



Cooksbridge GBI Settlement Appraisal

Prepared for: Lewes District Council

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Introduction

This settlement appraisal is intended to provide a picture of the existing Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) in and around the settlement boundary and highlight opportunities for improvement.

It is divided into three parts:

Part 1: Local Context - which provides detail of existing local issues and relevant planning policy.

Part 2: Current GBI – which examines local GBI from the perspective of the five ‘Why’ Principles of the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework.

Part 3: Audit and analysis - which provides a summary of a selection of audited sites from the settlement and highlights potential opportunities for improvement.

Useful terms:

GBI – Green and Blue Infrastructure

SuDS – Sustainable Drainage Systems

PRoW – Public Rights of Way

SDNP – South Downs National Park

LGS – Local Green Space

NE – Natural England

BNG – Biodiversity Net Gain

LNRS – Local Nature Recovery Strategy

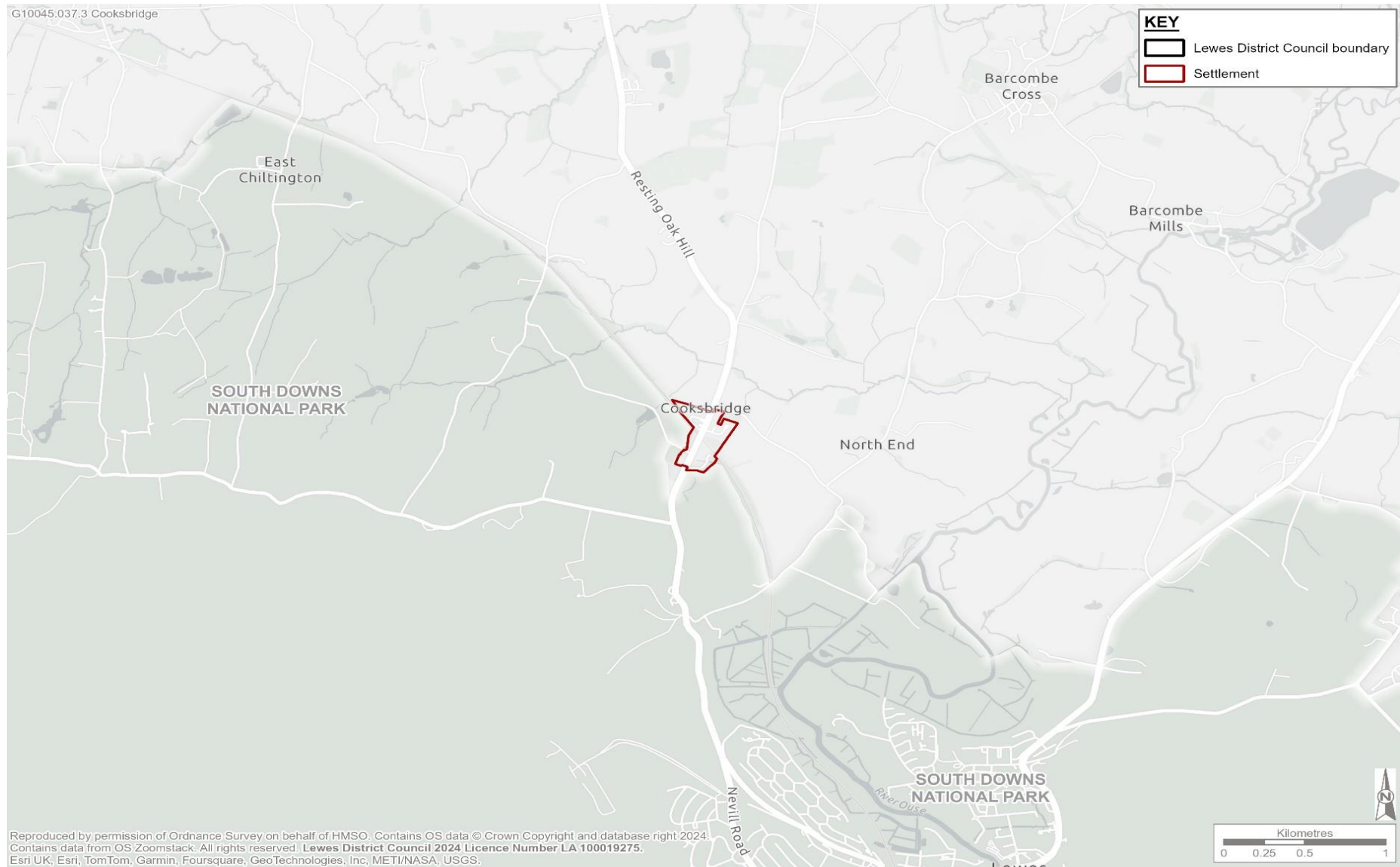


Figure 1: Cooksbridge Settlement Boundary as defined by Lewes District Local Plan Policies Map 2020.

Part 1: Local Context

1 Overview

Cooksbridge, identified in Figure 1, is located 3 km northwest of Lewes and is located within the civil parish of Hamsey. Hamsey ('the Parish') is a rural parish covering 1,144 hectares including the settlements of Cooksbridge, Old Cooksbridge, Offham, Hamsey and Bevernbridge. The southern part of the Parish falls within the South Downs National Park (SDNP) which borders the settlement of Cooksbridge to the south and west.

