Land East of Watermill Lane (north), Bexhill

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

July 2024

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Comment Final for Submission

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

Land East of Watermill Lane (north), Bexhill

1.0 Introduction

This document sets out the preliminary findings and recommendations of the **Landscape and Visual Appraisal** ('LVA') that has been undertaken in support of the promotion of the proposed residential development at the *Land West of Watermill Lane (north), Bexhill* ('the Site').

The purpose of this document is to consider the ability of the Site and its context to accommodate new residential development; identify the potential landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development; and highlight opportunities to mitigate and avoid potential adverse effects; and bring forward local landscape enhancements where possible.

The LVA has been undertaken by LDA Design, who have been appointed as landscape architects for Rurban Estates who are promoting the Site.

The LVA will form the basis of subsequent Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ('LVIA'), should a planning application be submitted in the future.

1.1. The Site's Context

The Site is situated to the north-east of Bexhill, a coastal town located in the Rother District of East Sussex, in a broad swathe of farmland beyond the northern extent of Bexhill's main settled area, the Site is nestled between Cockerel's Wood, Cole Wood, Haven Brook Avenue (A2691) and Watermill Lane. **Figure 1** places the Site in its local context.

The Site comprises two field parcels, which are separated by a shrubby linear hedgerow with several substantial gaps, along which a series of ponds follow its alignment. The Site encompasses an approximate area of 7.15 hectares ('ha'). A third field in the ownership of the landowner, which is situated between Cockerel's Wood and Watermill Lane, would potentially deliver recreational open spaces & biodiversity enhancements in conjunction with the Site and its main area of development.

The Site's boundaries are well-defined by a variety of landscape features, which can be described as follows:

• The Site's northern boundary is defined by the southern edge of Cockerel's Wood (an extensive and mature woodland), with a small section in the north-eastern corner marked by an established hedgerow and a field gate. Further north, the landscape is characterised by an undulating landscape that comprises a mosaic of medium to large agricultural fields, commonly bordered by well-vegetated boundaries.

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Park Wood, an expansive linear woodland that follows the general course of Watermill Stream and connects to Hanging Wood to the Site's east, is located to the north-east and east of the Site and forms a notable feature in the landscape. The village of Watermill lies immediately north of Park Wood, forming a linear settlement along Watermill Lane, the principal road in this area. Another cluster of development, comprising dwellings and commercial buildings, is located near the northernmost section of Freezeland, close to the Site's north-western boundary.

- The Site's eastern boundary is defined by Cole Wood, an extensive and mature woodland that stretches southwards towards Haven Brook Avenue. A small outcrop of this woodland also extends westwards, forming part the of the Site's south-eastern boundary. To the east of the Site, the landscape is characterised by a rural landscape that features undulating landform and a mosaic of agricultural fields, which range from small to large in scale and are commonly delineated by well-vegetated borders. Hanging Wood, an expansive linear woodland that follows the general course of Watermill Stream, connects to Park Wood, located to the Site's north, forming a notable feature in the landscape. A small number of isolated dwellings are situated within area, interspersed and connected by the A2690 and a small number of local roads / lanes.
- The Site's southern boundary is defined by Cole Wood, which extends westward along the southeastern edge and gradually merges with the shrubby hedgerows along the south-western boundary. Directly to the south lies a small-scale field of grassland, nestled between the Site and Haven Brook Avenue (A2691). Beyond the A2691 and its roadside bund (circa 2-3m high), there are a few small to large fields, each delineated by a mosaic of well-vegetated boundaries. Bexhill's north-western edge, near Preston Hall, adjoins these fields. The urban edge of Bexhill is well-vegetated with a combination of trees and shrubs, typically forming linear features that extend out into the surrounding landscape.
- The Site's western boundary is defined by a mature shrubby hedgerow lining the eastern edge of Watermill Lane and the well-vegetated boundary of Cockerels Farmhouse (a Grade II Listed Building). To the Site's west, the landscape is characterised by an undulating landform with a mosaic of small to medium agricultural fields, typically bordered by well-vegetated boundaries. Kiteye Wood, although smaller than other woodlands in the area, stands out as a discernible feature in the landscape. Near the northernmost section of Freezeland, close to the

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Site's western boundary, there is a cluster of development comprising both dwellings and commercial buildings. Further west, beyond Kiteye Wood, lies the settled area of The Thorne.

