

# **Northumberland Local Plan**

## **Employment Land Site Option Appraisal**

### **Morpeth Site Option Appraisal**

**July 2018**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The ELR (2011) concluded that there is the potential need for around 5ha of additional land to serve the Morpeth market, assuming that remaining sites at Fairmoor are retained. This need is affirmed by the ELPDS (2015) which indicates that the completion of the Morpeth Northern By-pass will increase the market attractiveness of sites by improving strategic road access. Since then the Morpeth neighbourhood plan has been made and allocates certain sites.
- 1.2 The Morpeth market has not had a constrained supply of employment in recent years, but previously allocated sites at Fairmoor have not come forward, which the ELR concluded was largely as result of poor access to the A1. As such the average take-up (1999-2014) of 0.1ha and the yearly average developed for other uses of 0.48ha is not an accurate reflection of market demand.
- 1.3 The vacancy rate for existing premises is currently 5.2%, and a business survey as part of the ELPDS (2015) showed that 11 businesses are seeking to expand into new premises. This includes a mix of office and industrial based companies seeking a range of different sized premises. Many have expressed that the current offer in the town is not matching their requirements and they may be forced to relocate elsewhere.
- 1.4 At the time when this site options appraisal was first carried out, (2015), Morpeth had 18.75ha of available allocated employment land, however nearly 8.5ha of this land had extant permission for residential development. Since then, (2017 assessment), construction on much of the housing has commenced and the available land recorded as slightly below 11 hectares.
- 1.5 Discussions with agents and commercial developers as part of the ELR and ELPDS (2015) identified that market demand would be significantly reduced if most land allocations were in the south or east of the town. It was identified that commercial traffic and in particular HGVs would need to traverse congested residential areas or the town centre to reach the A1 and the Clifton junction did not offer access north bound. The development of the Morpeth Northern Bypass presents the opportunity of unconstrained access to the strategic road network as well as frontage onto the A1. Options have therefore been focused on utilising this opportunity.
- 1.6 The Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan has now allocated a number of sites but there may be a need to identify additional land to take the supply on a further five years. The original site assessments are therefore retained notwithstanding that some are now allocations in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 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 12 and 13. The assessments published in 2016 for Sites 1-11 are the same unless circumstances have changed on the ground.

## Plan of Site Options

## 2. Morpeth site 1 – Land to the West of the A1 (south)

Site Area (Ha): 4.42

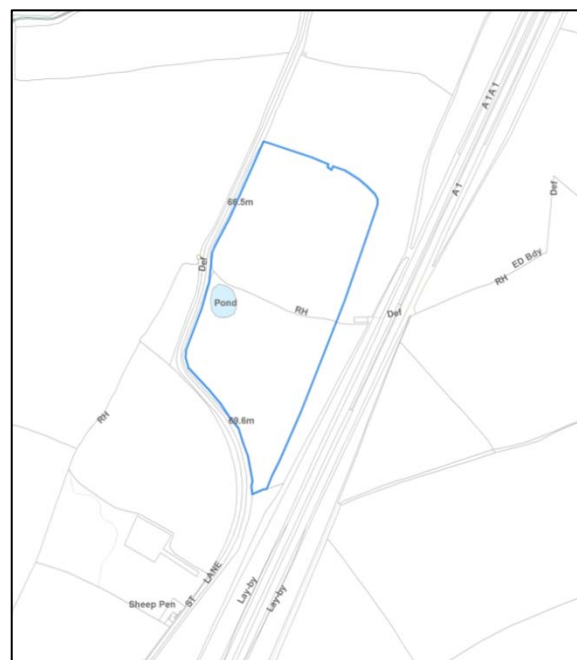
Easting: 417,778.980

Northing: 586,733.798

Indicative employment mix (assuming 40% build out of site):

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	40	7,000	148
B2	30	5,200	144
B8	30	5,200	74

- 2.1 The site is situated in-between the A1 and St Leonards Lane to the west of Morpeth. The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture agriculture with a mature hedgerow boundary running alongside St Leonards Lane.



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

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

- 2.2 The site can currently be accessed from St Leonard's Lane directly to the west, which is an unclassified road and would be problematic for HGV traffic. Therefore County Highways conclude this would not be suitable for point of access. However the site will be immediately adjacent to a roundabout, at the Morpeth Northern bypass, which serves the exit and entrance slip roads for the north bound carriageway. The highway design includes an agricultural entrance into the site accessed from a 5.5m carriageway stemming from the roundabout. This local road connection is of a good standard and offers quick access to the strategic road network immediately to the east. Employment traffic would not need to traverse residential areas to access the site, and traffic would likely be uncongested to access the strategic road network.
- 2.3 County Highways assessment concludes that mitigation would allow for a suitable access to the site utilising this infrastructure, and that onsite requirements could be accommodated on the site. It is specifically noted that cycle and pedestrian connections to the existing network would be required.
- 2.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions.

### **Conclusion**

- 2.5 The site will have excellent and local and strategic road access on completion of the North Morpeth Bypass, free from traffic stemming from other uses. The impact of the sites development in terms of congestion on the local road network would be likely to not have an unacceptable adverse impact on key local junctions, in conjunction with other planned development; accounting for the excess local capacity to bypass will deliver.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>5</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>5</b>

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 2.6 The shape and topography of the site is generally conducive with developing large footprint buildings. The land form slopes gently toward the northern end of the site where a new access road to the A1 is being developed. The remainder of the site is level and minimum earth movement would be required for employment development.
- 2.7 The site has no history of coal mining and the Coal Authority identifies no risks associated with the site.
- 2.8 The site is not within any mineral safeguard or resource area and as such it is evident that development of the site would not result in material sterilisation.
- 2.9 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>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**

- 2.10 It was observed during the on site assessment that although the site is predominantly agricultural land, the site is bounded by mature, mixed hedgerows, and that a small pond is located close to the western boundary of the site, both of which indicate the potential for ecological interest.
- 2.11 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 it is likely that the pond to the south of the site would need to be retained. A range of protected species has been recorded locally.
- 2.12 There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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**

- 2.13 The site is disconnected from the built form of Morpeth by the A1 which runs north to south alongside the eastern boundary. The site protrudes into an area of open countryside which is predominantly arable farmland, and as a result of its detachment from Morpeth the area does not feel like urban fringe.
- 2.14 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the majority of the site as ‘Mid-Northumberland, lowland rolling farmland’ character area; a notable key feature in relation to the site is “field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees”, which feature strongly. The study recommends that as a guiding principle to development the

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



landscape should be 'managed', which denotes that if features of the character area are maintained it has a "greater ability to absorb change, without significant detriment to the innate character". With maintaining of site features such as the strong hedgerow boundaries the surrounding landscape does have the potential to accommodate such development.

2.15 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges did include the site in its assessment, given its location beyond the A1. This is telling that development of the site would encroach into an area of open countryside which is disconnected from Morpeth to the degree that it is not considered 'edge of settlement'. It is apparent therefore the development risks urbanising the character of the surrounding landscape.

2.16 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

2.17 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial water flooding of the site, and some areas at minor risk of surface water flooding.

2.18 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure but it is not being assessed as part of NWL's 'North Morpeth Strategic Sewerage Project'. The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) also did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical employment area to the east of the A1 indicated that foul sewerage pipe runs to the south east of the site (to the east of the A1), which would require the provision of a new pumping station. It is reasonable to assume that Morpeth site 1 requires significantly more expenditure to link to this foul sewerage system given its location beyond the A1, but it is not clear if this is technically feasible.

2.19 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

2.20 There are no listed buildings within or close to the site; however a scheduled ancient monument (WW2 pillbox) is located 25m to the west of the site. The setting of this asset would need to be considered by Historic England as part of the site's development.

2.21 There is no known archaeological interest within the site, however there may be interest associated with the nearby Pillbox. As per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

2.22 Although the setting of the nearby pillbox would need to be closely considered and further archaeological investigation required as part of any further application it is apparent that the site is not heavily constrained in terms of the historic environment.

### Rights of way

- 2.23 Route 415/021 crosses the east to west and the southern boundary of the site. Nearly all of the site can be developed without impacting on the route.

### Conclusion

- 2.24 The site is largely unconstrained for employment development and little mitigation would likely be required. The site could accommodate large footprint buildings in terms of topography and site shape and size. It is also unaffected by past mine workings, minerals resources, flooding, green infrastructure, and there are no protected habitats or known protected species within the site. The setting of the nearby SAM would need to be carefully considered, but there are no other historic environment constraints. The main constraint would be the obvious encroachment into open countryside and the impact this would have on the character of the surrounding landscape, albeit it is an area which can more readily absorb additional development.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	4

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

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

- 2.25 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that for the majority of criterion assessed for the 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 more serious constraint. It was also noted that the site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Pedestrian and cycle links to the site from residential areas will be improved as part of the North Morpeth Bypass development, which will also improve connection to the nearest bus stop which is within 800m.
- 2.26 It is apparent that the site is isolated from other services which employees would be likely to use: both the town centre and the facilities at Heighley Gate Garden Centre are circa 2.5km from the site. The site is somewhat isolated from significant residential areas, and it is likely this will remain the case for the plan period as land to the east is planned to be safeguarded for development beyond the plan period.
- 2.27 As indicated, the site is relatively unconstrained by ecological, heritage, and the effects of flooding.
- 2.28 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.



- 2.29 The site is split between 2 land parcels in the Green Belt Assessment: the north of the site in MH13 and the southern portion in MH16. MH13 has a high contribution to 3 of the purposes of the Green Belt and medium contribution to the other. Development in this area particularly risks non-compact urban sprawl through encroachment into an area of open countryside, which in turn could impact on the historic setting of Morpeth. There is also a long term risk that Morpeth would merge with Fairmoor and Mitford. Parcel MH16 has a high contribution to all purposes of the Green Belt for similar reasons to MH13, but there is clearly a greater risk in the long term of merging with Mitford.
- 2.30 Although the site does have physical features which could denote the inner boundary, it is apparent that the A1 currently serves as a strong, durable feature for the setting of the limits of the Green Belt, and to develop into the open countryside to the west of it clearly represents urban sprawl. Development of the site would therefore be harmful to the Green Belt.

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

- 2.31 The site would not immediately adjoin an existing employment area; however there is an existing , but undeveloped, employment allocation circa 100m to the east of the site beyond the A1, assuming this is retained. Development of the site could be viewed as an extension to this planned cluster of employment around the new A1 access being constructed as part of the North Morpeth By-pass, albeit it would cross the threshold of the A1 and introduce development into an area of open countryside.
- 2.32 The site is surrounded by agricultural land, with the A1 running along the eastern boundary. Housing is located circa 500m to the north of the site, beyond open farmland. As such it is not considered that employment development would have any impact on the amenity of adjoining uses.

#### **Conclusion**

- 2.34 Past Sustainability Appraisal work has identified that the site is largely sustainable for employment use. However, the use of a greenfield site and the loss of agricultural land are noted as constraints, and the Green Belt assessment identifies that development of the site would negatively impact on 3 of the 4 functions of the Green Belt result. Of particular note is the resultant urban sprawl as the development would protrude into an area of open countryside and cross the threshold of the A1. This serves as a very strong boundary for the setting of new Green Belt boundaries.
- 2.35 The site is somewhat isolated from labour in terms of access by alternative transport modes, albeit links are being improved, and it is remote from complementary services. Development of the site would establish a new employment area in open countryside, which has the potential to impact on landscape character. However the amenity of adjoining land uses would not be impacted if the site were used for employment activity.

<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	3
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## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### Ownership and availability

- 2.36 The site has not been proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010) or subsequent SHLAA calls for sites. It is in dual private ownership, which could compromise the delivery of the site in its entirety. The owner of the southern portion of the site is also promoting land to the east for development, which is beyond the settlement limits set in the Morpeth Neighbourhood Development Plan. The northern part of the site is under the same private ownership as employment land to the east of Site 1, with residential development also being promoted at this location. It is apparent that development of Site 1 may be dependent on the successful promotion of other land interests of the sites owners, and therefore its availability is unclear.

### Development costs

- 2.37 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. An agricultural access will be added as part of the bypass development but additional cost would also be associated with upgrading it to dimensions suitable for employment use. As the site is generally level there will likely be lower additional costs associated with ground levelling, it is reasonable to assume that there will be no abnormal cost associated with mitigating land contamination and past mineral workings.

### Market demand

- 2.38 The site has immediate and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout being developed as part of the Morpeth Northern By-pass. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight. The frontage of the site will also be a positive feature to prospective operators.
- 2.39 The completion of the Morpeth Northern Bypass provides an unconstrained linkage between the A1 corridor and sites in south east Northumberland. It is unclear to what extent this may shift demand in the local industrial and office market.
- 2.40 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, which will appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 2.41 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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 access onto the A1 and the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial uses.

### Conclusion

- 2.42 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given the proximity to the A1 and the lack of sensitive adjoining land uses. The site will not have abnormal costs associated with development, but provision of services is required which will likely require gap funding. There is competition for investment in the local market, but the overall demand identified for wider Morpeth market suggests that the site would be quite attractive to the market.

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

### **Morpeth site 1 – Land to the West of the A1 (south)**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 1</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>25</b>

### 3. Morpeth site 2 – Land to the West of the A1 (north)

Site Area (Ha): 5.98

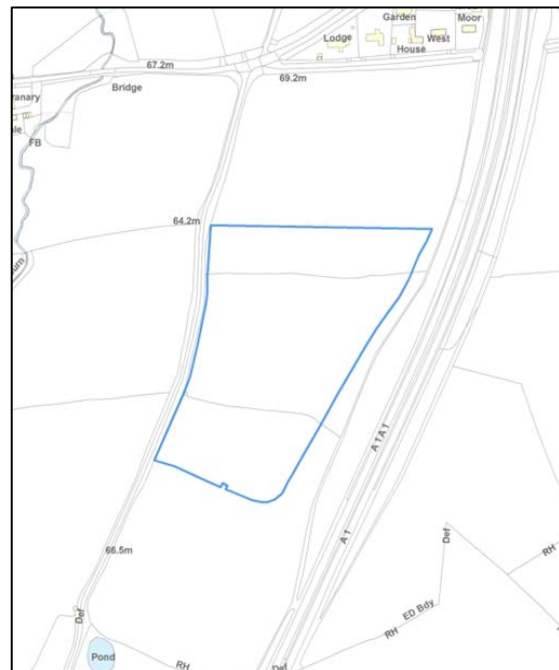
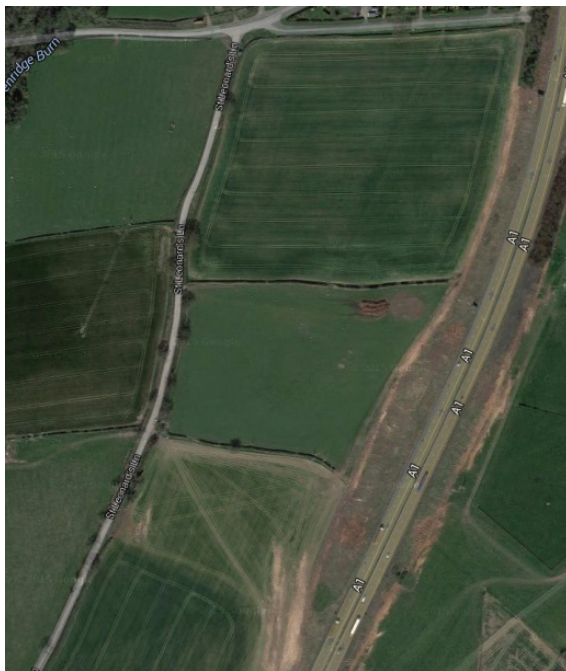
Easting: 417,924.625

Northing: 587,099.564

Indicative employment mix (assuming 40% build out of site):

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	40	9,500	202
B2	30	7,100	197
B8	30	7,100	101

- 3.1 The site is situated in-between the A1 and St Leonards Lane to the west of Morpeth. The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture agriculture with a mature hedgerow boundary running alongside St Leonards Lane and housing located to the north. The site is immediately north of site option 1.



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

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

- 3.2 The site can currently be accessed from St Leonard's Lane directly to the west, which is an unclassified road and would be problematic for HGV traffic. Therefore County Highways conclude this would not be suitable for point of access. However, like site 1 the site will be immediately adjacent to a roundabout, at the Morpeth Northern bypass, which serves the exit and entrance slip roads for the north bound carriageway. The highway design includes an agricultural entrance into the site accessed from a 5.5m carriageway stemming from the roundabout. This local road connection is of a good standard and offers quick access to the strategic road network immediately to the east. Employment traffic would not need to traverse residential areas to access the site, and traffic would likely be uncongested to access the strategic road network.
- 3.3 County Highways assessment concludes that mitigation would allow for a suitable access to the site utilising this infrastructure, and that onsite requirements could be accommodated on the site. It is specifically noted that cycle and pedestrian connections to the existing network would be required.
- 3.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions.

