

AN ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF SELECTED SITES AT MILTON ABBAS

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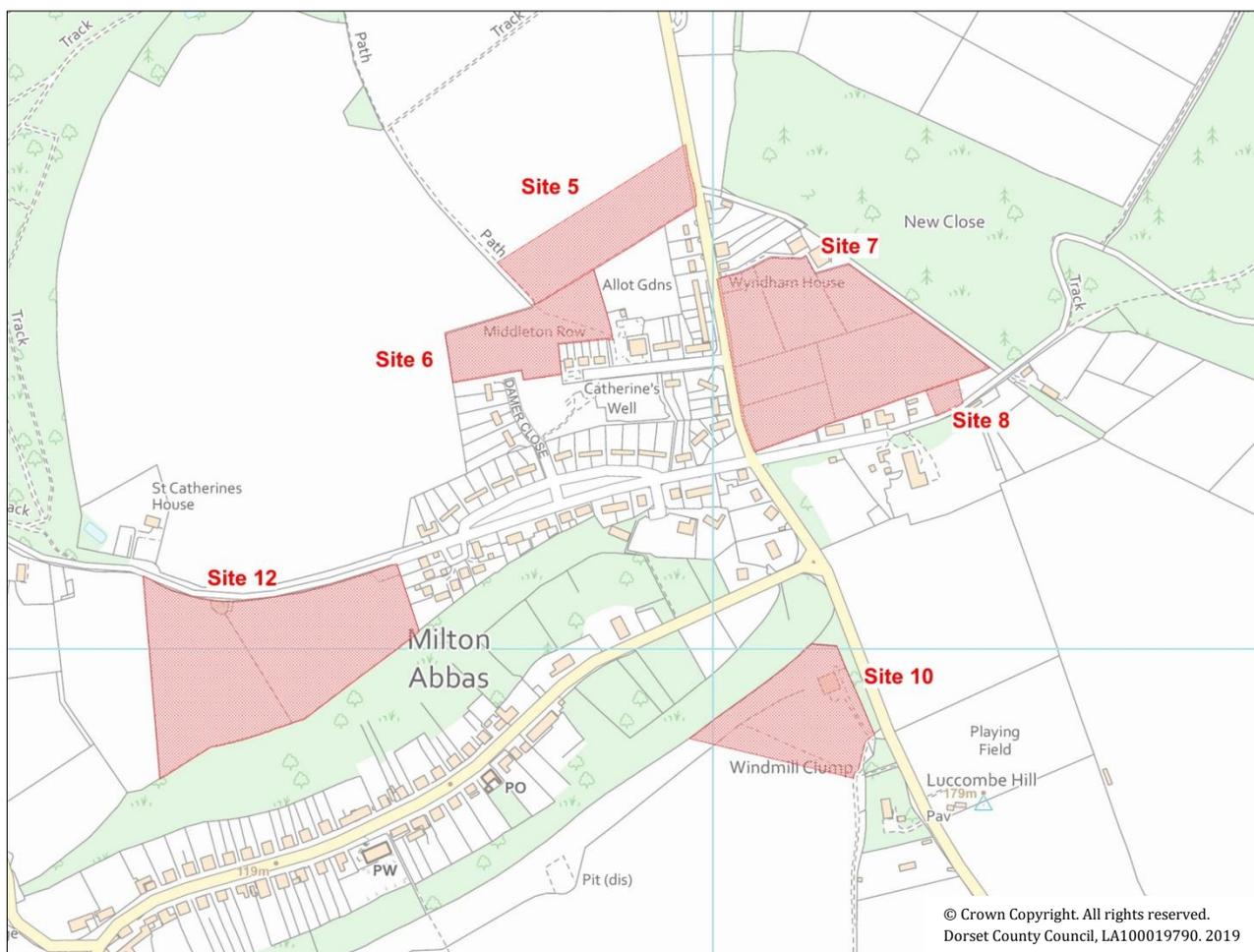
27th March 2019

BACKGROUND

An ecological survey was undertaken of six areas that have been put forward for development within the Milton Abbas Neighbourhood Plan. The sites were surveyed on the 18th March 2019. In addition a search was made for Protected Species and Biodiversity Priority (BAP) Species from the DERC database.

The following conclusions relate specifically to the brief supplied at the time of writing, if the proposals should change a re-appraisal or appraisal amendment may be required.

