

MOOR MILL TANKER DEPOT, SMUG OAK LANE, ST
ALBANS

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

JANUARY 2026

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3	4. IMPACT APPRAISAL	12
Purpose of the document	3	Landscape appraisal	12
Aims of the assessment	3	Visual appraisal	12
Methodology	3	Green belt	13
Description of study area	3		
Site location	3	5. MITIGATION	15
Development description	3		
Legislation, policy and guidance	4	6. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION	15
Landscape planning designations	6		
		7. REFERENCES	16
2. BASELINE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT	8		
Site description	8	8. FIGURES	17
Topography and soils	8		
National landscape character	8	9. ON-SITE PHOTOGRAPHS	24
Local landscape character	9		
Site landscape character	9	10. VIEWPOINT LOCATION PLAN & VIEWPOINT PHOTOGRAPHS	26
Landscape condition	10		
Landscape receptors	10	11.. APPENDICES	37
Landscape value	10		
3. BASELINE VISUAL ASSESSMENT	11		
Potential visual receptors	11		
Visual receptor baseline	11		
On-site photographs	11		
Nature of visual receptors	11		

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1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Document

1.1 Ubu Design Landscape Architects were commissioned by MRP Planning on behalf of Smug Oak Lane Limited to undertake a landscape and visual appraisal for a residential development on the site of a tanker depot between Colney Street and Bricket Wood, St Albans.

Aims of the Assessment

1.2 This appraisal seeks to inform the design and layout of the development through an appraisal of the landscape and visual considerations relating to the site and its setting, through a combination of desktop research and field survey work. The report aims to:

- Establish a clear understanding of the site and its setting in respect of landscape character and visual amenity;
- Establish an understanding of the proposed development in terms of its relation to landscape character and visual amenity;
- Identify potential direct and indirect effects of the proposed development upon the landscape;
- Identify potential effects on visual receptors;
- Determine mitigation measures necessary to reduce/eliminate any potential adverse effect on the landscape or visual amenity arising as a result of the proposed development;
- Identify opportunities for enhancement measures.

Methodology

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Guidance Documents

1.3 The methodology used to carry out the landscape and visual assessment of the proposed development is primarily based upon that set out in the following guidance:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3), (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment, 2013);
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014);
- LI TGN-2024-01- Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of GLVIA3, (Landscape Institute, 2024).

1.4 The process follows a standard approach, namely establishing:

- The baseline conditions, i.e. the character, quality, value and relative sensitivity of the landscape;
- The type and relative sensitivity of visual receptors;
- The sensitivity to change of the landscape in relation to the proposed development; and
- Mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate potential adverse effects on the landscape and visual receptors.

Site Visit and Conditions

1.5 A site visit was carried out on 21 November 2025 between 11.30 and 14.10, to undertake the assessment of the visual and landscape impacts of the proposed site. The conditions were sunny with good visibility.

1.6 The visit was preceded by a desk top study of landscape designations and analysis of the local area. Field work focussed on the site and surrounding roads and footpaths. The appraisal was carried out during autumn when the deciduous trees and vegetation on and surrounding the site were partially in leaf. This represents a mid case scenario in relation to screening effects of vegetation. The screening effect of the deciduous trees, hedgerows and understorey shrubs will decrease during the winter and increase in summer.

Landscape

1.7 Existing landscape character assessments were reviewed to inform the description of landscape character across the Study Area in advance of the field survey work. This provides the baseline of qualitative information, with reference to landscape planning designations, against which the potential landscape effects of the Scheme can be assessed.

1.8 During the site visit the site and local area were surveyed through observation, recording of observations and through photographs. The assessment reviewed site and local landscape features, character and condition, and the key views into the site.

Visual Amenity

1.9 The viewpoints used in the assessment were selected in order to:

- Determine the extent of visibility of existing built structures;
- Determine the visibility of the proposed development, utilising the results from the desk study to guide field work;
- Gain further understanding of the components which

create the landscape character; and

- Carry out the assessment of landscape and visual effects.

1.10 The following types of viewpoints were investigated:

- Representative viewpoints (for example representing views of users of a particular footpath);
- Specific viewpoints (for example a key view from a specific visitor attraction);
- Illustrative viewpoints (chosen to demonstrate a particular effect/specific issue); and
- Any important sequential views (for example along key transport routes).

1.11 The potential visual receptors that would be affected at the chosen viewpoints include:

- Public footpath and cycle route users including pedestrians;
- People using public open spaces and parks;
- People living in, working in, or visiting the area and the neighbouring properties, farmsteads and workplaces; and
- People using roads or railways.

Photography

1.12 Photographs were recorded using a 50mm focal length lens on a Sony DSLR-A200 digital camera.

1.13 Panoramic views were created by taking a series of overlapping photographs (overlapping by 30-50% as recommended in the guidelines). These have been stitched together using Photoshop, employing the 'reposition photomerge' method.

Description of study area

1.14 The study area for the assessment of landscape and visual effects of the proposed development is shown on Figure 1 and covers an area extending up to approximately 2km from the centre of the site. This is considered to be the maximum extent within which significant visual effects could occur for the type of development proposed.

Site location

1.15 Grid Reference: TL14870227. The site is located on Smug Oak Lane just to the south of the M25, between Bricket Wood and Colney Street.

Development description

- 1.16 The Application Site extends to approximately 0.74 hectares. Planning permission is sought for a residential development (see MRP Planning - Location Plan and Indicative Proposed Block Plan within Appendix A).
- 1.17 Key design features of the development proposals include:
- A new access is proposed very close to the eastern Smug Oak Lane access point, with the existing accesses closed off;
 - 16 two storey dwellings are proposed within the site in a mix of detached, semi-detached and short terraces;
 - A landscape buffer is proposed around the boundaries of the site.

Planning Background

- 1.18 The Site is enclosed by a development site named Former Aerodrome Site, North Orbital. Through reference to the extract of this application scheme provided within Appendix B, the present paddocks and woodland surrounding the site will be replaced with a Country Park, including further woodland.

Potential for Cumulative Effects

- 1.19 The potential for cumulative effects from the adjacent scheme is considered within the assessment.

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

- 1.20 The landscape and visual assessment (LVA) has been undertaken within the context of relevant legislation, planning policies and guidance documents.
- 1.21 The key planning policies considered relevant to the Scheme's landscape and visual considerations are summarised below.

National policy

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

- 1.22 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated in December 2024, provides the Government's current overarching framework relating to planning and new development in England.

- 1.23 Para 8 of the NPPF sets out the three overarching and interdependent objectives required to achieve sustainable development, which underpin plan-making and decision-taking. The overarching objective of relevance to landscape and visual amenity comprises:

- *The environmental objective to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.'*

- 1.24 Regarding achieving well-designed places, Paragraph 131 (Chapter 12) identifies that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.

- 1.25 Paragraph 135 identifies that planning decisions should ensure that developments are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, though nevertheless, not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities).

- 1.26 Regarding protecting green belt land, Paragraph 142 (Chapter 13) identifies that: *'the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.'*

- 1.27 Paragraph 143 identifies that: *'Green Belt serves five purposes:*
- 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.'*

- 1.28 In respect of the natural environment, Section 15, Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that:

- 1.29 *'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and*

enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;...'

(c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;

(d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;...'

- 1.30 The landscape aspects of the NPPF as described above are supported by Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment, Landscape.

Local policy

St Albans District Local Plan Review (Adopted 1994) Saved and Deleted Policies Version (July 2020)

- 1.31 The site falls within St. Albans City and District Council and within the Parish Council of St Stephens.

- 1.32 The Statutory development plan for St Albans District consists of the saved policies of the District Local Plan Review, (Adopted 30 November 1994) supported by the St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan, made on the 20 July 2022. St Albans City and District Council are preparing a new Local Plan 2020-2038, which is in the early stages of development, therefore the saved Policies from the Local Plan 1994 have been reviewed as part of this assessment.

- 1.33 The key documents and policies that relate to the landscape and visual issues relevant to this application are listed and summarised below. Refer to the accompanying Design and Access Statement for a full planning policy review in relation to the application.

- 1.34 The LVIA has taken account of these policies when considering the sensitivity of the site and surrounding area within the base line study. It has also made reference to the policies within the

landscape and visual effects section.

- 1.35 The following are key policies that relate to the landscape and visual issues. The accompanying Planning Statement identifies key Planning Policy that is of relevance to the application.

St Albans District Local Plan Review (Adopted 1994) Saved and Deleted Policies Version (July 2020)

Policy 1: Metropolitan Green Belt

- 1.36 This Policy identifies that:

- 1.37 *'... New development within the Green Belt shall integrate with the existing landscape. Siting, design and external appearance are particularly important and additional landscaping will normally be required. Significant harm to the ecological value of the countryside must be avoided.'*

Policy 69: General Design and Layout

- 1.38 This Policy identifies that:

- 1.39 *All development shall have an adequately high standard of design taking into account the following factors:*

(i) Context - The scale and character of its surroundings in terms of height, size, scale, density or plot to floorspace ratio;

(ii) Materials - Shall normally relate to adjoining buildings. Large isolated buildings in rural or settlement edge settings shall be clad in materials that take account of the general colour and tonal value of their background;

(iii) Other Policies - Applicants shall take into account all relevant policies and requirements. ...

Policy 70: Design and Layout of New Housing

- 1.40 This Policy identifies that:

- 1.41 *The design of new housing development should have regard to its setting and the character of its surroundings and meet the objectives set out in (i) to (xii) below:*

(i) Design and layout - massing and siting of buildings shall create safe, attractive spaces of human scale;

(ii) Dwelling mix - to cater for a range of needs and provide a variety of layout and appearance, a mix of housing types and sizes will be negotiated on large schemes. Large concentrations of small dwellings should be designed

in a manner that avoids domination of public spaces by overbearing hard surfaces and vehicles, and by lack of privacy for ground floor flats;

(iii) Roads and footpaths - Policy 34 shall be complied with in a manner that minimises pedestrian/ vehicular conflict and is visually attractive;

(v) Landscape - proposals shall comply with Policy 74; ...

Policy 74: Landscaping and Tree Preservation

- 1.42 This Policy identifies that:

- 1.43 *The Council will take account of the following landscaping factors when considering planning applications:*

(i) Retention of existing landscaping

a) significant healthy trees and other important landscape features, such as hedgerows, ponds and watercourses shall normally be retained unless it can be shown that retention is incompatible with overall design quality and/or economic use of the site;

b) on sites with significant existing landscaping, planning applications shall be supported by a full tree survey indicating all landscape features, tree species, canopy spread, trunk diameter and levels at the base of each tree;

c) trees shall not normally be severely topped or lopped, or endangered by construction work or underground services. In addition, buildings shall not be sited where they are likely to justify future requests for tree felling or surgery for reasons of safety, excessive shading, nuisance or structural damage;

d) the Council will make tree preservation orders and/or attach appropriate landscaping conditions to planning permissions to safeguard existing trees and ensure that new planting is established and protected;

(ii) Provision of new landscaping

a) where appropriate, adequate space and depth of soil for planting must be allowed within developments. In particular, screen planting including large trees will normally be required at the edge of settlements;

b) detailed landscaping schemes will normally be required as part of full planning applications. Amongst other things they must indicate existing trees and shrubs to be retained; trees to be felled; the planting of new trees, shrubs and grass; and screening and paving. Preference should be

given to the use of native trees and shrubs;

c) wildlife corridors shall be established in accordance with Policy 75, wherever opportunities occur.

St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2019 - 2036

Policy S1: Location of Development

- 1.44 This Policy identifies that:

1. Development proposals in St Stephen Parish will be supported within the Built-up Area Boundaries of Bricket Wood, Chiswell Green and Park Street, identified on the Policies Map. Development proposals that would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area and achieve a net gain in biodiversity will be particularly supported.

4. Development that would be visually intrusive when viewed from publicly accessible locations will not be supported unless it can be appropriately mitigated with landscape screening.