### **Conclusion**

- 3.5 Site 2, like site 1, would have immediate and unconstrained access to the strategic road network, given that the North Morpeth Bypass is now complete, and the local road network would likely be free of traffic generated from other road users. The impact of the sites development in terms of congestion on the local road network would be likely to not have an unacceptable adverse impact on key local junctions, in conjunction with other planned development; accounting for the excess local capacity to bypass will deliver.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>5</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>5</b>

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 3.6 The topography and shape of the site would allow for the development of large footprint commercial buildings. The site gently slopes northward from the logical point of access, with no undulation, and the gradient would likely not demand significant site preparation for employment use.
- 3.7 The site has no history of coal mining and the Coal Authority identifies no specific risks associated with the site. However a portion of the site does fall within the Coal Mine Reporting Area and so any application would require a mining report.
- 3.8 The site is not within any mineral safeguard or resource area and as such it is evident that development of the site would not result in material sterilisation.
- 3.9 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>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 NPPF.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 3.10 It was observed during the on site assessment that although the site is predominantly agricultural land, the site is bounded by mature, mixed hedgerows interspersed with semi mature trees. Desk based assessment indicates there are red squirrels reported within or adjacent to the site, although this would not prevent the site from being developed for employment, loss of relevant habitat when the site is developed would need to be avoided and/or mitigated/compensated as part of the site layout. This has the potential to add development cost through loss of developable area.
- 3.11 It is likely that the pond to the south of the site would need to be retained. A range of other protected species has been recorded locally. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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**

- 3.12 The site is disconnected from the built form of Morpeth by the A1 which runs north to south alongside the eastern boundary. The site protrudes into an area of open countryside which is predominantly arable farmland, and as a result of its detachment from Morpeth the area does not feel like urban fringe, despite proximity to residential development at Fairmoor.
- 3.13 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the majority of the site as ‘Mid-Northumberland, lowland rolling farmland’ character area; a notable key feature in relation to the site is “field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees”, which

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

feature strongly. The study recommends that as a guiding principle to development the landscape should be 'managed', which denotes that if features of the character area are maintained it has a "greater ability to absorb change, without significant detriment to the innate character". With maintaining of site features such as the strong hedgerow boundaries the surrounding landscape does have the potential to accommodate such development.

3.14 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges did include the site in its assessment, given its location beyond the A1. This is telling that development of the site would encroach into an area of open countryside which is disconnected from Morpeth to the degree that it is not considered 'edge of settlement'. It is apparent therefore the development risks urbanising the character of the surrounding landscape.

3.15 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

3.16 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial water flooding of the site, and some areas at minor risk of surface water flooding.

3.17 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure but it is not being assessed as part of NWL's 'North Morpeth Strategic Sewerage Project'. The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) also did not model the impact and need for development of this site. However, the modelling of a hypothetical employment area to the east of the A1 indicated that foul sewerage pipe runs to the south east of the site (to the east of the A1), which would require the provision of a new pumping station. It is reasonable to assume that Morpeth site 1 requires significantly more expenditure to link to this foul sewerage system given its location beyond the A1, but it is not clear if this is technically feasible.

3.18 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

3.19 There are no listed buildings within or close to the site; however a scheduled ancient monument (WW2 pillbox) is located circa 150m to the south west of the site. The setting of this asset would need to be considered by Historic England as part of the site's development.

3.20 There is no known archaeological interest within the site, however there may be interest associated with the nearby Pillbox. As per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

3.21 Although the setting of the nearby pillbox would need to be closely considered and further archaeological investigation required as part of any further application it is apparent that the site is not heavily constrained in terms of the historic environment.



### Rights of way

3.22 The site is not impacted by any rights of way.

### Conclusion

3.23 The site is largely unconstrained for employment development aside from the need to address the presence of red squirrels through the design of the site to ensure retention of habitat. The site could accommodate large footprint buildings in terms of topography and site shape and size. It is also unaffected by past mine workings, minerals resources, flooding, and green infrastructure within or adjacent to the site. The setting of the nearby SAM would need to be carefully considered, but there are no other historic environment constraints. The main constraint would be the obvious encroachment into open countryside and the impact this would have on the character of the surrounding landscape, albeit it is an area which can more readily absorb additional development.

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**

3.24 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that for the majority of criterion assessed for the 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 more serious constraint. It was also noted that the site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Pedestrian and cycle links to the site from residential areas will be improved as part of the North Morpeth Bypass development, which will also improve connection to the nearest bus stop which is within 800m.

3.25 It is apparent that the site is isolated from other services which employees would be likely to use: both the town centre and the facilities at Heighley Gate Garden Centre are circa 2.5km from the site. The site is somewhat isolated from significant residential areas, and it is likely this will remain the case for the plan period as land to the east is planned to be safeguarded for development beyond the plan period.

3.26 As indicated, the site is relatively unconstrained by heritage and the effects of flooding, and ecological constraints would not prevent the site's development for employment.

3.27 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the green belt in the NPPF.

- 3.28 The site falls within land parcel MH13 in the Green Belt Assessment: the north of the site in MH13 and the southern portion in MH16. MH13 has a high contribution to 3 of the purposes of the Green Belt and medium contribution to the other. Development in this area particularly risks non-compact urban sprawl through encroachment into an area of open countryside, which in turn could impact on the historic setting of Morpeth. There is also a long term risk that Morpeth would merge with Fairmoor and Mitford.
- 3.29 Although the site does have physical features which could denote the inner boundary (hedge lined field boundaries), it is apparent that the A1 currently serves as a strong, durable feature for the setting of the limits of the Green Belt, and to develop into the open countryside to the west of it clearly represents urban sprawl. Development of the site would therefore be harmful to the Green Belt.

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

- 3.30 The site would not immediately adjoin an existing employment area; however there is an existing, but undeveloped, employment allocation circa 100m to the east of the site beyond the A1, assuming this is retained. Development of the site could be viewed as an extension to this planned cluster of employment around the new A1 access being constructed as part of the North Morpeth By-pass, albeit it would cross the threshold of the A1 and introduce development into an area of open countryside.
- 3.31 The site is surrounded by agricultural land, with the A1 running along the eastern boundary. Housing is located circa 180m to the north of the site, beyond open farmland. As such it is not considered that employment development would have any impact on the amenity of adjoining uses. Site design, through planting on the northern boundary, could help to mitigate visual impact for these residents.

### **Conclusion**

- 3.32 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that the site is largely sustainable for employment use. However, the use of a greenfield site and the loss of agricultural land are noted as constraints, and the Green Belt assessment identifies that development of the site would negatively impact on 3 of the 4 functions of the Green Belt result. Of particular note is the resultant urban sprawl as the development would protrude into an area of open countryside and cross the threshold of the A1. This serves as a very strong boundary for the setting of new Green boundaries.
- 3.33 The site is somewhat isolated from labour in terms of access by alternative transport modes, albeit links are being improved, and it is remote from complementary services. Development of the site would establish a new employment area in open countryside, which has the potential to impact on landscape character. However the amenity of adjoining land uses would not be impacted if the site were used for employment activity.

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	3

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### Ownership and availability

- 3.34 The site was not proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010), or SHLAA call for sites (2013) but has subsequently been put forward as such. It is in single ownership, along with the current employment allocation.

### Development costs

- 3.35 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. An agricultural access will be added as part of the bypass development but additional cost would also be associated with upgrading it to dimensions suitable for employment use. As the site is generally level there will likely be lower additional costs associated with ground levelling, it is reasonable to assume that there will be no abnormal cost associated with mitigating land contamination and past mineral workings.

### Market demand

- 3.36 The site has immediate and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout being developed as part of the Morpeth Northern By-pass. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight. The frontage of the site will also be a positive feature to prospective operators.
- 3.37 The completion of the Morpeth Northern Bypass provides an unconstrained linkage between the A1 corridor and sites in south east Northumberland. It is unclear to what extent this may shift demand in the local industrial and office market.
- 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, which will appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 3.39 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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 access onto the A1 and 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 A1 and the lack of sensitive adjoining land uses. The site will not have abnormal costs associated with development, but provision of services is required which will likely require gap funding. There is competition for investment in the local market, but the overall demand identified for wider Morpeth market suggests that the site would be quite attractive to the market. However, the known alternative development interest of the landowner in the local area means that it is uncertain if the site would be available for employment development.

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

### **Morpeth site 2 – Land to the West of the A1 (north)**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 2</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>24</b>

#### **4. Morpeth site 3 – Land east of A1 & north west of Pinewood Drive**

Site Area (Ha): 8.10

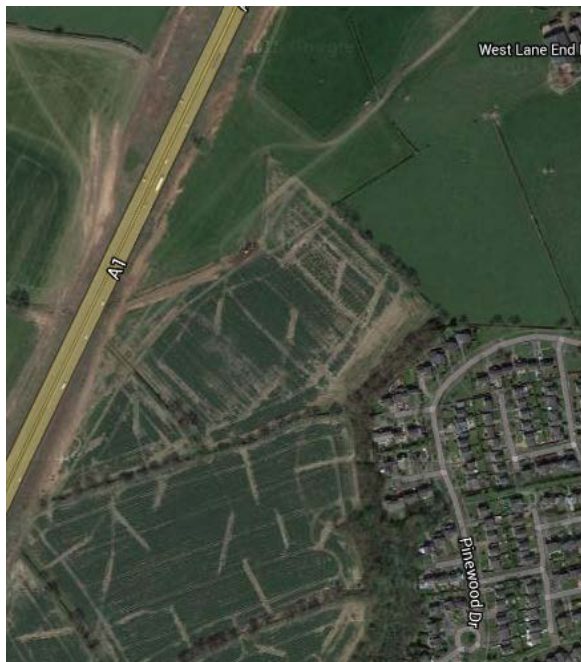
Easting: 418,208.386

Northing: 586,762.896

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	40	12,966.4	276
B2	30	9,724.8	270
B8	30	9,724.8	270

- 4.1 The site is situated between Lancaster Park and the North Morpeth By-pass, at the point it merges onto the A1. The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture agriculture with mature hedgerow boundaries punctuated by mature trees. .



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

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

- 4.2 Access to the strategic road network (A1) is less than 1km from the site via the Morpeth Northern By-pass.
- 4.3 The site presently has no existing point of access with only Pinewood Drive, a residential estate road unsuitable for shared use, adjoining the site. However, upon completion of the North Morpeth Bypass a roundabout access will be available immediately to the north west of the site. The roundabout does not include a spur in its present design to enter the site but there is a gap in the bund to allow for an agricultural access road. This could allow for upgrading to deliver a suitable point of ingress and egress from the site. It would enable immediate access to the strategic road network, with no constraint from traffic stemming from other land uses.
- 4.4 County Highways assessment concludes that mitigation would allow for a suitable access to the site utilising this infrastructure, and that onsite requirements could be accommodated on the site. It is specifically noted that cycle and pedestrian connections to the existing network would be required.
- 4.5 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that enter Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. It is apparent that given the location of the site, it is unlikely that there would be a severe impact on these two key junctions, and that there is sufficient excess capacity in the Bypass to support development at this location.

### **Conclusion**

- 4.6 Site 3 would enable unconstrained access to the strategic road network, given that the North Morpeth Bypass is now complete. The impact of the site's development in terms of congestion on the local road network would be likely to not have an unacceptable adverse impact on key local junctions, in conjunction with other planned development; accounting for the excess local capacity the bypass will deliver.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>5</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>5</b>

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 4.7 The site is suitable in shape and topography to allow for the development of large footprint commercial buildings. It is generally flat with very little undulation. Land to the south of the site slopes gently, intensifying in slope as toward the River Wansbeck basin.
- 4.8 Although the site falls within a coal mining reporting area, which indicates the need for mining report as part of a future planning application, the Coal Authority does not identify any specific risks or history of coal mining.
- 4.9 The site is not within any mineral safeguard or resource area and as such it is evident that development of the site would not result in material sterilisation.
- 4.10 The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture farming. Its designation is split between grades 3 and 4, with the vast majority being the Grade 3. Grade 3 indicates “land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield” and Grade 4 indicates that it is “poor agricultural land” with “severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops and/or level of yields”. 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**

- 4.11 The site is open mainly agricultural land with mature hedgerow boundaries interspersed with mature deciduous trees in the southern portion of the site. A finger of mature woodland, Scotch Gill Woods, starts on the south east boundary of the site and extends southwards toward the River Wansbeck.
- 4.12 Desk based assessment indicates that a number of protected species (Bat’s, Red Squirrels and Badgers) have been recorded within or close to the site. Although this would not prevent development of the site as a whole for employment it will mean that through design and layout the loss of relevant habitat should be avoided and/or mitigated or compensated. This has the potential to add development cost through loss of developable area.
- 4.13 A range of other protected species has been recorded locally. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) all within 2km. There is a Local Nature Reserve located to the south east and a buffer zone may be required 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**

- 4.14 The site is within a wedge of green land which separates the edge of Morpeth from the A1. The area is characterised by small fields enclosed by mature hedgerows and broadleaf trees, and more open pasture land to the north east. The site is split between these two areas. The distance between the A1 and the edge of Morpeth denote a feeling of urban fringe.



- 4.15 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the majority of the site as 'Mid-Northumberland, lowland rolling farmland' character area; a notable key feature in relation to the site is "field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees", which feature strongly. The study recommends that as a guiding principle to development the landscape should be 'managed', which denotes that if features of the character area are maintained it has a "greater ability to absorb change, without significant detriment to the innate character". With maintaining of site features such as the strong hedgerow boundaries the surrounding landscape does have the potential to accommodate such development.
- 4.16 The southern portion of the site is within the 'Broad Lowland Valley – Wansbeck Valley' character area, which is characterised by "gentle v-shaped valleys set within rolling farmland" and "Riparian woodland". It is recommended that "the landscape should be managed to conserve both its natural and cultural history" and that development should seek "a net gain for landscape quality" with development briefs recommended for larger developments to ensure this delivered. It is apparent therefore that the southern portion of the site and land to south although suitable for development would need to ensure that the dominant landscape features are preserved and enhanced.
- 4.17 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges does not directly assess an approach to development to the west but does , in relation to the northern suggest a need to " create distinct transition between urban and rural landscape" through the retention and strengthening of woodland belts and trees. It is apparent that such an approach could be relevant to the site and emphasises the need for any development to retain and enhance the tree cover which characterises the area to soften the transition to open countryside beyond the A1.
- 4.18 To ensure the development of the site does not impact on green infrastructure designations, a buffer zone may be required in relation to the Local Nature Reserve located to the south east of the site.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 4.19 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial water flooding of the site, and some areas at minor risk of surface water flooding.
- 4.20 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure and that a foul water connection is part of the 'North Morpeth Strategic Sewage Project'. The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) modelled a hypothetical employment area to the east of the A1 and indicated that the main concern was a water main running close to the site which would require to be diverted with a suitable easement, but this does not impact the site directly.
- 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 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.

- 4.23 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. As per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 4.24 Route 415/013 runs along the southern boundary of the site, and so the layout of any development would need to ensure that this retained.

#### Conclusion

- 4.25 The site is able to accommodate large footprint buildings without substantial site levelling, and past and future mining workings will not impact development. There is no known archaeological (subject to identified investigation) interest and no historic assets would be impacted. Although there is some ecological interest in the site it would not prevent site development, but may require retention and enhancement of habitat features. Similarly the landscape is able to absorb additional development and the A1 beyond helps to denote the area as urban fringe countryside, but enhancement of key landscape features would be needed. This has the potential to add to the marketability of a future employment site.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	4

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

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

- 4.26 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that for the majority of criterion assessed for the 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 more serious constraint. It was also noted that the site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Pedestrian and cycle links to the site from residential areas will be improved as part of the North Morpeth Bypass development, which will also improve connection to the nearest bus stop which is within 800m. The amenity of nearby residents is considered a potential risk as the development would be immediately adjacent to houses at Lancaster Park.
- 4.27 It is apparent that the site is isolated from other services which employees would be likely to use. The town centre is circa 2km from the site and there are few other amenities within the adjoining neighbourhood. The site is immediately adjacent to a residential area, although there are no present linkages to the site which would need to be improved to allow for access on foot or by cycle. A bus stop is located a suitable walking distance to the site but this could be improved.

- 4.28 As indicated, the site is relatively unconstrained by heritage and the effects of flooding, and ecological constraints would not prevent the site's development for employment, but rather its layout and design.
- 4.29 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.
- 4.30 The site falls within land parcel MH12a in the Green Belt Assessment, which extends from the A192 south of the site to the point the land starts to drop down into the River Wansbeck Valley. The area is considered to have a medium contribution to all of the purposes of the Green Belt. The role of the A1 to act as a strong and durable boundary for the Green Belt and prevent urban sprawl is recognised, as is the presence of built structures like roads and housing which denote a medium role for the setting of Morpeth. It is apparent that mature hedge boundaries to fields also have the potential to act as boundaries to development.

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

- 4.231 The site is bounded to the A1 to the west and open farmland to the north and south. Residential properties would immediately adjoin the site to the east and so the layout of the site and location of uses would need to consider this potential impact in terms of noise, light and odour pollution. It is noted that these uses would not use a shared access and so commercial and residential traffic would not be mixed.