Cooksbridge is the largest settlement and is located geographically at the heart of the Parish. Home to Cooksbridge railway station, Beechwood Hall and Rural Park, and Hamsey Community Primary School, Cooksbridge is classified as a 'local village' within the Lewes District Settlement Hierarchy Review (July 2023). This means that it has very limited facilities, services and accessibility to the higher order settlements and few employment opportunities.

Malthouse Playground is an informal play area located within the centre of Cooksbridge village which provides an environment where children can develop cognitive, social and physical skills. Beechwood Hall and Rural Park is located within the centre of Cooksbridge village. It is an attractive, modern, multi-use event space which serves the communities of Cooksbridge, Offham and Bevernbridge. The hall itself uses renewable energy from three sources – ground source, wind and solar power. This village hall unites the community and also contributes to the local area's net zero carbon target.

¹ Note: North End Stream is referred to in Lewes GBI Study and associated maps as Hamsey River

Cooksbridge Railway Station serves the village of Cooksbridge and is located on the East Coastway Line. The railway line provides access to London and Eastbourne, with links to Brighton (via Lewes).

Cooksbridge has two separate walking routes. The Offham Loop is 2 miles long and is accessible with several gradual climbs, and the Cooksbridge, Hamsey and Offham Loop is 3 miles and is mainly flat.

2 Consultation

The Hamsey Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) undertook consultation in 2014 and was adopted in 2016. The following key themes were identified:

- Housing Growth and Development;
- Transport and Travel;
- Education;
- Social, Recreation and Sports;
- Local Economy;
- Sustainability;
- Environment; and
- Health and Wellbeing.

Lewes District Council with consultants at TEP undertook consultation in 2023 to support a district-wide GBI Study. As part of the consultation an interview was undertaken with a representative from Hamsey Parish Council.

The consultation found that GBI is important for people's wellbeing and that Cooksbridge has some good existing GBI assets including North End Stream¹, but in Cooksbridge there is an issue with

community access to green and blue spaces. Local walkers often have to use congested roads (particularly the A275) or narrow pavements, and pathways across farmland are not well maintained. Local roads that are deemed quieter and more suitable for cycling are still intimidating for less experienced cyclists.

The Parish Council noted various green initiatives in the Cooksbridge area, including local wildlife groups and a newt conservation project near Old Hamsey Brickworks.

The Council representative highlighted an underused green space opposite the train station² which is under consideration for making a protected green walkway for local school children, with a view to providing a healthier and more attractive walking route.

3 Local GBI Initiatives

There are multiple local initiatives in and around Cooksbridge including:

- **Sustainable Hamsey** – Supports the villages of Cooksbridge, Offham, Bevernbridge and Hamsey to act towards a more sustainable future. The aim of this initiative is “*to inspire the community to increase biodiversity in places like Hamsey churchyard.*” The initiative is already working on projects to improve footpaths, active travel routes, and rural public transport as well as investigating alternative energy sources.
- **Beechwood Hall and Rural Park** – Beechwood Hall is a multi-use event space which serves the community of Cooksbridge. The Hall includes a furnished kitchen and private car park, with an EV charging point. The Hall is the

first community building in southeast England to use integrated renewable energy from ground source, wind and solar power. The Rural Park provides tennis courts, a playground, playing fields, and an outdoor gym. The site provides a suitable location for community events.

