



**BALLSHILL GROVE**  
**MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
2023 - 2028



## OVERVIEW

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### Map-based management plans

Map-based management plans specify activities that should take place on a site over a stated period of time; these activities will help to deliver the agreed aspirations which the site managers and stakeholders have identified for that site.

### Public Engagement

Engagement with stakeholders is at the centre of effective management planning on any site. An initial engagement was held from 27<sup>th</sup> June to 7<sup>th</sup> July with two meetings being held on site to allow the residents and users to discuss their views, as well as the opportunity for those who could not attend the meetings to make comment via email. These meetings established the core aims and objectives for the site; these are reflected in Section 3. A second stage of engagement is to be completed in April/May 2023, which will enable stakeholders to provide written comments on the proposed management actions for the site.

### Version Control

Version	Issue Date	Details	Author	Reviewed	Approved
1		Initial Draft	FD	GA, SA	
2		Updated Draft	FD	GA, SA	
3		Final	FD	SA	

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# 1.0 SUMMARY

## 1.1 Site Summary

Site Name: Ballshill Grove

Site Address: Ballshill Grove, Hertford, SG13 7RF

Grid Reference: TL 3339 1244

Owner: Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)

## 1.2 Site Description and Vision Statement

The aim of this management plan is to provide a structured framework outlining the ongoing maintenance and management of the site to ensure it continues to meet the requirements of the local community and visitors, whilst protecting and enhancing its natural features for biodiversity for the duration of this plan being in place.

Balls Hill Grove is a small area of greenspace in Hertford. The site is split across three sections, categorised for the purpose of this document as ‘upper’ ‘middle’ and ‘lower’, from Northwest to Southeast across the map as shown in Figure 1.

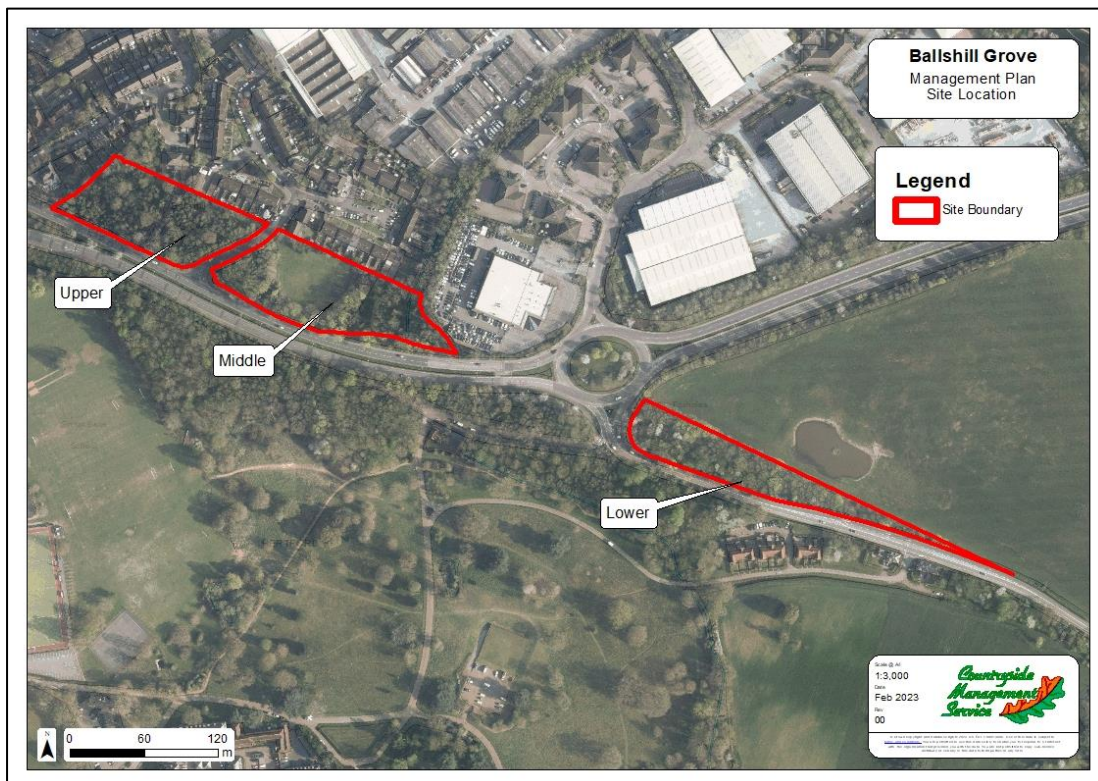


Figure 1 Site Sections

The upper section is a woodland comprising of 22% young sycamore trees and a dense layer of ivy along the ground level. There is a small path cutting through the woodland which is utilised as a shortcut from the garages to the main road into Hertford town centre. Local residents have reported that there is a population of slow worms living in this area, however no formal survey has been completed to confirm this.

The middle section features some woodland and an area of shorter rough-cut grassland. The woodland is mainly small self-set sycamore, with some beech trees. Separating the woodland and the grassland is a small border of meadow grassland. This area is well utilised by the local residents. The woodland to the east of the section is a yew woodland, often used by the community for 'forest school' type activities with children, as described by the residents of the nearby estate.

The lower section is inaccessible to the public and is a small area of woodland made up of species including sycamore, cherry, hazel, hornbeam, oak, and ash.

The upper and lower sites have mainly been managed through safety works, with no previous woodland management aside from reacting to possible hazardous trees. The middle site was previously let out to East Herts District Council (EHDC) where it had been mown every 4 weeks for recreational use. The site was handed back to HCC in 2017 and has since been managed as rough cut grassland by the HCC Rural Estates Team. During this time the site was cut 3 to 4 times yearly between May and October with arisings left on site. There was an attempt made in 2020 to reduce cutting to allow for wildflowers, however this was met with community concern. Since then, the management of the site has been a mixed approach, with the main area of grassland being managed with a shorter rough cut and a small border of grassland being allowed to grow longer. This management plan will focus on creating a structure for the maintenance on site, with a key focus on the community aspect of the site, as well as improving biodiversity.



