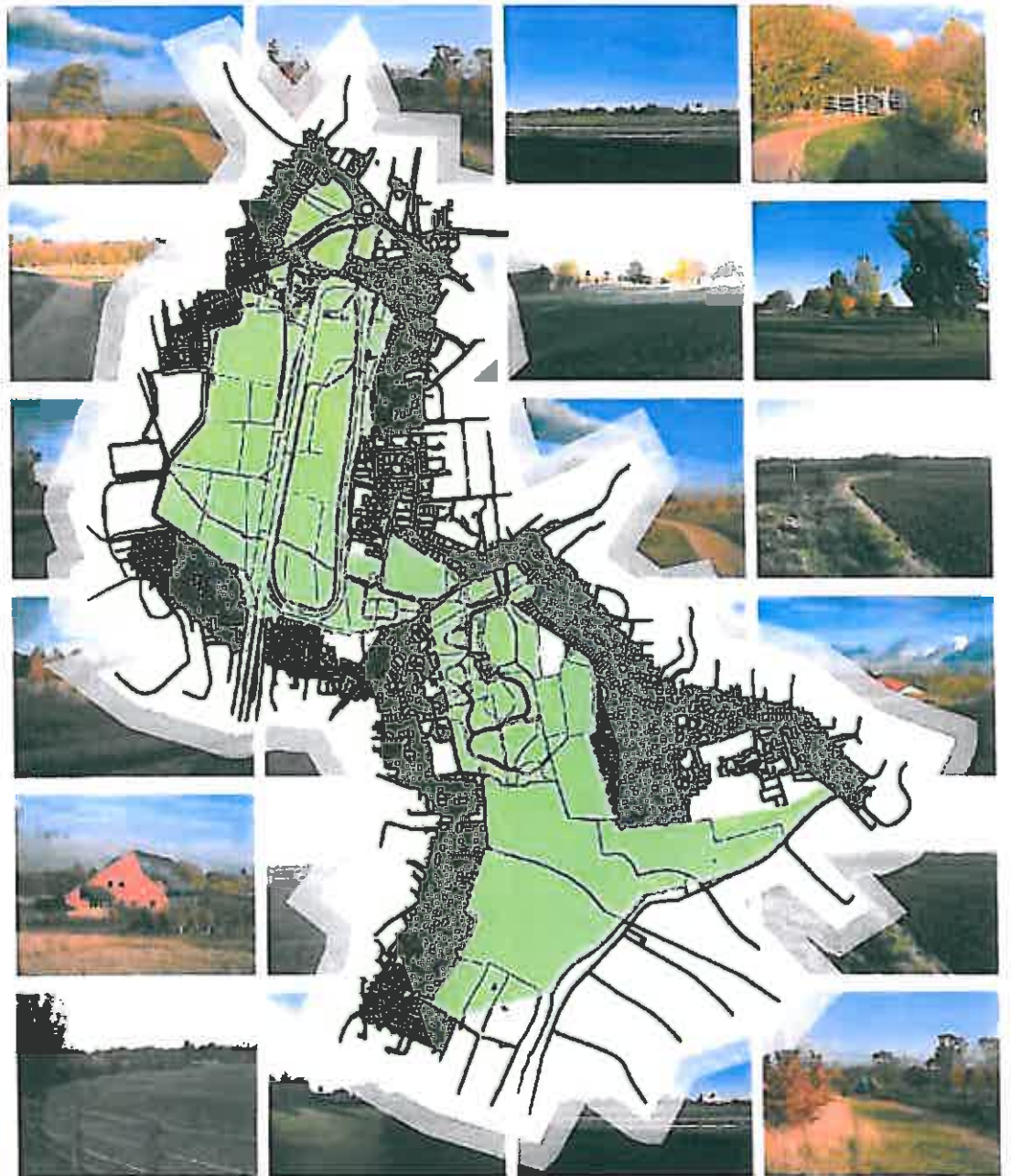


Management Strategy





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the landscape character, recreational use, land use and ecology of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge. The study area comprises largely of recreational or amenity land, for the most part intensively managed, but with a large area of arable farmland in the southern portion of the wedge.

The Green Wedge area is valued by local people in terms of its use, and at particular points or at certain times is well used. However, as a whole it is not perceived as having a coherent identity and does not meet its potential.

