

ECOLOGICAL SURVEY,
POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SITES, SONNING COMMON, 2014

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CONTENTS

Text

Executive Summary	Page 3
Introduction	Page 4
Survey Dates, Methods and Personnel	Page 4
Survey Areas	Page 5
Possible Development Plans	Page 7
Habitat Summary	Page 8
Summary of Species Survey Results	Page 9
Review of Fauna	Page 10
Mammals	Page 10
Birds	Page 11
Invertebrates	Page 12
Amphibians and Reptiles	Page 12
Habitat Survey Results	Page 12
Results Format	Page 12
Notes on Suggested Management	Page 13
Mitigation Guidelines	Page 13
Individual Survey Area Summaries	Page 14
Area SON 01	Page 14
Area SON 02	Page 16
Area SON 03	Page 17
Area SON 04	Page 18
Rudgings Plantation	Page 20
Area SON 05	Page 20
Area SON 06	Page 21
Area SON 07	Page 22
Area SON 08	Page 23
Area SON 09	Page 24
Area SON 10	Page 25
Area South East of SON10	Page 26
Sonning Common Sewage Works	Page 27
Area SON 15	Page 28

CONTENTS (continued)

Tables in Text

Table 1 – Survey Areas and Dates

Page 6

Maps

Map 1 - Potential Development Sites (and Existing Woodland)

Map 2 – Areas Surveyed in March and June 2014

Map 3 – Hedgerows and Woodland Boundaries

Appendices

Appendices supplied as Excel spreadsheets, separate from main report.

Appendix 1 – Species Records, March 2014

Appendix 2 – Species Records, June 2014

Appendix 3 – Species Distribution by Survey Area

Appendix 4 – Overall Species Summary Table

Appendix 5 – Summary Table of Survey Areas

Executive Summary

This report summarises the results of a survey of potential development sites in Sonning Common, South Oxfordshire. The survey was commissioned by Sonning Common Parish Council. Fifteen sites were proposed for development in the parish. Eleven of the fifteen sites received one or more visits in March and/or June 2014. The parish is surrounded by the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – with any decisions about potential development needing to take this factor into account (for landscape and other considerations).

The survey recorded the habitats and species present and assessed the quality of these habitats. The method was simple, a walk over diurnal survey. Most of the species recorded were plants (important in identifying the potential ecological quality of the sites) with other groups including birds, mammals and invertebrates being recorded. A comprehensive survey of species other than plants would require specific targeted methods, potentially undertaken at different times of year or times of day – and beyond the resources of this survey. It is recommended that any such surveys should be carried out if required to inform the process of any actual development of chosen sites.

Sonning Common and its surrounds supports a variety of habitats including woodland, some more open part wooded habitats, hedge or other field boundaries, grassland and agricultural land including a large element of arable. Most of the possible sites are on the periphery of the village in open countryside but there are some more centrally located sites wholly or partially hemmed in by existing development. The landscape east and north of the village tends to be more open with larger fields and fewer hedges or similar field boundaries – with a more structured landscape with smaller fields and hedges to the west and south. Much of the land is subject to intensive management with the better wildlife habitats generally being less intensively or occasionally managed.

There is good connectivity of wooded habitats – especially west and south of the village. Most of the woodlands proper are linked by a network of linear wooded habitats such as hedges and/or lines of trees. In addition, the village itself has numerous trees and hedges – including some large wooded gardens.

Some of the best habitats identified in the survey are the more mature hedge / boundary banks such as those in west of village (SON01, SON02, SON03 and SON04) - these being much more than simple low hedges containing some large / old trees potentially of high conservation value. Towards the south of the village, there are some more open habitats perhaps remnants of a previous more open parkland type landscape (SON06, SON07) including a possible old green lane. These sites are adjacent to Hagpits Wood (one of several woods in or around the parish) and together they form an area of continuous habitats. Good open habitats such as grassland are more restricted, in the areas surveyed at least, being dominated by arable land with only small fragments of more herb rich open grassland. In the event of any development it is important to retain this variety and connectivity of habitats in and around the parish. Where possible, existing habitats should be improved and new wildlife habitats created (appropriate for the local area and conditions).

Introduction

This is a report of a survey of a number of proposed development sites in Sonning Common - each site being designated by the acronym "SON" followed by a unique number. A total of 15 sites were proposed, but not all of them have been surveyed. Eleven of the fifteen sites were surveyed and an additional three additional sites were also briefly surveyed while in the area. These extra sites provide linking habitats between two or more of the proposed development sites and are areas that could be good wildlife habitat and/or support notable species in their own right.

The purpose of the survey was to gain information about the nature and quality of the habitats present, and where the survey method allowed record the presence of any notable or important species and in a wider sense to gain a better understanding of the way the different sites create a set of linked wildlife habitat corridors through the parish. It needs to be emphasised that the survey was designed to gain an idea of the overall value of the wildlife habitats, rather than a comprehensive survey identifying in detail the diversity of species present.

The survey was commissioned by Sonning Common Parish Council.

Survey Dates, Methods and Personnel

The sites were surveyed over two days, 14 and 20 March 2014 with most sites being visited once. The survey method was very simple, walking through the sites recording the types and distribution of the habitats present and a representative sample of the species present. The recorded species groups included plants, primarily as indicators of the quality of the habitats but also in their own right including any unusual or notable species present. The early season nature of the survey means that the list of species recorded needs to be treated as indicative only. Another purpose of the survey was to gather information about the sites as a whole and how they together provide potential or actual wildlife corridors within and through the parish.

The additional survey carried out later in the year (27 June) was intended primarily to gather extra information about some of the more common fauna groups (butterflies and birds) and any other notable species that may not have been present earlier in the year. This latter season survey included most of the sites and a similar survey route to the early season survey.

Most of the records made were for plants but whenever possible records were also made for other species seen and/or the sites looked at with respect to their potential value for other species. Specifically, one or more records were made for amphibians, birds, mammals, invertebrates, fungi and mosses. All of these records (except birds) were mostly incidental records as most if not all groups require more targeted surveys, often using different specialist survey methods at other and/or additional times of year. (Such surveys were beyond the resources and time constraints of this survey.) Birds were the main other group recorded. The early season surveys were undertaken prior

to the arrival of the spring migrants and thus limited to resident species only. Summer migrant species, if present, were also recorded in the June survey.

All surveys were undertaken by Rod d'Ayala and Alan Parfitt.

Survey Areas

There are 15 potential designated development areas in Sonning Common. Map 1 shows the location of the 15 potential designated development areas and woodlands. Not all of these sites had been selected (at least at the time of this survey) as potential development sites. Thus following discussion with and by agreement of the Parish Council the resources were concentrated on the sites to the west and south of the parish. In addition to these “main” sites two other additional areas (linking habitats adjacent to two of the sites) were also surveyed for better continuity of habitat information.

Eleven of the fifteen sites were surveyed in March 2014. Ten of these were re-surveyed in June. Map 2 shows the areas surveyed and the survey route used (marked in pink hatching). For survey purposes most of the main sites were broken down into smaller units either by habitat and/or by ground features e.g. footpaths. Table 1 below shows the main survey areas, the number of site divisions and their survey dates. This information as well as a summary description of each of the areas is shown in table form in Appendix 5.

