

Kilmashogue Upland Farm

2021 Ecological Survey



Final Report

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Kilmashogue Upland Farm

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1. Introduction

A baseline habitat condition and ecological survey and habitat management plan was prepared for the Kilmashogue Upland Farm in 2019¹ and the measures within same underwent screening for Appropriate Assessment².

The implementation of the management prescriptions in the plan began in 2019. The management prescriptions in the SUAS plan for the upland farm aim to retain **Favourable status** for the Annex I habitats present on the site, namely **4030 European Dry Heath** and **4010 Northern Atlantic Wet Heath**. For those habitats which are not Annex I habitats, namely acid grassland, areas of fens and flushes and cutover bog, the habitat condition is based on best expert judgement or in some cases from the perspective of the hill farmer.

Large herds of deer (red/Sika hybrids) graze the farm for which deer culling licences are regularly granted from National Parks and Wildlife Service. The continuation of this practice is necessary to prevent over grazing.

The farm is within the known range of Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), while Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) was recorded during the site surveys. Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*) occurs in the general area and has been recorded from these lands in the past. Some very localised burning has previously been conducted to provide suitable habitat for this species, large scale regular burning is not recommended for this site.

The management prescriptions in the SUAS plan for the Kilmashogue Upland Farm also need to ensure that **Favourable status** is retained for the Annex I bird species which would utilise these lands for foraging purposes, namely:

- Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*),
- Merlin (*Falco columbarius*).

The extent of habitats present within the Kilmashogue Upland Farm and their affinities to either Fossitt (Level 3) or Annex I habitats were mapped as presented on **Figures 1 and 2** (See **Appendix 1**) and their conservation status was assessed and mapped as shown on **Figure 3** (See **Appendix 1**). A series of management prescriptions were drawn up for the Kilmashogue Upland Farm as detailed in **Table 1** and mapped on **Figure 4** (See **Appendix 1**).

¹ Wilson, F. (2019). Ecological Baseline Survey prepared for Kilmashogue Upland Farm, Kilmashogue, Co. Dublin as part of the Commonage Management Plan for SUAS. 20th August 2019. Unpublished report for SUAS EIP.

² Wilson, F. (2019). Report for Screening for Appropriate Assessment for a Commonage Management Plan at Kilmashogue Upland Farm, Kilmashogue, Co. Dublin in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive. 15th November 2019. Unpublished report for SUAS EIP.

2. SUAS Vegetation Management Measures

The proposed management measures for the Kilmashogue Upland Farm in 2019 under SUAS were as follows:

Year 1 (2020)

1. Continue to burn individual or small clumps of bushes in area 2
2. Cut areas of tall heather in areas 2, 3 & 4.
 - a. Cut a fire control line in area 2 to prepare for controlled burning in year 2
 - b. Cut small patches of tall heather in area 1
 - c. Cut fire control lines in area 4 if possible. This may be done mechanically or by hand with brush cutters.
3. Encourage more grazing by sheep in the winter months on areas 2 & 4 using sheep feed buckets.

Year 2 (2021)

1. Burn small patches or individual bushes in area 2. Consider cutting/flailing the bushes along the east boundary where gorse is taking over and spreading out. This will make fires further in easier to control.
2. Carry out controlled burning in areas 2 & 4 if the fire control lines are in place.
3. Encourage more grazing by sheep in the winter months on areas 2 & 4 using sheep feed buckets.

Year 3 (2022)

1. Burn small patches or individual bushes in area 2. Consider cutting/flailing the bushes along the east boundary where gorse is taking over and spreading out. This will make fires further in easier to control.
2. Encourage more grazing by sheep in the winter months on areas 2 & 4 using sheep feed buckets.

Shepherding

Average time per shepherding: 2 Hours

No of times sheep are to be shepherded: 2-3 Times per week from 1st May to 30th November

Identified objective of the shepherding:

- Sheep to be moved off recently burned areas regularly to reduce grazing pressure there and allow vegetation to recover. Move sheep into the taller vegetation regularly to get them to graze these areas.
- Monitor sheep health for signs of tick diseases.
- Count numbers of deer grazing the farm and areas they are grazing.

