their abundance as follows:

D = Dominant; **A** = Abundant; **F** = Frequent; **O** = Occasional; **R** = Rare; **L** = Local (e.g. **LF** = Locally Frequent)

3.0 LEGISLATION & POLICY

3.1 LEGISLATION

The following legislation may be of relevance to the proposed works. Full details of statutory obligations with respect to biodiversity and the planning system can be found in DCLG Circular 06/2005.

- **The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019:**

This transposes the EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) into domestic law and ensures that the habitat and species protection and standards will continue to apply upon the UK's exit from the EU. The Regulations provide protection for a number of species including:

- All species of bat
- Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)
- Great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*).

This legislation makes it an offence to deliberately capture, kill or injure individuals of these species listed on Schedule 2 and damage or destroy their breeding site or place of shelter. It is also illegal to deliberately disturb these species in such a way as to be likely to significantly affect: (i) the ability of any significant group of the species to survive, breed or rear or nurture their young; or (ii) the local distribution or abundance of the species.

This legal protection means that where development has the potential to impact on bats, or other species of national interest, the results of a protected species survey must be submitted with a planning application.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are also protected under this legislation. These are a network of sites designated for supporting habitats or species of high nature conservation importance in the European context. Any activity that has a detrimental effect on these European sites³ is made an offence under the Regulations. Where a development is likely to have a significant impact on a European site, the Regulations require a rigorous assessment of the impacts, known as an Appropriate Assessment.

- **The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and amendments):**

Protected fauna and flora are listed under Schedules 1, 5 & 8 of the Act. Species likely to be of relevance include:

- All species of **bat**. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb any bat whilst it is occupying a roost or to intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost
- All species of **British reptile** (in particular grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), adder (*Vipera berus*) and slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*)). It is illegal to kill or injure these species
- **Great crested newt**. It is illegal to obstruct access to any structure or place which great crested newts use for shelter or protection or to disturb any great crested newt while it is using such a place.

This Act also makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or to take, damage or destroy their eggs and nests (whilst in use or being built). In addition, it is an offence to disturb any nesting bird listed on Schedule 1 or their young.

Schedule 9 of the Act lists those species for which it is an offence to plant or cause their spread. Species listed under Schedule 9 that are most likely to be encountered are Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*).

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are also protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. These are a network of sites identified as being of national nature conservation importance and hence afforded legal protection.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are also protected under the Act (section 35 (1)) and established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. These are nature reserves which are considered to be of national importance by the relevant statutory bodies i.e. Natural England, Natural resource Wales.

- **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006:**

This Act enforces a duty on the planning authority and local council to conserve biodiversity (section 40). Additionally, section 41 encourages the local councils to be aware of the species and habitats of 'principal importance' and to act accordingly to protect and manage these habitats and species.

- **The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000:**

This Act strengthens nature conservation and wildlife protection through a number of mechanisms. It places a duty on Government Ministers and Departments to conserve biological diversity, provides police with stronger powers relating to wildlife crimes, and improves protection and management of SSSIs.

- **The Protection of Badgers Act 1992:**

This Act makes it an offence to wilfully take, injure or kill a badger (*Meles meles*); cruelly mistreat a badger; interfere with badger setts, sell or possess a live badger; mark or ring a badger. A licence is required for work affecting badgers and their setts.

- **Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996:**

This Act provides protection for all wild animals from intentional acts of cruelty.

- **Hedgerow Regulations 1997:**

These Regulations establish a set of criteria for assessing the importance of hedgerows. Where a hedgerow is deemed to be 'important' its removal is prohibited without consent from the local Planning Authority.

3.2 POLICY

The following policy is of relevance to this report:

- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):**

This sets out the Government's vision for biodiversity in England with the broad aim that planning, construction, development and regeneration should maintain and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests. NPPF (2018) includes sections on legally protected species and sites (see Section 2.1).

- **Local Sites (including Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), and Biological Notification Sites (BNSs)/County Wildlife Sites (CWSs)):**

These are a network of sites designated for their nature conservation importance in a local context. Although they are not afforded legal protection they contribute towards local and national biodiversity.

- **Natural England Protected Species Standing Advice:**

The standing advice is used by local authorities as a fall-back position when in pre-application consultation or during the determination period to define habitat and species survey efforts and mitigation proposals.

