



HMCTS SOVEREIGN HOUSE

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This document has 35 pages including the cover.

Document history

Document title: Biodiversity Net Gain Design Stage Report

Document reference: 20250010_Sovereign House_EclA_AtkinsRealis_2025

Revision	Purpose description	Originated	Checked	Reviewed	Authorised	Date
1.0	For Issue	LH/GH	JB	VH		

Client signoff

Client	HM Courts and Tribunal Services
Project	HMCTS SOVEREIGN HOUSE
Job number	100099718
Client signature/date	



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Summary

Proposed Scheme	The development involves the establishment of the Tribunals Courts (hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Scheme') within the grounds of the Sovereign House, Vastern Road, Reading (hereafter referred to as the 'Application Site').
Desk studies and field surveys	The ecological information presented within this report was obtained during the following: A desk study, conducted in January 2025, with species, habitat and designated site records obtained from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). An ecological walkover survey conducted in January 2025.
Irreplaceable habitats	No irreplaceable habitats are present on Site.
BNG Metric result	The application of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric shows that there is a predicted total net gain of 10.11% in biodiversity for area-based habitats. BNG commitments will be achieved.
Actions required to deliver BNG	If the proposed landscaping plans are followed, 10% BNG should be achieved.

1. Introduction

1.1 Terms of Reference

AtkinsRéalis has been instructed by His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) to provide a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Design Stage assessment in relation to development at Sovereign House (hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Scheme'). The Proposed Scheme is located within Reading, Berkshire; as shown on the Application Site Location Plan provided in Appendix A.

The British Standard BS 8683:2021¹ defines BNG as “*a specific, quantifiable outcome from project activities that deliver demonstrable benefits for biodiversity compared to the baseline situation.*” It is an approach that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than beforehand.

This report is intended to form part of the Proposed Scheme's planning application submission to Reading Borough Council (for full planning consent under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) in relation to meeting the biodiversity gain objective (the 'biodiversity gain condition') under the statutory framework for BNG. The objective is for development, within the scope of mandatory BNG, to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of a development site. The increase in biodiversity value can be achieved through on-site biodiversity gains, registered off-site biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.

The report provides an assessment of changes in biodiversity, as a result the Proposed Scheme, from a pre-development baseline to a post-development scenario. It follows the framework set out by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)² for reporting in relation to BNG assessments. The assessment has been undertaken by a competent person with reference to the British Standard BS 8683:2021¹.

1.2 The Application Site

The Application Site is in Reading, in the Reading Borough district of Berkshire, at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference SU 71597 74061. It is shown on the Application Site Location Plan provided in Appendix A.

The Application Site is approximately 0.3 ha and comprises developed land (comprising hardstanding roads and buildings), introduced shrub, and urban trees.

Within this report, any use of the term 'on-site' refers to the Application Site as described above, i.e. all land within the planning red line boundary of the Proposed Scheme. Any reference to 'off-site' is to any land outside of the Application Site (regardless of proximity or ownership), which may be considered in the assessment if meeting the biodiversity gain objective cannot be achieved through gains within the Application Site.

¹ The British Standards Institution 2021. BS 8683:2021 Process for designing and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain – Specification. BSI Standards Limited 2021.

² CIEEM (2021). Biodiversity Net Gain Report and Audit Templates. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester, UK.

1.3 The Proposed Scheme

The Proposed Scheme involves the conversion of Sovereign House into Reading Tribunal Courts. The details of the Proposed Scheme, as they are currently understood, are shown on the General Arrangement Plan provided in Figure 6-3. In Appendix A.

The internal area of the Sovereign House building will be reconfigured to provide appropriate spaces for the Tribunal Courts. External to the building, a secure carpark and a new lift are proposed.

All trees are to be retained on Site. Landscaping works including the creation of areas of native and introduced shrub species are to be planted.

The Proposed Scheme requires full planning consent.

It is anticipated that the construction period will last approximately 39 weeks, with the proposed start date being April 2026.

1.4 Relevant Legislation and Policy

1.4.1 Legislation

The Environment Act was given royal assent in November 2021. This is an act to make provision about targets, plans and policies in relation to the environment, including Part 6 of the Environment Act 2021 'nature and biodiversity', which allows for biodiversity gain in planning.

In England, Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021 makes provision for a 10% biodiversity gain to be a condition of planning permission through amendment of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. It also makes provision for habitat creation and enhancements to deliver biodiversity gain to be maintained for a period of at least 30 years after the development is completed. Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021 was brought into force in 2024; BNG is now mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for most types of development. A summary of relevant BNG legislation is provided in Appendix B.

The Proposed Scheme is within the scope of mandatory BNG.

Reading Borough Council, as a public body, has a duty to conserve biodiversity under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (as amended). The introduction of the Environment Act 2021 strengthens this biodiversity duty by amending Section 40 of the Act 2006 so that public bodies also have a duty to enhance biodiversity. Public bodies must now:

- Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration.
- Act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives.

1.4.2 Policy

1.4.2.1 National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)³ “provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans can provide for housing and other development in a sustainable manner”. It emphasises the importance of protecting and enhancing the natural environment. In relation to BNG, the NPPF states the following:

- Paragraph 187 (d) *Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*
 - minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures *and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs.*
- Paragraph 192 (b) *To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:*
 - *promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.*
- Paragraph 193 (d) *When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:*
 - *Development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.*

1.4.2.2 Local Policy

At present, there are no net gain targets above 10% set within the Reading Local Plan⁴, however there is no policy wording which creates substantive changes from the statutory framework for BNG.

