

## The case for 'Exceptional Circumstances'



	<b>Exceptional Circumstances</b>	<b>Why exceptional?</b>
1	The need to deliver new homes in Harpenden, and the wider district	The Council's Annual Monitoring Report (December 2020) states there is only 2.4 years supply of housing based on the NPPF Standard Methodology or 3.4 years supply of housing based on the 2014 ONS Household Projections. Further, affordable housing delivery has fallen significantly short across the period of 1994-2020, averaging just 69 per annum against the 200 per annum policy objective. The development will provide c50 dwellings to assist in the much-needed delivery of affordable housing for the local community. It is anticipated that it would be possible to deliver new homes by the Q4 2025, and therefore the site could contribute to meeting the housing needs of St Albans City and District, including the local needs of Harpenden, early in the plan period.
2	Inherent constraints on land supply and consequent difficulties in achieving sustainable development without impinging on the Green Belt	There are constraints on land supply outside the Green Belt within the District and also within other neighbouring authorities. Without impinging on the Green Belt, the identified housing needs may not be met, and any new development that results through planning applications on unallocated sites, rather than sites allocated in the Local Plan, is likely to result in unsustainable and uncoordinated development that fails to link new housing development with appropriate new supporting infrastructure.
3	The sustainable location of this site, adjoining the existing shops and services of Harpenden	Harpenden is a town and is 2 <sup>nd</sup> in the settlement hierarchy for St Albans. The site is within an easy walk/cycle distance to the town centre, schools, shops, Harpenden railway station and other essential local facilities. Future occupiers would not be reliant on private vehicle. The town centre would benefit from additional footfall.
4	The very limited harm to the green belt	<p>The site would maintain openness of the wider Green Belt and has limited views from surrounding vantage points. It is adjacent to residential development borders to the east and south, ensuring it relates well to the existing urban area.</p> <p>Overall, the site has either limited or no harm on the open character and objectives of the Green Belt. The concept and indicative site layouts demonstrate that around 50 homes could be sensitively accommodated through high quality design, appropriate landscaping and open space. The site context and proposals are able to therefore help ameliorate any impact on the Green Belt.</p>



		<i>See Table 1 of the Call for Sites Submission (2021) for full assessment of Green Belt impact applying the method of the SKM Green Belt Review: Purposes Assessment, Nov 2013.</i>
5	Supporting investment in the LEP's No 1 priorities	Proceeds from development will assist the Trust, along with other potential sources of funding, to provide on-going investment in Rothamsted.
6	The reinvestment of receipts in Harpenden, to aid the local economy	The development will benefit Harpenden ensuring Rothamsted growth is delivered. It will also support local facilities through the delivery of approximately 50 houses.
7	The single ownership of the land and the subsequent confidence of delivery	The Trust is sole owners of the site and Hill Residential are selected development partners. If approved, the development would be built out in one phase, with completion within 18 months from commencement.
8	The benign ownership context that provides a locally based custodian of significant standing to control quality and the future management of the site	The Trust is keen to ensure the development is of the highest quality. Local stakeholder engagement will be undertaken. Hill Residential has a strong track record for delivering high quality award winning housing schemes.



Land at Townsend Lane, Harpenden  
Submission to the St Albans City and District Council, Call  
for Sites

Hill Residential Limited

March 2021

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## **Executive summary**

Land at Townsend Lane is suitable for residential development and delivery of housing on this site would deliver much needed new market and affordable homes to meet local needs, would support the work of the Lawes Agricultural Trust, and would accord with the strategic aims of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The site is bounded by built form on three sides, is not subject to any site-specific constraints and is readily available. It is in a sustainable location and is capable of providing around 50 new homes at a scale and density that responds positively to the character of the area. The site represents an excellent opportunity for new homes to be delivered to contribute towards Harpenden's housing stock. The dwellings would be offered at a range of size, type and tenure.

The site is located to the west of Harpenden Town Centre, at the settlement edge and currently within the Green Belt. Detailed assessments have been undertaken to demonstrate the development of the site would not result in harm to the Green Belt or affect the Green Belt's objectives or purposes in relation to restricting sprawl, preventing towns from merging and preserving the setting and character of historic towns. Given the level of housing need in the district, the site's release would not impact on urban regeneration. Whilst the site lies outside the urban area at present and is countryside, the site's location, bounded on 3 sides by development, means it would not have any significant impact on encroachment into the countryside. Development of the site would knit into the established urban grain at the edge of Harpenden.

Lawes Agricultural Trust own the site and it has been identified as surplus to requirements. Development of the site would generate much needed financial support for the Trust in its role to fund improvements to facilities at Rothamsted Research, enabling Harpenden to continue as the long-term location for the world's oldest agricultural research centre and in support of Hertfordshire LEP's number 1 priority, maintaining global excellence in science and technology.

The increased population to the neighbourhood, continued investment in Rothamsted and its ability to attract staff and students will benefit the local community and the economy of Harpenden and the district, adding to the vitality and vibrancy of the existing town centre.

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This document accompanies the representation to the St Albans City and District Council (SADC) 'Call for Sites' by Terence O'Rourke on behalf of Hill Residential Limited (Hill) as selected partner of the landowner Lawes Agricultural Trust (the Trust), in respect of land at Townsend Lane, Harpenden.
- 1.2 Historically, representations have been submitted to the SADC Local Plan 2020-2036 Examination, the Local Plan Publication Draft 2018, the Issues and Options Consultation 2018, the Strategic Local Plan Publication Draft (SLP) 2016, and to the Detailed Local Plan 2011-2031 (DLP) Draft for Consultation, November 2016. Representations were also made to the Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan Call for Sites in April 2017 and in response to the Regulation 14 draft Neighbourhood Plan in December 2017 and Regulation 16 'Publicising a Plan Proposal' Consultation in June 2018. The representations identify the suitability of the site for residential development, promoting the land for housing allocation.
- 1.3 By way of background, the landowner (the Trust) is a registered charity that aids the advancement of agricultural science through providing support for Rothamsted Research (Rothamsted), the oldest agricultural research station in the world, which is located in Harpenden. The Trust owns the land and buildings at Rothamsted, provides annual research grants and makes capital grants to help complete and to modernise the facilities. The land at Townsend Lane lies on the periphery of the Rothamsted Estate and has been identified as surplus to the requirements of the Trust and Rothamsted. The site is located on the edge of the town of Harpenden and within the Green Belt.
- 1.4 As a local stakeholder and employer, firmly committed to the area, the Trust and Rothamsted Research wish to contribute positively to the local community, as well as securing its longer-term future at the forefront of research.
- 1.5 The development will benefit Harpenden ensuring Rothamsted growth is delivered by continuing to invest in facilities and accommodation, attracting students and staff to the area. This would support Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) number 1 priority to maintain global excellence in science and technology. The priority is one of four guiding principles outlined by the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan 2017-2030 for its vision to be recognised as the functional core of the Golden Triangle, the single most concentrated area in Europe for scientific research and development, benefiting the UK economy as a whole. A key area for action for priority 1 is to encourage research and development for commercial success to ensure future job creation.
- 1.6 The LEP's Strategic Economic Plan 2017-2030 already highlights achievements of Rothamsted Research which include enhanced incubator facilities for agricultural technology (AgriTech) businesses at Rothamsted. Overall, the LEP seeks to invest in science, research and innovation and support businesses to start and grow. It stresses the need to be smarter in the way resources are used to promote jobs and housing growth, addressing a major challenge in the shortage of affordable housing, which development of the site would ultimately help support.
- 1.7 The site is linked to the existing urban area and facilities of Harpenden and will increase local population through the delivery of up to 50 new homes, assisting the local economy and vitality of the town centre. Through the delivery of new homes across a range of size, type and tenure, the site will offer increased choice and availability of accommodation within the local area.

- 1.8 The Trust has been actively involved in Harpenden since 1889. The future of the town is important to the Trust as is providing a legacy for Harpenden. It is within the Trust's interests to ensure the development is of the highest quality. Hill Residential are the selected development partner, having a strong track record for delivering high quality award winning housing schemes.
- 1.9 Despite strong housing pressures and demands, there has historically been under-delivery of new homes to meet local housing need in SADC. As evident from the most recent Housing Delivery Test (HDT) results, covering the period 2017-2020, only 63% of the identified need has been achieved in SADC. The HDT states that SADC need to deliver 820 homes for 2019-20 and only delivered 442. Given the significant affordability pressures in SADC, there is an urgent need to put in place an adopted plan, release land from the Green Belt and ensure that increased delivery can begin to be achieved as early as possible. Land at Townsend Lane can make an early contribution and be delivered within the first five years of the plan.
- 1.10 SADC previously acknowledged in order to meet housing needs that approximately 9-10,000 homes will need to be delivered on land currently within the Green Belt. With the continuation of under-delivery, the need is likely to be increased as the new Local Plan is prepared. The Council stated within a meeting regarding the progress of the new Local Plan on 22 February 2021 that it is anticipated that around 10,000 homes will need to be delivered within the Green Belt, this is not a definite figure at this stage and will need to be confirmed however it is at the higher end of the position for the previous Local Plan.
- 1.11 Land at Townsend Lane offers an opportunity to increase the supply at a range of tenures in a sustainable growth location, with an appropriate form of development in keeping with the residential character of the area, and without unduly affecting the objective and function of the Green Belt.
- 1.12 SADC is one of the most expensive Districts to live in the UK. In 2019, the ratio of median house price to median gross annual workplace-based earnings stood at 16.09, making it the least affordable district in the East of England, the 4<sup>th</sup> outside London and 13<sup>th</sup> nationally. The median house price in the District stood at £530,000 in September 2019. As a result it is a challenge for prospective buyers and also for Rothamsted to attract and retain staff. In addition, affordable housing delivery has fallen significantly short across the period of 1994-2020, averaging just 69 per annum against the 200 per annum policy objective. The development of Townsend Lane would deliver much-needed affordable housing for the local community.
- 1.13 The St Albans City and District draft Local Plan 2020-2036 was formally withdrawn from examination in November 2020. Prior to this on 14 April 2020, the Planning Inspectors had provided detailed feedback to the Council following concerns expressed over its draft Local Plan. One of the main concerns related to the Green Belt Studies and evidence base.
- 1.14 One of the Inspectors' specific concerns stated that although previously recognised as a source of housing to be identified at some stage, smaller Green Belt sites were disregarded as part of the plan making process. It was the Inspectors view that this approach ruled out, without sufficient justification, an important potential source of housing that may have been found to have a lesser impact on the purposes of the Green Belt than the sites selected. The need to undertake a finer grain assessment and consider merits of smaller-scale sites, as part of a portfolio of opportunities along with strategic sites, reflected the key

themes from previous representations submitted on behalf of Hill to promote the allocation of Land at Townsend Lane.

- 1.15 It was concluded by the Inspectors that a new Green Belt Review would need to be undertaken in accordance with the advice in the NPPF and the PPG and to address the concerns identified in their letter. We welcome the Council's intention to undertake a new Green Belt Review.
- 1.16 With regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) this report demonstrates the site's suitability, availability and capability for new homes. It also reviews the site in terms of its contribution to Green Belt purposes, providing evidence that the provision of new homes on this contained small site will not harm the purposes or objective of the Green Belt in this location and should be supported for inclusion within the draft Local Plan.
- 1.17 The site is suitable for Green Belt release. It has existing built development on three sides and will not extend the settlement beyond its existing western extremity. It will not adversely impact upon the purposes of the Green Belt in respect of sprawl, coalescence, historic towns, recycling urban land. Whilst the site is countryside and therefore will have limited encroachment, given the well-contained nature of the site, development would not encroach into open countryside nor push the boundary of Harpenden further west. On those grounds alone the site should be released from the Green Belt to help meet housing needs.
- 1.18 In addition, the release of the land for development is part of a wider strategy to generate the investment needed to support the science-base of the economy.
- 1.19 This document is accompanied by a series of appendices, which further demonstrate the opportunities and capability for the site to be developed and should be read alongside this report. It is noted that some of the technical reports included within the appendices were produced to support previous local plan representations. However the findings hold good, and these can be updated during the course of 2021 where necessary. An indicative site layout (appendix 3) is included to show how development of the order of 40 to 50 homes could be accommodated on the site. This option shows 41 new homes.



