

LAND AT DUNKIRK FARM
ELLESMERE PORT

Development Framework
P21-2361_201B

Prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of Redrow Homes Ltd.

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ELLESMERE PORT

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MARCH 2024

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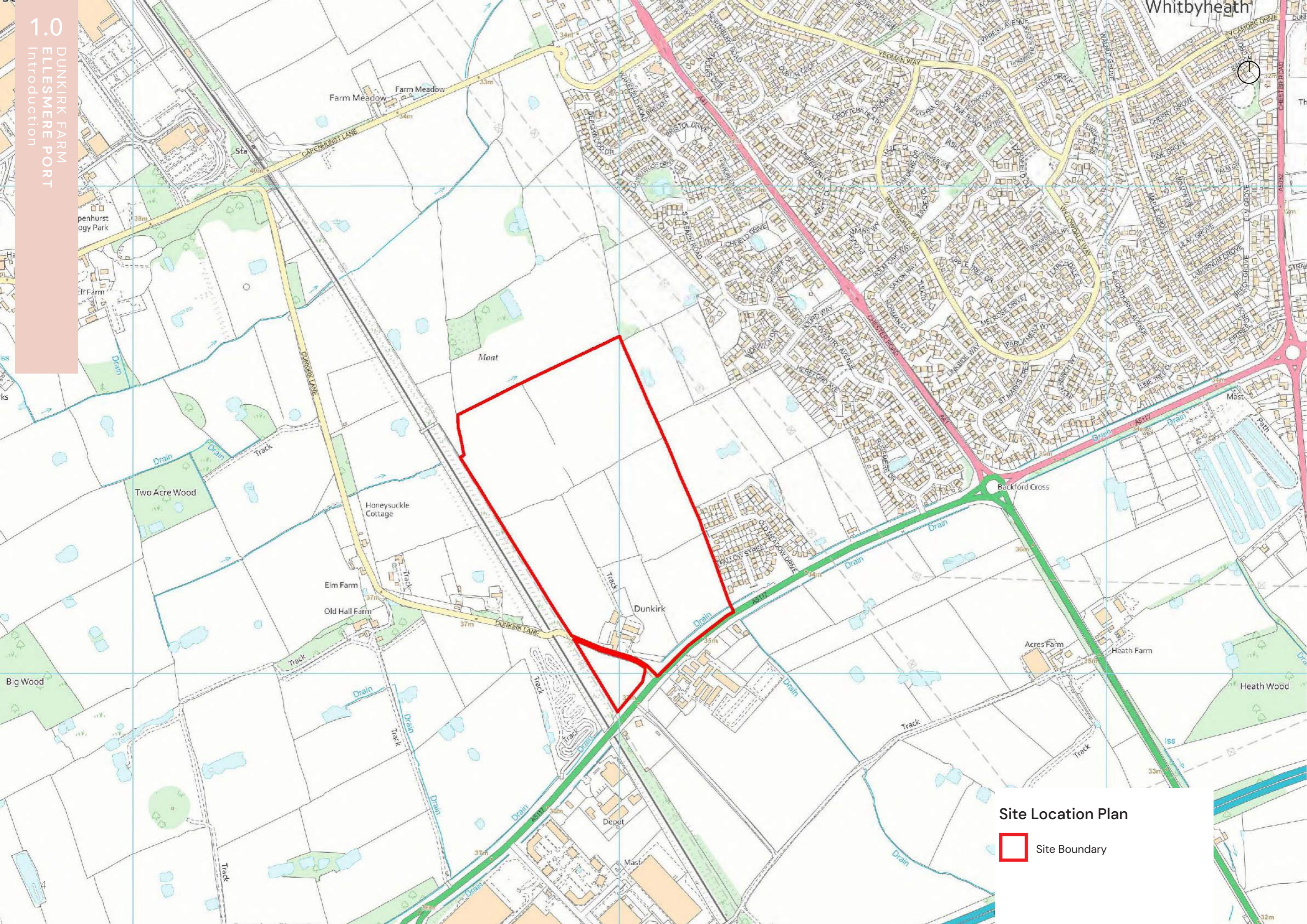
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37m

DUNKIRK LANE

Dunkirk

37m



Site Location Plan

 Site Boundary

1.0 Introduction

Redrow Homes have a long standing presence in Cheshire West and Chester, having delivered over 1,200 homes in the Borough since 2010, over 25% of which have been affordable dwellings across 9 sites. Redrow are now actively promoting additional sites for housing development, including their land interests at Dunkirk Farm, Ellesmere Port. Pegasus Group and a range of other technical consultants have been appointed to assess Dunkirk Farm's suitability for development, considering a range of environmental, physical and planning policy considerations.

This document provides an executive summary of the Site's context in terms of the surrounding topography, natural environment, historic environment and local planning policy, including the Site's current designation as Green Belt. It goes on to demonstrate that the site is highly accessible and sustainably located.

