CLINTON DEVON ESTATES

DELIVERING ON NATIONAL AMBITION FOR NATURE RECOVERY

Produced for the National Estate for Nature Group

March 2026

Contents

Introduction

The Clinton Devon Estates' 2030 strategy sets a clear ambition to demonstrate environmental sustainability across all areas of our business, and this is underpinned by our guiding principle of responsible stewardship: *doing today what is right for tomorrow*. We want the Estate to be a leading national example of multifunctional land use, where farming, forestry, habitat restoration and community access coexist to deliver climate resilience, nature recovery, and thriving rural economies.

The Estate has a proud history of embedding long-term thinking, transparency and integrity in its actions, and this is more important today than ever before. In facing simultaneous and related threats from climate change, a biodiversity crisis, and increasing pressure on food and timber security, we must adapt the way we use our land to support the continued growth of the businesses, communities, habitats and species that are so reliant on it.

Further, we recognise our responsibility as a member of *The National Estate for Nature Group* to support the delivery of the Government's targets for nature recovery – including those set out in the Environment Act 2021 and the commitment to protect and conserve a minimum of 30% of land and sea for biodiversity by 2030 (30 by 30).

We last set out our plans for nature recovery across the Estate in *Space for Nature: A Wildlife Prospectus for Clinton Devon Estates* in 2017, and have made significant progress since that time.[1] In particular, we have:

- **Completed the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP),** which allowed tidal water back into the historic Otter floodplain for the first time in 200 years, creating 55 hectares of wetland habitat and providing flood resilience for the local community.
- **Achieved National Nature Reserve (NNR) status** for the Pebblebed Heaths and the Otter Estuary, safeguarding their conservation and public access for the long-term.
- **Launched the Heaths to Sea (H2C) Landscape Recovery Project**, which will (subject to agreeing further Defra funding) radically transform the Otter Valley over the next 20 years, creating, restoring and connecting habitat across 4,500 hectares of farmed, forested and open access land in line with opportunities identified in the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).[2] [3]

This document sets out how the Estate will further transform land use and support the Government's ambition for nature recovery across six priority areas, as well as describing the challenges the Estate faces in achieving this ambition and how the Government can help. The document also includes maps of priority habitats and site designations, published as part of our commitment to improving transparency regarding how we use our land.[4]

[1] Further detail on progress against *Space for Nature* is set out at Appendix 1.
[2] Further detail on H2C can be found at https://www.heathstosea.com/.
[3] Further detail on how H2C is informed by the Devon LNRS can be found at Appendix 2.
[4] Maps and other land use data can be found at Appendix 3.

Priority Areas

Habitats

The Estate is home to a wide range of wildlife-rich habitats of local, national and international importance, including calcareous grasslands on the Beer Estate, dwarf shrub heathland across the Pebblebed Heaths, saltmarsh and mudflat in the Lower Otter Valley, and culm grasslands and ancient woodland on the Heanton Estate.[5]

Creating, Restoring and Connecting Habitats

The Estate is actively progressing plans to create, restore and connect habitats in line with the Government's habitat creation target, and **our ambition is to deliver on the 30 by 30 commitment by protecting and conserving at least 30% of Estate land for biodiversity by 2030.** We will achieve this through improving the habitat condition of our protected sites, and through considering where newly created habitat can be designated as 'Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures' (OECMs).

Our efforts to deliver on 30 by 30 will be focused primarily on our largest holding, the Clinton Estate in East Devon, through our Heaths to Sea (H2C) Landscape Recovery project, as well as on the Heanton Estate through the Restoration of the River Mere Catchment (RRMC) project in partnership with Devon Wildlife Trust.

Delivering our H2C plans would achieve, over the next 20 years:

- **The creation of up to 90 hectares of new multipurpose productive woodland.**
- **The creation of 167 hectares of wood pasture and scrub mosaic.**
- **212 hectares of floodplain restoration and reconnection** on land currently used primarily for agriculture but which has high environmental risk.
- The connection of the fragmented 1,063-hectare Pebblebed heaths NNR by **establishing 20m-wide riparian corridors along either side of the River Otter and its main tributaries.**

Through RRMC, **we will restore 60 hectares of floodplain habitat by 2030,** connecting the River Mere with its tributaries.

Managing Existing Habitat

We will continue to manage our existing habitat effectively, including through our Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, established by the Estate in 2007.

The most recent SSSI condition assessment of the Pebblebed Heaths undertaken in 2020 and 2021 indicated that only 28% is in favourable condition.

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[5] Further detail and mapping of the Estate's land use, protected sites and habitat types can be found at Appendix 3.

To improve its ecological condition, we will:

- **Finalise a new 10-year ecological management plan for the Pebblebed Heaths by the end of 2026.**
- **Expand conservation grazing on the Pebblebed Heaths from 212 hectares to 1,188 hectares by 2030**, reducing pressure on specific areas, improving resilience of threatened species and increasing overall biodiversity.

It is our ambition that the Heaths will **achieve 80% favourable status by 2040.**

Additionally, **we will finalise a 10-year ecological management plan for the recently restored Otter Estuary by 2027.**

Species

A key focus of our work to restore habitats is to provide homes for important species, many of which are distinctive to our Estate. Just some examples of this include:

- Our partnership in 2015 with Devon Wildlife Trust to support the introduction of the beaver into England, which in 2020 received permanent legal status. Estate land currently supports eight territories - around 10-15% of the nationally significant River Otter population. The wetland habitats they create through damming support flood and drought resilience, increases biodiversity and improves water quality.
- Our Heanton Estate supports one of the last remaining populations of critically endangered freshwater pearl mussels, and our work through the RRMC to restore floodplain habitat will support their conservation, alongside the migrating salmonids on whose life cycles the mussels depend.
- The Estate-owned, SSSI-designated Beer Quarry Caves are home to greater horseshoe bats – one of the UK's most threatened bat species – as well as the lesser horseshoe, Bechstein's, Natterer's, Daubenton's, Brandt's and common pipistrelle. The Estate has worked with the Devon Wildlife Trust-led Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project and tenant farmers surrounding the caves to support the at-risk species within the sustenance zones they need to survive, including through hedgerow planting and creating bat-friendly ponds.
- The Estate is home to a range of rare birds, such as the nightjar and Dartford warbler, whose populations are meeting favourable ecological condition criteria on our holdings, and cirl buntings, a red-listed species almost lost in the 20th century largely due to changes in agricultural practice. We have worked with our tenant farmers to actively support a regional stronghold of cirl buntings by maintaining a mixed farming model which provides the food and habitat they need to thrive.

At a local level, the delivery of H2C would more than deliver on the Government's species abundance target of a 10% increase by 2042 compared to 2030. The project is forecast to drive significant uplifts for species at a landscape scale, including:

- **A 40% increase in bat populations by 2050,** supported by the delivery of foraging corridors as identified in the draft Devon LNRS, and covering those bats listed as Devon Special Species.
- **A 50% increase in beaver territories by 2040,** supported by riparian habitat creation.
- **A 33% increase in wetland bird species richness on the Otter Estuary by 2050.**
- **A 50% increase in farmland bird species richness by 2050, with cirl bunting breeding territories increasing from 10 in 2030 to 40 in 2040.**

Farming

Approximately 70% of the Estate's land is high quality agricultural land. Whilst this figure will change over time, in particular through the changes under H2C, we will continue to use our land to produce high quality food, supporting our nation's food security across our farms.

