LAND AT BLEACHCROFT WAY, BARNSLEY

LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL



NOVEMBER 2016

re-form landscape architecture

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01 INTRODUCTION

re-form Landscape Architecture Ltd. has been appointed by U & I Group PLC to carry out a strategic landscape assessment of a proposed development site to the south east of Barnsley, South Yorkshire.

This report assesses the landscape character and visual issues of the development. It provides a detailed landscape analysis and sets out a strategic landscape framework in order to inform and support the development masterplan proposal for a residential housing scheme to be built on the site.

The report considers the constraints and opportunities the site presents through an analysis of the existing landscape features including vegetation, topography, and landscape character. The appraisal also looks at landscape related planning policies and designations which may shape any future development proposals for the site.

The report concludes with recommendations for the development and masterplan, including a strategic landscape masterplan that will help integrate new development into the landscape and create a high quality environment for living.



Aerial view of the site

02 THE SITE

WIDER CONTEXT

The site is located to the south east of Barnsley, approximately 3km from the town centre. The area of the site is 11 hectares, and is adjacent to the existing Stairfoot Retail Park, and a large B & Q retail outlet (currently closed at the time of writing). To the southern edge of the site there is a wooded beck and farmland, and to the western edge, Ardsley Cemetery and Hunningley Lane Allotments. Part of the Dearne Canal extends into the site. The canal has been filled in after a long period of disuse.

The Barnsley-Sheffield rail link into Barnsley centre cuts the western edge of the site off from the Kendray residential area.



02 THE SITE

URBAN GRAIN & VEGETATION



The site is located to the edge of Stairfoot, southeast of Barnsley. Currently the Stairfoot Business/Retail Park sits to the east of the site, with several large commercial units also to the north of the site. The railway line connecting to the centre of Barnsley forms the western boundary to the site.

Buildings to the vicinity comprise a mixture of large retail and commercial buildings, public buildings such as local primary schools, and large areas of suburban residential housing at Kendray, Worsbrough and Stairfoot.

On site, there are dense areas of overgrown scrub vegetation and colonising tree species such as birch. Open areas on site consists of scrubby grass. The railway embankment is heavily vegetated with a mixture of native trees and scrub, and Dob Sike, to the south-eastern edge is densely planted with trees. Beyond the southern boundary, the landscape turns to open agricultural land, with occasional copses of deciduous trees.