4.0 EXISTING DATA

The following summary is based on the desk study carried out by DERC for Dorset Council covering the Local Plan Emerging Site Allocations (DERC 2020). The species records are based on post-2010 data.

4.1 PROTECTED SPECIES

Species	Status	Distance from site
Badger	WCA	Within 1-km radius
Bats	EPS; WCA	Within 1-km radius
Dormouse	S41; EPS; WCA	-
Otter	EPS; WCA	-
Water Vole	S41; WCA	-
Brown Hare	S41	-
Hedgehog	S41	-
Great Crested Newt	EPS; S41	-
Reptiles	S41; WCA	-

4.2 PROTECTED HABITATS

Lowland Heathland – Section 41; UK Priority Habitat	920 metres to the east
Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland – Section 41; UK Priority Habitat	1,430 metres to the south
Wet Woodland – Section 41; UK Priority Habitat	1,440 metres to the south

4.3 PROTECTED SITES

Dorset Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	1,410 metres to the south
Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA)	1,410 metres to the south
Dorset Heathlands RAMSAR	1,410 metres to the south
Warmwell Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	1,410 metres to the south

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 SITE DESCRIPTION

The site lies between Crossway and the Weymouth – London railway line and overlies the Poole Formation which gives rise to acid free-draining soils although the site gets damper at the bottom of the slope in the northeast corner where a ditch has been dug. At the time of the survey the field was a wheat crop which occupies c. 95% of the area, the only semi-natural habitat present in a thin strip adjoining the railway line along the northern boundary. .

5.2 HABITAT DESCRIPTION

Field

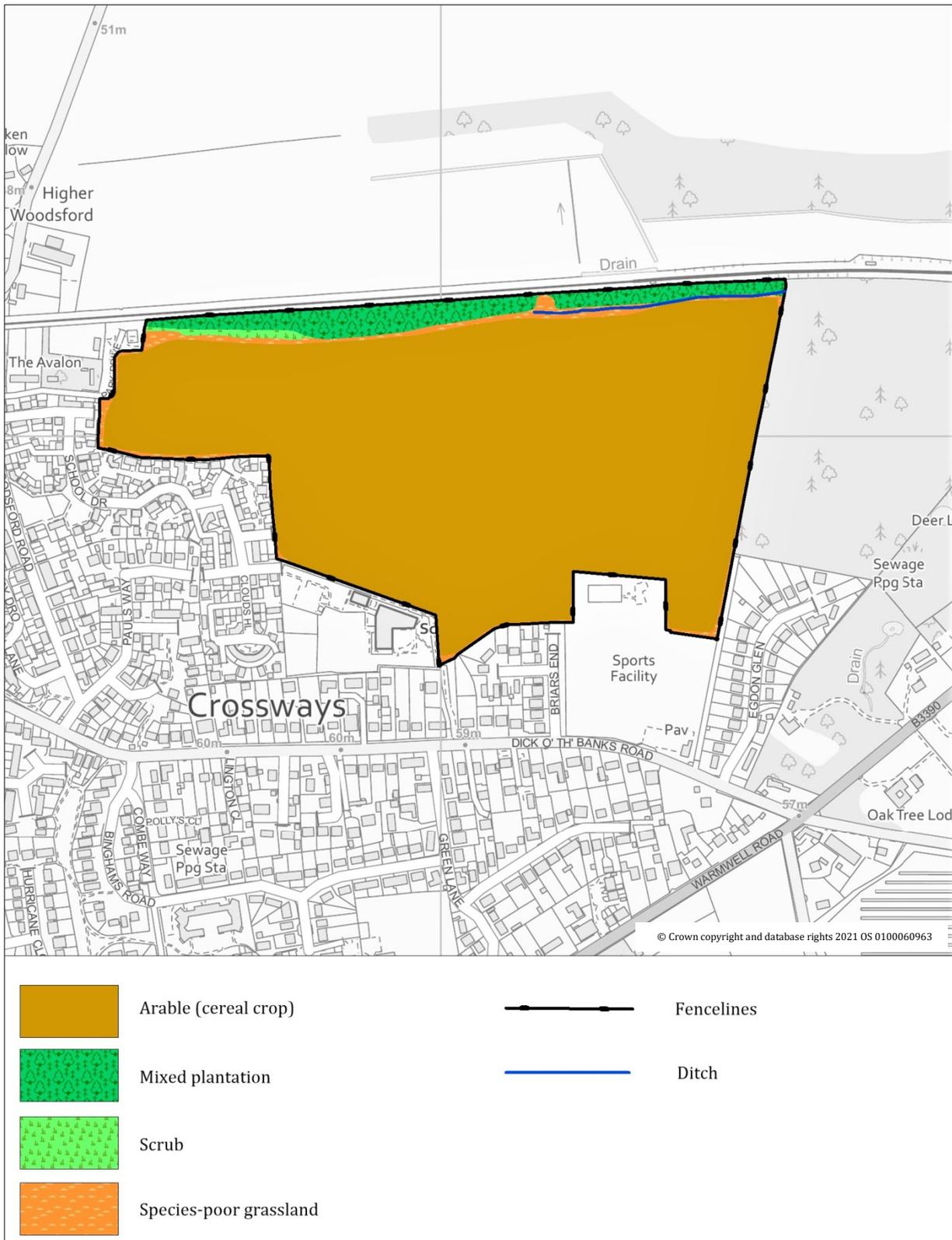
The field had a cereal crop that had been harvested at the time of the survey. The bare patches in the stubble held a range of widespread arable plants including Knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare*, Common Field Speedwell *Veronica persica*, Scentless Mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum* and Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua*, with species found on sandy soils such as Dove's-foot Crane's-bill *Geranium molle* and Trailing St John's-wort *Hypericum humifusum* also locally frequent. Less common arable species include Field Madder *Sherardia arvensis* and Sharp-leaved Fluellen *Kickxia elatine*.

