



**East Pye Solar
Environmental Statement
Volume 3: Appendix 8.8 - Water Vole and Otter
Survey Report**

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Non-technical Summary

Stantec was commissioned by East Pye Solar Ltd to undertake otter *Lutra lutra* and water vole *Arvicola amphibius* surveys to inform the design evolution of the Development Consent Order (DCO) process for the proposed East Pye Solar (also referred to as the 'Scheme').

This technical appendix to the Environmental Statement (ES) presents the findings of otter and water vole surveys and assesses the potential for and geographical importance of the Order Limits for the species.

The surveys were carried out in September 2025. A total of 66 ditches were recorded during the surveys though two were choked with vegetation and not assessed further and an additional three were subsequently determined to be off-site due to Order Limits changes. As such 61 ditches were assessed against eight criteria known to influence water vole presence/likely absence and were scored 0-8 dependant on the number of criteria they met. Ditches with a score of 6 to 8 achieve an 'Optimal' score and would then undergo targeted surveys whereby surveyors' hand-search for signs of water voles. Of the 61 ditches surveyed, only 2 achieved an 'Optimal' score. No water vole signs were observed on any of these ditches.

Most ditches were dry at the time of the survey, which is a significant limiting factor for supporting water voles, outweighing other favourable attributes. Only Hempnall Beck (D35, CRC7) consistently held enough water to support water voles. Hempnall Beck also runs through CRC6 however the section of the waterbody here did not hold enough water. Of the other ditches assessed with water permanence, none had suitable nesting habitats, and only two lacked signs of disturbance. The overall lack of suitable habitat suggests that water voles are unlikely to be present, and any found would likely be transient and significant only at the **site** level.

Otter surveys were carried out concurrently with the water vole assessments. Otter suitability is similarly limited by the absence of water in many of the ditches, with Hempnall Beck also representing the most prominent source of permanent water. Data search records suggest historic otter use of areas near the River Tas (to the west) and could range within the Order Limits vicinity. While Sub-Sites closest to otter records lacked suitable waterbodies, there was some terrestrial connectivity between habitats that otters might use. The lack of suitable waterbodies and no observed otter signs suggests any otters present would be transient and significant only at the **site** level.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Introduction

- 1.1.1 Stantec was commissioned by East Pye Solar Ltd to undertake otter and water vole surveys in relation to an application to be made to the Secretary of State under Section 37 of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended), seeking a DCO for the Scheme on land located south of Norwich and north of Harleston (the Order Limits).
- 1.1.2 This Appendix provides details of the desk study, habitat suitability assessment and targeted surveys for water vole and otter to determine the presence/likely absence surveys and includes an evaluation of the geographic importance of the Order Limits for otter and water vole. Baseline data has been compiled from an ecological desk study, habitat suitability assessments and targeted surveys.
- 1.1.3 The **ES Vol I, Chapter 8 - Ecology and Biodiversity [EN0110014/APP/6.1.8]**, includes a final assessment of potential impacts and subsequent effects on any identified important ecological features. Further embedded mitigation methodologies are provided within **ES Volume III, Appendix 8.10: Outline Protected Species Mitigation Strategy [EN0110014/APP/6.3.8.10]** which details appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures required to avoid adverse effects from occurring.

Scope of report

- 1.1.4 The 'survey area' included an assessment of all watercourses / ditches within and immediately adjacent to the Order Limits. The Order Limits are shown in **Figure 1**.
- 1.1.5 The objectives of the report are to:
- present the methodology used and identify any constraints encountered during the surveys;
 - present the results of the ecological desk study.
 - present the results of the Order Limits habitat assessment;
 - present the results of the targeted otter and water vole surveys;
 - provide a summary of the potential for the proposed development to support opportunities for otter and water vole; and
 - based on the results of the desk study and surveys, assess the geographical importance of the Order Limits for otter and water vole.
- 1.1.6 The assessment is based on the following sources of information:
- A desk study of the Order Limits and land within a 2km radius;
 - A habitat suitability assessment of all accessible watercourses within the Order Limits boundary;

- Targeted surveys for water vole and otter of specific ditches in the vicinity of likely crossing points identified within the scheme.
- 1.1.7 This will be used to identify any potential ecological constraints associated with the Scheme that may risk contravention of legislation or policy.
- 1.1.8 This assessment has been prepared with reference to best practice guidance published by the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, 2017; 2018) and as detailed in British Standard 42020:2013 Biodiversity - Code of Practice for Biodiversity and Development (BSI, 2013).
- 1.1.9 Watercourse locations and survey results plans are provided within **Figure 1**, photographs provided within **Annex 1**, the survey results in **Annex 2**, and details of relevant legislation in **Annex 3**.

1.2 Order Limits Context and Scheme Description

- 1.2.1 The Order Limits are located within the administrative areas of Norfolk County Council and South Norfolk Council. Order Limits are the maximum extent of land anticipated to be acquired and/or used for the construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning phases of the Scheme. A description of the Order Limits can be found in **Chapter 3 – The Order Limits [EN0110014 /APP/6.1.3]**.
- 1.2.2 The location of the Order Limits and surrounding landscape is shown in **Figure 1**.

The Scheme

- 1.2.3 The Scheme comprises the construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning of a solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generating station with a total capacity exceeding 100 megawatts (MW) and associated development including a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), up to three 132 kV Project Substations and up to three 400 kV Project Substations, Grid Connection Infrastructure and a new National Grid Substation. A description of the Scheme can be found in **Chapter 4 – The Scheme [EN0110014/APP/ 6.1.4]**.

1.3 Relevant Legislation

Water Vole

- 1.3.1 Water voles and their breeding and resting habitats are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This piece of legislation protects water voles against killing, injury, taking (capture) and disturbance and also protects their burrows from damage, destruction, obstruction or disturbance (while occupied). In addition, water voles are listed as species of principal importance (SPI) to the conservation of biodiversity in England (see **Annex 3**).

- 1.3.2 A mitigation licence is needed for displacement or trapping/relocation of water voles if there is a risk that water voles may be killed or injured, or their burrows or nests damaged or disturbed, by works.

Otters

- 1.3.3 Both otters and their resting places/places of shelter are afforded protection under the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). In broad terms these pieces of legislation jointly mean that the animals themselves are protected against killing, injury, taking (capture) and disturbance. In addition, their places of shelter are protected against damage, destruction and obstruction. The otter is also classified as a Species of Principal Importance (SPI). SPI species are included on a list drawn up in response to the requirements of Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006 and are considered priority for the conservation of biodiversity in England.
- 1.3.4 A European protected species mitigation licence (EPSML) is required if works are likely to result in damage, destruction or obstruction of one or more otter holts or other resting places, or there is a risk of causing disturbance to an otter using these features.
- 1.3.5 A more detailed description of this legislation and associated planning policy is provided in **Annex 3**.

2 Methodology

2.1 Desk study

- 2.1.1 A desk study was conducted to obtain data relating to otter and water vole within the Order Limits and a 2km radius. Records were acquired from Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service (NBIS). Additional contextual information was compiled from publicly available data sources:
- MAGIC (<http://www.magic.gov.uk>) – the Government’s on-line mapping service. Information was sought regarding: the presence of suitable riparian habitats, European Protected Species Mitigation Licences (EPSML) issued for otter, and statutory designated nature conservation sites designated in-part for either species;
 - Ordnance Survey mapping and publicly available aerial photography to determine any habitats features such as running and standing water; and
 - The National Water Vole Database Project (NWDP) Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment (Glossop & Morse, 2024).
- 2.1.2 Baseline information on the presence of potentially suitable habitats was obtained from the data search and the existing habitat survey data collected for the Order Limits (see **ES Volume III, Appendix 8.1: Ecological Desk Study & Extended Habitat Survey [EN0110014/APP/6.3.8.1]**).

2.1.3 The water vole habitat suitability assessment followed methodology which was originally presented by in the CIEEM's In Practice (Issue 122, Dec 2023) and was designed for large sites with complex watercourse networks such as the Scheme (and coincidentally based on a study in Norfolk). The suitability assessment involved the walking of all wet ditch and watercourse banks and conducting a visual condition assessment using the water vole habitat condition suitability index; provided in **Table 2.1** below. **Table 2.2** provides the evaluation criteria of each score permutation.

Table 2.1 Habitat Suitability Criteria (Bullion, S. et al., 2023)

Attribute	Notes
Well developed (>60%) bankside and emergent vegetation (WDBV)	If there is over 60% bankside vegetation cover then score 1 . Vegetation should ideally be >30 cm high and provide a relatively continuous cover. If water level is obviously at a high point try to imagine the water body at a time of normal water levels. If bankside vegetation is insufficient then score 0 .
Year-round availability of food sources (YRFA)	Where there is a good mixture of vegetation types (grasses, reed and reed rhizomes, sedge and limited areas of scrub such as hawthorn or bramble) and plenty of currently green vegetation then score 1 . If the vegetation is very low and sparse and patchy then score 0 .
Suitable refuge areas above extremes in water levels (SRA)	Where there is good refuge (i.e. an area of dense rush or grass tussocks) within 10 m of the water margin and situated on higher ground, which would not become flooded at high water levels, then score 1 . If there are no tussocks present or they are very sparse then score 0 .
Steep banks suitable for burrowing (SBB)	Where the banks are >40–50 cm high freeboard, an angle of 30–50°, appear stable and with a substrate suitable for burrowing, score 1 . If the banks are <30 cm in height above the current water level, or are at a very low angle, then score 0 . If the bank is two-staged (e.g. two clear slope phases but not a wetted berm proper) then a comment should be made accordingly.
Permanent open water (POW)	Where there is permanent open water score 1 . Where the water body is choked with emergent vegetation to the point where water vole cannot freely swim to escape predators, and/or the water is shallow (typically <30 cm), score 0 . If score is 0 then note whether ditch may still provide sink habitat.
Presence of berm (POB)	If there is a continuous berm along the water body edge score 1 . If there is only a very limited berm or none at all, then score 0 .
Lack of disturbance through poaching and grazing and/or recent management (LOD)	Where there are few signs of poaching damage (or poaching is clearly historical and no longer occurring) or no sign of recent cutting/slubbing out of the water body, or the provision of stock-proof fencing, then score 1 . Tracks with ditches both sides often afford this feature. However, if there is obvious poaching damage to the bank and short, grazed bankside vegetation then score 0 .
Nest-building opportunities in vegetation above water level (NBO)	Where there are low, unsuitable bank levels the presence of nearby nest-building opportunities provide an alternative refuge habitat. Where there are numerous, dense grass, rush or sedge tussocks within 5 m of the water body margin then score 1 . If there are few tussocks then score 0 . If suitable nest-building opportunities are present >5 m from the margin this should be noted separately.
Permanent open water (POW)	Where there is permanent open water score 1 . Where the water body is choked with emergent vegetation to the point where water vole cannot freely swim to escape predators, and/or the water is shallow (typically <30 cm), score 0 . If score is 0 then note whether ditch may still provide sink habitat.

Table 2.2: Assessment of Habitat Suitability (Bullion, S. *et al.*, 2023)

Score	Suitability	Comment
0	Unsuitable	A score of 0 means that the habitat contains none of the desirable attributes including permanent open water. At best, it may provide seasonal dispersal habitat but will not be permanently occupied.
1	Sink/Unsuitable	This type of water body will contain very little if any vegetation, poor shallow or low banks, no berm and with no rush/grass tussocks in close proximity of the water body. It is possible that this type will have been recently dredged out and will have scored 1 from having open water present.
2	Sink/Unsuitable	A score of 2 will also be unsuitable and lack well-developed vegetation cover.
3	Sub-optimal	In this case, there will be a small number of positive features; these water bodies may rarely be of enhancement potential.
4	Sub-optimal	This type of water body is quite common, often characterised by suitable open water, steep banks and good vegetation coverage. A score 4 water body will often have good enhancement potential to make it an optimal water body.
5	Sub-optimal	A score 5 water body can often appear suitable for water voles and will often have a number of field signs present; enhancement potential to make it an optimal water body is almost certain.
6-8	Optimal	A score of 6–8 represents an optimal water body for water voles. It will often have dense and varied vegetation, tall and structurally sound banks, permanent open water, a lack of disturbance (often due to the exclusion of cattle) and the presence of one or more of a berm, suitable refuge sites or nest-building opportunities. A water body scoring 6, 7 or 8 will often be lined with a 5–10 m band of grass or rush tussocks.

2.2 Water Vole Targeted Surveys

2.2.1 Based on Bullion, S. *et al.*, (2023), and adopting a precautionary methodology, targeted surveys were subsequently undertaken on any ditch/watercourse with a habitat suitability score of 5 or above and which had the potential to be impacted by the development based on indicative crossing point information available at the time of survey.

2.2.2 These areas subject to targeted surveys are shown in **Figure 1** and detailed within **Table 2.3** below.

Table 2.3: Water Vole Target Survey Areas

Reference Number	Site Reference	Habitat Information
D12	7D	A dry ditch with grassy, low lying scrub vegetation, with water mint within the channel and banks.
D35	CRC7	Hempnall Beck. Heavily shaded stream on both sides, with gravelly bed within the channel. Connects with D36 and D37 which combined, make up part of Hempnall Beck
D8	BESS	Ditch within a wooded footpath. The ditch banks are mostly gently sloping is frequently lined by dense scrub in places, although some bare patches are present along the length. Ditch was dry in most parts but contained water intermittently.

2.2.3 Surveys were carried out in September 2025 (the period when the species is at its densest population levels) and involved at first, surveyors walking both banks and looking for water vole signs by eye. This was then followed by a hand-search of vegetation on the bank edge of watercourses/waterbodies being

thoroughly searched for field signs indicating the presence of water voles. Field signs were also visually searched for up to 1m out into the water and at least 1m up the bank (Dean et al, 2016). Signs indicating water vole presence searched for included feeding remains, characteristic grass lawns, burrows, runs, and footprints, with the presence of latrines/water vole droppings confirming presence (Strachan, Moorhouse & Gelling, 2011).

2.2.4 Following from these surveys, if water vole presence was confirmed, a population size estimate for water voles would be undertaken. The water vole mitigation guidelines state that ‘*the numbers of latrines recorded during the survey visits will give an indication of relative population size*’ (Dean et al, 2016). **Table 2.4** below shows relative population sizes based on the numbers of latrines per 100m survey section.

Table 2.4: Water Vole Population Size (Dean et al, 2016)

Relative Population Density	Approximate Number of Latrines per 100m of Bankside (July to September)
High	20 or more
Medium	6-19
Low	< 5 (or non, but with other confirmatory field signs)

2.3 Otter Surveys

2.3.1 An assessment of the suitability of habitats was also made for otters.

2.3.2 In conjunction with the water vole habitat suitability assessment and targeted water vole surveys, field signs of otter were also recorded. This survey conformed to standard methodology for otter survey (Chanin, 2003). This guidance does not contain specific methods for assessing habitat suitability, with otters known to use a wide range of habitats when commuting through a landscape, but with hunting, shelter and breeding being most associated with areas close to water containing a good supply of food, shelter from dense or woody vegetation (or other cover such as rocks in open landscapes) and low levels of pollutants.

2.3.3 Signs that otter may be present were searched for including characteristic spraints (droppings), holts, resting places, otter footprints and pathways through vegetation along or down the bank (slides). Particular attention was paid to more suitable habitats, most notably the Hempnall Beck, which is lined by a habitat mosaic suitable to support otters.

2.3.4 In addition, badger *Meles meles* surveys have been undertaken throughout terrestrial habitats within the Order Limits (see **ES Volume III, Appendix 8.7: Badger Survey Report (confidential) [EN0110014/APP/6.3.8.7]**) these recorded all badger setts and recorded other mammal burrows/excavations (including otter holts if present).

2.4 Limitations

- 2.4.1 The surveys were carried out between summer and the early autumn at a time of the year when most ditches were dry. Professional judgement was used to determine whether the ditches in question were likely to contain water for more than four months in a year and therefore likely to qualify as a wet ditch watercourse as per UK Habitat Classification (UKHab Ltd, 2023). A number of ditches were deemed to not meet this threshold. These ditches were therefore excluded, based upon the assumption that the lack of water permanence was by itself enough to make the ditches unsuitable for water voles and otter.
- 2.4.2 Ditches were also excluded from detailed surveys whether they held water or not, if they were not located at crossing points identified within the scheme at that point.
- 2.4.3 D9 and D67 were unable to be properly assessed due to dense bramble within the channel preventing inspection of the underlying banks. Combined with the lack of water in both mean that water vole and otter presence is unlikely.
- 2.4.4 The survey described here was undertaken in accordance with the recognised methodologies current at the time of commissioning. Site circumstances (scope of works and development parameters), scientific knowledge or methodological requirements can change during the course of a scheme, and these external factors may impact on the scope of subsequent work requirements.
- 2.4.5 All ecological surveys have an expected validity period owing to the tendency of the natural environment to change over time. This validity period varies from receptor to receptor and is also dependent on the degree of change in a site's management and overall landscape ecology. Where the potential for change is considered to be relevant to the Order Limits, this is highlighted in the appropriate section.

