



# planning direct



Planning feasibility report:

Land at Heydon Grange, Royston, Hertfordshire

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Date: 06/03/2025

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July 2020



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# Introduction

This feasibility report assesses the development potential of land in Heydon Grange, Royston, Hertfordshire.

The site measures approximately 857 ha. It has been put forward in response to a Call for Sites by the Councils involved in the preparation of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan (GCLP). It is proposed to be allocated in the GCLP as a sustainable and self-contained New Town (mixed use) delivering:

- Approximately 10,500 new homes, including affordable houses, family houses, small houses, flats, self-build plots and a nursing home;
- Various services, facilities and education/employment opportunities, including a doctor's surgery with pharmacy, shops, cafes and restaurants, offices, light industrial units, a post office, a community centre, a children's daycare centre, primary and secondary schools, bus stops, cycle tracks and a park-and-ride facility; and
- A range of accessible green spaces, children's playgrounds, parks and a leisure centre.

The proposal is supported by a site location plan (ref. 1111-103) and a preliminary masterplan for the New Town (ref. 01).

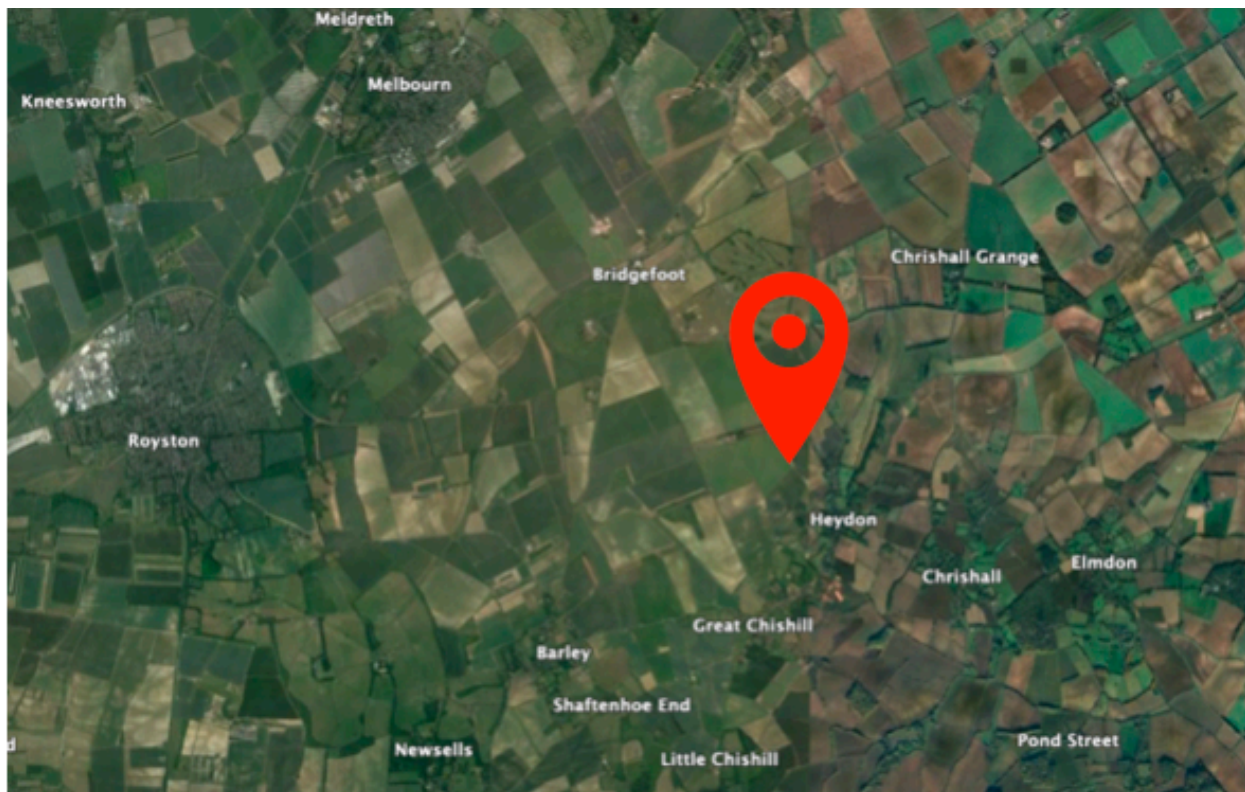


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## The site

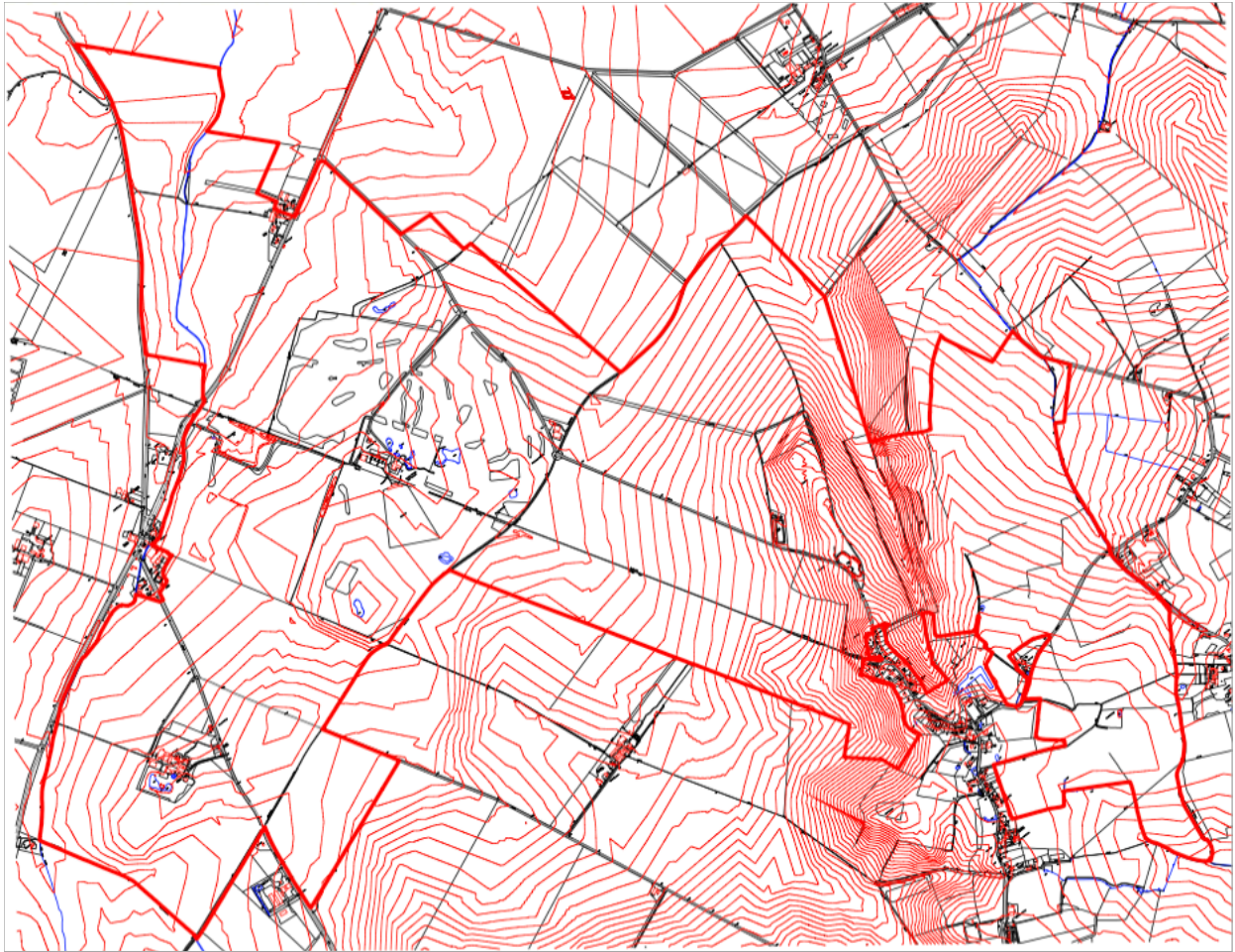
The site consists of a large and irregular tract of land with an area of c. 857 ha. It is located just north of the village of Heydon and c. 5 miles east of the town of Royston. It contains Heydon Grange Golf and Country Club and this facility is proposed to be retained, with the New Town developing around it.

The site's position is roughly plotted on the following satellite image which shows it in context with the area's existing settlements. A copy of the site location plan can be found overleaf.



*2025 satellite image - the approximate position of the site is indicated by a red location pin*

The site benefits from access onto the A505, a primary route that connects together a range of higher-level settlements in Cambridgeshire and the surrounding counties, including Royston, Letchworth Garden City, Hitchin, Luton and Dunstable. It would also be connected to various other local roads, including the B1368 which provides access to Cambridge in the north and Heydon, Great Chishill and Barley in the south.