This study divides the area into three 'local landscape character areas'. These fall into two broad groups; an area to the north which is relatively flat, associated with the urban environment and organised recreational pursuits and two areas to the south which lie on rising ground to a prominent ridge line, associated with rural pursuits and economy. Pressures on each set of character areas are different however proximity to the urban environment is a common issue.

Brocks Hill Country Park in the centre of the Green Wedge area is a considerable asset of the wedge, providing both a centre for recreation and education. Surrounding schools offer a significant and valuable link to the wedge however their interaction is limited to Brocks Hill.

Accessibility and bio-diversity do not currently meet their potential. The enhancement of the wedge for these items is therefore the main issue that needs to be tackled. Across the wedge access is an important issue to be addressed. Links through and beyond this area are inadequate and those that do exist are poorly signed. Intensive management regimes in the golf course, racecourse and farmland etc limit the wedges biodiversity potential and ecological value.

At a local landscape character area level, initiatives should be based on good examples of landscape management practice and the capacity for new initiatives to be delivered. It is imperative when considering any initiative to ensure that it conserves and enhances the local character and does not substantially alter or detract from it.

Any strategy for overall land management would be greatly assisted in being put into practice, by making connections with people, physical connections within the landscape and connections over time through a programme of monitoring and review.

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1a: INTRODUCTION

The Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project represents a partnership that aims to improve access for all, enhance the environment, improve people's awareness and encourage community participation in the countryside around Leicester.

Leicestershire County, and several District and Borough Councils fund the Stepping Stones Project. The project covers a number of Green Wedge areas, identified within relevant District and Borough Local Plans and the County Structure Plan. The Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge is one of these areas. It is the intention of the Stepping Stones Project to prepare management plans for all the Green Wedges.

Whilst the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project were represented on the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Steering Group, the actual appointment of munro+whitten ltd and Loughborough Ecologists to carry out a study of the Green Wedge, was determined by Oadby & Wigston Borough Council, with funding provided by the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project.

The purpose of the study is to formulate an overall strategy, which can be adopted by Oadby & Wigston Borough Council and other stakeholders, and used to guide future management of the wedge.

The work was carried out between August and December 2003, with the fieldwork being completed from September to November 2003.

A number of meetings were held with the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy Group to guide the process and to ensure that the resulting report was of a form and with a content that would be of most use to the maximum number of stakeholders.

The report includes a number of pull out maps, which can be referred to while reading text on different pages.

The study and report have been presented in a form that is deliberately rich in graphics. It is believed that this approach is most appropriate for a study of this kind, reflecting both the nature of the subjects and the importance of accessibility to a general readership.



VIEWS OF THE WEDGE GALLERY 1 – refer to pull out plan page 5

METHODOLOGY

1b: GENERAL APPROACH

A desk-based study was carried out to gather background information on landscape, access, local plan designations, wildlife, Countryside Stewardship and archaeological records etc. This information was received either from the Stepping Stones Project Officer, Local Authority (Leicestershire County Council or Oadby & Wigston Borough Council) sources or other relevant bodies such as DEFRA and the Environment Agency. This was then collated into the report.

Landscape

For the landscape character field assessment, the study area was divided into two parts north and south of Oadby Road. Permissions were sought for access into privately owned areas, which were then walked through and photographed. Any area where permission was not given or was unable to be obtained was visually assessed from neighbouring accessible routes and/or areas. At the same time as recording the landscape character, and taking photographs, the condition of access routes was also recorded.

Talking to people when carrying out fieldwork, as well as observing behaviour, was seen as an important means of assessing use and also perceptions towards the landscape. Fieldworkers were therefore encouraged to talk to members of the public whenever possible and conversations were noted on survey sheets. Numbers of people varied largely according to the time of day or day of the week.

Landscape character assessment was carried out based on the Countryside Agency's 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (April 2002)'. This format was modified to make the survey form more suitable to the relatively small scale and detailed nature of this study. Space for recording path condition and other access information was also included.

The report contains an overall analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of the landscape character of the wedge as a whole, together with SWOT analyses for each of the local landscape character areas. Following the SWOT analyses, an overall management strategy for the study area was formulated. This was then refined to address each local landscape character area.



