

Ilketshall St. Andrew and St. John Land Management Company

Commons – Management Plan March 2021 – February 2022

The following sections outline the intentions of the Land Management Company (LMC) with respect to different aspects of the Commons.

This document should be read in conjunction with the *Annual Management Plan for March 2020 – February 2021* (available on the Commons website, www.ilketshallcommons.co.uk) and the Progress Report on the implementation of the 2020 – 2021 Management Plan (also available on the Commons website).

It must be recognised that the fulfilment of many aspects of the Management Plan will be dependent to some extent on weather conditions and resource availability. It must also be recognised that the Management Plan is the starting point for the management of the Commons over the ensuing 12 months, and therefore that additional work may be completed as and when required. The LMC is fully accountable to Natural England for the management of the HLS and ELS agreement and therefore has to follow strict rules and guidelines laid down by Natural England. Due to this, it is important that no work is carried out on the Commons without the knowledge and approval of the LMC, as Natural England may impose fines if any rules are broken.

Section 1. General

1.1 Long-term management of the Commons.

As a consequence of the Commons being ‘open access’ land under the terms of the Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) Act, the management of the Commons has to reflect the interests of both Parishioners (and non-Parishioner) users of the Commons, as well as the Commoners. The LMC stated [Management Plan 2020-2021, Section 1.1.] its intention to consult widely with its stakeholders, and particularly the Commoners and the Parishioners in the two parishes during 2020, to identify what features of the Commons they would like to see enhanced and established on a long-term basis, and to thereby establish a consensus view as to the objectives the management of the Commons should seek to achieve. The Covid-19 pandemic made face-to-face meetings impossible, but the LMC arranged for the circulation of an initial questionnaire to all households in the two Parishes in November 2020. An analysis of the results of that questionnaire are available on the website, but the summary findings are:

A total of 32 responses were received, from the 140 questionnaires that were distributed in the two Parishes. Although the Commons were not an important reason for many people deciding to live in the area, the overall result was that the Commons, and the management of the Commons, **are** important. There was a slightly stronger support for the objective of the Commons being to provide a habitat for wild flowers, insects and butterflies, than there was for wild bird populations and wild animal populations, but all three objectives are important. The objectives of providing a source of grass and grazing, and of being an amenity for villagers and others to walk, walk their dogs, enjoy open space, etc. are not regarded as being important as the wild birds/wild animals/flowers etc. objectives. The objective of making a contribution to meeting climate change is seen as important, but the Commons becoming more like parkland was not widely supported.

A number of respondents added significant comments and observations, and these are also reported in the analysis on the website. It must be stressed that the questionnaire is the first stage of the review of the longer-term objectives for the Commons, and it is the intention to

initiate other activities during 2021 to build on these results of the questionnaire. These initiatives will probably include face-to-face meetings when pandemic-related restrictions are lifted to allow such activities.

A central purpose of identifying long-term objectives for the Commons is to be able to align those objectives with whatever funding schemes are available. At the time of writing, there is considerable uncertainty about the long-term arrangements for agricultural support funding, but there is a widespread expectation that the overall level of funding will be substantially less in the future than it has been hitherto. The indications so far have been that funding will be linked much more strongly to environmental protection and enhancement, which is clearly a positive signal to the Commons; however, it has been pointed out that Common land, along with certain other categories of land, is almost automatically aligned with environmental protection and therefore does not need significant funding to further that objective. It should therefore be recognised that whatever long-term objectives are established for the Commons, there may have to be some adjustment of them in order to be able to take advantage of funding schemes, as and when the detail of these schemes become available. Overall, it remains the case that the future funding and subsidy arrangements for agriculture in the UK are very uncertain, but that the funding of the Commons in future years will be both significantly reduced and focused, and the management of the Commons will need to reflect that.

At the current time, the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) and Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) funding schemes will expire in January 2022, and therefore the Commons has a further year of these schemes available. The payment from these schemes is dependent upon the LMC re-applying each year; the LMC has submitted its application to continue in the scheme until January 2022.

Various Commoners have the rights to graze specified numbers and types of livestock on the Commons. Consultations with the Commoners will take place in relation to any future funding opportunities, in the light of those rights. Consultations with all other stakeholders will also take place prior to applying for any future funding opportunities, and will take account of the consensus view of what the long-term objectives of the Commons should constitute.

1.2 Incursions and encroachments.

The Commons have been in existence for a very long period of time, and the overwhelming majority of stakeholders want to see them continue indefinitely into the future. The LMC therefore sees the preservation of the acreage as being a prime responsibility. To that end, the LMC stated in the Management Plan for 2020 – 2021 that it would seek to establish more precisely the boundaries of all of the Commons, and therefore to secure agreement as to the ownership of certain ponds, hedges, and areas, with the owners of properties adjoining the Commons. The Covid-19 pandemic has made progress on that intention more difficult, but a start has been made and work will continue where possible, with the objective of establishing a definitive set of boundaries agreed to by all parties.

The LMC also stated in the Management Plan for 2020-2021 that it would take a robust approach to any encroachment or incursion onto the Commons. The LMC has followed through with that, and during 2020 has spent time and money in doing so in relation to encroachments. The Commons do not have any legal owner, and it is therefore Suffolk County Council that is the 'guardian' of the Commons. It should be noted that Suffolk County Council, and East Suffolk District Council, have indicated that they are not prepared to undertake enforcement action against incursions and encroachments. The costs of such action therefore falls to the LMC, particularly since the Parish Council does not have sufficient funds for such purposes. In the light of the LMC's solicitors advising that the costs of pursuing action relating to an encroachment through to the ultimate end-point would probably cost in the region of £30,000, the LMC needs to maintain substantial reserves in

order to pay for necessary actions, and to increase that amount each year in line with inflation in legal costs. The LMC intends to allocate £30,000 of its existing funds as the amount for this purpose for 2021-2022. This sum will be reviewed on an annual basis.

1.3 Funding

As at December 2020, the net funds held by the LMC constituted approximately £67,000. In recent years, the income to the LMC has mainly come from three sources; the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the Entry Level Stewardship Scheme (ELS) and the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS). In approximate terms, the income from these sources has constituted £13,000 per year, with £5,835 from the ELS/HLS and £7,200 from the BPS. [These are approximate figures representing averages for the past two years. The figure for the BPS is dependent on the £/€ exchange rate, but it is anticipated that they will be very similar to previous years.]

As noted above, the future funding arrangements continue to be very uncertain at the current time, but the consensus is that in the future, funding available to the Commons will be significantly less. In the light of that, the LMC intends to continue to take a cautious approach towards expenditures, at least until future funding arrangements become significantly clearer. This plan is based on the assumption of the receipt of funding from the HLS/ELS scheme through to January 2023.

