

Ilketshall St. Andrew and St. John Land Management Company

Commons – Management Plan March 2025 – February 2026

The following sections outline the intentions of the Board of Directors of the Land Management Company (LMC) with respect to different aspects of the Commons. The Board of the LMC at the time of the preparation of this Management Plan are:

Tim Basey-Fisher (Chair)
John Bedwell (Company Secretary)
Chris Roberts
Roo Lee
Jack Poulden
Rod Apps

Tim Basey-Fisher and Rod Apps have been nominated as Directors by the Commoners' Association. John Bedwell, Chris Roberts, Roo Lee and Jack Poulden have been nominated by the Parish Councils. Given that the Constitution of the LMC allows for 4 Directors to be nominated by each constituency, at the time of writing there are 2 vacancies for nominations from the Commoners' Association.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Annual Management Plans for previous years (available on the Commons website, www.ilketshallcommons.co.uk).

It must be recognised that the fulfilment of many aspects of the Management Plan will be dependent to some extent on weather conditions prevailing at different points in the year, and people will probably not need to be reminded of the very hot and dry summer of 2022 and the very wet summer and autumn of 2023 and into winter 2024. The fulfilment of the Management Plan will also be dependent upon the availability of resources at the relevant time. It must also be recognised that the Management Plan is only the starting point for the management of the Commons over the ensuing 12 months, and therefore that additional work may be completed as and when required. The LMC is fully accountable to DEFRA for the management of the HLS and ELS agreement and therefore has to follow strict rules and guidelines laid down by DEFRA. Due to this, it is important that no work is carried out on the Commons without the knowledge and approval of the LMC, as DEFRA may impose fines if any rules are broken.

Section 1. General

1.1 Long-term management of the Commons.

As a consequence of the Commons being 'open access' land under the terms of the Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) Act, the management of the Commons has to reflect the interests of both Parishioner (and non-Parishioner) users of the Commons, as well as the Commoners. Following consultations undertaken in previous years, the LMC identified 10 long-term objectives for the management of the Commons in the Management Plan for 2022-2023. These 10 objectives are:

1. Maintain the Commons as predominantly open spaces constituting uncultivated grassland.
2. Secure sources of adequate long-term funding, to enable the Commons to be maintained indefinitely into the future in the same manner as the recent past.

3. Maintain the Commons in order that all Commoners will be able to utilise their grazing rights if they wish to do so.
4. Maintain and develop the hedges and scrub on the Commons on a long-term basis in order to maximise benefits for all wildlife.
5. Making use of advice from suitably qualified individuals, seek to maintain and develop the ponds on the Commons on a long-term basis as significant sources of wildlife diversity.
6. Create and maintain a tree coverage in corners and on boundaries of the Commons that is commensurate with the aim to maintain open spaces and grazing rights, but which also recognises the benefits of tree coverage in terms of its amenity and wildlife value, and as a contribution to sustainability.
7. Making use of advice from suitably qualified individuals, pursue an integrated approach to the enhancement of wildlife diversity through the management of the grassland, hedges, trees and ponds.
8. Use the Commons as a resource for education concerning the management of open spaces, ponds, hedges, etc. for varied groups, particularly as this may relate to funding opportunities.
9. Promote engagement by the community and the Commoners with the work of the Land Management Company, and secure a succession of people willing to act as volunteers for work on the Commons, and as Directors of the LMC.
10. Achieve an appropriate long-term balance between the use of the Commons by the community (including dog-walkers) and the protection and enhancement of wildlife.

The Board has kept these objectives under review, and after taking account of feedback from stakeholders, has concluded that there is no need to make any amendments to those objectives at the current time. It is believed that they will continue to provide a consensus view, across all individuals in both villages (and across both Commoners and parishioners) to guide the long-term management of the Commons. It should be noted that the sequencing of the objectives does **not** imply any prioritisation (and therefore that all the objectives carry equal 'weight'), and furthermore that the intention has been to provide the objectives with sufficient detail to be meaningful, but to avoid such a high level of detail that would constrain and limit the objectives in a manner that would not be appropriate for **long-term** objectives. It should also be recognised that changes in the funding arrangements for the Commons may necessitate some amendment to the objectives at some point in the future in order to meet the expectations of the funding providers.

1.2 Incursions and encroachments.

The Commons have been in existence for a very long period of time, and the overwhelming majority of stakeholders want to see them continue indefinitely into the future. The Board therefore sees the preservation of the acreage as being a prime responsibility. To that end, the Board has previously made a commitment to seek to establish more precisely the boundaries of all of the Commons, and therefore to secure agreement as to the ownership of certain ponds, hedges, and areas, with the owners of properties adjoining the Commons. Work has progressed with respect to this project during 2024, with the majority of property owners contacted so far agreeing that the Land Registry map for their property accurately represents the boundary with Common land. Work remains to be undertaken to clarify and agree boundaries on a number of properties where the owners have been contacted, and

also to contact the remaining property owners with a boundary with Common land. Due to a small number of properties giving rise to time-consuming difficulties in securing agreeing regarding the boundaries, it was not possible for this work to be completed, as hoped, during 2024 but it is hoped to complete it as soon as possible.

The Board also previously stated that it would take a robust approach to any encroachment or incursion onto the Commons. As noted in Section 1.6 below, the Parish Council is empowered to take action in relation to the Commons as a consequence of the Commons Act (2006), but the Parish Council does not have the resources to initiate legal action to counter incursions or encroachments, and therefore the costs of such action falls to the LMC. At meetings held between the policing team responsible for the area and representatives from Parish Councils, the police have emphasised the need to take whatever steps are feasible to limit the possibility of incursions, and emphasised that the police will **not** become involved unless there are aggravating circumstances to warrant such involvement.

The Board therefore intends the LMC to maintain a substantial reserve of funds to pay for legal and other costs associated with incursions and encroachments if these occur. In the previous Management Plan, the Board proposed to allocate £30,000 of its existing funds as the amount for this purpose; it proposes the same figure for 2025-2026. The sum will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis.

1.3 “Lawnisation”

Over a number of years, concern has been expressed to members of the Board regarding an increasing tendency for people to regularly mow areas of Common in front of their property, and hence convert them into lawns. An issue is that some of these areas are within the areas of the Commons covered by the ELS/HLS scheme and are therefore subject to restrictions on grass cutting, etc. In addition, all such areas are in any event areas of Common and share the purpose of encouraging wildlife and flora. Following discussions at the AGM of the LMC in February 2024 and other consultations, the Board developed guidance on the nature and frequency of mowing of Common land in front of properties that aligned with the majority views expressed at the AGM and other consultations. This guidance was distributed to all properties fronting the Commons but unfortunately it has had no effect and “lawnisation” remains as problematic as ever.

1.4 Funding

As at September 2024, the net funds held by the LMC constituted approximately £77,000. This represents an increase in net funds relative to the figure for September 2023 (approximately £73,000), and is partly the result of the changed timing of the receipts for the Basic Payment Scheme. In addition, the company has benefited from higher interest rates on its deposits, leading to an income from that source of nearly £3,000. On the expenditure side, the company managed to limit its expenditures to around £10,000, which is broadly in line with expectations outlined in the Management Plan for 2024-2025 and also with expenditure in the previous year, despite the effects of inflation.

The view of the Board is that adequate funding is crucial to the appropriate management of the Commons on a long-term basis. Cutting of the grass is necessary in order to avoid the Commons being overtaken by brambles, tallows, etc. In addition, maintenance of the hedges and ponds is necessary in order to promote wildlife, while maintenance of the ditches is necessary to deter incursions. All these (and other) activities require funding on a long-term basis.

In recent years, the income to the LMC has mainly come from three sources; the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the Entry Level Stewardship Scheme (ELS) and the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS). In approximate terms, the income from these sources

constituted £11,448 in 2024, with £5,836 from the ELS/HLS and £5,612 from the BPS. There was an additional £3,000 of income representing interest payments on investments in 2024. The Basic Payment Scheme is being phased out, and will end completely in 2027. Payments from that scheme are being progressively reduced, and therefore the income to the Commons from that source will also fall and end completely in 2027. In 2022, following consultation with Commoners and parishioners, the LMC extended its participation in the ELS/HLS scheme for a further 5 years with effect from 2023, and with the final payment therefore being made in 2027. The annual income from participation in that scheme will continue to be fixed at £5,836.10. It should be noted that this figure will fall in real (inflation-adjusted) terms due to the impact of inflation.

The current position is therefore that all payments from the BPS and the ELS/HLS will end in 2027, and that after that point the LMC will have no income (apart from interest on its investments).

The details of the government's scheme to replace the BPS, and the ELS/HLS – the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) – are gradually becoming clearer, and it is likely that there will be a number of elements of that, and in particular the Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) component of ELMS, that it is appropriate for the Commons to join once the existing schemes run out in 2027. The Board of the LMC will investigate, and take advice on, the alternative possibilities nearer the time, and will continue to monitor developments within the SFI in particular. Consultations with the Commoners will take place in relation to any future funding opportunities in the light of their grazing rights, along with consultations with all other stakeholders prior to applying for any future funding opportunities, taking into account the proposed long-term objectives of the Commons identified in Section 1.1 above. It has been noted in *Management Plans* of previous years that while the emphasis within the Environmental Land Management Scheme upon environmental protection and enhancement is clearly a positive signal to the Commons, Common land, along with certain other categories of land, is almost automatically aligned with environmental protection and therefore does not need significant funding to further that objective. It should therefore be recognised that the long-term objectives for the Commons proposed in Section 1.1. above may require some adjustment in order to be able to take advantage of appropriate funding schemes, as and when the detail of these schemes become available.

