Balance Power Project Ltd

Land at Draycott Cross Road, Cheadle

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN ASSESSMENT

May 2023

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The following report provides details of a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment undertaken by FPCR Environment and Design Ltd. on behalf of Balance Power Project Ltd, for a proposed development on land at Draycott Cross Road, Cheadle, Staffordshire (herein referred to as 'the Site') (central OS grid reference: SJ 993 425).

Site Location and Context

1.1 The Site (approximately 1.8 ha) comprises part of an improved grassland field compartment with other habitats present on-site comprising a hedgerow, mature trees, a dry ditch and individual shrub specimens.

1.2 The Site is located on the western periphery of Cheadle, Staffordshire with industrial development lying to the east, south-west and south of the site with coniferous plantation woodland located to the north.

Site Proposals

1.3 The proposals for the Site comprise a battery storage facility with associated infrastructure and areas of green infrastructure.

Aims and Objectives

1.4 This BNG Assessment is broadly based on the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) guidance[1]. The scope and objectives of this report are to:

- Summarise the results of the baseline UKHab survey undertaken on the Site and to present the results of habitat condition assessment surveys following Natural England's Biodiversity Metric 4.0 Technical Guidance
- Provide an overview of the proposed habitats following completion of the scheme
- Present the results of Natural England's Biodiversity Metric 4.0 assessment completed for the proposals
- Assess the feasibility of the proposals to achieve a net gain in biodiversity through Natural England's Biodiversity Metric 4.0
- Recommendations for the proposals to maximise their biodiversity potential

1.5 This report provides only a summary description of the habitat baseline and should be read in conjunction with the Ecological Appraisal (FPCR, 2023[2]) completed for the Site which contains full details of the habitat survey results.

Legislative and Policy Context

1.6 The UK Government, as signatory to the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity, is committed to conserving and enhancing biodiversity. This commitment is further enforced in the Natural

[1] CIEEM (2021) Biodiversity Net Gain Report and Audit Templates Chartered institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester, UK.
[2] FPCR, 2023. Land off Draycott Cross Road, Cheadle. Ecological Appraisal

Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006 and the Natural Environment White Paper (June 2011).

1.7 Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) seeks to embed a 'net environmental gain' principle for development to deliver environmental improvements locally and nationally. Current policy is that the planning system should provide biodiversity net gains where possible; however, this is moving towards a mandatory requirement.

The Environment Act

1.8 The Environment Act 2021 came into force on 9th November 2021. Of particular relevance is the requirement for all developments subject to the Town and Country Planning Act to provide an at least 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG), as calculated using a Biodiversity Metric and a Biodiversity Gain Plan, with habitat used for net gain to be secured for a minimum of 30 years. Delivery of BNG may be on site, off-site or undertaken using statutory biodiversity credits. The requirement for BNG does not over-ride the need to apply the mitigation hierarchy (avoidance, mitigation and compensation) when considering biodiversity assets and their loss and does not change existing environmental and wildlife legal protection.

1.9 Whilst the Act mandates a 10% BNG delivery and for this to be a condition of planning permissions (Part 6 section 98 and Schedule 14 part 1), section 147 (3) states that this will only come into force once the secondary legislation is in place to support this requirement. Therefore, there is a transition period (the length of which is not defined but anticipated as being around 2 years) until the mandated 10% is required under law (expected November 2023).

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

1.10 The NPPF (2021) in particular seeks to ensure that the planning system contributes to and enhances the natural and local environment, protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity by:

'174. d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;

179. b) 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.'

Measurable Net Gain

1.11 A key point in the current legislative/policy context is that the term "measurable net gain" is not defined within the NPPF. Additionally, this term currently has no agreed definition in local or UK policy. Whilst a figure of 10% is widely viewed as best practice, it currently has no adopted policy support at either a local or national level.

Local Planning Policy

1.12 The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted 2020) includes the following policies of relevance:

'Policy NE1: Biodiversity and Geological Resources

The biodiversity and geological resources of the District and neighbouring areas will be conserved and enhanced by positive management and strict control of development (and having regard to relevant ecological evidence) by:

1. By ensuring all development schemes have regard to the surveys and actions recommended by the Council's Extended Phase 1 Habitat Surveys and Local Wildlife Assessment, and include measures for protection and enhancement of site biodiversity and protection of any geodiversity as appropriate.

