



Bardsey-cum-Rigton

Landscape Assessment

Sandby

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1.0 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope and Purpose

The Landscape Agency was commissioned by Sandby to undertake a Landscape Assessment of three parcels of land between Bardsey, East Rigton and Rigton Hill, West Yorkshire. The land parcels selected were those which were felt could offer significant opportunities for housing development.

The purpose of the assessment was to understand any potential landscape and visual impacts arising as a result of development.

The three land parcels are identified within the Leeds City Council Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).

The report provides a desktop review of relevant planning policy, combined with a field assessment and analysis of the site. Further to the background research, conclusions on the opportunities and constraints of the three sites are offered. A field assessment was carried out on 31st January 2013.

The key objectives of this report are to:

- Develop an understanding of the landscape character and visual relationships of the three SHLAA sites within the wider setting.
- Assess the visibility of the sites from key public receptors and identify any potential impacts.
- Offer recommendations to the suitability of development for each site.

1.2 Site Locations

The villages of Bardsey, East Rigton and Rigton Hill are located approx 13km to the north-east of Leeds and 6km to the south-west of Wetherby in West Yorkshire. The villages are located on the A58, a primary route between Leeds and Wetherby.

The three sites explored are listed in SHLAA numerical order and include:

Site 1027 Wetherby Road, land south of Bardsey

Characteristics include:

- Greenfield agricultural fields, tree belts and steep topography falling to the east.
- Bardsey to north.
- Small residential area to south.
- Fields and a few dwellings to west.
- Wetherby Road to the east with trees and fields beyond.

Site 1106 First Avenue, land north east of Bardsey

Characteristics include:

- Flat, greenfield site of agricultural fields.
- Bounded to the northwest and west by a beck and mature tree line, open fields beyond.
- To the south are residential properties.
- To the east is Wetherby Road and open fields.
- To the northeast more properties.

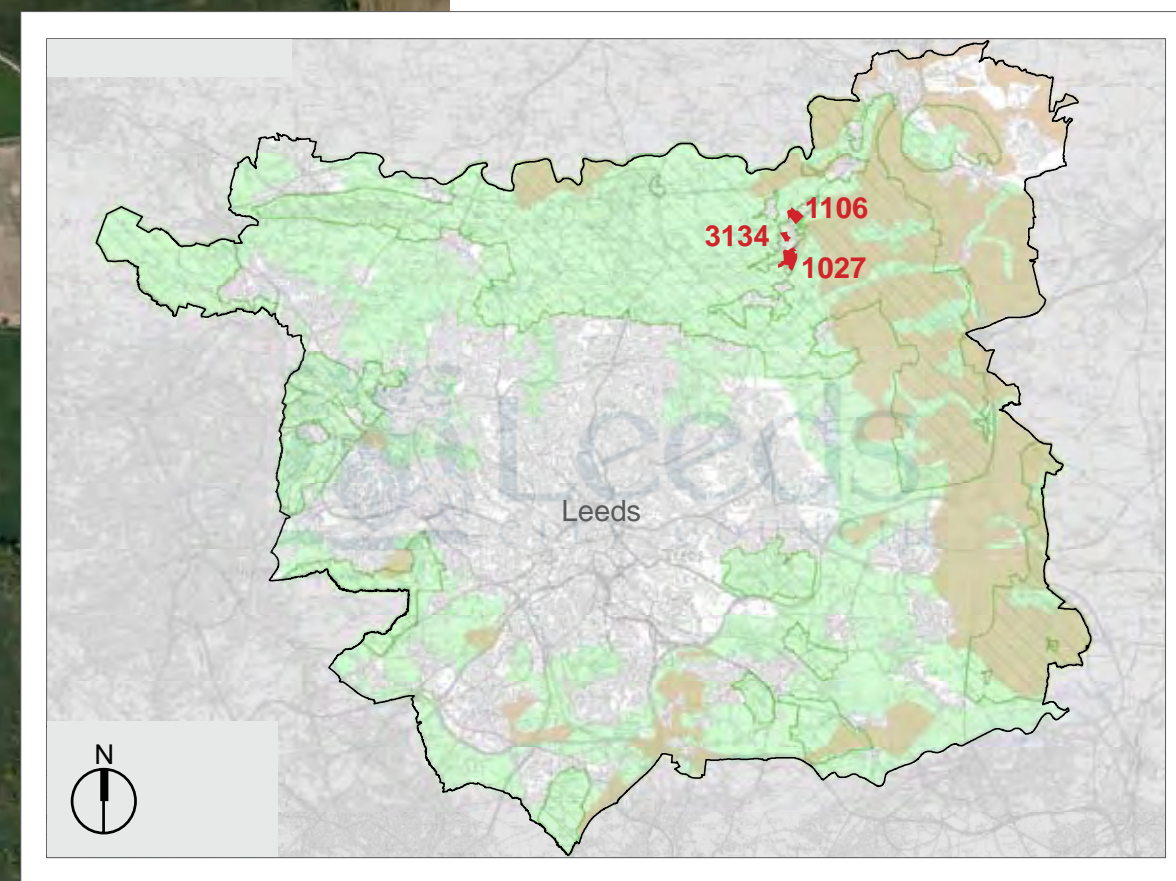
Site 3134 Woodacre Lane, land north of Bardsey

Characteristics include:

- Agricultural field, with flat plateau and steep topography falling to the east.
- Bounded to the south by a Scheduled Monument
- Residential housing to the west by Woodacre Lane.
- To the east and north are hedges beyond which are further fields.



▲ Site Location Map



▲ Site Location within the context and the wider boundary of Leeds

1.3 Assessment Methodology

This analysis was conducted following a review of the methodology for site assessment issued by Leeds City Council.

The assessment contained within this document would be considered as only a ‘baseline study’ within the context of these guidelines and does not amount to a full Landscape Visual Impact assessment of landscape issues. Notwithstanding this, the visual assessment recorded in this landscape and visual assessment remains fundamentally sound as a basis for planning discussions.

The landscape character and visual envelope of the three sites and their respective surroundings were identified through a review of baseline data, which was subsequently verified on site. The visual envelope (i.e the extent to which the site and the proposed developments would be visible from the surrounding landscape,) was verified on site from views taken at external locations within the public domain. Views from within buildings or private spaces have not been considered within the scope of this report.

A series of photographs are included within the report to illustrate the landscape character of each respective site. The photographic record provides an illustration and understanding of the extent to which the proposed sites could impact upon the context.

2.0 - LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

2.1 Landscape Character

Landscape character is assessed at different scales, from the national to the county, district and site specific. Assessment of the landscape can help in:

- Understanding how and why landscapes are important.
- Promoting an appreciation of landscape issues.
- Successfully accommodating new development within the landscape.
- Guiding and directing landscape change.

Bardsey is located within the Southern Magnesian Limestone Character Area as defined by Natural England Character Area No. 30. Key characteristics include:

- Elevated ridge with smoothly rolling landform dissected by dry valleys.
- Predominantly Magnesian Limestone geology which influences soils and ecological character.
- Long views over surrounding lowland.
- Fertile, intensively-farmed arable land.
- Large fields bounded by low-cut thorn hedges creating a generally large-scale, open landscape.
- Large number of country houses and estates with parkland, estate woodlands, plantations and game coverts.
- Woodlands combining with open arable land to create a wooded farmland landscape in some parts.

- Unifying influence of creamy white Magnesian Limestone as a building material often combined with red clay pantile roofing.
- River valleys and gorges cutting through the ridge exposing the underlying rock.
- Industrial influences, especially in the Aire and Don Valleys and other central valleys and along the Coal Measures fringe, with mines, shale tips, transport routes, power lines and industrial settlements.
- Main transport corridor of the A1 which is often apparent in areas of otherwise undisturbed rural landscape.
- Archaeological remains reflecting the long-standing importance of the area for settlement and transport.



▲ Southern Magnesian Limestone character area

Further details of Natural England Character Area 30; Southern Magnesian Limestone Character Area; are located within the appendix.

2.2 Planning Policy and Designations

Relevant planning policies which relate to the development sites include:

Conservation Areas

There are two local Conservation Areas:



Bardsey-cum-Rigton Conservation Area



East Keswick Conservation Area

Scheduled Ancient Monuments



Castle Hill Motte and Bailey Castle

National Monument No 13292. Castle Hill at Bardsey cum Rigton exhibits a good state of preservation and the survival over a wide area of extensive undisturbed archaeological deposits. Its unusual form reflects the diversity of this class of monument.

Listed Buildings



Listed Buildings. There are a number of listed buildings within Bardsey, East Keswick and East Rigton.

