

Land at Ashlawn House, Rugby

Landscape and Visual Technical Briefing Note

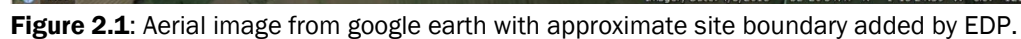
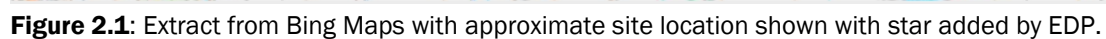
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The following Landscape and Visual Technical Briefing Note provides a high-level summary of the constraints and opportunities with respect to landscape and visual matters, for a potential development site on land at Ashlawn House, Rugby.
- 1.2 This note is provided to inform the early consideration of the site's potential and to support promotion of this site and discussions with the Local Planning Authority (LPA).
- 1.3 The note has been informed by a site visit undertaken by a qualified and experienced Landscape Architect on 26 August 2020 in clear, sunny conditions. Given that this is a preliminary advice note, the approach does not conform to a detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) as would be undertaken in the context of any future planning application, but is informed by the approach usually taken within such circumstances as set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal, third edition (GLVIA3).
- 1.4 The remainder of this document is structured as follows:
 - **Section 2** provides key information in respect of the site location, its appearance/features and its planning policy context;
 - **Section 3** provides the key findings of the preliminary investigations (both site and desk based) with regard to landscape character and visual amenity; and
 - **Section 4** provides discussion and conclusions on the key landscape and visual issues identified and professional opinion on how any adverse effects may be mitigated and what development opportunities the site may be able to accommodate.

2. Site Location, Description and Context

- 2.1 The site is located due south of Rugby town centre, accessed by Ashlawn Road in between Rugby Road and Onley Lane.



- 2.2 The site comprises two field parcels separated by a private drive to Ashlawn House. The site is fairly well contained on all sides except for part of the southern site boundary of the western field which is demarcated by fencing. The site contains a robust and mature tree belt bordering Ashlawn Road to the north with a number of parkland trees within grazed fields. The access road to Ashlawn House runs north-south in the centre of the site, with maintained hedgerows c.2.5m tall on both sides of the drive. Boundary vegetation (tall poplars, oaks and sycamore trees as well as shrub planting) to the west borders a derelict lane (with access blocked from Ashlawn Road), and the east is also enclosed by a vegetated boundary along this edge. Outward filtered views are available towards Ashlawn Road and a neighbouring property to the east where visibility is intermittent through tree canopies. Ashlawn House is also visible from the eastern field. The Lodge at the entrance to Ashlawn House has views into the western field.
- 2.3 Generally, the site is enclosed with the exception of those views described above, most notably the open boundary on part of the southern edge. The site has a parkland country estate character due to the mature trees interspersed on site and the formal existing access which is perceived from Ashlawn Road. Adjacent properties are perceived to the north and east and this aids the legibility of the site context in that the site lies, in landscape terms, on the edge of settlement. Furthermore, construction activities are perceived on land opposite the site at the time of the site visit. There are no public rights of way (PRoW) on site; Sustrans National Cycle Route (NCR) 41 borders its northern edge. The following photos further illustrate the site's appearance.



Figure 2.3: The access to Ashlawn House in the foreground in the centre of the view with tree belts to the left and right (out of view) on the site boundary.



Figure 2.4: Northward view taken on site with hedgerows bordering the drive to Ashlawn House.



Figure 2.5: Vegetation on the eastern edge of the site.



Figure 2.6: Southerly view from the eastern field; mature trees in the field and trees bordering Ashlawn House.



Figure 2.7: Westerly view from the western field showing mature trees and boundary vegetation on the western edge.



Figure 2.8: North-easterly view from the western field with gatehouse adjacent to the entrance on Ashlawn Road visible in the centre of the view.



Figure 2.9: Southerly view from the western field with a fence demarcating the open edge on the southern part of the site in the middle ground. Mature trees are seen along this boundary (right of view) and a hedgerow with mature trees interspersed is seen beyond the site's edge which limits open views into the site from the south.



Figure 2.10: View towards the south-westerly corner of the site from the western field. Robust mature vegetation encloses the corner of the site.