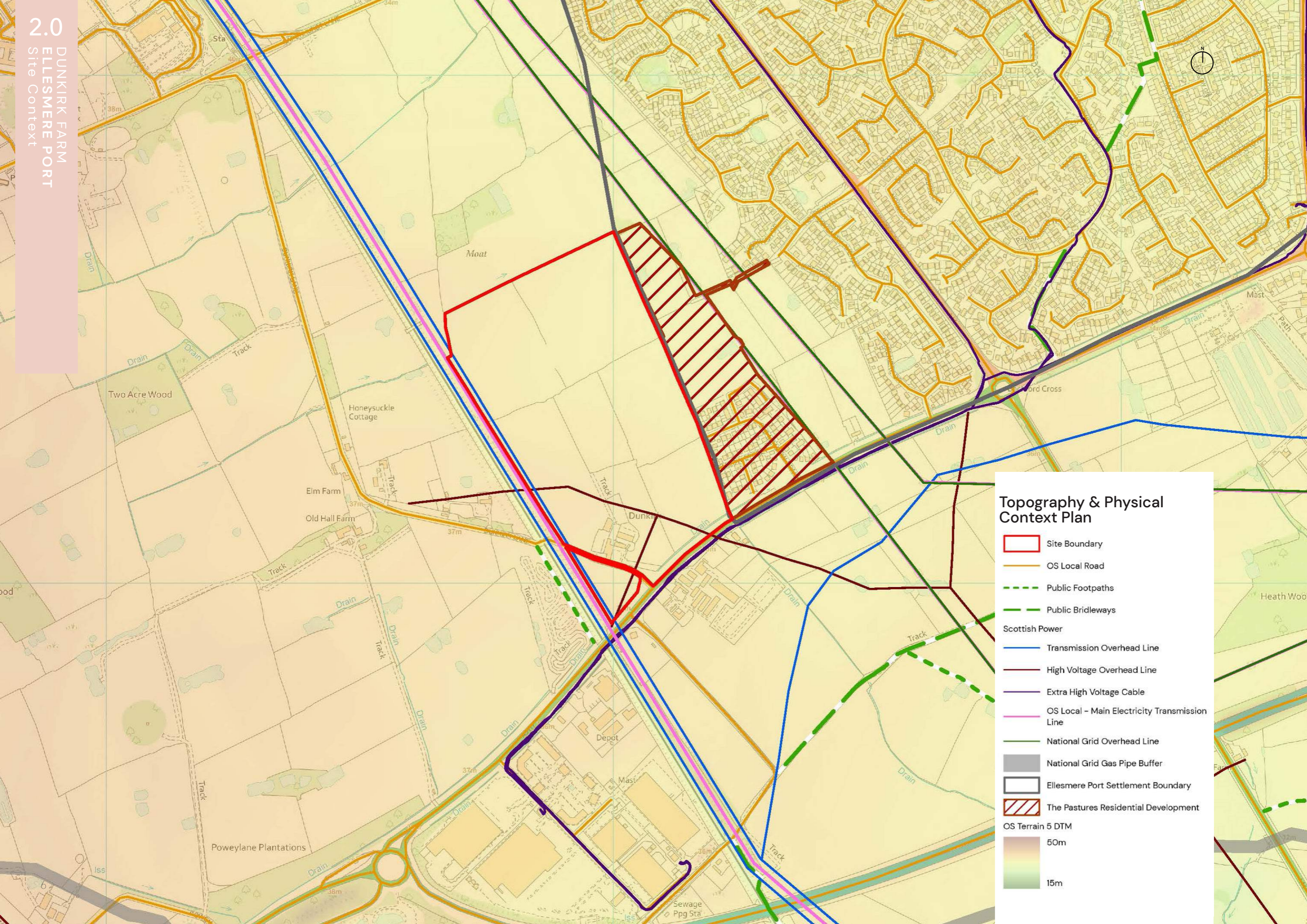
This Development Framework Document has been prepared in response to the Council's Call for Sites consultation, which ran between January – March 2024. Redrow previously submitted this site for consideration and representations to the Borough's Local Plan Conversation in 2021 and have updated the document and supporting evidence base for the current submission. Redrow remain strongly of the view that a new Local Plan must be prepared in Cheshire West and Chester in order to meet the Borough's emerging development needs, which are significant. Redrow therefore fully support the decision taken at the Council's Cabinet on 10th January 2024 to prepare a new Local Plan under the new national system for plan-making. Dunkirk Farm would make a positive contribution to meeting the Council's emerging development requirements. Furthermore, the site does not make a significant contribution to the 5 purposes of Green Belt land, therefore representing a suitable candidate for Green Belt release.

It is our view that exceptional circumstances do and will exist for additional Green Belt release as part of the emerging Local Plan, due to a lack of available and deliverable urban land, chronic affordable housing needs and the Borough's significant development needs.

The site is 23 hectares (57 acres) and having carried out an assessment of the Site's constraints and opportunities, this document confirms that there are no technical or physical site constraints which would prevent the site coming forward for residential development. An indicative masterplan has been prepared which demonstrates the site could deliver in the region of 550 residential homes (including affordable housing).

The vision is to create a high-quality development that would positively contribute to the Ellesmere Port area by providing aspirational homes for existing and new residents and affordable homes to those that have found it harder to get a foot on the housing ladder. It will also build on the adjacent 'The Pastures' development, which was also built out and delivered by Redrow Homes. With this investment, additional expenditure for local shops and Council Tax receipts will be collected which will assist in funding and improving local community services and facilities.

In short, the site represents a suitable, available and deliverable housing development opportunity.



Topography & Physical Context Plan

- Site Boundary
- OS Local Road
- Public Footpaths
- Public Bridleways
- Scottish Power
 - Transmission Overhead Line
 - High Voltage Overhead Line
 - Extra High Voltage Cable
 - OS Local - Main Electricity Transmission Line
 - National Grid Overhead Line
 - National Grid Gas Pipe Buffer
- Ellesmere Port Settlement Boundary
- The Pastures Residential Development
- OS Terrain 5 DTM
 - 50m
 - 15m

2.0 Site Context

2.1 Topography & Physical Surroundings

The site comprises of agricultural land and farm buildings, and is sustainably located adjacent to the settlement boundary of Ellesmere Port. To the east the site is bordered by Redrow's 'The Pastures' Backford Cross development, to the south by the A5117 Dunkirk Way, to the west by the Chester-Liverpool railway line and to the north by further agricultural land. Dunkirk Lane bisects the site in to two small parcels and is not located within the red line boundary. The site is not unduly constrained by its physical surroundings for the following reasons:

- The Site's topography is relatively flat and perfectly developable for residential dwellings.
- Land to the immediate east comprises residential development- and this site represents a logical extension to the existing settlement boundary of Ellesmere Port and to build on the success of the Redrow's adjoining 'The Pastures' development.
- The length of the site along the A5117 to the south ensures a deliverable access into the site can be provided. There is also potential scope to provide connectivity to the adjoining residential development.
- No electricity pylons run through the site, therefore there are no infrastructure constraints. There are electricity pylons to the immediate east of 'The Pastures' development, albeit these will not act as a constraint to residential development due to their distance from the Dunkirk Farm site.