## **2 Site and location**

- 2.1 The town of Harpenden lies midway between Luton and St Albans. It is located in close proximity to the M1 motorway and to Luton Airport to the north (see Figure 1). Harpenden has a main line railway station in the town centre which offers a regular service to London and between Luton and Bedford to Brighton via Gatwick Airport. The site is 1.654 hectares in area and located on the western edge of Harpenden and is currently in agricultural use.
- 2.2 Immediately on the north western edge of the site lies a plant nursery and beyond this is the local primary and secondary schools of Roundwood. On the north-eastern and south-eastern edges existing residential areas border the site and include Hartwell Gardens, Claygate Avenue and Townsend Lane (See Figure 2). Further to the east lies the inner historic core of Harpenden, which is designated as a conservation area. The south-western boundary borders the countryside.
- 2.3 Housing density in the surrounding urban area is varied (see Figure 3) which shows the immediate locale ranging between 5-14 dwellings per hectare (gross). Initial studies demonstrate that a development density in the region of 25 dwellings per hectare (gross) would be appropriate for this suburban location. This will enable the development to deliver new housing that optimises the site and is able to reflect the character and context of the local area whilst also meeting local needs.
- 2.4 Harpenden has been identified through planning authority documents as a town that has the facilities to ensure that any growth within the town is sustainable but also as a town where there is need for small-scale housing development.
- 2.5 Within saved Policy 4 from The City and District of St Albans District Local Plan Review (November 1994), Harpenden is identified as an area suitable for development and there would be a presumption in favour of development on the sites listed within the policy and other sites where housing is consistent with the policies of the plan.
- 2.6 The site is located within the Green Belt. The effect on the open character and objectives of the Green Belt is limited. This is evidenced in detail in this report and accompanying documentation. The development of Townsend Lane would conform to strategic aim for growth in sustainable locations, and provide much-needed new homes.
- 2.7 The concept and indicative site layouts demonstrate that around 50 homes could be sensitively accommodated. The size and characteristics of Land at Townsend Lane, and the form of development appropriate for the site and surrounding area would result in neighbourhood level housing being delivered.

### **3 Suitability for new homes**

- 3.1 Hill Residential has undertaken extensive technical study work that demonstrates the site's suitability for new homes. The review below demonstrates that there are no site-specific constraints that would prevent development of the site. This is supported by the enclosed figures (1-8) and attached appendices (2-15).
- 3.2 Development of the Land at Townsend Lane, Harpenden will not only help contribute to the local housing need but also enable the Trust and Rothamsted to fund vital improvements to its estate in order to attract and retain research staff and students in a globally competitive environment. This will be of benefit to Harpenden and further merits are discussed in section 6 below.

#### **Accessibility to local facilities and amenities**

- 3.3 The town of Harpenden lies midway between Luton and St Albans. It is located in close proximity to the M1 motorway and to Luton Airport to the north. Locally, the principal points of access to the site would be from Townsend Lane. All land required to access the site is within the control of the landowner or is in the public highway.
- 3.4 Paragraph 2.3 of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges TD91/05 "Provision for Non-Motorised Users" states:

*"Walking is used to access a wide variety of destinations including educational facilities, shops, and places of work, normally within a range of up to 2 miles. Walking and rambling can also be undertaken as a leisure activity, often over longer distances."*

- 3.5 Further, paragraph 4.4.1 of the Manual for Streets (MfS) states:

*"Walkable neighbourhoods are typically characterised by having a range of facilities within 10 minutes' (up to about 800 m) walking distance of residential areas which residents may access comfortably on foot. However, this is not an upper limit and PPG13<sup>1</sup> states that walking offers the greatest potential to replace short car trips, particularly those under 2km. MfS encourages a reduction in the need to travel by car through the creation of mixed-use neighbourhoods with interconnected street patterns, where daily needs are within walking distance of most residents."*

- 3.6 Figure 4 highlights the accessibility of the site to Harpenden town centre where all local needs can be met, and to the railway station. As per the above, the location of the site is within walking and cycling distance to essential local facilities, therefore the site is in a highly sustainable location.

#### **Accessibility**

- 3.7 An Access Appraisal is attached as appendix 5. This report provides an assessment of the existing and proposed options. Suitable access to the site can be achieved with links to several modes of transport. The scale of development will not have a material impact on the wider highway network. Vehicular access can be achieved safely from Townsend Lane.
- 3.8 The site is serviced by a number of bus routes including the 321, 357 and 366 connecting the site to Harpenden town centre, Watford, St Albans, London

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst PPG13 has been superseded by the NPPF, the NPPF does not include any reference to walking distances. Given that the most recent version of PPG13 was published in January 2011 it is reasonable to assume that the guidance regarding the 2km distance remains valid.

Colney, Hatfield and Luton. Harpenden also has a railway station in the town centre which offers a regular service to London and between Luton and Bedford to Brighton via Gatwick Airport. The public transport provision in the area is highlighted within figure 5.

### **Schools**

- 3.9 Figure 6 highlights the distance of the site from the closest primary and secondary school. The closest primary school to the site is Roundwood Primary School and closest secondary is Roundwood Park School, both located approximately 800m walking distance from the site.
- 3.10 Given the accessibility of the site to schools, local facilities, amenities and public transport, and its location close to the centre of Harpenden the site would be suitable for people of all ages, and at all stages of life.

### **Topography**

- 3.11 The site, whilst looking relatively flat, gently rises north-east to south-west towards a ridgeline. The inward sloping profile of the site helps to visually contain the site from the countryside to the south-west; something which can be enhanced by the set back of new buildings from the southern boundary.
- 3.12 The topography of the wider area is characterised by valleys of the River Lea and River Ver east and west of a pronounced ridgeline that curves north-west. The site, at 130m AOD, is located on the inner edge of the upper plateau, which is slightly domed before falling away east and west to the river valleys. A horseshoe ridgeline wraps around the north, west and southern edges of the site.

### **Natural Heritage**

- 3.13 The site itself is not subject to any ecological designations. A preliminary ecological appraisal is attached as appendix 12. Three Local Nature Reserves (LNR) lie within 5km of the site boundary. These designated sites are Batford Springs LNR, Marshalls Heath LNR and Wheathampstead Development Centre LNR, These lie 2.4km, 2.8km and 5km east of the site respectively. Each of these is separated from the site by Harpenden town.
- 3.14 There are no ponds on site or within the immediate vicinity and the site has been intensively farmed for many years. The hedgerows and trees surrounding the site have the potential to serve as foraging corridors for bats; and where possible these will be retained in order to preserve important habitat whilst providing screening for the development from the outside. Appendix 13 (bat survey) and 14 (reptile survey) provide further detail. There is no in principle reason on ecological grounds why the site cannot be developed.

### **Flood Risk**

- 3.15 The site lies within flood zone 1 (by reference to the Environment Agency's online flood mapping tool) and is free from any flooding constraint. A Flood Risk Assessment is attached as appendix 11. Through careful design, landscape proposals and selection of materials, development on this site will not be put at risk of flooding. Measures will also be incorporated into the proposals to ensure that the development does not lead to an increased flood risk downstream and incorporates sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) where ground conditions allow.

According to the Environment Agency website the site lies within Groundwater Source Protection Zone 3, and it is within a Surface Water Safeguard Zone and

in a Surface Water Nitrate Vulnerable Zone. Mitigation measures will be put in place to ensure ground or surface water is not contaminated during or post construction. As a result this is not considered to be a constraint to development and can be managed through the detailed design process.

### **Ground Investigation**

- 3.16 A site investigation undertaken by Geo-Environmental Investigations Ltd in October 2015 (Appendix 8) established that the site is suitable for residential development without requiring any remedial action.

### **Cultural Heritage**

- 3.17 There are no historic designations within or immediately adjacent to the site. An historic environment study (Appendix 7) has been undertaken. There are a number of listed buildings within 5km of the site however a large majority are separated from the site by the town of Harpenden. There is a cluster of listed buildings including grade I Rothamsted Manor House and associated buildings some 1.3km south of the site. Due to the enclosed nature of the site and its distance from these historic buildings there is unlikely to be any significant impact upon or change to the setting of these buildings.
- 3.18 There is a scheduled monument 0.8km south-west of the site (Rothamsted Romano-British cemetery), however the distance, topography and sheltered nature of the site all minimise any possible impact on the monument.
- 3.19 The site is close to the Harpenden Conservation area, but does not border it. Intervening development means that it is unlikely to adversely affect the conservation area or its setting.

### **Utilities and services**

- 3.20 The site has urban development to its west, north and east and is comparatively small in scale. There are no known or anticipated constraints with respect to services and utilities (see Appendix 9).

### **Sustainability**

- 3.21 In addition to the inherent sustainability of the site due to its location, the development would adopt a fabric first approach to carbon reduction and incorporate low and zero energy technologies as appropriate.

### **Landscape and visual considerations**

- 3.22 A visual analysis of how the site interacts with the adjoining townscape and landscape has been undertaken and is submitted alongside this document (see Appendix 4). It was initially undertaken as part of the SADC strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA) in 2016. It concludes that the site is well contained due to natural topography and vegetation cover, and visibility of the site is very limited.
- 3.23 Views of the site from the urban area are limited to the immediate locality. The development would be visible from a small number of surrounding residential properties, being viewed within the existing semi-urban context. The site is visible from Claygate Avenue as it rises towards the ridgeline to the south-west. However its rise and its containment by hedging mean the land does not appear to be part of the wider countryside. Indeed, views to the countryside beyond are not available from this location. Views from Townsend Lane are screened by the hedgerow on the site's boundary. Views to the site are therefore mostly from

upper floor windows of the surrounding properties in Townsend Lane and in Hartwell Gardens.

- 3.24 From the countryside the site is also visually contained with very limited inter-visibility with the surrounding landscape. A combination of the ridgeline, abundant hedgerow trees, copses and woodlands limit views of the site to the immediate area. Importantly, the site is perceived within a semi-urban environment, sitting within the settlement edge. Development of this site will therefore not result in the sprawl of Harpenden beyond the existing limits of the town or contribute to its coalescence with Redbourn, the nearest settlement to this part of Harpenden.
- 3.25 The proposals will retain the key vegetation structure on the site, which will be supplemented by additional planting. The site layout and design will also be sympathetic to and in-keeping with the surrounding context. The low-key settlement edge will also be maintained. The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) concludes that the proposals will not materially alter the experiential value of existing local views; and where the site is visible it is viewed as an area strongly associated with the existing built development. The plateau and ridgeline to the south west form a natural boundary to development, and the site sits on the eastern valley slope, maintaining the existing settlement pattern.

### **Green Belt**

- 3.26 The NPPF (paragraph 133) states *“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.”* Paragraph 134 goes on to identify the five purposes of the green belt as follows:
- To check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
  - To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
  - To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
  - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
  - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 3.27 As part of SADC’s previous (now withdrawn) Local Plan process, a Green Belt Review was undertaken. Whilst it is acknowledged that a new Green Belt Review will be undertaken in 2021, it remains relevant to comment upon the previous evidence base until a new document(s) is prepared in the context of Land at Townsend Lane.
- 3.28 The Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment for Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield (2013) assesses parcels of land using the five green belt purposes in order to assess their suitability for development. The site lies within parcel GB20 (Figure 9), and the review’s conclusions about its contribution to the purposes of the green belt are set out in table 1 overleaf.
- 3.29 The review identifies that parcel GB20 provides an important gap between settlements. However, parcel GB20 is an extensive area covering 1,150ha to the west of Harpenden and the general conclusions reached regarding the importance of this parcel to the purposes of the wider green belt are not applicable to every site within the parcel. A much finer-grained assessment is required with respect to particular sites. Land at Townsend Lane is 1.65ha, approximately 1/700<sup>th</sup> of parcel GB20 and if assessed on its merits and

contribution, will result in a conclusion that the site could be released without significant harm to green belt purposes.

3.30 Following the landscape and visual analysis it is concluded that the site in question does not contribute towards the wider green belt purposes of parcel GB20. Table 1 identifies and reviews the role of this particular site within parcel GB20.

3.31 Figures 7 and 8 illustrate pictorially the points made in table 1 with respect to the site. They demonstrate that:

- Placing new homes on this site will not result in a reduction in the distance between Harpenden and Redbourn, or between Harpenden and any other 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> tier settlement. The outer edge of the current built-up area of Harpenden in the immediate vicinity of the site is aligned with the south western edge of the site
- There are clear defensible boundaries to the edges of the site, which would form the Green Belt boundary in this location, contiguous with the urban edge to the east
- The site is well contained with very limited views from the countryside, due to its topography and landscape features
- The site is surrounded by urban development to the south and east
- The historic core of Harpenden and its conservation area are not visible from the site or countryside in this location. New homes will be of high quality design and complement the existing character of the area.

