

 <p>Lee Valley Regional Park Authority</p> <p>LEE VALLEY REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY</p> <p>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</p> <p>23 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 11:00</p>	<p><u>Agenda Item No:</u></p> <p>9</p> <p><u>Report No:</u></p> <p>E/824/23</p>
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**COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP, HIGHER TIER AGREEMENT
– CORNMILL MEADOWS AND SOUTH SITES**

Presented by the Corporate Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Countryside Stewardship is the current agri-environment funding stream which supersedes the previous Higher Level Stewardship scheme. The Authority currently has two active Higher Level Stewardship agreements and one active Countryside Stewardship scheme on its landholdings.

This paper seeks Member approval to enter into two separate five-year Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreements. These agreements are for landholdings at Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park, as shown in Appendix A to this report and five sites in the south of the Park as identified in Appendix B to this report.

The Authority would receive a revenue grant totalling £53,000 over the five-year agreement period for Cornmill Meadows and £151,000 over the five-year agreement for the south sites. There is also potential for accessing funding for capital items within the first three years of the agreement.

The Authority is also currently progressing an application for a mid-tier scheme at Holyfield Hall Farm (Paper E/825/23) which does not impact on this application.

RECOMMENDATION

Members Approve: (1) that the Authority enters into two, five-year Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship Agreements with the Rural Payments Agency for the Authority’s landholdings, the details of which are set out in the report and in particular at paragraph 6.

BACKGROUND

1 Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park, located in Waltham Abbey (Epping Forest District Council) is an important area for wildlife highlighted by much of the landholding being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

- 2 In the south area agreement Walthamstow Marshes (London Borough of Waltham Forest) is nationally important for biodiversity recognised through its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The other sites in the south agreement are of a regional significance and as such have non-statutory designations as part of the wider Lee Valley Site of Metropolitan Importance.
- 3 The Authority currently has two Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements and one Countryside Stewardship Scheme. In total the Authority will receive in excess of £97,000 through these current agreements.

The current HLS agreements are:

- Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park (01/1/2023 - 30/11/2028); and
- Silvermeade (1/10/14 - 30/09/24).

The current Countryside Stewardship agreement is:

- River Lee Country Park (1/01/23 - 21/12/27)

- 4 Two HLS agreements have recently expired. These are:

- South sites (1/03/13 - 28/08/23);
 - Tottenham Marshes;
 - Walthamstow Marshes;
 - Rammey Marsh;
 - Middlesex Filter Beds;
 - WaterWorks Nature Reserve; and
- Holyfield Hall Farm (1/01/23 - 30/11/23).

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP

- 5 Countryside Stewardship is an agri-environment scheme administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) which provides funding to farmers and landowners to deliver effective environmental management on their land.
- 6 There are a range of grants available through Countryside Stewardship. Two new agreements are proposed, one for Cornmill Meadows and the Tree Park and the second for a number of sites in the south of the Park: Rammey Marsh (east); Tottenham Marshes; Walthamstow and Leyton Marsh; WaterWorks Nature Reserve; and Middlesex Filter Beds. Both of these areas will be entered into the Higher Tier, multi-year agreements for environmentally significant sites that require more complex management. This type of agreement is for a five year period.
- 7 There are a range of Countryside Stewardship annual options and capital items which are individually tailored to deliver maximum environmental benefits for wildlife, landscape, historic environment and resource protection. Officers have worked with Natural England to create a package of works specifically for the sites. These works help the Authority in the delivery of both the Biodiversity Action Plan and Park Development Framework objectives.

THE AGREEMENT

- 8 Natural England has approved the proposed schedule of works and have submitted the application to the RPA who administer the grant on behalf of the

Government. Once the RPA has processed the applications an official grant offer will be made; this is a standard form of agreement and will need to be signed and returned usually within a 21 day period.

The agreements would then commence on 1 January 2024.

