

Building Footprint and Heights

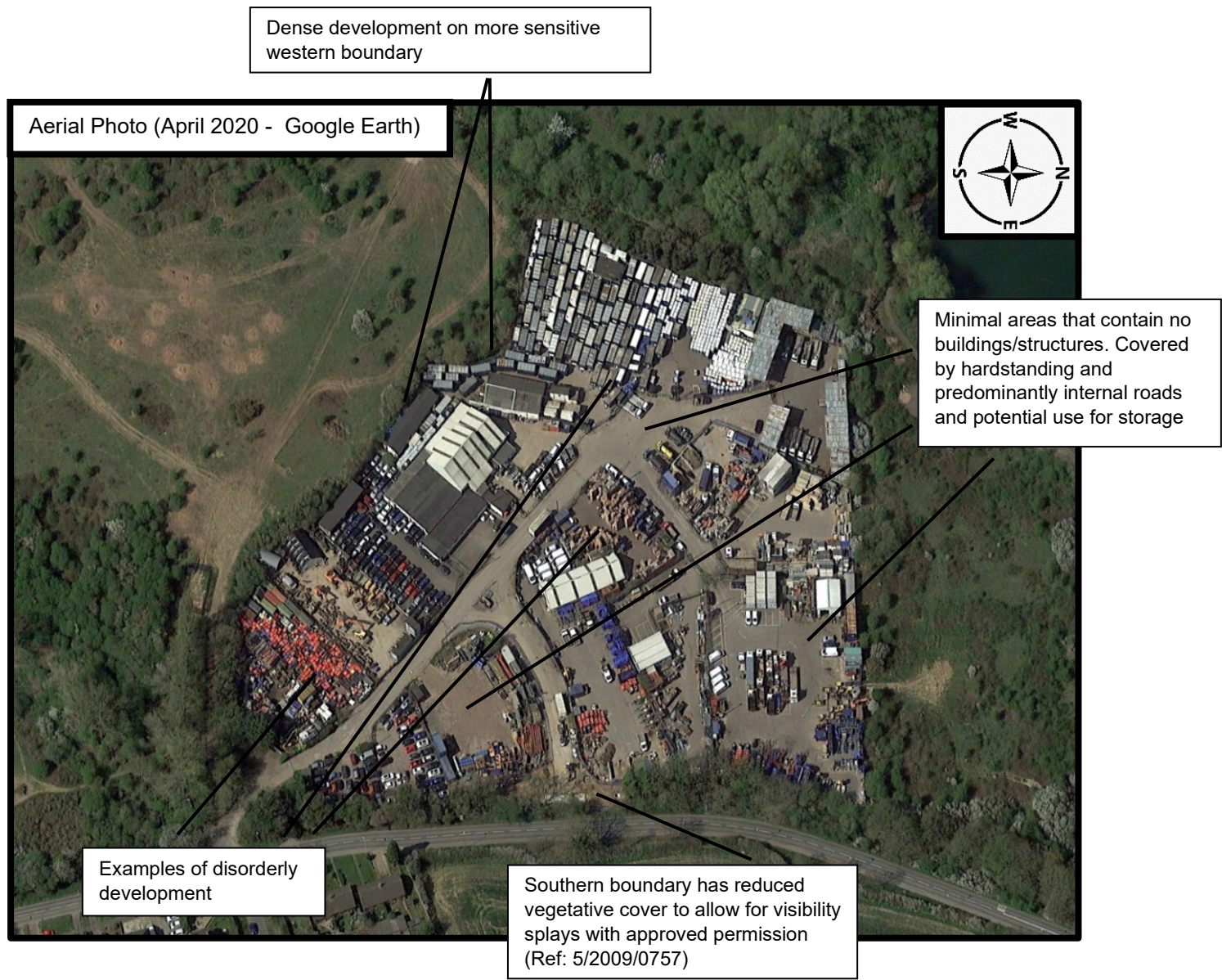
The existing site contains permanent buildings that extend to 2,673.45m² and are mainly one storey in height. The footprint of the proposed permanent buildings will not be determined until Reserved Matters stage and therefore cannot be considered absolute.

The Indicative Masterplan provides an example of what could be delivered, and demonstrates a footprint of 11,448m². These buildings would be two-storeys in height. Therefore, from this perspective, the proposals would have a negative impact on openness.

