



**LAND NORTH OF BEACONSIDE,
STAFFORD**

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

Prepared by

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Pegasus Environmental, part of The Pegasus Planning Group LLP was instructed by Maximus in September 2009 to carry out a Landscape and Visual Appraisal in connection with land north of Beaconside, Stafford.
- 1.2 The appraisal has been undertaken to determine the various different landscape and visual constraints and opportunities of the Site and its context, and how these might influence both a masterplan for development on the site, and an inherent landscape strategy as part of that masterplan. This is addressed through the analysis of the visual amenity and landscape character of the site and its landscape context.
- 1.3 This report summarises the appraisal, and is supported by a series of coloured A3 drawings to illustrate the analysis.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND ITS CONTEXT

Site Context

- 2.1 The site is located directly on the northern urban edge of Stafford, adjacent to the A513, and approximately 3km from the City centre. The site lies to the east of junction 14 of the M6, with part of its south western boundary lying adjacent to the A513. The B5066 Sandon Road divides the site into two distinct parcels. The location of the site is illustrated on Figure 1: Site Location and Planning Designations Plan.
- 2.2 To the north and west of the site the land use comprises open agricultural land, with associated farms and agricultural buildings and small local roads. The M6 and A34 however both run in a north to south direction to the west of the site, with the A34 leading to Aston-By-Stone, approximately 4 km north of the site. There is also a saved local plan allocation for new residential development adjacent to the A34 and B513, almost immediately west of the site. At the junction of the A34 and A513 is the extensive Trinity Fields industrial park, which is visible across the local landscape from many directions.
- 2.3 To the east of the site, land use is also primarily agricultural land mixed with woodland plantations, and larger areas of built form, including Hopton (approximately 1km to the east) and Weston (approximately 3.5km to the east). Existing units associated with a Ministry of Defence (MOD) depot (a barracks including radio masts) lie closer to the eastern/south eastern edge of the site. The River Trent runs from the north-west to the south-east, further to the north-east of the site.
- 2.4 Immediately adjacent to the southern boundary of the site, north of the A513, is another MOD depot which includes a number of large scale buildings which are generally visible in the local landscape. Beyond the A513 to the south there are a number of large industrial units and associated retail outlets, with residential areas of Stafford beyond.

Land Use, Planning and Designations

- 2.5 The site falls within the jurisdiction of Stafford Borough Council, and those relevant saved policies of the Local Plan, 2001. There are no specific landscape designations covering the site, however Sandon Registered Park and Garden lies approximately

2.5km north east of the site, and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies near Cresswell, approximately 2km south west. Other smaller SSSIs are also evident in the area, however are all over 3km away. Cannock Chase AONB also lies approximately 5 km to the south east of the site, and includes numerous Conservation Areas. All these designations, as illustrated on Figure 1.

2.6 Although the site has no specific landscape planning designations that cover its area, a number of general landscape policies are relevant to the site and it's context, including the following:

- Policy E & D2 - Consideration of Landscape or Townscape Setting: *Proposals for new development will subject to other policies be acceptable where the proposal pays due regard to the existing landscape and/or townscape framework and the individual elements of the landscape.*
- Policy E & D7 - Development in the Countryside: *Any development proposed in the countryside will only be permitted where it is well designed and if appropriate screened to reduce its impact on the landscape.*

Development will be permitted unless the proposal would demonstrably harm:

(i) an area of special control such as the Green Belt, AONB, SLA or other designation of special value;

(ii) the rural economy;

(iii) the landscape, wildlife habitats and historic features;

(iv) the quality of land for use in agriculture, forestry and other rural enterprises;

(v) the need to protect other non renewable resources such as minerals;

(vi) other considerations such as traffic, water, sewerage and sewage disposal, noise and pollution.

- Policy E & D27 - Green Network: *Development will not be permitted where it would adversely affect the character of the green network or sever important linkages between more extensive areas of undeveloped space.*
- Policy E & D28 - Landscape Conservation: *Planning permission will not be granted for development that will have detrimental effect on the landscape unless adequate mitigating measures are undertaken. The impact assessment of new development proposals on the landscape will be based on the following factors;*

(a) physical factors e.g. relief/landform, land use, vegetation, ecological habitats, archaeology, buildings and structures;

(b) visual factors, but also including the other senses;

(c) the significance of the landscape with respect to the historical and cultural associations of the area;

(d) the area's value relative to other areas i.e. nationally rare, regionally rare or typical to an area;

(e) evaluation of the area's character.

(f) the degree of public accessibility to the site and surrounding the site, either directly i.e. by vehicle, bicycle, horse or foot, or indirectly i.e. visual.

- Policy E & D30 - Mitigation of Impact on the Landscape: *Proposals for development on the edge of settlements or in rural areas, which have an adverse impact on landscape, will normally be required to carry out landscape enhancements incorporating tree and shrub planting, preferably using native species.*

Topography

- 2.7 Topographically, the site and adjacent land lie on the south facing slope of a ridge of landform that runs on a north-west to south-east axis north of Stafford. Further to the north, land then falls away again into the Trent Valley such that this ridge effectively separates Stafford from the wider countryside to the north. This is illustrated on Figure 2, Topographical Plan.
- 2.8 The ridge rises to approximately +145 metres AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) to the north-west of the site; and approximately +140 metres AOD to the north-east of the Site. The highest point of the ridge where it crosses the northern part of the site is approximately +120 metres AOD. From this ridge, land falls to the northern edge of Stafford to approximately +80-85 metres AOD.
- 2.9 The flanks of this ridge are eroded, and interspersed with many narrow spurs, mostly formed by the courses of small streams. The general character of the undulating topography is soft and gentle as opposed to steep and diverse.
- 2.10 The site itself sits at approximately 83 metres AOD in its south western and south eastern corners, and rises from south to the north, to approx +105 metres and +115 metres AOD in the north west and north east corners respectively, with a high point of

approximately +120 metres AOD. The undulations across the site are at their steepest on the eastern part of the site, where they form a soft localised ridge, which flattens out on the top.

Vegetation

- 2.11 The types of vegetation across the landscape include the hedgerow infrastructure associated with the agricultural field pattern, which varies from being mature in some areas to more sparse and almost completely eroded in other areas where maintenance has been more intense, or where hedgerows have been removed over time. The removal of hedgerows has left large open fields in many areas that contrast with some more enclosed areas where the field pattern is more intricate. There are also many hedgerow trees, but again their presence varies. Typical species mixes in the hedgerows include Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Typical hedgerow tree species include Oak (*Quercus robur*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*).
- 2.12 There are also a number of small, regularly shaped mixed woodlands in the area, specifically to the east of the site (areas around the County showground, Blackheath Covert and Beacon Hill, Lambert's Coppice and Salt Heath), although these are limited elsewhere. To the north-east of the site at Sandon Park, the vegetation is typical of a large parkland landscape.

Water Features

- 2.13 The main water feature in the area is the River Trent which runs to the north of the site, with a variety of smaller tributaries that form the extended drainage pattern across the area. The Trent and Mersey Canal also runs parallel to the River Trent. Elsewhere, water bodies are generally limited, to ditches along field boundaries associated with their drainage, and the occasional small agricultural pond or water body.
- 2.14 With regard to on site water features, Marston Brook, a narrow water course, forms a short part of the south-western site boundary. There are no other water features on the site, with the exception of the occasional drainage ditch running along a hedge line.