Monitoring and Spatial Targeting

We have carried out extensive environmental baselining of our farmed areas through natural capital assessments, MoRPH surveys of the surrounding river and tributaries, soil mapping, and regular citizen science monitoring. This data has been used to inform spatial decision-making under H2C to maximise our farms' contribution to food security and nature recovery, and we will monitor against individual H2C farm management plans for each farm throughout the duration of the project. For two of our tenanted farms, this includes plans to regularly assess ecosystem health through monitoring, including for organic matter, carbon, earthworms and fungal diversity through eDNA assessment.

The proposals have also been guided by Defra's draft land use principles as set out in its Land Use Framework Consultation. In particular:

- **We will continue to play to the strengths of our land by prioritising highest quality agricultural land for food production**, whilst prioritising less productive land for land use change (for example, land on the slopes of Otterton Hill currently used for grazing dairy youngstock will be transitioned into wood pasture and scrub mosaic habitat).
- Multifunctionality is embedded throughout the H2C plans, with regenerative methods supporting nature alongside food production; riparian corridors creating new habitats alongside natural flood protections; new habitat creation supporting species recovery alongside new access routes for the public; and new woodland supporting timber production, biodiversity and recreational space.
- Our land use changes will be safeguarded for the long-term, for example by ensuring that farmland and newly protected habitat alike are protected from flooding through the use of nature-based solutions to flood management.

Nature Friendly Farming

On our in-hand farm, we will continue to expand the use of regenerative practices, including through use of our own manures, integrated crop rotations, continuous cover cropping and a minimal or zero-till approach where possible, which enables us to keep living roots in the soil for 70-80% of the year. **It is our ambition that these changes will achieve soil organic matter uplift of 1% by 2050.** We have an integrated pest management plan in place, and use regular soil monitoring and agronomist advice to use fertilisers only where needed to ensure high quality food outputs.

We have begun to introduce environmental KPIs for new farm tenancy agreements, and are **committed to using stretching but achievable environmental KPIs in all new tenancy agreements, including requirements on nutrient and soil management.**

Forestry

The Estate is home to 1,900 hectares of woodland, which delivers vital habitats, carbon storage, flood mitigation, recreational space and a domestic source of timber for construction.

Timber

The UK is one of the biggest net importers of timber globally, and this results in significant transport costs, emissions, supply security risks, and displacement of impact to countries with lower environmental standards. That is why **the Estate will continue to supply 10,000 tonnes of sustainably grown, FSC certified timber to UK markets annually** – supporting achievement of carbon reduction goals across the construction supply chain.

Woodland Creation and Management

Delivering our H2C plans would see the **creation of up to 90 hectares of new multipurpose productive woodland, increasing woodland cover from 18% to 20% across the project area** (well in excess of the Government's target of 16.5%).[6]

In order to drive healthier soils, a greater diversity of native woodland flora and fauna, and increased resilience to biotic and abiotic threats, **we will transform our woodland management across the Estate from clear felling to continuous cover. We aim to complete this for 80% of the Estate's woodland by 2046.** This shift will maintain higher average carbon stocks, decrease requirement for chemical use, and increase water holding capacity with benefits for natural flood mitigation and resilience to drought.

Modelling shows that delivering our H2C plans would lead to the sequestration of an additional 115,469 tonnes of CO_2e over 100 years (doubling carbon storage across the project area).[7] This will be achieved largely through creation of new woodland and by transitioning away from clear felling.

Monitoring

We will update our woodland management plans by the end of 2027, looking at threats and resilience measures for our woodlands, and clarifying our silvicultural trajectory on a sub-compartment level. As part of this we will address interactions between forestry and adjacent SSSI sites, looking specifically at climate resilience, fire risk, public access, hydrology, habitat change and habitat buffering. In addition, **we will carry out a strategic assessment and prioritisation of further woodland creation opportunities for the whole Estate by the end of 2028.**

[6] N.B. not additional to the woodland creation figures referenced in the Habitats chapter.
[7] Modelling prepared for Clinton Devon Estates by Nature Advisory Services, 2026.

We have carried out Woodland Condition Assessments in a sample of sites, and it is our ambition that **woodland condition across the Estate will improve over the next 20 years as follows:**

- **Coniferous woodland to improve from poor to moderate.**
- **Mixed woodland to improve from poor to moderate**.
- **Broadleaved woodland to improve from poor to moderate**.
- **Lowland mixed deciduous woodland to improve from moderate to good.**

Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)

We will increase the proportion of native broadleaves on our PAWS through woodland management that supports both continued economic viability and broadleaf regeneration, **aiming to achieve a minimum 20% native broadleaves across the Estate's wooded areas over the next 20 years.**

Managing Invasive Species

Deer and grey squirrels have a significant impact on woodlands across the Estate, with the latter in particular affecting our ability to grow native broadleaves.

We have a deer management plan in place, with rangers currently achieving cull targets. **Under H2C we would employ a new wildlife ranger to deliver our invasive species management plan.**

Water

The Estate is actively managing water bodies across its land, including the River Otter which runs through the Clinton Estate, and the Rivers Torridge and Mere on the Heanton Estate.

Key pressures on water quality on the Estate are from agriculture and sewage pollution, and the River Otter and Lower River Mere are both in poor ecological condition and prone to flooding.

We plan to use nature-based solutions to simultaneously improve water quality and increase resilience to flooding across the Estate by:

- **Restoring and reconnecting the Otter (212 hectares through delivery of H2C) and Mere (60 hectares through RRMC) floodplains by 2030**, reconnecting the rivers with their natural floodplains and creating new wetland habitat.[8]
- **Creating 20m-wide riparian corridors along either side of over 90% of the River Otter and its main tributaries**, protecting the water from agricultural run-off whilst also creating ecological corridors in which species can move.
- **Continuing to maintain compliance with Farming Rules for Water on our Home Farm and including nutrient-related compliance in environmental KPIs for new farm tenancy agreements.**
- **Taking forward the final recommendations from the Environment Agency-led Climate-Resilient Otter Catchment (CROC) project,** such as for the creation of riparian corridors, leaky dams, and improved soil management**,** which, taken together, will **reduce agricultural run-off by 70%** (supporting delivery of the Government's target for reducing nutrient pollution from agriculture) and **create over 40,000m^3 of additional flood storage capacity** across the catchment.

We will continue to monitor the ongoing health of our rivers, including through regular riverfly surveys, using this data to target action where needed.

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[8] N.B. not additional to the floodplain habitat creation figures referenced in the Habitats chapter.

Green Infrastructure, Access and Communities

The Estate provides the natural surroundings for communities living across East and North Devon (with all settlements enjoying access to green or blue space within 15 minutes' walk), as well as a tourist attraction and source of wellbeing for those coming from further afield. As such, the provision of green infrastructure and access is an important part of the Estate's responsibility to support the local economy. This includes maintaining 1,000 hectares of open access heathland (which receives over a million visits annually), 500 hectares of woodland, 13 car parks which support access, and 14km of permissive rights of way, linking over 160km of footpaths.

Engagement

We work extensively with local communities to improve access and enjoyment of the natural landscape. Our employees deliver guided walks, talks and other events on our sites and in local communities. In recent years we have focused in particular on engaging under-represented groups through our Conservation Trust and National Lottery Heritage-funded Pebblebeds for All project. This has seen us running events to support women who feel less confident or safe in nature, facilitating regular sessions for the bereaved, and engaging younger people through our Youth Rangers programme. In 2024/25 alone, our community engagement events (i.e. cultural and wellbeing focused) had a total of 2,175 attendees, and our professional knowledge exchange events (e.g. talks from academics) had 635 attendees.

We are also committed to working closely with local communities to build consensus around land use change in alignment with the co-creation principle set out in the Land Use Framework Consultation. We have carried out regular consultation and engagement through a variety of fora for the LORP and H2C projects, and in 2024/25 our community consultation and involvement events had a total of 703 attendees.

