

XLINKS MOROCCO-UK POWER PROJECT

Preliminary Environmental Information Report

Volume 2, Appendix 1.11: River Condition Assessments



FOR ISSUE
April 2024

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Scope of this Report

- 1.1.1 This document forms Volume 2, Appendix 1.11 of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) prepared for the UK elements of the Xlinks Morocco-UK Power Project (referred to hereafter as ‘the Proposed Development’). The PEIR presents the preliminary findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment process for the Proposed Development.
- 1.1.2 This document provides the river condition assessments carried out as part of the Proposed Development in December 2022. The surveys and report have been undertaken by Ecus Ltd (Report No: 19570) and are presented below.

XLinks North Devon – River Condition Assessments

RPS Group Plc


December 2022


Ecus Ltd


Report to: RPS Group Plc

Report Title: XLinks North Devon – River Condition Assessments

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0.2	CE	Quality Assurance Review 1	21/11/2022
0.3	AD	Quality Assurance Review 2	12/12/2022
1.0	CE	Issue	15/12/2022

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Ecus accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of third party data used in this report.

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Executive Summary

Ecus Ltd (Ecus) was commissioned by RPS Group Plc in October 2022 to undertake a River Condition Assessment (RCA) of five separate watercourses, located near Bideford, north Devon (National Grid Reference (NGR) SS 42281 27039 (Site 1), SS 43254 24062 (Site 3), SS 44275 24339 (Site 4), SS 49387 24015 (Site 5), SS 49808 23555 (Site 6)). The proposed works are for a new cable route as part of the XLinks project, which will intersect the watercourses. In most cases, the construction works will be directionally drilled under the watercourse to lay the cable, so disturbance to the watercourse will be negligible. This RCA has been undertaken to provide a baseline condition of the watercourses to inform a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (BNGA).

The watercourses were all typically upland north Devon streams.

RCA use the Modular River Physical Survey (MoRPh5) methodology for the field surveys. The MoRPh5 field surveys were carried out by an experienced Ecus ecologist between 31st October and 2nd November 2022. MoRPh5 surveys were carried out at the five Sites (or 'reaches'), each consisting of two sub-reaches, except for Site 1, which consisted of one sub-reach. Each sub-reach consisted of five contiguous modules of 10 metres (m) in length.

The condition score for the streams was **Good** for Sites 1, 3 and 6, and **Fairly Good** for sites 4 and 5. The river type was calculated as **Type C** for sites 1, 3 and 4 and **Type D** for sites 5 and 6.

All sites are immediately bordered by narrow strips of woodland, which are in turn bordered by modified grassland (grazing pasture). There is no development within 10 m of the bank tops along any of the sub-reaches, so the riparian encroachment band is **no encroachment**. There is also no engineered bank revetment along any of the surveyed sub-reaches, meaning that the in-watercourse encroachment is considered to be **no encroachment**.

The watercourses were all in good or fairly good condition, therefore following the works, the watercourses should be returned to their baseline condition. In the event that the works cause permanent changes to the watercourses, e.g. by increasing in-watercourse encroachment, it may be necessary to carry out enhancements elsewhere along the watercourse to mitigate this.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Ecus was commissioned by RPS Group Plc in October 2022 to undertake a River Condition Assessment (RCA) of five separate watercourses, located near Bideford, north Devon (National Grid Reference (NGR) SS 42281 27039 (Site 1), SS 43254 24062 (Site 3), SS 44275 24339 (Site 4), SS 49387 24015 (Site 5), SS 49808 23555 (Site 6)). Access was not provided to Site 2 (SS 41763 25421).

1.2 Proposals

1.2.1 The proposed works are for a new cable route, which will intersect the watercourses. In most cases, the construction works will be directionally drilling under the watercourse to lay the cable, so disturbance to the watercourse will be negligible

1.3 Purpose of the RCA

1.3.1 The purpose of the RCA is to determine the baseline condition of the river to assist with BNGA. The RCA consists of a desk based assessment of the affected river reach as well as a field survey. The two components are used to determine the river type and baseline condition of the river. The extent of riparian and in-watercourse encroachment was also determined.

