



THE
ENVIRONMENT
PARTNERSHIP



Hodson's Mill, Robertsbridge

Landscape Statement

July 2024
IN10566.001

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1.0 Introduction

This Landscape Statement has been prepared by The Environment Partnership (TEP) Ltd on behalf of Homes England. This preliminary work considers the landscape and visual baseline to understand the landscape opportunities and constraints affecting the potential development of land at Hodson's Mill, Robertsbridge in relation to landscape character and visual amenity.

This document does not form a landscape and visual appraisal or assessment, however it provides a high level narrative of the existing landscape and views in the area with a consideration of where development could be accommodated and likely impacts on the High Weald National Landscape. The work has been carried out with reference to the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - Third Edition, Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013 (GLVIA3).



View west towards the Oast House from within the Site

The Site

The Site extends to approximately 6.2ha and comprises a number of disused industrial buildings together with extensive areas of hardstanding. The remaining buildings comprise offices and storage areas, together with Hodson's Mill and the Grade II Listed Oast House adjoining it.

The undeveloped areas of the Site comprise grassland, scrub, hedgerow and scattered trees with some steeply sloping areas of woodland. A mill pond is present in association with the former Hodson's Mill.

The former mill area is allocated for mixed use development in the Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2029 (see Section 2.0).

The Site is in the High Weald National Landscape. The site boundaries are shown on Figure 1: Site Location Plan. A more detailed description of the Site is presented later in this document.



View south-west towards Oast House and mill buildings from within the Site

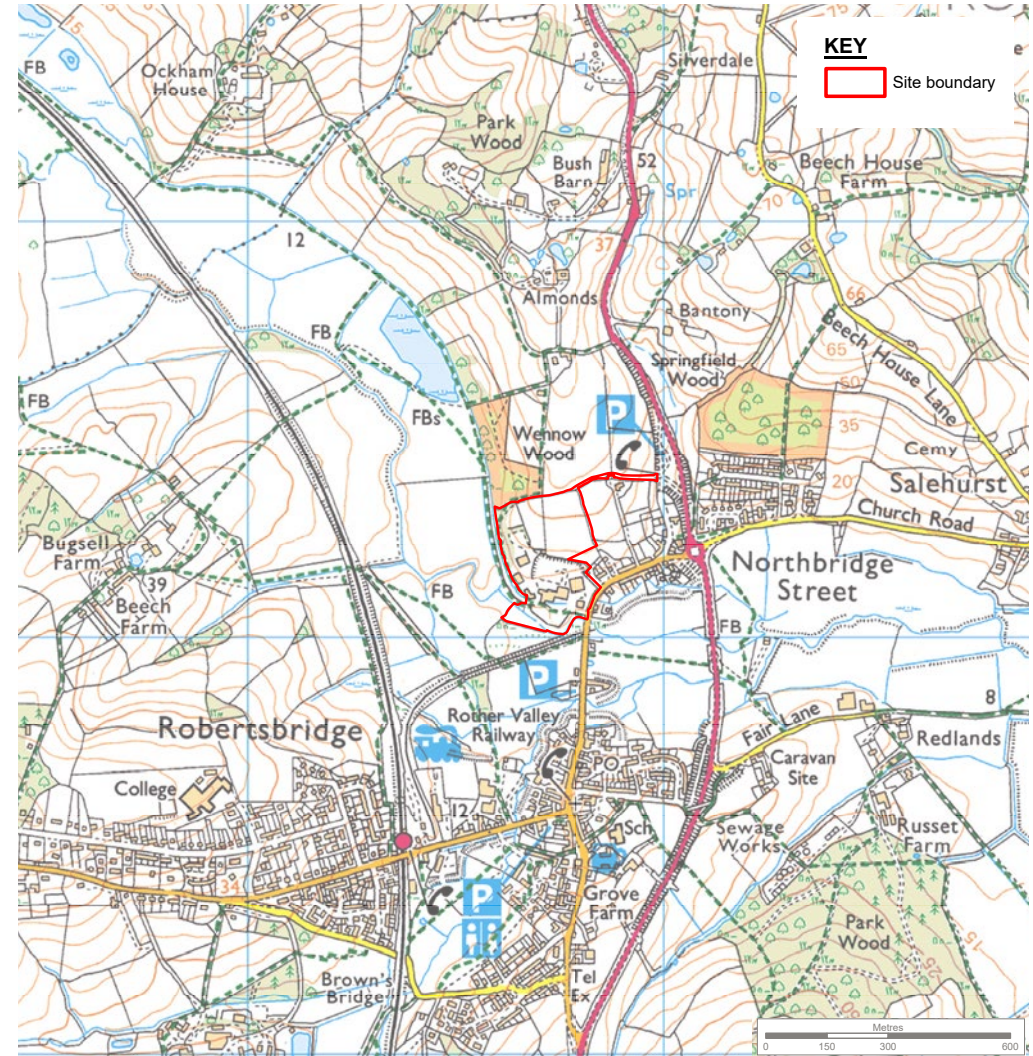


Figure 1: Site Location Plan

2.0 Planning Context

From November 22nd 2023, all Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are to be known as National Landscapes. The High Weald National Landscape remains designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is referred to as such in policy, legislation and guidance. Its statutory purpose remains unchanged.

National Planning Policy Context

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2023) sets out the Government's planning policies for England, how these are expected to be applied at a local level in development plans and how developers should address them.

Section 12: 'Achieving well-designed and beautiful places' recognises the importance of good design as *'the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve'*.

Section 15: 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment' states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan).

Plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national, and locally designated sites and allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the Framework.

Local Planning Policy Context

Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation landscape and scenic beauty.

The Site is in the administrative area of Rother District Council. The Development Plan for the area consists of the Local Plan Core Strategy (adopted September 2012) and the Development and Site Allocations Local Plan (adopted December 2019).

Local Plan Core Strategy

The Local Plan Core Strategy outlines the Council's vision and objectives for guiding the future pattern and form of development until 2028. This vision includes maintaining the high quality of the natural and built environment and enhancing long-term stewardship, with careful consideration of potential future impacts of climate change.

The following policies are of relevance to the site in relation to landscape:

Policy EN1 Landscape Stewardship

Policy EN1 states that the management of the historic, built, and natural environment will be accomplished by protecting and enhancing nationally designated and locally distinctive landscapes and features. This includes the High

Weald National Landscape, nationally designated historic sites, open landscapes between well-defined settlements, ancient woodlands, tranquil and remote areas with dark night skies, and other key landscape features across the district such as native hedgerows, field patterns, and watercourses.

Policy EN3 Design Quality

Policy EN3 emphasises the importance of high-quality design and outlines key design principles applicable to developments of all scales. The

landscape setting of buildings and settlements is a key principle for consideration.

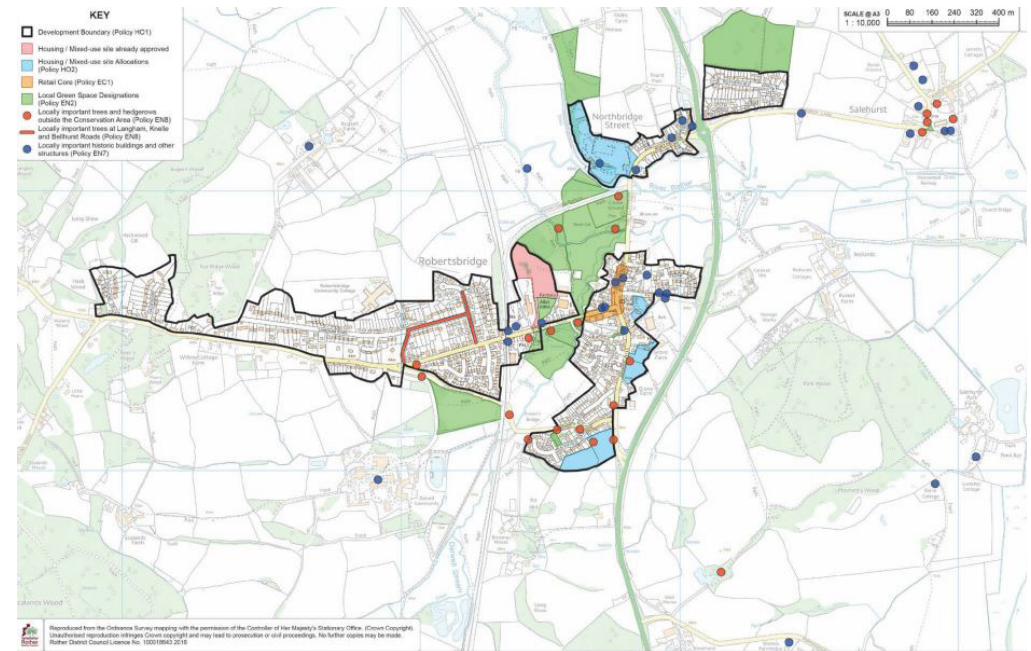


Figure 2: Extract from Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan

2.0 Planning Context

Development and Site Allocations Local Plan

The Development and Site Allocations Local Plan covers the same time period as the Core Strategy and effectively serves as “part two” of the Council’s Local Plan. Policies of relevance to landscape are outlined below.

