

Response ID ANON-B3JU-DSTV-N

Submitted to **Local Development Plan Main Issues Report 2019 Consultation**
Submitted on **2019-05-13 13:52:28**

About You

What is your name?

Name:

Ewan Maclean

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Emac Planning

On behalf of:

Stewart Milne Homes

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1 Introduction

Section 1 provides a context for the Main Issues Report Do you have any comments in relation to this section?

Do you have any comments in relation to this section?:

See Attached Statement

2 Settlement Strategy

Question 1 New Housing Sites

Do you agree with our preferred housing sites? Are there any other sites that would be suitable for housing?:

See Attached Statement

Question 2 Housing Allowances Beyond 2032

Is there a need for us to identify further Housing Allowances or sites for the period beyond 2032?:

See Attached Statement

Question 3 Brownfield and other Opportunity Sites

Are there any further brownfield or other opportunity sites which would be suitable for redevelopment?:

See Attached Statement

Question 4 New Healthcare Facilities

Do you have any comments on these sites? Are there any other sites in these areas that we should be considering?:

See Attached Statement

3 Aberdeen City Centre and the Network of Centres

Question 5 City Centre Boundary

Do you agree the Local Development Plan should modify its City Centre boundary to match the City Centre boundary shown in the City Centre Masterplan?:

Question 6 City Centre Masterplan Intervention Areas

Do you agree that the City Centre Masterplan intervention areas should be identified as opportunity sites within the Local Development Plan?:

Question 7 City Centre Retail Core

Should the retail core be reduced to focus on a more compact area of Union Street and the existing shopping centres?:

Question 8 Union Street Frontages

Should the Union Street Frontages percentages be reviewed? Do the current target percentages ensure there is a balance between a strong retail focus and allowing for other uses? What other uses should we allow on the retail core area of Union Street:

Question 9 Out of Town Retailing

Should we direct high footfall uses to existing centres including the City Centre? Should we consider new out of town retail parks? What would the impact of these be on Union Street and the City Centre, and Aberdeen's network of centres?:

Question 10 Commercial Leisure Uses

Should we continue to direct commercial leisure uses towards existing centres and the beach and leisure area?:

Question 11 City Centre Living

How can we encourage more people to live in the City Centre? Would a document outlining the principles which need to be applied in converting a building into residential use be helpful?:

MAIN ISSUE 1 Living in the City Centre

Should we include a policy in the Local Development Plan supporting residential development in the City Centre, including the conversion of upper and basement floors of premises to provide residential accommodation?:

Not Answered

Question 12 Residential Development in the City Centre

Are there any other locations within the City Centre where residential accommodation could be provided?:

MAIN ISSUE 2 A 24-Hour City

Should 24-hour activities in Aberdeen be supported and encouraged to grow, especially in the City Centre? Could this be achieved through policy?:

Not Answered

Question 13 Encouraging the Creative Arts

What can we do to support and encourage the creative sector to ensure a range of distinctive experiences so that Aberdeen City Centre is like no other place?:

Question 14 Proposals for Creative Arts

Are there other buildings or areas within Aberdeen that could accommodate the existing, and support an emerging creative sector for desk-based and studio-based artists?:

Question 15 Percent for Art

To ensure Aberdeen City Centre retains its distinctiveness, should developments with construction costs of £1 million or over be required to allocate at least 1% of construction costs for the inclusion of art projects in a publicly accessible/ visible place or places within the development?:

MAIN ISSUE 3 Support for Visitor Attractions

To support our existing visitor attractions should Aberdeen have a policy about protecting and growing visitor attractions?:

Not Answered

4 Quality Places

MAIN ISSUE 4 Minimum Internal Space Standards for New Residential Development

How can we ensure that new residential development delivers an adequate amount of internal floor space for future occupants?:

Not Answered

Question 16 External Space Standards

Do you think that the amenity spaces currently delivered are of a sufficient quality? Should we strive for a better quality/ quantity of private/ semi-private residential amenity space across the city and refuse planning permission to proposals which do not meet our high standards? What standards would you like to see set for new dwellings, flats, and conversions in respect of quality and quantity of external amenity space?:

Question 17 Natural Environment

Do you agree that the proposed list of policies for Natural Environment gives a clearer and more coherent structure than at present?:

Question 18 Food Growing

How can the Local Development Plan support the delivery of food growing projects in the City? Do you think food growing should be included in the next Plan by way of a new policy, or through existing policy and guidance?:

5 Transport and Infrastructure

Question 19 City Centre Parking

Should we reduce car parking in the City Centre to support the City Centre Masterplan? If so, how?:

MAIN ISSUE 5 Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

How best can we encourage the provision of infrastructure to support changes in transport technologies? :

Not Answered

Question 20 Digital Infrastructure

Should high speed broadband be mandatory in all new residential developments with 5 or more units? Do you wish to suggest any other proposed changes to the Digital Infrastructure and Telecommunications Infrastructure policies?:

Question 21 Developer Obligations and Infrastructure Delivery

Do we need to change our approach to securing developer obligations for future development proposals?:

See Attached Statement

6 Resource and Business Policy

MAIN ISSUE 6 Low and Zero Carbon Generating Technologies and Water Efficiency

Should the requirement of existing Policy R7 be changed?:

Not Answered

Question 22 Low and Zero Carbon Generating Technologies and Water Efficiency

What methodology should the Council use in calculating compliance with Policy R7, specifically how should the target of reducing carbon dioxide levels be calculated?:

Question 23 Solar Farm Developments

Do you agree that Solar Farms should be supported within the Council's policy on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy developments, and should specific guidance be included within Policy R8?:

MAIN ISSUE 7 Heat Networks

Should we include a policy in the Local Development Plan supporting the development of Heat Networks within the City?:

Not Answered

Question 24 Supporting Business and Industrial Development

Should we carry forward our current policy approach to safeguarding existing business and industrial areas from other development pressures into the next Local Development Plan?:

See Attached Statement

MAIN ISSUE 8 West End Office Area

Should the policy support a mix of uses in the West End Office Area? If so, what types?:

Not Answered

7 Affordable Housing

Question 25 Affordable Housing

Do you agree with the Local Development Plan's current affordable housing approach being carried forward? What other measures could the Council consider in order to assist with the delivery of affordable housing units via the Plan? Should the threshold of not applying affordable housing requirements to developments smaller than 5 units remain in place?:

Question 26 Private Rented Accommodation and Build to Rent

Are there ways that the Local Development Plan can facilitate Build to Rent development, through policy?:

Appendix 1 Proposed Draft New Policies

Policy D2 Amenity

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy D5 Advertisements and Signage

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy D8 Shopfronts

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy D9 Windows and Doors

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy H4 Housing Mix and Housing for Particular Needs

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

See Attached Statement

Policy H8 Residential Care Facilities

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy H9 Student Accommodation Developments

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy H10 Houses in Multiple Occupation

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy NC9 City Centre Living

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy NC10 24-hour City

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy NC11 Visitor Attractions and Facilities

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Policy NC12 Public Art Contribution

Do you have any comments on the policy?:

Additional Documents

Please include comments on other documents below:

Please include comments on other documents below::

See Attached Statement

Additional Files

If you have further information you would like to provide you may upload it here.:

SMH Westhill (Submitted) 13.05.19.pdf was uploaded



Aberdeen Local Development Plan Review

Main Issues Report 2019

Submissions on behalf of Stewart Milne Homes:

- **Westhill, Land at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill**

May 2019

Contents:

- 1.0 Introduction**
- 2.0 Call for Sites (May 2018)**
- 3.0 Main Issues Report**
- 4.0 Delivery**
- 5.0 Summary**

Appendix 1: Development Strategy (May 2018) and Addendum Report (May 2019)

Appendix 2: Westhill Capacity Study (May 2014)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Stewart Milne Homes welcome the early commencement of replacement of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2017 and the opportunity to promote land for allocation for housing, business and open space purposes at Westhill.
- 1.2 Stewart Milne Homes are a division of Stewart Milne Group, Scotland's largest privately owned homebuilder and timber systems manufacturer and have constructed many houses within Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and wish to see both continue to prosper through the confidence that a Development Plan led system can deliver to the business sector and all local stakeholders.
- 1.3 Stewart Milne Homes therefore regularly input to and monitor Local Development Plans effectiveness and along with much of the development industry, Stewart Milne Homes have ongoing reservations regarding the level of housing land supply generally and the failure of the Plan to conform with the Strategic Development Plan and Scottish Planning Policy in that regard.
- 1.4 Further to last years 'bid' stage of LDP preparation, Stewart Milne Homes therefore again welcome the opportunity to present their views on the appropriate direction for growth at Westhill for immediate and long term mixed use allocations within both Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire LDP areas. A Development Strategy (May 2018), as updated in an Addendum Report (May 2019), both prepared by Optimised Environments and both appended as Appendix 1, support the following submissions and those documents also include input from Fairhurst on technical matters including the delivery of local and strategic infrastructure.
- 1.5 Within the general environs of Westhill, Aberdeen City Council clearly acknowledge the benefits of development around the City edge through the 2018 grant of consent for the new Community and Sports Facilities / 20,000 capacity Stadium on land at West Kingsford. In considering the proposals, the City Council concluded that the significant public benefits for the region, both economic and social, balanced with the favourable location on the boundary between Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council's respective administrative boundaries, justified the grant of consent. Currently under construction, the new stadium and ancillary proposals respond well to their surrounding environment and the approval demonstrates how a sympathetic approach to siting and landscaping and the creation of positive woodland frameworks, appropriate to the local landscape and

environment, and has now set the context for further development opportunities within the local environs to the south east, south and south west of Westhill.

2.0 Call for Sites (May 2018)

- 2.1 During the 'Call for Sites' stage, SMH submitted a comprehensive development bid for the subject land, setting out a detailed justification as to why SMH considered the land should be identified for development purposes in the new LDP, including the strategic benefits that long term planning can bring to Westhill.
- 2.2 As referenced above, a Development Strategy, including information on infrastructure delivery, were also included with the bid and effectively demonstrated the concepts and justification for site selection.

3.0 Main Issues Report

- 3.1 The site bid is referenced within the MIR as **B0933** Land at Damhead / Backhill / Cadgerford, South of Westhill for a total of 750-900 homes and 9-10 ha of employment land within both Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.
- 3.2 In summary, along with the vast majority of other greenfield 'bid' sites within the Aberdeen LDP area, the recommendation regarding potential allocation of B0933 is listed as "*undesirable*". Through the detailed consideration of B0933, the MIR Bid Assessment then presents various summaries in a scoring system and we comment on the seemingly adverse scoring subjects as follows:
- 3.2.1 *"Development in this location would impact significantly on the rolling agricultural landscape to the south of Westhill. Development would be highly visible from the surrounding area. It is part of the open countryside which separates Kingswells and Westhill and serves the green belt function of maintaining their separate identities and landscape setting".*
"There is little shelter provided from topography".
"The proposal includes a mix of employment and residential uses, both of which are well catered for in Westhill".

Response: The Development Strategy (March 2018) and subsequent addendum (May 2019), both prepared by OPEN, both include a landscape and visual appraisal. Both conclude that due to topographical and landscape features which contribute to a sense of place and localised containment to the south of the existing Westhill

settlement, landscape and visual effects would be limited to a localised area. Any changes would therefore be very localised in effect and it is considered that the proposals provide the potential to introduce a large-scale development into the local landscape south of Westhill within the context of relatively limited landscape and visual effects. Both documents are included within Appendix 1.

The Westhill Capacity Study, an independent study commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council and included within Appendix 2, assessed a number of possible development options around Westhill to determine a percentage weighting as to their suitability for development purposes. 70% or over was considered 'Most Suitable', 61-69% was considered 'Suitable' and lower than 60% was considered 'Less Suitable'. Amongst key factors in being categorised as 'most suitable' were proximity to employment and retail nodes, to *"respect the character of the landscape and local identity"* and *"mixed use must be prioritised"*.

The subject land was included within site assessment areas 23 and 24. Area 23 achieved a score of 74% and Area 24 achieved a score of 73%, i.e. 'Most Suitable'. In the final report, out of the 24 sites assessed, the subject land is listed as being within Aberdeenshire Council's short list of most suitable sites with a "strong preference" to be developed first. Indeed, all the land to the south of Westhill is categorised as "most suitable" and falls within the same landscape area.

As the most up to date detailed study regarding the development potential of the town, these conclusions carry significant weight in the ongoing process of plan review and Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council should be planning for the strategically required releases now to ensure that any perceived constraints can be dealt with through an appropriate scale of enabling development.

Indeed, the recent Aberdeenshire LDP MIR recognised that development to the south of the B9119 is acceptable in principle, reference the employment land bid GR106 to the south of the B9119. Within this context it is further noted that the recent Aberdeenshire MIR also simply caveats that residential uses in this area are not supported *"at this time"*. Whilst recognising this first small step south of the B9119, SMH continue to assert that the land at Damhead, Cadgerford / Backhill has the potential to be an early and critical component in the planned, sustainable growth of the town, across both local authority areas, towards its natural southern boundaries.

To support this position a high-level development strategy for the expansion of Westhill to the south was prepared by Optimised Environments and Fairhurst to support submissions to both the Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen Call for Sites and has been updated through further report for the MIRs. The reports demonstrate how the Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill integrated site can help in the delivery of improvements to infrastructure and the provision of land to meet demand for employment and residential uses. The Development Strategy and further report are both attached as Appendix 1.

The reports also draw upon the findings of the Westhill Capacity Study, which assessed a number of development options around Westhill and favourably considered the subject land, i.e. south of the B9119, as one of the areas most suitable for development. It is therefore inevitable that, subject to a requirement being identified, land to the south of the B9119 is indeed the preferred direction of growth for Westhill. The proposed extension of Aberdeenshire LDP MIR employment site R1, Aberdeenshire MIR bid GR106 to the south of the B9119, is a welcome first step in endorsing this direction of growth within the emerging Aberdeenshire LDP and the Aberdeen LDP should be seeking to expand these principles.

3.2.2 ***“Service Infrastructure Capacity: Accessibility & Education”***

Response: On behalf of SMH, Ryden have submitted representations to the Proposed SDP seeking a modification to encourage Local Development Plans to consider the scope for development utilising the benefits arising from the AWPR and its associated junctions. Local Development Plans should therefore assess the capacity of the network and identify land for development where opportunities arise. In respect of any resultant impacts or mitigation identified, Local Development Plans should specify the mitigation works to be addressed by that particular development.

The development proposal is the first phase of a wider expansion of Westhill, which would see significant development of employment, retail and housing with circa 3000 houses proposed.

Fairhurst have inputted to the accessibility appraisal as included within the submitted Development Strategy and recent Addendum (Appendix 1) and both documents therefore set out how the proposals can be utilised to offer capacity improvements to the existing road network, unlocking both short and long term

development potential. We can confirm that all the land required is within the control of SMH and an additional route traversing east to west through Westhill provides the opportunity to relieve traffic elsewhere in the town. This is exactly what was envisaged within the Westhill Capacity Study (Appendix 2).

As part of the supporting documentation for an application for planning permission, a Transport Assessment (TA) would be prepared and would include detail of road widths, junction sizes, etc. This would include a phased approach to delivery with access requirements fully established for the initial phases of development and for the wider site area.

In terms of educational requirements, Westhill Academy is reaching the end of its useful lifespan and the proposals create the potential to provide a replacement site to the south of Westhill, as shown within the Appendix 1 documentation.

3.2.3 ***“Safeguarded areas for the major gas and oil pipelines restrict the amount and type of development that can take place within the consultation zones”.***

“Brodiach Burn.....significant area at risk of flooding”.

Response: The BP ‘Forties’ pipeline system does indeed run through the site and has various consultation zones as explained in para 4.5 of the Development Strategy, Appendix 1. This is not however a finite constraint to development, rather a manageable design opportunity that will be taken into account as appropriate along with other physical constraints and opportunities such as the Brodiach Burn, local topography and local woodland. Indeed, as way of example, the Development Strategy sets out how the watercourse corridor, within the most restricted pipeline consultation zone, can be utilised for open space and SUDS. The development framework has been arranged to take cognisance of the SEPA flood risk maps and a detailed flood risk assessment will be carried out at the appropriate stage.

3.2.4 ***“Allocations should be small in nature.....likely to be contrary to the Proposed Strategic Development Plan”.***

Response: There are no additional allocations proposed for Westhill within the Aberdeen City LDP MIR. The Aberdeenshire LDP MIR only identifies two sites as “Officers’ preference”, and both are suggested as reserved sites not preferred for immediate development. GR125 is the former blockworks site on Straik Road, identified as suitable for 33 homes; and GR106 proposes land south of Arnhall

Business Park (Phase 4) for employment land and a hotel. GR106 includes part of site R1, extending it along the settlement boundary and results in development on the south side of the B9119, i.e. directly adjacent to the subject land. This could be viewed as the first phase of a wider long-term development allocation for both plan areas.

Westhill is of course currently not recognised by the SDP as being within a Strategic Growth Area although SMH and others have submitted appropriate representations to the Proposed SDP, objecting to that position and promoting the continued strategic growth of the settlement through a re-designation of the western boundary of the Aberdeen Strategic Growth Area.

Indeed, the proximity of Westhill and the close relationship it enjoys with the city of Aberdeen makes it unique in the role it performs. As a settlement it is clear that over the course of recent years, Westhill has performed a strategic function in terms of the provision of employment and housing land, delivering development against a backdrop of strong demand for both sectors. Located within the Aberdeen Housing Market Area (AHMA), Westhill has clearly been an area which has benefited from sustained growth and economic performance. Despite this growth, whilst the settlement is surrounded by SGAs, Westhill continues to be somewhat of an anomaly as it lies outwith any SGA. Despite representation lodged by SMH at SDP MIR stage seeking its inclusion as an SGA, disappointingly the Proposed SDP continues to identify Westhill for “local growth and diversification”, where more limited opportunities for growth exist, that are focussed on meeting local, rather than strategic needs.

Notwithstanding any future changes to the SDP or otherwise as a result of these representations, the Proposed SDP currently recognises the vital role that local growth and diversification areas play to the Region’s economy.

Proposed SDP para 3.45 states that encouraging sustainable mixed communities and sustainable economic growth will be an essential part of making sure the local growth and diversification areas continue to contribute positively to the wider city region. *“The scale and level of opportunities for new growth will vary from place to place, with larger towns such as Fraserburgh, Alford, Turriff, Banchory and Westhill being the main focus for new investment. Levels of growth in individual settlements should relate to local needs, with different places having different potential”.* [Proposed SDP page 23].

Between the two Main Issues reports, in only identifying a very limited extension to an existing employment allocation and 33 houses to a settlement on the very edge of the SDP Aberdeen Strategic Growth Area, it is contended that neither MIR has identified a level of growth that reflects Westhill's potential.

The SDP also identifies a requirement for 'Strategic Reserve' sites to be identified. These are defined as "*Areas of land identified in a local development plan for possible future development*" (SDP page 48). The subject land to the South of Westhill should be formally acknowledged by both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council to be the preferred direction for growth for Westhill and designation 'Strategic Reserve' land, i.e. land that is identified for possible future development and protected from other uses.

Westhill is certainly not just a commuter suburb, the employment areas located in the settlement harness a unique and highly skilled workforce, harbouring one of the largest concentrations of subsea engineering expertise in the world. The presence of business and industrial development in Westhill sees it retain more than 25% of its residents' employment in Westhill rather than commuting to the wider area.

It is notable that section 8 of the Proposed SDP 'Our Future' does recognise that in order to ensure the success of the Spatial Strategy, future consideration may be given to changes to the SGAs and the inclusion of a western growth corridor will be undertaken. SMH have argued through representations to the Proposed Plan that the SDP is planning for a period of 25 years, therefore western growth needs to be tackled now, in order to future proof the sustainable development and economic prosperity Westhill provides as a settlement. The business community in Westhill has been pressing for this for many years and it remains incumbent on the SDP review to deliver that growth. This will provide the development industry confidence to continue to invest in Westhill and give certainty to the local community over the long-term growth and economic prosperity of the settlement.

4.0 Delivery

4.1 Outwith Westhill, there has been a clear failure of both extant Local Development Plans to deliver the housing land requirements set by the approved SDP. These issues are consistently highlighted by Homes for Scotland and various housebuilders, SMH amongst them, in response to the consultation on both emerging plans.

- 4.2 With reference to demand for housing and past completion rates at Westhill there is clear evidence that planning policies are artificially constraining the delivery of homes and failing to provide ongoing continuity of marketable and deliverable supply.
- 4.3 Indeed, the restrictive planning policies at Westhill are often used as an example of how a lack of a long-term vision in a strong market settlement can unreasonably fetter the ability to strategically plan for required infrastructure, education provision, etc. Rather than the LDP MIR listing these matters as constraints and used as a reason not to allocate additional land, effective forward planning such as the opportunity on the subject lands should be used to address and facilitate strategic infrastructure improvements through an appropriate scale of additional development allocation.
- 4.4 SMH continue therefore to consider that the subject land should be allocated as the first phases of a wider masterplanned area in line with the overall Westhill Capacity Study and the attached South Westhill Development Strategy.

5.0 Summary

- 5.1 In summary, the submitted documentation, in line with the SPP core principle of supporting economically, environmentally and socially sustainable places, sets out a high level strategy for the southerly expansion of Westhill, explores the key issues to be considered and shows how the Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill integrated site will help in the delivery of improvements to infrastructure and the provision of land to meet the identified demand for residential and employment uses.
- 5.2 Rather than the LDP MIR listing matters such as infrastructure and education provision as constraints and used as a reason not to allocate additional land, effective forward planning such as the opportunity on the subject lands should be used to address and facilitate strategic infrastructure improvements through an appropriate scale of deliverable development allocation.
- 5.3 The developable areas within Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City are shown in Section 6 of the supplemental report, Appendix 1.

- 5.4 Within Aberdeen LDP area, approximately 25.0 hectares of land is identified as suitable for development. This is split into specific development areas with around 5.8 hectares being suitable for employment and land for between 650 to 750 residential units.
- 5.5 In total, in accordance with the detailed presentation of land use and density included with Appendix 2 documentation, land within Aberdeen City at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill, South of Westhill should therefore be allocated or identified as 'Strategic Reserve' within the Aberdeen LDP for between 650 - 750 homes and around 5.8 ha of employment land.

