

A landscape photograph showing a green field in the foreground, a field of tall grasses in the middle ground, and a line of trees and buildings in the distance under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. A large blue triangle is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

Land North of the Railway, Baldock

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Prepared for: Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Planning
Group

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1. Introduction

- 1.1.1 AECOM Infrastructure and Environment UK Ltd (AECOM) has been commissioned by the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Planning Group to undertake a landscape and visual appraisal (LVA) of the land between Baldock, Upper Bygrave and Lower Bygrave, with a specific focus on the land to the immediate south of Lower Bygrave ('the Site').
- 1.1.2 The context of the LVA, and with reference to **Figure 1: Site Context**, is that most of the land between Baldock and Lower Bygrave has been allocated for residential led development within the Draft North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031, referred to as 'area BA1'.
- 1.1.3 The LVA has been undertaken following the pre-submission (Regulation 14) consultation on the draft Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan (7th May 2019 to 18th June 2019).
- 1.1.4 The draft Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan includes Policy E6: 'Development North of the Railway' which requires a:
- "clear visual and physical gap (of at least 250m) between the expanded built edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave, reinforced by planting at the periphery of the new development."*
- 1.1.5 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have responded to this Regulation 14 Consultation and Policy E6, via a landscape-based submission, which suggests:
- "the evidence provided herein demonstrates that the policy is unnecessarily restrictive to future development...through the use of considered design, a physical and perceptual separation of Bygrave and Baldock can be adequately achieved using a buffer of 60m. This is demonstrated by the design proposals set out at Section 4 of this report."*
- 1.1.6 The LVA therefore reviews the HCC submission in respect of the Site and questions raised by the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Planning Group.

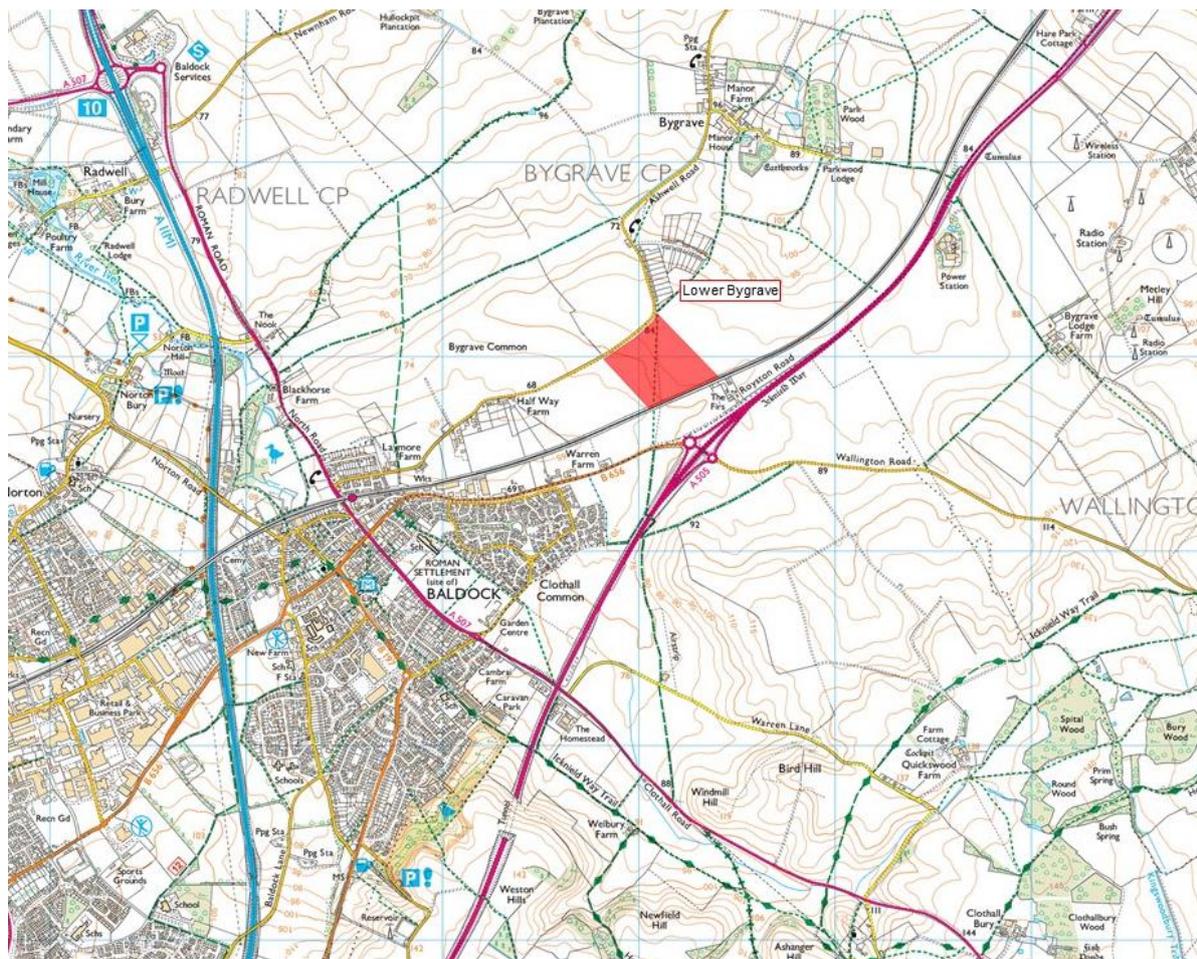
2. Landscape Context

2.1 Location

2.1.1 With reference to **Figure 1: Site Context** and the below image, the LVA study area covers Baldock and Upper Bygrave, with Lower Bygrave located to the south of Upper Bygrave, adjacent to Ashwell Road.

2.1.2 The Site is illustrated by the red hatch, to the immediate south of Lower Bygrave and Ashwell Road, which becomes Bygrave Road.

Image A 1: Location Plan of the LVA Study Area and the Site



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2.2 Landform

2.2.1 With reference to **Figure 2: Topography**, the study area is characterised by undulating landform, which forms a tract of elevated land to the north and south of Baldock, such that Baldock is situated in a relatively low lying position within this landscape, mainly between 60 metres (m) Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and 65m AOD.

2.2.2 To the south of Baldock the landform rises steeply to form a ridgeline consisting of a series of hills, including Weston Hill, Windmill Hill and Bird Hill between 130m AOD and 140m AOD.

2.2.3 To the north of Baldock and Bygrave Common, the landform rises to form a ridgeline between 90m AOD and 96m AOD and an elevated tract of land which extends north-east and covers Upper Bygrave at 95m AOD.

- 2.2.4 To the north-east of Baldock, the landform rises consistently across Bygrave Common to form a localised plateau at 80m AOD at Lower Bygrave and properties adjacent to Ashwell Road and across part of the Site.
- 2.2.5 From these properties, the landform falls eastwards to Wedon Way, within Lower Bygrave, before rising to form a ridgeline between 96m AOD and 101m AOD, which extends from the east of Lower Bygrave, northwards to Upper Bygrave.
- 2.2.6 The Site forms part of the culmination of this rising landform to the north-east of Baldock, with the western edge of the Site at 70m AOD and its eastern edge at 84m AOD.
- 2.2.7 Baldock, Lower Bygrave and Upper Bygrave are therefore situated at different elevations within the landscape, with the land between Baldock and Lower Bygrave characterised by consistently rising landform which culminates at a plateau at Lower Bygrave at 80m AOD, which includes part of the Site and the fields to the west of Ashwell Road.

2.3 Land Use and Infrastructure

- 2.3.1 Baldock, Lower Bygrave and Upper Bygrave are residential areas, with Baldock the larger settlement, containing commercial, educational and industrial land uses. Surrounding the settlements, the land use is predominantly agricultural, including between Baldock and Lower Bygrave.
- 2.3.2 The A1(M) is the main road network at the western part of the study area, which forms the western edge of Baldock. The A505 crosses the eastern and southern parts of the study area, forming the eastern edge of Baldock.
- 2.3.3 Within Baldock, the main roads include the A507 and B656 which converge at cross-roads in the central part of Baldock. The B656 extends eastwards to connect with the A505 via a grade separated roundabout. The B656 also divides residential and industrial land uses in the eastern part of Baldock.
- 2.3.4 The Cambridge railway line crosses the study area in a broadly west to east orientation. It forms a defined edge to Baldock's industrial land uses, which are situated between the railway line and the B656.
- 2.3.5 Baldock's residential land uses extend to the north of the railway line, via a small cluster of properties to the east of the A507, located adjacent to Bygrave Road and Salisbury Road in a 'square' layout.
- 2.3.6 To the east of these properties, there are several farms adjacent to Bygrave Road, including Laymore Farm and Half Way Farm. Bygrave Road continues eastwards to Lower Bygrave, where it becomes Ashwell Road.
- 2.3.7 Upper Bygrave is situated on elevated land, with the settlement pattern clustered around the church of St Margaret of Antioch.
- 2.3.8 Lower Bygrave is to the south-west of Upper Bygrave and therefore physically separate from Upper Bygrave. Lower Bygrave consists of generally two storey properties from the 1930s, with extensive gardens, located either adjacent to Ashwell Road or Wedon Way.
- 2.3.9 As noted, agricultural land uses extend between Baldock, Lower Bygrave and Upper Bygrave, consisting of a large-scale field pattern of intensively farmed crops. The Site is part of this agricultural land use.

2.4 Vegetation Pattern

- 2.4.1 Due to the agricultural land use, the vegetation cover between Baldock and Lower Bygrave is limited to occasional hedgerow field boundaries and small clumps of trees around farm properties, such that the landscape is 'open' in character. The Site is similarly reflective of this, with no key vegetation structure due to its agricultural land use.

- 2.4.2 There is mature vegetation bordering the Cambridge railway line which is notable due to its linear alignment and contrast to the open field pattern.
- 2.4.3 Tracts of vegetation are across ridgelines to the north of Baldock and east of Lower Bygrave, with a belt of mature woodland at Park Wood, to the east of Bygrave. Other notable areas of woodland are to the south of Baldock, across the slopes of Weston Hill and between the A507 and A1(M).
- 2.4.4 The residential areas of Baldock and Lower Bygrave are well vegetated via gardens and within Baldock there are areas of mature street trees.

2.5 Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

- 2.5.1 There are several PRoW (footpath) across the study area. These include:
- PRoW no.15 extends from Ashwell Road, Lower Bygrave, to the B656 and crosses the Site;
 - PRoW (footpath) no.4 extends to the north-west of the Site, between Ashwell Road and the southern edge of residential properties in Lower Bygrave;
 - PRoW (footpath) no.5 extends across the hill to the east of the Site;
 - PRoW (restricted byway) no.14 extends across the ridgeline to the north of the Site;
 - PRoW Clothall no.28, extends to the south of the A505; and
 - PRoW Rushton and Wallington no.041, extends to the east of Wallington Road.

2.6 Designations

- 2.6.1 Neither the study area, nor the Site, is covered by any statutory landscape designations (e.g. Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).
- 2.6.2 The Site does not contain any listed or locally listed buildings, nor is it within a Conservation Area, the closest of which is within Baldock.
- 2.6.3 The Site is not a Registered Historic Park and Garden, nor does it contain any Tree Preservation Orders.
- 2.6.4 Neither the Site, nor the land between Baldock, Upper Bygrave and Lower Bygrave, is within a designated 'gap'.
- 2.6.5 Area BA1 and the Site are within the Green Belt. However, with reference to **Figure 1: Site Context**, and the North Hertfordshire Proposed Submission Local Plan, the Green Belt boundary is proposed to be altered. The result would be that neither BA1 nor that part of it which forms the Site is within the Green Belt. The Green Belt would remain across the fields to the immediate north of the Site and west of Ashwell Road. These fields are in part at a similar elevation in the landscape as the Site and part of the setting to Lower Bygrave.

