



MetroWest+

Portishead Branch Line (MetroWest Phase 1)

TR040011

Applicant: North Somerset District Council

9.27 ExA.FI.D4.V1 – Appendix 1 to Applicant's response to the ExA's Actions from the Issue Specific Hearing 3 (ISH3)

Author: Womble Bond Dickinson (UK) LLP

Version: 1

Date: January 2021

Applicant's Response to Action 10, ISH3

Grassland Compensation

Action 10: To provide a plan (or reference to existing plans) confirming where the 0.06 hectares of grassland that would be lost is located and who owns it, Network Rail or National Trust; to confirm whether this would be lost temporarily or permanently and if it would be lost on a permanent basis clarify how this would be mitigated and confirm if this loss/ mitigation needs to be reflected in the HRA or other application documents.

Grassland Habitat Loss

The breakdown of *Festuco-Brometalia* grassland losses is given in Table 2 of the Avon Gorge Vegetation Management Plan (AGVMP) [AS-044] (a version of which is reproduced below) and illustrated in 2.58 - Habitat impacted by construction works within the Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC [APP-050]. Of the predicted losses, 401m² (0.04ha) is on National Trust land (Quarry Bridge No. 2 and third-party rock faces) and 181m² (0.02 ha) is on Network Rail land.

The appended set of drawings (Drawing No: 674946-004-004 – A) shows the location of grassland losses and land ownership boundaries at Maps 5 and 6.

Festuco-Brometalia grassland losses in Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC (from Table 2 of the AGVMP)

Construction Activity	SAC grassland (m ²)	Ownership	Duration
Fences removed/replaced or proposed and new access steps	76	Network Rail	permanent
Telecommunications masts and associated equipment boxes	15	Network Rail	permanent
Quarry Bridge No. 2 site compound (within National Trust owned former quarry) and ramp on rail embankment	381	National Trust	Temporary (to be reinstated following removal of the compound)
Geotechnical works on NR owned rock faces. Predicted areas.	80	Network Rail	permanent
Geotechnical works on third party owned rock faces. Predicted areas.	20	National Trust	permanent

Local rebuild of Retaining Walls at 122mi 67ch and 122mi 79ch.	10	Network Rail	permanent
Total	582		

Paragraph 8.5.6 of the Report to Inform the HRA [AS-027] refers to the duration of grassland habitat losses. Some of the grassland losses are considered temporary, albeit over a number of years, as they will be experienced for the duration of the construction phase and the time taken for the habitat to regenerate or to be restored. It is anticipated that grassland species could readily regenerate along the fence line but the new vegetation is likely to be lower in conservation value, characterised by ruderal species, and scrub would develop if left unmanaged. The grassland area within the site compound at Quarry Bridge No. 2 will require intervention to re-create and restore to a grassland habitat (see mitigation below). It is considered that all other losses owing to infrastructure and fencing are permanent.

Mitigation

Mitigation is described in Section 8.4 of the Report to Inform the HRA [AS-027], with key features as follows:

- Site briefings by an Ecological Clerk of Works (EcCoW)
- Demarcation of sensitive species
- Management of arisings (No timber or arisings are to be left in grassland areas)
- Avoidance of spread of non-native and invasive plants

Further mitigation measures to avoid impacts on SAC grassland, ancient woodland, rare whitebeam trees, Bristol rock-cress and other rare or notable plant species on rock faces will be considered during the detailed design stage. Detailed surveys of the rock faces will be undertaken during the detailed design of the geotechnical works and impacts on important habitats and species will be avoided, where possible. In addition, NR may be able to reduce the amount of new and replacement fencing within the Avon Gorge or undertake the fencing differently in key areas of sensitivity, subject to detailed design. This would reduce the amount of vegetation to be removed for fence installation. It is considered that the estimate of habitat loss is a worst case scenario, as micro-siting of rock bolts will be undertaken to minimise the impacts on rare species of plant that are characteristic species of the SAC grassland.

Detailed mitigation in relation to the Quarry Bridge No. 2 site compound is set out in 8.4.39-8.4.42 of the Report to Inform the HRA [AS-027]. The draft construction methodology for the works in this area takes account of ecological features and is given in Annex C of the AGVMP [AS-044].

Mitigation includes use of limestone hardcore on the ramp, avoiding and protecting rare whitebeam trees by fencing and temporary fencing around the construction compound. The underlying grassland vegetation will be protected

as far as possible by the temporary relocation of boulders, wood piles and construction materials on geotextile membranes to aid removal after construction works have been completed. The ramp will be constructed from imported clean limestone aggregate placed on geotextile membranes. Prior to construction works commencing, a full ecological survey of the area to be affected by the works will be completed, focusing on identifying any rare or protected species.

After completion of the construction works, the areas of grassland and scrub affected by the site compound within National Trust ownership will be monitored for two years to ensure that they are not affected by ruderal weeds on the disturbed ground after the construction works have been completed. If ruderal weeds affect the disturbed ground, this would be managed by topping and/or spot spraying the ruderal vegetation. The area will not be re-seeded unless there is a high concentration of weeds and the ground is not recovering. If this is the case, then short, native, local provenance limestone species, obtained from a reputable seed supplier, will be sown to restore the site.