Outreach with schools in the last decade through our Countryside Learning programme has seen all primaries and special schools within an 8km radius engaged with and an average of over 800 young people per year experiencing educational visits to our farms, woodlands or nature reserves. We also support the work of uniformed youth groups like Scouts and Girlguiding.

As part of LORP we also ran outreach to over 1,500 school children, and created Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level resources for use in local schools to educate pupils on how LORP supports effective climate adaptation.

Access

Delivering our H2C plans would improve access further by:

- **Creating or improving up to seven new permissive access routes over the next 20 years.**
- **Creating a circular access route around Otterton Hill**, connecting users with the new wood pasture and scrub habitats.
- **Creating 5m-wide permissive access through riparian corridors along the River Otter.**

Subject to securing sustainable funding and planning permissions, **we are also exploring the potential for allowing public access to the former railway line running through the Otter Valley.** If delivered, this will provide a new 4km accessible route that will overlook newly created habitat and connect three villages in the catchment, providing expanded opportunities for green tourism in the local area.

Green Infrastructure

We have built almost 500 homes in the last 10 years, and will continue to work with local planning authorities to deliver local plans to deliver high-quality, sustainable housing. **We are committed, through partnership with developers, to providing Suitable Alternative Greenspaces (SANGs), delivering Biodiversity Net Gain on site, and meeting the Future Homes Standard** – giving residents efficient and climate resilient homes with direct access to nature. **We will also continue to rent over 100 allotments across the Estate**, providing wellbeing to local communities.

Challenges

1. Certainty of funding

The Estate continues to be reliant on attaining Government and other additional external funding, such as green finance, to achieve our nature recovery ambitions. Delivery of a significant part of our ambition relies on the H2C Landscape Recovery project. The transformative land use change to 4,500 hectares of Estate land described under this scheme is permanent or semi-permanent, meaning that the inability to reach an initial financial agreement, withdrawal of funding, or the inability to diversify income streams away from agricultural production (including through accessing private nature markets) would leave the Estate in a vulnerable position.

The Government should work with *The National Estate for Nature Group* to explore how greater certainty can be given to landowners looking to make long-term investment decisions in aid of nature recovery. This should include certainty of funding through agri-environment schemes such as Landscape Recovery, as well as greater support for the long-term stability of private nature markets such as Biodiversity Net Gain.

2. Land tenure

The Estate maintains very positive relationships with its tenants and we are proud of the environmental work they do. The majority are either on Agricultural Holdings Act (AHA) or long-term Farm Business Tenancies (FBT). The Estate runs regular tenant forums discussing environmental issues, including the future of farming, conservation, climate change and agriculture and the possibilities afforded under the Government's agri-environment schemes. Although the Estate is the landowner, we have limited land management control over tenanted land, and changes in husbandry or approaches to conservation across the majority of Estate land cannot be directly delivered unless tenancy agreements mandate a specific environmental approach to a particular farm (though such tenancy agreements come up for renewal only rarely).

The Government should work with the Commissioner for the Tenant Farming Sector and *The National Estate for Nature Group* membership to explore how land use change and good environmental practice on tenanted land can be supported, for example through the wider rollout of environmental Farm Business Tenancies.

3. Aligning incentives for food production and nature

There remains a significant disconnect between the cost of production and the price that markets are prepared to pay for food. In incentivising an agricultural transition to self-sustaining, nature-rich and profitable farming models, **the Government should align overall outcomes for ecological and societal health and food output, as well as working across the supply chain, including supermarkets, to ensure that the wider**

beneficial outputs of new farming models are marketed to consumers and reflected in market value.

4. Water pollution and flood risk

Whilst the Estate is taking significant action to improve water quality and flood resilience through changes to agricultural practice and the use of nature-based solutions, it only manages a small proportion of the lower section of the catchment. The poor ecological status of the main River Otter is heavily sustained by poor agricultural husbandry upstream, as well as sewage pollution. Without action in these areas outside of Estate control, Estate-led initiatives can only go so far in improving the overall ecological health of the lower catchment.

Greater Government support for sustainable funding and private investment into water quality and natural flood management that is strategically aligned with wider improvements (e.g. through Landscape Recovery projects) would allow maximal value for money in public spending alongside better ecological outcomes.

5. Supporting broadleaved woodland creation

Whilst the Estate will support an increased broadleaf component in existing woodland stands through irregular selection silviculture, managing the impacts of grey squirrels remains extremely challenging. The support from Government outlined in the 2026 Grey Squirrel Policy Statement is welcomed as a stepping stone towards increased broadleaf planting. However, the damage that the squirrels cause through bark stripping, which is often focused on broadleaves, means that broadleaf woodland creation at commercial scale remains financially unviable.

Appendix 1 – *Delivery on 'Space for Nature'*

In 2017 we published *Space for Nature: A wildlife prospectus for the Clinton Devon Estates,* which set out a landscape-scale wildlife strategy for wildlife across Clinton Devon Estates. Updates for each of the *priorities for action* are set out below.[9]

1. ***Improve the quality of baseline habitat and wildlife data across the Estate***

   Why? To ensure Estate-wide decision-making is based on good ecological information.

   How? Through sharing of datasets with the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre and other wildlife organisations; development of volunteer monitoring and citizen science surveys; commissioning of in-house and professional ecological surveys.

   Monitoring of progress? Collate existing habitat and wildlife data for internal mapping systems by 2018; annual reporting on focus and number of additional surveys undertaken.

Update:

For over five years, the Estate has had a service-level agreement with the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre, and through this we have access to the best available data for species and habitat through our own GIS system. The Estate also co-ordinates ca. 30 citizen scientists working across its holdings, continuously building wildlife data. These have a focus both on and off reserves and includes surveys of birds (winter and breeding), butterflies, dragonflies, dormice, harvest mice, plants and invasive species. This data informs land use decision making. Through the LORP and H2C projects, numerous ecological surveys have been commissioned building baseline knowledge of habitats and species.

2. ***Secure funding and attain favourable status for the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths***

   Why? To ensure well-resourced management of this internationally important conservation site so that its wildlife can thrive in the face of increasing visitor pressure.

   How? Improve public awareness and profile of the site, diversification of funding models and strengthened management models.

   Monitoring of progress? The development of a funding strategy, income generated and status attained in quintennial reviews.

Update:

See the managing existing habitat section above.

The Estate completed a Fundraising Strategy for the Pebblebed Heaths in 2021 and since 2024 has employed a Fundraising Manager to diversify income streams to achieve more for nature on Estate reserves. Public awareness of the importance of the Pebblebed

[9] *Space for Nature: A wildlife prospectus for the Clinton Devon Estates,* Clinton Devon Estates, 2017, pp 122-125.

Heaths has been strengthened since 2020 through the Estate proactively recommending that the site be declared a National Nature Reserve (achieved 2020), and through the completion of an NNR Masterplan.[10] In 2024, the Estate's conservation charity was successful in securing funding for the Pebblebeds for All project (2024 to 2026). Through this Heritage Lottery-funded project, the Estate's conservation charity has been engaging more people from a greater diversity of backgrounds to support stronger connections to the NNR.

3. ***Strengthen management of statutory (SAC/SPA/SSSI) and non-statutory (CWS) wildlife sites***

Why? To improve quality and conservation value of all notable wildlife sites.

How? Through working in partnership with tenants and external bodies providing specialist advice.

Monitoring of progress? Areas of statutory reserves attaining favourable status, and County Wildlife Sites awarded green status.

Update:

See the managing existing habitat section above.

