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Proposed Car Park Extension at ASOS, Spring Park Road, Grimesthorpe, Barnsley

A Landscape & Visual Appraisal of the site



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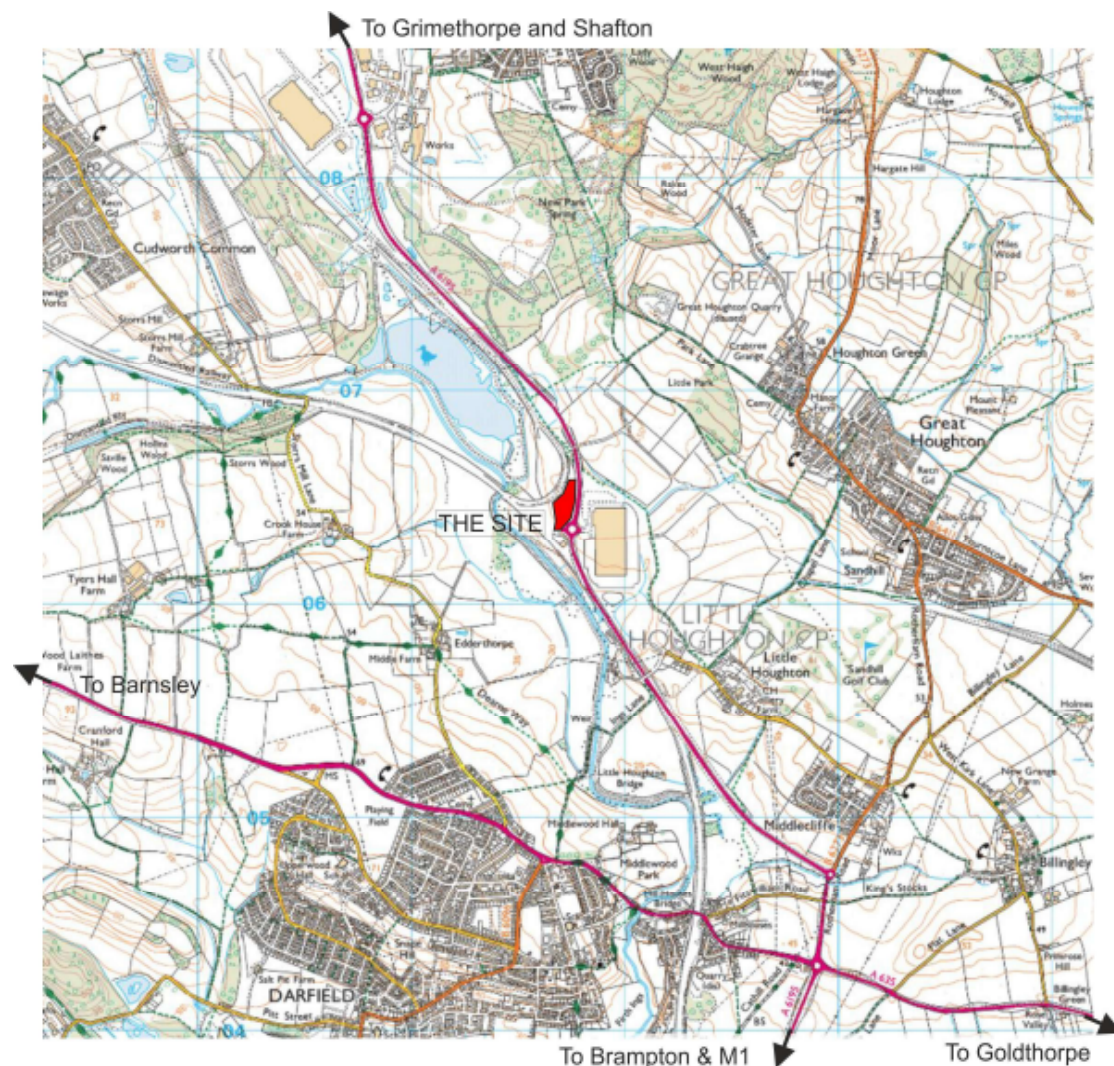
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Location and Context

