Tandridge Local Plan
Assessing the Ecological Suitability of 183 sites considered for development








Tandridge District Council, Surrey

1.0 INTRODUCTION

TEP conducted Site Based Ecology Assessments of 183 sites across Tandridge District in Surrey. Sites were assessed over 2 years during 2016 and 2017.

This formed an evidence base for the Council's emerging Local Plan.

AIMS

- Determine the ecological suitability of sites to accommodate development, including - Market Housing, Employment, Mixed Use, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation, Garden Village Sites
- Determine to what extent the sites' ecology would be affected by development
- Determine if the site's ecology would prevent development
- Identify the extent of the site's developable area that is ecologically suitable and suggest suitable yields
- Identify potential mitigation to be considered

1.0 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

- The Tandridge District Council has an Objectively Assessed Need of 9,400 dwellings between 2013 – 2033.
- Almost 400 potential development sites have been submitted to the Local Authority through the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment process for consideration.
- Tandridge District is rich in biodiversity. The district has more than 250 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and 200 potential SNCIs. 94% of the district is in the Green Belt.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

➢The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) stress that biodiversity and ecological networks are guiding factors in the site allocation process. As Tandridge district is predominantly rural with a diverse landscape, these considerations are key to the development of the Local Plan.

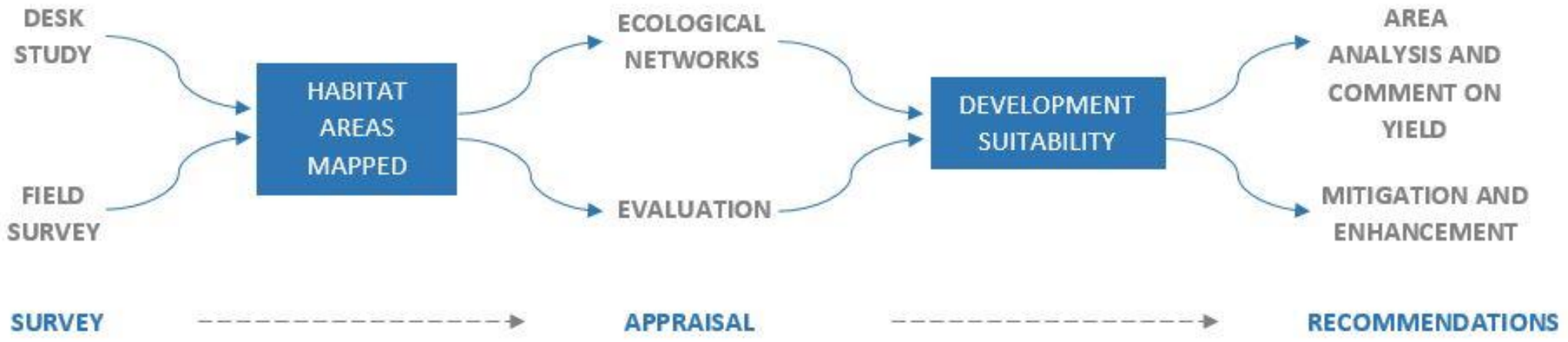
"Plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the Framework" NPPF, para 110

There is a "need for the planning system to perform.. an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and as apart of this, helping to improve biodiversity" NPPF, para 7

