

Local context

Historic context

Historic Growth

The area has been inhabited since the Roman era and there is evidence of an extensive settlement within Pounds Wood situated to the east of the site. The location of this Romano-British camp is shown on the adjacent designations plan.

The broad framework of settlements, roads and common land which is still evident today was established during the later Saxon period. The area came to be characterised by dispersed farmsteads and cottages focused around village greens through a process of woodland clearance and agricultural management of the land.

From the medieval era onward the area remained sparsely settled and characterised by agricultural land of enclosed fields and hedgerows interspersed with woodland.

Maps dating from the 1700s show that the largest settlement in the area was at Rayleigh where a town had developed at the foot of the castle while Hadleigh had grown into a small village. Smaller clusters of farmsteads were evident along the main route between the settlements (now the A129) including at Sawns Green to the south west of the site (as shown on the 1777 Chapman and Andre map of Essex) and to the north west of the site at the current junction of the A127 and A129.

By the 1900's homes had been developed along the A129 creating an almost continuous pattern of linear development between Hadleigh and Rayleigh although the area maintained its rural character. Major residential growth took place from the 1960s onward and by the 1970s the area had the suburban character we recognise today.

Historic Landscape

The establishment of an extensive royal estate, deer parks and castle during the 1200s transformed the character of the area and played a major role in establishing the landscape we see today of woodland and small, irregular enclosed fields. Wooded areas within the royal estate became intensively managed for a range of functions including hunting and timber production while land outside royal control took on a more fragmented appearance due to small scale agricultural management by numerous smallholdings.

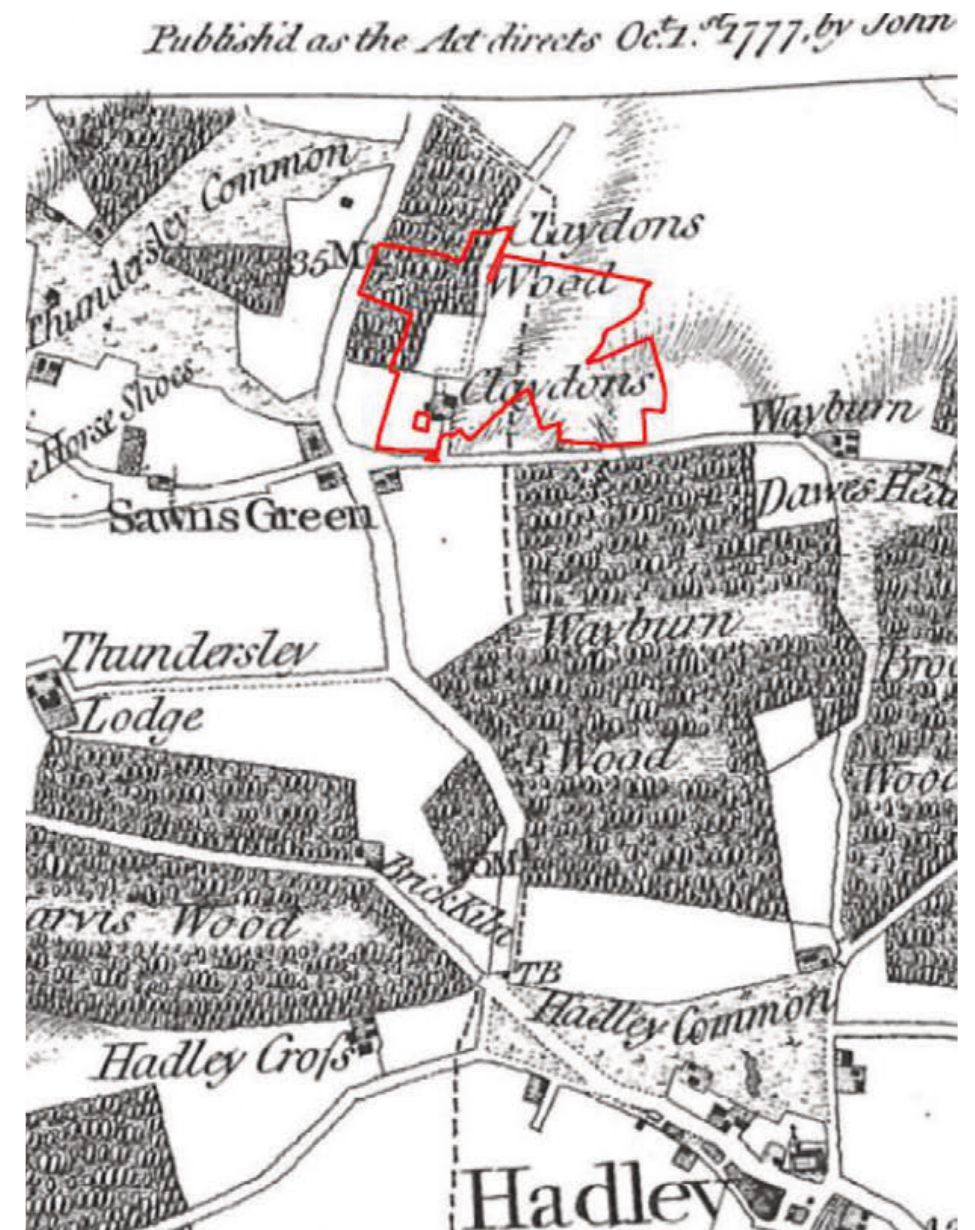
Today the area to the north of Daws Heath is listed as a Designated Ancient Landscape due to the presence of pre-1600 historic hedgerows and extensive ancient woodland which provide the area with a distinctive sense of place.

Historic Mapping

The historic mapping, right illustrates the changing character and landscape context of the Site.

The Site has remained as agricultural land throughout its documented history and the wider area was of a rural nature and comprised of a patchwork of small, enclosed fields. These fields featured corridors of hedgerows and trees, as shown on the 1866 map, right. These fields have gradually been enlarged due to increasingly intensive agricultural management from the mid 1800s onward resulting in a loss of hedgerows and vegetation cover.

