

Ecological Impact Assessment

Whiteknights Campus Boundary Replacement Fence Wokingham Borough Council

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Contents

1.0	Introduction.....	1
2.0	Legislation and Policy	1
3.0	Methods	3
	Desk Study	3
	Site Surveys.....	4
	Biodiversity Net Gain.....	4
	Constraints	5
4.0	Baseline Ecological Conditions.....	5
	Designated Sites	5
	Habitats	5
	Species	8
5.0	Biodiversity Net Gain	9
6.0	Impacts and mitigation	10

Figures

- 1: Baseline Habitat Plan
- 2: Overview of baseline habitats
- 3: Proposed Habitat Plan

Appendices

- 1: Photographs
- 2 Target Notes

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document has been prepared by Nicholas Pearson Associates (NPA) on behalf of University of Reading (UoR) who propose to replace the existing boundary fencing and gates at Whiteknights Campus, University of Reading (OS Grid reference SU7471).
- 1.2 A separate planning application will be submitted to Reading Borough Council for similar boundary fencing works in on the Whiteknights Campus in that LPA area.
- 1.3 Proposals are shown on the Site Plans¹ and is hereafter referred to as the "Site".
- 1.4 To inform the proposals NPA have undertaken a desk study, an extended habitat survey and a Biodiversity Metric Calculation. This report presents the results of the surveys, identifies potential impacts and sets out the proposals to mitigate those potential impacts and provide biodiversity enhancement.

2.0 Legislation and Policy

- 2.1 In carrying out this appraisal relevant legislation, planning policies, development plans and best practice guidelines were consulted.

Legislation

Designated Sites

- 2.2 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) provide for the designation of both Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) provides for the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Species Protection

- 2.3 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (also known as the Habitats Regulations) provide strict protection to a small group of species, commonly referred to as 'European Protected Species'. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) provides full and partial protection to species listed in the schedules.

¹ Nicholas Pearson Associates 2026 Site Plan WBC Sheets 1-7 30303 NPA WK ZZ DR L 3010-3017

Biodiversity

- 2.4 Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a duty on public authorities to: consider how they can, consistently with proper exercise of its functions, conserve and enhance biodiversity; agree policies and objectives based on that consideration; and act to deliver those policies and objectives. This act also places a duty on the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species of principal importance for the purpose of conserving or enhancing biodiversity.
- 2.5 Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 sets out that every planning permission, subject to some exemptions, is required to deliver at least a 10% biodiversity gain.

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

- 2.6 The NPPF requires Local Planning Authorities to set out a strategic approach to make sufficient provision for "conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measure to address climate change mitigation and adaptation (Para 20)". Section 15 of The NPPF includes guidance outlining that policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural local environment by protecting and enhancing sites of biodiversity value, minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats, and hedgehogs. When determining planning applications "if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused (para 193a)". Opportunities "to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate (para 193d).
- 2.7 The Government Circular 06/2005, which is referred to by the NPPF, provides further guidance in respect of statutory obligations for biodiversity and geological conservation and their impact within the planning system.

Local Planning Policy – Wokingham Borough Council

- 2.8 The Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2010 and the Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery (MDD) document include the following policies which relating to biodiversity:
- CP1 Sustainable Development
 - CP7 Biodiversity
 - Policy TB23 - Biodiversity and Development
 - Policy CC03 - Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping
 - Policy TB14 - Whiteknights Campus
- 2.9 A Local Plan Update is being prepared and was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination in February 2025. The Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023 – 2040 Proposed Submission Plan contains the following policies relating to biodiversity:
- SS1 Sustainable Development Principles
 - SS9 Whiteknights Campus
 - NE1 Biodiversity and geodiversity
 - NE2 Biodiversity Net Gain
 - NE4 Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows

3.0 Methods

Desk Study

- 3.1 Records of biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves, Local nature Reserves (LNRs), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar Sites within a 1km buffer of the Site were retrieved from Natural England's MAGIC website. The SSSI Impact Risk Zone layer was also searched to determine if the proposals were of a type which would give rise to likely impacts on SSSIs.
- 3.2 Online mapping was consulted to search for ponds within 250m of the Site.
- 3.3 The Wokingham Borough Council Planning Policies and Constraints Map² was reviewed to search for Local Wildlife Sites and Great Crested Newt Consultation Zones at the Site.

² Wokingham Borough Council Planning Policies and Constraints Map
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d76c713282874f3da74b3e46bc473d3f> Last accessed 29/04/2026

- 3.4 The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) mapping³ was reviewed to determine strategic significance for Biodiversity Net Gain. The Ancient Tree Inventory was also reviewed as part of the desk study⁴.

Site Surveys

- 3.5 An extended habitat survey was carried out by an experienced NPA ecologist on the 16th and 17th of April 2026. Mapping polygons were based on a previous site wide survey by LUC⁵ for University of Reading with an NPA surveyor updating the habitats and providing additional detail. Habitats and features of ecological value/interest were mapped using the habitat types required for Biodiversity Net Gain⁶, informed by Version 2.0 of the UK Habitat Classification system⁷. A condition assessment was undertaken by NPA using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric methodology⁸.
- 3.6 The scope of the survey was extended to include an assessment of the Site's potential to support protected species, including a search for evidence of Badger *Meles meles* and mammal paths under the existing fence line.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 3.7 The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool was used to calculate biodiversity metrics for the Site. The metric uses area and linear habitat features as a proxy measure to capture a quantitative value of the Site for biodiversity pre- and post-development. The calculation takes the area, distinctiveness, condition and spatial significance of the habitat features into account as well as the ease of habitat creation and time taken for habitats to mature.
- 3.8 The extent for the baseline and proposed areas were taken from the Baseline Habitat Plan (Figure 1) and the Site Plan – WBC Sheets 1-7⁹.

³ Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Map. https://mol.rbwm.gov.uk/mol/lnrs_berks/ Last accessed 29/04/2026

⁴ Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Inventory <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/> Last accessed 28/04/2026.

⁵ LUC 2023, Whiteknights Campus Baseline Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment for University of Reading.

⁶ Statutory biodiversity metric tools and guides - GOV.UK. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-biodiversity-metric-tools-and-guides>.

⁷ UKHab (2023) *UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0* [Online]. Available at: <https://ukhab.org/>

⁸ Statutory Biodiversity metric condition assessments. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-biodiversity-metric-tools-and-guides> (Last accessed 24/07/24)

⁹ NPA Site Plan – WBC 30303 NPA WK ZZ DR L 3011-3017 P02

Constraints

- 3.9 Some areas for the survey area could only be accessed from one side of the fence (Target Notes 13 and 14). Notes were made in relation to any mammal paths leading into these areas. This is not considered a significant constraint to assessment of the proposed fence replacement works.

4.0 Baseline Ecological Conditions

Designated Sites

Statutory Sites

- 4.1 There was two LNRs within the search area, details of which are provided in Table 4.1. The proposals do not fall within any of the descriptions of development for the SSSI Impact Risk Zones which overlay the Site.