Policy S3: Character of development

- 1.45 This Policy identifies that:

1. Development should conserve and where practicable enhance the character area in which it is located (as described in the Conservation Area Character Statements and in Section 2 of this Neighbourhood Plan). The design of new development should demonstrate how it has taken account of the local context and has reflected the character and vernacular of the area, using architectural variety in form and materials, in order to avoid building design that is inappropriate to the Plan area. Innovation in design will be supported where this demonstrably enhances the quality of the built form in a character area.

2. Where development sites abut open countryside, development on the rural boundary edge should mitigate any detrimental visual impacts on the countryside. As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, this should be achieved through the siting of lower density development at the rural boundary of the site in order to provide a gradual transition from the built form to open countryside, or by other means such as through a layout that clearly minimises the visual impact of any larger buildings.

Policy S5: Design of Development

- 1.46 This Policy identifies that:

1. Development proposals should incorporate a high quality of design, which responds and integrates well with its surroundings, ... In particular development proposals should demonstrate how they have sought to address the following matters as they are appropriate to their scale, nature and location:

i. High quality design that is in keeping with the character and scale of existing buildings in the area;

iii. Provides high quality boundary treatment and green landscaping;

viii. Contributes to the provision, extension and maintenance of accessible green space, including green space for sport and children's play areas, in accordance with St Albans open space provision and Hertfordshire County Council's Planning Obligations Guidance.

Policy S6: Minimising the Environmental Impact of Development

1.47 This Policy identifies that:

2. As they are appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should demonstrate that they address the following matters:

i. Contribute to the objectives of both the Watling Chase Community Forest Plan and the Charter for Trees, Woods and People, by supporting the planting of additional trees and woodlands;

ii. Employ sustainable husbandry of land and wild flower planting/ meadows;

iii. Maintain existing green verges and hedgerows and encourage the planting of new hedgerows and discourage fencing above 0.75m in front gardens;

iv. Provide wildlife corridors and buffer zones (in line with Environment Agency recommendations) to protect species and habitats;

vii. Mitigate the effects of carbon dioxide emissions, climate change and environmental noise by the planting of small to medium scale plantations of native mixed species of UK sourced and grown trees and shrubs to screen developments, all schools and major roads (including the ... M25 ...). Replacement of roadside hedgerows where appropriate.

Policy S10: Green Infrastructure and Development

1.48 This Policy identifies that:

Proposals should be designed from inception to create, conserve, enhance and manage green spaces and connective chains of green infrastructure, as shown in Figure 6.1, with the aim of delivering a net environmental benefit for local people and wildlife. Proposals that seek to improve the connectivity between wildlife areas and green spaces will be encouraged in order to enhance the green infrastructure of the Neighbourhood area.

Policy S14: Provision for walking, cycling and horse-riding

1.49 This Policy identifies that:

3. Development that is immediately adjacent to a footpath or cycleway will be expected to:

i. Ensure the retention and where possible the enhancement of the path;

ii. Not have any detrimental impact (visual, accessibility and/ or safety) on the path, and further assess and address the impact of the additional traffic movements on the safety and flow of pedestrians.

Landscape Planning Designations

1.50 Landscape planning designations within the Study Area are described below and their location shown on Figure 4, where appropriate.

Protected Trees

1.51 Tree Preservation Orders, (TPO) are made under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning, (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012 by a local planning authority to protect trees which bring significant amenity benefit to the local area.

1.52 Through reference to the St Albans Web GIS (accessed on the 14 November 2025), there is a large Area TPO in proximity to the Site to the south and south-west, south of Smug Oak Lane, incorporating Hanstead Wood and Hanstead Park. There are also numerous Group, Area, Woodland and Individual TPOs within the wider study area.

<https://gis.stalbans.gov.uk/WebMap9/Map.aspx?MapName=StAlbans>

Cultural Heritage Designations

1.53 Listed buildings have statutory protection under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

1.54 The nearest Listed Buildings to the Site are the three Grade II Listed Buildings (Moor Mill House and Mill and two Barns) approximately 200m to the north-east of the Site on Moor Mill Lane beside the River Ver. Further Listed buildings are scattered across the study area.

Green Belt

1.55 Green Belts are identified to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence, as reinforced within the NPPF (Dec 2024), Paragraph 142 and 143.

1.56 Grey Belt was introduced by the NPPF update, (Dec 2024) as a zone within the Green Belt: 'comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.' This definition is informed by government guidance on the definition of grey belt land, (last updated 27 February 2025).

1.57 Purpose (c) (of the NPPF) is excluded from the definition of grey belt, i.e. the purpose of 'assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment'.

1.58 The definition of grey belt could therefore include, for example, a small parcel of brownfield land.

1.59 The Metropolitan Green Belt extends to the Study Area outside of the suburban areas, and includes the Site. It is worth noting that over 81% of the St. Albans district comprises land in the Green Belt (ref: Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment, (June 2023, p7, Para 3.1).

Stage 1 Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment for Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield (SKM, 2013)

1.60 The SKM Stage 1 GBR is considered a robust evidence base, which assessed the performance of the entirety of the St Albans Green Belt against the NPPF Green Belt purposes.

1.61 The site lies within Strategic Land Parcel 27, as identified in the Stage 1 Review.

- 1.62 Within the Stage 1 GBR, the parcel within which the site falls was not identified as a Weakly Performing Green Belt parcel. The Parcel or sites within the parcel were not taken forward for review as they were not entirely or partially within a settlement buffer.
- 1.63 This Parcel was not identified for Stage 2 Green Belt Review.

2. BASELINE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Site description

- 2.1 The application site is an irregular shape with an east facing slope and extends to a total of approximately 0.74 hectares. Within the Site there are numerous stored steel lorry skips and a single storey building towards the centre of the Site.
- 2.2 Key features of the site include:
- There are two access points from Smug Oak Lane, with the access to the east being that which is currently in use;
 - The site comprises access track, hard standing, building, storage skips, and scrub and tree vegetation towards the boundaries.
 - Mature tree and hedgerow vegetation on the southern boundary separates the Site from Smug Oak Lane;
 - Smug Oak Lane runs east to west immediately to the south of the southern boundary of the Site;
 - The western end of the site is cut into the landform, with banks rising up to the western boundary and the western end of the northern boundary, while the northern access slopes down into the site;
 - There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) running through or adjacent to the Site.
- 2.3 Features of the local site context include:
- The M25 runs east to west to the north of the site;
 - Colney Street to the east comprises a large industrial estate with some residential ribbon development along Radlett Road, while further ribbon development extends north of the M25;
 - A number of farmsteads, dwellings, businesses and hamlets are dispersed through the local area, including Smug Oak House and the adjoining cluster of dwellings to the south, a farmstead/ stables to the west and the cluster of buildings on Moor Mill Lane to the north-east, as well as, at a slightly greater distance, the new development of Hanstead Park to the south-west, off Smug Oak Lane;
 - The closest Rights of Way in the vicinity of the site are public footpaths St Stephens 033 and 035 to the north of the site;
 - The site is surrounded by pasture land and woodland, with fields predominantly bounded by hedgerows with interspersed trees, and sub-divided by wire fencing.

Topography and soils

- 2.4 The site has a very gently slope falling to the east, varying between approximately 70m AOD on the eastern boundary to approximately 75m AOD on the western boundary of the site. The existing building towards the centre of the site lies at approximately 72m AOD.
- 2.5 The western end of the site is cut into the landform, with banks rising up to the western boundary and the western end of the northern boundary, while the northern access slopes down into the site.
- 2.6 Reference to the LandIS Soilscape Viewer identifies the site as having Soilscape 6: freely draining slightly acid loamy soils with low fertility.

National landscape character

- 2.7 England's 159 National Character Areas (NCAs) represent areas of distinct and recognisable character at the national scale. The Site and Study Area are situated within the Northern Thames Basin National Character Area (NCA 111, 2014), described as follows:
- 2.8 *'extends from Hertfordshire in the west to the Essex coast in the east. ...This NCA contains the suburbs of North London and historic towns and cities including St. Albans and Colchester. It also includes new and planned towns such as Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and Basildon. Arable agriculture is a large industry in the NCA, despite soil quality ranging from good to poor.'*
- 2.9 Landscape attributes of the NCA are identified including:
- 2.10 *'A diverse mixture of large urban areas, smaller urban settlements, as well as remote villages and hamlets surrounded by agricultural lands, grasslands/ heathlands and woodlands. (Justification: The CPRE Intrusion Map (2007) found the area to be 32 per cent urban, 55 per cent disturbed and only 13 per cent classified as undisturbed...)*
- 2.11 Key characteristics of the Northern Thames Basin NCA pertinent to the site context are defined as:
- *The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys. The prominent hills and ridges of the 'Bagshot Hills' are notable to the northwest and extensive tracts of flat land are found in the south.*

- *Characteristic of the area is a layer of thick clay producing heavy, acidic soils, resulting in retention of considerable areas of ancient woodland.*
- *Areas capped by glacial sands and gravels have resulted in nutrient-poor, free-draining soils which support remnant lowland heathlands, although these are now small. Areas that have alluvial deposits present are well drained and fertile.*
- *A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea, and slightly steeper valleys of the rivers Stour, Colne and Roman. Numerous springs rise at the base of the Bagshot Beds and several reservoirs are dotted throughout the area.*
- *The pattern of woodlands is varied across the area and includes considerable ancient semi-natural woodland. Hertfordshire is heavily wooded in some areas as are parts of Essex, while other areas within Essex are more open in character. Significant areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are also present.*
- *The field pattern is very varied across the basin reflecting historical activity. Informal patterns of 18th-century or earlier enclosure reflect medieval colonisation of the heaths. Regular planned enclosures dating from the Romano-British period are a subtle but nationally important feature on the flat land to the south-east of the area. In the Essex heathlands 18th- and 19th-century enclosure of heathlands and commons followed by extensive 20th-century field enlargement is dominant.*
- *Mixed farming, with arable land predominating in the Hertfordshire plateaux, parts of the London Clay lowlands and Essex heathlands. Grasslands are characteristic of the river valleys throughout. Horticulture and market gardening are found on the light, sandy soils of former heaths in Essex, particularly around Colchester, along with orchards, meadow pasture and leys following numerous narrow rivers and streams.*
- *The diverse range of semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, lowland heath and floodplain grazing marsh and provide important habitats for a wide range of species including great crested newt, water vole, dormouse and otter.*
- *Rich archaeology including sites related to Roman occupation, with the Roman capital at Colchester and City of St Albans (Verulamium) and links to London. Landscape parklands surrounding 16th- and 17th-century rural estates and country houses built for London merchants are a particular feature in Hertfordshire.*
- *The medieval pattern of small villages and dispersed farming settlement remains central to the character of parts*

of Hertfordshire and Essex. Market towns have expanded over time as have the London suburbs and commuter settlements, with the creation of new settlements such as the pioneering garden city at Welwyn and the planned town at Basildon.

- Brick-built dwellings are characteristic from the late 17th century onwards. Prior to this dwellings and farm buildings tended to be timber built with weatherboarding, now mainly painted white but traditionally black or tarred, and whitewashed plaster walls.

Local landscape character

South Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment

2.12 Hertfordshire County Council have produced the South Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment in 2001, undertaken by the Landscape Partnership. This assessment identifies the area within which the site lies as Landscape Character Area (LCA) 17 Ver/ Colne River Valley, as shown in Figure 3. The site is located towards the centre of this narrow LCA.

2.13 The landscape character of LCA 17 is described as follows:

2.14 'A narrow river valley corridor which skirts a mosaic of settlements, parkland, farmland and both active and restored mineral workings. The modest River Ver and upper Colne occupy a meandering floodplain which is grazed by livestock at a number of locations. Riparian willow plantations line the rivers along part of the course whilst south of Park Street restored wetland mineral workings provide recreational opportunities. A number of distinctive features punctuate the river landscape, including parkland, mills and fords. The valley is visually contained by side slopes and vegetation which generally conceal the presence of the adjoining settlements. The Ver-Colne Valley walk provides good pedestrian access.'

