

Position Statement

Habitat Banks and the High Weald National Landscape



This Position Statement supplements and supports the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

Summary

- **The High Weald AONB Management Plan, and its Objectives and Actions, should inform any habitat bank proposals in the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL), in order to increase biodiversity whilst also enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape.**
- **Habitat bank proposals in the HWNL should be informed by a robust understanding of the habitat typologies, medieval landscape character, and landscape features of the HWNL.**
- **Proposed enhancements or newly created habitats should support the Recovering Nature Principles set out in the AONB Management Plan (p.g. 61) and function as a meaningful part of the wider connected High Weald habitat mosaic.**
- **Proposals should be evidenced by robust accurate baseline habitat surveys, to ensure that habitat banks provide a genuine positive contribution to local biodiversity and habitats, and to ensure that grassland sites proposed for habitat creation would not result in the loss of species-rich grasslands in the HWNL.**
- **The pursuance of ‘biodiversity units’ should not be at the expense of creating/enhancing more complex habitat types which would be more appropriate in the HWNL.**
- **Achievement of ‘biodiversity units’ should also not inadvertently harm existing on-site or site-adjacent habitats through loss or reduction in their connectivity to wider habitat networks.**

Introduction - The High Weald National Landscape

Considered one of the best surviving and coherent medieval landscapes in north-west Europe, the High Weald has remained a unique and recognisable area for at least the last 700 years. An outstandingly beautiful landscape cherished by people and celebrated for its scenery, tranquillity and wildlife, its ridges and valleys are clothed with an intricate mosaic of small fields interspersed with farmsteads and surrounded by hedgerows and abundant ancient woods, all arranged around a network of historic routeways.

A nationally important, iconic landscape, it was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1983 and is now known as the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL).

This Position Statement has been prepared to aid those involved with scoping, designing, assessing, setting up and managing habitat banks, in considering the suitability of proposals with regard to the conservation and enhancement of the HWNL. It does not repeat all the national legislation and guidance as this information is set out on the government website (links are provided where relevant).

N.B. The content of this Position Statement is for guidance only, and should not be taken to imply support from the High Weald National Landscape Partnership for any specific habitat bank projects, nor for any specific development proposals.

What are Habitat Banks?

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement for all qualifying development (though some local authorities may set higher targets in their Local Plans). More detailed information is available at [Biodiversity net gain - GOV.UK](#)

Whilst BNG is commonly provided onsite within the development boundary, it may in some cases need to be provided wholly or partly at an offsite location. Such offsite provision must be in accordance with legislation and guidance and be secured by a s.106 legal agreement or Conservation Covenant, with a commitment to manage the habitat for at least 30 years. Sites secured under such legal agreements for the provision of offsite BNG are known as ‘habitat banks’.

Habitat banks are sites which are intended to be managed, through enhancement and habitat creation to uplift and increase the biodiversity value at that site. This uplift can then be sold, as ‘biodiversity units’ to buyers, primarily housing developers to enable them to fulfil their BNG obligations.

Anyone with suitable land can undertake management to improve biodiversity and so create biodiversity units with the possibility of selling those units to a developer. Habitat banks can be provided on most land, including that used for agricultural purposes or recreation if compatible, and not likely to cause conflict between the different site uses and users in the future. Depending on the arrangement, landowners may carry out the habitat enhancements, habitat creation, on-going habitat management and administration themselves, or all or some of this work could be undertaken by partners or a habitat bank operator.

Landowners can either sell the biodiversity units from their habitat bank independently, work with one or more partners such as a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) or use a habitat bank operator to manage the process for them. To be able to sell the units, the site will need to be entered onto the National Biodiversity Gain Sites Register managed by Natural England, before which all necessary legal agreements must be in place, and landowners must check with Natural England whether a screening decision is required under the Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulations (see below).

Relevant Legislation

Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000

National Landscapes (AONBs)¹ are designated by the Government to ensure that the special qualities of our finest landscapes are conserved and enhanced.

- Section 82 of the CROW Act confirms the primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.
- Section 85 of the CROW Act places a statutory duty on all relevant authorities requiring them, in exercising or performing any function that affects AONBs in England, to “**seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**”²

Defra has published s.85 [Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK](#)

¹ From November 22nd 2023, all AONBs are known as National Landscapes. The statutory designation remains an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is referred to as such in legislation.