In common with any organisation holding funds, those held by the LMC are subject to erosion from the effects of inflation. Taking a figure of £60,000 as being the funds held by the LMC, an inflation rate of just 2% will erode the spending power of that £60,000 by £1,200 each year. In common with the vast majority of charities and not-for-profit organisations, the LMC has sought to reduce the impact of inflation by placing some money as interest-bearing deposits, and has been successful in securing relatively high interest rates for this purpose (although still not as high as the inflation rate). The LMC has investigated the possibilities of investing in alternative assets as a way of securing above-inflation returns on a long-term basis, but given the volatility in the financial markets in 2020 has decided not to make such alternative investments for the time being.

1.4 Communications

The LMC followed through with its intentions to develop a website for the Commons, and the evidence is that it is successful and valued as a source of information relating to the Commons. The LMC intends to continue to develop the website, along with regular updating of the information contained on it.

Working parties of volunteers to undertake work on the Commons have been a feature of the Commons for many years, and it is intended that these will continue as a means of building involvement and commitment to the Commons; participants also comment that it is an enjoyable and rewarding thing to do. With the likely reductions in funding income, the role of such working parties will increase in the future.

Costs: £300 annual maintenance costs for the website.

1.5 Constitution of the LMC.

There have been no developments over the past year that have impinged upon the appropriateness of the current Constitution for the Land Management Company. The LMC will not, therefore, be proposing changes to the Constitution during the time period covered by this Management Plan.

Section 2. Grass.

2.1 Over-wintering Areas

There are two central requirements arising from the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement; first, that cutting of the grass does not take place until after the middle of June, and second that 10% of the grassland area under Option HK15 is not cut at that time, with a recommendation that they are cut after 28 February the *following* year. The primary function of the 10% uncut area is the promotion of wildlife for an extended period. [The areas were referred to as 'uncut' areas in the 2020-2021 Management Plan; to avoid confusion, this Plan refers to them as 'over-wintering areas'] The purpose of the cutting after 28 February is to avoid the encroachment of weeds and invasive species, but by 28 February the absence of cutting will have served its purpose in terms of promotion of wildlife, at least to some extent.

The LMC is not proposing any change to the 10% over-wintering areas that applied for the 2020-21 Management Plan. The rationale for the selection of the 10% over-wintering areas at the time of the 2019 Annual Management Plan was that::

- The 10% uncut areas are spread around the various Commons in order to maximise the benefit to birds and wildlife. Some areas have been selected for their proximity to ponds, scrub, etc.
- The 10% areas are generally those that are the least productive areas, and/or are those that are problematic in terms of cutting, turning, baling and carting.

This rationale continues to apply in relation to the intentions for 2021-2022.

The areas that were left uncut in July 2020 will be flailed at some point after 28 February 2021. This work is particularly subject to the prevailing ground conditions, since the wet autumn has left the ground saturated as at December 2020. These areas for over-wintering and for flailing in the following spring are identified in [Appendix 2](#) [Map 1: 10% Over-Wintering Areas, and Map 2: Flailing Plan of 10% Over Wintering Areas].

Costs: The anticipated cost of haymaking in 2021 is £1300, calculated at a compensation rate of £24 including VAT per acre. The anticipated cost of cutting and collecting the grass on the over-wintered areas in 2021 is £500, based on the cost in previous years. Pathway cutting will be undertaken as and when required, depending on growth rates. On the basis of what this activity has cost in previous years, the anticipated cost in 2021 is £600 including VAT. The late grass cut of Holdens East and Mill Common is anticipated to cost £500 including VAT in 2021, again based on the cost in previous years.

2.2 Harrowing & Rolling

The 2020-2021 Management Plan undertook to conduct a trial of harrowing and rolling on Great Common with the objective of establishing whether such action would enhance the quality and quantity of grass for the purposes of hay, on Great Common in particular. This trial was undertaken, but with disappointing results. The conclusion at the end of the work was that it had not been a success; despite the use of various pieces of equipment and depths, sufficient thatch could not be removed without also removing significant quantities of grass. Given that outcome, it is not the intention that further expenditures should be undertaken on attempting to improve the quality and quantity of grass for the purposes of hay.

2.3 Control of Weeds.

One of the requirements of the HLS agreement is that a number of injurious species of weeds should be controlled. Spot spraying of thistles on the HK15 areas was undertaken in 2020, and the intention is that this will be repeated in 2021 depending on what the results of the spraying in 2020 are then shown to be. Ragwort has started to become more of a problem (particularly on Great Common), and it was hoped that resources would be available to deal with this, but it turned out that resources were not available at the appropriate time to do so. The intention is that there will be an attempt to control ragwort in 2021.

It has to be noted that any initiative to control weeds will be dependent on weather conditions and on the availability of personnel to undertake the work, and therefore cannot be guaranteed.

Costs: The cost of the spot spraying of the thistles is difficult to estimate, but it is hoped to limit this to £1,000 on the basis of the cost in 2020-2021.

Section 3. Hedge and Scrub Cutting

The advice received from Kim Pearce (Natural England) and Tim Schofield (Suffolk FWAG) in November 2018 was that hedges should be cut either once every three years or once every two years. The LMC adopted the approach of cutting hedges every two years, although it should be noted that in a slow-growing year (for example, due to a drought or a cold spring), some hedges/parts of hedges may only require cutting once every three years. The reason for preferring cutting every two years is that if hedges are normally cut every three years, they would then need to be cut back hard. In turn, this leads to defoliation and the hedge becomes too cold and open for birds to nest there.

Appendix 3 [Hedge Cutting and Scrub Flailing Plan 2021] identifies the hedges to be faced or topped. It also identifies the areas of scrub to be flailed.

Any hedge would not normally be topped *and* faced in the same year, although there may be specific instances where this is appropriate. Flailing is used for those boundaries that constitute scrub and where flailing is therefore more appropriate to avoid the encroachment of the scrub onto the Commons. The plans for hedge and scrub cutting will be subject to amendment in the light of weather conditions, but it is anticipated that the work will be undertaken before the Commons become too wet, and therefore unsuitable for heavier machinery. In rare circumstances it may be necessary to maintain hedges or scrub which are not detailed in the Management Plan. This could result as a matter of nuisance or safety which are not detailed in this Management Plan and the Appendices at the time it was published.

Costs: The estimated cost of the hedge and scrub cutting activity for 2021 is £1,500 (including VAT).

Section 4. Drainage and Anti-Incursion Ditch Maintenance, Road and Trackside Flailing.