1.5 Scope of the Assessment

Biodiversity metrics provide a way of measuring and accounting for biodiversity losses and gains resulting from development and/or land management change.

This BNG Design Stage assessment quantifies the baseline biodiversity value of land within the Application Site (using habitat as a proxy and measured in biodiversity units), quantifies the habitats to be lost, retained and/or enhanced, and predicts the post-development biodiversity units to be delivered as part of the Proposed Scheme. The assessment is based on the Proposed Scheme plans (see Appendix A) available at the time of assessment (March 2025).

The Statutory Biodiversity Metric⁵, hereafter referred to as ‘the Metric’, has been used to calculate biodiversity units and measure the change in biodiversity at the Application Site, as a result of the Proposed Scheme.

³ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. *National Planning Policy Framework*. MHCLG, December 2024.

⁴ [Planning policy - Reading Borough Council](#)

⁵ www.gov.uk. 2024. Statutory biodiversity metric tools and guides. [online] Available at: [Statutory biodiversity metric tools and guides - GOV.UK](#) [Accessed 21/03/2025].

The Metric sets out four rules that must be followed in applying the Metric; BNG cannot be claimed if the rules are not followed. Where appropriate to the assessment, these rules are discussed in the relevant sections of this report.

The scope of this assessment is to inform HMCTS how the Proposed Scheme will meet the biodiversity gain objective under the statutory framework for BNG, whether this will be through on-site biodiversity gains or whether registered off-site biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits will need to be considered. This report will be submitted with the planning application to inform the LPA. It will also be used to inform the Biodiversity Gain Plan, which will need to be submitted and approved by Reading Borough Council before commencement of the Proposed Scheme.

This document must be read with Sovereign House Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool V1.

2. Methods

2.1 Desk Study

2.1.1 Irreplaceable Habitats, Protected Sites and Priority Habitats

A desk study was undertaken on 21 January 2025 to inform the Ecological Impact Assessment of the Proposed Scheme. In relation to this BNG Design Stage assessment, the desk study was used to identify any important ecological features (e.g. irreplaceable habitat, statutory designated nature conservation sites, priority habitat), which may influence the feasibility of delivering BNG, within and adjacent to the Application Site.

To identify any of these features, the following online data sources were accessed:

- Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)⁶; and
- Ancient Tree Inventory⁷.

2.1.2 Strategic Significance

The Metric applies a strategic significance score based on whether the location of a site and/or the baseline habitats present within a site or proposed habitat interventions have been identified as being locally important for biodiversity. The relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) should be used to assign strategic significance.

Berkshire's Local Nature Recover Strategy (under which Reading Borough Council will sit) has not yet been published. Therefore, a desk study was undertaken to identify any local biodiversity strategies and plans to determine the strategic significance of the Application Site and/or habitats within the Application Site. This included a review of the Reading Biodiversity Action Plan⁸.

2.2 Baseline Conditions

A field survey to record habitat types was undertaken on 22 January 2025. The survey comprised identifying the habitats present within the Application Site, using the classification system that the Metric predominantly uses in the area habitat module and the hedgerow module (the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab)⁹), and undertaking condition assessments of the habitats. Condition assessment scores were assigned using professional judgement and the criteria for habitat in 'good', 'moderate', or 'poor' condition as set out in the relevant condition assessment sheets in Technical Annex 1 of the Metric⁵.

⁶ magic.defra.gov.uk. 2024. Magic Map Application. [online] Available at: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/> [Accessed 21 January 2025].

⁷ ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk. 2022. Ancient Tree Inventory – Woodland Trust. [online] Available at: <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/> [Accessed 21 January 2025].

⁸ <https://www.reading.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/trees-hedges-and-environment/reading-biodiversity-action-plan/>

⁹ UKHab Ltd (2023). *UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0* (at <https://www.ukhab.org>)

The survey was led by a suitably experienced AtkinsRéalis ecologist with a Level 4 Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC) and who has appropriately evidenced their competency as being capable in the identification of habitats and plant species in accordance with the CIEEM Competency Standard for Preliminary Habitat Survey¹⁰.

The survey data was collected using ESRI ArcGIS FieldMaps and then exported and analysed using QGIS. GIS specialists processed the habitat mapping data to remove any overlaps and gaps between polygons that result from digitising at low resolution. The habitat survey data was then clipped to exclude habitat data outside of the Application Site. Using QGIS, areas (measured in ha) were calculated for each area habitat feature and, where present, lengths (measured in km) were calculated for hedgerow and watercourse features. Habitat parcels were then created, linking areas/lengths of habitat of the same distinctiveness, condition and strategic significance.

To calculate the area of any individual trees within the Application Site, the 'tree helper' tool embedded within the Metric was utilised. This tool calculates the projected area of individual trees according to their size (small, medium, or large) measured as 'diameter at breast height' (i.e. diameter measured at 1.5 m above ground).

The method for assigning baseline strategic significance is set out in section 2.1.2.

2.3 Proposed Design

The Proposed Scheme plans (see Appendix A) have been used to assess the post-development scenario. These plans were converted from CAD software to a QGIS environment where it was overlaid on the baseline habitat data. Areas and lengths of proposed design features, including built development and habitat creation and/or habitat retention/enhancement, were calculated using QGIS.

The proposed design features were translated to appropriate Metric habitat types and target condition scores were assigned based on the realistic likelihood of achieving the target condition.

