



HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH LOCAL PLAN

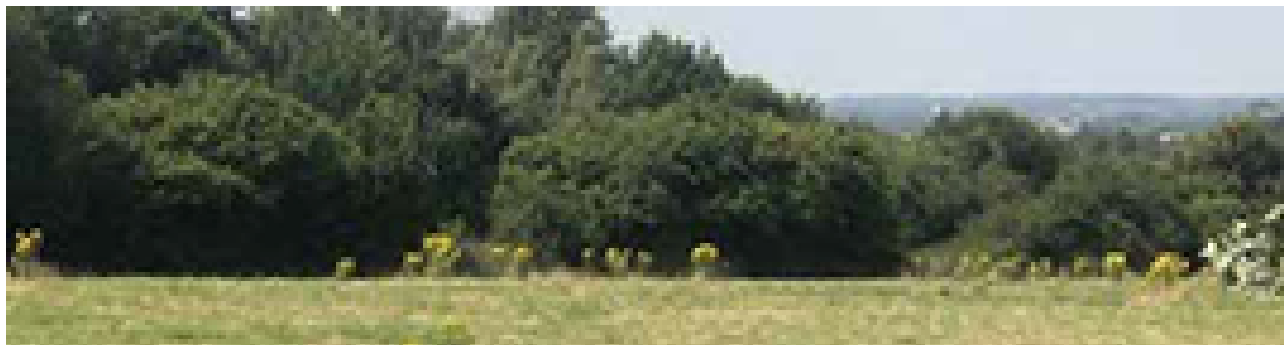
UKHAB SURVEY REPORT

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
A report from RSK Wilding

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1.1 This document has been prepared by RSK Wilding for Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to provide an updated habitat baseline at a series of sites around the borough, sites with potential to accommodate development within the Borough. These sites were provided to RSK Wilding by the Council. The information gathered through this process will be used to inform Local Plan policy, allocations for development, the Strategic Economic Land Availability Assessment and criteria for assessing the sustainability of future development proposals. Where possible, the report will also illustrate at a high level the likely ecological constraints to any future development proposals as well as potential for targeted habitat restoration and enhancement at sites through biodiversity net gain (BNG) policy and those sites where existing baseline conditions might warrant Local Wildlife Site designation.
- 1.1.2 The document (in combination with its appendices) provides:
- A detailed methodology, including limitations assumptions, for undertaking the UK Habitat (UKHab) survey and Habitat Condition Assessment (HCA) survey;
 - A summary of desk study results and UKHab survey results (see Appendix A);
 - A summary of the baseline biodiversity value of habitats within the surveyed sites prior to construction;
 - An overview of the other ecosystem services provided by the sites; and
 - An evaluation of the suitability of sites for development, based on high level consideration of ecological constraints.
- 1.1.3 Due to the volume of sites included within the scope, individual site descriptions including habitats present, and an overview of connectivity, and notable features will be detailed in an appended spreadsheet (see Appendix C).

1.2 Landscape context

- 1.2.1 The Sites are located within the borough of Hinckley and Bosworth, within the county of Leicestershire. The area includes the town of Hinckley, and surrounding villages to the north. Most of the sites are located adjacent to or on the fringes of each town or village, and mostly comprise arable or grazed farmland. A small number of sites comprise unmanaged land, or built habitat. There are a number of sites containing existing Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) which will be detailed in the results and appended site description spreadsheet.

2 Methodology

2.1 Desk based study

- 2.1.1 Each of the sites was subject to a desk based study, to determine:
- The existing ecological information available;
 - Its broad potential for biodiversity enhancements; and
 - Its strategic significance in the landscape and the wider district.
- 2.1.2 Each of the site boundaries provided were overlaid with freely available environmental data including:
- Local authority data;
 - MAGIC.gov (e.g. statutory and non-statutory designated sites, priority habitats);
 - The Natural England Habitat Networks mapping (see Appendix D for more information); and
 - Flood risk zones.
- 2.1.3 A previous report compiled by LUC in 2020 (LUC, 2020) which contains phase 1 habitat maps and survey data for a large portion of the sites was also reviewed and referred to if access was not possible for individual sites.
- 2.1.4 To determine a site's strategic significance in the landscape and the wider district, each site's location was reviewed in relation to Leicestershire's draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- 2.1.5 A desk-based survey (in combination with the UKHab survey) was also used to inform and identify sites that may be suitable for Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or LWS designation, which have not been previously identified.

2.2 UKHab and habitat condition assessment survey

- 2.2.1 The field survey was based on the UKHab survey methodology (UKHab, 2023). Habitats were mapped to at least UKHab level 4 and the condition of each habitat parcel was assessed, using Defra condition assessment information (Defra, 2024a). Target notes were used to identify potentially interesting or valuable features of ecological importance, along with invasive species. Vascular plant species were recorded during the survey, although no attempt was made to produce an exhaustive species list.
- 2.2.2 Where water courses were identified on site, River Condition Assessments (RCAs) using Modular River Physical Survey (MoRPh5) methodology were carried out by an accredited ecologist. Each watercourse was separated into sections based on the composition of the watercourse and riparian habitat, with one MoRPh5 survey completed at each section.
- 2.2.3 UKHab surveys were undertaken between 29th July 2024 and 26th August 2024 principally by suitably experienced Ecologists Sofie Borek and Eve Proudlove (ACIEEM). Principal Ecologist Porscha Thompson (MCIEEM), Technical Director Mark Lang (CEcol, CEnv, FCIEEM) and Ecologists Calum Rennie May, Kallum Buxton and Alicia Tredell who are also suitably experienced surveyors and undertook a small number of the surveys alongside Sofie and/or Eve.
- 2.2.4 RCAs were undertaken on w/c 26th August and w/c 28th October led by Principal Ecologists James Hicks (CEcol, CEnv, MCIEEM) and Rich Prew (MCIEEM), who hold RCA accreditation.

2.3 Quantifying baseline biodiversity value

- 2.3.1 The results of the field survey were used to carry out an assessment of the site's existing baseline biodiversity value using the Statutory Defra Biodiversity Metric (Defra, 2024b).
- 2.3.2 This assessment was undertaken in line with guidance from the British Standard for Biodiversity Net Gain (BS 8683) (British Standard Institute, 2021) and industry best practice (CIEEM/CIRIA/IEMA, 2024)
- 2.3.3 To calculate the baseline values for each site this study uses methods set out in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (hereafter 'the Metric') user guide (Defra, 2024b). The Metric measures biodiversity value for habitats in 'biodiversity units' (BUs)².
- 2.3.4 The Metric is designed to quantify losses and gains of biodiversity as a result of proposed development or land management, and to inform and improve planning, design, land management and decision-making. The Metric uses habitats as a proxy to describe biodiversity.
- 2.3.5 The Metric can calculate biodiversity value of:
- Existing habitats;
 - Habitat enhancement; and
 - Habitat creation.
- 2.3.6 The Metric can calculate different types of BUs. There are three types of BUs, which are calculated in three separate 'modules' of the Metric. These are:
- Area habitat units (e.g. woodland, grasslands, wetlands);
 - Hedgerow units (e.g. hedgerows and lines of trees); and
 - Watercourse units (e.g. culverts, canals, wet ditches, rivers and streams).
- 2.3.7 Consequently, a site can have three biodiversity unit values, which are assessed using the Metric, but which cannot be summed together or traded between.
- 2.3.8 The area or length of a habitat is multiplied by several factors in the Metric (called multipliers) that indicate its quality and value (distinctiveness, condition and strategic location), and this provides its overall BU value.
- 2.3.9 In addition, for those habitats that are to be created or enhanced, the risk of failure is accounted for by applying multipliers for risk factors (difficulty, time to target condition, and off-site risk).
- 2.3.10 A brief description of the different multipliers contained within the Metric are detailed below in Table 1.

Table 1: Statutory Biodiversity Metric multipliers and their explanations

Biodiversity Metric multiplier	Explanation
Habitat distinctiveness	<p>A measure based on the type of habitat and its distinguishing features. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ consideration of species richness and rarity;■ the extent to which the habitat is protected by designations; and■ the degree to which a habitat supports species rarely found in other habitats.

Biodiversity Metric multiplier	Explanation
Habitat condition	A measure of the habitat against its ecological optimum state. Condition is a way of measuring variation in the quality of patches of the same habitat type.
Strategic significance	Describes the local significance of the habitat based on its location and the habitat type.
Difficulty	A measure which represents the uncertainty in the effectiveness of management techniques used to enhance or create habitat.
Time to target condition	The average time taken between starting creation or enhancement of habitats and that habitat reaching its target condition or distinctiveness.
Spatial risk	Spatial risk represents the relationship between the location of biodiversity loss (on-site) and where the off-site habitat is being delivered. This is applied to off-site interventions only.
Riparian zone encroachment	A measure of any feature or intervention within the riparian zone that reduces the quantity, quality or ecological function of the riparian habitat.
Watercourse encroachment	A measure of any feature that adversely affects the natural function of the watercourse, or results in localised changes in habitat, species and migratory pathways.

2.4 Selection of potential local wildlife sites

- 2.4.1 As part of the analysis undertaken for this report, several sites containing habitats considered to have high potential to become LWS have been identified and described in Section 3.5.
- 2.4.2 This list was compiled by comparing the habitats present on site with the LWS designation criteria for Leicestershire (Leicestershire County Council, 2011) as well as considering habitats which have the potential to be uplifted to meet these criteria. Proximity to existing LWS and other desk study information were also considered in the selection process.

2.5 Evaluation of sites' suitability for development

- 2.5.1 The suitability of the sites for development was assessed based on the below criteria:
- Presence of priority habitats
 - Presence of existing Local Wildlife Sites, or potential to meet the published criteria
 - Presence of irreplaceable habitat
 - Suitability of the site for supporting protected species
 - Distinctiveness of the habitats present in the baseline
- 2.5.2 The Site Description Spreadsheet (Appendix C) contains a RAG rating for each site based on these criteria as well as an assessment of the suitability of each site to support protected species and which further surveys may be required in order to fully assess the impacts of development on the site. Note this exercise is high level only and does not constitute a detailed ecological impact assessment.

2.6 Allocation and policy review

- 2.6.1 This report also provides a review of the revised site allocations and policies set out in the 'Consultation Draft Plan – Regulation 18' for Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (2024), and associated documents, where appropriate.
- 2.6.2 This review is intended to ensure that site allocations and policies will deliver a positive policy framework to enable biodiversity benefits including through biodiversity improvement areas. A key aspect to this is ensuring that local policy effectively addresses statutory biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements, as set out in The Environment Act, 2021.
- 2.6.3 Where identified, this section also sets out recommendations for amendments that could be made to better align the revised site allocations and / or policies with Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's biodiversity vision.
- 2.6.4 The following documents were reviewed and considered in relation to the findings of the 2024 RSK Wilding habitat surveys, national policies and legislation and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's biodiversity vision. In particular, consideration was given to ensuring that policies would support the delivery of the draft Local Plan objectives, specifically those associated with 'Places – Environmental':
- Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan 2020 – 2041 (July 2024);
 - Appendix 2: Key Diagram; and,
 - Appendix 3: Regulation 18 Proposed Site Allocations.
- 2.6.5 Recommendations were made where amendments to proposed allocations and / or policies were considered beneficial and / or where additional policies may be required in order for Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to effectively deliver on their aim of a positive policy framework that can deliver biodiversity benefits

2.7 Assumptions and limitations

- 2.7.1 An extensive botanical list of species was not compiled however due to the time of survey, it was possible to sufficiently identify plants and indicator species to make an assessment of the habitat types present.
- 2.7.2 Not all sites were able to be accessed for the surveys. Whilst the companies and landowners putting sites forward for survey were notified of the approximate timeframe for surveys being carried out, tenants and land managers were not always aware therefore access was not possible at every site (e.g. due to large locked gates, barbed wire, livestock etc).
- 2.7.3 Where access was not possible at the time of survey but surveyors were able to view habitats from a distance, or the site boundary, an estimation was made of the habitat type and condition, with the limitation noted. Where it was not possible to gather sufficient information to assess a habitat, the broad habitat type was recorded, along with any identifiable species or features, but condition assessment not completed.
- 2.7.4 Where a site could not be accessed in its entirety, it has been excluded from the metric calculations.
- 2.7.5 Where a site was partially surveyed (due to access restrictions), surveyed habitats have been included in the baseline metric calculator for the site. Un-surveyed habitats in the same site have been included although assumptions about their condition and in some cases their habitat type have been made.

- 2.7.6 In cases where habitat type has been assumed, a combination of knowledge of the wider site, aerial photography and photos have been considered. All un-surveyed hedgerows have been entered as 'native hedgerow'.
- 2.7.7 In cases where no condition assessment was possible a 'moderate' condition has been applied within the metric.
- 2.7.8 Unless adjacent to a public footpath, boundary habitats were only assessed from within the site. For RCAs, this meant that watercourses on boundaries were sometimes only surveyed on one side where access permission had been granted.
- 2.7.9 Areas were assigned high strategic significance if they met all of the below criteria:
- Habitats within Areas that Could Become of particular importance for biodiversity and wider environmental benefits (ACB) (Leicestershire County Council, 2024);
 - Habitats of medium distinctiveness and above,
 - Habitats which were in good condition; and
 - Habitats which met the priorities laid out in the LNRS.
- 2.7.10 All other habitats were given a low strategic significance.
- 2.7.11 Where a hedgerow forms the border of two adjacent sites it has been included in the metric calculator of both sites. While this may increase the risk of 'double counting' biodiversity units, in this case each site is being considered separately, and units are not being summed across sites. Additionally, it is thought that leaving hedgerows out of sites (because they are considered as part of an adjacent site) might downplay the biodiversity resource of the site from which it is excluded.

3 Results

- 3.1.1 The sites have been split into the four Hinckley and Bosworth spatial sub areas (Central, West, Urban South and North East and Leicester) these sub areas and the sites location with them can be found in Figure 1 – Site location plan overview. The Figures are split by spatial sub area to make them easier to navigate.

3.2 Desk study

Designated sites

- 3.2.1 The desk study revealed that none of the sites were located within a statutory designated site. There were five sites which contained LWS or a potential, candidate or historic LWS. These were AS120, AS58, LPR16, AS705 and AS4241 A.
- 3.2.2 The LWS names and designations are described in Table 2: below. Not all of the below sites were accessed during the surveys and full botanical surveys of the sites were not carried out. See Figure 2a for each sub area.

Table 2: LWS within sites

Site	Designation	LWS name	Reason for designation
AS120	Potential LWS	Bullfurlong Lane grassland	Mesotrophic grassland
AS58	LWS	Little Fields Farm Meadow 1	Mesotrophic grassland
AS58	LWS	Little Fields Farm Meadow 2	Mesotrophic grassland
LPR16	Historic pLWS	Unknown	Semi-improved neutral grassland
LPR16	Historic pLWS	Unknown	Semi-improved neutral grassland
AS4241 A	Candidate Local Wildlife Site	Barlestone wet woodland and marsh	Wet woodland
AS705	Potential Local Wildlife Site	Groby, Laurel Farm grassland and SW hedge	Mesotrophic grassland

National character areas

- 3.2.3 The sites were split between several National Character Areas (NCA). Of the 77 sites, 40 were completely within NCA 94 Leicestershire Vales, seven sites were partially within this NCA. Nine were completely within NCA 72 Mease/Sence Lowlands, two were partially within this NCA. Thirteen of the sites were completely within NCA 71 Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield, three sites were partially within this NCA. Finally, 11 sites were

completely within the NCA 73 Charnwood. The descriptions of these NCAs are described in Appendix B below. See Figure 2a for each sub area.

Flood risk zones

- 3.2.4 Nine of the sites were located within a flood risk zone, these were LPR22, LPR44, LPR16, LPR200, LPR205, LPR49 A, LPR49 B, LPR107 and LPR79. See Figure 2a for each sub area.

Priority habitats

- 3.2.5 The priority habitat inventory identified priority habitat within several of the of the sites. This was predominately deciduous woodland, with two sites containing areas mapped as good quality semi-improved grassland and LPR16 containing one field of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh. See Table 3 below and Figure 2c for each sub area..

Table 3: Priority habitat mapping

Habitat Type	Sites
Deciduous woodland	LPR44, AS120, LPR16, LPR22, AS392, AS445
Good quality semi improved grassland	LPR16, LPR95
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh	LPR16

National Habitat Networks

- 3.2.6 Several sites were located partially within National Habitat Networks mapping areas and are therefore suitable locations to create or enhance habitat to form ecological networks. These are detailed in Table 4. For more information about National Habitat Networks see Appendix D.
- 3.2.7 Sites LPR79, LPR80 and LPR81 are within Network Enhancement Zone 2 as it is close to Ashby canal SSSI designated for communities of aquatic and emergent plants. See Figure 2b for each sub area.

Table 4: National Habitat Network mapping summary

National habitat mapping categorisation	Definition	Sites
Network Enhancement Zone 1	Land within close proximity to the existing habitat components that are more likely to be suitable for habitat re-creation for the particular habitat. These areas are primarily based on soils but in many cases has been refined by also using other data such as hydrology, altitude and proximity to the coast. This is termed the 'Network Enhancement Zone 1'.	LPR41 (traditional orchard), LPR183 (traditional orchard),

National habitat mapping categorisation	Definition	Sites
Network Enhancement Zone 2	Land within close proximity to the existing habitat components that are unlikely to be suitable for habitat re-creation but where other types of habitat may be created or land management may be enhanced including delivery of suitable Green Infrastructure. This is termed the 'Network Enhancement Zone 2'.	LPR200 (lowland fens), LPR49b (ancient woodland), LPR79 (proximity to Ashby Canal SSSI), LPR80 (proximity to Ashby Canal SSSI), LPR81 (proximity to Ashby Canal SSSI).
Network Expansion Zone	Land within relatively close proximity to the Network Enhancement Zones 1 & 2 that are more likely to be suitable for habitat creation for the particular habitat and identifying possible locations for connecting and linking up networks across a landscape. This is termed the 'Network Expansion Zone'	As519, AS518, AS455 B, . LPR121, LPR95, LPR70, LPR49b

3.3 Areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity and wider environmental benefits (ACB)

- 3.3.1 The draft LNRS for Leicestershire includes Areas that Could Become of particular importance for biodiversity and wider environmental benefits (ACBs) and therefore locations where habitat enhancement and creation should be targeted. The following sites which fall within ACBs either wholly or partially are included in Table 5. This comprised total of 27 of the 77 sites. These sites are not currently mapped due to the LNRS still being in draft.

Table 5: Sites within ACBs.

Location	Site name
Sites within ACBs	LPR16, AS133, LPR44, LPR21, LPR31, AS58, LPR200, AS235, LPR205, LPR181, AS541, LPR189, LPR79, AS1027, AS16, AS22, AS36, LPR107, LPR146A, LPR30, LPR196, LPR49 A, LPR49 B, LPR70, LPR43, LPR95, LPR121

3.4 UKHab and river condition assessments

- 3.4.1 An overview of the habitats present within each site can be found in the Site Description Spreadsheet in Appendix C. These habitats are mapped in Figure 3 for each sub area.
- 3.4.2 Of the 77 sites, 69 of them were accessible for surveys. The remaining eight could not be accessed by surveyors during the site visits.
- 3.4.3 The majority of the sites were at least in part agricultural, with many comprising fields of *cereal* and *non-cereal crops* (26 sites total), or *modified grassland* used for pasture (38 sites total). A smaller number of sites (31) had more species-rich farmland comprising *neutral grassland* habitat types. There was no *lowland meadow*, *acid grassland* or *calcareous grassland* types recorded.

- 3.4.4 Woodland was present in 25 of the sites, this largely comprised *other woodland*; *broadleaved* although there were some parcels of priority *lowland mixed deciduous woodland* present in four of the surveyed sites.
- 3.4.5 Priority habitat *traditional orchards* were recorded in LPR16.
- 3.4.6 Scrub was another habitat type that was common throughout the sites with 23 of the sites containing some form of scrub habitat. Most of this were *mixed scrub* habitats with some *bramble*, *willow* and *blackthorn scrub* also present.
- 3.4.7 Urban habitats were also common with *developed land*; *sealed surface*, *artificial unvegetated unsealed surface*, *vegetated garden*, *bare ground* and *allotments* all present across the sites. Two sites were entirely urban habitat (AS173 and AS86) which comprised *buildings* and *developed land*; *sealed surface*.
- 3.4.8 Eleven of the 69 sites surveyed included some form of pond, with two of these assessed as being *priority habitat ponds*.
- 3.4.9 Of the 69 sites, 32 contained individual trees, the vast majority of these were *rural trees* with only one site (LPR138, an old Cadent Gas site in Hinckley) containing *urban trees*. Three sites contained at least one veteran tree which is an irreplaceable habitat type.
- 3.4.10 The majority of the sites (62) contained at least one hedgerow which made up the field boundaries. Most of these hedgerows would qualify as priority habitat, with only 10 containing a non-native ornamental hedgerow which would not qualify.
- 3.4.11 Twenty-six of the sites contained some form of watercourse, with 18 containing at least one *ditch* and twelve containing a watercourse which qualifies as '*other rivers and streams*' which went on to have a MoRPH survey completed.

3.5 BNG baseline

- 3.5.1 A baseline metric calculation has been completed for each of the 69 surveyed sites. The Site Description Spreadsheet (Appendix C) includes the habitat, hedgerow and watercourse units for each site.
- 3.5.2 There was a total of 3536.52 habitat BU recorded across all the 69 sites surveyed. The spread of units across sites is summarised in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Habitat unit summary

Habitat BU range	Number of sites
0 to 20	41
21 to 50	15
51 to 100	6
100 +	7

- 3.5.3 The number of hedgerow units across all 69 sites should not be reported as a total as some hedgerows have been included in more than one site. i.e. where a hedgerow makes up the boundary of two sites. The hedgerow unit spread is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Hedgerow unit summary

Hedgerow BU range	Number of sites
0 to 20	54
21 to 50	10
51 to 100	2
100 +	3

- 3.5.4 There was a total of 167.26 watercourse units throughout the 69 sites. The spread of watercourse units is summarised in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Watercourse unit summary

Watercourse BU range	Number of sites
0	43
0 to 10	20
10 +	6

3.6 Sites with potential to be LWS

- 3.6.1 Of the 69 sites surveyed, none were identified that could qualify as a SSSI. There were however, five sites identified which had habitats which could meet the criteria for LWS selection or had potential to become LWS with minimal interventions.
- 3.6.2 To determine this the guidelines for the Selection of Local Wildlife Sites (Leicestershire County Council, 2011) was reviewed to determine which sites could qualify.
- 3.6.3 The Site Description Spreadsheet (Appendix C) summarises each site's suitability to support a LWS within it and a RAG rating of high, medium or low. The sites with habitats within them with high potential to become a LWS are described below. Those areas with LWS potential would require careful assessment when considering development proposals and understanding how biodiversity would be incorporated into any final masterplan.

AS120

- 3.6.4 Grassland within this site is currently designated as a potential LWS. The grassland was found to be reasonably diverse *Arrhenatherum* neutral grassland, although this did not achieve good condition due to not containing more than ten species per metre squared. Species recorded included Greater Burnet Saxifrage (*Pimpinella major*), Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Great Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*).
- 3.6.5 It is possible that this grassland would meet LWS criteria for mesotrophic grassland and could be enhanced through increasing species diversity through an appropriate hay cutting regime and cutting back encroaching scrub to improve grassland condition.

AS4241A

- 3.6.6 This site contained an area of good condition *wet woodland* with a stream (Carlton Brook) running through the centre of it. This woodland is considered to potentially qualify as a LWS due to passing the below criteria: 'dominated by Willow (*Salix* sp.) and/or Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) with the water table seasonally near or above the surface' and is already considered a candidate LWS. The woodland canopy was dominated by Alder with wetland indicator species such as Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*) indicating that the water table was likely high for some or all of the year.
- 3.6.7 Adjacent to this woodland to the west was a field containing other neutral grassland. This field has the potential to be enhanced to be included within the candidate LWS. The grassland contained some wetland indicator species including Greater Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), Willow scrub and Meadowsweet so may be able to become eligible under the wet grassland criteria. In order to achieve this, a more diverse species mix would have to be introduced to the sward including LWS indicator species (Leicestershire County Council, 2011).

As58

- 3.6.8 Sections of this site are already within Little Fields Farm Meadow LWS under the mesotrophic grassland criteria adjacent to the River Tweed. Species recorded in this area of the site that is currently designated as a LWS included Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*), Greater Willowherb, Meadowsweet, Common Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) and Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) although a full botanical survey was not undertaken.
- 3.6.9 The field to the south of the LWS was sheep grazed neutral grassland and showed moderate species diversity. This was assessed as being in moderate condition during the survey due to the presence of undesirable species in the sward - Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*) and White Clover (*Trifolium repens*) - although these were not dominant. This did not currently meet the grassland criteria to be designated as a LWS, but if suitable enhancements were made (such as removal of undesirable species from the sward and the introduction of a more diverse species mix) it could be a good opportunity to extend the existing LWS to the south.
- 3.6.10 Some of the hedgerows in this area could also potentially be included in a future LWS as they were species-rich and linked to offsite veteran trees.

LPR16

- 3.6.11 Sections of this site have previously been designated as an unnamed historic potential LWS and was described as 'semi-improved neutral grassland' in the previous designation. At the time of the habitat survey the grassland had recently been cut so a full botanical survey was not possible, however species including Soft-rush (*Juncus effusus*), Reed Canary-grass and Greater Willowherb in the east of the site suggested the grassland was frequently wet and a small pond was located within this area.
- 3.6.12 It is possible that these areas would still qualify as LWS under the wet grassland criteria.
- 3.6.13 Additionally, a field on the eastern boundary of the site north of the historic potential LWS (OS grid reference SP 46215 90446) may also meet the criteria for designation under the wet grassland criteria, it contained several of the species from the wet grassland indicator list including multiple sedges (*Carex* sp.), rushes (*Juncus* sp.) and Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*).

- 3.6.14 Additionally, several notable species including snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) and badger (*Meles meles*) were recorded on site during the survey.

LPR205

- 3.6.15 Grassland fields adjacent to the stream in the north of LPR205 may meet the criteria for designation under wet grassland with several sedge and rush species being recorded during the survey.

3.7 Ecological networks

- 3.7.1 The current Local Plan sets out a requirement for an 8m buffer around watercourses as part of its Blue Infrastructure policy. Our review of the desk study and survey data reflects the importance of such buffers, identifying watercourses as an important ecological network, with many of the sites linked by riparian corridors which act as a vital connection between areas of habitat with less biodiversity value.
- 3.7.2 As detailed in our review of current Local Plan policies (see Section 3.11) we recommend that the policy on watercourse buffers is increased from 8m to 10m, bringing it in line with the area considered for BNG watercourse assessments. This increase not only provides increased consistency in the areas developer's are expected to have consideration for but will continue to deliver the flood risk benefits for which the current 8m buffer was determined.
- 3.7.3 Any enhancements to watercourses which improve their condition in terms of BNG may generate watercourse units which could be used to offset impacts to watercourses on other sites throughout the borough. In addition, those sites located with ACBs and Network recovery zones could form the potential basis for ecological networks, as could expansion and buffering of existing and potential LWS.

3.8 Sites' suitability for development

- 3.8.1 The Site Description Spreadsheet (Appendix C) gives each site a RAG rating for its suitability to support development. This is based on the significance of the baseline biodiversity including its BNG baseline value, the protection afforded to any habitats present and the likelihood of protected species to be using the site.
- 3.8.2 43 of the sites surveyed contained over 80% cover of low distinctiveness habitats meaning that they have low baseline biodiversity value relative to their size indicating that they would be more suitable for development and would require a smaller amount of mitigation or offset to account for impacts.
- 3.8.3 The possible protected species which may be present within each site have also been identified within the Site Description Spreadsheet (Appendix C) however this is only indicative as further surveys would be required to determine the likely presence or absence of any protected species. It is impossible at this stage to indicate what mitigation measures may be required for individual sites without knowing the impacts of any development and what protected species are present. Further surveys which may be required for each site have been included in the Site Description Spreadsheet (Appendix C) however.
- 3.8.4 Sites shown as green in Appendix C have a higher development suitability. These sites appeared to be of relatively low ecological value containing a high proportion of low distinctiveness habitats such as cropland and were unlikely to support a large number of

protected species, although further surveys would be required to confirm this prior to development.

- 3.8.5 Sites shown as amber in Appendix C had a medium development suitability. These sites generally contained a mix of low distinctiveness habitats and habitats of higher distinctiveness. While they may support some protected species, the numbers present are likely to be relatively low, although further surveys would be required to confirm this prior to development. These sites did not contain any protected sites or habitats.
- 3.8.6 Sites shown as red in Appendix C had a low development suitability. Sections of these sites were of high ecological suitability. Generally these sites contained a high proportion of habitats of moderate or above distinctiveness. They may also contain a LWS, irreplaceable or priority habitat. They also had a higher suitability for supporting relatively large numbers of protected species, although further surveys would be required to confirm this prior to development. It is important to note that although some of these sites contained LWS or priority habitats, development may still be possible within other areas of the site as long as these features were preserved with a suitable buffer.
- 3.8.7 Based on the criteria outlined above, 32 of the sites were assessed as having a high suitability for development, 27 had a medium suitability and 10 were assessed as having a low suitability for development.

3.9 Mitigation for protected species

- 3.9.1 Almost all of the sites contained habitats suitable for nesting birds including hedgerows, trees or rough grassland. Impacts to nesting birds can be avoided by timing vegetation clearance to avoid the nesting bird season (April to September inclusive). A smaller number of sites may support protected or notable birds which may require suitable habitat to be provided if breeding habitat is lost. A nesting Schedule 1 bird (red kite, *Milvus milvus*) was identified within one site (As591). Schedule 1 species are protected from disturbance while breeding. A barn owl (*Tyto alba*) nest box was also recorded within LPR95 which may indicate the presence of another Schedule 1 bird species. Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) (a notable bird species) were recorded within LPR16. Larger sites, site's with more suitable habitat or sites where the proposal may impact bird species may require breeding bird surveys prior to any development so that bird populations on site can be understood.
- 3.9.2 Many sites included buildings or trees which may be suitable for use by roosting bats. As part of this assessment these were not subject to preliminary roost assessment (buildings) or ground level tree assessment (trees) in assess their suitability for roosts however these would be required in any cases where development proposals for sites included impacting existing buildings or trees. These may indicate the need for further surveys to determine the presence or absence of roosting bats these may include emergence/re-entry surveys, trees climbing surveys and/or internal inspections of buildings. Larger sites or sites with more suitable bat foraging or communising habitats would also likely require bat activity surveys which may include static detector surveys and walked transects to build a picture of how bats are utilising the site. Mitigation for loss of bat roosts is likely to include replacement roosts and habitats and would have to take place under a bat licence for the development.
- 3.9.3 Almost all of the sites contained some habitat suitable for badger (*Meles meles*) sett building. Badger are a mobile species who will build setts in many locations including at the base of hedgerows in agricultural fields. Therefore, badger surveys would likely be required to locate and classify any badger setts on site. Evidence of badger was recorded within several of the sites during the surveys. Badger setts were recorded within LPR16

and LPR95 and a badger latrine was recorded within LPR95. It is likely that badger setts are present within a larger number of the sites as a full survey was not undertaken as part of these works. If any development impacts an active badger sett a badger licence for the development would have to be sought, mitigation would depend on the classification of sett impacted but may include avoidance of works within 30m of the sett or the provision of an artificial badger sett if a main badger sett needs to be closed.

- 3.9.4 Some of the sites contained habitats suitable for reptiles. If large areas of reptile habitat are being impacted then reptile surveys would be required. If these reveal a significant population of reptile species then further mitigation including replacement habitat and translocation may be required.
- 3.9.5 Seventeen of the sites contained or were directly adjacent to a pond. These would need to be subject to an eDNA survey in order to determine the presence or absence of great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*). If great crested newt are present within these ponds then further mitigation is likely to be required as the result of any development on site. This may include contribution to a district level licencing scheme or replacement habitat and translocation if necessary.
- 3.9.6 Twelve of the sites contained a watercourse which may be suitable for otter or water vole. These sites would likely require further surveys for these species in order to determine the use of the watercourse by otter or water vole. If they were found to be present further mitigation would be required which may include translocation and provision of alternative laying up or resting sites.

3.10 Achieving 10% BNG on developments

- 3.10.1 Any development on any of the sites selected should follow the mitigation hierarchy to ensure that Biodiversity Net Gain can be achieved and any protected species mitigation is incorporated. This is likely to be easier to achieve when the baseline habitats are of low ecological value.
- 3.10.2 The mitigation hierarchy stipulates that impacts should always be avoided where possible. Where this is not possible, impacts should be minimised. Where impacts are necessary these must then be mitigated for.
- 3.10.3 As a general rule in any development which may take place within the sites the following features should be retained wherever possible:
 - Priority habitats
 - Irreplaceable habitats (these cannot be offset through BNG)
 - Habitats within a Local Wildlife Site
 - Habitats of high distinctiveness or baseline BNG value (such as woodland and ponds).
- 3.10.4 In order to achieve 10% BNG on any development which takes place, the above should be avoided with the majority of the impacts targeted on habitats with low baseline value for example arable habitat, modified grassland or poor condition other neutral grassland. This will reduce the amount of offsetting which is required to achieve 10% net gain on any development.
- 3.10.5 It is also important to note that the trading rules may affect where impacts should be targeted for specific sites. The trading rules are built into the metric and mean that some habitat types can only be replaced on a 'like for like' basis with the same specific habitat type or the same broad habitat type. Because of this impacts to medium and high

distinctiveness habitat types may be harder to offset at the habitat needed to offset them may be impossible to create within the site.

