

ST ALBANS PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE SEARCH

PLANNING APPRAISAL REPORT FOR SHORT LISTED POTENTIAL NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL SITES

SITE 6: O14 – BIRKLANDS DETACHED PLAYING FIELD, LONDON ROAD, ST ALBANS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

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

- Birklands Detached Playing Field, London Road, St Albans

1.2 The site is located on the south eastern side of St Albans outside but immediately adjacent to the Wider Search Area.

1.3 The site has been visited on a number of occasions, the most recent being on 2nd February 2016.

1.4 The site has an area of approximately 4.20ha. This appraisal assesses whether there is potential for the site to accommodate a 2fe primary school.

1.5 The following drawings accompany this report:

- Site Location Plan (drawing 5115/350)
- Site Identification Plan (drawing 5115/351)
- Aerial Photograph (drawing 5115/352)
- Site Appraisal (drawing 5115/353)
- Development Principles drawing (5115/354)

1.6 The following drawings, also accompany this report:

- Site Appraisal (drawing 4768/003)
- Illustrative Layout: 2 Form of Entry Primary School (drawing 4768/014)

1.7 These drawings were originally prepared in 2009, and were submitted to St Albans City and District Council in support of proposals for the development of the site for either residential development or a primary school. The Site Appraisal drawing is more detailed drawing which incorporates topographical survey information. The Illustrative Layout plan illustrates how a 2FE primary school could be accommodated on the site.

1.8 The site was originally acquired by Hertfordshire County Council for educational use to provide playing fields for the former Birklands College which adjoined the site and has since been converted and developed for housing. The former detached playing field remained in County Council ownership following the disposal of the remainder of the site and has been identified as a potential 2FE primary school site to serve the southern side of St Albans on a number of occasions. A number of technical studies and investigations have been undertaken, the most recent being in 2009. The following paragraphs incorporate the main findings of these investigations.

Note: the site boundary used in earlier stages of this study were based on the area originally identified by LSH. However, the boundary has been slightly adjusted to reflect the more precise boundaries which were given in studies undertaken in 2009 and shown in representations submitted to St Albans City and District Council.

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

- High Level Accessibility Appraisal (including drawing ST-2479-04) prepared by Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The Birklands site is located on the south-eastern edge of St Albans and comprises an area of land used informally as open space and has a sign at its entrance from The Poplars calling it Birklands Meadow. It is broadly rectangular in shape with projections to the north east and south east extending towards London Road. The south eastern extension meets the old London Road, which lies as short distance to the west of the current London Road, where there is a pedestrian entrance. It comprises an area of rough grassland to the centre, with scattered mature trees and recent tree planting around its perimeters.
- 2.2 It is located adjacent to but outside the Wider Search Area, approximately 1.7km from the Core Area of Search, and approximately 2.7km from the centre of the town (taken to be St Peter's Street).
- 2.3 The northern part of the site is more wooded, with a number of mature ornamental trees amongst more recent woodland, an overgrown tennis court and a filled in and overgrown outdoor swimming pool.
- 2.4 The southern part of the site comprises another area of woodland with a large dead oak tree and an attractive pond and weir.
- 2.5 Immediately to the north-west is an area of bungalows, and two storey detached and terraced 1960's houses.
- 2.6 Immediately to the north-east is a mixture of two and three storey flatted residential development known as Birklands Park (conversion and new build) in a parkland setting, which was the former Birklands College.
- 2.7 Immediately to the east is the old London Road, with the current London Road further to the east and a cemetery and farmland beyond.
- 2.8 Immediately to the south-east is an area of low density residential development fronting Birklands Lane.
- 2.9 To the south is a large garden centre, pet centre and shed outlet, occupying a former garden centre, and beyond these the A414 North Orbital dual carriageway, which separates the settlements of London Colney and St Albans.
- 2.10 To the south-west is an area of unused open land known as Napsbury Fields, which is crossed by a number of public footpaths, with an informal access to the site.

- 2.11 **Access/Highways** – the site has a short frontage to old London Road to the east, which provides a connection to London Road a short distance further to the east.
- 2.12 Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants have undertaken a high level transportation and accessibility appraisal for the site, which makes the following conclusions:
- The site is located on the southern edge of St Albans and it is likely that the majority of pupils will travel from the north. It is suggested that the most suitable option for vehicles to access the site is from Old London Road to the east of the site, while pedestrians could be provided with an additional access via New House Park and/or The Poplars to the north of the site. A northern pedestrian access may lie on the main pupil desire line to and from the school.*
- Whilst availability of on-street parking in the area is better than some sites, it will not be sufficient to serve a new school development, especially given its edge of town location south of the town. Therefore, on site parking for parents is required in addition to that provided for staff.*
- Minimal highway works should be required at the site consisting of the construction of the access road itself, road markings and the possible introduction of some parking restrictions. It may be that further studies show a longer ghost island would be beneficial on the A1081 London Road, although it may be difficult to achieve much change, given the proximity of the London Road Cemetery access road.*
- The existing footpath from The Poplars should be improved unless a new footway link is provided from New House Park. Depending upon results of desire line analysis, a new signal controlled crossing may be required on the A1081 to link the foot/cycleway to the east side of London Road to the cycleway on the west side.*
- The main challenge for the site is the impact of existing heavy traffic flows on the A1081 London Road which are likely to be increased by school traffic. This encourage parents to use a northern entrance, if provided.*
- If a single vehicular access from Old London Road is deemed insufficient, an additional drop off and circulation facility could be provided within the north of the site, formed by a one-way loop joining New House Park and The Poplars. A combination of accesses from New House Park/The Poplars, Old London Road and a possible park and stride via Birklands Lane could result in well distributed traffic, minimising the impact in any one location.*
- The local public transport network is reasonable and offers options for staff and accompanied pupils to use these sustainable travel modes.*
- Overall the site appears to offer good opportunities for suitable access for a 2FE primary school, if the measures set out above are implemented. It is recommended that it is sufficiently suitable in transport terms to warrant further more detailed investigation for such a use.*
- 2.13 A copy of the report, and the accompanying drawing which illustrates the main conclusions, is attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.14 **Pedestrian / cycle access** – the site is crossed by a number of informal paths, with pedestrian access points into the site from The Poplars to the north and old London Road to the east. There are also informal pedestrian access points along Birklands Lane to the south east and Napsbury Fields to the south west.
- 2.15 There is a segregated foot/cycleway running along the western side of London Road to the north of the site which terminates at the northern end of old London Road, just to the north of the Birklands site access.

- 2.16 A further foot/cycleway is located alongside Highfield Park Drive to the north which links to residential and other areas east of St Albans.
- 2.17 **Public transport** - London Road is served by four bus routes – 84, 602, 658 and 659, with four bus stops within 200 to 300m of the site. St Albans City railway station is located approximately 2.5 miles north of the site. The bus services running along London Road stop at the station
- 2.18 **Green Belt** – the site is located in the Green Belt in the relatively fragmented gap between St Albans and London Colney.
- 2.19 **Land ownership** – as mentioned above the site the site was originally acquired by Hertfordshire County Council to provide playing fields for the former Birklands College, which has since been disposed of and developed for residential use, but the former playing fields remain in County Council ownership. Signage indicates that the site is owned by the County Council and is not public open space but it is used informally by the public.
- 2.20 **Flooding** – a flood risk assessment was prepared for the site in 2009 which advises that the Environment Agency Indicative floodplain map of the area indicates that the site lies within an area not considered to be at risk from flooding, with less than a 1 in 1000 chance of occurrence in any one year. The assessment found that there is very little chance of the site experiencing fluvial flooding and recommended incorporating a number of sustainable drainage features, including swales, in any proposals for the site.
- 2.21 **Topography** – a topographical survey was completed for the site in 2009 which indicates that the site slopes down from 82.58m in the north to 76.35m in the southern corner, with the majority of levels around the centre of the site are in the region of 77.5m and 80.0m. The southern part of the site is relatively flat with levels varying between about 77.8m AOD and 78.4m AOD.
- 2.22 **Listed buildings/conservation area** – Newhouse Park Farm House, Newhouse Lane (now known as Lys Eira, Birklands Lane) immediately south of the site is a Grade II listed building. There are no other listed buildings, or conservation areas, in the vicinity of the site.
- 2.23 **Archaeology** – the site is not located in an area of archaeological interest.
- 2.24 **Ecology** – an ecological survey (including data survey and field survey) was undertaken in 2009. This indicated that the site is a County Wildlife Site and that there are records of great crested newts, slow worms and grass snakes in the study area in the vicinity of the site. It notes that the central part of the site is semi-improved neutral grassland surrounded by broad leaved woodland.
- 2.25 The County Wildlife Site citation for Birklands Fields is as follows:
“Semi- improved neutral grassland with a good range of indicator species. The sward is typically Red Fescue, Meadow Foxtail, Sweet Vernal – grass and Yorkshire Fog with Lady’s Bedstraw, Blue Knapweed, Pignut, Yarrow, Field Wood rush, Meadow and Bulbous buttercup. Only the edges show a decrease in diversity. The pond in the southern corner provides a valuable additional habitat along with a small stream and scrub. There are some scattered Oak trees and bluebell beneath. The site supports a good invertebrate population. Wildlife site criteria: 15 general grassland indicator species.”
- 2.26 The main conclusions of the field survey are:

- There is semi-improved grassland in the north-west corner of the site and around the main entrance
- The woodland supports trees of varying ages from over-mature examples to naturally regenerated stock and recent plantings
- The pond on the south-western boundary is overshadowed by mature oak trees which are causing heavy shading, contributing to the paucity of aquatic plant growth. However, it is considered to have suitable aquatic and adjacent habitat for great crested newts and a newt survey is recommended.
- The hedge along the north-eastern boundary does not meet the criteria for importance set out in the hedgerow Regulations (Note: possibly means NW boundary)
- There are no nationally rare or nationally scarce plant species on the site
- The grassland and scrubby margins to the woodland are good foraging habitats for lizards, slow worm and grass snake and a further reptile survey is recommended.
- A number of trees on the site are suitable for roosting bats and a further bat survey would be required; a separate tree survey is recommended
- All habitats on the site are suitable for breeding birds and site clearance should be undertaken outside the breeding season.

2.27 **Trees** – a tree survey was undertaken in 2009 which found that:

- All the significant tree groups are located around the site boundaries with several large mature specimen trees within Birklands Place but close to the site boundary
- An intermittent row of Lombardy poplars is found along the southern boundary however these are now approaching the end of their useful life and have collapsed
- Several tree groups exist around the pond some of which are worthy of retention
- In total there are seven significant tree groups and two areas of mixed woodland. There are three tree groups of low quality and three groups are of high quality.

2.28 **Tree Preservation Order** – a TPO (ref: TPO 1636) covers a number of individual trees and wooded areas on the northern and southern parts of the site and the adjoining Birklands Park which was confirmed in 2013. A further TPO covers a belt of trees on the boundary with Napsbury Fields to the south (mainly on Napsbury Fields).

2.29 **Agricultural land quality** – the land is not in agricultural use and does not appear to have been in agricultural use for very many years. Agricultural land classification maps indicate that the general area is classified as Grade 3 (average) agricultural use.

2.30 **Public Right of Way** – a public footpath runs along Birklands Lane immediately south of the site. A number of other public footpaths cross Napsbury Fields to the west.

2.31 **Public access / Community Use** – the site is not identified as an area of Registered Common Land or Open Access Land. It is used by the public as open space and is crossed by a number of informal paths. We are aware that local residents treat it as a public open space. As noted earlier signage

indicates that the site is owned by the County Council and is not a public open space. In March 2014 it was designated an Asset of Community Value and is referred to as Birklands Meadow.

- 2.32 **Noise sources** – the site is relatively close to the North Orbital Road, which is a source of traffic noise on the site, but this should not be a significant issue bearing in mind the separation.
- 2.33 **Size / shape** – the site comprises a large rectangular parcel of land which is significantly more than the minimum 0.7ha required by this study to accommodate a new primary school (excluding playing field) on a constrained urban site. It is also much larger than the minimum 1.99ha site required by BB103 for a new 2FE primary school (including 60 place nursery and playing field) on an unrestrained site in a non-urban area.
- 2.34 **Other Matters** – geo-environmental investigations (including boreholes) were undertaken in 2009 which indicated that ground conditions comprise mainly made ground to depths of between 0.3m and 0.5m. A contamination survey was also undertaken which identified some contaminants on parts of the site, which it recommended should be removed. It also recommended further gas monitoring to evaluate the ground gas regime.

3.0 SUMMARY OF RELEVANT LOCAL PLANNING POLICIES

- 3.1 The St Albans District Local Plan was adopted in November 1994 and covers the period 1981 to 2001. A number of policies have been ‘saved’.
- 3.2 The Local Plan Proposals Map indicates the following ‘saved’ designations/policies affecting the site:

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

Policy 143 Land Use Proposals Within the Upper Colne Valley – the site is identified as one of a number of sites in the Upper Colne Valley where the Council will encourage other uses. It is identified as UCV.6 Birklands Playing Field and advises that it is proposed to be used as public open space if vacated by the County Council.

