

# St. Helens Local Plan Examination

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**Response to Inspector's Matters, Issues  
and Questions**  
**Matter 4: Allocations, Safeguarded Land  
and Green Belt Boundaries**  
**Persimmon Homes North West (R01145)**

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MAY 2021



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<b>Mosaic Town Planning</b> Bloc 17 Marble St. Manchester M2 3AW	Enquiries.: 0161 638 9211 <a href="mailto:enquiries@mosaictownplanning.co.uk">enquiries@mosaictownplanning.co.uk</a>  <a href="http://www.mosaictownplanning.com">www.mosaictownplanning.com</a>
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Paul Williams
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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 These representations are submitted on behalf of Persimmon Homes North West, who have an interest in the site '**Land South of Billinge Road, Garswood (1HA)**'. The site is currently within the Green Belt and has a draft allocation for residential development.
- 1.2 Persimmon have historically been active within the St. Helens local authority area, as evidenced by their recently completed schemes on brownfield sites at Vulcan Park, Newton-le-Willows and Deacon Trading Estate, Earle Street, Earlestown, and continue to pursue new opportunities across the Borough.
- 1.3 This representation is accompanied by the following appendices:
1. Illustrative Masterplan – Escape
  2. Green Belt Assessment - LUC
  3. Landscape Feasibility Statement – LUC
  4. Ecological Statement – LUC
  5. Transport Issues Note – Croft/Eddisons
  - 6 a/b. Site Access Plans (Billinge Road and Garswood Road) – Croft/Eddisons
  7. Flood Risk Assessment / Drainage Strategy – BEK Enviro
- 1.4 Aspects of the Illustrative Masterplan are referred to under specific questions. However, its key features include:
- 242 dwellings at net density of 37dph.
  - Full range of house types and sizes based on emerging policy requirements set out in Policy LPC01
  - 30% affordable provision
  - Net developable area of 6.59 Ha., excluding easement for Rivington Aqueduct and area at risk from surface water flooding
  - Extensive green and blue infrastructure with 4 'greens', incorporating play area, plus allotments and public open space to south in accordance with Policy LPC05

## 2 Issue 2: Land to south of Billinge Road, Garswood (1HA) and land to south of Leyland Green, Garswood (1HS)

### 11. Do the Green Belt assessments support the allocation of Site 1HA and the safeguarding of Site 1HS and demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt?

- 2.1 The allocated site 1HA is referred to as sub-parcel GBP\_025b in the Council’s Green Belt Assessment. The assessment concludes that the overall significance of the parcel’s contribution to Green Belt Purposes is ‘low’, with the following summary: *“All sides of the sub-parcel have strong boundaries and therefore the sub-parcel is well contained. The parcel is enclosed to the east and south. A strategic gap between Billinge and Garswood could be maintained if this subparcel was released from the Green Belt.”* (p235)
- 2.2 In order to supplement the Council’s Green Belt Assessment, Persimmon Homes have obtained an independent assessment from consultants LUC, who have carried out Green Belt assessments on behalf of some 40 local authorities throughout England, including the North West.
- 2.3 LUC agree that the choice of parcel for assessment is appropriate, having regard to recognisable visual boundaries, land use/characteristics and enclosure by strong features including urban areas and roads.
- 2.4 The following table is a comparison of the findings of the Council’s assessment and those of LUC:

	Council	LUC
Purpose 1; check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Low	Low or No Contribution - containment means the site has a strong relationship with the existing built up area of Garswood, as opposed to the wider countryside
Purpose 2: prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Low	Low - site is relatively well contained by development along Garswood Lane, so that the perception of the narrowing of the gap between Billinge and Garswood would be limited, and that a significant gap would remain between the settlements
Purpose 3 seeks to ‘assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Low	Medium - Site is relatively well contained by existing development and has a stronger association with the

		built up area than the open countryside...release would lead to the loss of open land within site itself but not encroachment onto the wider countryside
Purpose 4 of Green Belt policy is 'to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Sites cannot be reliably differentiated	Not relevant in this locality
Purpose 5: to assist in urban regeneration	Contribution of each individual parcel cannot be differentiated	Agreed contribution not differentiated

2.5 In summary, the Council’s assessment has found the site does not make a significant contribution to the purposes of Green Belt, and this conclusion is shared by independent specialists LUC. Whilst LUC have found a ‘medium’ contribution to Purpose 3, their reasoning for this would apply equally to any greenfield site of this scale and nature. The differing assessment is a consequence of variance in the methodology used to assess the site against Green Belt Purpose 3, rather than disagreement over conclusions. Overall, LUC conclude that the site makes little contribution to any of the Green Belt purposes, and its allocation as a housing site (in terms of Green Belt issues) should not be considered unacceptable.

**12. If exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated have these been clearly articulated in the Plan?**

2.6 In *R (Compton Parish Council & Others) v Guildford Borough Council & others [2019] EWHC 3242 (Admin)*, it was established that the exceptional circumstances test might be satisfied by one reason or a combination of reasons. The exceptional circumstances are primarily a strategic issue for the Local Plan and are addressed under Matter 3. However, the strategic case is supplemented by the desirability of ensuring an appropriate distribution of development. Garwood has experienced little housing development in recent years and is within Billinge & Seneley ward which has seen population decline. In accordance with the spatial strategy in Policy LPA02, Garswood is identified as a key settlement and so would be expected to accommodate an amount of development proportionate to its scale, its accessibility to existing services and amenities, and its proximity to key employment areas. Furthermore, the site-specific contribution of site 1HA to the Green Belt is low. These exceptional circumstances are apparent from the Local Plan in combination with the evidence base.

### **13. Is the configuration and scale of allocation 1HA justified taking into account development needs and the Green Belt assessments?**

- 2.7 The configuration and scale of the site are strongly influenced by the parcel of land which is created by the three roads and associated development which enclose the site, with the Council's assessment noting its strong boundaries to all sides; this is consistent with the advice in parag. 139(f) of the Framework that Green Belt boundaries should be defined clearly, *"using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent"*. There would be no rational way to sub-divide the site having regard guidance within the Framework.
- 2.8 The proposed housing allocation is proportionate to the size of the settlement and consistent with the Local Plan identifying Garswood as one of the Key Settlement where new development will be directed

### **14. Would the adverse impacts of developing Site 1HA (Green Belt impacts, highway safety) outweigh the benefits?**

- 2.9 This response refers to the adverse impacts specifically identified by the question, and other impacts which could potentially arise from a development of this nature.

#### **Green Belt Impacts**

- 2.10 Having regard to the Council's assessment and that of LUC referred to above, the site-specific contribution to Green Belt purposes is low. The triangular site is entirely enclosed by highways, with built development along the majority of two sides. It does not involve incursion into otherwise open countryside beyond the limits of existing development and will not bring Garswood and Billinge closer together and retaining the significant gap that exists between the settlements

#### **Highway Safety**

- 2.11 There is no reason to believe that highway safety is an issue of particular relevance to the site. The Council's Stage 2B Developability Assessment comments that safe vehicular access could be provided, referring to the options of Garswood Road and Billinge Road used on the access plans accompanying this document. We have asked transport consultants Croft/Eddisons to respond on highway safety and they comment: *"A review of accident data for the last 5 years has been undertaken. The data reviewed has demonstrated that there are no particular road safety issues in the vicinity of the site. It is not considered that the proposals for a residential development will unduly change the characteristics or nature of the surrounding highway network and as such will not have a detrimental impact on overall road safety."*

### Traffic Generation

- 2.12 In terms of off-site impact, the proposals are likely to generate in the region of 300 plus vehicular trips in the two busiest hours of the day which are likely to be between 0800 and 0900 hours and 1700 to 1800 hours. The majority of the traffic will be travelling towards Wigan, St Helens, Manchester and the Strategic Highway Network. Persimmon Homes note the reference in Appendix 5 to ‘any necessary off-site improvements’ and will discuss any need for these with the Council prior to a planning application.

### Landscape Impact

- 2.13 The accompanying Landscape Feasibility Statement considers that the development of the site will not alter any of the wider key landscape characteristics, or introduce a discordant element in the existing setting when viewed from the wider landscape. Although the ridgeline accommodating the site is visible in wider views, the development offers an opportunity to improve the character and quality of the settlement edge of Garswood.

### Loss of Agricultural Land

- 2.14 The Council’s Assessment comments that whilst the sub-parcel includes agricultural land, the quality of this (grade 3) is lower than in some parts of the Borough. (p85)

### Ecology and Trees

- 2.15 The site is currently in pastoral agricultural use. The accompanying Ecological Assessment concludes that *“The Site was considered of negligible ecological value due to the lack of valuable habitats present, absence of protected species evidence and limited suitability of habitats to support protected species”*. Only a small number of trees are present, which are at the periphery and will not constrain access or the developable area.

### Conclusion

- 2.16 There is therefore no evidence of adverse impacts which would outweigh the benefits of the site being developed for housing.

## **15. Are the requirements for Sites 1HA and 1HS within Appendices 5 and 7 (Site Profiles) positively prepared and effective?**

- 2.17 We note that the Council has changed the requirements for Site 1HA in Proposed Modifications and initially focus on the amended version:

**Safe highway access should be provided from Garswood Road and / or Billinge Road (with any necessary off-site improvements).**

- 2.18 The Transport Note accompanying this Statement observes that the site benefits from extensive frontages onto both Billinge Road and Garswood Road, providing scope for vehicular access from both roads. The Note envisages that there will be a primary access from both roads, as shown on the accompanying detailed plans and reflected on the Illustrative Masterplan.
- 2.19 To cater for the volume of traffic movements turning into the site, the designs incorporate right-turning lanes on Billinge Road and Garswood Road. This will require widening into the site frontage but does not require the acquisition of third-party land to implement, as all additional land is within the existing limits of adopted highway or within the site boundary. The running lanes on Billinge Road and Garswood Road will be 3.0 metres wide with a 3 metre wide right turning lane.
- 2.20 The requirement is sound in accordance with paragraph 35 of NPPF. Whilst any necessary off-site improvements are not identified, there is no evidence of any constraint which would bring the allocation into question and detailed matters can be addressed through the development management process.

**Measures to secure suitable access to the site by walking, cycling and public transport such as: (a) the provision of segregated walking and cycling routes which must run through the site and link to nearby highways; (b) the upgrading of pedestrian footways alongside existing highways around the site; (c) the upgrading of existing bus stops on Garswood Drive, Billinge Road and Smock Lane close to the site so that they become fully accessible (including for disabled persons); and (d) a financial contribution towards the upgrading of Garswood station.**

- 2.21 Persimmon Homes support the requirement overall in the interests of good land-use planning. Garswood is a sustainable settlement in which there are realistic alternatives to use of the private car, and it is important that the development should be designed and integrated into the settlement to maximise their usage. The illustrative Masterplan shows segregated walking and cycling routes to facilitate movement within and through the site. These include a link onto Smock Lane opposite Thornhill Road, to provide an additional link into the body of the settlement of Garswood. Improved pedestrian footways to the perimeter of the site are either directly adjacent to the highways, or parallel to them and set back according to the immediate context.
- 2.22 Whilst the improvement sought to bus stops is specified, the need for upgrading Garswood Station is not identified in the Council's Infrastructure Plan and so Persimmon Homes are not aware of any evidence of its deficiencies or how a financial contribution would be used. Although a contribution may be justified, this would need to satisfy the relevant statutory tests.



**Provision of effective flood management measures to reduce the risk of flooding caused by overland flow.**

- 2.23 This requirement is positively prepared since it seeks measures to address an identified issue at the site, and effective because it identifies the action required.
- 2.24 Whilst the site is within Flood Zone 1 and so at the lowest risk of fluvial and tidal flooding, the Environment Agency’s Flood Risk Map from Surface Water (see Appendix F of the Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy) shows that the north-eastern extent of the site is at risk of surface water flooding during a ‘high risk’ (greater than 3.3% annual probability) event. A surface water flood flow route also crosses from west to east through the centre of the site during a ‘low risk’ (between a 1% and 0.1% annual probability) event.
- 2.25 The Illustrative Masterplan follows the recommended sequential approach, with no development (dwellings or gardens) located within the surface water flood extent identified on the EA ‘Flood Risk from Surface Water’ map and minimal road construction within the area. Provision is made for SuDS with an attenuation pond, located within the lower north-eastern portion of the site, facilitating gravity drainage, and outside of the area currently at risk of surface water flooding. The solution will both ensure that drainage within the development site is adequate and alleviate an existing problem caused by water from the site flooding the highway.

**Alteration to Submission Plan Requirements**

- 2.26 Persimmon Homes note that the generic requirements for open space and a range of house types are proposed to be deleted in Proposed Modifications. Persimmon agree that this is the correct approach as their repetition within the policy provides unnecessary duplication.

**16. Are the indicative site areas, net developable areas, minimum densities and indicative site capacities within Tables 4.5 and 4.8 justified and effective?**

- 2.27 The following table extract from the Submission Plan shows the application of the Council’s standard assumptions to Site 1HA:

**Table 4.5: Sites allocated for new housing development**

Site ref.	Name	Area <sup>23</sup> (hectares)	NDA <sup>24</sup>	Minimum Density (units per hectare)	Indicative site capacity (new dwellings)		Total
					Before 31.03.35	After 31.03.35	
1HA	Land South of Billinge Road, East of Garswood Road and West of Smock Lane, Garswood	9.58	75%	30	216	0	216

- 2.28 The Council and the Inspector now have the benefit of the Illustrative Masterplan produced on behalf of Persimmon, which provides a detailed layout and identifies the net developable area. This takes

account of the Rivington Aqueduct easement, the area at risk of surface flooding, structural open space and transport infrastructure. This shows:

- 242 dwellings
- NDA 69% (6.59 Ha)
- Actual density 37 dph

2.29 Whilst the net developable area is lower, this is not at the expense of housing delivery, with higher numbers achieved on the layout provided together with enhanced contributions to green and blue infrastructure. The Council's density assessment uses only its minimum expectation of 30dph, and the later evidence based on a bespoke developer layout should now be preferred.

## **17. Will infrastructure to support the allocations be delivered at the right time and in the right place?**

2.30 We have reviewed the Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2018 with regard to this site. This makes the following references of direct relevance to Garswood:

- Table 2: Site 1HA: Proposed development and surface water **drainage** - No watercourse available – follow drainage hierarchy. **Comment:** The provision of this infrastructure is within the control of Persimmon Homes and the Council will use planning conditions to ensure its provision when required.
- Table 3: Current and future capacity at **GP Practices** – Garswood surgery is a purpose built modern facility; It is considered that there is sufficient flexibility/capacity in Garswood to cater for the expected increase in demand
- Parag. 4.62 – Confirms Council-run **library** in Garswood
- Parag. 4.69 – Confirms parish council-run **playing pitches** in Garswood. The Billinge & Seneley Green Ward Key Diagram at Appendix C shows outdoor sports facilities immediately to the north-west and north-east of the site (Garswood United FC and multi-use games area / rugby pitches). The site is of sufficient size to incorporate children's play. **Comment:** The site includes a substantial amount of green infrastructure for informal enjoyment, children's play and allotment provision.
- The document refers to pressure on primary **school places** in specific locations, which do not include Garswood which has its own primary school, and to ongoing borough-wide work on options for secondary school places. **Comment:** Whilst developer contributions may be sought where insufficient places are available, there is no indication of any issue specific to Garswood.

- 2.31 Table 7 contains an Infrastructure Delivery Schedule and none of the proposals are directly relevant to Site 1HA.
- 2.32 In summary, there are no identified infrastructure barriers to the early delivery of the site.