1.3.2 This report details the methodology and findings of the desk based assessment and field survey in order to inform the BNGA.

2. Methodology

2.1 MoRPh5 Field Survey

2.1.1 The MoRPh5 survey is used to collect field data within ‘sub-reaches’ of a river. At least 20% of the river length within the proposed development should be surveyed (Gurnell *et al.*, 2020a). MoRPh5 surveys are carried out on short ‘modules’ of the river, the size of which is determined by the river width (see **Table 1**). The MoRPh5 field surveys were carried out by an experienced Ecus ecologist in good weather conditions between 31st October 2022 and 2nd November 2022.

Table 1. Determining module length from river width.

River width (m)	Module length (m)
< 5	10
5 to < 10	20
10 to < 20	30
20 to < 30	40
Large and navigable rivers and canals	50

2.1.2 Five contiguous modules are surveyed within each sub-reach. The area surveyed within each module includes land within 10 m of the bank top either side of the river, both bank faces and the channel bed. The features captured within the survey include the bank and bed sediments, morphological and hydraulic features, riparian and aquatic vegetation extent and structure, presence of non-native invasive plants, bank top land use pressures and human interventions within the river channel. See **Appendix 1** for the list of features used to calculate river condition.

2.2 Condition Analysis

2.2.1 Following the field survey, the data is inputted into the Cartographer web application which calculates a ‘condition score’ for each sub-reach of Good, Fairly Good, Moderate, Fairly Poor or Poor. Each sub-reach is also assigned a numerical preliminary condition score ranging from -2.5 to ≥ 2.5 , a higher number indicates a better condition score.

2.3 Indicative River Type

2.3.1 A combination of a desk based assessment and data from the MoRPh5 field surveys is used to determine ‘river type’ from one of thirteen near-natural river types. Eight river type indicators are

used to determine river type. Indicators A1 to A5 are derived from maps or aerial images. These indicators are A1 Braiding index, A2 Sinuosity index, A3 Anabranching index, A4 Level of confinement and A5 Valley gradient. Indicators A6 to A8 are derived from the MoRPh5 surveys. These indicators are A6 Bedrock reaches, A7 Coarsest bed material size class and A8 Average alluvial bed material size class.

2.3.2 The data is entered into the Cartographer web application which automatically calculates river type from one of the thirteen types shown in **Figure 1**.

