



Land at High House Farm

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRASIAL

July 2024

LDĀDESIGN

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This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001:2015

1.0 Introduction

This **Landscape and Visual Appraisal** ('LVA') supports the promotion of the proposed residential development at the Land at High House Farm, Ninfield Road, Bexhill (the 'Site').

Its purpose is to outline the relevant landscape and visual factors that will have a bearing on the Site's emerging proposals, considering it is the context of policy, physical, environmental, social and cultural factors.

LDA Design has considered the ability of the Site and its surroundings to accommodate new residential development, identified where opportunities and constraints exist from a landscape/visual perspective, and how potential impacts could be minimised through a sensitive design response.

Opportunities have been sought where local landscape enhancements could be brought forward as part of emerging proposals, with a series of preliminary design principles proposed by LDA Design to be considered in the evolution of the Site's design.

The Site's Context

The Site is formed by six field parcels that encompass an approximate area of 16.1 hectares ('ha'); situated within a broad swathe of farmland between Bexhill's northern extent and the nucleated residential area of The Thorne, which is located along the principal route, Ninfield Road (A269).

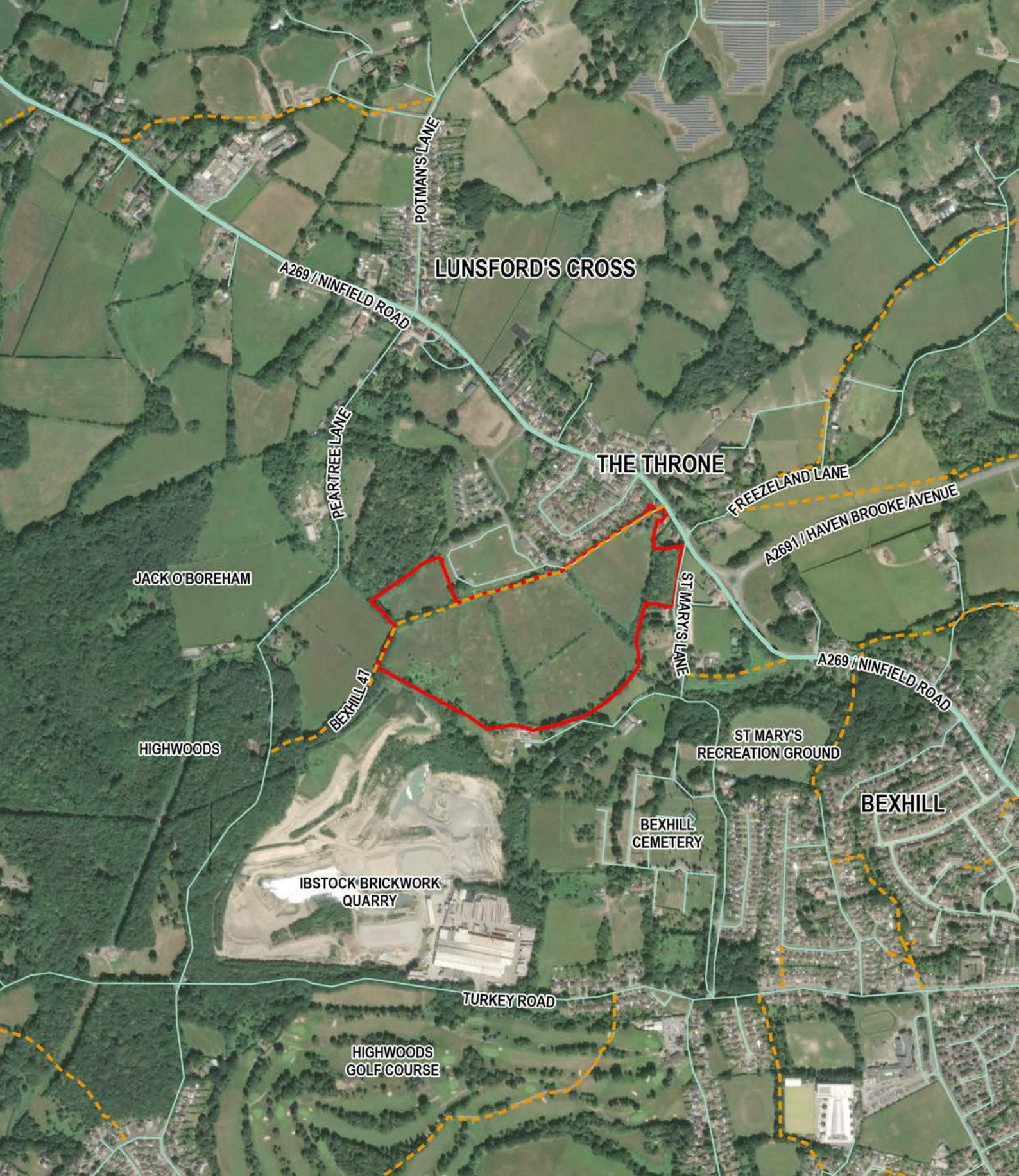
The Site's boundaries are delineated as follows:

The Site's northern boundary is defined by a mix of established shrub vegetation and mature trees, although there are notable gaps. Some gaps provide access to the fields, while others result from sparse vegetation. Beyond this boundary lies the settlement of Lunsford's Cross, which abuts part of the northern site boundary. A small block of woodland is also situated adjacently. The surrounding landscape consists of small to medium-sized fields, characterised by shrub and tree vegetation. These fields vary in openness, with some areas being relatively exposed while others are enclosed by mature vegetation.

