1.1.4.3.4 PROTECTED SPECIES INFORMATION

Please note that the following are details of records held at the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre. Lack of records may well indicate that no survey work has yet been undertaken but does not indicate that species are absent.

WBRC = Warwickshire Biological Record Centre
WWT = Warwickshire Wildlife Trust
EA = Environment Agency
WART = Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team

1.1.4.3.4.1 AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

See figure 9 illustrating amphibian and reptile records held for the study area. The following list gives the Latin codes used for each species:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Species</th>
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1.1.4.3.4.2  BADGERS

Due to an agreement with the local Badger Group WER only provide badger records within a 1km site radius.

There are records for several badger setts within the study area, refer to Figure 9 for the locations. However, there may be more badger setts which have so far gone unrecorded in the study area.

Please note that **badgers and their setts are statutorily protected under the 1992 Badgers Act.** If evidence of badgers is found within, or close to the working area, work should stop while Natural England is consulted.

In addition, working practices should take badgers into account. For example, foundation ditches could prove pitfall traps for badgers especially if they become filled with water in which the badgers could drown. Sloping boards or steps to allow the badgers to get out of the ditches would help to reduce this problem significantly.

1.1.4.3.4.3  WATER VOLES

There are records for water voles within the study area. See the following map, (figure 9).

<table>
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<td>SP40157986</td>
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1.1.4.3.4.4  BATS

There are records for bats within the study area. See the enclosed map.

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<td>10/07/1999</td>
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<td>Myotis daubentonii</td>
<td>SP398802</td>
<td>1990</td>
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<td>Myotis mystacinus/brandtii</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1.1.4.3.4.5  OTTERS
There is an otter record in the study area. See map enclosed.

<table>
<thead>
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</table>

1.1.4.3.4.6.  OTHER SPECIES
There are no known records of white-clawed crayfish, dormouse, barn owl or brown hare within the study area.

Figure 9: Ecological Data Search Coombe Abbey Park: Protected Species SP 4010 7948
1.1.5 SETTING

Combe Abbey is situated c. 7km north-west of Rugby and c. 4km east of Coventry, to the north of the A427 road. The c. 270ha site comprises approximately 6ha of formal gardens and informal pleasure grounds, c. 2ha of walled gardens, and c. 262ha of parkland, lakes and avenues.

The site is bounded to the south by the A427 road which runs west from the village of Brinklow to Coventry. Two avenues extend beyond this road to the south and south-west of the house. On the west, north and north-east boundaries the site adjoins agricultural land. The Rolls Royce engineering works is located approximately 1km north of the house, while to the east the site adjoins High Wood. A minor road leads north through the site from the A427 road towards Peter Hall and the site of the medieval villages of Upper and Lower Smite c. 1.25km north-east of the house.

The land to the north, west and south of the house is generally level. The Smite Brook flows from north-east to south-west through a shallow valley to the north and west of the house; this was dammed in the late C18 to form an extensive lake. To the east of the house the ground rises to East Lodge at the south-east corner of the park. There are views across surrounding agricultural land to the north and north-east from within the site. To the south there are views across the A427 road towards Birchley Wood, The Grove and New Close Wood, through which the two avenues extend south towards the village of Brandon.

Landscape Character Assessment describes and classifies the landscape across England in a systematic way. The assessment takes into account the factors that have helped to shape the landscape of Warwickshire such as geology, ecology and historic use by man, and outlines broad approaches towards its future conservation and management. Warwickshire County Council’s Landscape Guidelines are outlined in: (Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Warwickshire CC and Countryside Commission, November 1993).

Coombe Abbey Park is within designated Regional Character Area 1 Dunsmore. The Dunsmore Parkland is an enclosed estate landscape with a well wooded character defined by woodland edges, parkland and belts of trees. Coombe is one of a number of C18 and C19 parks which are a distinctive feature of this landscape. The landscape has a high sensitivity to change and many parks have been taken into intensive agricultural production. More information on these character areas can be found on pages 14-15 of the Landscape Character Assessment and 38-39 Management Strategy and Landscape Guidelines, (Appendix 5)

Warwickshire HLC Full Report contains 7 records for the park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HLC UID</th>
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<tr>
<td>HWA 126</td>
<td>Coombe Abbey Woods (Western end)</td>
<td>WDL-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HWA 127</td>
<td>Coombe Country Park</td>
<td>PAR-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HWA 128</td>
<td>Little Wood part of Coombe Abbey Country Park</td>
<td>WDL-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HWA 129</td>
<td>Part of Coombe Abbey Country Park</td>
<td>WDL-28</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1.1.6 SITE CONTEXT
1.1.6.1 HYDROLOGY

The Hydrology at Coombe park is a major feature of the landscape with Brown’s great lake formed by damning the Smite brook and Nesfield’s dramatic moat and canal linking into the eastern end of the lake. Over the year the lake at Coombe has progressively suffered from sediment accumulation. The main inflow to the lake is from the Smite Brook, which drains mainly agricultural land, and the lake also receives water from Monks Kirby and Stretton under Fosse.

A survey to map the lake and to assess the volume of sediment accumulation has been commissioned by Coventry City Council and is currently being undertaken. It is intended to identify the potential sources of sediment through catchment mapping and analysis. The findings will be appraised in a report giving recommendations concerning the management of sediment control, with the aim of establishing a sediment control policy either to prevent sediment entering the lake and/or to identify a catchment treatment strategy.
The condition of the other hydrological features within the park, such as the moat, the canal, weirs and penstocks, etc will be included within the survey which will also assess their operational condition and structural integrity. The section of Smite Brook within the Council’s ownership will also be included.

1.1.6.2 GEOLOGY

Combe Abbey Park lies to the east of a major fault line in the underlying rocks dividing the coal bearing Carboniferous strata from the shale and sandstone layers of the Polesworth Formation. The solid geology was heavily overlain during the Glacial and Post Glacial periods by extensive layers of sand, gravel and clay.

The Park has layers of clay, mudstone and gravel laid over the original shale and sandstone beds. These upper layers have been modified since Glacial times by the action of brooks and rivers cutting through the surface layers and depositing their own alluvium in shallow valleys forming river terrace deposits.

Coombe is now a complex mixture of clays, gravels and mudstone which vary according to the depth that the surface has been eroded by rain water. The clays and gravels are not clearly separated. Some clays are mixed with pebbles and also contain silt and gravel. The Abbey is built on an exposed area of red/brown pebbly clay called Thrussington Till. The Park to the west is a mixture of yellow/orange Baginton sand with gravel and areas of red mudstone around the Lake, which follows the shallow valley of a natural water course. The land to the east of the Abbey is an area of grey stoneless clay and silt known as Wolston Clay. North of the Abbey are strips of Baginton sand with gravel and alluvial deposits of silty clay with sand and gravel.

1.1.7 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND OTHER ACCESS

Until the opening of Centenary Way in the year 2000 no public rights of Way had crossed the Country Park. This situation is likely to change as Coventry City Council is currently discussing the improvement of access to the park and the provision of permissive links between existing legal routes.