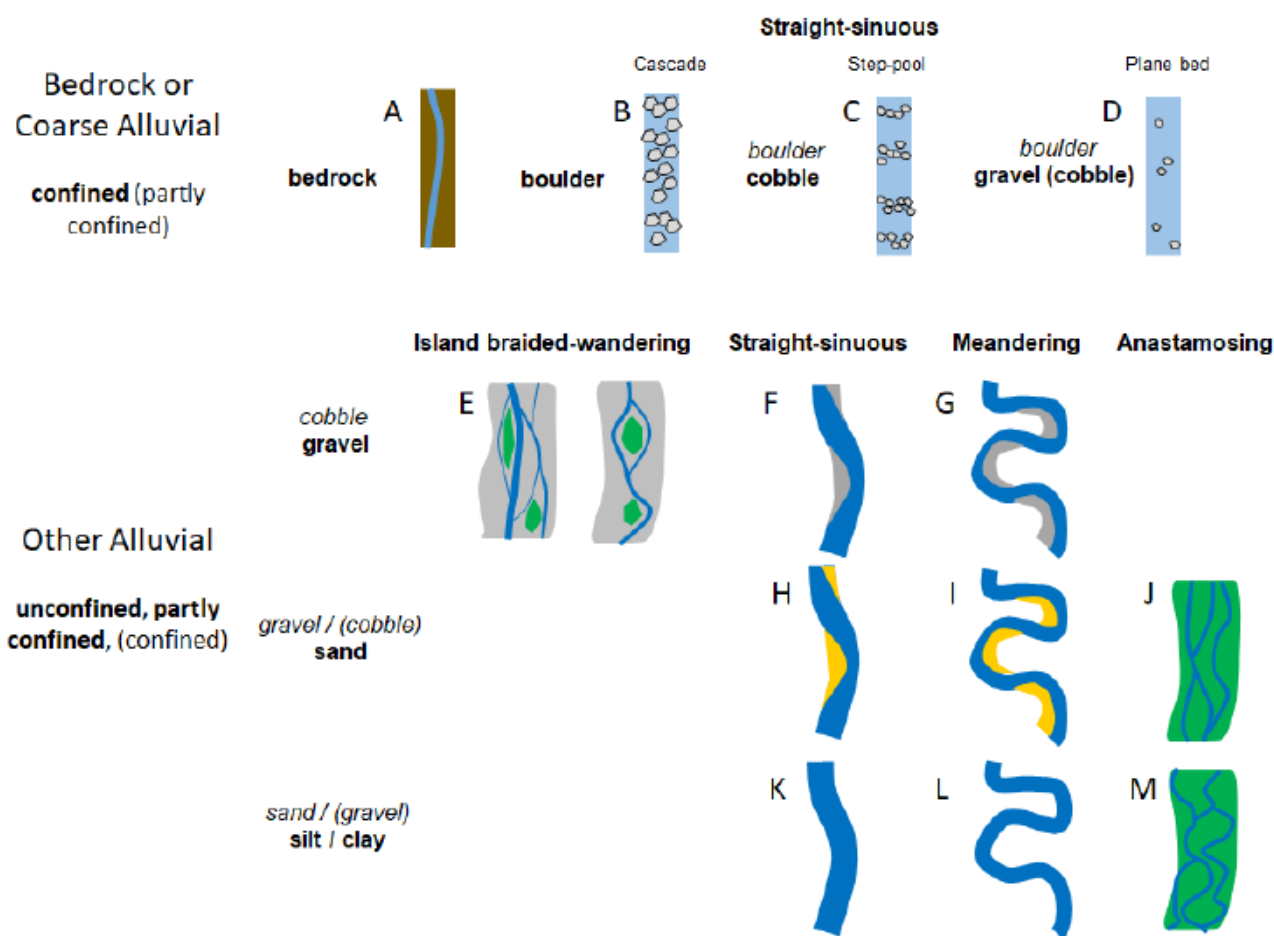


Figure 1. Thirteen near-natural river types that may be encountered in England (extracted from Gurnell *et al.*, 2020).

2.4 Riparian and In-Watercourse Encroachment

2.4.1 The riparian zone is defined as the area within 10 m of the bank top. Any development within this zone is termed 'riparian encroachment'. Encroachment can be classed as minor, moderate or major dependent on the proximity of the development to the bank top and the percentage area that it covers within the riparian zone. Riparian encroachment bands are described in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Description of riparian encroachment bands (Panks *et al.*, 2022).

Riparian Encroachment Band	Description
No encroachment	No development within 10 m of the bank top.
Minor	Any development 8 – 10 m from bank top (up to 100% of area) OR where development footprint occupies 0 – 10% of the riparian zone area 4 – 10 m from bank top.
Moderate	Any development where footprint occupies between 10 – 25% of the riparian zone area 4 – 10 m from bank top.
Major	Any development 0 – 4 m from bank top (except maximum of 5% footprint for amenity features) OR where total development footprint occupies > 25% of the total riparian area.

2.4.2 In-watercourse encroachment is defined as intervention that adversely affects hydrological and geo-morphological processes, creating localised changes in flow and/or sediment dynamics and riverine connectivity. In-watercourse encroachment is classed as minor or major dependent on the percentage of the bank length or channel width affected by the intervention; see **Table 3**.

Table 3. Description of in-watercourse encroachment bands (Panks *et al.*, 2022).