3. Key Findings

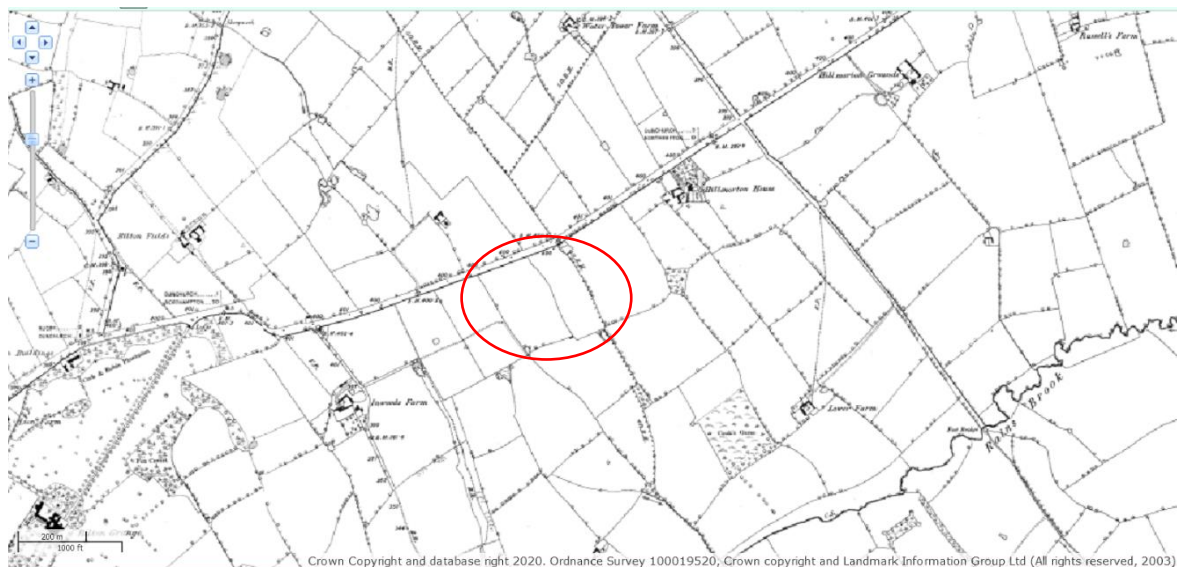
Landscape Character

- 3.1 An initial review of the published landscape assessment commissioned by Warwickshire County Council published in 2006, namely the Landscape Assessment of the Borough of Rugby Sensitivity and Condition Study, identifies that the host landscape character aspects concerning the site is within Landscape Character Type (LCT) – Dunsmore, Plateau Farmlands (Dpfa).
- 3.2 The Dpfa LCT is described as an ‘empty’ yet very distinctive landscape; few roads and built form with regular, geometric field patterns. Key landscape characteristics include mature oak trees, managed hawthorn hedges, large blocks of woodland and roadside verges.
- 3.3 The LCT evaluations pertaining the host area are listed below as follows:
 - The Dpfa LCT is evaluated as **Moderate** in terms of fragility of inherent character on the Landscape Description Units (LDU) fragility index;
 - The overall sensitivity of the Dpfa LCT is evaluated as **Moderate**. This evaluation is the result of marrying the cultural sensitivity of the area with the natural sensitivity and a moderate result is not overly sensitive considering that the scale varies from low to very high;

