



**Heron Farm, Besthorpe, Norfolk**

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

March 2023



## Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Personal Statement	3
3. Regional Landscape Character	4
4. Public Rights of Way	8
5. Designated Sites	9
6. Planning Background	10
7. Local landscape Character	11
8. Site Description	12
9. Topographical survey and sections	13
10. Visual Appraisal	19
11. Conclusion	38
12. Summary	38
13. Mitigation	38



# 1. Introduction

1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared on behalf of Newall Plant Limited in relation to a planning application on land adjacent to the Barn, Heron Farm, Bunwell NR17 2JN.

1.2 The application is for a change of use of land from open air storage (plant, materials and aggregates in connection with the operations of Newall Plant Ltd) to aggregate and soil recovery facility.

## Purposes of the Document

1.3 The purpose of this document is to assess the potential landscape and visual impacts of the proposed change of use on the site.

1.4 In particular, the visual impacts of specific operating machinery were assessed, namely a 'Jaw Crusher' and a Digger/Excavator.

## Structure of the Document

### Landscape Baseline

1.5 This section assesses the character and quality of the local landscape before identifying the extent to which the proposal site contributes to or detracts from that character and therefore its sensitivity to change.

1.6 The assessment of the character and of the proposal

site identifies the wider landscape receptors that may be affected by the proposals, as well as their sensitivity to change. These receptors may be features or elements of character that need to be preserved, restored or enhanced.

## Development Proposals and Site description

1.7 This section reviews the historic development of the site and its landscape setting, and describes the development proposals.

## Landscape and Visual Assessment

1.8 This section assesses the potential landscape and visual impacts of development on the site, based on a thorough field survey and panoramic site photographs. The precise locations of the photographs were plotted using GPS.

1.9 This assessment was undertaken during June 2021, on land open to the public or under the control of the applicant.



Site Location

## 2. Personal Statement

2.1 This report has been prepared by Luke Broom-Lynne CMLI MRTPI.

2.2 I am an independent Chartered Landscape Architect and Chartered Town Planner with over 30 years in professional practice. I was awarded a BA Degree in Landscape Architecture from Leeds Metropolitan University in 1983, followed by a Post-graduate Diploma (with commendation) in 1985. I have been a Chartered member of the Landscape Institute since 1989 and of the Royal Town Planning Institute since 2004.

2.3 I worked initially in the public sector, including senior posts in the planning teams of the Broads Authority and Norwich City Council. I have worked in the private sector for the past 18 years, including a period as Partner in a major regional planning and property consultancy. I now work as an independent landscape planning consultant, involved in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Urban Design and Masterplanning for a wide range of commercial and residential projects throughout the UK.

2.4 Major recent projects have included

- University of East Anglia – Landscape Strategy
- Bewilderwood, Tatton Park and Hoveton – LVIA and Landscape Strategy
- North Weald AONB, Essex Coast and Pembrokeshire

- LVIA for new solar farms

- Future Biogas – LVIA and landscape strategy for various power plants in Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.
- Coltishall airfield Solar Park – LVIA and landscape strategy.
- Grays, Essex - Masterplanning and urban design for new residential development
- Bridlington, Yorkshire - New holiday development
- Edinburgh - LVIA for new Park and Ride scheme
- Pembroke, S. Wales - LVIA for new solar farm

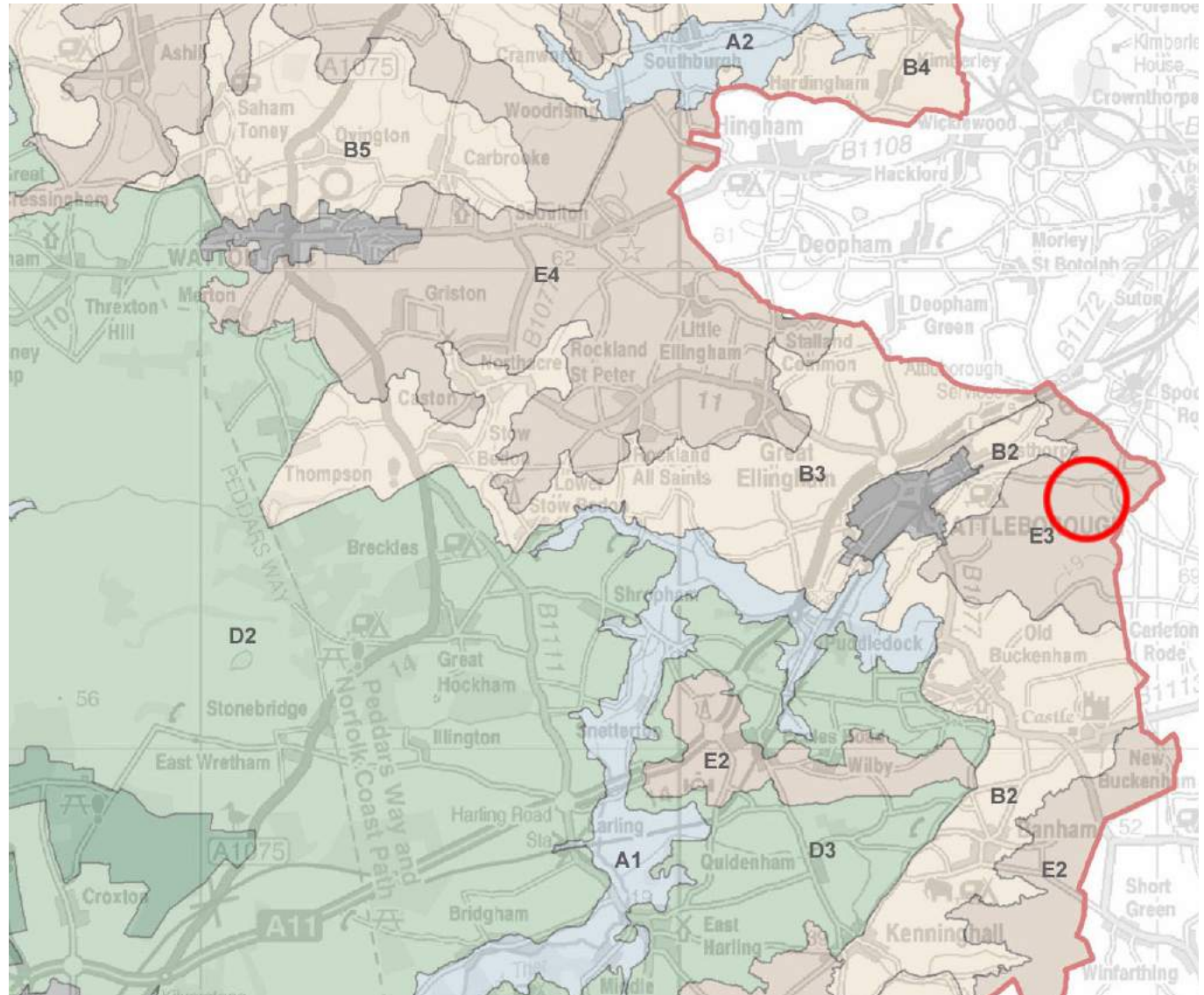
2.5 I believe that my submission complies with the requirements of the Codes of Professional Conduct of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Landscape Institute.



### 3. Regional Landscape Character

#### Breckland District Landscape Character Assessment (BDCLA)

- 3.1 One of the aims of the BDCLA is to provide key strategic information for use by both developers and development control officers in helping to make decisions on the appropriate location, scale and design of new development.
- 3.2 It is a strategic study rather than a detailed field by field survey and any detailed decisions will therefore also need to consider specific local circumstances. However, it is considered relevant to this assessment to note the key elements relating to the proximity of the site.
- 3.3 The BDCLA identifies the site as being located within the 'Old Buckenham Plateau' Landscape Character Area.
- 3.4 The Old Buckenham Plateau is described as being located in the eastern part of Breckland District, east of Attleborough. The character area boundary is drawn along the District boundary, although the landscape type extends eastward into South Norfolk District. The character area boundaries are defined primarily by topography.



Extract from the Breckland District Landscape Character Assessment

## Key Characteristics

- An elevated, gently undulating plateau landscape informed by underlying thick deposits of glacial Lowestoft Till.
- Topography ranges from approximately 45-66m AOD.
- Distant though intermittent views are available to the surrounding Thet Settled tributary farmland and River Thet character areas.
- Landcover is predominantly arable with some blocks and clumps of woodland/coverts, sometimes associated with former marl pits, in addition to a number of plantation blocks.
- Field pattern is irregular and large in scale, fields being bounded by hedgerows and occasional hedgerow trees.
- Although commons are referred to in place names e.g. Burgh's Common, common land is generally no longer present in the character area, with the exception of isolated remnants.
- Old Buckenham Airfield, a relic of World War II is located in the south of the character area.
- Settlement pattern is of linear formation and low density, being limited to two main hamlets at Black Carr and Burgh Common and scattered farmsteads related to the narrow rural road network.
- This is a large-scale landscape in terms of its landscape elements and is relatively open in aspect. An essentially tamed arable landscape of unified character.

- An empty, almost vacant landscape is created by the low settlement density and absence of main roads.
- Opportunities for recreation are provided by a network of rights of way, and the open access land within the woodlands in the western part of the character area.

## Settlement and Built Character

- 3.5 Settlement is of a low density and linear formation as at Foundry Corner along Buckenham Road. Employment development is apparent at Bunn's Bank. Other settlement displays a range of vernacular building materials including pantile, clay lump and red brick, and includes small hamlets such as Burgh Common and Black Carr, in addition to scattered farmsteads and buildings associated with Halls e.g. the cluster of buildings around Old Hall. However the character area otherwise has a remote and unsettled character.

## Perceptual/Visual

- 3.6 This is an open landscape, which is of a large scale due to its comparatively sparse land cover and field pattern. The elevated landform allows for occasional distant views into surrounding character areas. It is essentially a simple, tamed agricultural landscape of muted colour and smooth texture due to the arable land use.
- 3.7 The landscape has a peaceful rural character due to

the active arable land use, absence of main roads and low settlement density.

## Positive Landscape Features of Significance and Inherent Landscape Sensitivities

- 3.8 The following are judged to be the key inherent landscape sensitivities which are fundamental to the character of the landscape.
- The remaining network of hedgerow and hedgerow trees;
  - The rural road network of unmarked lanes;
  - Occasional small blocks of farm woodland, often associated with coverts or marl pits;
  - Areas of historic wetland features such as carr woodland.
  - Peaceful rural character.

## Visual Sensitivities

- 3.9 The key visual sensitivities within this character area are primarily the elevated and open aspect, resulting in intervisibility with adjoining character areas.

