

<b>Project Number</b>	<b>24-662</b>	<b>Client</b>	<b>Marhamchurch Parish Council</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>SS 220 041</b>		

**Summary**

Lakeway Ecology were commissioned to undertake a survey and provide an assessment of the current biodiversity value of the woodlands identified as Lot 1 – Hele Valley Trail.

Following the site visit, it was evident that the woodland has a diverse structure, with some new plantation areas in amongst mature and over mature trees and old hedgerows. A varied ground flora, including carpets of wild garlic, and occasional bluebell, is present. In addition there are three open areas of grassland. The location alongside the River Strat further adds to the biodiversity value of the site. Pictures and a map are included within the appendices.

It is likely that bats are roosting within the woodland, with potential roost features noted within mature trees on site. The Site would certainly be used by foraging bats, and the river provides a navigational feature in the landscape.

The woodland is suitable for dormice, with good structure including hazel coppice for nesting, and a variety of plants to provide food. It is likely that a breeding population is present.

Whilst no badger setts were observed, there were well worn mammal tracks within the woodland, and badgers have historically had setts here. It is likely that the woodland forms part of the territory of a badger clan.

The river is known to have otter present, and although no holts or slides were observed, the river corridor is likely to form part of a territory for one or more otters.

A variety of woodland birds is present, with chiffchaff and robin observed during the site visit. It is assumed that they will be breeding here, alongside a wide range of other species.

Invertebrate species are assumed to be abundant, and it is likely that a variety of woodland and grassland butterfly species are present on site. A dark-edged bee-fly was observed on an ant hill in the south-western grassland, where ant hills were abundant.

Tussocky grassland is present, which is suitable for a range of small mammal species.

There was evidence of deer damage on some of the trees, indicating that these mammals are present locally.

The presence of reptiles (grass snake and slow worms) should be assumed, particularly along the north-western boundaries, where the site is more open, with areas suitable for basking and grassland suitable for hunting.

Overall, the site provides good habitat for a range of species. Furthermore, its location along a river corridor links the woodland with other areas of woodland and priority habitat in the local area. The woodland should be retained and allowed to mature, allowing woodland species to disperse through the landscape. The woodland is likely to be of **Local** importance for wildlife, however it is likely that as the trees mature, and if there is some beneficial management, then the Site could become of County importance.

## Methods

A site walkover was undertaken in accordance with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC 2010) on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2024 when weather conditions were clear and dry with good visibility.

This was undertaken by Senior Ecologist Ruth Testa MSc, MCIEEM. Ruth has 16 years professional experience of ecology and wildlife conservation in both the voluntary and private sectors. She has extensive experience of carrying out quantitative and qualitative ecological surveys, interpreting ecological data and both writing and peer reviewing ecological reports.

In addition, a desk based study of publicly available information was undertaken to determine what species were likely to be using the woodland.

The following sources were consulted;

- The Government's mapping website MAGIC (<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>) was used to search for internationally designated sites, and for European Protected Species licences issued by Natural England in the surrounding area since 2008, within the zone of influence of the Site.
- The Cornwall Bird Atlas was consulted to determine which woodland species were known to be present in the area.
- The Cornwall Mammal group website was consulted to determine which mammal species could be present.
- A google search was performed to search for information on wildlife within the woodland area.
- Aerial photography (<https://wtp2.appspot.com/wheresthepath.htm>) was reviewed to assess connectivity between the Site and areas in the local landscape which may be of importance for protected species (wildlife corridors).

## Results

### Habitats (photos provided in Appendix 1)

Whilst there is evidence of older trees within the woodland, particularly along the riverbanks, and old field boundaries, the majority of the woodland is more recent. Since 2003 over 12,000 trees have been planted on the Site, and public access provided across the woodland.

The Site was broadly split into three sections.

#### North-eastern grassland and plantation

At the north-eastern end of the Site, adjacent to the car park is an area of modified grassland, with a small section of plantation woodland. Species present within the grassland included creeping buttercup, broad-leaved plantain, dock, dandelion, perennial rye grass and white clover. This is indicative of a nutrient-rich grassland.

The plantation comprised relatively young trees, with little ground flora beyond common grasses. In places it was very wet, with pools forming in the northern tip of the woodland. Species present



included ash (with dieback evident), field maple, elder, oak and pines. Flowering plants included Alexander's, creeping buttercup, hogweed, red campion, hart's tongue fern, broad-leaved willowherb and lesser celandine.

Along the north-western boundary of this area is an outgrown hedgerow, with mature oak trees present.

### Central woodland

The main woodland block runs alongside the river (forming its eastern boundary), with the northern boundary formed by an old hedgebank. The site is sloping here down towards the river, with the slope getting steeper towards the southern end. The northern end, and the flatter part towards the river are very wet in places. Towards the southern end, the steep slope becomes much drier, and more acid in appearance, with gorse and oaks the dominant species.