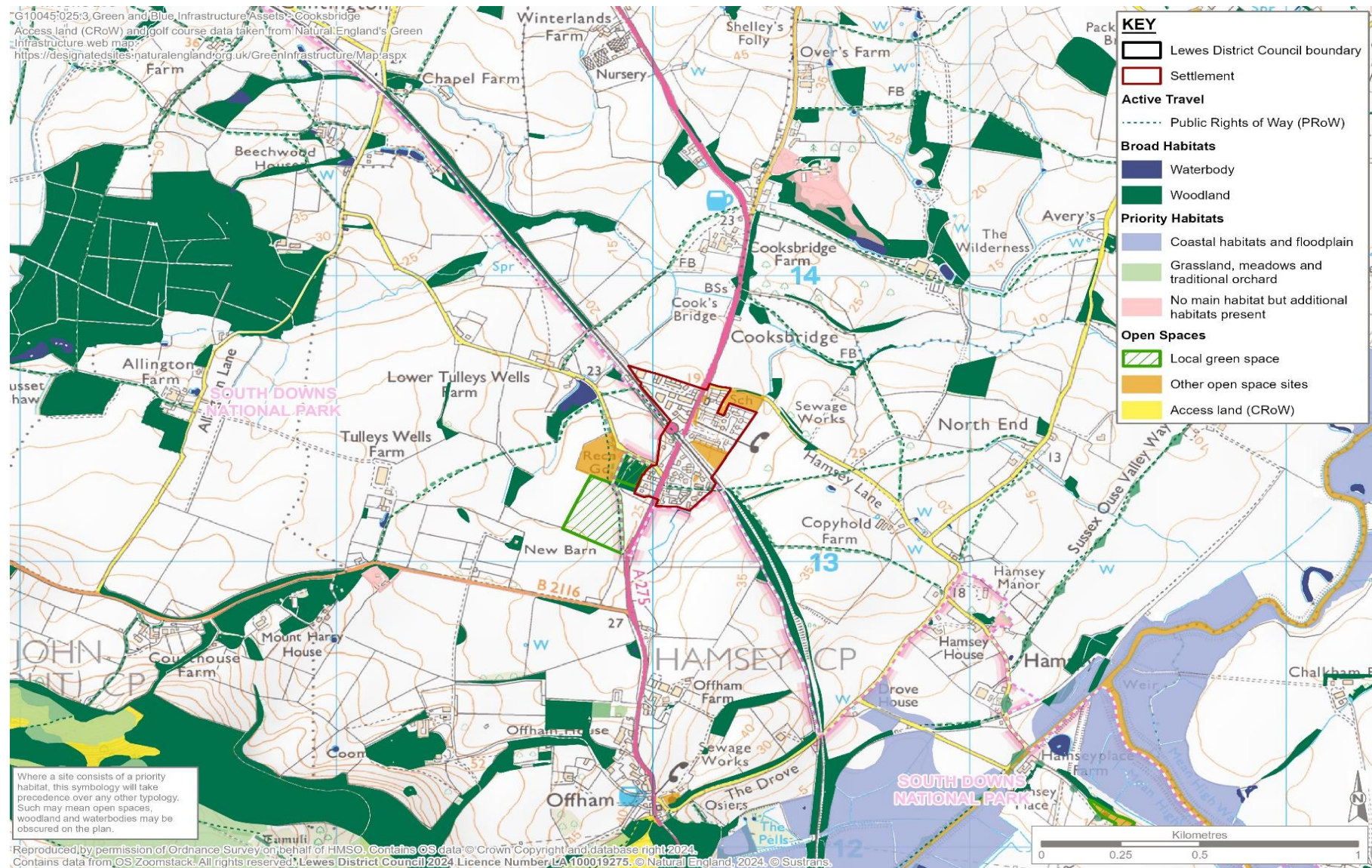
- **Hamsey Festival** – Hamsey Festival takes place at Beechwood Hall and Rural Park every summer and includes stalls and fun activities for all ages. These community events provide an opportunity for the local residents to connect to the culture and heritage of the village.
- **Hamsey, Cooksbridge and Offham Wildlife Group** – The group wish to help protect and record local wildlife. They share wildlife photography and have created a charity wildlife calendar.
- **Community Litter Picks** – undertaken quarterly by local volunteers.
- **Cooksbridge Station planting** – The train station at Cooksbridge provides access to Lewes and London. Shrubs have been donated, which are now planted along platform 1, by local volunteers as part of the Cooksbridge Station Partnership, enhancing the station’s environment and providing a mature setting.

² Labelled as Site 14 in Figure 8

- **The Monday Group** – The Monday Group is an initiative which was founded in 1961 and is still going to this day. There are currently 35 members who are responsible for maintaining footpaths, stiles, causeways, bridges, steps and even guiding fingerposts. The Monday Group have installed over 1000 stiles within the past 63 years.



Figure 2: Stile supplied by The Monday Group



4 Current GBI Assets

GBI assets in and around Cooksbridge have been mapped from desk-based assessment and are shown in Figure 3. There is some provision within and bordering the settlement, with larger open spaces and habitat areas over half a kilometre away.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

There are PRoWs located in and around Cooksbridge running east to west crossing the A275 and the railway line and providing connections to PRoW running northwards. Hamsey village lies to the east and southeast of Cooksbridge, and the Sussex Ouse Valley is located to the east and southeast of Hamsey. Paths to the southwest lead into the SDNP.

Woodland and Waterbodies

There are no woodlands within the settlement boundary. Some woodlands are present outside the settlement boundary, including ancient woodland at Warningore wood north of Allington farm over 1km to the west. These provide important habitats, but most are not accessible to the public.

North End Stream runs eastwards to the north of the settlement, joining the River Ouse. There is one waterbody present west of Cooksbridge village which is inaccessible.

Habitats

The main priority habitat areas are the grassland, meadows and traditional orchard which lie within the SDNP to the south, and the floodplain grazing marshes along the banks of the Ouse. The 'no main habitat' area to the north of Cooksbridge Farm indicates that

priority habitats are likely to be present but further surveys are required to establish more detail.

Open Space Sites

The allotments and Malthouse playground are within the Cooksbridge settlement boundary. The recreation grounds at Beechwood and open space at Little Mead (adjoining the Hamsey Primary School) sit outside of the settlement boundary.

The two Local Green Spaces (LGSs) in Cooksbridge identified in The Hamsey Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) are The Platt, Woodland at Beechwood Lane, and the Field to south of Beechwood Hall and Rural Park. Both lie outside of the settlement boundary.

Landscape Designations

The SDNP borders the south and west of the settlement.

5 Planning Policy and Strategy Review

A review of existing national, regional and local planning policy, strategies and evidence bases was undertaken as part of the district wide GBI Study and relevant findings are summarised below.