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

The adjoining Napsbury Fields are also identified as one of a number of sites in the Upper Colne Valley where the Council will encourage other uses (**Policy 143 Land Use Proposals Within the Upper Colne Valley**). It is identified as UCV.5 Land at Napsbury Lane and advises that it is proposed to be used as low and medium intensity leisure uses compatible with the amenity of nearby residential uses.

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

Policy 65 Education Facilities is particularly relevant to the current proposals, particularly part B (iii) which relates to proposals for new schools in the Green Belt, stating that *‘New schools will be permitted only if very special*

circumstances can be demonstrated. It must be shown that no suitable location is available in areas excluded from the Green Belt and that there is an overriding need for the proposal to cater primarily for children living within the District'.

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

Policy 75 Green Space Within Settlements seeks to protect green space or re-provide it elsewhere if its loss would result in a deficiency of open space in the area. The policy would not permit development if it would destroy the character of any remaining green space. The policy identifies a number of considerations which will be taken into account in determining planning applications for the development of green space within towns. The accompanying explanatory text advises that urban green spaces consist of all open land, irrespective of ownership, which supports trees and other plants in built-up areas, including parks, playing fields, allotments, verges, waste land about public utilities and gardens.

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

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

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 As far as we have been able to establish from St Albans DC's on-line planning records that there have not been any recent planning applications for the site, apart from a vehicular crossover, although the site was included in the application sites for a number of planning applications in the mid 1980's / early 1990's for the development of other land (Napsbury Fields and the former Napsbury Hospital) which involved taking an access road from the developments across the site to London Road. These proposals were either refused, appeals dismissed, or withdrawn.
- 4.2 Representations were submitted by V&G, on behalf of the County Council, in October 2009, in response to the City and District Council's Emerging Spatial Strategy which was then being prepared as part of their former Local Development Framework. Two options were put forward for the development of the site – one for residential development of 77 units on approximately 1.7ha of the site, with public open space on remaining areas, and the second option for a 2FE primary school. A copy of the illustrative layout plan which accompanied the representations, which indicates how a 2FE primary school could be accommodated accompanies this report.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL FOR NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL

- 5.1 The site has previously been assessed as suitable for accommodating a 2FE primary school and has been promoted for this use – mainly to meet the primary educational needs of the southern side of St Albans.
- 5.2 As far as we are aware the last time it was put forward for this use was in 2009. However, since this date there have been a number of changes:

- The current study to identify a potential location for a new 2FE primary school is based on needs arising from the town centre and the area east of the town centre, rather than needs from the southern part of the St Albans.
- Since 2009 the former Francis Bacon Secondary School, which is approximately 400m to the north of the site, has become an academy, has been rebadged as The Samuel Ryder Academy, and has become an all-through school, with a new two storey primary school block added. This would have met some of the primary school needs of the surrounding area, including the site.
- The site was designated an Asset of Community Value in 2014.

Site

- 5.3 The site has an area of over 4.08ha, which is significantly more than the minimum 0.7ha size sought for a new 2fE primary school by this study to identify potential new primary school sites (excluding playing field). It would also be significantly larger than the 1.99ha site required by BB103 for a new 2FE primary school (including nursery) on an unrestrained site in a non-urban area.
- 5.4 Even allowing for the significant areas of the site which contain trees and are wooded the site would be likely to be large enough for a BB103 based primary school (including playing field).
- 5.5 The site is located in the green belt and a new school would be contrary to green belt policy. In order to justify a new school in this location, very special circumstances would need to be justified to override the usual presumption against development in the green belt, in particular it would need to be demonstrated that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. It would also be necessary to demonstrate that the impact on the green belt has been minimised.

Acquisition of additional land

- 5.6 There is open land to the south west, comprising Napsbury Fields, but this should not be necessary.

Maximum height of development

- 5.7 Bearing in mind the green belt location the buildings should be kept as low as possible and preferably limited to single storey in height, in order to minimise the impact on the green belt and views. However, if the site is removed from the Green Belt two storey school building would be likely to be acceptable.

Location relative to area of need

- 5.8 The site is located on the south eastern side of St Albans just outside the Wider Search Area, approximately 1.7km from the Core Area of Search, which is the area of greatest need, and is approximately 2.7km from the centre of the town (taken to be St Peter's Street). It is therefore relatively remote from the area of need.

Development principles

- 5.9 The Development Principles drawing illustrates how a 2FE primary school could be accommodated on the site. This is based on a new 2FE primary school (including nursery) on an unrestrained site (1.99ha) in a non-urban area, rather than a two storey school on a constrained urban site (0.7ha), with detached playing field.
- 5.10 The drawing incorporates a new access road from old London Road. It does not include vehicular accesses from roads from the north or a dropping off / pick up and circulation area on the northern part of the site, which is identified in the high level transport and access appraisal, due to the impact on existing mature trees and nearby residential properties.
- 5.11 The accompanying illustrative layout plan at the Appendix indicates, in more detail, how a 2FE primary school could be accommodated on the site. However, it should be noted that this drawing was based on the former BB99 standards which have been replaced by the present BB103 standards. The former standards were higher and it was usual for sites of 2.5ha to be identified for a 2FE primary school, rather than the present day 1.99ha.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The main planning and environmental constraints and considerations which would affect the potential use of the site for a new primary school are:
- Green belt designation
 - Tree Preservation Order on a number of trees
 - Designation as an Asset of Community Value and use (informally) as open space
- 6.2 The site is of sufficient size to accommodate a new 2FE primary school based on either a 0.7ha site (excluding playing field) for a constrained urban site or a 1.99ha site for an unconstrained site in a non-urban area. Although there are a large number of trees on the site there is sufficient room to accommodate a new school and retain the most important trees.
- 6.3 The site is owned by the County Council and was originally purchased for use for educational purposes, and has previously been promoted for use for a new primary school. In theory it is therefore a suitable site for a new primary school. However, although it is located just outside the Wider Search Area it is relatively remote from the Core Area, which is the area of greatest need, and so is not well located to serve these needs, which is the purpose of this site search study, although it is well located to serve needs in the south eastern part of St Albans
- 6.4 The site is located in the green belt and so very special circumstances would need to be given to justify a new school on the site. It would also need to be demonstrated that there are no suitable non green belt locations available, although if the site were to be taken out of the green belt and allocated for a new school in the Local Plan, these justifications would not be required.
- 6.5 A number of trees are covered by a TPO, but as the larger trees are only located around the perimeter it is unlikely that they would significantly affect

the location of a school on the site. However, it is suggested that details of the TPO be obtained.

6.6 In addition to these issues the site is used by the public as if it were open space and it is designated an Asset of Community Value, although a school use may not conflict with this designation. If proposals for a school on this site are to be progressed we recommend that this issue be investigated to see whether there would be a conflict.

6.7 The main physical and site constraints and considerations which would affect the potential use of the site for a new primary school are:

- Woodland and mature trees on the site

6.8 The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal advises that overall the site appears to offer good opportunities for suitable access for a 2FE primary school, if the suggested measures are implemented. It recommends that it is sufficiently suitable in transport terms to warrant further more detailed investigation for such a use.

[Note: one of the possible mitigation measures set out in the appraisal is a dropping off / pick up and circulation area on the northern part of the site, with vehicular accesses from the roads to the north. However, these are unlikely to be acceptable due to the impact on existing trees and nearby residential properties.]

6.9 A number of studies and technical investigations were undertaken in 2009 and are adequate for the purposes of the current assessment. However, if it is decided to progress the site these will need to be reviewed and updated. It may also be necessary for a number of other studies to be commissioned. These include:

- Topographical survey (may need update)
- Tree survey (may need update)
- Ecological assessment – will need to be updated bearing in mind the timescale since it was originally completed. A number of species surveys may also need to be commissioned (as recommended in the current ecological assessment).
- Transport assessment / report
- Preliminary planning report

6.10 In due course the following studies and technical investigations are also likely to be required:

- Archaeological desk based assessment
- Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy
- Alternative site assessment (based on this study)
- Geophysical / Geotechnical investigations (may need update)
- Utilities report

6.11 The following may also be required:

- Archaeological evaluation (excavations) – depending on results of geophysical survey

- 6.12 The overall conclusion is that the site is of more than sufficient size to accommodate a new primary school and is owned by the County Council and has been previously identified for this purpose. However, it is relatively remote from the Core Area, which is the area of greatest need, and so a new school in this location may not meet needs arising from the area of greatest need.
- 6.13 The main issue is likely to be the green belt location and the need for very special circumstances to justify a school, including the need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. A secondary issue is likely to be the perceived loss of what is seen by the public as an open space and its designation as an Asset of Community Value.

APPENDIX

St Albans Primary School Site Search

High Level Accessibility Appraisal for Site at Birklands Park

This high level access appraisal is to consider the suitability of access for a new 2 Form of Entry (2FE) primary school on the Birklands Park location in St Albans. It is to be read in conjunction with Drawing ST-2479-04, attached to the end of this document and refers to site reference O14.

This site was subject to an assessment of access suitability for both residential and/or educational use by Stomor Ltd in 2009. This study considered serving the site in isolation and also as part of a wider development to the west, or to both the west and east of the site. A number of different access options were considered proportionate to the scale of the development. As this current appraisal is solely to consider the possibility of a 2FE primary school on the site, only the more scaled back access options have been considered.

1. Site Background

1.1 Location

The site is situated on the southern edge of St Albans, bounded by residential development to the north, trees and grassland to the west, a mixture of commercial and residential development to the south and London Road to the east. It is thought that the majority of pupils will travel from the north.

1.2 Local Road Network

London Road (herein referred to as Old London Road) is an approximately 7m wide 30mph local access cul-de-sac to the east of the site. Access to Old London Road is via a short link road, with T-junctions at either end onto the A1081 London Road. The A1081 is a Main Distributor Road connecting the centre of St Albans with the A414 North Orbital Road at the London Colney roundabout, southeast of the site. In the vicinity of the site the A1081 is approximately 10m wide and is subject to a 40mph speed limit.

There is a short ghost island on the A1081 London Road to allow southbound cars to turn right into the site via the Old London Road link.

To the north of the site, New House Park is an approximately 7.3m wide Local Access Road which serves the surrounding housing estate, connecting to the A1081 London Road approximately 500m to the north of the site. The cul-de-sac section of New House Park which abuts the site is 4.8m wide. The Poplars is an approximately 5.5m wide cul-de-sac which serves housing abutting the northern site boundary and is accessed from New House Park.

1.3 Existing Access

There is currently no operational vehicular access to the existing site. However there is a gated access bellmouth serving the site from Old London Road to the east. This access is currently

overgrown. Pedestrians are able to access the site from Old London Road via on a footpath adjacent to the bellmouth described above, as well as via a footpath from The Poplars to the north.

1.4 Existing Conditions

Observations of transport conditions in the vicinity of the site were made in the AM peak period of 14th January 2016 between 8am and 9am. The weather was cold and generally dry. Traffic appeared to be mostly light in the vicinity of the site, except on the A1081 London Road heading southbound onto the London Colney Roundabout, where peak queues stretched back to the roundabout with Highfield Park Drive 750m to the north.

There appeared to be little on street parking currently on Old London Road, with capacity for more cars to park along it. There was a moderate amount of parking observed on the residential roads to the north of the site with quite limited scope for extra parking.

1.5 Existing Pedestrian/Cycle Provision

The A1081 London Road has a pedestrian refuge island to the south east of the junction with the link to Old London Road.

Birklands Lane forms Public Footpath (PROW) FP53, linking Old London Road to the A414 North Orbital, running along the southern boundary of the site.

An existing footbridge crosses the A414 North Orbital Road about 400m to the south east of the site and connects London Road with the residential areas in the north of London Colney. There is also a signal controlled crossing over the A1081 arm of the London Colney roundabout, approximately 350m to the south east of the site.

A combined foot/cycleway runs alongside the A1081 London Road from the London Colney roundabout to the junction with Grosvenor Road approximately 2km to the north west. This path also provides a link to National Cycle Route 61, The Alban Way, approximately 1.8km north west of the site.

There is also a foot/cycleway running along the southern side of Highfield Park Drive, linking to residential areas to the north east of the site. The cycleway running along Highfield Park Drive continues south onto the eastern side of the A1081 London Road, but terminates to the east of the site with no formal crossing onto the cycleway present on the western side of the A1081. There is a signal controlled crossing to the north of the roundabout joining London Road and Highfield Park Drive.