## Current State of the Landscape

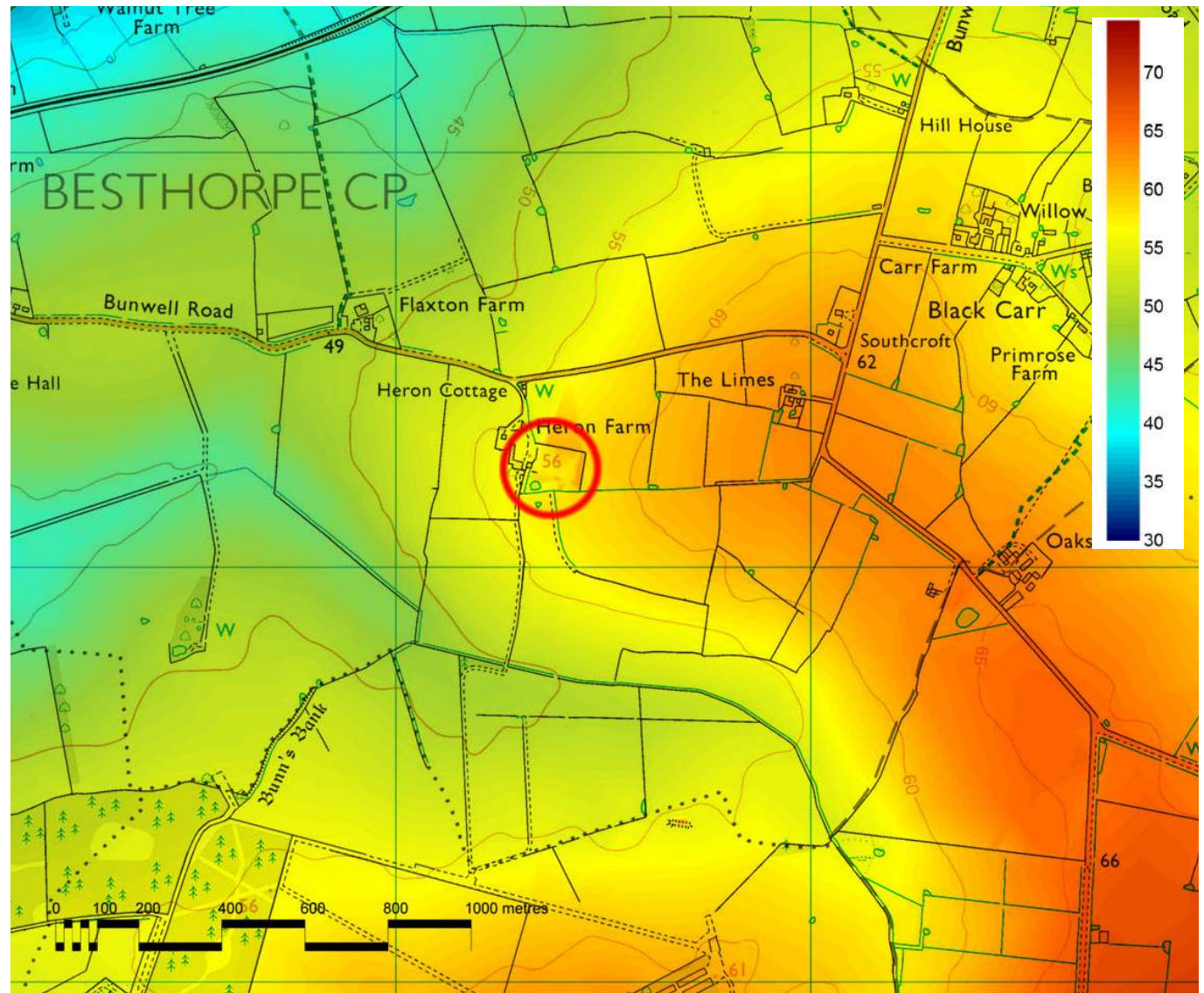
- 3.10 The landscape is essentially an intensively managed and productive arable landscape. As such historic and ecological integrity are both relatively low, due to the limited land cover and structure, e.g. field boundary hedgerows. Due to the intensive arable land use the



landscape is visually simple but broadly representative of the farmed plateaux within the District.

### Development Considerations

- Monitor new development within the urban fringes of Foundry Corner, Burgh Common and Black Carr ensuring that it fits with the established vernacular and uses an appropriate materials vocabulary;
- Conserve the linear character of settlements and pay careful attention to maintaining the predominantly open skylines when planning for change;
- Maintain small scale rural road network, discouraging signage or traffic calming measures/edge treatments which could have an urbanising influence.
- In planning for future change, consider the scale of potential development and its effects on long views, skylines and intervisibility with surrounding character areas.



Local topography

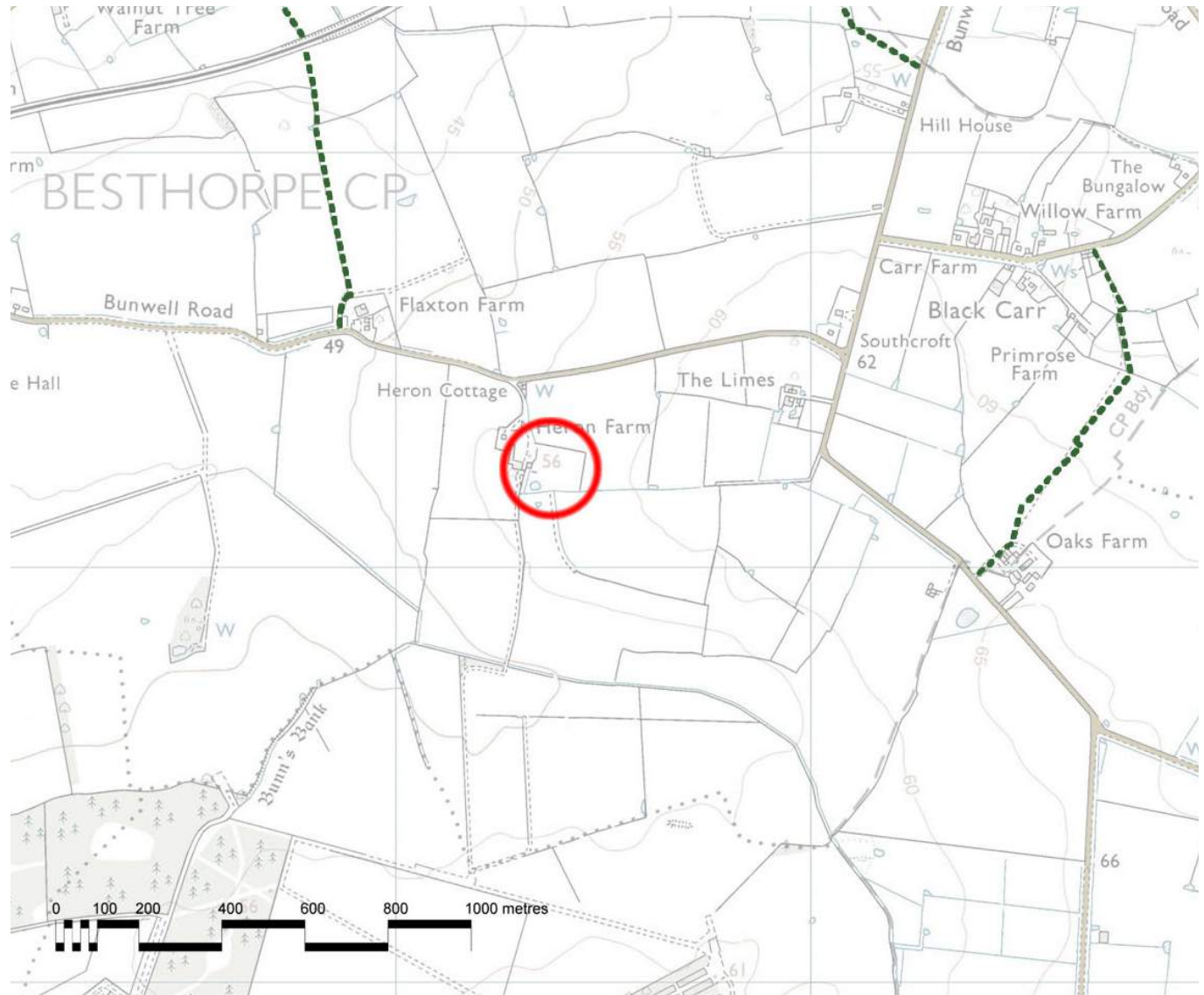


*Extracts from the Breckland District Landscape Character Assessment, showing the typical landscape character of the Old Buckenham Plateau*