County Wildlife Sites occur on both in-house and tenanted land with management recommendations via the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre shared with those who have land management control. Where there is concern about the status of a CWS, the Estate has commissioned advice to help rectify the situation. For example, on calcareous grassland on the Beer Estate in 2018 concerns were raised regarding the encroachment of scrub in small, steep field parcels. Work undertaken by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group provided recommendations and advice to tenants.

4. ***Enhance our woodlands for wildlife, including changing management from clear felling to continuous cover systems where appropriate***

Why? To develop more diverse, resilient and economically and environmentally sustainable woodlands.

How? Through adaption of management practices of plantations where selective felling is the most appropriate management regime.

Monitoring of progress? Tracking of areas converted from clear felling to selective felling.

Update:

Since 2020 the Estate has been transitioning its productive woodland from clear felling to continuous cover irregular silviculture. This is a long-term process that will be completed over many decades (see the ambition set out in the forestry chapter).

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[10] https://issuu.com/pebblebedheathsnnr/docs/pebblebed_heaths_nnr_masterplan_compressed_1_

5. ***Improve integrated spatial planning of wildlife delivery***

   Why? To understand strengths and weaknesses of existing habitats, wildlife populations and ecosystem services delivery within a multi-use landscape and to identify and cost a programme of enhancement works that improves habitat quality and connectivity.

   How? Through spatial planning by in-house ecological team, through partnerships with external wildlife organisations, and through commissioning of further professional advice when required.

   Monitoring of progress? Publication of wildlife enhancement plans for Beer Estate (2018), North Devon Estate (2019) and East Devon Estate (2020).

<u>Update:</u>

To improve decision-making relating to land use choices the Estate has invested in multiple natural capital assessments on its three main holdings since 2018. We also part-funded a PhD (Exeter University) into whether productive farming can also enhance natural capital. Since 2023, the Estate has had a Land Use Board that meets quarterly and scrutinises the benefits and disbenefits of major land use decision making. Through H2C and the RRMC the Estate has undertaken integrated spatial planning of wildlife for some 8,000 hectares on and off the Estate.

6. ***Deliver sustainable management and improved ecological health to the Lower Otter Valley***

   Why? To improve the value and ecosystem function of wildlife habitats, and safeguard the recreational and landscape value of one of Devon's primary tourist locations against a backdrop of the threats of a rapidly changing climate.

   How? Through partnership working with external parties and procurement of funds.

   Monitoring of progress? Through monitoring of project programme, securement of funding and delivery of managed re-alignment scheme and habitat restoration schemes.

<u>Update:</u>

The Lower Otter Restoration Project that restored 55 hectares of rare inter-tidal habitat was completed in 2022. Since then, plans have been prepared for the restoration of a further 200+ hectares of freshwater grazing marsh in the lower Otter valley under the H2C initiative. These plans have been developed with a Technical Advisory Group that includes membership of the RSPB, Devon Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency, South West Water, the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers, East Devon National Landscape, Exeter University, East Devon District Council and Devon County Council. Proposals for delivery and funding will be submitted March 2026.

7. ***Strengthen invasive species control, including of grey squirrels***

   Why? To minimise the threat of invasive species to the environment.

How? Annual control programmes of key species with local partners, including of Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and Grey Squirrels.

Monitoring of progress? Mapping of annual works undertaken, invasive populations reduced and staff time committed.

Update:

A comprehensive review of all invasive species in the East Devon Estate was completed in 2026 under H2C. Significant threats are actively managed – for example:

- Himalayan balsam is mapped and controlled annually in East Devon, with Estate employees and weekly volunteer parties undertaking clearance work. This is supported by additional contracted support.
- Grey squirrel control is undertaken by the Estate's Wildlife Ranger, but further resources are required to meaningfully address this issue at a landscape-scale.

8. Develop new models of business decision-making that reflect the true value of Natural Capital

Why? To ensure wildlife and ecosystem services are strengthened rather than eroded through business activities.

How? Building partnerships with academic institutions specialising in Natural Capital and trialling of new decision-making models.

Monitoring of progress? Tracking creation of research partnerships and incorporation of Natural Capital accounting into business model.

Update:

The Estate has significantly developed its understanding of natural capital and the trade-offs involved with land use decision-making since 2017. All major projects involving significant land use change are informed by natural capital accounting undertaken by external parties. Land use decisions are scrutinised by a Land Use Board with work commissioned in 2025 to investigate the potential for Estate diversification based around a green economy and green finance.

9. Introduction of environmental benchmarking of agricultural holdings

Why? To understand key qualities of soil, habitats and wildlife to enable enhancement and/or deterioration to be monitored and evaluated over time.

How? Soil, habitat and wildlife surveys undertaken in-house or through partnership models. Benchmarking introduced on Estate's Home Farm, and then incorporated into new tenancy agreements when they come up for renewal.

Monitoring of progress? Tracking of new benchmarking studies, with subsequent evaluation on a five- or ten-yearly basis.

Update:

See the farming section above.

Only two tenancies have come up for renewal since 2015. Both of these have environmental benchmarking related to soil health and wildlife outcomes. Tenancy agreements include commitments to building natural capital. Since 2015 there has been comprehensive ecological surveying across 4,000 hectares of Estate land, including of invasives, habitat condition and soils (under H2C). This has further been strengthened through a PhD (2018 to 2022) on natural capital focusing on the East Devon Estate (part funded by the Estate). Citizen scientists now undertake annual winter and breeding bird surveys on seven farms in East Devon with work commissioned on soil health baselining.

10. ***Develop collaborative, strategic wildlife enhancement partnerships with tenants, surrounding landowners and environmental bodies***

Why? Landscape-scale partnership working where groups of organisations with a shared vision work across ownership boundaries to deliver habitat or species-specific projects have been demonstrated to be effective in building shared ownership and enhancement of wildlife groups.

How? Creation of farmer-led, professionally advised habitat and species recovery projects.

Monitoring of progress? Annual tracking of partnerships formed and environment improvements against baseline levels.

Update:

The LORP, the Estate's two ELMS Test and Trials and the H2C landscape recovery project have built strong, collaborative partnerships based on consensus-building principles to guide large-scale nature recovery projects. All three have had strong stakeholder groups with wide representation including from local parish councils, district and county councils, local civic groups, tenants, utility companies and environmental organisations. In 2023 the Estate commissioned Exeter University to do a review of its engagement methods associated with LORP and to help create a methodology for engagement and involvement of end users and key stakeholders in coastal climate adaptation schemes.[11] A list of key partnerships is included at Appendix 4.

11. ***Monitor and improve the extent, connectivity and quality of hedgerows***

Why? Hedgerows represent one of the Estate's strongest wildlife assets, supporting biodiversity, providing connectivity through the countryside and providing resilience to climate change.

How? Through improving understanding of existing hedgerow condition, improved management of existing hedgerows and creation of new hedgerows. Work undertaken in-house, by tenants and external parties.

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[11] https://www.pacco-interreg.com/content/uploads/2023/02/Final_PACCo-T.2.4.1_ENG_Executive-Summary-Methodology-Report.pdf

Monitoring of progress? Tracking of status reports for farms, hedgerow management/creation undertaken.

Update:

The majority of hedgerows are managed under stewardship. The latest condition assessment (East Devon) was undertaken in 2025 on a subset of hedgerows (34 km) where the spatial distribution of 'species-rich native hedgerow' and 'other native hedgerow' were mapped. Of those surveyed, 81% were found to be in a good condition, 16% in moderate condition, and 3% in a poor condition.

12. Strengthening collaboration with citizen scientists and wildlife interest groups

Why? To improve external engagement, strengthen business capacity to capture baseline data on wildlife, and improve species- and habitat-specific enhancement programmes.