In-Watercourse Encroachment Band	Description
No encroachment	< 5% bank length comprising an engineered bank revetment AND no encroachment into the channel.
Minor	5% - 20% bank length comprising engineered bank revetment OR encroachment up to 10% channel width.
Major	> 20% bank length comprising an engineered bank revetment

	OR encroachment > 10% of the channel width.
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2.5 Limitations

- 2.5.1 There were several limitations to the survey work. There was limited access to all the Sites, meaning that only one sub-reach was surveyed instead of four sub-reaches for Site 1 and two sub-reaches were surveyed instead of three sub-reaches for Sites 3 to 6. This was due to permission being refused to survey parts of Site 1. At the remaining Sites, access was limited by the presence of fencing and dense vegetation.
- 2.5.2 Due to heavy rain in previous days, the streams were all at elevated flow levels. The guidelines recommend that MoRPh5 surveys are carried out during low flow conditions.
- 2.5.3 It was not possible to see the channel bed at site 3 due to the turbidity of the water, or at site 4 due to very steep banks limiting the view of the channel bed.

3. Results

3.1 River Condition Assessment

3.1.1 MoRPh5 surveys were carried out at five Sites (or 'Reaches'), each consisting of two sub-reaches, except for Site 1, which consisted of one sub-reach. The locations of each Site/Reach surveyed are displayed in **Figure 2**. Sub-reach locations for each Site are displayed in **Figures 3.1 – 3.5**. Site habitat photographs are provided in **Appendix 2**.

3.1.2 Each sub-reach consisted of five contiguous modules of 10 m in length. Where possible the sub-reaches were located at approximately equal intervals to provide a representative sample of the whole watercourse, however due access limitations this was not always possible.

3.1.3 The calculated condition scores for each Site and sub-reach are provided in **Table 4**. The condition score for Sites 1, 3 and 6 is **Good** and **Fairly Good** for Sites 4 and 5.

Table 4. Preliminary and final condition scores for each Site and sub-reach.

Site Number	Sub-reach Number	Preliminary Condition Score	Final Condition Score	Average Final Condition Score
1	1	2.38	Good	Good
3	1	2.32	Good	Good
	2	2.26	Good	
4	1	2.06	Fairly Good	Fairly Good
	2	1.82	Fairly Good	
5	1	1.85	Fairly Good	Fairly Good
	2	2.01	Fairly Good	
6	1	2.43	Good	Good
	2	2.06	Fairly Good	

3.2 River Type

3.2.1 The results of the river type assessment are summarised in **Table 5**. The river type was calculated as **Type C** for sites 1, 3 and 4, and **Type D** for sites 5 and 6.

Table 5. Results of River Type Assessment.

River Type Indicator	Result				
	Site 1	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6
A1 Braiding Index (number of wetted channels)	1 (single channel)				
A2 Sinuosity Index (reach river length/reach valley length)	1.03 (0.93/0.9)	1.02 (0.64/0.63)	1.01 (0.81/0.81)	1.01 (0.74/0.73)	1.12 (0.8/0.71)
A3 Anabranching Index (number of unvegetated channels separated by vegetated bars or islands)	1 (single channel)				
A4 Level of Confinement	Partly confined	Partly confined	Confined	Partly confined	Partly confined
A5 Valley Gradient (difference between upstream and downstream elevation divided by the reach valley length)	0.02441731	0.09651899	0.05061728	0.06122449	0.02097902
A6 Bedrock Reach	No	No	No	No	No
A7 Coarsest Bed Material	Boulder	Boulder	Bedrock	Boulder	Boulder
A8 Average Alluvial Bed Material	Cobble	Cobble	Cobble	Gravel / Pebble	Gravel / Pebble
River Type score	Type C	Type C	Type C	Type D	Type D

3.3 Riparian and In-Watercourse Encroachment

- 3.3.1 The Sites were bordered by a mix of semi-natural vegetation, including broadleaved woodland and modified grassland (grazing pasture), which extended 10 m from the bank top. There was no development within 10 m of the bank tops along any of the Sites, so the riparian encroachment band is **no encroachment** for all the Sites.
- 3.3.2 There was little to no engineered bank revetment at the Sites and no encroachment into the channel. Therefore, the in-watercourse encroachment is considered to be **no encroachment** for all the Sites.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Proposals

4.1.1 The proposed works include the construction of a new cable route, which will intersect the five separate watercourses. In most cases, the construction works will be directionally drilling under the watercourse to lay the pipe, so disturbance to the watercourse will be negligible

4.2 Conclusion

4.2.1 The watercourses were all in **good** or **fairly good** condition, therefore following the works, the watercourses should be returned to their baseline condition. In the event that the works cause permanent changes to the watercourses, e.g. by increasing in-watercourse encroachment, it may be necessary to carry out enhancements elsewhere along the watercourse to mitigate this.