Figure 2 Location Map

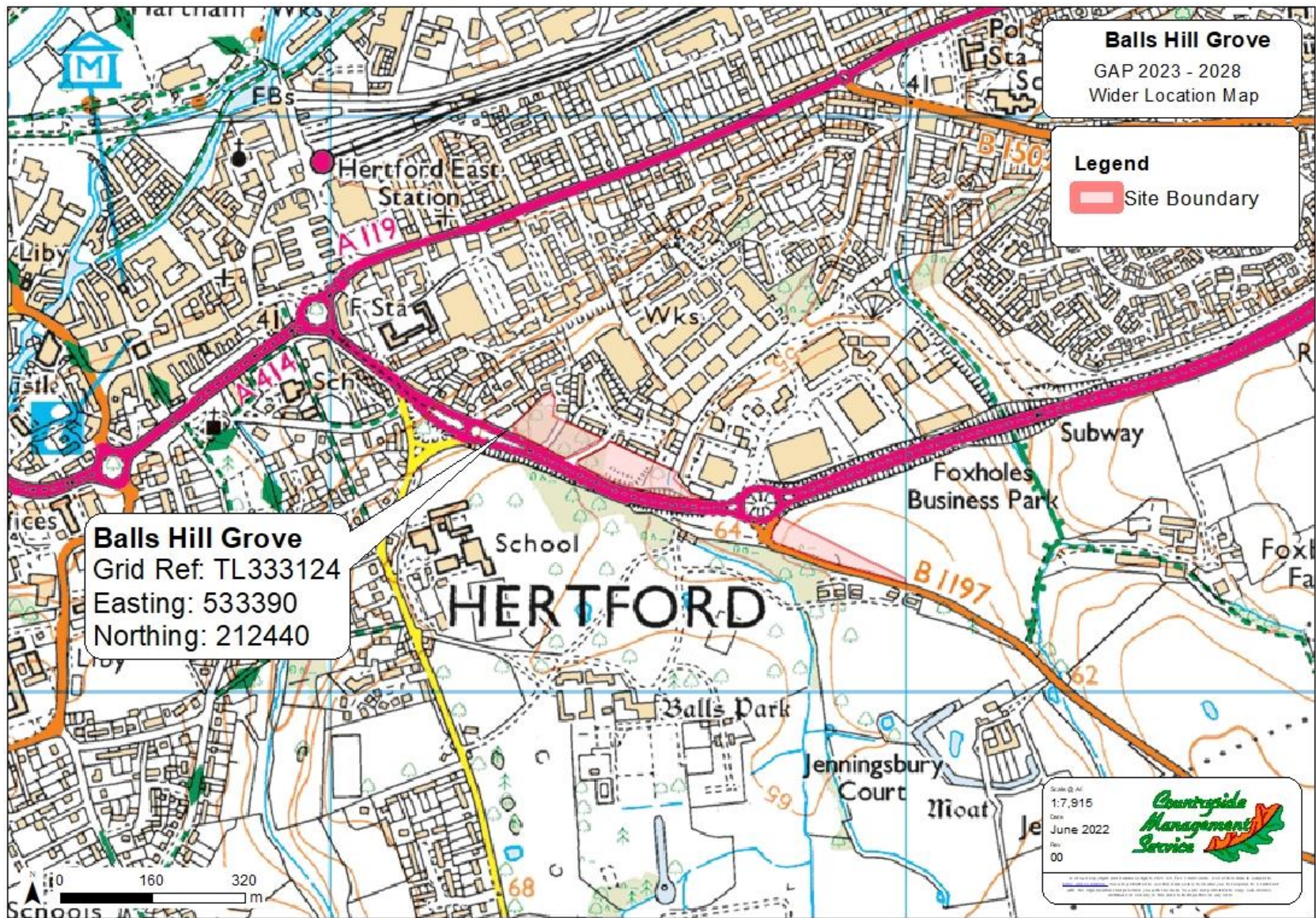


Figure 3 Wider Location Map





Figure 4 Upper Area Site Description

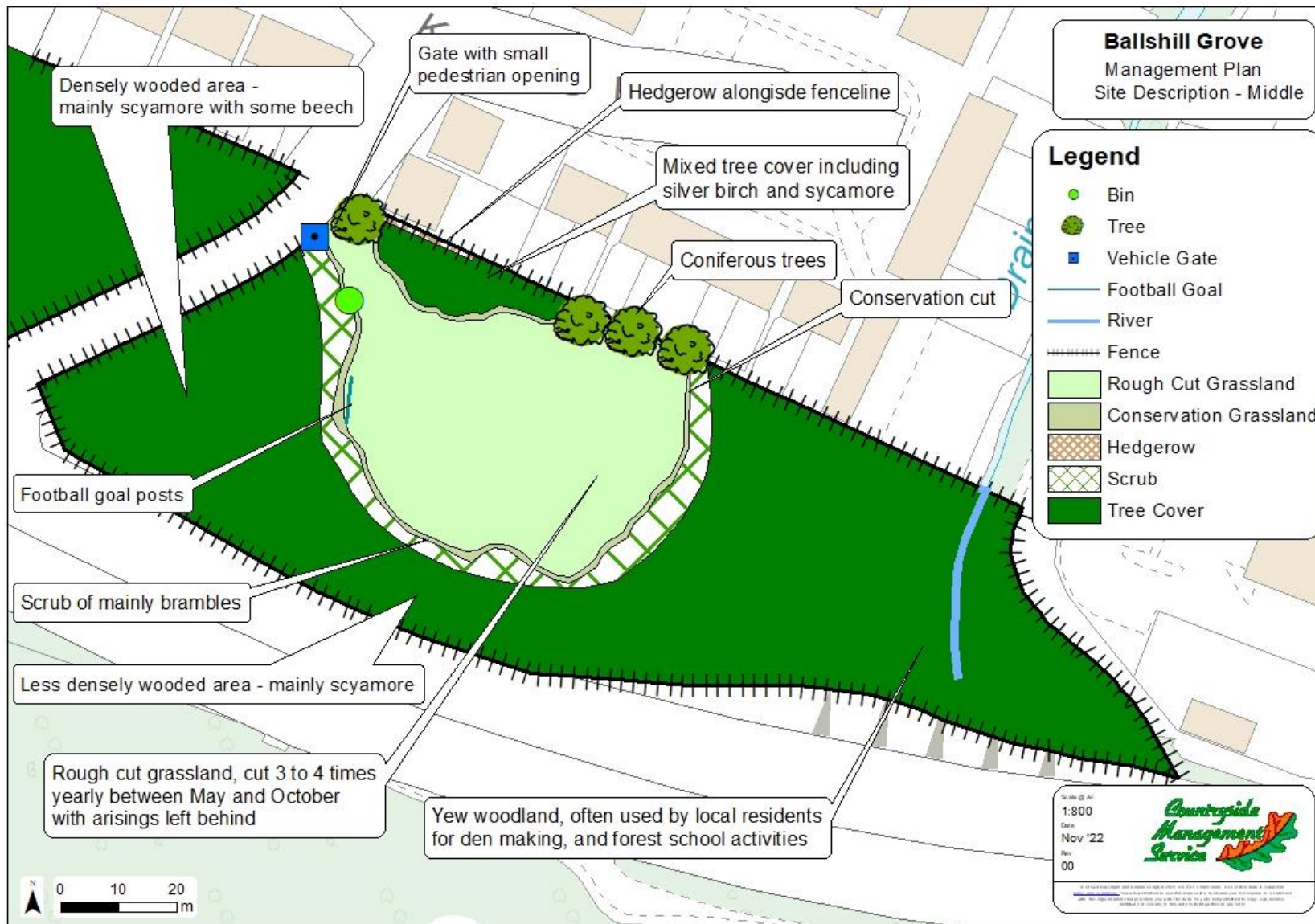


Figure 5 Middle Area Site Description

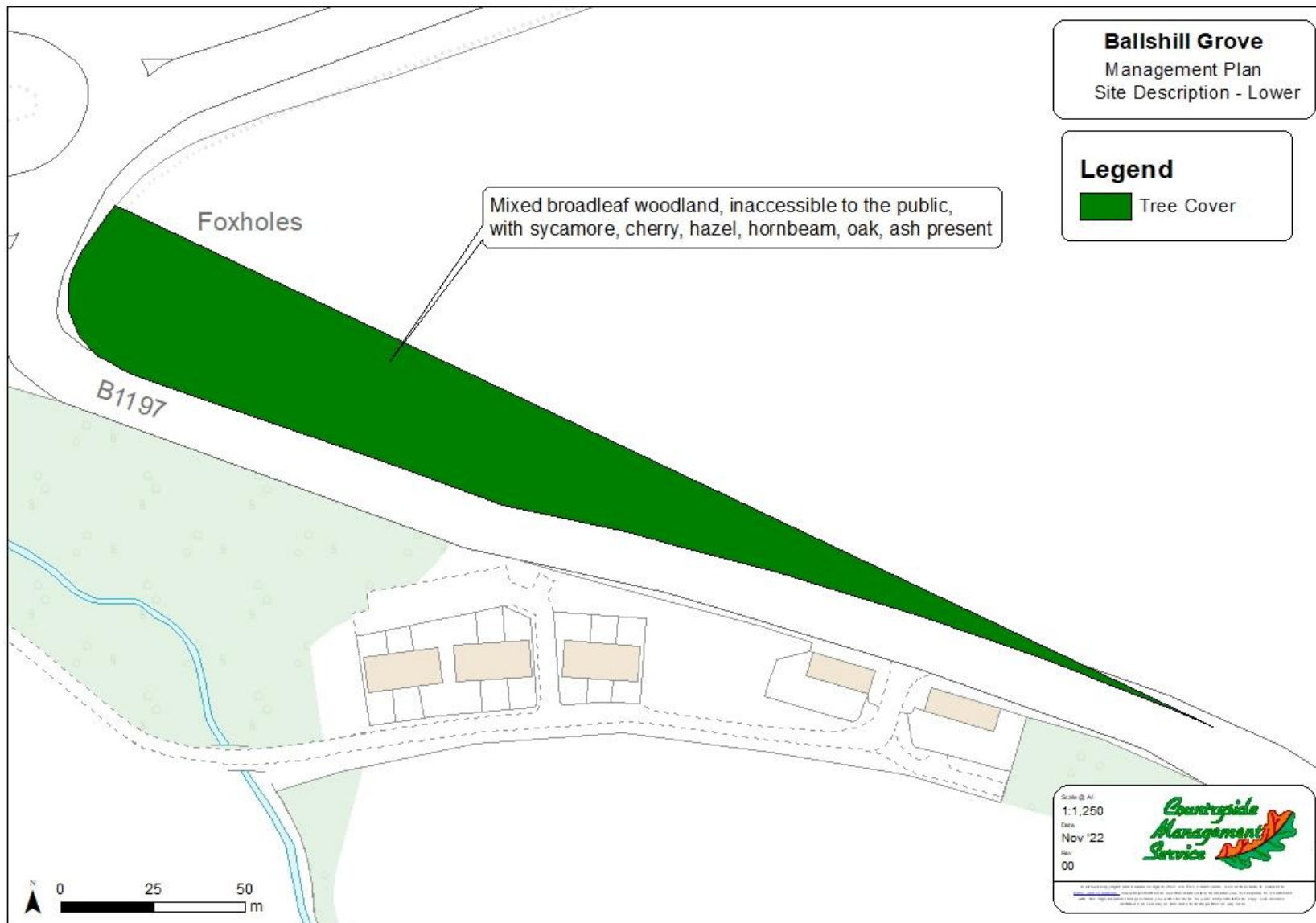


Figure 6 Lower Area Description

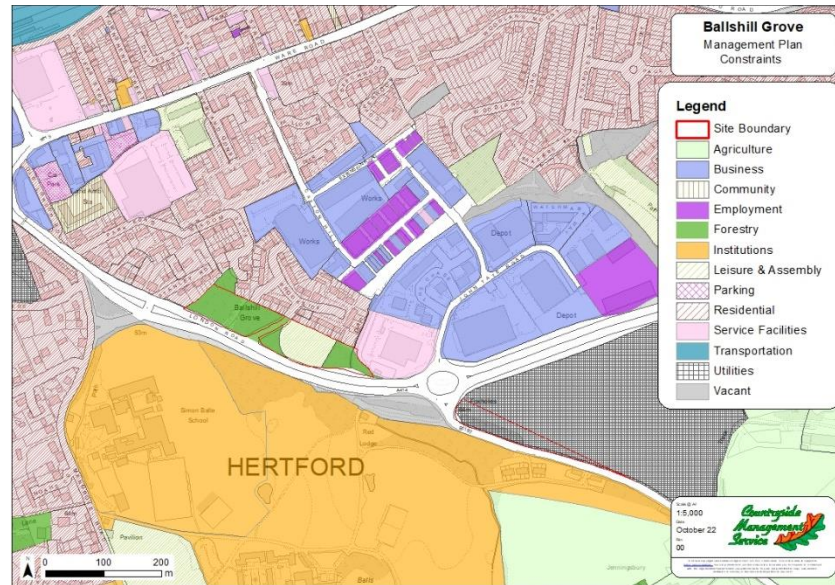
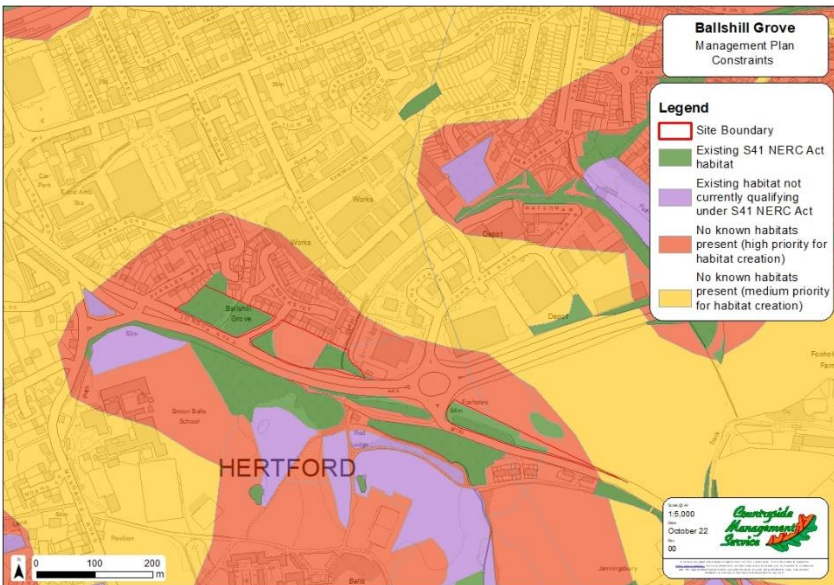
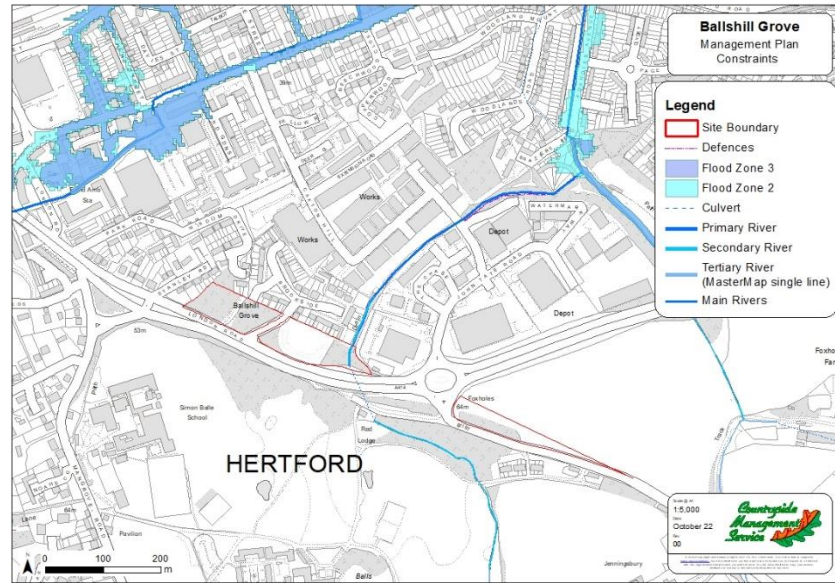


Figure 7 Constraints Maps

## **2.0 AIM & OBJECTIVES**

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The aim and objectives of the GAP are as follows:

### **2.1 Aim**

The aim is to maintain Ballshill Grove, in its current state, as an attractive area, being able to balance recreation with the natural environment.