#### **Conclusion**

- 4.32 It is apparent that the development of this site would have a lesser impact on the Green Belt given the presence of strong and durable boundaries and the containment of any built form by the A1. Although adjoining residential areas, access for labour is relatively poor as is the access to other services, but the former will be improved by the by-pass. The proximity to housing may impact on amenity and this would need to be carefully considered in the design of any development.

<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>4</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 for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010), or subsequent calls for sites. Ownership is split roughly in half and it is known that both landowners have been pursuing residential development in the immediate area. It is apparent that if the area is to be deliverable as an employment site the area would need to be moved to the north or south to ensure it is under single ownership, and commitment would be needed from one of the landowners to develop the site for employment use. Without this, site 3 is not a viable option. The site is being promoted as a housing site in the Northumberland SHLAA (3072 and 3073b).

### Development costs

- 4.34 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. However, the location of a new roundabout off the North Morpeth bypass immediately adjacent to the site will remove the normally expensive need to improve the local road network. Access from the roundabout would be short and a gap in the bund would negate earth works. The retention and enhancement of planting and tree boundaries to retain habitat and landscape character and act as buffer from adjoining residential areas could remove development land and add cost. It is not clear at this stage if a contribution would be required toward a new pumping station but this could potentially add substantial cost.

### Market demand

- 4.35 The site has immediate and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout being developed as part of the Morpeth Northern By-pass. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight. The frontage of the site will also be a positive feature to prospective operators.
- 4.36 The completion of the Morpeth Northern Bypass provides an unconstrained linkage between the A1 corridor and sites in south east Northumberland. It is unclear to what extent this may shift demand in the local industrial and office market.
- 4.37 Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, provided the site is suitably designed it will be largely unaffected by sensitive land uses which can unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This may add to the appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 4.38 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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 access and frontage onto the A1 and the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial use.

## Conclusion

- 4.39 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given clear business demand in Morpeth and excellent access to the A1, but it is apparent that the site should be shifted to ensure single ownership, if there is a commitment from a landowner to bring forward employment development. Site development costs might be comparatively low, but higher value commercial uses could be used to 'pump prime' the site, given the appeal of the location to such operators.

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

## **Morpeth site 3 – Land east of A1 & north west of Pinewood Drive**

### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 3</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>28</b>

## 5. Morpeth site 4 - Land east of the A1 & west of A192

Site Area (Ha): 4.565

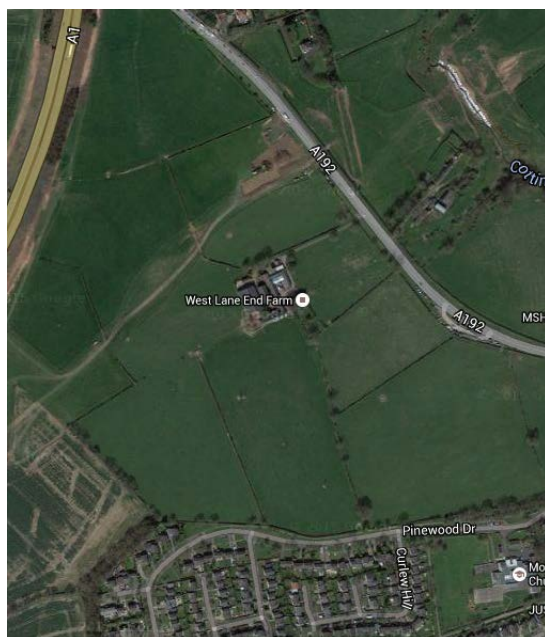
Easting: 418,468.440

Northing: 587,049,324

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	40	7,304	155
B2	30	5,478	152
B8	30	5,478	78

- 5.1 The site is situated to the south of the route of the North Morpeth By-pass and west of the A192. The site is currently used for pasture farming and the buildings associated with West Lane End Farm are located situated at the centre. Lancaster Park is located to the south beyond additional pasture fields.



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

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

- 5.2 Access to the strategic road network is circa 1km from the site via either the Morpeth Northern By-pass or the A192.
- 5.3 The site can be accessed from the A192 which would be suitable to accommodate employment traffic. Although the area is largely free of residential traffic and other traffic generating uses such as schools, there is housing under construction to the north and extant permission for additional residential development. A roundabout will be developed directly to the north east of the site as part of the by-pass construction. However this already has 5 arms and it is unlikely that a 6<sup>th</sup> could be accommodated to allow for access to be direct from the roundabout. County Highways have also suggested that a suitable access could be provided through the adjoining Morpeth site 3 option, utilising the capacity of the roundabout on the By-pass to the south west of site 4. However this could potentially add cost as the access would need to cross adjacent land just to reach the site.
- 5.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. It is apparent that given the location of the site, it is unlikely that there would be a severe impact on these two key junctions, and that there is sufficient excess capacity in the Bypass to support development at this location.

## **Conclusion**

- 5.5 Site 4 would enable unconstrained access to the strategic road network, given that the North Morpeth Bypass is now complete, via the A192. The impact of the sites development in terms of congestion on the local road network would be likely to not have an unacceptable adverse impact on key local junctions, in conjunction with other planned development; accounting for the excess local capacity to bypass will deliver.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>5</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>5</b>



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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 5.6 The site has slight undulation and it is likely that some levelling work would be required to accommodate large footprint buildings. Farm buildings associated with West Lane End Farm would need to be demolished as part of site preparation.
- 5.7 Although the site falls within a coal mining reporting area, which indicates the need for mining report as part of a future planning application, the Coal Authority does not identify any specific risks or history of coal mining.
- 5.8 The site is not within any mineral safeguard or resource area and as such it is evident that development of the site would not result in material sterilisation.
- 5.9 The site is currently used for 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>. 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 The site is pasture grazing land with quite sparse hedgerow boundaries. It is apparent that biodiversity may be associated with the farm buildings rather than the greenfield portions of the site. However, desk based assessment indicates that there are no protected species or habitat associated reported on the site. A range of protected species has been recorded locally. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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**

- 5.11 The site is within a wedge of green land which separates the edge of Morpeth from the A1. The area is characterised by open pasture fields, with hedgerow boundaries and some deciduous trees. To the south the field boundaries become more mature with greater tree cover. The proximity to the A1, A192 and housing at Lancaster Park, which are highly visible from the site, denote a feel of urban fringe.
- 5.12 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the site as ‘Mid-Northumberland, lowland rolling farmland’ character area; a notable key feature in relation to the site is “field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees”, which feature strongly. The study recommends that as a guiding principle to development the landscape should be ‘managed’, which denotes that if features of the character area are maintained it has a “greater ability to absorb change, without significant detriment to the innate character”. With maintaining of site features such as the strong hedgerow boundaries the surrounding landscape does have the potential to accommodate such development.

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

- 5.13 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges does not directly assess an approach to development to the west but does , in relation to the northern suggest a need to “ create distinct transition between urban and rural landscape” through the retention and strengthening of woodland belts and trees. It is apparent that such an approach could be relevant to the site and emphasises the need for any development to retain and enhance the tree cover which characterises the area to soften the transition to open countryside beyond the A1. This suggests the need for additional tree planting as part of any development to strengthen site boundaries.
- 5.14 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 5.15 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial flooding of the site, but a small area adjacent to the A192 is highly susceptible to surface water flooding.
- 5.16 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure and that a foul water connection is part of the ‘North Morpeth Strategic Sewage Project’. The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) and consultation with Northumbrian Water indicates that a water main runs across the site which would require to be diverted with a suitable easement. This and the potential need for a new pumping station could add to the site’s development costs.
- 5.17 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

- 5.18 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 5.19 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. As per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 5.20 The site is not impacted by any rights of way.

#### Conclusion

- 5.21 It is likely that some ground levelling would be required to accommodate commercial buildings, but past and future mining workings will not impact development. There are no known archaeological (subject to identified investigation) or historic assets which would be impacted by the sites development, and there are no protected species or habitat associated with the site. The landscape is able absorb additional development and the A1 beyond helps to denote the area as urban fringe countryside, but enhancement of key landscape features would be needed. This has the potential to add to the marketability of a future employment site.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	<b>4</b>

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

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

- 5.22 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that for the majority of criterion assessed for the 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 more serious constraint. It was also noted that the site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. As mentioned, the risk of surface water flooding is also cited as major risk, although it is likely that this can be addressed through design.
- 5.23 It is apparent that the site is isolated from other services which employees would be likely to use. The town centre is circa 1.5km from the site and there are few other amenities within the adjoining neighbourhood, aside from a small shop associated with the petrol station to the north. The site is relatively close to existing and permitted residential schemes and existing bus services running along the A192. The site could also be readily linked to existing pedestrian and cycle connections.
- 5.24 As indicated, the site is unconstrained by heritage and ecology issues and largely unaffected by the effects of flooding, aside from a small area being especially susceptible to surface flooding. These issues would not prevent the development of the site for employment, but rather its layout and design.
- 5.25 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the green belt in the NPPF.
- 5.26 The site falls within land parcel MH12a in the Green Belt Assessment, which extends from the A192 south of the site to the point the land starts to drop down into the River Wansbeck Valley. The area is considered to have a medium contribution to all of the purposes of the Green Belt. The role of the A1 to act as a strong and durable boundary for the Green Belt and prevent urban sprawl is recognised, as is the presence of built structures like roads and housing which denote a medium role for the setting of Morpeth. It is apparent that mature hedge boundaries to fields also have the potential to act as boundaries to development.

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

5.27 Adjoining uses are compatible with employment development. The site will be bounded by the Morpeth Northern Bypass to the north and west and the A192 to the east. An area of open farmland buffers the site from residential areas to the south, but planting may be required on the southern boundary.

#### Conclusion

5.28 It is apparent that the development of this site would have a lesser impact on the Green Belt given the presence of strong and durable boundaries and the containment of any built form by the A1, and adjoining uses are compatible for employment development. It is considered to be sustainable in terms access by alternative means and its environmental impact would not be adverse.

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

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

#### Ownership and availability

5.29 The site has not been proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010) or through subsequent calls for sites. The site is under single ownership but land registry records indicate that the land is optioned by a residential developer, indicating that the site is unavailable for employment development. The site is being promoted as a housing site in the Northumberland SHLAA (3072), with a favourable assessment.

#### Development costs

5.30 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. An access would need to be provided from the A192, or more expensively via site 3 from the bypass roundabout closest to the A1. It is not clear at this stage if a contribution would be required toward a new pumping station but this could potentially add substantial cost. Some cost would also be associated with the moving of the water which crosses the site.

#### Market demand

5.31 The site has quick and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout being developed as part of the Morpeth Northern By-pass. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight.

5.32 The completion of the Morpeth Northern Bypass provides an unconstrained linkage between the A1 corridor and sites in south east Northumberland. It is unclear to what extent this may shift demand in the local industrial and office market.

- 5.33 Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, provided the site is suitably designed it will be largely unaffected by sensitive land uses which can unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This may add to the appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 5.34 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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 access onto the A1 and the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial use.

#### Conclusion

- 5.35 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given clear business demand in Morpeth and excellent access to the A1. It is clear however that the site is not available for employment development, even if the potential abnormal development cost could be met, and should be discounted for this reason.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7:Market demand and availability	<b>2</b>

#### **Morpeth Site 4 – Land east of the A1 & west of A192**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 4</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>27</b>

## 6. Morpeth Site 5 – Land north of Fulbeck Grange

Site Area (Ha): 5.419

Easting: 419,250.766

Northing: 587,694.671

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	50	10,838	231
B2	30	6,502.8	181
B8	20	4,335.2	62

- 6.1 The site is located immediately to the north of the Morpeth Northern By-pass, specifically adjacent to a roundabout being constructed to access the St Georges Hospital site to the south. The site is currently used for arable farming and is surrounded by the same use, with a residential property located to the west beyond a minor road.



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

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

- 6.2 Access to the strategic road network will be via the Morpeth Northern Bypass, meaning that it will be suitable for HGVs, and it is circa 1.5km to the junction with the A1. Although significant residential traffic will use the by-pass it is not considered that this will impinge on the good access the site will have to the strategic network.
- 6.3 At present the site has poor access, with only a minor road running along the western boundary. However upon completion of the Morpeth Northern by-pass a roundabout will be located directly to the south. This is intended to access housing development to the south of the By-pass and so presently only one arm is planned. However it clear that there is capacity to add an additional arm to access site 5, which is supported by County Highways as an acceptable approach, although this would add to development cost. Access would not demand traversing any residential areas, and although the site would need to share a roundabout with a residential area, it is not considered that this will impact on quick and safe access for employment traffic. Pedestrian and cycle infrastructure connections from the site to the wider network will be required as part of the sites development.
- 6.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. It is apparent that given the location of the site, it is unlikely that there would be a severe impact on these two key junctions, and that there is sufficient excess capacity in the Bypass to support development at this location.

### **Conclusion**

- 6.5 Site 5 would enable unconstrained access to the strategic road network, despite passing present and planned residential development, and access to the site can be readily provided from the roundabout on the route of the by-pass. The development would not have a severe impact on the local road network as a result of additional traffic generation.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>5</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>5</b>



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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 6.6 The site slopes gently to the south, however the gradient would not prevent the development of large footprint commercial buildings and only minimum earth works would likely be required. Earth moved as part of the construction of the by-pass is currently stored on the site
- 6.7 Although the site falls within a coal mining reporting area, which indicates the need for mining report as part of a future planning application, the Coal Authority does not identify any specific risks or history of coal mining.
- 6.8 The south east corner of the site is within a sand and gravel safeguarding area. This does not necessarily mean that the site should be developed, but in terms of this portion at least, sterilisation should be avoided and reasonable alternatives should be favoured.
- 6.9 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**

- 6.10 The site is used for arable farming with only sparse hedgerows along the northern boundary of the site.
- 6.11 Desk based assessment indicates there are red squirrels reported within or adjacent to the site, although this would not prevent the site from being developed for employment, loss of relevant habitat when the site is developed would need to be avoided and/or mitigated/compensated as part of the site layout. This has the potential to add development cost through loss of developable area.
- 6.12 A range of other protected species has been recorded locally. There is a pond approximately 250m south of the site and substantial ponds and wetlands approx 1.5km to the NE. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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**

- 6.13 The site is part of an open area of agricultural land which opens out from the wooded river gorges which characterise the northern boundary of Morpeth. Fields have thin hedgerow boundaries and there is minimal tree cover in amongst the hedgerows.
- 6.14 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the site as ‘Mid-Northumberland, lowland rolling farmland’ (longhorsley) character area; a notable key feature in relation to the site is “field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees”, which

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

feature strongly. The study recommends that as a guiding principle to development the landscape should be 'managed', which denotes that if features of the character area are maintained it has a "greater ability to absorb change, without significant detriment to the innate character". With maintaining of site features such as the strong hedgerow boundaries the surrounding landscape does have the potential to accommodate such development.

- 6.15 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges identifies that at the northern edge of Morpeth it is lowest in areas associated with St Georges Hospital site. It is suggested that the settlement edge should be strengthened through retention of existing trees and field boundaries and the development of new woodland belts and trees. This should aim to create a distinct transition between urban and rural landscapes. It is apparent that the existing sparse tree cover and hedgerows do not offer strong boundaries to the site and would do little to soften the impact of the introduction of hard features into the open area north of the By-pass. This suggests the need for substantive planting around the site, particularly as the road and mature woodland to the south of the site already create a distinct mix of natural and man-made features to denote the transition from Morpeth to open countryside. The introduction of development beyond the by-pass appears to be a protrusion of development into open countryside which may be difficult to mitigate.

- 6.16 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 6.17 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial flooding of the site, and only small areas of the centre of the site are at lower risk of surface water flooding, which would not necessarily prevent development.
- 6.18 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure. Whilst the site has not been considered as part of the 'North Morpeth Strategic Sewage Project' it is indicated that the site is close enough to connect post 2017, although suggestion that the sites be future proofed as part of the by-pass development may not be possible at this stage of construction.
- 6.19 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

- 6.20 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 6.21 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. As per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 6.22 The site is not impacted by any rights of way.

## Conclusion

- 6.23 It is likely that some minor ground levelling would be required to accommodate commercial buildings. Further work would be needed to determine if the area of the site impacted by mineral safeguarding could be developed. There are no known historic assets which would be impacted by the sites development, and although there are protected species recorded close to the site, it would likely not prevent its use for employment development if the site was design appropriately. However it may be difficult to blend the development to form a soft transition from urban area to countryside and projecting development beyond the by-pass risks damaging the character of the surrounding landscape.