Other works to be carried out for the upland farm

Use feed buckets to encourage more sheep grazing the upland farm in the Jan/Feb and the April/May period.

Use the feed buckets to move grazing pressure to overgrown areas in Jan/Feb time.

Consider winter grazing with cattle which could help to break up areas of tall leggy heather.

Details of sheep stocking rates proposed

Sheep grazing activity shall be monitored accurately for the first year and grazing pressure modified after that depending on habitat condition.

Ecological Assessment

The Kilmashogue Upland Farm was surveyed in August 2021 by Faith Wilson to examine and review the implementation of the proposed measures conducted in 2021 and make any recommendations regarding same. The observations and recommendations from this visit are set out below.

3. 2021 Walkover Survey

The following observations, comments on same and recommendations on the works completed in 2021 are presented.

3.1 Recovery of Firebreaks/Manual Cutting

A firebreak/flailed area along the western and northern edge of the upland farm and along the old track through the centre of the site was manually created on 2nd November 2020 by a crew of contractors using brush cutters. On the eastern boundary of the site access areas of gorse and longer vegetation adjoining the Wicklow Way walking track were also cut on the 2nd November 2020 by a crew of contractors using brush cutters – again to reduce fire risk. This work tackled the areas of dense leggy heather and reduced fire risk to the farm and can be seen on **Figure 1** below. These areas were inspected during the walkover survey and are beginning to regenerate slowly.



Figure 1. The new firebreaks created at Kilmashogue along the western and northern boundaries of the site and across the central track over the hill as indicated by the red arrows and blue line.

Note that it is important for biodiversity and breeding birds that some areas of long heather and mature gorse remain on the hill.



Plate 1. Recovery of vegetation in areas which had been manually cut on the hill.



Plate 2. Localised cutting of autumn gorse on the hill with brush cutters.



Plate 3. Planting of small coupes of trees on the hill has been completed.

As reported in 2020 the manual cutting of long vegetation has created a firebreak on the edges of the hill and along the central access track opening it up for sheep. It is recommended that from a structural perspective for fauna and biodiversity it would be important to try and see if we could introduce diversity of structure to the sward as an outcome of the process whereby some long leggy areas, low areas and intermediate heights are created in the heather.

This would artificially restore the objective of achieving all growth phases of *Calluna vulgaris* in areas of dry heath outside the boundaries of sensitive areas with $\geq 10\%$ of cover in mature phase.

3.2 Controlled Burning

As in previous years there has been ongoing localised controlled burning of clumps of gorse in Area 2 on the hill. An examination of these showed regeneration of large volumes of gorse seedlings and also purple moor grass in the burnt patches.

The outcome from this type of activity will be monitored as it is questionable as to whether it is delivering additional grazing of any benefit or just encouraging the further spread of gorse in higher densities.

3.3 Management for 2022

A review of the works which were proposed for 2022 in the plan, coupled with the outcomes from the 2021 walkover was conducted. This has informed the proposed works for 2022.

2022

1. Encourage more grazing by sheep in the winter months on areas 2 & 4 using sheep feed buckets.
2. Explore the option of cattle grazing on the hill
3. Further cutting of gorse in areas 2 & 3 can be carried out using brushcutters.
4. Option of further tree planting should be explored.