² [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape will normally mean avoiding harm, and conserving and enhancing the character components identified in the statutory AONB Management Plan, supporting the Management Plan Objectives and following Actions set out for each character component.

Whilst the s. 85 duty may not apply to landowners or habitat bank operators, (unless they are themselves a 'relevant authority' such as a statutory undertaker), it does apply to local authorities and Natural England who may approve or consent to habitat bank plans or works.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Agriculture) Regulations 2017

These regulations protect uncultivated land and semi-natural areas from damage caused by the introduction of or changes in activities that improve the productivity of land for agriculture, and from the negative environmental effects from certain physical change to rural land.

Current Government advice sets out that you may require an EIA screening decision (from Natural England) to create or improve natural habitats on uncultivated or semi-natural land that will be registered and sold for biodiversity net gain (BNG) purposes (i.e. 'Habitat Banks').

Landowners should check if they need a screening decision before registering their land as a BNG site and should contact Natural England for advice. [Check if you need a screening decision - GOV.UK](#)

The process of registering land as a BNG site is not an alternative to a screening decision assessment and does not include necessary assessment under EIA (Agriculture) Regulations.

If your BNG proposal does require a screening decision, you must apply for this separately before registering the land as a BNG site. For proposals within or affecting a protected landscape, such as the High Weald National Landscape, current Government advice [Apply for a screening decision - GOV.UK](#) sets out that your application submission will need to, amongst other things:

'Identify the special qualities and landscape character for the protected landscape, using information from the protected landscape management plan (including the protected landscape assessment) in addition to the NCA profiles...' and

'Identify whether any of the special qualities and landscape character of the protected landscape are within the project area, using information from the protected landscape management plan (including the protected landscape assessment) in addition to the NCA profiles...'

As part of your submission, you will need to request a consultation response from the relevant National Landscape team for projects within a protected landscape.

The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations 2024

Irreplaceable habitats are those which are considered extremely difficult to replace if damaged or lost. There are currently eight habitats deemed irreplaceable, including ancient woodland, and ancient and veteran trees.

Because of the environmental cost if irreplaceable habitats are lost or damaged, actions likely to result in any degradation should be avoided. Irreplaceable habitats are still required to be accounted for within the BNG metric, but there is a different procedure that needs to be followed. Information on this process can be found here: [Irreplaceable habitat - GOV.UK](#)

The High Weald AONB Management Plan

The High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029 is a statutory document, which has been adopted by all the Local Authorities within the High Weald National Landscape, and which formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it, in accordance with the CROW Act(2000).

The Management Plan describes the High Weald's natural beauty through eight character components, each component has Objectives and Actions to support, maintain and enhance its character. Further details are set out in the [High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029](#).

Many of the Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles & Investment Priorities are particularly relevant to habitat bank creation, and should be considered in proposals:

Natural Systems

Objective G1 - To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.

Objective G2 - To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops.

Objective G4 - To restore soil health across the High Weald.

Action 'l' *Support the recovery of High Weald watercourses, including headwaters, by restoring natural processes in order to benefit a range of aquatic and riparian habitats and associated wildlife*

Action 'n' *Leaving buffer zones of minimum 5m (10m on slopes) along streams, rivers and ponds.*

Action 'o' *Encouraging rivers, streams and ponds to develop naturally, with targeted support for vulnerable species such as water vole and rare habitats such as floodplain woodland.*

Action 'q' *Producing protection plans for ferns, mosses and liverworts at vulnerable sandrock sites.*

Action 't' *Pursuing appropriate management of ditches and ponds for wildlife and farming.*

Action 'u' *Allowing targeted riparian woodland creation in appropriate locations primarily through natural regeneration.*

Woodland

Objective W1 - To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.

Objective W2 - To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.

Action 'h' *Enhance and restore shaws and gill woodlands*

Action 'k' *Adopt UK tree and plant health biosecurity policies and support local provenance tree nurseries.*

Action 'l' *Tailor environmental land management support to control invasive species, including landscape-scale deer management; grey squirrel eradication; and removal of rhododendron and other damaging invasive plants from ancient woodland, particularly gill woodland.*

Action 'p' *Avoiding use of large-scale machinery and instead using traditional techniques such as hand cutting, horses or small-scale machinery for woodland management to avoid damage to High Weald woodland*

Action 'q' *Allowing natural regeneration in and around woodland where appropriate*

Fieldsapes and Heath

Objective FH1 - To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.