In the light of the continuing uncertainties regarding future funding arrangements, but also the high probability that such funding arrangements will, in any event, only provide significantly reduced income relative to the past few years, the Board intends to continue with a cautious approach to expenditures. While the net funds of the LMC are currently in a good state, the need to manage the Commons for an indefinite period into the future necessitates the adoption of a long-term approach to balancing income and expenditure.

In common with any organisation holding funds, those held by the LMC are subject to erosion from the effects of inflation. In recent years, the Board has been able to identify opportunities for investing a significant part of those funds into fixed-term deposits paying high interest rates; given the continuing fall in the inflation rate, these interest payments have, and will continue for a period, to alleviate some of the pressures resulting from inflation. The LMC will continue to keep the possibility of investments into alternative assets as a way of securing above-inflation returns on a long-term basis, but does not anticipate making such investments in the foreseeable future.

1.5 Communications

Feedback from a range of users is that the Commons website has continued to provide a valuable source of information relating to the Commons. The Board intends to continue to develop the website where appropriate, along with continuing to regularly update of the information contained on it.

Working parties of volunteers to undertake work on the Commons have been a feature of the Commons for many years, and it is intended that these will continue as a means of building involvement and commitment to the Commons; participants also comment that it is an enjoyable and rewarding thing to do. With the inevitable reductions in funding income, volunteer work parties will be increasingly important and will therefore continue to be actively promoted and encouraged.

Costs: £375 annual maintenance costs for the website.

1.6 Authority of the Parish Council, and the LMC, to act in relation to the Commons.

Some uncertainty and confusion was created at a meeting of the Ilketshall St. Andrew Parish Council in November 2024 in relation to the authority of the Parish Council, and of the Land Management Company, to take action in relation to the Commons. Following this meeting, investigations were undertaken and advice received and there was a further meeting of the Parish Council in December 2024 at which the issues were clarified. In summary terms, the Parish Council is empowered to take action in relation to the Commons as a consequence of the provisions of Section 45 of the Commons Act (2006), and the Parish Council has delegated day-to-day management responsibility for the Commons to the Land Management Company while nevertheless retaining overall responsibility for the Commons.

A more detailed explanation of the authority of the Parish Council to act in relation to the Commons, and of the authority delegated to the Land Management Company, is available on both the Parish Council website and the Commons website.

1.7 Constitution of the LMC.

Following the increase in the number of Directors constituting the Board of the LMC (from 6 to 8) in 2023, there was a need to make the formal changes to the Constitution. The opportunity was taken to make some other changes to the Constitution, the majority of which were comparatively minor and reflected the need for some updating. However, the Board also proposed to move to a system whereby two Directors (one from the four nominated by the Commoners' Association, one from the four nominated by the Parish Councils) to retire each year, by rotation, and to seek re-election. The purpose of this change is to encourage a progressive change of Directors over time and to therefore ensure an appropriate set of long-term capabilities on the Board. The system of directors retiring by rotation is standard practice across companies, and the LMC would therefore be adopting this common practice. The revised constitution was approved by the Parish Council at its meeting in October 2023, but the meeting of the Commoners' Association in February 2024 did not provide a clear view as to whether the revised constitution should be adopted or not. In order to provide clarity and certainty (particularly in light of the nominations for Directors of the LMC due in February 2025), the Parish Council confirmed at its meeting in December 2024 that the revised Constitution would apply. The Constitution is available on both the Commons website and the Parish Council website.

Section 2. Grass.

2.1 Over-wintering Areas

There are two central requirements arising from the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement; first, that cutting of the grass does not take place until after the middle of June, and second that 10% of the grassland area under Option HK15 is not cut at that time, with a recommendation that they are cut after 28 February the *following* year. The primary function

of the 10% uncut area is the promotion of wildlife for an extended period, but also to protect and promote certain flora. The purpose of the cutting after 28 February is to avoid the encroachment of weeds and invasive species, but by 28 February the absence of cutting will have served its purpose in terms of promotion of wildlife, at least to some extent.

The rationale for the selection of the 10% over-wintering areas at the time of the 2019 Annual Management Plan was that:

- The 10% uncut areas are spread around the various Commons in order to maximise the benefit to birds, wildlife and flora. Some areas have been selected for their proximity to ponds, scrub, etc.
- The 10% areas are generally those that are the least productive areas, and/or are those that are problematic in terms of cutting, turning, baling and carting.

This rationale has had to be adjusted for the intended overwintering areas for 2025-2026 and beyond.

The intention is that the areas that were left uncut in July 2024 will be flailed at some point after 28 February 2025. This work is particularly subject to the prevailing ground conditions (as was the experience in both 2023 and 2024), since the previous autumns and winters had left the ground saturated. In 2024, the very wet ground conditions that applied at the end of February again meant that flailing could not be undertaken for many weeks, to the point that it became inappropriate to undertake the flailing due to the amount of new growth that had occurred. It is important that the over-wintering areas **are** cut regularly, however, since without that cutting brambles, willows, other saplings and injurious weeds would start to dominate. As was forewarned in the Management Plan for 2024/2025, the decision was therefore taken to create **new** over-wintering areas, implying that there would be new areas that would not be cut at the 'normal' time (that is, June/July 2024) and that the previous ('old') over-wintering areas would then be cut in June/July when the ground had dried out sufficiently. The Board came to the view that the increasingly wet autumn/winters implied that cutting any areas of the Commons would probably not be possible soon after the end of February in **any** year, and therefore that, for the foreseeable future, it would operate on the basis of alternating between two over-wintering areas in order that there would not be any areas left uncut for an extended period. The grass that is obtained from the cutting of an over-wintered area is, unfortunately, of less value than grass taken each June/July, since it contains more weeds (due, in turn, to the area not having been cut for nearly two years rather than one), but this is seen as a necessary price for to pay for preventing any areas becoming too overgrown.

There are some parts of the Commons that are individually small which means that they are difficult to cut in an economic fashion by the machinery used to cut the larger areas. These areas include, for example, Took's Common and parts of Little Common. These areas had been selected as over-wintering areas in the past due to this reason, but also due to the comparatively low quality of the grass arising from them. The string of wet autumn/winters discussed in the previous paragraph had meant that these areas were becoming significantly overgrown, and additional problems in relation to availability of appropriate equipment and personnel in 2024 meant that they were not cut until significantly later than other areas. In order to alleviate this problem and to prevent these areas becoming overgrown in future, the LMC intends that these will not be identified as over-wintering areas in future, and will therefore be cut on an annual basis – although, given the issues associated with appropriate machinery, this cutting may well not happen at the same time as larger areas.

The over-wintering areas that will **not** be cut at the 'normal' time of June/July 2025 and will therefore serve as the over-wintering areas for the winter of 2025/2026 (and are therefore scheduled to next be cut after the end of February 2026, but if the autumn/winter is wet, will realistically be in June/July 2026), are identified in Appendix 1. The overwintering areas that will apply for 2026/2027 are also identified in Appendix 1. These areas for 2026/2027 are therefore scheduled to be cut after the end of February 2027, but realistically – given the

wet autumns and winters – will probably be cut in June/July 2027. The overwintering areas for 2027/2028 will be the areas that are identified for 2025/2026, with the areas then alternating between the two in successive years.

The overwintering areas will therefore be concentrated on Great Common. As indicated above, this has been done in order to simplify the management of the smaller areas of Common, and to reduce costs.

Costs: The anticipated cost of haymaking in 2025 is £2,100, calculated at a compensation rate of £30 excluding VAT per acre. The anticipated cost of cutting and collecting the grass on the over-wintered areas in 2025 is £600, based on the cost in previous years. The late grass cut of Holdens East and Mill Common is anticipated to cost £500 including VAT in 2025, again based on the cost in previous years.

2.2 Control of Weeds.

One of the requirements of the HLS agreement is that a number of injurious species of weeds should be controlled. Spot spraying of thistles on the HK15 areas was undertaken in 2020, and this was followed up with further spot spraying on Great Common in June 2021. In overall terms, the incidence of thistles has been low in 2022 and 2023, and it is therefore intended that only very limited spot spraying will be needed in 2025. This would be limited to only one part of any Common in order to not limit access to a Common unduly.

Ragwort was less of a problem in 2024 than was feared, and generally on the verges of the roads running through the Commons. Measures will be taken in 2025 to prevent the ragwort problem getting any worse, which may involve working parties to pull the ragwort supplemented by spot spraying. The Board is investigating the possibility of using a recently-introduced organic weedkiller for the control of ragwort which will remove the need to close areas of Common off from dogs, etc., for safety reasons.

It has to be noted that any initiative to control weeds will be dependent on weather conditions and on the availability of personnel at the appropriate time to undertake the work, and therefore cannot be guaranteed.