1.6 Public Transport

There are bus stops on both sides of the A1081 London Road, approximately 200m from the possible access onto Old London Road, both to the north west and south east. Route 84/84A, operated by Metroline, connects St Albans and New Barnet, passing the site four times per hour. The half-hourly Route 602, operated by Uno, connects Hatfield with Watford via St Albans and London Colney while

the hourly Route 658, also operated by Uno, connects Borehamwood with St Albans via London Colney also call at these stops.

The nearest major Railway Station is St Albans City, approximately 2.2 kilometres to the north west of the site, which has regular connections with Harpenden, Luton, London and further afield. St Albans Abbey, an unmanned stop approximately 2.5 kilometres to the west of the site, has connections with Watford Junction, approximately every 45 minutes.

2. Access Considerations

2.1 Network Capacity

Heavy traffic and associated queuing on the A1081 London Road at the London Colney roundabout during the AM peak period presents a noticeable inconvenience for vehicles travelling to the site from St Albans. The timings on the traffic lights at the London Colney roundabout could potentially be changed to reduce queue lengths on the A1081. However, this is unlikely to be considered further as the A414 North Orbital Road currently has very heavy flows and the Highway Authority would not want to negatively affect the dominant flow more than necessary.

The only likely potential slight improvement for vehicles accessing the site would be to lengthen the existing ghost island for right turns into the site. The extent of this is constrained by the close proximity of a right turn lane in the opposite direction which allows northbound cars to access the London Road Cemetery.

It is unlikely that the Highway Authority will accept the principle of parents dropping off pupils on any of the surrounding roads within the public highway. Therefore, on site parking for parents as well as staff would be required. Parents who are unwilling to join the southbound queue on the A1081 are likely to look for an area to drop off/pick up elsewhere; with the residential area around New House Park likely to be used if a northern access to the site was provided.

2.2 General Improvements

Depending upon results of desire line analysis, a new signal controlled crossing may be required on the A1081 to link the foot/cycleway to the east side of London Road to the cycleway on the west side.

Old London Road is about 7m wide, so there may be some limited scope for on street parking to occur without disrupting the two way flow into and out of the school. It is considered unlikely that there will be sufficient on street parking for all parents expected to use this, especially given its location on the edge of the town, south of the main area of need. Therefore, on site facilities for parents as well as staff should be provided.

2.3 Proposed Access

There are several potential options for providing vehicular and pedestrian access into the proposed site, as outlined below:

Option 1: Single vehicular entrance from Old London Road with pedestrian access from the north

The proposed access to the site is likely to be a simple T-junction in the position of the existing unused and gated bellmouth on Old London Road. Widening of the bellmouth would be required to accommodate two way flows into and out of the site. Additional highway works would be required in the vicinity of the site including repainting of road markings and the introduction of some parking restrictions in the vicinity of the access.

An outline design was previously carried out, which consisted of changing the priorities along Old London Road to make the access to the site the main movement along with the introduction of vertical speed control measures. This design was subject to a Road Safety Audit in 2009, which suggested that the existing give way arrangements should be retained and that vertical speed control measures were not considered necessary.

The Highway Authority previously advised that an access from Old London Road for a 2FE JMI school would be acceptable in principle.

It is thought that there is also likely to be demand for a parent parking facility on the London Road side of the site to the east, as this will allow onward access to the A414 North Orbital Road and M25.

A significant desire line is likely to be via New House Park and/or The Poplars, subject to improvement of the existing footpath into the site from this direction. It is possible that waiting restrictions would be required to discourage parents using this area as a vehicular drop off /pick up zone, especially considering the fact that queuing on the A1081 may make using this northern area more attractive.

Option 2: Vehicular entrances from Old London Road and New House Park

There is potentially scope for vehicular access from the residential area to the north west of the site, either via The Poplars or New House Park. While it is likely to be on the desire line of many pupils, a northern vehicular entrance is likely to be resisted by local residents due to its location in what appears to be an otherwise quiet residential area, particularly considering the potential for parents to prefer a drop off in this area to queuing on the A1081 London Road. Furthermore, it would be undesirable to have the principal vehicular access through these narrow (approximately 4.8m to 5.5m wide) residential roads if there is a better alternative.

This option is likely to be required if modelling showed that queuing on the A1081 makes an eastern entrance unsuitable for the sole vehicular access into the site. A northern entrance would require a drop off and parking facility to be included within the site itself, as there is a lack of capacity for two way flow and parking on the New House Park network. The drop off facility is likely to consist of a one way system that involves two access points, one on The Poplars and the other on New House Park. This would be built in an area of woodland and may require the removal of some trees.

2.4 Park and Stride

Birklands Lane forms Public Right of Way FP53 to the immediate south of the site; linking the A414 North Orbital Road to the south. Aylett Nurseries are located to the north of the A414 with a large

car park within 250m walking distance of the site. Depending upon the origin of pupils, and vehicle desire lines avoiding queues on the A1081, this could provide a suitable location for a park and stride facility, subject to agreement with the landowners. A review of Birklands Lane in terms of safety would be required.

3. Conclusion

The site is located on the southern edge of St Albans and it is likely that the majority of pupils will travel from the north. It is suggested that the most suitable option for vehicles to access the site is from Old London Road to the east of the site, while pedestrians could be provided with an additional access via New House Park and/or The Poplars to the north of the site. A northern pedestrian access may lie on the main pupil desire line to and from the school.

Whilst availability of on-street parking in the area is better than some sites, it will not be sufficient to serve a new school development, especially given its edge of town location south of the town. Therefore, on site parking for parents is required in addition to that provided for staff.

Minimal highway works should be required at the site consisting of the construction of the access road itself, road markings and the possible introduction of some parking restrictions. It may be that further studies show a longer ghost island would be beneficial on the A1081 London Road, although it may be difficult to achieve much change, given the proximity of the London Road Cemetery access road.

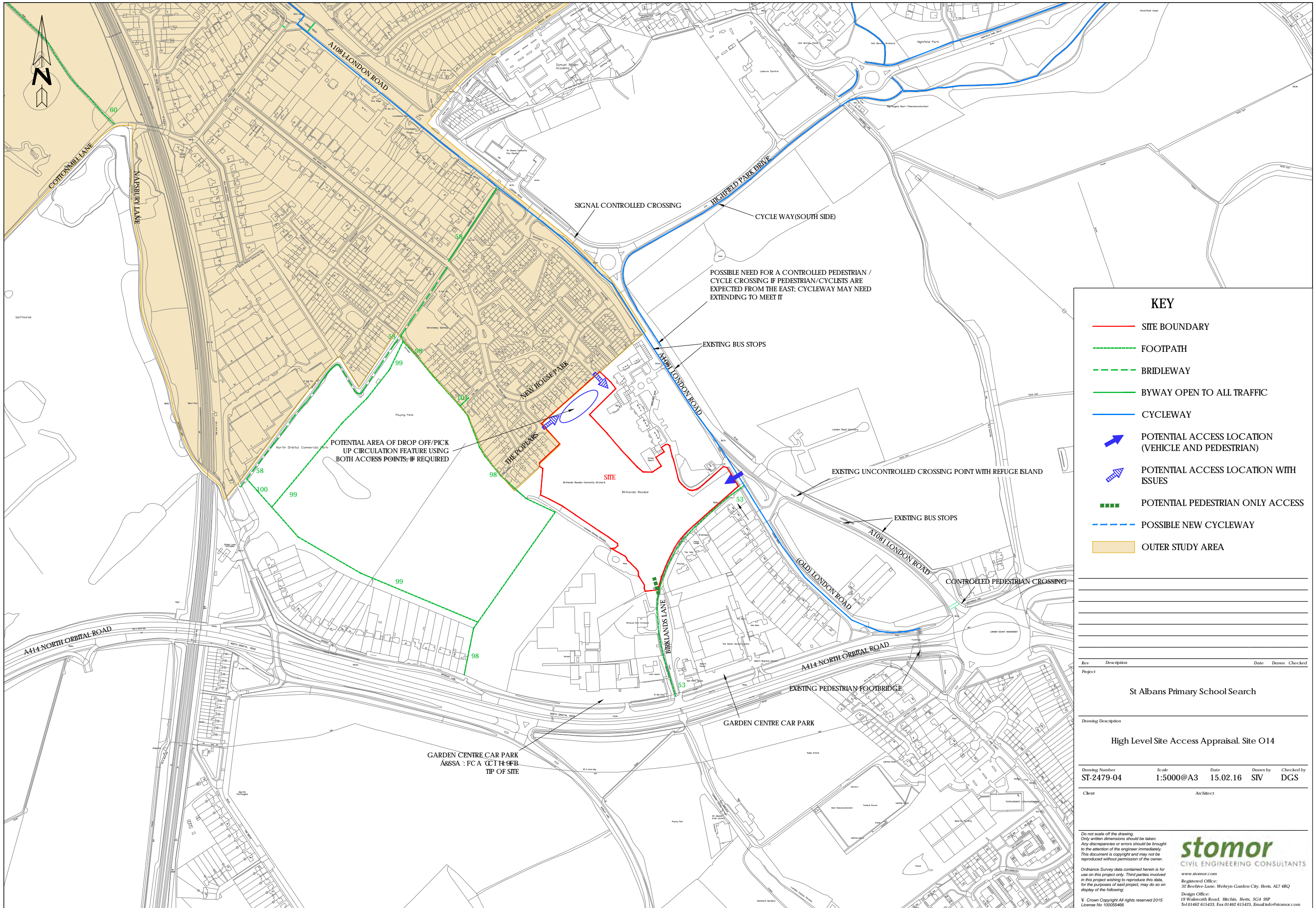
The existing footpath from The Poplars should be improved unless a new footway link is provided from New House Park. Depending upon results of desire line analysis, a new signal controlled crossing may be required on the A1081 to link the foot/cycleway to the east side of London Road to the cycleway on the west side.

The main challenge for the site is the impact of existing heavy traffic flows on the A1081 London Road which are likely to be increased by school traffic. This encourage parents to use a northern entrance, if provided.

If a single vehicular access from Old London Road is deemed insufficient, an additional drop off and circulation facility could be provided within the north of the site, formed by a one-way loop joining New House Park and The Poplars. A combination of accesses from New House Park/The Poplars, Old London Road and a possible park and stride via Birklands Lane could result in well distributed traffic, minimising the impact in any one location.

The local public transport network is reasonable and offers options for staff and accompanied pupils to use these sustainable travel modes.

Overall the site appears to offer good opportunities for suitable access for a 2FE primary school, if the measures set out above are implemented. It is recommended that it is sufficiently suitable in transport terms to warrant further more detailed investigation for such a use.



KEY

- SITE BOUNDARY
- - - FOOTPATH
- - - BRIDLEWAY
- BYWAY OPEN TO ALL TRAFFIC
- CYCLEWAY
- ➔ POTENTIAL ACCESS LOCATION (VEHICLE AND PEDESTRIAN)
- ➔ POTENTIAL ACCESS LOCATION WITH ISSUES
- ■ ■ POTENTIAL PEDESTRIAN ONLY ACCESS
- - - POSSIBLE NEW CYCLEWAY
- OUTER STUDY AREA

Rev	Description	Date	Drawn	Checked

Project: **St Albans Primary School Search**

Drawing Description: **High Level Site Access Appraisal, Site O14**

Drawing Number	Scale	Date	Drawn by	Checked by
ST-2479-04	1:5000@A3	15.02.16	SIV	DGS