- 9 The agreement can be terminated in writing by the RPA if there is a breach in terms or on giving the agreement holder six months written notice. The Authority may terminate the agreement at any time by giving written notice to the RPA whereby there may be the requirement to pay back payments received up to that point in time.
- 10 The current HLS agreement at Cornmill Meadows will terminate if the new Countryside Stewardship agreement is approved and documentation signed. There is no penalty to leave the existing scheme and moving into the new agreement will see an uplift in funding of approximately £22,000 over the five-year period to deliver the ongoing site management works.
- 11 The Countryside Stewardship scheme is divided into annual revenue and capital elements which if applicable are claimed for separately. The annual revenue payments are for the ongoing maintenance of biodiversity-focused features such as the management of grassland for target species, control of invasive species and management of scrubland.

The Authority will receive annual payments over the five-year period of the agreement of over £10,500 for Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park and over £30,000 for the south sites.

- 12 Capital payments are for one-off works, such as fencing to enable grazing, tree management and installation of wildlife boxes. The capital items need to be delivered within the first three years of the scheme start date. These works have been identified in the agreement but there are no penalties if the works are not delivered and no claim is made.
- 13 There is potential to apply for further standalone capital grants during the time period of the Countryside Stewardship scheme, applications remain open until the funding allocation is fully committed.
- 14 The annual revenue items outlined within the agreements over the next five years are works that the Authority's Ranger Service should undertake as best practice. With the assistance of the Countryside Stewardship scheme the Authority now needs to only partly fund rather than wholly fund these works. As well as the financial advantage the Authority will also benefit from advice on biodiversity improvements from Natural England, the national conservation body.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 15 There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report. Work carried out through the Countryside Stewardship scheme will enhance the biodiversity value of the associated Authority landholdings.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 16 If funding is claimed but the works not carried out the Authority may be in default of the agreement and grant funding could be clawed back. However, if the

delivery of planned works could not take place for any reason such as adverse weather conditions, early dialogue with both the RPA and Natural England would take place so that they are aware of the situation. With their agreement the claim form would be amended, the grant award revised accordingly and the agreement would therefore not be defaulted.

- 17 Failure to complete and submit a claim for items by the date shown in the agreement may result in the payment of the grant being delayed, reduced, recovered or withheld. The claim deadlines will be embedded in the work programme of the Ranger Service Managers to ensure that they are met and this work programme is monitored by the Head of Parklands.
- 18 There will be no additional revenue implications from the work carried out by the Authority through the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 19 If approved, the delivery of the Countryside Stewardship scheme will be the responsibility of the Authority's Ranger Service, supported by the Conservation Manager and can be assimilated into their regular work programme.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 20 The legal implications are noted in the body of the report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 21 It is considered that any risk to delivery is minimal. However, if planned work is unable to take place due to unforeseen circumstances officers will contact the RPA to advise them of any change and adjust the grant claim forms accordingly.

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PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORT

Executive	E/762/22	Countryside Stewardship, Higher Tier – River Lee Country Park	28 Apr 2022
Executive	E/547/18	Countryside Stewardship, Higher Tier – River Lee Country Park	22 Feb 2018
Executive	E/371/14	Higher Level Stewardship – Silvermeade and Broxbourne Meadows	25 Sept 2014
Executive	E/265/13	Higher Level Stewardship – Lower Lee Valley	28 Feb 2013
Executive	E/316/13	Higher Level Stewardship – Commill Meadows and Tree Park	21 Nov 2013
Executive	E/249/12	Higher Level Stewardship Holyfield Hall Farm	22 Nov 2012