*Site location plan [not to scale]*

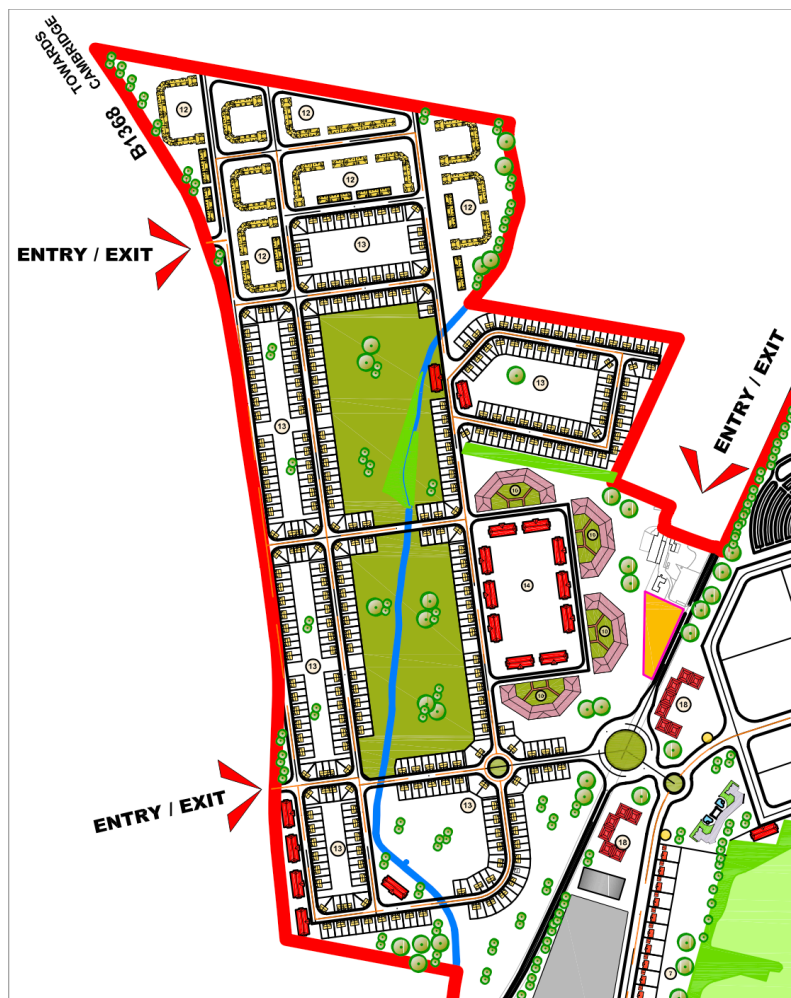




zone;

2. Site-specific drainage systems - utilising bespoke site drainage systems to direct water away from buildings;
3. Flood resistance and resilience measures - incorporating building and site features that improve resistance and/or resilience to flooding (e.g. flood-resistant building materials).

The preliminary masterplan shows areas of free-draining green space along the waterway which would act as an effective drainage system. This general concept could be developed further at the planning stage.



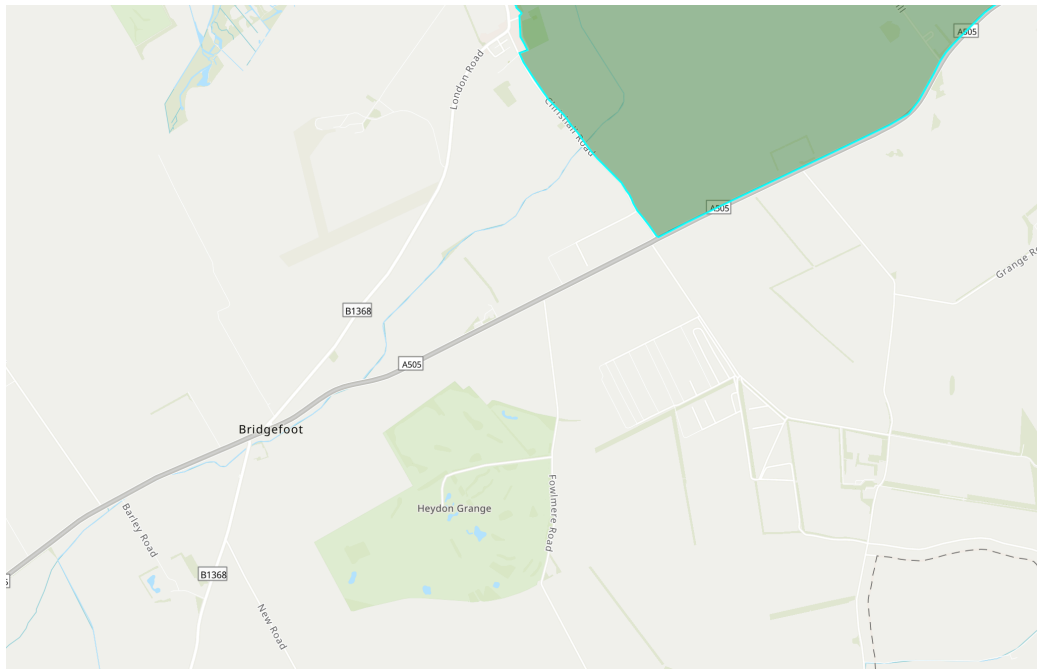
*Extract of the preliminary masterplan [not to scale] depicts the waterway and surrounding green spaces*

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## Landscape designations and constraints

### **Green Belts**

The site is located outside of the Cambridge Green Belt.



