



Call for Sites Statement

On behalf of Luton Rugby Club
Land off Newlands Road, Luton

February 2025

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The following statement has been prepared on behalf of Luton Rugby Club (the "Club"). It supports the submission of their existing land and premises at east of Newlands Road, Luton (the "Subject Site") to the Council's 'Greenfield Call for Sites'. A Location Plan is contained at **Appendix One** together with an aerial plan.
- 1.2 Luton Rugby Club is seeking to relocate. The Club has previously discussed with the Local Planning Authority, the potential of their existing grounds to accommodate housing development to help meet the identified needs within Luton. The relocation is a critical element of the Club's financial survival. The availability of funding and revenue to support the Club has significantly diminished in recent years, while the operational costs have continued to increase. The development of the existing facility for the purposes of housing will both fund the development of a new, improved and more efficient sports facility, while leaving a residual sum that can be invested to secure a revenue stream for ongoing maintenance etc, thereby securing its long-term future.
- 1.3 The Club has identified an alternative location that will accommodate a new facility for them. This is located at Sundon Road, Lower Sundon (the "Relocation Site"), and an application has been submitted for the development of a new sports facility at that location. This will shortly be presented to Central Bedfordshire Council's Development Management Committee with a recommendation for approval from Officers. Accordingly, the Club will have secured a replacement facility, and this will achieve a marked improvement upon the quality of their existing premises. While the replacement facilities fall just outside the administrative area of Luton, they will be immediately adjacent to the planned North of Luton Expansion. Accordingly, the facility will be accessible and well-connected to Luton. The facility will continue to serve existing residents and those in the planned urban expansion.
- 1.4 The following report provides further details on the Subject Site. It demonstrates that the land is available for development; that there are no insurmountable constraints; and that it is deliverable within the next five years. Following the relocation of the Club, the Subject Site will become vacant. Consequently, it is proposed that the land be allocated for residential development within the new Local Plan for Luton.

2 Site Location and Description

The Subject Site

- 2.1 The Club's existing grounds at Newlands Road are approximately 8.28 hectares in size. A site location plan is provided at **Appendix One**. The site is located approximately two miles to the southwest of Luton town centre. It is linear in form, extending between Newlands Road (which forms the site's eastern boundary) and M1 Motorway to the west.
- 2.2 The Club currently contains two main pitches, together with three training pitches. Accordingly, the site is predominantly undeveloped. However, it includes an element of built form and hardstanding. It is in part therefore, 'previously developed land'. The site accommodates a clubhouse that includes changing facilities, bar and restaurant and offices. In addition, there is a multipurpose hall that has been used to host private functions. In total, the existing buildings have a floorspace in the region of 1,323sqm. These facilities were built in the 1980's and are in now poor condition, requiring extensive refurbishment. It is intended that the development of the exiting grounds at Newlands would fund the relocation of Luton Rugby Club, and the project is critical to their continued financial survival.
- 2.3 A footpath bisects the site into two parcels. The clubhouse and the main pitches are located on the southern half. There is a vehicular access off Newlands Road, which serves the clubhouse with parking provision distributed around the building. The training pitches are on the northern half, which is largely open.
- 2.4 There are some changes in land levels within the site. Of note there is a significant landscaped bund along the western boundary providing a buffer from the M1 Motorway.

The Surrounding Area

- 2.5 Stockwood Park lies to the east of the Club's grounds. This is largely open and includes a golf course and athletics track.
- 2.6 The land to the south is currently open. This is referred to as 'land to the south of Stockwood Park'; and was allocated within the adopted development plan to accommodate the relocation of Luton Football Club. However, an alternative form of development was ultimately approved in an outline consent.¹ This showed that the land south of Stockwood Park would instead be developed to fund the relocation of Luton Football Club to Power Court. The approved development was extensive and included office floorspace, retail development, food and drink uses, leisure floorspace and a hotel, together with the necessary parking, access and landscaping.
- 2.7 Subsequently, a hybrid planning permission was granted on land south of Stockwood Park, which allows for:²
- " ... Hybrid planning application comprising of part full, covering the portion north of Newlands Road, and part outline (with all matters reserved), covering the south portion of Newlands Road, for employment development with parking, landscaping, earthworks, access, and utilities ... "*
- 2.8 The developer has subsequently applied to discharge various conditions to commence works.

¹ Application Reference 16/01401/OUTEIA

² Application Reference 22/00929/HYBEIA

- 2.9 Similarly, the land to the north of the Subject Site has been developed. The site has a complex planning history, but ultimately now benefits from planning permission for 340 dwellings.³ This permission has since been implemented.
- 2.10 Taking account of the above, it is evident that the surrounding land will change significantly in the coming years, and the grant of permission in relation to the land to the north demonstrates that Newlands Road represents an acceptable location for residential development.

Site Access and Transport Links

- 2.11 The Subject Site gains vehicular access directly off Newlands Road. Newlands Road forms part of the adopted highway maintained by Luton Council. While detailed surveys would be needed in due course, the access is capable of delivering the required visibility splays and would be able to serve a future development. There is the potential to secure an additional access off Newlands Road.
- 2.12 Although there are no bus stops on Newlands Road, we are aware that buses operate and provide informal stops that serve this location. Services include Route 46, which provides connections between Luton Park Square and Hemel Hempstead on an hourly basis. In addition, Route 231 runs between Luton and Dunstable, via Slip End and Caddington at hourly intervals.
- 2.13 There is an existing public footpath which crosses the Subject Site. This offers connections to Stockwood Park.
- 2.14 Rail connections are available at Luton town centre and Luton Parkway. These provide frequent services on the line running between London St Pancras and Bedford.

Sustainability

- 2.15 The land is well located for proximity to community facilities. The site is just 1.3 miles from Farley Neighbourhood Centre. This provides a range of facilities meeting the daily needs of residents, with food shops and a medical centre. Further facilities are available within Luton Town Centre, approximately 1.6 miles from the Subject Site.
- 2.16 There are educational facilities within Farley Hill, including:
- The Stockwood park Academy;
 - St Margrets of Scotland;
 - Parley Junior School; and
 - Hillborough Junior School.
- 2.17 Luton provides additional access to higher education at the University of Bedfordshire.
- 2.18 There are a range of leisure facilities in the vicinity. The site is immediately adjacent to Stockwood Park, which also includes Stockwood Athletics Centre and Stockwood Golf Course. There is similarly an established rugby club at Stockwood Park.