The Site's eastern boundary is bordered by a mix of features. These include a small woodland block adjacent to residential properties and St Mary's Lane, which is lined with mature hedgerows and shrub vegetation. To the southeast, the site meets a small linear woodland that forms part of the northern edge of Bexhill. Beyond this eastern boundary, the landscape is a patchwork of small to large fields, interspersed with vegetated field boundaries, tree belts, and larger blocks of woodland. The northern edge of Bexhill is apparent from this part of the landscape.

The Site's southern boundary is marked by a belt of shrub and tree vegetation that provides a backdrop to isolated dwellings along the private (residential) road west of St Mary's Lane. Additionally, a small watercourse delineates part of the southern boundary. Further south, the landscape transitions into the northern extents of Bexhill's settlement area, the Ibstock Brickworks quarry, and the Highwood Golf Course (south of Turkey Road).

The Site's western boundary is delineated by established shrub and tree vegetation along the field's edge and the Public Footpath 'Bexhill 47'. Beyond this boundary, lies medium to large sized fields and substantial areas of established woodland. The woodlands are characteristic of the landscape to the west and provide a high degree of enclosure.



LEGEND

- Site Boundary
- Local Road
- A-Road
- Public Rights of Way (PRoW)
- Footpath

Figure 1: The Site and its Local Context

2.0 Landscape Policy & Designations

Landscape Planning Policy

The **Rother Local Plan Core Strategy** (adopted 29th September 2014) is the prevailing local plan for the Site and its surrounding. The policies listed below are pertinent to this LVA's purpose:

- **Policy OSS2: Use of Development Boundaries** outlines how *“Development Boundaries around settlements will continue to differentiate between areas where most forms of new development would be acceptable and where they would not.”* However, this policy makes clear that existing boundaries will be reviewed in the Development and Site Allocations Development Planning Document ('DPD'), considering different factors. This LVA considers those factors relevant to landscape and visual resources .
- **Policy OSS3 Location of Development** outlines the criteria for assessing the suitability of a particular location for development, when both allocating land for development and determining planning applications, sites and/or proposals, making clear that it should accord with the relevant policies of the Core Strategy . This LVA considers those factors relevant to landscape and visual resources .
- **Policy OSS4 General Development Considerations** outlines the additional criteria for new development, in support of Policies OSS2 and OSS3 . This LVA considers those factors relevant to landscape and visual resources.
- **Policy EN3 Design Quality** sets out the requirements for new development to satisfy and be considered of a high design quality. Those requirements relevant to landscape and visual resources are considered by this LVA, and are set out below for reference [inter alia]:
 - *Contributing positively to the character of the site and surroundings, including taking opportunities to improve areas of poor visual character or with poor townscape qualities, and*
 - *Demonstrating robust design solutions tested against the following Key Design Principles as appropriate (expanded in Appendix 4), tailored to a thorough and empathetic understanding of the particular site and context.*
- **Policy EN5 Biodiversity and Green Space** outlines how the new development is firstly required to protect and enhance the biodiversity, geodiversity and green spaces of its site, taking due consideration of the district-wide network of green infrastructure and the international, national and locally designated sites within the district. It also sets out how the development should seek to increase accessibility to the countryside from urban areas, especially in the Hastings and Bexhill fringes; ensure that development retains, protects and enhances habitats of ecological interest; and that developers are to integrate biodiversity into development schemes by avoiding adverse impacts from development on biodiversity or habitat, or where wholly unavoidable, provide appropriate mitigation against or compensation for any losses.
- **Policy BX3 Development Strategy** sets out the development strategy for Bexhill. It identifies that outside of the Strategic Growth Area at North East Bexhill, further housing and business growth will be focused on sites to the north and west of the town. The policy notes that the scale, timing and location of these broad development zones will ideally be determined through the Site Allocations process.

Landscape Designations

No designated landscapes have been identified within the Site.

However, it is acknowledged that the **High Weald National Landscape** is located approximately 2.3km to the Site's north-east (at its nearest point).

Based on the analysis of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility ('ZTV') and fieldwork observations, it has been determined that there would be no discernible visibility between the Site and the National Landscape due to a combination of factors such as intervening vegetation, landform, and buildings. This is discussed in further detail in **Section 6.0**.

As a result, it is judged that there would be no likely effects arising from the Proposed Development on the special qualities and natural beauty of the National Landscape.

