

RUSHDEN ROAD, WYMINGTON - LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL SUMMARY

File Ref: 33017-A5-LVS

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Introduction

This Technical Note sets out Landscape and Visual Summary of a proposed residential development (the 'Proposed Development') at Rushden Road, Wymington in Bedfordshire ('the Site'), with the aim of informing the selection of options for the extents of the development. Refer to Figure 1: Site Context Plan for the location of the Site and its landscape context.

Site Context

A Site visit was carried out on 18 August 2021. The Site is located between the south-western edge of Rushden, a market town on the south-eastern edge of Northamptonshire and the valley of the River Nene, and the north-western edge of Little Wymington, a linear settlement on the north-western edge of Bedfordshire and associated with Rushden Road, linking Rushden with Wymington to the south.

The Site lies within the administrative area of Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Unitary Authority.

The Site is bordered to the north by residences, typically semi-detached two storey houses, in Rushden on Grangeway, Dean Close, and Sylmond Gardens, and to the east by residences in Little Wymington on Rushden Road, Cambridge Street and Oxford Street. These housing developments in Rushden and Little Wymington were built in the late 20th century, now effectively contiguous settlements. To the south and south-east respectively lie the older residences of The Old Pumping House and The Old Rectory. To the south and west the immediate Site context comprises a primarily agricultural landscape in arable use, with scattered blocks of woodland and a few isolated farmsteads.

The Site does not lie within or adjacent to any national landscape designations such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Green Belt.

The Site is located within a wider settled landscape, under the urbanising influence of Rushden, the transport corridors of the A6 trunk road and the Midland Main Line railway, smaller settlements,

isolated farmsteads, and energy infrastructure including Overhead Power Lines (OPLs), wind turbines (approximately 4.3km to the south of the Site) and a biomass waste plant at Goosey Lodge Industrial Estate (approximately 1.2km to the south-east of the Site).

The Site has not been identified as located within or near any green wedge, strategic gap or green buffer identified under local policy. Little Wymington and to an extent Wymington itself are already contiguous with Rushden such that the Site will not erode any gap between these settlements. Furthermore, other than Rushden, Wymington and Little Wymington, the nearest settlement is the village of Irchester, approximately 1.6km to the west. Other nearby settlements, including Podington, Hinwick and Farndish, are located at least 2km from the Site. Development of the Site would therefore be unlikely to contribute substantially, if at all, to any coalescence of settlements.

The Site is located on the north-eastern face of a small valley that runs east/west along the Site's south-western boundary and is associated with an unnamed stream that drains into a northward flowing tributary of the River Nene.

The blocks and belts of deciduous woodland scattered throughout the landscape context successfully filter and screen views of the Site from much of the publicly accessible land in the local area, though likely to be less so in winter. Many of the surrounding roads are bounded with tall hedgerows, such that there is only a limited availability of views of the Site for road users, including from much of Rushden Road and Green Lane.

There is a wide network of fairly well connected Public Rights of Way (PRoW) throughout the study area (refer to Figure 1: Site Context Plan), including a public footpath that runs just within the northern Site boundary, and another that skirts the south-western boundary. A section of the long distance footpath known as the Three Shires Way is present within the study area, passing approximately 3km to the south-east of the Site at its closest point.

Also to the south-east of the Site are several blocks of ancient woodland, concentrated roughly along the elevated ridge that characterises the NCA. The block nearest to the Site (approximately 2.7km to the south-east) is the Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland which makes up the central third of Great Hayes Wood. Other, often far smaller, blocks and belts of deciduous woodland, woodpasture and traditional orchards are present in closer proximity to the Site.

The Rushden Conservation Area is situated within approximately 830m of the Site, though no views of the Site have been identified from the Conservation Area due to intervening built form. The two other Conservation Areas within the study area, those of Podington and Farndish, are situated more than 2km to the south-west of the Site, and again, no views have been identified. There are several Listed Buildings located near to the Site, and throughout the wider study area, though in no instances were views of the Site identified. Such views are unlikely to be available due to the screening provided by intervening built form, vegetation and undulating topography.