2. Resisting any proposed development that could have an adverse effect on the integrity of an International site (or successor designation) alone or in combination with other plans or projects unless it can be demonstrated that the legislative provisions to protect such sites can be fully met. Any development with a potential to adversely affect a European site/s through construction activities should ensure that Ciria construction guidelines are followed including environmental good practice on control of dust and water pollution.

3. The Council will not normally permit any development proposal which would directly or indirectly (either individually or in combination with other developments) have an adverse effect on a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Where an adverse effect on the site's notified special interest features is likely, an exception should only be made where the benefits of the development, at this site, clearly outweigh both the impacts that it is likely to have on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

4. Conserving, and enhancing regional and locally designated sites. The Council will not permit any development proposal which would directly or indirectly result in significant harm to geological and biodiversity conservation interests, unless it can be demonstrated that:

a) there is no appropriate alternative site available; and

b) all statutory and regulatory requirements relating to any such proposal have been satisfied; and

c) appropriate conservation and mitigation measures are provided; or if it is demonstrated that this is not possible

d) the need for, and benefit of, the development is demonstrated to clearly outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site and compensatory measures are implemented.

5. Expecting all development where possible seeks to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In circumstances where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable, developers will be required to ensure that impacts are appropriately mitigated, with suitable compensation September 2020 119 Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan - Adopted measures towards loss of habitat used only as a last resort where there is no alternative. Where any mitigation and compensation measures are required, they should be appropriately scheduled and managed according to the nature, size and scale of the development so as to minimise impacts that may disturb protected or important habitats and species.

6. Supporting opportunities to improve site management and increase public access to wildlife sites including supporting the objectives of the Staffordshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

7. Ensuring development promotes the appropriate maintenance, enhancement, restoration and/or re-creation of biodiversity through its proposed nature, scale, location and design. The Staffordshire Moorlands Biodiversity Opportunity Map, in conjunction with the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan, will be used to guide biodiversity enhancement measures to be included in development proposals as appropriate to the nature and scale of development proposed and other environmental interest, in particular supporting opportunities to increase grassland and heathland habitats including supporting targets in the UK and Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

8. Protecting and enhancing habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity as identified in legislation, and recognising and implementing appropriate measures, including landscape-scale conservation management, to take account of the fact that the distribution of habitats and species will be affected by climate change.

9. Recognising the value of the natural environment for sport and leisure activities and the need to manage such activities to ensure there is no conflict.

10. Ensuring the provision and protection of green infrastructure networks in line with Policy C 3.

Policy NE2: Trees Woodland and Hedgerows

The Council will protect existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, in particular, ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows from loss or deterioration.

This will be achieved by:

- *Requiring that existing woodlands, healthy trees and hedgerows are retained and integrated within a proposed development unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh their loss;*
- *Requiring new developments to provide tree cover that secures a good level of sustainability through tree retention, planting and soft landscaping, including where possible the on site replacement of any trees that are removed with sufficient tree planting to replace or increase the canopy cover on-site as appropriate. Landscaping schemes will also be required to mitigate against negative landscape impact and complement the design of new development and make provision for future maintenance. Where it is not possible to secure this new or replacement tree planting within the site, the Council will work with applicants to ascertain if a suitable site(s) can be found off-site for replacement planting in the locality;*
- *Resisting development that would directly or indirectly damage existing ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows.*

The Council will refer to its adopted Tree Strategy in the consideration of proposals; and will in general seek to retain as many trees and as much hedgerow on site as possible.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 In order to compile existing baseline information, relevant ecological information was requested from both statutory and non-statutory nature conservation organisations including:

- Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website (www.magic.defra.gov.uk);
- Staffordshire Ecological Record (SER)

2.2 Further inspection of colour 1:25,000 OS base maps (www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk) and aerial photographs from Google Earth (www.maps.google.co.uk) was also undertaken in order to provide additional context and identify any features of potential importance for nature conservation in the wider countryside.