### **2.2 Objectives**

#### **A. A Welcoming Place**

A1 Carry out vegetation works as necessary.

A2 Move the football goal away from the border of the woodland.

#### **B. Healthy, Safe and Secure**

B1 Monitor and carry out reactive works to address safety issues.

B2 Respond promptly to any reports of misuse of the site.

#### **C. Clean and Well Maintained**

C1 Monitor grounds maintenance to ensure continued implementation to a high standard.

C2 Ensure structure and equipment in the areas are maintained to a good condition and appearance.

C3 Maintain a short rough cut and an annual conservation cut of the grass as appropriate.

C4 Carry out regular litter picking, emptying of bins, and pruning of shrubs.

C5 Replace the dog waste bin with a combined dog waste and litter bin.

C6 Discourage the use of the site for garden waste disposal.

#### **D. Sustainability**

D1 Ensure ongoing maintenance is financially sustainable.

D2 Secure external funding to ensure the viability of capital works.

#### **E. Conservation and Heritage**

E1 Carry out the woodland management of coppicing in all three areas of the site.

- E2 Plant a shade-tolerant hedgerow along the top of the hill in the southern border of the middle site.
- E3 Enhance the area of rough cut grassland in the middle site for biodiversity improvement.
- E4 Plant native trees, where appropriate, in the woodland areas.
- E5 Utilise any opportunities to reuse generated by-products from the site.
- E6 Carry out crown lift of perimeter trees.

**F. Community Involvement**

- F1 Encourage small-scale community involvement in Ballshill Grove and ensure that all involved operate toward achievement of the GAP.

**G. Marketing**

- G1 Promote the new GAP on HCC CMS website and e-newsletter and engage stakeholders in the new plan.

## **3.0 PROPOSALS**

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### **3.1 A Welcoming Place**

The upper site is currently only used as a cut-through to shorten the route from the estate onto the road leading into Hertford town centre. When discussed with the residents about making this area more welcoming they raised concerns that encouraging further use of this part of the site could lead to antisocial behaviour near their homes and garages. The presence of steep slopes also limits the scope of this space for wider recreational use. In this area, day to day management should include simple vegetation works to retain safe access; this will include cutting back any of the understory that may grow and overtake the path.

The middle site is well used by the local community. To allow the site to be accessible, vegetation works should be carried out to continue and improve safe access to the site. This will include ensuring the scrub around the entrance and the borders is managed, as well as ensuring a path through the scrub into the woodland. The football goal should also be moved approximately 3m forward away from the woodland edge. Behind this will be an area of conservation cut before the scrub and woodland, this will allow the football goal to be more readily used without having to enter the scrub following a goal being scored.

The lower site is not accessible to the public so no work will be completed in this area for this objective.

### **3.2 Healthy, Safe and Secure**

Reactive tree work should be carried out whenever any tree safety issues are identified on any of the three site areas. Any misuse of the site should be addressed in a proactive manner.

Oak processionary moth (OPM) is an invasive non-native species that was first identified in England in 2005. It has since become established in London before spreading to the surrounding counties, including south and central Hertfordshire. While the moth is harmless, caterpillars pose a risk to public health and to pets through microscopic hairs which cover its body. Contact with hairs typically cause skin rashes, although symptoms can include eye irritation, sore throats, and in extreme cases breathing difficulties and allergic reactions. OPM has not been identified at Ballshill Grove, but in recent years several cases were found in Hertfordshire.

If a potential OPM sighting is identified on site, either through the course of regular inspections or maintenance activities, the sighting will be assessed with consideration to the typical use of the site. If confirmed different methods of appropriate control dependant on the site will then be considered.

### **3.3 Clean and Well Maintained**

The current grounds maintenance work should be monitored to ensure that all three areas of the site are maintained as specified and continue to meet high standards. This covers regular bin emptying and litter picking, appropriately timed cutting of the grassland and any minor works to the shrubs and trees within the site. A new multi-use bin for both dog waste and litter should be procured to replace the existing dog waste bin.

### **3.4 Sustainability**

As there are no significant changes being proposed which would affect the ongoing regular management, maintenance costs should remain stable for the plan. Additionally, the small scale of non-maintenance works outlined in the plan are suited to volunteer work parties or community planting events ensuring the management is carried out in a cost-effective manner.

### **3.5 Conservation and Heritage**

The woodland areas in all three sections of the site would benefit from coppicing to create a healthier and more diverse woodland in these areas. The coppicing will help to establish a well-structured woodland with a combination of taller trees and smaller understorey planting. It will create areas of light in the canopy as well as making space for further tree planting. The coppicing should be completed on a rotation with set areas being coppiced each year to allow for regeneration.

A hedgerow should be planted along the top of the hill at the southern border of the middle site to act as a visual buffer between the recreational area and the main road. To help facilitate this, minor vegetation management is required to prevent the newly planted hedge being impacted by bramble and other strangling species.

Some tree planting will be required as appropriate featuring native tree to support wildlife and enhance the diversity of the woodlands present. This will require light ongoing maintenance for the first 3 years for each section planted, until being included in the management of the other trees in regard to general safety maintenance. The areas coppiced in the upper section will not be replanted in the hopes of promoting natural regeneration, this will be assessed in years 3 and 4 to see whether restocking is necessary.

Currently there is a small wildflower buffer before the scrub and woodland in the middle site. Increasing this in size by between around 3m and 11m at various points around the border of the grassland area will help to create further habitats and food sources for wildlife without impacting upon the recreation value of the site. In the first year the diversity of the seed bank present should be assessed and if found to be low, and if resources allow, the border should be over-sown with a native wildflower mix to create a species diverse conservation grassland border.



Any material, such as logs and brash, created during the works should be reused as habitat piles within the woodland areas. Particular attention should be paid to the upper site due to the reported slow worms in this area. Any opportunities to create habitats for this species should be made using the by-products produced.

### **3.6 Community Involvement**

A period of public engagement accompanies the production of this management plan, enabling the local community and stakeholders to play a role in informing management of the site. All user groups with interests in the site aim to be included in this process, and for their requirements to be considered as part of the planning process.

Currently there is little community involvement in the management of the site, although it is a hub for community activity, with residents reporting they organise community sports activities, picnics, and other events in the middle shorter rough cut grassland area.

There is also the potential to explore the involvement of the residents of the surrounding estates in small-scale volunteering, such as litter picking, and encouraging the use of the dog waste bins.

All community involvement is to be directed toward delivering the aims outlined in this GAP.

### **3.7 Marketing**

There is currently little in the way of advertising for Ballshill Grove due to none of the sites being classified as a public open space or a public right of way and instead being used in a permissive manner. This will remain throughout the duration of the GAP and there are no plans to increase the level of marketing for this site.

The GAP will be promoted on the Hertfordshire County Council CMS website and e-newsletter in order to promote and engage stakeholders in the plan.

## 4.0 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

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An indicative biodiversity net gain (BNG) assessment has been completed for this site producing an indicative condition score. Using the BNG metric, we can then calculate the potential BNG units the improvements outlined in this GAP could produce.

The table below shows the proposed condition changes to areas of the site that are likely to result from the works proposed in this GAP.

<b>Compartment</b>	<b>Habitat</b>	<b>Hectares</b>	<b>Current Condition</b>	<b>Hectares Improved</b>	<b>Potential Future Condition</b>
Lower	Woodland	0.67	Moderate	0.67	Good
Middle	Woodland	0.61	Moderate	0.61	Good
Middle	Grassland	0.22	Poor	0.08	Moderate
Upper	Woodland	0.73	Moderate	0.73	Good

This will generate 5.98 potential BNG units. With a percentage change of over 30% in each of the areas, well above the 10% net gain target.

## 5.0 ACTION PLANS AND MAPS

### 5.1 Annual and Regular Actions

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding	Est. Cost	Spec. Ref.	Status
0.1	Conservation cut and lift of long grass	C3/E3	Mar/Apr or Jul/Sept	HCC	Contractor	GM Budget	Contract Rates		
0.2	Prune hedges	A1/C1	Nov-Feb	HCC	Contractor	GM Budget	Contract Rates		
0.3	Review any tree or shrub planting requirements	C1/E2/E4	Oct - March	HCC /CMS	HCC / CMS	Internal Resource	n/a		
0.4	Carry out tree risk assessments	B1	Dec	HCC	Contractor	Tree Risk Budget	Contract Rates		
0.5	Shorter Rough Cut Grass mowing / strimming	C3	3-4 times between May&Oct	HCC	Contractor	GM Budget	Contract Rates		
0.6	Minor tree and shrub maintenance	A1	As required	HCC	Contractor	GM Budget	Contract Rates		
0.7	Routine inspections and monitoring of litter picking requirements	C4	Monthly	HCC	GM	GM Budget	Contract Rates		
0.8	Empty dog waste/litter bins	C4	Weekly	EHC	GM	GM Budget	Contract Rates		
0.9	Review previous year's action plan	-	Yearly	CMS	CMS	-	-		

**Abbreviations:** CMS – Countryside Management Service, HCC – Hertfordshire County Council Rural Estates Department, EHC – East Herts District Council, GM – Grounds Maintenance.