Objective FH2 - To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.

Objective FH3 - To protect and enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.

Action 'm' *Developing veteran tree replacement plans for hedges and shaws.*

Action 'n' *Utilising local provenance wildflower seeds and plant plugs to create or enhance grassland*

Action 'o' *Restoring, protecting and managing hedgerows as part of a diverse hedgerow mosaic, reinstating lost hedgerows, and ensuring hedges are cut only between September and March to avoid damage to wildlife*

Action 'p' *Avoiding new woodland planting on medieval fieldscapes and heath, and on species-rich grassland, to protect grassland and heathland biodiversity.*

Action 'q' *Protecting local and heritage breeds and crop varieties to preserve genetic diversity*

Action 's' *Sensitively managing and restoring lowland heathland as a key habitat.*

Soil Health: Principles and Investment Priorities 2029 (pg. 57)

- Practising no- or min-till farming
- Adopting rotational grazing practices
- Increasing agroforestry and multi-layered growing
- Utilising cover cropping
- Adopting companion / intercropping

Recovering nature: Principles and Investment Priorities 2029 (pg. 61)

- Restoration of species rich grasslands
- Recovery of the abundance of characteristic High Weald species and habitats
- Deer management
- Hedge restoration and reinstatement
- Creation and management of scrub and wilder boundaries
- Restoration of a pesticide and pollution free environment

High Weald National Landscape – Habitat Bank considerations

Natural beauty and landscape character

One of the key and defining components of the High Weald's medieval landscape are its small, irregularly shaped fields often bounded by (and forming a highly inter-connected mosaic with) hedgerows and woodlands. The essential landscape character of the area was established by the fourteenth century before the post-medieval period of Enclosure. As such, the High Weald is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape still highly legible today. The pattern of small irregularly-shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands are fundamental to the landscape's essential medieval character, and therefore maintaining their character is a key objective of the Plan.

Any habitat bank site assessment therefore needs to recognise this objective and should begin with an examination of historic field data (using Historic Environment Records (HERs)). Changes to historic field systems should be avoided, since this would adversely and permanently affect the fundamental and inherited character and natural beauty of the High Weald. The proposed site should also look to be part of a broader, interconnected habitat system, reinforcing the existing network of wildlife corridors, rather than an isolated site.

The creation of 'new' habitats will only happen at the expense of losing other biodiverse habitats (e.g. scrub, heathland or grassland) and productive agricultural land, as well as having potentially adverse impacts on existing landscape character. Therefore, the priority for most habitats in the High Weald is maintenance and enhancement through traditional management practices **before** undertaking habitat creation.

Habitat bank proposals in the High Weald should first and foremost be providing habitats most suited to the designated landscape, with the quantity of biodiversity units produced a secondary consideration.

Habitat banks which prioritise volume of biodiversity units and easy delivery, are unlikely to truly conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. For example, the High Weald has abundant ‘other neutral’ grassland in ‘moderate’ condition (semi-improved grassland). Habitat banks in the High Weald should be aiming to provide additionality to the landscape.

Habitats being enhanced or created within Habitat Bank proposals should be those which are most likely to align to the High Weald landscape and its nature recovery priorities, as set out under ‘Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles and Investment Priorities’ on the previous page.

Similarly, the following interventions should **not** generally be proposed in the HWNL:

- Creating ‘other neutral’ grassland (These habitats are already abundant in the High Weald, unless proposals involve enhancing to lowland meadow);
- Block tree planting (With 36% canopy cover across the High Weald, good management and enhancement of existing woodlands is the priority over new tree planting. The importance of the High Weald’s small-scale medieval fieldscape to the landscape character means large woodland creation schemes are usually unsuitable);
- Additional scrub in small fields (Small fields, especially those with undisturbed soils, can have good species diversity. Additional scrub can impact the core size and the long-term viability of the grassland species diversity);
- Tree and shrub planting, or management, that blocks views from public rights of way, or affects their usability;
- Creation of new lakes / over-management or over ‘tidying’ of ponds;
- PRow diversions (Many public rights of way in the HWNL are historic paths, which are an important character component of the natural beauty of the High Weald.)

