

VINCENT+GORBING

Primary school site  
search report

St Albans

On behalf of Hertfordshire  
County Council

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(Updated January 2017)

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## **ST ALBANS PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE SEARCH REPORT FOR HERTFORDSHIRE CC**

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
2.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY	2
3.0 SITE IDENTIFICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS	8
4.0 SHORT LIST SITES	15
5.0 SHORT LIST SITES – PLANNING APPRAISAL REPORTS	26
6.0 CONCLUSIONS	27

### **DRAWINGS**

5115/005	SITE SEARCH AREAS
5115/002A	DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS
5115/003A	OPTION SITES
5115/004	SHORT LISTED SITES

### **SCHEDULES**

1	Full List: summary
2	Long List: review
3	Long List: summary and conclusions
4	Medium List: conclusions
5	Short List: summary

### **APPENDIX**

1	Hertfordshire County Council's BB103 based Space Standards for new 2 FE Primary Schools
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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report summarises the results of a study which has been undertaken on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council to identify and assess potential sites for a new 2FE primary school to meet primary educational needs in the central area of St Albans. The report was originally prepared in March 2016 and has been partially updated and expanded to reflect further technical investigations which have been carried out for a number of the shortlisted sites.
- 1.2 The report looks at the potential sites from a planning point of view and will need to be considered alongside educational considerations by Children’s Services in terms of suitability of the sites and the locations from an education perspective, including meeting educational needs, implications for school catchment areas, and suitability of sites for accommodating a school.
- 1.3 Section 2.0 summarises the methodology and assumptions used in undertaking the study, including the area of search, size of site, and shape and characteristics of site. It also identifies the sources of potential sites, and the considerations which have been taken into account in identifying and assessing the sites.
- 1.4 Section 3.0 summarises the process of identifying and reviewing potential sites for a new primary school, including the various stages which the process went through, and outlines the main results and conclusions of this exercise.
- 1.5 Section 4.0 summarises the main findings and conclusions of a more detailed assessment of a number of short listed sites which were identified as potentially the most suitable sites for accommodating a new primary school (or schools), including the main findings of high level transport and access appraisals undertaken by transportation consultants.
- 1.6 The planning appraisal reports for each site form Section 5.0 and comprise a series of separate reports on each of the short listed school sites. Each report is accompanied by a series of drawings which provide more information on the sites and show the principles of how a school could be accommodated on the sites. Apart from one, where a more detailed Transport Assessment has been undertaken, each report is also accompanied by a High Level Accessibility Appraisal.

- 1.7 Section 6.0 is the main summary and conclusions of this study. This section has been updated to take account of the further technical investigations.
- 1.8 The report is accompanied by a series of schedules which summarise the information on the sites.

## 2.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY

2.1 This section summarises the methodology and assumptions used in undertaking the study. The study was based on the initial brief prepared by the client and the approved workplan, as subsequently modified and amplified in conjunction with the client.

### AREA OF SEARCH

2.2 An area of search was agreed with Hertfordshire CC at the start of the study, based on the area of greatest need for a new primary school, which was based on a review of the broad locations for new housing development proposed by the Local Plan in the period to 3031. This indicates that of the 3,800 dwellings which are likely to come forward in St Albans (city) approximately 74%, or 2,800, would come forward in the City Centre - mainly on the eastern side of the City Centre.

2.3 The area of search was therefore centred on the City Centre and the area to the east of the City Centre.

### Study area boundary

2.4 A study area, or area of search, was identified and defined in conjunction with the client and comprised three areas:

- **Core Search Area** – the preferred, or optimum, location for a new primary school based on the area of anticipated greatest need, and centred on the City Centre.
- **Wider Search Area** – the wider area of search beyond the Core Search Area, which is a sub-optimal location but may help to meet needs within Core Search Area, depending on location and linkages with the Core Area. This was weighted towards the east of the City Centre, to reflect the greater need to the east.
- **Outside Search Area** – an outer area of search (within 200m of the Wider Search Area, and Core Search area to the west) was also considered in case there are potentially suitable locations just outside the Wider Search Area, or Core Area to the west, which, although sub-optimal, could help to meet needs within Core Search Area, if no better located sites are identified.

2.5 The boundaries of the Core Area and Wider Area were defined to relate to strong features wherever possible e.g. main roads and railway lines, River Ver, and the edge of the built up area.

- 2.6 The study area and search area boundaries are shown on drawing 5115/005.

### **Site location and referencing**

- 2.7 For ease of undertaking the study and reviewing potential sites the areas of search were divided into geographical sectors and a referencing system adopted so that sites could be given individual reference numbers. Sites were identified by means of locational reference letters and numerical reference numbers, as follows:

- CW = Core Search Area West
- CE = Core Search Area East
- WNW = Wider Search Area North West
- WNE = Wider Search Area North East
- WE = Wider Search Area East
- WSE = Wider Search Area South East
- O = Outside Core Search Area / Wider Search Area

- 2.8 These geographical areas are also shown on drawing 5115/005.

### **SIZE OF SITE**

- 2.9 Preferably potential sites should be of sufficient size to comply with the County Council's BB103 based Space Standards for new 2 forms of entry (FE) primary schools for unrestrained school sites in non-urban locations. The standards note that BB103 provide for a range of areas of between 1.6ha and 2.0ha and suggest a minimum site area of 19,890sqm (or 1.99ha). A copy of the County Council's Space Standards is attached at Appendix 1.

- 2.10 As set out in the Standards a minimum 1.99ha site would allow for the following:

- Single storey building
- 60 place nursery
- Hard and soft outdoor PE areas – including grass playing field and Multi Use Games Area
- Hard and soft informal and social areas

- Habitat areas
- Car parking for staff (44 spaces), visitor parking and dropping off, cycle parking and turning area.
- Allowance for site constraints and drainage.

2.11 However, bearing in mind the location and anticipated difficulties finding suitable sites of 1.99ha, for the purposes of this study it was assumed that the potential sites should be a minimum of 0.7ha, which is considered to be the absolute minimum necessary to be able to accommodate a new 2FE primary school on a constrained site in an urban location. This area is based on the site area for the recently established Watford Free School at Ascot Road, Watford which has a site area of 0.72ha. This area assumes the following:

- New build 2FE primary school (420 pupils) with an adjoining nursery (30 FTE) and early years unit
- Two storey building
- MUGA and hard and soft play
- Nursery with external play area
- Staff car park for 33 spaces
- Regular shaped square or rectangular site with no site features or constraints which would affect the layout or reduce the area available e.g. trees, topographical features, drainage features etc.

2.12 The site area does not include a playing field, which would need to be provided elsewhere and would need to be the subject of a separate exercise to identify potential sites for these (possibly sharing a public open space or other facility). It also does not include full parking provision for staff, or any parent parking, or dropping off / picking up facility.

2.13 It is noted that two storey buildings may not be appropriate in some locations eg visually sensitive or Green Belt locations. Also, the number of parking spaces is unlikely to be Local Plan policy compliant. Transport studies may require additional staff parking, and parent parking and dropping off / picking up facilities, to be provided to avoid highways safety issues, so this level of provision may not be appropriate in some locations.

- 2.14 It is also noted that prior to publication of BB103 the County Council's usual standards for new 2 FE primary schools for unrestrained school sites in non-urban locations sought minimum sites of 2.5ha, so 0.7ha is significantly smaller than the minimum previously required. Even sites of 1.99ha would be smaller than those previously sought.

### **SITE SHAPE AND CHARACTERISTICS**

- 2.15 Preferably the site should have the following characteristics:
- Shape of site – ideally square or rectangular
  - Topography – level or nearly level (to avoid need for significant terracing)
  - Site features – ideally clear site free of significant site features and constraints e.g. trees, streams, existing buildings, public footpaths, overhead power lines etc
  - Access – preferably served by A or B road or other main road, and should avoid narrow country lanes and residential roads, and dual carriageways.

### **IDENTIFICATION OF SITES**

- 2.16 Potential primary school sites were identified within the study area (Core Area / Wider Area and Outer Area) based on the following sources of information:
- Sites identified by Lambert Smith Hampton for the County Council following a search for buildings and land potentially available, including undeveloped land
  - Land owned by Hertfordshire County Council
  - Sites identified by St Albans City and District Council in its Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
  - Other sites identified by V&G following a review of Planning and Environmental Constraints (see below), a review of OS base plans and aerial photographs, and our local knowledge.

- 2.17 These are shown on drawing 5115/003A:

### **Planning and environmental constraints and designations**

- 2.18 In identifying potential sites, and assessing sites identified by LSH, land owned by the County Council, and SHLAA sites, planning and environmental constraints and designations (and a number of other



considerations) within the study area and just outside were identified and plotted. These are shown on drawing 5115/002A and include:

- Core and Wider Search Areas
- Green Belt
- Golf courses
- Public open space / parks / playing fields and recreation grounds
- Private sports grounds
- Areas of woodland
- Cemeteries
- Allotments
- Registered Common Land
- Local Nature Reserves
- Conservation Areas
- Areas of Archaeological Interest
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Public Rights of Way
- Land liable to flooding

2.19 Existing school sites, including attached and detached playing fields (including independent schools and playing fields), were also identified and plotted.

### **ASSESSMENT OF SITES**

2.20 All the identified potential sites were assessed to establish which site (or sites) might be the most appropriate to accommodate a new primary school (or schools).

2.21 A series of steps or sieves were undertaken to identify potentially suitable sites for further considerations. The following section 3.0 outlines the stages which were undertaken and the results, but in summary the assessment process involved the following stages:

- Firstly the ‘full list’ of sites was reviewed and those sites which were too small (ie less than 0.7ha), or subject to fundamental constraints and designations, such as land liable to flooding, or were existing school sites, were rejected.
- Secondly, the remaining sites (or the ‘Long List’ of sites) were assessed according to their type and existing use, and a number of planning and environmental constraints and designations. Based on this assessment a number of conclusions were able to be drawn on the relative merits of the sites and a number of sites were rejected and others were identified which merited further consideration.
- Next, the remaining sites (or the ‘Medium List’ of sites), were given further consideration, including location, existing use and type of site, and planning and environmental constraints and considerations, to identify those potential sites which had the greatest potential and merited more detailed consideration.
- The final stage was a more detailed assessment of the ‘Short Listed’ sites, including undertaking a high level transport and access appraisal from specialist transportation consultants, to establish which site (or sites) might be best suited to accommodate a new primary school (or schools). The commission allowed for undertaking 5 detailed assessments of potential sites, but the study identified 7 potential sites which merited further consideration.