Table 4.1: Statutory Nature Conservation Designations within Search Area

Site Name	Reasons for designation	Distance from Site
Maiden Eriegh Park LNR	Habitats include lowland mixed deciduous woodland, ancient semi natural woodland and eutrophic open water.	530m south-east.
Highwood LNR	Mixed lowland woodland, heathland and exotic tree species which were part of an arboretum. Birds include kingfisher, goosander, pochard, shoveler, cormorant, heron, grey wagtail, waxwing, treecreeper and greater spotted woodpecker.	800m north-east.

Non-statutory Sites

- 4.2 The fence line is located on the boundary of Whiteknights Park Local Wildlife Site at The Wilderness (eastern section of the Site).

Habitats

- 4.3 Habitats along the fenceline were generally wooded with a mixture of more managed habitats at the entrances to the university.
- 4.4 Figure 1 shows the habitats present at the Site with Figure 2 showing an overview of the baseline habitats of the wider site. Photographs showing an overview of the Site are provided in Appendix 1 and Target Notes in Appendix 2. Condition assessments are provided as a separate Excel document (30303 NPA WK XX RP Y 0015).
- 4.5 The Site can be divided into the following habitat types:

- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Other woodland; mixed
- Non-native and ornamental hedgerow
- Bramble scrub
- Introduced shrub
- Modified grassland
- Developed land; sealed surface
- Bare ground
- Vegetated garden

Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

- 4.6 Areas of woodland with mature trees, typically with an Oak *Quercus* dominated canopy. There was generally a Holly *Ilex aquifolium* and Hazel *Corylus avellana* understory with Yew *Taxus baccata*, Birch *Betula pendula*, Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, Lime *Tilia cordata*, Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and scattered non-native conifer trees. Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* was present in all areas of woodland and in some areas, particularly near the fence line, the Cherry Laurel formed a significant component of the understory. Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* was present in The Wilderness (Target Notes 2 & 7) and Holm Oak *Quercus ilex* was scattered within the Site. Ground level vegetation generally comprised Ivy *Hedera helix*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and Lords and Ladies *Arum maculatum*, in some areas the understory was shaded and fairly bare. Deadwood was present but the woodlands were typically managed with felled wood typically cut and stacked.
- 4.7 Within the Harris Garden (in the south of the site) some vegetation bordering the fenceline had already been cut back.

Other woodland; mixed

- 4.8 Narrow blocks of woodland which were generally very dense. A mixture of trees was present with Holly, Yew and Cherry Laurel in the understory. A mixture of canopy trees were present with Lime, Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*, Hornbeam, non-native conifers.
- 4.9 The area within the Harris Garden contained a mixture of native and non-native trees, including mature specimens, but the understory was actively managed/gardened. Here the edge of the fenceline was maintained to be clear of vegetation.

Non-native and ornamental hedgerow

- 4.10 Regularly trimmed lines of Cherry Laurel were present at the edge of some areas of woodland, these were mapped as non-native hedgerows.

Bramble scrub

- 4.11 An area of Bramble dominated vegetation was present to the north of South Lodge.

Introduced shrub

- 4.12 Most areas mapped as introduced shrub are dominated by Cherry Laurel, either clipped into blocks or growing as large shrubs. There were some small areas of mixed ornamental planting including Cherry Laurel at road entrances to the university.
- 4.13 The large area mapped as introduced shrub within the Harris Garden in the south of the Site comprises an ornamental mixture of Bamboo *Bambusoideae* and Palm trees *Arecaceae* and other ornamental planting.

Modified grassland

- 4.14 Regularly mown lawns were present at entrances to the university. These areas of grassland were typically dominated by Perennial Rye Grass *Lolium perenne* with a variety of regularly occurring lawn species including White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Daisy *Bellis perennis*, Common Chickweed *Stellaria media*, Greater Plantain *Plantago major*, Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*, Red Dead Nettle *Lamium purpureum*, Cock's-foot grass *Dactylis glomerata* and Bent grasses *Agrostis* spp. There tended to be 6-8 species per m².

Developed land; sealed surface

- 4.15 This habitat comprises footpaths, roads and pavements.

Bare ground

- 4.16 Bare soil located between a hedgerow and a car park.

Vegetated garden

- 4.17 Part of the fence was adjacent to a small area of private garden.

Species

Bats

- 4.18 Habitats on the Site are likely to be used by commuting and foraging bats and it is likely that there are potential roosting features nearby (as the proposals would not remove any trees the trees were not assessed in detail).

Badger

- 4.19 A latrine was found within woodland (The Wilderness, Target Note 10) but no setts were found.
- 4.20 The woodland at Target Note 14 was fenced off and not fully searched, there was a mammal path leading under internal fences surrounding the area but they were not worn enough to indicate regular/recent usage by Badger, with no evidence of setts being visible from the other side of the fence.
- 4.21 A hole of a suitable size to be used by Badger was present in the fenceline to be replaced at Target Note 12, although it did not appear to be regularly used.

Birds

- 4.22 Woodland, shrubs and hedgerows provided habitat for nesting birds.

Amphibians

- 4.23 The site is within a mixture of red, amber and green Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* Impact Risk Zones. However the only water bodies within 100m of the proposed working area are Whiteknights Lake and some linear drains which were largely dry at the time of survey (April 2026), which appeared largely unsuitable for breeding Great Crested Newt. Aerial mapping does show several potentially suitable ponds within 250m of the work area.

Other Species

- 4.24 It is possible that reptiles could occur within the work area, although suitability was limited in most areas due to the sudden transition between shaded woodland and mown grassland/pavements. Suitable habitat was present in the Harris Garden and near Whiteknights Lake.
- 4.25 While the Site supports woodland, it is situated within an urban area and isolated from extensive wooded cover by roads and development, it is considered unlikely that Dormice *Muscardinus avellanarius* would be present.

- 4.26 Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* and Stag Beetles are known to be present on the Whiteknights campus¹⁰ with Stag Beetles utilising tree stumps / large deadwood.

5.0 Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.1 The proposed fenceline replaces an existing fenceline and as such vegetation removals are restricted to those required to allow for access to the fence.
- 5.2 Where possible, construction access will be taken from open land/highway adjacent to the fence, though a strip of vegetation around 50cm will be cut back to allow access, with trees and large branches retained. A slightly larger area would be cut back where the new fence needs to be installed around retained trees or where offsite habitats prevent access from the highway. As trees, large branches and the canopy above the works will be retained it is anticipated that vegetation will recover quickly after fence installation, with removal of Cherry Laurel and shading from alongside the boundary fence providing a benefit to the retained woodland by allowing light to the woodland floor, though this is not significant enough to result in an uplift to the BNG score. As it is expected that vegetation will return to at least its original condition within a 2 year period area based habitats are shown as 'retained' within the metric. A small area BNG uplift will be obtained by removing a stand of Cherry Laurel and replacing it with mixed native shrub at South Lodge.
- 5.3 Some sections of the existing fenceline are entwined with non-native Cherry Laurel hedges; these sections of non-native hedgerow will need to be removed to allow replacement of the fence. This is considered to be a benefit to the adjacent woodland, and a replacement section of species-rich native hedgerow will be planted to provide a biodiversity net gain in the hedgerow component of the BNG assessment.
- 5.4 Details of the above habitat enhancements, including species mixes and their management, are provided in the Proposed Planting Schedule and Management Notes¹¹.
- 5.5 The Metric calculations determine the proposals would result in an increase of 1.6% area habitat units and 16.0% hedgerow units.