How? Through building stronger links at community level with wildlife enthusiasts and organisations with wildlife interests.

Monitoring of progress? Tracking of relationships built, surveys/monitoring undertaken and species/habitat-recovery programmes undertaken.

Update:

The Estate has built a strong citizen science network of ca. 30 people who monitor wildlife on the core reserves and seven farms annually (see section on improving the quality of baseline habitat and wildlife data across the Estate).

13. Strengthen public engagement with wildlife management in the countryside

Why? To improve business understanding of local society values, and society understanding of the challenges of integrated land management.

How? Through resourcing an annual programme of countryside learning and engagement at primary, secondary, tertiary and community levels.

Monitoring of progress? Tracking of engagement activities and educational partnerships built.

Update:

See engagement figures described above in the Green Infrastructure, Access and Communities chapter.

Appendix 2 – *Heaths to Sea and the Devon LNRS*

The Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy gives an overview of Devon's wildlife and sets out priorities and actions to help nature recover. The Strategy is not yet finalised, with the public consultation phase still to be completed. A draft web-based version is available and has been fully referenced as part of the development phase of H2C, with the synergies outlined as follows:

Habitat

The LNRS highlights a number of areas within the Heaths to Sea project area where expansion of woody habitat could be considered. These include areas on Otterton Hill and along the River Otter which the project has identified for the creation of wood pasture/scrub mosaics and riparian woodland. Similarly, areas mapped under the LNRS as suitable for wildlife rich grassland (steep slopes) also coincide with planned meadow creation and wood pasture/grassland mosaics on Otterton Hill. Thus, there is a high degree of coincidence between the LNRS and project aspirations. Furthermore, the LNRS identifies the potential for the restoration of spring-line mire mosaics (species-rich rush pasture, mire, wet heath, scrub and wet woodland), also on Otterton Hill, which H2C has already identified as part of its restoration plans.

Mammals

A number of mammals occurring within the project area are listed as Devon Special Species by the LNRS. The project area is identified as being an important landscape connectivity zone for grey long-eared bats, greater horseshoe bats and Bechstein's bats. This supports a key species-focused priority of H2C: the development of foraging corridors and bat habitat across the lower Otter Valley.

Actions identified under H2C were informed by recommended LNRS actions for hedgehog, hazel dormice and harvest mice – namely creating a network of connected woodlands, bushy hedges, dense scrub managed through light grazing (or rotational cutting) and creating a network of connected habitats with tussocky grasses or reeds on mire, heath and pasture mosaics.

The LNRS does not identify the project area as a water vole zone due to their believed absence. However, more recent H2C project development data proves that water vole are present. The LNRS highlights that restoring healthy watercourse corridors with well vegetated banks, wetlands and woodlands is likely to support the expansion of small, disjunct water vole populations. The controlling of mink is an important part of our Invasive Species Management Plan which support existing water vole populations and allow them to expand.

The entire project catchment has been identified in the LNRS as an existing beaver catchment, with the main River Otter and the Budleigh, Colaton and Back Brooks classified as watercourses likely to have well vegetated banks providing good habitat for beavers. Work undertaken by the River Otter Beaver Trial and subsequently by the H2C ecological assessment has confirmed that this is the case, with the improvement of riparian corridors and facilitating beaver expansion a key project aspiration. There are currently six known beaver territories within the project area.

Birds

The LNRS identifies coastal areas within the H2C boundary as cirl bunting breeding areas. Our plans for farmland have been designed to consolidate and expand habitat for this species which thrives where there are wide tussocky margins (to provide a summer food source rich in grasshopper), thick bushy hedgerows (for nesting) and over wintered weedy arable stubbles (winter food source).

The LNRS has identified the western section of the project area associated with the Heaths to Sea project as having the potential to support wood larks through the provision of habitats rich in seeds and insects (weedy winter stubbles, wildlife rich grasslands, field margins) and areas of bare ground and short vegetation for nesting.

The Otter Estuary is identified under the LNRS as a key area for over-wintering wading birds. The project focus of restoring floodplain grazing marsh adjacent to inter-tidal habitat, particularly around Pulhayes Farm, will greatly enhance the Otter valley's potential for supporting good numbers of waders. We view the largescale restoration of grazing marsh as one of the biggest gains of the project.

Insects and Amphibians

The entirety of the H2C area is identified under the LNRS as a great crested newt zone. Our plans will increase the area of freshwater habitat across the project area, including through the creation of new ponds. This will further support populations of this species.

Much of the project area, including Otterton Hill, is identified as suitable for supporting wood white butterflies. The creation of wood pasture on Otterton Hill comprising grasslands with vetches (caterpillar foodplant) with scrub and trees for shelter and dappled shade should greatly improve the available habitat for this species.

The entire Otter Valley is mapped by the LNRS as a site important for dragonfly species (including Devon Special Species). Action suggested under the LNRS is to create a network of healthy wetland habitats (waterbodies and surrounding habitat), which is a key focus of H2C. All of the mires associated with the Pebblebed Heaths NNR are classified by the LNRS as sites of national importance for dragonfly. Important species include the southern damselfly and the small red damselfly.

Appendix 3 – *Land Use Data and Maps*

The Estate manages three main land holdings. These are the Heanton Estate in North Devon, the Beer Estate in East Devon, and the Clinton Estate, which is the largest, encompassing the lower Otter Valley in East Devon.

The vast majority of the Estate is farmland (both tenanted and in-hand), multipurpose woodlands and open access heathland. The Estate also manages a range of housing, industrial and commercial sites. The following maps and tables set out the breakdown of the Estate's primary land uses, protected sites and habitats.

The maps below reflect data from Devon Biodiversity Records Centre. Further centralised data and mapping work by the Estate is ongoing, and more comprehensive mapping will be published in future.