2.15 Key characteristics within LCA 17 are identified including the following:

- well-defined linear river corridor from St Albans to Watford
- flat sinuous floodplain with ecologically important floodplain meadows
- steeper valley sides including arable conversions, golf courses and restored land
- area of restored mineral workings in river floodplain

- fragmentation of linear valley form and a loss of tranquillity where crossed by the M25, M1 and A414
- sense of rural seclusion between Otterspool and Colne/ Ver confluence with attractive riverside views
- visual intrusion from urban fringe development at Watford, Park Street, Colney Street and St Albans.

2.16 Further information regarding the character area includes:

Vegetation and Wildlife

2.17 ...North of the confluence with the Colne are several important unimproved floodplain meadow grasslands, e.g. Sopwell Meadows. Sedge marsh or 'rich fen' is found with important species such as bogbean present. The natural woodland type is floodplain alder but very little remains. Small riverine plantations and linear belts are present for both cropping and amenity, with distinctive silvery-leaved willow, poplar and ash. There is a good mix in age structure of trees and most of the floodmeadows are actively managed. Hedgerows contain the wider valley along lanes or to higher ground. Hawthorn is the main species. There are many mature specimen trees and copses, including beech, sycamore, sweet chestnut, cedar and oak in the parklands at Wall Hall and Munden Hall...

Settlement and Built Form

2.18 A number of mills were built along the river, e.g. at Sopwell and Park Street. These mills are now converted to offices and restaurants. ... Local building materials comprise brick and clay tile with weathered timber-framed barns.

Visual and Sensory Perception

2.19 There are limited views of the river corridor from outside the area. The section from Otterspool to Colney Street has a strong visual unity and sense of rural seclusion. ... Other sections to the north and south are more influenced by adjacent urban uses, or comprise restored land. The noise from local roads provides the major detraction in downgrading what otherwise would be a very pleasant area.

Visual Impact

2.20 'The major roads which cross over the river corridor are significant detracting features by virtue of both the structures and the visual disturbance of the traffic. Pylons also disrupt the scenic value.'

Community Views

2.21 The western end of the Ver Colne valley is valued for some distinctive elements, including 'lovely walks by woodland and streams'.

Strategy And Guidelines For Managing Change:

2.22 A strategy of Improve And Conserve is identified, including the following guidelines:

- encourage planting of small to medium-scale plantations to screen major roads (including the M1, M25), soften urban edges and emphasise the slopes and sense of seclusion along the valley floor
- restore and sensitively manage the historic hedgerow pattern and river valley field trees

Site landscape character

2.23 The landscape character of the Site itself accords with the local landscape character assessments. The Site lies within the River Ver valley landscape on the sloping valley side, (off Smug Oak Lane which cuts across the valley connecting Smug Oak and Colney Street.)

2.24 The local landscape is visually contained, with views reduced by hedgerows, trees and copses, as well as the landform. The M25 dissects the valley and leads to visual disturbance and a loss of tranquillity. The landscape pattern is typified by pasture fields interspersed with copses. The floodplain meadows along the River Ver are also typical of this local landscape.

2.25 The Site has the following key characteristics:

- The Site is predominantly surrounded by pasture land, with a wooded copse to the east and Smug Oak Lane running to the south of the Site;
- The western end of the Site is cut into the landform, with banks rising up to the western boundary and the western end of the northern boundary, while the northern access slopes down into the Site;
- A tall telecommunications tower is located to the west of the western Site entrance;
- Smug Oak Lane runs along the southern boundary, separated from the Site by a wide verge accommodating a footpath. Boundary tree and hedgerow vegetation lines the southern boundary;

- Deciduous hedgerows line Smug Oak Lane and many of the local field boundaries;
- The site is relatively well enclosed due to tree and scrub vegetation on the southern boundary, a copse to the east, and scrub and intermittent trees on the northern and western boundaries, combined with the steep bank on the western boundary;
- An existing single storey building is located towards the centre of the Site, while numerous stored containers/ large skips line the internal hard standing area;
- Intervisibility is fairly low, with views contained by localised vegetation combined with landform and the cutting within the Site. However there is some visibility from parts of the footpaths to the north and north-west, to the south of the M25, where hedgerows do not obscure views.
- The site has a slight easterly aspect.

2.26 The overall character of the Site is that of a disused storage yard contained by unmanaged vegetation and largely hidden from view. The Site's setting is semi-rural in character, though influenced by suburban edge-of-settlement elements such as wire fencing and telegraph posts and urban infrastructure including the telecommunications tower and infrastructure associated with the M25 and Smug Oak Lane. The wider setting is also influenced by scattered development including industrial, commercial and residential development.

2.27 The Metropolitan Green Belt extends to part of the Study Area outside of the suburban areas, which includes the Site.

Landscape condition

2.28 The site is well vegetated towards the boundaries though with a predominance of unmanaged scrub at lower levels. A number of mature trees are located within the site towards the boundaries, in particular the southern and eastern boundaries and the eastern end of the northern boundary. Hardstanding runs east-west through the site, accessed from the western access.

2.29 Fields surrounding the site include small, sub-divided, permanent pasture fields to the north and west, and larger fields to the south, predominantly enclosed by intact hedgerows. Mature copses are also a feature of the landscape providing further enclosure, with copses to the east and north-east of the site along the River Ver. Woodland planting has recently been planted in the field immediately to the north of the Site.

Landscape receptors

2.30 Existing character assessments have been reviewed and interpreted for the Site. This review informs the identification of key characteristics associated with the character area that are most relevant to an appraisal of the proposal (as recommended within GLVIA3, p79, Para 5.15).

2.31 The Application Site is not a valued landscape in relation to Paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework as informed by LI Technical Guidance Note 02-21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations.

2.32 There is not considered to be a strength of expression, or presence of distinctive characteristics associated with the relevant published landscape character areas within or associated with the Site.

2.33 The description of relevant components of landscape enables an understanding of their value, including what the contribution of the Site is to that. Within the subsequent appraisal this enables a consideration of the susceptibility of these receptors against the type and magnitude of change proposed.

2.34 Landscape receptors, or components, which may include elements, features and areas where appropriate are defined to provide an understanding of the landscape both within the Site and at a wider landscape scale context. These landscape receptors considered to be potentially affected by the proposed development are as follows:

2.35 A number of landscape receptors were selected for the landscape assessment, representing those landscape receptors considered to be potentially affected by the proposed development, as follows:

- Setting/ character of the Ver/ Colne River Valley character area in the vicinity of the site;
- Application site landscape features, principally trees, hedgerow shrubs and scrub;
- Setting of the three Grade II Listed Buildings on Moor Mill Lane (Moor Mill House and Mill and two Barns), approximately 200m to the north-east of the site.

2.36 The site is not visible from the setting of Listed Buildings, as evidenced in the ZTV and confirmed during the site survey, therefore this receptor was scoped out of the appraisal.

Landscape value

2.37 The contribution of the Site as a storage yard to the local countryside and field pattern is considered to be low. The landscape value of the site features, with a number of mature native and non-native trees, is considered to be medium-low.

2.38 In relation to perceptual aspects, the local contribution of the Site as a storage yard to relative tranquillity is low, in the context of local loss of tranquillity from the M25.

2.39 In relation to landscape character, the landscape value of the immediate Ver/ Colne River Valley local character area (LCA 17) setting, including the sense of enclosure from localised copses, is considered to be medium.

3. BASELINE VISUAL ASSESSMENT

Potential visual receptors

- 3.1 The desktop study informed the selection of a series of potential visual receptors and viewpoints, which were then investigated through the field survey to provide a detailed assessment of the visual effects of the proposed development. The potential visual receptors, which comprise the people experiencing the view, are described below.
- 3.2 The Site is generally well enclosed to the south and east by mature tree and hedgerow vegetation. To the north and west, the boundary vegetation is less continuous.

Public receptors

- 3.3 Potential receptors identified included the following public routes which lie in the vicinity of the Site:
- Smug Oak Lane
 - Public Right of Way (footpath) St Stephens 033
 - Public Right of Way (footpath) St Stephens 035 and 035A
 - Public Right of Way (footpath) St Stephens 017
 - Public Right of Way (footpath) St Stephens 054
 - Public Right of Way (bridleway) St Stephens 007
 - Public Right of Way (Restricted byway) Aldenham 020
 - M25
- 3.4 Through field survey investigations it was found that there were no views of the Site from Public Rights of Way St Stephens 035A, St Stephens 017, St Stephens 007, St Stephens 054, Aldenham 020 and the M25 motorway due to landform, buildings or dense vegetation, or a combination of these factors. In some instances, the top of the telecommunications tower was visible.

Residential receptors

- 3.5 There are no residential properties in proximity to the Site with views towards the Site.

Recreational receptors

- 3.6 Potential receptors involving recreational receptors include:
- Walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Cultural receptors

- 3.7 There are some nationally listed buildings within the study area and these are identified in Figure 2.

- 3.8 Grade II Listed Buildings include:
- Three Grade II Listed Buildings approximately 200-250m to the north-east of the site.

- 3.9 These listed buildings were found to be separated visually from the site by woodland and landform and were therefore scoped out of the assessment.

Visual receptor baseline

- 3.10 Visual receptors were selected to provide coverage of all receptors or receptor groups with views that may be affected by the proposed development. Viewpoint locations are shown in Figure 9. Viewpoint Photographs, and the detailed descriptions of those Viewpoints, are provided within Chapter 10.

On-Site Photographs

- 3.11 Site photographs were recorded from within the Site to help describe the visual envelope of the proposals, and to give an indication of the site character and landscape condition. The site photographs (refer to Chapter 9) do not form part of the visual assessment.

Nature of visual receptors

Viewpoint locations

- 3.12 The River Ver Trail and the Ver Colne Valley Walk are recreational routes that follow public footpaths St Stephens 033 crossing the M25 and St Stephens 035 south of the M25.
- 3.13 Users of public footpath St Stephens 035 to the north of the Site are represented by Viewpoint 01. This Viewpoint also represents users of the River Ver Trail and the Ver Colne Valley Walk (recreational routes).
- 3.14 Users of public footpath St Stephens 033 to the north and west of the Site are represented by Viewpoints 02,03 and 04. Viewpoint 02 also represents users of the River Ver Trail and the Ver Colne Valley Walk (recreational routes), where the routes cross the M25 footbridge.
- 3.15 Users of Smug Oak Lane to the south-west and south-east of the Site are represented by Viewpoints 05, 06, 07 and 08. Viewpoint 08 also represents users of a short section of bridleway St Stephens 006 to the south-east of the Site.

- 3.16 Users of restricted byway Aldenham 020 to the south-east of the Site are represented by Viewpoint 09.

- 3.17 Users of Public Footpath St Stephen 054 to the south-east of the Site are represented by Viewpoint 10.

Susceptibility

- 3.18 Recreational users of Public Rights of Way within a semi-rural location have a Medium expectation of visual quality, reducing to Low where the major road infrastructure context dominates. Road and pavement users which experience incidental views within a semi-rural context have a Medium expectation of visual quality.

Value

- 3.19 Users experience views of Medium value primarily associated with the naturalistic elements of paddocks, woodland, native hedgerows and trees, decreasing to a Low value where influenced by suburban elements such as fencing and telegraph posts and infrastructure such as roads, M25, signage, road markings, and the telecommunications tower.

4. IMPACT APPRAISAL

General

- 4.1 This section appraises the landscape and visual impacts which would result from the Scheme described in Section 1.0, using a descriptive format.
- 4.2 The potential for cumulative effects from the surrounding consented scheme(s) as described within Section 1.0 is considered within this section. Through reference to the relevant application on the St Albans District Planning pages (see extract within Appendix B), new Country Park areas will be established surrounding the Site.