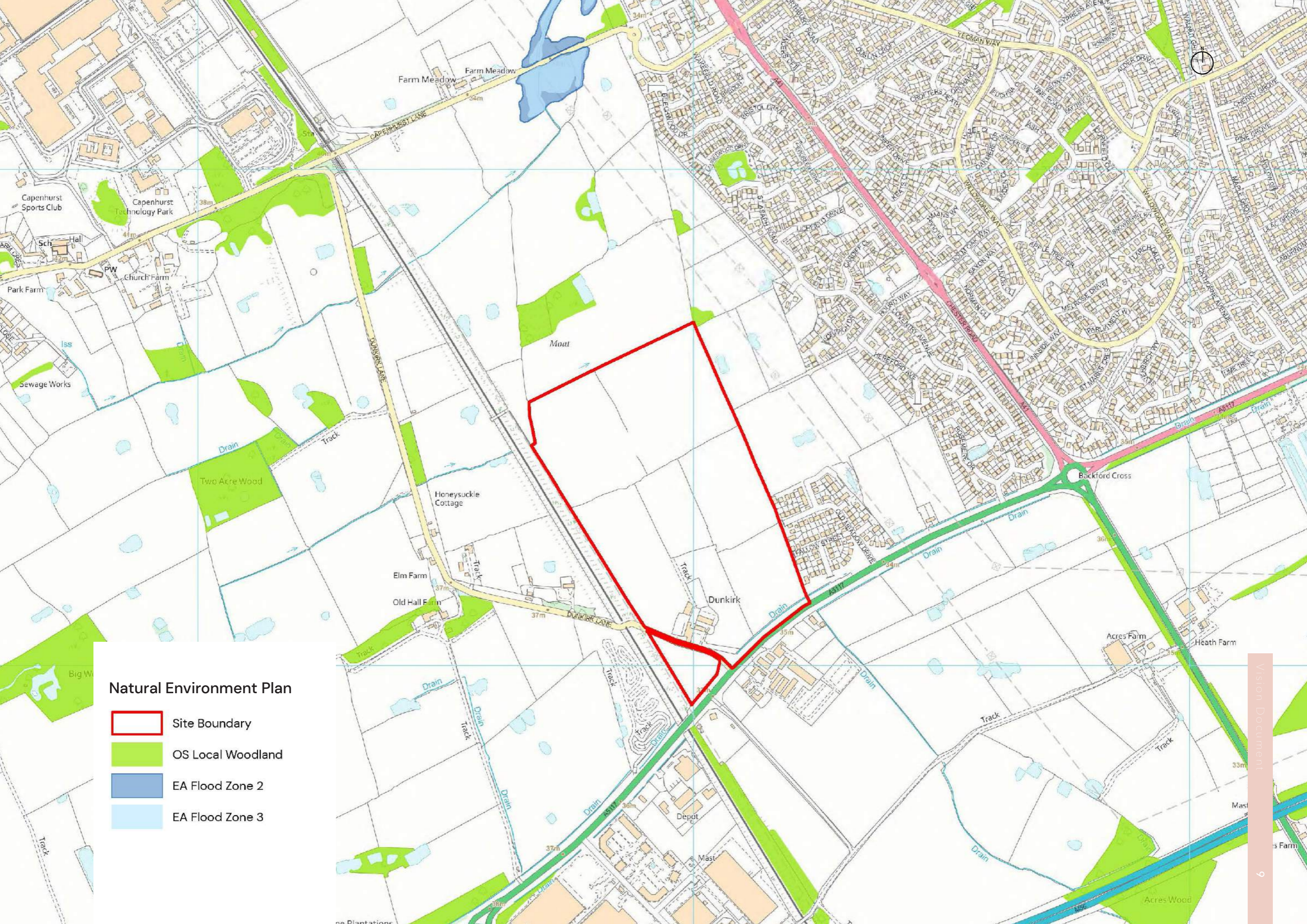
2.1 Natural Environment

Dunkirk Farm is largely unconstrained when considering environmental constraints for the following reasons:

- Is located entirely within Flood Zone 1 (lowest probability of flood risk);
- Not subject to any statutory environmental designations, such as SSSIs or Special Conservation Areas;
- There are no protected trees on site; and
- Classed as Grade 3 (good to moderate) agricultural land on Natural England's high-level, regional agricultural land mapping.

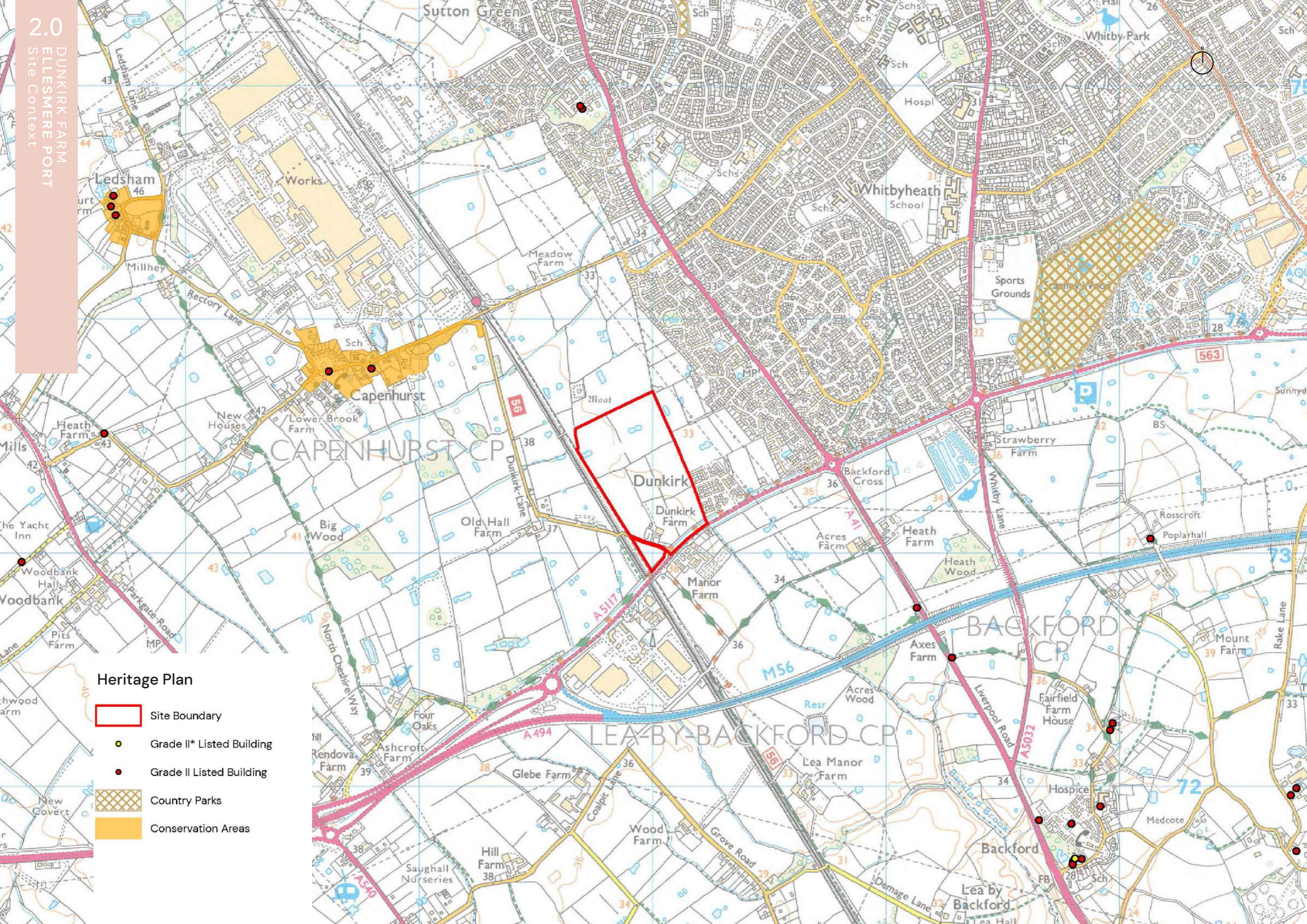
A preliminary ecological appraisal for the site has been prepared by TEP. The report concludes that the residential development of Dunkirk Farm would have no adverse residual effects on ecological features of value. The design and layout would increase the quality and resilience of the existing ecological network of woodlands, hedges and watercourses. Loss of intensively farmed land to development is of low adverse significance. No protected species would be adversely affected. Furthermore, an initial biodiversity assessment of the site and proposed developable area indicates that a net gain is achievable on site through a sensitively designed development incorporating ecological mitigation measures, which will be fully explored as part of a comprehensive ecological strategy for the site at the detailed design stage. To conclude, the development of this site for residential is entirely acceptable from an ecological perspective.

In short, there are no reasons to not allocate the site for residential development when considering the local natural environment of the area.