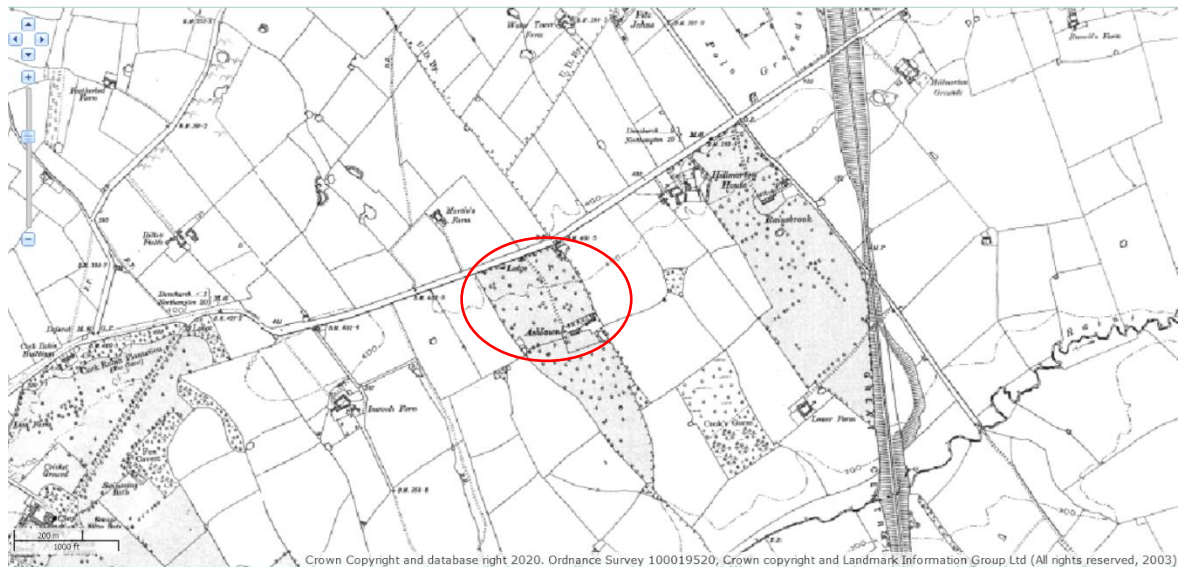
- The Dpfa scored **Low** in visibility therefore the host LCT containing the site is not considered visually sensitive; and
- The condition of the land parcel containing the site is evaluated as **Strong** meaning the condition of the physical landscape elements that make up the area are of good quality.

3.4 Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project was published by Warwickshire County Council in June 2010 and the site lists Ashlawn House as a 'designated park'. There is no record of Ashlawn House recorded as a Registered Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest which is a non-statutory designation assigned by Historic England (HE). The closest Registered Park and Garden is Bilton Grange which is a Grade II listed Park and Garden over 800m to the west of the site at its closest point.

3.5 Historic mapping sheds a bit more light on the historic landscape containing the site and the following map extracts show that the plantation on site is evident from 1900 onwards.



Warwickshire Historic Maps Edition 1-1a 1883-1889 extract from online resources (<http://maps.warwickshire.gov.uk/historical/> accessed 03 08 2020).



Warwickshire Historic Maps Edition 1-2-1a 1900-1906 extract from online resources (<http://maps.warwickshire.gov.uk/historical/> accessed 03 08 2020).

- 3.6 Notwithstanding the findings of published character assessment above including the national landscape historic landscape classifications, EDP carried out a site assessment to provide a more detailed review of the character of the site itself. When taken in isolation, the site has an estate parkland character with settled influences on its edges. The site is enclosed and visually separated from the associated Ashlawn House. The partially open southern boundary allows outward views and creates a connection to the wider farmed land to the south due to the open boundary, however this is not reciprocated in inward views back towards the site due to vegetated boundaries in proximity to the site. The position of the site in relation to the Ashlawn Road, which serves as a ring road around the southern flank of Rugby, has only a limited influence on the site; there is a direct visual link towards the site for road users travelling east and west as the entrance to Ashlawn House is formally marked with signage and a wall; a framed view into the site is available from the entrance. Road traffic was frequent and audibly perceived during the site survey but the vegetated boundary along this edge offers visual separation for the most part.
- 3.7 With respect to landscape related planning designations, the site is not covered by any designations at national or local level although Ashlawn House is listed as a designated park within the Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. No further detail could be found on the 'designated park' status.
- 3.8 Bilton Grange Registered Park and Garden (RPG) is the closest landscape designation (located more than 800m to the west of the site). The grade II listed park is now the site of a school and public access is not permitted. Intervisibility between the site and Bilton Grange is unlikely for the most part but there is a slim chance that some intervisibility with the site might be available in the south-east of the park where the boundary of the RPG is open, albeit the aspect is more so to the south-east due to the topography of the agricultural fields in this area of the park, rather than the north-east where the site is located.

- 3.9 Dunchurch RPG is located to the south of Bilton Grange RPG. No intervisibility is anticipated with the site due to the vegetation on the south-west edge of the site and the vegetated boundary of the RPG itself.