It is considered that the loss of *Festuco-Brometalia* grassland owing to the compound, as well as work on rock-faces which could damage or destroy individual plants of Bristol rock-cress, are not fully mitigated. The appropriate assessment (Stage 2) of the HRA (paragraph 8.5.6) therefore concluded that there is an adverse effect on integrity due to loss of this habitat.

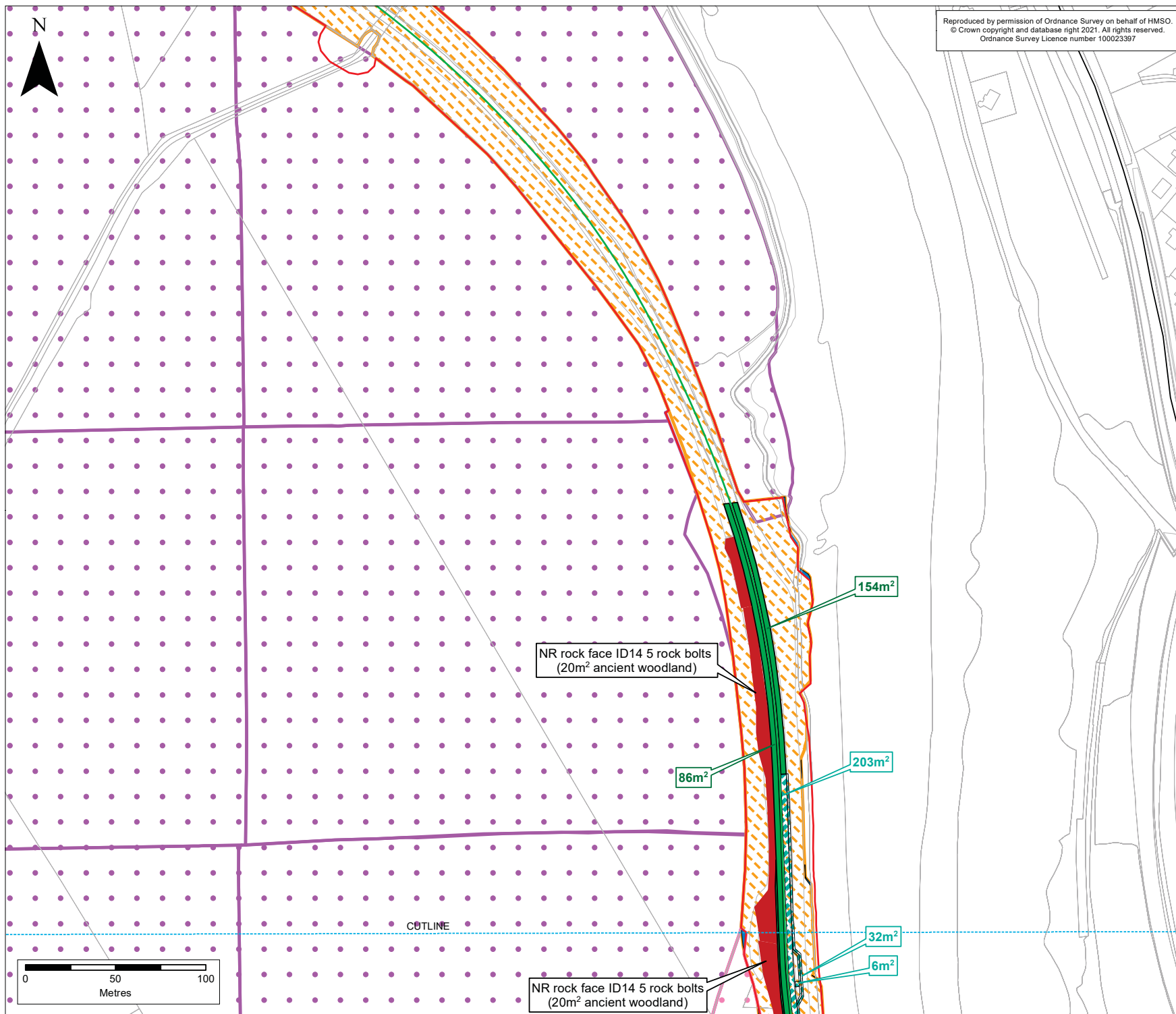
Compensation

Compensation for the loss of *Festuco-Brometalia* grassland is set out in Section 11.4 of the Report to Inform the HRA [AS-027]. The aims of the compensation measures are to improve the condition of existing areas of *Festuco-Brometalia* grassland and to implement a strategy for Bristol rock-cress. The locations of the areas for positive management are shown in Figure 1 of Annex F of the AGVMP [AS-044] and the management prescriptions for each of the areas are set out in Annex G of the AGVMP. The conservation strategy for Bristol rock-cress is provided in Annex K of the AGVMP.

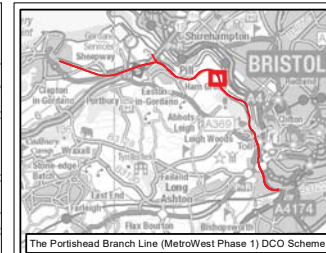
The total area of positive management within the SAC grassland habitat is estimated at 0.15 ha, which is more than double the area lost (0.06 ha). This ratio has been agreed with NE as appropriate compensation for habitat losses in view of the measures making improvements to existing qualifying features, which will be evident as soon as the management is undertaken. The proposals for positive management of SAC grassland, as described in the AGVMP [AS-044] and in paragraphs 11.4.5-11.4.7 of the HRA, focus on scrub control and the removal of non-native species including cotoneaster and holm oak.