- 3.10.6 Where new habitats are being created in order to offset the loss of habitats on site, enhancement of existing habitat can generate more units than the creation of a new habitat. These should be targeted to be in line with the LNRS and meet the aims of the ACB where appropriate.
- 3.10.7 Impacts to watercourses should be avoided where possible as these can be costly and complicated to offset.

3.11 Allocations and Policy Review

Site Allocations

- 3.11.1 A total of 77 sites potentially under consideration for site allocation, were provided to RSK Wilding for survey and assessment. Of these eight could not be accessed for survey and were therefore not assessed, of these one, LPR44, is listed in 'Appendix 3: Regulation 18 Proposed Site Allocations'.
- 3.11.2 Within 'Appendix 3: Regulation 18 Proposed Site Allocations' there were five locations listed which were not included within the site list provided to RSK Wilding (AS237, AS1029, LPR 235 A, LPR 4 A and EMP1), as such comment on the suitability of these sites for housing allocations cannot be drawn.
- 3.11.3 Of the remaining locations detailed in 'Appendix 3: Regulation 18 Proposed Site Allocations' only one location, AS58, was flagged, as a result of the 2024 survey and assessment process, as potentially containing biodiversity features which may result in greater than average incompatibility with development. This only covers a portion of the site including the existing LWS.
- 3.11.4 AS58, or Barwell Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE), is identified within 'Appendix 3: Regulation 18 Proposed Site Allocations' as being allocated for a mixed-use development including 2,500 dwellings and at least 6.2 ha of employment land, as well as a variety of social and infrastructure related features.
- 3.11.5 An area of wetland adjacent to the River Tweed and associated grassland areas within AS58 have been designed as a LWS. The 2024 habitat survey considered that wider grassland areas in this location also contained reasonable levels of diversity and had the potential to be further enhanced in order to expand the LWS, primarily through the removal and management of 'undesirable species' including Perennial Rye-grass and White Clover.
- 3.11.6 It is recognised that delivery of the developments covered by the Barwell SUE requires a significant area of land and that, from the site list provided, there does not appear to be alternative potential allocations of this scale within the Barwell area. As such it is not proposed that this site should be removed from the allocation list. However, in order to reflect Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's biodiversity vision and the environmental objectives set out in the 'Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan 2020 – 2041' one of the following actions is recommended:

Recommendation 1a: Removal of the parts of AS58 falling within the LWS boundary, and ideally those areas that may be suitable for improvement to meet LWS criteria, from the AS58 site allocation boundary.

Recommendation 1b: Where recommendation 1a is not deemed feasible it is recommended that appropriate caveats to development should be implemented within AS58 such that the retention, in the same or improved condition, of the LWS area must be assured within the masterplan for any future development. This could also include guidance to encourage any BNG measures delivered in relation to the development of AS58 to consider the potential to expand the LWS area into areas of grassland deemed suitable for uplift to meet LWS criteria.

Policy Review

3.11.7 The findings and recommendations associated with a review of the policies set out in the 'Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan 2020 – 2041' are detailed in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Summary of 'Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan 2020 – 2041' policy recommendations

Policy	Policy Content	Recommendation	Suggested Text	Justification
SPo2: Development Strategy	Sets out the strategy for development over the course of the Local Plan period including the location, strategic role and scale of developments.	Update, where required, in line with site allocation changes resulting from the site allocation review and / or wider findings and recommendations of this report	To be determined based on the nature of any agreed changes to site allocations	Consideration may wish to be given to the housing provisions set out within this policy in light of the site allocation review above and wider results of the 2024 site survey and assessment.
SPo4: Strategic Site: Barwell Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE)	Sets out the specific features that should be delivered by the Barwell SUE	Update to include text that encourages the retention of the LWS within this site allocation as part of any development proposals	<p>Development should aim to retain, without impact to condition, the habitats for which the Little Fields Farm Meadow Local Wildlife Site is designated, as part of the Barwell SUE masterplan.</p> <p>Developers are encouraged to consider habitat enhancement opportunities that may be present within the Little Fields Farm Meadow Local Wildlife Site and / or on adjacent land, with the aim of improving condition and / or extending the area meeting Local Wildlife Site criteria as part of the Barwell SUE biodiversity net gain provisions.</p>	It is noted that the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan 2020 – 2041 indicates that development within the Barwell SUE has received outline planning permission (paragraph 4.55). However, should it be possible to apply further requirements on subsequent reserve matters applications, and should Recommendation 1b, above, be implemented it is suggested that this policy is updated to include any expectations with regards to the LWS within this location.
SPo5: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change	Sets out the climate based actions that, if built into development proposals, will be supported where they assist Hinckley and Bosworth in becoming carbon neutral by 2050. These actions are split out into those that minimise carbon emissions, maximise carbon capture and storage and evidence mitigation or adaptation to the impacts of climate change.	Update to include consideration of habitat and plant species resilience to climate change within the ways developments may look to mitigate for and / or adapt to, the impacts of climate change	Consideration of climate resilience, including but not limited to, changes in weather patterns, disease and pests in the design of habitat creation / enhancement and selection of plant species.	Points K to Q within this policy set out ways in which developments may look to mitigate for and / or adapt to the impacts of climate change. Point N discusses improvements to habitat networks through the enlargement of existing habitats and delivering BNG. Key to doing so in a manner that considers and accounts for the potential impacts of climate change is the careful selection of appropriate habitat types and the plant species used, to ensure these will remain viable in light of any reasonably foreseeable changes to the landscape due to climate change
SPo6: Flood Risk	Sets out expectations in relation to flood risk assessments for proposed developments	Update to include specific reference to the use of nature-based solutions within flood risk and surface water management.	<p>Where development is permitted within flood risk areas, it must demonstrate that, where required, it will reduce fluvial and surface water flood risk and manage residual risks, address the impacts of climate change through appropriate flood mitigation and adaption measures, including enhancements to existing defences, provision of new defences or the use of nature-based solutions.</p> <p>All development proposals should, wherever possible, include measures to reduce and manage surface water in accordance with the principles laid out within the drainage hierarchy through appropriate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) or nature-based solutions and avoiding where possible discharge to the public sewerage system so as to minimise and manage flood risk and improve water quality in accordance with relevant Local Plan policies on climate change and pollution control.</p>	While the wording of this policy does not specifically exclude nature-based solutions for the management or mitigation of flood risk and / or surface water it does not make specific reference to such measures as an approach. Should Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council wish to encourage biodiversity friendly approaches and nature-based solutions to be embedded within development designs it is suggested that this policy is updated to include nature-based solutions as a specifically named example of the type of approach that could be taken.

Policy	Policy Content	Recommendation	Suggested Text	Justification
SPo7: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy	Sets out the parameters under which proposals for renewable energy and low carbon developments will be supported.	Update point a to include biodiversity as one of the specifically named features for which reasonable steps must be taken to avoid or mitigate adverse impacts.	a) All reasonable steps have been taken to avoid or mitigate any adverse impacts including, but not limited to, biodiversity, landscape, noise, visual and cumulative impacts.	While the current wording does not exclude biodiversity as a factor where adverse impacts must be avoided or mitigated, an update to include specific reference to biodiversity further solidifies Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's commitment its environmental objectives, in particular Point 6 of Section 3 in the 'Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan 2020 – 2041': <i>"to conserve and enhance the natural environment, protect biodiversity and deliver a network of green infrastructure that connect and contribute to the Nature Recovery Network."</i>
SPo8: High Quality Design	Sets out the design parameters that should be followed for developments within Hinckley and Bosworth.	It is not proposed that the policy language needs to be changed. However, it is recommended that Table 3 (in the text that follows the policy), which details the design objectives for Hinckley and Bosworth be updated to include an objective focused on building biodiversity measures into development designs.	Support BIODIVERSITY thorough appropriate consideration of BIODIVERSITY FRIENDLY DESIGN measures, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of nest boxes / bat boxes, Selection of native, wildlife friendly, plant species within landscaping designs Incorporation of urban greening design measures such as green roofs or walls. 	The current design objectives consider a range of factors from those of a practical nature (e.g. ease of movement) to those focused on societal benefits (e.g. having a distinctive character and being attractive and beautiful). The absence of a biodiversity focused design objective seems like an omission in light of this breadth of factors. Particularly since biodiversity actions can also further delivery of other objectives where appropriately implemented, such as creating an attractive and distinctive sense of place, in turn supporting wider societal benefits and community wellbeing.
SP2o: Green Infrastructure	Sets out the requirements development proposals must address in relation to the growth and enhancement of Hinckley and Bosworth's multi-functional green infrastructure network.	Split point f into two points and add text encouraging the retention of existing on-site green infrastructure assets and the linking up of the development design to off-site green infrastructure assets.	f) Development shall contribute to the green network through the integration of multi-functional green infrastructure into masterplans, or where it can be demonstrated to be more appropriate, through delivery of enhancements or expansion of the green network through off-site delivery, having regard to the latest Borough Council Green Infrastructure Strategy g) Proposals should take account of the existing on- and off-site green infrastructure assets. Developments should demonstrate how the design and layout has been informed by and developed in response to these assets, with developments encouraged to retain existing on-site assets and provide on-site links to off-site green infrastructure assets where feasible.	Point f currently reads as two distinct requirements that have been combined into a single point. The splitting of these into two clearly distinct points within the policy language makes the specific requirements under this policy clearer and less likely to be missed or poorly addressed. The current language indicates the need to have regard for existing green infrastructure within development designs. It is suggested that this could be strengthened by including an encouragement to retained or link up with existing assets as part of the design process, further solidifying Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's commitment its environmental objectives, in particular Point 6 of Section 3 in the 'Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan 2020 – 2041': <i>"to conserve and enhance the natural environment, protect biodiversity and deliver a network of green infrastructure that connect and contribute to the Nature Recovery Network."</i>

Policy	Policy Content	Recommendation	Suggested Text	Justification
SP21: Green Wedges	Sets out the purpose of green wedge areas, the types of activity that will be permitted within these areas and the requirements that need to be met should development associated with these activities occur.	<p>Remove the first 'Any land use or associated development in the Green Wedge must:' text as well as points h – m which appear to be a direct duplication of points n – r and points f and g.</p> <p>Add in reference to the presence of Burbage Wood and Elmsthorpe Plantation (a part of Burbage Wood and Aston Firs SSSI) and Burbage Common and Wood LNR within the Hinckley / Burbage / Earl Shilton Green Wedge with associated expectations on the retention and protection of these areas.</p> <p>Addition of a new requirement for land use or associated development in the Green Wedge to support the retention of biodiversity.</p>	<p>N/A</p> <p>m) In the case of Burbage Common and Wood LNR, and areas of Burbage Wood and Aston Firs SSSI within the Green Wedge, ensure the retention of areas of irreplaceable habitat, including ancient woodland, as well as associated areas of priority grassland. Ensure an appropriate buffer to these sites is implemented where activities are in close proximity.</p> <p>n) Retain features of biodiversity importance</p>	<p>There appears to be some duplication of text within the current policy text which results in confusion as to the requirements of this policy.</p> <p>The policy language already makes mention of specific requirements associated with Rothley Brook Meadow. While policy 'SP 24: Protecting Biodiversity' discusses requirements around designated sites it is considered that, given the specific mention of a location already within 'SP21: Green Wedges', it would be appropriate to also include mention of the presence of Burbage Common and Wood LNR / Burbage Wood and Aston Firs SSSI within the Hinckley / Burbage / Earl Shilton Green Wedge, with particular consideration to the irreplaceable and / or priority habitats present.</p> <p>While several requirements are already set out within the policy which would indirectly support biodiversity conservation (e.g. retain and create green networks and retain the visual appearance) it is considered that the addition of a point specifically focused on the retention of features of biodiversity value would not only support Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's aims in relation to the environment, but would also support the delivery of other requirements within this policy by supporting the maintenance of the function, connectivity and visual appearance of the Green Wedge.</p>
SP24: Protecting Biodiversity	Sets out the requirements associated with development that impacts on internationally and nationally designated sites, irreplaceable habitats and locally important sites.	<p>Reflect the same use of language regarding exceptional circumstances used for internationally or nationally designated sites within the text for irreplaceable habitats</p> <p>Amendments to the language used in point g to more closely reflect guidance regarding how impacts on irreplaceable habitats should be addressed.</p>	<p>Proposals which are likely to result in the loss or deterioration of an irreplaceable habitat Would only be acceptable in exceptional circumstances and where:..."</p> <p>g) Appropriate bespoke compensation measures, relative to the baseline habitat type, are provided on site, wherever possible, or off-site where this is not feasible. The purchase of biodiversity credits as compensation for irreplaceable habitat impacts will not be permitted.</p>	<p>Guidance associated with irreplaceable habitats, as defined in The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitats) Regulations 2024, states that:</p> <p><i>"developments resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists."</i></p> <p>And that</p> <p><i>"The planning authority may only approve the Biodiversity Gain if they are satisfied that the adverse effect of development on the irreplaceable habitat is minimised and that appropriate arrangements have been made for the purpose of compensating for any impact. The arrangements are only appropriate if they secure a compensation plan relative to the baseline habitat type and which do not involve the purchase of biodiversity credits."</i></p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain</p>
SP25: Enhancing Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity	Sets out the expectations for how development proposals must evidence that they are conserving and enhancing features of nature conservation and geological value. This policy includes consideration of the statutory requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain as detailed in The Environment Act, 2021.	Add text to address scenarios in which a development is exempt from Biodiversity Net Gain. Specifically this could include any expectations or areas in which developers will be encouraged to take action to enhance biodiversity regardless of Biodiversity Net Gain.	<p>Development proposals which meet one or more of the biodiversity net gain exemption criteria, are encouraged to still seek to deliver biodiversity enhancement measures including, but not limited to the provision of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bat or bird boxes, Swift bricks, Hedgerow appropriate fencing Native, wildlife friendly, planting 	<p>Paragraph 4.34 of the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan 2020 – 2041 (July 2024) states that small sites make an important contribution to the housing supply in the borough including through small scale conversions, change in use, infilling or vacant land. Many of these locations may meet Biodiversity Net Gain exemption criteria (e.g. having below the de minimis area of habitat or being a householder or self-build application).</p> <p>While applications such as these have no statutory requirement to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain it is considered appropriate that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council set out in Local Plan policy a general encouragement for these developments to still consider opportunities to enhance biodiversity, albeit without the focus on habitat provision associated with Biodiversity Net Gain.</p>

Policy	Policy Content	Recommendation	Suggested Text	Justification
SP28: Blue Infrastructure	Sets out the expectations for how development proposals must contribute towards the delivery of a high-quality, multi-functional blue infrastructure network. It sets out the expectations for how blue infrastructure assets should be provided, protected, maintained and enhanced for water management benefits and services to biodiversity, nutrient neutrality, recreation and landscape.	<p>Increase the buffer distance from the currently stated 8m from the top of a watercourse bank to 10m from the top of a watercourse bank.</p> <p>Increase the specificity of text on point f to state native natural or semi-natural vegetation rather than simply 'vegetation'.</p> <p>Provide additional information within the text following the policy regarding expectations for this buffer zone.</p>	<p>f) Provide a minimum of 10m 'buffer strips' comprising native natural or semi-natural vegetation along the banks of all watercourses....</p> <p>....Proposals for built development will be required to be at least ten metres away from the top of the bank of the nearest watercourse or main river.</p> <p>11.66no built development within 10m from the top of a watercourse or Main River.....</p> <p>11.67 Larger developments or those outside the boundaries of existing settlements should provide further buffering with these additional areas available for informal recreation. Where a watercourse runs through a site a buffer should be present on both sides of the watercourse. The bank top is defined as the point at which the bank meets the level of the surrounding land.</p> <p>11.68 Where possible developments should look to reinstate buffer zones in locations where prior land use or development prevent or did not provide such features. Developers are also encouraged to investigate the feasibility of de-culverting watercourses where existing culverts are present, removing other hard engineering and / or removing barriers to fish passage. Where bridges are provided in place of culverts continuous bank access should be retained.</p> <p>11.69 The buffer zone should be planted with native species consistent with those found in local riverside habitats and be reserved for the delivery of natural or semi-natural habitats. Buffer zones should be free from built development and formal landscaping. Soft infrastructure, such as footpaths, should be kept to a minimum.</p> <p>11.70 A development's buffer zone(s) may contribute to any requirements they may have for delivery of Blue and Green Infrastructure.</p> <p>11.71 Watercourse buffer zones should be supported by a long-term ecological management plan that is designed to retain and enhance its biodiversity value.</p> <p>11.72 Where Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council consider that the provision of a 10m buffer is not feasible (i.e. in densely urban landscapes) a smaller buffer may be permitted if justification to the satisfaction of the Council is provided. In such cases a long-term management plan detailing how the watercourse will be accessed for maintenance and how biodiversity will be retained and enhanced will still be required.</p>	<p>While it is noted that the 8m buffer zone currently indicated in this policy was determined on the basis of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2019), there is no universally agreed buffer distance for watercourses. Indeed in an evidence report produced by the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission (2020) current practices and recommendations range anywhere from 2m to 24m depending on the underlying habitats, land use, management regime and aims. While flood risk activities require a buffer between 8 and 16m dependent on whether the watercourse is tidal (EA and DEFRA, 2016)</p> <p>An increase in buffer size to 10m is recommended for this policy in order to bring this requirement in line with the assessments that would be required for BNG, in which consideration of the 10m riparian zone on either side of a watercourse is necessary. It is considered therefore that consistency between BNG assessment areas and developmental buffers would support clearer and simplified requirements for developers, while still ensuring that the buffer zone delivers the benefits and flood risk management actions detailed in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.</p> <p>The current text supporting this policy effectively sets out the key watercourses within the Borough and the national justification for a policy relating to Blue Infrastructure. However, in reviewing similar policies enacted by other local authorities it is considered that there is additional information that could be added to this text to detailed expectations for the effective delivery of watercourse buffers in a way that will encourage biodiversity, water management and visual benefits. In developing the suggested text the following local plan policies and guidance notes have been considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilford Borough Local Plan (2023); • South Oxfordshire Local Plan (2020); • Vale of White Horse Local Plan (2019); and, • Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (2021). <p>A watercourse guidance note intended to support planning applications, has been produced for Aylesbury Vale by a partnership of organisations including Buckinghamshire County Council and the Environment Agency (Buckinghamshire Council, 2022). Consideration could be given to referring this document or producing a Hinckley and Bosworth specific alternative, into which some of the suggest text expectations could be included to minimise discussion of these points within the Local Plan itself.</p>

4 Conclusion

- 4.1.1 Of the 77 sites throughout the Borough of Hinckley and Bosworth 69 of them were accessible to surveyors during their visit. These sites were subject to UKHab and condition assessment surveys. Rivers and streams, where present, were subject to MoRPh surveys.
- 4.1.2 The majority of the sites were found to be agricultural with the most abundant habitats being hedgerows, non-cereal and cereal crop, modified grassland and other neutral grassland. A smaller number of sites also contained some woodland, scrub and pond habitats. Urban habitats (such as hardstanding and buildings) were also present within the majority of sites.
- 4.1.3 Of the 69 sites surveyed, five were identified as having potential to be designated as LWS. The sites have all been evaluated for their suitability for development based on their baseline biodiversity value and potential mitigation which would be required for loss of habitats and species habitat. The detailed results of this evaluation for each site can be found in the Site Description Spreadsheet (Appendix C) and the broad principles have been summarised in the results section.

4.2 Next steps

- 4.2.1 The Local Plan should be developed with this information in mind with the sites judged more suitable for development prioritised for this purpose and less suitable sites used for other purposes. The relative value of the habitats present in the baseline for each site as well as its ability to support protected species should be taken into account in this process in order to ensure that the best habitats in the borough are being conserved while sites with lower value are being taken forward for development.
- 4.2.2 In order to designate any of the identified sites as LWS detailed botanical surveys would be required on site to determine if the sites are sufficiently diverse and contain indicator species of the relevant habitats as described in the LWS selection criteria document (Leicestershire County Council, 2011).
- 4.2.3 In order to progress with development on any of the sites a preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) would likely have to be completed which would include a detailed site visit to update habitat mapping and indicate any further surveys that would be necessary.
- 4.2.4 Any site taken forward for development will need a detailed masterplan that takes into account the information provided within this report and more, and puts biodiversity at the forefront of any development decisions made.

5 References

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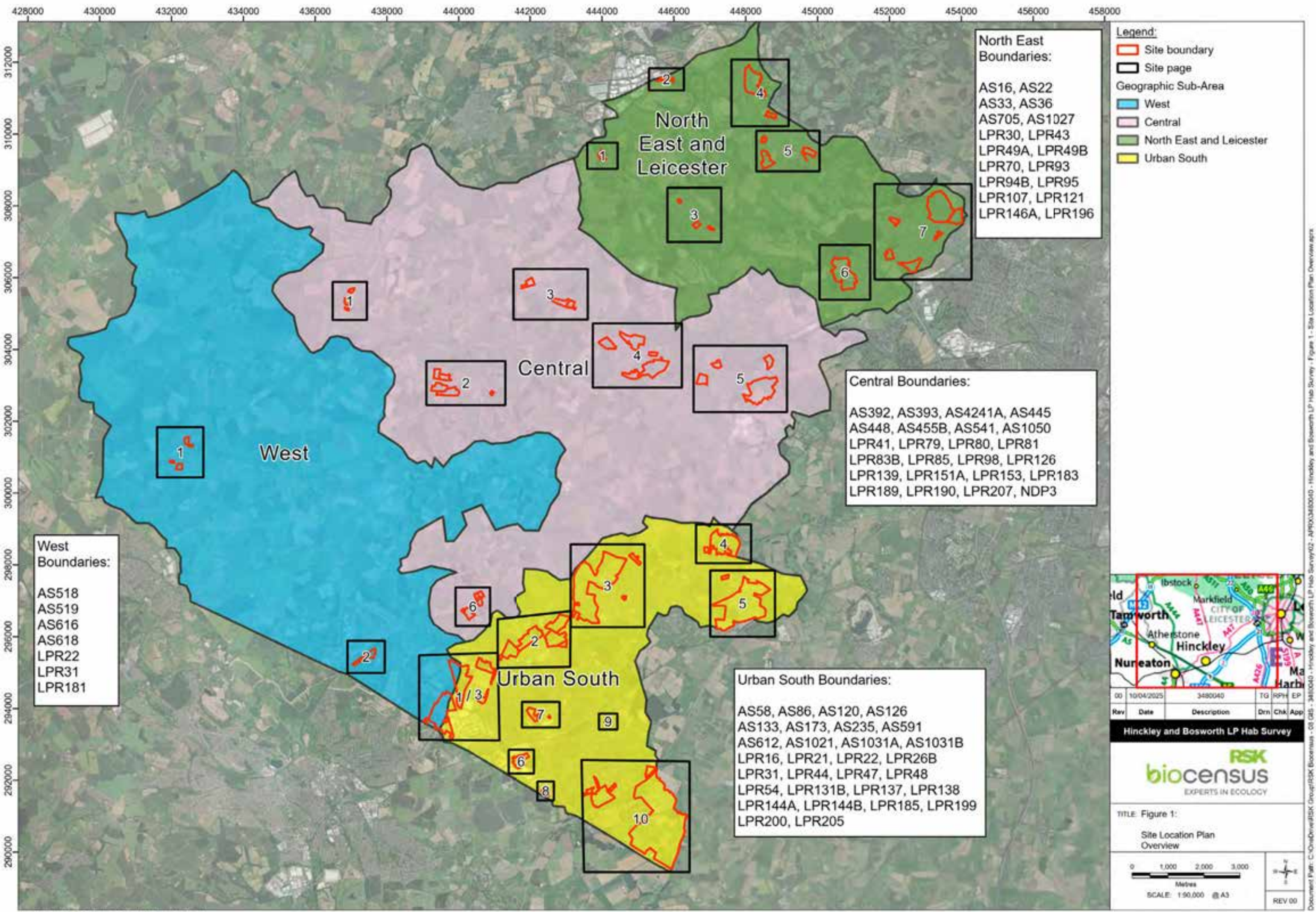
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Appendix A – Figures

Figure 1 – Site location plan overview



Central

Figure 1 – Site location plan - Central

Figure 2a - Desk Study - NCA, Flood Risk and Designated Sites - Central

Figure 2b - Desk Study - National Habitat Network – Central

Figure 2c - Desk Study - Priority Habitats Inventory – Central

Figure 3 - UKHab Habitats Map – Central



Legend:
 Site boundary



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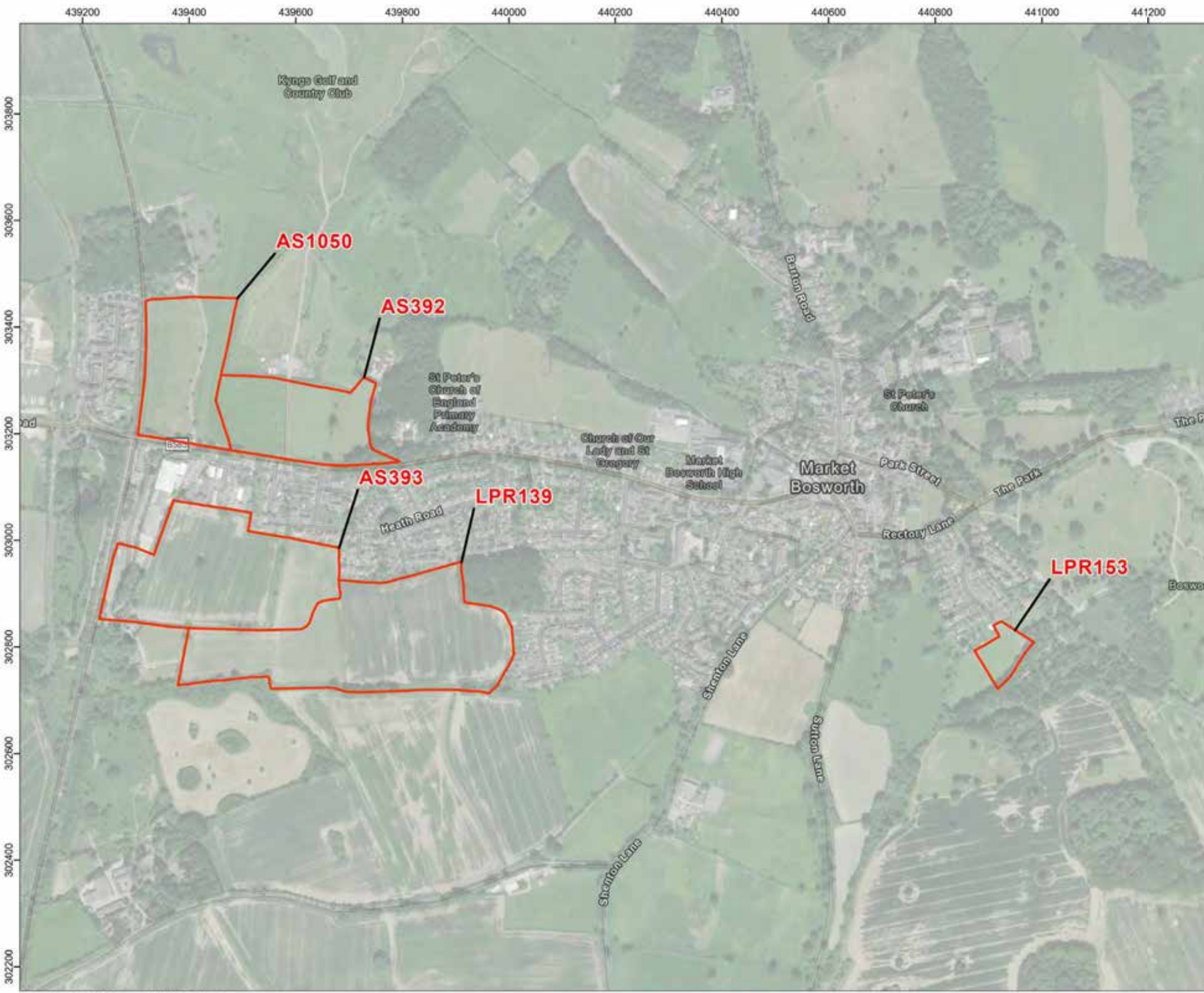
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

RSK
biocensus
 EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

TITLE: Figure 1:
 Site Location Plan
 Central
 Page 1 of 6

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REV 00



Legend:
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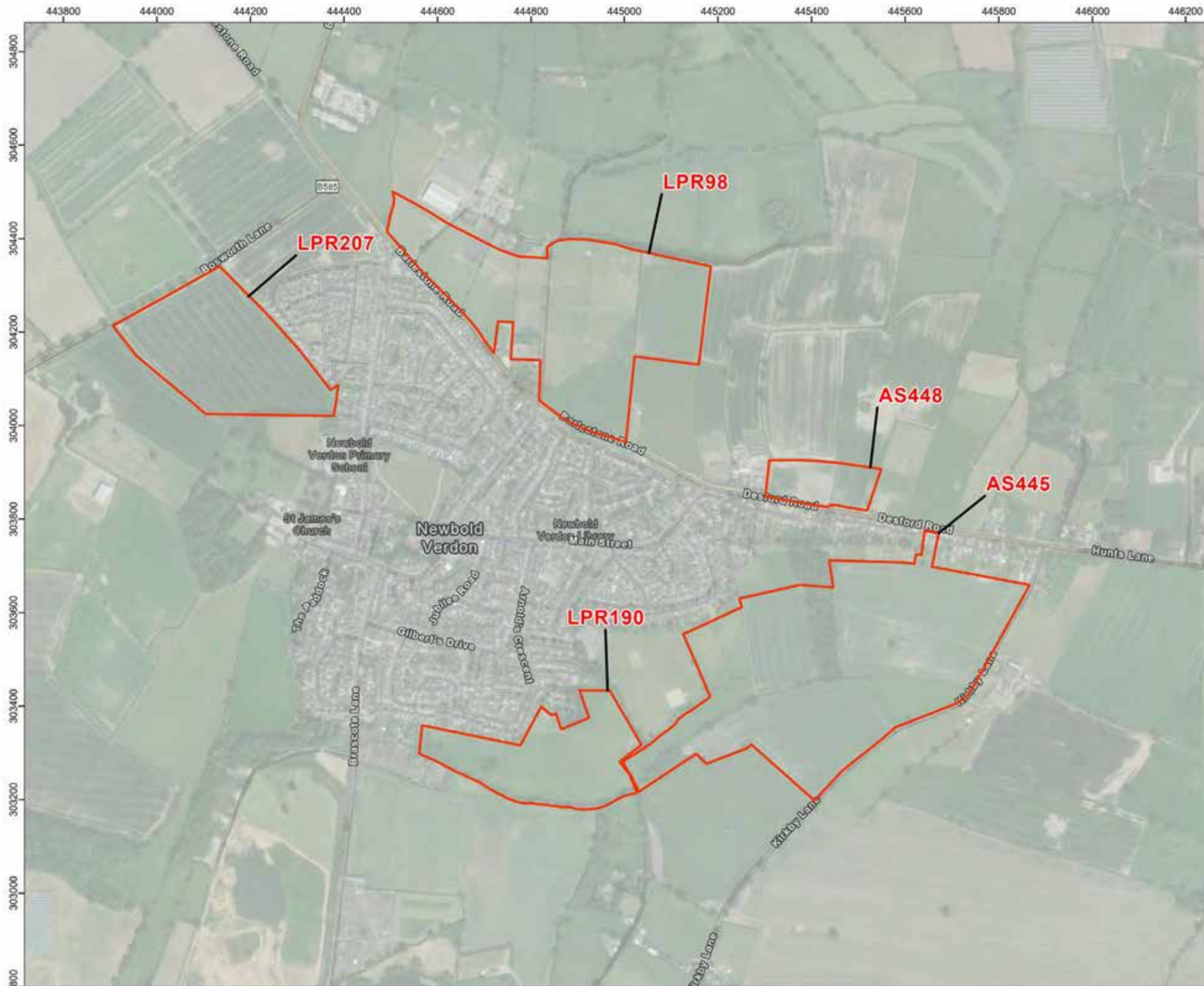
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