Visual Amenity

- 3.10 A simple 3D viewshed analysis was undertaken prior to the site survey which identified a number of areas in the wider landscape with the potential to offer views of/towards the site and any future development. During the site survey these areas were visited on foot to 'ground truth' this potential visibility and to consider how any available views might a) be affected by the development of the site and therefore b) how the development may need to sensitively respond as a result.
- 3.11 The key 'Representative Views' available toward the site are provided in **Appendix EDP 1**. It should be noted that the methodology for the recording and presentation of these images does not conform to the requirements which would apply to a full LVIA, and as such these should be repeated in the context of the preparation of any such report at a later date.
- 3.12 The images at **Appendix EDP 1** are annotated to identify their location and potential site visibility is assessed and described. Viewpoint locations are indicated on **Appendix EDP 2**.
- 3.13 From this assessment the following headline conclusions can be drawn:
- There is a very limited viewshed from within which the site itself is seen. Intervisibility with the site context is largely curtailed by the boundary vegetation first and foremost as well as localised undulations in the landform as well as the relatively high amount of vegetation in the landscape (woodland copses, hedgerows, and tree belts);
 - The tree belt on the northern edge provides defensible boundary to the site and limits views southward facing views to specific points along the edge of the site. The existing access seen from the site's edge permits a framed view into the site (Viewpoint 1) and there are filtered views for road users travelling east and west along Ashlawn Road through field gates in both corners of the site on the northern boundary (Viewpoints 2 and 3). There are a handful of farmsteads in proximity to the site which also have access from Ashlawn Road and are set back from it. Based on google earth imagery, there are no open views into the site for adjacent properties and there is the potential for filtered views of the proposals from the east albeit this is limited to filtered views due to the boundary vegetation on the site's edges;
 - Views from the majority of the PRoW to the south and south-west of the site are curtailed by the localised changes in topography as well as vegetation. PRoW 168/R177/1) is located c. 300m to the south-west of the site at its closest point. The worst case view from this route is represented in the viewpoint selection (viewpoint 6). An extract from LPA website is contained at **Appendix EDP 3** and shows local PRoW in the vicinity of the site;

- Wider visibility of the site is limited to close range framed or filtered views from the site's northern edge. The landscape is open to the south in part; there are very few visual receptors that would experience a change in view as a result of the proposals as the landscape context to the south comprises large scale agricultural fields, with no residential demises and only one PRoW with the potential for intervisibility with the part of the site. Views from neighbouring settlements such as Dunchurch were analysed and the findings show intervening vegetation would screen the proposals for the most part if not completely. The potential for views from Dunchurch Lodge RPG have been investigated and proposals on the site are unlikely to be perceptible due to the vegetated edge of the west and south-west corner of the site as well as vegetated boundaries found in the landscape in between the site and the RPG; and
- Visual effects are likely to be most apparent in the immediate proximity to the site – from parts of Ashlawn Road bordering the northern edge (vehicular and pedestrian receptors), NCR41. Neighbouring residential properties to the northern, east and west are unlikely to experience a fundamental change in views. The potential effects, particularly if trees and hedgerows are removed is likely to be 'significant' for a discrete group of visual receptors and therefore care needs to be given to the quality of the architectural proposals and their appropriateness for the receiving landscape.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

- 4.1 This preliminary Landscape and Visual Technical Briefing Note has identified that this is an enclosed site with a parkland character. There are high quality parkland trees and tree belts on site. The site is not covered by any national or local landscape designations or spatial planning policies such as green belt, NCR 41 passes adjacent to the site's northern boundary.
- 4.2 The site has a partially open boundary in the south-western edge (fencing) although this openness is not perceptible in views towards the site. The rest of the boundaries are bounded by mostly mature trees – there is some visibility through and or beneath canopies although, in no view inwards is the site greatly perceived. Two hedgerows run north-south through the centre of the site, abutting the existing driveway to Ashlawn House; the house itself sits outside of the site boundary. From a visual perspective, the site is well enclosed however there is some intervisibility with the site and a discrete area of land to the south. Visual receptors within the zone of visibility is limited partial visibility from PRoW 168/R177/1 (Viewpoint 6).
- 4.3 Generally, the influence of future proposals on the landscape character would likely be major adverse on the site itself (if one accepts that development is generally perceived as a negative influence), which is typically the case where built form seeks to replace greenfield land and in this case a parkland character site that is considered higher value in landscape terms than an intensively farmed agricultural field void of mature scattered trees. The effects on the host character area is significantly lower as the site forms a very small part of the LCA reviewed. Particularly with regard to the visual and sensory characteristics, proposals on this site would

not unduly affect the key characteristics of the area as the published assessment did not find the character area to be visually sensitive.