Statement of Common Ground with Natural England

The Statement of Common Ground with Natural England (Version2) [REP3-017] records at 5.2.11 (Quarry Bridge compound) and 5.2.12 (rock faces) that Natural England and the Applicant agree that the proposed measures will mitigate the potential impacts from the construction activities.



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The Portishead Branch Line (MetroWest Phase 1) DCO Scheme

KEY

Order Limits

Existing Railway

Existing Railway Line

Portishead Branch Line

The Associated Development Works

Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland - removed for fences, steps, structures and signal

Secondary Woodland - removed for fences, steps, structures and signal

Network Rail (NR) Rock Face Number and Potential Remedial Works

Land Ownership Boundary

Forestry England

Alvis Brothers Limited

Network Rail

Network Rail Discrepancies

Rev	By	Chkd	Apprvd	Date	Description
ES-A	MPC	CW	CF	19/01/2021	First draft

Client

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Project: Portishead Branch Line (MetroWest Phase 1)

Drawing: Habitat Impacted by Construction Works within the Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC
APFP Regulation 5(2)(a) and 5(2)(o)
(Map 1 of 8)

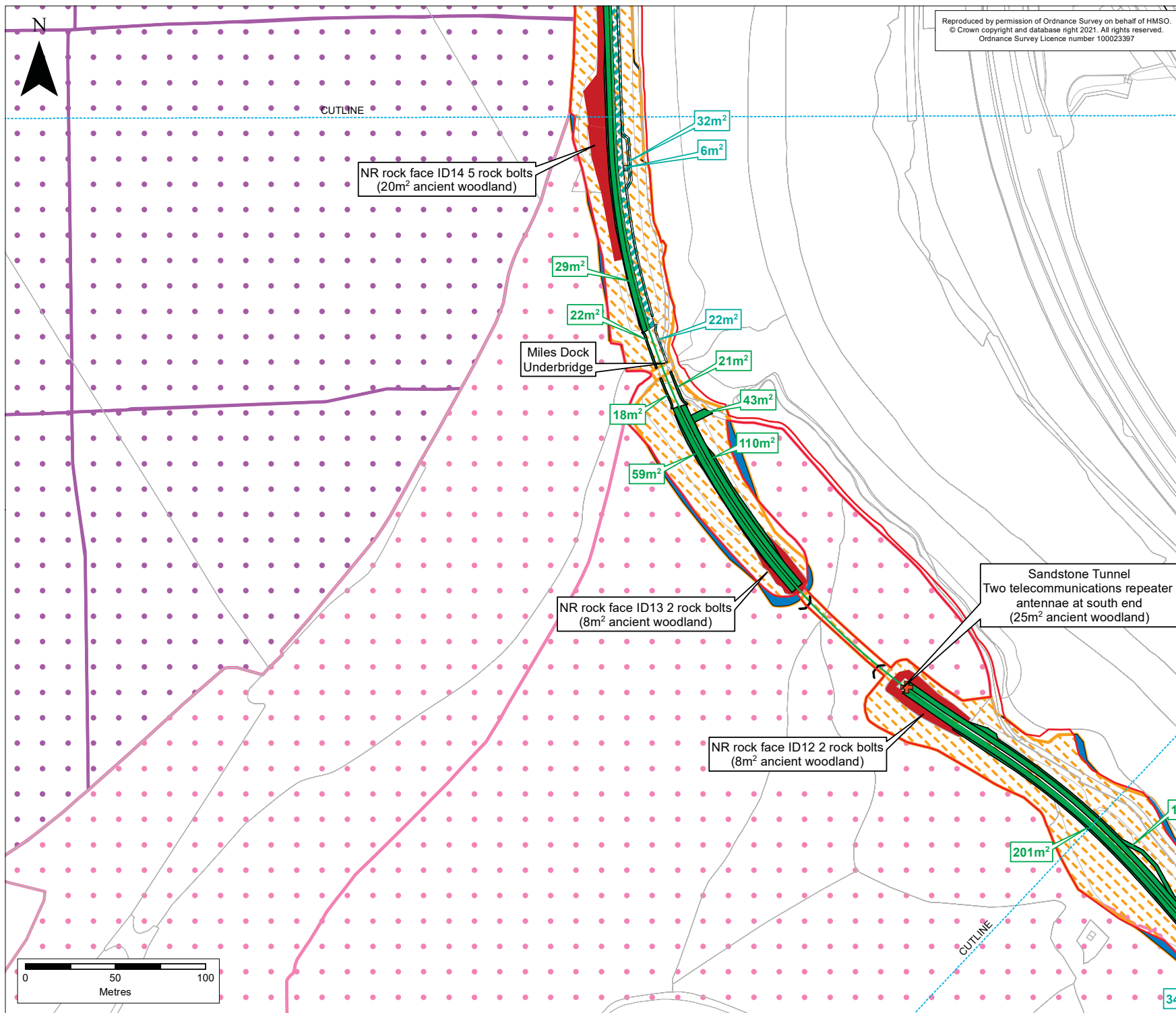
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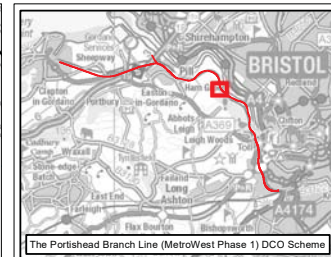
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The Portishead Branch Line (MetroWest Phase 1) DCO Scheme