¹⁰Campus Species Lists | Whiteknights biodiversity <https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/whiteknightsbiodiversity/campus-species-lists/>

¹¹ 30303-NPA-WK-ZZ-SH-L-5001-S4-P01_Planting Schedule and Notes.

- 5.6 Given the level of impact of the works and relatively short timescales associated with delivering the project, it is proposed to purchase area habitat units to achieve the final uplift to reach 10% net gain. Table 5.1 below summarises the baseline units and unit deficit.

Table 5.1 BNG Baseline units and units required to provide a 10% net gain.

Unit Type	Target	Baseline Units	Units Required	Unit Deficit
<i>Area habitat units</i>	10.00%	1.45	1.60	0.12
<i>Hedgerow units</i>	10.00%	0.20	0.22	0.00
<i>Watercourse units</i>	10.00%	0.00	0.00	0.00

6.0 Impacts and mitigation

- 6.1 While the works are generally of low impact, ecological receptors have been identified. Table 6.1 below identifies the potential impacts for each of these receptors and incorporates mitigation measures to avoid and reduce these impacts. In addition, it sets out additional ecological enhancements.

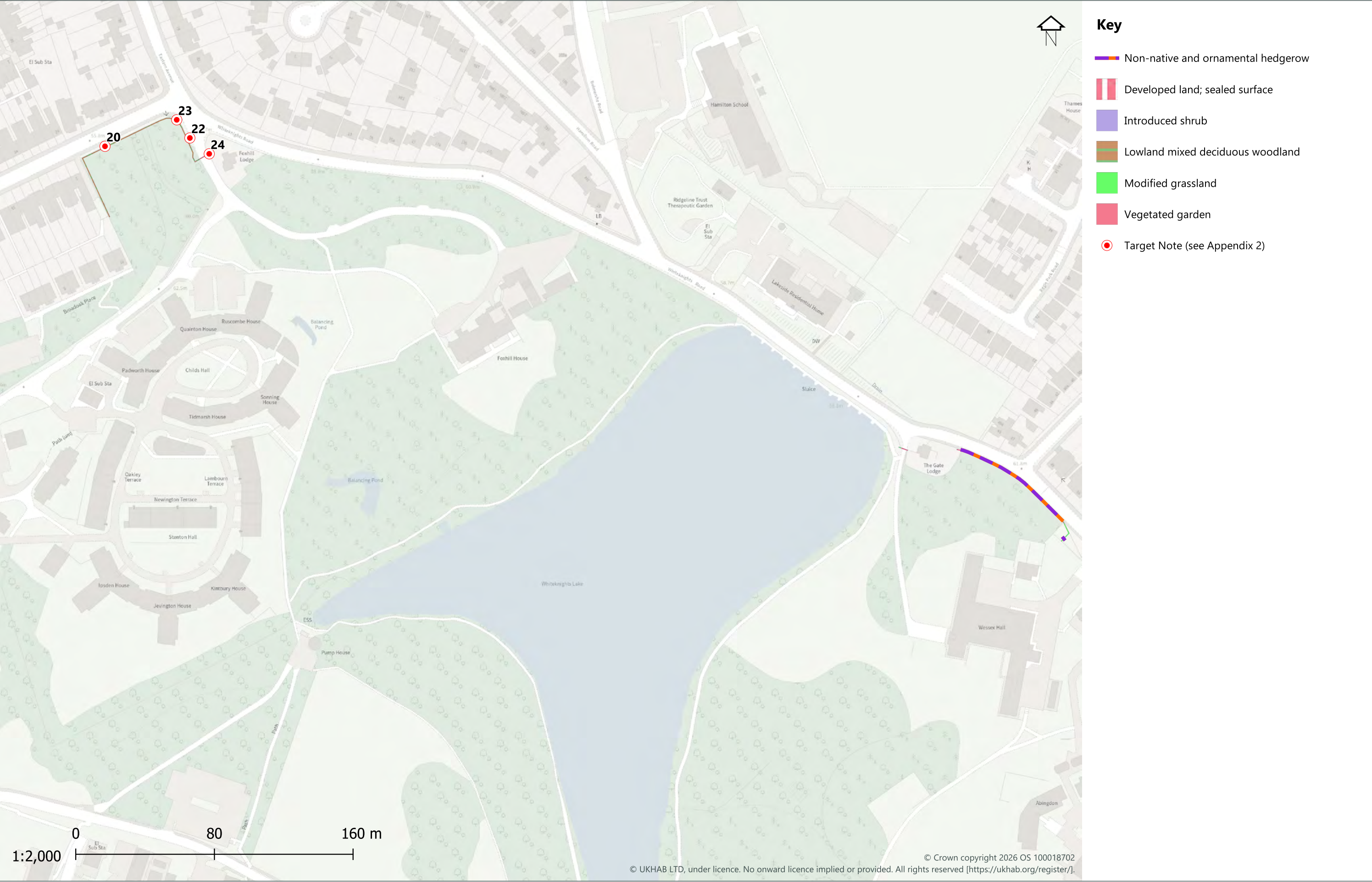
Table 6.1: Potential Impacts and Mitigation