Plate 1 below shows the view from the Site's western extent, looking southwards towards the northern edge of Bexhill.



Plate 1: View towards the Site's southern boundary

Plate 2 presents the views from the Site's south-eastern extent, looking northwards towards its northern boundary and Cockerel's Wood.



Plate 2: View towards the Site's northern boundary

Overall, the Site is visually enclosed by several natural features, and views to it are generally confined to its immediate context. While physically separated, the Site is influenced by both nearby urban and rural areas. An analysis of the Site and its surroundings is detailed in **Sections 3.0** to **5.0**.

The Site is also situated among several consented and planned developments, many of which were allocated in the **Development and Site Allocations Local Plan** ('DaSA') adopted in December 2019. Additionally, several 'potential sites' have been identified in the **draft Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment** ('HELAA') published in April 2024.

Figure 1 identifies the consented, allocated and potential sites within the Site's local vicinity, illustrating its location in an evoling landscape that will

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change in the future. With consideration of the Site and its context, the allocated / consented sites of BEX3c, RR/2021/2545/P and RR/2022/2545/P will, in particular, influence the character and visual environment of the Site's immediate surroundings in the future.

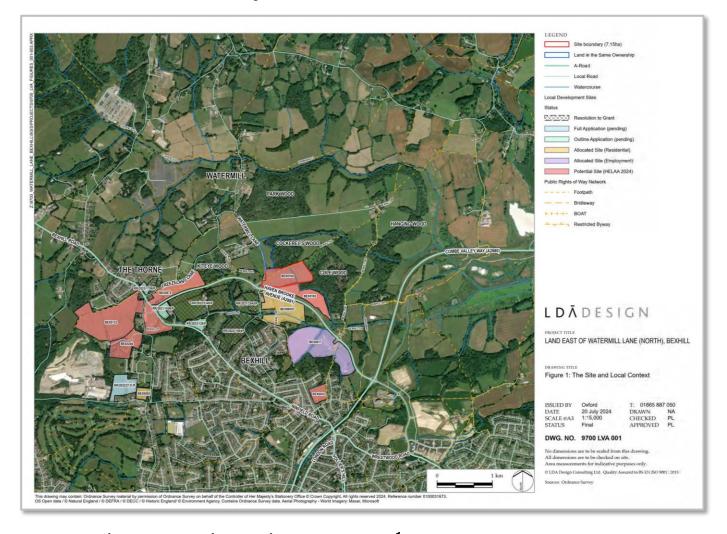


Figure 1: The Site and its Local Context¹

¹ A full-size copy of this Figure is appended to the end of this document.

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2.0 Landscape Policy & Designations

2.1. 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, such as [inter alia]:
 - Existing pattern, form and function of settlements, including of closely 'linked' settlements and important 'gaps' of countryside between them
 - Character and settings of individual towns and villages
 - Sensitivity to further development both within the main built up confines and in more rural fringes
 - The amount of land needed to fulfil development needs and requirements
 - Environmental considerations, including the need to conserve designated areas of national and local landscape, archaeological, geological, ecological or historical importance
 - Following physical features, unless this may suggest a potential for development that is inappropriate
- 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. The criteria is to be considered in the context of the following [inter alia]:
 - The spatial strategy for the particular settlement or area, and its distinct character

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- Making effective use of land within the main built-up confines of towns and villages, especially previously developed land, consistent with maintaining their character
- The deliverability of development, including consideration of land ownership patterns and the viability of development
- Policy OSS4 General Development Considerations outlines the additional criteria for new development, in support of Policies OSS2 and OSS3, which is as follows [inter alia]:
 - It does not unreasonably harm the amenities of adjoining properties
 - It respects and does not detract from the character and appearance of the locality
 - It is compatible with both the existing and planned use of adjacent land,
 and takes full account of previous use of the site
 - In respect of residential development, is of a density appropriate to its context, having due regard to the key design principles
- 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 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

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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. Bullet (iii) 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.

