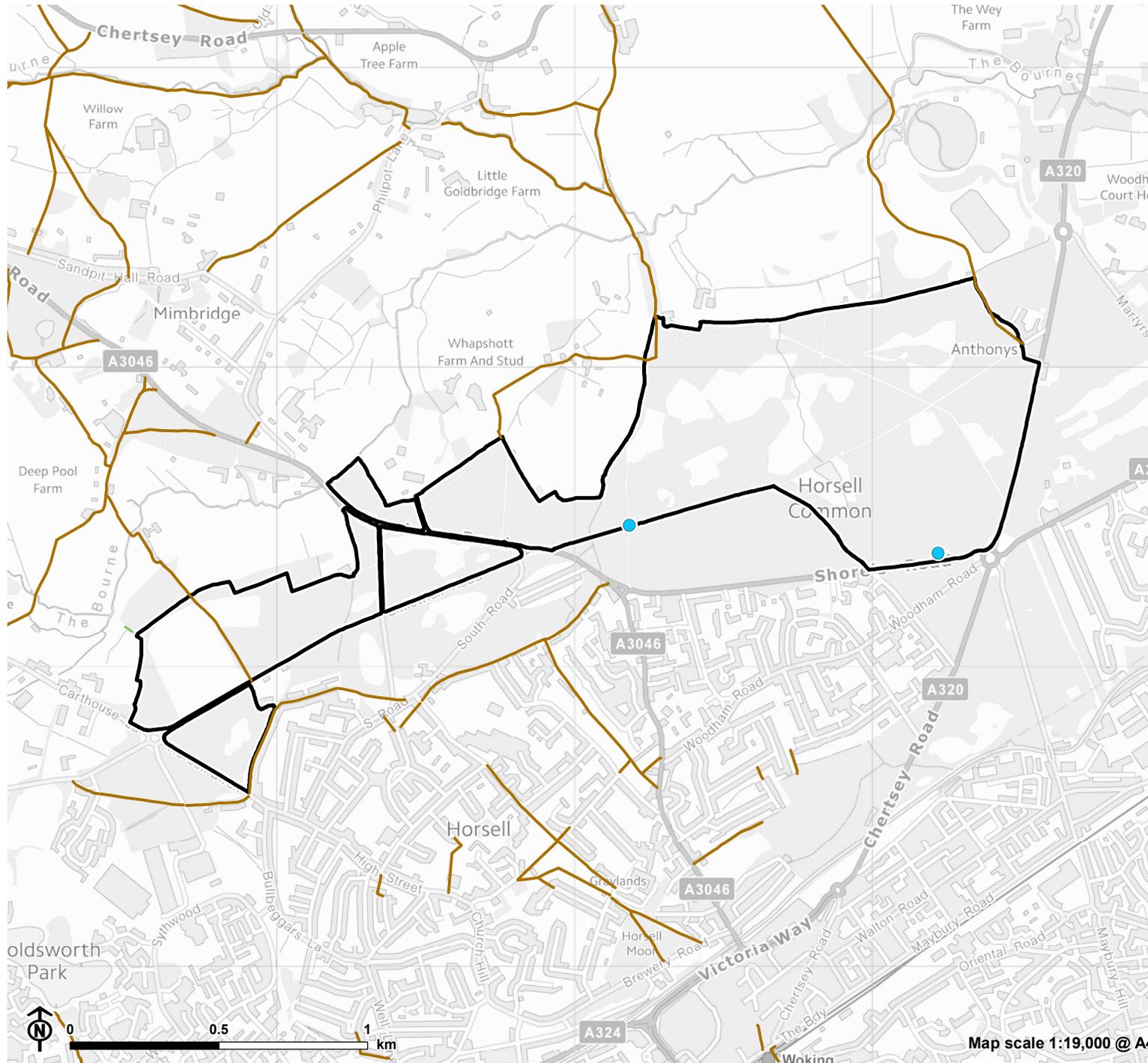
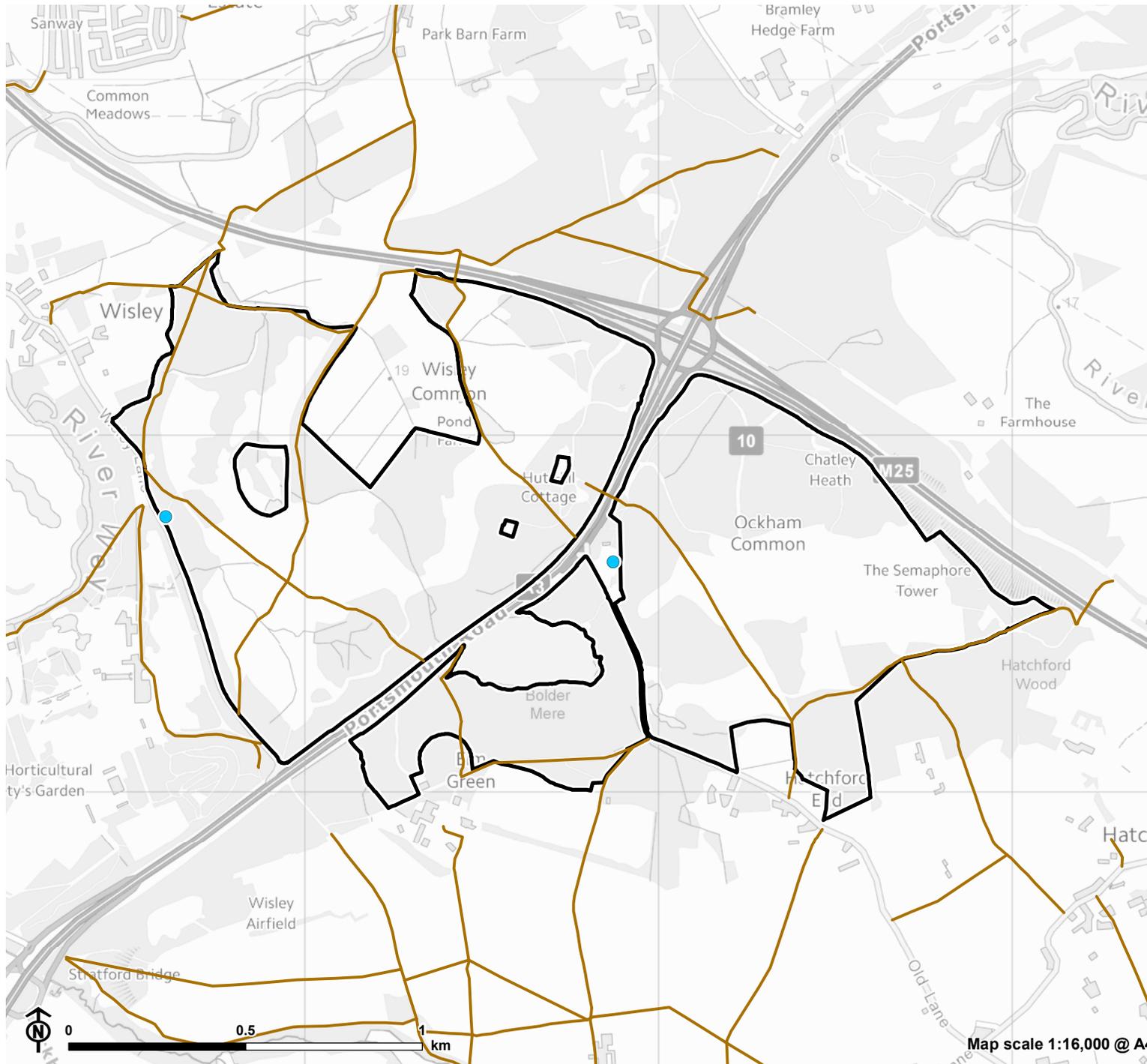


**Figure 3.10: Existing Access
Restrictions: Horsell Common**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Access point

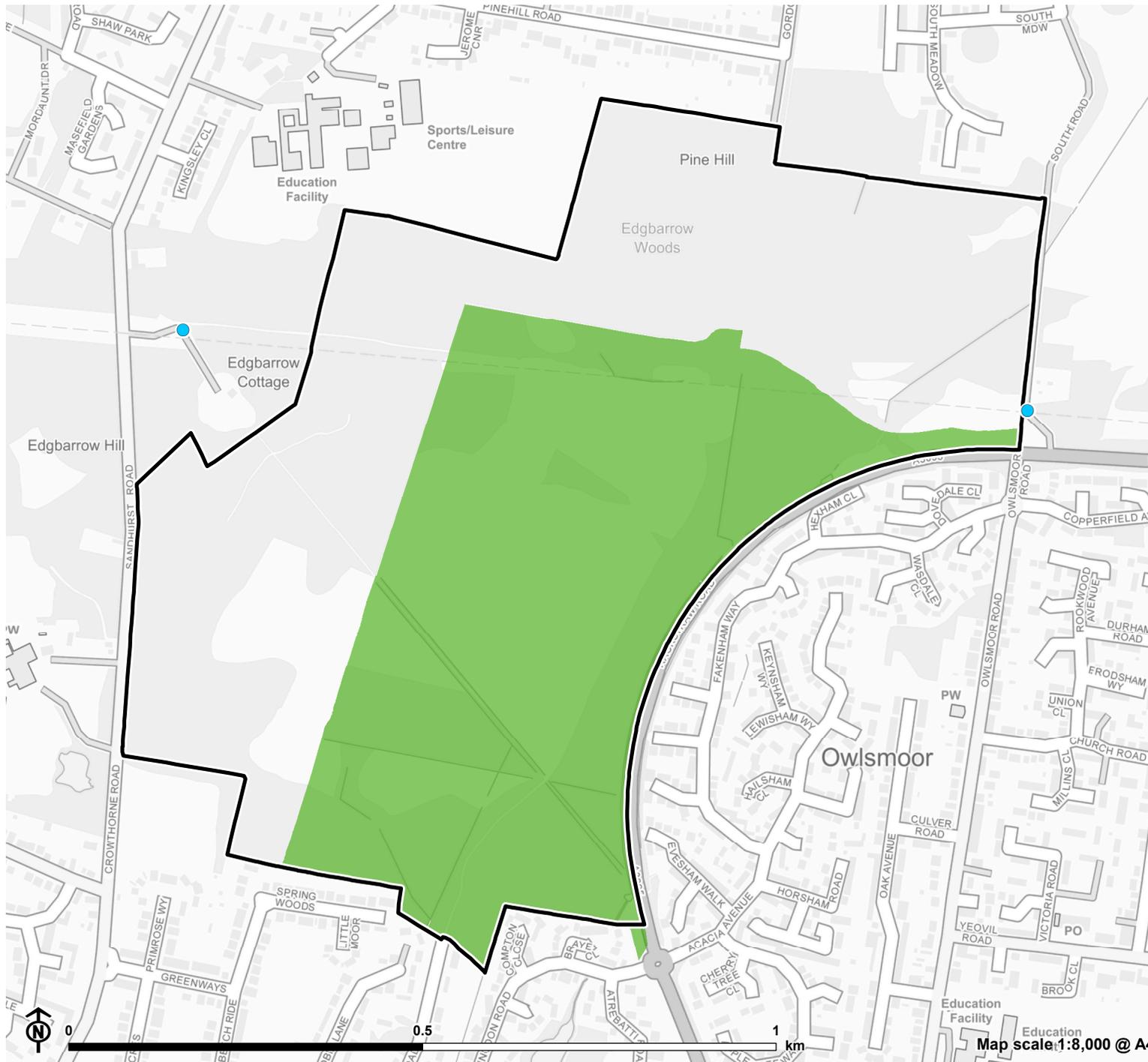
**Figure 3.11: Existing Access
Restrictions: Ockham and Wisley
Commons**



-  Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
-  Public right of way
-  Access point