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Page 2 of 6

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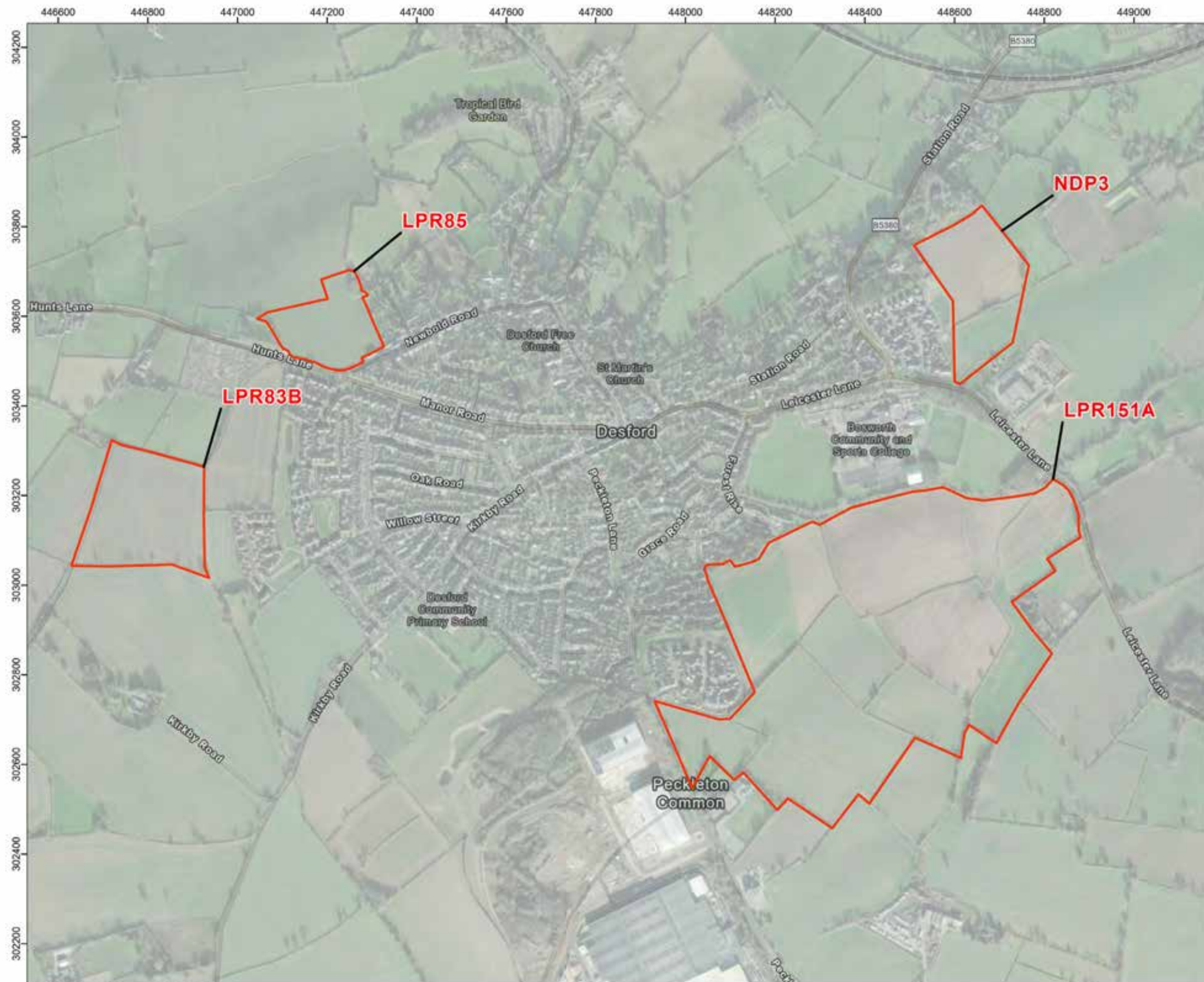
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

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 EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

TITLE: Figure 1:
 Site Location Plan
 Central
 Page 4 of 6



REV 00



Legend:
Site boundary

Figure 1: Site Location Plan Central
Page 5 of 6

Scale: 1:7,800 @ A3

Scale bar: 0 100 200 300 Metres

North arrow: N

Revision table:

Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

RSK biocensus
EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

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Legend:

Site boundary



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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

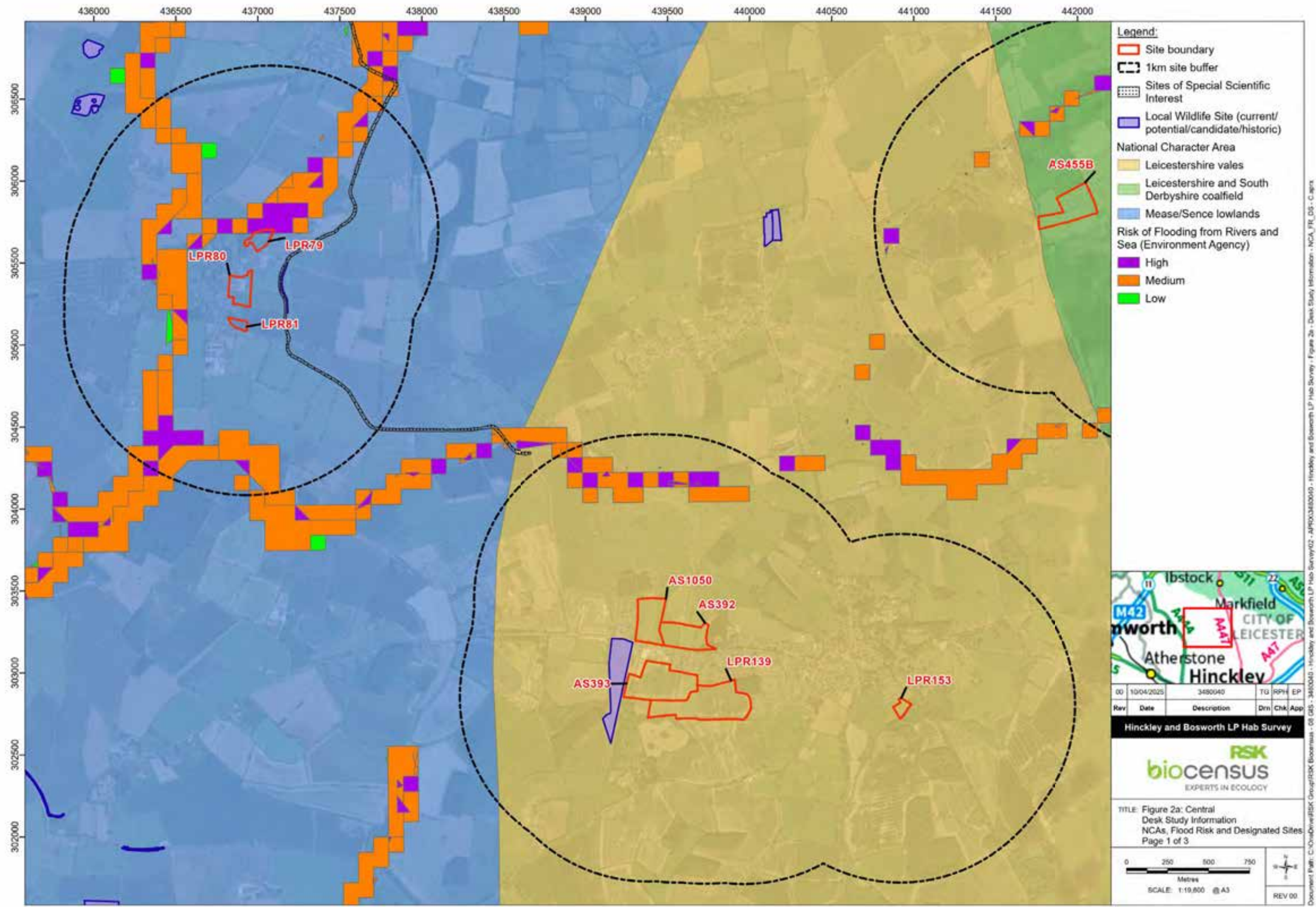
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biocensus
EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

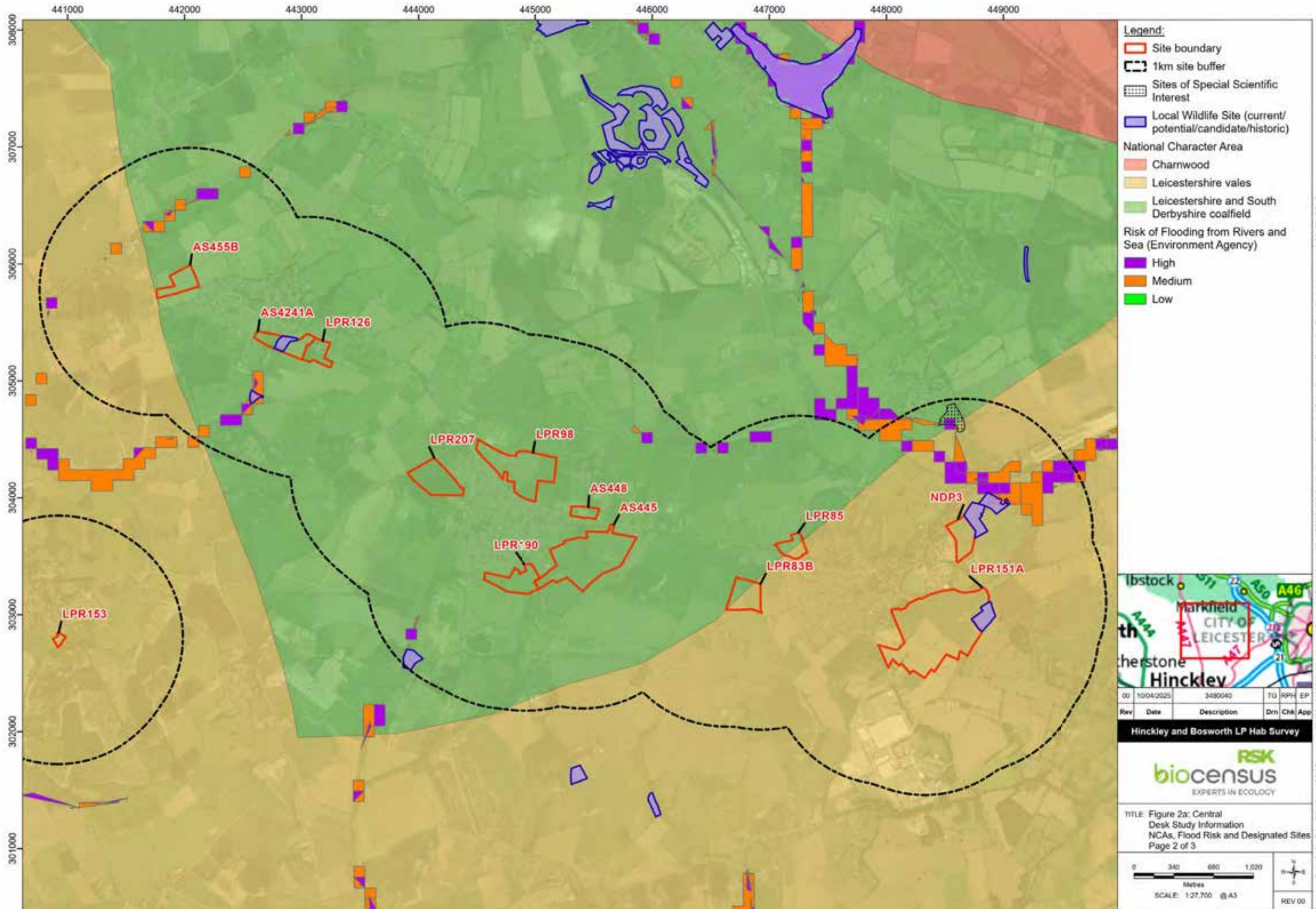
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Site Location Plan
Central
Page 6 of 6

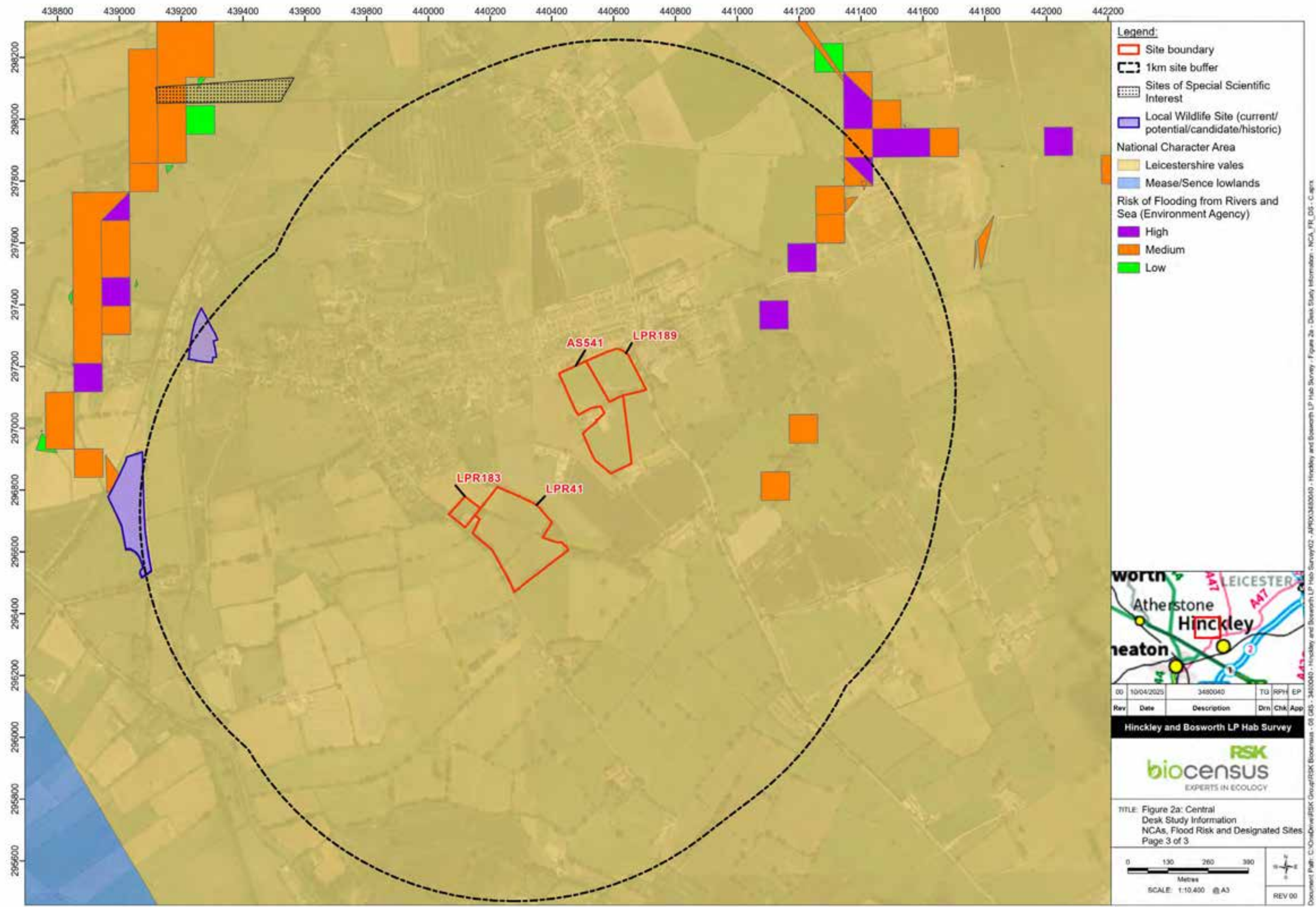
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REV 00





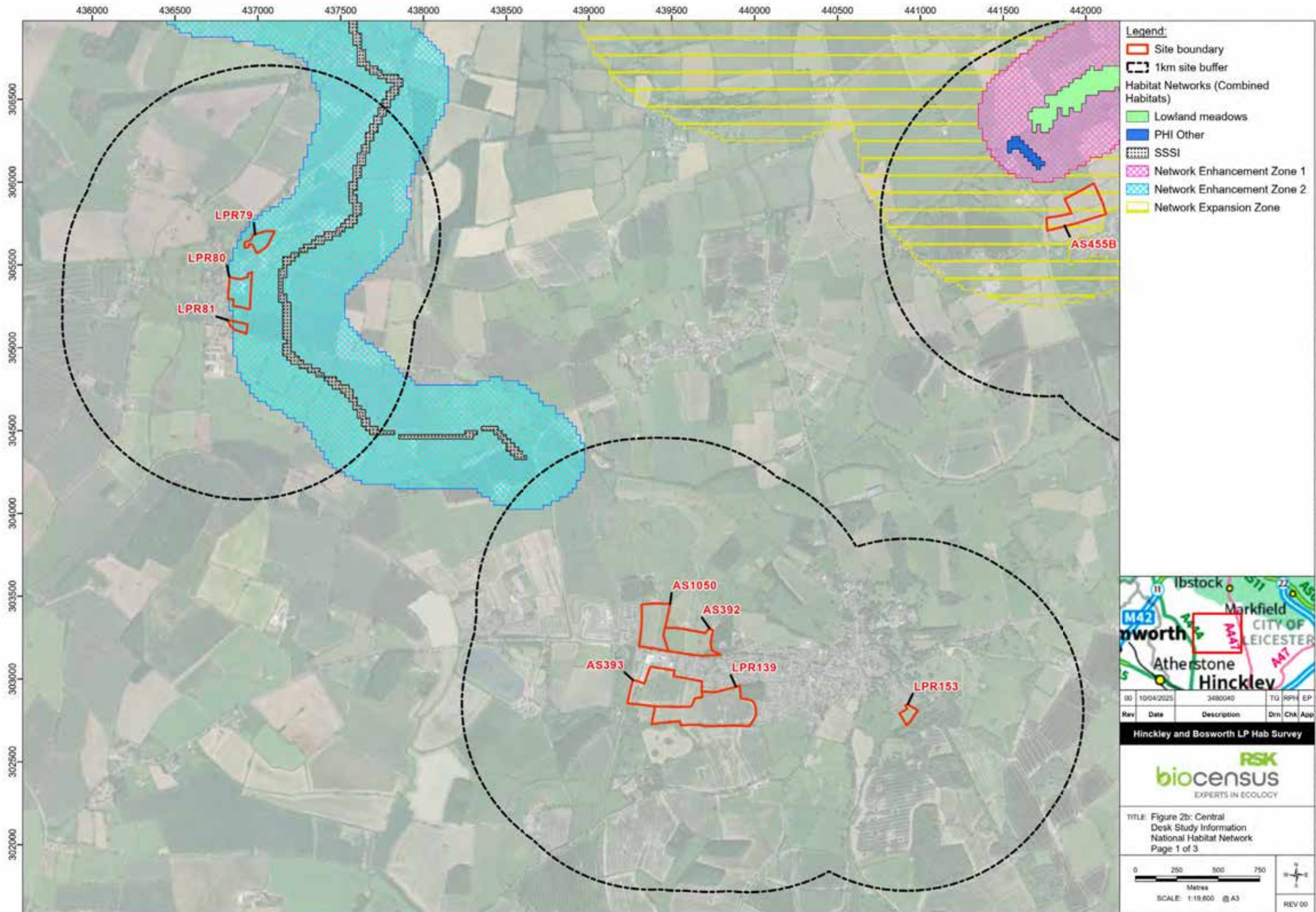


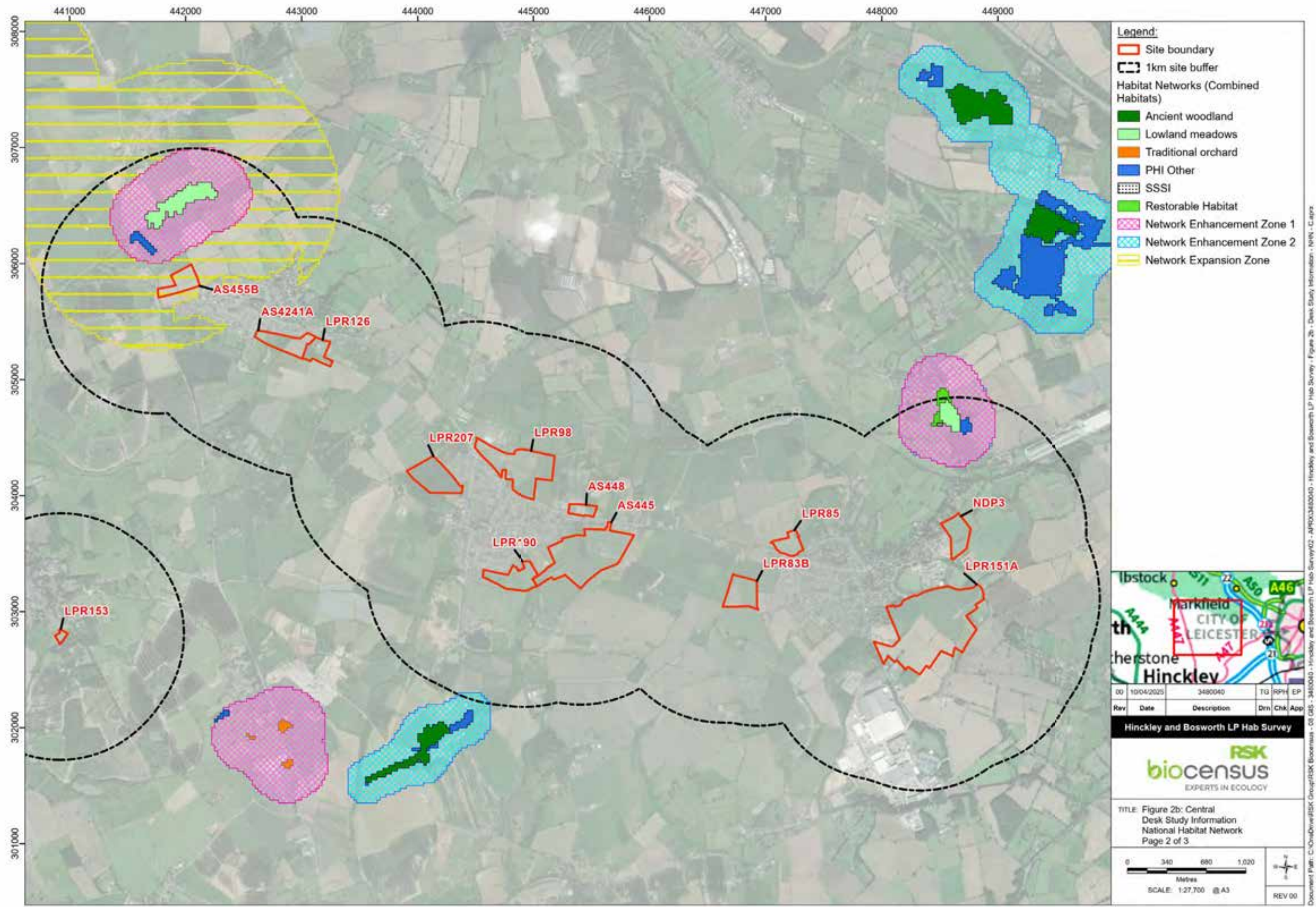
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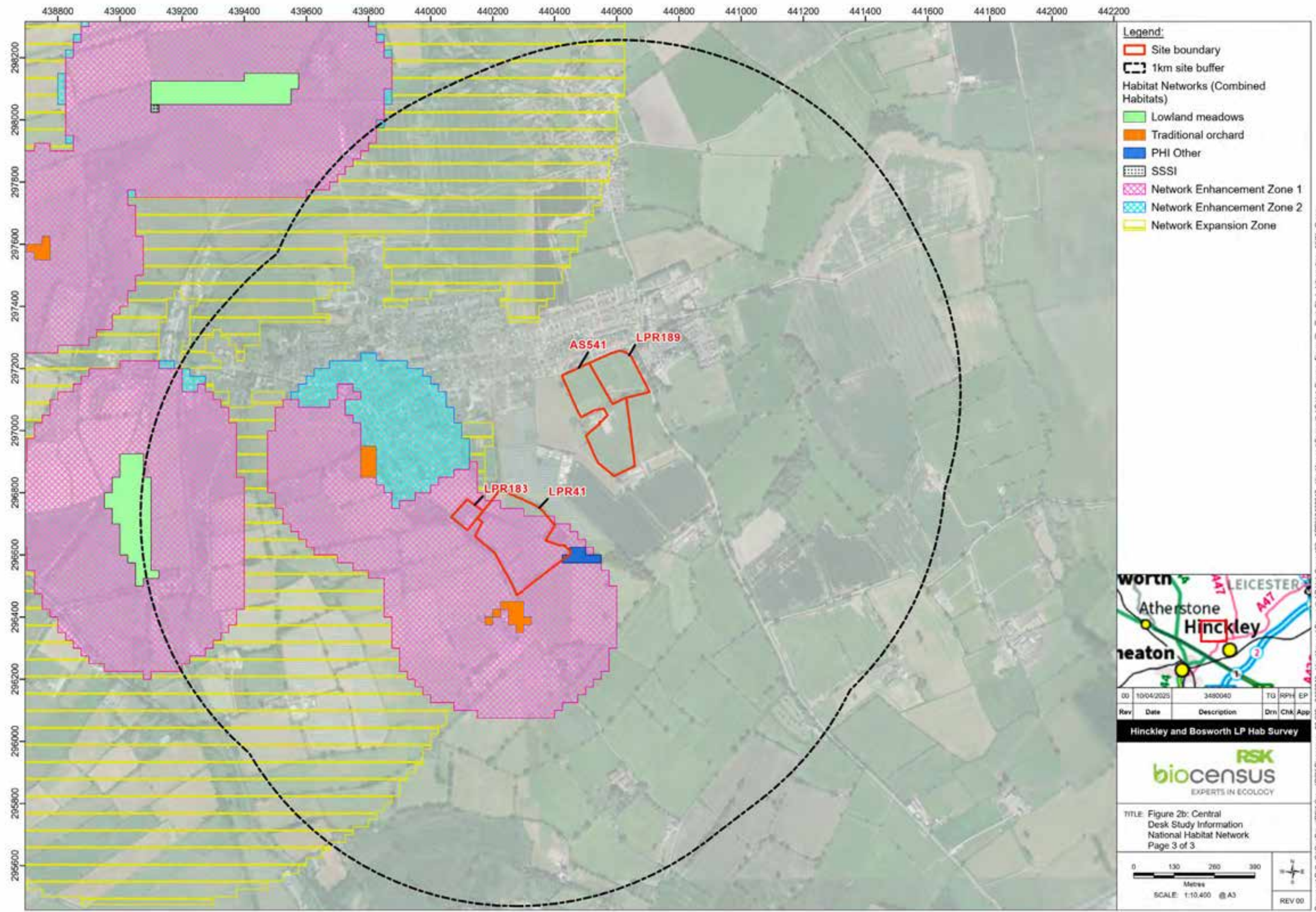
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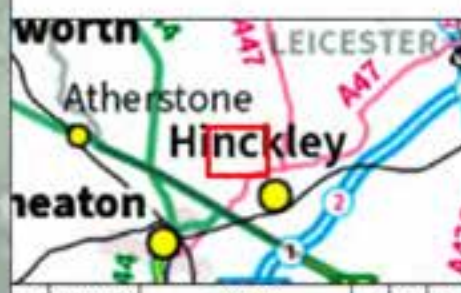
TITLE: Figure 2a: Central
Desk Study Information
NCAs, Flood Risk and Designated Sites
Page 3 of 3







- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - 1km site buffer
 - Habitat Networks (Combined Habitats)**
 - Lowland meadows
 - Traditional orchard
 - PHI Other
 - SSSI
 - Network Enhancement Zone 1
 - Network Enhancement Zone 2
 - Network Expansion Zone



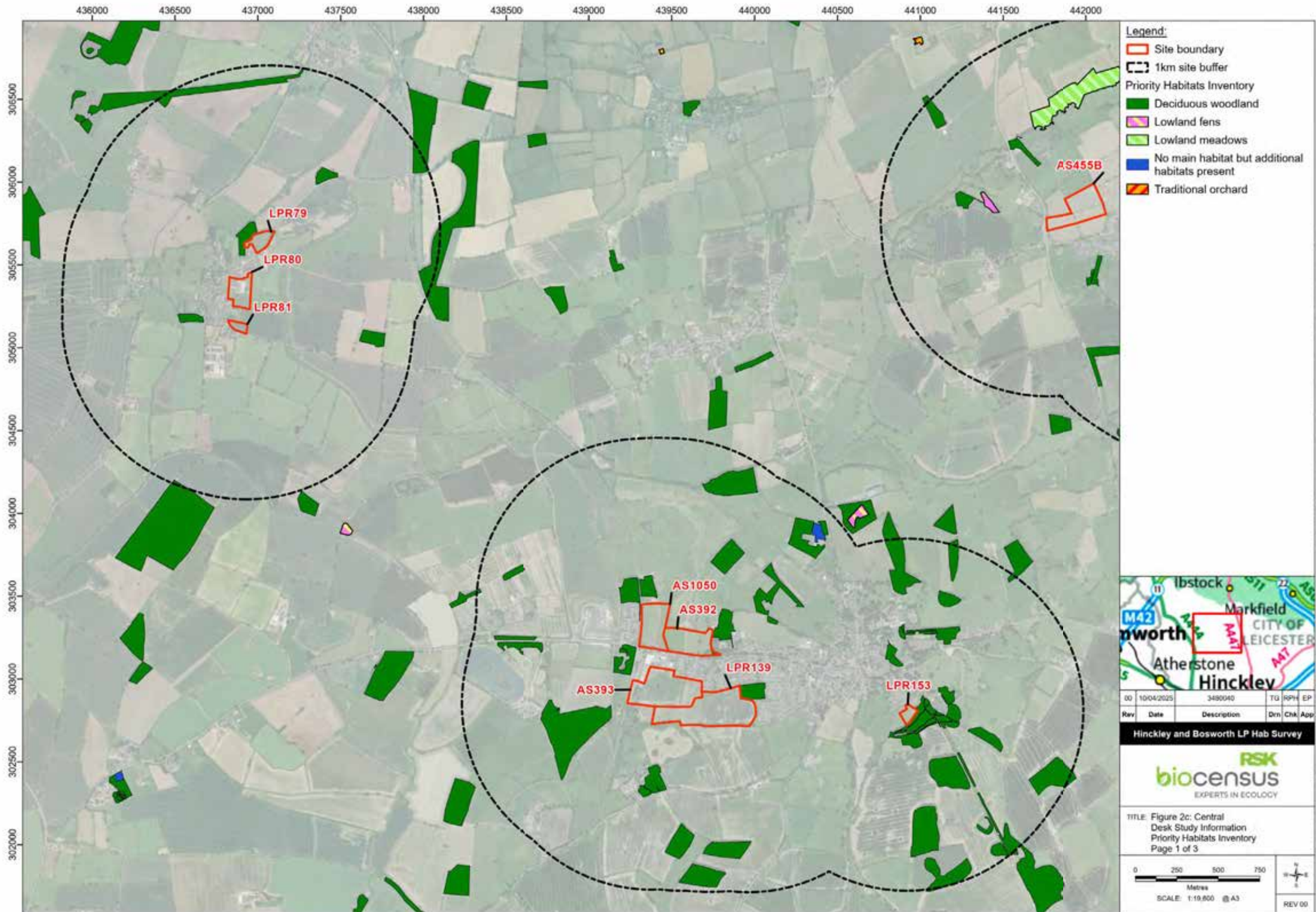
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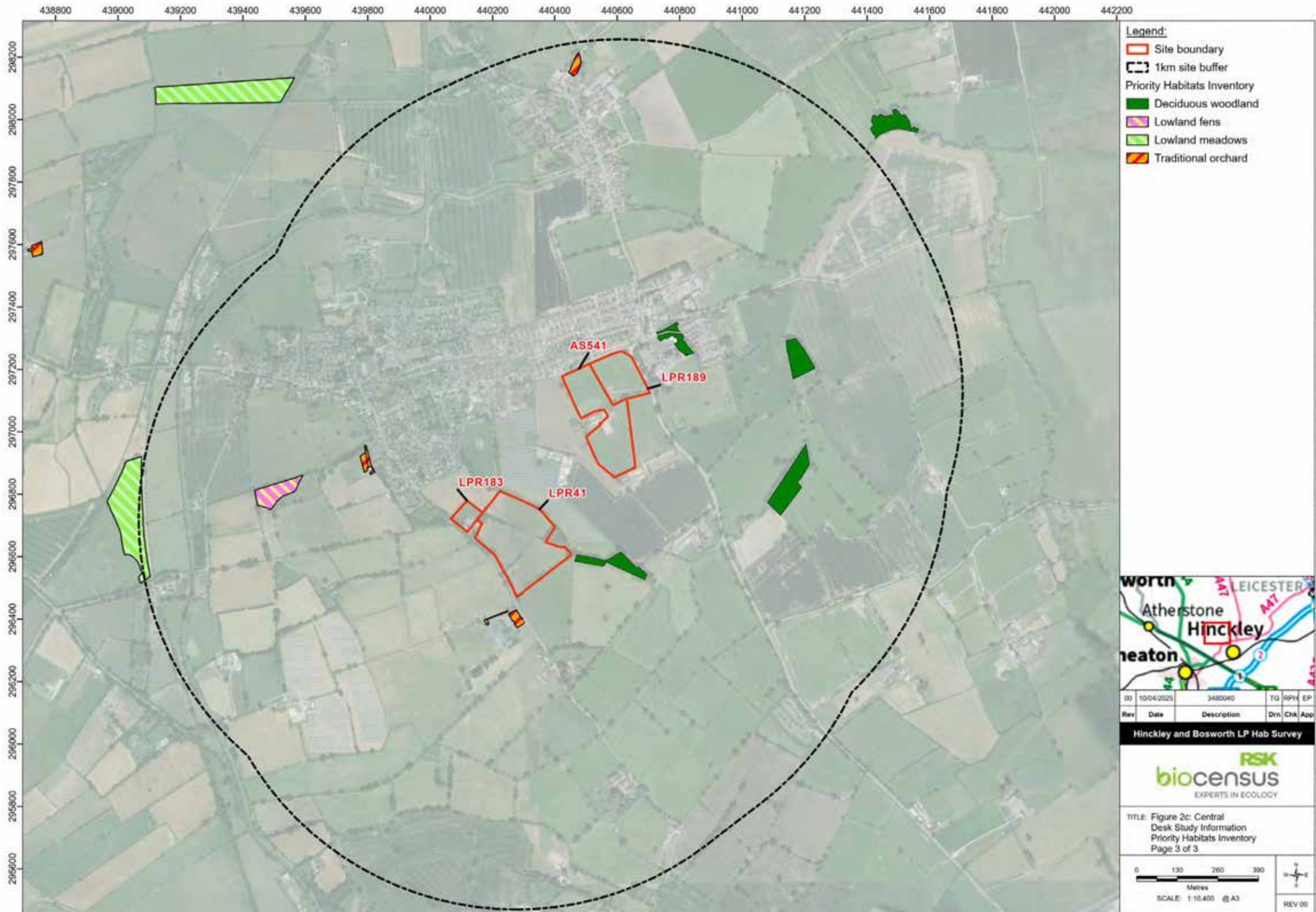
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TITLE: Figure 2b: Central
Desk Study Information
National Habitat Network
Page 3 of 3