Appendix 1

DAMHEAD/CADGERFORD/BACKHILL, WESTHILL

Development Strategy - Response to Aberdeen City Local Plan - Call for Sites
May 2018

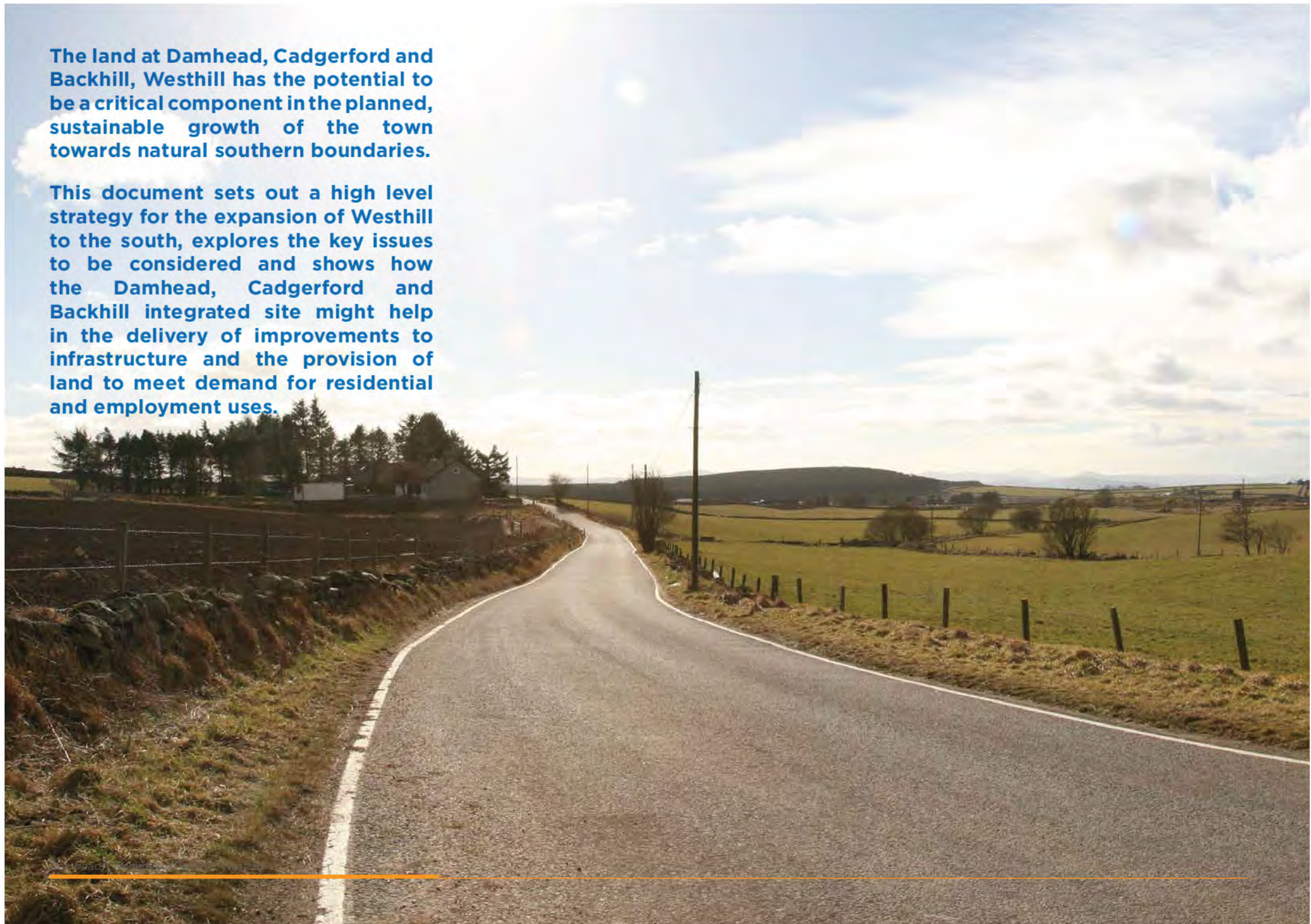
Prepared on behalf of:

STEWART
Milne
HOMES

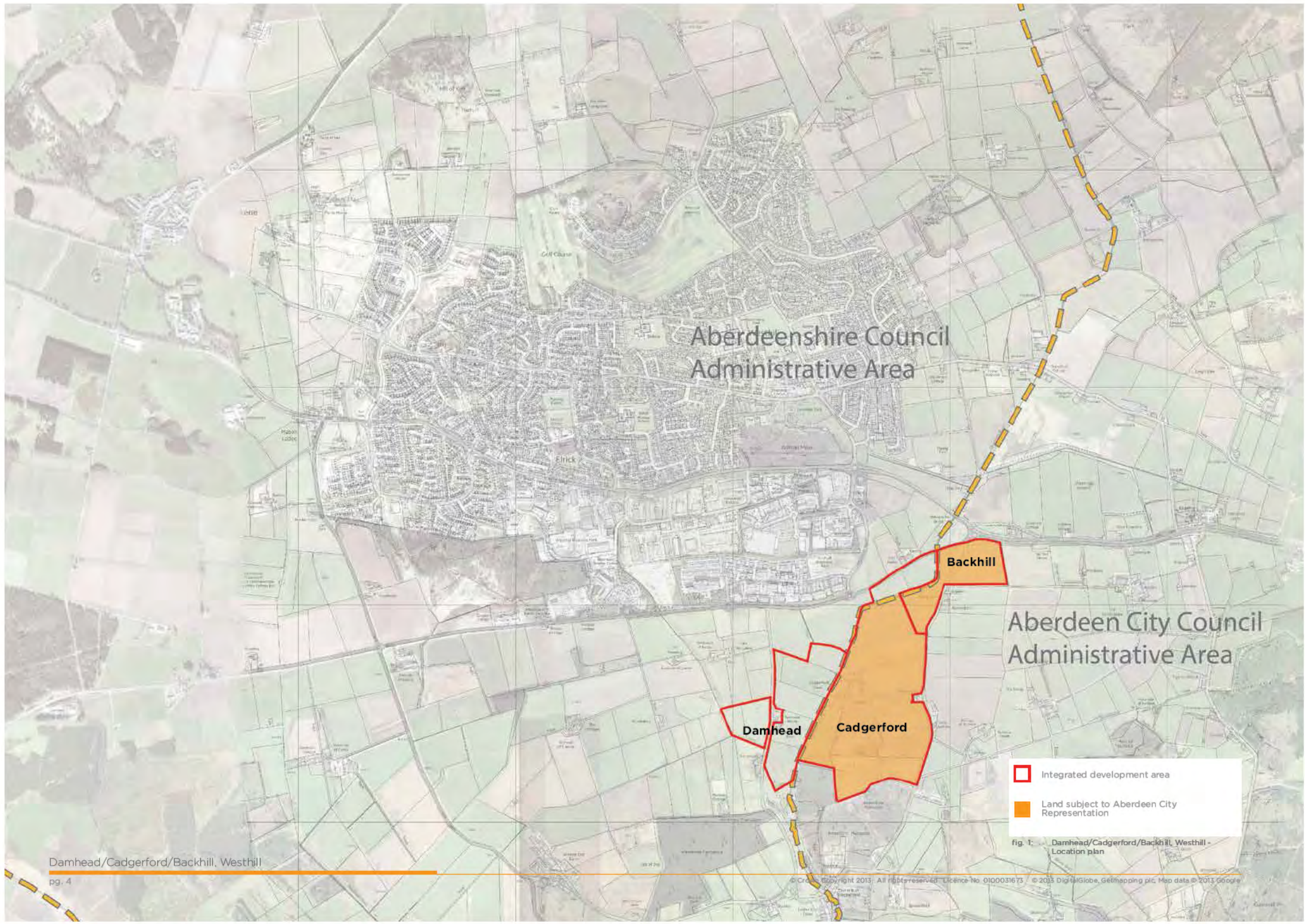
open
optimised environments

The land at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill, Westhill has the potential to be a critical component in the planned, sustainable growth of the town towards natural southern boundaries.

This document sets out a high level strategy for the expansion of Westhill to the south, explores the key issues to be considered and shows how the Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill integrated site might help in the delivery of improvements to infrastructure and the provision of land to meet demand for residential and employment uses.







Aberdeenshire Council
Administrative Area

Aberdeen City Council
Administrative Area

Backhill

Damhead

Cadgerford



-  Integrated development area
-  Land subject to Aberdeen City Representation

Fig. 1: Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill - Location plan

› Executive summary

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill

This document supports individual representations to the Aberdeen City Council Local Development Plan and Aberdeenshire Council Local Development Plan for sites that straddle the administrative boundaries of the respective Councils. The sites have been assessed by the Westhill Capacity Study as being 'most suitable' for development in the context of the long term growth of Westhill. They hold a strategic position in relation to existing and future road infrastructure and potential improvements and have the opportunity to be important gateway features to the town on the eastern approach. They are located within walking distance of the existing town centre and offer an appropriate and available location for sustainable growth.

The following document sets out the key issues relating to both the town of Westhill and the specific sites in question. It is structured as such:

Introduction

Setting out the purpose of the document, timing of submission and background on the promoter.

Planning

An overview of the key planning issues and current policy context.

Town context and growth issues

A short urban and landscape analysis of Westhill with particular emphasis on the area to the south which has been identified as the most appropriate location for sustainable growth.

Site appraisal

Baseline information on the site including an appraisal of suitability for development.

Vision for growth to the south

How an aspirational statement for the sustainable growth of Westhill might start to be translated into a strategic plan and policy, with particular focus on the implications of accommodating development to the south.

Development Framework

A high level development framework which gives a broad indication of the infrastructure improvements and movement network required, the structuring open space and development pockets which might be realised.

Site specific information

Details of relevance to the specific part of the site which fall into the respective Council boundaries.



Fig. 2 Sketch development framework illustrating southerly expansion of Westhill as per Westhill Capacity Study

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this document

This document has been produced in support of individual Representations to Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council for their respective Local Development Plans. Due to the nature of the site, which straddles the administrative boundaries, a single document with a common core has been formulated with site specific sections which set out relevant information for the respective councils.

The purpose of this document is to demonstrate:

- The suitability of the sites in performing a much needed and valuable function in accommodating requirements for housing and employment land that have been identified by both Councils;
- How an aspirational vision for the growth of Westhill might start to be translated into strategic plans and policies, with specific reference to the south of the town; and
- How the site fits into a strategy for southern expansion with particular reference to how required infrastructure improvements might be accommodated.

1.1.1 Stewart Milne Homes

The Stewart Milne Group was founded in Aberdeen in 1975. Since then it has grown to become one of the UK's leading privately owned house builders. They have a commitment to enterprise and innovation matched with traditional value for quality services. They are currently building in a number of locations through the UK but are proud to be headquartered in the North East of Scotland and particularly within Westhill.

1.2 Planning summary

The subject lands currently lie outwith the settlement boundary of Westhill, as defined in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017, and within Greenbelt in the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2017.

Stewart Milne Homes (SMH) are currently engaging through the process of review of both plans and will be submitting timeous representations to promote the subject lands. These bids are therefore the first stage of representation to promote high level masterplanning and reasoned justification as to why the subject lands should be allocated for residential and appropriate commercial development for the sites as follows:

- Land at Cadgerford, Westhill (Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan)
- Land at Backhill, Westhill (Aberdeen City Local Development Plan)
- Land at Damhead, Westhill (Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan)

Westhill is not currently recognised by the Strategic Development Plan 2014 as being within a Strategic Growth Area although Stewart Milne Homes and others will also submitting appropriate representations to the recently published Main Issues Report, i.e. objecting to the continued expression of that constraining position and promoting the much needed strategic growth of the settlement.

Due to the increasing pressure from local businesses and developers in Westhill, including Stewart Milne Homes, in December 2013 Aberdeenshire Council commissioned AMEC to update the Westhill Capacity Study (2008) and consider the capacity for future growth of the town over a 20 – 25 year period.

The study assessed a number of possible development options around Westhill to determine a percentage weighting as to their suitability for development purposes. 70% or over was considered 'Most Suitable', 61 – 69% was considered 'Suitable' and lower than 60% was considered 'Less Suitable'.

The subject land was included within site assessment 24 and achieved a score of 73%, i.e. 'Most Suitable'. In the final report, out of the 24 sites assessed, the subject land is listed as being within the Councils short list of most suitable sites with a "strong preference" to be developed first.

As the most up to date study regarding the development potential of the town, these conclusions carry significant weight in the ongoing process of plan review.

1.3 Holistic approach

This document assesses the site location and its surrounding context, and includes a visual and physical appraisal of the site and its environs. Through this appraisal, the study identifies the development capacity of the site to accommodate change and concludes with a vision for growth, strategic concept plan, high level development framework and a summary of the specific opportunities for development as relevant to the part of the site which falls into the respective Council administrative boundaries.

A master planning approach has been taken, which considers the site in a comprehensive and holistic way, emphasising context, landscape capacity, design quality, and sustainability as the key factors that can achieve this objective.

SMH has appointed a multi disciplinary team to demonstrate that development at Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill is both deliverable and can meet the aspirations for good place making enshrined within National, Regional and Local Policy

The team appointed consists of the following:

- Masterplanners / Landscape Architects: Optimised Environments (OPEN)
- Planning: Emac Planning
- Transport and Engineering Consultants: Fairhursts



2. Planning

2.1 Scottish Planning Policy

The aim of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) is to ensure that development and changes in land use occur in suitable locations and are in themselves sustainable. Planning policies and decisions should not therefore prevent or inhibit development and use of land in cities and towns unless there are sound reasons for doing so. The planning system guides the future development and use of towns and cities in the long term public interest. The goal is for a prosperous and socially just Scotland with a strong economy, homes, jobs and a good living environment for everyone.

As one of the UK's leading privately owned house builders Stewart Milne Homes therefore engage in strategic land promotion and representation throughout Scotland and specifically engage with the Scottish Government on national planning policy with a view to creating appropriate strategic and local context for allocation of land under their control for development purposes.

2.2 Current Development Plan Context

The subject lands currently lie outwith the settlement boundary of Westhill, as defined in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017, and within Greenbelt in the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2017.

Any planning promotion of the subject lands for development is influenced by the Strategic Development Plan context for the settlement and the consequential review of the LDP's and their requirement or otherwise to react to such context to include the need for additional development allocations or otherwise.

Stewart Milne Homes (SMH) have previously engaged through the process of review of the both plans and submitted representations at the Call for Sites, Main Issues Report and Proposed Plan stages of Plan preparation. These representations promoted high level masterplanning and reasoned justification as to why the subject lands should be first phase allocations for wider residential and appropriate commercial development. Since that time, control has been achieved of further land as required for the effective masterplanning of the proposed southern expansion area.

Westhill is not currently recognised by the Strategic Development Plan 2014 as being within a Strategic Growth Area although Stewart Milne Homes and others will also submitting appropriate representations to the recently published Main Issues Report, i.e. objecting to the continued expression of that constraining position and promoting the much needed strategic growth of the settlement.

Due to this increasing pressure from local businesses and developers in Westhill, including Stewart Milne Homes, in December 2013 Aberdeenshire Council commissioned AMEC to update the Westhill Capacity Study (2008)

and consider the capacity for future growth of the town over a 20 – 25 year period.

The Final Report was published in May 2014 and as the most up to date study regarding the development potential of the town, its conclusions carry significant weight in the ongoing process of Development Plan review.

2.3 Westhill Capacity Study

The updated study usefully considered the capacity for future growth of the town over a period of 20 – 25 years. This differs from the previous target of achieving 50% growth in housing stock which underpinned the initial 2008 study, therefore the findings and recommendations arising from the updated study differed significantly from the conclusions reached in 2008, reflected the ongoing growing pressure on the town and sought to understand the opportunity for the future growth potential of the settlement.

The key issues emanating from the updated Westhill Capacity Study should therefore again be considered by policy makers through the emerging Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Local Development Plans and the review of the Strategic Development Plan. This document should therefore be read with the separate submissions made to the Proposed Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Local Development Plans prepared by Emac Planning LLP on behalf of Stewart Milne Homes.

Significantly the capacity study was informed by and benefited from up to date statistical and planning data, a workshop comprising AMEC E&I staff and Aberdeenshire Council officers from the Transportation and Economic Development Departments and regular correspondence between members of the Project Delivery client group. Its conclusions therefore carried and continue to carry significant weight.

Positively, the study is underpinned by the assumption that development pressures recently experienced in Westhill will continue, at least in the short to medium term. It was also assumed that the Aberdeen Western Periphery Route (AWPR), which at its nearest point is situated only 1km east of Westhill will be fully operational within the 20 – 25 year time frame of the capacity study. The AWPR is currently under construction and nearing completion. A further assumption is that the vast majority of potential development in Westhill over the next 25 years will be funded by the private sector, although limited public sector funding may become available for infrastructure interventions.

The study clearly focused on opportunities to provide extensive employment land in order to sustain Westhill as a centre of excellence in subsea engineering, in addition to providing opportunities to diversify the local economy. Significant provision of employment land in Westhill will clearly have a positive impact on sustainability objectives and this of course should be achieved alongside suitable allocations for housing and other appropriate uses.

Early in the process, the authors of the report recognised that due to the high level nature of the study it was not possible or practical to consider detailed

site specific or design related issues. It would be for others to look at these matters through individual land promotion. Nevertheless the study does suggest that mixed use development should be encouraged as an appropriate way of achieving the overall vision for Westhill of creating a sustainable mixed community which balances residential, commercial and employment related development in such a way as to reduce the need to travel and create a vibrant place.

The study assessed a number of possible development options around Westhill to determine a percentage weighting as to their suitability for development purposes. 70% or over was considered 'Most Suitable', 61 – 69% was considered 'Suitable' and lower than 60% was considered 'Less Suitable'.

The subject land was included within site assessment areas 23 and 24. Area 23 achieved a score of 74% and Area 24 achieved a score of 73%, i.e. both in the 'Most Suitable' category. In the final report, out of the 24 sites assessed, the subject land is therefore listed as being within the Councils shortlist of most suitable sites with a "strong preference" to be developed first. Indeed all the land to the south of Westhill is categorised as 'Most suitable'.

As the most up to date study regarding the development potential of the town, should there be a strategic requirement, these conclusions carry significant weight in the ongoing process of plan review and Aberdeen City Council should be planning for the strategically required releases now to ensure that any perceived constraints can be dealt with through an appropriate scale of enabling development.

This document therefore seeks to apply the positive Aberdeenshire Council analysis to the subject lands and provide further more detailed site specific analysis and a vision as to how the land can facilitate the first phases of a strategy of southern growth for the town. This will help to inform the process of Plan review.

This document should therefore be read with the separate submissions made to the Proposed Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Local Development Plans prepared by Emac Planning LLP and the submissions on the SDP MIR by Stewart Milne Homes.

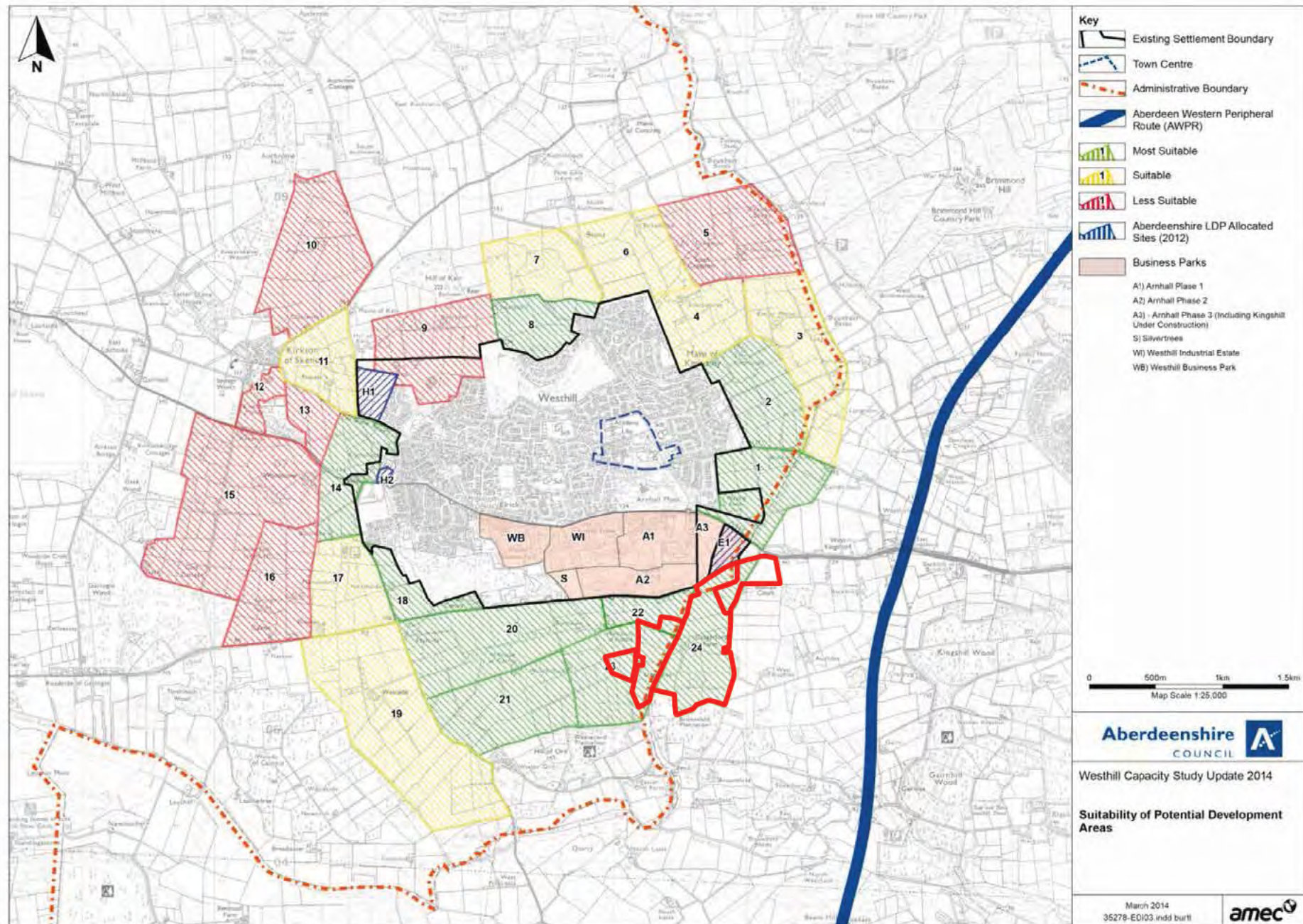


Fig. 3: Drawing from Westhill Capacity Study



fig. 4: View from south - southeast towards West hill.



3. Context

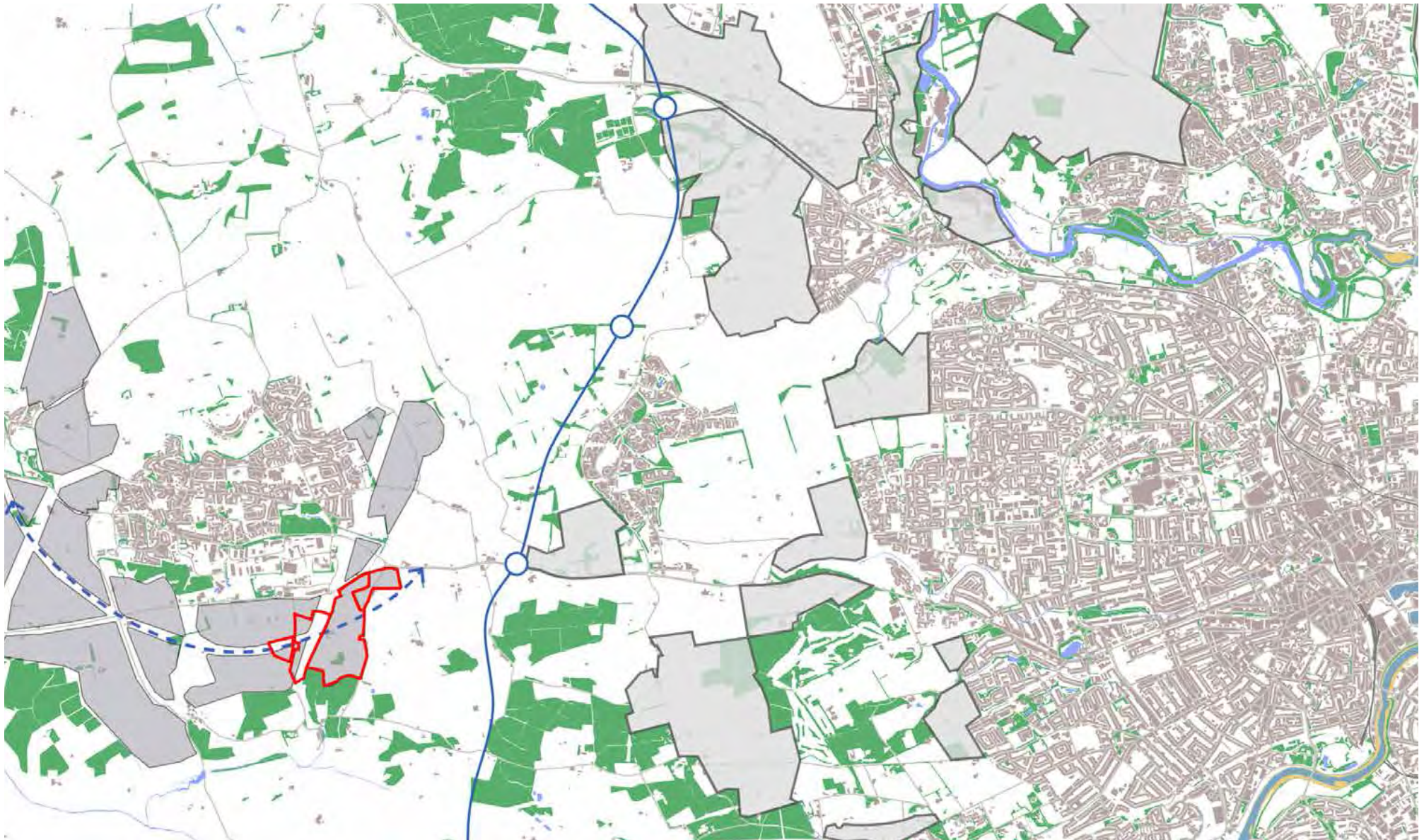


fig. 5: Westhill potential growth areas in context of other significant developments

3.1 Overview

Westhill falls within the administrative boundary of Aberdeenshire Council although the Aberdeen City Council limits lie immediately to the east of the town. Aberdeen city centre lies around 10km east of Westhill and is reached via the A944 Aberdeen Alford road which passes through the town. Nearby settlements include Kingswells to the east and Kirkton of Skene to the west.