2.4 Calculating BNG Units using the Metric

The Metric uses several measures to quantify baseline biodiversity value for each habitat type within a site boundary. These measures include the habitat's distinctiveness (a measure based on the type of habitat and its distinguishing features), its condition (a measure of the habitat against its ecological optimum state) and its size (ha for area habitat/km for linear habitat). In addition, the local strategic significance of a site and/or the habitats within it is taken into account by applying a strategic significance multiplier.

Area habitat units and hedgerow units are calculated in separate modules of the Metric. Rule 2 of the Metric states *"Biodiversity unit outputs, for each type of unit, must not be summed, traded, or converted between types. The requirement to deliver at least a 10% net gain applies to each type of unit."*

A habitat's distinctiveness score is derived from its intrinsic biodiversity value, reflecting species richness and rarity, the extent to which it is protected by designations and the degree to which it supports species rarely found elsewhere. This score is pre-assigned in the Metric.

Post-development biodiversity units are calculated the same way but with the addition of temporal and risk multipliers that take into account the average time it takes between starting habitat creation or enhancement and that habitat reaching its target distinctiveness or condition (time to target condition) and the difficulty¹¹ in creating or

¹⁰ CIEEM (2023). Competency Standard for Preliminary Habitat Survey Version 2. [online] Available at: <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Preliminary-Habitat-Survey-Competency-Standard-V2-February-2023.pdf>

¹¹ A measure which represents the uncertainty in the effectiveness of management techniques used to enhance or create habitat.

enhancing habitat. These temporal and risk related multipliers are set within the Metric and cannot be changed. Where habitat creation or enhancement is off-site, biodiversity units are calculated the same way but a spatial risk multiplier is applied based on the distance of the off-site habitat creation or enhancement to the on-site habitat loss.

The Metric also takes into account whether habitat creation or enhancement is delivered in advance of any impact it is compensating for or whether there will be any significant delay in an intervention relative to the impact. If taken into account, the standard temporal multiplier is adjusted accordingly.

To calculate the overall net change in biodiversity units, the baseline biodiversity units are subtracted from the post-development biodiversity units, as shown in Figure 2-1.

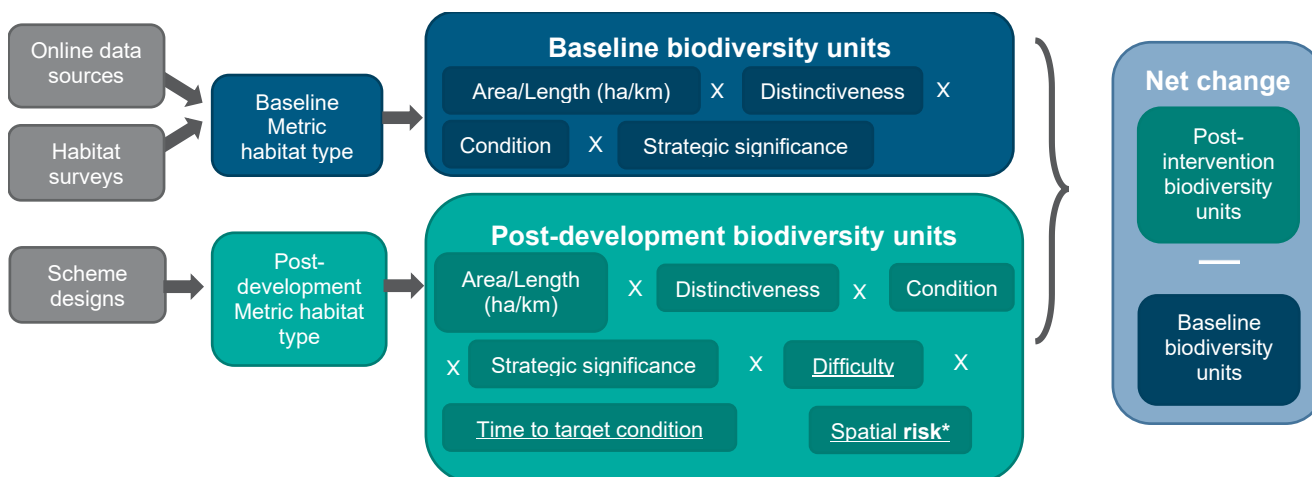


Figure 2-1 – Calculation of Biodiversity Units using the Metric

NB. Illustration does not fully depict calculation of watercourse units; additional multipliers taking into account watercourse and riparian encroachment are applied.

Text underlined indicates a risk factor applied when creating or enhancing habitats.

2.5 Assumptions and Limitations

As the proposed landscaping has not been planted, the target condition score has to be assumed based on an assumption of what is feasible.

It is assumed that an appropriate BNG management and monitoring plan will be implemented for the duration of the maximum time for the habitat creation proposals to achieve their target condition and to give surety that the Proposed Scheme will deliver the predicted net gain in biodiversity units. It is then assumed that the habitats will be subject to suitable management to maintain that condition.

For this assessment it is assumed that habitat creation will be delayed by four years (the duration of the anticipated construction programme) from the time of the initial site clearance and the standard temporal multiplier has been adjusted accordingly.

3. Baseline Conditions

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 Irreplaceable Habitats, Protected Sites and Priority Habitats

There are no irreplaceable habitats, protected sites or priority habitats within the Application Site.

3.1.2 Strategic Significance

Developed land; sealed surface does not have inherent ecological value and as such is considered to be of low strategic significance.

The introduced shrub habitats are comprised of non-native plant species and therefore provide limited biodiversity value. As such, these habitats are assigned a low strategic significance.

The urban trees on Site comprise 'green infrastructure' which is referenced within the Reading Borough Biodiversity Action Plan. As such, the urban trees on Site have been assigned high strategic significance.