#### 4. Public Rights of Way

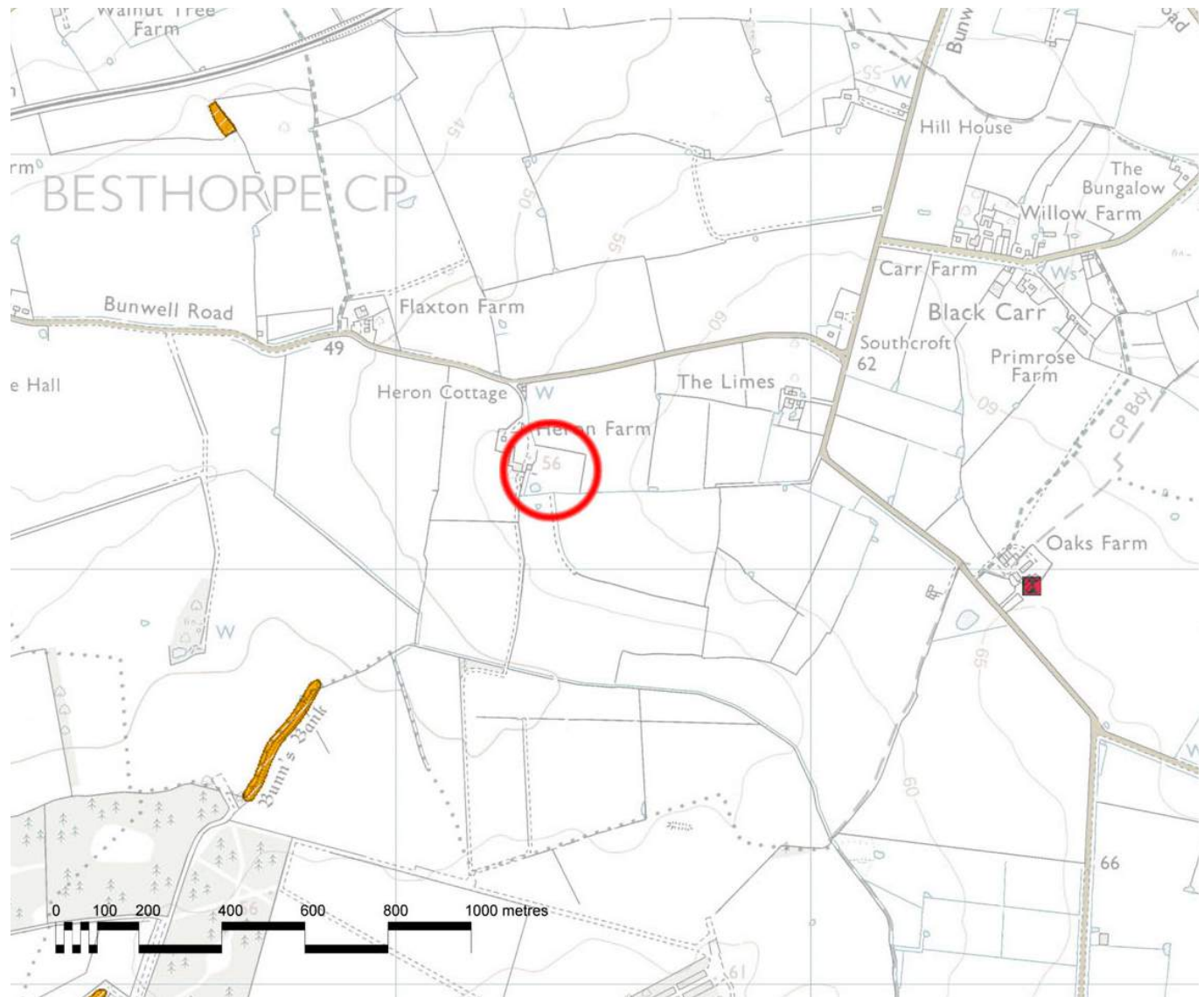
- 4.1 Unlike other parts of this Landscape Character Area, there are few public footpaths, or areas of public access, in the vicinity of the application site. There are thus few opportunities to view the site apart from public roads.
- 4.2 To the south of the site, there are no public right of way at all for at least two kilometres, with only sparse footpaths within a kilometre to the north.
- 4.3 Thus, no public rights of way will be affected by the proposals.



Public Rights of Way

## 5. Designated sites

- 5.1 There are no listed buildings, ancient monuments, SSSIs or any other designation sites which will be affected by the proposals.
- 5.2 The fragments of Bunn's Bank, a scheduled ancient monument, are located approximately one kilometre to the north-west and south-west of the site. Oaks Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building is approximately a kilometre to the east.
- 5.3 It is considered that these will not be affected by the proposals due to distance and insignificance of the impact.



Public Rights of Way

## 6. Planning Background

6.1 In 2020, a planning application (Ref. No FUL/2020/0062) was submitted to Norfolk County Council for the following proposal:

- Change of use of land from open air storage (plant, materials and aggregates in connection with the operations of Newall Plant Ltd) to aggregate and soil recovery facility (part retrospective).

6.2 County Council planning officers raised concerns regarding the potential landscape and visual impact of the proposed operations. The applicant therefore submitted subsequent landscape and visual appraisals were submitted which concluded that the proposals would clearly have a very insignificant and negligible impact. These appraisals included a thorough photographic analysis, including the placing of the proposed plan in situ, to clearly demonstrate the limited and very local impact of the plant.

6.3 Despite this evidence, the application was refused on the following grounds:

- *The development would have an unacceptable adverse impact upon the landscape character and visual amenity of the area, with a negative impact upon the rural countryside location and the adopted Landscape Character Assessment. The LVIA accompanying the application uses a baseline for the landscape assessment which is*

*unauthorised owing to the perimeter bunds not being built in accordance with the district council permission. The assessment is therefore misleading in that the landscape impact would be greater than that identified should the district council seek to regularise the bunds. The development would therefore not be in accordance with NMWDF Core Strategy Policies CS6, CS14 and DM8, and Breckland Local Plan Policies GEN 01 and ENV 05.*

- *The applicant has not demonstrated that any soft landscaping could be provided as part of this application to further mitigate the impact on landscape, owing to the inconsistencies between plans with particular reference to the red line site location plan and the topographical/proposed site layout plan submitted with the application. The proposals in this respect would be contrary to NMWDF Core Strategy Policies CS14 and DM8 and Breckland Local Plan Policies GEN 01 and ENV 05, in that officers are unable to assess if any additional landscaping could be secured as part of this application and any associated benefits which it may have.*

6.4 The council's assertion that there would be an unacceptable impact appears to be based on anecdotal opinion and desktop review, rather than a thorough site appraisal as was undertaken by the applicant.

6.5 The County Council's Landscape Officer's report makes assertions, for instance, that the 'introduction of further industrial uses of this land including the use of crushers

*and associated processing plant could be considered at odds with the character of the rural surroundings', and that 'this is a rural agricultural area with low lying vegetation and open plateau characteristics, the surrounding area is not accustomed to industrial features in the landscape, particularly those that protrude above the skyline'.*

6.6 However, as the applicant's original assessments have demonstrated, views toward the site are very limited and any activity on the site is virtually imperceptible from beyond the bunding.



## 7. Local Landscape Character

- 7.1 The local area is fairly typical of the regional landscape character area. It is a largely flat plateau landscape, with an intensively farmed agricultural character of large open fields and somewhat fragmented landscape character.
- 7.2 The roads are generally very straight which, along with the large rectangular fields, emphasises the rectilinear character of the landscape
- 7.3 There are wide open vistas across this landscape, often with blocks of trees around farmsteads, highlighting their presence. Hedgerows are fragmented with some isolated stature boundary Oaks, but mature tree cover is relatively limited. A notable proportion of the trees are Ash, which are now suffering from Ash Dieback disease.
- 7.4 Some strong hedgerows are still present along the lanes, notably along parts of Bunwell Road near the site, which largely screens the screens the application site from the road users.
- 7.5 In contrast to the statement made in the council's response to the former planning application that this is an area *'not accustomed to industrial features in the landscape'*, a wide range of industrial agricultural machinery is in plain view on a daily basis in close proximity to the site.



Top: Typical view over the open, flat landscape  
Bottom: Strong hedgerow along Bunwell Road



Agricultural machinery in the vicinity of the site - examples of working *'industrial features in the landscape'* visible in plain sight.

## 8. Site Description

- 8.1 The site currently consist of a working materials storage area with associated offices and technical buildings over an area of approximately 2.8 hectares. The application site area is approximately 1.14 hectares.
- 8.2 Earth bunding has been erected around the northern, eastern and southern boundaries of the site to screen the existing operational area. Some of this bunding to the south and south-east has now become established with grass and wildflowers. The bunding along the northern and north-east boundary is more recent and has yet to become established with vegetation.
- 8.3 The recent bunding comprised part of Breckland Planning Application 3PL/2018/1262/F.
- 8.4 A detailed topographical survey has been undertaken which has enabled the preparation of a digital model to aid in the determination of potential visual impact of the proposals. The survey has indicated that the bund is approximately 5 metres high.
- 8.5 The topographical survey has been combined with Ordnance Survey Terrain 5 data to accurately plot the wider topography and the site within its setting.