Westhill has recently experienced significant expansion to the south in the form of land development for employment uses, creating a cluster of predominantly subsea engineering industries. Although the Strategic Development Plan does not currently include Westhill within a strategic growth area (SGA), there is considerable recognised demand for housing that requires to be considered whilst also maintaining the town's success as a key employment centre. The town is currently home to around 11,800 residents (2012). SMH have actively sought the recognition and allocation of the A944 corridor as an SGA, and will continue to do so through the review of the SDP.

3.2 Context

Westhill is an important town in the context of both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, being the 'shire's first planned new town and providing overspill housing for Aberdeen City from the late 1960s onwards. As the adjacent diagram illustrates, there is a huge amount of development planned for the surrounding area to accommodate the projected growth in population and accommodate demand for a wide range of businesses who seek to base themselves in the area. Although the town sits outwith the boundaries of Aberdeen City Council, the construction of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route immediately to the east of Westhill will connect the settlement to a much greater spread of the city and a much wider range of surrounding locations; this connection will strengthen Westhill's position as an attractive place to live and work. Given the existing services at Westhill and the established reputation for subsea industries, a considered plan for sustainable growth which supports and enhances these strengths is of benefit to both councils, regardless of administrative boundaries.

In the current adopted Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan, Westhill is recognised as being a significant settlement within the City of Aberdeen Housing Market Area although it is not recognised by the Strategic Development Plan as being part of the Aberdeen Strategic Growth Area. Given Westhill's proximity to the City boundary it is believed that Westhill should fall within the Aberdeen City Strategic Growth Area with additional opportunities for housing development as well as encouraged employment growth area. A strategy which is promoted and adopted by both Councils can ensure an appropriate and sustainable approach to growth which is good for the settlement and the wider area.

This representation is an early step in promoting such a growth strategy and sets out the key issues which should be considered.



Fig. 6: General Westhill context photos.



Fig. 9: Site in context of Westhill and other current LDP allocations

3.3 Historic growth

Westhill was planned as a new town in the 1960s, expanding the existing settlements of Westhill and Elrick to provide overspill housing for Aberdeen. The town is primarily situated on the southern slopes of Hill of Keir, a strong landscape element which forms a visual barrier to the north.

The historic maps on this page show the rapid settlement growth on the former farming areas of Western Kinmundy and Elrick. Residential estates constructed through to the 1980s were in several separate areas which by 1990 had coalesced through infill development into a definable urban area. Since the 1990s there has been rapid growth outward from this established form with residential growth generally to the east and west and significant industrial growth to the south up to the B9119.

The Westhill Capacity Study acknowledges and identifies planned expansion of Westhill, which is welcomed. It is important through this planned expansion that clearly defensible boundaries for future growth are identified in order to enhance the spatial structure of Westhill and set it as a place and town in its landscape context. The land at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill can clearly set the eastern edge of this expansion and help to open up other identified land to the west.

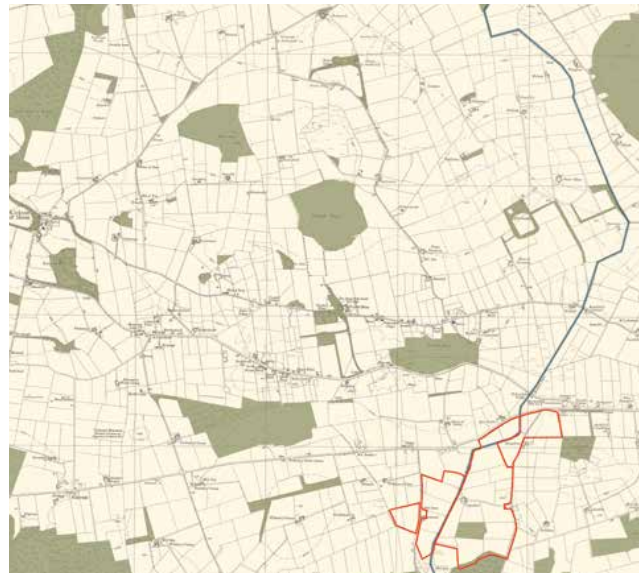


fig. 10: 1959



fig. 11: 1967



fig. 12: 1980

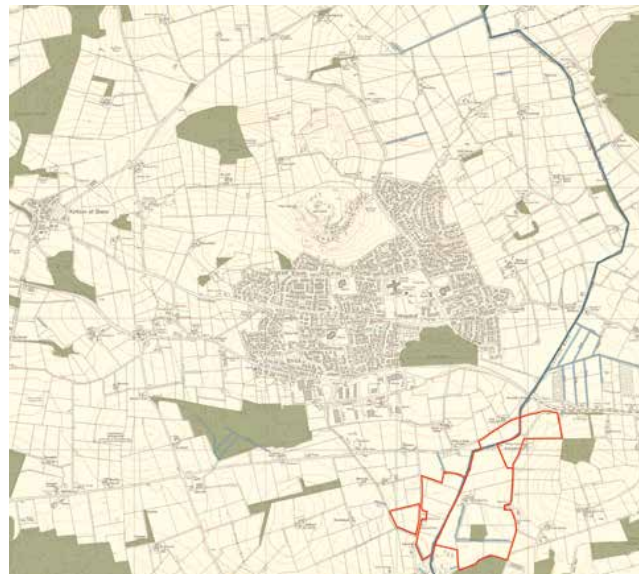


fig. 13: 1990



fig. 14: 2014

3.4 Town facilities, services and land use














Westhill is supported by a range of facilities and services, from retail to hotel and significant areas of employment uses. Although there is no historic core as such, the Westhill Shopping Centre to the east is identified for planning purposes as the town centre, supporting a range of food and specialist retail in addition to other services. Retailers in this location include M&S, The Co operative Food, Aldi and a collection of other independent and national businesses. Large scale retail has been established to the south of the A944 on the eastern entrance to the town in the form of a Tesco superstore. Restaurants, hotels, vet and dental practices and a doctors surgery are all accommodated within the town and convenience retail outlets are dispersed throughout the town.

There are four primary schools within Westhill: Westhill Primary, Skene Primary, Elrick and Crombie Primary school. Westhill also has a secondary school, Westhill Academy which services Westhill, Skene and pupils in the surrounding area.

Employment uses have expanded significantly in the past 10 years and the town has an established reputation as a centre for specialist subsea engineering businesses. Westhill Business Park and Arnhall Business Park accommodate the headquarters of many internationally renowned subsea companies which has contributed to Westhill's standing as a global subsea centre of excellence.

Community facilities and services include a swimming pool at the Westhill Academy campus, a Public Hall and Community Centre and Library.

A strong open space network is evident throughout the town, ranging from the town park of Denman Park to the Local Nature Reserve of Arnhall Moss and Carnie Woods which offer a range of passive and active recreation opportunities whilst also providing wildlife habitat.

-  Site boundary
-  Settlement boundary
-  Town Centre
-  Employment
-  Open Space
-  Retail
-  Residential
-  Recent Developments
-  School
-  Leisure/Sport Centre
-  Library
-  Post Office
-  Church

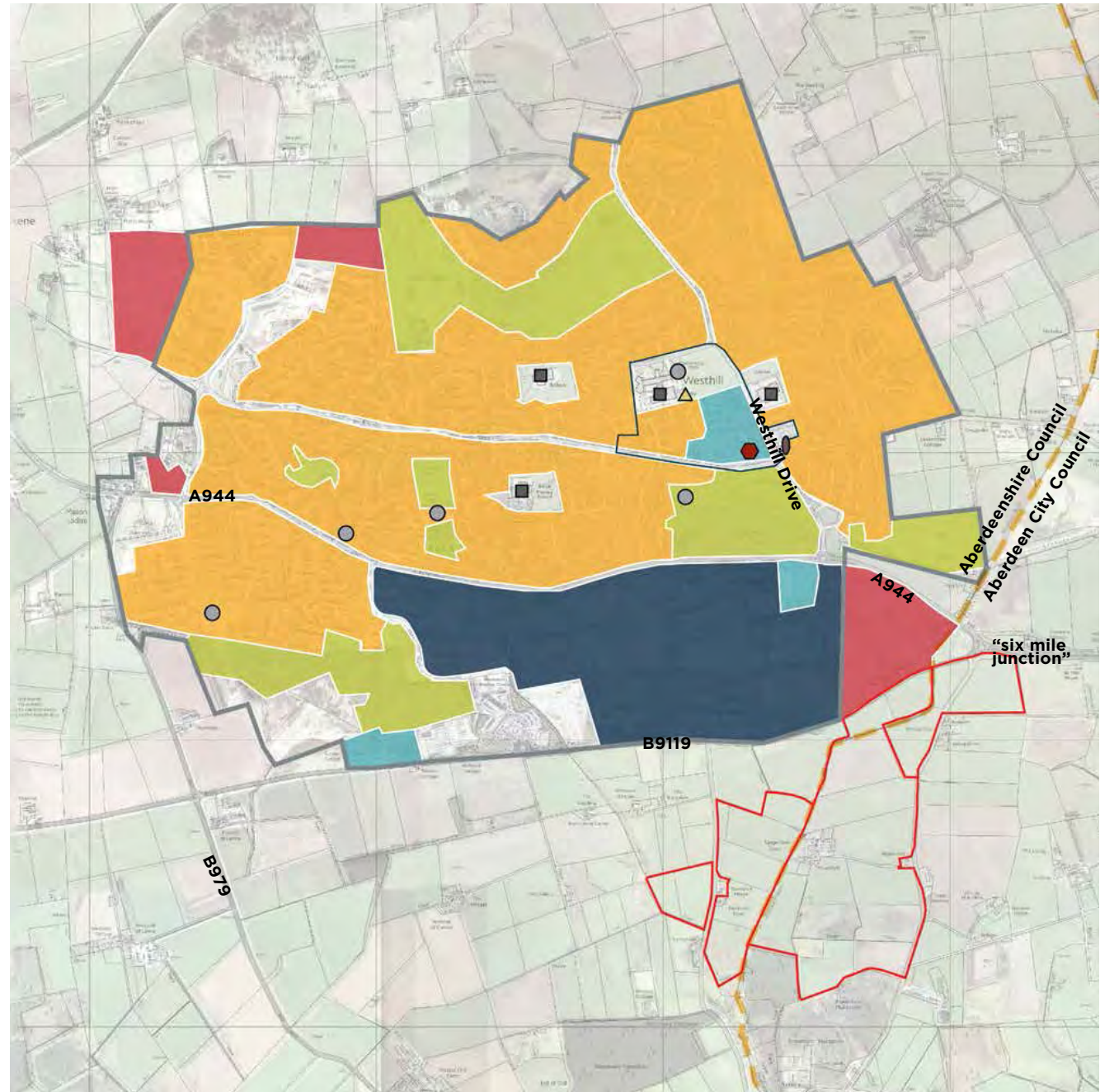


fig. 15: Town facilities and landuse

3.5 Open space/landscape

There are no statutory designated sites within the settlement boundary of Westhill, although statutory sites lie within the wider context and there are locally important non statutory designated sites within the town.

Arnhall Moss Local Nature Reserve

Arnhall Moss lies on the eastern edge of Westhill and has a recognised value as wildlife habitat, being part of a former lowland raised bog. It is now largely covered in birch woodland and no longer functions as an open wet area.

Carnie Woods

Approximately 8 hectares of woodland.

Ancient woodland

Parts of Wester Ord Plantation and Broomfield Plantation to the south are identified as Ancient woodland in addition to woodland on Backhill immediately to the south of Six Mile junction.

Green Belt

Aberdeen City Council have designated all land immediately to the east of Westhill within their boundaries as Green Belt. In the most recent Aberdeenshire Council greenbelt review of 2008, the area immediately to the east of Westhill within Aberdeenshire boundaries was to be retained as such. Areas to the south of the town within Aberdeenshire boundaries were not identified as green belt.

Green space network

Whilst ACC have mapped "green space networks" within their boundaries, due to the extents of the Aberdeenshire authority the same mapping is not available. No ACC green space network areas immediately adjacent to Westhill have been identified.

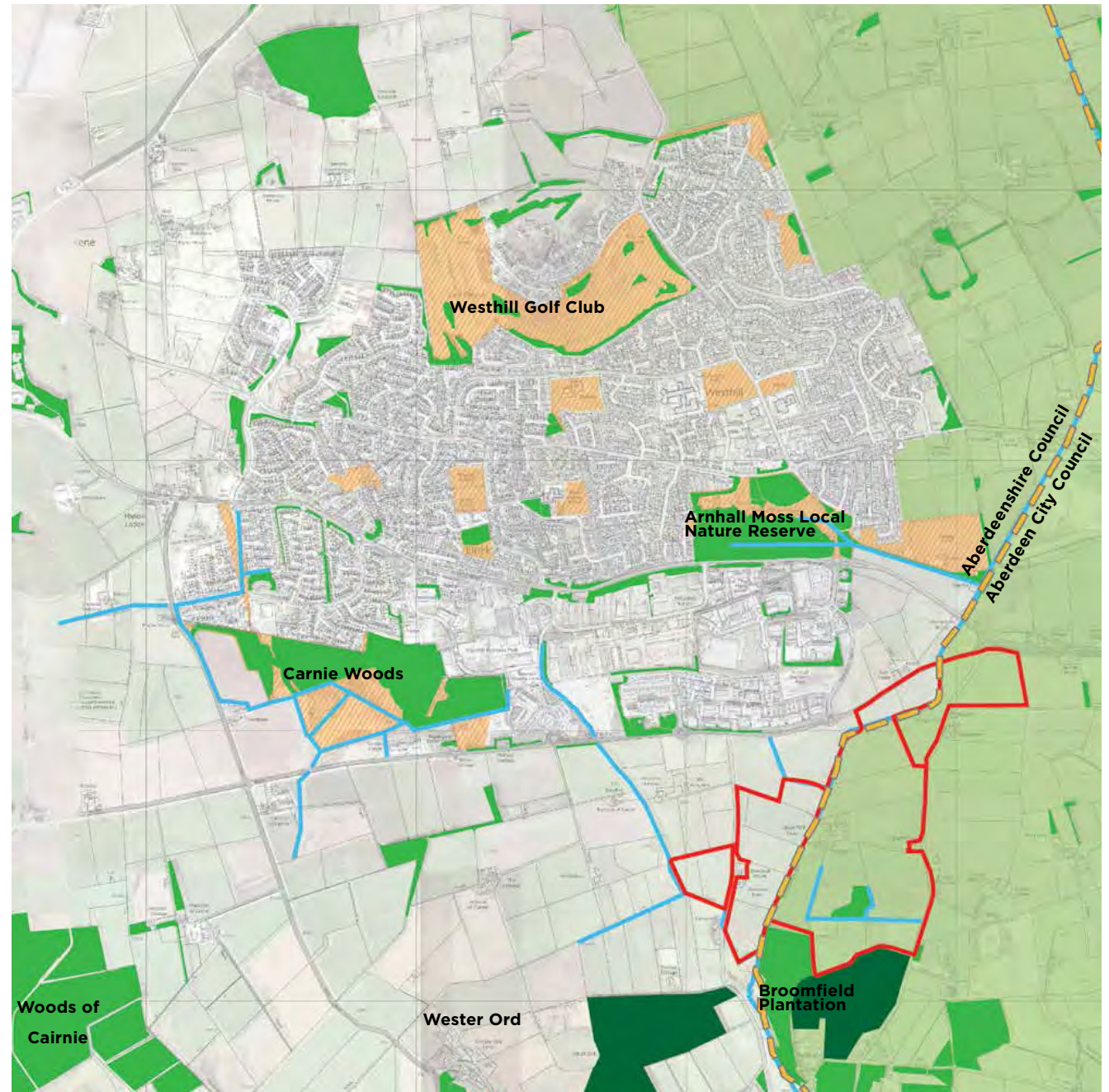
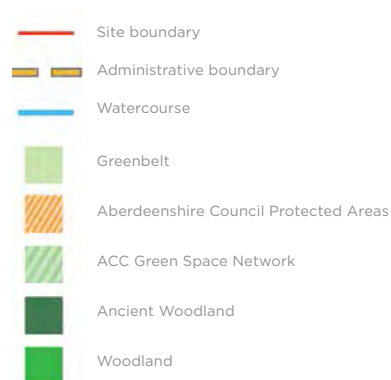


Fig. 16: Town facilities and landuse

3.6 Access and connections

The Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill sites offer an excellent opportunity for development in a sustainable manner. There are a number of benefits that can be realised by developing the sites. A separate Accessibility Appraisal has been carried out by Fairhurst that contains details of the existing facilities and movement network in Westhill and outlines the implications for the site itself.

This separate Accessibility Appraisal concludes the following:

- The sites are located within a reasonable walking distance from significant employment zones and from Westhill town centre where a number of amenities and facilities can be found. In addition the whole of Westhill is accessible by bicycle. The sites' location will therefore encourage short trips by sustainable means, reducing the need to travel by car, which meets with land use planning and transport planning policy.
- To enable sustainable trips footway and cycleway connections can be made from the sites to existing and proposed infrastructure within Westhill, notably within Arnhall Business Park. This could include a signalised crossing on the B9119. Excellent footway and cycleway provision exists or is proposed within the immediate vicinity of the site, offering direct links from the site to key trip generating destinations in Westhill.
- The B9119 forms a significant part of the northern site boundary and is a bus corridor that is served frequently, particularly during peak periods. There is potential to introduce bus stops on the B9119 adjacent to the Cadgerford and Backhill sites to allow public transport access to Aberdeen in particular. The sites can also be developed to allow future bus penetration.
- The sites are located close to the A944 corridor, which in turn will offer direct access to the AWPR which is expected to be complete in Autumn 2018. The sites will have excellent accessibility to the local and strategic road network.
- Studies by Aberdeenshire Council have identified infrastructure constraints on the local road network on the B9119 and at the A944 / B9119 Six Mile junction. These critical points are a threat to the short term growth of Westhill as opportunities to improve capacity are currently limited. However the Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill land parcels have frontage to the B9119 and the Six Mile junction and land from within these sites could be utilised to offer capacity improvements to the existing road network, unlocking short term development potential.
- The C class Westhill to Blacktop Road constrains improvement options at the Six Mile junction. Development at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill offers an opportunity to realign the road so that it meets the B9119 further west than it currently does, which would allow alternative improvements to be made to the Six Mile junction, increasing its capacity in the short term.
- Land from within the Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill sites could be used to make improvements to the B9119 over the frontage of the sites.
- Site access could be gained by a new signal controlled crossroads junction adjacent to the proposed Arnhall Phase 3 access, which is planned to operate on a left in / left out basis. The traffic signals would have

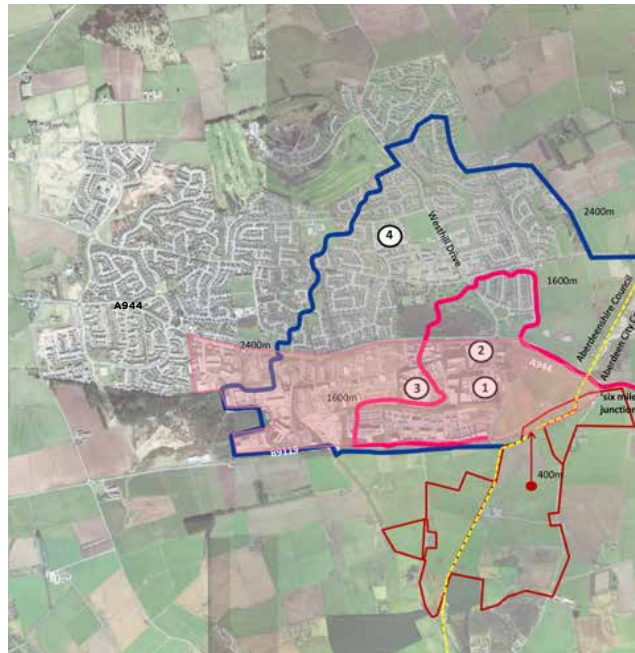


fig. 17: Pedestrian isochrones from Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill site



integrated pedestrian / cyclist crossing facilities and would also allow all movements to occur from Arnhall Phase 3. The traffic signals could be linked to the Six Mile junction traffic signals.

- The realigned C class Westhill to Blacktop Road would be designed in such a manner as to discourage rat running movements, which currently occur.
- Aberdeenshire Council are known to be considering long term infrastructure improvement options for Westhill, though no clear strategy has been identified at this stage. The land at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill can be developed in a manner which makes allowance for future long term infrastructure plans, including potential for a southern distributor road passing through the site. However an access strategy is also available which would allow short term development to progress to meet current demands in Westhill.

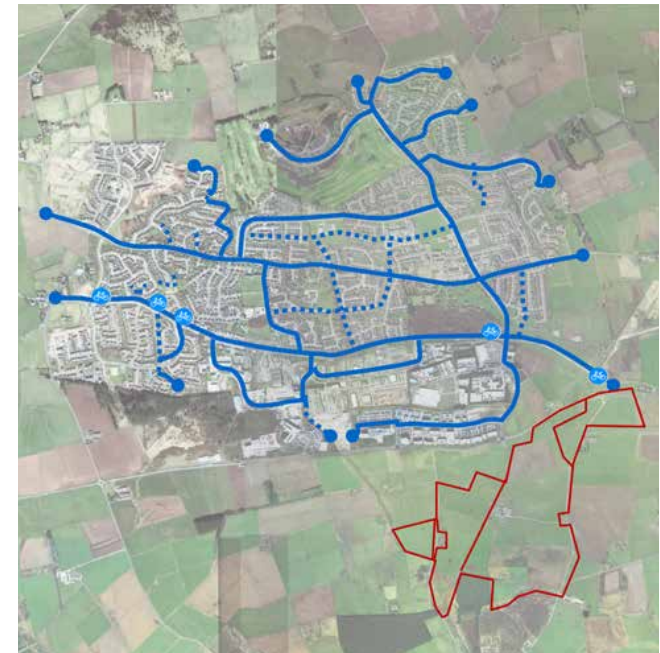
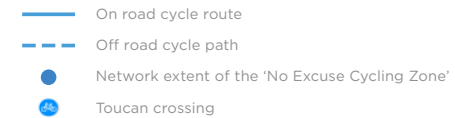


fig. 18: Cycle facilities



The Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill sites have rightly been recognised in the Westhill Capacity Study as being sites that are most suitable for development. Development of the sites could occur in a sustainable manner offering many benefits due to their location. In addition, development of these sites can offer road capacity benefits at critical points on the local network which cannot be easily realised through development of other sites. From a traffic and transport perspective, allocation of the sites for development would permit growth in Westhill in the short and long term which may not be achievable through development elsewhere in the town.