Client: Architect

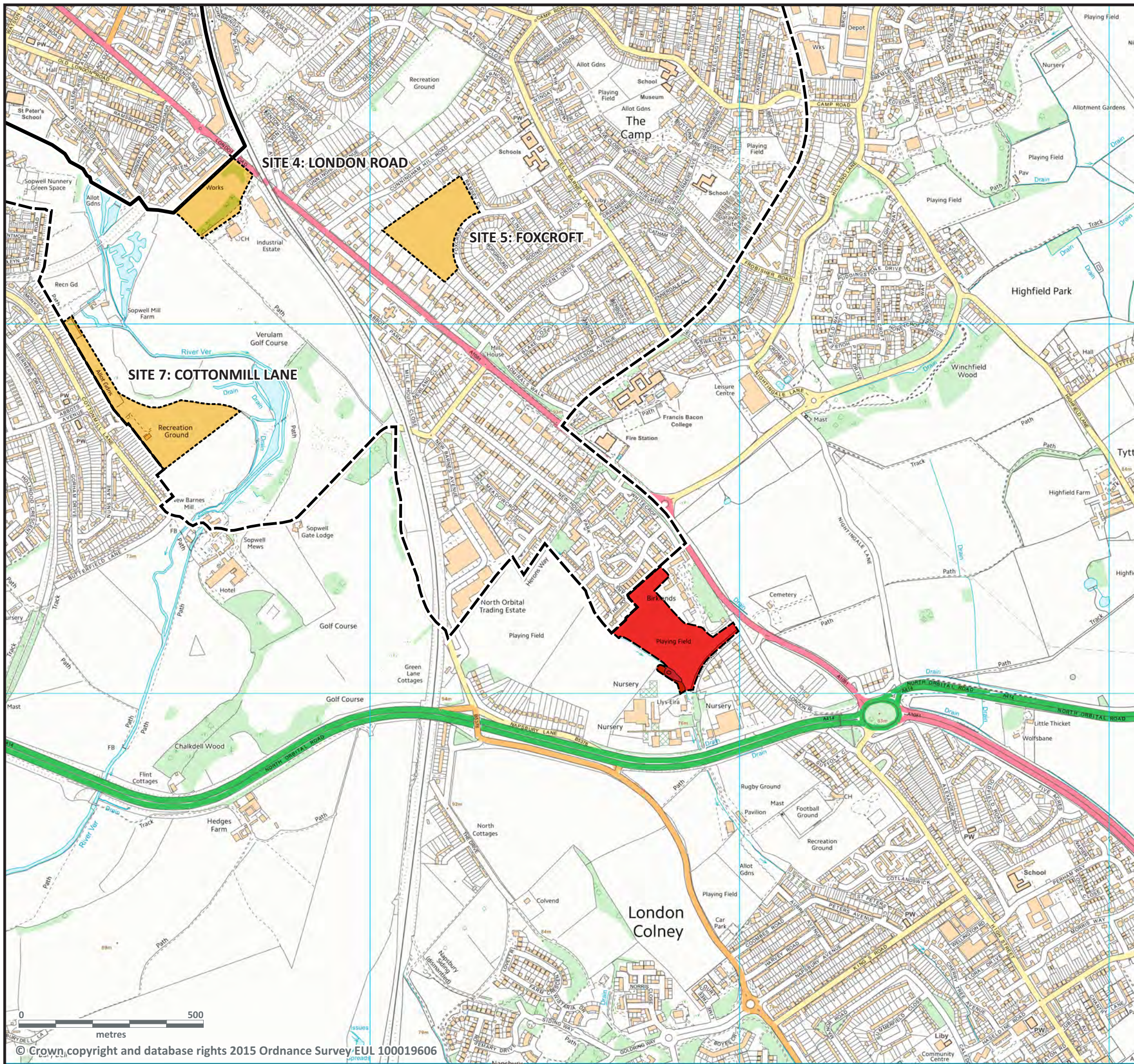
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DRAWINGS



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

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

DRAWING TITLE
**Site 6: O14 - Birklands Detached
 Playing Field
 Site location**

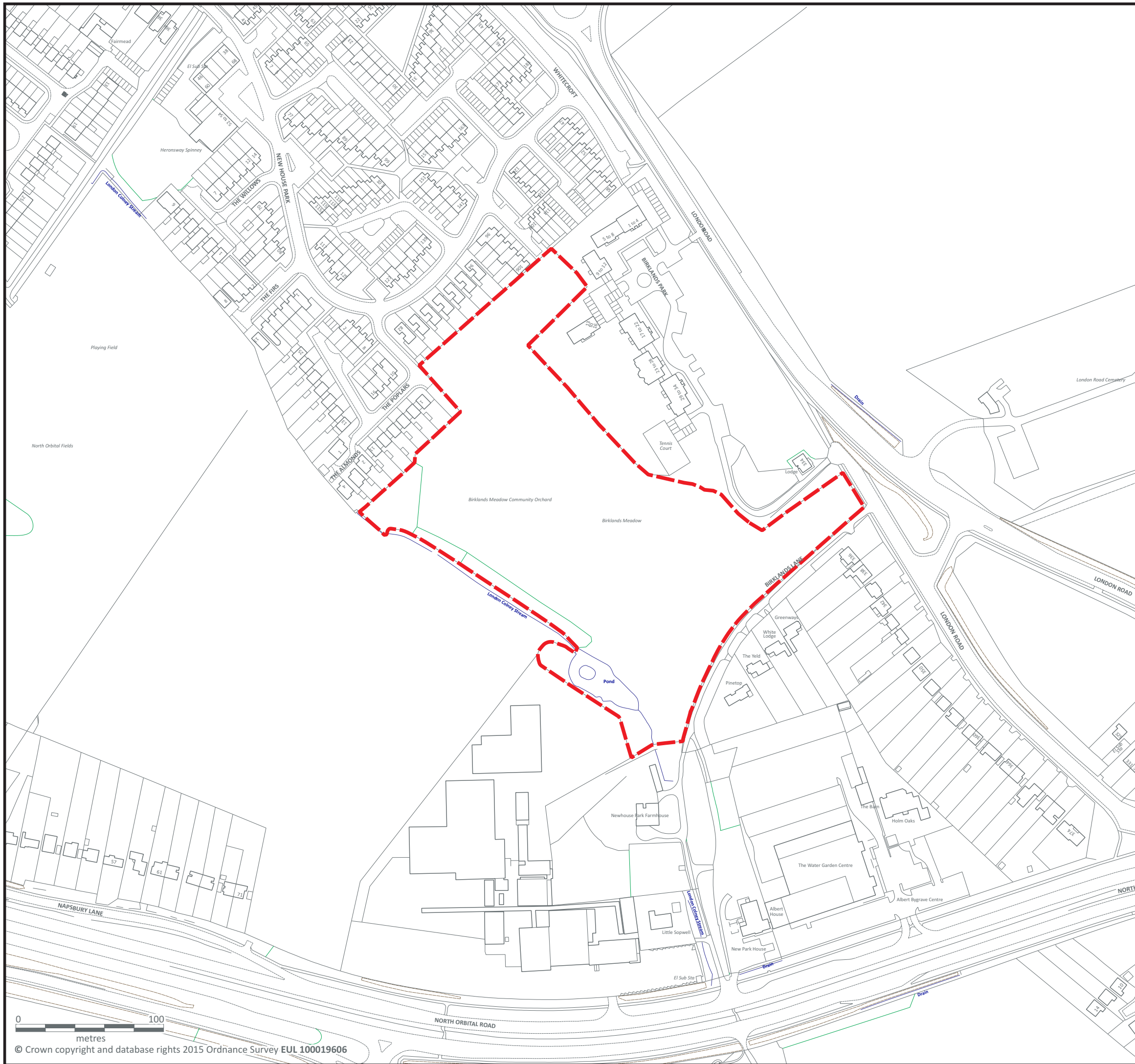
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PROJECT No.	5115	N	350
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SITE BOUNDARY
4.20ha 10.38ac



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

DRAWING TITLE
**Site 6: O14 - Birklands Detached
Playing Field
Site identification**

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PROJECT No.		351
5115		

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PROJECT TITLE
St Albans Primary School
Site search

DRAWING TITLE
Site 6: O14 - Birklands Detached
Playing Field
Aerial photograph

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	DRAWN	DATE
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PROJECT No.		352
5115		

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0 100
 metres
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PROJECT TITLE
**St Albans Primary School
Site search**

DRAWING TITLE
**Site 6: O14 - Birklands Detached
Playing Field
Site identification**

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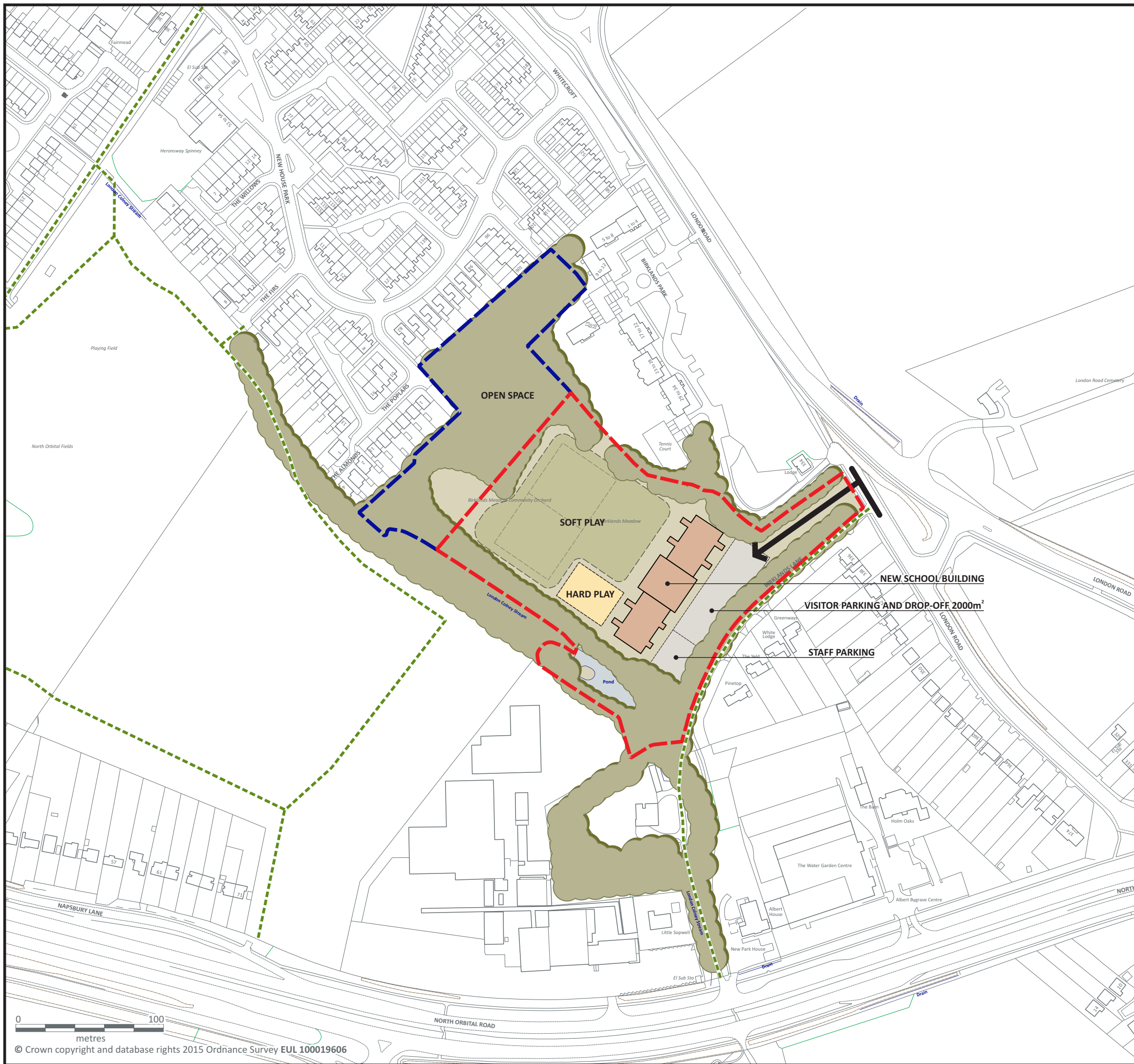
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0 100 metres
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SITE BOUNDARY
2.99ha 7.38ac



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PROJECT TITLE
St Albans Primary School
Site search

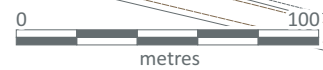
DRAWING TITLE
Site 6: O14 - Birklands Detached
Playing Field
Development principles

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PROJECT No.	N	354
5115		





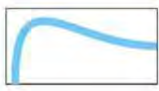



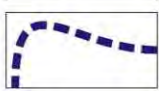





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-  SITE
-  FOOTPATH
-  BROADLEAF WOODLAND
-  GRASSLAND WITH MOWN PATHS
-  WATERCOURSES
-  POND
-  PEDESTRIAN POINTS OF ACCESS
-  UNAUTHORISED PEDESTRIAN POINTS OF ACCESS
-  PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY
-  FILTERED VIEWS INTO/OUT OF SITE
-  LONG DISTANCE VIEW OF ADJOINING RESIDENTIAL AREA
-  OVERGROWN TENNIS COURT
-  INFILLED SWIMMING POOL
-  TREE WITH BAT POTENTIAL

PROJECT TITLE
**Birklands Detached Playing Field,
 London Road,
 ST ALBANS**

DRAWING TITLE
Site appraisal

SCALE	DATE	CHECKED
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	DRAWN	DATE
	HP	



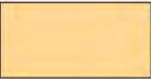











PROJECT No.		003
4768		

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-  SITE BOUNDARY
-  SCHOOL BUILDING
(2442m²)
-  INFORMAL HARD PLAY
(2255m²)
-  TEAM GAME HARD PLAY
(1736m²)
-  GRASSED PLAYING FIELD
(6690m²)
-  TREE CATEGORY A 1, 2, OR 3
(TREES OF HIGH QUALITY AND VALUE)
-  TREE CATEGORY A 1, 2, OR 3
ROOT PROTECTION AREA
-  TREE CATEGORY B 1, 2, OR 3
(TREES OF MODERATE QUALITY AND VALUE)
-  TREE CATEGORY B 1, 2, OR 3
ROOT PROTECTION AREA
-  TREE CATEGORY C 1, 2, OR 3
(TREES OF LOW QUALITY AND VALUE)
-  TREE CATEGORY B 1, 2, OR 3
ROOT PROTECTION AREA
-  TREE CATEGORY R
(TREES TO BE REMOVED)
-  OTHER TREES
(DERIVED FROM TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY)
-  OTHER FOLIAGE/VEGETATION
(DERIVED FROM TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY)

PROJECT TITLE
**Birklands Detached Playing Field,
 London Road,
 ST ALBANS**

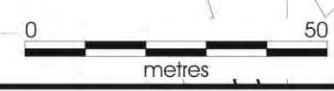
DRAWING TITLE
**Illustrative layout:
 2 form entry primary school**

SCALE	DATE	CHECKED
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	DRAWN	DATE
	HNA	

PROJECT No.	N	014
4768		

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ST ALBANS PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE SEARCH

PLANNING APPRAISAL REPORT FOR SHORT LISTED POTENTIAL NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL SITES

SITE 7: WSE4 – OLD OAK / MARLBOROUGH RECREATION GROUND (OR LAND EAST OF COTTONMILL LANE), ST ALBANS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

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

- Old Oak / Marlborough Recreation Ground (or land to the east of Cottonmill Lane), St Albans.