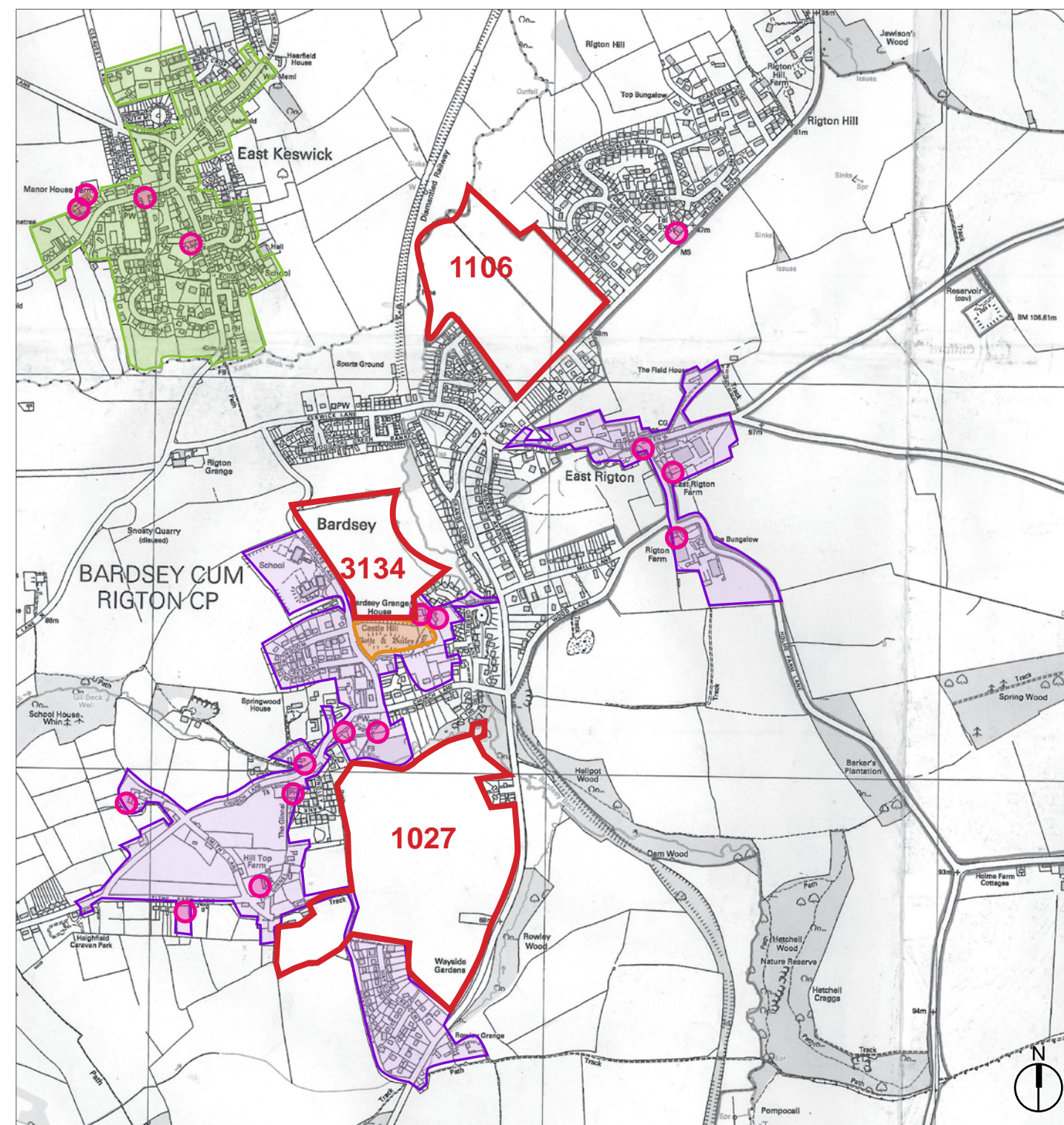
Further details of the above designations are located within the Leeds City Council Bardesy-cum-Rigton Conservation Area Appraisal:

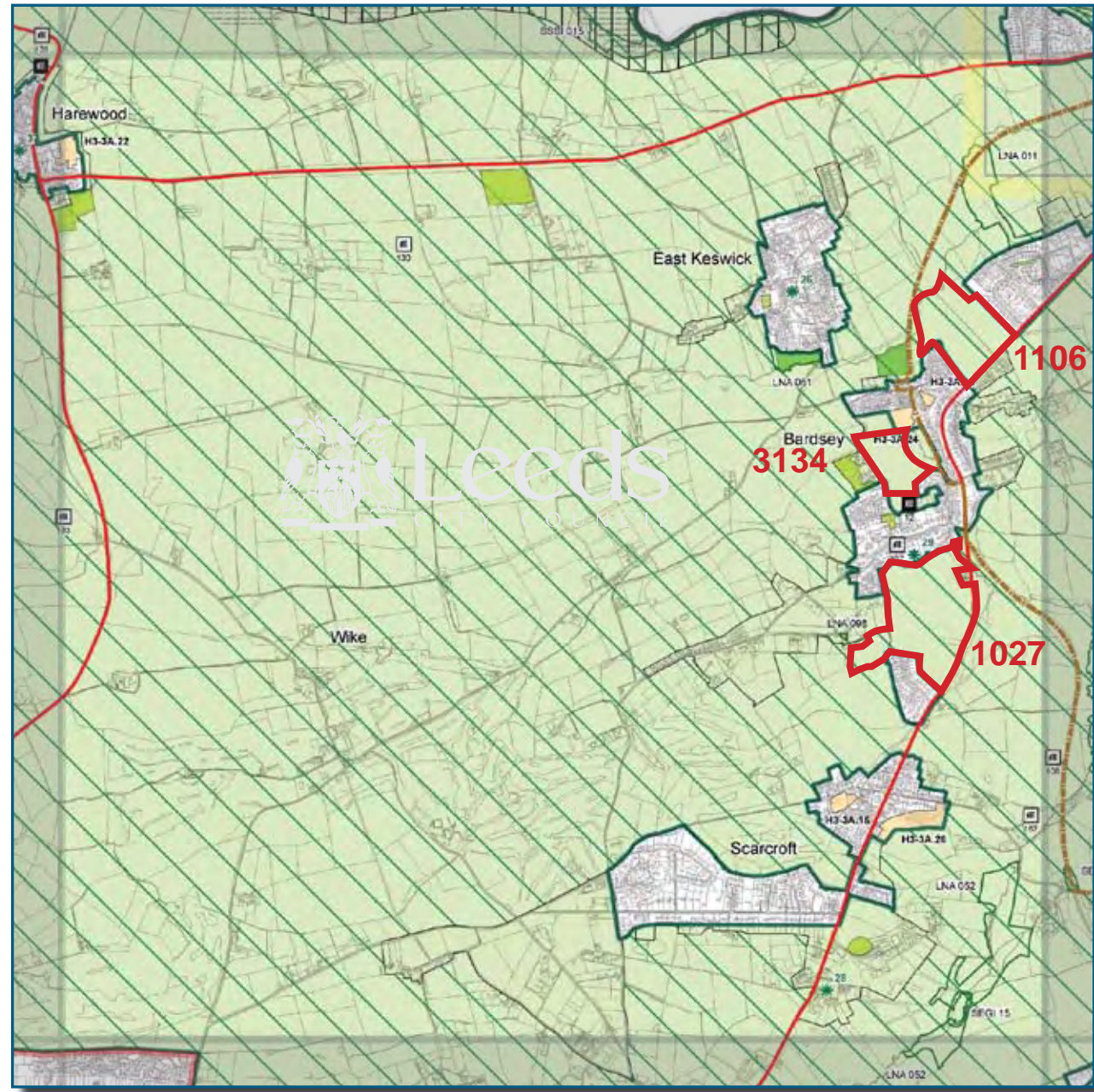
[http://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Bardsey conservation area appraisal and management plan.pdf](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Bardsey%20conservation%20area%20appraisal%20and%20management%20plan.pdf)

Green Belt and Special Landscape Areas

Please refer to the Leeds Unitary Development Plan extract overleaf for detailed locations of the Green Belt and Special Landscape Areas. Further details are located at Leeds City Council:

<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/council/Pages/Unitary-Development-Plan.aspx>



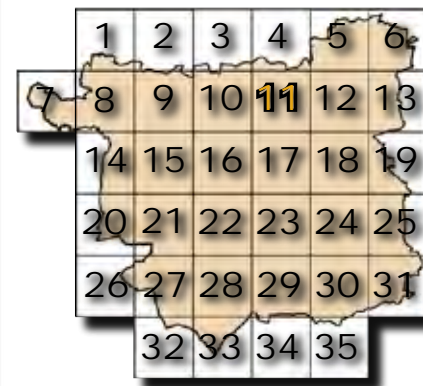


Leeds Unitary Development Plan (Review 2006)

MAP 11



Scale: 1/20 000



Green Belt



Special Landscape Areas

Policy N37 'Special Landscape Area' is defined within the Leeds Unitary Development Plan as follows:

8. Collingham/East Keswick/Bardsey/Scarcroft/Thorner/Shadwell.

This part of the SLA is typified by a series of ridges and valleys running eastwards into the Scarcroft/Bardsey/East Keswick becks which in turn feed into a tributary of the Wharfe.

The series of rolling ridges allow attractive middle- and long-distance views along the valleys and northeast out of the Leeds area. The scattered villages are located mainly on the higher ground though Thorner, Bardsey and Collingham descend into the valley bottoms. The field structure is largely intact, and small woodlands are located on the steeper valley sides. The southern part of the area includes several golf courses, some of which complement and enhance the local landscape character and some of which include inappropriate planting. Towards the west there are only small hamlets and farms, and the landscape is more open in character.

Positive factors:

strong structure and visual unity, interesting topography, high scenic quality, attractive groups of buildings, natural or semi-natural woods, trees, hedgerows, water bodies.

Negative factors:

none.

2.3 Spatial Analysis and Existing Character Areas

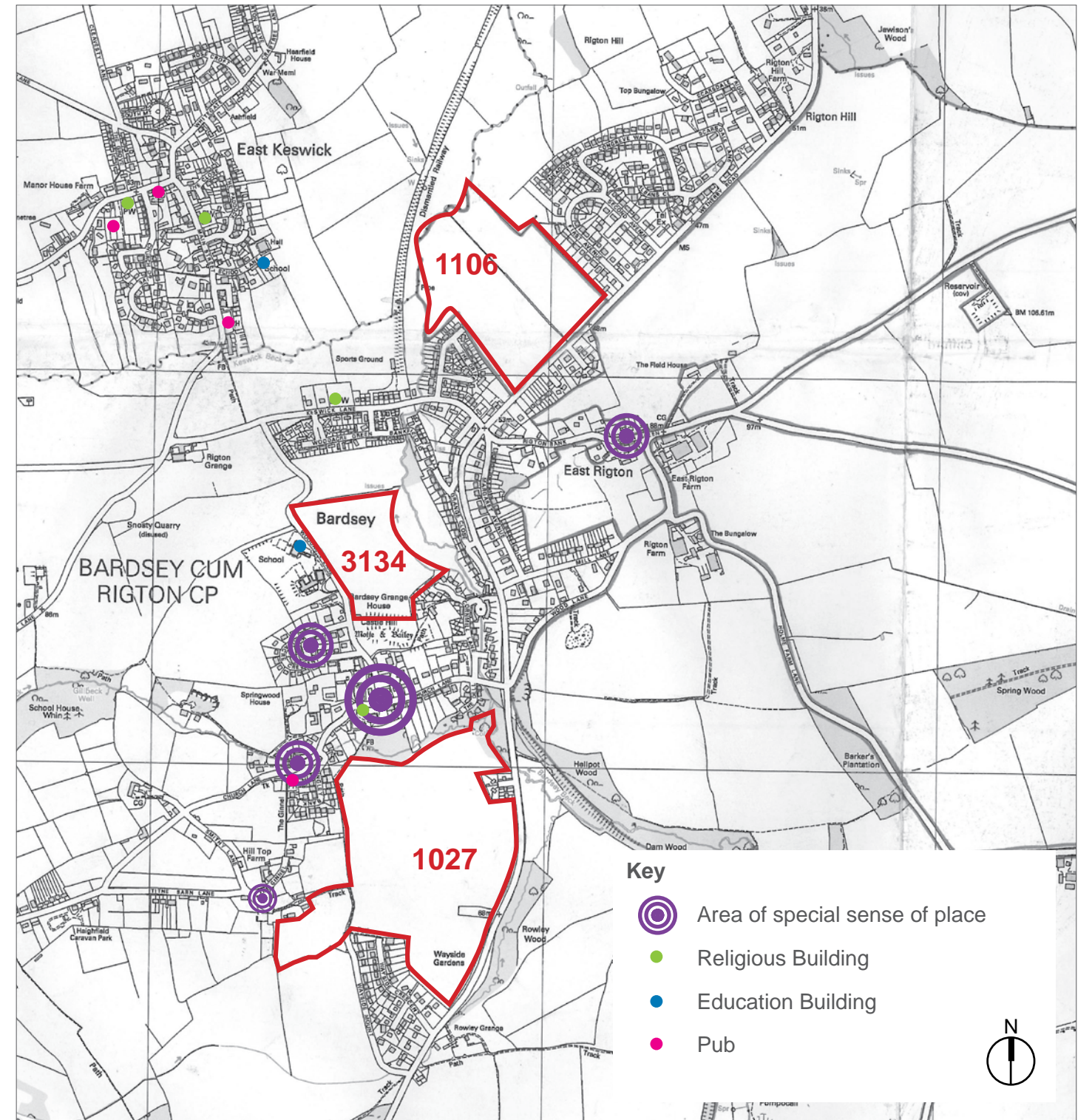
The following spatial analysis is based on a site walkover and review of the Bardsey-cum-Rigton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (2009).