*Cambridge Green Belt terminates at Chrishall Road, c. 750m to the east of the site*

### **National Landscapes**

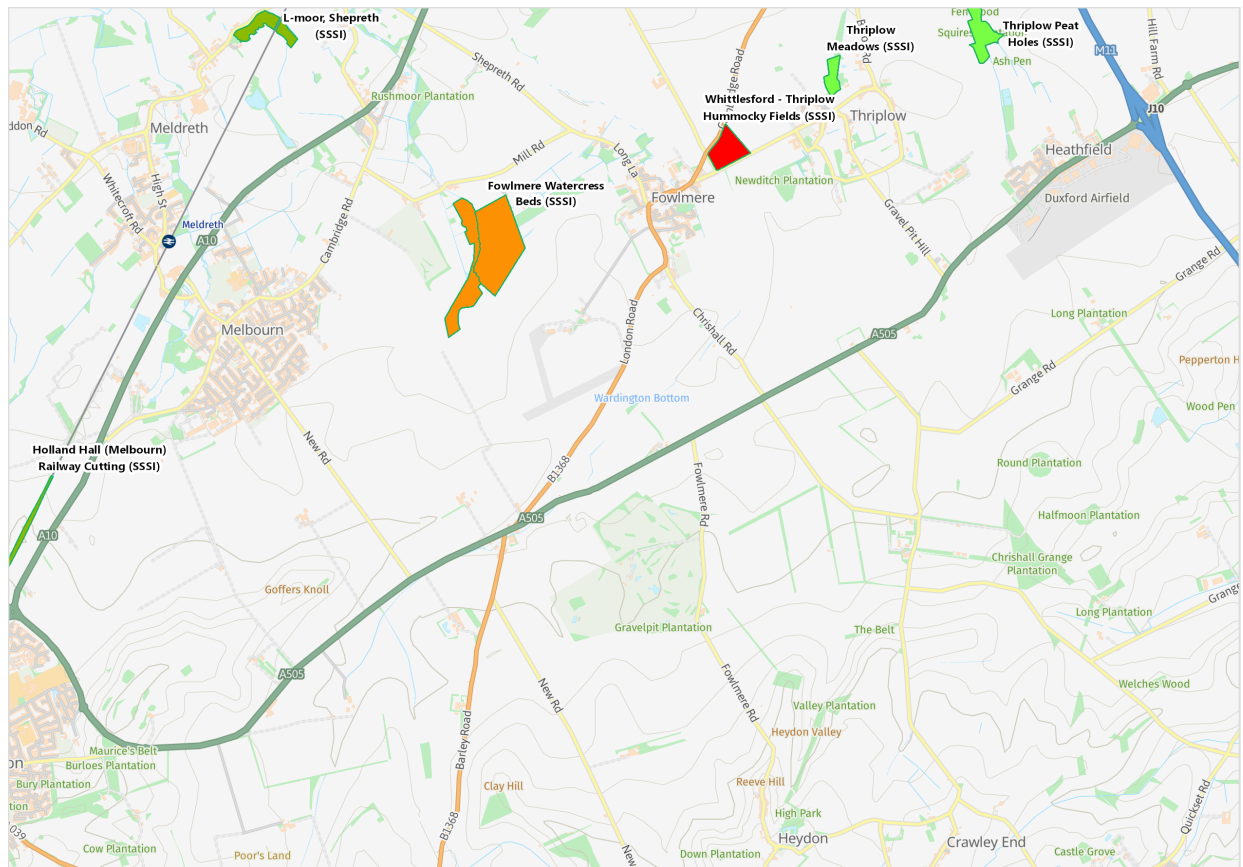
There are no National Landscapes (formerly AONBs) within proximity of the site. The nearest National Landscape is the Chilterns which is located just east of Hitchin, at least 15 miles away.

### **Other statutory landscape designations**

There are no Ramsar Sites, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in the area.

The site does not contain any Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The nearest SSSI is Fowlmere Watercress Beds which is located c. 0.9 miles (or 1.5 km) to the

north. The Whittlesford - Thriplow Hummocky Fields SSSI is located within a similar distance.



Map of SSSIs

The site's development as a New Town would not have any direct impacts on the SSSIs to the north. It is possible that the development would increase recreational pressure on the nature reserves but this can be avoided or otherwise mitigated via the provision of sufficient Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) within the boundaries of the New Town.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) is the name given to greenspace that is of a quality and type suitable for use as mitigation to offset the impact of new residential development on European protected Natura 2000 sites; Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The purpose of SANG is to provide an alternative greenspace to attract residents of new developments away from the protected and vulnerable sites.