As detailed in the previous Management Plan, works will be undertaken at various locations on both drainage and anti-incursion ditches and security bunds. These works will be completed, weather permitting, over the remaining 2020/21 winter period.

As part of the ongoing rolling programme, routine inspections will be made of both drainage and anti-incursion ditches and any remedial work will be undertaken as and when considered necessary. Accordingly, it is not possible to publish a plan of this type of work.

Wet weather often identifies locations which require maintenance but are not ostensibly the responsibility of the LMC; it would be worth considering whether these could be maintained by the LMC for the benefit of the local community as a whole. If undertaken at appropriate times in conjunction with other work, this would be a cost-effective solution.

In the autumn a survey will also be conducted to identify the growth of any willows or saplings within the ditches. If required these will be cut out during the winter months and treated to prevent regrowth.

In order to ensure compliance with the terms of the HLS/ELS agreement, it should be emphasized that no work should be undertaken on any drainage and anti-incurion ditches without the explicit agreement of the LMC.

[Appendix 4 Road/Trackside Flailing Plan 2021] Selected road and trackside ditches will be flailed. This work is carefully managed to ensure wildlife corridors are created wherever possible. To this end maintenance is planned on a rotational basis. On occasions additional work is identified which was not apparent at the publishing of the management plan. Such works are kept to a minimum and only actioned where considered necessary.

Costs: The intention is to limit the cost of this work in any one year to £2,000, with the aim of lower figures in later years.

Section 5. Other Works

5.1 Ponds.

Having undertaken a great deal of pond restoration in recent years, it has been recommended that ponds are kept cut and open during the growing season (see point about pond survey below). The aesthetic value will be greatly improved, the investment rewarded, and it will also alleviate the need for major works in the future. This work will be undertaken on a regular basis, probably around three times during the growing season.

The ponds in question are:

- Hawthorn
- Great Common, opposite 'The Homestead'
- Great Common, in front of 'English Cottage'
- Great Common, in front of Dairy Farm
- Great Common, west end
- Mill Common
- Blacksmiths
- The Mardle
- Little Common

Costs: The estimated cost of this activity in 2021 is £100 per visit.

The pond survey undertaken during 2020 [available on the Commons website at: <http://www.ilketshallcommons.co.uk/assets/docs/PDF-Docs/Pond%20Survey%202020.pdf>]

illustrates the importance of continued maintenance and provides recommendations of the works required. The intention is that those recommendations will be followed. Furthermore, it has been agreed that pond surveys will be conducted every three years in order to provide an ongoing reference as to the state and quality of the ponds.

5.2 Other planned works:

Vehicular access points and/or pedestrian access points will be strimmed as and when required.

Costs: The cost estimate of this strimming work for 2021 is £200 per visit.

The 'wetland' area on Little Common East has a schedule for 20% of its area to be cut each year, weather permitting. It is intended to continue with this schedule in 2021-2022.

Costs: The estimated cost of this work on the 'wetland' area in 2021 is £150.

6. Other expenditures, and total anticipated expenditures in 2021.

Certain other recurrent expenditures not referred to above need to be allowed for. These include fees to accountants; fees to Companies House; the cost of insurance; and the hire of the Village Hall.

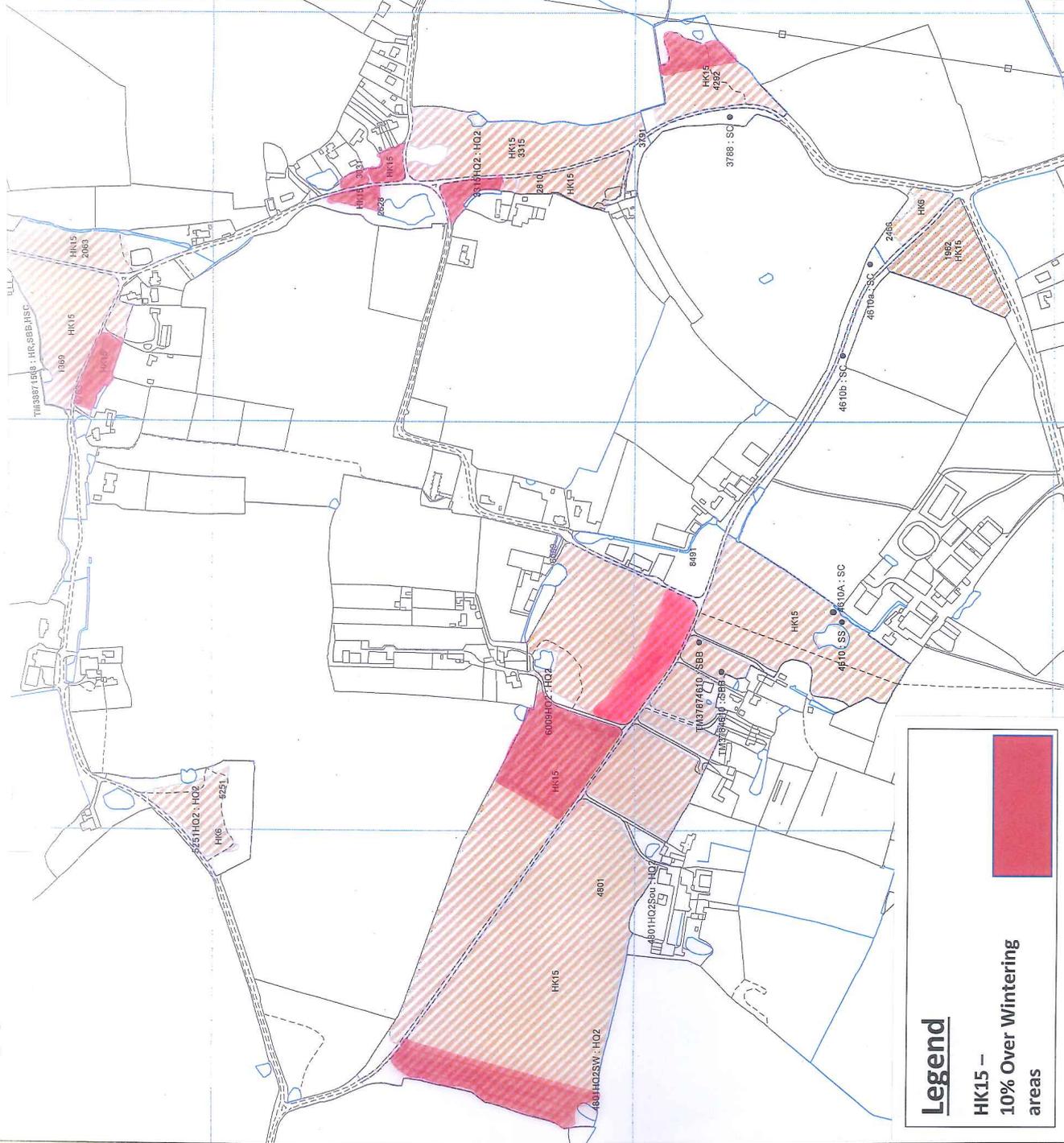
Costs: The anticipated cost of these recurrent items of expenditure in 2021 is £1,000.