VIEWS OF THE WEDGE GALLERY 2 – refer to pull out plan page 5



Ecology

Field ecologists surveyed the whole extent of accessible land within the study area in the period 27 October to 5 November 2003. Particular landscape features, such as field boundaries and mature trees were noted and land use patterns were recorded. Note was made of features of nature conservation interest including wildlife corridors.

Species rich hedges are noted in the strategy. For the purposes of this strategy species rich hedgerow includes hedgerows that have in their total length more than six native woody species. This definition has been adopted not only because of the importance of hedgerows for a variety of wildlife but also because of their role as wildlife corridors and their local importance in a relatively small area such as the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge. The importance of different types of hedgerows is recognised by the review of The Hedgerow Regulations 1997. This and other habitats and the species they support in Oadby and Wigston Borough is highlighted in the Borough's Biodiversity Action Plan.

Mature trees have been noted in the strategy. For the purposes of this strategy mature trees include those that by their general stature appeared to be mature as well as those showing obvious signs of ageing such as hollows or rotting. Although the majority of mature trees noted are native species some exotic species are also included.

Oadby & Wigston Borough Council has provided location details of non statutory sites and the Leicestershire Environmental Resources Centre provided details of species records for the non statutory sites.

Consultation

Oadby and Wigston Borough Council provided details of known land ownership. Telephone and written contact was made with landowners wherever possible to explain the purpose of the study and to obtain permission to access their land. Where permission was not available, in the southern part of the green wedge, the survey was carried out from publicly accessible points or routes.



VIEWS OF THE WEDGE GALLERY 3 – refer to pull out plan page 5

METHODOLOGY

Limitations

By far the greatest limitation to the field survey was the lack of certain key sources of information. Hydrological information concerning the Wash Brook was unavailable as this brook does not fall under the Environment Agency's jurisdiction and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council no longer keep drainage records. Certain Countryside Stewardship Grant documentation was confidential and as such this information is limited. Certain landowners did not respond to enquiries or refused permission to gain access to certain parts of the wedge with resulting gaps in the study area data.

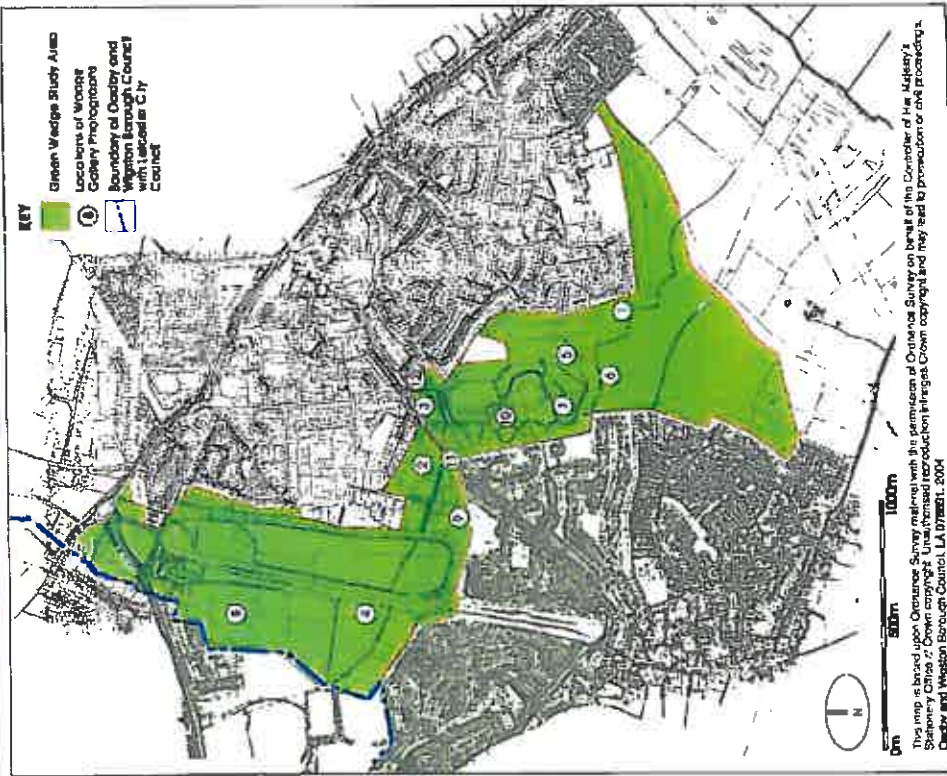
Mapping

All field data was collated and mapped using *VectorWorks* software on Apple Macintosh machines, to produce the results in either .jpeg or, if required, dxf data formats. All text is included in the Supplementary Information Compact Disk in a Microsoft Word format and is to be provided to Oadby & Wigston Borough Council.