Costs: The cost of the spot spraying of the thistles is difficult to estimate, but it is hoped to limit this to £200 in 2025.

2.3 Use of sheep on the Commons.

An opportunity was taken in February 2024 to have a flock of sheep on Great Common, in order to assess their usefulness in grazing an overwintered area. As noted above, the very wet previous autumns and winters had meant that cutting of the overwintered areas had not been possible when intended, soon after the end of February. The experiment was extended to areas that did not comprise over-wintered areas, and also to other Commons, on the basis that it might be possible to make use of sheep on a long-term basis as a means of avoiding the need (and therefore the cost) of cutting the grass.

In summary terms, the experiment was not particularly successful, and the Board of the LMC decided not to proceed further with the possibility. The sheep did not undertake a particularly good job of clearing the over-wintered areas, and therefore the cost of cutting those remained. While sheep could be used to reduce or eliminate the cost of cutting the grass, in order to not reduce the amenity value of the Commons unduly, this would require grazing to only occur at restricted times of the year, which would probably not be attractive to the owners of the flocks. There were, also, instances of vandalism while the sheep were located on Great Common and Peardyke (with temporary fencing being pulled down, and

sheep therefore wandering away) which would be difficult to counter on a long-term basis. Along with particular difficulties associated with the movement of sheep arising from blue tongue virus and the particular regulatory hurdles to be overcome to encompass long-term grazing of sheep on the Commons, the Board therefore decided that it was not worthwhile to continue further.

2.4 Soil sampling

Soil samples were taken at five different locations on the Commons in 2024 in order both to identify what the key characteristics of the soils were, but also to establish a 'base line' from which to identify changes over time. The principal findings were firstly that the organic matter content of all of the soil samples was very high, and at levels that are very rarely seen. Secondly, the phosphate levels were extremely low. Both of these findings are consistent with the use of the Commons over many years; the low phosphate levels is a reflection of the absence of virtually any fertiliser of any description (combined with annual cutting and baling), and the high levels of organic matter a reflection of the undisturbed soil (from, for example, ploughing) again over many years. In summary terms, the soils under the Commons have been accumulating organic carbon over time, resulting in a significant carbon store. Although the organic matter content is high, there is potential through careful selective management for further increases, and there may at some point in the future be an opportunity to exploit this for funding purposes. The very low phosphate levels would be unwelcome news if the Commons were used for crop production, and indeed they are partially responsible for the comparatively low grass yield. However, a benefit of the low phosphate levels is that they provide an excellent environment for many (non-grass) species that are beneficial to a variety of wildlife that is such a strong feature of the Commons.

Having established a set of 'base line' results from soil sampling in 2024, the LMC Board intends to continue to take regular samples in order to identify changes over time.

The data from the samples, and a commentary on that data, is included as Appendix 4.

Section 3. Hedge and Scrub Cutting

The advice received from Kim Pearce (DEFRA) and Tim Schofield (Suffolk FWAG) in November 2018 was that hedges should be cut either once every three years or once every two years. The Board adopted the approach of cutting hedges on a rotating basis every two years, although it should be noted that in a slow-growing year (for example, due to a drought or a cold spring), some hedges/parts of hedges may only require cutting once every three years. The reason for preferring cutting every two years is that if hedges are normally cut every three years, they would then need to be cut back hard. In turn, this leads to defoliation and the hedge becomes too cold and open for birds to nest there. The Board continues to see the approach as the best way of maintaining the characteristics of the hedges to promote wildlife, and therefore intends to continue to adopt it.

Appendix 2 [Hedge Cutting and Scrub Flailing Plan 2025/6] identifies the hedges to be faced or topped. It also identifies the areas of scrub to be flailed.

Any hedge would not normally be topped *and* faced in the same year, although there may be specific instances where this is appropriate. Flailing is used for those boundaries that constitute scrub and where flailing is therefore more appropriate to avoid the encroachment of the scrub onto the Commons. The plans for hedge and scrub cutting will be subject to amendment in the light of weather conditions, but it is anticipated that the work will be undertaken before the Commons become too wet, and therefore unsuitable for heavier machinery. In rare circumstances it may be necessary to maintain hedges or scrub which are not detailed in the Management Plan. This could result as a matter of nuisance or safety

which are not detailed in this Management Plan and the Appendices at the time of publication.

Given all of the above, the LMC will also explore the idea of not cutting some hedges on a routine or set rotational basis, with the view of benefitting wildlife.

Costs: The estimated cost of the hedge and scrub cutting activity for 2025/6 is £1,000 (including VAT).

Section 4. Drainage and Anti-Incursion Ditch Maintenance, Road and Trackside Flailing.

Appendix 3 [Ditch Flailing and Ditch Work 2025/6] outline the planned flailing work on the selected track and roadside ditches.

This work is carefully managed to ensure wildlife corridors are created wherever possible, and to this end maintenance is planned on a rotational basis. It is possible that works will be undertaken at various locations around the Commons on drainage ditches, anti-incursion ditches and security bunds. As part of the ongoing rolling programme, routine inspections will be made and any remedial work will be undertaken as and when considered necessary. Accordingly, it is not possible to publish, in advance, a plan of this work.

Extreme wet weather will continue to identify locations which require maintenance, but are not the responsibility of the LMC. The Board decided that it would be appropriate, for the benefit of the community as a whole, to undertake such maintenance, since if undertaken at the appropriate times in conjunction with other work, it would constitute a cost-effective solution. The Board intends to undertake such work as and when necessary.

In order to ensure compliance with the terms of the HLS/ELS agreement, it should be emphasized that no work should be undertaken on any drainage or anti-incursion ditches without the explicit agreement of the LMC.

Costs: The intention is to limit the cost of this work in 2025-26 to £1,000, although it should be recognized that this will be dependent on the need for such works.

Section 5. Other Works

5.1 Ponds.

Having undertaken a great deal of pond restoration in recent years, it has been recommended that fronts are kept cut and open during the growing season (see point about pond survey below). The aesthetic value will be greatly improved, the investment rewarded, and it will also alleviate the need for major works in the future. This work will be undertaken on a regular basis, probably around three times during the growing season.

The ponds in question are:

- Hawthorn
- Great Common, opposite 'The Homestead'
- Great Common, in front of 'English Cottage'
- Great Common, in front of Dairy Farm

- Great Common, west end
- Mill Common
- Blacksmiths
- The Mardle
- Little Common

Costs: The estimated cost of this activity in 2025 is £180 (no VAT) per visit.

In accordance with the advice contained within the pond survey, patch scraping selected ponds will be undertaken to control the spread of invasive Reedmace (bulrush). A trial of this work was undertaken in November 2022 on two ponds on Great Common, and initial results show that this was very successful with minimal impact on wildlife. Subject to continued specialist advice this work will be continued subject, as always, to weather conditions. It is proposed that ponds will be identified each year and work initiated on a rotational basis. The removal of reedmace from the Mardle has been identified as a priority for 2025/26.

Costs: The estimated cost of this activity in 2025/26 is £700 (including VAT).

The pond survey undertaken during 2023 [available on the Commons website] illustrates the importance of continued maintenance and provides recommendations of the works required in order to maximise the quantity and diversity of the wildlife that the ponds support. Given the expertise on which these recommendations were based, it is intended that these will be followed. Furthermore, it has been agreed that pond surveys will be conducted every three years in order to provide an ongoing reference as to the state and quality of the ponds. The next survey will therefore be undertaken during the summer of 2026.

Following comments from individuals regarding the management of the nine specific ponds that are maintained by the LMC, the Board will continue to consult further with its specialist advisers regarding the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing a more differentiated approach to the management of these ponds. Account will need to be taken of the fact that there are a number of ponds on the Commons additional to these nine that are not managed in accordance with the specialist guidance, along with many other common and private ponds in the near proximity to the various Commons.

5.2 Trees

There are a large number of trees around the edges of the Commons, and to a lesser extent on the Commons themselves. Following concern being expressed to the Board by a resident regarding the safety of such trees, a survey was undertaken by a tree surgeon in November 2022. The feedback from that survey concluded that there were no trees that constituted a safety risk such that they required immediate attention. A number of trees, and limbs of trees, were identified which could usefully receive attention to further reduce risk. Work on the subject trees has already been undertaken and will continue in 2025/6 and into the future.

The intention is to arrange for a tree survey to be conducted by a tree surgeon every four years in future, with the next being in 2026. In intervening years, members of the Board will conduct a survey, and bring in specialist expertise if and when thought necessary.

5.3 Other planned works:

The permissive grass pathways will be cut during the growing season as and when required. On the basis of experience in previous years, this could be on 3 – 5 occasions.

Costs: The estimated cost of this work for 2025 is £120 (inc VAT) per visit.

Vehicular access points and/or pedestrian access points, together with areas around benches, will be strimmed as and when required. On the basis of experience of previous years this is likely to be on 3 occasions.

Costs: The cost estimate of this strimming work for 2025 is £360 (no VAT) per visit.

The 'wetland' area on Little Common East has a schedule for 20% of its area to be cut each year, weather permitting. It is intended to continue with this schedule in 2025-26.

Costs: The estimated cost of this work on the 'wetland' area in 2025 is £100 (no VAT).