Map 1. Location of sites surveyed



SUMMARY

- The grasslands at all are improved or semi-improved and of little ecological interest with no Red Listed, Nationally Scarce or Dorset Notable species present.
- The hedgerows **Sites 5/6, 7 and 12** are the most important ecological features and may qualify as Important Hedgerows under the Hedgerow Regulations Act (1997).
- No Protected species were recorded from the four sites surveyed, although time of the year was not ideal for some species.
- There are no records of protected species directly on any of the four sites surveyed, but there are records of Bats close to several of the sites.

SITE DESCRIPTIONS:

Site 5. Land at Langham Farm, ST8088 0244

This site is the southern part and of an agricultural field which at the time of the survey was sown with an arable crop. Flailed hedgerows are present along the southern edge and the roadside to the east. There is a footpath along the western edge plus a line of mature trees that were part of an ornamental planting.

From an ecological point of view the hedgerows are the most important features. The southern hedge is dominated by Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, with smaller quantities of Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Elder *Sambucus nigra*. The ground layer and margin has frequent to abundant Ivy *Hedera helix*, Cleavers *Galium aparine*, Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* and Cuckoo Pint *Arum maculatum*.

The line of trees on the west side comprises mature multi-stemmed Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, with a few scattered shrubs of Elder and Hawthorn beneath. The ground flora is dominated by Ivy with Cleavers, Stinging Nettle, Cow Parsley and Cuckoo Pint.

Site 6. Land at Catherine's Well 1, ST8080 0233

A field in the north-west of the village at St Catherine's Well, with Damer's Close to the south-west, the Allotments to the east and fields to the north and west. The field has been unmanaged for several and is used by dog walkers, a footpath runs through the centre of the site.

The grassland sward is semi-improved and species-poor. Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* dominate with smaller quantities of False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, with Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* in shorter areas along paths. Herbs are largely restricted to abundant Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and frequent Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata* with occasional scattered plants of Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, Cut-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium dissectum*, Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg.

Small groups of trees have been planted in the field with Scot's Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, Beech *Fagus sylvatica* and Maple *Acer campestre*. Along the north edge of the field is a dense stand of Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. which has spread out from the hedge, beneath the Bramble Stinging Nettle and Cleavers *Galium aparine* is abundant.

In the northeast of the site is a hedge which divides the field from Site 7. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* dominates with scattered Elder *Sambucus nigra* and rare Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Holly *Ilex aquifolium*. The ground layer has frequent to abundant Ivy *Hedera helix*, Stinging Nettle, Cleavers, Bramble and Cuckoo Pint *Arum maculatum*.