Lewes District Local Plan: Part 1 Core Strategy (2016) notes a steady rise in population across the district that is expected to continue until 2030 and sets a vision for the Low Weald villages and wider countryside describing an aspiration of what the area will be like by the end of 2030. The vision strikes a balance between meeting the community's need for affordable housing and retaining and enhancing the attractive, distinctive local character. It also aims to deliver sustainable travel opportunities and safer roads particularly linking with the main railway line, whilst recognising that private car travel will still be necessary for many residents.

“Although the majority of recent development would have been directed to the urban areas of the district, development that meets the community’s needs for housing, including affordable housing, and supports the rural economy will have been sensitively accommodated, particularly in those settlements with the best range of community services and facilities and ease of access to employment opportunities.

With the London to Lewes railway line passing through this part of the district, further opportunities for sustainable travel, particularly to and from the stations of Plumpton and Cooksbridge will have been realised.

Although travel by the private car will still be, in many instances, the only practical way of accessing and travelling around this part of the district, improvements to road safety, including the

lowering of speed limits in the villages, will ensure that this form of transportation is undertaken in the safest possible manner.”

The vision also recognises that significant growth in nearby towns of Uckfield, Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath will increase demand for recreation and leisure facilities in the area. It expects that efforts to meet these needs should result in better local facilities and economic opportunities.

Core Strategy (2016), Spatial Policy 2 identified that a minimum of 30 net additional dwellings will be built in Cooksbridge by 2030. It only considers the area outside the SDNP (which borders Cooksbridge to the south). The HNP places emphasis on providing landscape buffers between the development and open countryside, especially where views to the SDNP may be affected.

The Lewes Open Space Strategy (2020) identified a total of 3.89ha of open space in the Parish, equating to 6.0ha of open space per 1,000 population. ‘Outdoor Sports Facilities’ is the main type present and accounts for 2.2ha of the open space in the Parish across two sites which are both in Cooksbridge: Beechwood (1.47ha, accessible to the public) and Little Mead (0.71ha, inaccessible to the public).

Within the settlement boundary there are also Allotments, and Provision for Children and Young People. The Parish overall has a deficiency in Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace as well as Amenity Greenspace.

The council are in the process of drafting a new local plan which will set new housing requirements across the district, allocate development sites and set out up to date policies for new development.



Figure 4 Cooksbridge settlement is surrounded by open farmland

6 Other Local Policies and Guidance

Lewes Landscape Character Assessment (May 2023)

Cooksbridge falls into the 'Western Low Weald' character area C, with undulating land and limited drainage.

The forces for change relevant to GBI at a settlement scale are:

- PRoW networks improved by local volunteers with increased recreational pressures; and
- Challenges posed by climate change, including extreme weather events and pressure for renewable development.

As described in the district wide GBI study, the relevant GBI management guidelines set out in the LCA are:

- Preserve the rural character away from development and roads. Plant new woodlands to improve screening and reduce disturbance from roads and overhead lines;
- Maintain semi-enclosed character with available views onto surrounding higher ground;
- Encourage local natural flood management initiatives;
- Protect and retain existing vegetation, especially ancient woodland; and
- Implement new developments within a robust landscape framework.

7 Local Priorities

Hamsey Neighbourhood Plan (2016)

Cooksbridge identifies with Hamsey's objectives and priorities identified below:

- To protect the high quality natural environment of valued green spaces;
- To conserve wildlife through maintaining the countryside and improving biodiversity;
- To ensure a well-connected network of habitats;
- To ensure developments protect and enrich the landscape and rural setting;
- To create an effective network of footpaths and new cycle paths linking the communities across the Parish;
- To protect cultural heritage and shared common land e.g., Beechwood Rural Park; and
- To ensure the Parish is a safe environment for all.

The local priorities are taken from the HNP but only include those most relevant to the GBI Study.

Part 2: Current GBI

In 2023 Natural England (NE) published a framework of Green Infrastructure (GI) Principles to guide the planning and implementation of GBI. In this section we consider the settlement in terms of the five ‘Why’ principles at local level.

8 Principle 1: Nature rich beautiful places

“To achieve nature rich and beautiful places at a local level, GI should:

- ***Thread biodiversity through the built environment connecting recreational, natural green and blue spaces;***
- ***Prioritise native species;***
- ***Be designed to connect people to nature; and***
- ***Contribute to site specific BNG requirements”***

Consultation as part of this Appraisal found that rare native species have been identified by local nature groups and enthusiasts, but it is not always clear if these are recorded officially. The HNP provides details of bird, bat and mammal sightings in The Platt woodland, noting concern over the falling numbers recorded and desire to further protect the habitat.

Both LGSs in Cooksbridge are privately owned but are described in the HNP as beautiful spaces that are important for community wellbeing.

The HNP landscape and environment policies state that new development should protect and enhance ecological corridors, with a

tree replacement ratio of 3:1. Additionally, BNG requirements and LNRS will provide new mechanisms and evidence for implementing these policies.

The Cooksbridge community clearly benefit from the proximity of beautiful open space and protected habitat areas bordering the settlement.