3.2 Pre-Development Biodiversity Value

The following sections summarise the pre-development biodiversity value of the Application Site. Field survey data to inform the Metric calculations was collected on 22 January 2025. No material changes to the Application Site have occurred since the date of the field survey and the output of the Metric is considered to be an accurate reflection of the Application Site's pre-development biodiversity value.

3.2.1 Area Habitat Baseline

The area habitat baseline of the Application Site is detailed within the associated metric. The developed land; sealed surface, introduced shrub, and individual urban trees together generate 1.89 habitat units at the baseline.

The area habitat features present within the Site are shown on the Habitat Baseline Plan provided in Appendix C. Condition assessment sheets, where required, are provided in Appendix D. These provide summary descriptions of the area habitats present and the results of their condition assessment.

There are no hedgerows or watercourses present at the Application Site, therefore these sections of the Metric have not been used.

4. BNG Good Practice Principles for Development

Use of the Metric is underpinned by several principles. Amongst these, Principle 3 states “*This biodiversity metric should be used in accordance with established good practice guidance and professional codes*”.

To claim BNG, evidence that demonstrates a project has clearly applied all ten of the good practice principles for achieving BNG¹², as detailed in Table 4-1, must be provided. Adhering to all principles together underpins the good practice required for achieving and sustaining BNG.

Table 4-1 – BNG good practice principles

Principle	In practice
1. Apply the mitigation hierarchy	Do everything possible to first avoid and then minimise impacts on biodiversity. Only as a last resort, and in agreement with external decision-makers where possible, compensate for losses that cannot be avoided. If compensating for losses within the development footprint is not possible or does not generate the most benefits for nature conservation, then offset biodiversity losses by gains elsewhere.
2. Avoid losing biodiversity that cannot be offset by gains elsewhere	Avoid impacts on irreplaceable biodiversity – these impacts cannot be offset to achieve No Net Loss or Net Gain.
3. Be inclusive and equitable	Engage stakeholders early, and involve them in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the approach to Net Gain. Achieve Net Gain in partnership with stakeholders where possible, and share the benefits fairly among stakeholders.
4. Address risks	Mitigate difficulty, uncertainty and other risks to achieving Net Gain. Apply well-accepted ways to add contingency when calculating biodiversity losses and gains in order to account for any remaining risks, as well as to compensate for the time between losses occurring and the gains being fully realised.
5. Make a measurable net gain contribution	Achieve a measurable, overall gain for biodiversity and the services ecosystems provide while directly contributing towards nature conservation priorities.
6. Achieve the best outcomes for biodiversity	Achieve the best outcomes for biodiversity by using robust, credible evidence and local knowledge to make clearly justified choices when: ▪ Delivering compensation that is ecologically equivalent in type, amount and condition and that accounts for the location and timing of biodiversity losses ▪ Compensating for losses of one type of biodiversity by providing a different type that delivers greater benefits for nature conservation ▪ Achieving Net Gain locally to the development while also contributing towards nature conservation priorities at local, regional and national levels ▪ Enhancing existing or creating new habitat ▪ Enhancing ecological connectivity by creating more, bigger, better and joined areas for biodiversity

¹² CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA. 2016. Biodiversity Net Gain: Good practice principles for development.

Principle	In practice
7. Be additional	Achieve nature conservation outcomes that demonstrably exceed existing obligations (i.e. do not deliver something that would occur anyway).
8. Create a net gain legacy	Ensure net gain generates long-term benefits by: ▪ Engaging stakeholders and jointly agreeing practical solutions that secure Net Gain in perpetuity¹³ ▪ Planning for adaptive management and securing dedicating funding for long-term management ▪ Designing Net Gain for biodiversity to be resilient to external factors, especially climate change ▪ Mitigating risks from other land uses ▪ Avoiding displacing harmful activities from one location to another ▪ Supporting local-level management of Net Gain activities
9. Optimise sustainability	Prioritise BNG and, where possible, optimise the wider environmental benefits for a sustainable society and economy.
10. Be transparent	Communicate all Net Gain activities in a transparent and timely manner, sharing the learning with all stakeholders.

4.1 Mitigation Hierarchy

Expanding on Principle 1 of the good practice principles for achieving BNG, the mitigation hierarchy and the avoidance of impacts to irreplaceable habitats must be applied when committing to achieving BNG. This is reinforced through the publication of the British Standard BS 8683:2021¹.

The sequential approach to applying the mitigation hierarchy is to:

1. Avoid – Where possible habitat damage should be avoided.
2. Minimise – Where possible habitat damage and loss should be minimised.
3. Remediate – Where possible any damaged or lost habitat should be restored.
4. Compensate – As a last resort, damaged or lost habitat should be compensated for¹⁴.

Application of the mitigation hierarchy is encouraged by the Metric because BNG can be more easily achieved by avoiding the loss of habitat through either retention or enhancement. Principle 2 of the Metric adds “*The use of this biodiversity metric does not override existing biodiversity protections, statutory obligations, policy requirements, ecological mitigation hierarchy or any other requirements. This includes consenting or licensing processes, for example woodlands.*”.

¹³ For projects being consented through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Environment Act 2021 now makes provision for habitat enhancements undertaken to deliver biodiversity gain to be maintained for a period of at least 30 years after the development is completed.

¹⁴ Compensation should be undertaken on-site. If this is not possible then off-site habitat compensation may be an option; however, this should be undertaken as close to the on-site area as possible.

