

Northumberland Local Wildlife Site

Field Record and Assessment Form

Site Name		Site Number	
OS Grid Reference		Local Authority	Northumberland County Council
Surveyed By (inc. qualifications)	Naomi Waite MSc MIEEM	Date of Survey	
Present Site Status	LWS	Date Designated	
Area		Date Reviewed	

Site Description

General description:

Ancient woodland with historical records back to the 13th C. Diversity of habitats within the area due to topography, variable soil and past management. >25 ancient woodland species recorded. Bird fauna well known, there are red and grey squirrels and badger setts. May be a valuable bat habitat but more information needed.

Site parking and access:

Parking in lay-by near Morpeth NHS Centre at 55° 10.305'N 1° 40.944'W or OS NZ 20389 86462.

Bus stop <100m or 10 minutes walk from Morpeth town centre.

Main access point from the lay-by is up a short flight of stone steps then footpath uphill.

Description:

Most of the woodland is on south-south-east or north-east facing slopes with drainage ditches and streams, producing a variety of habitats. Soil is variable but tends to be heavy with pH from around 6 to >5. No strongly acid areas known. Known to be wooded since the 13th C but has been managed from timber since then. Very few oaks or ash left but there are some relatively old specimens in a few locations. Rowan, birch and holly are present, some of the hollies being very large.

Planting with beech and conifers is recorded from the 18th C and some beech may be as old as 300 years. Very few conifers left and the main trees are beech, sycamore, ash, oak, rowan and a few elms.

The Bluebell Wood.

The western edge of this area (at the entrance) is dominated by sycamore, with a poor ground flora, but it thins out to the east and beech takes over. About 1m of the edge of parts of the main path is dominated by nitrophilous species. Elsewhere the ground flora is dominated by Anemone and bluebell with several ferns and an unusually large cover of wood millet. In places the largest beech are magnificent trees but they are limiting the ground flora. There is no sign of introgression with Spanish bluebells but wild garlic may be expanding. The Bluebell Wood is an important part of Morpeth's heritage and many residents and visitors come to see the spring flowers.

East end and the Howburn.

The east end of the Bluebell Wood graded into the N-S oriented Howburn Valley. This steep-sided valley has a history of industrial use (coal mining, timber, and access route to the Victorian "County Lunatic Asylum". However, there are only traces of these activities left. The east side of the Howburn was clear felled in the 1940s and even now has stands of young looking self-sown trees, many of them being ash. The ground flora is poor but it is the best site in the valley for shield fern. There is limited access up the burn by a path but the steep slopes deter most people so the valley remains a good retreat for deer etc. A new public footpath has just been made up the eastern edge of the Howburn and it is intended that it will link with the new Pegswood Moor Park so public traffic through the Bluebell Wood will increase.

The west side of the Howburn is also steep and it has extensive stands of greater woodrush and giant horsetail are significant features. Nearer the old hospital site the ground flora is very nitrophilous because it was part of the sewage dump. It needs active management, if only to keep the path clear.

Opposite the new hospital buildings public access is very much more difficult and the northern-most part is effectively fenced by the farmer (Dungait). It is difficult to survey this area because of the terrain but there are very good populations of anemone and bluebell together with wood millet. There are a few huge and very old (>500 year) oaks in the Dungait part of the wood.

Ownership

Bluebell Wood and part of the west side of the Howburn: HCA.

Undefined areas around the hospital: NHS Trust

East side of Howburn: Banks

Northern end of Howburn: Dungait

Note: Public access was limited until 2013 because of impassible wet, muddy paths but the Greater Morpeth Development Trust obtained funding from Natural England to repair the paths and provide signage, As a result public visits have increased by many times and the GMDT was given a Gold Award by Britain in Bloom.