### **18. Are there any barriers to Site 1HA coming forward as anticipated by the housing trajectory?**

- 2.33 The site is promoted by Persimmon Homes, one of the country's leading volume housebuilders, who have a strong recent track record within St. Helens as noted in the Introduction. They have already commissioned a series of technical reports and produced an Illustrative Masterplan with a detailed housing layout which reflects their findings. The site is located in an established housing market area which has experienced few completions in recent years, and Persimmon are confident of strong demand for the properties.
- 2.34 The Housing Trajectory contained within SHBC004 envisages 20 completions in 2024/25 and completions per annum thereafter. However, if the plan is adopted in early 2022 as envisaged in the Local Development Scheme, there are no constraints which would prevent a start on site early in 2023. On this basis the trajectory could be brought forward by one year, with 20 completions in 2024/24 and 40 thereafter, achieving the increased total of 242.

# St. Helens Local Plan Examination

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**APPENDICES 1 – 6b**

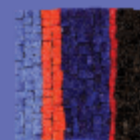
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**Matter 4: Allocations, Safeguarded Land  
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**Persimmon Homes North West (R01145)**

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- 1. Illustrative Masterplan – Escape**
- 2. Green Belt Assessment - LUC**
- 3. Landscape Feasibility Statement – LUC**
- 4. Ecological Statement – LUC**
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### Key

-  Site Boundary
-  Green Infrastructure
-  Blue Infrastructure
-  Play Area
-  Avenue
-  Street
-  Lane
-  Shared Drive
-  Shared Space
-  Footpaths and/or Cycleways
-  Front Gardens
-  Rear Gardens

 n\*ORTH  
 0m 10m 20m 30m 40m 50m 60m  
 Scale 1:1,250 (@ A2)  
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**e\*SCAPE10** Years  
 urbanists 2009 - 2019  
 Project Title  
**Weathercock Hill Farm, Garwood**  
 e\*SCAPE Job No.  
**021-012**  
 Client  
**Persimmon Homes North West**  
 Drawing Number                      Revision  
**021-012-P004**                      **REV B**  
 Drawing Title  
**Illustrative Masterplan**  
 Scale                                      Date  
**1:1,250 @ A2**                      **May'21**



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# **Green Belt Assessment - Land at Weathercock Hill Farm**

**Prepared by LUC  
February 2019**

**Project Title:** Green Belt Assessment – Land at Weathercock Hill Farm, Garswood

**Client:** Persimmon Homes (North West)

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
1.0	08/02/2019	Issued to client	Stuart Langer Richard Swann	Sarah Young	Sarah Young





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# Green Belt Assessment - Land at Weathercock Hill Farm, Garswood

Prepared by LUC  
February 2019

Planning & EIA  
Design  
Landscape Planning  
Landscape Management  
Ecology  
Mapping & Visualisation

LUC BRISTOL  
12<sup>th</sup> Floor Colston Tower  
Colston Street Bristol  
BS1 4XE  
T +44 (0)117 929 1997  
[bristol@landuse.co.uk](mailto:bristol@landuse.co.uk)

Offices also in:  
London  
Glasgow  
Edinburgh  
Manchester



FS 566056 EMS 566057

Land Use Consultants Ltd  
Registered in England  
Registered number: 2549296  
Registered Office:  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
LUC uses 100% recycled paper

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# 1 Introduction

## Background

- 1.1 Persimmon Homes (North West) has commissioned LUC to undertake an independent Green Belt Assessment of a proposed housing site at Land at Weathercock Hill Farm, Garswood, St. Helens, hereafter referred to as 'the Site'. This assessment:
- Reports on the policy context and strategic role of the Green Belt in the local area.
  - Summarises the Green Belt Review (December 2018) prepared for St. Helens Borough Council.
  - Assesses the contribution the Site makes towards the five Green Belt purposes as set out in Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 1.2 This report does not include consideration of the 'very special circumstances' or 'exceptional circumstances' required for the release of the Site from the Green Belt, as that needs to be considered in the context of wider environmental and planning issues.

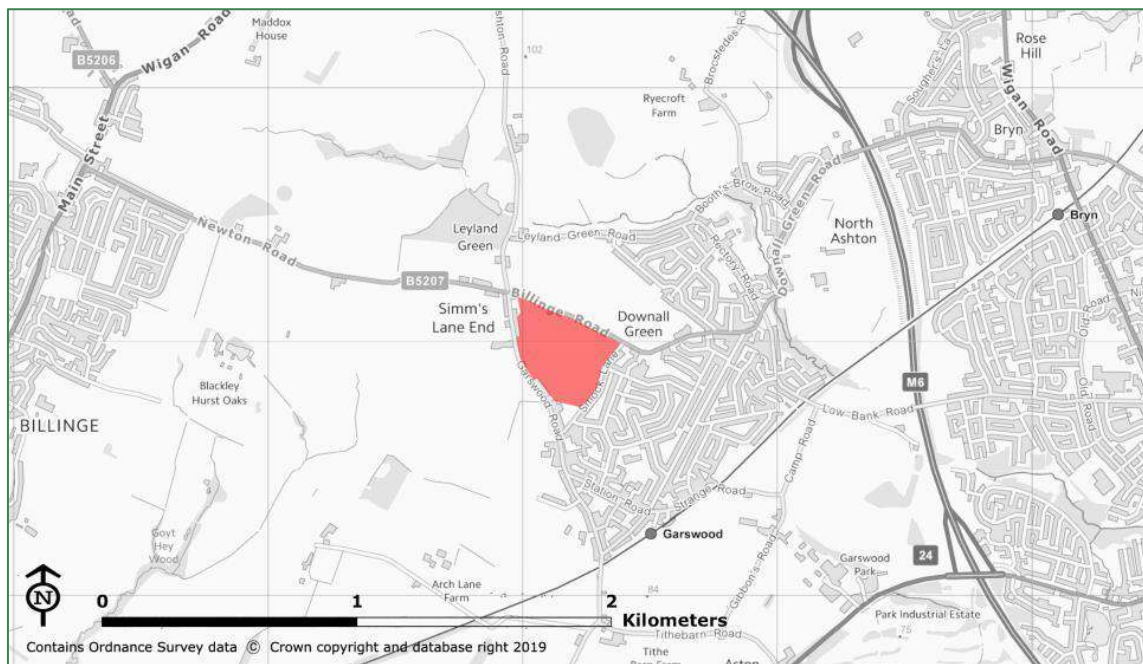
## LUC

- 1.3 LUC is one of the leading Environmental Consultants in the UK specialising in Environmental Planning, Design and Management. LUC has considerable experience of undertaking studies to inform the evidence base for Local Plans, as well as assisting Councils in preparing plans and defending them at Local Plan Examinations.
- 1.4 Our involvement in Green Belt policy development and review is unparalleled. We have advised developers and local authorities across the country on Green Belt issues, as well as undertaking numerous independent Green Belt studies at a range of scales. We have completed Green Belt Assessments or Reviews on behalf of near 40 Local Authorities throughout England. This has included assessments for the 10 authorities of Greater Manchester, five authorities of Oxford, a consortium of Local authorities in the West Midlands, Rossendale, Shropshire, Welwyn Hatfield, Enfield, South Staffordshire, Christchurch and East Dorset, New Forest, Waltham Forest, Epping Forest, Tewkesbury and many more. These studies have enabled us to build up an excellent understanding of the purposes of Green Belt and the application of Green Belt policy.

## The Site and Planning History

### Site Description

- 1.5 The Site is located to the west of Garswood, St. Helens. **Figure 1.1** shows the wider context surrounding the Site.



**Figure 1.1: Site Location**

- 1.6 The Site is allocated for housing development within the emerging St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035. The Site is referenced '1HA' and the full site description in the emerging Local Plan is 'Land South of Billingie Road, East of Garswood Road and West of Smock Lane, Garswood'. The Site is within the Green Belt as defined in the extant Local Plan, which is formed of the St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy<sup>1</sup> which was adopted on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012 and incorporated 'saved' policies from the St. Helens Unitary Development Plan (UDP) dated 1998<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.7 The Site is 9.58 hectares in area, and as per the description, bounded by Billingie Road to the north, Garswood Road to the West and Smock Lane to the East. Residential Development fronts the opposite side of Smock Lane. An area to the south of the Site, between Smock Lane and Garswood Road is developed, including some residential development and a sports pitch. To the west of the Site, the village of Simm's Lane End includes residential development, some employment and amenities including a public house. See **Figure 1.2** for an aerial image of the Site.

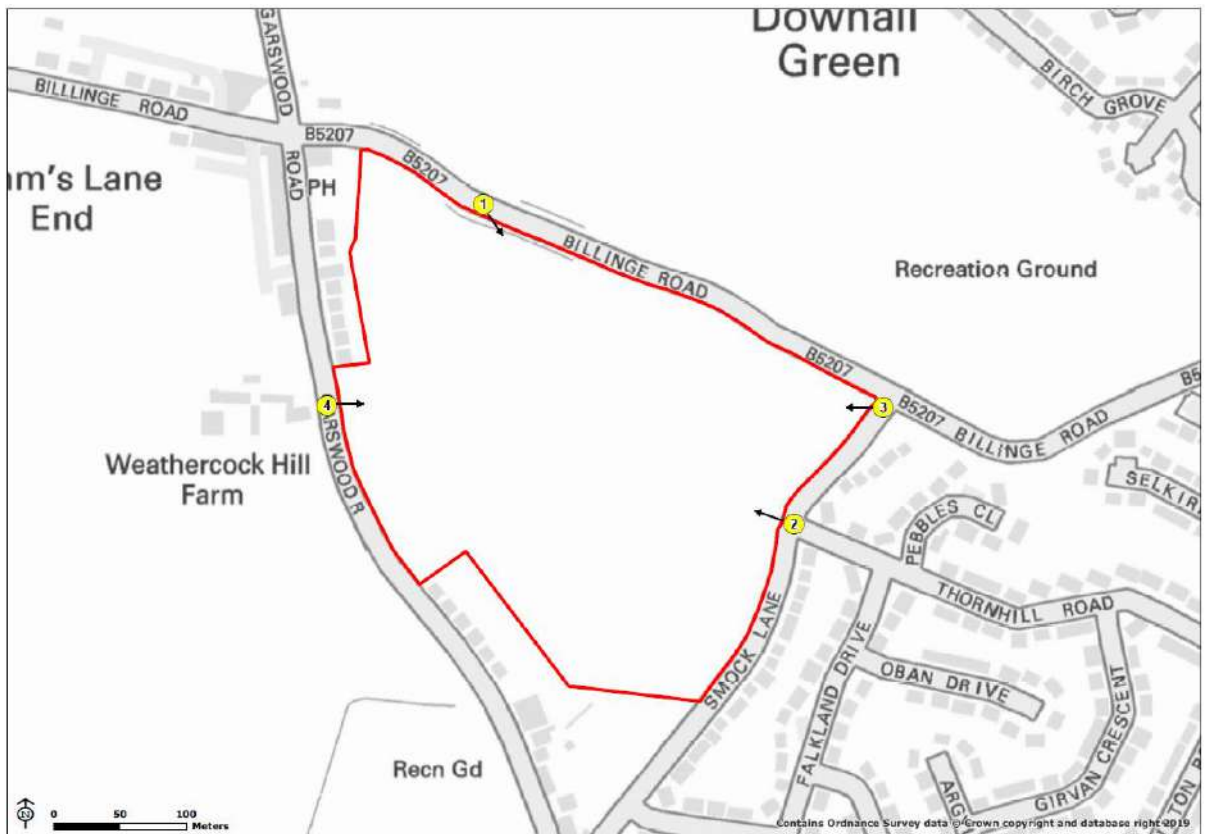
<sup>1</sup> St. Helens Council (2012) *St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy*

<sup>2</sup> St. Helens Council (1998) *St. Helens Unitary Development Plan*



**Figure 1.2: Aerial Image of the Site**

- 1.8 The Site is currently in pastoral agricultural use, the boundaries along the roads are formed by low hedges. Viewpoints 1-4 show the Site from the surrounding roads (**Figure 1.3** identifies the location of the viewpoints).



**Figure 1.3: Viewpoint Locations**



**Viewpoint 1: View from Billinge Road looking south east into site**



**Viewpoint 2: View from Smock Lane looking west into site**



**Viewpoint 3: View from Smock Lane looking North West into site**





**Viewpoint 4: View from Garswood Road looking east into site**

### Planning History

- 1.9 The Site is allocated for housing development within the emerging St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035. This Plan is undergoing its final consultation prior to submission to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. The consultation extends from 17th January 2019 to 13th March 2019.
- 1.10 No planning applications have been made within the Site boundary since 2000<sup>3</sup>.
- 1.11 An area to the north, on the other side of Billinge Road, has been safeguarded, but not allocated, within the emerging St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035.

### Structure of this Report

- 1.12 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 2:** Sets the context for Study covering the strategic role of Green Belt in the local area and relevant national and local planning policy.
  - **Chapter 3:** Provides a review of St. Helens Borough Council's Green Belt Assessment (2018) and an assessment undertaken by LUC of the contribution of the Site to the NPPF Green Belt purposes.

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<sup>3</sup> Earlier records of planning applications have not been reviewed.

## 2 Relevant Policy Context

- 2.1 This chapter sets out the context for the review of the Site in terms of national and local Green Belt policy and practice guidance which has shaped our Green Belt assessment of the Site.

### Green Belt in St. Helens

- 2.2 Prior to the Green Belt Review (2018)<sup>4</sup>, approximately 88km<sup>2</sup> of the Borough of St. Helens (135km<sup>2</sup> in total area) was designated as Green Belt (65%). The Green Belt in the Borough covers most of the countryside around its main towns and villages, and also 'washes over' individual buildings and small settlements. In many locations the boundary of the Green Belt follows the edge of existing built up areas. The Green Belt boundaries in St. Helens have remained substantially unchanged since being originally designated in 1983<sup>5</sup>.
- 2.3 The authorities that adjoin St. Helens, namely Wigan, Warrington, Halton, Knowsley and West Lancashire also have areas of Green Belt. However, the proportion of the area of St. Helens that is designated as Green Belt is much higher than that in any other district in Merseyside.

### National Green Belt Policy

- 2.4 The 2018 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out current national Green Belt policy (paragraphs 133-147). The NPPF is supplemented by additional National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).
- 2.5 Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states that '*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*'. This is elaborated upon in NPPF paragraph 134, which states that Green Belts should serve five purposes. The NPPF does not infer that any weighting should be applied to the five purposes. The purposes are set out in **Box 2.1** below.

#### **Box 2.1: The purposes of Green Belt**

1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
2. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 2.6 The NPPF emphasises in paragraph 136 that '*once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans*'.
- 2.7 Paragraph 138 of the NPPF states that '*when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and*

<sup>4</sup> St. Helens Council (2018) *St. Helen's Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 – Green Belt Review (December 2018)*

<sup>5</sup> Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan, Merseyside County Council 1983

villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously developed and / or is well served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land’.

2.8 The NPPF also states in paragraph 139 that when defining boundaries, local planning authorities should:

- *“ensure consistency with the development plan’s strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;*
- *not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;*
- *where necessary, identify areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;*
- *make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan which proposes the development;*
- *be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period; and*
- *define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.”*

2.9 Current guidance makes it clear that the Green Belt is a strategic planning tool designed primarily to prevent the spread of development and the coalescence of urban areas. To this end, land is designated because of its position, rather than its landscape quality or recreational use.

## Local Policy Context

### Extant Local Plan

2.10 The extant local plan which applies to the Site is comprised of the St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy<sup>6</sup> which was adopted on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012 and incorporated ‘saved’ policies from the St. Helens Unitary Development Plan (UDP) dated 1998<sup>7</sup>.

2.11 The Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan (adopted 2013) and the Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan (adopted July 2017) also form part of the local plan, however the Waste Local Plan does not allocate land within the Site boundary and Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan does not apply to the Site; therefore these elements of the Local Plan are not discussed any further.

#### *St. Helens Council Local Plan Core Strategy (2012)*

2.12 Relevant policies relating to St. Helen’s Borough have been reviewed to inform the planning context of the Site. Development of the Site would be subject to policies contained within the St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy<sup>8</sup> which was adopted on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012 and incorporated ‘saved’ policies from the St. Helens Unitary Development Plan (UDP) dated 1998<sup>9</sup>.