Landscape appraisal

Ver/Colne River Valley local character area in the vicinity of the site

- 4.3 The countryside within the Study Area is located within landscape characterised as the Ver/ Colne River Valley Landscape Character Area, (LCA 17). The description of this area highlights the valley's visually containment from side slopes and vegetation which generally conceal the presence of the adjoining settlements. Floodplain meadows combined with riparian willow plantations are also a feature of the LCA. The LCA suffers from a fragmentation of linear valley form where crossed by the M25.
- 4.4 The Site is located on an east facing side slope of the valley. The small scale of the proposed development would sit within an enclosed landscape of paddocks, woodland copses and hedgerows, studded with scattered small scale development including farms, converted mills, large houses and groups of dwellings, and in proximity to the motorway, which has a marked effect on the tranquillity of the Site and local area. Settlements such as Colney Street lie in the adjoining LCA. The valley landform and well vegetated local character combine to create relatively short range visibility, and result in development being largely hidden from view.
- 4.5 The Site as a storage yard has a localised negative impact on the local character, principally evident from within, or in very close proximity to, the Site, due to the landform and Site boundary vegetation. The proposed development would have a localised, though somewhat greater, effect (than the existing use) on the landscape character of LCA 17 due to the small scale and partially enclosed nature of the Site. The change from storage yard to residential development would introduce a noticeable change due to the introduction of the proposed taller and more dense built form (including some

short terraces), with some adverse effect. This would be limited to a certain extent by the existing banks and mature tree vegetation on parts of the Site boundaries, which would partially integrate the proposed built form.

- 4.6 The recommended native tree and hedgerow planting around the boundaries of the Site, along with the use of dull toned building materials for roofs and elevations, would help to visually and physically integrate the built form within the local landscape.
- 4.7 For users of Public Footpaths St Stephens 033 and 035 in proximity to the Site, the relative tranquillity from the Site in use as a storage yard with apparently little or no regular use, would be replaced with residential development with some additional impact to local tranquillity. However, in the context of the existing impact on tranquillity from the M25, this would be marginal.
- 4.8 Proposed and recently planted woodland and tree planting forming part of the consented scheme (Former Aerodrome Site, North Orbital - refer to Appendix B), would mature to further enclose the Site and embed the proposed development within the landscape.
- 4.9 Overall, the proposed development will represent a noticeable change to the Ver/ Colne Valley LCA with some adverse effect which will be limited by adjacent planting of the consented scheme and further limited if all opportunities for mitigation were implemented.

Application site landscape features principally trees, hedgerow shrubs and scrub

- 4.10 The Site landscape features principally comprise trees, hedgerow shrubs and scrub towards the periphery of the Site. This vegetation will have some habitat and biodiversity value.
- 4.11 Some of the existing trees on site are non native evergreens. Some trees are proposed to be removed as part of the development proposals to facilitate the development, including non native evergreens near the northern boundary and some pines towards the southern boundary. The loss of existing trees will provide an initial limited adverse impact to landscape features on the Site.
- 4.12 Some of the existing trees will be retained. The recommended native mixed species tree and hedgerow planting around the boundaries of the Site, along with further biodiverse planting within the Site, provide the opportunity to enhance biodiversity,

strengthen landscape pattern and contribute to the local landscape character.

- 4.13 Overall, there is likely to be a neutral impact to the Site landscape features if opportunities to implement landscape character and ecological enhancements are taken, once the recommended planting has matured.

Visual appraisal

- 4.14 The assessment is undertaken with reference to the Viewpoint Photographs and Viewpoint Location Plan within Chapter 10 and the Zone of Theoretical Visibility provided in Figure 7. Visibility towards the Site area is limited to the extent of public footpaths St Stephens 035 and 033 to the north of the Site and south of the M25, and Smug Oak Lane in proximity to the Site.

PRoW St Stephens 035 to north of site

- 4.15 For recreational users of footpath St Stephens 035 and the Ver Colne Valley Walk (which follows this footpath) to the north of the Site and south of the M25, visual amenity is illustrated by Viewpoint 01.
- 4.16 This Viewpoint represents a section of the Footpath without hedgerow, though other sections are partially contained by deciduous hedgerow or woodland. Users would observe the upper levels of the proposed dwellings beyond the intervening recently planted woodland belt and field, partially screened by the landform (due to the lower levels at the western end of the site) and mature boundary trees towards the eastern end of the site. The skyline would be partly defined by rooflines for the western end of the Site, with the telecommunications tower visible above the rooflines. In the eastern part of the site the intervening mature boundary trees would partially screen the built form and rooflines and they would therefore be less noticeable.
- 4.17 The changes to views would represent an adverse effect for users of this footpath where direct visibility occurs, which would diminish as the intervening woodland belt planting matures, with visibility likely to be reduced to only winter glimpses in approximately 5 years' growth of the woodland. The recommended site boundary tree and hedgerow planting would further reduce any remaining glimpses of the proposed built form.

PRoW 033 to north-west of site

- 4.18 For recreational users of footpath St Stephens 033 to the north-west of the Site, and over and south of the M25, visual amenity is illustrated by Viewpoints 02, 03 and 04. Viewpoint 02 also represents users of the River Ver Trail and the Ver Colne Valley Walk (recreational routes), where the routes cross the M25 footbridge.
- 4.19 In Viewpoint 02 from the footbridge crossing the M25, users are likely to have no change to visual amenity as the proposed development is likely to be screened by the intervening foreground vegetation.
- 4.20 To the immediate south of the M25, users are initially partially enclosed by hedgerow which encloses and foreshortens the view. The hedgerow peters out to occasional individual hedge shrubs, with largely open views towards the Site, apart from post and wire fencing.
- 4.21 From the section of the footpath to the south of the M25 as in Viewpoint 03, users would observe the upper levels of the built form beyond the intervening recently planted woodland belt and field. At the western end of the Site the built form would be partially screened by the landform (due to the lower levels of the Site) and towards the eastern end of the Site, by mature boundary trees. The skyline would be partly defined by rooflines for the western end of the Site, with the telecommunications tower visible above the rooflines. In the eastern part of the Site the intervening mature boundary trees would partially screen the built form and rooflines and they would therefore be less noticeable. A pale industrial unit in Ventura Park also provides an urbanising effect in the east of this view, glimpsed through the trees, which would be less noticeable in summer when trees are in leaf.
- 4.22 The changes to the view would represent an adverse effect for users of this footpath, which would diminish as the intervening woodland belt matures, with visibility likely to be reduced to only winter glimpses in approximately 5 years' growth of the woodland, though proposed dwellings at the eastern end of the Site are unlikely to be screened by the woodland. The recommended site boundary tree and hedgerow planting would help to diminish the visibility of these dwellings at the eastern end of the Site, and further reduce any remaining glimpses of the proposed built form through the woodland.
- 4.23 Further west along the footpath, as in Viewpoint 04, users would observe upper levels of the built form on the eastern part of the Site partially screened by the landform (due to the

lower levels at the western end of the Site) and boundary scrub vegetation. The skyline would be partly defined by rooflines, with the telecommunications tower visible to the immediate south of the built form. The introduction of the proposed development would be both noticeable and incongruous in the predominantly rural view from this short western section of the footpath, resulting in changes to the visual amenity for users of the footpath representing a noticeable adverse effect. Visibility of the built form would gradually diminish as the recommended site boundary tree and hedgerow planting matured.

- 4.24 Proposed woodland and tree planting to the immediate east of the eastern boundary of the Site, forming part of the consented scheme (Former Aerodrome Site, North Orbital - refer to Appendix B), would mature to further enclose the view and reduce the visibility of the rooflines of the proposed development.

Smug Oak Lane

- 4.25 For footway and vehicular users of Smug Oak Lane to the north-west, south and north-east of the Site, visual amenity is illustrated by Viewpoints 05 - 08.
- 4.26 In Viewpoint 05 to the north-west of the Site, users are enclosed by tall hedgerow vegetation, which is unmanaged on the northern side of the road. Users are likely to have no change to visual amenity as the proposed development is likely to be screened by the intervening foreground vegetation.
- 4.27 At close range to the Site, as in Viewpoint 06 to the immediate west of the western site entrance, there will be some change to the view with the entrance and tarmac removed, a new continuous footway and verge and new boundary vegetation across the gap. Users of the road and footway are also likely to observe the built form partially screened by the retained existing boundary trees, which will be better obscured in summer when the deciduous trees are in leaf.
- 4.28 The introduction of the proposed development would represent a limited beneficial effect in relation to the removal of the western entrance, and an adverse effect in relation to the introduction of the built form.
- 4.29 In Viewpoint 07 to the north-east of the Site at the eastern site entrance, users will experience some change to the view with the eastern entrance removed and relocated slightly further west, which may necessitate the removal of some boundary trees. Users of the road and footway will also observe the built

form of the proposed development beyond the site entrance and beyond newly planted boundary tree and hedgerow vegetation. From this close range location immediately south-east on Smug Oak Lane, the proposed built form, rooflines and access improvement would be both noticeable and dominant. The maturing of the recommended native hedgerow and trees on the boundary would help to soften and integrate the built form beyond and limit the impact on visual amenity.

- 4.30 Further to the east on Smug Oak Lane, as in Viewpoint 08, where footpath St Stephen 006 runs parallel to the road, the proposed development would not be visible, screened by the landform and intervening woodland, and there would be no change to the visual amenity of users of the road and footpath.

PRoWs to south of site

- 4.31 For recreational users of restricted byway Aldenham 020 to the south-east of the Site, represented by Viewpoint 09, and of Public Footpath St Stephen 054 to the south-east of the Site, represented by Viewpoint 10, the development proposals will not be visible from these distant viewpoints and there will be no change to the visual amenity for users of these footpaths.

Green Belt

- 4.32 As described within Section 2.0, Green Belts are protected to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts being their openness and permanence.
- 4.33 The Metropolitan Green Belt extends to part of the Study Area outside of the suburban areas, which includes the Site. It is worth noting through reference to the Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment, (June 2023, p7, Para 3.1) that over 81% of the St. Albans district comprises land in the Green Belt.
- 4.34 Grey Belt was introduced by the NPPF update, (Dec 2024) as a zone within the Green Belt: 'comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.
- 4.35 The anticipated changes from the consented scheme would substantially enclose the Site within a Country Park setting, with further woodland, tree and hedge planting introduced, in addition to the new woodland planting to the north of the Site.
- 4.36 The Site provides a limited contribution to the spatial and

visual qualities of openness within the Greenbelt, despite existing storage on site. The proposed development would result in a localised permanent impact to this openness. Maturing of the surrounding consented woodland vegetation and recommended on-site boundary vegetation would reduce awareness of loss of visual openness.

5. MITIGATION

- 5.1 The following mitigation measures should be given careful consideration to lessen adverse effects of the completed development, where required, and to ensure the full potential of beneficial effects to the landscape and visual amenity are realised.
- 5.2 The residual effects from both primary and secondary mitigation (including enhancement measures) are considered within the appraisal of landscape and visual effects, as applicable.

Primary Mitigation Measures

- Existing cutting at western end of site retained to reduce visual effects of dwellings towards the western end of the site;
- Retention and protection of existing boundary trees, hedgerows and shrubs, where of suitable condition;
- Site accesses reduced to a single (eastern) access, improving pedestrian accessibility on adjacent footpath alongside Smug Oak Lane to south of Site, by removal of western access.

Secondary Mitigation Measures (Recommended)

- New native mixed species hedgerow and tree planting introduced to all boundaries to supplement existing boundary trees and mitigate views from beyond the Site, strengthen local landscape pattern and enhance local landscape character through enhancing the site boundary landscape features. In the mid to long term this would maintain and improve a wooded skyline for users of the footpaths to the north and north-west of the site (St Stephens 033 and 035);
- Use of building materials with dull tones, particularly for roofs and boundary facing elevations, to reduce impact on visual amenity;
- Species choice of planting tailored to reflect locally found species and to enhance potential biodiversity value.

6. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The application Site currently consists of an existing yard used for storage of large skips, with a small building towards the centre of the Site. Scrub vegetation is located towards the boundaries, whilst a number of trees are located on or near the site boundaries. The site extends to 0.74 hectares.
- 6.2 The Site is located to the north of Smug Oak Lane between Colney Street and Bricket Wood, within an area of land designated as Green Belt.

6.3 The Site is located on an east facing side slope of the Ver/ Colne River Valley (LCA 17). The valley is visually contained with side slopes and vegetation which generally conceal the presence of scattered small scale development and adjoining settlements. The LCA suffers from a fragmentation of linear valley form where crossed by the M25.