2.5 Report Qualification

- 2.5.1 At the time of the completion of this report, unless otherwise stated, the surveys and assessments have been conducted in accordance with best practice guidelines. Site circumstances, scientific knowledge, or the methodological requirements can change during the course of a scheme, and these external factors may impact the scope of subsequent work requirements.
- 2.5.2 All work has been carried out by experienced and suitably qualified ecologists, in accordance with the Code of Professional Conduct of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (CIEEM, 2018¹).
- 2.5.3 This report does not purport to provide detailed, specialist legal advice. Where legislation is referenced, the reader should consult the original legal text and/or the advice of a qualified environmental lawyer.

¹ CIEEM. (2018). *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater and Coastal*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester

3 Results

3.1 Desk Study

- 3.1.1 A desk study was undertaken using data obtained from Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service (NBIS), utilising any water vole and otter records held within the data search results.
- 3.1.2 In total 22 records of water vole were returned within 2km of the Order Limits through only four were from the last 10 years. The closest records are two dead water voles in Brooke in 2015 (approximately 600m north and 830m north-east of Site 9) though these records are only accurate to 1km so exact distances cannot be confirmed. A third record is present in Newton Flotman approximately 2km north of Sub-Site 7A but no further information is provided in relation to this record. The only confirmed live record is of a water vole on Fritton Common approximately 860m south of Sub-Site 5B.
- 3.1.3 There are a total of 13 records of otter within 2km of the Order Limits boundaries including one on the boundary of Sub-Site 2B dating from 2012. Six of the records date from the last 10 years. The closest record of these more recent records is located across the road from Sub-Site 4B (190m north) dating from 2015. The land on which this record is from is owned by an angling club with at least one pond stocked with fish. Two records are approximately 700m north-west of Sub-Site 4A where otter spraints were found in 2017, and an otter was observed fishing along a tributary of the River Tas in 2019 and a further two records from 2018 of otter associated with the River Tas near Smockmill common approximately 1.65km north of a Highway Works (LCH) through Saxlingham Nethergate (over 2km from the Order Limits)

3.2 Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment

- 3.2.1 The results of the water vole habitat suitability assessment are provided in **Table 3.1** below, ditch/watercourse locations are provided in **Figure 1**.
- 3.2.2 Overall, a total of 66 ditches were assessed across the Order Limits. Two ditches (D9 and D67) were viewed but filled with dense scrub vegetation and therefore not surveyed. A further three ditches (D38, D44 and D56) were included within the original survey scope but were later removed from the order Limits due to boundary changes and are therefore not considered further in this report.
- 3.2.3 Of the remaining 61 ditches within the survey area only 3.3% reached an 'Optimal' score and were targeted for detailed surveys surveyed. Of the remaining ditches, 55.7% of were 'Sub-Optimal', 34.4% were sink/unsuitable and 6.6% were 'Unsuitable.'

3.2.4 **Table 3.1** provides a breakdown of the number of ditches passing each water vole habitat suitability assessment attribute. **Table 3.2** provides results of the targeted surveys.

Table 3.1: Habitat Suitability Assessment Results

Habitat Suitability Score	Number of Ditches/Watercourses	Site References	Associated Ditch/Watercourse Codes (see Figure 1)
0	4	6; 9; 10C; 10E	D13; D15; D17; D18
1	7	1A; 5A; 7C; 8B; 10A, 10C	D4; D6; D11; D16; D24; D28; D33
2	14	1B; 4A; 4B; 5B; 7C; 7G; 10E; CRC1; CRC3; CRC4	D1; D3; D7; D14; D25; D26; D27; D29; D34; D39; D40; D46; D50; D52
3	16	1A 1B; 2B; 4A; 7F; 8A; 8B; 9; 10A; CRC4; CRC8; CRC13	D2; D10; D32; D33; D41; D43; D45; D49; D54; D55; D57; D59; D62; D64; D65; D66
4	10	2B; 3B; 7C; 7G; 8A; 10A; 10C; CRC4; CRC7; CRC13	D5; D22; D23; D30; D36; D42; D51; D58; D60; D63
5	8	3A; 7C; 8A; CRC4; CRC6; CRC7	D19; D20; D21; D37; D47; D48; D53; D61
6	2	7D; CRC7	D12; D35

Table 3.2: Breakdown of Habitat Suitability per Suitability Attributes (including the three off-site ditches)

Attribute Criteria	Number of Ditches/Watercourses Passing the Criteria	Percentage of Total Ditches/Watercourses
Well developed (>60%) bankside and emergent vegetation (WDBV)	48	71.64%
Year-round availability of food sources (YRFA)	43	64.18%
Suitable refuge areas above extremes in water levels (SRA)	32	47.76%
Steep banks suitable for burrowing (SBB)	36	53.73%
Permanent open water (POW)	5	7.46%
Presence of berm (POB)	2	2.99%
Lack of disturbance through poaching and grazing and/or recent management (LOD)	21	31.34%
Nest-building opportunities in vegetation above water level (NBO)	8	11.94%

3.3 Targeted Water Vole Surveys

3.3.1 This section presents the results of three targeted water vole surveys on ditches which achieved an ‘Optimal’ WWSA score.

3.3.2 **Table 3.3** provides results of the targeted surveys.

Table 3.3: Water Vole Targeted Survey Results

Ditch/ Watercourse Reference	Site Reference	Water Vole Field Signs	Notes
D12	Sub-Site 7D	None	<p>A dry ditch with grassy, low lying scrub vegetation, with water mint within the channel and banks.</p> <p>Burrow found on the southern bank approximately 1m from the channel (approximate Ordnance Survey Grid reference: TM 23488 96017) with small, rounded droppings at the entrance suggestive of field vole and not water vole. Wasps were noted entering and exiting the burrow.</p> <p>Ditch contained water at the time of the WVSA but was dry at the time of the targeted survey after which the ditch was deemed unlikely to regularly hold enough water to support water voles.</p>
D35	CRC7	None	No water vole field signs found. Banks partially collapsed in places. Channel bed made up of gravelly substrate.
D8	BESS Site	None	No water vole field signs found. Dry at the time of survey along much of its (on-site) length. Unlikely to regularly hold enough water to support water voles.

3.4 Otter survey

3.4.1 The results of the otter surveys are presented within **Table 3.4** (below), no otter field signs were recorded.

3.4.2 In addition, badger surveys undertaken throughout terrestrial habitats within the Order Limits (see **ES Volume III, Appendix 8.7: Badger Survey Report (confidential) [EN0110014/APP/ 6.3.8.7]**), did not record any terrestrial otter field signs including the presence of otter holts/resting places.

Table 3.4: Otter Survey Results

Ditch/ Watercourse Reference	Area Ref.	Otter Field Signs	Notes
D12	7D	None	Agricultural ditch with water levels too low to support otters. No signs suggesting transient otters. Channel was heavily vegetated later in the year.
D35	CRC7	None	Hempnall Beck. Stream and surrounding habitat are suitable for transient otters but no signs observed that would suggest this. Connectivity to further suitable otter habitat off-site.
D44	CRC4	None	Agricultural ditch with low water levels – too low to sustain otter populations. Surrounding habitat regularly disturbed by agricultural practices. No signs suggesting transient otters.
D48	CRC6	None	Hempnall Beck. Dense bramble prevented a full inspection of the waterbody. Water levels too low to sustain otter populations. No signs suggesting transient otters observed.
D45	CRC4	None	Agricultural ditch with low water levels – too low to sustain otter populations. Surrounding habitat regularly disturbed

Ditch/ Watercourse Reference	Area Ref.	Otter Field Signs	Notes
			by agricultural practices. No signs suggesting transient otters.
D47	CRC4	None	Agricultural ditch with low water levels – too low to sustain otter populations. Surrounding habitat regularly disturbed by agricultural practices. No signs suggesting transient otters. (Photograph 5)
All other ditches	1A; 1C 1B; 2B; 3B; 4A; 4B; 5A; 5B; 6; 7C; 7F; 7G; 8A; 8B; 9 ;10A ;10C; 10E; CRC1; CRC2; CRC3; CRC4; CRC5 CRC6; CRC7; CRC8; CRC9; CRC13; BESS;	None	No water in ditches. Habitat deemed unsuitable. No signs suggesting transient otters.

4 Evaluation

4.1 Water Vole

- 4.1.1 The Order Limits are located generally within a part of Norfolk with low levels of water vole records. There is a low density of water vole “Alert” areas as identified in the National Water Vole Database Project. However, it should be noted that water vole absence can only be assumed by a lack of evidence, not confirmed.
- 4.1.2 All ditches and watercourses assessed had varying degrees of suitability for water voles; most, contained suitable bankside vegetation which was correlated with a presence of suitable foraging resources. Just over half the ditches assessed had banks deemed steep enough for water voles to burrow into.
- 4.1.3 Almost all ditches were dry at the time of the survey and though five were deemed to have some water permanence, most were not considered to be able to hold enough water regularly to support water voles. Only the stream in CRC7 (D35) was considered to contain enough water for water voles regularly. The lack of water in the ditches is considered the major limiting factor of water vole suitability across the Order Limits and likely over-rides other, more favourable attribute criteria such as the availability of food sources and vegetated banks.
- 4.1.4 Of the five ditches assessed as having permanence of open water, none were found to feature berms, or contain suitable nest building habitat above the water, within 5m of the margins. Only two of the five (D35 and D12) were found to lack signs of poaching or disturbance suggesting that these are limiting factors within of ditches with open water permanence. The general lack of water permanence can be attributed to the proliferation of vegetation within the channel itself soaking up any water that may accumulate. A significant proportion of the ditches surveyed were under hedgerow with trees.
- 4.1.5 Ditch D12 was the only ditch along which a very small burrow was observed, with droppings indicative of field vole *Microtus agrestis* at the entrance. The burrow itself is assumed to be inactive as wasps were seen entering and exiting the burrow. No signs of water vole were found.
- 4.1.6 The general lack of suitable habitat throughout the scheme means the presence of water vole is unlikely. Any water voles that may be present within the scheme in the future are likely to be transient. Therefore, in the unlikely event of any transient water voles being periodically present within the scheme, these would be considered to be of **Site level** geographical importance only.

4.2 Otter

- 4.2.1 Though otters can tolerate a variety of habitat conditions, the lack of water within much of the surveyed ditches was a major limiting factor in otter suitability. Of the waterbodies that did hold water (**Table 3.4, Figure 2**), only D35 (Hempnall Beck - CRC7) contained enough water to be of sufficient suitability for otters. This is part of a network of streams connected to the River Tas which runs

approximately 1.3km to the west. Otters can travel many kilometres in a day and can have home ranges well in excess of 10km (Chanin, 2003). Records held by NBIS suggest a small, historic otter population using areas around the River Tas. The Order Limits would therefore potentially be within the home range of any otters that may be residing within this area. No evidence to suggest current otter presence was recorded.

- 4.2.2 Sub-Sites 4A, 4B and 7A are closest in proximity to historic otter records however none of these parcels feature suitable waterbodies. Though there is terrestrial connectivity between on-site habitats and Hempnall Beck that otters may use, with the exception of Sub-Site 7B, CRC6 and CRC7 connectivity in the form of ditches or other waterbodies is limited.
- 4.2.3 Given the general lack of suitability of on-site waterbodies, the lack of otter signs observed it is thought any otters that may enter the Order Limits are likely to be transient and considered to be of **Site level** geographical importance only.

5 References

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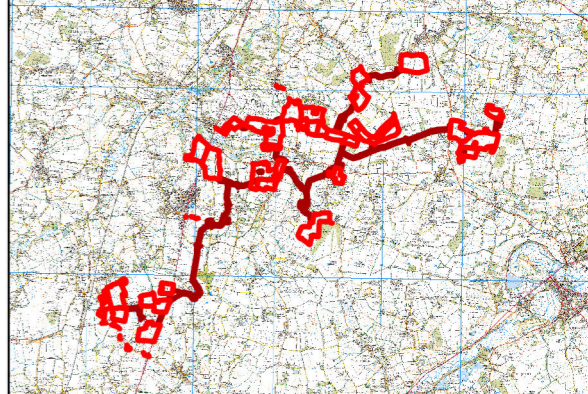
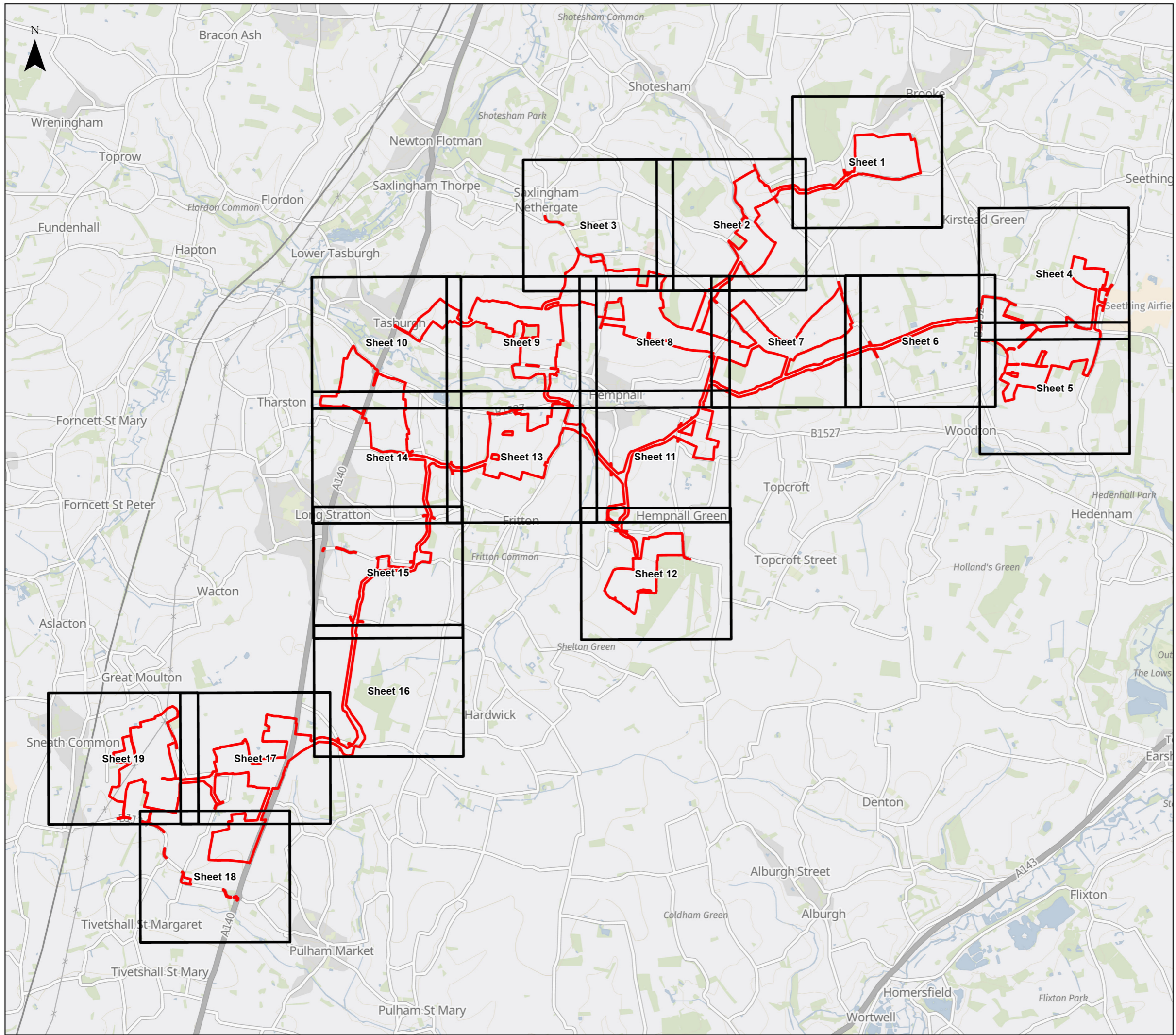
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6 Figures

Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

Figure 2: Ditches With Water Permanence



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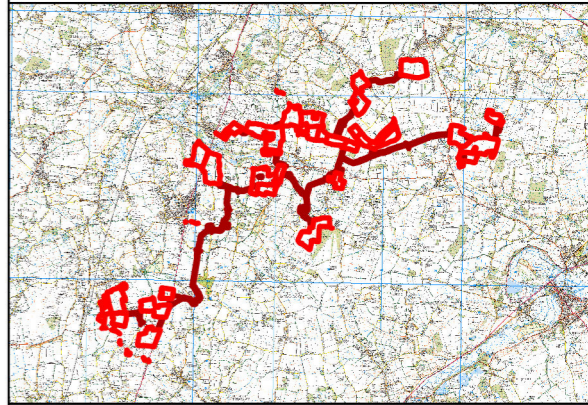
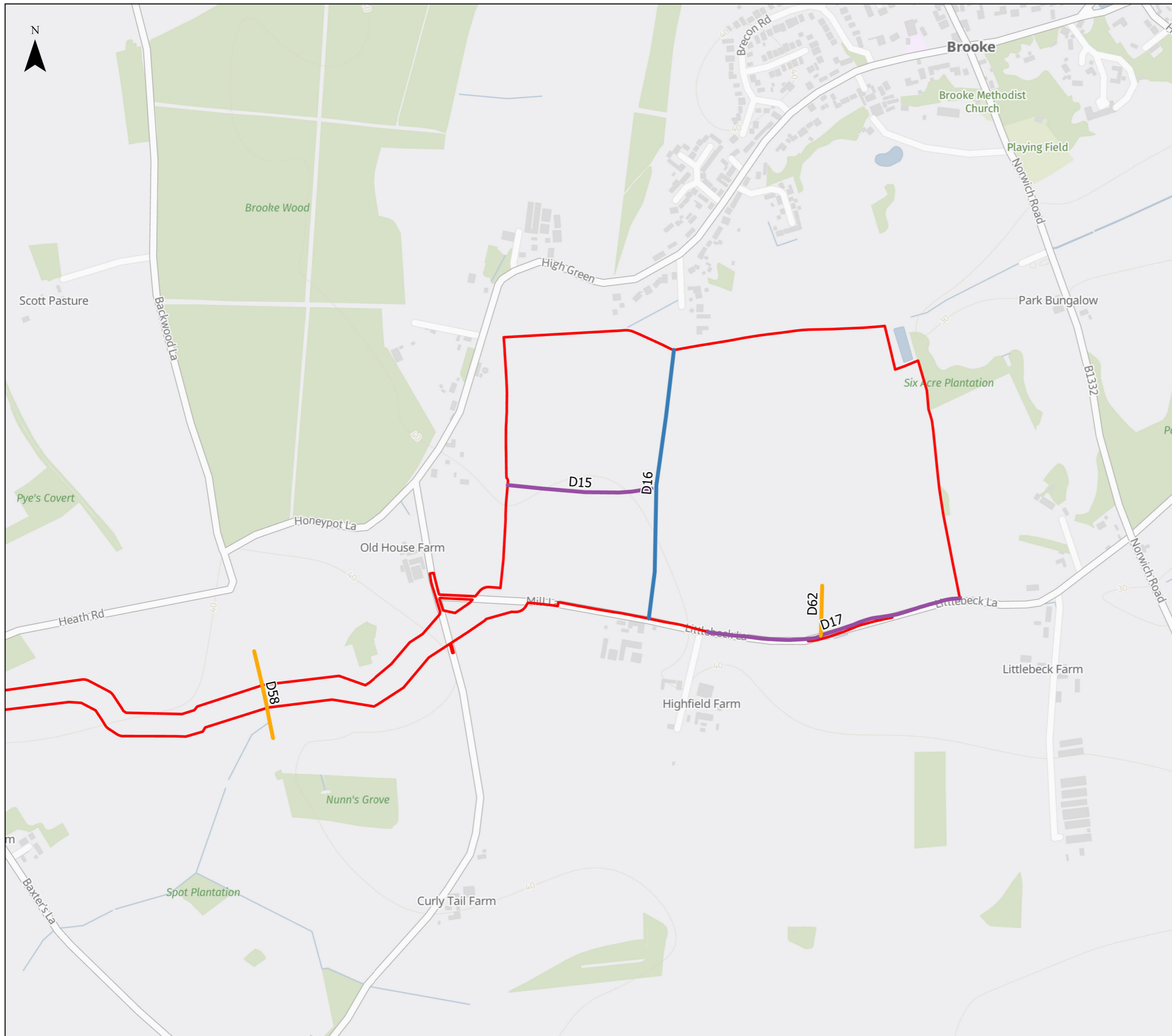
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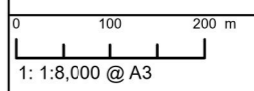
Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Overview
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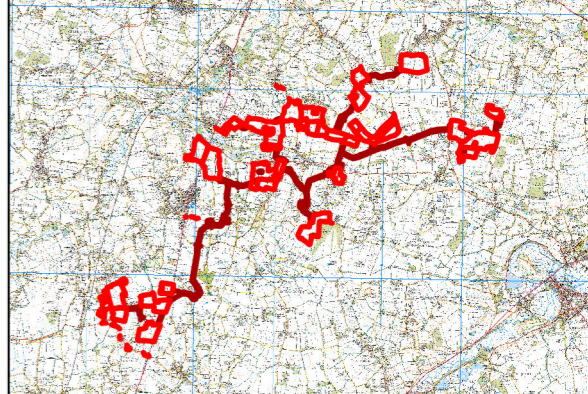
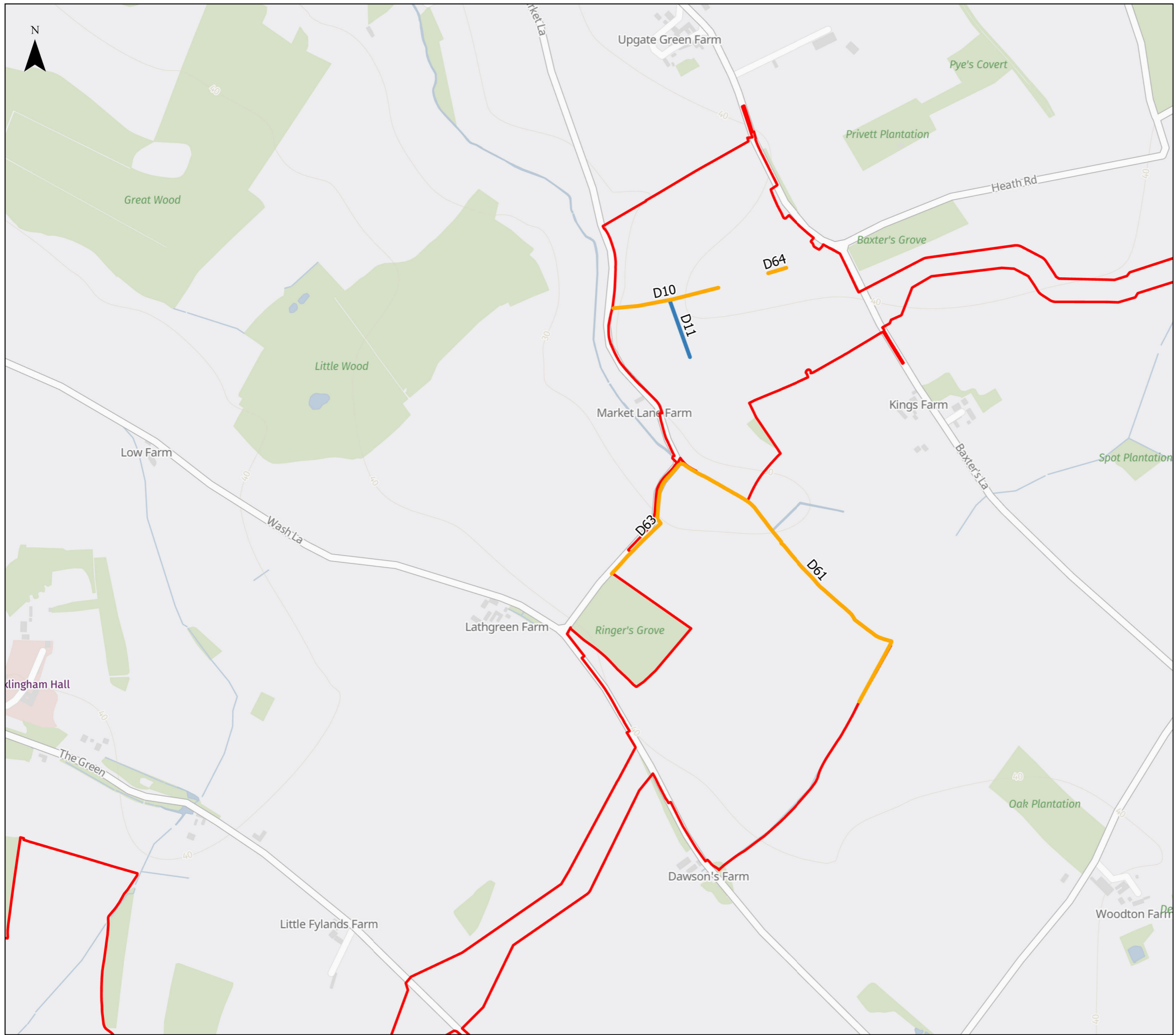
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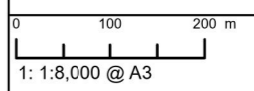
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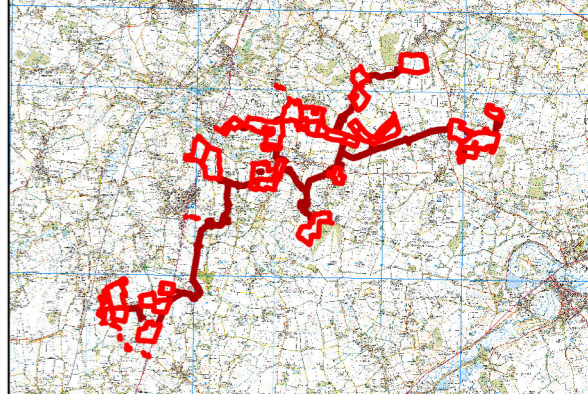
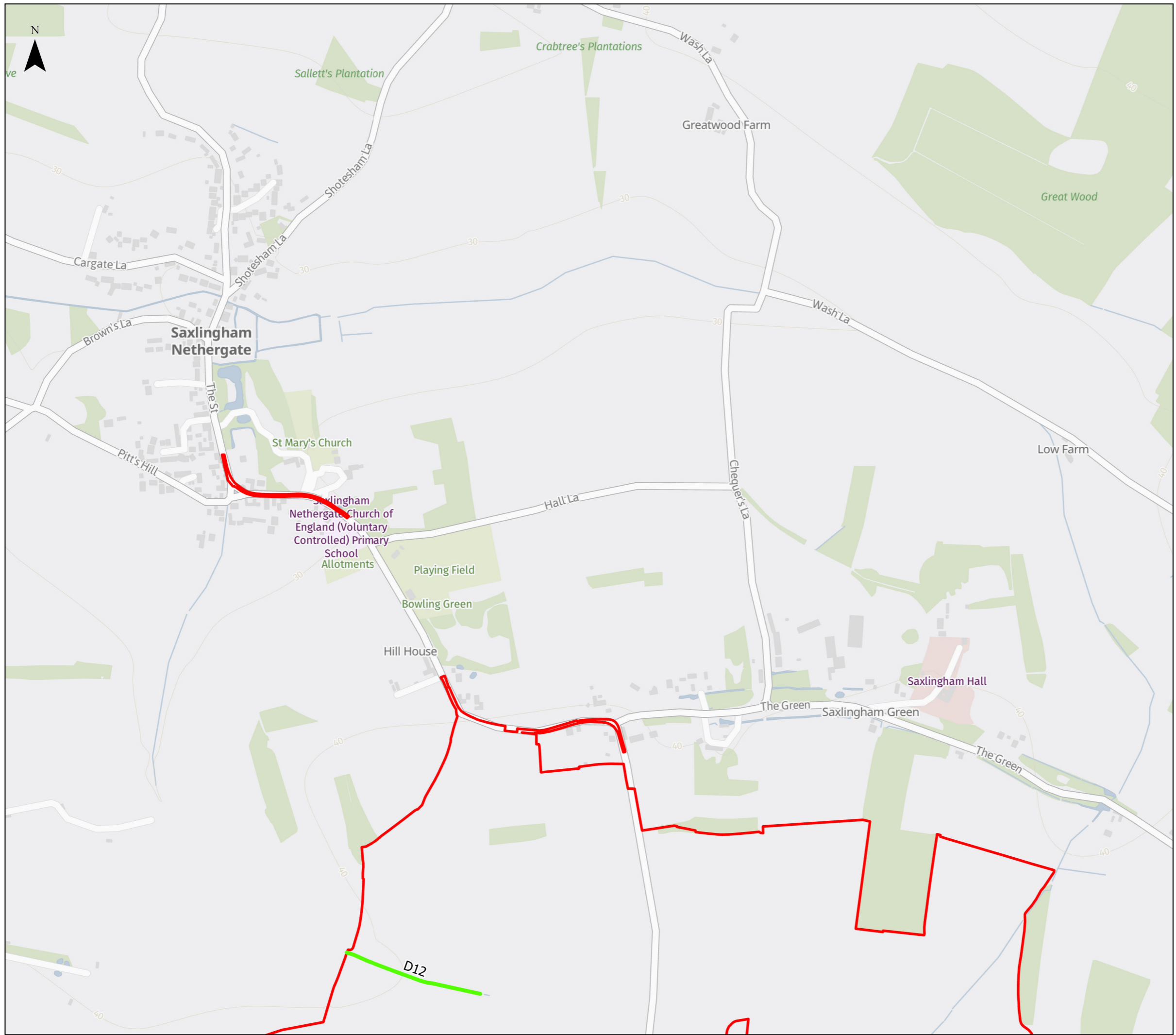
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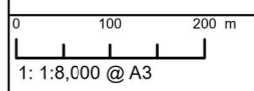
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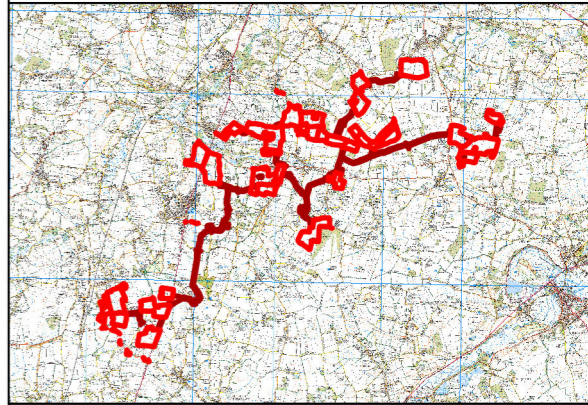
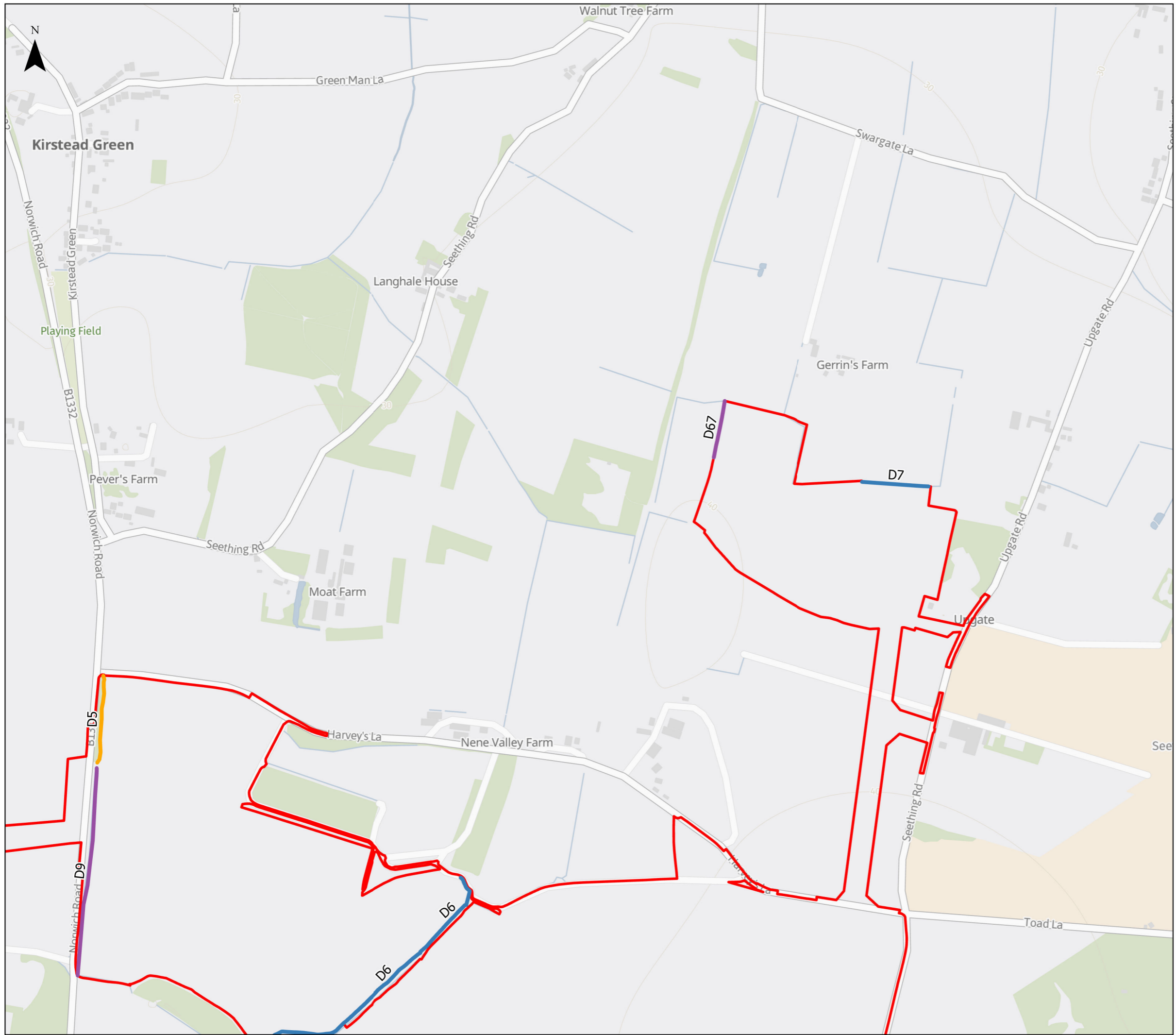
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