Figure 5 Accessible, signed wildflower area at Beechwood Hall and Rural Park

9 Principle 2: Active and healthy places

“To achieve active and healthy places at a local level GI should:

- ***Maximise health and wellbeing outcomes particularly in deprived areas and for disadvantaged groups;***
- ***Address issues of inequality in access to quality natural green space and routes, using the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (AGS); and***
- ***Be managed to deliver indirect benefits such as urban cooling, noise reduction, flood risk management and air quality improvements which can improve health outcomes.”***

The HNP identifies a potential need to provide better facilities for young people in Cooksbridge. There is also a need for socialising and exercising space particularly on evenings and weekends for those without cars. Currently Beechwood Hall and Rural Park west of Cooksbridge village is a community focus for social activity, providing a wide range of indoor and outdoor facilities and events.

The HNP shows an understanding of the role of green spaces like the LGS sites in providing noise and pollution buffers from the busy A275, and in mitigating and managing flood risk. This is important at the level crossing where idling and braking vehicles impact air quality near the school. These environmental services can then directly or indirectly improve the health of local residents.

Competition for space on the congested main road emphasises the need to find greener, traffic free routes for pedestrians and cyclists wherever possible.

10 Principle 3: Thriving and prosperous places

“To achieve thriving and prosperous communities at a local level GI should:

- ***Integrate services such as air quality regulation, flood risk management, noise mitigation, recreation, urban cooling, and pollination into development based on local needs;***
- ***Use early collaboration with adjacent local authorities, other developers, landowners, or infrastructure providers to create opportunities for jointly funded GI; and***
- ***Link to skills development, training and jobs by local employers, contractors, and training institutions”***

The importance of multifunctional GBI for a healthy community is highlighted in section 9. A reduction in the need to travel outside the village for leisure activities should also provide some economic benefits as mentioned in section 5.

The network of PRoW extends through Cooksbridge and provides access into the SDNP. The SDNP Authority has provided ‘Cooksbridge Rail to Ramble circular,’ a waymarked circular walk linking Cooksbridge to the SDNP passing through woodlands and open access land.

The upkeep of PRoW around this settlement is particularly important as cyclists are increasingly taking to country footpaths to avoid road congestion as described in the HNP. The consultation with the Parish Council representative highlighted ongoing communications with local landowners and the farming community, indicating that closer collaboration around issues like upkeep of PRoW could bring a



Figure 6 Sports facility and pathway at Beechwood Hall and Rural Park

significant improvement in the usability of existing pathways and improve residents' access to the surrounding countryside. There is already community engagement in supporting the upkeep and development of these routes and spaces through initiatives like Sustainable Hamsey and The Monday Group.

The SDNP provides an important educational link to the Parish's unique history in promoting heritage sites such as the Hamsey Heritage Trail.

11 Principle 4: Improved water management

“To achieve sustainable water management at a local level GBI should:

- ***Provide sustainable water management including though sustainable drainage systems (SuDS);***
- ***Be adaptable to take account of the impacts of climate change;***
- ***Reduce site specific flood risks identified in flood risk assessments;***
- ***Improve water quality and help address existing sources of pollution;***
- ***Improve natural filtration where this will protect and enhance groundwater supplies;***
- ***Help connect recreational, natural green and blue spaces and provide opportunities for everyone to safely experience blue space;***
- ***Use water to enhance public open space for a variety of recreational uses, ensuring potential conflicts are managed;***
- ***Create and enhance habitats including re-naturalising river corridors and providing riparian buffer zones;***
- ***Soften estuary edges with coastal habitats that can act as buffers to coastal erosion and tidal flooding; and***
- ***Prioritise native species and ensure biosecurity principles are adhered to avoid spreading non-native invasive species and diseases.”***

The HNP describes Cooksbridge as a water stressed area, with poor natural drainage and ground that can become boggy in wet weather. Low-lying areas adjacent to the North End Stream and Bevern stream (which is further north) are at risk of flooding. The settlement also receives runoff water from the SNDP and surrounding fields, and after flooding in the village in 2000, there has been increased work to maintain ditches.

There is an aspiration in the HNP for further examination of localised flooding issues (with emphasis on drainage and gulley issues) which would enable retrofitted GBI to target problem areas, for maximum benefit to the community, road users and local landowners.

The network of PRoW provides public access to the River Ouse and the Sussex Ouse Valley Way via Hamsey village.

12 Principle 5: Resilient and climate positive places

“To achieve resilient and climate positive places at a local level GI should:

- ***Be audited using local information for instance using local resilience strategies and plans to improve the climate resilience of existing GI***
- ***Incorporate adaptive management to ensure GI is planned to provide multi-functional benefits and continues to do so as the climate changes”***

Consultation with the Parish Council representative found that tree and wildflower planting has been delivered through the community and actively supported by Lewes District Council, but the main local challenge is finding public space in which to plant.

Part 3: Audit and Analysis

13 GBI Site Audits

Site audits were undertaken in October 2023 to provide an indication of how local green and blue spaces are performing. The exercise is not intended as a comprehensive review of all GBI in the settlement as only a limited number of sites could be audited across the district. However, the audit methodology and scoresheets can be used by an open space practitioner to evaluate other green spaces and draw up improvement plans in the future if required. GBI assets were chosen in each settlement from existing GIS mapping data to cover a range of different uses and GBI services for people and nature.

Audits assessed the current contribution of the green space to the five “Why” principles of good GBI. The audit covered “Quality and Value” using a system derived from best practice methods associated with the Green Flag Award criteria³, which was adapted to include additional criteria relevant to GBI.

