M3 Junction 9 Improvement

Scheme Number: TR010055

6.3 Environmental Statement Appendix 8.1w - White Helleborine Survey 2021

APFP Regulation 5(2)(a)

Planning Act 2008

Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009

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M3 Junction 9 Improvement
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6.3 ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT- APPENDIX 8.1w: WHITE HELLEBORINE SURVEY 2021

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TECHNICAL NOTE

Job Name: M3 Junction 9

Job No: 330610074

Ref: HE551511-VFK-EBD-X_XXXX_XX-TN-LE-0008

Date: 22 July 2021

Prepared By: Ed Austin

Subject: **White Helleborine Survey**

1. Introduction

1.1. Stantec UK has been commissioned by Volker Fitzpatrick to undertake surveys for white helleborine in relation to the M3 Junction 9 Improvement Scheme (the Scheme).

1.2. The Indicative Application Boundary along with the area subject to survey can be viewed on the White Helleborine Survey Figure in **Appendix A** and will be referred to as 'the Survey Area' throughout this report.

1.3. The Scheme is located to the north-east of Winchester and includes proposed improvements to Junction 9 of the M3 and the A34 around an approximate central grid reference of SU496308.

Background

1.4. M3 Junction 9 is a key transport interchange which connects South Hampshire and the wider sub-region, with London via the M3 and the Midlands/North via the A34. A significant volume of traffic currently uses the grade separated, partially signalised gyratory (approximately 6,000 vehicles per hour during the peak periods) which acts as a bottleneck on the local highway network and causes significant delay throughout the day.

1.5. Highways England is looking to reconfigure the junction to improve the situation for vehicle traffic and non-motorised users.

1.6. As part of a wider ecological assessment of the area potentially affected by improvement works, Jacobs (on behalf of Highways England) undertook a habitat survey including a search for orchid species in June 2020 (Highways England, 2020). A member of the public had informed Jacobs of the presence of white helleborine (Cephalanthera damasonium) within an area of woodland in the Tesco car park adjacent to Junction 9. However, this area had been mown shortly prior to the survey so it was not possible to fully assess the presence/absence or distribution of this species within this area at the time.

1.7. Due to the limitation with surveying the Tesco car park area at the time of the Jacobs survey, Stantec were commissioned to complete a follow-up survey of this area in 2021. The aims of this survey were to determine the presence/likely absence of white helleborine (and any other orchid or plant species of note) within this area and, where present, to gather information on distribution and number of plants (based on flowering or vegetative stems).

1.8. White helleborine is listed as 'vulnerable' on the 2021 Great Britain Red List for Vascular Plants (bsbi.org accessed 01/07/21); i.e. it is considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild. Although identified as a 'vulnerable' species, it is not afforded any specific legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended). The plant is however recognised as a "Species of Principal Importance" (SPI) for the conservation of biodiversity in England and is identified on the list provided in accordance with the requirements of Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006, all public bodies, including local and regional authorities, have a duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England when carrying out their normal functions.

2. Method

2.1. A survey area was defined including the land within the Tesco car park area adjacent to Junction 9 to the south-west (see Figure 1, **Appendix A**). This included the main car park area and central woodland strip where white helleborine had been anecdotally reported to be present in 2020. In addition, the survey included the areas of dense planted trees and shrubs around the car park margin to the north and east as well as ornamental shrub beds and other vegetated areas on the western side of the car park. For completeness, the road verges just beyond the Tesco boundary to the west and north (along Easton Lane) were also surveyed where a public footpath was present. A wooded area to the west of the Tesco petrol station and store buildings was also included for further information as this was noted to provide potentially suitable habitat for white helleborine (typically dry and heavily shaded areas beneath trees with limited other vegetation cover).

2.2. A search for white helleborine was undertaken within the survey area on 26th May 2021. Weather conditions were mild (16°C to 17°C) dry and overcast (6/8 cloud cover) with a light breeze (Beaufort scale force 2). A second survey visit was completed on 16th June 2021 when weather conditions were dry and warm (23°C) with minimal cloud (2/8 cloud cover) and largely still air (Beaufort scale force 1).