**Table 1: Review of Parcel GB20 and land at Townsend Lane (applying the assessment method in the SKM Green Belt Review: Purposes Assessment, November 2013)**

**Key:**

Significant contribution to green belt purposes	
Partial contribution to green belt purposes	
Limited or no contribution to green belt purposes	

A. Parcel GB20 assessment (from the 2013 Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment, Part I, Annex 1)			B. Land south of Townsend Lane, Harpenden (ToR review)		
	Contribution	Comments	Contribution	Comments	
<b>Green Belt Purpose Assessment</b>					
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Significant	The parcel is located south of Luton and Dunstable and forms a strong connection with a wider network of parcels to the north to restrict sprawl.	Limited or no	1) Does the parcel act, in itself, as an effective barrier against sprawl from large built-up areas outside of the study area specifically London, Luton & Dunstable and Stevenage?	<b>No</b> – This will not be sprawl. This site will be high quality and well-planned, and appear as a logical and expected part of the town. The parcel of land does not act as a barrier, the town of Harpenden will be the same distance from Luton and Dunstable whether or not this development were to be brought forward.
				2) Does the parcel contribute, as part of a wider network of parcels, to a strategic barrier against the sprawl of these built-up areas?	<b>No</b> - This particular section of GB20 is surrounded by development on three sides, nor does it extend the built up area further west into Parcel GB20, therefore the small parcel of land does not contribute to the strategic barrier between these built up areas.
To prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Limited or No	The parcel does not fully separate neighbouring 1 <sup>st</sup> tier settlements.	Limited or no	3) Does the parcel provide, or form part of, a gap or space between existing 1 <sup>st</sup> tier settlements?	<b>No</b> - This particular section of GB20 is bounded by development on three sides, therefore the small parcel of land does not contribute to the strategic barrier between these built up areas.
				4) What is the distance of the gap between the settlements?	Development of the site will not reduce the gap between Harpenden and any 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> tier settlements. The gap between Harpenden and the nearest settlement in the vicinity of the site, Redbourn, is currently 1.7km (approx.). This will not be affected by the development of the site.
				5) Is there evidence of ribbon development of major route corridors?	<b>No</b>
				6) What is the visual perception of the gap between settlements from major route corridors?	There is a large gap between all settlements, to which the site does not contribute (See LVA).
				7) Would a reduction in the gap compromise the separation of settlements in physical terms?	<b>No</b> - The development of this small parcel of land will make no difference to the size of the gap between settlements.
				8) Would a reduction in the gap compromise the separation of settlements and the overall openness of the parcel visually?	<b>No</b> - The development of this small parcel of land will not compromise or impact the overall openness of the gap.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Partial	The parcel displays a wide mix of urban fringe and rural and countryside characteristics. It predominantly contains large arable fields with hedgerow boundaries and hedgerow trees, and to the north there is mixed arable and pasture farmland around the rough grassland of the open Kinsbourne Green	Limited or No	9) What countryside/ rural characteristics exist within the parcel including agricultural or forestry land uses and how is this recognised in established national and local landscape designations?	The small land parcel is in agricultural use with a hedgerow defining its southern limit. It is not within any particular national or local landscape designations.

A. Parcel GB20 assessment (from the 2013 Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment, Part I, Annex 1)			B. Land south of Townsend Lane, Harpenden (ToR review)		
Contribution	Comments		Contribution	Comments	
<b>Green Belt Purpose Assessment</b>					
		<p>common. The central part of the parcel exhibits some urban influences including the Rothamsted Agricultural Experimental Station comprising a large manor house and parkland, surrounded by small, geometric, field plots (created for crop experiments).</p> <p>Notably, the west edge of Harpenden exhibits more localised levels of built enclosure as a result of surrounding residential development. There is also evidence of encroachment as recent housing development in the Green Belt is evident at Geescroft Walk and Meadow View, and encroachment at Hatching Green. The M1 also represents a key urban influence on the parcel and is less well concealed but audibly intrusive. Levels of visual openness are high in general but vary throughout the parcel.</p>			<p>The Agricultural Land Classification Report (Appendix 6) concludes that the site is grade 3a agricultural land, a medium grade on the scale. The agricultural land classification is graded from 1 to 5 in relation to its quality: Grade 1 – Excellent Grade 2 – Very good Grade 3a – Good Grade 3b – Moderate Grade 4 – Poor Grade 5 – Very poor.</p>
				10) Has there already been significant encroachment by built development or other urbanising elements?	<p>The site sits within an urban context. It has residential development on two sides and business development on a third side. Typical of a thriving historic town, the surrounding residential areas date from various periods, reflecting the town's small scale and sensitive growth. The site is therefore set within an urban context of varying ages. Recent development to the east of the site has not extended the urban edge westwards, but comprised a rounding off of the edge, as development on this site would.</p>
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Significant	The parcel adjoins Harpenden and Redbourn Conservation Areas. The Green Belt acts as an immediate open and rural historic setting, providing views to and from the countryside.	Limited to No	11) What settlements or places within historic features exist within the parcel?	No settlements or historic places lie within the parcel or site. Harpenden conservation area is separated both physically and visually from the site by residential development. Redbourn Conservation Area is over 1.7km away. In any event Redbourn is not an historic "town" and neither is Harpenden. The purpose as set out within the Green Belt Review and the NPPF refers to 'historic towns'. The designation of Conservation Areas does not constitute a place as a historic town.
				12) What is the relationship and connection (in the form of character, views and visual perception) between the parcel and historic feature?	Again Conservation Areas are not historic towns and should not be assessed as such. Further, the purpose relates to the setting and special character of 'historic towns' and does not assess the 'rural historic setting'. In



A. Parcel GB20 assessment (from the 2013 Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment, Part I, Annex 1)			B. Land south of Townsend Lane, Harpenden (ToR review)		
Contribution	Comments		Contribution	Comments	
<b>Green Belt Purpose Assessment</b>					
					any case, the feature of GB20 as an immediate open setting to Harpenden and Redbourn, that provides views to and from the countryside will not be compromised by the development of this site. The site is in a semi urban context and is very enclosed, and therefore this small part of green belt land adds little to this purpose of the green belt. The site is not on any major transport route into the town, so will not play a major role in shaping people's perception of arriving in Harpenden.
				13) Does the parcel provide an open setting or a buffer against encroachment by development around settlements or places with historic features?	Given the topography of the land and the hedgerow along the south-west boundary of the site, it does not contribute towards the setting of the town when viewed from the countryside. The southern hedgerow forms an effective buffer from encroachment into the open countryside.
To maintain the existing settlement pattern	Significant	The parcel provides the primary local gap to separate Harpenden (1st) and Redbourn (2nd). This is a large at 2.0k m and is largely open however is does contain the Experimental Station. Any reduction in the gap would be unlikely to comprise the separation of settlements in physical or visual terms, or overall openness. The parcel also provides a very narrow secondary local gap between Harpenden and Annables Kinsbourn Green (3rd) which represents ribbon development extending from the northwest of Harpenden along The Common. Any reduction in this gap would compromise the separation of settlements in physical terms, and affect overall levels of visual openness.	Limited to No	14) Same assessment as 2 <sup>nd</sup> purpose, applied to spaces and gaps between existing 1 <sup>st</sup> tier settlements	
				a) Does the parcel provide, or form part of, a gap or space between existing 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> tier settlements?	The closest 2 <sup>nd</sup> tier settlement to the site is Redbourn. Development of the site would not affect the gap between Harpenden and Redbourn as there are built-up areas of Harpenden closer to Redbourn than the site. There is no intervisibility between Redbourn and the site and hence no sense of the gap being diminished.
				b) What is the distance of the gap between the settlements?	At the closest point Harpenden is 1.7km from Redbourn, the site is 1.95km from Redbourn.
				c) Is there evidence of ribbon development of major route corridors?	Not in this location.
				d) What is the visual perception of the gap between settlements from major route corridors?	The LVA notes the numerous hedgerows, trees, copses and wooded areas in the vicinity of the site. There is no visibility of the site from the A5183 major route corridor.
				e) Would a reduction in the gap compromise the separation of settlements in physical terms?	The development of the site would not result in a reduction in the gap.
				f) Would a reduction in the gap compromise the separation of settlements and the overall openness of the parcel visually?	The development of the site would not result in a reduction in the gap.
Level of openness and countryside character					
Existence of built development	The level of built development is low at 0.5%. Kinsbourne Green represents a wayside development of large single dwellings along the edge of a common with no real centre.		The site is bordered on three sides by built development.		
Visual openness	Views are generally framed and filtered by treed hedgerows. The central Rothamsted Park area is concealed by a combination of access restrictions and the presence of vegetation in the form of field hedgerows and parkland avenues. Lower and partial hedgerows to the north of this area, around Kinsbourne Green, allow longer views of the more open landscape.		The site is very contained due to the topography, the built development on three sides and also the hedgerows and trees that border the site. Views across the site are generally only seen from the top floors of houses along Townsend Lane.		

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Contribution	Comments	Contribution	Comments
<b>Green Belt Purpose Assessment</b>			
Countryside character	The parcel has a rural character but there are recreational uses such as schools, a rugby club and golf courses adjacent to the urban fringe as well as the busy M1 corridor to the west.		Although in agricultural use the site is developed on three sides and is therefore viewed within an urban context. It is within easy walking distance to schools and also close to shops and other recreational facilities.

## **4 Site availability**

- 4.1 The Trust is the sole owner of the 1.654 hectare site. All land required to access the site is within the control of the landowner or is in the public highway. As such it can be confirmed that the site is immediately available for development. A high-quality and well respected house builder, Hill Residential, has been selected as the Trust's delivery partner and as with all of its proposals for new homes is keen to engage with local representatives and residents before drawing up detailed proposals for the site. Hill delivers around 2,000 new homes each year and has a proven track record of delivery.

## **5 Achievability and delivery**

- 5.1 The following indicative programming demonstrates when the site could start contributing to local housing needs. Given what is known of the site, it is not expected that there would be a need for any significant enabling or infrastructure works. Therefore, assuming Local Plan adoption by end of 2023 for around 50 homes, the first homes could be built and available for occupation by late 2025.

## **6 Supporting the local economy and science-base**

- 6.1 The Hertfordshire LEPs number 1 priority is to maintain global excellence in science and technology. Rothamsted plays a significant role in the Eastern Region Bio-Science cluster, the largest concentration of bioscience research and biotechnology commercial activity in Western Europe. The government has identified and recognised AgriTech as one of eight disciplines with the greatest potential in the UK.
- 6.2 Release of this site for development is part of an overarching strategy for the Trust to support the science-based economy Post-Brexit and Post-COVID. Hill considers that, in addition to the reasons already advanced in relation to housing need, sustainability and limited green belt contribution of the site, release of the land will assist the Trust and support its work as part of its wider strategy to support the science-based economy Post-Brexit and Post-COVID and represents an additional 'exceptional circumstances' to release the site.

**Table 3: Timescale of delivery of a full planning application in accordance with Local Plan adoption end of 2023**

Year	2021				2022				2023				2024				2025			
Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Local engagement																				
Design evolution and pre-application meetings with the Local Planning Authority																				
Local Plan site promotion to adoption																				
Submission and determination of planning application																				
Discharge of pre-commencement conditions																				
Construction drawings																				
Construction and occupation																				