TABLE 1 – SURVEY AREAS AND DATES

SURVEY AREA	MAIN HABITAT(S)	NUMBER OF DIVISIONS	SURVEY DATE
SON 01	Arable, Field Margins, Hedges	4	14/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 02	Arable, Field Margins, Hedges	3	14/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 03	Arable, Field Margins, Hedges	5	14/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 04	Arable, Grassland, Field Margins, Woodland, Hedges	6	14/03/2014, 20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
Rudgings Plantation	Woodland	1	20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 05	Grassland and Trees	2	20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 06	Pasture and Hedges	3	20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 07	Old Orchard, Green Lane, Hedge	3	20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 08	Grassland	1	20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 09	Grassland, Hedges, Trees	3	20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 10	Arable, Field Margins, Hedges	3	20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
Area South of SON 10	Rough Grass, Rough Herb, Scrub	1	20/03/2014, 27/06/2014
SON 15	Playing Fields, Hedges	2	14/03/2014
11 Main Areas, 2 Other Areas		35 in Main Areas and 2 Other Areas	

Possible Development Plans

The preferred development plans for each of the SON areas had not been finalised as of mid June 2014. Any potential development of areas within and/or adjacent to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) because of their location have to be considered with respect to their possible impact on the AONB. The sites that have been selected for and/or put forward for some sort of development are listed below.

SON01 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Currently farmland. .

SON02 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Currently farmland.

SON03 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Currently farmland. .

SON04 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Currently farmland. Site withdrawn by landowner.

SON05 – Area adjacent to AONB. Currently grassland.

SON06 – Currently farmland..

SON07 – Existing house and orchard.

SON08 – Currently privately run gymnasium.

SON09 – Area adjacent to AONB. Currently grazing land.

SON10 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Quality exposed site.

SON11 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Quality exposed site.

SON12 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Quality exposed site.

SON13 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Partially exposed quality site.

SON14 – Area within Chilterns AONB. Quality exposed site.

SON15 – Area adjacent to AONB. Currently school playing fields.

Habitat Summary

This discussion is based on the results of the survey of eleven of the fifteen sites and the network of ecological link sites and habitats. When considering the impact of possible development it will be important to look at this network of habitats across and around the entire village.

Woodlands in and around the village include Old Copse, Rudgings Plantation / Bur Wood, Hagpits Wood, Bird Wood, Young Wood, Slades Wood and woodland at Shiplake Hill. Only one of these, Rudgings Wood, was formally surveyed (but only in part) and one other looked at in passing (Old Copse while surveying SON01) in this survey. These sites vary in size from c. 1 hectare (Slades Wood) to Old Copse (c. 17 hectares). Hagpits Wood is a pivotal site backing onto / being adjacent to SON06, SON07 and SON09. The continuity of wooded habitat is created by a network of hedges / tree lines along field and other boundaries – many of which were surveyed as part of this survey. This network of wooded boundaries includes some wide banks including mature trees as well as an under storey of shrubs (e.g. the fine bank on the southern boundary of SON03) to low gappy (over) managed hedges (e.g. roadside hedge of SON10 along Peppard Road) and boundaries marked by a line of mature standard trees (Pines along south west boundary of SON09. Except for gaps for barriers such as roads there is a complex of linking wooded habitat surrounding most of the developed part of Sonning Common. The road network creates a probably un-crossable barrier for some species (e.g. Dormouse) and presents a risk to other species that may use the wooded habitats for foraging (etc) or “safe” movement corridors (e.g. Badger). Evidence for this was a dead (car killed) Badger on the roadside of SON06 – presumably killed while crossing the road between SON06 and SON07 / Hagpits Wood. Map 3 shows this network of woods and wooded boundaries. (The information on the map is based on the field survey, aerial photographs on Google Earth and information supplied by Sonning Common Parish Council)

The open habitats are in the main managed agricultural land including a lot of arable land (e.g. SON10, SON01, SON02, SON03, large part of SON04) and some pasture / grassland. These field habitats are by their nature more discontinuous and in the main relatively poor habitats for wildlife due to their overriding management as productive land. Many of the arable fields have some sort of grassland edge habitats, most of which are narrow and of recent origin and/or agriculturally improved. The best areas of grassland habitats surveyed in this survey were the disused (and thus long grass) paddock of SON05 and the nearby narrow but apparently herb rich grass margin along the old field boundary of SON04. To the south of the village is Kennylands Millennium Green, an area of grassland managed in part for nature conservation (but not surveyed in this survey). Other intensively managed grassland habitats (e.g. SON09, SON15) may or may not still include areas of better (more herb rich) turf - but their current management is too intensive to gauge their true value. After long periods of management they are likely to be of lower value for wildlife even if their current management regimes were to be relaxed.

There are also relatively small areas of mixed habitat that are neither heavily wooded, or open - e.g. the small area of old Orchard in SON07, fairly open quarry (south of and adjacent to SON04) and old green lane (part of the old parkland landscape in SON07).

Also of note north of the parish is Peppard Common (one of the eight commons that make up the Nettlebed Commons), a mixed area of open and wooded habitats, including some county rare acidic habitats including areas of heathland as well as areas of managed grassland.

Some of the SON sites are located within the boundary of the AONB, with their value being typical of gentle rolling landscape. It is interesting to observe that due to the intensive nature of their management the value for nature conservation for such landscapes is not necessarily as high as it might be and measures could be adopted that would significantly improve their status for nature conservation.

Summary of Species Survey Results

The survey results are summarised in written form in this section of the report. The full species results are provided as excel spreadsheets as Appendices 1 (March 2014) and 2 (June 2014). These raw records have been processed to produce a detailed species summary table (Appendix 3) which in turn has been reduced to a summary table showing the number of species by species group e.g. amphibians, plants (Appendix 4).

Overall from all the survey areas the following species were recorded: 131 plants, 28 birds, 17 invertebrates, 6 mammals, 2 fungi, 1 moss and 1 amphibian. No rare or uncommon species were recorded but some species (e.g. the summer migrant bird Whitethroat. and the “farmland” mammal Brown Hare) are of conservation concern.

The best areas in terms of the total number of species recorded were as follows: SON 03 (71 species), SON 05 (70 species), SON04 (67 species), SON 01 (57 species), SON 02 (45 species) and SON 06 (43 species). The other 5 main sites had records for 35 to 21 species. SON 01 to SON 04,

The complex of four sites in the west of the parish are included in the top six sites – in part probably because they include a concentration of and fine examples of old mature boundary bank habitats. Another factor for the relative richness of these areas is their location on the edge of the parish away from the more disturbed and/or developed parts of the parish.

A summary of the records of the species groups follows. For the groups with species records the best sites are as follows. For Amphibians there was one incidental record – i.e. Common Frog heard breeding in a garden pod adjacent to one of the main sites. (For the record no reptiles were recorded.) The best bird areas (between 15 and 10 records respectively) were SON 03, SON 01, SON 02 and SON 04. Fungi were only recorded on an incidental basis with a single species for two of the areas. The best area for invertebrates, primarily early season over wintering and mid-season butterflies, were SON 05 (11 species), SON 01 and SON03, SON 02 and SON10 respectively. The best areas for mammals (as far as obvious field signs and casual sightings can be relied on) were SON 05, SON 01, SON 02, SON 06 and SON 10. By far the best two areas for plants were SON 04, SON05 and SON03 (53, 48 and 46 species respectively), then SON 09, SON 06 and SON 01 (all low 30’s).