APPENDICES ATTACHED

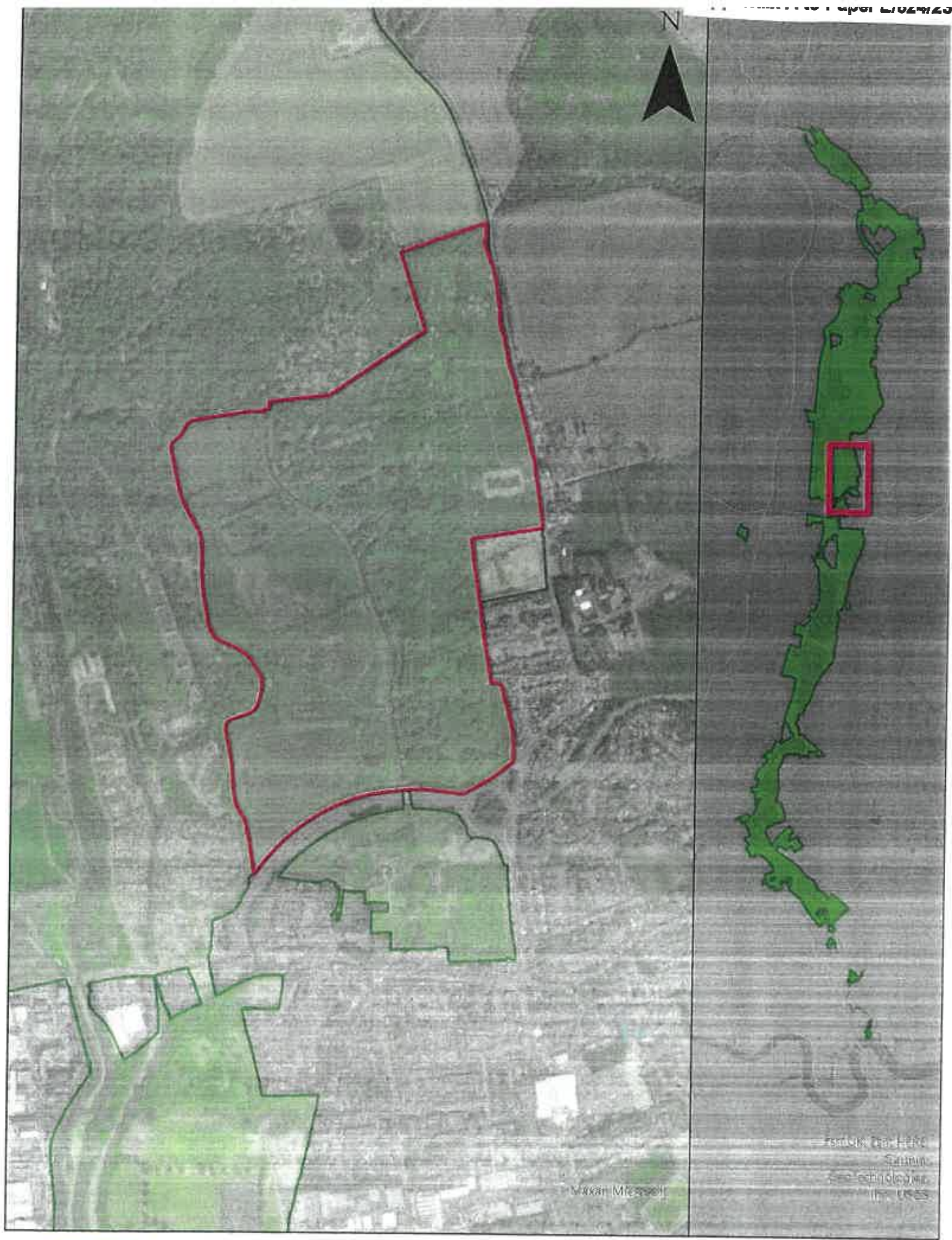
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|------------|---|
| Appendix A | Area to be included in the Cornmill Meadow and Tree Park
Countryside Stewardship agreement |
| Appendix B | Area to be included in the South sites Countryside
Stewardship agreement |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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| HLS | Higher Level Stewardship |
| RPA | Rural Payments Agency |