2.2. Landscape Designations

No statutory or non statutory (local) designated landscapes have been identified within or in close proximity to the Site.

However, it is acknowledged that the **High Weald National Landscape** is located approximately 1.6km to the Site's north (at its nearest point).

Based on the analysis of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility ('ZTV'), 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.

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 **High Weald National Landscape**.

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3.0 Landform, Landcover and Settlement Pattern

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

The coastal town saw significant expansion in the 1880s, with housing ranging 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 brought additional growth in the Holliers Hill and Dorset Road suburbs. Post-World War II expansion further extended Bexhill westward, merging it with the emerging area of Cooden and introducing a mix of housing types.

The Site is located to the north-east of Bexhill, the main settlement in the local area. The Site and its surroundings are characterised by an undulating landform that features several ridges and narrow valleys. Watercourses run along the base of these valleys, while small settlements and primary roads typically occupying the ridges. Bexhill descends gradually towards the coast, with much of the town situated on low-lying coastal land. However, higher ground areas, such as around Glenleigh Park, create a topographic 'bowl' towards the town centre. **Figure 2** places the Site in its local context.

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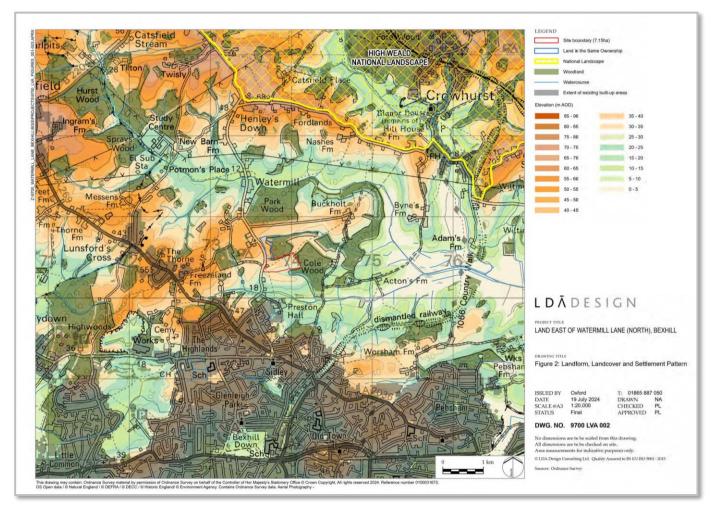


Figure 2: Landform, Landcover and Settlement Pattern²

The Site is located within the 'fringe landscape' that encircles the main settled areas of Bexhill, on the slopes of a narrow valley to north-east of the A2961. It is physically separated from Bexhill and visually enclosed by several natural features, including the A2691 and its roadside bunds, as well as Cockerel's Wood and Cole Wood. Despite this physical separation and visual enclosure, there is a perceptual sense that the landscape transitions between and is influenced by both nearby urban and rural areas. The A2691 imparts a noticeable urbanising character to its surroundings.

Additionally, the strong network of established vegetation that forms the Site's boundaries; the numerous woodlands beyond the Site's immediate context – Hanging Wood and Park Wood; and the Site's location on the southern slope of a localised ridgeline; combine to act as barriers that would preserve the key characteristics of the rural landscape to the Site's north.

² A full-size copy of this Figure is appended to the end of this document.

