

# Landscape and visual note on proposed site at Leek Road – HPK/2017/0110

## Purpose of note

To give a summary of the Site visit made by Stuart Ryder of Ryder Landscape Consultants on behalf of the development control team of High Peak Borough Council (HPBC). It captures the observations of Site and the surrounding area with regard to landscape and visual matters to inform the development control team considering the current planning application by Persimmon Homes (North West) for a residential development at this site.

## Structure of the note

After briefly outlining the methodology adopted in considering the application proposals the landscape and visual baseline of the site is summarised before identifying potential effects the proposals could have in landscape and visual terms. A separate section considers the conclusions drawn from the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) submitted by the Applicant and a series concluding points are provided as a summary to the overall note. Finally a series of site photographs are presented to illustrate particular points mentioned in the text.

## Methodology

Stuart Ryder as a Chartered Landscape Architect familiar with this part of the borough attended site on 9 May 2017 and inspected the potential development site from publically accessible locations. He took access onto the site itself following the existing Public Right of Way (PRoW) and was able to gain clear and unfettered views across it. He was accompanied by Faye Plant, Planning Officer of HPBC for the first part of the site visit.

I had the benefit of the submitted planning application documents lodged under application HPK/2017/0110. Of particular use on the site were the following drawings;

- Illustrative Masterplan 014-040-P009 prepared by e\*SCAPE Urbanists – February 2016;
- Landscape Strategy LEE1511\_LV011 prepared by PGLA Landscape Architects – March 2016; and
- The Applicant's LVIA and supporting appendices prepared by PGLA Landscape Architects – September 2016.

Subsequent to the site visit indicative sections prepared by e\*SCAPE were passed to me.

## Landscape baseline

### *Designated landscape and townscapes*

There is the immediate fact that the site is at the interface with the Peak District National Park (PDNP) a nationally important designation made to protect areas of significant landscape value.

There are no other designated landscapes e.g. Historic Park or Garden at or in the vicinity to the Site.

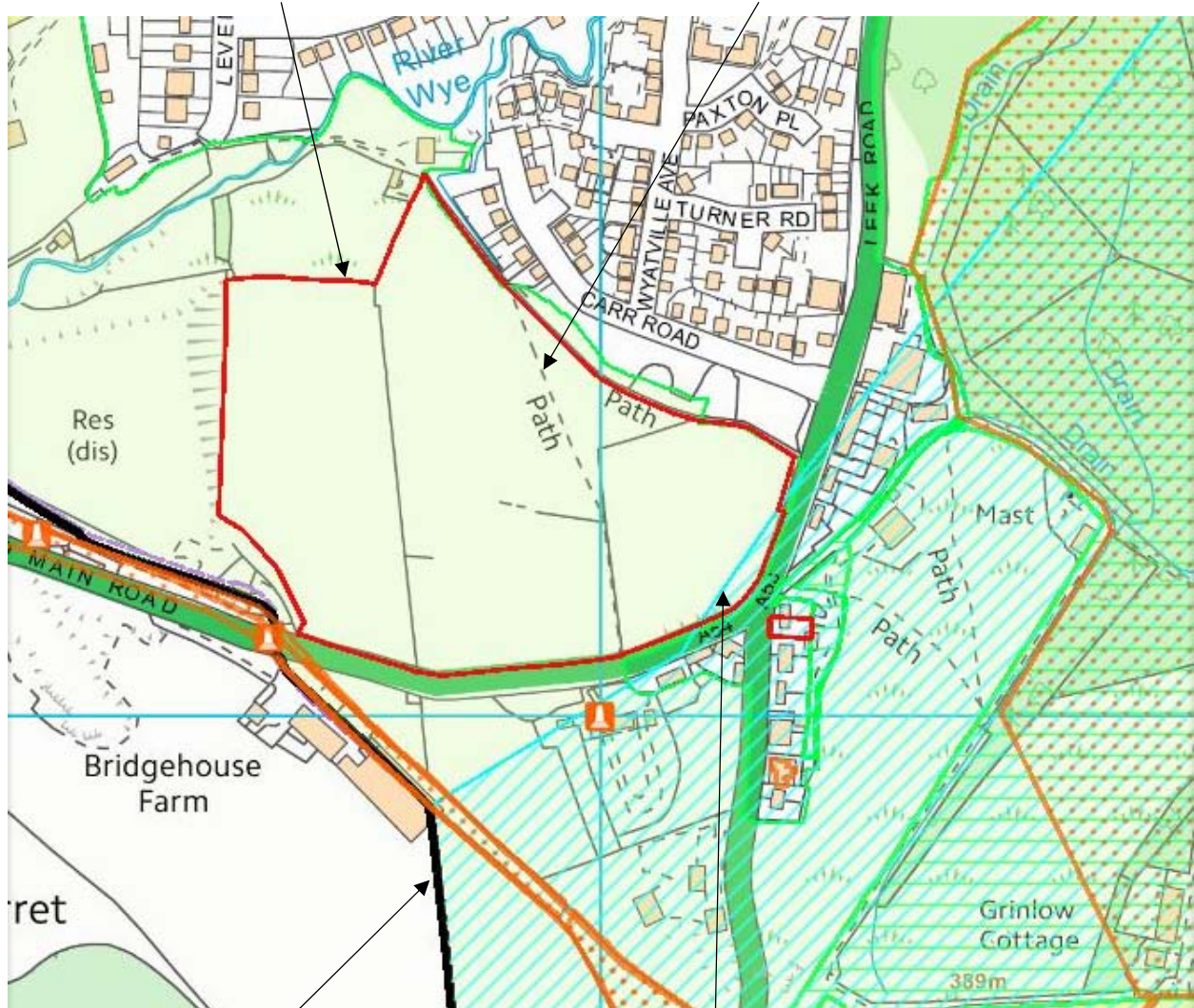
The site and the surrounding parts of A53 Leek Road are not part of a designated Conservation Area.

The site on the HPBC Proposals Plan 2016 is considered to be countryside and a small part at the south east corner falls within the Buxton Mineral Water Catchment.

The below extract from the Proposals Plans shows the designations around the site.