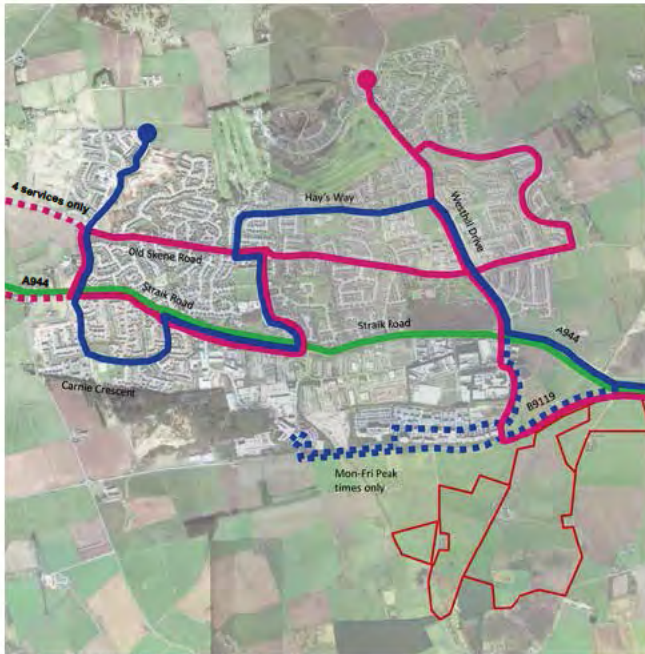


fig. 19: Sustainable Transport Maps: Bus Map

- Stagecoach Service X17 (Aberdeen and Westhill)
- Stagecoach Service X17 (Peak time only. Aberdeen and Westhill)
- Service 218 (Aberdeen to Alford)
- Stagecoach Service 220 (Aberdeen to Elrick)
- Stagecoach Service 220 (Aberdeen to Elrick via Kirktion of Skene)

- Bus stop
- Bus route
- 'A' Road
- 'B' Road
- Minor Road
- Core Path

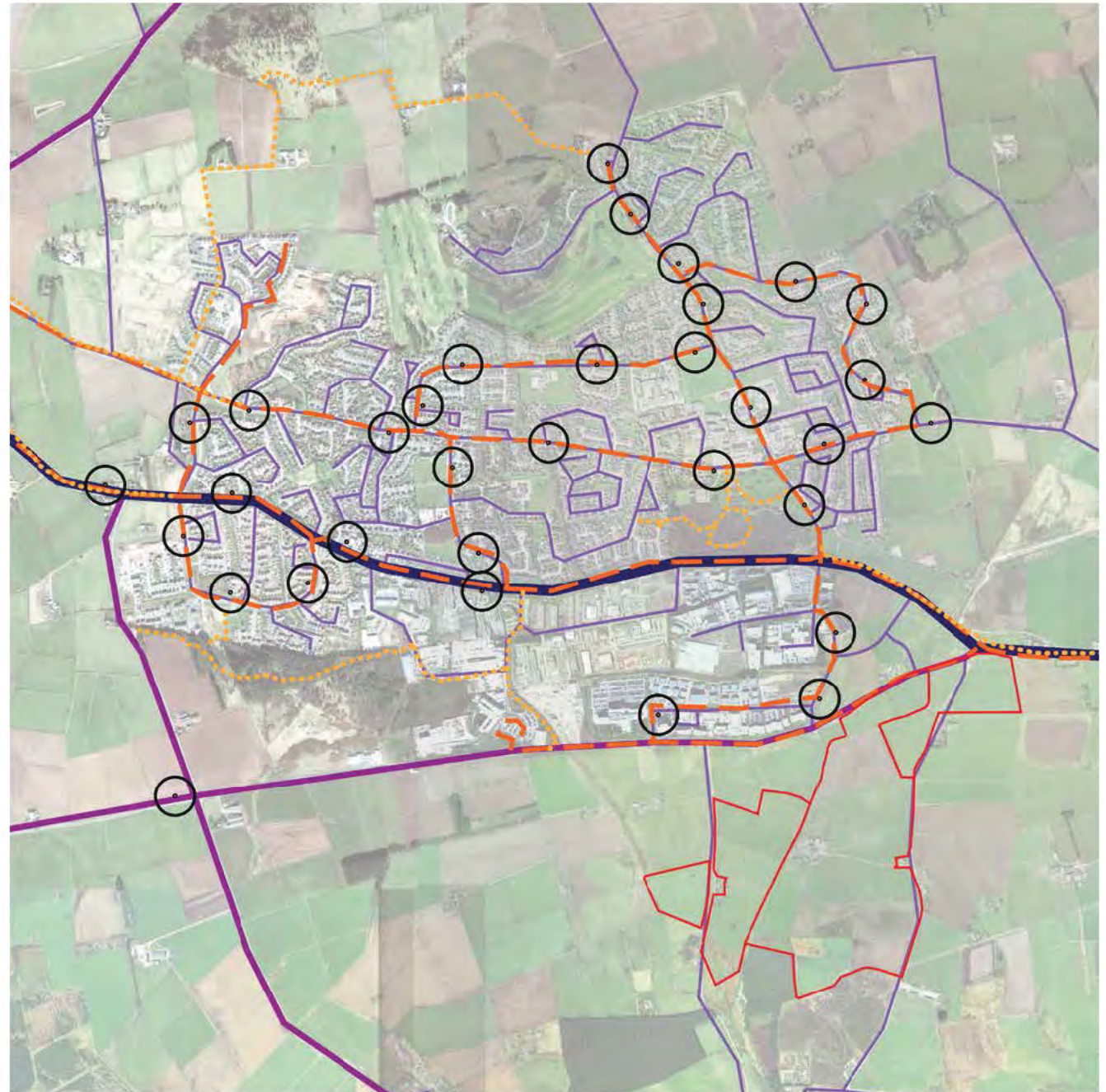


fig. 20: Connections, bus stops and local movement network

3.7 Future growth potential

Aberdeenshire Council recently commissioned an update to the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study by AMEC. Whilst the original study investigated a scenario of 50% housing growth, the updated document (2014) considers the capacity for future growth over a period of 20-25 years. Although the Local Development Plan context has somewhat changed since the original 2008 study was carried out, there is still a recognised pressure from businesses and developers regarding Westhill and the update was completed to provide an up to date position regarding the future growth potential of the settlement. The document provides a comprehensive and valuable overview of a range of issues that require to be considered for any growth scenario and a brief summary of key issues and their relevance to Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill is set out on this page.

3.7.1 Constraints

An extracted diagram below shows the range and complexity of absolute and relative constraints to growth that surround Westhill. These range from pipelines with associated areas of restricted development, to overhead powerlines to watercourses and protected open space. The Aberdeen City Council boundary is identified as a constraint due to recognised limits on cross administration planning. Aside from the presence of a watercourse on the western boundary of Damhead, a watercourse and pipeline between Damhead and Cadgerford, and an isolated element of woodland to the south of Cadgerford, the study does not highlight any other significant constraints on the site.

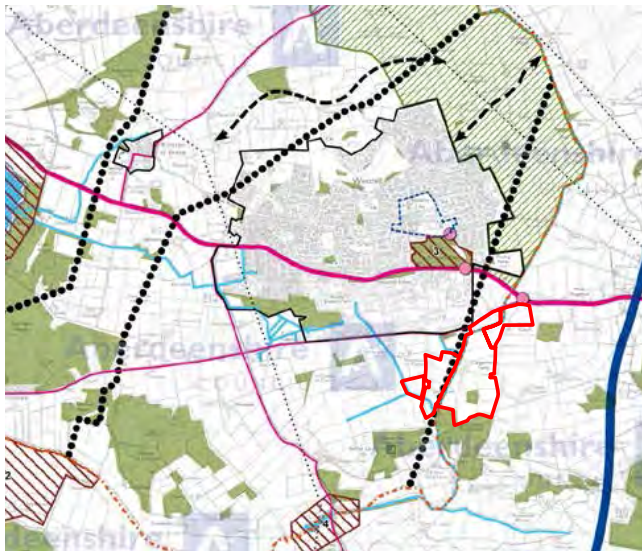


fig. 21: Extract from Westhill Capacity Study: Constraints

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill

3.7.2 Potential Development Areas

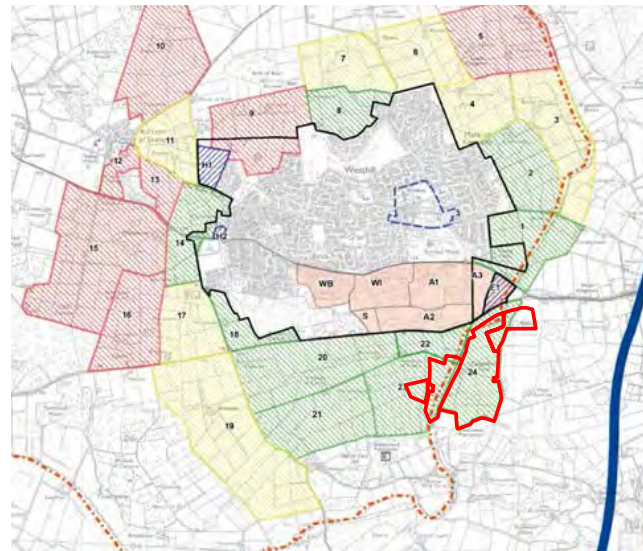
Sections 9 and 10 of the study sets out the results of an assessment of suitability for a wide range of sites around Westhill. This assessment included Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill (identified as part of site 23 and 24) which was one of ten potential development sites categorised as ‘most suitable’ (see extract below). In general the sites identified were to the south and east of Westhill and due to their proximity to employment, retail and transport capacity were considered to be the most sustainable areas for development. In addition, the top ten sites were scored highly for their “potential ability to enhance the spatial structure of Westhill”.

Within the recommendations, the study states a strong preference for those sites assessed as ‘most suitable’ to be developed first to avoid identified constraints elsewhere and to support those considered the most sustainable locations.

3.7.3 Other key issues

In addition to providing a baseline report on the town and assessing potential expansion sites, the document sets out a number of key issues that are critical to the future development of Westhill. These relate to spatial strategy and sustainability objectives and are integrated with the approved Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan. Of specific relevance to the Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill sites are those issues relating to:

- Housing provision: Potential for development to address the “lack of diversity and choice in terms of housing tenure and type” with Westhill.



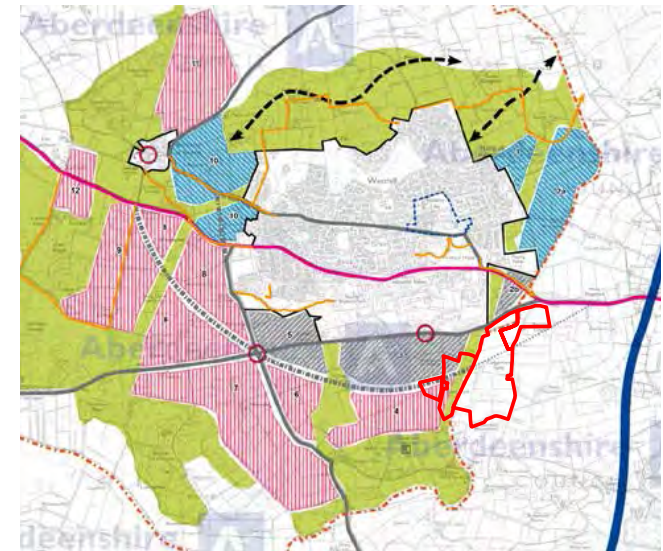
Most suitable
Suitable
Less suitable

fig. 22: Extract from Westhill Capacity Study: Suitability of Potential Development Areas

- Connectivity, Congestion and Emissions: Improvement of traffic flows, particularly on the A944. The document specifically identifies the significance of major infrastructure improvements being co-ordinated with a smaller number of large development proposals rather than a larger number of smaller development sites with individual improvements. Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill offers the potential as a significant development site to help deliver infrastructure to the south of the town.
- Relationship between Westhill and Surrounding Areas: Given the recognised poor character of approaches to Westhill at both the east and west, the importance of any potential development area in this location to contribute to a gateway entrance is highlighted. Development on these edges and approaches would furthermore offer the potential to clearly define the settlement boundaries.

3.7.4 “Indicative proposals”

In order to keep within the administrative boundaries of Aberdeenshire Council, the “Indicative Proposals” plan (extracted below) drafted in 2008 and included in the 2014 update does cover the Damhead site but does not feature the Cadgerford site although a proposed southern relief road linking the A944 east and west does pass through the site. Potential employment and housing areas are identified to the immediate north of the site and illustrate the importance of the Cadgerford/Backhill site in creating a coherent and distinctive gateway at the east of the town that could be carefully integrated with required infrastructure upgrades in the same location.



Strategic Open Space
Potential housing
Potential employment
Other suitable development areas
Proposed Road

fig. 23: Extract from Westhill Capacity Study: Indicative proposals

3.8 Visual containment to the south

This view from Westhill Heights looking to the east and south of Westhill shows the strong natural visual containment which exists due to local topography and established woodland areas. Even from this elevated position, there are significant background elements which rise above the limits of the immediate site boundary. These elements and the topographic conditions to the south ensure that new development to the south will not break the skyline and do not visually expand the limits of the settlement significantly.



fig. 24: View from Westhill Heights looking east and south.

4. Site appraisal

4.1 Overview

The location of this development framework comprises three adjacent landholdings: Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill. For the purposes of this section of the document, the three sites are considered as one integrated development area. The site is located immediately to the south of the B9119 at its junction with the A944 (the 'Six Mile junction'). It is bounded to the west by the Ord Burn, with the Brodiach Burn running between the Damhead and Cadgerford holdings. The unnamed C class road from the B9119 to Easter Ord runs through the Damhead landholding, with the east of the site bound largely by the unnamed Westhill Blacktop C class road. A portion of the 'Backhill' site extends east beyond the unnamed road upwards a short distance towards the Back Hill landform itself. The Broomfield Plantation forms the southern boundary. The land is currently in agricultural use and is identified within the Aberdeen City Council boundaries as greenbelt.

The identified areas are approximately (gross areas):

- Damhead: 16.48 hectares (3.56ha west and 12.92ha east);
- Backhill: 8.64 hectares; and
- Cadgerford: 39.07 hectares.



fig. 25: Aerial photography with sites identified

4.2 Topography

The site generally slopes from east to west towards a minor valley that contains the Brodiach Burn, separating Cadgerford and Damhead. A high point of around 135m AOD is located in the most easterly part of the Backhill site and a low point is generally around 100m AOD where the Brodiach Burn exits the site. The land that sits between the Ord Burn and Brodiach Burn, namely Damhead is generally flat. The unnamed C road to the east follows the 120m AOD contour before dropping away as it leaves the site. The ground initially falls relatively quickly away from the road on the eastern edge towards the watercourse. There are some significant local undulations that run at right angles to the B9119 and give the appearance of a distinctly rolling landscape to the north. Elsewhere, these ripples are less pronounced and the site is relatively flat towards the south and west of the site.

4.3 Aspect

The site is generally south facing although those areas immediately adjacent to the unnamed road on the eastern boundary have a more westerly aspect. Whilst there are a few locally steep areas of land, the majority of the site has a gradient of less than 5%, providing no particular challenges to built development.

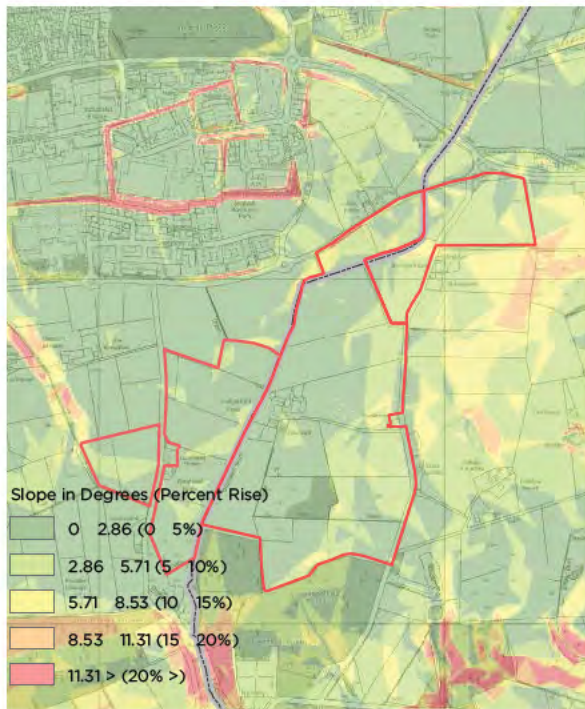
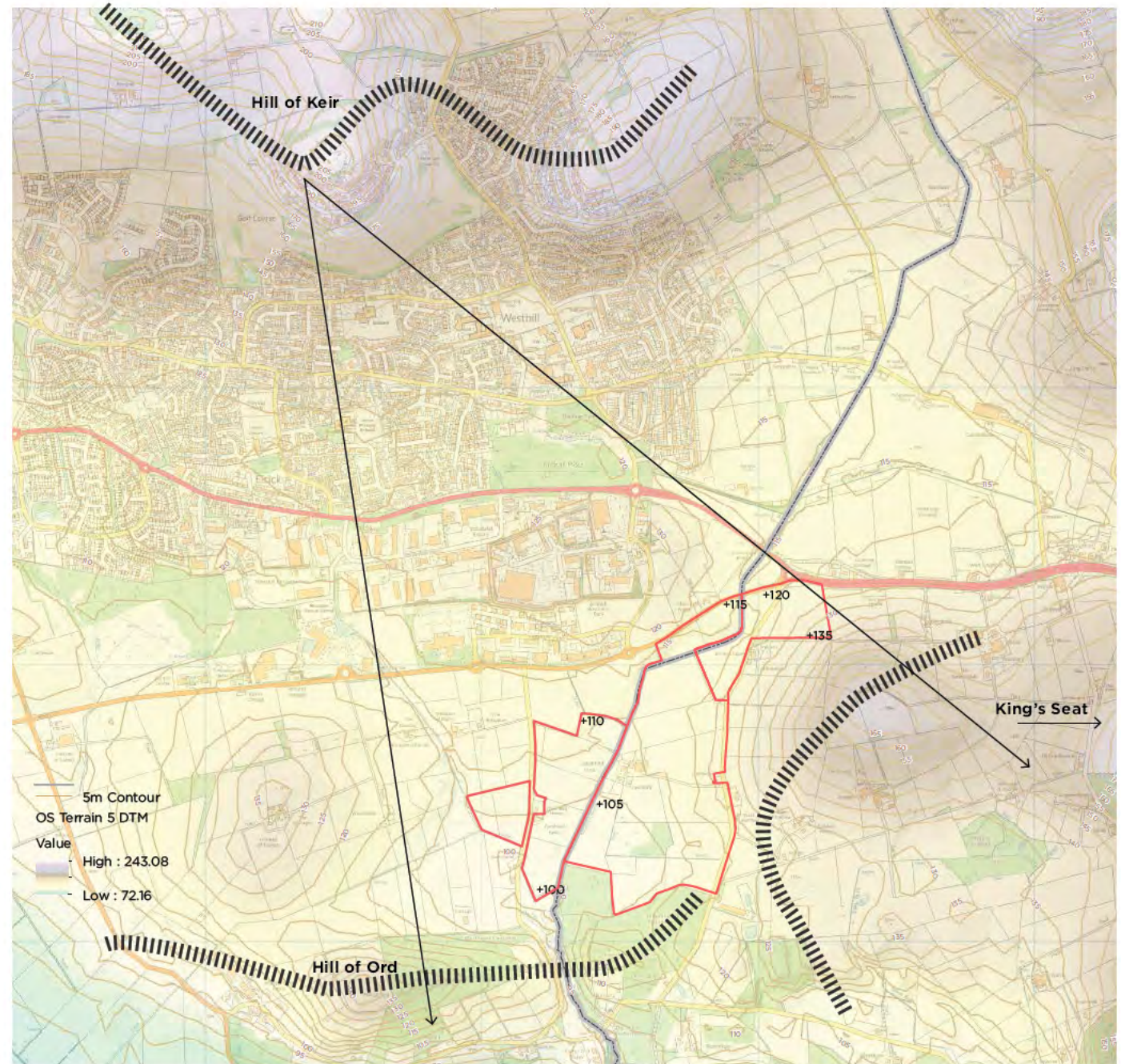


fig. 26: Slope analysis.



4.4 Watercourses/flood risk

The Brodiach Burn is the main watercourse within the site, although the Ord Burn runs to the west of Damhead, and there are a number of agricultural drainage ditches that drain towards the southern boundary within which flowing water has been observed. The SEPA flood risk maps indicate that any change of flooding due to the watercourse is largely constrained to those areas immediately adjacent to the main Brodiach channel. A wider area of potential flood risk is shown on the SEPA maps at the confluence of the Brodiach Burn and the Ord Burn which runs outwith the site further to the west.

The SEPA flood risk maps for surface water flooding is largely similar to the river flood risk, with additional local areas corresponding to local drainage ditches and existing wetland areas.

A wetland area is evident towards the south of the site adjacent to an existing mixed woodland area. Local earth sculpting to shape and contain this area can be seen which it is presumed is to allow agricultural activities around the site.

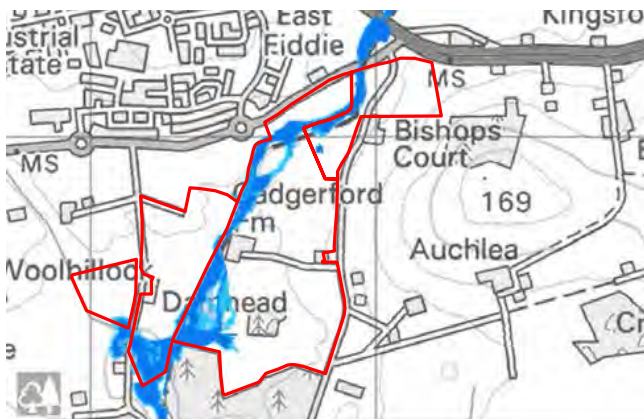


fig. 28: SEPA Flood risk map: River

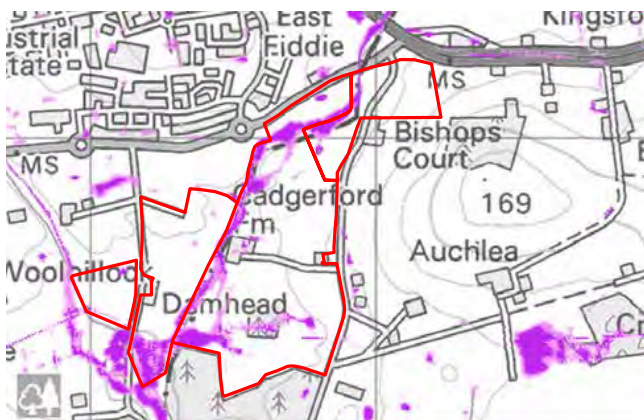


fig. 29: SEPA Flood risk map: Surface water

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill

4.5 Pipeline consultation zone

The BP 'Forties' oil pipeline system runs through the site, between the Damhead and Cadgerford landholdings and thereafter runs outwith the site, parallel to the Brodiach Burn. The pipeline carries unstabilised crude oil from Cruden Bay to Kinneil, Grangemouth. The pipeline has a consultation distance of 485m. The consultation distance is subdivided into three zones:

- Inner Zone: 0 110 metres;
- Middle Zone: 110 380 metres; and
- Outer Zone 380 485 metres.

The consultation zones around this oil pipeline restricts the amount and type of development which can take place. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are responsible for deciding whether to 'Advise Against' a proposed development. The current methodology which HSE uses when providing land use planning advice is known as PADHI (Planning Advice for Developments near Hazardous Installations). PADHI applies two main principles to a decision matrix to generate the response, these include:

- The zone that the development is located in; and
- The 'Sensitivity Level' of the proposed development, which is derived from an HSE categorisation system of "Development Types".

A full assessment of the acceptability of development requires an indication of the type of development, the proposed building floorplates and heights, building capacities and general site arrangement in order to assess the likely population that would be living or working in the proposed areas. Development with vulnerable users such as schools are most likely to be refused whilst those involving the normal working population at work are more likely to be acceptable.

For the purposes of this development strategy, the following has been applied in line with the PADHI guidance:

- Inner zone: No residential. Offices, industrial storage up to 2 storeys and less than 100 occupants. Hostels up to 9 bedspaces. Retail units up to 250 sqm per building. Bar/restaurant up to 250sqm.
- Middle zone: Low medium density residential. Office, industrial storage, no limit in height and population. Hotels up to 100 bedspaces. Retail units up to 5000 sqm per building. Bar/Restaurant up to 5000 sqm.
- Outer pipeline zone: Medium high density residential. Offices, industrial, storage no limit. Hotels not limit to bedspaces. Retail units no limit per building. Bar/restaurant no limit.