5. References

Gurnell, A., England, J., Shuker, L. and Wharton, G. 2020a. *The MoRPh Survey, Technical Reference Manual*. www.modularriversurvey.org/

Gurnell, A., England, J., Scott, S. and Shuker, L. 2020b. *A Guide to Assessing River Condition, Part of the Rivers and Streams Component of the BioDiversity Net Gain Metric*. www.modularriversurvey.org/

Panks, S., White, N., Newsome, A., Nash, M., Potter, J., Heydon, M., Mayhew, E., Alvarez, M., Russell, T., Cashon, C., Goddard, F., Scott, S. J., Heaver, M., Scott, S. H., Treweek, J., Butcher, B. and Stone, D. 2022. *Biodiversity metric 3.1: Auditing and accounting for biodiversity – User Guide*. Natural England, Peterborough.

Appendix 1: River Condition Indicators

Table A1. River Condition Indicators from MoRPh5 Field Surveys (Gurnell *et al.*, 2020b)

(NNIPS = Non-native Invasive Plant Species, Positive Indicators Underlined, *Negative Indicators Italics*)

Location of Feature	Feature	Example/Description
Bank top	<u>Vegetation structure</u>	Natural/lightly managed ground cover including grassland, scrub and trees
	<u>Tree feature richness</u>	Leaning and J-shaped trees
	<u>Water-related features</u>	Ponds, side channels and wetland vegetation
	<i>NNIPS cover</i>	Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed, floating pennywort
	<i>Managed ground cover</i>	Footpaths, transport infrastructure, buildings, landfill, farmland, orchards, parks
Bank face	<u>Riparian vegetation structure</u>	Ground cover including grassland, scrub and trees
	<u>Tree feature richness</u>	Leaning and J-shaped trees
	<u>Natural bank profile extent</u>	Natural bank profile including vertical, steep, gentle and composite
	<u>Natural bank profile richness</u>	Variation in bank profile
	<u>Natural bank material richness</u>	Variation in bank face sediment

Location of Feature	Feature	Example/Description
	<u>Bare sediment extent</u>	Extent of bank face which is un-vegetated
	<i>Artificial bank profile extent</i>	Artificial bank profile including reshaped, artificial two-stage, embanked and poached
	<i>Reinforcement extent</i>	Horizontal extent of reinforcement
	<i>Reinforcement material severity</i>	Reinforcement type including concrete, brick, sheet piling, rip-rap and gabions
	<i>NNIPS cover</i>	Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed, floating pennywort
Channel – water margin	<u>Aquatic vegetation extent</u>	Extent of aquatic vegetation including liverworts, mosses, lichens, emergent broad-leaved, emergent linear-leaved, amphibious and filamentous algae
	<u>Aquatic morphotype richness</u>	Variation in aquatic vegetation
	<u>Physical feature extent</u>	Side bars, berms, benches, cliffs
	<u>Physical feature richness</u>	Variation in physical features
	<i>Artificial features</i>	Pipes/outfalls, jettys
Channel bed	<u>Aquatic morphotype richness</u>	Variation in aquatic vegetation

Location of Feature	Feature	Example/Description
	<u>Tree features richness</u>	Trees growing in channel
	<u>Hydraulic features richness</u>	Variation in water surface flow patterns
	<u>Natural features extent</u>	Mid channel bars, islands, cascades, pools, riffles
	<u>Natural features richness</u>	Variation in natural features
	<u>Bed material richness</u>	Variation in bed material including bedrock, boulder, gravel-pebble, sand, silt, clay, organic matter and peat
	<i>Bed siltation</i>	Continuous or patchy silt layer
	<i>Reinforcement extent</i>	Extent of artificial reinforcement along channel bed
	<i>Reinforcement severity</i>	Reinforcement type including concrete, brick, sheet piling, rip-rap and gabions
	<i>Artificial features severity</i>	Large trash, weirs, bridge piers
	<i>NNIPS extent</i>	Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed, floating pennywort
	<i>Filamentous algae extent</i>	Abundance of filamentous algae