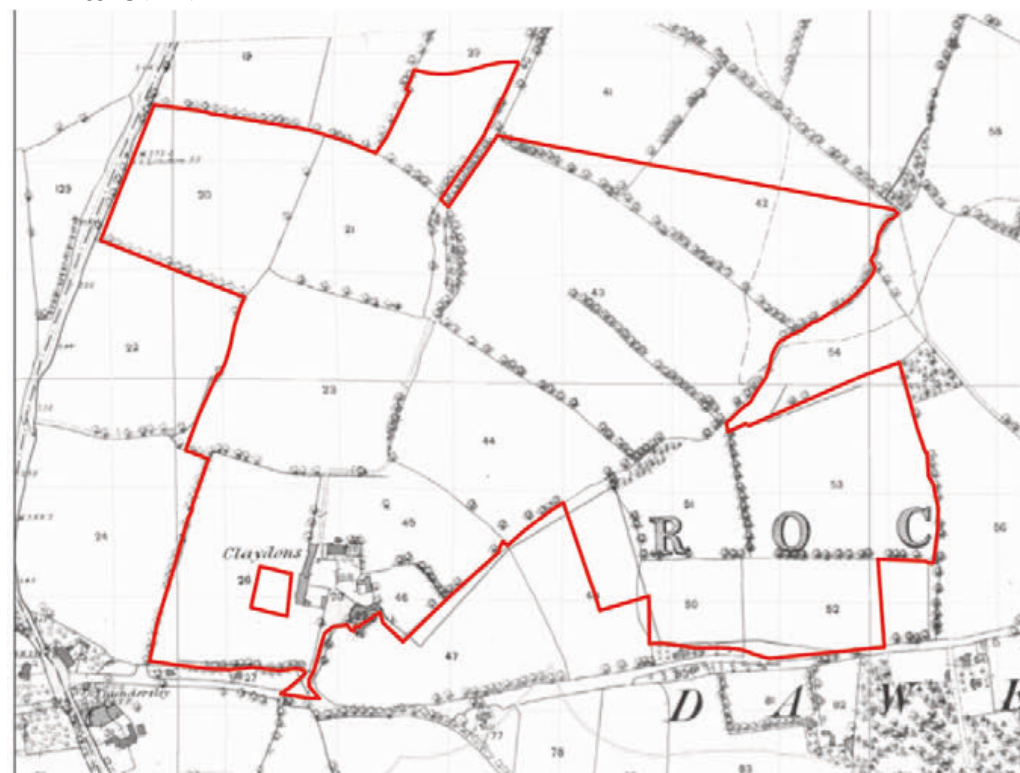
There are a few traces of the ancient field pattern today within the site which exist as a number of unmapped historic field boundaries which have been infilled or used for drainage. The historic remnants of wooded boundaries and enclosed green lanes along the Site's edge provide localised containment in significant parts of the Site.



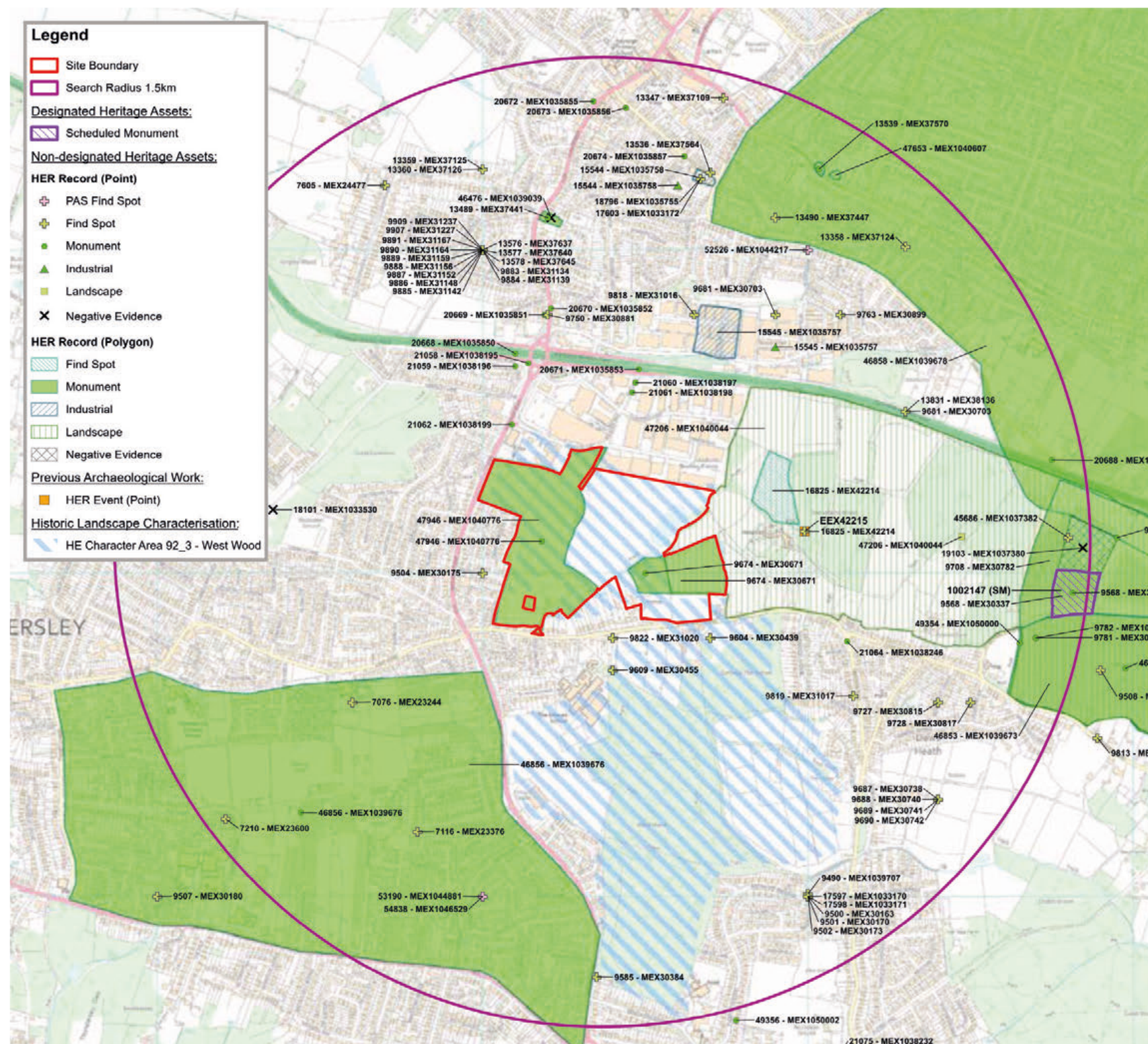
1777 Chapman and Andre Map of Essex (from RPS Archaeological assessment)