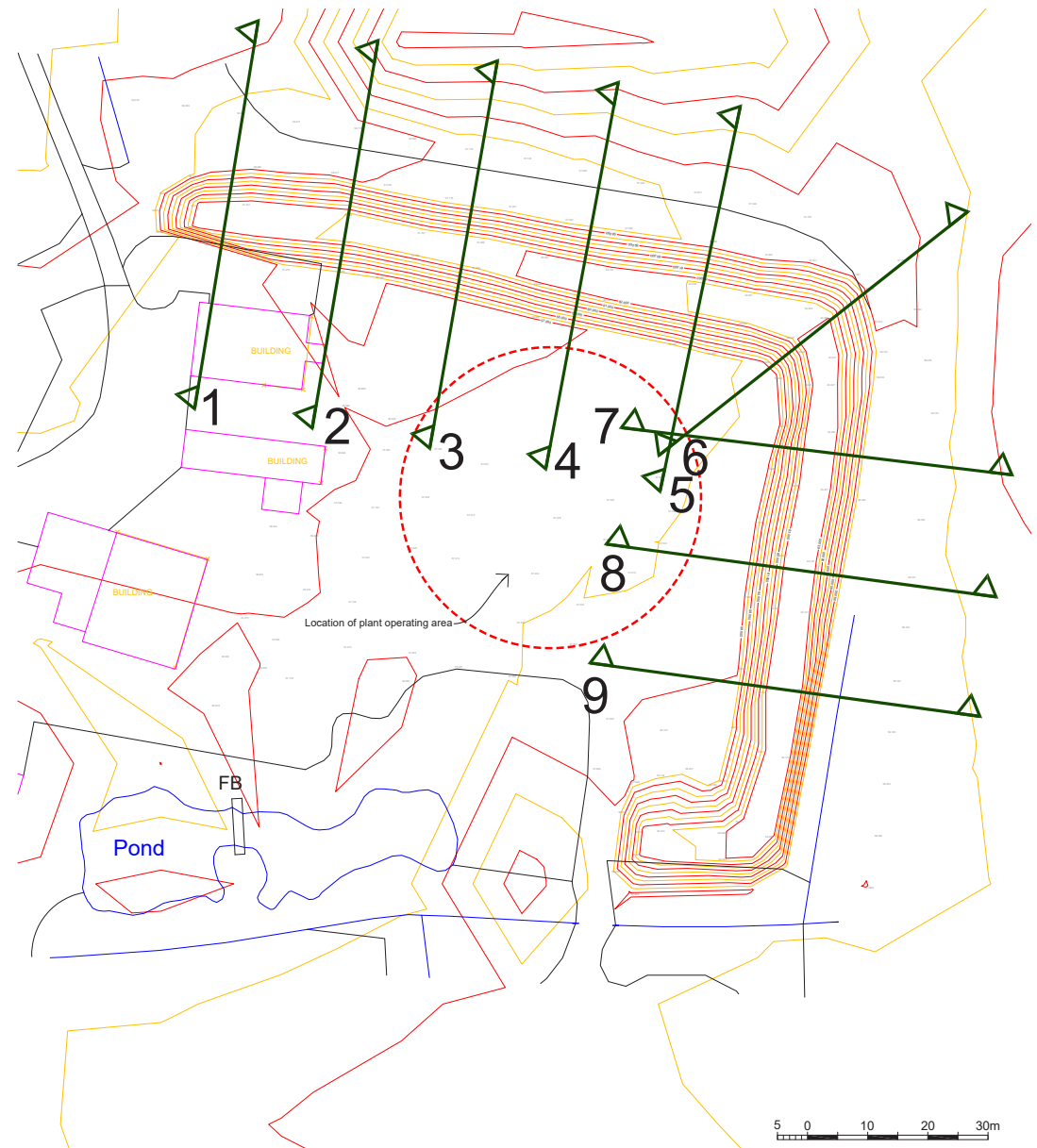
*Aerial view of the site, January 2021*

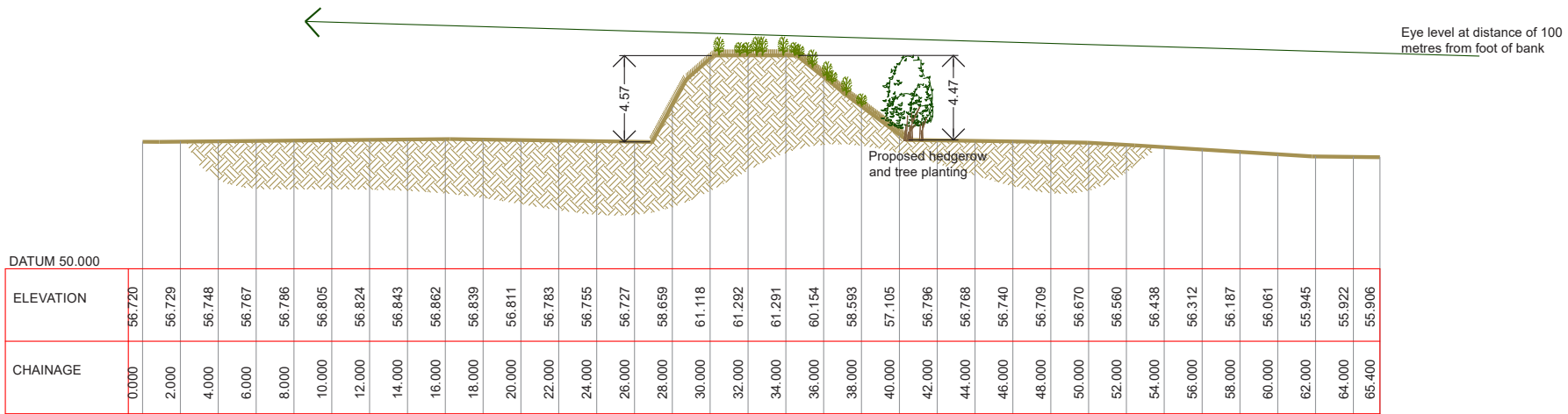


## 9. Topographical survey and Sections

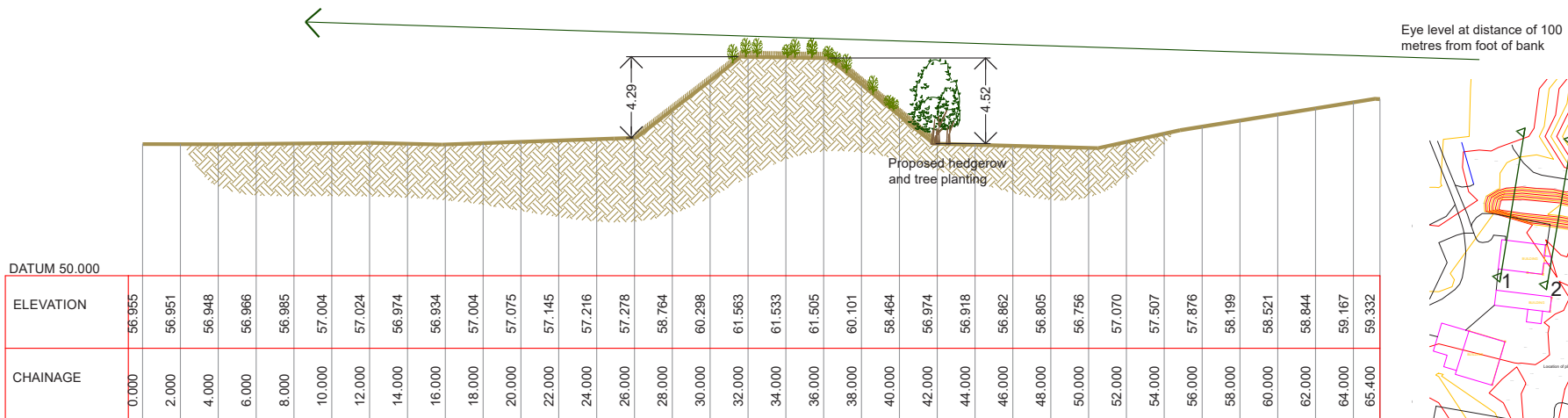
- 9.1 A detailed topographical survey work has been undertaken to provide additional evidence base to demonstrate the potential visibility of the proposals.
- 9.2 In addition, clarity is provided regarding the potential height of the top of excavator arm (the only part of the application which could potentially be visible from outside), as there were inconsistencies in its stated height in the planning committee documents relating to the former application.
- 9.3 The general operating height of the excavator will be approximately 5.5 metres, occasionally rising to around 6.5 metres when manoeuvring.
- 9.4 Cross-sections of the bunding and the plant were prepared and these are illustrated on the following pages.
- 9.5 It is important and obvious to note that, in a flat landscape such as this, a 5 metre bund (with an additional screening effect of natural vegetation on top, will conceal a feature considerably higher than the bund itself for most viewers with an eye level of, say, 1.7 metres. Thus, even at 6.5 metres, the arm is likely to be barely noticeable and, if it were visible, one would need to be at some distance so that the effect would be negligible. This is demonstrated in the sections.