3. Published Landscape Character Assessments

- 3.1.1 The study area and the Site are covered by several published landscape character assessments which set out key characteristics and guidance for managing future change.

3.2 National Level

Natural England, National Character Area 87: East Anglian Chalk (2013)¹

- 3.2.1 The study area and the Site form the western part of National Character Area 87 (NCA 87), which covers the land between Baldock and Newmarket.

- 3.2.2 The landscape within the study area is representative of the following stated key characteristics of NCA 87:

“The rolling downland, mostly in arable production, has sparse tree cover...”

- 3.2.3 Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) for NCA 87 include:

“Conserve the settlement character and create or enhance sustainable urban drainage systems and green infrastructure within existing and new developments, particularly in relation to the urban fringe and growth...to provide recreation opportunities, increase soil and water quality and enhance landscape character.” (SEO4)

- 3.2.4 Stated landscape opportunities include:

“Identify and conserve views to and from key viewpoints and landmarks by careful design and vegetation management, minimising the visual impact and effects of development, woodland planting and scrub encroachment;

Create strong visions in the urban fringe as it is developed, as this will contribute positively to the sense of place; and

Conserve, enhance and create new public access infrastructure, access links and accessible natural and cultural features, especially near settlements, in order to enhance the transitional areas between urban landscape and countryside.”

3.3 County Level

Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment: North Baldock Chalk Uplands²

- 3.3.1 Most of the study area, including the Site, is covered by the North Baldock Chalk Uplands Landscape Character Area (LCA). The key characteristics which are representative of the study area and Site are:

- *“Rolling chalk landform;*
- *Small rounded chalk knolls;*
- *Large rectilinear fields in arable;*
- *Large to medium regular geometric plantations; and*
- *Nucleated settlements.”*

- 3.3.2 Baldock is noted as a historic market town and that the character of the LCA is on that is a large scale open landscape with long distance views, especially from elevated locations.

¹ Natural England, National Character Area 87: East Anglian Chalk, <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6417815967891456?category=587130>

² North Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment, <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/landscape/landscape-character-assessment.aspx>

- 3.3.3 The stated landscape management guidance is based on a strategy of ‘conserve and restore’, with actions including:

“Promote creation of new woodland and for existing woodlands encourage a diverse woodland flora; and

Maintain and extend the rights of way network.”

Land North of Baldock: Landscape Sensitivity Study, 2013³

- 3.3.4 This study covered BA1, the fields to the west of Ashwell Road and the western part of the Site, to provide background information in relation to the Local Plan and future development within North Hertfordshire.

- 3.3.5 With reference to **Figure 1: Site Context**, the study assessed the land to the north of Bygrave Road as ‘B1’ and the area to the south of the road, including the Site as ‘B2’.

- 3.3.6 The B2 analysis identifies for ‘landform, perception and sensitivity’ that it is:

“rising only gently eastwards for the most part but steepening toward the eastern edge of the study area...”

Although the higher, more open ground at the eastern end of this area shares characteristics in common with the B1 character unit to the north, the influence of the more developed landscape to the south towards which the landform slopes, is stronger. There is less of a sense of remoteness and tranquillity, and a stronger urban-edge perception, reducing sensitivity to development...

Within this area, sensitivity can be considered to lessen towards the town and increase towards the higher, more open eastern end.”

- 3.3.7 From this analysis, the Site is that part of the landscape where the landform is steeper and where it shares characteristics in common with B1 to the north. The overall sensitivity of B2 was judged as “moderate-low”, defined by the study as:

“The majority of the landscape characteristics are less likely to be adversely affected by change. Although change can potentially be more easily accommodated, care would still be needed in locating and designing change in the landscape. There is an opportunity to create and plan / design for new character.”

- 3.3.8 The ‘opportunities and constraints map’ identifies a view from the bench adjacent to Ashwell Road, looking west across the Site and fields to the west of Ashwell Road.

- 3.3.9 The key recommendations for B2 were:

“Relate any new development to the urban edge of Baldock, due to the high visibility of the study area, and avoid extensive linear development which would be out of keeping with the nucleated form characteristic of Baldock and other settlements in the locality.

Landscaping could be used to add green corridors along existing field boundaries, and to enhance the ecological value of the railway corridor. A buffer of open grassland to either side of the railway would enhance GI links.

Consideration could be given to using landscaping to create separation between any new development and the existing dispersed properties along the southern side of Bygrave Road and the northern side of Royston Road. Consideration could also be given to the potential for incorporating architectural features of these properties into any new development.

Scale, materials, colours and screening will be important considerations in any development of buildings associated with the provision of new employment.

³ North Hertfordshire District Council, Land north of Baldock: Landscape Sensitivity Study, 2013 <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/CG4%20Land%20north%20of%20Baldock%20Landscape%20Sensitivity%20Study.pdf>

Developers should also be encouraged to consider the use of green or brown roofs on new commercial buildings. The aim should be to create a less harsh urban-rural transition to this side of the town than exists at present, and to avoid creating structures which are highly prominent in views towards Baldock centre (from any direction), detracting from the visual focus on the town centre area around St Mary's Church and giving the impression of linear urban 'sprawl' along the easterly approaches to the town. The Ashville Trading Estate buildings are, through their massing and colour, out of keeping with any other buildings on the eastern side of the town."

- 3.3.10 As part of the conclusion, the study states:

"Considering the possibility of development that does not extend Baldock, the only possible area identified is alongside the linear development to the south-west of Bygrave (2 ha). This is the most sensitive of the areas identified but offers some potential in that there is more containment in this area, towards the head of the valley, than is the case further west, and new buildings would be visually associated with the existing dwellings on Ashwell Road. Good landscaping, high design standards and low density would be important if this was to be viable."

[North East Herts Landscape Study, Part 2, 2011⁴](#)

- 3.3.11 This reflects the information provided by the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment, with the study area and the Site covered by LCA 224: North Baldock Chalk Uplands.

[Hertfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation](#)

- 3.3.12 This identifies most of the land across BA1 as 'open field', with the fields to the west of Ashwell Road and including the Site as 'modified 19th century enclosures'.

[North Hertfordshire District Green Infrastructure Plan, Parts 1 and 2, 2009⁵](#)

- 3.3.13 The Plan identifies green infrastructure (GI) 'natural and semi-natural greenspace' assets between the A1(M) and the A507. Park Wood to the east of Bygrave is also included in this category. There are no assets across BA1, nor the Site.

- 3.3.14 Within the Plan, figure 4.1: Strategic Green infrastructure Network identifies a 'greenway' across the Site, extending either side of PRoW no.15, extending between the south of Baldock and the ridgeline to the north of Baldock, via the fields to the west of the Ashwell Road, as part of project ST8.2 'Peri urban greenway for Baldock'.

- 3.3.15 In terms of the priority of ST8.2, the Plan notes:

"consider in advance of development to urban-rural fringes."

- 3.3.16 Part 2 of the Plan identifies that green space and park provision will be essential for the successful growth of Baldock. Principles include:

"Where development is likely to occur (e.g. around Cambrai Farm) ensure links to the PRoW network are maintained and enhanced to ensure that access and recreational opportunities are maximised;

Screening of the settlement edge should include subtle landform changes which reflect the chalk landscape. Planting should include a variety of native species planted in varied densities and locations to avoid block screening. This is

⁴ North Herts Landscape Study, Character, Sensitivity and Capacity, 2011, <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/CG16a%20NHerts%20Landscape%20Study%202011%20-%20Part%202.pdf>

⁵ North Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Plan, 2009, https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/NHE15%20Green%20Infrastructure%20Report%20August%202009_Part1.pdf and https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/NHE15%20Green%20Infrastructure%20Report%20August%202009_Part2.pdf

particularly important around the employment development site, prominent in views from Ashwell Road, Bygrave;

Establish a network of wooded greenways in advance of built development, to connect landscape, development and areas of community green space;

The proposed development site on the edge of Bygrave Common is a possible location for a new strategic semi-natural green space (also potentially meeting the deficiency in relation to recreational and amenity green space provision) which could serve new development here and integrate new development with the landscape edge; seek developer contributions towards implementation and management;

Conserve views to the spire of St Mary's Church and the historic town core; and

Conserve the network of narrow sunken lanes and tracks which lead out from northern parts of the town such as Bygrave Road, as green corridors within the green infrastructure network."

4. Relevant Policy and Supporting Documents

4.1 National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework⁶ (2019)

- 4.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) environmental aim objective of sustainable development is:

“to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”

- 4.1.2 NPPF paragraph 9 includes:

“Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.”

- 4.1.3 In respect of achieving appropriate densities, NPPF paragraph 122 states:

“the desirability of maintaining an area’s prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.”

- 4.1.4 About achieving well designed places, NPPF paragraph 125 states:

“Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area’s defining characteristics. Neighbourhood plans can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development.”

- 4.1.5 NPPF paragraph 127 requires development to:

“a) ...function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit; and

e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks.”

- 4.1.6 NPPF paragraph 130 states:

“Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area

⁶ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents.”

4.1.7 NPPF paragraph 134, in respect of the Green Belt purposes states:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”*

4.1.8 NPPF paragraph 136 states:

“Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period. Where a need for changes to Green Belt boundaries has been established through strategic policies, detailed amendments to those boundaries may be made through non-strategic policies, including neighbourhood plans.”

4.1.9 NPPF paragraph 141 states:

“Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.”

4.2 District Policy

North Hertfordshire District Council Proposed Submission Local Plan 2011-2031⁷

4.2.1 Policy SP8: Housing, includes:

“Over the period 2011-2031, housing growth will be supported across the District.

We will:

Deliver these homes through the sites and allowances identified in this Plan that will support approximately:

ii. 7,700 homes from six Strategic Housing Sites:

- BA1 - North of Baldock for 2,800 homes (2,500 to be delivered by 2031).”*

4.2.2 Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability states:

“The Council considers good design to be a key aspect of sustainable development. We will:

- a. Support new development where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context;*
- b. Require masterplans for significant developments;*

⁷ North Hertfordshire District Council, Proposed Submission Local Plan 2011-2031, <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/Proposed%20Submission%20Local%20Plan.pdf>

c. Assess proposals against detailed policy requirements set out in this Plan and the Design SPD; and

d. Adopt the Government's technical standards for the size of new homes, water efficiency and, in specified circumstances, accessibility."

4.2.3 Policy SP12: Green infrastructure, Biodiversity and Landscape states:

"We will accommodate significant growth during the plan period whilst ensuring the natural environment is protected and enhanced. We will:

a. Protect, enhance and manage the green infrastructure network and seek opportunities to create new green infrastructure;

b. Protect, enhance and manage biodiversity networks including wetland and riverine habitats, Local Geological Sites and seek opportunities for net gains for biodiversity; and

c. Consider and respect landscape character and locally sensitive features, particularly in relation to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty."

4.2.4 Policy SP14: Site BA1 – North of Baldock includes:

"Land to the north of Baldock, as shown on the Proposals Map, is allocated as a Strategic Housing Site for a new neighbourhood of approximately 2,800 homes. Planning permission for residential-led development will be granted where the following site-specific requirements are met:

c. Structural planting to create a sense of place, integration into surrounding landscape and to reinforce a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary to the north and east;

...

