



Ivybridge Parks, Longtimber and Pithill Woods

Habitat Management Plan

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Contents

1	Intr	oduction	1
	1.1	Site Location	1
	1.2	Introduction	1
	1.3	Background	1
2	Site	Description and Recommendations	2
	2.1	Barons Pyke	
	2.2	Filham Park	2
	2.3	Holman's Way	3
	2.4	Longtimber and Pithill Woods	3
	2.5	MacAndrews Field	
	2.6	Orchid Avenue	5
	2.7	St Peters Way	
	2.8	Victoria Park	
	2.9	Woodlands Cemetery	6
3	Hal	oitat Management Advice	7
	3.1	Habitat Management Prescriptions	7
	3.2	Grassland Management for Biodiversity	
	3.3	Woodland and Scrub Management for Biodiversity	
	3.4	Dead Hedging	
	3.5	Invasive Species	
	3.6	Scrape Creation	
	3.7	Hedgerow Creation and Management	10
	3.8	Bird Box Installation	
Re	feren	ces	12
Ap	pendi	ces	13
_	_	x 1 - Annual Habitat Management Advice	
		x 2 - 10-year habitat management plan	
		x 3 - Habitat Management Plan Maps	
-	-	.	



Introduction

1.1 Site Location

This report details a Habitat Management Plan for nine sites across Ivybridge, Devon.

1.2 Introduction

This report contains site evaluation and management suggestions as well as habitat prescriptions for improving biodiversity in sites across Ivybridge.

1.3 Background

Devon Wildlife Consultants was approached by Ivybridge Town Council requiring advice on how to improve the biodiversity of nine sites across Ivybridge. Site evaluations and a site meeting with the town clerk to discuss requirements were undertaken by Alexander Parr MRes. On the 26th of October 2022.



2 Site Descriptions and Recommendations

The report covers management advice for nine sites around Ivybridge. Listed below are descriptions of each site and the recommended actions to improve the biodiversity of the site in question. Detailed methods of undertaking the management prescribed below are presented in section three. Tables summarising annual and 10-year management regimes for each of the sites are provided in Appendix 1 and 2, respectively. Maps outlining management prescriptions of Filham Park MacAndrews Field and Victoria Park are presented in Appendix 3.

2.1 Barons Pyke

Barons Pyke is a small green located in a cul-de-sac, currently managed as a closely mown amenity grassland. It is bordered by an approximately 6m wide grass verge. Together these form a sizable area of grassland. On the southeastern corner of the green, there is a mature beech *Fagus sylvatica* tree. The grass contains a mixture of species including common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, perennial ryegrass *Lolium perrene* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Wildflower species observed include yarrow *Achillea millifolia*, creeping buttercup *Rannunculus repens* and sorrel *Rumex acetosa*.

Recommendations

Regular cutting of the green and corresponding verge has left this grassland slightly infertile and in a relatively species-rich state. Altering management of the grassland at Barons Pyke would enable a species-rich grassland to develop; this would in turn form an important food source for pollinators. Cutting the entire area once a year in August-September to favour fine-leaved grasses would be the best management of the site. It would be beneficial to install a bird box on the mature beech tree which would provide additional nesting sites for birds within the area.

2.2 Filham Park

Filham Park is an approximately 8-ha park currently utilised for a mixture of recreational purposes. Part of the site is currently leased to the Plymouth Angling Association for use as a course fishing lake. The park consists of sizable areas currently managed for wildlife, the largest of which comprises a large mosaic of scrub and rush pasture on the northeastern corner of the fishing lake. The majority of the grassland is closely mown for amenity purposes. Seven large veteran oaks *Quercus robur* are located throughout the grassland; these are all surrounded by a 5-10m buffer of rough grassland dominated by a mixture of cocksfoot *Dactylis gliomata* and Yorkshire fog. A small plantation woodland called "Lesley's wood" is present in the north of the parkland; this consists of densely planted semi-mature trees with a ground flora consisting of a mixture of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and ivy *Hedera helix*. The park borders an unnamed stream to the east. Recent habitat improvement works have been undertaken with the creation of a community orchard and strips of tree planting along the eastern boundary and the border with the adjacent cricket ground.

Recommendations



A Proposed Habitat Management Plan map for Filham park is presented in Map No. 22/4069.01-01 in Appendix 3.