4. Appendix 1. Maps & Management Recommendations

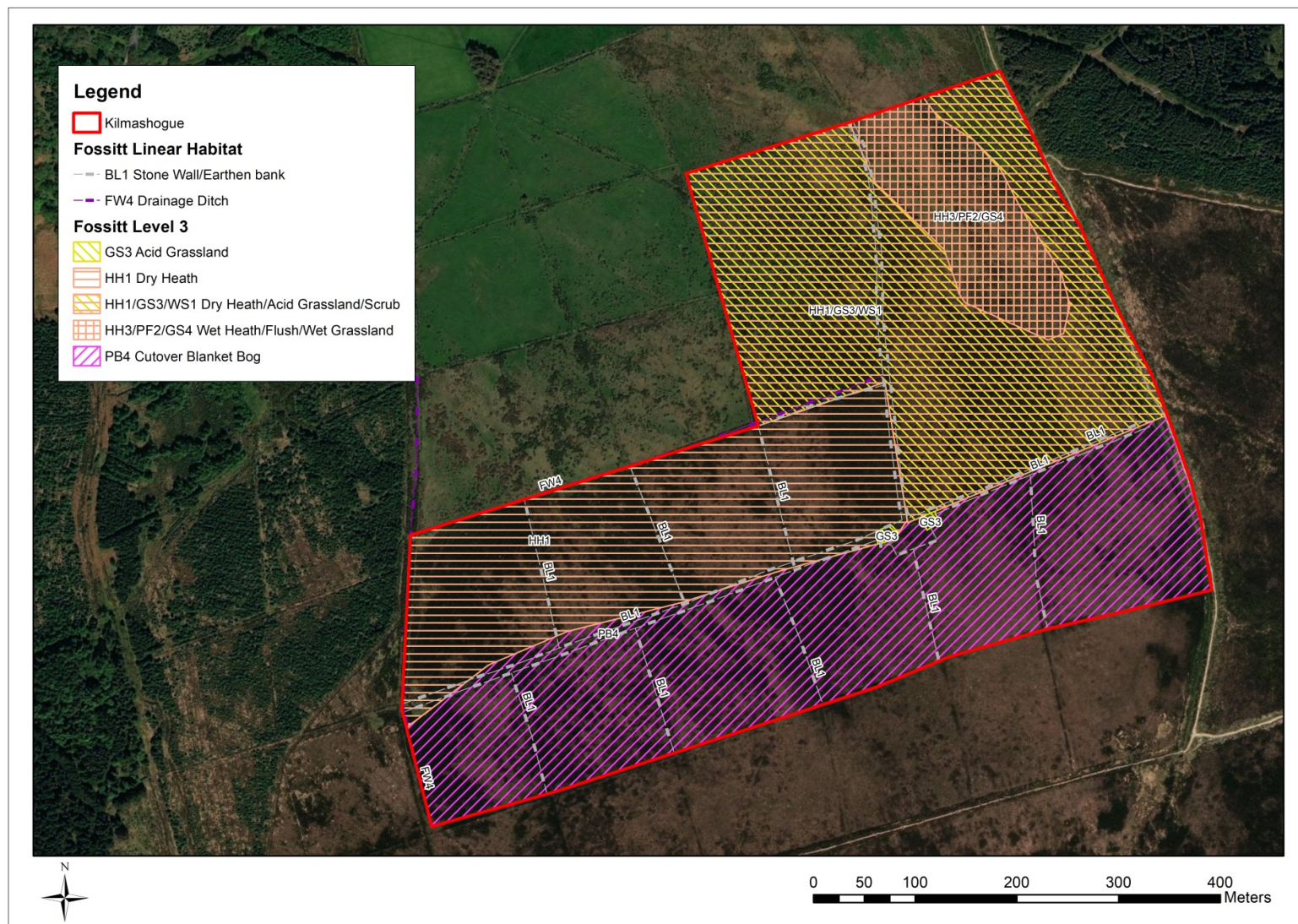


Figure 1. Habitats mapped to Level Three (Fossitt, 2000) within Kilmashogue Upland Farm.