Settlement form

- Bardsey-cum-Rigton lies astride a **steeply sloping valley** with Bardsey Beck running south-north along the main valley.
- The A58 spine road follows the north-south orientation of the main valley floor, separating the village centres of Bardsey and East Rigton. The different topographical locations have resulted in **distinctive characters** within the two village cores.
- Bardsey village core lies within the valley floor, centred on the church. The **bowl-like topography** creates a strong sense of **enclosure**. The valley topography also opens up **long-range views**, and features in one part of the valley have potential to have a much wider impact.
- **Linear ribbon development** of Bardsey has taken place along the road pattern.
- To the south west of Bardsey village centre there is **dispersed historic farm and cottage developments**.
- East Rigton is set on higher and flatter terrain and approached from the west.
- Developments have encroached on the village green, creating an **inward-looking core**.
- Both village centres retain a **rural, agricultural character** despite 20th and 21st century residential development between them which has a more suburban character.

Green Space

- The **village greens** act as focal points within the settlement and have a rural character, without suburbanising street furniture or kerbstones.
- The **church yard and the scheduled medieval Motte and Bailey castle** are important green spaces.
- Views into Bardsey are dominated by the **tree canopy**. In contrast, East Rigton has a more **exposed hill-top** character.
- In Bardsey **tree-lined roads** are a defining feature.
- Long views feature **hedged fields** and pockets of woodland.
- The **continuation of tree cover** into the village cores tie the settlement and its setting closely.



▲ Spatial Analysis based on the Bardsey-cum-Rigton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

Character Areas

The Bardsey-cum-Rigton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (2009) identifies 4 distinct character areas:

1. Bardsey - village core

- **Centred on All Hallows Church**, this character area contains many historic buildings.
- Significant green spaces include the church yard and wooded valley side below, and the site of the motte and bailey castle.
- There is a **strong approach along Church Lane**, with mature trees and strong build lines.

2. Bardsey - dispersed settlement

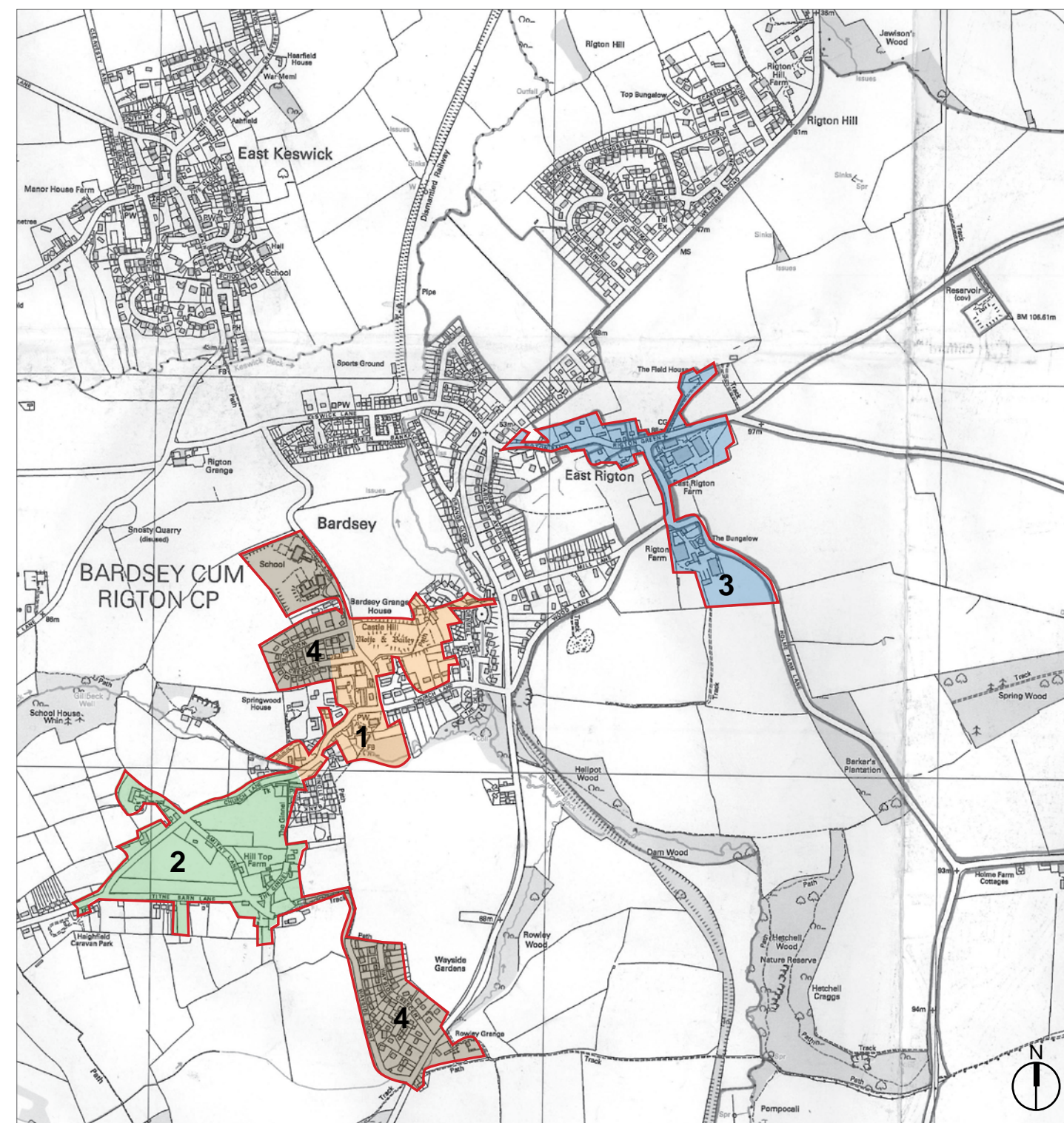
- Historic farms and cottages are dispersed along the network of lanes.
- The **village green** at Bardsey Hill is a focal point.
- **Open fields, trees, orchards and gardens** are a significant feature of the character.
- The Ginnel is an important pedestrian route linking the green to the village core
- The valley topography provides **long distance views**, including into the centre of the village and across to Rigton.

3. East Rigton

- The village was originally larger and had a more regular medieval pattern of plots recorded on historic maps.
- The village is **centred on a number of greens** which were originally one larger open space that has been encroached upon.
- The **surrounding open fields and hedgerows** are important.
- Views around the two main greens are important as are **long distance views** across the valley from Mill Lane and Rigton Bank.

4. Woodacre Crescent and Bardsey Primary School, Wylside Gardens and Rowley Grange

- The area covers **two early C20 residential developments**, Bardsey Primary School and the site of Rowley Grange, a historic farm complex.
- Trees and hedgerows are significant within this character area.
- White rendered houses and 'Mock-Tudor half-timbering are common.



▲ Character Areas based on the Bardsey-cum-Rigton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