³ Application Reference 17/00590/FUL

Physical Characteristics and Site Constraints

- 2.19 In terms of existing site constraints, we would note the following:
- Over half the land is classified as Grade 3 agricultural grazing land;
 - Approximately 1 acre represents 'previously developed land';
 - The site is not subject to any restrictive landscape designations, being outside the AONB and Green Belt;
 - The site is not within any Conservation Area and there are no heritage assets on or near the site;
 - The entirety of the site falls into Flood Zone One where there is low risk of flooding;
 - There is a need for mitigation to screen noise from the M1 Motorway;
 - Existing telecommunication masts and power lines crossing the site can be diverted.
- 2.20 A site analysis plan is provided at **Appendix Two**, together with a plan identifying the potential developable area.
- 2.21 A copy of the Environment Agency's flood map is contained at **Appendix Three**. Photographs of the Subject Site are provided at **Appendix Four**.

3 Planning History

The Subject Site

- 3.1 A number of applications have been submitted in relation to the Club's grounds and the site's planning history shows that permission was granted for the existing facilities in the late 1980's. Since then, there have been only a few applications relating to operational matters and modest improvements to the facilities, such as the installation of floodlighting etc.

Previous Representations to the Luton Local Plan

- 3.1 It is appropriate to note that representations were made in relation to the Subject Site when the Council was preparing the (now adopted) Luton Local Plan. Accordingly, the principle of residential development was considered in brief during the corresponding examination of the draft policies and proposed allocations. The findings are discussed in the 'Report on the Examination of the Luton Local Plan' 2017.

- 3.2 At that time, the Inspector commented on the potential of the Subject Site when reviewing housing sites suggested by landowners and developers. With reference to Newlands Road, the Inspector commented that (our emphasis):⁴

*" ... Land alongside the M1 motorway is currently used by Luton Rugby Club and comprises sports pitches and ancillary buildings and parking. Given this use, and having regard to Paragraph 74 of the Framework, the site is not a clear cut opportunity for a residential allocation. Instead, **any housing proposal could reasonably be considered through the development management process**, having regard to relevant policies in the Plan and any material considerations. **This could for example, include consideration of the merits of developing the site to assist the relocation of the rugby club and any overall need for playing fields and open space, as appropriate.** However, these are not matters which I need to conclude on here ... "*

- 3.3 Accordingly, the Inspector concluded that at that time, there was no need to allocate the land for residential development, but that it could instead be delivered through the determination of a planning application. The Inspector made specific reference to the provisions within the National Planning Policy Framework concerning the development of existing sports and recreational buildings. This suggests that such land should not be built upon unless it is surplus to requirements, or:⁵

" ... The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location ... "

- 3.4 Since that time, the Club's position has moved on in relation to the planned relocation and having identified an alternative location, there is now greater certainty. This is discussed below. It is now apparent that the development would not result in the loss of any sports or community facility. Indeed, it would specifically facilitate the Club's relation and directly enhance the level of sports provision, ensuring the survival of Luton Rugby Football Club. Accordingly, the proposal satisfies the provisions of the Framework concerning the development of existing sports fields.

⁴ 'Report on the Examination of the Luton Local Plan' 1 August 2017 §121

⁵ 'National Planning Policy Framework 2012 §74

Pre-Application Discussions

- 3.5 The Subject Site has been the subject of pre-application discussions with the Local Planning Authority over a number of years. Its potential to accommodate residential development was first considered in 2017.⁶ At that time, it was indicated that the site might accommodate a dense form of development, achieving up to 850 apartments within a series of buildings up to six storeys in height.
- 3.6 In brief, the Local Planning Authority's response noted that it would be necessary to demonstrate that the existing facility was 'surplus to requirements' to address the Council's policies concerning the protection of existing open space. On the basis that this could be demonstrated, the response noted that the Council generally supported the grant of permission for residential development on sites not allocated for housing. Discussions with the Local Planning Authority also noted the mix of housing and suggested that a greater range of housing types should instead be provided, reflecting the housing needs assessment at that time.
- 3.7 Following this initial advice, the Club went on to secure land to accommodate a replacement facility at Lower Sundon. In addition, it has engaged in discussions with prospective housing developers in respect of Newlands Road, and a further request for pre-application advice was submitted in 2023.⁷ This proposed a significantly reduced form of development, indicating the erection of 250 dwellings to reflect the Local Planning Authority's earlier response.
- 3.8 In their response to this request, the Local Planning Authority recognised that the relocation of Luton Rugby Club would deliver a replacement facility. However, it was suggested that as this was outside the administrative area, the proposal would continue to result in the loss of a community facility for the purposes of the policies within Luton's Local Plan. Evidence would therefore be required to demonstrate that the site was surplus to requirements. This is discussed below.
- 3.9 The response further suggested that it may be appropriate for the development to include a small convenience store. In addition, there was scope to enhance pedestrian access through the site using the existing footpath, which might link to Stockwood Park.

The Relocation to Lower Sundon

- 3.10 The Club has identified a site to which they intend to relocate. This is located just south of Lower Sundon, on Sundon Road. The Relocation Site is approximately 8 hectares in size and is currently used for arable purposes. It sits immediately north of the planning link road between the M1 and the A6, and the 'North of Luton' urban extension.
- 3.11 Although the Relocation Site will be adjacent to the North of Luton extension, it falls within the administrative area of Central Bedfordshire Council. A planning application was submitted to that authority in November 2022, seeking permission for:⁸
- "... Change of use of land and development of new sports facility, comprising the formation of three full-size pictures, (including all-weather pictures with floodlighting), two junior pictures, clubhouse (including changing rooms, fitness suite, and physio, rooms, spectator, seating, and viewing areas, dining room with kitchen and bar), creation of new access off Sundon Road, parking provision, landscaping and associated works ... "*
- 3.12 The application is to be presented to Central Bedfordshire's Development Management Committee on 14 February 2024. Officers have recommended that planning permission be granted, concluding that:

⁶ Application Reference PREAPP/17/00188

⁷ Application Reference PREAPP/23/00093

⁸ Central Bedfordshire Application Reference CB/22/04307/FULL

"... following for consideration of the case, and for the reasons set out, it is considered that the harm to the greenbelt, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by material considerations, which, when taken together with the overall balance of considerations, represent very special circumstances, justifying the grant of planning permission ... "

- 3.13 When developed, this will deliver a replacement that is 'equivalent or better' in terms of its size, the level of pitch provision, and that range of services that Luton Rugby Club will benefit from. Furthermore, the facility will be open for the wider benefit of other sport interests.