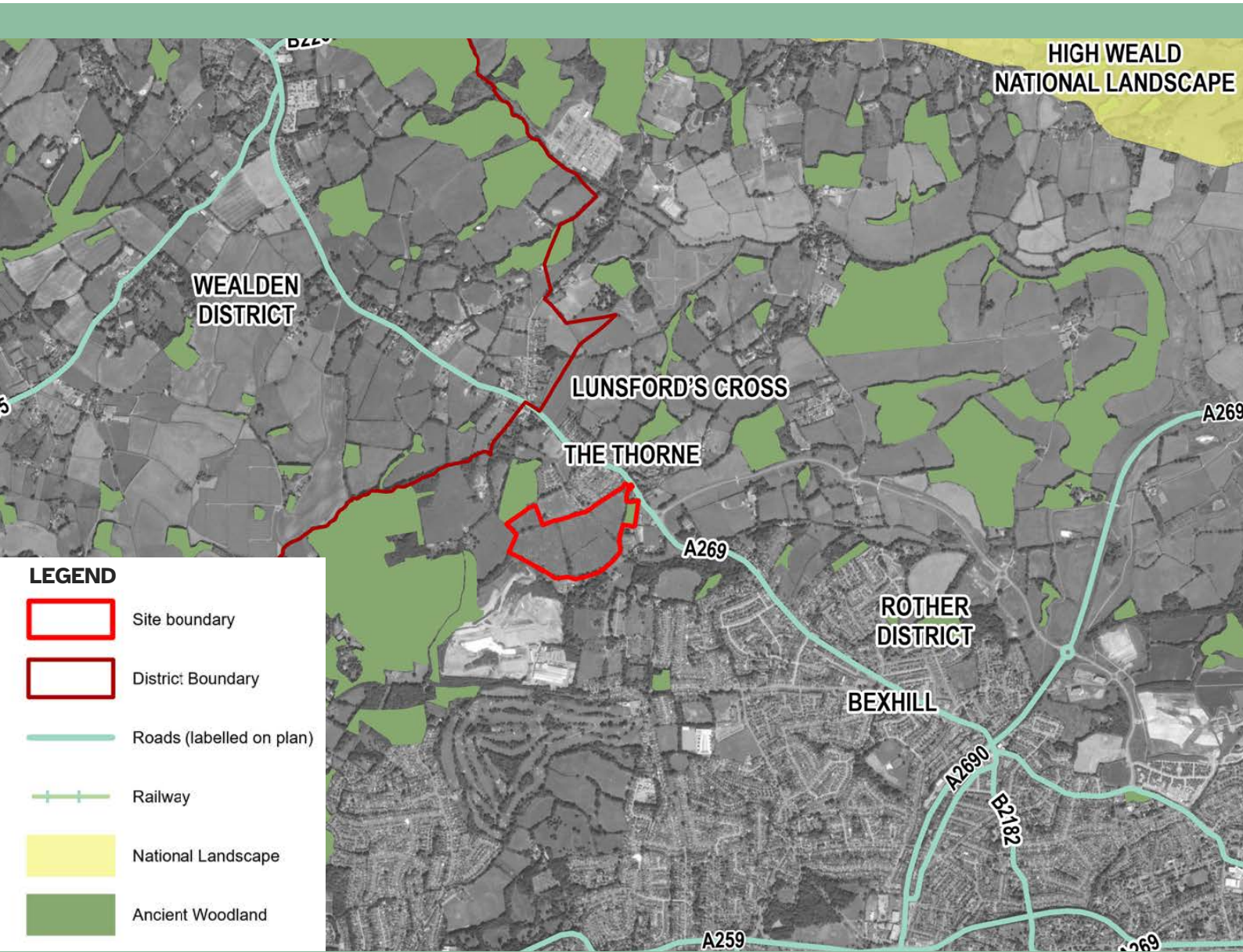


Figure 2: The Site and its Wider Context

3.0 Settlement Pattern

Bexhill originated from a medieval village, which today is situated on a hill approximately 1km from the coastline, reaching 46m AOD at St Peter’s Church and is known locally as the Old Town. Modern suburbs today surround this historic core, with the town’s central area nestled between Old Town and the seafront. This central district extends along Sackville Road, Buckhurst Road, Sea Road, and the Seafront, with a developed coastline stretching 6.2km.

The coastal town experienced significant expansion in the 1880s. Housing varied widely, from grand villas on Buckhurst and Station Roads to modest workers’ terraces around Victoria Road, and affluent four-story terraces on Devonshire Road, the town’s main shopping street. The early 20th century saw additional growth in the Holliers Hill and Dorset Road suburbs. Post-World War II expansion further extended Bexhill westward, joining it with the emerging area of Cooden and introducing a mix of housing types, including seaside flats.

The Site is situated north-west of Bexhill along Ninfield Road (A269), within a broad swathe of farmland extending between Bexhill’s northern edge and The Thorne. Located on the valley slopes of Bexhill’s fringe landscape, the Site is separated from Bexhill’s main settlement by several natural and man-made features, including the St Mary’s Lane Recreation Ground, Bexhill Cemetery and the Istock Brickwork Quarry. A notable change in topography to the Site’s south-east further accentuates this separation. Established vegetation (including Ancient woodland) in and around the Site serves as natural barriers, preserving a clear distinction from Bexhill and retaining a substantial open countryside to the Site’s east and west.