Filham park provides a good range of habitats in its current state. There is an opportunity to provide a benefit to biodiversity by extending the current scrub and grassland mosaic northwards along the stream edge. This area is currently prone to waterlogging and it would ease management burdens to establish this area in a more natural state. This habitat creation also has the potential to improve water quality within the stream and provide natural flood management. This would be further enhanced through the creation of a scrape, which would provide additional breeding grounds for invertebrates and amphibians as well as food for birds. Installing a scrape here would provide flood mitigation and could be funded through grants.

Lesley's wood and the scrub areas present within the site would benefit from some thinning works to improve their vegetative structure. The rough grassland habitats located in the park's margins, around the veteran park trees and growing within the community orchard area should follow the management for tussocky grasslands by cutting yearly in early spring.

2.3 Holman's Way

Holman's way is a small green situated in a residential suburb. It consists of a rough grass sward and a mixture of newly planted and mature trees. The grass sward is mostly dominated by a combination of Yorkshire fog and common bent. There are some flowering plants, however the grassland is relatively species-poor. The negative indicators common nettle *Utica dioica* and broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius* are growing within the grassland. The site is bordered to the east and west by a dense laurel *Lauris nobilis* hedge.

Recommendations

The species diversity of the grassland at Holman's way should be improved. It is recommended that for the next five years a twice-yearly cutting regime is undertaken to improve species diversity. Following this, due to the north-facing aspect, it is best to manage Holman way as a tussocky grassland with a singular cut undertaken in spring. The site has a risk of being shaded out in the future which would result in a loss of biodiversity. In 5-10 years, it would be beneficial to thin some of the trees on site, the arisings from which would make in situ habitat piles. If the laurel hedge is within the Council's ownership it would be beneficial to remove it and replant with a native species, which would allow more light into the site. It would be beneficial to create habitat piles from grass cuttings and tree arisings within the corners of the site. It would be beneficial to install bird boxes on the mature trees which would provide additional nesting sites for birds within the area.

2.4 Longtimber and Pithill Woods

Longtimber and Pithill woods comprise 21.7ha of broadleaved woodland on the western side of the Erme Valley. The site is managed for a combination of recreational and nature conservation-based aims. The lower reaches show an affinity to lowland beech woodland while the upper reaches show an affinity for upland oak woods. There is the presence of



numerous ancient woodland indicators throughout the wood including bluebell *Hyacinthoides* non-scripta, ramsons Allium ursinum, wood sorrel Oxalis acetosella and opposite leaved golden saxifrage Chrysosplenium alternifolium. There are numerous instances of the non-native pheasant's berry Leycesteria formosa located near the border with the town. The woodland also supports important ephemeral wetland features of importance to local amphibian populations. The River Erme borders the site's eastern boundary. The river here is a confined bedrock river type and is an important ecological feature, with the potential to support upland river birds such as grey wagtail Motacilla cinerea and dipper Cinclus cinclus.

Recommendations

Woodland management is a complicated topic and usually requires consideration of numerous factors in addition to ecology; it is recommended that a woodland management plan outlining the long-term goals of the woodland is created, if such a document does not already exist. In terms of ecology, Longtimber and Pithill woods would benefit from being thinned. However, the woodland is largely in a good condition. The only observed major issue was the presence of pheasant's berry.

As a publicly accessible woodland, one of the main concerns in the woodland is the overuse of ecologically sensitive areas by both people and dogs. Highlighted prior to the site survey were concerns about dogs disturbing ephemeral wetland features which currently provide important spawning grounds for the local amphibian population. During the survey, it was observed that the ecologically sensitive riverbank is bordered by a footpath running along almost the entirety of the length. Frequent public and dog use along this stretch are likely to result in damage to this habitat and the loss of potential breeding sites for important bird species. It is recommended that access is limited by the creation of a dead hedge along a few hundred meters of the riverbank and the ephemeral wetlands.

2.5 MacAndrews Field

MacAndrews Field is a recreational park with the majority managed as amenity grassland. The site is bordered by hedgebanks with a line of mature beech trees located along the southern edge. Recent tree planting has occurred along the site's eastern border, just north of the beech trees. There is a willow *Salix* sp. sculpture in the northwestern extent of the site and the hedgerows are bordered by 1-3m of rough grassland.