MAP 2. Habitat map for sites 5 and 6



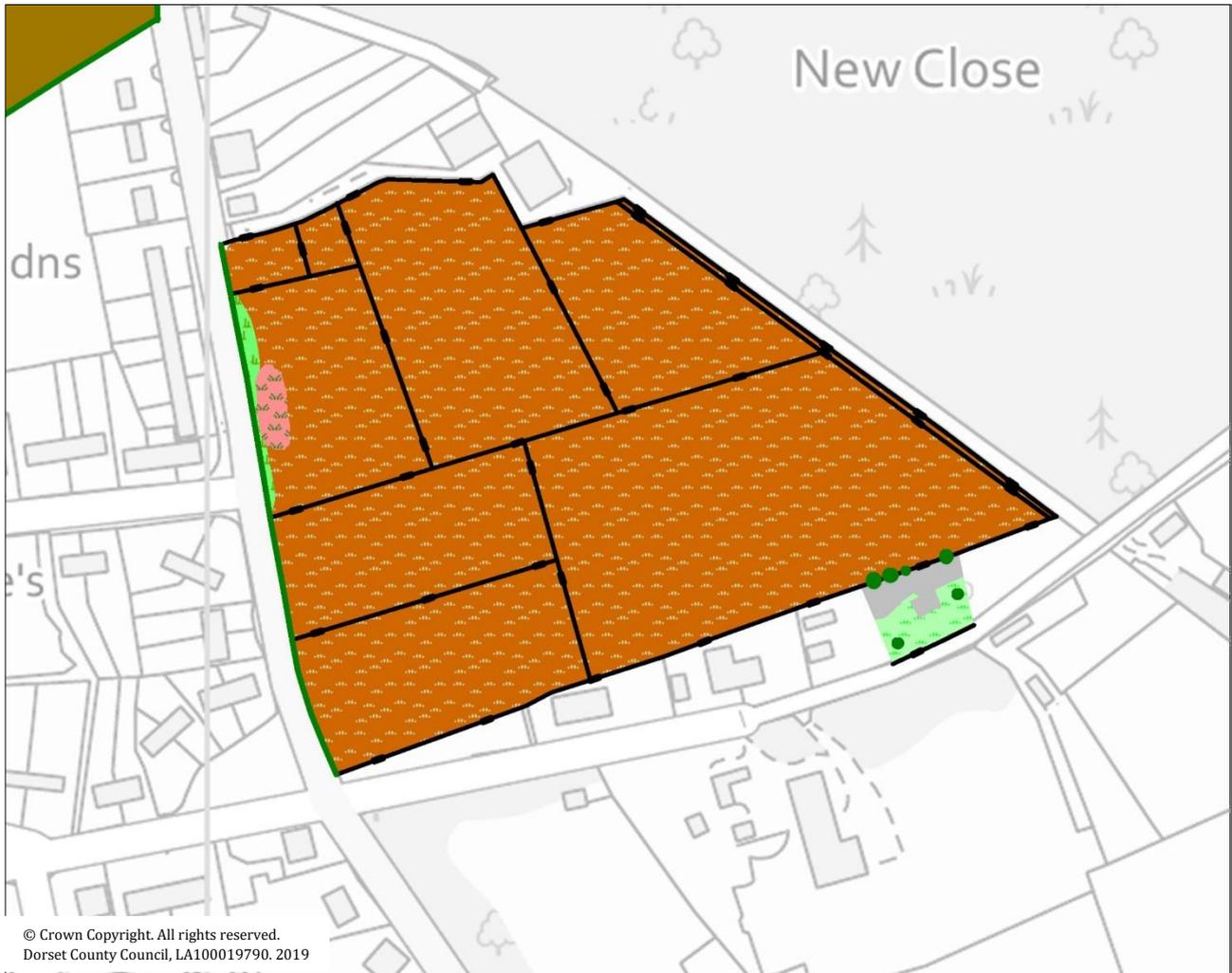
Site 7. Land at Catherine's Well 2, ST8106 0230

A large field on the east side of the village between the road and the woodland of New Close which forms part of the Milton Park Wood and is listed as Ancient Woodland which has been replanted, the woods are recognised as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). The field slopes gently to the southeast and is split into smaller horse paddocks. A flailed hedgerow forms the roadside boundary.

The grassland is best described as semi-improved and species-poor with the sward dominated by Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, with smaller quantities of Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Perennial Ryegrass *Lolium perenne* and False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*. Herbs are largely restricted to Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius* and Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg., plus more scattered Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*, Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, Cut-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium dissectum* and Daisy *Bellis perennis*. In the southeast quarter where the sward is shorter Common Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* is locally frequent. Towards the road hedge there are stands of Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* is spreading out from the hedge in places.

The road hedge is dominated by Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* with smaller quantities of Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Wayfaring Tree *Viburnum lantana*. The ground layer is dominated by Ivy *Hedera helix*, with Bramble, Cuckoo Pint *Arum maculatum*, Cleavers *Galium aparine* and Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*.

MAP 3. Habitat map for Sites 7 and 8



- | | | | |
|---|---|---|------------|
|  | Species-poor grassland |  | Hedgerows |
|  | Improved grassland |  | Fencelines |
|  | Low scrub - Bramble dominated |  | Trees |
|  | Tall ruderal vegetation | | |
|  | Hard standing, building & man-made structures | | |

Site 8. Land at Catherine's Well 3, ST8124 0226

This is a very small area which is at present used a garden to the property to the west. There is little of ecological interest with no semi-natural habitat present.

The area nearest the lane is a lawn and best described as improved grassland and grass-dominated with very few herbs present. Between the lawn and the northern boundary fence there are various small buildings and other man-made structures to do with the garden. Along the northern fence line are several small Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* trees.

Along the southern boundary formed by the lane there is a low bank and a fence with a few shrubs planted including Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* and a conifer species.