VIEWS OF THE WEDGE GALLERY 4 – refer to pull out plan page 5

THE STUDY AREA



GALLERY PHOTOS

1. View southeast past housing into open countryside.
2. View northwest from Oadby Road across Leicester Tigers training ground.
3. View south from Oadby Road into Topps Park car park.
4. View south across wet grassland on Oadby golf course.
5. View north along track in Brocks Hill Country Park.
6. View south across farmland.
7. View of a semi adjacent footpath in Brocks Hill Country Park.
8. View south across Oadby golf course.
9. View west from Oadby Road into the allotments
10. View of carved pedestrian gate west of Brocks Hill Environment Centre.
11. View west along access road into the Oadby and Wigston civil amenity site.
12. View east across semi improved grassland towards the line of the Wash Brook.

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PART TWO – SURVEY: CONTENTS

[PLEASE NOTE: THE LANDUSE AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES PULL OUT PLAN ON PAGE 63 ACCOMPANIES PART 2b: ECOLOGICAL SECTION.]

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2a: PHYSICAL SURVEY

TOPOGRAPHY

The Green Wedge study area falls into two distinctive parts topographically. To the north of Oadby Road the landform is gently undulating. These undulations form a shallow valley from 75m at the lowest point in the south east of the area rising to 90m in the north and 85m in the south. The low ground here is associated with the wash brook corridor a fast flowing stream that flows east to west across the wedge.

In contrast land to the south of Oadby Road rises gradually southwards from 85m above sea level to a ridge of 115m approximately half way down this area. This high point is a strong ridgeline feature, which runs east to west across the wedge. To the south of this point the land begins to drop away again down to the line of a second brook called Black Well Syke, sitting 90m above sea level.

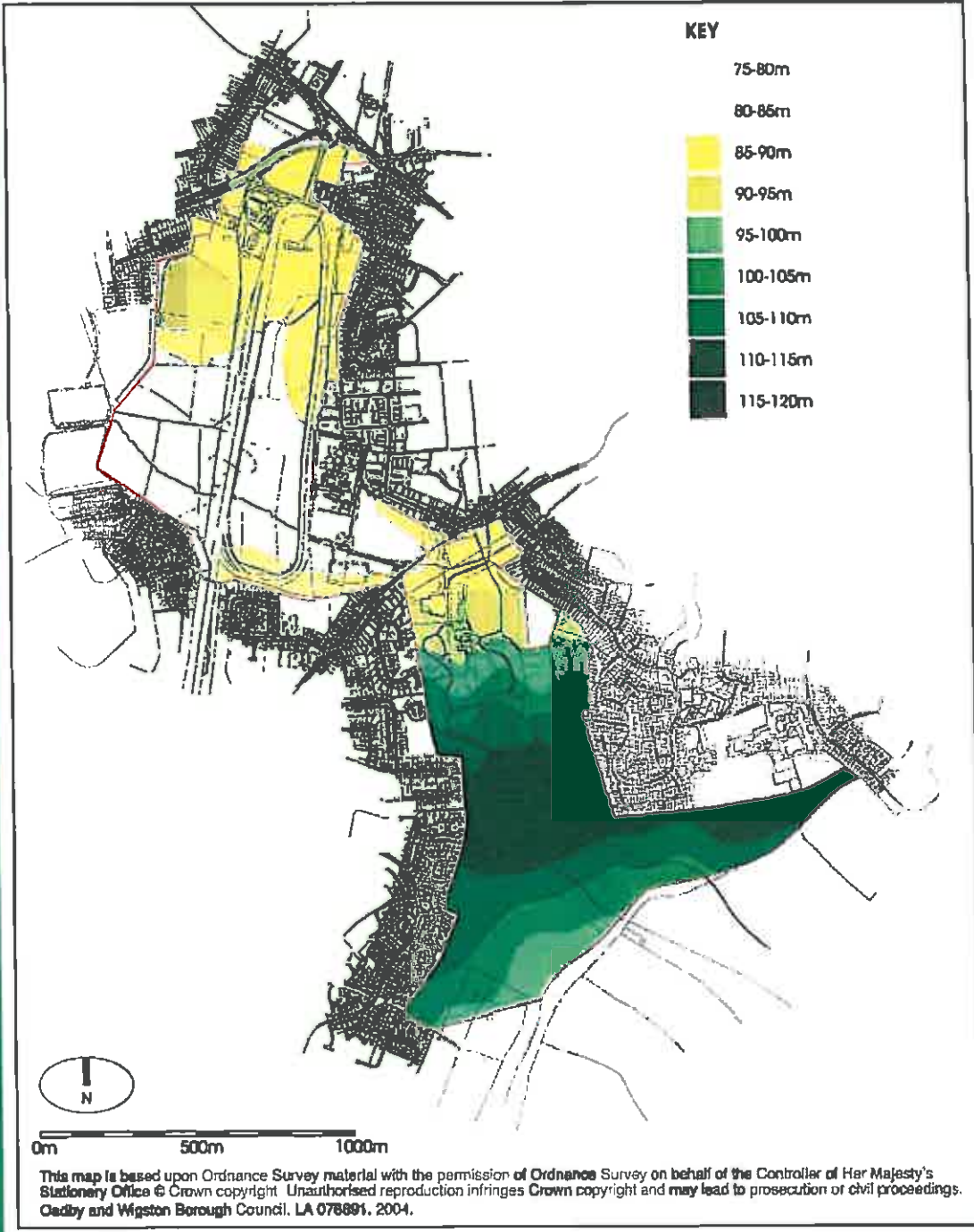
Views from the ridge are wide ranging encompassing the entire Green Wedge area and beyond into the built environment. Similarly views to the ridge from other parts of the Green Wedge are possible, amplified by a number of mature trees towards the ridge crest which act as focal points when viewed from some distance.