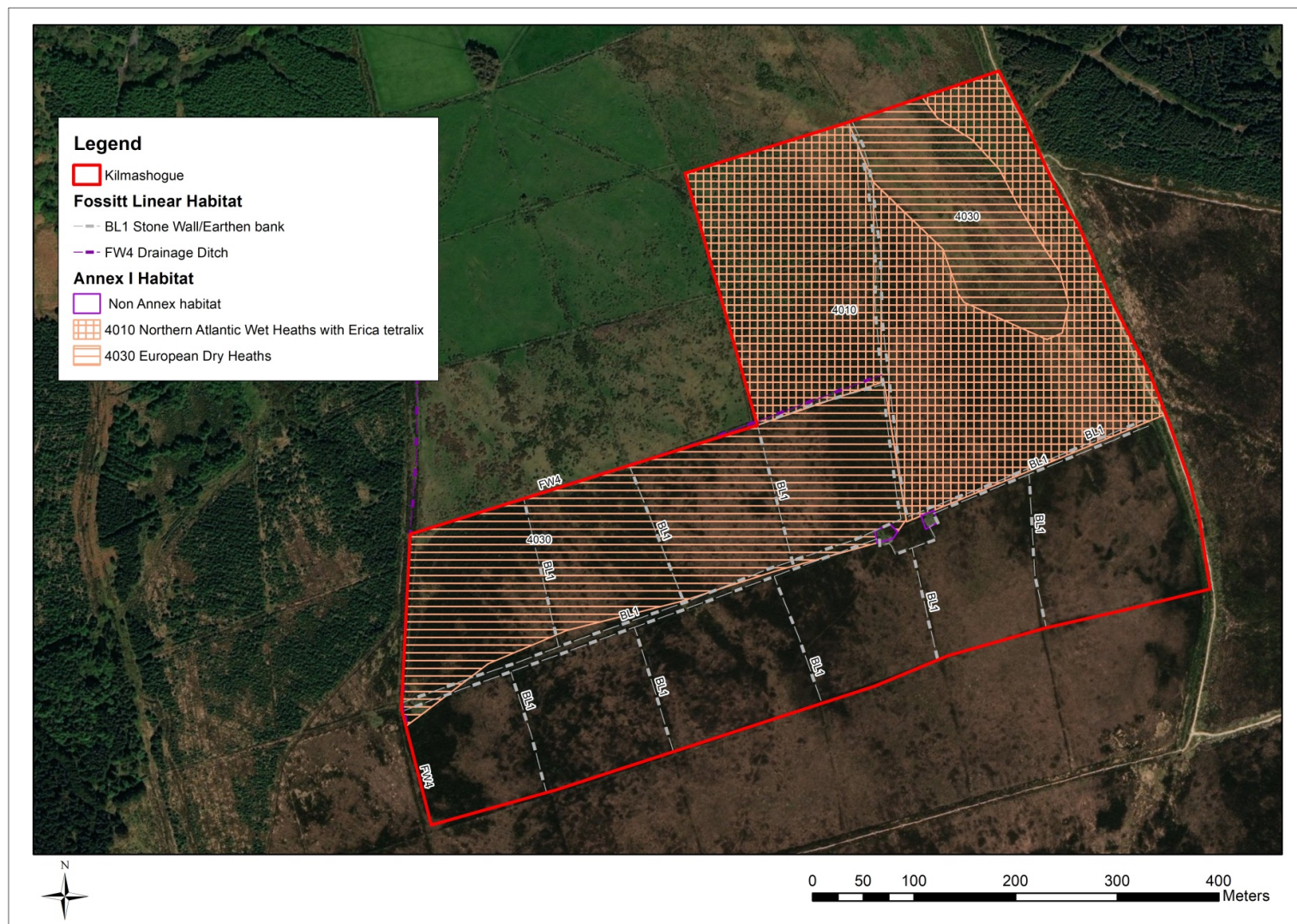


Figure 2. Habitats mapped according to their correspondence with Annex I habitats within Kilmashogue Upland Farm.