SITE

WATERCOURSES

OPEN SPACE

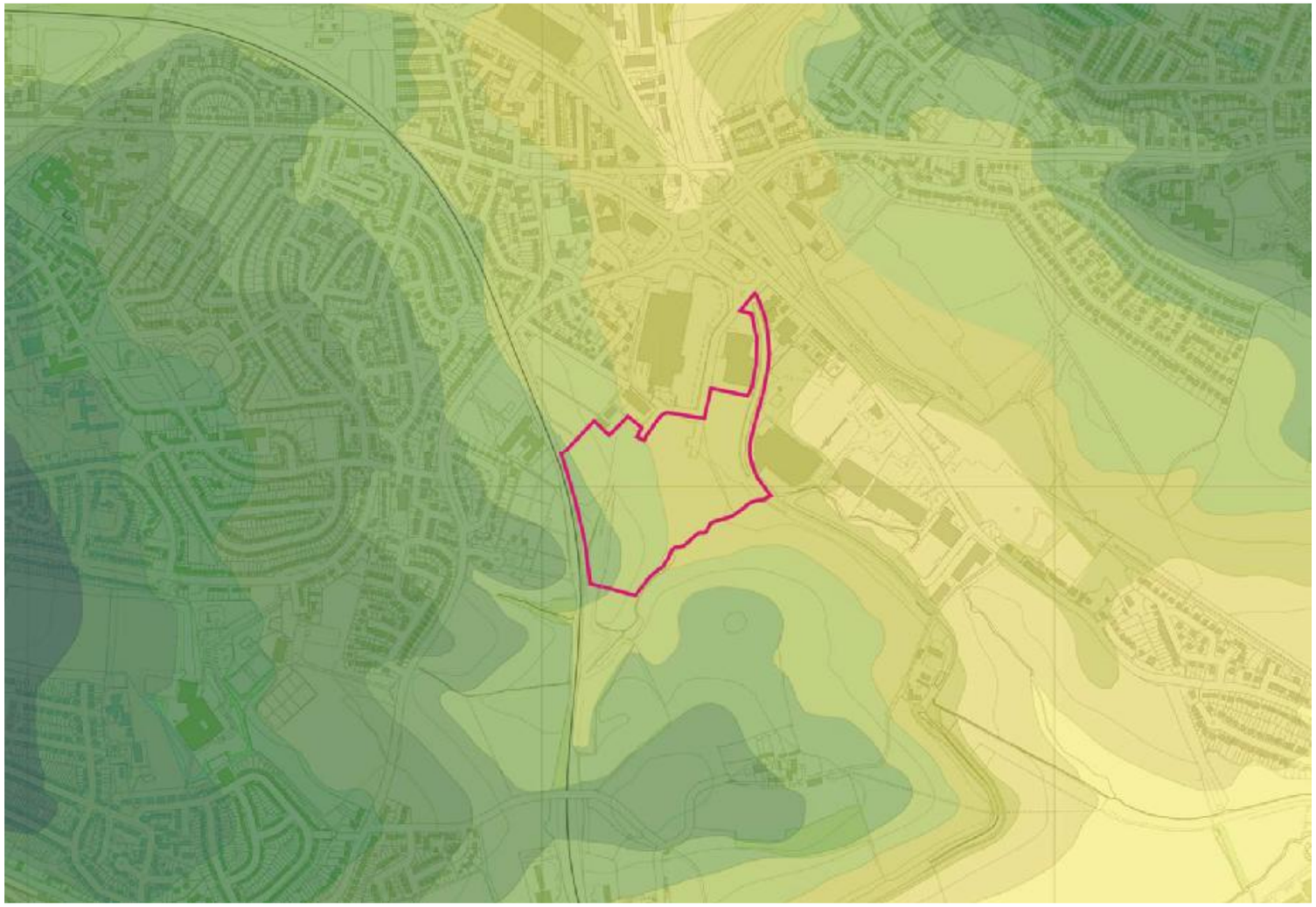
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT VEGETATION

BUILT FORM

N

02 THE SITE

TOPOGRAPHY



The site sits to the western side of the Dearne valley, southeast from the centre of Barnsley. The ground plane gently slopes upwards as it moves southwest, with the highest topography along the western edge along the railway line. The northern end of the site is predominantly flat.

The ground plane falls slightly to the southernmost corner at Dob Sike forming a localised dip in the landscape. Housing areas at Kendray and Stairfoot sit higher up the valley.

- SITE
- LESS THAN 40M
- 41-50M
- 51-60M
- 61-70M
- 71-80M
- 81-90M
- 91-100M
- 101-110M
- 111-120M
- 121-130M

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03 PLANNING POLICY REVIEW

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

PREVIOUS PLANNING APPLICATION & APPEALS

A residential scheme was previously submitted for planning which was refused by Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMDC) and subsequently dismissed at Appeal (Reference: APP/R4408/A/09/2115994, decision date 31st March 2010).

The open countryside setting to the south was described as providing positive opportunities to development on the site in the Appeal Decision Notice.

Emphasis was also put on the desirability for taking journeys on foot from any housing development on site. The Planning Inspector was of the view that: “Bleachcroft Way [does not] offer a desirable prospect as a pedestrian route” and that potential links to the retail park may be unattractive due to their extensive areas of car parking. It further notes that the existing footpath link adjacent to B & Q has limited scope to be an attractive pedestrian route for residents.

While observing there was scope for a “sustainable residential environment”, the summary conclusion reiterates the issues of edge condition, the relative sense of isolation, and lack of pedestrian connectivity of the site, such that housing proposals put forward were unsuitable.

In terms of landscape-related planning policies, any new proposal for residential development will need to address the concerns outlined above, particularly with respect to the surrounding context, connections to the site, particularly on foot, and the site’s proximity to the existing commercial developments in the area.

RELEVANT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

The government’s primary planning guidance is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Sections relevant to landscape and visual issues are as follows:

- Chapter 7: Requiring good design
- Chapter 8: Promoting healthy communities
- Chapter 10: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding & coastal change

In Chapter 7 the Government emphasises the importance of good design as a key aspect of sustainable development, which includes function, quality and creating a strong sense of place within new developments. Good design responds to the local character and reflects the identity of local surroundings and materials. The proposals will address integration of new development into the local context.