The opening of Centenary Way was devised to celebrate one hundred years of Warwickshire County Council. It runs through the Tame Valley, Atherstone Ridge, and the George Eliot country around Nuneaton, before passing to the east of Coventry to Kenilworth, Warwick and Leamington Spa. From here it heads to the Burton Dassett Hills, Edge Hill, Shipston-on-Stour and Ilmington Downs. The route enters the park via the twelve o’clock ride to the south and continues along the south approach drive. The walk crosses the eastern section of the lake and continues through the northern pleasure grounds before exiting the park and progressing to the north east towards Walsgrave Hill.
Figure 11: Public Rights of Way and other Access. The dotted red lines indicate public footpaths. The Centenary Way indicated in green leaves the park at the B4027 Coventry to Brinklow road and continues south along the Twelve o’clock Ride which is a Bridleway.
1.2 HISTORICAL SURVEY

1.2.1 SUMMARY

There have been three major landscape phases in the history of the Combe Abbey estate in the post monastic period. Combe Abbey which was a major Cistercian Abbey for nearly four hundred years was closed at the Dissolution in 1539. For the succeeding four hundred years it was a private estate, initially in the ownership of the Kelway and Hampton families, and, from 1622 until 1923 in the ownership of the Craven family.

The first phase, from the mid C16 to the late C17, comprised the development of formal gardens in the vicinity of the residence, which was converted from the monastic buildings, and the formal elements were extended into the deer park created from the monastic agricultural land. Secondly, a landscape park made in the mid to late C18 eliminated most of the formal landscaping. Lastly, in the late C19 there was the re-introduction of formal elements into the landscaping due to an interest in revivalist styles, particularly in the vicinity of the mansion, but this was only loosely based on historical precedents.

1.2.2 HISTORIC LANDSCAPE SURVEY

1.2.2.1 PHASE ONE

Phase one comprised the conversion of the monastic buildings and the creation of a formal landscape to complement the residence c.1560-1740s.

The Cistercian Abbey was dissolved in 1539, and passed into private ownership. By 1557 it was owned by Sir Robert Kelway who began the major rebuilding process of converting the main abbey buildings into a residence, a process which was continued by his son-in-law, John Harington, created Baron Harington in 1602.1 Like Laycock Abbey in Wiltshire, Combe Abbey became a two storey courtyard house around three sides of the cloisters, whilst the fourth side, originally formed by the nave of the church, was demolished. However the outline of the nave became a formal walled entrance court as seen in figure 122 leading to an inner courtyard formed by the three sides of the former cloisters.3 The entrance courtyard was reached by a formal approach from the public road from Coventry to the Fosse Way. On the east side of the residence, the principal garden or ‘Great Garden’ was laid out. This was probably in place by 1600 and was a Renaissance parterre garden divided into four rectangles and surrounded by raised walks. These walks had retaining walls made from medieval masonry from the demolished Abbey buildings.

1 Geoffrey Tyack Warwickshire Country Houses (Chichester, 1994) p. 57
2 Daniel King Engraving of South Front published 1657
Figure 12: Engraving of south front of Combe Abbey by Daniel King, published 1656, showing the outline of the former nave of the Abbey Church as an enclosed garden.

Figure 12 shows the Elizabethan staircase porch on the extreme right. This gave access to the Great Garden and was probably built whilst Princess Elizabeth, later Queen of Bohemia, was residing at Combe. The Great Garden is shown in detail in figure 13 of Kip’s engraving of Knyff’s view of the Abbey published in 1707, seen from the north-west. This illustration also shows the various other formal gardens that had been created around the Abbey by the end of the C17 by Lord Craven.

The north side had an enclosed parterre de Broderie, probably only recently constructed, in an area that had been a kitchen garden, and the west side had a rectangular garden with an oval pool in its centre. The west side of the Abbey had been extensively rebuilt in 1667-9 with a three gabled range by Sir Isaac Gibson, Lord Craven’s godson and heir, to be followed by a Palladian front of seven central bays with projecting wings by the architect William Winde, completed in 1684.

SE of Combe Abbey there was an extensive series of formal gardens in an area once an orchard, consisting of nine parterres, probably designed by William Winde, which ran parallel to the entrance approach and extended as far as the public road. These gardens included a wilderness with walks in a union flag pattern and can be seen in figure 13. The rectangular entrance forecourt on the footprint of the nave of the Abbey church had been greatly increased in size and the new enclosure was landscaped with a gravel sweep around an oval lawn. To the west of this there was an enclosed kitchen garden.

In 1634 Lord Craven was granted a licence to empark 650 acres of land. His park lay to the south beyond the public highway, and lines of tree planting extended the formal elements of the landscaping into the park. This avenue planting can be clearly seen in figure 13 (opposite).

Figure 13: Prospect of Combe Abbey from NW drawn by L Knyff and engraved by J Kip, published 1707 in Britannia Illustrata showing the formal gardens in the vicinity of the house.

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4 J Kip Britannia Illustrata (1707) plate 47
5 Ibid pp. 33-34
1.2.2.2 PHASE 2
THE CREATION OF THE LANDSCAPE PARK
1740s – EARLY C19

The fashion for formal landscape design had passed by the mid C18 and at Combe, like many estates, this was replaced by the landscape style. The acclaimed landscape architect Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown was employed by the 6th Lord Craven in the 1770s and he completely remodelled the Combe estate.

However, two changes had been made to the landscape before Brown was employed at Combe. An elliptical shaped piece of ground delineated by a brick walled ha-ha had been formed to the east of the Abbey in 1743, and the kitchen garden, formerly to the west of the entrance forecourt, had been relocated here. In 1755 the Coventry to Lutterworth road which ran to the south of the Abbey was turnpiked and diverted on a new route considerably further to the south greatly increasing the privacy of the estate and allowing for an enlargement of the park.

Brown commenced work at Combe in 1771 and was probably engaged in alterations to the drawing room in the west range, as well as the significant landscape changes. He created a Great Park of over 230 acres and a sinewy shaped lake of 77 acres made by damming the Smyte Brook. A new principal driveway was created from the south west so that the house was approached at an oblique angle. Figures 14 and 156 show the considerable changes made by

Figure 14: Watercolour of Combe Abbey and its setting from SW attributed to Maria Johnson, Oct. 1797. Source: Coventry Art Gallery Acc. No. 106181/1/18a

Brown commenced work at Combe in 1771 and was probably engaged in alterations to the drawing room in the west range, as well as the significant landscape changes. He created a Great Park of over 230 acres and a sinewy shaped lake of 77 acres made by damming the Smyte Brook. A new principal driveway was created from the south west so that the house was approached at an oblique angle. Figures 14 and 156 show the considerable changes made by

Figure 156: Coventry Art Gallery, drawings attributed to Maria Johnson Acc. No. 10618/1/18a and 106118/1/23a
Brown to the immediate environs of the house where the formal gardens have been swept away and the house appears to sit in pasture. The house is shown in 1797 twenty years after Brown completed his work, and three formal gardens had been destroyed. The garden on the west front with its central pool and fountain has been replaced by lawn with a slight slope to the newly created lake. The large forecourt enclosure with an oval lawn has been eliminated, and the only note of formality is an oval carriage sweep largely within the cloister garden (figure 15).