2.4 Access and Public Rights of Way

Public Rights of Way

Key

Leeds Country Way

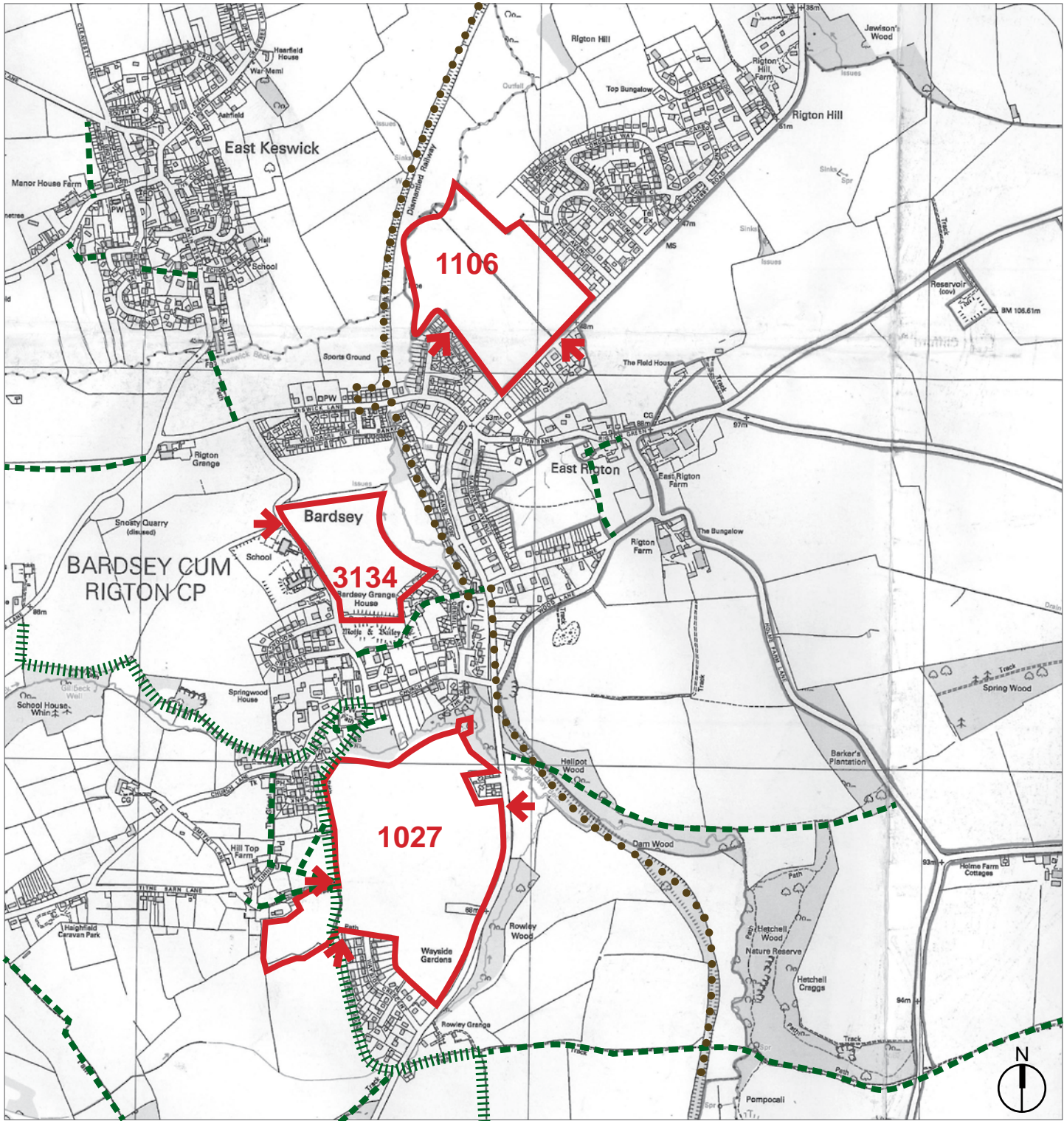
Public footpath

Access

Key

Proposed cycle route as identified within the UPD. For further detail refer to section 2.2.

Existing agricultural access points



▲ Public Footpaths

2.5 Flood Risk Area

The three sites reviewed within this document are identified as at risk of flooding. The map and summary identifies the location and flood risk factor as taken from the Environment Agency website (<http://maps.environment-agency.gov.uk>).

The flood risks are summarised as:

The western edge of Site 1106 has a Low Flood Risk, which means:

- The location is in an area that is unlikely to flood except in extreme conditions.
- The chance of flooding each year is 0.5% (1 in 200) or less. This takes into account the effect of any flood defences that may be in this area, whether or not these are currently illustrated on the Flood Map.

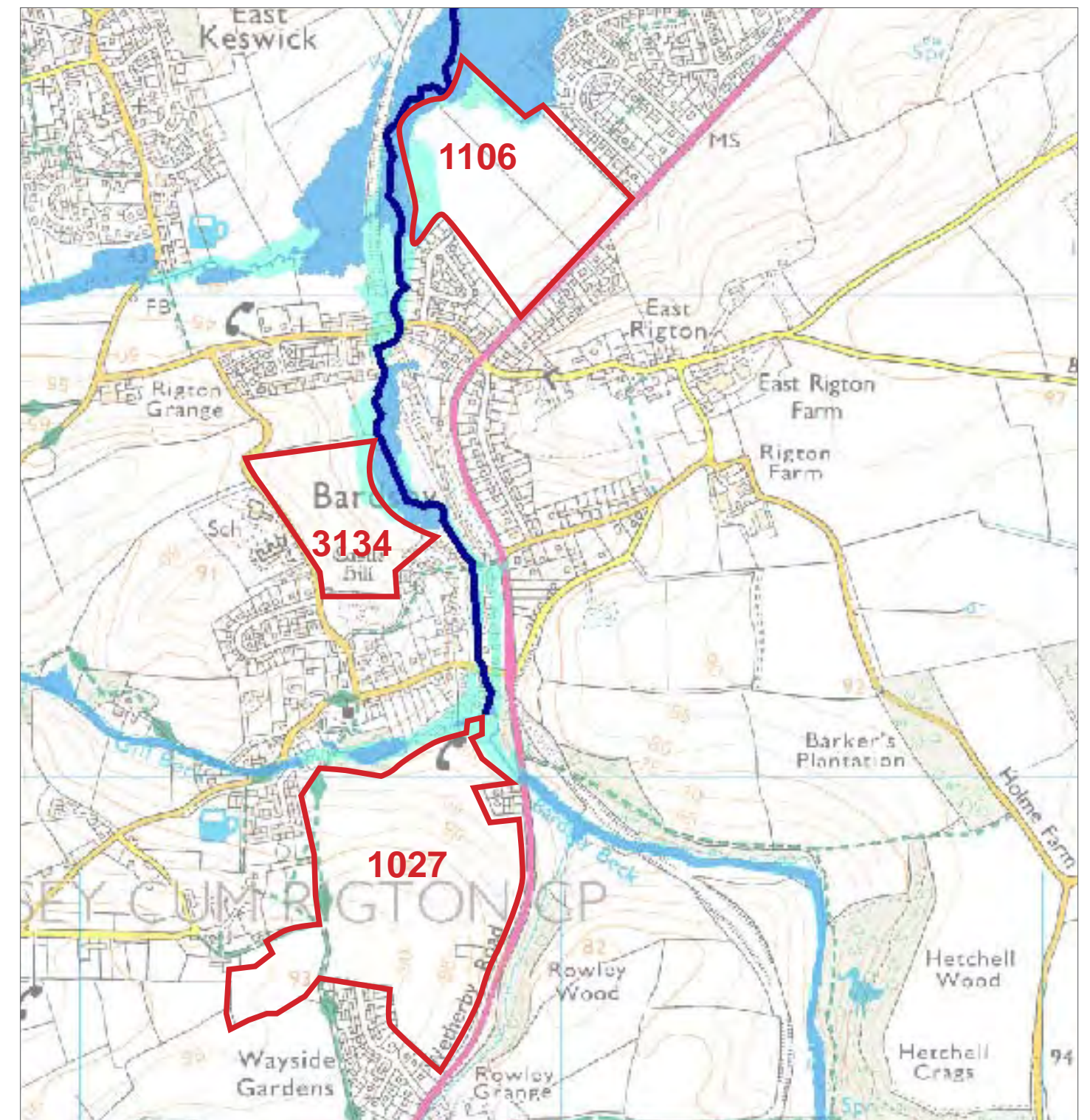
To the east of Site 3134, there is an area of Moderate Flood Risk, which means:

- The location is in an area that has a moderate chance of flooding.
- The chance of flooding each year is 1.3% (1 in 75) or less, but greater than 0.5% (1 in 200).

To the north east of Site 1027, there is an area of Moderate Flood Risk, which means:

- The location is in an area that has a moderate chance of flooding.
- The chance of flooding each year is 1.3% (1 in 75) or less, but greater than 0.5% (1 in 200).

A Flood Risk Assessment would be required as part of any development to identify potential sources of flooding, drainage impact and mitigations.



▲ Extract of the Flood Risk map from the Environment Agency website



East Keswick

1106

A58 Wetherby Road

East Rigton

3134

Bardsey

1027

A58 Wetherby Road

SHLAA SITE No 1027 - Wetherby Road (land to west), south of Bardsey

Constraints

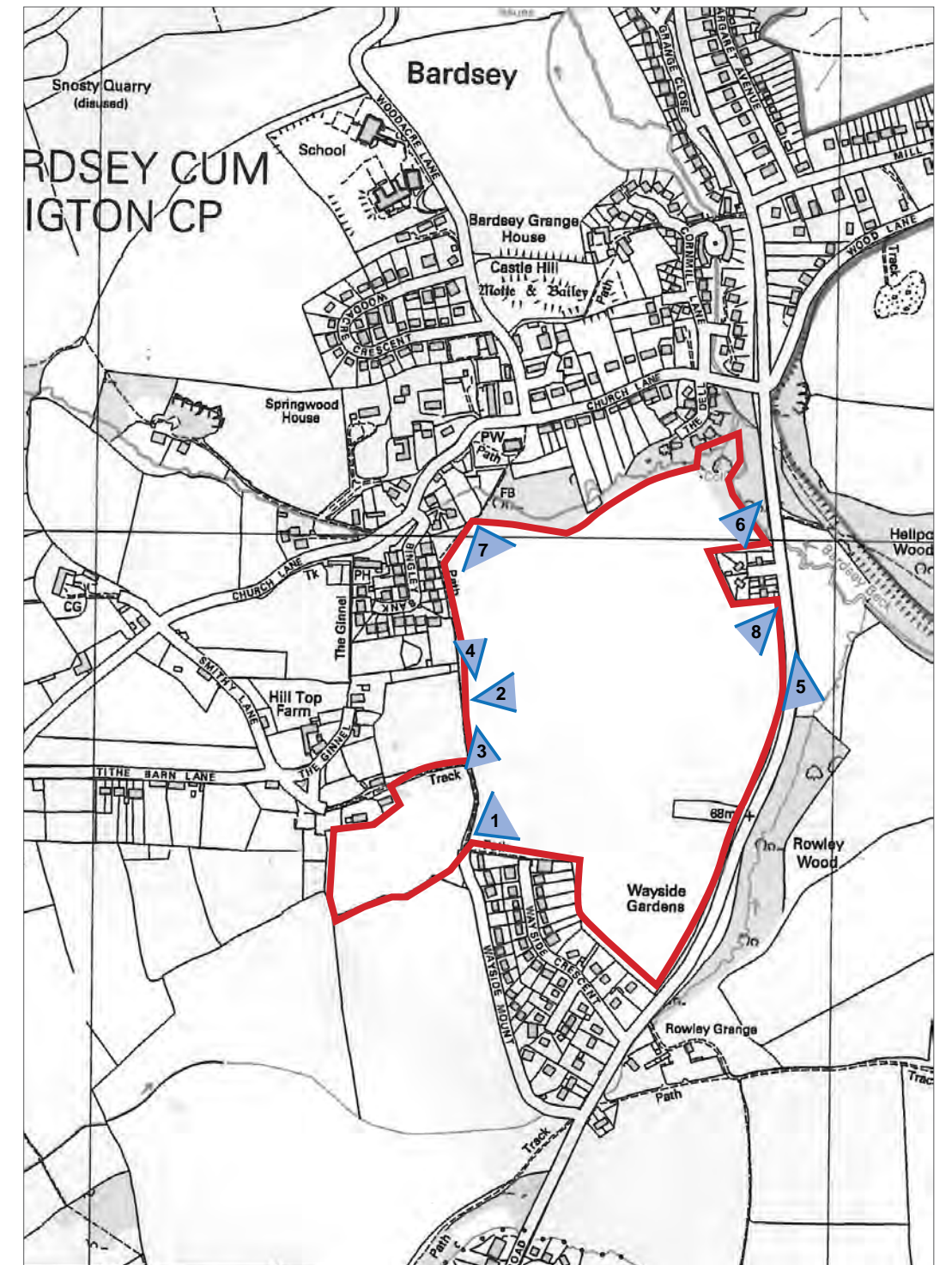
- Limited access opportunities
- Existing established residential properties overlook the site
- Steep topography would create limited opportunities for development
- Some development would be visible on the skyline
- Limited opportunities to create areas for play and recreation in accordance with agreed standards
- Limited opportunities for sustainable urban drainage
- Development could be visually unsustainable within the context of the current settlement patterns
- Development could potentially impact upon the dispersed settlement character to the south edge of Bardsey Village.
- Skyline development would impact upon the character of the landscape of Bardsey-cum-Rigton