In Chapter 8, the NPPF seeks to ensure that new developments ensure social interaction and healthy, inclusive communities, including safe and accessible developments, legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space. These encourage the active and continual use of public areas.

In Chapter 10 the NPPF highlights the need for local plans to take account of climate change over time, including through the planning of Green Infrastructure. There exists the opportunity within the development proposal to connect up the main infrastructure elements - existing trees and shrubs, existing hedgerows and field boundaries - through the planting of new native trees and shrubs, in order to ensure that the objectives relating to Green Infrastructure are met. This also correlates with aims of protecting green belt land, which sits adjacent to the site at Bleachcroft Way.

03 PLANNING POLICY REVIEW

LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

UDP & CORE STRATEGY PLANNING POLICES

The site is allocated for employment uses under the saved UDP (policy BA4, site 10).

Since the publication of the UDP, BMDC has adopted its Core Strategy (September 2011) which forms part of the Development Plan. With respect to landscape and visual issues, the following policies are relevant:

Policy CSP1 concerns the importance of climate change and development. Any proposals will be expected to reduce and mitigate the impact of new development on the environment and carbon emissions. Development needs to be sustainable and resilient, and give consideration to use of sustainable drainage systems, flood alleviation and promotion of green infrastructure.

Policy CSP25 refers to the importance of transport links and connectivity of new development. This includes designing accessible routes for pedestrians and cyclists, and reducing the need for car travel in the local area, such that the new development promotes people to change their travel behaviour.

In relation to the overall quality of the built environment, **Policy CSP29** is relevant as it refers to high quality place-making, consideration of topography, green infrastructure, habitats, woodlands and other natural features, such that the development can enhance the local environment of Barnsley. It includes meeting the needs of children, the disabled and elderly, and the contribution the development can make towards creating attractive, connected and successful neighbourhoods. It also states the new development must meet a minimum equivalent rating of 'good' in the Building For Life assessment for 10 or more dwellings.

Policy CSP33 states the importance of green infrastructure. Improvement of biodiversity and landscape character must be considered in new developments, and integrate well with existing landscape features and habitats. Introduction and improvement of green infrastructure also improves attractiveness of neighbourhoods, recreational opportunities and social benefits to communities.

The Dearne Valley Green Heart Corridor, which runs through the site, is considered part of the wider green infrastructure network. The network will be secured through provision of open spaces and improvement of existing green infrastructure.

CSP33 also covers retention and protection of trees and hedgerows on development sites. It includes recreational routes (UDP policy 27) which allow people and wildlife to more through the borough. A route-way is identified along Wombwell Road, near the site.

Similarly to policy CSP33**, Policy CSP36** covers the improvement and enhancement of biodiversity for new development. Opportunities for maximising biodiversity, conserving existing natural features and enhancing the form and local character of the setting should be considered.

RELEVANT DRAFT LOCAL PLAN POLICIES

The Local Plan Publication Draft is yet to be submitted to the Secretary of State and is of limited planning weight. The Plan however can indicate of the Council's latest thinking. Policies in the Draft Local Plan are relevant to landscape includes:

- Policy GI1 Green Infrastructure
- Policy BI01 Biodiversity & Geodiversity

PLANNING POLICY SUMMARY

The policies relating to landscape include climate change, creating high-quality and successful neighbourhoods, and the importance of green infrastructure. The proposals will also need to address those specific issues from the previous planning appeal, which concern connectivity, the environment of the surrounding local context, and the establishment of a well-integrated community.