## 5.2 Year 1 Action Plan 2023 – 2024

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding	Est. Cost	Spec. Ref.	Status
1.1	Coppicing an area of sycamore and hazel in all 3 site areas.	E1	Autumn/ Winter	CMS /HCC	Contractor				
1.2	Planting of hedging along the hill on the southern border of middle site.	E2	Autumn/ Winter	CMS /HCC	Contractor				
1.3	Movement of the football posts.	A2	Spring	HCC	HCC				
1.4	Allow for longer grass to extend creating a larger border in the middle area with an annual cut. Possible need for meadow creation through seeding.	E3	Spring / Summer	HCC	Maintenance Team	GM Budget	Contractor Rates		
1.5	Procure a new litter and dog waste bin for the middle site.	C5	Spring / Summer	HCC	HCC		Contractor Rates		
1.6	Planting of native species.	E4	Autumn / Winter	HCC / CMS	Contractor		Contractor Rates		
1.7	Crown lift of perimeter trees.	E6	Autumn / Winter	HCC / CMS	Contractor	GM Budget	Contractor Rates		





Figure 8 Action Plan Map Year 1 Upper

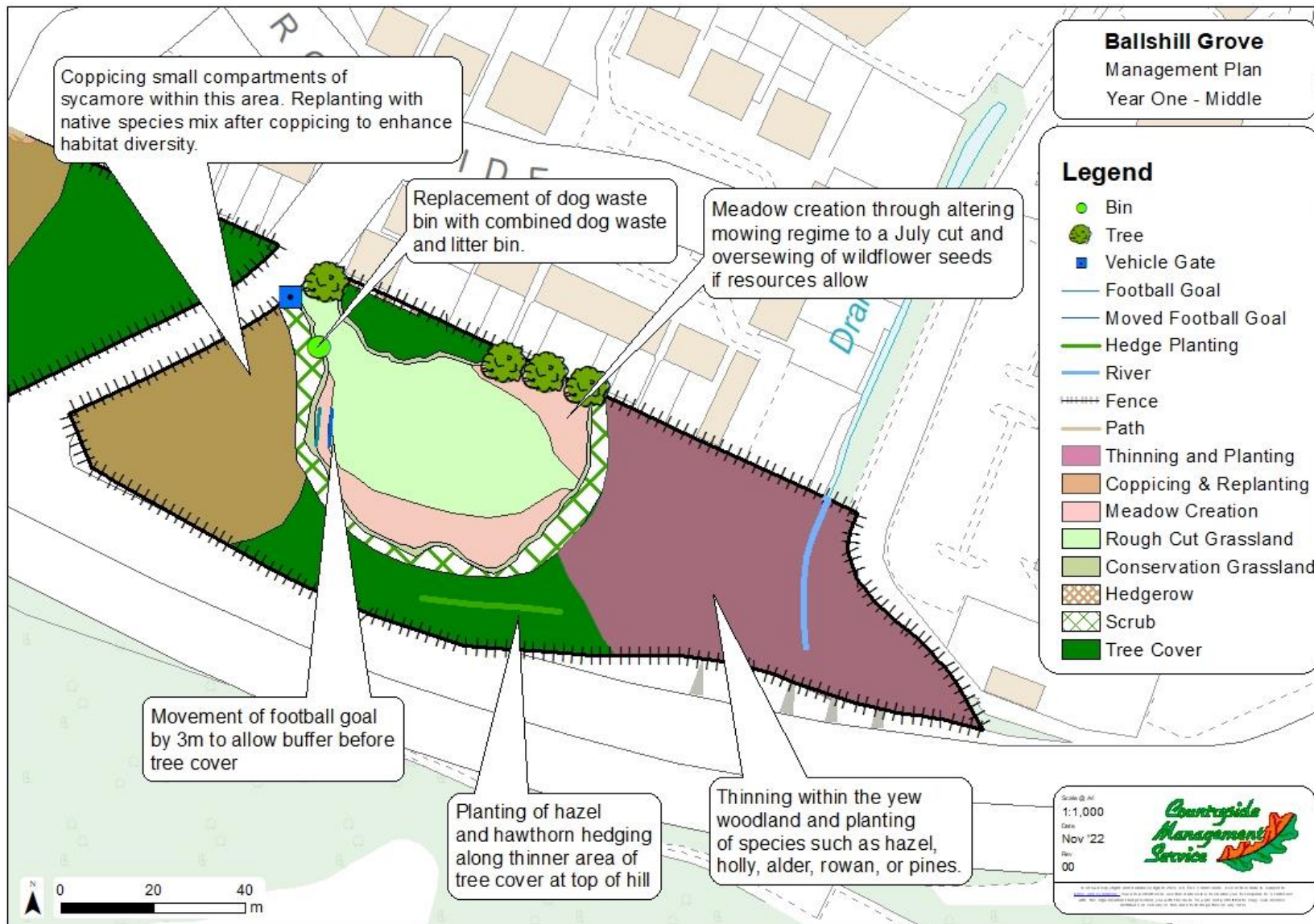


Figure 9 Action Plan Map Year 1 Middle

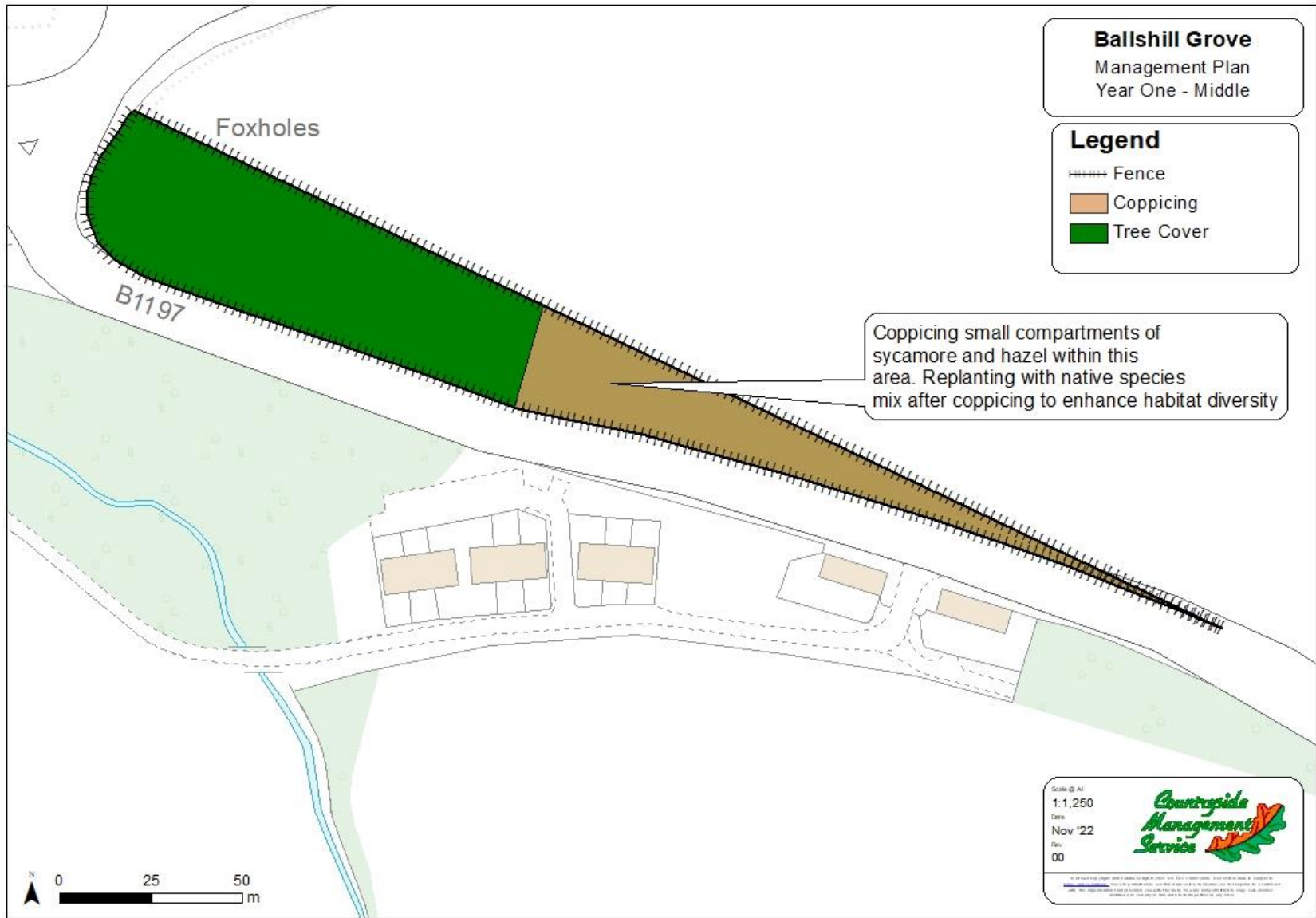


Figure 10 Action Plan Map Year 1 Lower



### 5.3 Year 2 Action Plan 2024 – 2025

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding	Est. Cost	Spec. Ref.	Status
2.1	Monitor hedgerows, remove any detrimental vegetation which may inhibit growth.	E2	Nov	CMS	CMS	GM Budget			
2.2	Move wildflower areas to a annual cut, ensuring to remove arisings.	C3/E3	March & Sept/Oct	HCC	Maintenance Contractor	GM Budget			
2.4	Planting of native species in areas coppiced the previous year.	E4	Autumn / Winter	HCC/ CMS	CMS / Contractor				
2.5	Coppicing an area of sycamore and hazel in all 3 site areas.	E1	Autumn / Winter	HCC /CMS	CMS / Contractor				