Woody species here include sycamore (this is dominant in the northern part of the woodland), oaks (including mature trees), elder, blackthorn (which has formed dense thickets), gorse, willow, wild cherry, ash, alder, rowan, hazel, spindle, holly and hawthorn.

Ground flora includes wild garlic, lesser celandine, Alexanders, dock, nettle, primrose, hart's tongue fern, cleavers, creeping buttercup, hedge woundwort, bracken, bramble, ivy, wild strawberry, bluebell, foxglove, hedge parsley, lesser stitchwort, honeysuckle, Lords and Ladies, meadowsweet and herb Robert.

As the riverside path rises up above buildings on the south-eastern boundary, a hazel hedge has recently been laid.

On the north-eastern boundary there is an open area, where grassland similar to that in the northern section of the site is present.

### South-western plantation

A large area of new plantation (c.20 years old) is present in the southern third of the Site. This is regimented in its planting, which is uniform in age and height, with tree guards still present around some of the trees. The ground cover here is less diverse, and in places absent. A number of ant hills are present here, and tussocky grassland is present.

Tree species include field maple, blackthorn, ash, rowan, oak, and wild cherry. Ground flora includes lesser celandine, greater stitchwort, nettle, creeping buttercup, red campion, Lords and Ladies and bramble.

### Bats

The site is suitable for bats to use for roosting (numerous mature trees with defects which could provide roost features), foraging and commuting through the landscape. Given its location it would be likely that barbastelle, brown long-eared, lesser horseshoe and pipistrelle bats would use the woodland, with other species possibly being recorded here too. All of these species have been recorded within 10km of the Site (granted European Protected Species (EPS) licences and Bat Conservation Trust distribution maps).

### Badgers

Well-worn mammal tracks are present throughout the woodland, however, no setts or latrines were observed. It is likely that badgers are present in the wider area, and the woodland would form part of the range of a badger clan.

## Birds

The habitat within the Site is suitable for a wide range of woodland bird species. Observed / heard during the visit were wren, robin, chiffchaff, magpie and woodpigeon. It is likely (local status confirmed through the Cornwall bird atlas) that song thrush, blue tit, great tit, dunnock, greenfinch and goldfinch are also present.

## Deer

There was evidence of bark stripping on trees within the woodland, this is likely to have been caused by deer.

## Hazel dormice

The habitat structure within the site, and the availability of a range of food sources (brambles, hazel nuts, sycamore seeds etc.) means it is likely that hazel dormice are present within the woodland. They are known in the local area (granted EPS licences around Bude), and the site is well linked by hedgerows and other woodland pockets to other possible breeding sites.

## Invertebrates

The site visit was undertaken during a period of time when few invertebrates are on the wing. However, a dark-edged bee-fly was observed resting on an exposed ant-hill, and a bumblebee was seen sheltering on vegetation. It should be assumed that a range of butterflies are present, including speckled wood, orange tip, large and small white, green-veined white, brimstone and ringlet.

A number of ant hills are present within the south-western plantation area, these are in amongst the trees, but also in more open areas.

## Otter

Otter are known to use the River Strat, and it is likely that the woodland forms part of an otter territory. No holts or slides were observed within the site, so it is not likely that it forms a significant resource but otters are highly likely to use the river corridor when dispersing through the landscape.

## Reptiles

It is likely that grass snake and slow worm are present in the woodland edges and the grasslands, with suitable habitat present for basking and for hunting.

## Small mammals

Tussocky grassland on site has the potential to house a variety of small mammals, including bank voles, and possibly harvest mice (last recorded in this area 20 years ago). The wider site is also likely to host wood mice and shrews.

## Landscape Context

No nationally designated sites lie close to the woodland, but the Tintagel-Marsland-Clovelly Coast Special Area of Conservation lies approx. 3km west of the Site. This is designated for its vegetated sea cliffs and old sessile oak woods. The site links to this via the river corridor, and patches of woodland to the west. The Site provides an important stepping stone in the landscape which will allow mobile species to disperse into other habitats.

## Potential enhancements

- Removal of remaining tree guards within the plantation.
- Thinning of the plantation to diversify the age structure, and reduce the row structure.
- Allow deadwood to remain where it is, or stack in brashpiles if it falls across a path.
- Retain all mature trees.
- Coppice hazel on a seven year rotation (split hazel parcels into seven and coppice one section each year).
- Mow grasslands and rides no more than twice a year – in spring (before March) and in early autumn once flower seeds have set.
- Consider oversowing the north-eastern grassland and the grassland on the north-western boundary with appropriate seed mixes for the soil type and dampness.
- Allow tussocks to remain in the south-western grassland, and ensure the ant hills remain undisturbed.
- Consider planting a hedgerow along the south-western boundary to act as a windbreak and allow the trees within the plantation to grow.
- Consider screening off areas of the river corridor with dead hedges, to reduce disturbance to otter and other aquatic wildlife.