Site 10. Land at Windmill Clump, ST8110 0194

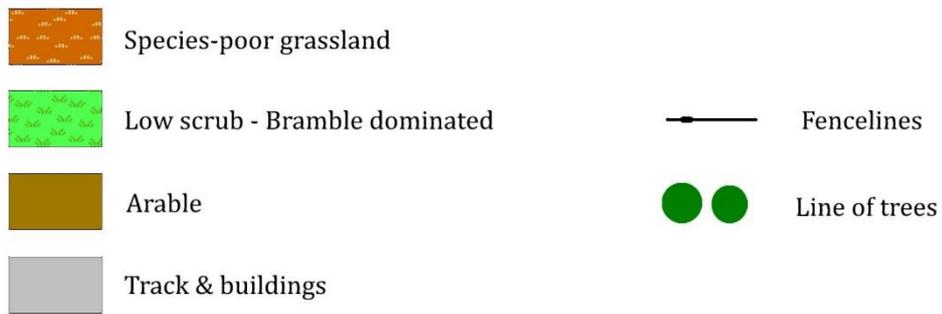
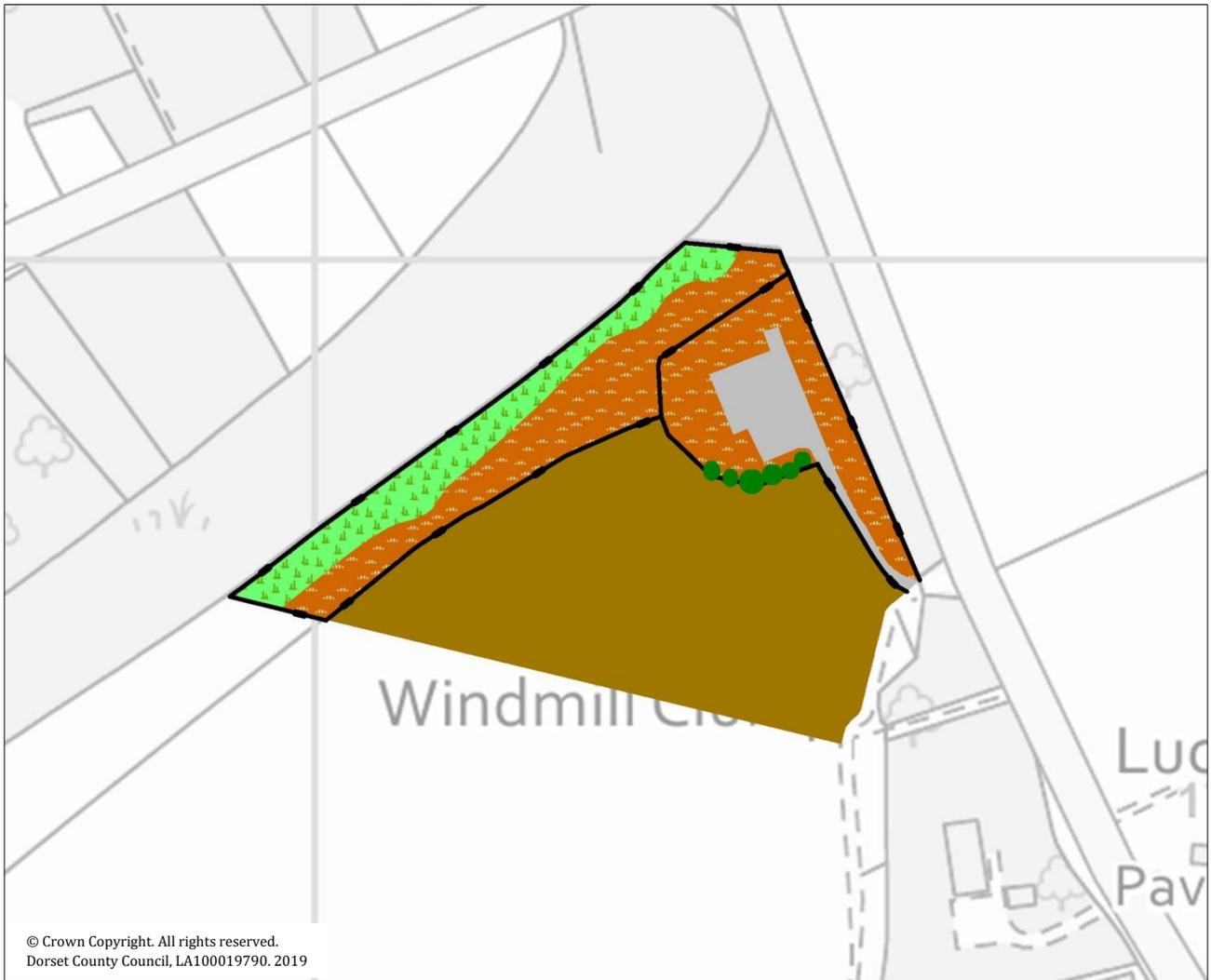
This site is the northeast corner of an arable field to the south of the main village bordered by the road on eastern side and deciduous woodland to the north. An agricultural barn occupies part of the site and the ground levels around it have been altered.