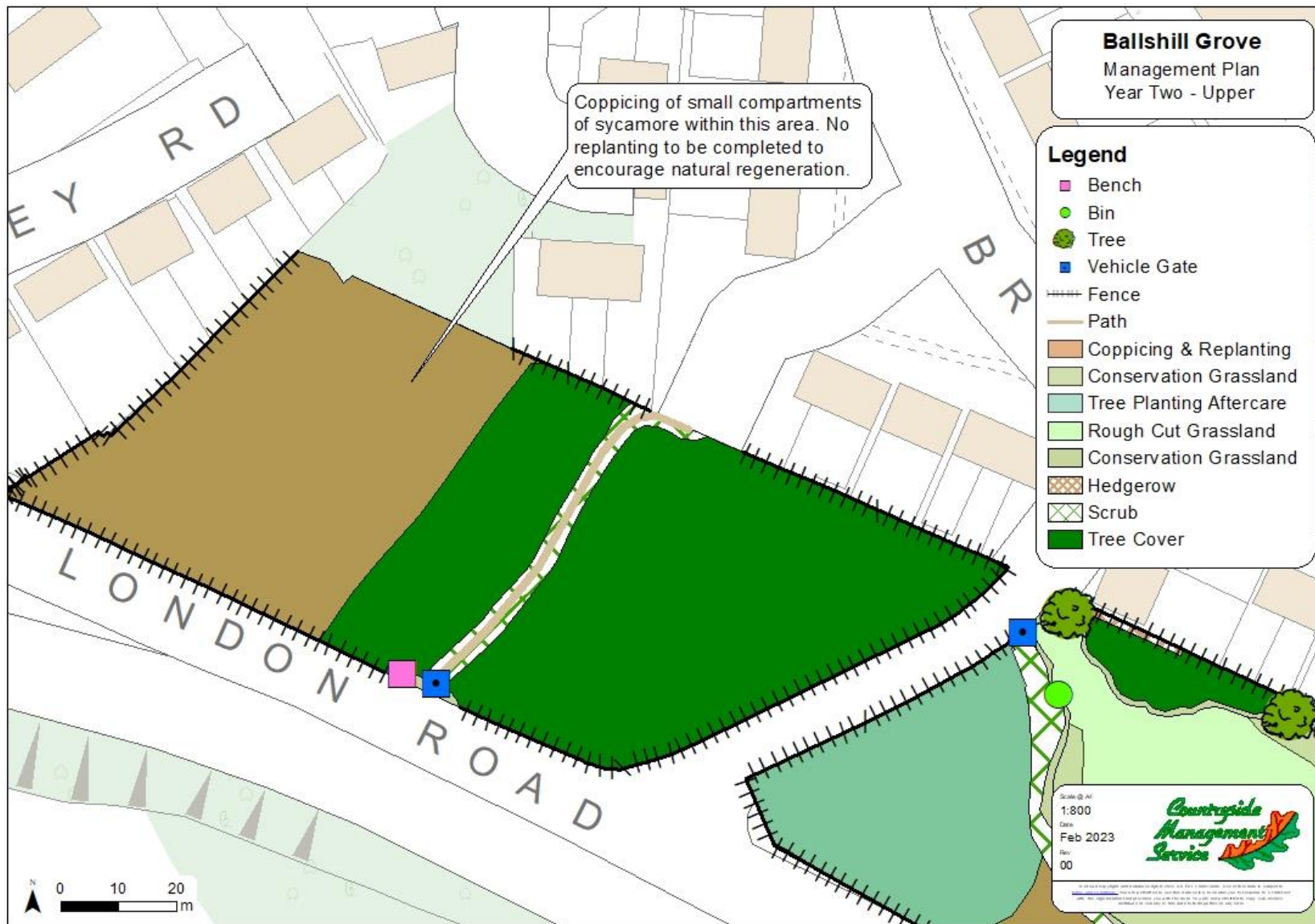


Figure 11 Action Plan Map Year 2 Upper

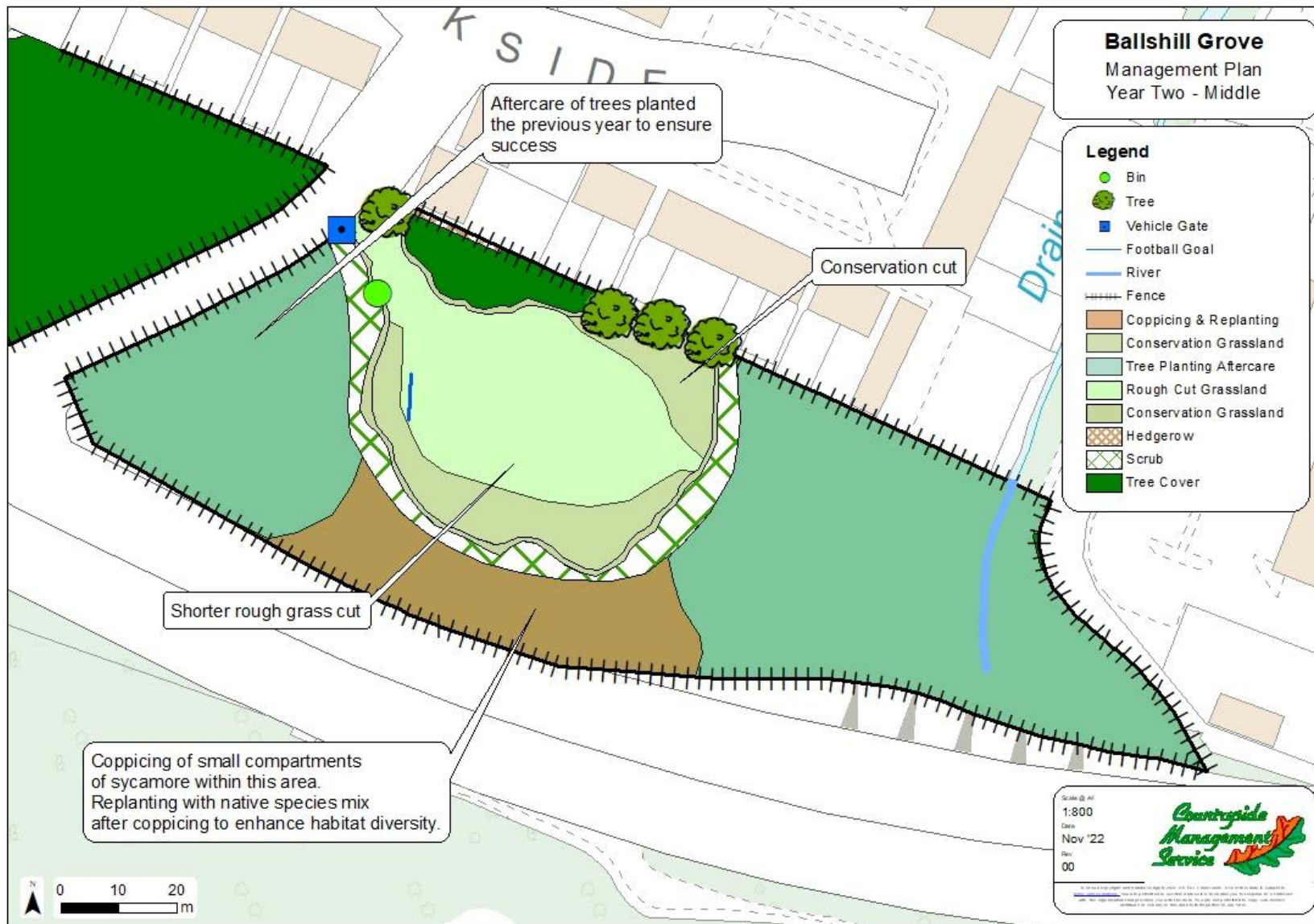


Figure 12 Action Plan Map Year 2 Middle

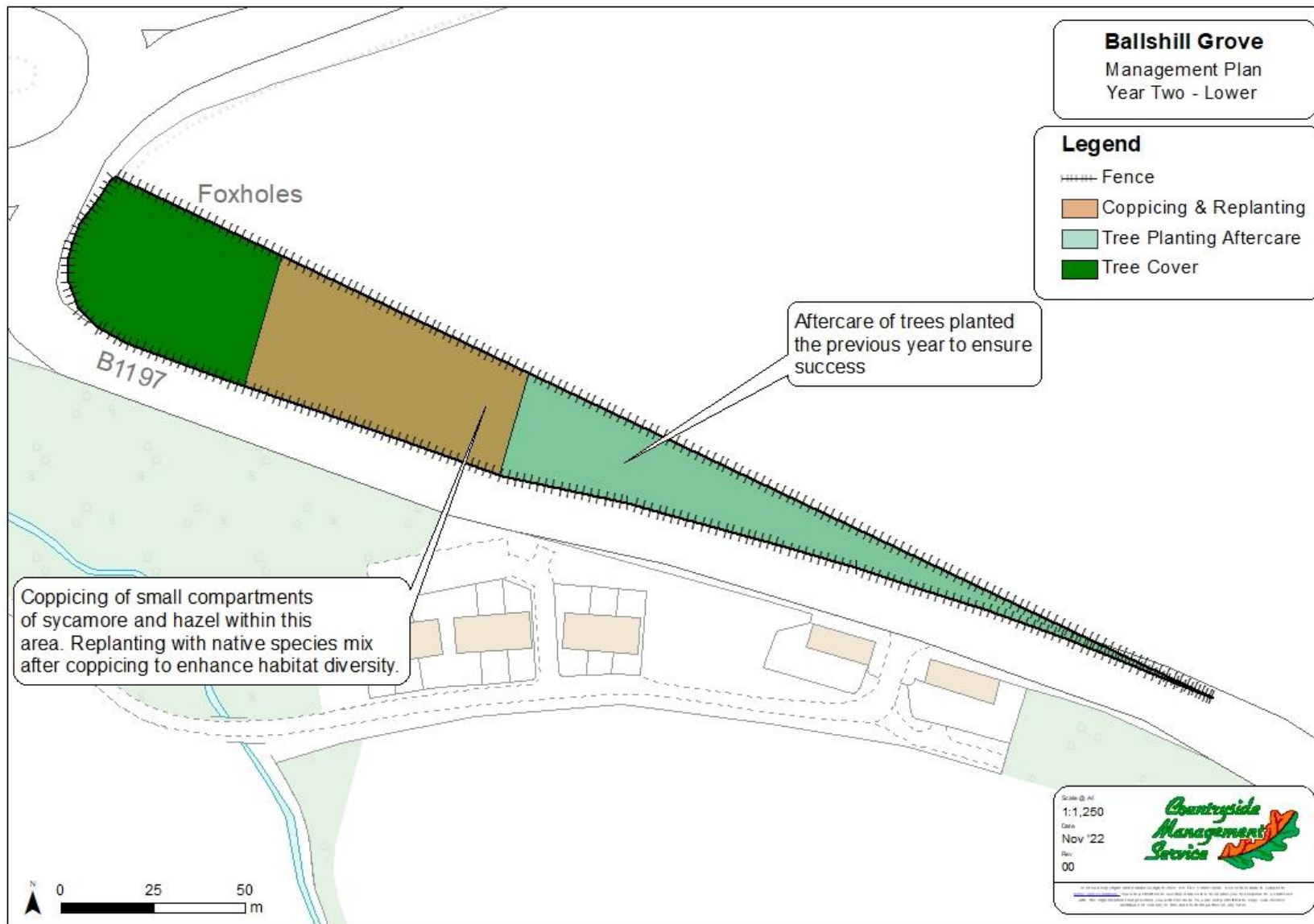


Figure 13 Action Plan Map Year 2 Lower

#### 5.4 Year 3 – 5 Action Plan 2025 – 2028

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding	Est. Cost	Spec. Ref.	Status
3.1	Monitor and review health of planted hedgerows and woodland area.	E1	Yearly	HCC	Contractor				
3.2	Coppicing an area of sycamore and hazel in all 3 site areas.	E1	Autumn/ Winter	CMS /HCC	Contractor				
3.3	Planting of native species in areas coppiced the previous year.	E4	Autumn/ Winter	CMS /HCC	Contractor				
3.4	Annual cut of wildflower areas.	E3	Mar & Sept/Oct	HCC	Maintenance Contractor				
3.5	Aftercare of trees planted including removal of guards after 3 years.	E4	Yearly	CMS/ HCC	Maintenance Contractor / Vols				