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**

- 6.24 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that for the majority of criterion assessed for the 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 more serious constraint. As noted, landscape sensitivity was also identified as a serious constraint as development of the site risks damaging the character of the open countryside beyond the route of the by-pass. It was also noted that the site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means, and over 800m from the nearest bus stop. In terms of the latter access by bus may improve as the St Georges housing scheme is developed.
- 6.25 The site is currently isolated from complementary services with the town centre being circa 1.5km from the site. However, a local centre is planned as part of the St Georges hospital development which may deliver closer services. As indicated in the SA, access by alternative transport means for labour is currently quite poor, and access for pedestrians and cycles is also relatively restrictive with no dedicated infrastructure in place along the minor road to the west of the site.
- 6.26 There is not considered to be a high risk to the environment, providing that red squirrel habitat is at least retained.
- 6.27 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.
- 6.28 The site falls within land parcel MH06 in the Green Belt Assessment, which extends north from the route of the bypass, and runs from the edge of the wooded Northgate hospital site to the

limit of former surface mining restoration to the east. It is considered that the land parcel has a high contribution to 2 of the purposes of the Green Belt, specifically the areas is considered open countryside with little opportunity for setting strong and durable boundaries to prevent encroachment, and is important for the historic setting of Morpeth. There is also a medium risk of urban sprawl through non-compact growth of Morpeth. There is no risk of settlement merger.

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

- 6.29 Adjoining uses are largely compatible with employment development. The site will be bounded by the Morpeth Northern Bypass to the south, with residential some distance beyond this. A residential property is located immediately to the west, and the amenity of its occupants would need to be closely considered in relation to future applications on the site. Although the agricultural would be unaffected functionally, as indicated the character of the landscape could be detrimentally impacted.

### **Conclusion**

- 6.30 It is apparent that there are serious sustainability constraints impacting the site, although some may be lessened as adjoining housing development advances. Access to the site for labour, other than by car is particularly an issue, although there are fewer concerns in terms of environmental impact. It is considered that development of the site would constitute urban sprawl into open countryside with no clear features to denote an inner Green Belt boundary.

<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>2</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>4</b>

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

#### **Ownership and availability**

- 6.31 The site has not been proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010) or through subsequent calls for sites. The site is under single ownership, and although there are no indications that the site is being promoted for alternative uses, it is not clear that use for employment development would be supported.

#### **Development costs**

- 6.32 As a greenfield site it is currently unserved in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. Some minor levelling may also be required. It would be relatively straight forward to provide access from the roundabout on the by-pass to the south, and the removal of the cost of adding the roundabout itself is significant. Substantial planting would be needed to establish a durable boundary for the Greenbelt and mitigate impact on the landscape.

### Market demand

- 6.33 The site has quick and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout at the Morpeth Northern Bypass, and it is only a short distance for HGV traffic to reach this, although this could add cost for businesses compared to sites closer to the A1. The site lacks frontage onto a trunk road, but the bypass would still provide prominence for relevant businesses. Road access for workers, customers and freight will likely be unconstrained by traffic congestion, but access by other means for staff is poor and there are no complementary services nearby.
- 6.34 The completion of the Morpeth Northern Bypass provides an unconstrained linkage between the A1 corridor and sites in south east Northumberland. It is unclear to what extent this may shift demand in the local industrial and office market.
- 6.35 Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, provided the site is suitably designed it will be largely unaffected by sensitive land uses which can unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This may add to the appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 6.36 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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 access onto the A1 and the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial uses.

### Conclusion

- 6.37 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given clear business demand in Morpeth and excellent access to the A1, but the lack of frontage onto the A1 and the slightly extended distance from the strategic road network could add cost for businesses. The site is not being actively promoted for employment use, but contesting development plans are known.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	4

## **Morpeth Site 5 – Land north of Fulbeck Grange**

### **Total Score**

Morpeth Site 5	
Total site score	26

## 7. Morpeth Site 6 – Land north of Cottingwood Common

Site Area (Ha): 4.277

Easting: 419,596.358

Northing: 587,668.606

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	50	8,554	182
B2	30	5,132.4	143
B8	20	3,421.6	49

- 7.1 The site is located immediately to the south of the Morpeth Northern By-pass, specifically east of a roundabout being constructed to access the St Georges Hospital site to the south. The site is currently used for pasture farming, with other farmland and woods to the east and west. Open space to the south is part of the St Georges Strategic housing site.



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

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

- 7.2 Access to the strategic road network will be via the Morpeth Northern Bypass, meaning that it will be suitable for HGVs, and it is circa 1.8km to the junction with the A1. Although significant residential traffic will use the by-pass it is not considered that this will impinge on the good access the site will have to the strategic network.
- 7.3 At present the site has poor access, but upon completion of the Morpeth Northern by-pass a roundabout will be located directly to the west. The arm extending to the south of this roundabout will act as an entrance to the St Georges Strategic Housing site. County Highways indicate that access would only be acceptable from the bypass roundabout, but it was apparent on the site visit that this may not be feasible as the access road would have to cross a substantial dip in the land, adding significantly to cost. An alternative could be to access the site slightly further south from a roundabout leading into the St George's development, but this will result in a shared housing / employment access road, which has safety and congestion implications at peak times. However in technical terms the road would likely be suitable for employment traffic. Pedestrian and cycle infrastructure connections from the site to the wider network will be required as part of the sites development
- 7.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. It is apparent that given the location of the site, it is unlikely that there would be a severe impact on these two key junctions, and that there is sufficient excess capacity in the Bypass to support development at this location.

## **Conclusion**

- 7.5 Site 6 would have good and relatively unconstrained access to the strategic road network. Access to the site directly from the roundabout on the bypass may not be a feasible option and an entrance off the road leading into the St Georges sites would effectively lead to a shared housing / employment access road.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>5</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>4</b>

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 7.6 Site 6 is largely level but, but circa 25% of the area along the western and northern boundaries slopes and would likely be unsuitable for the development of large footprint commercial buildings. It is not considered feasible to mitigate this. It may be more appropriate to shift the site area to the east to take advantage of level ground.
- 7.7 The site falls within a coal mining reporting area and coal mining high risk area, on account of a coal outcrop that runs underneath the site. This does not necessarily exclude development as a significant proportion of land in Northumberland falls under these two designations. The risks to development and therefore possible approaches and costs to mitigation would need to be addressed in mining risk assessment as part of any future planning application.
- 7.8 The extreme north west corner of the site is within a sand and gravel safeguarding area. This does not necessarily mean that the site should be developed, but in terms of this portion at least, sterilisation should be avoided and reasonable alternatives should be favoured. It is noted that this area is sloping and unsuitable for employment development.
- 7.9 The site is currently used for pasture farming and is classified as grade 3b, which indicates “land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield”<sup>5</sup>. 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**

- 7.10 The site is used for pasture farming with quite mature deciduous tree lined boundaries to the south and west. An area of ancient woodland is located around 170m to the west of the site.
- 7.11 Desk based assessment indicates there are red squirrels reported within or adjacent to the site, although this would not prevent the site from being developed for employment, loss of relevant habitat when the site is developed would need to be avoided and/or mitigated/compensated as part of the site layout. It is also noted that a watercourse stemming from a spring runs along the western boundary which may require a buffer. This has the potential to add development cost through loss of developable area.
- 7.12 A range of other protected species has been recorded locally. There is a pond approximately 390m south west of the site and substantial ponds and wetlands approx 1.5km to the NE. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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**

- 7.13 The site is part of an open area of agricultural land which opens out from the wooded river gorges which characterise the northern boundary of Morpeth. Fields have thin hedgerow boundaries and there is minimal tree cover in amongst the hedgerows.

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<sup>5</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988



- 7.14 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the site as 'Mid-Northumberland, lowland rolling farmland' (longhorsley) character area; a notable key feature in relation to the site is "field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees", which feature strongly. The study recommends that as a guiding principle to development the landscape should be 'managed', which denotes that if features of the character area are maintained it has a "greater ability to absorb change, without significant detriment to the innate character". With maintaining of site features such as the strong hedgerow boundaries the surrounding landscape does have the potential to accommodate such development.
- 7.15 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges identifies that at the northern edge of Morpeth it is lowest in areas associated with St Georges Hospital site. It is suggested that the settlement edge should be strengthened through retention of existing trees and field boundaries and the development of new woodland belts and trees. This should aim to create a distinct transition between urban and rural landscapes. The site is contained within the route of the bypass which helps to retain the open feel of countryside to the north, and tree lined boundaries to the south and east will help to blend natural and developed land forms and transition from the settlement in to countryside. Planting may be required along the northern boundary to help mask the site from long range views from the north.
- 7.16 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 7.17 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial flooding of the site, and only small areas of the south of the site are at lower or intermediate risk of surface water flooding, which would not necessarily prevent development.
- 7.18 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure. Whilst the site has not been considered as part of the 'North Morpeth Strategic Sewage Project' it is indicated that the site is close enough to connect post 2017, although suggestion that the sites be future proofed as part of the by-pass development may not be possible at this stage of construction.
- 7.19 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

- 7.20 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 7.21 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, as per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

### Rights of way

- 7.22 Route 407/009 runs along the western boundary of the site and would need to be retained. This has implications if the site area were to be shifted eastward to take include more level ground.

### Conclusion

- 7.23 A portion of the site is sloped enough to be unsuitable for development, but moving of the allocation eastward could address this. Further work would be needed to determine if the area of the site impacted by mineral safeguarding could be developed, and there is a potential high risk from past coal mining. There are no known historic assets which would be impacted by the sites development, and although there are protected species recorded close to the site, it would likely not prevent its use for employment development if the site was design appropriately. Impact on landscape is lessened being south of the bypass and come enclosure by tree lined boundaries, assuming additional planting to the north. Constraints would not prevent development on most of the site.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	4

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

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

- 7.23 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that for the majority of criterion assessed for the 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 more serious constraint. Landscape sensitivity was also identified as a serious constraint but it is apparent that being located south of the bypass and the presence of stronger natural site boundaries, suggest that impact on landscape can be more readily mitigated than if the site was located within the open land to the north. It was also noted that the site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means, and over 800m from the nearest bus stop. In terms of the latter access by bus may improve as the St Georges housing scheme is developed. As mentioned, the risk of surface water flooding is also cited as major risk, although it is likely that this can be addressed through design.
- 7.24 The site is currently isolated from complementary services with the town centre being circa 1.5km from the site. However, a local centre is planned as part of the St Georges hospital development which may deliver closer services. As indicated in the SA, access by alternative transport means for labour is currently quite poor, and access for pedestrians and cycles is also relatively restrictive with no dedicated infrastructure in place at present, although this can be addressed through the provision of better connections to the St George's housing development when an access road is developed from the bypass.

- 7.25 There is not considered to be a high risk to the environment, providing that red squirrel habitat is at least retained.
- 7.26 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the green belt in the NPPF.
- 7.27 The site falls within land parcel MH03 (Cottingwood Common) in the Green Belt Assessment, which encompasses the areas south of the bypass up to the boundary of St Georges Hospital, and extends east to west from Howburn Wood to Fullbeck Grange.
- 7.28 The area overall provides a medium contribution to Green Belt purposes. Whilst there is no risk of settlement merger if the site was developed, it is clear that the bypass to will provide a strong and durable boundary for the edge for the Green Belt to prevent sprawl. However the area itself is currently open countryside with no clear features to limit the growth of the settlement. The area currently does not contribute to the historic setting of Morpeth given the expanse of open countryside beyond, but may play a greater role once the bypass is constructed.

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

- 7.29 Existing adjoining uses are largely compatible with employment development. The site will be bounded by the Morpeth Northern Bypass to the north, with agricultural land beyond this and to the east. A large residential development is planned immediately to the south of the site and there is the potential for the amenity of future residents to be impacted if particular types of employment operations are developed on the site. There may also be potential issues regarding a shared access for housing and employment.

#### **Conclusion**

- 7.30 It is apparent that there are serious sustainability constraints impacting the site, although some may be lessened as adjoining housing development advances. Access to the site for labour, other than by car is particularly an issue, although there are fewer concerns in terms of environmental impact. It is considered that development of the site would not constitute urban sprawl into open countryside and the bypass is the strongest feature to north of Morpeth to which to set the inner Green Belt boundary. This suggests that it is appropriate for the site to not be included in the Green Belt.

<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**

- 7.31 The site has not been proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010) or through subsequent calls for sites. The site is under single ownership, and although it is not indicated on the land registry title, it is understood that the land is optioned for residential development. The site is being promoted as a housing site in the Northumberland SHLAA (8057), with a reasonably favourable assessment. This indicates that the land is unavailable for employment development.

### **Development costs**

- 7.32 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. An access directly for the bypass roundabout to the west may be beyond benchmark cost owing to the unfavourable topography. Providing an access off the planned road leading into the St Georges site would also add cost. The design of the site would also need to address the risk of surface water flooding, although it is not clear if this would add abnormal costs to the site development.

### **Market demand**

- 7.33 The site has quick and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout at the Morpeth Northern Bypass, and it is only a short distance for HGV traffic to reach this, although this could add cost for businesses compared to sites closer to the A1. The site lacks frontage onto a trunk road, but the bypass would still provide prominence for relevant businesses, albeit that this could be restricted if planting is provided on the northern boundary. Road access for workers, customers and freight will likely be largely unconstrained by traffic congestion, but access by other means for staff is poor and there are no complementary services currently nearby.
- 7.34 The completion of the Morpeth Northern Bypass provides an unconstrained linkage between the A1 corridor and sites in south east Northumberland. It is unclear to what extent this may shift demand in the local industrial and office market.
- 7.35 The site is not linked to an established employment area, and when planned housing is developed to the south of the site it may significantly reduce the appeal to businesses producing noise, odours, and most businesses would be wary that residential amenity may restrict hours of operation. A shared access route could also detract market demand for businesses requiring a high number of lorry movements.
- 7.36 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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 access onto the A1 and the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial uses.

## Conclusion

- 7.37 The general area is likely to be attractive to the market given clear business demand in Morpeth but proximity to planned residential development may be a deterrent to some businesses. Good access to the strategic road network will be attractive, although frontage may be restricted. It is known that the land is optioned for alternative development and as such it is not considered to be available for employment development.

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

## Morpeth Site 6 – Land north of Cottingwood Common

### Total Score

<b>Morpeth Site 6</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>25</b>

## 8. Morpeth Site 7 – Land west of Whorral Bank Roundabout

Site Area (Ha): 5.65

Easting: 420,971.465

Northing: 587,235.998

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	50	11,300	240
B2	30	6,780	188
B8	20	4,520	65

- 8.1 The site is located to the south west of the junction of the Morpeth Northern Bypass and the A197, with agricultural land surrounding the site, bar a veterinary practice to the east. The site is currently used for arable and pasture farming, with the some tree planting close to the roundabout.



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

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

- 8.2 Access to the strategic road network will be via the Morpeth Northern Bypass, meaning that it will be suitable for HGVs, and it is circa 3.6km to the junction with the A1. Although significant residential traffic will use the by-pass it is not considered that this will impinge on the good access the site will have to the strategic network.
- 8.3 The site can only be feasibly accessed from the roundabout linking the A197 and the B137 located to the north east of the site. This currently has four arms and a fifth will be added when the construction of the bypass is complete. It is indicated by County Highways that the roundabout is now at capacity in terms of the number of routes it serves as the addition of another would result in an unsafe junction. Other options such as accessing the site from the A197 (Whorral Bank) and directly from the bypass further to the west would likely not be safe, particularly for HGV traffic, and left turn only exits would be inappropriate for an employment site, and would require significantly more developer investment.
- 8.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. It is apparent that given the location of the site, it is unlikely that there would be a severe impact on these two key junctions, and that there is sufficient excess capacity in the Bypass to support development at this location.

### **Conclusion**

- 8.5 Although site 7 would have good and unconstrained access to the strategic road network, and there is capacity in the local road network to accommodate the development of the site, the lack of a viable option for traffic to access the site effectively and safely excludes site 7 as an option.

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

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 8.6 The site undulates slightly and slopes gently to the south so would require some levelling, but the topography would likely not preclude the development of large footprint buildings. The ground starts to slope south of the site, which may exclude any subsequent phases of development in this area.
- 8.7 The site falls within a coal mining reporting area and coal mining high risk area, on account of a coal outcrops that run underneath the site. The Coal Authority also identifies 'probable shallow workings' impacting the whole of the site. This does not necessarily exclude development as a significant proportion of land in Northumberland is impacted by these issues, however, shallow workings in particular may demand significant abnormal costs to site preparation. The risks to development and therefore possible approaches and costs to mitigation would need to be addressed in mining risk assessment as part of any future planning application.
- 8.8 The site falls within the coal and brick clay mineral safeguarding area. This does not necessarily mean that the site cannot be developed but unnecessary sterilisation should be avoided and reasonable alternatives should be favoured. An application would need to demonstrate the effect on the resource.
- 8.9 The site is currently used for pasture and arable farming and is classified as grade 3b, which indicates "land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield"<sup>6</sup>. 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**

- 8.10 The site is used for pasture and arable farming with some relatively recent tree planting to the north east of the site. Howburn Woods is located to the west and south some distance beyond further pasture farmland.
- 8.11 Desk based assessment indicates there is no protected habitat and there have been no recordings of protected species on the site. A range of protected species has been recorded locally. There is a large pond approx 330m to the N with smaller ponds approx 50m S, 90m E, 210m NW, 450m NE and substantial ponds and wetlands approx 1km to the N. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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**

- 8.12 The site is part of an open area of agricultural land which opens out from the wooded river gorges which characterise the northern boundary of Morpeth. Fields have thin hedgerow boundaries and there is minimal tree cover in amongst the hedgerows.