The scores awarded in each category are classed from X to 4 outlined below:

- X - not appropriate;
- 0 - missing but needed;
- 1 - complete re-designed needed;
- 2 - major improvement needed;
- 3 - minor improvement needed; and
- 4 - no improvement needed.

The audit also covered criteria of multifunctionality, connectivity, variety and distinctiveness, which are relevant to the NE “What”

³ [Green Flag Award - Green Flag Award](#)

principles of good GBI. Six GBI assets are identified in Cooksbridge, and two were audited as part of the Study.



Figure 7 Green Gym at Beechwood Hall and Rural Park

Site Audit Map

The site audit map shown in Figure 8 below identifies the settlement boundary of Cooksbridge and the six main GBI assets. Two sites were audited for this study, both of which are accessible to the public.

Table 1 shows the Quality and Value scores from the site audits. Scores from site visits are based on a snapshot in time and should be considered in the context of local knowledge and other more detailed surveys where those are available.

| Criteria | GI Principles | 13. Beechwood Hall and Rural Park | 14. Greenspace Opposite train station/bus stop |
|--|---------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Social Criteria – Appropriately welcoming / Accessible to all | 1,2,3 | 4 | 1 |
| Social Criteria – Healthy, safe and secure | 2,3 | 4 | 1 |
| Social Criteria – Well maintained and clean | 2,3 | 3 | 4 |
| Social Criteria – Contribution to local amenity, vitality and sense of place | 2,3 | 4 | 3 |
| Social Criteria – Recreation, play and exercise value | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| Environmental Criteria – Diversity and Naturalness of Habitats | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Environmental Criteria – Site Management and Habitat Diversity supports pollinators and soil invertebrate diversity | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Environmental Criteria – Shade and Ventilation available to users | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| Environmental Criteria – Vegetation, land surface cover contributes to natural flood management | 1,4,5 | 4 | 1 |
| Environmental Criteria – SuDS or water quality management features visible and effective | 4.5 | 4 | 1 |
| Total Score | N/A | 39 | 21 |
| Potential Score | N/A | 40 | 40 |