2.3 The search area for biodiversity information was related to the significance of sites and species and potential zones of influence, as follows:

- 5km around the application area for sites of International Importance (e.g. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Ramsar sites).
- 2km around the application area for sites of National or Regional Importance (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNR).
- 1km around the application site for sites of County Importance (e.g. Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) / Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and species records (e.g.: protected, Species of Principal Importance as listed on Schedule 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) or other notable species).

Baseline Habitat Assessment

2.4 The Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and habitat condition assessment survey was completed by Ben Carver, a principal ecologist with over eight years' experience in ecological consultancy who is experienced in botanical surveys having achieved a level 3 on the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland's (BSBI) Field Identification Skills Competency (FISC). These surveys were undertaken on 22nd August 2022.

2.5 The following documents were used to inform this assessment:

- Ecological Appraisal (FPCR 2023)
- Landscape Masterplan, drawing number 3302-01-L-01 (Axis 2023)

Natural England's The Biodiversity Metric 4.0

2.6 Natural England's published BNG metric is an MS Excel spreadsheet that is used to quantify the predicted net-change in biodiversity value (using a proxy "biodiversity unit" measurement) of a proposed development site before and after development. It treats the flat "Habitats" and linear features "Hedgerows" and "Rivers" separately, and is based on pre-determined values, along with published written guidance, set by a Natural England-led team of experts. Finally, individual trees are recorded on a count basis and their total 'area' is added on top of the total project area. As the most up-to-date version at the time of writing this report, Natural England's 4.0 metric has been used for this scheme.

2.7 In accordance with the 4.0 Metric User Guide, habitats have been defined under the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab). The detailed landscaping proposals for the Site were then uploaded into the QGIS template and the proposed habitats mapped and digitised to generate areas for each of the habitats proposed for retention, creation or enhancement.

2.8 These pre- and post-development habitat areas were then inputted into the 4.0 Metric Calculation tool. Pre-development habitats were grouped into their habitat type and condition based on the results of the UKHab and condition assessment surveys, while post-developments were classified into their UKHab type as identified through the classification of proposed habitats within landscaping plans into appropriate UKHab types and their target condition scores. The metric then provides a habitat distinctiveness score for each of the baseline and proposed habitats which are pre-assigned scores based on the habitat type.

2.9 The strategic significance of the habitats was also assessed for both the pre- and post-development habitats based on the location of the site, its proximity to existing areas of biodiversity interest and its setting within wider habitat corridors.

2.10 The metric then assigns a range of pre-assigned factors to each of the proposed habitats. These have been advised by subject knowledge experts and are universal multipliers generated by the metric itself for the following variables relevant to habitat creation, enhancement or restoration proposals:

- Difficult of creating or restoring/enhancing a habitat: This pre-assigned score is based on how difficult a particular habitat type is to create or restore/enhance
- Temporal risk: This is the 'time to target condition' for any particular habitat and determines how long a particular habitat type is likely to take to reach the target condition score assigned to it
- Spatial Risk: This score is based on the distance between the site of habitat loss and any habitats creation or enhancement proposals at any offsite offsetting solutions

2.11 Full details of the calculation methodology used is provided in Natural England's Biodiversity Metric 4.0 – User Guide.

Limitations

2.12 The UKHab map has been reproduced from detailed field notes and informed by aerial imagery, OS mapping and site maps provided by the client. The accuracy of this figure is therefore ultimately guided by the accuracy of these sources and can only be relied upon to a certain degree of resolution.

2.13 Natural ecological communities are susceptible to change; at times this change can be rapid as a result of internal and external environmental factors. The biodiversity offsetting calculations are based on ecological assessments of habitats carried out during 2022. As a result, changes which may affect the conclusions of this report may occur, if a prolonged period of time elapses prior to the commencement of the project.

2.14 No other limitations specific to this report influenced this assessment.

3.0 BASELINE CONDITIONS

Desktop Study

Statutory Designated Sites

3.1 The MAGIC website indicates that there are no internationally designated sites within 5km of the Site boundary and no nationally designated sites within 2km of the site boundary.

Non-statutory Designated Sites

3.2 There were two locally designated sites located within 1km of the Site boundary. Commonside Quarry Biodiversity Alert Site (BAS) was located approximately 525m south-west of the Site boundary and Huntley Wood Local Wildlife Site (LWS), located approximately 400m south of the Site boundary.