Recommendations

A Proposed Habitat Management Plan map for MacAndrews Field is presented in Map No. 22/4069.01-02 in Appendix 3.

It is recommended to increase the buffer and improve the quality of the grass bordering the hedgerows; this should be extended to 5-10m where practicable. The grass along the northern boundary of the site will be positioned in a sunny aspect and well-drained soil. This area should be managed to benefit fine-leaved grasses with one annual cut being undertaken in August-September. The grass buffers along the east and west boundaries as well as that which is growing beneath the beech trees should be managed as tussocky grassland and cut in March-April. It would be beneficial to create habitat piles from grass cuttings and tree



arisings along the edge of the hedgerow. It would be beneficial to install bird boxes on the mature beech trees which would provide additional nesting sites for birds within the area. The hedgerow surrounding the site should be managed on a rotational coppice with the arisings utilised to build up the hedge and fill in gaps.

2.6 Orchid Avenue

Orchid Avenue consists of a small area of hazel coppice located within a suburban setting. The site supports a woodland-influenced grassland including Yorkshire fog, false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and cock's foot. There is an old hedge bank bordering the north of the site. This hedgerow has a poor structure with some gaps

Recommendations

The coppice stalls are relatively young, however they provide the most important feature of this site. The coppice stools should be cut back to 30cm height every 10-15 years on rotation. This will ensure that the coppice stools keep expanding and that all growth stages of hazel are present within the site. The grassland would be best managed as a tussocky grassland being cut annually in March-April. It would be beneficial to use the arisings from the coppicing works to fill in some of the gaps within the hedgebank. The hedgerow bordering the site should be managed on a rotational coppice with the arisings utilised to build up the hedge and fill in gaps.

2.7 St Peters Way

St Peters Way consists of two small sections of grassy road verge separated by a roundabout; there is an area of dense scrub with mature trees growing to the south of these two areas. Part of the area is currently managed as a wildflower grassland. The grassland itself is relativity species rich with the flowering species oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris* noted.

Recommendations

St Peters Way represents a good quality grassland and its continued management as such is recommended. Due to the shady aspect of the sites, it is recommended to manage the grassy areas as tussocky grassland with annual cutting in March-April. The recent tree planting when combined with the mature trees and scrub to the sites south, presents the future risk of overshading which would result in a decline in biodiversity. Some tree thinning will likely be required in 5-10 years. It would be beneficial to install bird boxes on the mature tree which would provide additional nesting sites for birds within the area.

2.8 Victoria Park

Victoria Park is a mixture of amenity grassland surrounded by mature trees including beech oak and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*. The open area located centrally is dominated by a mixture of perennial ryegrass and common bent while beneath the trees the grassland is dominated by cock's foot. There is a basketball court, children's play area and a neglected wildlife garden in the southern extent of the park. The park's eastern border comprises a laurel



hedgerow. The Schedule 9 invasive species montbretia *Crocosmia crocosmiiflora* is present within the wildlife garden.

Recommendations

A Proposed Habitat Management Plan map for Victoria Park is presented in Map No. 22/4069.01-03 in Appendix 3.

It is recommended that the grassland growing beneath tree cover is managed as a tussocky grassland, with cutting carried out once annually in March-April. The wildlife garden would benefit from a few wildlife-friendly features such as a pond and a bug hotel. As a garden, it would be beneficial to plant the area with a naturalistic planting scheme which would be low maintenance and provide a range of benefits to wildlife. The invasive species montbretia should be removed and the area planted with a mixture of native and pollinator-friendly plants. This could include species such as foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, tufted hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, bluebell, snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis*, native daffodils *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, woodland tulips *Tulipa sylvestris*, baneberries *Actaea* sp., geraniums *Geranium* sp. and spurges *Euphorbia* sp.. It would be beneficial to install bird boxes on the mature trees which would provide additional nesting sites for birds within the area.

2.9 Woodlands Cemetery

Woodlands Cemetery consists of two compartments; the eastern compartment is surrounded by a stone wall with a chapel located centrally and the western compartment is partially bordered by a native hedgebank comprising predominantly hazel. The hedgebank is in good condition comprising a dense thicket of deadwood and coppiced hazel. The grass within the cemetery consists of a closely mown sward. There are ornamental shrubs and trees planted across the cemetery. The grassland contains a good mixture of species notably ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and oxeye daisy.