The area of grass immediately around The Mardle will be cut during the growing season as and when required. On the basis of experience of previous years this could be on 3-5 occasions,

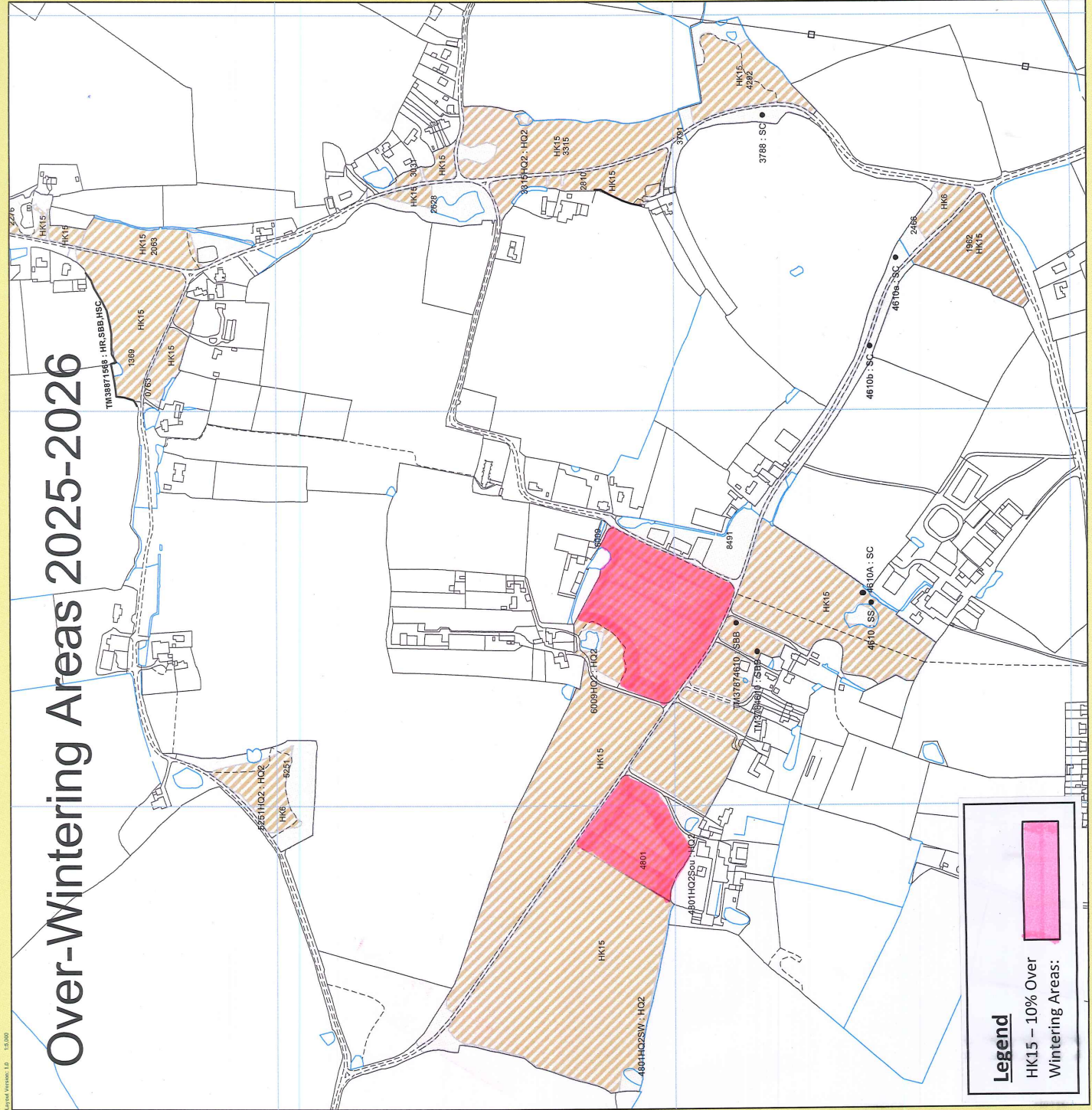
Costs: The estimated cost of this work for 2025 is £50 (no VAT) per visit.

6. Other expenditures, and total anticipated expenditures in 2024-25.

Certain other recurrent expenditures not referred to above need to be allowed for. These include fees to accountants; fees to Companies House; the cost of insurance; and the hire of the Village Hall for the AGM, etc..

Costs: The anticipated cost of these recurrent items of expenditure in 2025-26 is £1,500.

Total estimated expenditure: Taking all the estimated costs above, and recognising the uncertainty around many of the estimates, the total expenditures by the LMC for the period from March 2025 until February 2026 is estimated to be around £10,000.



HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT MAP

Options

- HB Maintenance of hedgerows/ditches of very high environmental value
- HC/OHC Management of woodland edges/hedgerow buffer strips
- HC/OHC Protection of trees
*Number within circle represents number of trees in parcel
- HC/UHC/UOHC Woodland and orchards
- UHD/UOHD Visibility of archaeological features on moorland
- HD/OHD Historic and landscape
- HE/OHE Buffer strips and grass margins
- HF/OHF Arable land
- HG/OHG Encourage a range of crop type
- HJ/OHJ Maintenance of watercourse fencing
- HJ/OHJ/UHJ/UOHHJ Resource protection
- HK/OHK Grassland
- HL/OHL/UHL/UOHL Upland grassland and moorland
- HN Linear access (agreements to October 2010 only)
- HN Permissive open access (agreements to October 2010 only)
- HO Lowland heathland
- HP Inter-tidal and coastal
- HQ Wetland

Option codes are annotated on the map. Please see scheme handbooks for detailed explanation of each option code.

Supplement options are annotated where present e.g. HL13, HR4

- CA1/PC CP1/GF GL1/WS Capital item

Positions of capital items are indicative and for identification purposes only

1234 RLR field number

Remaining land comprising agreement area



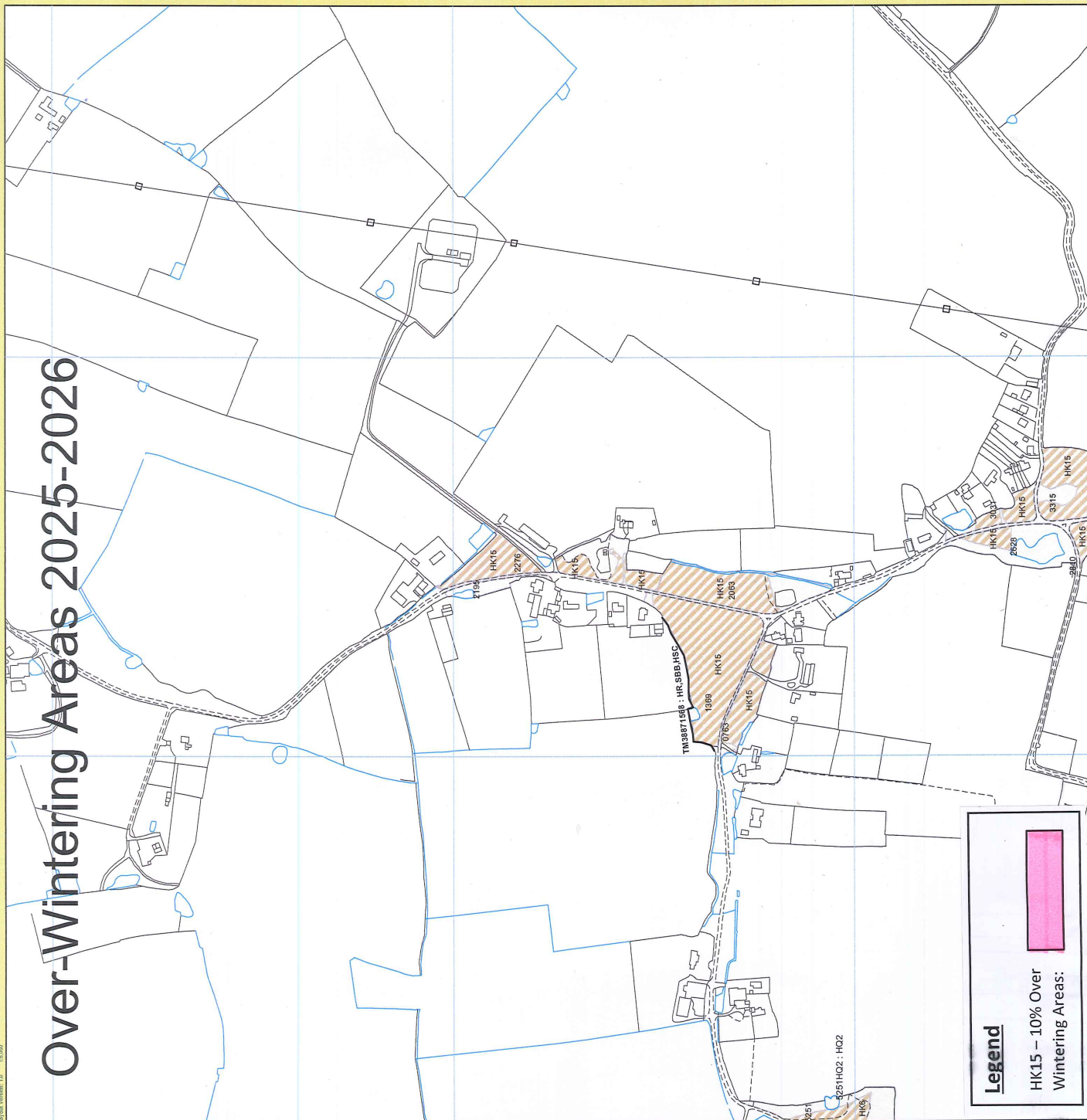
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Application Ref: AG00241949

