

# **Northumberland Local Plan**

## **Employment Land Site Option Appraisal**

### **Hexham Site Option Appraisal**

**July 2018**

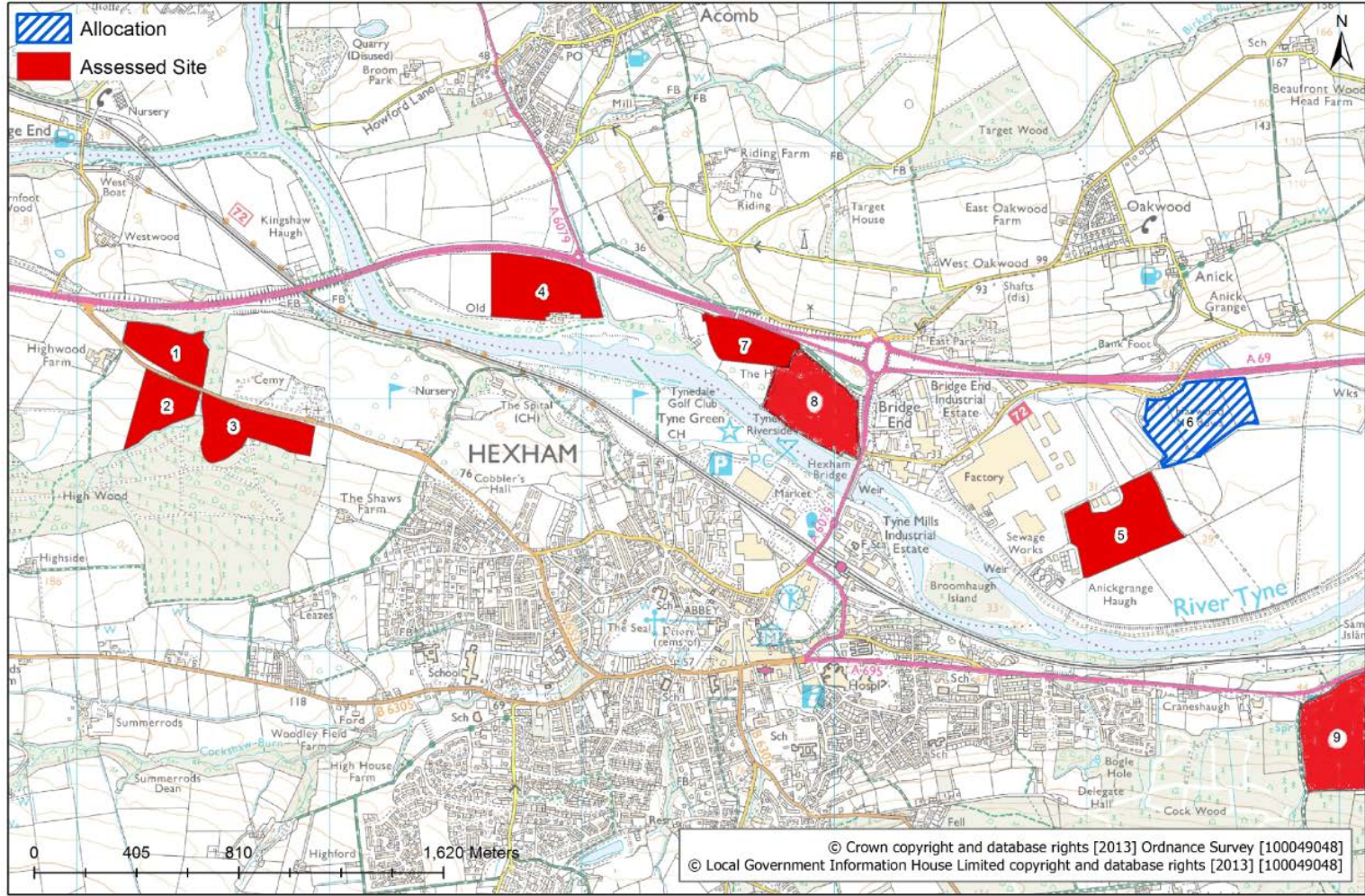
## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The ELR (2011) concluded that Hexham has very low levels of employment land supply, with stakeholders agreeing that there was virtually no suitable land for development, given the constraints affecting existing allocations. It was suggested that this constrained supply impinged on development during periods of strong economic growth, which led to hidden demand on the market. Vacancy rates are low and it was the view of the industry that there is demand for office and industrial development. The study recommends a 10-15ha allocation for the town.
- 1.2 The constrained supply of land and premises in Hexham is reflected in recent levels of land take-up. In the 16 years period 1999-2014 9.58ha of land was taken-up, an average of 0.61ha per annum. However the vast majority of this relates to the expansion of Egger, and if this was stripped out average annual take-up falls to only 0.15ha per annum, which is very low in relation to the size of both the settlement and the town's commercial property market. In the same period 1.56ha of land was developed for other uses.
- 1.3 The current supply of land and property in Hexham is also very constrained. At the 31 March 2015 the vacancy rate was 3%, which is significantly below what is expected in a well-balanced market. The town also has very little land available for development. Whilst Egger has land to expand to the east, only just over 2ha is available to the market. The majority of this is at the 'former Bunker Site', which has relatively poor access.
- 1.4 The ELPDS (2015) shows through market engagement that there remains healthy demand for land and premises; both for offices and industrial, and that current supply is restrictive. However, it is considered that that this may be more modest than what is indicated in the ELR and that 10ha would provide for market need. The business survey as part of the study showed that 5 businesses required additional industrial premises, mainly for smaller units, but also that larger businesses are also being frustrated by the lack of suitable premises to expand their operations. However, revealed demand for offices was not particularly strong.
- 1.5 Site options provide genuine alternatives for the allocation of land, but the following known constraints were considered when identifying site options. Site identification particularly considered the importance of unconstrained access, level topography for the development of large buildings, and issues and opportunities concerning current and planned infrastructure.
- 1.6 In Hexham, options were identified to maximise access from the A69, which would be a key requisite to future operators. No site options were considered to the south of the town, as any significant employment site would need to be accessed via residential roads, and topography would be unsuitable for large footprint commercial buildings. Known town centre congestion was also considered, and the need to avoid excessive ribbon development to the east and west of the town were also factored.
- 1.7 New sites have been suggested through the SHELAA call for sites in 2018. The additional sites that are assessed in this document, as a result of this call for sites, are limited to those that are in or well related to the town, (including Green Belt, as before), and which were put forward either for employment only or for mixed uses including commercial /

employment. In this case, the two newly assessed sites are numbered 8 and 9. The assessments published in 2016 for Sites 1-7 are the same unless circumstances have changed on the ground.

Plan of Hexham Site Options

Hexham



## 2. Hexham Site 1 – Land north east of Highwood Farm

Site Area (Ha): 5.291

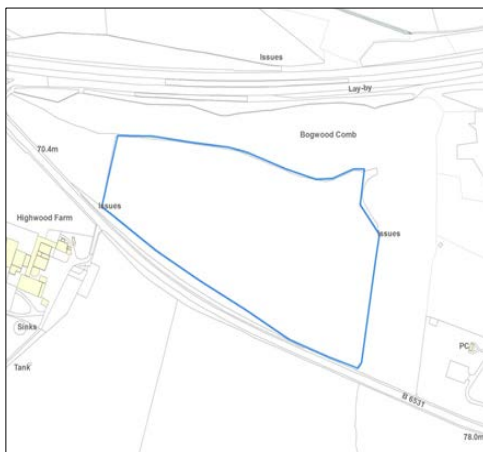
Easting: 391,369.317

Northing: 565,193.278

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	10	2,116	176
B1c	40	8,464	180
B2	30	6,348	176
B8	20	4,232	60

- 2.1 The site is located to the west of Hexham, on the northern side of the West Road, close to the junction with the A69.





## **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

## **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 2.2 The site fronts the B6531 but access is not currently taken from it. Consequently, a new point of access would need to be created in order to access the site. NCC Highways determine that the creation of a priority junction would be the most appropriate solution to access the site.
- 2.3 The B6531 serves as the main route into Hexham town centre from the west. The point at where this road meets the A69 transpennine route lies approximately 400m from the centre of the site, meaning the site is well placed to access the strategic road network. In addition, its proximity to the A69 means that industrial traffic would not need to pass through residential areas or the town centre. However, the County Wide Transport Assessment (November 2015) identifies the A69 / B6531 junction, a priority crossroads junction on a major trunk road, as a sensitive receptor on the local road network and sensitive to any significant changes to traffic flows resulting from development or pinch points elsewhere on the network. Whilst there are no capacity issues with this junction that would prevent development of this site, there are clear safety issues with the current arrangement which would be exacerbated by the increased prevalence of HGVs crossing four lanes of traffic in order to travel eastwards. The TA identified that improvements to this junction would be possible but would likely need to be led by developer contributions.
- 2.4 Pedestrian and cycle connections to the network will be required.
- 2.5 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, most notably occurring on the A6079 at the A6079 / Station Road mini-roundabout junction and the A6079 / Ferry Road junction. However, the site's location means traffic generated by new development will avoid congestion in the town centre. It is unlikely that development at this site would generate a significant impact on the local road network. However, any new junction that would provide access to this site should be situated as distant from the B6531/A69 junction as possible, in order to minimise the amount of congestion in close proximity to the junction. There are no capacity constraints identified on the road network in proximity to the site.

## **Conclusion**

- 2.6 Whilst, the site benefits from excellent access to the strategic road network due to its proximity to the A69, the safety issues identified with the B6531 / A69 junction for HGVs in particular means that strategic road access has to be given a lower score. Whilst the site does not currently have access from the B6531, a priority junction arrangement could represent an appropriate solution. There are no road capacity constraints identified in proximity to the site, and the development is unlikely to create additional congestion on the local road network, as long as the site access is situated a sufficient distance away from the existing B6531/A69 junction.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>4</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>4</b>

### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 2.7 The shape and topography of the site is prohibitive to developing the site in its entirety, particularly the eastern part of the site, which would require significant earthworks to develop large footprint buildings. It is likely that any development of this site would be concentrated on the western part of the site.
- 2.8 The site lies within a Coal Mining Reporting Area. However, there are no known Mine Entries or Abandoned Mine Workings within the site boundary.
- 2.9 Superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across the entirety of the site. Whilst it is unlikely that this would prevent any development of the site, the benefits of its prior extraction will have to be considered in accordance with relevant policies.
- 2.10 The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture farming and is classified as grade 3, which indicates “land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield”<sup>1</sup>. Subsequent assessment has not been undertaken to determine if the site falls within the A or B subcategory of grade 3. As such development of the site would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land as per annex 2 of the NPPF.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 2.11 A desk based assessment indicates there are no protected species or habitat within the site, and therefore there are no ecological constraints which would prevent employment development on the site. However, a range of protected species has been recorded locally.
- 2.12 Mature woodland can be found adjacent to the north and east of the site and a small watercourse can be found along the site’s northern boundary. Buffer zones would be required to protect both of these features.
- 2.13 A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodlands (AWs) are all within 2km and further consultation with Natural England would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ). A HRA is likely to be required.

#### **Landscape and Green Infrastructure**

- 2.14 The site is disconnected from the built form of Hexham. The site sits within an area of open countryside which is predominantly arable farmland; whilst the A69 can be found in close proximity to the site, its detachment from Hexham means the area does not feel like urban fringe.
- 2.15 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the area within which the majority of the site is located as ‘Glacial Trough Valley Sides’ in character. Elements of this character area reflected strongly through this site and its immediate surroundings include: the relatively steep valley slopes, forming part of the setting to

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<sup>1</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988

Hexham; a mixed-scale field pattern defined by hedges, fencing and stone walls; areas of coniferous plantation; and narrow lanes running up and down valley sides. The study recommends the guiding principle for development in this area as seeking to 'Manage', i.e. strengthen existing characteristics and manage pressures for change. Any development could present an opportunity to seek improved management and extension of semi-natural woodland and improvement to hedgerows, hedgerow trees and field trees. However, development on approach routes and gateways to settlements, which the development of this site would represent, should be given careful consideration, and development extending onto upper valley sides should be discouraged.