Site Survey

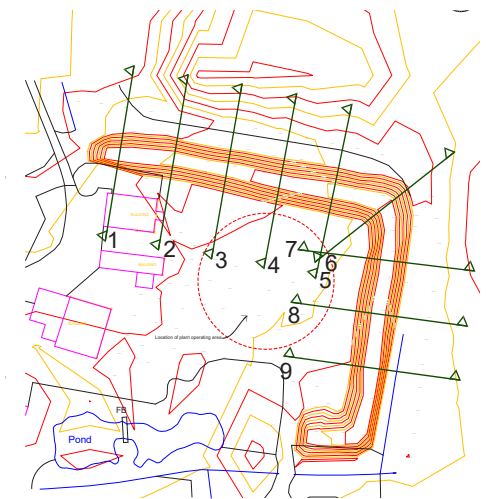


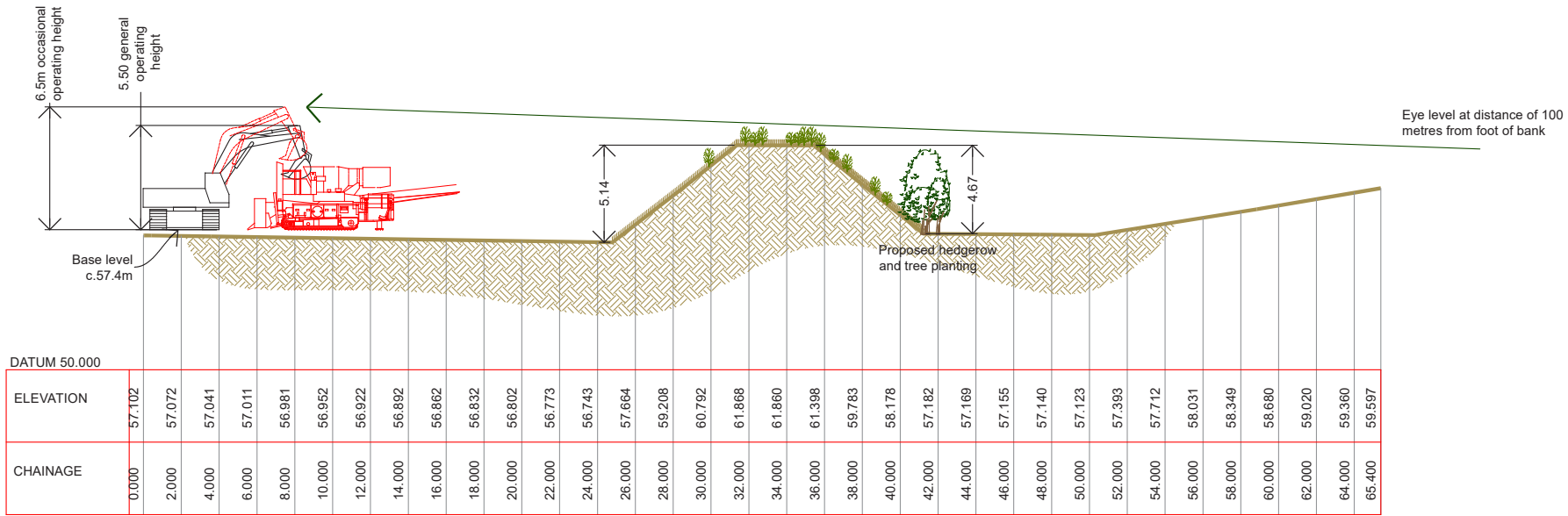


## Section 1

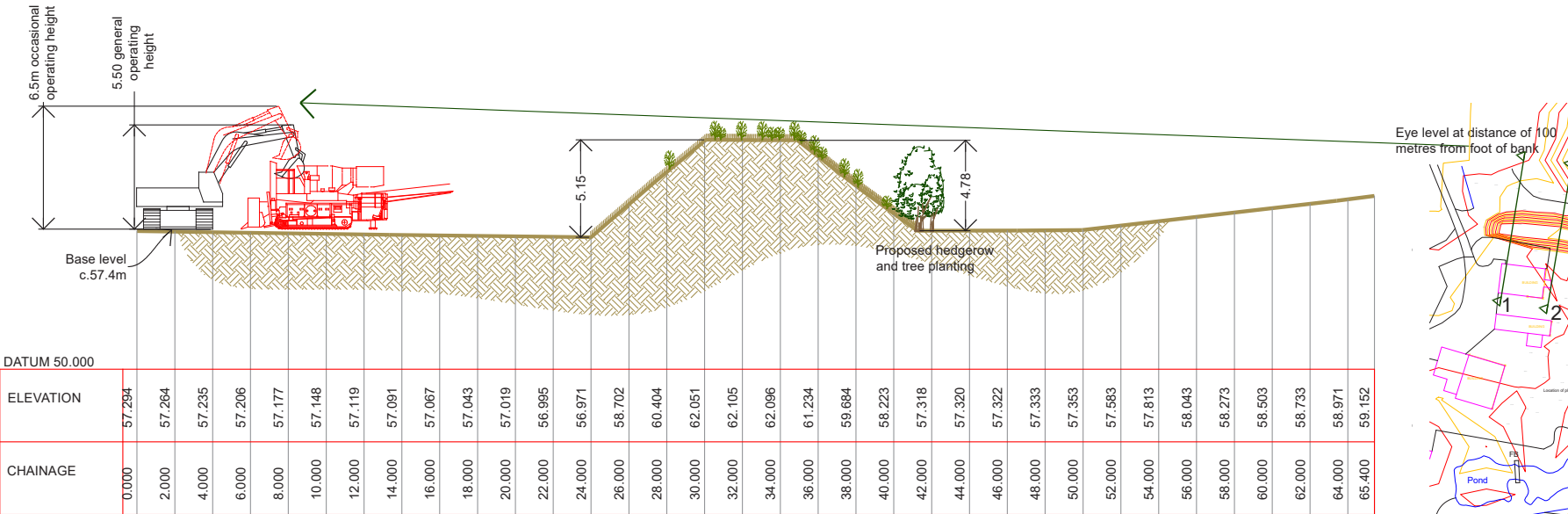


## Section 2

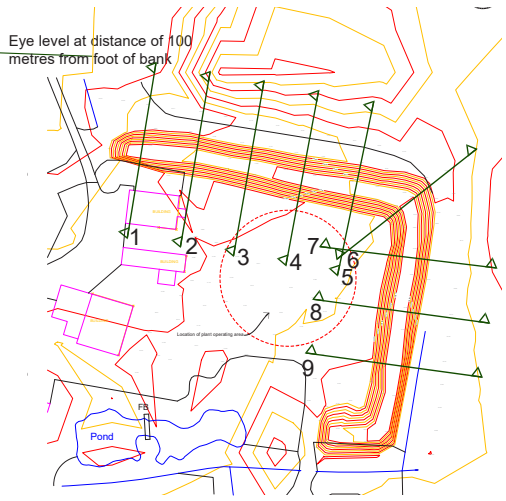




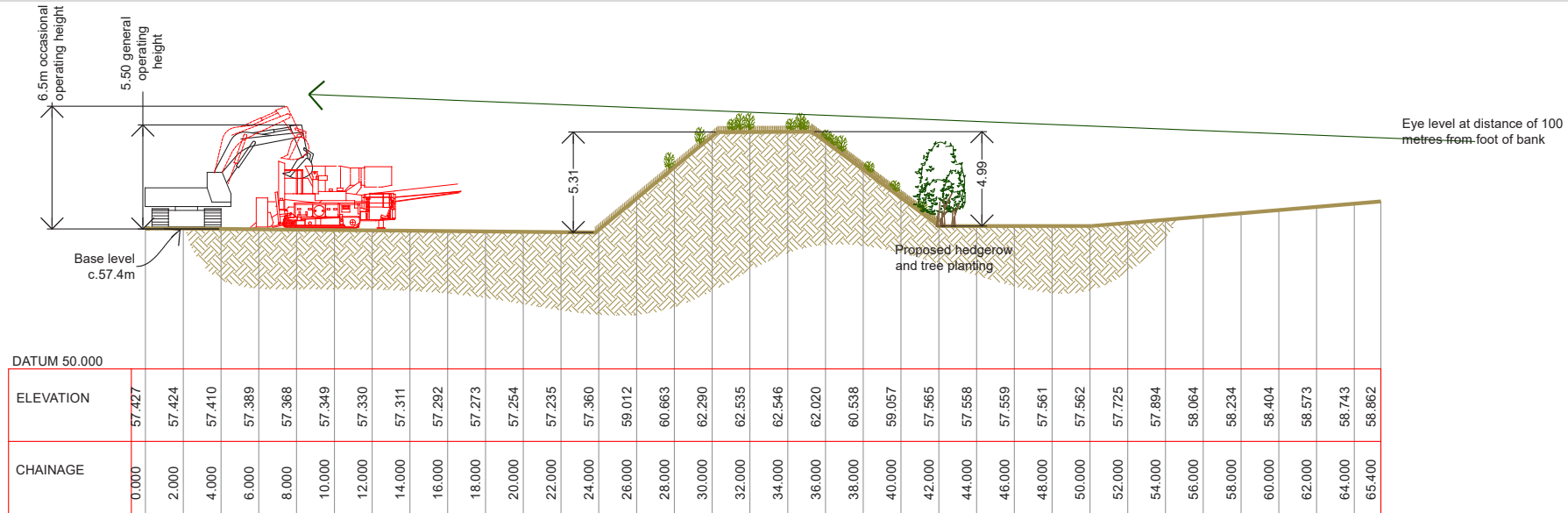
### Section 3



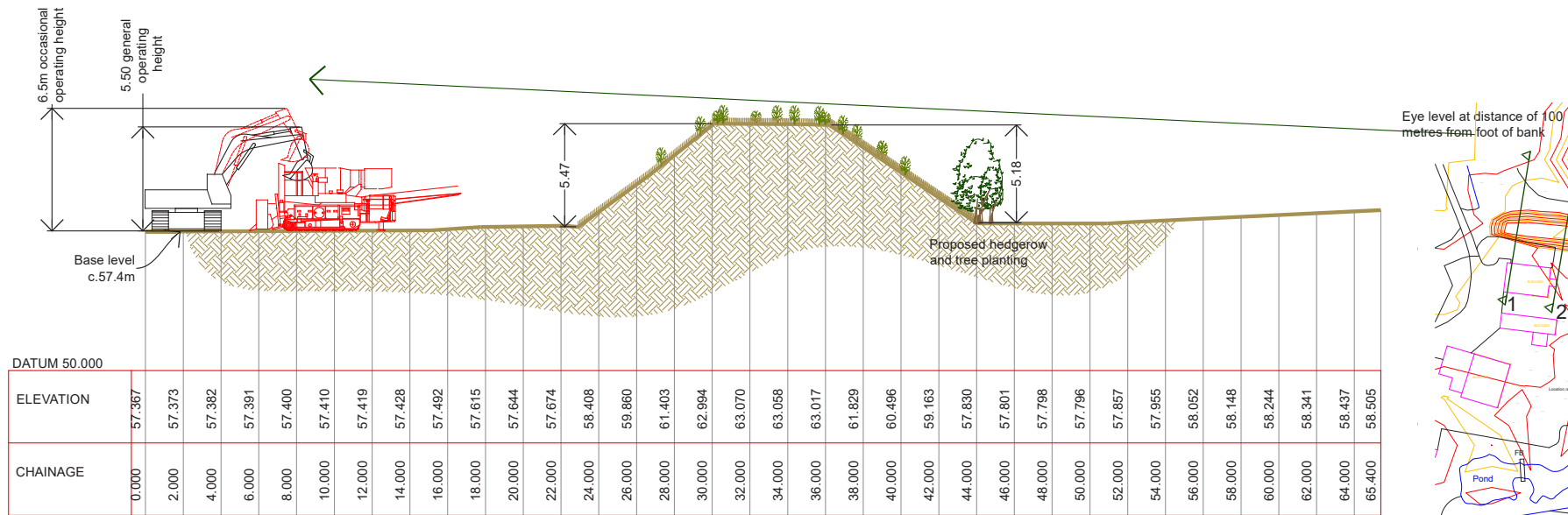
### Section 4



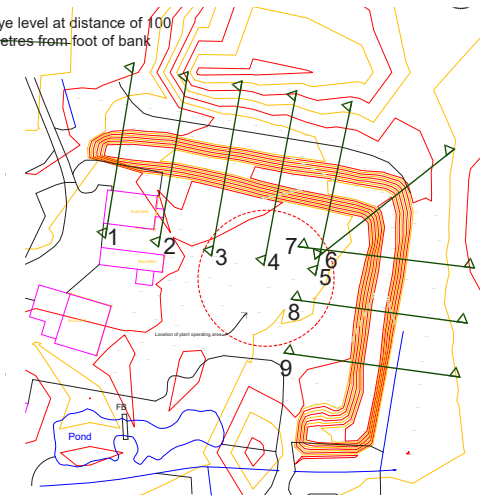


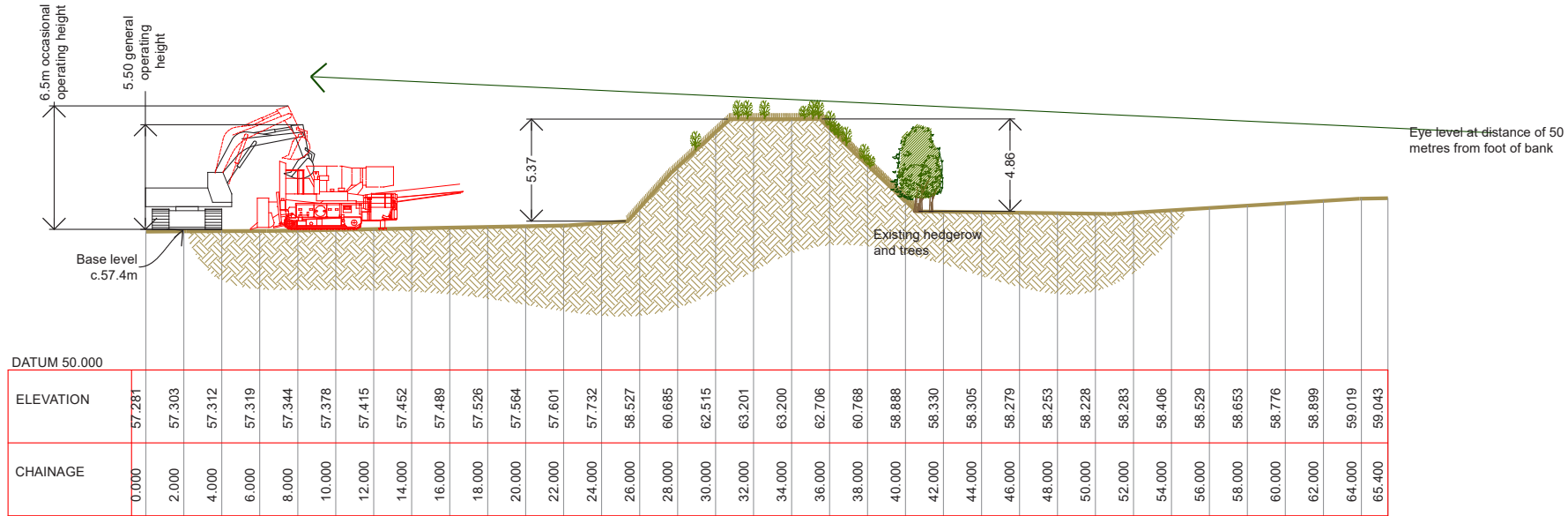


## Section 5

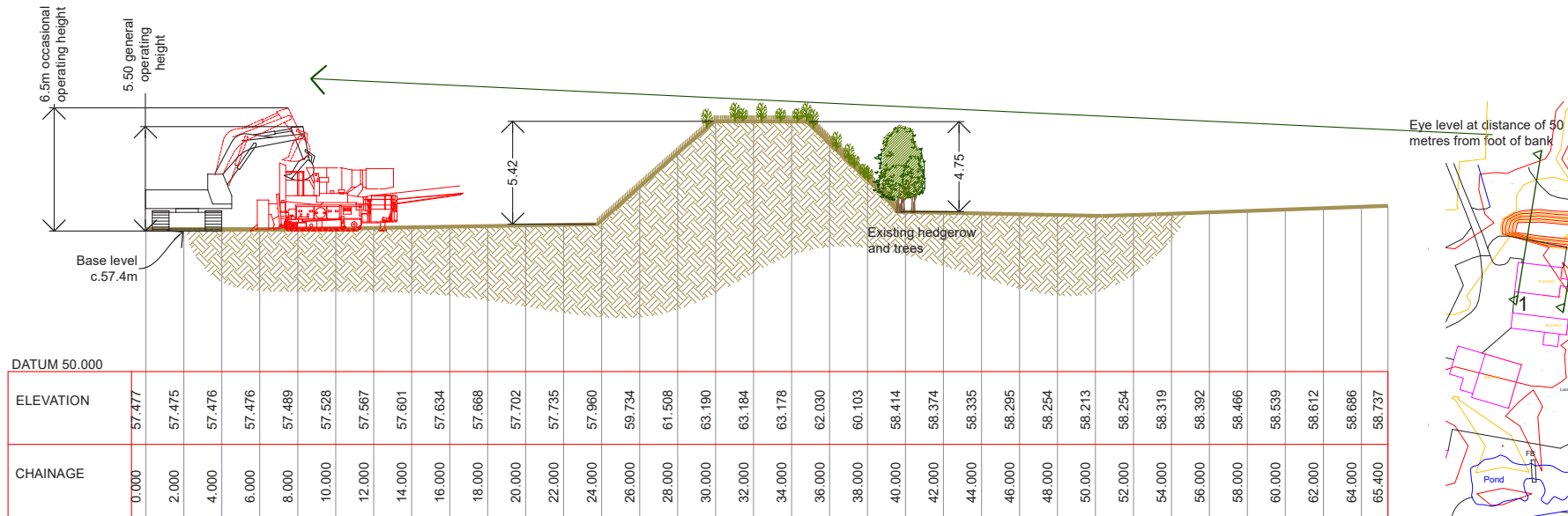


## Section 6

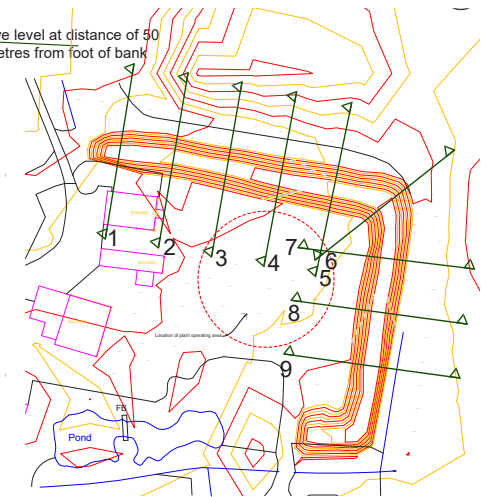


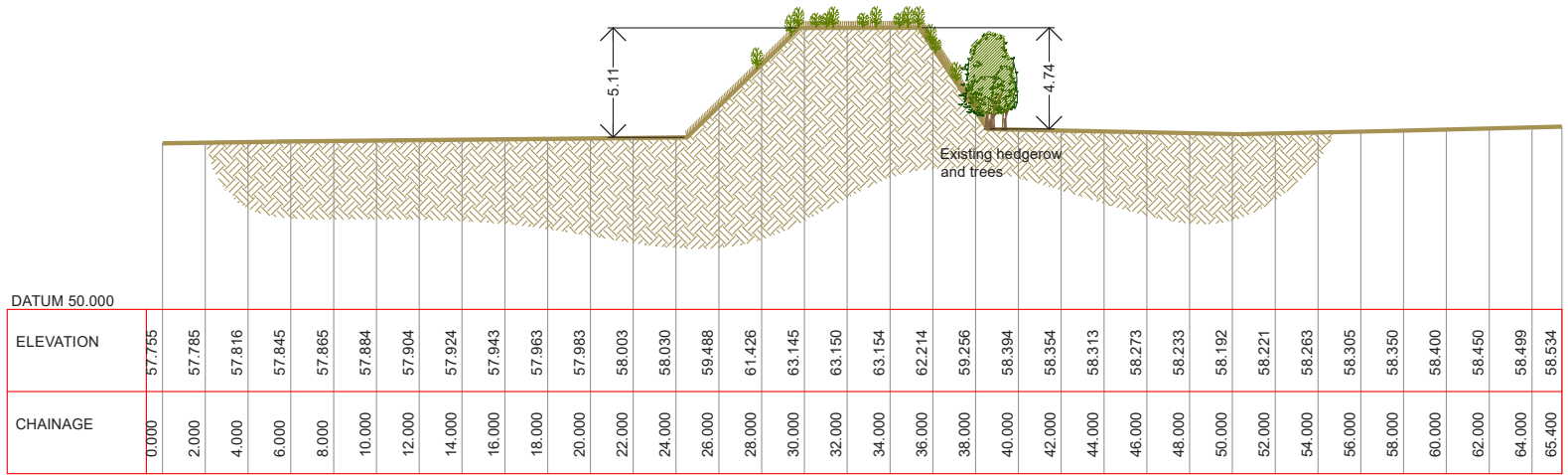


## Section 7

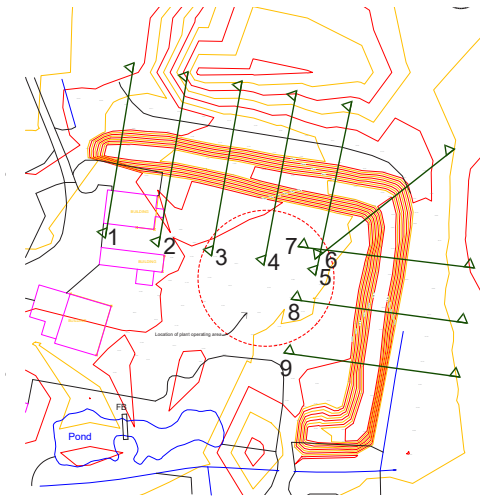


## Section 8





Section 9



## 10. Visual appraisal

- 10.1 To demonstrate the potential impact of the proposals, plant of the type proposed was placed on site, and photographs were taken at strategic locations to show the visual impact of the plant.