2.13 Policies of relevance to the Site are set out below.

- Criteria vii of Policy **CSS 1 ‘Overall spatial strategy’** sets out that *‘The general extent of the Green Belt as indicated on the Core Strategy Key Diagram will be maintained in the short to medium term. The detailed Green Belt boundary is shown on the Proposals Map. Any strategic review of the Green Belt will be dependent on work carried out at the sub-regional level’.*

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<sup>6</sup> St. Helens Council (2012) *St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy*

<sup>7</sup> St. Helens Council (1998) *St. Helens Unitary Development Plan*

<sup>8</sup> St. Helens Council (2012) *St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy*

<sup>9</sup> St. Helens Council (1998) *St. Helens Unitary Development Plan*

- Criteria ix of the same policy sets out that *'Elsewhere within the Green Belt area, development will be restricted to within existing settlement boundaries and outside of these areas development will comply with Green Belt policy'*.
- **Policy CAS 5 'Rural St. Helens'** sets out that *'Development will be restricted to within existing rural settlement boundaries. Outside of these areas development will comply with Green Belt policy'*.
- **Saved Policies S1 'Green Belt' and GB1 'Green Belt'** state that land defined as Green Belt on the Proposals Map will be maintained in order to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, prevent neighbouring towns from merging into each other and assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The Policies also aim to assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict land and other urban land.
- **Policy CP 1: 'Ensuring Quality Development in St. Helens'** sets out that development proposals will be expected to safeguard environmental quality in St. Helens.
- **Policy CAS 5: 'Rural St. Helens'** states that development will be restricted to within existing rural settlement boundaries. Outside of these areas development will comply with Green Belt policy.
- **Policy CQL 2: 'Trees and Woodlands'** states that trees, woodlands and hedgerows should be protected and enhanced by conservation, enhancement and management. Developers will be required to plant new trees, woodlands and hedgerows on appropriate sites or contribute to off-site provision and elsewhere support new planting.

2.14 St. Helens Borough Council is also currently in the process of preparing the new St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035<sup>10</sup> which will replace existing planning documents (except for the Waste Local Plan). It is this Plan which allocates the Site, and a review of the Greenbelt boundary has taken place to inform this process. Further commentary in relation to the Green Belt Review and new Local Plan is set out below.

*Wigan Council Local Plan Core Strategy (2013)*<sup>11</sup>

2.15 The corridor of Down Brook, approximately 300m north of the Site, delineates the boundary separating St. Helens District from Wigan District. The Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy outlines the spatial vision and strategic objectives of the Borough through to 2026. Due to the close proximity of Wigan District to the Site, the policies considered relevant are listed below:

- **Policy CP8: 'Green Belt and Safeguarded Land'** states that development within the Green Belt will only be allowed in accordance with national planning policy.
- **Policy C1E: 'Greenway Network'** seeks to develop a network of safe, attractive, off-road routes linking the countryside and recreational facilities with urban areas across the Borough. The Network will be protected from development which would negate its purpose.

### Green Belt Review

*St. Helen's Council Green Belt Review (2018)*<sup>12</sup>

2.16 According to the latest Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) for St. Helens<sup>13</sup>, sufficient sites are available for housing development on urban sites within the borough. However, it has also been established that sites with an overall capacity of at least 2,034 dwellings must be released from the Green Belt to help meet pre-2035 needs<sup>14</sup>. In addition, it has been identified that 203.65 hectares of land must be found from within the Green Belt for employment uses.

2.17 In order to inform the selection of housing sites within the new Local Plan, the St. Helens Green Belt Review was published in December 2018<sup>15</sup> with the aim of guiding the location and form of new development. The review identifies areas where development could be accommodated whilst

<sup>10</sup> St. Helen's Council (2019) *St. Helen's Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 – Submission Draft*

<sup>11</sup> Wigan Council (2013) *Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy*

<sup>12</sup> St. Helens Council (2018) *St. Helen's Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 – Green Belt Review (December 2018)*

<sup>13</sup> St. Helens Borough Local Plan Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment update, 2017

<sup>14</sup> Table 4.6 within the reasoned justification to Policy LPA05, St. Helens Local Plan: Submission Draft 2019

<sup>15</sup> The Green Belt Review is available from <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/localplan>

causing least harm to the Green Belt itself. The document also assesses the contribution that different parts of St. Helens make to the purposes of the Green Belt. The study divided the full extent of the St. Helens Green Belt into parcels of land for assessment. The Site itself was identified as sub-parcel GBP\_025b.

- 2.18 The findings of the review state that whilst sub-parcel GBP\_025b contributes to the physical and visual separation of Billinge and Garswood with strong vegetated boundaries, a strategic gap between the settlements could be maintained if this sub-parcel was released from the Green Belt. The study concluded that GBP\_025b makes only a limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt land and has 'many positive attributes which would justify its allocation for development'. Commentary on the methodology and findings of the Green Belt Review is included in Chapter 3, below. In addition, LUC has provided our own assessment of the Site in relation to the purposes of Green Belt, which is also set out in Chapter 3.

### **Emerging Local Plan**

#### *The New St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035*

- 2.19 St. Helens Borough Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan which will set out the framework for growth and development of the Borough. The document is currently being consulted upon (17th January 2019 to 13th March 2019), after which the Submission Draft will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination. The Site is currently allocated within the Submission Draft document and for housing within Policy LPA05: Meeting St. Helens Borough's Housing Needs, site reference '1HA' and described as 'Land South of Billinge Road, East of Garswood Road and west of Smock Lane, Garswood'. Should this plan be found sound in its current form, and adopted by St. Helens Borough Council, the Site will be allocated and the policies referenced in relation to the current local plan will be superseded. As the Site would then be allocated for housing development, the relevant policies would be those relating to requirements of development, rather than the policies of the extant Local Plan which seek to restrict development on the site.

## 3 Green Belt Purposes - Review of the Site

### Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter summarises the findings of the St. Helens Green Belt Review (2018) in relation to the Site. It also outlines LUC's own review of the contribution of the Site to the NPPF Green Belt purposes.
- 3.2 The St. Helens Green Belt Review sets out a step by step methodology which not only considers Green Belt issues, but also presents an assessment of the constraints to the delivery of development within the Sites and the residual development potential. This chapter considers the findings of the Green Belt assessment only and not the wider sustainability and deliverability factors considered in the Review.
- 3.3 Our review has been undertaken via a desk based analysis of the St. Helens Green Belt Study, in addition to a review of aerial imagery, mapping and site photography.

### Identification of Site Parcel

- 3.4 The Green Belt Review divides the St. Helens Green Belt into Parcels of land for assessment. It is agreed that this is a sensible and appropriate way in which to assess the contribution that different areas make to the Green Belt. The Review sets out that site boundaries were identified based upon '*recognisable visible boundaries; adjacent areas of similar land use or characteristics, and the relative degree to which areas are enclosed or confined by features such as urban areas, woodlands, roads or railways*'. This is considered appropriate and LUC considers that the identification of the site parcel (reference GBP\_025b) is suitable for the purposes of the Green Belt Review.

### Assessment against Green Belt Purposes

- 3.5 The Green Belt Review assesses each site in relation to the five Green Belt purposes set out in the NPPF (see **Box 2.1** of **Chapter 2**)

#### Assessment of Green Belt purposes 1, 2 and 3

- 3.6 The Green Belt Review assesses the contribution each parcel/sub-parcel makes to each of Green Belt purposes 1, 2 and 3 in turn. It attributes a score of 'low', 'medium', or 'high' to each purpose, with 'high' meaning the parcel makes a 'high' contribution to the Green Belt (and vice versa). Appendix C of the Green Belt Review provides commentary on the specific scores given in relation to purposes 1, 2 and 3<sup>16</sup>. A review of these scores and comments are set out below.

#### *Assessment of the Site in relation to Green Belt purpose 1*

- 3.7 Green Belt purpose 1 seeks to 'check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas'. The Green Belt Review methodology identifies the large built up areas in the Borough as including four main areas:
  - St. Helens Town.
  - Haydock, Blackbrook, Newton-le- Willows/Earlestown.
  - Prescott/Whiston/Rainhill.

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/media/9620/appendix-b-c\\_part2.pdf](https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/media/9620/appendix-b-c_part2.pdf)

- Warrington, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Golborne.
- 3.8 The Green Belt Review does not identify Garswood as one of the large built up areas. LUC agrees with this finding.
- 3.9 The Green Belt Review methodology also sets out how it identifies sprawl, which is taken from the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines 'sprawl' as being '*Spread out over a large area in an untidy or irregular way*'. The review sets out that the extent to which a site will result in sprawl depends on: the overall size of the Site; its proximity to the 'large built up areas' (referred to above); and the degree to which it is contained by the edge of the existing urban area and/or by other strong physical features.
- 3.10 LUC agrees that the role land plays in preventing sprawl is dependent on the relationship with the large built-up areas but should also take account of the extent of existing development that has occurred and the degree of containment by existing built development, or other features (e.g. landform). This has an influence on the potential for sprawl to occur beyond the parcel. LUC would also assert that land which is more clearly associated with a settlement, that is not a large built up area, can be considered to make no direct contribution to purpose 1.
- 3.11 The Green Belt Review Appendix C, Page 234 states that the Site scores as 'low'. The reasons for this, and LUC's comments on purpose 1 are set out in **Table 3.1**.

**Table 3.1: Assessment against Green Belt purpose 1**

	St. Helens Green Belt Review (2018)	LUC Review
<b>Score</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>LOW or No Contribution</b>
<b>Commentary</b>	<p>The sub-parcel is triangular in shape and is bounded by strong physical boundaries to the north by Billinge Road, to the west by Garswood Road, to the east and south by Smock Lane and the built development of Garswood.</p> <p>Residential properties run along Garswood Road to the north west and a significant pocket to the south, the remaining of the sub-parcel is agricultural field.</p> <p>All sides of the sub-parcel have strong boundaries and therefore the sub-parcel is well contained.</p>	<p>The Site is not associated with a settlement that is a large built up area and therefore the Site makes no contribution to purpose 1 (the prevention of sprawl from the large built up area).</p> <p>The Site is also well contained by existing development along Garswood Road. This containment means the Site has a strong relationship with the existing built up area of Garswood, as opposed to the wider countryside and hence any development within the parcel would not be perceived as sprawl.</p>

*Assessment of the Site in relation to Green Belt purpose 2*

- 3.12 Green Belt purpose 2 seeks to 'prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another'. The Green Belt Review methodology sets out the settlements which it considers to be 'towns'. It states that the Council has included towns, but also some smaller settlements (including Rainhill, Rainford, Billinge and Garswood).
- 3.13 The Green Belt Review, therefore assesses each parcel/sub-parcel according to the contribution that it makes in preventing the following settlements from merging with each other:
- St. Helens;
  - Haydock and Blackbrook;
  - Newton-le-Willows/Earlestown;
  - Prescott/Whiston/Rainhill;
  - Rainford;

- Billinge;
  - Garswood;
  - Warrington;
  - Ashton-in-Makerfield; and
  - Golborne.
- 3.14 It is suggested that whilst not all of these settlements may be regarded as 'towns' in the context of Green Belt Purpose 2, they each form separate communities with their own identities, character and range of community facilities and are identified in the Local Plan as the Borough's Key Settlements. As such, it is LUC's opinion that the Council are justified in including these settlements where there is local justification for doing so – i.e. because of their role as key settlements within the Borough. The LUC assessment of the Greater Manchester Green Belt also identified these settlements as 'towns' in the consideration of purpose 2.
- 3.15 In determining the importance of gaps between settlements, the Green Belt Review does not apply an arbitrary distance guideline. Instead it considers whether the parcel lies adjacent to a settlement or not, and whether the gap is a strategic gap. It is suggested that if a parcel does not border onto one of the listed settlements on any side, it means there is at least one Green Belt parcel on either side of the parcel being assessed and therefore the parcel considered in isolation is less likely to play a significant role in preventing the settlements from merging.
- 3.16 In LUC's opinion, whether the parcel lies adjacent to the settlement or not, is not the key issue as that can be easily affected by how the parcels have been defined. A parcel that does not lie adjacent to a purpose 2 town, but lies within an important gap between two towns could still make a significant contribution to purpose 2.
- 3.17 The methodology also notes that where a strategic gap can be maintained between towns, even if the Site is developed, then the impact is likely to be low. It also states that whilst maintaining a physical gap can be important, the study takes into account the relative size of each settlement; visual sensitivity of the gap; and, whether the settlements have already effectively merged in that location.
- 3.18 LUC agree that the role land plays in preventing the merging of towns is more than a product of the size of the gap between towns. It is important to consider both the physical and visual role that Green Belt land plays in preventing the merging of settlements. This approach accords with PAS guidance which states that distance alone should not be used to assess the extent to which the Green Belt prevents neighbouring towns from merging into one another.
- 3.19 Land that is juxtaposed between towns will make a contribution to this purpose, and the stronger the relationship between the towns, the more fragile the gap, and the stronger the contribution of any intervening open land will be. Physical proximity is the initial consideration, but land that lacks a strong sense of openness, due to the extent of existing development that has occurred, will make a weaker contribution. This includes land that has a stronger relationship with an urban area than with countryside, due to extent of containment by development, dominance of development within an adjacent inset area, or containment by physical landscape elements.
- 3.20 The Green Belt Review Appendix C, Page 235 sets out that the Site scores as 'low' against purpose 2. The reasons for this, and LUC' comments on purpose 2 set out in **Table 3.2**.



**Table 3.2: Assessment against Green Belt purpose 2**

	St. Helens Green Belt Review (2018)	LUC Review
<b>Score</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>LOW</b>
<b>Commentary</b>	The sub-parcel contributes broadly, along with other parcels (GBP_026), to the physical and visual separation of Billinge and Garswood. A strategic gap between Billinge and Garswood could be maintained if this sub-parcel was released from the Green Belt.	<p>The Site is immediately to the west of Garswood, and approximately 1.4km from Billinge both of which are considered as 'towns' under purpose 2.</p> <p>The Site is relatively well contained by development along Garswood Lane including Sims Lane End and as such the perception of the narrowing of the gap between Billinge and Garswood would be limited. A significant gap between the settlements would remain.</p> <p>There are no other relevant settlements under purpose 2 that should be considered in relation to the Site.</p>

*Assessment of the Site in relation to Green Belt purpose 3*

- 3.21 Green Belt purpose 3 seeks to 'assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment'. The Green Belt Review methodology states that the assessment is based on: a consideration of the degree of self-containment of each parcel/sub parcel; sense of openness; whether the parcel has the characteristics of the countryside; and whether the parcel has already been encroached upon by the construction of houses or other forms of development that are normally considered to be inappropriate in the Green Belt.
- 3.22 LUC agree with these criteria but would add that the degree of containment relates to whether land physically relates to the adjacent settlement, or to the wider countryside (i.e. whether it has a stronger relationship to built-up areas rather than to the wider countryside).
- 3.23 The Green Belt Review Appendix C, Page 235 sets out that the Site scores as 'low'. The reasons for this, and LUCs comments on purpose 3 are set out in **Table 3.3**.

**Table 3.3: Assessment against Green Belt purpose 3**

	St. Helens Green Belt Review (2018)	LUC Review
<b>Score</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>
<b>Commentary</b>	The parcel is very well enclosed on all sides by highway and residential properties.	<p>Whilst the majority of the Site is open, there is some existing development within the parcel in the form of residential properties along Garswood Road before the junction with Billinge road. Billinge Road also represents a 'readily recognisable' Green Belt boundary to the north.</p> <p>The Site is relatively well contained by existing development and has a stronger association with the built up area than the open countryside. Whilst release of the Site would lead to the loss of open land within the Site itself, it would not lead to encroachment on the wider countryside.</p>

### Assessment of Green Belt purposes 4 and 5

3.24 Purpose 4 of Green Belt policy is 'to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns'. The Green Belt Review states in relation to purpose 4, that the Borough contains a number of Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and other designated and non-designated heritage assets, some of which fall within its towns. However, the towns contain substantial areas that are not subject to any recognised heritage designation and their settings have already been affected by extensive modern suburban and industrial development. Given these circumstances, the different parcels of Green Belt land cannot be reliably differentiated in terms of their contribution to Green Belt purpose 4. The assessment therefore does not assess each individual parcel in relation to Green Belt purpose 4.