2.16 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) assessed landscape sensitivity in landscape character areas and noted that the landscape within which the site sits scores relatively low when compared with other areas nearby. However, historic features, condition and rarity came out as the higher scoring features. Further consideration of the impact of employment development on the landscape will be required as part of any application.

2.17 While development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations, the site represents an extension of the green corridor formed by the Tyne valley.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

2.18 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial water flooding of the site. A very small amount of the northern and eastern extent of the site is at low risk of surface water flooding.

2.19 Consultation with NWL indicates that there is no existing sewerage or water infrastructure within the vicinity of the site. It is assumed that nearby Highwood Farm is currently served by a septic tank. As NWL have not indicated that investment is programmed for new infrastructure in this area, this would add significantly to development costs.

2.20 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical development area for housing and employment to the west of Hexham indicates that there may be a risk of sewer flooding and/or potential capacity constraints at this location as a result of sewer flooding reported to the southeast of the potential development area option. This suggests that any connection to existing sewer infrastructure initiated by the development of this site may not be feasible without wider upgrades to the local network.

2.21 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area and so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

#### Archaeology and historic environment

2.22 There are two buildings both at Highwood Farm listed Grade II, located on the opposite side of the road to the site. The farm itself is situated on an elevated position on the valley sides and is visible from several vantage points as well as on the approach to the site. The



impact of employment development on the setting of this asset would need to be given careful consideration by NCC Conservation and Historic England.

- 2.23 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching. There is potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity, and mitigation work will depend on the results of this initial evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 2.24 There are no Public Rights of Way in the vicinity of the site that would be affected by the development of this site.

#### Conclusion

- 2.25 The site is somewhat constrained for employment development. The shape and topography of the site is prohibitive to developing the eastern part of the site, as significant earthworks would be required to develop large footprint buildings. There are no protected species or habitat within the site, but buffer zones would be required to protect mature woodland and a watercourse. Superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across the entirety of the site and prior extraction will have to be considered in accordance with relevant policies. The site is not connected to water or sewer infrastructure, and connecting to nearby constrained infrastructure is likely to be costly and technically problematic. The setting of the nearby Grade II listed buildings would need to be carefully considered. Finally, the obvious encroachment into open countryside would likely have an impact upon the character of the surrounding landscape, and weight should also be given to the Landscape Character Assessment and its recommendations that development at settlement gateways should be given careful consideration. The site is not affected by past mine workings, green infrastructure, fluvial flooding, water supply or public rights of way.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	2

#### **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

#### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

- 2.26 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that employment sites to the west of the town and the option to the south of the A69 junction with Acomb are likely to require significant junction upgrades and have a high landscape impact. Site options to the east of the town are more closely associated with existing industrial estates, and junction improvements are likely to be less expensive.
- 2.27 The majority of criterion assessed for this site scored no constraint and or a positive impact. The agricultural value of the site was identified as a potential constraint, and as the

site is 100% greenfield this was considered a major issue. The site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Highways access was also noted as a major issue, given that a new junction from the B6531 would be required to facilitate access to the site and the safety issues identified with HGVs utilising the B6531 / A69 priority crossroads junction.

- 2.28 The site is remote from services which employees would likely use. The nearest services are located circa 2.5km from the site, in Hexham town centre.
- 2.29 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.
- 2.30 The site lies within the HM19b land parcel, which is assessed as having a medium contribution to green belt purposes. Development in this area would not present a serious risk of coalescence as a result of the containment of the site by the A69, B6531, the railway and the River Tyne. However, it does form part of the green valley corridor around the north of Hexham, contributing to the wider setting of the historic town. Given that the site extends beyond the neighbouring woodland, into the open countryside, the impact of development upon the Green Belt may be significant.

#### **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

- 2.31 The site is located in an open countryside setting, albeit in close proximity to a major trunk road, unrelated to the settlement of Hexham and with agriculture the predominant land use in the site vicinity. It is located next to a junction of the A69, so it could be viewed as an “out of town” employment development which would enjoy good access to the strategic road network. Housing at the western extent of the settlement is located circa 1.1km south east of the site, with a cemetery, mature woodlands, golf course and farmland separating the site and the settlement. It is not considered that employment development would have any impact on the amenity of adjoining uses.

#### **Conclusion**

- 2.32 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Submission version of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) identifies that whilst the site is largely sustainable for employment use, the use of a greenfield site, access to transport through alternative means and highways access are noted as significant constraints. The site is remote from services which employees would likely use, with the nearest services located 2.5km from the site in Hexham town centre. Agriculture is the predominant land use in the site vicinity and there would be no issues with compatibility of adjoining uses. The Green Belt Review identifies that the land parcel area currently offers a medium contribution to all of the Green Belt purposes, so loss of the site to employment development would have a moderate impact on the Green Belt around Hexham. Development of the site would establish a new employment area in open countryside unrelated to the settlement of Hexham, albeit in close proximity to a major trunk road.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	2
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	2
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	4

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### Ownership and availability

- 2.33 The site has not been proposed and/or assessed for employment use through the ELR call for sites (2010), subsequent calls for sites. It is in single private ownership. The same landowner is also promoting new development to the southeast of the site at the western extent of Hexham (Shaws Farm), although their intentions to develop this particular site are unknown.

### Development costs

- 2.34 As a greenfield site, it is currently unserved by utilities (including water and sewerage) and does not contain any internal or external road access. The servicing of this site with utilities, internal roads and a new priority junction to serve the site from the B6531 are all likely to add significantly to the site's development costs.
- 2.35 Given the site's topographical constraints, a developer may choose to not develop the eastern part of the site, reducing the site's net developable area, or undertake significant earthworks in order to make the entire site suitable for large footprint buildings, which would represent an abnormal cost. Undertaking either of these options has the potential to affect the site's viability for employment development.
- 2.36 It is reasonable to assume that there will be no abnormal cost associated with mitigating land contamination and past mineral workings.

### Market demand

- 2.37 The site is located in close proximity to the B6531 / A69 junction, so it has good access to the strategic road network. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight. However, this junction has been identified as one that could benefit from upgrading. The site would enjoy prominent frontage onto a main road in and out of Hexham town centre.
- 2.38 Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, there are no nearby sensitive land uses which may unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This will appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 2.39 Evidence shows the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development

ready site, which this site could address. It is apparent that the location is very appealing to the market in terms of physical accessibility and access to the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial uses.

#### Conclusion

- 2.40 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given the proximity to the A69 and the lack of sensitive adjoining land uses. There could be some abnormal costs associated with connecting to utilities and creating a new road junction to serve the site. There is competition for investment in the local market, but the overall demand identified for the Hexham market suggests that the site would be quite attractive to the market.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>3</b>

### **Hexham Site 1 – Land north east of Highwood Farm**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Hexham Site 1</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>22</b>

### 3. Hexham Site 2 – Land east of Highwood Farm

Site Area (Ha): 4.813

Easting: 391,329.996

Northing: 564,970.148

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	10	1,925.2	160
B1c	40	7,700.8	164
B2	30	5,775.6	160
B8	20	3,850.4	55

- 3.1 The site is located to the west of Hexham on the southern side of the West Road, close to the junction with the A69. The site lies to the west of High Wood.



### **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

### **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 3.2 The site fronts the B6531 but access is not currently taken from it. Consequently, a new point of access would need to be created in order to access the site. NCC Highways determine that the creation of a priority junction would be the most appropriate solution to access the site.
- 3.3 The B6531 serves as the main route into Hexham town centre from the west. The point at where this road meets the A69 transpennine route lies approximately 500m from the centre of the site, meaning the site is well placed to access the strategic road network. In addition, its proximity to the A69 means that industrial traffic would not need to pass through residential areas or the town centre. However, the County Wide Transport Assessment (November 2015) identifies the A69 / B6531 junction, a priority crossroads junction on a major trunk road, as a sensitive receptor on the local road network and sensitive to any significant changes to traffic flows resulting from development or pinch points elsewhere on the network. Whilst there are no capacity issues with this junction that would prevent development of this site, there are clear safety issues with the current arrangement which would be exacerbated by the increased prevalence of HGVs crossing four lanes of traffic in order to travel eastwards. The TA identified that improvements to this junction would be possible but would likely need to be led by developer contributions.
- 3.4 Pedestrian and cycle connections to the network will be required.
- 3.5 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, most notably occurring on the A6079 at the A6079 / Station Road mini-roundabout junction and the A6079 / Ferry Road junction. However, the site's location means traffic generated by new development will avoid congestion in the town centre. It is unlikely that development at this site would generate a significant impact on the local road network. However, any new junction that would provide access to this site should be situated as distant from the B6531/A69 junction as possible, in order to minimise the amount of congestion in close proximity to the junction. There are no capacity constraints identified on the road network in proximity to the site.

### **Conclusion**

- 3.6 Whilst, the site benefits from excellent access to the strategic road network due to its proximity to the A69, the safety issues identified with the B6531 / A69 junction for HGVs in particular means that strategic road access has to be given a lower score. Whilst the site does not currently have access from the B6531, a priority junction arrangement could represent an appropriate solution. There are no road capacity constraints identified in proximity to the site, and the development is unlikely to create additional congestion on the local road network, as long as the site access is situated a sufficient distance away from the existing B6531/A69 junction.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>4</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>4</b>



### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 3.7 There is a relatively steep slope across the entire site, with a slope from the site's northern to the southern extent, following the direction of the valley sides. This would mean that significant earthworks would be required to develop large footprint buildings on this site.
- 3.8 The site lies within a Coal Mining Reporting Area. However, there are no known Mine Entries or Abandoned Mine Workings within the site boundary.
- 3.9 Superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across a small portion of the site at its northern extent. Whilst it is unlikely that this would prevent any development of the site, the benefits of its prior extraction will have to be considered in accordance with relevant policies.
- 3.10 The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture farming and is classified as grade 3, which indicates "land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield"<sup>2</sup>. Subsequent assessment has not been undertaken to determine if the site falls within the A or B subcategory of grade 3. As such development of the site would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land as per annex 2 of the NPPE.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 3.11 A desk based assessment indicates there are no protected species or habitat within the site, and therefore there are no ecological constraints which would prevent employment development on the site. However, a range of protected species has been recorded locally.
- 3.12 Mature woodland can be found adjacent to the southern boundary of the site. A small watercourse can also be found along the site's southern boundary. Buffer zones would be required to protect both of these features.
- 3.13 A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodlands (AWs) are all within 2km and further consultation with Natural England would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ). A HRA is likely to be required.

#### **Landscape and Green Infrastructure**

- 3.14 The site is disconnected from the built form of Hexham. The site sits within an area of open countryside which is predominantly arable farmland; whilst the A69 can be found in close proximity to the site, its detachment from Hexham means the area does not feel like urban fringe.
- 3.15 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the area within which the majority of the site is located as 'Glacial Trough Valley Sides' in character. Elements of this character area reflected strongly through this site and its immediate surroundings include: the relatively steep valley slopes, forming part of the setting to

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<sup>2</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988

Hexham; a mixed-scale field pattern defined by hedges, fencing and stone walls; areas of coniferous plantation; and narrow lanes running up and down valley sides. The study recommends the guiding principle for development in this area as seeking to 'Manage', i.e. strengthen existing characteristics and manage pressures for change. Any development could present an opportunity to seek improved management and extension of semi-natural woodland and improvement to hedgerows, hedgerow trees and field trees. However, development on approach routes and gateways to settlements, which the development of this site would represent, should be given careful consideration, and development extending onto upper valley sides should be discouraged.