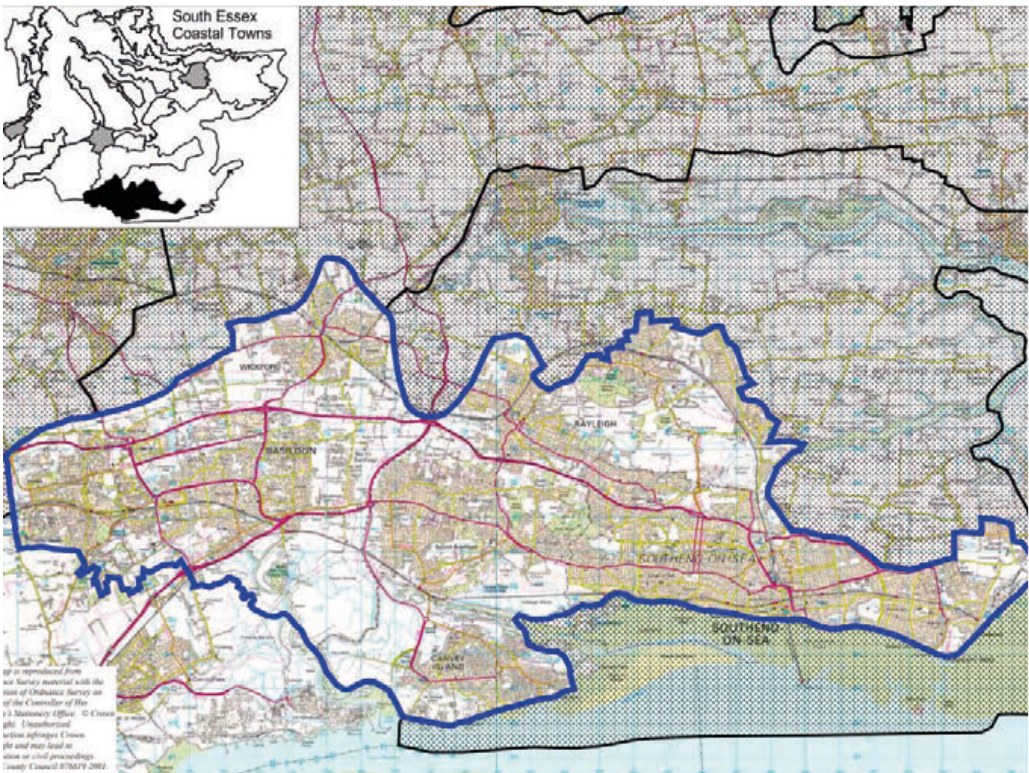


Tithe Mapping (1838)

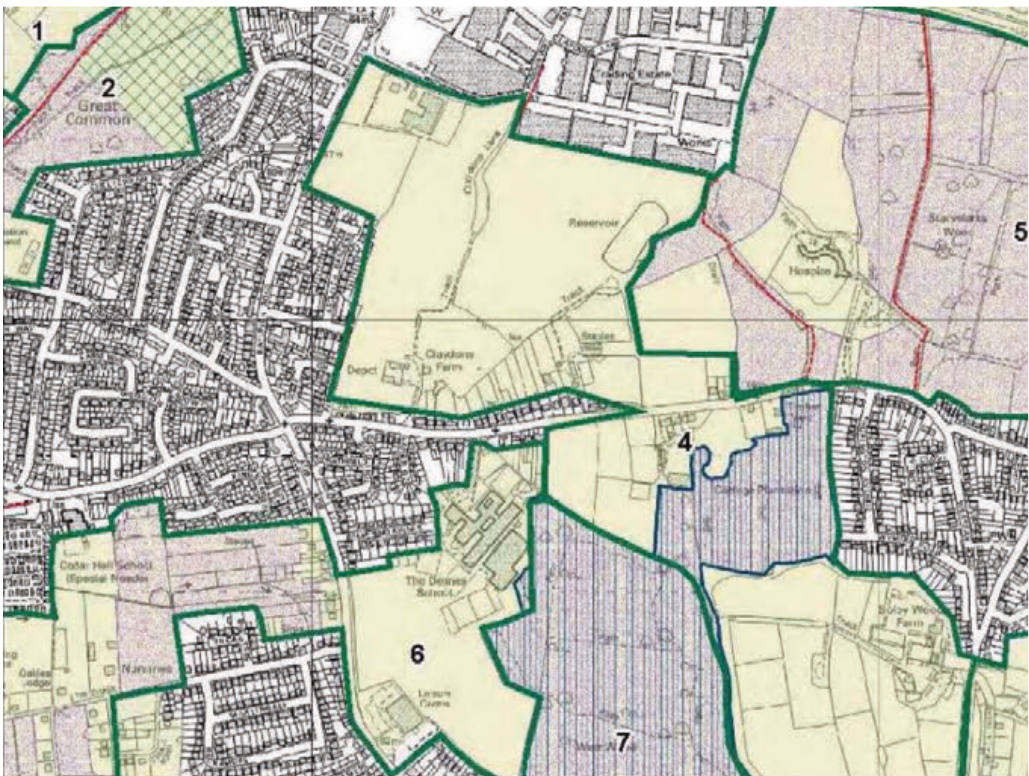


Tithe Mapping (1866)





Extract from Green Belt Landscape Assessment, 2010



Extract from Essex Landscape Character Area to show the extent of the South Essex Coastal Towns LCA

Local context

Landscape character

This section describes the Site and its surrounding landscape character in general terms. More detailed information can be found in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

Wider Landscape Context

Borough Scale

At a local scale the area falls within Area 4 of the Green Belt Landscape Assessment undertaken by Essex Landscape Design in 2010. The characteristic elements of Area 4 are listed as:

- The topography is rolling with small valleys. It contains areas of pasture, woodland and hedgerows with field boundary trees.
- The field pattern is generally fairly small scale, and the land is well managed for grazing.
- The landscape is very attractive due to the individual elements and the contrasts. The rolling landform and well vegetated field boundaries are key elements of its landscape character.
- There are attractive views within the area and looking into the area from surrounding roads and other viewpoints. The industrial estate on the northern edge is reasonably well screened and set below the high ground in views from the south. The area is very attractive in views from Daws Heath Road.