Views in the northern portion of the Green Wedge are much more limited. From the valley floor at 75m views are relatively restricted giving the area a strong sense of containment. Views from the higher ground in this area are extensive east to west providing a sense of the scale of the area. In contrast small fragmented lengths of hedgerow often interrupt views north to south.



OADBY & WIGSTON GREEN WEDGE

TWO





PHYSICAL SURVEY

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Solid Geology

The underlying rock within this study area consists almost entirely of clay, mudstones and limestone. With clay being the predominant geology to the south and limestone to the north.

Drift Geology

The majority of the area is covered with Glacial till which is chalky in places. There are smaller areas where no drift cover has been recorded.

Soils

The majority of the wedge area is unsurveyed, noted as mainly urban and industrial area on the soils of Midland and Western England map 1983. To the south of the wedge however the soils are recorded as a Ragdale soil. This type of soil belongs to the surface water gley soil type, which is characteristically seasonally waterlogged and slowly permeable. This soil can be both clayey and fine loamy over clayey soils with calcareous clayey soils on slopes.

PHYSICAL SURVEY

FLOOD RISK

The Wash Brook

There are three notable watercourses in the Green Wedge. The largest of the three is the Wash Brook, which flows east to west across the wedge entering the area from the south side of Oadby Road.

The brook emerges from a culvert on the wedge boundary with housing of Oadby. It then flows west along a densely vegetated channel merging with a secondary arm that flows south past Lucas Marsh from its origin at a rising spring to meet the brook.

The brook continues flowing for a short stretch along a well vegetated channel as it crosses underneath Oadby Road and flows past the allotments. The brook then crosses through the Racecourse and the golf course and on through the wedge boundary into Knighton Park. In contrast along this stretch there is limited bank side vegetation as mowing regimes keep tall grasses and woody vegetation down to a minimum.

Hydrological information concerning the Wash Brook was unavailable, as this brook does not fall under the Environment Agencies jurisdiction and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council no longer keep drainage records. We know through consultation with landowners that this is a critical watercourse* and is subject to levels of flooding at peak flow. As no records are available the full extent of any flood risk is unknown.

Severn Trent Water does have a nearby pumping station and may possibly undertake a degree of maintenance along the brook to coincide with pumping operations.

Other water corridors

There are two other streams in the Green Wedge. The first is a small, narrow stretch of flowing water that crosses the Triangle, also known as Racecourse Meadow, north of Palmerston Way. Although little more than a ditch it flows through an area of ecological value and as such ought to be assessed in more detail, although unlikely to cause a flood risk.

