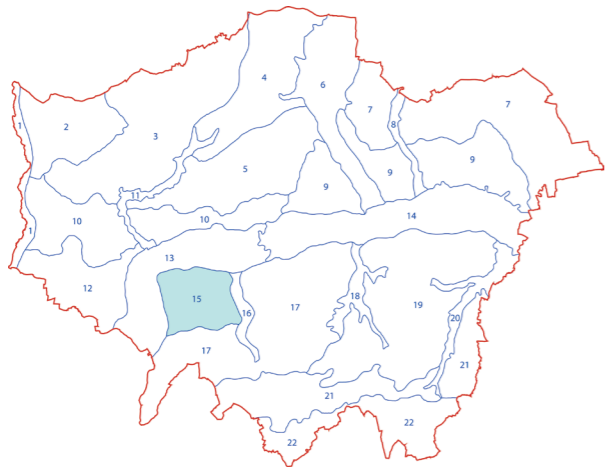


15. South Thames Heaths & Commons



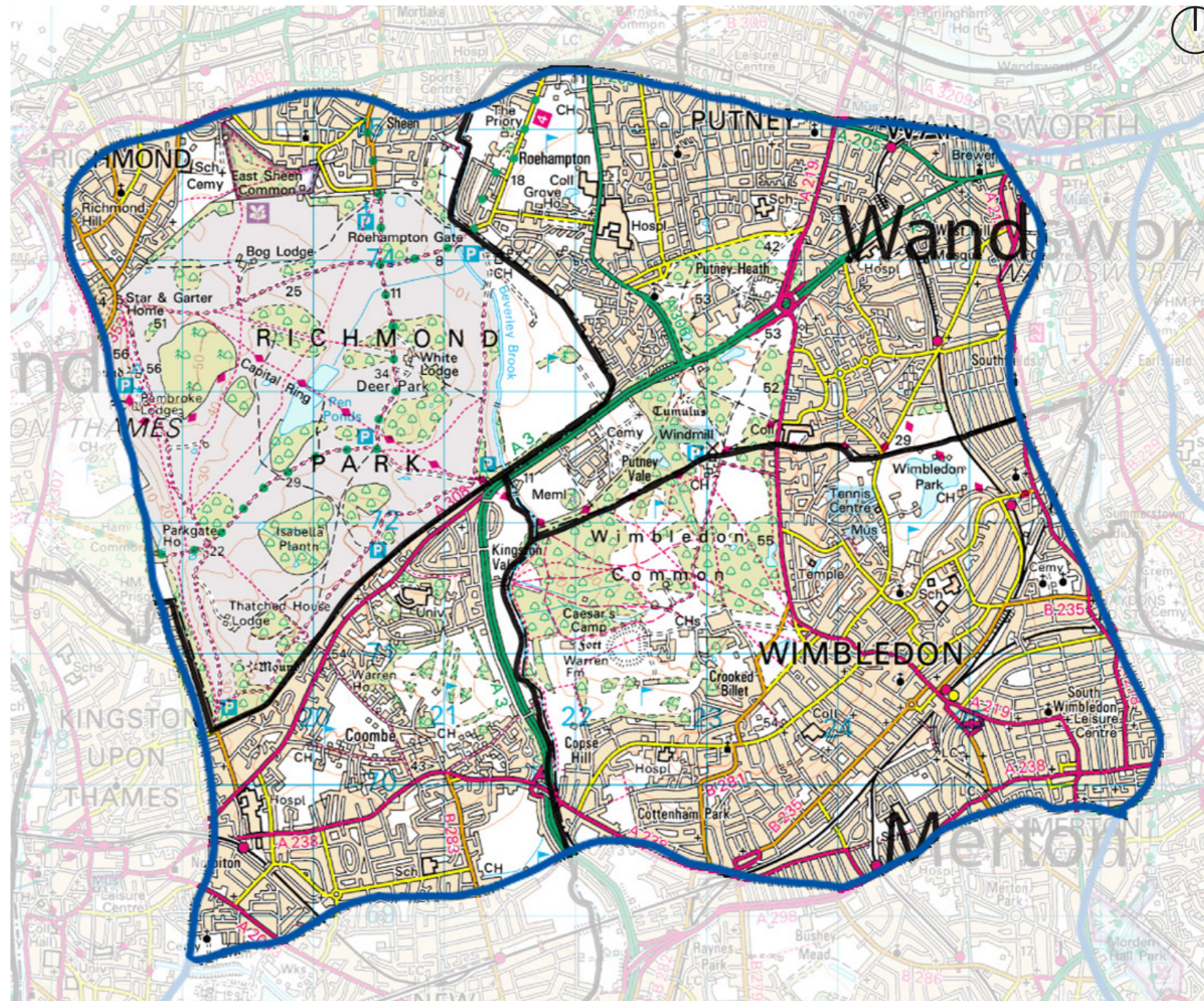
Key plan

Description

The South Thames Heaths and Commons extend from Kingston upon Thames to Wandsworth and include Richmond Park, Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath. The area is bisected by the Beverley Brook, which flows northwards into the Thames.

The area is mainly underlain by London Clay and forms part of the gentle rise southwards from the Thames towards the North Downs. In two areas of higher ground, the London Clay is capped by the younger, sandier Claygate Member and in the western part of Wimbledon by an isolated outcrop of the more resistant Bagshot Formation. The sandy soils of the Bagshot Formation are characteristically free-draining and support heathland vegetation.