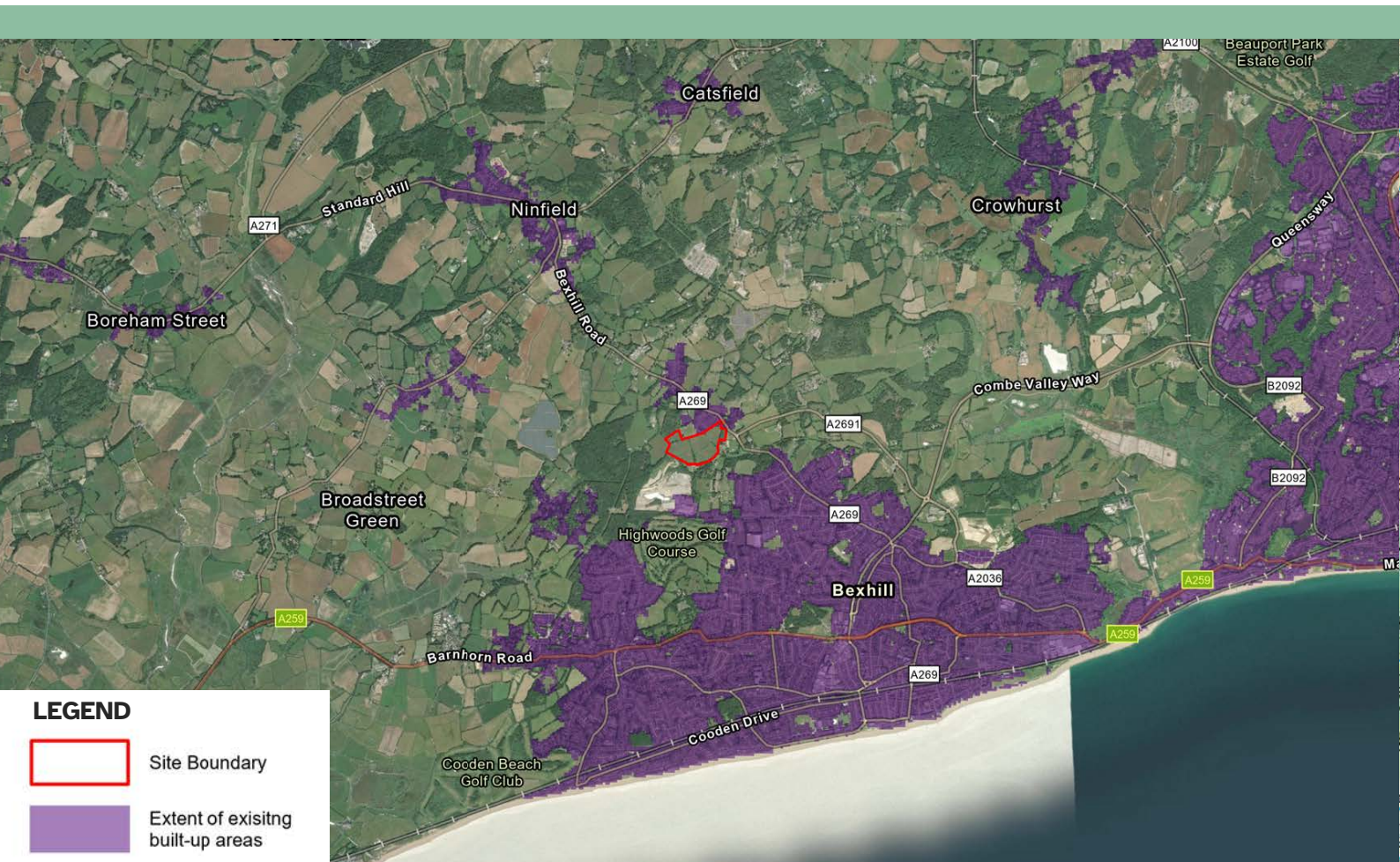


Figure 3: Settlement Pattern

4.0 Landform & Land Cover

The Site and its surrounding area feature an undulating landscape, characterised by ridges and narrow valleys. Watercourses often run along the base of these valleys, while small settlements and primary roads occupy the ridges. Bexhill, a nearby settlement, descends gradually towards the coast, with much of the town on low-lying coastal land. However, higher ground areas, like around Gleneigh Park, create a topographic 'bowl' towards the town centre.

The Site is well-vegetated, consisting of mature woodland, shrubs, and hedgerows. This, in combination with the undulating landform, limits visibility between the Site and its surroundings. Narrow routes, such as Freezeland Lane, are close to the Site's western boundary, and Bexhill's settlement edge lies to the south, occupying the north-facing valley side. Views to housing is visible along the ridgeline from location to the north of the settlement and the Site.

Nearby landmarks include Bexhill Cemetery to the west, buildings associated with the Listed Preston Hall visible in northern Bexhill to the east, and the Istock Brickworks quarry to the south-west. South of Turkey Road is Highwoods Golf Club, which forms part of a significant open space indented into Bexhill's western part.

To the east of the Site and Bexhill lies the lower-lying landscape of Combe Valley Countryside Park, which extends to meet Hastings. The broader High Weald countryside, to the north, is distinctly undulating, with a network of valleys and ridgelines. This area is heavily wooded, giving it an enclosed character, and is traversed by numerous lanes, some of which are sunken and lined with trees and hedgerows.