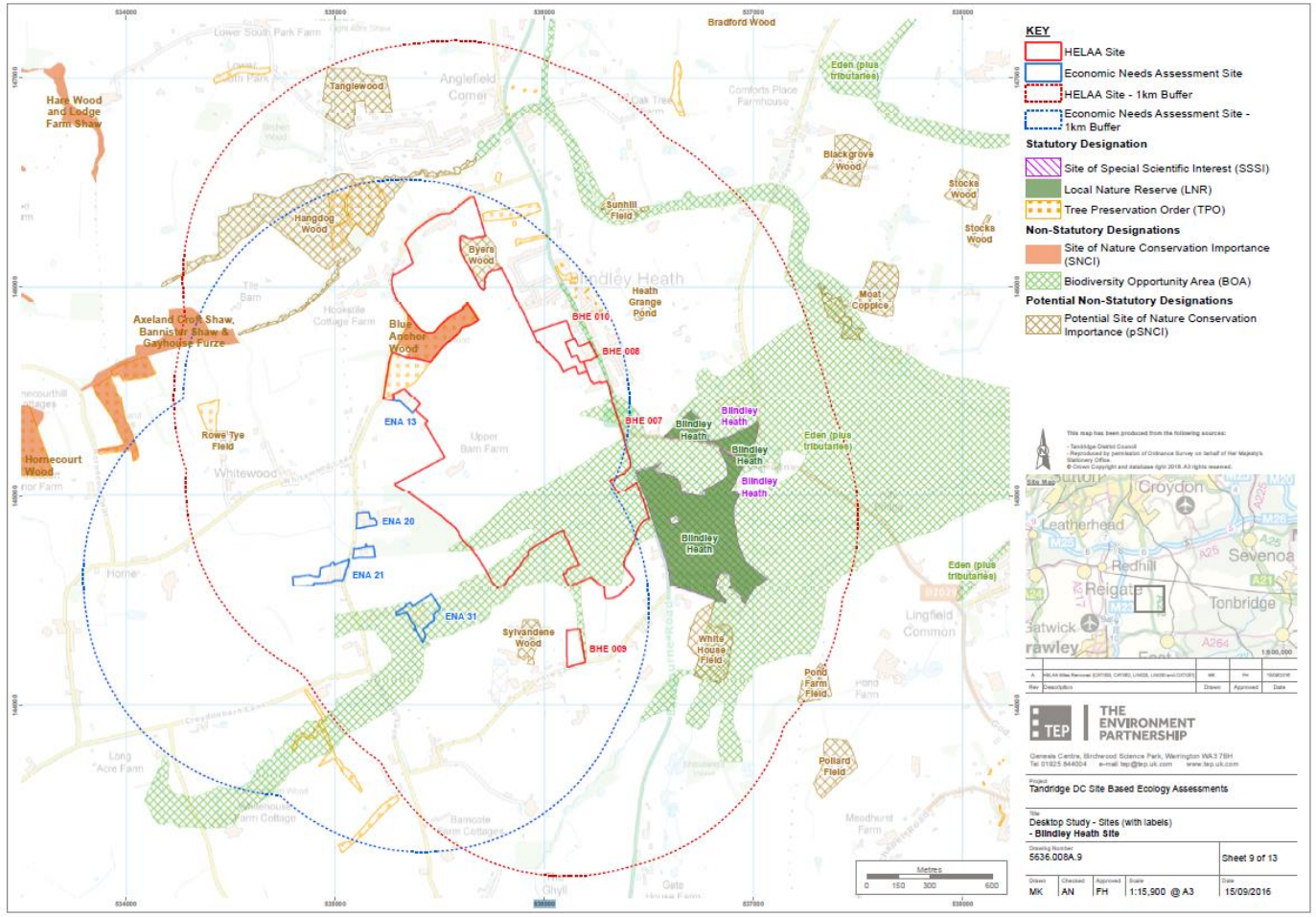
➢Site Based Ecology Assessments were required to guide the development of the new Local Plan, which needs to demonstrate that land will be allocated to meet the housing requirement.

2.0 METHOD

Each site was assessed in stages, as set out below:



2.1 DESK STUDY – PROTECTED SITES

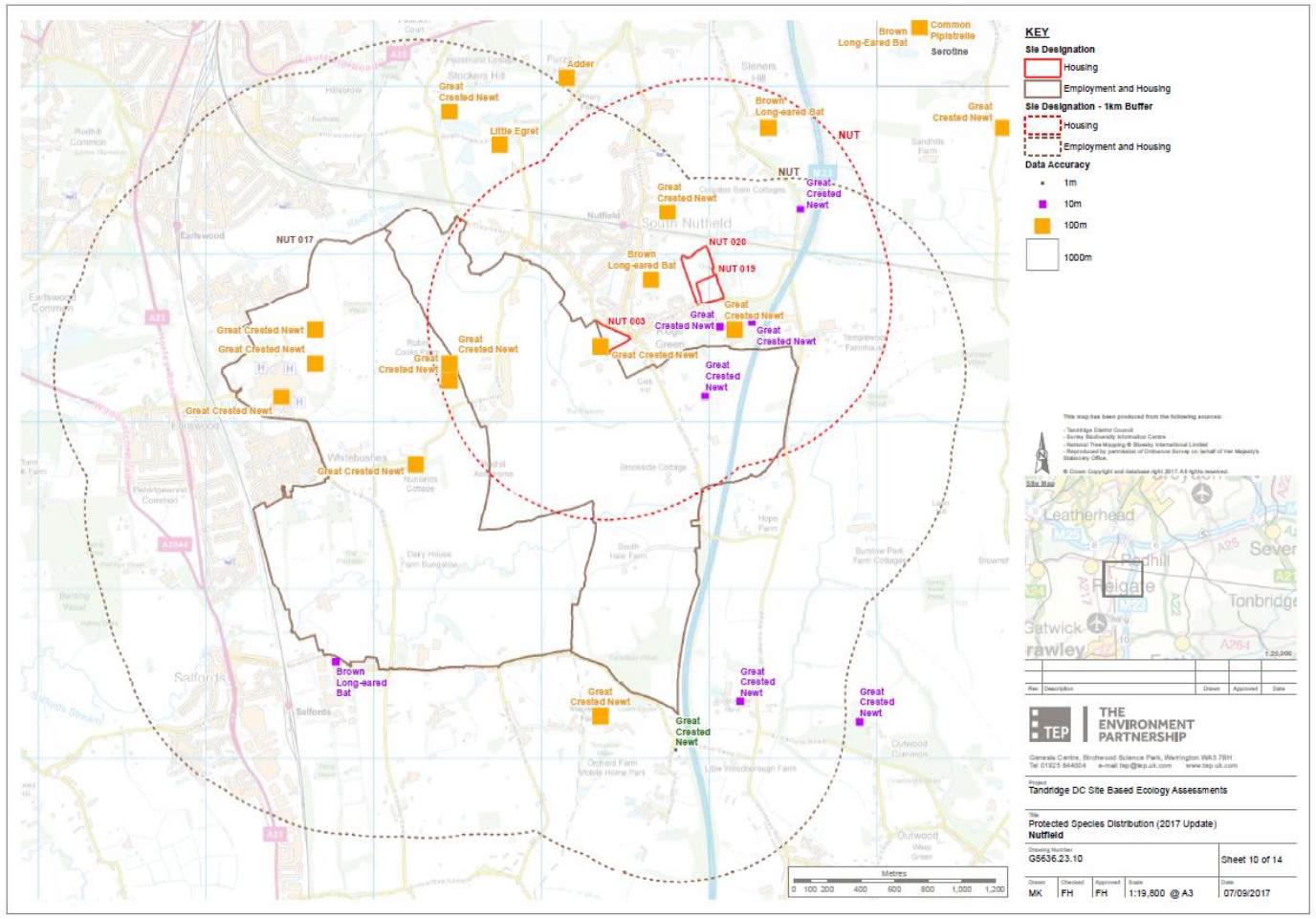


The following data was collated for each site within a 1km radius:

- **Statutory Designations**
  - Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
  - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
  - Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)
- **Non-Statutory Designations**
  - Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs)
  - Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)
- **Potential Non-Statutory Designations**
  - Potential SNCIs (pSNCIs)
- **Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)**

Data was obtained from Tandridge DC and Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre (SBIC).