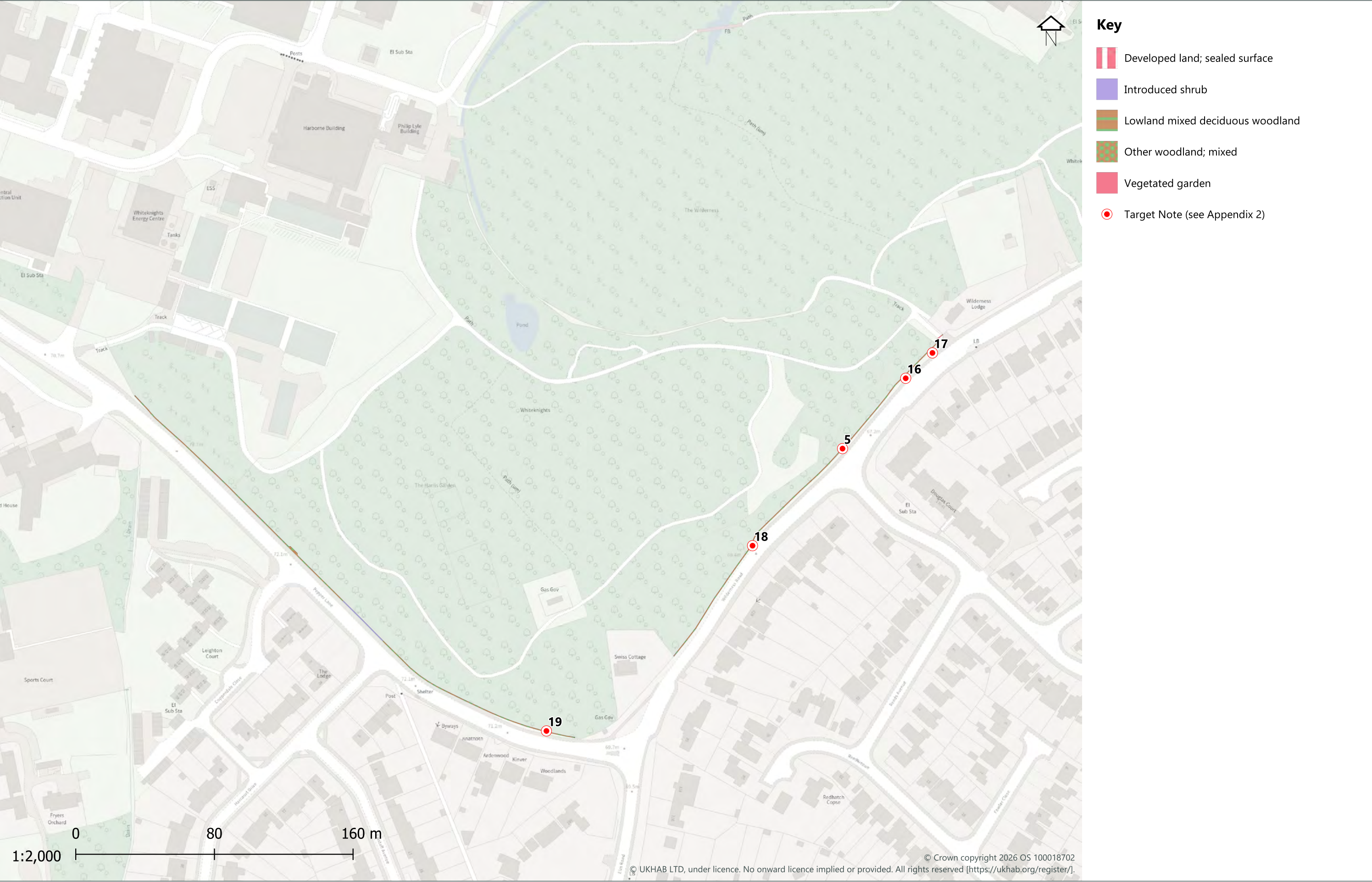
Ecological Receptor	Potential Impact	Design response/ Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects
Designated sites	- No impacts to statutory designated sites anticipated. - Damage to habitats within Whiteknights Park Local Wildlife Site	The proposed fence will be a replacement of an existing fence that forms part of the boundary. See habitats below.	N/A
Habitats	- Damage to habitats during works - Risk of spreading Schedule 9 invasive <i>Rhododendron</i>	- Cutting back of vegetation will be limited to a narrow strip with trees over 75mm and branches over 150mm being retained. Cherry Laurel and <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> will be removed from along the fenceline/works area. The canopy above the fenceline will be retained. It is anticipated that vegetation will regrow quickly. Wherever possible (ie the majority of the fence) access will be taken from adjacent open habitats which reduce disturbance along the fenceline. - Note: the university is actively managing the woodlands, including invasive species management, under a woodland management plan. - Materials will not be stored in woodland areas. - Materials (incl soil) which may contain <i>Rhododendron</i> seeds or material that may regrow will not be removed or spread around. - Offsite habitat units will be purchased to deliver at 10% Biodiversity Net Gain.	Positive as required by statutory 10% gains.
Bats	Potential loss of bat roosting habitat in trees.	No trees over 75mm diameter at 150mm will be removed and no branches over 50mm diameter will be removed.	Not significant.
Badger	Post installation affecting new or unidentified Badger setts.	The route of the fence should be checked for Badger setts before replacement of the fence.	Not significant

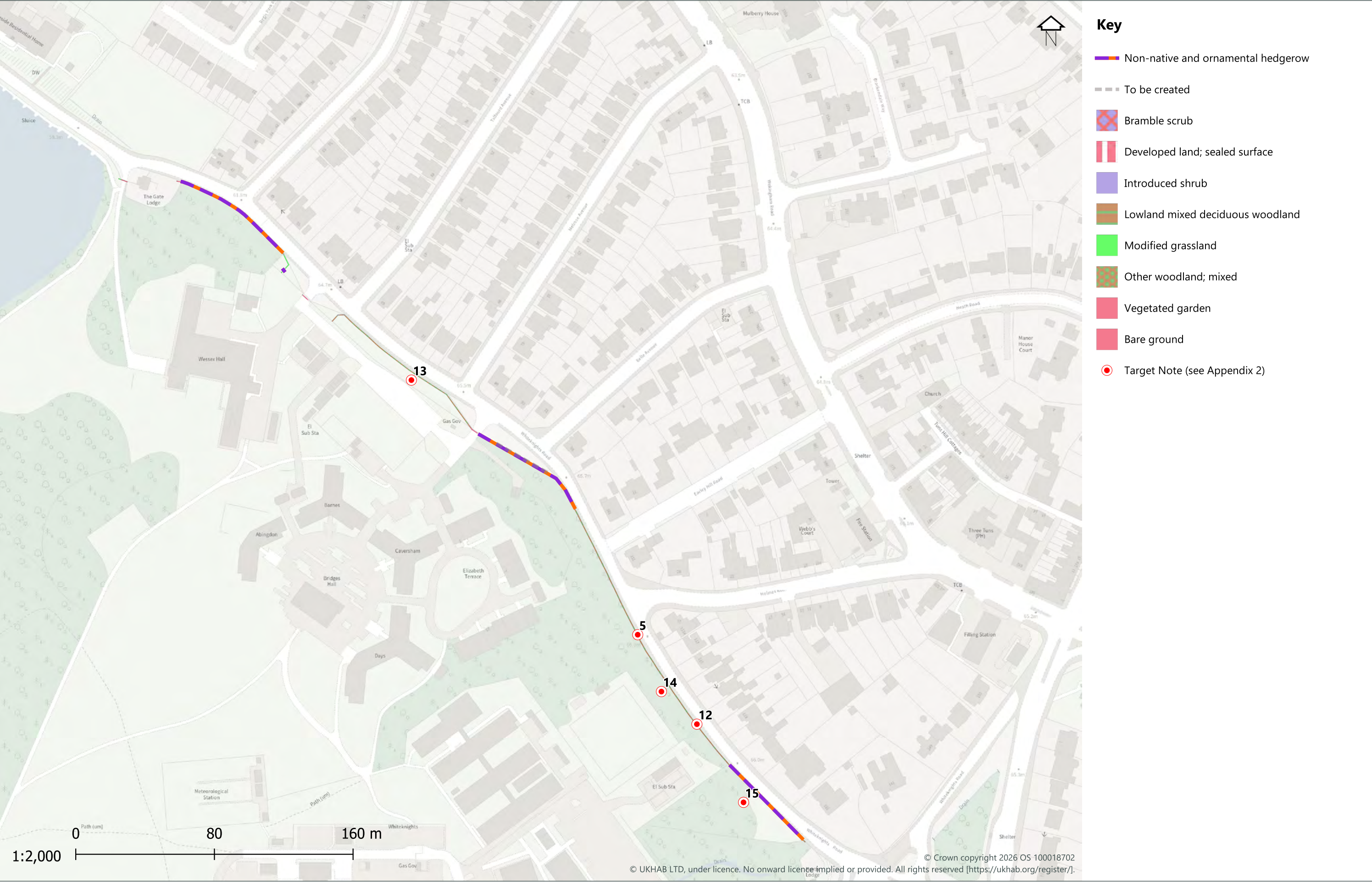
Ecological Receptor	Potential Impact	Design response/ Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects
	Barriers changing movement patterns of Badger	Wildlife passage points will be located in the same locations that existing suitably sized gaps in fences are present.	
Birds	- Potential harm to nesting birds in trees or shrub during vegetation clearance. - Temporary loss of nesting habitat.	- Removal of tree and scrub will be avoided during the nesting bird season (March-August) or checks for nesting birds will be undertaken immediately before works. If nesting birds are found, they will be protected. 5 No. 1B Schwegler nest boxes (mix of 26mm and 32mm entry holes) will be installed on mature trees adjacent to the Site, <i>e.g.</i> within the woodland to the south. They will be positioned: - Out of direct sunlight, ideally facing between north and east, - against the trunk of the tree so as to be more stable, - between 2-4m off the ground, - box tilted forward slightly to provide further protection from the rain, and - with a clear flight path to/from the box.	Not significant
Amphibian	Potential killing, injury and/or disturbance.	- It is unlikely that Great Crested Newt would be in the work area but not impossible to rule their potential presence out. - The rapid risk assessment tool in the Natural England GCN method statement results in an assessment of Green: Offence Highly Unlikely - Excavations (eg for post holes) will not be left open overnight to avoid fauna falling into holes. - Materials will not be stored in woodland areas. Materials will either be stored on hard standing or lifted off the ground on pallets.	Not significant
Other species	Risk of harm to fauna if refugia/hibernacula are damaged	If any potential refugia or hibernacula (eg log or stone piles, tree root systems, large deadwood) are present along the fence line these should be left in place if possible. If these features do need to be moved then this should be done by	Minor positive