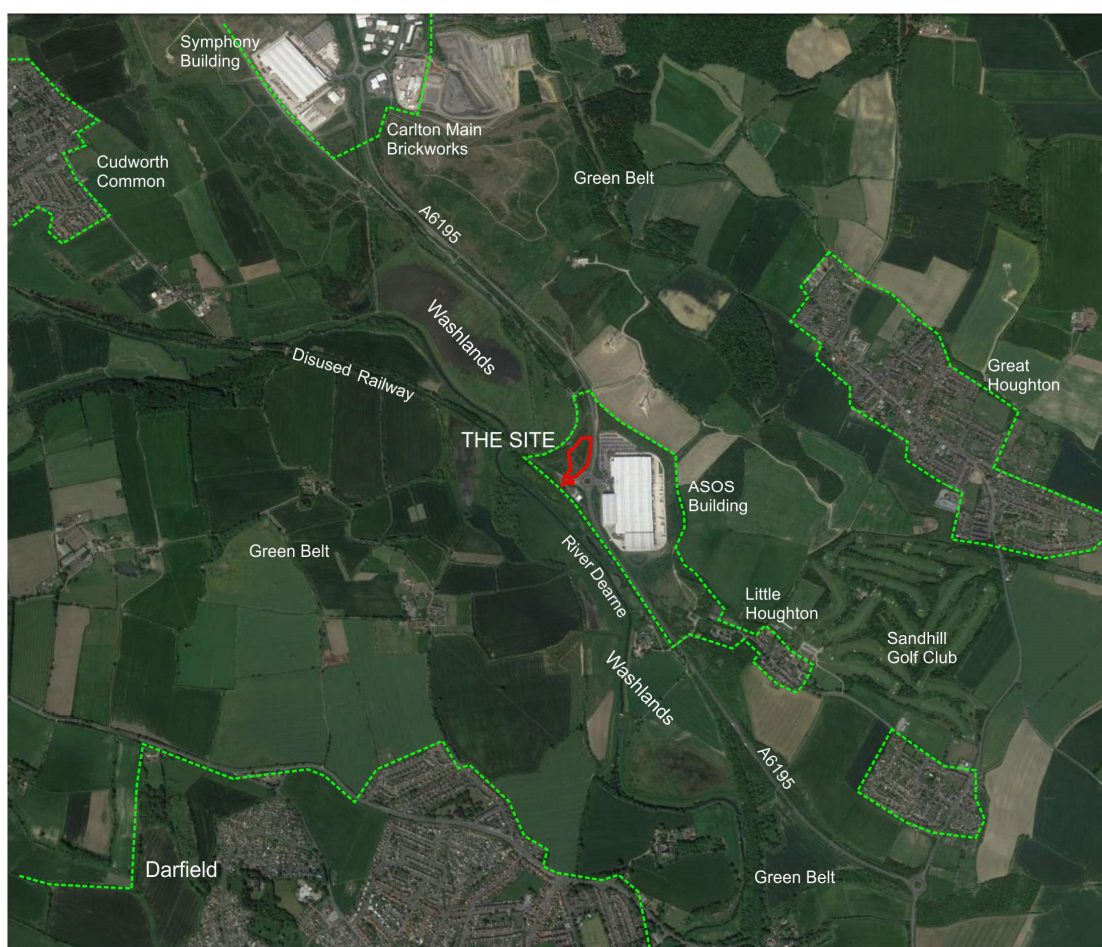
The site is a field of ruderal grasses and regenerating scrub, less than 1.5 hectares in size, located on the eastern side of Park Spring Road (A6195) immediately north of the roundabout adjoining the ASOS building and its associated car park. The site lies at some distance from any settlement, the nearest being Great Houghton and Little Houghton at 1.0km to the west and south-west respectively. Grimesthorpe village lies approximately 2.5km to the north and Cudworth Common 2.5km to the north-west. Darfield is over 1.5km to the south.



LOCATION PLAN

Landscape Policy & Character

Barnsley Metropolitan District's Core Strategy was adopted in September 2011. Together with the saved policies of the Unitary Development Plan, these documents constitute the current Statutory Development Plan. These policy documents will be superseded once the new Local Plan is adopted. To date there is no Proposals Map to accompany the Core Strategy, only key diagrams; so until a more detailed Map is produced, the plan policies will continue to relate to the areas designated on the UDP Map.



AERIAL - LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

On the Core Strategy's Key Diagram, the hatching which denotes the Green Belt's general area extends across the whole of Barnsley district east of the M1. The UDP Map, however, shows the principal developed areas are excluded from the Green Belt, as outlined with a green dashed line on the above Google Earth image. The UDP Policy GS6 'Extent of the Green Belt' has been saved, and the Core Strategy Green Belt Policy (CSP34) states that the Green Belt boundaries will be subject to localised review only. So as the site (outlined in red on the

aerial) is shown located within one of these exclusion areas, the Green Belt policy CSP34 does not apply to it.