Site Coverage

Several permanent buildings are found along the western edge of the site, as well as within northern and central parts of the site. The rest of site is covered by extensive hardstanding and structures associated with the industrial units – leaving minimal open space and no green space. The extent of storage on site has intensified over the years (see also Appendix A11) most notably in the southern, central and western parts of the site. Nearly the entirety of the floorspace is utilised for some form of storage.

The Proposed Development introduces a more orderly layout to the development, placing development at its most dense where it is least open (visually) along the northern and eastern boundaries. The coverage of areas without development (i.e. land that does not consist of buildings, structures, or hardstanding) is significantly increased through the provision of residential gardens and a new Village Green that also works to separate instances of development.



Visual Impact

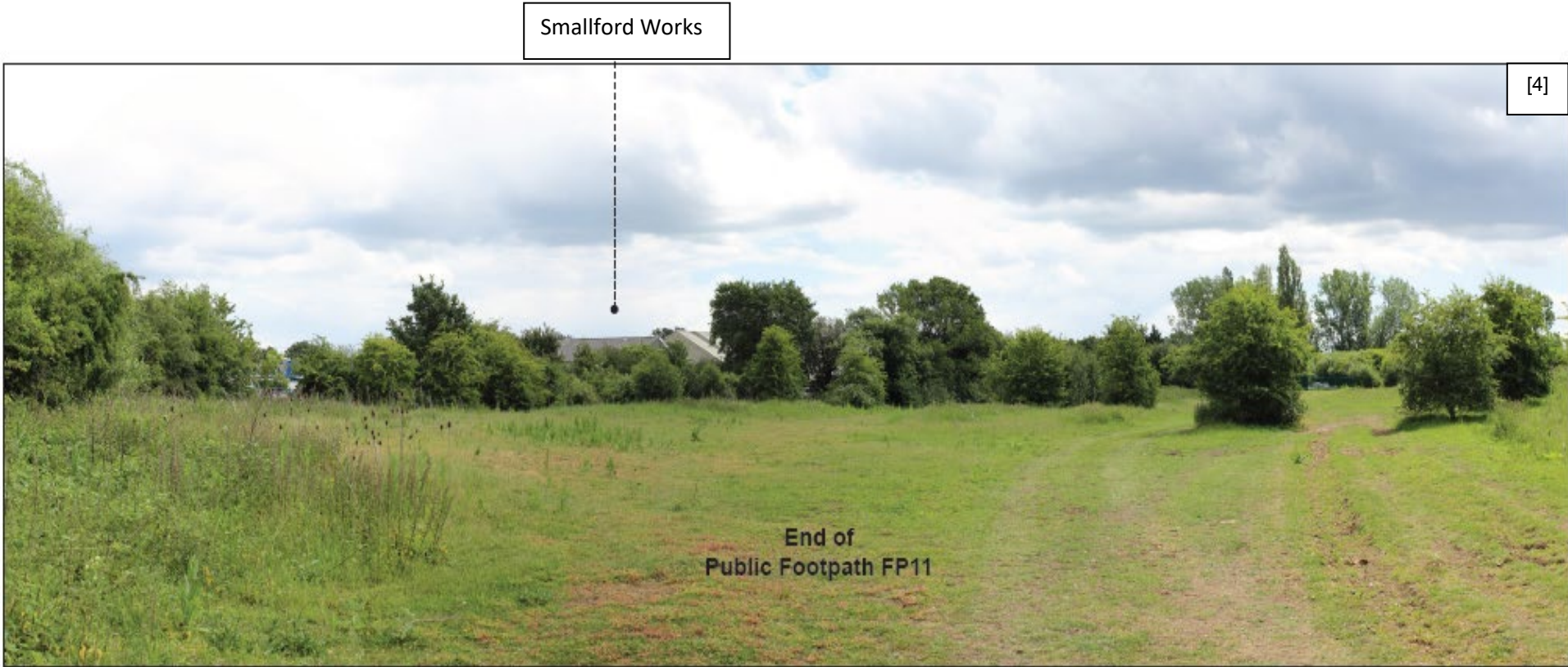
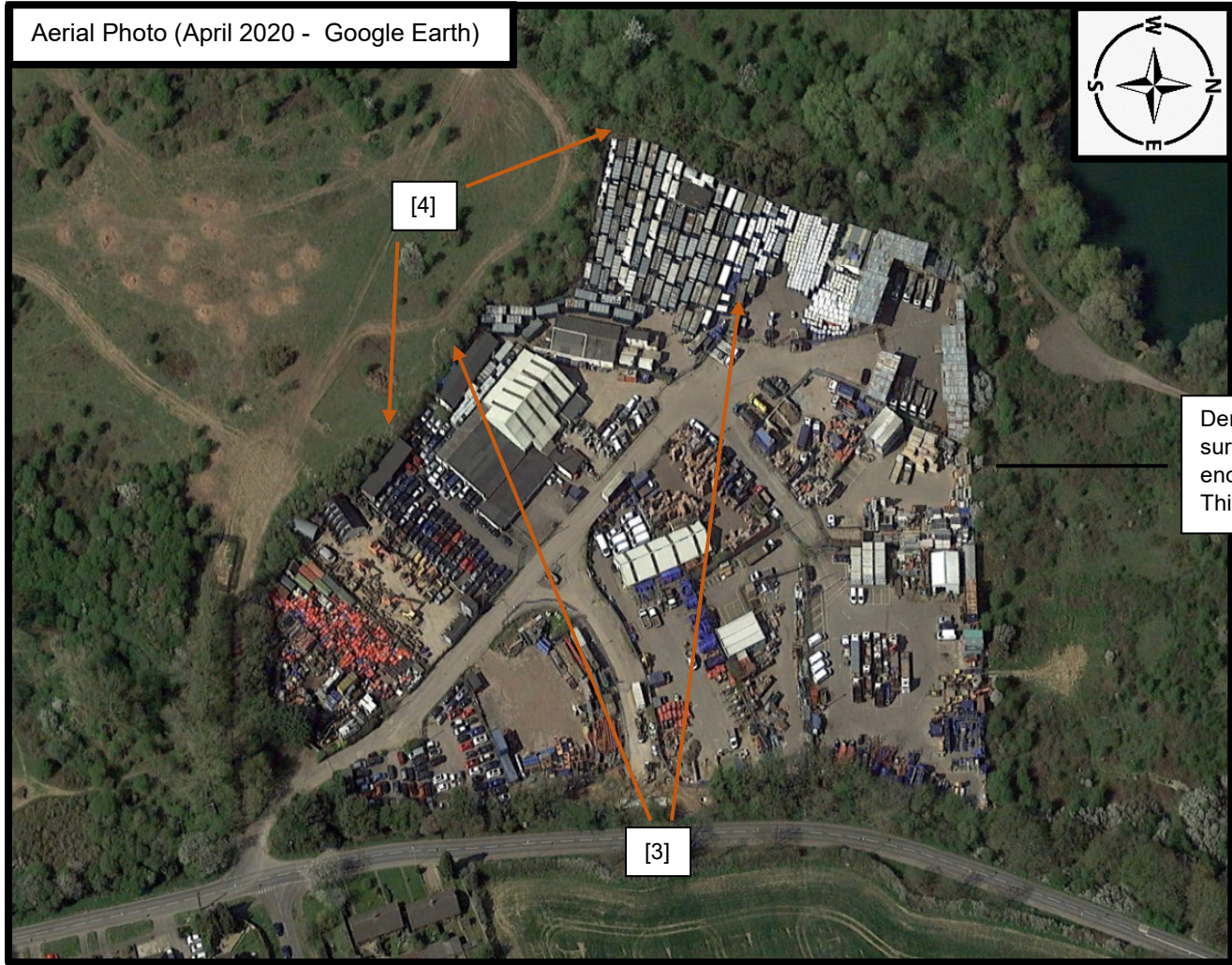
The existing site is largely self-contained, benefitting from dense landscaping around its boundary and a flat topography that limits visual impact on long views or at a local level. Standing within the site – between the expanse of stored material, intense industrial activity, and dense landscape boundaries – there is minimal connection to the open countryside (see [1] and [2] below). These structures in of themselves have a detrimental impact to visual openness. From outside of the site, views go little further than the existing trees around the boundaries, with the exception of the altered landscape boundary at the location of the new access. This provides views of existing structures upon the eastern boundary, as well as the permanent buildings in the centre and western boundaries of the site – but allows now visible association to the countryside beyond. It is important to note that this access has now been delivered and therefore forms part of the existing baseline. The viewpoint from this access ([3]) shows the existing view of the block of industrial buildings through the centre towards the western boundary.