Map scale 1:16,000 @ A4

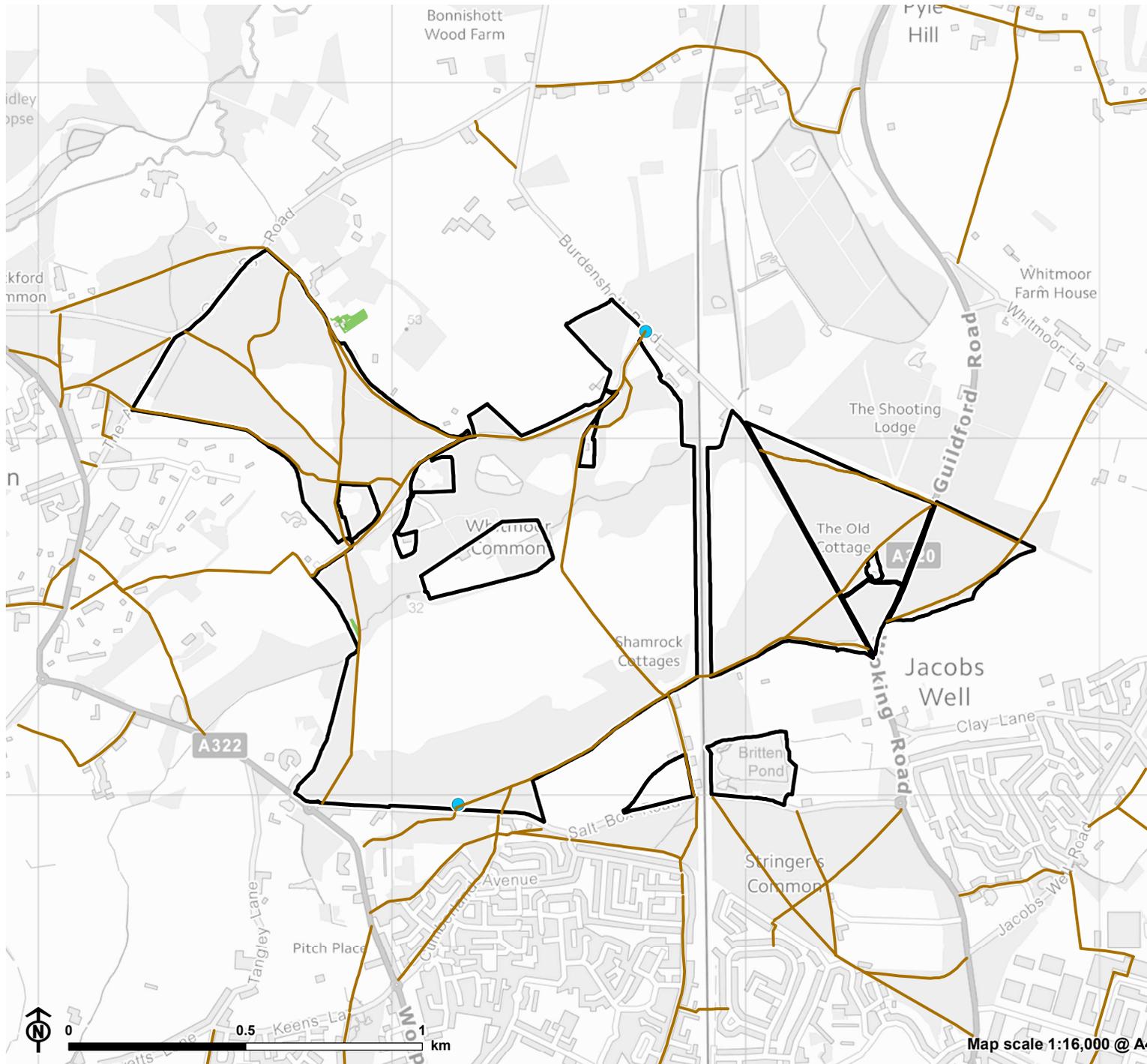
**Figure 3.12: Existing Access Restrictions:
Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Access point

0 0.5 1 km
Map scale: 1:8,000 @ A4

**Figure 3.13: Existing Access
Restrictions: Whitmoor Common**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Access point

Ministry of Defence (MOD) land

3.6 The MOD owns almost 50% of the land within the SPA. There are different types of restriction within these areas, depending on how they are used by the MOD and the risk to the public; some areas always have public access whereas others have none.

3.7 The types of restriction⁵ that exist in these areas are as follows (and as marked on Ordnance Survey maps):

- Danger Area: areas in which life-threatening activity takes place, such as the use of live ammunition. No public access is allowed while red flags are up or red lights are on (the exception to this is Pirbright Range danger area, which is closed at all times due to unexploded ordnance). If there are public rights of way (PROW) across a danger area, the MOD uses byelaws⁶ to close the paths temporarily. Firing and closure times are published online⁷.
- 'Dry Training' areas (shown as 'Managed Access' on OS maps): access is normally allowed to these areas when it is not being actively used for military training. Red flags are not used at these sites, but the MOD uses byelaws (indicated with warning and byelaw signage) to manage access.

3.8 The SPA falls within the MOD's 'Aldershot Training Area'⁸, which includes the five areas described below:

- Sandhurst Royal Military Academy, which includes Barossa Common (Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI): Danger Areas and dry training areas;
- Pirbright Ranges (Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath SSSI): Danger Areas and dry training areas;
- Ash Ranges (Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI): Danger Areas and dry training areas;
- Minley Dry Training Area (Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI): dry training only; and
- Aldershot Dry Training Area (Bourley and Long Valley SSSI): dry training only.

Forestry Commission land

3.9 The Forestry Commission is another major landowner within the SPA.

3.10 The westernmost parcels of the SPA (Bramshill SSSI and part of Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI) are in Forestry Commission ownership and collectively form part of the Bramshill Forest. Forestry Commission land within the SPA has public access.

3.11 Much of the forestry is under active management and the Forestry Commission uses fencing to prevent access to areas of conifer plantation that have been recently clear-felled, for example at Bramshill, Warren Heath and Heath Warren. There is currently no access to Yateley Heath Wood.

3.12 The Forestry Commission's *Bramshill Forest Plan*⁹ states that:

"Conifer plantation managed under the clearfell-restock cycle will provide a continual supply of open space suitable for breeding nightjar and woodlark. Harvesting residues will be treated to create nesting habitat and permit replanting. This temporary open space will persist until the trees close canopy at between 5-7 years of age being initially more favourable for Woodlark with a longer span of suitability for Nightjar. The temporary fencing which accompanies these restocked stands until they reach thicket stage will provide ground nesting birds with added protection against disturbance from people and dogs."

Crown Estate land

3.13 The Crown Estate owns Swinley Forest, within the Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI portion of the SPA, south of Bracknell.

3.14 The Estate allows informal access on a permissive basis.

Other private ownership

3.15 A number of other small areas of the SPA are in private ownership and have restricted or no access to the public.

3.16 These include:

- Eelmoor Marsh;
- Cobbett Hill; and
- Part of the grounds of the estates of Bramshill House and the adjacent Pheasantry.

3.17 Horsell Common is also in private ownership but has public access.

⁵ Ramblers guidance on walking on military sites:

<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/advice/safety/walking-on-military-sites.aspx>

⁶ MOD byelaws: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/byelaws-south-east>

⁷ MOD firing and closure times:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/south-east-training-estate-firing-times>

⁸ Public Access Consultancy report for the Army Training Estate (2003):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425347/20150302-FOI01304-Annex_A.pdf

⁹ Bramshill Forest Plan (2018)

https://www.forestryengland.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Thames%20Basin%20Heaths%20Introduction_0.pdf

Open Access Land

3.18 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) gives public rights of access to 'open country' and registered common land; known collectively as 'open access land'.

3.19 Government guidance¹⁰ states that access can be restricted in the following circumstances that may be relevant to parts of the SPA:

You can exclude or restrict public access rights for up to 28 days per calendar [with some limitations]

Visitors using their open access rights must keep their dogs on a short lead of no more than 2 metres between 1 March and 31 July each year and at all times near livestock.

You may apply for a restriction for any type of land management activity on access land including: farming, forestry, sporting activities, events.

You can apply to restrict access for any period of the year, but only if this is necessary for land management, public safety or fire prevention reasons.

3.20 The CROW Act also restricts various activities such that visitors cannot "*disturb livestock, wildlife or habitats with intent*".

3.21 In some cases, land can be mapped as open access land but have no rights of access. This is known as 'excepted land' and includes land under MOD byelaws.

3.22 Where open access rights existed on land prior to 2000 (known as 'section 15 land'), the older rights apply instead of the CROW Act. Older rights include those conferred by the National Trust Act 1907 (permits access on foot) and s193 of the Law of Property Act 1925 (within the TBH is used to permit access on horseback).

3.23 The majority of the registered common land within the SPA is 'section 15 land', i.e. had access rights prior to 2000.

3.24 Within the SPA, areas of registered common land exist at:

- Chobham Common;
- Horsell Common;
- Whitmoor Common;
- Yateley Common; and smaller areas at
- Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath.

3.25 Other areas of open access land (open country) exist within the MOD lands, and are therefore 'excepted land', and in small areas within:

- Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths; and
- Bramshill.

Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs)

3.26 PSPOs are in place within parts of the SPA and require dogs to be on leads; the orders also ban dogs from some areas. These do not apply to visitors without dogs, but could influence the location of visitor hotspots within the SPA, as dog walking is the most common activity cited in visitor surveys on the SPA (the effect on dog walkers specifically is considered in the dog control study).

3.27 There is a PSPO in force across the whole of Surrey Heath Borough that requires people in charge of dogs to put them on a lead when directed to. The PSPO within Lightwater Country Park (within the SPA in Surrey Heath) requires all dogs to be on leads from 1 March to 31 July (although the breeding season for nightjar extends to September). Surrey Heaths PSPOs are enforced through the use of Fixed Penalty Notices. Hart District Council and Rushmoor Borough Council have no PSPOs requiring dogs on leads.

Other measures

3.28 Hampshire Country Council's 'Countryside Canines'¹¹ initiative uses red, amber, green 'paw print' zones to refer to dog control on council sites. Green indicates that dogs are allowed off the lead, Amber refers to on-site restrictions and dog owners should read the signage, and Red restricts dogs from entering the area. As with the PSPOs, this only affects dog walkers but could affect the location of visitor hotspots within the SPA. Within the SPA, this initiative only applies to the following locations in Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI:

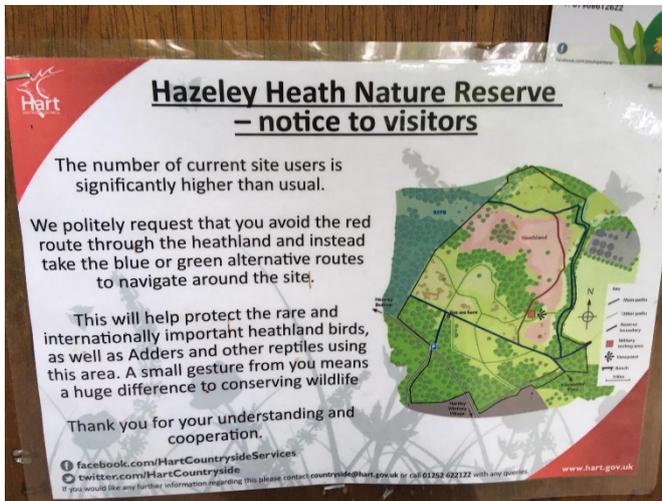
- Parts of Yateley Common: 'green', dogs permitted off lead 'outside ground nesting bird season'; and
- Castle Bottom, near Yateley: 'amber', due to grazing livestock.

3.29 There is also evidence (**Figure 3.14**) that temporary signage is being used to manage the increase in visitor numbers associated with the Covid19 pandemic.

¹⁰ Open access land and the coastal margin: how to restrict public access (2015) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-access-land-and-the-coastal-margin-how-to-restrict-public-access>

¹¹ <https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countrysidecanines>

Figure 3.14: Temporary signage at Hazeley Heath



3.30 In many cases, as shown in the visitor distribution maps (Figure 3.15:), visitors stick to formal paths within the SPA. However, the visitor surveys also refer to visitors leaving paths. How far from the path that people go and where they go will be influenced by various factors, including where they *want* to go versus whether they can get there. Features such as boundaries (e.g. fences or roads) or impenetrable habitats will influence where people go; both within the SPA, or sections of it, and between it and the wider area.

3.31 The 2005 visitor survey took into account "visitable area" which includes areas of the heath within which people could walk or visit and was estimated using GIS. The SPA boundary in most instances was the "visitable area" boundary; however, areas of open undesignated countryside adjacent to the SPA where access is permitted were also included. Therefore, the "visitable area" encompassed land with public access and directly accessible land from the given access point. Accessible areas adjacent to the SPA are relevant to this study as they could draw people through the SPA and/or provide alternative areas to use if access were restricted within the SPA.