Natural Environment Plan

- Site Boundary
- OS Local Woodland
- EA Flood Zone 2
- EA Flood Zone 3



Heritage Plan

-  Site Boundary
-  Grade II* Listed Building
-  Grade II Listed Building
-  Country Parks
-  Conservation Areas

2.2 Historic Environment

The site is unconstrained when considering the historic environment and associated assets for the following reasons:

- There are no Grade I, II* or II listed buildings within the site or in close proximity;
- There are no Conservation Areas within the site boundary or immediately adjacent to it. Capenhurst Conservation Area is located to the north-west of the site, circa 630m from the northern site boundary;
- There are no locally designated heritage assets on the site or within close proximity;
- There are no Registered Parks & Gardens within the site or within close proximity; and
- There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the site or within close proximity.

In short, there are no heritage constraints in the area that would preclude the development of this site for housing.





VIEWPOINT 01



VIEWPOINT 02



VIEWPOINT 03

2.3 Landscape Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The site is located on the south-western edge of Ellesmere Port, Wirral, adjacent to the Wirral – Chester railway line and an existing housing allocation to the east. The site and the immediate context is shown on Figure 5. The following section provides an initial overview in landscape and visual terms of the site and its surroundings in relation to the proposed development of the site for housing.

LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The site falls within National Character Area 59, Wirral. At a local level the site falls within landscape character type 6, Enclosed Farmland, and landscape character area (LCA), 6e – Capenhurst Plateau, of the Cheshire West and Chester Landscape Strategy (2016).

Some of the Key landscape characteristics of relevance to the site are listed below:

- “Close proximity to Ellesmere Port and other urban influences, including major transport corridors and industrial areas, has a significant effect on the character of the landscape;
- Small to medium scale fields with a mixture of small, mostly regular, ancient medieval enclosure, regular post-medieval enclosures and larger, mostly regular fields resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems;
- Fields are mostly bounded by a predominantly intact hedgerow system, with hedgerow trees dominant and providing verdant enclosure;
- Field ponds are a feature of the landscape, some quite large and surrounded by vegetation; streams are minor and inconspicuous...
- Sporadic ribbon development stretches out along the roads adding to the urban fringe character, including kennels, a large plant nursery at Ledsham, caravan storage at a number of farms, fields used for quod biking/motor cross...
- Generally a small scale landscape and enclosure where views are limited by hedgerows, trees and copses despite the plateau-like topography;
- The A540, A550, A5117 and the Birkenhead–Chester railway are major, visually intrusive transportation corridors affecting the character of the area;
- The huge Capenhurst industrial complex lies at the heart of the area and is the focus for numerous electricity pylons and overhead power lines which are more visually intrusive than the industrial buildings themselves”.

Under the ‘Perceptual/Visual’ section, the assessment states, “the presence of woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape”.

The overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 6e: Capenhurst Plateau “should be to conserve the traditional historic field pattern of small to medium scale regular fields bounded by hedgerows and trees, and enhance woodland cover to reduce the influence of urban intrusions on the landscape”.

The assessment provides built development guidelines. Those of relevance are listed below:

- “Soften built edges and aim to integrate large intrusive structures into the landscape using native planting, and ensure proposals are accompanied by enhancement of existing hedgerows, trees and woodland in the vicinity of the site to ensure the landscape structure around any new facility is maintained / improved
- Consider views from Sustrans NCR 56 and the North Cheshire Way long distance footpath when considering the location of new built development”.

CHARACTER OF THE SITE AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDINGS

The site straddles Dunkirk Lane, with the majority of the site situated north of the lane. It comprises Dunkirk Farm along with several fields that are bound by hedgerows, some fragmented, and hedgerow trees. The western boundary is defined by mature trees along the railway line embankment. The northern boundary is defined by a hedgerow. Fields extend northwards of the site towards Capenhurst Lane with strong, intact field boundaries and a small area of woodland. Two lines of overhead pylons run within close proximity east of the site in a north-westerly direction. The eastern boundary is defined by a hedgerow and Redrow's Pastures housing development, that extends to the settlement edge of Ellesmere Port. The southern boundary comprises mature trees beyond which is the Dunkirk Way (A5117).

DESIGNATIONS

The site is designated Green Belt and countryside (Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan Policy STRAT 9). There are no other designations of landscape importance present on the site at a local, national or international level.

VISUAL

The figure adjacent illustrates the location of key views taken during a site visit in August 2021.

The key receptors to development on the proposed site include users of Dunkirk Lane, Dunkirk Way (A5117), National Cycle Route 56 and a brief section of the North Cheshire Way along with two residential properties located south of the site and the Pastures development to the eastern boundary.

Generally, views in to the site are prevented by the strong intact network of vegetation, both along the site boundaries and within the wider landscape.

Views of the proposed development site from Dunkirk Lane are restricted by dense vegetation along the lane and the trees lining the railway cutting that generally screen views towards the site. The vegetation thins and opens up south of the railway bridge near Dunkirk Farm affording glimpsed views into each of the site areas either side of the lane (see Viewpoint O3). The frontage to Dunkirk Farm is open. The site is generally well screened from Dunkirk Way (A5117) by the mature vegetation to the southern boundary. The North Cheshire Way briefly passes the south-western most corner of the site as it travels past Manor Farm continuing westwards on the A5117. Views of the site are limited by the mature trees to the southern site boundary. National Cycle Route 56 passes the site to the west along Dunkirk Lane, briefly passing the southern boundary before continuing southwards past Manor Farm and along the railway line. Views of the proposed development from this route are expected to be limited to a short section along Dunkirk Lane in the vicinity of Dunkirk Farm and the A5117 junction. There is no visual relationship between the public footpath (Capenhurst FP6) running along the western side of the railway line.

Two residential properties are located south of the site on the opposite side of the A5117; orientated towards the site. However, receptors views of the proposed development are anticipated to be filtered if not well screened by trees along each property's frontage.



Site Context and Viewpoint Location Plan



OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The following recommendations inform the landscape framework plan shown in Figure 6 and have been informed by a review of relevant policies of the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan, Cheshire West and Chester Landscape Strategy and assessment work undertaken on site:

Opportunities

- The site has strong visual containment to the west and south, beyond the site boundary to the north, the layering of field boundary vegetation restricts visibility of the site from Capenhurst Lane resulting in few potential visual receptors
- A landscape buffer to the northern boundary would mitigate potential impact on landscape character immediately north of the site
- There are opportunities to provide green links with the adjacent housing allocation to the east
- Existing field boundary vegetation provides a starting point for a landscape framework around which development areas can be formed, with the potential for a central green enabling the retention of existing trees and hedgerows. This is in accordance with Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan Policies ENV2 and ENV3
- Retain boundary vegetation where possible and incorporate and enhance into green buffers / corridors

Constraints

- Potential impact to character of landscape immediately north of the site across the northern site boundary
- Noise from railway line and A5117

Landscape Framework Plan



2.4 Green Belt Policy Context

Approximately 41% of the Borough is designated Green Belt with Chester, Ellesmere Port and Northwich either enclosed or partially defined by the Green Belt. This results in the Borough being very constrained in terms of future growth outside existing settlement boundaries, particularly in the northern areas of the Borough where there is strong market demand for housing growth but significant Green Belt constraints. There will therefore be a need to release some sites from the Green Belt to meet emerging development requirements.