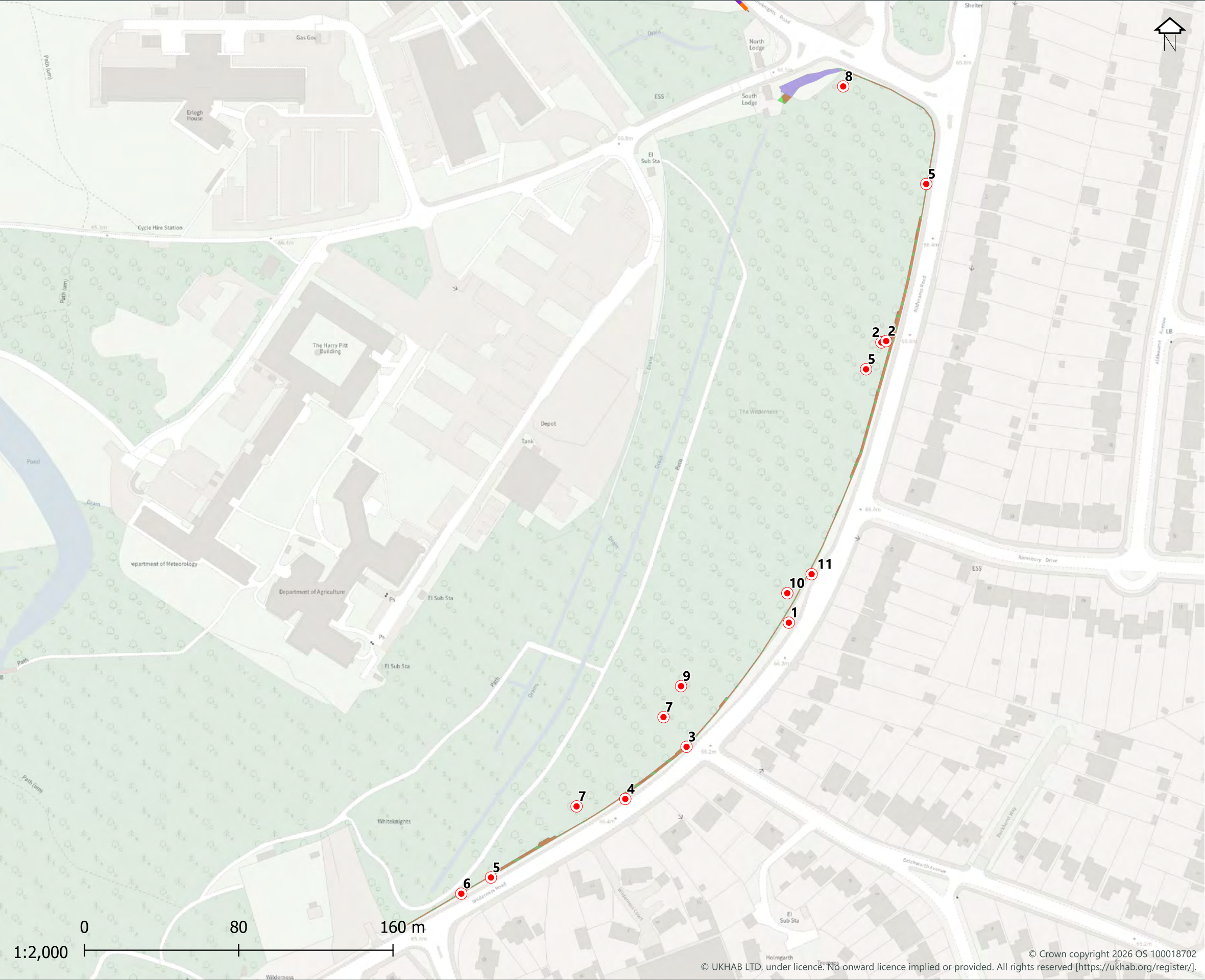
Ecological Receptor	Potential Impact	Design response/ Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects
		hand, during the period March-October (ie outside of the hibernation period), if this is not possible an ecologist will be consulted for advice.	
	Improvement in fence design	The new vertical bar fence is of a more wildlife friendly design than the old chain-link mesh fence due to having larger gaps between solid bars.	
	Opportunity to provide enhancements for hedgehogs	2x hedgehog nest boxes will be provided  ¹² - Hedgehog boxes to be positioned: - on the ground in a quiet, shady location away from footpaths. - To be placed under thick vegetation. - The entrance is to be out of the wind.	