**Figure 15**: Watercolour of Combe Abbey and its setting from SSE attributed to Maria Johnson, Oct. 1797. Source: Coventry Art Gallery Acc. No. 106181/1/23a

Little remains of the series of parterres to the south east of the house except for a clump of trees, now masking the eastern front, and possibly formed by allowing the wilderness trees to grow unchecked (figure 15). Mathias Baker’s plan of Combe Park of 1778 (figure 16)\(^7\) indicates that one of the formal gardens, the Great Garden, has continued in existence at this time. A later plan shows it designated as a courtyard and drying ground (see figure 18). The northern garden disappeared and became yards and service areas. To the north-west Brown enclosed the kitchen garden, which had earlier been moved to this area.

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\(^7\) Warwickshire Record Office, Craven Papers CR8/184.430 William Baker Plan of Combe Park 1778
Brown, in conjunction with his son-in-law, Henry Holland, was responsible for a number of new buildings. Many of these were in the park including the Menagerie, the West and East Lodges, the Kennels and the boathouse, but some were in the vicinity of the house. A new stable block was built to the north east of the house, and was therefore not visible from the south west approach. The block replaced the old stables of c.1652 which lay to the south-west and would have been too prominent in the new park landscape. Additions were made to the stable block in the early C19 extending into an L-shaped building and with a low range across the yard that abutted the wall of the Great Garden. It is now known as the

**Figure 16:** Matthias Baker’s Plan of Combe Park, 1778 showing the surviving Great Garden on the east front. Source: Warwickshire Record Office Craven Papers CR8/184, 430
Abbeygate. The stables were reached by a new service road on the east which led from the old public road to Combe Fields which had continued in use. The service road led north through the park from the new Coventry road. Figure 17 shows its alignment and the link to the stables. To the north west of the mansion Brown erected a building with a ‘pavilion-like’ character which was intended as a service building but which had a decorative west end as a show face from the park. The building is now divided into two dwellings – Pump Cottage and Dovecote Cottage. A further building was erected to the rear of the Abbey subsequent to Brown’s additions. This was a large structure to be used as an indoor tennis court and may date to c.1810. The tennis court intruded into the north-west corner of the Great Garden.

The general layout of the gardens and pleasure grounds in the early C19 is recorded on a survey made by John Cattems in 1821. This plan is not as detailed as that made by Baker in 1778, but still shows the area enclosed by the ha-ha to the north-east of the Abbey and the road to Combe Fields still crosses the park to the south-east of the pleasure grounds. The most significant changes recorded by Cattems relate to the alignment of the pleasure ground boundary to the north and west of the house. It appears that the lawns and planting below the west façade of the Abbey have been incorporated into the park, while the boundary of the pleasure grounds has been moved north, away from the south-west drive, to sweep north of the house and stables. This change is illustrated in the watercolour view of the Abbey from the south-west, painted by Maria Johnson in 1797, which clearly shows a fence line extending westwards from a point adjacent to the north-west corner of the house, (figure 14).

Figure 17: John Cattems, A Survey of Combe Park 1821

8 - John Cattems, A Survey of Combe Park in the year 1821 (WCRO: D34 plan 2)
9 - Maria Johnson, watercolour of Combe Abbey from the south-west, 1797, reproduced in R Moore, A History of Coombe Abbey (1983)
1.2.2.3 PHASE THREE
THE REINTRODUCTION OF FORMAL ELEMENTS IN THE REVIVALIST STYLE 1860s to EARLY C20

In 1861 the second Earl of Craven commissioned the architect William Eden Nesfield (1835-88) to prepare plans for the complete rebuilding of the Abbey, but in the event the work was confined to the east wing which was rebuilt in a style that has been described as ‘Anglo-Franco-Victorian medievalism’. This was completed in 1874 at a cost of £58,000. New kitchens were also built and a coach house added to the stable block, designed by Nesfield. At the same time alterations were carried out to the gardens, also designed by Eden Nesfield to conform with the new style of the Abbey, essentially to give it a medieval look which in reality it had never had previously. The principal feature was a moat which ran across the south of the Abbey in the position which had been occupied by the nave of the monastic church. This was formed by making an eastern moat...

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Figure 18: Section from the Plan of Combe surveyed in 1849 by Bland Hood Galland with later overdrawing in 1860s showing the proposed alterations including the moat. The plan has later pencil additions imposed upon it showing the line of the south drive, the moat and the west terraces. The fence line between Seed Park and Cow Pasture to the south-east and south of the eastern pleasure grounds is crossed out, and the line of the new road to Combe Fields and the drive leading from that road to the walled garden is sketched in. Source: Private Collection

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10 Tyack op. cit. p.63; Rodway loc. cit. p. 27
11 It has been suggested that changes to the gardens were designed by Eden Nesfield’s father, William Andrews Nesfield but there appears to be no evidence to support this, see p. 21 ‘Combe Abbey, historic significance of the southern approach, walled garden and eastern pleasure ground’ (unpublished report, Parklands Consortium, 2005)
extension from the east end of the lake which then continued as a moat. Access to the cloister courtyard was via a stone medieval-style bridge over the moat. The East wing contained a Watergate which gave direct access to the moat. These changes are shown in figure 18\textsuperscript{12} where proposals have been added to an earlier map. A cascade was constructed at the eastern end of the moat in the form of a weir which gave the appearance of further stretches of water and this was fed with water piped to the south east corner of the moat. In c.1865 the western garden was raised as a terrace using spoil from the moat to create a formal Italian garden with a central path leading from a flight of steps running to the edge of a canal that linked to the moat. William Miller, who was head gardener at Combe from 1861 to 1898,\textsuperscript{13} also carried out extensive landscape works around the walled kitchen garden to create the north east gardens. The Great Garden was also revived. A central lily pool with a fountain of Mercury was installed and the sloping east bank was bedded in a huge scroll pattern.

Figure 19: The West Parterre laid out by Miller 1897-8, Unpublished Country Life Photograph c.1900

Further work to the gardens was carried out at the turn of the C19 following the marriage of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Earl to Cornelia Martin, an American heiress. The Italian garden was replanted to a design by William Miller in 1897.\textsuperscript{14} The central walk divided the two rectangular hedged enclosures that were planted as elaborate parterres of a

\textsuperscript{12} Private Collection Plan of Combe surveyed by Bland Hood Galland 1849, later over drawing of 1860s
\textsuperscript{13} The Gardeners’ Chronicle ii (1898) p. 229
\textsuperscript{14} RIBA PA93/5 (4) W Miller Plan of the West Terrace Scheme 21 Feb 1897
stylized plant in a vase set in grass, with central fountains and other statuary. A new terrace wall was constructed in 1908 along the north side of the canal which was set with fragments of the demolished Elizabethan porch (figure 19). A new entrance approach to the house was made between 1886 and 1903 and replanted with lime and chestnut along the lines of the formal approach made in the C16. The reintroduction of the formal landscape elements in the environs of the house in the late C19 and early C20 can be seen in figure 20, a section from the 25 inch Ordnance Survey map of 1905.