Policy DEN1: Maintaining Landscape Character

Policy DEN1 emphasises that the siting, layout, and design of development should maintain and reinforce the landscape character of the area, reflecting local landscape features. In remote areas, tranquillity should be maintained, including the preservation of dark skies.

Policy DEN2: The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Policy DEN2 states that the landscape and scenic beauty of the High Weald AONB should be conserved and enhanced where development occurs within its boundaries or settings, considering the impact on its character components as outlined in the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan

The Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan (adopted in July 2018) covers the period 2016-2028 and aims to preserve and improve the parish, while endorsing sustainable development that respects their location within a National Landscape (AONB). Policies of relevance to landscape include:

Policy EN3: Countryside Protection and the Parish's place within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Policy EN3 states that ‘development will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances the natural beauty of the Parish and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan’.

Policy EN4: Conservation of Landscape and Natural Resources

Policy EN4 stipulates that development must preserve established landscape features such as mature trees, diverse hedgerows, watercourses, and ecological networks, along with their adjacent habitats and ponds. In cases where trees and shrubs are lost as a result of development, compensatory planting must be undertaken elsewhere on the site.

Policy EN8: Locally important trees and hedgerows outside the Conservation Area

Policy EN8 notes that development proposals should aim to preserve trees or hedgerows of significant arboricultural and/or amenity value whenever feasible.

Policy HS2: Site Allocations

The Neighbourhood Plan designates the Mill Site along Northbridge Street for a mixed-use development, encompassing residential development as well as the conversion of the Mill building and listed buildings. The Site includes this allocated area.

Policy HO5: Design

Policy HO5 states that new development must be of high quality and inclusive design that is sympathetic to local character and qualities of the High Weald AONB.

Emerging Planning Policy

A new District Local Plan for the period 2020-2040 is being prepared and a Draft Version (Regulation 18) was published in April 2024.

Draft policies of relevance to landscape include:

Proposed Policy GTC9: High Weald National Landscape (AONB)

Proposed Policy GTC9 states that all development within or affecting the setting of the High Weald National Landscape (AONB) must conserve and enhance its distinctive landscape character and scenic beauty.

Proposed Policy LAN1: Rural Environments and Landscape Character

Proposed Policy LAN1 notes that distinctive local landscape characteristics should inform the siting, layout, and design of developments to preserve the natural and built character of the area. Priority should be placed on landscapes and features, including the High Weald National Landscape, as well as tranquil and remote areas.

Proposed Policy LAN2: Trees, Woodlands, and Hedgerows

Proposed Policy LAN2 expresses that ‘development must, where appropriate, enhance and expand the district’s tree, hedgerow and

woodland resource’.

Proposed Policy LAN3: Dark Skies

Proposed Policy LAN3 outlines that development should uphold and strengthen tranquillity in remote areas, notably those within the High Weald National Landscape, by preserving dark skies and minimising light pollution. Projects that require significant lighting should be situated away from naturally dark rural skies and wildlife-sensitive zones.

2.0 Planning Context

Extant Planning Permission

Rother District Council has granted planning consent (Application Ref: RR/2017/382/P) for the erection of 96 no. residential dwellings (Use Class C3), non-residential floorspace comprising 280 sqm (Use Class A3) and 920 sqm (Use Class B1), and associated access, car/cycle parking, open amenity space, strategic landscaping and green infrastructure and including restoration works to the Mill Building and Oast House.

Other Relevant Guidance

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 details the key purpose of a National Landscape, which is to conserve and enhance the special attributes that represent its natural beauty. It provides guidelines for landscape management by defining natural beauty in terms of its essential characteristics, also relevant to its setting.

The special attributes of significance within the High Weald National Landscape include:

Woodland

The High Weald AONB features extensive woodlands, including ancient woods, gills, and shaws, resulting from traditional long-term management practices. The overall visual character is shaped by trees and hedgerows dividing small irregular fields.

Management objectives should prioritise preserving and restoring the current extent and

layout of woodland cover, along with safeguarding the historical assets of woodlands.

Fieldscapes and Health

The High Weald AONB features a picturesque mosaic of small, irregularly shaped fields, enclosed by hedgerows, shaws, small woodlands, and in-field trees. These fields are commonly utilised for livestock grazing and small-scale horticulture.

Management objectives should aim to maintain the pattern of small, irregularly shaped fields bordered by hedgerows and woodlands.

Dark Skies

The High Weald AONB is characterised by dark skies, which imparts a feeling of remoteness and tranquillity.

Management objectives should aim to preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution in both existing and new developments.

Aesthetic and Perceptual Qualities

Aesthetic and perceptual include its surprising panoramic vistas, its quietude and tranquillity, and the idea of the High Weald as a 'quintessential English pastoral landscape'.

Management objectives should aim to protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views, and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.



Landscape Strategy for Hodson's Mill Site (Source: The Urbanists)

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

Designations

Relevant environmental designations are shown on Figure 3 and are described further below.

High Weald National Landscape

The Site is in the High Weald National Landscape which is characterised by its hilly, rugged, and remote terrain of ridges and valleys, covered by a patchwork of fields, woods, and shaws.

National Landscapes are recognised as being exceptional landscapes of distinctive character and natural beauty. They are of national importance and receive special protection from the Government. A National Landscape would be anticipated to be a 'valued landscape' referenced in the National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 180 a).

Scheduled Monuments

Robertsbridge Abbey is the only Scheduled Monument in the study area, located on flat ground approximately 1.5km east of Robertsbridge. It includes the Cistercian Abbey and monastic precinct of St Mary, with remnants such as a moat and fishponds. There is no intervisibility between the Site and the Scheduled Monument beyond intervening vegetation.

Listed Buildings

There is an eighteenth century timber-framed building which forms part of the Oast House. Situated near the western boundary, this two-storey building features large attic windows and retains original structural elements, such as reused posts, braces, and old floorboards. The

building is now in poor and dilapidated condition and is missing cowls.

There are numerous other Grade II Listed Buildings in Northbridge Street to the east of the Site. These buildings are predominantly timber-framed cottages featuring tiled roofs and casement windows.

Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street Conservation Area

The Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street Conservation Area stretches westward into the Site, encompassing the now disused Hodson's Mill and the land to its south. This section of the Conservation Area serves as a prominent visual representation of the village's industrial past. To the east of the Mill, the vicinity around Northbridge Street exhibits predominantly linear development with medieval origins.

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woodland is a key aspect of the landscape and forms an essential part of Rother's historical heritage. There are over 8,000 ha of ancient woodland in the district and the closest Ancient Woodlands are Park Wood and Townfield Shaw.