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- Order Limits
 - Existing Railway**
 - Existing Railway Line
 - Railway Tunnel
 - Portishead Branch Line**
 - The Associated Development Works
 - Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland - removed for fences, steps, structures and signal
 - Secondary Woodland - removed for fences, steps, structures and signal
 - Telecomms Masts and Associated Equipment
 - Network Rail (NR) Rock Face Number and Potential Remedial Works
 - Land Ownership Boundary**
 - Forestry England
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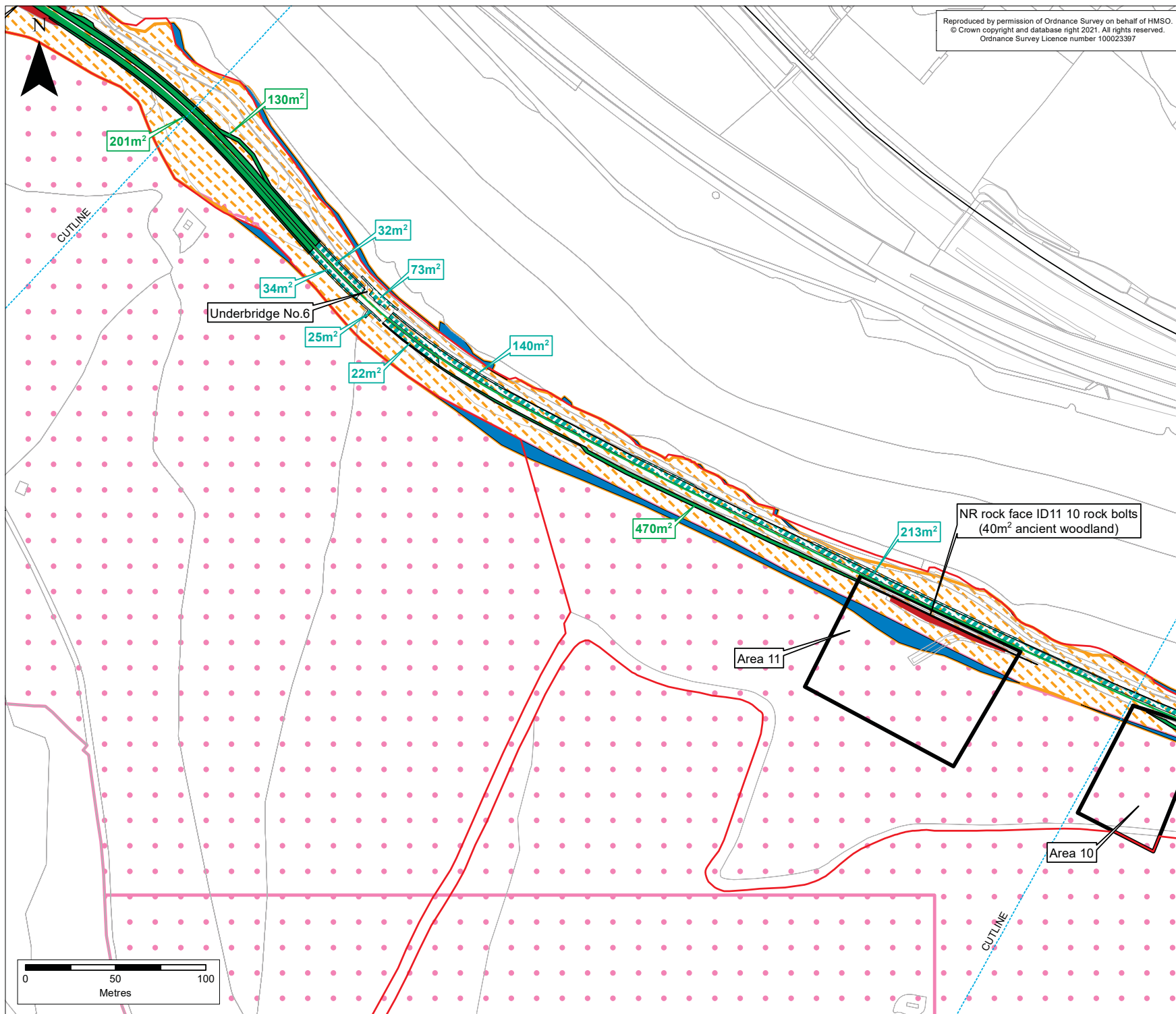
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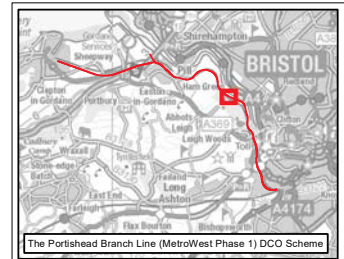
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(Map 2 of 8)