Impacts of existing access restrictions

3.32 The impacts of access restriction at the SPA can be measured in terms of hotspots of visitor activity and the resulting effect on bird populations. For some types of restriction and/or location, measures are less or more effective in terms of compliance, as set out below.

Hotspots of visitor activity

3.33 The mapping of visitors' routes as part of the visitors surveyed shows that, although visitors may not individually penetrate far into the SPA, collectively they access most of the site. The 2005 survey report¹² found that:

"the routes taken by the visitors interviewed have covered a considerable proportion of the SPA. The routes taken create a web like network spreading out from each access point. Were all access points to be mapped, and a similar mapping exercise conducted for each, it is clear that few areas would remain undisturbed. Even on some of the larger heaths, it can clearly be seen from Figure 19 that the routes from different access points overlap, suggesting that the centre of some heaths will be visited by people who have entered from different access points. Depending on the shape and size of site, and also the distribution of access points, it is possible that visitor numbers could be highest away from car-parks."

3.34 Hotspots of activity, as recorded in the 2018 survey¹³ are shown on Figure 3.15. As with the 2005 survey, these only represent visitor routes taken from a small sample of entry points and only during the summer (July-September). Because of this, the visitor hotspots mapped by following the 2018 visitor survey cannot be used to accurately identify areas subject to the highest levels of visitor pressure; however, they do show that most of the SPA is subject to visitor activity.

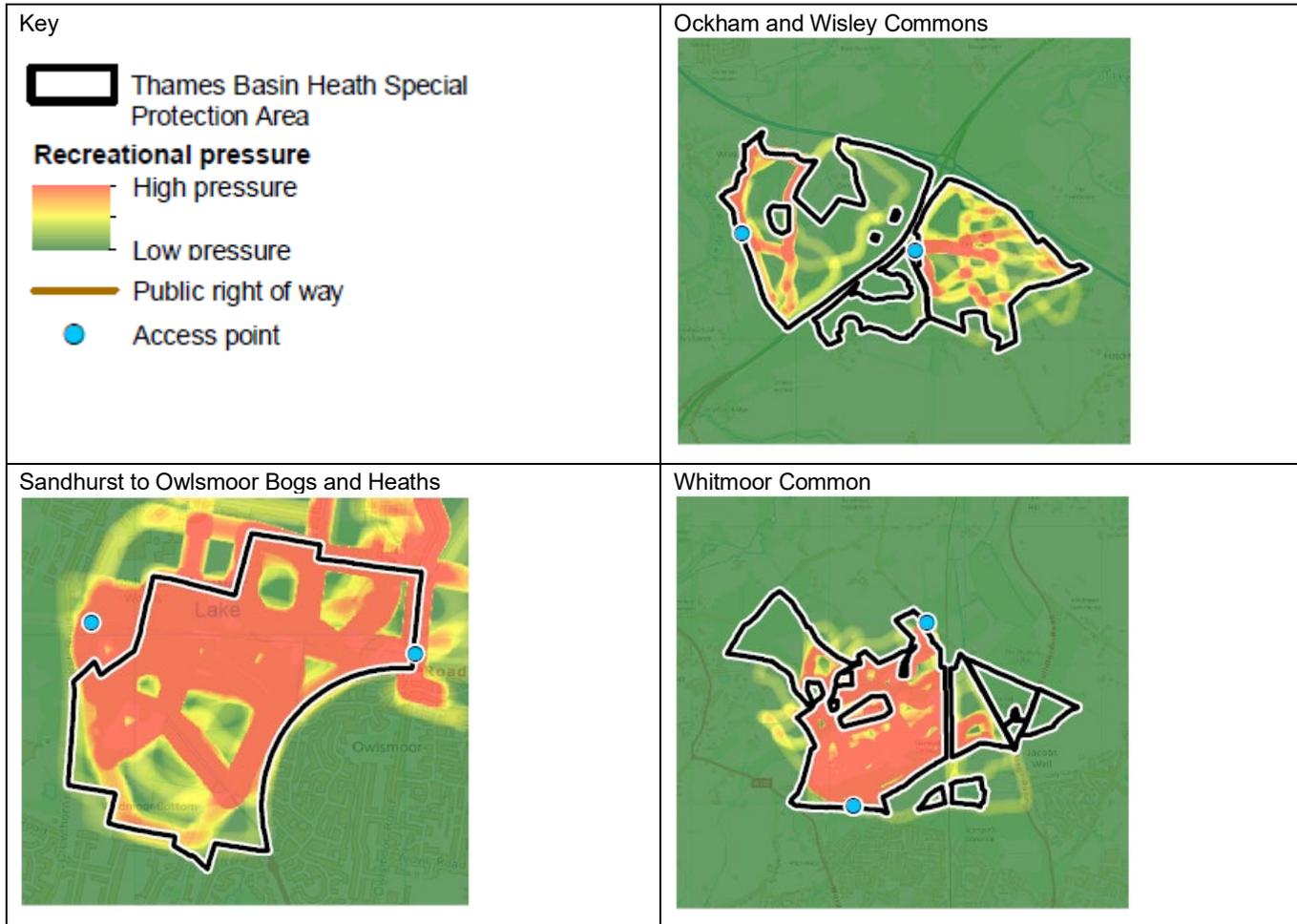
¹² Visitor access patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths, 2005 (Footprint Ecology / English Nature)

¹³ Visitor access patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA – visitor questionnaire survey 2018, 2018 (EPR)

Figure 3.15: Recreational pressure associated with surveyed access points (EPR survey, 2018)







3.35 With the exception of the MOD Danger Areas, which show no visitor activity, it is not possible to identify areas in which current access restrictions are affecting visitor activity from these maps. This is principally because the other types of access restriction (e.g. PSPOs) apply to dog walkers specifically, and visitor hotspots were not mapped comprehensively for all SPA access points, or separately for dog walkers versus visitors without dogs. EPR's visitor survey, which produced the hotspot mapping, was also undertaken from late July to early September, so partly when Surrey Heath's requirements for dogs on leads would be in place (March-July), and partly outside that period.

3.36 In some cases, the lack of routes recorded through an area of the SPA may be due to limited access (or lack of attractive routes) from the surveyed entry point, rather than a lack of public access. Similarly, the entry points surveyed may not have been the busiest; there may be hotspots of visitor activity not shown on the survey maps, that are caused by visitors from other entry points.

3.37 In general, the 'visitor hotspot' data is an indicator of busier areas but not a definitive indicator of visitor pressure.

Trends in visitor numbers

3.38 Both the 2017 car park transect¹⁴ (surveyed throughout the year) and 2018 visitor survey¹⁵ (surveyed in summer only) recorded changes in the distribution of visitors at the SPA compared with surveys in previous years.

3.39 The car park transect report stated that the results suggest:

"1) an overall reduction in use; and 2) a move away from many smaller parking locations to single large locations. This results in a change in the distribution of visitor pressure, with higher, concentrated densities in a few locations, compared to a more even spread across the whole area. Additional data are required from further years to determine whether this pattern is real and future counts need to be conducted in line with the previous counts to give confidence in the findings. Comparisons of data across multiple years will reduce variability in counts from weather patterns and overall seasonal variability to show clearer long-term trends."

3.40 The 2018 visitor survey was more conclusive:

"the most striking change between the 2018 survey and previous surveys in 2012/13 and 2005 is the overall drop in visitor numbers across the access points surveyed, including a statistically significant decrease in footfall compared to 2005, indicating a gradual change over

time. The latter is particularly notable in the context of a 12.9% increase in housing numbers within 5km of the SPA boundary over the same time period, together with the general trend towards increased levels of access to the countryside."

3.41 The 2018 report explores factors that could have influenced visitor patterns across the SPA and concludes that weather, the distribution of new housing, and SAMM and SANG mitigation strategies are all likely to have influenced visitor numbers. Other changes were identified that may have influenced visitor numbers at individual entry points, including:

- Parking availability and charges;
- Access and footpath provision;
- Habitat management;
- Visitor management and infrastructure; and
- Incidences of anti-social behaviour.

3.42 The report states that:

"Landowners and managers across the 30 access points provided information on changes that have taken place at their sites since 2012/13. The majority did not report any major changes [ie habitat management or visitor management] that could potentially affect visitor numbers, with the following exceptions:

- *In 2018, bunds were installed along the roadside at AP1 [access point] (Mytchett Place Road) to block off informal parking. This AP saw a decrease in footfall compared to 2012/13 which could be explained by these parking restrictions;*
- *A new perimeter fence at Long Valley, erected in January/February 2018, could potentially discourage visitors at APs 28 and 29 – however footfall actually appears to have increased in these locations; and*
- *Traveller incursions took place at AP12 (Chobham Road) in July and late August 2018. This is likely to explain the decrease in footfall compared to 2012/13."*

3.43 Access restriction is therefore thought to affect visitor numbers and distribution, but many other factors also have an effect and it is difficult to disentangle the effects of access restriction alone from the current data.

3.44 Anecdotally, the Covid19 pandemic has also affected SPA visitor numbers, with an initial drop in visitors in spring 2020 followed by a significant increase as restrictions eased.

¹⁴ Analysis of 2017 Thames Basin Heaths SPA Parking Transects & Counter Data, 2019 (Footprint Ecology)

¹⁵ Visitor access patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA – visitor questionnaire survey 2018, 2018 (EPR)

Bird distribution

3.45 Annual bird monitoring is undertaken at the SPA, with the same transects walked across sites from March through to late July. This provides a baseline against which populations of birds can be tracked and the impact of access restrictions can be measured. It is worth noting, however, that the bird data records bird sightings rather than nest productivity, which is a better measure of the effects of disturbance: birds may breed but abandon their nest due to disturbance.

3.46 Data from the annual survey of SPA bird species (**Figures 3.16-3.31**) has been provided for 2015 to 2019, with points indicating where birds were recorded, and average territory sizes plotted around those. These show that Dartford warbler, woodlark and nightjar are distributed throughout much of the SPA, with the main determinant of their distribution being habitat type.

3.47 These birds favour more open habitats (e.g. heathland), although they also require a mosaic of some or all of the following:

- Young heathland, particularly heather, with a diverse structure;
- Areas of bare ground and low-lying vegetation, particularly on well-drained, sandy soils;
- Areas of dense gorse;
- Young woodland with open areas;
- Sparsely scattered trees;
- Tussocky grassland; and
- Active management to maintain an open and diverse structure: bird distribution often follows forestry management cycles, with birds moving into recently felled areas until the habitat becomes less suitable.

3.48 This is borne out by the data, which shows denser records of birds in the more open areas, as well as some nightjar records within wooded areas. These may be areas of woodland that were felled in the few years prior to the bird surveys, which would not be evident from the habitat data. This is the case, for example, at Unit 7 of Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods & Heaths SSSI, where the SSSI condition assessment¹⁶ shows that woodland was felled prior to the assessment in 2017 and is estimated to provide suitable habitat for 5-10 years after this.