Sensitive treatment of heritage assets and their settings including:

ii. retaining framed views of St Mary's Church from within and beyond the site...

...

k. Built development contained to the south and south-west of the ridgeline that generally extends eastwards from the A507 south of Blackhorse Farm and southwards from Ashwell Road;

l. Sensitive treatment of heritage assets and their settings including:

ii. retaining framed views of St Mary's Church from within and beyond the site."

4.2.5 The supporting text to Policy includes:

"Along the eastern edge, the boundary to the north of Ashwell Road is defined by a field boundary hedgerow which should be reinforced. The boundary and ridgeline to the south of Ashwell Road are less well defined."

4.2.6 The land to the south of the railway line is covered by Policy BA10 in support of employment land use to the east of Baldock.

[North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031: Green Belt Review \(update 2018\)⁸](#)

4.2.7 The Site is included as location 'D', with the following analysis

- *"openness visual – high*
- *openness physical – mixed / high*

⁸ North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031: Green Belt Review, update 2018, <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/ED161A%20NHDC%20Green%20Belt%20Review%20update%20-%20main%20report.pdf>

- *sprawl – significant*
- *merge – limited*
- *countryside – significant*
- *historic – moderate.”*

4.2.8 From the above, the overall contribution of the Site was ‘significant’, representing an increase from the ‘moderate’ conclusion of the earlier Green Belt Review.

[Pre-Submission Consultation for the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan, May 2019⁹](#)

4.2.9 For this LVA, Policy E6: Development north of the Railway states:

“The development of allocation BA1 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should:

a) maintain a clear visual and physical gap (of at least 250m) between the expanded built edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave, reinforced by planting at the periphery of the new development (using a suitable variety of native species, with the mix and density of planting being varied to create a natural appearance);

b) minimise any adverse visual impacts on longer-distance views from within and towards Baldock, including those from Upper and Lower Bygrave, by giving careful consideration to the positioning and height of development, as well as to appropriate screening;

c) retain and incorporate existing landscape and built features that contribute to the site’s history and character, including Bygrave Road/Ashwell Road, the existing cottages on Bygrave Road, trees and hedgerows (while safeguarding the habitat value of the Bygrave Road local wildlife site);

d) make provision for improved pedestrian and cycle access between Bygrave and Baldock, through a new footpath and cycleway using the route of Bygrave Road/Ashwell Road;

e) minimise the potential for increased traffic flows through lower and upper Bygrave, by providing for an appropriate package of measures such as: suitable access arrangements (including restrictions on heavy goods vehicles); physical features such as gateways and appropriate road surfaces; speed limits and signage); and

f) make provision within the site for a community hall suitable for meetings of Bygrave Parish Council and other local groups, and for additional indoor recreation facilities to serve the expanded town.”

4.2.10 The supporting text for Policy E6 includes:

“Bygrave village will remain in the Green Belt, and it is important that a meaningful gap between Lower Bygrave and Baldock is retained to prevent coalescence. A gap of at least 250m would maintain separation, while keeping new development below the ridgeline that crosses the Ashwell Road immediately to the south of Lower Bygrave (and so helping to lessen the visual impact of development in views from the south). Appropriate screening of site BA1 will also help to maintain a sense of separation, and additional guidance on a suitable approach to planting is set out in North Hertfordshire’s Green Infrastructure Plan.”

⁹ Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan, Consultation Draft, May 2019, http://www.bbplan.co.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Draft_Neighbourhood_Plan.pdf

Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan Design Guidelines, 2019¹⁰

4.2.11 Following workshops, relevant design principles included:

“where new development abuts existing homes, new buildings should be no higher than the existing ones, and planting should be used to soften the edges of new development;

development should be designed to respond to existing views and landmarks;

high quality new walking and cycling routes which connect to existing routes and amenities should be a priority any new development, and walking routes should usually run along streets, not be segregated from them.”

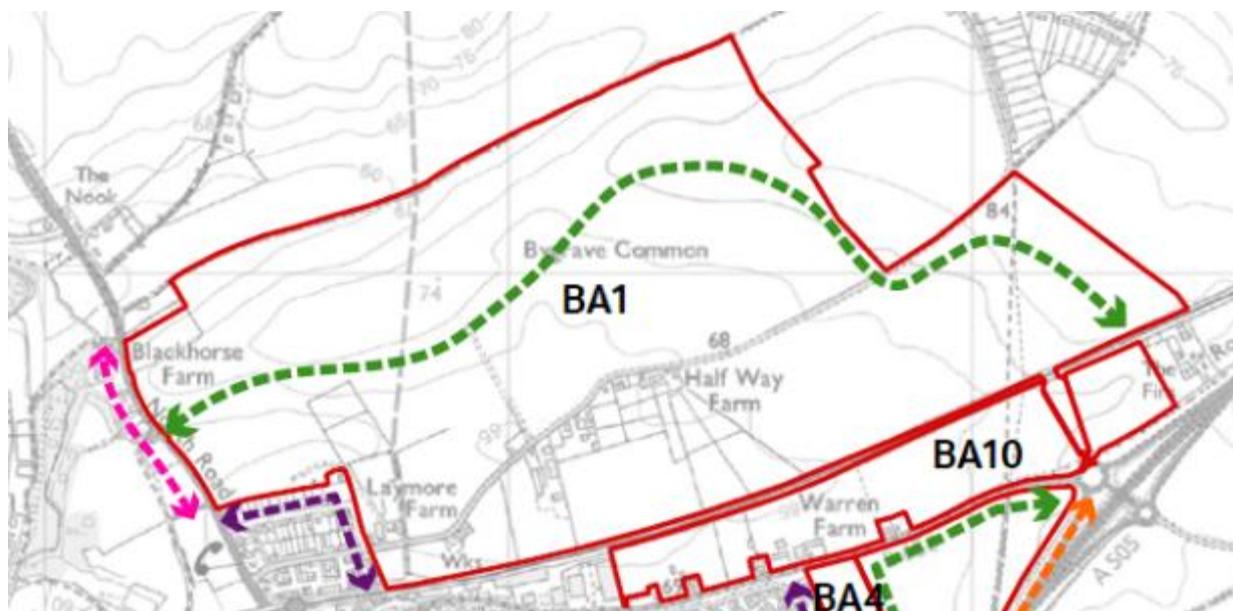
4.2.12 In respect of landmarks and vistas, the guidelines state:

“Places should be planned to respond to existing view corridors or reinforce views of existing landmarks. St Mary the Virgin is Baldock’s most notable landmark. Its prominence should be preserved as a focal point from any new development if the church is visible.”

4.2.13 In respect of ‘edges’, green open space is proposed across the northern part of BA1 and across the eastern part of the Site, as illustrated by the dashed green line below, with the supporting text noting:

“In the case of BA1, the relationship with Bygrave also needs to be handled very sensitively.”

Image A 2: Diagram reflecting boundary lines along the edges of the Urban Extension sites in Baldock.



4.2.14 The guidance states in respect of ‘Edges facing existing residential areas’:

“Bygrave needs to be recognised as a separate community with its own character. A field left undeveloped between the village and the edge of BA1 would help to maintain this character and avoid it being subsumed into Baldock.”

4.2.15 In respect of ‘Edges facing the bypass’ the guidance states:

¹⁰ Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan, Design Guidelines, 2019, http://www.bbplan.co.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Design_Guidelines.pdf

“The edge should be softened with planting, avoiding a harsh fence, given that this edge will be so prominent.”

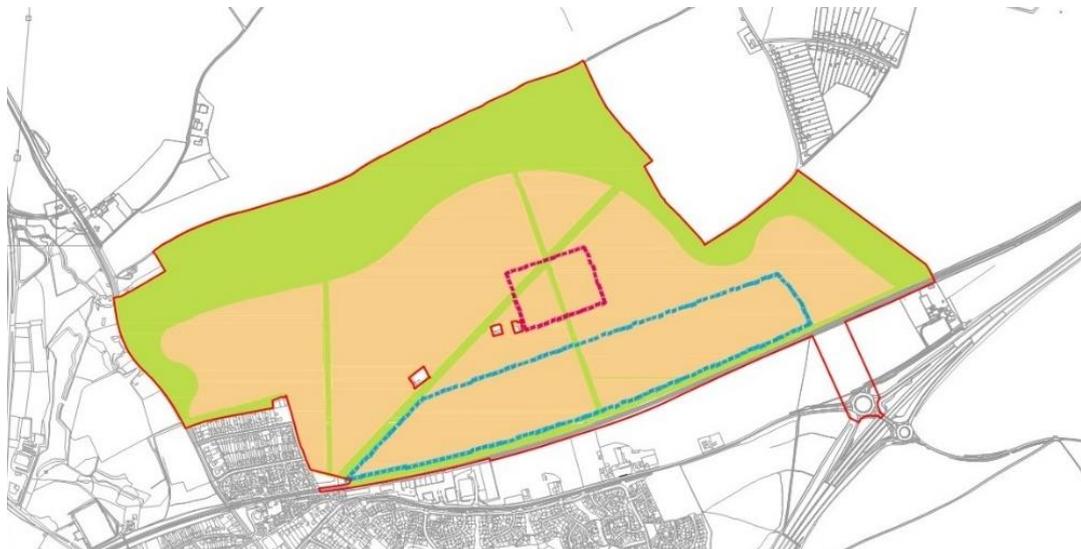
Planning Application for the Development of Land North of the Railway (Ref: 17/04420/OP)¹¹

4.2.16 Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) planning application was for:

“Outline application for the development of an urban extension to the north of Baldock, comprising up to 2,800 dwellings, a new local centre, primary and secondary schools, a healthcare hub, up to 1,900sqm of ‘A’ Class land uses including a supermarket, open space, nature conservation, recreation, landscaping and associated facilities, following demolition of existing structures and vehicular access.”

4.2.17 HCC's Parameter Plan: Land Use (inset below) illustrates a 100m 'strategic open space' (green hatch) between Lower Bygrave and new residential development within the Site.

Image A 3: Land Use Parameter Plan, 2017



Hertfordshire County Council: Parameter Plan – Land Use

4.2.18 HCC's Parameter Plan: Landscape (inset below) illustrates strategic buffer planting within the strategic open space, via the dark green hatch.

Image A 4: Landscape Parameter Plan, 2017



Hertfordshire County Council: Parameter Plan – Landscape

¹¹ North Hertfordshire District Council, https://documentportal.north-herts.gov.uk/GetDocList/Default.aspx?doc_class_code=DC&case_number=17/04420/OP

4.2.19 Chapter 10: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for the development predicted:

“Major adverse, significant effects are identified upon the landscape setting of public rights of way that pass through the site area at all stages of development. Although the routes are anticipated to be retained, their setting is anticipated to change from passing through open arable countryside to that of an urban area; and

Moderate adverse effects are also anticipated upon Local Landscape Character Area 224 North Baldock Chalk Uplands due to the localised change that the Proposed Development would have upon the area. This effect is considered not significant.”

4.2.20 Chapter 10: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment does not specifically mention Lower Bygrave, nor the potential for coalescence between the extended edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave.

4.2.21 The illustrative plan of a possible layout for BA1, (reproduced below) includes woodland between Lower Bygrave and the Site, along with residential land uses and the link road to the A505. The illustrative woodland is not as dense as that indicated on the Landscape Parameter Plan as it enables a number of path networks, including that of PRow no.15, which extends from Lower Bygrave.

