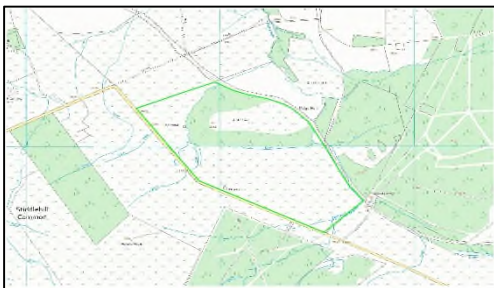


ECOLOGICAL CHECKING STUDY

ELIZABETH LANDMARK, RAY ESTATE



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1. INTRODUCTION

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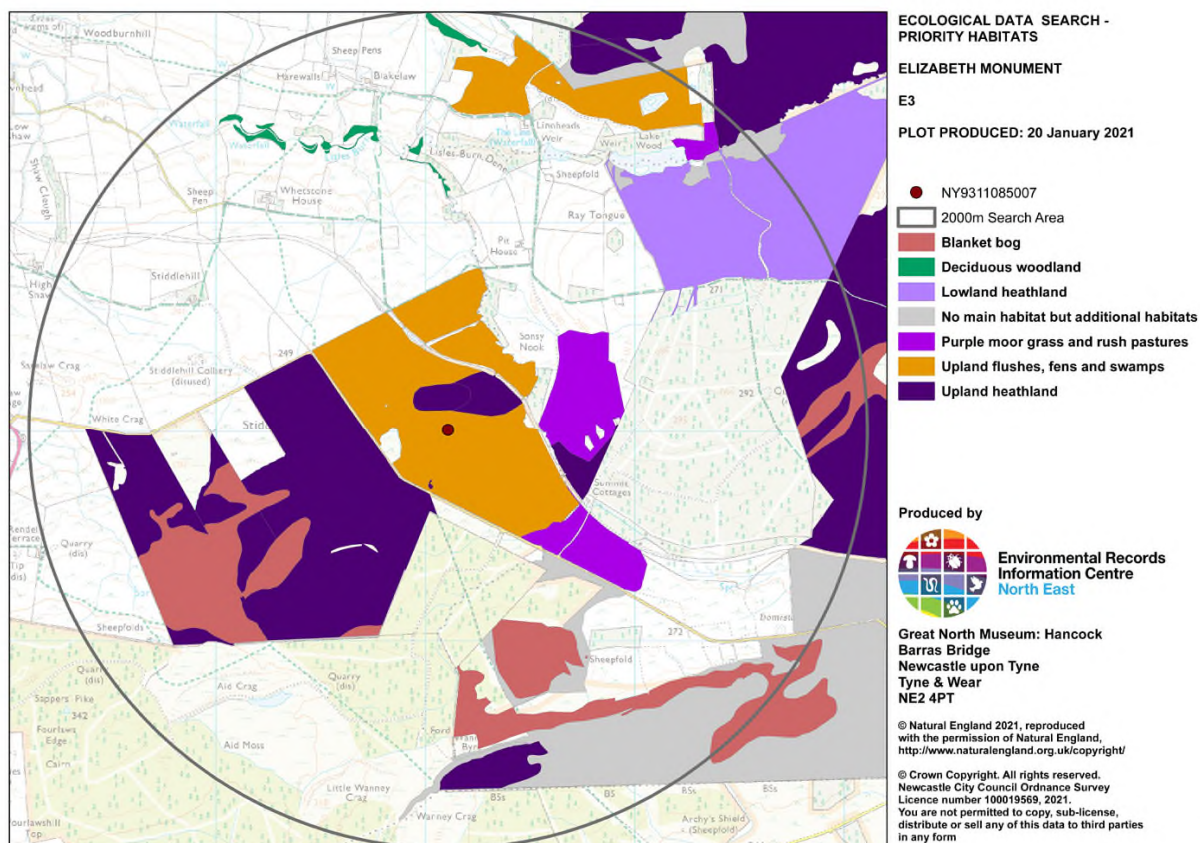


2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 E3 Ecology Ltd was commissioned by Lord Devonport in December 2018 to undertake an Ecological Appraisal of an area of land on the Ray Estate, between Ridsdale and Kirkwhelpington. This report has been prepared to review the resulting 2019 Ecological Appraisal results and conclusions and to inform the forthcoming public inquiry. It references a site walk over undertaken in January 2021 to inform the inquiry.
- 2.2 It is proposed to erect a commemorative Landmark with associated access and car parking.
- 2.3 Consultation with the MAGIC website¹ indicated that the site is not near to any Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or within an impact risk zone for this type of development. Nearby European protected species licences have been granted for a range of bat species but there are no great crested newt records in the wider local area. The site lies within the moorland line but there are no Special Protection Areas (SPAs) within 10km. The Simonside Hills Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is around 10km away. Parts of the site are identified as priority habitats: upland heathland, flushes, fens, and swamp with the remainder shown as network enhancement zone 1².
- 2.4 From the site walkover in January no changes have taken place to the management of the site nor to the extent of the habitats reported in 2019.
- 2.5 The Environmental Records Information Centre North East (ERIC NE) in 2018 indicated that the site lies adjacent to The Wanneys and Aid Moss Local Wildlife Site (LWS), with four other LWSs within 2km. Local records include otter, white clawed crayfish, a range of bat species, adder, common lizard, badger, brown hare, hen harrier, small pearl bordered fritillary, large heath, and a good range of upland and mire plant species. Fresh water pearl mussel is present down-stream of the catchment.
- 2.6 Updated ERIC NE data as at January 2021 provided a plan of priority habitats in the local area, illustrated below. This is largely in accordance with the information available on MAGIC for these habitats. There is also a possible great crested newt record from Chesterhope common 1.5km to the south, but with eDNA records from the same site suggesting absence.