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4.0 Landscape Character

4.1. Landscape Assessment (March 2008)

The key characteristics of the Site and its surroundings are detailed in 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 '1. Freezeland' LCA, described as follows [inter alia]:

Area 1 Freezeland:

...The area already has a strong urban fringe character and this will be strengthened by the NE Bexhill scheme. Whilst the area is quite sloping, the slope is towards the existing and future urban area and would have little effect upon the wider countryside and can remain well contained. There was some ambiguity about the northern boundary of the area in the area of Cole Wood but it has been taken to the natural boundary which is close to the edge of the woodland.

Generally there is a good tree structure upon which to build a spatial design in the development brief and the mapping indicates in general terms the spatial "cells" which may be created whilst conserving the existing structure.

The three character areas within this search area all display great development opportunities whilst drawing upon the strong existing landscape character and using it to the benefit of the development...

1.C Cole Wood:

Largely South facing open fields which are well contained from the north but strong woodland features of Cole Wood. Mainly sheep grazing but some arable, generates a strong rural character but this is degraded by influence of the existing urban edge of Bexhill and will be greatly affected by future development at NE Bexhill. This change will be fundamental to the future character of this area. It will tend to reduce the extent of remote and exceptionally remote landscape which currently exists.

The **RDCLA** rates this landscape character as 'Ordinary Quality' and of 'Moderate to Low Value.' Its sensitivity to change is assessed as 'Moderate' for character resources and visual receptors, indicating a 'High' capacity to

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accommodate housing. LDA Design supports with RDCLA's assessment of the landscape character; concurring with its conclusions.

LDA Design identifies that the Site and its defining characteristics present an opportunity to integrate existing landscape features into the development structure, while preserving and enhancing these features for the benefit of the local environment. Field boundaries should be strengthened with new planting, and existing vegetation would benefit from less intensive management. Additionally, woodlands should be protected and managed to ensure their longevity, thereby enhancing and preserving the prevailing woodland character that defines this part of Bexhill's fringe landscape. For further design recommendations, see **Section 6.0**.

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5.0 Visual Environment

The Site is situated on the upper slopes of a narrow valley to north-east of the A2961 within an area of undulating topography that characterises the broader landscape.

The preliminary Zone of Theoretical Visibility ('ZTV'), illustrated in **Figure 3**, indicates that while the Site is positioned on comparatively 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 that immediately surrounding the Site.

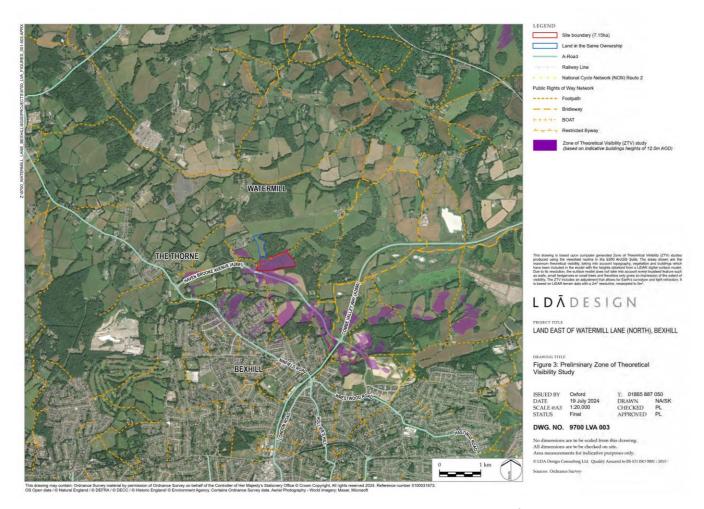


Figure 3: Preliminary Zone of Theoretical Visibility Study³

Theoretical visibility of the Site and its proposals (up to 12.5m AOD) are described as follows:

• To the Site's north and east: Visibility is limited to its immediate surroundings. This limitation arises from established shrub vegetation

³ A full-size copy of this Figure is appended to the end of this document.