According to the Core Strategy, the section of the Dearne River valley in which the site lies is one of five strategic corridors for Green Infrastructure that are subject to Policy CSP33. Entitled the Dearne Valley Green Heart Corridor, the designation is shown on Diagram 5 of the Core Strategy to cover land either side of the River Dearne between Cudworth Common and the River Don. The Green Infrastructure Policy is intended to establish an integrated network that will, amongst other things, *'provide attractive environments where people want to live, work, learn, play, visit and invest'*, and *'enhance biodiversity and landscape character'*.



VIEW NORTH-WEST ACROSS THE DEARNE RIVER VALLEY CLOSE TO THE SITE

There are no other landscape-related designations pertinent to the development of the site for car parking, although the lake to the north-west of the site, beyond the loop of the disused railway line, is recorded as being a site of nature conservation importance (not an SSSI). This lake, together with the floodplain (the 'Washlands') of the Dearne River west of the disused railway line that runs parallel with the A6195, is encompassed within the Environment Agency's Food Zones 2 and 3 (high risk), but the site lies outside these zones.

The Barnsley Borough Landscape Character Assessment (May 2002) places the site in the C2 Lower Dearne Lowland River Floor Landscape Character Area (LCA). The LCA is described as having the following characteristic features:

- **Flat valley floor*** of varying width and degrees of enclosure, framed by sloping valley sides outside the character area.
- **Diverse range of land use** including agriculture, recreation, residential, industry, commercial, communication, landscape renewal and nature conservation.

- **Substantial areas of agricultural land** both in arable and pastoral use, intermixed and surrounded by other landuses and linear features.
- **Large areas without built development or without a dense covering of trees**, giving a sense of openness in much of the character area.
- **Small areas of scrub and trees** scattered throughout the character area, often associated with reclaimed or abandoned land, dismantled railwaylines, watercourses and newly landscaped areas.
- **Disused and active linear transport/communication routes running along and across the valley floor*** including dismantled railways, pylons, the River Dearne and the newly constructed A6195 road.
- **Immature, newly created landscapes*** in the form of open grass areas and young tree planting, associated with reclaimed industrial areas and the A6195.
- **Localised clusters of new warehouse style buildings*** bringing large scale buildings into the relatively open landscape.
- **Open water*** in the form of the River Dearne, streams, dikes, flashes and man made lakes.

In evidence of the assessed Character Type, those characteristics marked by an *asterix are present on the site or very close to it. The A6195 passes immediately alongside the site and the ASOS warehouse, together with its associated car park, stands immediately across the road to the east. Along the other two sides of the roughly triangularly-shaped plot are disused railway lines, sections of which have become so overgrown with regenerating vegetation that they are impassable on foot. Beyond the disused line to the north-west is the aforementioned expanse of open water.



VIEW SOUTH FROM THE A6195 TOWARDS THE ASOS ROUNDABOUT

In order to establish a strategy for the LCA, in 2002 The Barnsley Borough Landscape Character Assessment evaluated the strength and condition of the landscape of the Lower Dearne Lowland River Floor. Then in 2016, the Borough undertook a review of the evaluation in the light of changes that had occurred in the intervening period. In brief, their findings were as follows:

	2002	2016
Strength of character	<i>moderate</i>	<i>moderate (but weaker)</i>
Condition	<i>moderate</i>	<i>moderate (but weaker)</i>
Landscape sensitivity	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>
Landscape capacity	<i>low</i>	<i>low</i>

From the above evaluation, the strategy objectives for the LCA are to:

- *Conserve and enhance the open, undeveloped character of the valley floor*
- *Conserve and enhance existing green corridors*
- *Conserve and enhance existing wildlife habitats*
- *Conserve and enhance the condition of the farmland*

In 2002 the Landscape Character Assessment included a more detailed commentary on land to the western edge of Grimethorpe. It concluded that development to the west of the A6195 would be uncharacteristic of the undeveloped character of C2 and would truncate the open valley floor. Despite this, in 2005 outline planning permission was granted for redevelopment of the former open cast colliery site linked to a regeneration initiative. A large warehouse occupied by Symphony now stands on the site and is an extremely prominent feature in the landscape. The objective in the 2002 Assessment to keep the land to the west of the A6195 undeveloped was not therefore achieved.



