

**South Staffordshire Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan
Consultation May 2024**

Representations on behalf of Bericote

Land at Gravelly Way and Vicarage Road, Four Ashes

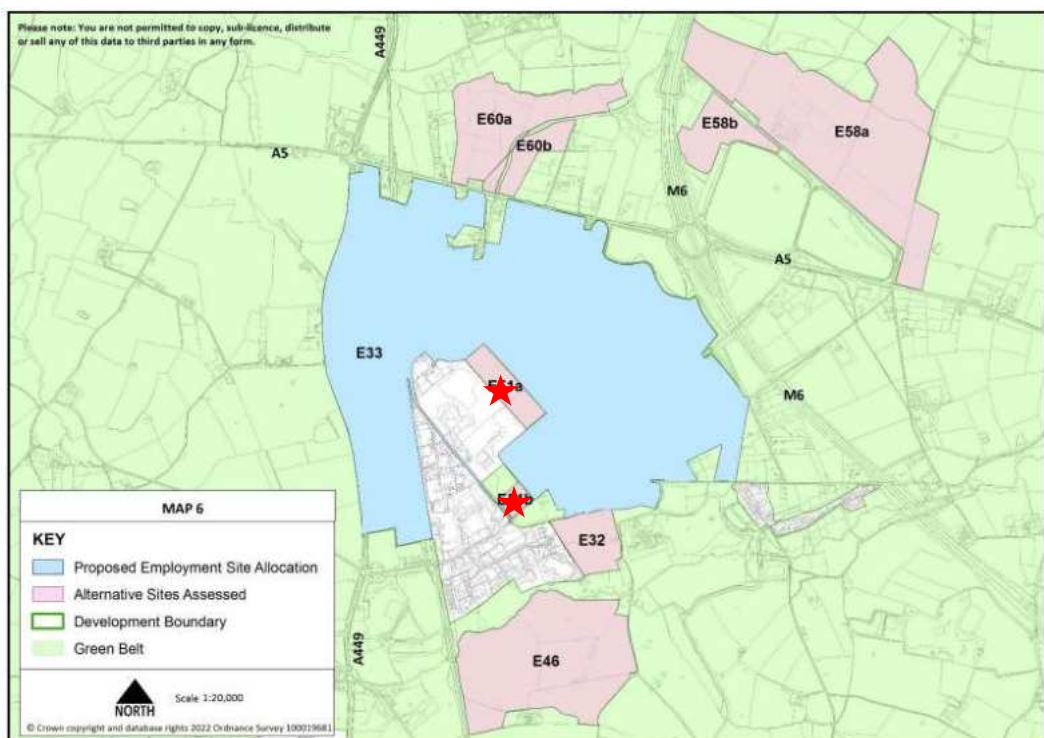
“Bericote Four Ashes” and previous site references E51a and E51b

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Executive Summary

1. Bericote are a specialist logistics developer. They control sites E51a and E51b at Four Ashes. They are concerned that the Plan is unsound as drafted, on the following grounds:
 - 1) The selection of allocated sites is not based on evidence. Poor performing sites have been allocated. Bericote's sites score better than proposed allocations. Allocating sites which are less sustainable and less market attractive than Bericote's sites is both illogical and not supported by evidence. Appendix C of the Employment Land Site Assessment Topic Paper clearly shows Bericote's site performing better than proposed allocation Site E30.
 - 2) The impact of West Midlands Interchange (Site E33) on the Green Belt has not been properly considered. That permission, and proposed allocation, will completely undermine the essential characteristic of the Green Belt- which is to remain open. WMI will have a major urbanising influence on the Green Belt immediately around Four Ashes. In practical terms, Bericote's sites at Four Ashes will become isolated islands of Green Belt surrounded by major industrial units (see plans below). Leaving it in the Green Belt is a policy contrivance. The entire area should be removed from the Green Belt, to reflect the practical effects of the WMI DCO permission.





- 3) There is no choice and flexibility in the supply of Employment Land. There are only 2 sites available for small to mid-box logistics units- at ROF Featherstone (Site E18) and the new allocation at J13, Dunstan (Site E30). There are deliverability concerns around ROF Featherstone, which provides the majority of the supply for B8 development (36Ha). Bericote's site at Gravelly Way (Site E51a) should be allocated to provide more choice, in a location close to West Midlands Interchange where there will be increased demand for supply chain services.
2. Bericote seek allocation, and the removal from Green Belt, of their land at Gravelly Way (site E51a). It sits between an existing major strategic employment site and West Midlands Interchange and will perform no discernible Green Belt function once West Midlands Interchange is developed- even if WMI is not removed from the Green Belt, it will be a major urbanising influence that undermines the purpose of the designation and the extent to which Bericote's sites can perform it's essential functions.
3. Bericote also control land at Vicarage Road (site E51b), although they intend to provide landscape and ecological mitigation on this area. This site also performs no Green Belt function and should also be removed from that designation.



4. Once WMI is built, Bericote's sites won't perform any of the Five Purposes of including land in the Green Belt and it won't be necessary to keep them open- as they will be surrounded by industrial development. Leaving them designated will simply result in pressure to release them in the future- undermining the expected permanence of the Green Belt boundary.
5. In the current supply, there are just 2 available sites for small to mid-box B8 uses.
6. One of these (ROF Featherstone, Site E18) is already committed and well known to the market, but not yet developed. That site has been allocated for 26 years and permission was granted in October 2022. There remains a deliverability concern at Featherstone, as a result of the expensive infrastructure needed to open up the site. Irrespective of that concern, the supply for this part of the market is extremely limited.
7. The new allocation (Site E30) is less suitable than Bericote's land and scores poorly against the site selection methodology.



8. Bericote’s sites are the 7th and 8th best performing employment sites in the District, as analysed by the Council. 2 of these sites, Hilton Cross and Vernon Park, have no capacity left. Hilton Cross is fully developed and Vernon Park secured permission in 2022 and was being actively pursued.
9. Site E30 is the 14th best performing site in the District, as scored by the Council. It is less market attractive, less sustainable and does not fulfil strategic planning considerations as well as Bericotes sites. Allocating site E30 in preference to E51a and E51b is illogical and counter to the evidence supporting this Plan.
10. Bericote’s sites score the same as ROF Featherstone for Market Attractiveness- although it is clear that Featherstone is suffering major deliverability issues which should reduce it’s scores. Bericote’s sites also score better than ROF Featherstone, and both i54 sites for Strategic Planning Considerations.
11. The evidence base is clear that Bericote’s sites is equal to, or better then, employment sites that are proposed for allocation.
12. Bericote consider that the Plan, as currently drafted, is unsound. This could be rectified by allocating their site for employment purposes.
13. The allocation of Bericote’s sites would deliver highly sustainable development. They propose the use of numerous sustainability measures including:
 - Green and Blue Roof;
 - Blue roof to store water and irrigate green walls, to remove Co2 from mechanical irrigation;
 - Solar cladding

- Solar PV and Solar Thermal roofing
 - Battery storage
 - Low carbon space heating
 - Low embodied carbon in building materials
14. The development could also create in the region of 325 jobs on site and produce GVA of up to £23.8m per annum when operational. The development therefore offers considerable economic benefits, which is increasingly important given that we are now into the recessionary part of the economic cycle. It will also help to reduce some of the considerable out-commuting from South Staffordshire to Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley and Cannock Chase.
 15. This site offers a rare combination of highly sustainable development, on buildings aimed at the local market. This will help re-set the bar for other developments in the area and allow a local demonstration of what can be achieved in sustainable design.
 16. The Gravelly Way site should be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for employment Development.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Representation is submitted on behalf of Bericote Properties. Bericote are a specialist logistics developer, having delivered over 12m sqft of buildings for companies as diverse as Amazon, Asda, Tesco, Rolls Royce, Kellogs, Sainsbury's, Ready Steady Store, DHL and Ocado.
- 1.2 Bericote successfully delivered the north eastern extension to the Four Ashes Industrial Estate. That site is now home to a range of occupiers, including Gestamp, CEVA, Haulotte, HOPPE UK, Air Liquide Healthcare and Carver Gasses.
- 1.3 Bericote have a strong local presence and have been instrumental in securing important local employers for South Staffordshire.
- 1.4 This representation considers their remaining land interests at Four Ashes, which are located off Gravelly Way (previously known as Site E51a "Extension to Bericote Four Ashes (Site A)") and Vicarage Road (previously known as Site E51b "Extension to Bericote Four Ashes (Site B)"). Both sites were assessed in the 2022 Economic Development Need Assessment (EDNA) as "Bericote Four Ashes", but the 2024 Site Assessment Topic Paper uses the references E51a and E51b. The 2024 EDNA Update does not include a re-appraisal of sites, although sites are scored in the relevant Topic Papers.
- 1.5 These are omission sites in the Pre-submission Draft Local Plan, which Bericote consider should be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for employment development.
- 1.6 Bericote recognise that the Plan seeks to allocate a significant amount of new employment land – primarily at West Midlands Interchange (WMI), which benefits from a DCO, granted in May 2020. That site will deliver major new rail connected, and rail served, logistics space. The developers of that site intend to follow the illustrative masterplan for that DCO.
- 1.7 The development at WMI will take the form of larger units, at around 250,000sqft+. That scale of development will serve a wider than local market: The Plan recognises that WMI will contribute to meeting unmet needs in the Black Country, and also has potential to meet strategic needs on a wider basis.
- 1.8 The Plan then relies on older committed sites- notably at i54 and ROF Featherstone. These sites offer a limited supply of restricted space, which is well known to the market and has limitations in terms of:
 - Use Class restrictions
 - Infrastructure costs
 - Unit size and availability
- 1.9 Bericote consider that the older supply of employment land has major qualitative issues.
- 1.10 The Council now propose the allocation of a further site at Dunston, south of J13 of the M6. The selection of this site solely seems to be because it is outside the Green Belt. All of the other evidence suggests that it is less attractive, less sustainable and doesn't meet strategic

planning considerations as well as Bericote's sites. The J13 site is scores as being less accessible, being in a less sustainable location, and being less suitable for employment development.

- 1.11 The supply of sites suitable for local businesses is highly restricted. There is a small plot at Vernon Park (2.8Ha) which is now committed development and tiny sites (0.1Ha and 0.8Ha) at Dunstan Business Village and Womborne Enterprise Park. Beyond this, the supply for mid-box sized B8 development is limited to Featherstone (already committed) and J13. This level of choice does not offer a suitable mix of available and attractive sites for the bulk of the market- which is generally in the "mid-box" range. The two allocated sites will not offer enough units to meet this demand over the next 18 years (2023-2041).
- 1.12 Bericote also consider that their sites – in particular site E51a at Gravelly Way- no longer perform the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. The allocation of West Midlands Interchange is considered to be both sensible and helpful to the delivery of that nationally important Strategic Rail Freight Interchange.
- 1.13 However, leaving it in the Green Belt is fundamentally flawed. It will not remain open and it will create major urbanising effects on the area of the DCO. Whilst it may now be left in the Green Belt, the net effect will be of creating an island of land which is surrounded by industrial buildings and not connected to any other Green Belt land, as illustrated below and reproduced At Appendix 1:



- 1.14 The land at Gravelly Way will be isolated, surrounded by existing and committed industrial development on four sides, and will no longer be permanently open and won't perform any of the 5 Purposes. It is illogical to keep that site in the Green Belt; it is not necessary to keep it permanently open, and therefore; the Green Belt notation should be deleted.
- 1.15 On this basis, Bericote seek the following amendments to the Plan:
- (a) Delete Green Belt notation on site E51a
 - (b) Allocate site E51a for employment development
- 1.16 Bericote also consider that the case to delete their site at Vicarage Road (Site E51b) from the Green Belt is strong. However, they intend to pursue biodiversity and local community uses on that plot, rather than employment development. The Green Belt notation should also be deleted on that site.
- 1.17 The rest of this representation sets out Bericote's evidence which supports this position.

2. Site Location and Description

- 2.1 Bericote's sites are located to the east of Gravelly Way, Four Ashes (Site E51a) and west of Vicarage Road (Site E51b). This is an established industrial area, close to the junction of the A5 and M6 (Junction 12). The sites are shown in the aerial photograph below:



- 2.2 The northern site is some 7.3Ha and lies north east of Gravelly Way. It is currently woodland, primarily silver birch, although has a dense understory of Rhododendron, Bracken and Bramble, which has created heavy leaf litter and considerable overshadowing of the ground flora.
- 2.3 The southern site is some 1.7Ha and lies west of Vicarage Road. It is primarily rush and poor quality semi-improved grassland, with areas of scrub and trees.

Committed Development

- 2.4 The West Midlands Rail Freight Interchange order 2020 was made on 4 May 2020. It is a Development Consent Order (DCO) for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) which is now being delivered by Logistics Capital Partners. Detailed applications for the first units are currently under consideration by the Council.
- 2.5 West Midlands Interchange (WMI) is committed, being pursued and will deliver around 8m sqft of large unit rail connected logistics development. It surrounds Bericote's site at Gravelly Way and adjoins their site at Vicarage Road.

2.6 The WMI masterplan demonstrates the extent of development relative to the existing Four Ashes Industrial Area, as shown below. Bericote's sites are indicated by a red star on the illustration below:



2.7 As can be seen, Bericote's Gravelly Way site is completely surrounded by large industrial units. The Vicarage Road site is surrounded by development on 3 sides and has a strong and defensible boundary to the south east on Vicarage Road.

2.8 The WMI site was proposed to be removed from the Green Belt in the draft Plan, but the pre-submission draft proposes allocation whilst washing over with Green Belt. This site accounts for the vast majority of the employment land in the draft Plan.

Proposed Development

Gravelly Way (Site E51a)

2.9 Given the scale of the units on the WMI site, Bericote propose to develop their sites to meet locally arising needs.

2.10 There is a shortfall in readily available and deliverable land to meet the needs of local businesses, and Bericote have had enquiries from businesses who are struggling to find

appropriate buildings and sites in South Staffordshire. Bericote also foresee a need to provide for those businesses that will offer services and support to larger businesses at WMI, but who do not require the larger buildings and rail premium that WMI will deliver. This will help to maximise the economic benefits of West Midlands Interchange by providing for local businesses which will not locate on that site due to the scale of the units likely to be made available.

- 2.11 Bericote propose to develop the Gravelly Way site to provide 3 smaller units of 80,000sqft; 90,000sqft and 100,000sqft. These are sized to address an existing gap in supply that will exist for B8 / warehousing units following the adoption of the Draft Plan.
- 2.12 The currently available units, outside WMI, are set out below, with Bericote’s proposed units inserted to illustrate that they fit a gap in supply:

Unit Size (sqft)	Site
16,000	Featherstone
18,000	Featherstone
20,000	Featherstone
45,000	Featherstone
53,000	Featherstone
76,000	Featherstone
80,000	Bericote Proposed Release
90,000	Bericote Proposed Release
100,000	Bericote Proposed Release
137,000	Featherstone
152,000	Featherstone

- 2.13 It is acknowledged that the site at J13, Dunstan could provide a range of unit sizes. However, there are 8 mid-box units at Featherstone and the J13 site is around ½ of the size, so a supply of (say) 12 units in the 10,000sqft- 250,000sqft range, for the next 18 years, is considered to be far too low.
- 2.14 The Bericote site will help to address a pre-existing local supply issue which is heavily masked by the quantum of land proposed for release in in the Plan- the majority of which is at WMI.
- 2.15 The development of a total of 270,000 sqft (25,083sqm) of B8 development could create in the region of 325 jobs on site; 420 in the local area and 469 in the region. This could produce GVA of up to £23.8m per annum when operational. The development therefore offers considerable economic benefits, which is increasingly important given that the economy is continuing to struggle with recessionary and inflationary trends.
- 2.16 The current draft layout is shown on the plan below, and is reproduced at Appendix 9:



2.17 This shows the proposed development sitting in a gap between larger units, with retained and enhanced landscaping to maintain the wildlife corridor function of the site, adding to the buffer provided to the south of WMI's unit 3030.

2.18 Bericote are known for delivering highly sustainable development, having:

- Pioneered the removal of a gas supply, and it's replacement with renewable energy, at their site in Dartford for Amazon- an approach which has now been adopted by Amazon globally; and
- Secured the first BREEAM Outstanding Industrial building in the UK at their "Toys r Us" redevelopment in Coventry.

2.19 This development will continue that theme, with the use of numerous sustainability measures including:

- Green and Blue Roof;
- Blue roof to store water and irrigate green walls, to remove Co2 from mechanical irrigation;
- Solar cladding
- Solar PV and Solar Thermal roofing
- Battery storage
- Low carbon space heating
- Low embodied carbon in building materials

2.20 The proposed sustainability measures are illustrated below, and are reproduced at Appendix 10:



2.21 The axonometric layout below shows how these measures will be incorporated into the site design:



2.22 More detailed plans are provided at Appendices 9 and 10.

- 2.23 This site offers a rare combination of highly sustainable development, on buildings aimed at the local market. This will help re-set the bar for other developments in the area and allow a local demonstration of what can be achieved in sustainable design.

Vicarage Road (Site E51b)

- 2.24 The Vicarage Road site is current partly in use a balancing pond and landscaping, and links well to the committed proposals at WMI to provide a new country park and wildlife area to the east of the site around Vicarage Road and Straight Mile, as shown below:



- 2.25 As the Gravelly Way site proposal will remove some existing local habitat, the purpose of this site will be to focus on BNG, landscape enhancement and to tie in with WMI's proposals for a community park. The precise proposal will be subject to detailed design, but will incorporate considerable tree planting, habitat enhancements and make provision for local beekeeping.
- 2.26 Bericote have been discussing this area with the South Staffordshire & District Beekeepers Association. This follows the success of Bericote's apiary in Dartford. This will look to meet their needs based on previous experience of local community bee keeping, including providing parking, a secure area, habitats suitable for bees, tea making facilities, and composting toilets.



2.27 The development of this site has the potential to create more than just economic benefits. It will benefit biodiversity, local interest groups and pioneer new technologies for sustainable logistics- which could help the Council to guide other applicants in the area.

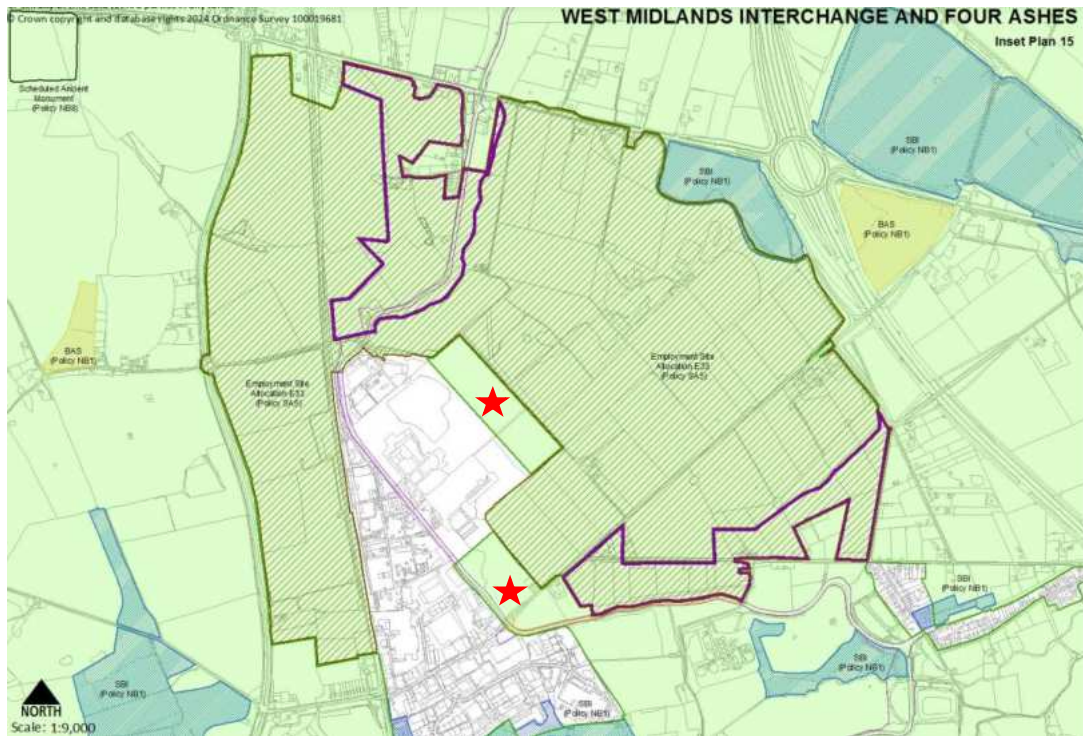
3. Green Belt

- 3.1 The previous draft Plan proposed to remove WMI from the Green Belt.
- 3.2 That approach would seem to be both logical and sensible, given that the site will deliver around 8m sqft of warehousing development, which is incompatible with the fundamental aim of the Green Belt, which is to keep land permanently open¹. The WMI site will not be open, which- in turn- will impede it's ability to serve the 5 purposes of the Green Belt- especially those relating to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas².
- 3.3 Bericote consider that WMI should be removed from the Green Belt as previously proposed- that would be logical and consistent with the inevitable urbanisation of land that ought to be kept permanently open, but will now become an industrial estate. The DCO approval is fundamentally incompatible with a Green Belt designation. This would seem to be a suitable basis for an Exceptional Circumstances case, alongside the economic benefits, wider need for Rail freight capacity and lack of alternative sites which justified the grant of the DCO.
- 3.4 However, the Council have not elected to remove WMI from the Green Belt. This results in an unusual position. Bericote's sites will be entirely surrounded by industrial development- in the case of site E51a, on all 4 sides. But the policy position will be that it is part of a contiguous area of Green Belt.
- 3.5 Site E51a will be unconnected to any open land, but it will be kept permanently open in order to perform the 5 purposes set out in NPPF 143- none of which it will contribute to in any practical sense. This is a pure contrivance, with no practical merit.
- 3.6 In reality, Bericote's sites will form two isolated parcels:
- The Gravelly Road site will be completely unconnected to open Green Belt land. It will become surrounded on all sides by existing industrial development and the committed WMI.
 - The Vicarage Road site has one boundary, to it's south east, which will still connect to the wider Green Belt once WMI is built- but this site will then be a small finger of Green Belt within a wider industrial development. The one boundary is both strong and defensible, and meets current guidance on what features to use a Green Belt boundaries³. The proposed Local Plan Green Belt boundaries are shown on the Plan extract below, with the sites indicated by a red star:

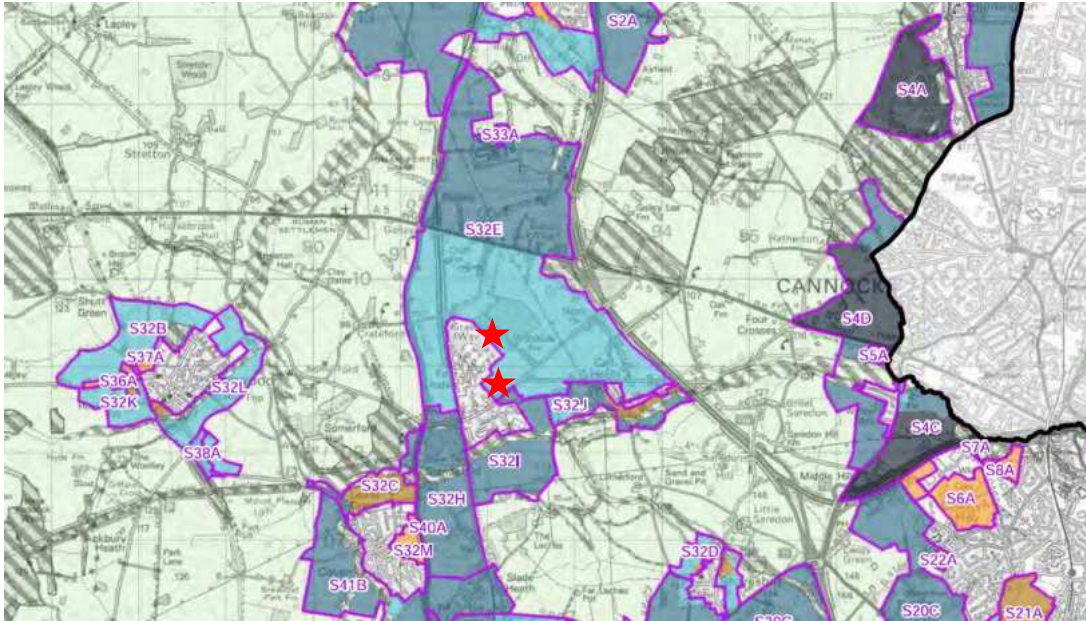
¹ NPPF 142

² NPPF 142 a) and c)

³ NPPF 148 f)



- 3.7 The sites relative to the current WMI allocation is shown above.
- 3.8 When the WMI and existing Four Ashes development is coloured the same as the proposed new allocation; and the existing and proposed industrial development is show on the base mapping; the resulting position becomes clearer, as shown below (again with the sites indicated by a red star):



3.11 However, the 2024 Exceptional circumstances paper notes the following:

*For employment allocations, with the exception of two sites, all sites proposed are within a development boundary. West Midlands Interchange is within the Green Belt, however, **can come forward in line with its Development Consent Order and therefore it is not deemed necessary to amend Green Belt boundaries as this location.** The Council can meet its own needs for employment land and make a proportionate contribution to unmet needs within our Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) with a 112.2ha contribution to employment land shortfalls of the Black Country authorities (including a proportion of WMI) and a 10ha contribution to Cannock from WMI. Given this, it is not considered that exceptional circumstances exist for Green Belt release for the allocation of further employment land.⁶*

3.12 However, the Plan still allocates the site- when the DCO could be implemented whilst still delivering the 18.8Ha of land for South Staffordshire needs from this site.

3.13 The Publication Plan notes that:

This will provide certainty that the site will come forward in accordance with the DCO, reducing the risk that alternative forms of development could come forward. The council will continue to work positively with the developers on WMI to ensure the site comes forward in accordance with the DCO and delivers the best scheme possible.⁷

3.14 Bericote assume that the Council are looking to achieve a pragmatic balance: The delivery of the DCO is inevitable, and so it should be counted towards meeting development needs, but that does not necessarily mean it needs to be released from the Green Belt.

3.15 However, the existence of the WMI development will fundamentally undermine the Green Belt in this area, to the extent that it no longer performs it's essential function.

⁶ Para 6.3 Green Belt Exceptional Circumstances Topic Paper April 2024, our emphasis

⁷ Para 6.45 Draft Plan.

3.16 NPPF is very clear that Planning Authorities should:

a) ensure consistency with the development plan's strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;

b) not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;⁸

3.17 The current approach results in an inconsistency between:

a) The Plan's strategy (to make best use of the inevitable development of WMI) and

b) the Green Belt boundary (which includes 8m sqft of industrial development in the Green Belt), and therefore

c) includes land which can no longer be kept permanently open.

3.18 This approach does not sit well with national guidance and thus suggests a failure against Soundness Test d) "Consistent with national policy".

3.19 The Plan's evidence⁹ ascribes the following scores to the Parcel's performance against the Purposes, with associated mapping provided at Appendix 2 of the LUC Green Belt Study:

Purpose	Score
Check unrestricted sprawl	Weak / No Contribution
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Weak / No Contribution
Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Strong (although this is applied to all areas of existing Green Belt)
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Weak / No Contribution
Assist in urban regeneration	Not included in methodology

3.20 The Plan's evidence base shows that the only purpose which is fulfilled by this wider parcel is "safeguarding against encroachment". This purpose is aimed at halting the gradual advancement of the urbanised area into the countryside- which is a fundamental purpose of the Green Belt.

3.21 Clearly, once WMI is developed, that encroachment will already have occurred in the vicinity of the subject sites, and Bericote's omission sites will no longer perform that role. They will simply be a gap in the middle of an Industrial Estate.

⁸ NPPF 148 a) and b)

⁹ 2019 LUC South Staffs GB study Appendix 2

3.22 It seems clear, therefore, that- once the WMI site is developed- Bericote’s sites will no longer perform any Green Belt purpose. The Green Belt study does not review the retained Green Belt following the draft allocations. Therefore, we have offered our view on the performance of Bericote’s sites, post development of the WMI site, in the table below:

Purpose	2019 Green Belt Study Score	Bericote Score
Check unrestricted sprawl	Weak / No Contribution	Weak / No Contribution
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Weak / No Contribution	Weak / No Contribution
Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Strong (although this is applied to all areas of existing Green Belt)	Weak / No Contribution
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Weak / No Contribution	Weak / No Contribution
Assist in urban regeneration	Not included in methodology	Not included in methodology

3.23 On this basis, the fundamental objectives of the Green Belt- to prevent urban sprawl, keep land open and to be permanent¹⁰- will no longer apply to Bericote’s sites. The enclosure of the sites by WMI completely removes their contribution to Green Belt purposes:

- The Gravelly Way site will be an isolated island within a large industrial area, unconnected to any other open land.
- The Vicarage Road site will be surrounded on 3 sides by industrial development and have only a weak connection with open land- but more importantly, it will simply serve to stop two areas of industrial estate merging with each other- the Council’s evidence shows that there is no risk of settlements merging here- this is simply a small gap within an existing industrial estate.

3.24 Bericote consider that it is illogical to leave any of these sites (WMI / E33, E51a and E51b) as Green Belt when they do not perform any Green Belt function.

3.25 Retaining Bericote’s sites in the Green Belt would not comply with the following elements of National Policy:

- (a) It will not prevent urban sprawl, as required by NPPF 137
- (b) It would not serve any of the five purposes set out at NPPF 138

¹⁰ NPPF 137

(c) As a result, it is not necessary to keep this land permanently open, as required by NPPF 143 b)

(d) There will be pressure, both now and in future Plan reviews, to release this land as it does not perform any Green Belt purpose. Therefore, it will contribute to pressure on, and thus reduced permanence of, Green Belt boundaries in the long term. Permanence is required by NPPF 137 and NPPF 140.

3.26 In order to change Green Belt boundaries, national policy expects the demonstration of exceptional circumstances. This case, those circumstances would be:

- A failure to perform any meaningful or practical role as Green Belt
- Failure against multiple points of policy guidance, such that retaining these 3 sites as Green Belt is both illogical and unreasonable.
- There is a qualitative need for local employment space, which is set out in more detail in Section 4.

3.27 Bericote suggest that the following remedies are appropriate in this case:

- 1) Bericote's site should be allocated for employment purposes
- 2) However, if the qualitative need case is not accepted, the sites should still be removed from the Green Belt, as they do not perform any Green Belt purpose.

3.28 The current Green Belt boundaries are not considered to be Sound as they fail the following soundness tests:

b) Justified – Retaining these sites as Green Belt is not an appropriate strategy. The removal of the Green Belt notation is justified by existing evidence and the lack of performance of any meaningful Green Belt function. A reasonable alternative would be to remove the sites from the Green Belt and thus ensure that they- collectively- have the best ability to meet local economic needs in a flexible manner. Taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence, these sites should be removed from the Green Belt.

d) Consistent with National Policy – The retention of these sites as Green Belt does not meet current national policy- in particular relating to the need to maintain the openness of this land; the need to secure permanence of Green Belt boundaries, and; the need for Green Belt to meet the Five Purposes to some degree. Fundamentally, these sites do not meet any of the criteria expected of Green Belt land. Leaving them designated as such is illogical and unreasonable.

3.29 These concerns would be rectified if Bericote's sites are removed from the Green Belt and allocated for development.

4. Employment Land

- 4.1 Bericote recognise that the updated Plan reflect a number of the points they raised about employment land supply. However, the local need and supply picture is very complex and there are critical qualitative points have not been adequately considered in the draft Plan.

Local Needs

- 4.2 Bericote successfully secured the Four Ashes extension for Gestamp, CEVA and Haulotte. The approval of WMI is clearly a major economic boost for the area and will meet much wider market needs. With a supply of around 8m sqft of larger units, there is no real concern about larger unit supply. Indeed, this accounts for a large part of the quantitative need picture, and offers some flexibility about overall quantum that could serve South Staffordshire's needs- this 297Ha site, notionally, has 18.8Ha dedicated to meeting South Staffordshire need, and so there is considerable headroom in the supply from a purely quantitative perspective.
- 4.3 However, for an occupier looking for a small and mid-box units, the supply is very limited. The concern is particularly great for B8 uses.
- 4.4 There are just 5 sites with any meaningful capacity that have the potential to deliver¹¹:
- 1) E18: ROF Featherstone- 36Ha with permission granted in October 2022
 - 2) E33: West Midlands Interchange- 297Ha, but with 18.8Ha dedicated to "local" needs.
 - 3) E30: M6, J13- a proposed allocation of 17.6Ha
 - 4) E44: i54 Western Extension – 16.7Ha with a B2 Use restriction
 - 5) E24: i54 Wobaston Road- 4.8Ha with a B2 Use restriction
- 4.5 The use restrictions to B2 on the i54 sites, removes two sites from the supply for a B8 occupier, and the West Midlands Interchange site doesn't; have units smaller than 250,000sqft.
- 4.6 Once those are removed from the supply, an occupier looking for a small to mid-box B8 unit is restricted to the following:
- i. ROF Featherstone. This site has a considerable history, having been first allocated in the 1996 Local Plan. It was the subject of a Viability and Delivery Options study in December 2013. This site finally secured permission in October 2022, some 26 years after allocation, and the site will provide 8 units. These units are all in one location, and are all reliant on an expensive new road- which will link the site to Stafford Road and J2 of the M54. The outline permission granted has been subject to 2 non-Material Amendment applications, but no Reserved Matters or Discharge of Conditions applications have been submitted. the site has 3 years to submit

¹¹ Table at paragraph 6.44 of the draft Plan, note that Hobnock Road is excluded due to lack of delivery for over a decade

Reserved Matters. It will effectively expire in October 2025, which is just 17 months away. There is major risk, given the history on this site, that it will expire. Bericote have had discussions with an occupier which would not consider this site due to lack of certainty.

- ii. The new proposed allocation at J13, M6. This is likely to be fairly flexible in terms of unit size, and no doubt the promoters will be keen to address a market gap. However, the revised boundary is only 17.6Ha and it is a triangular shaped site, which is not particularly efficient. Once BNG, Landscape buffers, drainage infrastructure and circulation space are provided, the capacity will likely be similar to that on offer at Featherstone- possibly around 8 small to mid-sized units, but perhaps fewer larger units.
- 4.7 There are, therefore, only really 2 available site options for a local B8 uses requiring a unit of less than 250,000sqft:
- 1) ROF Featherstone- which has major infrastructure constraints, and history of non-delivery and little progress is being made since permission was granted 18 months ago.
 - 2) A new allocation- which, if adopted, could provide in the order of (say) 5-8 units
- 4.8 Having only 1 reliable site, which is not even allocated, for an entire segment of the market does not allow any real choice or flexibility for an occupier.
- 4.9 It is important to remember that this supply of (broadly) 5-16 units needs to last for the 18 year Plan Period. This supply amounts to just over 1 unit for every year of the Plan. That level of supply is clearly not adequate for this market across the Plan Period.
- 4.10 PPG confirms¹² that it is necessary to consider qualitative information on gaps in the market, in particular the needs of SME's operating in the logistics sector¹³.
- 4.11 The 2022 EDNA notes that there has been a:
- ...trend of unprecedented growth in the commercial property market in South Staffordshire, particularly e-commerce, warehousing and logistics sectors – a trend which has been seen across the country and has been accompanied by increasing rental yields and land values. A number of the strategic employment sites in South Staffordshire are delivering quicker than expected with strong levels of demand, particularly for floorspace within Use Classes B2 and B8.*¹⁴
- 4.12 The logistics sector is clearly a strong local market, and the EDNA 2024 update does not update that general position.

¹² PPG Housing and economic development needs assessment. Paragraph: 029 Reference ID: 2a-02920190220

¹³ PPG Housing and economic development needs assessment. Paragraph: 031 Reference ID: 2a-031-20190722

¹⁴ 2022 EDNA para 0.28

The 2022 EDNA notes¹⁵ that there are low annual losses from B8 floorpace and that there is very little churn in existing stock¹⁶. It also notes¹⁷ that:

In particular, there is a lack of medium-sized 'grow-on' units (25,000-100,000sqft) within South Staffordshire

- 4.13 Clearly, the evidence presented in the EDNA suggests that:
- 1) There is a continued demand for B8 space
 - 2) There are low losses and little churn in existing stock
 - 3) There is a shortage of small to medium units in South Staffordshire
- 4.14 In light of these market signals, it is concerning that the small to mid-box market has just one reliable site to rely on. The evidence suggests that more land is needed for this sector.
- 4.15 The existing supply of units at Feathertstone, assuming that actually delivers during the plan period- which is looking increasingly unlikely- also has a gap in provision. Bericote have illustrated units ranging between 80,000sqft and 100,000sqft in order to meet this gap.
- 4.16 Whilst the quantum of land has been (broadly) provided for, the nature of space that can be made available to meet locally arising needs in the B8 market does not accord with the evidence in the EDNA. There is notable a gap in supply for smaller units across the Plan Period.
- 4.17 To add to this concern: The delivery of WMI is a major opportunity for the District. However, it is likely to generate a need for smaller businesses that will support activities at WMI- most likely through direct business support and supply chain services. This was a point raised at a recent WMI stakeholder meeting- where the concept was described as a “coalescence of small businesses supporting WMI”. It is clear that, in spatial terms, there is no smaller unit supply in close proximity to WMI which could easily meet that need. Bericote’s sites could provide for that market.
- 4.18 The current position raises Soundness concerns. The supply of land proposed is clearly not flexible enough to:
- accommodate needs identified in the Plan Period;
 - to anticipate new working practices likely to be generated by a major new source of employment in South Staffordshire, nor;
 - adequate enough to enable a response to changing economic circumstances.
- 4.19 Therefore, the Plan does not accord with the guidance at NPPF 82 d).

¹⁵ 2022 EDNA para 0.29

¹⁶ 2022 EDNA Table 21 “recent performance” response summary, page 73

¹⁷ 2022 EDNA Table 21 “gaps in provision” response summary, page 74

- 4.20 This shortage of supply will do little to address commuting patterns in the area. South Staffordshire has a low level of commuting self-containment¹⁸ and the strongest out-bound commuting flows are for commuters travelling out of South Staffordshire into Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley and Cannock Chase¹⁹.
- 4.21 Clearly, people drive out of South Staffordshire for work at the moment, and whilst WMI may help to address that, the provision of more space within the District would further contribute to reducing reliance on the private car and make working patterns more sustainable.
- 4.22 It is considered that there is a severe shortage of space for smaller B8 occupiers in the proposed land supply. Despite there being (broadly) enough supply in quantitative terms, there are qualitative limitations which mean that local businesses, looking for small to medium B8 buildings, have a very limited choice.
- 4.23 NPPF asks us to take into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development (NPPF81) and to allocate land for both local businesses and inward investment (NPPF 82b). Currently the Plan is over providing for strategic needs and under providing for local needs- on a qualitative basis, and in terms of site choice and availability.
- 4.24 The approach to providing employment land should counter any existing weaknesses and try to address the challenges of the future (NPPF81). Currently, the supply does not address market needs for small to medium operators, which is a weakness in the proposed supply.
- 4.25 The land supply should also be flexible enough to meet unanticipated needs (NPPF82 d). It is likely that the supply is flexible enough in terms of quantum, given the significant amount of land available at WMI. However, relying on that site leaves qualitative deficiencies that need to be considered. There is potential for WMI to change market patterns, and this is not provided for in terms of the size and location of available units for smaller businesses looking to supply to that major development site.
- 4.26 It is clear that there are key national policy points which are not being met. **This results in a soundness concern around Consistency with National Policy (NPPF 35 d)).**

¹⁸ Para 3.36 EDNA 2022, and verified in Para 3.10 + key points box in the 2024 EDNA update

¹⁹ ibid

5. Site Performance

- 5.1 Bericote consider that the choice of sites allocated does not reflect the scoring exercise undertaken in the evidence base.
- 5.2 Bericote’s sites (Identified as sites E51a and E51b, in the 2018 EDNA and Appendix C in the Employment Topic Paper; and “Bericote Four Ashes” in the 2022 EDNA) score higher than sites which have been selected for allocation.
- 5.3 The 2018 scoring (Appendix 4) shows that Bericote’s sites were ranked 2nd and 3rd in the District, following WMI. Allocated sites, including ROF Featherstone and i54, did not feature on that list.
- 5.4 The 2018 EDNA recommended²⁰ that:
- “... going forward, should there be a need to allocate new sites, where possible, **the focus should be on the best sites in the first instance.** These for example **should include:***
- *West Midlands Interchange (Site E33) following the sites consent in 2020*
 - ***Sites E51a and E51b given that these are very close to the consented WMI.; and***
 - *Potentially site E30 at junction 13 given that it is strategic in scale and not in the Green Belt (although it is acknowledged that this site fell within the good rather than best category)”*
- 5.5 The Council have now elected to allocate Site E30, which was clearly acknowledged to be a poorer performing site than Bericotes sites, in the 2018 data analysis.
- 5.6 The 2022 Topic Paper (Appendix 6) verifies that finding. Bericote’s sites are ranked 7th and 8th in the District, with a score of 70. However, site E30 is ranked 14th in the District, with a score of 58.
- 5.7 The 2024 Topic Paper (Appendix 7) shows the same outcome. Site E30 scores considerably less well on Market attractiveness measures, Sustainability measures and Strategic Planning considerations.
- 5.8 It is clearly illogical to allocate site E30 over sites E51a and E51b. This is not supported by the evidence, which is clearly a major soundness concern.
- 5.9 Some of the individual scores do not seem to be rational. For example:
- ROF Featherstone and Hobnock Road in Essington have the same score for “development constraints” (3) as WMI and Bericotes sites. Both Featherstone and Hobnock Road have decades long histories of failure to deliver- They are clearly much more highly constrained than either WMI or Bericote’s land. This does not seem to be a logical or consistent scoring.