Public Access

- 2.15 There are a variety of publicly accessible footpaths and bridleways both across and around the site. The majority of these are footpaths, although running along the northern boundary of the site, and extending southwards through the site, is a bridleway network.

Site Description

- 2.16 The overall site covers approximately 172 hectares in size, and generally rises in topographical terms from the south to the north (which is consistent with the wider topography of the area), away from the built up area of Stafford, from approximately 83 metres in the south west corner of the site to 115 metres AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) to the north east corner. There is a ridge which extends from the northern boundary, south eastwards into the site which creates a localised raised plateau towards the north east corner of the site. The site then falls to the same level as Sandon Road (B5066) which forms the eastern boundary to part of the site.
- 2.17 The site is sub-divided into two parcels, either side of Sandon Road. The land to the west of Sandon Road comprises the vast majority of the site (155 Ha), and a much smaller section to the south of Sandon Road (17Ha). Both parts of the site currently comprise open agricultural fields.

Land west of Sandon Road

- 2.18 The main part of the site north and west of Sandon Road is defined by an intermittent hedgerow along its northern boundary, with a public bridleway running along its length, all the way to Sandon Road. At the eastern end of this boundary, the bridleway runs along the access lane to the farm that sits just north of the site. This access lane is 'sunken' with mature hedgerows on either side.
- 2.19 The southern boundary is defined by the A513, which is lit, and a mature hedgerow with some tree planting towards its western end. It then skirts around the MOD unit where it is delineated by a steel post and wire fence, with very limited planting along its length. It then links back in with Sandon Road, which is not lit, and a mature hedgerow.

- 2.20 The eastern boundary is defined by Sandon Road and a mature hedgerow running along its length, the only deviation being around the car showroom on the northern side of Sandon Road. There are virtually no trees in the hedgerow along Sandon Road.
- 2.21 The western boundary is defined by Marston Brook at the southern end, with some groups of mature tree planting, and further north by the alignment of field hedgerows. The majority of these hedgerows are mature and intact, with the occasional gap, and there are a number of mature trees within them.
- 2.22 Across its sloping topography, this part of the site comprises a number of mostly large open pasture fields where many field boundaries have been removed for agricultural purposes. Slight undulations across the south facing slope provide some variation however the site character is generally consistent, open, exposed and bears a direct visual relationship with the northern part of Stafford because of its topography. There are several buildings on this part of the site including Newbuildings Farm and Newbuilding Cottage with associated outbuildings and access tracks. There are also areas of mature vegetation surrounding these farms which serve to screen the built form to a greater or lesser extent. The access to Newbuildings Farm from Sandon Road is finished in tarmac and is formal in contrast to other tracks that cross the site. This access lane forms part the alignment of the public bridleway that runs on a north to south direction across this part of the site. North of Newbuildings Farm the bridleway follows a hedgerow and is particularly informal.

Land south of Sandon Road

- 2.23 This part of the site is irregularly shaped and lies between the MOD barracks to the south-west and residential development on the western edge of Hopton (Mount Edge) to the north-east. Directly to west is a par 3 golf course.
- 2.24 The northern boundary is defined by mature vegetation associated with farm buildings off Sandon Road in the west, and thereafter by Sandon Road and a mature hedgerow with a number of mature trees towards the eastern end. The southern boundary is defined in along its length with a concrete post and wire fence (adjacent to the MOD barracks), with a large mature planting belt along the western half. The eastern boundary is also defined by the fence adjacent to the MOD barracks, with a more limited amount of vegetation, and by the back gardens of residencies just off Mount Edge at the northern end. The western boundary is defined in part by the MOD fence

line again, but with a significant amount of vegetation; and in part by a post and wire fence and associated vegetation, that forms a weak boundary with an adjacent field.

- 2.25 The site comprises 3no. overall field enclosures, with the two northerly ones bisected by a mature belt of planting and a fence line. This is the planting that then continues along the western half of the southern site boundary, and together they represent the alignment of a dismantled railway. The planting has gaps in places, and the ground beneath it has been particularly eroded by grazing animals. The topography across this part of the site is generally level, but gradually rises to the north.

Landscape Character

- 2.26 The landscape character of the area is classified under the Countryside Agency's Countryside Character West Midlands (Volume 5) region, and more specifically as part of character area number 67, Cannock Chase and Cank Wood. A small part of the Site on its western boundary also lies within character area number 61, Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain. The key elements of these character areas are described as:

Character Area 67 Cannock Chase and Cank Wood

- Very varied landscape with a range of industrial, residential, agricultural and recreational land uses;
- Strongly contrasting settlement pattern with some areas densely populated, others unpopulated and 'wild';
- Rounded central plateau, dominated by heathland and coniferous woodland
- Sprawling coal mining settlements;
- Reclaimed and active open-cast coal sites and spoil tips from abandoned deep mines;
- Strong rectilinear pattern of parliamentary enclosure in some areas;
- Black Country with a mosaic of urban areas, former industrial land and patches of farmland;
- Extensive urban fringe;
- Open arable areas with low hedges;
- Areas of small hedged fields, scattered farmsteads and small holdings;
- Historic parks;
- Red-brick buildings; and
- Industrial archaeological features.

Character Area 61 Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain

- Extensive gently rolling plain interrupted by sandstone ridges, the most prominent being the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge;
- A unified rural landscape, with strong field patterns, dominated by dairying which merges with more mixed and arable farming to the north and south-east;
- Mosses, meres and small field ponds are scattered throughout. Subsidence flashes occur to the east of the Cheshire Plain;
- Boundaries are predominantly hedgerows, generally well-managed, with abundant hedgerow trees which are mostly oak. Metal railing fences occur locally on estates;
- Woodlands are few and are restricted to deciduous and mixed woods on the steeper slopes of sandstone ridges, and some of the wetter areas. There are also locally extensive tracts of coniferous woodland. The plentiful hedgerow trees, particularly in Cheshire, give the appearance of a well-wooded landscape;
- Large farmsteads regularly spaced throughout with dispersed hamlets and few market towns;
- Buildings are predominantly red brick with warm sandstone churches and, in the national park, occasional very distinctive black and white halftimbered buildings; and
- Extractive industries generally small-scale but widespread - sand, gravel, salt, sandstone, peat.

2.27 The area is described in greater detail in the 'Planning for Landscape Change: Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996-2001' where the site itself is found under the landscape type 'settled farmlands'. The key elements of character are described as:

- A gently undulating landform with pronounced occasional high points;
- Thin scatter of small mature broadleaved woodlands;
- Mixed arable and pastoral farmland in which farming practices vary from low intensity, still retaining an intact ancient pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, to areas of more intensively farmed arable and improved pasture.
- Hedgerow oaks and a strong irregular hedgerow pattern;
- Well treed field ponds and stream corridors;
- Traditional red brick farmsteads and settlements;

- Small ancient winding lanes;
- Settlement pattern is mixed, and not distinctive including new housing developments, industrial developments and large modern farm buildings; and
- Other incongruous features include power lines, busy main roads and the introduction of fencing for stock control.