- 3.16 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) assessed landscape sensitivity in landscape character areas and noted that the landscape within which the site sits scores relatively low when compared with other areas nearby. However, historic features, condition and rarity came out as the higher scoring features. Further consideration of the impact of employment development on the landscape will be required as part of any application.
- 3.17 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations but it is located adjacent to High Wood which is used for informal recreation.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 3.18 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial water flooding of the site. A very small part at the site's centre is at low risk of surface water flooding.
- 3.19 Consultation with NWL indicates that there is no existing sewerage or water infrastructure within the vicinity of the site. It is assumed that nearby Highwood Farm is currently served by a septic tank. As NWL have not indicated that investment is programmed for new infrastructure in this area, this would add significantly to development costs.
- 3.20 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical development area for housing and employment to the west of Hexham indicates that there may be a risk of sewer flooding and/or potential capacity constraints at this location as a result of sewer flooding reported to the southeast of the potential development area option. This suggests that any connection to existing sewer infrastructure initiated by the development of this site may not be feasible without wider upgrades to the local network.
- 3.21 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area and so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

#### Archaeology and historic environment

- 3.22 There are two buildings both at Highwood Farm listed Grade II, approximately 300m north west of the site. The farm itself is situated on an elevated position on the valley sides and is visible from several vantage points as well as on the approach to the site. The impact of employment development on the setting of this asset would need to be given careful consideration by NCC Conservation and Historic England.

- 3.23 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching. There is potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity, and mitigation work will depend on the results of this initial evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 3.24 There are no Public Rights of Way in the vicinity of the site that would be affected by the development of this site.

#### Conclusion

- 3.25 The site is somewhat constrained for employment development. There is a relatively steep slope across the entire site, with a slope from the site's northern to the southern extent, meaning that significant earthworks would be required to develop large footprint buildings on this site. There are no protected species or habitat within the site, but buffer zones would be required to protect mature woodland and a watercourse. The site is not connected to water or sewer infrastructure, and connecting to nearby constrained infrastructure is likely to be costly and technically problematic. The setting of the nearby Grade II listed buildings would need to be carefully considered. Finally, the obvious encroachment into open countryside would likely have an impact upon the character of the surrounding landscape, and weight should also be given to the Landscape Character Assessment and its recommendations that development at settlement gateways should be given careful consideration. The site is not affected by past mine workings, green infrastructure, fluvial flooding, water supply or public rights of way.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	2

#### **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

#### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

- 3.26 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that employment sites to the west of the town and the option to the south of the A69 junction with Acomb are likely to require significant junction upgrades and have a high landscape impact. Site options to the east of the town are more closely associated with existing industrial estates, and junction improvements are likely to be less expensive.
- 3.27 The majority of criterion assessed for this site scored no constraint and or a positive impact. The agricultural value of the site was identified as a potential constraint, and as the site is 100% greenfield this was considered a major issue. The site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Highways access was also noted as a major issue, given that a new junction from the B6531 would be required to facilitate access to the site and the safety issues identified with HGVs utilising the B6531 / A69 priority crossroads junction.

- 3.28 The site is remote from services which employees would likely use. The nearest services are located circa 2.5km from the site, in Hexham town centre.
- 3.29 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.
- 3.30 The site lies within the HM18b land parcel, which is assessed as having a high contribution to green belt purposes. Whilst there would be no risk of sprawl or coalescence, any development of this site would represent encroachment on the countryside and would have an effect on the wider setting of the historic town as a result of its exposure within the Tyne Valley, both of which far outweigh the former two. Whether developed in isolation or in tandem with other sites nearby, build out of this site could be very harmful to the Green Belt.

#### **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

- 3.31 The site is located in an open countryside setting, albeit in close proximity to a major trunk road, unrelated to the settlement of Hexham and with agriculture the predominant land use in the site vicinity. It is located next to a junction of the A69, so it could be viewed as an “out of town” employment development which would enjoy good access to the strategic road network. Housing at the western extent of the settlement is located circa 1km south east of the site, with a cemetery, mature woodlands, golf course and farmland separating the site and the settlement. It is not considered that employment development would have any impact on the amenity of adjoining uses.

#### **Conclusion**

- 3.32 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that whilst the site is largely sustainable for employment use, the use of a greenfield site, access to transport through alternative means and highways access are noted as significant constraints. The site is remote from services which employees would likely use, with the nearest services located 2.5km from the site in Hexham town centre. Agriculture is the predominant land use in the site vicinity and there would be no issues with compatibility of adjoining uses. However, the Green Belt Review identifies that the site currently offers a high contribution to all of the Green Belt purposes, so loss of the site to employment development would have a significant detrimental impact on the Green Belt around Hexham. Development of the site would establish a new employment area in open countryside unrelated to the settlement of Hexham, albeit in close proximity to a major trunk road.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	<b>2</b>
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	<b>2</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>4</b>

#### **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### Ownership and availability

- 3.33 The site has not been proposed and/or assessed for employment use through the ELR call for sites (2010) or subsequent calls for sites. It is in single private ownership. The same landowner is also promoting new development to east of the site at the western extent of Hexham (Shaws Farm), although their intentions to develop this particular site are unknown.

### Development costs

- 3.34 As a greenfield site, it is currently unserved by utilities (including water and sewerage) and does not contain any internal or external road access. The servicing of this site with utilities, internal roads and a new priority junction to serve the site from the B6531 are all likely to add significantly to the site's development costs.
- 3.35 The site's topographical constraints and the subsequent earthworks that would be required in order for the site to accommodate large footprint buildings is likely to add significant costs to the development.
- 3.36 It is reasonable to assume that there will be no abnormal cost associated with mitigating land contamination and past mineral workings.

### Market demand

- 3.37 The site is located in close proximity to the B6531 / A69 junction, so it has good access to the strategic road network. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight. However, this junction has been identified as one that could benefit from upgrading. The site would enjoy prominent frontage onto a main road in and out of Hexham town centre.
- 3.38 Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, there are no nearby sensitive land uses which may unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This will appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 3.39 Evidence shows the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development ready site, which this site could address. It is apparent that the location is very appealing to the market in terms of physical accessibility and access to the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial uses.

### Conclusion

- 3.40 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given the proximity to the A69 and the lack of sensitive adjoining land uses. There could be some abnormal costs associated with connecting to utilities and creating a new road junction to serve the site. There is competition for investment in the local market, but the overall demand identified for the Hexham market suggests that the site would be quite attractive to the market.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>3</b>

## **Hexham Site 2 – Land east of Highwood Farm**

### **Total Score**

<b>Hexham Site 2</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>21</b>



#### 4. Hexham Site 3 – Land south of St Andrew’s Cemetery

Site Area (Ha): 7.109

Easting: 391,680.221

Northing: 564,875.502

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	30	8,530.8	710
B1c	40	11,374.4	242
B2	20	5,687.2	158
B8	10	2,843.6	41

- 4.1 The site is located to the west of Hexham, on the southern side of the West Road. To the south lies High Wood, and to the north St Andrew’s cemetery.



### **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

### **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 4.2 The site fronts the B6531. Access to the site is currently taken from a small point of access leading to an existing property on the site. It is unlikely that this current access would meet adoptable standards and therefore it would be unsuitable to serve the site and a new point of access would need to be created. NCC Highways determine that the creation of a priority junction would be the most appropriate solution to access the site.
- 4.3 The B6531 serves as the main route into Hexham town centre from the west. The point at where this road meets the A69 transpennine route lies approximately 850m from the centre of the site, meaning the site is reasonably well placed to access the strategic road network. In addition, its proximity to the A69 means that industrial traffic is less likely to need to pass through residential areas or the town centre. However, the County Wide Transport Assessment (November 2015) identifies the A69 / B6531 junction, a priority crossroads junction on a major trunk road, as a sensitive receptor on the local road network and sensitive to any significant changes to traffic flows resulting from development or pinch points elsewhere on the network. Whilst there are no capacity issues with this junction that would prevent development of this site, there are clear safety issues with the current arrangement which would be exacerbated by the increased prevalence of HGVs crossing four lanes of traffic in order to travel eastwards. The TA identified that improvements to this junction would be possible but would likely need to be led by developer contributions.
- 4.4 Pedestrian and cycle connections to the network will be required.
- 4.5 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, most notably occurring on the A6079 at the A6079 / Station Road mini-roundabout junction and the A6079 / Ferry Road junction. However, the site's location means traffic generated by new development will avoid congestion in the town centre. It is unlikely that development at this site would generate a significant impact on the local road network. There are no capacity constraints identified on the road network in proximity to the site.

### **Conclusion**

- 4.6 Whilst, the site benefits from excellent access to the strategic road network due to its proximity to the A69, the safety issues identified with the B6531 / A69 junction for HGVs in particular means that strategic road access has to be given a lower score. A priority junction arrangement would represent an appropriate solution in order to create a suitable access from the B6531 to serve the site. There are no road capacity constraints identified in proximity to the site, and the development is unlikely to create additional congestion on the local road network.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>4</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>4</b>

### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 4.7 The site is reasonably conducive to the development of large footprint buildings and is flat overall. The western part of the site slopes up to woodland, slightly reducing the total developable area of the site.
- 4.8 The site lies within a Coal Mining Reporting Area. However, there are no known Mine Entries or Abandoned Mine Workings within the site boundary.
- 4.9 Superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across a significant part of the site. Whilst it is unlikely that this would prevent any development of the site, the benefits of its prior extraction will have to be considered in accordance with relevant policies.
- 4.10 The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture farming and is classified as grade 3, which indicates “land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield”<sup>3</sup>. The western part of the site has been assessed using the post-1989 methodology and has been determined as Grade 3a. However, development of the site would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land as per annex 2 of the NPPF.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 4.11 A desk based assessment indicates that badger, bats and red squirrel have been recorded on or adjacent to the site. The mitigation of this will have to be given due consideration prior to any development of the site. In addition, a range of protected species has been recorded locally.
- 4.12 Mature woodland can be found adjacent to the southern boundary of the site. A small watercourse can also be found along the site’s southern boundary. Buffer zones would be required to protect both of these features.
- 4.13 A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodlands (AWs) are all within 2km and further consultation with Natural England would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ). A HRA is likely to be required.

#### **Landscape and Green Infrastructure**

- 4.14 The site is disconnected from the built form of Hexham. The site sits within an area of open countryside which is predominantly arable farmland.
- 4.15 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the area within which the majority of the site is located as ‘Glacial Trough Valley Sides’ in character. Elements of this character area reflected strongly through this site and its immediate surroundings include: the relatively steep valley slopes, forming part of the setting to Hexham; a mixed-scale field pattern defined by hedges, fencing and stone walls; areas of coniferous plantation; and narrow lanes running up and down valley sides. The study

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<sup>3</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988

recommends the guiding principle for development in this area as seeking to 'Manage', i.e. strengthen existing characteristics and manage pressures for change. Any development could present an opportunity to seek improved management and extension of semi-natural woodland and improvement to hedgerows, hedgerow trees and field trees. However, development on approach routes and gateways to settlements, which the development of this site would represent, should be given careful consideration.

- 4.16 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) assessed landscape sensitivity in landscape character areas and noted that the landscape within which the site sits scores relatively low when compared with other areas nearby. However, historic features, condition and rarity came out as the higher scoring features. Further consideration of the impact of employment development on the landscape will be required as part of any application.
- 4.17 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations but is located to the south of a cemetery and north of High Wood which is used for informal recreation.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 4.18 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial water flooding of the site. A small part of site site, at its northern extent, is at a moderate to high risk of surface water flooding. This may necessitate targeting preventative measures, such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), in this location.
- 4.19 Consultation with NWL indicates that there is no existing sewerage or water infrastructure within the vicinity of the site. It is assumed that nearby Highwood Farm is currently served by a septic tank. As NWL have not indicated that investment is programmed for new infrastructure in this area, this would add significantly to development costs.
- 4.20 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical development area for housing and employment to the west of Hexham indicates that there may be a risk of sewer flooding and/or potential capacity constraints at this location as a result of sewer flooding reported to the southeast of the potential development area option. This suggests that any connection to existing sewer infrastructure initiated by the development of this site may not be feasible without wider upgrades to the local network.
- 4.21 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area and so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

#### Archaeology and historic environment

- 4.22 A Grade II listed Park and Garden, St Andrew's Cemetery, is situated directly opposite this site. In addition to the listing of the cemetery, several buildings that form part of the entrance to the site are also listed at Grade II. The impact of employment development on the setting of this asset would need to be given careful consideration by NCC Conservation and Historic England.