Site Appraisal

The Site itself comprises one small pasture and two medium-to-large scale arable fields, all regular in shape, as well as an area of allotments in the north-eastern corner. The Site covers an area of approximately 30 hectares (ha). The county road, Rushden Road, runs broadly north/south to the east of the Site.

The highest part of the Site lies in the north-eastern corner at approximately 86m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and falls to approximately 65m AOD in the south-west, descending gently at first and more steeply towards the south-western boundary.

The south-western edge and the southern half of the western edge of the Site are heavily vegetated outside of the boundary with mature woodland blocks and belts, providing a strong visual separation

between the southern half of the Site and the immediate and wider landscape context to the south and west. More sporadic vegetation to the north-western and south-eastern edges provides partial screening or heavy filtering of the Site in views from Rusden Road, with similar views likely to be experienced from houses in this location.

One PRoW, a short distance local footpath, runs along the inside of the northern boundary of the Site, connecting Rushden/Little Wymington to the rural landscape to the south and west of the Site via other PRoW and apparent informal permissive access along tracks (refer to Site Context Plan).

The long distance views and well-vegetated and undulating landscape afford the Site and its immediate landscape context a moderate sense of remoteness and tranquillity, though these characteristics suffer from the detracting influence of audible intrusion, in particular from the frequent trains passing along the Midland Main Line to the south-west, which also contributes some visual intrusion to much of the Site. This is exacerbated by OPLs visible both beyond and within the Site, as well as wind turbines, communications masts, and industrial, agricultural and residential built form visible from the PRoW within the Site.

Other than the field boundaries external and internal to the Site, which consist of hedgerows and some hedgerow trees, vegetation within the Site is limited. The land cover consists predominantly of arable fields, pasture and allotments. There are scattered individual trees within the pasture and a small group of trees is associated with a modest pond in its north-eastern corner.

Local Policy

The Local Plan for Bedford Borough Council (BBC) adopted in 2020¹ sets out the following policies of particular landscape and visual relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development:

Policy 35S – Green Infrastructure:

"Development shall provide a net gain in green infrastructure, while seeking to provide a high quality multi-functional green infrastructure network in accordance with the Bedford Green Infrastructure Plan."

Policy 37 – Landscape Character:

"iii. Make provision for the retention and enhancement of features of landscape importance, and

iv. Safeguard and where possible, enhance key views and vistas, and

...

vi. Where appropriate, provide landscape mitigation."

¹ Bedford Borough Council, 2020. Local Plan 2030. [online] <<https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Planning%20and%20Building/local-plan-2030/Local%20plan%202030.pdf>> [Accessed 19 August 2021].

Policy 38 – Landscaping in New Development:

"iii. The proposed landscaping scheme should consider the character of the site, site constraints, function, diversity of existing and proposed landscaping, soil type, ecological value and resilience based on the location of the site.

...

vi. The proposed landscaping shall make a positive contribution to the streetscape and integrate with the built development and where applicable, adjoining developments..."

Policy 91 – Access to the Countryside:

"In considering proposals for development all of the following criteria will apply:

iii. Development should where possible, provide improvements to the public rights of way network...

New permissive paths are encouraged as they can help to fill in gaps in the public rights of way network."

Published Landscape Character

The Site lies within the north-western extents of the Hinwick Wooded Wolds Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCAs) identified in the 2020 Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment² (BBC LCA).

The Hinwick Wooded Wolds is described as having the following key characteristics:

- ***"An elevated plateau ...***
- ***Rolling, gently sloping landform cut by tributaries of the River Great Ouse forming subtle valleys.***
- ***Small to medium scale landscape with an enclosed, peaceful character. Enclosure consists of thick hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees...***
- ***A land use characterised predominantly by arable farming with some pasture.***
- ***Significant woodland cover, including several ancient woodland sites ...***
- ***Sparse settlement of farmsteads and small villages ...***
- ***Rural roads cross the area and connect the settlements, but large sections of the landscape are accessible only by tracks and footpaths.***
- ***...***

² Bedford Borough Council, 2020. Landscape Character Assessment. [online] <<https://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=H1s1ijkK2oPN8wKbNf7JDw%3d%3d&name=Bedford%20LCA%202020.pdf>> [Accessed 19 August 2021].