Image A 5: Illustrative Masterplan, 2017



Hertfordshire County Council: Illustrative Masterplan

5. Site and Visual Appraisal

- 5.1.1 Field work from publicly accessible locations has been undertaken during September 2019 to verify the desk-based review and ascertain the visibility of the Site. The locations of the photographs are illustrated on **Figure 1: Site Context** with the photographs presented in **Figures 4 to 9**.
- 5.1.2 With reference to Photograph 1, the Site and study area are representative of the published landscape character assessments and related studies, being an open and undulating landscape bordered by elevated landform. Photograph 1 demonstrates the open character of the Site and the falling landform between it and the Cambridge railway line and that from PRoW (footpath) no.15 there are open views which include the roundabout junction with the A505 and industrial units in east Baldock.

Image A 6: Inset of Photograph 1, looking across the Site (in the foreground of the view) to Baldock



- 5.1.3 Moving to the north-east of the Site, Photograph 2 is taken from PRoW no.5 which crosses elevated land. From this location, the Site is visible, as well as the plateau in the landform across the Site, such that it forms a localised ridgeline within the landscape. The proximity of the Site to residential properties adjacent to Ashwell Road is visible, as well as the scale of industrial units to the south of the Cambridge railway line. The view demonstrates that the northern part of the Site, closest to properties in Lower Bygrave forms part of the viewing corridor to St. Mary's Church in Baldock.
- 5.1.4 Photograph 3 demonstrates the view from residential properties adjacent to Ashwell Road and that their view covers the fields to the west of Ashwell Road as well as the northern edge of the Site.
- 5.1.5 Photograph 4 is taken from the bench adjacent to Ashwell Road, with views across the Site and the fields to the west of Ashwell Road. The view demonstrates how the landform across the Site is perceived in the same context as that on the opposite side of Ashwell Road, being elevated above the fields extending from Baldock.

- 5.1.6 From the south of area BA1, Photograph 5 demonstrates the view from Bridleway Clothall 028 and the falling landform between Lower Bygrave and Baldock, as well as the open character of the landscape. The Site is perceived as forming part of the plateau of land to the south of Lower Bygrave.
- 5.1.7 Also, from the southern part of the study area, Photograph 6 and Photograph 7 demonstrate how the slightly elevated position of the Site is perceived as forming the setting to Lower Bygrave.

Image A 7: Inset of Photograph 7, with the Site visible in the middle ground of the view, in front of the white property in the central part of the view



- 5.1.8 Photograph 8 demonstrates that from the western edge of Baldock, most of area BA1 is visible; however, the intervening buildings screen views of the Site. There is therefore a visual sense of leaving Baldock and moving through the countryside via Bygrave Road.

Image A 8: Inset of Photograph 8, view from Baldock across BA1, with the Site not visible



- 5.1.9 Continuing eastwards along Bygrave Road, Photograph 9 and 10 demonstrate that Lower Bygrave is perceived from adjacent to Half Way Farm. Lower Bygrave is seen in an elevated position, with the fields to the west of Ashwell Road and the Site being perceived at the same elevation in the landscape and forming the rural setting to Lower Bygrave.

Image A 9: Inset of Photograph 9, with the Site visible on the skyline, forming part of the elevated land bordering Lower Bygrave



- 5.1.10 In longer distance views from the west of Baldock, Photograph 11 demonstrates how the fields to the west of Ashwell Road and the Site are distinguishable from the other fields due to their elevation above Bygrave Common, such that they are an area of transition in the landscape and setting to Lower Bygrave.

Summary

- 5.1.11 The field work has demonstrated that the Site is visible from close, mid and longer distance locations.
- 5.1.12 The Site, along with the fields to the west of Ashwell Road form the perceived setting to Lower Bygrave due to their rising profile and elevated position above the surrounding fields.
- 5.1.13 The field work confirmed the Site's contribution to the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031: Green Belt Review as 'significant', due to its high visibility and prevention of the sprawl of Baldock.

6. Review of HCC Submission

- 6.1.1 The HCC submission (June 2019) suggests that the requirements of Policy E6: Development North of Railway and specifically the “*maintaining of a clear visual and physical gap of at least 250m between the expanded edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave*” are unnecessarily restrictive.
- 6.1.2 The HCC Submission provides a series of design principles to suggest the physical and perceptual separation between Lower Bygrave and the expanded edge of Baldock can be achieved via a 60m planted buffer. The two design options, whilst sketches, appear to only have a 60m buffer along part of the north-east edge of the Site, with the buffers along the north-west and southern edges being smaller in width, between 20m and 40m.
- 6.1.3 The HCC Submission refers to the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan Guidelines for ‘*Edges facing green open spaces*’, which does refer to a 50m strip of planting to soften the mass of the built form. This does not suggest however that the 50m strip of planting “*fully screens*” new built form, only that it “*softens the mass*”.
- 6.1.4 The HCC Submission does not refer to the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan Guidelines (NP) for ‘*Edges facing existing residential areas*’ which specifically states:
- “Bygrave needs to be recognised as a separate community with its own character. A field left undeveloped between the village and the edge of BA1 would help to maintain this character and avoid it being subsumed into Baldock.”*
- 6.1.5 The HCC Submission and design principles are therefore not based on the main guidance of the NP, relating to Lower Bygrave and the relationship between the Site and future residential development.
- 6.1.6 The HCC Submission has also not referred to the revised Green Belt assessment, which has increased the contribution of the Site to the Green Belt purposes, and incorporated this revision into the design analysis, despite HCC claiming:
- “It is acknowledged that the immediately surrounding landscape to the east and north would remain Green Belt. This is an important factor that has been taken into consideration as part of the conceptual design of the proposed development.”*
- 6.1.7 Section 3 of the HCC Submission provides an analysis of the Site and its context, with an analysis of Lower Bygrave which is additional information to that presented in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for BA1, which as set out above in paragraph 4.2.20, did not mention Lower Bygrave.
- 6.1.8 The HCC Submission states:
- “All views of the Site from the primary facades of the dwellings on Ashwell Road would be oblique. It is acknowledged that there may be views from windows on the side elevation of the southernmost property on Ashwell Road. Otherwise views of the Site would be limited to the gardens of the southern most properties on Ashwell Road and from the upper storeys on Wedon Way, however these are not representative of Lower Bygrave as a whole.”*
- 6.1.9 With reference to the Site and Visual Appraisal section of this report, the Site is clearly visible from:
- PRoW (footpath) Bygrave no.4, adjacent to the southern edge of residential properties on Ashwell Road and in very close proximity to the Site;
 - Ashwell Road;
 - PRoW Bygrave (footpath) no.5, to the east of the Site, due to its elevated position in the landscape;

- PRow (footpath) Bygrave no.14, due to its elevated position to the north-west of the Site;
 - PRow Clothall no.28, to the south of the A505;
 - PRow Rushton and Wallington no.041, to the east of Wallington Road; and
 - The view from the bench adjacent to Ashwell Road, looking west across the Site and fields to the west of Ashwell Road, as identified in the Land north of Baldock Landscape Sensitivity study.
- 6.1.10 The suggestion of the HCC Submission as to “*views of the Site being limited to the gardens of the southern most properties on Ashwell Road*” is therefore not justified, given the visibility of the Site from the wider landscape and the design concepts have therefore not been based upon addressing this wider visibility.
- 6.1.11 Additionally, to suggest that the views from properties on Ashwell Road and Wedon Way are not representative of Lower Bygrave as a whole, does not acknowledge that these are the only two streets in Lower Bygrave.
- 6.1.12 The HCC design principles are based upon two concept designs and supporting sections. The aims of each design are similar, including:
- up to a 60m depth of vegetation around the northern, eastern and southern boundaries of the Site, comprising both native evergreen and deciduous woodland;
 - green and brown roofs where feasible on buildings; and
 - terraced landform, with the tallest buildings at the lowest part of the Site.
- 6.1.13 Neither the concept designs, nor the sections, provide any details as to the proposed topographic levels for the landform across the Site, as whilst contours are indicated, there is no corresponding AOD height.
- 6.1.14 It is therefore not evident how the proposed terracing (i.e. creating flat areas for development at different levels in the landscape) relates to the 80m AOD plateau to the west and south of Ashwell Road, which includes the Site.
- 6.1.15 Nor is it evident from the sections what AOD level the taller buildings would be situated at, to understand whether their height in the landscape complies with the NP requirement to:
- “where new development abuts existing homes, new buildings should be no higher than the existing ones.”*
- 6.1.16 Neither the concept designs nor the sections include Lower Bygrave within the illustrations and therefore no context is given to aid in understanding the spatial context of the design. For example, Design Option 1 – Cross Section C-CC (which appears to require the relabelling of ‘CC’ to reflect the alignment on the design drawing) does not include the residential properties at the southern edge of Ashwell Road to understand the relationship in height between the existing and proposed properties.
- 6.1.17 Both of HCC’s concept designs appear to relocate PRow no.15 from within the Site to adjacent to Ashwell Road, such that in effect it becomes a footway to the road. There is no suggested linkage to the south of the Site, in response to the North Hertfordshire District Green Infrastructure Plan requirements of the ‘greenway’ either side of PRow no.15 and ensuring links to the PRow network are maintained and recreational opportunities maximised.
- 6.1.18 The suggestion of the 60m block planting would also not respond to the GI Infrastructure Plan requirements of green space provision (nor the illustrative masterplan), given the density of this vegetation to achieve a ‘solid’ screen would preclude public access.
- 6.1.19 HCC’s conclusion that a physical and perceived gap between development and Lower Bygrave can be achieved without the need for a 250m offset from Lower Bygrave are considered not to be justified, as HCC have not:

- identified the wider visibility of the Site and how the design options would be perceived in these longer distance views;
- provided detailed topographic level information within their design options and sections, to understand how the proposed development would be sited in the landscape and its relationship to the height and context of Lower Bygrave;
- provided public access requirements across Site due to the density of the 60m block planting; and
- considered the revised Green Belt assessment findings for the Site and their design response.

7. Response to Questions

- 7.1.1 The following questions have been raised by the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Planning Group.
- 1. To what extent are the gap and landscape mitigation works proposed by HCC likely to secure a sense of visual separation between Bygrave and the expanded edge of Baldock?**
- 7.1.2 The ‘mitigation works’ propose a 60m woodland buffer consisting of dense planting, to visually screen views between Lower Bygrave and new residential land uses within the Site.
- 7.1.3 The proximity and the density of the planting, are, once established (potentially after 15 years) and in leaf, most likely to visually screen new residential land uses in views from Lower Bygrave.
- 7.1.4 Both the proximity of the new buildings and the mitigation proposals would also truncate any longer distance views from these properties across the landscape as demonstrated by the red hatching in illustrative **Figure 10: Illustrative View from Lower Bygrave**¹².
- 7.1.5 Therefore, the sense of separation would only relate to the physical distance of the new buildings, not the principle of the expanded edge of Baldock. This is because the proximity and density of the planting would be visually perceived as the ‘new edge’ and would essentially create a ‘green wall’ to visually emphasise the change in land use, rather than achieve a sympathetic transition between the existing and proposed residential land uses and the rural landscape.
- 7.1.6 From south of the Cambridge railway line, new residential land uses adjacent to the new link road would be visible in views, due to the limited planting shown on HCC’s design sketches for the western edge of the Site. The new residential land uses in the Site would essentially replace views of the facades of properties adjacent to Ashwell Road, so that the only views of this part of Lower Bygrave would be of the properties roof lines. The visual perception would be of a continuous area of residential properties, with no visual separation between the new residential land uses in the Site and the roof lines of properties adjacent to Ashwell Road. By year 15 and the assumed establishment of the proposed planting around the northern and eastern edges of the Site, the roof lines in Lower Bygrave would be largely screened, such that the Ashwell Road part of Lower Bygrave would no longer be perceived.
- 7.1.7 This is considered not be the same principle as ‘visual separation’ as it requires Lower Bygrave to remain perceptible in the landscape and separate from new residential land uses.
- 7.1.8 In relation to the ‘*Land North of Baldock: Landscape Sensitivity Study*’ which requires development on the Site to demonstrate “*good landscaping, high design standards and low density would be important if this was to be viable*”, the block planting would not constitute “*good landscaping*” to the same extent as that proposed on HCC’s Illustrative Masterplan, which enables integrated public access and new planting as part of a holistic designed approach to the Site and BA1. The block planting would not fit with the wider proposals for BA1 and would emphasise the change between the expanded edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave, rather than achieve a sympathetic transition.