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<sup>6</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988



- 8.13 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the site to be within the 'coalfield farmland' character area. The area is impacted by "historic and ongoing mineral extraction which has affected large parts of the landscape, while urban fringe is also a key influence. This is a heavily modified landscape which has lost much of its natural landscape structure and which is dominated by man-made elements. However there are "there are pockets of unaltered rural character", particularly areas of ancient woodland. The guiding principle for the landscape is to "plan". It is suggested significant damage to landscape has already occurred and developments should try and restore and recreate where the landscape is damaged, or where key qualities remain their long term viability should be retained. In short, it is apparent that in general it is a landscape that can accommodate development.
- 8.14 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges identifies that at the north east of Morpeth as Pegswood Manor and notes that it is of "lower sensitivity", though development would raise issues of coalescence, and would extend the settlement beyond a strong existing boundary" which is currently strongly defined by Howburn woods. Therefore the landscape could accommodate additional development, but may bring about degrading of the strength of the settlement boundary.
- 8.15 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure designations.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 8.16 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial flooding of the site, and only small areas of the east of the site are at lower risk of surface water flooding, which would not necessarily prevent development, but may affect the design and layout of any development.
- 8.17 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure. The site has not been considered as part of the 'North Morpeth Strategic Sewage Project'. Therefore the site does not have a public foul sewage system and no investment is planned from NWL to provide this. Adjacent development relies on septic tanks. The provision of such infrastructure could add significantly to site development costs.
- 8.18 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

- 8.19 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 8.20 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, as per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

#### Rights of way

- 8.21 No public rights of way impact the site.

## Conclusion

- 8.22 The site is suitable for development in terms of topography and there are no constraints concerning natural and historic assets. The site does have some area of constraint concerning the past mining and mineral safeguarding but it is not clear that this would exclude development. The landscape is able to accommodate additional development, but development would effectively leapfrog Howburn Woods, which serves as a strong north east boundary to Morpeth. The lack foul sewerage infrastructure has the potential to add cost.

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**

- 8.23 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that for the majority of criterion assessed for the 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 more serious constraint. As the site cannot be accessed from the adjoining roundabout for employment use, highways access is also identified as a serious constraint. As a consequence marketability for the intended is constrained. It was also noted that the site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. There is not considered to be a high risk to the environmental indicators of sustainability.
- 8.24 The site is currently quite isolated from complementary services with the town centre being circa 1.5km from the site. Whilst the site is accessible by car by the labour force of Morpeth and south east Northumberland, it has poor infrastructure to access by other means. With no residential development within the vicinity of the site it is not clear bus services could be improved if the site was built out.
- 8.25 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.
- 8.26 The site falls within land parcel MH07 (Pegswood Manor) in the Green Belt Assessment, which encompasses the area around the site and the restored former surface coal mine to the north.
- 8.27 The area overall provides a high contribution to Green Belt purposes. There is a medium risk of urban sprawl as although it risk leapfrog development, it is contained strongly within the route of the bypass and A197. However, as it is open countryside which is separated from the rest of Morpeth by Howburn Woods there is high risk of encroachment. The also a high risk of merger with Pegswood and the area contributes highly to the historic setting of Morpeth.

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

- 8.28 Existing adjoining uses are largely compatible with employment development. The site will be bounded by the Morpeth Northern Bypass to the north, with agricultural land beyond this and to the west and south. The veterinary practice beyond the A197 would not be adversely impacted.

#### **Conclusion**

- 8.29 The site does not have any non-conducive neighbouring uses, but it is apparent that there are serious sustainability constraints impacting the use of the site for employment use. It is also somewhat isolated from services and has quite poor sustainable access for labour. The area contributes highly to the role of the Green Belt and so may it may not be appropriate the set the inner boundary in this parcel of land.

<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>5</b>

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

#### **Ownership and availability**

- 8.30 The site has not been proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010) or through subsequent calls for sites. The site is predominantly under single ownership, with only a thin strip of land alongside the A197 not being under the land owners control. The site is being promoted as a housing site in the Northumberland SHLAA (6900), although was assessed unfavourably. It is reasonable to assume that the site is not available for employment use.

#### **Development costs**

- 8.31 As a greenfield site some levelling may be required and as it is not currently unserved in terms of utilities and internal roads, which could all add to the site preparation cost. The need to provide connection to the foul sewerage system without planned NWL investment could add prohibitive costs. With the straight forward access route via the adjacent roundabout not being a viable option on grounds of safety, other options would need to be explored which would likely to be substantially more expensive. The design of the site would also need to address the risk of surface water flooding, although it is not clear if this would abnormal costs to the site development.

#### **Market demand**

- 8.32 Evidence shows the Morpeth market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises, but poor access to employment sites has restricted past delivery. The site has quick and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout at

the Morpeth Northern Bypass, and it is only a short distance for HGV traffic to reach this, although this could add cost for businesses compared to sites closer to the A1. However, as the site cannot be readily accessed from the adjacent roundabout, the additional abnormal costs associated with an alternative access (if this is feasible at all) would likely make the site unviable and so would consequently diminish market demand.

#### Conclusion

- 8.33 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given clear business demand in Morpeth and although the site would have good and unconstrained access to the strategic road network, the lack of a viable option to for traffic to access the site effectively and safely excludes the site as a viable option. The site is not being actively promoted for employment use, and contesting development plans are known.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>1</b>

### **Morpeth Site 7 – Land west of Whorral Bank Roundabout**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 7</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>20</b>

## 9. Morpeth Site 8 – Land south of Coopies Lane

Site Area (Ha): 5.015

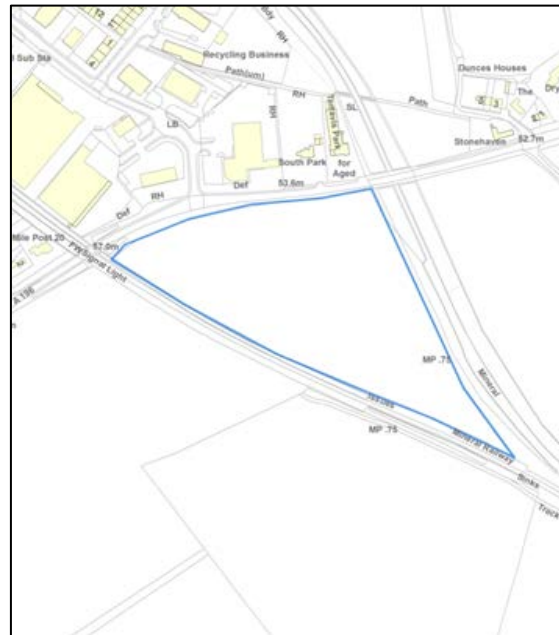
Easting: 421,485.322

Northing : 585,006.011

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	60	12,036	256
B2	30	6,018	167
B8	10	2,006	29

- 9.1 The site is located immediately to the south of Coopies Lane Industrial Estate beyond the A196, and is enclosed by freight railway lines to the west and east. Beyond this is farmland to the east and south and a housing development is under construction to the west.



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

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

- 9.2 The site is located to the south east of Morpeth, with the A1 running long the western boundary of the settlement. Therefore access to the strategic road network is circa 5km from the site. The Clifton junction is the closest but does not have a northbound slip road, and so works traffic originating from the site would have to travel south to the junction with Stannington to travel north, adding circa 5km to a journey north. This would have time and cost implications for businesses. Alternatively the junction on the A1 at the Morpeth Northern Bypass construction could be used, which provides and south and north bound slips. However, this junction is also circa 5km from the site, and would require employment traffic to past through the town centre, including the constrained junction at Telford Bridge. It is apparent that both junctions with the A1 are remote from the site and require traversing residential areas and/or the town centre and the residential traffic congestions associated with this. A third but somewhat unreasonable option is for generated employment traffic to use the A192 to access the strategic road network at Cramlington some 13km to the south.
- 9.3 The site can be accessed from the A196 running along the northern boundary of the site. County Highways suggest alignment with the entrance to Coopies Lane, utilising either a roundabout or signalled junction would be the best option. Pedestrian and cycle infrastructure connections from the site to the wider network will be required as part of the sites development. As stated above, although the site could have suitable access, the local road network to the west of the site is constrained by residential and town centre traffic, and there are consequential impacts on noise and air pollution if HGVs use these routes.
- 9.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. However, it is apparent that given the location of the site there is a risk of adding traffic load to the most constrained junctions in the town, in particular the River Wansbeck crossing at Telford Bridge which the study identifies as Morpeth's "key pinch point".

## **Conclusion**

- 9.5 Site 8 would have constrained and distant access to the strategic road network which would demand traversing residential areas and/or the town centre, and could have adverse impact on the key constrained junction at Telford Bridge. However, access to the site itself would be readily achievable via a shared junction with Coopies Lane.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	1
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	2

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 9.6 The majority of site 8 is level, with a gentle slope at the extreme south. It would be suitable for the development of large footprint commercial buildings without the need for substantial earthworks.
- 9.7 The site falls within a coal mining reporting area and coal mining high risk area, on account of a coal outcrop that runs underneath the site. This does not necessarily exclude development as a significant proportion of land in Northumberland falls under these two designations. The risks to development and therefore possible approaches and costs to mitigation would need to be addressed in mining risk assessment as part of any future planning application.
- 9.8 The site falls within the coal and brick clay mineral safeguarding area. This does not necessarily mean that the site cannot be developed but unnecessary sterilisation should be avoided and reasonable alternatives should be favoured. An application would need to demonstrate the effect on the resource.
- 9.9 The site is currently used for pasture farming and is classified as grade 3a, which indicates “land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops”<sup>7</sup>. As such development of the site would result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land as per annex 2 of the NPPF. As per paragraph 112 of the NPPF, preference should be given to developing lower grade land before higher grade.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 9.10 The site is used for arable farming, with patchy hedgerows to the north and a bush and tree belt alongside the railway line to the east.
- 9.11 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. A range of protected species has been recorded locally. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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**

- 9.12 The site is part of an open area of agricultural land which opens out from the wooded river gorges which characterise the eastern boundary of Morpeth. Fields have thin hedgerow boundaries and there is minimal tree cover in amongst the hedgerows.

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<sup>7</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988

- 9.13 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the site to be within the 'coalfield farmland' character area. The area is impacted by "historic and ongoing mineral extraction which has affected large parts of the landscape, while urban fringe is also a key influence. This is a heavily modified landscape which has lost much of its natural landscape structure and which is dominated by man-made elements. However there are "there are pockets of unaltered rural character", particularly areas of ancient woodland. The guiding principle for the landscape is to "plan". It is suggested significant damage to landscape has already occurred and developments should try and restore and recreate where the landscape is damaged, or where key qualities remain their long term viability should be retained. In short, it is apparent that in general it is a landscape that can accommodate additional development.
- 9.14 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges identifies that "rising ground to the south of Morpeth and the valley of the Coal Burn to the southwest are considered to be of higher landscape sensitivity as they play an important role in allowing visual separation between Morpeth and settlements further south, including Hepscoth, Clifton and Stannington Station". It is advised that consideration should be given that development south of the A196 views into the settlement and the setting of settlements to the south. It is apparent therefore that although the site is within a broad landscape capable of accommodating new development, the area south of Morpeth is locally sensitive and high quality treatment to boundaries may help to mitigate impact. It is noted that the adjoining housing development protrudes into the open landscape and its impact was deemed to be acceptable.
- 9.15 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure sites or corridors.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 9.16 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial flooding of the site, and only very small areas of the east of the site are at lower risk of surface water flooding, which would not necessarily prevent development.
- 9.17 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure. A foul water connection can also be readily be made with the existing head of the public sewer on Coopies Way.
- 9.18 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

- 9.19 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 9.20 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, as per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.



### Rights of way

9.21 The site is not impacted by public rights of way.

### Conclusion

9.22 The site is largely unconstrained and conducive for employment development. The site is greenfield and is higher quality agricultural land which will need to be factored against other site options. The potential impact on the landscape would need to be carefully considered in the design of the site and the incorporated boundary treatments.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	4

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

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

9.23 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that for the majority of criterion assessed for the site scored no constraint and or a positive impact, with only assessed to be a serious limitation, the current greenfield status of the site. As the site is also categorised as grade 3a agricultural land this is considered a potential constraint, as is the sensitivity of the landscape. As discussed, highways access is a potentially major constraint, and factoring evidence in the Northumberland Transport Assessment it could be reasonable to identify this as a serious constraint to sustainability. Conversely however, unlike site options to the north of the town the site is 1.5km to the nearest train station. Amenity it is also a potential constraint given the ongoing construction of housing immediately to the west. There is not considered to be any significant risk to the environment.

9.24 The edge of town site is currently isolated from other services associated with the town centre which is circa 2km away, but Coopies Lane contains a range of complementary operators for both staff and businesses. In terms of supply of labour the site is accessible from adjoining settlements and is relatively close to residential areas allowing for cycle and pedestrian access. A bus stop is already located close to the site and there are regular services serving nearby development.

9.25 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.

9.26 As the site is enclosed by a road and railway line the site has been assessed as its own land parcel: MH31a (Stobhill North).

9.27 The area overall provides a medium contribution to Green Belt purposes. The main high contribution is to safeguarding of the merger of settlements as it would bring the boundary of

Morpeth significantly closer to Hepscott. However, only a medium contribution is considered in relation to checking unrestricted sprawl as the site is contained by existing man made features. Consequently there is a low contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment given the urbanising effect of the railway lines in close proximity, and the area does not contribute to the historic setting of Morpeth.

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

- 9.28 Existing adjoining uses are largely compatible with employment development; with existing employment development to the north and agricultural land the east and south. The main concern is the proximity of housing under construction to the east. There is potential for the amenity of residents to be impacted by noise/light/odour in relation to the likely types of operators on the site. A bund/landscaped buffer would likely be required along the western boundary.

### **Conclusion**

- 9.29 Although a greenfield site, it is a largely sustainable location for development with the loss of high quality agricultural land and the highways access being the main constraints, or the latter is significant. Adjoining uses are generally compatible if concerns about residential amenity were addressed in the site design, and the site contributes less to the purposes of the Green Belt than other site options.

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

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

#### **Ownership and availability**

- 9.30 The site has not been proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010) or through subsequent calls for sites. It is however being promoted as a housing site in the Northumberland SHLAA (8007). Past indications are that the landowner, whilst being supportive of the land being developed, is not supportive of the site providing additional employment growth. It is reasonable to conclude that the site is unavailable for employment use.

#### **Development costs**

- 9.31 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. An access would require signalling or a roundabout at the junction with Coopies Way which may add to generally assumed external costs of an employment site. Connection to water infrastructure can be made without substantial works.

### Market demand

9.32 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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. The adjacent Coopies Land site remains relatively attractive to employment operators, although the vacancy rate as of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 was over 15%. However the site is effectively built out with no land available for new development. Access to the strategic road network is a key requisite for industrial / distribution operators, as indicated in evidence base documents, and the identified issues concerning efficient access to the A1 will likely be a significant constraint on future market demand. Industry consultation as part of the ELR (2011) and ELPDS (2015) acknowledged the opportunity to expand Coopies Lane into the site, building on the presence of existing commercial activity. However, it is indicated that it would be constrained by the same poor access that businesses recognise impacts Coopies Lane, which is “essentially on the wrong side of the town with poor access from trunk roads”.

### Conclusion

9.33 It is apparent that whilst there is likely to not be any abnormal development costs associated with the site, it is clear that the site is not available for development. Even if the site were, evidence indicates that the poor access to the strategic road network would significantly dampen market demand, and this needs to be considered against the improved access to the A1 the bypass will offer.