- *Network of footpaths and bridleways with The Three Shires Way forming an important recreational route crossing the landscape.*
- *...*
- *Valley side settlements ... overlook the character area ...*
- *The relative elevation and rolling landform allows occasional views of wind turbines on the north eastern edge of the character area."*

The landscape strategy identified for the Hinwick Wolds LLCA is:

"to conserve the rural landscape of rolling arable farmland with its largely intact hedgerow network, its scattered small scale limestone settlements and farmsteads, and historic earthworks, parks and ancient woodlands and grasslands of high biodiversity value while enhancing elements of the landscape which are in declining condition."

The landscape management guidelines identified for the Hinwick Wolds LLCA are:

- *"Encourage the planting or regeneration of new broad-leaved woodland ... reflecting the historic pattern of woodland in the area.*
- *Conserve and enhance the historic field boundaries, replanting hedgerow and hedgerow trees where necessary.*
- *... restore woodland ... to conserve and enhance its biodiversity interest.*
- *...*
- *Conserve the character of the rural roads with their wide grass verges and limit urbanising influences – widening/kerbing and ensure that traffic management measures are sympathetic to the rural character... "*

The development guidelines identified for the Hinwick Wolds LLCA are:

- *"Retain the individual settlements avoiding merging these through linear development along roads for instance between ... Wymington, Little Wymington and Rushden.*
- *...*
- *... green infrastructure opportunities e.g. linking woodlands with access routes and centres of population, ... hedgerow planting and management to re-establish the historic field pattern and enhance rights of way."*

Visual Appraisal

The northern half of the Site approaches the top of the ridge at an elevation of 75-86m AOD which is above that of the majority of the landscape to the south and west of the Site, such that the Site is visible approaching the skyline from certain locations within these areas. However, in combination with the frequent vegetation, the undulating topography of the study area, which comprises small valleys also associated with tributaries of the River Nene, goes a long way to filtering and often screening medium and long-distance views of the Site from much of the surrounding landscape.

Close range views of the northern half of the Site are available from the residential developments immediately to the north and east, with many residences having upper storey windows directly overlooking the Site, though the landform of the Site falls from view towards the south. The partial yet open views of the Site from these properties and the PRoW within the northern Site boundary are seen in the context of open long distance views across the wider rural landscape, though with the detracting influence of wind turbines, the Midland Main Line and its associated infrastructure, as well as other built form. There is some intervisibility between the northern half of the Site and the landscape to the south and west, with views of this part of the Site available from several PRoW here as well as from the railway, though again these are in the context of the built form of the southern settlement edge of Rushden and residences in Wymington and Little Wymington, and often with the railway infrastructure in the foreground. From some of these PRoW the Site is also seen in the context of the Goosey Lodge Industrial Estate and its biomass waste plant in the foreground.

Whilst many of the residences along Rushden Road are likely to have partial views of the Site, users of the road itself for the most part have views that are channelled along the road by the built form on either side and/or the tall, dense, well-maintained hedgerows between the road and the Site. In only one instance were views of the Site from this road identified, where a farm access opening allows views into the paddock that forms the south-eastern part of the Site. Green Lane, which forms part of the south-western boundary of the Site, is accessible to the public only as a footpath, though it connects well with the wider network of PRoW to the south and west. However, the boundary here is similarly well-vegetated, also with tall hedgerows, often dense and well-maintained. Glimpses of the southern half of the Site are nevertheless available in places where the hedgerow is gappy and sparse, particularly towards the western extents of the lane.

However, medium distance views from other roads and PRoW within the study area are partial and heavily filtered by intervening vegetation, if available at all. No views of the Site were identified from the Three Shires Way long distance footpath, due to the comprehensive screening effect of the intervening vegetation, built form and undulating topography.