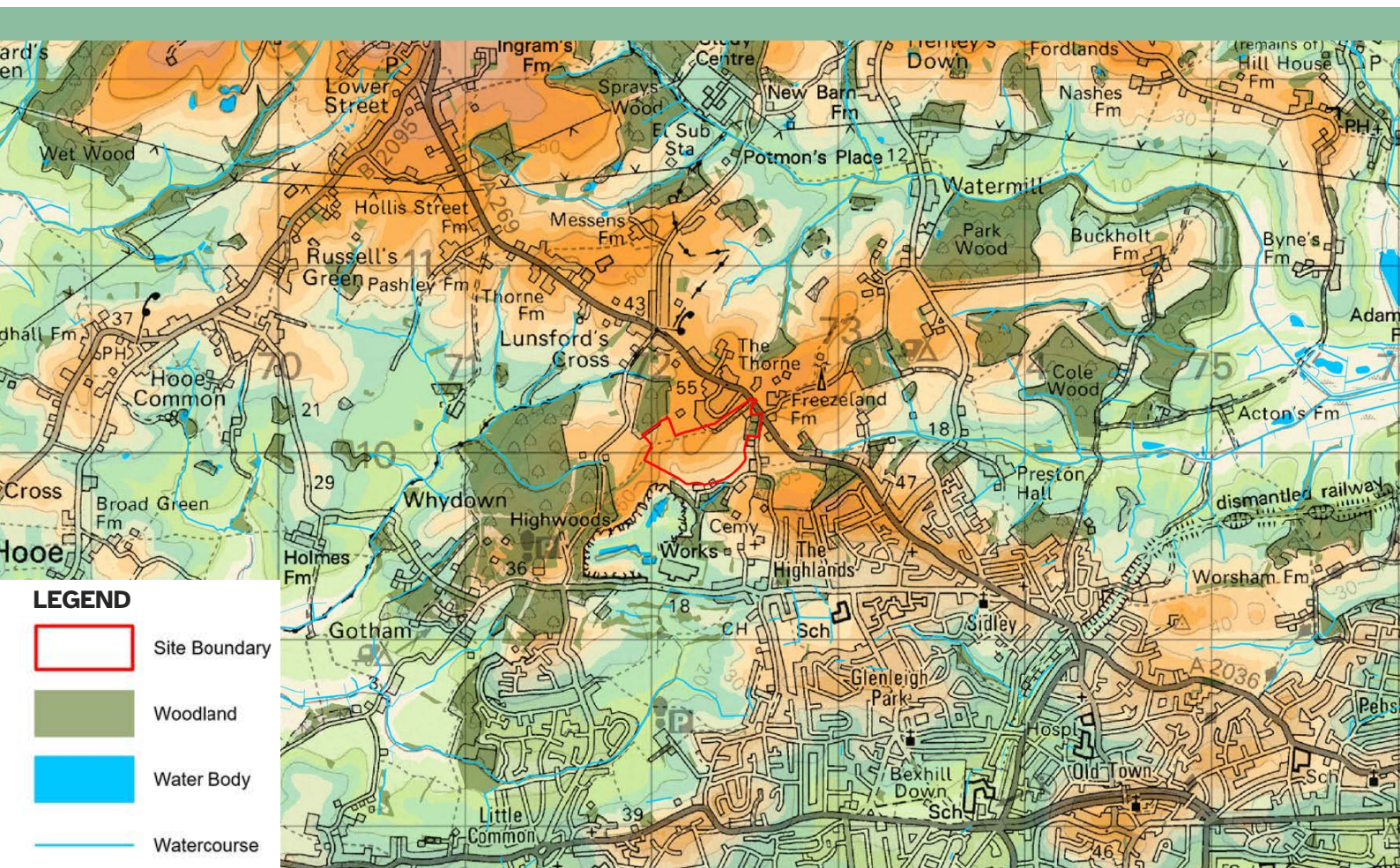


Figure 4: Landform, Land Cover and Hydrology and Woodland

5.0 Landscape Character

Landscape Assessment (March 2008)

The key characteristics of the Site and its surroundings are detailed in the **Rother District Council's Landscape Assessment** (March 2008) ('RDCLA'). This document evaluates each character area in terms of quality, value, sensitivity, and capacity for change from a landscape and visual perspective. The Site falls within 'Area 2: Lunsford Cross' LCA, described as [inter alia]:

"An area which straddles a ridge which embraces the north west of Bexhill and topped trees culminating in the notable block of woodland at Highwoods. The ridge top is fairly enclosed but becomes very exposed at the western end. The major south-facing slope is undulating...and becomes more exposed to the west, albeit above the brickworks and with a treed backdrop. [...]"

The **RDCLA** rates this landscape character as 'Good Quality' and of 'Medium Value.' Its sensitivity to change is assessed as 'Mainly Low' for character resources and 'Mainly Moderate' for visual receptors, indicating a 'Moderate' capacity to accommodate housing. Despite its proximity to urban areas, any development in this LCA would require careful design to preserve hilltop views. The **RDCLA** also considers it a "natural extension of Area 1: Freezeland, which has more capacity for development."

The North Bexhill Landscape and Ecological Study (August 2015)

The **North Bexhill Landscape and Ecological Study** ('NBLES') was prepared for Rother District Council to evaluate the nature and extent of development potential at North Bexhill, which was identified for further growth in the adopted Rother District Council's Local Plan Core Strategy. The **NBLES** is supported by a second report, **North Bexhill: Appraisal and Recommendation of Development Options**, which presents development options at North Bexhill.

