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Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites in Darlington Borough

Prepared by LUC for Darlington Borough Council
July 2019



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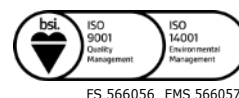
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Planning & EIA
Design
Landscape Planning
Landscape Management
Ecology
GIS & Visualisation

LUC MANCHESTER
2 Mount Street
Manchester
M2 5WQ
+44 (0)161 3026640
manchester@landuse.co.uk

Offices also in:
Bristol
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Lancaster
London



Land Use Consultants Ltd
Registered in England
Registered number: 2549296
Registered Office:
250 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8RD
LUC uses 100% recycled paper

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1 Introduction

Background and purpose

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a landscape sensitivity assessment, undertaken to inform decisions relating to a number of proposed housing and mixed use allocations within Darlington Borough. The sites are located around the edges of Darlington, and around Middleton St George.
- 1.2 LUC was appointed in 2015 to undertake a landscape sensitivity study as part of the Darlington Landscape Character Assessment, and initial work was commenced but not completed at the time. In 2019, LUC was reappointed to revisit the earlier sensitivity work and to complete a report setting out findings.
- 1.3 The study focuses on an identified set of proposed development land allocations in the Darlington Borough Draft Local Plan June 2018, and provides information on the landscape and visual sensitivity of each site. In addition, LUC was asked to review the emerging masterplan proposals for two strategic allocations. The study was undertaken by landscape architects at LUC, following a methodology developed for the purpose.
- 1.4 This study does not draw any conclusions in relation to the capacity or suitability of sites for development, but identifies overall landscape sensitivity and visual sensitivity, as well as any potential for mitigation. It is focused solely on landscape character and visual amenity, including consideration of settlement setting, and does not consider potential impacts of development on habitats and species, the historic environment or other factors that may influence allocation decisions.

Sites assessed

- 1.5 LUC was asked to examine the sensitivity of particular development land allocations, as shown on the Darlington Borough Draft Local Plan Policies Map. These comprise ten sites around the periphery of Darlington, and four sites in Middleton St George. These are listed in **Table 1.1**, and shown on **Overview Maps 1-6** in **Appendix 2**.
- 1.6 The two sites to be reviewed in greater detail are the strategic allocations defined on the policies map: site 185 Greater Faverdale; and site 251 Skertingham.

Structure of the report

- 1.7 **Section 2** of this report presents the methodology used to examine the sites. A summary of findings and a discussion of relative landscape sensitivity are presented in **Section 3**, along with the review of the emerging masterplans for the strategic allocations. Detailed findings are presented for each site in **Appendix 1**.

Table 1.1 Development land allocation sites included in the evaluation

Sites West of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 1)
Site 041 – South Coniscliffe Park
Site 100 – Hall Farm, Branksome
Site 249 – Coniscliffe Park, North
Sites North-West of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 2)
Site 003 – South of Burtree Lane
Site 008 – Berrymead Farm
Site 185 – Greater Faverdale
Sites North-East of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 3)
Site 251 – Skerningham
Site 392 – Elm Tree Farm
Sites East of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 4)
Site 020 – Great Burdon
Sites South of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 5)
Site 243 – Snipe Lane, Hurworth Moor
Sites Around Middleton St George (refer to Overview Map 6)
Site 089 – Land West of Oak Tree
Site 099 – Maxgate Farm
Site 146 – Land south of railway line
Site 375 – South of High Stell

2 Methodology

Sensitivity criteria

- 2.1 In line with recommendations made in available published guidance,¹ the landscape sensitivity assessment is based on carefully defined criteria which draw on experience of other similar studies across the UK. Criteria selection is based on the attributes of the landscape most likely to be affected by development, and considers both 'landscape' and 'visual' aspects of sensitivity, as well as indicators of landscape value.
- 2.2 The criteria chosen for this study are also tailored to the specific issues the sensitivity assessment seeks to address – primarily the role the landscape plays in providing a setting to the existing settlements in the Borough – in order to assist in guiding development to the most appropriate locations.
- 2.3 The appraisal criteria and associated decision rules are set out in **Table 2.1**. These enable an overall judgement of sensitivity but also show the factors that contribute to the assessed level of sensitivity where this reflects the importance attached to a particular aspect.

Table 2.1 Criteria for sensitivity analysis

	Lower sensitivity	<----->			Higher sensitivity
Landscape criteria					
Landform	Simple, large scale, predominantly flat	Simple, large to medium scale, predominantly flat to undulating	Occasional variety but lacking strong complexity	Complex with Topographical variety	Very complex with strong topographical variety
Landcover	Simple, large scale pattern (large conifer plantations, arable fields), and/or regularly disturbed, fragmented landcover	Largely simple, some disturbance, largely fragmented landcover and land use	Some variety, limited disturbance, a degree of consistency in pattern of land use and landcover	Varied pattern with some intricacy, largely undisturbed and coherent landcover, some historic land use pattern evident	Intricate, varied pattern, undisturbed consistent patterns of land cover or land use, historic field patterns
Scale	Large scale, featureless	Medium to large scale	Medium to small scale with some human scale indicators	Small scale with human scale indicators	Very small scale, intricate with human scale indicators
Enclosure	Enclosed	Mostly enclosed, some open areas	Some enclosure	Generally open, enclosed in places	Open, exposed
Condition	Low level of intactness with landscape elements in poor state of repair	Some intactness with some elements in poor state of repair	Generally intact with elements in reasonable state of repair	Intact and elements in good state of repair	High level of intactness and very good state of repair

¹ The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2004) Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity.

	Lower sensitivity	<----->			Higher sensitivity
Typicality and rarity	No rare features or weak association with typical features of the landscape	Few rare features or some association with typical features	Some rare features and attributes or largely corresponding to typical features	Rare features and attributes, strong correspondence with typical features	Rare features of regional importance or representative of typical features
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Not tranquil, much human activity, noise and light	Limited tranquillity	Some human activity reducing sense of tranquillity, some lighting	Relatively tranquil, no lighting	Tranquil, little human activity, noise or lighting
Visual criteria					
Skylines	No relationship to skyline	Limited relationship to skyline	Some relationship to skyline with some complexity and interruption	Relationship to prominent skylines that is largely simple or with some variety and interruption	Strong relationship to prominent, simple and undeveloped skylines
Views and landmarks	Contains no landmarks and is not a feature in local views	No or limited landmarks or limited significance in local views	Locally important landmarks or views	Some important landmarks, or significant views	Landscape includes key landmarks or is important in views across a wide area
Inter-visibility	Self-contained, restricted inter-visibility	Occasional views to adjacent landscapes	Inter-visibility with some neighbouring landscapes	Inter-visibility and strong links to neighbouring landscapes	Extensively inter-visible, part of wider landscape
Visual relationship with existing settlement	Strong visual relationship with the existing settlement	Moderate visual relationship with the existing settlement	Weak visual relationship with the existing settlement	Slight visual relationship with the existing settlement	No visual relationship with the existing settlement
Landscape value criteria					
Natural heritage	No landscape conservation designations	Limited extent of nature conservation areas and areas of ancient woodland	Some nature conservation designations	Nature conservation designations over a significant area	Statutory nature conservation designations over an extensive area
Historic environment and settings	No significant historic features	Historic features but not relating to landscape	Some historic features relate to landscape	Some prominent historic features	Historic features are prominent in the landscape
Recreation	Little or no recreational use	Low level informal or local recreational use	Locally significant recreational use or attraction	Well used for recreation, greater than local attraction	Important for recreation for locals and visitors
Green infrastructure	The site is self-contained with little or no connection to the wider landscape	The site provides limited connections for wildlife or people	The site forms part of a local network with key connections for wildlife or people	The site provides important links for wildlife and people	The site is a key element within an important green corridor or network

Assessment process

- 2.4 Prior to undertaking field work, a desk-based exercise involved collation and review of information sources such as the landscape character assessment and spatial information on cultural and natural heritage resources. This included the Darlington Landscape Character Assessment (2015),² which describes the characteristics of the landscape of the Borough; and Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013),³ which sets out aspirations for enhancing the landscape in and around settlements for the benefit of people and wildlife. Particular attention was paid to locations that provide important connections within this Green Infrastructure network, which may therefore have higher value than their landscape and visual characteristics indicate.
- 2.5 Other designations and planning policies from the Local Development Plan that informed the assessment are shown on the **Overview Maps 1-6**, and include:
- Green Wedges (as amended in the Draft Local Plan);
 - Community Woodland;
 - Local Wildlife Sites (LWS);
 - Local Nature Reserves (LNR); and
 - Local Green Space (proposed in the Draft Local Plan)
- 2.6 The following tasks were undertaken in the field for each of the sites shown in **Table 1.1**:
- consideration of the landscape context of the site, informed by the 2015 Landscape Character Assessment;
 - a site specific analysis of landscape sensitivity, using the assessment criteria outlined in **Table 2.1**;
 - observations of the role of the site in contributing to the townscape setting of the adjacent settlement, including the visual relationship between the site, settlement, important viewpoints and transport corridors;
 - consideration of green infrastructure connections which the site provides or contributes to;
 - consideration of the character of existing and potential settlement boundaries and gateway features; and
 - consideration of the potential for site layout, scheme design, structural planting or other measures to mitigate the impact of development, more effectively tie development into the settlement and/or fit development into the wider landscape.

Judging sensitivity

- 2.7 An overall judgement was made in relation to landscape sensitivity and visual sensitivity for each site, using the five-point scale defined in **Table 2.2**.

² LUC (2015) Darlington Landscape Character Assessment. Darlington Borough Council. [<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-and-environmental-policy/strategies-projects-and-studies/landscape-character-assessment/>]

³ Darlington Borough Council (2013) Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013-2016. [<https://microsites.darlington.gov.uk/local-plan/document-library/darlingtons-green-infrastructure-strategy/>]

Table 2.2 Sensitivity levels and definitions

Sensitivity Level	Definition
High	The key (landscape/visual) characteristics and qualities of the landscape are highly vulnerable to change from development. Such development is likely to result in a significant change in character.
High-medium	The key (landscape/visual) characteristics and qualities of the landscape are vulnerable to change from development. Great care would be needed in siting and designing development.
Medium	The key (landscape/visual) characteristics and qualities of the landscape may have some ability to absorb development, subject to careful siting and design.
Medium-low	Fewer of the key (landscape/visual) characteristics and qualities of the landscape are vulnerable to change from development. Care is still needed when locating siting and designing development.
Low	The key (landscape/visual) characteristics and qualities of the landscape are robust and are less likely to be adversely affected by development.

- 2.8 These judgements, combined with the indicators of landscape value, and the observations in relation to settlement setting, informed observations on potential landscape 'fit'. This statement included comments on any landscape and visual sensitivity variations within the site which may inform appropriate development.

Presentation of findings

- 2.9 The field-based assessment forms were written up and are presented in **Appendix 1**. These set out the criteria-based assessment for each site, and the observations made in relation to settlement setting and mitigation potential. **Appendix 1** includes the assessment forms for each site, in the order that they appear in **Table 1.1**.
- 2.10 The findings of the study are summarised in the following section, including an overview of key sensitivities in each of the areas of focus around Darlington and Middleton St George. The overall effects of multiple developments are also considered, in terms of how they could give rise to cumulative effects on the landscape and on the setting of the settlement.
- 2.11 The study also involved a review of the Greater Faverdale and Skerningham masterplans, and commentary on their responsiveness to the identified landscape sensitivities is also provided in the following section.

3 Summary and Discussion

Summary of sensitivity findings

3.1 **Table 3.1** presents a summary of the key findings of this study in relation to each of the sites considered. Detailed assessments for each site are presented in **Appendix 1**.

Table 3.1 Summary of findings

Site	Landscape Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
Sites West of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 1)		
Site 041	Low	Low
Site 100	Low	Low
Site 249	Low	Low
Sites North-West of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 2)		
Site 003	Low	Low
Site 008	Medium-Low	Medium-Low
Site 185	High-Medium	High-Medium
Sites North-East of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 3)		
Site 251	Medium	Medium
Site 392	Medium-Low	Medium-Low
Sites East of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 4)		
Site 020	High-Medium	Medium
Sites South of Darlington (refer to Overview Map 5)		
Site 243	Low	Low
Sites Around Middleton St George (refer to Overview Map 6)		
Site 089	Medium-Low	Low
Site 099	Medium-Low	Medium-Low
Site 146	Low	Low
Site 375	Low	Low

Discussion

Sensitivity

- 3.2 **Table 3.1** gives an 'at a glance' summary of the landscape and visual sensitivities associated with each site. It should be noted that within some sites, particularly the larger sites, there is variation on both landscape and visual sensitivity and this is discussed in greater detail under each site assessment in **Appendix 1**. The main findings are summarised below but should not be relied on without reference to the detail presented in the Appendix.

Sites West of Darlington (Refer to Overview Map 1)

- 3.3 **Site 041 / 100 / 249:** All three sites to the west of Darlington have limited relationship with the existing settlement, have predominantly well-defined potential development limits and a landscape character which is robust enough to accommodate change. This would suggest that carefully designed and sited developments could be achieved without detriment to the landscape at these locations. Development should ensure that the proposed Cocker Beck Green Wedge remains open, and green infrastructure links provided south to the Broken Scar LWS and Merrybent Community Woodland.