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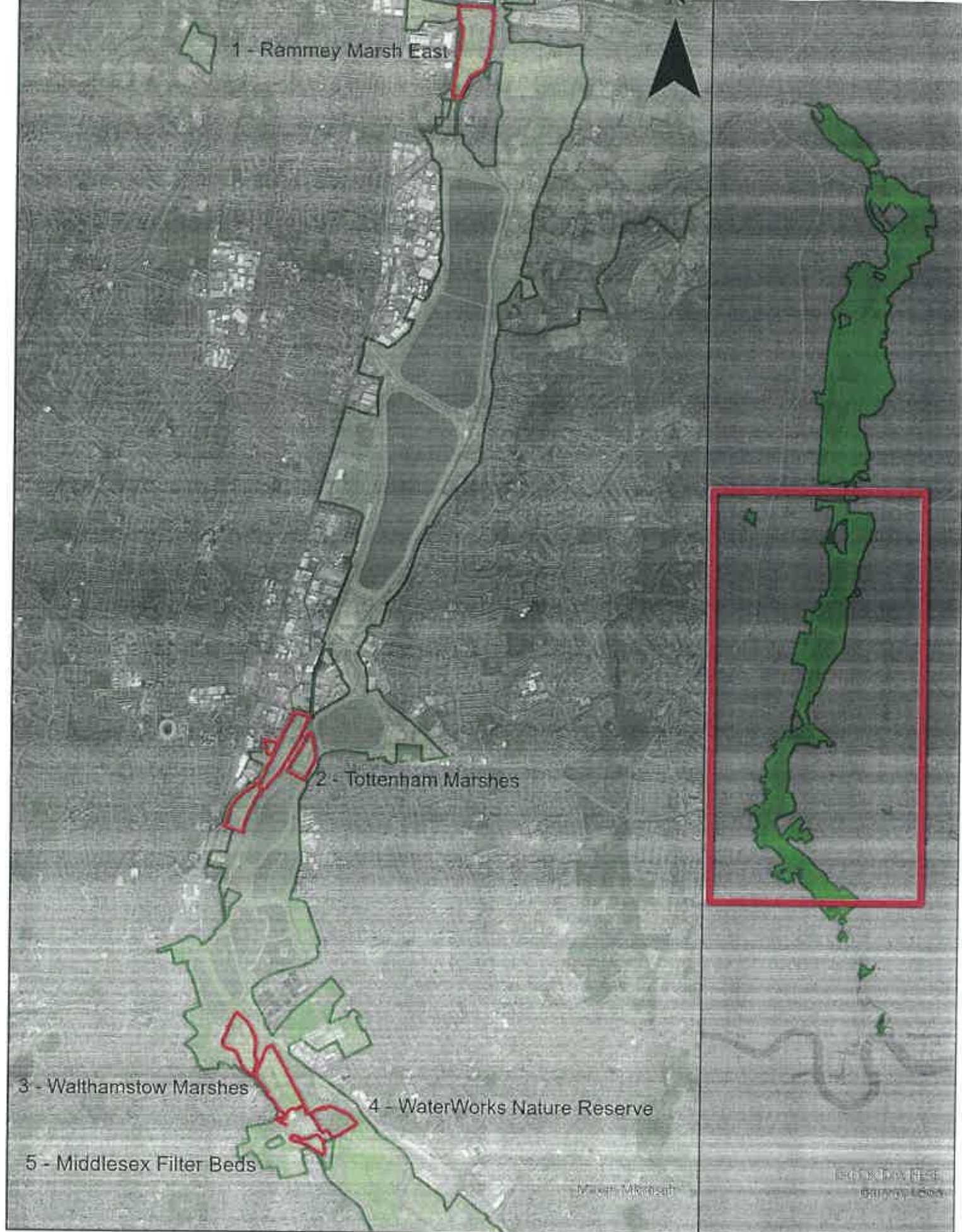
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Appendix One - Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park

NTS @ A4
08.11.23 Produced by Corporate GIS (HH)

- Site
- Park Boundary



Appendix Two - South Sites

NTS @ A4
08.11.23

Produced by Corporate GIS (HH)

Site

Park Boundary

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