In summary:

Topography: Gently to more steeply sloping land with a south-facing aspect, providing open views at the highest elevations;

Openness: Strong containment to much of the southern half of the Site, with open views both into and out of the northern half;

Landscape Features: Small woodland blocks and tree belts to the Site boundaries, hedgerows with hedgerow trees internal and external to the Site, with one pond and a few trees internal to the paddock – all of either moderate or low quality and low rarity within the wider landscape context;

Accessibility: One short distance local footpath traverses the Site, being of only local importance but providing valuable links to the wider rural landscape; and

Heritage: Several heritage assets are present within the study area, though no intervisibility between them and the Site has been identified.

Much of the Site is likely to have a high capacity to accommodate development, due to localised vegetation patterns and topographical features which provide physical and visual enclosure to the southern parts of the Site and the context of residences, which form the skyline in many views, immediately adjacent to the northern parts of the Site.

Development Recommendations

As demonstrated on Figure 3: Sketch Layout Plan, we would recommend that undeveloped green space be located towards the westernmost and southernmost parts of the Site, with built form located towards the existing settlement edges of Rushden and Little Wymington in order to minimise visual encroachment upon the rural landscape of the westernmost valley slopes, which were identified as visible from some short sections of PRow within the wider rural landscape. This will help to minimise the change in views experienced from these PRow since the settlement edges of Rushden and Little Wymington are already visible on the skyline here, such that additional residential built form in this part of the Site would have a lesser effect on views here than it would if it were located on the western boundary of the Site.

The existing vegetation along much of the western and south-western Site boundary would limit the influence of the development on users of the PRow to the south and west of the Site, though all boundaries of the Site would benefit from some level of reinforcement with vegetation where possible, to strengthen screening effects on glimpsed views from these PRow and from Rushden Road. This reinforcement of the boundary vegetation would also help to filter and soften any views of the development that may be available from residences on the settlement edges of Rushden and Little Wymington, as well as from the railway to the south-west.