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along the field boundaries and the mature woodland of Cockerel's Wood and Cole Wood, which form the Site's northern and eastern boundaries. Visibility beyond the Site is possible only where gaps occur in the vegetation along the Site's most north-eastern boundaries. From this section of the boundaries potential visibility would extends northward across part of the first field up to its northern edge, which is marked by a linear outcrop of Cockerel's Wood. Beyond, theoretical visibility this feature would be restricted by vegetation and undulations in the intervening landscape to a few small areas of fragmented visibility from parts of the Site's surrounding on higher landform. Should views be possible, proposals in the Site would be seen in the context of Bexhill.

- To the south: Visibility would extend southward towards the northern edge of Bexhill, where visibility would be restricted to a number of locations. Analysis from the ZTV confirms that potential visibility from the landscape beyond Bexhill would be minimal, due to the combined screening effect of intervening building and vegetation that would limit long-range views toward the Site.
- To the west: Visibility is restricted to the Site's immediate surroundings. Analysis from the ZTV confirms that potential visibility from the landscape beyond Watermill Lane would be minimal. This is primarily due to the combined screening effect of intervening vegetation and the undulating terrain, which significantly obscure long-range views toward the Site.

It should be borne in mind that the ZTVs represents a theoretical model of the Proposed Development's potential visibility, which at this stage of the Project, is based on assumed building heights of 12.5m above Ordnance Datum. Therefore, the ZTV only gives an impression of the potential scheme's extent of the visibility. In reality, due to the resolution of the digital surface model used in the ZTV, some localised features (such as walls, low hedgerows and small trees) are not captured within the dataset used at the time of this appraisal. Consequently, the extent of visibility experienced on-the-ground would be less than suggested by the ZTV as these unaccounted localised features combine to screen the Proposed Development to a greater degree.

Overall, despite the Site's elevated position on the slopes of a narrow valley, established natural features, such as woodlands, tree belts, hedgerows and shrubs, combined with an undulating terrain, would limit the Proposed Development's visual impact on the wider landscape as a consequence of the high degree of visual enclosure.

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LDA Design identifies opportunities to preserve and enhance the existing landscape features within the Site and its surroundings. This approach ensures that any development on the Site is well integrated into its surroundings and effectively screened from the wider landscape. For further design recommendations, refer to **Section 6.0**.

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6.0 Responding to the Site's Landscape Character, Settlement Character and Visual Environment

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.

Currently, the Site and its surroundings are characterised by prevalent and established vegetation along its boundaries and beyond; situated within the 'fringe landscape' that encircles the settled areas of Bexhill, on the slopes of a narrow valley to north-east of the A2961. While the Site is physically separated and visually enclosed from the surrounding settlements / landscape by several natural and man-made features, there a perceptual sense that the landscape transitions between and is influenced by both nearby urban and rural areas, with the A2691 imparting a noticeable urbanising character to its surroundings. Additionally, the strong network of established vegetation that forms the Site's boundaries, acts as barriers that would preserve the key characteristics of the rural landscape to the Site's north.

Visually, 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, with consideration of the emerging concept layout and landscape strategy.

Therefore, with consideration to the prevailing enclosed and transitional 'fringe' landscape in which it is located, it judged that the Site has capacity to accommodate a scheme that is sensitivity designed and sympathetic to its surrounding character and visual environment, without any undue effects on existing landscape and/or visual resources.

Nonetheless, it remains important for the design of the Proposed Development to carefully address landscape and visual considerations to mitigate potential impacts.

6.1.1. Design Recommendations for a Landscape-led scheme

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 consideration of landscape and visual resources is an iterative process, which ensures that all necessary measures to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects are incorporated

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into the proposals. 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 its surroundings.

Understanding the Site and its context has led to the identification of several opportunities and constraints, which have informed the emerging concept for the proposed development. LDA Design worked closely with EdgeUD to ensure that the emerging concept plan responds sensitively to the landscape and visual context in providing for approximately 130 homes together with community and ancillary uses.

A series of **Design Principles** support the overarching vision of the Site, emphasising the sensitive integration with the existing landscape and community and seek to ensure any future masterplan is guided by the Site's inherent qualities. They prioritise the preservation and enhancement of existing vegetation on-site, ensuring the new development integrates with its surroundings.