Opportunities

- Potential for landscape enhancements to enrich the character of the development
- Retain and manage existing hedgerows and green spaces to enhance natural boundaries to the sites
- Close proximity of primary school

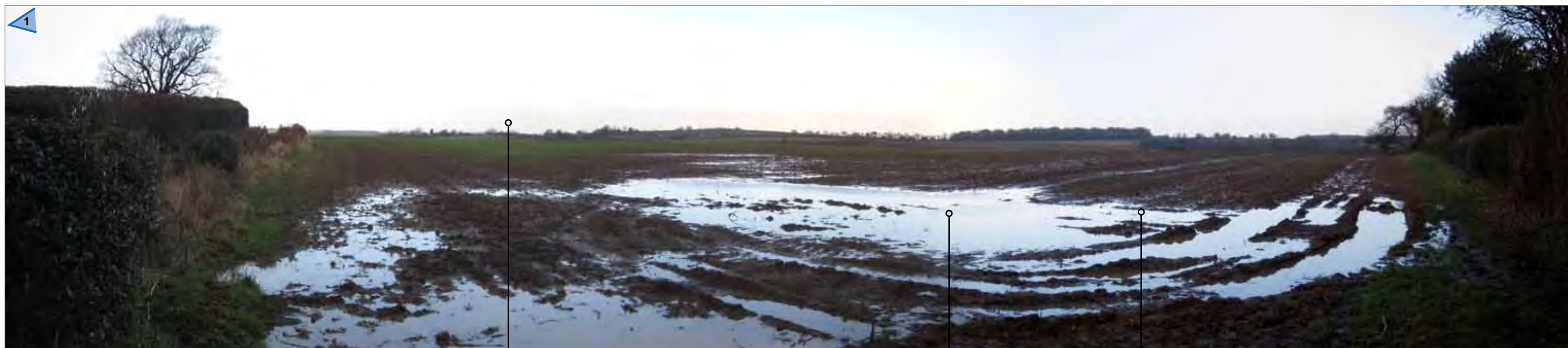
Site Suitability for Development

- The Steep topography and exposed nature would impact strongly on the context and dilute key settlement characteristics within the conservation area if developed
- Views from the wider landscape would be compromised
- The adjacent A58 is located upon a steep incline and includes an overtaking lane. Access from the A58 would be challenging
- Alternative access options would be through existing established residential areas which could be problematic
- Increased run off from development upon steep topography could place pressure on Bardsey Beck and surrounding residential areas



▲ Photoviewpoint Location Site 1027





▲ Looking west from the public footpath across the south-western section of SHLAA Site No 1027.

Long views over surrounding lowland

Waterlogging

Fertile, intensively-farmed arable land



▲ Looking east from public footpath across the central section of SHLAA Site No 1027. The southern development boundary of Bardsey can be seen to the left of the photograph.

Bardsey settlement edge

Large fields bounded by low-cut thorn hedges creating a generally large-scale, open landscape

Views of the context are of an unbroken skyline



▲ Looking west from Wetherby Road over Bardsey Beck

Fields overlooked by residential areas and contained by managed hedgerows



▲ Looking north along the public footpath towards Bardsey

Bardsey

Clear views of Bardsey with a strong village edge



▲ Looking south along Wetherby Road

Busy Road with over taking lane



▲ Looking west from Wetherby Road over Bardsey Beck

Bardsey Beck runs along the north and east boundary



▲ Looking south-west from public footpath across the north-western section of SHLAA Site No 1027.

Mature, dense field boundaries

The site is highly visible from Wetherby Road due to the steep topography

8



▲ Looking south-west from the A58, Wetherby Road across the central section of SHLAA Site No 1027.

The steep topography creates a highly visible site from the A58 Wetherby Road

Residential boundaries are open and visible



Feature trees within agricultural land

Steep topography

Views to open fields from residential properties

Localised water run off from agricultural land

3.2 SHLAA SITE No 1106 - First Avenue (land west of), Bardsey

Constraints

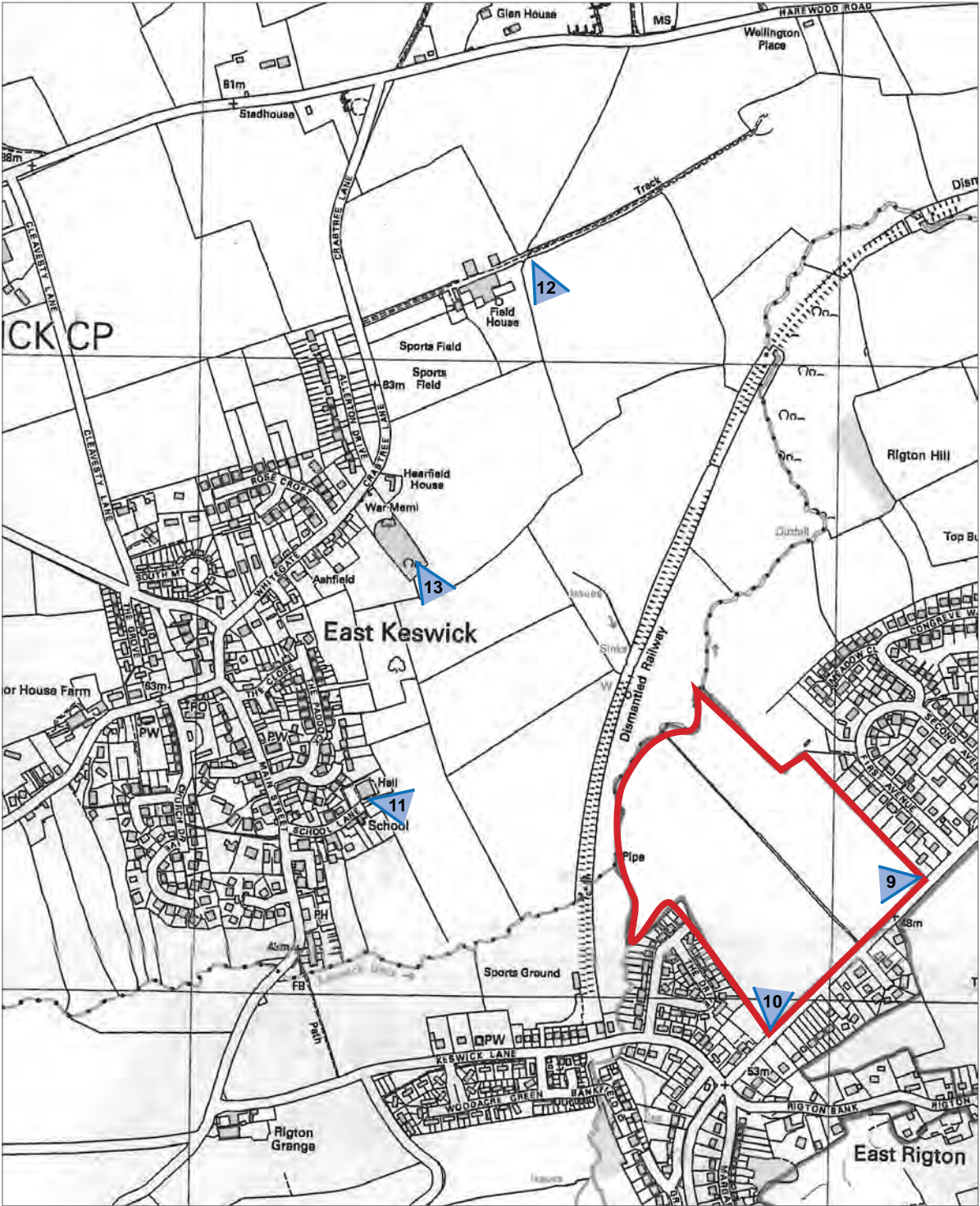
- Existing established residential properties overlook the site
- Potential for flooding
- Forms part of a green gap between settlements
- Potential views of development from East Rigton
- The open fields reinforce the rural character of surrounding settlements

Opportunities

- Largely flat topography
- Site contained by mature boundaries
- Opportunities for the creation of green cycle and pedestrian routes to connect residential areas to the north and south of the site with the new community facilities.
- Good access off A58, Wetherby Road
- Potential for landscape enhancements to enrich the character of the development
- Retain and manage existing hedgerows and green spaces to enhance natural boundaries to the sites
- Opportunity to provide a variety of play and sports area in accordance with agreed standards
- Opportunities for sustainable urban drainage
- A number of mature hedgerow trees could be incorporated into the green space within the development.