Appendix 2: Site Habitat Photographs



- 1 Site 1, Subreach 1, Module 1
- 2 Site 1, Subreach 1, Module 2
- 3 Site 1, Subreach 1, Module 3
- 4 Site 1, Subreach 1, Module 4

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Appendix 2: Site Photographs

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- 5 Site 1, Subreach 1, Module 5
- 6 Site 3, Subreach 1, Module 1
- 7 Site 3, Subreach 1, Module 2
- 8 Site 3, Subreach 1, Module 3

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- 9 Site 3, Subreach 1, Module 4
- 10 Site 3, Subreach 1, Module 5
- 11 Site 3, Subreach 2, Module 1
- 12 Site 3, Subreach 2, Module 2

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- 13 Site 3, Subreach 2, Module 3
- 14 Site 3, Subreach 2, Module 4
- 15 Site 3, Subreach 2, Module 5
- 16 Site 4, Subreach 1, Module 1

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- 17 Site 4, Subreach 1, Module 2
- 18 Site 4, Subreach 1, Module 3
- 19 Site 4, Subreach 1, Module 4
- 20 Site 4, Subreach 1, Module 5

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- 21 Site 4, Subreach 2, Module 1
- 22 Site 4, Subreach 2, Module 2
- 23 Site 4, Subreach 2, Module 3
- 24 Site 4, Subreach 2, Module 4

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- 25 Site 4, Subreach 2, Module 5
- 26 Site 5, Subreach 1, Module 1
- 27 Site 5, Subreach 1, Module 2
- 28 Site 5, Subreach 1, Module 3

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- 29 Site 5, Subreach 1, Module 4
- 30 Site 5, Subreach 1, Module 5
- 31 Site 5, Subreach 2, Module 1
- 32 Site 5, Subreach 2, Module 2

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- 33 Site 5, Subreach 2, Module 3
- 34 Site 5, Subreach 2, Module 4
- 35 Site 5, Subreach 2, Module 5
- 36 Site 6, Subreach 1, Module 1

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Appendix 2: Site Photographs

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- 37 Site 6, Subreach 1, Module 2
- 38 Site 6, Subreach 1, Module 3
- 39 Site 6, Subreach 1, Module 4
- 40 Site 6, Subreach 1, Module 5

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- 41 Site 6, Subreach 2, Module 1
- 42 Site 6, Subreach 2, Module 2
- 43 Site 6, Subreach 2, Module 3
- 44 Site 6, Subreach 2, Module 4

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Site 6, Subreach 2, Module 5

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Appendix 2: Site Photographs

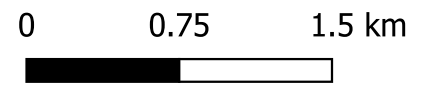
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Figure 2: Reach Location Map

Legend

- - - River Condition Assessment Reaches





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Figure 2
Reach Locations

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Figure 3.1 – 3.5: Sub-reach Location Maps

Legend

-  Subreach Location
-  River Condition Assessment Reaches





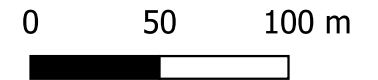
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Figure 3.1
Site 1 Subreach Location