3.25 An extract from Hansard in 1988 clarifies which historic settlements in England were considered 'historic towns' in the context of the Green Belt purposes. The Secretary of State for the Environment clarified in answer to a parliamentary question that the purpose of preserving the special character of historic towns is especially relevant to the Green Belts of York, Chester, Bath, Oxford and Cambridge. Durham has since been added to this list. LUC therefore agrees that purpose 4 – protection of the setting and special character of historic towns – is not relevant in this locality.

Similarly, with regard to purpose 5, 'to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land', the Green Belt Review sets out that the contribution of each individual parcel to purpose 5 cannot be differentiated, and therefore does not assess each individual parcel in relation to this purpose. We agree that purpose 5, is not something that can be assessed on a parcel-by-parcel basis. This is in line with the PAS guidance as cited in the Review which states that: '*...it must be the case that the amount of land within urban areas that could be developed will already have been factored in before identifying Green Belt land. If Green Belt achieves this purpose, all Green Belt does to the same extent and hence the value of various land parcels is unlikely to be distinguished by the application of this purpose*'.

### Summary of Review of the Land at Weathercock Hill Farm Site

3.26 It is clear that the review of Green Belt undertaken by St. Helens Borough Council has found the Site does not make a significant contribution to the purposes of Green Belt.

3.27 LUC has undertaken its own review and similarly concludes that the Site makes little contribution to any of the Green Belt purposes and therefore its allocation as a housing site (in terms of Green Belt issues) should not be considered unacceptable.



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# Landscape Feasibility Statement

## Land at Weathercock Hill Farm, Garswood

Prepared by LUC  
February 2019



**Project Title:** Land at Weathercock Hill Farm, Garswood – Landscape Feasibility Statement

**Client:** Persimmon Homes (North West)

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
V1	06/02/19	First Draft	SC	SO	SO



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# Landscape Feasibility Statement

## Land at Weathercock Hill Farm, Garswood

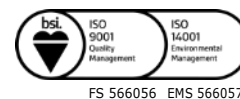
Prepared by LUC

February 2019

Planning & EIA  
Design  
Landscape Planning  
Landscape Management  
Ecology  
GIS & Visualisation

LUC MANCHESTER  
6<sup>TH</sup> Floor, 55 King Street  
Manchester  
M2 4LQ  
T +44 0161 537 5960  
[london@landuse.co.uk](mailto:london@landuse.co.uk)

Offices also in:  
Edinburgh  
Glasgow  
Lancaster  
Bristol  
Manchester



Land Use Consultants Ltd  
Registered in England  
Registered number: 2549296  
Registered Office:  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
LUC uses 100% recycled paper

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# 1 Introduction

## Context

- 1.1 LUC was commissioned by Persimmon Homes (North West) to produce a high level review of the current landscape and visual condition of a proposed site in Garswood, St. Helens (herein referred to as the 'Site'). This report describes the key opportunities and constraints affecting the potential development of the Site in relation to landscape character and visual amenity.
- 1.2 Lying at the western limit of Garswood within the St. Helens administrative boundary (see **Figure 01: Site Location Plan**), the Site occupies land currently used as pastoral agricultural land.

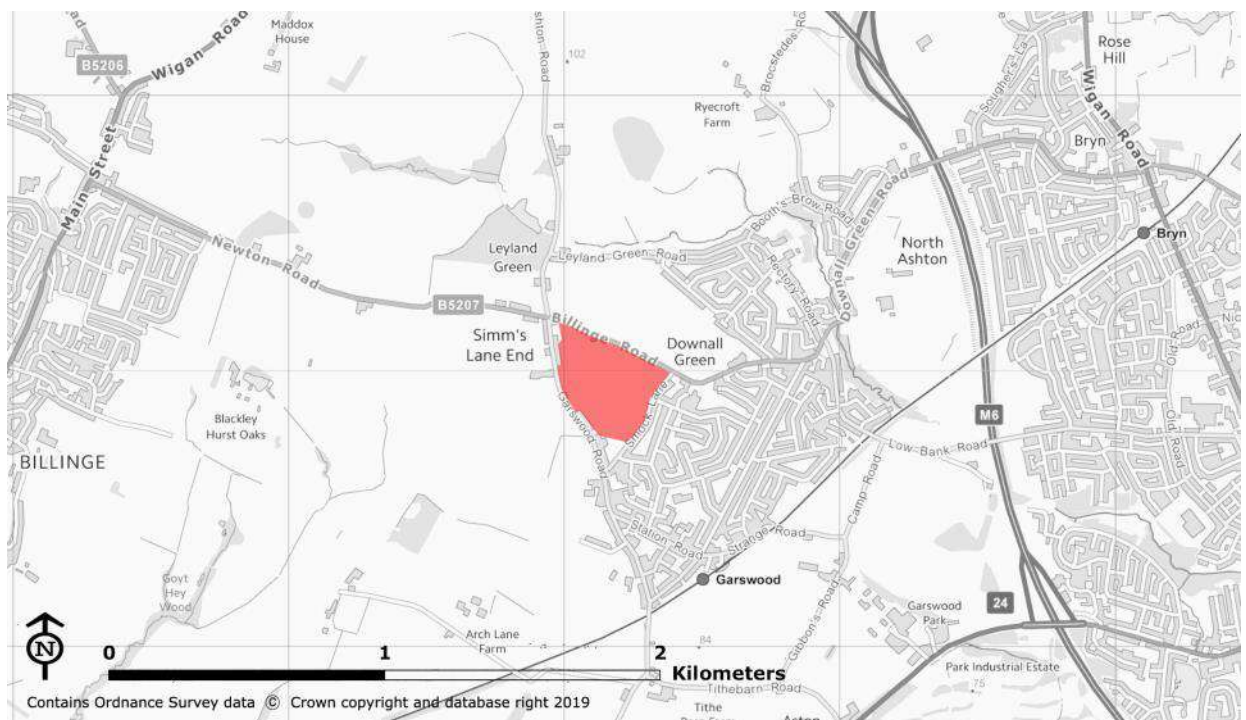


Figure 01: Site Location Plan

## Objectives

- 1.3 This study aimed to highlight any landscape or visual issues that would potentially impede delivery of development at the Site. An indication of any specific constrained areas or areas of landscape opportunities have been highlighted has been provided, and used to develop potential design objectives for the Site. Relevant landscape policies and existing baseline material have also been reviewed to inform the planning context of the Site, supported by the findings of a site visit, held in January 2019.
- 1.4 This report is not a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), although some reference has been made to the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (3rd Edition) (2013)*<sup>1</sup> which forms the standard reference for undertaking this work in the UK.

<sup>1</sup> Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (2013) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, 3rd Edition, Routledge.

## Scope and Structure of the Report

1.5 The report is structured as follows:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: Landscape Baseline
- Section 3: Visual Baseline
- Section 4: Analysis
- Section 5: Summary and Conclusions



## 2 Landscape Baseline

### Policy Context

#### **St. Helens Council Local Plan Core Strategy (2012)**

- 2.1 Relevant landscape policies relating to St. Helens Borough have been reviewed to inform the planning context of the Site.
- 2.2 Proposed development of the Site would be subject to policies contained within the *St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy*<sup>2</sup> which was adopted on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012 and incorporated 'saved' policies from the *St. Helens Unitary Development Plan (UDP)* dated 1998<sup>3</sup>. St. Helens Council is also currently in the process of preparing the new *St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035*<sup>4</sup> which will replace existing planning documents.
- 2.3 Landscape policies of relevance to the Site are set out below.
  - **Saved Policies S1(Green Belt) and GB1 (Green Belt)** – states that land defined as Green Belt on the Proposals Map will be maintained in order to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, prevent neighbouring towns from merging into each other and assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The Policy also aims to assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict land and other urban land. The Site is within the Green Belt as defined in the extant *St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy*<sup>2</sup>. This policy also encompasses land lying between the settlements of Garswood and Billinge.
  - **Policy CAS 5: Rural St. Helens** – states that development will be restricted to within existing rural settlement boundaries. Outside of these areas development will comply with Green Belt policy. The Site itself is located on the settlement edge of Garswood.
  - **Policy CQL 1: Green Infrastructure** – seeks to protect, manage, enhance and where appropriate expand the Green Infrastructure network by reinforcing the protection of greenways and linkages between sites. The Policy also aims to promote and improve the accessibility of open space within walking distance of housing, health, employment and education facilities. The Site itself is located on the settlement edge of Garswood, although devoid of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) / recreational use.
  - **Policy CQL 2: Trees and Woodlands** – states that trees, woodlands and hedgerows should be protected and enhanced by conservation, enhancement and management. Developers will be required to plant new trees, woodlands and hedgerows on appropriate sites or contribute to off-site provision and elsewhere support new planting. The boundaries of the Site are currently comprised of both intact and fragmented hedgerows, with some trees located on the Site's eastern boundary.

#### **St. Helens Council Green Belt Review (2018)**<sup>5</sup>

- 2.4 Published in December 2018 with the aim of guiding the location and form of new development in the emerging *St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035*<sup>4</sup>, the review identifies areas where development could be accommodated whilst causing least harm to the Green Belt itself. The document also assesses the contribution that different parts of St. Helens make to the purposes of the Green Belt. The study divided the full extent of the St. Helens Green Belt into parcels of land for assessment. The Site itself was separated out as land sub-parcel GBP\_025\_B, incorporating land situated to the north west of Garswood.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Helens Council (2012) *St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy*

<sup>3</sup> St. Helens Council (1998) *St. Helens Unitary Development Plan*

<sup>4</sup> St. Helens Council (2019) *St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 – Submission Draft*

<sup>5</sup> St. Helens Council (2018) *St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 – Green Belt Review (December 2018)*

2.5 The findings of the review stated that whilst sub-parcel GBP\_025\_B contributes to the physical and visual separation of Billinge and Garswood, with strong vegetated boundaries, a strategic gap between the settlements could be maintained if this sub-parcel was released from the Green Belt. The study concluded that GBP\_025\_B makes only a limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt land and has 'many positive attributes which would justify its allocation for development'.

#### **The New St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035<sup>4</sup>**

2.6 St. Helens Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan which will set out the framework for growth and development of the Borough. The document is currently in the publication period, after which the Submission Draft will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public. The Site is currently allocated within the Submission Draft document and the Submission Draft Policies Map as housing within *Policy LPA05: Meeting St. Helens Borough's Housing Needs*. Reference *1HA Land South of Billinge Road, East of Garswood Road and west of Smock Lane, Garswood* wholly encompasses the Site itself.

#### **Wigan Council Local Plan Core Strategy (2013)<sup>6</sup>**

2.7 The corridor of Down Brook, approximately 300m north of the Site, delineates the boundary separating St. Helens District from Wigan District. The Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy outlines the spatial vision and strategic objectives of the borough through to 2026. Due to the close proximity of Wigan District to the Site, the policies considered relevant are listed below:

- **Policy CP8: Green Belt and Safeguarded Land** – states that development within the Green Belt will only be allowed in accordance with national planning policy.
- **Policy C1E: Greenway Network** – seeks to develop a network of safe, attractive, off-road routes linking the countryside and recreational facilities with urban areas across the Borough. The Network will be protected from development which would negate its purpose.

## Landscape Character

2.8 The use of published landscape character assessments is a widely accepted tool, used to inform an understanding of the landscape context for potential development sites. Landscape character is described at both national and local levels.

2.9 At a national level, mapping and written descriptions published by Natural England classify the landscape character of England into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). These NCAs provide a broad landscape context for individual development schemes.

#### **GLVIA3<sup>1</sup> paragraph 5.14, suggests that:**

*"broad scale assessments set the scene and reference can be made to the descriptions of relevant character types or areas to indicate the key characteristics that may be apparent in the study area".*

#### **Published Character Assessment – National Level**

2.10 At a national level, the Site lies within **National Character Area (NCA) 56: Lancashire Coal Measures**. Encompassing the towns of Wigan and St. Helens, this NCA is characterised by a mosaic of scattered urban centres, industry, farmland and active or derelict mineral sites. Key characteristics of this NCA are summarised below:

- densely populated fragmented landscape reflecting a complex pattern of mining and industrial activity intermixed with housing;
- gentle hills and valleys running north-west to the south-east, **creating a soft but varied topography**;

<sup>6</sup> Wigan Council (2013) *Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy*

- associations with industrial heritage and long history of mineral working;
- limited woodland coverage, with the exception of the area north-west of Wigan;
- large tracts and isolated pockets of agricultural land within the urban fabric, principally used for permanent grassland or cereal production, although horse grazing and stabling are also common;
- **field patterns are predominantly medium to large and rectangular, with field boundaries defined by poorly managed hedges** or post-and-wire fencing;
- presence of subsidence flashes due to widespread ground subsidence, caused by coal mining activities;
- strong cultural and industrial heritage, although the majority of the pits, spoil heaps and open cast sites have now been reclaimed and landscaped; and
- influence of transport and utilities infrastructure, with motorways, major roads and rail lines criss-crossing the landscape.

2.11 A site visit confirmed that the Site and surrounding landscape share some of the key attributes and character qualities of this NCA, particularly the aspects highlighted in **bold** text above. However, as NCAs cover extensive areas they are of limited relevance to the scale of the Site. It is noted within the *Summary* of the NCA profile that the continued pressure to accommodate both housing and industry forms a future challenge of the area. However, opportunities to incorporate environmental and social benefits; including improving habitat quality, distribution and connectivity through urban linkages is also recognised.

2.12 The Statement of Environmental Opportunities for **NCA 56: Lancashire Coal Measures** contain suggested opportunities that are relevant to the Site as outlined below.

- SEO 3: Manage and support the agricultural landscape through conserving, enhancing, linking and expanding the habitat network (including grasslands, woodlands, ponds, hedges and field margins) – to increase connectivity and resilience to climate change, and reduce soil erosion and diffuse pollution, while conserving the qualities of the farmed landscape and improving opportunities for enjoyment of the open countryside.
- SEO 4: Expand and link green infrastructure through restoring and enhancing post-industrial sites and creating new habitat mosaics that raise the overall quality, design and location of new development, bringing multiple environmental benefits including functioning networks for wildlife and access and recreational amenities for people to enjoy.

### Published Landscape Character Assessment – Local Level

2.13 The *Landscape Character Assessment for St. Helens* (2006)<sup>7</sup> was prepared to assess the landscape character of the Borough of St. Helens, to inform its future growth and development. The landscape of the study area is divided into Landscape Character Types (LCTs) reflecting the results of desk study and field survey undertaken as part of that study. These LCTs are then further refined into Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) forming discrete named geographical units. The townscape character of Garswood has been classified under the broader character type of *Separate Settlements*, reflective of its broad pattern of land use and age of development.

### LCA Weathercock Slopes (3 BRS 2)

2.14 The Site lies within the Broad Rural Slopes LCT, subdivided further into **LCA Weathercock Slopes (3 BRS 2)**. Located primarily to the north of the Borough on the rolling topography, this LCT comprises a large area of agricultural landscape. Key characteristics of this area are summarised within the *Landscape Character Assessment for St. Helens*, as below:

- **gently undulating agricultural landscape** or broad smooth ridgeline with slopes of either a southern or northern aspect;
- availability of open views and strong intervisibility with the wider landscape and settlement of St. Helens;

<sup>7</sup> St. Helens Council (2006) *Landscape Character Assessment for St. Helens*

- generally intact woodland blocks and shelterbelts which creates a strong interplay between open and enclosed space;
- **medium sized fields of improved pasture bound by hedgerow field boundaries** form the dominant land use, providing a strong rural character;
- various settlement type of local built vernacular, ranging from small villages to a scattering of farmsteads. Later infill housing is often poorly sited and constructed of contemporary materials which contrast with the vernacular properties;
- network of small 'B' roads enclosed by hedges cross the landscape, broadly following the contours of the undulating terrain; and
- the strong rural character emphasizes the physical separation of the landscape, elevated above the adjacent urban landscape.