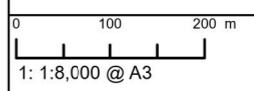
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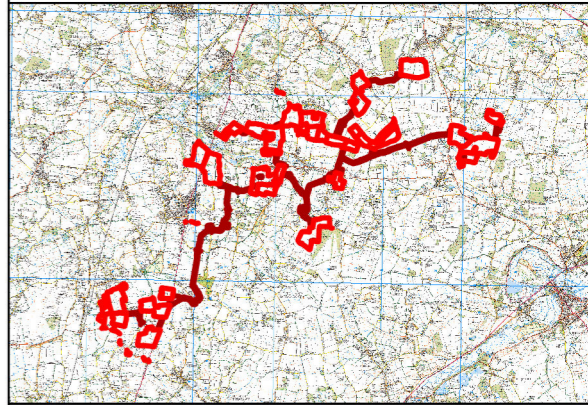
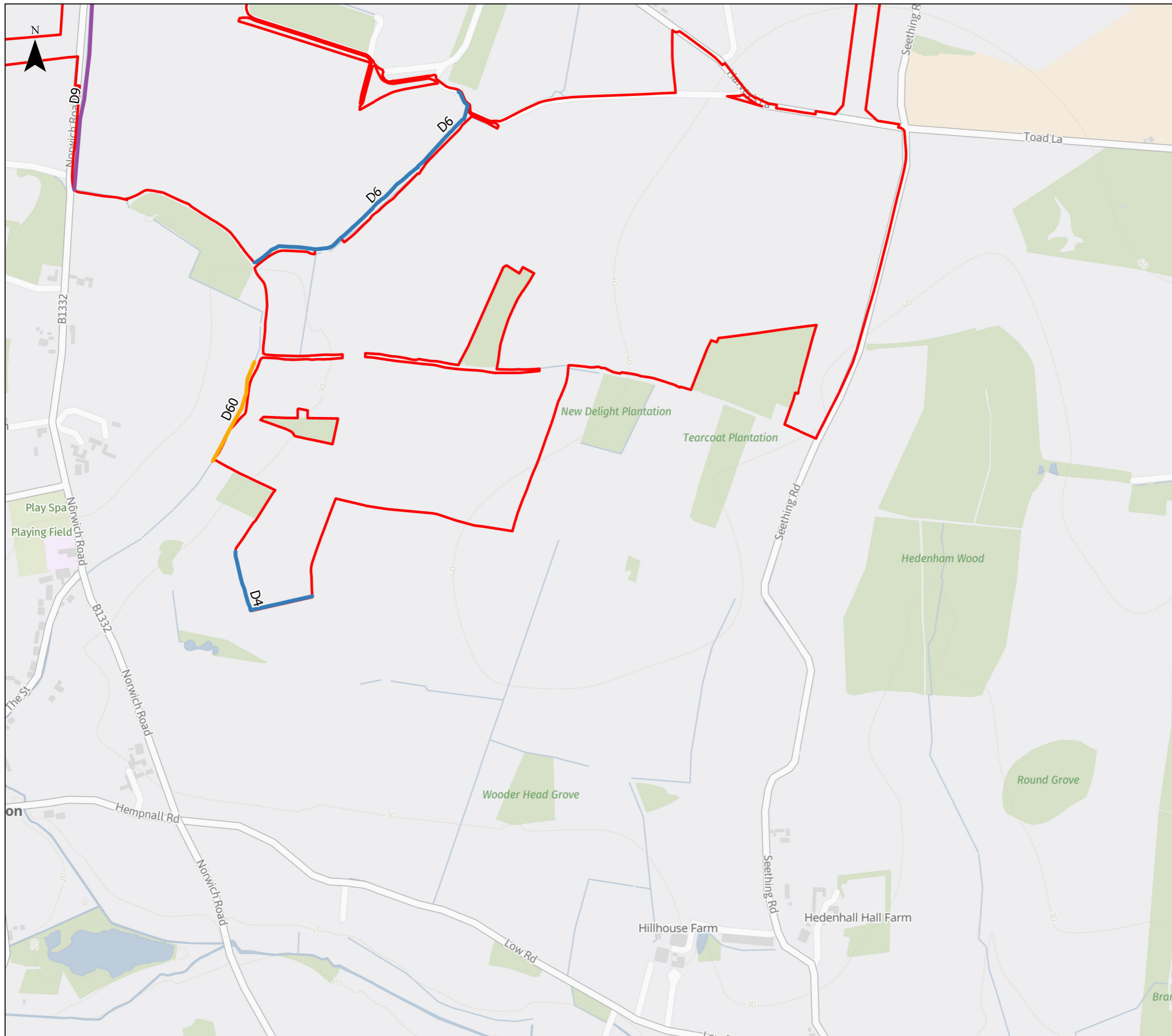
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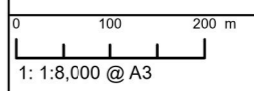
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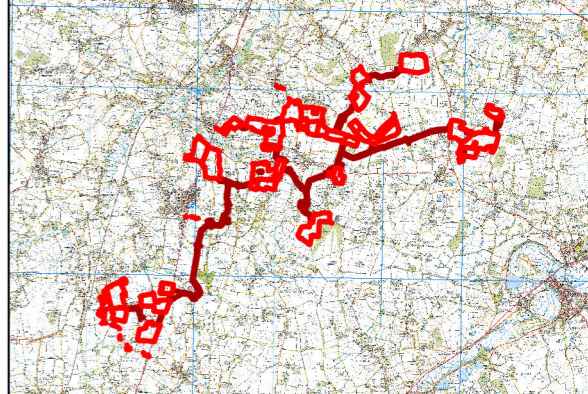
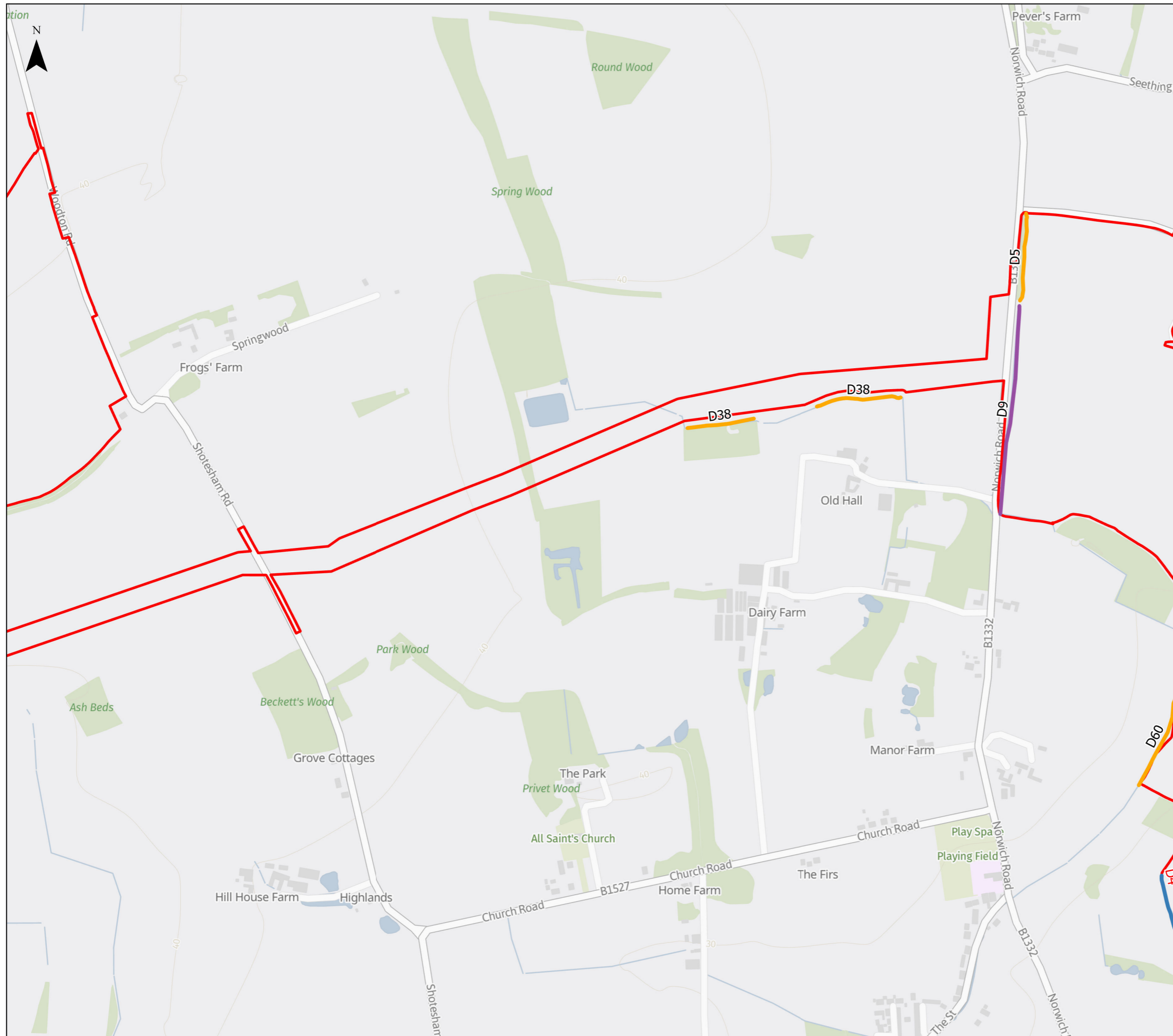
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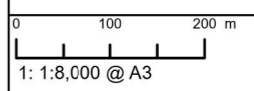
Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

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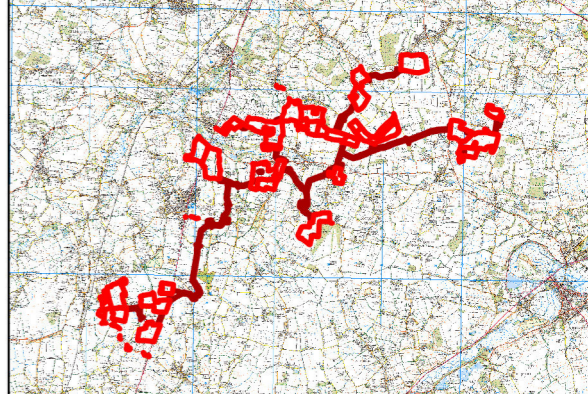
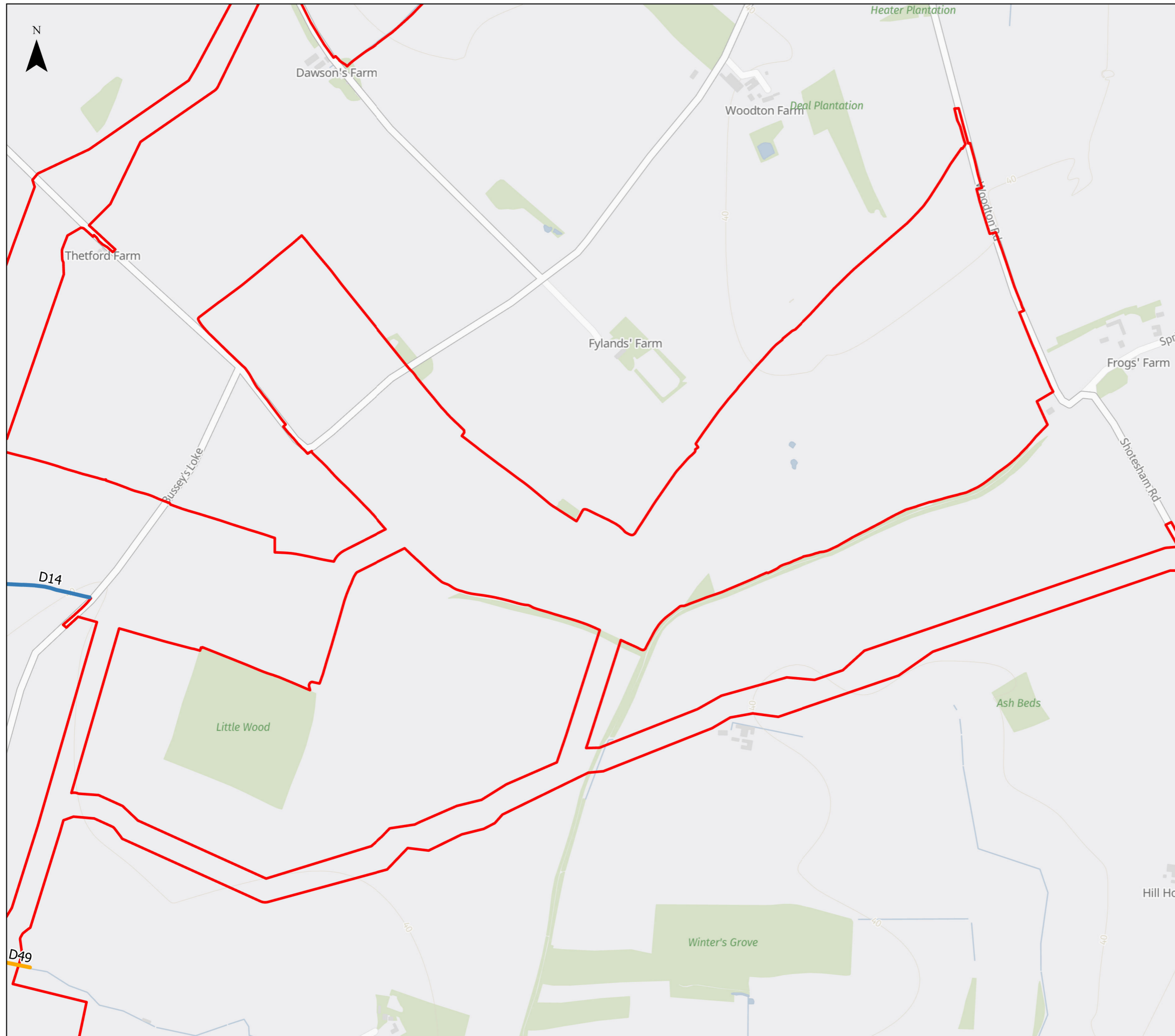
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