6.4 The proposed development comprising 16 two storey dwellings would replace the existing storage yard. Some existing trees would be retained, with the loss of further trees to facilitate the development. The development provides the opportunity to introduce native mixed species tree and hedgerow planting around the boundaries of the Site, along with further biodiverse planting within the Site.

Landscape and visual appraisal

6.5 The landscape and visual effects of the proposed development have been investigated and appraised.

6.6 The proposed development will represent a noticeable change to the Ver/ Colne Valley Landscape Character Area (LCA 17) with some adverse effect which will be limited by adjacent planting of the consented scheme and further limited if all opportunities for mitigation were implemented.

6.7 In relation to the Site landscape features, there is likely to be a neutral impact as a result of the proposed development, if opportunities to implement landscape character and ecological enhancements are taken, once the recommended planting has matured.

6.8 In terms of visual amenity, the Site is well contained by landform and vegetation, with visibility towards the Site area limited to short sections of public footpaths St Stephens 035 and 033 to the north of the Site and south of the M25, and Smug Oak Lane in close proximity to the Site.

6.9 There will be some adverse effect for recreational users of public footpath St Stephens 035 to the north of the Site and south of the M25, Views from St Stephens 033 to the north-west are more open and changes to the visual amenity for users of a short section of this footpath would represent a noticeable adverse effect. The adverse effects on short sections of these footpaths would diminish as intervening existing and consented woodland belt planting matures. The recommended site boundary tree and hedgerow planting would further reduce visibility of the proposed built form.

6.10 For vehicular and footway users of Smug Oak Lane in close

proximity to the Site alongside the southern boundary, there will be some adverse effect in relation to the introduction of the built form and removal of some existing trees near the southern boundary. The proposed built form, rooflines and eastern access improvement would be both noticeable and dominant in the short term, although visual amenity at the western access would be somewhat improved. The maturing of the recommended native mixed species hedgerows and trees on the boundary would help to soften and integrate the built form beyond and limit the impact on visual amenity.

Greenbelt

6.11 The Site provides a limited contribution to the spatial and visual qualities of openness within the Greenbelt, despite existing storage on site. The proposed development would result in a localised permanent impact to this openness.

7. REFERENCES

- 7.1 Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, The Landscape Institute/ Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013.
- 7.2 Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland. Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002.
- 7.3 Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland: Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity. Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2004.
- 7.4 An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Natural England, 2014.
- 7.5 Advice Note 01/04 as Amended (August 2008): Use of Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Assessment. The Landscape Institute, 2008.
- 7.6 Technical Guidance Note 02/17 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals. The Landscape Institute, 2017 / 2019.
- 7.7 Technical Guidance Note TGN 02-21: Assessing landscape value outside national designations. The Landscape Institute, 2021.
- 7.8 National Character Area Profile 111 North Thames Basin, 2014.
- 7.9 South Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment. Landscape Partnership for Hertfordshire County Council, 2001.
- 7.10 St Albans District Local Plan Review (Adopted 1994) Saved and Deleted Policies Version. St Albans City and District Council, 2022.
- 7.11 St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2019 - 2036, Parish Council of St Stephens, 2022.
- 7.12 Stage 1 Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment for Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield. SKM, 2013.

8. FIGURES



Figure 1: Access and Circulation

Scale 1:17,500

- Site Boundary
- Development
- Study Area (from site centre)
- Public Right of Way Status**
- Bridleway
- Byway Open to All Traffic
- Footpath
- Restricted Byway
- Unmetalled Unclass Country Road
- PROW Abbreviations**
- A** Aldenham
- LC** London Colney
- SIS** St. Stephen

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Figure 2: Recreational & Long Distance Routes

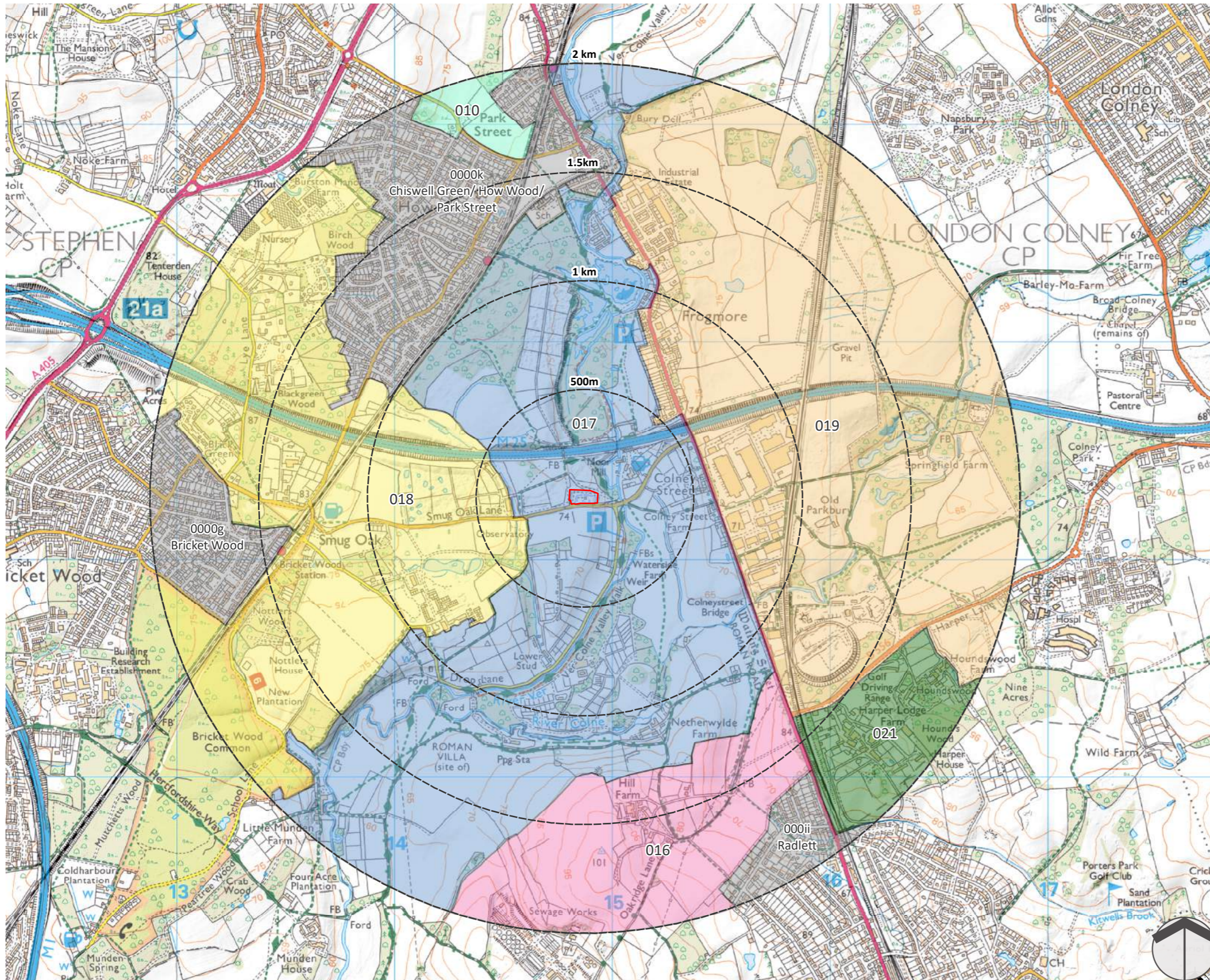
Scale 1:17,500



- Site Boundary
- Development
- Study Area (from site centre)
- Recreational & Long Distance Routes**
- Abbey Line Trail
- Hertfordshire Way
- Hertsmeare Way
- River Ver Trail
- Ver Colne Valley Walk
- National Cycle Network**
- Route No.6
- Local Walking & Cycling Routes**
- Abbot Trail
- Morgan Trail
- Shenley Walk 3

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Figure 3: Local Landscape Character
Scale 1:17,500



- Site Boundary
- Development
- Study Area (from site centre)
- Hertfordshire Landscape Character**
- Aldenham Plateau
- Bricket Wood
- High Canons Valleys and Ridges
- St Stephens Plateau
- Vale of St Albans
- Ver / Colne River Valley
- Urban

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Figure 4: Landscape Designations

Scale 1:17,500



- Site Boundary
- Development
- Study Area (from site centre)
- Listed Buildings**
- Grade II
- Grade II*
- Archaeological Site for Local Preservation
- Conservation Area
- Registered Park & Garden
- Scheduled Monument
- Traditional Orchard
- Wood Pasture and Parkland

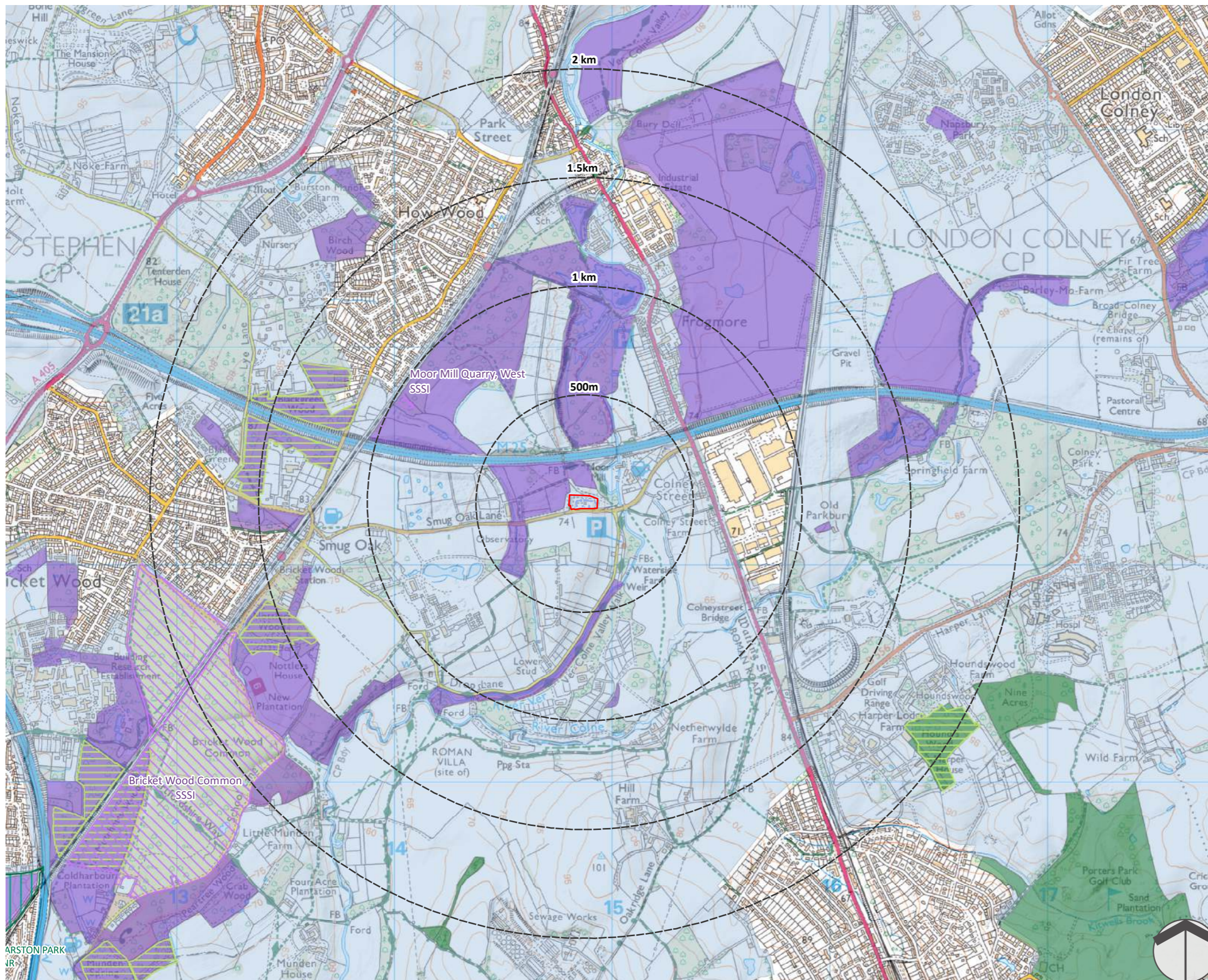
The following datasets have been included for consideration on this map. If a dataset does not appear on the map or in the legend, it is not located within the study area.