2.28 In terms of these aspects of character that are evident in the context of the site, these include the gently undulating landform with pronounced high points; mixed arable and pastoral farmland; irregular hedgerow pattern; farmsteads; small winding lanes; industrial developments and large modern farm buildings; and power lines, busy main roads and fencing. The Site also lies adjacent to other landscape areas including areas of built character and the sandstone estatelands, the latter of which are described as gently rolling, featureless landscapes which have been affected by intense arable farming, for example hedgerow removal, large modern farm buildings etc. Settlement is characterised by a sparsely settled pattern of expanded hamlets and isolated farms and estate building.

2.29 These adjacent landscape character areas inevitably have some influence on the Site, as does the proximity of the northern urban area of Stafford. The visual connectivity between the site and the urban area, combined with numerous large scale buildings, the MOD units and major lit highways infrastructure all serve to generate an urban fringe character. The landscape character areas are illustrated on Figure 3.

2.30 An Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment has also been undertaken by Stafford Borough Council as part of the evidence base for the Stafford Borough LDF. The purpose of the study is to show areas around the principal settlements within the Borough to highlight areas that may be sensitive to new development in terms of landscape character. The assessment however identifies that the site is of low sensitivity and falls within the 'post 1880's re-organised fields' character area.

Visual Context and Amenity

2.31 The following series of photographic panoramas illustrate the views towards the site from the adjacent areas. The location of the panoramas is illustrated on Figure 4, and the panoramas themselves are illustrated on Figure 5.

Viewpoint 1 is taken from the public footpath within Sandon Park, approximately 3.3 km from the site, at an elevation of approximately 130m AOD looking south west towards the site. The vegetation within the Registered Park and Garden and the surrounding topography screens any views of the site from this location.

Viewpoint 2 is taken from the public footpath leading to the A34 near Grove Farm, approximately 2.4 km from the site, at an elevation of approximately 140m AOD looking south east towards the site. Vegetation along the A34 helps to filter long distance views of the site, however there are glimpsed views of the MOD depot adjacent to the southern boundary of the site, in addition to Newbuildings Farm in the centre of the site. The urban edge of Stafford is also visible.

Viewpoint 3 is taken from the public footpath leading to the A34 from Manor Farm, approximately 1.9 km from the site, at an elevation of approximately 120m AOD looking south east towards the site. The site is barely perceptible from this location, due to intervening vegetation.

Viewpoint 4 is taken from the public footpath leading from Sandon Park approximately 1.15 km from the site, at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking south west towards the site. Again, the intervening vegetation and landform serve to screen the site, specifically the higher landform just to the north of the site. The large industrial units associated with Trinity Fields west of the site and A34 are visible.

Viewpoint 5 is taken from the bridleway near Skeath House Farm approximately 650m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 95m AOD looking south towards the site. The rising landform just north of the site serves to screen views from this location, in combination with the vegetation infrastructure.

Viewpoint 6 is taken from the bridleway on the northern boundary of the site at an elevation of approximately 105m AOD looking south across the site. This view illustrates the rising topography on the northern part of the site, and its open character which serves to screen views of the urban edge of Stafford, and views of Newbuildings Farm and Cottage.

Viewpoint 7 is taken from Marston Lane approximately 300m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking south east towards the site. Parts of the western section of the site are visible from this location, including the built form on site

associated with Newbuildings Farm and Cottage, in addition to the buildings of the MOD depot adjacent to the southern boundary of the site. Marston Farm and associated buildings are also visible, off-site to the north. The vegetation associated with agricultural field boundaries does however serve to filter these views across the site.

Viewpoint 8 is taken from the bridleway on the northern boundary of the site at an elevation of approximately 105m AOD looking south across the site. This viewpoint illustrates the open character of this upper part of the site, punctuated by Newbuildings Cottage and Newbuildings Farm and their associated vegetation. Again the higher lying topography serves to screen the majority of views of the urban edge of Stafford, although some of the larger buildings along the A513, including the MOD depot, are visible, in addition to the industrial units associated with Trinity Fields.

Viewpoint 9 is taken from the bridleway which runs through the centre of the site at an elevation of approximately 110m AOD looking west over the western half of the site. From this viewpoint the rising landform to the north is evident and the landscape is more open; to the west and south the built up area of north Stafford is visible, in addition to the MOD depot to the south of the site and Trinity Fields west of the A34. Again the buildings onsite associated with Newbuildings Farm and its vegetation are visible.

Viewpoint 10 is taken from the bridleway which runs through the centre of the site at an elevation of approximately 110m AOD looking east/south east over the eastern half of the site. The rising landform towards the north-eastern corner of the site is evident, with Kents Barn Farm visible just north of the site. Beacon Hill, a local topographical landmark to the south-east is also visible. As the land falls to the south, the urban edge of Stafford is visible from this location, including Staffordshire General Hospital.

Viewpoint 11 is taken from Sandon Road approximately 200m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 115m AOD looking south towards the site. There are open views across the eastern part of the site, west of Sandon Road; the part of the site south of Sandon Road is not visible. The urban area of Stafford is visible in the distance.

Viewpoint 12 is taken from Marston Lane approximately 150m from the site at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking east towards the site. The western part of the site is visible, with the landform falling to the south clearly evident, leading down

to the urban edge of Stafford, including the MOD site. Newbuildings Farm and Cottage also are also visible, as is Beacon Hill in the distance.

Viewpoint 13 is taken from the bridleway which joins Sandon Road at the north-eastern corner of the site, at an elevation of approximately 105m AOD looking south west across the site. The rising topography in the north-eastern part of the site is evident from this location which, in addition to the boundary vegetation, serves to screen the remainder of the site, and the majority of the urban edge of Stafford. Beyond Sandon Road, residential dwellings just north of the part of the site south of Sandon Road are visible, as is a telephone mast that is set within the MOD barracks south of that part of the site.

Viewpoint 14 is taken from the bridleway which runs through the centre of the site at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking west across the western part of the site. The open, agricultural character of the site is evident, surrounding Newbuildings Farm and its vegetation. The urban edge of Stafford is also clearly visible, including the industrial units in Trinity Park and those buildings on the new industrial estate off A513.

Viewpoint 15 is taken from the bridleway which runs through the centre of the site at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking east over the eastern half of the site. The viewpoint illustrates the rising landform towards the north and east of the site, and the localised plateau that is formed on top of it, in contrast to the falling topography towards Stafford to the south. This viewpoint also demonstrates the eroded field boundaries and lack of hedgerow infrastructure across this part of the site.

Viewpoint 16 is taken from Marston Lane approximately 100m from the site at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking east towards the site. The western part of the site is visible in this viewpoint through the field boundary vegetation which serves to filter views across the site. Elements of built form on the urban edge of Stafford are also visible.

Viewpoint 17 is taken from the A513, at the south-western corner of the site, at an elevation of approximately 82m AOD, looking north across the site. Rising topography to the north-east of the site is evident in the distance, and the site is seen in the context of the infrastructure of the lit A513 carriageway, and adjacent development including the MOD depot.

Viewpoint 18 is taken from Cromwell Close in Hopton, approximately 900m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 125m AOD looking west towards the site. This elevated viewpoint gives a wide open panorama across the urban edge of Stafford, in the context of adjacent Villages and an undulating agricultural landscape. Elements of the site are visible amongst the undulating topography and vegetation framework.