4 Planning Policy Guidance

'National Planning Policy Framework' 2024

- 4.1 National planning policy guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. This was most recently updated at the end of 2024. Amongst other things, the Framework identifies the Government's objective to 'significantly boost the supply of homes'. It is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay⁹
- 4.2 The Government requires planning authorities to establish the housing requirement for their whole area, which shows the extent to which their identified housing need (and any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas) can be met over the plan period. The requirement may be higher than the identified housing need if, for example, it includes provision for neighbouring areas or reflects growth ambitions linked to economic development or infrastructure investment.¹⁰
- 4.3 Furthermore, authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area, identifying a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability.¹¹ Planning policies must identify a supply of specific, deliverable sites for five years following the intended date of adoption.
- 4.4 It is recognised that 'small to medium' sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing need.¹² Similarly, the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns.¹³
- 4.5 Having regard to the existing use of the Subject Site, it is appropriate to note the Government's guidance on 'open space and recreation'. In this regard, the Framework advises that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields and formal play spaces, should not be built on unless:
- An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
 - The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
 - The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use'.
- 4.6 Accordingly, the Government's advice safeguards against unmitigated loss of such land, but does not prohibit development on existing open space or recreational land. These provisions are broadly reflected in the adopted development plan set out below.

⁹ National Planning Policy Framework §61

¹⁰ National Planning Policy Framework §69

¹¹ National Planning Policy Framework §72

¹² National Planning Policy Framework §73

¹³ National Planning Policy Framework §77

'Luton Local Plan 2011 to 2031' 2017

- 4.1 The statutory development plan currently comprises the adopted 'Luton Local Plan 2011 to 2031' 2017. The Application Site is not subject to any site-specific designations within the adopted development plan and is not covered by any restrictive landscape designations.
- 4.2 Although Stockwood Park to the west is subject to various landscape designations, these do not affect the Application Site. Land to the north is designated for residential development within the plan and this has now been developed.¹⁴ Land to the south of Stockwood Park is also allocated for development.¹⁵
- 4.3 Relevant policies within the adopted development plan include the following:
- LLP1 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development'
 - LLP2 'Spatial Development Strategy'
 - LLP15 'Housing Provision'
 - LLP16 'Affordable Housing'
 - LLP24 'Education and Other Community Facilities'
 - LLP25 'High Quality Design'
 - LLP27 'Open Space and Natural Greenspace'
 - LLP28 'Biodiversity and Nature Conservation'
 - LLP34 'Public Safety Zone'
 - LLP30 'Historic Environment'
 - LLP31 'Sustainable Transport Strategy'
 - LLP38 'Pollution and Contamination'
 - LLP39 'Infrastructure and Developer Contributions'
- 4.4 The key policy concerning the development of the site is Policy LLP24 'Education and Other Community Facilities'. Amongst other things, this seeks to protect existing community facilities. The policy advises that development which would lead to loss of community facilities will be permitted where:
- Existing facilities elsewhere in a suitable location can meet the displaced needs; **or**
 - It is unsuitable for alternative community uses for which there is a demonstrable need; **or**
 - equivalent or better replacement facilities in terms of quantity and quality are provided in a suitable location.
- 4.5 These requirements reflect the Government's advice in the Framework. It will be noted that to comply with national and local policy, it is only necessary to satisfy one of the three criteria. This is discussed below.
- 4.6 The Council has also indicated that the site will be regarded as 'open space', and subject to Policy LLP27 'Open Space and Natural Greenspace'. Again, this policy guards against the loss of such land, but accepts that is may be permitted where replacement open space is made of an equivalent type, quality and quantity or better, and is accessible and within the vicinity; or the proposal is for alternative or ancillary sports and recreational provision, the need for which clearly outweighs the loss.

¹⁴Luton Local Plan 'Policy LLP15'

¹⁵ Luton Local Plan 'Policy LLP34'

5 Planning Assessment

Availability and Deliverability

- 5.1 At the outset, it should be recognised that the Subject Site is available and able to support housing development within the next five years.
- 5.2 As discussed above, the Club has identified an alternative location and sought planning permission for a replacement facility near Lower Sundon. Central Bedfordshire Council has recommended that planning permission be granted for this, and it will shortly be presented to the Council's Development Management Committee.
- 5.3 Once permission has been granted for the new facility, the Club will be able to pursue the development of the Newlands Road site with certainty. However, it has already engaged in discussions with developers over the last few years to identify a preferred partner and to consider the Subject Site's potential. A phased development would be proposed, first releasing the northern part of the Subject Site. This would allow an element of development to proceed and release funds to support the construction of the replacement facility. Meanwhile, the Club could continue to operate on a temporary basis on the southern half of the Subject Site. Once the new facility had been completed, the Club would be able to relocate, and the southern half of the Subject Site could be completed for residential development.
- 5.4 There are no constraints to ownership or other restrictions that would prevent development. Given the above, the site could deliver houses within five years or less.