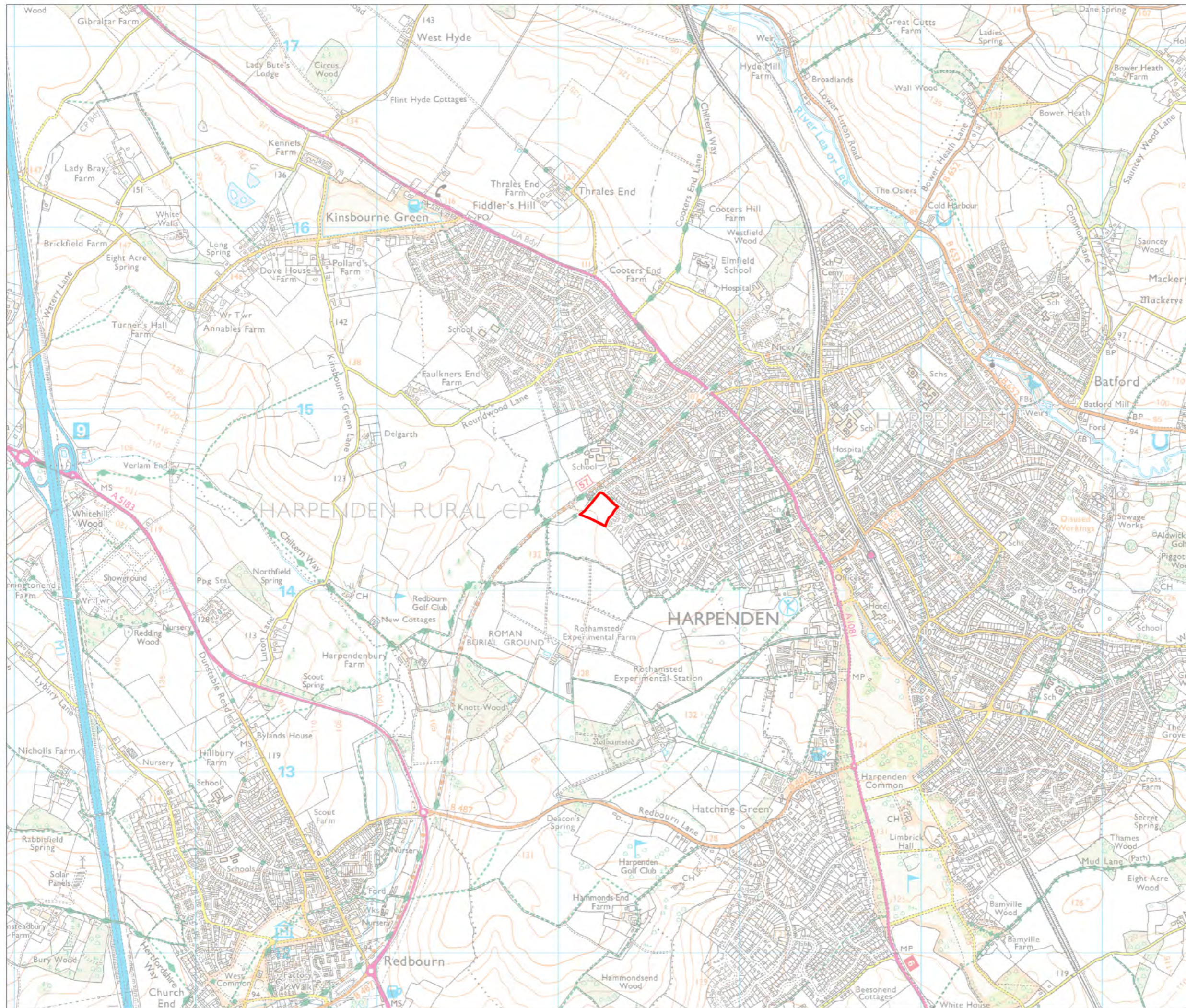
## 7 Conclusions

7.1 Land at Townsend Lane is being submitted to the SADC's Call for Sites (March 2021) as a site with excellent potential for development for the following reasons:

- 1) The site is suitable and available for development purposes, and delivery is fully achievable.
- 2) The development of the site would present the opportunity for a 'strong green edge' to the western side of the site, adjoin the open countryside, which would strengthen the boundary between the settlement and the green belt.
- 3) Development of this section of land from green belt would not harm the purposes of the wider green belt given its visual containment and the fact that it is developed on three sides.
- 4) The site itself is not subject to physical or environmental constraints that would affect development.
- 5) It is anticipated that it would be possible to deliver new homes by the Q4 2025, and therefore the site could contribute to meeting the housing needs of St Albans City and District, including the local needs of Harpenden, early in the plan period.
- 6) The site assessed on its own merits makes a limited or no contribution towards checking sprawl, preventing merging, recycling urban land, preserving setting or maintaining local gap.

7.2 The above, on their own, represent the exceptional circumstances necessary to justify the site's removal from the Green Belt and its allocation for residential development. In addition, the release of the land would support the wider strategy of the Trust, to generate investment in Rothamsted.

7.3 As a local employer, firmly committed to the area, the Trust has a stake in the future of Harpenden and wishes to contribute positively to the local community in terms of helping to provide a range of homes, as well as securing its longer-term future at the forefront of research. Hill, working closely with the Trust, will be seeking the views of neighbouring residents with respect to the possible layout of the site, its landscaping, and the character of the new homes that could be provided, and will bring their design expertise and track record of delivery of high quality and award-winning homes that enhance and complement their surroundings.




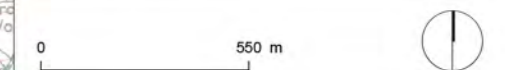
 Site boundary

Figure 1. Site location

**Land at Townsend Lane, Harpenden Hill**



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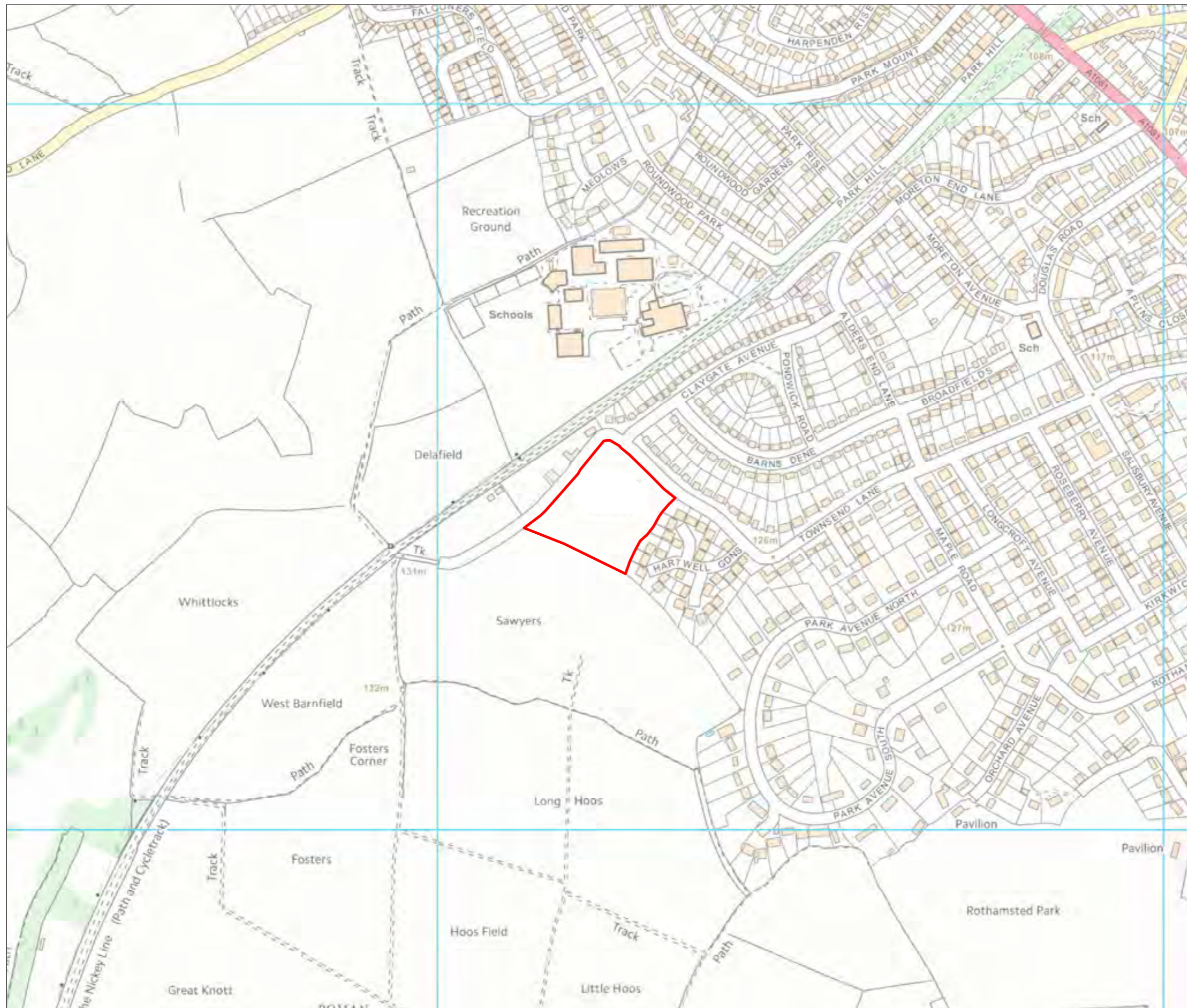


**TERENCE O'ROURKE**

LONDON  
Linen Hall  
162-168 Regent St  
London  
W1B 5TE

BOURNMOUTH  
Everdene House  
Deanleigh Road  
Bournemouth  
BH7 7DU

TELEPHONE  
020 3664 6755  
www.torrltd.co.uk




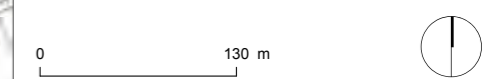
 Site boundary

Figure 2. Site plan

**Land at Townsend Lane, Harpenden Hill**



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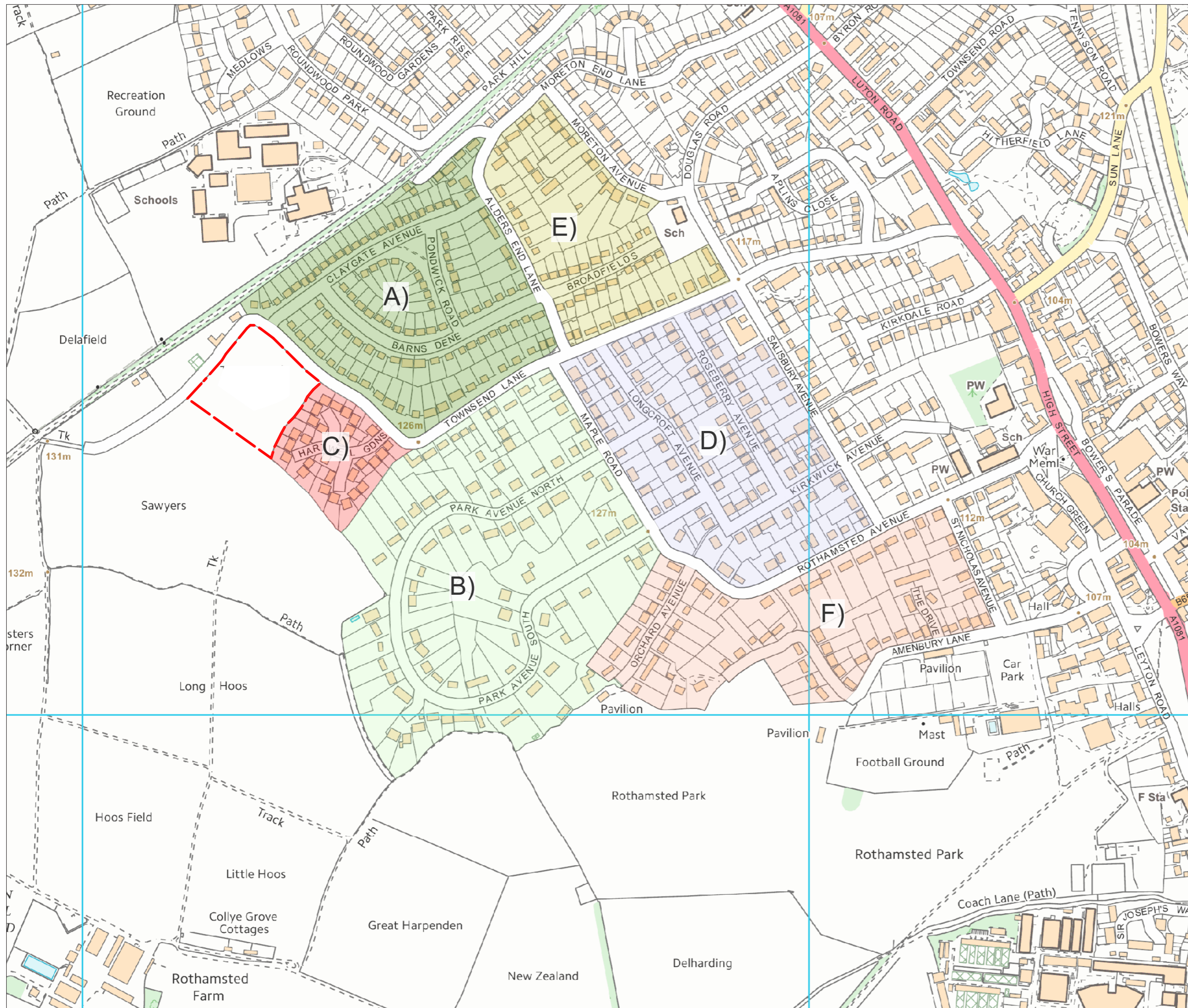


**TERENCE O'ROURKE**

**LONDON**  
Linen Hall  
162-168 Regent St  
London  
W1B 5TE

**BOURNEMOUTH**  
Everdene House  
Deansleigh Road  
Bournemouth  
BH7 7DU

**TELEPHONE**  
6755  
www.torfd.co.uk



**Densities around the site**

- A) 115 dwellings/8.98ha = 12 dph
- B) 81 dwellings/15.6ha = 5dph
- C) 28 dwellings/2ha = 14 dph
- D) 110 dwellings/9.6ha = 11 dph
- E) 62 dwellings/5.3ha = 11 dph
- F) 66 dwellings/8ha = 8 dph

**Figure 3. Local housing density study**

**Land at Townsend Lane, Harpenden Hill**



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LONDON  
Linen Hall  
162-168 Regent St  
London  
W1B 5TE

