

AP 7.9 WDC to confirm whether Policy HW9 contains priority habitat.

AP 7.19 WDC to confirm whether priority habitats are present on Policy HW17 allocation.

Response: We have reviewed the available evidence and concluded that neither site contains priority habitats.

'Priority habitats' (or 'habitats of principle importance') are habitats defined in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). There is no indication that HW17 contains priority habitat (with the possible exception of boundary hedgerows), and conflicting indications re HW9.

There is no definitive map of priority habitats. The WDLP evidence base used mapping provided by the Bucks and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC). Based on this mapping neither HW9 or HW17 contain priority habitat. The second main source of mapping is the MAGIC mapping compiled by Natural England and referred to in oral submissions by the Chilterns Conservation Board. The MAGIC maps show HW9 as "no main habitat but additional habitat exists". They do not show anything for HW17.

We have therefore inquired further into the relevance of the MAGIC maps and the particular category that applies to HW9. Natural England have confirmed by email 14.9.18 that this means "that a polygon may contain priority habitat but [we] have low confidence in the underpinning evidence and/or it is at a coverage of less than 50% of the polygon and/or it is below the minimum mapping unit".

This corresponds with a recent email from BMERC responding to the Chilterns Conservation Board. (My emphasis.)

Glynswood site HW9

As an example in the Glynswood area, taking the bright pink wedge on the MAGIC version as an example because it's easy to see, it appears to be mapped as Priority Habitat. **But if you read on through the pop up box its "good quality semi-improved grassland (non-priority)" and they have a low confidence it is what its mapped as in the main habitat classification.** I know that field. In general it is grassland on chalk, so that's ok as a broad principle. But it has been improved quite substantially in the past. Various stewardship schemes have improved it in

terms of its conservation value so it's fair to say it is chalk grassland with conservation value. **But in the strictest terms of "Priority Habitat" it doesn't meet the stringent criteria for Priority Chalk Grassland.** We only map polygons we have very good confidence are entirely compliant with the PH descriptors. So in this case we don't map it as we don't agree. But it's still of importance for conservation.

The main bulk of Hughenden Park next door to the west is a good example. We map most of it as Lowland Wood Pasture & Parkland, which it is. This is one of the weirder habitats in that's its partly a landscape designation as well as more habitat things. MAGIC shows parts of it to be Deciduous Woodland. Which they are in a very general way. As viewed from aerial photos those patches have quite a few trees, but from the ground are far more open with grassland below in some cases. Where does one draw the line between trees dotted about in various formations which is "parkland" and a few which might be a bit closer together so could loosely be called woodland? It's a nightmare classification as it is extremely variable; tree densities are very much local to the character of each "park" but still it is all "park". Both versions then could be considered "truth".

Generally speaking our maps have far less polygons than Natural England's (as viewed on MAGIC). This means we have missed some good bits inevitably, but also means we haven't shown bits which may or may not in a vague way comply with the description. In essence ours are purer but less inclusive, the MAGIC ones are broader and all-inclusive and take quite a bit of ploughing through the small print to see quite how close it is to a strict PH definition. I truly wish they would only show the ones they have a reasonable confidence comply with the PH's as it confuses everyone!

Environmental Records Centre Manager
Historic and Natural Environment Team
Transport, Economy and Environment

