

LANDSCAPE & VISUAL ASSESSMENT



BIRCH HOUSE, BIRCH VALE

PREPARED BY DEP LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE LTD

FOR MR AND MRS B LAWTON

ISSUED FOR PLANNING 20 04 2015

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

DEP Landscape have been commissioned by Mr and Mrs B Lawton to produce a Landscape Assessment for land at Birch House on the outskirts of Birch Vale. Birch Vale is a village in Derbyshire, just outside the boundary of the Peak District National Park, between New Mills and Hayfield.

The site forms the wider grounds of what was once a large residential property called Birch Vale House (since demolished). The site now comprises a collection of buildings, outhouses, stables and a chalet. It has most recently been used as a licensed carcass and incinerator disposal centre and slaughter house as recent as 2005. The site is now vacant apart from the stables and barn which is being used for livery and the horses are turned out into the adjacent field.

The Landscape Assessment will look to review the existing landscape features within the grounds, trees, ecology, landscape character and potential views of the site from the surrounding countryside. It will help inform the redevelopment of the site for 3 residential units which will look to be both sympathetic to the character of the site and surrounding landscape and views.

The report will help to identify and make recommendations for mitigation, appropriate management and landscape improvement works to integrate the new development into its environment and inform the general arrangements and planting plan to accompany a detailed planning application.