Total estimated expenditure: Taking all the estimated costs above, and recognising the uncertainty around many of the estimates, the total expenditures by the LMC for the period from March 2021 until February 2022 is estimated to be in the range of £10,000 - £12,000.

HK15 – 10% Over-wintering areas – Map 1

Appendix: 1

Ilketchall St Andrew & St John Commons – Management Plan 2021-2022



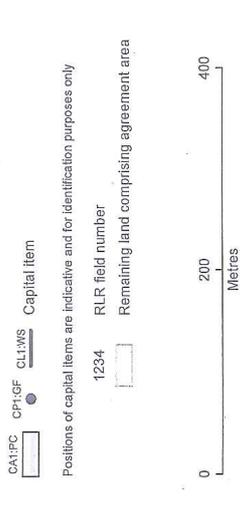
HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT MAP

- Options**
- Maintenance of hedgerows/ditches of very high environmental value
 - Management of woodland edges/hedgerow buffer strips
 - Protection of trees
 - Woodland and orchards
 - Visibility of archaeological features on moorland
 - Historic and landscape
 - Buffer strips and grass margins
 - Arable land
 - Encourage a range of crop type
 - Maintenance of watercourse fencing
 - Resource protection
 - Grassland
 - Upland grassland and moorland
 - Linear access (agreements to October 2010 only)
 - Permissive open access (agreements to October 2010 only)
 - Lowland heathland
 - Inter-tidal and coastal
 - Wetland

Option codes are annotated on the map. Please see scheme handbooks for detailed explanation of each option code.

Supplement options are annotated where present e.g. HL13, HR4

- CA1:PC CP1:SF
- Capital Item
- Positions of capital items are indicative and for identification purposes only
- 1234 RLR field number
- Remaining land comprising agreement area



Map provided for the sole purpose of supporting ES Scheme Applications and Agreements.
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Legend

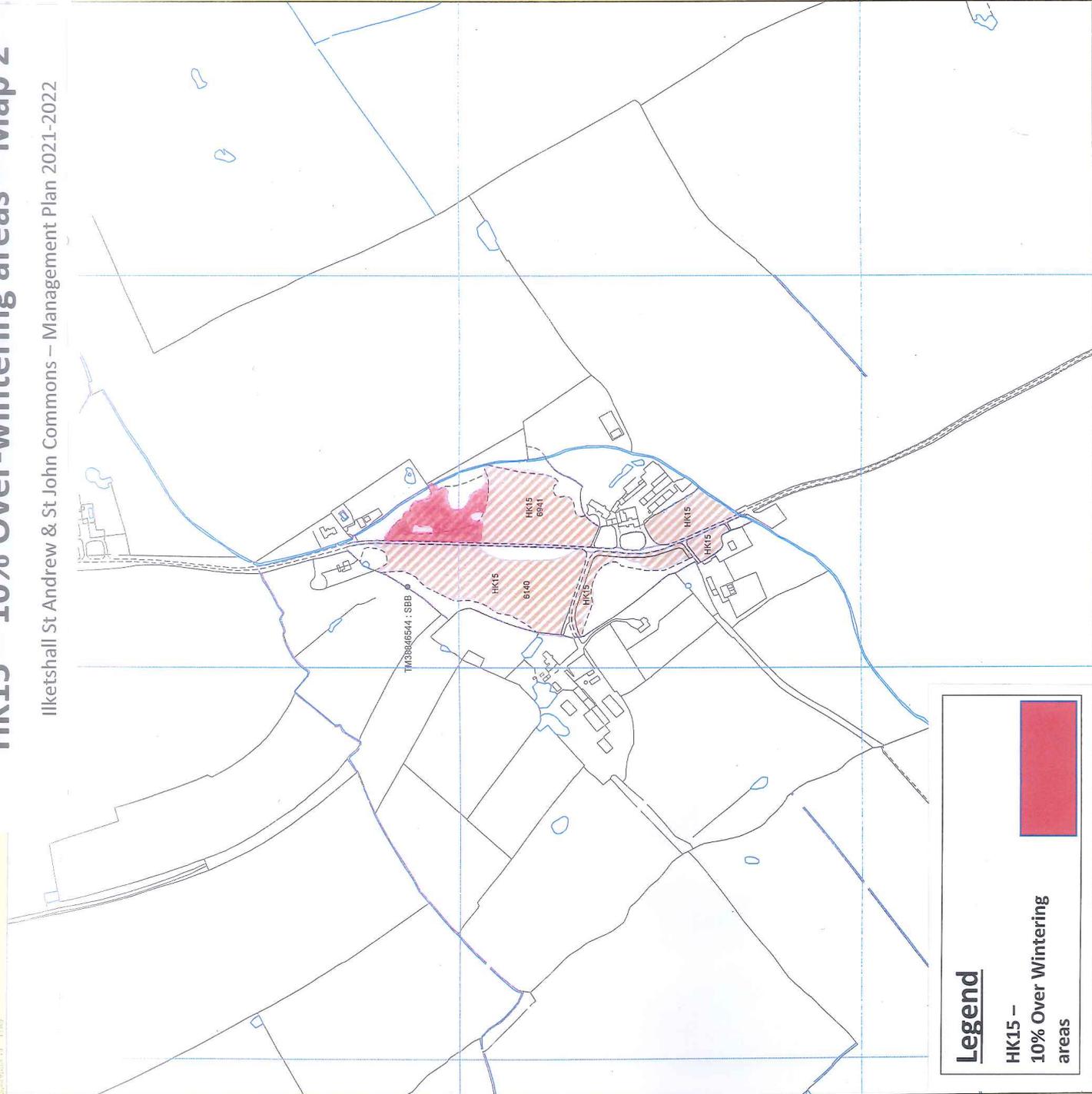
HK15 – 10% Over Wintering areas

Application Ref: AG00241949



HK15 – 10% Over-wintering areas – Map 2

Ilketchall St Andrew & St John Commons – Management Plan 2021-2022



Legend

HK15 –
10% Over Wintering
areas

HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT MAP

- Options**
- Maintenance of hedgerows/ditches of very high environmental value
 - Management of woodland edges/hedgerow buffer strips
 - Protection of trees
*Number within circle represents number of trees in parcel
 - Woodland and orchards
 - Visibility of archaeological features on moorland
 - Historic and landscape
 - Buffer strips and grass margins
 - Arable land
 - Encourage a range of crop type
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CA1/PC CP1/GF CL1/WS Capital Item