SANG can include woodlands, meadows, heathlands and wetlands. The preliminary masterplan includes a large area of green space in the southern portion of the site that separates the New Town from Heydon village. This could provide SANG.

### **Agricultural land**

The site itself consists primarily of a network of open arable fields, with limited tree cover and no habitats of note. The site is not considered to make a substantial positive contribution to biodiversity or landscape character.

The site is understood to contain a mix of Grade 2 (very good) and Grade 3 (good to moderate) Agricultural Land. Best and most versatile agricultural land is graded 1 to 3a. It should be noted that most of the land in this part of the country - built-up areas excluded - is Grade 2.



*Relevant extract of the Agricultural Land Classification map for the Eastern region*

This assessment is based on the current Agricultural Land Classification map for the Eastern region. This data is subject to a number of limitations and is not sufficiently



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accurate for use in the assessment of individual fields or sites. A detailed site survey can be carried out if the LPA decides to take this site forward.

Subject to further, detailed assessment, it is considered likely that the development would result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. The LPAs will need to weigh the harm associated with this against the public benefits of the New Town, taking account of the following factors:

- The public benefits of the New Town will be substantial, especially given the significant contribution that would be made to housing land supply and the sustainability benefits associated with the delivery of an accessible, self-contained and self-sustaining community;
- If the LPAs support the principle of delivering a New Town in Greater Cambridgeshire, then any suitable site is likely to include best and most versatile agricultural land. This is an unavoidable consequence of delivering a new settlement in this part of the country.

### **Geology**

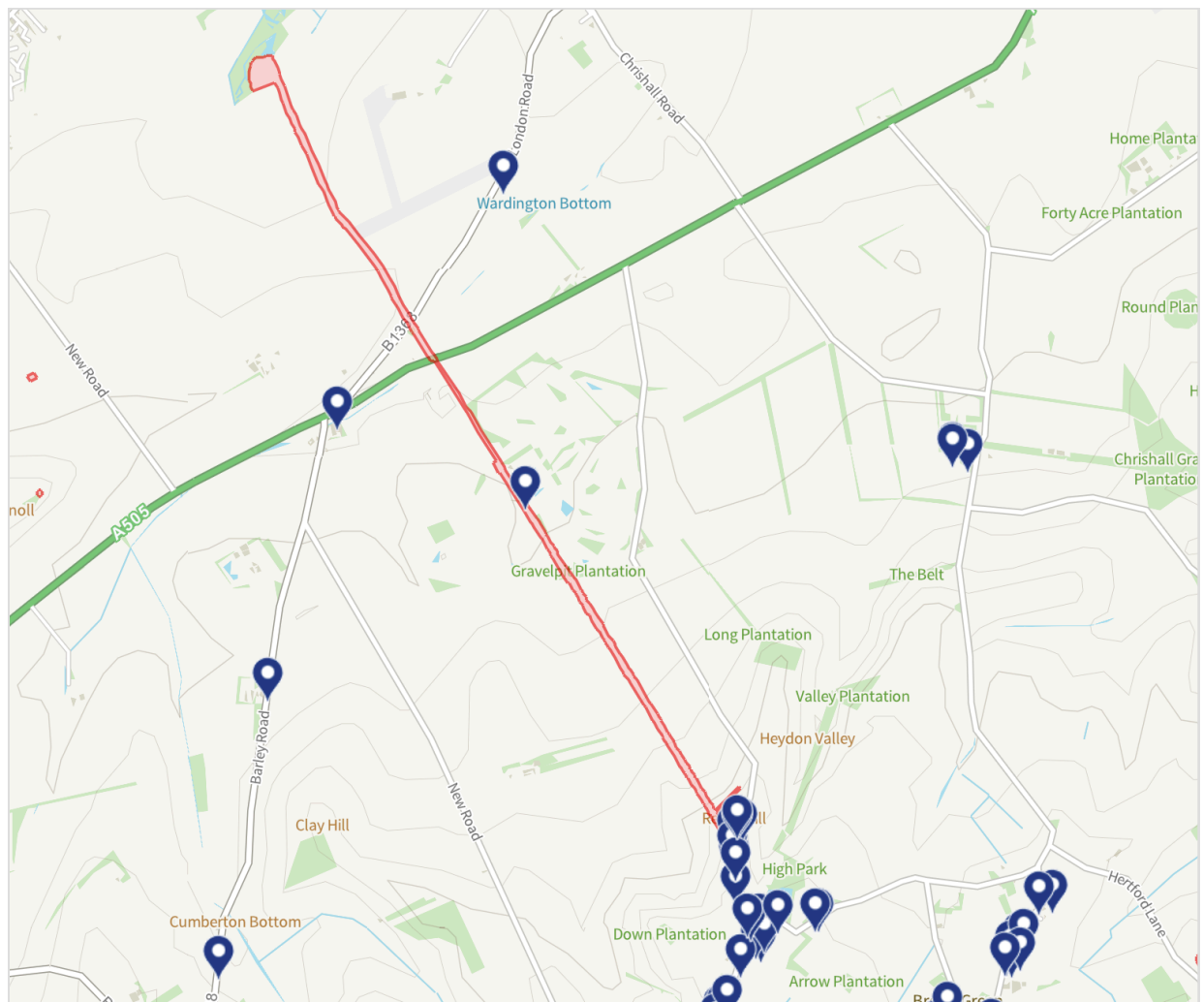
It is understood that there is a site of geological importance in the southern portion of the site, close to Fowlmere Road. This does not appear to benefit from statutory designation but would not be affected by the proposed development in any case. The preliminary masterplan does not include any new development on or adjacent to it.