Strategic Significance

3.3 The Site is located within the 'Species-rich Farmland zone of the Staffordshire Moorlands Biodiversity Opportunity Map. The objectives within this area are:

- the maintenance, restoration and expansion of species-rich grasslands, particularly lowland meadows and also upland and lowland heathland.
- The other objective in the area is to increase connectivity of semi-natural habitats to create larger habitat complexes using priority habitats where appropriate.

3.4 Although semi-natural habitats, including species-rich grassland and scrub, are proposed within the landscaping plans, it is not considered appropriate to qualify these as being strategically important due to the very limited areas to be created. The existing grassland is not considered to be strategically important due to its species-poor nature and limited area. Consequently, the on-site habitats have all been categorised as '*Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy'* in both the baseline and proposed habitats.

Biodiversity Units

Habitats

3.5 The site comprised part of improved grassland field with individual shrub specimens, a hedgerow, mature trees and a dry ditch also present along the Site boundaries.

3.6 A summary of the baseline habitats and their conditions are provided in Table 1 below. The baseline Habitats are shown in Figure 1 while Figure 3 displays the baseline habitat distinctiveness and conditions.

Table 1: Biodiversity Units: Baseline On-Site Habitats

Habitat and Description	Area (ha)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Biodiversity Units
Modified grassland	1.8426	Low	Poor	3.69
Rural Tree	0.0733	Medium	Good	0.88

Habitat and Description	Area (ha)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Biodiversity Units
Total	**1.92** (1.84 excluding rural trees)	N/A	N/A	**4.56**

Please note there may be minor discrepancies (rounding errors) between the columns and the totals, however, the numbers duplicate those presented within the matrix calculator.

Hedgerows

3.7 The biodiversity units for the on-site hedgerow on the site has been calculated and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Biodiversity Units: Baseline On-Site Hedgerows

Habitat	Length (km)	Condition	Biodiversity Units
Hedges: Native hedgerow	0.169	Moderate	0.68
Line of Trees	0.06	Moderate	0.24
Total	**2.61**	-	**0.92**

Please note there may be minor discrepancies (rounding errors) between the columns and the totals, however, the numbers duplicate those presented within the matrix calculator.

4.0 PROPOSED DESIGN

Habitats

Habitat Creation

4.1 Habitat creation is shown in Figure 2.

4.2 Green infrastructure proposals include the creation of a range of habitats throughout the Site that will be managed for their biodiversity value; including mixed scrub, species-rich grassland and an attenuation feature.

4.3 The biodiversity units for each habitat on the Site have been calculated and are presented in Table 3, along with a description of the management recommendations which will be employed to achieve the target conditions for each habitat type.

Table 3: Summary of Proposed Habitat Creation

Habitat (Landscaping Plan Reference)	Habitat (UKHab Type)	Targets for Creation/Management	Area (ha)	Target Condition	Distinctiveness	Biodiversity Units
Proposed Species-rich Grassland	Other Neutral Grassland	The focus of management for these grasslands will be on maximising their biodiversity to create a diverse sward by employing the following management measures: • Using a native species-rich seed mix to achieve a diverse sward. • Management will be reduced to create a varied sward height, following the supplier's specifications with one cut per year following establishment. • Reseeding any areas of failed establishment.	0.7257	Moderate	Medium	4.86
Attenuation Basin	Sustainable urban drainage feature	The attenuation feature will likely be dry for the majority of the year, only holding standing water seasonally. This feature will be planted with an appropriate species-rich grassland mix (Naturespace N8 Water's Edge Meadow Mixture) to create diverse features. Ongoing management will also ensure that a varied vegetation structure will be created and maintained with no ecotone forming over 80% of the are whilst also ensuring the absence of invasive non-native species.	0.0759	Moderate	Low	0.18
Woodland Mix	Mixed Scrub	Areas of native scrub will be managed to achieve moderate condition through the following measures: • Planting will ensure a diversity of species with within blocks of scrub with no one species comprising more than 75% cover • The borders of scrub will be subject to relaxed management extended at least 2m from the scrub edge to encourage a diverse interface between habitats.	0.2006	Moderate	Medium	1.34