2.15 The *Landscape Character Assessment for St. Helens*<sup>7</sup> includes a criteria used to evaluate the opportunities and constraints of each LCA, as summarised below:

- *Developed Edge Analysis* – considers the overriding character and robustness of the existing urban / rural interface.
- *Landscape Evaluation* – provides an overall classification of the inherent sensitivity of both the landscape and visual resource.
- *Landscape Strategy* – determined by the consideration of strength of character and landscape condition.
- *Judgement about Potential to Accommodate Development* – provides a judgement which considers the character and condition of the landscape as well as its inherent sensitivity.

#### *Developed Edge Analysis - LCA Weathercock Slopes (3 BRS 2)*

2.16 The settlement edges at Billinge and Garswood are assessed as **Weak to Moderate**. The Garswood edge, encompassing the Site itself, is described as less well defined than the eastern edge of Billinge because of sporadic settlement expansion along roads which often give the impression of multiple settlements.

#### *Landscape Evaluation - LCA Weathercock Slopes (3 BRS 2)*

2.17 Landscape sensitivity is judged to be **medium to high** with a strong landscape pattern. However, a general degradation of hedgerows is noted as well as an encroachment of urban features. The presence of the prominent ridge affords intervisibility to other areas, resulting in a **medium to high** visual sensitivity.

#### *Landscape Strategy- LCA Weathercock Slopes (3 BRS 2)*

2.18 The landscape strategy for the area is described as **Conserve and Restore**, derived from the assessment of strength of character and landscape condition.

#### *Judgement about Potential to Accommodate Development - LCA Weathercock Slopes (3 BRS 2)*

2.19 The assessment suggests that further development at Garswood *'may provide a more robust edge and improve the character and form of the settlement, although siting development here should be sensitive to the surrounding more elevated and prominent land'*. It is noted that the area is not suited to accommodating large scale change or vertical structures as a result of its high visibility which would protrude against the skyline in views.

#### **LCA Garswood (12 SS 4)**

2.20 Located within the wider LCT 12: *Separate Settlements*, **LCA Garswood (12 SS 4)** encompasses land running parallel the route of Smock Lane and adjoins the Site at its south eastern limit. Lying within the north east of the Borough, the settlement is bounded to the south east by the route of the Wigan to Liverpool Rail Line and to the east and north by the incised valley of the Down Brook. Built form at the western extent of the settlement is focused on the lower slopes, although is less well defined, described as exhibiting *'an irregular layout only partially responding to landform characteristics'*.

#### *Developed Edge Analysis - LCA Garswood (12 SS 4)*

- 2.21 The western developed edge of Garswood incorporating the Site is described as an often abrupt and prominent edge that follows existing road alignments. Although a clear separation exists between Billinge and Garswood, the experience of arrival from the west is less well defined. The contrast between the strong edge to Garswood in the south with the western developed edges results in a varied overall character judged to vary from **Strong to Weak**.

#### *Landscape Evaluation - LCA Garswood (12 SS 4)*

- 2.22 The area is identified as exhibiting medium landscape sensitivity in virtue of the presence of the historic urban core and road layout. However, the area lacks a cohesive settlement layout due to the proliferation of infill development. Visual sensitivity is judged to be **medium to high**, as a result of locally elevated topography and opportunities for intervisibility within an area containing a high number of receptors.

#### *Landscape Strategy - LCA Garswood (12 SS 4)*

- 2.23 The landscape strategy for the area is described as **Conserve and Enhance**, derived from the assessment of strength of character and landscape condition.

#### *Judgement about Potential to Accommodate Development - LCA Garswood (12 SS 4)*

- 2.24 The report concludes that opportunities exist to the west and north of Garswood to accommodate small scale development to improve the settlement layout, whilst retaining the wider separation from Billinge. Improvement to the layout in this location would potentially improve the settlement edge and sense of arrival.

#### *Key Visual Gateways*

- 2.25 A number of *Key Visual Gateways* were identified within the published *Landscape Character Assessment for St. Helens (2006)*<sup>7</sup>, related to the transition from one landscape to another and forming the first impressions of a settlement or landscape. The subtle reduction in topography from the north to the south of the Borough creates a gateway '*travelling south over Billinge Hill ridgeline on the minor roads north of Garswood*', located approximately 250m from the Site itself. This location was visited as part of the field survey although the Site was not visible in the view due to the presence of intervening vegetation parallel to Garswood Road.



View looking south from the junction of Garswood Road and Leyland Green Road (identified as a *Key Visual Gateway* within *St. Helens Landscape Character Assessment (2006)*<sup>7</sup>)

## Historic Landscape

- 2.26 Published in 2011, the *Merseyside Historic Characterisation Project: St. Helens Report*<sup>8</sup> divides the landscape of the locality into identifiable LCTs, derived from modern field patterns and land use.

<sup>8</sup> Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service and Museum of Liverpool (2011) *Merseyside Historic Characterisation Project: St. Helens Report*

The assessment further refines Landscape Character Broad Types, providing a description and historical rationale as well as a list of key characteristics. The Site itself is contained within *Field System* Landscape Character Broad Type. Garswood is not included within the Historic Settlement Study encompassed within the document.

## Topography

- 2.27 Located to the north east of St. Helens District, the Site is underlain by a broad band of Carboniferous Silesian period geology, forming part of the wider Lancashire Coalfield. The Site and immediate area are formed by an elongated ridge running broadly south east to north west and forming a plateau of surrounding farmland. The Site itself exhibits localised undulations but generally slopes from 92m AOD at its northern extent to 84m AOD at its eastern limit.
- 2.28 Located approximately 2km north west of the Site, Billinge Hill forms the principal landform feature in the locality and reaches a height of 179m AOD at its summit. This pronounced feature of the ridgeline with an asymmetrical form is visible in views from the Site itself. Tatlock's Hillock also forms an important undeveloped visual horizon in immediate and wider views.
- 2.29 The Site does not contain or directly border any hydrological features. However, the incised channel of Down Brook denotes the administrative boundary with Wigan District and drains a dense network of drainage channels in the landscape to the north of the Site.

## Land Use

- 2.30 Located on the north western edge of Garswood, the Site is dominated by improved pastures. An intact hawthorn hedge characterises the western boundary of the Site, along Garswood Road, reducing visual permeability into the Site from this location. However, hedgerow boundaries along both Smock Lane and the B5207 Billinge Road are somewhat fragmented, allowing views in.



Scrub vegetation forming the boundary of the B5207 Billinge Road



Fragmented hedge with mature hedgerow trees in the immediate foreground of Smock Lane

- 2.31 The immediate landscape is dominated by the settlement pattern of Garswood, separated from Billinge in the west by undulating farmlands. The eastern boundary of the Site abuts existing housing on Smock Lane whereas the western extent of the Site lies adjacent to residential dwellings, forming the frontage to Garswood Road. A suburban context typifies Garswood itself, characterised by continuous urban development of predominantly semi-detached and terraced residential properties.
- 2.32 The wider agricultural landscape comprises both arable fields and grazed pastures. Medium to large scale field patterns predominate, subdivided by mainly post and wire fencing or hedgerows. Where woodland forms the horizon in views, such as at Weathercock Hill or the roundel at Tatlock's Hillock, they form prominent features in the landscape. A tract of ancient woodland at Barton Clough, associated with the incised channel of Down Brook, also contributes to landscape character in the area.

## Settlement

- 2.33 The settlement edge of Garswood typifies the immediate Site, where ribbon development and groups of residential dwellings form a partial frontage to Garswood Road. More recent residential development on Smock Lane has a suburban character and contrasts in character with the darker red brick of the vernacular buildings. The settlement extent of Garswood is constrained to the south by the route of the Liverpool to Wigan Rail Line, whereas the course of Down Brook envelops the town to the north and east. To the west the settlement boundary of Garswood is less defined, although retained on lower slopes.
- 2.34 Garswood is connected to Billinge in the west by the route of the B5207 Billinge Road. Scattered farmsteads such as Blackley Hurst Farm occupy the landscape dividing the settlements, forming prominent features set within a wooded backdrop.



Residential properties forming the frontage to Garswood Road



Residential dwellings located at Simm's Lane End, bordering the Site at its northern limit

## Communications

- 2.35 The corridor of the B5207 Billinge Road runs in a broadly east-west alignment, linking the settlements of Billinge and Garswood. Both Garswood Road and Smock Lane adjoin this route, forming the western and eastern limits of the Site. The carriageway of the M6 lies to the east of Garswood, accommodated largely in cutting as it divides Garswood from Aston-in-Makerfield in the east. Garswood is also bounded to the south east by the cutting landform of the Liverpool to Wigan Rail Line.
- 2.36 The Site itself is devoid of PRoW. However, a network of PRoW characterise the landscape to the north and west of the Site, predominantly following the line of existing field boundaries.

## Establishing the Value of the Landscape

- 2.37 The Site does not lie within any area designated in terms of specific national statutory landscape designation such as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 2.38 Conservation Areas, whilst not specific landscape designations, reflect landscape and architectural quality and are relevant to development proposals which may impact upon them. The Site does not encompass any land defined as a Conservation Area.
- 2.39 Forming part of the Development Plan for the Borough, the *St. Helens Unitary Development Plan Saved Policies Addendum (2013)*<sup>9</sup> includes Policy *GB1 General Criteria for Development Control in the Green Belt* which encompasses large stretches of land dividing the settlement of Garswood and Billinge, including the Site itself. However, Green belt is a planning designation that seeks to maintain openness between settlements rather than act as an indication of landscape quality. Areas defined as *Policy ENV1 Public Open Space* within the *St. Helens Unitary Development Plan*

<sup>9</sup> St. Helens Council (2013) *St. Helens Unitary Development Plan Saved Policies – 2013 Addendum*

*Saved Policies Addendum (2013)*<sup>9</sup> lie within 50m of the Site itself, on both Garswood Road and the B5207 Billinge Road.

- 2.40 A section of *Policy C1E Greenway Network* within the *Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy (2013)*<sup>6</sup> also lies approximately 2km north of the Site, within close proximity to the corridor of the M6. Located approximately 2.5km from the Site at its closest extent, the *Stanley Bank, Carr Mill Dam and Billinge Hill Corridor* is identified within *St. Helens Local Plan Core Strategy (2012)*<sup>2</sup> as a significant priority for action within *Policy CQL1 Green Infrastructure*. However, the relatively long distance dictates that development of the Site is not likely to directly affect these areas.



Public Open Space located on Garswood Road



View towards the Public Open Space from the B52017 Billinge Road



## 3 Visual Baseline

### Key Visual Receptors

- 3.1 Following the preliminary assessment of the landscape context it was considered that there would be potential views from:
- users of the local PRow network, principally Public Footpath 929 (St. Helens) and Public Footpath 935 (St. Helens);
  - users of the Public Open Spaces on Garswood Road and the B5207 Billinge Road;
  - motorists on the local road network, including Garswood Road, the B52017 Billinge Road and Smock Lane, which form the perimeters of the Site.
  - local community within Garswood; and
  - local community at Billinge.

### Views to the Site

- 3.2 Six publically accessible viewpoints were selected and visited as part of the field study to demonstrate the range of potential views into the Site (see **Figure 02: Viewpoint Location Plan**). The selected viewpoints are listed below.
- Viewpoint 1: View looking north east from Public Footpath 929 (St. Helens);
  - Viewpoint 2: View looking south Public Footpath 07/10 (Billinge and Winstanley) (forming a section of *Policy C1E Greenway Network* within the *Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy* (2013)<sup>6</sup>);
  - Viewpoint 3: View looking south east from Public Footpath 868 (St. Helens), Billinge Hill;
  - Viewpoint 4: View looking south east from the B5207 Newton Road, Billinge;
  - Viewpoint 5: View looking south from Public Footpath 935 (St. Helens), Downall Green; and
  - Viewpoint 6: View looking north from the Public Open Space on Garswood Road.
- 3.3 Viewpoint photography is provided for illustrative purposes and has been annotated to indicate the visible extents of the Site. Photography was recorded in January 2019 and represents maximum visibility as the vegetation is devoid of leaf cover.

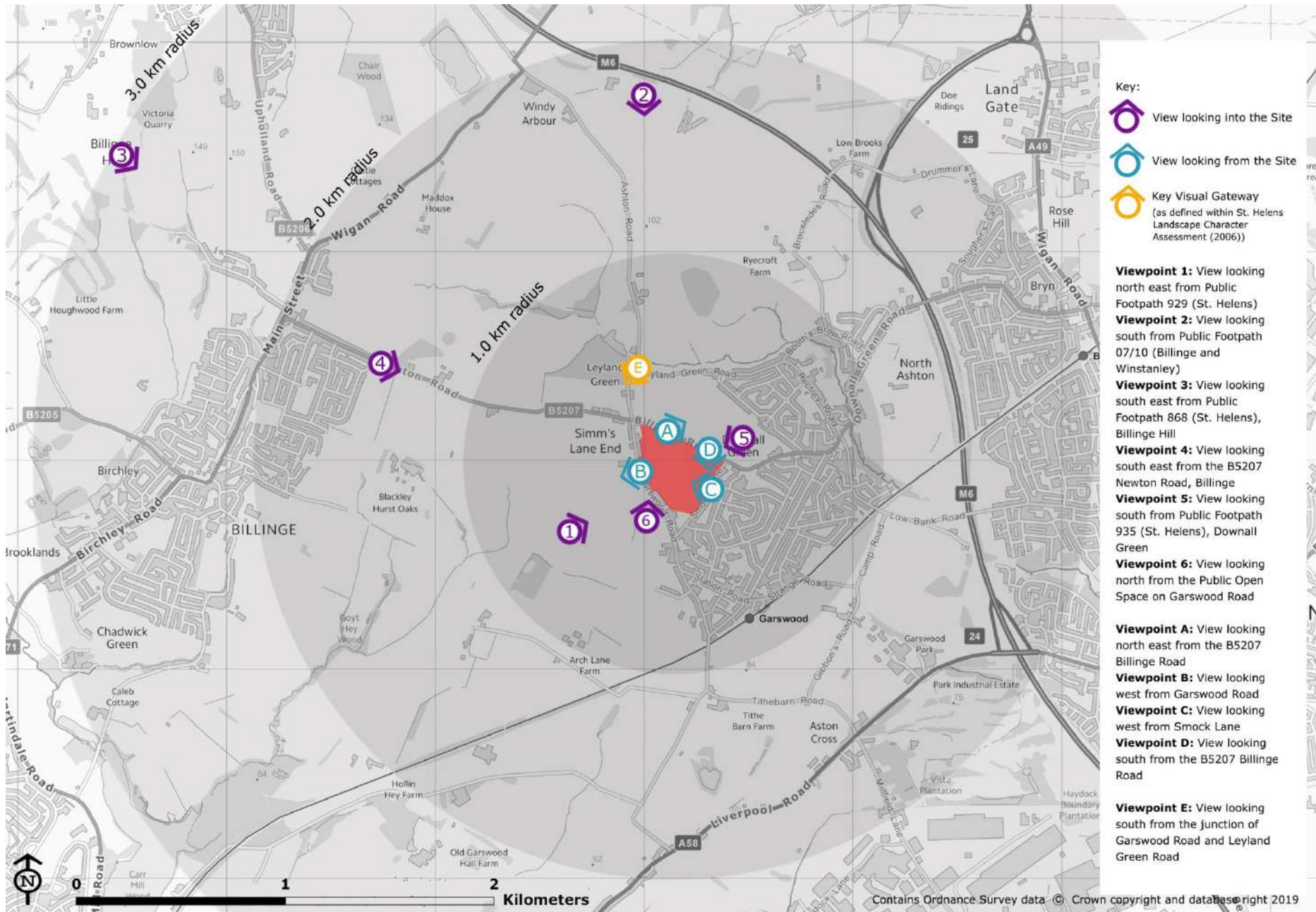


Figure 02: Viewpoint Location Plan (views in and out)



**Viewpoint 1: View looking north east from Public Footpath 929 (St. Helens)**

The panorama provides views towards the Site and western settlement edge of Garswood from a locally elevated position on the rising slopes of Weathercock Hill. The gap in the continuity of built form along Garswood Road is apparent in the central frame of the view.