Sites North-West of Darlington (Refer to Overview Map 2)

- 3.4 **Site 185:** Due to the size of the site and the Strategic Masterplan Framework, this site will be discussed in more detail below. This site was assessed as having a high-medium landscape and visual sensitivity, suggesting that key characteristics are more vulnerable to change and development would need to be carefully designed and sited. There are locally sensitive areas, such as on elevated ground near High Faverdale Farm, though the large site offers flexibility to avoid these locations.
- 3.5 **Site 003 / 008:** Both sites indicate lower degrees of landscape and visual sensitivity than that of the neighbouring Faverdale site. They are more contained with limited visual relationship with existing settlement edges, though with potential for effects on the northern approach to Darlington along the A167. Mitigation to enhance green infrastructure and recreation networks could play a key role in creating more robust settlement boundaries thereby containing proposed development. Site 003 in particular has potential for development in keeping with the surrounding settlement pattern, and with a topography and scale more able to absorb residential expansion.

Sites North-East of Darlington (Refer to Overview Map 3)

- 3.6 **Site 251:** A very large site, covered by Skerningham Masterplan Framework as discussed below. The sensitivities associated with the landscape around the River Skerne and Community Woodland to the north would indicate that development may best be steered away from this part of the site. Expansion around the peripheries of the existing settlements of Whinfield and Harrowgate Hill could be appropriate and create a more integrated settlement edge with the surrounding landscape. Care should be taken to maintain green infrastructure links across the site, such as between Beaumont Hill and Harrowgate, as well as along the Skerne corridor. There is significant variation in landscape and visual sensitivity across the site which is analysed further below.
- 3.7 **Site 392:** The visual containment of the majority of this site, as well as its close relationship with the existing built environment, means that it has the potential to absorb residential development as an add-on to existing housing, though with a need to retain mature planting as a landscape framework.

Sites East of Darlington (Refer to Overview Map 4)

- 3.8 **Site 20:** The landscape to the west of Darlington exhibits some landscape and visual qualities which make it more susceptible to change from development, and higher ground should ideally be kept open. The Green Wedge landscape designation within the site increases the landscape sensitivity to high-medium, and would indicate much higher sensitivity to development in the western parts of the site. The landscape in the eastern part of the parcel, particularly towards the busy A66, offers a lower degree of landscape sensitivity and more potential for development opportunities. There are opportunities for the inclusion of green infrastructure corridors along the Skerne, and linking to the Red Hall LWS to the south of the site.

Sites South of Darlington (Refer to Overview Map 5)

- 3.9 **Site 243:** The site does not demonstrate any particular landscape or visual sensitivities and would provide a logical expansion south of Darlington. The railway lines provide a distinct separation in the landscape to the south of Darlington, and the A66 provides a robust settlement edge. The visual sensitivity is also lower in this area, and there are opportunities to enhance green infrastructure along the north and west boundaries, in association with the LNRs at Brankin Moor and Geneva Wood.

Sites around Middleton St George (Refer to Overview Map 6)

- 3.10 **Site 146 / 375:** These sites have been assessed as having low landscape and visual sensitivity. There is evidence within the immediate surroundings of current and planned development, and there is limited physical or visual relationship between the sites and the existing settlement. Site 375 is between consented development and the railway line, and therefore has robust boundaries. Site 146 includes an operational commercial site, and the area to the east has a logical relationship with the settlement. The western field within this site does not have robust boundaries and development in this area may be detached from the rest of the site.
- 3.11 **Site 089 / 099:** These sites on the eastern and western fringes of Middleton St George exhibit a slightly higher degree of landscape and visual sensitivity than neighbouring sites. This is largely due to the location and relationship of the site with the existing settlement, with both sites contributing to settlement setting, and site 089 providing a strategic gap between Middleton St George and Oak Tree. Development at either site would require careful design and siting in order to maintain access links and integrate proposals with the settlement and surrounding landscape. For example, development at site 099 could be restricted to the east of the watercourse which flows through the site.

Potential for cumulative effects

- 3.12 Several of the sites, particularly around the west and north of Darlington, are contiguous or closely related in the landscape. While a cumulative assessment is not within the scope of this study, some commentary has been provided to consider any further effects that might arise from development across multiple sites, including implications for settlement setting and the function of the Green Wedges.

Sites West of Darlington (Refer to Overview Map 1)

- 3.13 The three sites in this area are all within the Denton and Walworth Farmland character area, but are contained by the A1(M) and so cumulative effects on the wider landscape are not considered likely. There are few locations from where they will all be visible, other than passing views from the motorway. The approach to Darlington from the west, along the B6279, may be affected by development to the north and south, but retaining the open green corridor along the Cocker Beck and maintaining the landscape functionality of the proposed Green Wedge would help to mitigate this.

Sites North West of Darlington (Refer to Overview Map 2)

- 3.14 Sites 003 and 008 could, if sensitively laid out in relation to one another, help to improve the indistinct settlement edge in this part of Darlington. Development would need to relate to existing piecemeal development along Whessoe Road, Burtree Lane and the A167, and ideally provide a common settlement boundary that works across both sites. There is an opportunity at this location to enhance the existing public right of way network and to link potential developments with existing local footpaths and new circular routes.
- 3.15 When considered alongside the large site 185 (Greater Faverdale), the same approach to the northern settlement boundary of Darlington could be continued, with the line of Burtree Lane, and running west to Beaumont Hill, potentially forming a long-term edge between the A1(M) and the A167. However, due to the scale of the site there will inevitably be some cumulative effects, particularly in combination with the committed development west of the A68, as the perceived 'gateway' into the settlement is likely to shift from Rotary Way out to the motorway junction.

Sites North East and East of Darlington (Refer to Overview Maps 3 and 4)

- 3.16 Cumulative effects may occur across and within the large site 251 (Skerningham). This would be most apparent in relation to the more sensitive parts of the site, along the River Skerne, where the presence of separate development parcels could have cumulative effects on the sequential experience of moving through the Skerne corridor.
- 3.17 Site 251 adjoins site 020 across the A1150. Development on both these sites could affect the setting of the village of Great Burdon, potentially enveloping it within an expanded urban area. Great Burdon would no longer serve as a gateway into eastern Darlington, which would move east to the A66 roundabout.

Sites South of Darlington (Refer to Overview Map 5)

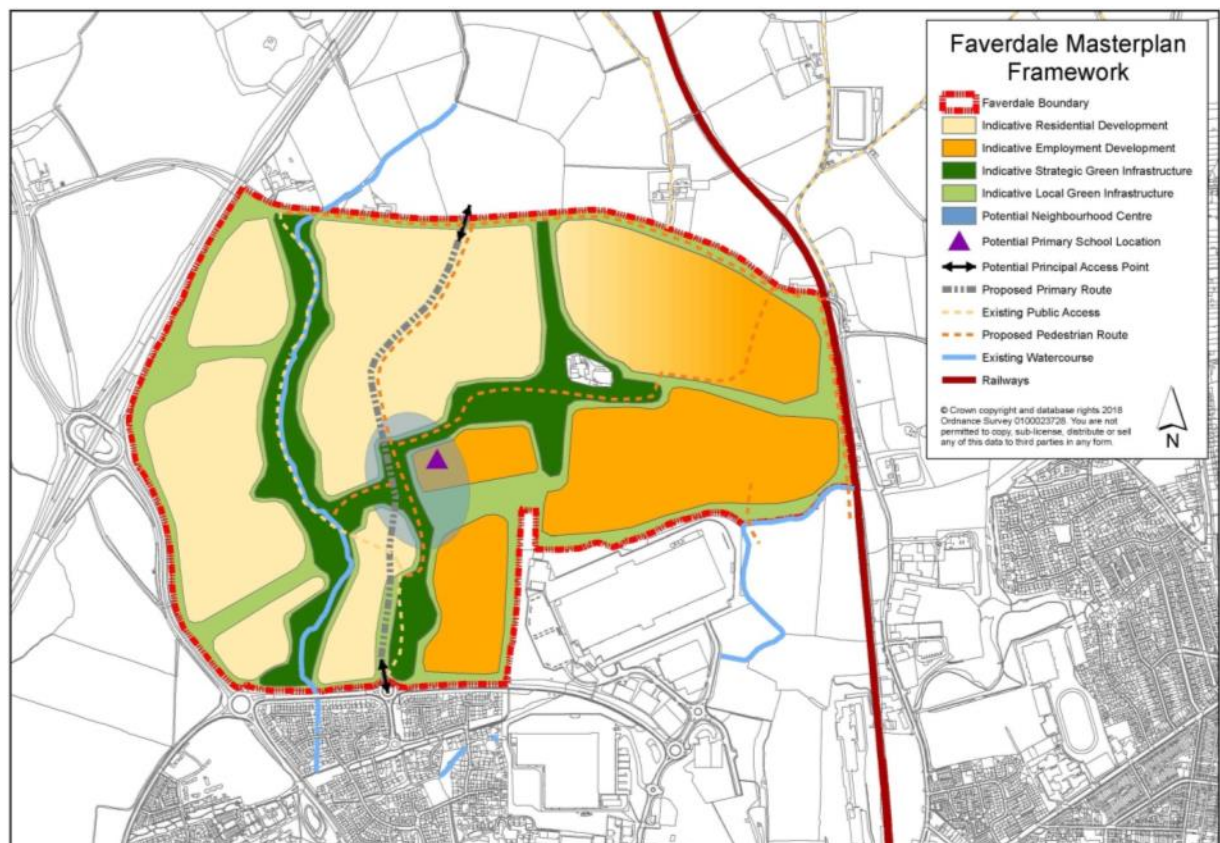
- 3.18 Site 243 is physically separate from other proposed housing allocations, and no cumulative effects would be likely as a result of its development.

Sites around Middleton St George (Refer to Overview Map 6)

- 3.19 Potential developments in this area should take into account the important local recreational activity and settlement form to maximise integration. The main cumulative risk is to the east, and development here should be planned with robust boundaries that work across sites to maintain a strategic gap with the neighbouring settlement of Oak Tree.

Commentary on emerging masterplans

Greater Faverdale

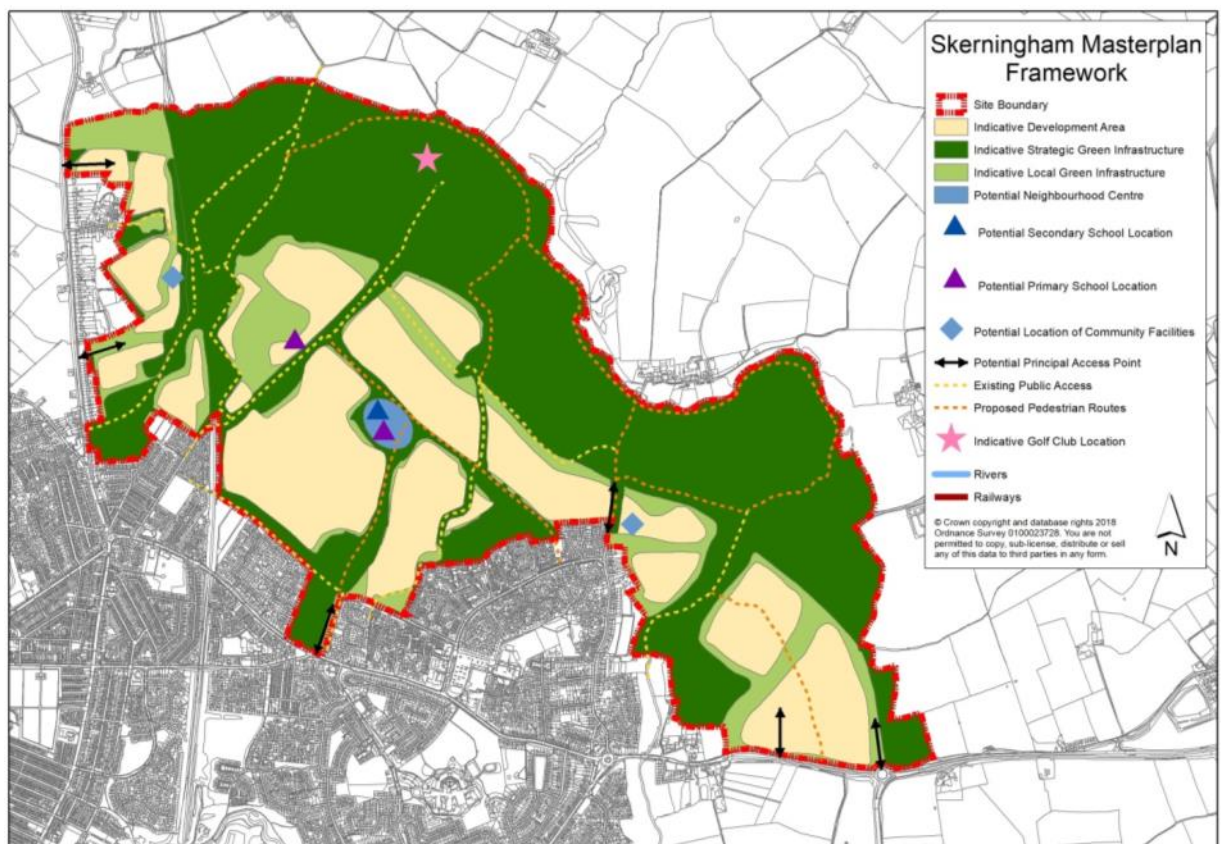


- 3.20 The Faverdale Masterplan Framework encompasses site 185. The strategic plan shows Indicative Employment Development in the form of the northern expansion of Faverdale Industrial Estate (north of Rotary Way). This would remain in-keeping with the existing light industrial units in this location. The existing residential fringe to the south of Rotary Way bears little connection with the surrounding landscape due to a buffer of mature vegetation and the large scale of Rotary Way itself. This would suggest that the area to the north is the most appropriate area to locate

residential development. The remainder of the Indicative Residential Development is located in the more open landscape and could alter the rural character of this area, requiring careful siting and design.