Farming and natural beauty

The High Weald is characterised by a significant land-based sector and related community life. Management Plan Objective LBE1 “*seeks to improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture, and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.*” However, the Management Plan clarifies that the pursuance of this objective should not harm the other character components or be at the expense of their contribution to the natural beauty of the HWNL.

Most land in the HWNL is classified Grade 3 or lower under the Agricultural Land Classification. However, it is still predominantly highly productive agricultural grazing land, reflecting the characteristic and historic agricultural practices of the area, and as such is intrinsically valuable to the landscape character. The use of ALC grade 3b classification is not a justification for habitat bank creation by itself within the High Weald NL. Indeed, grade 3b grasslands are where much of the species-rich grasslands in the High Weald can be found, many of them already managed with low chemical inputs.

The High Weald landscape already stores large amounts of carbon in its soils owing to the undisturbed nature of many grasslands (fields) and ancient semi-natural woodlands, making a sizeable contribution to climate mitigation. Habitat bank proposals should avoid disturbing previously undisturbed soils, as this will affect important soil biota and release carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere.

Wildlife and biodiversity

Nature recovery and biodiversity is a key cross-cutting theme in the High Weald Management Plan, which sets out that biodiversity is a fundamental component of natural beauty and enriches the distinctive landscape patterns of the HWNL.

In the High Weald, the biodiversity value of the landscape is greater than the sum of its parts. The High Weald's structurally diverse, permeable and complex habitat mosaic supports a rich diversity of wildlife. The importance of the area's biodiversity stems not only from the rarity and variety of species, but also the ancientness, interconnectedness and assortment of the habitats that support them, and the quantum, quality and tranquillity of these habitats.

All habitats in the High Weald are valuable for supporting nature recovery. Ancient woodlands support a wide range of plants, and animals including birds, bats and invertebrates; gill woodlands (with their unusual Atlantic microclimate) sustain rare and endangered plants, ferns and bryophytes; the head waters of seven river catchments support over 4,500km of natural or unmodified waterways; and there are numerous undisturbed pastures that support wildflowers and waxcap fungi communities. The Management Plan supports the protection and recovery of all characteristic species, from the smallest invertebrates to reintroductions of charismatic fauna.

Grassland

Most land that comes forward for habitat banks is likely to be grassland. The High Weald holds nationally important fragments of species rich grassland, and 40% of fields are historically undisturbed indicating a strong presence of semi-improved grasslands, much of it good quality semi-improved grassland. They are valuable within both a national and local context and are an increasingly rare habitat. Although they do not have the range and number of grass and wildflower species associated with unimproved grassland, they can still support significant, sometimes rare, plant species and invertebrate fauna and, with appropriate management, they do have the potential to return to species-rich grassland. Habitat creation proposals on grasslands risk the loss of important existing grassland habitats and biodiversity.

The complex, underlying geology of sandstones, silts and clays in the High Weald gives rise to a variety of soils that can range from acidic, to dry and wet neutral soils often within one field. It is common to find a diverse range of wildflower species and grassland mosaics associated with these different soil types occurring within the same grassland in the High Weald.

The grassland data held on Natural England's Priority Habitats Inventory (PHI) is an underestimate of the distribution of important grasslands in the High Weald as there has not been a systematic survey of grasslands within this National Landscape. Because of this:

- Significant amounts of unregistered (PHI) good quality semi-improved (known as other neutral grassland in good condition for BNG) and species-rich grasslands (such as lowland meadows) exist.
- Any grassland proposed for habitat creation schemes should be informed by grassland surveys using appropriately qualified ecologists who are familiar with interpretation / evaluation of the grassland within a HWNL context.
- Tree planting proposals, for all sites within the High Weald, irrespective of size, should be informed by a robust ecological survey, landscape character assessment, and archaeological assessment, to ensure medieval fields, good quality semi-improved and other species-rich grasslands are not lost.
- The High Weald NL Partnership does not support the use of aerial/satellite photographs and AI rapid habitat modelling outputs as evidence of a grassland's character because

they are not currently credible methods for assessing the biodiversity interest of a grassland.

- Species lists for habitat banks should consist of species that naturally occur within the HWNL, sourced locally where possible, for example using Weald Native Origin Seed Mix for grasslands and local provenance plugs from nearby donor sites.
- Biological records collected during surveys and monitoring should be submitted to the appropriate (Sussex/Kent/Surrey) biodiversity record centre. This should continue across the lifetime of the habitat bank.