Red line marks application boundary

Footpath route Buxton FP38 crossing site



Black line marks the National Park Boundary

Blue cross hatch is the Buxton Mineral Water Catchment

### ***NPPF §109 & §115 – Valued Landscape***

By virtue of the fact that the site is immediately adjacent to a National Park (by definition a Valued Landscape) the subject of it being a Valued Landscape in terms of NPPF §109 in its own right or affecting the Valued Landscape of the PDNP needs to be carefully considered. In addition NPPF §115 directs decision-makers that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks.

The matter of Valued Landscape is not addressed in the Applicant's LVIA, nor could I see reference to it in the Planning Statement. The Applicant's LVIA was prepared with the benefit of discussion with the PDNP Landscape Officer. They agreed viewpoints with PGLA to indicate effects on the setting of the National Park and on views from the National Park.

The setting of a Valued Landscape is typically taken back to the Stroud DC v Gladmans Leonard Stanley appeal ([APP/C1625/A/13/2207324](#), 14 Jul 2014), in which the Inspector noted that; *"I accept that, currently, there is no agreed definition of valued as used in this paragraph. In the absence of any formal*

*guidance on this point, I consider that to be valued would require the site to show some demonstrable physical attribute rather than just popularity.” i.e. a Valued Landscape cannot just be valued by local people but has to have some demonstrable features or reason to be considered as a Valued Landscape.*

### ***Local landscape and amenity policies***

The following landscape and environmental policies form part of the Adopted High Peak Borough Council Local Plan – April 2016 planning policies that the submitted proposals will be considered against;

- Policy EQ2 – Landscape Character
- Policy EQ6 – Design and Place Making
- Policy EQ8 – Green Infrastructure
- Policy EQ9 – Trees, woodland and hedgerows

### ***Historic landscape***

The Site does not appear to be a part of any designed landscape or agrarian system and as stated above is not on Historic England’s Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, nor forms the setting to such a designated feature.

It is however close to a number of local historic environment records sites (HERS) when viewed on the Local Plan Interactive Map element of the HPBC website. An archaeological assessment has been submitted and this should be reviewed to consider the effect on known and suspected heritage assets.

The historic land-use of the site is considered to be moorland edge field enclosures. These enclosed fields provide better grazing than the open moor. They were historically used in the moorland system to take lambing ewes to for better grazing in more clement conditions before turning them out onto the nearby open, higher moors. The fields were being used for sheep and lamb grazing during the time of the site visit. There is evidence of the former rail bed to the south of the site.

There is a series of apparent areas of disturbed field profile which may be the locations for previous localised quarrying or other mineral winning, possibly associated with the rail bed. These are also evident on aerial photography of the site as a series of terraces. They add interest to the ground profile of the site.

## **Site overview**

The apparent site forms a bowl between the moorland edge of the PDNP and the current edge of Buxton.

It is made up of series of three fields demarked by drystone walls. There is evidence of further older, field division with some remnant stubs of other field walls but these are no longer full. The drystone wall field boundaries contribute to the quality of the local scene at the site and further up the valley to the west where the patterning continues.

The current land-use across all three fields is as improved pasture being used at the time of the survey for sheep grazing for ewes with lambs (photograph 1). A silage crop may be taken off the field later in the year. The site although made up of three fields appears to be managed as a single farming entity with stock passing between each.

The site is positioned in a very prominent location between two primary access roads into Buxton. The A54 – Macclesfield Main Road runs down the valley side to the south of the site with the A53 Leek Road running to the east. To the north lies Carr Road which is part of the new development positioned off A53 Leek Road. Finally to the west there are other open fields and a disused water reservoir positioned (photographs 2-5).

The volume of traffic along both the A54 – Macclesfield Main Road and the A53 Leek Road is such that the site although rural in appearance cannot be described as tranquil. These two routes are primary roads across the Peak District and carry a notable amount of heavy goods vehicles (photograph 6).

The northern and southern boundaries are longer running at approximately 275m each with the western and eastern ones shorter at approximately 120m.

As stated in the first line of this section the site topographically forms a very obvious bowl that can be best observed from both the higher southern and eastern sides. The site falls an estimated 30m from the higher southern side to the lower northern boundary. This accords with the general topographical form of the area as a climbing topography running north to south climbing out of Buxton up to the moors of the PDNP.

There are no largescale water features evident on site but a small ephemeral stream channel runs south to north across the site to discharge during wet conditions into the River Wye which flows to the north of the site (photograph 7). At the time of the survey this channel was dry.

There is a distinct lack of tall vegetation on the site. The one exception to this is the large, mature sycamore positioned to the north-east end of the site which I believe benefits from a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) given its contribution to public amenity (photograph 8). The vegetation in the fields appears to be an improved agricultural sward with some sedge and damp loving herb species to the lower parts of the fields nearer the stream (photograph 7 again).

There is currently no built form on the site other than the drystone walls but buildings are evident around it, most notably the new development along Carr Road to the north (photograph 9). There are however two Public Rights of Way (PRoW) both footpaths associated with the site. Buxton FP38 runs south to north across the proposed site (photograph 10) and links to FP40 that runs along the site's northern boundary.

### *Current landscape character of the site*

The current character is of a series of medium sized regular shaped upland fields that are set on the edge to the open moors. The site's topographical form as a bowl adds to its character and prominence in the local landscape. The site is notably sloped and there is evidence of ground disturbance.

The drystone walls that act as boundaries add to the upland character of the site and contribute to the regular pattern on the wider landscape (photograph 11).

There is a distinct lack of trees or hedge cover on the site with the exception of the veteran sycamore tree to the north east corner of the site. This highly notable tree is particularly visible from the south and east sides of the site, benefits from a TPO and acts as a local landmark. The grass in the fields on the site appear to be improved pasture used for sheep grazing.

The site is not tranquil with the presence of busy roads to its south and east. There is also the presence of residential homes to its north and east and a mix of buildings to its south. However its own character is still as a functioning piece of upland farmland sat at the interface of the built settlement of Buxton and the open moors of the Peak District National Park. It is in a transition zone between the settled lower ground of Buxton and the higher open moor of the south west Peak District.