Positions of capital items are indicative and for identification purposes only

0 200 400 Metres

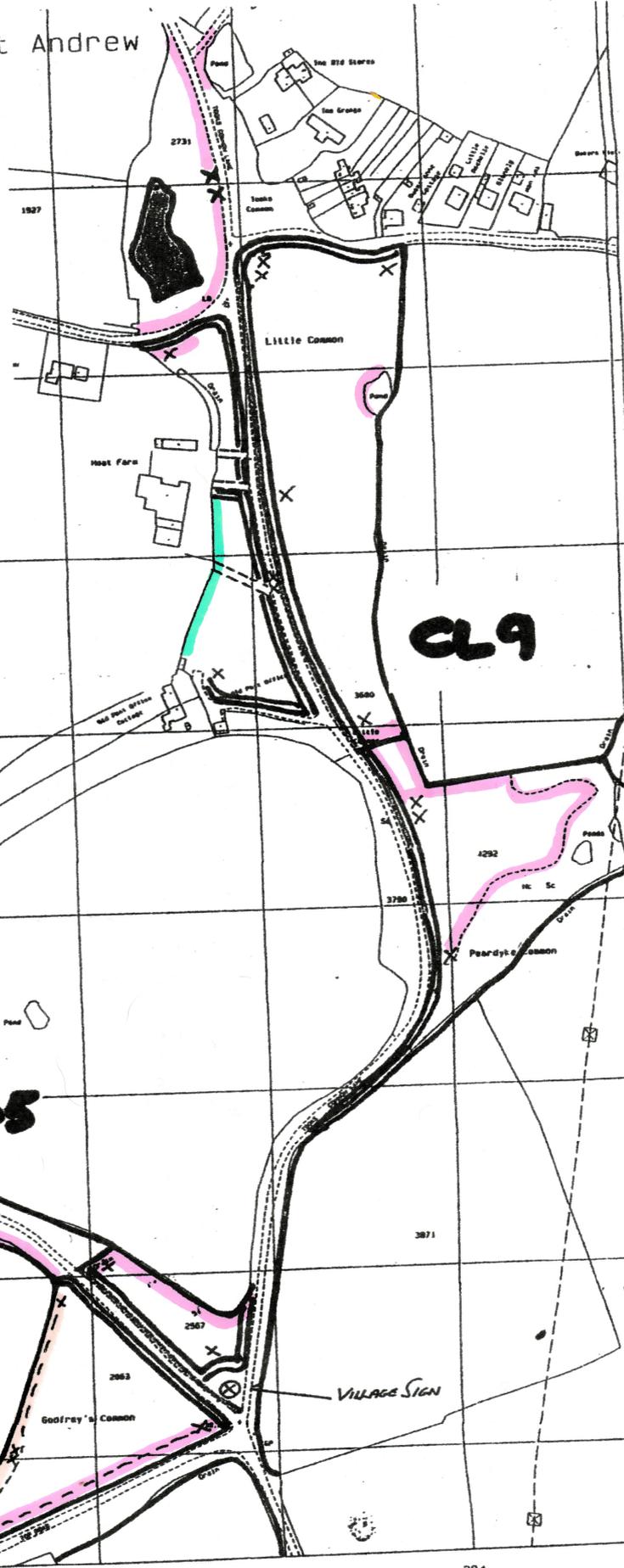
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Application Ref. AG00241949