2.1 DESK STUDY – PROTECTED SPECIES

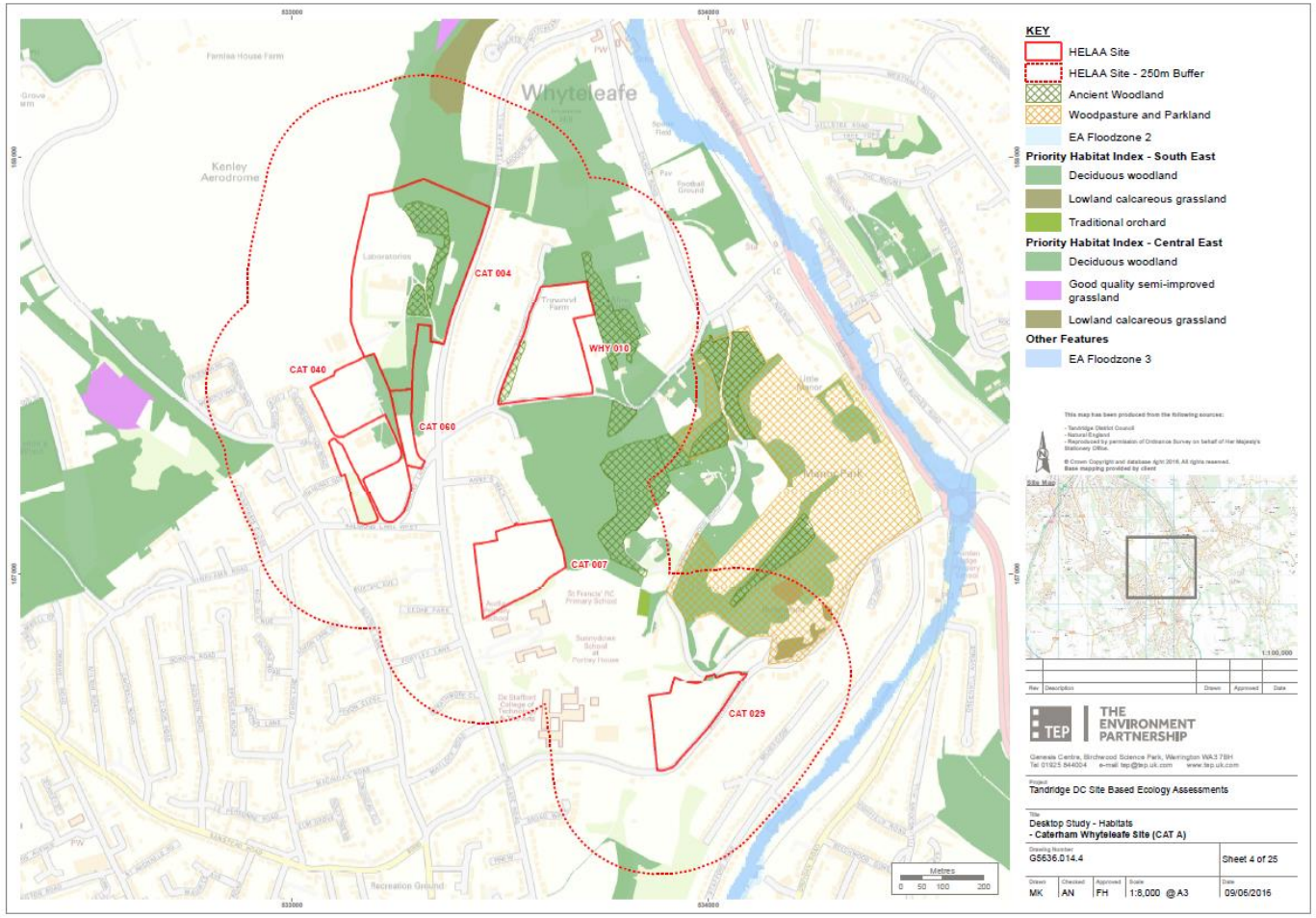


The following data was collated for each site within a 1km radius:

- **Protected species, including**
  - Bats
  - Dormouse
  - Great Crested Newt
  - Otter
  - White-clawed crayfish
  - Early gentian
  - Adder
  - Water vole
  - Birds (Annex 1 and Schedule 1 Species)

Data was obtained from SBIC.

2.1 DESK STUDY – PRIORITY HABITATS



The following data was collated for each site within a 250m radius:

- **Priority habitats, examples include**
  - Deciduous Woodland
  - Good Quality Semi-Improved Grassland
  - Traditional Orchard
  - Lowland Fens
- **Ancient woodland, including**
  - Ancient and semi-natural woodland
  - Plantation on ancient woodland
- **Wood pasture and Parkland**

Priority habitats are habitats listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act, 2006.