Additional Features of Note (refer to Ratcliffe criteria where appropriate):

Management

Issues:

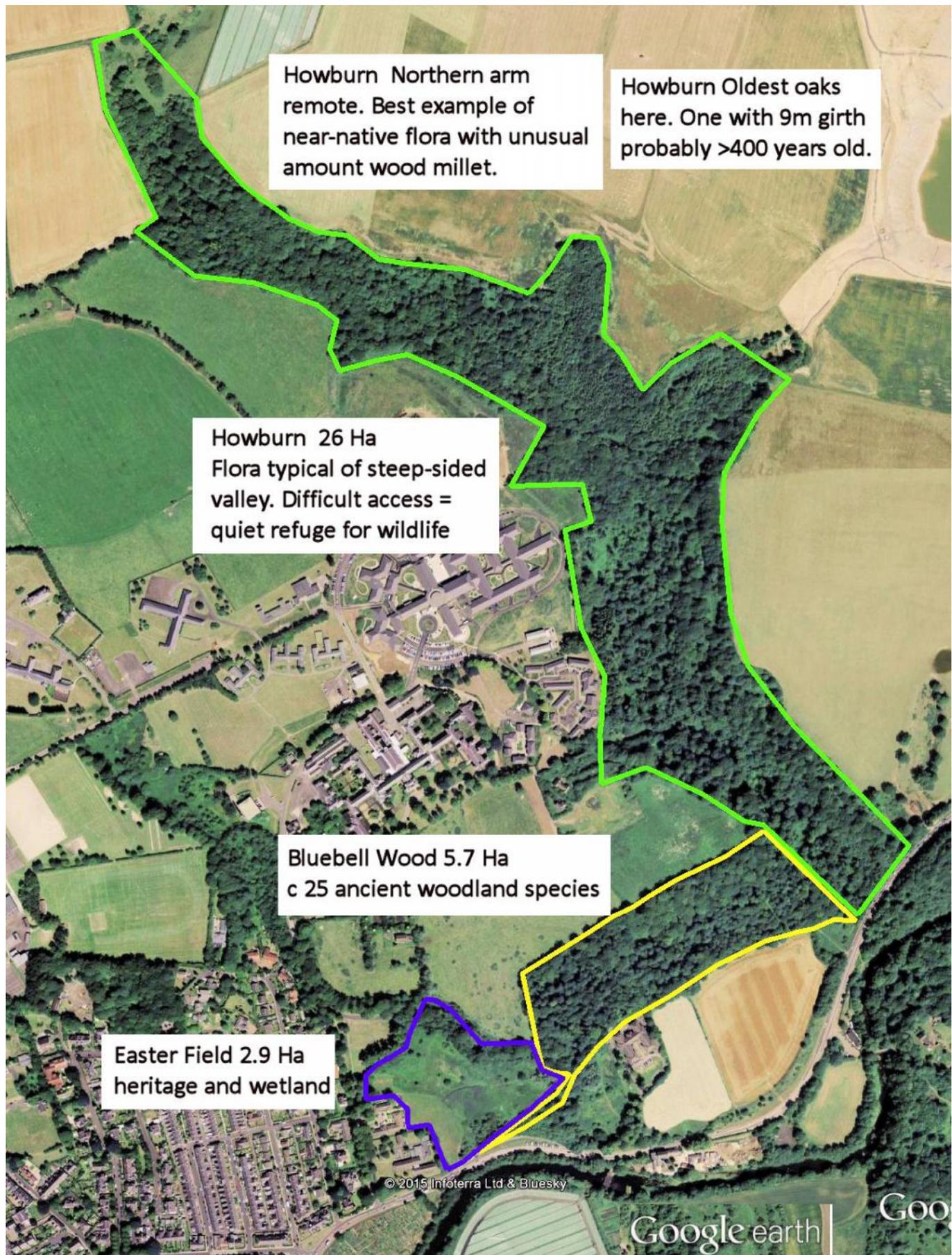
Sycamore encroachment in places, footpath maintenance, large scale housing development on adjacent HCA-owned property.