Field margins

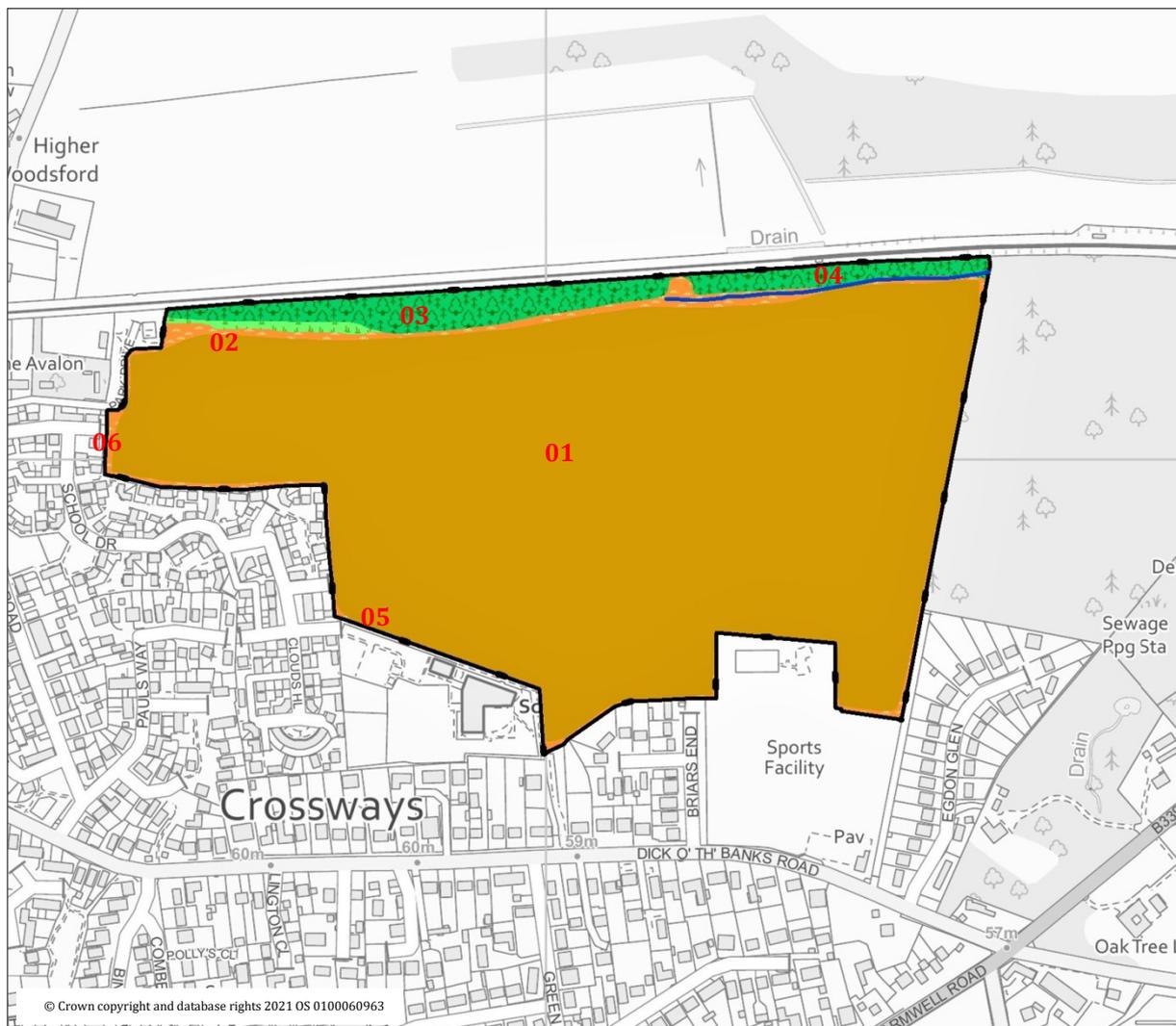
The main habitat of ecological interest present on the site is a 20-40 metre wide band along the northern boundary adjoining the railway line. The trees that have been planted here are around 30 years old, just visible as young trees on the 1997 aerial photos. There are mixed areas with Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*, Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Scot's Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, with smaller quantities of Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Beech *Fagus sylvatica* and Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*. Beneath the trees is a grassy sward of Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris* with patchy Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. Closer to the field there is a band of rank grassland with patches of dense Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* dominates the grassland with frequent Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Yorkshire Fog and Common Bent, plus patchy Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*. Herbs include White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Smooth Hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris* and Common Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, plus patches of Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense* and scattered Ragwort *Jacobaea vulgare*. Further east the soil is damper and a ditch has been dug. There are patches of Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* with scattered Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* is abundant along the ditch.