DATASET	SOURCE
Conservation Areas	Historic England / Hertfordshire Council
Country Parks	Natural England
Listed Buildings	Historic England
National Landscapes (AONB)	Natural England
Registered Battlefield	Historic England
Registered Parks and Gardens	Historic England
National Parks	Natural England

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Figure 5: Environmental Designations

Scale 1:17,500



- Site Boundary
- Development
- Study Area (from site centre)
- Ancient Woodland Inventory
- Green Belt - London
- Local Nature Reserve
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Sites for Local Nature Conservation***
- St Albans - Site for Local Protection
- Hertsmere - Local Wildlife Site

The following datasets have been included for consideration on this map. If a dataset does not appear on the map or in the legend, it is not located within the study area.

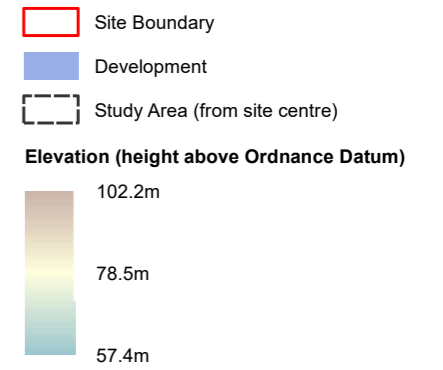
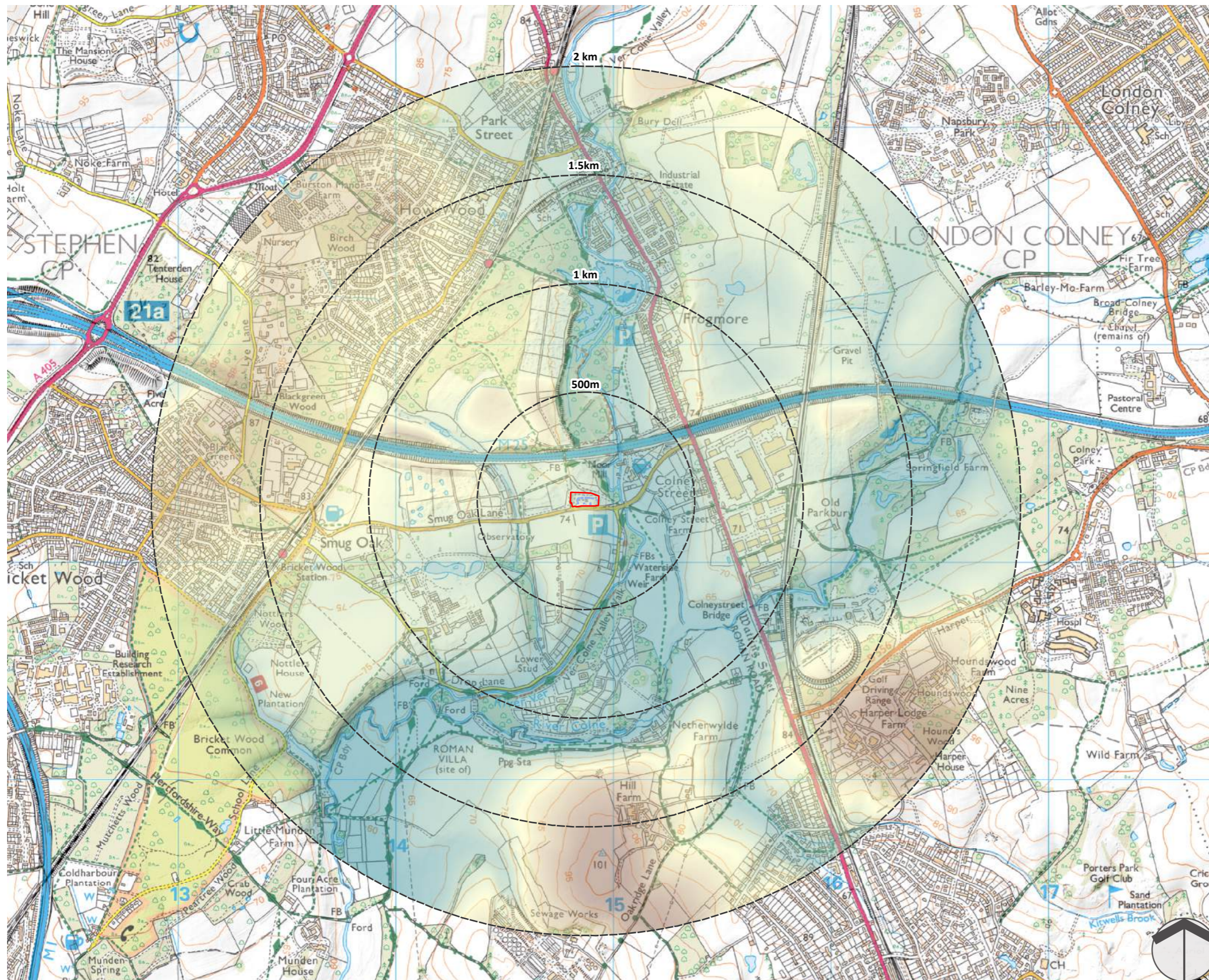
DATASET	SOURCE
Ancient Woodland Inventory	Natural England
Biosphere Reserves	Natural England
Green Belt	Data.gov.uk
Heritage Coast	Natural England
Important Bird Area	RSPB
Limestone Pavement Orders	Natural England
Local Nature Reserve	Natural England
National Nature Reserve	Natural England
Ramsar Site	Natural England
RSPB Reserve	RSPB
Site of Special Scientific Interest	Natural England
Special Areas of Conservation	Natural England
Special Protection Area	Natural England
Local Wildlife Sites	

*Boundaries are digitised and therefore approximate

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Figure 6: Topography

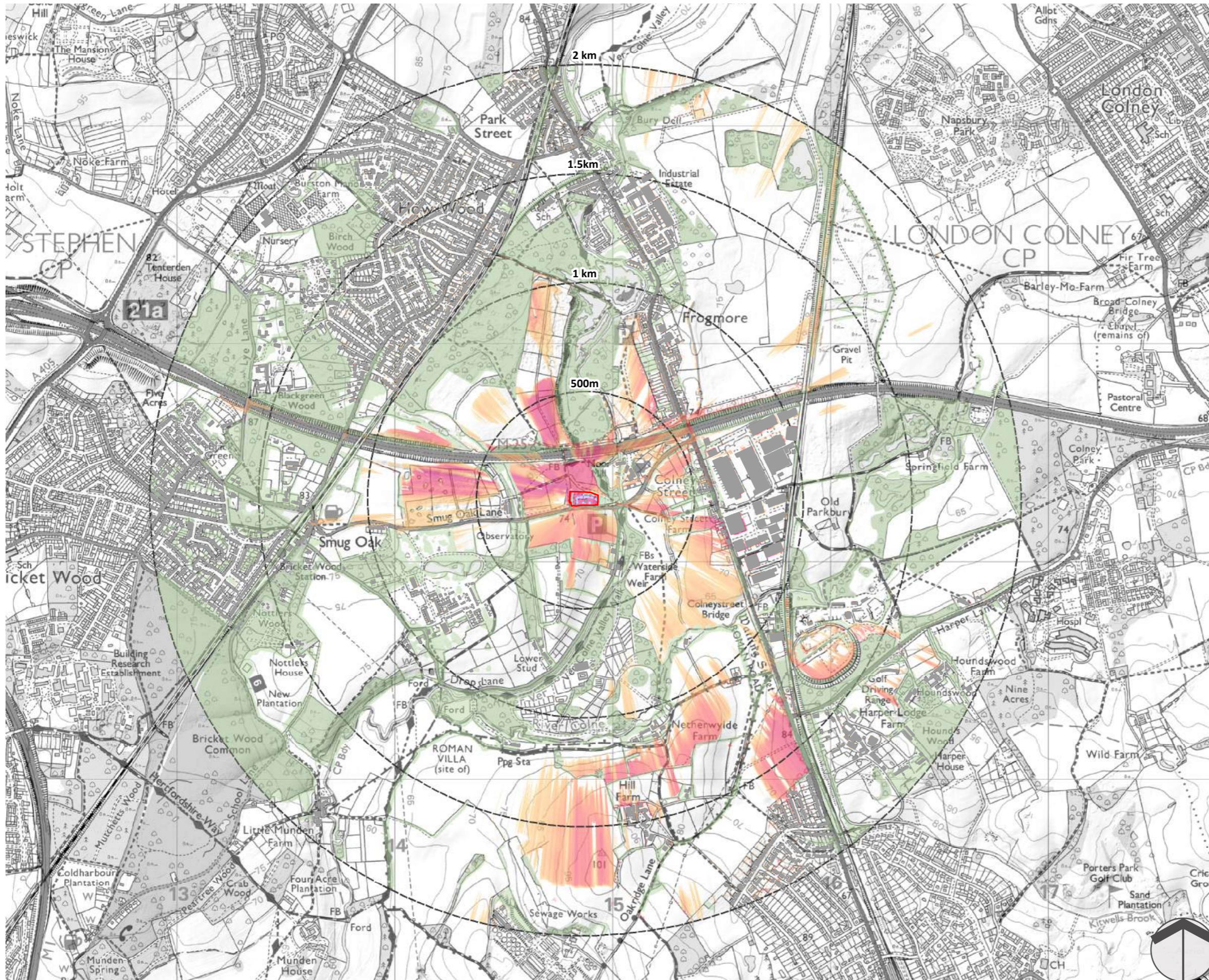
Scale 1:17,500



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Figure 7: Zone of Theoretical Visibility

Scale 1:17,500



- Site Boundary
- Development
- Buildings
- Woodland
- Study Area (from site centre)
- Zone of Theoretical Visibility**
- High visibility
- Low Visibility

The Viewshed is calculated using an Environment Agency LIDAR survey (2022) 1m resolut digital surface model (DSM).

Maximum development height is 9m. Observer height assumed to be 1.8 m
Visibility is calculated from the development footprint.

The LIDAR composite First Return DSM does account for the screening effect of surround buildings and vegetation. Buildings, woodlands and hedgerow from OS OpenMap Local™ satellite imagery have been added to the map to show those visual barriers.