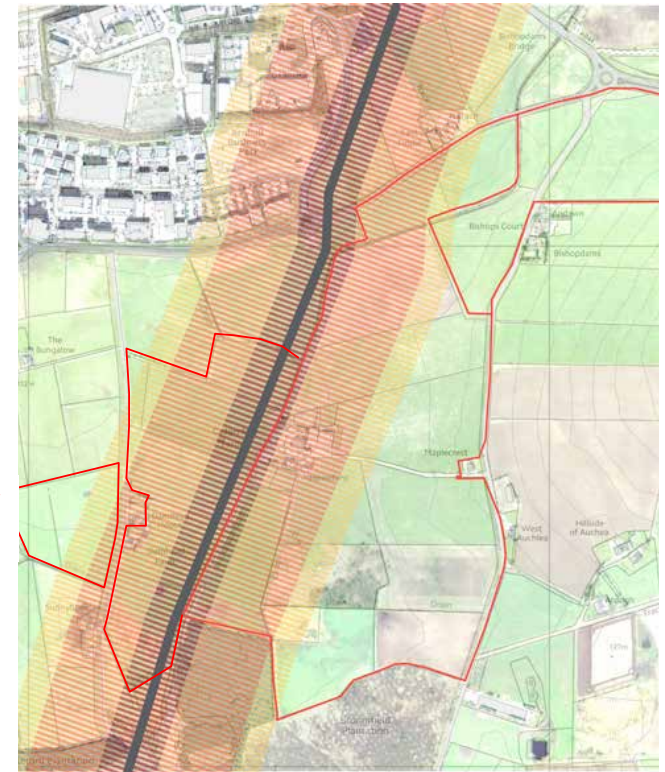
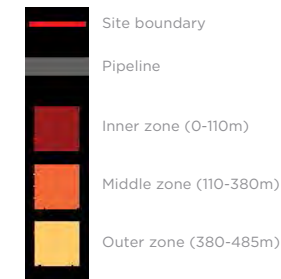


fig. 30: BP 'Forties' consultation zone



4.6 Landscape elements

Key landscape elements within the site include:

Watercourse

As described previously, the Brodiach Burn runs through the middle of the site, between the Damhead and Cadgerford landholdings. The Ord Burn borders the western edge of the Damhead landholding. Along its length if the Brodiach Burn there is generally an associated strip of vegetation of various types and densities. This ranges from long grasses to shrubs and self seeded small trees.

Small scale agricultural drainage ditches

Water flows along a number of drainage ditches formed for agricultural purposes. In general these ditches pick up water from fields to drain towards the Brodiach Burn.

Wetland area

There are areas of wetland identified by the Scottish Wetland Inventory to the south of the site formed at a low points in the site and surrounded by several drainage ditches. This is in the form of wet grassland/marshy grassland.

Existing trees

An area of native woodland sits adjacent to the wetland area to the south of the Cadgerford landholding. This appears to be mature broadleaved woodland of a mature nature which has had little or no management.

Dry stone dykes and associated rough scrub strips

There is some evidence of dry stone dykes constructed as field boundaries. These are particularly significant on the boundaries with woodland areas.

Agricultural land

In general, the site is clearly in agricultural use and as such has been intensively managed in places where land has been under various functions.

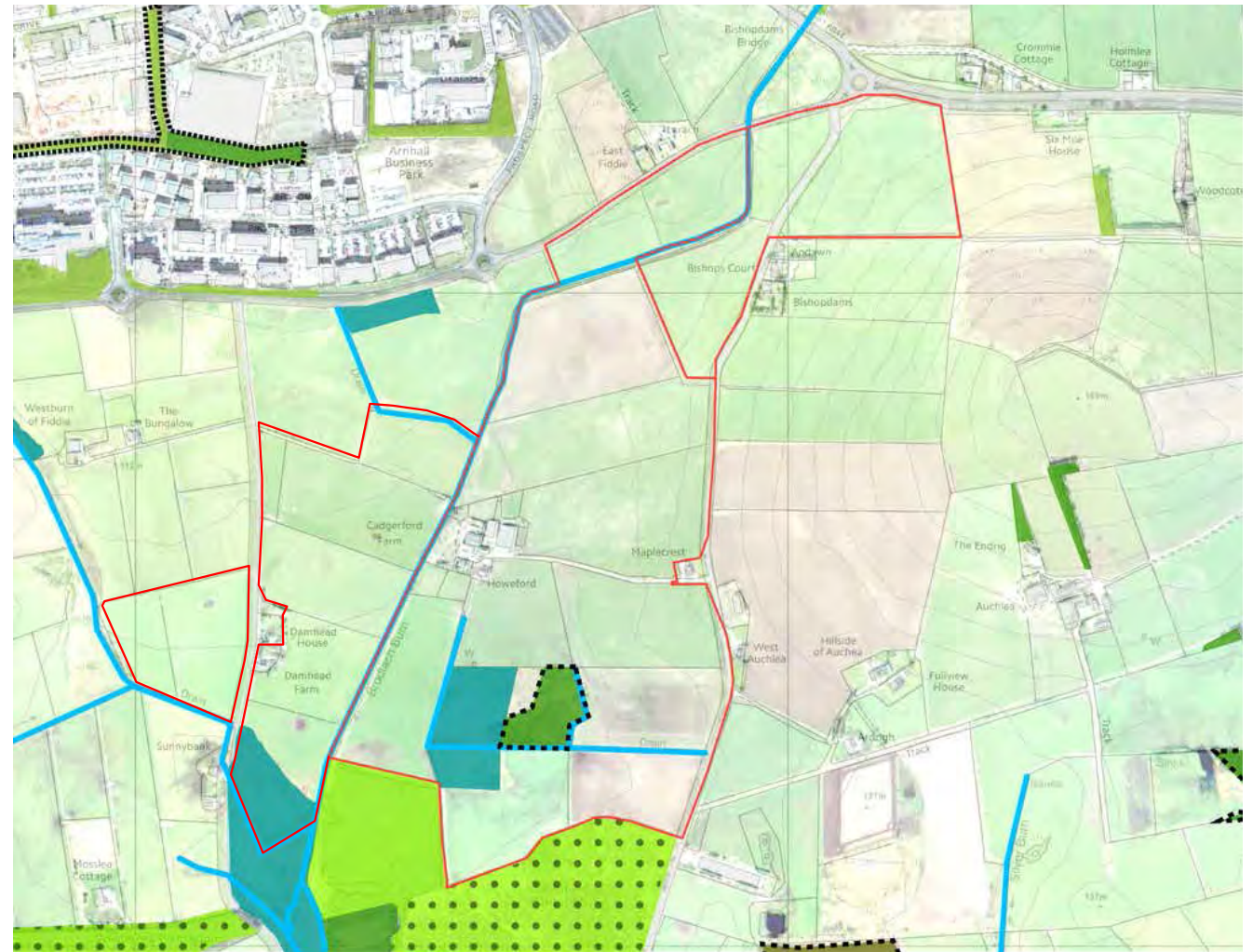
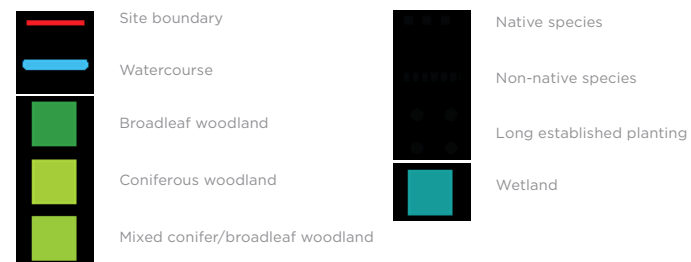


Fig. 31: Key landscape elements



4.7 Views/enclosure/boundary

The site is well contained and enclosed to the south and east by woodland and the Back Hill landform, which is in turn part of the larger King's Seat landform (see panorama at foot of this page). Landform contains immediate views beyond the site boundary to the south west, however there are distant views possible to Hill of Fare and the Midmar Forest area. Moving southwards along the Westhill Blacktop road beyond Maplecrest there are distant views to the south east before a local ridge closes them off.

Due to its slightly elevated position, in general there are good views from the Westhill Blacktop road over the gentle valley that contains the Brodiach Burn to the west and north of the southern edge of Westhill. As can be seen on the photographs shown on this page, Westhill's immediate urban edge is visually ragged and incoherent along this boundary, displaying a wide array of office and light industrial building types, heights, materials and designs with no overall structure or pattern. Beyond the immediate built edge, Westhill rises up to the north and displays a somewhat softer, residential character that is quite visually dominant against the Hill of Keir and other local hills.

The wooded boundary to the south is of a plantation character but does have an fringe of trees that softens the edge and prevents too stark a barrier.



View from C-class road adjacent to Brodiach burn west of Broomfield Plantation showing ragged southern urban edge of Westhill



Incongruous building styles and forms that are dominant on skyline



Large floor-plate buildings with significant visual impact



The Back Hill landform contains the site on the east.

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill

4.8 Site analysis summary

A summary of the key site features and issues is illustrated on the adjacent diagram. In summary, the site:

- Is well contained to the east and south through landform and woodland planting;
- Generally faces west and south with a slope towards a small watercourse running through the site;
- Is bounded to the east by the minor Westhill Blacktop road;
- Contains few existing significant landscape features beyond the watercourse and a small area of woodland and wetland;
- Has a visually incoherent and disruptive northern boundary where the industrial/office park edge of Westhill is located; and
- Has topography that lends itself to development and is of a size to allow mixed use development.

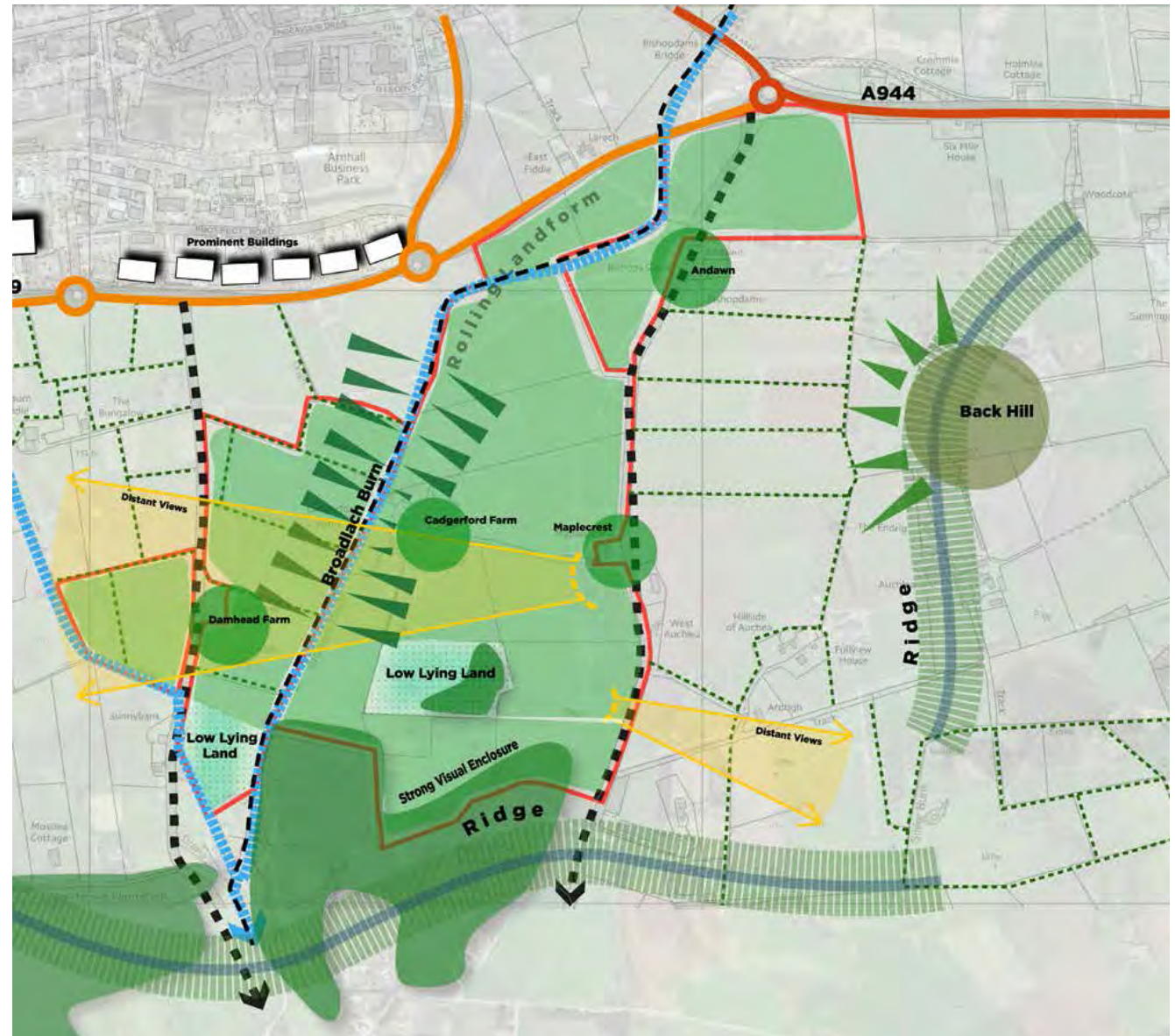


Fig. 32: Views, enclosure and site analysis summary

4.9 Site photos

The following pages of photos record the character of the site from its boundary edges and also the immediate rural countryside context. Long distance shots from the north show how the site is visually contained by woodland and topography to the south and east.



Fig. 33: Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, View point location plan.

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill





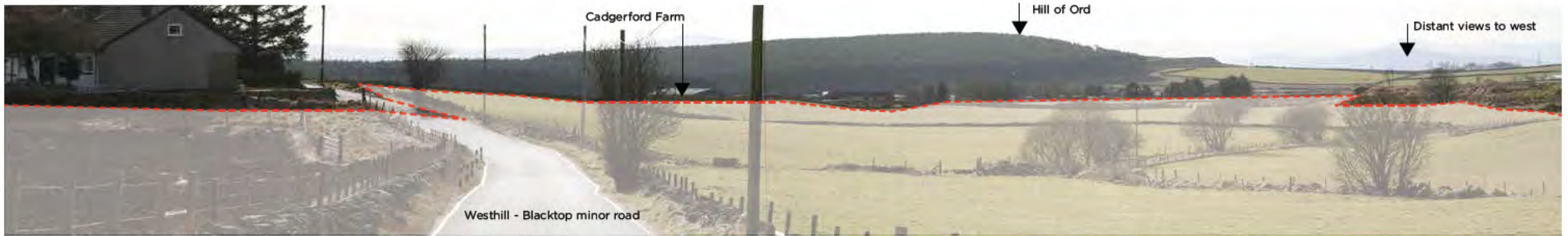
Panorama viewpoint 1: View from Westhill - Blacktop minor road at junction with B9119



Panorama viewpoint 2: View from roundabout on B9119 looking east across Easter Ord unnamed road.



Panorama viewpoint 3: View from junction between Westhill - Blacktop minor road and B9119 looking west along southern boundary of Westhill



Panorama viewpoint 4: View to hill of Ord from Westhill - Blacktop minor road



Panorama viewpoint 5: View from Westhill - Blacktop minor road looking to southern boundary of Westhill



Panorama viewpoint 6: View from Westhill - Blacktop minor road looking to southern part of the site

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill



Panorama viewpoint 7: View of southern site boundary and Westhill southern boundary



Panorama viewpoint 8: View from Cadgerford Farm towards southern site boundary



Panorama viewpoint 9: View east from Cadgerford Farm towards elevated Westhill - Blacktop minor road



Panorama viewpoint 10: Native woodland block to south of site



Panorama viewpoint 11: View through wetland and native woodland block



Panorama viewpoint 12: View from Westhill Heights leading to Westhill Golf Club

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill



Panorama viewpoint 13: Looking north over southern extents of Damhead landholding from Easter Ord road



Panorama viewpoint 14: View from Easter Ord road looking north.



Panorama viewpoint 15: View looking east from Easter Ord road looking towards Back Hill landform.

5. Vision for southerly growth

Westhill already has a reputation as a successful employment centre and a settlement that is attractive to residents because of its broad range of facilities and services. The successful and sustainable growth of the town, whilst supporting and strengthening its current reputation, requires a vision that is not only ambitious and spatially coherent but also deliverable.

A vision statement has already been articulated by Aberdeenshire Council through the Westhill Capacity Study:

"Westhill will continue to be a place where people choose to live, work, visit and invest in. The town will fully exploit its position as the world centre of excellence for subsea engineering, and it will seek to attract a wide range of businesses and skilled workers. Westhill will develop a distinctive spatial character and a high quality physical environment, with enhanced provision of services for residents and businesses. This will be achieved through creating a sustainable mixed community, balancing residential, commercial and employment related development in such a way as to reduce the need to travel and create a vibrant place."

This statement articulates clearly the key components that all development growth areas around Westhill will need to deliver in the future and gives an indication of the issues and concerns that need to be translated into both policy and a spatial strategy through future Local Development Plan allocations and identified infrastructure requirements. This representation has made the case that the most appropriate place to start sustainable and viable growth is to the south and east of the town, adjacent to existing employment areas, within easy reach of town centre facilities and where infrastructure improvements can be accommodated to address transport capacity issues in the wider area.

Given the previously identified constraint of administrative boundaries falling on the eastern edge of the settlement, it is apparent that collaboration and

co operation between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils is required to ensure a boundary blind approach that is appropriate for the place rather than restricted to arbitrary mapped lines.

With this in mind, an indication of the implications of delivering sustainable growth to the south of the town is set out on the following pages followed by a high level development framework that specifically shows how the Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill sites fit into an overall spatial strategy and delivery of infrastructure improvements.

Key proposals/strategy:

- To assist initial southern expansion of Westhill, releasing land at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill will allow establishment of a fitting 'gateway' setting to Westhill from a commercial and residential perspective as well as placemaking;
- Land at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill can initially release capacity on the 'Six mile junction' by stopping up of a section of the Westhill Blacktop C class road. The C class road would then be re routed to connect back in to the B9119 further south and west through the site;
- Transformation of the B9119 to an 'urban boulevard' spine linking existing and future development, particularly the commercial/employment heart of Westhill;
- Alignment of the future southern relief road, as identified in the Westhill Capacity Study, will be planned to run through the overall future expansion area, with the land at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill facilitating a key link eastwards towards the A944 and the City
- Together with the improved B9119 and the southern relief road, a permeable network of routes and street structure should prevail, creating a connected place with ease of movement between commercial and residential led development, ensuring that the

southern relief road does not become a barrier to development;

- Promotion of high quality connections by foot and cycle along the eastern boundary of the town that recognises there are certain impermeable areas within the industrial estates along the current southern boundary;
- Distinctive gateway entrances to east and west;
- Creating a defined settlement edge south east and southwest;
- Additional retail and neighbourhood centre to south;
- Enhancement of open space connections to rural edge, by utilising existing feature and landform such as the Brodiach Burn corridor and surrounding woodland.



Fig. 34: Illustrative development framework in context.



6. Development framework

6.1 Approach

This section sets out a high level development framework for the area to the south of Westhill, building upon the principles and capacity testing established with the Westhill Capacity Study by AMEC (which is extracted below for information).

The key principles of the development framework are:

- Show proposals within identified logical development boundaries and enclosure rather than limited by administrative boundaries;
- Identify improvements to existing infrastructure and appropriate new movement networks to the south which minimise potential for severance;
- Extend existing employment areas to create identifiable business core with supporting residential uses surrounding;
- Create a strong network of open space which links to surrounding areas and creates a high quality setting to the town extension.

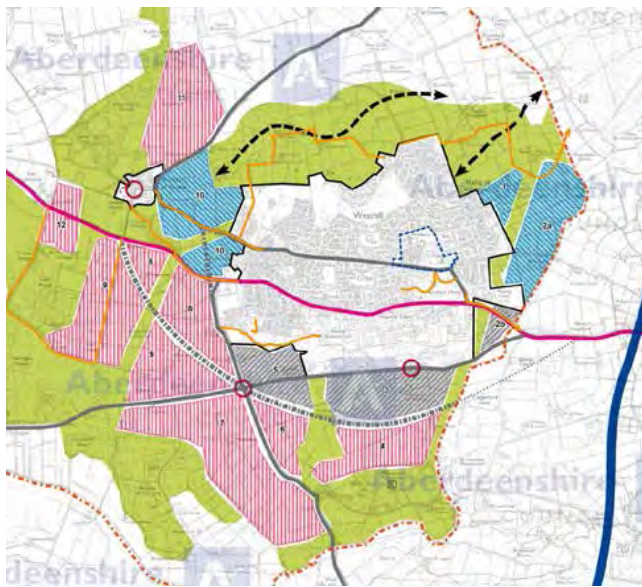


fig. 35: Extract from AMEC Capacity study showing indicative proposals for expansion within Aberdeenshire Council boundaries

Damhead/Cadgerford/Backhill, Westhill

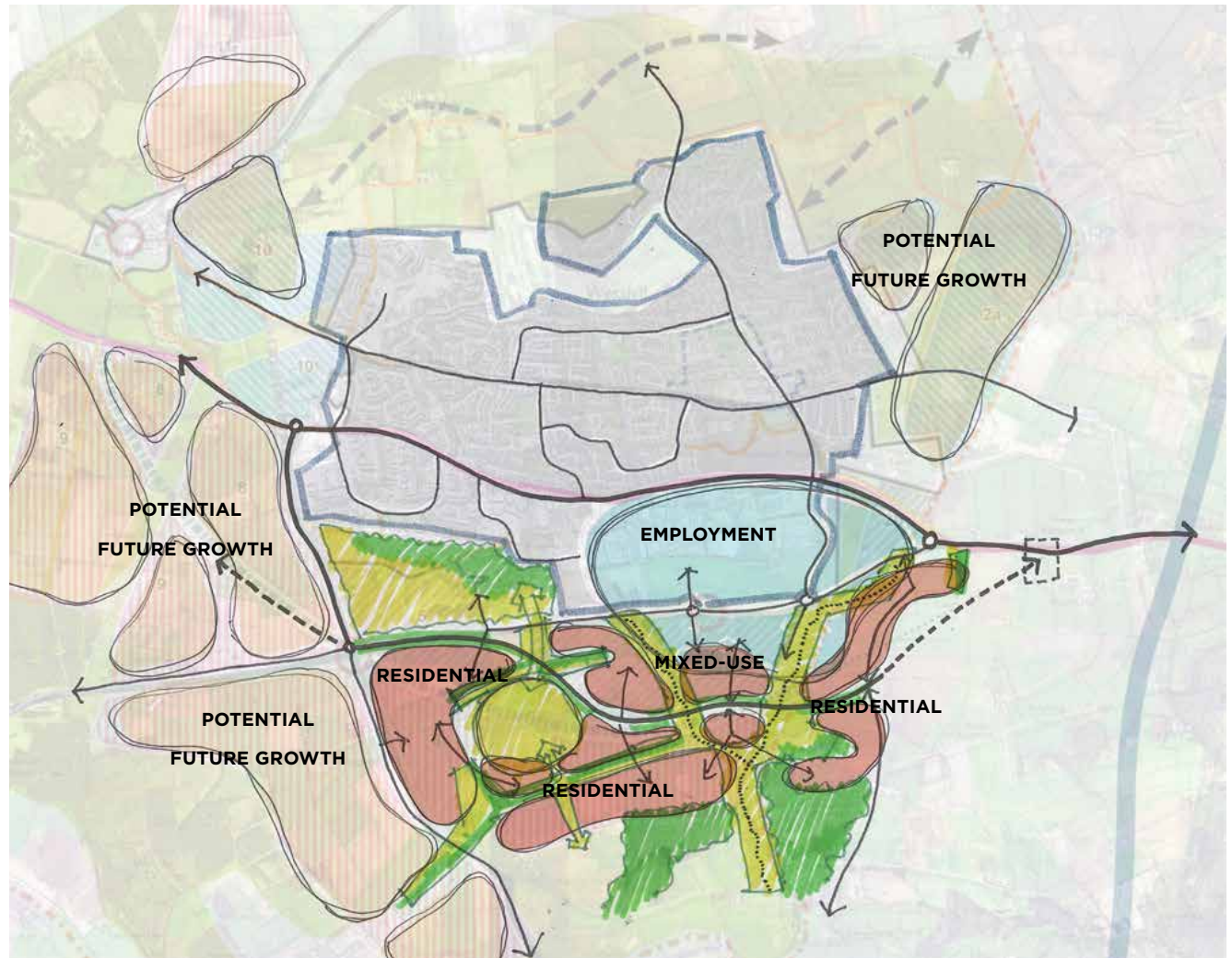


fig. 36: Conceptual plan illustrating approach focussed on southerly extent within logical boundaries rather than administrative boundaries



fig. 37 Illustrative sub-block plan showing how the grain of employment land and residential development might vary across the area in response to topography and existing landscape features

6.2 Strategic plan for growth to the south of Westhill

The adjacent development framework illustrates the land uses, open space and movement network that should be considered when planning sustainable growth to the south of the B9119. The key strategic principles and interventions are:

Infrastructure/movement

1. Stop up Westhill Blacktop C class road to allow for improvements at 'Six Mile junction' between A944 and B9119;
2. Re route C class road to connect back in further south and to the B9119 to the north;
3. Upgrade B9119 to 'urban boulevard' spine linking existing and future development, which will assist in enhancing local vehicular distribution along with the planned southern relief route as identified in the Westhill Capacity Study;
4. Suggest that traffic filters through a network to the south in a variety of routes, allowing connection to the planned southern relief route, ensuring that this new route does not become a barrier to development;
5. Southern relief route as per Westhill Capacity Study.