2021 - Appendix 3 Hedge cutting & scrub flailing

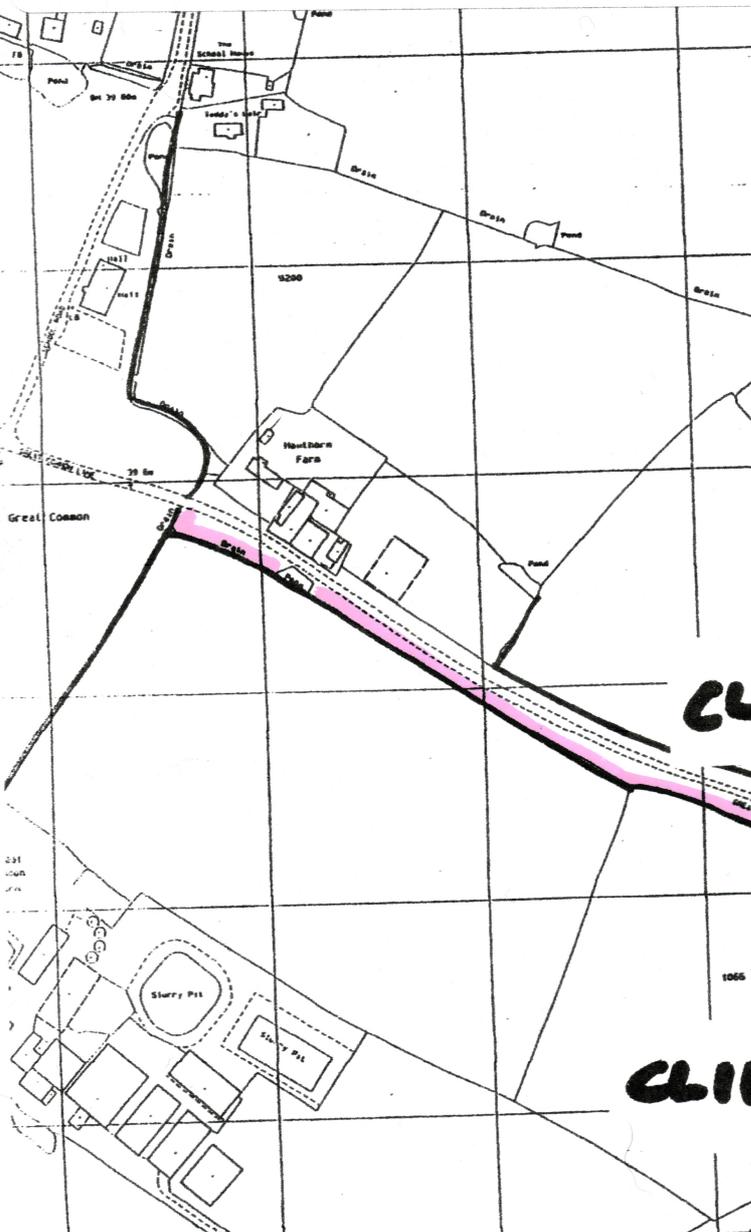
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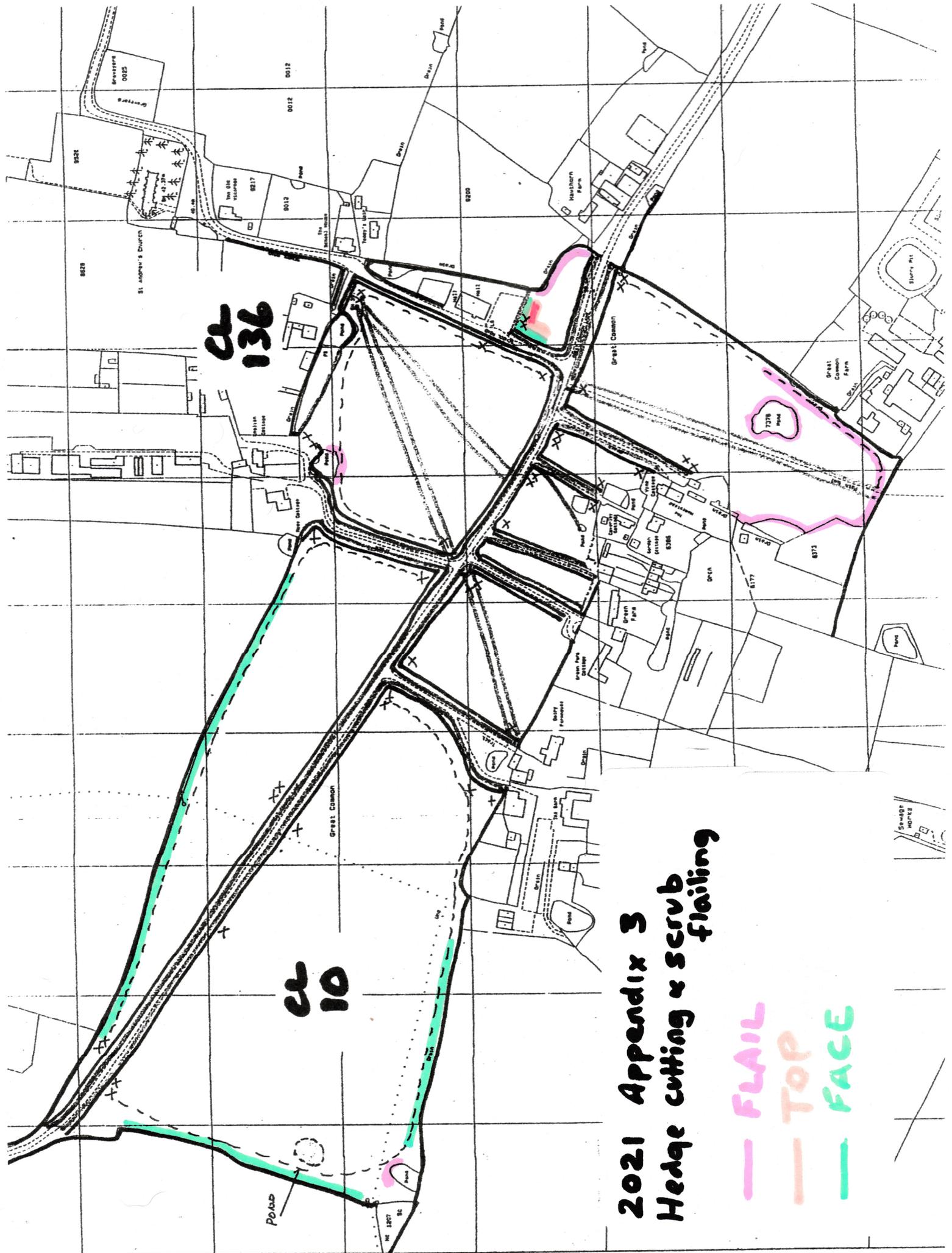


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**2021 Appendix 3
Hedge cutting & scrub
flailing**

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SEWER WORKS

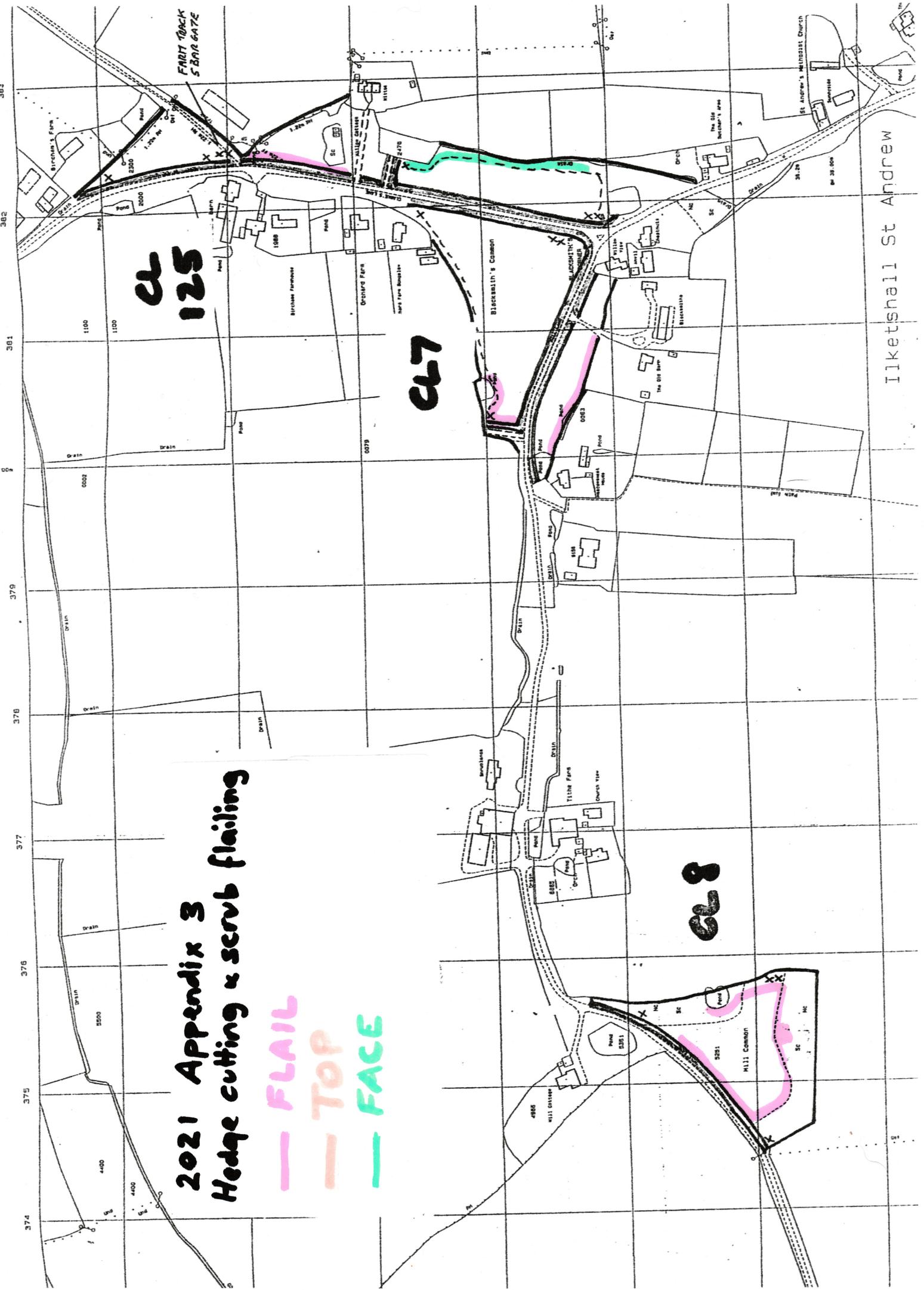
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Hedge cutting & scrub flailing