¹ MAGIC website: www.magic.gov.uk

² Network Enhancement Zone 1: Land connecting existing patches of primary and associated habitats which is likely to be suitable for creation of the primary habitat. Factors affecting suitability include: proximity to primary habitat, land use (urban/rural), soil type, slope and proximity to coast. Action in this zone to expand and join up existing habitat patches and improve the connections between them can be targeted here.



Ecological Data Search Priority Habitats – ERIC NE Jan 2020

- 2.7 The Ecological Appraisal dated January 2019³ and checks in 2021 show that the site is dominated by acid grassland with areas of wet and dry heath, marshy grassland, semi-improved acid grassland and continuous bracken. Drainage ditches are present in a number of areas.
- 2.8 Assessment of the 2019 report confirms that the site is of local value for the habitats it supports, such habitats being common in the local area. Based on there being no change, this level of value remains valid.
- 2.9 The survey area comprises an open and exposed mosaic of upland habitats of low suitability to a number of species/species groups such as bats, badger, otter, red squirrel, that if present these species are likely to only utilise the survey area on occasion. In 2021 in very wet conditions after snow melted, a pool was present close to the sheep fold. This is not present on the OS map (MAGIC), but aerials on Google Earth suggest that the area does flood at times. It was dry during the initial survey work.
- 2.10 The survey area provides abundant habitats for ground nesting birds and is likely to support a suite of locally common species such as meadow pipit, skylark and curlew, though it holds the potential to form part of the territory of scarcer species such as short eared owl. Given the abundance of similar habitat in the local area the survey area is of local ornithological value.
- 2.11 The survey area provides habitat for reptiles, and adder have been recorded on the boundaries of the site. Given the abundance of similar habitats in this area of north

³ Ecological Appraisal Elizabeth Landmark, Ray Estate R02 Jan 2019
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Northumberland the survey area forms part of a network of habitats of up to district value to the species, with the actual development footprint of lower value.

- 2.12 The watercourse downstream of the site holds the potential to support white clawed crayfish and they are known to be present in the wider catchment. Fresh water pearl mussel are present downstream at West Woodburn.
- 2.13 No other protected or priority species are likely to be affected by the proposals.
- 2.14 Following a walk over survey in 2021, the conclusions of the 2019 Ecological Appraisal remain valid and robust. Since the original work was completed, greater weight has been given to the enhancement of biodiversity in the assessment of planning applications, as illustrated by changes to planning practice guidance. Nevertheless, the proposed mitigation, to be delivered through a section 106 agreement that has already been agreed with the local planning authority, remain appropriate and proportionate and will deliver net gain.
- 2.15 It is understood that concern has been expressed by some third parties that the proposals could affect future use of the area by hen harrier. Hen harrier records are kept confidential because of the risks of persecution. The Ray Estate has been monitoring bird populations as part of the adjacent windfarm monitoring and these data can be made available to the inspector, if necessary. However, to clarify by way of response to third party concerns, there is no evidence that the species is likely to be adversely affected by the proposals.
- 2.16 The local topography and proposals to rewet habitats on adjacent land means that the likelihood of additional visitor pressure away from the immediate vicinity of the monument, other than on the existing footpath and bridleway network, is low.
- 2.17 The original Ecological Appraisal⁴ identified that detailed design will use additional information on the habitats and peat depths to allow impacts to be minimised and benefits maximised and this will be addressed within a Construction and Environmental Management Plan ("CEMP").
- 2.18 The provision of a CEMP will be secured by planning condition. The local planning authority has already endorsed the proposal for habitat creation and associated long term management proposals (in the form of a Conservation Management Plan ("CMP"), which would be delivered through a section 106 agreement.
- 2.19 With suitable detailed design and input from the proposed ecological clerk of works and the undertakings within the CMP, habitat loss would be further minimised and the quality of habitats that are created and managed would be maximised. As part of the CMP it is proposed to block mire drains over a 60ha area to return land to a more natural hydrology. This would increase and extend the wetland and wet heath habitats. This multi-layered approach to habitat restoration and creation would deliver net gains to biodiversity sufficient to meet current planning practice guidance.

⁴ Ecological Appraisal Elizabeth Landmark, Ray Estate R02 Jan 2019