Habitat Banks in the HWNL – Checklist

Habitat bank proposals in the High Weald National Landscape should be appropriate to the site and planned and evidenced sufficiently well that they are highly likely to successfully deliver additionality over the long-term.

The following checklist is designed as a tool to help habitat bank operators and landowners consider the HWNL in their proposals, which in turn benefits the statutory purpose of the designation to conserve and enhance this National Landscape. The checklist can also be used by Natural England in assessing screening applications under the EIA (Agriculture) Regs.

Site background information:

- ❖ Has the site and adjacent land been checked using open-source data and records from the local biodiversity record centre for:
 - Priority habitats using the Priority Habitat Inventory
 - On-site or near-by statutory designations
 - Irreplaceable habitats including veteran trees
 - Protected species
 - Registered archaeological features
 - Public rights of way including bridleways
- ❖ Is the site within a strategic location for nature recovery (as per the Local Nature Recovery Strategy ACIB³maps)? Have the habitat bank proposals considered how they fit with the LNRS?
- ❖ If the LNRS map is unavailable, because it has not yet been published, does the site sit within the relevant Local Authority's strategic location for nature recovery?
- ❖ If the site has non-statutory designations such as Local Wildlife Sites, or historic non-statutory designations, are proposals consistent with the designation purpose?
- ❖ Have historic maps been used to ascertain historic land uses, and has that been reflected in the habitat bank proposals? For example lost features (e.g. ponds, hedgerows, parkland, woodland, orchards), field patterns, historic field boundaries etc. identified for reinstatement.
- ❖ Is the current and recent land management known? e.g. grazing, cultivation, including past agricultural improvement.
- ❖ Are there site-specific conditions that will make achieving the habitat bank proposals difficult, or that need specifically addressing in the proposals? e.g. other restoration works and grant schemes, felling licences, public rights of way, tree preservation orders, flood zones, rivers, and utilities infrastructure etc.

³ 'Areas that Could Become of Particular Importance for Biodiversity'

Evidence and qualitative information:

- ❖ Have baseline surveys been undertaken by a professional ecologist at FISC Level 4 or above, (and accredited to use River Condition Assessments where water course units are involved) following best practice methodology for UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) surveys, to inform the proposals, including:
 - Surveying at the appropriate time(s) of year?
 - Undertaking quadrat surveys on High Weald grasslands?
 - Any limitations to surveying clearly explained?
 - Protected species surveys undertaken if they are likely to be on site?
 - Ensuring the use of the UKHab secondary codes to aid site descriptions?
 - ❖ Has the proposal understood and been informed by the main landscape characteristics of the site? Do proposals align with, and been informed by, the High Weald AONB Management Plan, including:
 - Consideration of the Management Plan character components and key characteristics?
 - Meeting Management Plan Objectives and relevant Actions?
 - Meeting Management Plan Nature Recovery Priorities and Investment Principles?
 - ❖ Has the proposal understood the landscape habitat complexity of the site and its surroundings? How will the proposed planting maintain or enhance the habitat complexity?
 - ❖ Has soil analysis been carried out where appropriate, to help understand likely past use of nutrient inputs, and pH levels, to better inform decision making around habitat enhancement or creation techniques, especially for grassland?
 - ❖ Does the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan specify a robust and appropriate methodology for carrying out the habitat works pursuant to the Habitat Bank creation, and what is the proposed management regime over the 30-year period to achieve the planned enhancements?
 - ❖ Do the proposed species naturally occur in the High Weald, and will they be locally sourced?
 - ❖ Have conditions at the site been checked for suitability for the habitats proposed:
 - Is the site or areas of the site prone to flooding, does it have seasonally saturated soils, or flushes and springs within other broader habitats?
 - Does the underlying soil vary even across a single field, suggesting the need to consider mosaic habitats and alternative habitat types, management, or expectations?
 - Will livestock continue/be introduced to the site? And what considerations are required for this? Is there access for livestock and machinery?
 - Is the site likely to be adversely impacted by deer browsing, and if so, what deer management will be undertaken?
 - Are soils undisturbed, and are habitat bank proposals likely to disturb soils, affecting soil biota, and releasing carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere?
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Appendix 1 - Habitat Bank requirements and duties

Owning and/or operating a habitat bank selling biodiversity units comes with some legal requirements and duties, of which landowners should be aware. Additionally local authorities may have further criteria that needs to be met for any habitat bank set-up within their district.