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

### **Morpeth Site 8 – Land south of Coopies Lane**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 8</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>21</b>

## 10. Morpeth Site 9 – Land north west of County Hall (former fire station)

Site Area (Ha) - 1.169

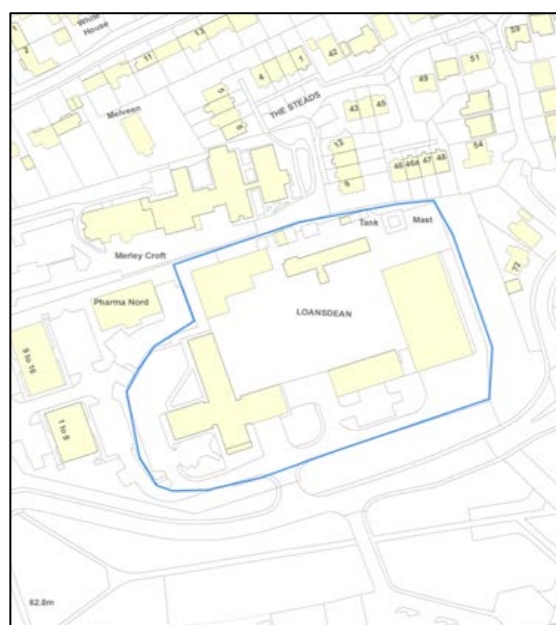
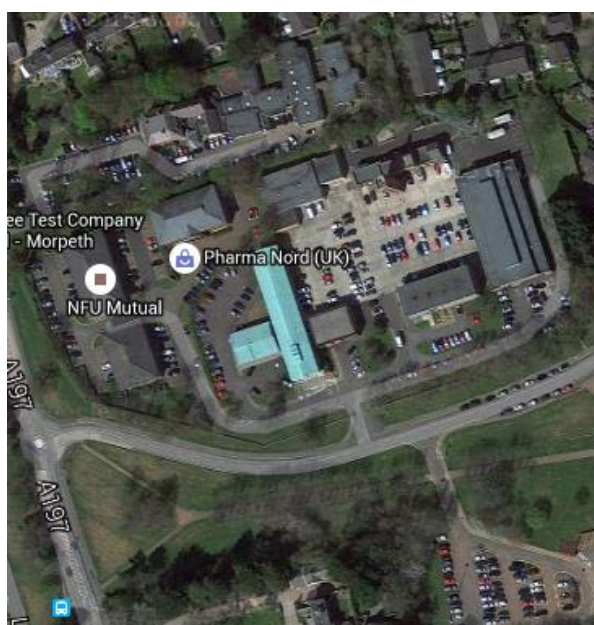
Easting - 420,060.577

Northing - 584,509.700

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of 60% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	100	7,014	585

- 10.1 The former fire station site is located immediately to the east of the existing Loansdean office development, with residential and healthcare uses located to the north. County Hall is situated to the south east and the site is currently used by the County Council.



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

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

- 10.2 The site is located to the south of Morpeth, with the A1 running long the western boundary of the settlement. Therefore access to the strategic road network is circa 2.2km from the site. The Clifton junction is the closest but does not have a northbound slip road, and so works traffic originating from the site would have to travel south to the junction with Stanington to travel north, adding circa 5km to a journey north. This would have time and cost implications for businesses. Alternatively the junction on the A1 being improved as part of the Morpeth Northern Bypass construction could be used, which provides and south and north bound slips. However, this junction is circa 5km from the site, and would require employment traffic to past through the town centre, including the constrained junction at Telford Bridge. It is apparent that both junctions with the A1 are remote from the site and require traversing residential areas and/or the town centre and the residential traffic congestions associated with this.
- 10.3 There is an existing access point for the site, but County Highways indicate that this may need some modification. This site entrance is off the access road leading to the County Hall site, which is immediately off the A197. This is the main route into Morpeth from the south which although passes residential development is suitable for work traffic. The County Hall access road is also physically able to accommodate works traffic and is generally free flowing, although it is also used to access a residential estate.
- 10.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. As the Clifton A1 junction does not provide a north bound slip road, it is reasonable to assume that the traffic may traverse the town centre to use the improved junction at Fairmoor. However, it is apparent that given the location of the site there is a risk of adding traffic load to the most constrained junctions in the town, in particular the River Wansbeck crossing at Telford Bridge which the study identifies as Morpeth's "key pinch point".

## **Conclusion**

- 10.5 Site 9 would have constrained and distant access to the north via strategic road network which would demand traversing residential areas and/or the town centre, and could have adverse impact on the key constrained junction at Telford Bridge. However, access to the south via the strategic road network would be relatively unconstrained. There is an existing access point for the site, which is also used to access a residential estate, however this may need some modification.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	3
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	3

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 10.6 The site is level throughout and would be compatible for the development of large footprint commercial buildings.
- 10.7 The site falls within a coal mining reporting area and coal mining high risk area, on account of a coal outcrop that runs underneath the site. This does not necessarily exclude development as a significant proportion of land in Northumberland falls under these two designations. The risks to development and therefore possible approaches and costs to mitigation would need to be addressed in mining risk assessment as part of any future planning application. It is noted however that the risk did not prevent the current development on the site.
- 10.8 The site falls within the coal and brick/fire clay mineral safeguarding area. This does not necessarily mean that the site cannot be redeveloped but unnecessary sterilisation should be avoided and reasonable alternatives should be favoured. An application would need to demonstrate the effect on the resource.
- 10.9 The former fire station site is currently being used for other uses associated with the County Council. The site therefore holds no value as agricultural land.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 10.10 The site is currently fully developed.
- 10.11 Desk based assessment indicates there are red squirrels and bats reported within or adjacent to the site, although this would not prevent the site from being developed for employment, loss of relevant habitat when the site is developed would need to be avoided and/or mitigated/compensated as part of the site layout.
- 10.12 A range of other protected species has been recorded locally. There are Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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**

- 10.13 The site is within the built up area of Morpeth and does not front onto the settlement edge. Therefore provided the scale of the development is similar to its current built form, it is apparent that the redevelopment of the site would not significantly impact on the surrounding landscape.
- 10.14 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure sites or corridors.

### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 10.15 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial flooding of the site, and only very small areas of the east of the site are at lower risk of surface water flooding, which would not necessarily prevent development.
- 10.16 Consultation with NWL indicates that a 225mm foul sewer currently crosses the site which will be readily developable with unrestricted flows for foul water. A minimum of a 50% reduction in surface water flows to reduce downstream flood risk would be required.
- 10.17 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

- 10.18 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 10.19 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, as per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

### Rights of way

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

### Conclusion

- 10.21 The site is currently developed and aside for the need to protect or mitigate the current protected species habitat on the site, the site is largely unconstrained for redevelopment for employment use.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	5

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

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

- 10.22 As brownfield site within the settlement, the Pre-Submission Draft Sustainability Appraisal (2015) indicates that the site does not have any serious sustainability constraints, and only some potential constraints concerning highways access and distance to the nearest train station. However, highways access is a potentially major constraint in relation to the intended use, and factoring evidence in the Northumberland Transport Assessment it could be reasonable to identify this as a constraint to sustainability.
- 10.23 Although within the settlement the site is somewhat isolated from complementary services with the town centre circa 2km away. The site is readily accessible from adjacent residential

areas by foot and cycle, and is close to existing bus stops with established services serving other development.

10.24 As the site is within the current Morpeth settlement boundary the Green Belt assessment is not applicable.

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

10.25 The site adjoins a current office development, which currently shares the site access.

Residential development is located immediately to the north east of the site of the site and healthcare facilities are situated to the north. Noisy / odour emitting developments may not be appropriate in such close proximity due to the impact on residential amenity, which in turn could restrict the types of businesses which could operate from the site. Such uses could also be incompatible with and impact on the marketability of the adjoining office development.

### **Conclusion**

10.26 The site is brownfield and accessible by sustainable modes of transport. The site is close to labour which will be a positive to prospective businesses. Adjoining uses may not be compatible with some types of employment development. As such it is apparent that the site may only be suitable for office development.

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

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

#### **Ownership and availability**

10.27 The site owned is by the County Council and is currently used for various local authority functions. The site is currently being marketed for sale as part of the wider County Hall complex and is considered suitable for a range of uses. The site is included in the Northumberland SHLAA (3067), with a favourable assessment. There is therefore uncertainty as to whether the site may be available for employment development.

#### **Development costs**

10.28 Buildings currently on the site will need to be cleared, but as a brownfield site utilities are already in place and the site has an existing access point, albeit this may require some modification. Public assistance through site clearance could significantly improve the viability of the site.



## Market demand

10.29 Evidence shows the Morpeth market is strong with tangible demand for new business premises. Assuming that the site would be developed for offices the ELPDS (2015) indicated strong demand across size ranges, and the attractiveness of the town as a location for office growth was also highlighted in the ELR (2011). However, it was indicated that a more central location would be favourable such as above shop offices, and this may be reflected in the over 10% vacancy rate of the adjacent Loansdean offices. The appeal of the site to the market could be improved through pre-emptive site clearance, given the relative lack of other abnormal costs.

10.30 There is also a clear demand for industrial and warehousing operations and so the site cannot provide for all market demand given the constraints of adjoining uses, as reflected in the site area being less than the 5ha need identified through the evidence base. Poor access to the strategic road network, in terms of there being no northbound access from the Clifton junction with the A1, could detract demand for such operations.

## Conclusion

10.31 Although Morpeth, is a strong market, it is apparent that the site may not be available for employment development and even if it the site was, it could only provide for a portion of demand, as issues concerning residential amenity could restrict site uses to offices only.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market demand and availability	<b>3</b>

## **Morpeth Site 9 – Land north west of County Hall (former fire station)**

### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 9</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>26</b>

## 11. Morpeth Site 10 – Land East of Coopies Lane

Site Area (Ha) - 5.01

Easting - 421318.238

Northing - 585574.848

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	60	8,016	171
B2	30	8,016	223
B8	10	4,008	57

- 11.1 The site is located immediately to the east of Coopies Lane Industrial Estate beyond a mineral railway line, with agricultural land to the north, east and south. The site is currently used for arable farming.



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

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

- 11.2 The site is located to the south east of Morpeth, with the A1 running long the western boundary of the settlement. Therefore access to the strategic road network is circa 5km from the site. The Clifton junction is the closest but does not have a northbound slip road, and so works traffic originating from the site would have to travel south to the junction with Stannington to travel north, adding circa 5km to the a journey north. This would have time and cost implications for businesses. Alternatively the junction on the A1 at the Morpeth Northern Bypass construction could be used, which provides and south and north bound slips. However, this junction is also circa 5km from the site, and would require employment traffic to past through the town centre, including the constrained junction at Telford Bridge. It is apparent that both junctions with the A1 are remote from the site and require traversing residential areas and/or the town centre and the residential traffic congestions associated with this. A third but somewhat unreasonable option is for generated employment traffic to use the A192 to access the strategic road network at Cramlington some 13km to the south.
- 11.3 Access to the site would need to be from Coopies Lane, a minor road which runs along the northern boundary of the site. This currently crosses the mineral railway line which separates the site from Coopies Lane via a narrow bridge, which would need upgrading to be used as a suitable access point. Junctions to the west of the site are also poor and not suitable for intensified use, particularly in relation to the level crossing at Salisbury Street. County Highways do not consider this to be appropriate for employment traffic and suggest that it is not feasible to mitigate. The route is undesirable as an access for pedestrians, cycles and via public transport. Even if the site area were to be shifted to the south possible access has been blocked through the construction of two residential properties alongside the A196, and visibility and safety are impacted by the railway bridge and the separation of current junctions.
- 11.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. However, it is apparent that given the location of the site there is a risk of adding traffic load to the most constrained junctions in the town, in particular the River Wansbeck crossing at Telford Bridge which the study identifies as Morpeth's "key pinch point".

## **Conclusion**

- 11.5 Site 10 would have constrained and distant access to the strategic road network which would demand traversing residential areas and/or the town centre, and could have adverse impact on the key constrained junction at Telford Bridge. Access to the site also be unachievable and unsuitable via Coopies Lane and the single lane railway crossing.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	1
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	1

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 11.6 The site is generally level with only a slight slope at the eastern side of the site. Extensive levelling would not be required.
- 11.7 The site falls within a coal mining reporting area and coal mining high risk area, on account of a coal outcrop that runs underneath the site and the presence of potential shallow coal workings. This does not necessarily exclude development as a significant proportion of land in Northumberland falls under designations. However, shallow coal workings have the potential to add significantly to development cost depending on the depth and nature of the shafts. The risks to development and therefore possible approaches and costs to mitigation would need to be addressed in mining risk assessment as part of any future planning application.
- 11.8 The site falls within the coal, clay (brick and fire), and sand and gravel mineral safeguarding area. This does not necessarily mean that the site cannot be developed but unnecessary sterilisation should be avoided and reasonable alternatives should be favoured. An application would need to demonstrate the effect on the resource.
- 11.9 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>8</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**

- 11.10 The site is used for arable farming, with mature hedgerow boundaries and an area of meadow with sparse tree cover to the east.
- 11.11 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. A range of protected species has been recorded locally. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) 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).

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<sup>8</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988

### Landscape and Green Infrastructure

- 11.12 The site is part of an open area of agricultural land which opens out from the wooded river gorges which characterise the eastern boundary of Morpeth. There are mature hedgerow boundaries to the west and an area of meadow with sparse tree cover to the east.
- 11.13 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the site to be within the 'coalfield farmland' character area. The area is impacted by "historic and ongoing mineral extraction which has affected large parts of the landscape, while urban fringe is also a key influence. This is a heavily modified landscape which has lost much of its natural landscape structure and which is dominated by man-made elements. However there are "there are pockets of unaltered rural character", particularly areas of ancient woodland. The guiding principle for the landscape is to "plan". It is suggested significant damage to landscape has already occurred and developments should try and restore and recreate where the landscape is damaged, or where key qualities remain their long term viability should be retained. In short, it is apparent that in general it is a landscape that can accommodate additional development. However it is noted that the site is close to the areas of ancient woodland emanating out of the main River Wansbeck gorge, which would need to be closely considered in relation to future development proposals.
- 11.14 The above is recognised in the Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges identifies that the railway line adjacent to the site as strong settlement boundary, with open countryside beyond. It is recommended that the rural character of this eastern side of the town is retained, which the introduction of large scale development to the east of the railway line risks preventing.
- 11.15 Development of the site would not impact on green infrastructure sites or corridors.

### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 11.16 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial flooding of the site, and only very small areas of the east of the site are at lower risk of surface water flooding, which would not necessarily prevent development.
- 11.17 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure. In terms of a suitable waste water connection it is indicated that the site may be able to utilise an appropriately dimensioned system located to the south west of the site. If the existing system within Coopies Lane were to be utilised, only foul flow would be possible, indicating the need for a separate solution to address surface water discharge. The lower level of the site also indicates that a new pump system would be required, which could add abnormal costs to the development.
- 11.18 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

- 11.19 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 11.20 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, as per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

### Rights of way

- 11.21 Route 409/002 runs along the eastern boundary of the site and the retention of this would need to be factored into design of the site.

### Conclusion

- 11.22 The site could potentially impact on the character of the surrounding landscape by crossing a currently strong settlement boundary into an area of open countryside. The site's topography is conducive but past and potentially future mineral workings would need further detailed assessment. The site is largely unconstrained by historic and ecological constraints.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	4

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

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

- 11.23 The site was not assessed as part of the past Sustainability Appraisal work, but following the methodology of the assessment it is apparent that the main constraints focus on site access. It is one of the closest of the site options to Morpeth train station but this is still beyond 800m and this is a potential constraint, as is distance to the nearest bus stop. As discussed, highways access is a potentially major constraint, and factoring evidence in the Northumberland Transport Assessment it could be reasonable to identify this as a serious constraint to sustainability. The development of a greenfield site and loss of grade 3 agricultural land are also potential constraints respectively.
- 11.24 The edge of town site is currently somewhat isolated from other services associated with the town centre which is circa 1.5km away, but Coopies Lane contains a range of complementary operators for both staff and businesses. In terms of supply of labour the site is accessible from adjoining settlements and is relatively close to residential areas allowing for cycle and pedestrian access, albeit the access route is both undesirable and has poor legibility for users.
- 11.25 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment

(2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.

- 11.26 The site falls with a parcel MH33 (Shadfen Park) which stretches and contained by the River Wansbeck to the north and the A196 to the south.
- 11.27 The area contributes highly to all of the Green Belt purposes. There is a risk of sprawl, in particular from ribbon development along the A196, and would encroach into the open countryside. However it is recognised that the lane to the east of the site could potentially form a new boundary, albeit not as strong as the current railway line settlement edge. The area also contributes to the historic setting of Morpeth and risks closing the separation with Guidepost.

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

- 11.28 Existing adjoining uses are largely compatible with employment development; with existing employment development to the west and agricultural land surrounding the rest of the site.

### **Conclusion**

- 11.29 The site's access is a major sustainability constraint and it is also apparent that the setting of Green Belt boundaries to exclude the site could be harmful to its purposes, as the area to the east of the railway line is sensitive to sprawl. However, surrounding uses are generally compatible.

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

### **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness, Deliverability and viability**

#### **Ownership and availability**

- 11.30 The site is under single ownership and is not being promoted for housing development through the Northumberland SHLAA. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the site is available for employment development.

#### **Development costs**

- 11.31 As a greenfield site it is currently unserved in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. NWL indicate that a pumping system would be required if the existing foul water system serving Coopies Lane was to be utilised. A suitable access could be prohibitively expensive given the likely work required to the bridge over the railway line and works on the local road network.

### Market demand

11.32 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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. The adjacent Coopies Land site remains relatively attractive to employment operators, although the vacancy rate as of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 was over 15%. However the site is effectively built out with land available for new development. Access to the strategic road network is a key requisite for industrial / distribution operators, as indicated in evidence base documents, and the identified issues concerning efficient access to the A1 will likely be a significant constraint on future market demand. It is also evident that the very poor access to the site and expensive infrastructure required would deter investment.