Site Suitability for Development

- Safe access could be provided from the adjacent A58
- Development within the flat bowl of the landscape could be absorbed with greater sensitivity than an elevated location.
- Views from public areas of East Keswick are limited
- Existing mature hedge and field boundaries assist in absorbing the visual impact of potential development
- The largely flat site provides opportunities for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems to connect with Keswick Beck and mitigate the impact of any increased run off
- Any development would not compromise the characteristic long valley views



▲ Photoviewpoint Location Site 1106





▲ Looking south-west from the A58, Wetherby Road across SHLAA Site No 1106. The village of East Keswick is visible to the rear of the photograph.

Large fields bounded by low-cut thorn hedges creating a generally large-scale, open landscape.

Remnant hedgerow trees

Mature and well established boundary adjacent to Keswick Beck

Elevated ridge with smoothly rolling landform

Mature and well established boundary adjacent to residential properties



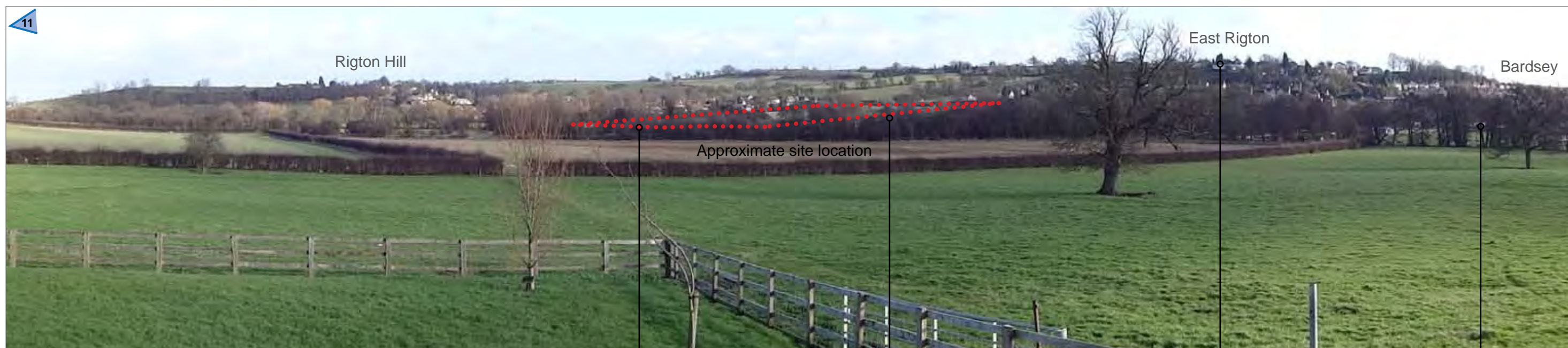
▲ Looking north east from the A58, Wetherby Road across SHLAA Site No 1106. Rigton Hill is visible to the right of the photograph.

Mature and well established boundary adjacent to Keswick Beck

Elevated ridge with smoothly rolling landform

Large fields bounded by low-cut thorn hedges creating a generally large-scale, open landscape.

The A58 Wetherby Road is clearly visible and accessible from SHLAA Site No. 1106



▲ Looking east from the village hall in East Keswick towards the SHLAA Site No 1106. The residential properties of Bardsey and East Rigton are visible to the right of the photograph.

The mature hedge line and trees adjacent to Keswick Beck create a natural screen to this site

The natural topography and existing vegetation absorb this site effectively into the landscape

Elevated ridge with smoothly rolling landform

Strong character of open fields, trees and hedgerows



▲ Looking south from a public footpath off the A659 towards SHLAA Site No 1106. The residential properties of East Rigton are visible on the skyline.

Long distant views across the valley topography

A division between developments is visible at this location

Elevated ridge with smoothly rolling landform

Large fields bounded by low-cut thorn hedges creating a generally large-scale, open landscape



▲ Looking south from the Frank Shires Meadow and Quarry Nature Reserve in East Keswick towards SHLAA Site No 1106. It should be noted that this is only a glimpsed view and will only be afforded to users of the Nature Reserve.

Views of SHLAA Site No. 1106 are limited from East Keswick

A division between developments is visible at this location

Mature and well established boundary adjacent to Keswick Beck

Large fields bounded by low-cut thorn hedges creating a generally large-scale, open landscape

Landscape Assessment, Bardsey-cum-Rigton

The Landscape Agency

3.3 SHLAA SITE No 3134 - Woodacre Land, Bardsey

Constraints

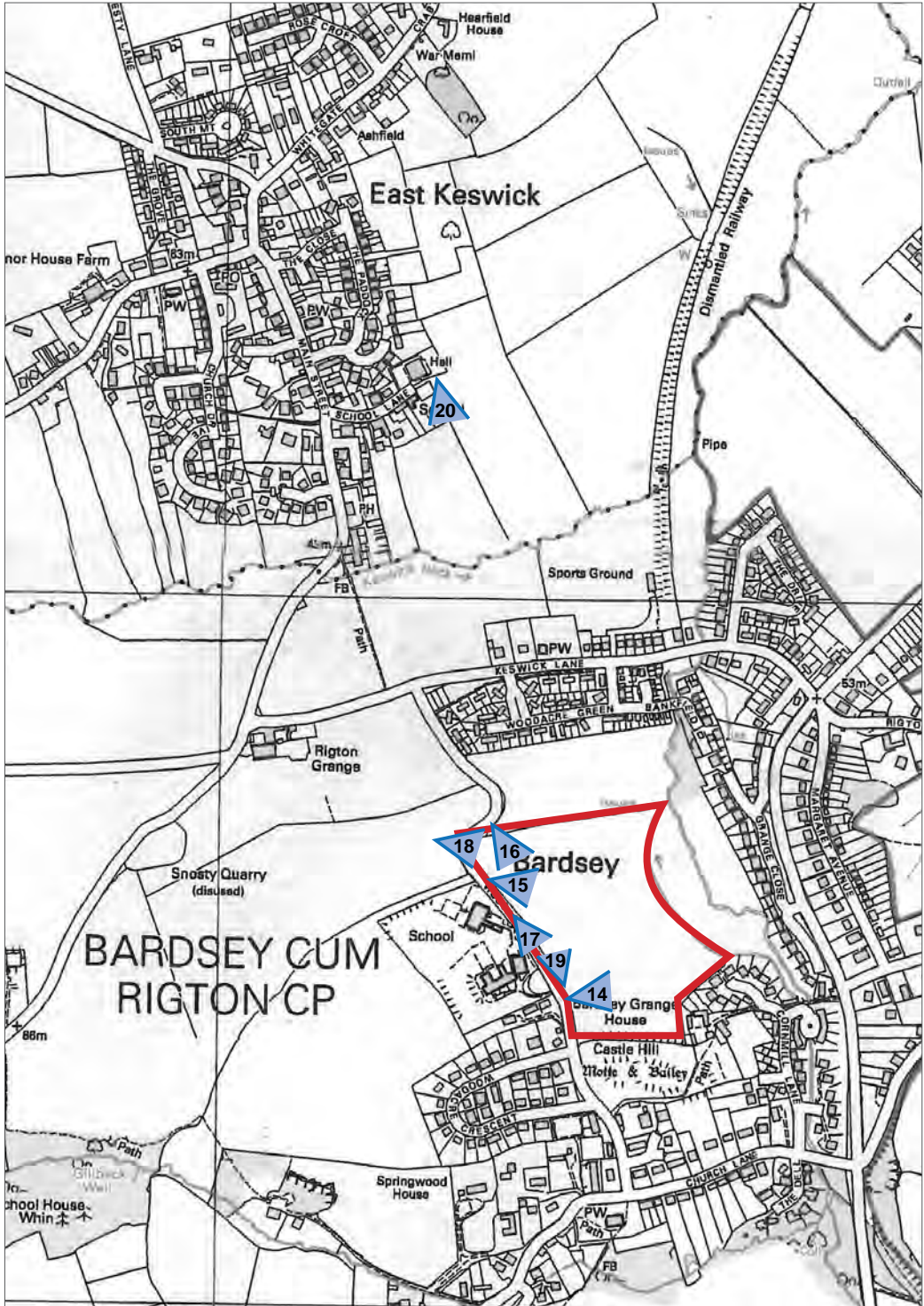
- Existing established residential areas overlook the site
- Steep topography would create limited opportunities for development
- Limited opportunities for sustainable urban drainage due to steep topography
- Development could visually unsustainable within the context of the current settlement patterns of Bardsey
- Large scale skyline development would impact upon the character of the landscape of Bardsey-cum-Rigton
- Potential impact of new development on locally significant buildings in Bardsey including the Motte and Bailey
- Potential impact on the rural character of Bardsey Village core

Opportunities

- Potential for landscape enhancements to enrich the character of the development
- Retain and manage existing hedgerows and green spaces to enhance natural boundaries to the sites
- Close proximity to Bardsey Village core
- Potential to connect with the valley landscape and improve pedestrian access to the wider setting
- Potential for new development to respond to the context in terms of settlement pattern and architectural style to reinforce Bardsey

Site Suitability for Development

- Access is limited and restricted to existing narrow village roads
- Development would compromise the characteristic long valley views
- Development of this site would consolidate Bardsey and significantly alter the Conservation Area settlement pattern
- The steep topography would create construction challenges and significantly impact upon the rolling landscape character



▲ Photoviewpoint Location Site 3134





▲ Looking east from Woodacre Lane across SHLAA Site No 3134 towards the residential properties of Bardsey and East Rigton.

Long distance views

Residential receptors

Elevated ridge with smoothly rolling landform with largely unbroken skyline

Ribbon development concentrated along A58

Steep exposed site in highly receptive location

Residential areas are characterised with a high quantity of trees



▲ Looking south-east from Woodacre Lane across SHLAA Site No 3134 towards the residential properties of Bardsey and East Rigton.

Field boundaries characterised with mature hedgerow trees

Limited access

Adjacent development is linear in character

Historic growth has been incremental and small scale

Steep exposed site in highly receptive location



▲ Looking south from Woodacre Lane across SHLAA Site No 3134. A primary school is visible to the right of the photograph and residential properties of Bardsey and East Rigton visible to the left of the photograph.