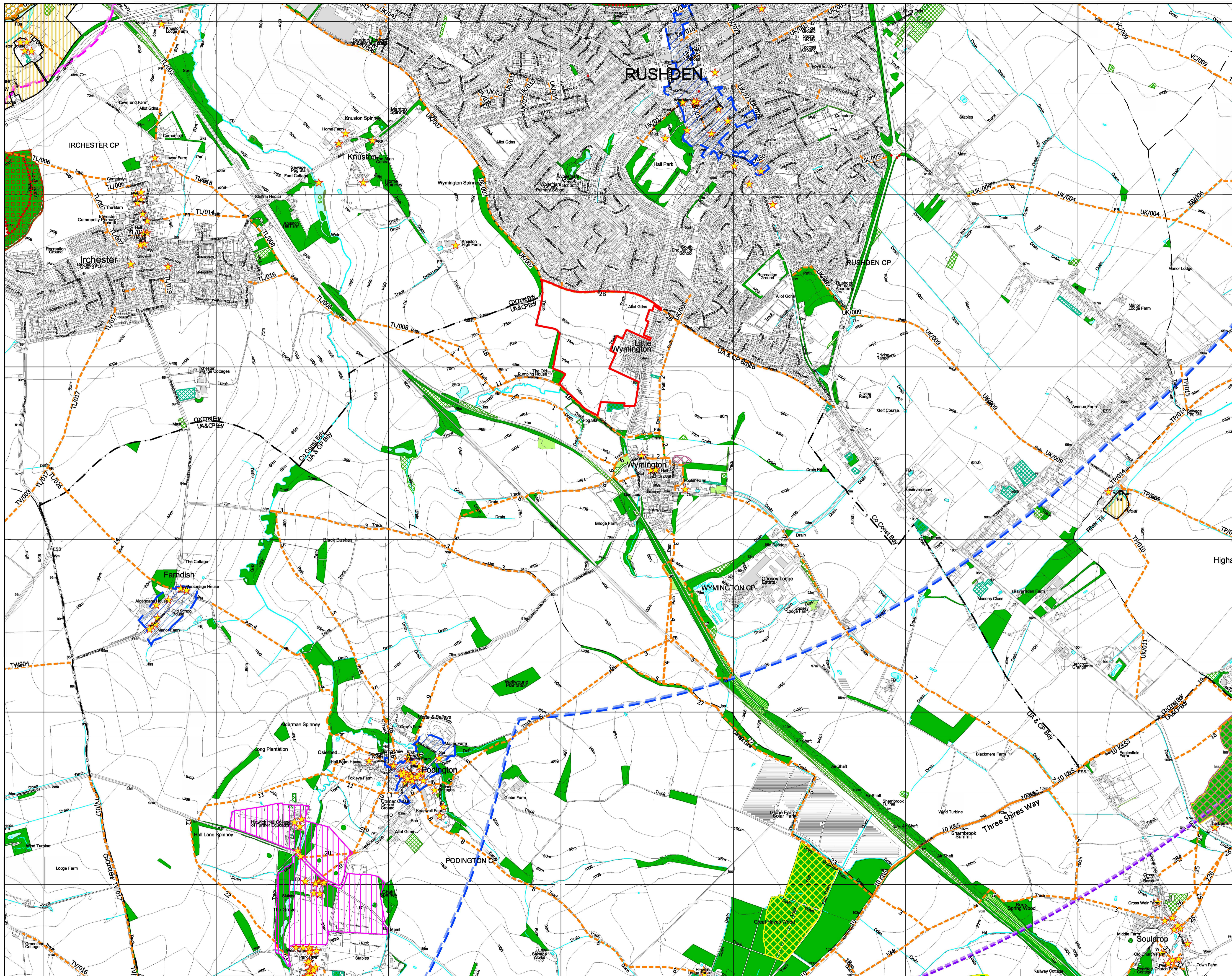
The elevated north-westernmost part of the Site should be proposed as open green space. This would substantially limit any visual effects of the proposals, since this area has some existing intervisibility with certain areas within the landscape to the south and west of the Site. Buffer vegetation should also be considered internally to the Site here, in order to further soften and filter views of the development.

There are several existing points of access between the footpath within the Site and the residential area immediately to the north. Where possible, these access points should be kept relatively open, with clear and legible pedestrian routes from these access points through the development to the rural landscape beyond.

The southernmost parts of the Site should be proposed as open green space with vegetated buffers to the north and south, in order to retain the perception of enclosure and remoteness experienced by users of the PRow along Green Lane. Again this would substantially minimise any visual effects of the development on users' enjoyment of this footpath.

The existing hedgerow between the two arable fields of the Site provides an opportunity to include a strong east/west vegetated buffer that will further soften and filter views of the development within the northern parts of the Site, as well as reinforcing the historic field pattern and providing additional biodiversity enhancements.

Due to the elevated topography of the northern parts of the Site and its open character, the aim of locating development towards the settlement edge, with the roofline where possible avoiding breaching the existing rooflines on the southern edge of Rushden, would substantially limit any perceived encroachment of the Proposed Development upon the landscape and would not result in an unacceptable level of harm to the character and appearance of the edges of Rushden and Little Wymington and the surrounding environment.



The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured
 Revision _____ Date _____ Dm Ckd _____

Legend

- Site Boundary
- Ancient Woodland #
- Existing Woodlands, Woodland and Tree Belts ^
- Existing Scrub ^
- Existing Water Courses and Features ^
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
- Public Rights of Way *
- National Trails # / Long Distance Walks ^
- Countryside Limits of Way Access Areas #
- Cycle Routes #
- Listed Buildings ~
- Conservation Area ###
- Registered Parks and Gardens ~
- Scheduled Monument ~
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest #
- Special Protection Area #
- Special Protection Area, 400m Buffer #
- Special Protection Area, 5km Buffer #
- Special Protection Area, 7km Buffer #
- Ramsar Site #
- Country Park #
- Traditional Orchards #