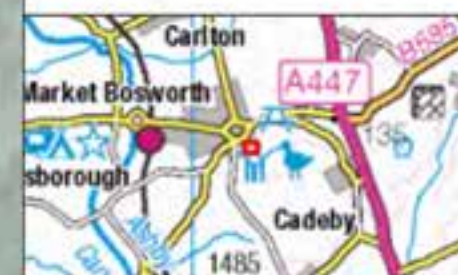






Legend:

- Site boundary
- UKHab Habitats
- Modified grassland

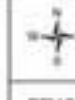
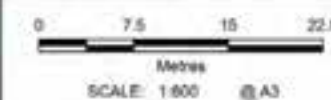


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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey



TITLE: Figure 3:
UKHab Habitats Map
Central
Page 3 of 12



REV 00

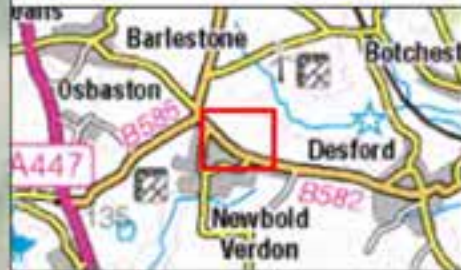








- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - UKHab Habitats
 - Cereal crops
 - Non-cereal crops
 - Other neutral grassland
 - Modified grassland
 - Mixed scrub
 - Developed land; sealed surface
 - Native hedgerow
 - Other native hedgerow
 - Species-rich native hedgerow
 - Scattered tree

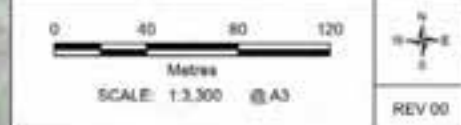


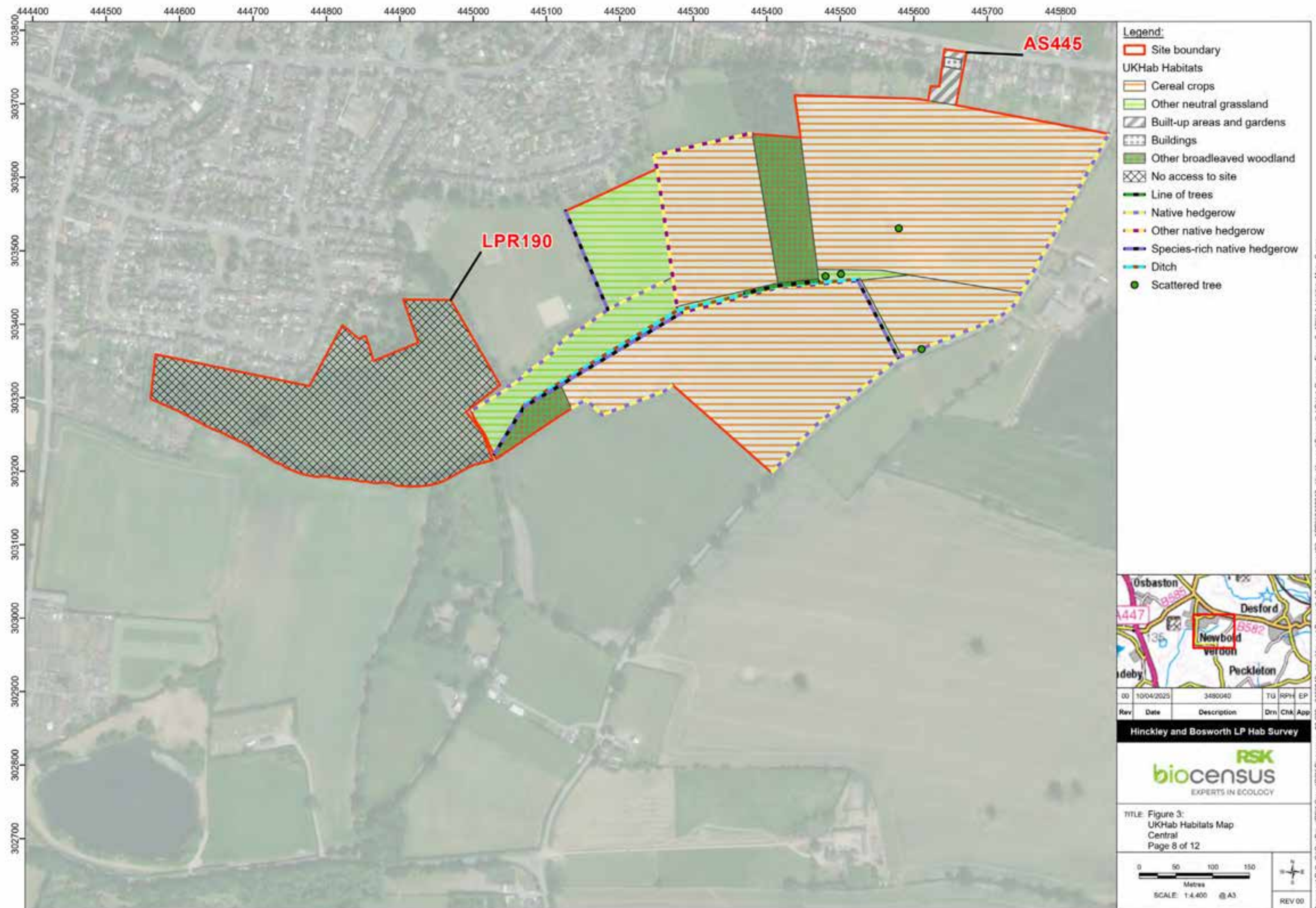
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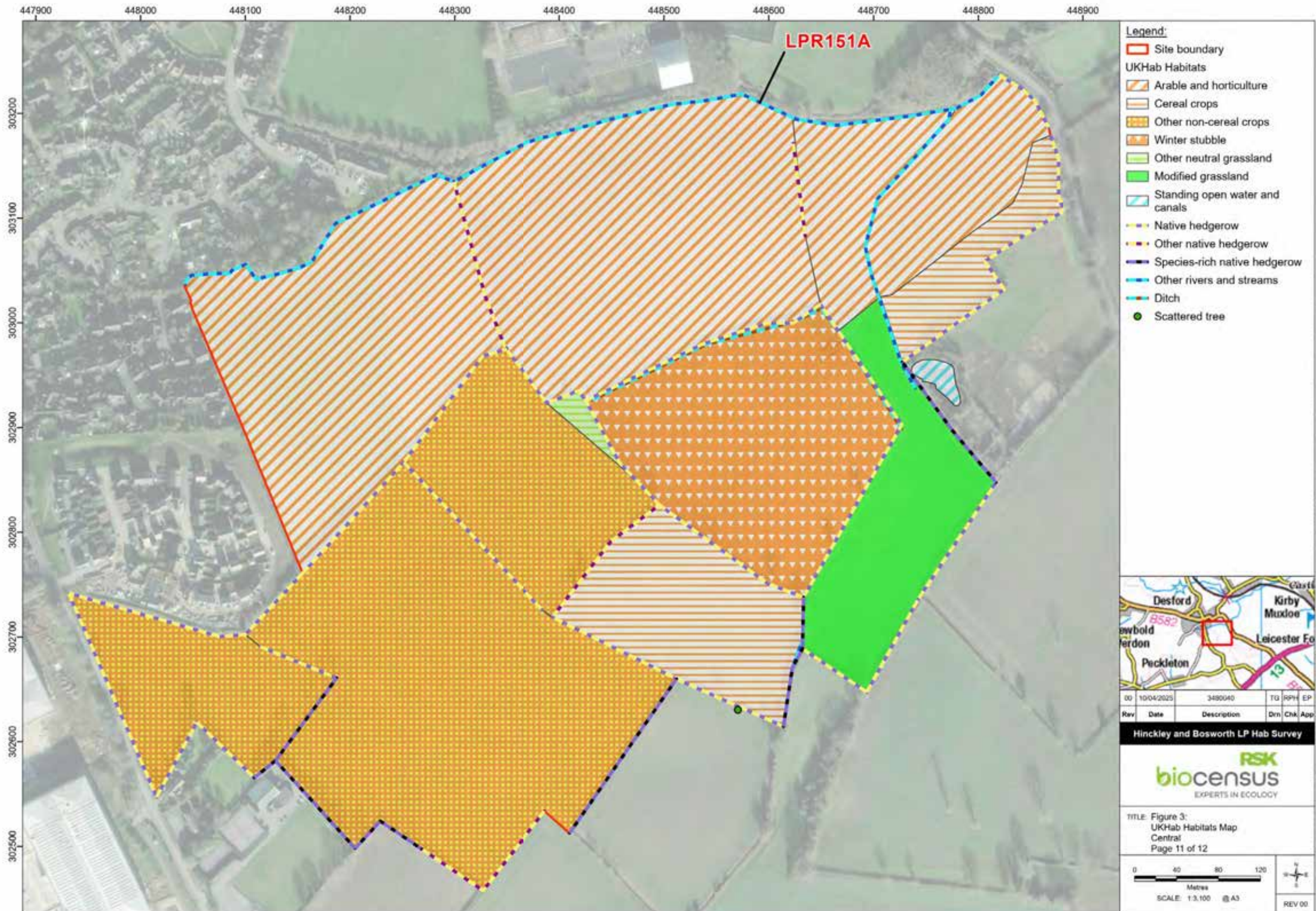
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UKHab Habitats Map
Central
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North East and Leicester

Figure 1 – Site location plan - North East and Leicester

Figure 2a - Desk Study - NCA, Flood Risk and Designated Sites - North East and Leicester

Figure 2b - Desk Study - National Habitat Network – North East and Leicester

Figure 2c - Desk Study - Priority Habitats Inventory – North East and Leicester

Figure 3 - UKHab Habitats Map – North East and Leicester





Legend:

Site boundary

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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

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EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

TITLE: Figure 1:
Site Location Plan
North East and Leicester
Page 2 of 7

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Metres
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REV 00



Legend:
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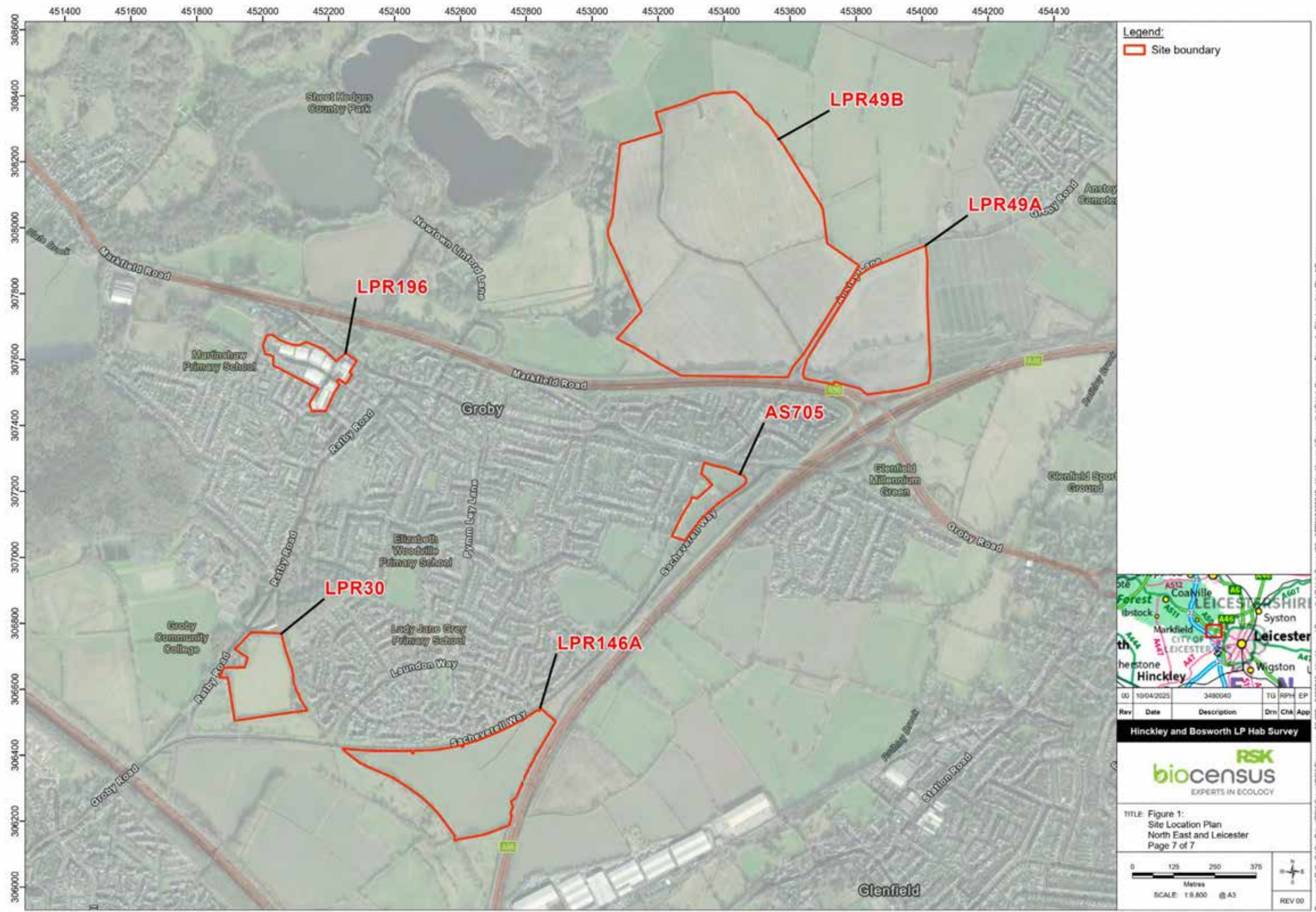
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

RSK biocensus
EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

TITLE: Figure 1:
Site Location Plan
North East and Leicester
Page 5 of 7

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Metres
SCALE: 1:5,300 @ A3

REV 00



Legend:
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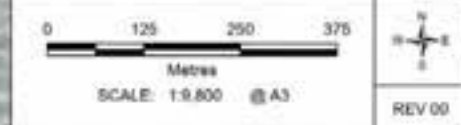


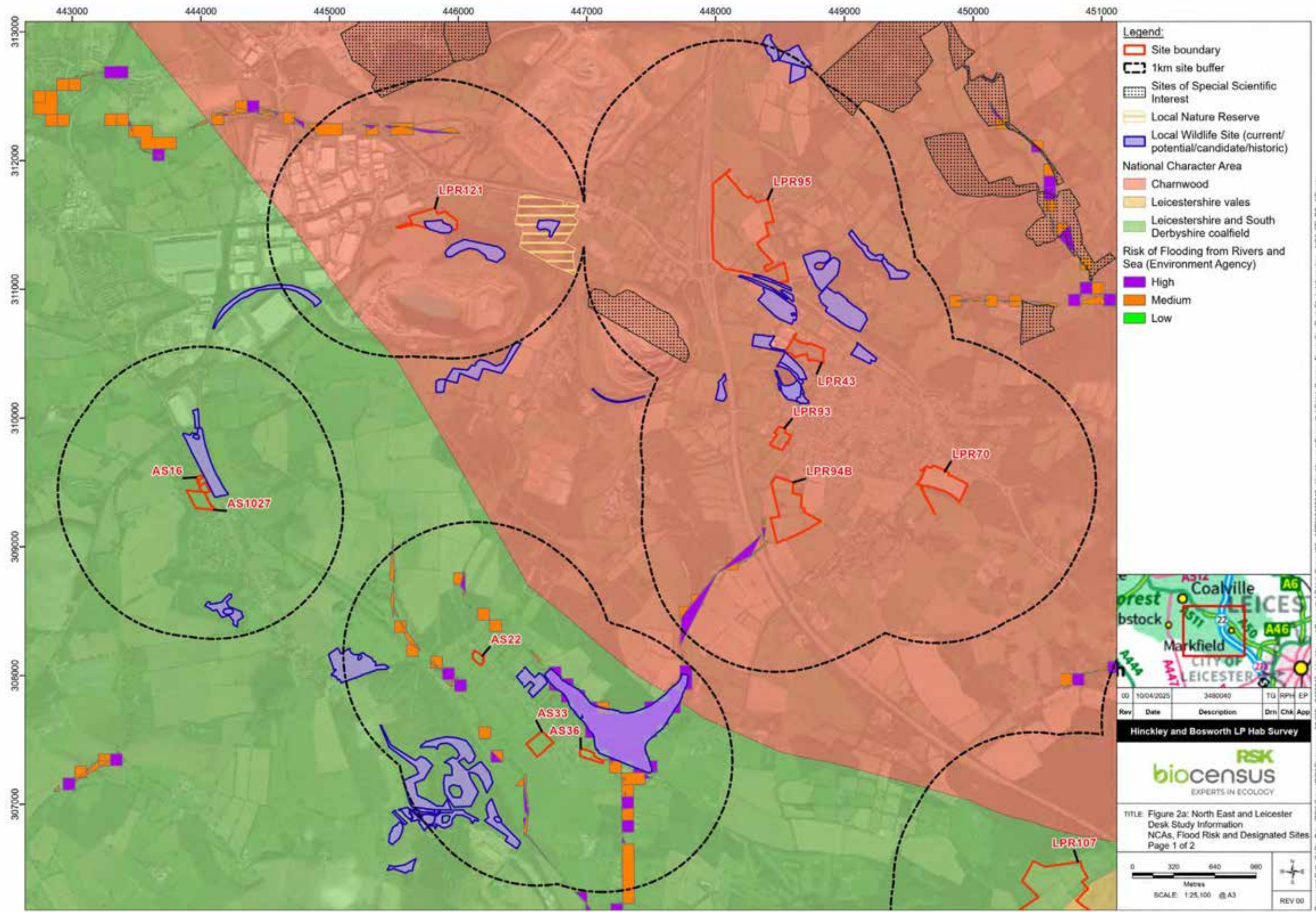
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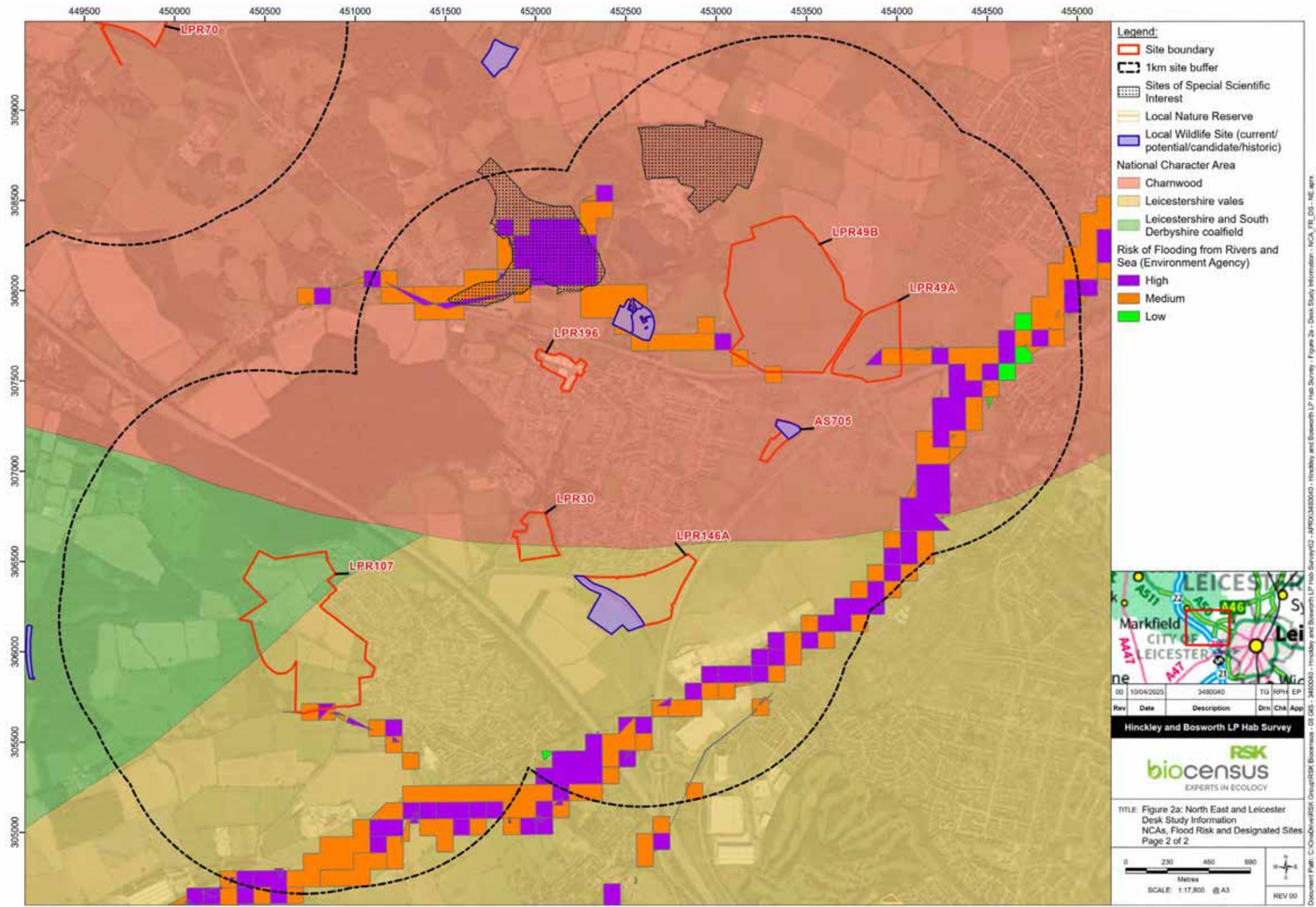
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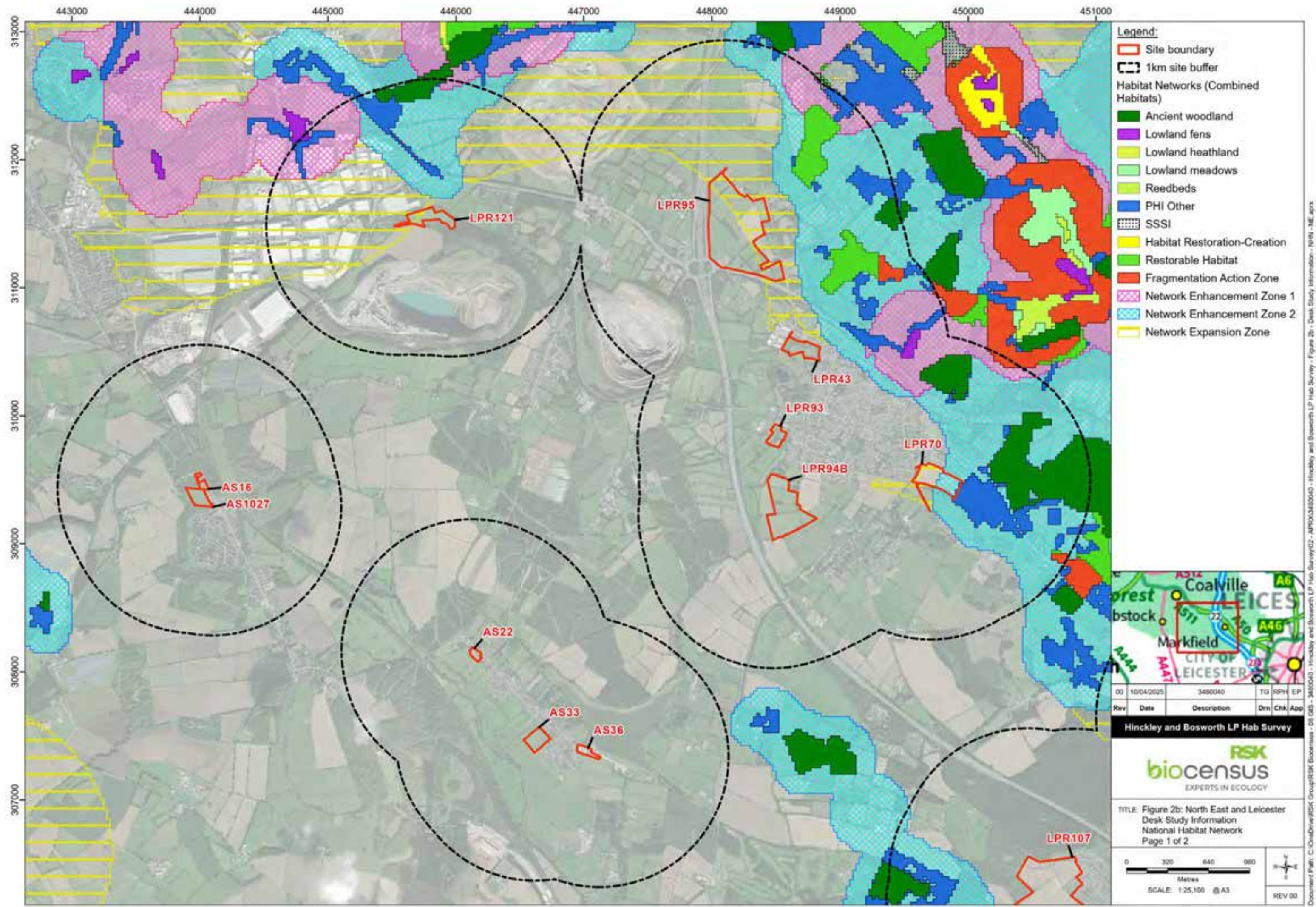


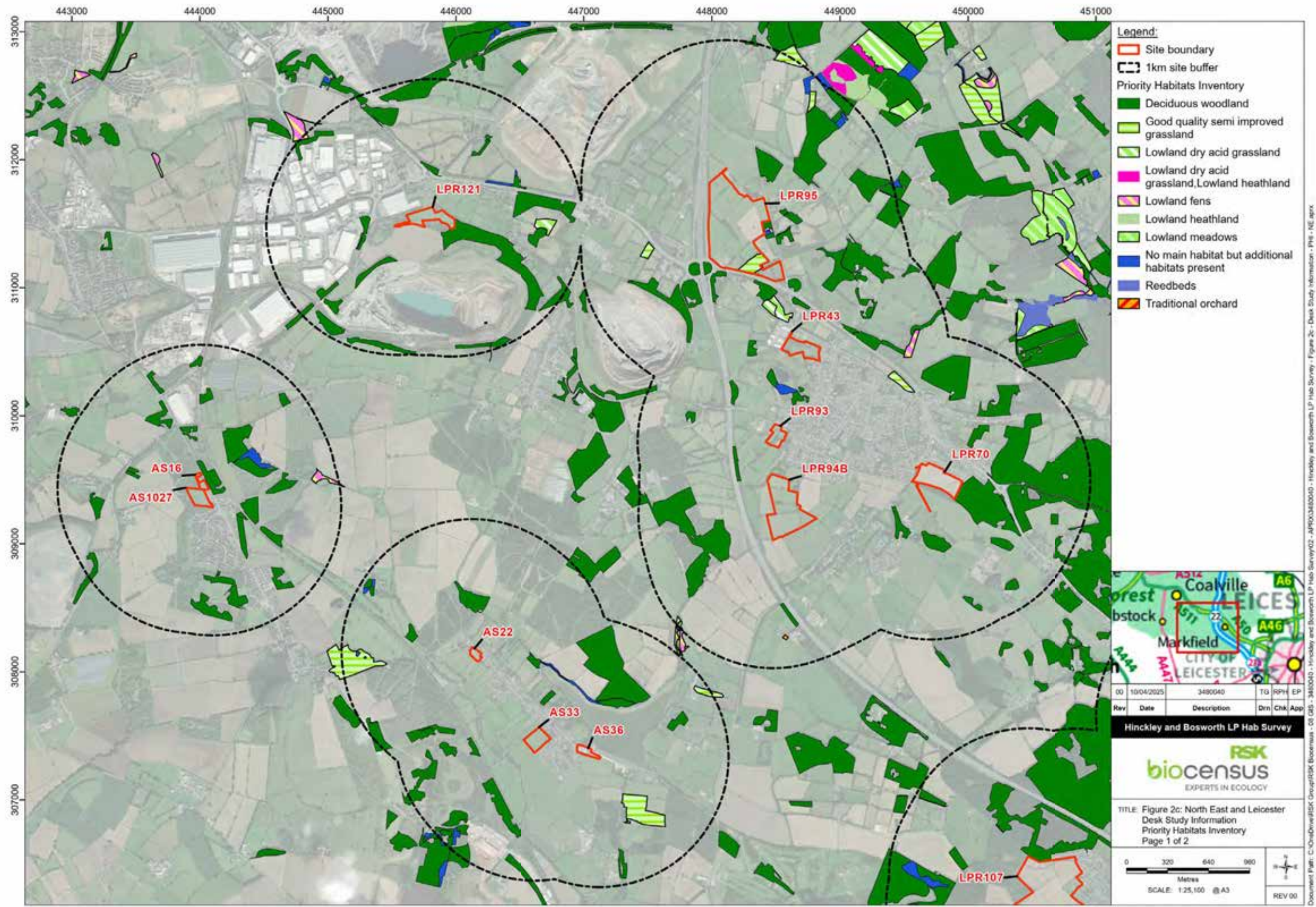
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Site Location Plan
North East and Leicester
Page 7 of 7

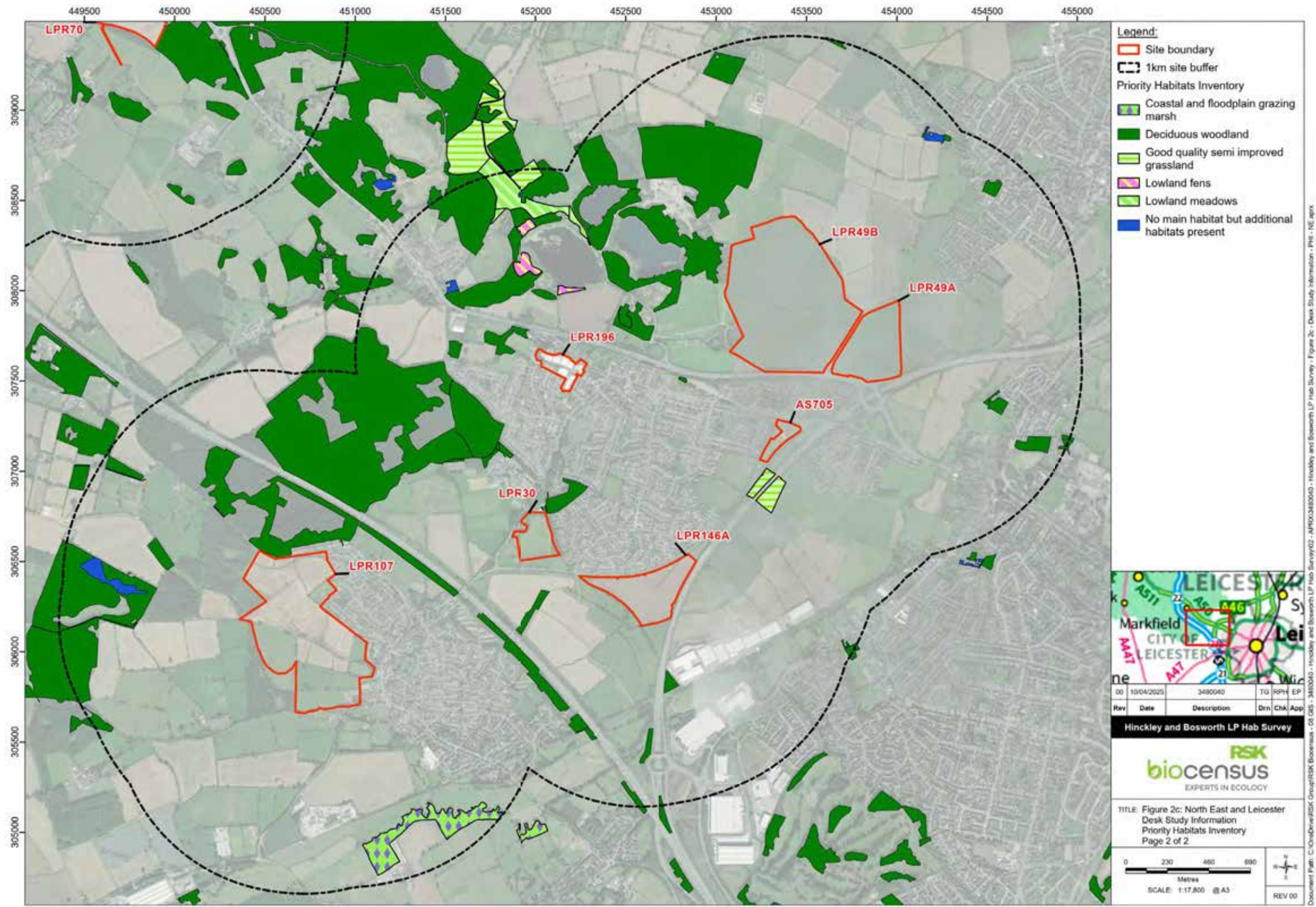












- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - 1km site buffer
 - Priority Habitats Inventory**
 - Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
 - Deciduous woodland
 - Good quality semi improved grassland
 - Lowland fens
 - Lowland meadows
 - No main habitat but additional habitats present