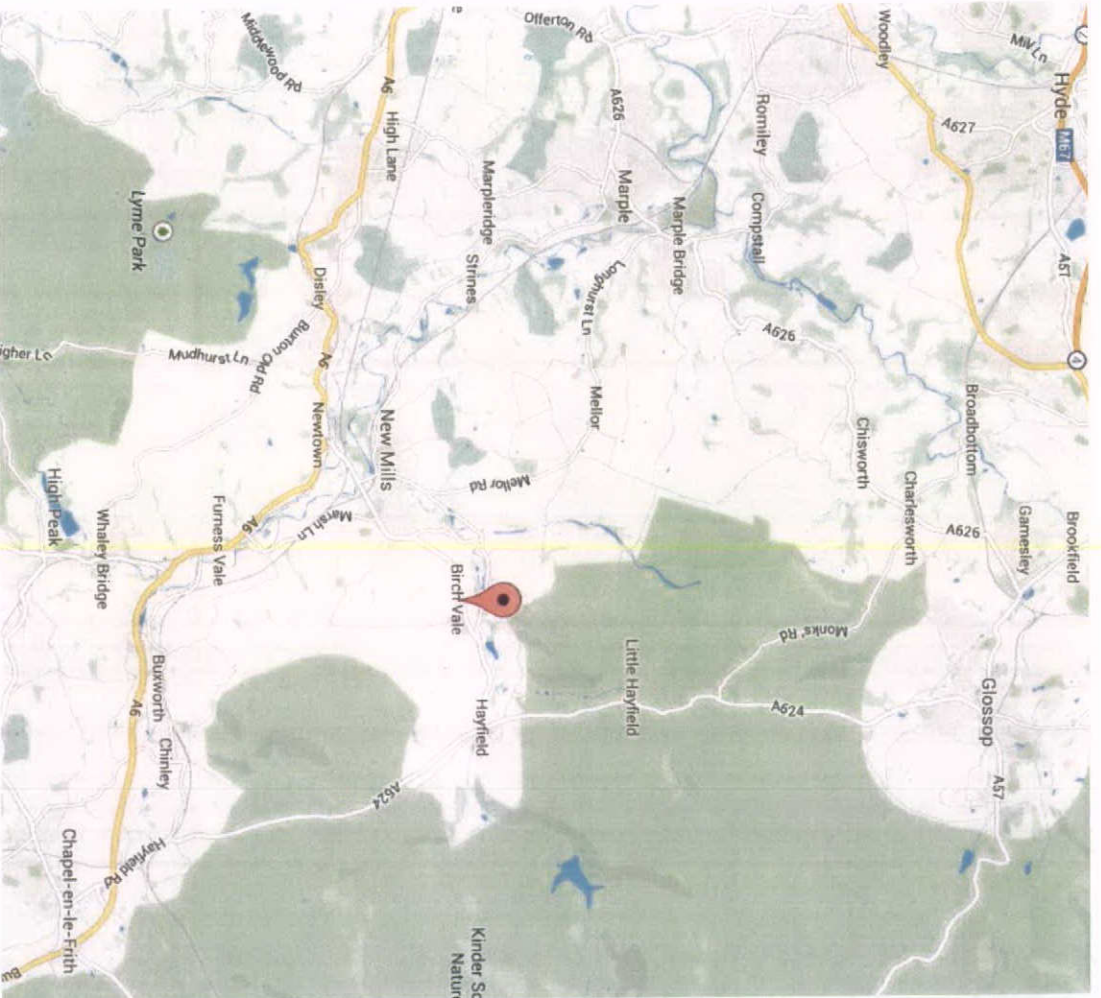


Figure 1 - Map to show the location of Birch Vale in relation to the surrounding towns and landscape.

2.0 SITE LOCATION

The site is located off Spinnerbottom road in the village of Birch Vale. Spinnerbottom is a minor road which connects into the A6015 New Mills Road and links Hayfield and New Mills. Spinnerbottom is a rural road with scattered traditional stone dwellings including cottages and terrace houses with typical low stone walls along the frontage. There are a large number of mature trees and wooded areas around and behind the houses.

From Spinnerbottom road views to the north (up to the site) are restricted by the topography of the landscape, houses and trees. Views south of the road are more open and look out across the wooded river valley of the River Set. There is a public house called The Sycamore Inn on the opposite side of the road to the site entrance.

The site is accessed off a private track which runs north east of Spinnerbottom road. It sits behind a row of residential properties which comprise semi-detached houses, cottages and terraced houses. It is bound by farmland to the north, east and west. Stitch Lane sits above the site just beyond the northern boundary.

There are a number of public rights of way and bridleways which pass close to the site. The Pennine Bridleway runs past the south eastern corner of the site and is part of a National Trail which travels through the Peak District National Park and the Yorkshire Dales. There is a public footpath which crosses a field to the north west of the site and a network of footpaths further north on the opposite side of Stith Lane.

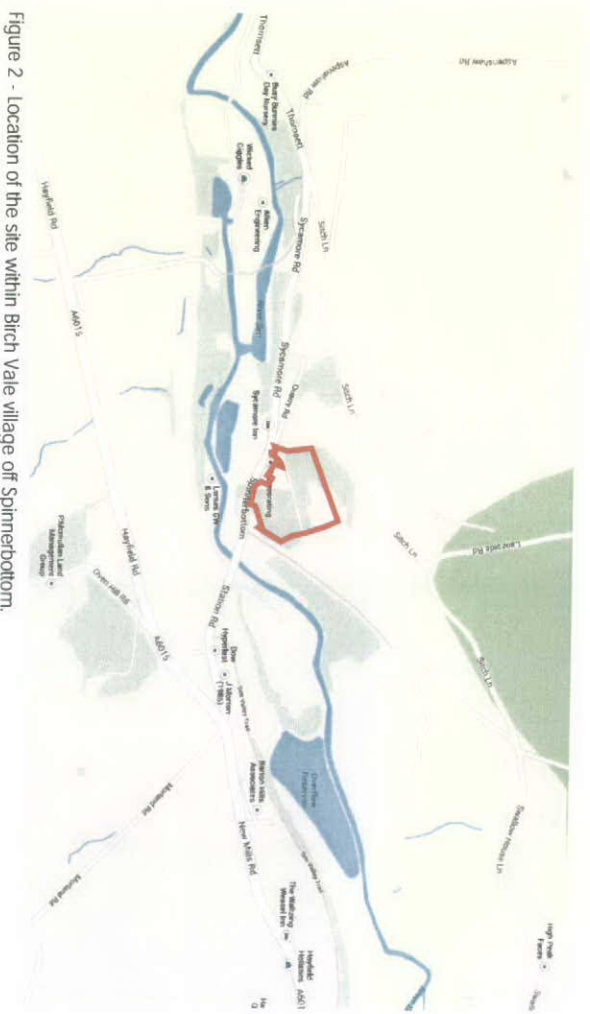


Figure 2 - Location of the site within Birch Vale village off Spinnerbottom.