- 4.4 However, at an immediate level, effects would be greater and could cause harm if inappropriate development were proposed – particularly to the character of the parkland. In order to ensure this is not the case the design process needs to respond positively and sensitively to the existing site conditions and character and provide a high-quality, sensitive approach in terms of design, through the retention of high quality mature trees, materials and execution (craftsmanship). Put simply, while the level of effect may be significant in any case, the nature of effect – positive, negative or neutral – will be defined by the quality and attractiveness of the proposals and their suitability for the receiving environment.
- 4.5 The following recommendations are therefore made for the design of the site to ensure effects are both minimal and beneficial where possible:
- Access to the site should, insofar as highways regulations allow, be kept as small/controlled as possible with signage etc minimised to avoid clutter. Options should be explored to accommodate the visibility splay and to minimise vegetation removal as much as possible;
 - Prioritise the retention of the quality mature parkland trees in good condition as well as all vegetated boundaries. The scheme should mitigate for loss elsewhere on site through strengthening existing boundaries and the planting of new hedgerows and trees;
 - Incorporate a landscape buffer along the open part of the southern boundary to minimise visual effects and enhance the green infrastructure of the site and local area and provide further separation and privacy to Ashlawn House and the adjacent property to the west;
 - The long term management of all landscape features should be secured through planning conditions to improve its appearance and increase its longevity;
 - Lighting to the development should similarly be tightly controlled to minimise light spill and limit night-time effects while ensuring residential security and safety. Low level and/or directional lighting should be considered;
 - Development will need to be designed in accordance with a suitable drainage strategy; the green and blue infrastructure strategy should ensure this is integrated fully and attractively into the street scene. Any attenuation or flow features such as ponds and swales should be designed to have biodiversity and open space benefits as well as fulfilling their engineering functionality; and
 - A substantial landscape strategy should be employed to 1) reduce the visual impact experienced in close range views; and 2) create physical separation and buffer future development particularly where boundaries are open at present. Wildlife corridors comprising trees, shrubs and wildflower verges could be used to create ecotones within and

around the site to integrate the proposals into their surroundings. The location of such landscape features should be well thought out to connect to existing green infrastructure (GI) elements and enhance the local GI network of the existing area.

- 4.6 Subject to the development conforming to the above guidance, EDP considers there to be no reason why landscape or visual concerns should constrain the site coming forward. Any future application should however be informed and supported by a thorough LVIA to ensure this is the case and a detailed Landscape Scheme should be provided which integrates fully with the SuDS strategy.

Appendix EDP 1 Representative Viewpoints



Viewpoint 1: View from Ashlawn Road and NCR41 at the entrance to the site and Ashlawn House, looking south-east. The trees and the walled entrance are seen on the site boundary and there is a framed view into the site in which the drive is seen in the centre of the view; in this view proposed development is likely to be seen at close range depending on the layout proposed. The proposals could retain the hedgerows bordering the drive for the most part with sections removed to facilitate access into the east and west fields. A redesign of the access is likely to be an obvious change to the site boundary if it is required to facilitate vehicular movement. Assuming new development retains the mature trees on either side of the entrance and development is set back from the entrance and site edge however, the visual effects are unlikely to be significant.



Viewpoint 2: South-westerly view from Ashlawn Road and NCR41 with a gate and trees showing on the site's edge in the foreground. The framed view into the eastern field comprises a grazed field with mature trees, and Ashlawn House is seen beyond the boundary of the site. Assuming mitigation planting is proposed on the site's near edge and the agricultural gate is removed, the framed view into the site would be lost and new development would be screened from the view.



Viewpoint 3: Similar to Viewpoint 2, this is a framed view from Ashlawn Road and NCR41 only into the western field looking south-east towards the site. The framed view into the western field via a field gate and on site, a compound is seen within the grazed field. A glimpsed view to the wider landscape is available beyond the site from this location. Again, assuming mitigation planting is proposed on the site's near edge and the agricultural gate is removed, the framed view into the site would be lost and new development would be screened from the view.