- 10.2 Photographs were taken at strategic locations to demonstrate potential visibility to and from the proposed development site. The location of the viewpoints was logged using GPS and this data was used to prepare the panoramic visualisations which were used in the preparation of the proposals.
- 10.3 Note that the site is well away from any public viewpoints apart from neighbouring roads. There are no public footpaths near the site from where photographs could be taken.



View of proposed plant in-situ, August 2021





Bund, 5 metres high

Excavator arm, c 5.5 metres high

Crusher

*View of the proposed plant in-situ from the top of the bund*

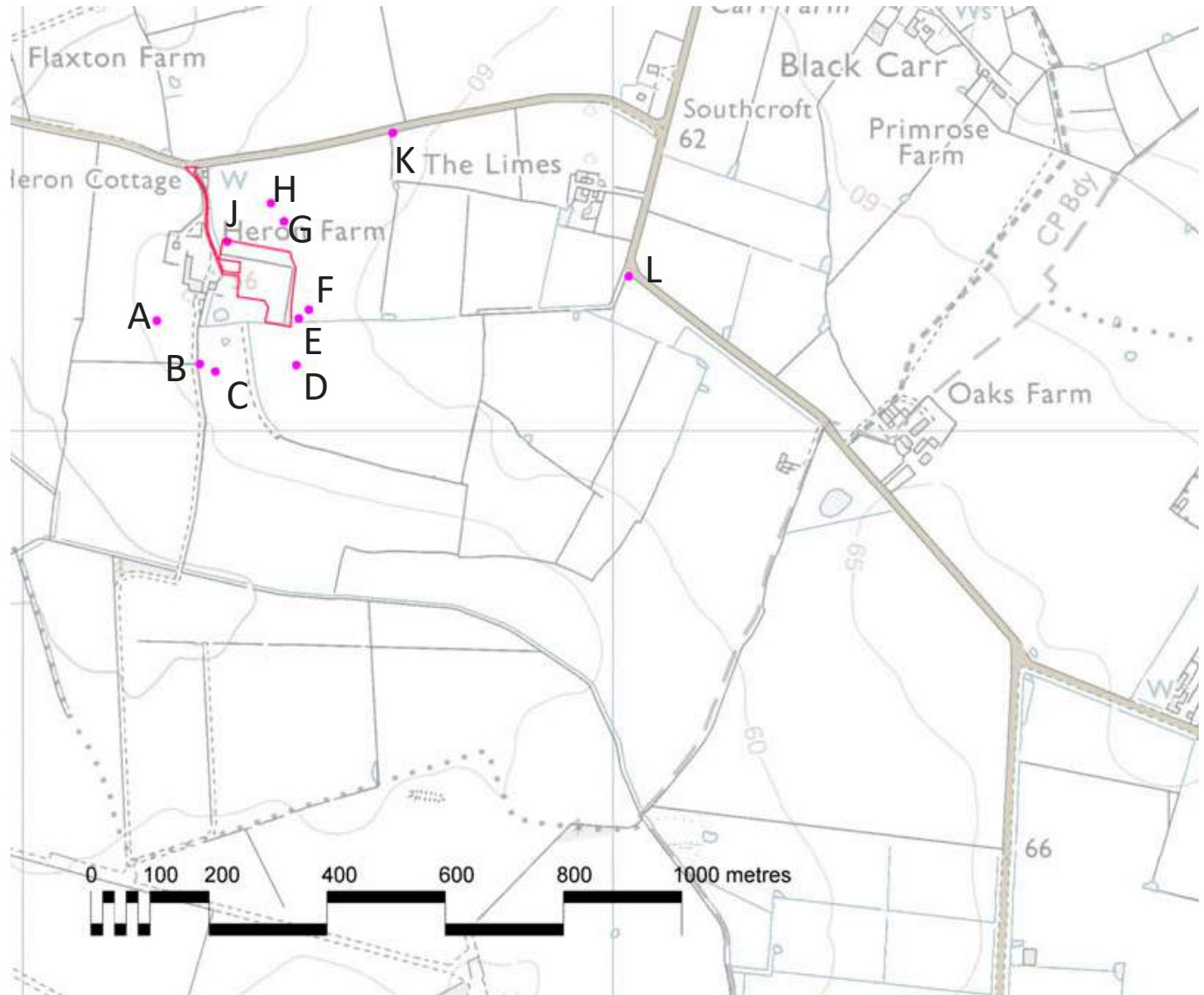




*View of existing approved activities from the top of the bund. Note that the tipper (for operations already with planning approval) is taller than the proposed plant*