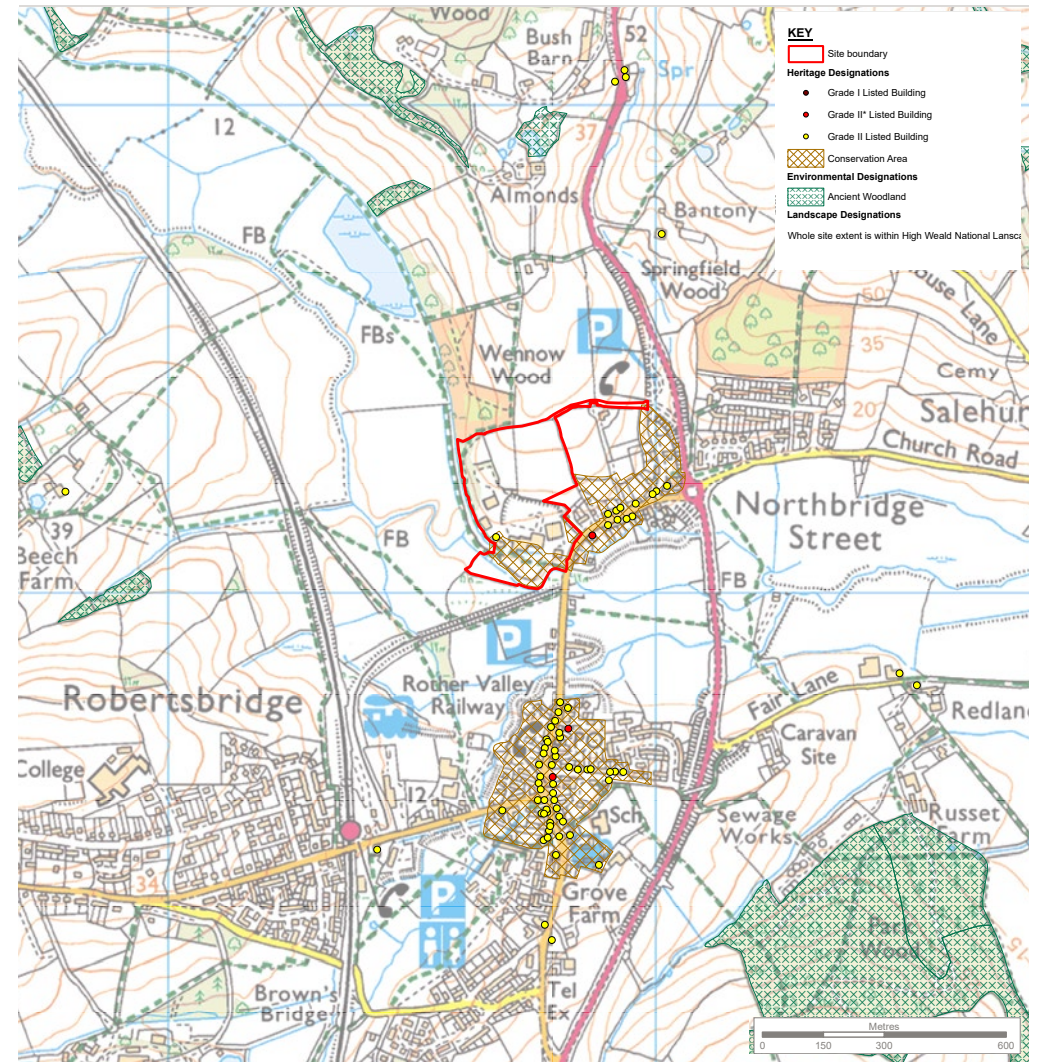


Figure 3: Environmental Designations

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

Published Landscape Character Assessments

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

National Landscape Character 122: High Weald

At a national level, the Site is within National Character Area (NCA) 122: High Weald. The NCA is an area of ancient countryside, featuring a mixture of fields, small woodlands, and farmsteads. The High Weald holds a rich historical significance renowned for its well-preserved medieval landscape. Prominent medieval patterns of small pasture fields enclosed by thick hedgerows and shaws remain fundamental to the character of the landscape. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) encompasses 78 percent of this area.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) of relevance to the Site include:

SEO 1: Maintain and enhance the existing woodland and pasture components of the landscape;

SEO 3: Maintain and enhance the distinctive dispersed settlement pattern, parkland and historic pattern and features of the routeways of the High Weald; and

SEO 4: Manage and enhance recreational opportunities, public understanding and enjoyment, as well as conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment, in accordance with the purpose of the High Weald AONB designation.

As NCAs cover extensive areas they are of limited relevance to the scale of the Site.

East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment

The East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment was published in 2016 and provides an overview of the East Sussex Landscape, including areas within the High Weald National Landscape.

The landscape of East Sussex is divided into County Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) which share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use, and settlement pattern.

The Site is in the Upper Rother Valley LCA, as shown on Figure 4: Landscape Character.

This LCA is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features, and well managed as farmland. The lack of main roads and large settlements maintains a relative remoteness although the character assessment reported that there is evidence of creeping suburbanisation around the villages and on country estates detracting from local distinctiveness. As with most of the Wealden landscape, the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact, apart from in the wider more fertile river valleys where farming is more intensive.