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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey



TITLE: Figure 2c: North East and Leicester
Desk Study Information
Priority Habitats Inventory
Page 2 of 2









- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - UKHab Habitats**
 - Other neutral grassland
 - Mixed scrub
 - Built-up areas and gardens
 - Native hedgerow

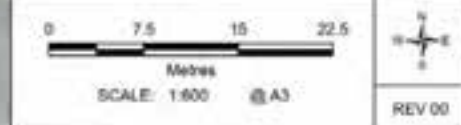


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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey



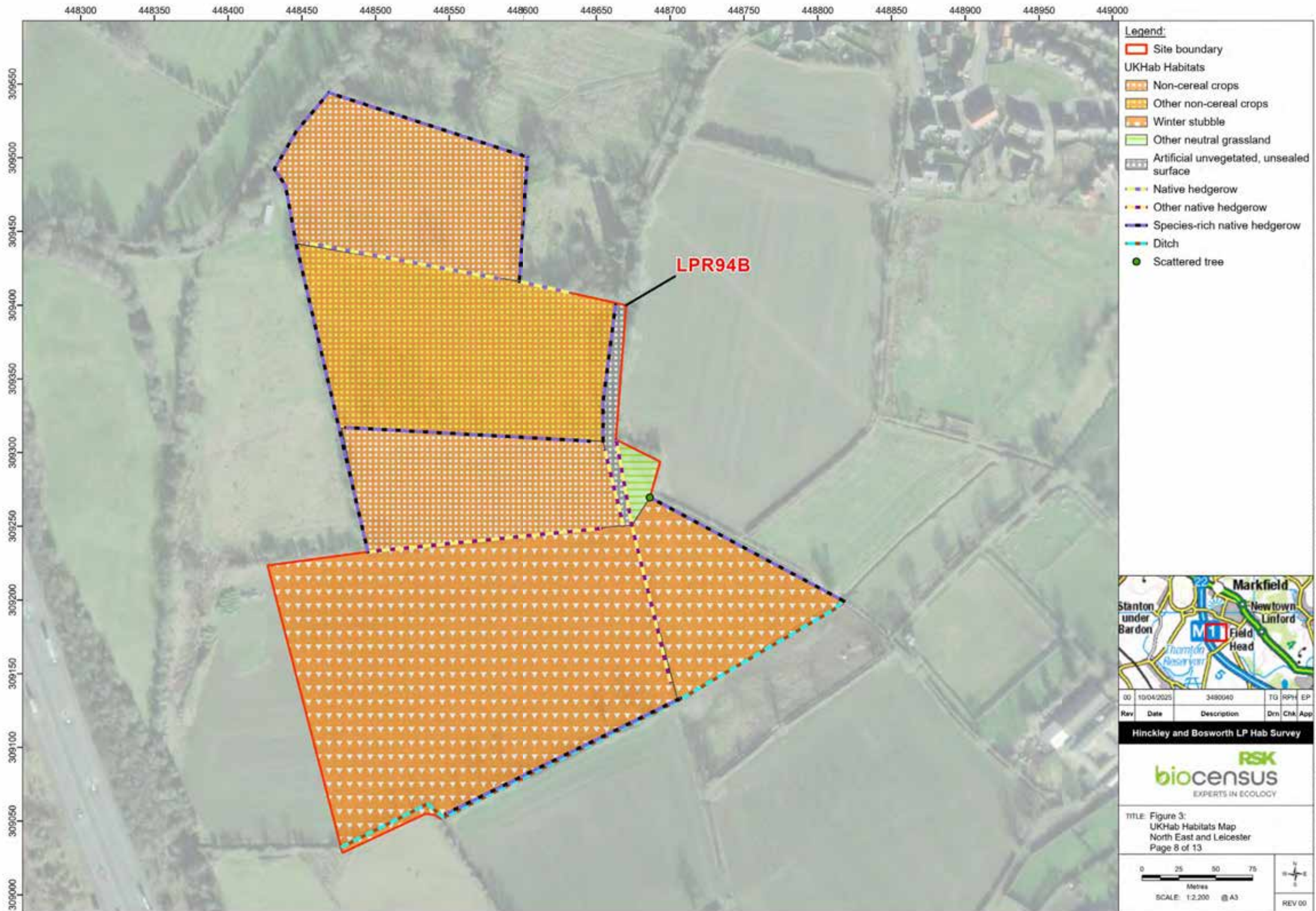
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UKHab Habitats Map
North East and Leicester
Page 3 of 13





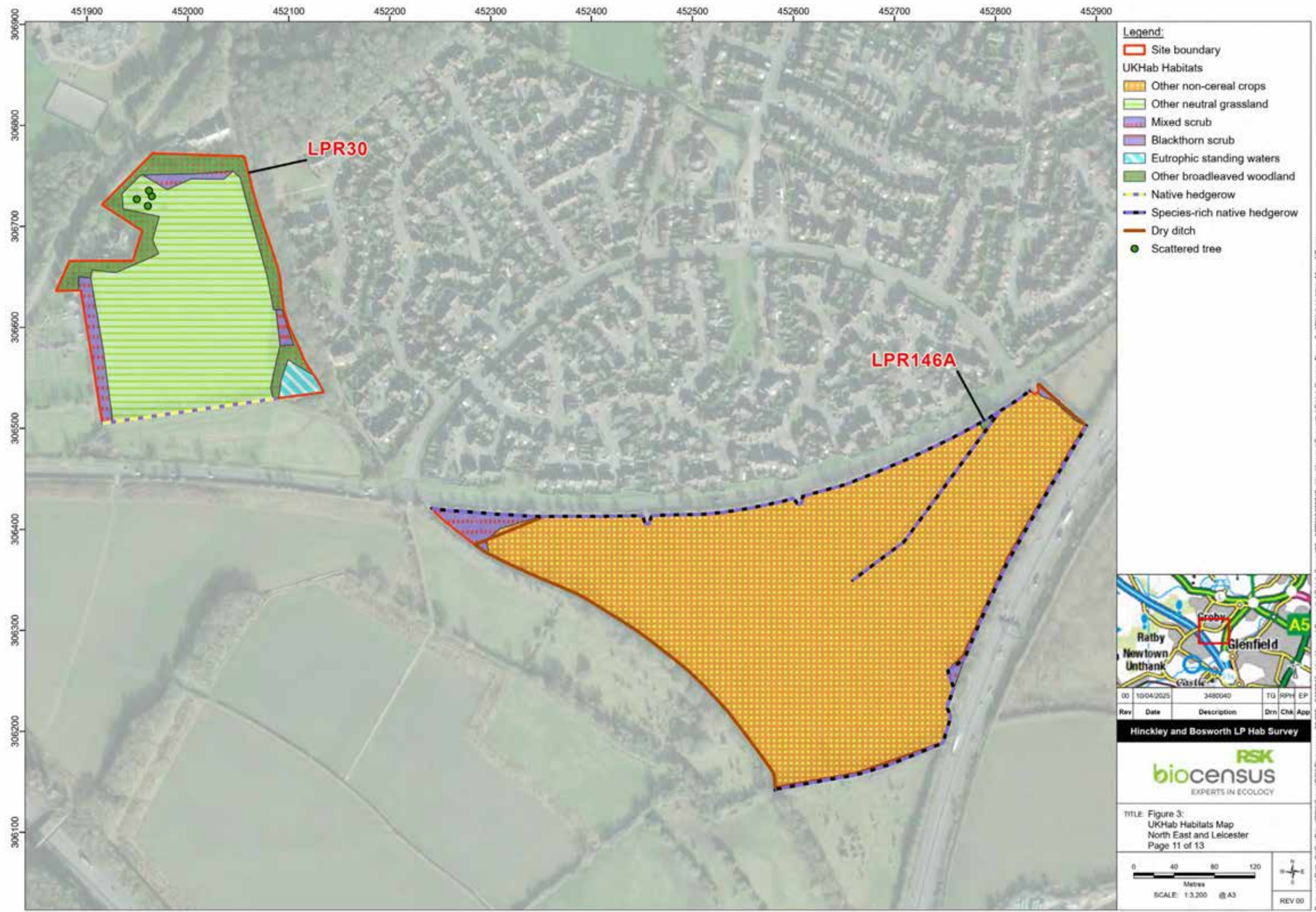
















Urban South

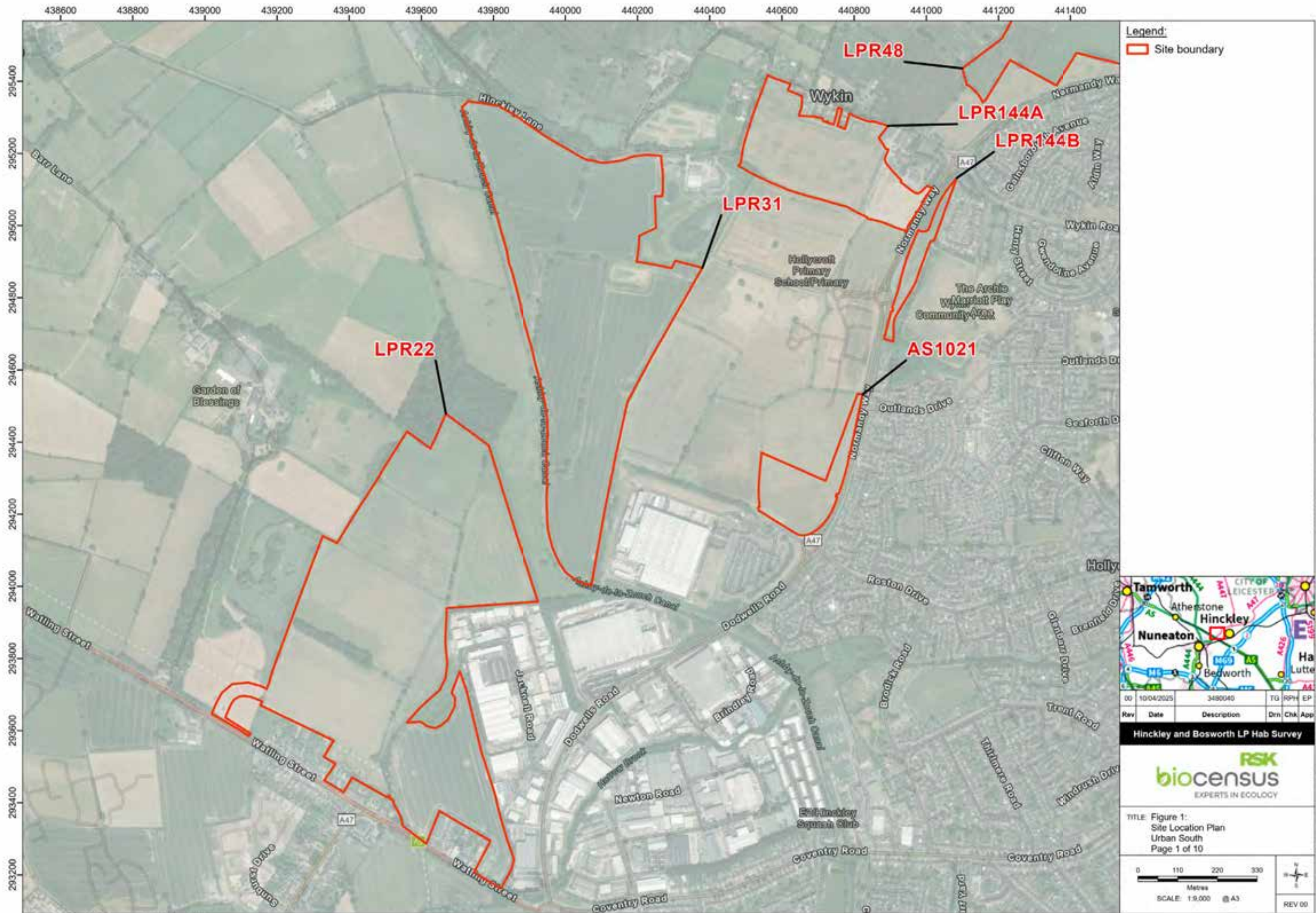
Figure 1 – Site location plan – Urban South

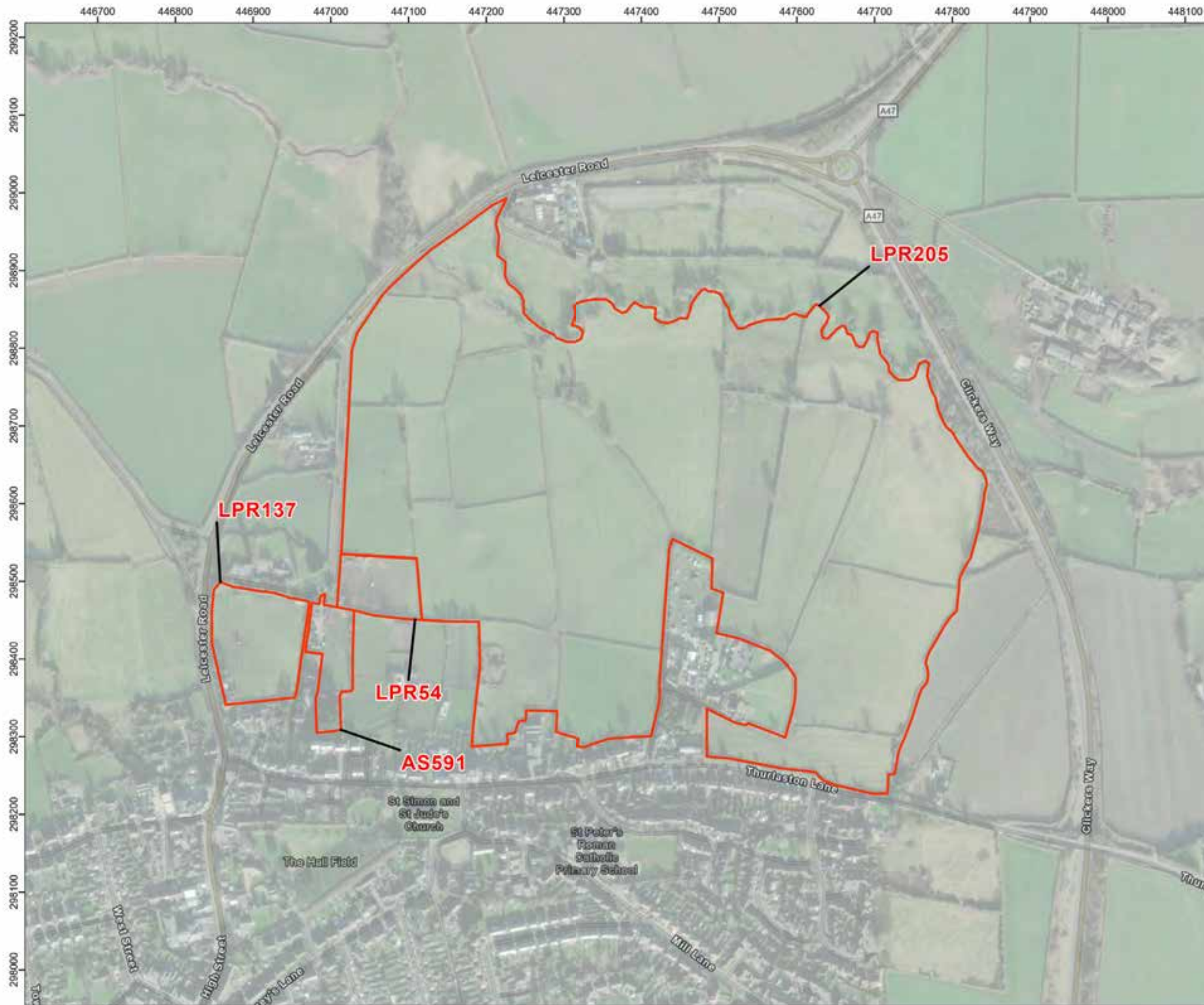
Figure 2a - Desk Study - NCA, Flood Risk and Designated Sites - Urban South

Figure 2b - Desk Study - National Habitat Network – Urban South

Figure 2c - Desk Study - Priority Habitats Inventory – Urban South

Figure 3 - UKHab Habitats Map – Urban South





Legend:

Site boundary

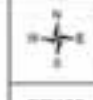
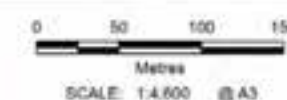


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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

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biocensus
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TITLE: Figure 1:
Site Location Plan
Urban South
Page 4 of 10



REV 00





Legend:
 Site boundary



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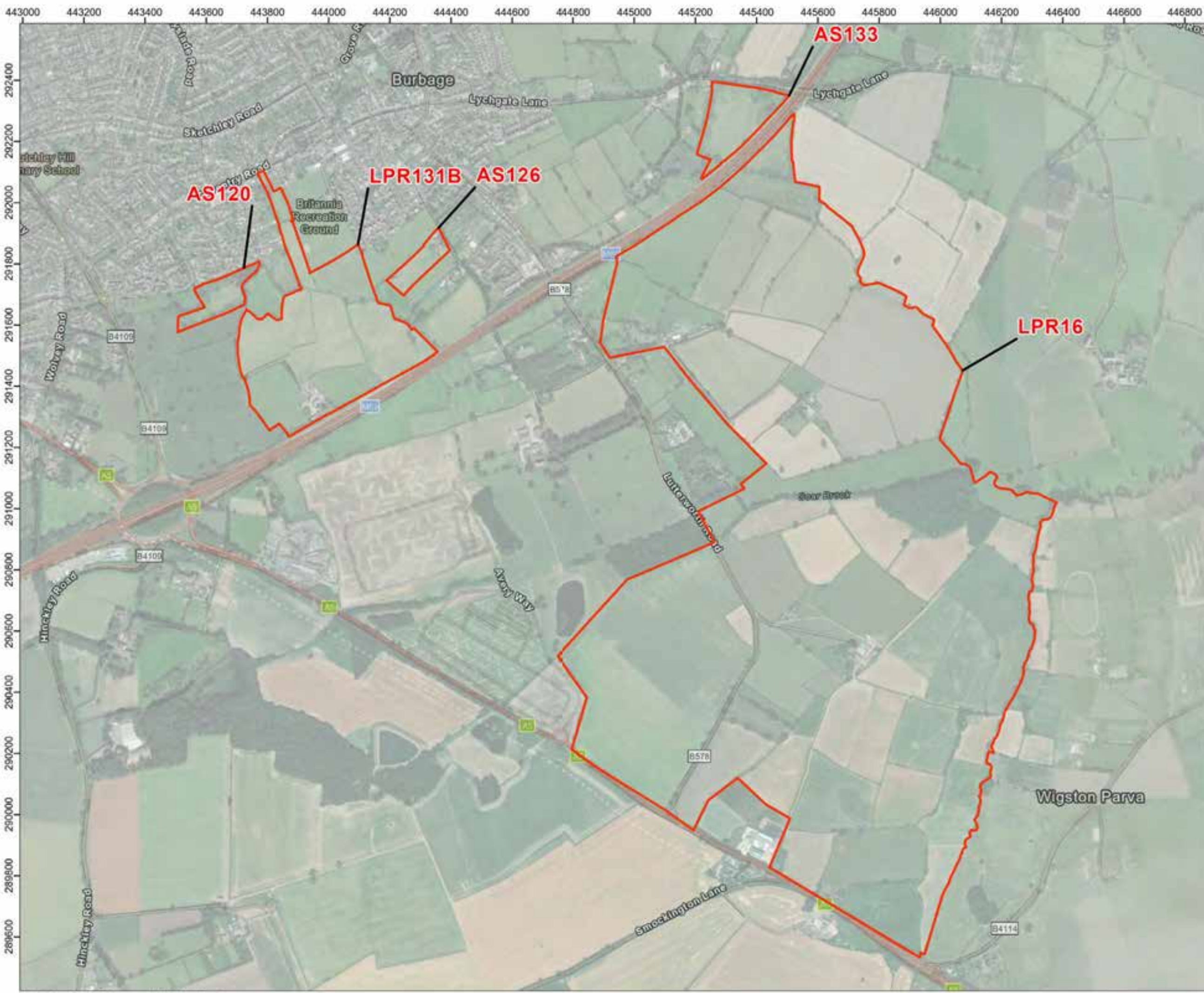
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

RSK
biocensus
 EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY


TITLE: Figure 1:
 Site Location Plan
 Urban South
 Page 9 of 10



REV 00



Legend:
Site boundary



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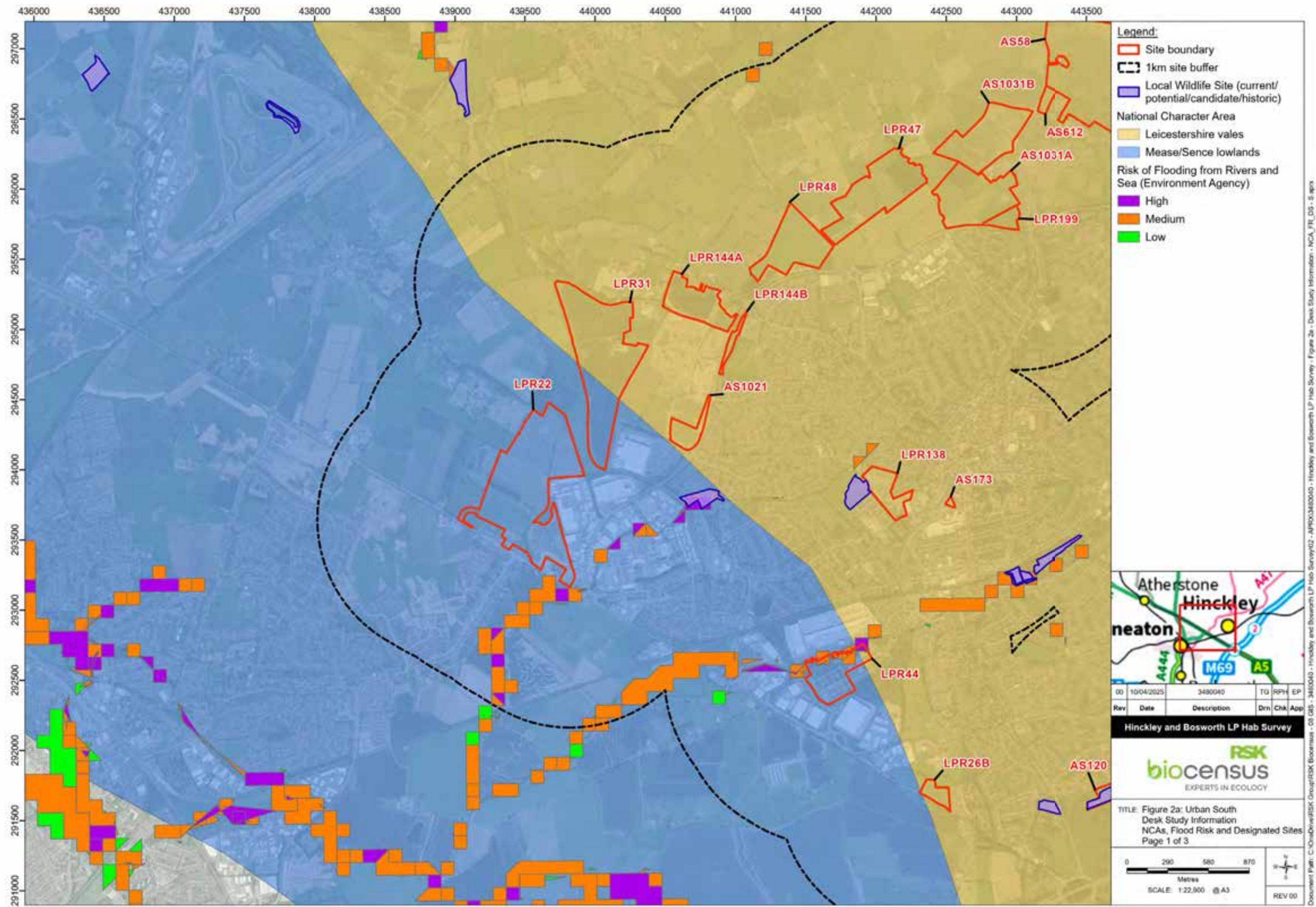
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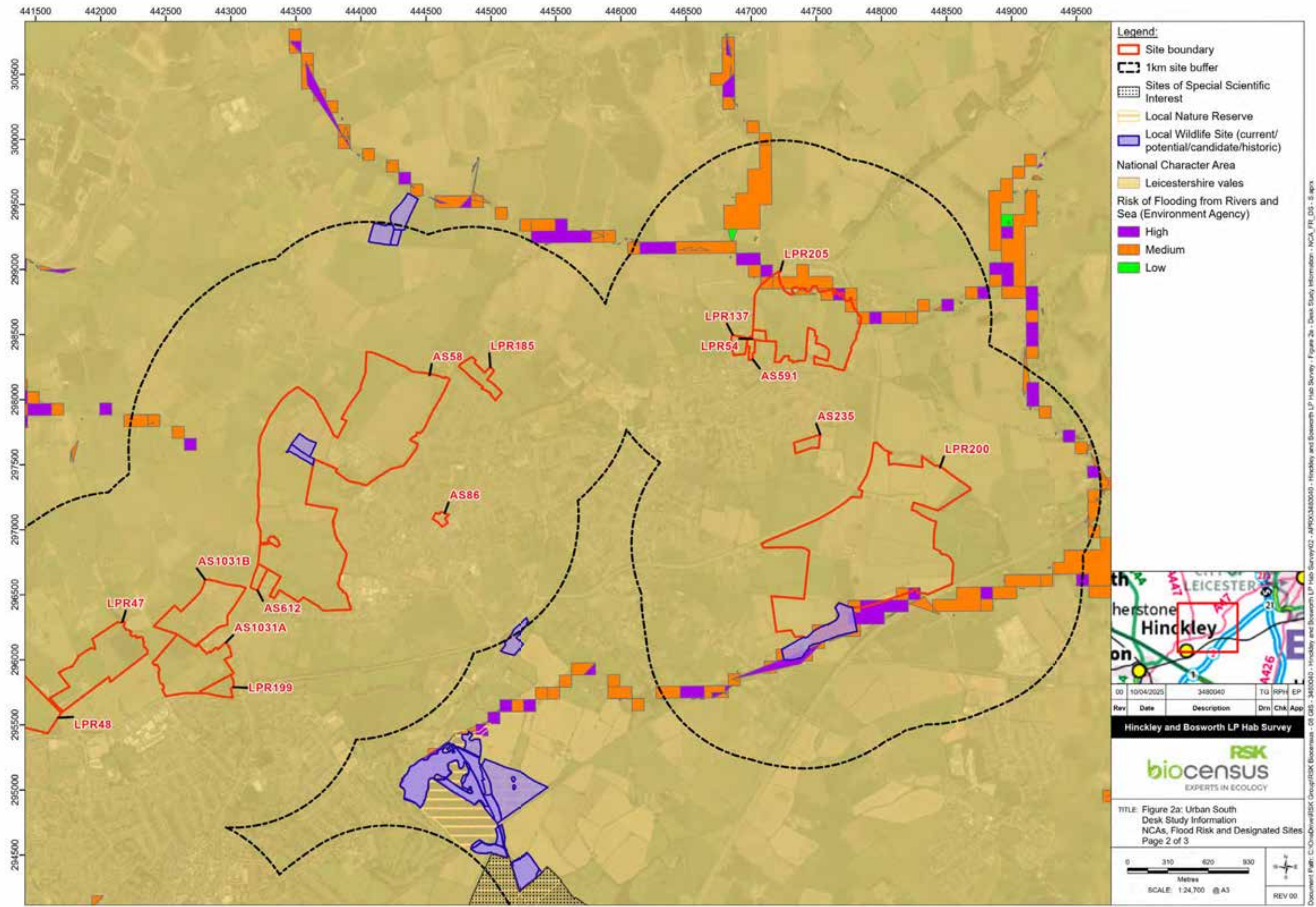
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EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

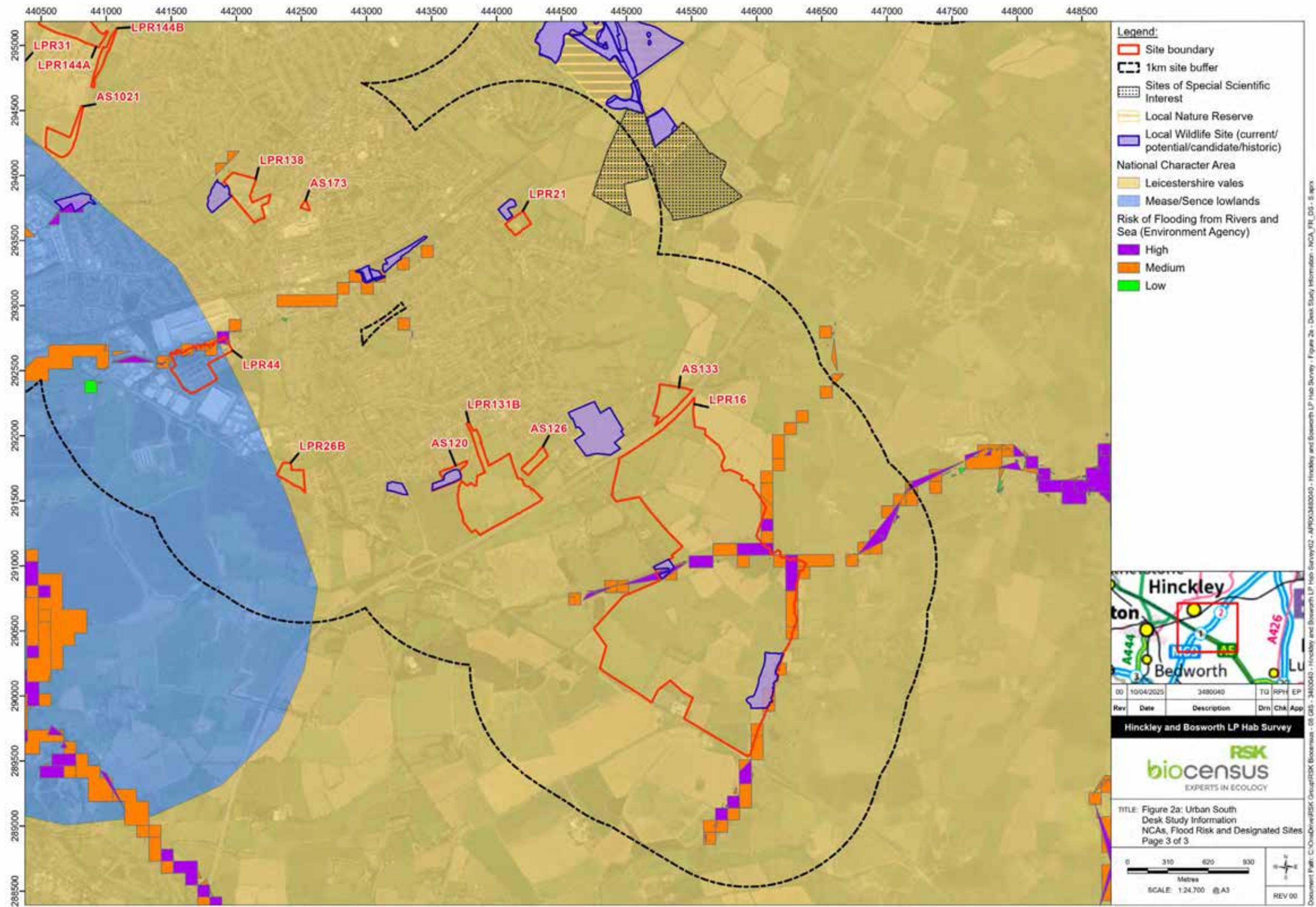
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Site Location Plan
Urban South
Page 10 of 10

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REV 00







- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - 1km site buffer
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest
 - Local Nature Reserve
 - Local Wildlife Site (current/potential/candidate/historic)
 - National Character Area
 - Leicestershire vales
 - Mease/Sence lowlands
 - Risk of Flooding from Rivers and Sea (Environment Agency)
 - High
 - Medium
 - Low