- 3.21 On inspection of the Faverdale Masterplan Framework, consideration appears to have been taken to ensure that there will be robust boundaries to settlements and that green infrastructure has been incorporated into the design to provide landscape integration and habitat enhancement. The northern boundary could be reinforced further through emphasising the importance of east-west green infrastructure along Burtree Lane. This boundary is key to the creation of a strongly defined settlement edge and a positive transition from urban to rural landscape should be planned from the outset.
- 3.22 It will also be important to maintain a strategic green corridor along the eastern boundary, creating and enhancing physical and functional links between Brinkburn and Drinkfield Marsh wildlife sites to the south, and the open countryside to the north. Again the masterplan could emphasise this by indicating strategic green infrastructure alongside the railway line, which could form a future Green Wedge in the north of Darlington.
- 3.23 The Faverdale Masterplan Framework looks to retain and enhance much of the green infrastructure around the stream which dissects the site north-south, which could form a positive landscape 'spine' for the area. Higher ground in the centre of the site has been retained as strategic and local green space, with a connection to the stream corridor. Development will need to be carefully designed and integrated into the more visible higher ground across the central and northern parts of the site, through the early-stage implementation of a landscape framework that builds on existing features. The south west corner of the site exhibits the most intact field boundary patterns adjacent the watercourse, and these should be retained for their landscape and habitat value. The development is in the vicinity of the deserted medieval village of Whessoe, and although little trace of this now remains, it could serve as a reference point to bring a sense of time-depth to any new development.

Skerningham



- 3.24 The Skertingham Masterplan Framework focuses on site 251 and includes the smaller site 392 to the south. The masterplan has identified Indicative Development Areas for residential use, although future potential has been identified for up to 15 hectares of employment land on the south eastern corner of the site adjacent the A66 roundabout.⁴ On the whole, these areas have been located in a way that should help to reduce the visual and landscape impacts. The area around Barmpton Lane, Whinfield and the central parts of the parcel (Darlington Golf Course) would be less sensitive to development based on the landscape and visual criteria analysis (limited views, appropriate scale, and existing relationship with settlement). However, the Indicative Development to the west of the parcel surrounding Beaumont Hill appears more fragmented, and it may be more difficult to relate development in this area to the existing settlement pattern.
- 3.25 The existing urban edge essentially turns it back on the surrounding countryside, typically with garden fences adjoining agricultural fields and Darlington Golf Course. The Skertingham Masterplan will connect into the existing road and footpath networks and provide an opportunity to form an urban edge with a more positive relationship with the surrounding countryside. Some of the central area of the site provides setting for rural farmsteads including Skertingham Manor and Low Skertingham, and parts of the site to the south provide a rural backdrop to Great Burdon and Harrowgate Village. However, the fringes of Whinfield and Harrowgate Hill back onto the countryside and have some limited interface with the site.
- 3.26 The indicative development to the east of Great Burdon will create a new gateway into Darlington from the east along the A1150. The cumulative effects of this development alongside potential development at site 20 to the south could effectively absorb Great Burdon into the urban form of Darlington. While some effort has been made to indicate open space around Great Burdon, from a landscape and visual perspective it will also be important to consider the approach to the village from the east to retain its more rural character.
- 3.27 The landscape to the north around the River Skerne and woodlands offers a higher degree of sensitivity to potential development. The identification of extensive strategic green infrastructure is a positive response, though the detailed treatment of the actual development edge will be a key factor for the success of this development in landscape and visual terms. Buildings should be set well back from the valley edge to maintain its open setting, and existing woodlands must be retained.
- 3.28 The Skertingham Masterplan Framework shows Indicative Development Areas along western, southern and eastern parts of the site. Whilst this would show sympathetic integration with the northern fringes of Whinfield and Harrowgate Hill, careful consideration should be given to how development would relate to settlement expansion around Beaumont Hill, and as the setting for historic buildings and settlements including Skertingham Manor, Low Skertingham and Great Burdon village.
- 3.29 Any development within site 251 should retain the green corridor along the River Skerne and the railway line, and the Skertingham Community Woodland. Public access and habitat enhancements should be part of proposals. The setting of Great Burdon, Barmpton, Skertingham Manor and Low Skertingham must be key considerations.

⁴ See paragraph 6.10.8 of the Darlington Borough Draft Local Plan.

Appendix 1 Site assessments

Site number	41 (South Coniscliffe Park)
Site area	28ha
Outline description of site	Arable farmland incorporating five irregular shaped fields influenced by the meandering form of the Baydale Beck watercourse located on the Western suburbs of Darlington. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	Baydale Beck forms the boundary to the east with the A67 creating the southern boundary. A bridleway and Merrybent Community Woodland form the western boundary and site 249 encloses the site to the north.
Character area	3: Denton and Walworth Farmland



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	The land is gently undulating, rising to the northern part of the site.
Landcover	The site is predominantly arable farmland with a small field of pasture adjacent Baydale Beck.
Scale	Fields are large in size, bounded by hedgerows which contribute to a medium to large scale character.
Enclosure	The site is contained by Merrybent Community Woodland to the west, the vegetated road corridor of the A67 to the south and the riparian woodland corridor of Baydale Beck to east.

Condition	Farmland is well maintained although there is an absence of hedgerows.
Typicality and rarity	This site is relatively typical of the character area, although influenced by the busy A67.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Pylons and the busy A67 detract from the tranquillity of this rural landscape.
Landscape sensitivity	Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	The gently rising landform limits the relationship to wider skylines. Power lines running through the site appear on the skyline in wider views.
Views and landmarks	None of note, as views are largely contained by the local landscape.
Inter-visibility	Intermittent views to adjacent landscapes.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	There is very little relationship to the surrounding settlement which is entirely screened by vegetation along the Baydale Beck.
Visual sensitivity	Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Broken Scar Local Wildlife Site adjoins the parcel to the east. Mature trees to the southern part of the site and the riparian woodland along the Baydale Beck contribute towards the natural heritage within the site. The site also provides part of the rural setting for Merrybent Community Woodland to the west.
Historic environment and settings	None identified.
Recreation	A bridleway follows the western boundary of the site which connects north-south, providing local recreation opportunities for residents in Western Darlington.
Green infrastructure	The Baydale Beck connects with the Broken Scar Local Wildlife Site and onwards to the River Tees. The Baydale Beck forms a green corridor running between the Tees and the proposed Cocker Beck Green Wedge. New community woodland to the south-west of the site could be better linked to the watercourse.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	There is very limited relationship between the site and the existing modern housing developments to the east. The site is adjacent to the A67, and development could alter the approach to Darlington along this route, which is currently characterised by the Victorian frontage of the water treatment works.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	The Community Woodland to the west, the A67 to the South and Baydale Beck to the east provide definitive development limits within the site. Boundaries to the north and north-west are less robust and would require green buffers to ensure landscape integration.

Initial comments on landscape fit	This site has been assessed as having a low landscape and visual sensitivity to development. This would suggest that carefully designed and sited development could be accommodated without significant effect on the wider landscape character and visual amenity of the site.
Potential for mitigation	Retain and enhance the existing bridleway / access network with further links to Baydale Beck to the east. Enhanced habitat links to Broken Scar Local Wildlife Site would also be positive mitigation features. This could be achieved through implementation of a green corridor along the Baydale Beck. The frontage to the A67 will need to be carefully designed.

Site number	100 (Hall Farm)
Site area	22ha
Outline description of site	Triangular shaped parcel of farmland to the west of Branksome, an estate on the western edge of Darlington, with the shallow valley of the Cocker Beck in the south. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	The site incorporates a number of larger fields defined by hedgerows and woodland belts. The A1 and B6279 define the site boundaries to the west and south respectively. Woodland and a farm access track define the site to the north. To the east is the proposed Cocker Beck Green Wedge separating Branksome and Staindrop Road. The Cocker Beck runs through the site, with a tributary beck along the east boundary. Two overhead power lines cross the site from north to south.
Character area	3: Denton and Walworth Farm



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	Gently undulating site which rises in a north western direction towards the A1.
Landcover	Mainly arable farmland to the north. To the south of the site, and either side of the Cocker Beck, are areas of pasture.
Scale	Rising ground, field pattern size and hedgerow boundaries/ woodland belts contribute to a medium scale site.

Enclosure	Existing development in the form of residential development and roads and embankment planting enclose the site to the east and west.
Condition	Some areas of underused pasture, field boundaries include overgrown hedges and wire fences.
Typicality and rarity	Not considered particularly rare, and not typical of this character area, being more influenced by settlement fringe.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Human activity through traffic noise, views of fast moving traffic on A1 and electricity infrastructure reduce the sense of tranquillity.
Landscape sensitivity	Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	Limited relation to skyline in wider views.
Views and landmarks	None of note.
Inter-visibility	The site is overlooked by residential receptors of the edge of Branksome. The surrounding roads also offer views over the site. However, the site is not considered to be widely overlooked and only offers occasional views to surrounding landscapes to north and south.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	Limited riparian vegetation along minor watercourse on eastern boundary often screens views to site from Branksome.
Visual sensitivity	Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Areas of woodland along watercourses and hedgerow network will provide some habitat value.
Historic environment and settings	The former Barnard Castle Railway passes the north edge of the site.
Recreation	Footpath passes along eastern boundary of the site, linking to the Cocker Beck corridor and to the Barnard Castle Railway cycle path.
Green infrastructure	Connects eastward to the Cocker Beck corridor, which includes open space and wildlife sites, and onward connection to the wider countryside albeit interrupted by the A1.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	Views of the site from the modern residential development to the east are quite limited. The southern part of the site is visible from The B6279 on the approach to Darlington from the west.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	A1 provides a definitive boundary to the west, which is likely to contain any future residential expansion of Darlington into open countryside further west.

Initial comments on landscape fit	Both landscape and visual impact has been considered low in this site, meaning that there is some opportunity for carefully sited and designed residential development.
Potential for mitigation	Retain and enhance footpath network and riparian woodland/ wetland habitat along watercourses. The Cocker Beck is an important green corridor leading into central Darlington, and this corridor should be maintained across the site for people and wildlife. The corridor of the tributary beck to the east of site 100 should also be enhanced to provide a northward green link.

Site number	249 (Land off Staindrop Road, Darlington)
Site area	50ha
Outline description of site	Large area of open arable farmland consisting of a number of large scale irregular fields on the western fringe of Darlington. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	Baydale Beck forms the eastern site boundary beyond which a large, modern housing estate encloses the site. The B6279 and a large farm (Coniscliffe Grange) bound the site to the north whilst a line of electricity pylons creates the more permeable western boundary. Site 41 forms the southern boundary to site 249.
Character area	3: Denton and Walworth Farmland



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	Undulating and gently rising to the northwest towards the farm at Coniscliffe Grange.
Landcover	Mainly arable farmland, notable areas of riparian woodland along the Baydale Beck corridor.
Scale	Large size field pattern, rising ground and hedgerow boundaries contribute to a medium to large scale character.
Enclosure	The site is contained by woodland to the east although boundaries to the north, south are more open, and the telegraph pylons to the west form a more permeable boundary, creating a sense of openness.

Condition	Well maintained intensive farmland, although there are few trees and occasional gaps in hedges.
Typicality and rarity	Not considered to be particularly rare, and relatively typical of this character area, albeit influenced by the A1.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Surrounding busy roads, large farm buildings and pylons result in limited tranquillity.
Landscape sensitivity	Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	Gently rising site with limited relationship to wider skylines.
Views and landmarks	None of note, views are largely contained by undulating landform
Inter-visibility	Occasional views to adjacent landscapes but these are short distance.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	The site is well screened from the housing to the east by woodland along the Baydale. There are open views to the site from the large farm development at Coniscliffe Grange.
Visual sensitivity	Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Riparian Woodland along Baydale Beck corridor will provide habitat value. Wildflower planting to the east of the watercourse was also noted. The site is also directly south of a Green Wedge as designated in Darlington Borough Council's Local Development Plan.
Historic environment and settings	None identified.
Recreation	There are no recreational routes within the site itself. A footpath runs along the eastern boundary of the site adjacent the Baydale Beck.
Green infrastructure	The Baydale Beck, and the Cocker Beck to the north, are identified as local green corridors. The Baydale Beck connects with the Broken Scar Local Wildlife Site and onwards to the River Tees.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The relationship from the site to existing residential development is very limited. It was very difficult to obtain views of the site from the modern residential development to the east, although views of the site were more extensive from the open space and public right of way along the Baydale Beck. The northern edge of the site is along the B6279, and development would be visible from this approach into Darlington from the west.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	The B6279 and Baydale Beck provide robust boundaries to the north and east. Due to the defined boundary of the A1, farmland to the west of the parcel may be more vulnerable to future development if site 249 was built on.