2.22 For further details see the following section.

### **3.0 SITE IDENTIFICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS**

3.1 This section summarises the process of identifying and reviewing potential sites for a new 2FE primary school, including the various stages or sieves which this process went through.

#### **FULL LIST OF SITES**

3.2 A full list of all potential sites within the study area (and just outside) was assembled based on the sources identified earlier at section 2.0 (ie LSH sites, HCC land, SHLAA sites and other sites identified by V&G). Sites which were cemeteries / graveyards or golf courses were not included.

3.3 In total 145 potential primary school sites were identified and were plotted on drawing 5115/003A, which also identifies the sources of the sites (see section 2.0). The sites are listed in Schedule 1 and are listed by location and reference letter/number. The following information is also given:

- Source of site
- Site area
- Constraints (see below)
- Summary

#### **Review**

3.4 The sites on the list were reviewed against a number of criteria which were considered to be fundamental to their ability to potentially accommodate a new 2FE primary school, to see which sites should be taken forward for further consideration. These criteria were:

- Size of site
- Existing school sites
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Land liable to flooding
- Registered Common Land

3.5 Sites of less than 0.7ha were rejected, as were sites which were currently used as schools (including independent schools and related

playing fields). Sites which were designated Scheduled Ancient Monuments, registered Common Land, or liable to flooding were also rejected. This sieve exercise reduced the number of potential sites from 145 to 53 sites, to produce a 'long list' of sites for further consideration. See the full list of sites at Schedule 1 for a summary of why particular sites were rejected or carried forward.

3.6 In summary:

- In the Core Search Area 54 potential sites were identified. Of these 42 were rejected and 12 were carried forward.
- In the Wider Search Area 66 potential sites were identified. Of these 43 were rejected and 23 were carried forward.
- Outside these areas 25 potential sites were identified. Of these 7 were rejected and 18 were carried forward.
- In total 145 sites were identified, 92 were rejected and 53 were carried forward for further consideration.

### **LONG LIST OF SITES**

3.7 A long list of those sites which were carried forward from the Full List was prepared. Sites were listed according to their type of location, as follows:

- Within built up area - urban brownfield (previously developed land)
- Within built up area - urban greenfield
- Urban edge greenfield / Green Belt

3.8 They were also sub-categorised according to their location relative to the Area of Search, ie Core Area / Wider Area / Outer Area.

3.9 The list of sites, which is attached as Schedule 2, lists the sites by type of location and area, and includes the following information:

- Site reference number
- Site location / address
- Source of site
- Site area
- Current use of site

- Site constraints:
  - Planning and environmental constraints and designations which may apply to the sites, over and above those identified earlier in the previous stage (see below for details)
  - Practical considerations including site shape and features and whether the sites are likely to be in multiple ownership / occupation
  - These constraints have been identified by means of a red amber green system (see below)
- Conclusion – overall conclusion

### **Assessment**

3.10 The sites were assessed according to their existing use and planning and environmental constraints and designations, as follows:

- Current use of site:
  - Existing public open space / park / recreation ground / public playing fields
  - Allotments
  - Private sports grounds
  - Areas of woodland / significant trees
- Planning and environmental constraints and designations:
  - Green Belt
  - Local Nature Reserve
  - Conservation Area
  - Area of Archaeological Interest
- Other considerations:
  - Public Rights of Way
  - Site shape and features
  - Multiple ownership / occupation

3.11 The schedule identifies the constraints by means of a red amber green system, as follows:

- Green – constraint not applicable to site
- Amber / yellow – constraint affects part of site, or immediately adjoins site
- Red – all, or majority, of site affected by constraint

3.12 Sites which were areas of woodland and/or significant trees and Local Nature Reserves were rejected as were a number of other sites for other reasons including: sites were in multiple ownership / occupation, which would mean that the site would be unlikely to be available in at least the near future, preliminary access considerations, and practical considerations including site shape and features, for example long narrow sites or awkwardly shaped sites which would be difficult to accommodate a school. In a number of cases a combination of constraints and considerations resulted in sites being rejected rather than an individual constraint or consideration.

3.13 See Schedule 2 for details

### **Conclusions**

3.14 Based on this review a number of conclusions were able to be drawn and a number of sites rejected and others identified which merited further consideration.

3.15 See Schedule 3 which indicates which sites were rejected and the reasons for rejection and those sites which merited being taken forward for further consideration. As a result of this assessment the number of sites was reduced from 53 potential primary school sites to 21 which were considered to merit further consideration.

3.16 In summary:

- In the Core Search Area 12 potential sites were considered. Of these 9 were rejected and 3 were carried forward.
- In the Wider Search Area 23 potential sites were considered. Of these 13 were rejected and were 10 carried forward.
- Outside these areas 18 potential sites were considered. Of these 10 were rejected and 8 were carried forward.

- In total 53 sites were considered, 32 were rejected and 21 were carried forward for further consideration.

### **MEDIUM LIST OF SITES**

3.17 The review of the long list of sites resulted in 21 potential sites being identified which were considered to merit further consideration, in particular their location relative to the optimum location / area of need, and the type of site, as follows:

- Core Search Area – optimal location
  - Within built up area - urban brownfield - preferable
  - Within built up area - urban greenfield – less preferable
  - Urban edge greenfield / Green Belt – only if no non- Green Belt sites available
- Wider Search Area – sub-optimal location
  - Within built up area - urban brownfield - preferable
  - Within built up area - urban greenfield – less preferable
  - Urban edge greenfield / Green Belt – only if no non-Green Belt sites available
- Outer Area – less than sub-optimal location
  - Within built up area - urban brownfield - preferable
  - Within built up area - urban greenfield – less preferable
  - Urban edge greenfield / Green Belt – only if no non- Green Belt sites available

3.18 Further consideration was also give to the existing use of the sites, as follows:

- Public open space
- Allotments
- Unused land
- Farmland

3.19 These 21 sites were then reviewed in conjunction with the client, taking account of the following considerations:

- Location (ie Core / Wider / outer area - relationship to area of need) and type of site (ie brownfield / greenfield / Green Belt – sequential) (see above)
- Existing use of site (see above)
- Planning and environmental constraints and designations (see above)
- Size of site and whether proposed school would result in the partial or complete loss of the use eg public open space or allotments
- Possible access / highways issues (and whether additional properties would be likely to need to be acquire to provide a satisfactory access)

### **Conclusions**

3.20 Based on this review a number of conclusions were able to be drawn and a number of sites rejected and others identified which merited further consideration. See Schedule 4 for the main conclusions of this exercise.

3.21 In summary;

- In the Core Search Area 2 potential primary school sites were considered. None were considered to merit more detailed consideration.
- In the Wider Search Area 11 potential sites were considered. Of these 5 were considered to merit more detailed consideration.
- Outside these areas 8 potential sites were considered. Of these 2 were considered to merit more detailed consideration.
- In total 21 potential primary school sites were considered, and 7 were considered to merit more detailed consideration.

### **SHORT LIST OF SITES**

3.22 The review of the medium list of sites resulted in 7 potential sites being identified which were considered to merit further, more detailed, consideration, including commissioning high level transportation and access studies from specialist consultants. See Section 4.0 for further details.



## 4.0 SHORT LIST SITES

### INTRODUCTION

4.1 Seven possible sites were identified, or short listed, for more detailed consideration for possibly accommodating a new primary school to serve the central St Albans area, as follows:

- WE6 Land west of Foxcroft
- WSE13 Land North of Verulam GC
- WSE 4 Old Oak / Marlborough Recreation area
- O14 Birklands detached playing field, London Road
- O22 Land west of Batchwood Drive
- WNW10 Ariston Works (main site)
- WNW11 Ariston Works (former playing field)

4.2 See drawing 5115/004 for the location of the short listed sites, including their locations relative to the Core Search Area and the Wider Search Area.

4.3 The planning appraisal reports, which summarise the more detailed assessment for each of these sites, comprise Section 5.0. As set out in the introduction each report:

- Describes the site and the surrounding area and planning and environmental considerations
- Summarises relevant local planning policies and planning history
- Assesses the potential of the site to accommodate a new primary school, and
- Gives a summary and conclusion.

4.4 Each report is accompanied by the following drawings:

- Site Location Plan
- Site Identification Plan
- Aerial Photograph
- Site Appraisal

- Development Principles
- 4.5 Apart from WSE13 Land North of Verulam GC, where a Transport Assessment has been undertaken by Pell Frischmann, each report is accompanied by a High Level Accessibility Appraisal, including drawing, prepared by Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants. Following the initial study further technical work was undertaken for a number of the short listed sites to address issues which had been identified, as follows:
- WSE13 Land North of Verulam GC – preliminary access design, Stage 1 Road Safety Audit, and Design Team’s Response to Safety Audit
  - WNW10 Ariston Works (main site) - Technical Note on the Heathlands Drive / Harpenden Road junction, and report on Geotechnical Hazards.
  - WNW11 Ariston Works (former playing field) - Technical Note on the Heathlands Drive / Harpenden Road junction, and report on Geotechnical Hazards
- 4.6 This updated report incorporates the main findings of this further technical work and revises the conclusions to reflect these findings.
- 4.7 From a planning (and Green Belt) point of view the sites have been considered on a sequential basis (with the top of the list being preferable to the bottom of the list), as follows:
- Brownfield sites within built up area i.e. previously developed land
  - Greenfield sites within built up area
  - Greenfield sites outside the urban area (mostly Green Belt)
- 4.8 Only one of the short listed sites comprises a brownfield site within the built up area:
- WNW10 Ariston Works (main site)
- 4.9 This site is located in the Wider Search area, which is less than optimal.
- 4.10 Two of the short listed sites comprise greenfield sites within the built up area:
- WE6 Land west of Foxcroft

- WNW11 Ariston Works (former playing field)
- 4.11 Both sites are also located in the Wider Search area, which is less than optimal.
- 4.12 Four of the short listed sites comprise greenfield sites located outside the built up area, which are also located in the Green Belt.
- WSE13 Land North of Verulam GC
  - WSE 4 Old Oak / Marlborough Recreation area
  - O14 Birklands detached playing field, London Road
  - O22 Land west of Batchwood Drive
- 4.13 Two of these sites (WSE13, and WSE4) are also located in the Wider Search area, which is less than optimal, although one of these (WSE13) is located just outside the Core Area, which is the optimum location.
- 4.14 Two of these sites (O22 and O14) are located outside the Wider Search area, which is less than optimal, although one of these (O22) is located just outside the Core Area, which is the optimum location.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.15 The main conclusions of the assessments of each of the short listed sites are summarised below, in the sequential order given above ie:
- Brownfield sites within built up area i.e. previously developed land
  - Greenfield sites within built up area
  - Greenfield sites outside the urban area (mostly Green Belt)
- 4.16 The main conclusions are also set out in Schedule 4.
- 4.17 For further details see the Planning Reports at 5.0.