Table 1: Audit scores

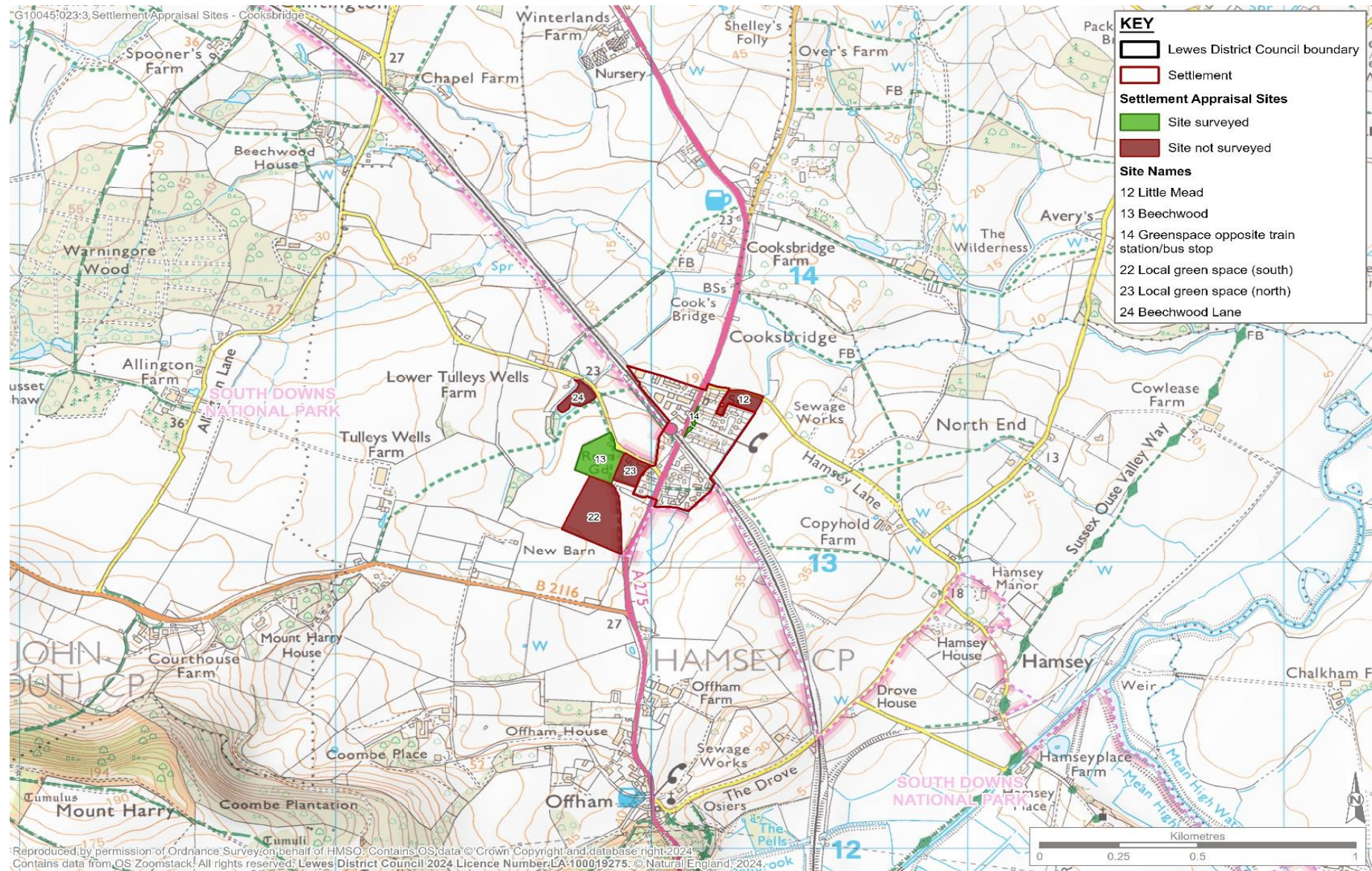


Figure 8: Site Audit Map

13.1 GBI Audit Scores

Beechwood Hall and Rural Park – 39/40

This site achieved the maximum score in all categories except one, with a slightly lower score under 'well maintained and clean' due to some litter identified during the site audit. The Park is an excellent open space with a balance between habitats, play, recreation and accessibility. The Park provides access into the open countryside to the south via a PRoW, which leads to the A275. It also has a village hall, which provides space for community activities and is also hired out for events.



Figure 9: Beechwood Hall and Rural Park

Greenspace opposite train station/bus stop - 21/40

This site consists mainly of amenity grass and scores low on GBI criteria, only achieving the top score of 'no improvement needed' for two criteria. However, there is value for local residents as it provides a landscape buffer between the busy A275 and the residential area

of Chandler's Mead. The site has a phone box used as a book hub, which is a good community resource. The extensive coverage of mown grass provides little opportunity for water management, biodiversity, or visual planting diversity.



Figure 10: Green space opposite train station/ bus stop

Inaccessible sites

Four additional sites were selected for auditing which could not be accessed. The playing fields attached to Hamsey Community Primary School have no public access and the other three sites were private land.

Land to the east and south of the Beechwood Hall and Rural Park are both designated in the HNP (2016) as Local Green Space (LGS1 The Platt, Woodland at Beechwood Lane, Cooksbridge and LGS2 Field South of Beechwood Rural Park, Cooksbridge).

13.2 Multifunctionality

Multifunctionality (delivering multiple functions from the same area of GBI) is especially important in areas where provision of GBI is poor or scarce. GBI should deliver a range of functions and benefits for people, nature and place.

The two audited sites were assessed for their multifunctionality:

- **Beechwood Hall and Rural Park** – Provides a variety of social, environmental and economic functions. The informal play for young children, playing fields and outdoor gym provide space for local residents of different ages to exercise outdoors. There are a range of habitats present including trees, hedges, long grass and wildflower areas. The village hall is a social hub, powered by renewable energy which is used for a variety of events and can be hired out. It also incorporates electric vehicle charging.
- **Green Space Opposite Train/Bus Stop** – there are a limited range of functions provided partly due to the size of the site. There are community benefits provided by benches, a recycling bin and the 'Phonebook' informal library. There are a few larger trees/shrubs present on the site which will increase the value for wildlife, but the planting does not serve to screen pedestrians from traffic on the A275.

13.3 Connectivity – to SDNP, Coast and other GI Assets

GBI should function and connect with the living network for both people and nature at all scales (e.g. within sites, across regions and at a national scale). It should enhance ecological networks and support a variety of ecosystem services, connecting provision of GBI with those who need its benefits.

The sites were assessed for their connectivity to the SDNP, the Coast and other GBI assets:

- **Beechwood Hall and Rural Park** – The site borders the SDNP and views towards the downland are available from the centre and boundaries of the site. There is land to the south and east of the Park allocated as Local Green Space (LGS) in the HNP which has recorded wildflowers of local interest, and there are wildflower areas planted around the Park which connect well to provide further support for pollinators and wildlife. A PRoW runs across the site as part of a walking route between pathways to the north and the A275 and the SDNP to the south through the LGS.
- **Green Space Opposite Train/Bus Stop** – The site is not well connected with other habitats or green spaces as it is close to the train and bus connections on a busy road near the centre of the residential area. It is next to a well-trafficked route for local residents and visitors on various modes of transport, and children on their way to school.

13.4 Variety and Distinctiveness

GBI should consist of a variety of types and sizes of green and blue spaces, green routes and environmental features (as part of a network) that can provide a range of distinct functions, benefits and solutions to address specific issues and needs.

The sites were assessed for their variety and distinctiveness:

- **Beechwood Hall and Rural Park** –The predominant feature of the Park is the playing field, however the other areas of the site have clear uses which are easy to find and navigation around the site is clear. This is a well-designed, well-managed and well-used space that the local community are clearly proud of.
- **Green Space Opposite Train/Bus Stop** – There is limited variety of planting on this site although the existing structural plants provide visual interest among the cut grass areas. The benches, recycling and Phonebook (Figure 11) features show local interest in the site for social use but do not create a comprehensive and distinctive sense of place across the site.