- 4.23 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching. There is potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity, and mitigation work will depend on the results of this initial evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 4.24 There are no Public Rights of Way in the vicinity of the site that would be affected by the development of this site.

#### Conclusion

- 4.25 The site could accommodate large footprint buildings in terms of topography and site shape and size. Protected species or habitats have been recorded on or in close proximity to the site, which will have to be given due consideration. Buffer zones will also be required to protect mature woodland and a watercourse. The site is not connected to water or sewer infrastructure, and connecting to nearby constrained infrastructure is likely to be costly and technically problematic. The setting of the nearby Grade II listed St Andrew's Cemetery would need to be carefully considered. Finally, the obvious encroachment into open countryside would likely have an impact upon the character of the surrounding landscape, and weight should also be given to the Landscape Character Assessment and its recommendations that development at settlement gateways should be given careful consideration. The site is not affected by past mine workings, green infrastructure, fluvial flooding, water supply or public rights of way.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	2

#### **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

#### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

- 4.26 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that employment sites to the west of the town and the option to the south of the A69 junction with Acomb are likely to require significant junction upgrades and have a high landscape impact. Site options to the east of the town are more closely associated with existing industrial estates, and junction improvements are likely to be less expensive.
- 4.27 The majority of criterion assessed for this site scored no constraint and or a positive impact. The agricultural value of the site was identified as a potential constraint, and as the site is 100% greenfield this was considered a major issue. The site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Highways access was also noted as a major issue, given that a new junction from the B6531 would be required to facilitate access to the site and the safety issues identified with HGVs utilising the B6531 / A69 priority crossroads junction.

- 4.28 The site is remote from services which employees would likely use. The nearest services are located circa 2.2km from the site, in Hexham town centre.
- 4.29 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.
- 4.30 The site lies within the HM18a land parcel, which is assessed as having a medium contribution to green belt purposes. Whilst development in this area would not present a risk of merger with other settlements, there is a risk of ribbon development from the west edge of Hexham. In addition, it forms part of the green valley corridor around the north of Hexham, contributing to the wider setting of the historic town. Developed in isolation, build out of the site would likely inflict moderate harm to the Green Belt.

#### **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

- 4.31 The site is located in an open countryside setting, unrelated to the settlement of Hexham and with agriculture the predominant land use in the site vicinity. Housing at the western extent of the settlement is located circa 800m south east of the site, with a cemetery, mature woodlands, golf course and farmland separating the site and the settlement. Residential development is proposed to the east of the site. If developed, employment development may have any impact on the amenity of local residents, and the cemetery.

#### **Conclusion**

- 4.32 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that whilst the site is largely sustainable for employment use, the use of a greenfield site, access to transport through alternative means and highways access are noted as significant constraints. The site is remote from services which employees would likely use, with the nearest services located 2.2km from the site in Hexham town centre. Agriculture is the predominant land use in the site vicinity, though, development is likely to impact upon the amenity of residents in the proposed residential area to the immediate east, and the cemetery to the north. The Green Belt Review identifies that the site currently offers a medium contribution to all of the Green Belt purposes, so loss of the site to employment development would have a moderate impact on the Green Belt around Hexham. Development of the site would establish a new employment area in open countryside unrelated to the settlement of Hexham and endorse gradual ribbon development to the west of Hexham.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	<b>3</b>
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	<b>3</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>3</b>



## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### **Ownership and availability**

- 4.33 The site has not been proposed and/or assessed for employment use through the ELR call for sites (2010). The site was indicated as a potential employment site in the SHLAA call for sites (2013). Past indications are that the landowner would support employment development on the site as part of a mixed use development to the west of Hexham including housing. The site is under single ownership but it is apparent that the landowner would be unlikely to support employment development on this site without housing also coming forward on part of this site

### **Development costs**

- 4.34 As a greenfield site, it is currently unserved by utilities (including water and sewerage) and does not contain any internal or external road access. The servicing of this site with utilities, internal roads and a new priority junction to serve the site from the B6531 are all likely to add significantly to the site's development costs.
- 4.35 It is reasonable to assume that there will be no abnormal cost associated with mitigating topography, land contamination or past mineral workings.

### **Market demand**

- 4.36 The site is located in close proximity to the B6531 / A69 junction, so it has good access to the strategic road network. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight. However, this junction has been identified as one that could benefit from upgrading. The site would enjoy prominent frontage onto a main road in and out of Hexham town centre.
- 4.37 Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, there are no nearby sensitive land uses which may unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This will appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 4.38 Evidence shows the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development ready site, which this site could address. It is apparent that the location is very appealing to the market in terms of physical accessibility and access to the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial uses.

### **Conclusion**

- 4.39 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given the proximity to the A69 and the lack of sensitive adjoining land uses. There could be some abnormal costs associated with connecting to utilities and creating a new road junction to serve the site. There is competition for investment in the local market, but the overall demand identified for the Hexham market suggests that the site would be quite attractive to the market.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>3</b>

### **Hexham Site 3 – Land south of St Andrew’s Cemetery**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Hexham Site 3</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>22</b>

## 5. Hexham Site 4 – Land north of Old Bridge End

Site Area (Ha): 9.492

Easting: 392,836.621

Northing: 565,436.653

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	50	18,984	404
B2	30	11,390.4	316
B8	20	7,593.6	108

5.1 The site is located between the River Tyne and the A69, north of Hexham, and south of Acomb. The site is open countryside close to the junction with the A6079.



### **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

### **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 5.2 The site fronts the A69 and enjoys its own dedicated access road and junction onto the strategic road network. However, this junction only permits access to and from the westbound carriageway. It is unclear whether this junction could be upgraded to enable access from the eastbound carriageway. If a solution can be found, it will significantly add to development costs and will require further discussions with Highways England.
- 5.3 Given its remoteness from the settlement of Hexham, NCC Highways have raised access for pedestrians, cyclists and pedestrians as a concern.
- 5.4 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, most notably occurring on the A6079 at the A6079 / Station Road mini-roundabout junction and the A6079 / Ferry Road junction. However, the site's location adjacent to the strategic road network means traffic generated by new development is not likely to impact upon the local road network, if an appropriate access can be achieved.

### **Conclusion**

- 5.5 While the site benefits from an access on the westbound A69, safe and appropriate access to the eastbound carriageway is not possible without a costly upgrade to this junction. Highways England would need to be consulted with regards to possible upgrades. NCC Highways have also raised concern for access by modes other than the private car, hence the lower score. In the event that an appropriate access can be achieved, given the location, development is unlikely to impact upon the local road network.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>2</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>3</b>

### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 5.6 The site is reasonably conducive to the development of large footprint buildings and is flat overall. However power lines cross the site which could sterilise some land from development.
- 5.7 The site lies within a Coal Mining Reporting Area. However, there are no known Mine Entries or Abandoned Mine Workings within the site boundary.
- 5.8 Superficial sand/gravel deposits and surface coal resources can be found across the entirety of the site. Whilst it is unlikely that this would prevent development of the site, the benefits of its prior extraction will have to be considered in accordance with relevant policies.
- 5.9 The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture farming and is classified as grade 3, which indicates "land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing

and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield”<sup>4</sup>. Subsequent assessment has not been undertaken to determine if the site falls within the A or B subcategory of grade 3. As such development of the site would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land as per annex 2 of the NPPF.

### Biodiversity

- 5.10 A desk based assessment indicates there are no protected species or habitat within the site, and therefore there are no ecological constraints which would prevent employment development on the site. However, a range of protected species has been recorded locally.
- 5.11 Woodland can be found to the south and east of the site. A small watercourse can also be found close to the site’s eastern boundary. Buffer zones are likely to be required to protect both of these features.
- 5.12 A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodlands (AWs) are all within 2km and further consultation with Natural England would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ). A HRA is likely to be required.

### Landscape and Green Infrastructure

- 5.13 The site is disconnected from the built form of Hexham. The site sits within an area of open countryside which is predominantly arable farmland. Whilst a major trunk road can be found in close proximity to the site, its detachment from Hexham means the area does not feel like urban fringe.
- 5.14 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the area within which the majority of the site is located as ‘Glacial Trough Valley Floor’ in character. Elements of this character area reflected strongly through this site and its immediate surroundings include: flat, well defined and sheltered valley floor; medium to large scale fields with mixed farming, defined by hedgerows and post and wire fencing; generally open character; and major transport communication routes in close proximity.
- 5.15 The study recommends the guiding principle for development in this area as seeking to ‘Manage’, i.e. strengthen existing characteristics and manage pressures for change. Any development could present an opportunity to seek improved management and extension of semi-natural woodland and the retention of meadows and glacial features to enhance visual diversity. However, new development extending onto the valley floor, which development of this site would represent, is discouraged, and the creation of strong settlement boundaries is encouraged.
- 5.16 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) assessed landscape sensitivity in landscape character areas and noted that the landscape within which the site sits scores relatively low when compared with other areas nearby. However, views and landmarks, recreation, condition, distinctiveness and rarity came out as the higher scoring features. Further consideration of the impact of employment development on the landscape will be required as part of any application.

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<sup>4</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988

- 5.17 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations but the site lies to the north of woodland on the northern bank of the River Tyne which represents a green corridor.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 5.18 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that the site lies within Flood Zone 2 and is therefore prone to medium probability of flooding. Whilst development should be directed to areas not at risk of flooding through a sequential testing process, commercial or industrial development on this site would not be subject to an exception test. Parts of the north and east of the site are also at low risk of surface water flooding.
- 5.19 Consultation with NWL indicates that a Water Main crosses the site. This would be required to be diverted or placed within a suitable easement. In addition, the existing building does not appear to have a connection for foul flows to the public sewerage system; a connection to the closest available sewer would require crossing two water mains and may require the provision of a new pumping station.
- 5.20 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical development area for employment to the north of Hexham does not indicate a risk of sewer flooding and/or potential capacity constraints at this location. The study also indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area, so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

#### Archaeology and historic environment

- 5.21 Several Grade II listed buildings can be found approximately 750m from the centre of the site at The Hermitage. Whilst relatively distant from the site, the impact of employment development on the setting of this asset would need to be given careful consideration by NCC Conservation and Historic England.
- 5.22 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching. There is potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity, and mitigation work will depend on the results of this initial evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 5.23 Route 501/017 can be found to the south beyond the site boundary. It is considered that all of the site can be developed without impacting on the route.

#### Conclusion

- 5.24 The site could accommodate large footprint buildings in terms of topography and site shape and size. There are no protected species or habitats on or in close proximity to the site. However, buffer zones will be required to protect mature woodland and a watercourse. The site lies within Flood Zone 2 and parts of the north and east of the site are at low risk of surface water flooding. A Water Main crosses the site, which would be required to be



diverted or placed within a suitable easement, and connection to the public sewerage system is likely to be required. Consideration will need to be given to the impact of employment development on nearby Grade II listed buildings at The Hermitage. Finally, the obvious encroachment into open countryside would likely have an impact upon the character of the surrounding landscape, and weight should be given to the Landscape Character Assessment and its recommendations that new development extending onto the valley floor should be discouraged in favour of creating strong settlement boundaries. The site is not affected by past mine workings, green infrastructure, water supply or public rights of way.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	2

#### **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

#### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

- 5.25 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that employment sites to the west of the town and the option to the south of the A69 junction with Acomb are likely to require significant junction upgrades and have a high landscape impact. Site options to the east of the town are more closely associated with existing industrial estates, and junction improvements are likely to be less expensive.
- 5.26 Many of the criterion assessed for this site scored no constraint and or a positive impact. The agricultural value of the site was identified as a potential constraint, and as the site is 100% greenfield this was considered a major issue. The site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Highways access was also noted as a major issue, given the aforementioned issues with the existing access onto the A69.
- 5.27 The site is remote from services which employees would likely use. The nearest services are located approximately 1.2km from the site, in Acomb village centre. However, given that sole access to the site is taken from the A69, a dual carriageway with no pedestrian or cycle access or safe crossing facilities, it is currently not possible to walk or cycle to access these services or services in Hexham town centre.
- 5.28 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.
- 5.29 The site lies within the HM2 land parcel, which is assessed as having a medium contribution to green belt purposes. Whilst this site is well contained by the River Tyne, the railway and A69, it could increase the risk of merger with Hexham, and there is little opportunity to provide strong, durable boundaries that would prevent encroachment on the countryside. Developed in isolation, build out of the site would likely inflict moderate harm to the Green Belt.