2.3. The white helleborine survey was completed by an ecologist experienced in the identification of this species as well as other plants (including similar helleborine species such as narrow-leaved helleborine (*Cephalanthera longifolia*)). Each survey visit involved a walkover of suitable habitat within the survey area with these areas being slowly searched for stems of white helleborine. Any stems or groups of stems found were recorded using a hand-held GPS unit or recorded on a map of the survey area where large clusters of plants occurred. The total number of individual stems visible was also noted. Following the survey, the data was compiled to give a total number of white helleborine stems recorded.

2.4. The two survey visits were completed during the peak flowering season for white helleborine (typically from the end of May to the end of June). It was evident from the number of stems of full flower during the late May visit that growing conditions were optimal. There were therefore no limitations in terms of survey timing.

3. Results and Interpretation

3.1. A total of 118 stems of white helleborine were recorded growing within the survey area. The majority of these (109 stems) were growing along the western edge of the avenue of woodland within the centre of the Tesco car park. A further stem was recorded toward the eastern edge of this central woodland. Photographs can be viewed in **Appendix B**.

3.2. A further four stems were recorded growing within an area of planted ornamental shrubs in the north-western edge of the car park (north of the recycling area) with a single stem also recorded on the edge of the car park in the north-east corner of the car park just before an area of dense shrubs and trees. Two stems were recorded on a small area of grass verge outside the car park just north-east of the Easton Lane roundabout. The remaining individual stem was located in an area of ivy ground cover on a bank beside a footpath to the west of the Tesco service yard area (south-west of the car park).

3.3. A search within the embanked area covered with dense trees and shrubs around the northern and eastern edges of the car park did not reveal any white helleborines.

3.4. The current Scheme design assumed that areas most likely to be affected would include those in proximity to the Junction 9 gyratory itself, such as the densely vegetated embanked areas on the northern and eastern margins of the car park. The survey results indicate that white helleborines are largely absent from these areas although small numbers of plants may occur on the edges of the car park itself nearby. Minor changes along this bank are unlikely to cause significant impacts on white helleborine presence and distribution within the survey area. If works require removal of larger sections of the woody vegetation this could cause loss of plants nearby through changes to the amount of shade and other localised growing conditions. However, this would only likely affect very low numbers of plants (with only one stem recorded close by in 2021). The key habitat within the survey area was the central wooded strip where the vast majority of stems were recorded. This should be retained and protected in its current form as far as is practicable.

3.5. If for any reason significant impacts on white helleborine are likely to occur and cannot be avoided mitigation may be required such as creation of suitable habitat elsewhere nearby and possibly translocation of plants to establish new colonies. However, given the current distribution and likely extent of works this is considered unlikely to be required.

3.6. While likely beyond the scope of this project, it was noted that management of the central woodland strip appeared to have been undertaken recently (possibly in 2020) including cutting or mowing of shrub species along the woodland margin. This may have been the cutting reported by Jacobs in 2020 that prevented survey although this is not known. However, during the 2021 survey it was incidentally noted that the management of the area had likely benefitted white helleborine by creating more open and less vegetated conditions in parts of the woodland. Young regrowth of species such as privet (*Ligustrum* sp.) was noted although areas of largely bare or sparsely vegetated ground were present on the western side of the woodland. Areas that did not appear to have been cut to the same extent, or had a higher cover of grassland, such as the southern and eastern edges of the woodland, did not support white helleborine in 2021. This indicates that the occasional management of the central woodland may be required to maintain suitable conditions.