Initial comments on landscape fit	The site is considered to be of low landscape and visual sensitivity and is less likely to be adversely affected by residential development.
Potential for mitigation	Mitigation features could include the protection and enhancement of the Baydale Beck as a green corridor and improved connectivity with the Cocker Beck corridor and the River Tees. The frontage to the B6279 should maintain the openness of the approach into Darlington. Creation of a robust western boundary would be required, to avoid further pressure on the land to the west.

Site number	3 (South of Burtree Lane)
Site area	17ha
Outline description of site	Six irregular shaped fields of farmland (mainly pasture/ rough grassland) located on northern edge of Darlington to north of Drinkfield, between Whessoe Road and Burtree Lane. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	The site wraps around a substation located on Whessoe Road, with open farmland to the north and west. Industrial development and a modern housing development are located along the southern edge, and dispersed development along Burtree Lane.
Character area	4: Whessoe and Dene Beck



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	Gently undulating site with a slight rise towards the northeast.
Landcover	Mainly pastoral farmland with some areas of rough grassland. Field boundaries are typically defined by hedgerows with some more notable areas of woodland surrounding and to the north of the substation.
Scale	Gentle topography, field size and large hedgerows combine to give this site a medium to small scale.
Enclosure	Harder urban edges to south, large hedgerows provide element of enclosure in other directions.

Condition	Medium to low, some areas of farmland, particularly along western edge of site are underused and the presence of the substation, industrial development to the south and overhead lines which crosses the site from west to east affect the rural character.
Typicality and rarity	Not considered rare, and more urban influence than is typical of this character area.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Surrounding roads introduce traffic noise and the proximity of the substation and industrial buildings reduce the perceived tranquillity.
Landscape sensitivity	Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	No relationship to skylines.
Views and landmarks	No landmarks, not widely visible
Inter-visibility	Not widely visible, glimpsed views through hedgerows from surrounding roads. Limited number of houses in modern development to south overlook site (seen beyond a small recreational area with a playground). Potential views from a limited number of properties on surrounding road to west and east.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	Limited visual relationship with the settlement, as the housing to the south-east is screened by mature planting.
Visual sensitivity	Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Hedgerows and woodland offer some habitat potential. There is also a small pond to the far south of the site.
Historic environment and settings	None identified.
Recreation	No recreational value of note.
Green infrastructure	The site is within the River Skerne to Faverdale green corridor, and is located just to the north of Drinkfield Marsh Local Nature Reserve. There are potential links between this wetland and the hedges and trees on site, and existing footpath links could be developed further to link town and country.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	Inward looking modern housing development to the south only has limited relationship with the site and this is mainly focused around the playground to the north which has views over the farmland in the site.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	Existing housing and depot to south provides hard edge in this direction. Roads and scattered housing along the eastern, northern and western edges likely to provide new potential settlement boundaries in these directions.

<p>Initial comments on landscape fit</p>	<p>Both landscape and visual impact has been considered low in this site, meaning that there is some opportunity for carefully sited and designed residential development.</p>
<p>Potential for mitigation</p>	<p>Any new housing development should be focused to the south of the site, contained behind the more northerly line of pylons and linking with the playground/ recreational area located off Tintagel Court. Strengthening the boundary and woodland planting to the north of the site should help to strengthen the settlement boundary and contain any future residential development in this direction. Enhance recreational links southward and seek better links to the wider footpath network to the north.</p>

Site number	8 (Land at Berrymead Farm / Land North of White Horse Pub)
Site area	21ha
Outline description of site	Triangle shaped area of rising farmland to the north of Darlington, immediately west of the linear settlement of Harrowgate Village along the A167, and north of Burtree Lane. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	The southern end of the site and eastern boundary is edged by modern residential development on the edge of Darlington, including a long row of mainly modern detached bungalows along the A167 at Beaumont Hill. The north western edge of the site faces onto open countryside.
Character area	4: Whessoe and Dene Beck



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	Gently undulating and rising in the north towards Tutin Hill.
Landcover	Mainly pastoral farmland with smaller field pattern defined by hedgerows.
Scale	Field boundaries defined by hedgerows and residential edges to east and south, contribute to a medium to small scale character.
Enclosure	Linear settlement of Harrowgate Village and modern residential development on northern edge of Darlington provide hard edges to the east and south. Open countryside along north-western boundary with more limited enclosure on higher ground.

Condition	Some fencing in poor condition and some hedgerows are gappy, however on the whole the farmland appears in good condition.
Typicality and rarity	Not considered rare and relatively typical of farmland in this character area.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Beaumont Hill is a busy road with fast moving traffic which affects the tranquillity of the site. Glare from street lighting, and overhead power lines, also reduce the perceived tranquillity.
Landscape sensitivity	Medium-low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	Gently rising site which does not contribute to any important skylines in wider views, though the higher ground in the middle of the site can be seen from the A167. Overhead power lines cross the southern section of the site.
Views and landmarks	None of note.
Inter-visibility	Limited to receptors along site edges, with glimpsed views from the A167 and views from residential properties facing the site in Beaumont Hill and Harrowgate Hill.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	Properties along Beaumont Hill have glimpsed views through hedgerow and woodland towards the site. The parcel also provides some openness on the approach to Darlington from the north.
Visual sensitivity	Medium-low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Hedgerows and woodland copses provide some habitat interest.
Historic environment and settings	None identified.
Recreation	None identified
Green infrastructure	The site is between two proposed green corridors (the River Skerne strategic corridor and River Skerne to Faverdale local corridors). There are features of note within the site, including hedges and field trees and a minor watercourse, that indicate potential green links and basis for landscape framework.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The site is not widely visible from Darlington although it currently provides a rural backdrop in filtered views through hedgerows from properties along Beaumont Hill, and provides some openness on the northern approach to Darlington.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	The existing settlement boundary at Harrowgate Village is not robust due to the dispersed development along the A167 and Burtree Lane. Northwest boundary of the site faces onto open countryside, and a settlement boundary would have to be formed based on field boundaries.

<p>Initial comments on landscape fit</p>	<p>The landscape on the northern edge of Darlington (southern part of the site) would be less sensitive to development due to proximity to existing settlement along the A167. Narrow ribbon development along the A167 would affect the visual approach into Darlington and should be avoided.</p>
<p>Potential for mitigation</p>	<p>The north western parts of the site, which occupy the highest ground, should remain free of residential development. Strong boundary planting would be required to define a settlement edge to the north and discourage further encroachment into open countryside, which could be combined with green infrastructure along the watercourse.</p>

Site number	185 (Wider Faverdale)
Site area	179ha
Outline description of site	Very large area of farmland incorporating a number of farmsteads (Whessoe Grange, High Faverdale, Bottom House) on the north western edge of Darlington. Allocation: Great Faverdale Strategic Allocation H11 (Mixed Use Allocation H2 and E2)
Landscape context	The site is bounded by modern residential development and a large commercial site to the south. Burtree Lane and Whessoe Road contain the site to the north and east within open farmland beyond. The A1 and A68 form the western boundary of the site. A line of steel lattice pylons crosses the site from southwest to northeast.
Character area	4: Whessoe and Dene Beck





<i>Landscape sensitivity</i>	
Landform	Gently undulating and rising in elevation to the north, with a high point on Whessoe Road. Elevated above much of the surrounding landscape.
Landcover	Mixed farmland, mainly pasture to the southeast and more arable to the northwest. The farmland provides a rural setting to the period farmsteads set within the site. Intact field boundary patterns are evident in the south-west, where there are most trees.
Scale	Field pattern is quite small scale however rising ground and open character contribute to a larger scale feel to the site.
Enclosure	Field boundaries typically formed by lower hedgerows or post and wire fences, though with denser hedges in the south-west that provide more enclosure to smaller fields. The upper parts of the site are relatively exposed.
Condition	Most of the farmland and boundaries appear well maintained.
Typicality and rarity	Not considered to be rare, but is highly typical of the wider Whessoe and Dene Beck character area.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Nearer site edges and busy roads/ large areas of commerce this site has a less tranquil character, however this is a large area of open countryside which has a very rural character.
Landscape sensitivity	High-medium
<i>Visual sensitivity</i>	
Skylines	Gently undulating site with high ground at its heart provides low, relatively indistinct skylines in wider views.
Views and landmarks	Longer distance views to the south towards hills in the North York Moors National Park are obtainable from open areas of higher ground.
Inter-visibility	Longer distance views over the site are obtainable from Whessoe Road to the east and the A1 to the west. The high ground in this site is seen in some long-distance views looking across Darlington.

Visual relationship with existing settlement	Due to the large commercial area and inward looking modern housing development the site does not have a strong visual relationship with Darlington, even at its southern edge.
Visual sensitivity	High-medium
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Woodland copses and hedgerows will provide some habitat value, as well as minor watercourses and ponds. A relatively intact network of dense hedges exists to the south-west.
Historic environment and settings	The site of the medieval village of Whessoe is located to the south of the site, though remains are limited and the site is not scheduled. A number of related features are noted in the Historic Environment Record. The ruins of the manor at Whessoe Grange are Grade II Listed.
Recreation	Public footpath crosses the site from north to south, linking Faverdale and Burtree Lane.
Green infrastructure	The site is crossed by a proposed green corridor running East West through the site and along the rail line linking to Brinkburn Local Nature Reserve. The stream and public footpath provide an important north-south link from the settlement into the countryside.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The site is a highly rural area to the north of Darlington, separated by an area of commerce and an inward looking modern housing development. The site is not widely visible from the settlement, but does include high ground which is seen in longer views and provides containment to the northern edge of Darlington. The western edge is adjacent to the A68 and is visible in the approach to Darlington from the north-west.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	Strong existing settlement boundary along the A68, Rotary Way and woodland around the Argos depot. The A1 and Burtree Lane could form future settlement boundaries, though there are no obvious intermediate boundaries. The A1 is a strong feature in the landscape, though Burtree Lane would require enhancement to form a robust boundary.
Initial comments on landscape fit	This is a large scale, open site which is judged to be of high-medium landscape and visual sensitivity. Development has the potential to overwhelm the rural character of this area, and could be highly visible due to its elevated nature.
Potential for mitigation	The south west corner of the site has the most intact field boundary patterns around the watercourse, which should be retained for their landscape and habitat value. Development will need to be careful designed and integrated in the more visible higher ground across the central and northern parts of the site. It will be important to maintain a strategic green corridor along the eastern and northern boundaries. Further detail is provided in Section 3 of this report.

Site number	251 (Skerningham)
Site area	492ha
Outline description of site	A large irregular shaped parcel to the north of Darlington, between the A167 Durham Road and the A66. The area incorporates mixed farmland, Darlington Golf Course, Skerningham Plantation (Community Woodland) and Skerningham Manor. The parcel forms a flat raised area with the incised valley of the River Skerne to the north. Allocation: Skerningham Strategic Allocation H10 (Housing H2)
Landscape context	The site is bounded to the west by the A167 Durham Road, to the north by the River Skerne and to the south by the urban fringe of Whinfield (North Darlington). The East Coast Mainline Railway runs north-south through the western section of the site. A large broadleaf woodland and the green corridor of the Skerne Valley are located to the north of the parcel and the village of Barmpton is situated outside parcel by the river Skerne.
Character area	5: Upper Skerne Valley & 7: Bishopton Vale





Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	A subtle valley landform which slopes down towards the River Skerne to form small areas of flat floodplain. Higher ground is evident in the central (Skerningham Manor) and western parts of the site (Beaumont Hill).
Landcover	Landcover consists of arable farmland, small areas of pasture and belts of woodland along the River Skerne. Two large woodlands, Hutton and Skerningham Plantations are located in the north of site 251. Recreational facilities are also significant landcover features within the site, including Darlington Golf course to the north west of Whinfield and Springfield Park to the north of Slaters Lane North.
Scale	Scale varies within the site from larger, more open land to the north around Skerningham Manor to medium scale in the central and eastern parts of the parcel where fields are large scale but sloping, to a smaller scale valley landform closer to the River Skerne.
Enclosure	There is a higher degree of enclosure at the settlement edges of Whinfield, Harrogate Village and Beaumont Hill. Throughout the remainder of site 251, enclosure varies from the valley landform and hedgerow field boundaries in the north which contain longer distance views to open countryside to the east and west. Physical enclosure is strongest within the Skerne Valley.
Condition	Arable and pastoral farmland which appears to be in good condition often enclosed with gappy, although well-maintained hedgerows or small woodland blocks. Designed landscapes including the Golf Course are maintained to a high standard. There are some urban fringe influences at settlement edges and laybys where fly tipping has occurred.
Typicality and rarity	The rural character of the majority of the site is typical of the Upper Skerne Valley LCA, although the central area around Skerningham Manor on raised farmland is not a feature commonly associated with this LCA. The majority of the landscape is not rare although the enclosure and extent of woodland along the river valley is considered to be locally rare as it is the only wooded section of the River Skerne.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Tranquillity is particularly notable adjacent the River Skerne and along the many PROWs which cross through the area. The edges of the site, in particular the A167 and railway line to the west provide noise and visual interruption to an otherwise rural site with high levels of perceived tranquillity.