At the time of the survey the main field was sown with an arable crop and is of low ecological value. Around the barn, along the entrance track and in north are areas of the grassland, with the last area fenced and has been used for grazing horses. The grassland is semi-improved and species-poor with abundant Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, plus smaller quantities of Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*. Here are few with Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg., Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* most prominent, plus smaller quantities of Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*. A chalky bank by the barn has Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Red Clover *Trifolium pratense* and Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* and Perforate St John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum*.

Along the northern edge adjoining the wood are patches of Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., and tall ruderal vegetation with abundant Stinging Nettle, plus Hogweed and Cleavers *Galium aparine*, and also Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna* and Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* that have spread out from the wood.

Between the barn and the road is an area that has been planted with trees including Maple *Acer* species and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with some very sparse Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and planted Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* beneath. The ground flora is dominated by Ivy *Hedera helix*.

MAP 4. Habitat map for site 10



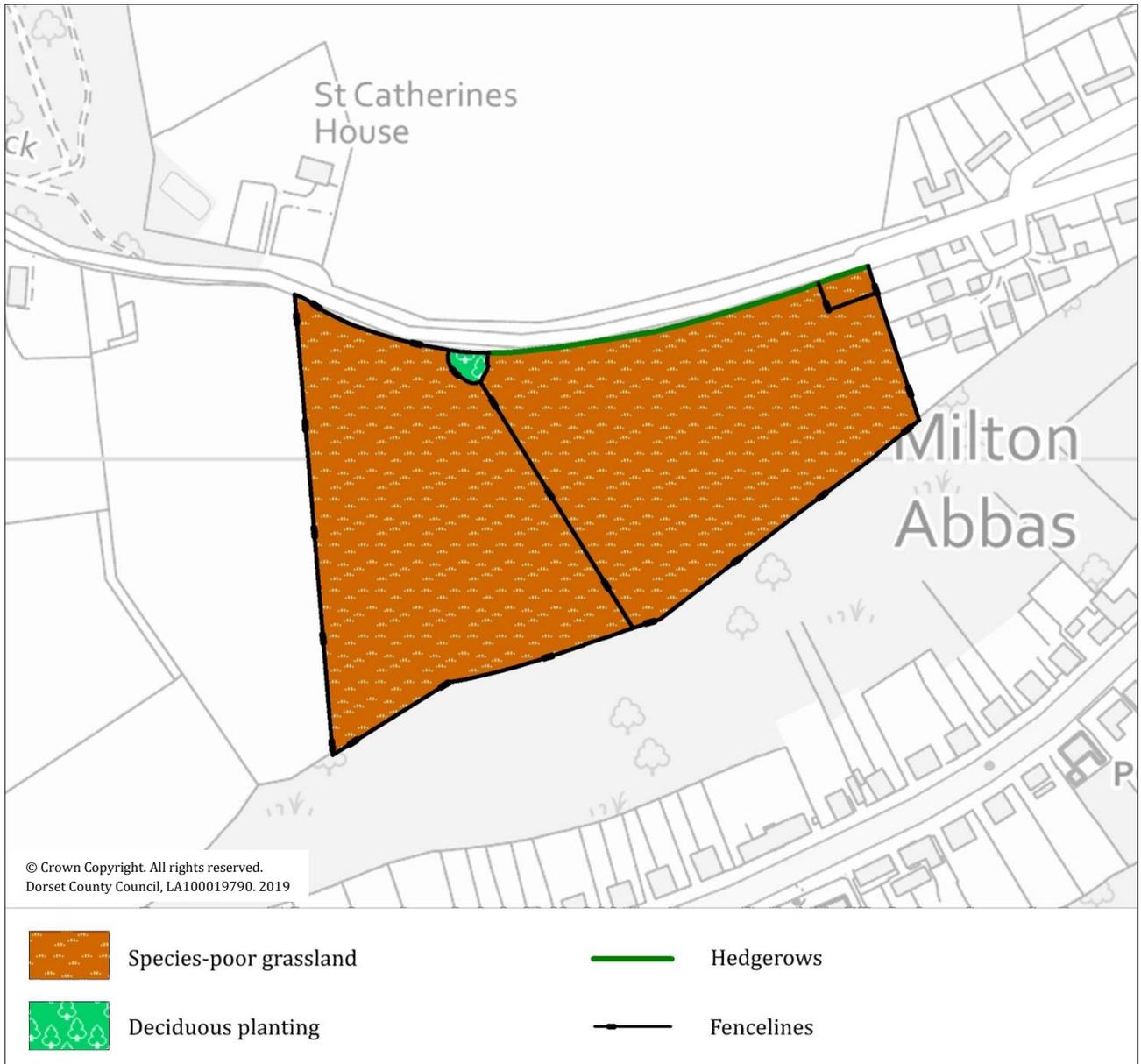
Site 12. Land at Catherine's Well 4, ST8058 0201