Recommendations

It is recommended to manage the cemetery as a flowering lawn. The grassland is currently species-rich and as such would not need overseeding. Some of the corners could be managed as a tussocky grassland. This would allow greater connectivity across the site and provide hibernation opportunities. The



3 Habitat Management Advice

3.1 Habitat Management Prescriptions

Listed below are prescriptions for obtaining the habitat outcomes detailed in the previous section. The advice here can also be utilised for managing other similar habitats.

3.2 Grassland Management for Biodiversity

When managing grassland for biodiversity in the absence of grazing, it is recommended to undertake a minimum of one cut per year, with the exception of wet grasslands which discussed separately. Grasslands can still benefit biodiversity if cut more than once a year, however cutting too frequently results in a loss of biodiversity. Two main grassland structures can be attained through cutting regimes. The first is grasslands where fine creeping grasses such as red fescue Festuca rubra and common bent dominate the sward; this produces a flower-rich habitat containing species such as yarrow, meadow buttercups and red clover Trifolium pratense. These support more species and provide large amounts of nectar and pollen to pollinators. The other type of grasslands achievable through cutting are those which are formed of tussock-forming species such as false oat and Yorkshire fog; these grasslands favour sturdier taller flowering species such as ribwort plantain, lesser knapweed Centaurea nigra and oxeye daisy. These grasslands usually support a lower density of flowering species, however, provide commuting corridors and hibernation areas to a host of wildlife. Both of these grassland structures provide great benefits to biodiversity and ideally, they should be located near each other to gain maximum benefits. However, many species found in fine grasslands will struggle to grow in shade, under leaf fall or in waterlogged soil. Ideally these grasslands should be positioned in south-facing aspects on gently sloping ground. The species in tussocky grasslands are generally hardier and can grow in a variety of aspects or soil types.

Cutting at different times of the year influences which grasses grow best. There are two cutting periods where grasslands can be influenced to provide an increase in biodiversity. Cutting at the beginning of the growing season (March - April) helps reduce the vigour of grasses which would otherwise out-compete the seedlings of flowering plants. Cutting at the end of the growing season (August-September) prevents a build-up of thatch which would prevent seeds from entering the seed bank. Cutting between May-July is usually detrimental to grassland biodiversity, as it prevents flowering plants from setting seed and disrupts insect assemblages. During both cutting periods, all grass cuttings must be removed from the ground. Leaving grass cuttings in situ will smother seedlings and produce soil conditions in which unwanted nettles and docks will thrive. Grass cuttings can be placed in 1m² piles located around the borders of the grassland or within nearby scrub. This will provide hibernation spots for insects and small animals.

If grass swards are considered to be rank and species-poor in the middle of the growing season, it is recommended that these grasslands are cut twice a year in each of the beneficial cutting periods. This will help reduce the vigour of the established grasses while allowing a greater number of flowering plants to establish. In some particularly species-poor grasslands, the addition of wildflower seeds can help boost biodiversity. However, if there are already a few flowering plants in the grassland additional seeds are not required. It is never beneficial to



grassland biodiversity to introduce fertilisers either inorganic or organic. Fertile conditions benefit only a few species in a grassland habitat. In grasslands already considered to be in good condition, only one cut a year is required. Cutting only at the end of the growing season helps break up grass tussocks and produces a grassland dominated by fine-leaved grasses. Only cutting an area only at the beginning of the growing season favours tussocky grass species and will result in a grassland dominated by these.

Grass species which grow well in wet conditions are usually tussocky in nature. Wet soil limits grass growth and cutting annually is usually detrimental to biodiversity. In areas where soils become regularly waterlogged, it is beneficial to cut the area on a three-year rotation where one-third of the area is cut once a year. Species that favour waterlogged soil are often coarse and require topping with heavy cutting machinery such as a flail.

In more formal settings where low-growing grass is required the area can be managed as a flowering lawn. Flowering lawns are managed by cutting the grass to 10cm every two weeks over the growing season; this produces the short sward required in many formal settings while allowing many species of flowering plants to flower and set seed.

3.3 Woodland and Scrub Management for Biodiversity

The most important woodland and scrub habitats for biodiversity are those with a varied structure; this requires trees of multiple age classes. Dense stands of trees and shrubs do not allow light to penetrate to the ground level and prevent young trees, shrubs and other plants from growing. Therefore, it is vital to thin areas of woodland and scrub by removing a proportion of the mature/semi-mature individuals and allowing new younger individuals to take their place.