¹² Figure 10: Illustrative View from Lower Bygrave has been prepared in accordance with the Landscape Institutes Technical Guidance Note 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals (2019). The category type of the view is assessed as Type B, whereby the purpose of the image is in respect of concerns about landscape and visual effects and the image will be in the public domain. The visualisation type 2 is assessed as appropriate for illustrating the 3D form and context of new residential land uses within the Site and at varying distances from Lower Bygrave. The image has been produced by copying the extent of the proposed residential area within the Site and extruding its height by 9 metres to create a 3D model. The model has then been positioned within the model to reflect HCC’s proposed 60m offset from Lower Bygrave and hatched in red, as well as 250m from Lower Bygrave (hatched in yellow). Due to the proximity of the 60m offset (red hatch) to Lower Bygrave and its position on more elevated landform compared to the 250m offset (yellow hatching), the HCC massing appears closer to the viewer, is perceived as taller in height and extends above the ridgeline.

- 7.1.9 With respect to the North Hertfordshire District Green Infrastructure Plan, Parts 1 and 2, the layout does not achieve the stated 'greenway' across the Site, nor maintain the alignment of PRoW no.15.
- 7.1.10 Similarly, the study advises that "*planting should include a variety of native species planted in varied densities and locations to avoid block screening.*" The visual perception of the design options would be of 'block screening' and therefore contrary to the aims of the study.
- 7.1.11 The block planting design does not take account of the character of Lower Bygrave, the wider vision of the Illustrative Masterplan, nor the aims of the NP. As a result, the HCC design options are considered not to function well nor add to the quality of Lower Bygrave.
- 7.1.12 The proximity of the planted buffer would in effect result in encroachment on Lower Bygrave, which is contrary to the aims of the NPPF Green Belt purposes, especially in the context of the raised status of the Site in the Green Belt review.
- 7.1.13 The block planting is considered not to accord with Policy SP14: Site BA1 – North of Baldock as it does not visually establish "*structural planting to create a sense of place nor integration into the surrounding landscape*".

2. How could using the parcel of land closest to Bygrave in the east of Site BA1 for business units rather than residential affect this assessment (and alter the mitigation that may be required)?

- 7.1.14 This would depend on the quantum of business units that were required.
- 7.1.15 The opportunities of business units would be that they could be located close to the new link road, reflecting the design options of placing the larger buildings further from Lower Bygrave. Depending on the quantum of business units, this could enable a more meaningful 'gap' between the business units and Lower Bygrave to be established. The business units could also enable the alignment of PRoW no.15 to be retained.
- 7.1.16 The constraints of business units would be in relation to their height, form and mass. They would most likely require a larger footprint and extensive areas of hardstanding for car-parking. As a result, this could limit the ability to successfully terrace the Site in a sympathetic manner to the landform, because the 'footprint' of the business units would be larger.
- 7.1.17 The larger business unit 'footprint' could also limit the ability for new planting within the Site. HCC's design sketches propose a 'terraced' design, whereby planting is arranged across the Site. However, with a larger business unit 'footprint' there would not be same amount of space for planting within the Site.
- 7.1.18 In order to reduce the visibility of the business units, a similar solution to that proposed by HCC's design sketches would be required, whereby there is a continuous planted buffer around the perimeter of the Site. This screening would also be required for addressing potential security fencing and lighting features often associated with business land uses. The planted buffer would therefore present the same challenges as identified above for the residential layout.
- 7.1.19 The business units would also likely be of a larger building form than detached or semi-detached residential properties, resulting in more continuous roof profiles within views, especially from the elevated land to the north-east of the Site, in which commercial and industrial buildings are already visible in Baldock, as demonstrated by Photograph 2.
- 7.1.20 The business land uses would evidently be a different landscape character to proposed residential land uses adjacent to Lower Bygrave. In relation to the wider masterplan, the business and employment uses are located between Baldock and the Cambridge railway line. This arrangement is considered to be beneficial in landscape terms, retaining the business uses to a part of the landscape already influenced by the railway line and proximity to main roads and the settlement edge.

- 7.1.21 Therefore, on balance, it is considered that if development is to occur at the Site, then it would be preferable to be residential land uses rather than business units.

3. To what extent would a larger gap – of up to 250m – and/or additional landscape works achieve more effective visual separation between the expanded edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave?

- 7.1.22 A larger gap than the 60m proposed by HCC would be more effective in achieving visual separation between Baldock and Lower Bygrave, because it enables a greater physical distance and more of a transition in landscape and visual terms, rather than the abrupt edge of HCC's block planting.
- 7.1.23 With reference to **Figure 3: Spatial Analysis**, the main feature in this open landscape is the landform, specifically the 80m AOD contour which forms the plateau around Lower Bygrave and the perceived setting to the settlement. The plateau extends up to 400m from properties adjacent to Ashwell Road to cover the land to the west of Ashwell Road, which is proposed to remain within the Green Belt.
- 7.1.24 The revised Green Belt review has increased the Green Belt 'importance' of the Site. Given that the Site is also in part at the same elevation as the Green Belt land to the west of Ashwell Road, the 80m AOD is a logical and physical feature on which to base a larger 'gap' to the south of Lower Bygrave.
- 7.1.25 On the approach along Ashwell Road, the 80m AOD contour is approximately 170m from the settlement. Therefore, by locating new residential land uses 170m from Lower Bygrave it would retain a similar pattern of landform either side of Ashwell Road, with the landform rising from an expanded edge of Baldock to then plateau around Lower Bygrave. The 170m 'gap' could then form an expanded landscape area to enable both open space and new planting for screening, softening views and public access.
- 7.1.26 The 170m would not be as optimal as a 250m gap however, as new residential land uses within the Site would still truncate longer distance views from Lower Bygrave. With reference to **Figure 10: Illustrative View from Lower Bygrave**, if new buildings were located 60m from Lower Bygrave (illustrated by the red hatch) as suggested by HCC, then they would not only be perceived at close range, but they would also truncate views of wider ridgelines and the perception of the surrounding landscape. The effect of the block planting at such close range would further truncate longer distance views and establish a 'green wall' adjacent to Lower Bygrave.
- 7.1.27 In contrast, the yellow hatch on **Figure 10** illustrates that it is only when residential massing is positioned at 250m from Lower Bygrave that views of the wider landscape remain, with a ridge line visible in the background of the view. Evidently the increased distance of 250m compared to 60m also reduces the perceived scale of the new massing in close range views.
- 7.1.28 In longer distance views, all development within the Site would be visible. However, the positioning of the new residential land uses at 60m from Lower Bygrave would not be enough to prevent the expanded edge of Baldock from being perceived as an extension to residential properties on Ashwell Road.
- 7.1.29 This is because in longer views from the east and south of Lower Bygrave, the 60m offset would be closer to Ashwell Road than the 150m-300m distance between properties on Ashwell Road and Wedon Way. In contrast, the proposed larger 'gaps' of between 170m to 250m between Ashwell Road and new residential land uses in the Site would reflect the spatial pattern of Lower Bygrave in longer distance views.
- 7.1.30 A larger gap of 170m is therefore considered more effective in achieving separation between Lower Bygrave and new residential land uses in the Site than HCC's suggested 60m. This is because the 170m distance would reflect the pattern of the landform at the 80m AOD contour that creates a plateau around Lower Bygrave. This distance would also enable a logical relationship to the retained Green Belt to the west of Lower Bygrave.

- 7.1.31 However, a gap of 250m would be the most effective separation between Lower Bygrave and new residential land uses, as well as retain longer distance views of the landscape from Lower Bygrave.
- 7.1.32 Both the 170m and 250m 'gaps' could be used for open space and new planting, enabling a more effective visual transition between an expanded Baldock and Lower Bygrave, rather than the abrupt edge of the block planting suggested by HCC.

4. Are there ways in which a similar quantum of development as proposed by HCC could be arranged differently across the land closest to Bygrave in the east of Site BA1 so as to minimise visual impacts?

- 7.1.33 The inherent constraint of the HCC proposals is the quantum of development within the Site, which negates the number of options for an alternative arrangement.
- 7.1.34 Given the design options illustrate the western edge, adjacent to the link road, with limited planting, development would be visible from the wider landscape to the south, which is evidently not a concern of the design. Therefore, the whole of the layout could be moved closer to the southern boundary of the Site by reducing the width of the proposed planting along the southern edges of the Site.
- 7.1.35 This would enable the residential area to be located more across the southern and eastern parts of the Site, increasing the 'gap' between these new land uses and Lower Bygrave.
- 7.1.36 Ultimately, compared to HCC's Illustrative layout (Image A4 above), the HCC proposal does not provide the landscape structure and the opportunity for improved integration and a sympathetic transition between the extended edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave.

8. Summary and Conclusion

- 8.1.1 An LVA of the land between Baldock, Upper Bygrave and Lower Bygrave has been undertaken with a specific focus on the land to the immediate south of Lower Bygrave ('the Site'), which is allocated for future residential development within the North Hertfordshire Proposed Submission Local Plan, as area BA1.
- 8.1.2 The context of the LVA is that HCC have responded to the Regulation 14 Consultation of the draft Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan and Policy E6: 'Development North of the Railway', suggesting:

"the evidence provided herein demonstrates that the policy is unnecessarily restrictive to future development...through the use of considered design, a physical and perceptual separation of Bygrave and Baldock can be adequately achieved using a buffer of 60m. This is demonstrated by the design proposals set out at Section 4 of this report."