It is noticeable in the above simple analysis that though areas other than SON 01 to SON 04 support relatively good numbers of particular species groups, the western complex of sites appear to be the richest wildlife areas overall. However, it needs to be emphasised that the survey was primarily carried out very early in the season and for most species groups was at best indicative and for many species groups inadequate. This is true even for plants (the best recorded species group) which were relatively well but not comprehensively recorded in this survey. Generally, woodland habitats are more likely to be better recorded in the early part of the year than grassland habitats. To a great extent all the fauna groups are under-recorded, with the more secretive species most under-represented. Better records for these and other species would require targeted surveys.

Review of Fauna

This section reviews the actual species records made and considers other species that could be present should more extensive and/or targeted recording be undertaken.

Mammals

Evidence of the presence of six species of mammals was recorded in this survey, all species being common and widespread. These are two species of deer i.e. Muntjac and Fallow, both species of Lagomorphs i.e. Rabbit and Brown Hare, and two common carnivores i.e. Badger and Fox.

Other ubiquitous species not recorded in the survey that will undoubtedly have been present in one or more of the survey areas where suitable habitat exists include small mammals such as Mole, Common and Pigmy Shrews, Field and Bank Voles and Grey Squirrel. Another possible small mammal species that could be present in the woodlands is the Common (or Hazel) Dormouse for which there are many local records e.g. woods and wood edges in Nettlebed, Woodcote and Stoke Row. The species is not uncommon in the Chilterns. As well as this native species there are historic records for the non-native Edible Dormouse in Sonning Common itself. Hedgehogs appear to be mostly species of suburban and urban habitats – perhaps due to predation by Badgers in more rural habitats which are now much more common than historically. They may or may not be present in the farmed areas beyond the developed part of the village.

Roe Deer, which has also in the last two decades become much more common, is the other species of deer that is likely to be present. All three deer species are now so common and cause problems in local woodland and probably other habitats by their heavy browsing damaging trees and woodland plants – and on some sites the damage being so bad that some species are being lost.

Apart from Badger (with signs of presence in five areas) and Fox (one area) the other common predators not recorded were the two smaller mustelids – the Weasel and Stoat. These species are normally seen in more open habitats and wood edges where their prey species live. There is abundant habitat for them in many of the survey areas. It is also possible that Polecat is present in the Parish –

having re-colonised Oxfordshire in the last two decades from its former stronghold in western Britain.

No bats were recorded in the survey; records will require nocturnal surveys for foraging sites and potentially other surveys (dusk and/or dawn) surveys to confirm any potential roost sites. Diurnal surveys can be used to identify potential roost sites including holes or cracks in trees or other habitats such as dense Ivy. No such surveys were undertaken in this survey. The most likely sites for bat roosts will be larger and/or older trees which have had time to develop rot holes and other suitable niches for bats.

Hence perhaps the best possible tree roost sites identified in this survey are large / old trees such as those in the old field boundaries around SON03 and other areas. More recent boundaries with dominated by small shrubs and/or younger mostly “undamaged” trees are less likely to provide bat roosts. Bats prefer continuous habitat for foraging and thus a good network of linked hedges and woodland. It is not just the trees that are important but open areas and a diversity of type and size of trees and shrubs – with abundant flying invertebrates.

Birds

Twenty eight species of bird were recorded in the survey including both resident species and spring / summer migrants. A more comprehensive bird survey could easily result in c. 40 to 50 species of these types of species with additional winter visitors and vagrants / casual species (e.g. gulls) also being possible. Eight of the 28 species are included in the list of Birds of Conservation Concern (2014, BTO *et al*), four on the Red List and four on the Amber List. The list of Birds of Conservation Concern includes some species that are still relatively common and/or widespread but have suffered significant declines in their populations – which therefore need to be monitored to assess their status and any further declines. There are two categories – Red species have suffered the biggest losses and are potentially mostly threatened and Amber list the lower risk / changed species.

Invertebrates

The sheer diversity of invertebrate species means any surveys will always be incomplete and, unless specialist surveyors are employed, necessarily concentrate on the more popular species groups such as butterflies – using these better known species as indicators (as best as possible) of the quality of the habitat. Eleven species of butterfly were recorded in the surveys in March and June. Five of these were longer grassland species (members of the Brown family including Marbled White and two Skippers), a shorter sward species (Small Heath) and five generalists (e.g. Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell) including probable migrant species from Europe as well as resident individuals.

The “missing” species include more specialist grassland species typically found in shorter more herb rich sward e.g. Dingy and Grizzled Skippers. Many of these species are uncommon and confined to better quality habitats. More survey work would have been needed for these species - which are likely to be less common anyway as the area of suitable habitat in the survey areas is limited. The other “missing” group are the woodland specialists which again would have been flying at different

times of year and require more targeted surveys. Some of these species will undoubtedly be present in some of the wooded areas in Sonning Common – e.g. Purple Hairstreak which lives on Oaks and perhaps White Letter Hairstreak on Elm. No records were made for the normally common and ubiquitous Speckled Wood, another member of the Brown family (*Satyridae*).

Amphibians and Reptiles

Only one incidental record was made for these groups – spawning Common Frogs being heard in a garden pond adjacent to one of the survey areas.

No ponds were recorded in the survey, reducing the likelihood of finding amphibians due to the lack of breeding sites. Amphibians in terrestrial sites outside their breeding season are secretive and not easy to record. The species of amphibian most likely to be present in the area are Common Frog, Common Toad, Smooth (or Common) Newt and perhaps Palmate Newt. The latter is rare in Oxfordshire as a whole with its stronghold in clay cap ponds in the Chilterns in South Oxfordshire. Palmate newts were (and probably still are) present for example in ponds on the nearby Kingwood Common.

Reptiles are generally very secretive, except perhaps at particular times of year or times of the day when they may spend time sunning. The most likely species to be present in the survey areas are Slowworms (which mostly shelter in dense cover rarely in the open) and Grass Snakes (widespread but not necessarily common). Common Lizards are known to be present in the local area (Peppard and Kingwood Common for example) but are generally not common and not necessarily present in any of the survey areas. The other local species the Adder is now very rare in the county (verging on extinction) and believed to be lost from the area though there are unconfirmed records for the Sonning Common area (possibly misidentified Grass Snakes).

Habitat Survey Results

Results Format

Each survey area is described in turn (in survey order number) under 5 headings (listed below). A summary description for each of the survey area divisions and their locations (grid reference) can also be found in Appendix 4:

- Summary Description – Brief description of the main habitats present and their relative value for particular species groups and/or wildlife in general.
- Overall Value for Wildlife – Short statement about the known value of the site for wildlife based on the survey results using both the species and habitat records.
- Potential Species Interest – The potential value of the site for species that could not be recorded due to the limitations of the date of the survey, survey methods and/or available resources. These species groups include protected species such as Bats.

- Suggested Management – The suggested management approach for the habitats to ensure their best condition for wildlife without (as far as current information allows) compromising their current function(s). The actual management of any site as used by the land manager will be informed by the type of habitat and by practical and other considerations (e.g. financial) including in some cases overriding functions other than nature conservation. *It should be noted that the management control of all the sites remains with the owners or their agents and any suggestions for management in this report are just this.*
- Suggested Mitigation – This section outlines any suggestions for specific approaches to maintain or enhance (where possible) the wildlife interest of the sites and their role in the wider network of wildlife link habitats - *should all or part of the sites be developed*. In advance of any proposed or final development plans these suggestions are at most provisional.