On the southern and western margins of the field is a narrow band of coarse vegetation dominated by the grasses Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* with few herbs apart from Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, Ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris* and Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica*.

5.2.1 Habitat map



5.2.2 Target notes



No.	Grid Ref	Target Note
01	SY7703 8897	The field had a cereal crop in 2021 and was wheat stubble at the time of the survey. The field edges had a number of common arable plants such as Common Field Speedwell, Groundsel and Knotgrass plus species of sandy soils such Trailing St John's-wort and Dove's-foot Crane's-bill. Less common species include Field Madder and Sharp-leaved Fluellen.
02	SY7671 8910	Northern margin, west end - a wide grassy strip of Common Bent and Cock's-foot, with smaller quantities of False Oat-grass, Yorkshire Fog and Perennial Rye-grass. Herbs are few apart from scattered plants of White Clover, Creeping Thistle, Ragwort, Canadian Fleabane and Smooth Hawk's-beard.

No.	Grid Ref	Target Note
03	SY7690 8913	Northern margin, central area – this area is a recent plantation, mainly Sweet Chestnut with small quantities of Ash, Rowan and Scot’s Pine. Beneath the trees is patchy Bramble and Bracken, with grassy sward of Common Bent and Yorkshire Fog.
04	SY7725 8915	Northern margin, eastern end. This end is damper with a ditch between the field edge and the planted trees, the ditch has few plants except for clumps of Soft Rush. There is a narrow band of grassland with abundant Common Bent, Cock’s-foot and Yorkshire Fog with rare Red Fescue. There are several patches of Grey Willow scrub plus planted Alder, Sweet Chestnut and a few Scot’s Pine.
05	SY7686 8885	Southwest margin with a narrow margin of coarse grassland dominated by Cock’s-foot and False Oat-grass with patches of Bramble and Stinging Nettle.
06	SY7663 8902	Western margin by gate with a wide band of coarse grassland with Cock’s-foot, False Oat-grass and Perennial Rye-grass, with scattered Ribwort Plantain, White Clover, Hogweed, Ragwort and Stinging Nettle.