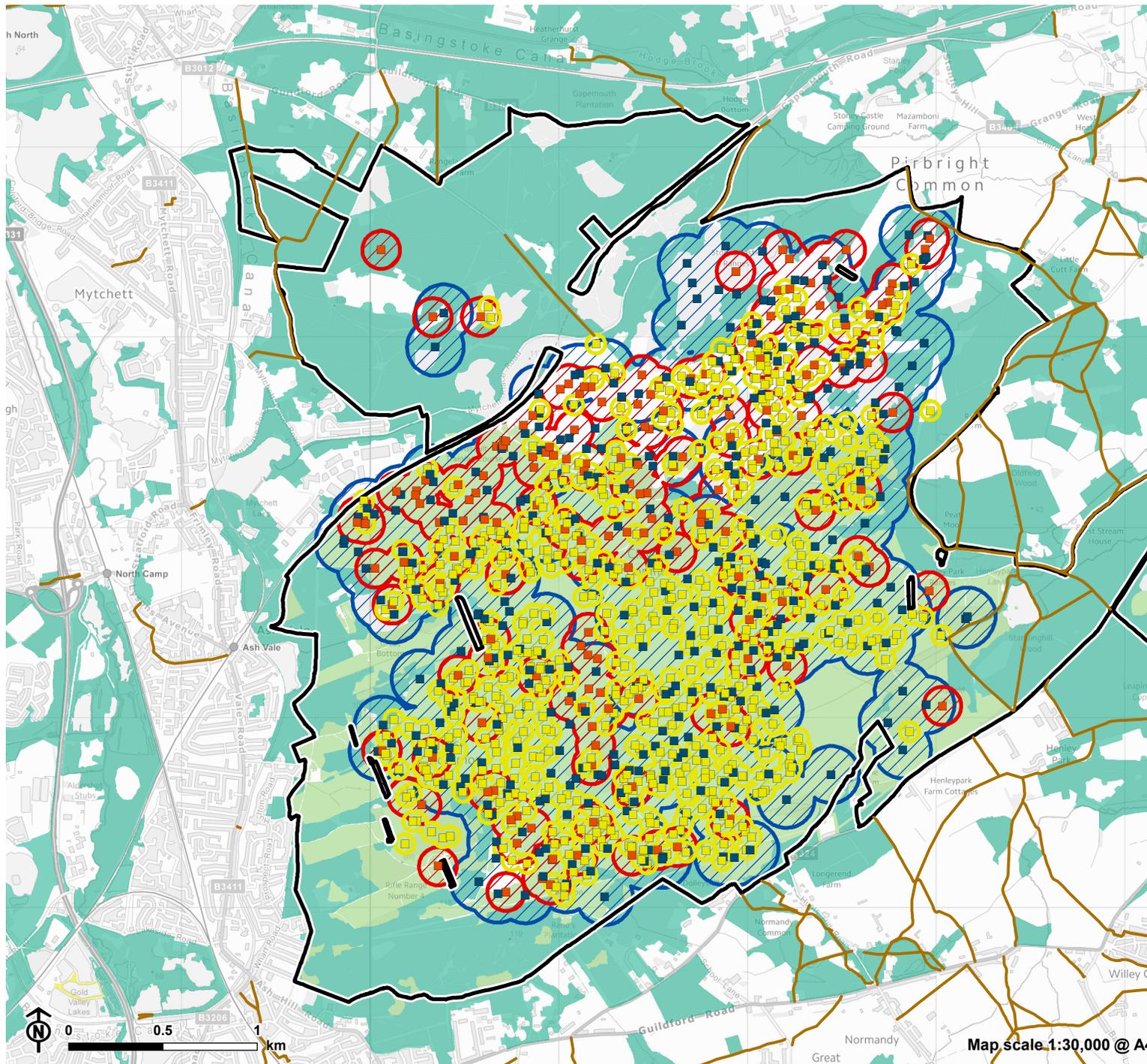
3.49 There are some locations in which 'visitor hotspots' coincide with sparser distribution of birds (for example the northwest corner of Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI, near

Mytchett), but this does not necessarily imply a correlation. Bird numbers may be being affected by habitat suitability instead or as well as disturbance from visitors (and in this case military activity) in these locations. There are also many locations shown as having low visitor pressure and few birds (for example parts of Bourley & Long Valley SSSI), which may be because those areas are in fact subject to high visitor pressure that has not been mapped (not all access points were surveyed), or for other reasons.

¹⁶ SSSI condition assessment for Unit 7 of Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods & Heaths SSSI:
<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/ReportUnitCondition.aspx?SiteCo>

de=S1004223&ReportTitle=Broadmoor%20to%20Bagshot%20Woods%20and%20Heaths%20SSSI

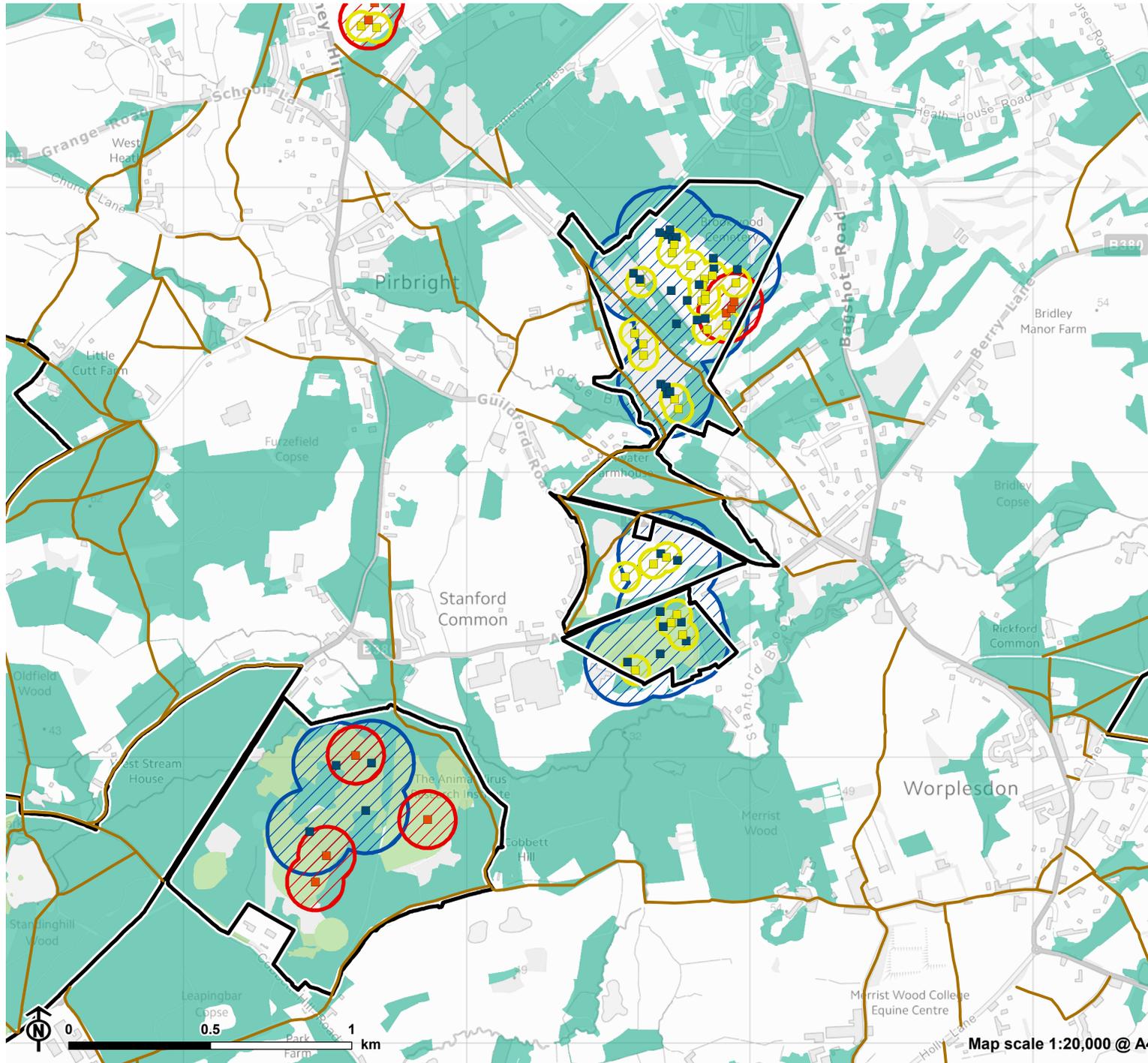
**Figure 3.16: Bird Survey Data:
Ash to Brookwood Heaths (Part 1)**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
 - Lowland heathland
 - Good quality semi-improved grassland
 - Woodland
 - Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
- Dartford Warbler
 - Nightjar
 - Woodlark
 - Dartford warbler territory
 - Nightjar territory
 - Woodlark territory