Viewpoint 19 is taken from Common Road, approximately 200m from the site at an elevation of approximately 80m AOD looking northeast towards the site. This viewpoint provides views over the site and illustrates the rising topography and localised plateau and ridge to the north. The built form of the MOD depot and industrial estate are clearly evident in the view, and serve to screen parts of the site.

Viewpoint 20 is taken from the footpath leading from Hopton approximately 850m from the site at an elevation of approximately 110m AOD, towards Beacon Hill, looking north west towards the site. This viewpoint again provides views of the built up area of Stafford, including Staffordshire General Hospital and the industrial units on Trinity Fields. The vast majority of the site is screened in the view due to the intervening topography and vegetation, however the buildings associated with the MOD depot to the south of the site are visible.

2.32 In summary, given the scale of the overall site, it is particularly well visually contained from many aspects, and that section of it east of Sandon Road is particularly well enclosed. This is mainly due to the topographical character of the overall site, combined with the undulating contextual landform and associated vegetation patterns. Consequently, long distance views are generally limited, and the majority of views of the site are short to mid distance ones, typically in the context of the urban edge of Stafford and the infrastructure of the A513. Within this urban edge infrastructure, there are a number of visually prominent features, including the MOD depots; Trinity Fields Industrial Estate; and the industrial units directly south of the A34. Further into Stafford, visible elements include the General Hospital and the radio mast associated with the MOD Barracks, south of Sandon Road.

2.33 From the north, views are limited because the landform rises to a localised plateau along the northern edge of the site and its north-eastern corner. As the land falls away to the north, this area of raised landform serves to screen the vast majority of the site, limiting views to those from its immediate northern boundary. There are no views from Sandon Registered Park and Garden due to the intervening vegetation. From the

south, there are a number of views from the A513 and areas within the urban edge of Stafford, always in the context of built form and highways infrastructure. The curved alignment of the A513 and built form of the MOD depot limit views of the entire site. From the east, there are a number of short distance views from Sandon Road across the elevated landform of the eastern part of the site, and a number of more distant views from elevated areas around Hopton, where the site is seen in the context of a wide open panorama including well vegetated undulating landform and the urban edge of Stafford. From the west, views are also limited to short distance ones in the vicinity of Marston Lane, where vegetation on and adjacent to the western site boundary serve to screen and filter views across the site. There are very limited views west of the A34.

3. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

Landscape and Visual Analysis

3.1 The Landscape and Visual Analysis is illustrated on Figure 6 and can be summarised as follows:

Context

- The topographical disposition of the site generates a sloping aspect that faces towards the urban area of Stafford, as opposed to the more open rural areas further north;
- Only the more elevated parts of the site along the northern boundary and at the north-eastern corner, have a strong visual relationship with the wider countryside to the north and north-east;
- The existing urban edge of Stafford provides visual containment to the south of the site from long distant views;
- Consequently the site is well visually to both the north and south;
- Views from the east and west are typically filtered by surrounding vegetation, including hedgerows with trees, and small woodlands with open views limited to the site boundaries;
- Many of the views of the site are therefore mid-short distant views, and typically include elements of the existing urban edge;
- Along Sandon Road, when travelling south towards Stafford, the perception of crossing the 'threshold' from a rural (or semi-rural) environment takes place approximately where the lane that leads to the Village Hopton junctions with Sandon Road. At this point, urban form along Sandon Road is visible at close proximity, and there are views across the urban edge of Stafford looking south;
- There are a number of visually prominent elements of built form along this part of the urban edge that are visible in the wider landscape, including the industrial units on Trinity Park, the MOD depot to the south of the site, units on the A513 industrial site and Staffordshire General Hospital; and
- The presence of the (lit) highways corridors, industrial infrastructure including telephone masts and large scale built form of the industrial estates combine with the existing built form of Stafford to generate an "urban edge" influence across the southern part of the site, which is emphasised by the topographical slope of the site towards Stafford.

Site

- In terms of the land to the west of Sandon Road, the western section that is generally lower lying is more enclosed and intricate in character than the eastern section, with its raised landform, plateau and evidence of hedgerow removal;
- The section of the site to the south of Sandon Road is particularly enclosed, generally flat and retains a good existing landscape infrastructure associated with the disused railway line;
- The presence of Newbuildings Farm and Cottage and the vegetation which surrounds their built form further help to sub divide and filter views across the site;
- All parts of the site west of Sandon Road, except parts on the northern boundary, and north-eastern corner have a strong and direct visual relationship with the urban edge of Stafford;

Constraints and Opportunities

Constraints

3.2 On site constraints can be summarised as follows:

- The steep topography of the north-eastern part of the site, particularly the slope towards the western edge of Sandon Lane;
- The more exposed higher lying landform along the northern edge of the site that has a good visual relationship with the wider landscape;
- The inter-visibility to surrounding agricultural fields, farms and villages to the east and lesser extent to the west; and
- The removal of many hedgerow field boundaries across the site as part of agricultural practices, creating a number of large, open and potentially exposed areas of land;

Opportunities

3.3 On site opportunities can be summarised as follows:

- The visual connectivity between the site and Stafford, insofar as the south facing slope of the site bears a direct link with the existing urban edge, as opposed to away from it;

- Limited visual connectivity between the site and the wider landscape context, specifically to the north, including visual containment provided by field boundary vegetation across the site itself, and the rising topography to the north;
- The strong visual containment of the part of the site to the south of Sandon Road;
- The existing hedgerow infrastructure and vegetation across the site, notably on its western half, which provide a landscape framework to assist in assimilating development form;
- Open space and landscape/biodiversity opportunities associated with the Marston Brook corridor;
- The existing 'urban fringe' character and influence, notably across the southern part of the site, generated by the proximity and visual link between the site to the urban edge of Stafford; and
- The presence of the A513 in terms of access, and the expectation of adjacent built form.

4. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL DESIGN AND STRATEGY

Redevelopment Proposals

4.1 It is proposed to redevelop the overall site for mixed use development, including residential, community use with a local centre, employment, and associated supporting facilities including local highways infrastructure and public open spaces. Access to that part of the site west of Sandon Road is likely to be in two places; firstly from the A513 Beaconside towards the south-western corner of the site; and secondly from Sandon Road. Access to that part of the site south of Sandon Road is likely to be directly off Sandon Road. In terms of building height and massing, it is proposed to develop the following mix:

- 3 storey residential units (at focal points etc.), up to 10.8 metres to ridge;
- 2.5 storey residential units, up to 9.8 metres to ridge;
- 2 storey residential units, up to 8.5 metres to ridge;
- (Up to) 4 storey employment, up to 14 metres high; and
- A Primary School (single storey).

4.2 The employment uses and local centre would be focussed in the centre of the proposal, just off the A513 Beaconside, adjacent to the existing MOD depot, in a lower lying part of the site, with both access and frontage adjacent to the A513. Residential development would extend in all directions from this central area, including that part of the site south of Sandon Road.

4.3 In addition, the landscape strategy seeks to create a viable and attractive mixed use development, which has been prepared in response to the landscape and visual analysis and the various different landscape and visual constraints on Site. It is founded on the following principles:

- Careful consideration of the location and extent of built form;
- Retention of the existing hedgerow planting infrastructure across all areas of the site;
- Retention of areas with distinct landscape amenity value;
- Retention of areas with ecological potential;
- Creation of a consistent planting infrastructure around the site, taking into account visual containment and mitigation;

- Habitat creation where opportunities exist e.g. as part of a Sustainable Urban Drainage Scheme (SUDS);
- Consideration of visual and physical off-site links e.g. views to the open countryside to the north; and
- Creation of a fully accessible and secure public access network.