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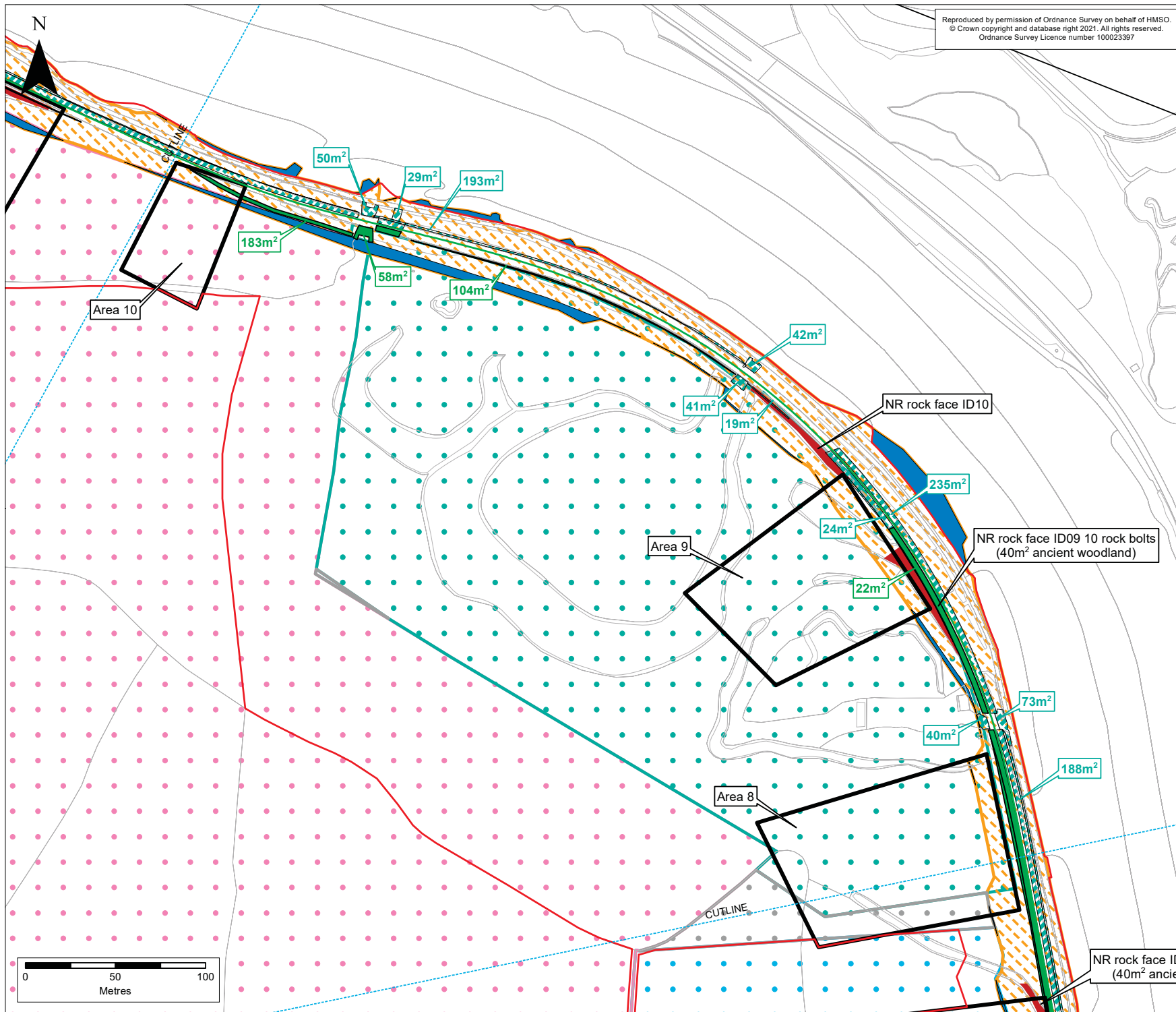
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APFP Regulation 5(2)(a) and 5(2)(o)
(Map 3 of 8)