¹² <https://www.nhbs.com/hedgehog-nest-box>









Key

Non-native and ornamental hedgerow

Bramble scrub

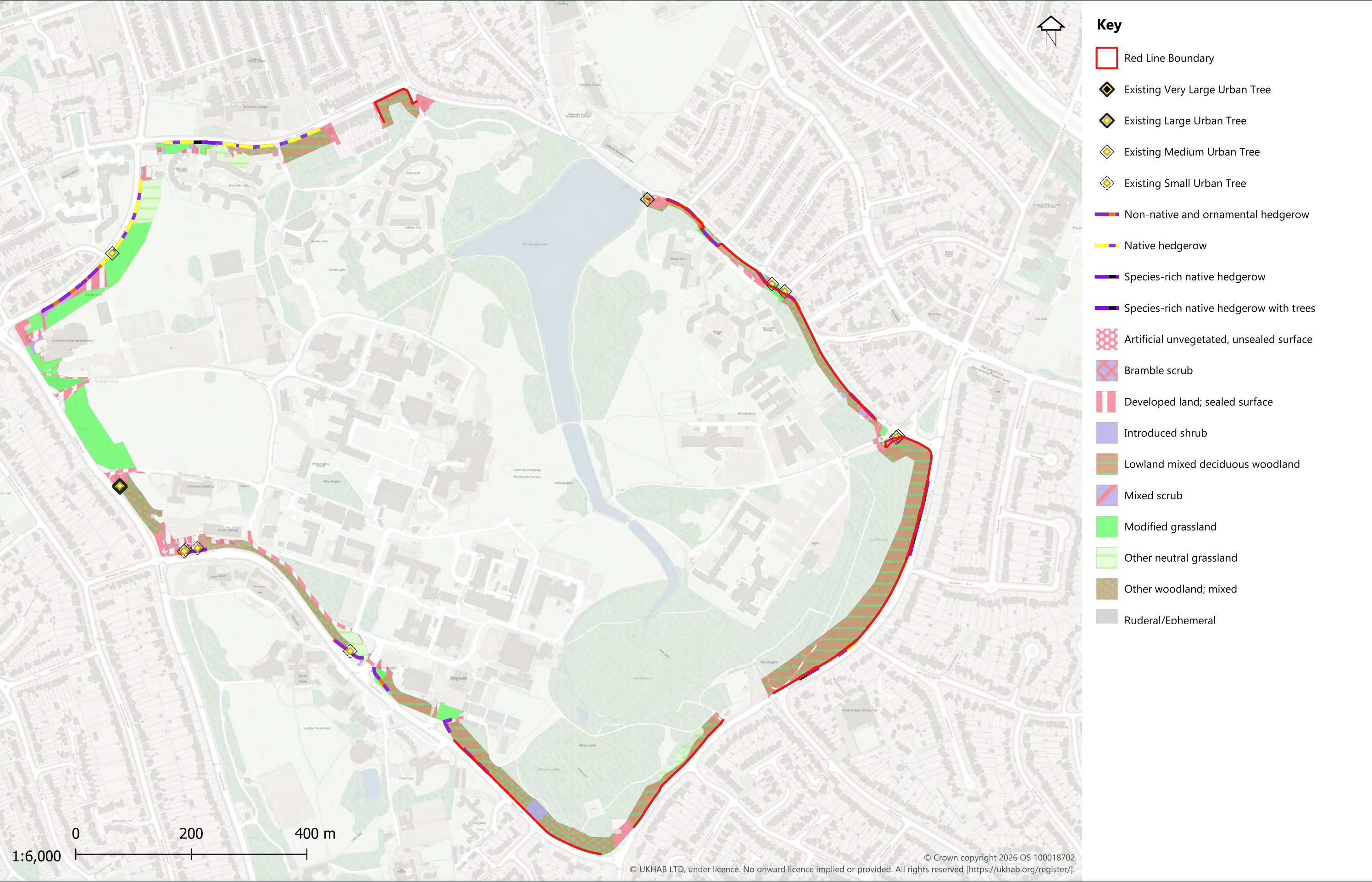
Introduced shrub

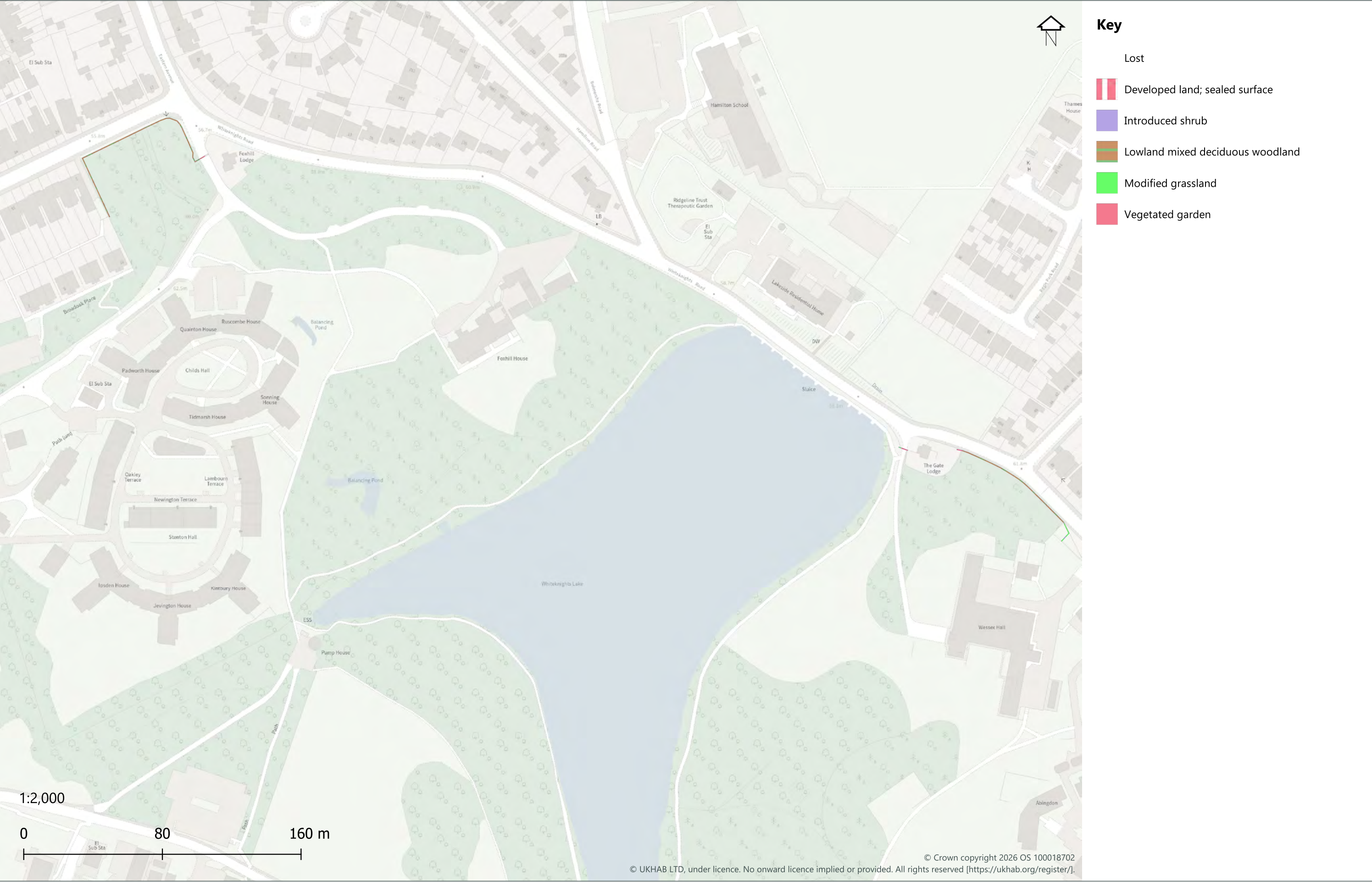
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