Notes On Suggested Management

Site management is undertaken for a variety of reasons with management targeted for nature conservation only one of many possible functions. All the sites included in this report are managed by their landowners for a variety of reasons and any suggestions made are intended to enhance the nature conservation value of the sites.

Managing sites for wildlife is not necessarily the same as managing them for other reasons, though there may be a large overlap in actual management tasks undertaken. For example, the methods used may be the same as for other agricultural or other reasons, but undertaken at different times of year and/or at different intensity to other (perhaps commercial) operations.

Mitigation Guidelines

In the absence of any actual development proposals it has not been possible to provide any site specific mitigation advice, but there are a number of general principles that should be followed in the event of any development. These include the following:

- Given the ongoing continued reduction in sites and habitats that are good for wildlife, effort should be made to reduce the loss of and/or damage to all species and sites - not just protected species where there is strong legal requirement to do so and/or known higher quality habitats or sites designated for nature conservation.
- All sites should be subject of more detailed surveys, including if required targeted surveys for species groups not likely to be found in a general survey using simple visual based survey methods. All surveys should be carried out using appropriate methods, at the correct time of year for the target species and/or weather conditions..
- Once the ecological value of each site has been established, if at all possible the better areas for wildlife should be retained and during any development these areas protected from potential damage.

- Habitats and species should only be trans-located and/or recreated as a last resort. *In situ* conservation is the best option as long as the habitats concerned (including wildlife corridors where needed) are still viable in the changed / new landscape.
- The impact of the proposed development on the remaining areas of wildlife habitat needs to be assessed - including often difficult to define post development long term impacts such as increased levels of disturbance from greater public access. Compensation measures could include buffer zones or other measures necessary to reduce any future impacts on the better wildlife habitats.
- Any habitat creation should ideally be carried out using native local species, where possible obtained from local sources. The created habitats should be appropriate for the geographical area, be sustainable in the future with sufficient resources available for their ongoing management including any establishment phase.

Individual Survey Area Summaries

Area SON 01

Summary Description: This area is a large arable field surrounded by a rough grass margin with in places a mature well developed boundary habitat. The area was divided into five areas for recording purposes (two being amalgamated into one description here). The main part of the area (the large central ploughed area) was not surveyed.

South Boundary: The eastern part of the southern boundary is a mature planted hedge dominated by Hawthorn with Elder and Cherry and abundant Ivy. To its west the boundary is made up of a much deeper wider planted mostly deciduous wooded strip including mature trees over a sparse cover of rough ground plants. The trees include a number of large mature Sycamores with smaller trees such as Holly and other Sycamores. Along the field margin there is a strip of rough species poor grassland, c. 5 metres wide.

West Boundary - South and North of Footpath: For recording purposes this boundary habitat was broken down into two sections, south and north of the public footpath. The south section is a mature deciduous tree line (especially Cherry) including an equal width rough grass strip between the trees and ploughed area, in total both being c. 15 metres wide. The ground flora is heavily shaded and consequently locally very sparse including a lot of Lords and Ladies with Nettle, Hedge Parsley and Cleavers. North of the footpath the hedge runs parallel with power lines and (recently at least) has been cut back to create an open corridor for the wires. English Elm is locally dominant in this section with Hawthorn being common. The most northerly part of the boundary is contiguous with Old Copse and shares some of the characteristics of this wood.

North Boundary: Relatively narrow rough grass strip adjacent to residential gardens, some with formal low mostly regularly managed hedges. More mature typical hedgerow shrubs and trees are mostly absent. There are some garden escapes and typical species of disturbed grassland, for example cultivated Geranium and American Bramble.

East Boundary: Relatively narrow rough grass strip adjacent to residential gardens of newer housing with (as the North Boundary above) very little old hedge shrubs. There are formal garden hedges in some of the adjacent houses (species including Beech, *Leylandii* and some Bramble). The southern end of the boundary however does have a short length of remnant *Prunus* hedgerow growing in the field margin.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The best existing habitats for wildlife are the mature boundary hedges / tree lines along the south and west margins of the field. The northern part of the western boundary also forms the southern section of the eastern margin of Old Copse, an area of old Chiltern plateau woodland. The other (east and north) boundaries alongside the adjacent modern housing estates are mostly recent habitats of rough grass relatively and species poor margins with a more limited value for wildlife.

Potential Species Interest: The main part of the site, the arable field was not surveyed. There are many species of plant associated with arable fields with among them a number of uncommon and rare species. A full survey of the field would be needed to identify any such species present. The mature field boundaries are good quality habitats suitable for many species, including a wide variety of animals. These could include bats at least for foraging habitat, though the general age of the trees is such that good roost sites will not be common. The western and southern boundaries also provide potentially good corridor habitats.

Suggested Management: No change in the current management regime is suggested. The non-intervention or limited intervention approach to the management of the mature field boundaries is good for wildlife. There is scope to improve the eastern and northern field margins, for example by the planting and/or encouraging the natural colonisation of native local shrubs and a greater diversity of plants and thus potentially other species.

Suggested Mitigation: In event the site is developed, it will be very important to protect, retain and enhance the existing mature boundary habitats along the western and southern boundaries, if possible improve the other boundaries and create additional wildlife habitat should circumstances allow. The quantity and type of wildlife habitats included will in part be controlled by the type and extent of development.

Area SON 02

Summary Description: This area is a large arable field with three of its boundaries included in the survey area – therefore it is divided into three survey areas. (The fourth boundary hedge is included in SON 03.) As with SON01, the main part of the area (the large central ploughed area) was not surveyed.

West Boundary: The western boundary is made up of a mature strip of relatively recent planted mostly deciduous trees, including Wild Cherry, Oak, Beech, Alder, Birch, Lime, Holly etc. The ground cover is fairly sparse and species poor made up of typical wayside species such as Nettle and Hedge Parsley. Ivy is common on the trees and ground – suggesting a secondary origin and/or significant amounts of disturbance.

North Boundary: The western section of the northern boundary is a continuation of the Hawthorn dominated hedge to the west (SON01 South Boundary). Ivy is abundant. There is a rough species poor grass strip between the hedge and ploughed part of the field. The shrubs / trees in the eastern section of this hedge have either been (mostly) removed or were never present - and it is currently dominated by rough grass and herbs with Bramble being locally dominant. There is also a stand of Bracken. The original shrubs are apparently present again at the eastern end of the hedge. There is a single established Primrose plant (garden escape) in this part of the boundary. A colony of House Sparrows was apparently resident in this hedge, one of only two records for this species in the survey.

East Boundary: The eastern boundary is made up of a strip of rough grass and herb which backs onto garden fences of the adjacent modern houses. The garden hedges include Holly, Cherry Laurel, cultivated Privet (including some variegated) and cultivated *Lonicera*. Bramble is locally common. There are some smaller escaped garden plants - most notably Spanish Bluebell in two separate locations.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The best existing habitats for wildlife are the existing western and northern boundaries. The remaining habitats are apparently of lower value for wildlife.