4.4 The Landscape Strategy is illustrated on Figure 7, and may be summarised as follows:

Identification of the development envelope: This is driven by the topographical and landscape character of the site, with proposed development accommodated across those parts of the site that retain a strong visual relationship with Stafford, and slope towards it. The envelope excludes all elevated areas along the northern boundary and the plateau area to the north-east, all of which retain an open aspect to the wider landscape to the north and north-east. The envelope is also set back from the western site boundary, with particular respect to the Marston Brook corridor;

Acknowledgement of the urban/rural threshold along Sandon Road: The point at which the urban/rural threshold is crossed is retained, such that there is not development further north, along the western edge of Sandon Road that would effectively 'extend' the urban presence further into the rural area;

Open space to the north and west: out with the development envelope, the creation of a large linear open space that extends around the western and northern boundaries of the site in respect of both landscape and visual amenity, and which broadens out significantly along the northern edge of the site to provide an area of significant open space to accommodate both active and passive recreation;

Landscape buffer to development edge: at the junction between proposed development and the open space, creation of a series of different landscape treatments; smaller groups planting along the western boundary adjacent to Marston Brook to reinforce the very local character of the stream corridor; a series of linear tree belts further north along the western and north-western boundaries as the landform gets higher and in respect of views towards the site from Marston lane and adjacent areas; and a strong linear woodland along the northern boundary adjacent to the highest areas of landform to ensure that this area of open space retains its strong relationship with wider landscape, where no significant built form, existing or proposed, would be visible;

Existing hedgerows: reinforcement of the existing hedgerow infrastructure across all parts of the site, retention of the existing mature trees, and planting of new hedgerow trees to provide a level of compartmentalisation between development cells;

Green Links and Open Space: incorporation of green walkways (or similar, incorporating the existing public footpath/bridleway that runs through the site) between development cells, possibly linked to the existing hedgerow infrastructure. These links would provide access to a series of primary and secondary open spaces within the development to provide ease of access to all users. Other secondary spaces would include the entrance landscape and the public footpath corridors. As well as providing useable space for residents and amenity value, in combination with the perimeter structural landscape, will assist in providing both a greater variety of landscape resources across the Site, and their associated biodiversity value;

Amenity Planting: In addition to the public open space, numerous green infrastructure links will be created across the development, along access roads and in garden spaces to provide a pleasant local setting for the new development, and ensure that a balance is struck across the Site in terms of planting, as opposed to confine it to the perimeter of the Site;

Species Mixes: Species planted will be based on the native indigenous mixes found in the area to assist in assimilating the development in the surrounding area on a more detailed level.

- 4.5 The landscape strategy has been developed integrally to the overall Masterplan, and reacts positively to the local landscape context, specifically topographical relationship between the site and the wider landscape, and also its relationship with the existing urban edge of Stafford. It has also been prepared with due consideration to a landscape and visual analysis of the baseline.

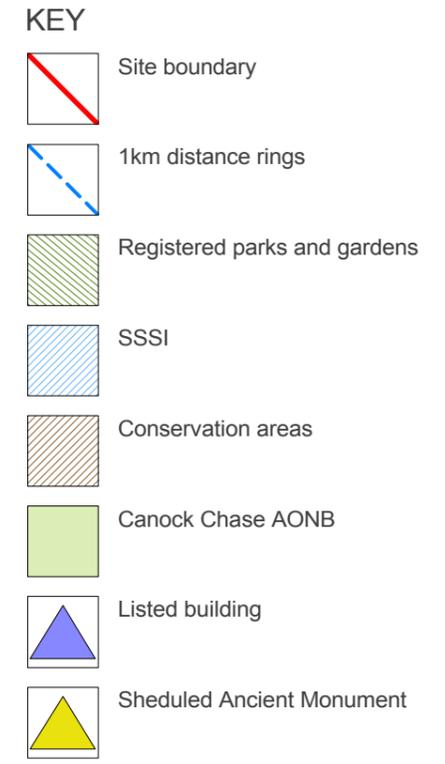
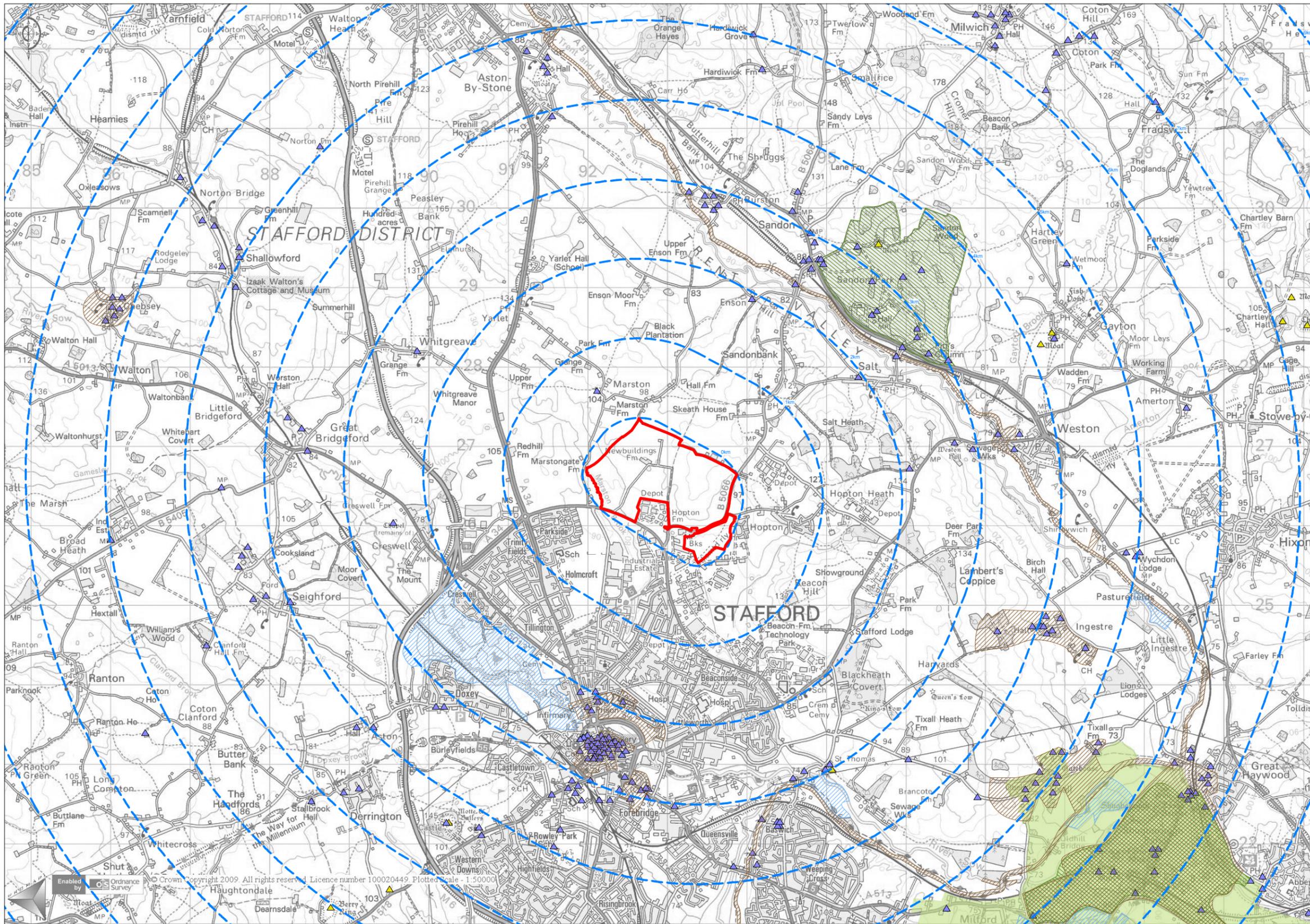
5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The Site is located directly to the north of the urban area of Stafford, that is characterised by major highways infrastructure, large scale industrial and retail development, and residential development. It is surrounded by open (non-developed) land to the north, east and west, although the highways infrastructure associated with the A34 comprises a significant feature in the landscape to the west. Land directly to the east, whilst currently undeveloped, also includes a number of Villages including Hopton, Weston and Sandon Bank.
- 5.2 The Site lies in an area under the jurisdiction of Stafford Borough Council. It is not covered by and (landscape) planning designations. In terms of its character, both the Site and its context are generally consistent with both national and local landscape character studies, displaying tree belts, arable fields, and the influence of the urban area of Stafford. The site also retains an 'urban edge' character, being influenced by the (lit) A513 corridor and large visually prominent development, including and MOD unit.
- 5.3 The Site itself is irregular in plan form, is sub-divided into two distinct parts: a much larger area to the west of Sandon Road; and a smaller area to the south of Sandon Road. The overall site generally comprises a number of agricultural fields formed by mature hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Land to the west of Sandon Road has rising topography to the north, such that the vast majority of it 'faces' Stafford, with its northern section retaining strong visual links with the wider landscape. A public footpath/bridleway runs in a north-south alignment down the centre of this part of the site. Land to the south of Sandon Road is much flatter, and generally very enclosed with a mature landscape framework generated by a disused railway line.
- 5.4 Visually the overall Site is well contained, by various different elements. These include existing and emerging urban form of Stafford to the south; and where the site to the west of Sandon Road is concerned, the topographical ridge and localised plateau that extend along its northern boundary which serves to screen the vast majority of the site from the wider landscape to the north and north-east. There are a number of short and (filtered) mid distance views of the site from the east and west, otherwise the majority of views are from the site boundaries.
- 5.5 It is proposed to redevelop the overall Site for mixed use, including (in the majority) residential, with a local centre, and some employment use. The development will be