5. Proposed Design

The proposed design used in this assessment is based on the General Landscape Plan (see Appendix A).

The following sections summarise the habitat intervention proposals, which have taken into account the BNG good practice principles, the mitigation hierarchy and the biodiversity gain hierarchy.

The habitat intervention proposals, illustrated using the Metric habitat types, are shown on the Proposed Habitats Plan provided in Appendix E.

5.1 Habitat Retention and Enhancement

All trees on Site are to be retained. The introduced shrub habitat is proposed to be lost to facilitate the Proposed Scheme, and landscaping will reinstate some of this habitat.

5.1.1 Area Habitat Retention/ Enhancement

A summary of area habitat retention¹⁵ and enhancement¹⁶ is provided in **Table 5-1**.

Table 5-1 – Area Habitat Retention/ Enhancement

Habitat parcel reference	Habitat type	Area retained (ha)	Area enhanced	Baseline units retained	Baseline units enhanced	Area habitat lost	Units lost
1	Urban – Developed land; sealed surface	0.26	0	0	0	0	0
2	Urban - Introduced shrub	0.00	0	0	0	0.07	0.14
3	Individual trees – Urban tree (2 small, 5 medium)	0.0896	0	0.82	0	0	0
Total		0.35	0	0.82	0	0.07	0.14

¹⁵ Habitat retention is when there is no loss of habitat, when habitat is retained in its baseline condition, and when there is no action to enhance the habitat.

¹⁶ Habitat enhancement is where habitat is retained and there is an improvement in condition compare to the baseline state, a change to a higher distinctiveness habitat within the same broad habitat group compared to the baseline state or restoration of relict high or very high distinctiveness habitats, or restoration of intertidal habitats.

5.2 Habitat Creation Proposals

Based on the proposed design, there will be a total loss of 0.07 ha of area habitat features. Area habitat creation proposals (including built development) need to address the loss of 0.07 ha of area habitat features within the Application Site.

Descriptions of the habitat creation proposals (including the translation landscape design description to Metric habitat types), assumptions for realistic target condition scores and rationale for assignment of medium or high strategic significance are provided in **Table 5-2**.

Table 5-2 – Habitat Creation Proposals

Landscape design code	Habitat type	Target condition and assumptions	Strategic significance
Proposed native species tree	Individual trees – Urban tree (small)	Condition: Moderate It is assumed that this tree will pass criterion A (proposed to be a native species as this is the same as other trees in the Sovereign House site), criterion B (individual trees automatically pass), criterion C (the tree will grow to become mature) criterion D (little to no adverse impact due to human activities), and criterion F (more than 20% of the tree canopy area is oversailing vegetation).	The urban trees on Site comprise 'green infrastructure' which is referenced within the Reading Borough Biodiversity Action Plan. As such, the urban trees on Site have been assigned high strategic significance.
Proposed planting mix A. This is a meadow mix comprising predominantly ornamental grass with some native species.	Urban – introduced shrub	N/A. No condition assessment required.	The introduced shrub habitats are comprised of predominantly non-native plant species and therefore provide limited biodiversity value. As such, these habitats are assigned a low strategic significance.
Proposed mixed species hedgerow. Comprised of common holly, common beech, and English yew	Native hedgerow	Condition: Moderate It is assumed that both criteria in group A (height >1.5 m and width >1.5 m) fail. All other criteria pass.	An action theme within the Reading Biodiversity Action Plan is to manage hedgerows for wildlife, and to increase the quantity of hedgerows across the borough. As hedgerows are specifically mentioned within the Biodiversity Action Plan, the hedgerows on Site have been assigned a high strategic significance

Landscape design code	Habitat type	Target condition and assumptions	Strategic significance
Proposed planting mix B. This is proposed to comprise of native scrub species	Heathland and shrub: Native scrub	Condition: Moderate It is assumed that the scrub will represent a good example of the habitat type, there will be no invasive non-native species, and there is a well-developed edge as there are other grassland habitats located adjacent. It is not considered likely that there will be a diverse age range, and it is unlikely clearings or glades will be present due to the small size.	Native mixed scrub is not referenced specifically within the local Biodiversity Action Plan, however the species provide value to biodiversity and as such the habitat has been assigned a medium strategic significance.
Amenity grassland	Grassland: Modified grassland	Condition: Moderate It is assumed the grassland will pass criterion A (6-8 species per square metre), criterion C (no scrub), criterion D (no damage), criterion D (no bracken), and criterion G (no invasive non-natives).	Modified grassland can provide some biodiversity value such as for pollinators, however, is not referenced specifically within the local Biodiversity Action Plan. Therefore, this habitat has been assigned medium strategic significance.
Proposed planting mix C. Flowering perennials and ornamental grass in raised planters.	Urban – introduced shrub	N/A. No condition assessment required.	The introduced shrub habitats are comprised of predominantly non-native plant species and therefore provide limited biodiversity value. As such, these habitats are assigned a low strategic significance.

5.2.1 Area Habitat Creation

A summary of the area habitat units delivered by the habitat creation proposals is provided in **Table 5-3**.