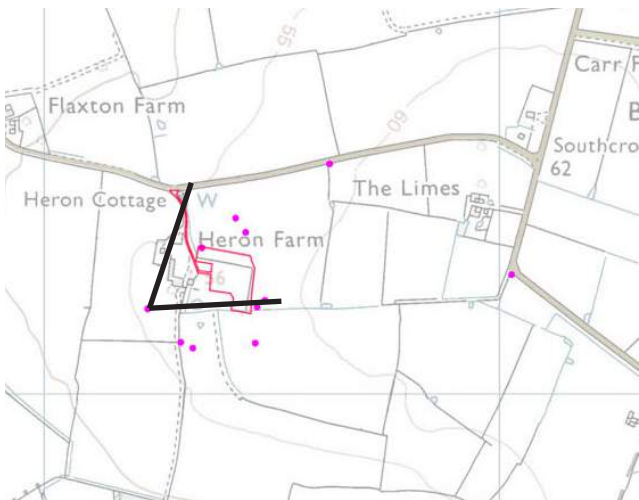
### Visual Assessment

10.4 The plan here indicates the viewpoints selected as providing representative views of the proposed development. Where possible, views were from locations readily accessible to the public, although this was only possible from Besthorpe and Bunwell Roads as there are few public footpaths in the area.



Viewpoints used in the visual assessment, additional to the original LVIA prepared in June 2021



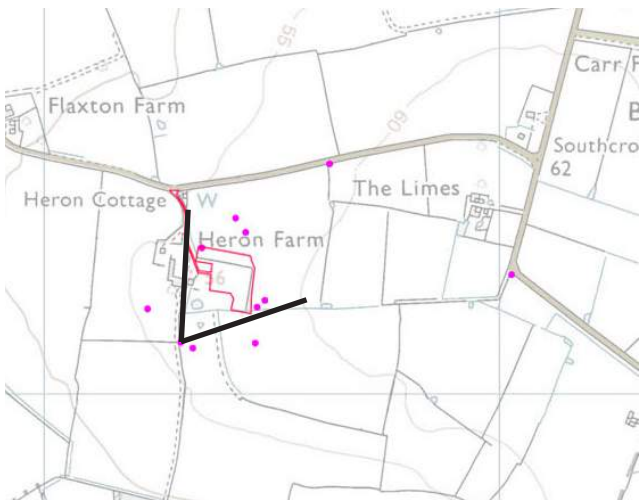


Viewpoint A  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.514782°N, 1.067317°E, 62m  
TM0822795188  
608227, 295188

This is the view from neighbouring private land, approximately 200 metres South-west of the proposed plant. Very little of the existing activity is visible from here, and the application proposals are not visible.





Viewpoint B  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.514118°N, 1.068358°E, 58m  
TM0830095117  
608300, 295117

View North-eastwards from the farm track running south from Heron Farm, approximately 175 metres from the application site. The existing bund screens all activity from view, including the application site.

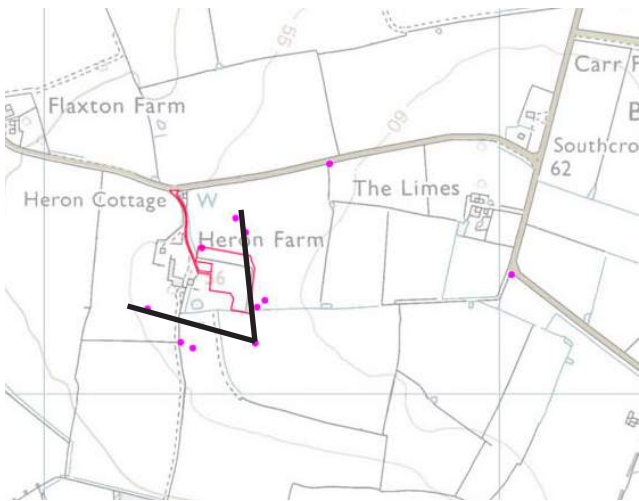


Viewpoint C  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.513996°N, 1.068735°E, 58m  
TM0832695105  
608326, 295105

View north-eastwards from the adjacent field, approximately 175 metres from the application site. The proposals are screened from view by existing bunding.



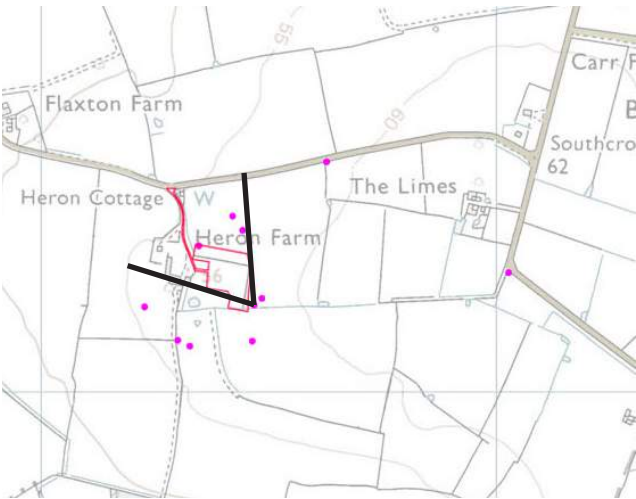


Viewpoint D  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.514061°N, 1.070738°E, 59m  
TM0846295118  
608462, 295118

This is the view northwards from the adjacent field, approximately 140 metres from the proposed plant. The existing bunding screens sll existing activity as well as the proposed plant



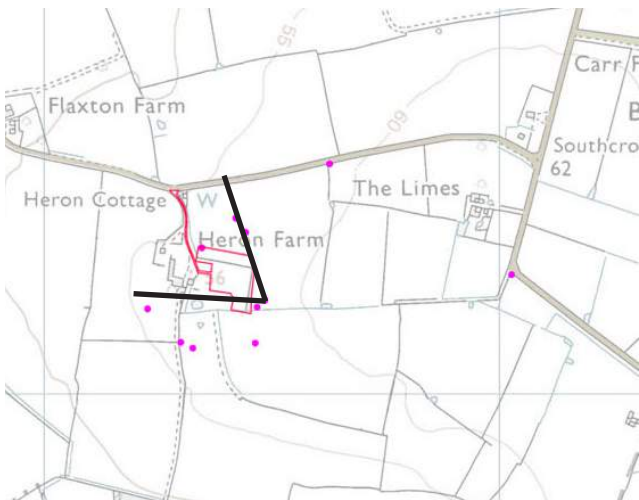


Viewpoint E  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.514725°N, 1.070855°E, 56m  
TM0846795192  
608467, 295192

View North-westwards from the adjacent field, approximately 65 metres from the proposed plant, which is screened from view by existing bunding and trees.



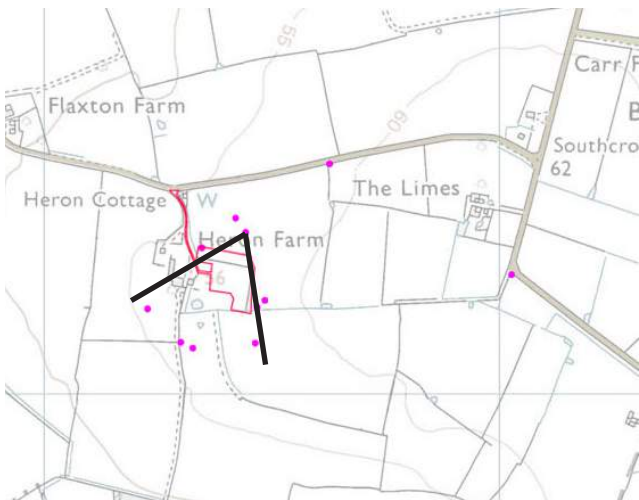


Viewpoint F  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.514851°N, 1.071112°E, 57m  
TM0848495207  
608484, 295207

This is the view view North-westwards from the adjacent field, approximately 85 metres from the proposed plant, which is screened from view by existing bunding and trees.



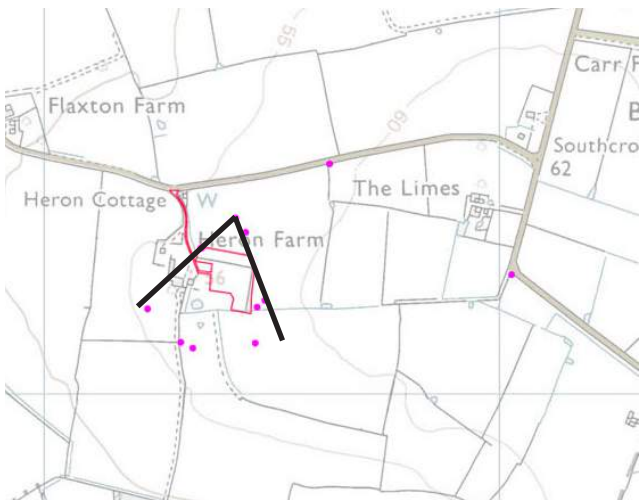


Viewpoint G  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.516209°N, 1.070595°E, 58m  
TM0844295356  
608442, 295356

View Southwards from private land close to the application site, approximately 100 metres from the proposed plant. The plant is not visible, screened by existing bunding





Viewpoint H  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.516506°N, 1.070287°E, 57m  
TM0842095388  
608420, 295388

View Southwards from private land close to the application site, approximately 100 metres from the proposed plant. The plant is not visible, screened by existing bunding. Note the grass and wildflowers establishing on the bunding, softening its impact.