²⁰ See para 5.3 Stage 2 Report

- WMI, which surrounds Bericote's site, scores much higher on market activity, (WMI = 5, Bericote = 2) which is surprising given that both are being pursued by nationally recognised logistics developers and are in exactly the same location.
- 5.10 The evidence base is clear that Bericote's sites score as well as, and better, than Site E30 which is proposed for allocation. It is also unclear why the scoring of other sites seems to have been elevated to a degree which is plainly unrealistic- particularly where there are known delivery issues.
- 5.11 This raises a clear soundness concern. **The allocation of less sustainable and less market attractive sites is not "an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence". The Justified soundness test (NPPF 35 b)) is therefore failed.**

6. Technical Considerations

6.1 Bericote consider that there are no technical impediments to the allocation of their site. They recognise that there will be a need for detailed consideration of various issues at the Development Management stage, but that is true for all allocations.

6.2 The key issues are considered to be:

- Ecology
- Landscape and Visual
- Noise
- Highways

6.3 These are considered in turn below.

Ecology

6.4 The Gravelly way site is currently woodland and the Vicarage Road site is rush and grassland. However, neither site has an ecological designation.

6.5 Bericote have commissioned an ecology report and appraisal which is provided at **Appendix 8**. That report concludes that:

- The site has some ecological interest but is generally only of local importance.
- The woodland habitat has low species diversity, is relatively young and has invasive species.
- Some mitigation for protected species may be needed, subject to further survey work, but mitigation appears to be achievable and can successfully work alongside development.
- Some improvement to current conditions will arise from the removal of invasive species (Rhododendron, bramble and bracken).
- The inclusion of a BNG area has the potential to improve the overall biodiversity value of the site: Beyond what is available now, and post development.
- The site can continue to perform a suitable wildlife corridor / green lung / carbon sink function post development - through the retention of a buffer to the rear of the proposed units and retention of a woodland block to join in with existing and proposed landscape areas as part of WMI. A sensitive development will not harm the corridor function and connectivity role that the site performs now.

6.6 The report concludes that, with sensitive design, appropriate landscaping and buffer zones, the development of the site would offer new opportunities for wildlife. Suitable wildlife corridors, and connectivity to the wider landscape, can be delivered alongside the proposed

development. Future development and mitigation could be designed to complement the mitigation and enhancements at West Midlands Interchange.

- 6.7 There are no overriding ecological constraints to the development of this site.

Visual Impacts and Landscape Character

- 6.8 The Gravelly Way site will be wholly contained by industrial development. It will have no visual connection to the wider landscape and all views will be within the context of existing (or committed) buildings.
- 6.9 The layout proposed will leave the Vicarage Road site for biodiversity net gain and landscaping purposes; and the Gravelly Way site will retain an area of woodland and extend the buffer on the eastern boundary of WMI.
- 6.10 The development of the site will not result in any harmful visual or landscape character effects.

Noise

- 6.11 The site is not close to any sensitive receptors, and other existing or consented industrial units would act as a suitable noise barrier for any users on this site.
- 6.12 The development of this site will not result in any harmful noise or amenity effects.

Highways

- 6.13 The site capacity is modest and it is accepted that detailed modelling would be needed to support an application in the future. However, the local network has been improved by Bericote's previous applications, and WMI will make major improvements to the highways network in the wider area- including a major new industrial estate road between the A5 and the A449.
- 6.14 There is not likely to be a significant highways issue which suggests that these sites should not be developed.

7. Soundness Issues

7.1 Bericote raise the following soundness issues with the Draft Plan.

Green Belt Boundaries

7.2 Following the development of West Midlands Interchange, Bericote's sites will:

- No longer be necessary to remain open, and
- No longer perform any of the Five Purposes of including land in the Green Belt;
- Impact the permanence of the Green Belt boundary by:
 - Not following guidance on using defined features on the ground and
 - Creating pressure for release in future Plan reviews, due to the lack of performance of the Five Purposes.

7.3 The existence of the WMI development will fundamentally undermine the Green Belt in this area, to the extent that it no longer performs its essential function. Even without WMI, the Plans evidence suggests that Bericote's sites make a weak or no contribution to the Purposes, and post-development their contribution will be removed.

7.4 The current Green Belt boundaries are not considered to be sound as they fail the following soundness tests:

NPPF 35b) Justified:

- Retaining these sites as Green Belt is not an appropriate strategy.
- The removal of the Green Belt notation is justified by existing evidence and the lack of performance of any meaningful Green Belt function.
- A reasonable alternative would be to remove the sites from the Green Belt and thus ensure that they- collectively- have the best ability to meet local economic needs in a flexible manner.

7.5 Taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence, these sites should be removed from the Green Belt.

NPPF 35d) Consistent with national policy:

- The retention of these sites as Green Belt does not meet current national policy.
- It will not prevent urban sprawl, as required by NPPF 137
- It would not serve any of the five purposes set out at NPPF 138

- As a result, it is not necessary to keep this land permanently open, as required by NPPF 143 b)
- There will be pressure, both now and in future Plan reviews, to release this land as it does not perform any Green Belt purpose. Therefore, it will contribute to pressure on, and thus reduced permanence of, Green Belt boundaries in the long term. Permanence is required by NPPF 137 and NPPF 140.
- Fundamentally, these sites do not meet any of the criteria expected of Green Belt land. Leaving them designated as such is illogical and unreasonable

7.6 These concerns would be rectified if Bericote's sites are removed from the Green Belt and allocated for development.

Choice and flexibility in the supply of Employment Land

7.7 There is a highly restricted supply of land which is suitable to meet small to mid-sized B8 requirements across the 18 year Plan Period. Despite there being a (broadly) sufficient supply in quantitative terms, there are qualitative limitations which mean that local businesses have a very limited choice.

7.8 In the currently proposed supply there are just 2 sites providing for this part of the market:

- 1) ROF Featherstone- which has major infrastructure constraints, and history of non-delivery and little progress is being made since permission was granted 18 months ago. The current permission will expire in around 18 months.
- 2) A new allocation (Site E30)- which has potential to be flexible but is of a limited scale.

7.9 The Plan evidence shows that logistics and warehousing is a string market locally, with low losses of space and a lack of "grow on" space in the 25,000-100,000sqft range.

7.10 The delivery of WMI is a major opportunity for the District; which is likely to generate a need for smaller businesses to support that development- through direct business support and supply chain services. There is no supply of smaller unit land in close proximity to WMI which could easily meet that need.

7.11 The supply of land proposed is clearly not flexible enough to accommodate needs identified in the Plan Period; to anticipate new working practices likely to be generated by a major new source of employment in South Staffordshire (WMI), nor; adequate enough to enable a response to changing economic circumstances. Therefore, the Plan does not accord with the guidance at NPPF 82 d).

7.12 There is also a need to address commuting patterns in the area. South Staffordshire has strong out-bound commuting into Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley and Cannock Chase. WMI may help to address that out flow of residents for work, but the provision of more locally oriented space within the District, would further reduce reliance on the private car and make working patterns more sustainable.

7.13 Clearly, there are qualitative limitations which mean that:

- Local businesses, looking for small to medium B8 buildings, have a very limited choice.
- The potential to maximise the local economic benefits of WMI, for local businesses, is therefore reduced.
- The opportunity to stem out-commuting, through the provision of sites which meet local business needs is not being achieved.

7.14 This results in issues around national policy compliance:

- NPPF asks us to take into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development (NPPF81) and to allocate for both local and inward investment (NPPF 82b). Currently the Plan is over providing for strategic needs and under providing for local needs- on a qualitative basis, and in terms of site choice and availability.
- The approach adopted to providing employment land should counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future (NPPF81). Currently, the supply does not address market needs for small to medium operators, which is a weakness in the Plan's proposed approach.
- The supply should also be flexible enough to meet unanticipated needs (NPPF82 d). It is likely that the supply is flexible enough in terms of quantum, but there are qualitative deficiencies that need to be considered should any changed circumstance mean a greater local need arises- indeed, it is foreseeable that WMI could change market dynamics and encourage local growth which generates a greater need for smaller and mid-box provision, which current could only locate to 2 sites.

7.15 It is clear that there are key national policy points which are not being met. This results in a soundness concern around **Consistency with National Policy (NPPG 35 d)**.

Selection of allocated sites not based on evidence

7.16 The Plan's evidence base has included a site score mechanism, which has consistently scored Bericote's sites (E51a and E51b) as being amongst the best in the District. In 2018, these sites were second only to West Midlands Interchange.

7.17 Despite adding in a weighting factor (presumably to help justify the allocation of consented sites) the Plan now proposes the allocation of a site which score considerably lower than Bericote's sites. The 2018 evidence noted that this new allocation (E30) was "good" rather than "the best". The 2022 and 2024 evidence consistently scored Site E30 much lower than Sites E51a and E51b.

7.18 Site E30 scores considerably less well on Market attractiveness measures, Sustainability measures and Strategic Planning considerations. Allocating site E30 is both illogical and counter to the evidence supporting those allocations.

- 7.19 This raises a clear soundness concern. The allocation of less sustainable, less market attractive and sites that score less well on strategic planning measures is not *“an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence”*. Those allocations are made contrary to the evidence the Bericote’s site performs better than land proposed for allocation.
- 7.20 **The Justified soundness test (NPPF 35 b)) is therefore failed.**

8. Amendments to the Plan

8.1 Bericote seek the following amendments to the Plan to make it sound:

1. Amend the Green Belt boundary to remove the Gravelly Way site (Site E51a) from the Green Belt
2. Allocate the Gravelly Way site (Site E51a) as employment land

8.2 Bericote consider that the case for releasing the Vicarage Road site (E51b) is also strong. However, they propose to use the land for biodiversity, landscaping and local bee keeping activities.

9. Conclusions

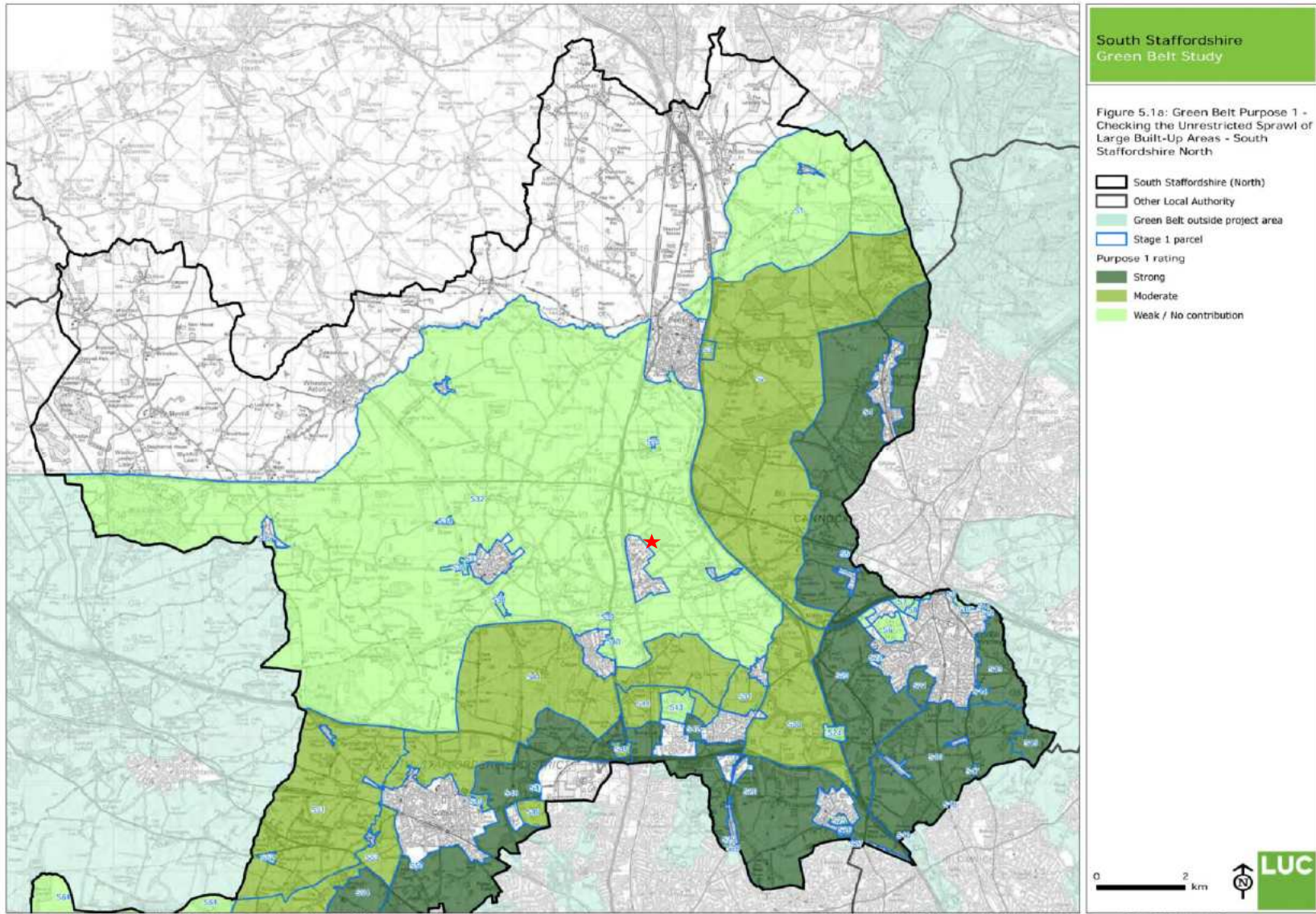
- 9.1 Bericote are concerned that the Plan is unsound as drafted. They seek removal of their land at Gravelly Way from the Green Belt and it's allocation as employment land. They also control land at Vicarage Road, where they intend to provide landscape and ecological mitigation. That land also performs no Green Belt function and should also be removed from that designation.
- 9.2 These sites will be surrounded by large scale industrial development at West Midlands Interchange. They won't perform any of the Five Purposes of including land in the Green Belt and keeping them open won't be necessary. Leaving them designated will simply result in pressure to release them in the future- undermining the expected permanence of the Green Belt boundary.
- 9.3 In the current draft supply, there are just 2 sites for local B8 uses and ROF Featherstone has a long history of failed delivery. The permission finally granted in 2022 only has 18 months remaining to submit reserved matters. It is possible that the permission may expire. The level of supply is clearly not adequate for this market- either quantitatively or in terms of providing a reasonable choice for occupiers. This is particularly the case when the potential for local job growth, spurred on by the delivery of West Midlands Interchange is taken into account- that is a foreseeable need which the Plan does not allow for in it's land supply.
- 9.4 Bericote's site is one of the best performing employment site in the District. However, Site E30 is proposed for allocation, which scores poorly. That is illogical and counter to the evidence supporting those allocations. Bericote suggest that there is a qualitative requirement for both sites, but if that is not accepted, it would be logical to allocate Bericote's sites over site E30.
- 9.5 Bericote consider that the Plan, as currently drafted, is unsound. This could be rectified by allocating their site for employment purposes.

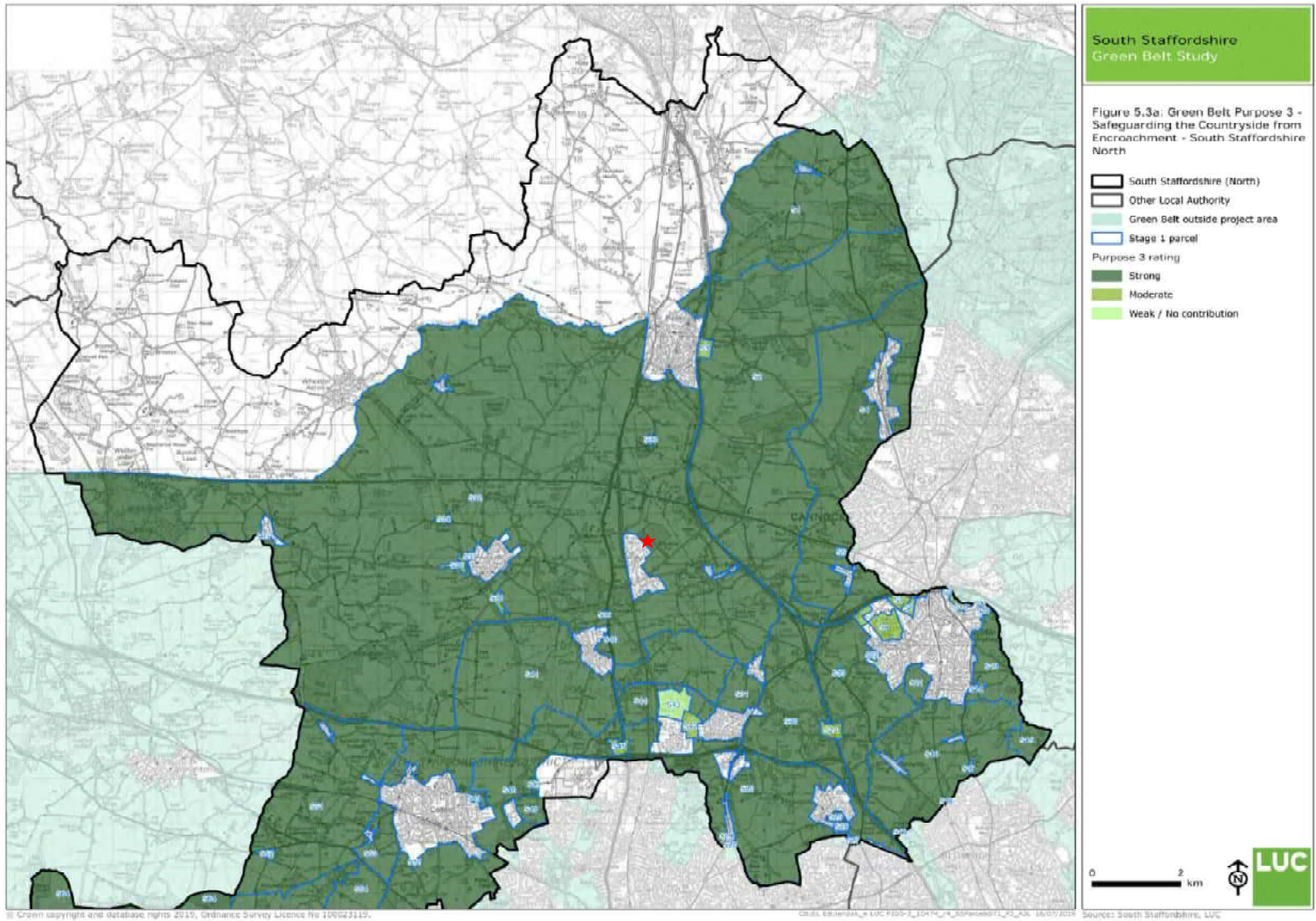
Appendix 1: Plan showing Industrial Development at Four Ashes

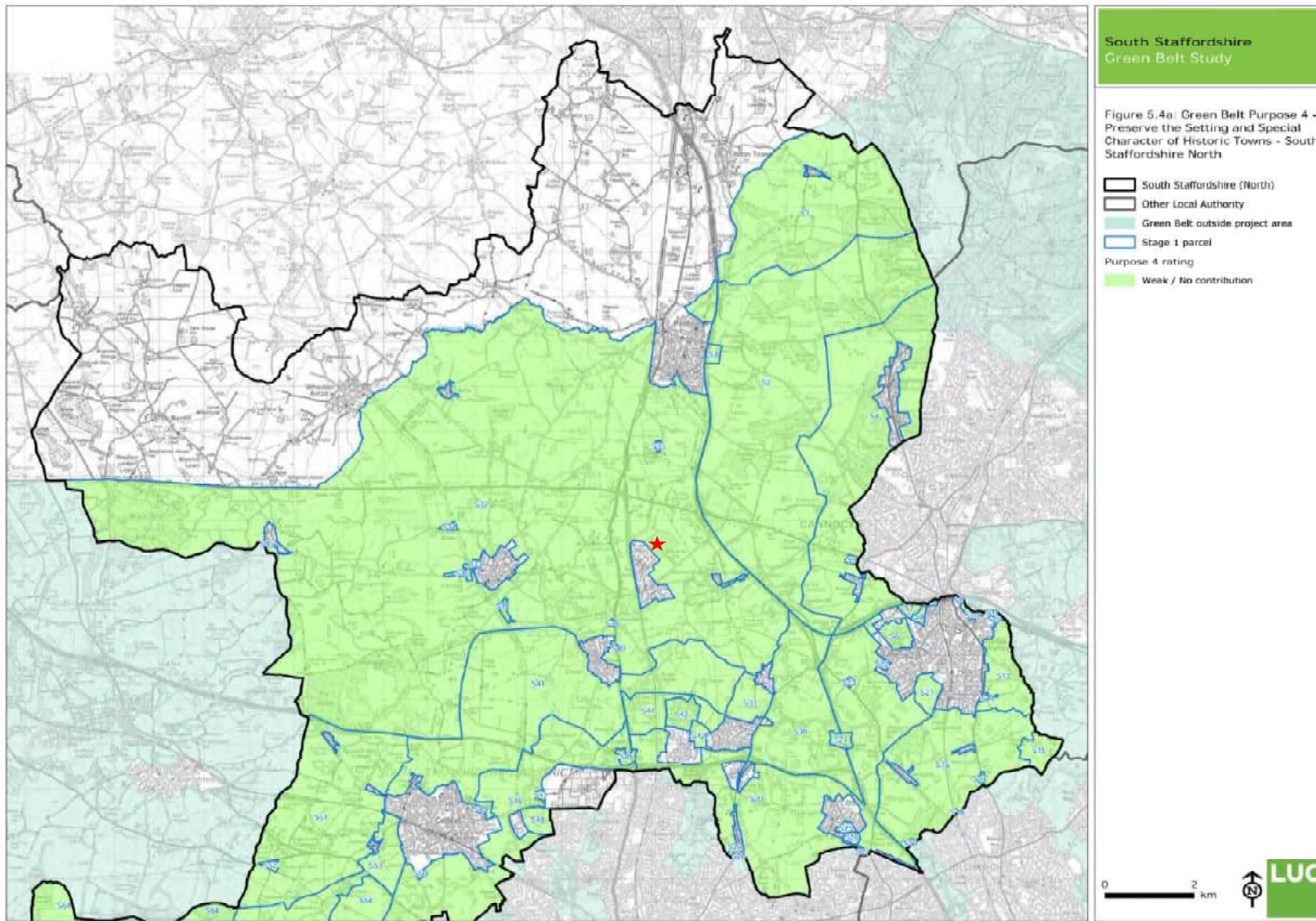


Appendix 2: Extracts from 2019 Green Belt Study

NOTE: The site locations on this mapping are shown by a red star







Appendix 3: Applicant Green Belt Appraisal (December 2021)

Green Belt Review

Four Ashes Expansion, South Staffordshire

December 2021



Bryant Landscape Planning

Prepared by Bryant Landscape Planning Ltd
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FOUR ASHES EXPANSION

GREEN BELT REVIEW

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1. Introduction
2. Green Belt
3. Approach
4. The Sites and their context
5. Contribution to Green Belt Purposes
6. Summary and Conclusions

Appendix A: SSC Green Belt Assessment Criteria

Appendix B: SSC Green Belt Assessment – Four Ashes Parcel 2

Appendix C: Assessment of Site B's contribution to Green Belt purposes

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This note has been prepared by Bryant Landscape Planning Ltd on behalf of Bericote Ltd to provide advice on the potential extension of the Four Ashes Enterprise Park at Four Ashes, South Staffordshire. Two expansion sites are considered (hereafter referred to as 'Site A' and 'Site B'). The planning authority is South Staffordshire Council (SSC) and both sites are designated as West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt. Around 80% of the district is designated as Green Belt.
- 1.2. This note:
 - reviews Green Belt assessments previously carried out on behalf of SSC;
 - provides an appraisal of the contribution the Site(s) currently make to the purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF; and
 - provides an appraisal of the contribution the Site(s) would make to the purposes of the Green Belt following completion of the West Midlands Freight Interchange.
- 1.3. A site visit and field study were undertaken in September 2021 to understand the Sites and the surrounding area.