The Dunkirk Farm site is currently designated as Green Belt land and sits directly adjacent to the defined settlement edge of Ellesmere Port. Release of the site for development would require the redefinition of the Green Belt boundary but this can be done in a manner that would not undermine or threaten the purposes of the Green Belt in Cheshire West and Chester.

Pegasus has undertaken an assessment of the Site against the five purposes of the Green Belt. Each purpose, as per paragraph 143 of the 2023 NPPF, is considered in turn.

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

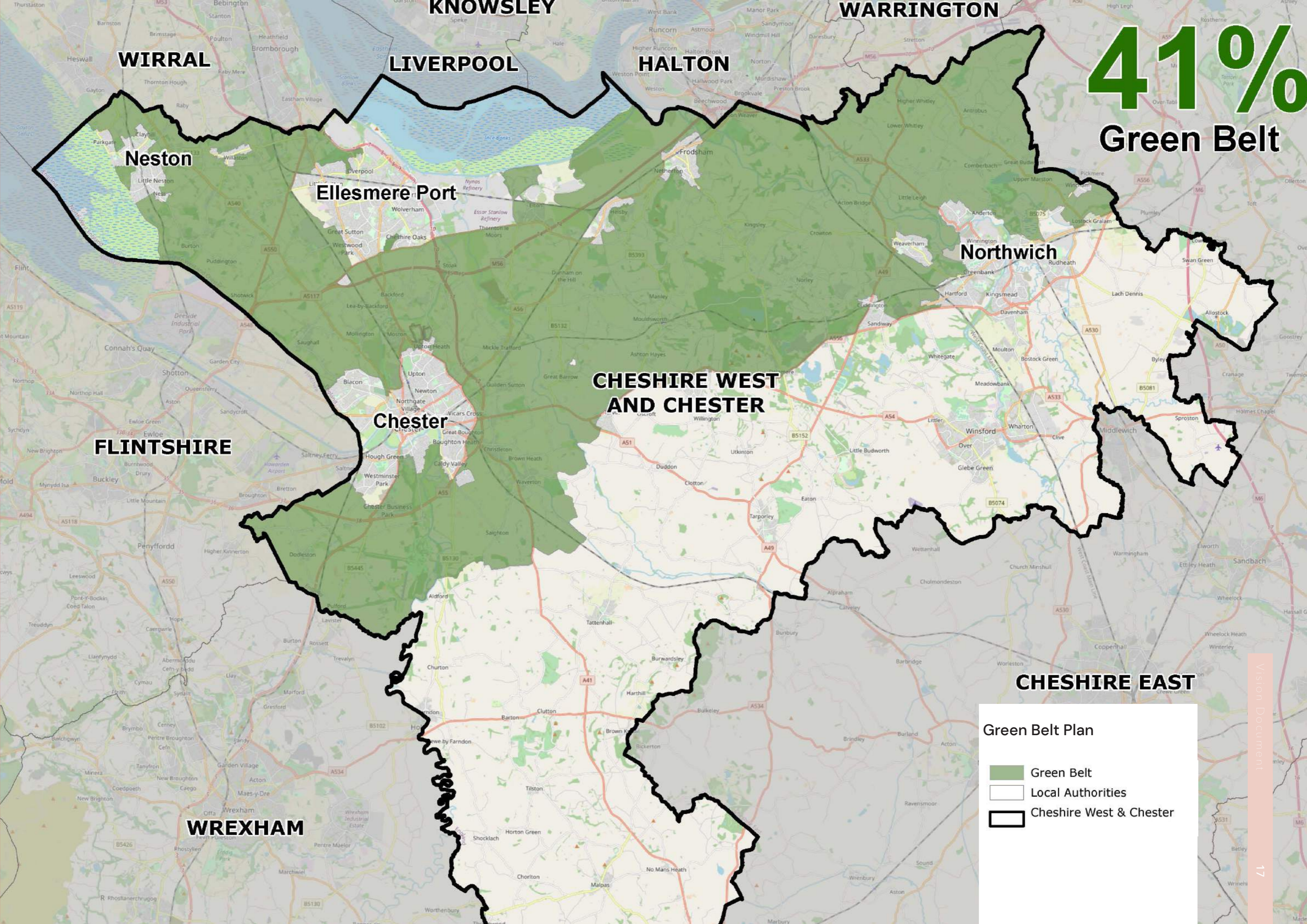
The site would form a logical extension to the south-western extent of Ellesmere Port and the release of the site from the Green Belt would not represent unrestricted sprawl. Indeed, it would be planned development delivered through a statutory Local Plan whereby specific policies could be provided to ensure robust Green Belt boundaries are formed as part of the development. In this instance, the site benefits from strong and durable boundaries which help to enclose the site. Redrow's 'The Pastures' residential development immediately borders the site to the east, the A5117 Dunkirk Way borders the site to the south and the Chester-Liverpool railway line borders the site to the west- all of which provide strong and durable boundaries. The northern site boundary is less well defined, albeit already benefits from a line of hedgerows and the layering of field boundaries provides good screening to the north. Redrow Homes would be willing to explore a strong landscape buffer along the northern boundary to restrict any further unrestricted sprawl post adoption of the new Local Plan, or working with adjacent landowners to the north should it be decided to take the new Green Belt boundary up to Capenhurst Lane.

Furthermore, the release of this site from the Green Belt would also present the opportunity to redefine the Green Belt boundary in this area, which is not logical due to the poorly defined settlement edge of Ellesmere Port (see Figure 8). As per NPPF paragraph 148, when defining Green Belt boundaries Local Plans should define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent. The release of this site from the Green Belt, with strong boundaries along Dunkirk Way and the railway line, provides the opportunity to achieve this requirement.




To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

The site is not important in preventing any neighbouring towns merging into one another. Capenhurst, located to the north-west of the site, is washed over by Green Belt and does not have a settlement boundary on the adopted Proposals Map. Furthermore, it is not identified within the Borough's settlement hierarchy, with the Urenco, Capenhurst site classed as a commercial site within the Green Belt. The release of this site from the Green Belt would therefore not lead to merger issues between Ellesmere Port and any other settlements