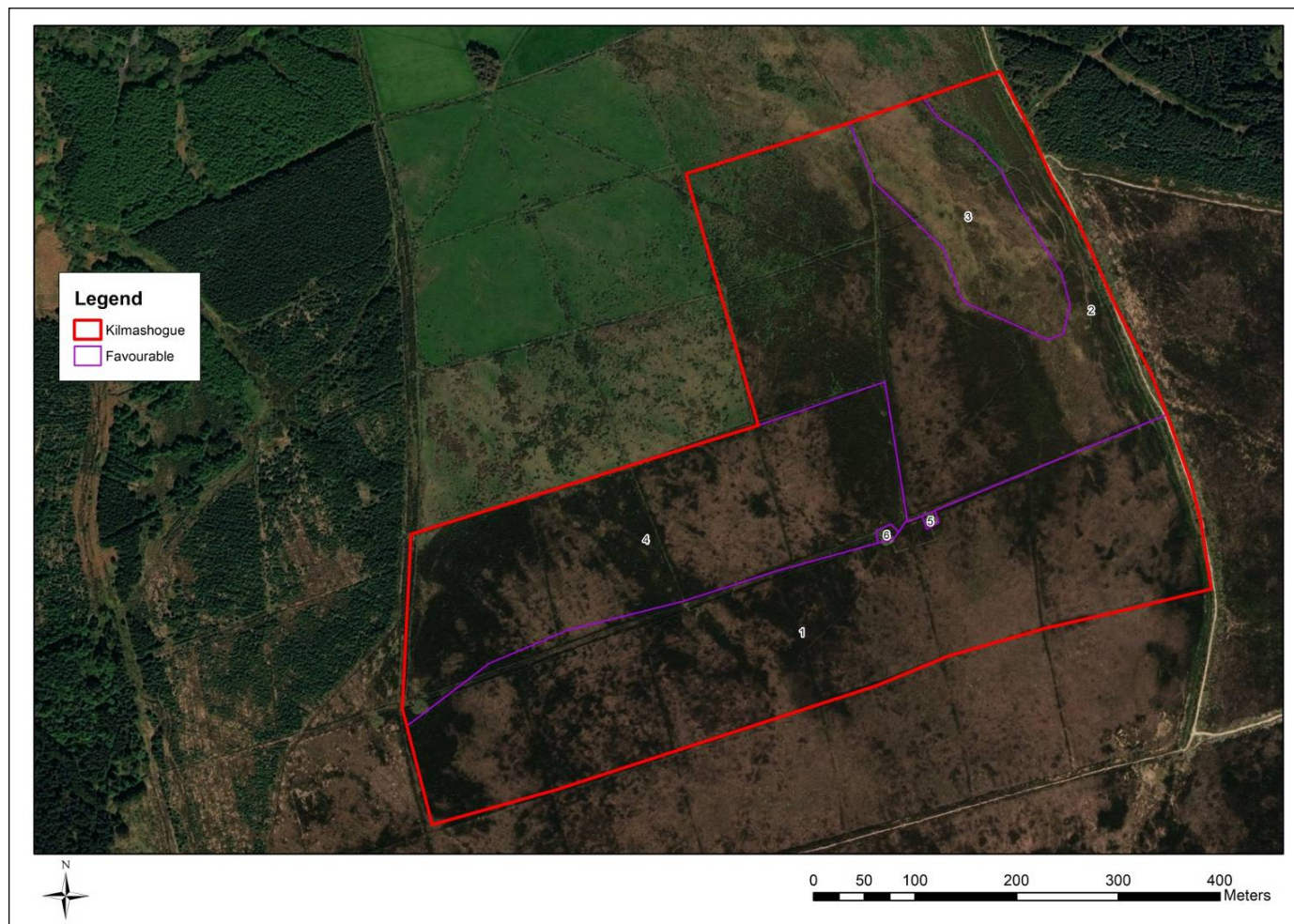


Figure 4. Management measures for Kilmashogue Upland Farm.

Table 1. Habitats present on Kilmashogue Upland Farm and Management Recommendations.

Id	Annex Code	1	Fossitt Code	Habitat	Area (m²)	Conservation Status	Management Prescription
1			PB4	Cutover Bog	114801	Favourable	No uncontrolled burning Control deer No other specific measures required
2	4030		HH1/GS3/WS1	Dry Heath/ Acid Grassland/Scrub	98607	Favourable	No uncontrolled burning Cut and remove encroaching gorse Winter grazing with cattle could help to break up areas of tall leggy heather
3	4010		HH3/PF2/GS4	Wet Heath/Flush/Wet Grassland	23316	Favourable	No uncontrolled burning Cut and remove encroaching gorse in areas of wet heath/flush Winter grazing with cattle could help to break up areas of tall leggy heather
4	4030		HH1	Dry Heath	73569	Favourable	No uncontrolled burning Winter grazing with cattle could help to break up areas of tall leggy heather Could trial some manual cutting of leggy heather if required
5			GS3	Acid Grassland	177		No measures required
6			GS3	Acid Grassland	257		No measures required