### Conclusion

11.33 It is apparent that whilst the site is available for employment, it would not stimulate market demand given both poor site access and distant and congested access to the strategic road network.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market demand and availability	<b>2</b>

### **Morpeth Site 10 – Land East of Coopies Lane**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 10</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>19</b>



## 12. Morpeth site 11 – Lancaster Park

Site Area (Ha): 14.45

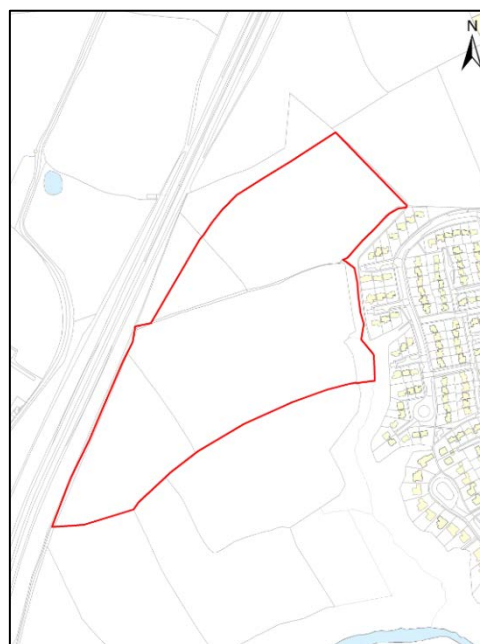
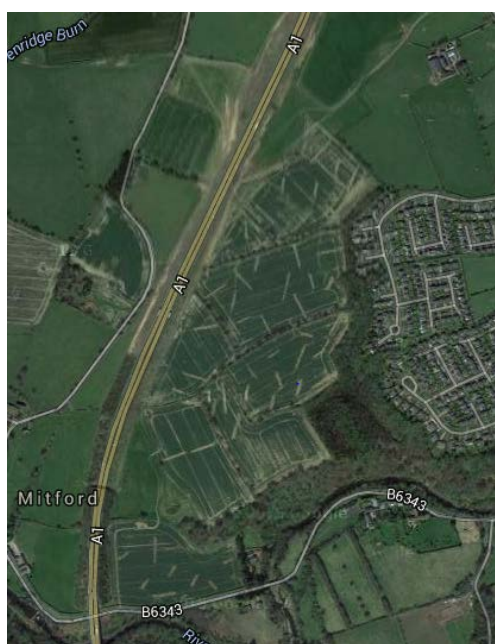
Easting: 418,066.800

Northing: 586,665.590

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1c	40	23,120	492
B2	30	17,340	482
B8	30	17,340	248

- 12.1 The site is situated between Lancaster Park and the North Morpeth By-pass, at the point it merges onto the A1. The site is bounded to the east by residential development at Lancaster Park, with woodland acting as a buffer. The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture agriculture with mature hedgerow boundaries punctuated by mature trees.



- 12.2 Site 11 has been reviewed as the assessment of other site options indicates that whilst site 3 is the most suitable option for a new employment site, this option is constrained by the split land ownership and that it should be shifted to remove this issue. Land to the south of site 3 is under the same ownership and it is apparent that the land owner is willing for the site to be allocated and developed for employment use. The larger site also provides an alternative option for the continued allocation of land at Fairmoor (allocated in the Castle Morpeth Local Plan (2003), and designated as site D21 in the Northumberland Employment Site Schedule 2014/15), which is constrained by land ownership issues, meaning the site is likely to be unavailable for employment development. The area of site 11 is comparable to the combined area of the existing employment allocation at Fairmoor and the evidenced need for about 5ha of new land for employment development. This assessment will indicate to what degree site 11 shares the positive site characteristics and constraints which need to be overcome.

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

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

- 12.3 Access to the strategic road network (A1) is less than 1km from the site via the Morpeth Northern By-pass. There would not be a need to traverse residential areas to reach the A1.
- 12.4 The site presently has no existing suitable point of access. However, upon completion of the North Morpeth Bypass a roundabout access will be available immediately to the north west of the site. The roundabout does not include a spur in its present design to enter the site but there is a gap in the bund to allow for an agricultural access road. This could allow for upgrading to deliver a suitable point of ingress and egress from the site. It would enable immediate access to the strategic road network, with no constraint from traffic stemming from other land uses.
- 12.5 County Highways assessment concludes that mitigation would allow for a suitable access to the site utilising this infrastructure, and that onsite requirements could be accommodated on the site. It is specifically noted that cycle and pedestrian connections to the existing network would be required.
- 12.6 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that enter Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. It is apparent that given the location of the site, it is unlikely that there would be a severe impact on these two key junctions, and that there is sufficient excess capacity in the Bypass to support development at this location.

## Conclusion

- 12.7 Site 11 would enable unconstrained access to the strategic road network, given that the North Morpeth Bypass is now complete. The impact of the sites development in terms of congestion on the local road network would be likely to not have an unacceptable adverse impact on key local junctions, in conjunction with other planned development; accounting for the excess local capacity the bypass will deliver.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	5
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	5

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

### Ground conditions

- 12.8 The site is suitable in shape and topography to allow for the development of large footprint commercial buildings. It is generally flat with very little undulation. Land to the south of the site slopes gently, intensifying in slope toward the River Wansbeck basin. Woodland to the east of the site corresponds with dip in the topography which would prevent employment development.
- 12.9 Although some of the site falls within a coal mining reporting area, which indicates the need for mining report as part of a future planning application, the Coal Authority does not identify any specific risks or history of coal mining.
- 12.10 The site is not within any mineral safeguard or resource area and as such it is evident that development of the site would not result in material sterilisation.
- 12.11 The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture farming. Its designation is split between grades 3 and 4, with the vast majority being Grade 3. Grade 3 indicates “land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield” and Grade 4 indicates that it is “poor agricultural land” with “severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops and/or level of yields”. 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

- 12.12 The site is open mainly agricultural land with mature hedgerow boundaries interspersed with mature deciduous trees in the southern portion of the site. A finger of mature woodland, Scotch Gill Woods, starts on the east boundary of the site and extends southwards toward the River Wansbeck. Some of this wood is within the site boundary.
- 12.13 Desk based assessment indicates that a number of protected species (Bat's, Red Squirrels and Badgers) have been recorded within or close to the site. Although this would not prevent development of the site as a whole for employment it will mean that through design and layout the loss of relevant habitat should be avoided and/or mitigated or compensated. This has the potential to add development cost through loss of developable area. A range of other protected species has been recorded locally

12.14 The extreme south east corner of the site is designated ancient woodland and so would require a stand-off buffer which would likely slightly reduce the developable area. There are also Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), and further ancient woodlands (AWs) within 2km of the site. There is a Local Nature Reserve located to the east and south of the site and a buffer zone may be required 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

12.15 The site is within a wedge of green land which separates the edge of Morpeth from the A1. The area is characterised by small fields enclosed by mature hedgerows and broadleaf trees, and more open pasture land to the north east. The site is split between these two areas. The distance between the A1 and the edge of Morpeth denote a feeling of urban fringe.

12.16 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the majority of the site as 'Mid-Northumberland, lowland rolling farmland' character area; a notable key feature in relation to the site is "field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees", which feature strongly. The study recommends that as a guiding principle to development the landscape should be 'managed', which denotes that if features of the character area are maintained it has a "greater ability to absorb change, without significant detriment to the innate character". With maintaining of site features such as the strong hedgerow boundaries the surrounding landscape does have the potential to accommodate such development.

12.17 The southern portion of the site is within the 'Broad Lowland Valley – Wansbeck Valley' character area, which is characterised by "gentle v-shaped valleys set within rolling farmland" and "Riparian woodland". It is recommended that "the landscape should be managed to conserve both its natural and cultural history" and that development should seek "a net gain for landscape quality" with development briefs recommended for larger developments to ensure this delivered. It is apparent therefore that the southern portion of the site and land to south although suitable for development would need to ensure that the dominant landscape features are preserved and enhanced.

12.18 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges does not directly assess an approach to development to the west but does , in relation to the northern suggest a need to " create distinct transition between urban and rural landscape" through the retention and strengthening of woodland belts and trees. It is apparent that such an approach could be relevant to the site and emphasises the need for any development to retain and enhance the tree cover which characterises the area to soften the transition to open countryside beyond the A1.

12.19 To ensure the development of the site does not impact on green infrastructure designations, a buffer zone may be required in relation to the Local Nature Reserve located to the east and south of the site.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

12.20 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial water flooding of the site, and some areas at minor risk of surface water flooding.

12.21 Consultation with NWL indicates that the site does not impact on any existing water management infrastructure and that a foul water connection is part of the 'North Morpeth Strategic Sewage Project'. The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) modelled a hypothetical employment area to the east of the A1 and indicated that the main concern was a water main running close to the site which would require to be diverted with a suitable easement, but this does not impact the site directly.

12.22 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

12.23 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.

12.24 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. As per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

#### Rights of way

12.25 Route 415/013 cuts through the site, and so the layout of any development would need to ensure that this retained.

#### Conclusion

12.26 The site is able to accommodate large footprint buildings without substantial site levelling, and past and future mining workings will not impact development. There is no known archaeological (subject to identified investigation) interest and no historic assets would be impacted. Although there is some ecological interest in the site it would not prevent site development, but may require retention and enhancement of habitat features and a buffer zone. Similarly the landscape is able to absorb additional development and the A1 beyond helps to denote the area as urban fringe countryside, but enhancement of key landscape features would be needed. This has the potential to add to the marketability of a future employment site. The layout of the site would need to take account of the right of way which crosses the site.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	4

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

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

12.27 The northern part of the site has been assessed in previous Sustainability Appraisal work and this shows that for the majority of criterion assessed for the 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 more serious constraint. It was also noted

that the site is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Pedestrian and cycle links to the site from residential areas will be improved as part of the North Morpeth Bypass development, which will also improve connection to the nearest bus stop which is within 800m. The amenity of nearby residents is considered a potential risk as the development would be immediately adjacent to houses at Lancaster Park.

- 12.28 It is apparent that the site is isolated from other services which employees would be likely to use. The town centre is circa 2km from the site and there are few other amenities within the adjoining neighbourhood. The site is immediately adjacent to a residential area, although there are no present linkages to the site which would need to be improved to allow for access on foot or by cycle. A bus stop is located a suitable walking distance to the site but this could be improved.
- 12.29 As indicated, the site is relatively unconstrained by heritage and the effects of flooding, and ecological constraints would not prevent the site's development for employment, but rather its layout and design.
- 12.30 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.
- 12.31 The site falls within land parcel MH12a in the Green Belt Assessment, which extends from the A192 south of the site to the point the land starts to drop down into the River Wansbeck Valley. The area is considered to have a medium contribution to all of the purposes of the Green Belt. The role of the A1 to act as a strong and durable boundary for the Green Belt and prevent urban sprawl is recognised, as is the presence of built structures like roads and housing which denote a medium role for the setting of Morpeth. It is apparent that mature hedge boundaries to fields also have the potential to act as boundaries to development.

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

- 12.32 The site is bounded to the A1 to the west and open farmland to the north and south. Residential properties would immediately adjoin the site to the east and so the layout of the site and location of uses would need to consider this potential impact in terms of noise, light and odour pollution. It is noted that these uses would not use a shared access and so commercial and residential traffic would not be mixed.

#### **Conclusion**

- 12.33 It is apparent that the development of this site would have a lesser impact on the Green Belt given the presence of strong and durable boundaries and the containment of any built form by the A1. Although adjoining residential areas, access for labour is relatively poor as is the access to other services, but the former will be improved by the by-pass. The proximity to housing may impact on amenity and this would need to be carefully considered in the design of any development.

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

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### **Ownership and availability**

12.34 The site has not been proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010) or through subsequent calls for sites. It is in single ownership, and it is known that the landowner has been pursuing residential development in the immediate area. The site has been promoted as a housing site in the Northumberland SHLAA (3072 and 3073b), however the land owner has subsequently indicated that it would be supportive of the site being allocated and developed for employment use.

### **Development costs**

12.35 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. However, the location of a new roundabout off the North Morpeth bypass immediately adjacent to the site will remove the normally expensive need to improve the local road network. Access from the roundabout would be short and a gap in the bund would negate earth works. The retention and enhancement of planting and tree boundaries to retain habitat and landscape character and act as buffer from adjoining residential areas could remove development land and add cost. It is not clear at this stage if a contribution would be required toward a new pumping station but this could potentially add substantial cost.

### **Market demand**

12.36 The site has immediate and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout being developed as part of the Morpeth Northern By-pass. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight. The frontage of the site will also be a positive feature to prospective operators.

12.37 The completion of the Morpeth Northern Bypass provides an unconstrained linkage between the A1 corridor and sites in south east Northumberland. However, it is unclear to what extent this may shift demand in the local industrial and office market.

12.38 Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, but there is clear support from the landowner to develop the site for employment use and they are actively pursuing development partnerships to bring forward and anchor a new location for economic growth. Provided the site is suitably designed it will be largely unaffected by sensitive land uses which can unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This may add to the appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.

12.39 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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 access and frontage onto the A1 and the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial use.

#### Conclusion

4.39 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given clear business demand in Morpeth and excellent access to the A1, and there is a commitment from the landowner to bring forward employment development. Site development costs might be comparatively low, but higher value commercial uses could be used to 'pump prime' the site, given the appeal of the location to such operators.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market attractiveness	<b>5</b>

### **Morpeth site 11 – Lancaster Park**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 11</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>29</b>



### 13. Morpeth Site 12 – Land North of Coningsby House

Site Area (Ha) - 1.93

Easting - 420883.600

Northing - 585776.620

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

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	50	5,790	526
B1c	50	3,860	82

13.1 The site is located north of Coopies Lane Industrial Estate beyond a mineral railway line, with agricultural land to the north, east and south. The site is currently used for arable farming.



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

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

- 13.2 The site is located to the north of the existing Coopies Lane employment area and would have to be accessed via a level crossing across the minerals rail line and then via Coopies lane to the A192 at the Morpeth rail station. Therefore access to the strategic road network is circa 5km from the site. The Clifton junction is the closest but does not have a northbound slip road, and so works traffic originating from the site would have to travel south to the junction with Stannington to travel north, adding circa 5km to the a journey north. This would have time and cost implications for businesses. Alternatively the junction on the A1 at the Morpeth Northern Bypass could be used, which provides and south and north bound slips. However, this junction is also circa 5km from the site, and would require employment traffic to past through the town centre, including the constrained junction at Telford Bridge. It is apparent that both junctions with the A1 are remote from the site and require traversing residential areas and/or the town centre and the residential traffic congestions associated with this. A third but somewhat unreasonable option is for generated employment traffic to use the A192 to access the strategic road network at Cramlington some 13km to the south.
- 13.3 Access to the site would need to be from Coopies Lane via a narrow level crossing, which would need upgrading to be used as a suitable access point. Thereafter the access would be across a field that is not part of the site, so would add cost. Junctions to the west of the site are also poor and not suitable for intensified use. County Highways, in commenting on a site with similar access, do not consider this particular road system to be appropriate for increased employment traffic and suggest that it is not feasible to mitigate. The route is undesirable as an access for pedestrians, cycles and via public transport.
- 13.4 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. However, it is apparent that given the location of the site there is a risk of adding traffic load to the most constrained junctions in the town, in particular the River Wansbeck crossing at Telford Bridge which the study identifies as Morpeth's "key pinch point".

## Conclusion

- 13.5 Site 12 would have constrained and distant access to the strategic road network which would demand traversing residential areas and/or the town centre, and could have adverse impact on the key constrained junction at Telford Bridge. Access to the site would also be unachievable and unsuitable via Coopies Lane and the level crossing.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	1
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	1

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

### Ground conditions

- 13.6 The site slopes quite steeply (25+ metres) from south to north. Extensive levelling would be required if larger footprint employment buildings were to be introduced.
- 13.7 The site falls within a coal mining reporting area and coal mining high risk area, on account of a coal outcrop that runs underneath the site and the presence of potential shallow coal workings. This does not necessarily exclude development as a significant proportion of land in Northumberland falls under designations. However, shallow coal workings have the potential to add significantly to development cost depending on the depth and nature of the shafts. The risks to development and therefore possible approaches and costs to mitigation would need to be addressed in mining risk assessment as part of any future planning application.
- 13.8 The site falls within the coal, clay (brick and fire), and sand and gravel mineral safeguarding area. This does not necessarily mean that the site cannot be developed but unnecessary sterilisation should be avoided and reasonable alternatives should be favoured. An application would need to demonstrate the effect on the resource.
- 13.9 The site is currently 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>9</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

- 13.10 The site has a small area of brownfield, derelict land towards its southern end. North of this, the site is a combination of rough grazing and wooded areas.
- 13.11 There are no wildlife designations within the site or in its near vicinity. However, given the site’s wooded nature, it is likely that wildlife interest will have established there, with the possibility of the presence of protected species. A range of protected species has been recorded locally in the past. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) within 2km and further consultation with Natural England

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<sup>9</sup> Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988

would be required as part of any applications as the site may be in the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ).