accompanied by means of access, open space and infrastructure and perimeter landscape. The landscape strategy is based upon identification of a development envelope that focuses proposed built form on land sloping back towards Stafford, retaining other parts of the site that relate to the wider landscape as open space. This generates a significant open space network, to create a landscape infrastructure around the perimeter to assist in further containing the Site, and retention of all the key landscape resources on Site. The proposals have been developed inherently with this landscape strategy, in order to both provide a balanced setting for the development.

- 5.6 On the basis of this landscape and visual appraisal therefore, development of the nature and scale proposed therefore is considered to be acceptable on the basis of the character of the Site in its context. In summary, the Site retains many attributes that provide good development potential. The proposed landscape strategy is based on a landscape and visual appraisal of the Site and its context, and responds to matters of local landscape resources, character, visual amenity and the (landscape) broader planning context within which the site lies.

FIGURE 1



Land north of Beaconside,
Stafford

**Site Location & Planning
Designations Plan**

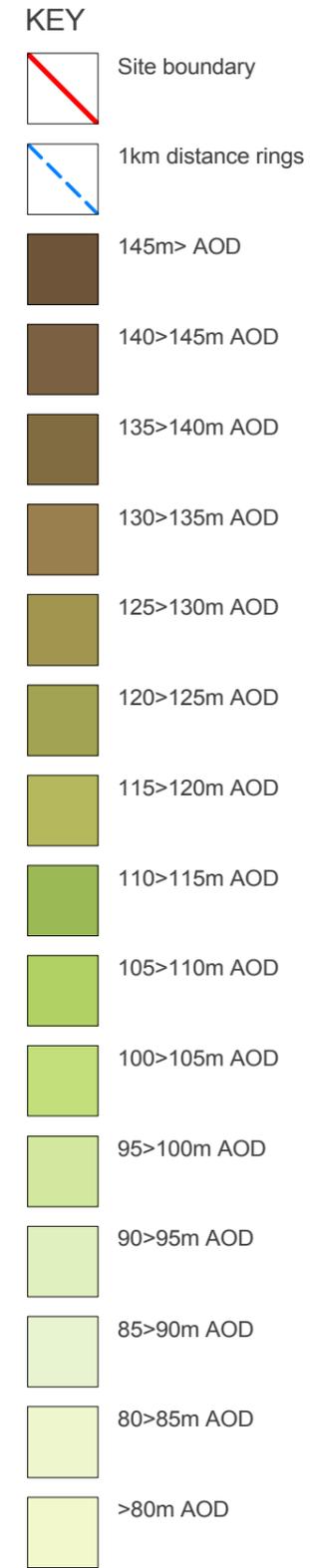
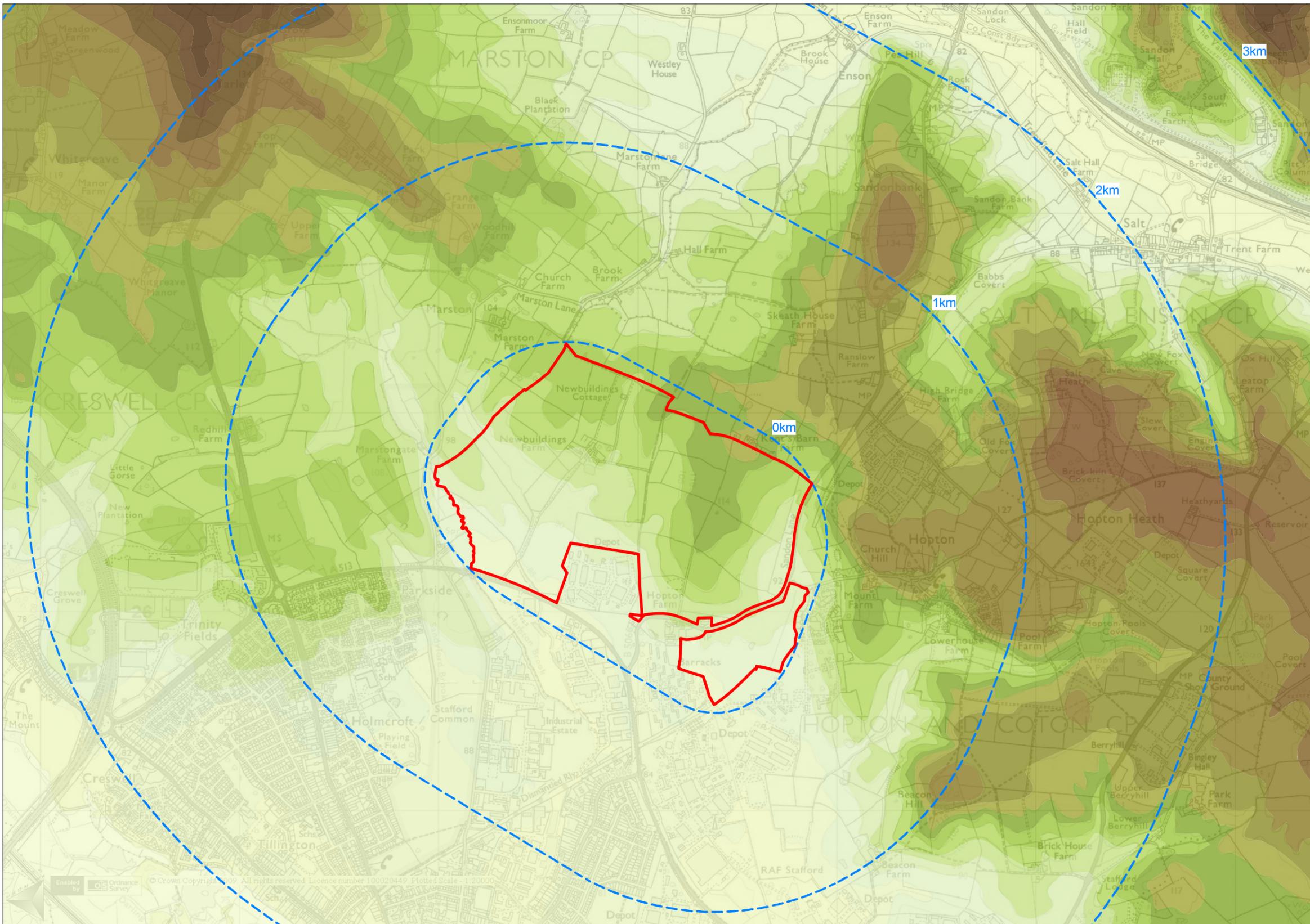
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FIGURE 2