Figure 1: Clinton Estate – Habitats

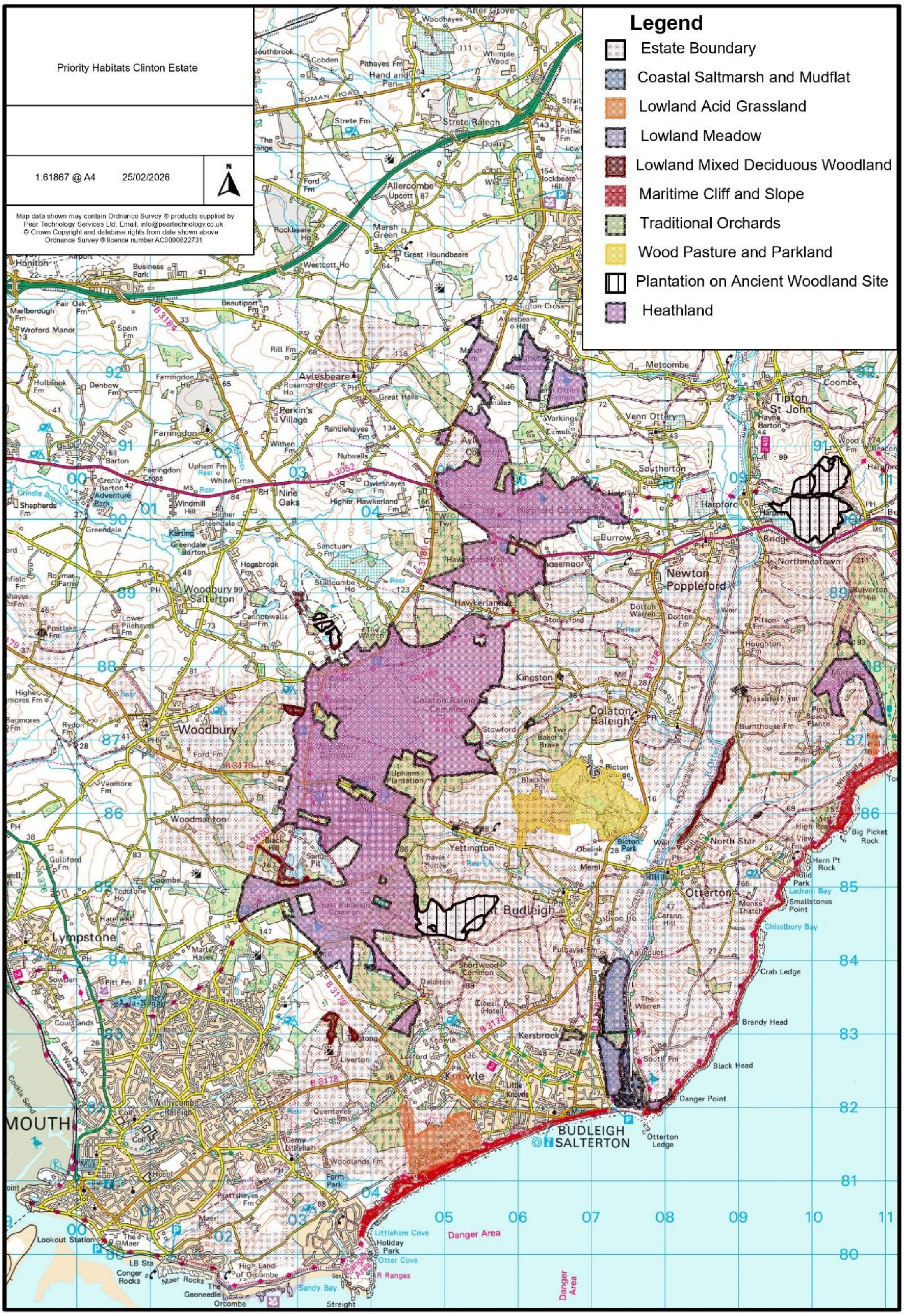

Figure 2: Clinton Estate – Reserves

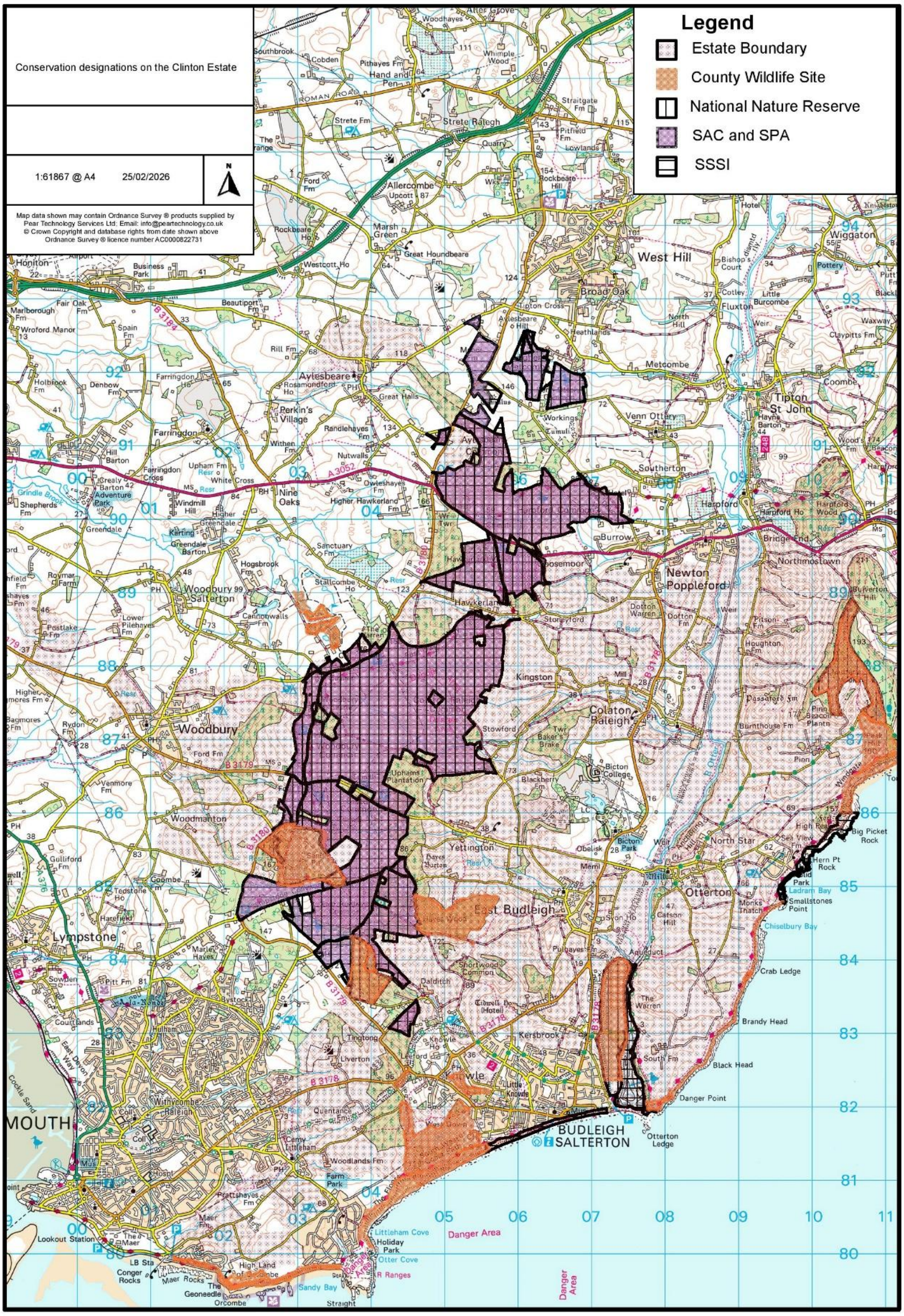

Figure 3: Beer Estate – Habitats

Figure 4: Beer Estate – Reserves

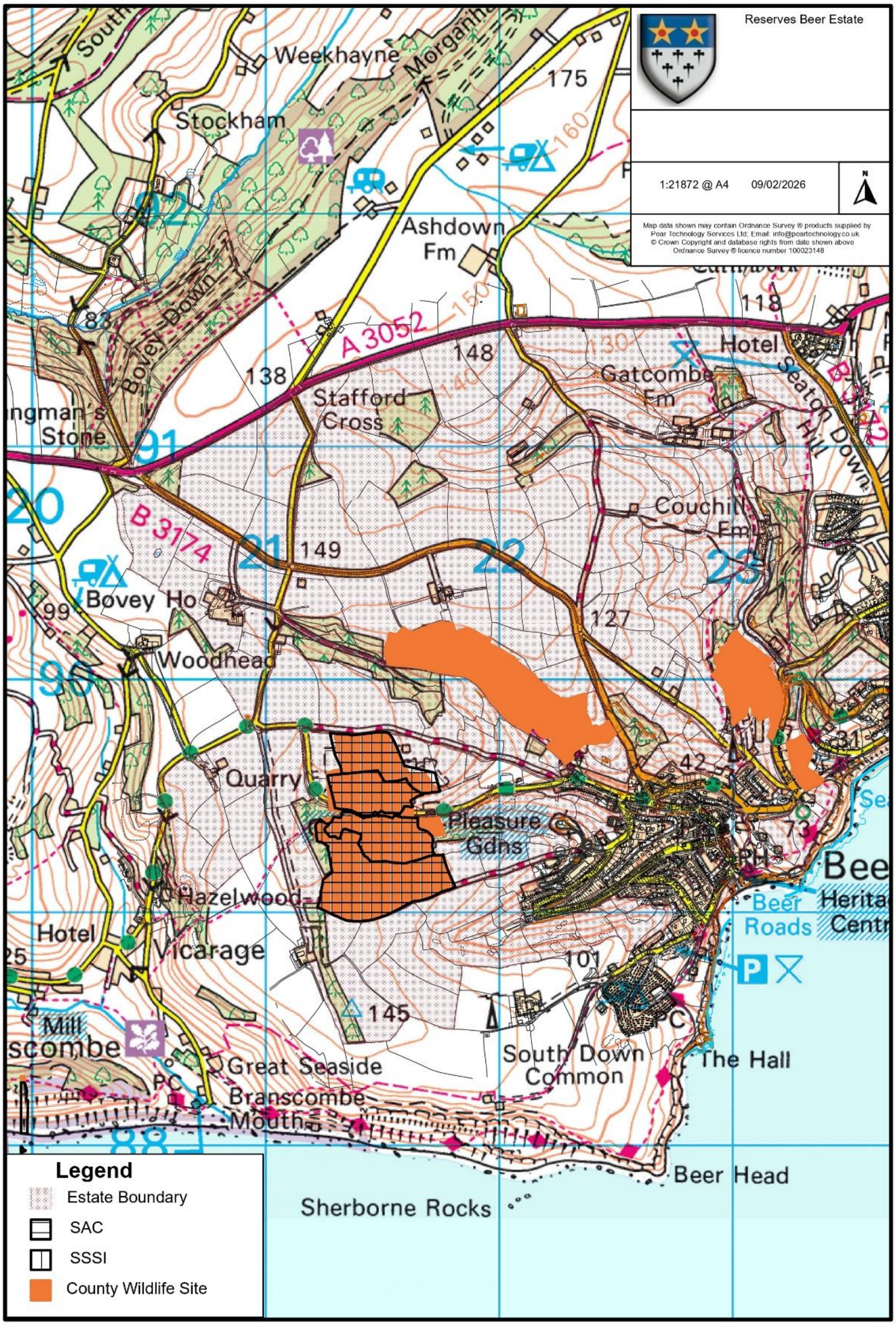

Figure 5: Heanton Estate – Habitats

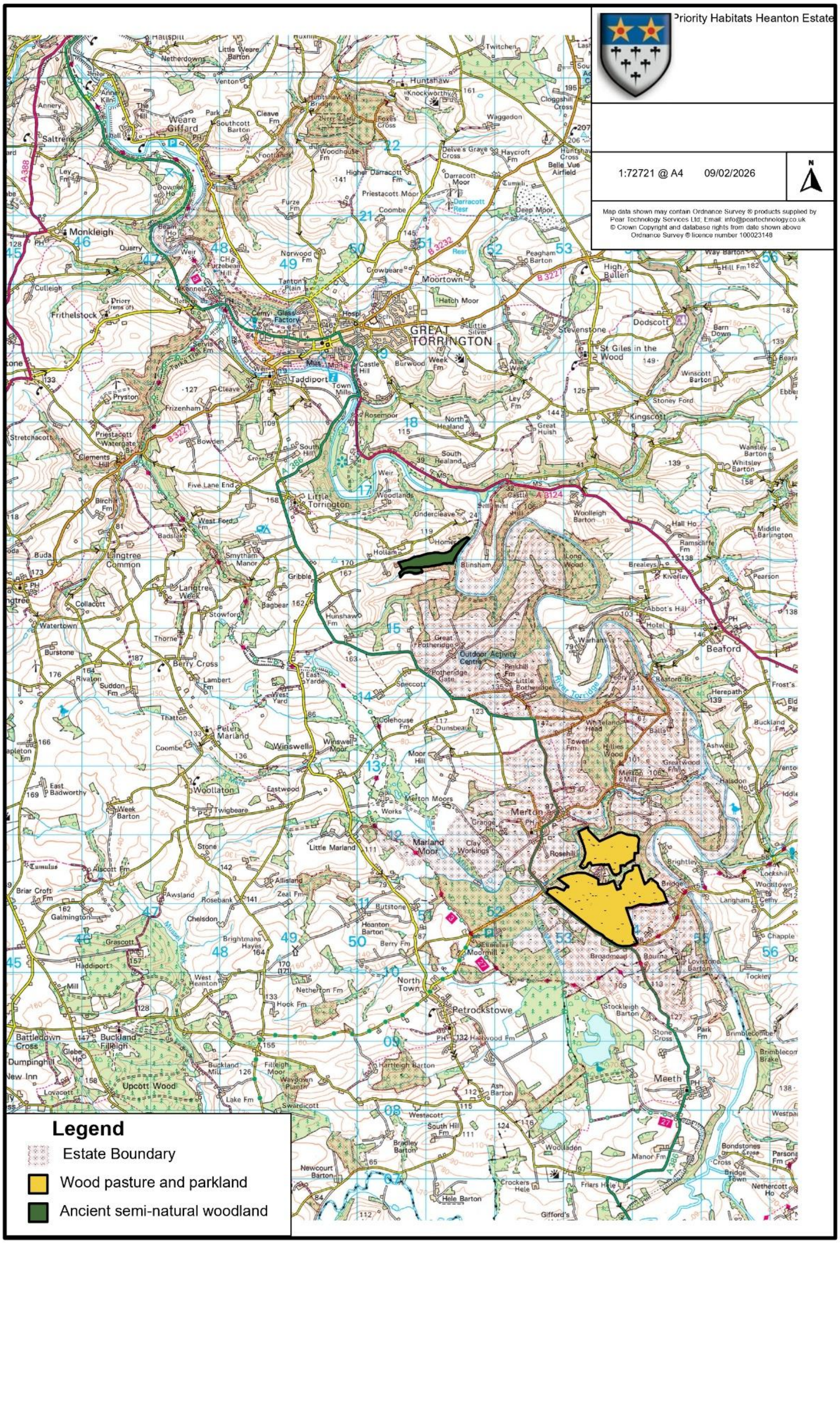

Figure 6: Heanton Estate - Reserves

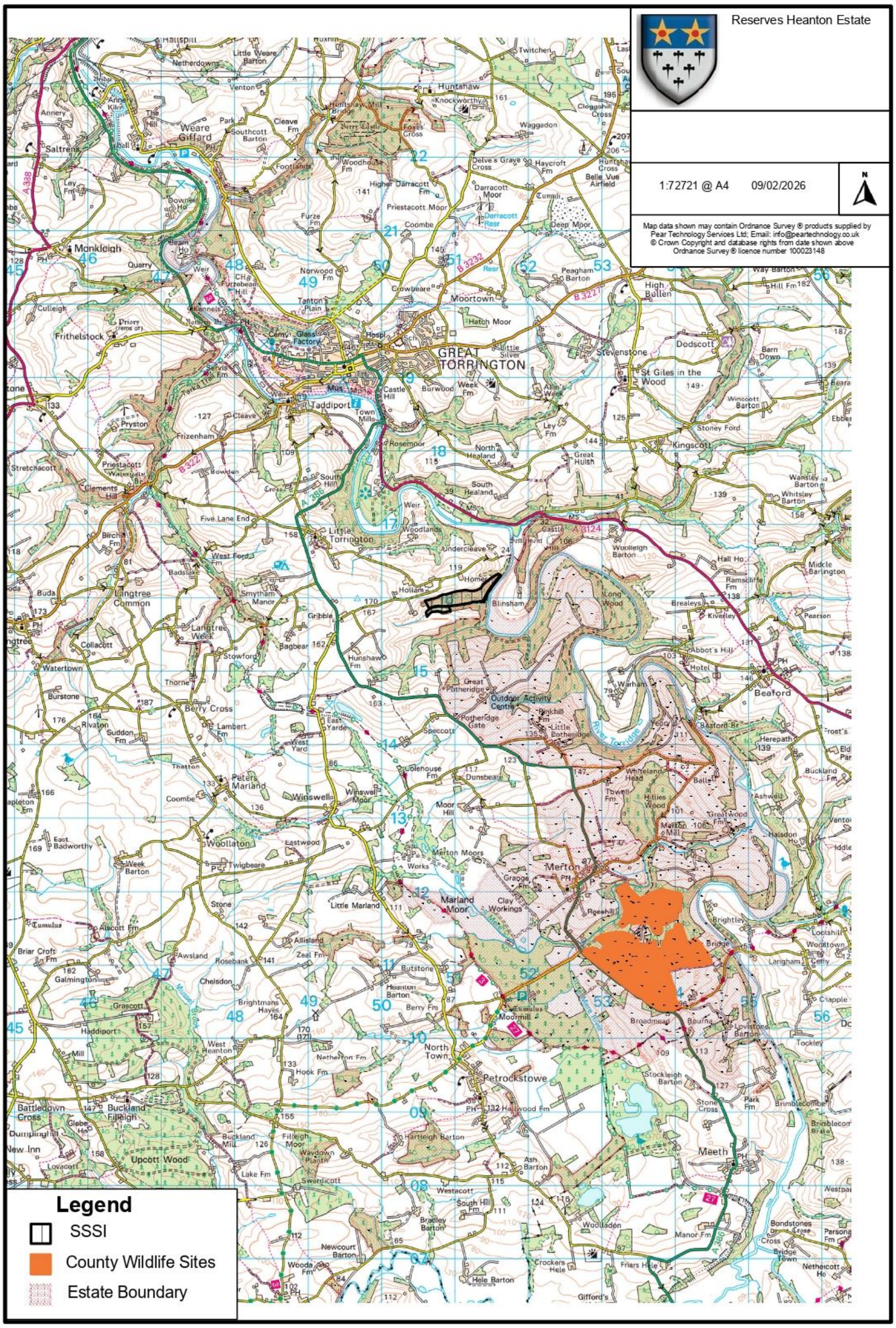

Table 1: Primary Estate Land Uses

Description	Percentage of Holdings
Multipurpose woodlands (coniferous/broadleaf)	17
Open Access heathland SSSI/SAC/SPA	11
In-hand agriculture, including share farms	20
Tenanted agriculture	37
Paddocks and miscellaneous lettings	8
Equestrian arena	<1
Sports facilities (fields, etc.)	<1
Solar sites	<1
Allotments	<1
Quarries	<1
Beaches	<1
Housing, industrial and business lettings, development sites	<1

Table 2: Summary of Habitats of High Conservation Value

Habitat	Area/length (hectares/kilometres)	Management responsibility
Mixed deciduous woodland	450	Predominantly in-hand
Hedgerows	1,378 km	In-hand/tenants
Saltmarsh and mudflats	30	In-hand
Grazing marsh	52	Tenants
Calcareous grassland	28	Tenants
Heathland	990	In-hand/tenants
Reedbeds	3	In-hand/tenants
Historic parkland	32	In-hand
Rivers	60 km	In-hand/tenants
Maritime cliff and slope	5 km	In-hand/tenants
Traditional orchards	2	In-hand/tenants
Total	**1,587 ha**	

Table 3: Designated and Non-Designated Sites of High Conservation Value on Estate

Site	Habitat	Area (Hectares)	Management Responsibility
Special Area of Conservation / Special Protection Area			
East Devon Pebblebed Heaths	Heathland	990 (of 1,112)	In-hand (81%) / RSPB (19%)