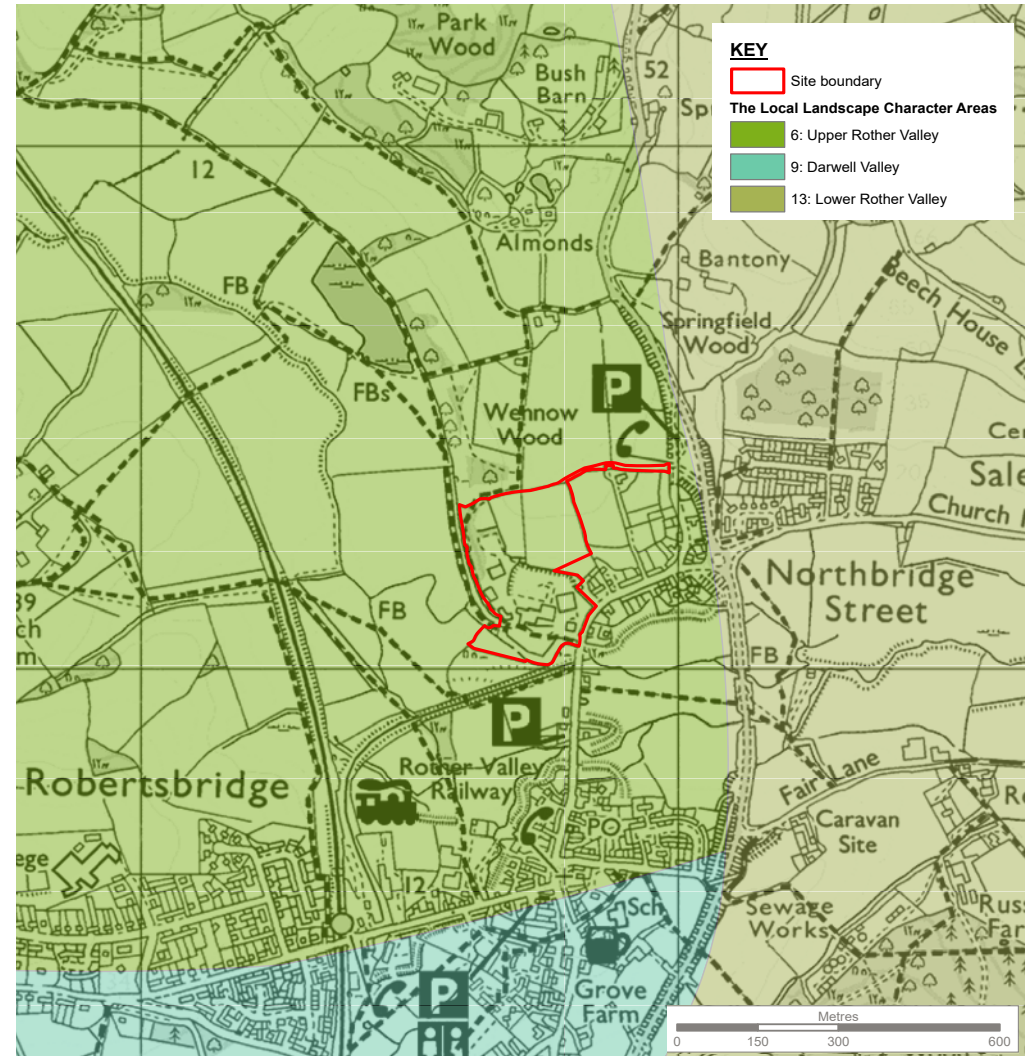


Figure 4: Landscape Character

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

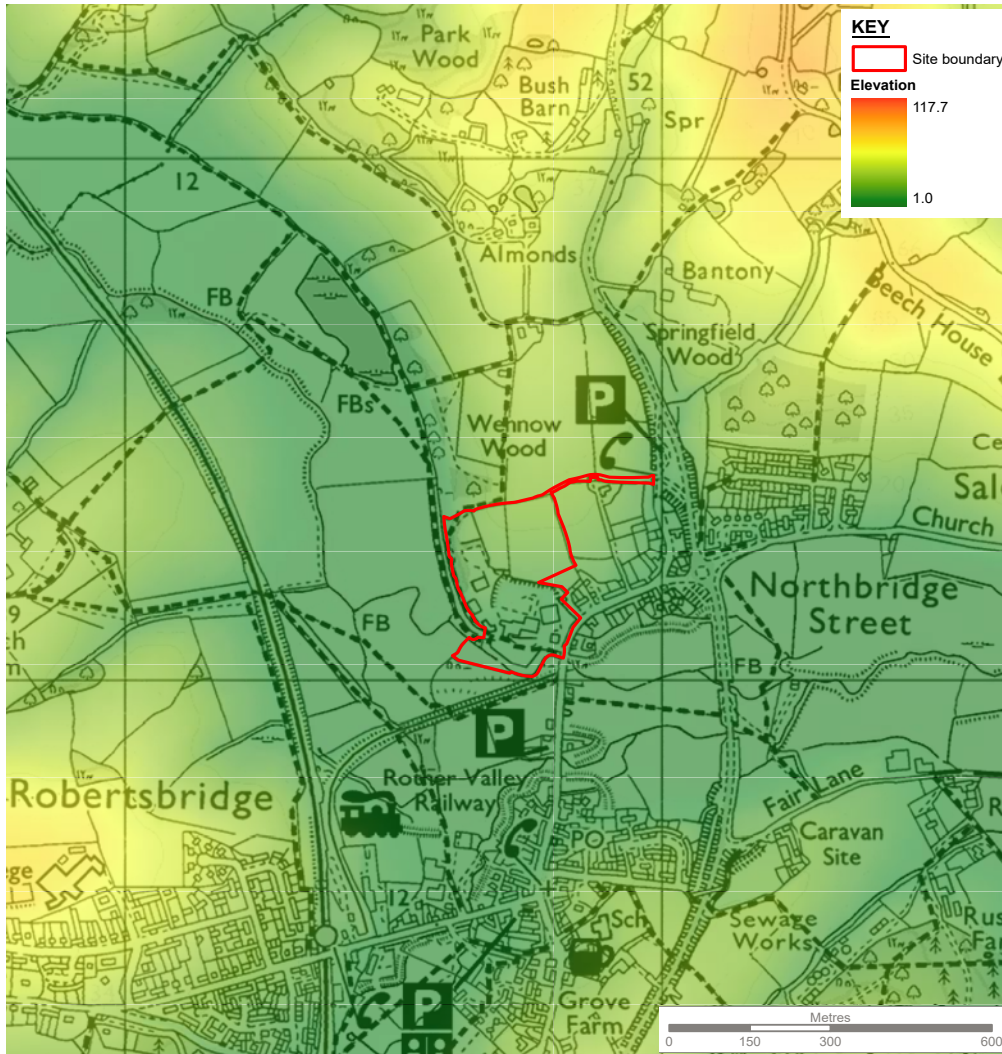


Figure 5: Topography

Key features include:

- *'The broad valley of the River Rother dominates the landscape and is overlooked by bold ridges and spurs;*
- *A strong pattern of linear ghyll woods as well as many larger woods on the valley slopes.*
- *Stunning views across the valley from the enclosing ridges, some of the finest views in the High Weald;*
- *The upper half of the largest valley system in the High Weald and the catchment and source of the western river Rother;*
- *Relatively open valley floor with small, winding, partly tree-lined river;*
- *Extensive areas of remote countryside and exceptional remoteness especially in the valleys and larger woods;*
- *The villages have great character and variety often with landmark churches and other historic buildings;*

Landscape guidelines for the Upper Rother Valley LCA include:

- Protection and management of existing wetland habitats and planning for restoration of ditches, riverside vegetation and tree cover;
- Protection and enhancement of the remote qualities of the river valleys;

- Integrate proposed and existing development into the landscape through planting of tree features and woodland;
- Ensure that the design and layout of new developments respect the character and form of the landscape and settlements;
- Conserve the setting of historic buildings and landscape features;
- Protect and enhance historic designed landscapes and features of archaeological significance;
- Consider appropriate species for new planting to maintain landscape character and biodiversity;
- Restore and strengthen tree and woodland structure.

A site visit confirmed that the Site and surrounding landscape share some of the key features of this LCA, particularly views across the valley, the tree-lined river and characterful villages.

Development pressure in larger villages is identified as a force for change, but the assessment also recognises the need to provide local housing in the villages and larger service centres.

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

Rother District Council Market Towns and Villages Landscape Assessment

The Market Towns and Villages Landscape Assessment describes the character and capacity to accommodate development in the market towns and villages in Rother District.

The study uses a four point scale to determine capacity, including high, moderate, low or no capacity. This represents the capacity of a particular area to absorb the proposed type of development without significant adverse effects.

The Site is evaluated as part of Parcel R6 - Northbridge Street which encompasses enclosed pastures and meadows on the edge Northbridge Street.

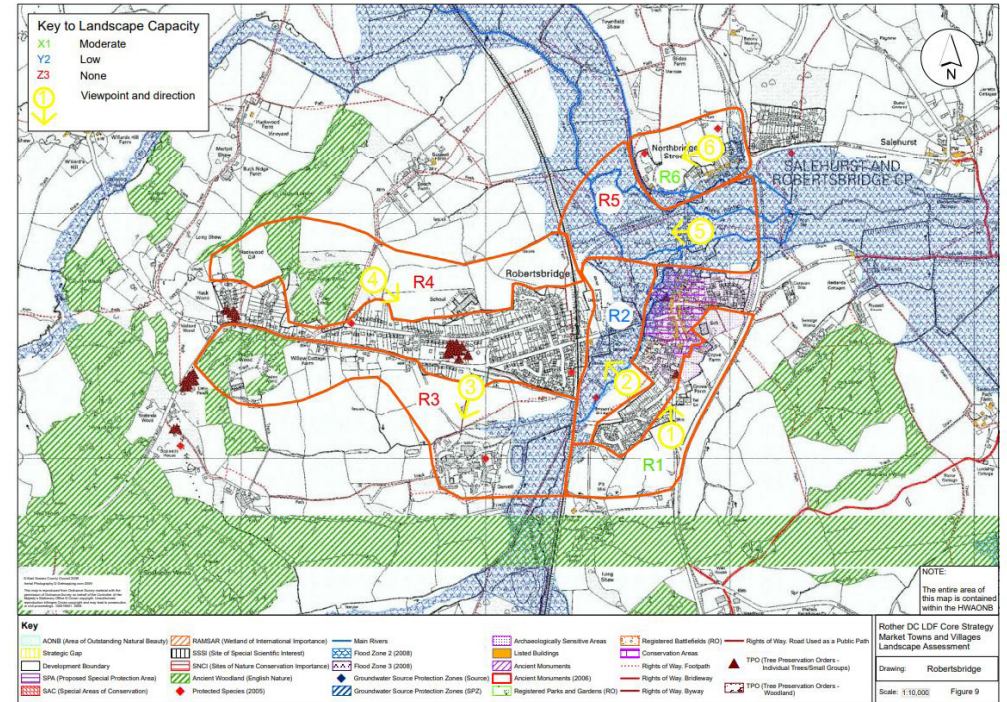
The parcel is reported to be of a high value due to its location within the National Landscape and to be in good condition. The landscape and visual sensitivity to change is reported to be moderate.

Overall this parcel is reported to have a moderate capacity to accommodate new residential development which would only be considered acceptable near the village edges. The capacity for development takes into account the presence of landscape designations.

The assessment notes that there is moderate potential for mitigation, and that there would be some scope to strengthen the edge of the village in views to the High Weald beyond.

The overall summary for Robertsbridge notes that Hodson's Mill is one of the areas with greatest capacity. Six parcels were evaluated in Robertsbridge and only Hodson's Mill and Grove

Farm are reported to have moderate landscape capacity, with one parcel reported to have low capacity and the remaining three parcels reported to have no capacity to accommodate development.



Landscape Capacity from the Rother District Council Market Towns and Villages Landscape Assessment

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline



Figure 6: Site Context

Landscape Character of the Site

Land Use

The Site occupies approximately 6.2 hectares (ha). This includes the floodplain of the River Rother in the southern part of the Site within Flood Zone 3, the Mill Race channelled section of the River Rother, the four-storey Victorian mill building (Hodson's Mill), a mill pond adjacent to the south east of the mill building, a Grade II listed Oast House, a storage barn and areas of hardstanding.

Beyond the former mill area are two field parcels comprising grassland and bound by hedgerows and woodland (referred to in this report as 'Open Fields').

Access

Vehicular access to the Site is via High Street to the east.

A Public Right of Way (PRoW) [Footpath SAL/8/1] crosses the centre of the Site on an east-west alignment connecting Mill Race to Northbridge Street. The footpath extends beyond the western site boundary.

Beyond the northern site boundary a permissive footpath extends from PRoW [Footpath SAL/8/1] to the lay-by on the A21.

Boundaries

The Site is bound to the north by woodland, to the east by Northbridge Street, to the south by River

Rother and woodland to the north of the Kent & Sussex Railway and to the west by Mill Race.

Topography

Generally, the Site slopes from north to south from a high point of approximately 30m AOD on the Site's northern boundary to 10m AOD in the south of the Site just south of the River Rother (see Figure 5: Topography).

The central and north-western areas of the Site have been re-profiled containing a series of terraces cut out from the slope. Each terrace is bounded to the north by steep embankments. The main plateau surrounds the existing mill building and sits low in relation to surrounding topography.