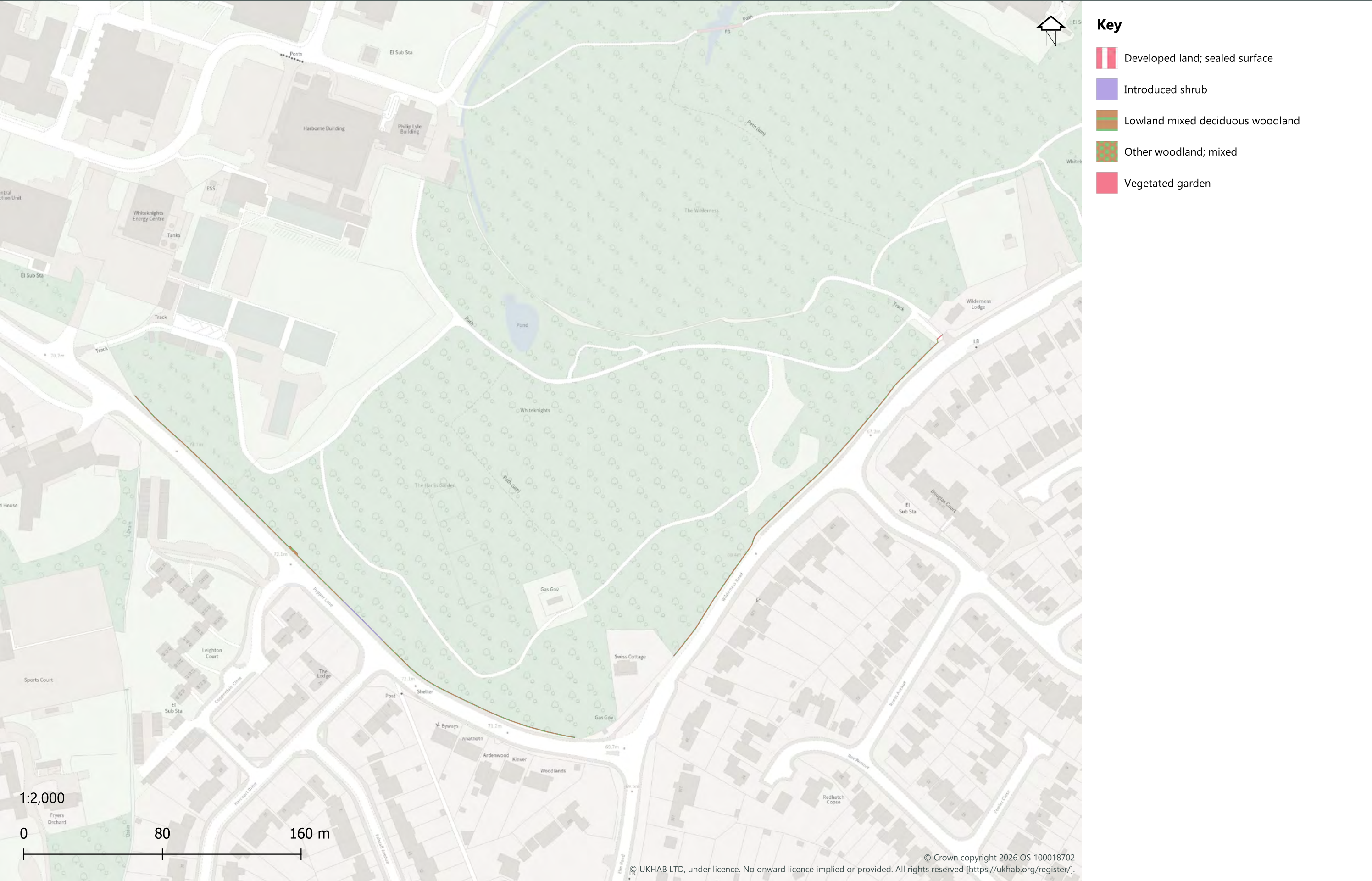
Modified grassland

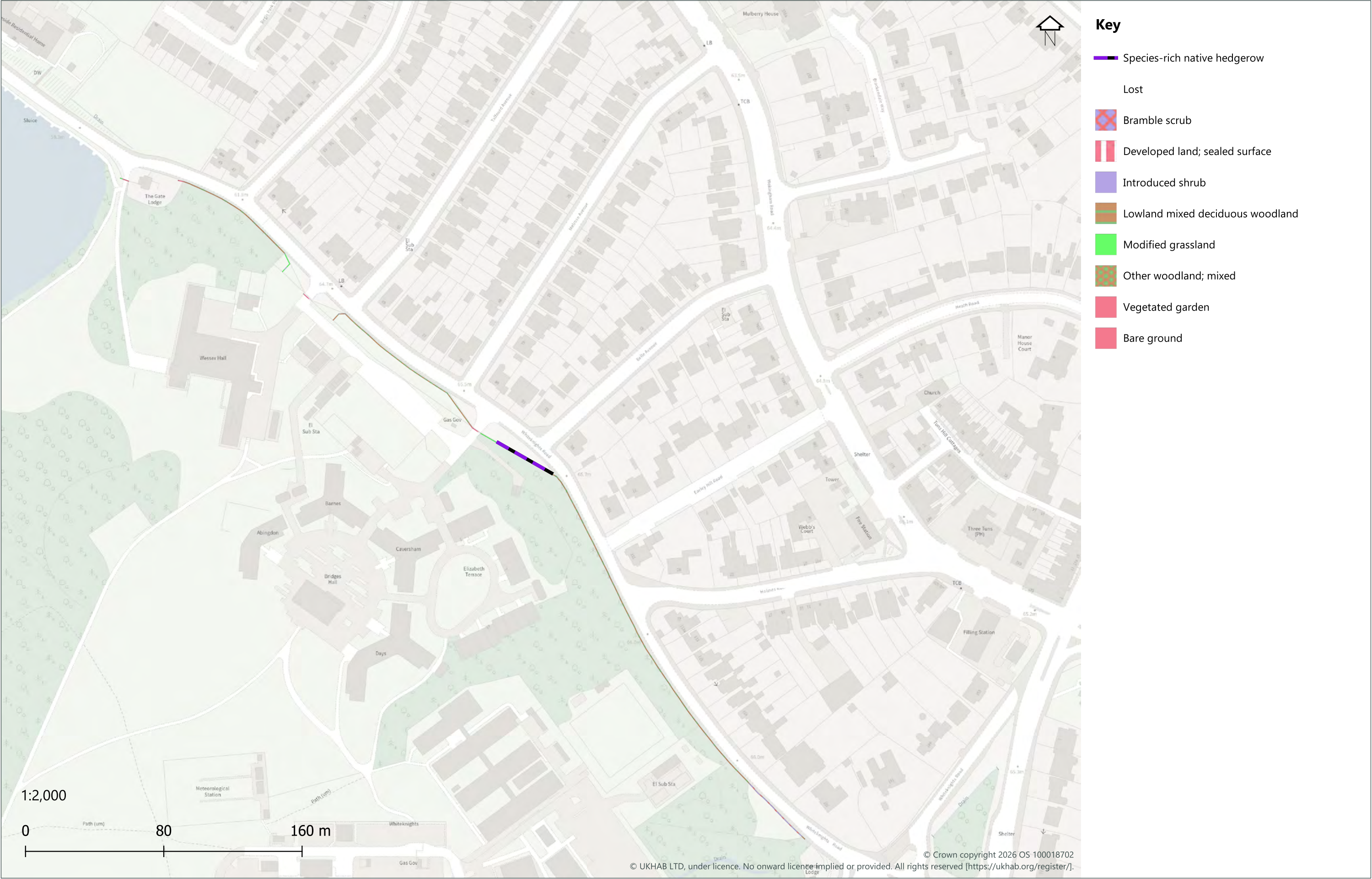
Vegetated garden

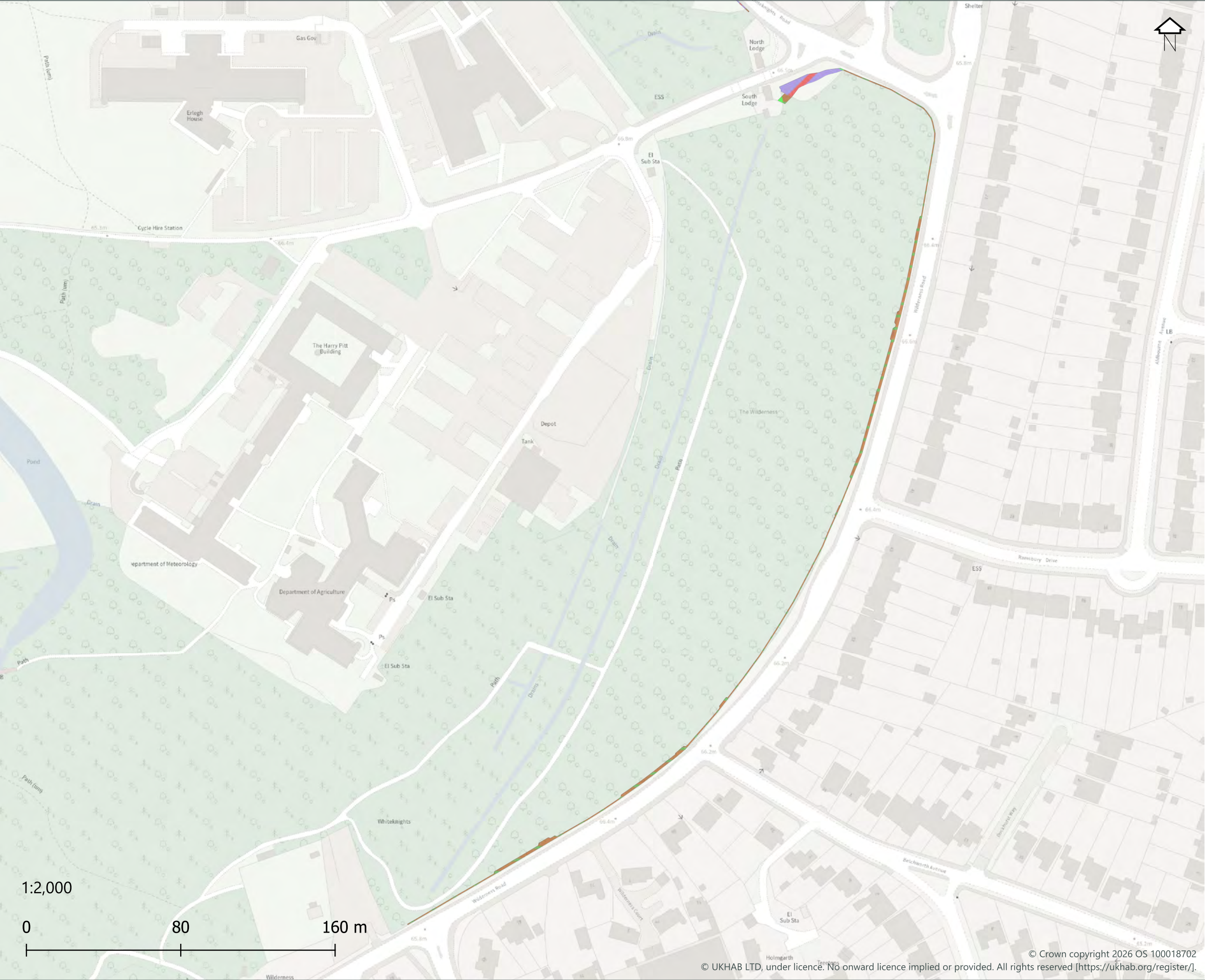
Target Note (see Appendix 2)











Key

- Lost
- Bramble scrub
- Introduced shrub
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Mixed scrub
- Modified grassland
- Vegetated garden

Appendix 1: Photographs

Number	Photograph
1	 View of fenceline from Wilderness Road – with Local Wildlife Site woodland in background.
2	 Cherry Laurel with fence in background, north end of The Wilderness, near South Lodge.

3



Proposed location for removal of Cherry Laurel and replacement with native shrub planting, area in front of South Lodge.

4



Woodland block at northern end of Site, off Upper Redlands Road

5



Vegetation and existing fence along edge of Harris Garden at southern end of Site.

6



Photo taken from above fence, showing trimmed Cherry Laurel hedge along fence line, adjacent to dense woodland. Alongside Whiteknights Road.

=

Appendix 2: Target Notes

Note Number	Notes
1	Mature trees on highways land. Contain ivy, mature, mostly native eg oak
3	Oak large, Tree right on fence line, fence bending around tree a little . Ivy cover.
4	Rhododendron ponticum, including some growing through fence. Wood melic also present
5	Cherry laurel growing through fence