2. GREEN BELT

- 2.1. The purposes of the Green Belt are set out in section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ The essential characteristics of Green Belts are defined as being their permanence and openness and the NPPF states that '*the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open*'. There is no legal definition of the term '*openness*' with regard to Green Belt.
- 2.2. Five purposes which Green Belt should serve are defined in the NPPF:
 - *Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
 - *Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
 - *Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
 - *Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
 - *Purpose 5: To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*
- 2.3. Green Belt policy maintains the principle that certain forms of built development, however small in scale, are inappropriate and should not be approved except in '*very special circumstances*'.
- 2.4. Green Belt is a spatial planning tool, not a designation which is designed to protect nature and landscape character or the benefits they provide; Green Belt policy does not require Green Belt to

¹ Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021); *National Planning Policy Framework*

be of high landscape quality or even particularly attractive. It should be noted therefore that a Green Belt review does not provide an assessment of landscape quality.

- 2.5. The planning system is required to secure environmental, social and economic benefits and there is an overarching presumption in the NPPF in favour of sustainable development. Current Green Belt policy is a 'spatial separation'² designation which does not require the transformation or enrichment of Green Belt land to deliver such benefits.
- 2.6. *SSC Policy ENV2: Control of Development in the Green Belt* requires that where development is consistent in principle with the purposes of the Green Belt, the Council will require that its siting, design, form, scale and appearance is compatible with the character of the surrounding area, as explained further in *SSC Policy ENV3*.
- 2.7. *SSC Policy ENV3: Detailed Evaluation of Proposals* within the Green Belt states that where development is acceptable in principle in the Green Belt (under Policy ENV2), proposals will be assessed for their impact on the Green Belt in terms of:
 - The detailed layout of the site;
 - The siting, design, grouping, height and scale of buildings, structures and associated outdoor equipment;
 - The colour and suitability of building materials, having regard for local styles and materials;
 - The opportunities to use redundant land and buildings for suitable alternative uses;
 - The quality of new landscape schemes;
 - The impact on significant views, viewpoints and topographical features;
 - The cumulative physical effect of proposals in any one area;
 - The implications for local facilities, particularly public services and infrastructure; and
 - Any other relevant considerations identified in Policy GP2.
- 2.8. *SSC Policy ENV4: Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt* states that the limited infilling of major developed sites in the Green Belt may be permitted provided that there will be no greater impact on the purposes of the Green Belt than the existing development; the height of the existing buildings is not exceeded; and there will be no greater impact (and where possible, less impact) than the existing development on the openness and purposes of the Green Belt. The policy seeks to enable appropriate infilling or redevelopment of major developed sites whilst ensuring that the functions and amenity of the Green Belt are not prejudiced. Whilst the Sites are not part of one of the major developed sites referenced in *SSC policy ENV4*, they are located adjacent to the approved West Midlands Rail Freight Interchange (WMI).

² Landscape Institute (2018); *Green Belt Policy*

3. APPROACH

- 3.1. In 2014, as part of the evidence base which underpins the Local Plan, SSC commissioned a partial Green Belt Review³. It was updated in 2016. The Green Belt Review assessed the contribution to the five Green Belt purposes made by parcels of land adjoining villages and employment sites.
- 3.2. Since there is no universally accepted methodology for carrying out Green Belt reviews, and to ensure consistency, the SSC methodology has been used in this appraisal, and is provided at **Appendix A**. It is important to note that the methodology does not take account of landscape quality or the sensitivity of the Sites to accommodate development since these issues are not relevant to a Green Belt review.

4. THE SITES AND THEIR CONTEXT

- 4.1. Both sites are pockets of land to the south and east respectively of the recent extension of the Four Ashes Enterprise Park (Figure 1; Photo 1). The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, which is a conservation area, passes to the west of Site A (Photo 2). Neither site is covered by any designation which denotes landscape value.
- 4.2. The approved WMI abuts both sites to the north, east and south (Figure 2).



Photo 1: View looking north towards Four Ashes Enterprise Park



Photo 2: Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal to the west of Site A

³ South Staffordshire District Council (2014); *South Staffordshire Partial Green Belt Review*



Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: West Midlands Rail Freight Interchange (Parameter Plan)

Site A

- 4.3. Site A comprises a 1.92 hectare (ha) rectangular parcel of land. It does not contain any built form and there is no public access.
- 4.4. It is bordered to the west by the canal, to the north by an area of open land which contains a pond, to the east by a field and to the south by Vicarage Road. To the north, beyond the drainage pond, is a recently completed distribution centre within the Four Ashes Enterprise Park (Photo 1).
- 4.5. The Site is overgrown, colonised by ruderal scrub. The boundary with Vicarage Road is a native hedgerow and there are mature trees on the western boundary associated with the canal.
- 4.6. Land use in the immediate context of Site A is predominantly light industrial and commercial, with arable fields to the east.

Site B

- 4.7. Site B is located to the north-east of Site A, abutting the recent Four Ashes expansion. It is rectangular, measuring 6.96ha in area. It is bounded to the east by the Four Ashes Enterprise Park, to the north by arable farmland, to the east by Calf Heath Wood and to the south by farmland.
- 4.8. Site B is woodland. There is no public access.

- 4.9. Similar to Site A, land use in the immediate context of Site B is light industrial and commercial, with arable farmland to the north and south and woodland to the east.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO GREEN BELT PURPOSES

- 5.1. It is appropriate to consider both the current contribution each Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt and the contribution they will make when the WMI is complete.

- 5.2. The methodology applied in the SSC Green Belt Study assessed whether each parcel of land:

- makes a considerable contribution to Green Belt Purposes;
- makes a contribution to Green Belt Purposes; or
- makes a more limited contribution to Green Belt Purposes.

- 5.3. The SSC Green Belt Study, in making the overall judgement, took account of the individual value scores against each purpose. If one of the parcels scored highly, i.e. 3, for a single purpose, it was automatically assessed as making a considerable contribution to Green Belt purposes.

- 5.4. The SSC Green Belt Review assessed four parcels of land at Four Ashes (Figure 3). Four Ashes East (Parcel 2) included Site A.

- 5.5. Site B was not assessed in the SSC Green Belt Review.

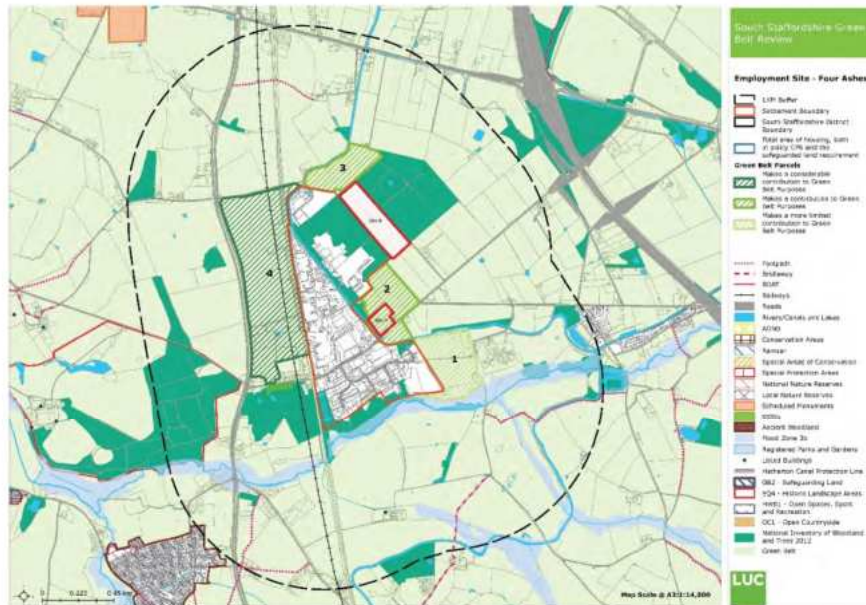


Figure 3: SSC Green Belt Review – Employment Site Four Ashes

Site A

- 5.6. Four Ashes Parcel 2, of which Site A represents approximately a fifth, was assessed in the SSC Review as making a contribution to Green Belt purposes, with a value of 12 (**Appendix B**).
- 5.7. Applying the SSC methodology specifically to Site A, it is considered that the value for Purpose 3 (To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment) is lower than for parcel 2 in its entirety since there has been additional encroachment of built development to the north of the parcel. Site A's overall value is therefore lowered and it is concluded that it currently makes a **more limited contribution** to Green Belt Purposes.
- 5.8. When the WMI is complete to the east of Site A (Zone A6 on the WMI parameter plan), the value for Purpose 1 (To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas) will also reduce since Site A will no longer play a role in preventing ribbon development. Site A will therefore make an even more limited contribution to Green Belt Purposes.

Site B

- 5.9. Applying the criteria defined in the SSC Green Belt Assessment (**Appendix A**) to Site B, it is considered that it currently makes a **limited contribution** to Green Belt Purposes, scoring 11.
- 5.10. Since Site B was not assessed in the SSC Review, detail of the assessment of values is provided at **Appendix C**.
- 5.11. When the WMI is complete to the east of Site B (Zone A4B on the WMI parameter plan), the value for Purpose 3 (To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment) will reduce since there will be development to the west and east of Site B. Site B will therefore make an even more limited contribution to Green Belt Purposes.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1. Notwithstanding their Green Belt designation, neither site is subject to wider landscape constraints such as a designation which would denote landscape value, Ancient Woodland, heritage assets etc.
- 6.2. Applying the assessment criteria and methodology employed in the SSC Green Belt Review, it is considered that both sites currently make a limited contribution to Green Belt Purposes as defined in the NPPF.

- 6.3. It is considered that they will make an even lower contribution to the Purposes following completion of the WMI, when existing built form and built form associated with the WMI will surround them.
- 6.4. Due to their limited contribution to Green Belt Purposes, particularly following the completion of the WMI, release of the Sites from Green Belt would not compromise SSC's overall vision of maintaining and enhancing the character and local distinctiveness of the district, including the natural and historic environment and the character of the wider rural landscape.
- 6.5. Development of the Sites could be compatible in terms of siting, design, form, scale and appearance with the character of the surrounding area, particularly following implementation of the WFI, resulting in no greater impact on the purposes of the Green Belt.

APPENDIX A – SSC Green Belt Assessment Criteria

Appendix 1 - Review Criteria

NPPF Green Belt Purposes	Issues for consideration	Criteria	Value
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.	Location in relation to the West Midlands urban area (Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall and Cannock).	Is the parcel abutting the boundary of Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall or Cannock?	If yes, +++ If no, +
	Ribbon development.	Does the parcel play a role in preventing ribbon development?	If strong role (i.e. it lies either side of a road corridor), ++ If no role, +
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.	Distance between parcel and the nearest neighbouring settlement(s).	What is the distance to the nearest neighbouring settlement?	If abuts boundary or <500m, +++ If between 500m and 2km from boundary, ++ If more than 2km, +
	Location of the parcel.	Does the parcel play a major role in maintaining separation? (This will partly be a function of the size of the parcel).	Major, ++ Minor +
	Type and location of physical boundaries bordering/separating parcels: motorways, railways, rivers or woods.	Are there natural or man-made features that could prevent settlements from merging with one another? (These could be outside the parcel itself).	If there is no significant boundary between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +++ If there is a less significant boundary, ++ If there is a significant boundary(s) between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +

South Staffordshire Partial Green Belt Review

November 2016

NPPF Green Belt Purposes	Issues for consideration	Criteria	Value
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.	Significance of existing urbanising influences. ¹² Openness.	Has the parcel already been affected by encroachment of built development within the parcel?	If no encroachment, +++ If limited encroachment, ++ If already encroached upon, +
	Significance and permanence of boundaries / features to contain development and prevent encroachment.	Are there existing natural or man-made features / boundaries that would prevent encroachment in the long term? (These could be outside the parcel itself).	If no significant/less significant boundary between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, ++ If significant boundary(s) between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +
	Countryside access / recreation.	Is there evidence of positive use of the countryside in this location (e.g. footpaths, bridleways, formal or informal sport and recreation)? (Accessible countryside on the doorstep.)	If yes and abutting the settlement, ++ If yes but not abutting the settlement, or no +
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	Contribution of parcel to setting and special character of settlement.	Are there features of historic significance in the parcel or visible from the parcel?	If yes and in/abutting the parcel, +++ If yes and not abutting the parcel, ++ If no, +
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.	The need to incentivise development within settlements.	Does the settlement contain significant areas of brownfield land? (Only applies to one settlement)	If yes, ++ If no, +

¹² The significance of existing urbanising influences has a direct influence over the relative openness of green belt parcels. We have therefore used the presence of urbanising influences as a proxy for assessing the degree of openness within the parcel.

South Staffordshire Partial Green Belt Review

November 2016

The following definitions were used alongside the assessment criteria to assess the Sites against the purposes of Green Belts:

- Ribbon development – linear development along route ways, such roads, canals and railways.
- Settlement – a village or strategic employment site as defined in Core Policy 1 of the South Staffordshire Local Plan.
- Sprawl - the irregular or straggling expansion of an urban or industrial area, spreading out over a large area in an untidy and irregular way.
- Separation – open countryside between two detached settlements.
- Merging – the joining or blurring of boundaries between two settlements.
- Encroachment from urbanising influences – intrusion, gradual advance of buildings and urbanised land beyond an acceptable or established limit.

Features of historic significance – Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens, Listed Buildings and Historic Landscape Areas.

APPENDIX B – SCC Green Belt Assessment - Four Ashes Parcel 2

Settlement: Four Ashes

Direction: East

Parcel Number: 2

Overall Parcel Judgement				
Makes a contribution to Green Belt Purposes				
General Commentary				
Enclosed to the north, south and west but open towards village of Calf Heath				
NPPF Green Belt Purposes	Issues for consideration	Criteria	Value ¹	Assessment and Comments
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.	Location in relation to the West Midlands urban area (Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall and Cannock).	Is the parcel abutting the boundary of Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall or Cannock?	If yes, +++. If no, +	+
	Ribbon development.	Does the parcel play a role in preventing ribbon development?	If strong role (i.e. it lies either side of a road corridor), ++ If no role, +	++ road on southern boundary
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.	Distance between parcel and the nearest neighbouring settlement(s).	What is the distance to the nearest neighbouring settlement?	If abuts boundary or <500m, +++ If between 500m and 2km from boundary, ++ If more than 2km, +	++ Village of Calf Heath <1km to east
	Location of the parcel	Does the parcel play a major role in maintaining separation? (This will partly be a function of the size of the parcel).	Major, ++ Minor +	+ not immediately between ES and village
	Type and location of physical boundaries bordering/separating parcels: motorways, railways, rivers or woods.	Are there natural or man-made features that could prevent settlements from merging with one another? (These could be outside the parcel itself).	If there is no significant boundary between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +++ If there is a less significant boundary, ++ If there is a significant boundary(s) between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +	+ Minor roads, canal and sewage works in between ES and village

¹ Definitions in method statement

Settlement: Four Ashes

Direction: East

Parcel Number: 2

Overall Parcel Judgement				
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.	Significance of existing urbanising influences. Openness.	Has the parcel already been affected by encroachment of built development within the parcel?	If no encroachment, +++ If limited encroachment, ++ If already encroached upon, +	++ industrial estate to north west
	Significance and permanence of boundaries / features to contain development and prevent encroachment.	Are there existing natural or man-made features / boundaries that would prevent encroachment in the long term? (These could be outside the parcel itself).	If no significant boundary between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, ++ If less significant boundary between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, ++ If significant boundary(s) between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +	+ Minor roads, canal and sewage works in between ES and village
	Countryside access / recreation.	Is there evidence of positive use of the countryside in this location (e.g. footpaths, bridleways, formal or informal sport and recreation)? (Accessible countryside on the doorstep.)	If yes and abutting the settlement, ++ If yes but not abutting the settlement, or no +	+
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	Contribution of parcel to setting and special character of settlement.	Are there features of historic significance in the parcel or visible from the parcel?	If yes and in/abutting the parcel, +++ If yes and not abutting the parcel, ++ If no, +	N/A
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.	The need to incentivise development within settlements	Does the immediate area contain significant areas of brownfield land?	If yes, ++ If no, +	+

APPENDIX C – Appraisal of Site B’s contribution to Green Belt purposes

Site B – Contribution to Green Belt purposes (post completion of WMI in brackets)				
NPPF Green Belt Purpose	Issues for consideration	Criteria	Value	Assessment and Comments
<i>To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas</i>	Location in relation to the West Midlands urban area (Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall and Cannock).	Is the parcel abutting the boundary of Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall or Cannock?	If yes, +++. If no, +	+
	Ribbon development.	Does the parcel play a role in preventing ribbon development?	If strong role (i.e. it lies either side of a road corridor), ++ If no role, +	+ Already development on west side of Gravelly Way
<i>To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another</i>	Distance between parcel and the nearest neighbouring settlement(s).	What is the distance to the nearest neighbouring settlement?	If abuts boundary or <500m, +++ If between 500m and 2km from boundary, ++ If more than 2km, +	++ 1km from village of Calf Heath
	Location of the parcel	Does the parcel play a major role in maintaining separation? (This will partly be a function of the size of the parcel).	Major, ++ Minor +	+
	Type and location of physical boundaries bordering/separating parcels: motorways, railways, rivers or woods.	Are there natural or man-made features that could prevent settlements from merging with one another? (These could be outside the parcel itself).	If there is no significant boundary between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +++ If there is a less significant boundary, ++ If there is a significant boundary(s) between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +	+ road
<i>To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment</i>	Significance of existing urbanising influences. Openness.	Has the parcel already been affected by encroachment of built development within the parcel?	If no encroachment, +++ If limited encroachment, ++ If already encroached upon, +	++ industrial estate to west (+)
	Significance and permanence of boundaries / features to contain development and prevent encroachment.	Are there existing natural or man-made features / boundaries that would prevent encroachment in the long term? (These could be outside the parcel itself).	If no significant boundary between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, ++ If less significant boundary between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, ++ If significant boundary(s) between the parcel and the neighbouring settlement, +	+ road
	Countryside access / recreation.	Is there evidence of positive use of the countryside in this location (e.g. footpaths, bridleways, formal or	If yes and abutting the settlement, ++ If yes but not abutting the settlement, or no +	+

		informal sport and recreation)? (Accessible countryside on the doorstep.)		
<i>To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns</i>	Contribution of parcel to setting and special character of settlement.	Are there features of historic significance in the parcel or visible from the parcel?	If yes and in/abutting the parcel, +++ If yes and not abutting the parcel, ++ If no, +	n/a
<i>To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land</i>	The need to incentivise development within settlements	Does the immediate area contain significant areas of brownfield land?	If yes, ++ If no, +	+

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Appendix 4: 2018 EDNA Stage 2 Site Assessment