The Proposed Development retains the self-contained nature of the site, through retention and strengthening of landscaping around its boundary, thus providing equal or less visual impact on long views at a local level. Views from the new access would transform into a tree lined access, leading into a central village green, with the housing along this viewpoint set further back in the site. This has the potential to be an improved position, but it most certainly would not create substantial harm to the openness of the site. The height of the existing vegetation around the boundary would minimise the impact that increased building heights and scale would ultimately have. The rooftops of some new houses would be visible from outside of the site and a public footpath; however, the existing buildings are also visible from this footpath. Accordingly, the magnitude of change is small, even in winter months [4].

The proposals increase the visual and perceptual openness of the site within the development with features that better relate it to the neighbouring countryside. The landscaped gateway for pedestrians and cyclists that comprise the former access works to blend this entrance to the site with surrounding dense landscaping upon the boundaries. The central village green and residential gardens within the development will undoubtedly provide the benefit of increasing the visual perception of the site as an edge of settlement, countryside location. The provision of mews avenues within the development draws the attention to the neighbouring open space to the west of the site, thus creating a greater perceptual and visual connection to it – as opposed to the existing site where existing development, both permanent buildings and others, prevents this.

The Proposed Development in the more central part of the site is placed perpendicular to Smallford Lane to avoid substantial impact on the visual openness of the countryside beyond the site to the west. Even with an increase in building height, this would provide a limited obtrusive vision into the site than the existing buildings that sit almost parallel and prevent views beyond it.





Viewpoint 05

Remediability

Throughout the Officer's Report, the Case Officer is keen to stress the remediability of the existing site. The existing site does contain some structures that are by nature "remediable", but this forms only one side of remediability. At Paragraph 8.3.23, the Officer makes an incorrect assumption about the site:

"Whilst much of the site is covered by structures these are transient and not permanent, nor has the lawfulness of the site been established and planning permission does not exist for the existing use".

As we have made clear, the site is not unlawful and has not been subject to enforcement action. This is further confirmed by SACDC's Enforcement Teams "No Comment" on the application. Whilst in the middle of undertaking a key, determinative assessment of the proposal, this comment should cast serious doubt on the Officer's overall assessment, particularly given the view has been relied upon to make the assessment throughout.

The correct baseline needs to reflect all the existing permanent structures on the site, as well as the extent of storage activities that have occurred. As has been detailed, the extent of storage activity has never fallen to a low level, though often times the vast majority of individual units has been occupied by storage material. In lieu of the redevelopment of the site, the Appellant will continue to lease out all units and will seek ways to intensify the industrial operations of the site in order to maximise its commerciality.

The activity associated with a residential use on this site compared to the existing industrial use has been proven to be improved through the reduction of HGV vehicular travel movements, which in itself will reduce the visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Although some structures are by nature, "remediable", they also have the potential to be intensified.

Activity

At Paragraph 8.3.24 of the Officer's Report, the Case Officer concludes:

"The application form indicates that 100 houses would be provided. The redevelopment of the site to provide 100 houses would be likely to result in a greater impact upon the openness of the Green Belt than the existing situation and would result in substantial harm to the openness of the green belt by reason of the likely scale, built form, and activity associated with 100 houses."

We outline our opinion of scale and built form above. Despite making the comment with regards to activity, the Case Officer appears to have not considered the "baseline" activity. As set out, in PPG on openness – quoted by the Officer – a comparable factor is vehicular movements.

The submitted Transport Assessment confirms that the number of vehicular trips, when compared to the existing site in both AM and PM peak hours, will reduce, as well as the total number of trips throughout the day. Further, there would also be a "significant decrease" in the number of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) travelling along rural-edge roadways. Elsewhere in the Officer's Report (Paragraph 8.8.7) this is considered acceptable, though should be recognised as a considerable benefit. Although considered acceptable in regard to highways, the Officer considered that the activity with 100 houses would contribute to "substantial impact" on openness. Although noted that presence cannot necessarily be comparable, the reduction of HGVs would also have the benefit of reducing a further visual impact.

In addition to the visual impacts of the industrial uses (including traffic generated), the noise, dust and pollutant impacts of such a use in such a location should be considered as part of the baseline. The Council has previously stated that this is a "poorly located industrial uses on the site". The activities associated with industrial uses, and the resultant noise created when compared to residential development, is a further consideration that officer appears not to have fully explored.