Landscape sensitivity	Medium
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	The gentle undulations of the site mean it has limited relationship to the wider skylines. The northern part of the site forms a skyline when seen from the lower ground within the Skerne Valley.
Views and landmarks	Longer distance views are afforded from the west of the site looking east. The central and eastern parts of the site around Barmpton are largely enclosed by local vegetation and undulating landform. A line of electricity pylons dissects the site and are visually prominent from within the study area and at high points to the west near Beaumont Hill.
Inter-visibility	Intervisibility is limited in the central and eastern parts of the site due to the largely self-contained landscape with limited views to and from the surrounding area. Receptors within Beaumont Hill experience some intervisibility towards the railway line whilst receptors on the A167 and the East Coast Mainline Railway experience glimpsed views across the gently rolling farmland.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	Due to the size of the site, the northern part bears little relationship with Darlington with features such as the railway line and golf course providing a degree of separation. The western and eastern parts of the site provide rural backdrops to properties in Great Burdon and Beaumont Hill. The parcel has a weak visual relationship with Whinfield to the south as properties have limited rear views towards the site.
Visual sensitivity	Medium
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Skerningham and Hutton Plantations form part of a habitat network whilst the River Skerne links to Local Wildlife Sites upstream including Oxbow Lake and Fox Hill Quarry. Extensive areas of woodland across the site, including Skerningham Community Woodland, are of biodiversity value.
Historic environment and settings	The site provides landscape context for Skerningham Manor and Low Skerningham, both Grade II Listed properties. There are also period buildings in Great Burdon, including the mill buildings to the north.
Recreation	A number of footpaths and bridleways cross the site, particularly linking historic settlements east-west including Great Burdon and Barmpton. The woodland plantations to the north offer further recreational access for residents in Darlington. Darlington Golf Course is privately owned and is a well-used local facility. Springfield Park is owned by Darlington Borough Council and located to the south of the site offering a play area and football pitch. Skerningham Community Woodland is an important accessible resource, and there are links to circular routes into the adjacent countryside.

<p>Green infrastructure</p>	<p>The River Skerne is the focus of a strategic green corridor that provides links between town and country from central Darlington to Great Burdon and on past Barmpton. The open nature of this corridor is essential to its function. Skerningham Plantation, also known as Skerningham Community Woodland is an important part of this corridor with connectivity along the river. There is also an existing and potential habitat network along the railway. The community woodland and planting around the golf course provides potential landscape structure and green links into Darlington.</p>
<p>Observations</p>	
<p>Role of the site in settlement setting</p>	<p>The majority of the site does not have a strong relationship with residential development. Some of the central area of the site provides setting for rural farmsteads including Skerningham Manor and Low Skerningham, and parts of the site to the south provide a rural backdrop to Great Burdon and Harrowgate Village, but the fringes of Whinfield and Harrowgate Hill back onto the countryside and have limited interface with the site. The site is not visible from approaches into Darlington, except its southern boundary along the A1150. This route passes through Great Burdon before entering Darlington itself. The southern parts of the site therefore play a role in the setting of Great Burdon and of Darlington.</p>
<p>Existing and potential settlement boundaries</p>	<p>Existing settlement boundaries are predominantly hard at the eastern limits of Whinfield (Brampton Lane area) with limited vegetation. Relationship with future development could be positive at this location. The existing road network (A167, A1150) provides robust edges to the south and west. To the north, the River Skerne forms the northern edge of this site: with its woodland framework this would form a strong long-term boundary to any development. Along the eastern edge of the site there is not currently a boundary feature, with the site extending into open countryside. Existing mature vegetation around the fringes of the golf course provides a softer edge and would require sensitive integration with development. The railway line to the west may also serve as an interim or internal boundary.</p>
<p>Initial comments on landscape fit</p>	<p>The site as a whole has a medium landscape and visual sensitivity level, although there are important variations within this. This means that there are parts of the site, particularly at the urban fringes of Whinfield for example to the north of Galloway (West of Barmpton Lane), and north of Glebe Road (west of the railway) which have the ability to absorb residential development subject to careful siting and design. Other areas are more sensitive, particularly the Skerne Valley itself, and the areas forming the setting of Great Burdon.</p>
<p>Potential for mitigation</p>	<p>Any development within site 251 should retain the green corridors along the River Skerne and the railway line, and the Skerningham Community Woodland. Public access and habitat enhancements should be part of proposals. The setting of Great Burdon, Barmpton, Skerningham Manor and Low Skerningham must be a key consideration.</p> <p>Further detail is provided in Section 3 of this report.</p>

Site number	392 (Elm Tree Farm)
Site area	7ha
Outline description of site	A small area of pastoral farmland to the south of Darlington Golf Course. The site is fully enclosed by mature tree-lined hedgerows. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	Site 392 is bounded to the north and west by the well-maintained landscape of Darlington Golf Course. The southern and eastern fringes are flanked by post-war residential developments and Sparrow Hall Drive. A southern part of the site adjoins Springfield Park, maintained by Darlington Borough Council.
Character area	5: Upper Skerne Valley



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	The site is flat.
Landcover	Landcover is restricted to small pastoral fields bounded by mature hedgerows. A farm steading (Elm Tree Farm) is located centrally within the parcel.
Scale	Due to the field pattern, size and enclosure, the landscape exhibits a small-medium scale.
Enclosure	Apart from a small section along Sparrow Hall Drive, the site is fully enclosed by mature hedges which are particularly robust with varied species adjacent Darlington Golf Course.

Condition	The pasture and the central farmstead appear well maintained, although hedgerows are overgrown.
Typicality and rarity	The landscape does not display any particularly rare features, and is relatively typical of this Landscape Character Area.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	The landscape is rural and offers a high level of tranquillity bearing in mind proximity to the urban fringe.
Landscape sensitivity	Medium-Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	There is no visual relationship between the site and the skyline.
Views and landmarks	There are no landmarks and limited views from the locality.
Inter-visibility	The site is largely self-contained with very limited intervisibility due to mature boundary vegetation.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	The western portion of the site has a physical distinction from nearby settlement. The eastern side of the site is closer to the urban fringe of Whinfield but bears little visual relationship with a high degree of mature planting creating a soft edge to the settlement. There are a few properties on Sparrow Hall Drive which face onto the southern boundary across the road and have a direct visual relationship with the site.
Visual sensitivity	Medium-Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Natural heritage is confined to field hedgerows.
Historic environment and settings	None of note.
Recreation	There is a public right of way in the eastern part of the site providing local recreational connectivity, and a play area/open space in the southern corner. The site itself forms the vehicular arrival to Darlington Golf Course in the north.
Green infrastructure	The site has the potential to play an important green link between Springfield Park and the surrounding countryside, in particular Darlington Golf Course, a mature designed landscape.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The site has limited relationship to the surrounding residential settlement pattern with properties on Kilmarnock Road and Argyll Close. There is a direct visual relationship with residences on Sparrow Hall Drive, and the southern part of the site could be considered to create an element of landscape setting for such properties, albeit separated by Sparrow Hall Drive.

<p>Existing and potential settlement boundaries</p>	<p>Existing settlement boundary to the east is relatively robust with mature vegetation providing a green buffer. Existing and potential boundaries to the south would be contained by Sparrow Hall Drive, although boundaries to the north and west would require reinforcement to allow separation between the site and existing green infrastructure at Springfield Park and Darlington Golf Course.</p>
<p>Initial comments on landscape fit</p>	<p>The southern part of the site adjacent Sparrow Hall Drive exhibits slightly higher landscape sensitivity due to the relationship with the existing settlement opposite. The central and western parts of the site are more visually contained by localised planting and would represent a lower degree of landscape and visual sensitivity to potential development</p>
<p>Potential for mitigation</p>	<p>There is opportunity for reinforcement of local recreational and green infrastructure links particularly west towards Springfield Park and north towards the River Skerne.</p>

Site number	20 (Great Burdon)
Site area	88ha
Outline description of site	A large, open site incorporating several large-scale arable fields on the eastern fringe of Darlington, west of the A66. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	The site is located to the east of Darlington and the River Skerne, wrapping around the historic village of Great Burdon. The eastern and southern boundaries are defined by the A66 and B6279 respectively. The site is bounded to the west by the River Skerne and the existing settlement limits of the suburb of Haughton Le Skerne. The A1150 forms the northern perimeter to the site.
Character area	8: Middleton Farmland



<i>Landscape sensitivity</i>	
Landform	A gently undulating landscape predominantly rising from the south to the north with an elevated ridge in the central part of the parcel, south of Great Burdon.
Landcover	Landcover is predominantly arable farmland but there is pasture and set-aside land around the fringes of Great Burdon and along the River Skerne. Fields are bounded by low hedges with occasional trees.

Scale	Due to the field size, landform and low hedgerows offering more expansive views, the landscape exhibits a medium-large scale.
Enclosure	The site is relatively open to the east, south and west along the existing road and river corridors where vegetation is intermittent. Landform and existing settlement contain the site to the south-west but again, it is more open to the north where field boundaries are fences rather than hedges.
Condition	The farmland appears to be well maintained although there is an absence of hedgerows in the northern section of the site.
Typicality and rarity	From initial inspection, the site does not appear to exhibit particularly rare landscape features in the eastern part, although part of the landscape to the west is designated as Green Wedge and is likely to have a higher landscape sensitivity.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	The site edges adjacent busy trunk roads including the A66, offer lesser degrees of tranquillity due to noise and lighting interference, whereas the northern part of the site around Great Bardon has a more rural character.
Landscape sensitivity	High-Medium
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	The site does not contribute to any important skyline features.
Views and landmarks	There are far-ranging views across the site from the southern perimeter, particularly from the elevated position of the footbridge over the A66. A ridge within the central part of the site restricts views to the northern area. There are extensive views north towards the windfarm north of Barmpton.
Inter-visibility	There is intervisibility to the east of site 20, particularly towards the elevated settlement of Sadberge. The sloping landform to the south and settlement enclosure to the north and west limits the visual relationship.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	There is a degree of physical separation between the site and the existing settlement edge and therefore the relationship is more limited. Properties in Haughton Le Skerne to the south west have their backs to the site with amenity green space and vegetation acting as a buffer to the site edge.
Visual sensitivity	Medium
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Natural heritage within the site is confined to the River Skerne corridor and the limited vegetation located at field boundaries. There is a Local Wildlife Site at Red Hall immediately adjacent the site to the south west, and some of the land within the western part of the parcel is designated as a proposed Green Wedge according to Darlington Borough Council Planning Policy.
Historic environment and settings	There is a Scheduled Monument, a World War II Bombing Decoy Control Shelter, located 600m south east of Great Burdon Farm. The landscape surrounding this feature will maintain a higher degree of sensitivity in relation to the setting of this feature.

Recreation	A bridleway cuts north-south through the site linking the village of Great Burdon with south east Darlington suburbs including Red Hall.
Green infrastructure	There is opportunity to enhance and reinforce the green infrastructure along the River Skerne and create links with Red Hall Local Wildlife Site.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The site bears limited relationship with the surrounding settlement. The site is in close proximity to on-going development south of the B6279. Due to the openness on the southern boundary the site does form a gateway into eastern Darlington along the B6279.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	The surrounding road network provides a robust boundary to the east and south of the site, containing any future development. The River Skerne to the west also provides a more definitive boundary, although field boundaries to the north could be reinforced to provide separation between any proposed development and the historic village of Great Burdon.
Initial comments on landscape fit	The southern part of the site adjacent the B6279 is lower lying and opposite an existing development site. This area would therefore exhibit a lower landscape and visual sensitivity to development than the more elevated central and northern parts of the site which also provide landscape setting for the Scheduled Monument. The area within the site which is designated Green Wedge will also have a higher landscape sensitivity to development.
Potential for mitigation	Local recreation and green infrastructure links surrounding Red Hall Local Wildlife Site could be strengthened and existing vegetation along the road corridors reinforced to enhance green connectivity. Planting along the River Skerne could also be reinforced to strengthen this feature as a green corridor and create more robust links to the proposed Green Wedge portion of the site.

Site number	243 (Snipe Lane, Hurworth Moor)
Site area	34ha
Outline description of site	Large area of pastoral farmland on the southern fringe of Darlington west of the Darlington Arena stadium. The site includes two large farm steadings and associated outbuildings, and a number of cottages to the north. Geneva Wood Local Nature Reserve is a distinctive feature adjacent the site. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	The A66 trunk road bounds the site to the south whilst Neasham Road forms the eastern boundary. Woodland blocks between the site and the two rail lines create the northern and eastern boundaries. The rail lines which further enclose the site west and north are the east-coast mainline and the local line to Middlesbrough.
Character area	9: Lower Skerne and Hurworth Moor



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	The site is relatively flat with little topographical variation.
Landcover	Landcover is mainly pasture with tall hedgerows enclosing fields. This provides a relatively rural setting for the farmsteads and cottages located within the site.
Scale	The field pattern and size and sense of enclosure contributed by surrounding hedgerows create a medium scale landscape.