1.2 The site is located on the south eastern side of St Albans on the outer edge of the Wider Search Area.

1.3 A site visit was carried out on 2nd February 2016.

1.4 The site has an area of approximately 4.15ha. This appraisal assesses whether there is potential for the site to accommodate a 2fe primary school.

1.5 The following drawings accompany this report:

- Site Location Plan (5115/400)
- Site Identification Plan (5115/401)
- Aerial Photograph (5115/402)
- Site Appraisal (5115/403)
- Development Principles drawing (5115/404)

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

- High Level Accessibility Appraisal (including drawing ST-2479-03) prepared by Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 The site is located to the east of Cottonmill Lane between the residential properties fronting Cottonmill Lane and low lying land adjacent to the River Ver, to the south of the city centre.

2.2 It is located on the outer edge of the Wider Search Area, approximately 350m from the Core Area of Search, approximately 1.25km from the centre of the town (taken to be St Peter's Street).

2.3 The northern part of the site comprises an area of unused dilapidated lockup garages and a large hardstanding / car parking. To the south of this is a long narrow strip of land used for allotments (part used and part unused).

2.4 The southern part of the site, which is separated by an area of trees and change in level, widens out and is roughly triangular in shape and comprises a recreation ground with car park, community centre / pavilion (The Marlborough

Club), and floodlit multiuse games area, grass football pitch and a disused BMX track.

- 2.5 Immediately to the north of the allotment part of the site is a recreation ground with children's playground and the Alban Way cycleway / footway beyond, on a well treed embankment.
- 2.6 Immediately to west are the rear gardens of predominantly two storey semi-detached and terraced houses fronting Cottonmill Lane.
- 2.7 Immediately east of the site is an area of low lying open land, which appears to be unused, comprising willows, reeds and scrub, and the River Ver. Beyond the river is Verulam Golf Course.
- 2.8 **Immediately to the south of the site is an area of open farmland with the tree lined river and a group of large converted mill buildings (New Barnes Mill) beyond.**
- 2.9 **Access/Highways** – the site is has two indirect accesses to Cottonmill Lane. The northern part (garages and allotments) is via a narrow lane leading to Sopwell Mill Farm. The southern part (recreation ground) is via a residential access road - Old Oak
- 2.10 Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants have undertaken a high level transportation and accessibility appraisal for the site, which makes the following conclusions:

The site at Cottonmill Lane is located adjacent to a residential area in the southern part of St Albans. Existing levels of traffic in the vicinity of the site are currently relatively low; however it would appear that, in places, the surrounding road network does not have much additional capacity. Modelling may be required to assess the impact of school traffic on the local network.

The existing access points to the site appear to be unsuitable for use as a sole access for a new 2FE school. Old Oak is narrow and is unlikely to be suitable for widening due to the close proximity of existing buildings. Additionally, the road has a meandering alignment and poor visibility onto Cottonmill Lane. The cul-de-sac to the north west of the site is even narrower, though does have better visibility than Old Oak.

A one way system between Old Oak and the cul-de-sac to the north west, is deemed unlikely to have sufficient capacity for the combined vehicular and pedestrian movements associated with a 2FE school.

The preferred option would be to create a new vehicular access from Cottonmill Lane to the south of the site, combined with a pedestrian access from the cul-de-sac to the north of the site. This would require the acquisition of third party land to the south of the site for the access and a new junction from Cottonmill Lane. No access to the site for vehicles or pedestrians would be provided from Old Oak to minimise potential vehicular traffic on and around this road. This option would allow pedestrians to use a dedicated foot/cycleway from the cul-de-sac to the north, allowing for segregation from the general school vehicular traffic.

Both potential options would require a new pedestrian crossing on Cottonmill Lane and improvements to the footpath link from Saldeir Road to the north of the site. Given the extensive level of residential parking around the site already, on site provision for parents as well as staff vehicles will be required.

Local widening or provision of laybys could help to ease the flow of traffic along Cottonmill Lane.

There may be an opportunity for 'park and stride' from the St Albans Retail Park to the north west, which would provide a suitable facility for pupils and parents travelling from the west of the site.

The local public transport network is generally fairly poor, but potentially offers an option for travel by staff as well as accompanied pupils.

On balance, this site presents a number of potential challenges to providing suitable access for a 2FE school. These issues could be overcome through the construction of a vehicular access to the south of the site, a pedestrian crossing over Cottonmill Lane and a pedestrian access to the north west of the site. However, this would involve the acquisition of third party land which will need further investigation.

- 2.11 A copy of the report, and the accompanying drawing which illustrates the main conclusions, is attached at the Appendix.
- 2.12 **Pedestrian / cycle access** – the site has pedestrian accesses via the existing accesses to Cottonmill Lane. The Alban Way cycleway / footway runs approximately 110m to the north of the site. It forms part of the National cycle Network (route 61).
- 2.13 **Public transport** – a bus service S4 operates in a one way direction (south bound) along Cottonmill Lane near the northern part of the site.
- 2.14 **Green Belt** – the site is located in the Green Belt.
- 2.15 **Land ownership** – St Albans City and District Council's website indicates that, apart from an area at the centre of the site to the rear of Old Oak, the site is owned by the District Council.
- 2.16 **Flooding** – The Environment Agency website indicates that the adjoining land to the north and east is within an area at risk of flooding.
- 2.17 **Topography** – the northern part of the site slopes down gently towards the River Ver to the east. The southern part of the site is partly flat where the car park, community centre / pavilion, playing pitch and MUGA are located, with relatively steep slopes down to the river to the north east of these.
- 2.18 **Listed buildings/conservation area** – Sopwell Mill (Grade II) to the north east of the site is listed. There are two Grade II listed buildings and a number of locally listed buildings within the New Barnes Mill complex to the south east of the site. Beyond this is the large listed country house (now hotel) – Sopwell House Hotel (Grade II). A conservation area 'Sopwell Conservation Area' covers the mill and Sopwell House area.
- 2.19 **Archaeology** – the site is not located in an area of archaeological interest.
- 2.20 **Ecology** – there are no designated areas of nature conservation importance in the vicinity of the site. However, due to the boundary trees and scrub on much of the site it may well have ecological value. The adjoining low lying land immediately to the east of the site, next to the river, is likely to have high ecological value.
- 2.21 **Trees** – there are a number of trees on the site. There is a block of trees between the allotments and recreation ground parts of the site (which may preclude vehicular access between the two parts), trees on the northern frontage to the lane leading to Sopwell Mill Farm, a number of mature oak

trees with the centre of the recreation ground, and other trees alongside the Old Oak access road.

- 2.22 **Tree Preservation Order** – there are a number of TPO trees adjacent to Old Oak which is the access to the southern part of the site. A tree survey will be required.
- 2.23 **Agricultural land quality** – Agricultural land classification maps indicate that the general area is classified as land predominately in urban use.
- 2.24 **Public Right of Way** – there are no public rights of way within or adjacent to the site.
- 2.25 **Public access / Community Use** – the site is not identified as an area of Registered Common Land or Open Access Land or designated as an Asset of Community Value, although the recreation ground is a public open space.
- 2.26 **Noise sources** –the Midland Mainline / Thameslink railway line runs beyond the golf course to the east of the site but is unlikely to materially affect the site.
- 2.27 **Size / shape** – the northern part of the site is a long narrow shape some 25 to 30m wide and would be likely to be too narrow to accommodate a primary school, without extending onto the adjoining low lying land next to the River Ver (which is liable to flooding and likely to be of ecological value). The southern parcel is much wider and larger and would be more than adequate to accommodate a new primary school of 0.7ha (excluding playing field). See later for further discussion on this issue.
- 2.28 **Other Matters** – none.

3.0 SUMMARY OF RELEVANT LOCAL PLANNING POLICIES

- 3.1 The St Albans District Local Plan was adopted in November 1994 and covers the period 1981 to 2001. A number of policies have been ‘saved’.
- 3.2 The Local Plan Proposals Map indicates the following ‘saved’ designations/policies affecting the site:

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

Policy 114 (St. Albans City Centre, Building Height, Roofscape and Skyline) – site is located in a Zone of Visibility. The recreation ground is identified as a public viewpoint from which there are views of the City Centre skyline. The policy advises, amongst other matters, that proposals shall not obscure or detract from views of the historic roofscape of the Building Height Control Area.

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

Conservation Area No. 14 Sopwell. Policy 85 advises that the Council will pay attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of conservation areas, and also provides detailed guidance on proposals within conservation areas.

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

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

Policy 67 Public Meeting Rooms and facilities, advises that before granting permission for a change of use or redevelopment of buildings used for community purposes, the Council will need to be satisfied that a need for them no longer exists.

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

Policy 75 Green Space Within Settlements seeks to protect green space or re-provide it elsewhere if its loss would result in a deficiency of open space in the area. The policy would not permit development if it would destroy the character of any remaining green space. The policy identifies a number of considerations which will be taken into account in determining planning applications for the development of green space within towns. The accompanying explanatory text advises that urban green spaces consist of all open land, irrespective of ownership, which supports trees and other plants in built-up areas, including parks, playing fields, allotments, verges, waste land about public utilities and gardens.

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

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

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

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 St Albans DC’s on-line planning records indicate that there have been a number of applications for the recreation ground. In 1997 consent was given for a replacement club/community centre. In 2000 consent was given for amendments to the changing room/meeting hall, and in 2008 permission was given for a floodlit multi-use games area.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL FOR NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL

Site

- 5.1 The site has an area of 4.15ha, which is significantly more than the minimum 0.7ha size sought for a new 2fE primary school by this study to identify potential new primary school sites (excluding playing field). It would also be

larger than the 1.99ha minimum site required by BB103 for a new 2FE primary school (including nursery) on an unrestrained site in a non-urban area.

- 5.2 If the northern part of the site, which would be likely to be too narrow to accommodate a school, were to be omitted the remaining area south of the block of woodland, although it would be triangular in shape, would have an area of approximately 2.0ha (excluding the sloping areas near the river) which would still be more than the area required for a new primary school based on 0.7ha or 1.99ha.
- 5.3 The site slopes down gently towards the River Ver and, depending on the extent of the site it may be necessary for some re-contouring near the northern and eastern edges of the site where it starts to slope down towards the river. The most significant site constraints are the existing mature oak trees within the recreation ground, and also the TPO trees adjacent to the main site access road (Old Oak). The trees adjacent to the access may limit the scope for highway improvements.
- 5.4 The site is located in the green belt and a new school would be contrary to green belt policy. In order to justify a new school in this location, very special circumstances would need to be justified to override green belt designation, in particular it would need to be demonstrated that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. It would also be necessary to demonstrate that the impact on the green belt has been minimised. At this stage it may be necessary to assume that a building should be single storey (Note: the 0.7ha site assumes a two storey building).
- 5.5 The site is identified as a public viewpoint from which there are views of the St Albans City Centre skyline. The policy advises, amongst other matters, that proposals shall not obscure or detract from views of the historic roofscape of the Building Height Control Area. This mainly relates to developments in the Building Height Control Area but we would expect it to be an important consideration in any proposals for a new school on the site.

Acquisition of additional land

- 5.6 There is open land to the south and east of the site which could enable the site to be enlarged, if necessary. The land to the east is low lying land adjacent to the River Ver, which is an area liable to flooding and is likely to have ecological value and so may not be suitable. The land to the south is farmland above the area liable to flooding and could enable the site to be enlarged, or possibly provide replacement open space for that lost to the school. However, the land forms part of the open setting of the adjoining conservation area / listed buildings based on New Barnes Mills.