Appendix: 1 Map: A



Over-Wintering Areas 2025-2026



HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT MAP

Options

- HB Maintenance of hedgerows/ditches of very high environmental value
- HC/OHC Management of woodland edges/hedgerow buffer strips
- HC/OHC Protection of trees
*Number within circle represents number of trees in parcel
- HC/UHC/UOHC Woodland and orchards
- UHD/UOHD Visibility of archaeological features on moorland
- HD/OHD Historic and landscape
- HE/OHE Buffer strips and grass margins
- HF/OHF Arable land
- HS/OHG Encourage a range of crop type
- HJ/OHJ Maintenance of watercourse fencing
- HJ/OHJ/UHJ/UOHJ Resource protection
- HK/OHK Grassland
- HL/OHL/UHL/UOHL Upland grassland and moorland
- HN Linear access (agreements to October 2010 only)
- HN Permissive open access (agreements to October 2010 only)
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- HQ Wetland

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CA1/PC CP1/GF CL1/WS Capital item

Positions of capital items are indicative and for identification purposes only

1234 RLR field number

Remaining land comprising agreement area

0 200 400 Metres

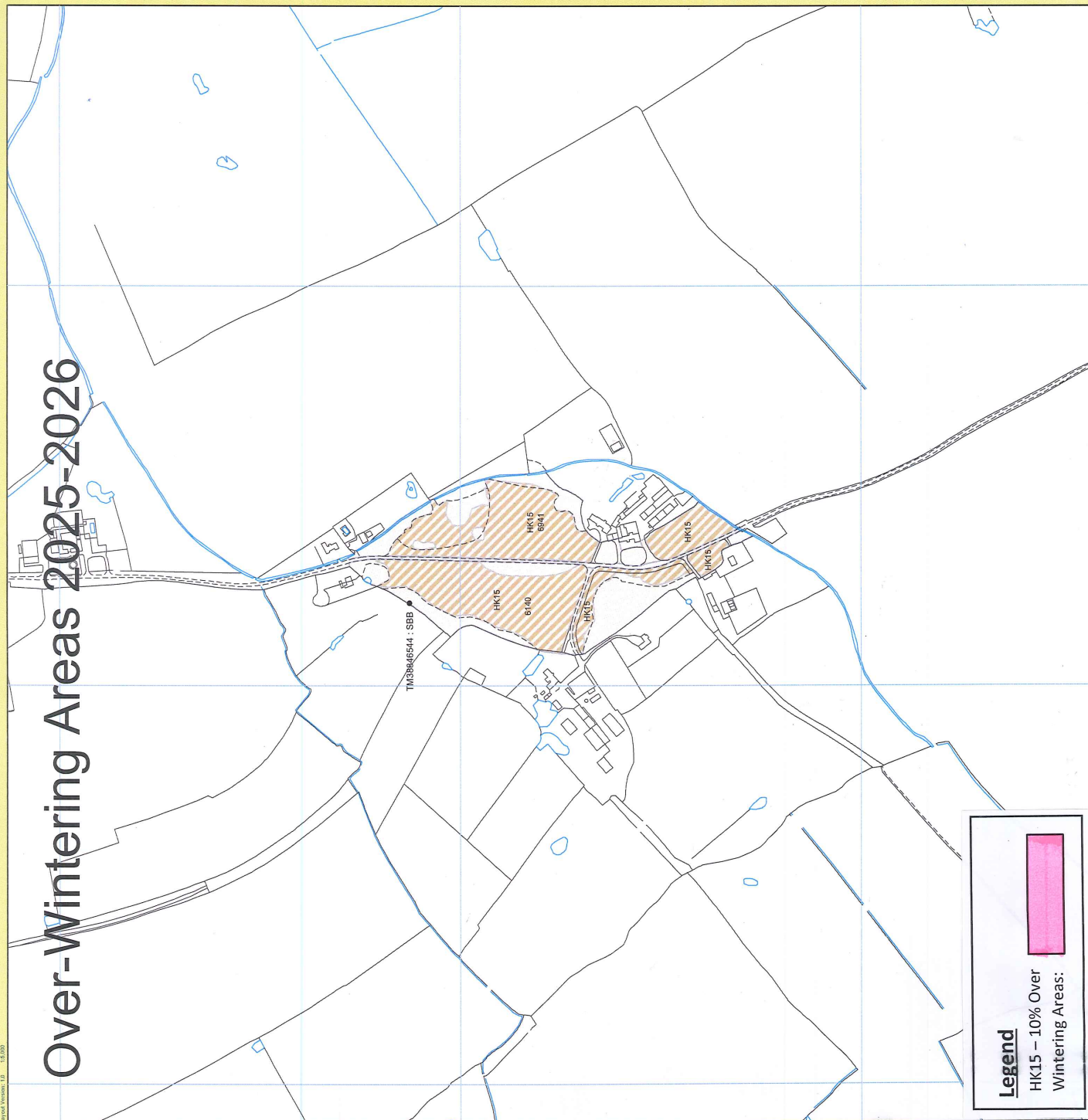
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Application Ref: AG00241949

Appendix: 1 Map: A



Over-Wintering Areas 2025-2026



Legend

HK15 - 10% Over Wintering Areas:



HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT MAP

Options

- HB Maintenance of hedgerows/ditches of very high environmental value
- HC/OHC Management of woodland edges/hedgerow buffer strips
- HC/OHC Protection of trees
*Number within circle represents number of trees in parcel
- HC/UHC/UOHC Woodland and orchards
- UHD/UOHD Visibility of archaeological features on moorland
- HD/OHD Historic and landscape
- HE/OHE Buffer strips and grass margins
- HF/OHF Arable land
- HG/OHG Encourage a range of crop type
- HJ/OHJ Maintenance of watercourse fencing
- HJ/OHJ/UHJ/UOHJ Resource protection
- HK/OHK Grassland
- HL/OHL/UHL/UOHL Upland grassland and moorland
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- HN Permissive open access (agreements to October 2010 only)
- HO Lowland heathland
- HP Inter-tidal and coastal
- HQ Wetland

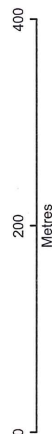
Option codes are annotated on the map. Please see scheme handbooks for detailed explanation of each option code.

Supplement options are annotated where present e.g. HL13, HR4

- CA1/PC CP1/GF Capital item
- CL1/WS Capital item

Positions of capital items are indicative and for identification purposes only

- 1234 RLR field number
- Remaining land comprising agreement area



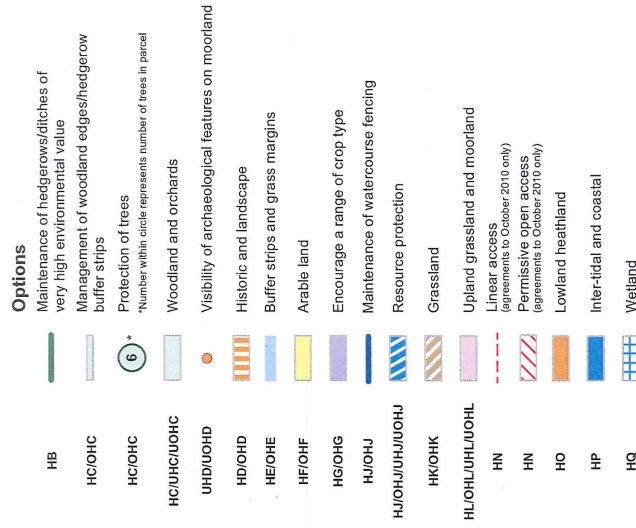
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Application Ref: AG00241949