The 2010 assessment concluded that the Landscape Sensitivity of Area 4 is high due to:

- Substantial area of ancient woodland and small-scale pasture – the ancient woodland is outside and to the south of the Site. The intensification of agricultural operations within the land holding have enlarged the field pattern and results in the absence of small-scale pastures.
- Woodland boundary banks and ancient pattern of field enclosure contribute to the strong character of the area – There are few historic remnants of the ancient field pattern within the Site and some enclosed green lanes are present on the edge of the Site.
- The rolling topography and small scale pasture in the northern portion of Area 4 contrasts with the enclosed ancient woodland to the south and contributes to the setting of the nature reserve. The loss of the small-scale field pattern has not been noted in the assessment and therefore the actions have resulted in the loss of vegetative cover and hedgerows and an erosion of the rural qualities of the landscape.

Living Landscapes

The Essex Wildlife Trust have prepared a visioning document (2010) to guide the delivery of the Hadleigh and Daws Heath Complex living landscape. This strategy aims to benefit biodiversity and the local community through ecological enhancement and recreational.

In relation to the Site, the objective is to create woodland and plant hedgerows which integrate into the network of ancient woodlands and wildlife Sites. This document is considered in more detail in the Ecological Assessment prepared by SES.

Site Specific Landscape Character

The Site is located on the edge of the urban areas of Thundersley and Rayleigh. The developed context comprises residential, commercial, and retail areas. The variation in townscape components results in a mixed character dominated by larger scale retail and commercial ‘sheds’ to the north and smaller scale residential and domestic scale development to the west and south.

To the east there is a change in character from the urban area to rural wooded landscape, which dominates the context. The wooded landscape to the east is intimate and enclosed.

One notable aspect of the Site is the landform. This can be differentiated into two parts; the elevated and relatively flat land to the south and west at approximately 77m AOD gently falling to 60m AOD and the sloping land to the east falling relatively steeply from 75m AOD to 50m AOD.

Most of the Site can be defined as being currently ‘open’ as a result of the intensification of the agricultural land, management and loss of hedgerows.

The south and south eastern portions comprise a number of paddocks and small pastures defined by a series of mature hedgerows. In these areas there are several connected green lanes, which creates an intimate setting.

The Site

The Site is situated in a peri-urban location and has a character and appearance consistent with the peri-urban qualities of this settlement edge location. The existing townscape is evident and has a strong influence over the Site. The eastern portion is more ‘rural’ in character and adjoins the off-Site wildlife areas.

Within the Green Belt Landscape Assessment, 2010, the visual sensitivity of the Site and wider area is recorded as being High, based on the following recorded observations:

- General Visibility: Northern part of the area is more steeply sloping with views east. Central part of the Site is densely wooded and enclosed. Southern part is enclosed and well screened by woodland and mature hedgerows.
- Properties in the immediate vicinity of the area. Scatter of houses and farmsteads along Daws Heath Road within the Site.
- Mitigation: Scope to mitigate the impacts of development in the southern part of the Site through additional planting.

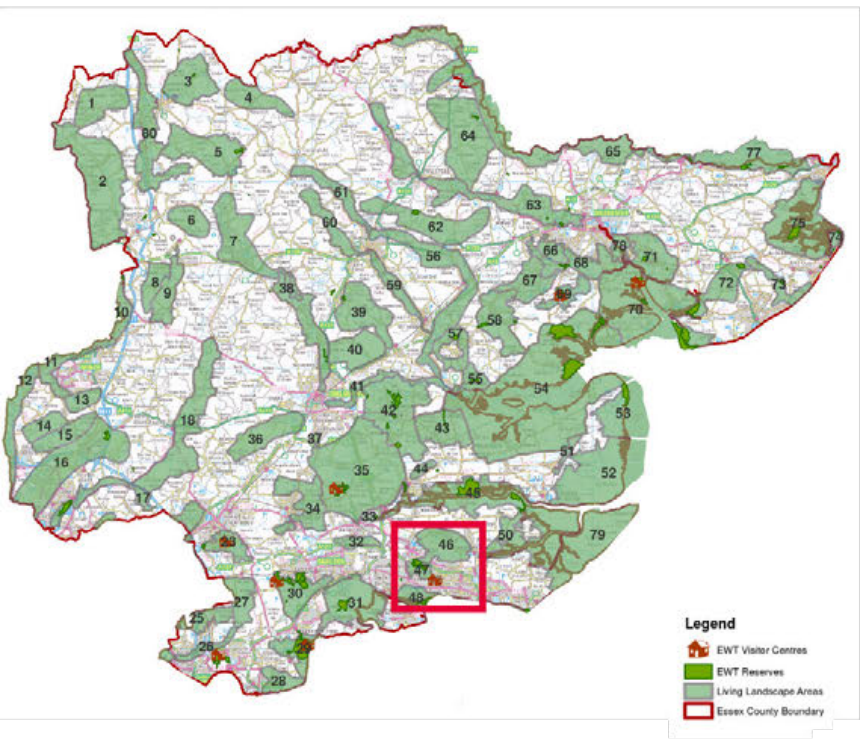
Following our analysis, in terms of visual containment, existing residential properties prevent views into the Site from the majority of the road network in the vicinity of the Site. Exceptions exist for a short section of Daws Heath Road near to the equestrian facilities, Rayleigh Road to the north-east, and from the end of Asquith Avenue and alongside Firfield Road. To the north the extent of the visual envelope is defined by the development off Stadium Way.

Views from the east are limited and obscured by the presence of the characteristic woodland and mature hedge lines. Overall, the extent to which the Site is visible from the wider area is limited, so that the primary issue is local views and immediate neighbours.

