

HAWKESWOOD ECOLOGY

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Our Ref: HE/34/2022

Dear Alex,

In Season Walk Over, Land at Sun Fields, Dream Fields, Llandarcy.

Introduction

Following a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) undertaken at the above Site in January 2023, a recommendation was made for a walk over of the grassland areas at an appropriate time of year to properly categorise the quality of the habitat present. Accordingly, a second visit was made to Site on 12th June 2023.

The Site consists principally of two grazed and cut meadows. One was considered most likely to be agriculturally improved grassland (AIG) with few broad leaved herbs present in the sward, the other was considered to be a semi-improved acidic grassland but could not be properly assessed at the time of survey as many grassland plant species are not visible at this time. The Biological Data search undertaken as part of the PEA indicated an area of semi-improved acid grassland at the location identified during initial survey.

This letter report should be read in conjunction with the PEA, '*Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Sun Fields, Dream Fields, Llandarcy. Hawkeswood Ecology – March 2023*'

Methodology and Constraints

The assessment consisted of a walk-over survey of the two fields (Target Note 3, the field most likely to be AIG and Target Notes 7 and 9 that most likely semi-improved acidic) following the Phase 1 Habitat Survey guidelines (JNCC, 2010). The initial Target Note descriptions are given in the PEA and locations are shown in Figure 1 of the PEA.

The fields had been cut for silage; however it was considered that enough material and growth remained to properly assess them during the assessment.

Surveyor Experience:

The surveyor and report author is Eric Hawkeswood. Eric has many years experience of broad habitat and detailed botanical and species surveying. He is a Natural Resources Wales (NRW) licensed bat worker (SO88903-1) and has extensive experience of roost inspections and emergence work. He is also licensed to work with dormice (no SO89083-1) and has been involved in initiating and running several dormouse schemes across south Wales. He has been a professional in the nature conservation field for thirty three years formerly working as Reserves Manager and Conservation Officer at Gwent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Manager for the Ruperra Conservation Trust. Eric has worked as an Ecological Consultant as joint proprietor of Hawkeswood Ecology since 2001.

Field Study:***Target Note 3***

Although recently cut for silage or hay, the field was considered to be Agriculturally Improved Grassland. The sward was dominated by grasses with perennial rye-grass and crested dog's tail the most abundantly occurring. Other species were frequently occurring red fescue, Yorkshire fog and sweet vernal-grass. Cocksfoot was occasional throughout the sward with false oat-grass occurring at the margins of the field.

Few broad leaved herbs were present with the most abundant white clover and ribwort plantain which were found across the field. Other species noted were as identified in the PEA with no significant change to frequency of occurrence.

Target Notes 7 and 9

Target Note 7 covers the majority of the area at the south of the Site. In the PEA it looked notably different to the field at TN3 with the apparent key differences being the greater dominance of fescue and the presence of sheep's sorrel, particularly associated with the rocky outcrops present here and in the area of Target Note 9.

The area of Target Note 7 had been cut but a wide margin left on the field boundary. A greater diversity of species was noted here and area is best described as poor semi-improved acid grassland. However, many species present are also occur in more neutral situations and it is likely the field has been modified by agricultural operations over recent years. It is noticeable that indicators of more acidic edaphic conditions such as sheep's sorrel are much more frequent near where the ground rock has broken through. Species recorded were:

<i>Species</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Bird's-foot trefoil	F
Cat's-ear	LF
Cocksfoot	LF
Common knapweed	LF
Common sorrel	F
Creeping buttercup	F
Crested dog's-tail	O-LF
Dandelion	O-LF
Field scabious	R

Ragwort	O
Red clover	F
Red fescue	F/LA
Ribwort plantain	A
Sheep's fescue	LF
Sheep's sorrel	O
Sweet vernal-grass	A
Yorkshire fog	A

The area at Target Note 9 is uncut and dominated by a large rock breakthrough and shallow soils. Part of this area has been affected by machinery with some surface vegetation removed recently, this area is similar to TN7 but the large amount of rock has led to it being more clearly acidic in nature with species such as common heather frequent in the rocky areas. Even here though, species more characteristic of less acidic soils are found with common restharrow locally frequent, noticeably in disturbed areas. Species recorded here were:

<i>Species</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Bird's-foot trefoil	F-LA
Bladder campion	R
Bracken	LA
Cat's-ear	LF
Cocksfoot	F
Common bent	A
Common heather	LA
Common knapweed	O-LF
Common restharrow	LF
Crested dog's-tail	LF
Greater plantain	O
Hairy sedge	R
Red clover	O
Red fescue	LF
Ribwort plantain	O
Sheep's fescue	LF
Sheep's sorrel	O
Yarrow	O
Yellow rattle	F
Yorkshire fog	O

Additional Recommendations:

In addition to recommendations made in the PEA we suggest that areas of the field in Target Notes 7 and 9 are carefully stripped and stored on Site to re-cover any filled trenches. If this is feasible then a method statement should be produced to ensure it the process is carried out in a suitable manner.

If possible, areas with yellow rattle should be cut in the peak season and the cuttings strewn across areas of Target Note 3 whilst green. This is to particularly introduce yellow rattle. This species is a hemi-parasite which feeds on nutrients produced by grasses and reduces grass vigour; this can result in low growing patches of grass into which other broad leaved herbs can colonise and succeed against the generally more competitive species increasing the grassland biodiversity.

Fauna:

A small number of birds were noted, mostly flying over the Site or foraging on it. These included jackdaw, buzzard, raven and lesser black backed gull. Perching birds recorded were skylark, chaffinch, song thrush and common whitethroat. In terms of relevance to the Site, skylark is of interest as it breeds on open pasture. In the PEA it was considered that the management of the Site was not particularly suitable for this species and this is likely to remain the case. They would be likely to forage around the area however and there are more suitable breeding areas both within the farm complex and around it.

Conclusions:

It is considered that the habitat characterisation made in the PEA is confirmed with the field described in TN3 being agriculturally modified and that at TN7 and 9 being poor semi-improved acidic grassland.

The recommendations made here are in addition to those made in the PEA which remain valid. Without any mitigation being undertaken the works are considered to be of **minor negative significance** in a local (local area) context. If the recommendations made in the PEA and in this letter addendum are fully implemented there is potential for the works to support Net Biodiversity Benefit and the works could be of **minor positive significance** in a local context.

We hope this update is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned if you require further detail or have any queries.

Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eric Hawkeswood', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Eric Hawkeswood
Principal Ecologist

Photographs:



The field described in TN3, above a general view, below a close up of the sward showing dominance of grasses and bare patches.



Views across TN 7 showing the uncut areas (above) and to TN 9 in the distance below.



The rocky area in TN 9 and bladder campion and restharrow in the area of disturbed vegetation.