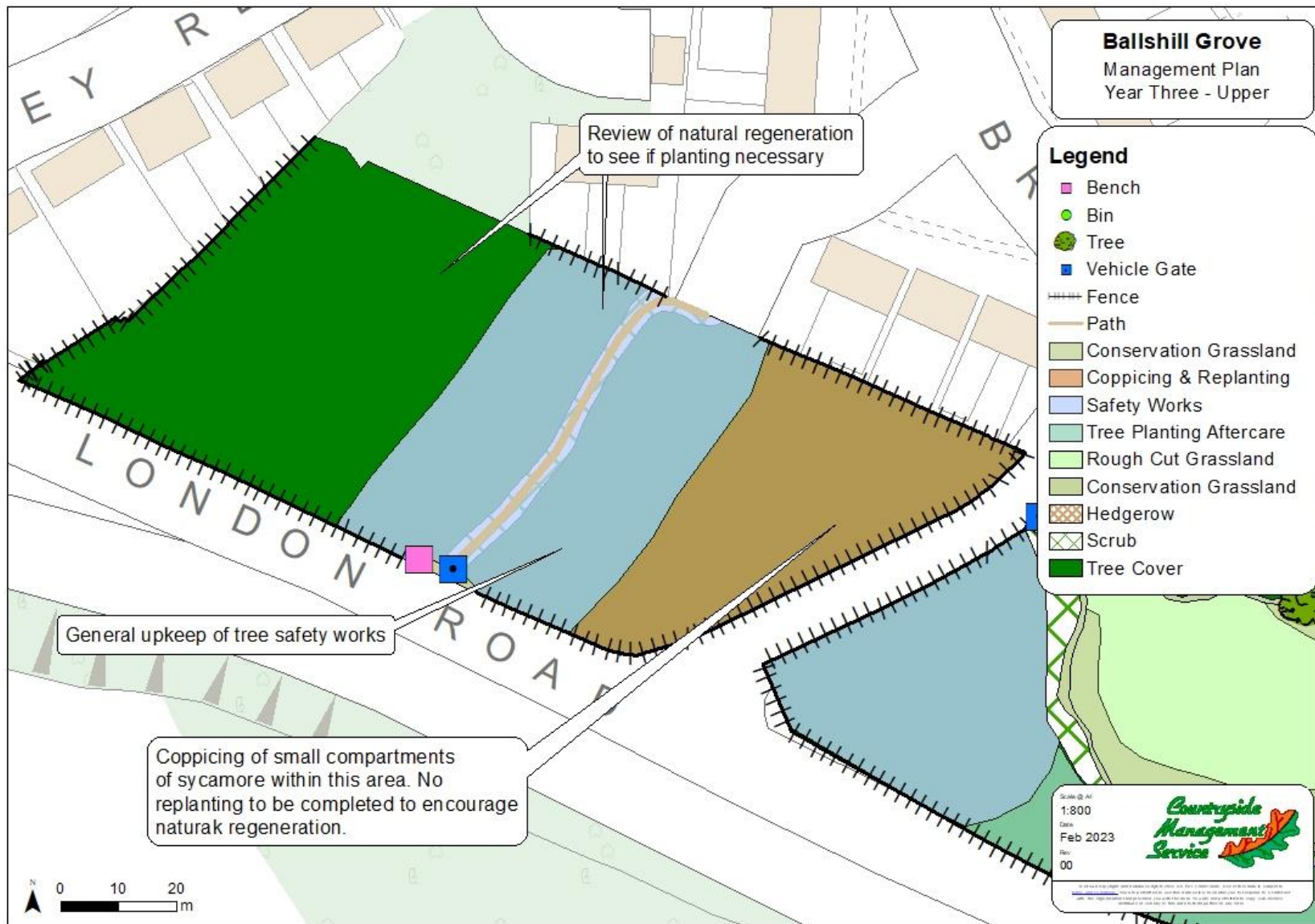


Figure 14 Action Plan Map Year 3 Upper

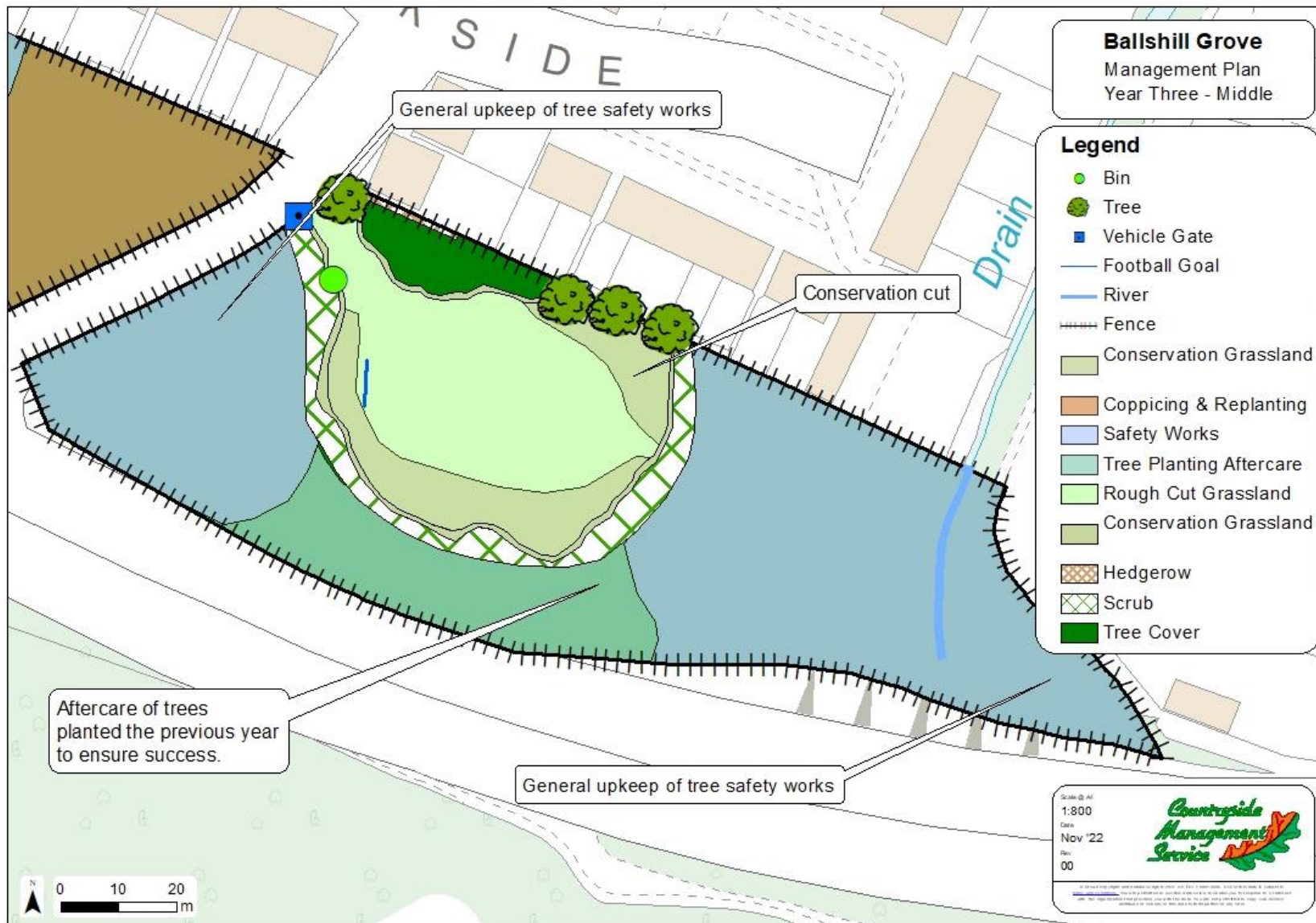


Figure 15 Action Plan Map Year 3 Middle

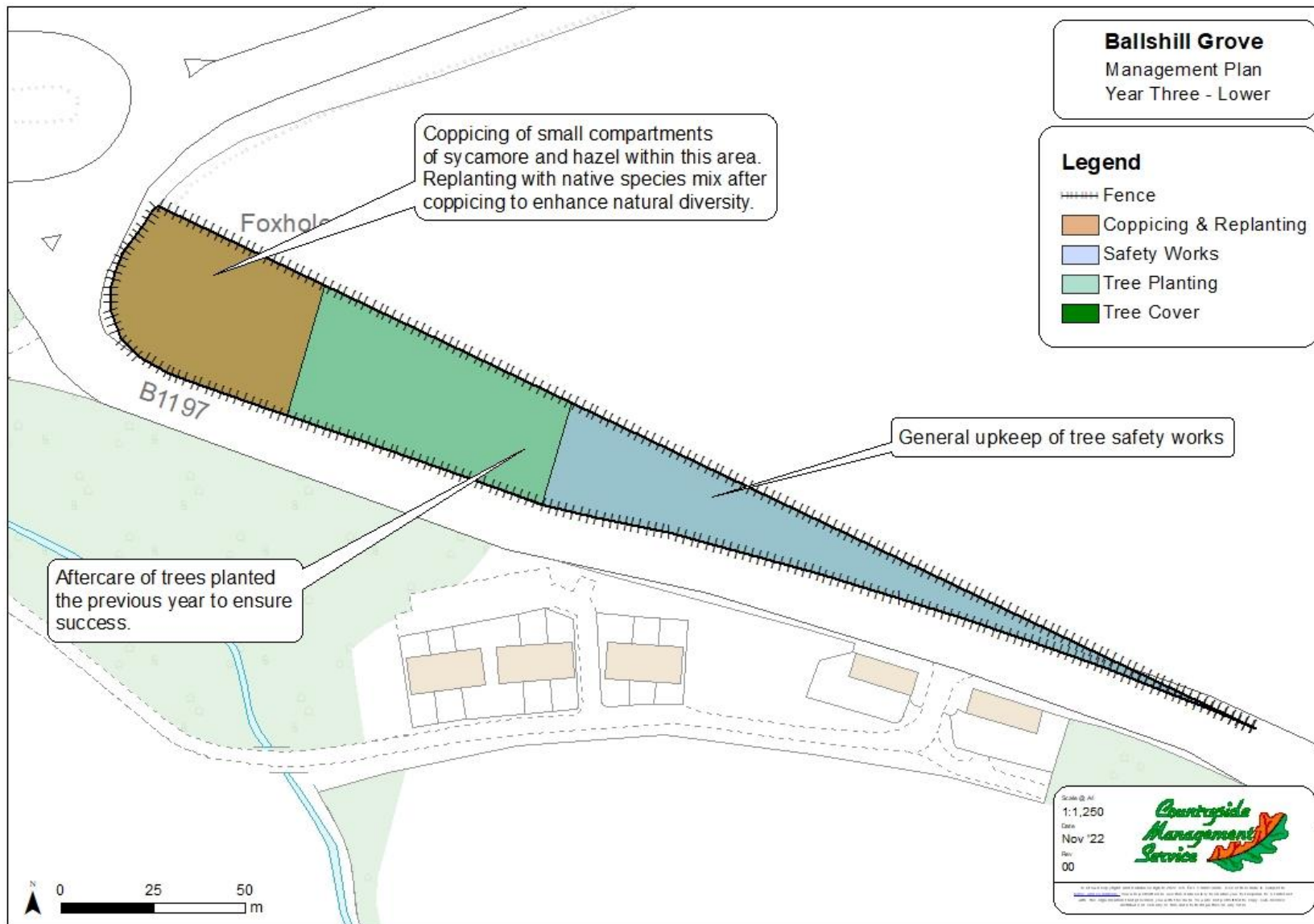


Figure 16 Action Plan Map Year 3 Lower



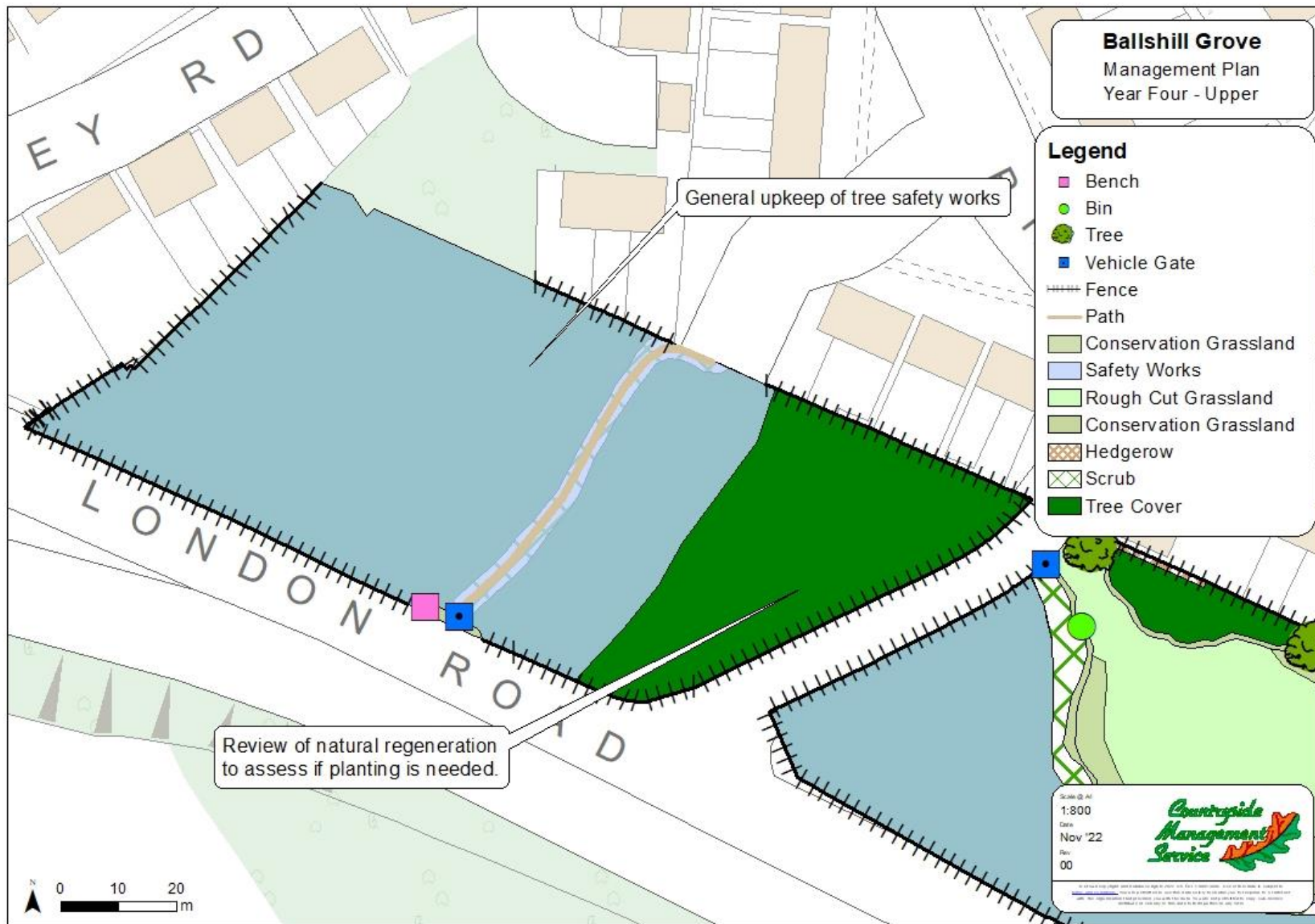


Figure 17 Action Plan Map Year 4 Upper



Figure 18 Action Plan Map Year 4 Middle

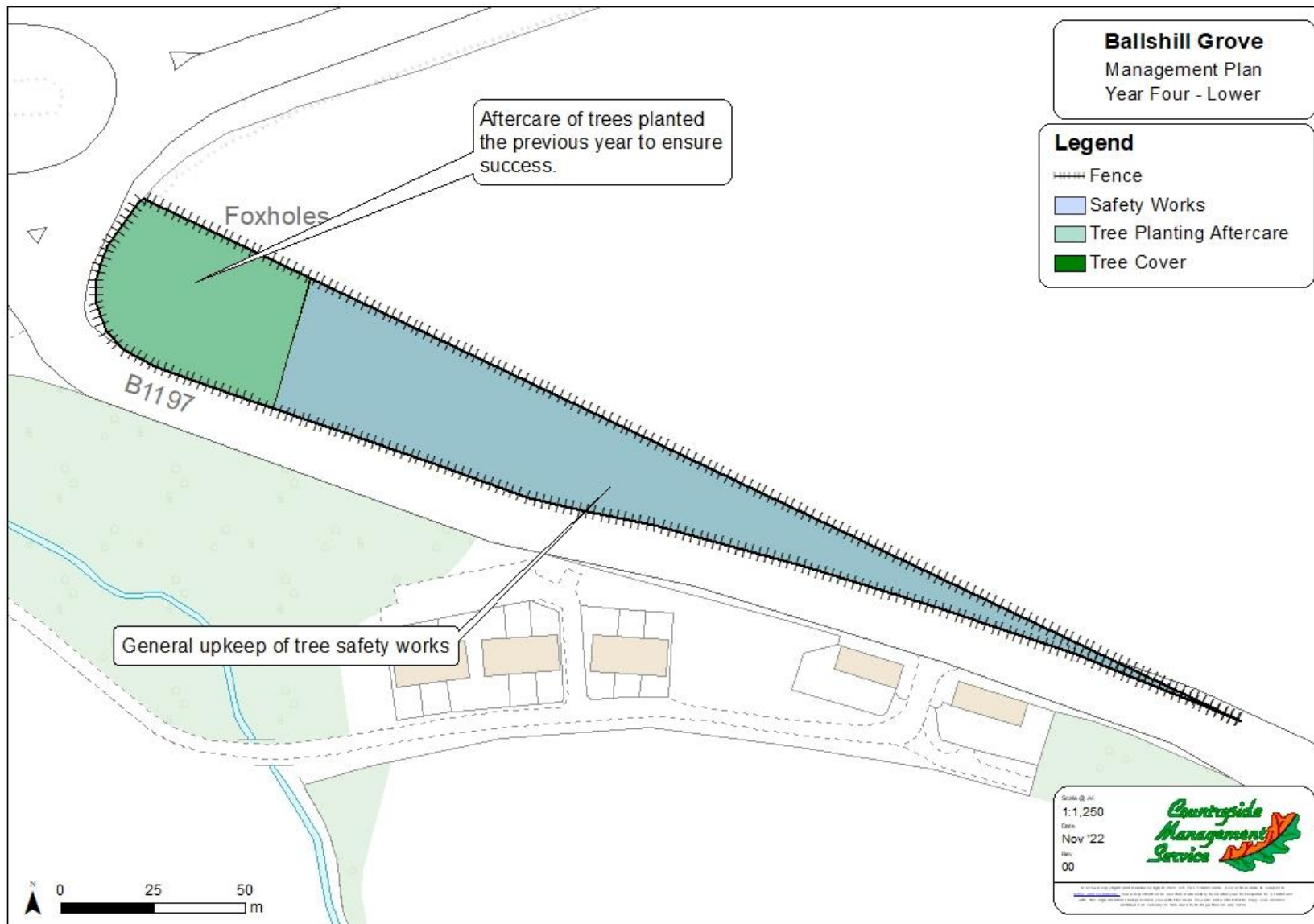


Figure 19 Action Plan Map Year 4 Lower

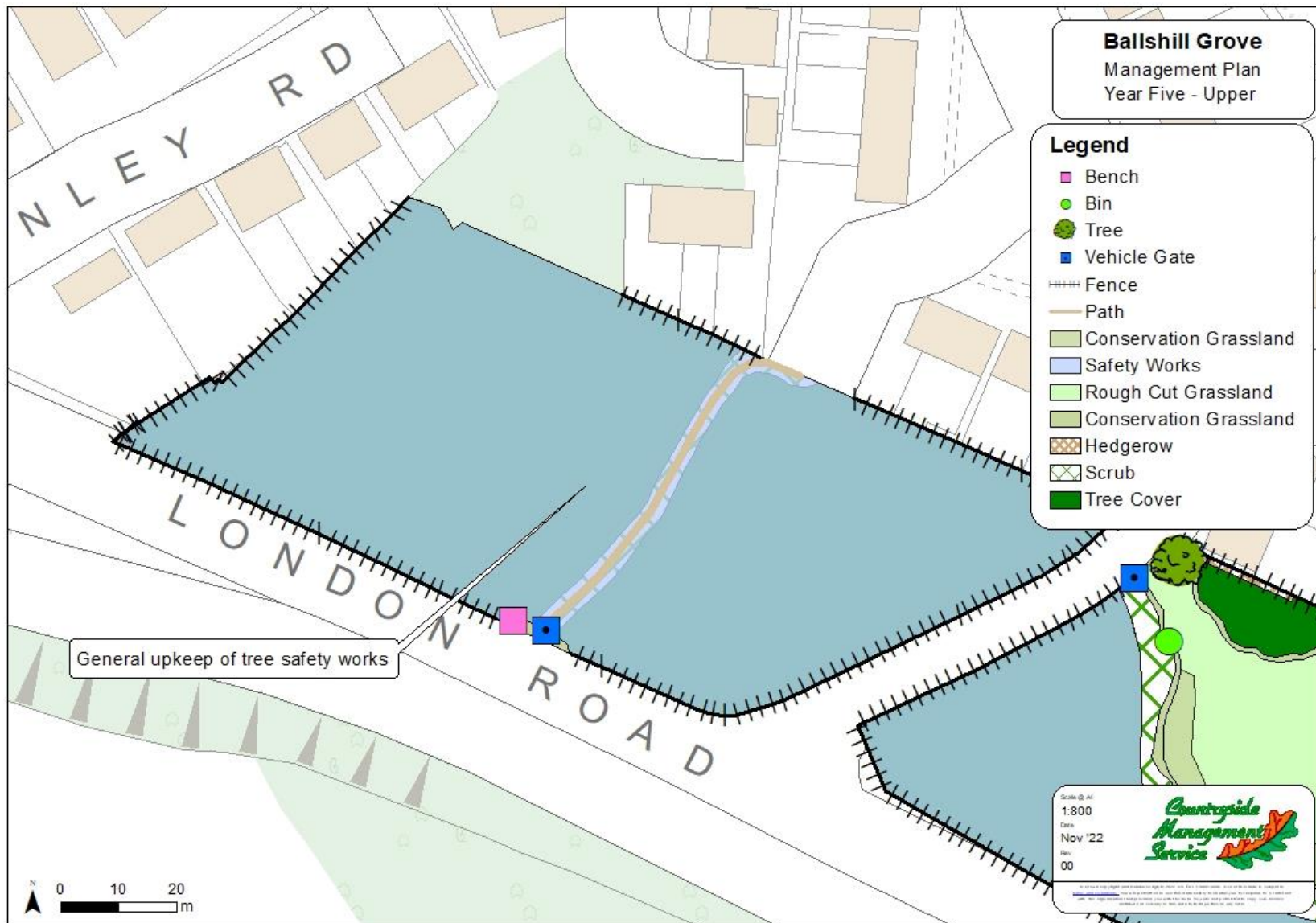


Figure 20 Action Plan Map Year 5 Upper

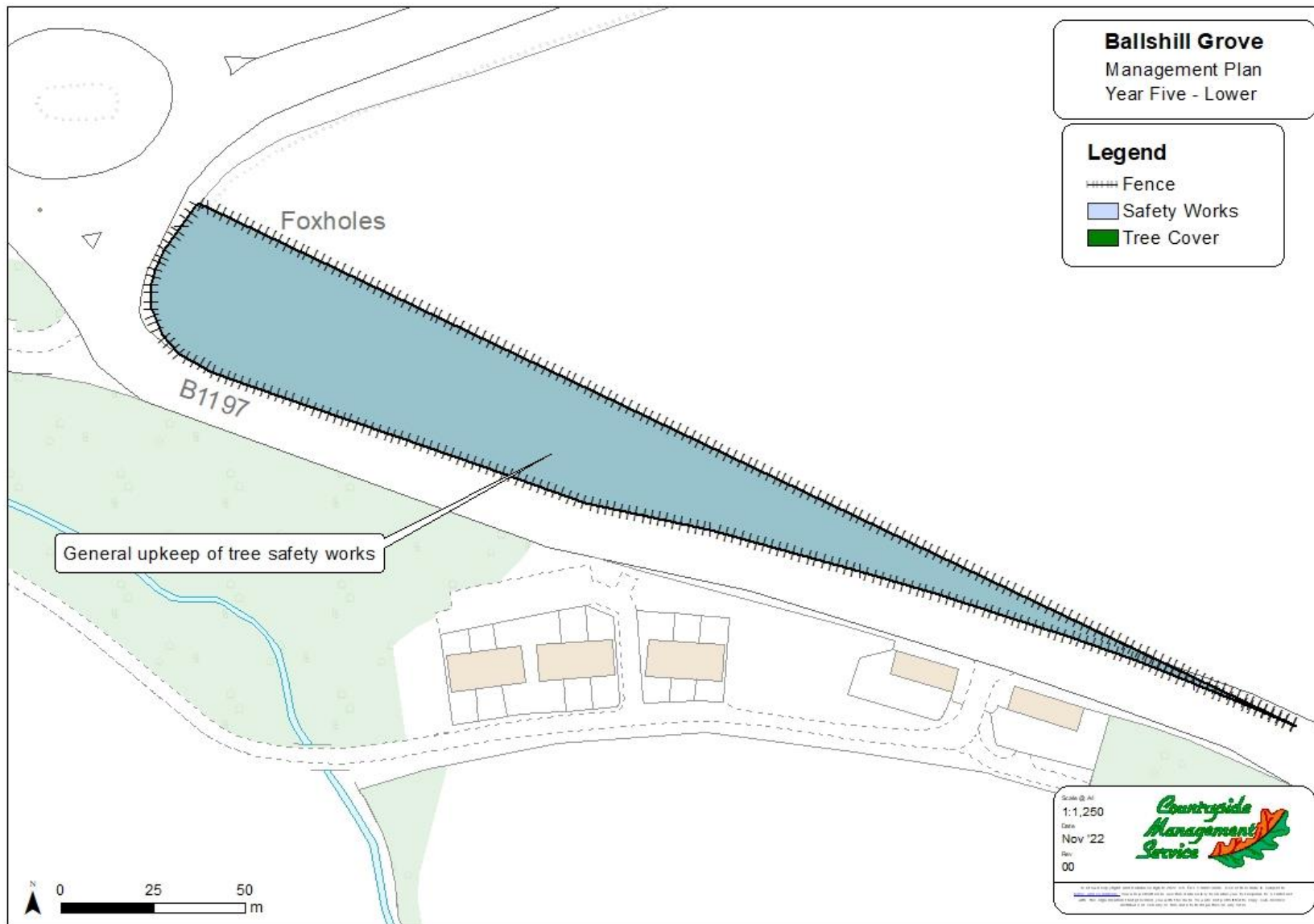


Figure 21 Action Plan Map Year 5 Lower

## 6.0 SPECIFICATIONS

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### 6.1 **E1: Carry out the woodland management of coppicing in all three areas of the site to create a healthier, more diverse woodland.**

- a) Coppicing work to only to be completed in the marked area on the map each year.
- b) Coppicing to include all the sycamore and/or hawthorn in the marked area to allow it to regrow as an understory element and support the widening of rides in the area.
- c) It should be coppiced at no more than 12 inches high, where feasible, to encourage regrowth at an understory level.
- d) The coppicing operation will require high quality, clean coppice cuts to provide maximum survival and regrowth, as well as the protection of soils, standard trees, and other features of the site during operations.

### 6.2 **E2: Planting of hedgerow along the southern border of the middle site.**

- a) Planting of a native mix at 4 per linear metre, where 50% minimum should be hawthorn.
- b) Plants should be protected using spiral guards and bamboo canes, removed after 3 years.