Local context

Green infrastructure

This spread provides an overview of the Green Infrastructure (GI) network surrounding the site. GI includes areas of ancient woodland and nature reserves and has multifarious benefits, providing invaluable social, economic, ecological and recreational resource, which are outlined below. GI engenders a sense of place and identity to a settlement and the local community.



Social, Recreational and Health Benefits

The GI assets shown on the opposite plan are critical in providing a positive environment for the health and wellbeing of the community. The woodland and nature reserves allow people to exercise and connect with each other; enhancing their connectivity and relationship with their environment.

Ecological and Environmental Benefits

The green network surrounding the Site also plays a key role in strengthening biodiversity and reducing climate change in the local area. The considerable amount of tree canopy cover through the woodland in the area contributes towards climate change mitigation, providing a positive effect on the urban heat island effect through evapotranspiration and shading. The features described in the following paragraphs are an important local amenity that allow people of all ages to encounter and learn about nature while also providing walking and recreation routes alongside opportunities for quiet relaxation.

Essex Living Landscapes

The site is within the Daws Heath Essex Living Landscape Area (47) and in close proximity to sites 46 (to the north-west) and 48 (to the south). The wider Living Landscape network is shown on the adjacent plan.

Living Landscapes is a scheme managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust which promotes conservation and education within local communities and ensures that land is available for people to interact with nature. It is about allowing bio-diversity to thrive and working to restore, recreate and reconnect local wildlife habitats, protecting many species and ensuring they can move through the landscape with ease.

The Daws Heath Living Landscape Area is comprised of approximately 470 ha of woodland, grassland meadow and glades. It also includes two Nature Reserves (Little Haven and the Great Wood) and two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (Garrold's Meadow and the Great Wood SSSI). As a result of close management, a number of rare species including the Heath Fritillary butterfly are present in the area.

Key areas within the Living Landscape are described further, right.

Little Haven Nature Reserve

The grounds of Little Haven Hospice are a nature reserve containing woodland, acidic grassland and dense hedgerows which form important habitats for birdlife and rare flowering plants. The woodland is a remnant of the historic woodland which spanned Daws Heath area, connecting Hadleigh Great Wood in the east to Valeria Wells Wood in the west.

Tile Wood

Tile Wood forms a key ecological corridor in an urbanised area connecting Little Haven and Pound Wood nature reserves. It is one of the oldest ancient woodlands in the area and is home to wood ants and woodland plants including wood-rush and bluebells.

Pound Wood

This large ancient woodland has undergone major restoration and is an important habitat for birds, flowers and rare butterflies and includes areas of managed coppices, water bodies and woodland dells. It also contains important archaeological features including medieval woodbanks and ponds.



Local context

Urban character

This spread outlines key elements such as movement routes, edges (real or perceived boundaries), nodes (destinations or activity areas) and landmarks (identifiable features), which collectively give settlements their own distinctive character.



Morphology

The local area is characterised by urban development permeated by pockets of green space and woodland surrounded by agricultural land. Development is focused in the historic town of Rayleigh, to the north of the Site and Hadleigh to the south, with linear development along the A129 between the two settlements. Thundersley is a good example of this.

The area is primarily residential in character with a predominantly gridded street network and occasional cul-de-sacs, industrial and office use along the A129 to the north of the Site.

Land to the east and west of the Site is generally of a more open, agricultural character with the exception of Daws Heath, a nucleated village with clearly defined edges.

Key Nodes and Landmarks

The historic core of Rayleigh is the primary retail and social centre in the local area with smaller nodes in Thundersley and at the junction of the A129 and Hart Road adjoining the Site providing more localised services.

Rayleigh Windmill, Rayleigh Mount and Holy Trinity Church in the centre of Rayleigh are key local landmarks.

Listed buildings are primarily found along Rayleigh's historic high street with other occasional listed buildings distributed through the wider area.

The network of woodland, green spaces and nature reserves are also key points of interest and recreation within the area which are popular with local residents and visitors.

Edges

The settlement edges generally comprise of attractive natural green spaces, woodland and agricultural land which are accessible through a network of public rights of way that connect into the surrounding countryside.

The A127 running east-west between Rayleigh and Thundersley is a heavily trafficked route which forms both a real and perceived barrier to pedestrian movement and is the most notable cause of severance within the area.

Vehicular Movement

The junction of the A127 and the A129 to the north west of the Site serves as a key vehicular access point into both Rayleigh and Thundersley.

Within Thundersley, Hart Road and Daws Heath Road serve as the primary movement corridors for with residential streets branching off these routes.



Local context

Facilities

The Site is located in Thundersley and therefore is close by to a wide variety of facilities.



Local Facilities

The Site is bounded to the north by the Rayleigh Retail Park, which features a range of large box retail and hardware facilities, such as Sainsburys, Argos, Smyths Toys, Homebase and Wickes. It also features a significant amount of light industrial office, workshop and retail space. The Retail Park provides a significant amount of local employment.

Beyond that, there are a number of clusters of local facilities in close proximity to the Site. The compact local centre at the junction of Daws Heath Road and Rayleigh Road features a pub, off licence, take away, newsagent, hairdresser, beauticians and interiors shop. This hub is within convenient walking distance of all parts of the Site, being located just outside of the site boundary to the south-west.

Thundersley local centre is located to the south west of the Site and features several shops as well as several community based facilities such as a health centre, pub, post office and nursery.