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Site Photo 1: Looking east towards eastern boundary



Site Photo 2: Looking west towards western boundary bank and vegetation



Site Photo 3: Looking south-east towards southern boundary, from north-western corner of site

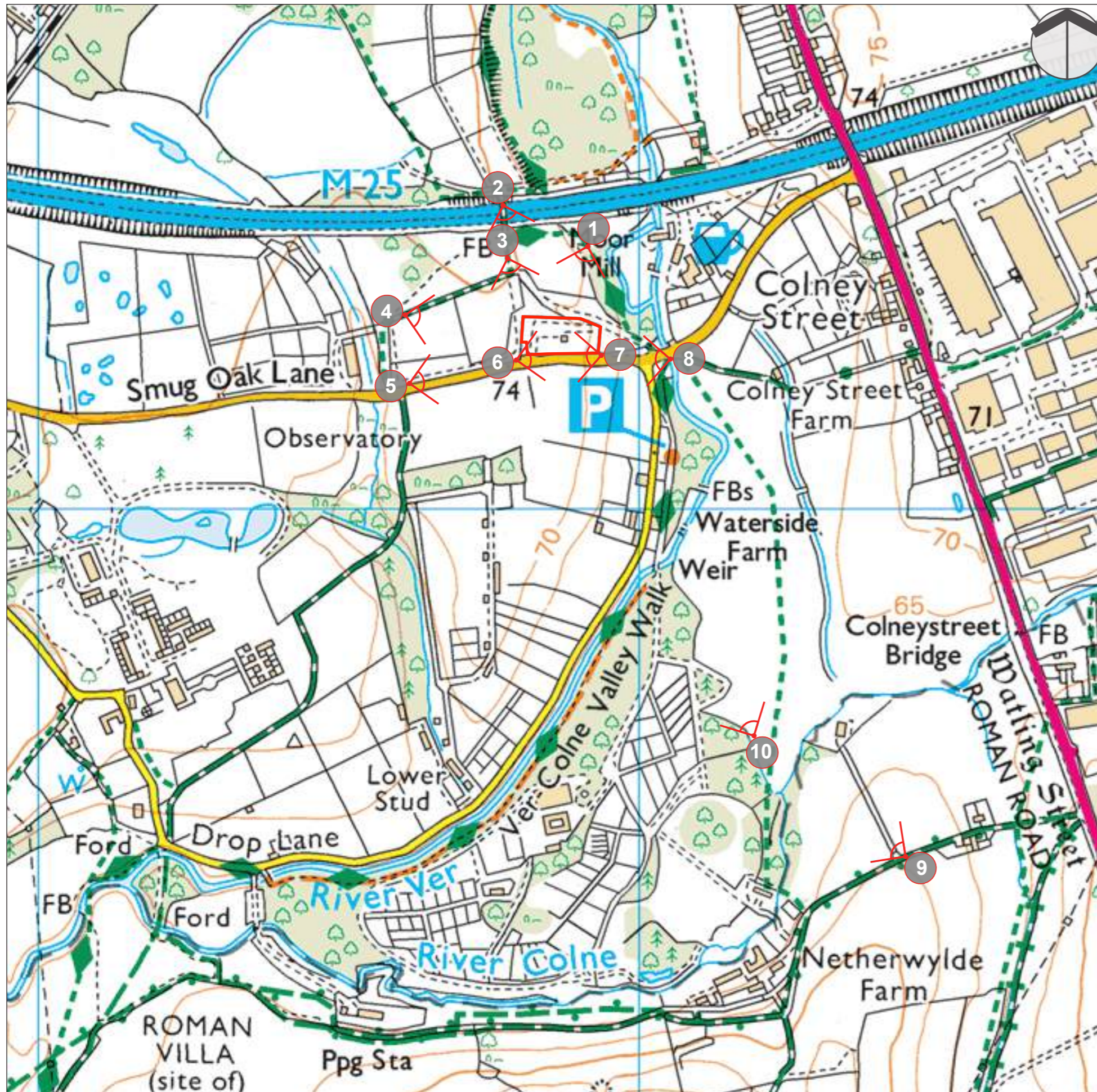


Site Photo 4 Looking north-east at northern boundary

10. VIEWPOINT LOCATION PLAN
& VIEWPOINT PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure 9: Viewpoint
Location Plan

Scale: NTS



Viewpoint 01

Location: Public Footpath St Stephen 035, south of north-eastern corner

Direction of view: south-west

Description:

View 01 looks across a recently planted woodland belt in the foreground, with the northern boundary vegetation of the Site, and the taller trees of the southern Site boundary, foreshortening the view and defining the skyline beyond. The telecommunications tower beyond the south-eastern corner of the Site stands tall above boundary vegetation at the eastern end of the Site.

For recreational users of the footpath, visual amenity is contributed by the largely rural nature of the view, though detracted by the telecommunications tower and other telegraph posts, lighting columns and post and wire fencing.

Viewpoint 01 Location



Viewpoint 02

Location: Public Footpath St Stephen 033, at northern end of footbridge over M25

Direction of view: south-east

Description:

The telecommunications tower beyond the south-eastern corner of the Site is visible protruding above the foreground vegetation. Foreground vegetation screens lower levels of the Site.

Viewpoint 02 Location



The Site

Telecommunications tower



Viewpoint 03

Location: Public Footpath St Stephen 033, south of footbridge
Direction of view: south

Description:

View 03 looks along the footpath and across a recently planted woodland belt in the foreground to the west, towards the northern boundary vegetation of the Site, and the taller trees of the southern Site boundary, which foreshorten the view. The telecommunications tower beyond the south-eastern corner of the Site stands tall above boundary vegetation at the eastern end of the Site. For recreational users of the footpath, visual amenity is contributed by the largely rural nature of the view, though detracted by the telecommunications tower and other telegraph posts, post and wire fencing and glimpsed industrial unit in the distance to the south-west.

Viewpoint 03 Location



Industrial unit in Ventura Park

The Site

Telecommunications tower



Viewpoint 04

Location: Public Footpath St Stephen 033, near south-western corner
Direction of view: east

Description:

View 04 looks across the foreground paddock to the scrub vegetation on the western boundary of the Site, with part of the northern boundary vegetation also visible. The telecommunications tower beyond the south-eastern corner of the Site rises above boundary vegetation at the eastern end of the Site. The Site's eastern boundary vegetation appears continuous with the vegetation along Smug Oak Lane.

Viewpoint 04 Location



The Site

Telecommunications tower



Viewpoint 05

Location: Smug Oak Lane, just east of entrance to bridleway St Stephen 007
Direction of view: east

Description:

This view shows Smug Oak Lane and the adjoining footpath, as it passes the western entrance into the Site, with the road sign just beyond the entrance. The southern boundary vegetation and fencing is visible beyond the Site entrance, while the eastern Site boundary is screened by intervening roadside hedgerow vegetation. For users of the road, visual amenity is contributed by the relatively rural nature of the view, though detracted by the road, telegraph posts and road signs.

Viewpoint 05 Location



The Site



Viewpoint 06

Location: Smug Oak Lane, just west of western entrance to Site
Direction of view: east

Description:

This is a close range view showing the western entrance to the Site off Smug Oak Lane. The entrance track is lined with scrubby hedgerow vegetation and drops down in to the Site. Views into the Site are largely screened by foreground scrubby hedgerow vegetation at the entrance.

The southern boundary vegetation and fencing is visible beyond the Site entrance.

For users of the road, visual amenity is contributed by the relatively rural nature of the view, though detracted by the road, telegraph posts and road signs.

Viewpoint 06 Location



The Site



Viewpoint 07

Location: Smug Oak Lane, at eastern entrance to Site
Direction of view: west

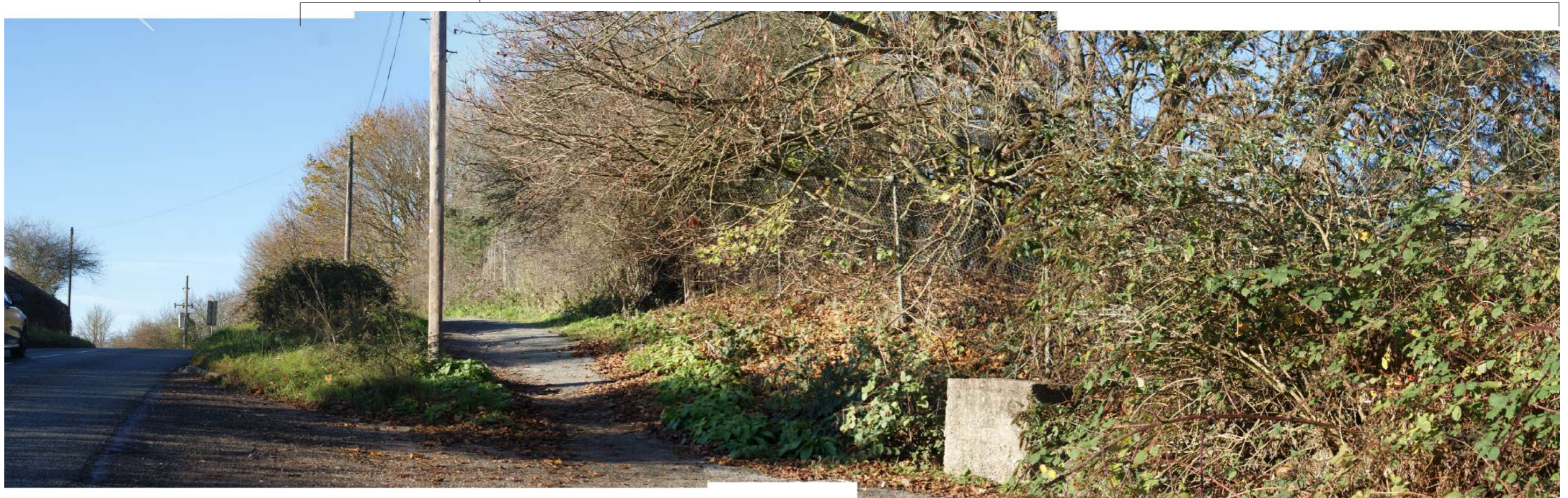
Description:

This view shows the eastern end of the fencing, tree and scrub vegetation on the southern boundary of the Site.
For users of the road, visual amenity is contributed by the relatively rural nature of the view, though detracted by the road, suburban fencing, telegraph posts and road signs.

Viewpoint 07 Location



The Site



Viewpoint 08

Location: Smug Oak Lane/ bridleway St Stephen 006, immediately east of junction with Drop Lane
Direction of view: west

Description:

This view is from a short section of the bridleway that follows Smug Oak Lane. The Site is not visible in the view, screened by the landform and the intervening woodland vegetation.

Viewpoint 08 Location



The Site



Viewpoint 09

Location: restricted byway Aldenham 020, at entrance to track leading north to a farm building
Direction of view: north-west

Description:

The Site is not visible in this distant view (over 1km from the Site), screened by the landform and the intervening layers of woodland and tree belt vegetation.

Viewpoint 09 Location



Viewpoint 10

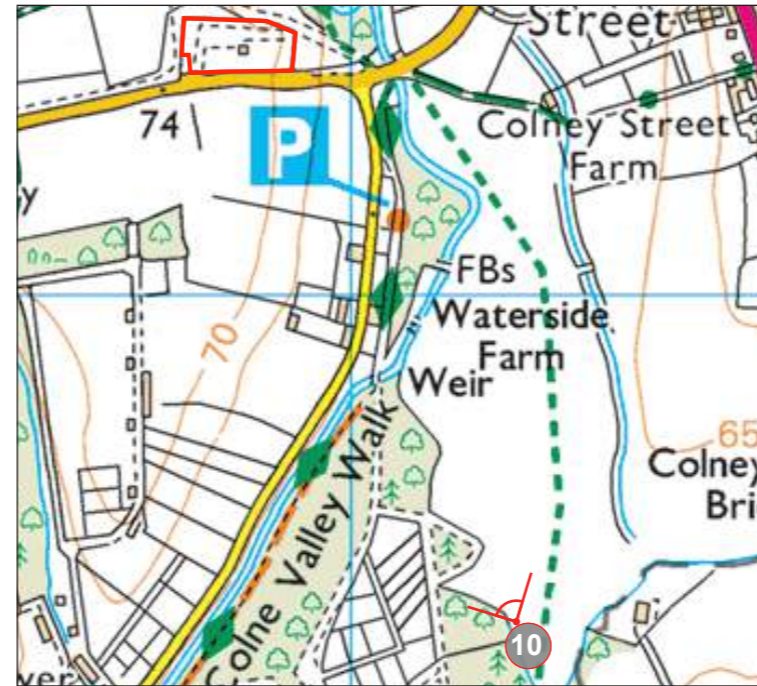
Location: Public Footpath St Stephen 054, north of the path's exit from Walnut Wood. Note: Footpath does not run through the centre of the water meadow as shown on the map, but follows the woodland edge on the western side of the meadow.

Direction of view: north-west

Description:

The Site is not visible in this distant view (approximately 750m from the Site), screened by the landform and the intervening layers of woodland and tree belt vegetation.