## Heritage designations and constraints

The site contains a small number of designated heritage assets, notably including:

- A Scheduled Monument, Bran Ditch (list entry no. 1410907); and
- A Grade II listed building, Heydon Grange Farm barn (list entry no. 1163508).

A scattering of Grade II listed milestones are located on the fringes of the site, along existing roads.



*Historic England map depicts all listed buildings and scheduled monuments on and around the site*

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The Scheduled Monument is a linear feature that crosses through Heydon Grange Golf and Country Club. It comprises an Anglo-Saxon bank and ditch that runs between Heydon in the south and Fowlmere in the north. The line of the ditch is marked by a hedgerow, although this is missing or sparse in places.

Given the presence of the Anglo-Saxon ditch, the site also has high archaeological potential.

The neighbouring village of Heydon contains a Conservation Area and a multitude of listed buildings .



*Heydon Conservation Area outlined in pink*

In terms of likely impacts, the effect on the Scheduled Monument will require some consideration but there is potential for negative effects to be entirely avoided by simply designing around this linear feature, noting that it only affects a small portion of the overall site. The monument could be incorporated into an area of open green space,

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avoiding any need for excavations or construction works in its proximity.

Heydon Grange Farm barn is located within the confines of the Heydon Grange Golf and Country Club and this facility is proposed to be retained exactly, with no potential for harm to the listed building.

The grade II listed roadside milestones would not be at all affected by the site's development.

Although the site borders Heydon village, its southern portion is not proposed to be developed but would be retained as open, green space. This green space would function as a buffer between the historic settlement of Heydon and the New Town, maintaining their separation. This approach would ensure the preservation of Heydon's historic settlement pattern and avoid the risk of harm to the character and significance of its Conservation Area and listed buildings.

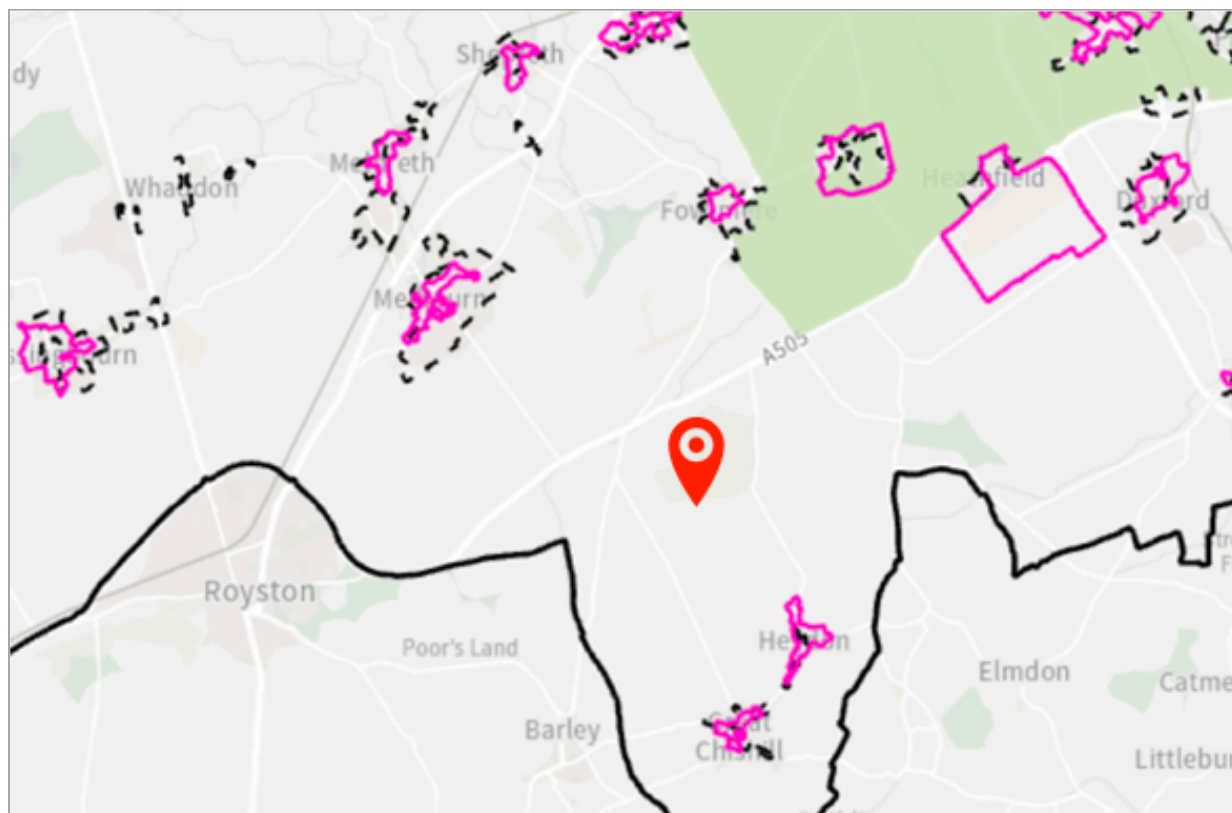
The archaeological potential of the site should be investigated further. Such investigations can be secured at the formal planning stage with the use of suitable planning conditions. As a minimum, a written scheme of investigation and programme of archaeological work should be approved and implemented prior to any preliminary groundworks. Provided suitable conditions are in place, the site's development will present an exciting opportunity to uncover new buried artefacts that may add to our understanding of both the Anglo-Saxon monument and the area in general.

