

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Roost Assessment

Survey site:

Land to the South of The Squirrels, Rhododendron Avenue, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent DA13 0TT

Client:

Mick Humphries

Survey date:

29th July 2024

Project:

This report is prepared to inform a planning application with the Gravesham Borough Council. The proposal is described as:

The construction of two houses and garages

[Unsubmitted]

PEA survey methodology and legislation can be found in the Arbtech Supplement: [PEA Methodology and Legislation - 2024.](#)

PRA survey methodology and legislation can be found in the Arbtech Supplement: [PRA Methodology and Legislation - 2024.](#)

The site survey was undertaken by Craig Williams BSc, MSc, DIC, MRSB (Natural England Protected Species Licence Numbers: [Bats] (2018-33540-CLS-CLS) [Great Crested Newts] (2015-16682-CLS-CLS) [Barn Owls] (CL29/00097))					
Date of survey	Temperature (°C)	Humidity (%)	Cloud Cover (%)	Wind (km/h)	Rain
29/07/2024	21	68	30	10	None

Ecological Survey Factor	Detailed using desk study and site survey (carried out under good weather conditions). Any specific limitations noted within relevant section. This table may include further work you will need to commission (if any) to obtain planning permission or comply with legislation for other consent. All clients are expected to read and understand this section, or to contact the lead surveyor for advice.
Conclusion, Impact or Recommendations	
Habitats and plants (see habitat map in appendix 1, location plan in appendix 2, photos in appendix 3 and proposal plan in appendix 4). Botanical species are described with reference to the DAFOR scale (D = Dominant; A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional, R = Rare).	
Summary of Survey Findings (UKHab codes used)	The survey area is centred on National Grid Reference TQ 6416 6275 and has an area of approximately 0.13888ha. The site lies in an area of houses interspersed with small and separate woodland parcels. Priority habitat deciduous woodland is found adjacent to the east of the site. Ancient woodland is found close off-site to the south-east, estimated at 4m from the boundary. The woodlands can connect via gardens and hedges to a much large woodland of Trosley Country Park and Whitehorse Wood to the south and south-east. Other woodland extends north through farmland for almost 2 kilometres and could be to access other copses in the area to the north-east. No ponds or other water bodies are known with 500m of the site, which lies in a sloping valley.

	No previous ecology surveys for the site are known. <u>Other broadleaved woodland [w1g]</u> The site is a small parcel of broad-leaved woodland, set on an eastward sloping hill with ash the dominant tree. Also found are horse chestnut and scattered hazel. A central area of scrub on the slope has sycamore saplings, hawthorn, bramble, cotoneaster, garlic mustard, common hogweed and nettle. The scrub is over-sailed by the canopy. The scrub is likely to have grown within recent years, as in 2016 the understory was without it. At the top of the slope to the east, yew, beech small birch and sycamore are found alongside a fallen log. Most of the ash trees are tall, thin and some are covered in ivy. No veteran trees apparently and only two age classes. The woodland parcel scores 29 points for a moderate condition under the Woodland Condition Survey Method. A chain-link fence and defunct access gate are found at the western end by the road.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	The broadleaved woodland on site is a priority habitat which will be removed for the proposal.
<i>Recommendations</i>	The development does not meet any of the exemptions from Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). A completed BNG metric is required for the development before a planning application can be validated. Gravesham Borough Council additional states: <i>A Biodiversity Gain Statement, which will include the completed Metric and habitat condition assessment sheets should set out how the development will achieve a minimum 10% gain in Biodiversity through on</i>

	<i>and/or offsite provision and how such provision will be secured (condition/planning obligation/financially), maintained and monitored for a minimum period of 30 years. A commentary of how the proposals comply with the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy should also be included. Applicants are advised to use the council's Biodiversity Gain Statement template.</i> <i>Applicants are generally encouraged to submit as much information on BNG as possible with their application to assist the council with BNG considerations and all material matters that may interact with BNG. Limited information may result in requests for further information and/or delays in determination of an application</i>
Locality and Designated Sites	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	The site is not subject to any statutory or known non-statutory wildlife designation. Halling to Trottiscliffe Escarpment Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is present ~1.3km south of the site. This is described from its SSSI citation as: <i>This site consists of an extensive area of the North Downs west of the ÒMedway GapÕ. The site is representative of Chalk grassland in west Kent and beech woodland on the chalk. Outstanding assemblages of plants and invertebrates are present.</i> North Downs Woodland Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is found ~2.9km east of the site. This holds <i>Asperulo-Fagetum</i> beech forests, <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods and Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) (* important orchid sites)