- c) Apply loose organic mulch at least 10cm thick for the first three years of growth.
- d) Once planted prune each plant to around 15cms to promote the growth of lateral buds and produce dense, bushy growth.

### 6.3 **E4: Planting of native trees in the woodland areas to support wildlife and enhance the diversity of these woodlands.**

- a) Species selection of a mixture of native species such as oak, birch, and hornbeam.
- b) Once planted, trees should be protected with stakes and tree guards, to be removed after 3 years.
- c) Apply loose organic mulch at least 10cm thick for the first three years of growth.

## 7.0 ENGAGEMENT RESPONSES

Name	Organisation	Summary of Responses	Action
Ruth Wing	Local Resident	Concerned about impact of coppicing in middle site while woodland regenerates due to current trees helping to reduce pollution and noise.	Coppicing be done in compartments, so it is not all done at once.
		Concerned about movement of goal posts 6.5m forward into the field and its possible impact on the use of the field for community events – would prefer them to be moved ~3m.	Changed to 3m.
Pamela Murray	HCC Employee and Local Resident	Supportive of the plan	None needed.
Jo Phelps	Local Resident	Interested in planting fruit trees in the middle section – e.g., a couple of native crab-apple trees.	This was considered however unable to complete any planting within the grassed area of the middle section where this is in reference to.
Carly Fitzpatrick	Local Resident	Interested in the movement of the football goal posts – has bought a net for the posts and wants to attach it.	None needed.