#### Landscape and Green Infrastructure

- 13.12 The site is part of an open area of agricultural land which opens out from the wooded river gorges which characterise the eastern boundary of Morpeth. The wooded nature of the site and its locality have already been mentioned.
- 13.13 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the site to be within Landscape Character Type 35: Broad Lowland Valleys – the Font and Wansbeck Valley, the incised wooded valleys being a key feature. The local field pattern here dates back several hundred years. Development guidelines for the area note the need for long term woodland management and an examination of capacity of the landscape to absorb any larger forms of development.
- 13.14 The above is recognised in the Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity recognition is given to the importance of this green finger (i.e. the open and wooded valley areas between the railway and the River Wansbeck to the north, which can be regarded as a key part of the green infrastructure in and around Morpeth.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

- 13.15 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial flooding of the site, although Flood Zone 2 lies just to the north. Surface water issues also tend to be limited to areas north of the site itself
- 13.16 Consultation with NWL on nearby sites indicated that the that development in the vicinity should be capable of being services for water supply and foul water sewerage; but considerable infrastructure investment could be needed to deal with significant increases in surface water run-off.
- 13.17 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

- 13.18 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.
- 13.19 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. However, as per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

### Rights of way

- 13.20 No public rights of way affect the site.

### Conclusion

- 13.21 The site could potentially impact on the character of the surrounding landscape by encroaching into a 'green finger' area of Morpeth, where any development would need to be controlled in terms of its impact. The site's topography and historic landscape could also form an obstacle to other than small scale development. Past and potentially future mineral workings would need further detailed assessment. The site is largely unconstrained by historic or known ecological constraints.

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**

- 13.22 The site was not assessed as part of the past Sustainability Appraisal work, but following the methodology of the assessment it is apparent that the main constraints focus on site access. It is one of the closest of the site options to Morpeth train station but this is still beyond 800m and this is a potential constraint, as is distance to the nearest bus stop. As discussed, highways access is a potentially major constraint, and factoring evidence in the Northumberland Transport Assessment it could be reasonable to identify this as a serious constraint to sustainability. The development of a greenfield site and loss of wooded areas are also potential constraints respectively.
- 13.23 This part of town site is currently somewhat isolated from other services associated with the town centre which is circa 1.5km away, but Coopies Lane contains a range of complementary operators for both staff and businesses. In terms of supply of labour the site is accessible from adjoining settlements and is relatively close to residential areas allowing for cycle and pedestrian access, albeit the access route is both undesirable and has poor legibility for users.
- 13.24 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment

(2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.

- 13.25 The site falls with a parcel MH34 (Parish Haugh) contained by the River Wansbeck to the north and the railway.
- 13.26 The area contributes highly to most of the Green Belt purposes. In particular, the area contributes to the historic setting of Morpeth and risks closing the green breathing space.

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

- 13.27 There is a degree of compatibility with nearby employment uses but, on the other hand, there are intervening houses and the development of the site would encroach into the countryside.

#### **Conclusion**

- 13.28 The site's access is a major sustainability constraint and it is also apparent that the setting of Green Belt boundaries to exclude the site could be harmful to its purposes of protecting the setting of the town and stopping sprawl within its valuable 'green fingers' such as this area represents. There may also be some incompatibility issues with surrounding uses.

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

#### **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness, Deliverability and viability**

##### **Ownership and availability**

- 13.29 The site appears to be under single ownership and is not being promoted for housing development through the Northumberland SHELAA. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the site is available for employment development.

##### **Development costs**

- 13.30 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities, meaning a degree of expense to deal with surface water etc. and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. A suitable access could be prohibitively expensive given the likely work required to the level crossing and an internal access road.

##### **Market demand**

- 13.31 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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. Nearby Coopies Land site remains relatively attractive to employment operators,

although the vacancy rate as of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 was over 15%. However the site is effectively built out with land available for new development. Access to the strategic road network is a key requisite for industrial / distribution operators, as indicated in evidence base documents, and the identified issues concerning efficient access to the A1 will likely be a significant constraint on future market demand. It is also evident that the very poor access to the site and expensive infrastructure required would deter investment.

#### Conclusion

13.32 It is apparent that whilst the site is available for employment, it would not stimulate market demand given both poor site access and distant and congested access to the strategic road network.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 7: Market demand and availability	<b>2</b>

#### **Morpeth Site 12 – Land North of Coningsby House**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 12</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>15</b>



## 14. Morpeth site 13 – Land north of Pinewood Drive

Site Area (Ha): 9.89

Easting: 418,543.970

Northing: 586,854.000

Indicative development mix (Assuming build out of between 60 and 40% of the site)

Use-class	Site coverage (%)	Floorspace (sqm)	Employees
B1a	80	47,472.4	4,315
B1c	20	9,724.8	421

- 14.1 The site is that part of a SHELAA submission for mixed uses in 2018 that was not already part of an assessed site. It is situated between Lancaster Park and the North Morpeth By-pass, at the point it merges onto the A1. The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture agriculture with mature hedgerow boundaries punctuated by mature trees.





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

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

- 14.2 Access to the strategic road network (A1) is less than 1km from the site via the Morpeth Northern By-pass.
- 14.3 The site could be accessed either from the A192. The other road that runs alongside the site (serving the residential development to the south) would be unsuitable for shared use.
- 14.4 County Highways assessment on the adjacent site concludes that mitigation would allow for a suitable access from the new roundabout close to the A1 junction although this would have to be via the adjacent site 3.
- 14.5 The Transport Assessment (carried out in relation to the now withdrawn Core Strategy) concluded that the impacts of the new bypass are wide ranging including the grade separated junction adjacent to the site improving access to south east Northumberland, which in turn will reduce traffic flows through the town centre including the key pinch point at Telford Bridge. Without factoring planned development, significant reductions can be observed in the AM and PM peak periods at two key links that entering Morpeth from the south that regularly experience traffic congestion during the peak periods, notably the A197 at Mafeking and A192 at Telford Bridge. Overall, across the selected links, traffic reductions of approximately 10% can be anticipated. When other planned development is factored in, impacts remain positive, with only modest increases in traffic flow at 2 key junctions. It is apparent that given the location of the site, it is unlikely that there would be a severe impact on these two key junctions, and that there is sufficient excess capacity in the Bypass to support development at this location.

### **Conclusion**

- 14.6 Site 13 would enable unconstrained access to the strategic road network, given that the North Morpeth Bypass is now complete. The impact of the sites development in terms of congestion on the local road network would be likely to not have an unacceptable adverse impact on key local junctions, in conjunction with other planned development; accounting for the excess local capacity the bypass will deliver.

<b>ELR site assessment score</b>	
Criterion 1: Strategic road access	<b>4</b>
Criterion 2: Local road access and impact	<b>5</b>

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

#### **Ground conditions**

- 14.7 The site slopes relatively gently, so will be suitable in shape and topography to allow for the development of relatively large footprint commercial buildings.
- 14.8 Although the site falls within a coal mining reporting area, which indicates the need for mining report as part of a future planning application, the Coal Authority does not identify any specific risks or history of coal mining.
- 14.9 The site is not within any mineral safeguard or resource area and as such it is evident that development of the site would not result in material sterilisation.
- 14.10 The site is currently used for mixed arable/pasture farming. Its designation is split between grades 3 and 4. 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**

- 14.11 The site is open mainly agricultural land with mature hedgerow boundaries interspersed with mature deciduous trees in the southern portion of the site. A finger of mature ancient woodland, Scotch Gill Woods, is in the near vicinity, south of the site and extends southwards toward the River Wansbeck.
- 14.12 Desk based assessment indicates that a number of protected species (Bat's, Red Squirrels and Badgers) have been recorded within or close to the site. Although this would not prevent development of the site as a whole for employment it will mean that through design and layout the loss of relevant habitat should be avoided and/or mitigated or compensated. This has the potential to add development cost through loss of developable area.
- 14.13 A range of other protected species has been recorded locally. There are Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Ancient Woodlands (AWs) all within 2km. There is a Local Nature Reserve located to the south east and a buffer zone may be required 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**

- 14.14 The site is within a wedge of green land which separates the edge of Morpeth from the A1. The area is characterised by small fields enclosed by mature hedgerows and broadleaf trees, and more open pasture land to the north east. The site is split between these two areas. The distance between the A1 and the edge of Morpeth denote a feeling of urban fringe.
- 14.15 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) identifies the site as 'Mid-Northumberland, lowland rolling farmland' character area; a notable key feature in relation to the site is "field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees", which feature strongly. The study recommends that as a guiding principle to development the landscape should be 'managed', which denotes that if features of the character area are maintained it

has a “greater ability to absorb change, without significant detriment to the innate character”. With maintaining of site features such as the strong hedgerow boundaries the surrounding landscape does have the potential to accommodate such development.

14.16 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) in assessing landscape sensitivity at settlement edges does not directly assess an approach to development to the west but does , in relation to the northern suggest a need to “ create distinct transition between urban and rural landscape” through the retention and strengthening of woodland belts and trees. It is apparent that such an approach could be relevant to the site and emphasises the need for any development to retain and enhance the tree cover which characterises the area to soften the transition to open countryside beyond the A1.

14.17 To ensure the development of the site does not impact on green infrastructure designations, a buffer zone may be required in relation to the Local Nature Reserve located to the south of the site.

#### Flooding and water management infrastructure

14.18 The Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015) indicates that there is no risk of fluvial water flooding of the site, with only small areas at minor risk of surface water flooding.

14.19 Consultation with NWL on adjacent land, indicates no impact on any existing water management infrastructure and that a foul water connection is part of the ‘North Morpeth Strategic Sewage Project’. The Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015) modelled a hypothetical employment area to the east of the A1 and indicated that the main concern was a water main running close to the site which would require to be diverted with a suitable easement, but this does not impact the site directly.

14.20 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

14.21 There are no listed buildings or other historic assets within or close to the site.

14.22 There is no known archaeological interest within the site. As per NPPF para 128 any planning application would require pre-determination evaluation (e.g. field walking, geophysical survey (that part not previously surveyed) and trial trenching) potential for unrecorded prehistoric or Iron Age/Roman period activity. Mitigation work will depend on results of this evaluation.

#### Rights of way

14.23 Route 415/013 runs along the southern boundary of the site, and so the layout of any development would need to ensure that this retained.

#### Conclusion

14.24 The site is able to accommodate large footprint buildings without substantial site levelling, and past and future mining workings will not impact development. There is no known archaeological (subject to identified investigation) interest and no historic assets would be impacted. Although there is some ecological interest in the site it would not prevent site

development, but may require retention and enhancement of habitat features. Similarly the landscape is able to absorb additional development and the A1 beyond helps to denote the area as urban fringe countryside, but enhancement of key landscape features would be needed. This has the potential to add to the marketability of a future employment site.

ELR site assessment score	
Criterion 3: Site characteristics and development constraints	4

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

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

- 14.25 Previous sustainability appraisal work (carried out in relation to the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy), showed that the majority of criteria assessed for this location scored no constraint and/or a positive impact. The agricultural value was identified as a potential constraint, and as the site is 100% greenfield this was considered a more serious constraint. It was also noted that this is more than 1600m from the nearest train station, indicating a serious constraint in terms of access by alternative transport means. Pedestrian and cycle links to the site from residential areas will be improved as part of the North Morpeth Bypass development, which will also improve connection to the nearest bus stop which is within 800m. The amenity of nearby residents is considered a potential risk as the development would be immediately adjacent to houses at Lancaster Park.
- 14.26 It is apparent that the site is isolated from other services which employees would be likely to use. The town centre is circa 2km from the site and there are few other amenities within the adjoining neighbourhood. The site is immediately adjacent to a residential area, although there are no present linkages to the site which would need to be improved to allow for access on foot or by cycle. A bus stop is located a suitable walking distance to the site but this could be improved.
- 14.27 As indicated, the site is relatively unconstrained by heritage and the effects of flooding, and ecological constraints would not prevent the site's development for employment, but rather its layout and design.
- 14.28 The site falls within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015) reviewed the contribution of land parcels around settlements to establish the most appropriate inner boundary by testing their contribution to the main purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF.
- 14.29 The site falls within land parcel MH12a in the Green Belt Assessment, which extends from the A192 south of the site to the point the land starts to drop down into the River Wansbeck Valley. The area is considered to have a medium contribution to all of the purposes of the Green Belt. The role of the A1 to act as a strong and durable boundary for the Green Belt and prevent urban sprawl is recognised, as is the presence of built structures like roads and housing which denote a medium role for the setting of Morpeth. It is apparent that mature hedge boundaries to fields also have the potential to act as boundaries to development.

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

14.30 The site is bounded to the A1 to the west and open farmland to the north and south.

Residential properties would immediately adjoin the site to the east and so the layout of the site and location of uses would need to consider this potential impact in terms of noise, light and odour pollution. It is noted that these uses would not use a shared access and so commercial and residential traffic would not be mixed.

### **Conclusion**

14.31 It is apparent that the development of this site would have a lesser impact on the Green Belt given the presence of strong and durable boundaries and the containment of any built form by the A1. Although adjoining residential areas, access for labour is relatively poor as is the access to other services, but the former will be improved by the by-pass. The proximity to housing may impact on amenity and this would need to be carefully considered in the design of any development.

<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>4</b>
Criterion 6: Compatibility of adjoining uses	<b>2</b>

## **Criterion 7: Market Attractiveness**

### **Ownership and availability**

14.32 The site has not been proposed for employment use during in the ELR call for sites (2010), or subsequent calls for sites. However the most recent SHELAA puts it forward for mixed use with this proposal extending onto parts of adjoining sites (as assessed here). The submission proposes residential or mixed uses so there is some clarity that those in control of the land would not want to see the majority developed for employment.

### **Development costs**

14.33 As a greenfield site it is currently unserviced in terms of utilities and internal roads which would add to the site preparation cost. However, the boundary with the A192 and the location of the new roundabout off the North Morpeth bypass close to the site will remove the normally expensive need to improve the local road network. The retention and enhancement of planting and tree boundaries to retain habitat and landscape character and act as buffer from adjoining residential areas could remove development land and add cost.

### **Market demand**

14.34 The site has immediate and good quality access to the strategic road network from the improved junction layout being developed as part of the Morpeth Northern By-pass. This could reduce transport costs and make access easier for workers, customers and freight. The frontage of the site will also be a positive feature to prospective operators.

- 14.35 The completion of the Morpeth Northern Bypass provides an unconstrained linkage between the A1 corridor and sites in south east Northumberland. It is unclear to what extent this may shift demand in the local industrial and office market.
- 14.36 Although the site is not linked to an established employment area, provided the site is suitably designed it will be largely unaffected by sensitive land uses which can unduly restrict the times and hours of operation of businesses on the site. This may add to the appeal to business producing noise, odours, or a high number of lorry movements.
- 14.37 Evidence shows the Morpeth 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 access and frontage onto the A1 and the skilled local labour market, but the site may need enabling infrastructure through gap funding or a higher value commercial use.

#### Conclusion

- 14.38 The site is likely to be attractive to the market given clear business demand in Morpeth and excellent access to the A1. However it is clear that the owner would not wish to see the majority of the site in employment use. Site development costs might be comparatively low, but higher value commercial uses could be used to 'pump prime' the site, given the appeal of the location to such operators.

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

### **Morpeth site 13 – Land north of Pinewood Drive**

#### **Total Score**

<b>Morpeth Site 13</b>	
<b>Total site score</b>	<b>25</b>

### 13. Morpeth Total Site Scores

<i>Site reference</i>	<i>Site name</i>	<i>Strategic Road Access</i>	<i>Local Road Access and congestion</i>	<i>Site characteristics and development constraints</i>	<i>Proximity to urban areas and access to services and</i>	<i>Sustainability and planning factors</i>	<i>Compatibility of adjoining uses</i>	<i>Market attractiveness</i>	<b>Total site score</b>
1	Land to the West of the A1 (south)	5	5	4	2	2	3	4	25
2	Land to the West of the A1 (north)	5	5	3	2	2	3	4	24
3	Land east of A1 & north west of Pinewood Drive	5	5	4	3	4	3	4	28
4	Land east of the A1 & west of A192	5	5	4	3	4	4	2	27
5	Land north of Fulbeck Grange	5	5	3	3	2	4	4	26
6	Land north of Cottingwood Common	5	4	4	3	3	4	2	25
7	Land west of Whorral Bank Roundabout	4	1	3	3	3	5	1	20
8	Land south of Coopies Lane	1	2	4	4	4	4	2	21
9	Land north west of County Hall (former fire station)	3	3	5	4	5	3	3	26
10	Land East of Coopies Lane	1	1	4	4	3	4	2	19
11	Lancaster Park	5	5	4	3	4	3	5	29
12	Land North of Coningsby House	1	1	2	4	2	3	2	15
13	Land north of Pinewood Drive	4	5	4	3	4	2	3	25

13.1 The assessment indicates that site 11 is the highest scoring location in Morpeth. Although site specific issues have lessened some scores, in general sites situated along the bypass scored highly on account of excellent access to the strategic road network and unconstrained local road access, and they are also generally unconstrained by current and planned adjoining land uses. This results in high scores for market demand, but site availability does temper this in

some cases, notably site 4. Sites to the east of the town are constrained by poor access to trunk roads and the need to traverse residential areas or the town centre to get to the A1. This, and the lack of frontage onto busy roads, could inhibit market appeal. Nevertheless, the location of south of Coopies Lane site close to the main, established employment site of the town adds to its planning value despite the low score here.