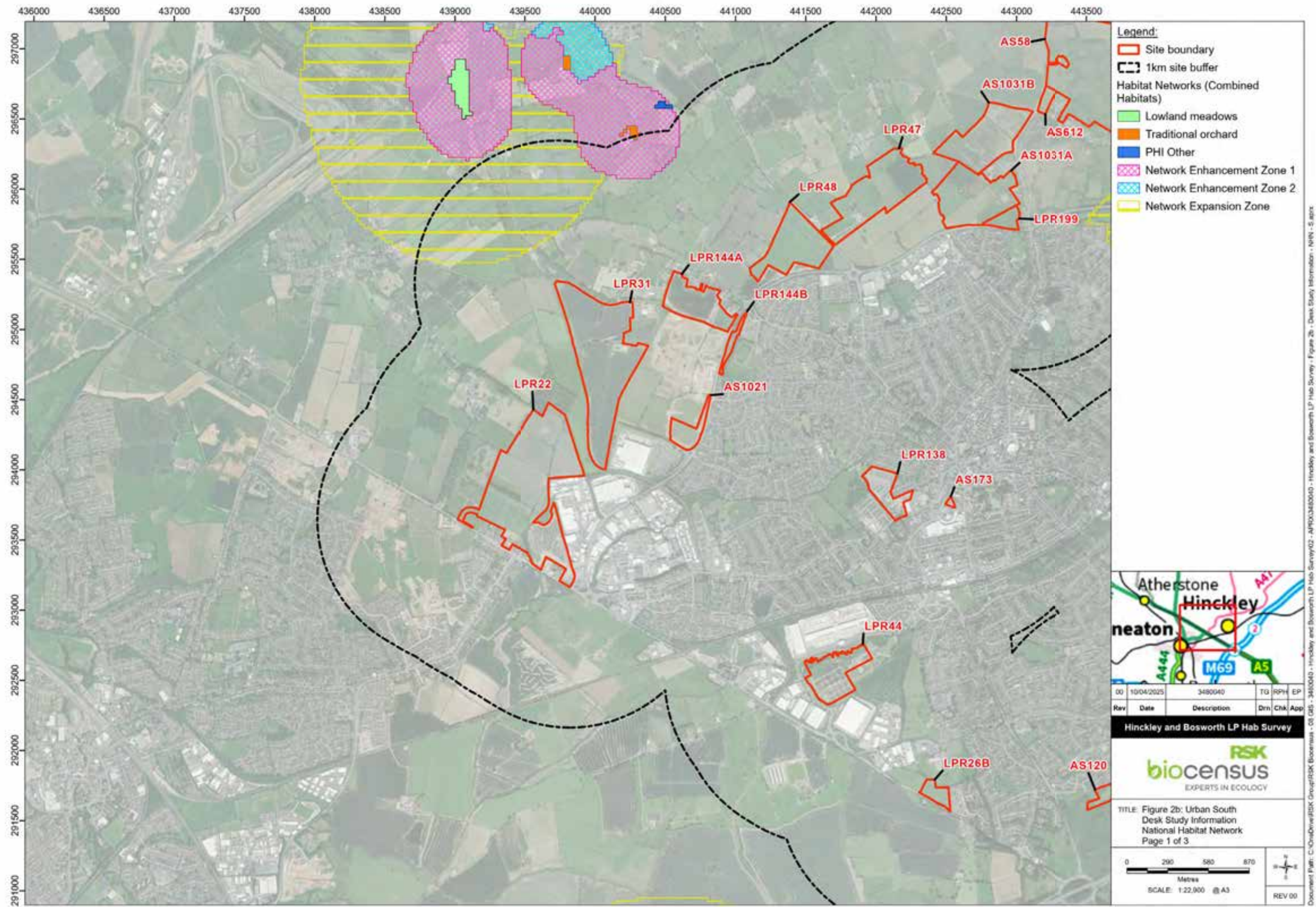
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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey



TITLE: Figure 2a: Urban South
Desk Study Information
NCAs, Flood Risk and Designated Sites
Page 3 of 3





- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - 1km site buffer
 - Habitat Networks (Combined Habitats)
 - Lowland meadows
 - Traditional orchard
 - PHI Other
 - Network Enhancement Zone 1
 - Network Enhancement Zone 2
 - Network Expansion Zone



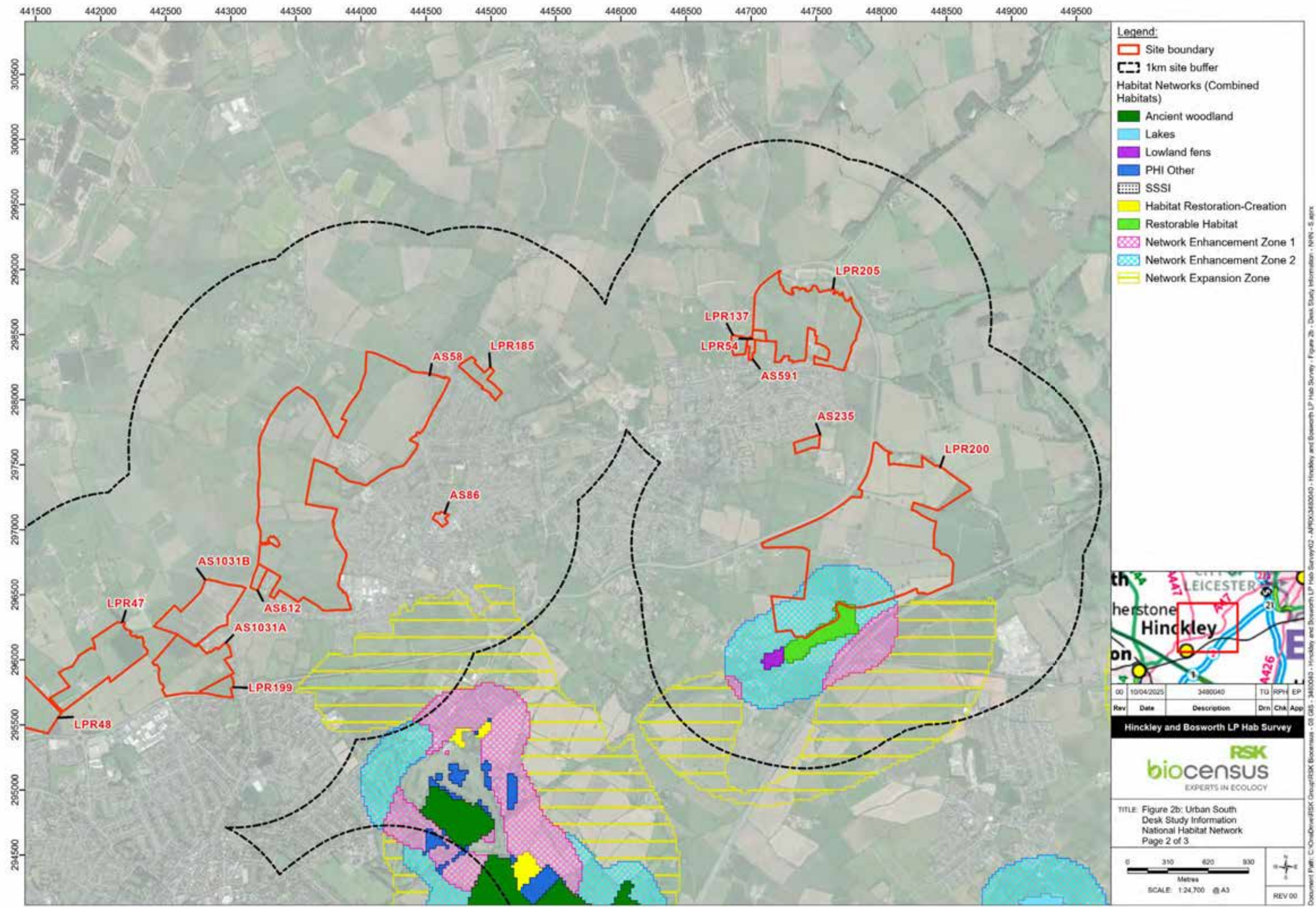
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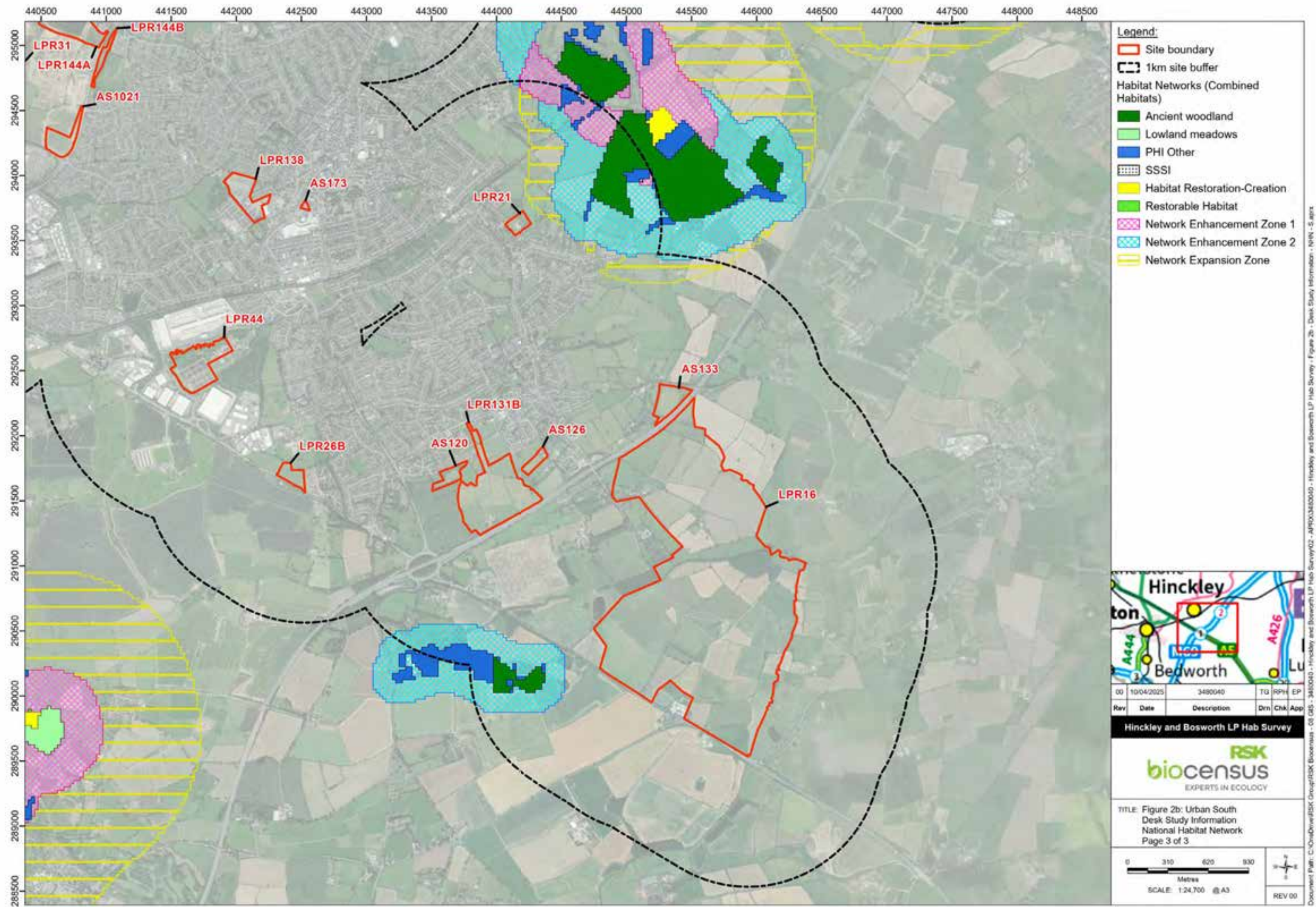
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey



TITLE: Figure 2b: Urban South
Desk Study Information
National Habitat Network
Page 1 of 3







- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - 1km site buffer
 - Habitat Networks (Combined Habitats)
 - Ancient woodland
 - Lowland meadows
 - PHI Other
 - SSSI
 - Habitat Restoration-Creation
 - Restorable Habitat
 - Network Enhancement Zone 1
 - Network Enhancement Zone 2
 - Network Expansion Zone



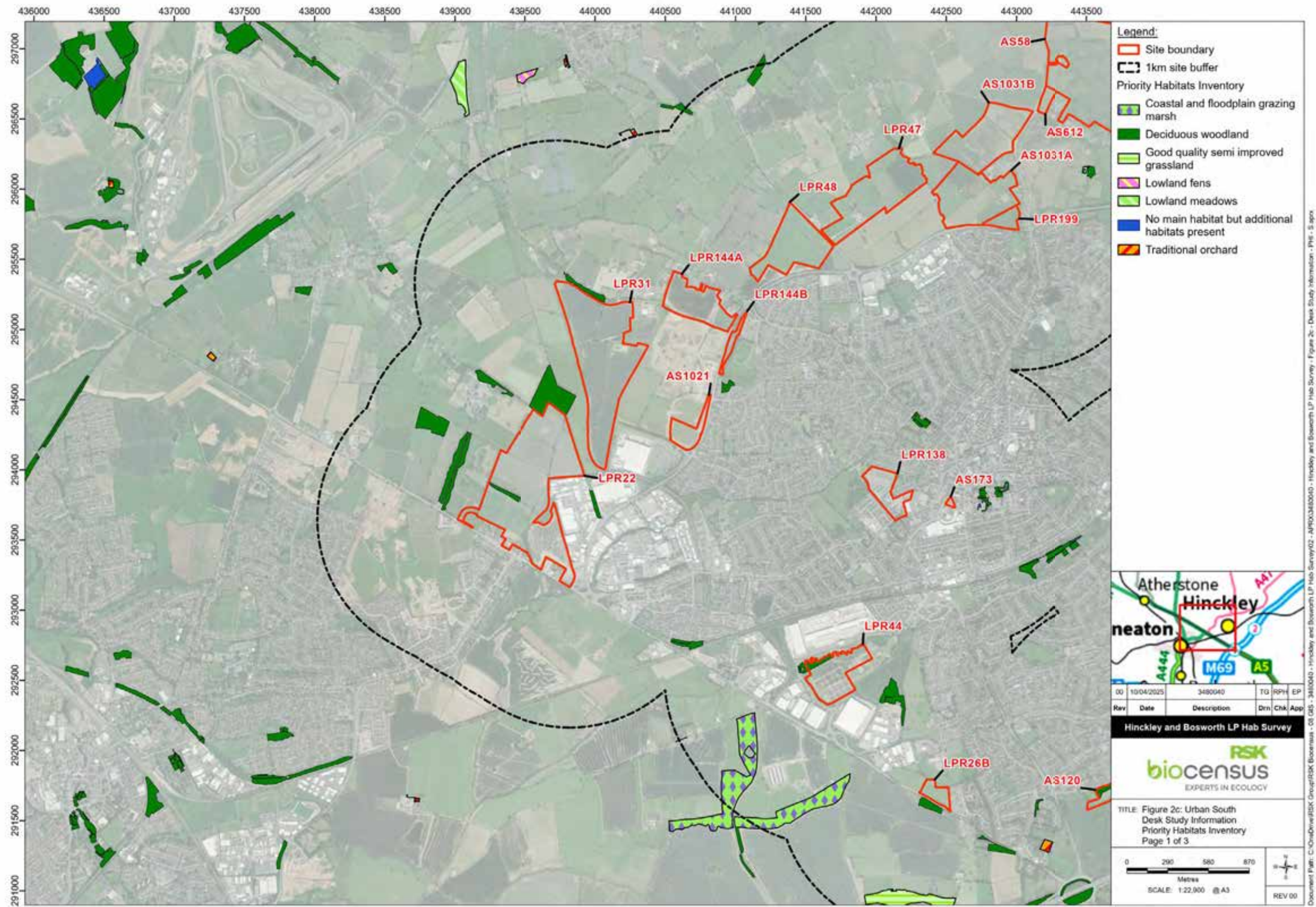
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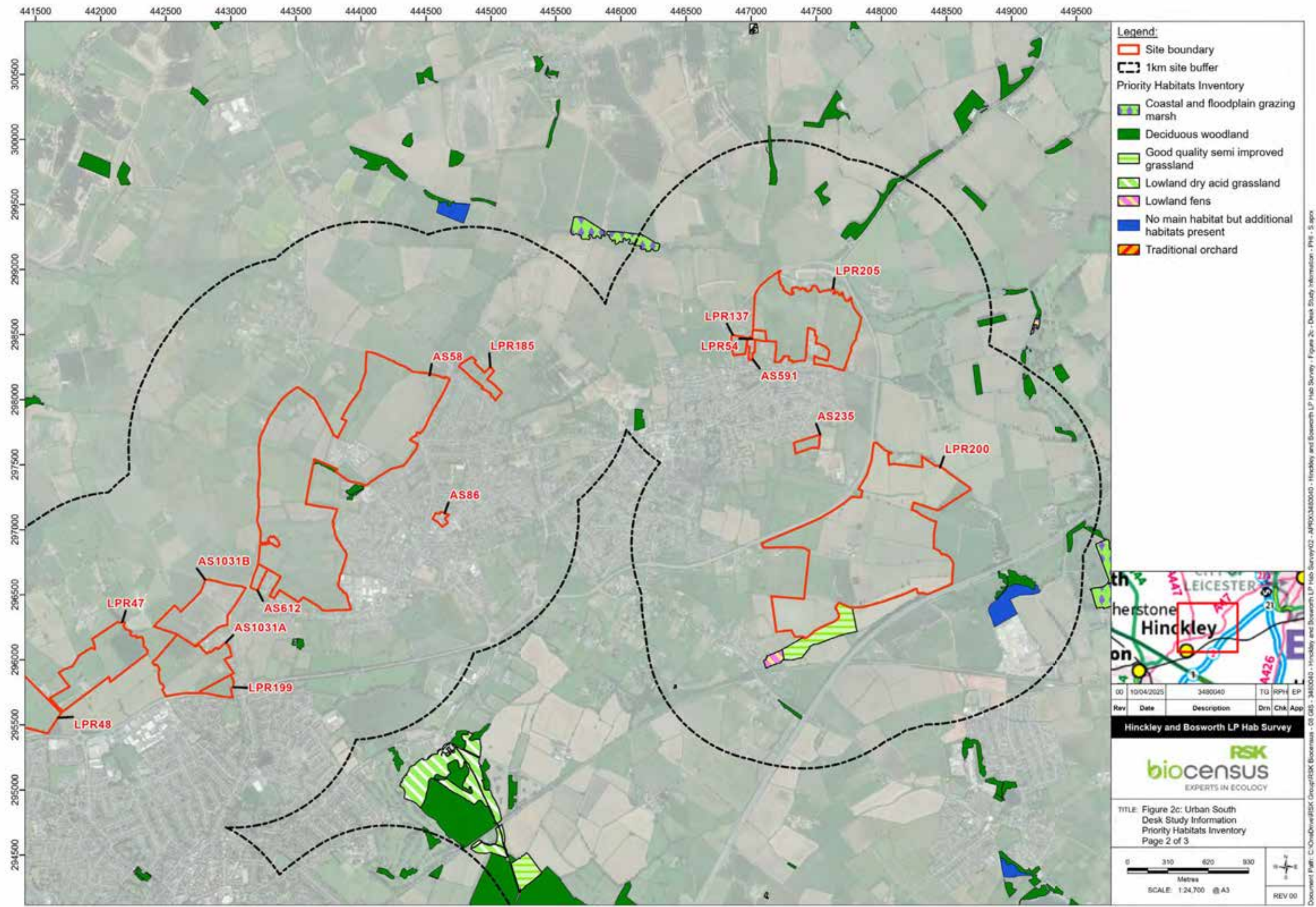
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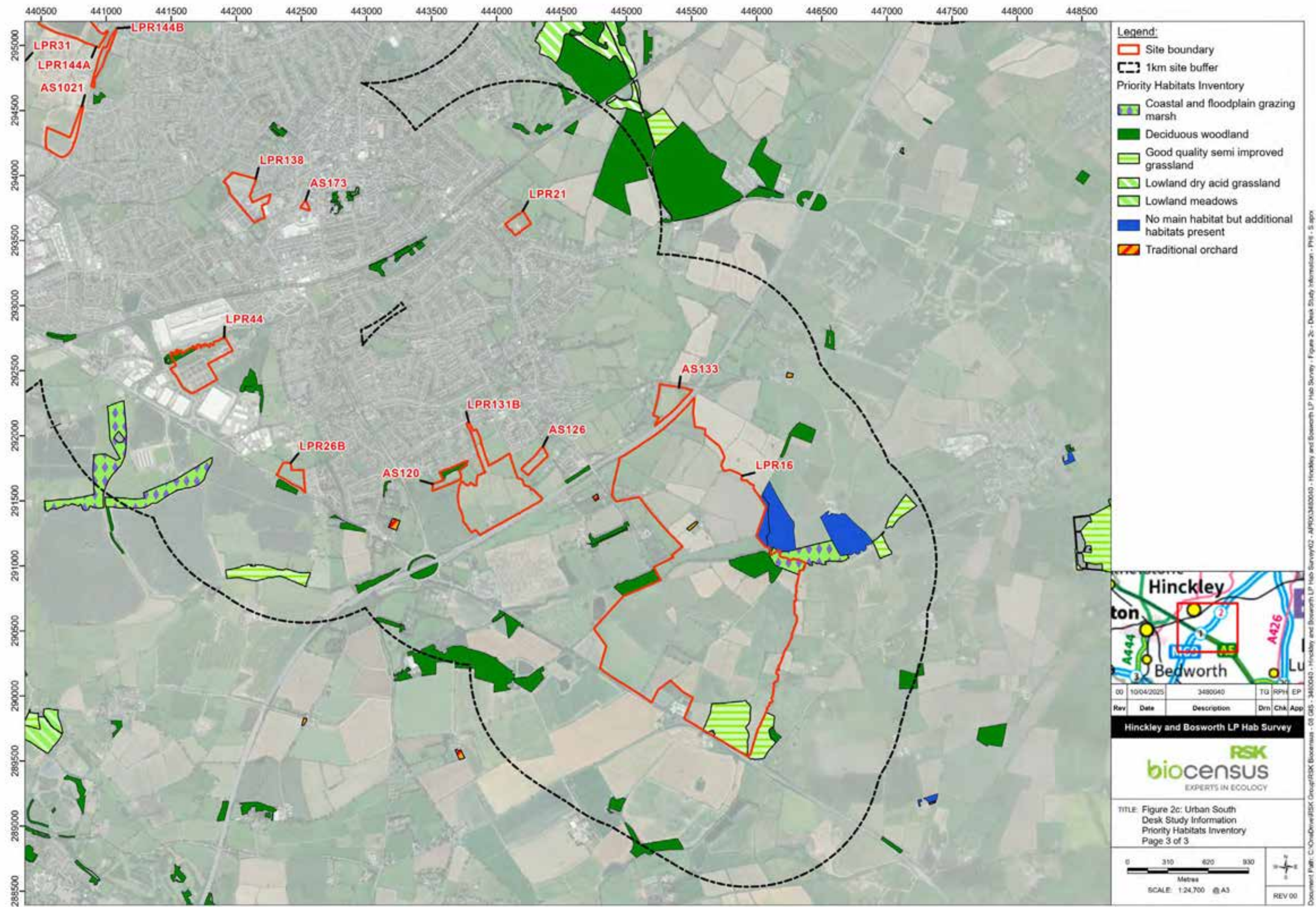


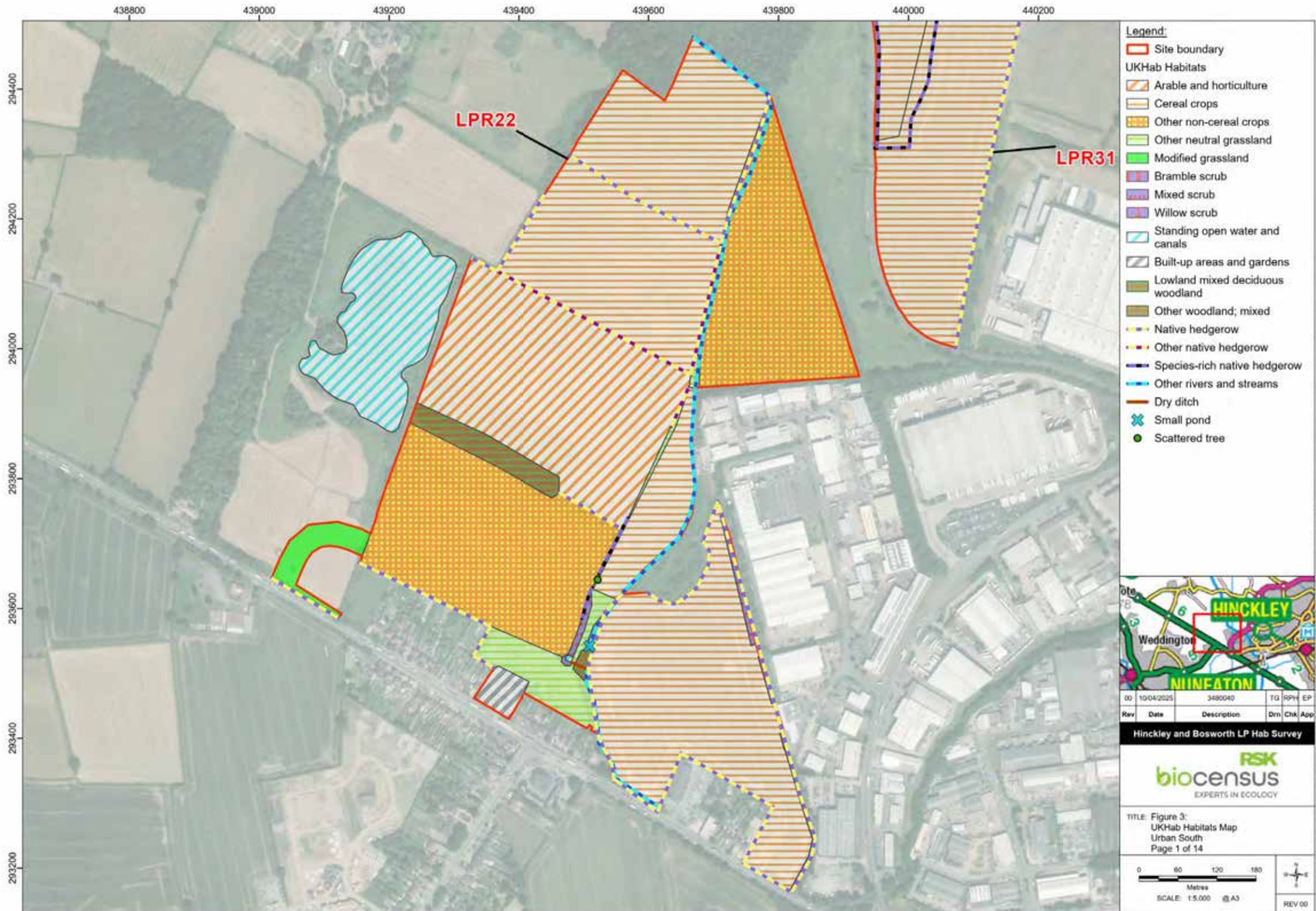
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Desk Study Information
National Habitat Network
Page 3 of 3