Figure 20: 2nd Edition 25” Ordnance Survey, published 1905

15 unpublished Country Life photograph, c.1900
16 Parklands Report, 2005, pp. 34-7
1.2.2.4 PHASE FOUR

COMBE AFTER THE CRAVENS - 1920 TO PRESENT

The 4th Earl of Craven died in 1921 as a result of falling from his yacht at Cowes. His son who succeeded as 5th Earl had been seriously injured during the First World War and did not wish to take up residence at Combe or run the estate. As a result the Estate was broken up and offered for sale in 1923 in various lots.

The Abbey with 120 acres of surrounding land, including the gardens, pleasure grounds and walled garden was sold to John Gray, a Coventry builder. Gray demolished much of the Abbey, including the entire north-west wing, and the northern service ranges whilst the east range and the south-east wing were demolished to first floor level. However the formal gardens around the house were maintained. The house and gardens were leased to the GEC for use as a residential hotel in 1952. The walled garden and the former eastern and north eastern pleasure grounds were excluded from this lease and remained part of the farming enterprise at Coombe Abbey Farm. John Gray died in 1963, and the following year Combe Abbey and the park were purchased by Coventry City Council in whose ownership they remain today (2008). The east block was rebuilt in the 1990s.

From 1965 car parking took place along the late C19 approach to the Abbey. In the early 1990s a car park was laid out to the south east of the moat on a site which in the C17 had had the formal gardens designed by William Winde.
1.3 FIELD SURVEY

1.3.1 SUMMARY

A visual survey of the site has been undertaken, informed by the historic review, the archaeological survey, the arboricultural survey and the Ecological survey.

The site has been informed by an investigation of the physical elements of the site as follows:

- Archaeology
- Entrances and circulation
- Views and Vistas
- Arboriculture
- Ecology
- Hydrology

1.3.1.1 ARCHAEOLOGY

- An archaeological evaluation including a walk-over field survey has been carried out.

- A desktop survey has identified listed buildings and areas of local interest recorded in the Warwickshire HER in the holding.

- The present arrangement of buildings and layout of grounds around the site of the former Cistercian abbey dates from the C17 onwards. It includes the creation during the C18 of pleasure grounds and a walled garden at the east as well as other redevelopment. The period from 1861 until the end of the C19 saw further improvements and rebuilding, including the creation of the moat and West Garden together with rearrangement of the approach. Recent alterations incorporate extensive areas of hard standing for car parking.

- Changes of use have had variable effects upon the survival of earlier landscape features. Many of the elements depicted by Kip and Knyff towards the end of the C17 have disappeared completely. The digging of watercourses and subsequent development of the West Garden will have been most destructive. Similarly, the original forecourt and turning circle, together with its replacement at the end of the south-western approach from the park, have been largely cut away.

- The series of formal gardens that extended southwards along the eastern flank have also gone. Whilst their location coincides with an area of trees shown in later C18 proposals, successive replacement and other new growth have destroyed the previous pattern. The construction of modern car parking areas has further damaged the historical layout.

- Any change of use or other development that may affect the historic landscape and its features requires consideration of the archaeological implications which may include further assessment, evaluation and survey.
1.3.1.2 ENTRANCES AND CIRCULATION

The entrances to the mansion at Combe are not documented prior to Kip’s engraving of Knyffe’s birds-eye view of Combe, published in 1707. The medieval monastic church stood to the south of the present Abbey and it appears that the main approach was from the west.

The demolition of the abbey church, probably by John Harington in the late C16, made it possible to create a southern approach. Kip’s engraving shows an axial approach from the south (figure 13). Gates lead from the public road to a drive enclosed to the east by the wall of the formal gardens, and to the west by a single line of trees. The drive entered a rectangular forecourt enclosed by walls and railings to the south. Kip’s engraving also indicates improvements that had been made to the landscape beyond the course of the old Coventry road, with the axis of the drive projected southwards. It was framed by an avenue to the east and a tree-lined track to the west creating the impression of a series of parallel avenues.

Matthias Baker’s Plan, (1778, figure 16), shows the diversion of the Coventry road to its present course as the result of an Act of Parliament in 1755. A significant change was the removal of the south drive which was replaced by a new drive from the south west which Brown had constructed as the principal approach to the house. Maria Johnson’s watercolour, (1797, figure 14) shows a drive leading away south, south-west from the turning circle immediately south of the Abbey. To the south-east a further drive led through the eastern park. A plan of the wider estate, that accompanied Baker’s plan of the park, indicates the Twelve O’Clock Ride extending southwards through agricultural land to The Grove.

The entrances and circulation in the early C19 are recorded on a survey made by John Catteines in (1821, figure 17) and there is little change from the circulation shown on Matthias Baker’s plan of 1778. The south-west approach and the east drive remain in use, and the road to Combe Field continues to serve as a secondary approach, running to the east of the remnants of the southern avenue.

The circulation within the park and approaches to Combe Abbey remained substantially as shown on the Baker (1778) and Catteines (1821) plans until the 1870s, when the creation of the new south approach was undertaken between 1886 and 1903, (figure 20). The south drive was lined by a double avenue and new fence lines separated the drive and avenues from the park to the east and west. The south approach was created as the final stage of a series of improvements both in the park and pleasure grounds surrounding the Abbey. In completing the south approach remnants of the C18 avenue east of the south drive was retained, providing an effective screen between the new drive and the service drive on the course of the old Combe Fields road to the east.

At the entrance to the south drive from the Coventry Road the mid/late C18 gate piers were presumably relocated to their present position as part of the formation of the new approach and was completed with the planting of the new avenues, which were contemporary with the formation of the new west terrace gardens in 1897-8, and coincides with the succession of the 4th Earl. With the exception of some recent features in the lawns adjacent to the south approach it remains unchanged. Features include the car park to the SE of the Abbey, located in the site of the late C17 early C18 formal gardens formally used for patrons of the ‘mediaeval’ banquets held in the Abbey, and recently for the hotel.
1.3.1.3 VIEWS AND VISTAS

There have been several changes to the views and vistas on the Combe Abbey estate over time due to the various styles of landscape design adopted by different owners. In the late C17 and early C18 the mansion was viewed from the south and from the east. Kip’s engraving of Knyff’s bird-eye view of Combe (1707 figure 13) indicates the formal gardens contained within the old Coventry Road, however, improvements had also been made to the landscape beyond. The axis of the drive projected southwards beyond the road in the form of an avenue, flanked to the east by a further avenue and to the west by a tree lined track created the impression of a series of vistas extending across the landscape.