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 and create a strong sense of place. Consequently, longer-range views are expected to remain limited. Should the Proposed Development be visible, it would appear as part of the broader Bexhill settlement context.

The **Design Principles** as follows:

- **Creation of New Green Infrastructure**: Introduce new green spaces that integrate with the surrounding landscape. Utilise existing natural features to foster an attractive, biodiverse environment that encourages positive visual connections to and from the Site.
- Protection of the adjoining Woodland: Safeguard the adjoining woodland that defines the Site's northern, eastern and southern boundaries ensuring their preservation as a vital natural resource.
- Respect the Site's Topography and Heights of surrounding Landscape features: Design new buildings that complement the Site's rising landform; respect the current visual environment of the area; and do not exceed the height of the adjoining woodland.
- Enhance Existing Public Rights of Way: Improve the amenity of the onsite PRoW, enriching the walking experience while preserving natural pathways.

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- Creation of 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.
- **Establish New Connectivity:** Develop new pathways through and out of the Site, creating links to nearby settlements and integrating with the broader network of accessible routes.
- Respect the adjoining Grade II Listed Building: Ensure provisions are
 made to retain, in so far as possible, the agricultural character in the
 immediate vicinity of the Grade II Listed Building, Cockerels Farmhouse.
 This could be achieved through the implementation of a land use such as
 a meadow or orchard.

The principles set out above should be read in conjunction with the plans by EdgeUD, which have also considered highways, ecology, arboriculture and heritage as part of the consideration of the Site's opportunities and constraints.

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7.0 Conclusion

Overall, it is considered that the Site's and its proposals can be successfully integrated into the landscape, with appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures incorporated into its design to address potential landscape and visual effects.

While it is acknowledged that there would be inevitable changes to the Site's landscape character and to views would be available to new buildings within the Site's local context, it is considered that a sensitively design scheme for approximately 130 homes and supporting uses would – assuming that the above design recommendations are broadly adhered too – relate well to the existing settlement pattern; would be well-integrated into the landscape and existing built-up area of Bexhill through careful consideration of site layout, building heights and green infrastructure; and would not become a prominent feature in views.



No dimensions are to be scaled from this drawing. All dimensions are to be checked on site.

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Sources: Ordnance Survey

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Site boundary (7.15ha)

Local Road Watercourse

Footpath

Bridleway

Land in the Same Ownership

Full Application (pending) Outline Application (pending) Allocated Site (Residential) Allocated Site (Employment) Potential Site (HELAA 2024)

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Figure 1: The Site and Local Context