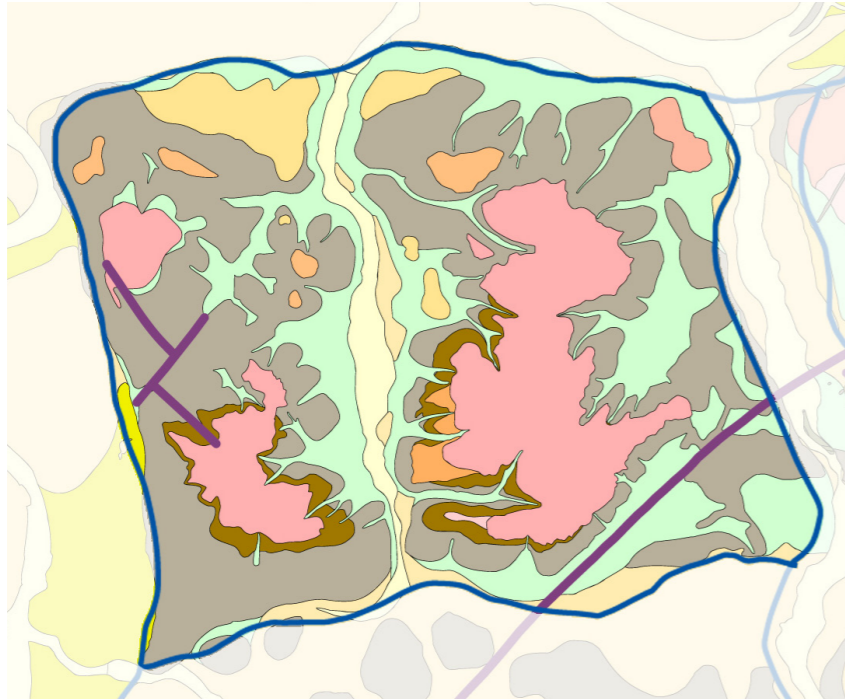
Gravel overlies bedrock as a series of river terrace deposits forming what is now higher ground. They were deposited in several phases, mainly in cold periods, between about 430 000 and 70 000 years ago. On the lower valley slopes, head deposits have accumulated through solifluction and hillwash processes, often in periglacial climates. Some of these superficial deposits are sandy; others are more gravelly. Small outcrops of peat can also be found in low-lying areas. Areas of sandy clay in Richmond Park and on Wimbledon Common provide the basis for the heaths, bogs and meadows that characterise this area.