Maximum height of development

- 5.7 Bearing in mind the green belt location and the location in a Zone of Visibility any buildings should be kept as low as possible and preferably limited to single storey in height, in order to minimise the impact on the green belt and views. [Note: the 0.7ha site requires a two storey building]

Location relative to area of need

- 5.8 The site is located on the outer edge of the Wider Search Area, with the southern part some 600m crowfly distance of the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new primary school. However, it is physically separated from this area by the River Ver and its valley, which forms a barrier, with relatively few crossing points, although the Alban Way cycleway does provide a link. It is also located approximately 1.5km from the centre of St Albans (taken to be St Peter's Street). It is considered to be relatively remote from the Core Area, which is the area of greatest need, and that it may not help to meet needs in that area.

Other considerations

- 5.9 The majority of the site is a public open space with sports pitch, floodlit all-weather playing pitch, BMX course (under used) and community centre. The proposals would result in the loss of the open space, and other uses (unless there were shared use facilities at the school).
- 5.10 Local Plan Policy 75 seeks to protect Green Spaces, including parks, so there would be a policy objection to the loss of the open space. It may be necessary to undertake an assessment to establish whether there is adequate open space provision in the locality and what the implications of the loss of at least part of the open space would be. Depending on the outcome of such an assessment and the view of St Albans City and District Council towards the loss of part of the open space it may be necessary to enhance the remaining area of the open space / provide replacement open space elsewhere / enhance other open spaces to compensate for the loss.
- 5.11 Sport England may object to the loss of at least some of the open space, in particular the football pitch, and may require alternative replacement provision to be provided nearby, or existing facilities to be enhanced to make up for the loss, although it might be possible to have shared use of a school pitch.
- 5.12 If this site is to be progressed as a location for a new primary school it is suggested that Sport England be consulted.

Development principles

- 5.13 The Development Principles drawing illustrates how a 2FE primary school could be accommodated on the site. This is based on a new 2FE primary school (including nursery) on an unrestrained site (1.99ha) in a non-urban area, rather than a two storey school on a constrained urban site (0.7ha), with detached playing field, as this could be accommodated on the site, although it would result in the loss of more of the open space.
- 5.14 The drawing also incorporates a new access road and other highway mitigation measures suggested by the high level transportation and accessibility appraisal.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The main planning and environmental constraints and considerations which would affect the potential use of the site for a new primary school are:

- Green belt designation
 - Loss of open space and playing pitch
 - Loss of community centre.
 - Identification as a public viewpoint and location in a Zone of Visibility from which there are views of the St Albans City Centre skyline
- 6.2 The site is of sufficient size to accommodate a new primary school (based on a 0.7ha site, excluding playing field). It is also likely to be of sufficient size to accommodate a new primary school based on a site area of 1.99ha (for an unconstrained site in a non-urban area, including playing field) although this would be likely to result in the loss of all of the open space.
- 6.3 The site is likely to be in single ownership, which is an advantage, but is relatively remote from the Core Area, which is the optimum location for a new primary school, being the area of greatest need, and so it may not help to meet needs in that area.
- 6.4 The site is located in the green belt and so very special circumstances would need to be given to justify a new school on the site. It would also need to be demonstrated that there are no suitable non green belt locations available, although if the site were to be taken out of the green belt and allocated for a new school in the Local Plan, these justifications would not be required.
- 6.5 The loss of the whole recreation ground to a school use would result in the loss of one of the identified viewpoints from which there are important views of the City Centre Skyline, in particular the cathedral, which could be a significant issue. The loss of the community centre would also be a significant issue, unless the school were to include a replacement facility (possibly shared with the school).
- 6.6 The site is relatively free of physical and site constraints and considerations (apart from loss of open space) which would affect the potential use of the site for a new primary school. The main constraint is:
- Existing mature trees within the site and adjacent to the access to the site
- 6.7 The high level transportation and accessibility appraisal advises that overall the site presents a number of potential challenges to providing suitable access for a 2FE school. These issues could be overcome through the construction of a vehicular access to the south of the site, a pedestrian crossing over Cottonmill Lane and a pedestrian access to the north west of the site. However, this would involve the acquisition of third party land which will need further investigation.
- 6.8 If proposals for a school are to be progressed it is likely to be necessary to undertake an assessment to establish whether there is adequate open space provision in the locality and the implications of the loss of at least part of the open space. Discussion would need to take place with the Council and with Sport England at the earliest opportunity to establish whether they would object in principle to the proposals and whether replacement open space / playing pitch would need to be provided.

- 6.9 Assuming that proposals are to be progressed the following studies and technical investigations are likely to be required (in addition to the open space assessment):
- Topographical survey
 - Tree survey
 - Ecological assessment
 - Transport assessment
 - Preliminary planning report
- 6.10 A suitable design for providing a suitable access to the site and mitigating the impact of the school on the surrounding roads will also need to be provided and agreed with the highway authority – the access avoiding important trees (to be identified by tree survey) and minimising the impact on the adjoining conservation area / listed buildings.
- 6.11 In due course the following studies and technical investigations are also likely to be required:
- Archaeological desk based assessment
 - Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy
 - Alternative site assessment (based on this study)
 - Geophysical / Geotechnical investigations
 - Utilities report
- 6.12 The following may also be required:
- Archaeological evaluation (excavations) – depending on results of geophysical survey
- 6.13 The overall conclusion is that although the site could accommodate a new primary school and is owned by the District Council, and could help meet needs, it is relatively remote from the Core Area, which is the area of greatest need and so may not be well located to help meet this need.
- 6.14 The main issue is likely to be the green belt location, which means that there would need to be very special circumstances to justify a school on this site, including a need to demonstrate that there are no alternative non-green belt sites available which could accommodate the school. The loss the public open space and the implications of this for open space provision in the area and the attitude of the Council and Sport England to the loss, the loss of the existing community centre, is also likely to be an important issue, as are the highway mitigation measures which would be likely to be required in order to accommodate a school, in particular the need to construct a new access road, which would be significant.

RL/5115/8.3.16

APPENDIX

St Albans Primary School Site Search

High Level Accessibility Appraisal for Site East of Cottonmill Lane

This high level access appraisal is to consider the suitability of access for a new 2 Form of Entry (2FE) primary school to the east of Cottonmill Lane in St Albans. It is to be read in conjunction with Drawing ST-2479-03, attached to the end of this document and refers to site reference WSE4.

1. Site Background

1.1 Location

The site is situated on the southern side of St Albans and consists of a long row of allotments to the north and the Marlborough Club sports ground to the south. The site is bounded to the north and west by housing, associated with Cottonmill Lane, to the east by the River Ver and the south by a large field which is owned by a third party. It is likely that pupils will arrive via the Cottonmill and St Julians residential areas to the west and north, many arriving at Cottonmill Lane via smaller local residential access roads.

1.2 Local Road Network

Cottonmill Lane is a 30mph Local Distributor Road, which runs broadly northwest-southeast through the Cottonmill residential area of St Albans from a mini-roundabout at the junction of Watsons Walk and Old London Road near the City Centre, to another mini-roundabout at the junction of Napsbury Lane and Mile House Lane. The former mini-roundabout is about 800m north of the site and provides connections to the A1081 north west via Watsons Walk, while the latter mini-roundabout is approximately 450m east of the site and provides connections to the A414 via Napsbury Lane and the A1081 south east via Mile House Lane.

Cottonmill Lane varies in width along its length, and is subject to poor alignment to the south east, particularly adjacent to Sopwell House and the old buildings at the River Ver. To the west of the site, the road is approximately 6.7m wide.

Abbots Avenue consists of two approximately 10m wide carriageways, both of which are one-way, separated by an approximately 7m wide grassed central reserve. They connect to Cottonmill Lane approximately 80m north of the junction with Old Oak.

1.3 Existing Access

The southern section of the site is currently accessed from Cottonmill Lane via Old Oak, a small cul-de-sac to the west of the site. The northern section is also accessed from Cottonmill Lane via a small unnamed cul-de-sac to the north west of the site which provides connections to the Ver-Colne Valley Walk, a recreation ground, Sopwell Mill Farm and garages.

The Old Oak cul-de-sac offers a poor access to a school site as it is relatively narrow, has poor visibility at the junction onto Cottonmill Lane due to parked cars and has a meandering alignment. Due to the position of houses at its western end, there is a very limited corridor width of about

8.4m. This corridor consists of a verge of 0.8m on the northern side, carriageway of 4.8m, footway of 1.8m and a strip of trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) in the remaining width on the south side.

The small cul-de-sac to the north west of the site is approximately 3m wide and has a fairly tight horizontal alignment. Visibility from the access onto Cottonmill Lane is considerably better than at Old Oak, and at the time of the site visit no parking impeded this.

1.4 Existing Conditions

Observations of transport conditions in the vicinity of the site were made in the AM peak period of 14th January 2016 between 8am and 9am. The weather was cold and generally dry. Traffic in the vicinity of the site was mostly light, although some localised short-term queuing was observed around parked cars on Cottonmill Lane. Congestion was observed at the roundabout between Cottonmill Lane, Old London Road and Watsons Walk, with traffic queuing along Watsons Walk from the junction with the A1081 London Road. Queuing was also observed in the AM peak near the other end of Cottonmill Lane, on Mile House Lane where it joins the A1081 at traffic signals further to the south east.

Relatively extensive on street parking was observed along Cottonmill Lane in the vicinity of the site and was the main constraint on the flow of traffic. Parking along verges was observed to create muddy areas where they had not been hardened with tarmac.

1.5 Existing Pedestrian/Cycle Provision

There are approximately 1.8m wide footways on both sides of Cottonmill Lane adjacent to the site, separated from the carriageway by hard and soft verges. There is no pedestrian crossing provision along Cottonmill Lane in the vicinity of the site. There is no footway on the northern side of Old Oak. The northern access has a narrow footway to its northern side, with no provision to the south.

National Cycle Route (NCR) 6, a major north-south route between Uxbridge and the north of England, passes along Berners Drive which travels parallel to Cottonmill Lane near the site, before joining it approximately 300m north west of the possible northern site access. NCR 6 intersects NCR 61 at the same point. NCR 61 provides connections between Maidenhead and Hoddesdon via Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City (partially using NCR 6). The section between St Albans and Hatfield is also known as The Alban Way and this forms part of the new St Albans Green Ring walking and cycling route.

There are also local cycle routes identified to the north west, which link to St Albans Retail Park with associated large parking areas.

1.6 Public Transport

A bus stop is present on Cottonmill Lane, adjacent to the northern site access. A further bus stop is located on Abbots Avenue outside St Julian's Church approximately 150m to the west of the site. These stops serve local route S4 which has two services per hour to and from St Albans City Centre.

The nearest railway station is St Albans Abbey, an unmanned stop approximately 800m to the north west of the site, which provides connections to Watford Junction approximately every 45 minutes. The nearest major railway station is St Albans City, approximately 1.1 kilometres to the north of the site, which has regular connections with Harpenden, Luton, London and further afield.

2. Access Considerations

2.1 Network Capacity

While existing levels of traffic in the vicinity of the site were observed to be low, it would appear that the surrounding road network may, in places, lack the capacity required for the additional vehicles associated with a new 2FE school. There is currently extensive on-street parking in the vicinity of the site, despite many grass verges being hardened to accommodate parked cars, and this is currently a constraint on the flow of traffic. As a result of this on site parking provision would be required within the school site for parents as well as staff, combined with parking restrictions along Cottonmill Lane. There is also enough room on Cottonmill Lane for some localised widening, potentially incorporating laybys, which would ease two way traffic flow.

Additionally, the area of Cottonmill Lane to the south of the site contains several blind bends and pinch points which are likely to become congested if there are heavy flows via this route associated with a new school. There are unlikely to be any suitable mitigation measures to ease these issues due to the close proximity of existing buildings to the highway and the existing narrow bridge over the River Ver.

Further modelling may be required at areas of potential congestion to assess the impact of school traffic on the local network.

2.2 General Improvements

As the majority of the local residential area is to the west of Cottonmill Lane, it would be reasonable to assume that a sizeable percentage of pupils would need to cross this road. Therefore, regardless of the access option that is chosen, a new pedestrian crossing would be required.

Additionally, improvements may be required to the footpath connection between Saldeir Road and Monks Close 500m north west of the site. This footpath would potentially be on the desire line of many pupils arriving from the north on foot. A direct foot/cycle link could potentially be provided across the western edge of the sportsground to connect to the northern tip of the site.

New uncontrolled pedestrian crossing points may be required on Abbots Avenue to the west of the site due to the wide carriageway width at the junction with Cottonmill Lane. Abbots Avenue itself has the potential to be used for some further on street parking.