Beer Quarry and Caves	Caves	31	Tenants/In-hand
Sites of Special Scientific Interest			
East Devon Pebblebed Heaths	Heathland	990 (of 1,112)	In-hand (81%) / RSPB (19%)
Sidmouth to Beer Coast	Coastal cliff	1 (of 11)	Tenants
Beer Quarry and Caves	Caves	31	Tenants/In-hand
Hunshaw Woods	Oak woodland	16 (of 18)	In-hand
County Wildlife Sites			
Black Hill Quarry	Heathland	58	Tenants/In-hand
Dalditch Plantation	Heathland	27	In-hand
Squabmoor Reservoir	Open water/unimproved grassland/heathland	3	In-hand / South West Lakes
Shortwood Heath	Heathland	3	In-hand
Hayes Wood	Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS)	44	In-hand
Knowle Hill Embankment	Woodland	2	East Devon District Council

West Down Golf Course	Mixed	60	East Devon Golf Course
Orcombe Point to Straight Point	Coastal cliff/mixed	13 (3 managed in-hand)	In-hand (23%) / National Trust (77%)
The Floors	Coastal cliff	31 (16 managed in-hand)	In-hand (52%) / National Trust / Devon Cliffs Holiday Park (48%)
Knowle	Marsh	6	Tenants
Rockham Wood	Woodland	14	Tenants
Otter Meadows	Grazing marsh	52	Tenants
Otter Estuary to Green Point	Coastal cliff	5	Tenants
Wingate Cliffs	Coastal cliff	23 (15 managed in-hand)	In-hand (65%) / National Trust (35%)
Peak Hill	Mixed	23 (18 managed by Estate tenants)	Tenants (78%) / National Trust (22%)
Mutter’s Moor	Heathland	54	In-hand
Beer Quarry and Caves	Calcareous grasslands/scrub	32	Tenants/In-hand
Bovey Lane Fields	Calcareous grasslands	5	Tenants
Bovey Lane Quarries	Calcareous grasslands	15	Tenants
Beer Fields	Calcareous grasslands	8	Tenants
Beer Brook Fields	Calcareous grasslands	2	Tenants
Total		**1,464**	

Appendix 4 – *Partnership Working*