A large field on the north-west of the village on a gentle south-facing slope between the lane to St Catherine's Chapel to the north and Jane's Wood to the south. The field is used for sheep grazing and there is a fenced chicken pen in the northeast corner.

The grassland is best described as semi-improved and species-poor. The sward is dominated by Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, with smaller quantities of Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis* and Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*. Herbs only form a small percentage of the sward with Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Smooth Hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris* and Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg. the most prominent species, along with the mosses *Brachythecium rutabulum* and *Kindbergia praelonga*. In any shorter swards there is a wider range of herbs with Bulbous Buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*, Common Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*, Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Slender Speedwell *Veronica filiformis*, Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* and Daisy *Bellis perennis*. Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*, Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* and Common Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* were noted along the northern edge.

The hedge along the track which forms the northern boundary appears to be a fairly recent hedge that has grown up naturally along the iron railings which are now present in the middle of the hedge. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* is most abundant, with occasional Elder *Sambucus nigra*, and rare Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Yew *Taxus baccata* and Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*. Beneath the shrubs Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* is abundant and Traveller's Joy *Clematis vitalba* occasional, with the ground layer dominated by Ivy *Hedera helix*, plus Wood Avens *Geum urbanum*, Cleaver *Galium aparine*, Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Cuckoo Pint *Arum maculatum*.

MAP 5. Habitat map for site 12



PROTECTED SPECIES

No signs of protected species were seen during the survey, however this does mean that they are not present as the time of the survey and the weather conditions were not ideal for nesting birds, reptiles etc. A search for protected species was made on the Dorset Important Species layer on the Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) GIS system.

A summary of the suitability of the sites for protected species is given below.

Bats: There are bat records from around the village including Long-eared, Pipistrelle and Serotine, but none directly on any of the sites. The barn in Site 10 is not particularly suitable for bats. There is however foraging habitat along hedgerows and lines of trees in Site 5, 6 and 8 and more especially along the deciduous woodland edges in Sites 7, 10 and 12.

Birds: The survey was too early in the season for nesting birds. Suitable habitat does exist in some of the older hedgerows and bramble scrub at Site 5/6, 7 and 12.

Badger: No Badger setts or latrines were found within the sites and very few signs were seen apart from a Fox or Badger path through part of Site 7 and through the hedge in Site 12. The nearest recorded sett on the DERC database is 500 metres southwest of Site 12 in Lower Lodge Plantation.

Hedgehog: There is a record of Hedgehog from the village, but none from any of the sites. There is however suitable habitat present in Sites 6, 7 and 10.

Dormouse: There are no records of Dormouse from the sites surveyed and most of the hedge are flailed with very little or no Hazel and the habitat is sub-optimal. Dormouse monitoring tubes were noted in the hedge of Site 7.

There are a cluster of records from the DWT Reserve at Green Hill Down 2-kilometres northwest of the village, and other from Bramblecombe Lane 2-km to the west.

Reptiles: The survey was too early for reptiles and there are no records on the DERC database but suitable habitat for Common Lizard and / or Slow Worn is present at Sites 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, particularly along south-facing hedgebanks.

Great Crested Newt: Open water or ponds are not present on any of the sites surveyed. There is a record for Great Crested Newt (and Smooth Newt) from 2012 in ponds at St Catherines, 90 metres to the northwest of Site 12.

Otter and Water Vole: These are wetland species with no suitable habitat on any of the sites of generally within the village where surveys were undertaken. There is a record of Water Vole from Milton Abbey Lake from 2004.