### *Current landscape characteristics*

The current landscape characteristics of the Site are listed below;

- Three medium sized, regular shaped fields of improved pasture under active management as sheep pasture;
- Limited habitat variation in the sward on the site;
- Drystone walls demarcate field boundaries instead of hedges;
- Notably sloping site forming the impression of a bowl;
- Prominent location between busy roads;
- Even though a rural site it is not perceived as a tranquil location;
- Lack of trees apart from single prominent sycamore; and
- It is overlooked from public locations on three out of its four sides.

## Context to the site

Taking the cardinal points of the compass in turn the site has the following areas as its immediate context;

### *North – Carr Road*

Carr Road is the southern-most edge of the approximately 160 No. unit new build area off A53 Leek Road. The last 12 No units on Carr Road are currently being built out by Copper Leaf Developers of Buxton and the construction works are prominent across the site. The buildings are clad in light reconstituted stone with darker roofing materials, at present there is little boundary separation or vegetation between the Carr Road properties and the proposed site.

### *East – A53 Leek Road*

There are houses positioned to the east of the site running up A53 Leek Road. These properties are positioned on the opposite side of the road side to the proposed development. The properties all appear to be stone built workers cottages set in blocks and at a higher elevation than the A53 Leek Road by an estimated 2m. The occupants of these properties will have views from their front rooms to the site.

### *South – A54 - Macclesfield Main Road*

The A54 links Macclesfield to Buxton and runs down from upland moors following the shoulder of the hill. It is quite a dramatic, steep and recognisable route that marks the entry to Buxton. Road users are afforded an extensive view down into the site, to the housing beyond that marks the beginning of Buxton and to the encircling high ground to the north of Buxton in the distance. There is a mixture of built form along the eastern half of the southern boundary consisting of farm, agricultural buildings, a more contemporary bungalow dwelling and what appears as a standalone block of stone built workers cottages right at the very junction of the A54 with the A53 Leek Road.

### *West – Open countryside*

A combination of similar sized, regular fields stretch up the valley to the west of the site into the PDNP. Also to pasture these fields do not appear to be as improved as the proposed site but along with the site contribute to the quality of the local landscape with similar drystone field boundaries and upland character.

### *Surrounding landscape context*

The surrounding landscape context is one of transition from the built form of Buxton running up to the open moor of the Peak District National Park that is characteristic of this part of the National Park.

Existing houses are evident to people walking or driving down the A54 or A53 Leek Road and form part of the current landscape character of the area. However the presence of houses does not dominate the landscape scene with the upland, rural character of the landscape being more dominant. The sense of a

wider landscape is assisted by sight to other upland areas to the south, west and even in the far distance on the other side of Buxton to the north.

Tree vegetation is generally kept to the more sheltered river valleys with some more upland forestry areas on the higher slopes. The scene is not wooded in nature but there are areas of woodland visible notably the mixed coniferous and deciduous woodland of The Terret positioned at a higher elevation within the PDNP to the south of the site and the mixed woodland to the east associated with Buxton Country Park.

By its very location at the junction of the A54 and A53 with the start of more evident larger areas of houses the area acts as a gateway or perceived start to Buxton. This is further heightened by the presence of name signs for the town. If one is travelling over the moor the sense of descending off the tops, down into the valley and arriving in a safer, more sheltered location is palpable.

### *Nearby built form*

There is a mix of built forms in the area ranging from the older stone workers cottages in Burbage to the east of the site, more modern detached and semi-detached dwellings estimated to be from the 70's and 80's on Level Lane and Anncroft Road to the north. Immediately adjacent to the proposed site is the highly contemporary properties on Carr Road and the wider Leek Road development.

If there is a unifying characteristic it is a commonality of two storeys in height and a cladding or construction of pale, local limestone of the White Peak.

There are also the farm buildings to the south of the site off the A54 which is a complex of old and new, some with considerable aesthetic appeal others as larger, more utilitarian buildings.

## Visual baseline

### *Site visibility*

The site is positioned in a highly visible location from surrounding public areas with the following as a summary of views visited during the study;

- Close range views from the adjacent A54 – Macclesfield Main Road to the south;
- Close range views from the adjacent A53 – Leek Road to the east
- Close range views from the adjacent Carr Road to the north;
- Close range views from footpaths that cross the site or run along its northern boundary;
- Mid-range views from Macclesfield Old Road to the north;
- Mid-range views from Bishop Lane to the north; and
- Mid to long range views of the site from the west within the National Park.

The Applicant's LVIA considers these views amongst the 28No views they visited.

The Site forms the open foreground of elevated public views from Macclesfield Main Road (south) and Leek Road (east) when the whole site is evident looking down into the bowl of the landscape.

Likewise looking back up the site's falling topography from the public viewpoints to the north from the public footpath it forms the foreground to these public views.

The site is also evident in a number of mid and long range views predominately to the west. There are anticipated long range views from the high ground to the north of Buxton. However there would appear to be no public views from nearer higher ground to the south on and around The Terret due to a lack of public access routes. This does not mean that views would not exist, just that they are not publically

available but instead will be experienced by land owners, tenants and workers using these fields and moorland.

### *Visual context*

The visual context is an upland rural scene with the existing presence of houses set on the edge of Buxton and Burbage but the larger sense of open countryside forms the greater impression on the viewer.

Burbage appears as a ribbon development along the A53 – Leek Road with the area of new development off Leek Road a change to this linear form of development. Views are framed and channelled by the sloping topography of the Peak District and the valley form where transport routes run. Views are typically extensive from elevated positions and less so from lower ground where trees thrive and development have taken place.

Part of the upland visual context is the relative lack of trees in the scene. This is not to say that there are not trees but rather they are kept to defined woodland blocks such as The Terret and Burbage Edge rather than in hedged field boundaries.

The upland countryside of unenclosed moors on higher ground and drystone walls around the fields just off the open moor form the backdrop to the south and west of the site. To the east the developing woodland of Buxton Country Park is set and to the north the settled edge of Buxton.

## Potential landscape effects

### *The site's landscape*

The proposals would fundamentally change the open character of this bowl of land turning it from open space into a settled extension of Buxton. It would totally remove the rural quality of the landscape at the site and considerably reduce it in the surrounding area.