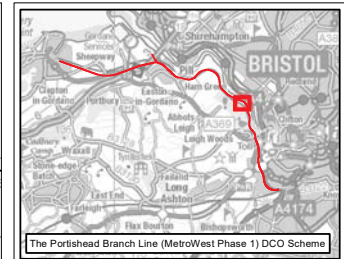
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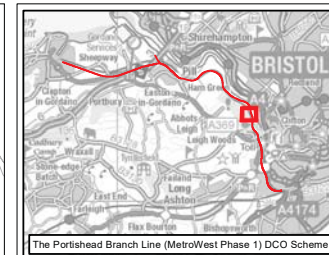
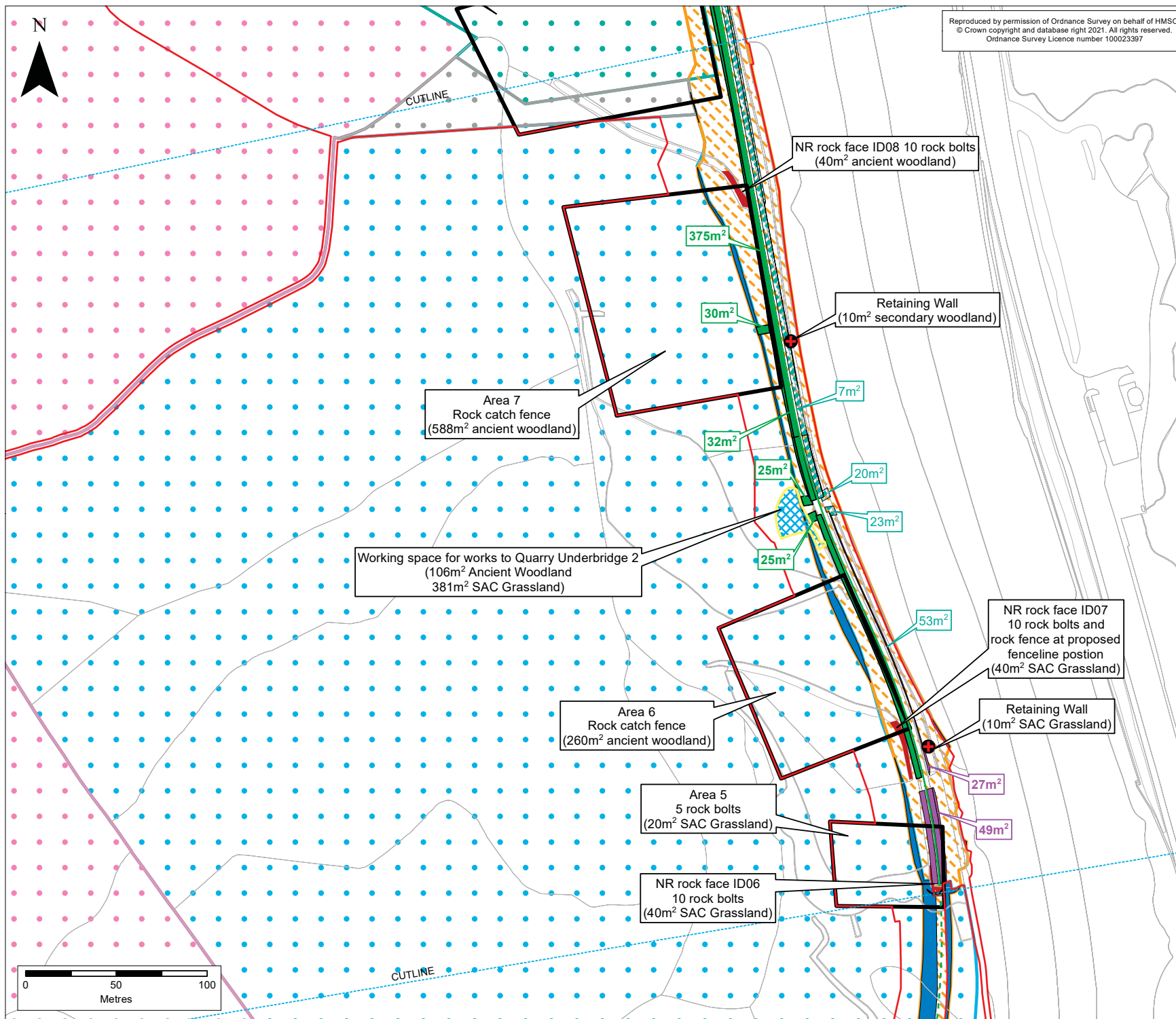
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(Map 4 of 8)