The Principle of Development on Newlands Road

- 5.5 It is considered that the principle of development on the Subject Site for residential purposes is acceptable. As set out above, this has been considered during previous local plan reviews and through informal discussions with the Local Planning Authority over the last few years. We provide an assessment of the key points below.
- 5.6 **The Loss of Existing Facilities:** The key issues concern the loss of the existing community facility and open space, having regard to the provisions of Policy LLP24 'Education and Other Community Facilities' and LLP27 'Open Space and Natural Greenspace' in the adopted development plan. These broadly mirror national policy. It is important to recognise that although these guard against the unnecessary loss of sports facilities (amongst other community assets), they do not preclude development. The policies advise that development may be permitted where:
- Existing facilities elsewhere in a suitable location can meet the displaced needs; or
 - It is unsuitable for alternative community uses for which there is a demonstrable need; or
 - equivalent or better replacement facilities in terms of quantity and quality are provided in a suitable location.
- 5.7 To comply with the policy, only one of the three criteria must be satisfied.
- 5.8 In this case, the development would not result in the loss of any sports or community facility. Indeed, the proposal to relocate Luton Rugby Club will save the facility in financial terms. The continued operation of the Club on the current basis is not sustainable in the long term. It is no longer able to generate sufficient revenue, while the operational costs increase. They are heavily reliant upon a single sponsor to maintain and fund the Club. The relocation project is therefore critical to the continued survival of the Club. The residential development of Newlands Road will not only fund construction of the new facility, but it will also leave a residual sum that can be invested to support its ongoing maintenance. Inherently therefore, the development will help prevent the loss of an existing facility, which is the fundamental purpose of the Council's planning policies concerning community facility and open space. Without the residential development of the Newlands Road site, the Club is likely to close, resulting in a loss.

- 5.9 Furthermore, it is apparent that the proposed replacement facility at Sundon would achieve a significant betterment in terms of the quantity and quality. The new facility would deliver the same number of pitches and provide a bespoke clubhouse. Furthermore, the development includes the provision of all-weather pitches, meaning that the new facility would be able to host other sports alongside rugby. This means that the new facility can deliver wider community benefits. Again, this satisfies the requirements of the Council's planning policies as it will provide an improved facility with greater accessibility.
- 5.10 During discussions with the Local Planning Authority about the Subject Site, concern has been raised about the location of the replacement facility as it is outside the administrative boundary of Luton Borough Council. While this is the case, an administrative boundary cannot automatically render the site at Lower Sundon 'unsuitable' to meet the needs of Luton. The site at Lower Sundon is just 5 miles from Luton town centre, and the proposed development of the new facility includes enhancements to accessibility. These measures include improvements to the footpath along Sundon Road and Sundon Park Road connecting to north Luton, with appropriate pedestrian crossings in place. These improvements are to be secured by Condition.
- 5.11 Moreover, the Relocation Site lies immediately north of the allocated 'North of Luton' urban expansion. This development is similarly within the administrative boundary of Central Bedfordshire, but is located to meet the growth needs of Luton and responds to the lack of land within the Borough of Luton. The development will contain 3,600 dwellings and 7 hectares of employment land. The 'North of Luton' expansion also includes the link road between the M1 Motorway and the A6.
- 5.12 This development will effectively function as part of Luton. It will include significant enhancements to connectivity and accessibility and will help the integration of the Club's proposed sports facility. Accordingly, the proposed replacement facility will both continue to serve existing patrons and residents of Luton, while also meeting needs of those within the new 'North of Luton' expansion.
- 5.13 Given these factors, we believe that notwithstanding the administrative boundaries, the Relocation Site is in a suitable location for the purposes of the Council's policies based on its physical location, and existing and future accessibility.
- 5.14 **The Lack of Alternative Relocation Sites:** While not one of the policy considerations, it must also be accepted that the Club undertook an extensive search to identify alternative sites for its relocation.
- 5.15 The Club's has been looking to relocate for nearly a decade now. As part of this process, Kirkby Diamond was instructed to provide a valuation of their existing premises back in 2015. Since then, we have also provided advice on the potential of several other sites to accommodate a relocated facility and there is clear evidence of a long and extensive search. The site at Lower Sundon was identified after considerable deliberation, but the reality is that there are no practical and viable alternatives.
- 5.16 When assessing alternative sites, they must not only be of a critical size to accommodate the physical quantum of development needed (which must in itself, meet the demands of Sport England), but most also have other practical qualities. For example, any site must be:
- Within approximately 5 miles of Luton Town Centre;
 - A generally level site with good natural drainage and shape that allows optimum pitch orientation;
 - Sheltered from excessive wind conditions;
 - Accessible for members and visitors alike;
 - In a location that will not give rise to concerns over residential amenity;
 - Within good access to the motorway network for visiting league teams;
 - Capable of achieving planning permission for the proposal; and
 - Available for the Club to purchase at a price that would make the relocation viable.

- 5.17 An Alternative Site Assessment has been prepared that demonstrates the considerable lengths that the Club has gone to over a period of many years, to find a site that meets these needs. We have analysed specific sites within our assessment, and any possible alternative was readily discounted. Several of the sites were on steep inclines and would have required excessive landscape remodelling that would have been inappropriate in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Others occupied an exposed location on the Greensand ridge where wind conditions would have made them impractical for rugby, and some sites were a considerable distance away.
- 5.18 There are no sites of the size required available within the urban area of Luton (and if there were then they would no doubt be allocated for housing or employment purposes), and the green belt tightly encloses the urban area of Luton, while most of the land to the west is also within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Consequently, from a practical perspective almost any alternative site would be within the green belt and subject to the same tests as the application site.
- 5.19 Against this background, the application site at Sundon was identified by the Club, and its key qualities can be summarised as follows:
- The land is of a sufficient size to meet the Club's physical requirements;
 - It is approximately five miles from Luton town centre;
 - The site is less than ten miles from their existing grounds and accessible to its players and club members;
 - The site is broadly level and requires limited intervention to create pitches;
 - It is sheltered from prevailing winds;
 - A safe and suitable access can be provided;
 - The site is well located to the M1 for visiting teams from the Midlands Region in which the club plays;
 - This connection will be enhanced by the planned M1 to A6 link road;
 - It will be well located to the population within the North of Luton growth area; and
 - The site is available for the Club to purchase at an acceptable and viable price.
- 5.20 For these reasons, the site at Lower Sundon meets all the Club's needs.
- 5.21 **Availability of Alternative Provision near Newlands:** Notwithstanding the above, there are other similar facilities in close proximity. Stockwood Park lies immediately adjacent to the Subject Site. Stockwood Park hosts Stockwood Park RFC and so there is an existing, alternative rugby facility in a suitable location that might meet and displaced needs.
- 5.22 **Newlands Road as a Suitable Housing Site:** Setting aside matters relating to the loss of the existing private sports use, it is evident that the land at Newlands Road is entirely suitable for residential development. It would be appropriate and consistent with the provisions of national and local planning policy guidance.
- 5.23 The site is in part 'previously developed land'. It lies within the built-up area of Luton, being contained by the motorway, and the Council's allocation and grant of permission for the development of land immediately to the north confirms that Newlands Road represents an appropriate and sustainable location for residential development.