The second watercourse called Black Well Syke, runs along the southern boundary of the wedge before leaving the boundary and flowing directly south through open countryside. As with the two other water corridors there are no records and as such a flood assessment cannot be undertaken.

* 'critical watercourse' is an Environment Agency waterway classification.



2b: ECOLOGICAL SURVEY

AN OVERVIEW

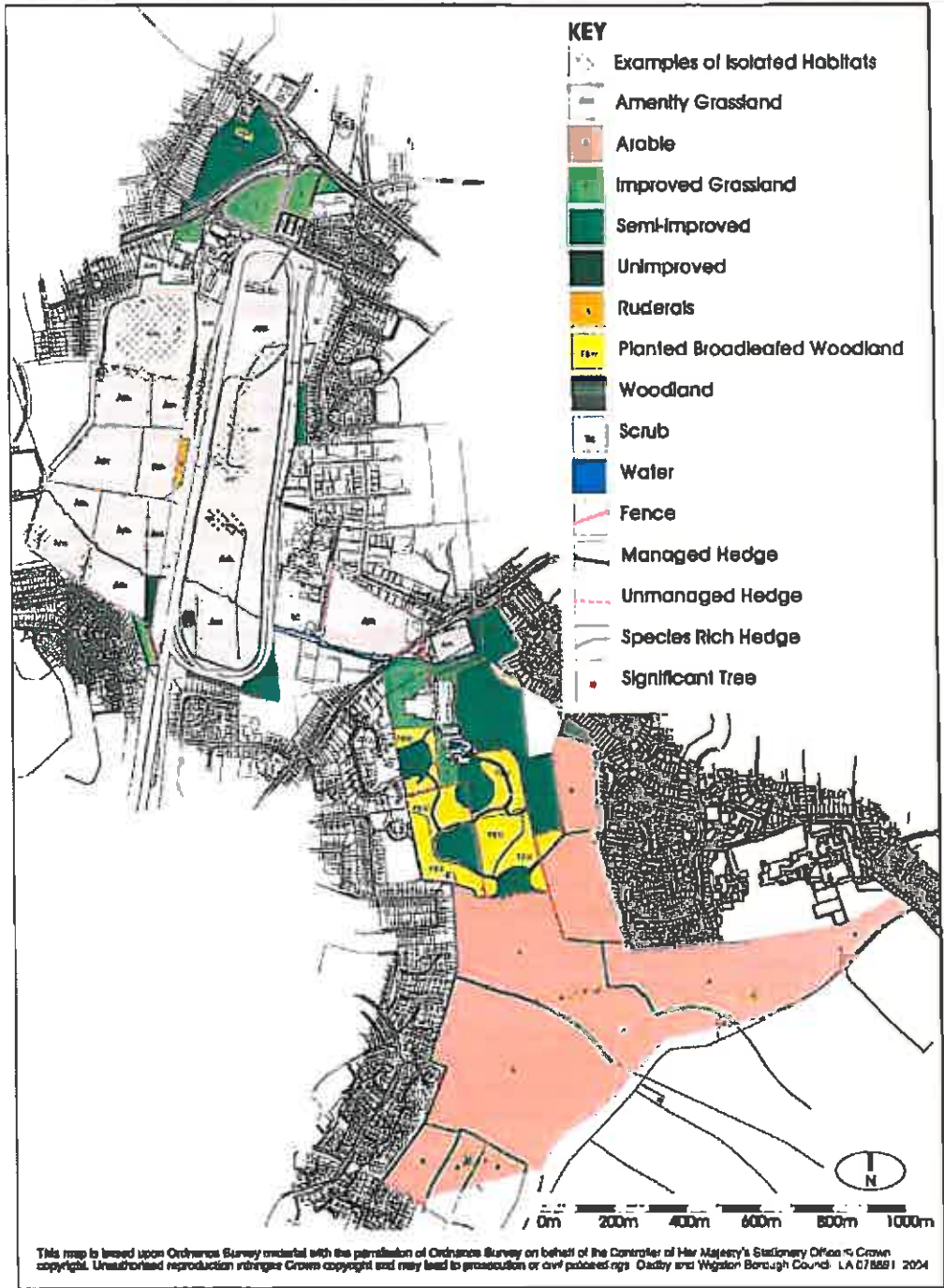
The Green Wedge can be geographically divided into three main habitats of: amenity grassland on the golf course and Racecourse to the north, young woodland at Brocks Hill Country Park in the centre and arable fields to the south. In the north and centre there are other habitats including species rich hedgerows, mature trees, semi improved grassland and the wildlife corridor of the Wash Brook. The latter provides a major ecological link between the northern and central sections of the Green Wedge.