The skyline is largely unbroken

The agricultural land does not appear to be intensively managed and more natural in appearance

A clear division between the school site and East Rigton is provided through this open setting



▲ Looking south from Woodacre Lane. Strong uninterrupted views are appreciated and a clear unbroken skyline is visible



▲ Looking east from Woodacre Lane. Field boundaries are less managed and more organic in form



▲ Looking north along from Woodacre Lane. Strong uninterrupted views are appreciated and a clear unbroken skyline is visible

SHLAA SITE No 3134

▲ Looking south from the Village Hall in East Keswick.
The SHLAA Site No 3134 is visible on the skyline.

4.0 - CONCLUSIONS

The key landscape settlement characteristics to consider and respect during site selection include:

- Settlements within the Bardsey, East Rigton and Rigton Hill Villages have a sensitive visual relationship with the wider valley landscape.
- The different topographical locations have resulted in **distinctive characters** within the village cores of Bardsey and Rigton Hill. These should be respected and protected as part of any potential site selection process.
- The valley topography opens up **long-range views**. Features in one part of the valley have potential to have a much wider impact.
- Bardsey and East Rigton village centres retain a **rural, agricultural character** despite 20th and 21st century residential development between them which has a more suburban character.
- The **village greens** of Bardsey and East Rigton act as focal points within the settlement and have a rural character, without suburbanising street furniture or kerbstones.
- Bardsey village core lies within the valley floor, centred on the church. The **bowl-like topography** creates a strong sense of **enclosure**.
- **Linear ribbon development** of Bardsey has taken place along the road pattern.
- In Bardsey **tree-lined roads** are a defining features
- Long views feature **hedged fields** and pockets of woodland.
- The **continuation of tree cover** into the village cores tie the settlement and its setting closely.
- The **surrounding open fields and hedgerows** are important.
- **Open fields, trees, orchards and gardens** are a significant feature.
- Each site contains an element of **flood risk**. SHLAA site 1106 has the lowest inherent risk.
- Any proposals should be encouraged to integrate with the existing Public Rights of Way and proposed cycle routes

SITE SUMMARY

Further to the landscape assessment a summary of site suitability is provided to inform discussions regarding the appropriateness of each site for development. These summaries combine the site survey and desk top analysis and seek to form an unbiased assessment of the landscape impacts resulting from development upon the identified SHLAA sites.

SHLAA SITE No 1027 - Wetherby Road (land to west), south of Bardsey

- The Steep topography and exposed nature would impact strongly on the context and dilute key settlement characteristics within the conservation area if developed
- Views from the wider landscape would be compromised
- The adjacent A58 is located upon a steep incline and includes an overtaking lane. Access from the A58 would be challenging
- Alternative access options would be through existing established residential areas which could be problematic
- Increased run off from development upon steep topography could place pressure on Bardsey Beck and surrounding residential areas

SHLAA SITE No 1106 - First Avenue (land west of), Bardsey

- Safe access could be provided from the adjacent A58
- Development within the flat bowl of the landscape could be absorbed with greater sensitivity than an elevated location.
- Views from public areas of East Keswick are limited
- Existing mature hedge and field boundaries assist in absorbing the visual impact of potential development
- The largely flat site provides opportunities for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems to connect with Keswick Beck and mitigate the impact of any increased run off
- Any development would not compromise the characteristic long valley views

SHLAA SITE No 3134 - Woodacre Land, Bardsey

- Access is limited and restricted to existing narrow village roads
- Development would compromise the characteristic long valley views
- Development of this site would consolidate Bardsey and significantly alter the Conservation Area settlement pattern
- The steep topography would create construction challenges and significantly impact upon the rolling landscape character

5.0 - APPENDICES

Southern Magnesian Limestone

Character Area 30



- Key Characteristics
- Elevated ridge with smoothly rolling landform dissected by dry valleys.
 - Predominantly Magnesian Limestone geology which influences soils and ecological character.
 - Long views over surrounding lowland.
 - Fertile, intensively-farmed arable land.
 - Large fields bounded by low-cut thorn hedges creating a generally large-scale, open landscape.
 - Large number of country houses and estates with parkland, estate woodlands, plantations and game coverts.
 - Woodlands combining with open arable land to create a wooded farmland landscape in some parts.
 - Unifying influence of creamy white Magnesian Limestone as a building material often combined with red clay pantile roofing.
 - River valleys and gorges cutting through the ridge exposing the underlying rock.
 - Industrial influences, especially in the Aire and Don Valleys and other central valleys and along the Coal Measures fringe, with mines, shale tips, transport routes, power lines and industrial settlements.
 - Main transport corridor of the A1 which is often apparent in areas of otherwise undisturbed rural landscape.
 - Archaeological remains reflecting the long-standing importance of the area for settlement and transport.

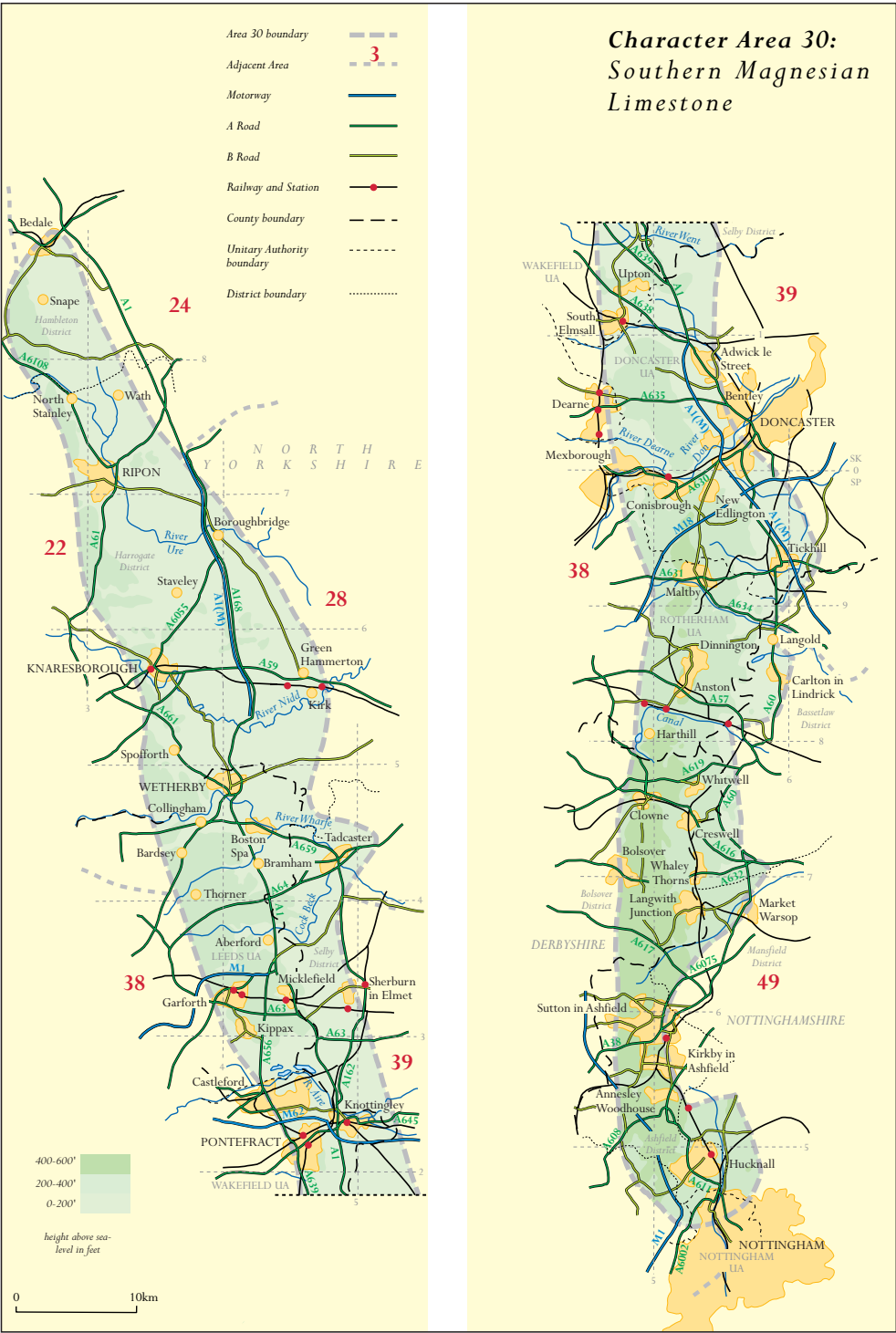
Landscape Character

This landscape is formed by the two escarpments of the Upper and Lower Magnesian Limestone, which stretch from near Bedale, running southwards through South Yorkshire and into Derbyshire where they terminate near Nottingham. The escarpments form quite a narrow ridge feature, nowhere more than a few miles across, which acts

as a distinct barrier between the industrial coalfields and the Yorkshire Dales fringe to the west and the lowland vales to the east. Although covered in many places by drift deposits, the limestones have a unifying effect on the landscape because of their widespread use as a building material and because of their effect on ecological character. Throughout the length of the limestone belt, the well-drained soils, reasonably good climate and low altitude has created a landscape of rolling landform, fertile farmland and well-wooded estates cut by numerous dry valleys. The ridge is generally low with a rounded, rolling profile. The western edge of the thicker Lower Limestone locally forms quite a prominent scarp but, elsewhere, the escarpments are less distinct and in places are barely noticeable. These steeper slopes to the west give way to a gentle, dissected dip slope to the east which eventually disappears below the adjacent drift deposits in the east. There is a feeling of elevation on the ridge with many long views over the surrounding lowlands.



The amount of tree cover, either in woodlands or hedgerows, gives the area a generally wooded character, although land use is predominantly intensive arable cropping. Fields tend to be large and geometric in pattern, with long straight roads dating from relatively late, planned enclosure.





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Maltby Mine is one of several which have worked the coal seams lying under the Magnesian Limestone. This view also illustrates the typical wooded arable landscape, with some remaining areas of permanent pasture. The farm buildings are built of characteristic magnesian limestone with red pantile roofs.

The soils in this area are very fertile and so farming is intensive and arable crops predominate. Despite the open arable character of the rolling farmland, the landscape also has a well-wooded character. Woodland is more abundant here than in the adjacent vale, mainly because of the presence of a great number of large country houses and their managed estates. These estates incorporate gardens and designed parklands and extensive areas of estate woodlands, plantations and game coverts. Many of the woodlands occur in quite large blocks, which combine with the open arable fields to create a distinctive wooded farmland landscape in many parts of the area. There are also a number of semi-natural and, in parts, ancient woodlands on the ridge. Some of these occur on hill tops or steeper slopes and also along small valleys.