Table 5-3 – Area Habitat Creation

Habitat parcel reference	Broad habitat	Proposed habitat	Area (ha)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Strategic significance	Habitat units delivered
1	Urban	Developed land; sealed surface	0.01	V. low	N/A – Other	Low Strategic Significance	0

Habitat parcel reference	Broad habitat	Proposed habitat	Area (ha)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Strategic significance	Habitat units delivered
2	Individual trees	Urban tree (small)	0.0041	Medium	Moderate	High Strategic Significance	0.01
3	Urban	Introduced shrub	0.01	Low	Condition Assessment NA	Low Strategic Significance	0.02
4	Grassland	Modified grassland	0.015	Low	Moderate	Medium Strategic Significance	0.06
5	Heathland and shrub	Mixed scrub	0.025	Medium	Moderate	Medium Strategic Significance	0.18
Total habitat area			0.06				
Total site area (excluding area of individual trees, green walls, intertidal hard structures)			0.06				
Total habitat units delivered							0.28

5.2.2 Hedgerow Creation

A summary of the hedgerow units delivered by the habitat creation proposals is provided in **Table 5-4**.

Table 5-4 – Hedgerow Creation

Hedgerow reference	Habitat type	Length (km)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Strategic significance	Hedgerow units delivered
1	Native hedgerow	0.09	Low	Moderate	Formally identified in local strategy	0.35
Total length (km)		0.09				
Total hedgerow units delivered						0.35

6. BNG Metric

6.1 Habitat Trading

6.1.1 Area Module

6.1.1.1 Very High and High Distinctiveness Habitat

The Proposed Scheme does not result in the loss of very high, high, or medium distinctiveness habitat.

6.1.1.2 Medium Distinctiveness Habitat

The Proposed Scheme will currently result in the gain of 0.18 units of mixed scrub and 0.01 units of individual trees. This satisfies the trading rules for medium distinctiveness habitats.

6.1.1.3 Low Distinctiveness Habitat

The Proposed Scheme will currently result in the loss of 0.12 units of introduced shrub but the gain of 0.06 units of modified grassland. This lower distinctiveness deficit is addressed through the cumulative surplus of 0.14 units to offset the deficit. This satisfies the trading rules for low distinctiveness habitats.

6.1.2 Hedgerow Module

There are no hedgerows present at the baseline, therefore the trading rules for hedgerows do not need to be considered.

6.2 Headline Results

Using the Metric, the Application Site has the following pre-development biodiversity unit values:

- Habitat units: 0.96
- Hedgerow units: 0

The proposed design (habitat retention, habitat creation) will deliver:

- Habitat units: 0.28
- Hedgerow units: 0.35

A screenshot of the final results of the Metric calculations is provided in Figure 6-1. The assessment shows that the Proposed Scheme is predicted to result in:

- A net gain of 0.1 habitat units, with a predicted total net change of +14.00%.
- A net gain of 0.35 hedgerow units. As the baseline is zero, a percentage change cannot be calculated

The net change as a result of the Proposed Scheme therefore is predicted to meet the target of achieving 10% biodiversity net gain.

FINAL RESULTS		
Total net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	<i>Habitat units</i>	0.14
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.35
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.00
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	<i>Habitat units</i>	14.00%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	N/A
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.00%
Trading rules satisfied?		Yes ✓

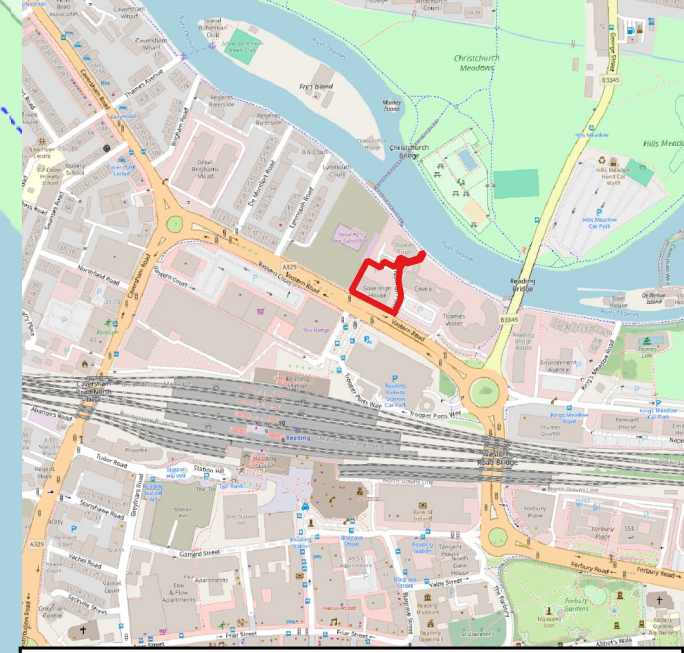
0 baseline units - % cannot be calculated

Figure 6-1 – Metric Final Results

Appendix A. Proposed Scheme Plans

A.1 Application Site Location Plan

Figure 6-2 - Application Site Location Plan



Legend

 Site Boundary

0 15 30 m

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Original scale: 1:700.00		Figure No. A-1
AtkinsRéalis ©, Woodcote Grove, Ashley Road, Epsom, England, KT18 5BW		
Project: Sovereign House		
Client: HMCTS		
Title: Sovereign House Site Location Plan		
Drawn by: LH Date: 21/01/2025	Checked by: ARL Date: 07/03/2025	Reviewed by: VH Date: 11/03/2025

A.2 Landscape General Arrangement Plan

Figure 6-3 - Landscape General Arrangement Plan

Appendix B. Summary of Relevant BNG Legislation

The relevant primary legislation for the statutory framework for BNG is principally set out under Schedule 7A (Biodiversity Gain in England) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990¹⁷, which was inserted into the 1990 Act by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021¹⁸. The biodiversity gain objective (the 'biodiversity gain condition') under the statutory framework for BNG is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of a development site. The increase in biodiversity value can be achieved through on-site biodiversity gains, registered off-site biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023¹⁹ has amended Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990:

- Section 135 Biodiversity net gain: pre-development biodiversity value and habitat enhancement.
 - This provides a clause to ensure that habitats assessed for BNG during pre-development calculations are taken at their highest value on site prior to any proposed clearance that could have been undertaken during a previous activity (e.g., a previous planning application). This is to reduce incentives to clear habitats on potential BNG sites or off-site contributions to BNG.