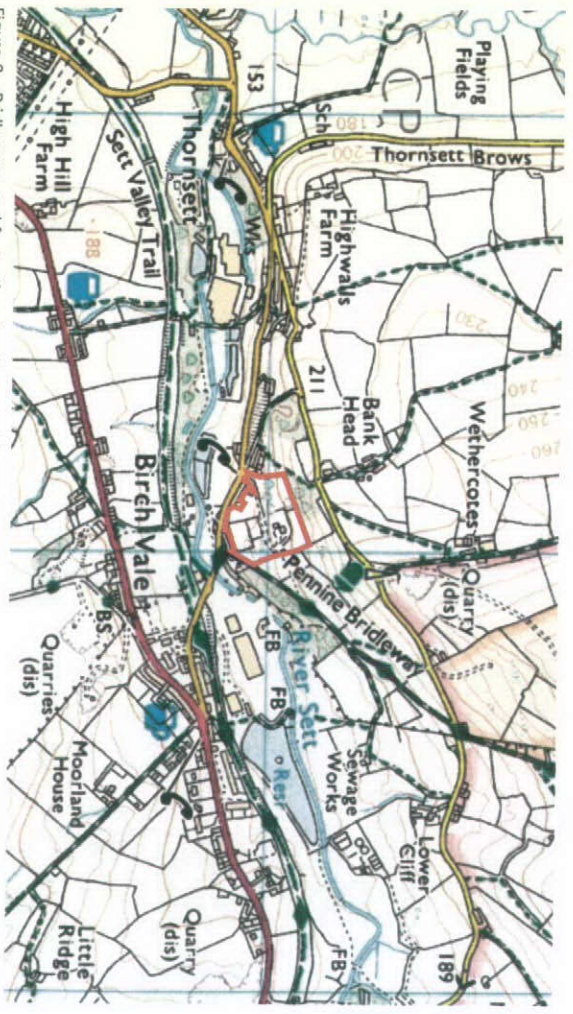


Figure 3 - Bridleways and footpath network around the site.

2.0 SITE LOCATION

KEY

- Trees - Existing specimen trees. Condition and accurate canopy spreads will subject to a detailed arboricultural survey
- Trees - Existing woodland groups. Condition and accurate canopy spreads will subject to a detailed arboricultural survey
- Shrubs - Overgrown Rhododendrons
- Rough Grass - Overgrown grass and brambles
- Patience - Managed grazing land
- Stone walls - Varying heights around the site
- Concrete wall
- Timber post and rail fence
- Buildings - Main brick buildings, barns and longhouse
- Buildings - Storage units and sheds
- Hard standing - Areas of gravel, tarmac and concrete
- Cobbles
- Public Footpath and Bridleway



Figure 5 - Site description (original produced to scale at A1)

3.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

3.1 SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

The site comprises two main buildings with associated outbuildings and sheds, stable block and barn along the eastern boundary and a chalet further down the hill. The site is steeply sloping and accessed off a tarmac track which sweeps up the hillside and provides access to the buildings described above. The site comprises several different landscaped areas which include a steep wooded embankment, grazing fields, a walled garden and steeply sloping rough grassed areas with mature specimen trees, the areas are largely divided by stone walls. For the purposes of this report we have broken the main areas down and provided individual descriptions and a photographic record for each.

1. Access track

The main entrance into the site is taken from Spinnerbottom. Old stone walls and feature stone piers define the site entrance (picture on the left) and there are remnants of the original wrought iron gates still on site. There are cobbles laid at the bottom of the track and the mouth of the entrance, after which the track is largely surfaced in tarmac with a cobble trim and drainage channel. The track is enclosed along the bottom half by large mature trees, Rhododendrons and Holly (picture on the right). The track opens out further up the hillside and provides access to the chalet, stables and then turns back on its self to provide access to the two main buildings and courtyards at the top.



2. Wooded embankment

There is a large expanse of woodland to the north of the track which rises up a steep embankment. The woodland is densely planted with deciduous trees with a woodland under storey. Holly and Rhododendrons are mainly growing along the edge of wood along the track (picture on the left). The trees and shrubs provide some screening to the two main buildings within the site when looking north up the track (picture on the right). The woodland is bound to the west and north by a stone wall varying in height from 1.2-2m high.