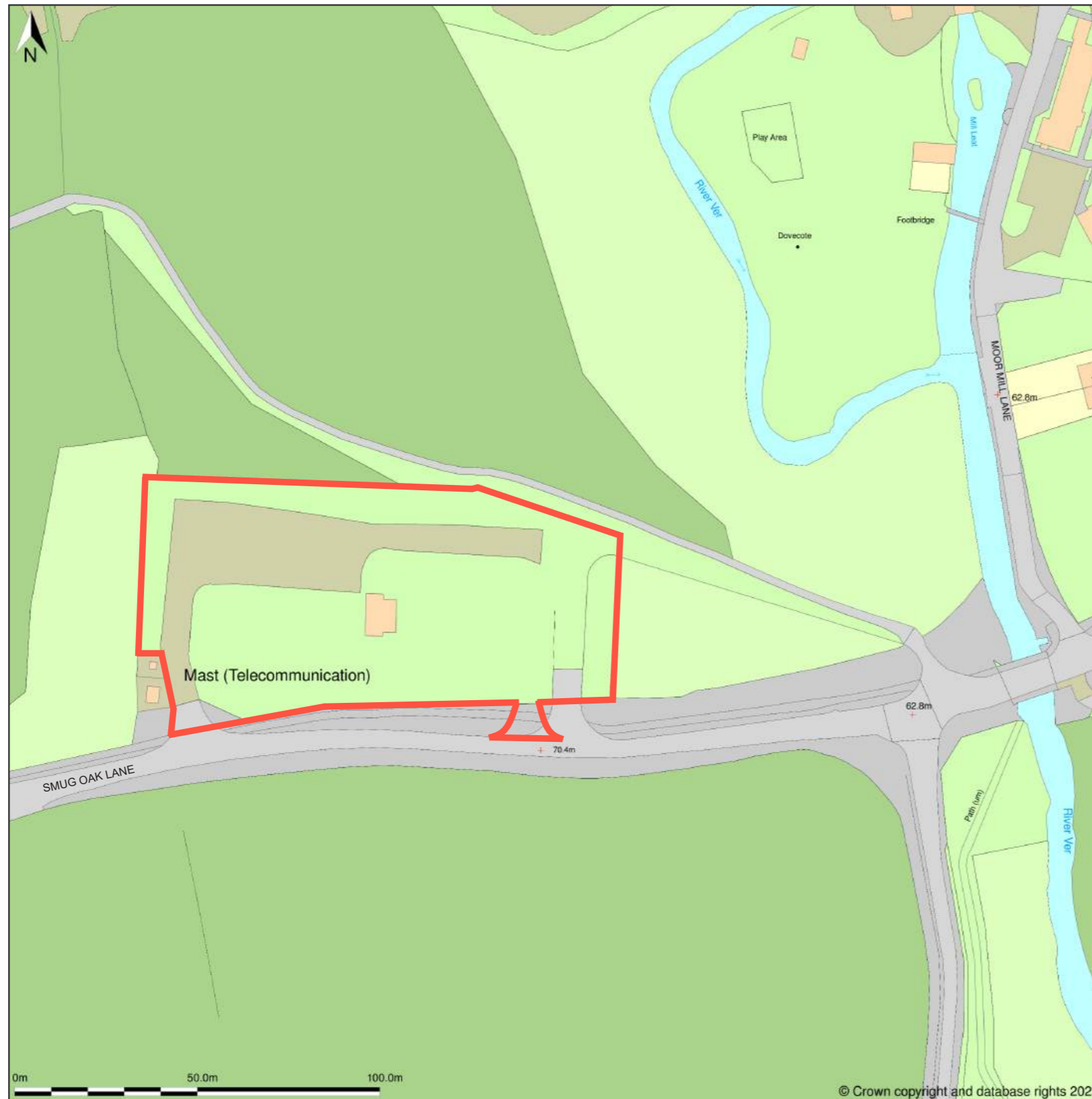
Viewpoint 10 Location



Approximate location of the Site



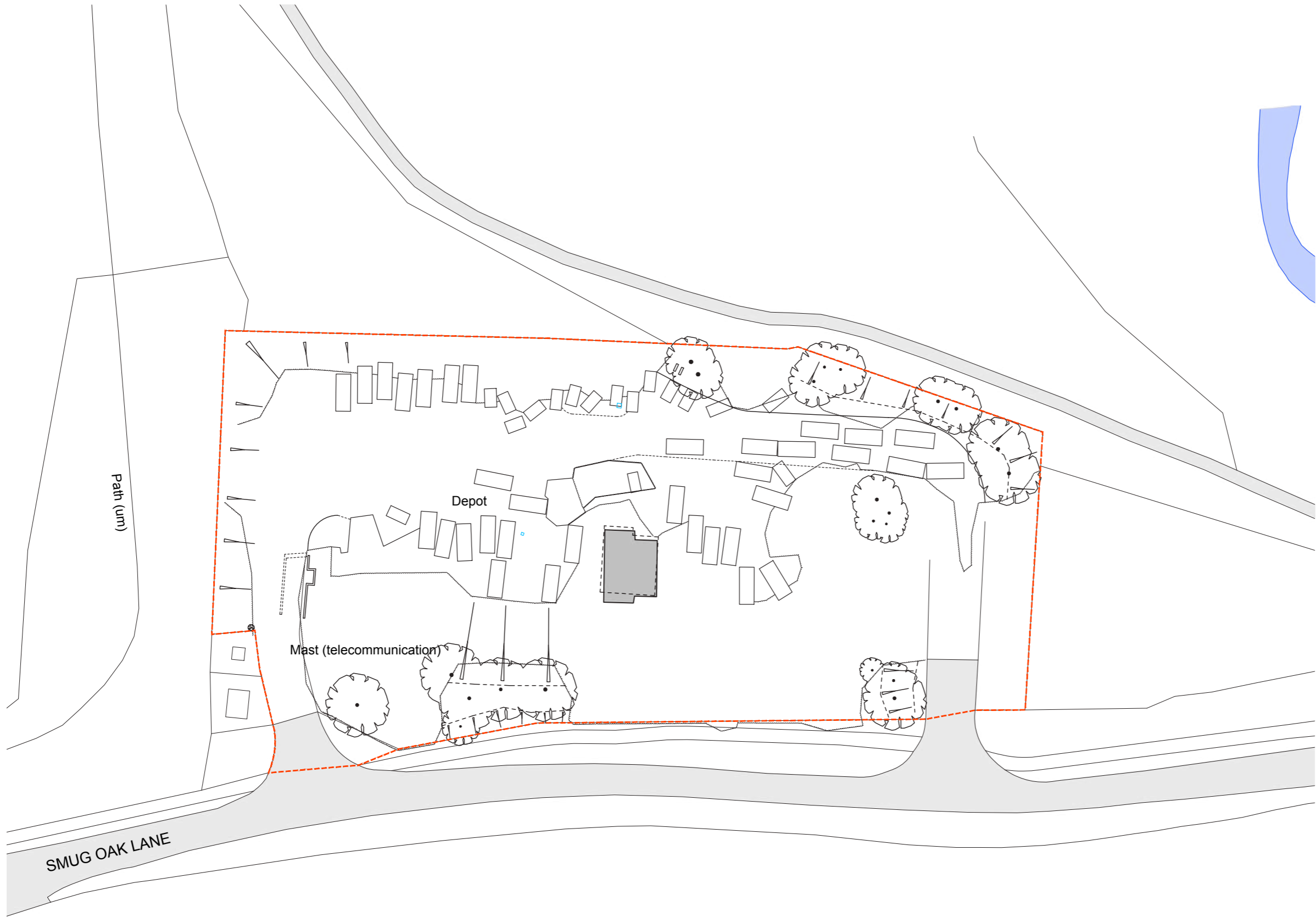
Moor Mill Tanker Depot, Smug Oak Lane AL2 3TZ



Location Plan shows area bounded by: 514775.39, 202146.68 515075.39, 202446.68 (at a scale of 1:1250), OSGridRef: TL1492 229. The representation of a road, track or path is no evidence of a right of way. The representation of features as lines is no evidence of a property boundary.

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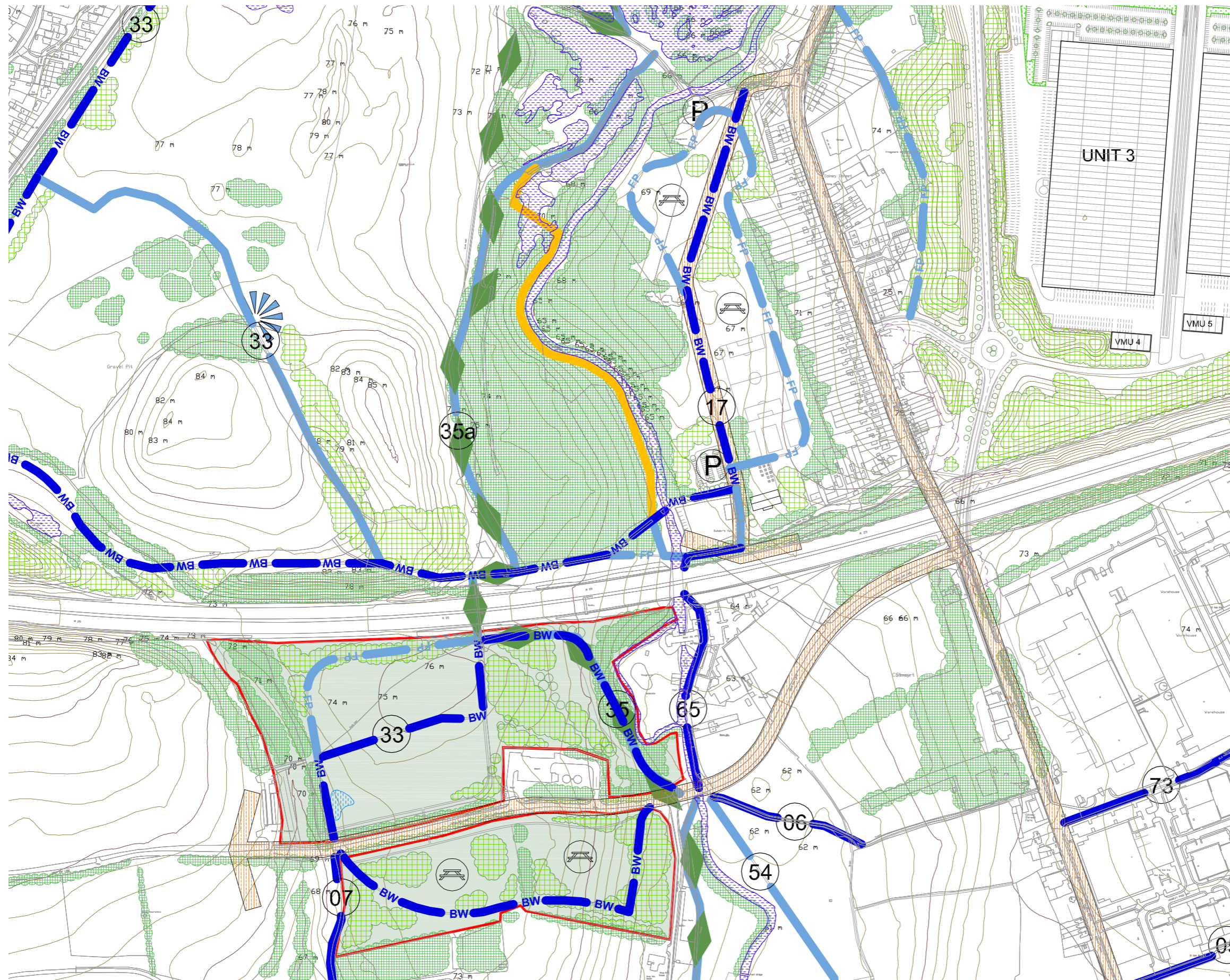
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Former Aerodrome Site,
North Orbital
Proposed Area 6

Scale NTS



- LEGEND**
- Development Site Boundary
 - Major Contours - 5m Intervals
 - Intermediate Contours - 1m Intervals
 - Proposed Contours
 - Conservation Area Boundary
 - Existing Vegetation (Trees, Hedges, Shrubs ETC)
 - Proposed Woodland and Tree Planting
 - Proposed Hedge/Shrub & Scrub Planting
 - Proposed Street Trees
 - Existing Vegetation Removed
 - Existing Footpath
 - Existing Bridleway
 - Existing Permitted Footpath
 - Proposed Bridleway
 - Proposed Footpath
 - National Trail
 - Proposed Cycle Route
 - Existing Water bodies and tributaries
 - Proposed Water bodies