The relevant secondary legislation (BNG regulations) to support the delivery of the statutory framework for BNG is summarised in **Table B-1**.

Table B-1 – Summary of BNG Regulations

Regulation	Summary
The Biodiversity Gain (Town and Country Planning) (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2024 ²⁰	These regulations make further consequential amendments to existing primary legislation on planning, to integrate the BNG framework. These amendments include the definition of a planning authority under Schedule 7A which sets out the BNG framework.
The Environment Act 2021 (Commencement No. 8 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024 ²¹	These regulations commence BNG for most types of new planning applications and provides transitional arrangements for section 73 permissions. This includes: ▪ Provision for biodiversity gain as condition of planning permission. ▪ Provision for a register of biodiversity gain sites (the 'biodiversity gain site register').

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/contents>

¹⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/schedule/14/enacted>

¹⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/55/contents>

²⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2024/9780348254419>

²¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2024/44/made>

Regulation	Summary
	Arrangement for the purchase of statutory credits.
The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 ²²	These regulations prescribe exemptions for categories of development to which BNG does not apply. This includes the following: - Householder development. Development which is subject of a householder application as defined within Article 2(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. - Development granted planning permission by a development order under section 59. This includes permitted development rights. - Development subject to the de minimis exemption. Development that does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than 25 square metres (e.g. 5 m by 5 m) of habitat, or 5 metres of linear habitats such as hedgerows. - Self-build and custom build development. Development which: - consists of no more than 9 dwellings, and - is carried out on a site which has an area no larger than 0.5 hectares, and - consists exclusively of dwellings which are self-build or custom housebuilding as defined in section 1(A1) of the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015. - Urgent Crown development granted permission under section 293A Town and Country Planning Act 1990. - Development of a biodiversity gain site. Development which is undertaken solely or mainly for the purpose of fulfilling, in whole or in part, the biodiversity gain condition which applies in relation to another development. - Development related to the high speed railway transport network. Development forming part of, or ancillary to, the high speed railway transport network comprising connections between all or any of the places or parts of the transport network specified in section 1(2) of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013.
The Biodiversity Gain (Town and Country Planning) (Modifications and	These regulations amend the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 and the Town and Country Planning (Section 62A Applications) (Procedure and Consequential Amendments) Order 2013 to include provisions in respect of applications for planning permission and the

²² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/47/contents/made>

Regulation	Summary
Amendments) (England) Regulations 2024 ²³	submission and determination of Biodiversity Gain Plans, as well as modifications of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for phased development.
The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations 2024 ²⁴	These regulations set out the modifications for irreplaceable habitat. The following habitats are considered to be irreplaceable for BNG metric calculation purposes: ▪ Blanket bog ▪ Lowland fens ▪ Limestone pavements ▪ Coastal sand dunes ▪ Ancient woodland ▪ Ancient trees and veteran trees ▪ <i>Spartina</i> saltmarsh swards ▪ Mediterranean saltmarsh scrub
The Biodiversity Gain Site Register Regulations 2024 ²⁵	These regulations allow for fees to be charged for applications to register land in the biodiversity gain site register and allows the register operator (Natural England) to issue financial penalties where false or misleading information is provided.

²³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/50/contents/made>

²⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/48/contents/made>

²⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/45/contents/made>

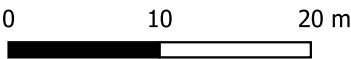
Appendix C. Habitat Baseline Plan

Figure 6-4 - Habitat Baseline Plan



Legend

- Site Boundary
- Urban trees
- Introduced shrub
- Developed land; sealed surface



Base Mapping: © Open Street Map

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Woodcote Grove
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HMCTS

Project
Sovereign House

Title
Baseline Habitats Map

Sheet Size A3	Original Scale: 1:500.00000	Design/Drawn GH Date 21/3/25	Checked JB Date 25/03/2025	Reviewed VH Date 27/03/2025
Drawing Number N/A				Rev 00