Scrub is a relatively young habitat; most scrub species will consist of individual plants roughly 5-15 years old. At different ages scrub benefits different species, a good example being the scrub requirements for nesting birds. The chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* will nest at ground level in dense stands of scrub less than 10 years old, and the closely related willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* will only nest in scrub greater than 10 years old. To create a variety of structures in patches of scrub while retaining the habitat it is recommended to cut one-fifth of the woody plant species to ground level once every two years. This will allow areas of open space to be created and then recolonised. Ideally, scrub should be cut in autumn between September and November to avoid disturbing nesting birds or hibernating animals. The arisings from the cut scrub can be utilised to create habitat piles within the scrub, by placing them in 1m² piles within the scrub or by creating dead hedging (see section 3.4 below).

Woodlands are representative of particularly old plant growth and as such need to be cut at a lesser rate. Removal of a few mature and semi-mature trees can provide extensive benefits to woodland structure and species diversity. Management of woodland is a dangerous task, especially when felling large trees. Felling trees greater than 30cm in diameter will require specialist forestry contractors. In addition, felling licenses will be required from the forestry commission to cover each year's work. There are grants available to assist with these costs.



In managing woodland for biodiversity up to 10% of the mature and semi-mature trees should be removed in the thinning process each year; this will allow the woodland to support trees of all age classes and provide the maximum benefits to biodiversity. Selecting trees for thinning should follow this basic set of rules.

- Prioritise thinning non-natives first. For example conifers, holm oak *Quercus ilex*, turkey oak *Quercus cerris* and horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*.
- Prioritise thinning native invasives second. For example beech, sycamore and holly.
- Prioritise thinning non-invasive native trees last. Only select those without veteran features (torn limbs, rot holes, cankered bark).

Thinning should be undertaken evenly across the woodland. Trees with veteran features, including standing dead trees, are vital for biodiversity and other than for public safety concerns, such as those growing dangerously alongside a footpath, should not be removed as part of woodland management. Many species rely on veteran trees, including protected species. If a veteran tree requires removal a qualified ecologist should be consulted.

In areas away from extensive public use, it is beneficial to select some trees which are going to be thinned to be "ring barked" instead. This involves using a chainsaw to sever the tree's cambium, the first centimetre under the bark, at ground level killing the tree without felling it. This is a useful tool for creating standing deadwood in woodlands; it also has the benefit of being able to be undertaken by anyone qualified to utilise a chainsaw. Where possible, dead wood from felled trees should be left in situ to provide dead wood habitat. Branches can be utilised to create dead hedges and habitat piles.

Some areas of ancient woodland have historically been managed as coppice. Within coppice areas management should be more intensive; coppice stools should be cut to 30cm from ground level on a 10–15-year rotation. Following the removal of old limbs new growth will grow out of the stool and provide a range of habitats at each growth stage before it requires cutting on the next cycle.

Forestry works should ideally be undertaken between September and November to avoid impacts on nesting birds and other protected species.

3.4 Dead Hedging

Dead hedging is a method of utilising the arising produced when working with trees and shrubs to create a barrier limiting the movement of people and animals to sensitive ecological areas. Dead hedging entails installing two lines of stakes roughly 1m apart and piling arising from working with woody plants between the two rows. The height of the dead hedge should ideally be 1-1.5m to form a significant barrier to most people and domestic animals.



3.5 Invasive Species

Invasive species should be removed wherever they are encountered growing within a natural habitat. The main invasive species encountered during the walkover of the sites were montbretia and pheasant's berry. Montbretia was only identified in one small patch and should be dug out carefully making sure to not leave any corms in the soil. The montbretia should be disposed of bio securely, to make sure it does not spread to the wild.

Pheasant's berry should be cut to ground level and injected with herbicide.

3.6 Scrape Creation

Scrapes are shallow temporary water bodies which often occur on floodplains. They hold water for a minimum of 4 months of the year and will usually dry up in the summer. The temporary nature of a scrape provides opportunities for insect and amphibian populations to breed. Due to the temporary nature these features lack the usual predators found within permanent ponds, resulting in greater breeding success. To create a scrape a shallow depression 30-50cm deep should be dug within the centre. The sides should gently slope out at 10 degrees from the centre. This allows similar conditions to be maintained across the spring.