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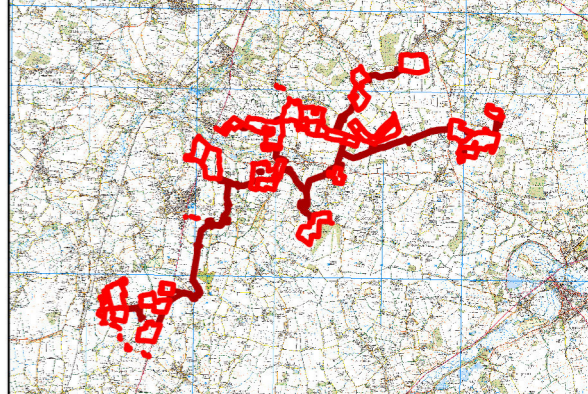
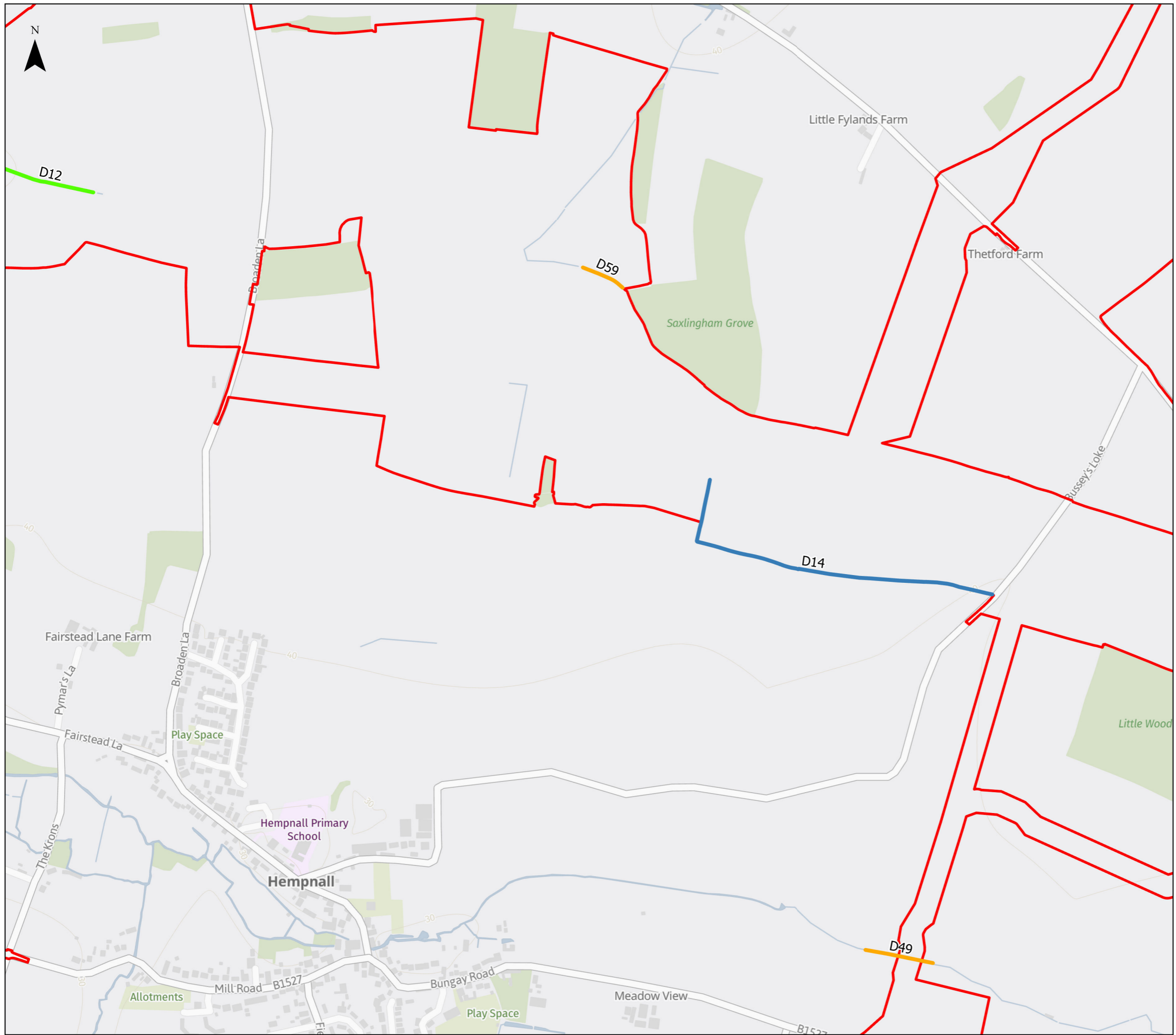
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