It would form a major extension in landscape terms running higher up the moorland transition to the south of Buxton than any other major development has done before.

The individual landscape elements that when combined give the site its character and contribute to the wider rural scene would largely be lost, or have their context changed so they no longer contribute to the local landscape. These include;

- Change of land use from sheep pasture to housing;
- Loss of openness to houses;
- Loss of drystone walls from view should they be retained within the new layout;
- Loss of prominence of the individual mature sycamore tree set within houses rather than in pasture; and
- Loss of local bowl topography of the site with its various undulations modified to form house pads then screened by built form and proposed mitigation planting.

It can be argued that these adverse landscape effects are inevitable as the result of development of a green field site but it should also be recognised that these effects cannot be realistically mitigated.

### *Landscape context*

Looking at the effects on the landscape context to the site the links to the Peak District National Park at this entrance to the Park should be acknowledged. It would reduce the sense of arriving at the National Park and remove the fields from acting as a landscape buffer to the National Park.

The proposals would reduce the moorland transition in the Burbage area and bring a larger development closer to the open moorland.

Should the mitigation proposals establish successfully it would present a more wooded edge to the open countryside to the west in contrast to the pasture fields that currently exist.

It would be perceived as an extension to the existing recently built development off Leek Road as there is limited distance between the two. This contemporary development does not follow the ribbon development form of the existing Burbage homes adjacent to the A53 – Leek Road and appears contemporary in the scene.

### *Valued Landscape*

It is arguable given;

- the prominence of the site's location;
- its proximity to and positioning as a gateway to the Peak District National Park;
- the public access offered by the two footpaths
- the notable topography; coupled with
- ready visibility across the site;

that the site could be classed as a Valued Landscape in NPPF terms even though it does not carry a landscape designation itself.

If the site is deemed a Valued Landscape then NPPF §109 would need to be considered within the planning balance and whether the proposals contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.

### *Landscape mitigation measures*

Turning now to the effects of the proposed landscape mitigation measures. The mitigation that is illustrated is on Figure 13 – Landscape Strategy Drawing is largely tree, hedgerow and low level native planting set to the west, south and east to form buffers between the nearby viewpoints and the proposed housing.

The character of the planting suggested is not in keeping with how woodland is formed and used in the upland landscape. It is more akin to a scheme where trees and hedgerows are already more prevalent and does not appear to respond to the upland character of the site.

The landscape mitigation planting may struggle to establish in this particular location but assuming it does it is not the same character as the surrounding landscape that does not have such amenity planting. Given the bowl topography of the site there will still be the ability to look up or down into the site and view housing running up the slopes.

The topography associated with the new access road and the re-configuration of the Macclesfield Main Road realignment will be highly notable features along the A54 road corridor. There is a distinct 'drop-off' in topography at the point of the proposed main access into the site and how this is managed to achieve safe highway standards is not readily discernible from the plans I took to site. Should this outline application be granted consent I would advise the Reserved Matter for access, roads and ground profiles be carefully scrutinised.

## Visual effects

### *Indicative public viewpoints*

Taking the identified public views from the visual baseline in turn the following table summarises the change in these views and likely visual amenity effects should the proposals be built. The appraisal of views have been prepared independently of the submitted LVIA and does not constitute a full LVIA as not all the indicative locations from where the development would be visible were visited. The nature of change is described with the presumption that the proposed landscape mitigation planting has successfully established.

View and visual receptors	Nature of change
Close range views from the adjacent A54 – Macclesfield Main Road to the south;	<p>The view down onto the site through the vegetation would not be to houses set below in a valley situation but to houses running up the hill to the road. The presence of houses so close to the wild, openness of the National Park would be a sharp contrast.</p> <p>Depending on the density of planting and house positions adjacent to the road the expansive long range views over Buxton to the hills beyond would be lost.</p> <p>Illustrative sections submitted as part of the application also show the road set at a higher level than the adjacent houses with views potentially to the first storey of the boundary properties. This could appear discordant.</p>
Close range views from the adjacent A53 – Leek Road to the east	<p>The current view is across the open fields and up the valley to the west and the National Park beyond. This attractive view would be dramatically changed with houses forming the foreground and basically removing it from the public view. There may be sight to some of the higher ground beyond such as Burbage Edge but it would be viewed between house and over roof tops.</p> <p>The residents of Leek Road properties opposite the site would look across the roofs and upper floors of the buildings from their own slightly elevated position (photo 13).</p>
Close range views from the adjacent Carr Road to the north;	<p>Residents of the newer properties on Carr Road would have sight up the site from the rear of their homes.</p> <p>Carr Road users would see between houses to further houses beyond giving them the sense of being in the middle of a housing area rather than at the edge of one (photo 14).</p>
Close range views from footpaths that cross the site or run adjacent to it to the north;	<p>The users of Buxton FP38 and FP40 would experience the greatest visual change as they walk through or adjacent to a large housing area instead of open, upland fields (photo 15). Their views out in every direction will be curtailed by the presence of built form.</p> <p>There are two areas of open space in the proposals that the paths could run through/by – Linear Park and Sycamore Green. These open areas could improve the visual amenity of the development but would not replace the expansive and attractive views across the rural scene currently experienced by path users.</p>
Mid-range views from Macclesfield Old Road to the north;	<p>Macclesfield Old Road is now predominately used as a footpath rather than a vehicle route and is a largely a recreational route in the National Park.</p>

View and visual receptors	Nature of change
	Views are back eastwards towards the site (See Applicant's LVIA Viewpoints 16, 17, 17a) and the development would form a notable extension visually linking the existing southern edge of Buxton up to the parts of Burbage situated around the A53-A54 junction. This filling in of the visible undeveloped gap would compound the view of development appearing to reach up the valley to the higher ground beyond.
Mid-range views from Bishop Lane to the north; and	Bishop Lane is a quiet route off the A53 – Leek Road and looking south from it the development would be seen rising up the valley side beyond the existing recent development off Leek Road. The longer view is onto the National Park. As is the mid-range view 15 from the Applicant's LVIA that looks south from a public footpath over the tops of the Old Macclesfield Road properties across the site running up to the National Park beyond. From here houses would be seen stretching up the valley side towards the National Park.
Mid to long range views of the site to the west from the National Park.	These are illustrated on Applicant's LVIA Views 18 & 19 and include the site in a wider, expansive landscape scene as they themselves are from a higher elevation. The proposed development would be seen extending into the countryside sometimes with other major built form set at a higher level as in Viewpoint 18 and other times it would form the most significant group of buildings at the highest elevation as in Viewpoint 19.