BOURNEMOUTH  
Everdene House  
Deansleigh Road  
Bournemouth  
BH7 7DU

TELEPHONE  
01752 8755  
www.torttd.co.uk





Figure 4. Site accessibility



Figure 5. Public transport accessibility



Figure 6. School accessibility

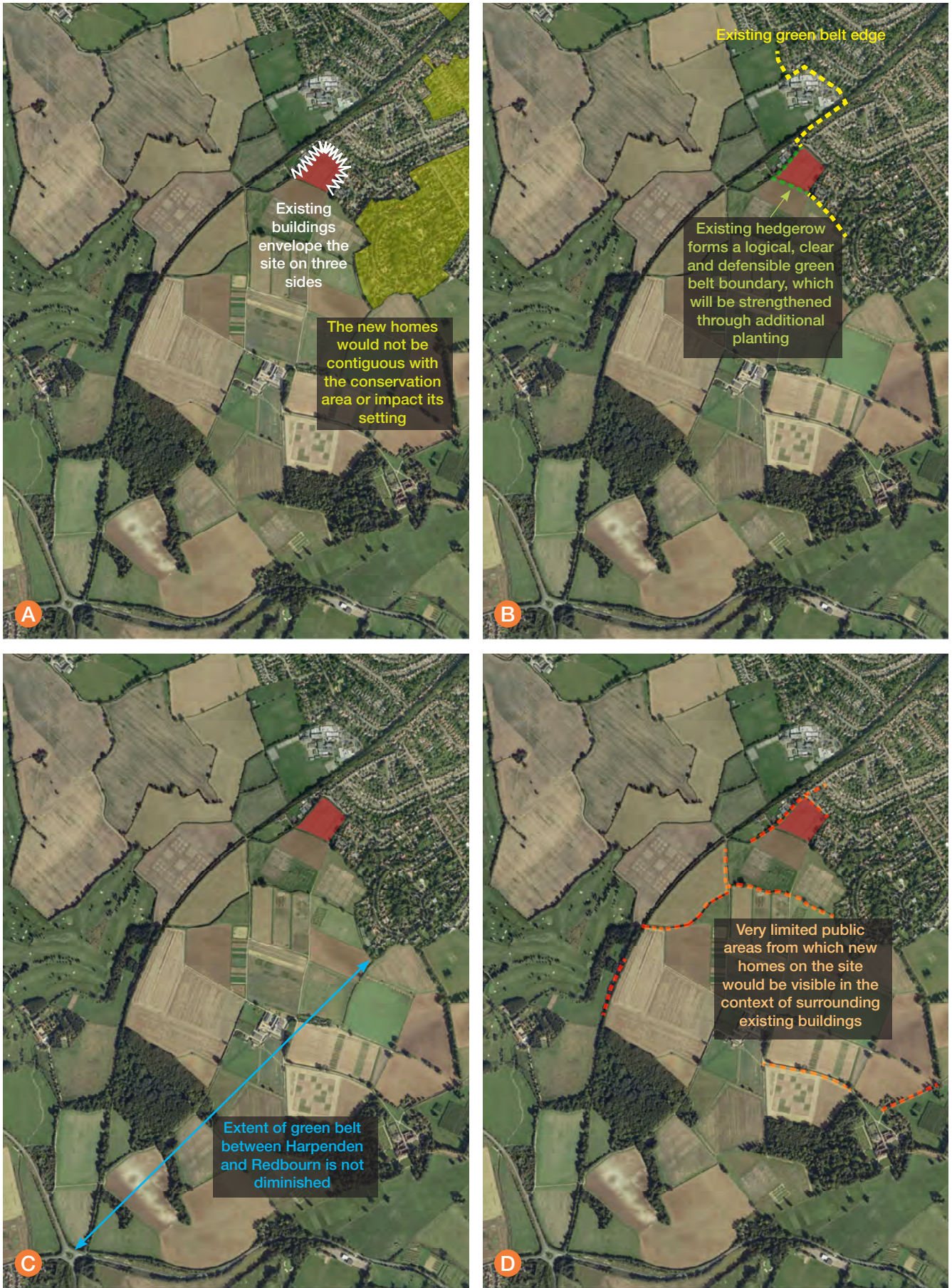
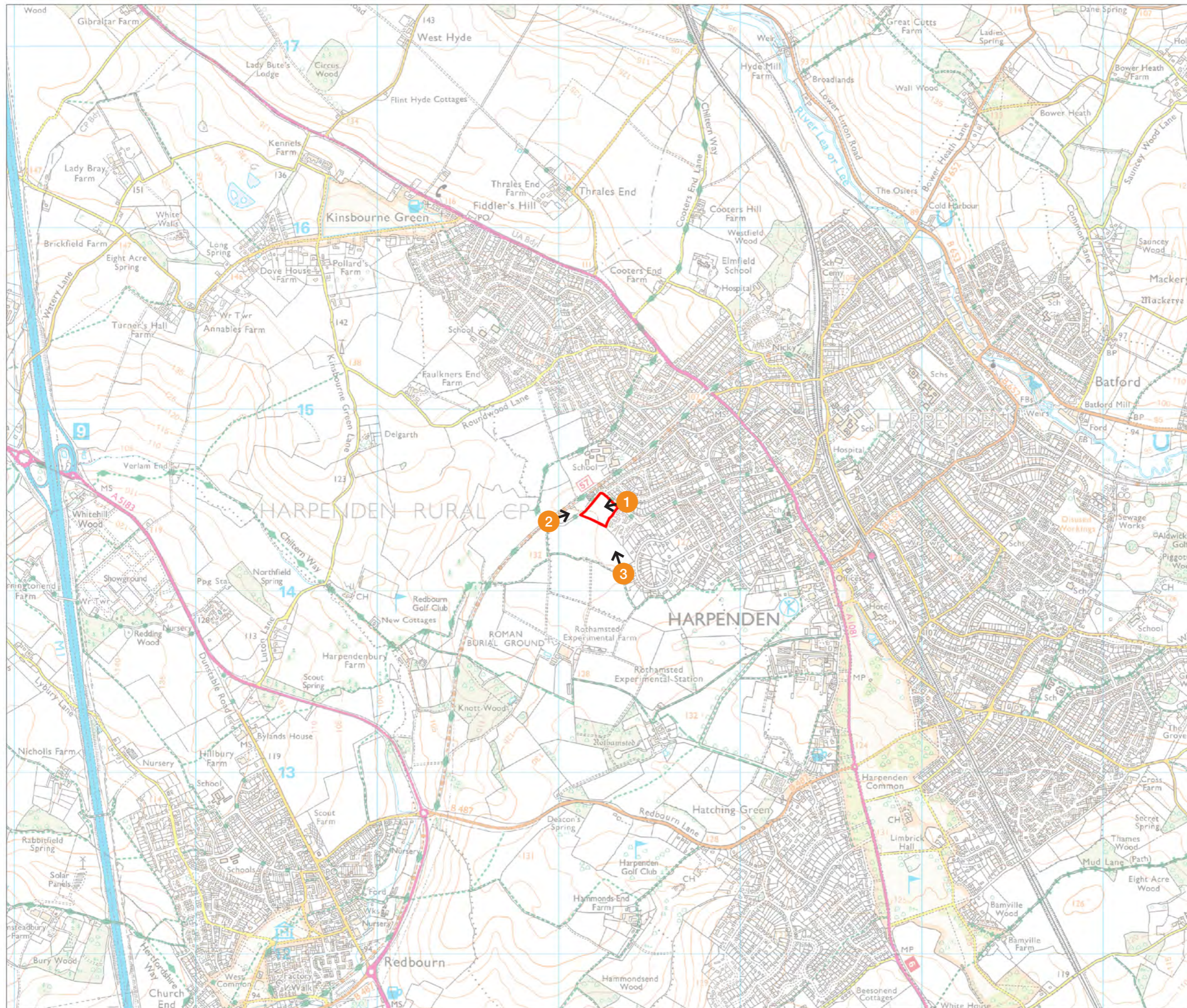



Figure 7. Green belt analysis (1)

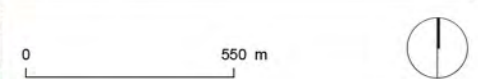




 Site boundary

Photograph viewpoint locations

Land at Townsend Lane, Harpenden Hill



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Linen Hall  
162-168 Regent St  
London  
W1B 5TE

BOURNMOUTH  
Everdene House  
Deanleigh Road  
Bournemouth  
BH7 7DU

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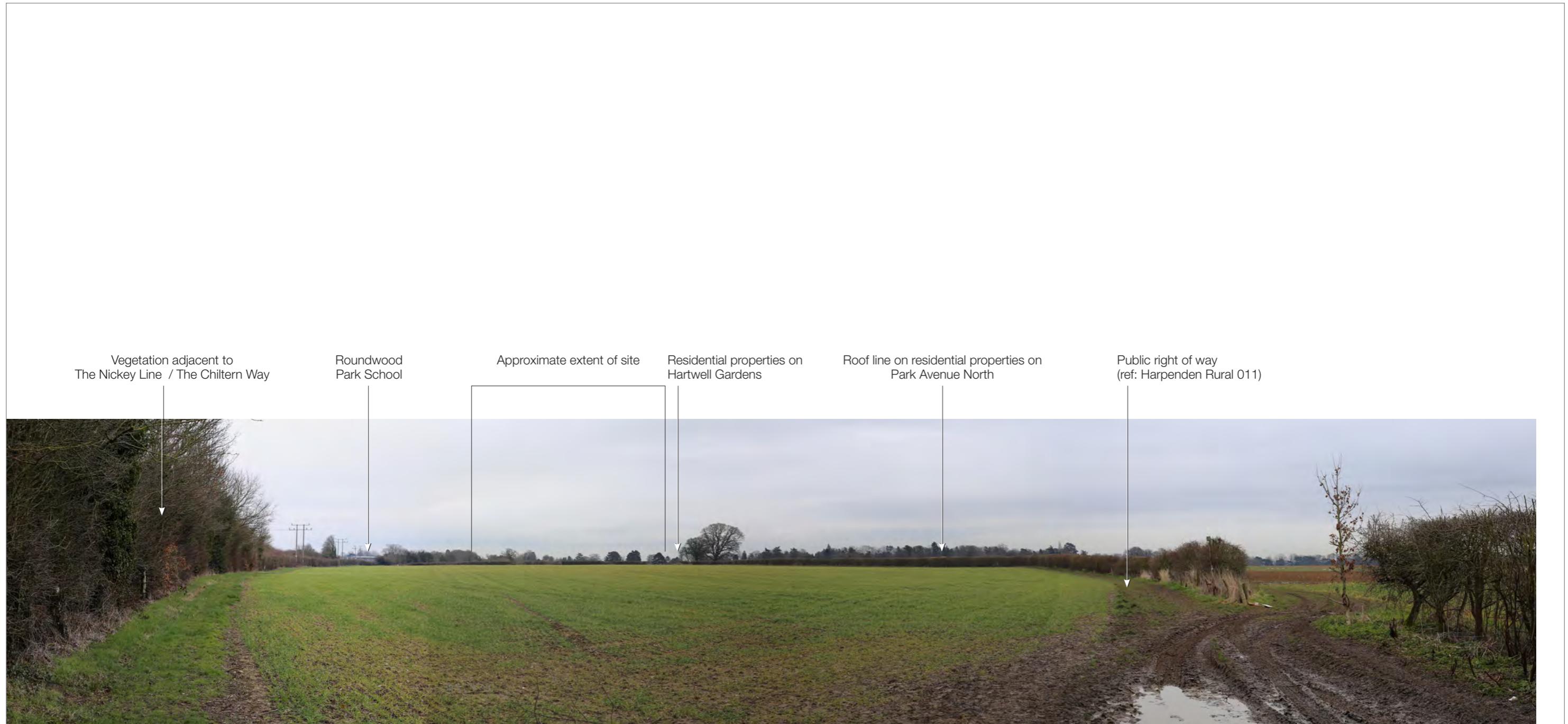


Sites north eastern boundary

Townsend road

Residential properties on Claygate Avenue

Photograph 1. Taken from Townsend Lane adjacent to the sites north eastern bounday looking west



Photograph 2. Taken from a public right of way (ref: Harpenden Rural 011) adjacent to the Nickey Line / The Chiltern Way approximately 650m to the south west of the site looking north east



Photograph 3. Taken from a public right of way (ref: Harpenden Rural 001) to the south of the site looking north



# LAND AT TOWNSEND LANE, HARPENDEN

SUBMITTED IN SUPPORT OF REPRESENTATION TO THE ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT 2020-2038 LOCAL PLAN CALL FOR SITES CONSULTATION, MARCH 2021

HILL RESIDENTIAL LIMITED

MARCH 2021



Harpenden

*'a place to live, a place to work, a place to invest and a place to visit'*

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# Harpenden

*'a place to live, a place to work, a place to invest and a place to visit'*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared on behalf of Hill Residential, the selected development partner of the Lawes Agricultural Trust, in respect of land off Townsend Lane, Harpenden (the site). It demonstrates that the site is suitable, available and deliverable with respect to the provision of a sustainable housing development that will help meet local housing need and deliver future funding requirements of the trust.