		Wants to keep the grass short around the goal during the summer to enable continual play.	Mowing schedule at current deemed most appropriate for the site in regard to site characteristics and budget.

		Requests a bench.	Considered but unable to go forward with due to concerns regarding attraction of antisocial behaviour.
Sophia Bidwell	Local Resident	Requests the site is left as it is.	Site needs intervention to ensure it remains a healthy site that has positive benefits for people and the environment.
		Would like to see it maintained and the grass cut more regularly to allow children to play safely.	Mowing schedule at current deemed most appropriate for the site in regard to site characteristics and budget.
Melanie Hughes	Local Resident	Supportive of the proposals.	None needed.
		Requests an increased mowing frequency to be included in the plan – states that if a regular timetable to cut the field is not part of the new proposal it would be a waste of time and effort to put the plan into action.	Mowing schedule at current deemed most appropriate for the site in regard to site characteristics and budget.
Paul Hoy	Rural Estates Supervisor	Wanted to add in reference to annual work along chain link fence leading into Brookside – strimming and hedge cutting to prevent vegetation encroaching.	Included as part of 'minor tree and shrub maintenance' in annual tasks.



		<p>Addition of periwinkle management and control in middle site and discouragement of garden waste disposal on site.</p>	<p>Included as part of 'minor tree and shrub maintenance' in annual tasks.</p> <p>Added discouragement of garden waste disposal to objectives.</p>
		<p>Requested addition of the need to crown lift some trees on the perimeter of the trees.</p>	<p>Added into Year 1.</p>