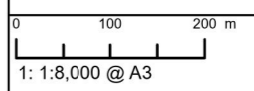
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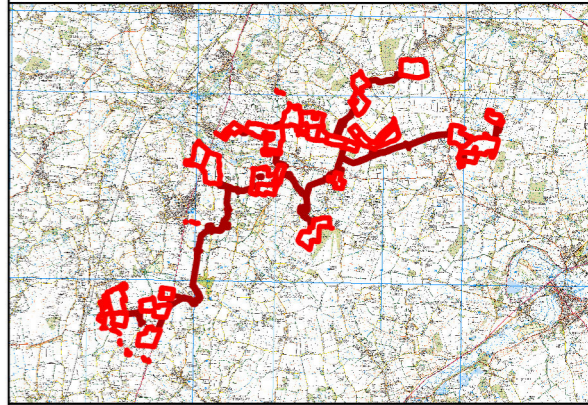
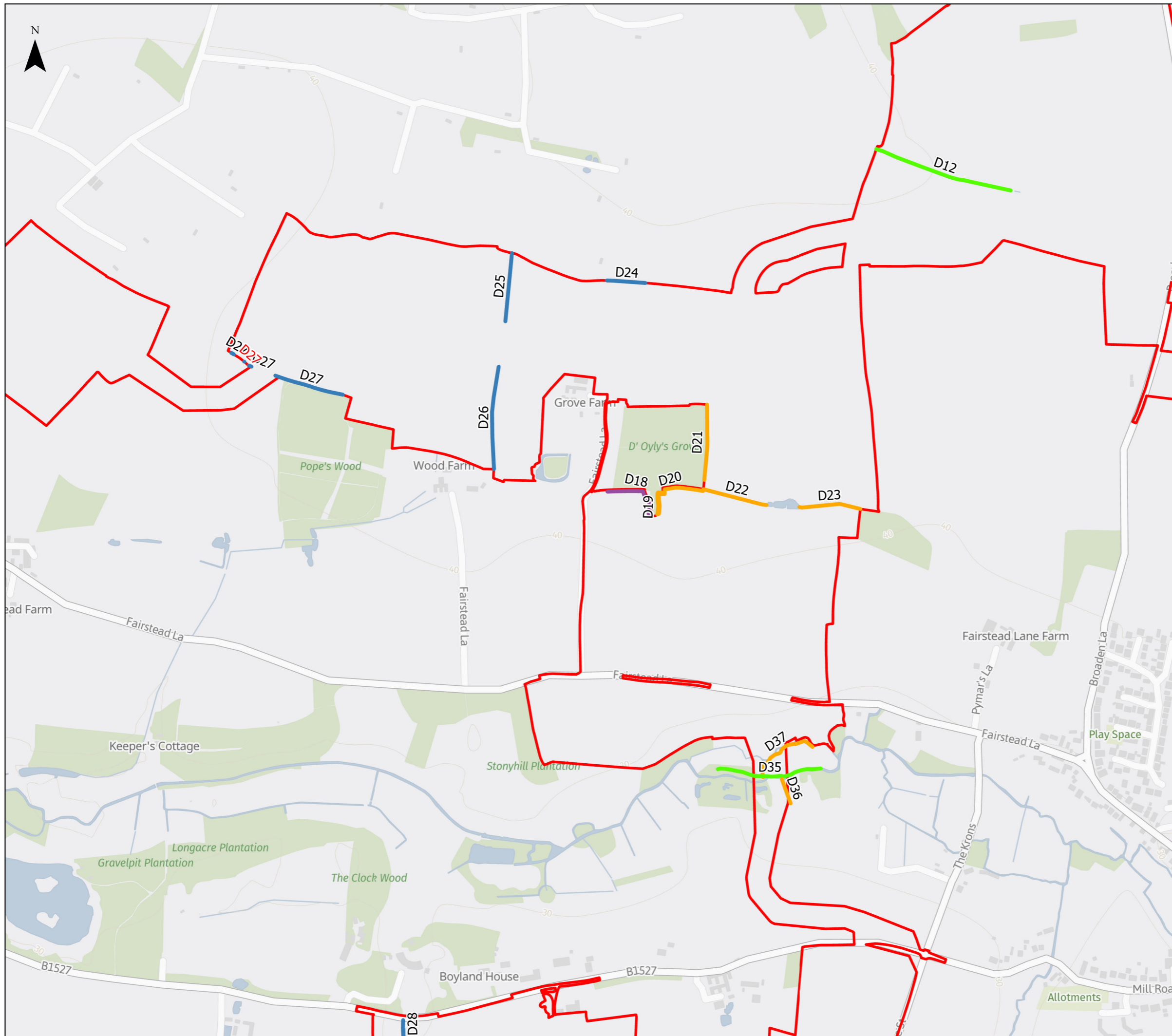
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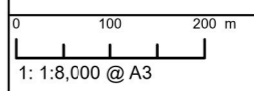
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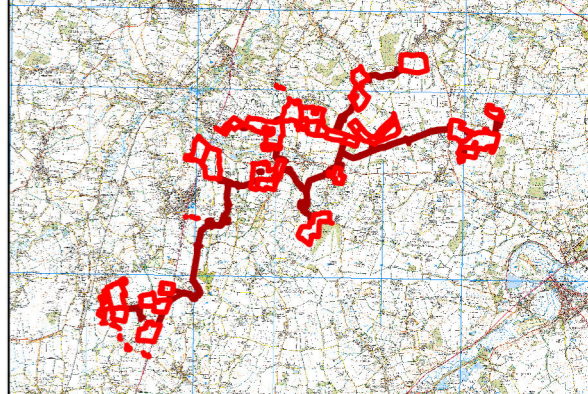
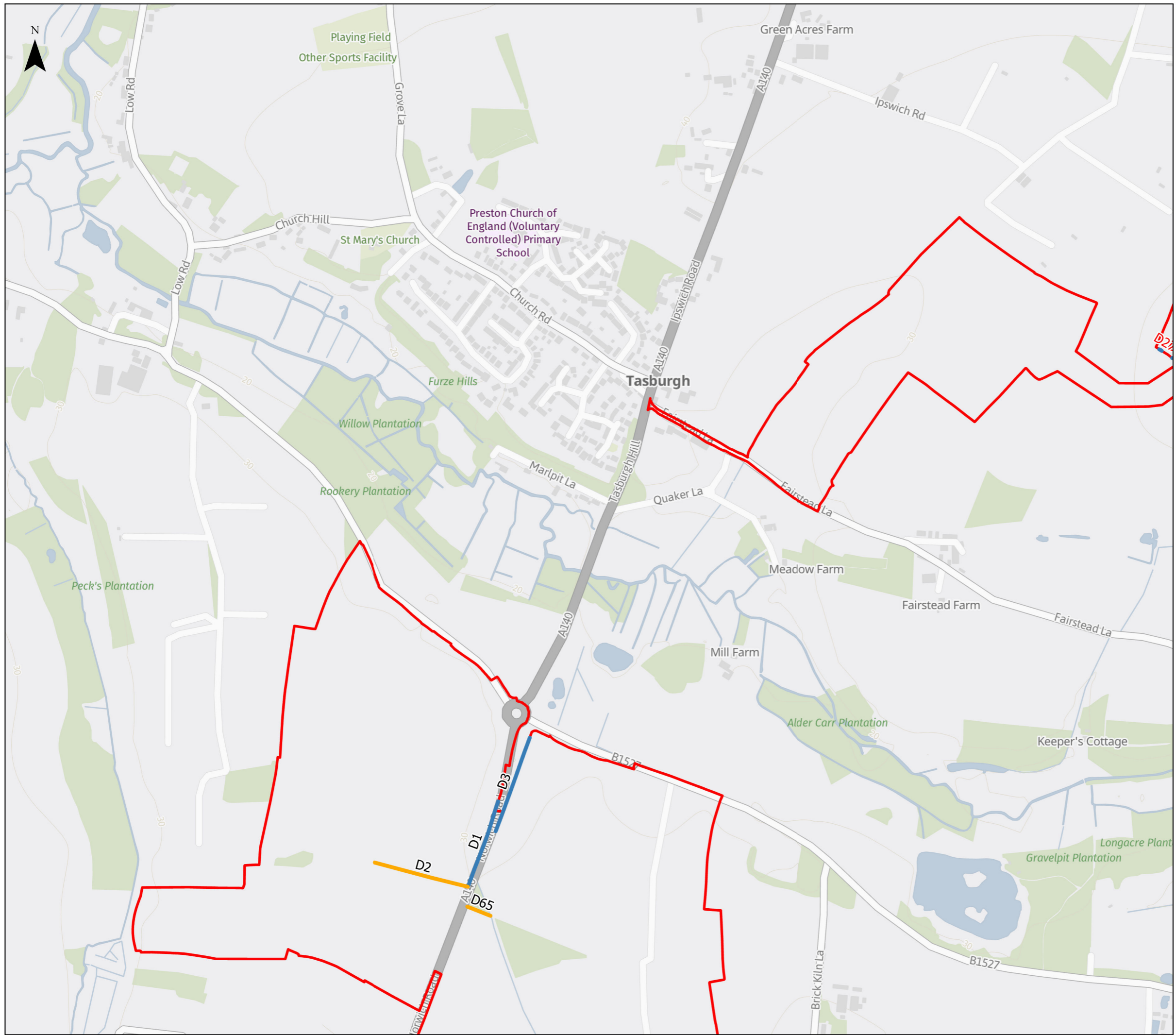
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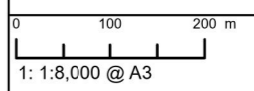
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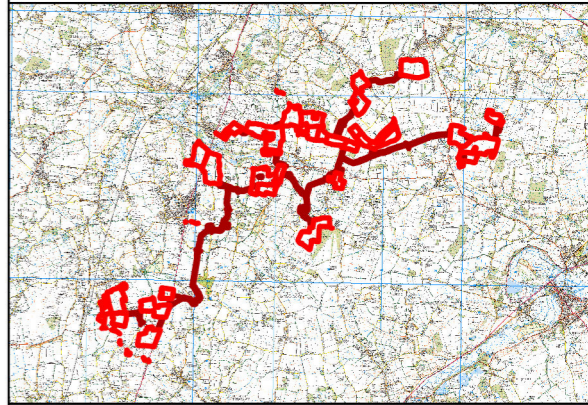
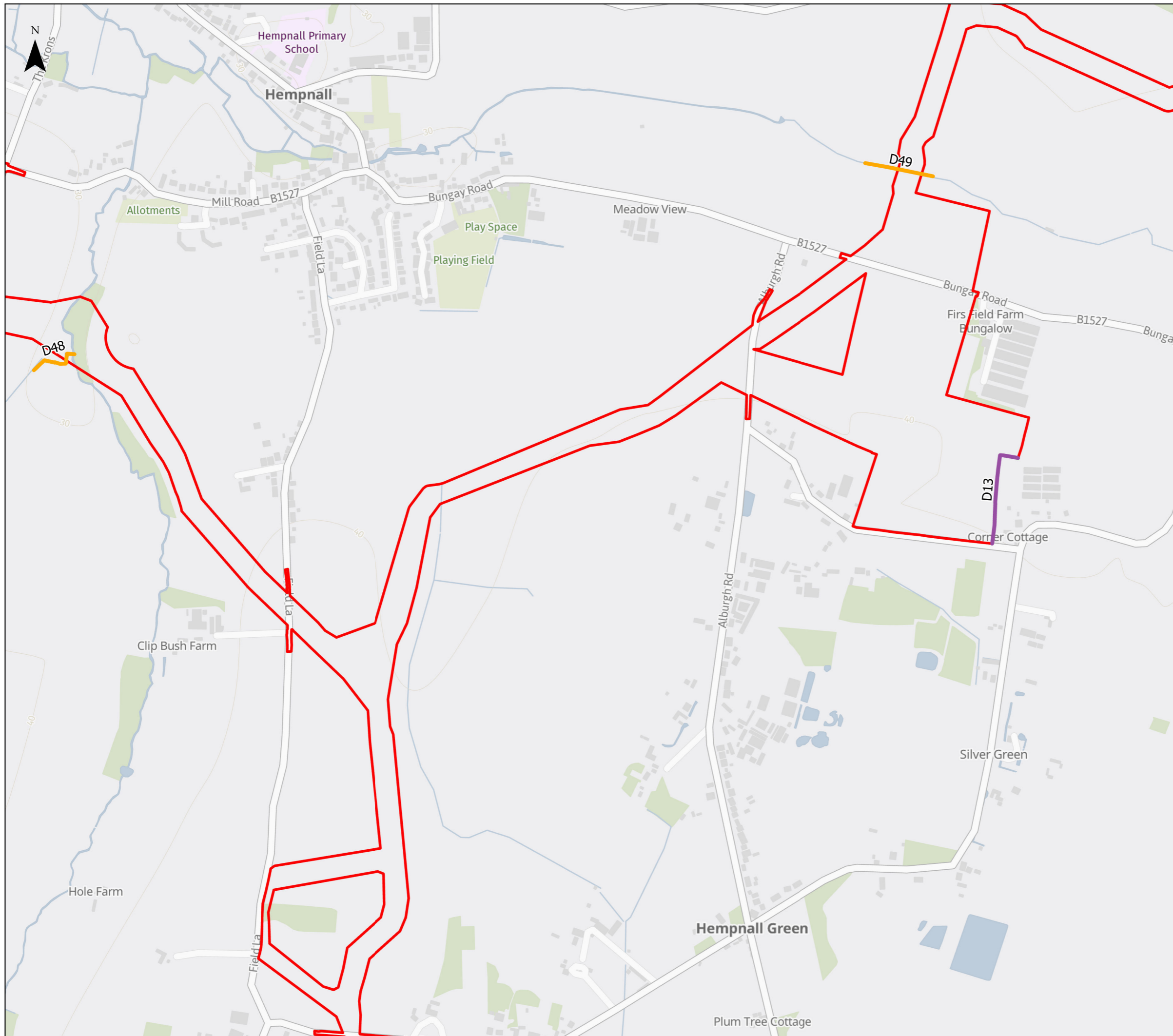
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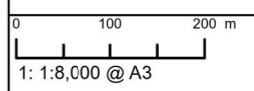
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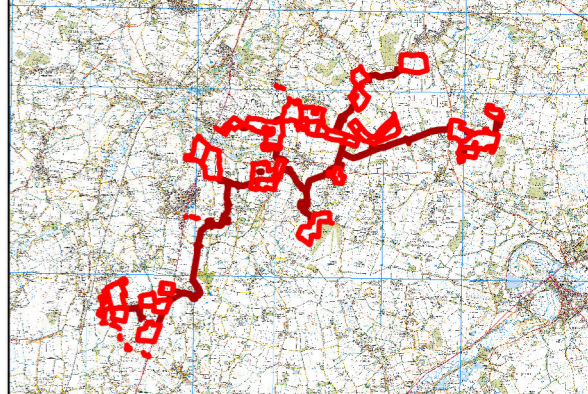
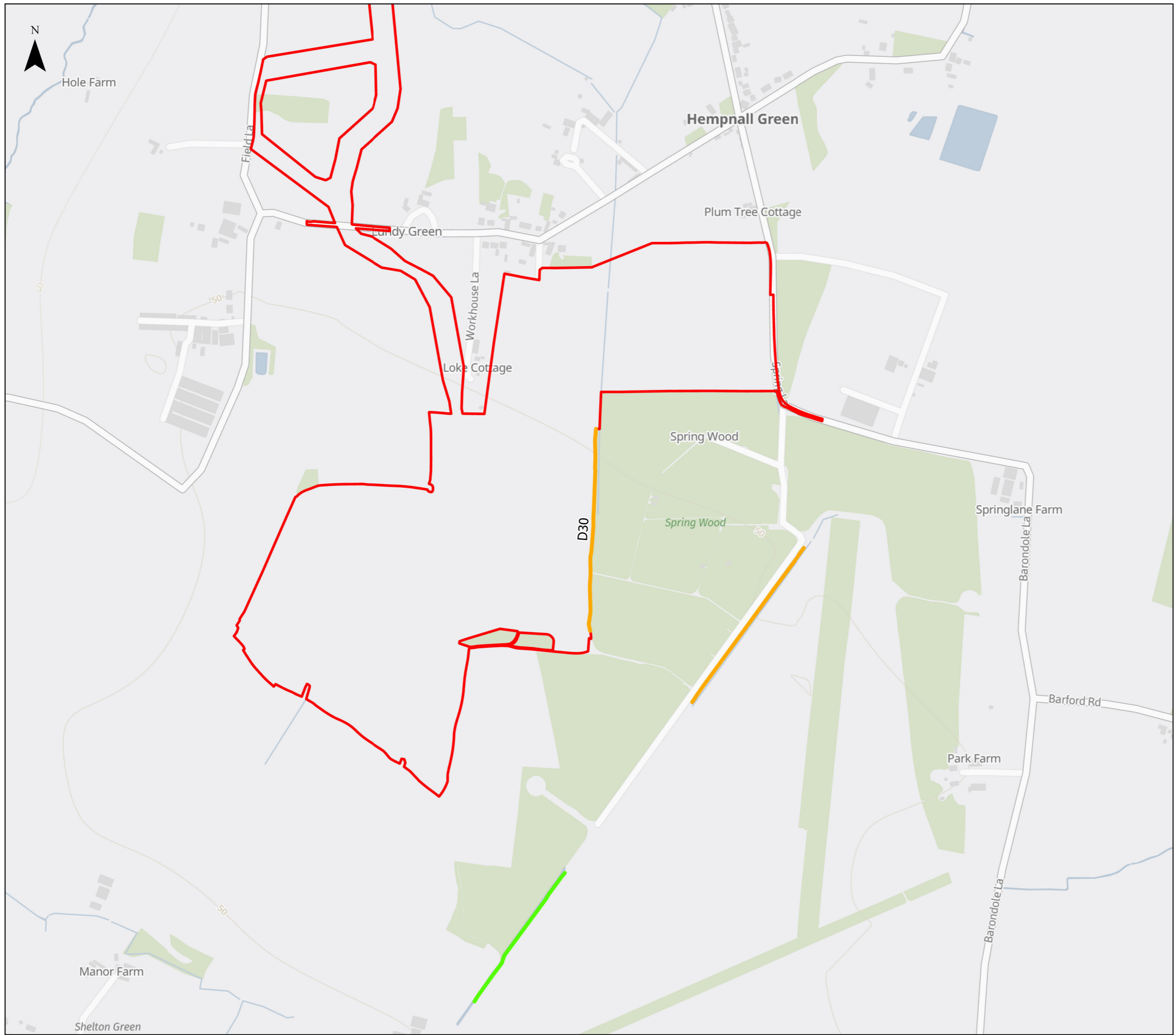
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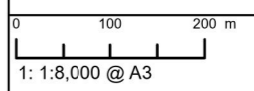
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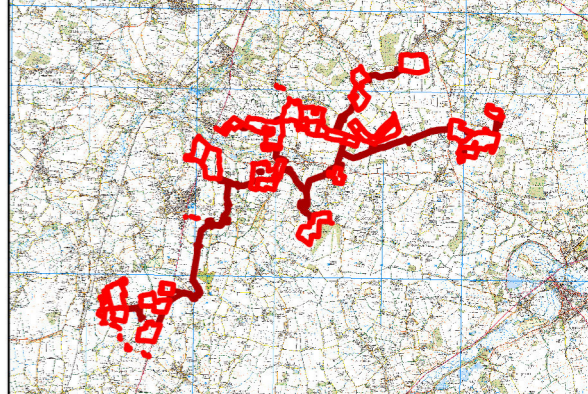
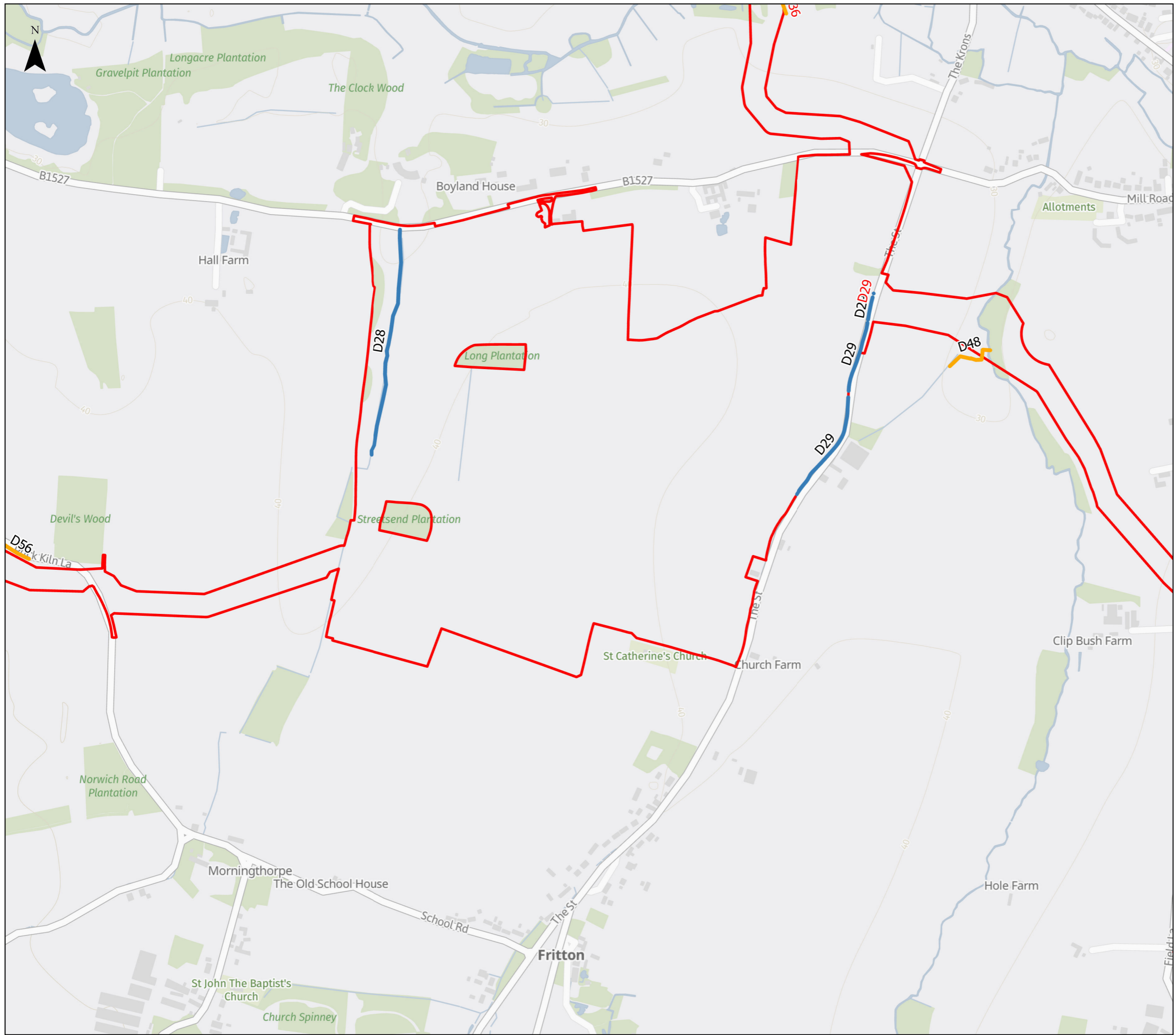
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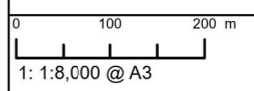
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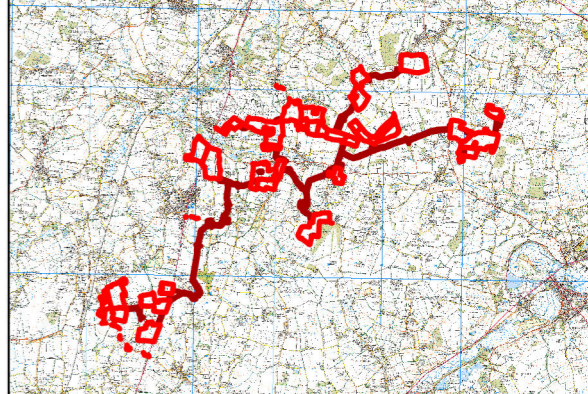
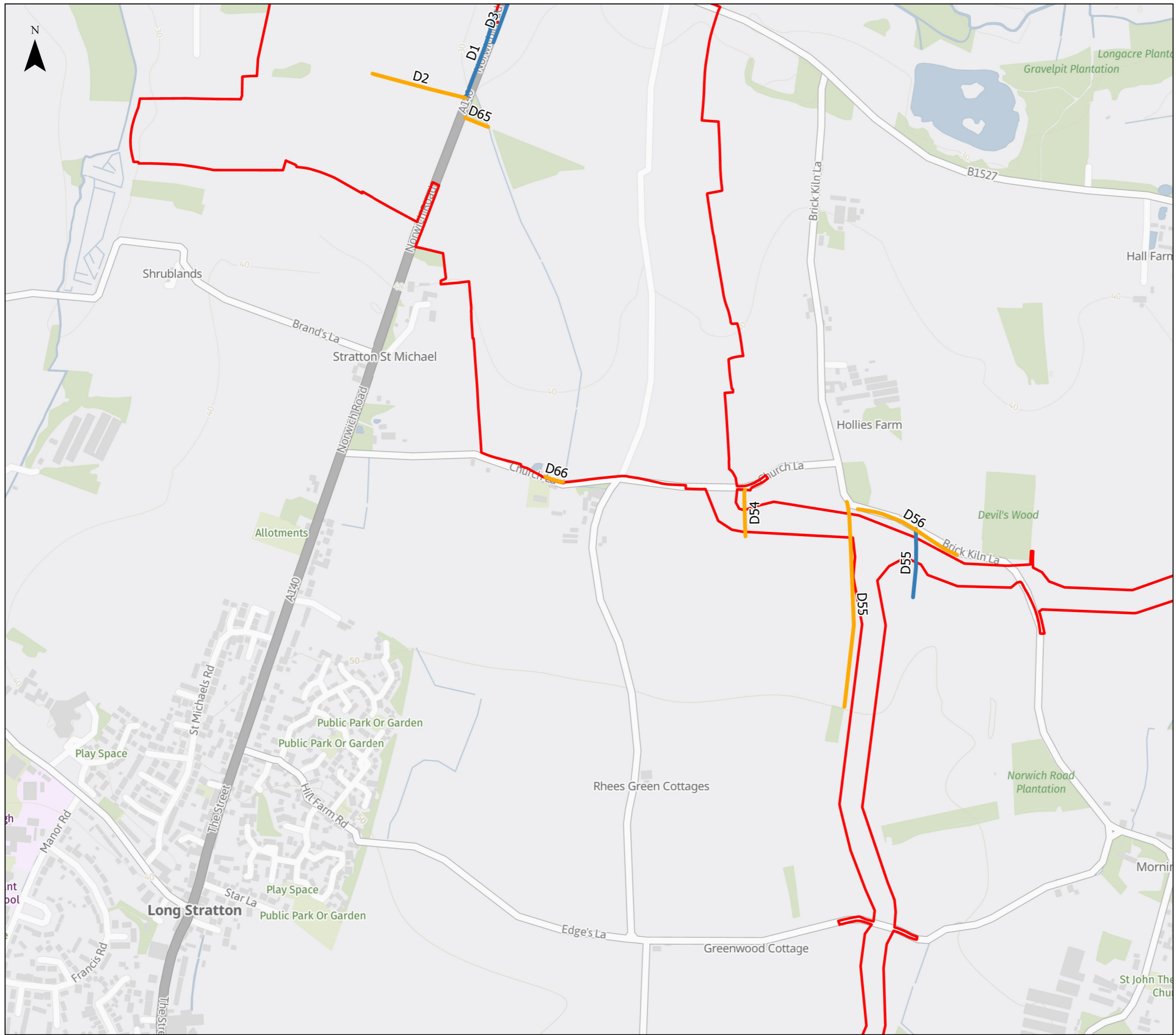
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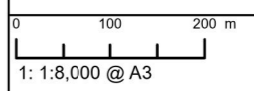
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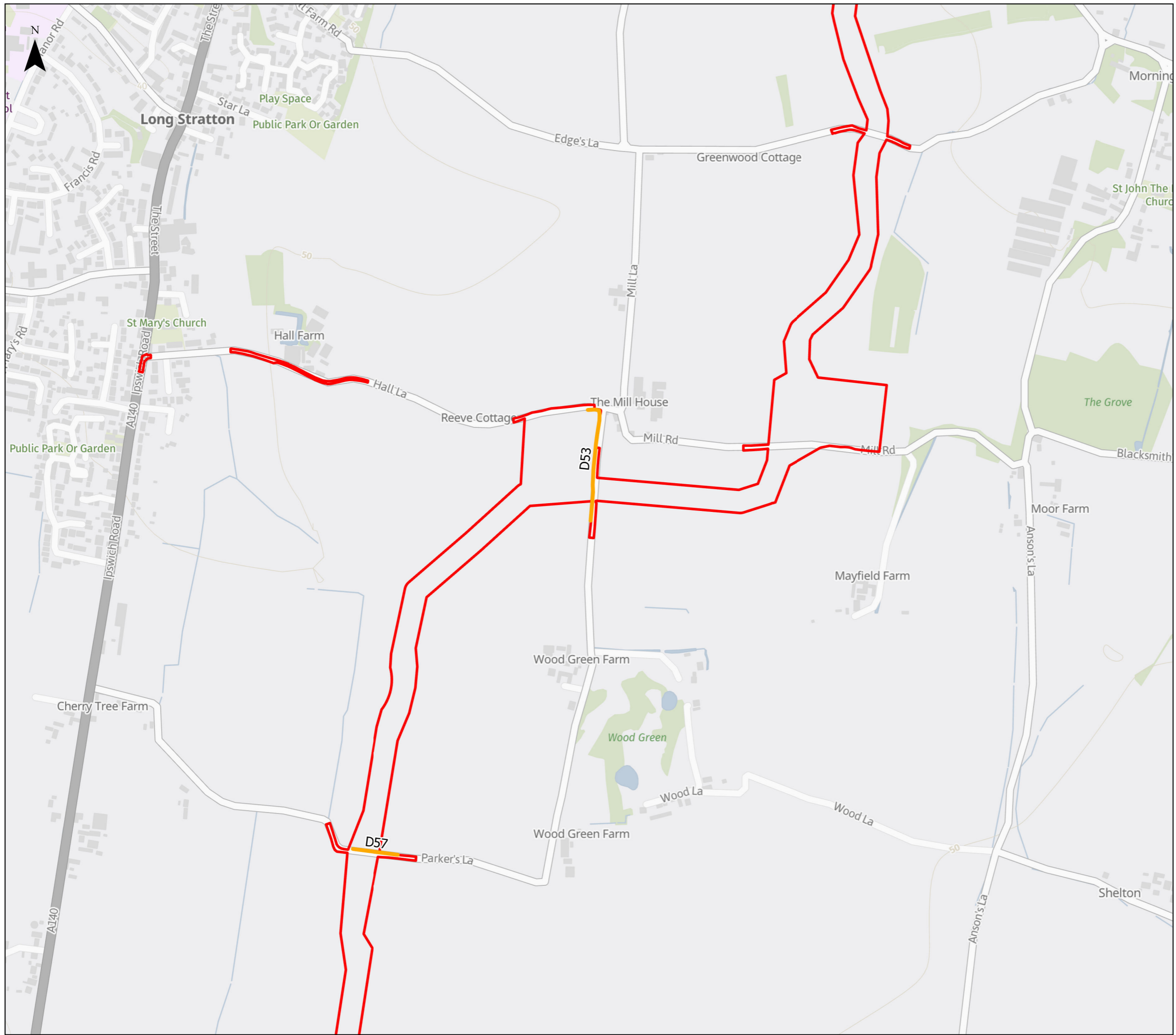
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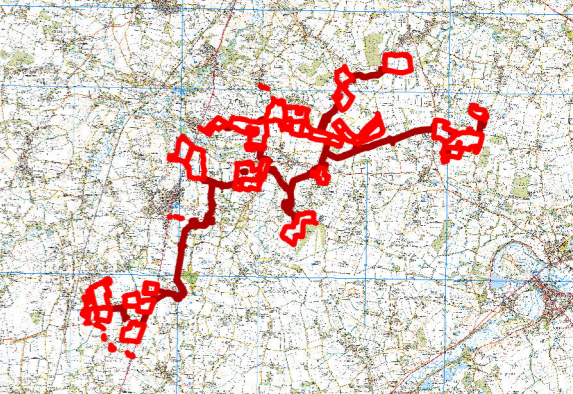
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