As such the site should be identified for housing in the St Albans City and District Local Plan and prioritised for early delivery. This document is submitted to the council in support of representations submitted by Hill Residential Limited to the Call for Sites consultation which runs from 25 January - 8 March 2021.

The Lawes Agricultural Trust is a registered charity. The Trust's charitable objective is to support scientific investigation and research to advance the science of agriculture. It originates in a settlement established in 1889 by Sir John Lawes, the local Harpenden entrepreneur and landowner who is often referred to as the father of agricultural science. He founded the artificial fertilizer industry and, in 1843 the Rothamsted Experimental Station (now known as Rothamsted Research), which is the oldest active agricultural research station in the world, attracting numerous visiting scientists to the location.

The Lawes Agricultural Trust is owner of the land and buildings at Rothamsted, Harpenden, Hertfordshire and also at Brooms Barn, Suffolk. Rothamsted Research, also a charitable body, operates from both of these sites and the trust supports the work in a variety of ways including the upkeep of the long term experiments dating from 1843 and provision of residential accommodation for Rothamsted scientists. Rothamsted as a centre of international excellence in the field of agricultural and environmental research and makes a world-class contribution to advances in agricultural sustainability, biotechnology and the bio-economy. The national and global need for sustainable development inspires Rothamsted in fostering research and creating new products and services in the cause of food security, from plant and microbial sources.

The activities of the Lawes Trust and Rothamsted Research are of international significance. This document highlights the link between the activities of the Lawes Agricultural Trust and the potential development of the site off Townsend Lane in Harpenden, as proceeds from development will assist the Trust, along with other potential sources of funding, to provide on-going investment in Rothamsted. This would support investment in the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) number 1 priority to maintain global excellence in science and technology and as a result, is considered to contribute towards the exceptional circumstances that justify an amendment to the green belt boundary in this location and the site being allocated for new homes.

The primary factor in support for development of the site is its sustainable location, adjoining the existing shops and services of Harpenden and the very limited contribution that the site currently makes to the purposes of the green belt in this location which both constitute exceptional circumstances. It is demonstrated that locating homes on this site will not harm the purpose of the green belt into the west of Harpenden.

As with most land surrounding the settlements in St Albans City and District, the site is currently designated as green belt. In order to support any formal planning application, and inform the ongoing work of St Albans City and District Council review into the release of appropriate green belt land, this document outlines the landscape and master planning principles that would inform any new housing development on the site. It explains how the delivery of up to 50 new homes in this location would be a sustainable way to meet local housing need without harm to the objectives and purposes of the green belt. It demonstrates how sound place-making principles will ensure an integrated and high quality addition to Harpenden.

Specifically it demonstrates that new housing would:

- Be contiguous with the existing urban edge and benefit from excellent public transport links, including Harpenden railway station on the Thameslink to London/Luton/Brighton and a number of local bus routes
- Have excellent pedestrian and cycle links to nearby shops and community facilities on Harpenden High Street and the local Roundwood primary school and secondary school, thereby promoting the concept of a walkable neighbourhood
- Benefit from attractive leisure and public amenity both within the site and the immediate locality
- Provide a good landscape setting based on the site's landscape features, such as the existing boundary hedges, and not harm the objectives and purposes of the metropolitan green belt in this location

It also demonstrates that the site is a logical location for the release of green belt, being visually contained and benefiting from strong, well-defined landscape boundaries that will provide a robust new defensible green belt boundary, which can be augmented with additional landscaping.

Based on the initial analysis of the site and its context, some preliminary design principles have been developed. The trust and Hill will engage with local residents, the town council and planning authority to discuss and develop these further to ensure a sensitive and design-led approach to the site.



Figure 1.1: Harpenden's attractive conservation area

## 1.1 LOCATION

The town of Harpenden lies midway between Luton and St. Albans. It is located in close proximity to the M1 motorway and to Luton Airport to the north. The site is 1.654 hectares and located on the western edge of Harpenden (see figure 1.3). It is currently in agricultural use being of grade 3 quality.

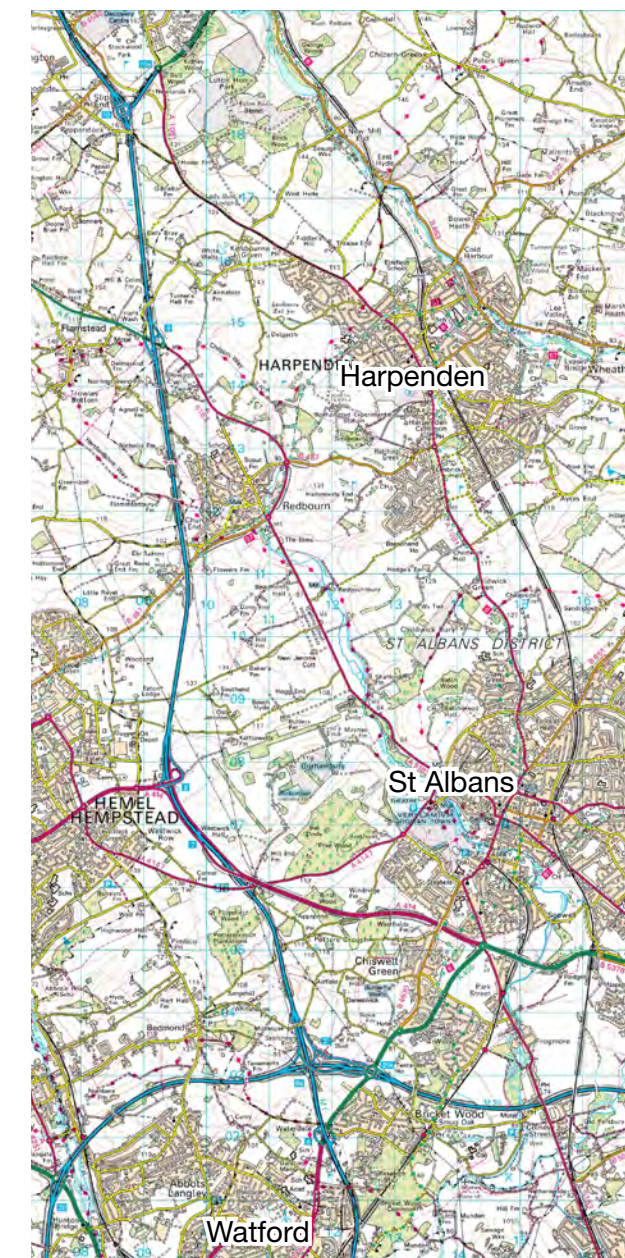


Figure 1.2: Harpenden location map

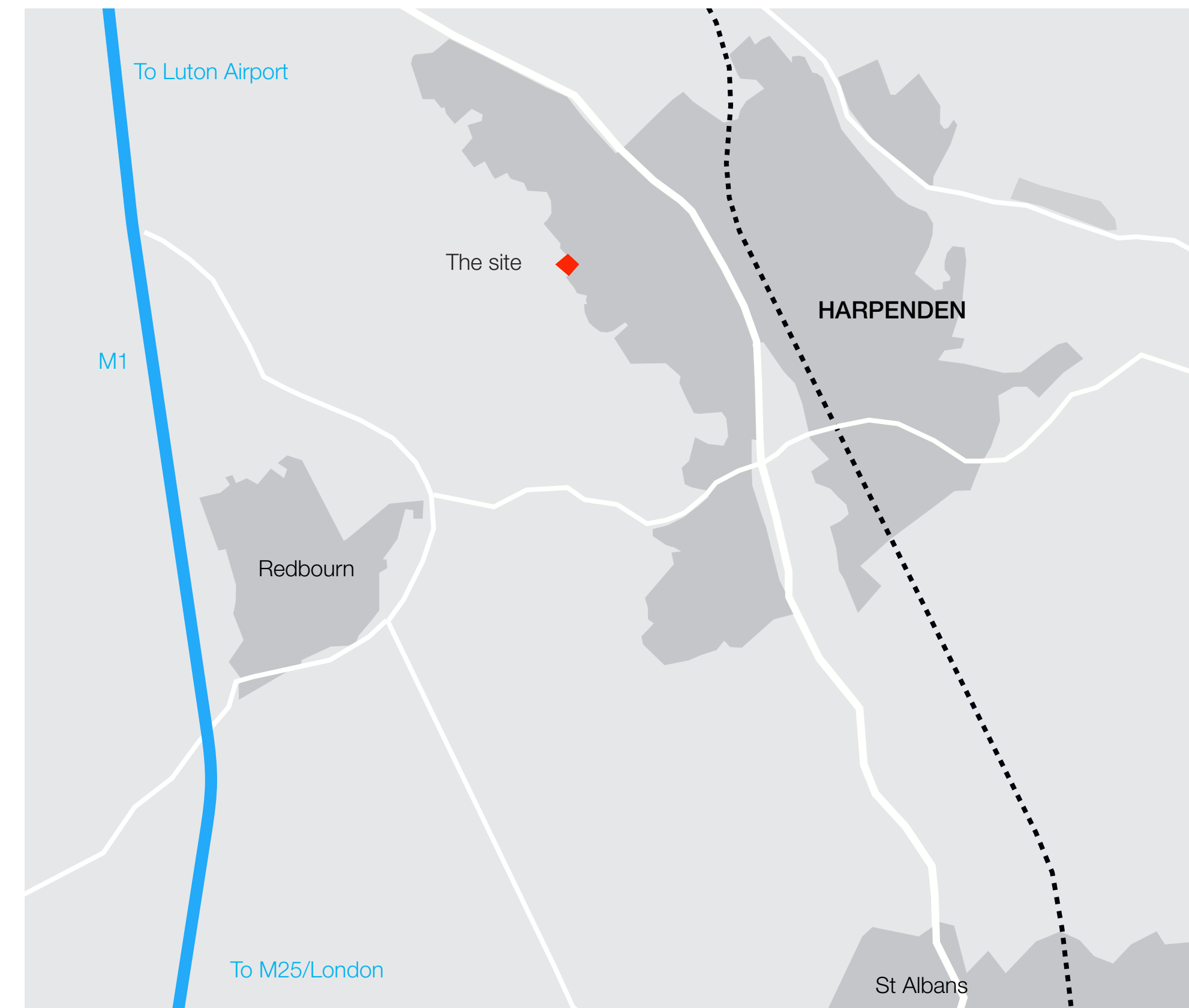


Figure 1.3: The site lies on the western edge of Harpenden

## 1.2 PLANNING POLICY OVERVIEW

### Current policy

The statutory Development Plan for the site comprises:

- St Albans District Local Plan Review (1994) – Saved and deleted policies version July 2020
- Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan – Adopted 2019
- Waste Core Strategy & Development Management Policies DPD - Adopted 2012
- Waste Site Allocations DPD – Adopted 2014
- The Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan 2007.

St Albans City and District lies wholly within the metropolitan green belt, which is drawn tightly around the main settlements and washes over the smaller villages. As such the site, which abuts the urban area of Harpenden and is enclosed on three sides by existing development, is currently washed over by the green belt. With respect to landscape character, the site is located within the Rothamsted Plateau and Kinsbourne Green Landscape Character Area (Hertfordshire County Council Ref: 099).

Whilst the site is close to the Harpenden conservation area, it does not border it.