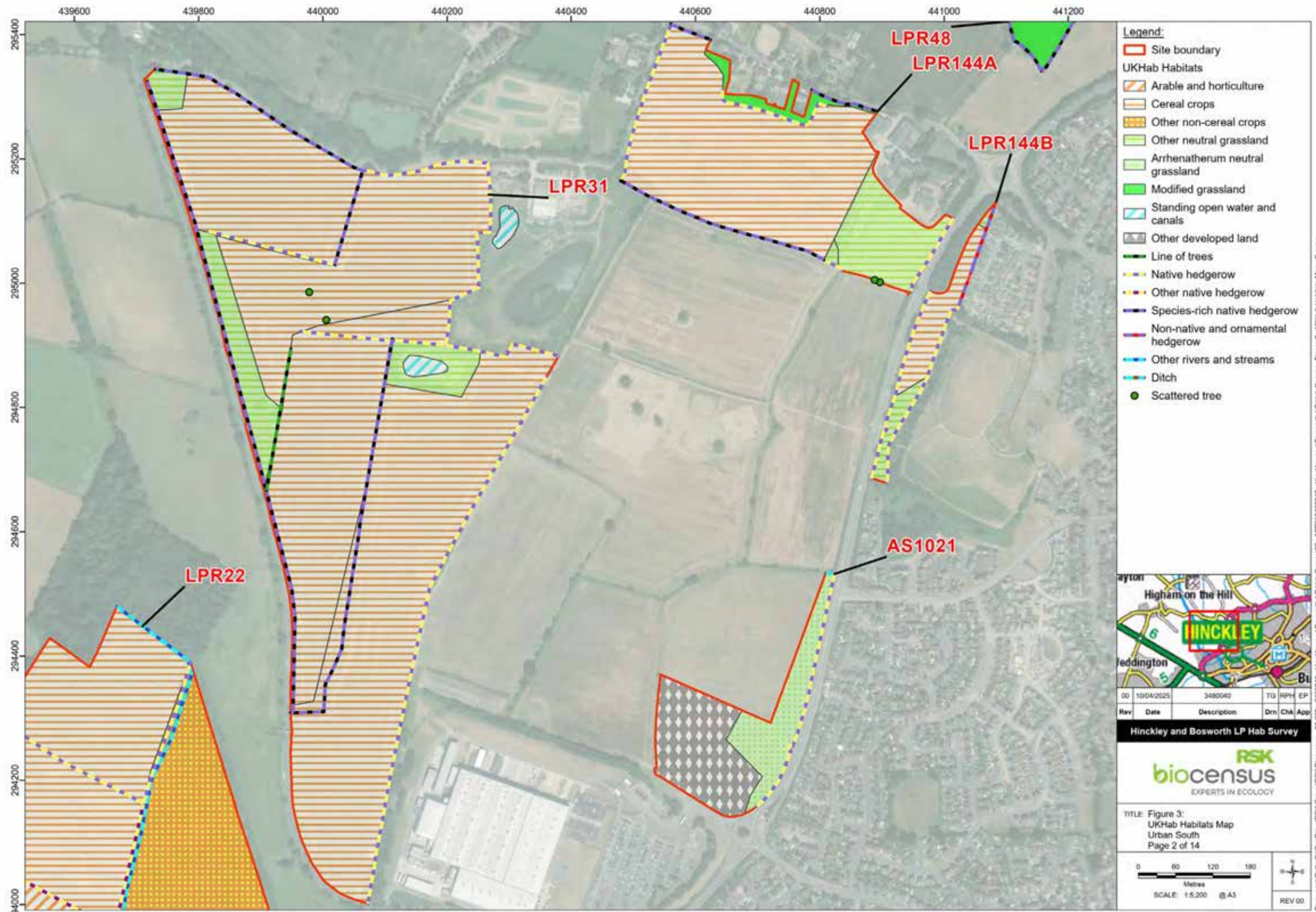




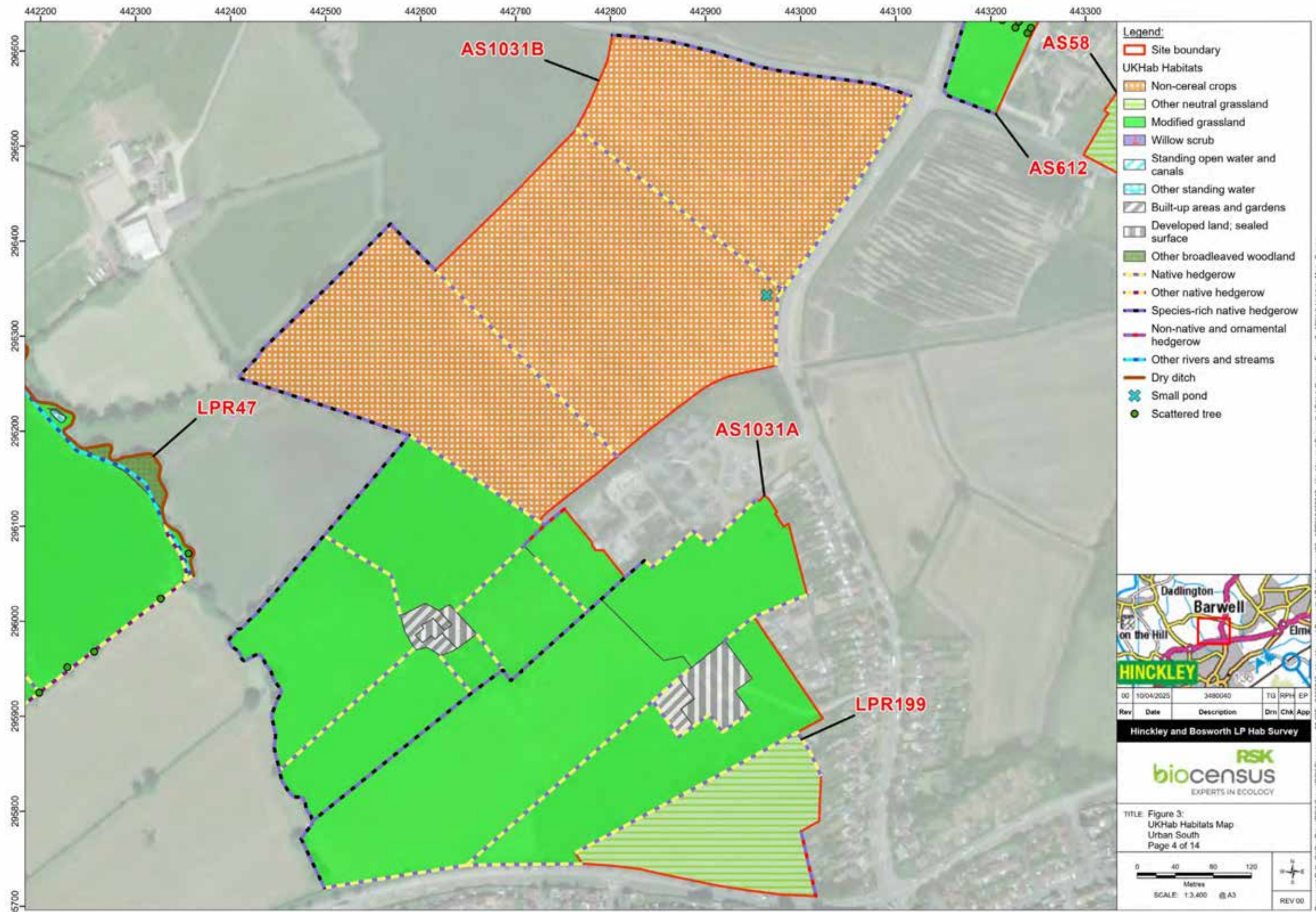


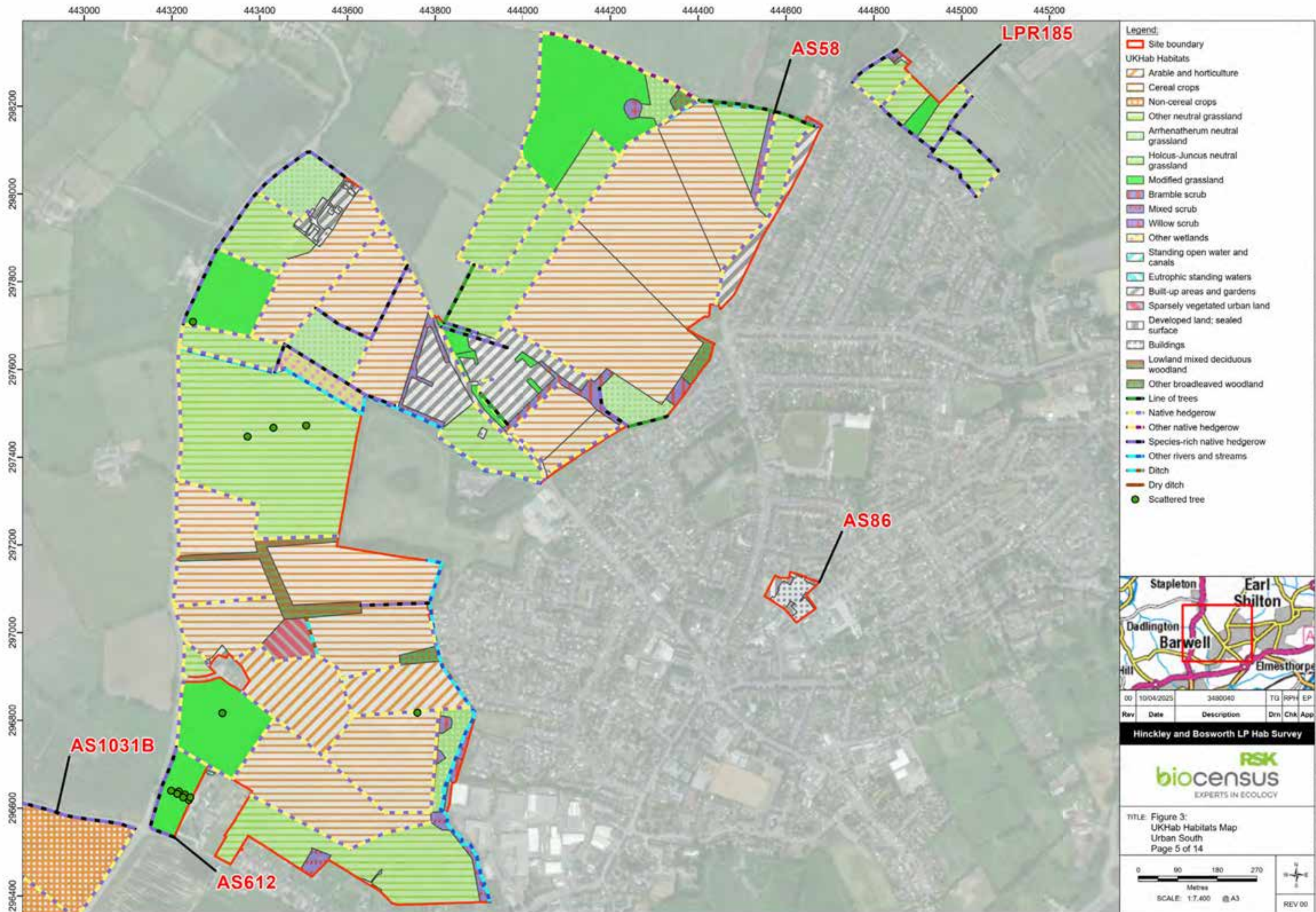




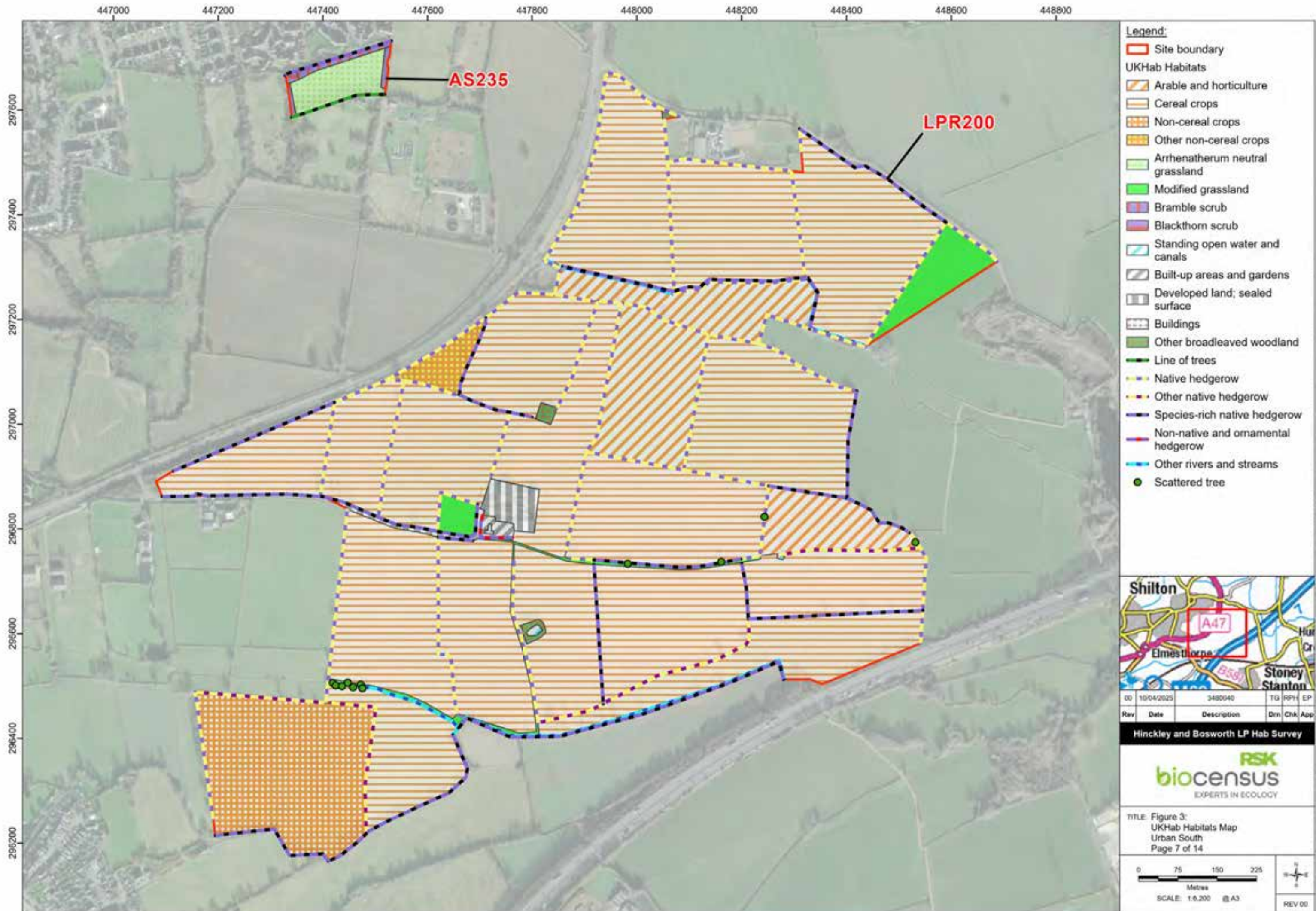


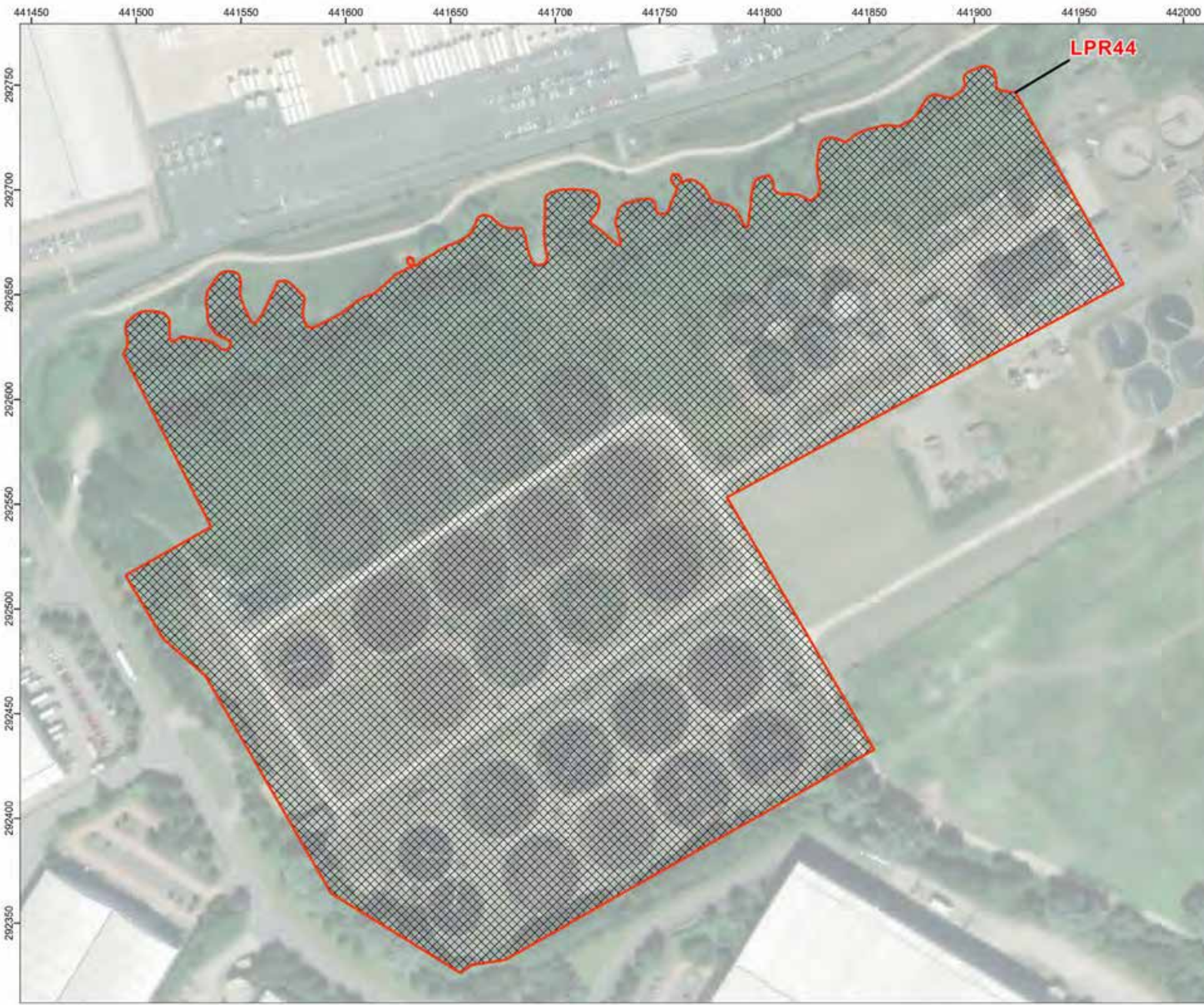












- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - No access to site

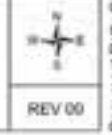
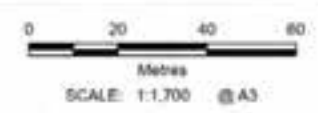


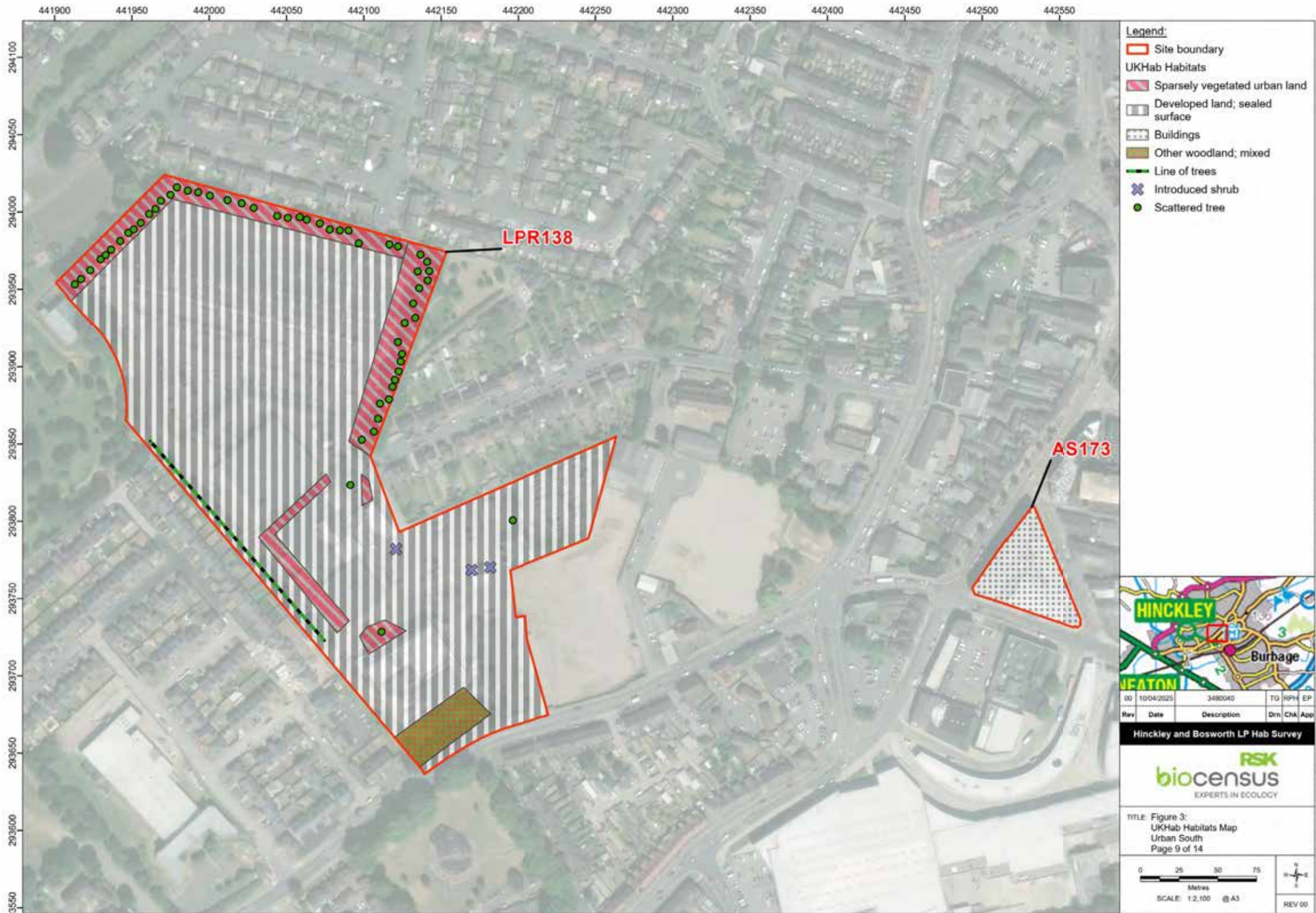
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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey



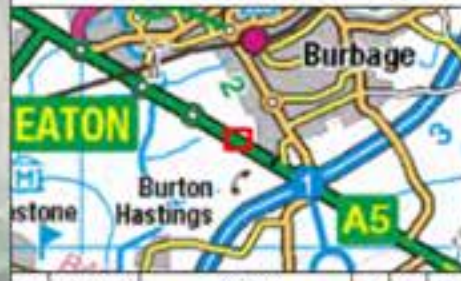
TITLE: Figure 3:
UKHab Habitats Map
Urban South
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- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - UKHab Habitats
 - Modified grassland
 - Standing open water and canals
 - Line of trees
 - Native hedgerow
 - Species-rich native hedgerow



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TITLE: Figure 3:
UKHab Habitats Map
Urban South
Page 10 of 14

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Legend:

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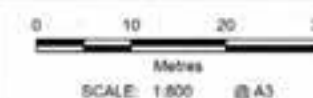


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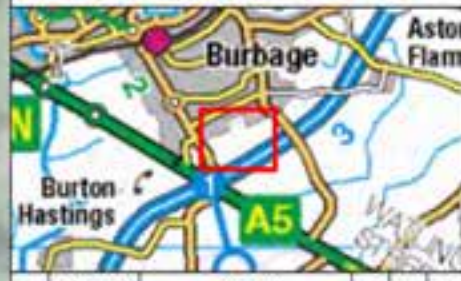
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey



TITLE: Figure 3:
UKHab Habitats Map
Urban South
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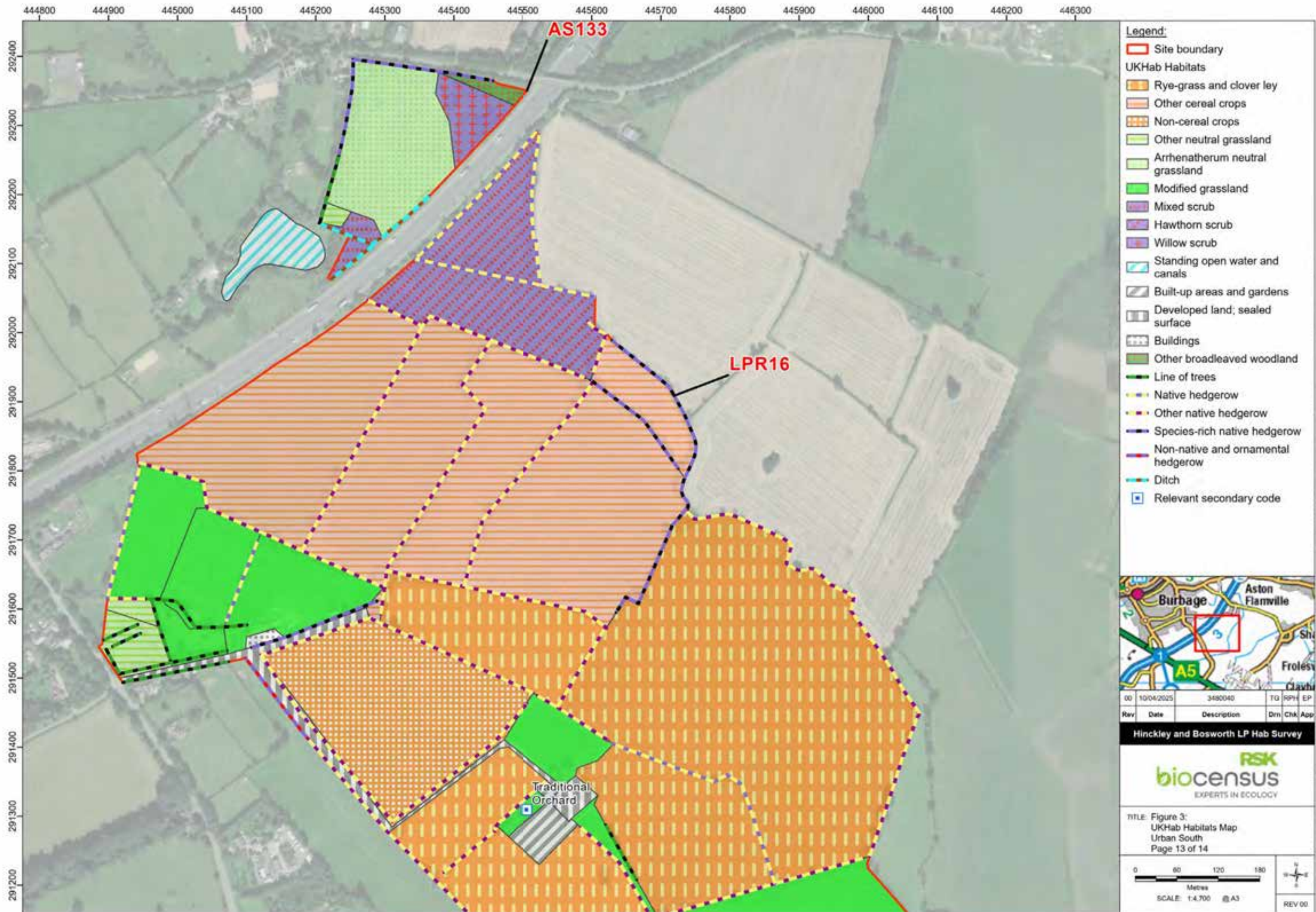
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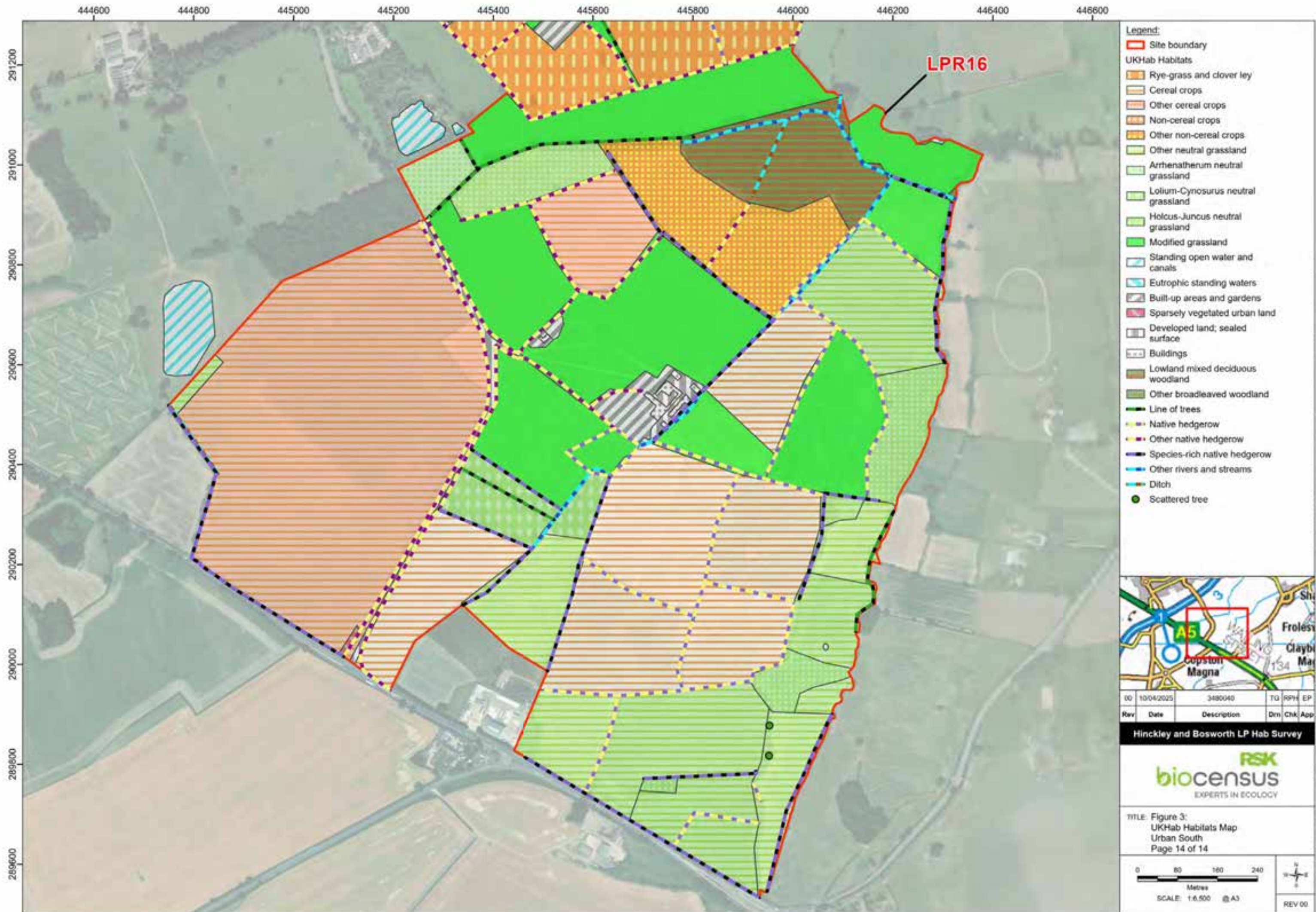
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hub Survey



TITLE: Figure 3:
UKHab Habitats Map
Urban South
Page 12 of 14

REV 00





West

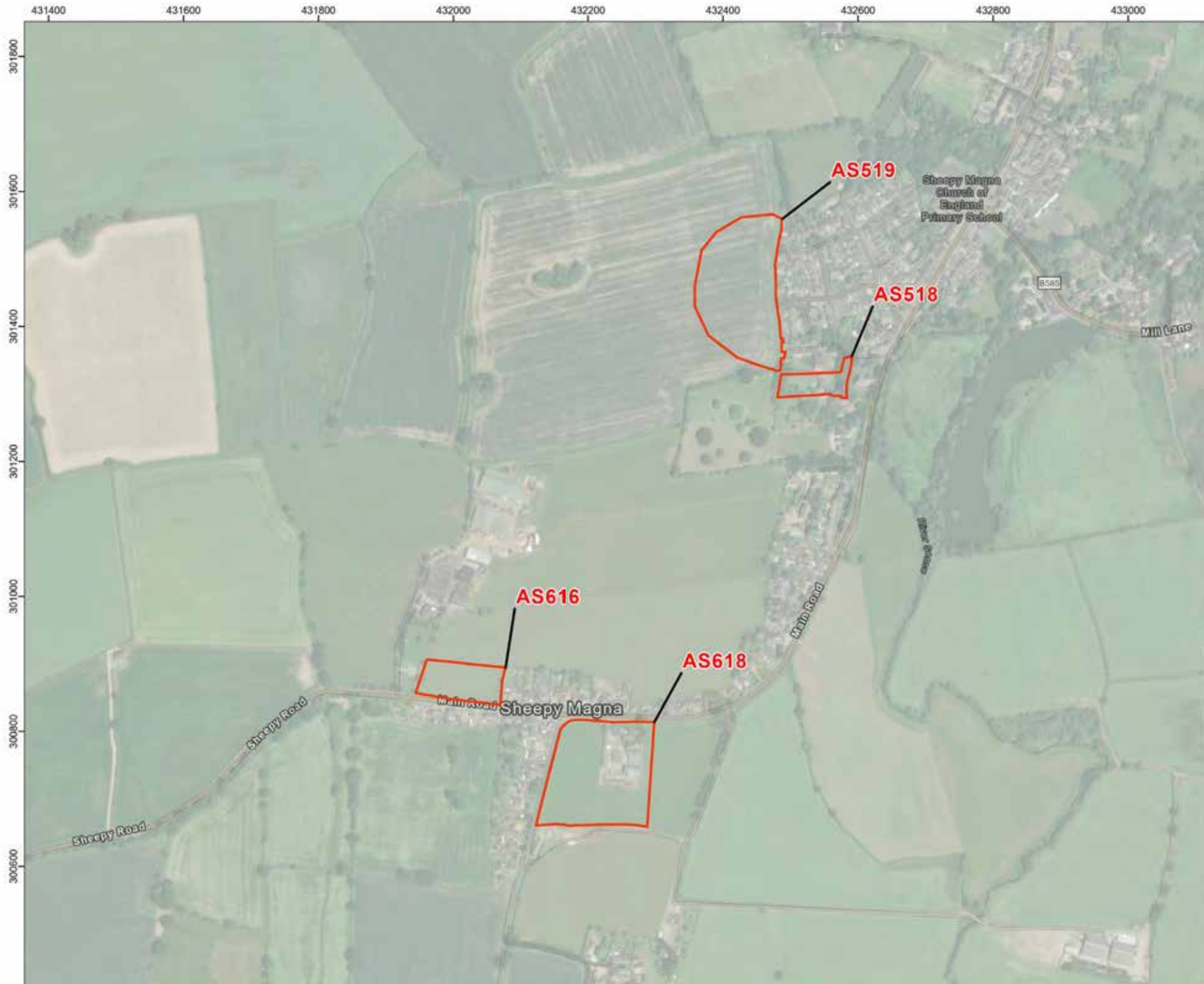
Figure 1 – Site location plan – West

Figure 2a - Desk Study - NCA, Flood Risk and Designated Sites - West

Figure 2b - Desk Study - National Habitat Network – West

Figure 2c - Desk Study - Priority Habitats Inventory – West

Figure 3 - UKHab Habitats Map – West



Legend:

Site boundary



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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

RSK
biocensus
EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

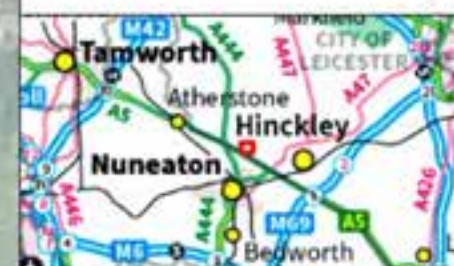
TITLE: Figure 1:
Site Location Plan
West
Page 1 of 3

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Legend:
 Site boundary



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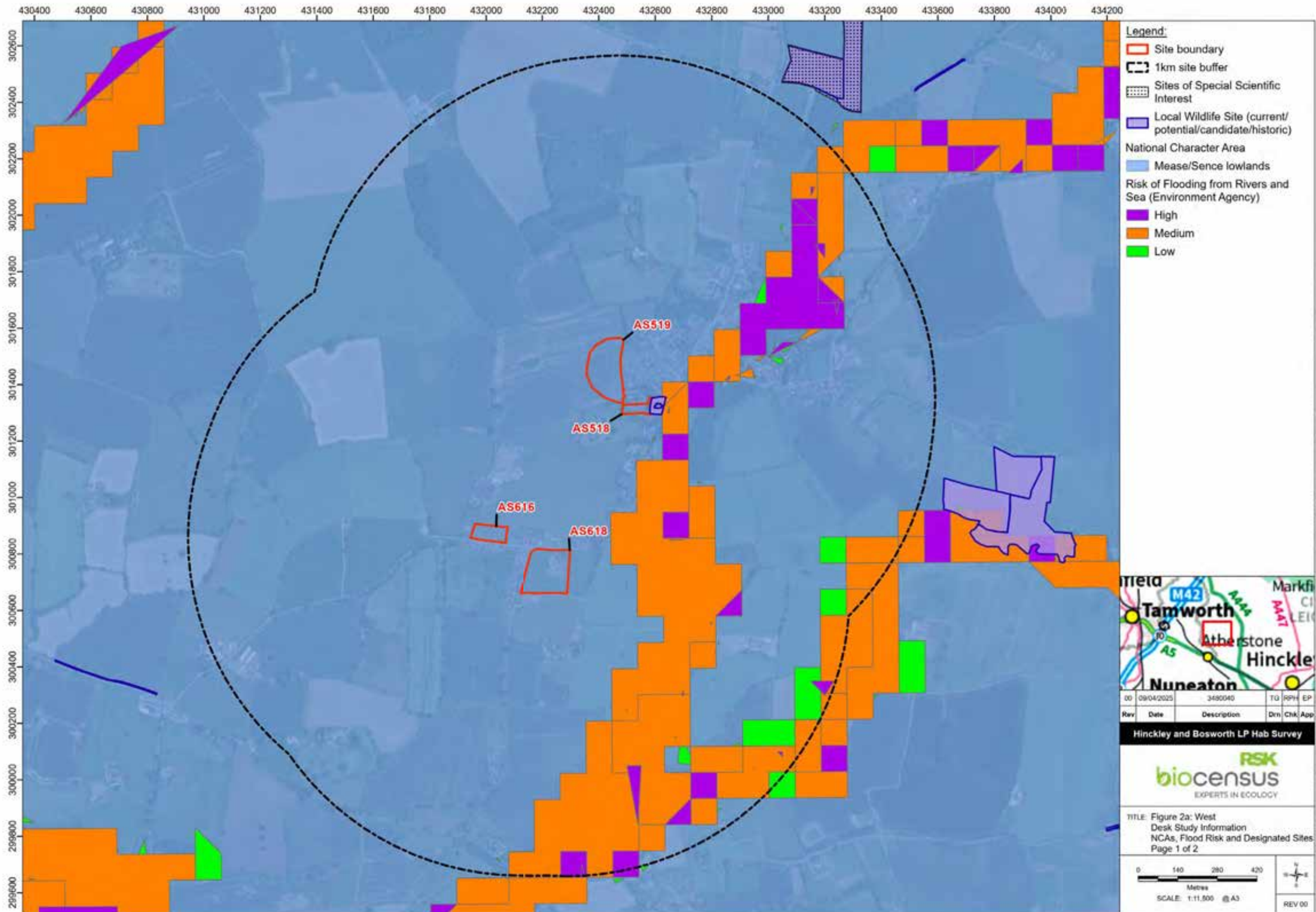
Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