Map scale: 1:30,000 @ A4

**Figure 3.17: Bird Survey Data:
Ash to Brookwood Heaths (Part 2)**



Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area

Lowland heathland

Woodland

Public right of way

Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019

Dartford Warbler

Nightjar

Woodlark

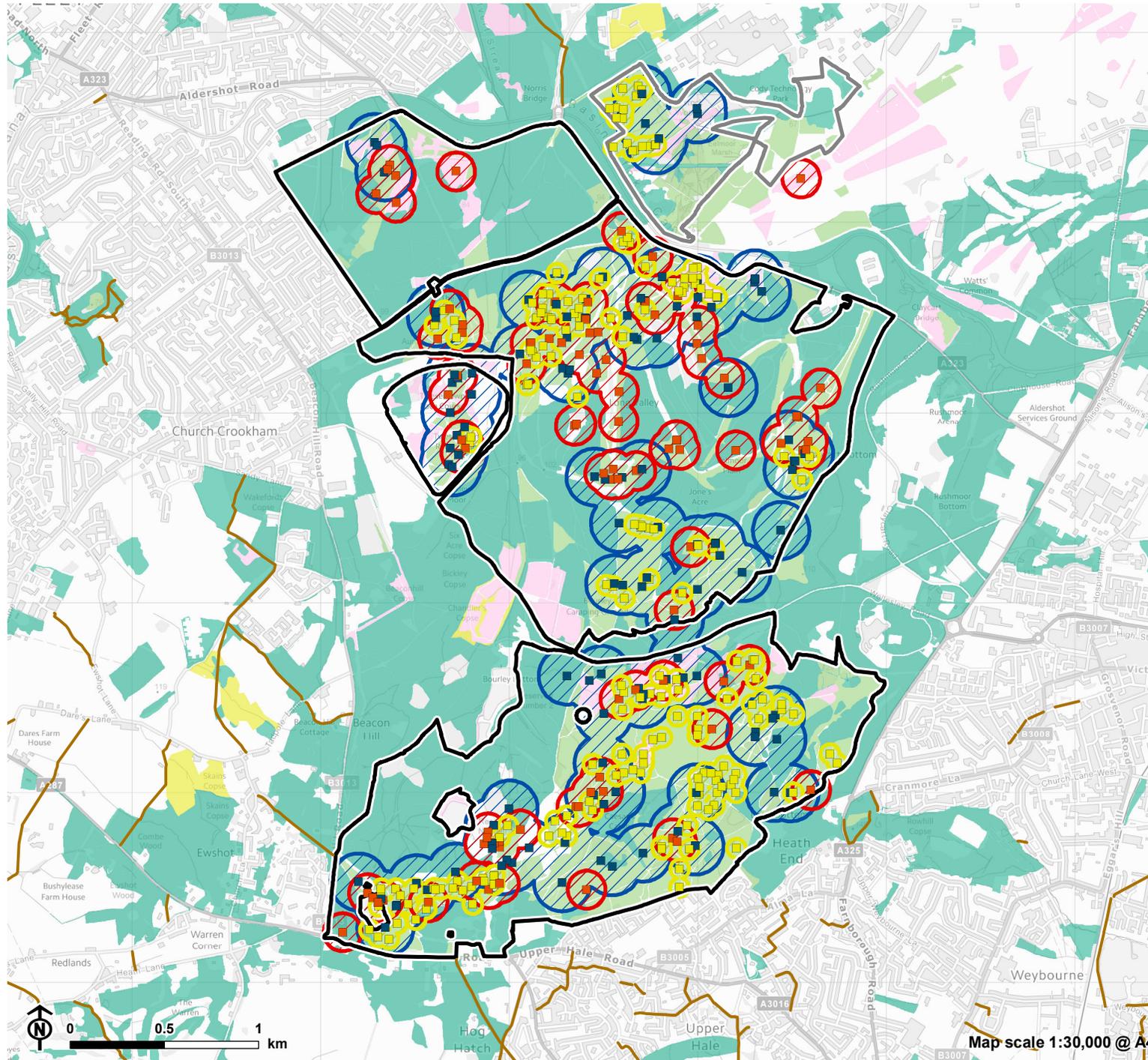
Dartford warbler territory

Nightjar territory

Woodlark territory

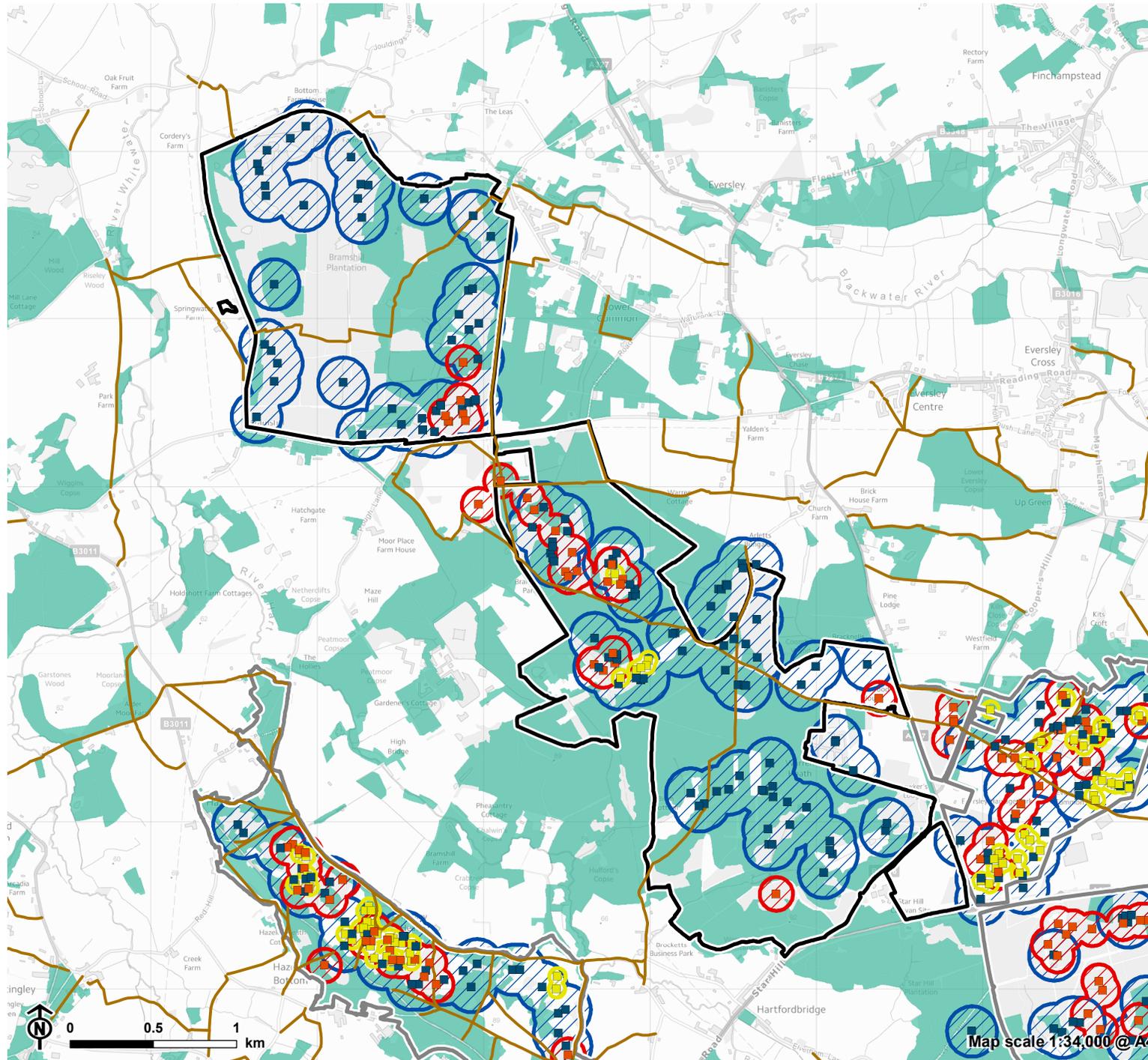
Map scale 1:20,000 @ A4

Figure 3.18: Bird Survey Data: Bourley and Long Valley



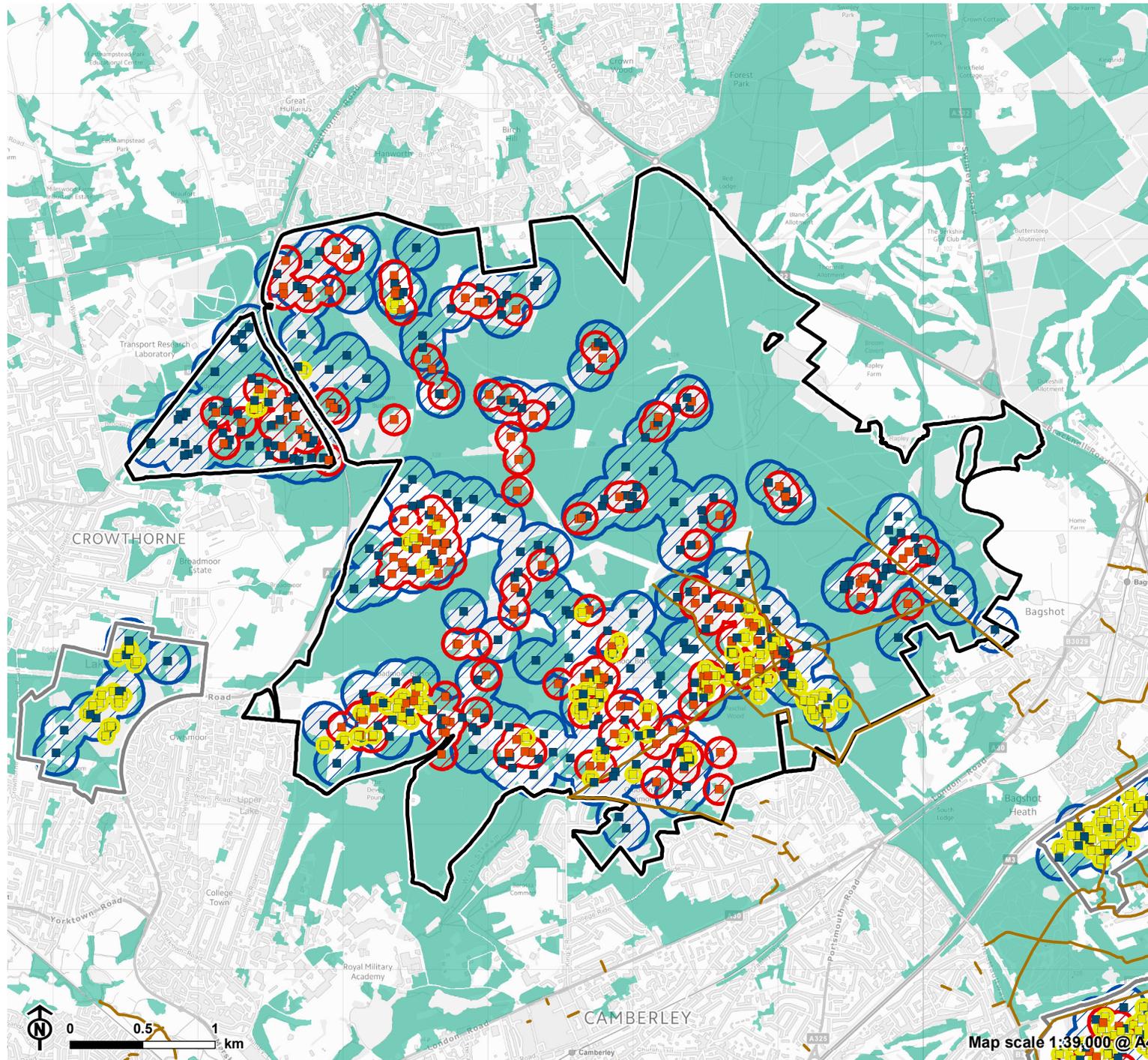
-  Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
-  Lowland heathland
-  Good quality semi-improved grassland
-  Lowland dry acid grassland
-  Woodland
-  Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
-  Dartford Warbler
-  Nightjar
-  Woodlark
-  Dartford warbler territory
-  Nightjar territory
-  Woodlark territory

Figure 3.19: Bird Survey Data: Bramshill



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Woodland
- Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
- Dartford Warbler
- Nighthjar
- Woodlark
- Dartford warbler territory
- Nighthjar territory
- Woodlark territory