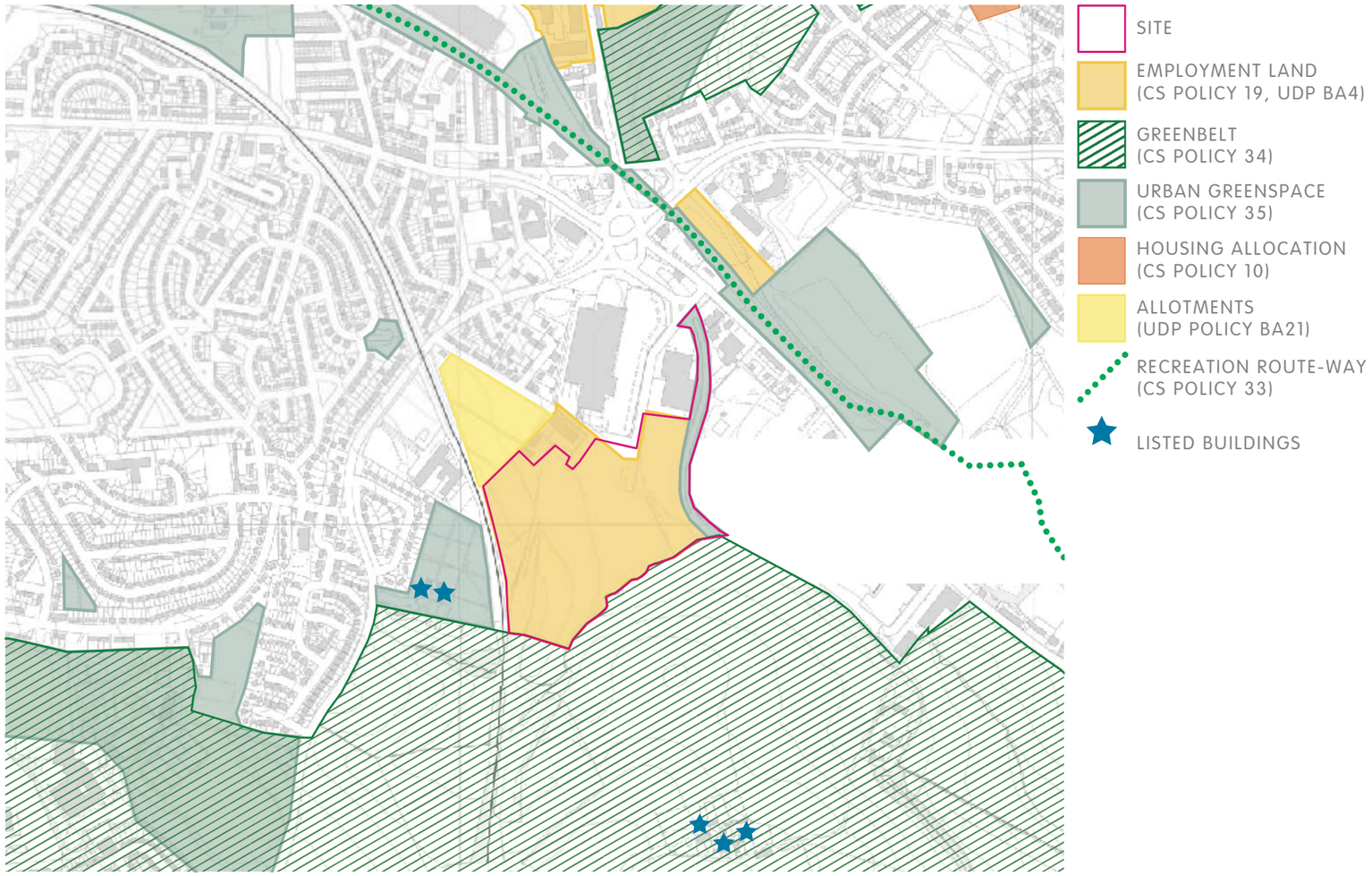
03 PLANNING POLICY REVIEW

PLANNING DESIGNATIONS

PLANNING POLICY MAP

The site has no landscape designations under the Saved UDP or the adopted Core Strategy. Land to the immediate south is designated as Green Belt in the Saved UDP and in the Local Plan Publication Draft. Also under the Local Plan Publication Draft, the site is part of the Dearne Valley Green Heart Nature Improvement Area (NIA) and is adjacent to the Elsecar Greenway. Designations from the UDP and Core Strategy are shown on the map opposite.

There are listed assets at Ardsley Cemetery and Swaithe Hall. These assets are considered in the FAS Heritage Report.



Landscape related planning policies from BMDC
UDP (adopted December 2000)

04 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

LITERATURE

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREAS

National Character Areas (NCA) define landscape areas which have similar characteristics and follow natural characteristics in the landscape rather than planning boundaries to inform decision making.