Records from the Leicestershire Environmental Resources Centre show that there are records for badger and the field survey confirmed that they are well established in the northern part of the Green Wedge. An old record exists for grass snake and there is a more recent record for water vole at Lucas' Marsh. The field survey did not find any obvious evidence of the presence of water vole on the Wash Brook or other watercourses but did find evidence of mink, one possible explanation for their absence. Bats have been recorded in the vicinity of the Green Wedge and it is highly likely that they feed over the golf course, Racecourse and Brocks Hill Country Park.

Brocks Hill Country Park has a variety of habitats many of which are still comparatively young. With time and appropriate management there is every expectation that the nature conservation value of the Country Park will increase. By contrast, the overriding impression is that the northern and southern sections of the Green Wedge are failing to meet their potential for wildlife interest. Intensive management of the golf course and Racecourse has diminished its value for wildlife. Small pockets of potentially more interesting habitat such as trees, scrub and hedgerows are isolated from one another further reducing their value (please refer to plan opposite). More sympathetic management of the Wash Brook corridor would considerably improve its value to wildlife.

The arable fields to the south are also intensively managed to the detriment of wildlife. The planting of more connecting hedges, the creation of field margins and appropriate management of Black Well Syke on the southern boundary would greatly improve the nature conservation interest of this part of the Green Wedge.

A number of birds were recorded during the field surveys. The lateness of the season and the fact that habitat such as the arable fields had just been ploughed probably account for the fact that most of them were common species. Species of particular interest have been noted in the text.





ECOLOGICAL SURVEY

LANDUSE AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES SURVEY

The northern area of the Green Wedge is dominated by the large open expanses of Oadby golf course and Leicester Racecourse. Both courses are heavily managed with most of the grounds comprising of regularly mown amenity grassland. The golf course has scattered clumps of planted trees and ornamental planting with remnant hedges and a species rich hedgerow on the boundary with Knighton Park. In the south eastern corner of the course there is an area of important wet grassland habitat. This rank wet grassland is dominated by tufted hair-grass. A diverse wetland flora has been recorded at this site in the past. Snipe was flushed from this site during the field survey.

The Racecourse also has remnant hedges and two areas of woodland and scrub in the south and eastern part of the site. Many of the trees and scrub are grown to provide material for horse jumps on the Racecourse. There are numerous signs of badger activity on the Racecourse. The Racecourse also owns land in the north of the green wedge including the Triangle or Racecourse Meadow as its otherwise known. This small area of land has been documented as ecologically significant. Information supplied by Oadby and Wigston Borough Council indicates that the Triangle has an area of species rich ridge and furrow grassland with seasonally wet areas.

The Triangle also has a species rich hedge with mature trees backing onto houses on the western boundary and species rich roadside planting. A hedgerow with mature trees divides the Triangle in two. A great spotted woodpecker was recorded in one of the trees.

A small polluted watercourse crosses the northern part of the Triangle. A snipe was recorded here during the field survey. Nearby is a silver birch plantation used to provide material for horse jumps. It is understood that further planting is being considered. There is an old record for grass snake on this site.

The Wash Brook runs west through the Racecourse and golf course and into Knighton Park. It is a recognised Wildlife Corridor (O&W BAP) with a fairly diverse aquatic flora as it flows through the golf course. Snipe were flushed on several occasions from the brook. The Wash Brook receives a discharge from the sewage treatment works to the east of the Racecourse.

In the south east corner of this character area the Wash Brook flows past allotments, The Tigers training ground, the civic amenity site and an area of tall elder scrub. The brook at this point is clear, very shaded as it passes the civic amenity site but more open near to Oadby Road. A grey wagtail was recorded on this stretch of the brook.

South of Oadby Road the Green Wedge is composed predominately of Brocks Hill Country Park and arable farmland. The Wash Brook east of the Country Park is comprised of two arms both heavily shaded by tall trees. A woodcock was flushed from the brook during the field survey.