## Site Photographs

<b>North-eastern grassland</b>	<b>North-eastern plantation woodland</b>
<p>Potential access</p> 	
<b>Mature trees with potential bat roost features</b>	<b>Riverside path</b>
	
<b>Developing woodland</b>	<b>Woodland</b>
	

<b>Change to sandy, drier, acid woodland</b>	<b>Bee-fly on ant hill</b>
	
<b>South-western plantation</b>	<b>Tussocky grassland with ant hills</b>
	
<b>Potential for hedgerow planting</b>	<b>Mammal track</b>
	

**Figure 1: Hele Valley Trail – habitats and opportunities plan**

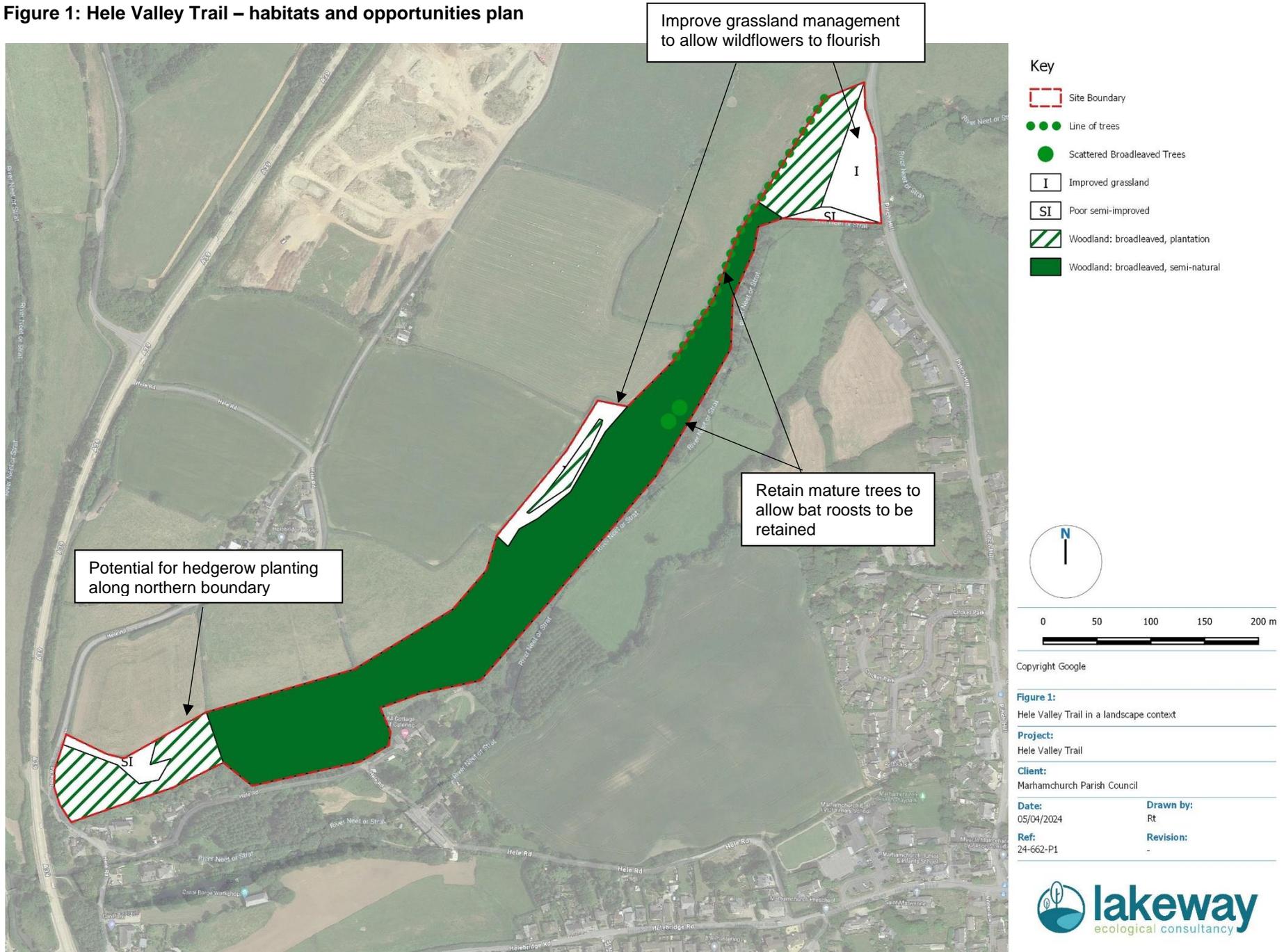
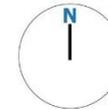


Figure 2: Hele Valley Trail (boundary not accurate) within the wider landscape



Key

 Site Boundary



0 200 400 600 800 m



Copyright Google

**Figure 2:**  
Hele Valley Trail in a landscape context

**Project:**  
Hele Valley Trail

**Client:**  
Marhamchurch Parish Council

**Date:**  
05/04/2024

**Drawn by:**  
Rt

**Ref:**  
24-662-P2

**Revision:**  
-