**Viewpoint 2: View looking south from Public Footpath 07/10 (Billinge and Winstanley) (forming a section of Policy C1E Greenway Network within the Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy (2013))**

Representative of recreational users, views looking south towards the Site are foreshortened by undulating farmland to the north of Garswood. Direct views towards the Site are unavailable from this location.



**Viewpoint 3: View looking south east from Public Footpath 868 (St. Helens), Billinge Hill**

The view looks south-east from Billinge Hill, the principal landform feature in the locality. Fiddlers Ferry Power Station is visible protruding against the skyline and the wooded corridor of the M6 is evident in the background view. The Site itself is barely perceptible in the view due to viewing distance.



**Viewpoint 4: View looking south east from the B5207 Newton Road, Billinge**

The view affords a locally elevated vantage point at the residential edge of Billinge. However, views towards the Site itself are interrupted by a combination of intervening vegetation and distance of view. The location of Billinge on elevated landform enforces the sense of separation between the settlement and Garswood.



**Viewpoint 5: View looking south from Public Footpath 935 (St. Helens), Downall Green**

The Site is visible in the central frame, beyond the agricultural pastures bound by post and wire fencing in the immediate foreground. The existing settlement edge of Garswood is apparent in the left frame of the view with residential properties at the junction of the B5207 Billinge Road and Garswood Road occupying the middle distance of the view.



**Viewpoint 6: View looking north from the Public Open Space on Garswood Road**

Located at the Public Open Space on Garswood Road, this viewpoint offers views towards the Site in the central frame of the view, albeit partially interrupted by the existing residential properties on Garswood Road. The gap in the continuity of built form offers views towards the hedge and pastoral farmland beyond.

## Views from the Site



**Viewpoint A: View looking north east from the B5207 Billing Road**

Views looking north east are afforded to the settlement edge of Downall Green, with the spire of the Church of the Holy Trinity perceptible above the residential land use. Agricultural land forms the immediate foreground of the view.



**Viewpoint B: View looking west from Garswood Road**

Weathercock Hill provides containment and a visual backdrop in views to the west. The woodland block at this location is prominent in the view and is visible against the skyline. Direct views towards the settlement edge of Billing are precluded at this location due to the nature of the intervening topography.



**Viewpoint C: View looking west from Smock Lane**

Residential properties on Garswood Road are visible in the middle distance with long distance views foreshortened by intervening topography at Weathercock Hill. The woodland tract at Weathercock Hill forms a partially wooded horizon.



**Viewpoint D: View looking south from the B5207 Billing Road**

Two storey residential development of suburban character forms the frontage to Smock Lane. The fragmented hedge bordering the Site offers a limited visual buffer with open views available to the western settlement edge of Garswood.

## 4 Analysis

### Landscape Opportunities

- 4.1 The study and review of the recommendations within the *St. Helens Landscape Character Assessment* (2006)<sup>7</sup> has led to the identification of the following key opportunities and recommendations (see **Figure 03: Landscape Opportunities and Constraints**):
- soften and strengthen the existing harsh settlement edge along Smock Lane;
  - ensure that development responds to the landform, taking advantage of the natural screening provided by topography at the north of the Site;
  - encourage future linkages between the recreational assets on the edge of Garswood, including the areas of Public Open Space on the B5207 Billinge Road and at Garswood Road;
  - maintain views across to wider landscape and townscape features such as Weathercock Hill and Tatlock's Hillock and the church spire at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Downall Green;
  - replicate the existing pattern of ribbon development along Garswood Road;
  - take the opportunity to improve the settlement gateway and sense of arrival into Garswood; and
  - supplement the strong framework of existing boundary vegetation parallel Garswood Road and restore / supplement the degraded hedge boundaries along the B5207 Billinge Road and Smock Lane. Vegetated boundaries will assist in landscape and visual integration and avoid the introduction of abrupt urban fringe characteristics.

### Landscape Constraints

- 4.2 The following constraints are applicable to the Site:
- the location of the Site on an open ridgeline dictates that sympathetic design is required to ensure any proposed development does not protrude above the ridgeline within the wider landscape;
  - fragmented and gappy hedgerows along field boundaries along the B5207 Billinge Road and Smock Lane, afford views in from residential properties or users of local roads; and
  - the existing undulating landform may require minor contour remodelling to accommodate any proposed development.



Figure 03: Landscape Opportunities and Constraints



## Design Principles

4.3 The following design principles should be considered when developing options for proposed development of the Site:

- avoid locating development in the more elevated northern portion of the Site;
- secure a scale and form of residential development which reflects the adjoining urban areas of Garswood;
- consider an architectural response that integrates well and takes visual cues from the local vernacular (dark red brick) as well as the potential for attractive frontages visible on Garswood Road and Smock Lane;
- ensure an appropriate scale of development which retains existing views towards locally elevated landscape features such as Billinge Hill as well as local townscape features such as the spire of church;
- create a defined urban edge with appropriate mitigation treatments. The western edge of Garswood appears to have expanded sporadically with pockets of development lining roads; and
- enhance the sense of arrival on approach through the creation of a gateway entrance feature at the junction of Garswood Road and the B5207 Billinge Road.

## 5 Summary and Conclusions

- 5.1 It is not considered that development of the Site will alter any of the wider key landscape characteristics or introduce a discordant element in the existing setting when viewed from the wider landscape. Although the ridgeline accommodating the Site is visible in wider views, the Site itself offers an opportunity to improve the character and quality of the settlement edge of Garswood.
- 5.2 The *St. Helens Landscape Character Assessment (2006)*<sup>7</sup> considers that opportunities exist to accommodate small scale development to the west and north of Garswood, whilst retaining the wider separation from Billinge. The findings of the *St. Helens Council Green Belt Review (2018)*<sup>5</sup> also states that settlement coalescence of Billinge and Garswood would not occur, as a strategic gap between the settlements would be maintained if the Site was released from the Green Belt.
- 5.3 Subject to architectural proposals which are consistent in scale and composition with the setting of Garswood, the residential development would not appear incongruous with the established settlement pattern. The least sensitive parts of the Site are located in the south and where the Site abuts existing residential development along Smock Lane and also benefits from partial visual shelter provided by the rising landform to the north.
- 5.4 Following consideration of the identified opportunities and constraints, it is concluded that the Site should be able to accommodate sensitively designed residential development. However, it is recommended that a Landscape and Visual Appraisal is undertaken of the proposed development to thoroughly assess potential landscape and visual effects within the locality and inform the masterplanning process.



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# Ecological Statement

## Land at Weathercock Hill Farm, Garswood

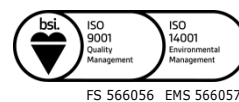
Prepared by LUC

February 2019

Planning & EIA  
Design  
Landscape Planning  
Landscape Management  
Ecology  
GIS & Visualisation

LUC GLASGOW  
37 Otago Street  
Glasgow  
G12 8JJ  
T +44 (0)141 334 9595  
[glasgow@landuse.co.uk](mailto:glasgow@landuse.co.uk)

Offices also in:  
Bristol  
Edinburgh  
Glasgow  
Lancaster  
London  
Manchester



Land Use Consultants Ltd  
Registered in England  
Registered number: 2549296  
Registered Office:  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
LUC uses 100% recycled paper

**Project Title:** Weathercock Hill Farm

**Client:** Persimmon Homes

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
1.1	08/02/19	First Version	MO	JT	HL

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 LUC was commissioned by Persimmon Homes (the 'Client') to undertake an Ecological Assessment (EA) of a parcel of land (hereafter referred to as the 'Site') located at Garswood, Merseyside. The Site is located to the west of Garswood, bound by Billinge Road, Garswood Road and Smock Lane (centred at SJ 55153 99968).

## Project Understanding

- 1.2 St Helens council has submitted a Draft Local Plan for public consultation which details the land for which the council district has designated for housing, employment and other development. This EA was required to support the council's allocation for the development of housing within the Site.
- 1.3 This Ecological Statement will detail the survey methods and results undertaken to inform the EA, and provide a summary of the overall ecological value of the Site.

## 2 Methodology

### Desk Study

- 2.1 A desk study was undertaken to obtain baseline ecological information in relation to the Site, and the local area. The desk study sought information on all designated sites located within 2 km of the Site using freely-available, online data sources. The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)<sup>1</sup> database was reviewed for information on locally, nationally and internationally statutory designated sites of nature conservation importance. Additional information on non-statutory designated sites was also gathered from St Helens Council.

### Field Surveys

- 2.2 A field survey (hereafter referred to as the 'Survey') was undertaken on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019 by LUC consultant ecologist, Michal Ostalowski Grad CIEEM<sup>2</sup>. All features of ecological significance were recorded on a field tablet, using a georeferenced map-based application. Photographs were also taken and accompany this report, where necessary.

#### Habitats

- 2.3 The Survey followed the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) guidelines<sup>3</sup> to classify the habitats located within the Site, up to and including a 50 m buffer (hereafter referred to as the Survey Area) as shown in **Figure 1, Appendix 1**. The Surveys aimed to rapidly map the broad habitat types located within the Survey Area, recording plant species, where applicable. Target Notes (TN) were also taken to provide detailed information relating to ecological features of interest recorded during the Survey.

#### Protected Species

- 2.4 The Survey also aimed to assess the potential for the Survey Area to support protected species including, but not limited to, bats, badger and reptiles. Where field signs of such faunal species were observed, this was recorded and provided within this ES.

#### Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

- 2.5 A check for invasive, non-native species (INNS), which could pose constraints to development, was also carried out during the Survey. Species searched for included Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed and rhododendron.

### Survey Limitations

- 2.6 The Survey was undertaken outside of the optimum period for Phase 1 habitat surveys (April to September, inclusive). However, given the broad habitat types found within the Survey Area this constraint is not considered to be a limitation to the current assessment of the value of the Site.
- 2.7 It is worth noting that the time frame in which the Survey was undertaken provides a snapshot of activity for the Site and will not necessarily detect all evidence of use by a species. Ecological surveys are limited by a variety of factors which affect the presence of flora and fauna such as

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<sup>1</sup> MAGIC. Available online at [www.magic.gov.uk](http://www.magic.gov.uk). [Accessed February 2019]

<sup>2</sup> Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management

<sup>3</sup> Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010) Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: a technique for environmental audit. Peterborough.

season, migration patterns, and species behaviour. Evidence of species is not always discovered during the Survey. This does not mean that a species is absent and as such, the survey aims to assess the suitability of habitats to support protected species.



## 3 Results

- 3.1 The desk study and Survey results are summarised below, with reference to **Figure 1, Appendix 1**.

### Desk Study

- 3.2 There were no statutory designated sites located within the Site, or within a 2 km buffer. The Site falls within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zones. SSSI IRZs have been adopted to identify areas within which the Local Planning Authority (LPA) should consult Natural England (NE) before granting planning permission on a development. This SSSI IRZ has been put in place to recommend consultation for specific developments such as airport runways and aviation developments, and farm-related developments (such as slurries). As the Site has not been allocated for development of these kinds, the developer would not be required to undertake consultation with NE with regards to impacts on the SSSI.
- 3.3 There were three non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within 2 km of the Site. Information relating to these non-statutory designated sites is provided in Table 1, below.

**Table 1: Non-Statutory Designated Sites Located within 2 km of the Site**

Site Name	Distance and Direction from Site	Designated Feature
Barton Clough Local	0.5 km northwest	Ancient semi-natural woodland
Mine Spoil	0.5 km west	Wetland
Goyt Hey Wood	1.4 km southwest	Ancient semi-natural woodland

- 3.4 No further non-statutory designated sites were located within 2 km of the Site.

### Field Surveys

#### Habitats

##### *Scattered Scrub (A2.2)*

- 3.5 A small area of bramble and elder scrub was present in the east corner of the Survey Area, situated on the Site's boundary.

##### *Mixed Scattered trees (A3.3)*

- 3.6 Broadleaved trees were scattered along south-western and eastern Site's boundaries. Species present include sycamore, alder, and silver birch.
- 3.7 A single tree line was recorded along the southern boundary of the Site. Species present include Leyland cypress, sycamore, elder, silver birch and poplar sp.

##### *Improved Grassland (B4)*

- 3.8 Improved grassland was the dominant habitat recorded within the Survey Area, dominating the land within the Site and fields to the northeast and southwest (**Photograph 1, Appendix 2**). At the time of the Survey, this grassland was under intensive agricultural management. Species present include perennial ryegrass, thistle species, and buttercup species.

### *Tall ruderal (C3.1)*

- 3.9 A narrow strip of tall ruderal vegetation was present along the Billinge Road, in the north of the Survey Area. Species recorded include rosebay willowherb, bramble, broadleaved dock, and grass, such as cock's-foot.

### *Arable (J1.1)*

- 3.10 An arable field was recorded in the north-eastern of the Survey Area. At the time of the Survey, the crop had been harvested and therefore resembled a stubble field.

### *Intact hedge (J2.1)*

- 3.11 A single section of intact hedge was present in the west of the Survey Area, located along the Site's western boundary. The hedge was considered to be species-poor with only two species present, including hawthorn and bramble.

### *Defunct hedge (J2.2)*

- 3.12 A single line of defunct hedge was recorded in the east of the Survey Area, along Smock Lane. Species present include blackthorn, hawthorn, bramble, and holly.

### *Dry ditch (J2.5)*

- 3.13 A dry ditch was recorded along the north-eastern boundary of the Site, adjacent to the Billinge Road. Vegetation within the ditch was similar to the surrounding habitat (tall ruderal; comprising rosebay willowherb, bramble and cock's-foot).

### *Buildings (J3.6)*

- 3.14 Residential buildings, with associated gardens were present within the Survey Area. Residential buildings appeared to be occupied, in good condition and evidence of recent human presence.

### *Other habitat (J5)*

- 3.15 A lawn bowling pitch and a number of allotments were recorded in the south on the Survey Area.

## **Protected Species**

### *Bats*

- 3.16 The trees, scrub, and hedgerows, recorded within the Survey Area, were considered to provide limited foraging and commuting potential for bats. Residential buildings recorded within the Survey Area were considered to provide some bat roosting potential. They appeared to be in relatively good condition, with no visible evidence of cracks or fissures in brickwork but a few potential bat roosting opportunities were recorded within the roof of the buildings (e.g. gaps between tiles).
- 3.17 There were no buildings recorded within the Site and therefore the Site's potential to support bats is considered negligible.
- 3.18 The majority of the trees adjacent to Site offer no roosting opportunities (e.g. cracks, crevices, splits, woodpecker holes). However, a single sycamore tree, recorded to the south of the Site was considered of moderate bat roost potential due to the presence of a narrow crevice located on its limb (**Photograph 2, Appendix 2**).

### *Badgers*

- 3.19 No sign of badger activity was recorded on, or within close proximity to, the Site. The field margins and improved grassland were considered to provide suitable foraging habitat for badgers to feed on earthworms. The Site was considered to offer suboptimal habitat for sett creation due to the lack of suitable cover and likely regular disturbance from dog walkers and local residents.

### *Nesting Birds*

- 3.20 Two bird nests were observed within the Site; the first nest was located in a hedgerow along the eastern boundary of the Site, and the second was on a silver birch tree. Carrion crow, woodpigeon, magpie, goldfinch, blackbird, and robin were present within the Survey Area at the time of the Survey.

- 3.21 The trees, hedgerows, scrub and improved grassland were considered suitable for foraging and/or nesting bird species.

*Other species*

- 3.22 No evidence of other species, or suitable habitat to support species, was identified at the time of Survey.