Access and Sustainability

5.24 The Subject Site offers a sustainable location for housing development, consistent with the development of other land on Newlands Road for this purpose. We have noted above that there are various services and facilities at Farley Hill and also in Luton town centre that can be reached from the site. In previous discussions with the Local Planning Authority, it has been suggested that any development of the Subject Site might include a small foodstore and this can be incorporated. This would provide a facility for other residents in the immediate vicinity and further support the site's sustainability.

5.25 As discussed above, it is expected that there would be two primary access points serving the development of the Subject Site: one to the north and a second to the south. This not only facilitates the phased development of the site, but also allows for an even distribution of vehicular movement throughout. During previous discussions, the Local Planning Authority has noted that:¹⁶

"... there is also a potential increase in trip generation associated with this development and this will have an impact on the junction of Caddington Road and Newlands Road. This development is likely to facilitate the requirement for improvements to the junction and a capacity assessment will need to be carried out as part of a Transport Assessment.

The character and nature of Newlands Road will clearly change if this development is permitted, particularly when considered against the development approved for 340 units to the northwest. In light of this, the speed limit on the road would potentially reduce to 30 mph, this would result in a requirement for additional signage and street lighting ... "

5.26 There are no overriding concerns about the ability to achieve a safe access. Discussions with the Highway Authority have not identified any 'severe' residual impacts on the highway network, and while improvements may be needed, these can be delivered within the Subject Site or the adopted highway.

5.27 There is an existing footpath that crosses the Subject Site. There is the potential to connect this with Stockwood Park to help provide greater opportunities for pedestrian permeability. In previous discussions, the Highway Authority has therefore suggested the inclusion of a pedestrian crossing over Newlands Road. This requirement can be accommodated within any development.

5.28 We have noted above that there are several bus routes along Newlands Road. While there are no formal bus stops at present, they are nevertheless used. The proposed development would offer the opportunity to provide formal bus stops either physically or as part of the development, or by way of commuted payments to off-site improvements.

5.29 Taking account of the above, it is considered that the Subject Site offers an opportunity to provide an accessible and sustainable location. As well as accommodating the needs arising from the development itself, it offers the potential to achieve improved pedestrian and public transport connections for the wider benefit of the surrounding area. These improvements will need to be considered alongside other developments on Newlands Road to provide a comprehensive package.

¹⁶ Application Reference PREAPP/23/00093

Scope and Form of Development

- 5.30 **Amount and Mix of Dwellings:** The Subject Site is capable of delivering between 250 and 300 dwellings, assuming a density of between 30-35 dwellings per hectare. Our estimate has also been informed by indicative layouts prepared by prospective development partners.
- 5.31 This is markedly lower than that which has been delivered on the land to the north, but reflects the Council's desire for a greater range and type of housing rather than a development exclusively of apartments and flats. The development of Newlands Road can achieve a mixture of both houses and apartments, adapting to the latest housing needs assessment.
- 5.32 The Council's local plan requires that 20% of new dwellings be provided as affordable housing, and it is expected that this could be met within the site.
- 5.33 **Layout:** The Subject Site offers a large developable area. While there are various constraints and opportunities that will need to be taken into account in the layout of development, the Subject Site essentially comprises large areas of generally flat, unconstrained open land.
- 5.34 We would anticipate the provision of two vehicular access points off Newlands Road. This will help phase the development of the site in accordance with the relocation objectives, as the provision of separate access points will readily form two land parcels.
- 5.35 **Scale:** The Subject Site can accommodate a range of different building forms. As the Council's housing needs assessment focuses on the need for family housing, it is anticipated that the majority of development would be two storey, potentially with accommodation in the roofspace.
- 5.36 However, the site is also able to accommodate a greater intensity of built form if desired. A greater scale of development would be consistent with the proposals on the site to the north, which comprises a range of buildings, from two to five storeys in height.
- 5.37 **Landscape:** As discussed above, the nature of the existing use means that the body of the site is largely open. It predominantly comprises managed grass pitches. Although there are some mature trees and landscape, this lies at the site's boundaries and we would expect that this could be readily accommodated within any development of the site. Existing boundary treatment including landscaped margins along Newlands Road, acting as a transition to the open countryside to the east. Landscaping will also help create a soft edge around the development and help mitigate any noise impacts as well as enhancing the visual appearance of the development.
- 5.38 It is anticipated that a landscape buffer would be provided along the western boundary adjacent to the motorway. This would provide an element of public open space, but there would also be scope for other large areas of landscaping amongst the built development, including attenuation ponds. As well as providing informal amenity space, this will soften the appearance of the development.