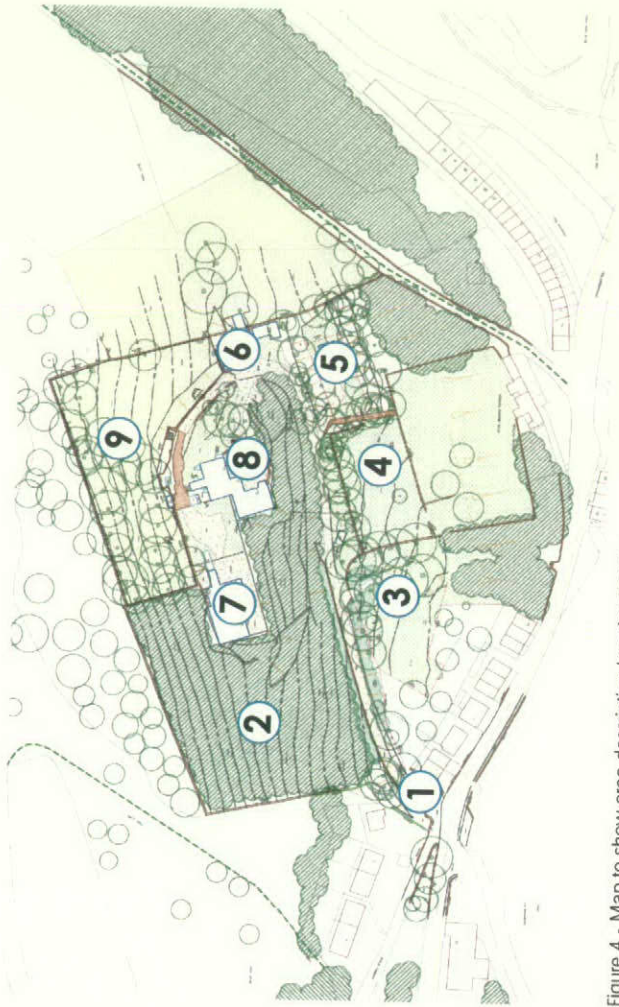


Figure 4 - Map to show area description location points

3. Rhododendron Walk

There is an old gated access which leads down to an area of land at the back of properties 1-21 off Spinnerbottom (picture of gate on the left). The land slopes down towards the road and looks to have once been a Rhododendron walk through an avenue of mature trees (picture on the right). The area of land is largely unmanaged and at the bottom of the slope is an area of dense woodland and woodland under storey. There are some old steps hidden under the trees which lead down to Spinnerbottom. The boundaries of the residential properties which back onto the site are largely open timber post and rail fences. To the east and south the area is bound by a high stone wall.



3.1 SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

4. Walled garden

The walled garden is a fairly level rectangular area which is contained on all sides by a high stone wall. There are remnants of old stone edgings presumed to be the old planting beds. The area has been left and is now rough grass and bramble with an old fruit tree in the middle (picture on the top right). Along the northern boundary the wall retains the track above. Sycamore are growing along the top of the wall (picture on the top left) and causing damage to its structure. There is a rocky and access ramp in the far north eastern corner of the garden which is overgrown with Holly. There is a gap in the wall at the south western end of the walled garden which leads to a larger area of steeply sloping land. There are the remains of an old wall coming off the walled garden which could have been a building or store. This area of land is largely overgrown with grass, bramble and self seeded trees with a few mature trees which are in a poor state (bottom picture).



5. Chalet

This is a level area of land which has an old chalet on (mobile style caravan with a fixed porch). The plot has been used until recently as a residential property and the area is relatively clear of trees and scrub. It is bound with a timber post and rail fence (picture on the left) and is partially screened from the track by Holly and Sycamore trees along the little embankment to the north (picture on the right). The land falls sharply away from the chalet to the west and south and there are mature trees on all sides of this area. There is a wooded embankment to the south which leads down to the bridleway in the south east corner. The bridleway is set lower than the site and screened by a very high stone wall and trees. Stone walls define the western and eastern boundaries of the woodland slope and the far eastern boundary of the chalet.



6. Stables

The stables and barn are accessed from the track and is located along the eastern boundary of the site. It comprise two vehicular storage areas (picture on the right), a stable block and barn. The stables and barn (picture on the left) are currently being used as a livery with access to the adjacent field to the east for grazing. The stable block extends out into the field and there are several large mature trees within the field at the side of the stable. There is an area of concrete hard standing between the stable and the barn and remnants of a gravel surface now overgrown with grass in front of the vehicle storage areas. Apart from the area where the stable juts out into the field there is a stone wall which runs the length of the eastern boundary between the site and the adjacent field.