### **Brownfield sites within built up area**

- 4.18 There is only one potential brownfield primary school site within the built up area, which is located within the Wider Search Area. The main conclusions for this site are:

WNW10 Ariston Works (main site)

- The site is of sufficient size to be able to accommodate a new primary school and could accommodate a larger school site based on the area for an unconstrained site in a non-urban area, ie 1.99ha (subject to a number of considerations which are set out in the report)
- The site is a previously developed site and is relatively unconstrained in terms of planning and environmental constraints.
- The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal advises that the site offers a fairly straight forward opportunity to locate a 2FE primary school with reasonably good accessibility and the existing access should be able to adequately deal with the proposed use.
- It is located outside the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new school to meet primary educational needs, being located in the Wider Search Area, which is a sub-optimum location, but it could help meet needs within the Core Area.
- It is also owned by the County Council, which is an advantage.
- Ground condition issues were previously identified as a matter which meant that there was significant uncertainty about whether the site would be able to accommodate a new school or whether the cost of provision on site would be prohibitive. However, further investigations for the adjoining former playing field site suggest that this issue is likely to be able to be addressed and would not prevent the site being able to accommodate a new primary school.
- But the main issue is that the site it is not available for use for a new school. The site is subject to development proposals which would fund the provision of new replacement youth and community facilities on site, or off site. If the site was not to be redeveloped, in order to provide a new school, the existing youth and community uses would need to remain on site, and so the site could not accommodate a new school. If the youth and community facilities were to be re-provided on site, in new facilities, or relocation off site, as is currently proposed, this would need to be funded by the redevelopment of the site, so would not happen if the site is not redeveloped, if it were to accommodate a new school. In either scenario the site would not be available for use for a new school.

### **Greenfield sites within built up area**

- 4.19 There are two potential greenfield primary school sites within the built up area, both located within the Wider Search Area. The main conclusions for these sites are, in summary:

### WE6 Land west of Foxcroft

- The site is of sufficient size to be able to accommodate a new primary school and could accommodate a larger school site based on the area for an unconstrained site in a non-urban area (ie 1.99ha), although this would require most of the site, which is a public open space, with sports pitch and children's ground.
- The site is a greenfield site within the built up area.
- The main constraint / consideration is likely to be the loss of the existing public open space (including sports pitch), although apart from this the site is relatively unconstrained in terms of planning and environmental constraints. It is a Green Space (open space) which Local Plan policies seek to protect. If proposals for a school are to be progressed it is likely to be necessary to understand any existing open space assessments to establish whether there is adequate open space / sports pitch provision in the locality and the implications of the loss of at least part of the open space. Discussion would need to take place with the District Council and with Sport England to establish in principle views on the proposals and whether replacement open space / playing pitch would need to be provided elsewhere, and if so can it be provided.
- The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal advises that it would be possible to achieve a school on the site but it would be likely to have a substantial impact on local residents in terms of the highway works required, including road widening, new footway and crossing, possible one way arrangement and parking restrictions.
- The site is located outside the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new school to meet primary educational needs, being located in the Wider Search Area, which is a sub-optimum location, but it could help meet needs within the Core Area, although linkages with the Core Area are limited due to a number of intervening barriers – main railway line, and the Alban Way footpath / cycleway (former railway line), with few crossing points.
- It is owned by the District Council.
- However, the main issue is the loss of part, if not most, of the public open space and the playing pitch and whether this would be acceptable in order to accommodate a new school.
- A further issue would be the impact of the proposals on views from nearby residential properties and the impact of the alterations to

the highway which would be necessary in order to be able to accommodate a new school.

WNW11 Ariston Works (former playing field / or Lower Field)

- The site is of sufficient size to be able to accommodate a new primary school and could accommodate a larger school site based on the area for an unconstrained site in a non-urban area (ie 1.99ha).
- The site is a greenfield site within the built up area.
- One of the main constraints / considerations is that although the site is not a public open space it is used by the public as open space, and it is a designated Asset of Community Value. It is a Green Space which Local Plan policies seek to protect.
- Other important constraints / considerations, include:
  - The possibility that the site may be needed to allow the expansion of Heathlands School, or provide a playing pitch for the proposed youth and community building on the adjoining main Ariston Works site, or for another school.
  - The site may be one of the last open areas of the site of the Second Battle of St. Albans, although this is not a formally designated battlefield site.
  - The adjoining Bernard's Heath (County Wildlife Site / Registered Common Land / Access Land / mature trees)
- Access to the site would need to be taken via the adjoining main part of the Ariston site (WNW10 Ariston Works) and would be likely to be dependent on that site being redeveloped to provide a suitable satisfactory access.
- The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal initially advised that the existing Harpenden Road / Heathlands Drive junction would be unlikely to be able to accommodate proposed residential development, new youth and community facilities, Heathlands School, and a new primary school. However, the subsequent technical note which looked in more detail at the suitability of the junction to serve these uses found that it should just about be able to cope with the predicted traffic, based on a number of assumptions, including the majority of pupils would walk to the school, and all school related traffic is from the south.
- It is located outside the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new school to meet primary educational needs, being located

in the Wider Search Area, which is a sub-optimum location, but it could help meet needs within the Core Area.

- It is also owned by the County Council, which is an advantage.
- The March 2016 version of this report found that the main issue affecting the site was significant ground stability issues, which may mean that the site is not suitable for use for a new primary school, or that the cost for remediation may prove to be prohibitive. It advised that until further investigations had been concluded it was uncertain whether the site would be able to accommodate a new primary school. A report commissioned by HCC (Opus - August 2016) indicates that the site is developable and could accommodate a primary school. Although there will be abnormal costs they are within the normal range of costs.
- Ground condition and access issues were previously identified as matters which, taken together, meant that there was significant uncertainty about whether the site would be able to accommodate a new school. However, these further technical investigations indicate that these issues can be addressed and would not prevent the site being able to accommodate a new primary school.
- The site is therefore potentially suitable for a new primary school and merits further consideration.

#### **Greenfield sites outside the urban area**

4.20 There are four potential greenfield primary school sites located outside the built up area, all of which are located on greenfield sites in the Green Belt. Two of these sites are located in the Wider Search area and two are located outside the Wider Search area.

4.21 The main conclusions for each of the sites are, in summary:

#### WSE13 Land North of Verulam GC

- The site is of sufficient size to be able to accommodate a new primary school based on the minimum area for a constrained site in an urban area (ie 0.7ha), but would not be able to accommodate a larger school site based on the area for an unconstrained site in a non-urban location (ie 1.99ha). It may also be necessary to provide a detached playing field, a location for which would need to be identified.
- The site is a greenfield site located in the Green Belt. Unless allocated within the Local Plan, very special circumstances would be needed to justify a school on this site, including the need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites

available which could accommodate the school. This is likely to be the main issue.

- The site is relatively well located relative to the Core Search Area, which is the optimum location for a new school, although it is just outside the Core Area, in the Wider Area. It is located to the east of the centre which is the area of greatest need.
- The site is likely to be in single ownership, and is slightly detached from nearby houses, which would help to reduce the impact on residential amenities, which are advantages.
- The site is located Location in a Zone of Visibility across which there are views of the St Albans City Centre skyline and so a new school would need to be designed to minimise the impact on views, as well as minimising the impact on the Green Belt.
- The Transport Assessment prepared by Pell Frischmann indicated that there may be significant difficulties providing a suitable access to the site and that a school may have an unacceptable impact on the highway network. However, the more recent Stage 1 Road Safety Audit indicates that a satisfactory access may be able to be provided, subject to resolving a number of detailed design issues. However, one of the issues identified in the safety audit assumed that full staff parking and dropping off /picking up facilities would be provided on site, but this might not be possible due to the size of the site and what can physically be accommodated on the site.
- In order to help establish whether or not full car parking and dropping off / picking up facilities can be provided on site and also establish whether a detached playing field is required it suggests that a feasibility layout plan be prepared for the proposed school. If a detached playing field is required an exercise should be undertaken to identify a suitable location, which might involve shared use of an existing public open space or playing field.
- The report also suggests that discussions take place with the highway authority to establish whether access and highway issues are fundamental to the potential use of the site for a new primary school and whether they would preclude use of the site for a school.

#### WSE 4 Old Oak / Marlborough Recreation area

- The site is of sufficient size to be able to accommodate a new primary school and could accommodate a larger school site based on the area for an unconstrained site in a non-urban area (ie 1.99ha), although this would require most of the site, which is a public open space, with sports pitch, all-weather playing pitch and community centre.



- The site is a greenfield site located in the Green Belt. Unless allocated within the Local Plan, very special circumstances would be needed to justify a school on this site, including the need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. This is likely to be the main issue.
- The main constraint / consideration, other than Green Belt, is likely to be the loss of the existing public open space (including sports pitches and community centre). It is a Green Space (open space) which Local Plan policies seek to protect. If proposals for a school are to be progressed it is likely to be necessary to undertake an assessment to establish whether there is adequate open space / sports pitch provision in the locality and the implications of the loss of at least part of the open space. Discussions would need to take place with the District Council and with Sport England to establish whether they would object in principle to the proposals and whether replacement open space / playing pitch would need to be provided elsewhere, and if so can it be provided.
- The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal advises that the site presents a number of challenges to providing suitable access for a 2FE school and that the existing access is unlikely to be suitable. A new access road is suggested to the south of the site, which would cross third party land. However, this would be close to a number of listed buildings and a conservation area.
- The site is likely to be in single ownership, which is an advantage, but is relatively remote from the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new primary school, being the area of greatest need, and so it may not help to meet needs in that area.
- The site is located outside the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new school to meet primary educational needs. It is located in the Wider Search Area, which is a sub-optimum location, and so in theory could help meet needs within the Core Area. However, it is relatively remote from the Core Area and so may not help meet these needs.
- It is owned by the District Council.
- The loss of the whole recreation ground to a school use would result in the loss of one of the identified viewpoints from which there are important views of the City Centre Skyline, in particular the cathedral, which could be a significant issue. The loss of the community centre would also be a significant issue, unless the school were to include a replacement facility (possibly shared with the school).