<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	No direct impacts are foreseen from the construction or operation of the proposal. The net increase of two dwellings may increase recreation pressure on the North Downs Woodland SAC.
<i>Recommendations</i>	The LPA should advise the applicant of any current policy towards mitigation recreational impacts from developments on the SAC.
Invasive / Non-native species	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	None found on site or adjacent.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	None foreseen.
<i>Recommendations</i>	No further surveys.
Invertebrates	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No significant habitat for protected or notable invertebrates is found on site.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	None foreseen.
<i>Recommendations</i>	No further surveys.
Bats	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	The local area is of good bat habitat with woodland and leafy gardens in the immediate vicinity. No bat European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) have been granted within 2km of the survey site. The small woodland itself had no trees of observed roosting value, and its size likely makes it of low commuting and foraging value although this is expected to occur on a small scale.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	None foreseen on roosting bats. Commuting and foraging bats could be impacted if no lighting mitigation is used to maintain dark corridors around the site boundaries.
<i>Recommendations</i>	No further surveys required. A condition of lighting mitigation should be applied using the 2023 Bat conservation trust guidance as a base.

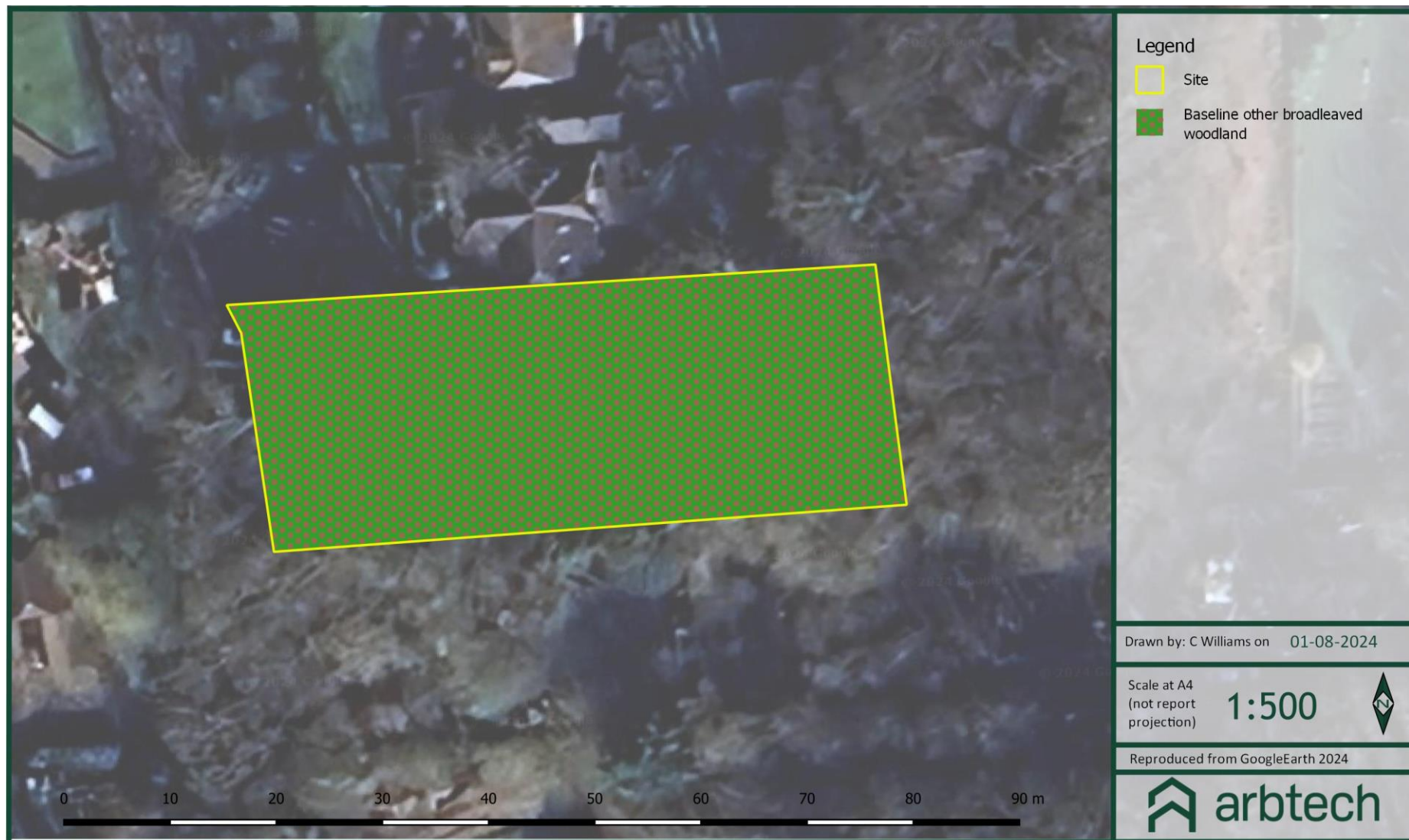
Birds	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No evidence of nesting birds was found on site during the surveys; however, birds could use the trees scrub areas for nesting. No habitat for schedule 1 birds was observed.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	The proposed development could result in the destruction or the disturbance and subsequent abandonment of active bird nests.
<i>Recommendations</i>	Any vegetation removal should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to 31st August. If this timeframe cannot be avoided, a close inspection of the building and vegetation should be undertaken immediately prior to the commencement of work. All active nests will need to be retained until the young have fledged. Precautions should be taken with machinery and noise levels when working close to any retained nests so as not to disturb any nearby nesting birds during construction works. At least a 3-5m buffer should be created between any machinery and active nests until the young have fledged.
Reptiles	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	The small, shaded woodland site has sub-optimal reptile habitat value, although they may be present as transients.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	Reptiles may be injured or killed without mitigation.
<i>Recommendations</i>	No further surveys, but habitat manipulation required to reduce the chance of injuring or killing individuals is considered proportional to the scale of the works: Pre-Development Clearing