The habitat information was extracted from publicly available datasets from Natural England and magic.gov.uk.

2.2 FIELD SURVEYS

An ecologist visited each site. Potentially complex sites were visited by an ecologist with Field Identification Skills Certificate at Level 4.

Results comprised:

- **On-site Habitat Appraisal**
  - A description of habitats on site, including any UK priority habitats
- **Off-site Appraisal of Ecological Networks**
  - A description of features providing connectivity between habitats on site and the wider area
- **Protected, Priority & Invasive Species**
  - Details of evidence of protected, priority and invasive species on site
  - Assessment of the potential of habitats on site to support protected species
- **Photographs**
  - Site photographs and annotations to highlight features of interest

2.2 FIELD SURVEYS – EXAMPLE SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

Area A - Area of amenity grassland used for recreational purposes

Area C - Area of marshy grassland located at the edge of the golf course

Area A - Residential property and front garden

Area A - Small garden centre

Area A - Large arable field within the northwest land parcel

Area A - Semi-improved horse-grazed grassland

2.2 APPRAISAL OF ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS

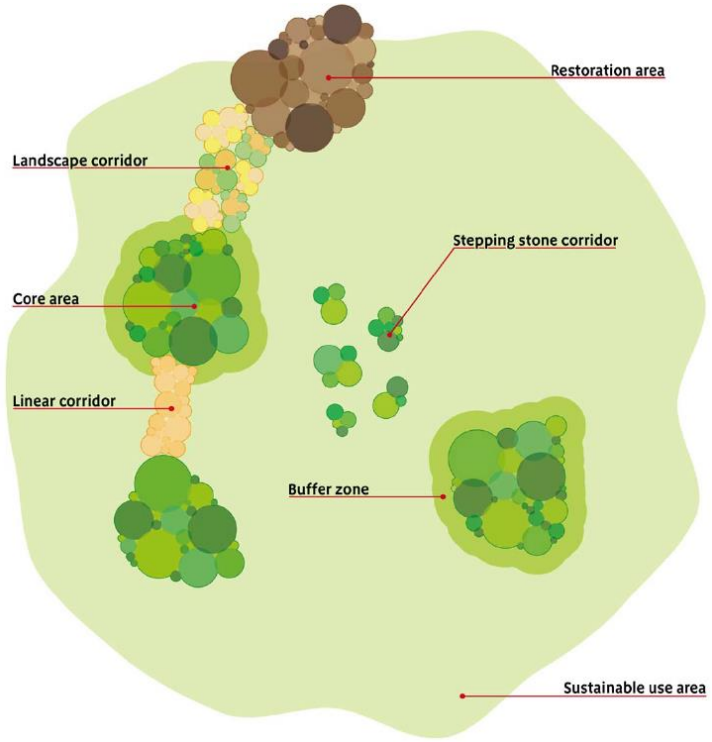


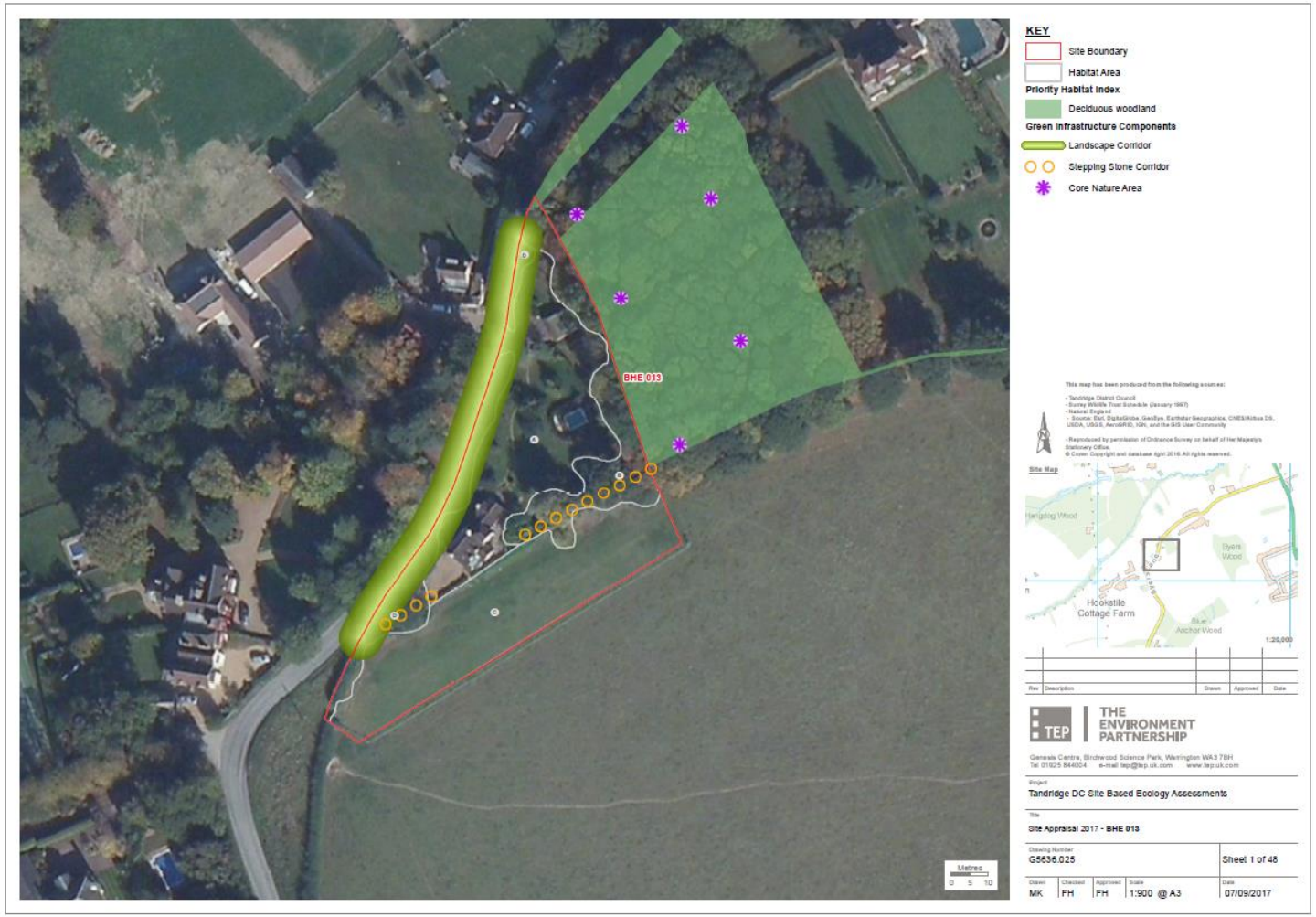
Figure: An ecological network (Reproduced from Lawton (2010). "Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network")

Using desk study and field survey, ecological networks were identified for each site, based on Lawton's (2010) graphic of Ecological Networks.

Some of the detailed definitions within Lawton were amalgamated to create the following definitions used in this study:

- Core Nature Areas – Large and functional areas of high-quality habitat
- Landscape Corridors: Linear areas of quality habitats, usually connected to Core Nature Areas
- Stepping-Stone Corridors: Smaller areas of quality habitats that benefit movement of species

2.2 MAPPING OF HABITAT AREAS AND ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS



Site Appraisal maps show:

- Discrete habitat areas
- Areas of priority habitats
- Local ecological networks
  - Core Nature Areas
  - Landscape Corridors
  - Stepping-stone corridors

2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and recommendations were made regarding the site's development potential.