Habitat (Landscaping Plan Reference)	Habitat (UKHab Type)	Targets for Creation/Management	Area (ha)	Target Condition	Distinctiveness	Biodiversity Units
		• Replacement planting of failed specimens during establishment period • Additional planting after 10 years where nature regeneration has not been successful.				
Trees	Urban Trees	Native Trees will be planted oversailing vegetation and will not be excessively pruned so that the trees maintain a minimum of 75% if their expected canopy for their age and size.	0.0326	Moderate	Medium	0.1

Hedgerows

Retained/enhanced hedgerows (Figure 4)

4.4 The existing hedgerow will be retained and enhanced through a commitment towards its long-term management with the aim of maximising its biodiversity value. The following measures will be employed within the Site Boundary to enhance the existing hedgerows:

- Hedgerows will be subject to reduced management to encourage the establishment of tall, bushy hedgerows.
- Additional planting of a range of native hedgerow species will be carried out within retained hedgerows to close up gaps and create more continuously dense and bushy features.
- Fertiliser use will be prohibited within grasslands adjacent to hedgerows to prevent nutrient enrichment as a result of the Site management operations.
- A minimum of 1m adjacent the hedgerows will be managed as 'undisturbed' ground where possible within the Site boundary. Management of grasslands within these areas adjacent to hedgerows will be in line with the management of meadow grasslands.

4.5 Due to the proposed regular tree planting along the length of hedgerow H1 this hedgerow is considered to be a 'Native hedgerow with trees' post-development. This upgrade from a low distinctiveness hedgerow to a medium distinctiveness hedgerow will generate an additional 0.15 hedgerow units.

Additional Enhancements

4.6 Additional mitigation measures will be implemented to contribute to a biodiversity net gain across the Site. This will focus on the provision of faunal enhancements that are not captured within the Natural England Biodiversity Metric 4.0 calculations. To achieve this, the site will support habitat features for bats, bird and invertebrates including:

- A range of bat roosting features are recommended to be provided which will be provided on mature trees where possible.
- A range of bird nest boxes are recommended comprising both small and medium hole nest boxes on mature trees around the Site.

5.0 BNG METRIC CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The habitat retention, enhancement and creation proposals highlighted within this report have all been inputted into the Biodiversity Metric 4.0. Table 4 provides a summary of the headline results of the Biodiversity Metric 4.0 assessment completed for the proposals. The full metric has been provided in Appendix A.

Table 4: Biodiversity Metric 4.0 Headline Results

Baseline	Habitat Units	4.56
	Hedgerow Units	0.92
Post-Intervention	Habitat Units	7.36
	Hedgerow Units	1.06
Total Net Unit Change	Habitat Units	**+2.80**
	Hedgerow Units	**+0.15**
Total Net Percentage Change	Habitat Units	**+61.31%**
	Hedgerow Units	**+15.90%**

5.2 The assessment has demonstrated that this phase of the proposals will lead to a gain in both area habitat units and hedgerow units.

Habitat Trading Summary

5.3 The low distinctiveness modified grassland to be lost under the proposals will be compensated for through the creation of higher distinctiveness habitats, comprising species-rich grassland and scrub, whilst existing medium distinctiveness habitats (individual trees) will be retained. Therefore, the trading rules of the metric have been satisfied by the proposals.



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Key

Red Line Boundary

Habitats Baseline

Modified grassland

Hedgerow Baseline

Line of trees

Native hedgerow

Individual tree Baseline

Existing Medium Rural Tree

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project
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drawing title
Habitat Baseline