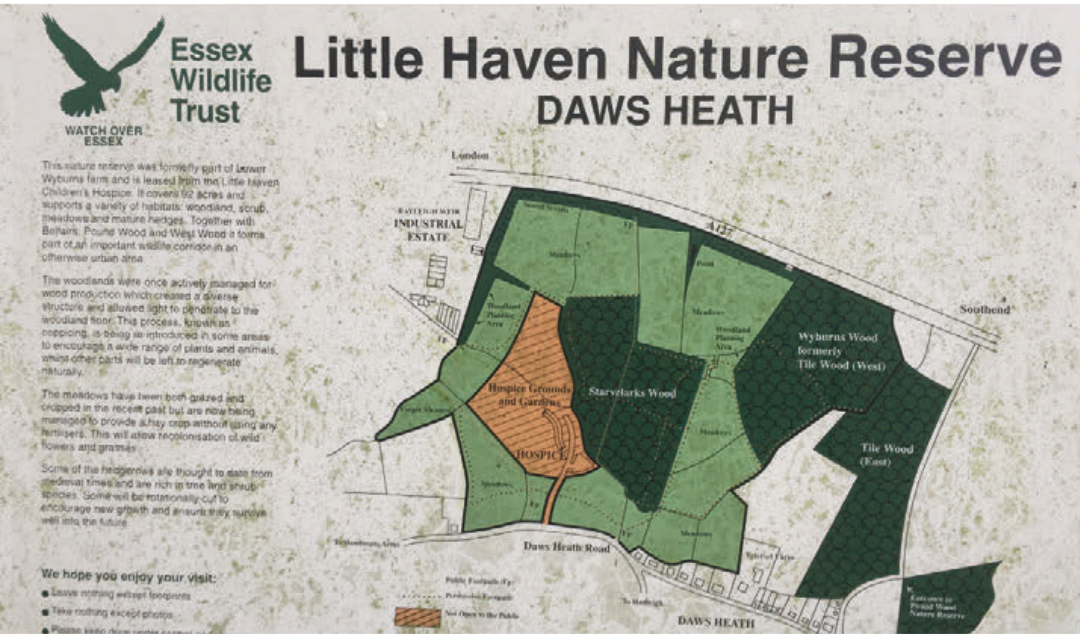
Slightly further afield, Rayleigh high street to the north of the site is a significant hub, with several shops alongside bars, restaurants, post office, library, museum and health centre.

Education

Several local primary schools are located around the Site including Wyburns, Kingston and Thundersley with the latter being the closest to the Site. The Deanes Secondary Academy School is close to the south of the Site boundary, on the south side of Daws Heath Road.

Open Space

The Site benefits from a fishing lake within its confines, which is to be retained within the proposed development. Beyond that, the vicinity of the Site includes a network of attractive parks, woodland and nature reserves. These are key points of interest and are popular with local residents and visitors. Other key recreational facilities include Thundersley Common Park and Kingsley Wood Playing Fields.





Site analysis

These aerial views, taken from drone footage, allow a clear impression of the site within its built context.

View

- A N/E from Hart Road
- B S/W from Little Haven Nature Reserve
- C South from Retail Park
- D North from Daws Heath Road



Views A & D

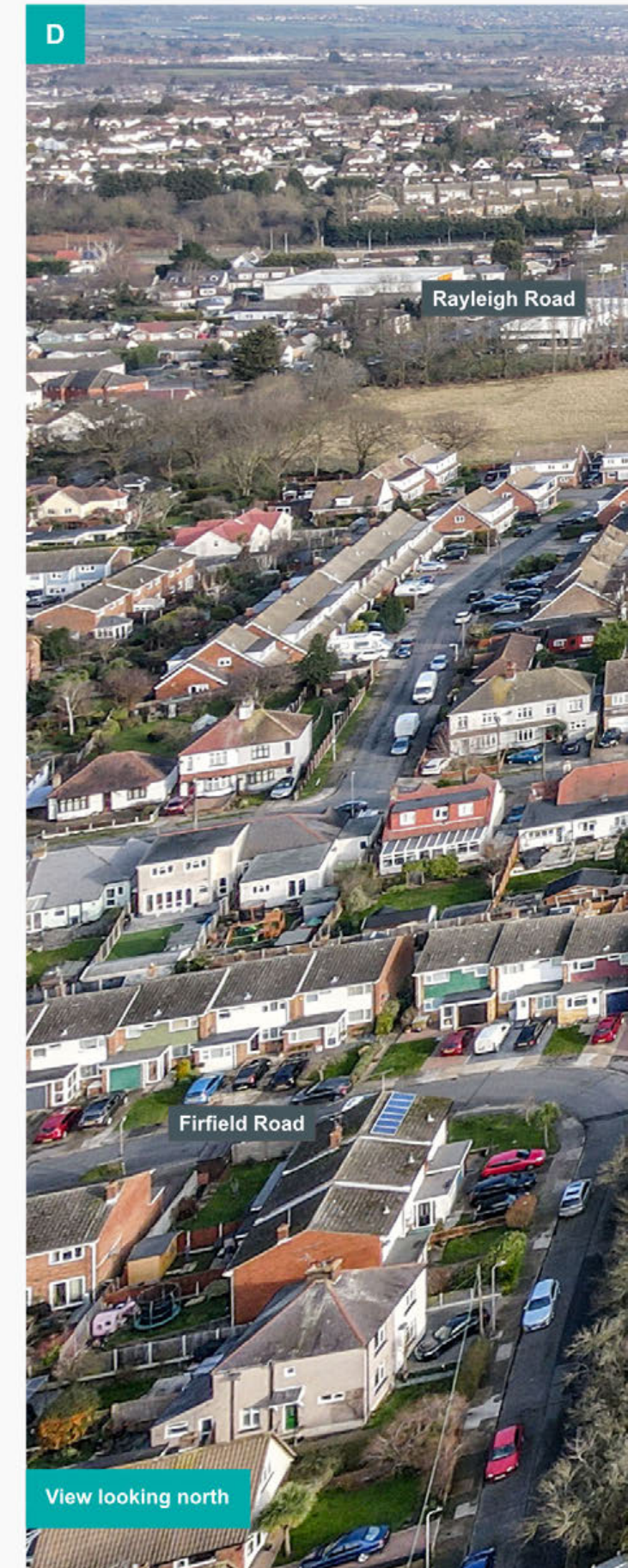
These views convey the suburban environment of Thundersley that surrounds the site, which is flanked by the retail park and housing along Daws Heath Road and the A129. The cluster of existing farm buildings and stables that are located in the southern part of the site are also particularly noticeable in the foreground of View D.

View B

The way that the site's natural features - such as the lake, established hedgerows and the tree lined field boundaries - compartmentalise the site, is extremely clear in this view.

View C

The scale and massing of the Retail Park directly beyond the northern boundary of the site, can be seen clearly in this view, with the suburban extents of Thundersley and Rayleigh beyond to the south.