7. Main Buildings - 1

These are located at the top end of the track within the middle of the wooded embankment above the other main buildings - 2. The track turns into a cobbled driveway (picture on top left) and leads into an open level area (picture on top right) which is bound by a concrete retaining wall which retains the site to the south, and a stone retaining wall to the north. The building is located at the far end of this area and is a tall structure made from concrete blocks. The building is screened by woodland to the south and west. There is also a collection of trailers and small sheds around here. The stone retaining wall to the north retains a steeply sloping field above the site which leads to Stitch Lane. Trees within this field filter views of this building from above.



8. Main Buildings - 2

These are located in the main body of the site down a gravelled driveway which is located off the track (picture on the top right). There is a collection of trees along the driveway which include Sycamore, Yew and Holly. The buildings sit within the woodland embankment and views are filtered by trees to the south and west (picture on the top left). The buildings comprise mainly concrete blocks (southern elevation is timber clad) with some old stone walls thought to be remnants of the old house which once stood here. Off the western elevation of the building is a tall imposing chimney shown in the photograph at the bottom of the page. The courtyard is concrete and is bound to the south and east by stone walls. The northern arm of the building is built into the embankment and looks to be split level.



3.2 TREES AND VEGETATION

All of the trees within the red line boundary of Birch Vale House, Birch Vale are protected by a Tree Preservation Order TPO 203. This order was made by the High Peak Borough Council in 1989 and refers to W1 which describes a mixed deciduous trees consisting mainly of Horse Chestnut, Sycamore, Purple Beech, Ash and Birch.

A tree survey inline with BS5837:2012 was carried out in November 2014 by DEP Landscape Architecture in association with Georgina Teame a qualified arboricultural consultant.

The tree survey report will be used to help inform the design, development and to make an assessment of the potential implications of demolition and construction works associated with the new development. The tree survey report will also be used to inform the long term maintenance requirements for the trees in the wider landscape and any immediate tree works required to ensure that the trees and woodland are maintained structurally sound and in good health.

For the purposes of the Landscape Assessment the descriptions below look to provide a basic understanding of the different types of trees and vegetation around the site. Please refer to the Tree Survey Report for further information:

- 1 - The main woodland area sits on a steep slope and covers a large portion of the site. It comprises semi-mature and mature Birch, Sycamore, Hawthorn, Ash and Lime with an under storey of Ivy, Yew, Holly and Rhododendron. The majority of the trees are narrow formed Sycamores which have probably self seeded over time through lack of management.
- 2 - The track is lined on both sides with overgrown Rhododendrons and Sycamore trees.
- 3 - This area is known as the Rhododendron walk, the land slopes down towards the main road and has an avenue of mature specimen Sycamores with patches of Rhododendrons underneath. It leads down to an area of dense woodland fronting onto the road which comprises mature Sycamore, Pine, Lime, Birch and Horse Chestnut with Holly and Rhododendron under storey.
- 4 - Semi-mature Sycamore trees are growing on top of a stone retaining wall which forms the northern boundary of the walled garden. The majority of these trees are of poor quality and multi-stemmed and have set themselves into the wall. In places the roots of these trees have started to cause damage to the structure of the wall. The area is rough grass and there is an old Apple tree growing in the middle of what would have been the allotment garden. Holly has grown over the ramped access which leads down into the walled garden on the eastern boundary with some large mature trees which include Sycamore and Horse Chestnut between this site and the chalet above.
- 5 - The trees around the chalet are mature and include individual Sycamore trees with a Holly under storey along the northern embankment and Sycamore, Oak, Horse Chestnut, Beech and Holly to the south. The trees become more dense further down the slope. There has been little or no maintenance of the trees around the chalet and some are in poor condition.
- 6 - There is a large Yew tree, some Holly and a few individual specimen Sycamore trees in this triangular section of land between the driveways to the two main buildings. The trees sit close to the edge of the track and driveway.
- 7 - This is a steeply sided grassy slope with Birch and Sycamore. Each tree stands as an individual specimen with a high canopy and the area is clear from any scrubby vegetation, as a result of grazing.
- 8 - This is a collection of 4 large mature Sycamore trees which sit at the back of the barns in the neighbouring field.
- 9 - This area is mainly rough grass with patches of bramble and scrub. There are a few trees at the top of the embankment which are generally of poor quality. A Beech tree has a large cavity in the trunk and a collapsed Willow.