Land north of Beaconside,
Stafford
Landscape Topographical Plan

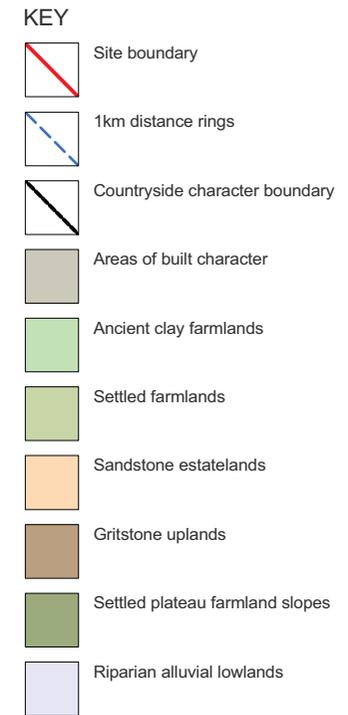
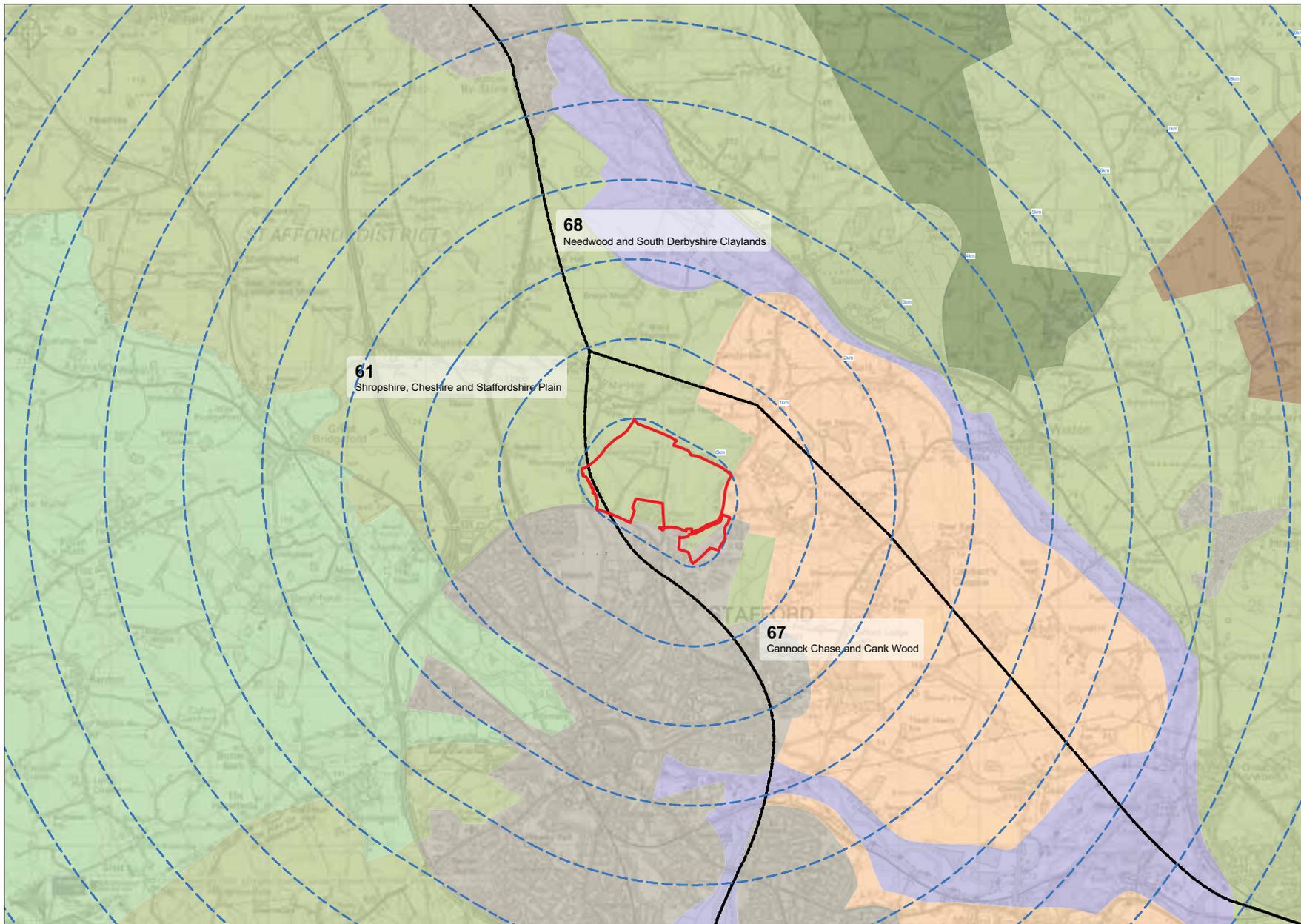
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FIGURE 3



Data derived from 'Planning for Landscape: Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996-2001'