Appendix: 1 Map: A

NATURAL
ENGLAND

HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT MAP



Supplement options are annotated where present e.g. HL13, HR4

Remaining land comprising agreement area

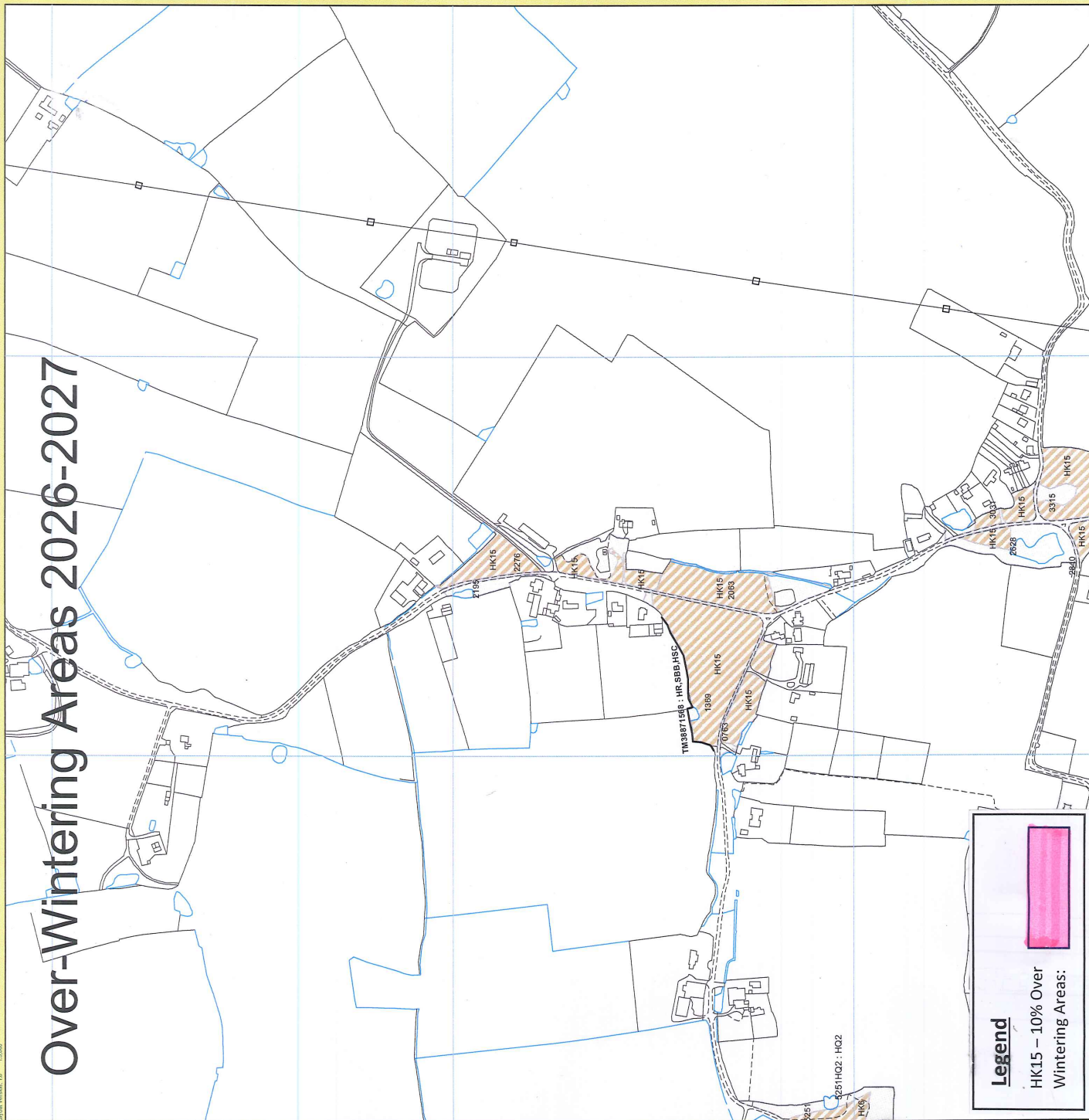
A vertical scale bar labeled "Metres" with markings at 0, 200, and 400. The bar is oriented vertically with 0 at the bottom and 400 at the top.

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Appendix: 1
Map: B

NATURAL
ENGLAND

Over-Wintering Areas 2026-2027



HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT MAP

Options

- HB Maintenance of hedgerows/ditches of very high environmental value
- HC/OHC Management of woodland edges/hedgerow buffer strips
- HC/OHC Protection of trees
*Number within circle represents number of trees in parcel
- HC/UHC/UOHC Woodland and orchards
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- HQ Wetland

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Supplement options are annotated where present e.g. HL13, HR4

CA1/PC CP1/GF CL1/WS Capital Item

Positions of capital items are indicative and for identification purposes only

1234 RLR field number

Remaining land comprising agreement area



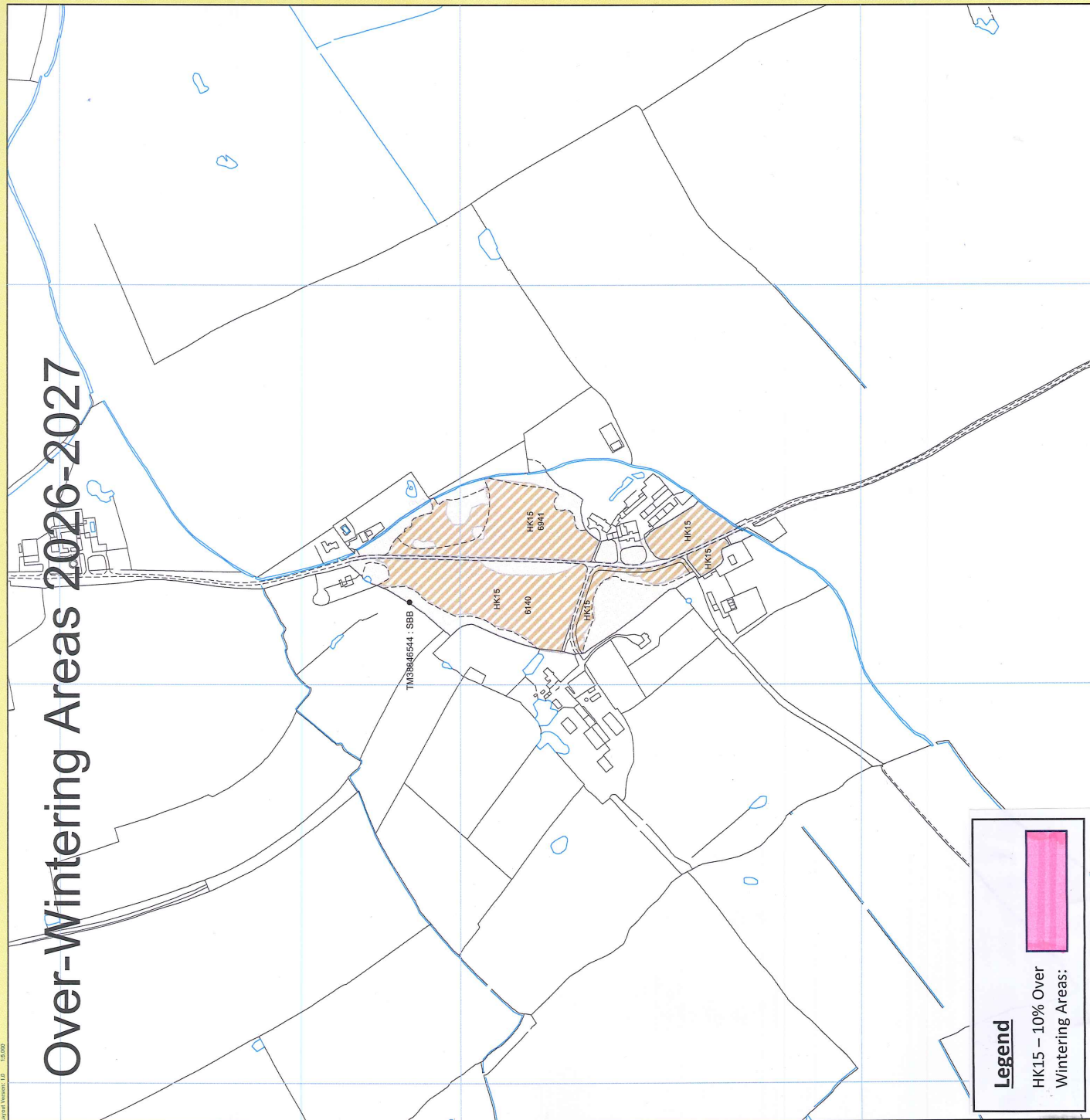
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Application Ref: AG00241949

Appendix: 1 Map: B



Over-Wintering Areas 2026-2027



Legend

HK15 – 10% Over Wintering Areas:



HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT MAP

Options

- HB Maintenance of hedgerows/ditches of very high environmental value
- HC/OHC Management of woodland edges/hedgerow buffer strips
- HC/OHC Protection of trees
*Number within circle represents number of trees in parcel
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- HQ Wetland

Option codes are annotated on the map. Please see scheme handbooks for detailed explanation of each option code.