Sources:
 ^ OS Mapping
 # Natural England GIS Data Set
 * Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set
 + County Councils' Definitive Map
 + Statutory National Cycle Network GIS Data
 ++ Department of Transport Cycle Network Model
 + Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data
 ## District Councils' Local Plan Proposals Map Adopted
 ## County Councils' Landscape Character Assessment
 ## District Councils' Landscape Character Assessment

Data collected for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation. Inherent using the British National Grid and may therefore not be accurate. Barton Willmore shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

FIGURE 1

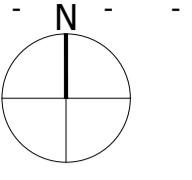
Project
 Rushden Road,
 Wympington
 Drawing Title
 Site Context Plan

Date 17.08.2021	Scale 1:10,000 @A1 1:20,000 @A3	Drawn by ML	Check by XXX
Project No 33017	Drawing No LN-LP-01		Revision -

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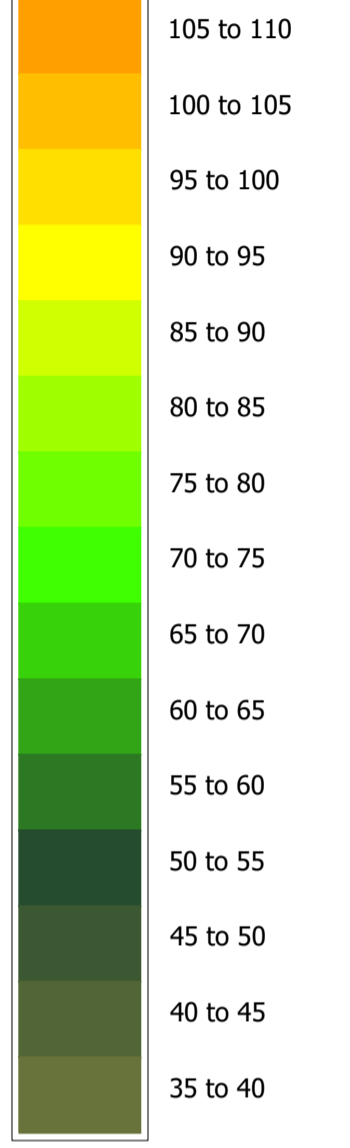
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Legend

- Site Boundary
- Existing Water Courses and Features ^
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
- Ridgelines
- Valleys

Elevation (m AOD)



Sources: ^ OS Mapping
 Data collected for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation (inset) using the British National Grid and may itself not be accurate. Barton Willmore shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