Natural England have identified Barnsley within the NCA No. 38, Nottingham, Derbyshire and Yorkshire Coalfield.
The key characteristics of this NCA as a whole include:

- *"A low-lying landscape of rolling ridges with rounded sandstone*
- *escarpments and large rivers running through broad valleys, underlain by Pennine Coal Measures.*
- *Local variations in landscape character reflecting variations in underlying geology.*
- *Several major rivers flow through the rural and urban areas of the NCA, generally from west to east in broad valleys.*
- *A mixed pattern of built-up areas, industrial land, pockets of dereliction and farmed open country.*
- *Small, fragmented remnants of pre-industrial landscapes and more recent creation of semi-natural vegetation, including woodlands, river valley habitats and subsidence flashes, with field boundaries of clipped hedges or fences.*
- *Many areas affected by urban fringe pressures creating fragmented landscapes, some with a dilapidated character, separated by substantial stretches of intact agricultural land in both arable and pastoral use."*

The NCA report also summaries the potential for the area:

"The large populations of the towns and cities within the NCA mean that there will be opportunities to better engage people with the natural and historical environment, creating new access and recreational openings that deliver a better quality of life while also helping people and wildlife to adapt to a changing climate...

...Rivers and waterways are an important feature in the landscape, often linking rural and urban areas and increasingly providing green corridors and tranquil settings for both people and wildlife. The source of the water is outside the NCA, as is the case for a number of ecosystem services, and the large population means that the area is a key user of ecosystem services (such as water) that are provided by surrounding NCA. A key challenge will be to improve links between this NCA and others in order to get a better understanding of the delivery of ecosystem services and how they can be improved."

LOCAL CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council have undertaken their own Landscape Character Assessment (May 2002) which looks in more detail at the landscape in the borough. The site falls into the West Dearne Settled Arable Slopes character area, summarised as:

"The main land use in this character area is agriculture, punctuated by the dense settlements of Ardsley and Darfield. Other lesser land uses include commercial, industrial, landscape renewal and communication."

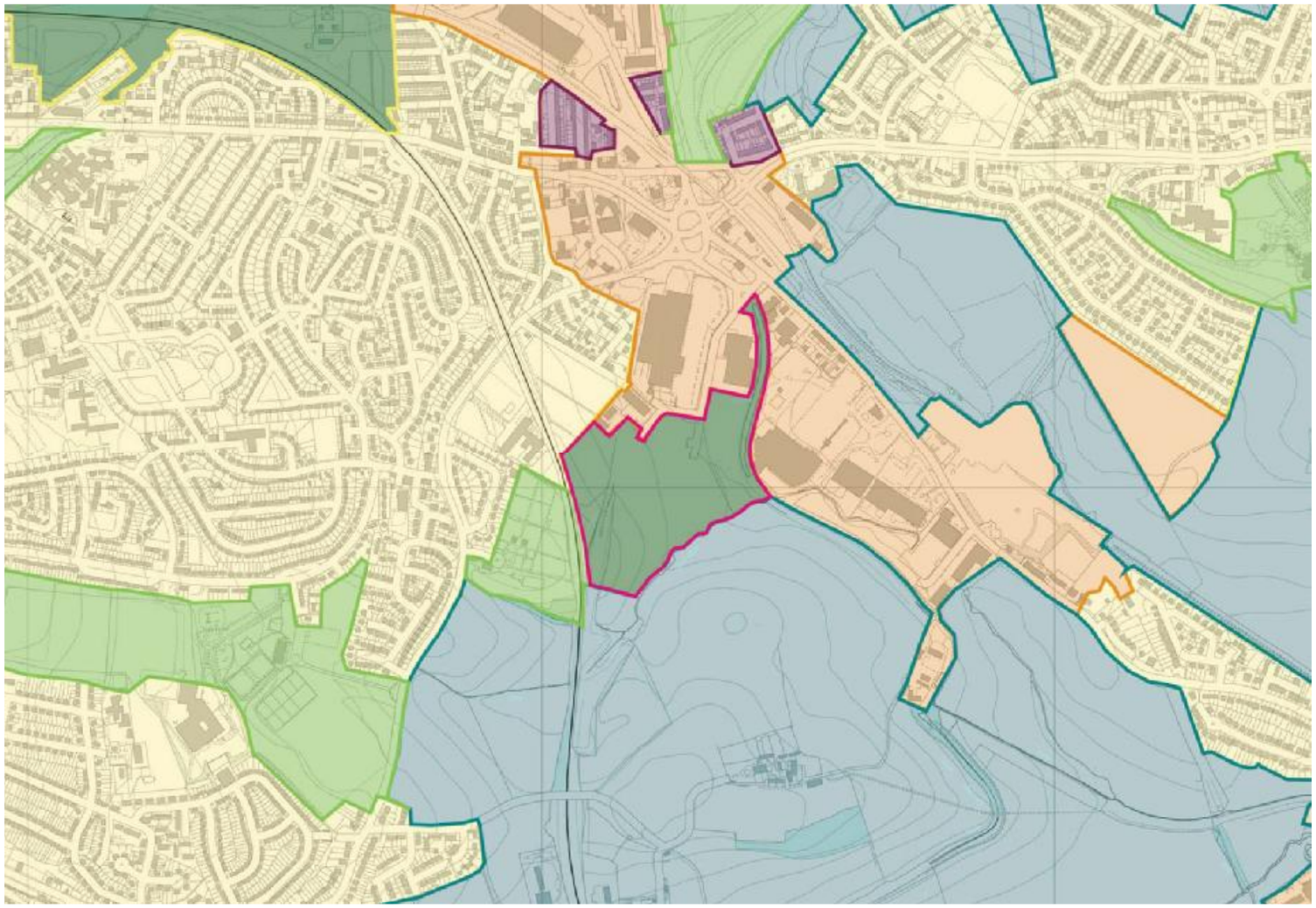
Other characteristics include:

- Large 20th Century warehouse style industrial or commercial buildings bordering the A633 at Stairfoot.
- Small working quarries at Ardsley
- Network of roads, including the A635 and A633
- Road margins often consist of infrequently managed or fragmented hedgerows and degraded stone walls.
- A limited number of minor roads are found in this character area, most of them providing access to farmsteads.
- The railway line from Barnsley to Sheffield crosses the western extreme of the character area.
- Mature trees are limited to infrequent clumps of deciduous trees on the valley sides
- Built development on the settlement edges consists of a mixture of late 20th Century brick housing in a variety of styles and colours.

In general, the assessment describes the landscape condition as considered 'poor' due to lack of management of agricultural features and the decline of vegetation, particularly hedgerows. The assessment highlights the potential for development to benefit the land adjacent to the site, between the railway line at housing at Kendray. This would provide visual and physical improvements, and consolidate the urban edge to this side of the character area.

04 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

LOCAL CHARACTER ANALYSIS



A landscape character assessment has been undertaken at the local level following fieldwork and desktop surveys. This shows the commercial and industrial valley floor to Stairfoot and the Dearne Valley, and the presence of large areas of suburban residential development to either sides of the valley floor.

The site is bounded by three landscape character areas - C20th suburban development, C20th industrial and commercial development and agricultural land to the south. On site itself, the character is suburban open space, with additional areas towards Kendray and Stairfoot.

There is a small pocket of C19th/early C20th housing to the north of Stairfoot.

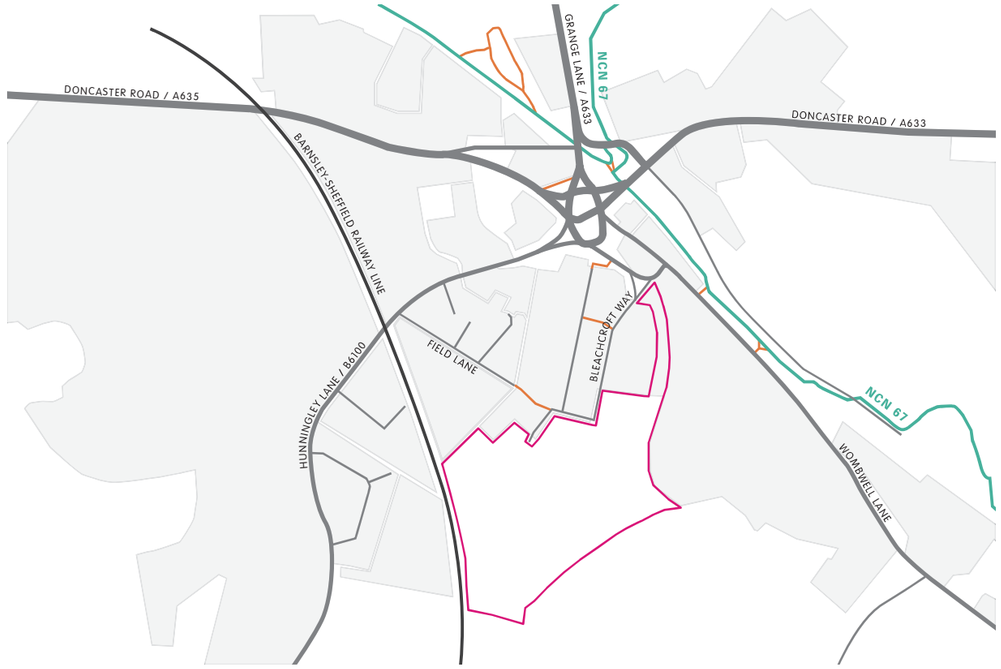
- SITE
- C20TH INDUSTRIAL/COMMERCIAL AREAS WITH LARGE WAREHOUSE STYLE ARCHITECTURE
- C20TH SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT, PREDOMINANTLY RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE
- AGRICULTURAL LAND WITH SMALL SETTLEMENT
- C19TH HISTORICAL RESIDENTIAL CORE
- INFORMAL SUBURBAN OPEN SPACE
- FORMAL SUBURBAN OPEN SPACE