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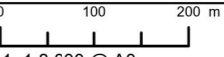




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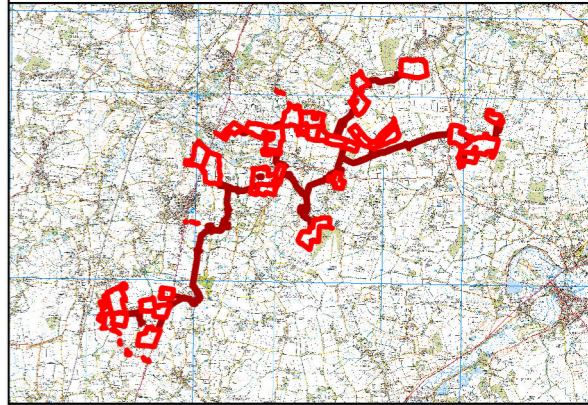
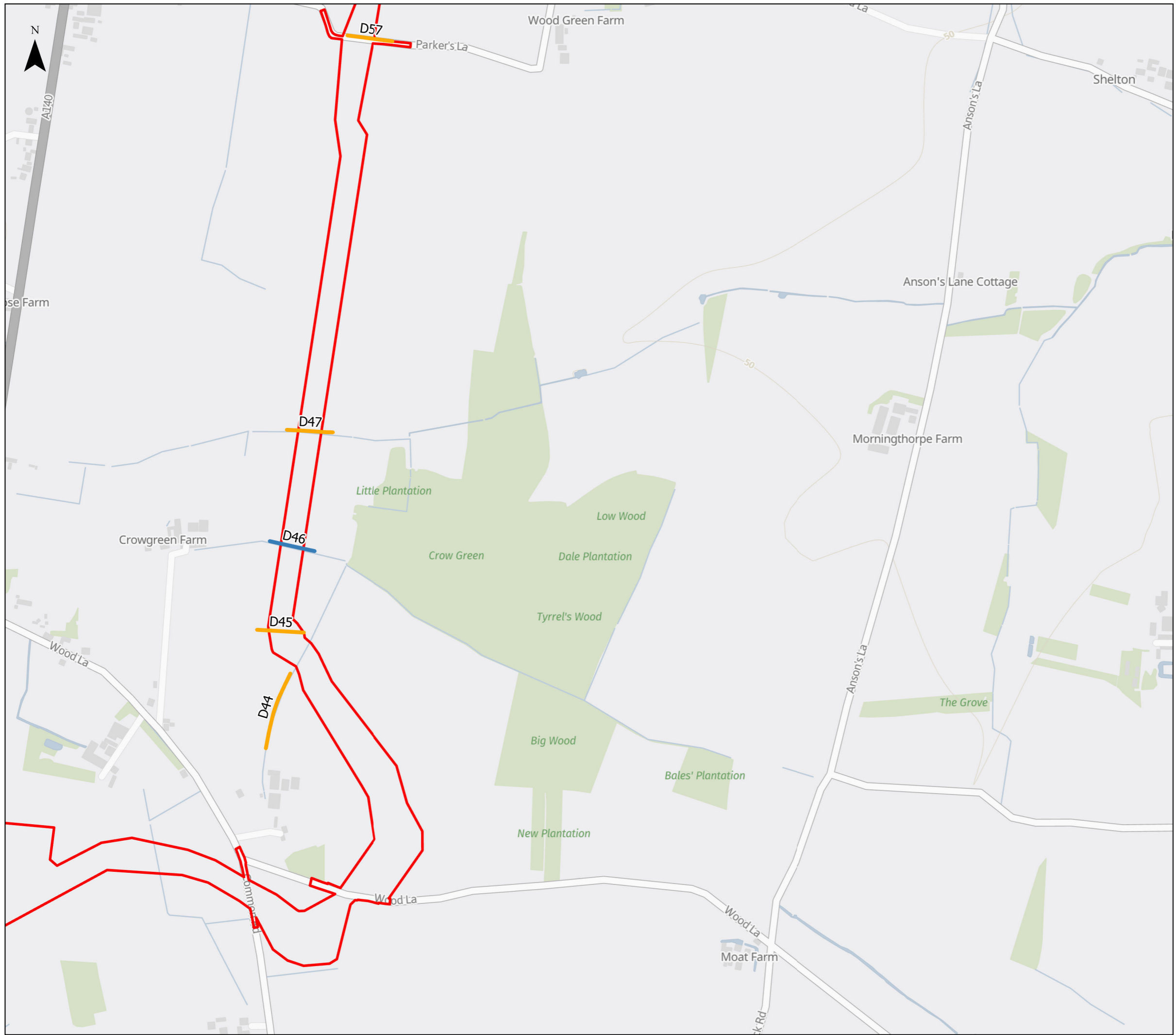
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

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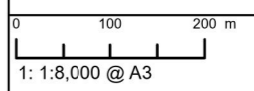




Legend

- Order Limits
- Optimal
- Sub-optimal
- Sink/Unsuitable
- Unsuitable

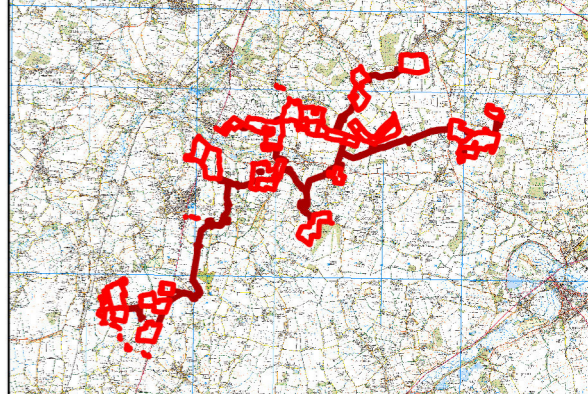
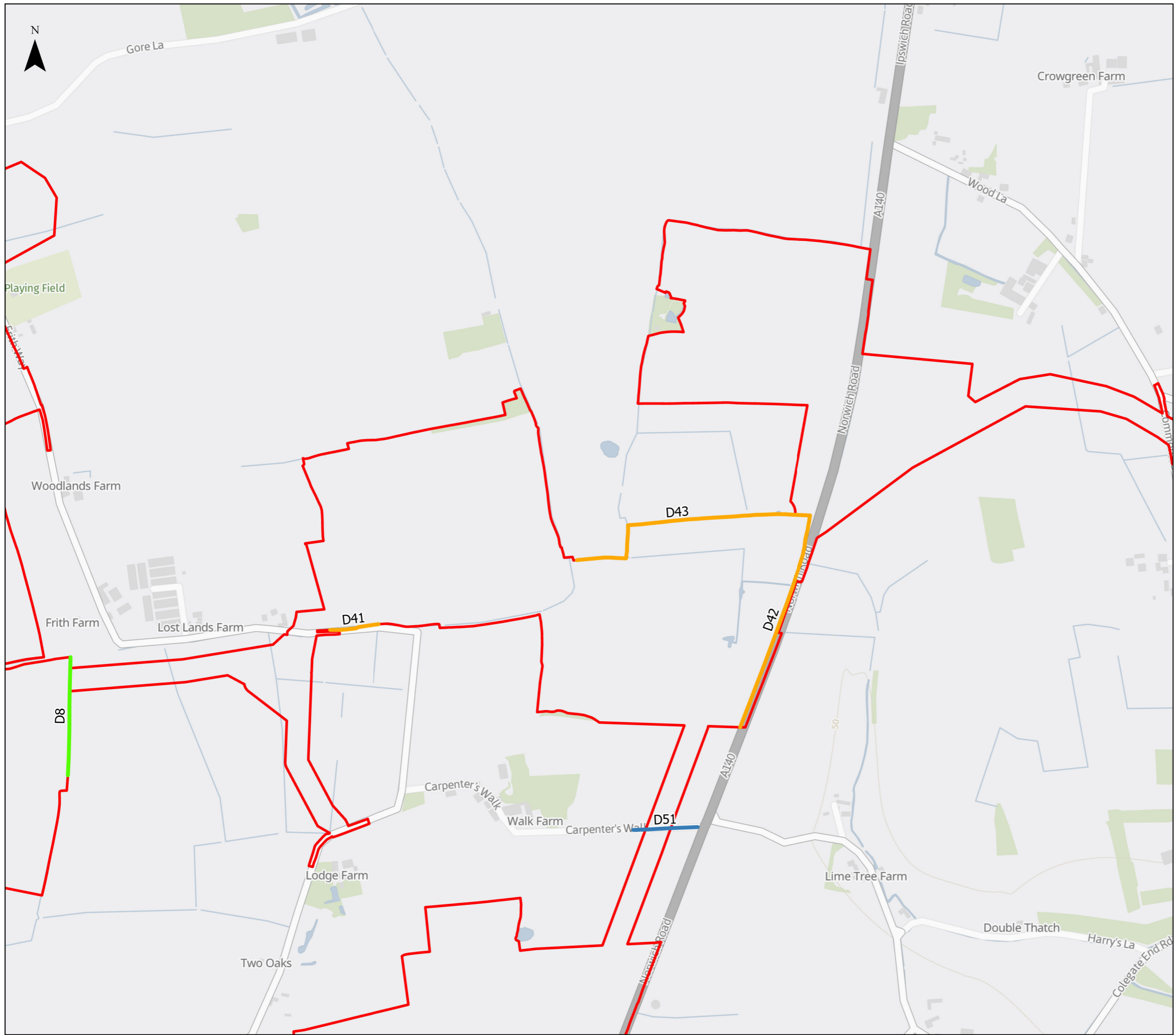
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

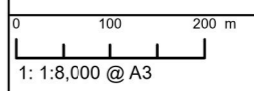
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Legend

- ▭ Order Limits
- ▭ Optimal
- ▭ Sub-optimal
- ▭ Sink/Unsuitable
- ▭ Unsuitable

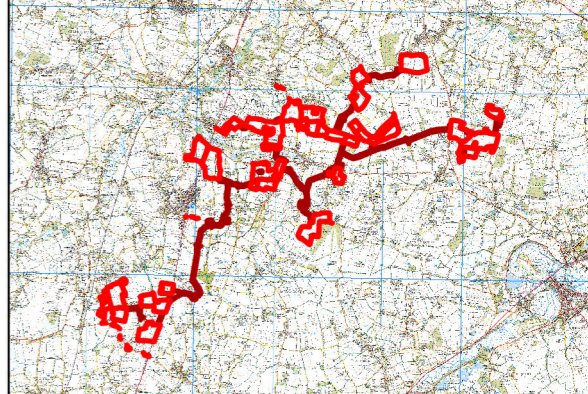
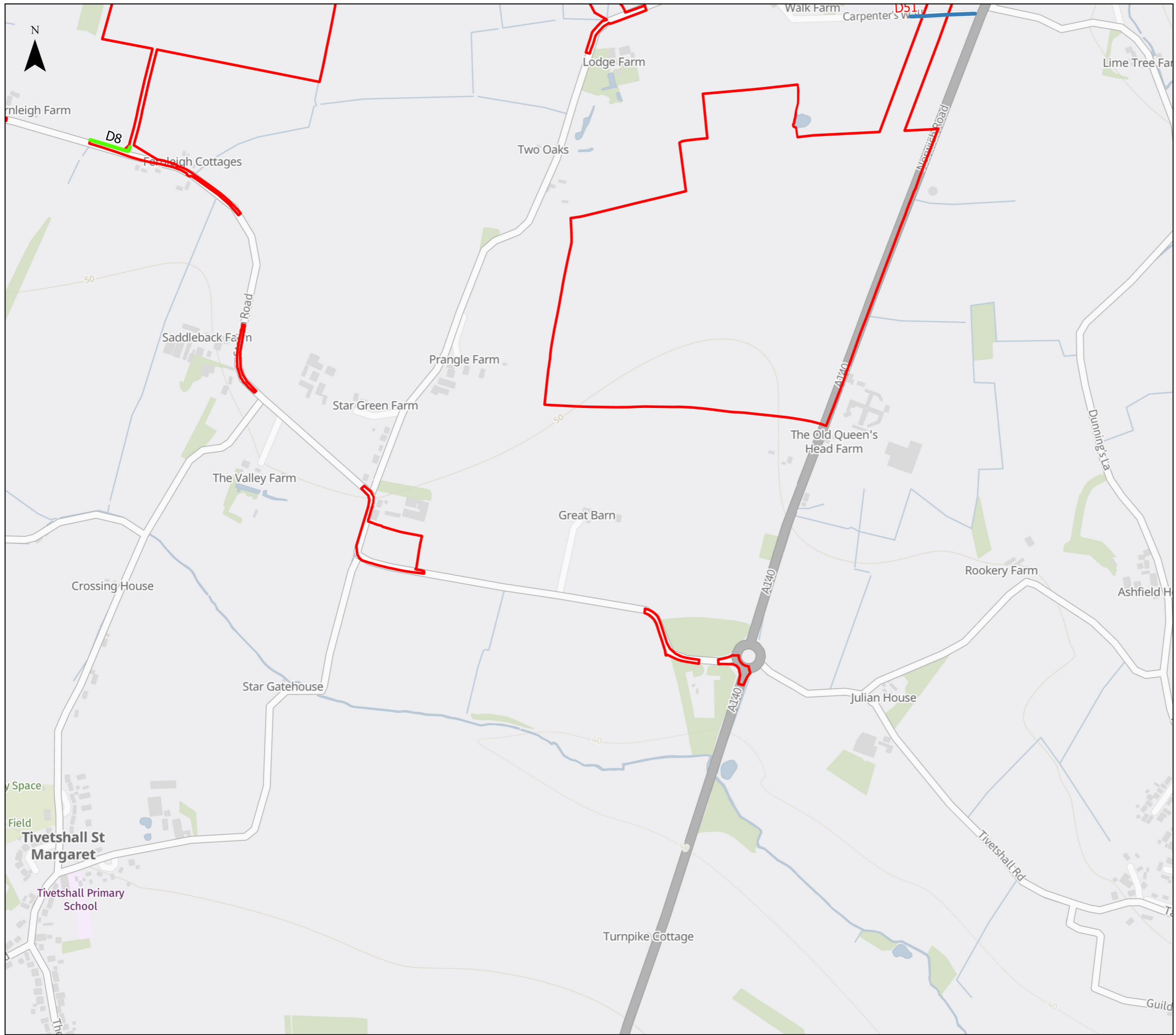
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