- In conclusion, the use of the site as a school has a number of difficulties including Green Belt location, loss of public open space, sports facilities and community centre, and difficult access. It is also relatively remote from the area of need.

#### O14 Birklands detached playing field, London Road

- The site is owned by the County Council and was originally purchased for use for educational purposes, and has previously been promoted for use for a new primary school by the County Council.
- It is of sufficient size to be able to accommodate a new primary school and could accommodate a larger school site based on the area for an unconstrained site in a non-urban area (ie 1.99ha), although this would require most of the site, which is used informally as open space by the public and is a designated Asset of Community Value.
- However, although it is located just outside the Wider Search Area, it is relatively remote from the Core Search Area, which is the area of greatest need, and so is not well located to serve these needs, which is the purpose of this site search study, although it is well located to serve needs in the south eastern part of St Albans
- The site is a greenfield site located in the Green Belt. Unless allocated within the Local Plan, very special circumstances would be needed to justify a school on this site, including the need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. This is likely to be the main issue.
- Apart from Green Belt other important constraints and considerations which would affect the potential use of the site for a new primary school are the woodland and mature trees on the site, including a number covered by a TPO, and its designation as an Asset of Community Value, and its use (informally) by the public as open space
- The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal advises that overall the site is suitable for a 2FE primary school, if the suggested measures are implemented. It recommends that it is sufficiently suitable in transport terms to warrant further more detailed investigation for such a use.
- The overall conclusion is that the site is of more than sufficient size to accommodate a new primary school and is owned by the County Council and has been previously identified for this purpose. However, it is relatively remote from the Core Search Area, which is the area of greatest need, and so a new school in

this location may not meet needs arising from the area of greatest need.

- The main issue is likely to be the green belt location and the need for very special circumstances to justify a school, including the need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. A secondary issue is likely to be the perceived loss of what is seen by the public as an open space and its designation as an Asset of Community Value.

#### O22 Land west of Batchwood Drive

- The site is of sufficient size to be able to accommodate a new primary school and could accommodate a larger school site based on the area for an unconstrained site in a non-urban area (ie 1.99ha), with room for further expansion, if necessary. It is also likely to be in single ownership, which is an advantage.
- The site is a greenfield site located in the Green Belt, beyond a strong and clearly defined boundary. Unless allocated within the Local Plan, very special circumstances would be needed to justify a school on this site, including the need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. This is likely to be the main issue.
- The site is relatively well located relative to the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new school, although it is just outside the Core Area (and outside the Wider Area, which does not extend to the west of the Core Area), although it is located to the west of the centre, rather than the east - which is the area of greater need.
- A new school would need to be designed to minimise the impact on views of the City Centre Skyline, in particular the cathedral. Investigations would also need to be undertaken to establish whether there are any archaeological features on the site and whether these would constrain development.
- The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal advises that overall, there appears to be reasonable potential for this site to be able to accommodate a school (subject to mitigation measures), although there may be an issue about the preferably point of access from a highway point of view and the need to retain existing trees on the frontage and so minimise the impact on the Green Belt.
- The overall conclusion is that the site is of more than sufficient size to accommodate a new primary school and is likely to be in single ownership, which is an advantage. Although it is outside the Core Area it is only just outside the boundary and so is relatively well

located relative to the area of greatest need. It is also slightly detached from nearby houses which would help to reduce the impact on residential amenities, which is an advantage.

- The main issue, as set out above, is likely to be the Green Belt location, outside a strong and clearly defined boundary, and the need for very special circumstances to justify a school, including the need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school.

4.22 For further details see the Planning Appraisal Reports which are contained in the next section.

## **5.0 SHORT LIST SITES – PLANNING APPRAISAL REPORTS**

5.1 The planning appraisal reports (including related drawings and high level transport and access appraisals) for the following sites follow:

- WE6 Land west of Foxcroft
- WSE13 Land North of Verulam GC
- WSE 4 Old Oak / Marlborough Recreation area
- O14 Birklands detached playing field, London Road
- O22 Land west of Batchwood Drive
- WNW10 Ariston Works (main site)
- WNW11 Ariston Works (former playing field)

5.2 The planning appraisal reports for WSE13 Land North of Verulam GC, WNW10 Ariston Works (main site), and WNW11 Ariston Works (former playing field) have been updated to reflect more recent investigations.

5.3 See drawing 5115/004 for the location of the short listed sites, including their locations relative to the Core Search Area and the Wider Search Area.

# ST ALBANS PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE SEARCH

## PLANNING APPRAISAL REPORT FOR SHORT LISTED POTENTIAL NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL SITES

### SITE 1: O22 – LAND TO THE WEST OF BATCHWOOD DRIVE, ST ALBANS

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This planning appraisal is for the following site which was short listed following a review of potential sites for a new primary school at St Albans:

- Land to the west of Batchwood Drive, St Albans

1.2 The site is located on the western side of St Albans immediately adjacent to the Core Search Area.

1.3 A site visit was carried out on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016.

1.4 The site has an area of approximately 5.69ha. This appraisal assesses whether there is potential for the site to accommodate a 2fe primary school.

1.5 The following drawings accompany this report:

- Site Location Plan (drawing 5115/100)
- Site Identification Plan (drawing 5115/101)
- Aerial Photograph (drawing 5115/102)
- Site Appraisal (drawing 5115/103)
- Development Principles (drawing 5115/104)

1.6 The following report also accompanies this report (see Appendix):

- High Level Accessibility Appraisal (including drawing ST-2479-01) prepared by Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants.

#### 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 The site is located on the western side of Batchwood Drive immediately to the west of the built up area of the town and comprises the larger part of a large arable field lying between Batchwood Hall Golf Course and Batchwood Drive.

2.2 It is located immediately to the west of the Core Area of Search approximately 1.2km from the centre of the town (taken to be St Peter's Street).

2.3 It is enclosed by hedgerows with mature trees on the western, northern and eastern boundaries. The southern boundary is open and undefined (although a field boundary is shown on OS maps).

2.4 Immediately to the north and west is Batchwood Golf Course, which is a municipal golf course, with Batchwood Hall Country Club, and Batchwood Sports and Leisure Centre further to the north. Beyond this is more open countryside.

- 2.5 Immediately to the south is the remainder of the arable field with a driveway (one way) leading from Batchwood Hall, and a further arable field beyond.
- 2.6 The site fronts Batchwood Drive to the east with a residential area beyond (known as Batchwood), which comprises an area of mainly two storey semi-detached and terraced houses built in the 1950's as a Local Authority housing estate.
- 2.7 **Access/Highways** – the site has a frontage to Batchwood Drive. It doesn't have an existing vehicular access and is accessed via the remainder of the field to the south.
- 2.8 Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants have undertaken a high level transportation and accessibility appraisal for the site, which makes the following conclusions:

*The site is located on the north western edge of St Albans and it is likely that the majority of the pupils will approach the site from the south and east. Existing levels of traffic in the vicinity of the site are generally high and modelling would be required to simulate the impact of school traffic on the local network.*

*One option for vehicular access to the site is provision of a new four-armed roundabout on Batchwood Drive, connecting the new site access to Links View. A simple T-junction into the site from Batchwood Drive is the second option, with a central ghost island on Batchwood Drive for vehicles turning right into the site or, as a slight variation on this, as a 'left-in/left-out only' arrangement, with existing roundabouts assessed for additional U-turning traffic. An alternative site access could be used to the north if these other options are unsuitable. However, this option is likely to require major earthworks to overcome the level difference between Batchwood Drive and the site at the north eastern boundary.*

*It is unlikely that the Highway Authority will accept the principle of parents dropping off/picking up pupils on Batchwood Drive and the surrounding highway. Therefore, on site parking for parents as well as staff will be required.*

*It is likely that the majority of pedestrians will need to cross Batchwood Drive. A signal controlled pedestrian crossing will be required. A new footway would be required along the northern side of Batchwood Drive in the vicinity of the pedestrian access.*

*There are no specific facilities for cycling adjacent to the site, though the new St Albans Green Ring walking and cycling route passes close by. There may be scope to widen the south eastern footway to provide a foot/cycleway. The local public transport provision in the area is reasonable, so offers options for staff as well as accompanied pupils to use this sustainable travel mode.*

*Overall, there appears to be reasonable potential for this site to be able to accommodate a school once the mitigation measures set out above are undertaken.*

[Note: the access options, particularly the northern option and the roundabout option would be likely to result in a significant loss of trees on the road frontage (which would help to screen the site). The southern access option would have less impact on trees or existing screening.

- 2.9 A copy of the report, and the accompanying drawing which illustrates the main conclusions, is attached at the Appendix.
- 2.10 **Pedestrian / cycle access** – none at present. There is currently no footway on the western side of Batchwood Drive.

- 2.11 **Public transport** – a bus stop is located on the frontage of the site. The stop is served by route 301 which runs from Hemel Hempstead to Stevenage (approximately 4 buses per hour).
- 2.12 **Green Belt** – the site is located in the Green Belt, which has a very clear, strong and well defined boundary in the vicinity of the site, which corresponds to Batchwood Drive.
- 2.13 **Land ownership** – not known. However, it is likely to be in single ownership – possibly in the same ownership as Gorhambury Estate, or the Crown Estate, who own extensive areas of land to the south and south west. St Albans Council’s website indicates that it does not form part of their estate, but that they own the adjoining Batchwood Golf Course.
- 2.14 **Flooding** – The Environment Agency website indicates that the site is not within an area at risk of flooding.
- 2.15 **Topography** – The slopes down from north west to south east, with the north western boundary being a gentle ridge, and the northern corner being the highest point.
- 2.16 **Listed buildings/conservation area** – there are no listed buildings on the site or in the vicinity of the site and the site is not within a conservation area. However, Batchwood Hall (unlisted - surprisingly) is a substantial country house located approximately 350 to the north of the site. The site is located approximately 400m from the St Albans Conservation Area which covers the older parts of St Albans and Verulamium.
- 2.17 **Archaeology** – the site is located in an extensive Area of Archaeological Significance: Sites where planning permission may be subject to a recording condition. Immediately to the south of the site is an Area of Archaeological Significance: Sites for Local Preservation. Approximately 550m to the south of the site is an extensive Scheduled Ancient Monument which covers the site of the Roman city of Verulamium. The site therefore has high archaeological potential. [See Section 3.0 – Relevant Local Planning Policies for more details]
- 2.18 **Ecology** – there are no designated areas of nature conservation importance in the vicinity of the site. Due to the arable nature of the site it is unlikely to have any interest, which is likely to be confined to the perimeter hedgerows and trees.
- 2.19 **Trees** – There are a number of mature trees on the north western, north eastern and south eastern boundaries of the site.
- 2.20 **Tree Preservation Order** – the status of the trees has not been investigated at this stage but it is likely that there are trees on the site which would be worthy of a TPO. A tree survey will be required.
- 2.21 **Agricultural land quality** – Grade 3.
- 2.22 **Public Right of Way** – a public Bridleway (St Albans 75) runs alongside the western boundary of the site and a further bridleway (also St Albans 75) runs along a driveway to the south of the remainder of the field.