To the south of Robertsbridge land rises steeply to a high point of 74m AOD near Maynard's Wood.



South-facing valley slopes of the River Rother Valley

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

Settlement

Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street are distinct linear settlements to the south and east of the Site respectively. Both developed around the River Rother during the 14th Century with the riverine landscape providing a scenic backdrop. The positioning of the settlements along the valley sides and floor creates a sense of enclosure and a predominantly 'introverted' character, with much of the settlements' edge concealed from distant views.

As identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal, these settlements feature diverse streetscapes with a mix of leisure, commercial, and residential properties, resulting in varied character areas within the settlements themselves.

Robertsbridge predominantly consists of medieval 'Wealden' Hall Houses that are timber-framed and generally uniform in character. In the northern section of High Street, these buildings are densely packed, creating an urban streetscape with heavy

traffic. Conversely, the southern end of High Street has a wider building line, resulting in a more suburban and residential character. This coherent development pattern is lost along Station Road to the west, which lacks the density and volume of historic buildings found in the rest of the village centre.

North of Robertsbridge, Northbridge Street features a cluster of historic buildings that showcases its varied vernacular materials and architectural styles. The character is much less urban than the main village of Robertsbridge. To the east of the A21 Northbridge Street is characterised by mid to late 20th Century residential development with some infill development along Rotherview and Coronation Cottages disrupting the linear settlement pattern.

Existing development in Robertsbridge generally does not extend beyond the 35m contour line with development in Northbridge Street generally not extending beyond the 30m contour line.



Robertsbridge High Street

Landscape Value

The Site is in the High Weald National Landscape. National Landscapes are recognised as being exceptional landscapes of distinctive character and natural beauty. They are of national importance and receive special protection from the Government. A National Landscape (AONB) would be anticipated to be a 'valued landscape' referenced in the National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 180 a).

Whilst not specific landscape designations, Conservation Areas reflect landscape and architectural quality and are relevant to development proposals which may impact upon them. Part of the Site is in the Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street Conservation Area.

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

Visual Baseline

Views from within the Site

The Site is on the northern sides of a relatively steep and narrow valley surrounding the River Rother and its tributaries. The valley is rural and relatively small-scale with fields bound by blocks of deciduous woodland and tall hedgerows. From areas of higher ground within Site there are views across the valley to the south towards Robertsbridge with views towards isolated dwellings and woodland to the east and west.

Views towards the Site

Views towards the Site are typically foreshortened by woodland and topography. Many of the roads and footpaths are set low within the surrounding hedgerows and hedgebanks.

Following the preliminary assessment of the landscape context it was considered that there would be potential views from:

- The local PRoW network, principally Public Footpath SAL/8/1 and the permissive path to the north of the Site;
- Robertsbridge Cricket Club and The Clappers Recreation Ground;
- The local road network, including High Street and the A21;
- The local community within Northbridge Street; and

- Local community at Robertsbridge.

The Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street Conservation Area Appraisal identifies two views looking towards the Site, at the time of survey the view looking north over the railway was heavily screened by intervening vegetation.

Six publicly accessible viewpoints were selected and visited as part of the field study to demonstrate the range of potential views into the Site (see Figure 7: Viewpoint Location Plan). The selected viewpoints are listed below.

- Viewpoint 1: View west towards the Site from High Street;
- Viewpoint 2: View north towards the Site from Robertsbridge Cricket Club;
- Viewpoint 3: View south across the Site from permissive path to the north;
- Viewpoint 4: View north-west towards the Site from PRoW [Footpath SAL/30/3] below the A21;
- Viewpoint 5: View north-east towards the Site from PRoW [Footpath SAL/23/2] ; and
- Viewpoint 6: View north-east towards the Site from PRoW [Footpath SAL/21/1].

Viewpoint photography is provided for illustrative purposes and has been annotated to indicate the visible extents of the Site. Photography was recorded in June 2023 and represents 'best-case scenario' visibility when vegetation is in full leaf.

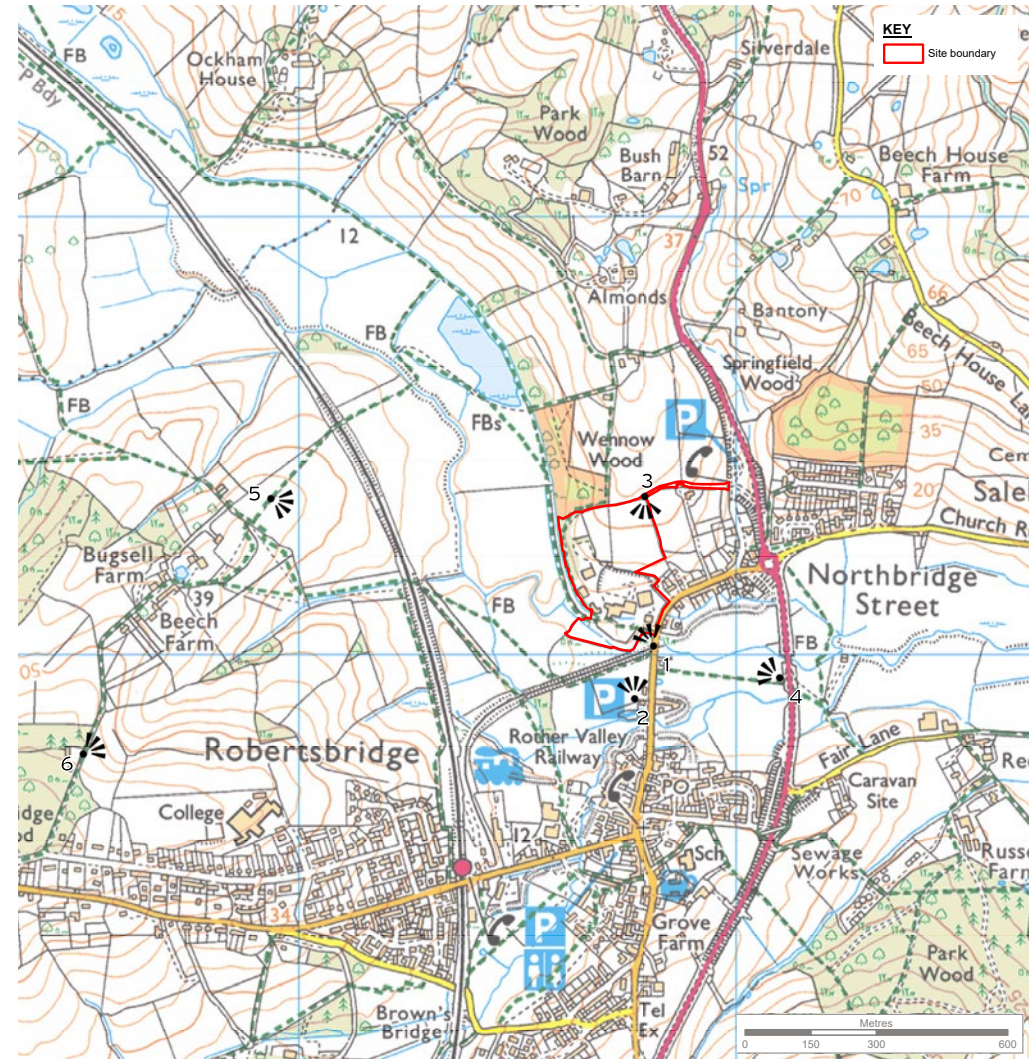


Figure 7: Viewpoint Location Plan

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

In this view looking west from High Street the majority of the Site is screened from view by existing vegetation along the River Rother. There are some glimpsed views towards Hodson's Mill, which is likely to be more visible in winter when deciduous vegetation is not in leaf. The Open Fields are not visible from this location.

This view is identified as a significant view in the Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street Conservation Area Appraisal.



Viewpoint 1: View west towards the Site from High Street

Looking north from Robertsbridge Cricket Club there are clear views towards Hodson's Mill through gaps in existing vegetation along the River Rother. The majority of the Site is screened from view by existing vegetation, but views are likely to be slightly more open in winter when deciduous vegetation is not in leaf.



Viewpoint 2: View north towards the Site from Robertsbridge Cricket Club

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

In this panoramic view from a gateway along the permissive path to the north of the Site there are clear views across Open Fields East with some glimpsed views towards Open Fields West beyond the intervening hedgerow and Hodson's Mill. The Oast House is not visible from this point beyond intervening vegetation.

Beyond the Site there are views towards rooftops of residential properties in Northbridge Street and Robertsbridge and towards the north-facing valley slopes with areas of woodland on high ground.