## **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

5.30 The site is located in an open countryside setting, albeit in close proximity to a major trunk road, unrelated to the settlement of Hexham and with agriculture the predominant land use in the site vicinity. It is located directly off, and benefits from frontage to, the A69, so it could be viewed as an “out of town” employment development with convenient access to the strategic road network. Woodlands and a water course separate the site from The Hermitage, approximately 750m to the east. The River Tyne physically separates the site from Hexham proper. It is not considered that employment development would have any impact on the amenity of adjoining uses.

### **Conclusion**

5.31 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that whilst the site is sustainable for employment use in some way, the use of a greenfield site, access to transport through alternative means and highways access are noted as significant constraints. The site is remote from services which employees would likely use and is not currently accessible by any sustainable modes. Agriculture is the predominant land use in the site vicinity and there would be no issues with compatibility of adjoining uses. The Green Belt Review identifies that the site currently offers a medium contribution to all of the Green Belt purposes, so loss of the site to employment development would have a moderate impact on the Green Belt around Hexham. Development of the site would establish a new employment area in open countryside unrelated to the settlement of Hexham.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	<b>1</b>
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	<b>3</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>4</b>

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### **Ownership and availability**

5.32 The site has not been proposed and/or assessed for employment use through the ELR call for sites (2010) or subsequent calls for sites. The site is under single private ownership. It is not clear if the site is available for employment development. It is of note however, that the site is under the same ownership as site 7, which is being actively promoted for housing.

### **Development costs**

5.33 As a greenfield site, it will require connection to some utilities and the creation of internal roads. A water main will have to be diverted or placed in suitable easement, adding to development costs. In addition, the current access road and junction from the A69 is unsuitable to serve an employment site of this scale, and it is currently unclear whether

mitigation is technically or financially feasible. Irrespective of this, any such upgrades to this junction agreed with Highways England will inevitably add significant development costs to the build out of this site for employment development.

- 5.34 It is reasonable to assume that there will be no abnormal cost associated with mitigating topography, land contamination or past mineral workings.

#### Market demand

- 5.35 The site enjoys direct access from the A69, albeit from the westbound carriageway only. Should the existing junction be upgraded to enable access eastbound as well as westbound, its proximity to the A69 could serve as a major benefit, reducing transport costs and making access easier for workers, customers and freight. The site would enjoy prominent frontage onto this busy transpennine route as well as on the River Tyne. Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, there are no nearby sensitive land uses which may unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This will appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 5.36 Evidence shows the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development ready site, which this site could address. It is apparent that the location is very appealing to the market in terms of physical accessibility and access to the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial uses.

#### Conclusion

- 5.37 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given the proximity to the A69 and the lack of sensitive adjoining land uses. There could be some abnormal costs associated with connecting to utilities and creating a new road junction to serve the site. There is competition for investment in the local market, but the overall demand identified for the Hexham market suggests that the site would be quite attractive to the market.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>2</b>

### **Hexham Site 4 – Land north of Old Bridge End**

#### **Total score**

<b>Hexham Site 4</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>17</b>

## 6. Hexham Site 5 – Land south of Egger

Site Area (Ha): 10.375

Easting: 395,140.732

Northing: 564,490.506

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	40	16,600	353
B2	40	16,600	461
B8	20	8,300	119

- 6.1 The site is located to the south of the Egger wood processing plant, between the northern bank of the River Tyne and the A69.



### **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

### **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 6.2 The site connects with the strategic highways network at the Bridge End roundabout, approximately 1.6km to the northwest. The SRN can be accessed via Ferry Road and Rotary Way.
- 6.3 The site is set back from Ferry Road, and can be accessed via an unadopted road to the south. Third party right of access will need to be secured. Pedestrian and cycle connections to the network will be required.
- 6.4 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, most notably occurring on the A6079 at the A6079 / Station Road mini-roundabout junction and the A6079 / Ferry Road junction. Modelled impacts on the A6079 / Ferry Road junction shows congestion and delays for vehicles exiting Ferry Road, as a result of the high volume of traffic using the A6079. This results in queuing on Ferry Road, made worse by the prominence slow moving HGV traffic of existing industrial premises accessed from Ferry Road.
- 6.5 Development of the site would result in additional traffic being assigned to Ferry Road, exacerbating existing queuing quite considerably. The A6079 / Ferry Road junction suffers from constraints with the proximity of the river and bridge and level differences limiting options to the south of the junction and the embankment on the western side of the A6079 making any works potentially costly to implement.
- 6.6 As a result of the constraints identified in the 2015 County Wide Transport Assessment mitigation solutions have been explored further, utilising either a roundabout or signals. These indicate that reasonable mitigation solutions are available to support additional employment development. Soft solutions around improved cycle and pedestrian access and the avoidance of shift changes at peak times could also help to alleviate congestion.

### **Conclusion**

- 6.7 While site access may be achievable, third party right of access will need to be achieved. Development will exacerbate existing problems at the A6079 / Ferry Road junction, however suitable mitigation solutions are available which allow for the site to be developed, but a funding solution will need to be found. When junction improvements are made the site would have good access to the strategic road network.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>4</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>3</b>

### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 6.8 The site is flat and conducive to the development of large footprint buildings.
- 6.9 There is no history of mining which could impact the site. However, superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across the entirety of the site. There is known interest to extract this resource in the rear future and it is apparent that the development of the site could sterilise this, and the benefits of prior extraction need to be further considered.
- 6.10 The site is currently used as pasture and is classified as grade 2 agricultural land. As such, development would result in the loss of some of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 6.11 A desk based assessment indicates there are no protected species or habitat within the site, and therefore there are no ecological constraints which would prevent employment development on the site. However, a range of protected species including great crested newts have been recorded locally.
- 6.12 Ponds can be found to the north of the site and the River Tyne to the east. A small watercourse can also be found near the southern boundary and a buffer zone may be required.
- 6.13 A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodlands (AWs) are all within 2km and further consultation with Natural England would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ).

#### **Landscape and Green Infrastructure**

- 6.14 The site is disconnected from the built form of Hexham, but sits adjacent to the Egger manufacturing plant.
- 6.15 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies that the site is of landscape character type 30: Glacial Trough Valley Floor; and is located with character area 30b. The study indicates that the overall approach should be to manage change while seeking to conserve and locally enhance character, taking advantage of opportunities offered by new development.
- 6.16 The study indicates that retention of meadows on the valley floor and protection of glacial features should be encouraged in order to enhance the visual diversity and topography of this landscape. It indicates that new built development should be discouraged from extending onto the valley floor, that strong settlement boundaries should be created, and that the approach routes, key views and gateways to settlements should be given particular consideration.

- 6.17 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) identifies that there are areas of lower sensitivity east of the Bridge End Industrial Estate. The site is located south of this area closer to the river. The landscape in this location is considered more sensitive to development.
- 6.18 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations; however the site lies close to the River Tyne which forms a green corridor.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 6.19 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that the site lies within Flood Zone 3a and is therefore at high risk of flooding. Offices, general industry and storage and distribution uses are however considered less vulnerable to flooding, and are compatible with this flood zone. There are flood defences in place along the northern bank of the River Tyne.
- 6.20 Small areas of the site are susceptible to surface water flooding.
- 6.21 The site extends to the boundary of a sewage treatment works. This has the potential to conflict with future expansion of the work. Consultation with NWL indicates that the existing sewage network is to the north of the Egger plant and could be accessed via an off-site sewer. However, it may be possible to take flows direct to the sewage treatment works.
- 6.22 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical development area for employment to the north of Hexham does not indicate a risk of sewer flooding and/or potential capacity constraints at this location. The study also indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area, so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

#### Archaeology and historic environment

- 6.23 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 6.24 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching. There is potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity, and mitigation work will depend on the results of this initial evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 6.25 The site is not impacted by public rights of way.

#### Conclusion

- 6.26 The presence of a sand and gravel resource (with a known interest in extraction), the potential loss of grade 2 agricultural land, potential restriction of expansion of the sewage treatment works, and the landscape impact of development are the main constraints to development. The encroachment into open countryside would likely have an impact upon the character of the surrounding landscape, and weight should be given to the Landscape

Character Assessment and its recommendations that new development extending onto the valley floor should be discouraged in favour of creating strong settlement boundaries.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	2

#### **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

#### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

- 6.27 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that the site scores highly against a number of the criteria considered. Criteria against which a major issue was identified was in relation the existing the distance from a train station, agricultural land and land use, due to the site being greenfield land. Minor issues were identified in relation to distance to a bus stop, highways access, fluvial flood risk, local wildlife and infrastructure constraints. These issues are examined in more detail in other sections.
- 6.28 The site is located approximately 2.2km from Hexham town centre. While there are footpaths adjacent to road for much of the distance, Ferry Road does not benefit from footpaths towards the site. The town centre contains a range of services which will be complementary for both staff and businesses. However, the site is not well connected to the centre. In terms of supply of labour the site is accessible from adjoining settlements. The site is some distance from residential areas. The nearest bus stops are on Ferry Road approximately 650m away.
- 6.29 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.
- 6.30 The site is located within land parcel area HM03a – Anickgrange Haugh which covers the area south and east of the Egger plant. The assessment identifies that the LPA makes an overall medium contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt.
- 6.31 It indicates that there is a risk of non-compact development adjacent to the Egger plant but that this would be limited by the River Tyne and the A69, that risk of merger with Corbridge is limited in that the western part of the LPA is well contained by meanders in the river. It indicates that field boundaries create opportunities to provide strong durable boundaries, but that glimpsed from the A69, the LPA contributes to the wider setting of the historic town.
- 6.32 Given that the site represents the western part of the LPA, adjacent to Egger and the sewage treatment works, and is partly shielded from the A69, the contribution that the site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt are less that the LPA as a whole.



## **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

- 6.33 The site is located south of the Egger wood products plant, and east of a sewage works. General industrial and storage uses would be compatible with these uses, although office development may not be so compatible due to odours from the above.

### **Conclusion**

- 6.34 Most employment uses are compatible with existing neighbouring land uses. Given the proximity of the Egger plant and sewage works, the impact of development on the Green Belt will be limited. The site is not however well connected to the settlement, and would result in the loss of grade 2 agricultural land.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	<b>2</b>
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	<b>3</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>4</b>

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### **Ownership and availability**

- 6.35 The site has not been proposed and/or assessed for employment use through the ELR call for sites (2010) or later calls for sites.
- 6.36 The site was identified as a potential employment site by Council officers. The site is known to be in private ownership and the lands deeds indicate that it is optioned by Egger for further expansion. However, there is a known interest to work the site to extract the sand mineral resource which may mean that the site is not available within the plan period for employment use.

### **Development costs**

- 6.37 Securing access rights to the public highway, and the provision of footpath and cycle connections will add to development costs. Contribution to the upgrading of the junction could add significantly to development costs and alternative funding would likely be needed.