2.23 **Public access / Community Use** – the site is not identified as an area of Registered Common Land or Open Access Land or designated as an Asset of Community Value. However the adjoining golf course is a public course with public access.

2.24 **Noise sources** – there are unlikely to be any significant noise issues.

2.25 **Size / shape** – the site comprises a large rectangular field which is more than the minimum 0.7ha size required by this study to accommodate a new primary school (excluding playing field) on a constrained urban site. It is also larger than the minimum 1.99ha site required by BB103 for a new 2FE primary school (including 60 place nursery and playing field) on an unrestrained school site in a non-urban area.

2.26 **Other Matters** – none.

### 3.0 SUMMARY OF RELEVANT LOCAL PLANNING POLICIES

3.1 The St Albans District Local Plan was adopted in November 1994 and covers the period 1981 to 2001. A number of policies have been ‘saved’.

3.2 The Local Plan Proposals Map indicates the following ‘saved’ designations/policies affecting the site:

**Policy 1 Green Belt** – the usual presumption against inappropriate development applies.

**Policy 111 Archaeological Sites where Planning Permission may be subject to a Recording Condition** – the site is located in AS.R.23 (Area around Verulamium) within which planning permission may be subject to a recording condition.

**Policy 114 (St. Albans City Centre, Building Height, Roofscape and Skyline)** – site is located in a Zone of Visibility. The bridleway immediately to the west of the site and a location near Batchwood Hall to the north are identified as public viewpoints from which there are views of the City Centre skyline. The policy advises, amongst other matters, that proposals shall not obscure or detract from views of the historic roofscape of the Building Height Control Area.

3.3 The Local Plan Proposals Map indicates the following ‘saved’ designations/policies adjoining the site:

**Policy 109 Scheduled Ancient Monument** - an extensive Scheduled Ancient Monument (AM.7 Site of Verulamium) lies to the south of the site. The policy resists proposals within the scheduled areas which would detract from their character.

**Policy 110 Archaeological Sites for Local Preservation** – the site is located adjacent to AS.LP.7 (Roman Occupation Area, North of Verulamium) within which planning permission will not be given to proposals which adversely affect remains or the character of the site.

- 3.4 The Local Plan also contains the following ‘saved’ policy which are also relevant:

**Policy 65 Education Facilities** is particularly relevant to the current proposals, particularly part B (iii) which relates to proposals for new schools in the Green Belt, stating that *‘New schools will be permitted only if very special circumstances can be demonstrated. It must be shown that no suitable location is available in areas excluded from the Green Belt and that there is an overriding need for the proposal to cater primarily for children living within the District’.*

**Policy 69 General Design and Layout** – seeks to ensure developments are to a high standard.

**Policy 74 Landscaping and Tree Preservation** – seeks to retain existing landscaping and provide new landscaping in developments

**Policy 102 Loss of Agricultural Land** – advises that development that would result in the loss of agricultural land will be assessed against a number of criteria – land quality, and farm economics and management.

**Policy 39 Parking Standards, General Requirements** sets out the Council’s car parking standards.

#### 4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 As far as we have been able to establish from St Albans DC’s on-line planning records there have been no planning applications for the site.

#### 5.0 ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL FOR NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL

##### Site

- 5.1 The site has an area of 5.69ha, which is significantly more than the minimum 0.7ha size sought for a new 2fE primary school by this study to identify potential new primary school sites (excluding playing field). It would also be significantly larger than the minimum 1.99ha site required by BB103 for a new 2FE primary school (including nursery) on an unrestrained site in a non-urban area.
- 5.2 The site slopes down relatively steeply (approx. 15m) from west to east and so would be likely to need to be terraced to create level areas for buildings, car parking, hard play and playing fields. There are mature trees on the frontage of the site and so an access would need to be positioned to avoid or minimise their loss.
- 5.3 The site is located in the green belt, on the outside of a very strong and clear boundary, and a new school would be contrary to green belt policy. In order to justify a new school in this location, very special circumstances would need to be justified to override the green belt designation, in particular it would need to be demonstrated that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. It would also be necessary to demonstrate that the impact on the green belt has been minimised.

- 5.4 An access would preferably need to be positioned to avoid or minimise the loss of trees on the frontage of the site, to avoid opening up the site to views and increasing the impact of the school on the Green Belt, which would reduce the prospects for obtaining permission. Three access options are identified in the transportation and accessibility appraisal, two of which would result in the loss of trees and the opening up of the site to views, which would harm the prospects. From a planning point of view the southern option is preferable but this may not coincide with the preferable access from a highways point of view and would extend the site in a southerly direction.
- 5.5 The site is also located in a Local Plan designated Zone of Visibility across which there are views from a number of public viewpoints of the St Albans City Centre skyline. The policy advises, amongst other matters, that proposals shall not obscure or detract from views of the historic roofscape of the Building Height Control Area. This policy mainly relates to developments in the Building Height Control Area itself but we would expect it to be an important consideration in any proposals for a new school on the site. A particularly important view is likely to be the view between Batchwood Hall and St Albans Cathedral. Subject to more detailed investigations to assess the visual impact on views we would expect a new school building to be located as close to Batchwood Drive as possible (subject to retaining trees), where the site is lower, and the height of any buildings to be limited to single storey. A location at the northern end of the site would avoid views of the more important parts of the skyline. Proposals should also be accompanied by generous landscaping proposals, which the site would be large enough to accommodate.
- 5.6 The site is also located in an area of potential archaeological interest around Verulamium within which planning permission may be subject to a recording condition. It is therefore suggested that an archaeological assessment be undertaken at the earliest possible opportunity to establish whether archaeology is likely to be a significant constraint on development.

#### **Acquisition of additional land**

- 5.7 There is open land to the south, currently part of the same field, which could potentially enable the site to be enlarged, but this should not be necessary.

#### **Maximum height of development**

- 5.8 Bearing in mind the green belt location and the location in a Zone of Visibility any buildings should be kept as low as possible and limited to single storey in height, in order to minimise the impact on the green belt and views.
- 5.9 In this location a green roof could possibly assist with minimising the impact on views as viewpoints are at a higher level.

#### **Location relative to area of need**

- 5.10 The site is located immediately adjacent to the Core Area which is the optimum location for a new primary school. It is located approximately 1.2km to the west of the centre of St Albans, taken to be St Peter's Street.
- 5.11 Although the site is outside the Core Area it is only just and so is therefore relatively well located relative to the need, although it would mainly serve the western half of the area.

- 5.12 However, it is located on the outside of Batchwood Drive which is a busy road forming part of the unofficial ring road to St Albans and would be a barrier for pedestrians and cyclists and so would be likely to require a pedestrian / cycle crossing to provide a safe crossing point.

### **Development principles**

- 5.13 The Development Principles drawing illustrates how a 2FE primary school could be accommodated on the site. This is based on a new primary school (including nursery) on an unrestrained site (1.99ha) in a non-urban area, and would be a single storey building (to reduce its impact on the Green Belt), rather than a two storey school on a constrained urban site (0.7ha), with a detached playing field, as this is considered to be more appropriate for the site bearing in mind its size and location.
- 5.14 The drawing includes two of the three access options (roundabout and southern options) identified in the high level transportation and accessibility appraisal. The northern access option is not included due to the location of the proposed building, the greater difference in level between the site and Batchwood Drive and the greater impact on trees.

## **6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The main planning and environmental constraints and considerations which would affect the potential use of the site for a new primary school are:
- Green belt designation
  - Location in a Zone of Visibility across which there are views of the St Albans City Centre skyline
  - Location in an area of archaeological interest
- 6.2 The site is of more than sufficient size to accommodate a new primary school, even to the higher BB103 based standards, and is well located relative to the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new school, although it is just outside the identified area. The site is likely to be in single ownership.
- 6.3 The site is currently located in the green belt, beyond a strong and clearly defined boundary, and so very special circumstances would need to be given to justify development. It would also need to be demonstrated that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. However, if the site were to be taken out of the Green Belt and allocate for a new school in the Local Plan these would not need to be demonstrated.
- 6.4 A new school would also need to be designed to minimise the impact on views of the City Centre Skyline, in particular the cathedral.
- 6.5 Investigations would also need to be undertaken to establish whether there are any archaeological features on the site and whether these would constrain development.
- 6.6 The main physical and site constraints and considerations which would affect the potential use of the site for a new primary school are:
- Topography - sloping nature of the site

- Trees on the frontage of the site
- 6.7 The topography means that the site is likely to need to be terraced (which would affect any archaeology)
- 6.8 The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal advises that overall, there appears to be reasonable potential for this site to be able to accommodate a school once the mitigation measures set out in the appraisal are undertaken. However, there may be an issue about the preferably point of access from a highway point of view and the need to retain existing trees on the frontage and so minimise the impact on the Green Belt.
- 6.9 If proposals for a school are to be progressed the following studies and technical investigations are likely to be required:
- Topographical survey
  - Landscape and visual impact assessment – in particular an assessment of the implications on Zone of Visibility and views
  - Archaeological desk based assessment, followed up by a geophysical survey
  - Tree survey
  - Transport assessment (including access drawing(s))
  - Preliminary planning report
- 6.10 In due course the following studies and technical investigations are also likely to be required:
- Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy
  - Ecological assessment
  - Alternative site assessment (based on this study)
  - Geophysical / Geotechnical investigations
  - Utilities report
- 6.11 The following may also be required:
- Archaeological evaluation (including excavations) – depending on results of geophysical survey
- 6.12 The overall conclusion is that the site is of more than sufficient size to accommodate a new primary school and is likely to be in single ownership, which is an advantage. Although it is outside the Core Area it is only just outside the boundary and so is relatively well located relative to the area of greatest need. It is also slightly detached from nearby houses which would help to reduce the impact on residential amenities, which is an advantage.
- 6.13 The main issue, as set out above, is likely to be the Green Belt location, outside a strong and clearly defined boundary, and the need for very special circumstances to justify a school, including the need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school.