Potential Species Interest: The main part of the site, the arable field was not surveyed. There are many species of plant associated with arable fields with among them a number of uncommon and rare species. A full survey of the field would be needed to identify any such species present or any other species typical of this habitat (e.g. farmland birds).

Suggested Management: No changes in the current management regime are suggested. The non-intervention approach to the management of the mature field boundaries is by default good management. There is scope to improve the eastern field margins, for example by the planting and/or encouraging the natural colonisation of native local shrubs and improving the quality of the grassland habitats.

Suggested Mitigation: In the event the site is developed it would be important to retain and enhance the existing mature habitats along the western and southern boundaries - and ideally create additional better boundary and/or internal habitats elsewhere. The quantity and type of habitats that can be maintained and/or created will be controlled by the type and extent of development.. The subsequent management of these habitats and any planned access should be designed to minimise these impacts.

Area SON 03

Summary Description: An arable field surrounded on four sides by boundary hedges and grass margins. The boundary was divided into five recording areas, with the main part of the site (ploughed arable) not surveyed.

North Boundary: This boundary has been included in SON03, but equally could have been included in SON 02 (as SON 02 South). It is a tall mature hedge dominated by Hawthorn with Field Maple, Holly, Elder, Dog Rose and some Bramble. The hedge includes Ash standards and some Ivy. There is a relatively narrow species poor rough grass margin on both the north and south sides of the hedge.

East Boundary: This boundary is made up of a strip of rough grass and herbs which backs onto a relatively undisturbed fenced 8 metre wide access strip behind the adjacent modern houses. This fenced strip includes a strip of mixed native and non-native shrubs including Hawthorn, Field Maple, Rose sp. and Garden Privet. Bramble is locally common. The grassland strip was not accessible from the field and thus not surveyed – but appeared to be species poor and dominated by rough grass.

West Boundary: Strip of close spaced mature planted Poplars with abundant Ivy on the trees and ground. The Poplars have been planted adjacent to a pre-existing hedge with smaller trees including Hawthorn, Elder and regenerating English Elm. Ground plants include mostly common rougher wayside species but also a few species of more mature habitats. Mistletoe grows in two of the trees. The field edge is a strip of rough species poor grass c. 5 metres wide. This strip is dominated by rough grasses and herbs including abundant Nettle and Bramble - with small Poplar suckers being locally abundant. The northern part of the hedge includes a number of large mature trees including Walnuts and Sweet Chestnut.

North West Boundary: This relatively short length of boundary is a more or less open fence line with scattered shrubs (Elder and Bramble) which are more continuous at its eastern end (where it joins SON 02) and overall equal amounts of rough wayside vegetation. The rough grass margin between the fence and ploughed area is c. 4 metres wide.

South Boundary: Old mature boundary (ditch and bank) topped by large mature deciduous trees (Oak, Ash etc.) including some large specimens over a mature under storey of shrubs including Hazel, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Elder and Spindle where light allows. Ivy is not uncommon on both tree and ground. There is a variable width rough grass margin along the field margin - relatively narrow at the western end of the hedge (5 metres) but much wider to the east (up to 15 metres) – here wide enough to include two mature isolated Goat Willows. The eastern end of the hedge includes a wide margin of smaller woody growth including a dense patch of Birch saplings. The hedge ground flora includes some typical woodland species such as Bluebell. The grassland strip is dominated by rough grasses with only a few herbs - with common wayside herbs being dominant.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The best existing habitats for wildlife are the existing western and southern boundaries – with the northern more recent boundary being of reasonable value. The remaining habitats are apparently of lower value for wildlife.

Potential Species Interest: The main part of the site, the arable field was not surveyed. There are many species of plant associated with arable fields with among them a number of uncommon and rare species. A full survey of the field would be needed to identify any such species present.

Suggested Management: No changes in the current management regime are suggested. The non-intervention or limited intervention approach to the management of the mature field boundaries is good for wildlife – hedges do not need to be managed as short habitats managed by regular cutting or laying.

Suggested Mitigation: In the event of all or part of the arable field being developed it will be important to retain undamaged the older and well established boundary banks with their mature trees and associated wildlife. It would be best if an undeveloped buffer zone was retained between the developed part of the site and these boundary banks. The development could allow the inclusion of some areas of grassland specifically created and managed for wildlife (e.g. sown species rich swards) and wood edge / scrub habitat. Appropriate management regimes would need to be devised to maintain such habitat value and, ideally, resources made available to monitor their condition and inform their ongoing management.

Area SON 04

Summary Description: This area is dominated by recently sown grassland with an old established boundary hedge including some large older trees along the boundary to the north. The western part of the site is a smaller mature permanent paddock surrounded on all sides by wooded boundaries. At this end of the site is a wide north – south mixed deciduous woodland strip. The surviving margin of grass between the planted field and hedge is a narrow strip of fairly species rich grassland – evidence perhaps of a previous species rich sward prior to the conversion to the field to a more intensive arable crop.

West Hedge: Locally steep south facing more or less north south orientated wooded bank with relatively narrow strip (c. 4 metres wide) of unploughed grassland at the bottom of the bank. Hedge trees include mature Oak, Ash and Field Maple and under storey shrubs including Hazel, Blackthorn and Bramble. Climbers include Ivy and Wild Clematis. Under the dense canopy a relatively sparse woodland ground flora includes Dogs Mercury, Lords and Ladies, Wood False Brome - with the grassland strip dominated by rough grass (False Oat Grass suggesting the strip is mostly unmanaged) but with some herbs and disturbed ground plants. (The surrounding habitats include grass paddocks to the north and a sown grass ley to south.) A clump of Stinking Iris grows in the hedge (a probable garden escape).

Central Hedge (East of Footpath): Continuation of West Hedge (described above), with greater number of larger trees dominated by Ash, with a good variety of under storey shrubs including suckering Elm, Field Maple, Elder, Hawthorn, Hazel, Spindle, Wild Privet, abundant Ivy and Bramble. Numerous small planted (mostly dead) Oaks have been planted along the leading edge of hedge. (This planting is inappropriate in nature conservation terms as the hedge needs no additional trees.) Ground plants in the hedge include some typical woodland herbs such as Greater Stitchwort and Dogs Mercury. The grassland strip includes some typical chalk grassland herbs such as Bladder Campion, Wild Basil, Hedge Bedstraw with dense patches of rough grass (Cocksfoot, False Oat Grass). This flora suggests the field was formerly unimproved chalk grassland.

Eastern Hedge (Including Adjacent Chalkpit): The western part of this section is a wide wooded band and hedge (as above) - grading to the east into a narrow Hawthorn hedge with very narrow grassland bank (remnant chalk grassland) along the edge of the abandoned wooded chalk pit to north. The Chalk Pit is open woodland dominated by mature Ash with a lot of bare ground. There is a scattered under storey of smaller shrubs (Elder, Hawthorn) over a sparse ground flora including Lords and Ladies and Dogs Mercury. There is a stand of (planted) mature Scots Pine and Norway Spruce to the east of the pit. Red Kites were present in and calling from a tree in the pit - a possible nest site? There is a Badger sett on the upper part of the north bank of the pit.

Western Paddock: Intensively managed species poor short grassland paddock - probably both grazed and cut regularly. No access was gained, the field was surveyed from the adjacent area.

Western Paddock, North Boundary: Mature tree covered old steep south west facing boundary bank with more or less no under storey (cut down or grazed out) with some surviving ground cover of woodland / shade loving plants. No access was gained and the area was surveyed visually from a distance.