Assessment of Potential Constraints

- 5.39 **Amenity:** It is expected that the design of the proposed buildings (and notably those positioned along the motorway) will need to ensure an acceptable noise level within the dwellings. This may be achieved through the layout of development and orientation of built form, as well as the detailed specification of windows and ventilation. Measures may include the installation of acoustic ventilators, trickle acoustic vents in windows, or acoustic airbricks vents within the walls. This would enable occupant to obtain natural ventilation without any loss of amenity.
- 5.40 In terms of air quality, it is possible that positive mechanical ventilation will be needed to serve the dwellings.
- 5.41 **Public Safety Zone:** It is recognised that a small section of the site is covered by the Public Safety Zone, and this will need to be reflected within the final layout of the development.
- 5.42 Development is restricted within the Public Safety Zone and the relevant guidance would not permit any new residential development within it.¹⁷ However, the guidance allows development that would involve low density of people living, working or congregating within the zone. It is therefore anticipated that this zone might be used to provide incidental landscaping or open space.
- 5.43 The existing sports ground would no longer be accepted within the Public Safety Zone, and the proposed development may be designed to reduce the extent of risk when compared to the existing position. In this respect, the Government's Guidance allows for changes of use of land and buildings which could not reasonably be expected to increase the number of people, living, working or congregating on land beyond the current level.¹⁸
- 5.44 **Existing Utilities:** There is an underground gas main running along the northeast side of the site, adjacent to Newlands Road. In addition, there are overhead power cables. These can be accommodated within any development and if necessary, overhead power cables may be placed underground.
- 5.45 **Flood Risk and Drainage:** The site is wholly contained within Flood Zone One, where there is a low risk of flooding. We believe that the site is capable of accommodating sustainable urban drainage to address surface water runoff, and attenuation may be provided in the form of ponds within the site.
- 5.46 **Landscaping and Ecology:** There are not considered to be any significant constraints in relation to landscaping or matters of ecology. As discussed above, the site is largely managed grass and contains little mature landscaping, other than that which could be retained on the site's boundaries. Similarly, there is not known to be any significant ecological potential on the site. We are not aware of any protected species or other constraints that could not be mitigated. Similarly, there would be scope to achieve an appropriate net gain in biodiversity.
- Heritage Assets and Archaeology:** Earlier responses to pre-application enquiries have noted that the Subject Site has some archaeological interest.¹⁹ It is understood that there is evidence of Neolithic, Bronze Age, Roman and Medieval remains in the form of surface artefacts. However, it is unclear how much surviving archaeological remains. It has therefore been suggested that any planning submission be accompanied by the results of a geotechnical investigation.
- 5.47 The site is not within any Conservation Area, nor does it contain any designated or non-designated heritage assets. Nevertheless, it has been suggested in discussions that any planning submission should also consider the impact of the development on the setting of Stockwood Park (HER 6985) and Luton Hoo (HER 6989, NHLE 1000578: Grade II*). Given the context of the site and the surrounding development, we do not believe that these matters present any insurmountable consideration.

¹⁷ DfT Circular 01/2010 'Control of Development in Public Safety Zones' §11

¹⁸ DfT Circular 01/2010 'Control of Development in Public Safety Zones' §11(iii)

¹⁹ Application Reference PREAPP/17/001788

6 Summary and Conclusion

Summary

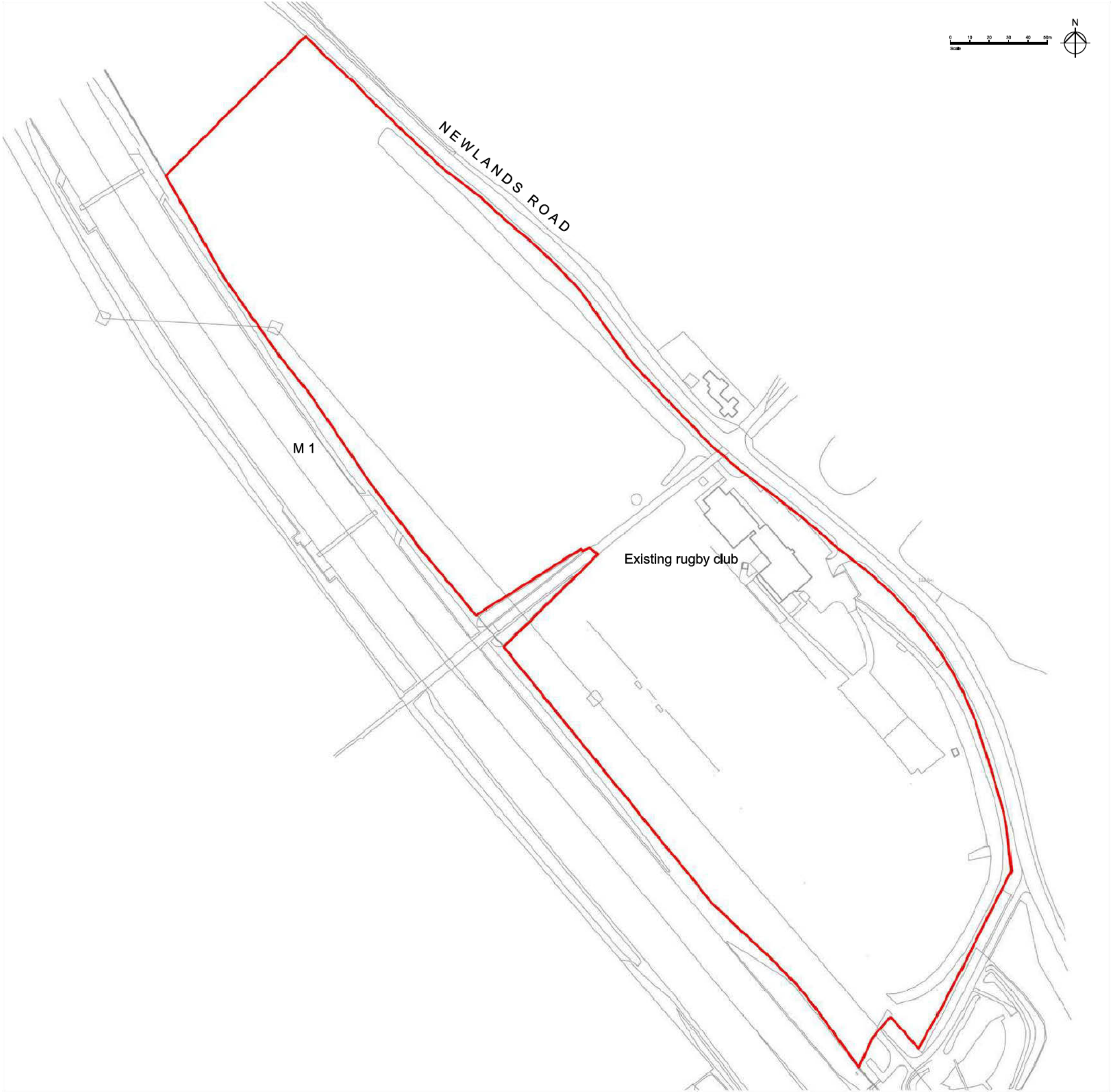
- 6.1 In summary, it is proposed on behalf of Luton Rugby Club that their existing land and premises at east of Newlands Road, Luton be allocated for the purposes of housing development. The site is approximately 8.28 hectares in size and offers the potential to accommodate between 250 to 300 dwellings.
- 6.2 The allocation and development of the land will realise the Club's critical need to relocate to ensure its long-term survival. The Club has identified an appropriate location for a replacement facility, and it is expected that this will shortly benefit from planning permission accordingly.
- 6.3 On the basis that an alternative and improved sports development will be delivered, land at Newlands Road is suitable for development, and will be available. Housing development can be delivered within the next five years.