Viewpoint 3: View south across the Site from permissive path to the north

In this view looking north-west from PRoW [Footpath SAL/30/3], below the A21, the majority of the Site is screened from view by existing vegetation. There are some glimpsed views towards Hodson's Mill, which is likely to be more visible in winter when deciduous vegetation is not in leaf. The Open Fields are not visible from this location.



Viewpoint 4: View north-west towards the Site from PRoW [Footpath SAL/30/3] below the A21

3.0 Landscape and Visual Baseline

In this panoramic view from PRow [Footpath SAL/23/2] near Bugsell Farm the Site is barely discernible amongst existing vegetation. There are some glimpsed views towards rooftops within Robertsbridge and clear views towards the north facing valley slopes and areas of woodland on higher ground beyond.



Viewpoint 5: View north-east towards the Site from PRow [Footpath SAL/23/2]

In this view from PRow [Footpath SAL/21/1] there is a glimpsed, distant view towards the northern part of the Site, including the northern boundary of the Open Fields. Hodson's Mill and the Oast House are screened from view by intervening vegetation. This view could be missed by a casual observer.



Viewpoint 6: View north-east towards the Site from PRow [Footpath SAL/21/1]

4.0 Constraints and Opportunities

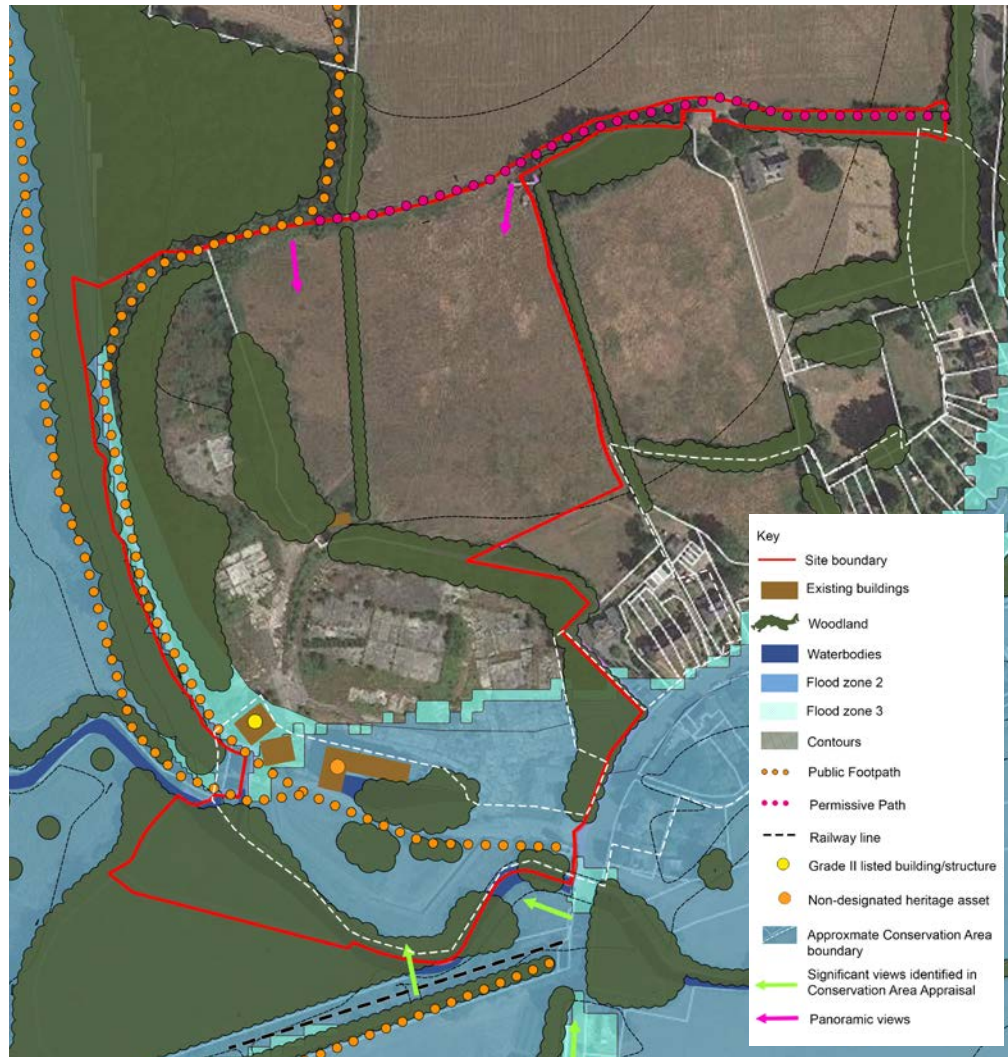


Figure 8: Landscape Constraints and Opportunities Plan

The study and review of the recommendations within the East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment has led to the identification of the following key constraints and opportunities (see Figure 8: Landscape Constraints and Opportunities):

- Ensure that development responds to the landform, taking advantage of the natural screening provided by the valley landform and woodland;
- Retain and enhance existing PRoW which provides good connectivity through the Site and with the wider area. PRoWs adjacent to the Site have potential to be improved with surfacing and signage;
- Maintain views across the wider landscape from the northern site boundary;
- Replicate the existing pattern of residential development in Northbridge Street;
- Retain existing landscape features which will provide a mature landscape framework for development and will help reach Biodiversity Net Gain targets. Vegetated boundaries will assist in landscape and visual integration and avoid the introduction of abrupt urban fringe characteristics;
- Retain the well-vegetated site boundaries which provide visual containment and creates a framework into which development could be easily assimilated into the wider landscape;

- Respect the designated and non-designated heritage assets on the Site.

Landscape Constraints

The following constraints are applicable to the Site:

- The Site is within the High Weald National Landscape with part of the Site also in Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street Conservation Area.
- The location of the Open Fields on the more prominent valley slopes dictates that a sympathetic design approach is required to ensure any proposed development does not appear prominent within the wider landscape;
- Openness to residential properties in Northbridge Street;
- The undulating landform may require minor contour remodelling to accommodate any proposed development.

5.0 Landscape Evaluation

Parcels

The baseline information, topography and opportunities and constraints have been considered and the Site has been split into four distinct parcels (see Figure 9: Parcels) to enable a more detailed analysis of constraints and opportunities and potential landscape and visual effects if the parcel were to be developed.

- Parcel A - Hodson's Mill
- Parcel B - River Rother Corridor
- Parcel C - Open Fields West
- Parcel D - Open Fields East

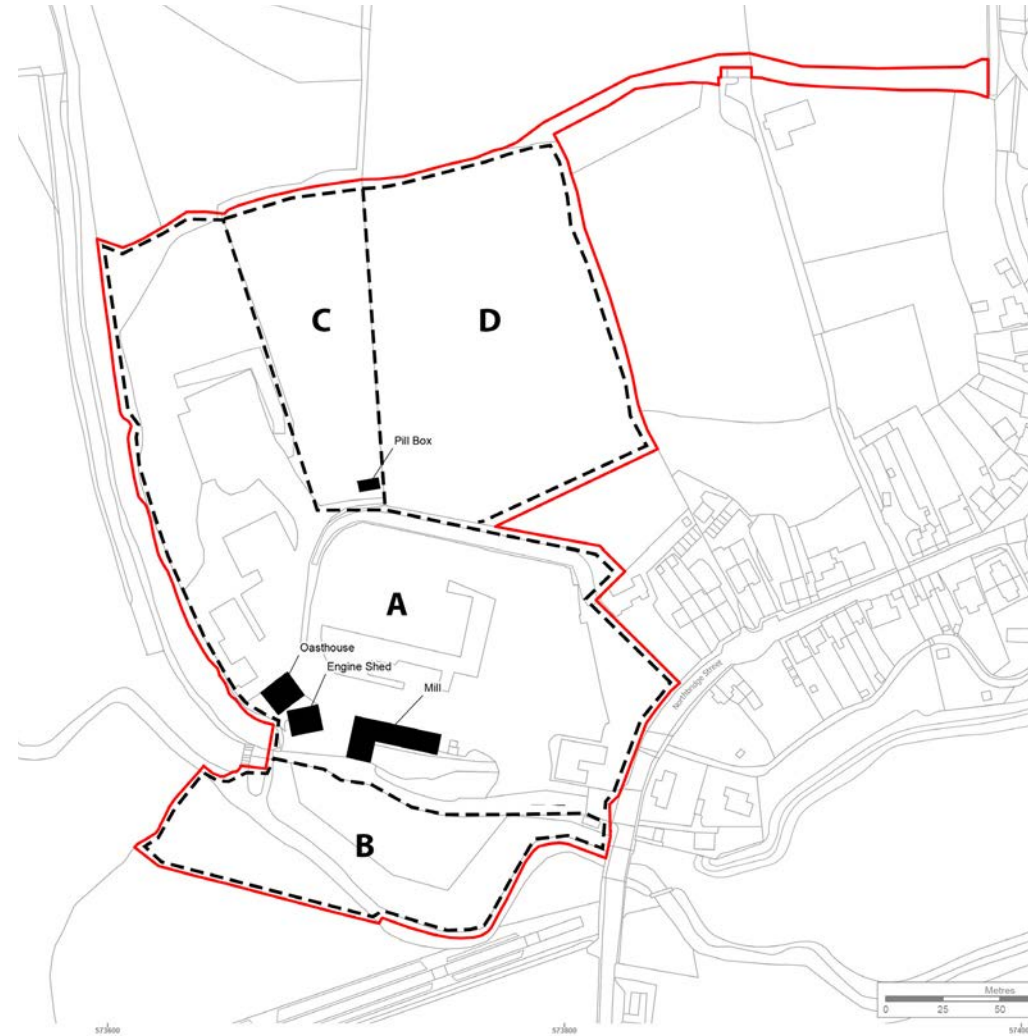


Figure 9: Parcels

Parcel A - Hodson's Mill

This parcel comprises large areas of hardstanding and existing buildings associated with the Site's former use as an animal feed mill. The parcel extends to approximately 3.0ha.