Land-use

6. Extend existing business area.
7. Plan for mixed use area as interface between employment areas and residential.
8. Residential densities to reflect restrictions imposed by adjacent pipeline consultation zones.

Landscape and open space

9. Protection and enhancement of existing watercourse corridors as structuring open space.
10. Areas of local topography used as open space.

6.2.1 Development at Damhead, Cadgerford & Backhill

Within the overall development framework for the south of Westhill, development at Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill offers the opportunity to create a mixed use development that can act as gateway to Westhill on the east of the town. This would allow initial infrastructure improvements specifically around the Six Mile junction and along the B9119 that would otherwise be restricted. The gateway experience can be further enhanced in the future by allowing space for a relief road as identified in the Westhill Capacity Study, to run through Damhead and Cadgerford and on to a potential connection further east on the A944. The development framework and associated components set out on the following pages show a potential movement network, a mix of uses and residential densities and structuring open space that can not only act as a high quality setting for development but also provide amenity space for residents and links northwards towards the established facilities of Westhill and outward into the countryside.

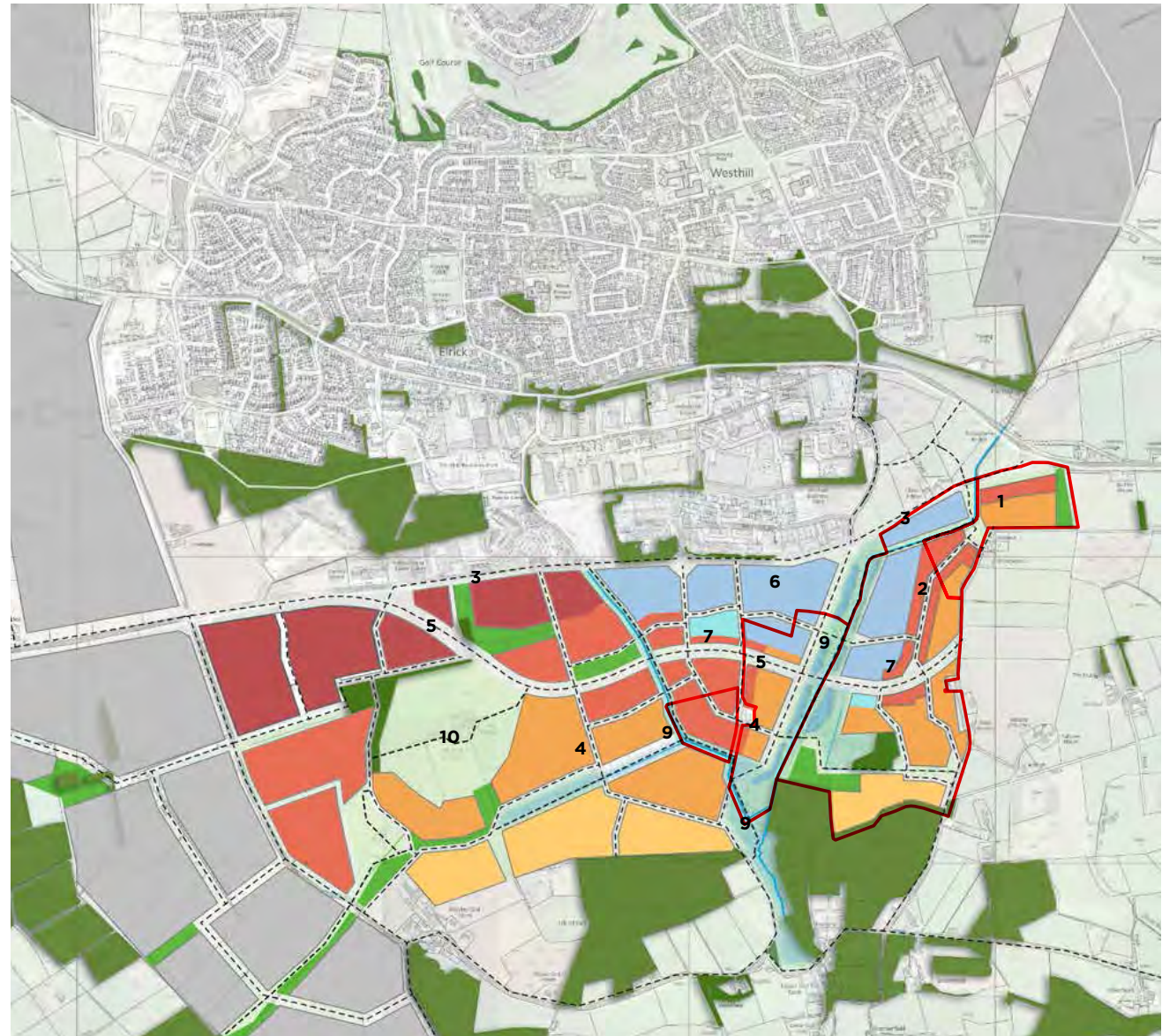


fig. 38: Development Framework for the south of Westhill

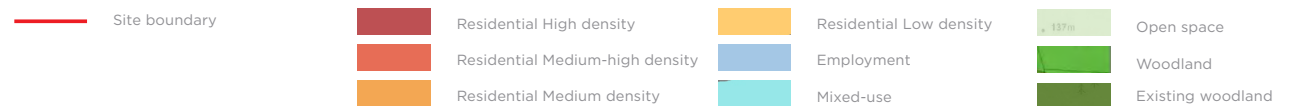
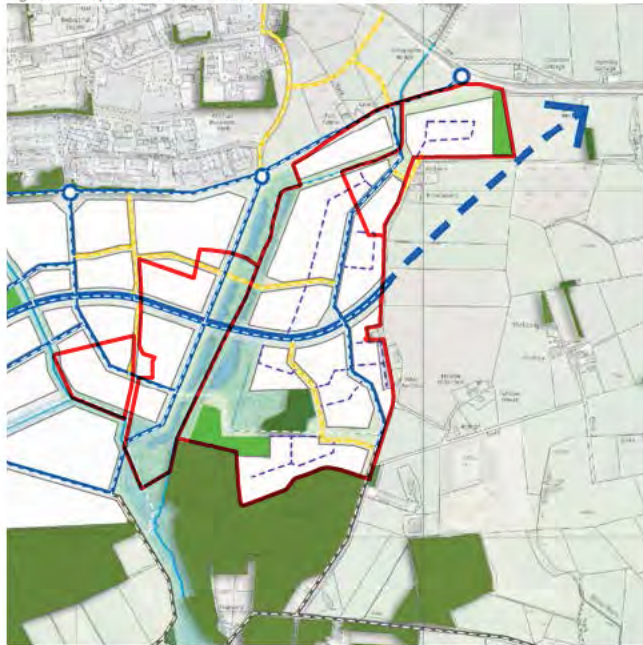


fig. 39: Proposed movement network

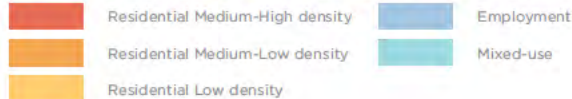
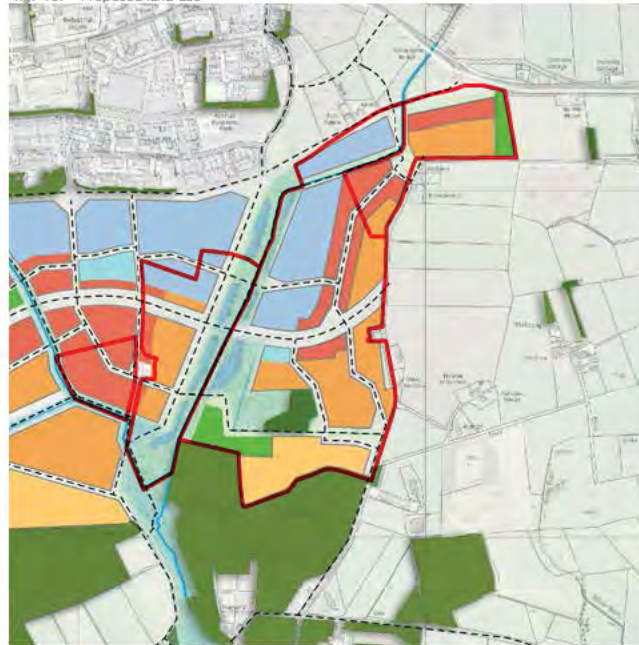


6.2.2 Movement network

Key principles

- Re routing Westhill Blacktop minor road allowing increased capacity at Six Mile junction;
- Upgrading of B9119 to urban boulevard, allowing increased capacity, improved environment and better connection in to future development areas to the south;
- Improvements to Westhill Blacktop minor road;
- Tying into roundabout at Prospect Road;
- Allowing space for southern relief route that is integrated in to development areas and provides potential for future link to A944 east of Cadgerford and Backhill;
- Overall emphasis on a permeable network elsewhere; and
- Pedestrian/cycle routes associated with street network and through structural open space, including along Brodiach Burn corridor.

fig. 40: Proposed land use

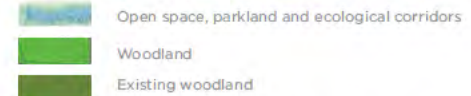
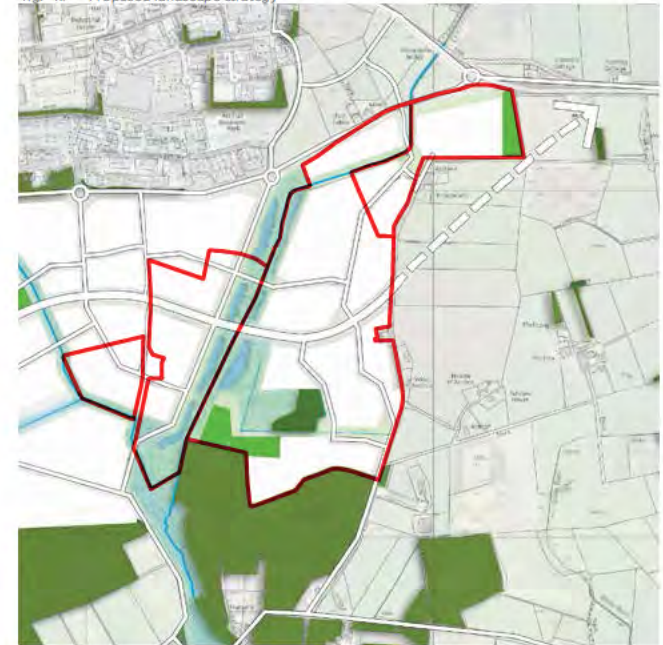


6.2.3 Land use

The development framework has been designed so that proposed land uses are set out in relation to existing town functions adjacent to the north and to create appropriate interfaces between employment and residential uses. Employment areas expand on the successful Arnhall Business Park to create a high quality business core with adjacent mixed use areas as a transition to residential uses. Distribution and location of employment land also reflects restrictions on development that are required by the proximity of the Forties pipeline. Residential density also takes into account the consultation zones whilst ensuring there is an appropriate centre of gravity to the development and densities support the proposed hierarchy of movement. Residential land uses are particularly well suited to the smaller scale development pockets identified to the south of the site where there are significant existing landscape elements that add to the potential housing character. In summary, the development framework illustrates the following areas within the Damhead, Cadgerford and Backhill site boundary:

- Approximately 26 hectares of residential/mixed use development which could accommodate 750 900 units;
- 9 10 hectares of employment land; and
- Open space for active and passive recreation, amenity and natural green space.

fig. 41: Proposed landscape strategy



6.2.4 Landscape strategy

- Improvement of Briodach Burn to allow for pedestrian/cycle route and provide open space;
- Utilise watercourse corridor area within most restricted pipeline consultation zone for open space and SUDS
- Work with and improve the existing natural woodland areas and associated wetland to provide a feature landscape element for housing and mixed use areas to the south of the site.

6.3 Land within Aberdeen City Council boundaries

The adjacent diagram highlights those areas which fall within Aberdeen City Council administrative boundaries. In summary, the key aspects of the development framework in this area are as follows.

Land use

A mix of employment and residential uses could be accommodated within the land falling within the Aberdeen City Council boundary. Around 6 hectares of employment land would be most suitable for the area adjacent to the Brodiach Burn, responding to the development restrictions of the Forties Pipeline which runs parallel to the watercourse in this location. In order to accommodate flood risk areas and the strictest of the development restrictions related to the pipeline consultation zones, a wide watercourse corridor is proposed that has the benefit of ensuring the western boundary of the employment land enjoys not only a good outlook onto a landscape element, but also is highly visible from the B9119.

Residential uses are shown edging these employment blocks to provide a step down in scale and mitigate the visual impact of what will inevitably be larger parking areas associated with the business uses.

Access and connections to movement network

The land could be accessed from the B9119 or from a new road access created as a cross roads opposite the proposed route into the Arnhall Phase 3 development. This road would replace the existing Westhill Blacktop C class road and tie into a wider movement network with connections south and west. This would help alleviate pressure on the Six mile junction. Further enhancement of this route would be possible as it headed south through the proposed development linking in to local infrastructure.

Landscape

A linear park associated with the Brodiach Burn watercourse corridor would form a significant landscape space along the western boundary of the identified land. This would effectively provide an ecological landscape spine through the development, connecting mixed use communities to the rural setting and providing a direct north south route from the established settlement through the expansion area.

6.4 Land within Aberdeenshire Council boundaries

The adjacent diagram highlights those areas which fall within Aberdeenshire Council administrative boundaries. In summary, the key aspects of the development framework in this area are as follows.

Land use

Around 9.5 hectares of land is suitable for development within the Aberdeenshire boundary. This is split in to two main areas which will be subject to land use and density restrictions, requiring consultation as a result of the Forties pipeline. An area to the north of the Cadgerford landholding is around 2 hectares and is suitable for employment. The area identified is immediately adjacent to the B9119 that runs to the north and is bounded to the south by the Brodiach Burn. It is a highly visible site which reflects the type of functions proposed in the Arnhall Business Park to the north, hence the employment land use proposal. Running to the west of the Brodiach Burn

the Damhead landholding accounts for approximately 7.5 hectares of development land, proposed as a mix of employment and residential, the final density being subject to the consultation process with regard to the Forties pipeline designations.

Access and connections to movement network

The land could be accessed from the B9119 or from a new road access created as a cross roads opposite the proposed route into the Arnhall Phase 3 development. This road would replace the existing Westhill Blacktop C class road and tie into a wider movement network with connections south and west in to Damhead. This would help alleviate pressure on the Six Mile junction.

Landscape

The Brodiach Burn runs in a southerly direction to the south of the identified land and could form a significant landscape corridor with links to the south and west and out to the wider countryside.

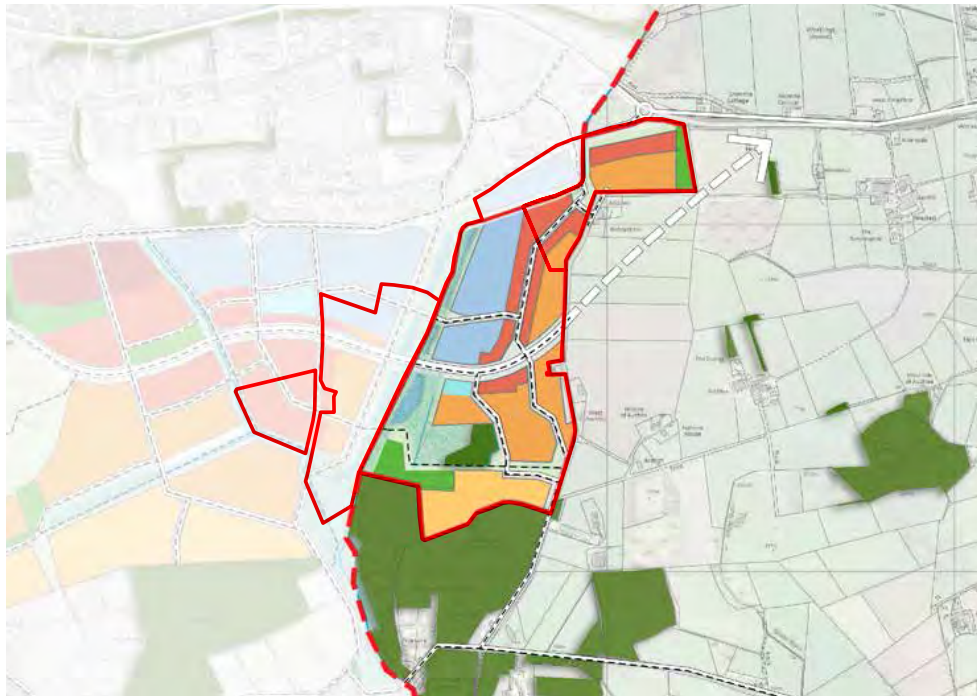


fig. 42: Land within Aberdeen City Council administrative boundaries

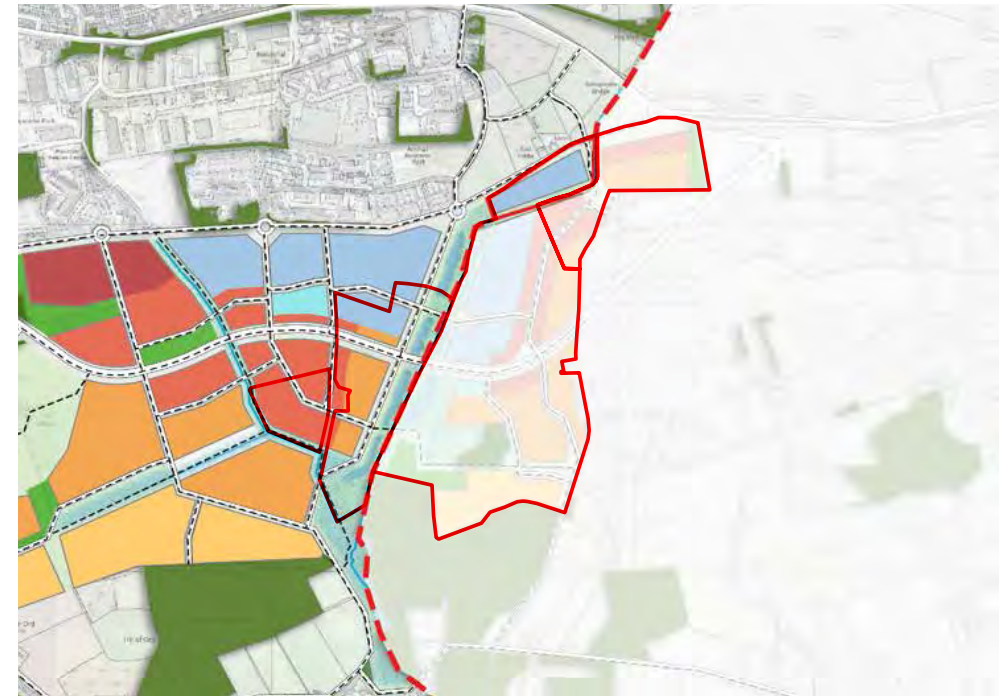


fig. 43: Land within Aberdeenshire Council administrative boundaries

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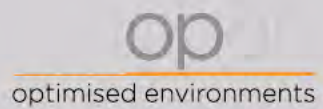
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Damhead, Backhill and Westhill South

Response to Aberdeen City Council Local Development Plan 2021: Main Issues Report

May 2019



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Cover Image - Southern edge of Westhill viewed from the Broomfield Plantation woodland

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the document

This document has been prepared in response to Aberdeen City Main Issues Report (MIR) by Optimised Environments Limited, 'OPEN' on behalf of Stewart Milne Homes' (SMH).

It has been arranged as an addendum to accompany SMH's Development Strategy, Response to the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan Call for Sites submitted April 2018 and contains supplementary information to address the points raised in the MIR and further assist in demonstrating the effectiveness of land at Cadgerford/Blackhill/Damhead (MIR REF GR066) to accommodate mixed use development for 750 900 new homes and 9 10 hectares of employment land as part of a new mixed use allocation.

This information should be read in conjunction with the MIR Response Form, the Development Strategy and the Access Strategy and Capacity Assessment.

Updated Development Strategy

The MIR lists the main constraints to development as green belt, transportation constraints, presence of a gas pipeline and risk of flooding from the Brodiach Burn.

The information in this updated development strategy addresses the issue of the green belt through provision of landscape and visual appraisal of the site and diagrams have been prepared to further reinforce that appropriate guidance relating to required offset distances from both the gas pipeline and the burn has been followed in the preparation of the development framework for the site.

Additionally information has been prepared identifying a location for a community campus and the split of housing numbers and employment areas between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire identified, given that the site crosses the administrative boundary of the two authorities.



Figure 1: View of Westhill and the proposed development site area from the Brimmond Hill viewpoint

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2. Landscape and Visual Appraisal

The landscape and visual analysis presented in this section of the report, whilst representing a cross section of receptor types and sensitivities in the area, is intended as a preliminary appraisal.

1.2.1 Landscape Context

The site is within an area of agricultural and rural character, to the south east of Westhill. The site area lies between the B9119 Tarland Road / A944 junction and the Broomfield Plantation woodland to the south. It would occupy numerous field compartments which break across the landscape found between two minor roads that connect the B9119 to Easter Ord via the Broomfield Plantation woodland. The majority of field compartments are in active agricultural use although rougher texture fields (gorse and rush grasses) are found to the south of Cadgerford Farm. The Brodiach Burn cuts through a central part of the site on a north south axis, the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire local authority boundaries also follow this watercourse feature. The topography of the site undulates between field compartments and a depression follows the Brodiach Burn. A series of small hills surround the site area including Backhill, Hill of Ord and Hillhead of Carnie.

The existing settlement edge north of the B9119 is commercial / business with no residential context it is primarily made up of the Arnhall and Westhill Business Parks. Farmsteads and individual properties are found throughout the site area including Bishops Court, West Auchlea, Cadgerford Farm, Damhead and Westburn of Fiddie.

There are no scenic landscape designations on or close to the site. The part of the site within Aberdeen City is in an area of Greenbelt land that covers the vast majority of the landscape that surrounds Aberdeen. Areas of Ancient Woodland are identified at the Broomfield Plantation, Backhill and Wester Ord. Landscape character areas (LCAs) are as defined and described in Scotland's digital map based national character assessment (published in 2019). The central part of the site area is within the Undulating Open Farmland LCA (6), areas west of Brodiach Burn lie within the Wooded Estates Aberdeenshire LCA (26) and a small part of the site area to the north east lies within the Low Hills Aberdeen LCA (5).

Key Characteristics of Undulating Open Farmland (6) are listed as follows:

- A gently undulating landform with some shallow basins contained by low lying ridges.
- Predominantly improved pasture and arable farming with a weak enclosure pattern.
- Semi natural habitats are limited to pockets of rough grass and scrub with occasional areas of moss and wetland.

- Sparse woodland with only occasional small clumps and lines of trees and some coniferous plantations in the south west.
- A sparsely settled landscape with a pattern of scattered farmsteads and houses accessed by a network of minor but often busy roads.
- The openness of this landscape allows extensive views particularly on the western edges of the city.
- A landscape with a prevailing rural character although eastern areas are influenced by the proximity of the urban area.