- 8.1.3 With reference to **Figure 2: Topography**, Baldock, Upper Bygrave and Lower Bygrave are situated at different elevations within the landscape, with the land between Baldock and Lower Bygrave characterised by consistently rising landform which culminates at a plateau at Lower Bygrave at 80m AOD. This plateau includes part of the Site and the fields to the west of Ashwell Road which are within the Green Belt.
- 8.1.4 Baldock, Upper Bygrave and Lower Bygrave are residential areas, with Baldock the larger settlement, containing commercial, educational and industrial land uses. Surrounding the settlements, the land use is predominantly agricultural, including for between Baldock and Lower Bygrave.
- 8.1.5 Upper Bygrave situated on elevated land, with the settlement pattern clustered around the church of St Margaret of Antioch. Lower Bygrave is to the south-west of Upper Bygrave and physically separate from Upper Bygrave, consisting of generally two storey properties from the 1930s, with extensive gardens.
- 8.1.6 Neither the land between Baldock, Upper Bygrave and Lower Bygrave, nor the Site, is covered by any statutory landscape designations (e.g. Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or designated 'gap'.
- 8.1.7 Area BA1 and the Site are within the Green Belt. However, with reference to **Figure 1: Site Context**, the North Hertfordshire Proposed Submission Local Plan proposes to alter the Green Belt boundary, so that neither BA1, nor the Site, is within the Green Belt. However, the 2018 updated Green Belt Review for the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031, has now increased the contribution of the Site to the Green Belt purposes, since the 2017 planning application for residential development across BA1.
- 8.1.8 The HCC Submission provides a series of design principles to suggest the physical and perceptual separation between Lower Bygrave and the expanded edge of Baldock can be achieved via a 60m planted buffer. The two design options, whilst sketches, appear to only have a 60m buffer along part of the north-east edge of the Site, with the buffers along the north-west and southern edges being smaller in width, between 20m and 40m.
- 8.1.9 The HCC Regulation 14 Consultation Submission does not refer to this revised Green Belt assessment.
- 8.1.10 Nor does the Regulation 14 Consultation Submission refer to the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan Guidelines (NP) for '*Edges facing existing residential areas*' which specifically states:
- "Bygrave needs to be recognised as a separate community with its own character. A field left undeveloped between the village and the edge of BA1 would help to maintain this character and avoid it being subsumed into Baldock."*

8.1.11 The HCC Regulation 14 Consultation Submission and design principles are therefore not based on the main guidance of the NP, relating to Lower Bygrave and the relationship between the Site and future residential development and the increased importance of the Site in respect of the Green Belt.

8.1.12 HCC's Regulation 14 Consultation Submission states:

"All views of the Site from the primary facades of the dwellings on Ashwell Road would be oblique. It is acknowledged that there may be views from windows on the side elevation of the southernmost property on Ashwell Road. Otherwise views of the Site would be limited to the gardens of the southern most properties on Ashwell Road and from the upper storeys on Wedon Way, however these are not representative of Lower Bygrave as a whole."

8.1.13 However, with reference to the above site and visual appraisal section, the Site is clearly visible from the wider landscape and the HCC design concepts have therefore not been based upon addressing this wider visibility.

8.1.14 Neither the HCC design concepts, nor the sections, provide any details as to the proposed levels across the Site, as whilst contours are indicated, there is no corresponding AOD height. It is therefore not evident how the proposed terracing relates to the 80m AOD plateau around Lower Bygrave, nor what AOD level the taller buildings within the Site would be situated at.

8.1.15 HCC's Regulation 14 Consultation conclusion that a physical and perceived gap between an expanded Baldock and Lower Bygrave can be achieved without the need for a 250m offset is considered not to be justified. This is because HCC have not:

- identified the wider visibility of the Site and how the design options would be perceived in these longer distance views;
- provided detailed topographic level information within their design options and sections, to understand how the new development would be sited in the landscape and its relationship to the position and context of Lower Bygrave;
- provided public access requirements across Site due to the density of the 60m block planting; and
- acknowledged the revised Green Belt assessment findings for the Site and their design response.

8.1.16 In relation to the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Planning Group questions:

1. To what extent are the gap and landscape mitigation works proposed by HCC likely to secure a sense of visual separation between Bygrave and the expanded edge of Baldock?

8.1.17 The proximity and the density of the planting, are, once established (potentially after 15 years) and in leaf, most likely to visually screen new residential land uses from Lower Bygrave. The mitigation proposals would also truncate any longer distance views from these properties across the landscape and create an unsympathetic 'green wall' in immediate proximity to residents.

8.1.18 The visual separation would only relate to new buildings, not the principle of the expanded edge of Baldock.

8.1.19 This is because the proximity and density of the planting would be visually perceived as the 'new edge' of Baldock and the 'green wall' would visually emphasise the change in land use, rather than achieve a sympathetic transition between the existing and proposed residential land uses and the rural landscape.

2. How could using the parcel of land closest to Bygrave in the east of Site BA1 for business units rather than residential affect this assessment (and alter the mitigation that may be required)?

- 8.1.20 The opportunities of business units would be that they could be located close to the new link road, reflecting the design options of placing the larger buildings further from Lower Bygrave.
- 8.1.21 Depending on the quantum of business units, this could enable a more meaningful 'gap' between the business units and Lower Bygrave to be established with a landscape strategy of achieving the landscape and open space objectives of the original planning application. The business units could also enable the alignment of PRoW no.15 to be retained.
- 8.1.22 The constraints of business units would be in relation to their height, form and mass. They would most likely require a larger footprint and extensive areas of hardstanding for car-parking. As a result, this could limit the ability to successfully terrace the Site in a sympathetic manner to the landform, because the 'footprint' of the business units would be larger.
- 8.1.23 Therefore, on balance, it is considered that if development is to occur at the Site, then it would be preferable to be residential land uses rather than business units.

3. To what extent would a larger gap – of up to 250m – and/or additional landscape works achieve more effective visual separation between the expanded edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave?

- 8.1.24 A larger gap than the 60m proposed by HCC would be more effective in achieving visual separation between Baldock and Lower Bygrave, because it enables a greater physical distance and more of a transition in landscape and visual terms, rather than the abrupt edge of HCC's block planting.
- 8.1.25 With reference to **Figure 3: Spatial Analysis**, the main feature in this open landscape is the landform, specifically the 80m AOD contour which forms the plateau around Lower Bygrave and the perceived setting to the settlement. Given that the Site is also in part at the same elevation as the Green Belt land to the west of Ashwell Road, the 80m AOD is a logical and physical feature on which to base a larger 'gap' to the south of Lower Bygrave.
- 8.1.26 A larger gap of 170m is considered more effective in achieving separation between Lower Bygrave and new residential land uses in the Site than HCC's suggested 60m. This is because the 170m distance would reflect the pattern of the landform at the 80m AOD contour that creates a plateau around Lower Bygrave. This distance would also enable a logical relationship to the retained Green Belt to the west of Lower Bygrave.
- 8.1.27 However, a gap of 250m would be the most effective separation between Lower Bygrave and new residential land uses, as well as retain longer distance views of the landscape from Lower Bygrave.
- 8.1.28 Both the 170m and 250m 'gaps' could be used for open space and new planting, enabling a more effective visual transition between an expanded Baldock and Lower Bygrave, rather than the abrupt edge of the block planting suggested by HCC.

4. Are there ways in which a similar quantum of development as proposed by HCC could be arranged differently across the land closest to Bygrave in the east of Site BA1 so as to minimise visual impacts?

- 8.1.29 The inherent constraint of the HCC proposals is the quantum of development within the Site, which negates the number of options for an alternative arrangement.
- 8.1.30 Given the design options illustrate the western edge, adjacent to the link road, with limited planting, development would be visible from the wider landscape to the south, which is evidently not a concern of the design. Therefore, the whole of the layout could be moved closer to the southern boundary of the Site by reducing the width of the proposed planting along the southern edges of the Site.
- 8.1.31 This would enable the residential area to be located more across the southern and eastern parts of the Site, increasing the 'gap' between these new land uses and Lower Bygrave.

- 8.1.32 Ultimately, compared to the illustrative layout, the HCC proposal does not provide the landscape structure and the opportunity for improved integration and a sympathetic transition between the extended edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave.

Figure 1: Site Context Plan

Figure 2: Topography

Figure 3: Spatial Analysis

Figure 4: Viewpoints 1-2

Figure 5: Viewpoints 3-4

Figure 6: Viewpoints 5-6

Figure 7: Viewpoints 7-8

Figure 8: Viewpoints 9-10

Figure 9: Viewpoint 11

Figure 10: Illustrative View from Lower Bygrave

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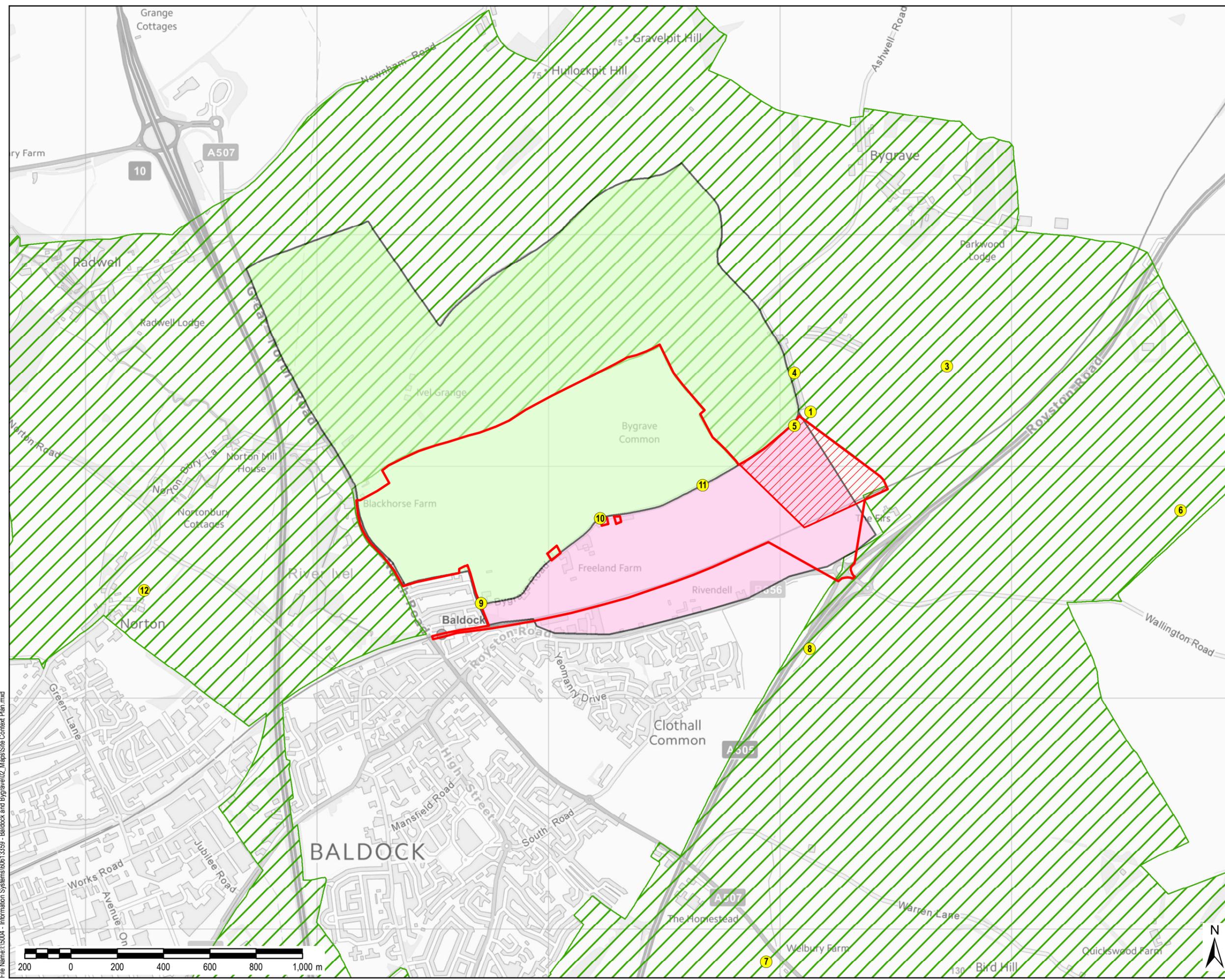
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LEGEND

- BA1
- The Site
- Viewpoint

Landscape Unit

- B1
- B2
- Proposed Green Belt Boundary



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Project Title **BALDOCK & BYGRAVE**