6.0 ASSESSMENT

The larger field is regularly cultivated and had a cereal crop in 2021 and is considered to currently be of **Low Ecological Interest**. The only habitat of some interest is the narrow band of rough grassland and scrub with planted broadleaved and coniferous trees in the north of the fields bordering the Weymouth – London railway line. There are no notable plants here, but the area is likely to support common breeding birds and habitat for reptiles.

6.1 PROTECTED SPECIES ASSESSMENT

Species	Status	Habitat potential	Future surveys
Badger	WCA	No latrines or setts noted along the northern boundary where suitable habitat for Badgers is present. Several mammal tracks noted along the northern and eastern boundary of the site, but these were not confirmed as Badger.	
Bats	EPS; WCA	No mature trees on the site. Suitable foraging habitat is found along the northern boundary where the belt of trees is maturing and there is also some grassland and scrub and it faces south. Along the eastern boundary is mature secondary woodland (CRS07) which provides a woodland edge flight line and foraging habitat.	
Dormouse	S41; EPS; WCA		
Otter	EPS; WCA	No suitable habitat present on the site.	
Water Vole	S41; WCA	No suitable habitat present on the site.	
Brown Hare	S41		
Hedgehog	S41	Suitable habitat on the south-facing grassy bank in the north of the site.	
Great Crested Newt	EPS; S41	No permanent water present on the site.	
Reptiles	S41; WCA	Suitable habitat for Slow Worm and Common Lizard on the south-facing grassy bank in the north of the site.	

REFERENCES

DERC 2012 *Dorset Notable Species Lists*. Dorset Environmental Records Centre, Dorchester

DERC 2020 *Local Plan Emerging Site Allocations: Ecological Data*. [Unpublished report for Dorset Council]

Stace, C.A. 2019 *New Flora of the British Isles* (4th Ed). C & M Floristics, Suffolk.

APPENDIX I: Plant species recorded 7th September 2021

Species	Common Name	Frequency¹
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	PI ²
<i>Aethusa cynapium</i>	Fool's Parsley	R
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	Common Bent	O-LA
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent	O-LF
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Alder	O
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False Oat-grass	O-LA
<i>Castanea sativa</i>	Sweet Chestnut	PI
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping Thistle	O
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle	R
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	Smooth Hawk's-beard	O
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot	O-LA
<i>Elytrigia repens</i>	Common Couch	O
<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	Great Willowherb	R
<i>Erigeron canadensis</i>	Canadian Fleabane	O
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Beech	PI
<i>Festuca rubra</i>	Red Fescue	R
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	PI
<i>Fumaria officinalis</i>	Common Fumitory	R
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	Cut-leaved Crane's-bill	O
<i>Geranium molle</i>	Dove's-foot Crane's-bill	O
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood Avens	R
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed	O
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire-fog	O-LF
<i>Hypericum humifusum</i>	Trailing St John's-wort	O-LF
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	Common Cat's-ear	O-LF
<i>Jacobaea vulgare</i>	Ragwort	O
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft Rush	O-LF
<i>Kickxia elatine</i>	Sharp-leaved Fluellen	R-O
<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>	Common Toadflax	R
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial Rye-grass	O-LF
<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	Scot's Pine	PI
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain	R-O
<i>Poa annua</i>	Annual Meadow-grass	O-LF
<i>Polygonum aviculare</i>	Knotgrass	O-LF
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken	O-LF
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Pedunculate Oak	PI
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup	O
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	Bramble	O-LA
<i>Salix cinerea</i>	Grey Willow	R-O
<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	Groundsel	O-LF

Species	Common Name	Frequency ¹
<i>Sherardia arvensis</i>	Field Madder	O
<i>Sisymbrium officinale</i>	Hedge Mustard	R
<i>Sonchus arvensis</i>	Perennial Sow-thistle	O
<i>Sonchus asper</i>	Prickly Sow-thistle	R
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> agg.	Dandelion	O
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	White Clover	O
<i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i>	Scentless Mayweed	O-LA
<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	Common Gorse	R
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Stinging Nettle	O
<i>Veronica persica</i>	Common Field Speedwell	O-LF

¹ **D** = Dominant; **A** = Abundant; **F** = Frequent; **O** = Occasional; **R** = Rare; **L** = Local (e.g. **LF** = Locally Frequent)

² Pl = Planted