Key Characteristics of Wooded Estates Aberdeenshire LCA (26) are listed as follows:

- Rolling landform of low gently rounded hills and broad valleys.
- Occasional low lying basins are filled with mosses or lochs.
- Strong woodland structure associated with numerous estate policies.
- Mixed farmland with varying size and pattern of fields, these enclosed by a mix of fences, low stone walls and, in places, thick mixed shelterbelts and field trees.
- Occasional mosses are ringed by birch and Scots pine.
- Numerous and varied archaeological features occur in this landscape and include henges, carved stone balls, recumbent stone circles and Pictish monuments.
- Well settled with a large number of towns and villages. More recent settlement expansion and housing development is particularly evident closer to Aberdeen.
- Significant network of roads radiating out from Aberdeen.
- Long views across open farmland contrast with sudden enclosure by woodland as one passes through this landscape. The prominent Grampian Outlying Hills and ridges often form a focus in these views.

Key Characteristics of Low Hills Aberdeen LCA (5) are listed as follows:

- Prominent hills which form distinctive landmark features seen from the city.
- A gently rounded landform with relatively steep slopes gives these hills a well defined profile.
- Large areas of open moorland and woodland cover summits and upper slopes.
- Farmland is associated with the lower slopes of the western hills.
- These hills are largely undeveloped apart from telecommunication masts on some summits.
- Small farms are generally situated at the foot of the larger western hills.

- Prehistoric monuments are associated with many of these hills.
- Many of these hills are well used for recreation.
- Areas of higher open ground provide panoramic views across the city, Aberdeenshire and the sea.
- A sense of seclusion can be experienced on summits and within the more extensive woodlands.

Although the site is spread across three character areas the overall character of the site area appears relatively homogenous. This is due to the merging of key characteristics which occurs at the threshold of each character area. For instance although identified key characteristics of Undulating Open Farmland (6) include that it is sparsely settled, with sparse woodland and with extensive open views, this is clearly not evident in the immediate surroundings of the site area which is closely associated with the existing Westhill settlement and is enclosed by topography and woodland. Equally, whilst the identified key characteristics of Low Hills Aberdeen LCA (5) include that the hills have relatively steep slopes, are largely undeveloped, and are well used for recreation, this is not the case for the Backhill which forms the focus of this unit of Low Hills LCA. On the contrary, almost all of the hill is in agricultural use, it is not considered to have steep slopes and the AWPR major infrastructure development cuts through the centre of this area.

Taking this into account it is considered that the characteristics of the site area and immediate surrounds are more closely associated with the broader descriptions for the Wooded Estates Aberdeenshire LCA (26).

Development considerations have not yet been published as part of the 2019 characterisation update and it is understood that these will follow as part of the digital dataset. The 1998 Aberdeenshire Character Assessment contained the following 'specific guidance' for the Wooded Estates Aberdeenshire LCA (26):

Aim: To conserve wooded character

- Broadleaf woodlands which are managed to conserve a mix of species and resist conifer domination will help to maintain a well balanced woodland structure.

Aim: To conserve the setting of estates and archaeological features

- Woods, shelterbelt and drystone dykes enhance the setting of estates and archaeological features; maintenance and enhancement of these will help create a more unified landscape structure

Aim: To integrate new development in the landscape.

- Native broad leaf trees may be used to integrate and contain new housing estates and soften the edge of urban developments.



Figure. 2: View of Westhill and the proposed development site area from the Brimmond Hill viewpoint

1.2.2 Visual Context

Although the landscape of the site is undulated between the various field compartments and watercourses, it has a relatively uniform overall elevation when viewed across the fuller extent of the site area. Opportunities from which to appreciate the whole site are limited to the higher elevated agricultural land on Backhill to the east or from the more elevated Brimmond Hill to the north east (see figure 2). Other distant and elevated views to the north include Hill of Keir and Westhill Heights on the slopes of Hill of Keir, although views of the site are almost entirely restricted by the buildings of the Business Parks which intervene (see figure 3).

As a result of these site characteristics, the potential visual effect of housing development would be restricted to close views within or immediately surrounding the site area. The key visual receptors within this immediate area include

- close views from the southern edges of Westhill on the B9119 (see viewpoint 1 Minor Road near B9119 / A944 junction & viewpoint 2 B9119 / Prospect Road);
- close views from the northern edges of Broomfield Plantation Woodland, which screens views further to the south (see viewpoint 3 Minor Road near West Auchlea & 7 Minor Road near Mosslea Cottage);
- views from the agricultural land to the west from the east facing slopes of Hillhead of Carnie (see viewpoint 5 Road to Woolhillock); and
- limited views from elevated landscape to the east of the Westhill settlement (see viewpoint 4 Minor Rd near Cloghill & viewpoint 6 Westhill Rd).

Whilst the site itself has a relatively open character visual effects would be limited to the localised visual receptors described above due to intervening topography of Backhill, Hill of Ord and Hillhead of Carnie and the plantation woodland at Broomfield and Westerord which provide substantial limitation on views of the southern edges of the Westhill settlement.

As the site and wider settlement context of Westhill is visible from Brimmond Hill, it is anticipated that this longer view is a key view in relation to the further potential expansion of the Westhill settlement (within the wider context of other areas of settlement expansion around Aberdeen more generally which is also visible from this key viewpoint location). Kingsford Stadium will sit immediately in front of the site area in this view from the north east.

1.2.3 Conclusion

The proposal site would add a large area of development to the south of the existing settlement of Westhill. Due to topographical and landscape features which contribute to a sense of localised containment to the south of the existing Westhill settlement, landscape and visual effects would be limited to a localised area. The business parks that lie between the A944 that passes through Westhill and the B9119 on the northern edges of the site area, separates the site areas from the residential area of Westhill. The Kingsford Stadium once completed would also intervene in views from the north east. Visual effects for residents of Westhill would therefore be very limited both in the level of effect potentially experienced and the number of potentially affected residential receptors.

The character of the landscape would be altered at a local level due to the size of the development, however, surrounding areas of the same character types would remain relatively unaffected by a proposed development due to the lack of wider intervisibility and experience from the larger areas of rural agricultural landscapes found to the east and west.

The changes would be relatively localised in extent. The following considerations and potential landscape mitigation, are also applicable in relation to settlement expansion in this area:

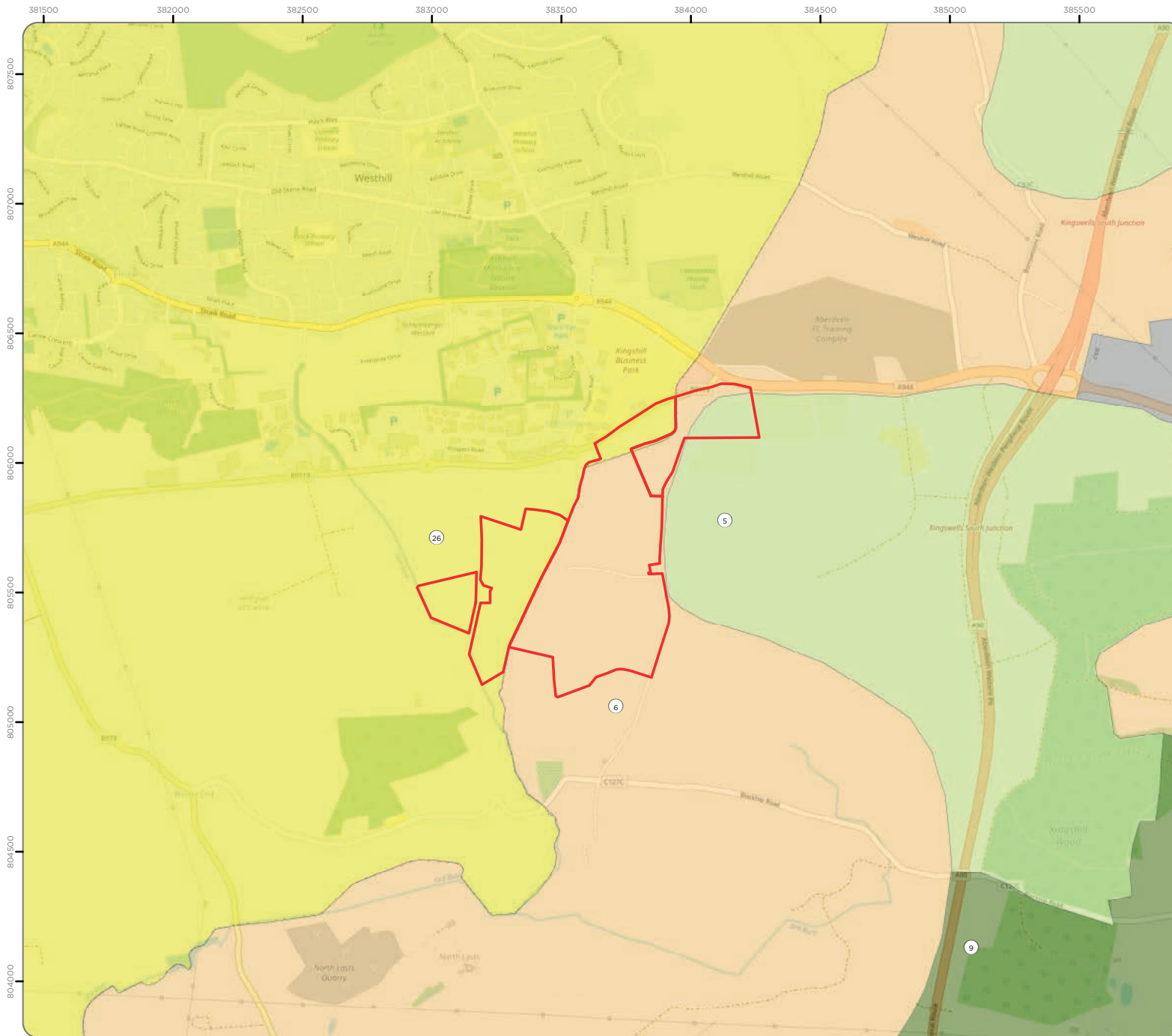
- Landscape structure and open space within the illustrative development framework would separate compartments of development across the site area;
- A landscape structure of wooded strips between areas of development would improve the woodland structure of the area by connecting to existing and established woods, particularly the Broomfield and WesterOrd Plantations to the south of the site;

- Woodland enhancement at edges of the Broomfield Plantation would help to integrate development proposals;
- The proposed landscape structure ensures that wider views across the entire site are partly contained by a landscape structure that includes street trees and riparian planting along burn corridors; and
- A more substantial landscape strip along the Brodiach Burn corridor would provide a linear park and enhance habitat connectivity.

The above considerations and potential mitigation for the proposals indicate that the site has the potential to meet the key aims listed in the Aberdeenshire landscape character assessment for the Wooded Estates Aberdeenshire LCA (26). In conclusion, it is considered that proposals as described in the 'Illustrative Development Framework' for the site provide the potential to introduce large scale housing development into the rural landscape south of Westhill within the context of relatively localised landscape and visual effects.

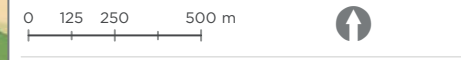


Figure. 3: View south across Westhill from Westhill Road on the slopes of Hill of Keir.



Legend

- Site Boundary
- SNH Landscape Character (2019)**
- Source: SNH GIS Data Download (2019)
- 5, Low Hills Aberdeen
- 6, Undulating Open Farmland
- 9, Wooded Estates Aberdeen
- 26, Wooded Estates Aberdeenshire
- Urban

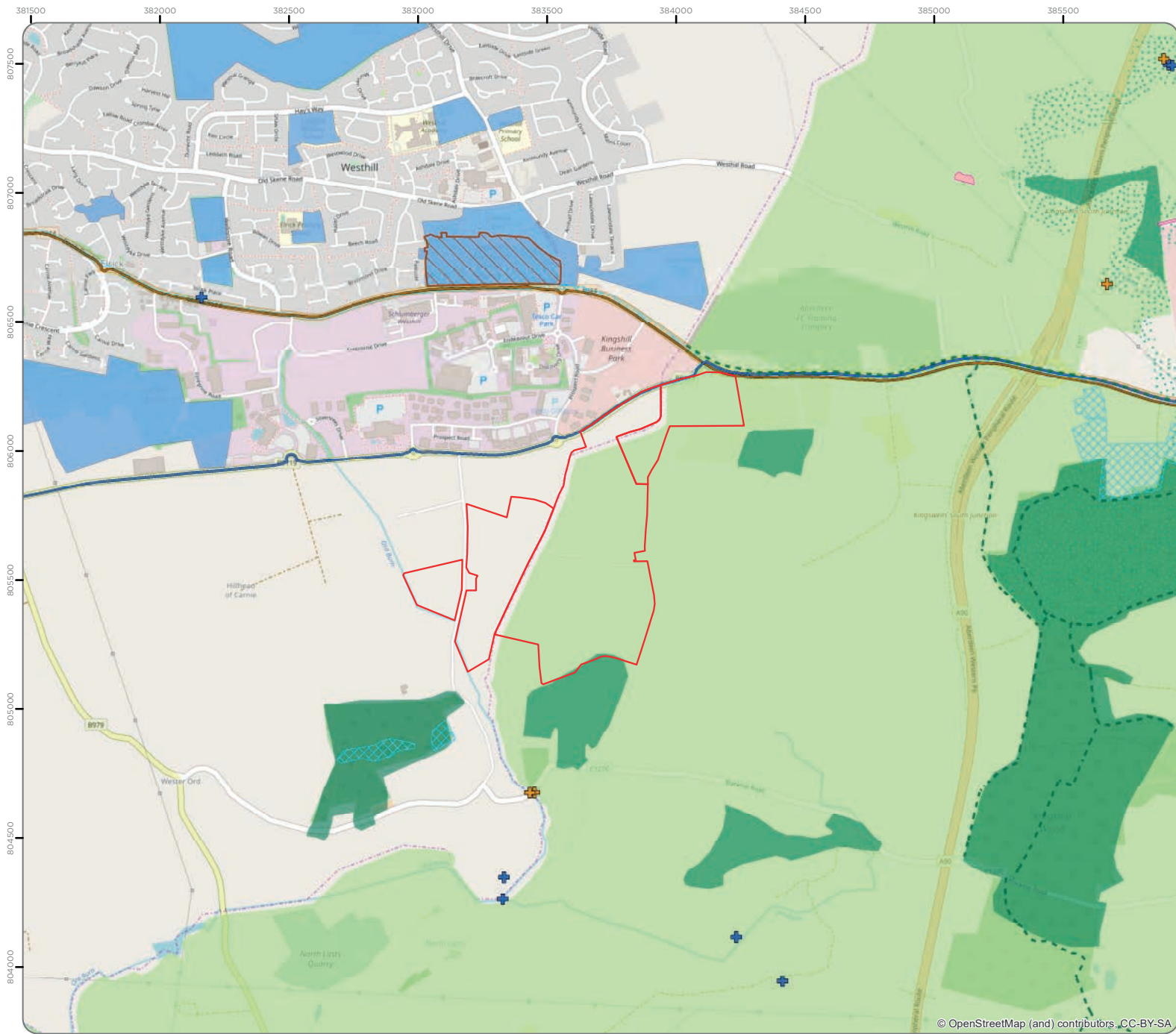


WESTHILL

Figure. 4: Landscape Character

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Scale: 1:15,000	Drawing Size: A3	Date: 04/04/2019
Coordinate System: BNG OS GB 1936 Datum		





- Legend**
- Site Boundary
 - + B Listed Building
 - + C Listed Building
 - Core Path
 - ~ Deeside Tourist Route
 - ~ Highland Tourist Route
 - Scheduled Ancient Monument
 - Canmore Historic Site
 - Local Nature Reserve
 - Geenspace Network
 - Ancient Woodland
 - Greenbelt
 - Protected Areas

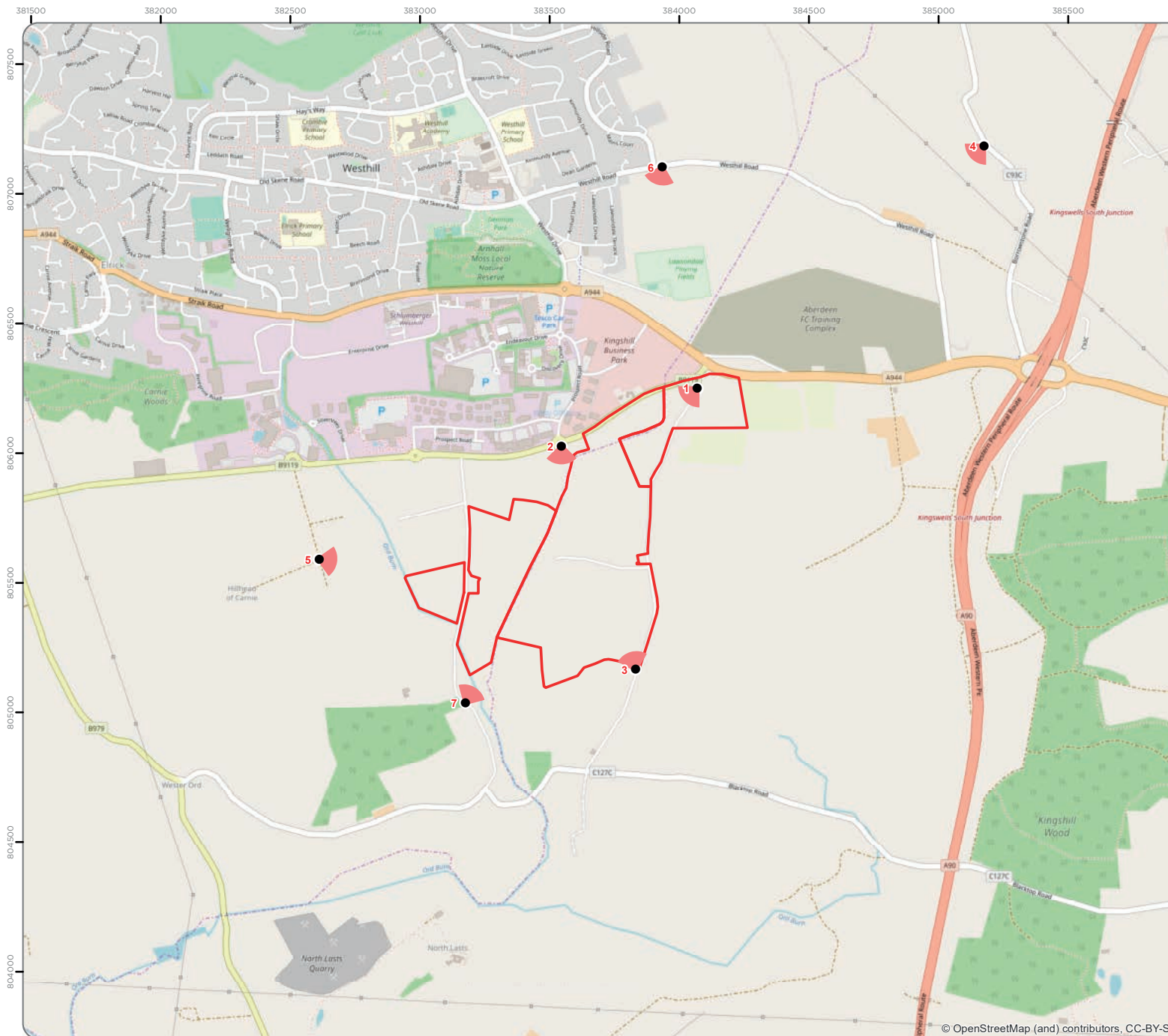


WESTHILL

Figure. 5: Landscape Designations

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Scale: 1:15,000	Drawing Size: A3	Date: 04/04/2019
Coordinate System: BNG OS GB 1936 Datum		





Legend

- Site Boundary
- Viewpoint

- 1 Minor Rd near B9119 / A944 junction
- 2 B9119 / Prospect Rd
- 3 Minor Rd near West Auchlea
- 4 Minor Rd near Cloghill
- 5 Rd to Woolhillock
- 6 Westhill Rd
- 7 Minor Rd near Mosslea Cottage



WESTHILL

Figure. 6: Appraisal Viewpoints

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Scale: 1:15,000	Drawing Size: A3	Date: 04/04/2019
Coordinate System: BNG OS GB 1936 Datum		



› Viewpoint Photography



Figure. 7: VP01 - Minor Rd near B9119 / A944 junction



Figure. 8: VP02 - B9119 / Prospect Rd





Figure. 11: VP03 - Minor Rd near West Auchlea



Figure. 9: VP04 - Minor Rd near Cloghill



Figure. 10: VP05 - Rd to Woolhillock



Figure. 12: VP06 - Westhill Rd



Figure. 13: VP07 - Minor Rd near Mosslea Cottage

3. Pipeline Consultation Zone

2.3 Pipeline

The BP 'Forties' oil pipeline system runs through the site, between the Damhead and Cadgerford landholdings and thereafter runs outwith the site, parallel to the Brodiach Burn.

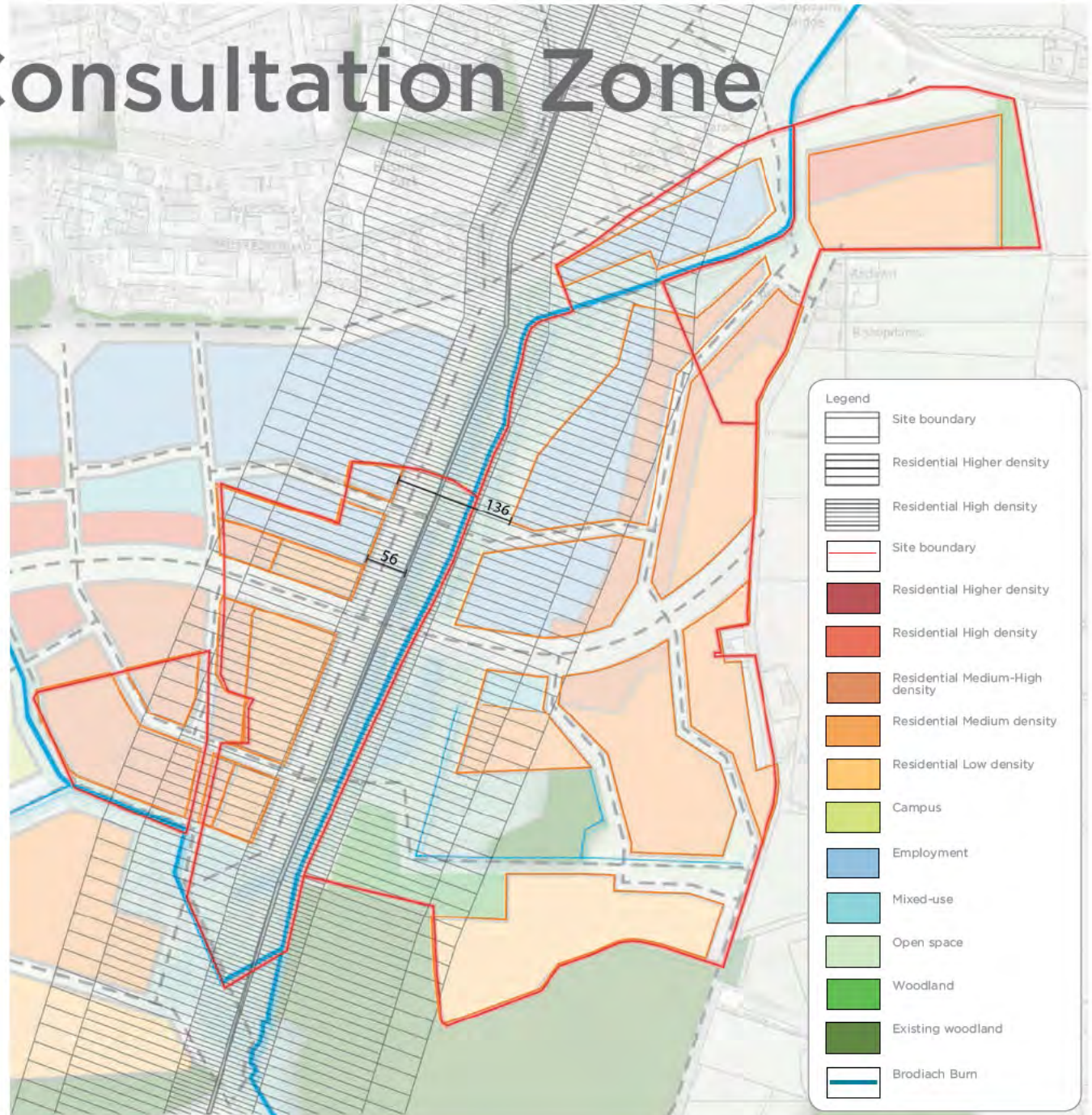
To recap on the information previously submitted in the representation document, the pipeline has a consultation distance of 485m and that distance is subdivided into three zones:

- Inner Zone: 0 - 110 metres;
- Middle Zone: 110 - 380 metres; and
- Outer Zone: 380 - 485 metres.