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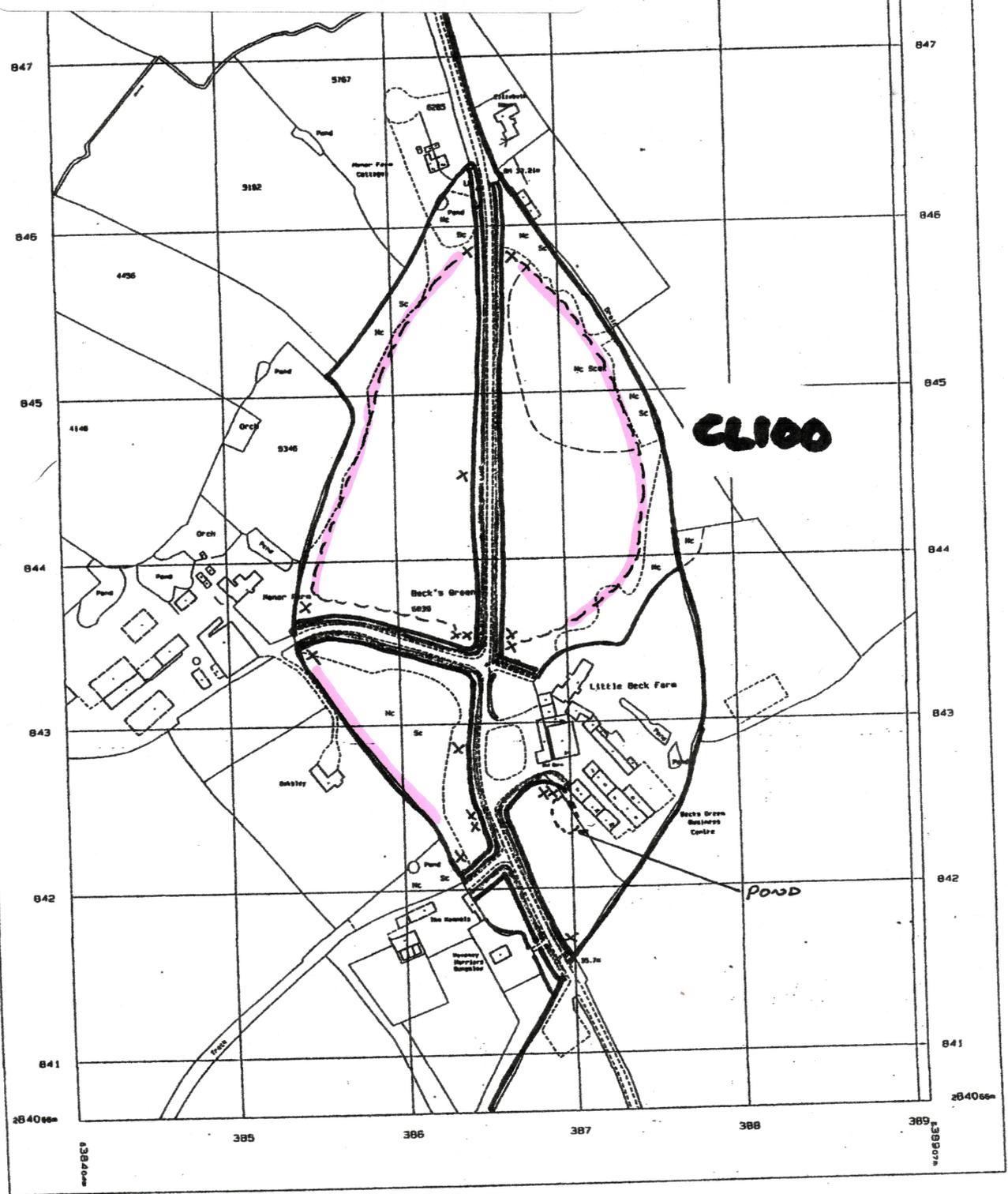
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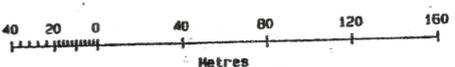
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2021 Appendix 3 Hedge cutting & scrub flailing