Enclosure	Field boundaries are typically formed by taller, mature hedgerows dominated by hawthorn species. Pony paddocks around the farm steadings are enclosed by modern post and wire fences.
Condition	Most of the farmland in the south appears in good condition. There is evidence of fly-tipping along minor roads, and the out-buildings and farm infrastructure along the track at the northern boundary give an urban fringe feel to the landscape.
Typicality and rarity	The site is typical of the Lower Skerne and Hurworth Moor LCA, exhibiting a number of the urban fringe qualities associated with this landscape. It is not considered to be a rare landscape.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	The A66, railway line and stadium introduce human influence, including lighting, into the landscape and reduce the sense of tranquillity.
Landscape sensitivity	Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	The site is not important in skyline views.
Views and landmarks	Longer distance views are contained by the flat landform and localised mature vegetation. The nearby stadium is visible from within the site.
Inter-visibility	Due to the rail lines, topography and site vegetation there is limited intervisibility with the surrounding landscape.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	The site does not have a strong visual relationship with Darlington due to the intervening railway and woodland. The rural properties located within the parcel have more visual interaction with the landscape but localised planting and positioning of properties looking away from the main site reduce this relationship.
Visual sensitivity	Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Apart from hedgerow vegetation and small wooded copses, there are no natural heritage features within the site. Geneva Wood Local Nature Reserve adjoins the site to the north and Brankin Moor Local Nature Reserve is east of the site.
Historic environment and settings	None to note.
Recreation	There are several Public Rights of Way crossing through the site, providing local recreational access to the Local Nature Reserves, the River Skerne to the west and forming circular routes accessible from the Darlington urban fringe.
Green infrastructure	There are relatively good green infrastructure links in existence along the rail corridors, although green infrastructure could be enhanced along the A66 and Neasham Road to improve landscape integration at these boundaries.

Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The site provides the rural setting for two farmsteads and a number of cottages, but otherwise has limited relationship with the urban fringe of Darlington, separated by the two railway lines. Neasham Road is a local approach to Darlington from villages to the south.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	There are robust development boundaries created by Neasham Road and the A66. The woodland planting to the west and north along the East Coast Mainline creates a green buffer which should be retained to prevent development up to the limits of the rail line.
Initial comments on landscape fit	The low landscape and visual sensitivity in the parcel will be relatively consistent across the site.
Potential for mitigation	There is opportunity to strengthen boundaries along the A66 and Neasham Road with planting to create green corridors and a green arrival into Darlington from the West. There is also potential to bolster green links between Geneva Wood Local Nature Reserve and Brankin Moor Local Nature Reserve. Development of the site should integrate the existing cottages on the site.

Site number	89 (Land west of Oak Tree, Middleton St George)
Site area	3ha
Outline description of site	Three small fields, with a house and stables to the east, enclosed by a dense line of mature trees and woodland. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	The site is located between the settlement of Middleton St George and Oak Tree, and is bounded by Yarm Road to the south and the railway line to the north, with the A67 beyond.
Character area	8: Middleton Farmland



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	Relatively flat.
Landcover	Pasture and rough grassland, with farm buildings. The area appears to be used for horses.
Scale	Small scale field pattern and enclosed site.
Enclosure	A dense belt of trees encloses the site to all sides.
Condition	Areas of grass are quite overgrown with weeds and appear underused.
Typicality and rarity	Not considered rare or representative of the wider Middleton Farmland.

Tranquillity including noise and lighting	A busy road and railway to the north introduce traffic noise, however the enclosing woodland belt provides some element of tranquillity.
Landscape sensitivity	Medium-Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	Flat and enclosed by woodland so no relationship to skyline.
Views and landmarks	No landmarks and not visible in wider views.
Inter-visibility	Inter-visibility is very limited. Glimpsed views through small gaps in woodland are available from Yarm Road to south.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	Due to surrounding woodland and elevated railway line, the site has a limited visual relationship with settlements to either side. Caution should be taken with development in this location in order to prevent coalescence with the neighbouring settlement of Oak Tree
Visual sensitivity	Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Broadleaf woodland and hedgerows surrounding the site link into wider hedgerow and vegetation network and provide some habitat value. The woodlands to the north of the railway line are a Local Nature Reserve.
Historic environment and settings	The Stockton & Darlington Railway trackbed is to the north, still in use in this section.
Recreation	None identified.
Green infrastructure	The site is adjacent to the Stockton & Darlington Railway trackbed which forms the spine of a strategic green corridor. Woodland and green space on this site provide an important link between the Local Nature Reserve and the countryside to the south.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The site provides an area of open ground, which plays an important role in providing separation between settlements of Middleton St George and Oak Tree, especially when driving along the Yarm Road.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	Existing residential and commercial development to the west, residential development to the east and the road/railway network to the north would contain any development on this site.
Initial comments on landscape fit	Developing this site would result in continuous residential development between Middleton St George and Oak Tree and could set a precedent for continued residential expansion to the south in an area of open countryside.
Potential for mitigation	If site were to be developed it would be important to retain and enhance the surrounding woodland belt, and seek to provide links north to the Local Nature Reserve.

Site number	99 (Maxgate Farm, Middleton St George)
Site area	14ha
Outline description of site	The site is formed of smaller fields of farmland, located on the north western edge of the settlement of Middleton St George. A group of agricultural buildings is set within a belt of woodland by a watercourse which flows through the northwest of the site. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	Set on the edge of a settlement, with housing along Station Road to the east, and a new housing development across Darlington Road to the north. Three reservoir ponds are located within woodland to the south with open countryside to the west.
Character area	8: Middleton Farmland



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	Relatively flat, the ground rises to the northwest of the site.
Landcover	Mainly pasture separated by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees. A more substantial belt of woodland to the northwest around the farmstead.
Scale	Small scale field pattern, flat land and large hedgerows result in this area having quite a small scale.

Enclosure	Residential development to the north and south. Banking around the reservoir and a substantial hedgerow with trees to the west gives the site an enclosed character. The field to the north west is more open along the western boundary, although rising ground in this area encloses the site.
Condition	Pastoral farmland and hedgerows are in good condition, with intact field boundaries and trees.
Typicality and rarity	Not considered rare, though relatively typical of the Middleton Farmland character area, despite settlement fringe influence.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Road to immediate north and east introduces some traffic noise. Street lighting along Station Road would also be apparent through gaps in housing along western side of this street.
Landscape sensitivity	Medium-low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	Flat and largely enclosed by hedgerows with mature trees and residential development, so no relationship to skylines.
Views and landmarks	No landmarks and not visible in wider views.
Inter-visibility	Rear views from properties along Station Road are available. The north eastern parcel of land is also visible from Station Road, beyond a low post and rail fence, and from the public house and properties which face south and west along the road.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	Site has quite a strong visual relationship with northern edge of Middleton St George, especially near the Fighting Cocks pub, with properties fronting onto the open farmland which contributes to a 'village green' character.
Visual sensitivity	Medium-low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Large mature hedgerows and belts of woodland will provide some habitat value, as well as the watercourse flowing through the site.
Historic environment and settings	None identified.
Recreation	Two footpaths cross southern field and provide access to reservoirs and to the wider footpath network beyond.
Green infrastructure	The watercourse on the site flows south into Neasham Stell, and therefore forms part of a habitat network.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The site provides views of open farmland from properties along Station Road and from the public house. The north-east corner of the site contributes to the rural setting of this part of Middleton St George. The rising farmland to the west of Maxgate Farm has a stronger relationship with the open countryside to the west, beyond the village boundary.

Existing and potential settlement boundaries	The settlement boundary along Station Road is relatively weak with gaps in the houses on the west side of the road. The reservoirs to the south and the watercourse could provide logical settlement boundaries in this site, though the north-west corner is more open.
Initial comments on landscape fit	Assessment on the landscape and visual sensitivity of this site has suggested that it would be less vulnerable to change from development, although the approach in to Middleton St George along Station Road could be affected.
Potential for mitigation	Retain open farmland to west of Maxgate and the watercourse to limit residential expansion beyond village boundary. Retain and enhance the watercourse corridor around Maxgate, with open space linking to the wider network. Keep area of open ground opposite public house and design housing to face onto this to strengthen 'village green' character. Retain and enhance footpath links.

Site number	146 (Land South of Railway, Middleton St George)
Site area	15ha
Outline description of site	The central part of the site is a transport and storage depot in active use with buildings, hard standing and security fencing. The land to the east and west are small sized pastoral fields. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	The site is located south of the railway line and Yarm Road. A new housing development is currently being constructed north of the site between the Railway line and Yarm Road. The western boundary is defined by a mix of modern and older terraced housing off Middleton Lane. The east and south sides of the site are bounded by gappy hedgerows and the continuation of Yarm Road.
Character area	8: Middleton Farmland



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	A flat site.
Landcover	A mix of hard standing associated with the storage depot and grazed and underused pasture. Boundary hedgerows are predominantly overgrown hawthorn with occasional ash trees.
Scale	Small to medium scale fields and storage depot (two storey buildings, lorry parking areas).

Enclosure	Mainly enclosed with substantial hedges on all sides.
Condition	Unused pasture, overgrown hedges, unmade paths and temporary soil storage give this site a more neglected feel.
Typicality and rarity	Not considered a rare or particularly representative landscape in the context.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	Not a tranquil location due to active storage depot, adjacent road and railway line and nearby housing construction activity which is clearly audible.
Landscape sensitivity	Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	No relationship to skylines.
Views and landmarks	No landmarks, limited views out.
Inter-visibility	The site can be viewed from Yarm Road and the minor road to the east of the site, where the depot is quite prominent. It is also visible from the railway and from residential properties on Chapel Street to the West. Apart from this, the site is not widely visible.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	Located on the opposite side of the railway tracks, there is little relationship with the settlement. There is some visual relationship from residential developments to the west off Middleton Lane.
Visual sensitivity	Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	Natural heritage is limited to the woodland blocks and hedges surrounding the site and along the rail corridor.
Historic environment and settings	A low brick bridge gives pedestrian access through the site under the railway line, north-south.
Recreation	A public right of way dissects the site to the west of the storage depot linking to a wider local footpath network.
Green infrastructure	The site is connected to woodland along the railway embankment and to the local hedgerow network. The site provides recreational links between the housing north of Yarm Road, the open countryside to the south, and Middleton One Row beyond.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	Plays a very limited role in the setting of the settlement as it is not widely visible from Middleton St George or the surrounding area. Yarm Road serves as a gateway into Middleton St George from the south with a 'Welcome to Middleton St George' sign located adjacent to the site. The eastern part of the site therefore provides separation between Middleton St George and Oak Tree, as viewed from Yarm Road.

<p>Existing and potential settlement boundaries</p>	<p>The railway is a strong existing settlement boundary. Outer boundaries of the site are dense hedges which could form settlement boundaries. There is a weaker settlement boundary to the rear of properties at Chapel Lane, west of the site. Potentially robust boundary to the south of the site and along the minor road, but weaker around the eastern site, which adjoins the 'Middleton Hall' retirement development.</p>
<p>Initial comments on landscape fit</p>	<p>The site has been assessed as a relatively low landscape and visual sensitivity to development, due mainly to its enclosure and lack of visibility / connectivity. The eastern parcel would be of higher sensitivity as it does not relate as well to the settlement form.</p>
<p>Potential for mitigation</p>	<p>Potential to retain and enhance trees/hedges, and expand boundary planting to form a robust settlement boundary. There is also the opportunity to enhance local habitat and access networks and link to the railway embankment. Access to the site is uncertain, and would likely impact on the large hedges and trees along the boundaries.</p>

Site number	375 (Land South of High Stell Middleton St George)
Site area	7ha
Outline description of site	Two small fields (arable and pasture) located on the western edge of Middleton St George. Allocation: Housing H2
Landscape context	Situated on the edge of the settlement bounded on the east by a 20 th Century Housing development. Open farmland is to the north (a committed housing development) and west, and the railway line to Middlesbrough forms the southern boundary.
Character area	8: Middleton Farmland



Landscape sensitivity	
Landform	Relatively flat.
Landcover	Two fields of arable and pasture enclosed by mature hedgerows.
Scale	Medium scale, flat site largely enclosed by hedges.
Enclosure	Large hedgerows with occasional mature trees enclose the site to the north, and west and a woodland belt creates the southern enclosure along the rail line. The housing to the east provides a harder edge.
Condition	Large fields with intact field boundaries. There is evidence of fly-tipping adjacent the site.

Typicality and rarity	The site is relatively typical of Middleton Farmland Landscape Character and is not considered to be rare.
Tranquillity including noise and lighting	The railway to the south exerts an audible influence on the site whilst street lighting from the neighbouring residential development is also visible, reducing the tranquillity and rurality of the landscape.
Landscape sensitivity	Low
Visual sensitivity	
Skylines	The site has limited relationship with the skyline.
Views and landmarks	There are no landmarks on the site and it is not visible in wider views.
Inter-visibility	Views are relatively contained within the site. There is some visibility from the rear of adjacent properties and glimpsed views from the railway line.
Visual relationship with existing settlement	There is no strong visual relationship with the existing settlement of Middleton St George. Properties along Grendon Gardens have upper rear views over the site due to mature buffer planting.
Visual sensitivity	Low
Landscape value	
Natural heritage	The hedgerows and woodland belt along the railway provide some habitat value.
Historic environment and settings	None identified.
Recreation	The site is crossed by a number of Public Rights of Way which provide access to the reservoir to the north and the network of local footpaths west of Middleton St George.
Green infrastructure	The site provides important recreational connections at a local level and contributes to woodland and hedgerow networks. There is potential for improving green infrastructure links to the north around the reservoirs which are designated Local Green Space. The railway line forms a local green corridor.
Observations	
Role of the site in settlement setting	The site is not widely visible. Modern expansion housing to the east is inward facing with limited interaction with the surrounding countryside.
Existing and potential settlement boundaries	Boundaries to the south and east are robust, contained by the railway line and housing, although boundaries to the west would require reinforcement to prevent further expansion into open countryside. The land to the north is identified as Committed Housing Allocation, and therefore masterplanning for this site should integrate the northern boundary of site 375 to ensure appropriate design and development at a future stage.
Initial comments on landscape fit	With careful design, this site could be considered as an expansion of housing development identified in the Committed Allocation parcel to the north with access from this new development.