**Figure 3.20: Bird Survey Data:
Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and
Heaths**



Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

Woodland

Public right of way

Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019

- Dartford Warbler
- Nighthjar
- Woodlark

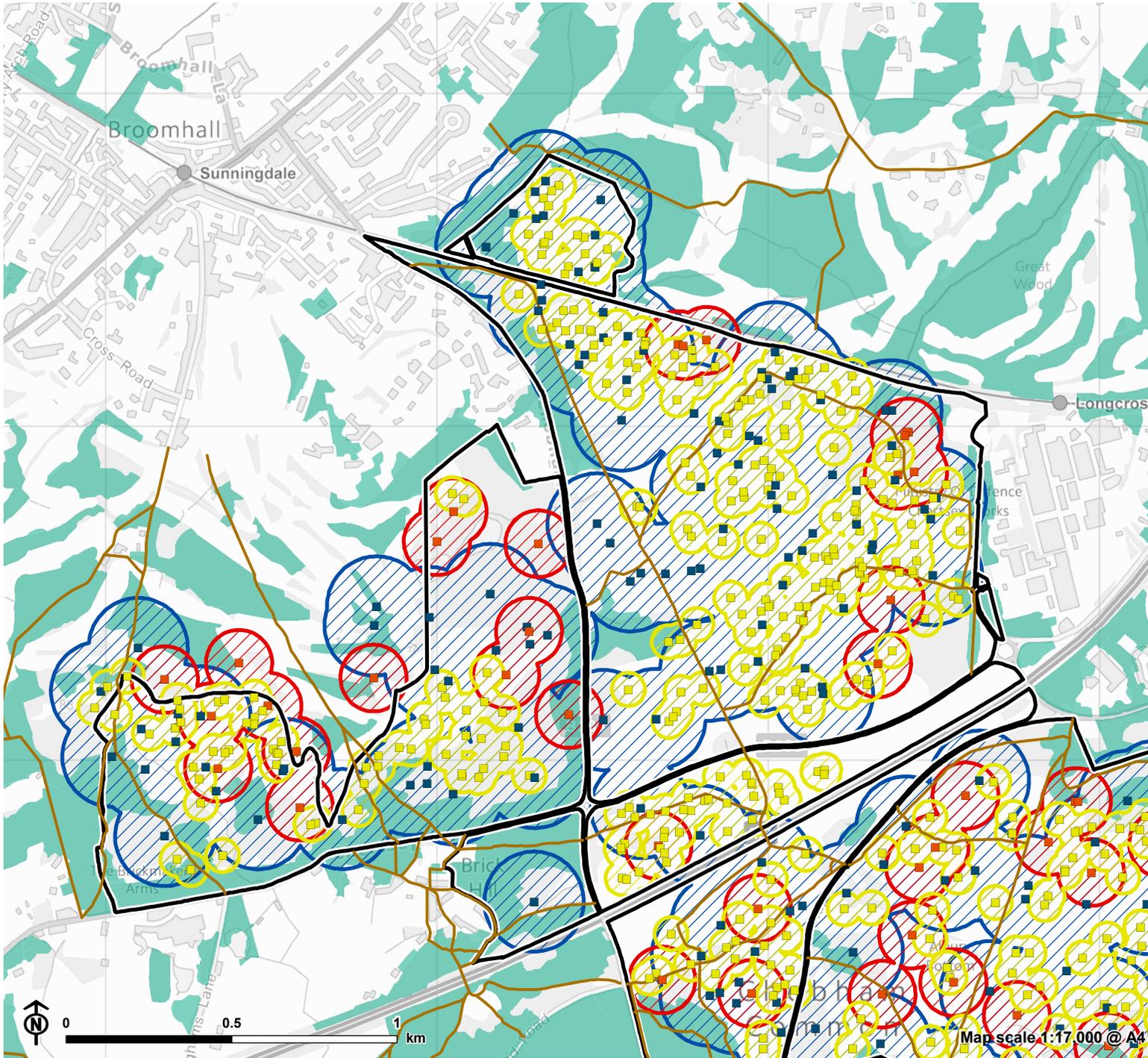
▨ Dartford warbler territory

▨ Nighthjar territory

▨ Woodlark territory



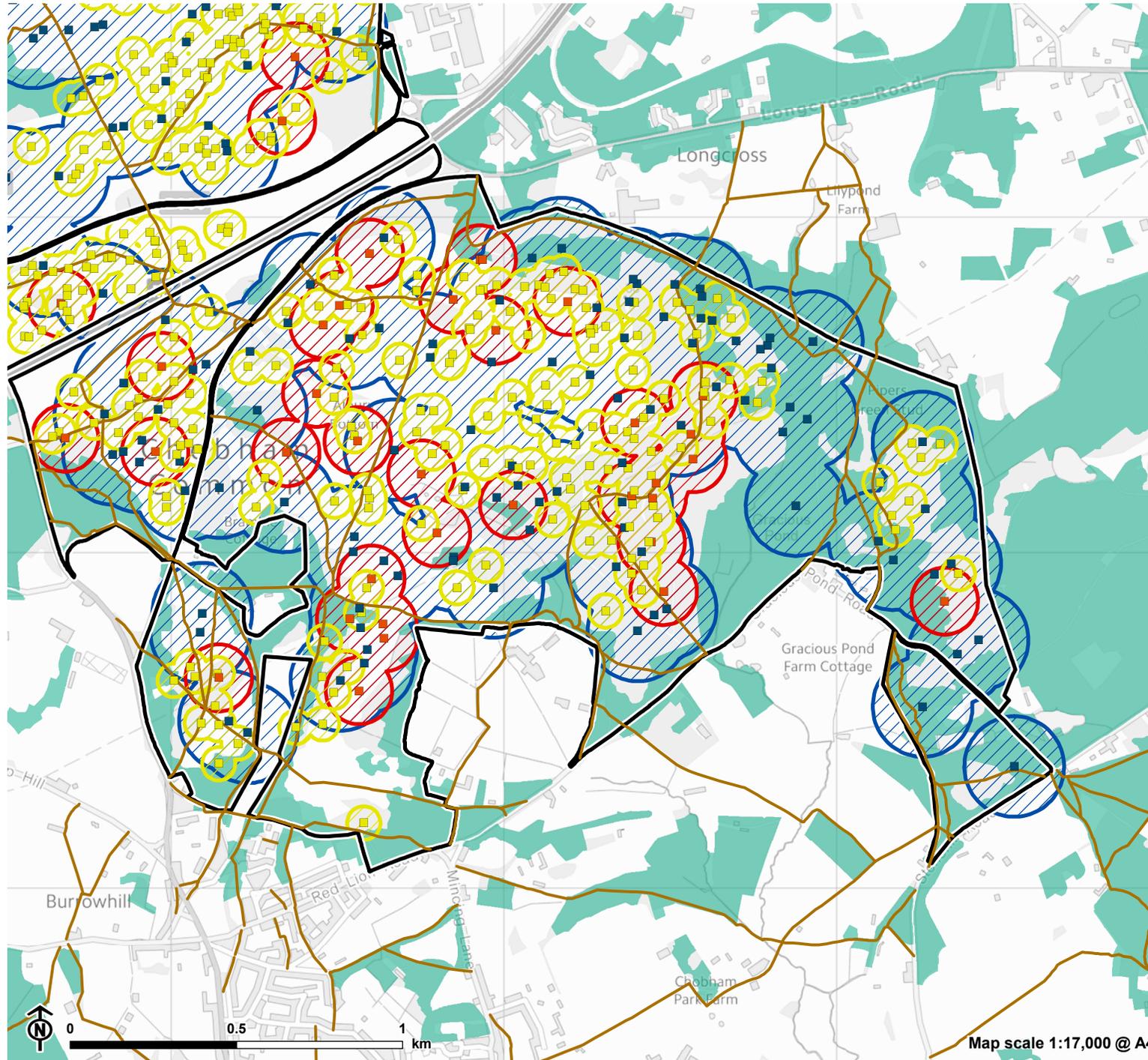
Map scale 1:39,000 @ A4



**Figure 3.21: Bird Survey Data:
Castle Bottom to Yateley and
Hawley Commons (Part 1)**

- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Woodland
- Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
- Dartford Warbler
- Nightjar
- Woodlark
- Dartford warbler territory
- Nightjar territory
- Woodlark territory

**Figure 3.22: Bird Survey Data:
Castle Bottom to Yateley and
Hawley Commons (Part 2)**



Thames Basin Heath Special
Protection Area

Woodland

Public right of way

Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019

- Dartford Warbler
- Nightjar
- Woodlark

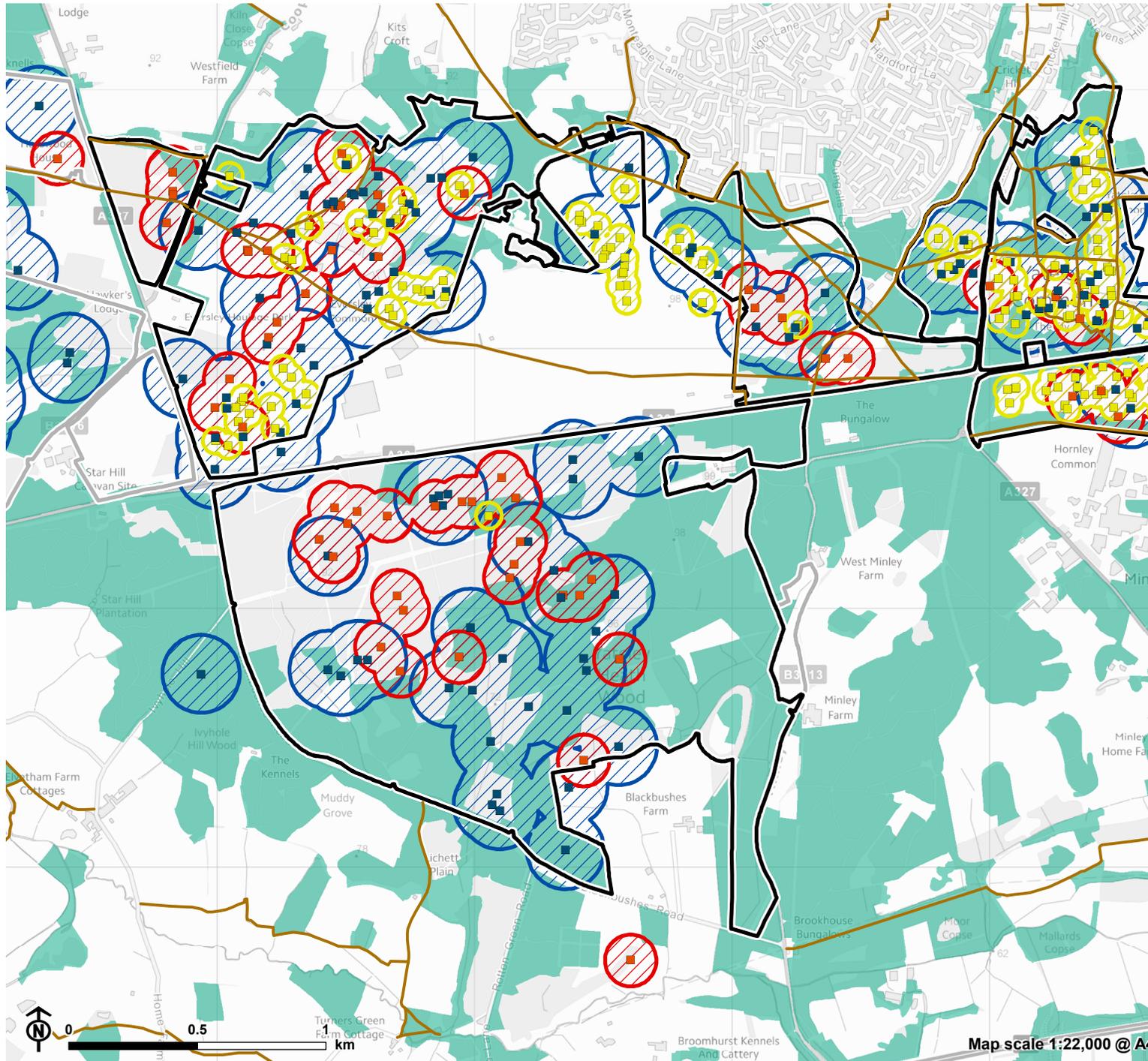
Dartford warbler territory

Nightjar territory

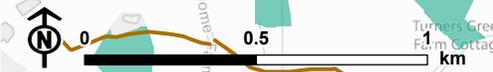
Woodlark territory

Map scale 1:17,000 @ A4

**Figure 3.23: Bird Survey
Data: Chobham Common
(Part 1)**

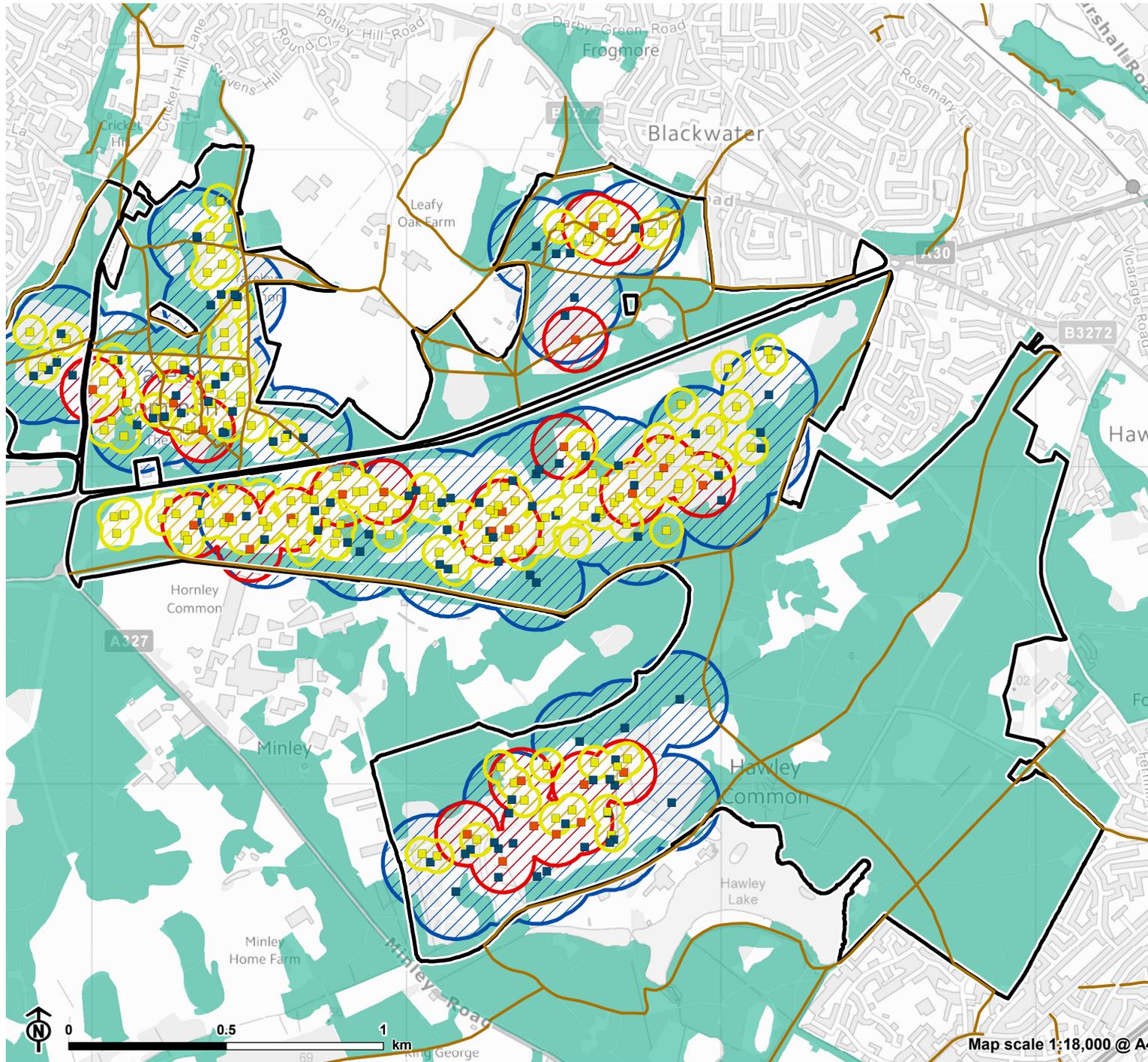


-  Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
 -  Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
 -  Woodland
 -  Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
-  Dartford Warbler
 -  Nightjar
 -  Woodlark
 -  Dartford warbler territory
 -  Nightjar territory
 -  Woodlark territory