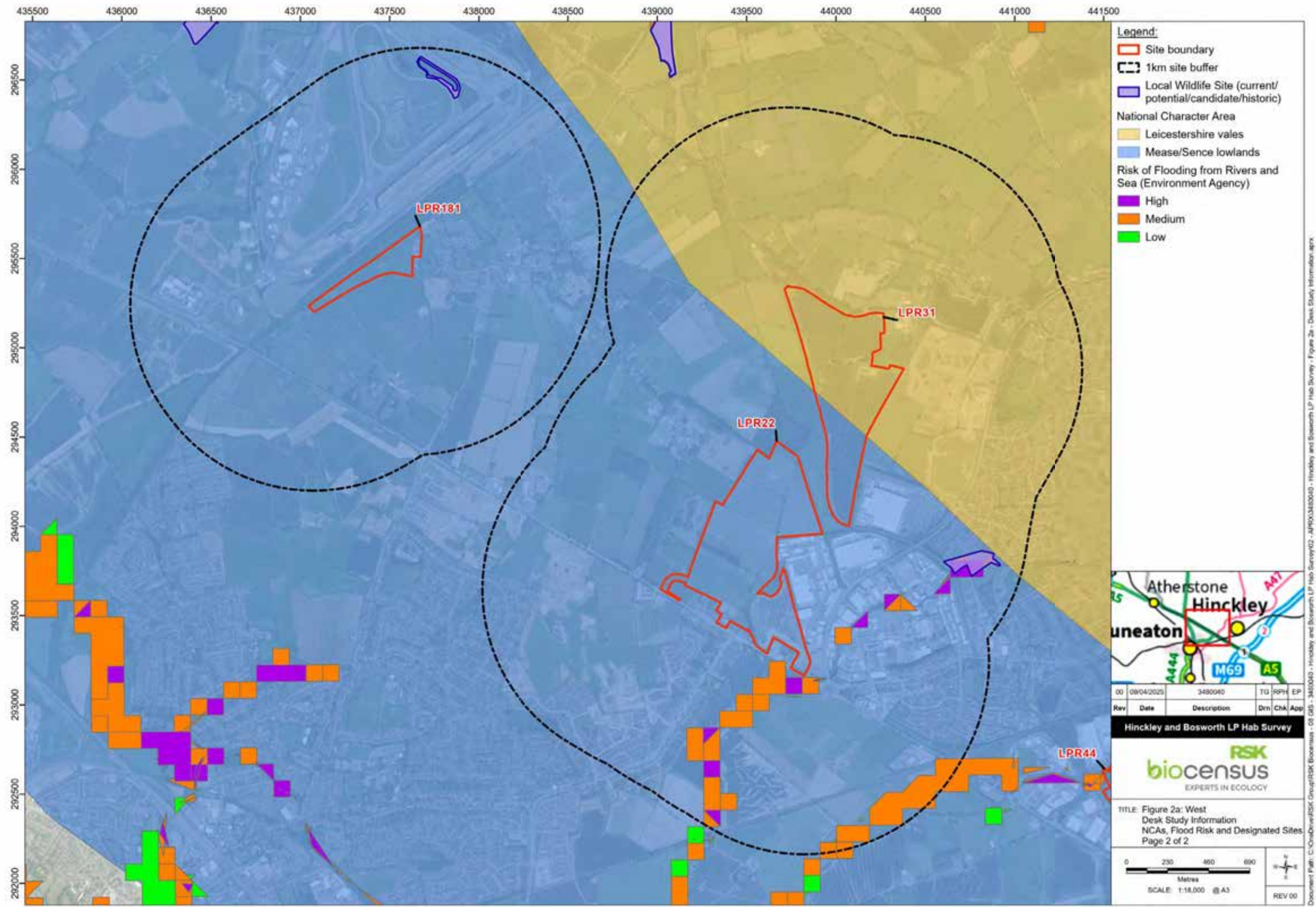
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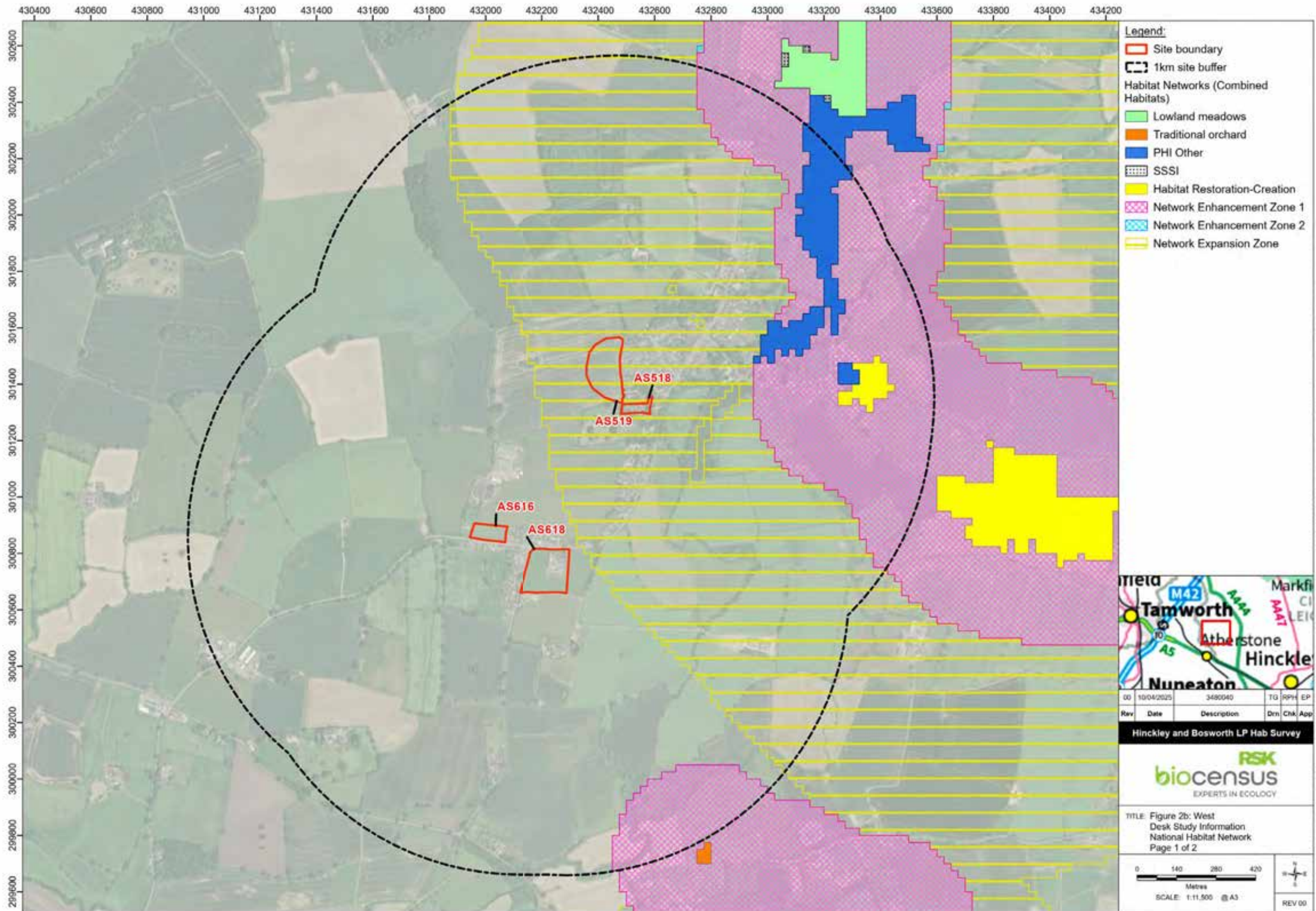
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 Site Location Plan
 West
 Page 2 of 3

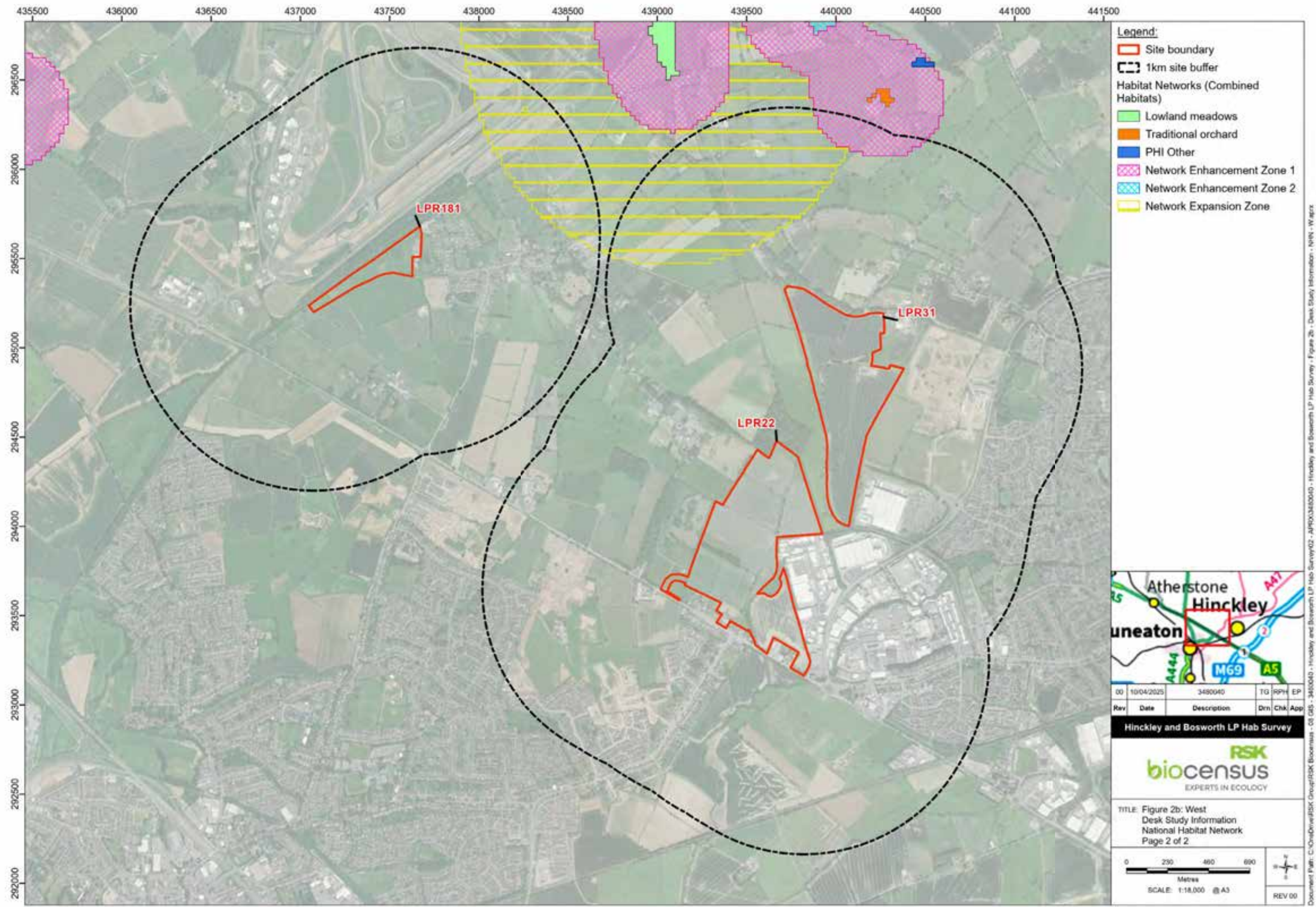
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REV 00









- Legend:**
- Site boundary
 - 1km site buffer
 - Habitat Networks (Combined Habitats)
 - Lowland meadows
 - Traditional orchard
 - PHI Other
 - Network Enhancement Zone 1
 - Network Enhancement Zone 2
 - Network Expansion Zone



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TITLE: Figure 2b: West
Desk Study Information
National Habitat Network
Page 2 of 2

0200400

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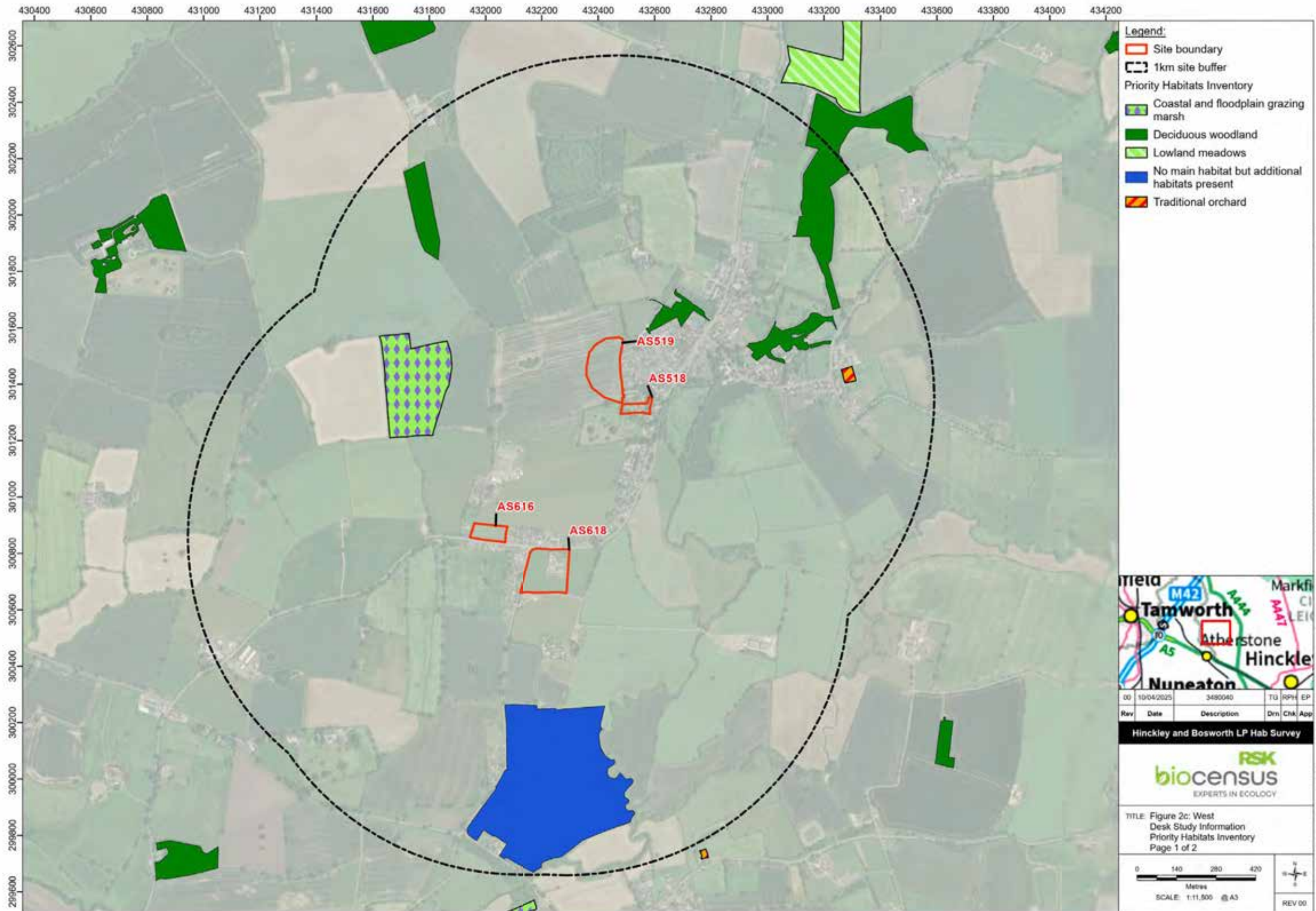
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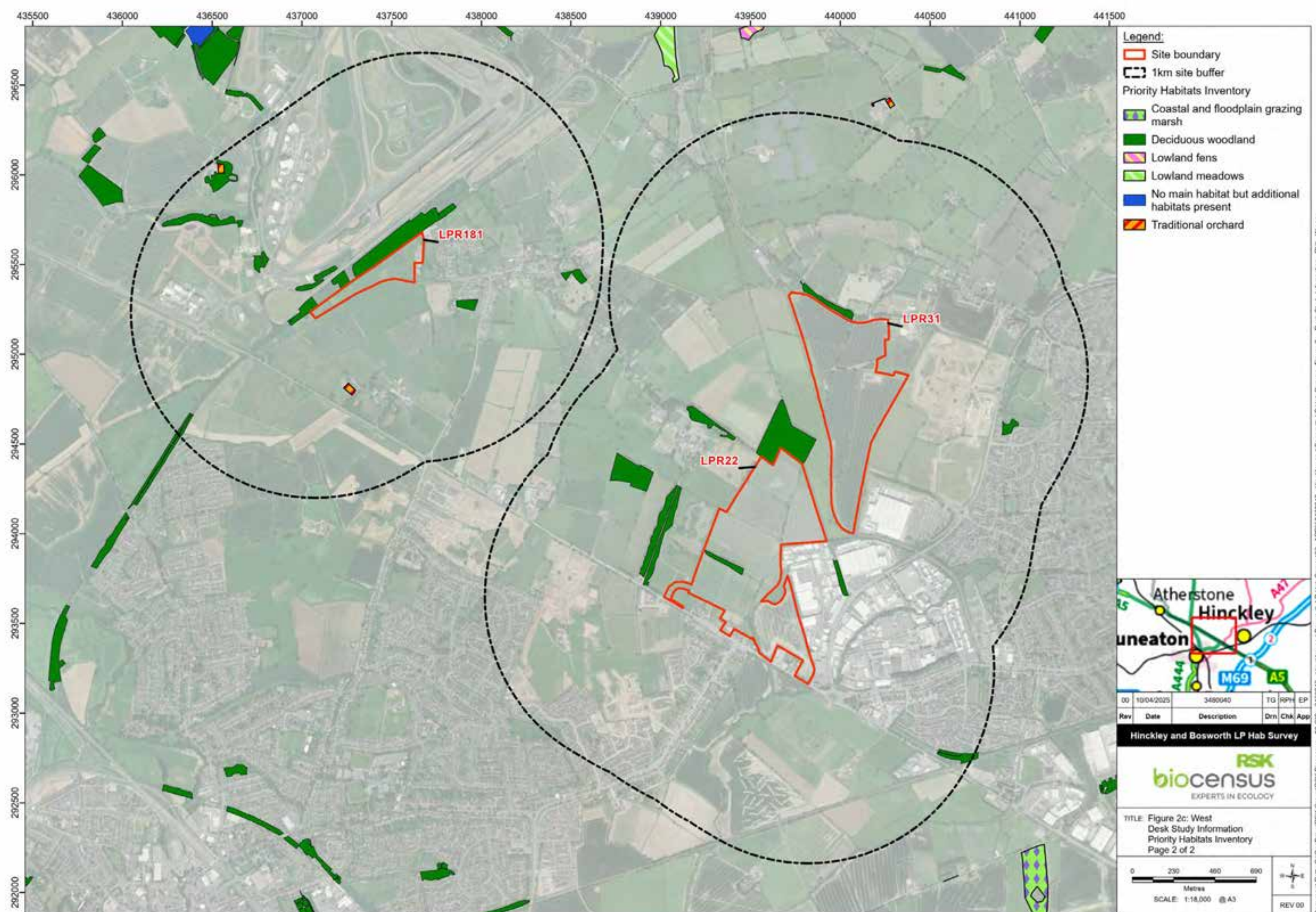
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Metres

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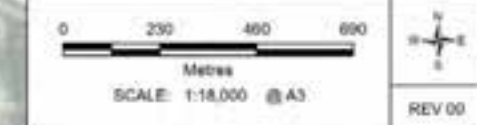


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Hinckley and Bosworth LP Hab Survey

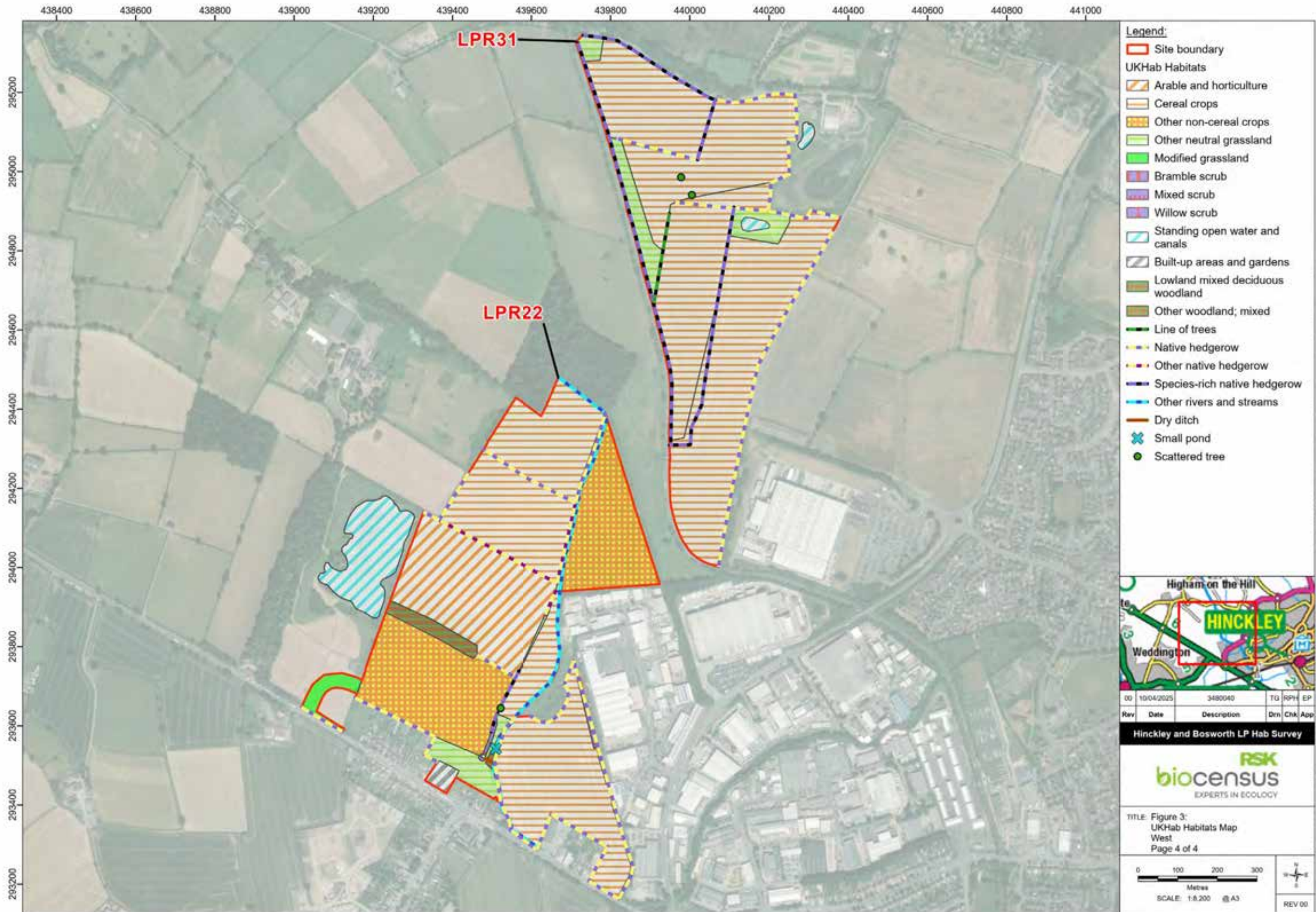


TITLE: Figure 2c: West
Desk Study Information
Priority Habitats Inventory
Page 2 of 2









Appendix B – National Character Areas

NCA	NCA description	NCA targets	Sites within this NCA (either completely or partially)
94 Leicestershire Vales	This is a large, relatively open, uniform landscape. Composed of low-lying clay vales, it is interrupted by varied river valleys. Settlements are visually dominant. Views to surrounding higher ground define the sense of place. The city of Leicester dominates the north-eastern corner of the NCA.	<p>SEO1 - Protect and appropriately manage the strong historic character and heritage and the geological assets within the rural and urban landscapes, maintaining the evidence of past land use and connections between agriculture, settlement pattern and topography, as well as the significant places and events that took place within the area, so that the area can be enjoyed by all. Ensure that development is fully integrated into and informed by the landscape.</p> <p>SEO 2 - Manage, conserve and enhance the woodlands, hedgerows, streams and rivers – particularly the rivers Soar, Sence, Swift and Welland – in both rural and urban areas, to enhance biodiversity and recreation opportunities; improve water quality, flow and availability; benefit soil quality; and limit soil erosion.</p> <p>SEO3 - Increase, manage and enhance the recreational assets, principally the rights of way network, country parks such as Watermead and historic linear features such as the canals. Improve access to these assets and the open countryside from the city of Leicester and surrounding rural communities and provide green infrastructure to help improve people's health and wellbeing.</p> <p>SEO4- Create new habitats where opportunities exist, such as woodlands and wetlands at old gravel extraction sites, to extend, link or buffer areas of existing habitat to reduce the impacts of fragmentation. Manage existing grassland, woodlands, coverts and spinneys that contribute to sense of place, enhancing biodiversity resilience and habitat networks.</p>	LPR16, AS133, AS126, LPR131B, AS120, LPR26 B, LPR44, LPR21, AS173, LPR138, AS1021, LPR31, LPR144 B, LPR144 A, LPR41, LPR183, AS541, LPR189, LPR48, LPR47, LPR199, AS1031 A, AS1031 B, AS612, AS58, AS86, LPR185, LPR200, LPR205, LPR54, AS591, LPR137, LPR146 A, LPR107, NDP3, LPR151 A, LPR85, LPR83 B, LPR153, LPR139, AS393, AS392, AS1050, LPR30, AS455 B

NCA	NCA description	NCA targets	Sites within this NCA (either completely or partially)
72 Mease/Sence Lowlands	The Mease/Sence Lowlands are a gently rolling agricultural landscape centred around the rivers Mease, Sence and Anker. The area extends across: Derbyshire in the north, Warwickshire in the south, Leicestershire in the east and Staffordshire in the west. With its towns lying on the fringes of the National Character Area (NCA), only a very small percentage of it is urban. These lowlands retain a rural, remote character, with small villages, red brick farmsteads and occasional historic parkland and country houses. The National Forest extends into the area north of the River Mease.	<p>SEO1 - Protect and appropriately manage this important network of natural and manmade rivers, streams, ponds, canals and other wetland habitats for its internationally important populations of white-clawed crayfish, spined loach and bullhead fish and their contribution to sense of place, water quality and climate regulation.</p> <p>SEO2 - Manage and conserve the woodland habitat of the landscape and plan to expand appropriately scaled woodland cover, particularly in The National Forest, to increase people's access and enjoyment and to secure opportunities to enhance biomass and biodiversity and manage the impact of climate change.</p> <p>SEO3 - Protect and appropriately manage the historic character, settlement pattern and features of this landscape, in particular its ancient woodlands, veteran trees, landscaped parklands and areas of archaeological interest, including ridge and furrow.</p> <p>SEO4 - Protect the overall strong rural, open and tranquil character of this well-ordered lowland agricultural landscape; increase the opportunity to encourage sustainable food production; and enhance access to and enjoyment of the wider countryside for both residents and visitors.</p>	LPR44, LPR22, LPR31, LPR181, As618, As616, As519, AS518, LPR81, LPR80, LPR79

NCA	NCA description	NCA targets	Sites within this NCA (either completely or partially)
71 Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield	The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield landform consists of a plateau with unrestricted views of shallow valleys and gentle ridges that become less pronounced in the south due to a layer of glacial till. To the east the land rises steeply, affording views of the Charnwood National Character Area (NCA). Ancient woodland straddles part of the boundary in the north, where the land falls away affording views of the wooded rolling landscape of the Melbourne Parklands NCA. The River Mease Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) forms part of the boundary with the Mease/Sence Lowlands NCA in the south-west and the Leicestershire Vales NCA forms a less visually defined border in the south.	<p>SEO1 - Protect and manage the area's riverine and flood plain environment, its manmade and natural wetland habitats, especially the River Mease for its internationally and nationally important species and range of river plants, for the benefit of biodiversity, sense of place, water quality, recreation, geodiversity and climate regulation.</p> <p>SEO2 - Manage and conserve ancient and plantation woodland and plan appropriately scaled new woodland cover, particularly in The National Forest; restore and reinstate hedgerows and hedgerow trees and increase biomass provision, timber supply and biodiversity that will mitigate the impact of climate change and enhance the experiential qualities of the area.</p> <p>SEO3 - Protect and manage the industrial/mining heritage of the coalfield and wider historic landscape; balance the needs of forestry, commercial, industrial and agricultural growth with the developing visitor economy and maintain a high level of public access to the wealth of recreational experiences the National Character Area offers.</p> <p>SEO4 - Take an integrated approach to managing the natural environment that reflects the strong link between geology and its influence on landscape, biodiversity, industrial development, heritage and settlement pattern of the National Character Area; promote greater understanding of the contemporary link between wildlife and geodiversity, particularly in the distribution of habitats and species, and recognise the importance of former extraction sites for both geodiversity and biodiversity.</p>	LPR107, LPR85, LPR83B, AS445, LPR190, AS448, LPR98, LPR207, LPR126, AS4241 A, AS455B, AS36, AS33, AS22, AS1027, AS16

NCA	NCA description	NCA targets	Sites within this NCA (either completely or partially)
73 Charnwood	Charnwood is a unique landscape, marked out by its geology and upland qualities, which contrast with the surrounding gentle lowlands. It is formed by a mosaic of heathland, farmland, parkland and woodland. The underlying Precambrian geology has given rise to the distinct area of land characterised by exposures of rugged, rocky outcrops. It is a relatively well wooded landscape, with many areas of mixed, deciduous and coniferous woodlands. The western part of Charnwood lies within The National Forest, which offers people extensive access, environmental education and volunteering opportunities, and the chance to become involved with local community projects.	<p>SEO 1 - Protect, manage and promote the important geology and cultural interests of Charnwood, including the internationally significant Precambrian geology, the characteristic rocky outcrops, the unique country parks, the manor houses and the medieval monastic buildings, to ensure access and interpretation, and for people to enjoy and understand these important resources.</p> <p>SEO2 - Conserve the strong settlement character of the inner Charnwood villages and ensure that development is sympathetic to the character of this rural NCA, surrounded by large and expanding urban areas. Maximise the green infrastructure and sustainable recreation opportunities.</p> <p>SEO3 - Protect and significantly increase the extent and quality of the unimproved grasslands, heathlands, open waterbodies and streams, to enhance biodiversity, ecological networks, water availability and quality, climate regulation and sense of place.</p> <p>SEO4 - Where appropriate, manage and expand the native woodlands throughout Charnwood to reinforce the wooded character, to increase the potential for biomass, access and recreation, and to regulate climate change and water quality.</p>	LPR121, LPR95, LPR43, LPR93, LPR94B, LPR70, LPR30, AS705, LPR49B, LPR49A, LPR196

Appendix C – Site description spreadsheet

Appendix D – Combined Habitat Networks Map

In May 2020, Natural England published a report, and a set of GIS map layers, setting out how the Lawton principles of 'more, better, bigger and joined' could be implemented across England through a process of more strategic habitat restoration (Edwards et al, 2020).

The 'Combined Habitat Networks Map' within this national GIS covers the whole of the country, and essentially makes recommendations for where habitat restoration and/or creation could best be undertaken to reconnect areas of Priority Habitat fragmented by historic habitat loss and current land management practices.

The mapping is divided into two categories: (A) Existing Habitat; and (B) Network Enhancement & Expansion. The intention is firstly to determine the current distribution of both high-quality and currently degraded Priority Habitat (and associated habitats) across England, and then to use this, alongside an understanding of soils, geology, hydrology and other biophysical parameters, to identify opportunities to enlarge, strengthen and connect these valuable habitats. This is important not only for enhancing the viability of habitat areas currently threatened by fragmentation but also for ensuring climate resilience.

The Existing Habitat mapping focuses on 23 Priority Habitats in England (as listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act), and is divided into the following four components:

Primary Habitat: The priority habitat which is the focus of the individual habitat network (e.g. lowland heathland).

Associated Habitat: Other priority habitat types that form a mosaic or an ecologically coherent group within the landscape and may, for example, be essential for some species associated with the primary habitat.

Habitat Creation/Restoration: Areas where work is already under way to either create or restore the primary habitat.

Restorable Habitat: Areas of land, predominantly composed of existing semi-natural habitat, where the primary habitat is present in a degraded or fragmented form and which are likely to be suitable for restoration.

Similarly, the Network Enhancement & Expansion mapping is also further divided into four sub-components, as follows:

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 to expand and join up existing habitat patches and improve the connections between them can be targeted here.

Network Enhancement Zone 2: Land connecting existing patches of primary and associated habitats which is less likely to be suitable for creation of the primary habitat. Action that improves the biodiversity value through land management changes and/or green infrastructure provision can be targeted here.

Fragmentation Action Zone: Land within Enhancement Zone 1 that connects existing patches of primary and associated habitats which are currently highly fragmented and where fragmentation could be reduced by habitat creation. Action to address the most fragmented areas of habitat can be targeted here.

Network Expansion Zone: Land beyond the Network Enhancement Zones with potential for expanding, linking/joining networks across the landscape (e.g. because the soils are potentially suitable for habitat creation for the specific habitat in addition to Enhancement Zone 1). Action to improve connections between existing habitat networks can be targeted here.