6	Holm oak growing through fence
7	Rhododendron. Large area from fence to 8m back
7	More rhododendron, big patch
9	Woodland management works. Understory of woodland has been cleared leaving little at ground level, some sucker regrowth and soft rush, plus planted trees willow
10	Latrine over footpath, plus scuffles/foraging nearby
11	Tree 0452. Mature hornbeam large on fence
5	Stand of cherry laurel
2	Stand of cherry laurel and rhododendron
2	Stand of cherry laurel and rhododendron
5	Cherry laurel
8	Lots of cherry laurel - compartment of worse condition due to extent
12	Existing hole in fence, doesn't appear regularly used
5	Cherry laurel against fence, Holm oak near
13	Limited access into woodland due to dense veg
14	Fenced off section of wood, appears similar to adjoining. Mammal path into area but not heavily used
15	Tree planting
16	Dry ditch on highways side of fence with nettle, cleavers and hedge mustard
17	Bramble and locust tree saplings on verge
5	Cherry laurel growing into fence
18	Fence to south has had vegetation cleared alongside it to 50cm
19	Vegetation also cut back along this section, some stumps plugged
20	Existing fence ivy covered, some veg growing through
22	Holly forming boundary here
23	Wooden fence
24	Garden hedge forming boundary, pyracantha

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