Rayleigh Retail Park

Daws Heath Road

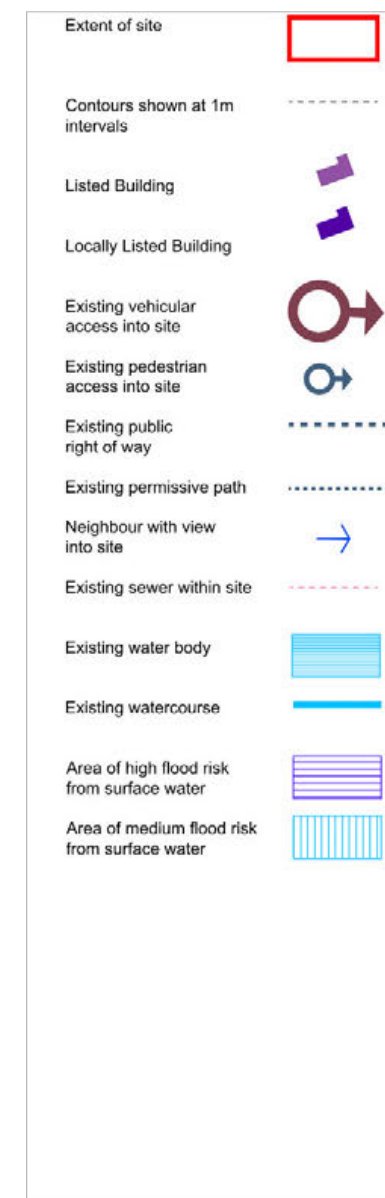
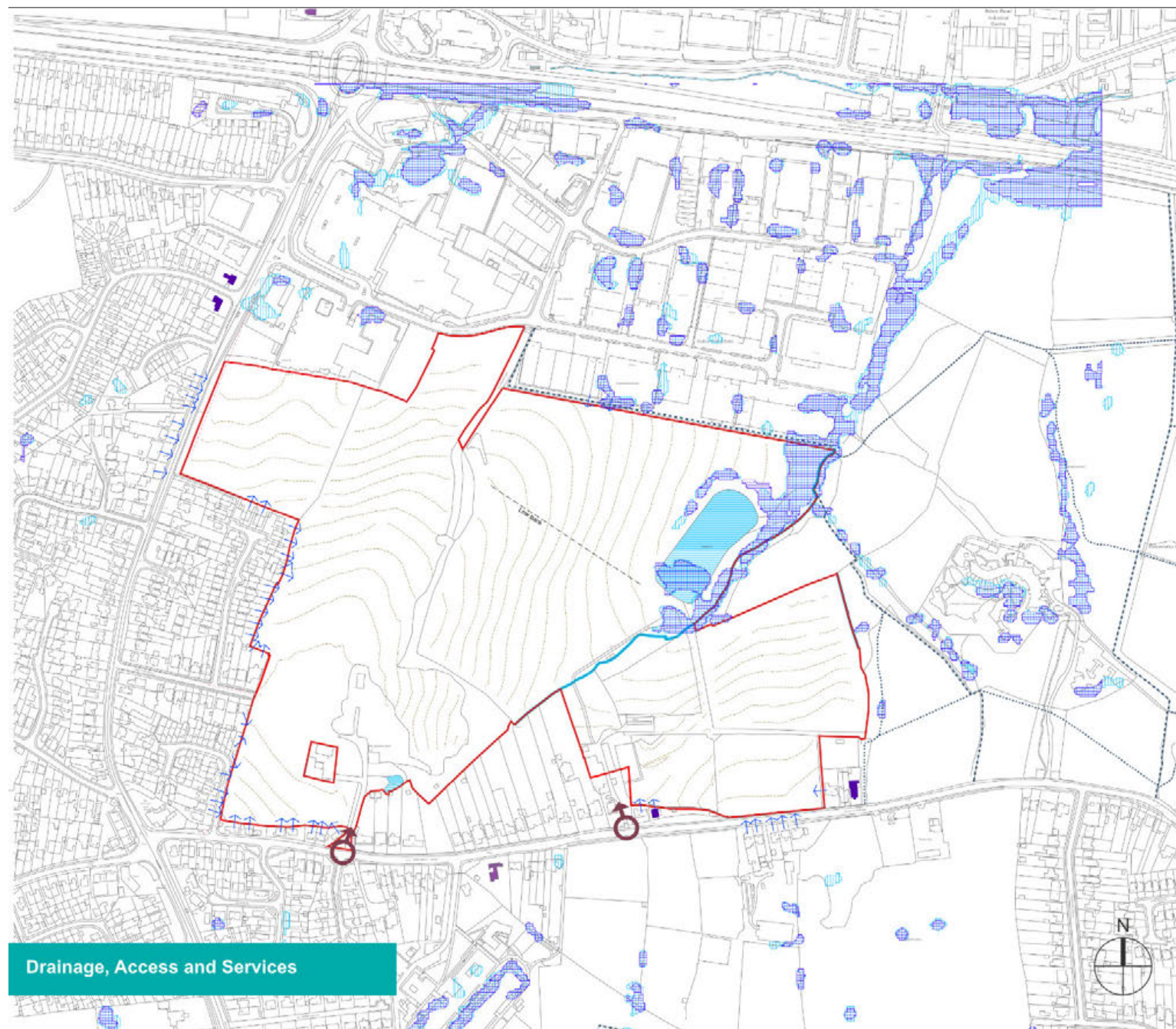
Site analysis

These photographs of the site provide an overall impression of the site's main features and edges.





Site features



These two diagrams define the main natural and man made site features and the spatial constraints that they place on the masterplan layout

The diagram to the left shows the main site features related to landform, potential flood risk, access and services.