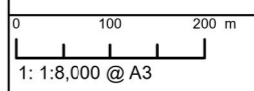
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Legend

- █ Order Limits
- █ Optimal
- █ Sub-optimal
- █ Sink/Unsuitable
- █ Unsuitable

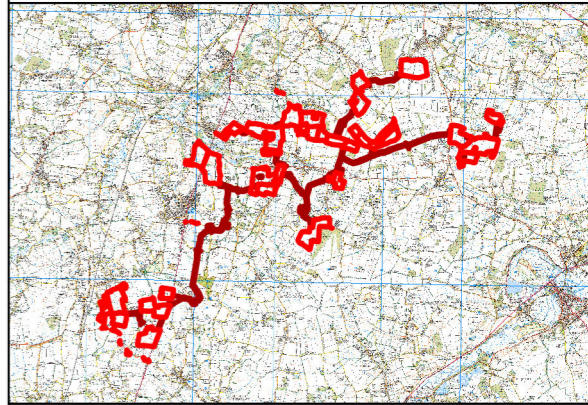
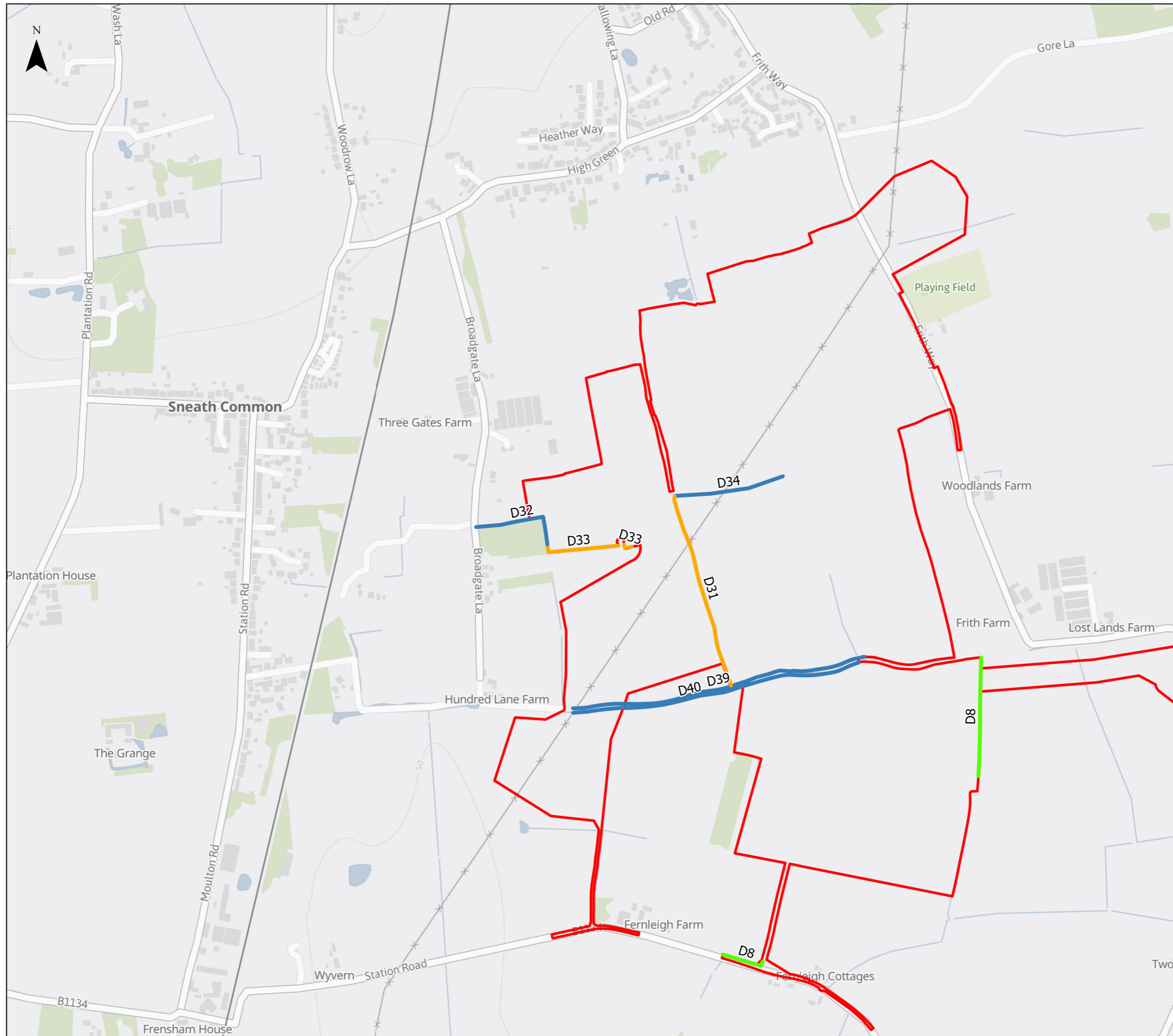
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

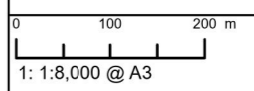
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Revision A



Legend

- ▭ Order Limits
- ▭ Optimal
- ▭ Sub-optimal
- ▭ Sink/Unsuitable
- ▭ Unsuitable

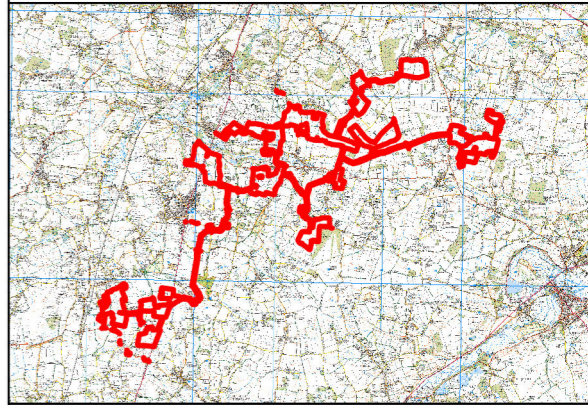
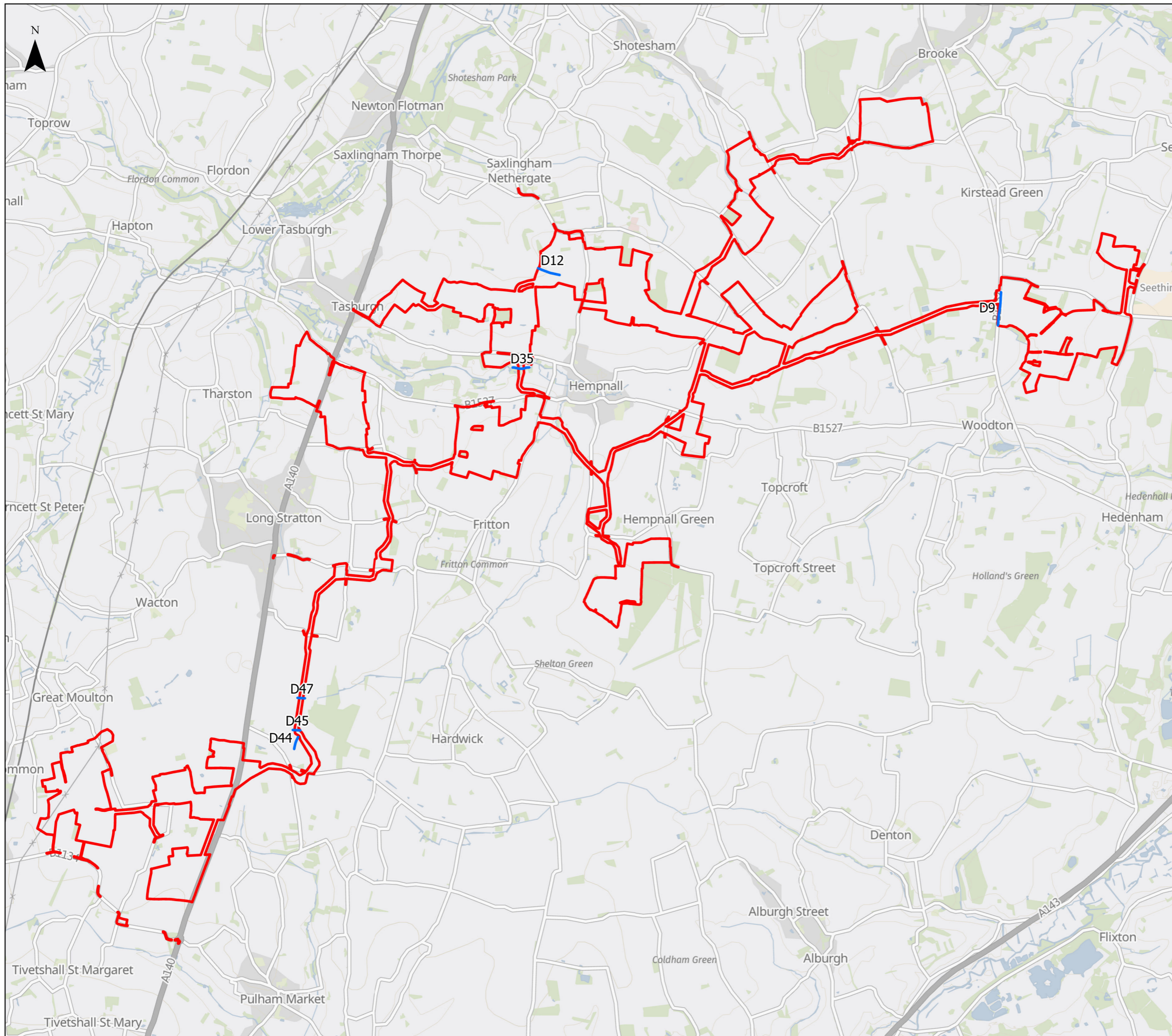
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Figure 1: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Plan

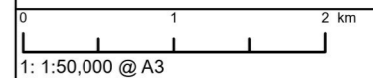
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Legend

- Order Limits
- Ditches - Water Permanence

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Figure 2: Ditches With Water Permanence

Revision A

Annex 1: Photographs

Photograph 1:
D53 is part of a roadside nature
reserve (CRC04)



Photograph 2:
Burrow in D12 with field vole
droppings



Photograph 3:
Section of Hempnall Beck within
CRC07 (D35)



Photograph 4:
D46 (CRC04)



Photograph 5:
D47 (CRC04)



Annex 2: Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment Results Data

Sub-Site	Ditch Ref.	Bankside Veg	Food Availability	Refuge areas	Steep banks	Perm. Open water	Berm	Disturbance	Nest Building	Score	Suitability
4A	D1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
4A	D2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
4B	D3	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
10A	D4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Sink/Unsuitable
10C	D5	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	4	Sub-optimal
10C	D6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	Sink/Unsuitable
10E	D7	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
BESS	D8	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	7	Optimal
10C	D9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	unsuitable
8B	D10	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
8B	D11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Sink/Unsuitable
7D	D12	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	6	Optimal
6	D13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	unsuitable
7G	D14	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
9	D15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	unsuitable
9	D16	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Sink/Unsuitable
9	D17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	unsuitable
7C	D18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	unsuitable
7C	D19	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	5	Sub-optimal
7C	D20	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	5	Sub-optimal
7C	D21	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	5	Sub-optimal
7C	D22	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	Sub-optimal
7C	D23	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	4	Sub-optimal
7C	D24	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Sink/Unsuitable

Sub-Site	Ditch Ref.	Bankside Veg	Food Availability	Refuge areas	Steep banks	Perm. Open water	Berm	Disturbance	Nest Building	Score	Suitability
7C	D25	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
7C	D26	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
7C	D27	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
5A	D28	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	Sink/Unsuitable
5B	D29	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
3	D30	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	Sub-optimal
1B	D31	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	Sub-optimal
1A	D32	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	Sink/Unsuitable
1A	D33	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	Sub-optimal
1B	D34	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
CRC7	D35	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	6	Optimal
CRC7	D36	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	Sub-optimal
CRC7	D37	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	5	Sub-optimal
CRC9	D38 (offsite)	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	Sub-optimal
CRC1	D39	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
CRC1	D40	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
CRC2	D41	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
2B	D42	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	Sub-optimal
2B	D43	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
CRC4	D44 (offsite)	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	4	Sub-optimal
CRC4	D45	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
CRC4	D46	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
CRC4	D47	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	5	Sub-optimal
CRC6	D48	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	5	Sub-optimal
CRC8	D49	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
CRC4	D50	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable

Sub-Site	Ditch Ref.	Bankside Veg	Food Availability	Refuge areas	Steep banks	Perm. Open water	Berm	Disturbance	Nest Building	Score	Suitability
7G	D51	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	4	Sub-optimal
CRC3	D52	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	Sink/Unsuitable
CRC4	D53	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	5	Sub-optimal
CRC4	D54	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
CRC4	D55	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
CRC4	D56 (offsite)	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	5	Sub-optimal
CRC4	D57	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
CRC13	D58	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	4	Sub-optimal
7F	D59	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
10A	D60	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	4	Sub-optimal
8A/8B	D61	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	5	Sub-optimal
9	D62	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
8A	D63	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	Sub-optimal
8B	D64	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
4B	D65	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
4B	D66	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	Sub-optimal
10E	D67	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	unsuitable

Annex 3: Legislation and Policy

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy

1.1.1 **National Policy Statements** - National Policy Statements (NPS) set out the primary policy tests against which the application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) for the Scheme will be considered. Listed below are elements of NPS considered relevant to the water vole and otter assessment.

- Overarching National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy (EN-1) 2025¹⁶;
- NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) 2025¹⁷;
- NPS for electricity networks infrastructure (EN-5) 2025¹⁸;

1.1.2 **National Planning Policy Framework** - The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as revised in December 2024 sets out national planning policies that reflect priorities of the Government for operation of the planning system and the economic, social, and environmental aspects of the development and use of land. The NPPF has a strong emphasis on sustainable development, with a presumption in favour of such development. The NPPF's policies related to biodiversity conservation, including those that protect habitats of protected species such as water voles and otters, are particularly important and relevant to this assessment. Listed below are details of the elements of the NPPF relevant to this report.

- **Chapter 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment:** This chapter emphasizes the protection of biodiversity, including through the protection of priority habitats and species, which directly relates to water vole and otter conservation.
- **Paragraph 179:** Promotes the protection and recovery of priority species and habitats, ensuring development proposals minimize impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains.
- **Paragraph 180:** Stipulates that development should be refused if significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided, mitigated, or compensated for.

Local Planning Policy

1.1.3 The Scheme is located within the administrative area of South Norfolk Council (SNC), who are the host authority. Local planning plan policies which have informed this assessment are detailed below:

- **Greater Norwich Local Plan (2024).**
- **SNC Development Management Policies Document (2015)**

Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs)

- 1.1.4 Since the publication of the UK BAP in 1994, new strategies and frameworks have resulted in the development of biodiversity issues and changes in the terminology used to describe these habitats and species in England. This has been brought about through the replacement of the previous England Biodiversity Strategy with *Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy For England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services* (2011) and the replacement of the UK BAP itself with the *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework* (2012). All previous UK BAP species and habitats are still of material consideration in the planning process but are now referred to as Habitats and Species of Principal Importance (as described under the NERC Act 2006 above).
- 1.1.5 The distribution of BAP/priority habitats has been used to identify Biodiversity Opportunity Areas at a regional scale through Biodiversity Strategies/Partnerships. They represent a strategic landscape scale approach to habitat creation, restoration or expansion. They represent regional priority areas of opportunity to restore and create key habitats. They are therefore a spatial representation of targets for Habitats of Principal Importance and are areas of opportunity, not constraint.

Other Guidance

- 1.1.6 The assessment has been carried out in accordance with the following other guidance documents:
- **CIEEM InPractice² Water Vole Habitat Suitability Assessment (WVHSA) methodology:** This methodology provides a standard approach for assessing water vole habitat suitability, ensuring that assessments are consistent and reliable.
 - **Water vole mitigation handbook (Dean, et. al., 2016³):** This handbook offers comprehensive guidance on mitigating impacts on water voles during development, including strategies for habitat creation and enhancement.
 - **The Wildlife Trusts Guidelines for Otter Conservation:** These guidelines recommend practices for protecting otter habitats during development, ensuring that their ecological needs are considered in planning decisions.