VIEW EAST FROM THE SITE TOWARDS THE ASOS BUILDING

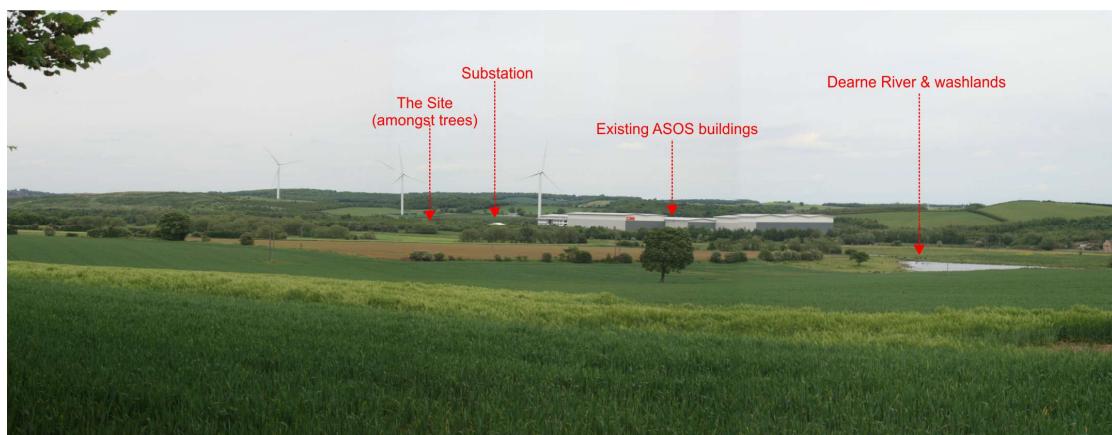
The Site Setting

The annotated aerial photo on page 3 above shows that the site does not lie in the Green Belt and it is remote from any settlement. It also illustrates that the proposed development site, although positioned on the other (west) side of the A6195 from the existing development, is in close proximity to the ASOS warehouse and to its principal car park on the north/north-west side of the building.



VIEW EAST FROM THE SOUTH END OF THE SITE TO THE ASOS BUILDING

The entrance to the site is west off a roundabout on the A6195, the same roundabout from which is accessed the ASOS building to the east. The western spur off the roundabout already serves an energy sub-station, located on a small plot immediately adjacent to the site to the south. Around the sub-station on all sides is young woodland up to 10 metres tall, which so shrouds the structure that only its roof is visible from much of the surrounding valley landscape. This woodland links with vegetation along the adjacent disused railway line to the south and west, with trees surrounding the lake to the north and with scrubland east of Cudworth Common, providing a continuous corridor of vegetation throughout the length of the valley.



THE SETTING OF THE SITE AND ASOS BUILDING & WIND TURBINES WITHIN THE VALLEY

The River Dearne meanders on a course south-eastwards along the valley floor, following the west side of the A6195. After flowing alongside the lake, it crosses beneath the disused railway line at a point 300 metres north-west of the site. It thereafter continues south before turning east at Brampton, 3.5 kilometres from the site, where the washlands of its floodplain are a sanctuary for wading birds at the RSPB reserve of Old Moor (Dearne Valley). Attracted to this reserve, the birds forage and nest along the length of the Dearne as far as to the lake north of the site.