	• Before any development, the vegetation in will be strimmed down to 150mm, directed towards off site suitable habitat (the woodland to the east). Any reptiles that are found should be placed outside of the development area in retained suitable habitat by a suitably experienced ecologist. Any log or rubble piles should be destructively searched for reptiles at the same time. • Rest period of at least 24 hours. • After a fingertip search by an ecological clerk of works (ECoW), the remaining vegetation will be strimmed to ground level, to be maintained for the duration of the development. • If at any other point reptiles are recorded, operations should cease immediately until further advice has been sought from the ecologist. • In addition, any wood, material or spoil piles should be dismantled by hand in the active season of April-October to allow any animals a chance to escape.
Amphibians	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	There is suitable terrestrial habitat within the site for protected amphibians (woodland and scrub understory), however no aquatic habitat (ponds) are known in the vicinity which is critical to their breeding. Therefore, protected amphibians are likely be absent from the interior of the survey site year-round. No previous amphibian European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) or GCN licence returns are known nearby.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	None foreseen.
<i>Recommendations</i>	No further surveys are required.
Badger	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No badger evidence was found on site, and no setts are suspected within 30m of the development area.

<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	None foreseen
<i>Recommendations</i>	Basic precautionary mitigation during works is recommended: - Any excavations will be covered overnight, or a ramp will be installed to enable any trapped animals to escape. - The use of night-time lighting will be avoided, or sensitive lighting design will be implemented to avoid light spill on to habitats which badgers could use. South and west boundaries. - Any chemicals or pollutants used or created by the development should be stored and disposed of correctly according to COSHH regulations. In the unlikely event that a badger sett is identified within 30m, works must cease and advice must be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist.
Riparian animals	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No waterways are present on or adjacent to the site.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	No impacts are anticipated on riparian animals as a result of the proposed development.
<i>Recommendations</i>	N/A
Hazel dormouse	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	Although the woodland has small amounts of hazel and bramble in the site interior, no historic dormouse EPSLs are found in the vicinity making their presence on site unlikely.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	None foreseen.
<i>Recommendations</i>	No further surveys are required.
Other e.g. hedgehog	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	The woodland and scrub understory had value for hedgehogs.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	The habitat would be removed for the proposal.

