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**From:** [REDACTED]

Hi [REDACTED]

Please see below from FC Ecologist. We have something to work on to move forward.

Andy.

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#### **Abbeystead Estate (Fair Oak Fell)**

The site visit was carried out to check a Biological Heritage Site (also known as Local Wildlife Site, Second Tier Site or Site for Nature Conservation Importance) in relation to a possible track upgrade to facilitate extraction of an existing stand of timber but also, depending on current survey outcomes, a potential new woodland creation application.

The site was recently assessed (June 2022). The survey was not an NVC or UKHabs survey so it is difficult to make a judgement on which priority habitat it is most closely associated with and fully understand its condition. However, although it has undergone some modification, it is clear from this survey that it still has botanical interest. This was confirmed on my recent visit on the 23 June, see attached photographs. They show some indicative species of unimproved grassland, including Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Eyebright and Yellow-rattle. The sward still retains a good ratio between forbs and small-leaved grasses.

It is the western field that will be impacted by any track enhancement for forestry operations.

I have a number of thoughts and questions on possible ways forward. They include the following bullet points.

- Have all alternative routes been explored and ruled out with supporting evidence? For example, a better route may present itself south of Whitmore that runs north to south and follows a flatter contour line.
- If no alternative routes can be optioned then the upgraded track needs to be designed to have the least footprint possible where it crosses the Local Wildlife Site. It should also utilise a stone dressing that will not impact on the soils that support the plant assemblage. This may involve some limited soil sampling to best gauge the most appropriate stone dressing, for example, we would not wish to use a stone that would result in damaging run-off, affecting soil pH etc.
- It is important to know what management regime has been carried out on the grassland, for example, grazing regime, stock used, when it has been shut up for haylage, when it has been cut, when and how much muck dressing applied (some remains of muck dressing were visible during site visit) and what aftermath grazing has been applied.