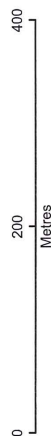
Supplement options are annotated where present e.g. HL13, HR4

CA1/PC CP1/GF CL1/WS Capital item

Positions of capital items are indicative and for identification purposes only

1234 RLR field number

Remaining land comprising agreement area

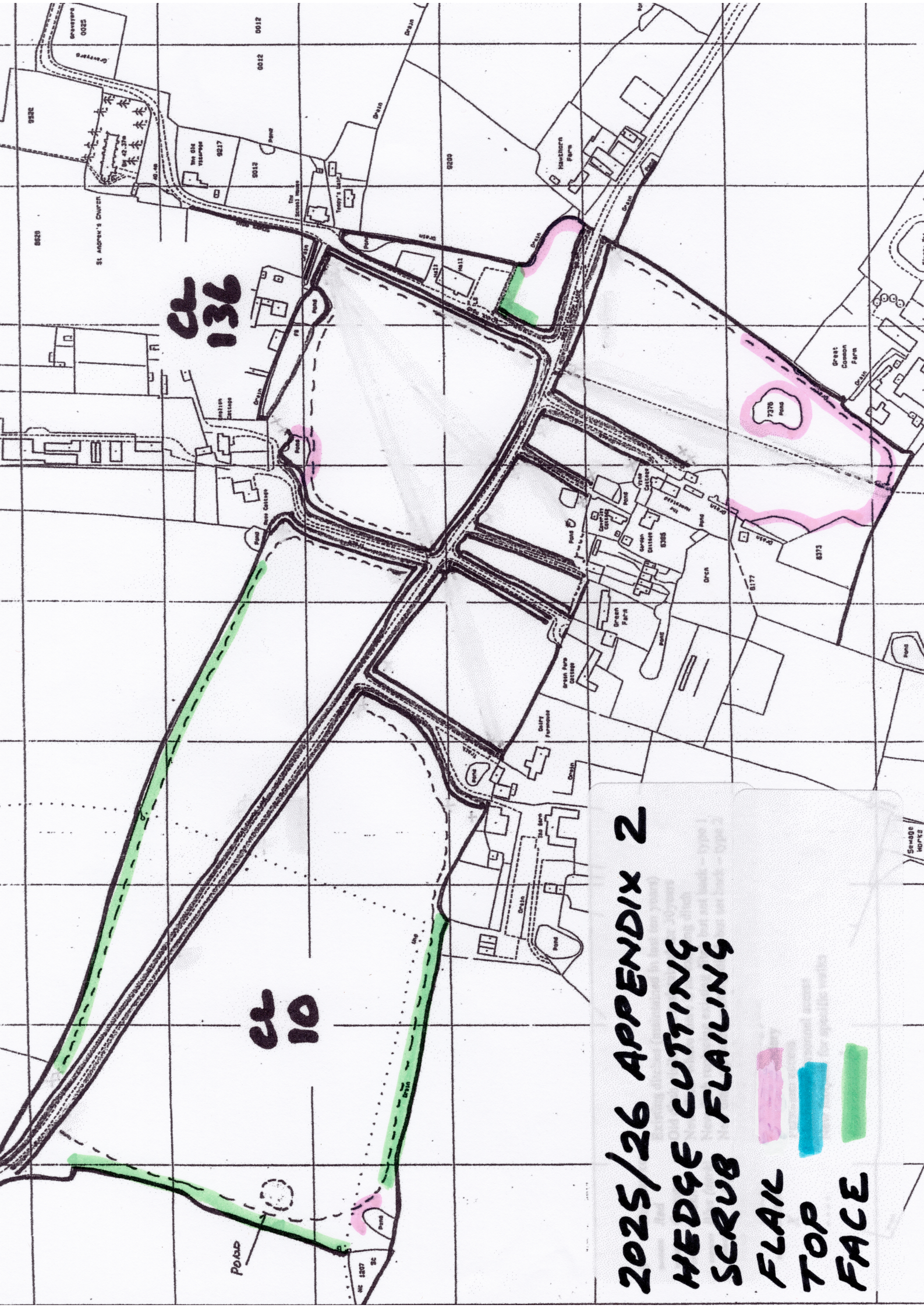


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Application Ref: AG00241949

Appendix: 1 Map: B





2025/26 APPENDIX 2

HEDGE CUTTING
SCRUB FLAILING

FLAIL
TOP
FACE

SCAUB FLAILING

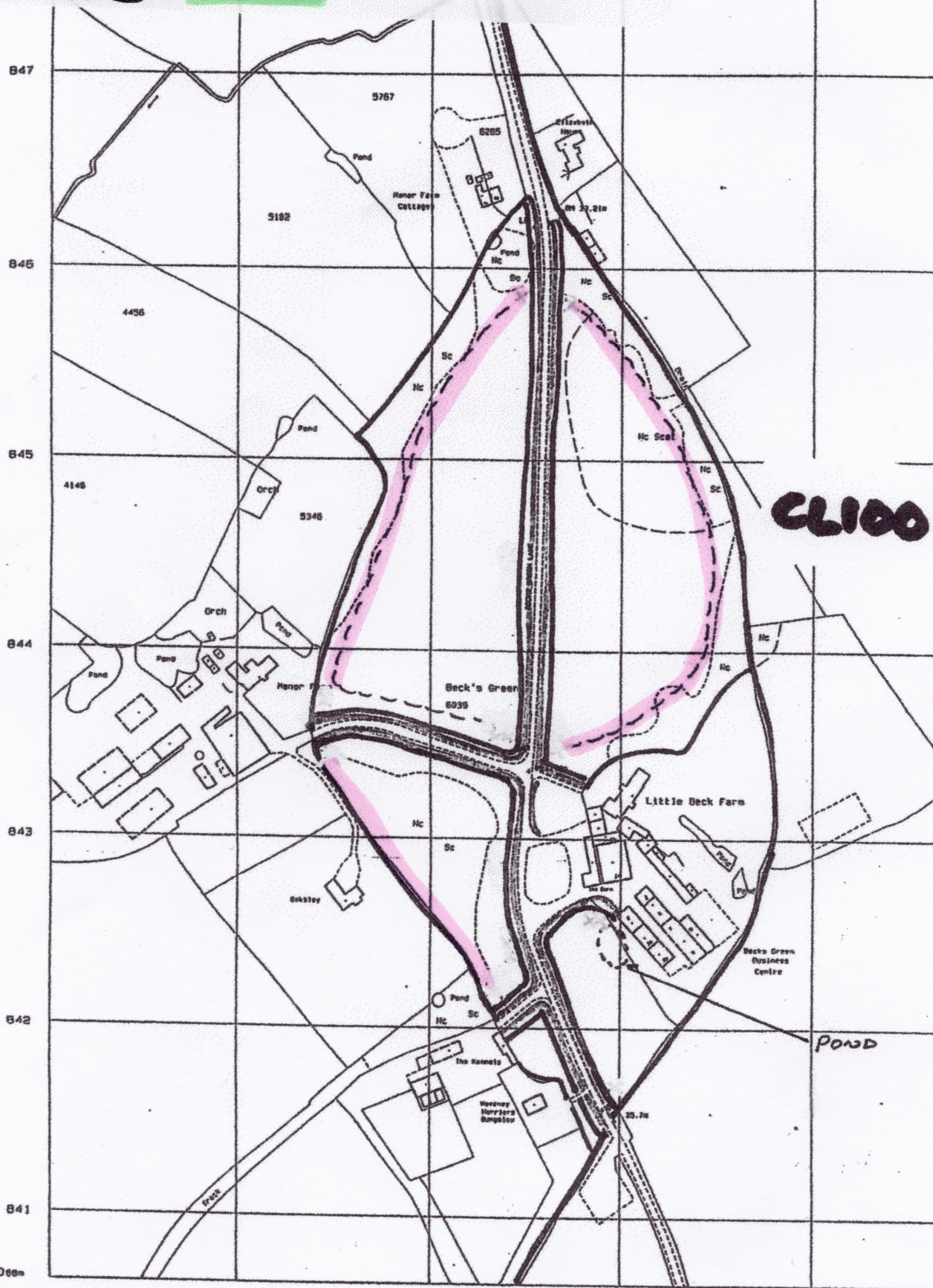


FLAIL
TOP
FACE

FLARIL

TOP

FACE

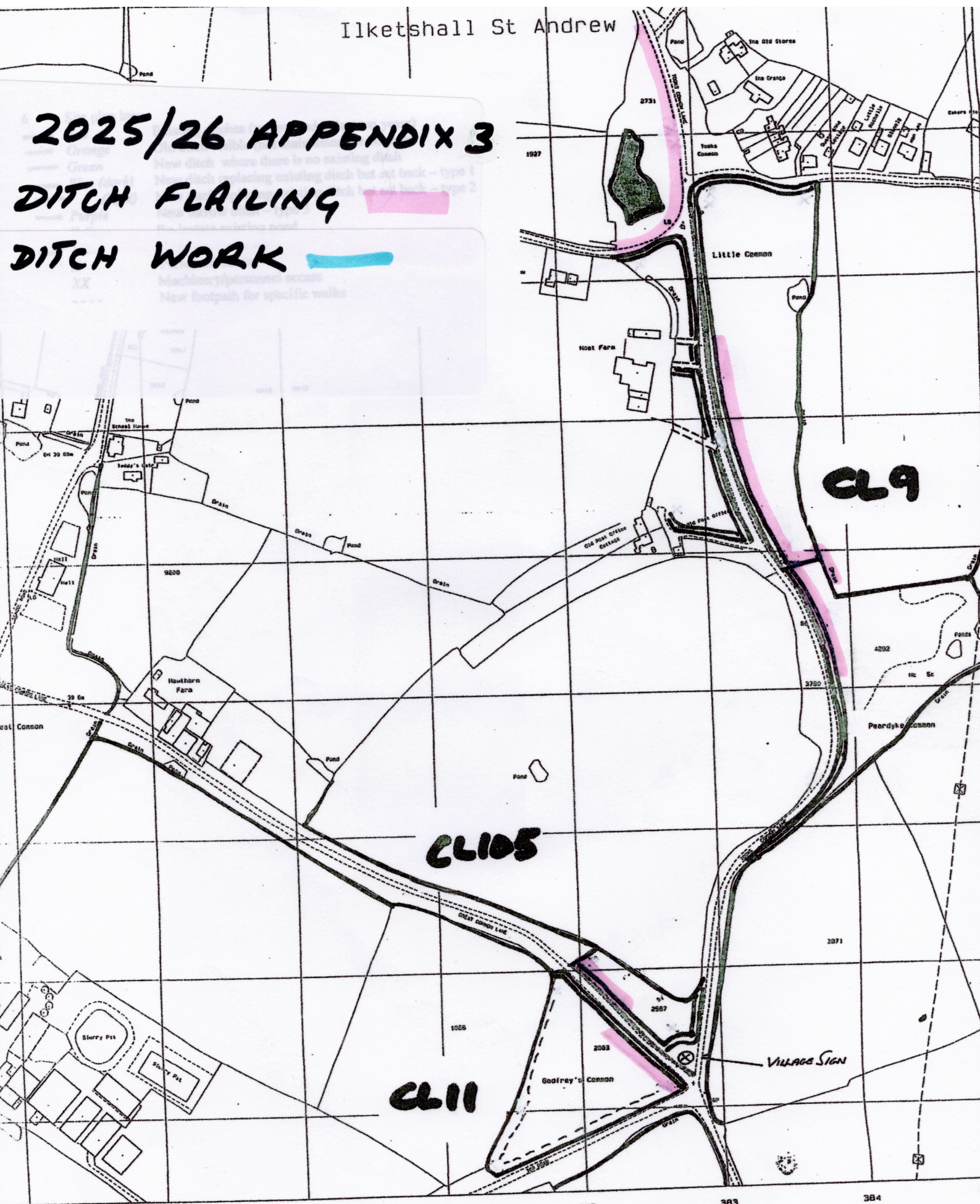


Ilketshall St Andrew

2025/26 APPENDIX 3

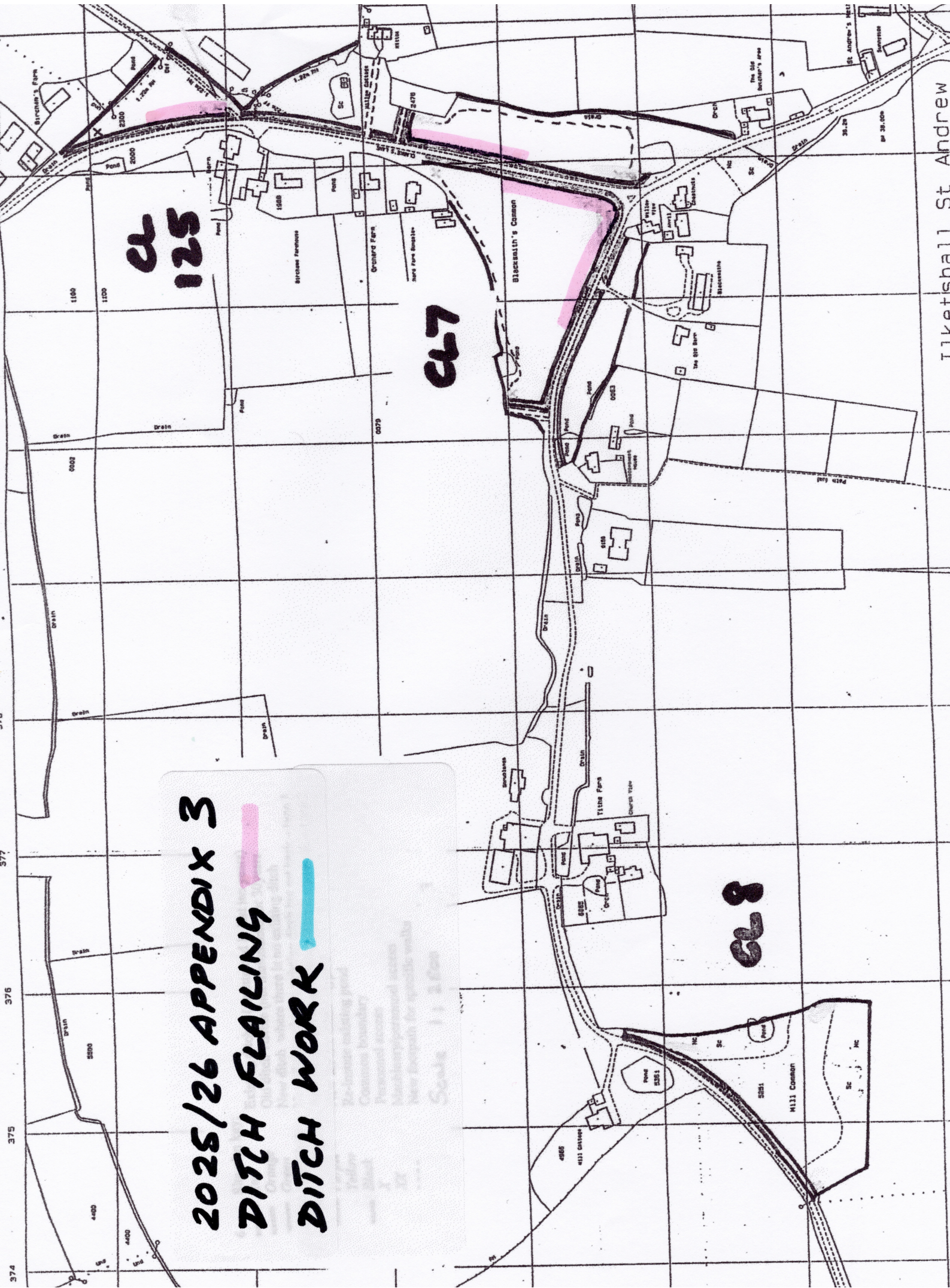
DITCH FLAILING

DITCH WORK



525

53





Appendix 4: Soil analysis results, 2024

Figure 1: pH, Soil Index P K Mg with exact figures in mg/l

SOIL ANALYSIS REPORT									
Laboratory Sample Reference	Field Details			Index			mg/l (Available)		
	No.	Name or O.S. Reference with Cropping Details	Soil pH	P	K	Mg	P	K	Mg
36124/24	1	PEARDYKE/LT COMM <i>No cropping details given</i>	5.4	0	1	2	3.8	91	92
36125/24	2	BECKS GREEN <i>No cropping details given</i>	5.3	0	1	2	3.4	79	78
36126/24	3	BIG COMMON <i>No cropping details given</i>	5.2	0	1	2	3.4	79	99
36127/24	4	HOLDINS <i>No cropping details given</i>	5.2	0	1	2	3.2	72	98
36128/24	5	BLACKSMITHS <i>No cropping details given</i>	5.4	0	1	2	3.4	77	76

Figure 2: Soil Organic Matter %, determined via Loss On Ignition testing

Lab Ref.	Field Details		Soil Organic Matter [LOI%] Result
	No.	Field Name or Reference	
36124	1	PEARDYKE/LT COMM	5.4
36125	2	BECKS GREEN	6.2
36126	3	BIG COMMON	6.9
36127	4	HOLDINS	7.0
36128	5	BLACKSMITHS	6.4

Interpretation

Soil testing was conducted in 2024 in response to the temporary reintroduction of livestock to the Commons for the first time in nearly two decades.