Conclusions

- 6.4 In conclusion, we would highlight the following key points concerning the principle of development:
- The residential development of Newlands Road is critical to the long-term financial survival of Luton Rugby Club;
 - A replacement facility will be delivered of better quality, with additional community benefits;
 - The replacement facility, while outside Luton's administrative boundary, is physically and functionally connected;
 - The replacement facility is accessible and will be immediately adjacent to the North of Luton expansion;
 - Development of Newlands will therefore save a community facility, rather than result in a loss;
 - The Club could not identify any alternative sites for a replacement facility within the boundary of Luton;
- 6.5 Turning the development of Newlands Road:
- The site is in part 'previously developed land' and is able to accommodate development;
 - The site is generally flat, open grassland and largely unconstrained;
 - There are no insurmountable constraints that cannot be mitigated;
 - The site can deliver a mix of housing, including affordable housing;
 - The site offers a sustainable and accessible location, surrounded by other residential development;
 - There is scope to enhance accessibility and sustainability with additional facilities on the site.
- 6.6 Taking account of the above, it is concluded that the development of the land at Newlands Road should be allocated for housing purposes. The proposal would comply with the provisions of national and local planning policy and the principles of sustainable development.

Appendix One

Site Location Plan and Aerial Plan



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PROJECT: Land off Newlands Road
Luton
CLIENT: .
ISSUE STATUS:
DESIGN ☐ B of Q ☐ CONSTRUCTION ☐ RECORD ☐

DRAWING TITLE: Location Plan
SCALE: 1:2000 (A3) DATE: June 2017 BY: JB
DRAWING NO: 17087 (SK) 001 REVISION:

BY: DATE: DETAILS:



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PROJECT: Land off Newlands Road
Luton

CLIENT: .

ISSUE STATUS:

DESIGN ☐ B of Q ☐ CONSTRUCTION ☐ RECORD ☐

DRAWING TITLE: Aerial View
[courtesy of Google Maps]

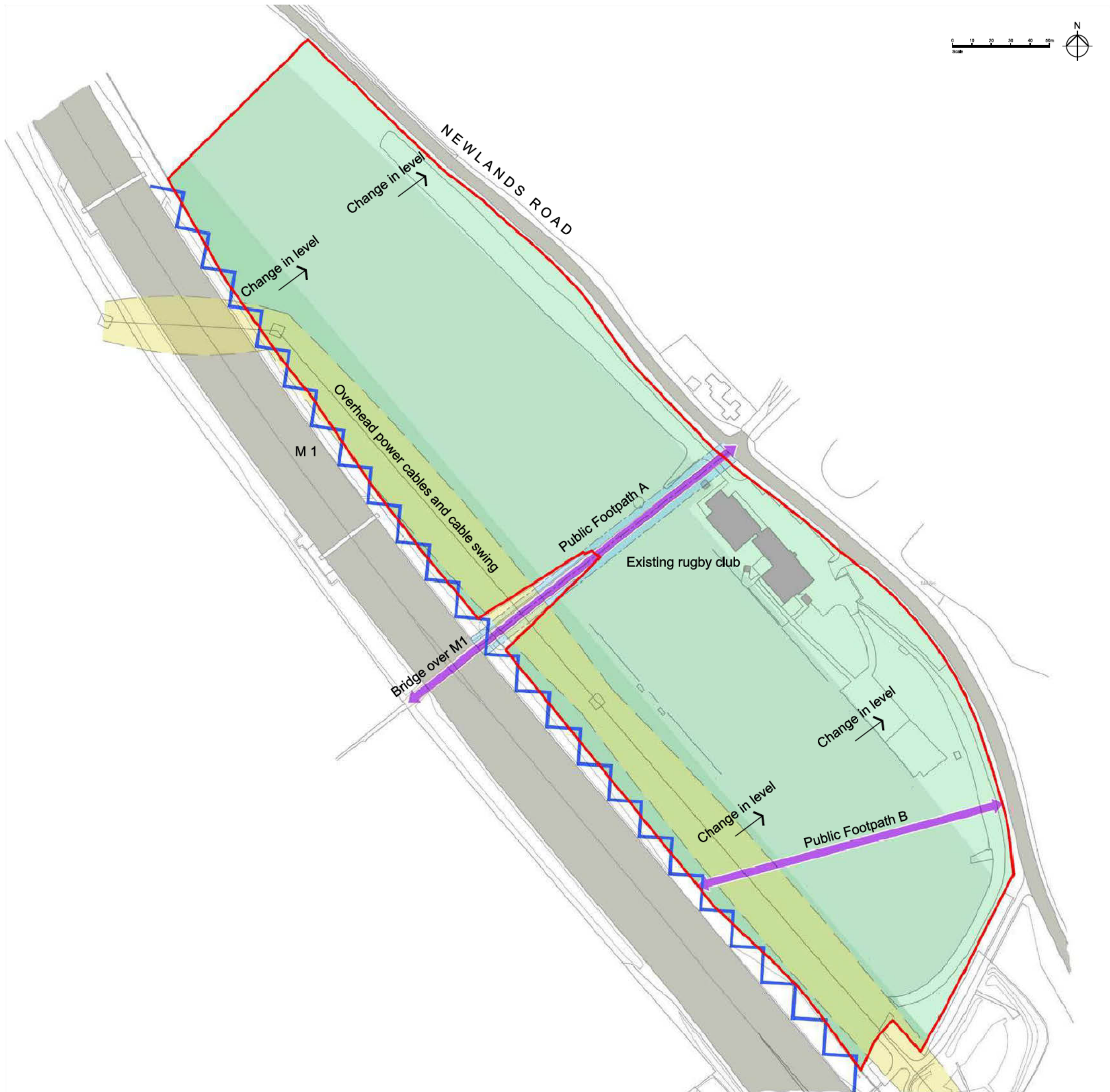
SCALE: 1:2000 (A3) DATE: June 2017 BY: JB