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Legend

-  Subreach Location
-  River Condition Assessment Reaches





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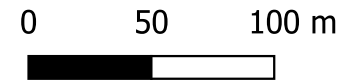
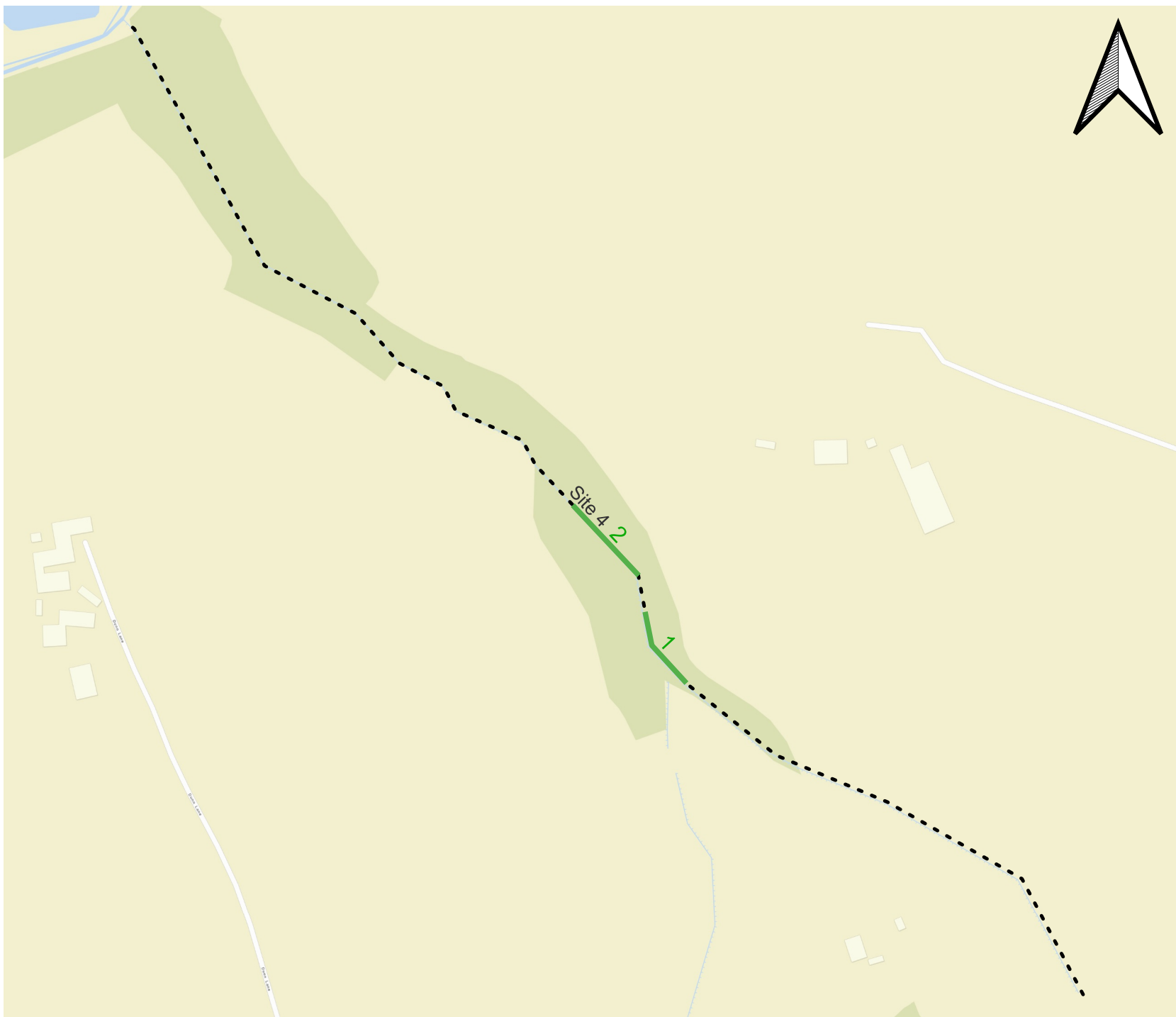
Figure 3.2
Site 3 Subreach Location