## APPENDIX

## St Albans Primary School Site Search

### **High Level Accessibility Appraisal for Site North West of Batchwood Drive**

This high level access appraisal is to consider the suitability of access for a new 2 Form of Entry (2FE) primary school to the north west of Batchwood Drive in St Albans. It is to be read in conjunction with Drawing ST-2479-01, attached to the end of this document and refers to site reference O22.

#### **1. Site Background**

##### 1.1 Location

The site is situated on existing farmland on the north western edge of St Albans, bounded by Batchwood Golf Course to the north and west, a small area of farmland to the south west and Batchwood Drive to the south east. The site is noticeably higher than Batchwood Drive with an approximate level difference of 2m at the north eastern corner dropping to approximately 1m to the south east. It is likely that the majority of pupils will arrive from the Batchwood and Townsend residential areas to the south and east; using Batchwood Drive, Waverley Road and/or other smaller local residential roads.

##### 1.2 Local Road Network

Batchwood Drive is an approximately 7.3m wide 30mph Local Distributor Road which connects the A1081 Harpenden Road with the A5183 Redbourn Road. The A1081 meets Batchwood Drive at a traffic signal controlled crossroads junction approximately 1km to the north east of the site. The A5183 meets Batchwood Drive and the A4147 Hemel Hempstead Road at a four arm roundabout approximately 400m to the south west of the site.

Waverley Road is a 30mph Local Distributor Road which connects Batchwood Drive with the surrounding residential areas, via a three-arm mini roundabout.

Links View is an unclassified Local Access Road which joins Batchwood Drive opposite the site via a simple T-junction and runs about 225m south east to White Hedge Drive. It is a residential road of about 5.5m width.

##### 1.3 Existing Access

There is no existing pedestrian or vehicular access onto the site, with farm traffic accessing the site directly from the west.

##### 1.4 Existing Conditions

Observations of transport conditions in the vicinity of the site were made in the AM peak period of 19<sup>th</sup> January 2016 between 8am and 9am. The weather was cold and generally dry. Heavy traffic flows were observed along Batchwood Drive throughout the peak period. Traffic was heavy at the roundabout to the south west of the site, particularly on the A5183 Redbourn Road arm, where queueing was observed.

There are several existing laybys along the south east side of Batchwood Drive which were seen to be partially used at the time of the site visit.

### 1.5 Existing Pedestrian/Cycle Provision

There is no pedestrian footway along the north western side of Batchwood Drive in the vicinity of the site, apart from a small section which allows access to the northbound bus stop. There is a continuous, approximately 1.8m wide footway on the south eastern side of Batchwood Drive, separated from the carriageway by a grass verge.

There are two pedestrian refuge islands on Batchwood Drive, which are associated with the northbound bus stops. The nearest of these is adjacent to the north-east corner of the site. It is likely that the majority of pedestrians travelling to/from the site on foot/bicycle will be required to cross Batchwood Drive.

There is no provision for pedestrians to cross at the roundabout between Batchwood Drive and the A5183 to the south west. There are pedestrian facilities at the signal controlled junction between the A1081 and Batchwood Drive to the north east. There are footways on both sides of Waverley Road and on at least one side of Links View.

There are several public bridleways to the north of the site which pass through the surrounding countryside and golf course. However, these routes are unlikely to be used by pupils due to their rural location.

The new St Albans Green Ring walking and cycling route passes along Ladies Grove to the east of the site before joining Batchwood Drive 400m to the north east. National Cycle Route 6 passes 800m to the east of the site, crossing Batchwood Drive east of Townsend Drive, connecting Harpenden with St Albans.

### 1.6 Public Transport

There are existing bus stops adjacent to the site, on both sides of Batchwood Drive. Route 301, operated by Arriva, which connects Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead via Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and St Albans City Station, passes the site every half hour. Bus stops at the north western end of Waverley Road also serve route 653, operated by Uno Bus, which connects St Albans with Welwyn Garden City, via Hatfield, with approximately three services per hour.

The nearest railway station is St Albans Abbey, an unmanned stop approximately 1.9 kilometres to the south of the site, which has services approximately every 45 minutes to Watford Junction. The nearest major railway station is St Albans City, approximately 2 kilometres to the south east of the site, which has regular connections with Harpenden, Luton, London and further afield.



## **2. Access Considerations**

### 2.1 Network Capacity

Batchwood Drive was observed to experience heavy traffic flow in the AM peak period and appears to be a major route for vehicles entering and exiting the northern part of St Albans. As a result, the impact of any of the proposed highway and access works will need to be modelled.

The existing laybys on the south side of Batchwood Drive would not be sufficient for parking associated with the new school site. Batchwood Drive would not be an appropriate road for on street parental parking due to the current traffic volumes. Therefore, on site parent parking would be required.

### 2.2 General Improvements

Thick vegetation, including some mature trees, is present along the edge of the north eastbound carriageway of Batchwood Drive and would need to be cut back to achieve a proposed access arrangement and allow visibility for vehicles leaving the site.

The proposed site would require a new footway or foot/cycleway to be installed along the northern edge of Batchwood Drive, along pedestrian/cyclist desire lines into the school. Existing vegetation would need to be cut back to achieve this. Additionally, the existing pedestrian crossing refuge island would be insufficient to cater for the number of pedestrians expected and the relatively high traffic flows on Batchwood Drive. Therefore, a signal controlled crossing will be required.

There may be scope to widen the south eastern footpath of Batchwood Drive to provide a foot/cycleway.

### 2.3 Proposed Access

The topography of the area means that the southern section of the site is best suited to a vehicular access. Access from Batchwood Drive will have to consider the impact on the junction with Links View, which is opposite the site.

Pedestrian access to the site would be from the north western side of Batchwood Drive, with its position dependent upon desire lines into the site.

The following arrangements may be suitable:

#### *Option 1: Four-armed roundabout with Links Road*

There may be potential for a new four-arm roundabout to be installed on Batchwood Drive, connecting Links View and the site access. It is likely that the roundabout footprint would extend into the site and require earthworks due to the level difference between the site and Batchwood Drive. Modelling would be required to ensure that a roundabout does not have an unacceptable impact on the wider road network.

Option 2: T-junction with Batchwood Drive to south east

Another potential access point is approximately 120 metres to the south west of the junction with Links View. The separation between the site access and Links View would be greater than the Highway Authority standards of a minimum 30m distance between opposite junctions on a Local Distributor Road. However, it is advised that further study is undertaken to ensure that traffic utilising the access does not interfere with the Links View junction, due to its 'left/right' stagger arrangement.

Due to the high volume of traffic on Batchwood Drive, it is considered likely that a central ghost island will be required to permit southbound right turning traffic to wait, without affecting through traffic. Localised road widening will be needed to facilitate this. Alternatively, the vehicular access could be installed as a 'left in/left out only' arrangement, with traffic turning at the nearby roundabouts. These roundabouts would need to be modelled to establish if they are currently suitable or would require upgrade works, to accommodate more U-turning traffic.

Option 3: T-junction with Batchwood Drive to north east

If a new junction to the south east of the site is shown to have an unacceptable impact on Links Road and the roundabout is not viable, an alternative access position may be provided approximately 100 metres to the north east of the junction with Links Road. This would require an existing bus stop to be relocated and the access road would need to be constructed at a relatively steep gradient to overcome a level difference of approximately 2.5m. It is likely that the bank would have a major impact on visibility for drivers emerging from the junction, so it would be necessary to undertake further earthworks to improve this to an acceptable level.

### **3. Conclusions**

The site is located on the north western edge of St Albans and it is likely that the majority of the pupils will approach the site from the south and east. Existing levels of traffic in the vicinity of the site are generally high and modelling would be required to simulate the impact of school traffic on the local network.

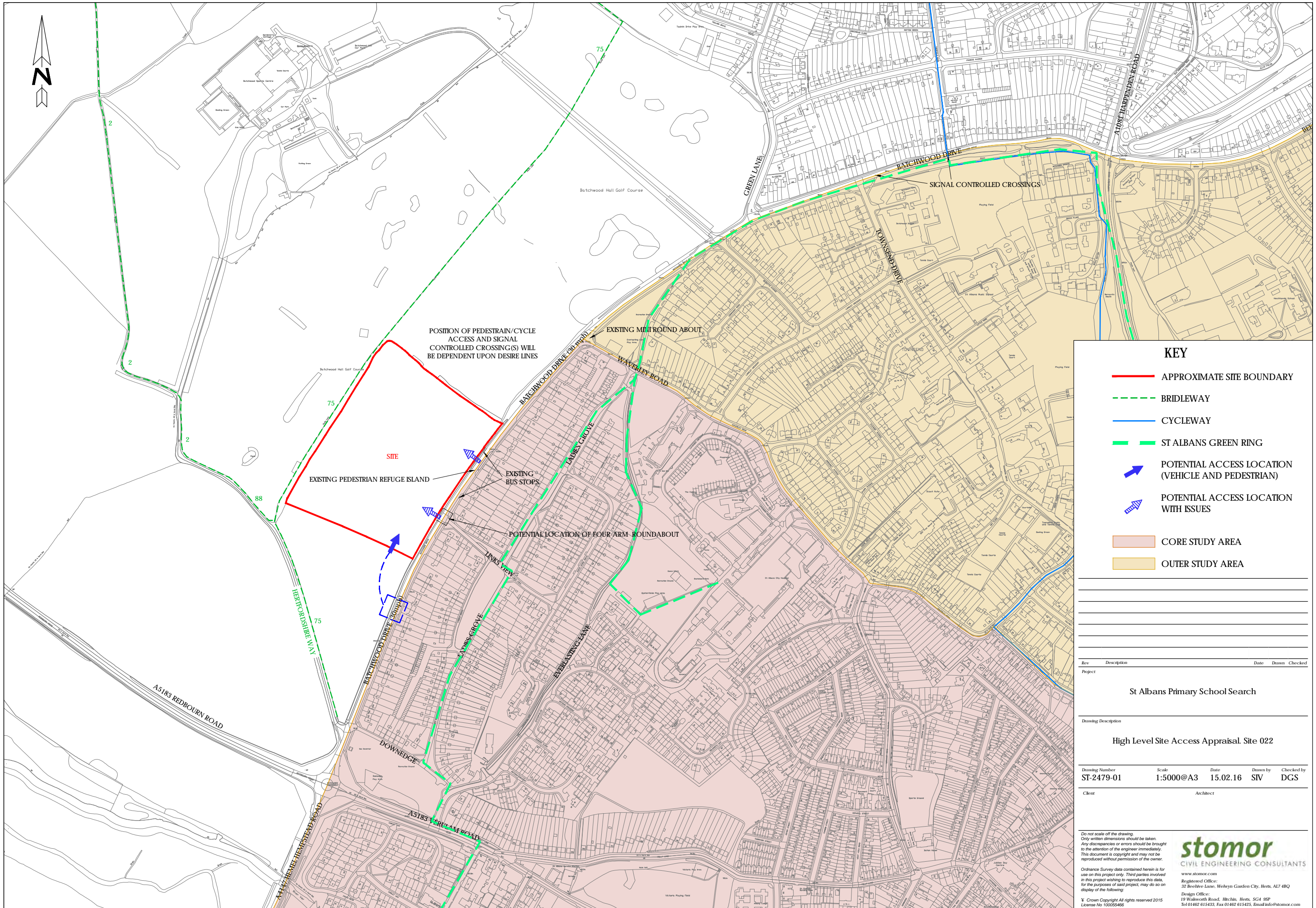
One option for vehicular access to the site is provision of a new four-armed roundabout on Batchwood Drive, connecting the new site access to Links View. A simple T-junction into the site from Batchwood Drive is the second option, with a central ghost island on Batchwood Drive for vehicles turning right into the site or, as a slight variation on this, as a 'left-in/left-out only' arrangement, with existing roundabouts assessed for additional U-turning traffic. An alternative site access could be used to the north if these other options are unsuitable. However, this option is likely to require major earthworks to overcome the level difference between Batchwood Drive and the site at the north eastern boundary.