### *Summary of private visual receptors*

The majority of private visual receptors are local residents living in the area. It is a recognised fact that private individuals do not have a 'right to a view' but their visual amenity and enjoyments of a scene can be dramatically changed by new development.

Taking the cardinal points of the compass again the local residents who will receive a notable change to the views from their homes and gardens are;

- North – residents of Carr Road properties and further to the north some residents of Level Lane and Anncroft Road;
- East – residents of properties on A53 – Leek Road and some set behind in Stable Lane;
- South – residents of the cottages and farmsteads positioned off the A54 – Macclesfield Main Road; and
- West – no visual receptors noted.

The tear-drop shaped island of woodland that would be formed by the Macclesfield Main Road realignment would go some way to screening sight of the proposed development for the eastern of the two residential areas off the A54. However the creation of woodland planting on the teardrop would effectively prevent the wider, more expansive view to the north as well.

### **Architectural appearance and layout**

This note does not pass comment on the merit or otherwise of the architectural appearance of the proposed dwellings.

However three points of note are given with regard to the benefits or otherwise of the layout as shown on the illustrative Masterplan;

- There does not appear to be any proposed separation between the rear of properties e.g. fences or walls giving the illustration a much more open appearance than is likely to come to pass;
- As already highlighted above the topographical treatment of the access road is likely to require significant earth works in the form of embankments or retention to overcome the change in level between the site and Macclesfield Main Road; and
- The scheme is suggested to present a softer, improved settlement edge to the hard edge of the Carr Road development to the north. This appears to be a reasoned suggestion but overlooks the fact that development will be more clearly evident to viewers as it is closer to the busy viewpoints of the A53 and A54 road corridors, assumes the planting will successfully establish and does not take into account the range of other landscape and visual harm the proposals may lead to.

## Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)

### *Methodology*

The LVIA that has been submitted to address landscape and visual matters was produced by PGLA and is dated September 2016.

It states at §2.1 that it has been produced to best practice outlined in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Third Edition (GLVIA3) and makes reference to the same throughout.

The sensitivity of landscape receptors and visual receptors has been derived from considering value and susceptibility. However I have not been able to review any tables that explain how sensitivity has been derived for individual receptors.

At §2.4 it defines the varying levels of Magnitude of Change for landscape receptors and at §2.5 it spells out the judging of significance of landscape effects. §2.8 defines the levels of Magnitude of Change for visual receptors and at §2.9 it explains the judging of significance of visual effects.

The study area has been set at a radius of 7.5km from the site which is appropriate for the landscape and development under consideration.

The selection of viewpoints was undertaken after a Zone of Theoretical Visibility Mapping exercise and the selected viewpoints were verified with the High Peak Case Officer (unnamed) as being appropriate and sufficient.

All these matters point to a sound approach and an appropriate methodology for the LVIA.

### *Judgements contained in the LVIA*

The LVIA presents the significance of both operational and residual landscape effects in Tables B and C whilst operational and residual visual effects are presented in Tables D and E. For ease it is only the residual effects that have been reviewed in this note. These have been dated for 10 years after completion to allow for mitigation planting to take effect which is standard practice.

The LVIA explains at para 2 in §2.5 that the LVIA considers all those effects which result in a 'moderate' or 'major' level of effect to be a significant effect. It rightly reminds the reader that effects can be beneficial, adverse or neutral.

Based on the judgements regarding significance of effects in Tables B to E the LVIA then presents conclusions on landscape effects at §8.1, visual effects at §8.2 and overall conclusions at §8.3.

### ***Review of significance of landscape effects***

In considering Table C at Page 39 of the LVIA there appears to be an under reporting on the landscape effects on the site and the setting of the proposed development.

For the site I believe there to be an under reporting of its sensitivity with the LVIA considering it Medium when it is arguable given its prominent location, demonstrable character and value given its proximity to the National Park it should be graded as Medium-High. Likewise the magnitude of change after 10 years is considered to be Moderate when I would have considered it remained Major. Even with mitigation planting there is still the total change of a piece of attractive rural landscape to an area of housing which however well designed or screened is still the loss of an attractive piece of countryside. Should the suggested re-assessment be placed in the same look-up matrix as Appendix B - Table B then the significance of landscape effects on the site after 10 years, even with mitigation planting, is deemed in my opinion to be Major, Adverse and permanent effect. Table C does not state whether it is a permanent or adverse effect but I believe this to be a typographical error and this type of landscape change should be considered permanent and adverse.

Carrying out a similar process for the setting of the proposed development I agree that the sensitivity of this landscape area is Medium-High based on some of the setting being built form at the edge of Buxton and other being the Peak District National Park. However the magnitude of change after 10 years I would assess at Moderate not Minor as the Applicant's LVIA suggests. This would compute through to a Moderate/Major permanent and adverse change instead of the Moderate one suggested in the applicant's LVIA.

In summary both I and the Applicant's landscape advisers consider there to be significant, adverse and permanent harm to the landscape of the site and to the setting of the proposed development. However I consider that a greater degree of significant adverse landscape effects would take place than reported.

The review of the remaining five number larger geographical landscape areas I have no reason to challenge and the assessment of landscape effects appear reasonable.

Finally on landscape effects I would have expected to see an assessment of the landscape effect on the adjacent part of the Peak District National Park. This development will not alter the landscape character of the wider Park but as a landscape entity with the highest level of protected landscape status I would expect specific commentary on the landscape effects on this part of the National Park. I recognise that the National Park has been considered as part of the setting to the proposed development but perhaps this more specific information could be requested from the Applicant. The PDNP Planning Liaison Officer may well be interested in considering any more detailed information.

### ***Review of significance of visual effects***

It is Table E on page 41 of the Applicant's LVIA that presents the significance of visual effects from 27No viewpoints selected to be representative of the views gained by visual receptors around the proposed site.