APPENDIX B – Sites and Assessment

Sites	Site Assessment Criteria																	All Criteria							
	Market Attractiveness							Sustainable Development							Strategic Planning Considerations				Total Scoring						
Reference	Market Activity/ Developer Interest	Development Constraints	Need for Investment	Accessibility	Site Condition	Quality of Surrounding Environment	Market Attractiveness Total	Location	Previously Developed / Greenfield	Public Transport Accessibility	Estimated Impact on Environment/ Biodiversity	Suitability for Growth Sectors	Suitability for employment development (including all possible uses)	Suitability & benefits of other uses	Proximity to workforce with suitable skill and qualification characteristics	Sustainability Total	Planning Context	Specific uses/Use		Regeneration Corridor/Development proposals	Importance to Economic Development Activities (Core Strategy)	Importance to Economic Development Activities (SEP)	Neighbouring Uses	Strategic Planning Score Total	Total Scoring
E33	Proposed West Midlands Interchange	5	3	4	5	3	4	24	5	2	5	2	5	5	3	3	30	Open Green Belt or Countryside Designations	5	5	5	5	3	23	77
E52a	Extension to Berkote Four Ashes (site a)	2	3	3	5	4	4	21	5	0	3	3	4	5	4	3	27		3	4	5	5	5	22	70
E52b	Extension to Berkote Four Ashes (site b)	2	3	3	5	4	4	21	5	0	3	3	4	5	4	3	27		3	4	5	5	5	22	70
E35a	Holnock Road Essington	5	3	1	4	4	4	21	1	3	5	4	4	4	3	3	27		3	3	3	3	3	15	63
E45	Land north of 154 / M54	2	2	1	5	2	2	14	5	0	5	3	4	4	5	3	29		3	3	5	5	2	18	61
E32	Land east of Four Ashes, (proposed extension to four	1	2	1	2	2	3	11	5	2	3	3	3	5	5	3	29		3	3	5	5	5	21	61
E57	Land at Mount Pleasant Dunston	2	3	3	5	3	3	19	5	0	5	3	4	4	3	3	27		3	3	3	3	3	15	61
E41	Land north of Bognop Road	2	2	1	5	2	4	16	5	2	3	3	3	4	4	3	27		3	3	3	3	5	17	60
E30	Land South of Junction 13 of the M6	2	3	1	4	4	4	18	2	0	5	3	4	4	4	3	25		3	3	3	3	3	15	58
E5a	Land at M6 Toll, Cheslyn Hay	3	2	1	5	3	4	18	5	0	3	2	3	4	5	3	25		3	3	3	1	5	15	58
E37	Land between ROF Freatherstone and the A449	2	2	1	3	3	3	14	5	0	5	3	2	3	3	3	24		3	3	5	5	3	19	57
E38	Land South of Mosely Road	2	2	1	5	3	3	16	5	0	5	3	3	3	2	3	24		3	3	5	3	3	17	57
E04a	Land around Dunston Business Village	3	3	3	3	3	4	19	1	0	5	3	4	4	4	3	24		3	2	3	1	4	13	56
E31	Land to the East of Paradise Lane, Slade Heath	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	2	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	25		3	2	3	1	3	12	54
E53	Upper Pendeford Farm	2	3	1	3	3	3	15	5	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	24		3	3	3	3	3	15	54
E56	Land at Wall Heath	2	3	1	4	3	2	15	1	0	5	3	4	4	3	3	23		3	3	3	3	3	15	53
E43	Land at Junction 11 of Hilton Park	2	2	2	2	3	3	14	1	0	5	3	4	4	4	3	24		3	3	3	3	3	15	53
E49	Land at Middlehill Farm (site C)	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	4	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	22		3	3	3	1	3	13	52
E54	East of Wolverhampton Road	2	2	1	4	3	2	14	2	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	21		3	3	3	3	3	15	50
E47	Land at Middlehill Farm (site A)	1	2	1	5	3	3	15	1	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	20		3	3	3	3	3	15	50
E52	Land at Laney Green	1	3	1	3	3	3	14	1	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	19	3	3	3	1	3	13	46	
E48	Land at Middlehill Farm (site B)	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	1	0	3	3	2	1	1	3	14	3	2	3	1	2	11	42	

Appendix 5: EDNA 2022 Revised Site Assessment

Table 22. Summary of Employment Site Quality Scoring

	Market Attractiveness Total	Sustainability Total	Strategic Planning Score Total	Grand Total	Weighted Total
i54 Wobaston Road	30	36	20	86	89.0%
i54 Western Extension	30	32	20	82	86.0%
Hilton Cross, Hilton	29	35	19	83	85.7%
West Midlands Interchange	24	28	23	75	81.8%
Vernon Park	29	33	17	79	81.0%
ROF, Featherstone	21	33	22	76	81.0%
★ Bericote Four Ashes	23	34	20	77	80.5%
Hawkins Drive Industrial Estate, Cheslyn Hay	26	35	14	75	74.7%
Balliol Business Park	24	33	15	72	72.8%
Argos, Acton Gate	25	32	14	71	71.4%
Heathmill Road Industrial Estate, Wombourne	24	33	13	70	69.6%
Former GE Aviation, Bilbrook / Owens Trading Estate	20	33	15	68	68.8%

	Market Attractiveness Total	Sustainability Total	Strategic Planning Score Total	Grand Total	Weighted Total
Hilton Main Industrial Estate, Hilton	18	35	15	68	68.3%
Kingswood Business Park, Kingswood	26	28	12	66	66.2%
Landywood Lane Industrial Estate, Cheslyn Hay	16	34	14	64	63.9%
Hobnock Road, Essington	21	25	15	61	63.8%
Former Sandvik Site, Brinsford	22	29	12	63	63.0%
Coppice Lane, B.S Eaton, Cheslyn Hay	23	33	9	65	62.2%
Dunston Business Village	21	27	13	61	62.1%
Landywood Enterprise Park, Great Wyrley	19	31	12	62	61.5%
Hepworth Site, Warstones Road, Essington	21	26	13	60	61.3%
Huntington Industrial Estate, Huntington	18	29	13	60	60.6%
Proposed ROF Extension (West)	14	21	19	54	60.2%
Proposed ROF Extension (East)	14	23	18	55	60.1%
Littleton Business Park, Littleton Drive, Huntingdon	18	31	11	60	58.9%
Wombourne Enterprise Park	19	27	12	58	58.5%
Paradise Lane, Slade Heath	20	25	12	57	58.0%
Former Loades PLC, Great Wyrley	16	31	11	58	56.9%
Acton Plaza, Acton Gate	21	22	11	54	55.1%
Essington Light Industrial Estate, Bognop Road	13	27	12	52	52.5%
Wolverhampton Business Airport, Bobbington	12	23	13	48	50.1%
Smestow Bridge Industrial Estate, Wombourne	10	27	12	49	49.5%

Source: SPRU analysis

Appendix 6: 2022 Topic Paper ELAA Site Scores

Appendix C: ELAA site scores

Sites		Site Assessment Criteria															Strategic Planning Considerations					All Criteria			
Reference		Market Activity / Developer Interest	Development Constraints	Need for investment	Accessibility	Site Condition	Quality of Surrounding Environment	Market Attractiveness Total	Location	Previously Developed / Greenfield	Public Transport Accessibility	Estimated Impact on Environment / Biodiversity	Suitability for Growth Sectors	Suitability for employment (including all possible uses)	Suitability & benefits of other uses	Proximity to workforce with suitable skill and qualification characteristics	Sustainability Total	Planning Context	Specific user/use	Regeneration Corridor/Development proposals	Importance to Economic Development Activities (Core Strategy)	Importance to Economic Development Activities (SEP)	Neighbouring Uses	Strategic Planning Score Total	Total Scoring
E24	154	5	5	5	5	5	5	30	5	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	36		5	1	5	5	4	20	86
E20	Hilton Cross	5	5	4	5	5	5	29	4	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	35		5	1	5	3	5	19	83
E44	154 western extension	5	5	5	5	5	5	30	1	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	32		5	1	5	5	4	20	82
E14	Vernon Park	5	5	5	5	5	4	29	4	5	3	5	3	5	5	3	33		5	1	3	3	5	17	79
E18	ROF Featherstone	5	3	3	4	3	3	21	5	5	2	5	5	4	4	3	33		3	4	5	5	5	22	76
E33	West Midlands Interchange	5	3	4	5	3	4	24	5	2	3	2	5	5	3	3	28		5	5	5	5	3	23	75
E51a	Extension to Bericote Four Ashes (site a)	2	3	3	5	4	4	21	5	0	3	3	4	5	4	3	27		3	4	5	5	5	22	70
E51b	Extension to Bericote Four Ashes (site b)	2	3	3	5	4	4	21	5	0	3	3	4	5	4	3	27		3	4	5	5	5	22	70
E15a	Hobnock Road Essington	5	3	1	4	4	4	21	1	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	25		3	3	3	3	3	15	61
E45	Land north of 154 / M54	2	2	1	5	2	2	14	5	0	5	3	4	4	5	3	29		3	3	5	5	2	18	61
E32	Land east of Four Ashes, (proposed extension)	1	2	1	2	2	3	11	5	2	3	3	5	5	3	3	29		3	3	5	5	5	21	61
E57	Land at Mount Pleasant Dunston	2	3	3	5	3	3	19	5	0	5	3	4	4	3	3	27		3	3	3	3	3	15	61
E41	Land north of Bognop Road	2	2	1	5	2	4	16	5	2	3	3	3	4	4	3	27		3	3	3	3	5	17	60
E30	Land South of Junction 11 of the M6	2	3	1	4	4	4	18	2	0	5	3	4	4	4	3	25		3	3	3	3	3	15	58
E50	Land at M6 Toll, Cheslyn Hay	3	2	1	5	3	4	18	5	0	3	2	3	4	5	3	25		3	3	3	1	5	15	58
E37	Land between ROF Freatherstone and the A4	2	2	1	3	3	3	14	5	0	5	3	2	3	3	3	24		3	3	5	5	3	19	57
E38	Land South of Mosely Road	2	2	1	5	3	3	16	5	0	5	3	3	3	2	3	24		3	3	5	3	3	17	57
E04a	Land around Dunston Business Village	3	3	3	3	3	4	19	1	0	5	3	4	4	4	3	24		3	2	3	1	4	13	56
E60	Land north of A5, Gailey	2	3	1	5	3	3	17	5	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	24		3	3	3	3	3	15	56
E31	Land to the East of Paradise Lane, Slade Heath	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	2	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	25		3	2	3	1	3	12	54
E58	Land at Gailey Lea Farm	2	3	1	5	3	3	17	1	0	3	3	4	5	3	3	22		3	3	3	3	3	15	54
E53	Upper Pendeford Farm	2	3	1	3	3	3	15	5	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	24		3	3	3	3	3	15	54
E56	Land at Wall Health	2	3	1	4	3	2	15	1	0	5	3	4	4	3	3	23		3	2	3	3	3	15	53
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E49	Land at Middlehill Farm (site C)	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	4	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	22		3	3	3	1	3	13	52
E54	East of Wolverhampton Road	2	2	1	4	3	2	14	2	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	21		3	3	3	3	3	15	50
E61	Land at Pendeford Hall Lane	1	3	1	3	3	3	14	5	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	23		3	1	3	3	3	13	50
E47	Land at Middlehill Farm (site A)	1	2	1	5	3	3	15	1	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	20		3	3	3	3	3	15	50
E59	Land north of Cocksparrow Lane, Huntington	1	3	1	3	3	3	14	3	0	3	3	2	3	3	3	20		3	3	3	1	3	13	47
E52	Land at Laney Green	1	3	1	3	3	3	14	1	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	19		3	3	3	1	3	13	46
E48	Land at Middlehill Farm (site B)	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	1	0	3	3	2	1	1	3	14		3	2	3	1	2	11	42

Principal policy constraints affecting these sites are Green Belt or Open Countryside Designations

Appendix 7: 2024 Topic Paper ELAA Site Scores

Appendix C: ELAA site scores

Sites		Site Assessment Criteria															Strategic Planning Considerations					All Criteria			
Reference		Market Activity / Developer Interest	Development Constraints	Need for Investment	Accessibility	Site Condition	Quality of Surrounding Environment	Market Attractiveness Total	Location	Previously Developed / Greenfield	Public Transport Accessibility	Estimated Impact on Environment / Biodiversity	Suitability for Growth Sectors	Suitability for employment (including all possible uses)	Suitability & benefits of other uses	Proximity to workforce with suitable skill and qualification characteristics	Sustainability Total	Planning Context	Specific user/use	Regeneration Corridor/Development proposals	Importance to Economic Development Activities (Core Strategy)	Importance to Economic Development Activities (SEP)	Neighbouring Uses	Strategic Planning Score Total	Total Scoring
E24	154	5	5	5	5	5	5	30	5	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	36		5	1	5	5	4	20	86
E20	Hilton Cross	5	5	4	5	5	5	29	4	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	35		5	1	5	3	5	19	83
E44	154 western extension	5	5	5	5	5	5	30	1	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	32		5	1	5	5	4	20	82
E14	Vernon Palk	5	5	5	5	5	4	29	4	5	3	5	3	5	5	3	33		5	1	3	3	5	17	79
E18	ROF Featherstone	5	3	3	4	3	3	21	5	5	2	5	5	4	4	3	33		3	4	5	5	5	22	76
E33	West Midlands Interchange	5	3	4	5	3	4	24	5	2	3	2	5	5	3	3	28		5	5	5	5	3	23	75
E51a	Extension to Bericote Four Ashes (site a)	2	3	3	5	4	4	21	5	0	3	3	4	5	4	3	27		3	4	5	5	5	22	70
E51b	Extension to Bericote Four Ashes (site b)	2	3	3	5	4	4	21	5	0	3	3	4	5	4	3	27		3	4	5	5	5	22	70
E15a	Hobnock Road Essington	5	3	1	4	4	4	21	1	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	25		3	3	3	3	3	15	61
E45	Land north of 154 / M54	2	2	1	5	2	2	14	5	0	5	3	4	4	5	3	29		3	3	5	5	2	18	61
E32	Land east of Four Ashes, (proposed extension)	1	2	1	2	2	3	11	5	2	3	3	3	5	5	3	29		3	3	5	5	5	21	61
E57	Land at Mount Pleasant Dunston	2	3	3	5	3	3	19	5	0	5	3	4	4	3	3	27		3	3	3	3	3	15	61
E41	Land north of Bognop Road	2	2	1	5	2	4	16	5	2	3	3	3	4	4	3	27		3	3	3	3	5	17	60
E30	Land South of Junction 13 of the M6	2	3	1	4	4	4	18	2	0	5	3	4	4	4	3	25		3	3	3	3	3	15	58
E50	Land at M6 Toll, Cheslyn Hay	3	2	1	5	3	4	18	5	0	3	2	3	4	5	3	25		3	3	3	1	5	15	58
E37	Land between ROF Featherstone and the A4	2	2	1	3	3	3	14	5	0	5	3	2	3	3	3	24		3	3	5	5	3	19	57
E38	Land South of Mosely Road	2	2	1	5	3	3	16	5	0	5	3	3	3	2	3	24		3	3	5	3	3	17	57
E04a	Land around Dunston Business Village	3	3	3	3	3	4	19	1	0	5	3	4	4	4	3	24		3	2	3	3	4	13	56
E60	Land north of A5, Gailey	2	3	1	5	3	3	17	5	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	24		3	3	3	3	3	15	56
E31	Land to the East of Paradise Lane, Slade Heath	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	2	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	25		3	2	3	1	3	12	54
E58	Land at Gailey Lea Farm	2	3	1	5	3	3	17	1	0	3	3	4	5	3	3	22		3	3	3	3	3	15	54
E53	Upper Pendeford Farm	2	3	1	3	3	3	15	5	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	24		3	3	3	3	3	15	54
E56	Land at Wall Health	2	3	1	4	3	2	15	1	0	5	3	4	4	3	3	23		3	3	3	3	3	15	53
E43	Land at Junction 11 of Hilton Park	2	2	2	2	3	3	14	1	0	5	3	4	4	4	3	24		3	3	3	3	3	15	53
E49	Land at Middlehill Farm (site C)	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	4	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	22		3	3	3	1	3	13	52
E54	East of Wolverhampton Road	2	2	1	4	3	2	14	2	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	21		3	3	3	3	3	15	50
E61	Land at Pendeford Hall Lane	1	3	1	3	3	3	14	5	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	23		3	1	3	3	3	13	50
E47	Land at Middlehill Farm (site A)	1	2	1	5	3	3	15	1	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	20		3	3	3	3	3	15	50
E59	Land north of Cocksparrow Lane, Huntington	1	3	1	3	3	3	14	3	0	3	3	2	3	3	3	20		3	3	3	1	3	13	47
E52	Land at Laney Green	1	3	1	3	3	3	14	1	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	19		3	3	3	1	3	13	46
E48	Land at Middlehill Farm (site B)	1	3	3	4	3	3	17	1	0	3	3	2	1	1	3	14		3	2	3	1	2	11	42

Principal policy constraints affecting these sites are Green Belt or Open Countryside Designations

Appendix 8: Ecology Assessment

BERICOTE PROPERTIES LTD



ECOLOGYSOLUTIONS

Part of the ES Group

FOUR ASHES EXPANSION,
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

December 2022
10422.PEA.v1

ecology solutions for
planners and developers

Sheppard Planning

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Mammal hole (eastern expansion)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Information downloaded from Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Ecology Solutions was commissioned by Quod on behalf of Bericote Properties Limited in January 2022 to undertake an ecological appraisal of land known as Four Ashes Expansion in South Staffordshire.
- 1.2. The site is split between the eastern expansion plot and southern expansion plot. The eastern expansion plot comprises largely broadleaved woodland known as Calf Heath Woods, whilst the southern expansion plot comprises predominately rush dominant habitat and grassland.
- 1.3. The site does not contain any designated sites. The closest statutory site is Four Ashes Pit Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located approximately 0.6km to the south-west of the of the southern expansion parcel. The closest non-statutory site is Calf Heath Bridge Biodiversity Alert (BAS) located approximately 10m to the south of the southern expansion parcel, separated by Vicarage Road.
- 1.4. It is considered that the implementation of the proposals adhering to a strict construction method statement shall limit potential pollution risks such that all locally present designated sites are unaffected.
- 1.5. The habitats present across both parcels do hold some ecological value, however this is considered to be of local importance only. The woodland within the eastern expansion is mapped as Priority Habitat, however owing to the low species diversity, its relatively young age and extensive coverage of Rhododendron within the woodland it is considered unlikely, in reality, that this would meet criteria as Priority Habitat.
- 1.6. Any future development of the site has scope to include new areas of species-rich habitat to offset the loss of the any existing habitats, whilst provide a net gain in biodiversity beyond what is currently present on site. The removal of non-native invasive species, such as Rhododendron, would represent an improvement over the current baseline position.
- 1.7. Opportunities for protected species, such as Badger, bats, birds and reptiles have been identified, and further survey work will be required to fully ascertain the site's use by these and other notable and protected species.
- 1.8. With a sensitive design, appropriate landscaping and ecology buffer zones, it is considered that the site's development could offer new opportunities for wildlife, whilst retaining suitable wildlife corridors and connectivity to the wider landscape. Any future development could compliment mitigation and enhancements set out within adjacent consented schemes, such as the West Midlands Interchange.
- 1.9. In summary, an initial appraisal of the site does not highlight any overriding ecological constraint to its development. Appropriate mitigation and enhancements can be adopted to ensure that the development adheres to current and emerging planning policy and legislation.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background and Proposals

- 2.1.1. Ecology Solutions was commissioned by Quod on behalf of Bericote Properties Limited in January 2022 to undertake an ecological appraisal of land known as Four Ashes Expansion in South Staffordshire (see Plan ECO1).
- 2.1.2. The proposals for the site are likely to include a number of new commercial units, infrastructure and associated landscape planting.

2.2. Site Characteristics

- 2.2.1. The site, which is split between the eastern expansion plot and southern expansion plot, is approximately 8.88ha in size and situated to the north of Four Ashes, and to the west of Cannock in Staffordshire. The site is adjacent to existing development, whilst to the north and east of the site are areas of woodland and areas of agriculture land (principally grazing pasture). The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal is present to the southwest of the site, and fringed by a wooded belt.
- 2.2.2. The eastern expansion plot comprises largely broadleaved woodland known as Calf Heath Woods, whilst the southern expansion plot comprises predominately rush dominant habitat and grassland.

2.3. Ecological Appraisal

- 2.3.1. This document assesses the ecological interest of the site as a whole. The importance of the habitats within the site is evaluated with due consideration given to the current guidance published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)¹.
- 2.3.2. Where necessary, mitigation measures are recommended so as to safeguard any significant existing ecological interest within the site and, where appropriate, potential enhancement measures are put forward and reference made to priority habitats and priority species.

¹ CIEEM (2018). *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine*. Version 1.1 – Updated September 2019. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

3.1. The methodology utilised for the survey work can be split into three areas, namely desk study, habitat survey and faunal survey. These are discussed in more detail below.

3.2. Desk Study

- 3.2.1. In order to compile background information on the site and the surrounding area, Ecology Solutions contacted Staffordshire Ecological Record (SER) in 2022
- 3.2.2. Further information on designated sites from a wider search area was obtained from the online Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)² database, which uses information held by Natural England and other organisations.
- 3.2.3. This information is reproduced at Appendix 1 and where appropriate on Plan ECO1.