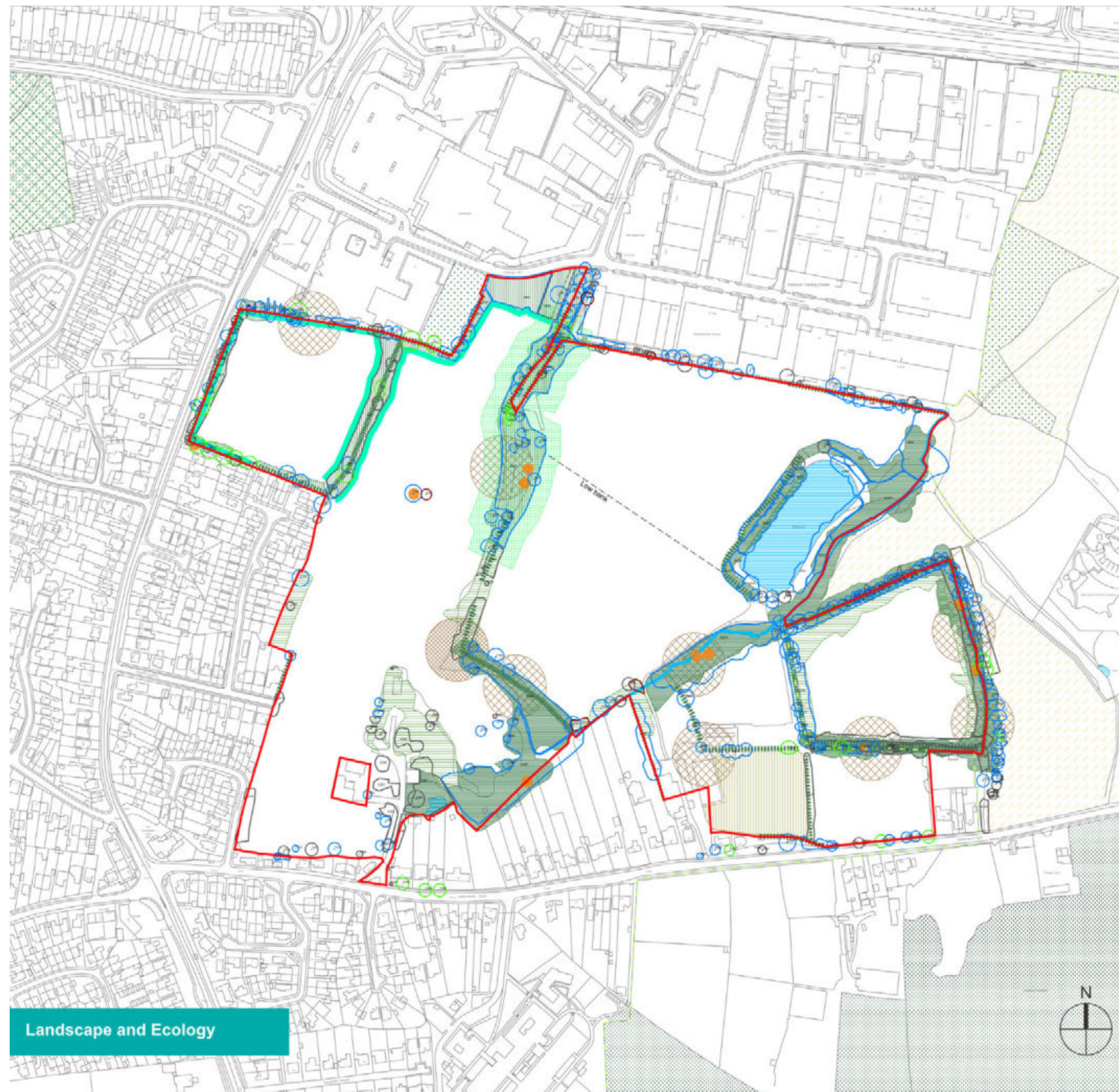
The landform is sloping, with levels ranging between 60-80m AOD with most of the site dropping in level to the north and east.

There are a limited number of Listed and Locally Listed buildings surrounding the site.

Water features, such as ditches and the man-made fishing lake, are located to the east of the Site in the lower-lying areas. This also includes a stream, south east of the lake, which flows to the north-east corner of the site and a small pond, which is located on the southern boundary, 30m south of Claydons Farm.

The site is within the catchment of Flood Zone 1 'Low Probability' of river flooding. The majority of the site is at a 'Very Low' risk of flooding from Surface Water, with the north eastern corner of the site being at 'High' risk (due to the stream in this area).

There is no permitted public access into the Site. A Public Right of Way (909m in length) runs just outside the site to the south and rear of development on Stadium Way continuing along the field boundary to the east (PROW BENF_77). Access to the fishing lake and equestrian facilities is limited to those with membership, via an existing track.



Landscape and Ecology

Extent of site	
Proposed Extent of Green Belt	
Extent of SSSI	
Extent of Historic Natural Landscape	
Extent of Little Haven Nature Reserve	
15m buffer around woodland of high value	
5m buffer to protect habitat connectivity	
Cat A tree	
Cat B tree	
Cat C tree	
Cat U tree	
Root protection area	
Ancient woodland (beyond site)	
Other woodland (beyond site)	
Semi-natural woodland (within site)	
Plantation woodland (within site)	
Scrub - moderate value (within site)	
Grassland - high value (within site)	
Hedgerow - high value (within site)	
Hedgerow - moderate value (within site)	
Hedgerow - lower value (within site)	
Badger sett (main)	
Badger sett (other)	
Tree with moderate bat roost potential	

Arboriculture and Ecology

The majority of the Site is open with limited hedgerows, whereas the south and south eastern portions comprise a number of paddocks and small pastures defined by a series of mature hedgerows. The Site has an enlarged field pattern as a result of agricultural operations.

Tree cover is limited to retained hedge lines, comprising long belts and are a mix of quality and type. Along the Site boundaries with residential areas, the vegetation is mainly ornamental trees and shrubs. Fuller details can be found within the Arboricultural Assessment and Tree Protection Plan submitted as part of the planning application.

In addition to protecting the root protection areas of individual trees, existing woodland of high ecological value will have a 15m buffer from development while a 5m buffer will be maintained along other tree belts and hedgerows to preserve habitat connectivity.

Valerie Wells Wood, an area of ancient woodland sits outside and to the south of the Site. Little Haven nature reserve, immediately to the east of the site contains grassland of high ecological value and areas of woodland. A pocket of high quality grassland is present in the south eastern corner of the Site.

There is evidence of bat roosts and badger setts within tree belts.