41%
Green Belt



Green Belt Plan

-  Green Belt
-  Local Authorities
-  Cheshire West & Chester

To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

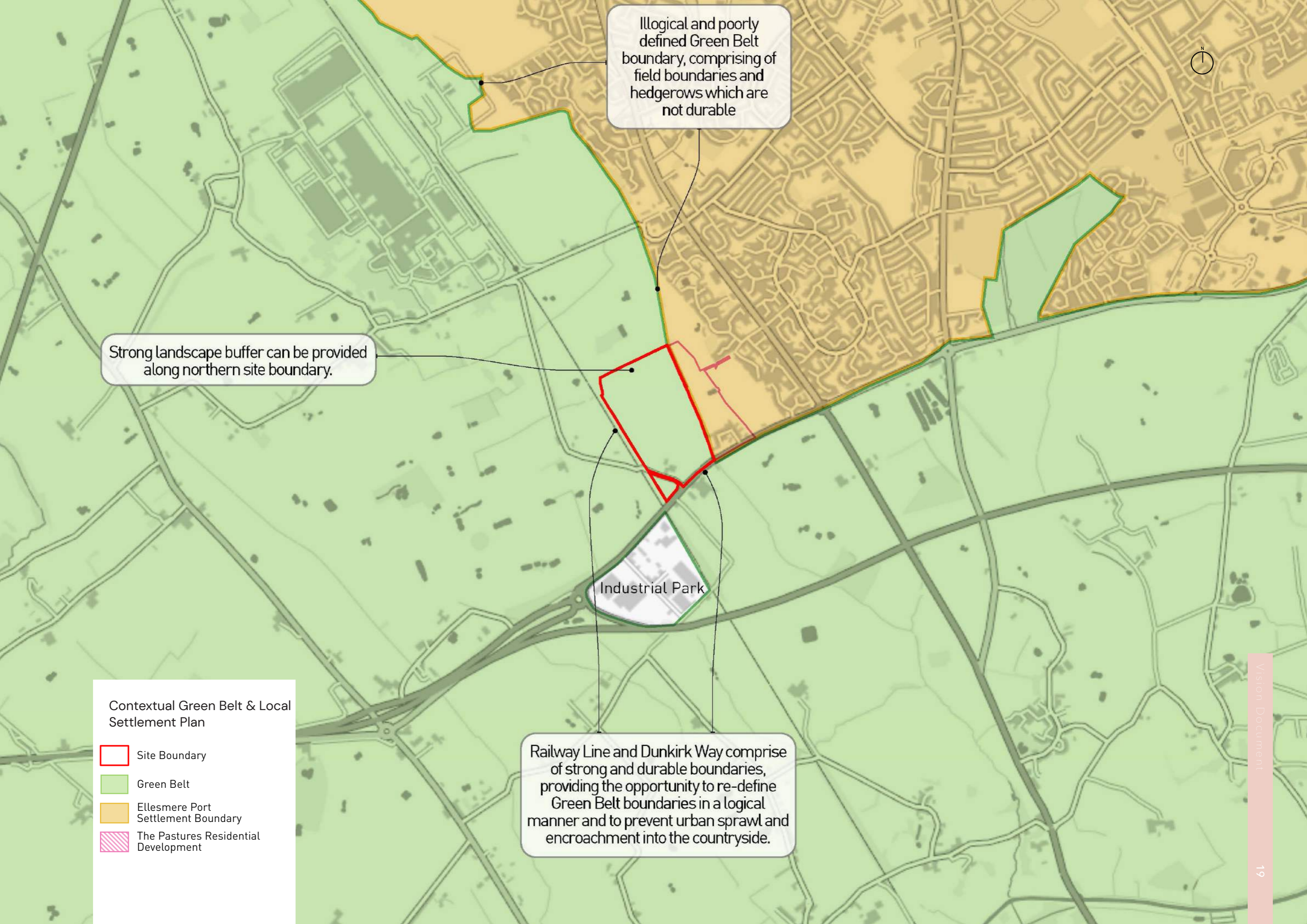
Dunkirk Farm and its associated farm buildings are located in the south-western section of the site, which has already led to some urban encroachment into the countryside in this location (and therefore is less sensitive in terms of landscape openness). The site also benefits from layered field boundaries, which provides good screening to the north and ensures there are unlikely to be long-line views from Capenhurst Lane. There are very few views in to the site even from close proximity, as the site is well screened by existing vegetation and in particular there is a strong tree lined boundary to south-east. Dunkirk Lane has mature trees along the majority of its frontage, which restricts views in to the site as do the trees along the railway line to the west of the site. The site does not include any public rights of way, open space or outdoor recreational uses. As such, it does not make a particularly positive contribution in terms of providing access to the open countryside, which is one of the main objectives of the Green Belt. The site does not provide a strong contribution to this purpose of the Green Belt.

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

to historic towns such as Chester, York, Oxford and Cambridge and is the principal reason why Green Belt has been designated around those towns. It does not directly apply to Ellesmere Port. Nevertheless, the site does not contain any heritage assets and none are located in close enough proximity to be materially impacted by development on the site, meaning the site does not contribute to this purpose even at a local level of analysis.

To assist in urban regeneration by encroaching the recycling of derelict and other urban land

National planning policy is clear that there is a brownfield first approach to development. Indeed, this is well enshrined in Green Belt policy, with NPPF paragraph 146 making it clear that before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, Councils must demonstrate that they have fully examined all other reasonable options (including making as much use as possible of brownfield sites). That said, the Borough's emerging development requirements are substantial and Green Belt constrains growth in the northern areas of the Borough including Ellesmere Port. There will therefore be a need to release suitable sites from the Green Belt to ensure development requirements are met, and as part of a strategy which assists and sits alongside brownfield development rather than hindering it.







Illogical and poorly defined Green Belt boundary, comprising of field boundaries and hedgerows which are not durable

Strong landscape buffer can be provided along northern site boundary.

Railway Line and Dunkirk Way comprise of strong and durable boundaries, providing the opportunity to re-define Green Belt boundaries in a logical manner and to prevent urban sprawl and encroachment into the countryside.