North-South Woodland Strip (Southern Boundary of Western Paddock): North / south strip of mostly deciduous trees and under storey of smaller shrubs, with a total width of c. 10 metres wide. There is a relatively sparse ground flora of mostly native woodland and/or shade loving plants. In places the strip is being used as dump for animal bedding etc from the adjacent paddocks. There is a small mostly dry ditch fed by water draining off / from around the Western paddock shelter.

Overall Value for Wildlife: This area includes a good variety of old or well established habitats forming a long linear more or less north south strip including a good range of both plant and animal species. It is a good site for wildlife, despite being rather hemmed in by the more intensively managed field.

Potential Species Interest: Additional surveys later in the year would probably identify additional species, including species such as bats which require more targeted surveys. There is, for bats, good foraging and potentially roost sites in the more mature trees on the site.

Suggested Management: For the main part of the site (not the Western Paddock or Quarry) the more woody / scrubby lower part of the main hedge bank will in time continue to spread into the narrow strip of surviving grassland. Without management this grassland will also become increasingly dominated by coarser taller grasses such as False Oat – with the subsequent loss of the smaller

remnant grassland plants. Occasional sensitive cutting of both habitats would slow down these successional changes. The more mature parts of the hedge bank require no regular management.

Suggested Mitigation: Development of this site runs the risk of the destruction and/or damage of some or all of this bank and subsequent loss of some long standing wildlife habitats. There is also the risk, even if retained in its entirety, of it being isolated from other areas unless links to other habitats (e.g. Rudgings Plantation to the south) are retained. If development was to happen the sustainability of the habitat would be improved by the addition of an extra buffer strip in what is currently intensive crop, this strip potentially including at least an element of herb rich grassland – a probable previous habitat. Resources would be needed to ensure any such management could be managed in the future.

Rudgings Plantation

Summary Description: Rudgings Plantation was included as an extra survey site because it forms a strategic linking habitat between SON 04 and SON 06. Only the western part of the wood was surveyed.

Western Section: Linear block of open woodland continuous with and south west of SON4. Apparently recently managed (thinned) woodland with a structure made up of well spaced fairly evenly sized trees with Ash and Sycamore common and also Oak and Field Maple and the occasional Scots Pine - with a sparse under storey of shrubs including Elder. The area may well have been the subject of recent felling / thinning. The ground flora includes a few woodland species such as Dogs Mercury, Bluebell and Lords and Ladies but is apparently not a rich woodland flora. There is an active Badger Sett at the top of woodland, adjacent to the field which includes SON 06.

Overall Value for Wildlife: Only a small part of this woodland was surveyed and it is not possible to fully quantify the value of the wood from this survey. However the initial results suggest the wood is not particularly species rich.

Area SON 05

Summary Description: Long grass disused (former horse grazed) paddock set back from the road, accessed via a strip of land c. 16 metres wide between two properties. Area divided into two parts for recording purposes – the access strip off Kennylands Road and the grassland paddock itself.

Access Strip, Off Kennylands Road: Part tree covered and part open east west strip of land c. 16 metres wide, access route for grass paddock – with power lines also following part of the route. The boundaries with the adjacent properties are tree and/or hedge lined - with some larger trees at the east (road) end of the strip. More or less open at its west end, including some (small) disused beds used for cultivation.

Grassland Paddock: Currently unmanaged long rough grass and tall herb paddock, formerly managed as horse pasture. Early season survey and lack of recent management means the variety of recorded plants and overall number of recorded species of all groups may be incomplete. In June, for

example, the field supported a large number of the relatively uncommon grassland butterfly, the Marbled White and good numbers of the more common Meadow Brown and Ringlets (many more than the field margins on the other sites). There is a low lying (dry) hollow on the eastern (upper) part of the paddock dominated by rough plants, including nettle and tall herbs such as wayside Umbellifers (Hogweed and Hedge Parsley). In the lower part of the paddock is a small fenced off area planted with trees, and another area in the south west corner of the site used for dumping compost etc. There are other grazed paddocks to the south east of this neglected paddock.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The survey to date is insufficient to provide a true assessment of the main grassland paddock – and more survey work is recommended to record other species that may be present including invertebrates such as butterflies or other species groups as potential indicators of its value for these groups. Initial results suggest the lack of recent grazing has reduced the abundance of some species and overall diversity of plants – or at least created a more localised distribution on site.

Potential Species Interest: With better management this field could prove to support a more diverse range of species of plants and animals. For example the June survey found four species of grassland butterfly –all long grass species. A mixture of sward heights would also support and encourage good numbers of other grassland butterflies such as the Common Blue with larval food plants associated with shorter swards.

Suggested Management: Intensive horse grazing, the presumed previous management is not ideal for nature conservation purposes. A less intensive regime allowing some areas to grow long including some as over wintering habitat – yet enough grazing to create and maintain short herb rich parts of the sward with larger more competitive grasses and herbs controlled.

Suggested Mitigation: In the absence of sufficient ecological information about the site no specific suggestions for site mitigation can be made.

Area SON 06

Summary Description: Proposed development site located in eastern part of arable field, presumably to be accessed through the road side woodland strip along Kennylands Road.

North West Hedge: Boundary hedge adjacent to house and garden of neighbouring property. The hedge is dominated by mature trees and shrubs to the south but is more open to the north with fewer trees. The trees include Field Maple, Hazel, Elder, Hawthorn, Holly and Scots Pine - with a ground cover of Bracken, Lords and Ladies, Bluebell and Ground Ivy. There is a wide rough grass margin between 8 and 14 metres wide between the crop and hedge. The upper section by the house is dominated by Bramble, with some more disturbed ground plants including naturalised Greater Periwinkle (garden escape).

Rough Grass Margin: The rough grass margin includes occasional species more typical of more permanent swards, but mostly species of rough habitats including Ragwort, Hogweed, Broad Leaved Dock, Wood Avens, Common Mouse Ear and Common Catsear.

North East Hedge: Roadside woodland strip c. 5 metres wide dominated by Sycamore, with other woody species (Ash, Field Rose) being more common to the south east. The mixed ground flora consists of woodland species (with locally abundant Bluebells, Lords and Ladies and Dogs Mercury) and typical wayside plants (Ground Elder, Rough Meadow Grass, Cocksfoot) and a few disturbed ground plants. There is a colony of the garden escape Greater Periwinkle. Ivy is common and Bracken present in places. Badgers (there was a dead road kill adult) and Muntjac (tracks only seen) use the woodland strip for access. Both the latter species are widespread and common.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The best part of the site for wildlife is the long Sycamore dominated woodland strip. The field itself is intensively managed and apparently species poor.

Potential Species Interest: The site as whole is used by mammals such as Badgers and probably by bats for foraging though probably not for roosting as the trees appear to lack suitable habitat niches.

Suggested Management: There is scope to improve the roadside woodland given its rather uniform structure (see below for suggested methods) and narrow width. No management changes are suggested for the main field, given its primary function as a commercial agricultural field.