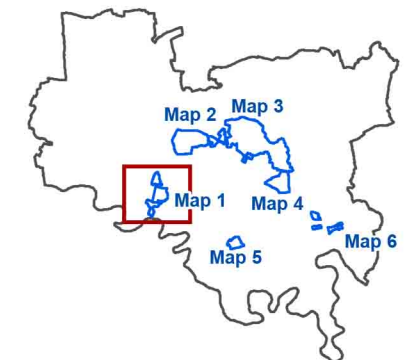
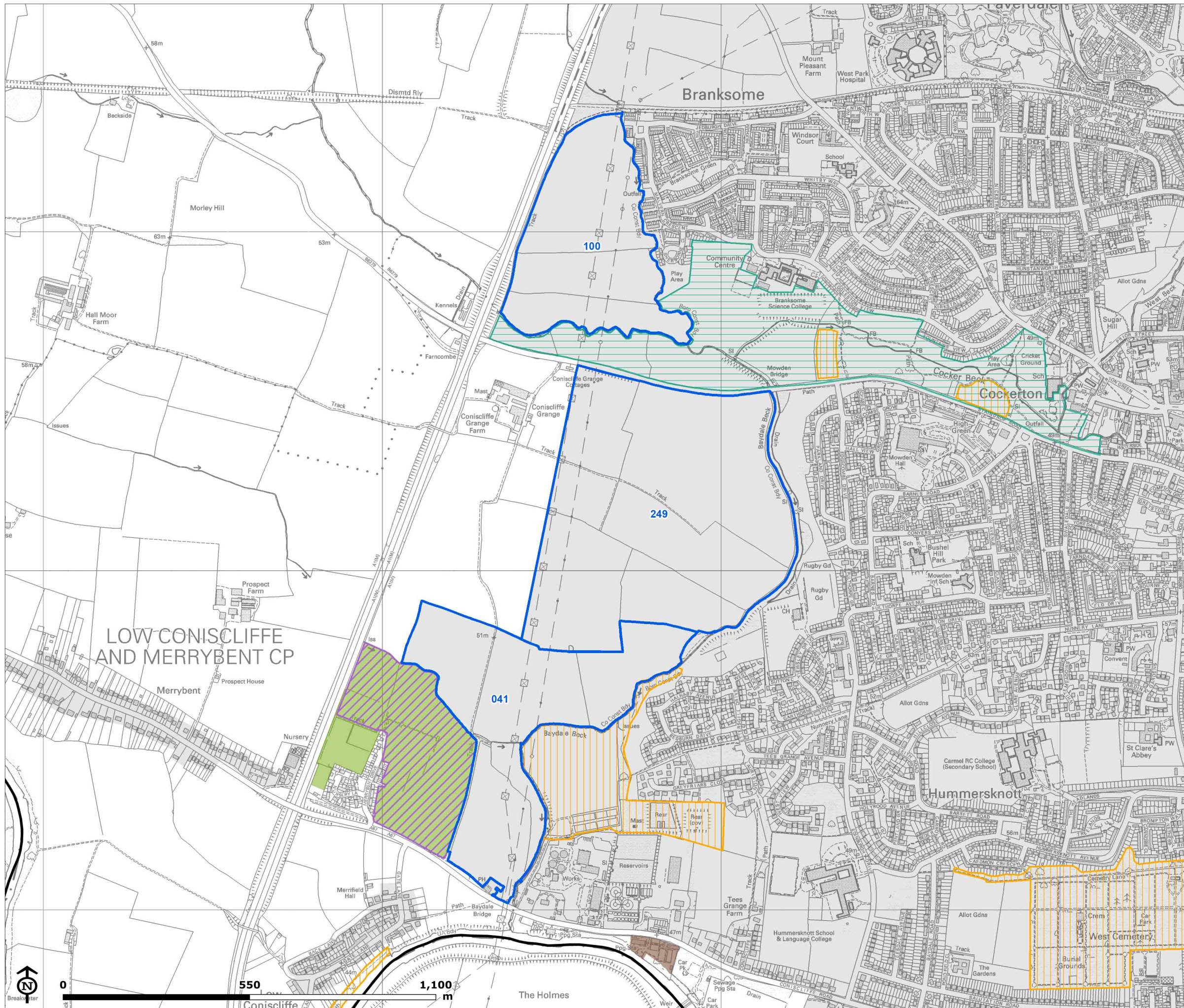
Potential for mitigation	Retention of the existing footpath network and onward connections and strengthening of boundary planting, particularly along the western perimeter to provide a more robust boundary for potential development.
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Appendix 2 Overview Maps 1-6

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND CAPACITY STUDY

Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites - Map 1

-  Darlington Borough Council
-  Study Area
-  Development Limit
-  Scheduled Monument
-  Local Wildlife Site
-  Proposed Green Wedge
-  Community Woodland
-  Proposed Local Green Space



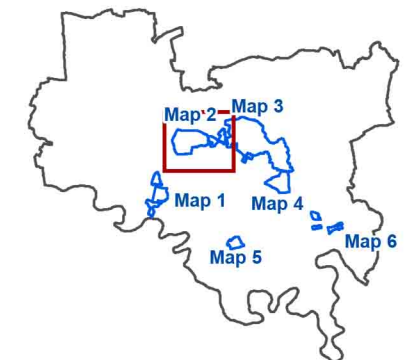
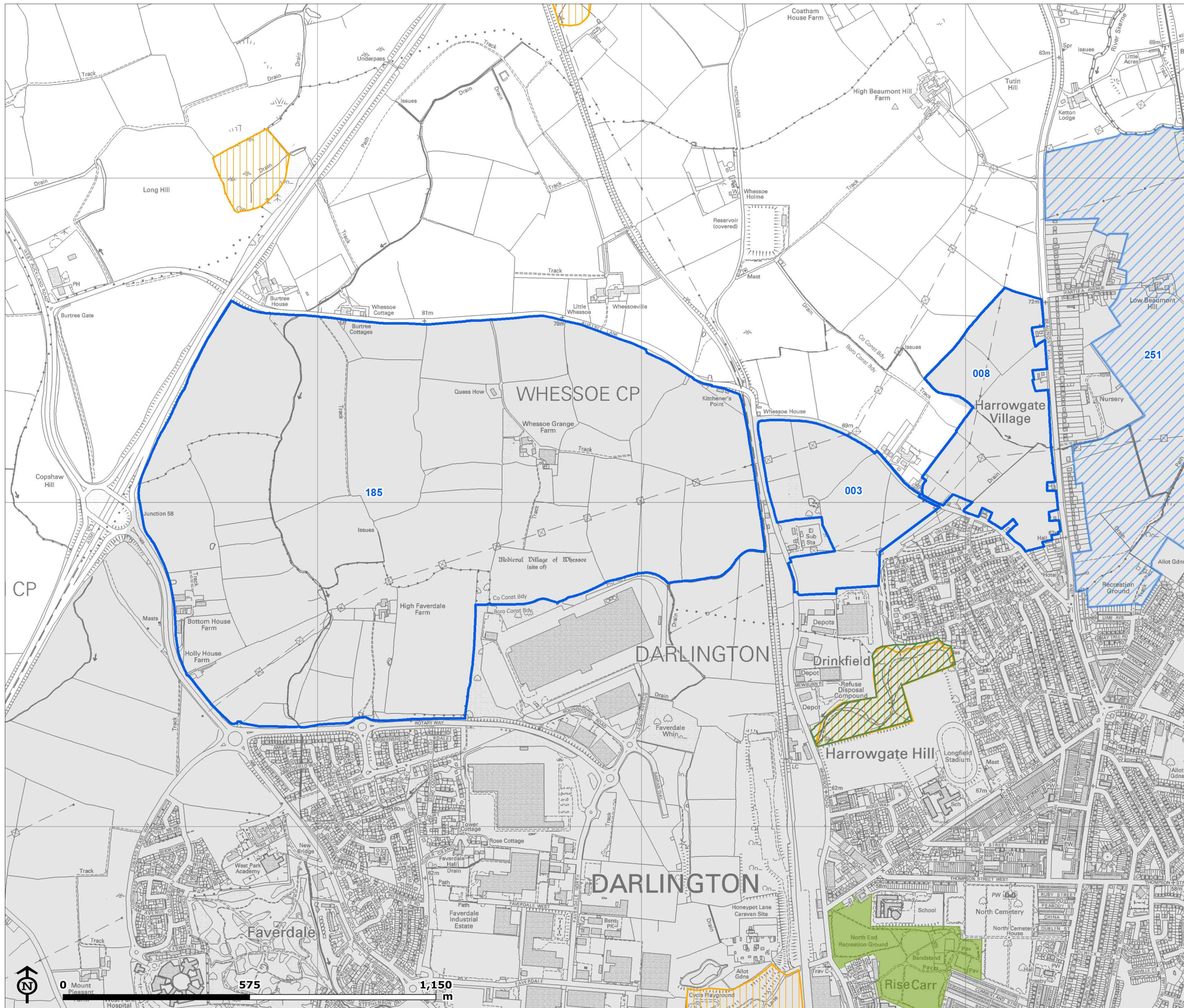
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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND CAPACITY STUDY

Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites - Map 2

-  Darlington Borough Council
-  Study Area
-  Other Study Area
-  Development Limit
-  Local Nature Reserve
-  Local Wildlife Site
-  Proposed Local Green Space



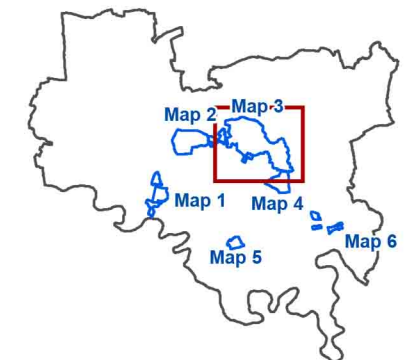
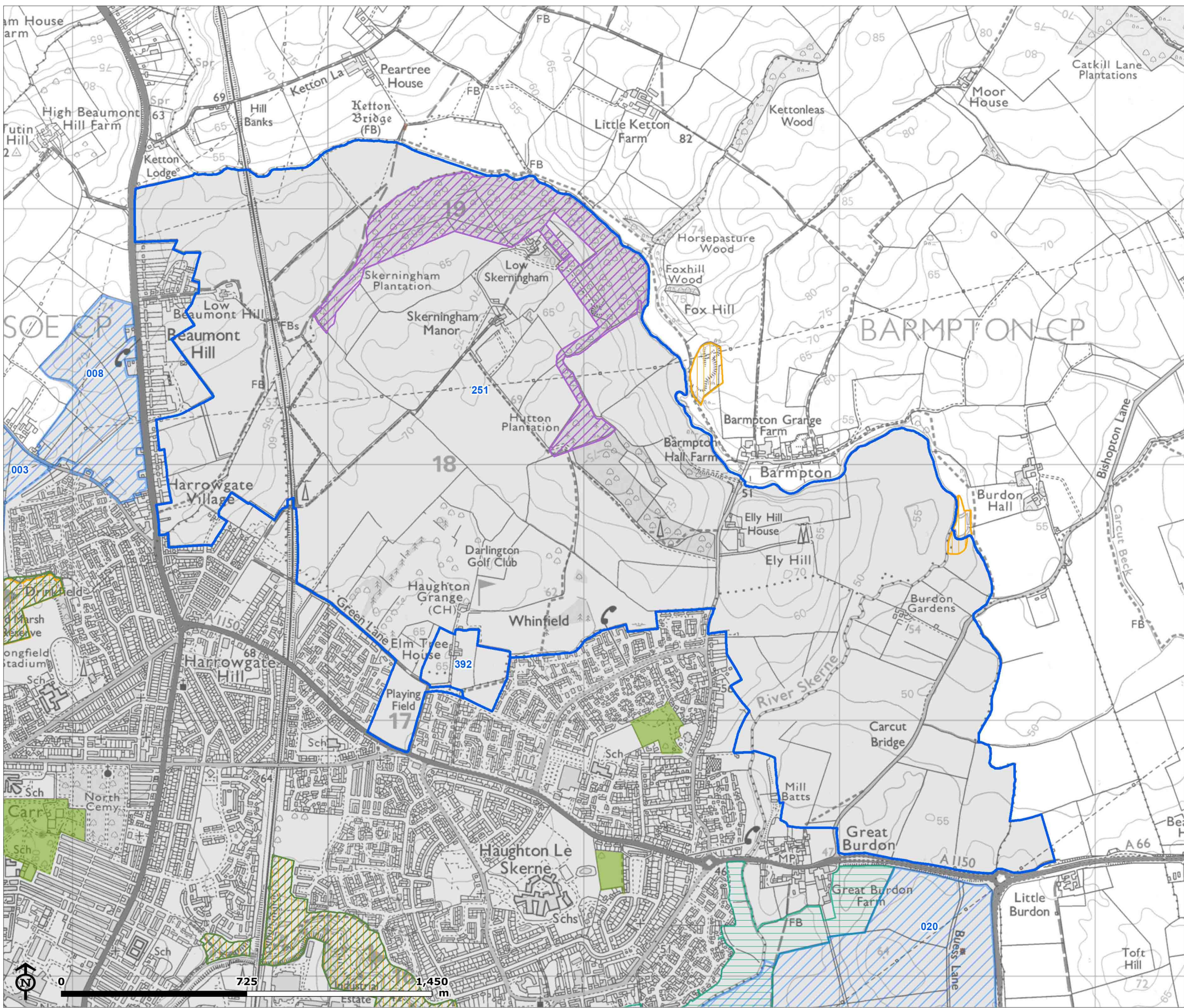
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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND CAPACITY STUDY

Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites - Map 3

-  Darlington Borough Council
-  Study Area
-  Other Study Area
-  Development Limit
-  Scheduled Monument
-  Local Nature Reserve
-  Local Wildlife Site
-  Proposed Green Wedge
-  Community Woodland
-  Proposed Local Green Space

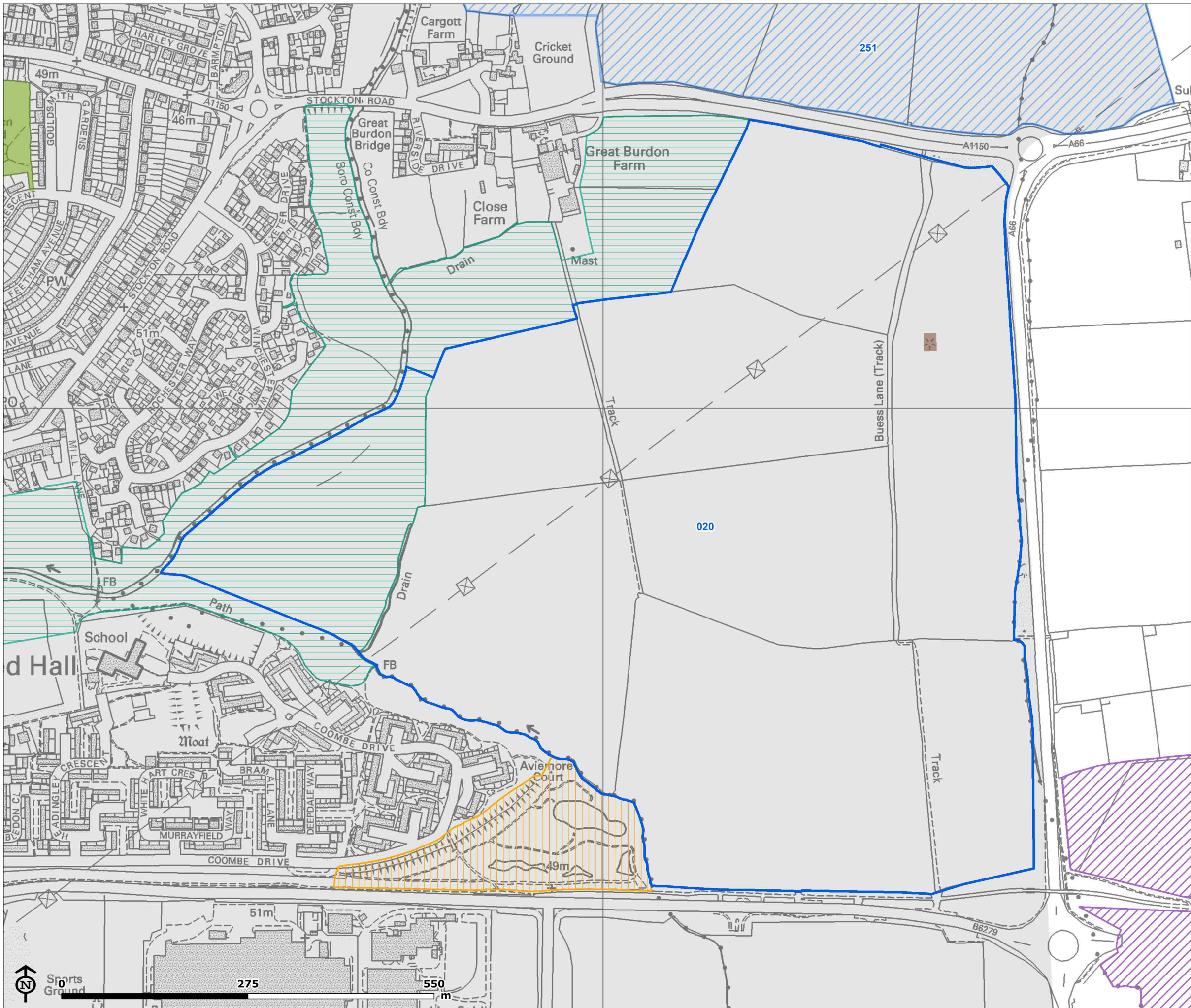


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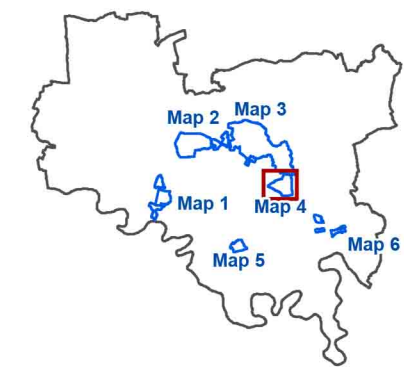


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND CAPACITY STUDY

Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites - Map 4



- Darlington Borough Council
- Study Area
- Other Study Area
- Development Limit
- Local Wildlife Site
- Proposed Green Wedge
- Community Woodland
- Proposed Local Green Space





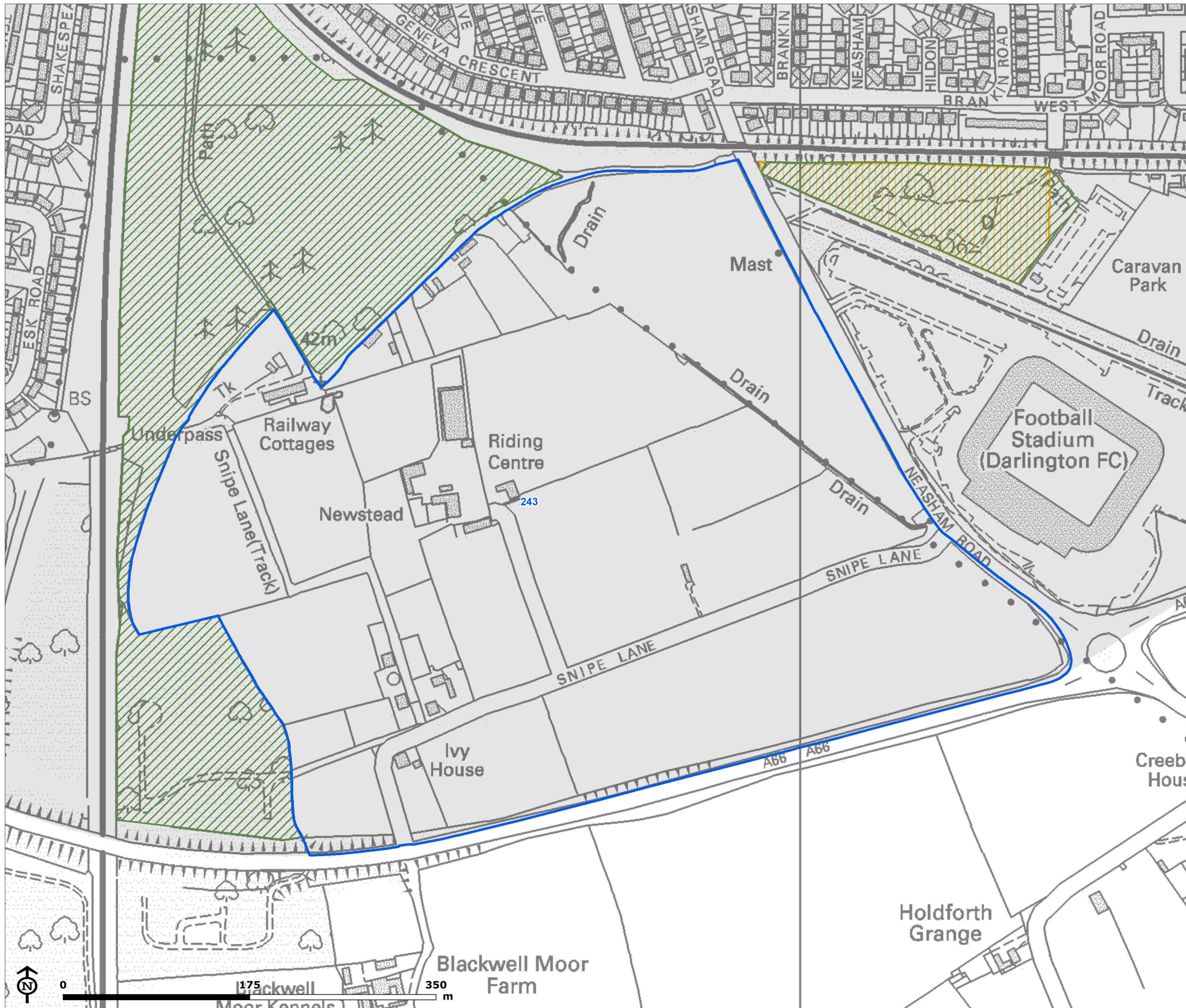
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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND CAPACITY STUDY

Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites - Map 5

-  Darlington Borough Council
-  Study Area
-  Development Limit
-  Local Nature Reserve
-  Local Wildlife Site



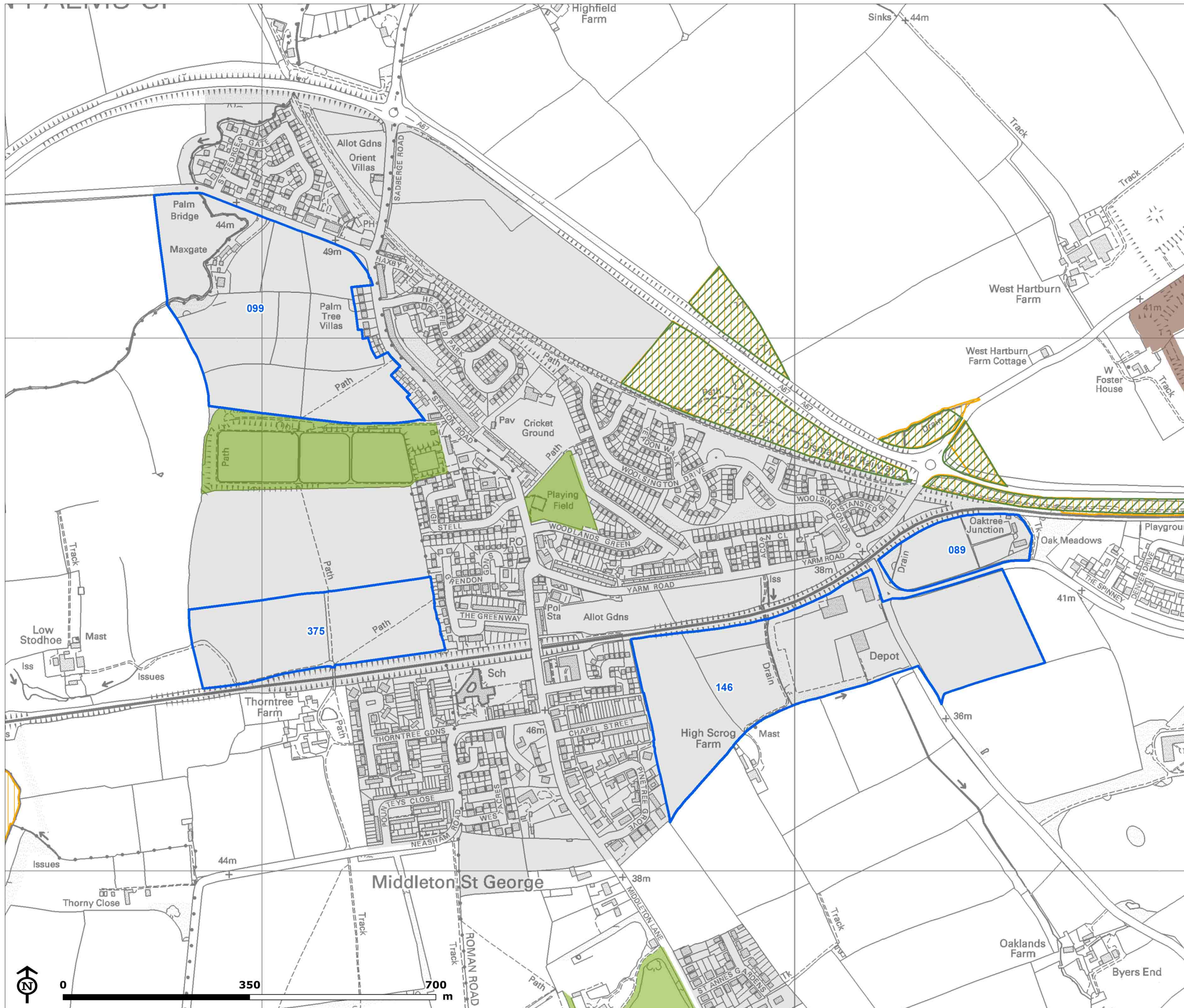
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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND CAPACITY STUDY

Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites - Map 6

-  Darlington Borough Council
-  Study Area
-  Development Limit
-  Scheduled Monument
-  Local Nature Reserve
-  Local Wildlife Site
-  Proposed Local Green Space



Map Scale @ A3: 1:7,000