Viewpoint 4: South-easterly view towards the site from a Bridleway, taken approximately 190m from the site. In this view, the mature trees on the site's edge adjacent to Ashlawn Road are seen in the middle ground, and the western edge of the site aligns with the columnar poplar trees seen on the skyline to the right of the view. Depending on the layout, the tops of proposals may be glimpsed in this view beyond the line of poplars. The view from the Bridleway is undergoing change at present as the land adjacent to the Bridleway was under construction.



Approximate site location to the left of the poplar trees seen on the skyline and behind Ashlawn House.

Viewpoint 5: North-westerly view towards the site from an unnamed road, taken approximately 2.5km from the site. In this view, Ashlawn House is seen in a filtered view in the background, to the left of the frame. Ashlawn House screens views into the eastern field and mature vegetation between the site and the western field screens views. No change is likely to be perceived if proposals came forward on the site.



Viewpoint 6: North-easterly view towards the site from PRow 168/R177/1, taken approximately 930m from the site at its closest point. From this perspective, there are no open views into the western field and Ashlawn House is partly visible in a filtered view. There may be filtered views of proposals in the western field when trees are not in leaf but they are unlikely to be an obvious change to the view, or a fundamental change as built form seen in filtered views towards the site (Ashlawn House) is already part of the view. Additional buffer planting on the site's edge, closest to the viewer would minimise visual effects over time also.