The **NBLES** records that the Site is situated in the Landscape Description Unit ('LDU'), G: *Land West of St. Mary's Road*, which is described as:

"...an area of valley farmland on the north western extent of the settlement. It is bordered to the north by the adjoining settlement of The Thorn and an existing caravan/camp site. It contains two dwellings and the farm buildings at Turkey Farm on the north facing slope of the valley. The remainder of the LDU comprises a medium scale network of pastoral fields. A shallow water course flows along the base of the valley which is fed by a couple of ephemeral watercourses which dissect the valley sides to the north. There are extensive views from the higher ground on the northern valley slopes, southwards towards the coast."

Fieldwork conducted as part of this LVA confirms this is a fair descriptive summary of the Site and its surroundings and accords with the **RDCLA's** description on the Site's surrounding character. Regarding this LDU's Landscape and Visual Sensitivity, the **NBLES** describes it as being a:

"...pleasant rural character and exhibits characteristics of the wider High Weald character area, particularly within the north western field. It forms the northern extent of a wider landscape corridor which extends southwards through the western edge of Bexhill and separates Bexhill from the smaller settlements at Lunsford's Cross and The Thorne. There are views from St. Mary's Road, Bexhill Cemetery and from the public footpath and caravan park which extends alongside the northern boundary of the LDU. Long distance views tend to be contained by the intervening topography and significant areas of established vegetation. The LDU adjoins the north western edge of Bexhill although it is separated from the wider settlement by the open space at Bexhill Cemetery and the recreation ground."

The **NBLES** assess that the LDU’s capacity to “accept change” relates to whether the development would be perceived as being separate from the main settlement of Bexhill as a consequence of the intervening existing areas of open space by a change in the topography, being that the LDU occupies the valley sides on the north-western edge of Bexhill. **NLBES** infers that any development in this area, characterised by “...a relatively intact and pleasant landscape character...” that “...forms part of a wider landscape corridor extending through the western part of Bexhill...” could adversely affect the existing character of the landscape. Equally, **NBLES** indicates that development could also result in coalescence with the adjoining settlements at Lunsford’s Cross and The Thorne.

NBLES concludes by documenting its recommended mitigation measures to avoid potential effects on landscape and visual receptors, stating: “Avoid development in the higher quality part to the north west of the LDU. Retain the existing landscape framework, valley landform and respect the setting of Bexhill Cemetery.”

Responding to Landscape Character and Settlement Pattern

The Proposed Development will inevitably transform the Site from an open field into a built environment, altering its land use and character. This change could initially be perceived as adversely affecting sensitive parts of the landscape and leading to the coalescence of neighbouring settlements. However, the design of the emerging proposals carefully incorporates landscape and visual considerations to mitigate these potential effects.

The landscape strategy prioritises preserving and enhancing existing vegetation on-site, ensuring the new development integrates with its surroundings. Particular attention will be given to parts of the Site that contain key landscape features or are more visible from the Site’s surroundings, ensuring the development’s final proposal can be well integrated. This approach will create attractive new open spaces and green infrastructure, helping to visually confine the new buildings to the Site and its immediate vicinity. Consequently, longer-range views are expected to be limited. Where visible, the Proposed Development will appear as part of the broader Bexhill settlement context.

Despite potential concerns about coalescence between Bexhill and neighbouring settlements, the Site is separated from Bexhill’s main settlement by several natural and man-made features. These include the St Mary’s Lane Recreation Ground, Bexhill Cemetery and the Istock Brickwork Quarry. A notable change in topography to the Site’s south-east further accentuates this separation. Established vegetation (including Ancient woodland) in and around the Site serve as natural barriers, preserving a clear distinction from Bexhill. This careful integration of the Site’s proposals would reinforce Bexhill’s identity as a town situated on rising ground while preserving the fringe landscape’s character and broad settlement patterns in the Site’s locality.



Figure 5: View from the Site’s north-western field, looking south towards Bexhill’s northern edge.

6.0 Visual Environment

The Site is situated on the upper slopes of elevated land within an area of undulating topography that characterises the broader landscape.

The preliminary Zone of Theoretical Visibility ('ZTV'), illustrated in **Figure 6**, indicates that while the Site is positioned on elevated ground and could potentially be visible from surrounding areas, it is generally well-contained visually. This containment is attributed to the prevalent landscape features within and around the Site.