The site's heritage assets will need to be taken into full consideration during the design and construction stages. By making appropriate design choices, the site's development will be capable of avoiding harm of any kind to statutory heritage assets.

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## Relationship to existing settlements

The site itself is mostly devoid of development. It contains a few scattered industrial/agricultural buildings, typically of modern character and a modest number of dwellings. It does not contain any existing settlements.



*The site - approximately marked by a red location pin - in relation to existing settlements*

The southern portion of the site borders the historic village settlement of Heydon. This area of the site is not intended to be developed, however, and would be retained as green space. This green space “buffer” would avoid coalescence between Heydon and the New Town, ensuring the historic form and character of the neighbouring village is retained.

The site would maintain distances of at least 0.75 miles (1.2 km) from the nearest settlements to the north. Royston is the largest nearby settlement, located c. 5 miles (8 km) to the east. The site would benefit from good connectivity to this neighbouring settlement but would be distant enough to avoid coalescence.

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Cambridge is located c. 10 miles (16 km) to the north, a commutable distance with a driving time of approximately 15 minutes.

The site is considered to be well-related to existing settlements, whilst still maintaining sufficient distance so as to avoid coalescence. Its development would provide new education/employment opportunities, key services and homes that would benefit the smaller rural settlements in the local area.

## Accessibility

The site benefits from excellent access to the existing road network including the A505, - a primary route that connects to Royston and a range of other high-level settlements in Cambridgeshire and the surrounding counties - and the B1368 which connects the site to Cambridge in the north and Heydon, Great Chishill and Barley in the south. The M11 is only 3 miles away, equating to a 4-minute drive along the A505.



*The site - approximately marked by a red location pin - in relation to the existing road network*

The site is within a commutable distance of Cambridge and it is intended that sustainable transport modes - including a regular bus service - would offer convenient access between Cambridge and the New Town, limiting residents' reliance on private car use.

The preliminary masterplan also promotes a high level of accessibility within the site. The land uses are well interspersed to create a pedestrian-friendly environment where houses are within easy walking distance of local shops and services. Functional pavements and cycle tracks are included throughout and dead-ends/cul-de-sacs are



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avoided to achieve an excellent level of permeability and promote active travel. Bus stops appear at regular intervals and a park and ride facility is provided in close proximity of the A505.

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## Planning and government policies

### New Towns

The current UK government has pledged to significantly boost housing delivery over the next five years and beyond. The government has already taken steps to facilitate this, including uplifts in local housing targets and the introduction of a New Towns initiative, including creation of a New Towns Taskforce.

The New Towns initiative is the largest housebuilding programme since the post-war era. Its aim is to develop a new generation of towns that will address the nation's housing shortage and promote economic growth. It is expected that the New Towns will deliver well-designed communities equipped with affordable housing and essential infrastructure such as schools, healthcare facilities, and public transport.