The Estate remains committed to partnership working in service of nature recovery. In addition to *The National Estate for Nature Group*, we maintain representation on the following fora:

- **Pebblebed Heaths National Nature Reserve Advisory Board;** The Estate's conservation charity convenes and acts as the secretariat.
- **Devon Local Nature Partnership;** The Estate is represented on the board and this partnership is critical to ensuring land use decisions are influenced by the LNRS.
- **Devon Invasive Species Initiative (DISI) Steering Group**
- **East Devon Catchment Partnership**
- **CROC (Climate Resilient Otter Catchment project);** Time limited (two years) major Natural Flood Management (NFM) initiative across the Otter catchment (East Devon), funded through the Environment Agency's £25m NFM Programme. The Estate is represented on the board and attends other technical meetings.
- **East Devon Beaver Management Group – Partnership Forum**
- **Defra's Resilient Treescapes Advisory Group**
- **East Devon National Landscape Partnership**
- **Land Use for Net Zero (LUNZ), a UK-wide consortium**
- **Air Quality Mitigation Strategy – East Devon Pebblebed Heaths (Steering Group)**
- **East Devon & West Dorset Green Finance Group Steering Group**

During 2024 and 2025 the Estate has also supported the Food and Farming Countryside Commission's national and Devon pilots for the **Multifunctional Land Use Framework**, including through attendance of strategy meetings and workshops.

Between 2015 and 2020 the Estate was a core partner of the **River Otter Beaver Trial** and were represented on the stakeholder group, technical advisory group, management group and board.