- **Ecological suitability of the site for development**
  - "Suitable" - minimal constraint
  - "Suitable – Sensitive" – specific types of development may be appropriate, or particular features require special consideration
  - Unsuitable – Retention and protection advised
- **Development guidance**
  - Types of development the site is suitable for
- **Yield**
  - Number of housing units the site is capable of providing at typical densities, or area of employment land
- **Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure**
  - Recommendations for retaining and protecting ecological features e.g. appropriate buffer zones around woodland
  - Recommendations for restoration, enhancement and management of habitats on site e.g. selective thinning of woodland to restore the understory, clearance of debris from water courses, enhancement of grassland buffer with wildflower seed mix
- **Additional assessment and surveys required to inform a planning application**
  - Including ecological assessment, arboricultural assessment, Phase 1 habitat survey, amphibian survey, preliminary bat roost assessment, water vole survey

2.3 CONCLUSIONS – ECOLOGICAL SUITABILITY OF THE SITE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Decision Framework for Assessment of Development Suitability

A decision framework was designed in line with NPPF, so development is steered to sites of least environmental value. The framework considers the potential impact of the development on protected sites, section 41 habitats, significant "supporting habitats" and protected species concentrations. Where ecological features may be affected, the mitigation hierarchy is applied (avoid – mitigate – compensate – enhance).

The decision framework considers the following questions –

1. Does the site, or its boundary contain s41 habitat, a protected site or significant areas of "supporting habitat"?

2. Can habitats and sites of value be retained and enhanced using embedded mitigation?

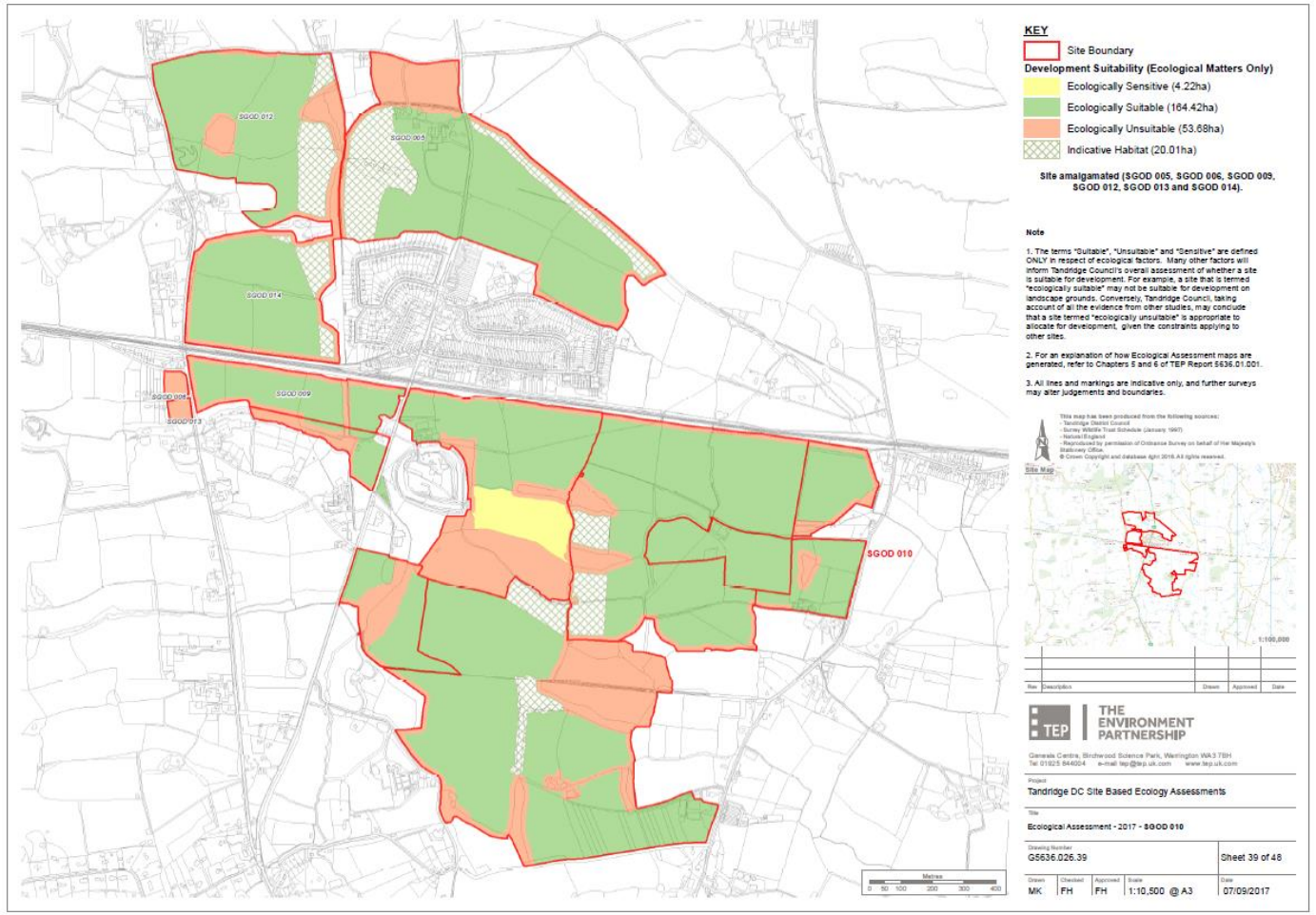
3. What is the value and replaceability of habitats that could not be protected by embedded mitigation?