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Key

Red Line Boundary

Individual tree Proposed

Proposed Medium Rural Tree

Proposed Small Rural Tree

Habitats Proposed

Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface

Built linear features

Developed land; sealed surface

Mixed scrub

Other neutral grassland

Sustainable drainage system

Hedgerows Proposed

Line of trees

Native hedgerow

Native hedgerow with trees

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Key

Red Line Boundary

Baseline Habitat Condition

Poor

Baseline Habitat Distinctiveness

Low

Baseline Hedgerow Condition

Moderate

Baseline Hedgerow Distinctiveness

Low

Baseline Individual tree Condition

Good

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Key

Red Line Boundary

Individual tree Retention

Created

Retained

Hedgerow Retention

Enhanced

Retained

Habitats Retention

Lost

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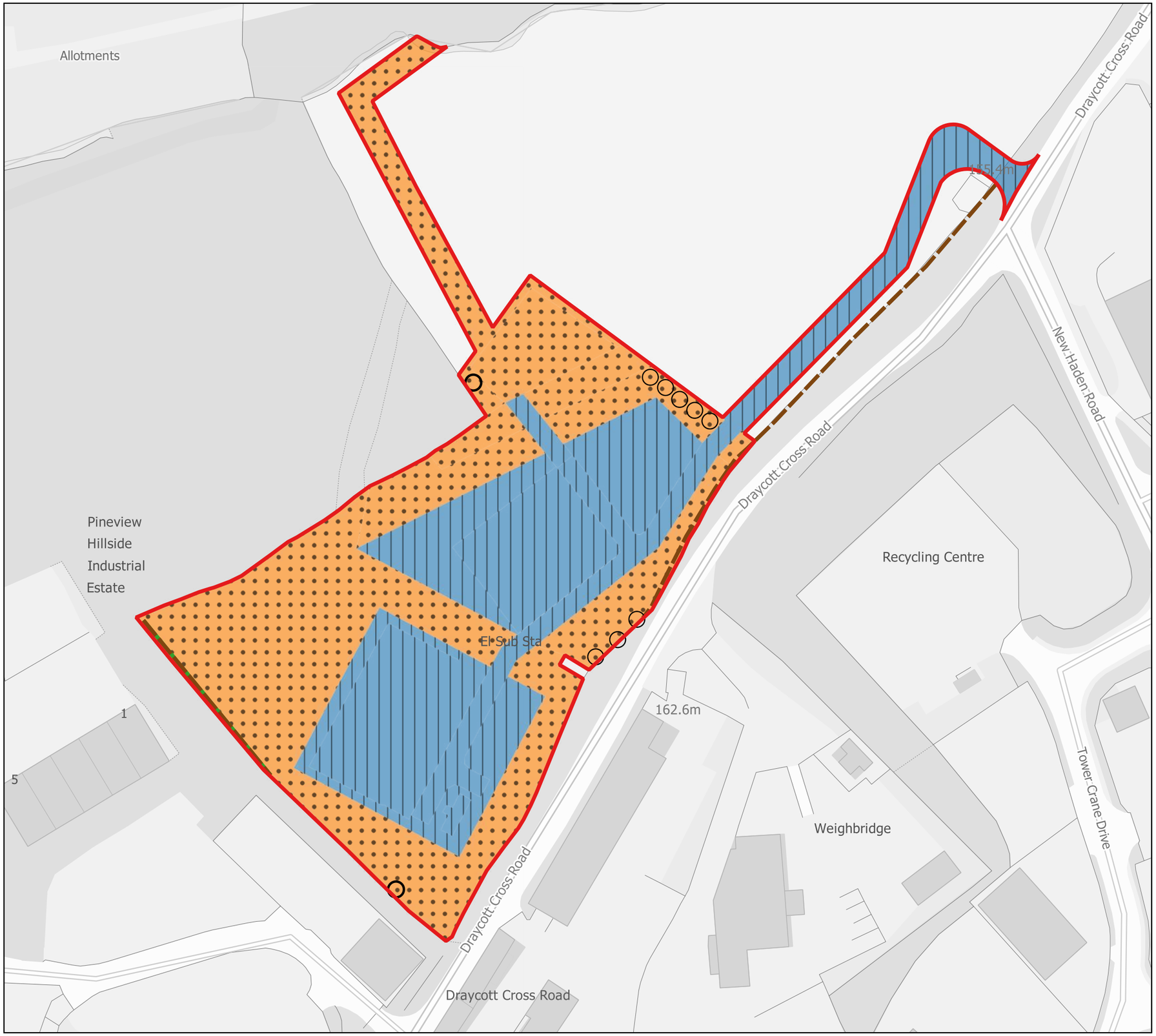
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Key

- **Red Line Boundary**

Proposed Habitats Distinctiveness

- **Medium**
- **V.Low**

Proposed Hedgerow Condition

- **Moderate**

Proposed Hedgerow Distinctiveness

- **Low**

Proposed Individual tree Condition

- **Moderate**
- **Good**

Proposed Habitats Condition

- **Moderate**
- **N/A - Other**

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