4. References

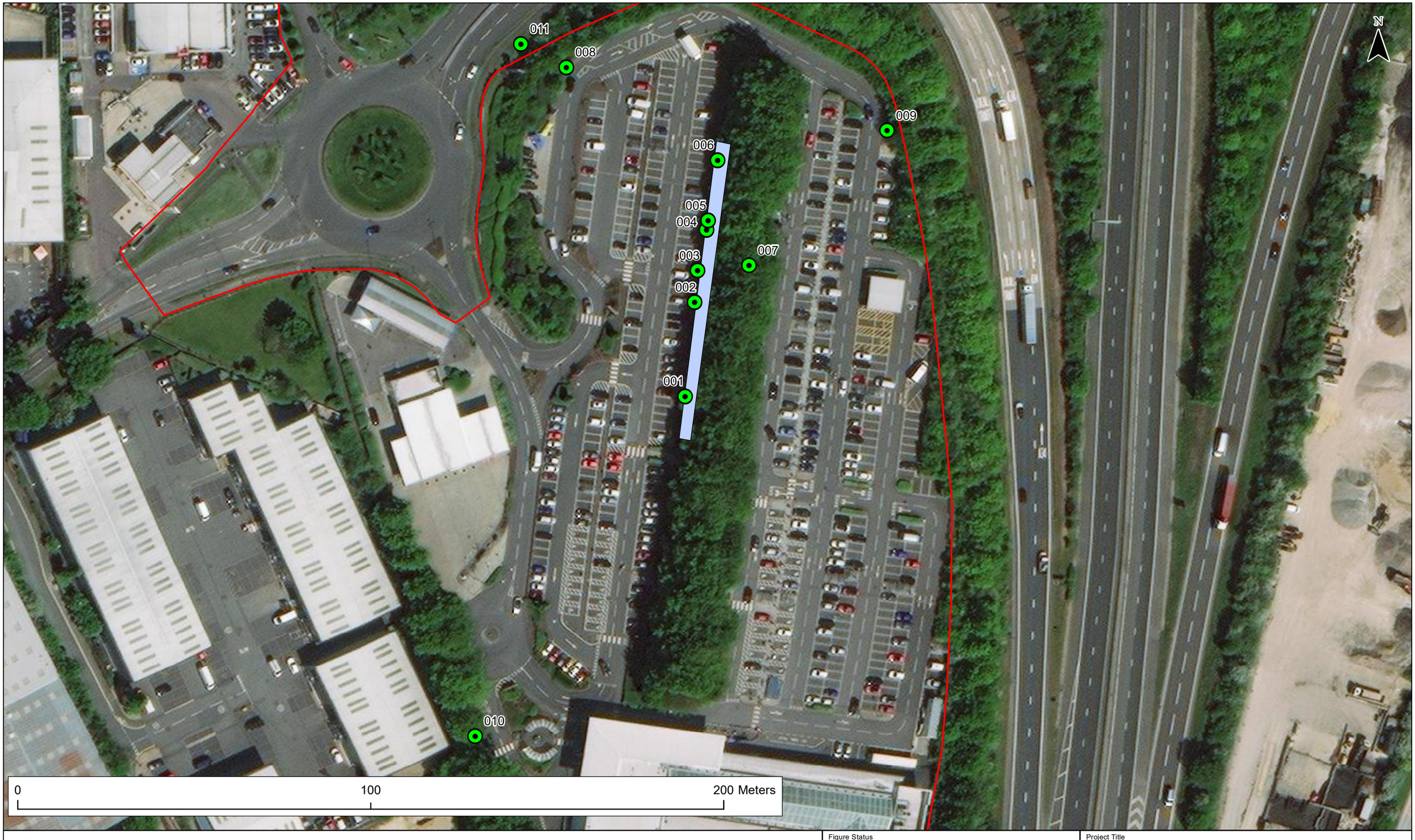
https://bsbi.org/taxon-lists

Highways England (2020). M3 Junction 9 Improvements. Habitat Verification and Orchid Survey.

DOCUMENT ISSUE RECORD

Technical Note No	Rev	Date	Prepared	Checked	Reviewed (Discipline Lead)	Approved (Project Director)
HE551511-VFK-EBD-X_XXXX_XX-TN-LE-0008	-	22/07/21	EA	DM	DM	TW

Appendix A - White Helleborine Survey Figure



KEY

- Application Boundary
- Hellborine Target Note (TN)
- Hellborine Area

Figure Status: FOR INFORMATION	Project Title: M3 JUNCTION 9 IMPROVEMENT
VolkerFitzpatrick	Figure Title: White Hellborine Survey Plan
Client: highways england	Scale: 1:1,000 / Designed: MD / Drawn: MD / Checked: GS / Approved: GS
	Original Size: A3 / Date: 04/08/2021 / Date: 04/08/2021 / Date: 04/08/2021 / Date: 04/08/2021
	FIGURE 1
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Document Path: \\pba.int\cbh\GIS\GIS_central\Projects\48176\02_mxd\Ecology\48176_WhiteHellborineSurveyPlan.mxd

Appendix B: Photographs

Photograph 1: Western edge of central woodland supporting groups of white helleborine (note sparsely vegetated ground conditions)

Photograph 2: Less shaded and more vegetated eastern edge of central woodland where white helleborines were absent

Photograph 3: White helleborines growing in ivy on edge of ornamental shrub bed on western edge of car park

Photograph 4: White helleborines growing on verge of Easton Lane to north-west of car park area