Suggested Mitigation: In the event of the site being developed it is suggested the woodland strip is protected from damage and plans put in place to enhance its value for wildlife. The two main enhancements would be a significant increase in its width and management to diversify its structure and perhaps its species composition. The latter could include the felling / coppicing of some of the tall Sycamore trees and the planting of additional shrubs and/or small trees using local native species. Should the site be adopted for infill housing the development could include the use of native shrubs in new garden hedges, wildlife friendly landscaping in the open areas between houses. One or more wildlife corridor should be created between Rudgings Plantation and the road to allow the movement of animals such as Badgers.

Area SON 07

Summary Description: Possible remnant of former more extensive parkland landscape, now part developed as residential developments to north-west and south east. Current habitats include a mature roadside hedge, and old orchard of mature or over mature trees and a probable old green lane.

Old Orchard: Old mature orchard with a small number of remaining trees with ground plants dominated by rough herb including nettles. The area is fairly heavily shaded by the tall roadside trees to west and the trees / mature hedge on the opposite garden boundary to north and east (the latter including some non-native conifers). The diversity of ground flora is apparently low.

Old Green Lane: More or less east west strip of land with scattered larger trees - probably a surviving remnant of former open parkland landscape. The green lane continues eastwards along the southern edge of SON 09. In one location the lane is crossed by a remnant section of more or less north - south orientated avenue of Limes. Ground flora not rich, but includes a few typical older woodland species such as Bluebells - surviving species which have perhaps in part spread in from the older boundary bank.

Roadside Hedge: Hedge line consisting of and dominated by large mature deciduous trees growing on a subsequently shaded bank, with a rather sparse ground flora

Overall Value for Wildlife: The results of the survey suggest the species diversity of the site in terms of plants at least is not high – but see below.

Potential Species Interest: Despite being rather hemmed in by adjacent residential properties and shaded by surrounding and internal trees overall the habitats of SON 07 may be more species rich than the survey suggests. Further survey work is suggested.

Suggested Management: No specific management is suggested as there is currently insufficient information about the habitats on site. However, one aspect for the old Orchard that would perhaps be beneficial is the reduction of shade by the removal / cutting back of some of the surrounding trees, especially the non-native conifers on the internal boundary hedge with the adjacent garden.

Suggested Mitigation: In the absence of any specific plans for the site and insufficient ecological information about the site no specific suggestions for site mitigation can be made. Though not managed at present the area provides a wildlife link between the more open habitats to the north and more enclosed habitats to the west (including SON06 and SON05). Though Hagpits Wood to the west provides another link the entire loss of all the part open habitats in SON07 would not be ecologically desirable. There is insufficient information to gauge the value of the site, though habitats of this kind can be very valuable. Features on particular note could be the old / mature standard trees and the old fruit trees.

Area SON 08

Summary Description: Open landscape of mostly regularly short mown grass surrounding a relatively new building, with bare areas used for car parking. Area recorded as one unit.

Thames Valley Gymnastics Centre: More or less open area of managed (regularly mown) grass surrounding the site buildings with bare hard standing areas used for car parking. Occasional trees present, including surviving trees of the habitats prior to the building of the Centre. Boundaries mostly open except for one short length of recently planted low hedge along the south boundary and low formal garden hedges along part of western boundary. The eastern part the northern boundary (with SON 9) is dominated by dense Bramble. The site includes three grassy mounds of varying size, presumably spoil created during building works. The largest mound is located in the north east corner of the site. The north-west boundary of the site where it merges in with the most recently built residential properties is unclear.

Overall Value for Wildlife: Under the current management regime, the overall value of this site is low. The grassland sward was semi-improved, supporting / retaining some variety of species but regular hard mowing reduces its value for wildlife.

Potential Species Interest: Under its current management regime this area is not likely to support a great diversity of species, though as all the areas surveyed it will be used even if only in passing by more species than recorded so far.

Suggested Management: There is a relatively large area of short mown grass which if not used for any other activity could be cut less frequently and/or less hard and some species allowed to flower – creating better wildlife habitat. The relatively poor boundary hedges could be enhanced and additional hedges created on the boundaries where there are none. There is scope to plant some local native small trees or shrubs, without compromising the area used for car parking. (Large tree species should be avoided.)

Suggested Mitigation: In the absence of sufficient ecological information about the site no specific suggestions for site mitigation can be made.

Area SON 09

Summary Description: Area dominated by large area of open short grassland divided into numerous smaller horse paddocks. The western boundary consists of a line of mature Pine trees, and along the southern edge an old green lane (the continuation of the feature in SON 08). The eastern boundary along Kennylands Road consists of a mature hedge with numerous trees. The area was divided into three parts for survey purposes.

Horse Paddocks: Intensively managed short grassland paddocks grazed by horses. The paddocks were not accessed but viewed from Area SON 09 to the south and Kennylands Road to the east.

Old Green Lane: Part grazed, part un-grazed (where fenced off) continuation of Green Lane (see SON 07) ,dominated by tall mature trees with shaded subsequently sparse ground flora. Trees include old and dying specimens especially where damaged by grazing animals. The ground flora includes a small number of typical woodland / shade loving plants including Bluebell. The lane was not accessed but surveyed from adjacent area (SON07 and Kennylands Road).

Roadside Hedge: Surveyed from the hard surfaced path alongside Kennylands Road. The hedge / tree line includes a variety of mature deciduous trees (e.g. Ash, Oak, Cherry, Field Maple) over an under storey of smaller shrubs and a ground flora of mostly typical wayside plants with some species typical of shady places including a few woodland species. There has been some dumping of soil and turf etc. in the hedge from maintenance work along the adjacent roadside pat.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The main (grassland) part of the site is of relatively low value due to intensity of management. The boundary habitats (green lane, western boundary and eastern hedge) are more valuable and also potentially important woodland link habitats between other nearby sites.

Potential Species Interest: The nature of the grassland sward in the main part of the field is not known. Long periods of intensive grazing and /or other improvements such as herbicide use or re-seeding can and does reduce the variety of species present - but it is possible that pockets of better sward still survive somewhere in the field and though local and sparse that the diversity of plants may be better than appearances would suggest (if it was allowed to flower).

Suggested Management: If opportunity arises allow some, even small areas, of the main grassland to grow longer - to find out what if any variety of herbs and grasses still survive. The demand for grazing in the field may mean only very small areas may be available for this purpose. The Green Lane appears to be a well established feature, supporting a different range of species from the field. The part of the Green Lane that is currently grazed should ideally be excluded from hard grazing.

Suggested Mitigation: Should all or part of the main open pasture be developed retain in its entirety the old Green Lane and an additional strip of land as a buffer zone between the Green Lane and development area. The two other wooded boundaries (roadside hedge and row of Pines) are also potentially important wildlife corridors which should be protected from damage and where possible enhanced (e.g. increased in size). The site has previously been subject to planning applications , but it is not currently known how many houses would be built if planning approval were given and what part / how much of the site will be affected. The area is part of a belt of undeveloped strip of land forming an east west corridor in the south of the village. Its loss or reduction in size could have a significant impact on wildlife even in its current state. If partially developed the improving and protecting any remaining habitats would be desirable.

Area SON 10

Summary Description: Large arable field and its associated margins and hedgerows - only partially surveyed. The field is intensively farmed by annual ploughing with crops sown close if not right up to the field boundaries - leaving room for narrow field margins only. There are intensively managed hedges along the south and east boundaries – which are very low and in places patchy and/or thin - in marked contrast to many of the boundaries elsewhere on the survey sites e.g. the fine old boundary banks in SON 01, SON 02 and SON 03 to the west. The field itself was not surveyed.