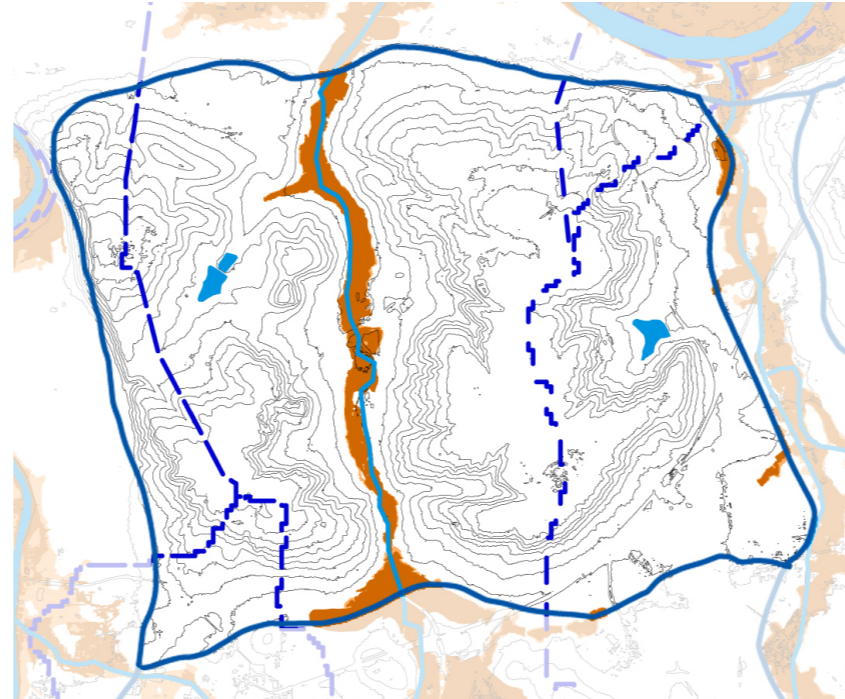
15. South Thames Heaths & Commons

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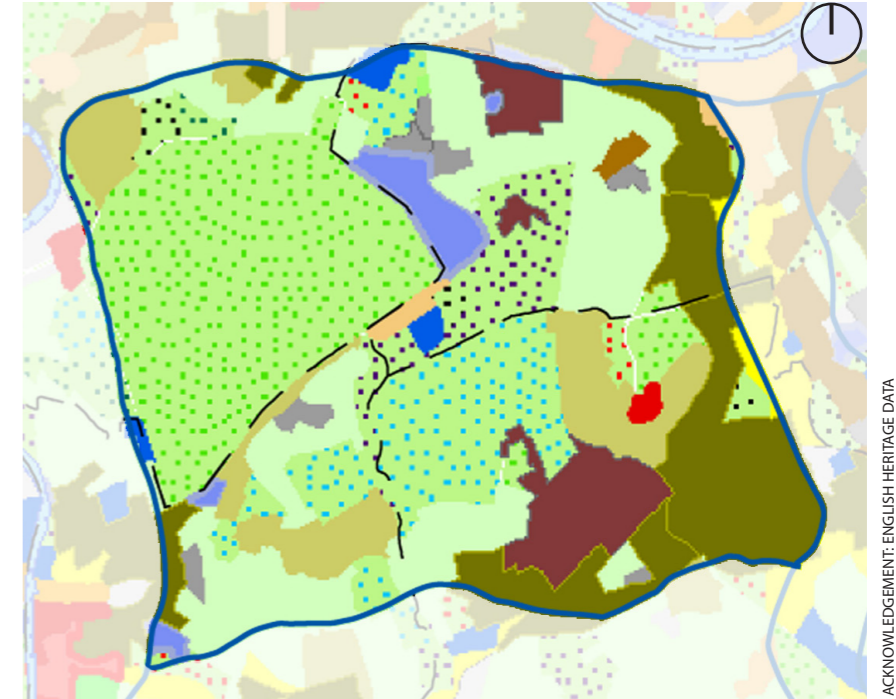
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Geology



Rivers and Topography



Historic Development

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: ENVIRONMENT AGENCY DATA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: ENGLISH HERITAGE DATA

The towns of Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames grew from early centres in the Victorian period, with terraces extending up the slopes between the River Thames and Richmond Park. The larger houses and terrace gardens are sited to take advantage of the views from the higher ground approaching the park. The settlements of Wimbledon, Southfields and Raynes Park also expanded rapidly from the late Victorian period and rows of Victorian and Edwardian terraces were built around the edge of Wimbledon Common and the open spaces (now mainly golf courses) nearby. The open spaces of heath, common, ancient woodland and parkland are focal points for the residents in these areas, used both as landmarks and for recreation.