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Legend

-  Subreach Location
-  River Condition Assessment Reaches





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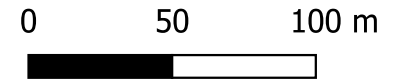
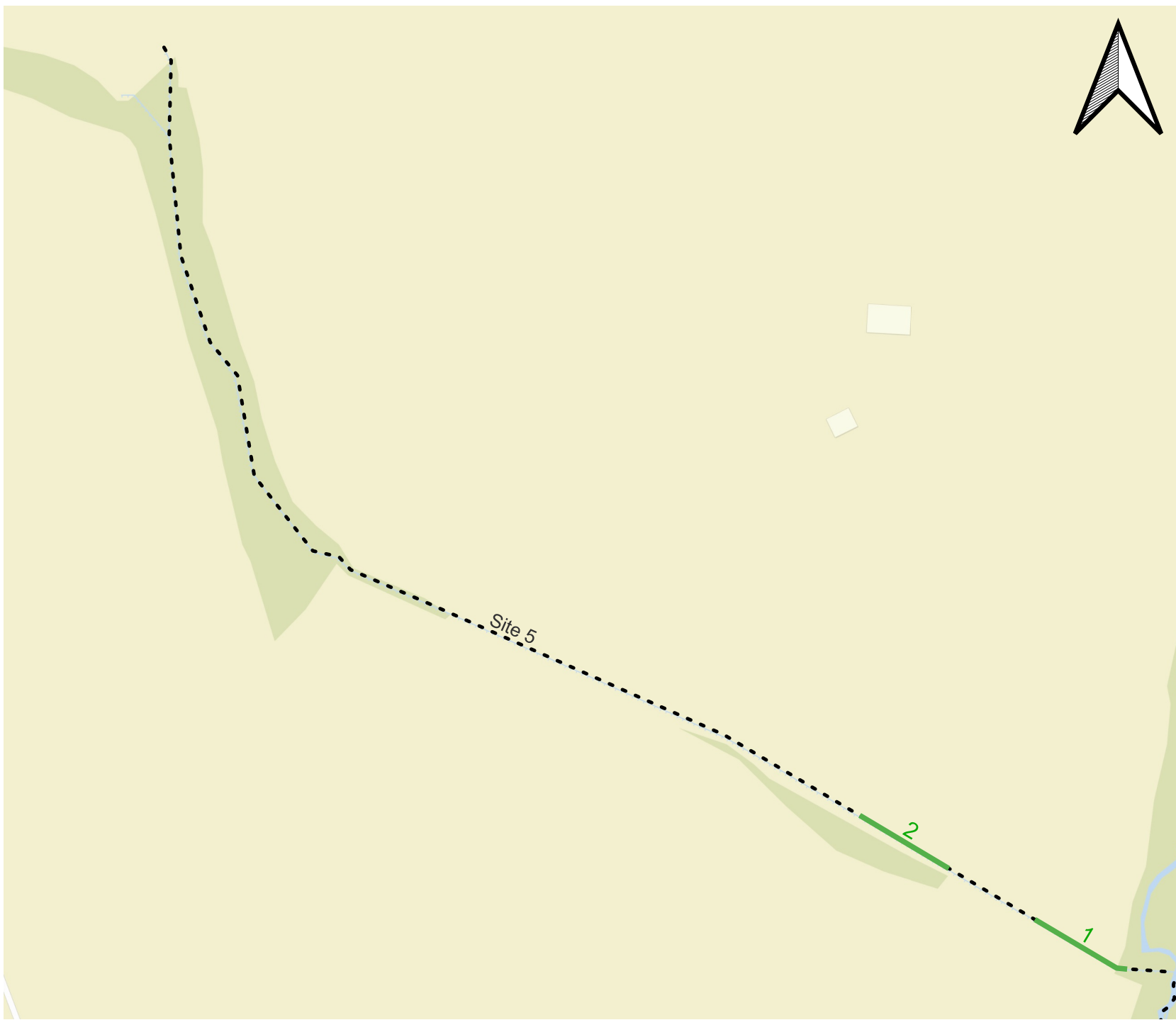
Figure 3.3
Site 4 Subreach Location

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Legend

-  Subreach Location
-  River Condition Assessment Reaches





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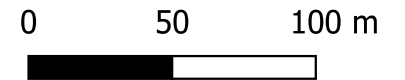
Figure 3.4
Site 5 Subreach Location

• Unit 1 Woodlands Business Village • Basingstoke • RG21 4JX
• tel: 01256 224588 • www.ecusltd.co.uk



Legend

-  Subreach Location
-  River Condition Assessment Reaches



RPS
River Condition Assessments

Figure 3.5
Site 6 Subreach Location

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• tel: 01256 224588 • www.ecusltd.co.uk