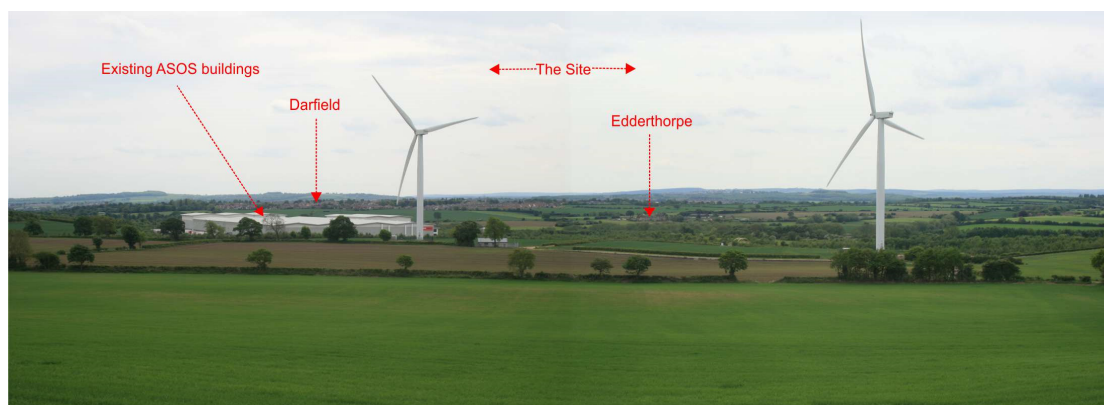
THE DEARNE RIVER'S 'WASHLANDS' NORTH-EAST OF THE SITE, AN ATTRACTION FOR
WADERS

Streams feed into the Dearne River from the surrounding higher ground. The valley floor lies at approximately 35.0m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), whilst the valley sides reach up to 60.0/65.0m AOD. The principal villages of Darfield (1.5Km to the south of the site), Great Houghton (1.2km to the east), and Cudworth Common (2.5Km to the north-west) all stand on this higher ground at the top of the valley sides. The smaller hamlet of Little Houghton is the nearest settlement to the site, situated midway up the valley side at a little less than 1.0km to the south-east.

There are public rights of way passing along the valley and crossing it at a couple of locations. A bridleway links Great Houghton with Little Houghton, and in turn there is a footpath linking Little Houghton with Darfield, via Ings Lane. There is also a footpath heading north out of Little Houghton which passes down into the valley behind the ASOS building to meet the A6195 and run alongside it in a northerly direction.

A spur off the above path crosses westwards over the A6195 on a footbridge just north of the site. After crossing the road it heads south, ramping down to join a wide footpath/cycleway set within the road verge alongside the site (see the photo on Page 5 above).

The bridleway that heads north-west out of Great Houghton towards Grimesthorpe follows a farm track known as Park Lane, which occupies a ridge above the Dearne Valley. As a result of its position and elevation, there are views south-west from the bridleway across the valley below.



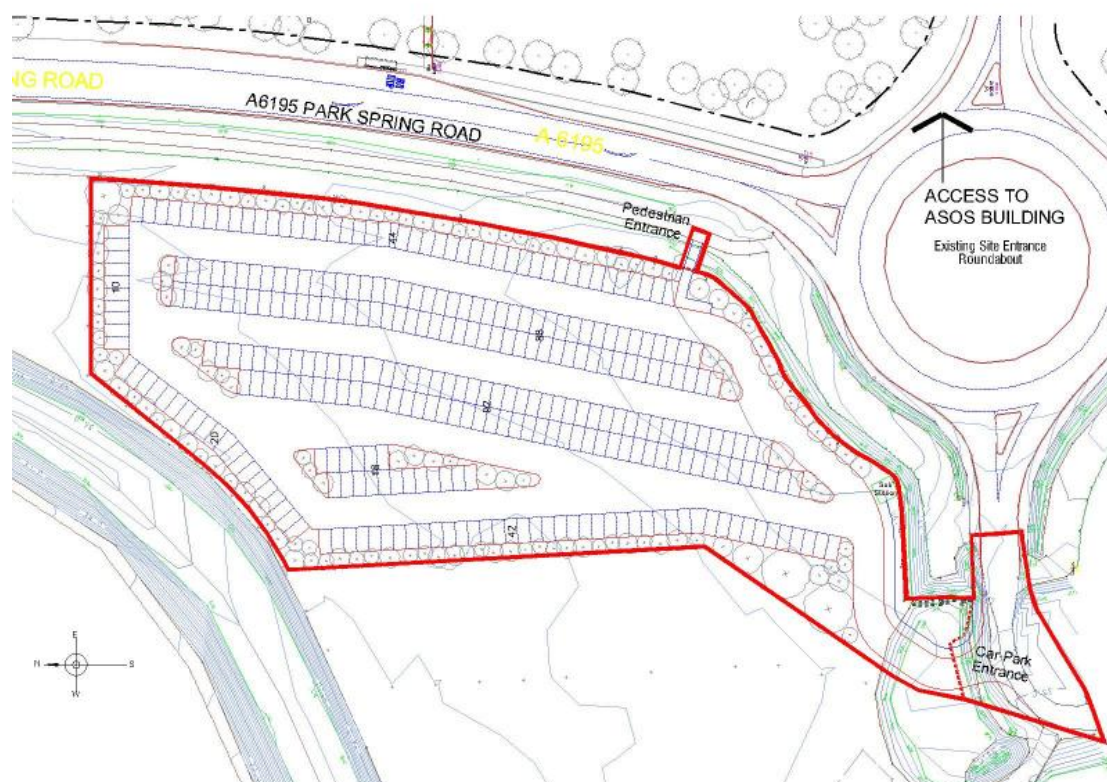
VIEW SOUTH-WEST ACROSS THE DEARNE VALLEY FROM THE BRIDLEWAY ON PARK LANE,
GREAT HOUGHTON