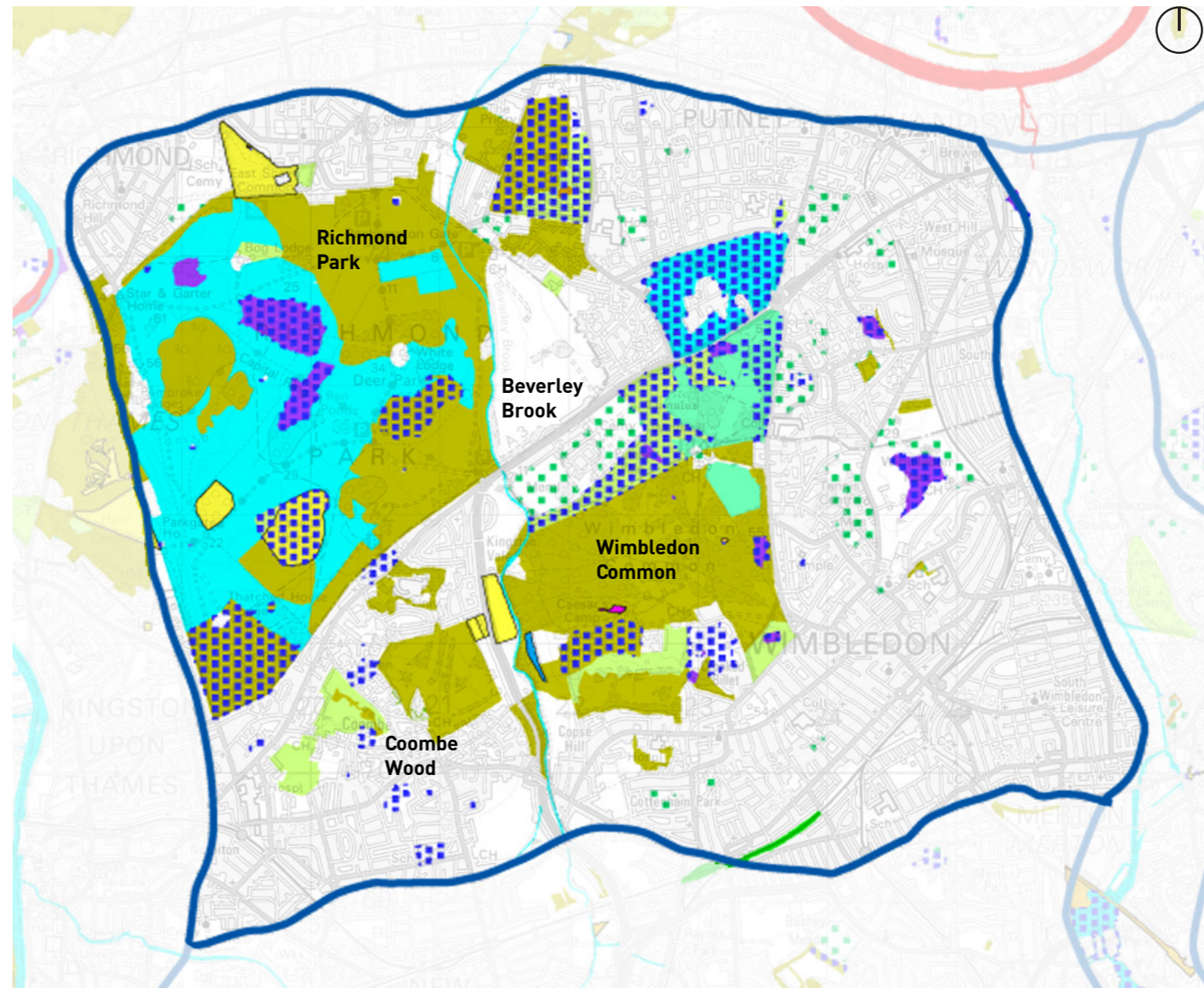
Natural Signature and natural landscape features

Natural Signature:
South Thames Heaths and Commons – Mosaic of heathland, grassland and ancient wood pasture with groups of veteran trees.

Historic Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common, together with Putney Heath and adjacent commons and cemeteries provide a cluster of extensive heathy parks and commons. The ancient woodland, veteran trees, grazing deer and open heathland of the historic parks, along with their wetland terrain, including marshes, gravel pits and ponds, are important focal points for recreation. Local residents use them as reference and view points for their area.