Hodson's Mill

The mill is not listed but is a non-designated heritage asset. It lies within the Robertsbridge and Northbridge Conservation Area and has associations with the historic milling industry on the Site.

The mill comprises two joined ranges forming an L-plan on a roughly north-west - south-east alignment.

The mill was water-powered and is on the north side of a mill pond with the mill race culvert passing below the west range.

Surrounding the mill are large areas of

hardstanding.

Oast House

The building consists of two adjoined parallel ranges, the western range being timber-framed and dating to the late 18th century and the eastern range being brick built. The western part of the building is Grade II listed.

The building is currently in a state of very poor repair with partial collapse of the western range roof and dense overgrown vegetation around the western side of the building.

Engine Shed

Adjacent to the Oast House on its south side, this is a mid to late 20th century portal-framed structure of brick and concrete with corrugated roof. It is at the terminus of the former railway siding which entered the site from the east, passing alongside the mill at its north. The building has a single large room which can be

sealed by sliding metal doors and includes two smaller rooms at the rear.

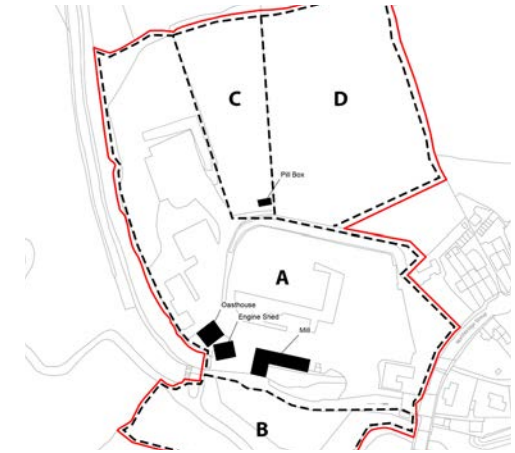
Potential for Development

This part of the Site is of lowest sensitivity in landscape terms due to the presence of existing buildings and large areas of hardstanding and containment by existing vegetation. This area also benefits from extant planning permission for redevelopment.

Historic maps indicate that when the mill was operational there were many more buildings on the Site, up to the 20m contour line.

There is potential for sensitively designed development on this part of the Site.

The majority of new development in this area would be screened in middle to long-distance views by existing vegetation along the River Rother.



Areas of hardstanding to the east of Hodson's Mill



The Oast House, viewed from the north-west



The Engine Shed, viewed from the south-east



Hodson's Mill from south of the River Rother

Parcel B - River Rother Corridor

This parcel is to the south of Hodson's Mill and comprises areas of grassland and the River Rother flood defences. The parcel extends to approximately 0.9ha.

Flood Defences

Part of the Site is in Flood Zones 2 and 3. Flood defences comprising a raised earth embankment with berm and flood wall is present on the land between the River Rother and PRoW [Footpath SAL/8/1]. The flood defences were built in 2004 and are owned and maintained by the Environment Agency.

A well-trodden grass footpath is located in the south of the Site around the south side of the flood defences. This footpaths is not shown on Ordnance Survey mapping.

River Rother Pocket Park

Beyond the River Rother to the south is a pocket park, part of which is within the site boundary.

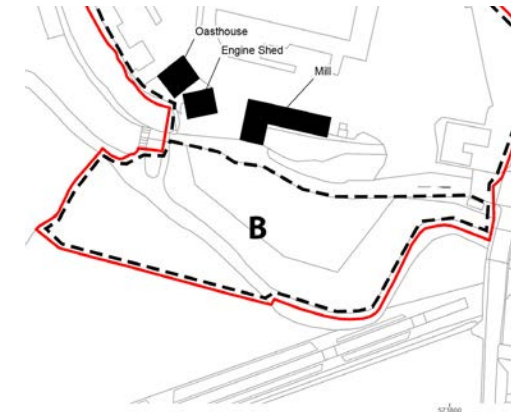
The pocket park contains a pond, dense areas of blackthorn and a mosaic of grassland and riverbank habitats. There are some mature, broad-leaved trees including ash, oak, maple and hazel.

Within the Site there are a number of old fruit trees associated with the former mill owner's garden.

There are a number of informal paths kept open by periodic cutting of the vegetation with links to the existing PRoW network.

Potential for Development

Given the location within the Flood Zone and existing land uses, including the flood defence walls and pocket park, this area has a low landscape capacity to accommodate development. Development of this parcel is not recommended.



View across grassland to the south of Hodson's Mill with flood defences visible

Parcel C - Open Fields West

This parcel is to the north and east of the Hodson's Mill parcel and comprises the western field of the 'Open Fields' Area. The parcel comprises of grassland and ruderal vegetation with a pillbox near the southern boundary and extends to approximately 0.6ha.

The parcel is generally well contained by existing vegetation to the south but becomes slightly more open to the north where there are far-reaching views across the wider landscape. The parcel is still contained by Wennow Wood and existing field boundary hedgerows.

A historic field boundary hedgerow separates the two Open Fields parcels.

Pillbox

The pillbox is at the southern edge of the parcel, adjacent to the entrance to Open Fields.

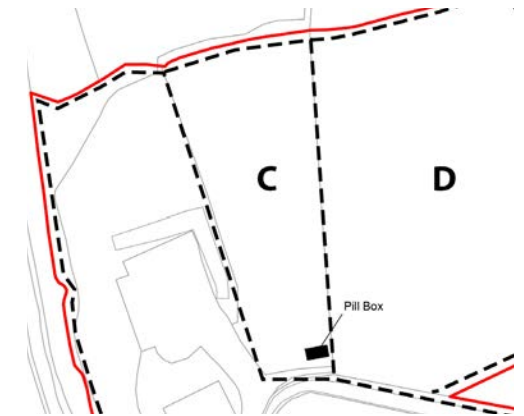
The pillbox is associated with WWII and provided a vantage point over Northbridge Street.

Potential for Development

The parcel comprises greenfield land within the High Weald National Landscape and has a medium-high sensitivity to change.

Given the enclosure of the Site, there is some potential to accommodate development within this parcel subject to the following:

- Historic hedgerow between the Open Fields to be retained.
- Development to be limited to the lower slopes of the field.
- Development to be limited to a maximum of 2 storeys.



Pillbox as seen from the south-east



View north across Open Fields West from near the Pillbox



View south across Open Fields West



View south across Open Fields West

Parcel D - Open Fields East

This parcel is to the north of the Hodson's Mill parcel and comprises the eastern field of the 'Open Fields' Area. The parcel comprises grassland and ruderal vegetation and extends to approximately 1.6ha.

The parcel is generally well contained by existing vegetation to the south but becomes more open to the north where there are far-reaching views across the wider landscape. The parcel is open to private views from residential properties along Northbridge Street.

A historic field boundary hedgerow separates the two Open Fields parcels.

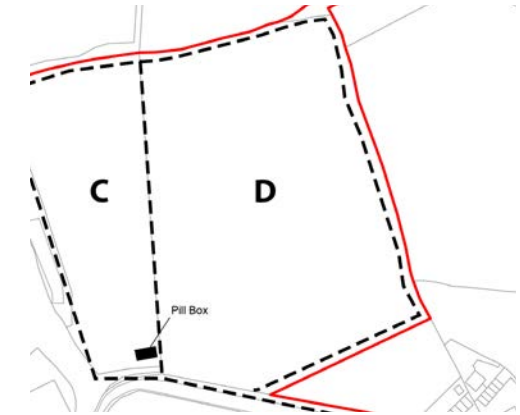
Potential for Development

The parcel comprises greenfield land within the High Weald National Landscape and has a medium-high sensitivity to change.