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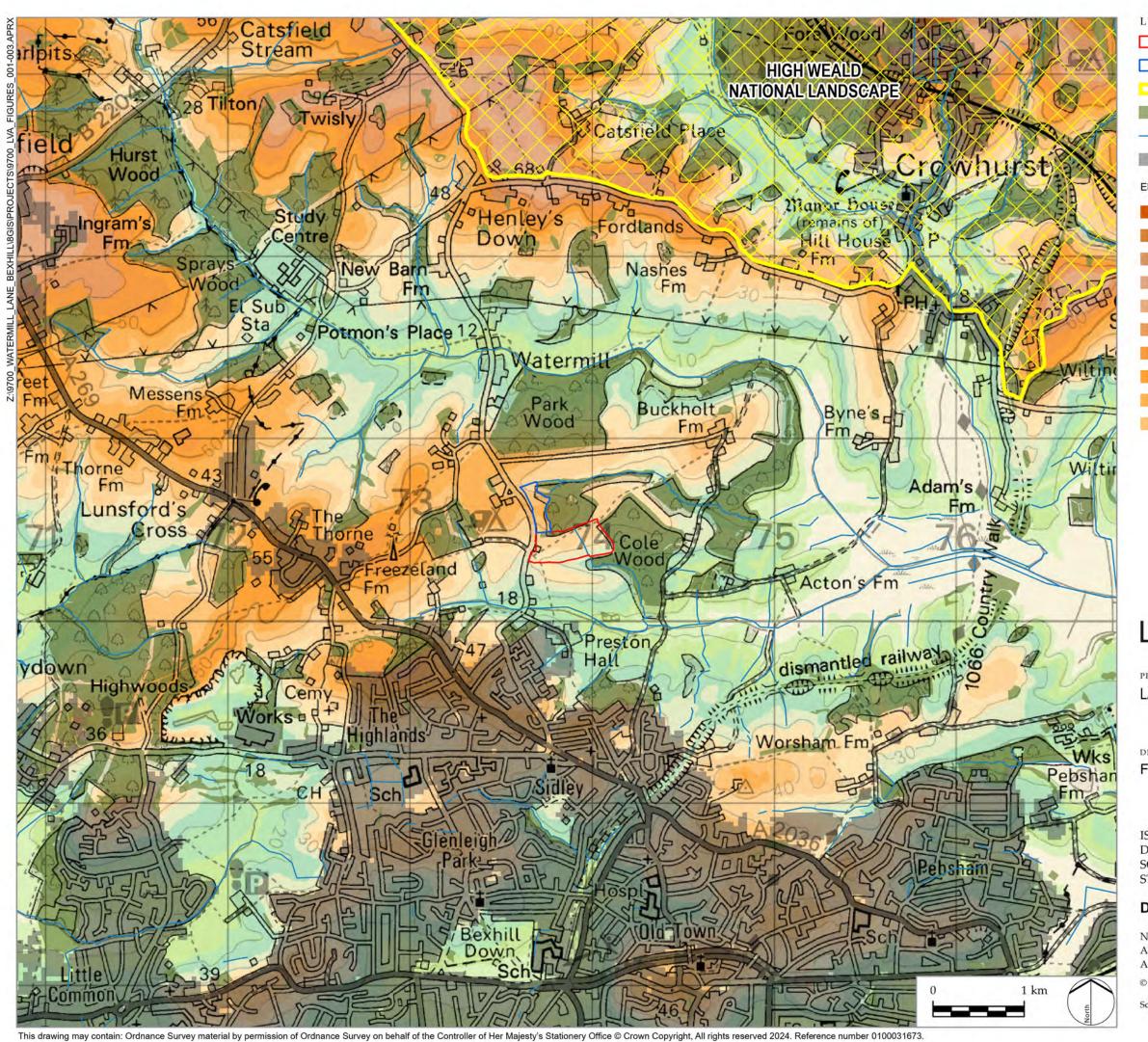
Final

Oxford

20 July 2024

Area measurements for indicative purposes only.

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LEGEND Site boundary (7.15ha) Land in the Same Ownership National Landscape Woodland Watercourse Extent of exisitng built-up areas Elevation (m AOD) 35 - 40 80 - 85 30 - 35 25 - 30 20 - 25 70 - 75 15 - 20 65 - 70 60 - 65 10 - 15 55 - 60 5 - 10 50 - 55 0-5 45 - 50 40 - 45

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LAND EAST OF WATERMILL LANE (NORTH), BEXHILL

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Figure 2: Landform, Landcover and Settlement Pattern