<i>Recommendations</i>	Similar to the badgers, a precautionary working method will be implemented during construction, including the following measures: • Any excavations will be covered overnight, or a ramp will be installed to enable any trapped animals to escape. • The use of night-time lighting will be avoided, or sensitive lighting design will be implemented to avoid light spill on to retained habitats which hedgehogs could use. • Any chemicals or pollutants used or created by the development should be stored and disposed of correctly according to COSHH regulations. If any hedgehogs are found in the working area these should be allowed to disperse of their own accord or, if at immediate risk, should be moved by hand to a sheltered, vegetated area away from disturbance.
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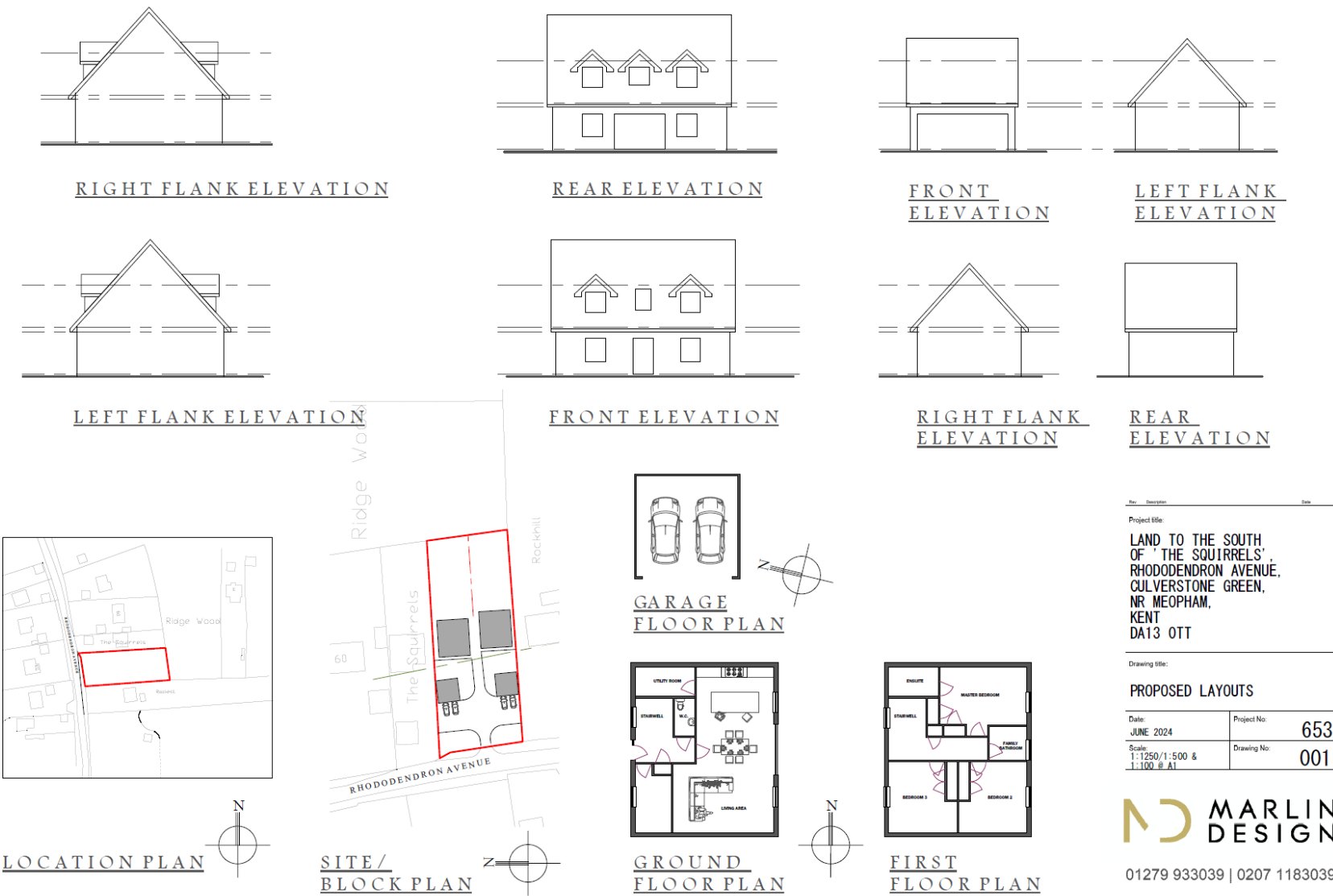
Appendix 1: Survey/Habitat map



Appendix 2: Location map



Appendix 3: Proposed plan



Appendix 4: Photos



Photo 1: Looking east at the front of the woodland site by the road.