I did not visit all the viewpoints myself during my site visit so limit my review to those that I did view. However I am satisfied that I viewed the proposed site from a sufficient number of the same viewpoints as the Applicant's advisors. The table I present below uses the same viewpoint references as the Applicant's LVIA, gives a title for the view and then sets the Applicant's LVIA assessment of the scene after 10 years (shaded in blue) with that of my own (shaded in green). I have already expressed concern

about the establishment rate and success of the proposed mitigation planting in the local climatic conditions at the site. However my assessment makes the assumption that the planting has been successful and is in place as shown on the Illustrative Masterplan and as described in the Landscape Strategy.

Ref	Name of view	Nature of receptor (Sensitivity)	Nature of effects (Magnitude of change)	Significance of visual effects	Comments on any difference
VP1	Public footpath access point to north of site	Medium	Moderate	Moderate Permanent: Minor Adverse	Receptor sensitivity is higher as the focus of the current scene is the expansive rural view. The Magnitude of Change remains Major as loss of open view to the upland landscape of the National Park being replaced by planting and housing is a major, adverse change at this location.
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP2	Public footpath adjacent to northern boundary	Medium	Moderate-Major	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	Ditto
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP3	Public footpath adjacent to northern boundary	Medium	Moderate	Moderate Permanent: Minor Adverse	Ditto
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP4	Public footpath next to Carr Road /northern boundary	Medium	Moderate-Major	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	Ditto
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP5a &b	Public footpath adjacent to northern boundary	Medium	Moderate-Major	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	Ditto
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP6	Public footpath to northern boundary looking to Leek Rd	Medium	Moderate	Moderate Permanent: Minor Adverse	Ditto
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP7	Public footpath to northern boundary looking west to Peak District National Park	Medium	Moderate-Major	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	Receptor sensitivity is higher. Even though this viewpoint is in the approximate position of the proposed Sycamore Park the longer views out to the west to the National Park remain truncated and the scene would be of housing.
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP8	Ditto	Medium	Moderate-Major	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	Receptor sensitivity is higher as the focus of the current scene is the expansive rural view. The Magnitude of Change remains Major as loss of open view to the upland landscape of the National Park being replaced by planting and housing is a major, adverse change at this location.
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP9	Public footpath Leek Road – Carr Road junction	Medium	Moderate-Major	Moderate-Major Permanent: Adverse	This view has been largely lost due to the recent construction of the last 12 properties on Carr Road. Narrow, constrained views still remain between the new properties to the fields and high ground beyond.
		Medium	Moderate	Moderate Permanent effect	
VP10	Bus stop on Leek Road	Medium	Moderate	Moderate Permanent: Minor Adverse	Receptor sensitivity is matched at Medium as visual receptors are standing by the side of a busy road in an area with some housing evident. However the magnitude of change is Major as the open fields and view to the National Park would be replaced by housing and associated planting. There may be some view to the upper part of the hills above the tops of houses but this will be dependent on the proximity of houses to the viewer on Leek Road.
		Medium	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP11	Public footpath access from A54 onto south of site	Medium-High	Moderate	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	Receptor sensitivity is matched given the proximity of the A54 and other housing in the scene down the valley towards Buxton. Change however would remain Major as the view to houses within amenity tree planting is a considerable change to the view down into the existing valley and across to the other side of Buxton.
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP12	A54 west of site looking north east	Medium-High	Moderate	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	Receptor sensitivity is matched given the proximity of the A54 and other housing in the scene down the valley towards Buxton. Change however would remain Major as the view to houses within amenity tree planting is a considerable change to the view to more distant houses on lower ground. Depending on the proximity of both houses and screen planting the expansive view north over Buxton to the distant hills of the White Peak will also be lost.
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP13	A54 approach to the site from the west	Medium-High	Moderate	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	Ditto
		Medium-High	Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	

Ref	Name of view	Nature of receptor (Sensitivity)	Nature of effects (Magnitude of change)	Significance of visual effects	Comments on any difference
VP14	Public footpath to north of site adjacent to Burbage	Medium	Minor	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	No grounds to raise differences.
		Did not visit			
VP15	Public footpath to north of site off Macclesfield Old Rd	Medium	Minor	Moderate-Major Permanent: Minor Adverse	The visual receptors sensitivity has been increased as this is a recreational path linking to open countryside and a wider network of quiet routes such as Bishop Lane to the north. Magnitude of change is also considered to be larger with a Moderate rating as even though there is existing housing in the view the new scene of house facades, roofs and some intervening planting will be seen to run up the hill as far as the A54 - Macclesfield Main Road.
		Medium-High	Moderate	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP16	Footpath to west of site within Peak District NP from Macclesfield Old Road.	High	Minor	Moderate Permanent: Minor Adverse	Confirm receptors sensitivity is High within National Park away from detracting influences. However magnitude of change is considered larger at Moderate with the quantum of visible housing, albeit set some 300m away practically doubling in the scene.
		High	Moderate	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP17	Footpath to west of site looking east from within Peak District NP	High	Minor	Moderate Permanent: Minor Adverse	Confirm receptors sensitivity is High within National Park and a reasonable distance from detracting influences. However magnitude of change is considered larger at Moderate with the amount of visible housing increasing and visually appearing to link the edge of Buxton with the existing built form adjacent to the A54.
		High	Moderate	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP18	Access Land to west of Burbage edge plantation in the Peak District NP	High	Imperceptible	Negligible: Permanent Adverse	The visibility back to the site is difficult once the footpath passes around the edge of the Burbage Edge plantation due to trees and landform, particularly without the visual reference to the A54. Receptors’ sensitivity remain High in the National Park and change after 10 years may be visible if the perimeter planting does not screen it. Line of other development visible above the site’s location and presumed to be the Harpur Hill area.
		High	Minor-Imperceptible	Minor Permanent Adverse effect	
VP19	Footpath to west of site looking east from within Peak District NP	High	Minor	Moderate Permanent: Minor Adverse	The receptors’ sensitivity remain as High but the magnitude of change is increased to Minor-Moderate. This higher rating is derived from the sense of a built up area jutting out into the fields where currently they end at Carr Road. At this distance the proposed boundary mitigation planting is likely to soften the western edge of the development but at this elevation not remove sight to the built form beyond it that runs up to the A53 – Leek Road.
		High	Minor-Moderate	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	
VP20	Tracks on Access Land within the Peak District NP	High	Imperceptible	Negligible: Permanent Adverse	No grounds to raise differences.
		Did not visit			
VP21	Dene Valley Way National Trail next to Grin Low Road	Medium	Imperceptible	Minor Permanent: Neutral	Receptor sensitivity as High on this National Trail within a key recreational area that is not discernibly different to the nearby National Park. Change will remain at Minor if the boundary planting to the south of the site does not work and if it does it will remove sight to the lower part of the Wye valley and the development around Old Macclesfield Road.
		High	Minor	Moderate Permanent Adverse effect	
VP22	Dene Valley Way National Trail	High	Minor	Moderate Permanent: Minor Adverse	Receptor sensitivity is agreed to be High. A thin line of native tree planting runs at the bottom of the large field that the National Trail traverses. The line of trees screen sight to the existing Carr Road properties. The sight of new houses in the mid-ground would appear unconnected to any other development adding to the sense of change. The nearer tree line will continue to grow and this view may be lost altogether. However the presence of a large housing development as a new addition to the scene, even with some
		High	Moderate-Major	Moderate-Major Permanent Adverse effect	