The Dearne Way Long Distance Footpath follows the Dearne River eastwards out of Barnsley, before cutting across higher ground through the countryside north-west of Darfield. Before reaching Darfield, it passes back down into the valley at Edderthorpe, coming to within almost 1.0km of the site. It then continues south to meet the A635 at Darfield, before re-joining the river at Mill Houses Bridge.

As denoted by a green dashed line on the Location Plan, there are several other public footpaths in the vicinity of Great Houghton, but they head north-eastwards out of the village away from the site.

Sandhill Golf Club has been laid out on the sloping valley side between Great Houghton and Little Houghton. It is an extensively planted course so that the fairways and greens are well-enclosed, and there are few opportunities for views across the valley landscape.

Development Proposals



A PLAN OF THE PROPOSED CAR PARK ON THE TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY OF THE SITE

In the above drawing extract, the scheme for the layout of the proposed car park designed by AJA Architects, is shown superimposed upon the topographical survey of the site (dwg. No. 6057-004). The existing vegetation on the site is not shown – the trees are illustrative only.

The scheme assumes a site cleared of vegetation, and comprises a bitumen macadam car park set out in back-to-back bays of blocks of approximately 72 bays (36 x 2).

The access to the car park will be off the existing access road which serves the energy sub-station on the adjacent plot to the south. The spur of this access into the site will be ramped to overcome the change in level of approximately one metre up to the level of the site.

It is intended to retain the existing vegetation that surrounds the site, including the hedgerow and verge alongside the A6195 and the young trees and patches of wildflower on the disused railway embankment.

The Site Features



AERIAL OF THE SITE AND OF ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE ASOS BUILDING

The site is presently an area of rough grassland with regenerating willow scrub and birch carr. Some areas have become boggy and grass has given way to mosses.



VIEW NORTH ACROSS THE SITE

Owing to the extent of the regenerating willow and birch, the site has a sense of enclosure, although the ASOS building can be seen over the boundary hedgerow to the east, and the north-east aspect is dominated by the three wind turbines in the valley north of the ASOS site.

On the embankment of the disused railway at the north/western edge of the site are open areas of wildflowers, although the embankment and disused track is largely covered in young mixed woodland.



VIEW ALONG THE DISUSED RAILWAY LINE BY THE NORTH BOUNDARY OF THE SITE

Species within the young woodland include oak, ash, wild cherry, birch, alder, willow, hawthorn, gorse and broom.

At its southern end the site is raised slightly above the level of the A6195, standing approximately one metre above the road and the proposed access drive which is shared with that to the sub-station.



THE SUB-STATION ACCESS OFF THE ROUNDABOUT AT THE SOUTH END OF THE SITE

As shown in the above photograph, beyond the edge of the site (as defined by the red line on the proposals plan) is more meadow before the woodland belt of the disused railway line is reached. Although the height of the belt is not great, reaching no more than 10.0 metres, it forms a strong screen for views to and from the valley in the west.

The birch trees on the site are mainly growing in small groups, and nowhere have they matured to a height of more than 8.0 metres.



ONE OF THE MANY GROUPS OF REGENERATING BIRCH TREES ON THE SITE

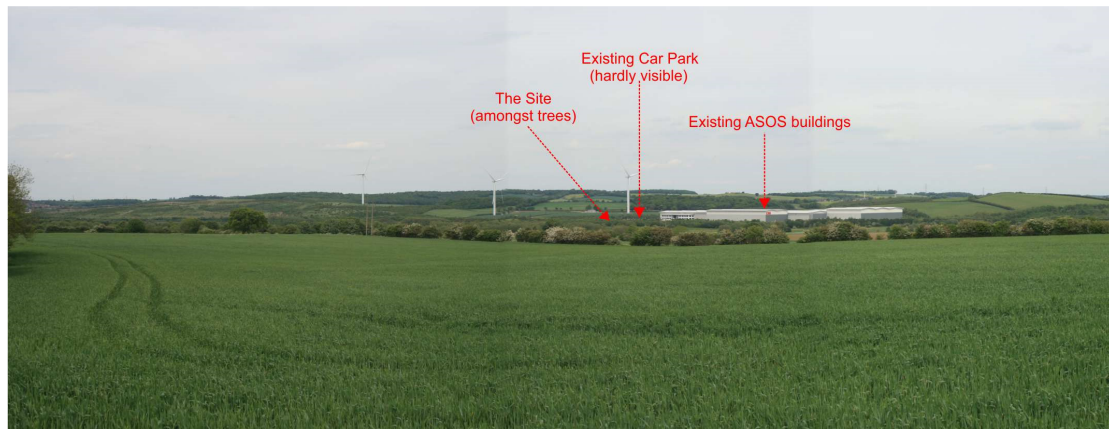
Marking the eastern edge of the site, and dividing it from the 10.0m-wide grass verge that runs alongside the A6195, is a hawthorn hedge of approximately 3.5m height.