pH: The soil across the commons has an unusually low pH, similar to the acidity of sparkling water. In agricultural systems, soils are typically maintained around a pH of 6.5, and the addition of fertilizer gradually raises the pH over time. However, since the commons have not been fertilized or grazed extensively, this has resulted in a lowered pH, creating a nutrient-poor environment. A low pH environment is a rare feature of a landscape, creating unique niches for the ecology of the Commons to fill.

Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K), and Magnesium (Mg):

Phosphorus is essential for energy transfer, root development, and overall plant growth. low phosphorus levels in the Commons soils suggest that, over time, without fertilization, much of the available phosphorus has been leached out or removed through cutting and grazing. Potassium helps regulate water balance, enzyme activity, and stress tolerance in plants. While potassium is more mobile in soil, its levels can still decrease without proper replenishment. Similarly, magnesium is vital for photosynthesis and plant health, and its deficiency can reduce plant growth and resilience.

The absence of nutrient inputs and limited grazing have resulted in a depletion of phosphorus, potassium, and magnesium in the commons. This nutrient loss, compounded by regular cutting, makes it harder for plants to thrive and reduces soil fertility.

As with pH this makes the Commons an unusual nutrient-poor environment which again creates a unique ecological niche.

Organic Matter and Soil Carbon:

In the East of England, agricultural soils typically have organic matter percentages ranging from 1.75% to 2.5%. Organic matter, primarily made up of decomposed plant and animal material, is crucial for soil health. It improves soil structure, enhances water retention, and provides nutrients for plant growth. A key component of organic matter is soil carbon, which helps sequester atmospheric CO₂, benefiting both soil fertility and the environment. Low organic matter content means reduced soil carbon storage, less efficient nutrient cycling, and poorer plant growth. This can also lead to diminished moisture retention and temperature regulation in the soil, further affecting ecosystem health and long-term productivity.