Map scale 1:22,000 @ A4

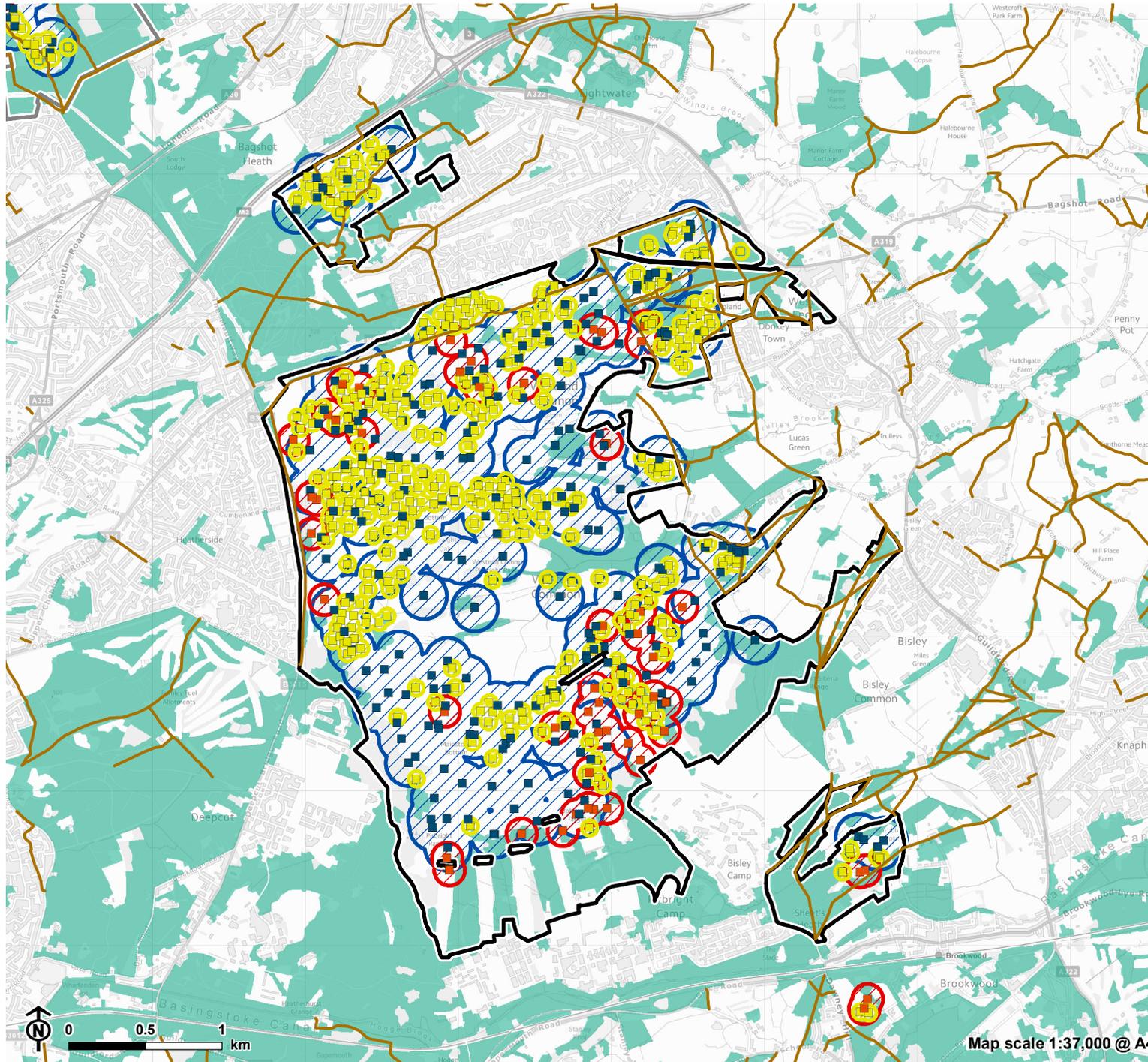
**Figure 3.24: Bird Survey
Data: Chobham Common
(Part 2)**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Woodland
- Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
- Dartford Warbler
- Nightjar
- Woodlark
- Dartford warbler territory
- Nightjar territory
- Woodlark territory

Map scale 1:18,000 @ A4

**Figure 3.25: Bird Survey Data: Colony
Bog and Bagshot Heath**



Thames Basin Heath Special
Protection Area

Woodland

Public right of way

Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019

Dartford Warbler

Nighthjar

Woodlark

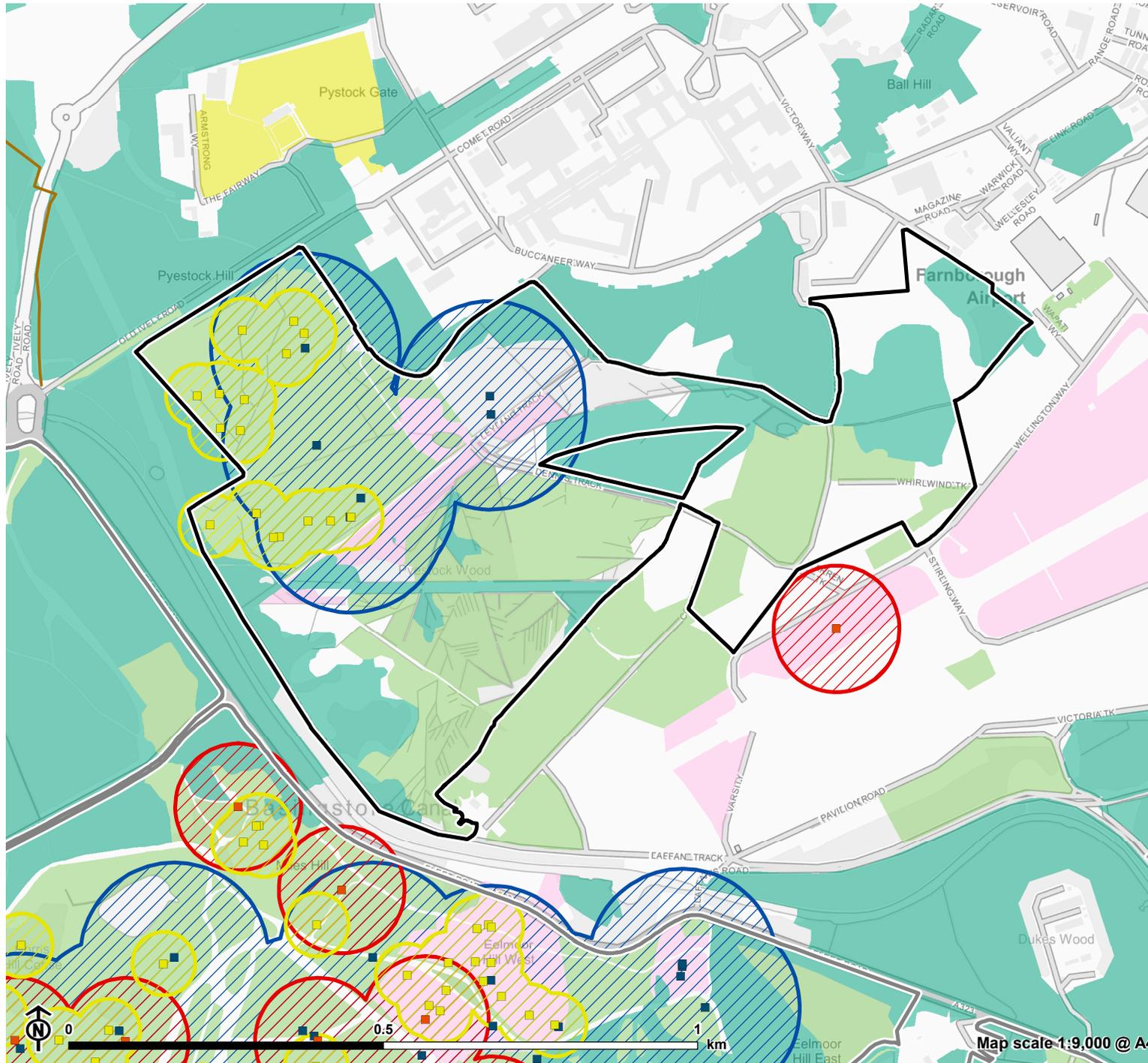
Dartford warbler territory

Nighthjar territory

Woodlark territory

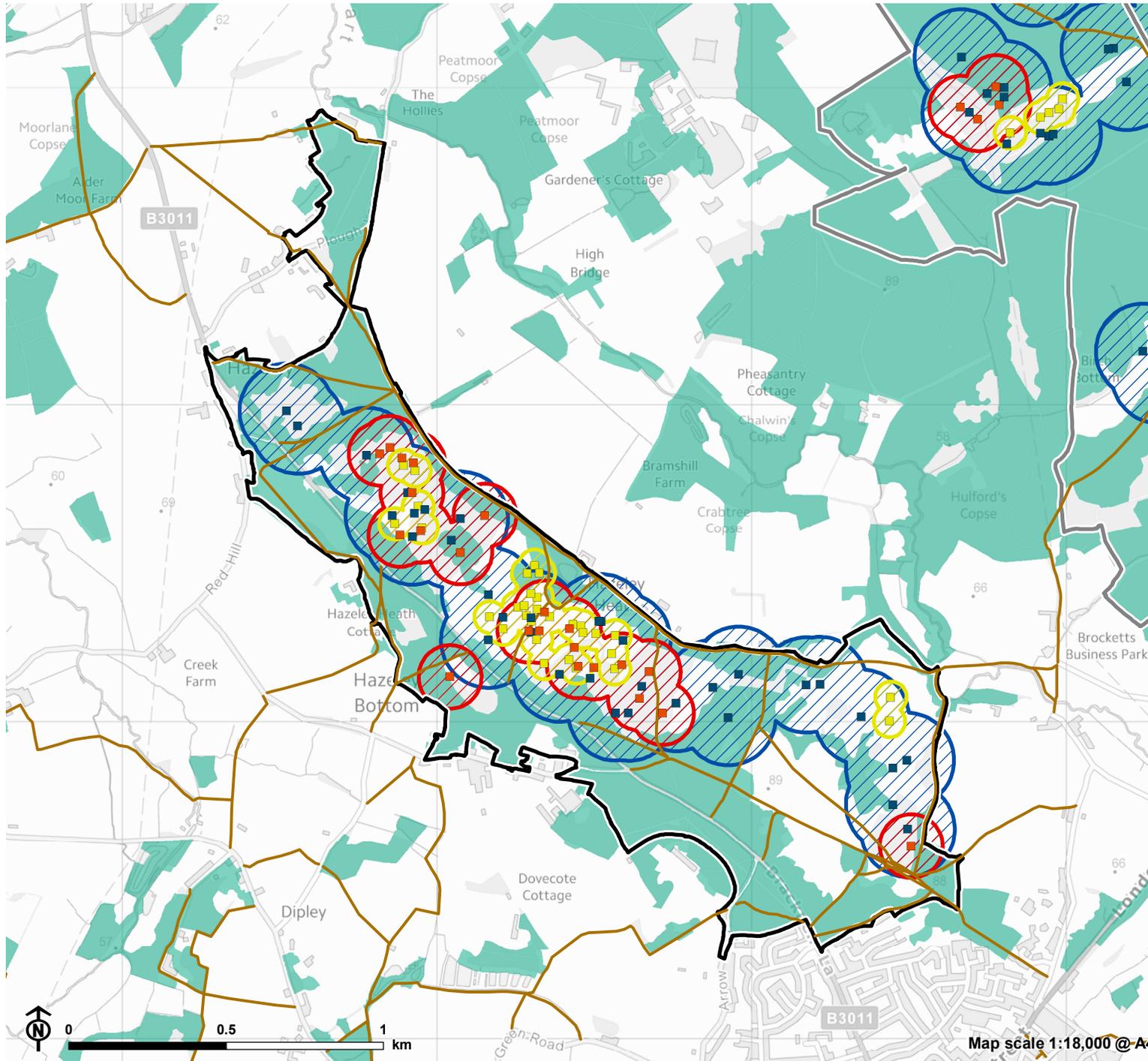
Map scale 1:37,000 @ A4

**Figure 3.26: Bird Survey Data: Eelmoor
Marsh**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Lowland heathland
- Good quality semi-improved grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Woodland
- Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
- Dartford Warbler
- Nightjar
- Dartford warbler territory
- Nightjar territory
- Woodlark territory