Figure 6 - Overview of the trees and vegetation types

3.2 TREES AND VEGETATION

3.3 ECOLOGY

Leigh Ecology carried out a Phase 1 habitat survey and protective species survey, including a bat activity survey on May 10th. In summary the report concludes the following:

Where possible any landscaping design should be planned to provide connectivity with the wider landscape, including woodland edge and hedgerows.

The following programme of work is recommended:

- Minimise any impact loss of tree/woodland habitat;
- Fine plan the driveway route to minimise impact on woodland trees;
- Use low impact matting for the new driveway base;
- Nestling bird check prior to tree removal if works are carried out during the period April-August;
- Undertake pre construction badger surveys, in order to update any provisions and standoff distances in line with Natural England Guidance;
- Development safeguards – covering storage of materials, covering trenches, check prior to backfilling etc.;
- Provision of bat roosting opportunities within targeted buildings which link into the green network of trees and potential wider foraging environment;
- Design of any floodlighting on the proposed building or infrastructure should consider bat flight lines and minimise disturbance and severance of commuting routes;
- Retention of key ecological features (trees) within the layout designs, and develop an on-going maintenance program to ensure future wildlife habitat;
- Removal of invasive shrub species allowing the ground flora e.g. brambles, bluebells and wild garlic to flourish.

A Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEMP) should be worked up in order to minimise any risk to ecological receptors during the construction phase and incorporating the provision of landscape plans and ecological enhancement proposals.

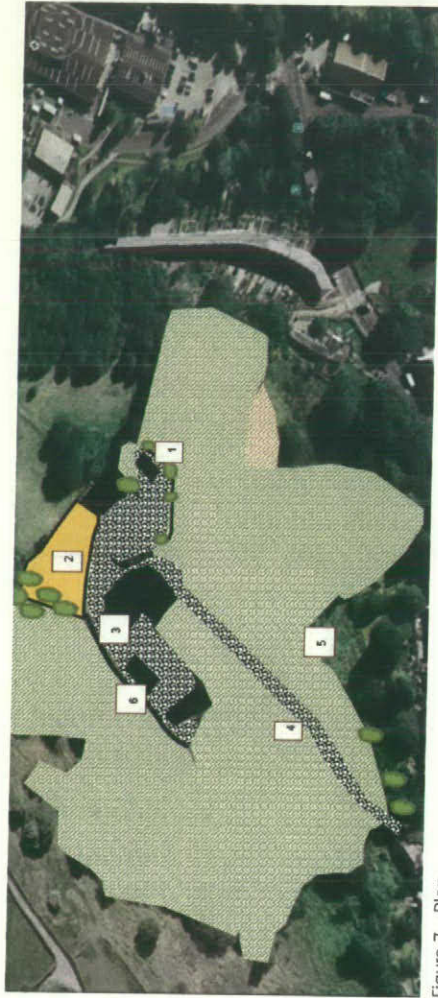
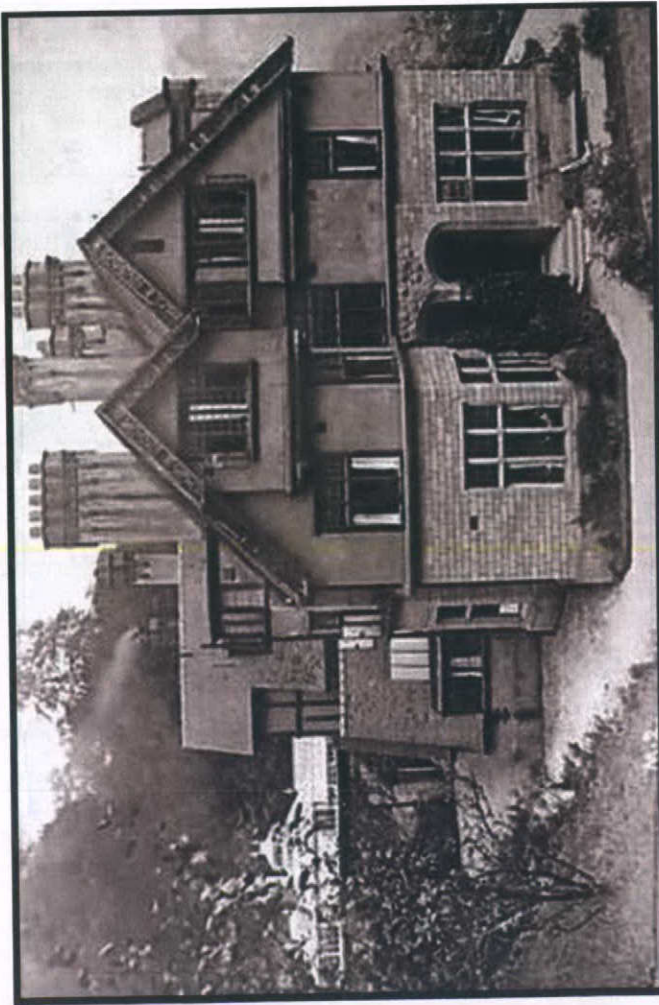