### Cambridgeshire

In March 2024, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities published *“The Case for Cambridge”*. This government guidance document outlines the unique challenges facing the Greater Cambridge area, with a particular focus on its housing deficit. It finds that Cambridge’s housing deficit makes it “the most unequal city in the UK”, jeopardises its future growth and risks wasting the human talents which are vested in the city. It also emphasises the need for a significant increase in housing to support the region's growth, particularly in light of Cambridge's global importance in research and innovation and envisages the creation of sustainable and integrated communities.

*“The Case for Cambridge”* presents a vision for building up to 150,000 new homes in and around Cambridge by 2050. Growth of this level has the potential to add approximately £6.4 billion to the economy.

The Greater Cambridge authorities have also put forward ambitious housing goals for the period up to 2050. The first priority of the *Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2024–2029* is to “increase the supply of new homes, including affordable housing, contributing to healthy and sustainable communities”.

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On the New Towns initiative, Urbanist Architecture<sup>1</sup> also reports:

*“Cambridge is a prime candidate for Labour’s new towns due to its booming tech and research sectors, anchored, of course, by the prestigious Cambridge University. The Greater Cambridge Partnership aims to accelerate housing delivery with plans for up to 150,000 new homes by 2050. This area is strategically positioned with excellent transport links, including direct rail connections to London, making it an ideal site for sustainable, mixed-use developments. The city’s blend of historical charm and modern infrastructure, coupled with a thriving economic base, makes it a compelling choice for new urban growth.”*

### **Summary**

The creation of new, sustainable and self-sustaining communities is a main priority of the current UK government and is expected to make a significant contribution to the national housing target.

Cambridge and the Greater Cambridge area has a serious and sustained housing shortage that jeopardises its future growth and historic role as a hub of culture, innovation, research and academic excellence. Its housing issues persist in spite of a generally excellent modern track record of housing delivery by the Greater Cambridge authorities.

It would appear that a different approach is required in the Greater Cambridge area if its particular housing issues are to be addressed. A New Town in the right location has the potential to meet the area’s considerable housing needs without increasing pressures on its existing infrastructure or permanently eroding the character of its historic settlements.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://urbanistarchitecture.co.uk/location-new-towns-labour/>

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## Conclusion

The site is considered to provide a suitable location for the type and quantum of development proposed. All of the potential constraints on its development are capable of being overcome, designed around or otherwise adequately mitigated. There are no constraints that would act as an insurmountable barrier to development. A summary of the main constraints and opportunities follows.

**Flood risk** - the vast majority of the site is in flood zone 1. A very small portion of the site - close to its northern extremity - is in flood zone 3. There are various design principles that can be employed to overcome this constraint. The simplest solution would be to locate vulnerable uses outside of and away from the flood zone. This is capable of being achieved without any increase in the site's area or changes to its amount/mix of development.

**Landscape** - the site is not subject to any statutory landscape designations. It is located within c. 1 mile of two different SSSIs. There would be no risk of direct impact on these SSSIs and the potential for increased recreational pressure is capable of being appropriately mitigated, including through the provision of sufficient SANG within the development site. The site itself contains few landscape features of note and consists primarily of open arable fields. The development is likely to result in a loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, although it is considered that the substantial public benefits associated with the New Town would more than outweigh this harm.

**Heritage** - the main constraint on development is posed by the Scheduled Monument (Bran Ditch) that passes through the site. As this is a narrow, linear feature, it is capable of being designed around at the masterplanning stage. It is recommended that the monument is incorporated into an area of green space, avoiding the need for construction or excavations in its proximity. The development is not likely to cause harm to any other statutory heritage assets and has the potential to advance our understanding of the area's archaeological significance.

**Relationship to existing settlements** - the site occupies a "gap" between existing settlements and would not give rise to any coalescence. It is not, however, remote from other settlements and benefits from excellent access to the local road network. It is in

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an ideal location to offer new services and opportunities - for employment, education, housing, health and leisure - to residents of nearby rural villages and hamlets.

**Accessibility** - The site benefits from excellent access to the established highways network, including the A505 and B1368. The M11 is also within a 4-minute drive. The site is within a commutable distance of Cambridge and sustainable transport modes - including regular bus services - will connect it to the city. The development itself will be designed to deliver an outstanding level of sustainability, accessibility and permeability. Its layout and facilities will create a pedestrian, cycle and bus friendly environment.

**Planning and government policies** - The political climate is supportive. The current UK government is specifically promoting the delivery of New Towns in the largest housebuilding programme since the post-war era. New Towns will enable the country to deliver the homes it needs to stem the ongoing housing crisis. This crisis remains particularly acute in the Greater Cambridge area, despite the authorities' excellent housing delivery track records. Cambridge is a prime candidate for a New Town and the site is a prime location for such an ambitious development.