Ref	Name of view	Nature of receptor (Sensitivity)	Nature of effects (Magnitude of change)	Significance of visual effects	Comments on any difference
					mitigation planting, will detract considerably on the setting to the National Park beyond when viewed from this National Trail.
VP23	Grinlow Tower close to Buxton Country Park	High	Imperceptible	Minor Permanent: Neutral	No grounds to raise differences.
		Did not visit			
VP24	Track off Waterswallows Rd, High Peak Golf Club	Medium	Imperceptible	Negligible: Permanent Adverse	No grounds to raise differences.
		Did not visit			
VP25	Roman road, Brookfield to north of proposed site.	Medium	Imperceptible	Negligible Minor: Permanent Adverse	No grounds to raise differences.
		Did not visit			

There has been a good range of visual receptors identified in the Applicant's LVIA. However I feel some may have been missed from the Buxton FP38 footpath that crosses the site and from Bishops Lane to the north of the site. Users of the site footpath are an important visual receptor group who will experience the greatest magnitude of effect from the development. The omission from Bishops Lane is however a small matter but if the LVIA was to be updated for any reason it would be the better for the inclusion of these two viewpoints.

The differences in the review of visual effects after ten years broadly shows the following;

- Receptor sensitivity immediately around the site has largely been under-valued;
- That the magnitude of change has been largely under-valued with my assessment typically one grade above that of the Applicant's LVIA;
- Computing through these changes to sensitivity and magnitude of change results in an increased number of Moderate, Moderate-Major and Major Adverse significance of visual effects.

### *Comment on significance of visual effects judgement wording*

I was initially confused by the method of presentation of the judgements of significance of visual effects. I could not understand how the effects, say for VP1 for example, as a Moderate, Permanent effect was only judged to have a Minor Adverse effect. This made me look again at §2.9 of the LVIA's methodology section which seeks to explain the judging of the significance of visual effects. It is the latter part of this section on Page 8 which is more informative.

The Permanent – Minor Adverse is I believe a possible reference to the 'degree to which the proposal fits with the landscape character' combined with commentary on a duration of effect. I find the judgement wording confusing and for a causal reader of Table E the immediate impression is that the vast majority of the visual effects are judged to be Minor Adverse. It should be recognised that it is the start of the judgement of significance that gives the grade of the significance of effect. I have not made reference to any of these duration comments in my own assessment of significance of visual effects.

By either the Applicant's LVIA or my own judgement of the same the overwhelming majority of identified views after 10 years experience a Moderate or Moderate-Major adverse visual effects that is permanent. The Applicant's LVIA explains at §2.9 that these levels of effect are classed as 'significant'. As they are significant, adverse and permanent visual effects I believe they should be considered fully in the planning balance against the benefits of development in this location.

### *Comments on landscape effects conclusions*

These are held at §8.1 of the Applicant's LVIA. The correct landscape character areas appear to have been identified for the site in national, regional and local landscape character assessments terms.

I concur that at a larger landscape character area scale as described at §8.1.2 there will be minor / negligible, adverse and permanent effects on these geographically large areas by a development that in comparison is small-scale in nature.

However I do not agree that development of the upland fields of the site will only result in a Moderate, adverse residual landscape effect and consider that this would be a Major, adverse residual landscape effect. The presence of houses, even if partially set with amenity planting is a significant change of landscape character when compared to the upland landscape that it is set within.

Likewise I consider there will be a larger landscape effect on the setting of the proposed development and this will not be a Minor, adverse and permanent residual effect as suggested but rather Moderate-Major, adverse and permanent.

There is no specific mention on the landscape effect on the adjacent parts of the Peak District National Park.

### *Comments on visual effects conclusions*

These are found at §8.2 of the Applicant's LVIA.

The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping assisted in identifying both residential and public receptors likely to be affected by the proposals.

The conclusions at §8.2.2 suggest that the screen planting would reduce views from residential receptors that initially are Moderate/Major down to Moderate, adverse. I believe this assessment does not take into account the fundamental change to longer range views out to the Peak District National Park that are also screened by the proposed mitigation planting should it establish.

The conclusions consider views from the National Park and views to it in terms of the impact of development on the setting of the National Park and concludes that there will be some significant visual effects. My own assessment agrees with this but grades many of these adverse visual effects at a higher level of significance than the Applicant's LVIA.

Views from local paths around the site are considered but not the route across it that would experience the greatest magnitude of visual change.

At §8.2.4 it is suggested that there are no major significant effects on views from the A54 - Macclesfield Main Road. I disagree with this assessment as I consider the views gained by road and footpath users across the prominent scene will be fundamentally changed. Initially houses will be seen and then houses set within amenity tree planting should it establish. The presence of houses will be clearly evident closer to the road user and longer distance views across Buxton to the north will be lost resulting in a considerable magnitude of change.