3.3. Habitat Survey

- 3.3.1. Habitat surveys were carried out by Ecology Solutions in January 2022 in order to ascertain the general ecological value of the site and to identify the main habitats and associated plant species present.
- 3.3.2. The site was surveyed based on extended Phase 1 survey methodology³, as recommended by Natural England, whereby the habitat types present are identified and mapped, together with an assessment of the species composition of each habitat. This technique provides an inventory of the basic habitat types present and allows identification of areas of greater potential which require further survey. Any such areas identified can then be examined in more detail.
- 3.3.3. Using the above method, the site was classified into areas of similar botanical community types, with a representative species list compiled for each habitat identified.
- 3.3.4. All the species that occur in each habitat would not necessarily be detectable during survey work carried out at any given time of the year, since different species are apparent at different seasons. Whilst it is acknowledged that the timing of the survey was undertaken outside of the optimal botanical season, it is considered that a robust assessment was undertaken in order to understand the nature of the habitats present.

3.4. Faunal Survey

- 3.4.1. Obvious faunal activity recorded during the site survey, such as birds or mammals observed visually or by call, was recorded. Specific attention was paid to any potential use of the site by protected species, priority species or other notable species.

² <http://www.magic.gov.uk>

³ Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey – a Technique for Environmental Audit*. England Field Unit, Nature Conservancy Council, reprinted JNCC, Peterborough.

- 3.4.2. In addition, specific surveys were undertaken in respect of bats and Badgers *Meles meles* by experienced surveyors.

Bats

- 3.4.3. Trees within the site were assessed for their potential to support roosting bats in January 2022. Features typically favoured by bats and evidence of past use by bats were searched for, including:

- Obvious holes, e.g. rot holes and old Woodpecker holes;
- Dark staining on the tree, below the hole;
- Tiny scratch marks around a hole from bats' claws;
- Cavities, splits and / or loose bark from broken or fallen branches, lightning strikes etc.; and
- Very dense covering of mature Ivy over trunk.

- 3.4.4. In addition, the site was appraised for its suitability for foraging and commuting bats.

- 3.4.5. All field surveys were undertaken with regard paid to best practice guidelines issued by Natural England (2004⁴), the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2004⁵) and the Bat Conservation Trust (2016⁶).

Badgers

- 3.4.6. The site and immediate vicinity was subject to specific surveys for Badgers in January 2022.

- 3.4.7. The surveys comprised two main elements: firstly, searching thoroughly for evidence of Badger setts. If any setts were encountered each sett entrance was noted and plotted, even if the entrance appeared disused. The following information was recorded where present:

- i) The number and location of well used or very active entrances if present; these are clear of any debris or vegetation and are obviously in regular use and may, or may not, have been excavated recently.
- ii) The number and location of inactive entrances; these are not in regular use and have debris such as leaves and twigs in the entrance or have plants growing in or around the edge of the entrance.
- iii) The number of disused entrances; these have not been in use for some time, are partly or completely blocked and cannot be used without considerable clearance. If the entrance has been disused for some time all that may be visible is a depression in the ground where the hole used to be together with the remains of the spoil

⁴ Mitchell-Jones, A J (2004). *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature, Peterborough.

⁵ Mitchell-Jones, A J & McLeish, A P (Eds.) (2004). *Bat Workers' Manual*. 3rd edition. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

⁶ Collins, J (Ed.) (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines*. 3rd Edition. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

heap.

- 3.4.8. Secondly, any evidence of Badger activity such as well-worn paths, run-throughs, snagged hair, footprints, latrines and foraging signs was sought and if present recorded so as to build up a picture of the use of the site by Badgers.

4. ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

- 4.1. A habitat survey was undertaken within the site by Ecology Solutions in January 2022.
- 4.2. The following main habitat / vegetation types were identified within the site during the surveys undertaken:
- Broadleaved woodland;
 - Modified grassland;
 - Poor semi-improved grassland;
 - Tree planting;
 - Bracken;
 - Ditch;
 - Pond (off-site);
 - Non-native invasive species;
 - Rush dominant habitat;
 - Tall ruderal / recolonising ground;
 - Scrub;
 - Tree belt; and
 - Hedgerow.
- 4.3. The locations of these habitats are shown on Plans ECO2 and ECO3. The proposals are set across two distinct plots and these are detailed separately below.

Eastern Expansion Plot

4.4. Broadleaved Woodland

- 4.4.1. This plot almost exclusively comprises broadleaved woodland and represents the southwestern portion of Calf Heath Wood (see Photograph 1).
- 4.4.2. The woodland is dominated by Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, with occasional Oak *Quercus robur*, and rare Poplar *Populus*, and Willow *Salix* sp., present in the north; and dominant Silver Birch, frequent Willow *Salix* sp., occasional Oak, and rare Elder *Sambucus nigra* towards the south.
- 4.4.3. The majority of this woodland is of similar age and has a sparse understory. Former coppicing management is apparent; however, management does not appear to not have been practiced recently. A number of trees were recorded as fallen, particularly Silver Birch, and dead wood is present in areas of the woodland.
- 4.4.4. The understorey is dense along the northeastern and central portions with Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum*, while the southwestern portion is heavily dominated by Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* with occasional dominance by Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Occasional Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea* was also recorded, although ground flora is restricted by the heavy leaf litter and overshadowing of Bracken.

4.5. Modified Grassland

- 4.5.1. A thin strip of modified grassland is present along the southwestern boundary of the eastern expansion plot which has been seeded with an amenity grassland seed mix and is tied to the adjacent Four Ashes Industrial Park (see Photograph 2). This grassland is well-managed and comprises dominant Fescue *Festuca sp.* and Perennial Rye Grass *Lolium perenne*, with frequent False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, and occasional Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*, Daisy *Bellis perennis* and Mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris*. Rare Common Chickweed *Stellaria media*, Common Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* and Hairy Bittercress *Cardamine hirsute* are also present.

4.6. Poor Semi-improved Grassland

- 4.6.1. A small area of poor semi-improved grassland is located in the southwest corner of this plot. The grassland does not appear to be heavily managed therefore possesses a greater sward height and more tussocky characteristics.
- 4.6.2. Species recorded include Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* and occasional Tufted Hair-Grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, Cleavers *Galium aparine*, White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Common Ragwort, Creeping Buttercup, Creeping Thistle, Dovesfoot Cranesbill *Geranium mole*, Red Champion *Silene dioica*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Rosebay Willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium*, Speedwell *Veronica sp.* and Wood Avens *Geum urbanum*. Rare Brome *Bromus sp.*, Groundsel *Senecio vulgaris* and Teasel *Dipsacus sylvestris* are also present.

4.7. Tree Planting

- 4.7.1. A small line of tree planting is present alongside the aforementioned grassland along the southwestern boundary of the plot, aligning with the adjacent road. Species recorded here include Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, Elm *Ulmus sp.* and Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*.

4.8. Bracken

- 4.8.1. An area of Bracken is present in the northwest of the site and represents a continuation of this species from the adjacent woodland. This species vegetates a tall spoil mound at this location and contains other less frequent species such as Bramble, Mugwort, St John's Wort *Hypericum sp.* and False Oat-grass, and occasional Creeping Buttercup and Creeping Thistle.

4.9. Ditch

- 4.9.1. A shallow drainage ditch runs along a section of the southwestern boundary and was constructed as during the adjacent development's construction.
- 4.9.2. No water was observed within the ditch at the time of the survey and it was heavily overshadowed by Bracken and Bramble with frequent Creeping Thistle and Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, occasional Broom *Cytisus*

scoparius, Cleavers, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Groundsel, Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus*, and Rosebay Willowherb (see Photograph 3). Rare Broad-leaved Dock and Red Campion were also recorded.

4.10. Pond (off-site)

- 4.10.1. An off-site pond, Pond P1, is located approximately 15m from the eastern expansion's southeastern boundary (see Photograph 4). The pond is associated with the adjacent arable field and off-site drainage ditches and is heavily shaded by surrounding Willow *Salix* sp. and Bramble scrub. No aquatic or emergent vegetation was recorded at the time of the survey, nor during previous survey work tied to the adjacent Four Ashes Industrial Park. The pond was holding approximately 20cm of water at its greatest depths and had a substrate comprising leaf litter.

4.11. Non-native Invasive Species

- 4.11.1. As detailed above, the broadleaved woodland contains a heavy presence of Rhododendron within its understorey (see Photograph 5).

Southern Expansion

4.12. Rush Dominant Habitat

- 4.12.1. The northeastern portion of the southern expansion is heavily dominated by Hard Rush and Soft Rush *Juncus inflexus* which would appear to have established and left unmanaged following the construction of the attenuation feature tied to the recent Four Ashes Industrial Park. Other species recorded here include Bramble, Creeping Thistle, Spear Thistle and Poplar *Populus* sp. and Willow *Salix* sp. saplings are also present

4.13. Poor Semi-improved Grassland

- 4.13.1. The southern portion of this parcel is seen to be dominated by coarse grassland species. The grassland does not appear to be subject to current management and as such elements of scrub are migrating from the adjacent bands of scrub into the field with self-seeded species also noted (see Photograph 6).
- 4.13.2. Species present within the semi-improved grassland include Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Cocksfoot, False Oat-grass, Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, Perennial Rye Grass, Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Common Chickweed, Broad-leaved Dock, Soft Rush, Foxglove, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Common Nettle, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and Creeping Buttercup. Scrub elements developing within the field include Bramble, Oak, Field Rose *Rosa arvensis*, Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* and Alder *Alnus glutinosa*.

4.14. Tall Ruderal / Recolonising Ground

- 4.14.1. There are pockets of tall ruderal vegetation across this parcel, typically associated with areas subject to ground disturbance as a result of works

undertaken for the new attenuation feature located immediately to the northwest of the site (see Photograph 7).

- 4.14.2. Species recorded include dominant Creeping Thistle, with frequent Broad-leaved Dock, occasional Bittercress *Cardamine* sp., Bramble, Foxglove, Gorse, Hard Rush and Rosebay Willowherb and rare Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*.

4.15. Scrub

- 4.15.1. Areas of scrub are present across the southern parcel predominately within the centre of the parcel but also along the boundaries. This scrub comprises almost entirely of Bramble. Occasional Elm *Ulmus* sp., Field Maple *Acer campestre* and Willow *Salix* sp. saplings were also recorded along with groundcover species comprising Creeping Thistle, Hard Rush, Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, Rosebay Willowherb, Spear Thistle and Teasel.

4.16. Tree Planting

- 4.16.1. Several small areas of tree planting have been undertaken within the site presumably as part of the Four Ashes Industrial Park landscaping. These are relatively young trees at the time of the survey and comprise Silver Birch, Oak, Alder, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Whitebeam *Sorbus aria* 'Majestica'.

4.17. Tree Belt

- 4.17.1. A tree belt is present along the western boundary associated with the canal (see Photograph 8). The trees present are typically semi to mature in nature and comprise Oak, Birch, Alder, Silver Birch, Willow *Salix* sp., Poplar *Populus* sp., and Elder. Bracken, Cleavers, Bramble, Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, *Carex* sp., Hogweed, Broad-leaved Dock and Creeping Buttercup are also associated with the wooded belt.

4.18. Hedgerow

- 4.18.1. Two hedgerows are present along the boundaries of the southern expansion plot; one bordering the adjacent Vicarage Road along the southern boundary (Hedgerow H1) and the other delineating the boundary along the northeastern edge of the parcel (Hedgerow H2).
- 4.18.2. Hedgerow H1 lies adjacent to Vicarage Road and is rather gappy and of a poor structure (see Photograph 9). Evidence of flailing management was noted during the March 2016 surveys to inform the new Four Ashes Industrial Park, although no recent evidence was observed during the latest survey. Species associated with Hedgerow H1 include Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Willow *Salix* sp., Alder, Ivy *Hedera helix* and Cleavers.
- 4.18.3. Hedgerow H2 is of a better structure than Hedgerow H1 but does not appear to be subject to any formal management regime. The hedgerow is approximately 2.5 metres in height and contains occasional standards.

Species present include Hawthorn, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Willow *Salix* sp., Oak and Bramble.

4.19. Background Records

- 4.19.1. No records for any species listed under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were returned by the data search within the last ten years. Additionally, the data search also did not return any records any invasive plant species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

5. WILDLIFE USE OF SITE

- 5.1. General observations were made during the surveys of any faunal use of the site with specific attention paid to the potential presence of protected species.

5.2. Bats

- 5.2.1. Trees on site were appraised for their suitability for roosting bats in January 2022. Six trees were identified within the broadleaved woodland that possessed suitable Potential Roost Features (PRFs) that could be utilised by roosting bats. Furthermore, surveys undertaken to inform the West Midlands Interchange, which is located partly adjacent to the eastern expansion's eastern boundary, identified two bat roosts within the broadleaved woodland attributed to two Daubenton's *Myotis daubentonii* day roost in two separate Silver Birch trees.
- 5.2.2. In addition to those recorded within the eastern expansion, a further tree was identified with multiple PRFs located within the tree belt running along the canal in the southern expansion plot.
- 5.2.3. All nine bat potential trees and known bat roosts are detailed on Plan ECO2.
- 5.2.4. Both parcels hold suitability for foraging and commuting bats with the broadleaved woodland, hedgerows, tree belt and semi-improved grassland are all considered to be of value for this group. The canal to the southwest of the southern expansion plot is also likely to offer opportunities for this group. Surveys undertaken to inform the West Midlands Interchange recorded a range of bat species utilising the habitats within the environs of the site, although the majority of registrations were attributed to Common Pipistrelle.

Background Records

- 5.2.5. Twenty-seven records were returned for Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*. The closest two records relate to the same location approximately 60m north-east of the site dating from 2016, whilst the most recent two records relate to the same location approximately 0.6km east of the site dating from 2017.
- 5.2.6. Twenty-two records were returned for Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, with the closest three records all relating to a location approximately 60m north-east of the site in 2016. The most recent five records, all date from the same day in 2017 and refer to two separate locations approximately 0.6 and 1.1km east of the site.
- 5.2.7. Nine records were returned for Noctule *Nyctalus noctula* with the closest two records again relating to a location approximately 60m north of the site in 2016 and with the most recent record relating to 2017 approximately 1.1km east of the site boundary.
- 5.2.8. Two Serotine *Eptesicus serotinus* records were returned from the data search. These both relate to the same location approximately 60m north-west of the site during 2016.

- 5.2.9. Eleven records were returned for Natterer's Bat *Myotis nattereri* with the closest two records returned by the data search relating to a location approximately 60m north-east of the site dating from 2016 and the most recent four records relating to locations approximately 0.6km and 1.1km east of the site, as well as 1.2km south-west of the site during 2017.
- 5.2.10. Twenty-eight records were returned for Brown Long-eared Bat *Plecotus auritus*. The six most recent records all date from 2017 and relate to locations approximately between 60m and 1.1km east of the site boundary. The three closest records relate to a location approximately 60m north-east of the site from 2016.
- 5.2.11. Nine records were returned for Whiskered Bat *Myotis mystacinus* / Brandt's Bat *Myotis brandtii*. The most recent of these records relate to two separate locations located approximately 0.4 and 1.3km east of the site in 2017. The closest three records relate to 2016 at a location approximately 0.6km north-east of the site.
- 5.2.12. Sixteen records were returned for Daubenton's Bat, the most recent of which dates from June 2016 from a grid square that includes the eastern expansion of the site. There are eight records returned that share the same most recent date from 2017 all of which are located between 0.6km and 1.1km east of the site.
- 5.2.13. Additionally, there were also three unidentified bat species returned by the data search, all dating from 2017 and relating to locations approximately 0.4km south of the site. There was also two unidentified *Myotis* sp. records, one of which relates to a location approximately 80m east of the site, and the other relates to a location approximately 350m north of the site, both within 2016.
- 5.3. Badgers**
- 5.3.1. Two adjacent mammal holes holding characteristics of Badger sett entrances were recorded within the eastern expansion plot within the broadleaved woodland (see Plan ECO2; Photograph 10). No recent evidence of Badger use was recorded at the entrances, however it cannot be ruled out that this is not an outlier Badger sett.
- 5.3.2. The broadleaved woodland is considered to provide suitable opportunities for this species, whilst the southern expansion parcel may offer limited foraging and dispersal opportunities, although no evidence of use by Badger was recorded in January 2022.
- Background Records*
- 5.3.3. The desk study returned eight records of Badger from the search area. The closest record relates to a location approximately 0.4km north of the site from 2016 and the most recent three records relate to locations approximately 1km north-west, 0.6km south and 1.3km south-west of the site and date from 2017.

5.4. Hedgehogs

- 5.4.1. No evidence of Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* was recorded on site. The woodland, hedgerows, grassland and scrub do offer opportunities for hibernating, dispersing and foraging Hedgehogs opportunities for this species.

Background Records

- 5.4.2. The data search returned four records for Hedgehog within the search area from the past 10 years. The closest record relates to a location approximately 1km west of the site dating from June 2015. The most recent record relates to a location approximately 1.5km north-west of the site dating from September 2015.

5.5. Other Mammals

- 5.5.1. It is considered that other small common mammal species could make use of vegetation within the site. None of the small mammals are likely to be notable or species of conservation concern.

- 5.5.2. It can not be ruled out that the off-site canal would not be used by Otter *Lutra lutra* for foraging and dispersal purposes, however proposals are unlikely to impact the canal therefore this species is not considered further in this appraisal.

Background Records

- 5.5.3. The data search returned four records of Otter. The closest of these dates from 2014 and relates to a location approximately 0.7km east of the site. The two most recent records both date from 2017 and relate to locations approximately 0.8 and 1.3km south and south-west of the site respectively.

- 5.5.4. The data search also returned two records of Polecat *Mustela putorius*. The closest record relates to a location approximately 1.5km north of the site dating from 2012 and the most recent record relates to a location approximately 1.9km south-east of the site in 2015.

- 5.5.5. No further protected mammal species were returned by the data search within the last ten years.

5.6. Birds

- 5.6.1. Bird species recorded on site by sight or call during the survey include Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*, Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*, Great Tit *Parus major*, Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba* and Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. Woodpecker holes are also present on some trees within the woodland.

- 5.6.2. The site does offer suitable nesting opportunities predominately within the broadleaved woodland, as well as within the rush dominant habitat, hedgerows, tree belt and scrub within the southern expansion.

Background Records

- 5.6.3. A total of thirty-four species listed under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 were returned by the data search within the last ten years, with the majority of records returned relating to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site.
- 5.6.4. Species of which all records returned exclusively relate to this reservoir include: Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* (single record); Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* (forty-six records); Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* (forty-two records); Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (ten records); Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (thirty-one records); Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* (twenty records); Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* (thirty-five records); Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* (eighteen records); Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* (single record); Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus* (single record); Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (one hundred and five records); Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* (twenty-eight records); Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* (six records); Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (five records); Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* (single record); Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* (forty-one records); Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* (single record); Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (seven records); Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* (fourty-eight records); Merlin *Falco columbarius* (two records); Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* (eleven records); Redwing *Turdus iliacus* (thirteen records); Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (three records); Scaup *Aythya marila* (sixty-nine records); Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (seven records); and Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* (single record). Of these species, ten (Bittern, Black-necked Grebe, Black tern, Cetti's Warbler, Common Scooter, Goldeneye, Green Sandpiper, Mediterranean Gull, Redwing and Scaup) have all been recorded as recently as 2019.
- 5.6.5. Additional species listed under this legislation not exclusively relating to Gailey reservoir include:
- 5.6.6. Eight records returned for Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. The closest of these dates from 2015 and relates to a location approximately 0.8km west of the site and the most recent relates to a location approximately 0.9km south-west of the site in 2017.
- 5.6.7. Thirty-three records returned for Fieldfare. The closest records relates to a location approximately 0.9km east of the site in 2015 whilst the most recent record relates to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site.
- 5.6.8. Three records returned for Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*. The two closest records relate to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site in 2015 and 2016. The most recent record returned dates from later in 2016 and refers to a location approximately 2.2km west of the site.
- 5.6.9. Seventy-six records returned for Hobby *Falco subbuteo*. The closest of these relates to a location approximately 1.1km south-east of the site from 2014. All remaining records relate to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site, with the most recent record returned dating from 2019.

- 5.6.10. Twenty-two records returned for Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* by the data search. The closest of these dates from 2015 and relates to a location approximately 0.4km east of the site and the most recent record relates to a location approximately 0.7km east of the site in 2017.
- 5.6.11. Four records returned for Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*. The closest of these relates to a location approximately 0.4km east of the site in 2014 and the most recent record dates from 2017 within Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site boundary.
- 5.6.12. Thirty-six records returned for Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*. The majority of these records including the closest and most recent records also relate to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site as recently as 2018. A few additional records were returned for this species though relating to a location approximately 1.9km south-east of the site from 2012 through 2014.
- 5.6.13. Twenty records returned for Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. The closest record relates to a location approximately 0.4km north of the site in 2012 and the most recent record relates to a location approximately 1.3km south-west of the site in 2019.
- 5.6.14. An additional twenty-four species were returned by the data search within the search area that fall under Section 41 of the Natural Environment Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 within the last ten years. Similar to the abovementioned bird species the majority of these relate to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north of the site.
- 5.6.15. Species of which all records returned exclusively relate to this reservoir include: Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* (thirteen records); Curlew *Numenius arquata* (six records); Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla* subsp. *bernicla* (single record); Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* (six records); Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret* (twenty-eight records); Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* (single record); Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* (thirteen records); Merlin *Falco columbarius* (two records); Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* (two records); Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* (sixty-four records); Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* (eleven records); White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* subsp. *albifrons* (seventeen records); Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* subsp. *Kleinschmidti* (two records); Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* subsp. *flavissima* (sixty-six records); and Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* (nineteen records). Of these species four (Lesser Redpoll, Linnet, Spotted Flycatcher and Yellow Wagtail) have been recorded as recently as 2019.
- 5.6.16. Additional species listed under this legislation not exclusively relating to Gailey reservoir include:
- 5.6.17. Forty-nine records returned for House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. The closest record for this species returned by the data search relates to a location approximately 0.4km north of the site in 2018, whilst the most recent relates to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site.
- 5.6.18. Thirty-two records returned for Kestrel, the closest of which also relates to a location approximately 0.4km north of the site from 2013. The most

recent record again relates from Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site.