It is unlikely that the Highway Authority will accept the principle of parents dropping off/picking up pupils on Batchwood Drive and the surrounding highway. Therefore, on site parking for parents as well as staff will be required.

It is likely that the majority of pedestrians will need to cross Batchwood Drive. A signal controlled pedestrian crossing will be required. A new footway would be required along the northern side of Batchwood Drive in the vicinity of the pedestrian access.

There are no specific facilities for cycling adjacent to the site, though the new St Albans Green Ring walking and cycling route passes close by. There may be scope to widen the south eastern footway to provide a foot/cycleway. The local public transport provision in the area is reasonable, so offers options for staff as well as accompanied pupils to use this sustainable travel mode.

Overall, there appears to be reasonable potential for this site to be able to accommodate a school once the mitigation measures set out above are undertaken.



POSITION OF PEDESTRIAN/CYCLE ACCESS AND SIGNAL CONTROLLED CROSSING(S) WILL BE DEPENDENT UPON DESIRE LINES

EXISTING MEDIAN ROUND ABOUT

EXISTING PEDESTRIAN REFUGE ISLAND

EXISTING BUS STOPS

POTENTIAL LOCATION OF FOUR-ARM ROUNDABOUT

**KEY**

- APPROXIMATE SITE BOUNDARY
- - - BRIDLEWAY
- CYCLEWAY
- - - ST ALBANS GREEN RING
- ➔ POTENTIAL ACCESS LOCATION (VEHICLE AND PEDESTRIAN)
- ➔ POTENTIAL ACCESS LOCATION WITH ISSUES
- CORE STUDY AREA
- OUTER STUDY AREA

Rev	Description	Date	Drawn	Checked
Project				
St Albans Primary School Search				
Drawing Description				
High Level Site Access Appraisal, Site 022				
Drawing Number	Scale	Date	Drawn by	Checked by
ST-2479-01	1:5000@A3	15.02.16	SIV	DGS
Client	Architect			

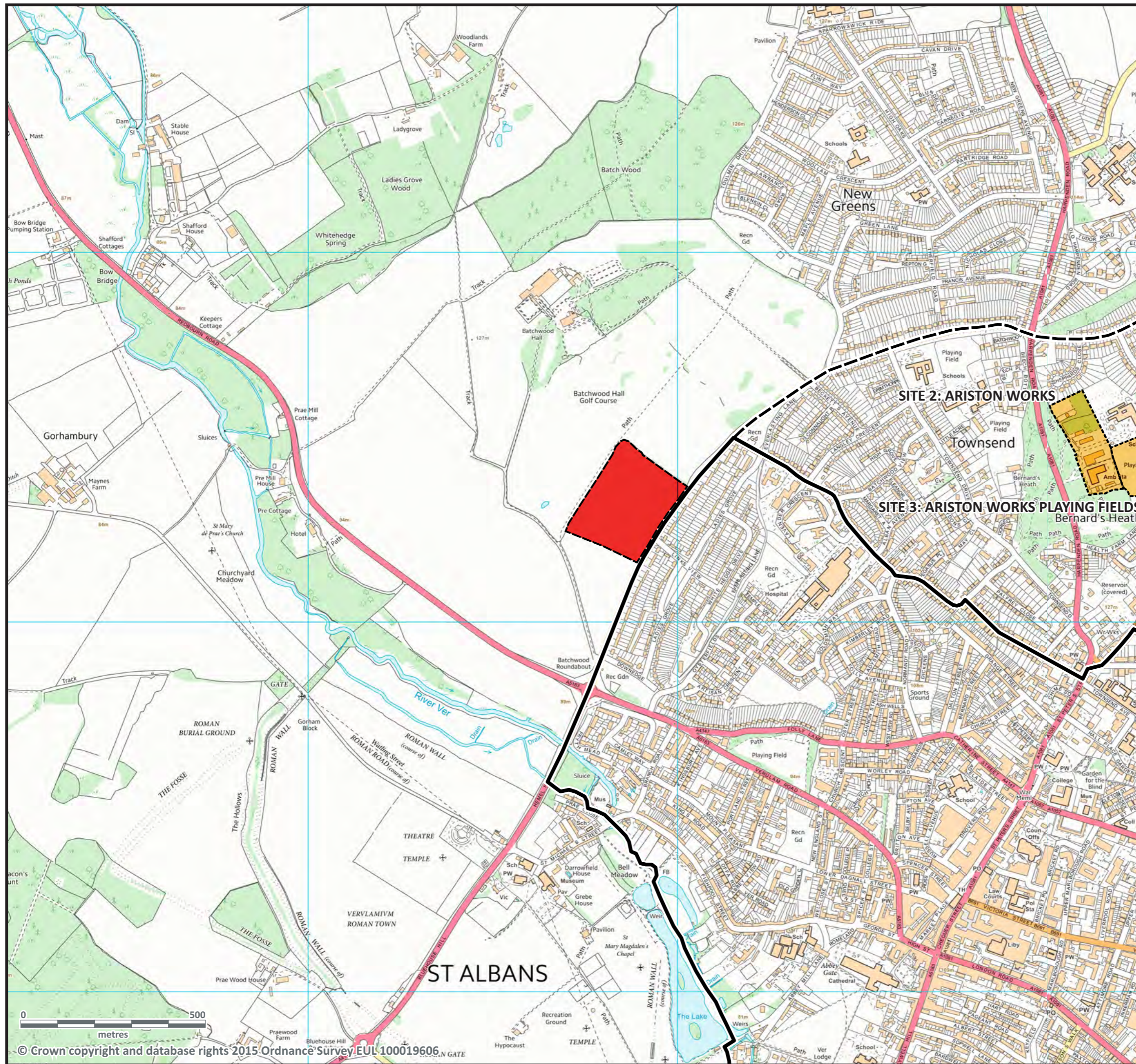
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## **DRAWINGS**



- THE SITE
- OTHER SITES UNDER CONSIDERATION
- CORE SEARCH AREA
- WIDER SEARCH AREA

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PROJECT TITLE  
**St Albans Primary School  
 Site search**

DRAWING TITLE  
**Site 1: O22 - Land to the west of  
 Batchwood Drive, St Albans  
 Site location**

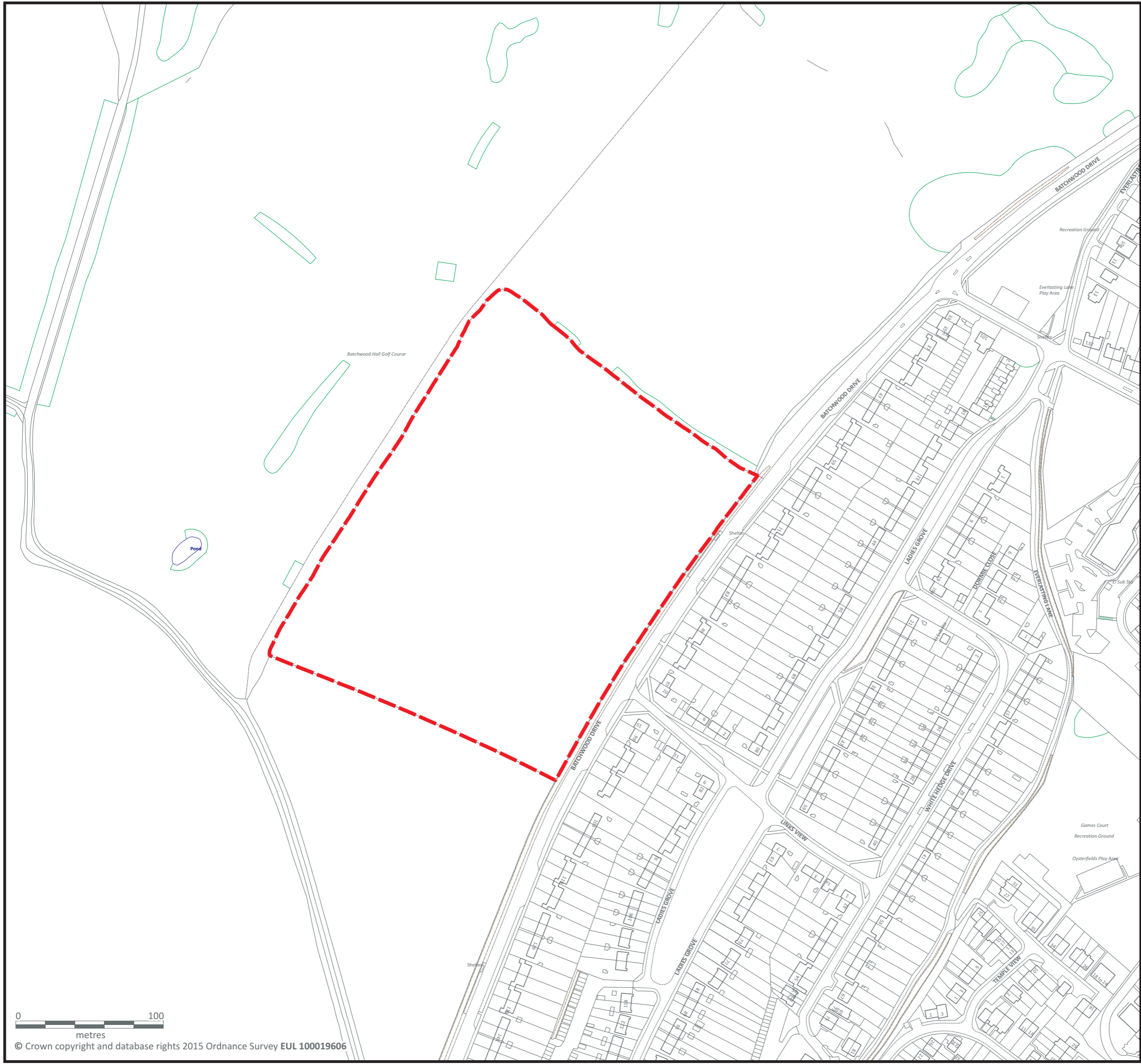
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PROJECT No.	N	100
5115		