Drawing Title **SITE CONTEXT PLAN**

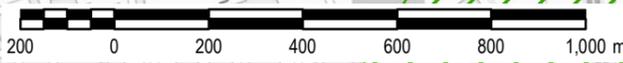
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Drawing Number **FIGURE 1**

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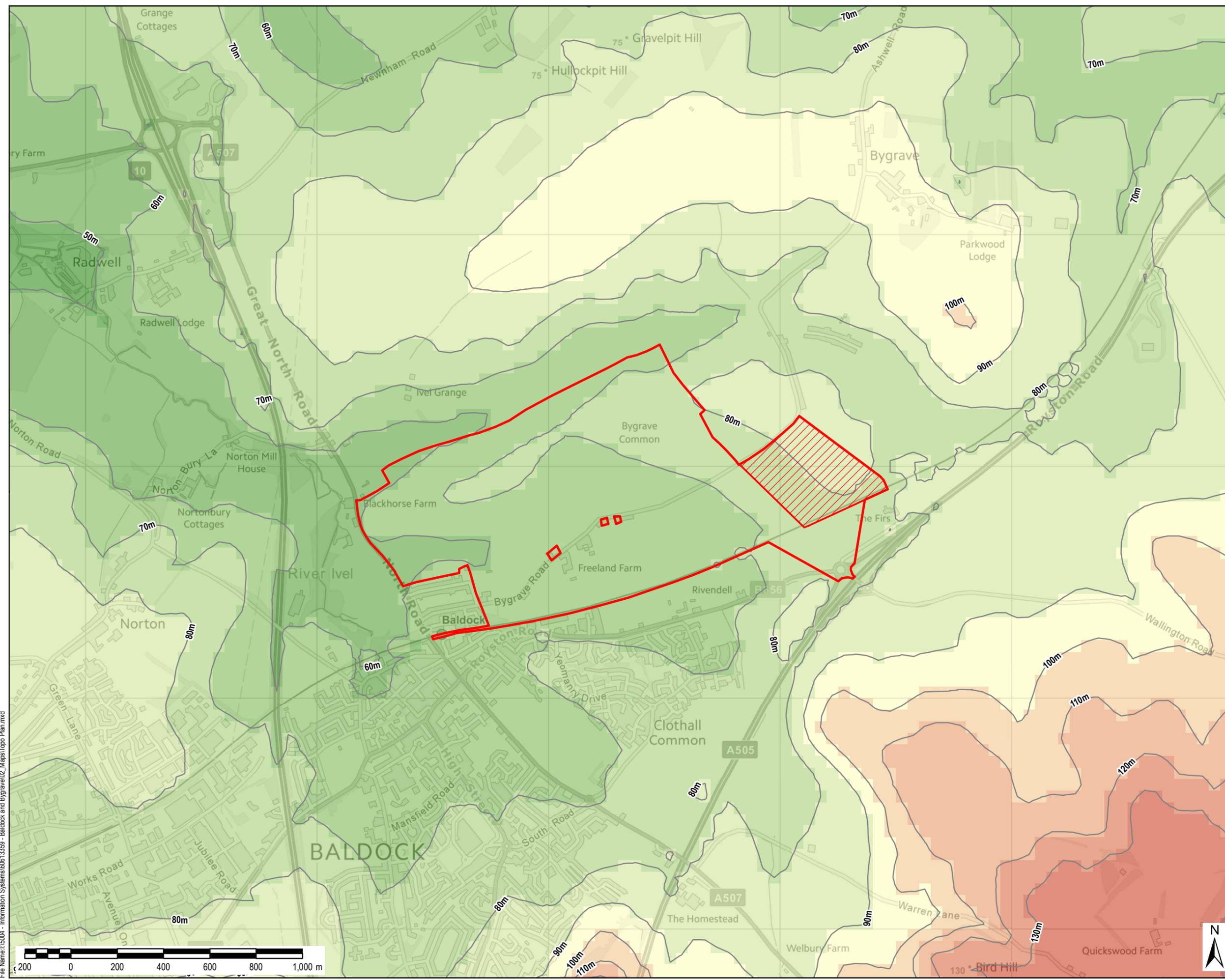
LEGEND

BA1 

The Site 

Topography
(Elevation above sea level/m)

-  >40 - 50
-  >50 - 60
-  >60 - 70
-  >70 - 80
-  >80 - 90
-  >90 - 100
-  >100 - 110
-  >110 - 120
-  >120 - 130
-  >130 - 140
-  >140 - 150



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- LEGEND**
- BA1
 - The Site
 - Property Edge
 - 50m Buffer from Property Edge

- Topography**
(Elevation above sea level/m)
- >40 - 50
 - >50 - 60
 - >60 - 70
 - >70 - 80
 - >80 - 90
 - >90 - 100
 - >100 - 110
 - >110 - 120
 - >120 - 130
 - >130 - 140
 - >140 - 150

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Purpose of Issue
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Client
BALDOCK, BYGRAVE AND CLOTHALL PLANNING GROUP

Project Title
BALDOCK & BYGRAVE

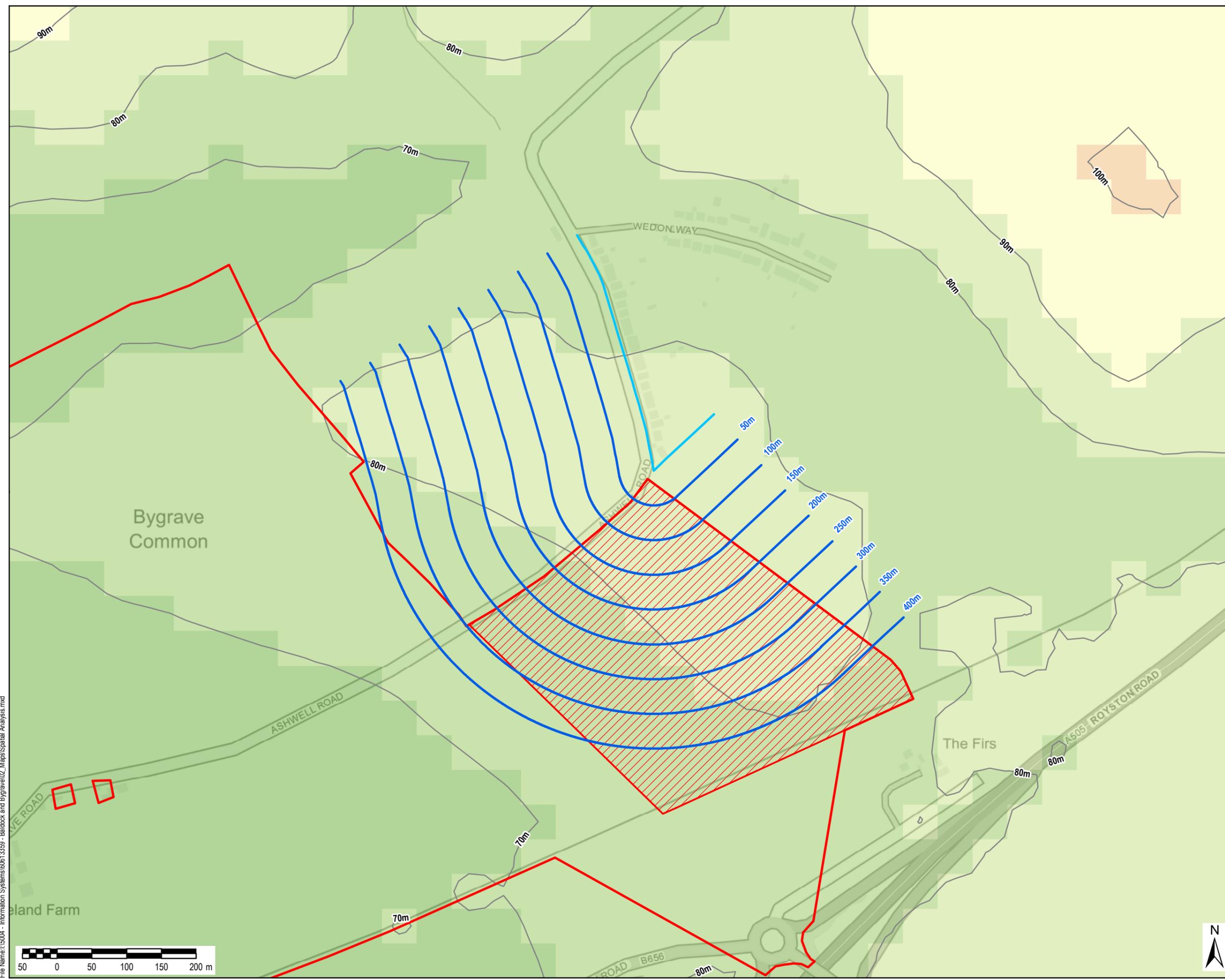
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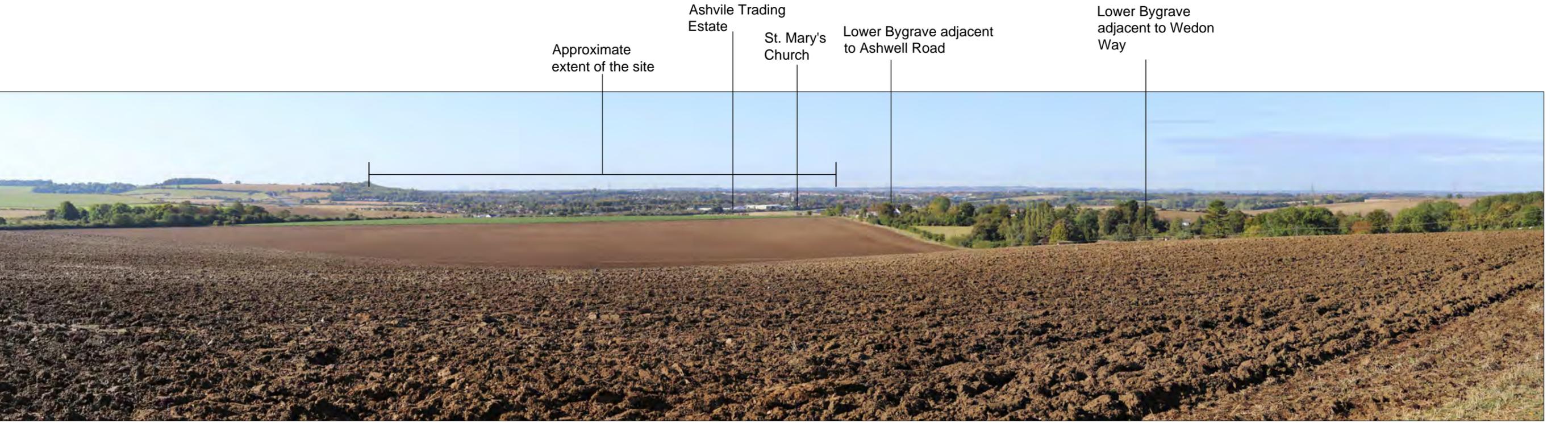
Drawing Number
FIGURE 3



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Site Context Photograph 1: View from PRoW (footpath) no.15 looking south-west across the Site



Site Context Photograph 2: View from PRoW (footpath) no. 5, looking west

<p>Project:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BALDOCK AND BYGRAVE</p>	<p>Title:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FIGURE 4 Site Context Photographs 1&2</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AECOM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Tel: +44 (0) 1256 310 613 www.aecom.com</p>	<p>Design: BL</p> <p>Chk'd: RH</p> <p>Date: 04/10/19</p>	<p>CAD: BL</p> <p>App'd: RH</p> <p>Scale: N/A</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">No. Figure 4</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Rev:</p>
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cm