### **Market demand**

- 6.38 The Employment Land and Premises Demand Study (2015) indicates that the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development ready site, which this site could address.
- 6.39 The location of the site, close to the A69 will be attractive to businesses, as long as local highway constraints can be addressed. The lack of conflict with existing uses will make the

site attractive for general industry and storage, although its location adjacent to a sewage works and wood processing plant may reduce the appeal to some end users and make it unsuitable for office development.

#### Conclusion

- 6.40 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given demand for space in Hexham, the proximity to the A69 and the lack of sensitive adjoining land uses. Development costs may be significant but not prohibitive, assuming that the junction improvements at Ferry Road can be delivered through to support the development. However, the site may not be available in the plan period owing to possible mineral extraction.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>3</b>

#### Hexham Site 5 – Land south of Egger

#### Total score

<b>Hexham Site 5</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>21</b>

## 7. Hexham Site 6 – Land at Harwood Meadows

Site Area (Ha): 9.827

Eastin: 395,441.162

Northing: 564,925.519

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	40	15,723.2	335
B2	40	15,723.2	437
B8	20	7,861.6	112

- 7.1 The site is located to the east of the Egger wood processing plant, on the northern side of the River Tyne, immediately south the A69.



### **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

### **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 7.2 The site connects with the strategic highways network at the Bridge End roundabout, approximately 1.6km to the northwest. The SRN can be accessed via Ferry Road and Rotary Way.
- 7.3 The site benefits from direct access to Ferry Road. Due to the nature of the road, a priority junction is likely to be required. Pedestrian and cycle connections to the network will be required.
- 7.4 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, most notably occurring on the A6079 at the A6079 / Station Road mini-roundabout junction and the A6079 / Ferry Road junction.
- 7.5 Modelled impacts on the A6079 / Ferry Road junction shows congestion and delays for vehicles exiting Ferry Road, as a result of the high volume of traffic using the A6079. This results in queuing on Ferry Road, made worse by the prominence slow moving HGV traffic of existing industrial premises accessed from Ferry Road.
- 7.6 As a result of the constraints identified in the 2015 County Wide Transport Assessment mitigation solutions have been explored further, utilising either a roundabout or signals. These indicate that reasonable mitigation solutions are available to support additional employment development. Soft solutions around improved cycle and pedestrian access and the avoidance of shift changes at peak times could also help to alleviate congestion.

### **Conclusion**

- 7.7 While site access may be achievable, third party right of access will need to be achieved. Development will exacerbate existing problems at the A6079 / Ferry Road junction, however suitable mitigation solutions are available which allow for the site to be developed, but a funding solution will need to be found. When junction improvements are made the site would have good access to the strategic road network.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>4</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>3</b>

### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 7.8 The site is largely flat and conducive to the development of large footprint buildings.
- 7.9 There is no history of mining which could impact the site. However, superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across the entirety of the site. There is known interest to extract this resource in the rear future and it is apparent that the development of the site could sterilise this, and the benefits of prior extraction need to be further considered. It is indicated that the resource could be extracted and still allow for the site to accommodate employment development.

- 7.10 The site is currently used for agricultural and is identified as grade 2 and 3, with the majority being grade 2. This indicates that the development of the site would result in the loss of high grade agricultural land.

#### Biodiversity

- 7.11 A desk based assessment indicates there are no protected species or habitat within the site, and therefore there are no ecological constraints which would prevent employment development on the site. However, a range of protected species including great crested newts have been recorded locally.
- 7.12 Ponds can be found to the north of the site and the River Tyne to the east. A small watercourse can also be found near the southern boundary and a buffer zone may be required.
- 7.13 A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodlands (AWs) are all within 2km and further consultation with Natural England would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ).

#### Landscape and Green Infrastructure

- 7.14 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies that the site is of landscape character type 30: Glacial Trough Valley Floor; and is located with character area 30b. The study indicates that the overall approach should be to manage change while seeking to conserve and locally enhance character, taking advantage of opportunities offered by new development.
- 7.15 The study indicates that retention of meadows on the valley floor and protection of glacial features should be encouraged in order to enhance the visual diversity and topography of this landscape. It indicates that new built development should be discouraged from extending onto the valley floor, that strong settlement boundaries should be created, and that the approach routes, key views and gateways to settlements should be given particular consideration.
- 7.16 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) identifies that there are areas of lower sensitivity east of the Bridge End Industrial Estate. The site is partly located in this area but extends further to the east, so the landscape impact may be significant. The site is currently detached from the existing industrial uses along Ferry Road. However, with the development of the Egger expansion site, the site would represent an extension of this.
- 7.17 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations or corridors.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 7.18 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that the southern and central parts of the site lie within Flood Zone 3a and is therefore at high risk of flooding. Offices, general industry and storage and distribution uses are however considered less

vulnerable to flooding, and are compatible with this flood zone. There are flood defences in place along the northern bank of the River Tyne.

- 7.19 A significant proportion of the site is susceptible to surface water flooding.
- 7.20 Consultation with NWL indicates that foul flows could be directed to an existing manhole via an off-site sewer. However, it may be possible to take flows direct to the sewage treatment works.
- 7.21 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical development area for employment to the north of Hexham does not indicate a risk of sewer flooding and/or potential capacity constraints at this location. The study also indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area, so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

#### Archaeology and historic environment

- 7.22 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 7.23 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching. There is potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity, and mitigation work will depend on the results of this initial evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 7.24 The site is not impacted by public rights of way.

#### Conclusion

- 7.25 The presence of sand and gravel resource, the potential loss of high grade agricultural land, and the landscape impact of development are the main constraints to development. The indicated timescales for the extraction of the mineral resource suggest that this could be done and still enable employment development on the site within the plan timeframe.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	3

#### **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

#### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

- 7.26 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that the site scores highly against a number of the criteria considered. Criteria against which a major issue was identified was in relation to the existing distance from a train station, agricultural land and land use, due to the site being greenfield land. Minor issues were identified in relation to highways access, fluvial flood risk, local wildlife and infrastructure constraints. These issues are examined in more detail in other sections.

- 7.27 The site is located approximately 2.2km from Hexham town centre. While there are footpaths adjacent to road for much of the distance, Ferry Road does not benefit from footpaths towards the site. The town centre contains a range of services which will be complementary for both staff and businesses. However, the site is not well connected to the centre. In terms of supply of labour the site is accessible from adjoining settlements. The site is some distance from residential areas. The nearest bus stop is on Ferry Road, close to the site.
- 7.28 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.
- 7.29 The site is located within land parcel area HM03a – Anickgrange Haugh which covers the area south and east of the Egger plant. The assessment identifies that the LPA makes an overall medium contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt.
- 7.30 It indicates that there is a risk of non-compact development adjacent to the Egger plant but that this would be limited by the River Tyne and the A69, that risk of merger with Corbridge is limited in that the western part of the LPA is well contained by meanders in the river. It indicates that field boundaries create opportunities to provide strong durable boundaries, but that glimpsed from the A69, the LPA contributes to the wider setting of the historic town.
- 7.31 The site represents the northeast corner of the LPA. While the site is adjacent to the Egger expansion area it does represent an eastward extension of development into an area which is characterised by its openness. Robust, defensible boundaries will need to be created to minimise encroachment into the countryside.

#### **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

- 7.32 The site is located east of the Egger wood processing plant, and south of the A69. There are no conflicts with neighbouring uses.

#### **Conclusion**

- 7.33 Most employment uses are compatible with existing neighbouring land uses. Given the proximity of the Egger plant the impact of development on the Green Belt is less than may otherwise be the case. The site is not however well connected to the town centre.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	<b>2</b>
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	<b>3</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>4</b>

### **Criterion Ownership and availability**

- 7.34 The site has not been proposed and/or assessed for employment use through the ELR call for sites (2010) or subsequent, calls for sites.
- 7.35 The site was identified as a potential employment site by Council officers. The site is known to be in private ownership and the lands deeds indicate that it is optioned by Egger for further expansion. However, there is a known interest to work the site to extract the sand mineral resource, but given the required timescales indicated to remove the resource, the site could still deliver employment growth in the plan period.

### **Development costs**

- 7.36 The cost of the providing suitable access and footpath and cycle connections will add to development costs, as will utility connections. Contribution to the upgrading of the junction could add significantly to development costs and alternative funding would likely be needed. However restoration of the site after mineral extraction could be an opportunity to provide a new site access and prepare the site for employment use.

### **Market demand**

- 7.37 The Employment Land and Premises Demand Study (2015) indicates that the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development ready site, which this site could address.
- 7.38 The location of the site, close to the A69 will be attractive to businesses, as long as local highway constraints can be addressed. The lack of conflict with existing uses will make the site attractive for general industry and storage, although its location adjacent to the wood processing plant may reduce the appeal to some end users, especially offices.

### **Conclusion**

- 7.39 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given demand for space in Hexham, the proximity to the A69 and the lack of sensitive adjoining land uses. Development costs may be significant but not prohibitive, assuming that funding of the road improvements is supported through other means. The site is available for employment uses, but likely only after extraction of the site's mineral resource.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>4</b>



## Hexham Site 6 – Land at Harwood Meadows

### Total score

Hexham Site 6	
Total site score	23

## 8. Hexham Site 7 – Land at the Hermitage (1)

Site Area (Ha): 5.107

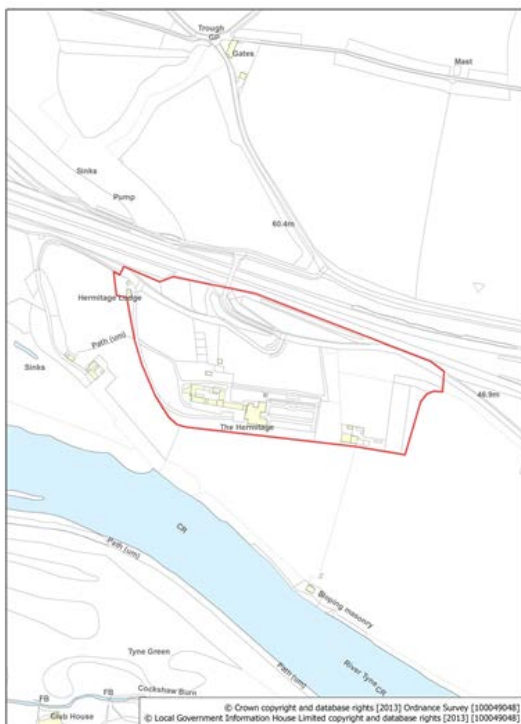
Easting: 393,661.492

Northing: 565,222.971

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	80	16,342.4	1361
B1c	10	2,042.8	43
B8	10	2,042.8	29

- 8.1 The site is located between the River Tyne and the A69, and is centred upon the Hermitage, and listed residential property and its associated buildings. The site contains a number of mature deciduous trees.



## **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

## **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 8.2 The site connects with the strategic highways network at the Bridge End roundabout, approximately 750m to the northwest. Access is via a minor road off the Rotary Way, or via a minor road over a narrow bridge over the A69.
- 8.3 The access road to the site is unsuitable for industrial use and turning movements are restricted. In order to access the site from Rotary Way, traffic from the A69 would need to enter Hexham or order to turn around which would be undesirable.
- 8.4 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, most notably occurring on the A6079 at the A6079 / Station Road mini-roundabout junction and the A6079 / Ferry Road junction. Modelled impacts on the A6079 / Ferry Road junction shows congestion and delays for vehicles exiting Ferry Road, as a result of the high volume of traffic using the A6079. This results in queuing on Ferry Road, made worse by the prominence slow moving HGV traffic of existing industrial premises accessed from Ferry Road.
- 8.5 Development of the site would result in additional traffic being assigned to Ferry Road, exacerbating existing queuing quite considerably. The A6079 / Ferry Road junction suffers from constraints with the proximity of the river and bridge and level differences limiting options to the south of the junction and the embankment on the western side of the A6079 making any works potentially costly to implement.
- 8.6 As a result of the constraints identified in the 2015 County Wide Transport Assessment mitigation solutions have been explored further, utilising either a roundabout or signals. These indicate that reasonable mitigation solutions are available to support additional employment development off the Ferry Road junction. However, it is apparent that the possible mitigation measures may not benefit the site as the roundabout or signals would not be located adjacent to the site entrance. Therefore entrance to the site from the A69 would still require a right hand turn across traffic, or turning on either existing roundabouts south of the Tyne or a possible new one further south on Ferry Road. This would essentially send further traffic into the town centre and exacerbate existing congestion and existing infrastructure would be unsuitable for turning HGVs. In addition the access road is not suitable for employment traffic and would require substantial upgrading.