The ridge is cut in several places along its length by a series of rivers. Many of these river valleys are picturesque with some dramatic river gorges overhung by woodland. They include, for example, the Nidd Gorge at Knaresborough and the Don Gorge near Conisborough. Elsewhere, the rivers link the coalfields and industrial cities to the west with the Humber to the east. The valleys of these rivers offer a very different landscape from the rest of the central part of the ridge. In areas like the Aire and the Don valleys there is an air of neglect and there are widespread industrial influences including shale tips, mines, power lines, railways, roads, subsidence depressions and *ings* where sand and gravel have been extracted. The settlements, too, have more in common with the traditional mining towns and villages lying to the west than with the limestone villages found elsewhere. In the central

and southern parts of the ridge, long views from the scarp and hills are over the more industrialised landscapes of South Yorkshire and Derbyshire and the coalfield influences spread into the limestone belt.

As well as the industrial influences of the coalfield, the Magnesian Limestone ridge is also an important transport corridor. The A1 runs along it for much of its length in Yorkshire and it is also crossed by the M1 and the M18 east of Sheffield. These major roads introduce traffic noise and are often highly visible along their length. The A1, in particular, reduces the peace and tranquillity of the more rural northern parts of this landscape. The importance of the limestone as a building material is reflected in the presence of a number of large limestone quarries which also have an impact on the landscape.

Physical Influences

The Magnesian Limestone sequence was deposited in an enclosed evaporitic inland sea during the Permian period approximately 245-255 million years ago. It comprises a lower unit of dolomite and dolomitic limestones, which forms the dominant landscape feature, overlain by red mudstone with gypsum. Then comes the upper dolomite and dolomitic limestone unit followed by more red mudstone and gypsum. The sequence locally has numerous swallow holes caused by the underground dissolution of gypsum and limestone. The Magnesian Limestone sequence is clearly seen where it is cut by rivers, for example in the Nidd Gorge at Knaresborough, the Wharfe valley at Wetherby and the Don Gorge near Doncaster.

North of Wetherby, where the York-Eskrick glacial moraines merge and swing to the north, the Magnesian Limestone is largely mantled with glacial deposits from the last glaciation. These deposits are very extensive in the Bedale area northwards where they almost swamp the limestone topography. The Nidd Gorge is the largest of several valleys (many of them dry) which cut the Magnesian Limestone and mark the glacial diversion of drainage along the edge of the ice-sheet. South of Wetherby, the Magnesian Limestone has only a thin local cover of glacial deposits. The soils here are derived from the limestones and, locally, their associated red clays. They are generally very fertile and often support agricultural land classified as Grade 2 in quality.

Historical and Cultural Influences

The light, fertile, well-drained soils of the limestone ridge made this a favoured area for early settlement and there is much archaeological evidence of early occupation. This includes finds in the caves at the important site of Cresswell Crags in the south which are thought to date from over 13,000 years ago.



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The ridge of Southern Magnesian Limestone is cut in several places by a series of west-east flowing rivers. Many of these river valleys, including the Went seen here near Wentbridge, are picturesque. Sometimes dramatic river gorges are overhung by woodland, such as the Nidd Gorge at Knaresborough and the Don Gorge near Conisborough. Elsewhere, especially in the central part of the ridge, valleys such as the Aire and the Don exhibit widespread industrial influences, including shale tips, mines, power lines, railways, roads and subsidence depressions.

There is evidence that, from the Iron Age to well after the end of the Roman occupation, there was increased use of ditches and banks to bound settlements, stock pens, fields and tracks. In this period, the landscape had probably been cleared of much of the woodland and was occupied by single, quite widely-spaced farmsteads with their associated field systems and ditched trackways leading outwards to the open pastures and woodland. An important defensible hillfort remains from this period at Barwick in Elmet in the central section of the ridge.

The Roman occupation had a major influence on the landscape as the ridge was a favoured location for the making of Roman roads. The routes, later to become known as Ermine Street and Dere Street, were the basis for much of the route of the modern A1 which has such an influence on the landscape today.

Wealthy landowners have also had a notable influence on the landscape by means of the fine buildings and landscapes they have created. These range from the remains of the great abbeys, such as Fountains Abbey near Ripon, to the chain of country houses and designed parklands which runs along the ridge from Bedale Hall in

the north to Hardwick Hall in the south. It includes the internationally renowned gardens at Studley Royal and estates like Bramham, Ledston and Lotherton to the east of Leeds as well as Brodsworth, Cusworth and Melton Parks near Doncaster. Some of these houses, parks and estates were created by wealthy families involved in industry in the nearby cities.

Buildings and Settlement

The Magnesian Limestone which creates this landscape is an excellent building material. It has been widely used in local buildings, from small cottages to country mansions, but also in famous buildings further afield notably York Minster. As a result of this, small limestone quarries occur throughout the length of the ridge. The larger modern quarries are mainly in the southern half.

The character of the limestone buildings is perhaps the single most unifying influence in this landscape. Settlement varies from large scattered farmsteads, increasingly dominated by complexes of large modern farm buildings, to the small nucleated villages characteristic of the plateau. It also includes larger towns

like Wetherby, Tadcaster and Ripon. But in all of them the creamy white dolomite and dolomitic limestone is dominant - sometimes in regular courses, often in large blocks and occasionally combined with brick or, more rarely, with stone cobbles. Many of the country houses which are prominent in the area, like Studley Royal, Bramham, Ledston and Lotherton also make use of the stone. In vernacular buildings the combination of limestone with red clay roofing pantiles is particularly striking, although slate and stone slates are used as well. Boundary walls in villages are also made from limestone. Most of the villages are set in open agricultural landscapes but they are often surrounded by a smaller-scale pastoral landscape where the old historic pattern of small strip fields or 'garths' still survives. Some, characteristically, lie at the spring line above the lower lying vale and many are linear villages with broad verges and village greens. There are also examples of estate villages such as Sprotbrough.

The area is more heavily settled where the ridge is more faulted and dissected near Nottingham. Industrial activity is more intense here due to the availability of coal and other materials. The character of the towns and villages reflects this. In many parts, the typical limestone and pantile vernacular style sits cheek by jowl with the bolder brick and slate terraces which housed the growing industrial population.

The limestone and associated gypsum beds also have an effect on the quality of the water which passes through them. It is excellent for brewing and helped the establishment of breweries at Tadcaster. It also led to the rise of the small spa town of Boston Spa and the famous Mother Shipton's spring with its tufa screen at Knaresborough.



Field boundaries are usually low, flailed thorn hedges, although stone walls also occur in many places, for example on estate boundaries and in and around villages. Hedges often follow the topography and serve, as here near Grafton, to emphasise the smooth, rolling landform which is so characteristic of the area.

Land Cover

Most of the farming in this area is intensive and arable. The fields are usually large and geometric in pattern with long straight roads dating from relatively late planned enclosure. Elsewhere, around some villages, there are small or medium-sized fields of irregular pattern dating from earlier periods of enclosure of open fields or common grazing. The field boundaries are usually low, flailed thorn hedges although stone walls also occur in many places, for example as estate boundaries and in or around villages. Hedges often follow the topography and serve to emphasise the smooth, rolling landform. Hedgerow trees are relatively sparse which adds to the open character of the farmed landscapes. In some parts the field pattern has almost disappeared as boundaries have been neglected or removed and the arable crops have become dominant.

The amount of woodland is higher than in the vales to the east. Historical evidence suggests that woodland cover is currently higher than its Domesday extent. Ancient, semi-natural woods occur on steep slopes or on parish boundaries. Elsewhere, large blocks of estate woodland remain despite substantial clearance in the 20th century. The designed parklands in estates also contribute to a quite well-wooded appearance in some parts of the landscape.

Small areas of permanent pasture exist especially on steeper slopes or in the narrow valley bottoms. The overall extent of grassland is small but it comprises a characteristic component of the landscape.

The Changing Countryside

- The pattern of intensive arable farming has resulted in lack of management of field boundaries - both hedges and walls - and some fragmentation of the field pattern as well as loss of hedgerow trees. Overall this has caused a loss of structure in the landscape which, in many parts, has become increasingly open.
- The wooded character of some areas owes much to the influence of large estates and there is some evidence that over maturity of estate landscapes, and especially the designed landscapes within them, is arising as a result of lack of management.
- Development pressures arise in a number of ways. The corridor of the A1 is particularly subject to demands for development related to this main trunk route, especially at major road junctions. There are also pressures for development around the fringes of main towns such as Ripon, Wetherby, Knaresborough, Pontefract and Bolsover especially where the industrial influences of the coalfield towns are significant.

- In the limestone villages, demands for small-scale housing development have in places led to an erosion of vernacular building character with an increasing use of brick.
- There are localised impacts of limestone quarrying, especially in the central and southern parts of the ridge, and industrial influences in the main river valleys and where coal mining affects the landscapes.

Shaping the Future

- There is significant scope to conserve and enhance the limestone character of this landscape. This might involve schemes to re-create limestone grassland on cultivated land and to encourage characteristic species in hedgerow and woodland planting.
- Consistent use of stone as a building material both in traditional, vernacular styles and in modern styles of building is important in much of the area. This includes stone features such as walls and gateposts.



Wealthy landowners have had a notable influence on the landscape by means of the fine buildings and landscapes they have created. These range from the remains of great abbeys such as Fountains Abbey near Ripon (shown above and now in the care of the National Trust), to the chain of country houses and designed parklands which runs along the ridge from Bedale Hall in the north to Harwick Hall in the South.

Although much of the farmed landscape is very open, the most attractive areas often occur where open arable land is mixed with woodland to create the impression of woods in farmland. These areas include broadleaved woodlands in valleys and estate plantations. There may be scope to increase the extent of woodland by well-designed new planting although it will be important to retain an appropriate balance between open and wooded land. The re-creation of limestone woods is likely to be of particular interest although safeguarding the interest of limestone grassland remnants will be essential. Parkland forms an important landscape component with opportunities for its conservation and enhancement.

Those parts of the area where there is significant industrial activity offer considerable opportunities for restoration and enhancement. Restoration proposals should be seen in the context of the adjoining coalfield area.

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Glossary

ings: local term for wetland areas, often associated with mining subsidence



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