Figure 3
Land north of Beaconside,
Stafford
Landscape Character Areas
Plan

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FIGURE 4

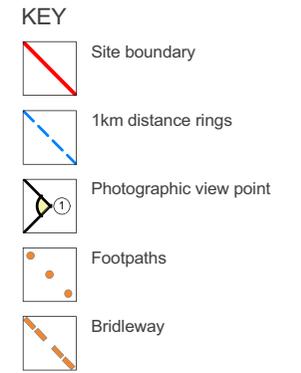
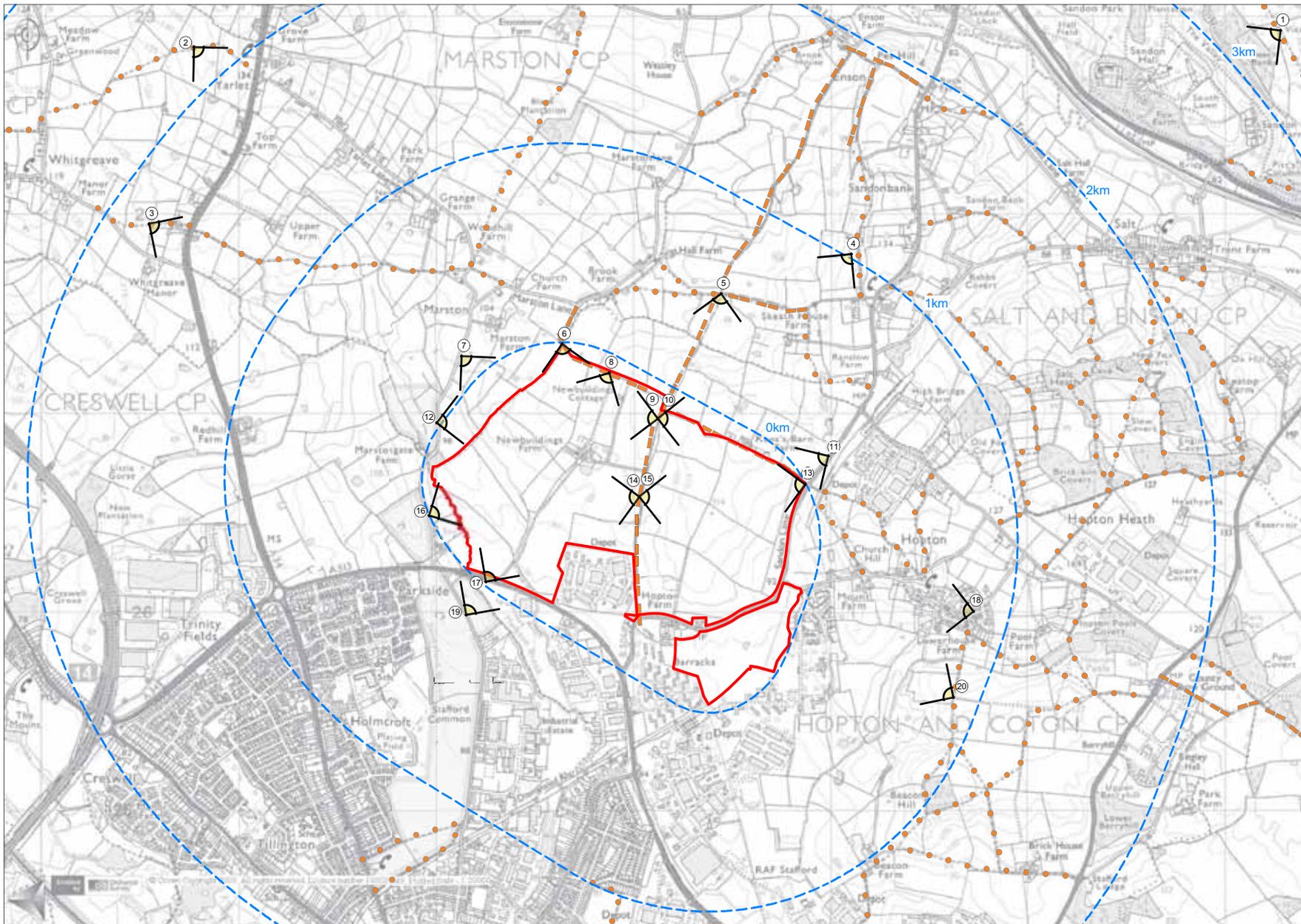


Figure 4
 Land north of Beaconside,
 Stafford
 Photograph Location Plan

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FIGURE 5



Viewpoint 1: Taken from the public footpath within Sandon Park, approximately 3.3km from the site, at an elevation of approximately 130m AOD looking south west towards the site.



Viewpoint 2: Taken from the public footpath leading to the A34 near Grove Farm, approximately 2.4km from the site, at an elevation of approximately 140m AOD looking south east towards the site.



Viewpoint 3: Taken from the public footpath leading to the A34 from Manor Farm, approximately 1.9km from the site, at an elevation of approximately 120m AOD looking south east towards the site.



Viewpoint 4: Taken from the public footpath leading from Sandon Park approximately 1.2km from the site, at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking south west towards the site.

Figure 5
Land north of Beaconside,
Stafford
Photo Sheet 01

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Viewpoint 5: Taken from the brideway near Skeath House Farm approximately 580m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 95m AOD looking south towards the site.



Viewpoint 6: Taken from the brideway on the northern boundary of the site at an elevation of approximately 105m AOD looking south over the site.



Viewpoint 7: Taken from Marston Lane approximately 350m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking south east towards the site.



Viewpoint 8: Taken from the brideway on the northern boundary of the site at an elevation of approximately 105m AOD looking south over the site.

Figure 5
Land north of Beaconside,
Stafford
Photo Sheet 02

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Viewpoint 9: Taken from the brideway which runs through the centre of the site at an elevation of approximately 110m AOD looking west/south west over the western half of the site.



Viewpoint 10: Taken from the brideway which runs through the centre of the site at an elevation of approximately 110m AOD looking east/south east over the eastern half of the site.



Viewpoint 11: Taken from Sandon Lane approximately 200m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 115m AOD looking south towards the south eastern part of the site.



Viewpoint 12: Taken from Marston Lane approximately 150m from the site at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking southeast towards the site.

Figure 5
Land north of Beaconside,
Stafford
Photo Sheet 03

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Viewpoint 13: Taken from the brideway which joins Sandon Lane/B5066 on the north eastern corner of the site at an elevation of approximately 105m AOD looking south west over the site.



Viewpoint 14: Taken from the brideway which runs through the centre of the site at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking west over the western half of the site.



Viewpoint 15: Taken from the brideway which runs through the centre of the site at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking east over the eastern half of the site.



Viewpoint 16: Taken from Marston Lane approximately 100m from the site at an elevation of approximately 100m AOD looking east towards the site.

Figure 5
Land north of Beaconside,
Stafford
Photo Sheet 04

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Viewpoint 17: Taken from the A513 approximately 10m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 85m AOD looking north into the site.



Viewpoint 18: Taken from Cromwell Close, Hopton, approximately 900m from the site, at an elevation of approximately 125m AOD looking west towards the site.



Viewpoint 19: Taken from Common Road approximately 200m from the site at an elevation of approximately 80m AOD looking northeast towards the site.

FIGURE 6



Figure 6
 Land north of Beaconside,
 Stafford
 Landscape and Visual Analysis
 Plan
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FIGURE 7



- KEY**
-  Site boundary
 -  Proposed woodland tree planting
 -  Proposed boulevard tree planting
 -  Existing hedgerow to be retained
 -  Proposed shrub planting
 -  Existing pond retained
 -  New Buildings Farm
 -  Proposed footpath
 -  Proposed sport provision
 -  Residential
 -  Employment
 -  School
 -  Public amenities
 -  MOD base

Figure 7
 Land north of Beaconside,
 Stafford
 Landscape Strategy Plan

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