## **Conclusion**

- 8.7 Appropriate highway access cannot be achieved. Potential means of access would also exacerbate existing problems on congested junctions on the approach to Hexham.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>2</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>2</b>

### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 8.8 The site is largely flat and conducive to the development of large footprint buildings, however the land occupied by and the positioning of listed buildings would restrict the area of the site which could accommodate such development.
- 8.9 Superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across the entirety of the site. Whilst it is unlikely that this would prevent development of the site, the benefits of its prior extraction will have to be considered in accordance with relevant policies.
- 8.10 The site is currently used for agriculture and is identified as grade 3 agricultural land. As such development of the site would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land as per annex 2 of the NPPF.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 8.11 A desk based assessment indicates there are bats and red squirrels recorded on or adjacent to the site. A number of other protected species, including great crested newts have been recorded locally. The River Tyne is located approximately 50m to the south.
- 8.12 A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodlands (AWs) are all within 2km and further consultation with Natural England would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ). A HRA is likely to be required.

#### **Landscape and Green Infrastructure**

- 8.13 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies that the site is of landscape character type 30: Glacial Trough Valley Floor; and is located with character area 30b. The study indicates that the overall approach should be to manage change while seeking to conserve and locally enhance character, taking advantage of opportunities offered by new development.
- 8.14 The study indicates that the conservation of historic parks and gardens, and the management of semi-natural woodland should be encouraged. The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) identifies the green area, within which the site is located, as being a key landscape characteristic of Hexham.
- 8.15 Development would not impact on green infrastructure designations, although the site does represent a continuation of green space along the Tyne valley.

#### **Flooding and water management infrastructure**

- 8.16 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that the western edge of the site lie within Flood Zone 3a and is therefore at high risk of flooding. Offices, general industry and storage and distribution uses are however considered less vulnerable to flooding, and are compatible with this flood zone. Small areas of the site are susceptible to surface water flooding.

- 8.17 Consultation with NWL indicates that there is no existing sewerage infrastructure in the vicinity of the site.
- 8.18 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical development area for employment to the north of Hexham does not indicate a risk of sewer flooding and/or potential capacity constraints at this location. The study also indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area, so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

#### Archaeology and historic environment

- 8.19 The Hermitage, a series of grade II listed buildings lies within the centre of the site. Development will have the potential to impact on the listed building, its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Whilst the buildings could potentially be sensitively converted for office use, their position at the centre of the site and the clear adverse impact adjacent employment development would have, essentially sterilises the site. A Heritage Statement would be required and should inform the design of any development.
- 8.20 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching. There is potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity, and mitigation work will depend on the results of this initial evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 8.21 The site is not impacted by public rights of way, although a byway forms the north eastern boundary of the site.

#### Conclusion

- 8.22 The presence of protected species on or adjacent to the site, a lack of sewerage infrastructure, server heritage constraints, and the impact that development will have on the green space which is identified as a key characteristic of Hexham, are the main constraints to development.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	2

#### **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

#### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

- 8.23 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that the site scores highly against a number of the criteria considered. Criteria against which a major issue was identified was in relation to highways access and heritage assets. Minor issues were identified in relation to the distance

to a bus stop, distance to a railway station, SSSI, land use and marketability. These issues are examined in more detail in other sections.

- 8.24 The site is located approximately 1.7km from Hexham town centre. While there are footpaths adjacent to road for much of the distance, the access road from Rotary Way does not have footpaths. The route to the town centre is beside a busy main road. The town centre contains a range of services which will be complementary for both staff and businesses. However, the site is not well connected to the centre. In terms of supply of labour the site is accessible from adjoining settlements. The site is some distance from residential areas. The nearest bus stops are at the Egger plant to the east, or Hexham railway station, approximately 1.5km away.
- 8.25 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.
- 8.26 The site is located within land parcel area HM02 – The Hermitage which extends from Rotary way in the east to where the A69 crosses the River Tyne in the west. The assessment identifies that the LPA makes an overall medium contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt.
- 8.27 The assessment identifies that while the LPA is contained by road and the river, there is a risk of non-compact development. It identifies that there is little opportunity to provide strong durable boundaries to prevent encroachment into the countryside, and that the recreational use of the historic ornamental parkland means the LPA contributes to the wider setting of the town.
- 8.28 The LPA represents only a small part of the LPA, and does currently contain a number of structures. However, the LPA assessment is considered applicable to the site too.

#### **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

- 8.29 The site is occupied in part by the Hermitage, a residential property, not currently is use. There is no conflict with neighbouring uses.

#### **Conclusion**

- 8.30 While there is not conflict with neighbouring uses, the site makes a significant contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt and is not well connected, or related to the town.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	<b>2</b>
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	<b>3</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>4</b>

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### **Ownership and availability**

- 8.31 The site was proposed for employment use through the ELR call for sites (2010). The site is under single ownership. However, since the ELR call for sites was undertaken it has become apparent that the landowner has aspirations to develop the site for housing (SHLAA site 8042). As such it not considered that the site is now available for employment use.

### **Development costs**

- 8.32 While it may not be possible to achieve appropriate access, if a transport solution can be found it is likely to be prohibitively expensive, as it would require junction and access road improvements. The length of the access road in particular could result in substantial costs. Provision of sewerage infrastructure into this area will increase costs.

### **Market demand**

- 8.33 The Employment Land and Premises Demand Study (2015) indicates that the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This is has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development ready site, which this site could address.
- 8.34 The location of the site, close to the A69 will be attractive to businesses. However, the constrained nature of the site may reduce its market demand as it would restrict how the site could be developed. However, it may still be attractive to conversion for small scale offices.

### **Conclusion**

- 8.35 While demand for space in Hexham is high, and the proximity to the A69 will be attractive to the market, the constrained nature of the site will make it less appealing to end users. Development costs may be prohibitive, even if appropriate access can be achieved. The site is also considered to be unavailable given clear aspirations for residential development.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>3</b>

## **Hexham Site 7 – Land at the Hermitage**

### **Total score**

<b>Hexham Site 7</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>18</b>

## 9. Hexham Site 8 – Land at the Hermitage (2)

Site Area (Ha): 10.698

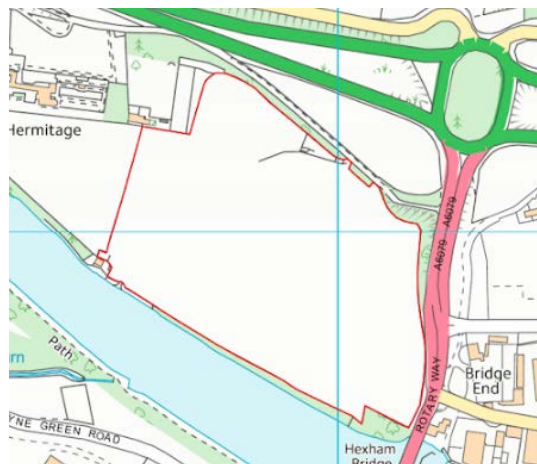
Easting: 393,933.340

Northing: 564,978.910

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	80	51,350	4668
B1c	10	4,279.2	91
B8	10	4,279.2	61

- 8.1 The site is located between the River Tyne and the A69, and is east of the Hermitage, a listed residential property and its associated buildings. The site contains a number of mature deciduous trees.





## **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

## **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 9.2 The site is close to the strategic highways network at the Bridge End roundabout, to the northwest. Access at present is via a minor road off the Rotary Way, or via a minor road over a narrow bridge over the A69.
- 9.3 The access road to the site is unsuitable for industrial use and turning movements are restricted. In order to access the site from Rotary Way, traffic from the A69 would need to enter Hexham or order to turn around which would be undesirable, unless a major junction improvement (that between Ferry Road and Rotary Way) were improved.
- 9.4 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, most notably occurring on the A6079 at the A6079 / Station Road mini-roundabout junction and the A6079 / Ferry Road junction. Modelled impacts on the A6079 / Ferry Road junction shows congestion and delays for vehicles exiting Ferry Road, as a result of the high volume of traffic using the A6079. This results in queuing on Ferry Road, made worse by the prominence slow moving HGV traffic of existing industrial premises accessed from Ferry Road.
- 9.5 Development of the site would result in additional traffic being assigned to Ferry Road, exacerbating existing queuing quite considerably. The A6079 / Ferry Road junction suffers from constraints with the proximity of the river and bridge and level differences limiting options to the south of the junction and the embankment on the western side of the A6079 making any works potentially costly to implement.
- 9.6 As a result of the constraints identified in the 2015 County Wide Transport Assessment mitigation solutions have been explored further, utilising either a roundabout or signals. These indicate that reasonable mitigation solutions are available to support additional employment development off the Ferry Road junction. However, it is apparent that the possible mitigation measures may not benefit the site as the roundabout or signals would not be located adjacent to the site entrance. Therefore entrance to the site from the A69 would still require a right hand turn across traffic, or turning on either existing roundabouts south of the Tyne or a possible new one further south on Ferry Road. This would essentially send further traffic into the town centre and exacerbate existing congestion and existing infrastructure would be unsuitable for turning HGVs. In addition the access road is not suitable for employment traffic and would require substantial upgrading.

## **Conclusion**

- 9.7 Appropriate highway access cannot be achieved without major strategic highway works. Potential means of access would also exacerbate existing problems on congested junctions on the approach to Hexham.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>2</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>2</b>

### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 9.8 The site is largely flat and conducive to the development of large footprint buildings.
- 9.9 Superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across the entirety of the site. Whilst it is unlikely that this would prevent development of the site, the benefits of its prior extraction will have to be considered in accordance with relevant policies.
- 9.10 The site is currently used for agriculture and is identified as grade 3 agricultural land. As such development of the site would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land as per annex 2 of the NPPF.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 9.11 A desk based assessment of an adjacent site indicates there are bats and red squirrels recorded on or adjacent to the site. A number of other protected species, including great crested newts have been recorded locally. The River Tyne is located immediately to the south.
- 9.12 A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodlands (AWs) are all within 2km and further consultation with Natural England would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ). A HRA is likely to be required.

#### **Landscape and Green Infrastructure**

- 9.13 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies that the site is of landscape character type 30: Glacial Trough Valley Floor; and is located with character area 30b. The study indicates that the overall approach should be to manage change while seeking to conserve and locally enhance character, taking advantage of opportunities offered by new development.
- 9.14 The study indicates that the conservation of historic parks and gardens, and the management of semi-natural woodland should be encouraged. The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) identifies the green area, within which the site is located, as being a key landscape characteristic of Hexham.
- 9.15 Development would not impact on green infrastructure designations, although the site does represent a continuation of green space along the Tyne valley.

#### **Flooding and water management infrastructure**

- 9.16 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that only the southern edge of the site lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3a and is therefore at risk of flooding. Offices, general industry and storage and distribution uses are however considered less vulnerable to flooding, and are compatible with this flood zone. An east-west strip along the central part of the site is susceptible to surface water flooding.

- 9.17 Consultation with NWL regarding an adjacent site indicated that there is no existing sewerage infrastructure in the vicinity of the site.
- 9.18 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical development area for employment to the north of Hexham does not indicate a risk of sewer flooding and/or potential capacity constraints at this location. The study also indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area, so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

#### Archaeology and historic environment

- 9.19 The Hermitage, a series of grade II listed buildings, lies west of the site, including the Grade II Garden Cottage immediately adjacent. Development could have the potential to impact on their setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess. A Heritage Statement may to inform the design of any development.
- 9.20 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching. There is potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity, and mitigation work will depend on the results of this initial evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 9.21 A Bridleway, (PROW 501/023) skirts the north of the site.