DRAWING NO: 17087 (SK) 002 REVISION:

REV: | BY: | DATE: | DETAILS:

Appendix Two

Constraints and Opportunities Plans



KEY

- Site boundary
- Existing buildings
- Change in level within the site
- Route of overhead power cables with building exclusion 'cable swing' zone
- Public right of way through the site linked to the bridge over the M1
- Noise source from M1
- Assumed route of high pressure gas main, and associated easement, running through the site [route to be confirmed]

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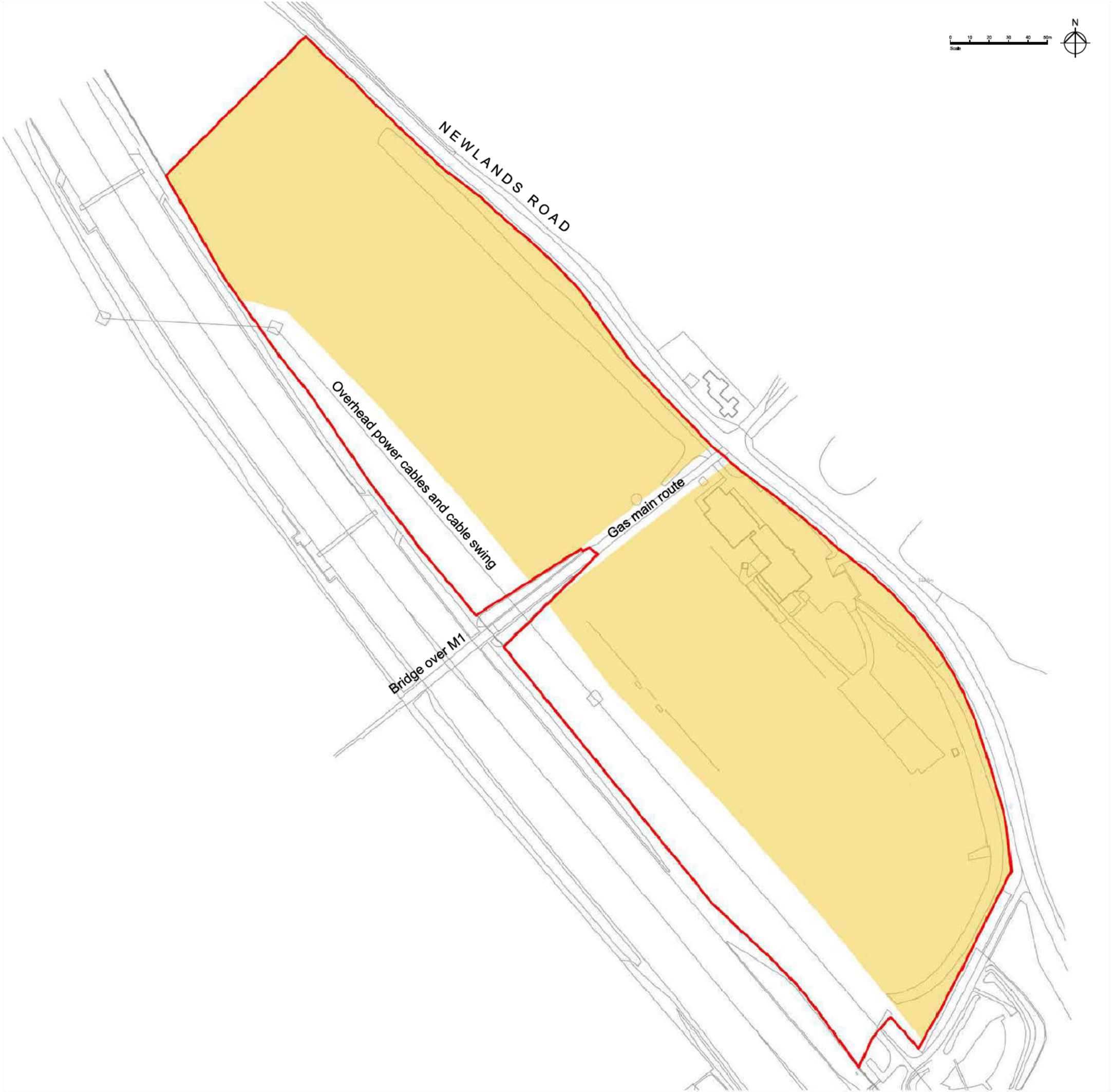
DESIGN ☐ B of Q ☐ CONSTRUCTION ☐ RECORD ☐

DRAWING TITLE: Site Analysis

SCALE: 1:2000 (A3) DATE: June 2017 BY: JB

DRAWING NO: 17087 (SK) 003 REVISION:

REV: BY: DATE: DETAILS:



KEY

Site boundary

Developable area



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DESIGN ☐ B of Q ☐ CONSTRUCTION ☐ RECORD ☐

DRAWING TITLE:

Developable Area

SCALE:

1:2000 (A3)

DATE:

June 2017

BY:

JB

DRAWING NO:

17087 (SK) 004

REVISION:

REV: BY: DATE: DETAILS:

Appendix Three

Environment Agency Flood Risk Plan

Flood map for planning

Your reference
<Unspecified>

Location (easting/northing)
508147/219310

Scale
1:2500

Created
28 Jan 2025 11:49

-  Selected area
-  Flood zone 3
-  Flood zone 2
-  Flood zone 1
-  Flood defence
-  Main river
-  Water storage area

0 20 40 60m

Page 2 of 2



Appendix Three

Site Photographs



Existing club house



Existing club house



View of southern part of site, towards M1 Motorway



View of southern part of site, towards M1 Motorway



View of northern part of site