The list below highlights key requirements, and is for information only, is not comprehensive, nor a substitute for appropriate legal, financial or other advice needed when considering habitat banking. **More detailed and up-to-date information can be found at: [Biodiversity net gain - GOV.UK](#)**

Amongst other things, habitat bank providers/landowners/operators will need to:

- Be aware of any restrictions such as permissions, consents, licences or designations, which could either constrain habitat enhancement and/or creation of biodiversity units on the site, or restrict their sale.
- Demonstrate under BNG regulations, that the work is truly additional to works delivered under other habitat obligations such as Forestry Commission works, or ELMS and other stewardship agreements, or works required as part of Natural England Protected Species Licences.
- Follow the specific guidance and regulations for irreplaceable habitats, and avoiding damage or loss to any irreplaceable habitat(s) on site.
- Produce BNG calculations, and a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) detailing the baseline and condition assessments using the statutory Biodiversity Metric.
- Secure the site for 30 years either via a Section 106 agreement with the relevant Local Planning Authority, or via a Conservation Covenant secured with a Responsible Body.
- Take legal responsibility for reaching the intended target habitat and condition within the prescribed timeframe as set out in the BNG guidance via an approved HMMP as agreed with the Local Authority or Responsible Body.
- Agree to the Local Authority or Responsible Body's legal, monitoring, remediation, and enforcement provisions as well as any additional fees or costs levied by the LA or RB.
- Register the site on the government's public Biodiversity Gain Sites Register. and keep up-to-date the registered allocation of biodiversity Units to developers.
- Report on the progress of the site to the Local Authority or Responsible Body at agreed times across the 30 year lifetime of the habitat bank.
- Have the resources to manage and maintain the habitat bank for 30 years, including appropriate finance, equipment and expertise.

Appendix 2 - Definition of terms relating to grasslands

BNG/UKHab⁴ grassland terminology:

Lowland meadow – One of the priority grassland habitats, but which is in serious decline across the country. Occurring on similar soils to neutral grassland, but with a richer species diversity (15-35 spp/m²) found across the enclosed lowland landscapes including traditional hay meadows, floodplain meadows, and pastures. Lowland meadows are also an important habitat for many animal species.

Other neutral grassland - Occurs on soils with a pH between 4.5 and 6.5 (neither acidic or lime-rich). Includes a range of semi-improved grassland plant community types on neutral soil, as enclosed or managed grassland such as pastures, a range of wet grasslands where vegetation is dominated by grasses, sown grassland strips alongside arable fields, long-term set-aside or fallow land and tall unmanaged grasslands. Not as species rich as lowland meadows (9-15spp/m²). It does not include improved species-poor grassland.

Modified grassland – A grassland of low diversity dominated by a few fast-growing grasses, specifically rye grass as well as white clover. The soils are generally nutrient enriched with fertiliser, and modified grasslands are sown.

Other grassland terminology⁵:

Semi-improved grassland - Semi-improved grassland is a transition category made up of grasslands which have had some degree of modification by artificial fertilisers, slurry, intensive grazing, herbicides or drainage, and consequently have a range of species which is less diverse and natural than unimproved grasslands.

Good quality semi-improved grassland – A semi-improved grassland with a range of species equivalent to or more than 10+spp/m² and is equivalent to an ‘other neutral grassland’ in good condition. It is a stepping stone to unimproved grasslands.

Species rich grassland – A grassland displaying a wide variety of wildflowers and grasses with the exact composition varying according to the dynamic interaction of factors such as management, drainage, history and soils. Includes species rich pastures, meadows, waxcap fungi grasslands, and neutral, acid and calcareous grasslands.

Unimproved grasslands – Often high species diversity, but with a very low percentage of agricultural species such as rye grassland and white clover. The make-up of species is characteristic of the area and the soils where the grassland is found. Unimproved grasslands may be rank and neglected, mown or grazed.

⁴ Descriptions taken from The UK Habitat Classification, Habitat Definitions Version 1.1

⁵ Descriptions taken from Plantlife (2023) Review of Grassland Trends in the UK V3 & High Weald NL AONB Management Plan 2024-2029