4. Is it feasible that special design and mitigation measures could overcome the adverse effect, while maintaining and enhancing biodiversity on site and in the local area?

5. Can the site be accessed from the existing road network or urban area with no effect on s41 habitats and designated sites?

6. Consider designated sites and protected species in the surrounding area. Even if they are not directly affected (Q1) can adverse indirect effects arising from development be mitigated using design and mitigation measures?

2.3 CONCLUSIONS – ECOLOGICAL SUITABILITY OF THE SITE FOR DEVELOPMENT



Using the decision framework, an assessment map was produced for each site, highlighting areas Ecologically Suitable, Ecologically Sensitive and Ecologically Unsuitable for development.

Caveat! This assessment is made purely on ecological grounds. The Council weighs several other factors in the balance during decisions on site allocation, including landscape capacity and sensitivity, sustainability appraisal, technical studies and housing need assessments.

2.4 BENEFITS TO TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

- A systematic and evidence-based approach to assessment of multiple sites
- Sits alongside other environmental, planning and technical studies to inform the Local Plan process
- A decision framework which follows principles set out in national policy and guidance and allows developers and landowners to understand ecological capacity
- Identification of ecological networks and advice on how these can be strengthened through the development process
- A cost-effective preliminary assessment which identifies the need for more detailed surveys on complex sites

2.4 COMMENTS FROM TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

"Tandridge District Council are preparing a Local Plan which must reflect the unique character of our district to complement and enhance our environment which is so highly valued. As a rural district with extensive green fields and biodiversity and landscape designations, the Council want to ensure that a thorough consideration of ecology matters are a key part of our evidence base and considered from an early stage and used to guide and inform policy and land allocations. TEP were commissioned to carry out this work for us and we have continued to work with them over a number of iterations of our Local Plan. TEP have provided an excellent service to the Council and were always on hand to answer questions, offer their expert advice and responded to our requirements flexibly, accommodating often last minute changes. We wouldn't hesitate to recommend them."

For more information, please contact: Francis Hesketh - Director, TEP. FrancisHesketh@tep.uk.com

HEAD OFFICE

Genesis Centre
Birchwood Science Park
Warrington
WA3 7BH

Tel: 01925 844004
E-mail: tep@tep.uk.com

GATESHEAD

Office 26 Gateshead
International Business Centre
Mulgrave Terrace
Gateshead
NE8 1AN

Tel: 0191 605 3340
E-mail: gateshead@tep.uk.com

LONDON

8 Trinity Street
London
SE1 1DB

Tel: 020 3096 6050
E-mail: london@tep.uk.com

MARKET HARBOROUGH

No.1 The Chambers
Bowden Business Village
Market Harborough
Leicestershire
LE16 7SA

Tel: 01858 383120
E-mail: mh@tep.uk.com

CORNWALL

4 Park Noweth
Churchtown
Cury,
Helston
Cornwall
TR12 7BW

Tel: 01326 240081
E-mail: cornwall@tep.uk.com