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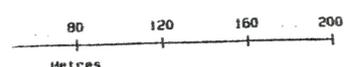
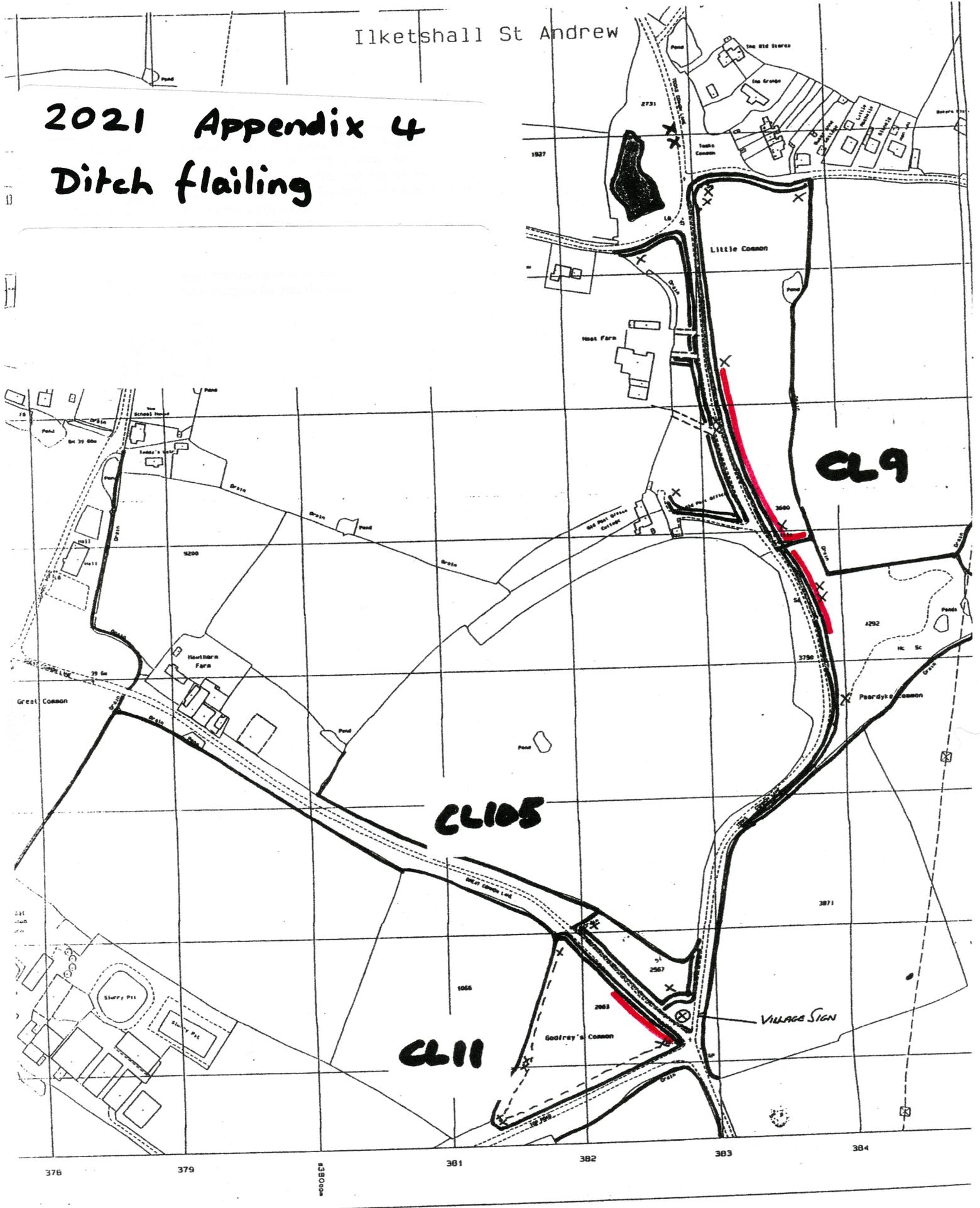
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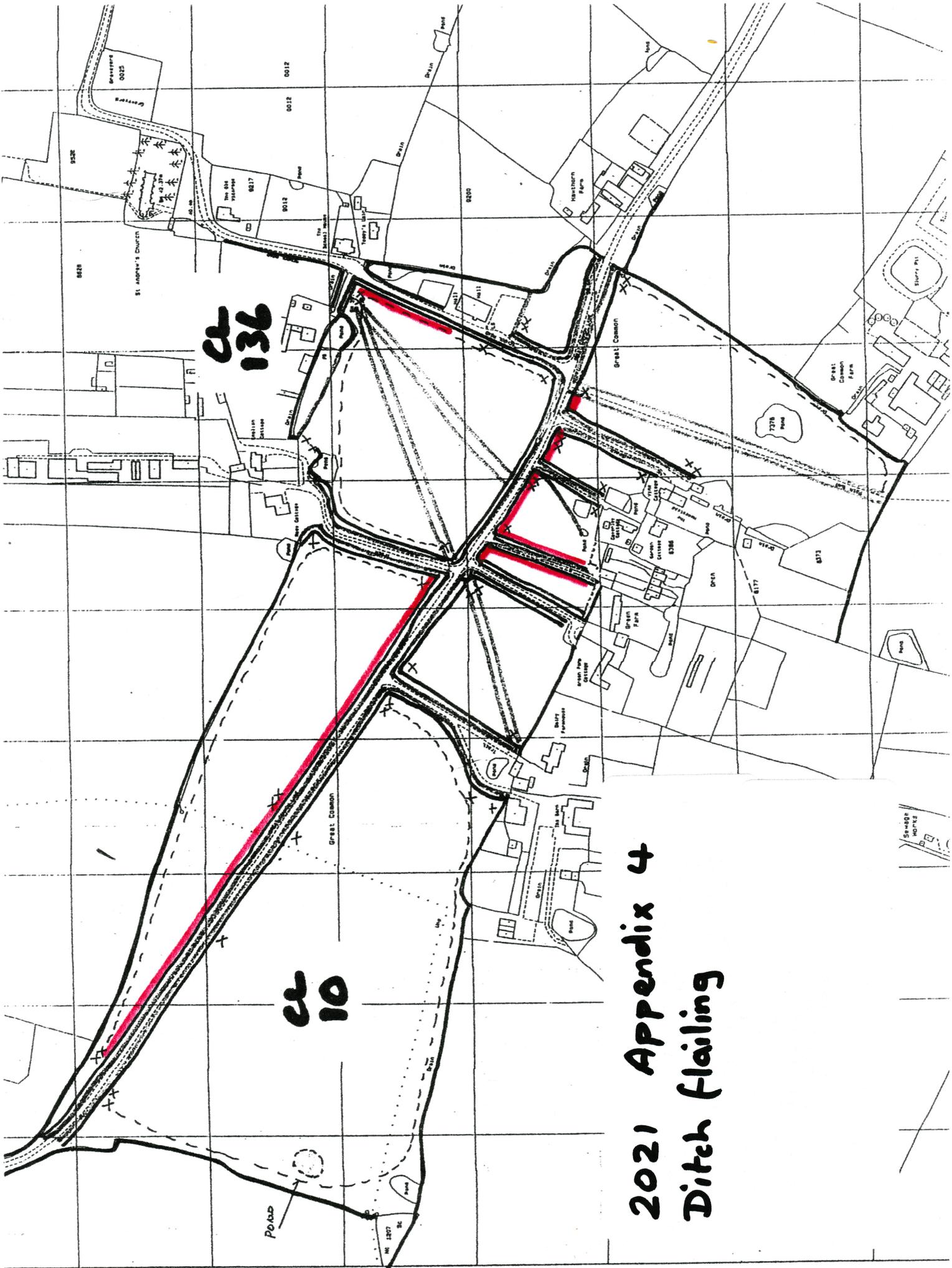
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2021 Appendix 4 Ditch flailing



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2021 Appendix 4
Ditch Flailing

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2021 Appendix 4 Ditch flailing

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FARM TRACK
S BAR GATE

Iiketshall St Andrew