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05 LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

WIDER CONTEXT

ROUTES AROUND THE SITE



SITE

NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK ROUTE 67

PUBLIC FOOTPATHS



Junction to start of Bleachcroft Way



Bleachcroft Way approaching the site



Footpath link to Stairfoot Way from Field Lane

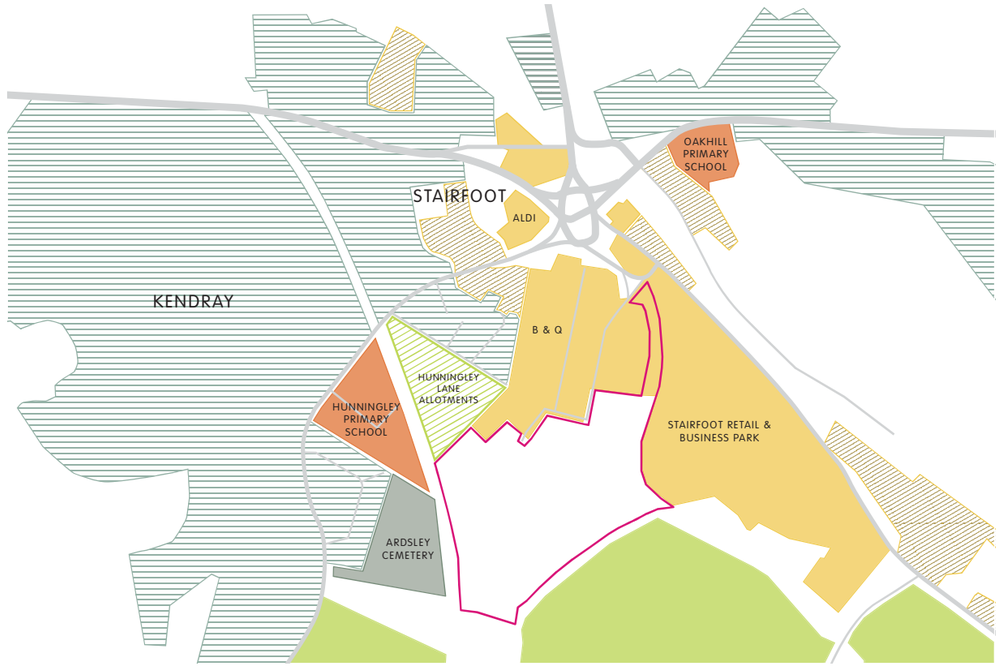
The road network to the local area is dominated by large, multi-lane roads and junctions favouring travel by car. However, there are also a number of cycle connections, particularly National Cycle Network route 67, and local public footpaths. Roads within residential areas and around schools are more pedestrian friendly, with slower car traffic.

Development on site will need to consider how best to connect to the existing local cycle and footpath network, and to create an environment which makes these modes of travel and attractive option.