2.3 Proposed Access

Considering the existing site conditions, there are several potential access options which may use a combination of access points and highway improvements, as outlined below:

Option 1: One-way system using Old Oak and Cul-de-Sac to North West of Site

As none of the current access roads for the site are likely to be appropriate for two way flows, a one way system may be beneficial.

Given the poor visibility from Old Oak onto Cottonmill Lane, an entry only arrangement could be considered for school traffic. However, provision would need to be made for local residents to continue with two way movements, to maintain access to their properties as before. School traffic would require a separate egress route, which would be provided via the cul-de-sac to the north west.

Alternatively, the visibility onto Cottonmill Lane could be improved by introducing parking restrictions in the vicinity of Old Oak, possibly supplemented with strategically placed buildouts on Cottonmill Lane.

It would be desirable to widen the existing footway on the south side of Old Oak to accommodate the volume of pedestrians expected. However, as there is limited width available between houses at the western end, there is very limited potential to increase the footway width. Trimming vegetation adjacent to the footway will assist in providing additional width and further east there is more potential to widen, subject to the limits of the highway boundary. If the limits of the highway boundary present a restriction to widening, acquisition of third party land may be required.

Swept path analysis would need to be undertaken to establish whether larger vehicles (including a fire appliance) would be able to manoeuvre along the route. If not, a large vehicle or school coach would need to make alternative arrangements such as stopping on Cottonmill Lane itself or using another access. Furthermore, two way vehicular access will need to be maintained to Sopwell Mill Farm, the recreation ground and any retained garages and allotments, even when the access is busy with school traffic.

Option 2: Vehicular Access via Third Party Land to the South East with Pedestrian Access via the Cul-de-Sac to the North West

With neither of the two existing vehicular accesses into the site being particularly suitable for school traffic, and possible difficulties with a one way system, third party land would need to be purchased in order to achieve access from Cottonmill Lane via open land to the south of the site. Connection to Cottonmill Lane would be in the vicinity of its junction with Butterfield Lane.

A new access arrangement in this location would present some challenges in terms of proximity to the junction with Butterfield Lane, the twisting alignment of Cottonmill Lane and established trees along the field's boundary. There may be scope for a four-armed roundabout to be provided serving Cottonmill Lane, Butterfield Lane and a school vehicular access and is something that could be investigated if third party land could be obtained.

It is considered that a site access from the south would be away from the desire line of most parents who would be coming from the north and west and may therefore wish to drop off/pick up pupils in the vicinity of Old Oak regardless of specific provision for them. As a result of this, use of a southern

vehicular entrance should be combined with a pedestrian access from the northern cul-de-sac, providing no access for either vehicles or pedestrians to the site from Old Oak.

This option would require the small cul-de-sac to the north west of the site to be improved to make it more suitable for pedestrian use. A new foot/cycle route into the school site would be required in the position of the existing allotments. Localised restrictions may be required to prevent drop offs/pick ups in unsuitable places in the vicinity of the pedestrian entrance, and to encourage parents to use the more suitable arrangement accessed from the south.

2.4 Park and Stride

There is potential for a 'park and stride' arrangement to be used from the St Albans Retail Park approximately 500m to the north west of the site if necessary permission can be gained.

3. Conclusion

The site at Cottonmill Lane is located adjacent to a residential area in the southern part of St Albans. Existing levels of traffic in the vicinity of the site are currently relatively low; however it would appear that, in places, the surrounding road network does not have much additional capacity. Modelling may be required to assess the impact of school traffic on the local network.

The existing access points to the site appear to be unsuitable for use as a sole access for a new 2FE school. Old Oak is narrow and is unlikely to be suitable for widening due to the close proximity of existing buildings. Additionally, the road has a meandering alignment and poor visibility onto Cottonmill Lane. The cul-de-sac to the north west of the site is even narrower, though does have better visibility than Old Oak.

A one way system between Old Oak and the cul-de-sac to the north west, is deemed unlikely to have sufficient capacity for the combined vehicular and pedestrian movements associated with a 2FE school.

The preferred option would be to create a new vehicular access from Cottonmill Lane to the south of the site, combined with a pedestrian access from the cul-de-sac to the north of the site. This would require the acquisition of third party land to the south of the site for the access and a new junction from Cottonmill Lane. No access to the site for vehicles or pedestrians would be provided from Old Oak to minimise potential vehicular traffic on and around this road. This option would allow pedestrians to use a dedicated foot/cycleway from the cul-de-sac to the north, allowing for segregation from the general school vehicular traffic.

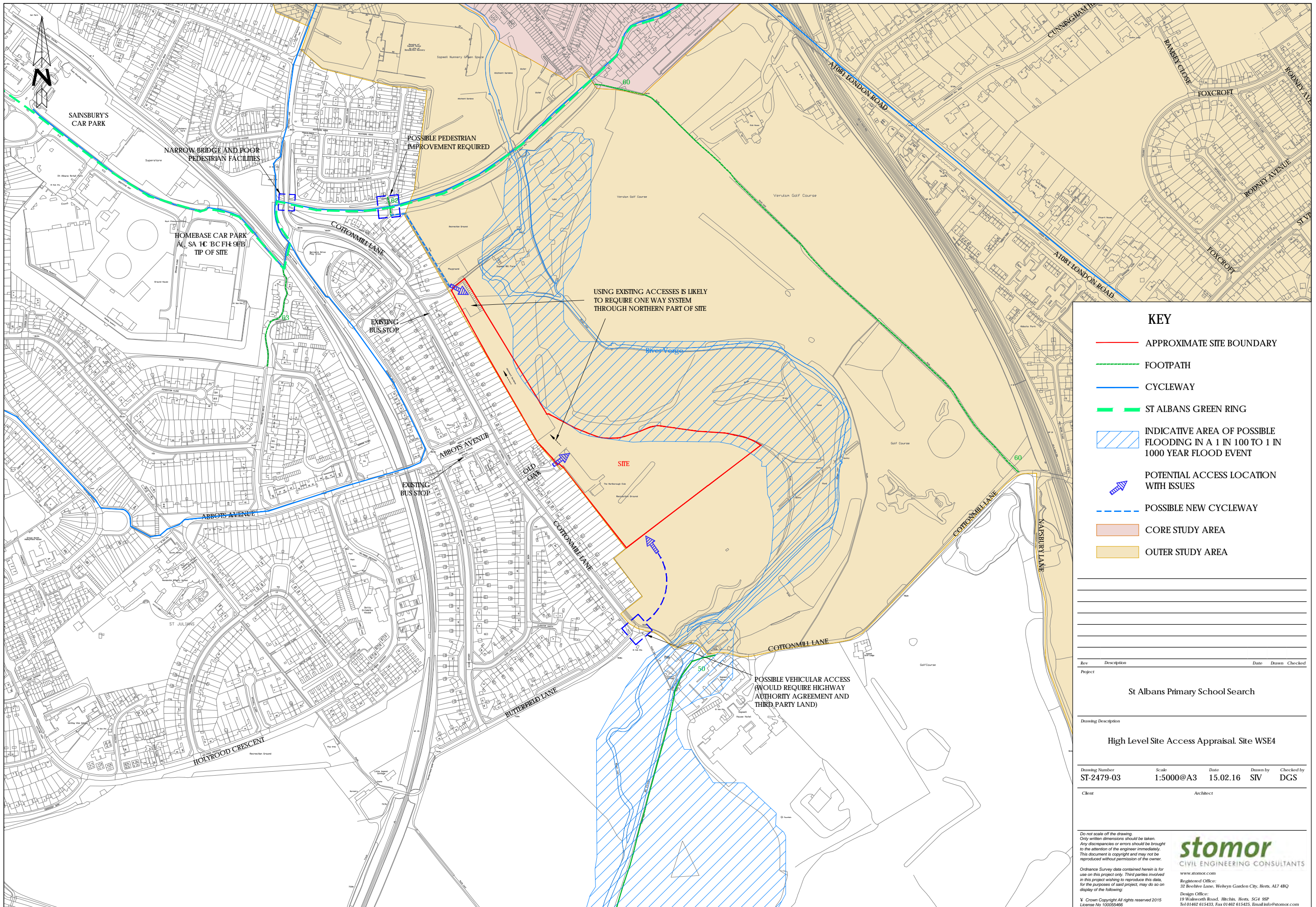
Both potential options would require a new pedestrian crossing on Cottonmill Lane and improvements to the footpath link from Saldeir Road to the north of the site. Given the extensive level of residential parking around the site already, on site provision for parents as well as staff vehicles will be required.

Local widening or provision of laybys could help to ease the flow of traffic along Cottonmill Lane.

There may be an opportunity for 'park and stride' from the St Albans Retail Park to the north west, which would provide a suitable facility for pupils and parents travelling from the west of the site.

The local public transport network is generally fairly poor, but potentially offers an option for travel by staff as well as accompanied pupils.

On balance, this site presents a number of potential challenges to providing suitable access for a 2FE school. These issues could be overcome through the construction of a vehicular access to the south of the site, a pedestrian crossing over Cottonmill Lane and a pedestrian access to the north west of the site. However, this would involve the acquisition of third party land which will need further investigation.



KEY

- APPROXIMATE SITE BOUNDARY
- FOOTPATH
- CYCLEWAY
- ST ALBANS GREEN RING
- INDICATIVE AREA OF POSSIBLE FLOODING IN A 1 IN 100 TO 1 IN 1000 YEAR FLOOD EVENT
- ↗ POTENTIAL ACCESS LOCATION WITH ISSUES
- - - POSSIBLE NEW CYCLEWAY
- CORE STUDY AREA
- OUTER STUDY AREA

Rev	Description	Date	Drawn	Checked

Project: **St Albans Primary School Search**

Drawing Description: **High Level Site Access Appraisal. Site WSE4**

Drawing Number	Scale	Date	Drawn by	Checked by
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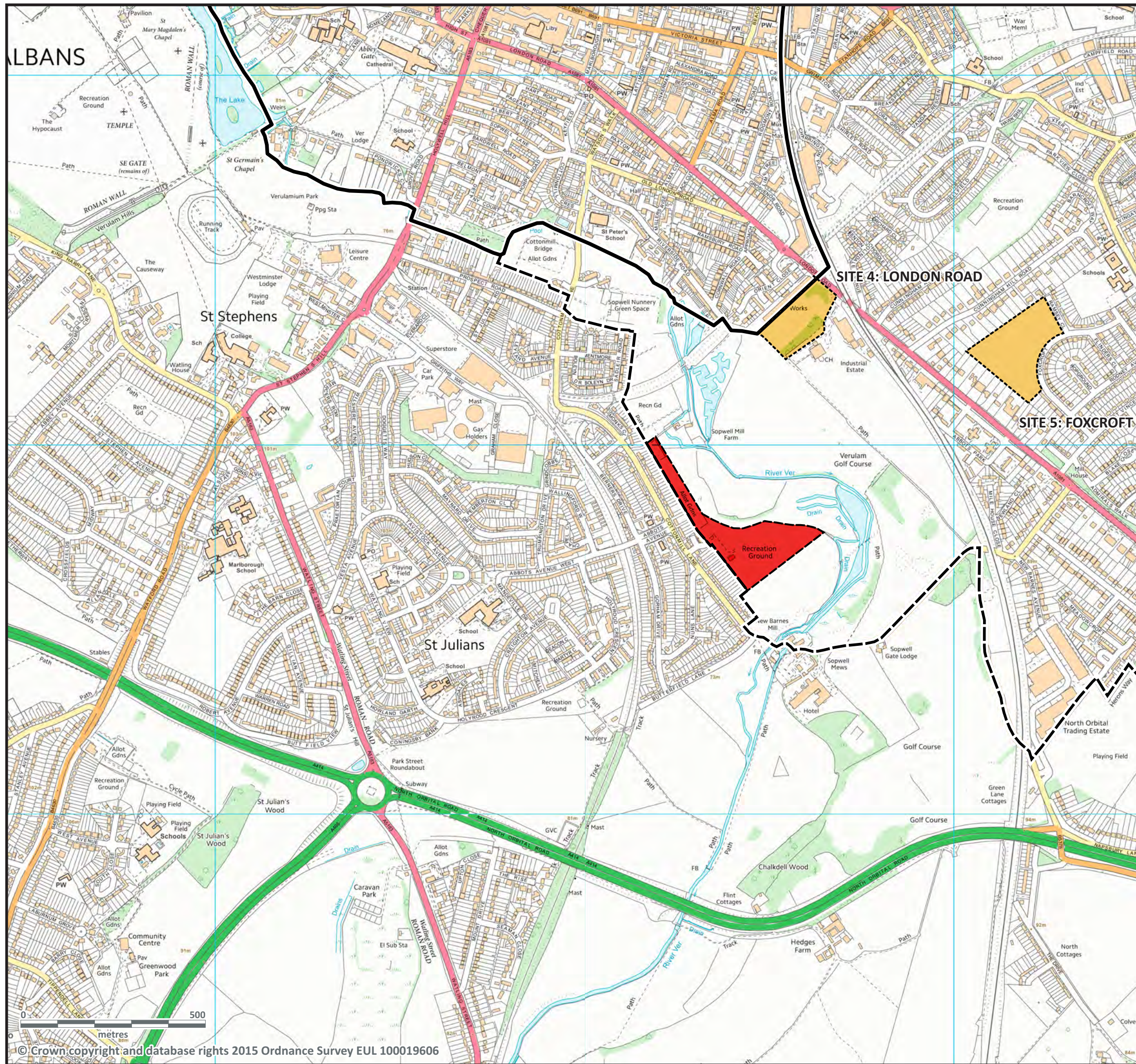
Client: **Architect**