**Invasive non-native species**

- 3.23 Three small stands of scattered Japanese knotweed were recorded on Site (**Figure 1, Appendix 1; Photograph 3, Appendix 2**; NGRs, SD 55014 00144, SD 55013 00170 and SJ 55192 99773). The largest stand was located in the north of the Survey Area (SD 55013 00170), recorded at a length of approximately 10 m, and at a height of approximately 40 cm.

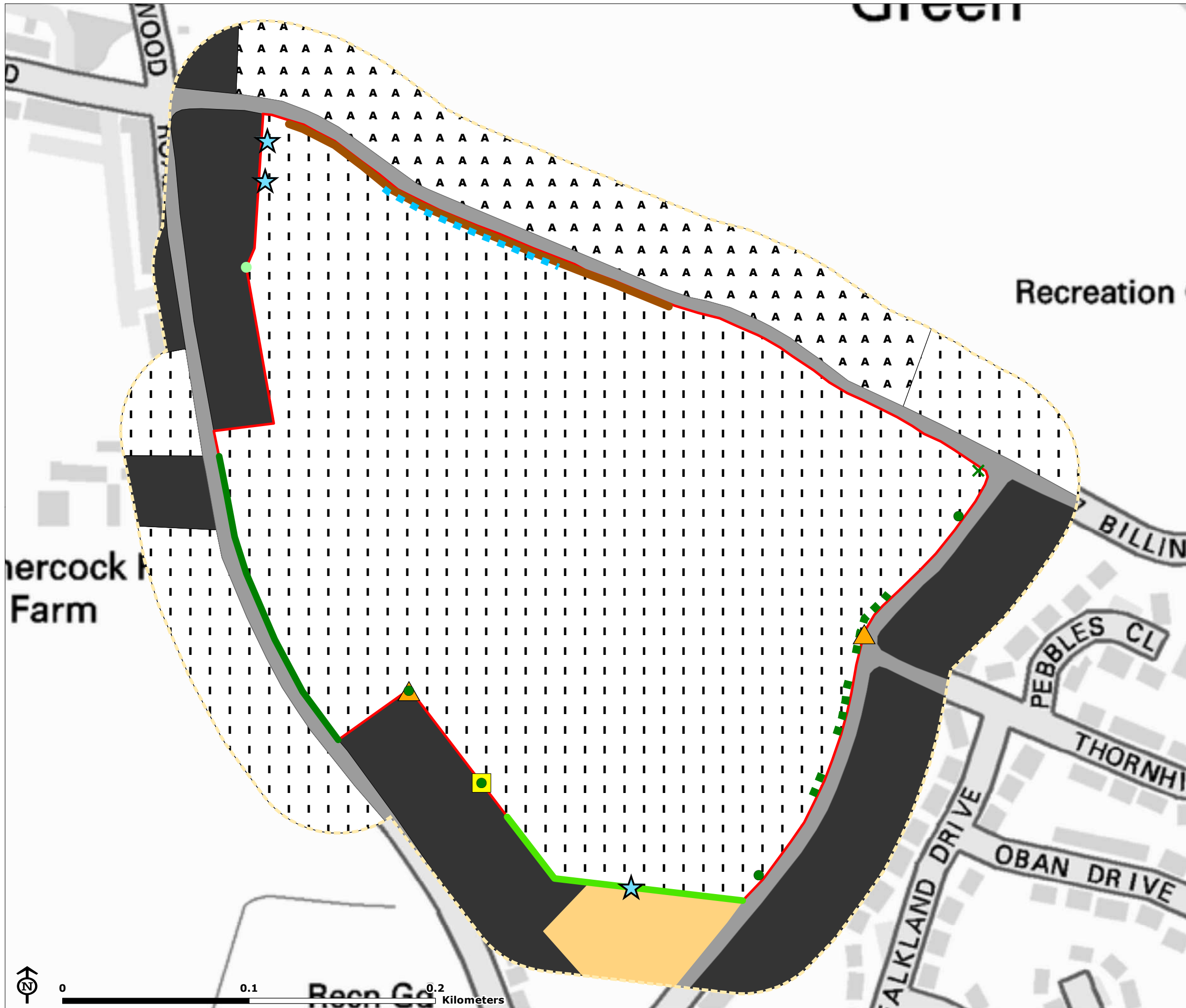
## 4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The Site was considered of negligible ecological value due to the lack of valuable habitats present, absence of protected species evidence and limited suitability of habitats to support protected species.
- 4.2 There were no statutory designated sites located within 2 km of the Site. Three non-statutory designated sites were located within 2 km of the Site, however there is no functional connectivity between these designated sites and the Site.
- 4.3 The majority of Site comprised improved grassland with small areas of scrub, tall ruderal vegetation, hedgerows, trees, and a dry ditch. These habitats were regarded as being common and widespread, and as such, of low intrinsic ecological value. However, hedgerows, trees, and scrub within the Survey Area, although not of particular botanical interest (in terms of species richness), offer potential opportunities for low numbers of protected species (such as breeding birds).
- 4.4 Three stands of the invasive, non-native Japanese knotweed were identified on the southern and western boundaries of the Site. Strict controls on soil movement will be required to facilitate any development which may cause the spread of this species, and therefore this could pose a constraint to development.

# Appendix 1

## Figures

Figure 1: Phase 1 Habitat Survey Results



# Weathercock Hill Farm

**Figure 1: Phase 1 Habitat Survey Results**

- The Site
  - Survey Area - 50m Buffer of the Site
  - ★ Japanese Knotweed
  - ▲ Bird nest
  - Tree with moderate bat roost potential
- Phase 1 Code**
- × A2.2 Scrub (scattered)
  - Broadleaved trees
  - Coniferous tree
  - Other Tall herb and fern (ruderal)
  - J2.1.2 Intact hedge (species-poor)
  - J2.2.2 Defunct hedge (species-poor)
  - J2.6 Dry ditch
  - TL Tree line
  - B4 Improved grassland
  - HS Hard standing
  - J1.1 Arable
  - J3.6 Buildings
  - J5 Other habitat

Map Scale @A3: 1:2,000



## Appendix 2

### Photographs



**Photograph 1:** Improved grassland located within the Site. Photograph was taken looking east, from the northern residential buildings, located on Garswood Road.



**Photograph 2:** Sycamore tree considered of moderate bat roost potential recorded on the southern boundary of the Site



**Photograph 3:** A stand of Japanese knotweed recorded in the north of the Site





## POTENTIAL RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, BILLINGE ROAD, GARSWOOD – TRANSPORT ISSUES NOTE – JANUARY 2019

### Introduction

Croft have been instructed by Persimmon Homes to provide a Transport Issues Note for proposals for residential development on land off Billinge Road in the Garswood area of St Helens.

### Location and Accessibility

The site is located approximately 750 metres north-west of the centre of Garswood, whilst Ashton-in-Makerfield is located 2.7 kilometres east of the site, where primary shopping and local facilities can be found. In addition, there are a range of services and facilities in the vicinity of the site itself.

### Education

Garswood County Primary School is located to south east of the site on Hamilton Road, pedestrian access can be achieved via Billinge Road, Smock Lane, Thornhill Road, Falkland Drive, Langholm Road and Hamilton Road.

The Rectory Church of England Primary School is located north east of the site on Rectory Road and can be accessed via the footway provision provided on Billinge Road and Rectory Road.

The most accessible secondary school to the site is Cansfield High School. Although this is located just outside the 2 kilometre pedestrian catchment, it's accessible via an 11 minute bus journey (156 Bus Service) and a short walk.

### Healthcare

Garswood Surgery which is located on Billinge Road, approximately 600m from the centre of the site, can be accessed via the pedestrian footways located on Billinge Road. In addition, various healthcare facilities such as Boots Pharmacy and Rowlands Pharmacy can be found in Ashton-in-Makerfield, just a short bus journey from the site.



## Employment

Although major employment opportunities may be limited within the vicinity of the site, with the exception of some small businesses, there are a number of large employment opportunities close by such as Wigan, Ashton-in-Makerfield and Haydock.

## Retail

There are local retail facilities within the vicinity of the site; a Texaco Petrol Station/Londis convenience store, Bargain Booze and The Store are located within 2 kilometres of the site, all of which can be accessed via the extensive pedestrian infrastructure located in the vicinity of the site.

## Sports and Recreation

A local recreation park and a football pitch are located to the south of the site on Garswood Road, approximately 400 metres from the centre of the site. In addition, Ashton leisure centre is located in Ashton-in-Makerfield, just a short bus journey from the site.

## Day to Day Accessibility

Table 1 below, shows the walking distances from the centre of the site to the local facilities/amenities in the vicinity of the site:



Local Amenity	Distance from Sites (Metres)
<b>Bus Stops</b>	300 (Billinge Road) 300 (Garswood Road)
<b>Post Box</b>	410 (Garswood Road)
<b>Garswood Surgery</b>	630 (Billinge Road)
<b>Garswood County Primary School</b>	880 (Hamilton Road)
<b>Convenience Store (Londis)</b>	1,120 (Garswood Road)
<b>Garswood Railway Station</b>	1,300 (Station Road)

**Table 1 – Distance from Key Day to Day Amenities**

The table clearly shows that the development site is within a short walk of a range of day to day amenities.

There is the scope for pedestrian improvements along Billinge Way and Garswood Road, in the form of footway enhancements as well as improvements to the bus stop facilities within the vicinity of the site.

### Transportation

Bus stops are located on Billinge Road and Garswood Road, which consist of a bus stop pole with passing services shown and a bus service timetable. Table 2 below, summarises the bus services that operate within close proximity of the site.



Service No	Route	Monday – Friday Frequency per hour				Sat	Sun
		AM Peak	Midday	PM Peak	Eve		
156	St Helens – Ashton-in-Makerfield	1	1	1	1	1	1
157	Ashton-in-Makerfield – Rainford Junction	1	1	1	0	1	0

**Table 2 - Existing Bus Services Operating Along Billinge Road and Garswood Road.**

As can be seen in Table 2, the bus services that operate along Billinge Road provide 2 peak hour services to and from St Helens and Ashton-in-Makerfield. Journeys to Ashton-in-Makerfield take 15 minutes whilst journeys to St Helens take approximately 26 minutes, therefore, the bus services available from Billinge Road provide the opportunity for residents to travel to St Helens, Ashton-in-Makerfield and surrounding areas by public transport.

### Infrastructure

The site benefits from extensive frontage onto Billinge Road and Garswood Road, due to this there is scope to provide vehicular access from both roads. For the purpose of this note, it is proposed that primary access into the site will be provided from both Billinge Road and Garswood Road.

To cater for the volume of traffic movements turning into the site the proposed designs incorporates right turning lanes on Billinge Road and Garswood Road can be provided. This will require widening into the site frontage but does not require the acquisition of third-party land to implement, as all additional land is within the existing limits of adopted highway or within the site boundary. The running lanes on Billinge Road and Garswood Road will be 3.0 metres wide with a 3 metre wide right turning lane. It is unlikely that both access points will require ghost-island access arrangements and this will form part of any masterplanning of the site.



The vehicular access arrangements will need to be agreed with the highways officers at St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council (SHMBC) regarding the suitability of the Site Access options. However, in our view there are no constraints to accessing the site that can't be overcome whilst actually improving the environment in the vicinity of the site for all road users.

As part of the proposals to develop the site pedestrian connectivity through the site will need to be promoted, this can be achieved by creating new pedestrian links through the site and connecting to the nearby existing right of ways. The site will also link with the existing cycle routes and local amenities in the vicinity of the site.

In terms of off-site impact the proposals are likely to generate in the region of 300 plus vehicular trips in the two busiest hours of the day which are likely to be between 0800 and 0900 hours and 1700 to 1800 hours. The majority of the traffic will be travelling towards Wigan, St Helens, Manchester and the Strategic Highway Network.

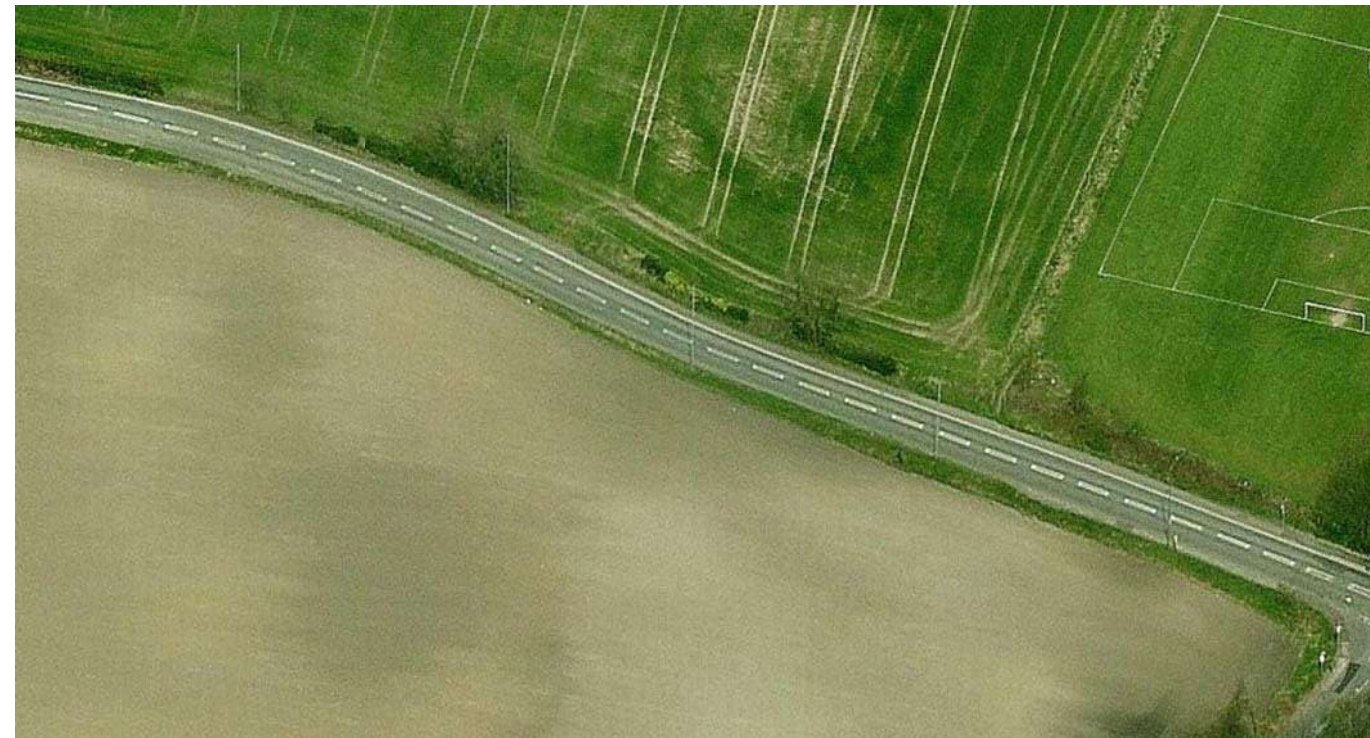
As part of any subsequent planning application there is likely to be a requirement to provide off-site highway improvement to mitigate the impact of the residential development at Billinge Road. The necessary mitigation measures will need to be agreed with the local highway authority to demonstrate that the development of the Billinge Road site can be delivered.