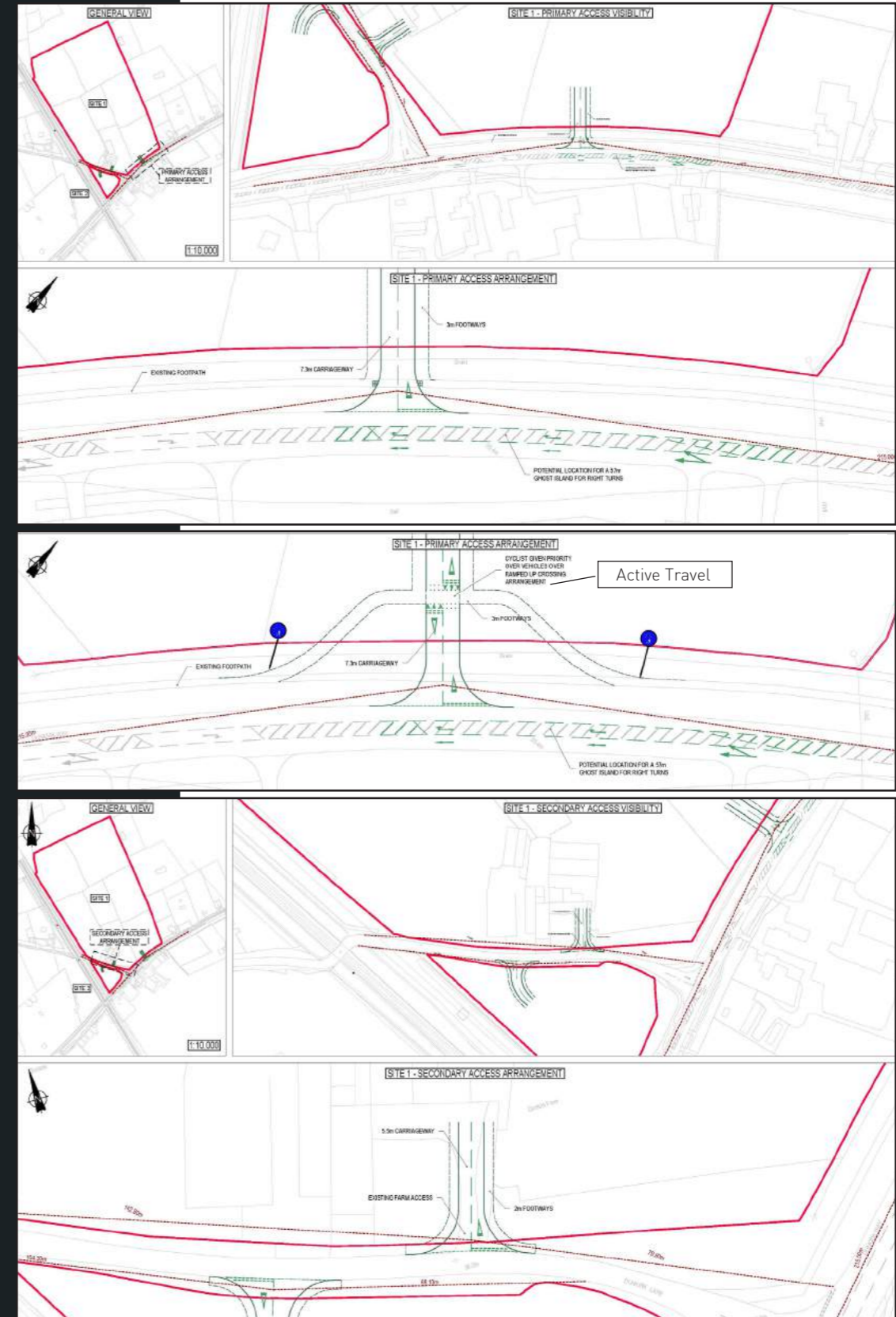
Contextual Green Belt & Local Settlement Plan

-  Site Boundary
-  Green Belt
-  Ellesmere Port Settlement Boundary
-  The Pastures Residential Development

2.5 Highways

An appointed Highways Consultant (Curtins) has prepared an initial Transport Statement for the Dunkirk Farm site. The report concludes that feasible access options can be taken via Dunkirk Way to the south and as shown on the potential site access drawing (which includes potential for an active travel arrangement, with cyclists given priority via a raised crossing). A secondary access point can also provide connectivity between the two main development parcels. The Transport Statement and site access arrangements were assessed on the basis of the site delivering up to 600 dwellings, which is acceptable from a highways perspective.

The site is located in a sustainable location. As shown on the Services Plan, Capenhurst Railway Station is located to the north of the site and located within a 800m radius of the site. The station provides regular services between Chester and Liverpool Central, calling at various stations throughout Wirral and Liverpool including Birkenhead. Users can also change at both destination stations to access additional services to areas within the wider vicinity such as Wrexham and Manchester; as well as catching alternative national services.



2.6 Facilities & Services

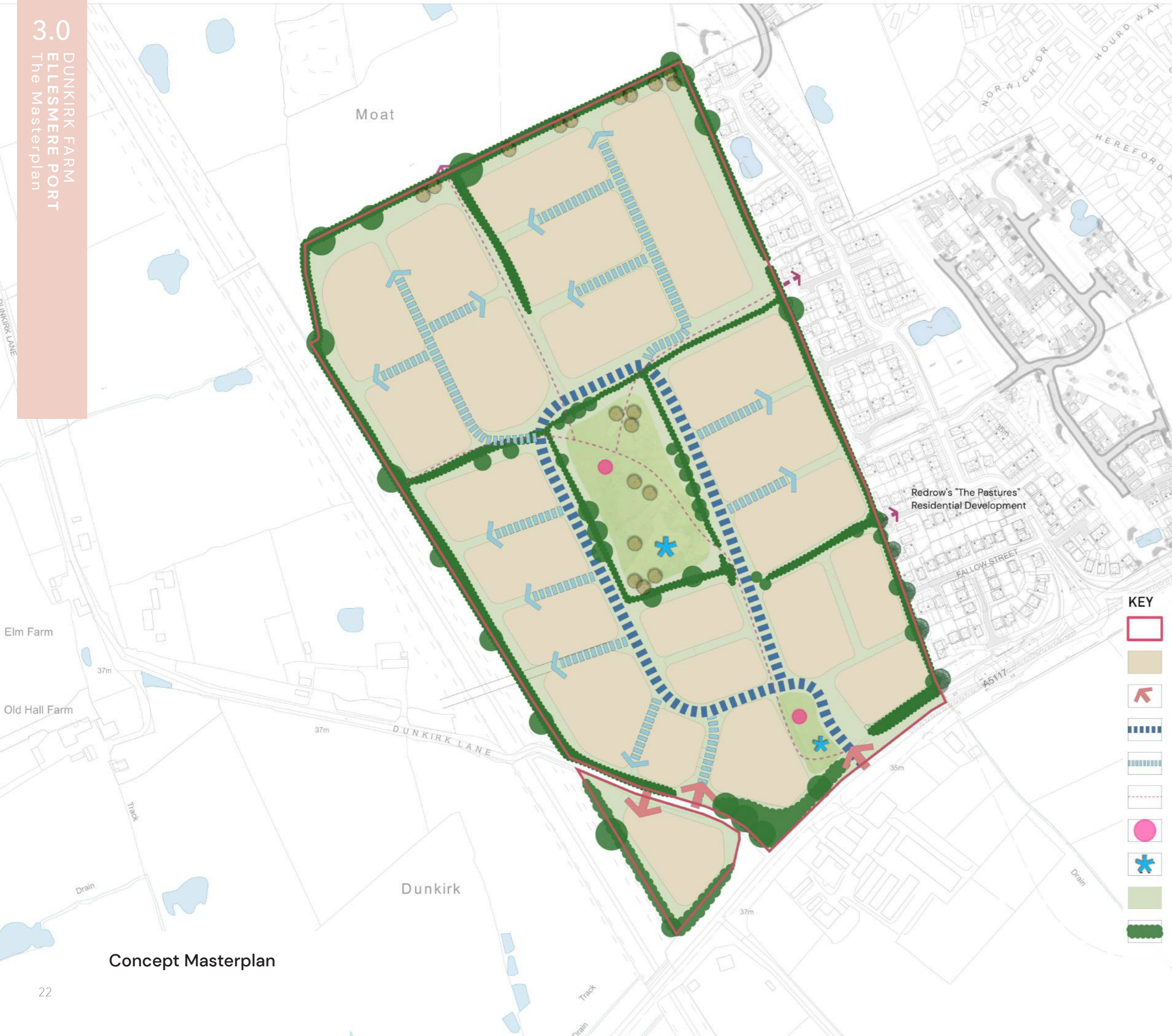
A number of bus stops are located within a 800m radius of the site, along the A41 Chester Road, and accessible within a 10-minute walk. The nearest bus stops are located along the A41 to the east of the site. The number 2 service operates at these stops and provides direct access to Liverpool at an operational frequency of 2 services per hour.