Field Margin Adjacent to Sewage Works: Apparently species poor narrow field margin with rough grass, rough herb, bramble and some scrub. This margin may once have included a more formal hedge, which has been damaged by over intensive management.

South West Road Verge and Hedge (South End): More or less typical managed low (flailed) roadside hedge and verge, with typical range of plants, i.e. a mix of bare and disturbed ground and

wayside species. The hedge itself is very patchy and in places absent and/or replaced by bramble. Overall this boundary has a low species diversity.

South East Boundary: Narrow rough species poor field margin north of sewage works with rough grass and rough herb, backing onto adjacent pasture.

It should be noted the hedge defining the northern margin of the sewage works access track includes a greater variety of species of plant with some typical woodland species – outlying populations of the adjacent Bird Wood (not surveyed) immediately to the south. The formal made track to the sewage works may have developed from a simple dirt track at / through the north end of Bird Wood.

Overall Value for Wildlife: This site is a typical intensively managed arable field with narrow field margins and heavily disturbed regularly managed boundary hedges – where they still survive. By comparison with many of the other survey sites in this survey it is less valuable for wildlife.

Potential Species Interest: The intensive nature of the management of the site and nature of the habitats present mean it is less likely to be an important site for most species – but could be of value for specialist species, such as in this case arable weeds. There are many species of plant associated with the regular disturbance of arable fields, potentially among them a number of uncommon or rare species. A full survey of the field would be needed to identify if any such species are present.

Suggested Management: There are no site specific management suggestions.

Suggested Mitigation: See general mitigation guidelines.

Area South East of SON10

Summary Description: Mixed habitat “waste ground” area with rubble piles, short bare areas, rough grass and herbs, bramble and scrub – located to the south of SON 10. The site is bounded to the east by the sewage works and west by Bird Wood. A good variety of birds were recorded. The site supports a few plants not seen elsewhere, including Bee Orchids. The site has not been proposed for development but it has been included in this report and briefly surveyed while in the area as it would be affected if the adjacent SON 10 was developed – even if only by an increase in public access and its associated disturbance.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The variety of habitats on site and its location sandwiched between two relatively undisturbed habitats to the east and west and its lack of active management mean it is a potentially good wildlife site, much better than current information may suggest.

Potential Species Interest: In part the site is included in this report as there are past (unconfirmed) record for Adder in the adjacent sewage works which if present would also be using this area of “waste ground”. Adders are now very rare in Oxfordshire, possibly on the verge of extinction and if they were to be found to be present in the area it would be a very important site. Even if the records are actually Grass Snakes (recorded in error) the presence of this species is also of note as though still widespread there are concerns about the current and future status of all reptile species.

Suggested Management: The current (default) management regime that could be classified as “benign neglect” is probably the ideal management for this site at present. Natural succession will mean the site will develop a bigger covering of bramble, shrubs and trees and shorter grassland and bare areas will decline. Some work could be needed in the future, but the nature of the site circumstances (an abandoned agricultural field) there is no obvious mechanism for this to be achieved.

Suggested Mitigation: In the event of the development of part or all of the adjacent arable land of SON 10 to the north the group of sites to the south including Bird Wood and this area of unmanaged land would be an important refuge areas in their own right as well as being potentially important link habitat with other sites on this side of the parish.

Sonning Common Sewage Works

Summary Description: Not surveyed and only viewed from the adjacent areas. Mostly short mown grass between the various component parts of the sewage works plant.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The value of the site for wildlife is not known. Given the need to manage the site for its core function i.e. sewage treatment, its current value and any potential value may be limited and/or confined to the margins of the site away from the main areas of working plant.

Potential Species Interest: The site in large part is included in this report for interest only, as there have been past (unconfirmed) record for Adder in the area of the works. If present they will probably also be using the adjacent “waste ground” area to the east. Adders are now very rare in Oxfordshire, possibly on the verge of extinction and if they were present in this area (or anywhere else in Sonning Common) it would be exceptionally important. Adders are a rapidly declining species nationally which are already extinct and threatened with extinction in several counties. (Oxfordshire falls into the latter category with confirmed records for Adders from only one current site though other small populations may still exist.)

Suggested Management: No specific management suggestions are made for the sewage works, except perhaps the provision and subsequent checking of reptile refuges to confirm the status of Adders (probably not present) and other reptiles on site. *It is understood that any measures for this site are not in the remit of Sonning Parish Council.*

Area SON 15

Summary Description: The area was formally divided into two survey areas prior to the actual survey. The two parts of the site are the recreation / sport fields used and maintained by Chiltern Edge School and the mature established road side hedge / tree line habitat along Kidmore Lane.

School Playing Fields (15a): Access was not gained to the field, but surveyed visually from Kidmore Lane to the south. The field consists of regularly short mown grass bounded by low regularly cut formal (garden) hedges. The condition of the grassland is not known, but if all or part it have only been mown and not fertilised or treated with herbicide it could still include at least some areas of unimproved / relatively species rich turf. However, the mowing will have caused the loss of some of the larger species or more sensitive species of plant.

Sunken Lane, Kidmore Lane (15b): Section of sunken lane flanked by old woodland banks. Typical flora including larger trees of Oak, Ash, Field Maple, Hawthorn, Holly, Hazel with woodland ground plants including Sweet Woodruff, Bluebell, Dogs Mercury, Wood Melick and some more common wayside species such as Hogweed.

Overall Value for Wildlife: The current value for wildlife is generally reduced due to the current land use of the grassland habitat, and the circumstances of the wooded habitats (divided / disturbed by a well used road). The road verge woody habitats will support a woodland flora and fauna much of it not identified in this survey. The presence of the road is an obvious issue, even if only that of disturbance for many species. The mature woody / hedgerow habitats along the road verges undoubtedly support many more species than this survey has identified. The actual value of the grassland is not known but it is much affected by its current management.

Potential Species Interest: The playing fields are very large and from the outside apparently the whole area is mown short on a regular basis. However playing pitches do not cover the whole of the mown area and it could be possible to leave some areas un-mown and/or mow others on a less frequent basis to create a variety of sward heights – much improving the value of the grassland habitats.

Suggested Management: There is probably limited scope to alter the management of the road side habitats given the obvious constraints due to the presence of the road. However if there was sufficient space the wooded hedge habitat could be allowed to expand into one or both of the grassland habitats either side of the road. (This expansion should not be allowed if any surviving herb rich or otherwise valuable open habitats are lost or damaged.) There is however a lot of scope to create / allow the natural development of better grassland habitats within the school grounds either as defined blocks and/or linear strips (narrow where space is limited) along boundaries or between pitches. It will first be necessary to define the core areas required for both formal and informal recreation, and thus the areas that will continue to need to be mown short on a regular basis. The remaining areas could be surveyed and depending on their location, size and actual or potential value alternative management regimes could be adopted. Suggested grassland management options include cutting only once a year or perhaps every other year, a regime similar to a hay management regime

but without grazing. Another regime would be selective intermittent cutting at appropriate times of year with cutting height adjusted as required to avoid damaging some plants but control others – and encourage shorter sward species. The diversity of other animal life (especially small mammals and invertebrates) would increase accordingly.

Suggested Mitigation: In the absence of any specific plans for the site, only general guidance is provided (see above).