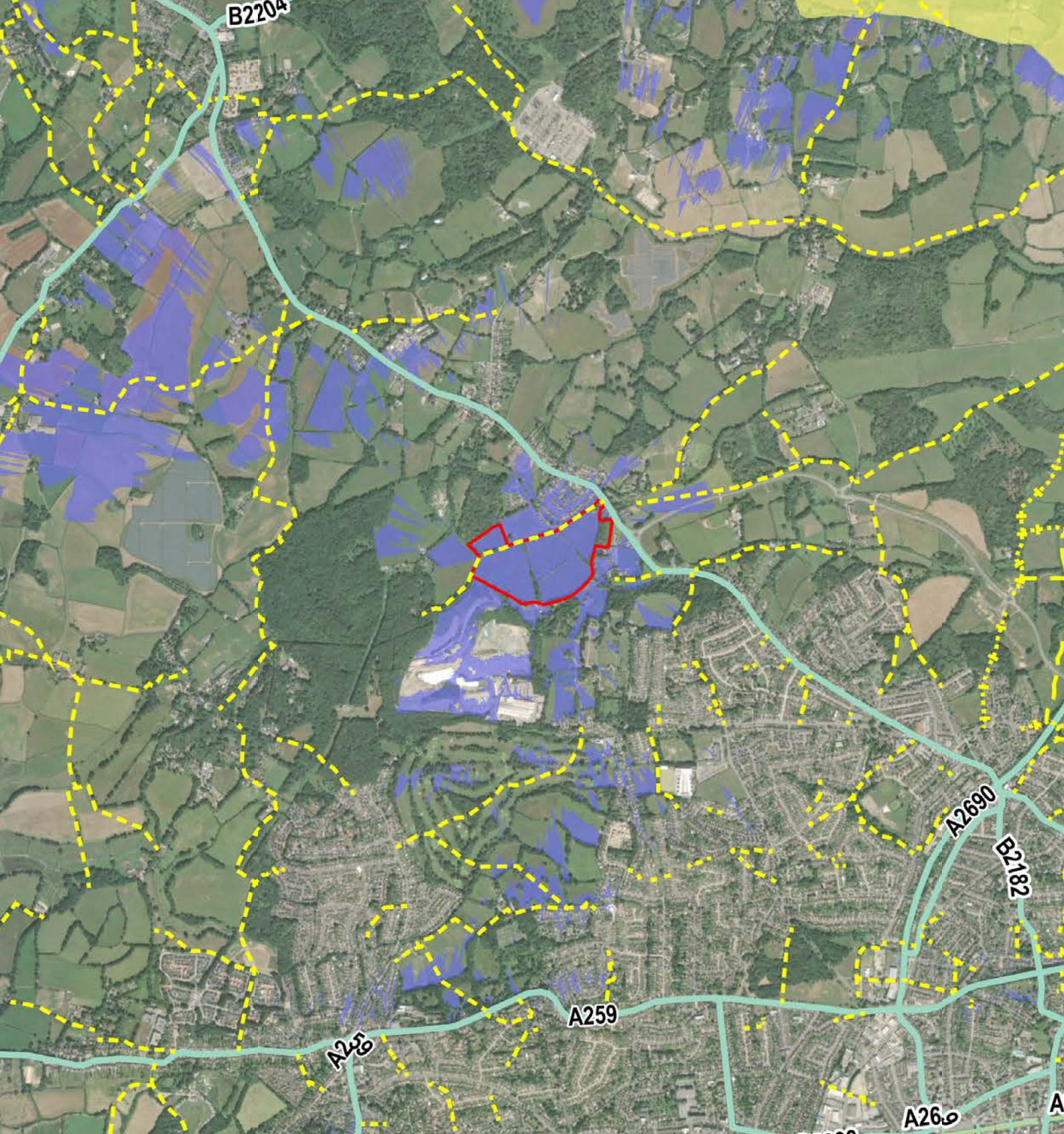
It should be borne in mind that the ZTVs represents a theoretical model of the Proposed Development potential visibility, which at this stage of the Project, is based on assumed building heights of 12m Above Ordnance Datum ('AOD'). Therefore, the ZTV only gives an impression of the extent of the visibility of the potential scheme. In reality, due to the resolution of the digital surface model used in the ZTVs, some localised features (such as walls, low hedgerows and small trees) are not captured within the dataset used/available at the time of assessment.

As a result, the extent of visibility experienced on-the-ground would be less than suggested by the ZTVs as these unaccounted localised features combine to screen the Proposed Development to a greater degree. Observations made during the assessment's fieldwork have provided a more informed understanding of the potential visibility on the ground; supporting the ZTVs study in deriving the extent of visibility that would, in reality, be experienced, as follows:

- **To the north:** Visibility is largely limited to the Site's immediate context. This restriction is due to a combination of established shrub vegetation and mature trees encircling the Site. Although the ZTV indicates potential visibility from the landscape to the north, particularly between the A269 and the National Landscape's boundary, field observations confirm that intervening vegetation and undulating terrain significantly obscure views of the Site and the Proposed Development from more distant vantage points.
- **To the east:** Visibility is confined to the Site's immediate surroundings. This is due to the prevalent presence of mature shrubs, hedgerows, and trees, along with local topographic variations. Fieldwork shows that there is minimal to no visibility of the Site from areas beyond its immediate context.
- **To the south:** Long-range views of the Site's most elevated slopes are possible from the rising landform across the narrow river valley. However, these distant views position the Site within the context of existing development that forms part of Thorne and the northern extents of Bexhill. The Site's lower slopes are obscured by a combination of vegetation and the undulating terrain.
- **To the west:** Visibility is restricted to the Site's immediate surroundings. Despite the ZTV suggesting potential visibility from the landscape beyond Highwoods, fieldwork confirms that there is minimal to no visibility from areas further west than the Site's immediate context. This is due to the combined effect of intervening vegetation and the undulating terrain, which significantly obscure long-range views towards the Site.

Overall, despite the Site's elevated position, established natural features and terrain limit its visual impact on the wider landscape. These natural features include established vegetation (comprising established woodlands, tree belts, hedgerows and shrubs) alongside a gently undulating landform and buildings in the intervening landscape. Fieldwork has observed also that this is typical of the landscape character.