Viewpoint J  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.51593°N, 1.06916°E, 60m  
TM0834695321  
608346, 295321

This is the view eastwards, approximately 100 metres from the proposed plant, which is completely screened by the bunding



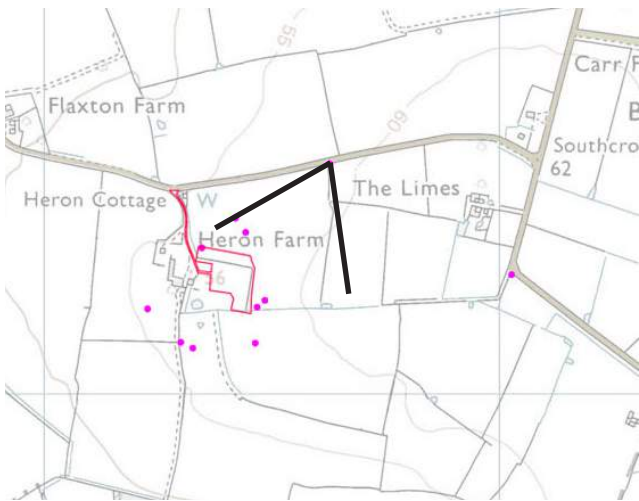


*This shows comparative views from similar viewpoints in June 2021 (top) and August (bottom), showing the rapid establishment of grass and wildflowers establishing on the bunding and softening its visual impact and providing landscape biodiversity.*





Approximate location of plant



Viewpoint K  
Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:  
52.517517°N, 1.073385°E, 56m  
TM0862595510  
608625, 295510

View South-westwards from a gap in the hedge on Bunwell Road, approximately 300 metres from the proposed plant, which is completely screened by the existing bunding

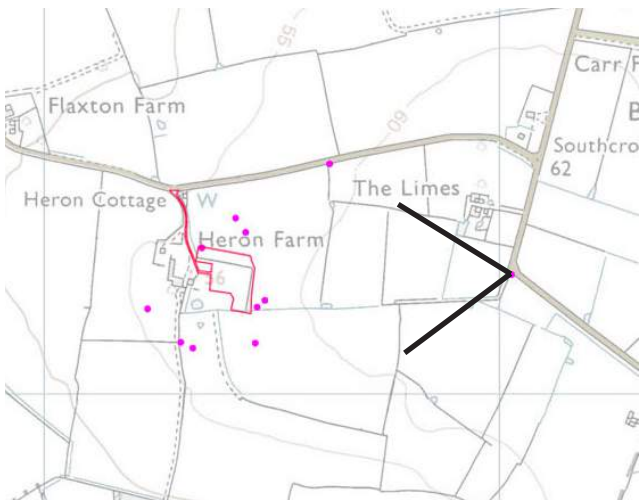


*This shows comparative views from the same viewpoints in June 2021 (top) and August (bottom), showing the rapid establishment of grass and wildflowers establishing on the bunding and softening its visual impact and providing landscape biodiversity.*





Approximate location of plant



Viewpoint L

Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR

Lens focal length: 50mm

Location:

52.515148°N, 1.079107°E, 68m

TM0902595263

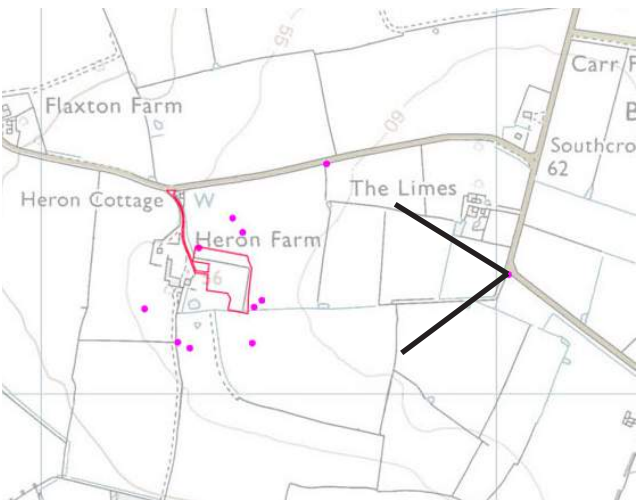
609025, 295263

This is the view Westwards from the corner on Besthorpe Road, approximately 600 metres from the application site. The plant is completely screened by the existing bunding, and so distant that it would have a negligible impact anyway.





*This shows comparative views from the same viewpoints in June 2021 (top) and August (bottom).*



Viewpoint L  
 Camera: Canon 6D Full Frame DSLR  
 Lens focal length: 300mm

Location:  
 52.515148°N, 1.079107°E, 68m  
 TM0902595263  
 609025, 295263

This is a highly zoomed view Westwards from the corner on Besthorpe Road, approximately 600 metres from the application site to demonstrate that the plant is completely screened by the existing bunding, and so distant that it would have a negligible impact anyway.

## 11. Conclusion

11.1 A Landscape and Visual Appraisal was undertaken to determine the potential impact of new development on a site at Heron Farm, Besthorpe, within an existing operational area. The proposals comprise:

- an excavator, with a general arm height of approximately 5.5 metres, occasionally rising to approximately 6.5 metres;
- a mechanical crusher with approximate dimensions 11.42m x 3.8m x 3.27m high.

11.2 This appraisal notes that the site is located within an agricultural area typical of the character of the Old Buckenham Plateau Landscape Character Area, an elevated, gently undulating plateau landscape with distant though intermittent views and a field pattern which is irregular and large in scale, fields being bounded by hedgerows and occasional hedgerow trees.

11.3 The existing site is an active operational area located within an original farm complex, with boundary tree planting and grass bunds. The overall appearance from a distance is of a typical isolated farmstead, characteristic of this character area. Most of the existing mechanical activity is screened by the trees and bunding, so that there is little perception of the intensity of activity here.

11.4 A combination of visual screening tree and hedgerow

cover, and existing bunding results in the proposed development thus having a very limited zone of visibility.

11.5 The assessment has noted that there are very few public footpaths in the area, and none with any close views toward the site. The only views possible toward the site from public viewpoints are glimpsed passing views from public roads through the thick boundary hedgerows.

11.6 There are no private residences with views toward the development which would be affected by the proposals.

11.7 There are no designated sites (SSSIs, Listed Buildings, or Scheduled Ancient Monuments) which would be affected by the proposals.

11.8 Digital modelling using accurate topographical survey and Ordnance Survey data, combined with a thorough site assessment, with the proposed plan in-situ, has demonstrated that the proposals will have a negligible visual impact, with only a small part of the top of excavator being occasionally distantly visible above the earth bund from a few (generally non-public) viewpoints. This impact is therefore considered to be **negligible**.

11.9 Being located within an area of existing intensive agricultural activity and development, the proposals will have no impact on landscape character.

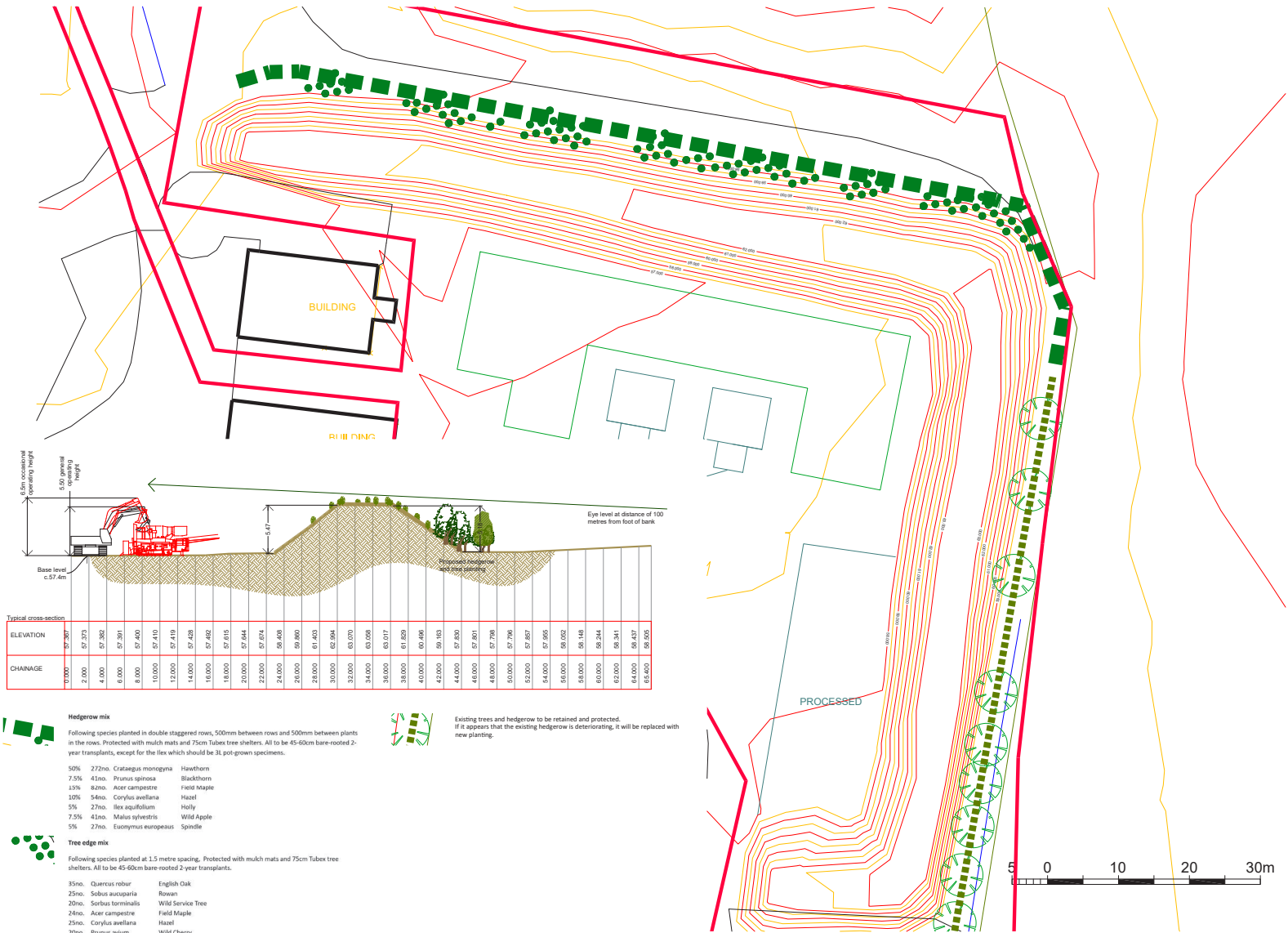
## 12. Summary:

- **The proposals will have a negligible landscape and visual impact.**
- **The visual impact from public viewpoints will be imperceptible.**
- **The visual impact from private viewpoints are limited to minor views from close proximity, of negligible impact.**
- **The proposals are located within an area of existing intensive agriculture, activity and development, and will have no impact on landscape character.**
- **It is not in a highly visible location, with local screening resulting in it having a limited zone of visibility apart from occasional distant glimpses for passing motorists.**

## 13. Mitigation

13.1 To soften the visual impact of the existing bunds (which already have planning permission anyway), it is proposed to plant native hedgerow, primarily a mix of Hawthorn, Field Maple and Hazel, with additional English Oak trees around the base of the bund. The details of this planting are shown on plan number 2021-417-004D, and reproduced here.





Landscape Mitigation

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