- 5.6.19. Thirty-eight records returned for Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. The most recent record relates to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site. This location, in addition to another location approximately 1.1km south-east of the site from 2012, are the closest records of this species to the site.
- 5.6.20. Thirty-nine records returned for Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*. The closest of these relates to a location approximately 0.4km east of the site from 2014, with all remaining records, including the most recent record from 2019, relating from Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site.
- 5.6.21. Eleven records returned for Skylark *Alauda arvensis*. All but one record, including the most recent record, relate to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site. This single record dates from 2014 and is also 1.1km from the site boundary however, is located towards the south-east of the site.
- 5.6.22. Forty-three records were returned for Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*. The closest record relates to a location approximately 0.2km east of the site from 2016 and the most recent record relates to Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site.
- 5.6.23. Fifty-five records returned for Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, the closest and most recent of which relates from 2019 in Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site. There are however a couple of additional records returned for this species located approximately 1.4km north of the site in 2015 and 2017.
- 5.6.24. Eighteen records returned for Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*. The closest and most recent of which dates from November 2018 at a location within a 1km grid square approximately 0.4km north of the site.
- 5.6.25. Twenty-six records returned for Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. The closest record relates to a location approximately 0.6km south of the site. The most recent record relates to 2019 from Gailey Reservoir located approximately 1.1km north-east of the site.

5.7. Reptiles

- 5.7.1. The site is considered to hold some suitability for reptiles largely across the semi-improved grassland in the southern expansion plot and on the fringes of the woodland in the eastern expansion plot that may be subject to greater light levels. The majority of the woodland is considered to be too heavily shaded to offer any significant opportunities for reptiles.
- 5.7.2. In addition to the above, Ecology Solutions carried out a reptile translocation in 2016 to facilitate the development of the Four Ashes Industrial Park as a result of surveys identifying a low population of Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* within this site. As part of this strategy, the semi-improved grassland in the southern expansion was used as a reptile receptor site for any translocated reptiles. A total of 33 Common

Lizards were captured as part of this exercise, comprising 16 adults and 17 juveniles, and placed into the receptor site.

Background Records

- 5.7.3. Two records were returned for Common Lizard both dating from 2015 and relating to the same location approximately 0.4km east of the site.
- 5.7.4. No further reptile species were identified by the data search within the search area of the site.

5.8. Amphibians

- 5.8.1. The site does not include any aquatic habitats that would offer suitable breeding opportunities, however a single pond, Pond P1, was identified during the extended Phase 1 habitat survey.
- 5.8.2. The majority of the habitats within the proposed development site would be considered to offer suitable opportunities for Great Crested Newts during the terrestrial phase.
- 5.8.3. The HSI assessment of Pond P1 recorded a score of 0.5, indicating it as offering poor suitability for Great Crested Newts (see Table 5.1 below).
- 5.8.1. A review of aerial photography would suggest that a further five off-site ponds, that are not separated from the site by dispersal barriers, are located within 500m of the site. The new attenuation feature to the north of the southern expansion was not considered suitable for amphibians given its lined nature and lack of aquatic or emergent vegetation.

Pond ref	P1
SI1 - Location	1
SI2 - Pond area	0.05
SI3 - Pond drying	0.5
SI4 - Water quality	0.33
SI4 - Shade	0.8
SI6 - Fowl	1
SI7 - Fish	1
SI8 - Ponds	0.8
SI9 - Terr'l habitat	0.67
SI10 - Macrophytes	0.3
HSI	0.50

Table 5.1. HSI Assessment Results of Pond P1.

Background Records

- 5.8.2. Fourteen records were returned for Great Crested Newt within the last ten years by the data search. These are all in close proximity to each other located approximately between 0.5 and 0.6km south / southeast of the site beyond Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and date from April to June 2016.

- 5.8.3. No further records for any amphibian species were returned within the last ten years by the data search.
- 5.8.4. According to the MAGIC database, the nearest European Protected Species (EPS) licence was for the destruction of a Great Crested Newt resting place granted in 2017 from a location approximately 90m south of the southern boundary located beyond both Vicarage Road and the canal.

5.9. Invertebrates

- 5.9.1. Given the habitats present it is likely an assemblage of common invertebrate species would be present within the site.
- 5.9.2. An appraisal of the wider Four Ashes Industrial Park for its entomological interest was undertaken in 2016. While the adjacent development was indicated as being of low entomological interest it was highlighted that the characteristics of Calf Heath Wood may offer opportunities for Argent and Sable Moth *Rheumaptera hastata*, a species included under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Background Records

- 5.9.3. No notable invertebrate species were returned by the data search within the last ten years.

6. ECOLOGICAL EVALUATION

6.1. The Principles of Ecological Evaluation

- 6.1.1. The guidelines for ecological evaluation produced by CIEEM propose an approach that involves professional judgement, but makes use of available guidance and information, such as the distribution and status of the species or features within the locality of the project.
- 6.1.2. The methods and standards for site evaluation within the British Isles have remained those defined by Ratcliffe⁷. These are broadly used across the United Kingdom to rank sites so priorities for nature conservation can be attained. For example, current Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designations maintain a system of data analysis that is roughly tested against Ratcliffe's criteria.
- 6.1.3. In general terms, these criteria are size, diversity, naturalness, rarity and fragility, while additional secondary criteria of typicalness, potential value, intrinsic appeal, recorded history and the position within the ecological / geographical units are also incorporated into the ranking procedure.
- 6.1.4. Any assessment should not judge sites in isolation from others, since several habitats may combine to make it worthy of importance to nature conservation.
- 6.1.5. Further, relying on the national criteria would undoubtedly distort the local variation in assessment and therefore additional factors need to be taken into account, e.g. a woodland type with a comparatively poor species diversity, common in the south of England, may be of importance at its northern limits, say in the border country.
- 6.1.6. In addition, habitats of local importance are often highlighted within a local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The Staffordshire BAP has been considered as part of this assessment and is referenced where relevant.
- 6.1.7. Levels of importance can be determined within a defined geographical context from the immediate site or locality through to the international level.
- 6.1.8. The legislative and planning policy context are also important considerations and have been given due regard throughout this assessment.

6.2. Habitat Evaluation

Designated Sites

- 6.2.1. The closest such site is Four Ashes Pit SSSI located approximately 0.6km to the south-west of the of the southern expansion parcel. The SSSI has been designated on account of its geological interest. The nearest statutory site designated on account of its nature conservation value are that of Belvide Reservoir SSSI and Shoal Hill Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR) located 4.7km to the north-west and 4.3km north-east of

⁷ Ratcliffe, D A (1977). *A Nature Conservation Review: The Selection of Biological Sites of National Importance to Nature Conservation in Britain*. Two Volumes. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

the site respectively at their closest points. The proposed development does fall within the impact zones of the aforementioned SSSIs, therefore triggering the need for the Local Planning Authority to contact Natural England for advice of whether they would consider impacts are likely.

- 6.2.2. It is considered that the site is sufficiently removed and buffered from the local designations. It is not anticipated that following adherence to standard engineering safeguards that any adverse effects would arise to locally present statutorily designated sites.
- 6.2.3. Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located approximately 8.5 km to the north-east of the site. It is considered that this SAC is sufficiently removed to be unaffected by either direct or indirect effects, which could impact on the conservation objectives for the site.
- 6.2.4. SAC are designated under the Habitats Directive, the Directive is transposed into UK legislation by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), commonly known as the Habitats Regulations.
- 6.2.5. The key section of the Habitats Regulations relevant to the current proposal is Regulation 61, which states inter alia:
- 61.—(1) A competent authority, before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which—**
- (a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and**
 - (b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site,**
- must make an appropriate assessment of the implications for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives.**
- (5) In the light of the conclusions of the assessment, and subject to regulation 62 (considerations of overriding public interest), the competent authority may agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site or the European offshore marine site (as the case may be).**
- 6.2.6. As part of the published Core Strategy documents, specifically the entitled 'Habitat Regulations Stage 1 Screening' details that it was considered unlikely that development within the district would have an effect on the integrity of Cannock Chase SAC. The assessment was based on Evidence Base and Visitor Impact Mitigation Strategy data and therefore is considered to be robust for completing the first screening stage pursuant to Regulation 61 of the Habitat Regulations. The documents also concluded that it was unlikely any in combination effect would arise when looking at other plans or projects.
- 6.2.7. Furthermore, given the nature of the development proposals it is not considered that this shall contribute to any increase in recreational pressure upon the SAC.

- 6.2.8. **Non-statutory sites:** Information returned from SER shows that there are no non-statutory designated sites within the site (see Plan ECO1). The nearest such site is that of Calf Heath Bridge Biodiversity Alert Site (BAS) which is located to the immediate south of southern expansion parcel (separated by Vicarage Road). The BAS, part of the canal, is designated for its marginal vegetation along its banks and for the suite of species found in an associated parcel of woodland which runs as a thin strip parallel to the canals most northerly bank.
- 6.2.9. The next closest site is Four Ashes Local Wildlife Site (LWS), located approximately 0.4km to the south of the site, the LWS is separated from the site by the existing built form of Four Ashes, and as such this LWS is well buffered from the site.
- 6.2.10. It is considered that the implementation of the proposals adhering to a strict construction method statement shall limit potential pollution risks such that all locally present non-statutory designated sites are unaffected. Consideration as to the proposed drainage strategy will need to be had to ensure that no adverse impacts occur to the LWS located adjacent to the site.

Habitats

- 6.2.11. Current proposals suggest that there will be a loss of habitats currently present within the site. While some habitats are considered to be of low ecological value, such as the grassland, tall ruderal and rush dominant habitat, other habitats, such as the broadleaved woodland, tree belt and hedgerows, are of greater ecological value.
- 6.2.12. The majority of the eastern expansion comprises broadleaved woodland and is mapped as Priority Habitat – Deciduous Woodland on the MAGIC website. While this is the case, the woodland itself is largely species poor, contains a limited ground flora dominated with Bracken and has not been subject to any form of beneficial management in recent years. In addition, the understorey of the woodland is heavily vegetated with Rhododendron, a non-native invasive species, lowering its overall biodiversity value. It is considered unlikely that the woodland would classify as Priority Habitat as defined by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).
- 6.2.13. Any proposed landscaping should incorporate a diverse mixture of native species or species of known wildlife value. New areas of tree and hedgerow planting should be included, alongside areas of mixed native scrub and wildflower grassland in order to partly compensate for any losses whilst maximising the proposed developments biodiversity.
- 6.2.14. **Further Survey Work.** It is recommended that further botanical survey work is undertaken to fully ascertain the woodland's biodiversity value. This survey work should be undertaken between April and August, with an early survey in spring recommended to capture early flowering species.

Invasive Species

- 6.2.15. Rhododendron is prevalent throughout the broadleaved woodland and given that this species is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is illegal to cause this species to

grow in the wild. Therefore, removal of this species should be undertaken with care and disposed of as 'controlled waste' at a licensed disposal facility.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 6.2.16. The proposed development will result in the loss of the majority of the habitats present within the site, including the majority of the broadleaved woodland, therefore opportunities to provide a 10% biodiversity net gain will need to be explored as part of the design of any future development of the site.
- 6.2.17. The proposals should seek to include a biodiversity rich landscape strategy including, but limited to, the provision of native tree planting, wildflower grassland, and native hedgerow planting to ensure that biodiversity is maximised as much as possible on site. The use of biodiverse green roofs could also be adopted to reduce the overall biodiversity impact of the proposed development.
- 6.2.18. Where this is not possible, options will need to be explored to provide a net gain in biodiversity off-site, whether this is via the Local Planning Authority's offsetting strategy, if one has been adopted, or through habitat compensation through a third party such as The Environment Bank.

6.3. Faunal Evaluation

Bats

- 6.3.1. **Legislation.** All bats are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and included on Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 ("the Habitats Regulations"). These include provisions making it an offence to:
- Deliberately kill, injure or take (capture) bats;
 - Deliberately disturb bats in such a way as to:-
 - (i) be likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or rear or nurture their young; or to hibernate or migrate; or
 - (ii) affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
 - Damage or destroy any breeding or resting place used by bats;
 - Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place used by bats for shelter or protection (even if bats are not in residence).
- 6.3.2. While the legislation is deemed to apply when bats are not in residence, Natural England guidance suggests that certain activities such as re-roofing can be completed outside sensitive periods when bats are not in residence provided these do not damage or destroy the roost.
- 6.3.3. The words deliberately and intentionally include actions where a court can infer that the defendant knew that the action taken would almost inevitably result in an offence, even if that was not the primary purpose of the act.

- 6.3.4. The offence of damaging (making worse for the bat) or destroying a breeding site or resting place is an absolute offence. Such actions do not have to be deliberate for an offence to be committed.
- 6.3.5. European Protected Species licences are available from Natural England in certain circumstances, and permit activities that would otherwise be considered an offence.
- 6.3.6. In accordance with the Habitats Regulations Natural England must apply the three derogation tests as part of the process of considering a licence application. These tests are that:
1. the activity to be licensed must be for imperative reasons of overriding public interest or for public health and safety;
 2. there must be no satisfactory alternative; and
 3. the favourable conservation status of the species concerned must be maintained.
- 6.3.7. Licences can usually only be granted if the development is in receipt of full planning permission.
- 6.3.8. **Site Usage.** The broadleaved woodland in the eastern expansion has been identified in the past as supporting roosts for small numbers of Daubenton's Bat and several other trees have been identified as possessing PRFs that could be used by roosting bats.
- 6.3.9. The broadleaved woodland also represents good foraging and dispersal opportunities for bats, whilst hedgerows, tree belt, scrub and grassland are all likely to be of some value for locally present bat populations.
- 6.3.10. **Further Survey Work.** Trees that have been identified as having Potential Roost Features (PRFs) or have been identified as supporting bat roosts in the past should be subject to further survey work to ascertain the presence or absence of roosting bats and inform the need for a Natural England EPS licence. Trees with PRFs should be subject to a series of emergence / re-entry surveys between May to September inclusive, or closer inspection through tree climbing where safe to do so, to determine presence and absence. If bat roosts are present in trees to be removed than a Natural England EPS licence will be required and appropriate mitigation measures undertaken.
- 6.3.11. The proposed development does propose the removal of significant areas of potentially suitable foraging habitat, particularly the area of broadleaved woodland in the eastern expansion. Such a habitat is likely to be of some use to the local bat population and has been highlighted as part of the mitigation strategy for the West Midlands Gateway.
- 6.3.12. Further survey work will be required to ascertain the level of use of the site for foraging and dispersing bats with five activity transects being undertaken monthly between May to September. These surveys should be bolstered through the deployment of static SM4 bat detectors on five occasions and left for a period of five nights.
- 6.3.13. Proposals should aim to retain as much suitable foraging and dispersal habitat as possible to provide continued opportunities for foraging and

commuting bats. The landscaping should aim to bolster any retained linear features and promote green infrastructure across the site with the establishment of new hedgerow and tree planting, thereby offering new opportunities for bats and maintain connectivity to the wider landscape. A sympathetic lighting scheme should be designed for the site to minimise light spillage onto retained boundary vegetation and adjacent canal.

- 6.3.14. Further roosting enhancements should be incorporated into the design of the proposals with bat boxes positioned on retained trees and /or integrated into new buildings.

Badgers

- 6.3.15. **Legislation.** The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 consolidates the previous Badgers Acts of 1973 and 1991. The legislation aims to protect the species from persecution, rather than being a response to an unfavourable conservation status.
- 6.3.16. As well as protecting the animal itself, the 1992 Act also makes the intentional or reckless destruction, damage, or obstruction of a Badger sett an offence. A sett is defined as "any structure or place, which displays signs indicating current use, by a Badger". 'Current use' is defined by Natural England as any use within the preceding 12 months.
- 6.3.17. In addition, the intentional elimination of sufficient foraging area to support a known social group of Badgers may, in certain circumstances, be construed as an offence by constituting 'cruel ill treatment' of a Badger.
- 6.3.18. Local Authorities are therefore obliged to consult Natural England over any application that is likely to adversely affect Badgers.
- 6.3.19. Any work that disturbs Badgers is illegal without a licence granted by Natural England. Unlike the general conservation legislation, the Badgers Act 1992 makes specific provision for the granting of licences for development purposes, including for the destruction of setts.
- 6.3.20. Guidance produced by Natural England in 2002, and subsequently amended, developed guidelines on the types of activity that it considers should be licensed within certain distances of sett entrances. Any work on site must be completed in accordance with that guidance.
- 6.3.21. **Site Usage.** Two mammal holes were recorded within the woodland that are considered to represent a Badger outlier sett. The site is likely to offer foraging and dispersal opportunities for this species.
- 6.3.22. **Further Survey Work.** In order to ascertain whether the considered Badger sett is active, monitoring surveys are recommended. This would include regular checks of the sett and use of a camera trap to monitor activity. If the sett is considered to be active, then its destruction will need to be undertaken under a Natural England licence, with any licensed work only permitted between the July and November.
- 6.3.23. Given that the sett is unlikely to be a main sett, given its size and number of entrances as well as a lack of evidence of current usage, there will not be a requirement to provide an artificial sett as compensation for its loss.

- 6.3.24. It is likely that further mitigation will be required during the construction phase of the development. This would include the adherence of strict measures as part of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to ensure that no new setts have established, nor any entrapment occurs were a Badger to disperse into the site during this period.

Hedgehogs

- 6.3.25. **Legislation.** Hedgehogs are not a protected species, but they are a priority species under section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. The NERC Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State to:

...take such steps as appear...to be reasonably practicable to further the conservation of the living organisms and types of habitat included in any list published under this section, or...promote the taking by others of such steps.

- 6.3.26. **Site Usage.** No evidence of Hedgehog was recorded on site. The woodland, hedgerows, grassland and scrub do offer opportunities for hibernating, dispersing and foraging Hedgehogs opportunities for this species.
- 6.3.27. **Further Survey Work.** No further survey work is required, however it is recommended that any areas of overgrown vegetation are cleared outside the hibernation period (October to April) or checked by an ecologist prior to removal, to ensure no hibernating Hedgehog is present.
- 6.3.28. Any trenches or deep pits associated with construction that are to be left open overnight should be provided with a means of escape in case a Hedgehog enters. This is particularly important if the trench fills with water, and will take the form of a roughened plank of wood placed in the trench as a ramp to the surface.

Birds

- 6.3.29. **Legislation.** Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 is concerned with the protection of wild birds, whilst Schedule 1 lists species that are protected by special penalties. All species of birds receive general protection whilst nesting.
- 6.3.30. **Site Usage.** Bird species recorded on site by sight or call during the survey include Blackbird, Blue Tit, Carrion Crow, Fieldfare, Great Tit, Kestrel, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail and Robin. Woodpecker holes are also present on some trees within the woodland.
- 6.3.31. The site does offer suitable nesting opportunities predominately within the broadleaved woodland in the eastern expansion and within the rush dominant habitat, hedgerows, tree belt and scrub within the southern expansion.
- 6.3.32. **Further Survey Work.** Owing to the likely loss of woodland on site as a result of the proposed development it is recommended that breeding bird surveys are undertaken to inform the site's use by birds. Surveys should consist of monthly surveys in April, May and June.

- 6.3.33. In order to avoid impacts on nesting birds, and to avoid a potential offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, proposal should avoid necessary clearance of vegetation highlighted as being suitable for nesting birds outside of the bird breeding season (March to July inclusive) wherever possible. Where this is not possible, a check survey of vegetation by an experienced ecologist would be undertaken immediately prior to clearance, with any confirmed nests left in situ, with a five-metre exclusion zone around it until the young have fledged.
- 6.3.34. Proposals should include replacement planting for losses in suitable nesting bird habitats as part of an ecologically led landscaping scheme. This should include new native tree and hedgerow planting and include fruit bearing species that would offer new foraging and nesting opportunities for birds. The inclusion of additional nesting provisions, such as bird boxes installed on buildings and/or retained trees, is recommended.