## **Summary**

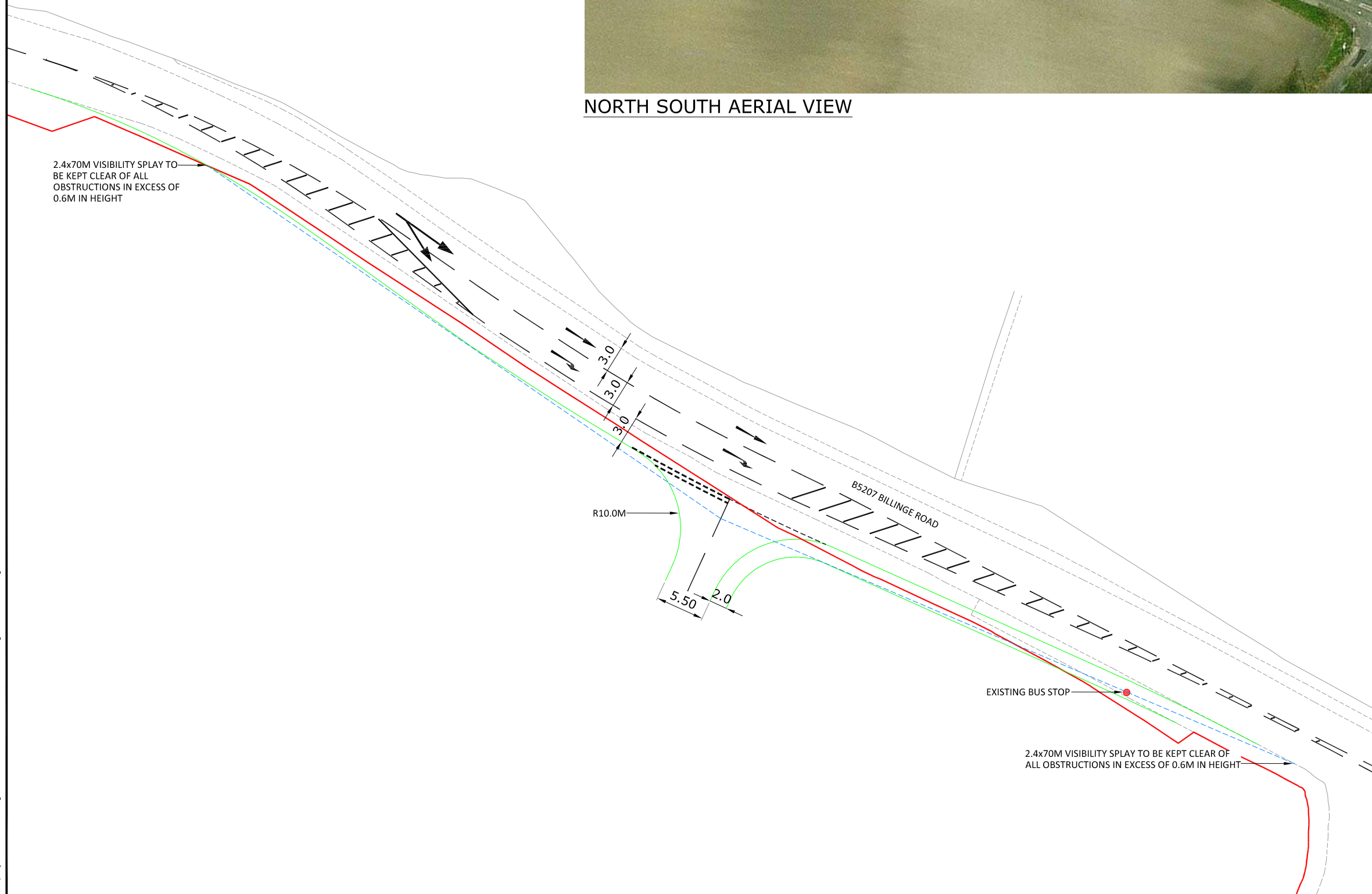
In summary, this note clearly demonstrates that the site in Garswood is very well located for new residential development. The site is in close proximity to a good range of shops, employment opportunities, education provisions and other facilities and services.

The site can be satisfactorily accessed and will generate a modest number of additional vehicular trips onto the local highway network which can potentially be mitigated by a range of improvements.

## DRAWINGS



NORTH SOUTH AERIAL VIEW



2.4x70M VISIBILITY SPLAY TO BE KEPT CLEAR OF ALL OBSTRUCTIONS IN EXCESS OF 0.6M IN HEIGHT

EXISTING BUS STOP

2.4x70M VISIBILITY SPLAY TO BE KEPT CLEAR OF ALL OBSTRUCTIONS IN EXCESS OF 0.6M IN HEIGHT

NOTES

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- SITE BOUNDARY
- ADOPTED HIGHWAY

REV	DETAILS	DRAWN	CHECKED	DATE

CLIENT:  
**PERSIMMON HOMES**

PROJECT:  
**BILLINGE ROAD, GARSWOOD**

DRAWING TITLE:  
**POTENTIAL SITE ACCESS ARRANGEMENT BILLINGE ROAD**

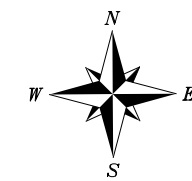
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DRAWN: JC      CHECKED: TSB      DATE: JAN 19

Croft Transport Planning & Design  
Hill Quays  
9 Jordan Street  
Manchester  
M15 4PY  
Email: [info@crofts.co.uk](mailto:info@crofts.co.uk)  
Tel: 0161 667 3746  
Web: [www.crofts.co.uk](http://www.crofts.co.uk)



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CLIENT:  
**PERSIMMON HOMES**

PROJECT:  
**BILLINGE ROAD, GARSWOOD**

DRAWING TITLE:  
**POTENTIAL SITE ACCESS ARRANGEMENT GARSWOOD ROAD**

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DRAWN: **JC**      CHECKED: **TSB**      DATE: **JAN 19**

Croft Transport Planning & Design  
Hill Quays  
9 Jordan Street  
Manchester  
M15 4PY  
Email: [info@crofts.co.uk](mailto:info@crofts.co.uk)  
Tel: 0161 667 3746  
Web: [www.crofts.co.uk](http://www.crofts.co.uk)

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# PLANS

# PLAN 1



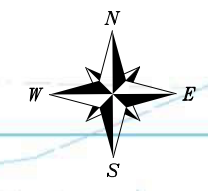
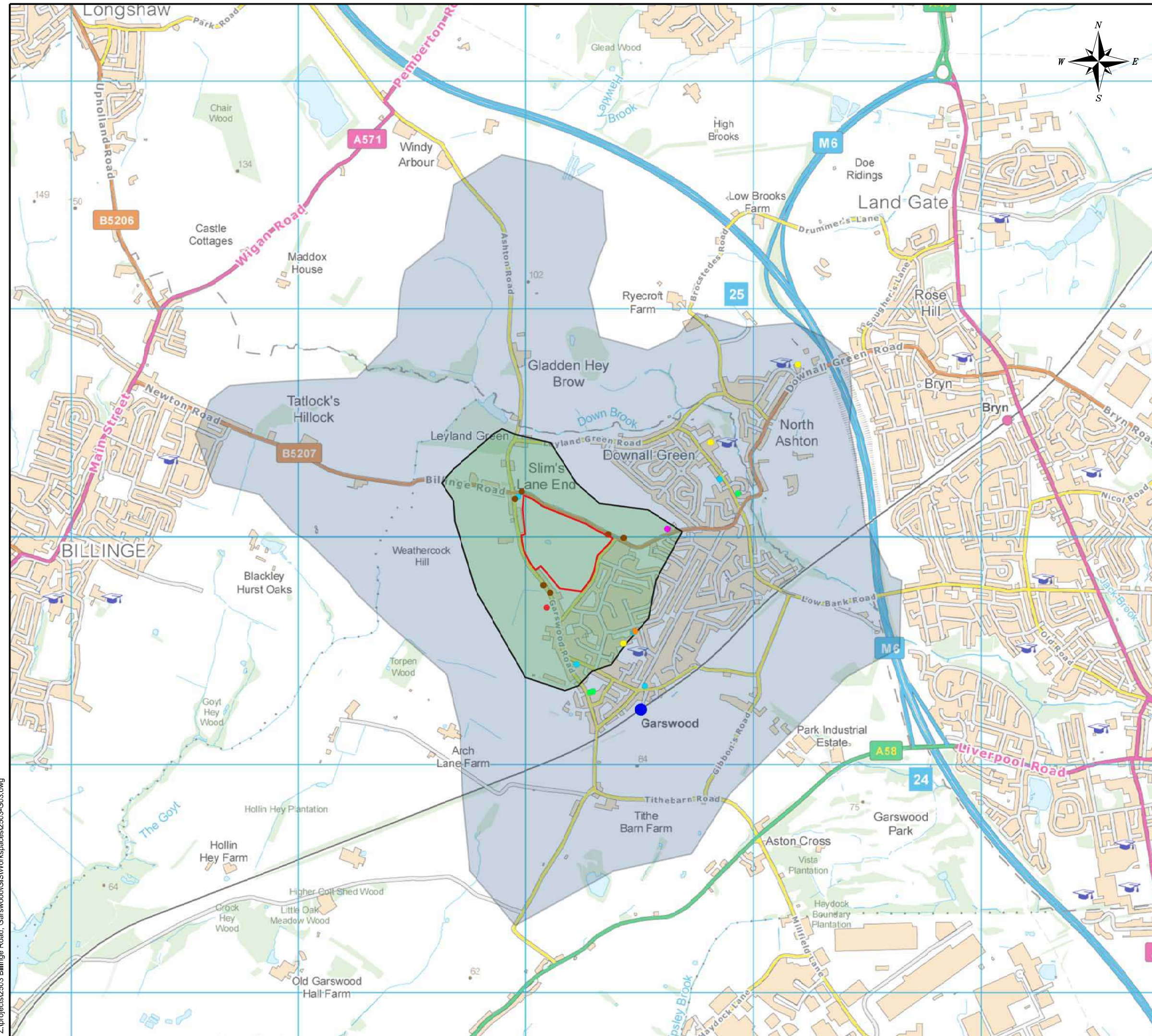
PERSIMMON HOMES

## PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT BILLINGE ROAD, GARSWOOD SITE LOCATION PLAN

Croft Transport Planning & Design  
Hill Quays  
9 Jordan Street  
Manchester  
M15 4PY  
Email: [info@crofts.co.uk](mailto:info@crofts.co.uk)  
Tel: 0161 667 3746  
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**NOTES** **PLAN 2**

- Site Location
- 800m Pedestrian Catchment
- 2km Pedestrian Catchment
- Train Station
- Nearest Bus Stop
- Cafe/Takeaway/Public House
- Education
- Healthcare/Medical
- Leisure/Sport
- Post Office
- Retail

REV	DETAILS	DRAWN	CHECKED	DATE

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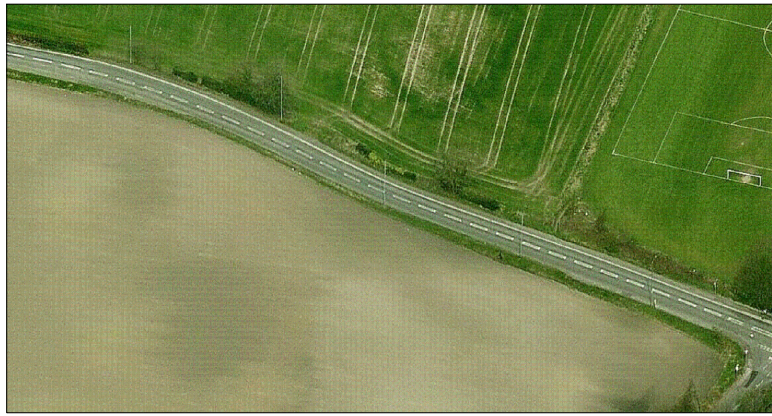
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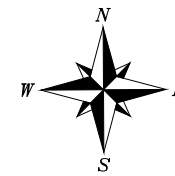
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NORTH SOUTH AERIAL VIEW



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- INDICATIVE SITE BOUNDARY
- DENOTES NEW KERBS



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**PERSIMMON HOMES**

PROJECT:  
**BILLINGE ROAD, GARSWOOD**

DRAWING TITLE:  
**POTENTIAL SITE ACCESS ARRANGEMENT BILLINGE ROAD**

SCALES:  
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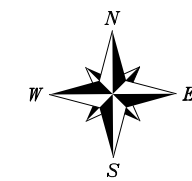
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Hill Quays  
9 Jordan Street  
Manchester  
M15 4PY

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- SITE BOUNDARY
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REV	DETAILS	DRAWN	CHECKED	DATE

CLIENT:  
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PROJECT:  
**BILLINGE ROAD, GARSWOOD**

DRAWING TITLE:  
**POTENTIAL SITE ACCESS ARRANGEMENT GARSWOOD ROAD**

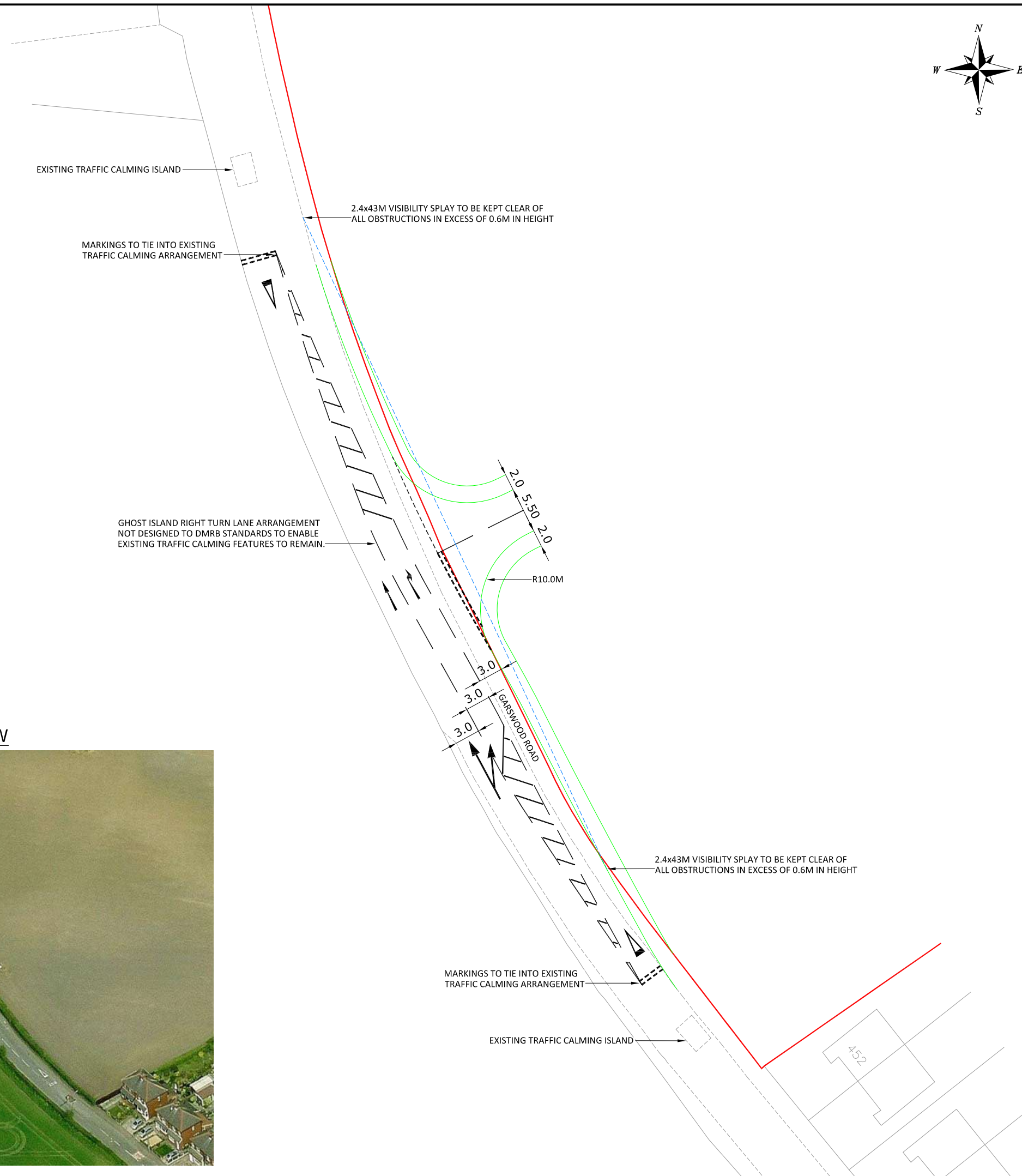
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Croft Transport Planning & Design  
Hill Quays  
9 Jordan Street  
Manchester  
M15 4PY  
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Tel: 0161 667 3746  
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