3.7 Hedgerow Creation and Management

Planting of new hedgerows should be undertaken in November, when the weather and soil conditions are most suitable for root establishment. Trees should be planted in a double staggered row with plants at a density of 6 plants per linear metre.

Ideally, hedge plants should be two-year-old transplants, 45 - 60cm high. The roots of the plants will need to be kept moist prior to planting and protected from wind or frost damage.

In order to reduce competition from weeds the hedgerow should be kept clear of vegetation for up to three years after planting. This should be carried out using mulch, which can be made from previously composted straw and wood chippings or well-rotted farm manure and should be applied at a depth of 5cm. During the first year the hedgerow should be well watered weekly. Any trees that have failed to establish should be replaced at the appropriate time of year.

Management of the hedgebank will involve coppicing the newly planted hedge plants on a six-year cycle. Stems should be cut at an angle 20cm above the ground level. Coppicing should be staggered so no more than a third of the hedgebank is managed in any one year. This will result in a fifth of the hedges being cut every two years. Following coppicing, any arisings from the works should be laid on top of the cut areas and used to fill in any gaps which have formed. Hedge management should be undertaken between September and November to avoid impacting breeding birds and hibernating animals.



3.8 Bird Box Installation

General purpose bird boxes suitable for a range of species should be installed on mature trees at a height of 2-3m. Boxes should be installed on a northern or eastern aspect out of the prevailing wind.



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Annual Habitat Management Advice

Appendix 2: 10-year Habitat Management Plan

Appendix 3: Habitat Management Plan Maps



Appendix 1 - Annual Habitat Management Advice

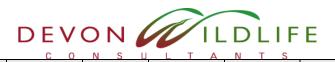
Site	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Barons Pyke								Annu	al grass cut			
Filham Park			Annual grass cut						Woodlar		nd and scrub thinning	
Holman Way			First grass cut					Secor	nd grass cut			
Long Timber and									Woo			
Pithill Wood									VV OC			
MacAndrew's Field			Grass cut along southern, eastern and western						along northern oundary			
Orchid Avenue			boundaries Annual grass cut							Coppicing		
St Peters Way			Annual grass cut									
Victoria Park			Annual grass cut									
Woodlands Cemetery			Cutting to 10cm height every two weeks									

Table A1.1 Annual management tasks at each of the sites



Appendix 2 - 10-year habitat management plan

Site	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10		
					Annual gr	ass cutting						
Barons Pyke	Installation of bird box											
	Install scrape area											
	Annual grass cutting of dry areas											
	Cutting a third of wet grassland areas annually											
Filham Park					Woodland	l Thinning						
I IIIIuiii I uik		Cut one		Cut one		Cut one		Cut one		Cut one		
		fifth of		fifth of		fifth of		fifth of		fifth of		
		scrub to		scrub to		scrub to		scrub to		scrub to		
		ground level		ground level		ground		ground level		ground level		
			larea twice anr			level	Cutting	area once in N	March/April	level		
		Cutting	area twice aiii	iuairy			Cutting	area once in N	naich/April	Plan tree		
										thinning		
Holman Way										works		
	Installation											
	of bird box											
Long Timber												
and Pithill					Woodland	d thinning						
Wood												
MacAndrew's												
Field					Annual gr	ass cutting						
1 ICIU	Installation											
	of bird boxes											
Orchid		Coppice		Coppice		Coppice		Coppice		Coppice		
		one hazel		one hazel		one hazel		one hazel		one hazel		
Avenue		stool		stool		stool		stool		stool		
St Peters Way					Annual gr	ass cutting						
Strown way										Plan tree		



Site	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
										thinning
					A					works
					Annual g	grass cut				
	Plant native hedging		Coppice			Coppice			Coppice	
77' 4 ' D 1			one fifth of			one fifth of			one fifth of	
Victoria Park			hedgerow			hedgerow			hedgerow	
	Installation		<u> </u>			<u> </u>				
	of bird boxes									
Woodlands										
Cemetery					Annual gra	iss cutting				
Confectory										

Table A2.1 Management Tasks over the next 10-year period for each site



Appendix 3 - Habitat Management Plan Maps