The final paragraph of the visual effects conclusions suggests that although the residual visual effect is that the development will remain visible, especially during the winter months when hedgerows and trees are not in leaf the development can contribute to the rural interface. It also suggests the mature planting will create an appropriate landscape framework for the development. However this presumes that the proposed mitigation planting firstly establishes and is in itself appropriate to the local landscape character which it can be argued it is not.

### *Comments on overall conclusions*

Three 'principle conclusions' are presented at §8.3.3 to §8.3.5.

The first addresses landscape effects and concludes that the overall likely effect on the local landscape will be Minor/Moderate. This conclusion is one that I believe is based on under-valued assessment and should be higher at Moderate/Major by my own comparative landscape assessment.

The second addresses visual effects and concludes that in the balance the impact is acceptable. This does not seem to be rooted in the majority of significant adverse visual effects for viewpoints summarised in Table E of the LVIA.

The third and final conclusion is that the scheme will become totally integrated into the landscape due to the effective screening properties of the trees and building materials such as stone walls. The scheme will not be totally screened by trees and the fundamental change to the landscape remains permanent and adverse.

## **Review of High Peak Planning Policies**

As identified above there are four Environmental Quality policies that these proposals need to be judged against to determine their compliance or conflict with adopted local plan landscape and visual policies.

***Policy EQ2 – Landscape Character***

Based on the residual adverse effects on the landscape character of the site, the setting to the proposed development and the nearby Peak District National Park the proposals are considered to be in conflict with this policy. The proposals neither protect nor enhance the intrinsic character, appearance and local distinctiveness of the local landscape nor the landscape setting of the Peak District National Park. It is considered the development would lead to significant harm and be detrimental to the character of the local and wider landscape notwithstanding the assessment presented in the Applicant's LVIA.

***Policy EQ6 – Design and Place Making***

Based on the residual adverse landscape and visual effects the proposals appear to be in conflict with the first two bullets of consideration, namely;

- Requiring development to be well designed to respect the character, identity and context of High Peak's townscapes and landscapes;
- Requiring that development on the edge of settlement is of high quality design that protects, enhances and / or restores landscape character, particularly in relation to the setting and character of the Peak District National Park

***Policy EQ8 – Green Infrastructure***

This policy has not been specifically considered in the note thus far. I would comment that the development could offer up a greater range and variety of green infrastructure than compared to the sheep pasture of the current fields. However development would not offer up any improved access to a wider Green Infrastructure network and would need to be offset against the ability to walk through an open pasture compared to a housing area.

I have not passed any comment as to whether the proposals would comply with all the strands of the policy but note that any environmental gains will have to be offset against environmental losses caused by the development.

***Policy EQ9 – Trees, woodland and hedgerows***

It is arguable that Policy EQ9 is not engaged as there are simply no trees, woodlands or hedgerows on site to protect or enhance other than the veteran sycamore that is subject to the TPO. The sycamore will form the focus of Sycamore Park but will lose its existing open field context and its visual presence as a single, visible specimen will be reduced.

The proposals by the volume of new tree planting where none are proposed for felling would certainly deliver a net gain in trees. However this policy does not address whether trees are appropriate to an area in local landscape character terms.

I do not consider the proposals to be in conflict with this policy. However consideration of the purpose of the veteran sycamore's TPO may be required by the Tree Officer or Planning Case Officer.

## In conclusion

The proposals as they stand would fundamentally change the landscape character of this prominent area of upland fields to one of residential settlement. It would extend built form up to the A54 Main Macclesfield Road and bring a major area of residential development much closer to the Peak District National Park.

The landscape effect on what may be considered a Valued Landscape of 120 houses is anticipated to be significant, permanent and adverse and this would have to be considered fully in the planning balance.

Likewise the visual effects of this proposed number of dwellings will also be significant, adverse and permanent.

In reviewing the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) – September 2016 I believe that many of the individual landscape and visual effects have been under graded. This in turn has led to an under assessment in the overall conclusions on residual, adverse effects to both the landscape and visual amenity.

There appears to be a reliance on the quantity of amenity tree planting proposed for screening and improvement of the settlement edge in the area to offset both visual and landscape harm. The issue of whether tree planting of this type in this upland landscape is appropriate should be carefully considered, arguably it is not. There is also an assumption in the application LVIA that trees will establish to such a level that after 10 years they will form an effective screen. Given the climatic conditions of this exposed part of Buxton this cannot be presumed.

I consider that due to the adverse landscape and visual effects identified throughout this note that the proposals are in conflict with the following two adopted High Peak planning policies;

- EQ2 – Landscape Character
- EQ6 – Design and Place Making.

This conflict will need to be weighed appropriately and proportionally within the planning balance as the application is determined.

The landscape officers of the PDNPA may also be interested in providing commentary on the proposed development given the proximity of the proposed development to the PDNP boundary.

## Photosheets



No.1 – Sheep pasture

The site is currently used as improved pasture that at the time of the survey was to ewes with lambs.



No.2 – Northern boundary

Carr Road forms the northern, lower boundary to the site and has residential development being built.



No.3 – Eastern boundary

Formed by the A53 Leek Road there is a mix of stone built workers cottages overlooking the site to the left.



No.4 – Southern Boundary

Formed by the A54 Macclesfield Main Road this sloping route sits at the higher side of the site.



No.5 – Western boundary

Taken from Buxton Footpath FP38 the west boundary is open and runs up to the Peak District National Park.



No.6 – HGV Traffic

A typical scene at the A53 – A54 junction with HGV's and other road users adjacent to the site.



No.7 – Ephemeral watercourse

View looking south showing the dry channel that will flow in wet conditions and the National Park beyond.



No.8 – Veteran sycamore tree

The tree most forward in this scene is the single mature tree on site. It would be retained in a small park area.



No.9 – Carr Road homes

The last of the consented Copper Leaf developers houses are being built to the north of the site.



No.10 – Buxton Footpath FP38

Shot to walkers using FP38 crossing the site. Observed route was down from National Trail to enter Burbage.



No.11 – Drystone walls

The drystone walls on site contribute to a wider pattern of walls stretching up the valley into the National Park.

Cell not used