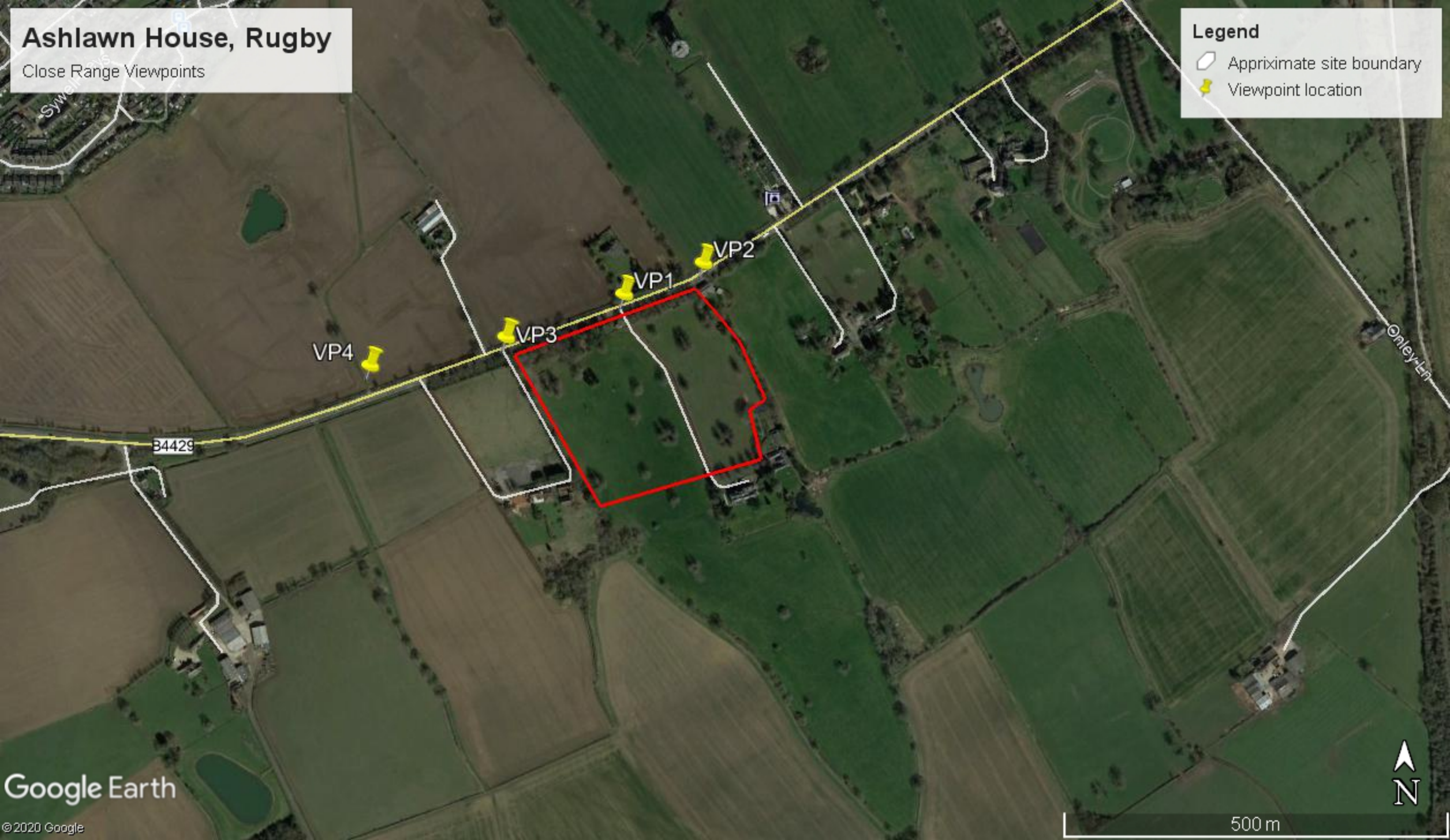
Appendix EDP 2
Viewpoint Plans

Ashlawn House, Rugby

Close Range Viewpoints

Legend


- Approximate site boundary
- Viewpoint location




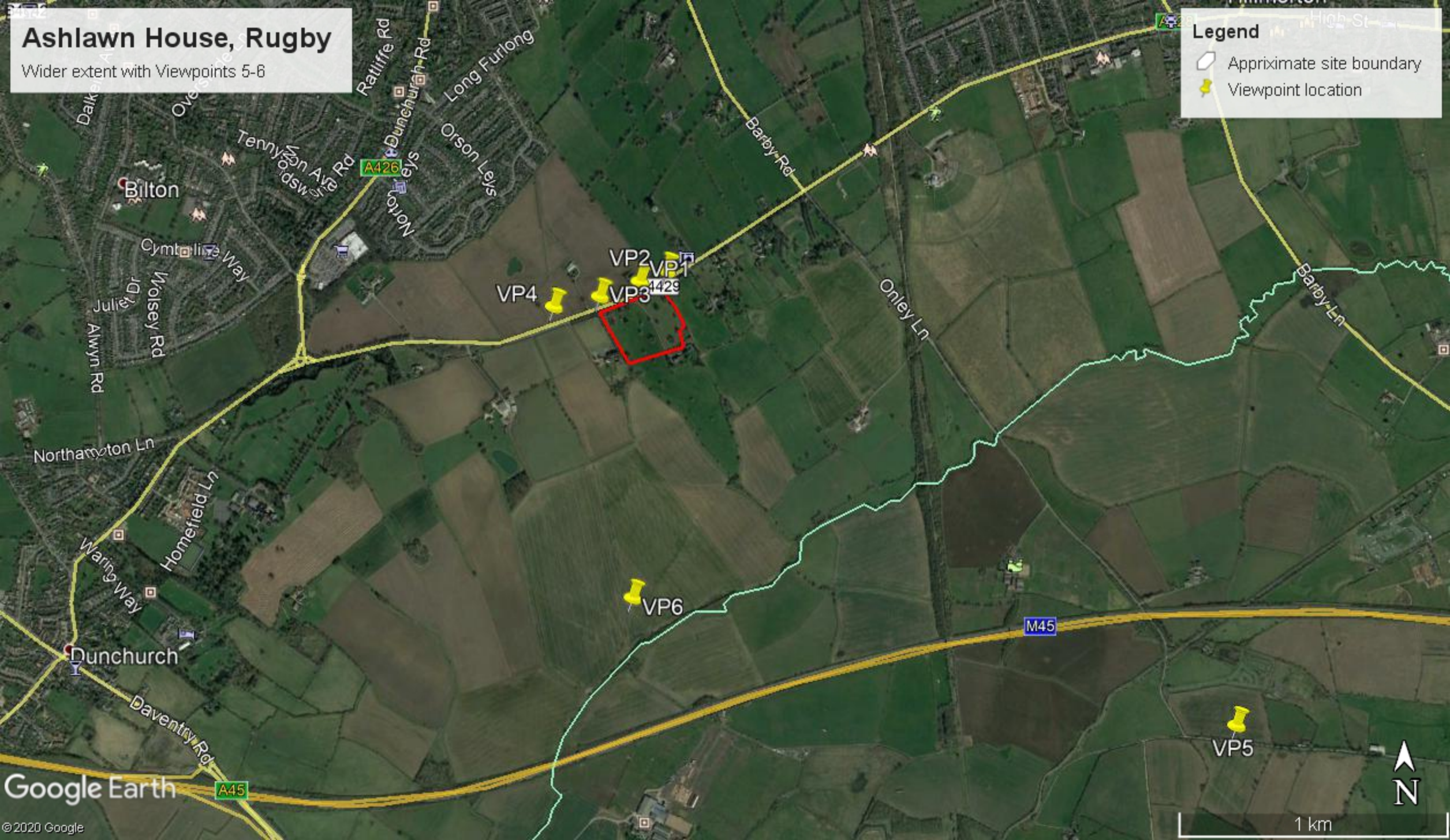
Ashlawn House, Rugby

Wider extent with Viewpoints 5-6

Legend

 Approximate site boundary

 Viewpoint location



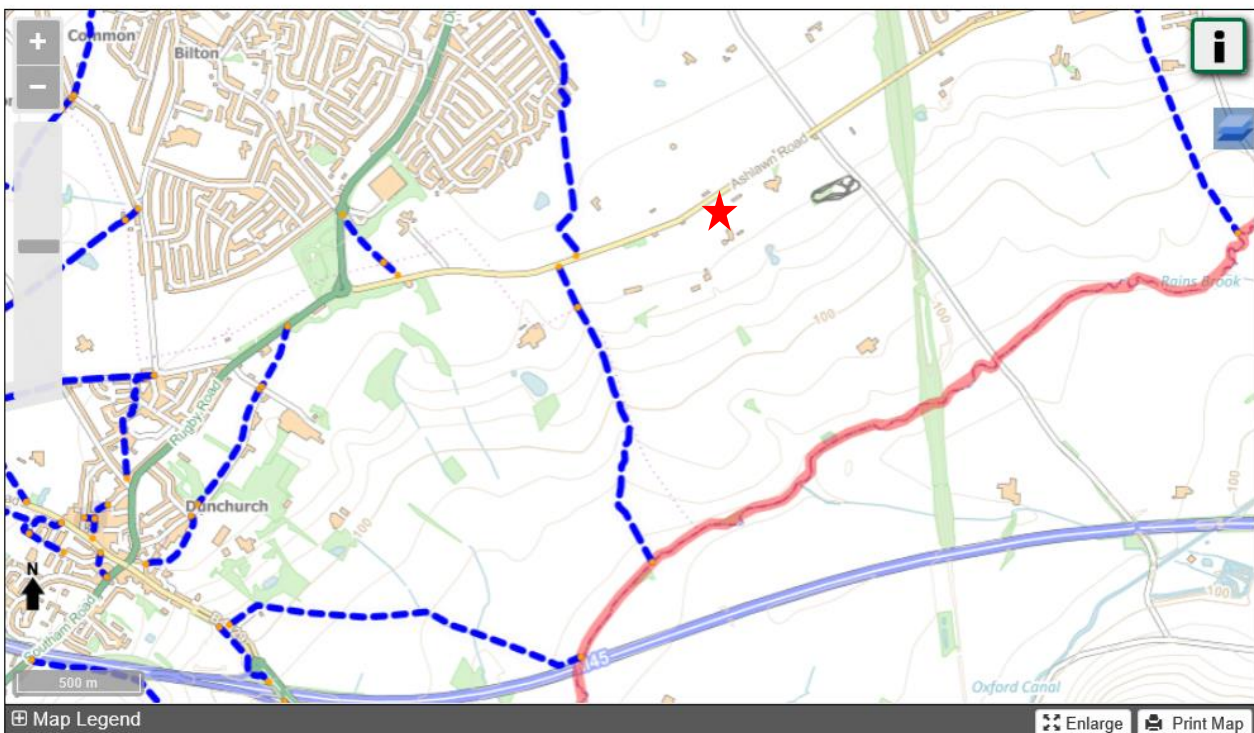
Appendix EDP 3 Local PRow extract from Warwickshire County LPA

Red star denoting approximate site location added by EDP.

Public Rights of Way Map

The map shows all of the public rights of way in the county. To report a problem, firstly log in, then select the 'Report a Problem' menu item.

To find a location use the Search options to locate paths, settlements or parishes. If your device has a GPS you can centre the map on your current position by pressing the 'Current location' button.



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