#### Conclusion

- 9.22 The presence of protected species on or adjacent to the site, a lack of sewerage infrastructure, server heritage constraints, and the impact that development will have on the green space which is identified as a key characteristic of Hexham, are the main constraints to development.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	2

#### **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

#### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

- 9.23 The Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the Pre-Submission Draft of the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy (2015) indicated that an adjacent site scores highly against a number of the criteria considered. Criteria against which a major issue was identified was in relation to highways access and heritage assets. Minor issues were identified in relation to the distance to a bus stop, distance to a railway station, SSSI, land use and marketability. These issues are examined in more detail in other sections.
- 9.24 The site is located approximately 1km from Hexham town centre. While there are footpaths adjacent to road for much of the distance, the access road from Rotary Way does not have

footpaths. The route to the town centre is beside a busy main road. The town centre contains a range of services which will be complementary for both staff and businesses. Some services have been located, such as a coffee shop have been located at Bridge End, about 200 metres from the site. However, the site is not well connected to the centre. In terms of supply of labour the site is accessible from adjoining settlements. The site is some distance from residential areas. The nearest bus stops are at the Egger plant to the east, or Hexham railway station, approximately 750m away.

- 9.25 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.
- 9.26 The site is located within land parcel area HM02 – The Hermitage which extends from Rotary way in the east to where the A69 crosses the River Tyne in the west. The assessment identifies that the LPA makes an overall medium contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt.
- 9.27 The assessment identifies that while the LPA is contained by road and the river, there is a risk of non-compact development. It identifies that there is little opportunity to provide strong durable boundaries to prevent encroachment into the countryside, and that the recreational use of the historic ornamental parkland means the LPA contributes to the wider setting of the town.
- 9.28 The site represents only a small part of the LPA but the LPA assessment is considered applicable to the site too.

#### **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

- 9.29 The site adjoins buildings associated with the Hermitage but there should be no conflict with neighbouring uses.

#### **Conclusion**

- 9.30 While there is not conflict with neighbouring uses, the site makes a significant contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt and is not well connected, or related to the town.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	<b>3</b>
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	<b>3</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>4</b>

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### **Ownership and availability**

9.31 The site was proposed for employment use through the ELR call for sites (2010). The site is under single ownership. However, since the ELR call for sites was undertaken it has become apparent that the landowner has aspirations to develop the site for housing or mixed uses. It has been included in this assessment due to the mixed use element, although it is clear that the intention is not for B-class uses. As such it not considered that the site is truly available for employment use.

### **Development costs**

9.32 While it may not be possible to achieve appropriate access, if a transport solution can be found it is could prove expensive, as it would require junction and access road improvements. There is also a change in levels that could add further to the cost. Provision of sewerage infrastructure into this area will increase costs.

### **Market demand**

9.33 The Employment Land and Premises Demand Study (2015) indicates that the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This is has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development ready site, which this site could address.

9.34 The location of the site, close to the A69 will be attractive to businesses. However, the constrained nature of the site may reduce its market demand as it would restrict how the site could be developed. However, it may still be attractive to conversion for small scale offices.

### **Conclusion**

9.35 While demand for space in Hexham is high, and the proximity to the A69 will be attractive to the market, the constrained nature of the site will make it less appealing to end users. Development costs may be prohibitive, even if appropriate access can be achieved. The site is also considered to be unavailable given clear aspirations for residential development.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>3</b>

## **Hexham Site 8 – Land at the Hermitage 2**

### **Total score**

<b>Hexham Site 8</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>19</b>

## 10. Hexham Site 9 – Land East of Hexham and South of the A695

Site Area (Ha): 21.494

Easting: 396,107.780

Northing: 563,667.920

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	80	103,200	9381
B1c	10	8,600	182
B8	10	8,600	122

10.1 The site is located east of the built-up area of Hexham on the Corbridge Road (A695) the River Tyne and the A69, and is east of the Hermitage, a listed residential property and its associated buildings. The site contains a number of mature deciduous trees.



### **Criterion 1: Strategic Road Access**

### **Criterion 2: Local Road Access and Impact**

- 10.2 The site is on an A-class road. In order to reach the strategic highway network, it is necessary to pass through the town of Hexham to the west or via the A695.
- 10.3 The County Wide Transport Assessment identifies that Hexham is known to suffer from peak period congestion, including substantial queues at key junctions. So industrial traffic passing through the town could encounter delays.
- 10.4 Access road to the site itself from the A69 would be possible but a new junction would be necessary.

### **Conclusion**

- 10.5 Appropriate highway access to the site could be achieved, with a new junction appropriate to the volume of development on the site. While the local road system is good, heavy traffic seeking to access the main road network would need to pass through the congested centre of Hexham or travel some 5 kilometres via the narrow streets of Corbridge.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>2</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>3</b>

### **Criterion 3: Site Characteristics and Development Constraints**

#### **Ground conditions**

- 10.6 The site slopes from south to north, which would preclude the largest footprint buildings.
- 10.7 Superficial sand/gravel deposits can be found across the northern third of the site. Whilst it is unlikely that this would prevent development of the site, the benefits of its prior extraction may need to be considered in accordance with relevant policies.
- 10.8 The site is currently used for agriculture and the northern third is identified as grade 2, some of the best in the County, while the remainder is grade 3 agricultural land. As such development of the site could be seen as resulting in the loss of some of the best and most versatile agricultural land as per annex 2 of the NPPF.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 10.9 There are no designations in the immediate vicinity of the site, however it is known that there is wildlife interest in the area. The site lies within a Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zone, however, the nearest SSSIs are located a significant distance away.
- 10.10 Ancient Woodlands exist within 1km and further consultation with Natural England could be required.

### Landscape and Green Infrastructure

- 10.11 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the northern part of the site as being of landscape character type 30: Glacial Trough Valley Floor; and as being located with character area 30b. The study indicates that the overall approach should be to manage change while seeking to conserve and locally enhance character, taking advantage of opportunities offered by new development. The conservation of historic parks and gardens, and the management of semi-natural woodland should be encouraged.
- 10.12 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the southern part of the site as being of landscape character type 31: Glacial Trough Valley Sides; and as being located with character area 31d. The study indicates that the overall approach should be to manage change while discouraging new built development from extending onto upper valley sides, and encourage the creation of good settlement boundaries. The setting of towns is seen as especially important, with approach routes, key views and gateways to settlements needing to be given particular consideration.
- 10.13 Therefore, while the site lies on a side of Hexham with lower landscape sensitivity than other edges of the town (see the Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010)), the character of the landscape can only be preserved if development on this edge of the settlement, on a key route in, is carefully managed, with building not stretching up the sloping area and any new building recognising the need for a well-designed settlement edge in terms of built form and landscaping associated with it.
- 10.14 Development would not impact on green infrastructure designations.

### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 10.15 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates no part of the site as being in Flood Zones 2 or above. There are no particular surface water issues except in the extreme NW corner of the site. Clearly, being on a hillside, there is a need to be vigilant that development does not exacerbate any surface water drainage issues from the hillside above.
- 10.16 The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) indicates that the site is within the Kielder Water Resource Area, so there is no issue in terms of water supply.

### Archaeology and historic environment

- 10.17 The closest listed building is the Grade II Red Lion House to the west.
- 10.18 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, a pre-determination evaluation will be required in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the remit of which could include field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching.

### Rights of way

- 10.19 A public footpath, (PROW 534/032) skirts the western side of the site.



## Conclusion

10.20 The main constraint from a natural and historic environment point of view would be likely to be the proximity of wooded areas, (including nearby ancient woodland), and the possibility of protected species being indirectly affected). The landscape considerations could also form strong arguments against buildings extending all the way to the upper (southern) end of the site, while anything close to the A695 would need to be carefully designed to blend with local character and provide an enhanced settlement edge. This lower part of the site also provides good quality agricultural land which should only be lost to development if there are no alternatives.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	2

## **Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services**

### **Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors**

10.21 In terms of sustainability, the site lies over 2 kilometres from the centre of Hexham with no intervening shops or related services, although it does lie on an existing bus route that can be seen as relatively frequent in a rural context. The proximity to an A-class road from which vehicular access could be provided could be seen as a plus factor.

10.22 The site is adjacent to the most easterly (newly built) residential areas of the town.

10.23 The site falls within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.

10.24 The site is located within land parcel area HM13 and the contribution to the Green Belt is high for reasons of historic town settings and views between Hexham and Corbridge

## **Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining land uses**

10.25 The site adjoins open countryside as well as some new housing. Depending on the eventual uses, there could be conflict, although the site is large enough to offer the opportunity for suitable buffer treatments.

## Conclusion

10.26 The site makes a significant contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt and is only moderately well connected, or related to the town.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 4: Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	4
Criterion 5: Sustainability and planning factors	3
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	3

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### Ownership and availability

10.27 The site is under single ownership. It is apparent that the landowner has aspirations to develop the site for housing or mixed uses, which could include offices, light industry and commercial. It has been included in this assessment due to the mixed use element. As such it not considered that the site is truly available for employment use in its entirety, although some employment could be included, should it be developed.

### Development costs

10.28 It may not be too costly to achieve appropriate access. The slope of the site could add slightly to development costs. The site is an agricultural field and would need to be provided with all access roads, sewerage and other utilities-related infrastructure.

### Market demand

10.29 The Employment Land and Premises Demand Study (2015) indicates that the Hexham market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. This is has been restricted in the past by poor access and lack of a development ready site, which this site could address.

10.30 The location of the site, away from the A69 will be somewhat less attractive to businesses, from an accessibility point of view, than other parts of the town. However, the landscape and attractiveness of the site could balance this the other way.

### Conclusion

10.31 While demand for space in Hexham is high, the appeal to end users will depend on their attitude towards the need for easy access from the main trunk road system and the attractiveness of the site itself.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>3</b>

### **Hexham Site 9 – – Land East of Hexham and South of the A695**

#### **Total score**

<b>Hexham Site 9</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>20</b>

## 11. Hexham Total Site Scores

<i>Site reference</i>	Site name	Strategic Road Access	Local Road Access and congestion	Site characteristics and development constraints	Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour	Sustainability and planning factors	Compatibility of adjoining uses	Market attractiveness	Total site score
1	Land north east of Highwood Farm	4	4	2	2	2	4	3	22
2	Land east of Highwood Farm	4	4	2	2	2	4	3	21
3	Land south of St Andrew's Cemetery	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	22
4	Land north of Old Bridge End	2	3	2	1	3	4	2	17
5	Land south of Egger	4	3	2	2	3	4	3	21
6	Land at Harwood Meadows	4	3	3	2	3	4	4	23
7	Land at the Hermitage 1	2	2	2	2	3	4	3	18
8	Land at the Hermitage 2	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	19
9	Land East of Hexham and South of the A695	2	3	2	4	3	3	3	20

- 11.1 The assessment indicates that site 6 is the most suitable location for employment development in Hexham. Sites to the west of Hexham scored reasonably well but are generally restricted by the topography of the sites (not site 3) and the impact that development may have on the landscape and the purposes of the Green Belt. Sites 4, 7 and 8 are constrained by poor access, and in the case of sites 7 and 8, heritage / landscape assets. The sites are also remote from services and sustainable transport options. Sites 5 and 6 share similar characteristics and are not unconstrained, with both at risk of fluvial flooding, and development would result in the loss of high grade agricultural land. The market attractiveness of site 5 would be lessened by adjoining uses and access may be constrained. Site 9 is attractive from the point of view of the greenfield location but has agricultural land and a landscape / Green Belt purpose constraints. It is on the wrong side of Hexham from a strategic access point of view. Key to delivering an extension to the current employment area north of the River Tyne is the upgrading of the access from Rotary Way and it is clear that mitigation solutions are technically available.