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DRAWINGS



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

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PROJECT TITLE
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 Site search**

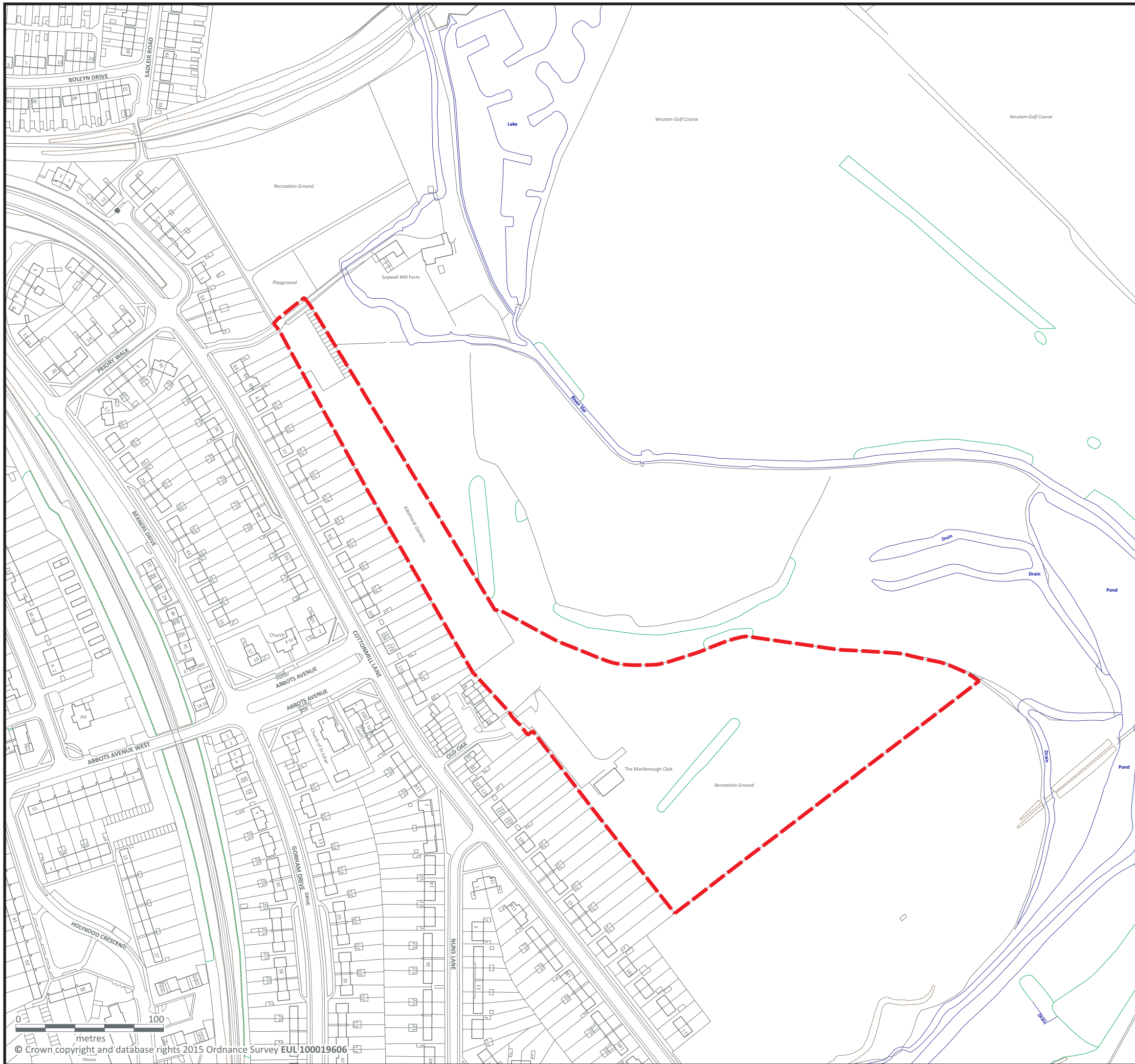
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SITE BOUNDARY
4.15ha 10.25ac

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DRAWING TITLE
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Recreation Ground
Site identification**

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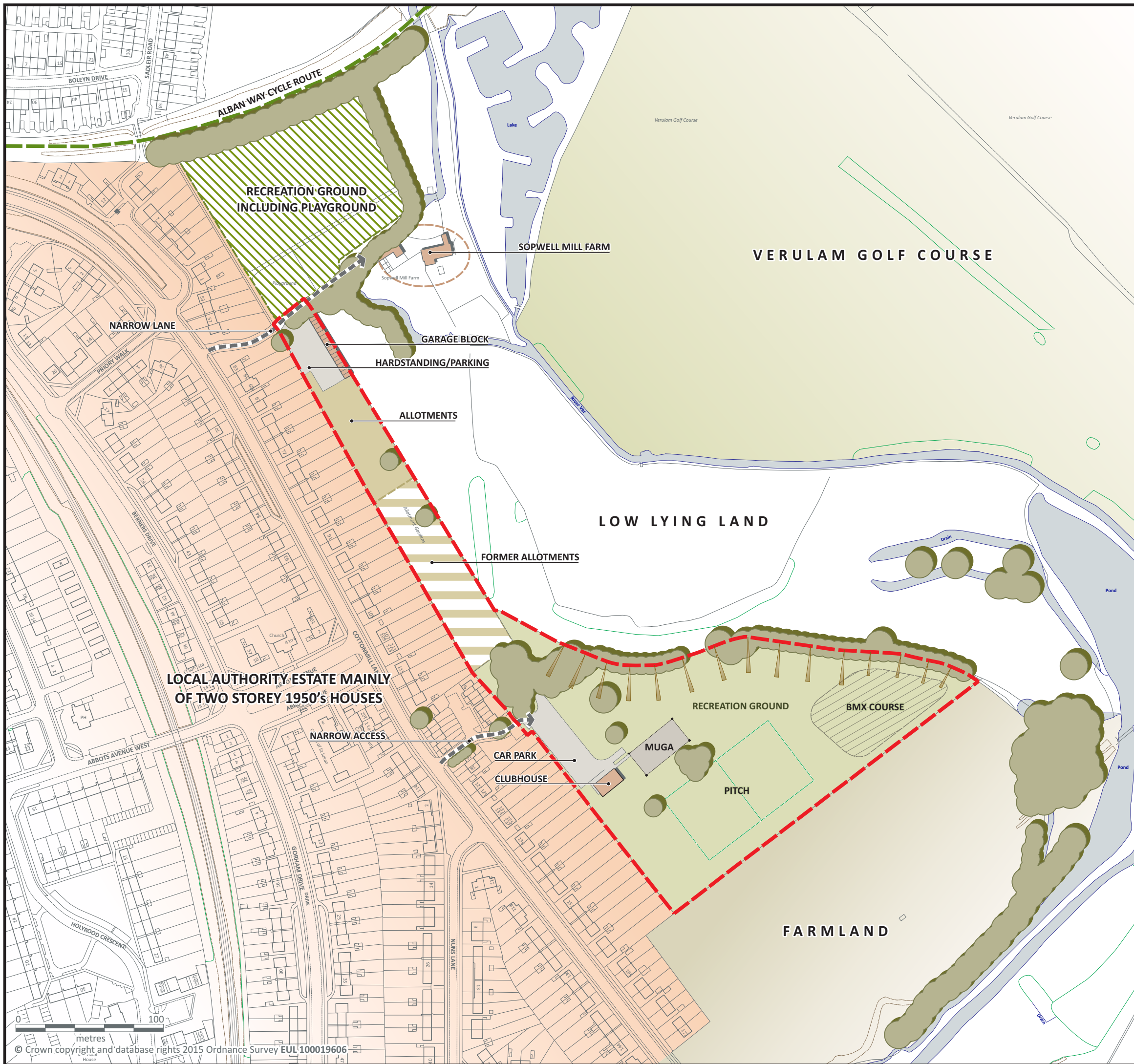
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Site search

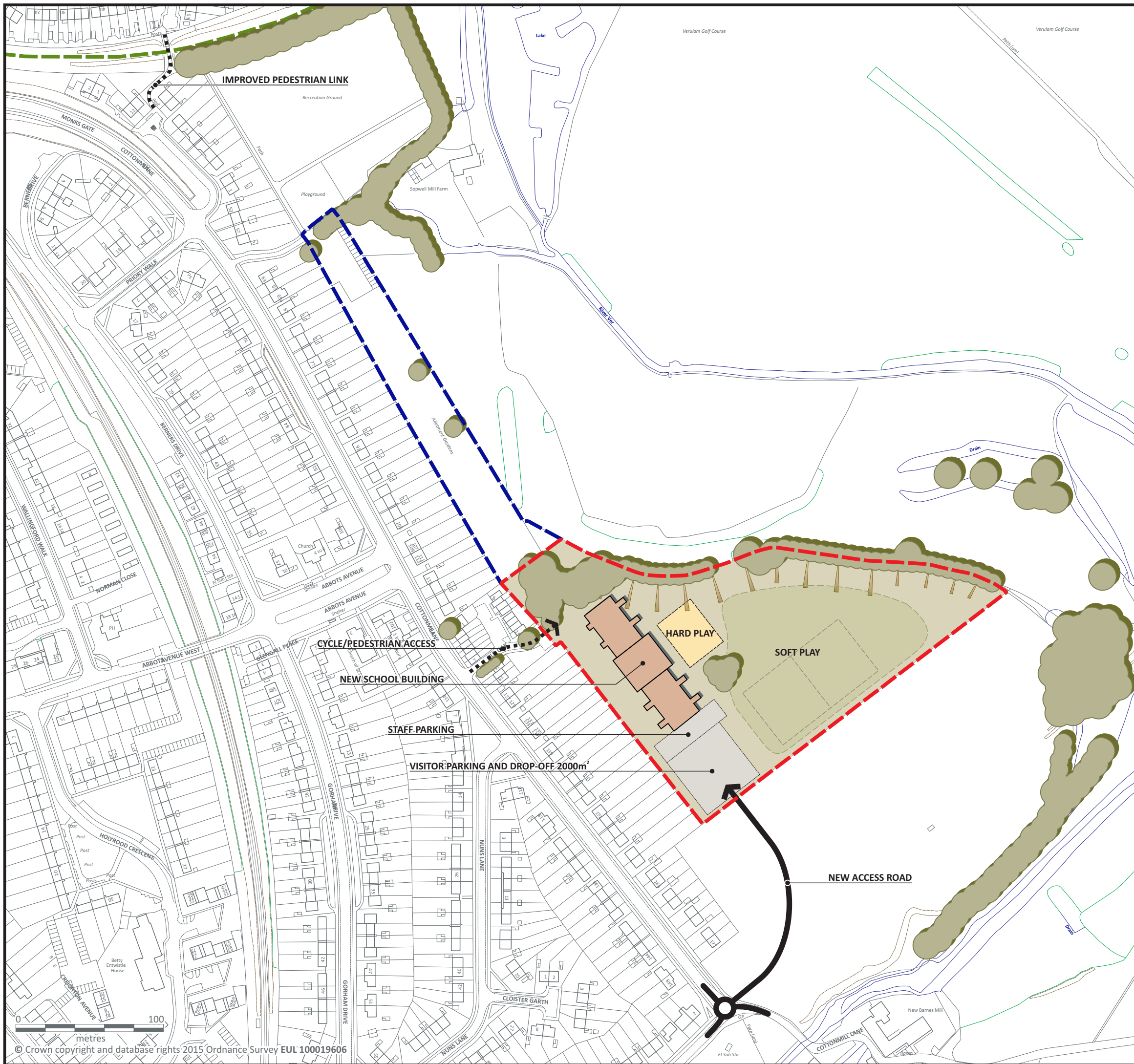
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Recreation Ground
Site appraisal

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- SITE BOUNDARY
3.27ha 8.08ac
- REMAINDER OF SITE

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PROJECT TITLE
St Albans Primary School
 Site search

DRAWING TITLE
Site 7: WSE4 - Old Oak/Malborough
 Recreation Ground
 Development principles

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