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**SITE BOUNDARY**  
5.69ha 14.06ac



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PROJECT TITLE  
**St Albans Primary School  
Site search**

DRAWING TITLE  
**Site 1: O22 - Land to the west of  
Batchwood Drive, St Albans  
Site identification**

SCALE	DATE	CHECKED
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	DRAWN	DATE
	HNA	

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**5115** **N** **101**

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Site 1: O22 - Land to the west of  
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Aerial photograph

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PROJECT No.		
5115		102

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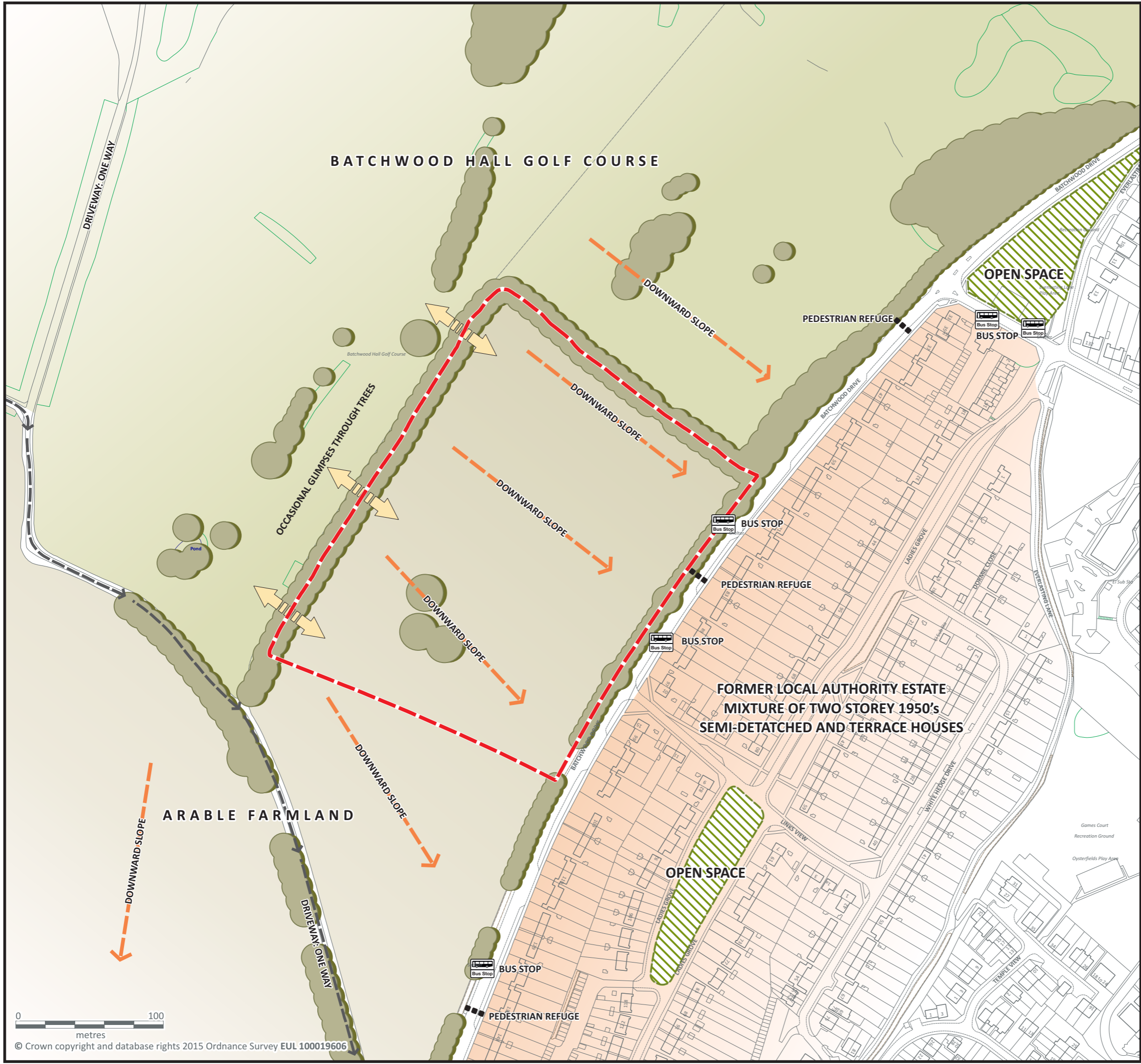
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0 100  
metres  
©GeoPerspectives



**SITE BOUNDARY**  
5.69ha 14.06ac



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**St Albans Primary School  
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DRAWING TITLE  
**Site 1: O22 - Land to the west of  
Batchwood Drive, St Albans  
Site appraisal**

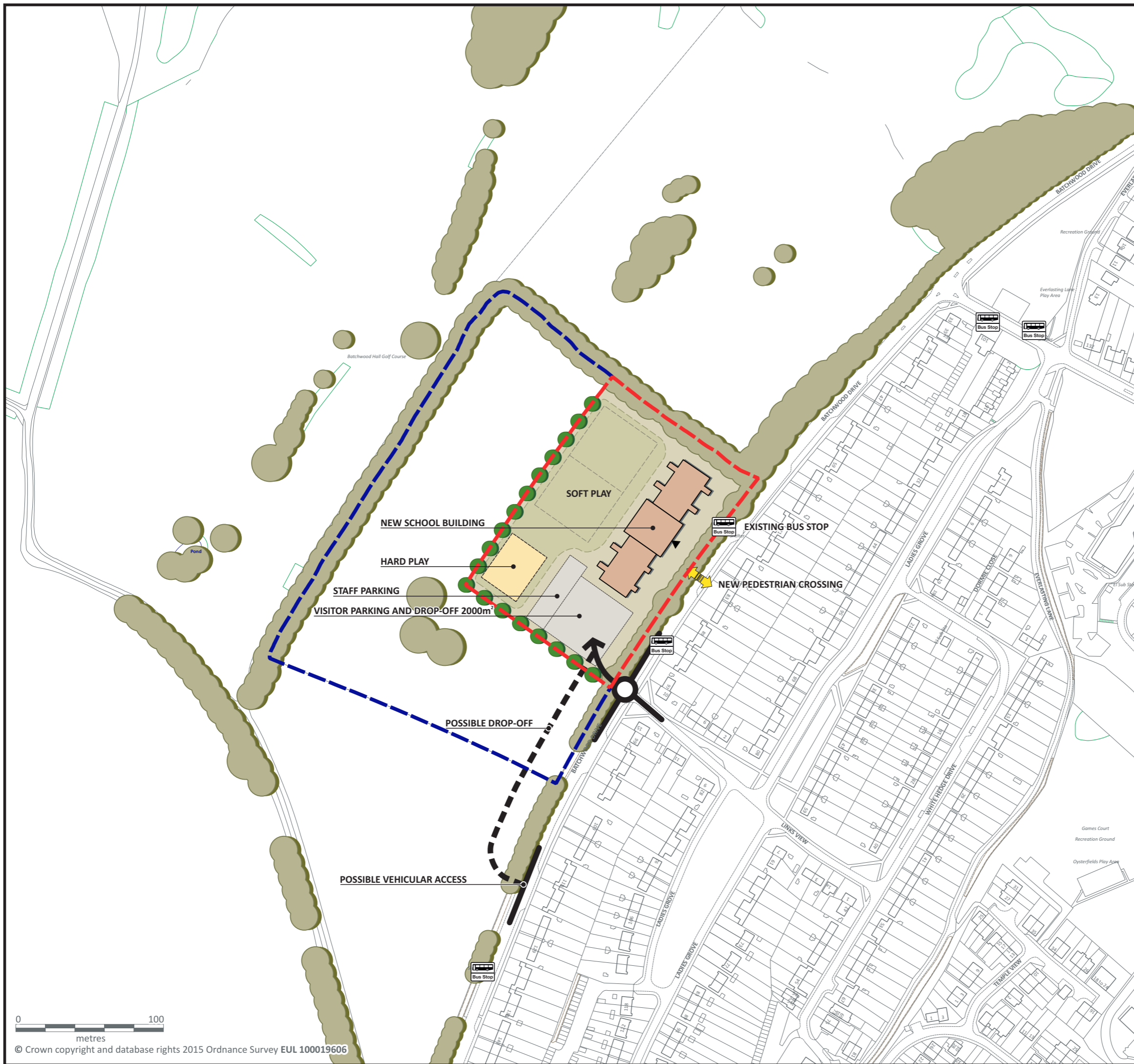
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PROJECT No.	N	103
<b>5115</b>		

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0 100 metres  
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- SCHOOL SITE BOUNDARY  
2.00ha 4.94ac
- REMAINDER OF SITE

**NOTE:**  
This drawing is based on accommodating a 1.99ha site

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PROJECT TITLE  
**St Albans Primary School  
Site search**

DRAWING TITLE  
**Site 1: O22 - Land to the west of  
Batchwood Drive, St Albans  
Development principles**

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1:2500	MARCH 2016	
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	HNA	

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5115		

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