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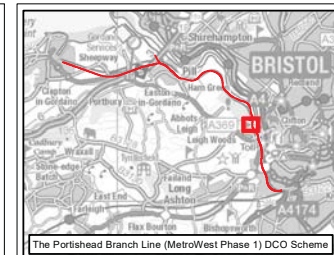
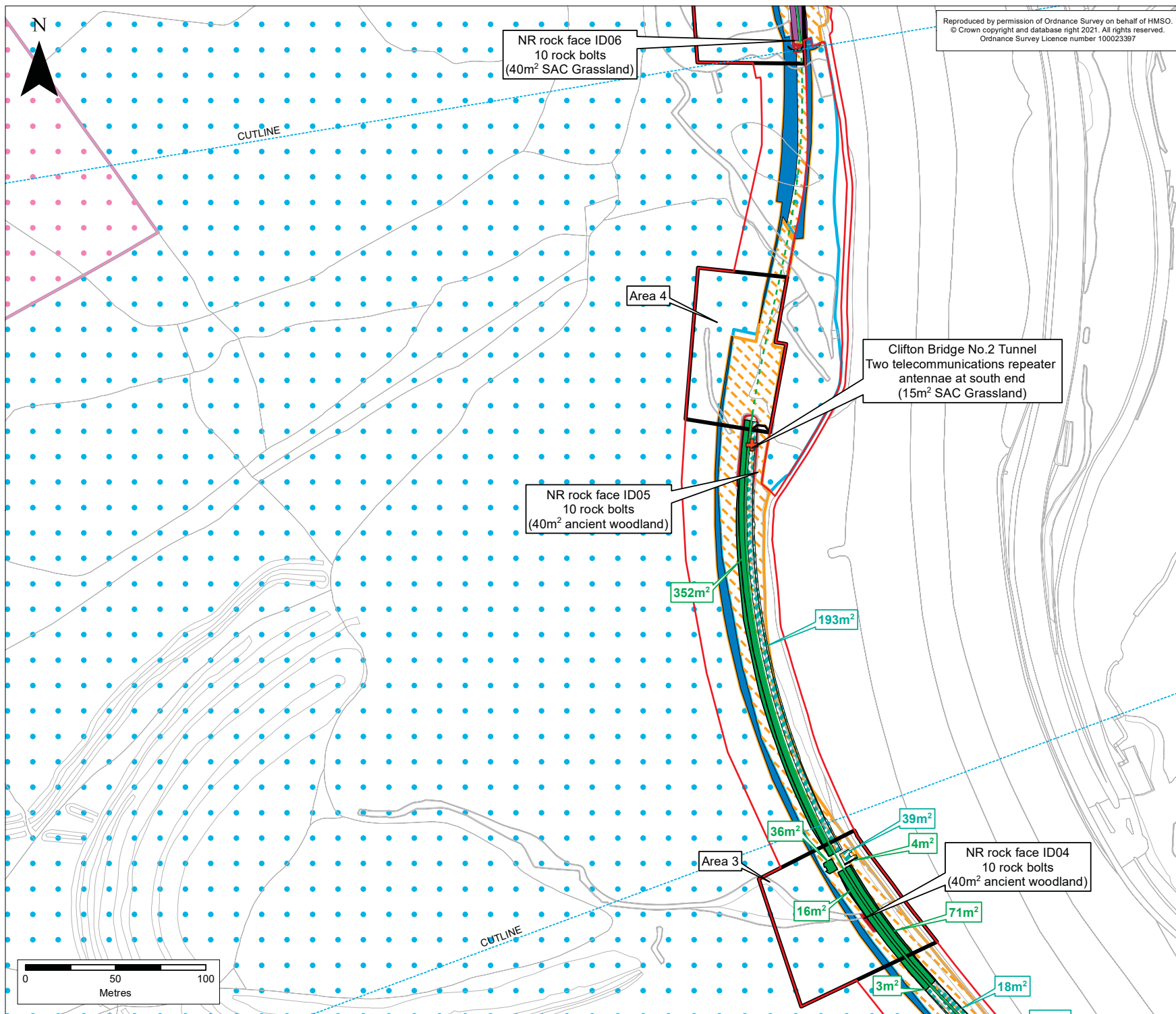
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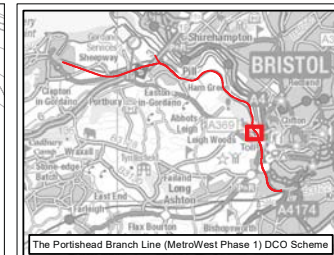
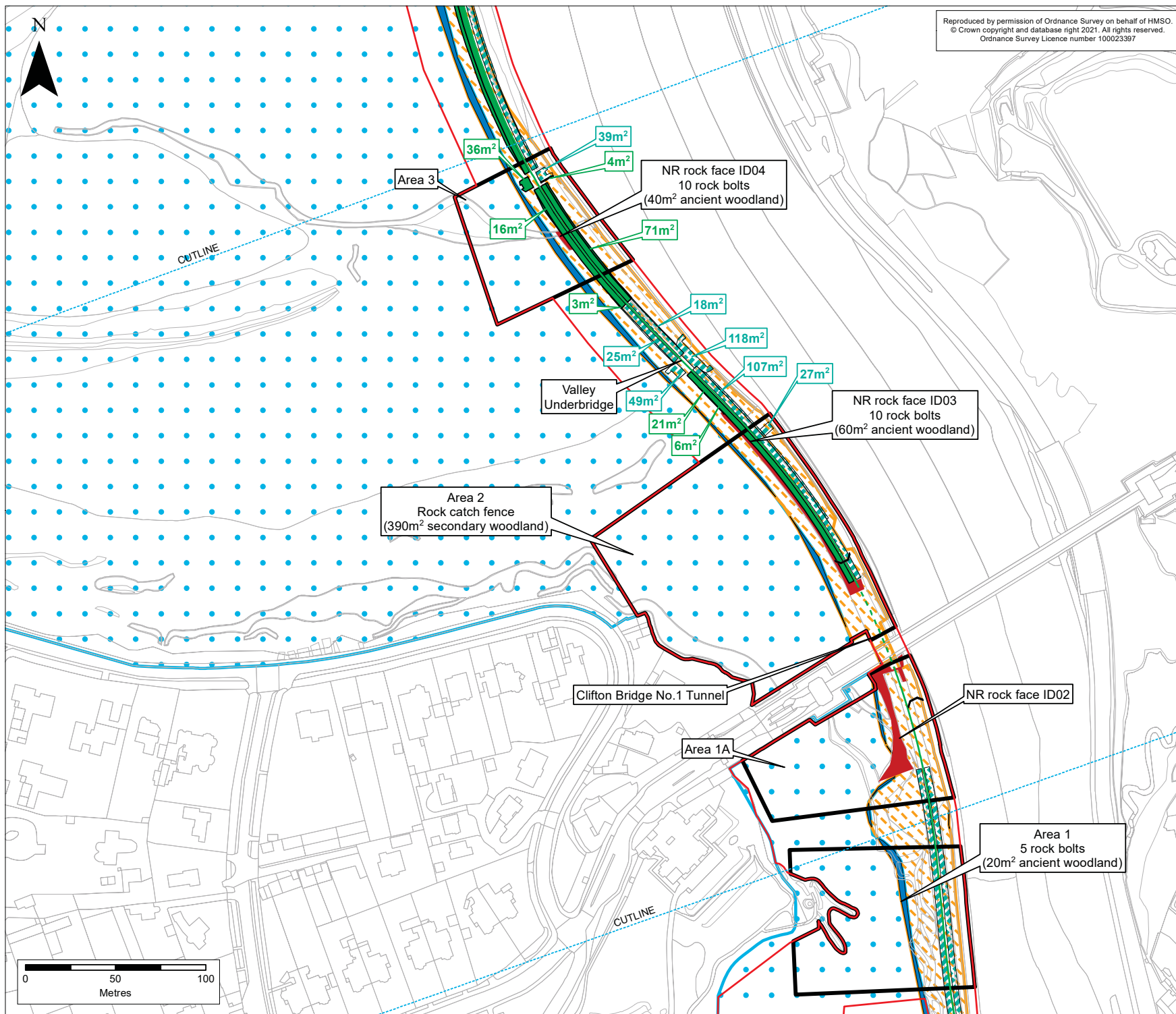
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Drawing:
Habitat Impacted by Construction Works
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APFP Regulation 5(2)(a) and 5(2)(o)
(Map 6 of 8)