Figure 7 - Plan

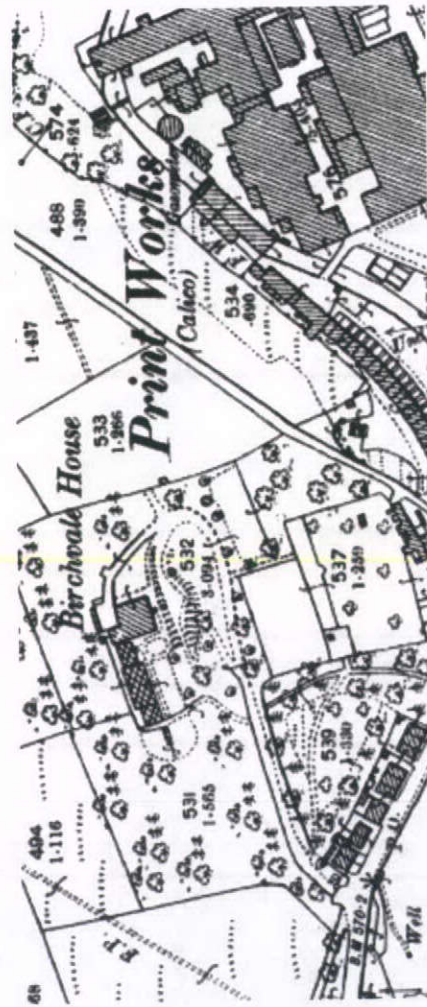
Proposed Footprint	
Tree Ground - Hard standing	
High Natural Vegetation Strata	
Overland	
Building	
Mature Trees	
Hedgerow	
Perennial	
Target Area	

4.0 HISTORY

Birch Vale House was once a fine and unique house. The Bennetts, who came from Charlesworth, started the Print Works, originally at the Garrison. They built Birch Vale Print Works in about 1841 (date on the first chimney, the second chimney was dated 1851), in what was then Spinnerbottom, but they changed the name to Birch Vale.



Photograph of the original Birch Vale House.



Extract from a map dated 1898 which shows the footprint of the house and grounds.

As part of the original grounds around Birch Vale House there was, altogether, 26 acres, most of it woodlands with some fields. More formally all along the long drive there was a narrow strip of lawn on both sides, and a double row of rhododendrons of which remnants can still be seen today in the picture below.



There was a "rhododendron path", used as a short cut to the main road and the railway station, with a double row of rhododendrons on either side of it. You can see the footpath through the walk on the map dated 1898. Some of the Rhododendrons are still growing in this area today and underneath the wooded area at the bottom there are still steps and an opening through the stone wall which leads you straight onto Spinnerbottom. The avenue of mature trees down this slope are probably remnants of the original route.



Photograph looking up the Rhododendron walk towards the main drive. Remnants of Rhododendrons are still growing here between the avenue of mature trees.



Photograph taken from Spinnerbottom looking at the original gate leading to a set of stone steps up to the Rhododendron walk (now overgrown with Holly).

On one side of the Rhododendron walk was a large orchard (which we presume is the area of land to the back of the houses fronting Spinnerbottom which is now overgrown) and on the other side a large kitchen garden. The walls of the kitchen garden are still intact and the area fairly clear. Undemeath the rough grass you can still find remnant of path edges and there is an old fruit tree in the middle of the garden.