Representative photography, presented in this section overleaf, shows a range of views from within the Site and its surrounding landscape.



LEGEND

- Site Boundary
- National Landscape
- A Road and B Roads (labelled on plan)
- Railway
- National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 2

- Public Rights of Way (PRoW)
- Footpath
- Bridleway
- Byway Open to All Traffic
- Restricted Byway

Preliminary Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Study

- 3 Storey building height of 12m

This drawing is based upon computer generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) studies produced using the viewshed routine in the ESRI ArcGIS Suite. The areas shown are the maximum theoretical visibility, taking into account topography, vegetation and buildings which have been included in the model with the heights obtained from a LiDAR digital surface model. Due to its resolution, the surface model does not take into account every localised feature such as walls, small hedgerows or small trees and therefore only gives an impression of the extent of visibility. The ZTV includes an adjustment that allows for Earth's curvature and light refraction. It is based on LiDAR terrain data with a 2m² resolution.

Figure 6: Preliminary Zone of Theoretical Visibility

Responding to the Visual Environment

The photography on the opposite page presents a series of views captured during the LVA's fieldwork, showing various localities where visibility of the Proposed Development might occur.

In areas where views of the Proposed Development are possible within the immediate context of the site, the landscape would fundamentally change from an open field to a newly developed area. Viewpoints 1 to 3 illustrate the current visibility of the Site from the Public Rights of Way Network. From the wider surrounding landscape, there is little to no visibility of the Site. Viewpoints 4 and 5 depict how the Site appears from public locations beyond its immediate vicinity.

Figure 7 displays the locations of each viewpoint.

Currently, the Site is characterised by prevalent and established vegetation along its boundaries and within its internal field pattern. Its elevated position north-west of Bexhill naturally limits its visibility. Nonetheless, it is crucial for the design of the Proposed Development to carefully address visual considerations to mitigate potential impacts.

Considering the emerging layout and landscape strategy, it is anticipated that any visual effects on views and surroundings would primarily affect the Site and its immediate surroundings, reducing with distance from the Site's extents. The landscape strategy emphasises the preservation and enhancement of existing on-site vegetation, ensuring the new development integrates itself with its surroundings, especially where parts of the Site are more visible from the wider landscape, such as its most western fields. This approach will enhance existing on-site vegetation while visually confining the new buildings to the immediate vicinity. Consequently, long-range views are expected to be minimally affected, and where visible, the Proposed Development will be seen in the broader settlement context of Bexhill.



Figure 7: Viewpoint Locations

THE SITE'S NORTH-WESTERN EXTENTS



Viewpoint 1 - Public footpath 'Bexhill 47'

THE SITE'S EASTERN EXTENTS



Viewpoint 2 - Public footpath 'Bexhill 47'

THE SITE'S NORTH-WESTERN BOUNDARY



Viewpoint 3 - Public footpath 'Bexhill 47'

THE SITE'S APPROXIMATE LOCATION
(beyond the vegetation and buildings)



Viewpoint 4 - Public footpath 'Bexhill 61'

THE SITE'S SOUTH-EASTERN EXTENT
(beyond the vegetation)



Viewpoint 5 - St Mary's Lane

7.0 Design Recommendations

Design Recommendations

The Site offers opportunities to create a landscape-led scheme that would deliver a beneficial addition to the District without undue consequences on landscape character and views. The design and LVA is an iterative process, ensuring that the necessary measures to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects are incorporated into the proposals, along with other measures that could be utilised. This approach puts the environment at the forefront of the design; preserving the existing, enhancing it and ensuring that the newly built environment is sensitively integrated into it.

Based on the understanding of the Site and its context, several opportunities and constraints have been identified, which have informed the emerging concept for the first phase of development. A series of landscape design principles are listed below that support the Site's overarching vision to create a strong sense of place and ensure that any future masterplan is informed by the Site's inherent qualities.

The **Design Principles** for the project emphasise sensitive integration with the existing landscape and community. They include:

- 1. Conservation of the Existing Field Patterns:** Develop within the current field boundaries, retaining as much of the existing vegetation as possible to preserve the landscape's character.
- 2. Create Green Infrastructure:** Introduce new green spaces that seamlessly interface with the surrounding rural landscape. Utilise existing natural features to foster an attractive, biodiverse environment that encourages positive visual connections to and from the Site.
- 3. Protect of Ancient Woodland:** Safeguard the Ancient Woodland in the Site's eastern area, ensuring its preservation as a vital natural resource.
- 4. Respect the Site's Topography:** Design new buildings that complement the site's higher landforms by not exceeding the Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) heights of adjacent properties, respecting the current visual environment of the area.
- 5. Enhance Existing Public Rights of Way:** Improve the northern boundary's PRoW with sensitive vegetation enhancements, enriching the walking experience while preserving natural pathways.
- 6. Create New Connections and Destinations:** Introduce new recreational, play and open areas that permit new and existing residents the space to gather and enjoy recreationally in combination with the development of new pathways through and out of the Site, creating links to nearby settlements and integrating with the broader network of accessible routes.

These principles focus on landscape and visual integration, with further considerations for ecology, heritage, traffic, arboriculture, and planning to be addressed in subsequent phases.

Figure 8 showcases the Project's masterplanner's illustrative masterplan.



Figure 8: Illustrative Masterplan