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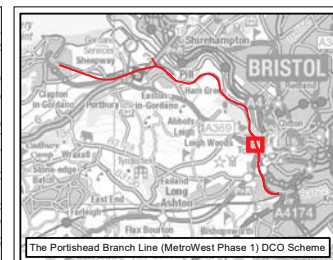
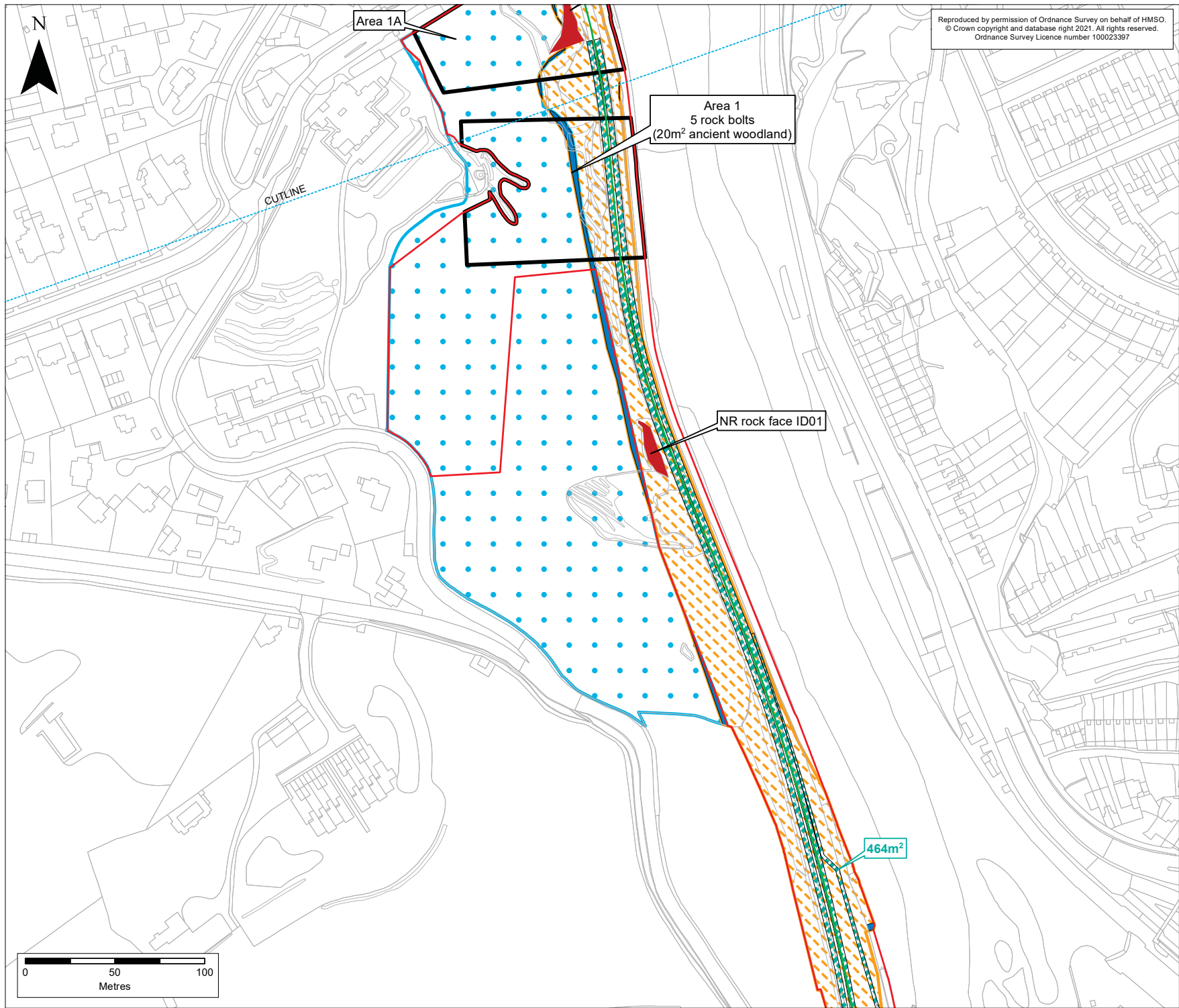
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Drawing: Habitat Impacted by Construction Works within the Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC APFP Regulation 5(2)(a) and 5(2)(o) (Map 7 of 8)

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(Map 8 of 8)

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