The Mathias Baker plan, (1778, figure 16), shows the diversion of the Coventry Road to its present course and indicates the changes that had occurred as a result of the improvements undertaken by Lancelot Brown. The most significant change was the removal of the south drive. The avenues remained in fragmentary form framing a vista or green ride southwards across the park to the boundary plantation that screened the new road. The new Gothic dog kennels, situated to the south east of the abbey and off axis, were designed to be viewed from the park rather than from the abbey. Views and glimpses of the Kennels from the drive were carefully framed by sections of the retained avenue.

In the 1860s the second Earl of Craven started improvements to the abbey and the landscape. In 1863 W E Nesfield commenced rebuilding the east range of the abbey and at this time the moat and eastern extension of the lake were excavated to his direction. The terrace below the west facade was also constructed resulting in the dramatic prospect to the west, (figure 19).

The approach towards Combe Abbey from the south west remained unchanged until the late C19 when the creation of a new south approach, between 1886 and 1903 changed the way that the Abbey was viewed. The entire length of the drive was lined with a double avenue which framed the view and the gate piers marking the approach from the Coventry Road, gave a feeling of antiquity, and emphasising the formality of the view towards the abbey. The inspiration for this new approach is probably to be found in Knyff and Kip’s early C18 view with its strong southern axis. The exceptional view from the southern approach is unchanged but the wilderness to the south of the Great garden was used in the late C20 for a car park. The subsequent creation of a new visitors centre situated to the west of the approach with its new car parks to the east of the drive detracts from the drama of this dramatic view.

1.3.1.4 ARBORICULTURE

Combe Abbey Park from the mid C16 to the late C17, comprised the development of formal gardens in the vicinity of the residence, which was converted from the monastic buildings, and the formal elements were extended into the deer park created from the monastic agricultural land. Most of the mature arboreal landscape features now visible relate to the landscape park created in the in the mid to late C18 which eliminated elements of the formal landscaping. However, in the late C19 there was the re-introduction of further formal elements into the landscaping due to an interest in revivalist styles.
Much of the treescape within the site is in variable condition, some sections are locally good, but others are of poor quality and suffering from disease or damage. Trees that would normally have been removed have been retained because of their historic value. These trees date back to the time of the second phase of the park’s development in the C18. The older trees are generally in a poor condition due to age and compaction.

Many of the trees found within the park have an ornamental nature and appear to have been planted for landscape purposes such as colour, tree form and rarity. Some elements of the original park layout can still be found. Additional planting to the original layout can also be seen, this has left the park with a mixed and varied treescape.

Understanding the age ranges of the trees at Combe Abbey reveals the development of the landscape from pre Park to the current time. Only one tree surveyed dates back to a period earlier than the 1700 plantings (tree 754) this has been dated as being planted in 1630. This tree would have been significant in the landscape at the time of the planting of the park and would have given maturity to the park during its establishment period.

Most of the large trees within the environs of the Abbey appear to date from plantings in the 1850s. There are also a considerable number of young trees and the trees to the front of the abbey around the car park are, in the most part, plantings from the C20.

1.3.1.5 ECOLOGY

Within Coombe Abbey Park the varied soils and land use have resulted in a rich variety of habitats. These include woodland, scrub, grassland and water. Coombe Pool, its reed beds and associated historic woodland have been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by English Nature.

The woodlands are all secondary habitats and managed under the Forestry Commission woodland grant scheme. They comprise predominantly mixed broadleaf woodland with some early C20 coniferous plantations on the edge of the Wrautum. The acidic sandy soils, occurring largely north and east of the Wrautum and along the northern edge of the SSSI, support Oak, Sycamore and Birch with some Ash and conifers and within the woodland east of the Wrautum there are some ancient oak and sweet chestnut trees.

The well-drained acidic soils with humus occur predominantly in the area now designated as a SSSI woodland planted by Brown. Species include Oak with Hornbeam, Hawthorn, Ash, Sycamore, Birch and numbers of Lime with some Horse Chestnut and Sweet Chestnut and a few Beech and Norway Maple.

There is a wet woodland around the duck decoy and south of the Wrautum where Alder, Poplar and Willow species thrive together with Ash, Oak, Sycamore and Birch in the drier locations. In the north west of the deer park there are several small plantations planted in the late C19. Species include Horse Chestnut, Scots Pine, Sycamore, Pendunculate Oak, Hornbeam and Norway Maple.

The Country Park includes a number of ancient trees, some planted by Brown and some preceding his work. These are found largely in the deer park but also include
the previously mentioned Oak and Sweet Chestnut east of the Wrautum. Tree
groups within the deer park are predominantly Oak, some stag headed and some
former pollards, providing valuable roost sites for owls and bats and vantage points
for Kestrel and Sparrowhawk.

There are some areas along the southern edge of Coombe Pool, associated with
the quarries and clay pits in the deer park and within one of the woodland
compartments south of the Wrautum. Beside the lake are a variety of Willow
species providing cover for waterfowl.

Within the country park there are areas of semi natural grassland, semi improved
grassland, improved grassland and cultivated fields. North west of the Wrautum
the light sandy soils have developed a healthy vegetation with patches of gorse,
bare ground and a sward that includes Wavy Hair Grass and Heath Bedstraw. A
grassland survey conducted in 1998 identified 7 grassland types in the deer park of
which the most diverse and species rich occur around the northern fringe of the
deer park and part of the southern deer park between the Menagerie and West
Lodge. Part of this area is important as a standing ground for the heronry.

Coombe Pool contributes to the mosaic of habitats that make the site attractive to
birds and to its importance for ornithology. As the County's second largest water
mass (approx 80 acres in total) the pool supports Warwickshire's largest heronry
and the reed beds of Coombe Pool and Top Pool are an unusual habitat in the
county. The pool is a reservoir and as such is governed by legislation accordingly.
The SSSI has a wide diversity of waterfowl and woodland birds.

1.3.1.6 HYDROLOGY

The Hydrology within Coombe Abbey park is diverse with the major features
consisting of Browne's C18 lake formed by damming the Smite brook and altered in
the C19 by Nesfield when he altered the eastern section of the lake and linked the
canal he created across the south front of the abbey via the canal cutting
through the centre of the west garden into the lake. These dramatic hydrological
features within the park have always been highly acclaimed but over the years the
lake at Coombe has progressively suffered from sediment accumulation. The main
inflow to the lake is from the Smite Brook, which drains mainly agricultural land. The
lake also receives water from Monks Kirby and Stretton under Fosse and a policy of
dealing with siltation is required.
1.3.2 ARCHAEOLOGY

Although the general history of the gardens can be reconstructed through the combination of documentary information and map regression analysis, many points of detail remain uncertain. Proposed landscape enhancement, as well as any future building, may afford the opportunity for systematic archaeological survey or other investigation to add significant information.