VIEW NORTH FROM THE PROPOSED ACCESS OFF THE ASOS ROUNDABOUT, SHOWING THE HEDGE AND VERGE THAT DIVIDE THE SITE FROM THE A6195, AND THE GROUPS OF BIRCH TREES NATURALISING ON THE SITE

Visual issues

The attractiveness of the valley landscape has been adversely affected by the development of the ASOS building and more recently by the three wind turbines advancing up the valley in the adjacent fields to the north of the building. In views across the landscape, these structures are the most prominent features within the valley, their white colour contrasting strongly with the verdant landscape of the valley sides. By contrast, the proposed car park will have very little height and its scale will be modest compared to these structures.



VIEW TOWARDS THE SITE FROM THE A635 SALTERBROOK ROAD, DARFIELD (NEXT TO THE BRIDLEWAY TO EDDERTHORPE)

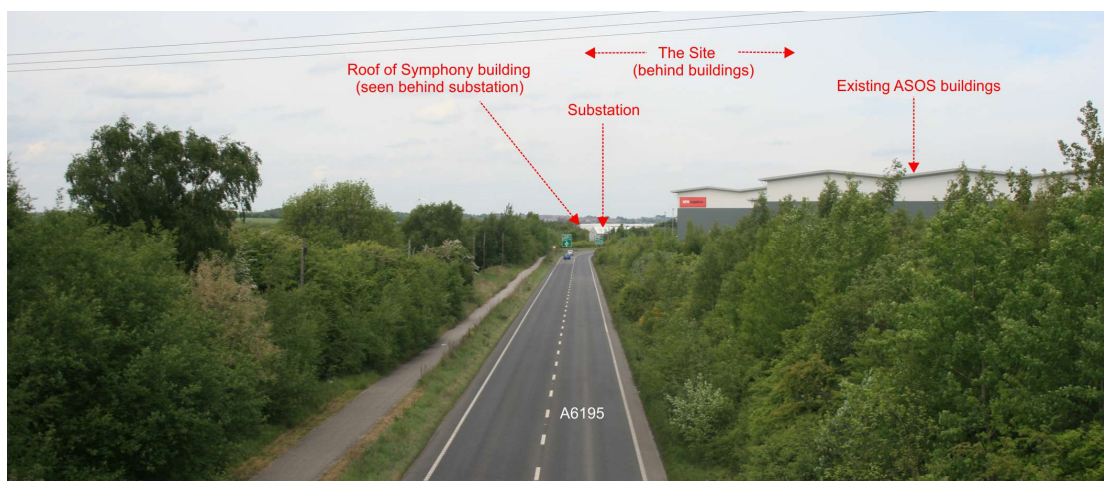
At first consideration, the car park's position on the floor of the valley would suggest that it is likely to be visible in views from the surrounding higher ground. But as illustrated in the above photograph from the edge of Darfield, for views from the west and the south, the trees and shrubs within the valley, notably those naturalised along the disused railway line, screen the existing ASOS car park. Only the luminaires of the lighting columns can just be seen. The same should be true of the proposed car park should it be constructed.



VIEW NORTH-EAST TOWARDS THE SITE FROM DEARNE WAY AT EDDERTHORPE

The potential for the proposed car park to be seen from viewpoints at a lower level in the valley is even more restricted, for example from homes in Edderthorpe, and from the Dearne Way Long Distance Footpath's section between the Mill Houses Bridge (Darfield) and Edderthorpe. Where the Dearne Way rises up the contours to the west, it reaches no higher elevation than the Salterbrook Road in Darfield; so views to the site from the path will be similar to that from the road, i.e. restricted to the luminaires of the lighting columns, as described above.