A3

Industrial land uses in Baldock



Site Context Photograph 3: View from residential properties in Lower Bygrave looking west towards Baldock

Ashwell Road



Site Context Photograph 4: View from the bench at lower Bygrave looking west towards Baldock

Project:
BALDOCK AND BYGRAVE

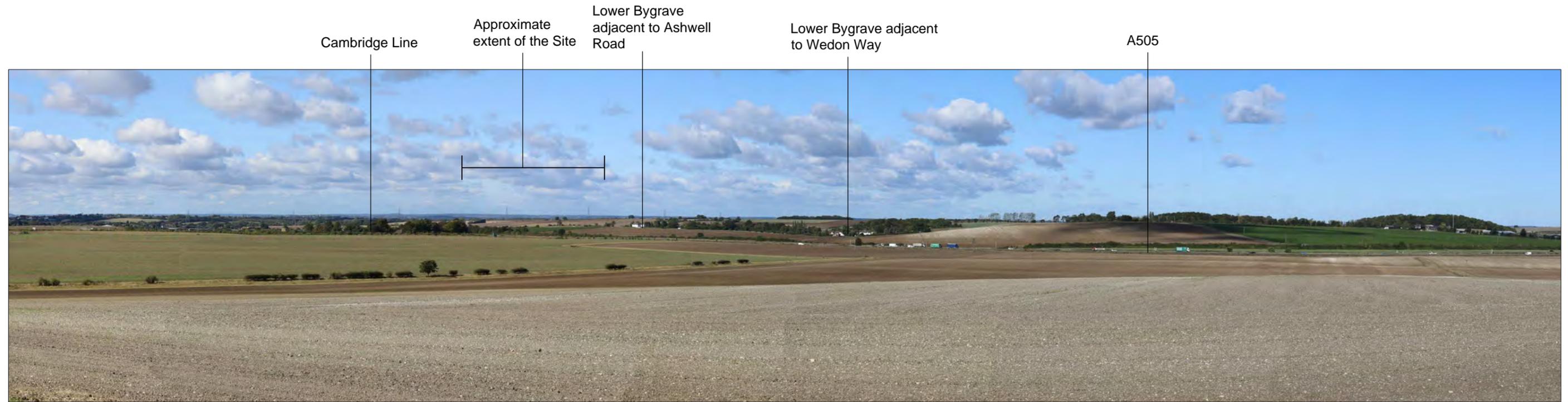
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FIGURE 5
Site Context Photographs 3&4



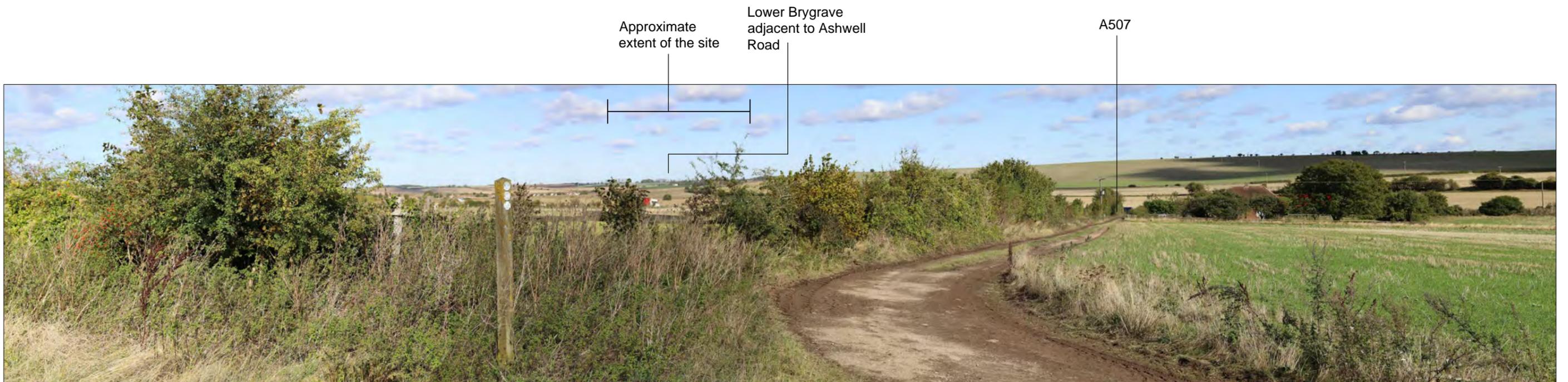
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Site Context Photograph 5: View from Bridleway Rushden and Wallington 041 looking north



Site Context Photograph 6: View from Bridleway Weston 001 looking north-east

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Title:
**FIGURE 6
Site Context Photographs 5&6**

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Site Context Photograph 7: View from Bridleway Clothall 028



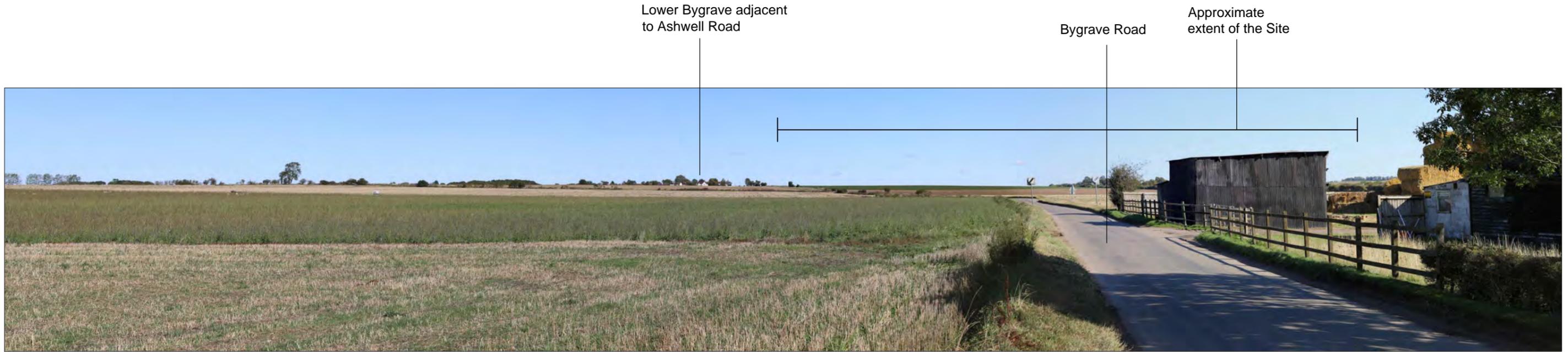
Site Context Photograph 8: View from Bygrave Road

Project:
BALDOCK AND BYGRAVE

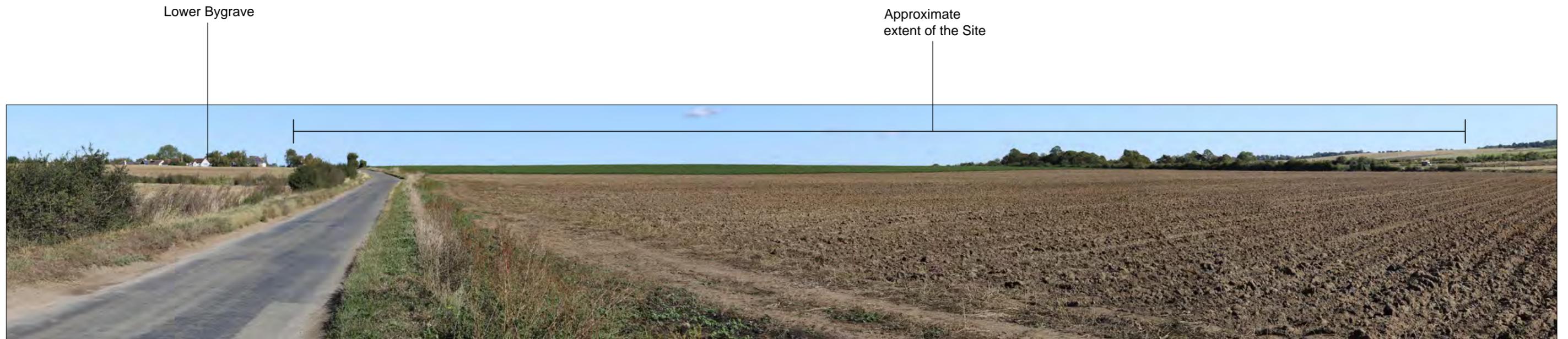
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**FIGURE 7
Site Context Photographs 7&8**

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Site Context Photograph 9: View from Bygrave Road



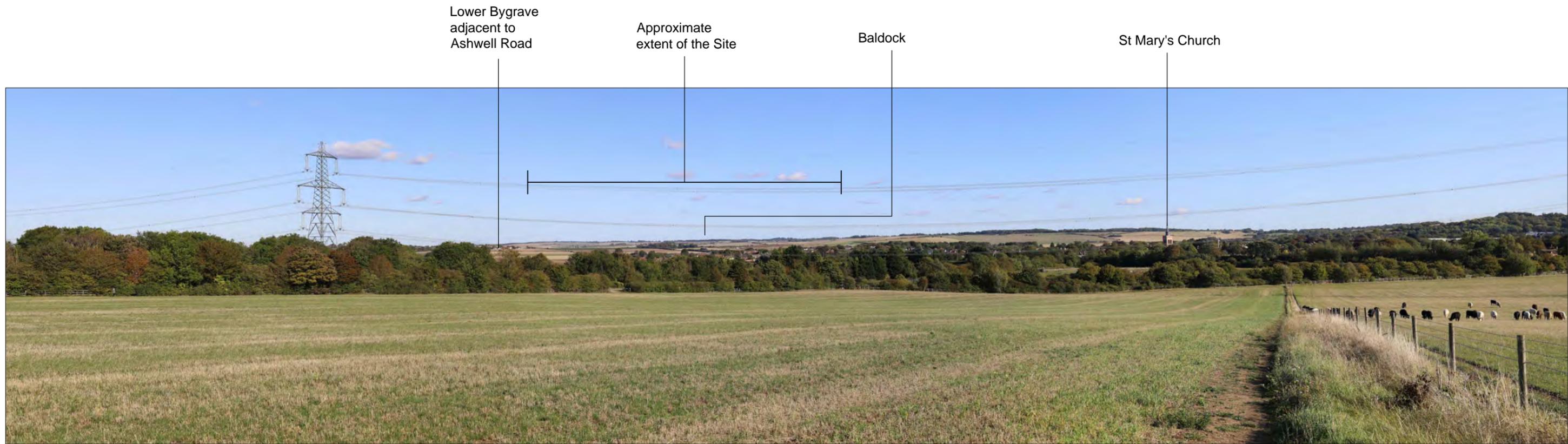
Site Context Photograph 10: View from Bygrave Road looking east towards the Site and Lower Bygrave

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BALDOCK AND BYGRAVE

Title:
FIGURE 8
Site Context Photographs 9&10

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Site Context Photograph 11: View from Footpath Letchworth Garden City 024

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Existing view from Viewpoint 3

Yellow hatch represents buildings at 250m from Lower Bygrave

Red hatch represents buildings at 60m from Lower Bygrave



Illustrated view from Viewpoint 3

Project:
BALDOCK AND BYGRAVE

Title:
FIGURE 10
Illustrated View from
Lower Bygrave at
Viewpoint 3

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