The present arrangement of buildings and layout of grounds around the site of the former Cistercian abbey dates from the C17 onwards. It includes the creation during the C18 of pleasure grounds and a walled garden at the east as well as other redevelopment. The period from 1861 until the end of the C19 saw further improvements and rebuilding, including the creation of the moat and West Garden together with rearrangement of the approach. More recent alterations incorporate extensive areas of hard-standing for car parking.

Such re-modelling and changes of use have had variable effects upon the survival of earlier landscape features. Many of the elements depicted by Kip and Knyff towards the end of the C17 have disappeared completely, particularly around the north, west and south sides of the present mansion where ground disturbance has been most extensive. The digging of watercourses and subsequent development of the West Garden will have been most destructive. Similarly, the original forecourt and turning circle, together with its replacement at the end of the south-western approach from the park, have been largely cut away.

The series of formal gardens that extended southwards along the eastern flank have also gone. Whilst their location coincides with an area of trees shown in later C18 maps, which might represent survivors from the earlier scheme, successive replacement and other new growth have destroyed the previous pattern. The construction of modern car parking areas has further damaged the historical layout.

Evidence of the redevelopment of the former paddock and fields to the north-east of the house is better preserved. Part of the oval boundary enclosing the walled garden and pleasure grounds still survives and contains surface indications of previous paths and other earthworks in addition to the features of the former kitchen garden. Despite C20 damage around the eastern end, the area remains largely intact. The surviving details should be recorded by analytical archaeological survey to allow comparison with the historical information.

Previous archaeological evaluation within the present car park on the north side of the hotel has revealed structural remains of the C19 kitchen block, which was demolished c.1925, together with drains or other culverts and a possible ice-house. Apart from a shallow gully and traces of a monastic drain, all of the features are post-medieval. The earlier remains were found at depths below the modern surface of 1.40 m and 2.60 m respectively, where they were overlain by a thick levelling deposit; the height of the ground surface was further built up during the C19. The stone-revetted bank at the west appears to have been constructed sometime after 1864.

1.3.3 ENTRANCES AND CIRCULATION

1.3.3.1 THE CISTERCIAN ABBEY PERIOD

The mediaeval monastic church stood to the south of the present Abbey, enclosing the southern side of the cloister or court and rendering an approach from the south impractical. It appears that the Cistercian abbey was approached from the west, presumably from the public road from Coventry which passed much closer to the buildings than is now the case.

The demolition of the abbey church, in the late C16, made it possible to create a southern approach leading from the public road to the Abbey which was now arranged around a courtyard open to the south.

1.3.3.2 THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY APPROACHES TO THE ABBEY

Kip's engraving of Knyff's bird's-eye view of Combe published in 1707 (figure 13), shows an axial approach from the south. Gates lead from the public road to a drive set within verges, enclosed to the east by the wall of the formal gardens, and to the west by a single line of trees which were presumably intended to screen the stables and to continue the axis of a line of trees to the south of the road. The drive entered a rectangular forecourt enclosed by walls and railings to the south. The forecourt was laid out with an elliptical carriage turn and central lawn, while the courtyard enclosed by the wings of the house was entered through further gates. This arrangement broadly conforms to that shown by S and N Buck in their view published in 1729.

Figure 21  Entrances and Circulation (Opposite)

Knyff and Kip indicate that the formal gardens were contained within the course of the old Coventry road but improvements had been made to the landscape beyond. This is apparent in the axis of the drive which is projected southwards beyond the road by an avenue leading to an area of plantation, corresponding to The Grove. This avenue is flanked to the east by a further avenue, while a tree-lined track to the west may have been intended to create a monumental series of parallel avenues extending across the landscape. Another avenue lines the public road to the south-west of the Abbey, while trees, possibly an avenue, are shown leading westwards from the stables.

Matthias Baker's Plan (1778, figure 16) shows the diversion of the Coventry Road to its present course, which had taken place as the result of an Act of Parliament in 1755. It also shows Brown's improvements undertaken in 1771-7 which were made possible by the road diversion. The significant change is the removal of the south drive and its replacement by a new approach from the south west. The avenues remain in fragmentary form framing a green ride southwards across the park to the boundary plantation screening the Coventry road. The Dog Kennels are shown south-east of the Abbey, off axis and largely concealed from the house by a length of retained avenue to the north. It appears from the plan that the show front of the Kennels was designed to be seen from the park, rather than from the Abbey, and particularly from the new south west drive which Brown had constructed as the principal approach to the house. Sections of retained avenue framed views and glimpses of the Kennels from the drive. Also retained was the planting south-east of the Abbey which formerly screened the public road. The road to Combe Fields continued in use, leading north through the park from the

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Coventry road, on a course approximately parallel to the fragments of the south avenues. The road was crossed to the south-east of the Abbey by Brown's east drive which led from his Gothic-style East Lodge through the eastern park. The junction of the drive and the Combe Fields road appears to have been screened from the Abbey by a plantation south of the Great Garden. The plantation corresponds to the site of the late C17 and early C18 formal gardens, and may have been developed from the formal wilderness by allowing the trees to grow out.

1.3.3.3 THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY APPROACHES

John Catterns' plan (1821, figure 17) reflects the arrangement of approaches shown on Matthias Baker's plan of 1778. The south-west drive and east drive remain in use, and the public road to Combe Fields continues to serve as a secondary approach running parallel and to the east of the remnants of the southern avenue. Catterns shows the avenues to the north and north-west of the Dog Kennels converging to form an inverted 'V' shape south-south-west of the Abbey, but this may be a cartographic distortion as the angle at which the remnants of the south avenue approach the Abbey seems to be inaccurate. A south drive has been sketched on to the plan, there is no southern approach at this date, and the boundary plantation screening the Coventry road remains intact. The Dog Kennels appear to be unchanged since 1778, but an area to the south of the buildings has been enclosed by sweeping belts of trees or shrubs, perhaps to form a larger exercise area for the hounds. This planting, sketched onto Baker's plan in pencil, and was clearly established between 1778 and 1821.

1.3.3.4 MID & LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY IMPROVEMENTS

The layout of the gardens and pleasure grounds in 1859 is recorded on a plan by Bland Hood Galland (figure 18).18 This survey shows the pleasure grounds to the north and the eastern pleasure grounds enclosed within the elliptical ha-ha. Also indicated a rectangular walled garden comprising two compartments is situated to the north-east. An axial walk leads from a western entrance east through the garden. A nursery is shown outside the southern wall of the garden, and this is separated from the shrubbery and shrubbery walk by a small area of 'pasture' which is entered from the stable yard to the west. To the north of the walled garden further areas of shrubbery are indicated while a straight walk, corresponding to the later Monkey Puzzle avenue leads from west to east, where it links with a series of curvilinear walks enclosing irregular shaped borders. Also overdrawn in pencil are the proposals for the pleasure grounds to the north and east and the new terrace gardens to the west.