- Listed buildings
- Scheduled monuments
- Ancient woodland inventory
- Conservation areas
- Green belt

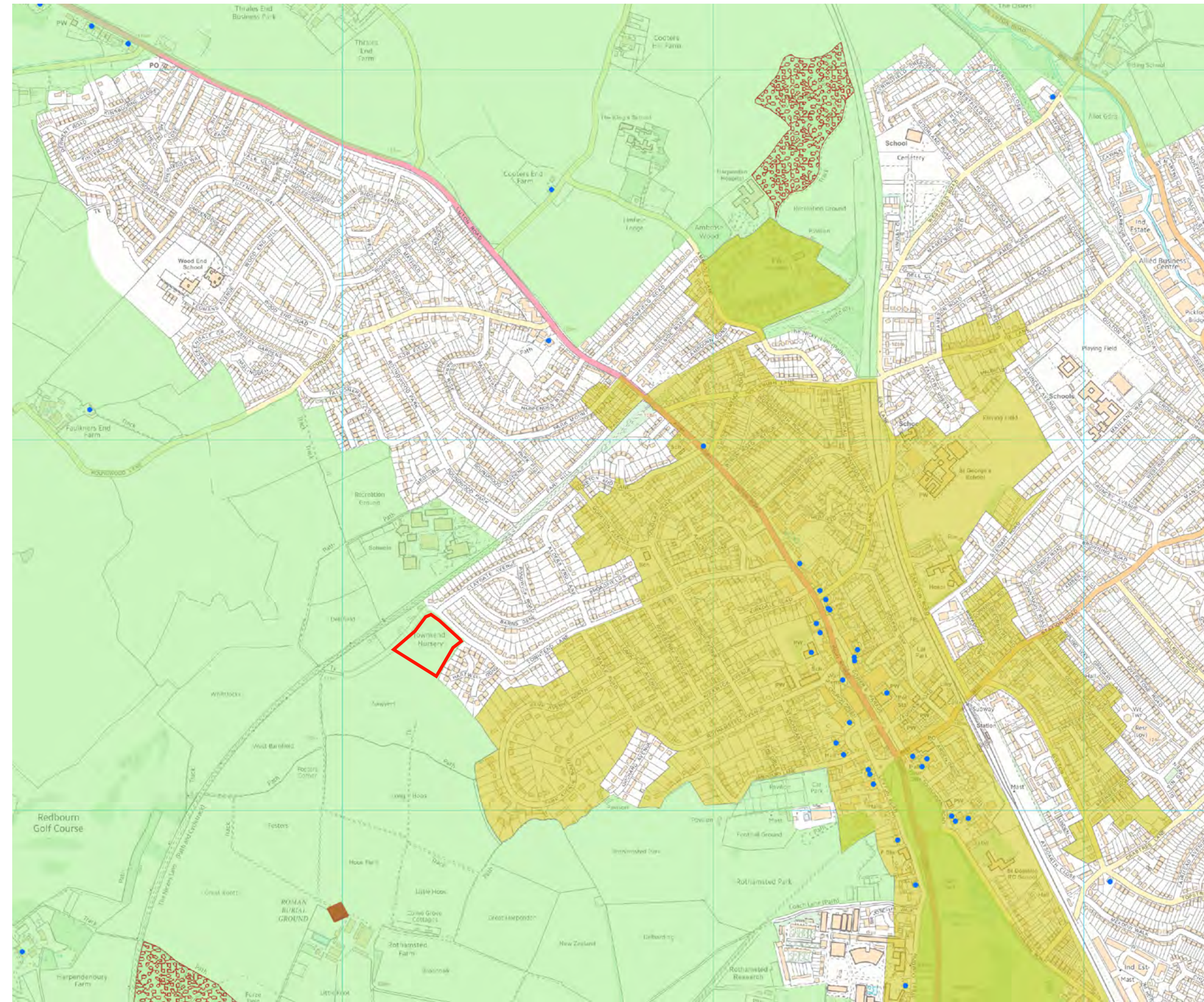


Figure 1.4: Designations in the vicinity of the site.

### Saved local plan designations

Other than the green belt mentioned above there are no other planning or minerals/waste designations on the site (figure s1.4 and 1.5). There are no flood risk, heritage, or environmental constraints on the site.

- Listed buildings
- Registered parks and gardens
- Scheduled monuments
- Local Nature Reserve
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Ancient woodland inventory
- Woodland Trust site

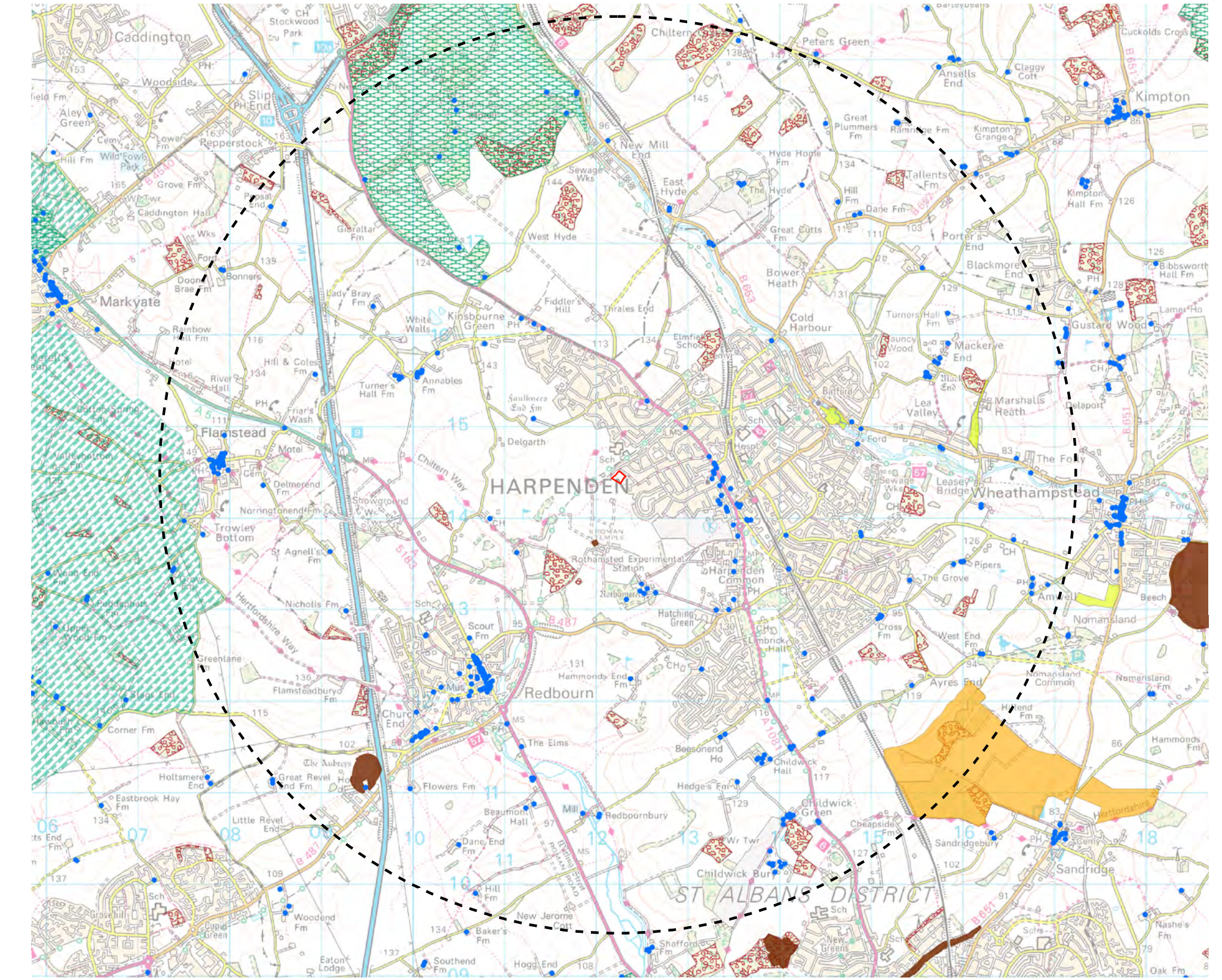


Figure 1.5: Designations within 5 km radius of the site (green belt not shown)

**Emerging policy**

The council is currently in the process of preparing a new Local Plan with the Call for Sites consultation having begun on 25 January 2021.

This report is submitted in support of the representations submitted by Hill Residential Limited to the Call for Sites consultation, providing evidence and justification for the allocation of this site in Harpenden for new homes.

The Local Development Scheme was revised in January 2021 and currently indicates that consultation on the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan will be undertaken in January / February 2022, with the pre-submission draft Regulation 19 consultation in November / December 2022. The council anticipates that the Local Plan will be submitted for examination in Spring / Summer 2023 and formally adopted at the end of 2023.

**National Planning Policy Framework**

The National Planning Policy Framework was last updated in June 2019. It constitutes guidance for local planning authorities and decision-takers both in drawing up plans and as a “material consideration” in determining applications. Local authorities must also have regard to The Planning Practice Guidance when developing their plans; and this is also a material consideration when taking decisions on planning applications.

The government continues to attach great importance to green belts, and 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”. Paragraph 134 continues to identify the five purposes of green belt as follows:

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

Although it is intended that green belt land has a degree of permanence, it is possible for a local planning authority to conduct a review of green belt land and consider redefining boundaries which add or take away green belt land in order to meet local planning requirements. This is set out in paragraph 136 of the NPPF.

Paragraph 139 of the NPPF advises that when defining green belt boundaries local planning authorities should not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open; and to define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

Given the enclosed nature of the site, and the presence of built-development on three sides, development of the site will not undermine the aim or objective of the green belt between Harpenden and Redbourn, or the purposes for which the green belt was identified in the wider area. This is illustrated in figure 1.6. The development of the site does not represent ‘unrestricted sprawl’ as its southern boundary does not extend into the countryside beyond that of the adjoining urban area. In effect the development could be considered as “in-filling”. This too ensures that it will not lead to the further merging of towns or encroachment into the countryside. Sensitive and bespoke design, which is possible on the small site, ensures that the character of the town will not be undermined, and a more attractive edge and approach to the town can be created. Lastly, a growing population in walking distance to the town centre will contribute towards the on-going vitality and vibrancy of the community. The existing hedgerow and ridge are also physical features that form a clear boundary to the south of the site, and this edge can be strengthened with additional planting as part of the proposal.

It is therefore not considered necessary to keep this site permanently open in order for the green belt to perform its important role in this locality. The removal of the green belt designation from the site and its allocation for the provision of new homes through the local plan review is consistent with green belt policies within the NPPF and with the promotion of sustainable development and growth.



Figure 1.6: Limited contribution that the site currently makes to the purposes of the green belt

# 2 THE SITE CONTEXT

## 2.1 THE SITE

The 1.654 ha site is currently in agricultural use cultivated annually with an arable crop. It is generally square in shape, flat and devoid of any features other than boundary vegetation.

Immediately on the north western edge lies the plant nursery and beyond this is the local primary school of Roundwood. On the north eastern and south eastern edges existing residential areas border the site and include Hartwell Gardens, Claygate Avenue and Townsend Lane. Further to the east lies the inner historic core of Harpenden, which is designated as a conservation area. The south western boundary borders the countryside.

Views into the site are principally available from Townsend Lane and the first floors of the adjoining houses, along with the houses that border the site in Hartwell Gardens.

Hedgerows and occasional mature trees on all sides of the site, in combination with the topography, visually contain the site including views from the countryside.

Townsend Lane is an attractive street and affords a number of options in terms of accessing the site.



Lower part of the site, gently sloping up towards ridge line on southern edge

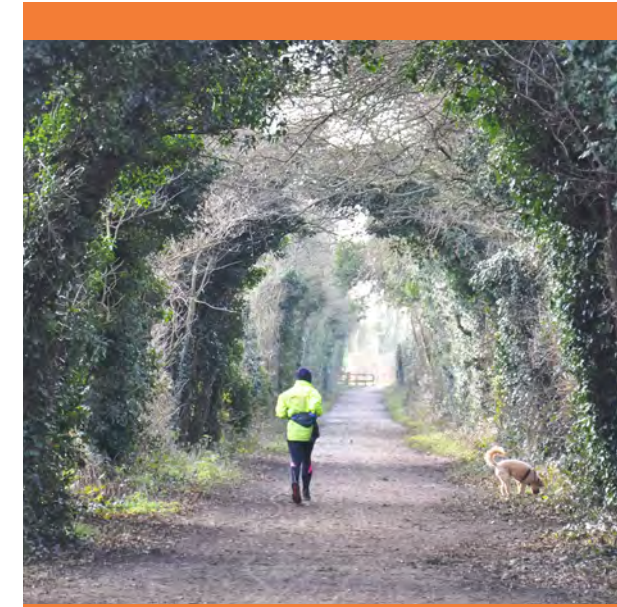
Fronts of existing housing along Townsend Lane

Site is more closely associated with the settlement edge than the open countryside

Backs of existing development at Hartwell Gardens

Hedgerows visually contain the site where it adjoins countryside

Figure 2.1: Panorama of the site looking towards south east edge



Nickey Line shown above is an historic railway line now used for recreation. It provides excellent connections to the wider countryside for pedestrians and cyclists. The site is ideally located to benefit from this strategic leisure route.

- Public rights of way
- Country lane
- Residential streets
- - - National Trail
- ↔ Pedestrian connection between Park Hill and Moreton End Lane



Figure 2.2: Site connections

## 2.2 TOPOGRAPHY

Although the site is perceived as relatively level, it rises gently north east to south west towards a pronounced ridgeline – see figure 2.3. The topography of the wider area is shown on figure 2.4. The inward sloping profile of the site helps to visually contain the site with the set back of new buildings from the southern boundary.