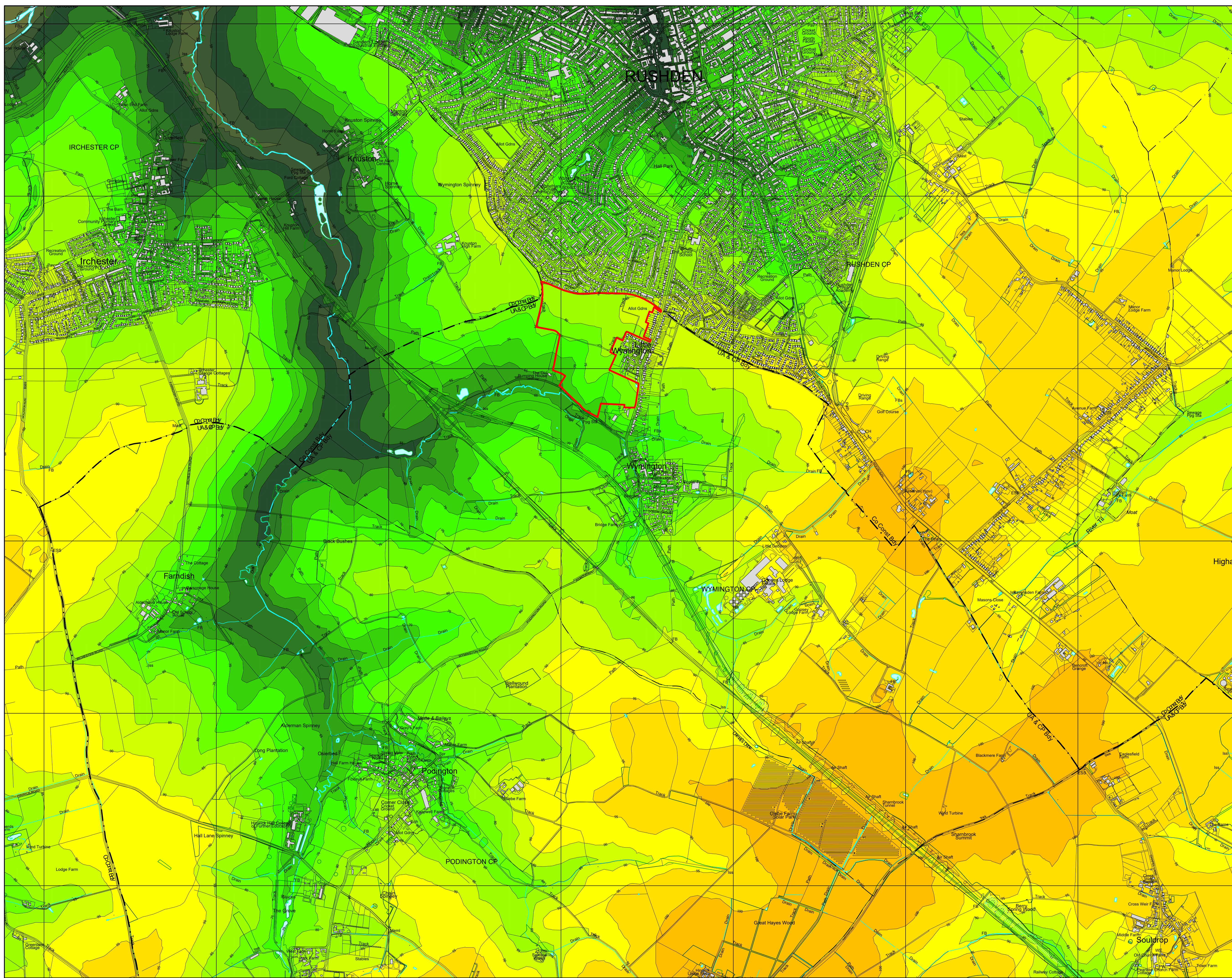


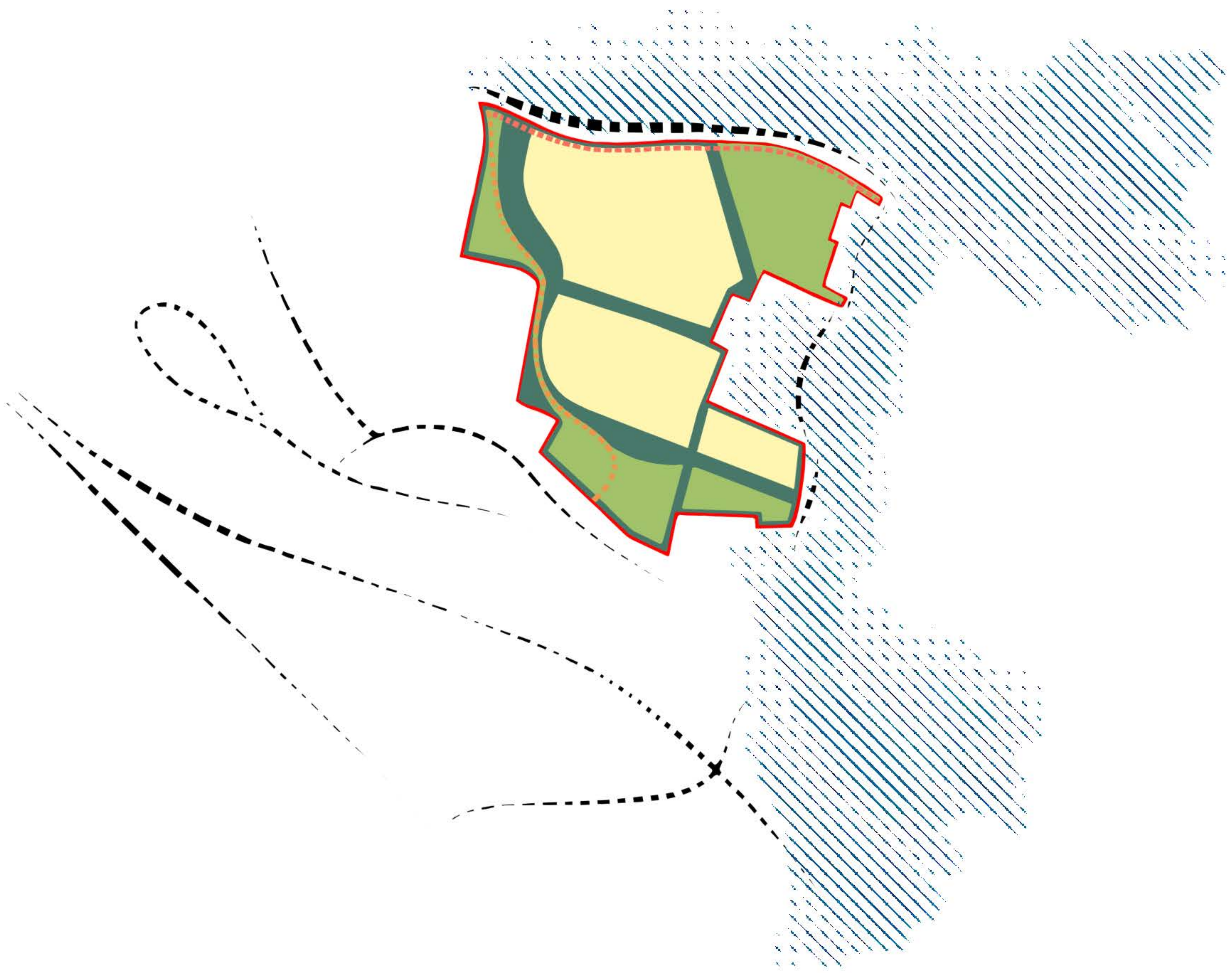
FIGURE 1







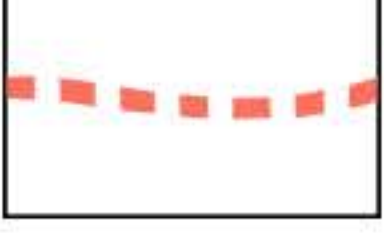
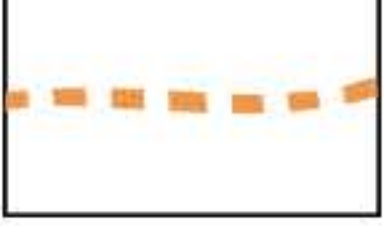
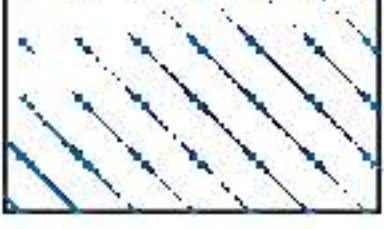
Project
**Rushden Road,
 Wymington**
 Drawing Title
Topographical Features Plan

Date 17.08.2021	Scale 1:10,000 @A1 1:20,000 @A3	Drawn by ML	Check by XXX
Project No 33017	Drawing No LN-LP-02	Revision -	

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- 
SITE BOUNDARY
- 
MORE OPEN VIEWS OF THE SITE
- 
MORE RESTRICTED VIEWS OF THE SITE
- 
OPEN SPACE (INCL. EXISTING ALLOTMENTS)
- 
BUFFER PLANTING TO BE CREATED OR REINFORCED
- 
BUILT FORM (MAXIMUM EXTENTS)
- 
EXISTING FOOTPATH WITHIN SITE
- 
PROPOSED FOOTPATH WITHIN SITE
- 
EXISTING BUILT FORM