Given the enclosure of the Site, there is some potential to accommodate development within this

parcel subject to the following:

- Historic hedgerow between the Open Fields to be retained.
- Development to be limited to the lower slopes of the field.
- Development to be limited to a maximum of 2 storeys.



View north-east across Open Fields East from near the Pillbox





View south across Open Fields East from the northern site boundary

6.0 Potential Effects on the High Weald National Landscape

Special Qualities

Table 1: Potential effects on the special qualities of the High Weald National Landscape

| Special Quality | Character Components Mapping Extracts | Current Contribution of the Site | Potential Effects of Development | Potential Mitigation Measures |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Natural systems (geology, soils, water and climate) - a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (gill streams) functioning under an oceanic climate.</p> |  | <p>Natural systems mapping for the High Weald National Landscape indicates that the Site has a geological bedrock composed of Cretaceous Chalk.</p> <p>The River Rother flows through the Site and small tributaries characterise its immediate surroundings. The mill pond is south-west of the Oast House.</p> | <p>Short-Term</p> <p>Temporary disturbance to the existing ground levels arising from the removal and storage of topsoil, and excavation for roads, foundations, drainage, and other infrastructure.</p> <p>Long-Term</p> <p>Permanent earthworks and changes to land cover, including existing hard standing areas, agricultural land, and vegetation.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to enhance existing land cover, such as grassland and vegetation, providing ecological benefits. |
| <p>Settlement - dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.</p> |  | <p>The historic settlement of Northbridge Street is to the east of the Site. The associated Conservation Area extends into the southern part of the Site, encompassing Hodson's Mill and the Grade II listed Oast House.</p> | <p>Short-Term</p> <p>Short term disturbance associated with construction activity within the Conservation Area.</p> <p>Long-Term</p> <p>Expansion of existing settlement with some alterations to settlement pattern.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintain and enhance the landscape setting of the Conservation Area around Hodson's Mill and the River Rother. ▪ Maintain existing vegetation along the eastern boundary to limit intervisibility with the historic core of Northbridge Street. ▪ Sympathetic building design respecting the character and settlement pattern of Northbridge Street Conservation Area. |

6.0 Potential Effects on the High Weald National Landscape

| Special Quality | Character Components Mapping Extracts | Current Contribution of the Site | Potential Effects of Development | Potential Mitigation Measures |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <p>Routeways - a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).</p> | | <p>Historic Routeway mapping for the High Weald National Landscape identifies a historic routeway - along the route of PRoW [Footpath SAL/8/1] through the Site and a historic routeway - road to the west of Hodson's Mill and extending north towards Wennow Wood.</p> <p>The PRoW is publicly accessible but the historic road is not subject to public access.</p> | <p>Short-Term</p> <p>Some short-term disturbance to recreational users of PRoW.</p> <p>Long-Term</p> <p>Negligible impacts with potential enhanced access to the wider countryside.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to enhance connectivity between the Site and the wider landscape through additional linkages. |
| <p>Woodland - an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.</p> | | <p>There is no ancient woodland within the Site or its immediate surroundings. The southern part of the Site near the River Rother has a wooded character.</p> | <p>Short-Term</p> <p>No impact.</p> <p>Long-Term</p> <p>No impact.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain existing extent of woodland and bring into regular management. |
| <p>Fieldsapes and heath - small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths and inned river valleys (reclaimed marshland).</p> | | <p>Fieldscape mapping for the High Weald National Landscape shows a historic field boundary between the Open Fields. This characteristic is consistent with the surrounding landscape, which includes small parcels of other field system types. The Site and its surroundings are not part of a medieval forest.</p> | <p>Short-Term</p> <p>No impact - assuming historic field boundary to be retained.</p> <p>Long-Term</p> <p>No impact - assuming historic field boundary to be retained.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain historic field boundary between Open Fields East and West. |

Image Caption

| Special Quality | Character Components Mapping Extracts | Current Contribution of the Site | Potential Effects of Development | Potential Mitigation Measures |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Dark night skies - intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the milky way) visible. | Not available. | Dark night skies mapping for the High Weald National Landscape illustrates that the Site is in an area of medium district brightness, characteristic of well-inhabited rural and urban settlements. | <p>Short-Term</p> <p>Introduction of temporary lighting associated with construction activities.</p> <p>Long-Term</p> <p>Some additional lighting associated with any development, typical of an urban area.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that temporary lighting is kept to the minimum necessary for safety and security. ▪ Ensure that temporary lighting is appropriately located to minimise light spill on the surrounding landscape. ▪ Ensure that the design of lighting is sympathetic to the dark skies of the High Weald National Landscape. |
| Aesthetic and perceptual qualities - arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape. | Not available. | <p>The Site has limited sense of rurality and tranquillity due to its proximity to Northbridge Street. There are some far-reaching views across the valley from the north of the Site.</p> <p>The Kent and East Sussex heritage railway is proposed to extend east, terminating in Robertsbridge, and passing the southern boundary of the Site.</p> | <p>Short-Term</p> <p>Construction activity will adversely impact the perceptual qualities of the landscape for the short-term through the introduction of traffic movements, noise and operation of machinery.</p> <p>Long-Term</p> <p>Perceptual qualities will be similar to the existing, but with an increase in the extent of built form visible from the Site's immediate surroundings.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Retain vegetation along the boundaries of the Site to limit intervisibility with surroundings. ▪ Retain any important and existing Site lines looking out of the area ▪ Ensure the development is integrated in the landscape and connected to existing countryside areas. |
| Land-based economy and rural living - with roots extending deep into history, and which has visibly and culturally shaped the landscape | Not available. | The Site does not contribute to the land-based economy and is currently not in active use. The Site contains designated and non-designated heritage assets including the Grade II Listed Oast House and Hodson's Mill. | <p>Short-Term</p> <p>No impact - but potential to integrate existing heritage assets within any proposed development.</p> <p>Long-Term</p> <p>No impact - but potential to integrate existing heritage assets within any proposed development.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to integrate existing heritage assets within any proposed development and/or provide interpretation. |

7.0 Design Principles

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

Development Envelope

- Use topography to inform the hierarchy of density and configuration of land parcels.
- Avoid locating development on the more elevated northern portion of the Open Fields. Existing development on the valley slopes surrounding Northbridge Street generally does not extend above the 30m contour.
- Secure a scale and form of residential development which reflects the adjoining urban areas of Northbridge Street and Robertsbridge.
- Ensure an appropriate scale of development which retains existing views south across the wider landscape.

Materiality and Heights

- Consider an architectural response that integrates well and takes visual cues from the local vernacular, including the historic buildings on Site.
- Limit building heights to a maximum of two storeys, with potential to include some single storey dwellings to provide variety to the roofscape.

Green Infrastructure

- Ensure that existing Green Infrastructure assets are retained and incorporated into any

proposed development.

- Retain the historic field boundary hedgerow between the Open Fields.
- Increase publicly accessible linkages through the Site to the wider landscape.
- Create a hierarchy of public and private open spaces within the green infrastructure network to increase accessibility and adds to the sense of place.
- Maximise the visual and biodiversity opportunities of the River Rother.
- Consider the inclusion of new areas of woodland along the northern site boundary. Many of the upper slopes of the valley and the skyline are already characterised by woodland in this area so the addition of more trees would be in keeping with the surrounding area.
- At detailed design, seek to use native tree and woodland species and prefer those present in the context of local landscape character.

These design principles can be taken forward through an iterative approach to inform an evolving design process at an increasing level of detail through the planning process.

8.0 Conclusion

Conclusion

The Hodson's Mill parcel benefits from a Neighbourhood Plan allocation and extant planning permission for redevelopment. This is the least sensitive part of the Site in landscape terms and could accommodate redevelopment without substantial adverse impacts on landscape character or views.

There is some potential for sensitively designed development in the lower slopes of the Open Fields subject to appropriate buffers and landscape mitigation measures.

The Site is in the High Weald National Landscape although its location on the valley slopes of the River Rother means that it is generally well screened by existing vegetation. Development of the Site would affect some of the special qualities of the National Landscape, mitigation through design can ensure that harm is minimised.

Following consideration of the identified opportunities and constraints, it is concluded that the Site should be able to accommodate sensitively designed residential development. However, it is recommended that a Landscape and Visual Appraisal is undertaken to accompany any future planning application to thoroughly assess potential landscape and visual effects within the locality and inform the masterplanning process.

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