As shown on the Services Plan a variety of other facilities are also located within a 1200m radius of the site, including primary schools, a pharmacy and a local convenience store which can be accessed by pedestrians and cyclists.

The site is therefore entirely deliverable from a highways perspective and benefits from a sustainable location in relation to public transport and existing facilities in Ellesmere Port.



3.0 DUNKIRK FARM ELLESMERE PORT The Masterplan



KEY

	Site Boundary (23.06 ha)
	Residential Development 15.00Ha = circa 525 units @ 35dph
	Site Access Point
	Primary Route
	Secondary Route
	Greenway for Non Vehicular Movement
	Potential Formal Play
	Potential Swales and Attenuation Ponds
	Public Open Space
	Existing Hedgerows and Tree Groups

Concept Masterplan

3.0 The Masterplan

The Illustrative design proposals have been informed by the local context of the site, its surroundings, constraints and opportunities.

The key drivers behind the design are:

- **Distinctiveness** – Creating a new settlement edge at the south-western extent of Ellesmere Port, with respect to the existing urban form and surrounding environment. The development will build on from the success of the adjoining 'The Pastures' residential development, also delivered by Redrow.
- **Green Infrastructure and Landscape** – Responding to the existing green infrastructure (retention of existing hedgerows and trees where possible) and creating new opportunities for Ecological enhancement and sustainable drainage solutions.
- **Access and Active Travel** – The new point of access along Dunkirk Way to the south of the site, as well as access point to connect the two land parcels via Dunkirk Lane.
- **Play Facilities** – Potential provision of formal play area in the centre of the site for use of both future residents and the existing local community.

As such the development could provide circa 550 high quality new homes that are sensitive to the local context, creating a new settlement edge at the south-western extent of Ellesmere Port.

The development will have a clearly legible hierarchy of streets providing connectivity and access to local facilities, with clear access into the site and good pedestrian linkages to the surrounding area.

The layout and urban form of the scheme will be such that it maximises the potential of the site.

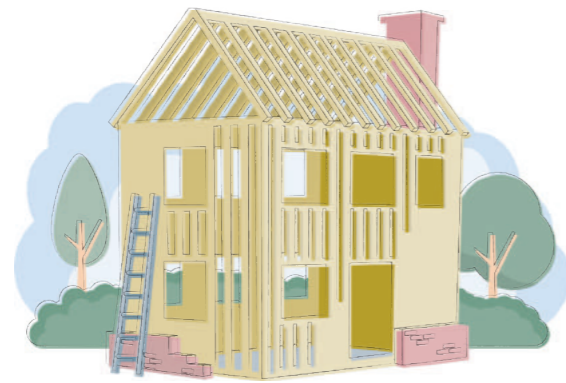
Economic Benefits

Land at Dunkirk Farm, Ellesmere Port Construction of up to 550 dwellings

Construction Benefits

£96.1million

Estimated construction investment over 7-year build programme

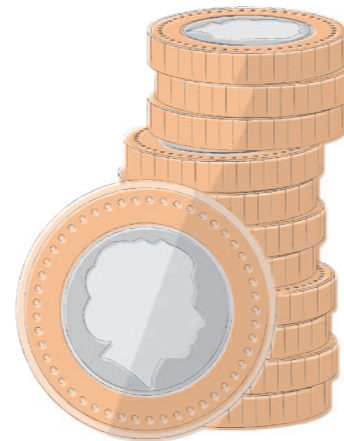


236

Direct construction roles and indirect/induced jobs supported during build phase

£84.8million GVA

Economic output contribution from jobs supported by activities at the site over the 7-year build programme (present value)



Operational Benefits



581

Economically active and employed residents estimated to live in the new housing

38

Full-time equivalent jobs supported in the economy



£6.1million

Of spend on food & drink, leisure, clothes, household goods etc

£13.9million

Total annual household expenditure

£1.1million

Estimated annual increase in Council Tax revenue



£3.2million

Estimated first occupation expenditure. (Spending to make a house feel like a 'home')



62%

Of employed residents estimated to be working in higher value/higher income occupations



4.0 Economics

Economic Benefit

The development of Dunkirk Farm will support the local labour market and generate the following specific benefits:

- **Construction-related employment:** The proposed development could support an estimated 236 jobs per annum during the construction over the estimated 7-year build programme. This includes direct jobs on site, as well as employment supported in the wider economy via supply chain impacts.
- **Contribution of construction phase to economic output:** The proposed development could generate an additional £84.8 million of gross value added over the 7-year construction period.
- **Growing labour force:** Approximately 581 economically active and employed residents are estimated to live in the new dwellings once the site is fully built and occupied. These residents, along with those who are not economically active, will be spending money in the local economy, as outlined in the next finding.
- **First occupation expenditure:** The proposed development will generate an estimated £3.2 million first occupation expenditure, within the first 18-months whilst residents make their house 'feel like home'.
- **Household spend:** Once fully built and occupied, the households are estimated to generate expenditure in the region of £13.9 million per annum.
- **Increased Council Tax income:** The proposed development could also generate in the region of £1.1 million per annum in Council Tax revenue, once fully developed and occupied.

The development of Dunkirk Farm would help to deliver significant benefits to the local economy. Notably, the development of up to 550 dwellings on site would secure a number of economic benefits including job creation, tax revenues to the Council and increased expenditure in the local economy.

Housing supply can also play a key role in the flexibility of the local labour market, which is an important component in local economic competitiveness and maintaining a dynamic economy. A shortage of housing or lack of affordability can act as a barrier to people accessing employment opportunities or result in long distance commuting and associated sustainability impacts.

Assuming the currently adopted Local Plan requirement to provide 30% affordable housing, this scheme will deliver 158 affordable dwellings.





5.0 Summary

Redrow Homes are committed to promoting this site through a New Local Plan for Cheshire West & Chester for a high-quality development scheme capable of delivering circa 550 residential dwellings (including affordable homes) on the edge of Ellesmere Port.

Due to the Council's housing needs and the fact that large swathes of the northern areas of the Borough are constrained by Green Belt (including Ellesmere Port), there is a need to reconsider Green Belt boundaries to ensure the housing needs of the Borough are met in a sustainable manner. The site does not make a significant contribution to the principal purposes and objectives of Green Belt and would be released from the Green Belt in a planned manner through the emerging Local Plan. For that reason, it can be delivered in a manner that will utilise existing strong boundaries including the Railway Line and Dunkirk Way and sufficient land is available to ensure that a robust landscape boundary can be created along the northern site boundary if required.

It is a sustainable site that is directly adjacent to the existing settlement boundary of Ellesmere Port. Of particular note is the site's proximity to Capenhurst Railway Station to the north, which provides rail services across the Wirral, Chester and to Liverpool.

The site is also unconstrained in terms of the natural, historic and physical environment and is therefore evidently suitable, available and deliverable.

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