Figure 11 'Phonebooks'

13.5 Capacity to accommodate change

Cooksbridge settlement is expected to accommodate an increasing population both locally and from further afield (section 5), which will then increase demand for green space for social use. The first five audit scores indicate how well a site is performing for people, with a maximum score of 20.

All GBI assets will also need to adapt to the inevitable consequences of climate change and provide as many environmental services as possible (like temperature regulation and water management) to best serve local communities. The final five audit scores indicate how resilient a site is to the effects of climate change, with a maximum score of 20.

- **Beechwood Hall and Rural Park** –The Park only falls short of the maximum score on social criteria by one mark (19/20). This site is managing use by the current population very well and is not expected to degrade excessively with extra footfall as long as current management is maintained accordingly. The maximum 20/20 score for habitat, water management and shade categories also indicates that the Park is well placed to adapt to a changing climate.
- **Green Space Opposite Train/Bus** – The site scored 11/20 for social factors. The score of 1 in the first two categories indicates that a complete redesign would be needed to make the site safe, accessible and welcoming for people. The site has potential to accommodate more people, or to serve existing visitors better, with significant improvements. The site scored 10/20 on physical environmental criteria and achieved the top mark for providing shade and ventilation for users which is important in the face of rising and more

extreme temperatures. The site falls short of its potential to provide for wildlife and is not designed for water management which makes it poorly adapted for a changing climate.

14 Summary of GBI Opportunities for Cooksbridge

The evidence base, consultation and site audit results have been analysed and a summary of specific place-based opportunities is presented below following the five themes of the NE 'How' Principles which guide the delivery of GBI at a local level. A next step would be discussion with local experts and community leaders to further define and prioritise any detailed actions to take forward.

Partnership

Local residents and stakeholders should be at the centre of the planning and design process, and well informed about risks, trade-offs and what can realistically be achieved.

Community clubs should be supported, and initiatives that explore and protect local wildlife according to local demand should be encouraged. Help should be given to existing grassroots wildlife groups and projects to connect to regional initiatives like Sussex Biodiversity Partnership, and actively contribute to wider scale nature recovery projects and benefit from relevant funding.

Opportunities to open up the playing fields at Hamsey Primary School to the general public at weekends and evenings should be explored to support more community recreation activities without the need for car travel.

Relationships with the local farming community should be developed to promote mutual understanding between landowners and users of local PRoW. Farmers should be supported with up to date information on financial incentives for habitat and green space management.

Options for increasing land available for wildlife, water resilience and recreation should be explored by engaging with local landowners, providing buffers for wildlife areas, active travel routes and chains of

ponds which can help store water in the landscape and increase drought resilience (as trialled in [Ringmer](#)).

Evidence

Examine or collect any further available evidence on local flooding hotspots to determine where opportunities to retrofit SuDS features would provide the most benefit. Measures such as street trees with connected tree pits, or rain gardens (which can also be used as traffic calming measures) may have the additional benefits of improving safety and providing better shade if they can be accommodated sensitively in the street scene.

Policy & Strategic Planning

Develop a plan to increase Amenity Greenspace and Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace to address the existing open space deficiencies. This could include new provision at appropriate locations associated with new development if it occurs. It may also provide a chance to connect active travel routes with the train station and increase space for local residents to exercise outdoors without needing to travel.

Design

Investigate opportunities for sustainable drainage systems, tree planting and wildflower planting in the small green space opposite the train station with consideration of passing pedestrians and social use. This space offers an opportunity for providing much better GBI services than it currently does, with thoughtful design following the NE framework. For example, 'play along the way' natural features and low-growing, denser foliage between walkers and traffic could be beneficial for children travelling to and from school.

Management

Enhance habitats wherever possible to encourage a variety of habitats and increase pollinating native species at Beechwood Hall and Rural Park.

Investigate local stewardship schemes and methods of supporting existing community groups which have already shown initiative in providing voluntary support in the management and maintenance of local GBI spaces and routes.

The management of Beechwood Hall and Rural Park as a successful, multifunctional GBI site may be a useful example to share with other neighbouring communities.

Summary list of opportunities:

- Link local nature groups to wider regional initiatives;
- Open up school playing fields to the public out of school hours;
- Improve collaboration with the farming community;
- Enhance GBI with habitat/ water features;
- Collect further evidence on local flooding hotspots to inform SuDS retrofit;
- Develop a plan to increase deficient areas of open space and active travel routes around the settlement;
- Create accessible GBI in new developments to address deficiencies;
- Redesign the greenspace opposite the train station to address local community needs;
- Enhance or extend existing habitats at Beechwood Hall and Rural Park;
- Investigate stewardship opportunities for local spaces; and
- Share success stories with neighbouring areas.

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| Author | Maggie Fennell Wells |
| Date | December 2024 |
| Checked | Rebecca Martin |
| Approved | Francis Hesketh |

| Amendment History | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Version | Date | Modified by | Check / Approved by | Reason(s) issue | Status |
| 1.0 | Jan 24 | MFW | FH | Initial issue of text content | Superseded. |
| 2.0 | April 24 | MFW | RM/FH | Update following client comment | Superseded. |
| 3.0 | May 24 | SB | MFW | Update following client comment. | Superseded. |
| 4.0 | December 24 | MG | MFW/RM | Update following consultation | Issued. |
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