05 LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

WIDER CONTEXT

LAND USE





Residential housing at Field Lane, Kendray



Agricultural land at Worsbrough to the south of the site



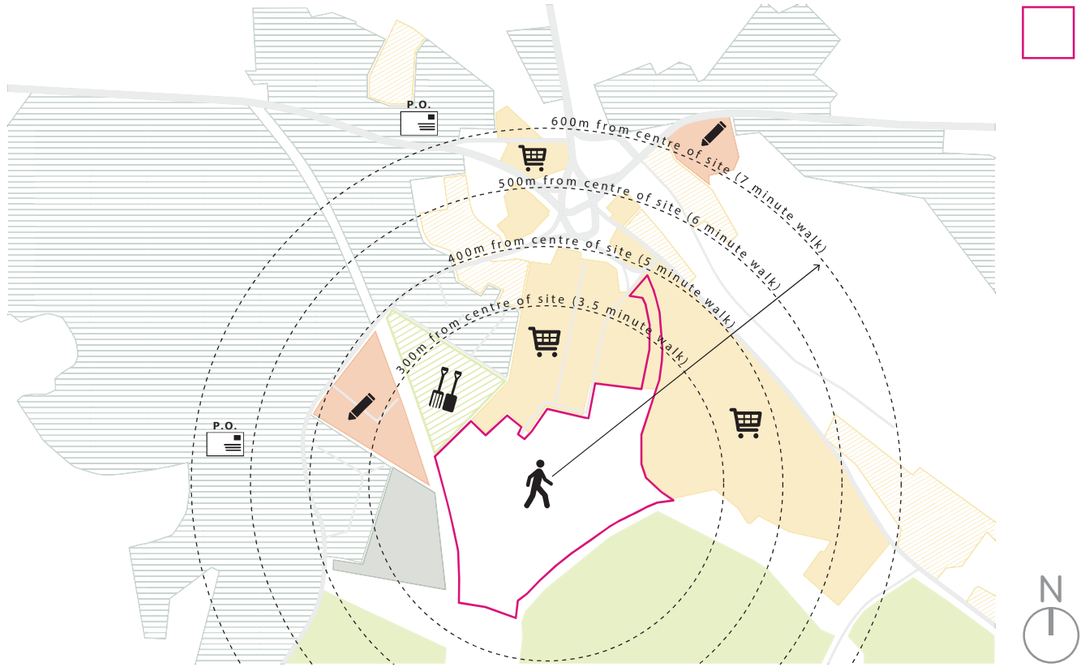
Commercial units along Bleachcroft Way

The local area has a broad range of land use types, in particular large areas of residential development at Stairfoot and Kendray, as well as allotments, schools and local retail centres. As a result, proposals for a residential development on site may not be out of place with the current landscape use in the local area, particularly if connections to Field Lane, and the suburb of Kendray are strengthened.

05 LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

WIDER CONTEXT

WALKING DISTANCES



SITE

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Hunningley Lane allotments, at Field Lane



Kendray Post Office



Tesco superstore at Stairfoot Retail Park

Within a 5 minute walk (400m) from the centre of site, there are allotments, supermarkets and a primary school. A 7 minute walk includes local services such as shops and a post office.

Any new proposals must prioritise these connections, in particular to make access on foot as legible and attractive as possible. The site has the potential to be a walkable neighbourhood, and this must be a main consideration for the layout and appearance of the development such that encourages journeys on foot.

05 LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

LANDSCAPE CONDITION



View from track looking back towards the former B&Q and Bleachcroft Way



Dense vegetated edge to Dob Sike along southern and western boundaries



View towards the back of Tesco/Stairfoot Retail Park



Footpath from Stairfoot Way to Field Lane

The site currently appears to be unmanaged land with overgrown areas of brambles and self-colonising trees, and expanses of rough grass. Many parts of the site are currently inaccessible although there are some informal routes across the site. Fly-tipping is present on site, and the end of Bleachcroft Way is used by travellers. Its location to the back of Bleachcroft Way, behind existing commercial units also contributes to the poor condition of the site.

The site slopes down eastwards towards the disused Dearne Canal. There are steep embankments to the western side of the site, one of which former the railway embankment along the site boundary. These areas are currently inaccessible due to the density of vegetation.

Dob Sike along the south forms a heavily vegetated edge adjacent to farmland and provides strong visual and physical containment to the site.

A section of Bleachcroft Way is closed off with localised earth bunding to prevent vehicles getting onto site. Similar bunding is found all the way along the edge of Stairfoot Way. A public footpath links Stairfoot Way and Field Lane. This runs between the fence line to the former B&Q building and smaller industrial warehouses.

Views from the site are expansive, with residential and commercial areas at Stairfoot, and the farmland towards Swaithe visible.