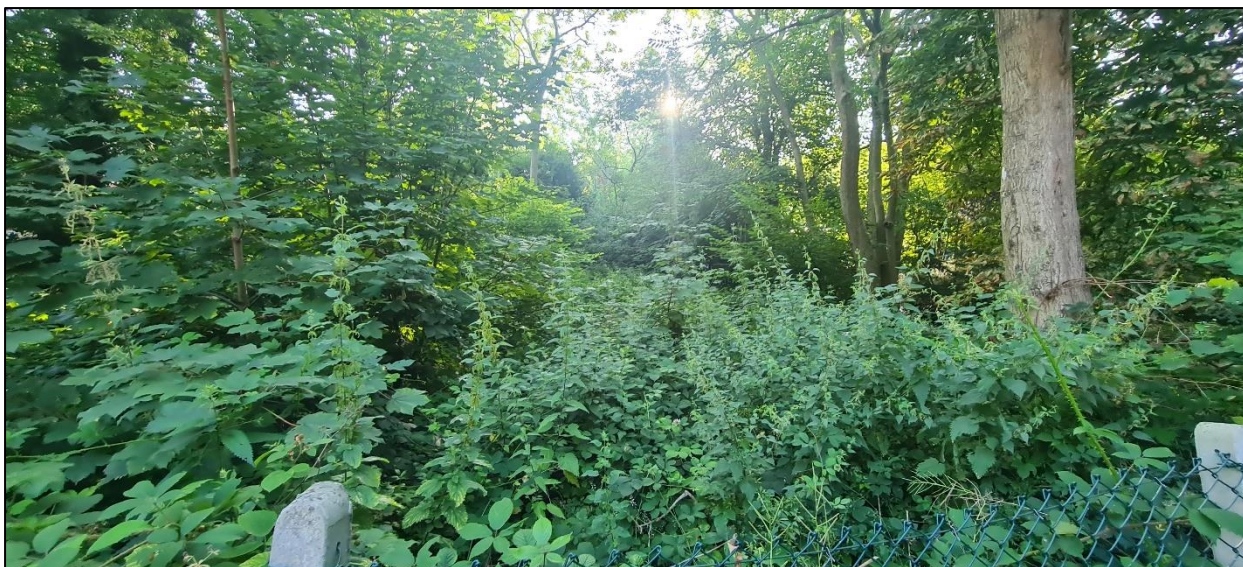


Photo 2: Looking east into the site, showing typical bramble/nettle understorey habitat.



Photo 3: Typical habitat within the woodland parcel.



Photo 4: looking west towards the road from inside the site.

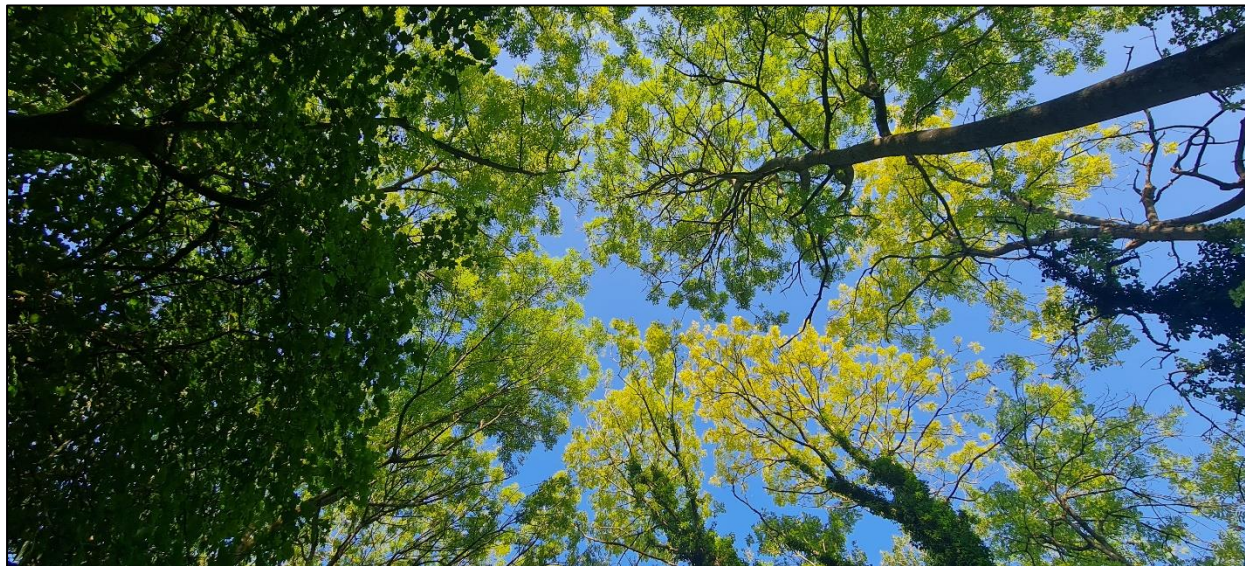


Photo 5: looking at the canopy trees on site.



Photo 6: Near the eastern end of the site at the top of the slope.

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Version control			
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