Conservation actions:

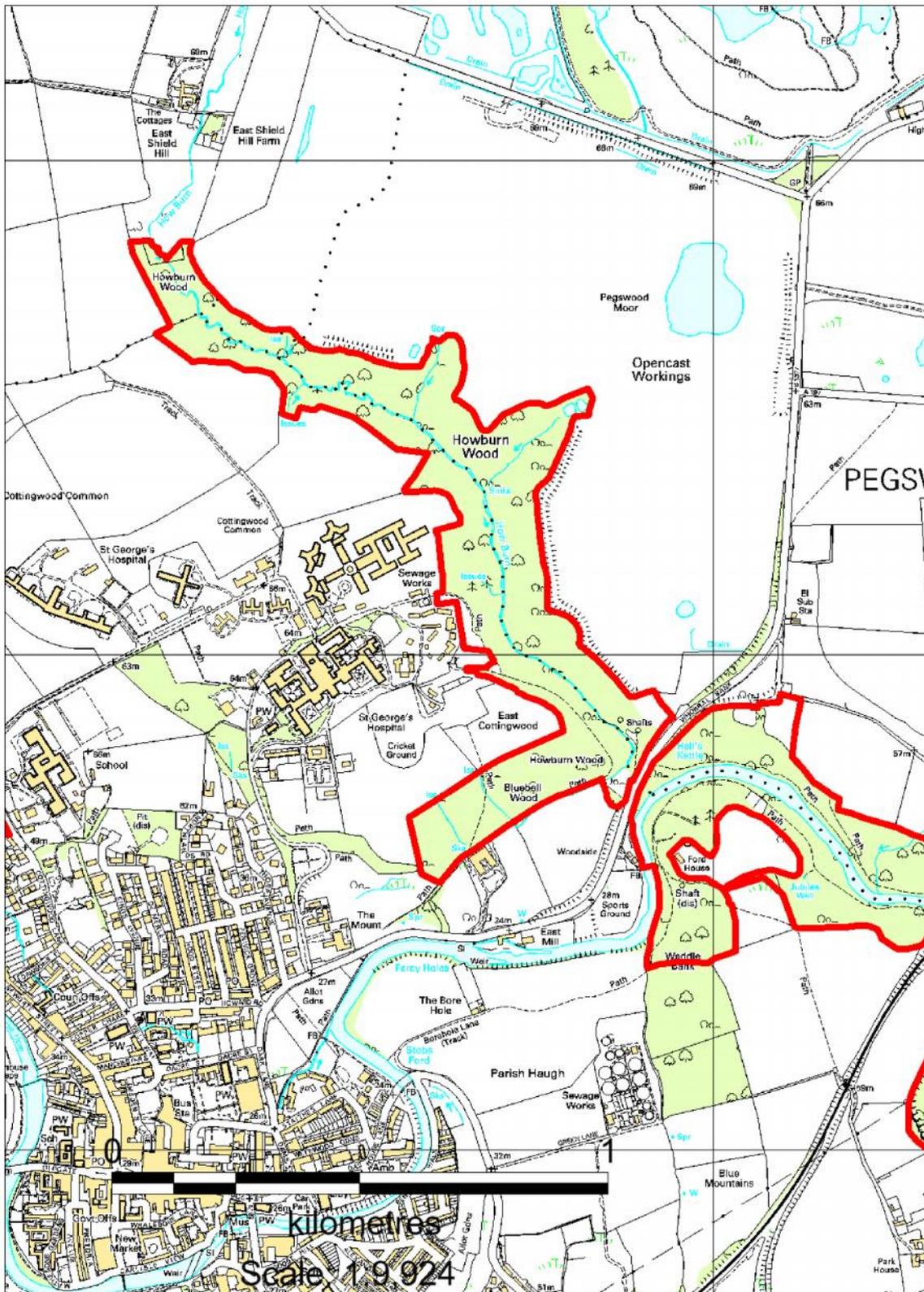
Notes for next survey

Maps and Aerial Photographs of Site

Aerial Photograph (taken from Google Earth)



Boundary Map (as shown in LS GIS layer)



Suggested boundary alteration

Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland map

Habitat Map

Key:

Photographs

Each numbered arrow matches the photographs below. The arrow indicates the direction that the photograph was taken.

Site Evaluation Against Guidelines

Version of criteria tested against:

Criteria	Site

*Site boundary has been established using: existing field boundaries/watercouses/roads/other on the ground feature. Please specify...*Field boundaries and planted woodland blocks

For full species list see Appendix



Confidential wildlife records

Land Ownership (details are **CONFIDENTIAL** and to be detached if report is sent out externally)

Number on map	Land Owner	Land Owner Address and other contact details if known	Contact	Contact address (if different to land owner)
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				