The new south approach appears to have been completed by 1903 when the second edition 25" Ordnance Survey was surveyed (figure 20). Significant planting had been undertaken since 1886, with the entire length of the south drive being lined by a double avenue. The plantation south of the Great Garden has been significantly augmented with new trees and new fence lines introduced separating the drive and avenues from the park to the east and west. The C18 avenue remnants east of the south drive are retained, providing an effective screen between the new drive and the service drive on the course of the old Combe Fields road to the east.

18 - Private collection
The present entrance to the south drive was marked by gate piers that were relocated to their present position. Possible they may have marked the point at which the Combe Fields road entered the park to the east of the present entrance; but alternatively, they may have formed part of the Dog Kennels.

The inspiration for the form adopted for the new southern approach with its monumental double avenues may be found in Knyff and Kip’s early C18 view with its strong southern axis. The feature as re-interpreted in the late C19 differs, however, from the earlier approach in bringing the avenues almost up to the house, whereas in the early C18 century they began beyond the forecourt.

The south approach remains on the 1903 alignment but a number of new features have been introduces. The plantation to the south of the Great Garden, which in turn occupies the site of the late C17 or early C18 formal gardens was used in the late C20 as the site for a car park which is now used by the hotel which occupies the Abbey. The parking area is hard surfaced, and retains some scattered trees, especially on its perimeter. The creation of a new visitors centre to the west of the approach with its associated disabled car park and play area and new tree planting occupies the area of the park which Brown opened to reveal the south and west facades of the house. The new visitor car parks to the east, that service the Visitor Centre and the Country Park creates a constant movement across the drive and forms a distraction from the drama of this exceptional approach.
1.3.4 VIEWS AND VISTAS

There have been many changes to the views and vistas on the Combe Abbey estate reflecting the landscape design style adopted by the individual owners.

In 1557 Sir Robert Kelway began the major rebuilding process of converting the Abbey buildings into a residence, a process continued by his son-in-law, John Harington, created Baron Harington in 1602. Combe Abbey became a two storey courtyard house around three sides of the cloisters, whilst the fourth side, originally formed by the nave of the church, became a formal walled entrance court, (figure 13). The entrance courtyard was reached by a formal approach from the public road from Coventry to the Fosse Way giving views to and from the house. On the east side of the residence the principal garden or ‘Great Garden’ was laid out. This was probably in place by 1600 and was a Renaissance parterre garden divided into four rectangles and surrounded by raised walks which commanded views internally and to the landscape beyond.

In the late C17 and early C18 the mansion continued to be viewed from the south and from the east. Kip’s engraving of Knyff’s bird’s-eye view of Combe, (1707 figure 13) shows the formal gardens contained within the old Coventry Road. Improvements to the landscape to the south included the central drive which projected beyond the road in the form of an avenue, flanked to the east by a further avenue with a tree lined track to the west and created a dramatic series of vistas extending across the landscape.

The Mathias Baker plan, (1778, figure 16), indicates the improvements undertaken by Brown after the diversion of the Coventry Road to its present course. Brown’s decision to remove the south drive totally changed the way the Abbey was viewed. His design ensured that the Abbey was approached and viewed from the south west and that the impressive south and west fronts were viewed together. The earlier avenues were retained in fragmentary form and framed a vista southwards across the park to the boundary plantation. The new Gothic dog kennels were situated as an eye catcher to the south east of the abbey. They were off axis and were designed to be viewed from the park rather than from the Abbey, in particular from the south west drive where views and glimpses of the Kennels from the drive were framed by sections of retained avenue.

Figure 22 Views and Vistas (Opposite)

Brown, in conjunction with Henry Holland, was responsible for a range of buildings, within the park, designed to be viewed as features within the landscape. The new buildings included the Menagerie, the West and East Lodges, the Kennels and the boathouse. There were also new buildings in the vicinity of the house including a new stable block built to the north east of the house, replacing the old stables c.1652, located to the south-west which would have been too prominent in the new park landscape. Brown also erected a service building with a ‘pavilion-like’ character with a decorative west end intended as a show face from the park.

The importance of the views from the south west is shown in the early C19 in John Cattern’s survey of 1821, (figure 17). The lawns and planting below the west facade of the Abbey have been incorporated into the park and the boundary of the pleasure grounds moved away from the south-west drive. This change is illustrated in the watercolour view of the Abbey from the south-west, painted by
Maria Johnson in 1797 (figure 14) which shows the open nature of the views across the park to the south-west corner of the house.

W E Nesfield’s improvements to the Abbey commenced in the 1860s included the rebuilding of the east range of the Abbey with alteration of the gardens to conform. The landscape was created to appear medieval in style. The principal feature of the design was a moat which ran across the south front of the Abbey. This created a dramatic view to the west to the lake which could be viewed from a stone medieval-style bridge over the moat which gave access to the cloister courtyard. In c.1865 the western garden was raised as a terrace using spoil from the moat to create a formal Italian garden with a central path leading from a flight of steps and running to the edge of a canal that linked to the moat. The Italian garden created a range of new views to and from the south and west in particular the view to the west towards the lake (figure 19).

The south west approach to Combe Abbey was not removed until the late C19 when the new southern approach was opened. The Abbey was again viewed from the south. The new drive was lined with a double avenue and the gate piers relocated to give an historical affect in framing the view towards the Abbey. The inspiration for this south vista may possibly be found in Knyff and Kip’s early C18 view with its strong southern axis but the additional length and the topography make it an imposing feature as it rises towards the Abbey. Although unchanged the drama is somewhat diminished. The creation of a visitor centre situated to the west of the approach with its car parks to the east which creates a constant movement backwards and forwards across the drive. This together with the modern details of fences and trip rails detracts from this exceptional view.
1.3.5 ARBORICULTURE

The park and treescape are very important locally. The park provides a feature of significance and also gives the community an area for passive recreation. The individual trees and shrubs have high visual amenity.

The general condition of the trees within the site is variable, some sections are locally good, but some are of poor quality and suffering from disease or damage, particularly grey squirrel bark stripping in sycamore and lime trees and Dutch elm disease. Trees that would normally have been removed have been retained because of their historic value. These trees date back to the time of the second phase of the park’s development in the C18.

The older trees are generally in a poor condition due to age and compaction. Ivy has not been controlled and it has become endemic in some areas dominating both the main stems of trees and their crowns.

Many of the trees found within the park have an ornamental nature and appear to have been planted for landscape purposes such as colour, tree form and rarity. Some elements of the original park layout can still be found. Additional planting to the original layout can also be seen, this has left the park with a mixed and varied treescape.

Understanding the age ranges of the trees at Combe Abbey reveals the development of the landscape from pre Park to the current time. Only one tree surveyed dates back to a period later than the 1700 plantings (tree754) this has been dated as being planted in 1630. This tree would have been significant in the landscape at the time of the planting of the park and would have given maturity to the park during its establishment period.

Most of the large trees within the environs of the Abbey appear to date from plantings in the 1850s. There are also a considerable number of young trees and the trees to the front of the abbey around the car park are, in the most part, plantings from the C20.