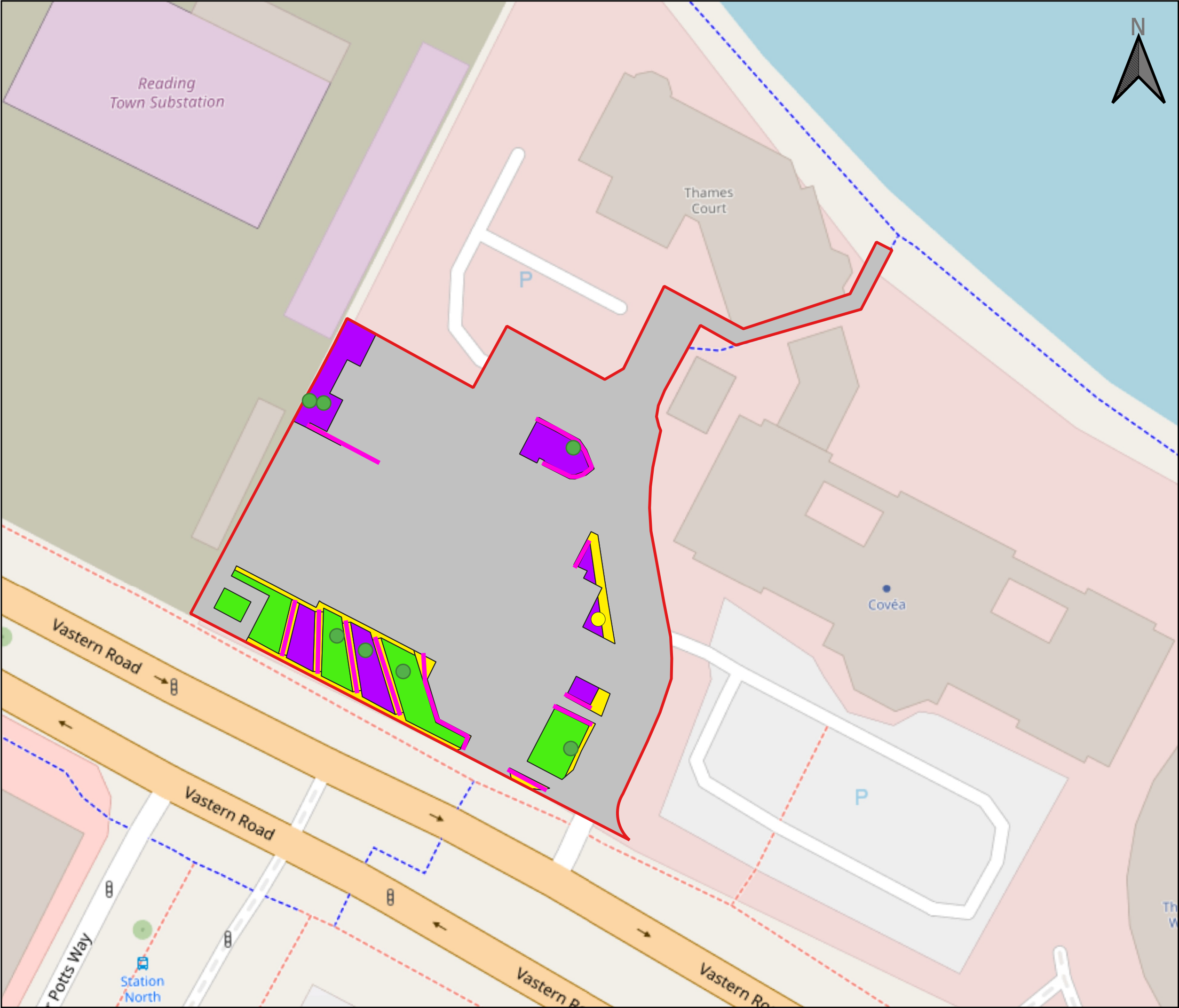
Appendix D. Condition Assessment Sheets

Condition Sheet: INDIVIDUAL TREES Habitat Type									
Habitat Type: Individual – Urban trees									
Habitat Description									
Eight individual trees located across the Sovereign House Site. Site is located within an urban area (Reading).									
On-site or off-site, site name and location	On-site, within Sovereign House. See Site description in main body of report	Survey date and Surveyor name		21/01/2025. SN and LH (AtkinsRéalis ecologists) Subsequent tree survey conducted by AtkinsRéalis arboriculture team.					
		Survey reference (if relating to a wider survey)		NA					
Limitations (if applicable)	See main text	Habitat parcel reference							
		G002-A	G002-B	G002-C	T003	T004	T005	T006	
Condition Assessment Criteria		Criterion passed (Yes or No)							Notes (such as justification)
A	The tree is a native species (or at least 70% within the block are native species).	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	G002 A-C are Norway maple therefore non-native
B	The tree canopy is predominantly continuous, with gaps in canopy cover making up <10% of total area and no individual gap being >5 m wide (individual trees automatically pass this criterion).	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	All individual trees
C	The tree is mature (or more than 50% within the block are mature) ¹ .	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	T005 is semi-mature, rest are mature

D	There is little or no evidence of an adverse impact on tree health by human activities (such as vandalism, herbicide or detrimental agricultural activity). And there is no current regular pruning regime, so the trees retain >75% of expected canopy for their age range and height.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	No vandalism or damage to tree identified
E	Natural ecological niches for vertebrates and invertebrates are present, such as presence of deadwood, cavities, ivy or loose bark.	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	No deadwood or other ecological niches noted
F	More than 20% of the tree canopy area is oversailing vegetation beneath.	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Trees in an urban context and mostly overhanging hardstanding
Number of criteria passed		3	3	3	4	4	3	4	
Condition Assessment Result (out of 6 criteria)	Condition Assessment Score	Score Achieved x/√							
Passes 5 or 6 criteria	Good (3)								
Passes 3 or 4 criteria	Moderate (2)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Passes 2 or fewer criteria	Poor (1)								
	Suggested enhancement interventions to improve condition score								
	Increase ecological niches such as areas of deadwood. Plant vegetation underneath trees.								

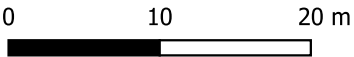
Appendix E. Proposed Habitats Plan

Figure 6-5 - Proposed Habitats Plan



Legend

- Site Boundary
- Proposed Habitats
 - Introduced shrub
 - Developed land; sealed surface
 - Modified grassland
 - Mixed scrub
 - New small tree
 - Native hedgerow
 - Retained trees



Base Mapping: © Open Street Map

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Sheet Size A3	Original Scale: 1:500.00000	Design/Drawn LH Date 26/3/25	Checked JB Date 26/03/2025	Reviewed VH Date 27/03/2025
Drawing Number N/A				Rev 00

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