Examples of natural landscape features within the South Thames Heaths and Commons Natural Landscape Area are:

- **Richmond Park** – A mosaic of ancient woodland, wood pasture, heathland and acid grassland with some of the oldest oak trees in the country. Historic references echo through Richmond Park, where the medieval farms and pasture were transformed into royal hunting grounds by Charles I circa 1625. Despite much opposition, the king built a wall around his desired hunting ground (with bricks made on site). Extensively repaired, it is still in existence today. Red and fallow deer were introduced, and are now a vital part of the park's character. The high areas of the park are well known to residents and visitors, especially King Henry's Mound on the escarpment to the west of the park, from which there are views to Windsor and St Pauls Cathedral.
- **Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath** – High quality heathland habitats which include the largest area of wet heath in Greater London, areas of dry heath and one of London's very few sphagnum bogs. There are also extensive areas of acid grassland, both dry and damp, much woodland and scrub, several ponds and a section of the Beverley Brook. These habitats support much unusual wildlife and flora. An ancient tumulus and the Iron Age hill fort at Caesar's Camp on Wimbledon Common provide focal points for visitors, but the low-lying meadows of acid grassland offer another powerful indicator of the land and soil type in the area. Promoted routes such as the Capital Ring and Beverley Brook Walk pass through the area, but there are numerous other routes used by the public for access to different parts of the Common.
- **Beverley Brook** – Although long stretches of the Beverley Brook are not prominent, the way the river subdivides the open spaces and defines borders makes it a key point of reference and orientation. In some sections, the river's naturally-banked reaches are mostly shaded by riparian woodland including willows, oak and elm.
- **Coombe Wood East and West** – Coombe Wood consists of two small woodlands situated on either side of the A3. Coombe Wood West is much older than its neighbour, and supports ancient woodland, mainly oak, sycamore, ash and old coppiced hazel, as well as some uncommon shrubs. The eastern woodland is of secondary woodland origin with a much more open structure, with Beverley Brook passing along the length of one side. Although not large, both woods are clearly visible from the busy A3.



Natural Habitats & Landscape Key Features

Underlining the natural signature of the South Thames Heaths and Commons

Key influences

- Heathlands – with transitions from dry heaths to wet heath and sphagnum bog.
- Acid grassland, grading to scrub and woodland.
- Deer grazing.
- Ancient wood pasture.
- Veteran trees.
- Formal avenues and views.

Design clues

Ideas for place making and shaping future design decisions - how the Natural Signatures for each natural landscape area might be expressed within the wider public realm, through new development and landscape management projects.

- Groups of specimen trees sited to frame views and create focal points.
- Informal landscape patterns – mosaics of woodland and glades – rather than straight hedgerows and subdivisions; wood pastures.
- Formal avenues and pathways cutting across organic, natural mosaics of woodland, scrub and grassland.
- Composed views and gateways.
- Heathland and acid grassland habitats on soils which have been stripped of organic nutrients.
- Bracken – on verges and the fringes of glades.
- Acid bog habitat, as part of flood attenuation schemes.

South Thames Heaths & Commons – Key environmental assets

Environmental asset	Relevant borough	Notes
Richmond Park,	Richmond-upon-Thames (Crown Land)	One of two National Nature Reserves in London, Special Area of Conservation. Incorporates the most important area of lowland acid grassland (dry and damp) in the Greater London Region (priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan). Contains ancient trees, especially oaks. Escarpment to the west offers spectacular views of the City and towards Windsor. Variety of wetland: ponds, ditches, section of Beverley Brook. Adjacent golf courses and commons provide additional areas of acid grassland and secondary woodland.
Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath	Kingston-upon-Thames, Merton, Wandsworth	Much of the site is an SSSI and SAC. It also includes the London Wildlife Trust-managed Local Nature Reserve Fishpond Wood. Largest area of wet heath in London, areas of dry heath and one of London's very few sphagnum bogs. Extensive areas of acid grassland, both dry and damp, much woodland and scrub. Several ponds and a section of the Beverley Brook. Perfect habitat for uncommon flora and fauna. High ground hosts an ancient tumulus, and an ancient monument, Caesar's Camp, can be seen near the Royal Wimbledon Golf Course.
Coombe Hill Golf Course	Kingston-upon-Thames	Roughs contain important areas of heathland. Strips of ancient woodland and wet ditches. Fairways divided by linear belts of ancient oak. Highest point commands views across to Wimbledon Common.
Richmond and Sheen cemeteries	Richmond-upon-Thames	Acid grassland complements the nearby Richmond Park NNR. Trees, scrub and secondary woodland host some rare plants (eg mistletoe).
Coombe Wood (west)	Kingston-upon-Thames	Ancient woodland supporting rare trees and shrubs. Local Nature Reserve, run by the London Wildlife Trust. Clearly visible from the A3.
Coombe Wood (east)	Merton	Secondary woodland. Clearly visible from the A3.
Beverley Brook	Richmond upon Thames, Merton, Kingston upon Thames	Hedges and scrub. Wet ditches and wet grassland.