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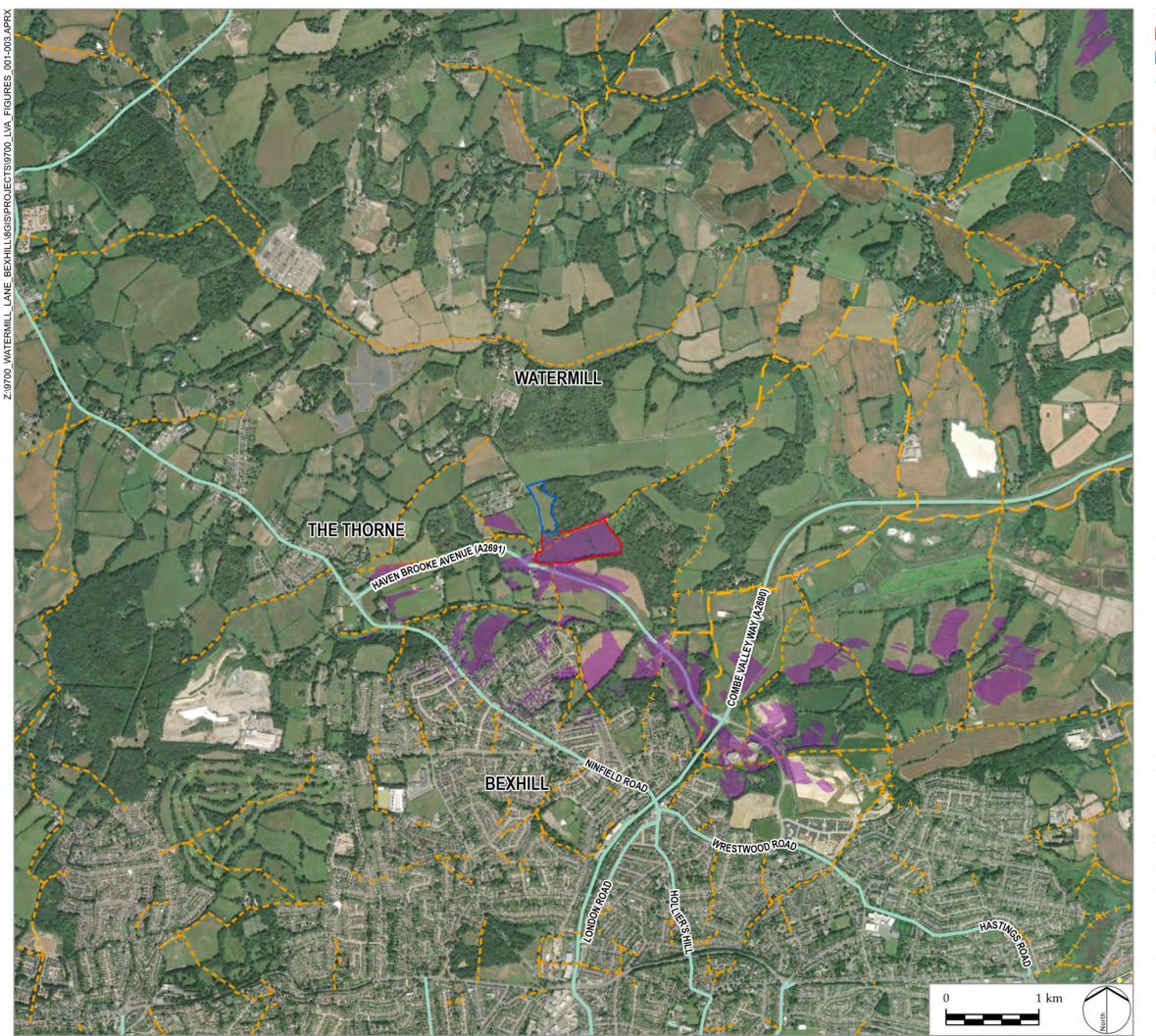
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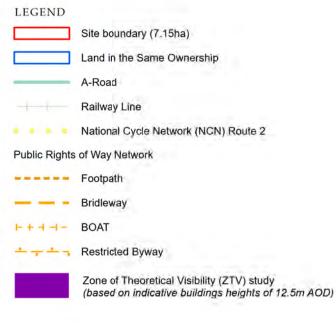
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This drawing is based upon computer generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) studies produced using the viewshed routine in the ESRI ArcGIS Suite. The areas shown are the maximum theoretical visibility, taking into account topography, vegetation 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 form as walls, small hedgerows or small trees and therefore only gives an impression of the extremt 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, resampled to 5m².

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PROJECT TITL

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Figure 3: Preliminary Zone of Theoretical Visibility Study

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