The full tree survey can be found in appendix II.
1.3.6  ECOLOGY

FLORA AND HABITAT TYPES

1.3.6.1  INTRODUCTION

The varied soils and land use have given rise to a rich variety of habitats. These include woodland, scrub, grassland and water. Coombe Pool, its reed beds and associated historic woodland have been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by English Nature.

1.3.6.2  WOODLAND

The woodlands are all secondary habitat and managed under the Forestry Commission woodland grant scheme. They comprise predominantly mixed broadleaf woodland with some early C20 coniferous plantations on the edge of the Wrautum.

The acidic sandy soils, occurring largely north and east of the high ground of the Wrautum and along the northern edge of the SSSI, support Oak, Sycamore and Birch often found in single species stands, with some Ash and conifers. There is a small remnant of oak and hazel coppice near the north boundary. The understorey and ground flora are generally poorly developed due to the heavy shading of the Sycamore and to rabbit activity. There are areas of bracken associated with stands of birch, rhododendron and bramble. Natural regeneration is taking place where trees have been felled and there are some stands of young broadleaf planting. Within the woodland east of the Wrautum there are some ancient oak and sweet chestnut trees.

The well-drained acidic soils with humus occur predominantly in the area now designated as a SSSI woodland planted by Capability Brown. Species are Oak with Hornbeam and Hawthorn, Ash, Sycamore, Birch and a considerable number of Lime with some Horse Chestnut and Sweet Chestnut and a few Beech and Norway Maple. The shrub layer is more varied but includes areas dominated by rhododendron, bramble or ivy. The herb layer is diverse in more open areas and north of the lake there are areas of fens and bluebells.

There is a wet woodland around the duck decoy and south of the Wrautum where Alder, Poplar and Willow species thrive together with Ash, Oak, Sycamore and Birch in the drier locations. The shrub layer is limited, elder and bramble predominating, though there are species such as Box around the duck decoy.

The ground flora in shady areas is often dominated by nettle and in lighter areas by Himalayan Balsam, but also includes a rich variety of marsh flora – Yellow Flag Iris, Pendulous Sage, Great Willowherb, March Thistle and Figwort. The decoy woodland contains a more diverse flora.

In the north west of the deer park there are several small plantations planted in the late C19. Species include Horse Chestnut, occasional Scots Pine, Sycamore, Pendunculate Oak, Hornbeam and Norway Maple. The plantations have no understorey. The ground flora consists of rank grassland dominated by nettles.
The Country Park includes a number of ancient trees, some planted by Brown and some preceding his work. These are found largely in the deer park but also include the previously mentioned Oak and Sweet Chestnut east of the Wrautum. Tree groups within the deer park are predominantly Oak, some stag headed and some former pollards, providing valuable roost sites for owls and bats and vantage points for Kestrel and Sparrow hawk. The old trees also provide valuable standing and falling deadwood habitat.

1.3.6.3 SCRB

There are some areas along the southern edge of Coombe Pool, associated with the quarries and clay pits in the deer park and within one of the woodland compartments south of the Wrautum. Beside the lake are a variety of Willow species providing cover for waterfowl. Scrub adjacent to the fishing pegs on the dam is maintained by coppicing. Elsewhere species commonly include Bramble, Field Rose, and Dog Rose with Hawthorn associated with areas of excavation.

1.3.6.4 STANDING GROUND

Within the country park there are areas of semi natural grassland, semi improved grassland, improved grassland and cultivated fields. North west of the Wrautum the light sandy soils have developed a healthy vegetation with patches of gorse, bare ground and a sward that includes Wavy Hair Grass and Heath Bedstraw. A grassland survey conducted in 1998 identified 7 grassland types in the deer park of which the most diverse and species rich occur around the northern fringe of the deer park and part of the southern deer park between the Menagerie and West Lodge. Part of this area is important as a standing ground for the heronry.

The improved grassland and cultivated fields are of limited habitat value, but the grassland on the northern slopes of the ridge provides an important grazing area for Canada and Greylag Geese, though the significant negative impact of these birds causes management problems elsewhere on site.

1.3.6.5 WATER

Coombe Pool contributes to the mosaic of habitats that make the site attractive to birds and to its importance for ornithology. As the County’s second largest water mass (approx 80 acres in total) the pool supports Warwickshire’s largest heronry and the reed beds of Coombe Pool and Top Pool are an unusual habitat in the county. The pool is a reservoir and as such is governed by legislation accordingly.

The SSSI has a wide diversity of waterfowl and woodland birds. The pool supports a fishery with 140 pegs, 100 of which are situated on the north and west banks. Fish stock succession is a problem due to a variety of factors, not least of which are cormorants. Refuges have been installed in the lake to provide shelter for juvenile fish.
1.3.7 HYDROLOGY

Over the past decade Coome Lake has progressively suffered from sediment accumulation. The main inflow to the lake is from the Smite Brook, which drains mainly agricultural land, and the lake also receives water from Monks Kirby and Stretton under Fosse.

Coventry City Council has commissioned a survey (subject to approval of funding) from Jacobs Coventry office to determine the sediment volume in the lake and permit effective analysis for comparison with any available past surveys.

The survey will include the following:

- Mapping the lake to assess the volume of sediment accumulation;
- Estimation of transported sedimentation rates from analysing sediment samples (cores);
- Identification of potential sources of sediment through catchment mapping and analysis of the physical/chemical properties of sediments and catchment soil, together with local farming practices.

The findings will be appraised in a report giving recommendations to the management of sediment control, with the aim of establishing a sediment control policy either to prevent sediment entering the lake and/or to identify a catchment treatment strategy to minimise sediment movement from the catchment.

Other hydrological features, outside the scope of the established maintenance management agreement, such as weirs and penstocks etc will be included in the survey, assessing their operational condition and structural integrity. The section of Smite Brook within the Council’s ownership will also be included.

It is understood that the report will not be available until early 2009.
1.3.8 GAZETTEER OF HISTORIC LANDSCAPE FEATURES

The Gazetteer identifies historic features in Combe Abbey Park, including their significance, condition, potential management and issues. The feature numbers are used later in relation to Character Areas and are marked on Plan 23.

**Significance** is categorised as follows:
- **A** Very significant: Fundamental to the design concept or to historic interest of park.
- **B** Significant: Essential parts or elements specific to Combe Abbey.
- **C** Some significance: Items of historic or archaeological interest; contribute to complexity of design.
- **D** Not significant.
- **E** Items which damage the historic character.

**Condition** is categorised as follows:
- **1** Good: No repair required; continue maintenance.
- **2** Fair: Structurally sound/complete, but some repair or replanting required.
- **3** Poor: Dilapidated/structurally unsound; needing major replanting/Restoration.
- **4** Derelict: A ruin or badly damaged/incomplete.
- **5** Lost.

**Figure 23** Coombe Abbey Landscape Features opposite