Old stone walls around the kitchen garden.



An old fruit tree in the middle of the kitchen garden.

Further up the hill towards the house, there was a grass tennis court which is possibly the area where the chalet now sits. In front of the house was an area, with a holly hedge on the lower side, to prevent the horses veering down the hill, where a carriage could turn. There were lawns, and rose bushes, in front of and just to the side of the house. There was also a large heated greenhouse to the side of the house. Sadly none of these features exist today.

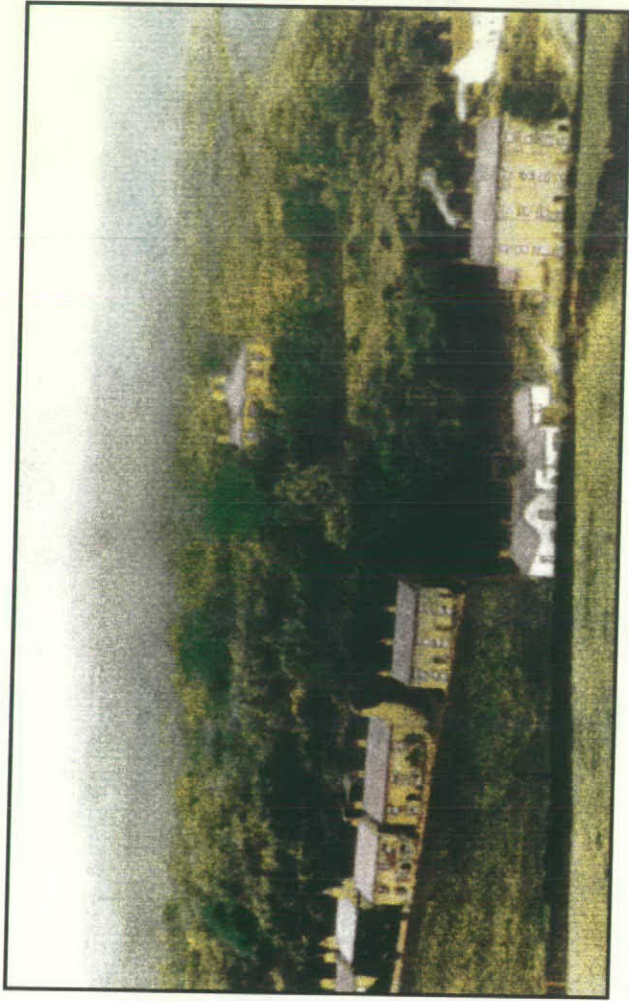
Originally there were two fountains in the garden, both powered by gravity with water from further up the hill. There looks to be remnants of one of these water features at the bottom of the embankment below where the original house would have been.



Possibly the hidden remnants of the water feature at the bottom of the embankment.

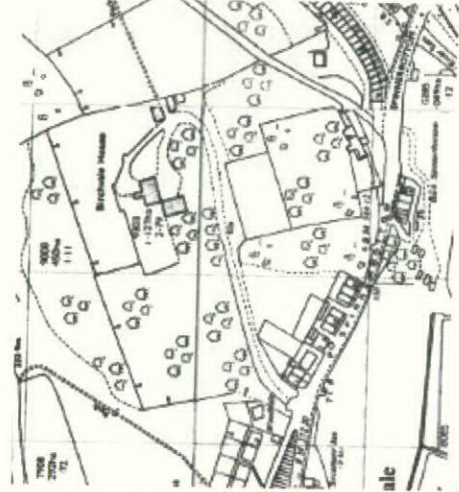


Looking up the embankment towards where the original house would have stood.



The photograph above shows what the house would have looked like set within the wider landscape. It looks like the tree cover has increased particularly to the south and east of the original house. The large amount of Sycamores found around the site today suggest a lack of management of the original landscape since the house was demolished.

The map below dated 1972 no longer shows the house and in its place are the two buildings which still exist today. It is thought that the stone from the house was used to build the facades of the new bungalows off Quarry Road which can be seen to the left of the site entrance. It is also clear when comparing the two maps that gardens from the adjacent cottages off Spinnerbottom have been extended into the orchard area.



Extract from a map dated 1972 after the house was demolished.



Bungalow on Quarry Road which is thought to have been built using the original stone from Birch Vale House.