Reptiles

- 6.3.35. **Legislation.** All reptile species receive protection under legislation in the UK. Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca* and Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* receive full legal protection in England due to their status as scarce, rather local, species. These species are highly unlikely to be present within the site on account of their habitat requirements and geographical distribution.
- 6.3.36. The other reptile species, namely Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis*, Common Lizard, Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica* and Adder *Vipera berus*, are common and widespread across the country. As such, these species receive only partial protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), being protected from deliberate killing or injury, their habitat receiving no statutory protection.
- 6.3.37. **Site Usage.** Suitable habitats for reptiles are present within the site particularly within the southern expansion parcel, which acted as a reptile receptor site for the adjacent Four Ashes Industrial Park and received 33 Common Lizards as part of the translocation exercise undertaken in 2016.
- 6.3.38. **Mitigation and Enhancements.** Owing to the known reptile populations on site, it is recommended that presence / absence surveys are undertaken to inform an appropriate mitigation strategy. These will need to be undertaken between April and September inclusive.
- 6.3.39. Depending on the results of the presence / absence surveys there may be a requirement for a translocation exercise to be undertaken to remove the reptile constraint prior to any development occurring. The loss of the previously used reptile receptor site will require an alternative receptor site to be established, if presence is recorded within the site, whether this be on-site or a locally present off-site location. The reptile receptor site will need to possess suitability for reptiles at the time of the translocation and allow for any populations of reptiles to be sustained in the future.
- 6.3.40. The proposed development should aim to incorporate new areas of reptile suitable habitat such as tussocky wildflower grassland to ensure that opportunities for this group are retained. The provision of hibernacula

could be established to offer enhanced opportunities for refuge and hibernation.

Amphibians

- 6.3.41. **Legislation.** Great Crested Newts are subject to the same legislative protection and licensing provisions as bats (see above).
- 6.3.42. **Site Usage.** The site does possess suitable terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newts in the form of woodland, grassland, Rush dominant habitat, scrub and hedgerows. There are no on-site ponds that could offer suitable breeding opportunities for this species, however there are six ponds within 500m of the site that may offer breeding opportunities.
- 6.3.43. **Further Survey Work.** Owing to the presence of off-site ponds, it is recommended that these ponds are subject to eDNA surveys to determine presence / absence of Great Crested Newts. These surveys can be undertaken between mid-April to the end of June.
- 6.3.44. If presence is recorded, population class surveys will be required to establish the population of Great Crested Newts and survey results would inform the need for a Natural England EPS licence and the necessary mitigation strategy.

Invertebrates

- 6.3.45. **Site Usage.** Given the habitats present it is likely an assemblage of common invertebrate species would be present within the site. A previous entomological appraisal for the Four Ashes Industrial Park have highlighted the suitability of the woodland for Argent and Sable Moth.
- 6.3.46. **Further Survey Work.** Owing to the previously highlighted suitability of the woodland for Argent and Sable Moth, it is recommended that further entomological surveys of the woodland are undertaken to ascertain the woodland's entomological interest. This would consist of up to three nights of light-trapping in late May and early June.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1. Ecology Solutions was commissioned by Quod on behalf of Bericote Properties Limited in January 2022 to undertake an ecological appraisal of land known as Four Ashes Expansion in South Staffordshire.
- 7.2. The proposals for the site are likely to include a number of new commercial units, infrastructure and associated landscape planting.
- 7.3. An extended Phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken in January 2022.
- 7.4. **Statutory Sites.** The site is not part of or adjacent to a statutory nature conservation designation.
- 7.5. The nearest statutory site designated on account of its nature conservation value are that of Belvide Reservoir SSSI and Shoal Hill Common LNR located 4.7km to the north-west and 4.3km north-east of the site respectively at their closest points. The proposed development does fall within the impact zones of the aforementioned SSSIs, therefore triggering the need for the Local Planning Authority to contact Natural England for advice of whether they would consider impacts are likely. However, it is considered that the site is sufficiently removed and buffered from the local designations and adverse effects are not considered likely.
- 7.6. Cannock Chase SAC is located approximately 8.5 km to the north-east of the site. It is considered that this SAC is sufficiently removed from the development, and, owing to the nature of the development, i.e., non-residential, that neither direct or indirect adverse effects will occur on the conservation objectives for the site as a result of the proposed development.
- 7.7. **Non-statutory Sites.** The nearest such site is that of Calf Heath Bridge BAS which is located to the immediate south of southern expansion parcel (separated by Vicarage Road).
- 7.8. It is considered that the implementation of the proposals adhering to a strict construction method statement shall limit potential pollution risks such that all locally present non-statutory designated sites are unaffected. Consideration as to the proposed drainage strategy will need to be had to ensure that no adverse impacts occur to the LWS located adjacent to the site.
- 7.9. **Habitats.** Current proposals suggest that there will be a loss of the majority of habitats currently present within the site. While some habitats are considered to be of low ecological value, such as the grassland, tall ruderal and rush dominant habitat, other habitats, such as the broadleaved woodland, tree belt and hedgerows, are of greater ecological value.
- 7.10. It is recommended that further botanical surveys are undertaken, specifically of the broadleaved woodland, in order to fully evaluate the biodiversity value of this habitat.
- 7.11. The proposals should seek to include a biodiversity rich landscape strategy including, but limited to, the provision of native tree planting, wildflower grassland, and native hedgerow planting to ensure that biodiversity is maximised as much as possible on site.

- 7.12. **Biodiversity Net Gain.** The proposed development will result in the loss of the majority of the habitats present within the site, including the majority of the broadleaved woodland, therefore opportunities to provide a 10% biodiversity net gain will need to be explored as part of the design of any future development of the site.
- 7.13. The proposals should seek to include a biodiversity rich landscape strategy including, but limited to, the provision of native tree planting, wildflower grassland, and native hedgerow planting to ensure that biodiversity is maximised as much as possible on site. The use of biodiverse green roofs could also be adopted to reduce the overall biodiversity impact of the proposed development.
- 7.14. Options will need to be explored to provide a net gain in biodiversity off-site, whether this is via the Local Planning Authority's offsetting strategy, if one has been adopted, or through habitat compensation through a third party such as The Environment Bank.
- 7.15. **Invasive Species.** Rhododendron is prevalent throughout the broadleaved woodland and given that this species is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is illegal to cause this species to grow in the wild. Therefore, removal of this species should be undertaken with care and disposed of as 'controlled waste' at a licensed disposal facility. This would represent a significant improvement over current baseline conditions.
- 7.16. **Bats.** The broadleaved woodland represents good foraging and dispersal opportunities for bats, whilst hedgerows, tree belt, scrub and grassland are all likely to be of some value for locally present bat populations. Previous Daubenton's Bat roosts have been identified within the woodland and additional trees with PRFs have been identified during the initial extended Phase 1 survey.
- 7.17. Trees that have been identified as having bat roost potential will need to be subject to further survey work to identify the presence or absence of bats roosting within the woodland and tree belt and the need for a Natural England EPS licence. Additional bat activity transects, bolstered by the deployment of static bat detectors will be required to evaluate the site's value for foraging and dispersing bats.
- 7.18. A sympathetic lighting scheme should be designed for the site in order to minimize light spillage onto retained and boundary vegetation whilst new roost provisions in the form of bat boxes on trees and /or integrated into buildings to offer new roost opportunities. An ecologically led landscape strategy should be designed to ensure that new habitats are provided to offer opportunities for bats and connectivity to surrounding environments are maintained.
- 7.19. **Badgers.** Two mammal holes were recorded within the woodland that are considered to represent a Badger outlier sett. The site is likely to offer foraging and dispersal opportunities for this species. In order to ascertain whether the considered Badger sett is active, monitoring surveys are recommended. If the sett is considered to be active, then its destruction will need to be undertaken under a Natural England licence, with any licensed work only permitted between the July and November.
- 7.20. **Hedgehogs.** No evidence of Hedgehog was recorded on site. The woodland, hedgerows, grassland and scrub do offer opportunities for hibernating, dispersing and foraging Hedgehogs opportunities for this species. It is

recommended that any areas of overgrown vegetation are cleared outside the hibernation period (October to April) or checked by an ecologist prior to removal, to ensure no hibernating Hedgehog is present.

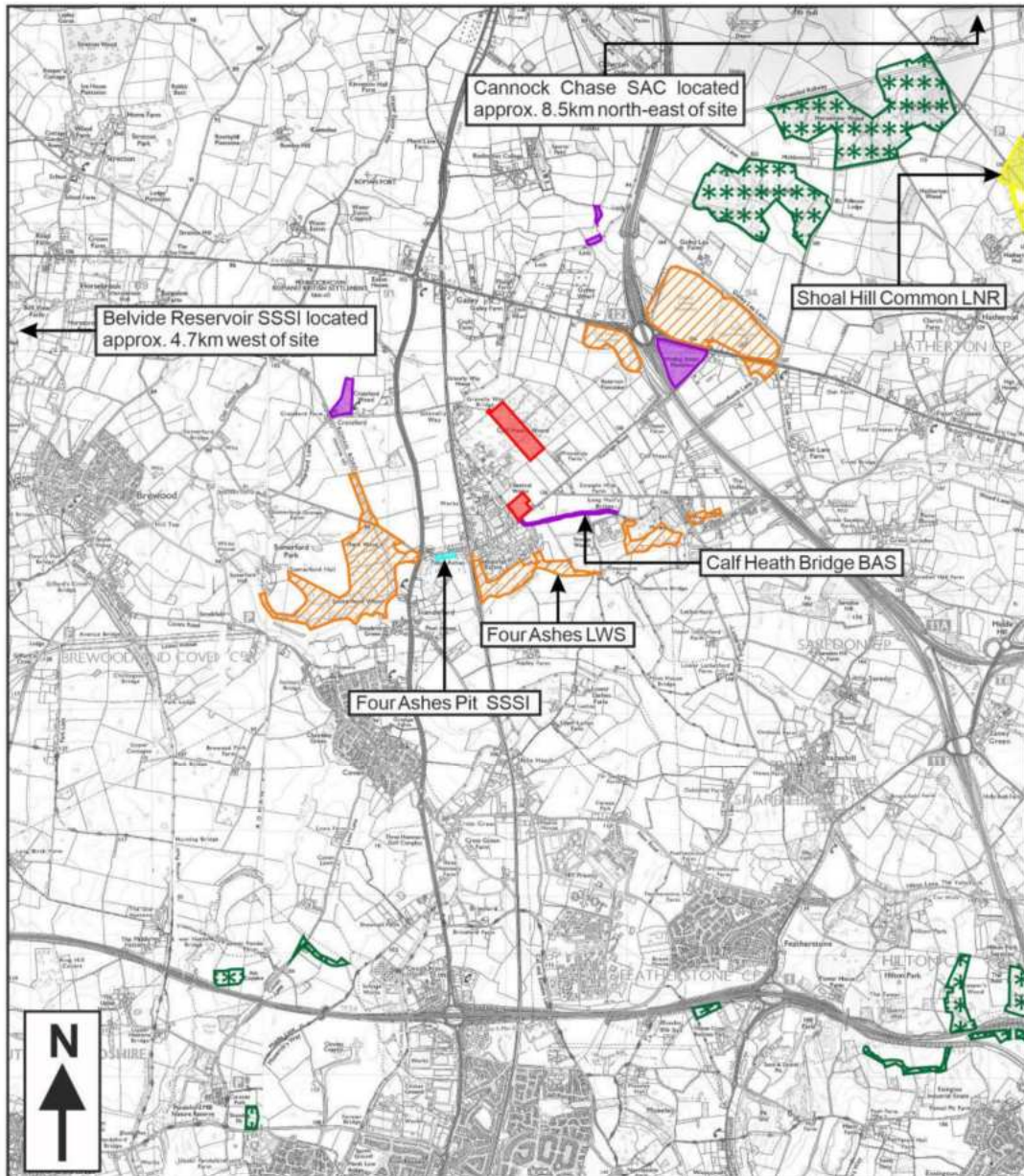
- 7.21. **Birds.** The site does offer suitable nesting opportunities predominately within the broadleaved woodland in the eastern expansion and within the rush dominant habitat, hedgerows, tree belt and scrub within the southern expansion. A range of common and widespread species were recorded during the extended Phase 1 habitat survey.
- 7.22. Owing to the likely loss of woodland on site as a result of the proposed development it is recommended that breeding bird surveys are undertaken to inform the site's use by birds. Surveys should consist of monthly surveys in April, May and June.
- 7.23. As a precaution to avoid a possible offence, it is recommended that removal of suitable nesting habitats be undertaken outside the breeding season (March to July inclusive) or checked for nesting birds by a trained ecologist immediately prior to removal. Consideration should also be given to incorporating native fruit-bearing plant species known to benefit birds into any proposed landscaping alongside the provision of bird boxes. This would provide enhanced foraging opportunities for bird species post-development.
- 7.24. **Reptiles.** Suitable habitats for reptiles are present within the site particularly the grassland within the southern expansion parcel, which acted as a reptile receptor site for the adjacent Four Ashes Industrial Park and received 33 Common Lizards as part of the translocation exercise undertaken in 2016.
- 7.25. Owing to the known reptile populations on site, it is recommended that presence / absence surveys are undertaken to inform an appropriate mitigation strategy. These will need to be undertaken between April and September inclusive.
- 7.26. Depending on the results of the presence / absence surveys there may be a requirement for a translocation exercise to be undertaken to remove the reptile constraint prior to any development occurring. The loss of the previously used reptile receptor site will require an alternative receptor site to be established, if presence is recorded within the site, whether this be on-site or a locally present off-site location.
- 7.27. The proposed development should aim to incorporate new areas of reptile suitable habitat such as tussocky wildflower grassland to ensure that opportunities for this group are retained. The provision of hibernacula could be established to offer enhanced opportunities for refuge and hibernation.
- 7.28. **Amphibians.** The site does possess suitable terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newts in the form of woodland, grassland, Rush dominant habitat, scrub and hedgerows. There are no on-site ponds that could offer suitable breeding opportunities for this species, however there are six ponds within 500m of the site that may offer breeding opportunities.
- 7.29. Owing to the presence of off-site ponds, it is recommended that these ponds are subject to eDNA surveys to determine presence / absence of Great Crested Newts. These surveys can be undertaken between mid-April to the end of June.

- 7.30. If presence is recorded, population class surveys will be required to establish the population of Great Crested Newts and survey results would inform the necessary mitigation strategy and the need for a Natural England EPS licence.
- 7.31. **Invertebrates.** Given the habitats present it is likely an assemblage of common invertebrate species would be present within the site. A previous entomological appraisal for the Four Ashes Industrial Park has highlighted the suitability of the woodland for Argent and Sable Moth, a species listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. It is recommended that further entomological surveys of the woodland are undertaken to ascertain the woodland's entomological interest. This would consist of up to three nights of light-trapping in late May and early June.
- 7.32. In conclusion, the extended Phase 1 habitat survey has identified a number of ecological constraints that will require further survey work in order to fully ascertain the impacts of the proposed development and inform any mitigation strategies that may be required. With this said, the identified ecological constraints are not considered to be insurmountable whereby the site could not come forward for the proposed development.

PLANS

PLAN ECO1

Site Location and Ecological Designations



KEY:

- SITE LOCATION
- SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (SSSI)
- LOCAL NATURE RESERVE (LNR)
- LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE (LWS)
- BIODIVERSITY ALERT SITE (BAS)
- ANCIENT WOODLAND



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**FOUR ASHES EXPANSION,
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE**

PLAN ECO1: SITE LOCATION AND
ECOLOGICAL DESIGNATIONS

Rev: A
Sep 2022

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PLAN ECO2

Ecological Features (Eastern Expansion)

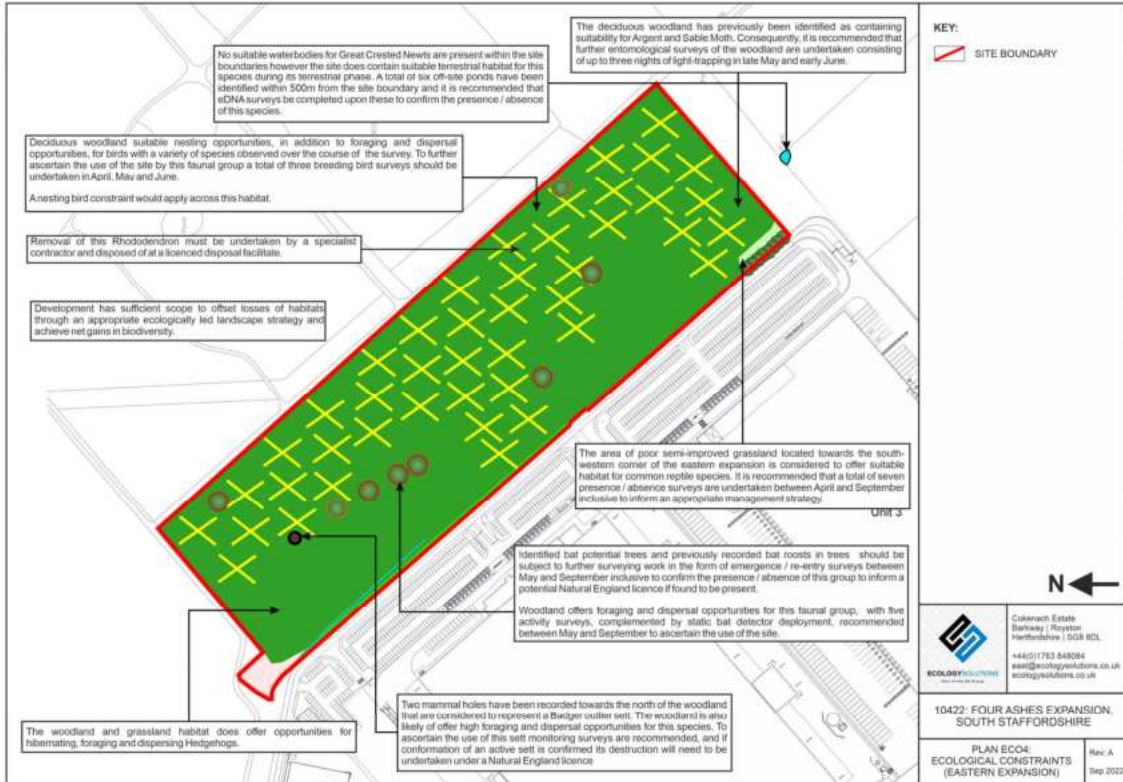


PLAN ECO3

Ecological Features (Southern Expansion)

PLAN ECO4

Ecological Constraints (Eastern Expansion)



PLAN ECO5

Ecological Constraints (Southern Expansion)

PHOTOGRAPHS

PHOTOGRAPH 1: Broadleaved woodland (eastern expansion)



PHOTOGRAPH 2: Modified grassland (eastern expansion)



PHOTOGRAPH 3: Ditch (eastern expansion)



PHOTOGRAPH 4: Pond P1 (off-site)



PHOTOGRAPH 5: Rhododendron (eastern expansion)



PHOTOGRAPH 6: Poor semi-improved grassland (southern expansion)



PHOTOGRAPH 7: Tall ruderal / recolonising ground (southern expansion)



PHOTOGRAPH 8: Tree belt (southern expansion)



PHOTOGRAPH 9: Hedgerow H1 (southern expansion)



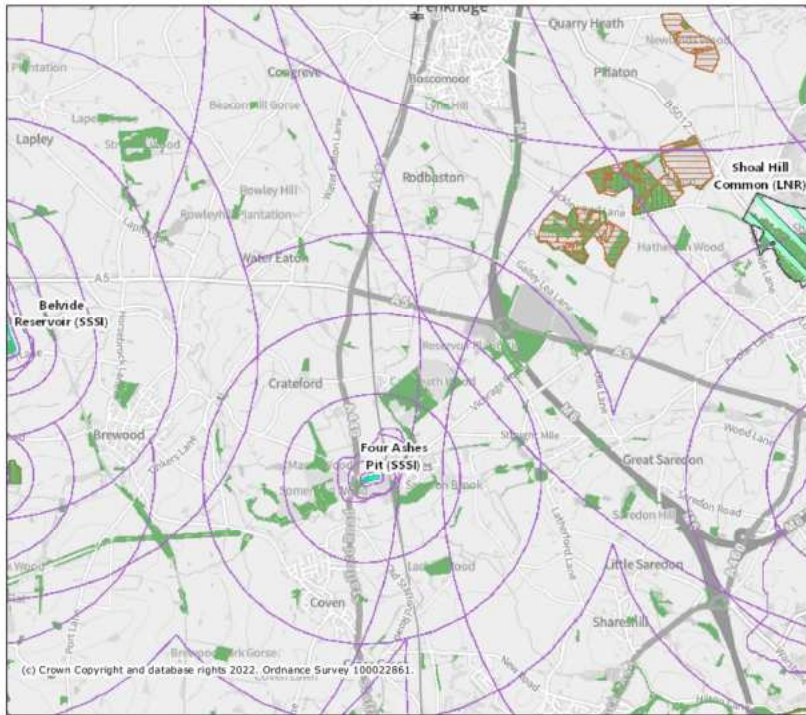
PHOTOGRAPH 10: Mammal hole (eastern expansion)



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Information downloaded from Multi-Agency
Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)



Legend

- Local Nature Reserves (England)
- National Nature Reserves (England)
- Ramsar Sites (England)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)
- SSSI Impact Risk Zones - to assess planning applications for likely impacts on SSSIs/SACs/SPAs & Ramsar sites (England)
- Special Areas of Conservation (England)
- Special Protection Areas (England)

Ancient Woodland (England)

- Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland
- Ancient Replanted Woodland
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Deciduous Woodland (England)

Projection = OSGB36
 xmin = 379400
 ymin = 303400
 xmax = 404500
 ymax = 316100

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ecology solutions for planners and developers

Sheppard Planning

Appendix 9: Proposed Site Layout



Appendix 10: Illustrative Views and Sustainability Measures



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BREEM
OUTSTANDING



PROPOSED BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENTS



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