There are neither views north towards the site from Little Houghton, nor from footpaths entering the village from the north, owing to the vegetation that surrounds that side of the settlement. For views from the edges of Great Houghton to the west of the site, the potential for the proposed development to be seen is curtailed by both the presence of the ASOS building and by an intervening ridge of higher ground. The only views of any significance will be from the Park Lane bridleway which leads out of Great Houghton to the north – as shown on the photograph on Page 9 above. From here it is likely that the vehicles within the car park will be visible as well as the lighting columns; although the site is more than 1.0km away, so they will not figure strongly in any views. Moreover, where the car park is visible, it will be seen in the context of, and appear to be ancillary to, the ASOS building, and will therefore not be incongruous in the scene.



VIEW NORTH TO THE SITE FROM THE BRIDGE BETWEEN LITTLE HOUGHTON & INGS LANE

For approaches towards the site along the A6195 from the south, the energy sub-station on the south side of the site is visible, as is the roof of the ASOS building. These structures, together with the surrounding vegetation, hide the site in views from the south. Depending on the height of any lighting columns proposed for the site, their luminaires may be visible from the bridge over the A6195 between Little Houghton and Ings Lane (see above photograph).

Conclusions and recommendations

The site is neither within the Green Belt nor in any other area designated for special protection. The lake of conservation importance to the north of the site and the Dearne River Floodplain/Washlands are both physically and visually separated from the site by disused railway lines, which are themselves colonised by naturally regenerating vegetation.

The character of the landscape of Barnsley District has been assessed by the Local Authority, and the area in which the site lies is placed within the C2 Lower Dearne Lowland River Floor Landscape Character Area (LCA). In spite of the LCA being assessed to have a low capacity to development, development of the ASOS building was permitted, as were several later additions to it and an extension to its car park on the east side of the A6195. The original character study argued that the land west of the A6195 should be especially protected from development, but since the date of the study, the Symphony building, which stands on the west side of the A6195 1.5km to the north-east of the site, has been erected (its roof can be seen in the forgoing photograph). It is noteworthy that the site's position west of the A6195 puts it in a similar relative position in the valley to the Symphony building.

Barnsley's Core Strategy does contain a Green Infrastructure Policy which is intended to establish an integrated network that will, amongst other things, *'provide attractive environments where people want to live, work, learn, play, visit and invest'*, and *'enhance biodiversity and landscape character'*. Whilst the proposed development will meet the former of these objectives, it is unlikely to be able to bring enhancement as it will be turning a field of meadow grassland and regenerating woodland into a tarmacadam car park. However, it has been demonstrated above that any adverse effect on the overall landscape character of the Dearne Valley will not be significant. Potential effects on biodiversity may to some extent be offset by including native species in any landscape proposals for the site and by following the recommendations of the Ecologist.

There are a number of trees, mainly naturalised birch, that will be lost should the development in its present form be permitted. The trees are, however, not mature and of only small stature, so their loss will not be irreplaceable by compensatory plantings in the short term. The existing hedge, which marks the eastern boundary of the site and screens the site for views from the road, will be retained except for a small section where the pedestrian access is proposed, and will prevent all but glimpses of parked cars from passing traffic and pedestrians once the car park is operational.

The forgoing study has identified that no views across the Dearne Valley landscape will be significantly adversely affected by the development. The site is shrouded in trees for views from the west and south and there are no public viewpoints in the north. Views of the site are hardly possible from the Dearne Way except for slight distant glimpses where the path is routed high enough on the valley's western slopes. Views westwards from Great Houghton are largely curtailed by the ASOS building and by intervening topography; only from the village's northern extremity is the site visible. Sight of the development will be possible from the bridleway on Park Lane (north of the village), but the new car park will appear insignificant as it will be seen in the context of the ASOS building and of the three huge wind turbine structures in the foreground of the view.

It is probable that the development will be more visible after dark when the car park is lit. The luminaires of the lighting columns will be seen from the A6195 and will appear over the intervening vegetation in some views across the valley. However, in most views the lights will read as an extension to the existing lighting of the established car park on the north side of the road.

Except in being unable to guarantee enhancement to landscape character and biodiversity, this study has found that there are no landscape-related planning policies that would be contravened by the development of the site for the proposed use. The extant character of the landscape would not be lost, and the visual amenity value of views would not be significantly adversely compromised. On the basis of sustainable development, the development in principle should not be refused.