Figure 3.27: Bird Survey Data: Hazeley Heath



Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area

Woodland

Public right of way

Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019

Dartford Warbler

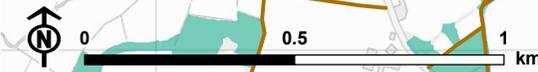
Nighthjar

Woodlark

Dartford warbler territory

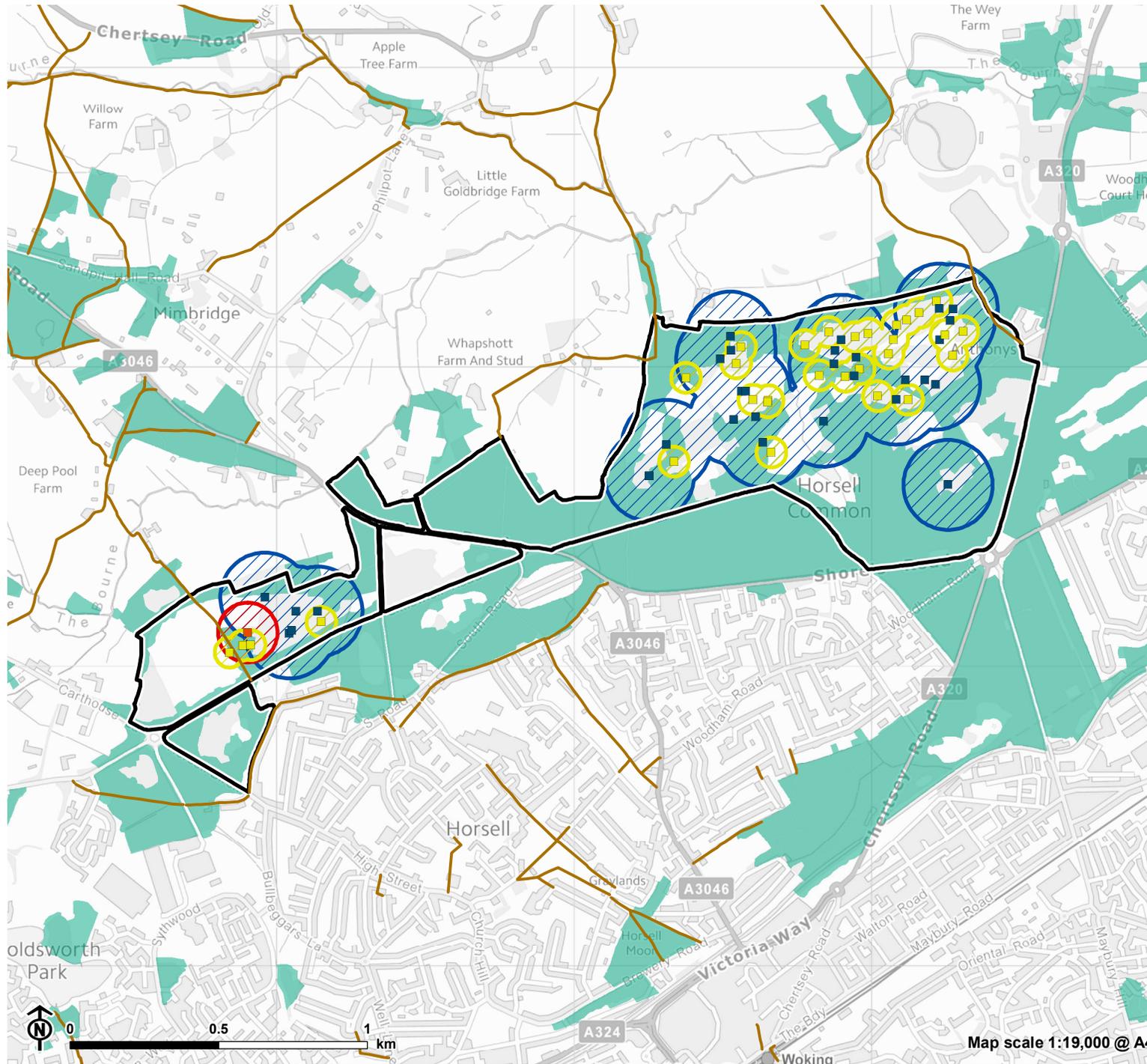
Nighthjar territory

Woodlark territory



Map scale 1:18,000 @ A4

Figure 3.28: Bird Survey Data: Horsell Common



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Woodland
- Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
- Dartford Warbler
- Nightjar
- Dartford warbler territory
- Nightjar territory
- Woodlark territory

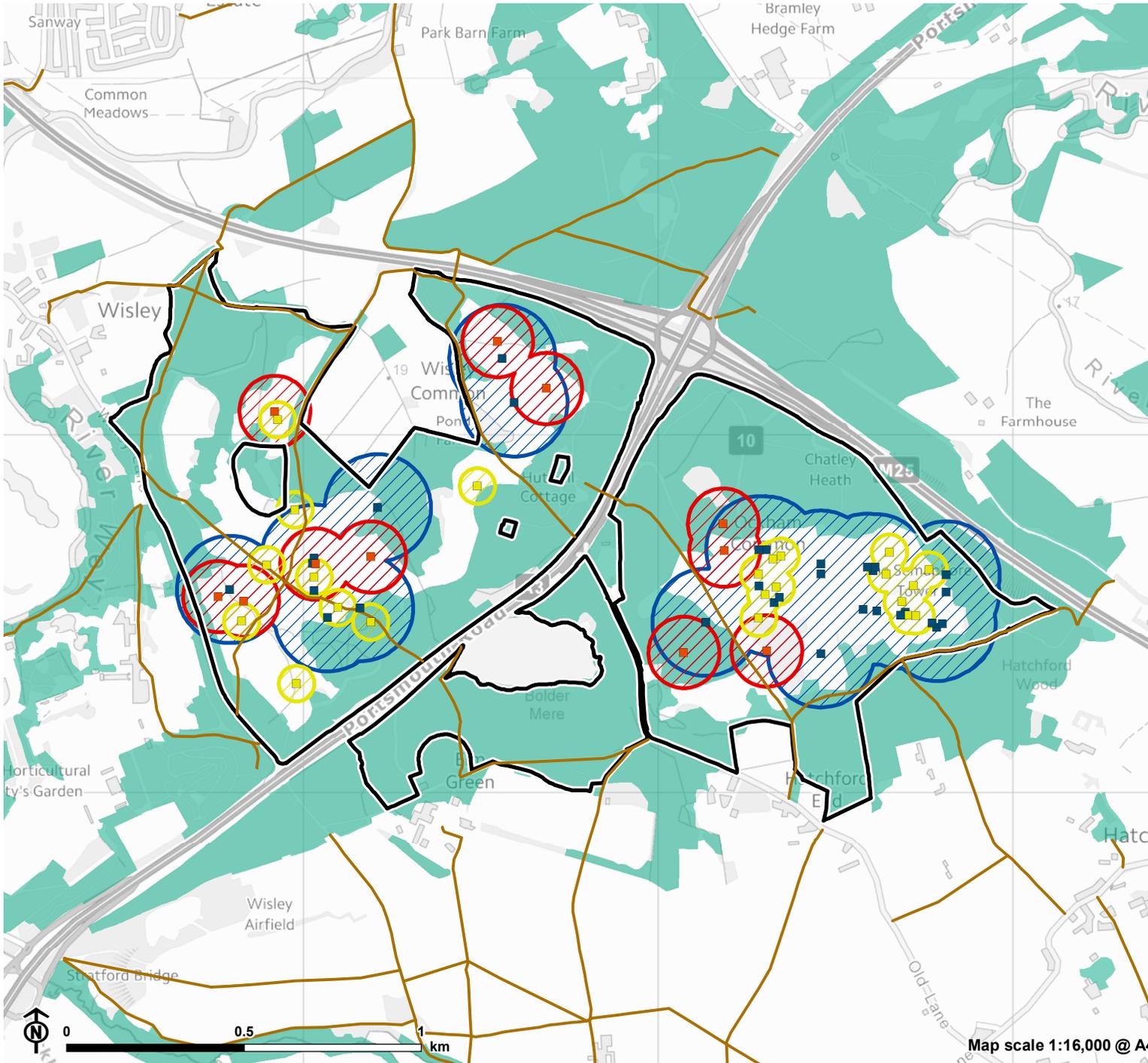


Figure 3.29: Bird Survey Data: Ockham and Wisley Commons

- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Woodland
- Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
- Dartford Warbler
- Nighthjar
- Woodlark
- Dartford warbler territory
- Nighthjar territory
- Woodlark territory

Figure 3.30: Bird Survey Data: Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths



Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area

Woodland

Public right of way

Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019

Dartford Warbler

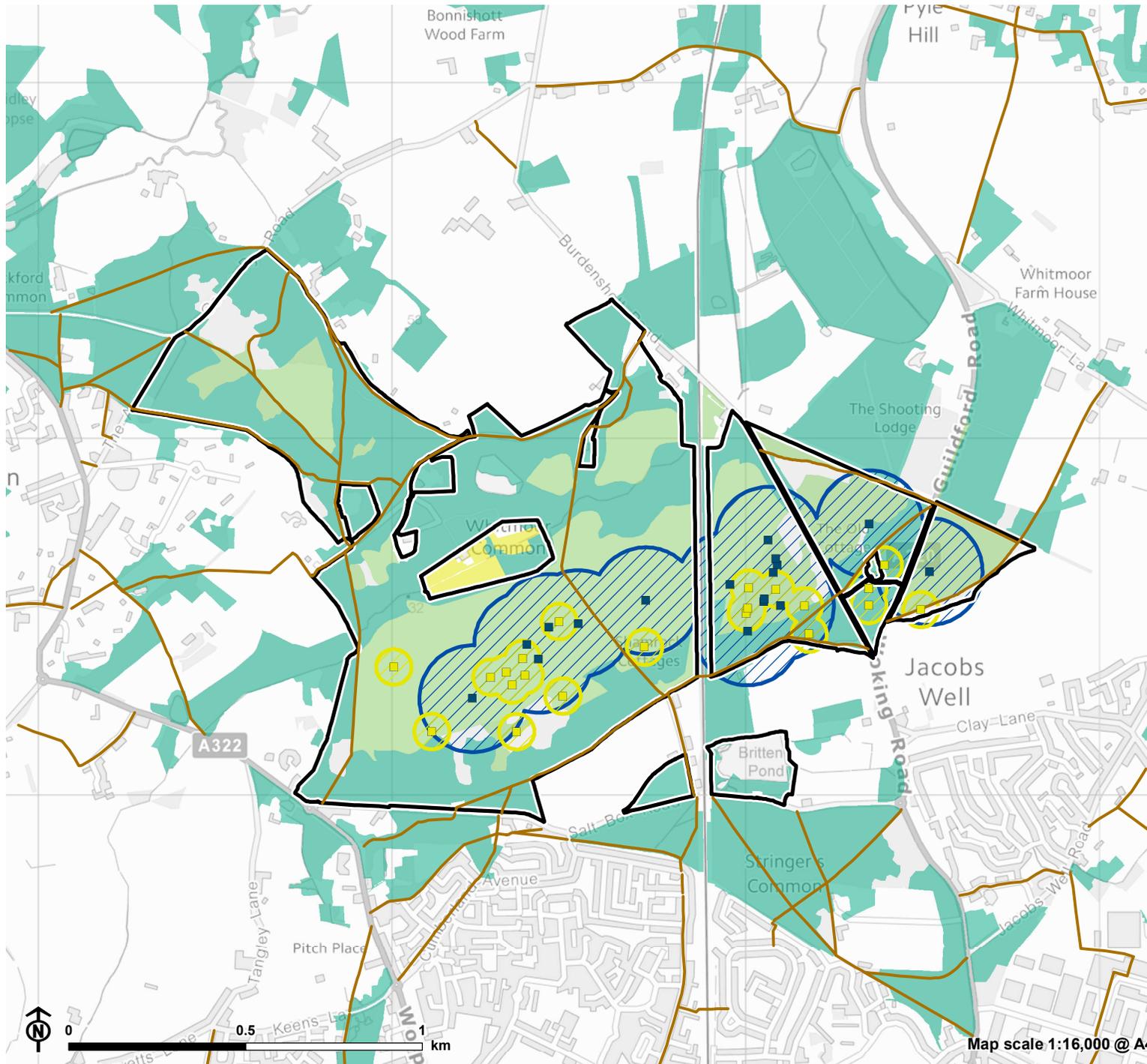
Nightjar

Dartford warbler territory

Nightjar territory

Map scale: 1:8,000 @ A4

**Figure 3.31: Bird Survey Data:
Whitmoor Common**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Lowland heathland
- Good quality semi-improved grassland
- Woodland
- Public right of way
- Annex 1 bird records 2015-2019**
- Dartford Warbler
- Nightjar
- Dartford warbler territory
- Nightjar territory