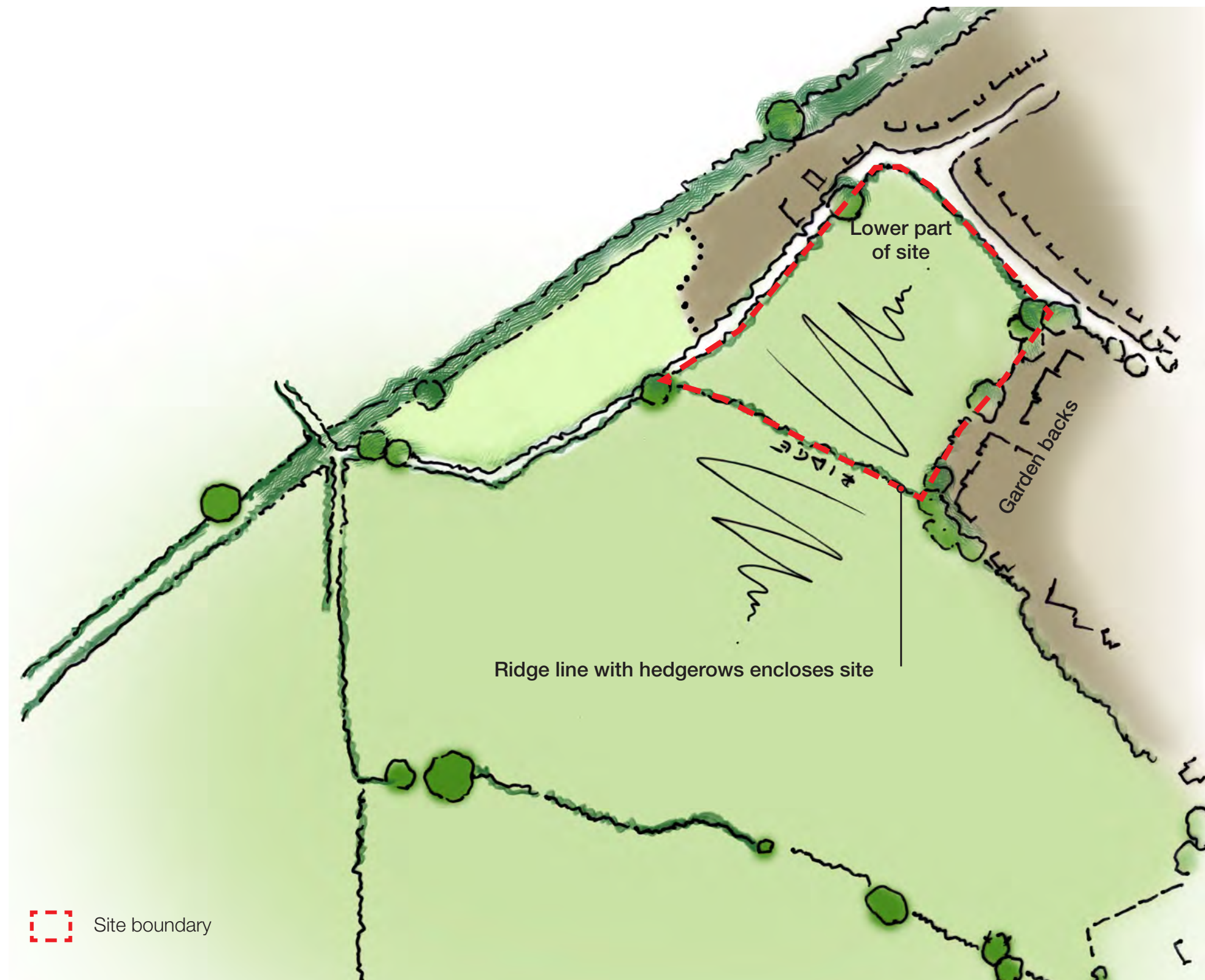


Figure 2.3: The sketch above shows general vegetation and topography structure in relation to the town edge

The topography of the wider area is characterised by the valleys of the River Lea and River Ver east and west of a pronounced ridgeline that curves north west. The site, at 130m AOD, is located on the inner edge of the upper plateau which is slightly domed before falling away east and west to the river valleys. A horseshoe ridgeline wraps around the north, west and southern edges of the site.

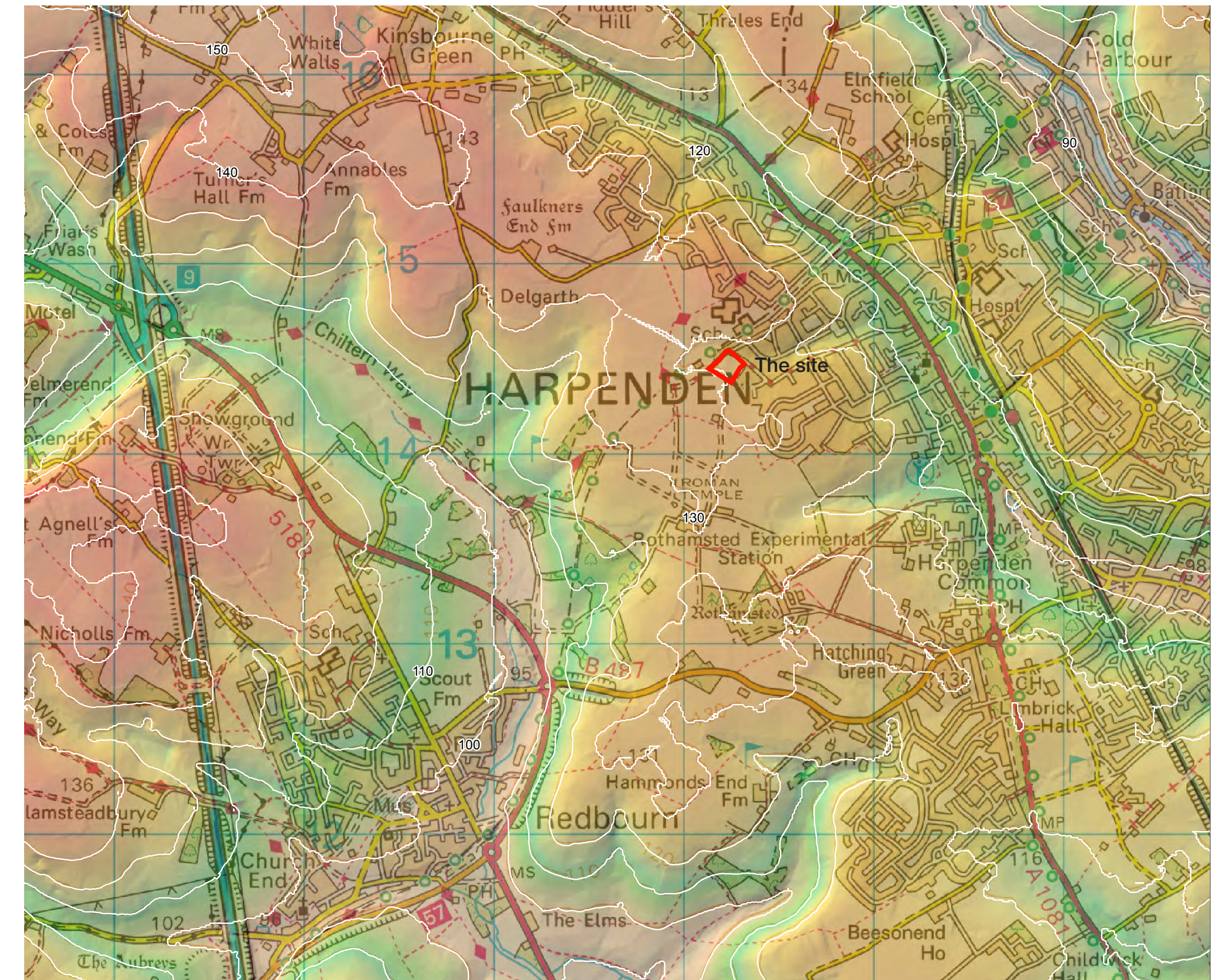


Figure 2.4: Topography context plan

### 2.3 VISUAL ANALYSIS

A visual analysis of how the site interacts with the adjoining townscape and landscape has been undertaken.

Views from the urban area are limited to the immediate locality. The site is visible from Claygate Avenue, see figure 2.6. Although in this vista the green field, which rises towards the ridgeline, is prominent, the land does not appear to be part of the wider countryside. Indeed, views to the countryside beyond are not available from this location.

Views from Townsend Lane are screened by the hedgerow on the site's boundary (figures 2.7 and 2.8). Views to the site are therefore mostly from upper floor windows of the surrounding properties in Townsend Lane and in Hartwell Gardens.

From the countryside the site is also visually contained. Figures 2.9 and 2.10 from the nearest public right of way clearly demonstrate that a combination of the ridgeline and vegetation limit views of the site to the immediate area. Importantly, the site is perceived as sitting within the settlement edge.

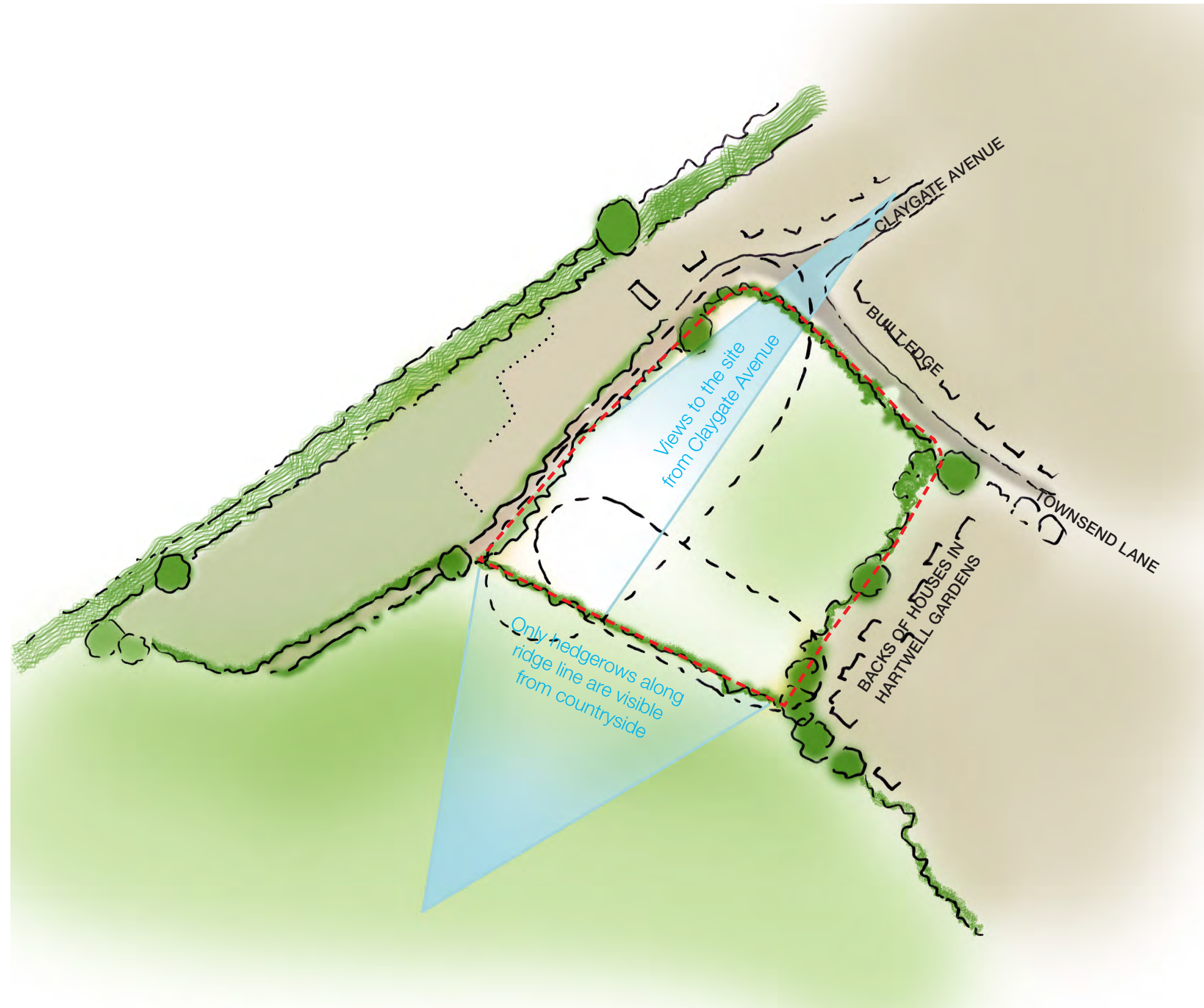


Figure 2.5: Main views to the site



Figure 2.6: View from Claygate Avenue towards site

Site visible from Claygate Avenue. Views to countryside beyond are contained by ridgeline



Viewpoint location



Physical and visual containment within existing settlement