In preparing the development strategy, the following was applied in line with the PADHI (planning Advice for Developments near Hazardous Installations) guidance:

- Inner zone: No residential. Offices, industrial storage up to 2 storeys and less than 100 occupants. Hostels up to 9 bedspaces. Retail units up to 250 sqm per building. Bar/restaurant up to 250sqm.
- Middle zone: Low medium density residential. Office, industrial storage, no limit in height and population. Hotels up to 100 bedspaces. Retail units up to 5000 sqm per building. Bar/Restaurant up to 5000 sqm.
- Outer pipeline zone: Medium high density residential. Offices, industrial, storage no limit. Hotels not limit to bedspaces. Retail units no limit per building. Bar/restaurant no limit.

The diagram opposite overlays the pipeline consultation zones on to the development framework and has been prepared to clearly demonstrate how the PADHI guidance has been followed in the arrangement of the site layout. Distances have been noted between the pipeline and development edge to further demonstrate compliance.



Damhead, Backhill and Westhill South, Aberdeen City MIR Response 150772 Figure 14: Location of Gas Pipeline

4. Flood Risk from Brodaich Burn

3.1 Flood risk from burn

The MIR states that a significant buffer will be required around the Brodaich Burn.

The development framework has been arranged to take cognisance of the SEPA flood risk maps and has utilised the area within the most restricted pipeline consultation zone for open space and SuDS. The offset distance from the pipeline is such that the minimum distance from the burn to development in this area is 36m. The offset reduces to 18m once outwith the pipeline restriction areas as noted on the diagram opposite.

These offset distances are compliant with recommendations stated in the Aberdeenshire PLANNING ADVICE: NUMBER 92015 BUFFER STRIP GUIDANCE which states that 'Buffer strips should be proportional to the bed width of the river and should be a minimum of 6m with up to 20m for major rivers such as the Rivers Dee and Don. This guidance is supported by SEPA and SNH.

Whilst the exact width of the burn will be determined through technical analysis at a later detailed stage it is not particularly wide and will comfortably comply with the buffer strip guidance.

A detailed flood risk assessment will be carried out at the appropriate stage.

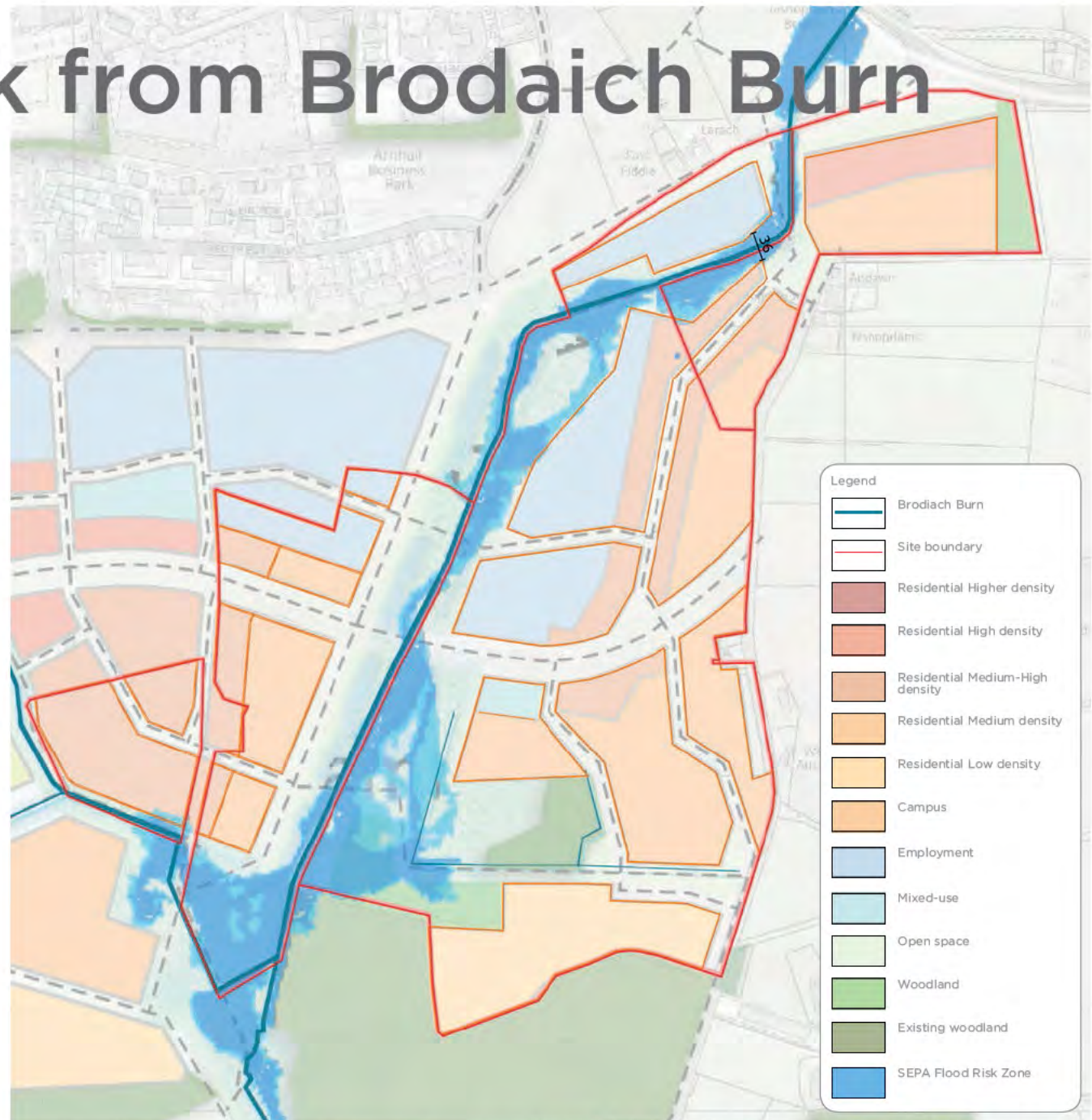


Figure. 15: SEPA Flood Risk Zone Map with Development Framework

Damhead, Backhill and Westhill South, Aberdeen City MIR Response 150772

5. Education

4.1 Community Campus

The MIR states that Westhill Primary School will be at 100% capacity and the academy at 81% capacity by 2020.

An area has been identified within the wider growth plan for a community campus. Based on recent relevant experience of community campus designs in developments of similar size and catchment area, a zone of 10 hectares has been identified within the development framework shown opposite. Accommodating this area could be readily achieved without materially affecting the development framework proposed within the original submission documents Development Strategy, Response to Aberdeen Local Development Plan Call for Sites submitted April 2018, for the arrangement of the site.

The Community Campus should provide a location for both a secondary school and primary school as well as sports and other community facilities. The campus is located on the main arterial route and adjacent to the primary area of open space to the east and woodland watercourse corridor to the south ensuring a prominent, accessible location and attractive setting. In this location the community campus could best fulfil its role as a fully integrated resource for the wider community. Good, direct access to the core road network and strategic path network will ensure it can be safely and easily accessed by pedestrians, buses and other vehicles.

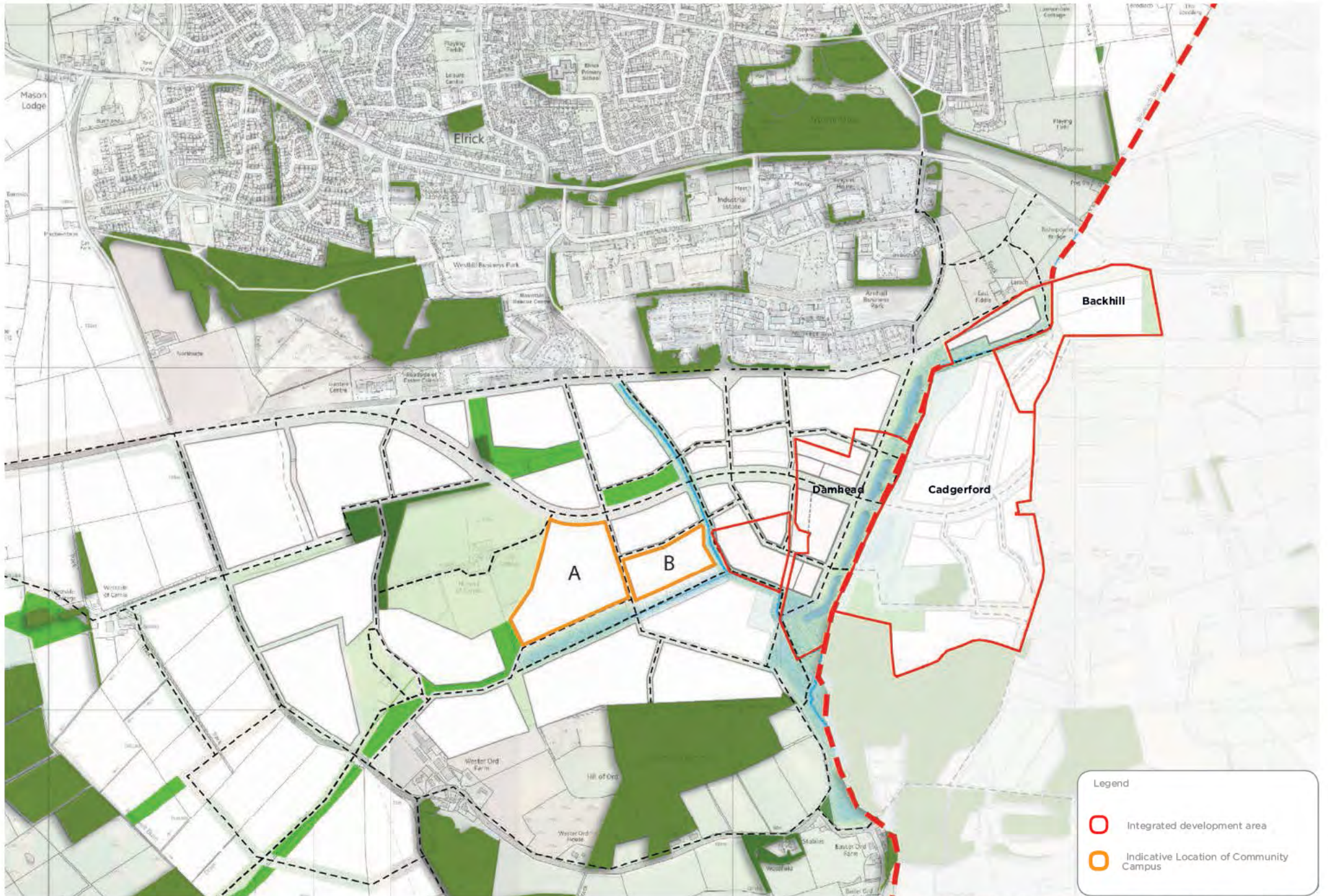


Figure 17: Community Campus Allocation

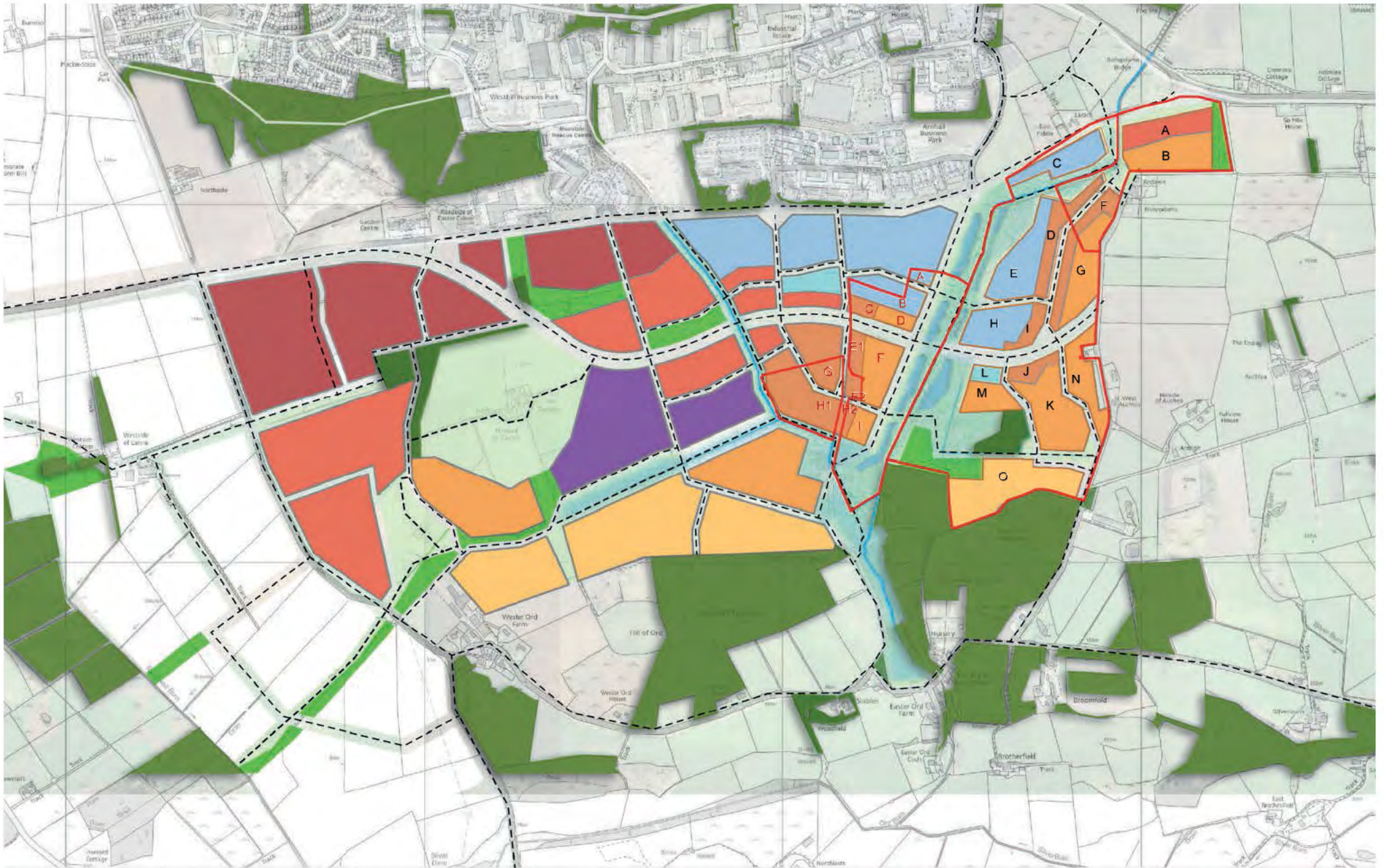
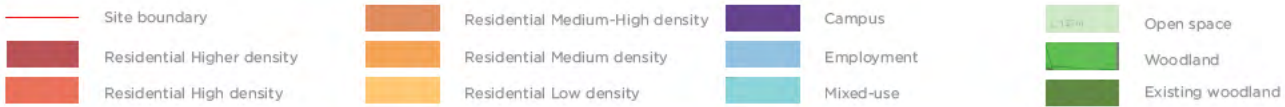


Figure 18: Development Framework south of Westhill



7. Vision for Southerly Growth

6.3 Updated strategic growth plan

The MIR states that the sites could come forward as part of an agreed strategic growth vision for the town. The development framework in the wider context has been updated to include the Kingsford Stadium proposal and highlight the location for a community campus as part of longer term growth.



Figure 20: Vision for Southerly Growth

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Appendix 2



Aberdeenshire Council

Update to 2008 Westhill Capacity Study

Final Report



AMEC Environment & Infrastructure UK Limited

May 2014

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Document Revisions

No.	Details	Date
1	Draft Baseline Report for Client Comment	31.01.14
2	Interim Report	03.03.14
3	Interim Report and client comments	12.03.14
4	Draft Final Report for Client Comment	25.03.14
5	Final Report	21.05.2014

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Update to 2008 Westhill Capacity Study

Final Report

AMEC Environment & Infrastructure
UK Limited

May 2014

Executive Summary

Purpose of this Report

AMEC Environment & Infrastructure UK Ltd (AMEC E&I) was commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council in December 2013 to update the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study. Entec UK Ltd (now part of AMEC E&I) was previously commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council in March 2007 to undertake the initial capacity study of the town. The requirement for the initial capacity study was identified in a report to the Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services Committee on the 3rd October 2002 that highlighted the need to take a view of the capacities, potential and thresholds for development in Westhill and similar towns in Aberdeenshire over the much longer term. In Westhill the initial study looked at a 50% housing growth scenario for the settlement. One of the key differences between this update and the 2008 study is that this updated study considers the capacity for future growth of the town over a period of 20-25 years, rather than 50% physical growth of the settlement.

Since the 2008 Capacity Study a new Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2012 has been adopted. It allocates two sites for housing development totalling 105 units in the first phase of the Plan (2007-16) and 95 units in the second phase (2017-23), as well as an area of employment land (4.4 hectares) during the period 2007-2023. Westhill also has an 'extraordinary affordable housing target' of 40%, whereby all housing developments in the town are to contribute to meeting this target; the 'normal' affordable housing target across Aberdeenshire is 25%. Westhill is also identified as having affordable housing 'pressured area status'. A new Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2016 is being prepared and the Main Issues Report (MIR) was subject to public consultation between 28th October 2013 and 1st February 2014. The MIR does not identify any preferred housing land to be taken forward into the Aberdeenshire LDP 2016, but land has been identified for commercial/employment uses to support Westhill's role as a world renowned location for subsea expertise associated with the oil and gas industry.

Due to the time that has lapsed since the initial capacity study, and the increasing pressure from businesses and developers regarding Westhill, this updated capacity study is required to understand the future growth potential of the settlement. The preparation of this updated Capacity Study has been informed by the latest available statistical and planning data, a workshop comprising Aberdeenshire Council officers from Transportation and Economic Development, and regular correspondence between members of the Project Delivery client group.

A Draft Baseline report, a subsequent Workshop and an Interim Report were prepared in advance of this Final Report to collate relevant data and to identify the spatial objectives which would underpin the site assessment stage of the study. The Interim Report integrated the content of the Draft Baseline Report with the outcomes of the Workshop and included an analysis of current characteristics and predicted trends in Westhill, together with the identification of key development constraints and a high level assessment of the key drivers of change, including an analysis of the policy context for Westhill. The Interim Report also identified key issues which are likely to affect the future development of Westhill and outlined a vision and set of strategic objectives to underpin Westhill's future development. In addition the Interim Report detailed three potential growth trajectories for Westhill, and

following instructions from Aberdeenshire Council officers it was decided to progress a ‘maximised growth option’ within the final (site assessment) stage of the study.

This Final Report includes the complete contents of the Interim Report, together with the results of the site assessment stage of the study and a number of recommendations for actions and further work to maximise sustainable economic growth in Westhill. The main report is accompanied by a series of appendices detailing the criteria used to assess the suitability of sites for development, the detailed results for each of the 22 areas which were assessed in the study, and the key diagrams from the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study.

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1. Introduction

This report presents the final output from a programme of work to update a previous capacity study for the town of Westhill, Aberdeenshire, which was prepared by Entec UK Ltd (now part of AMEC Environment & Infrastructure UK Ltd) in 2008. This report includes: an analysis of the baseline and predicted future characteristics of Westhill; the identification of key development constraints; an overview of the local and regional spatial planning policy context, the identification of key issues which are likely to influence the town's development, the establishment of a vision around which potential options for the growth can be framed; and the results of 22 site appraisals around the periphery of Westhill. The concluding section of this report also sets out a number of recommendations which are designed to maximise sustainable economic growth within Westhill over the next 20-25 years.

This section firstly outlines the background to this updated study, clarifies its purpose and status, as well as its key assumptions and limitations. The approach undertaken in preparing this updated study is subsequently outlined, and the key members of the project/client team and key stakeholders are then identified.

1.1 Background

Entec UK Ltd was commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council in March 2007 to undertake a capacity study of the town of Westhill, and the resulting Westhill Capacity Study report was published in October 2008. The need for the capacity study was identified in a report to the Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services Committee on 3rd October 2002 which highlighted the need to assess the capacities, potential and thresholds for future development in Westhill and similar towns in Aberdeenshire over the long term. Consequently the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study considered the spatial implications of a 50% housing growth scenario.

A significant amount of time has elapsed since the 2008 Capacity Study was prepared, during which development pressures from businesses within Westhill have significantly increased. Therefore, Aberdeenshire Council identified a need for an updated capacity study in order to understand the future growth potential of Westhill, and to inform the development of future planning policies, potentially including the preparation of a strategic masterplan for Westhill.

1.2 Purpose & Status

The overall purpose of this study is to update an earlier capacity study which was prepared for Westhill in 2008, taking account of the key assumptions noted below in section 1.3. The rationale for the updated capacity study is the need to support economic development within Westhill, and in particular to accommodate the growing and world leading subsea engineering cluster which has developed in the town over recent years.

The finalised updated capacity study has a similar status to the Westhill Capacity Study 2008, in that the document will not itself become part of the development plan for Aberdeenshire. However, it does form part of the body of knowledge from which will inform future development plans and planning applications.

1.3 Key Assumptions & Limitations

The 2008 Westhill Capacity Study was underpinned by an assumption that the housing stock within Westhill would increase by 50% (from a predicted baseline of 4,628 dwellings in 2008) due to a significant population increase. Therefore, it sought to understand what land use changes and developments would be needed to accommodate a 50% increase in housing. This updated capacity study continues to assume that the population of Westhill will increase. However, it does not impose a predicted growth rate of 50% in the housing stock. The scope of this capacity study therefore differs from the scope of the 2008 Capacity Study, in that the aim here is to identify the future growth potential of Westhill over a 20 to 25 year period, without focusing on the specific need to accommodate a 50% increase in its housing stock.

This capacity study assumes that development pressures recently experienced in Westhill will continue, at least in the short-medium term, particularly in relation to employment land and the development of business parks. A related assumption is that, providing suitable development opportunities exist, subsea engineering firms will continue to choose to locate in the established subsea cluster within Westhill, at least in the short-medium term.

It is assumed that the Aberdeen Western Periphery Route (AWPR), which at its nearest point is situated 1km east of Westhill, will be fully operational within the 20-25 year timeframe of this capacity study. The AWPR currently has a three year build programme scheduled for 2015-2018. A further assumption is that the vast majority of potential development in Westhill over the next 25 years will be funded by the private sector, although limited public sector funding may become available for infrastructure interventions.

The study area for this study is identical to the study area used in the 2008 Capacity Study. In terms of geographic limitations, the study area extends as far east as the administrative boundary with Aberdeen City, south also as far as the administrative boundary, west as far as Kirkton of Skene and north to include Berryhill and Souterhill.

1.4 Methodology

The preparation of this report has involved the following stages:

1) Inception Meeting & Site Visit (December 2013)

AMEC's Project Director met key staff from Aberdeenshire Council to discuss issues including the scope of work, data requirements, the Council's expectations regarding outputs, project logistics and the intended work programme. An accompanied site visit was undertaken in advance of the inception meeting.

2) Review of 2008 Westhill Capacity Study (January 2014)

An early task in this project was to review the previous study prepared by Entec UK Ltd to identify sections where a similar approach should be taken in this study, or where a different approach would be required.

3) Familiarisation with Key Issues and Documents (January 2014)

This stage involved a review of current and historical Ordnance Survey maps, photography, secondary data and policy documents to familiarise the project team with relevant aspects of Westhill.

4) Collation of Baseline Information, High Level Policy Analysis & Preparation of Draft Baseline Report (January 2014)

Building upon the data collected and reviewed in stage three, this stage involved a detailed analysis of relevant data and policy documents to collate a comprehensive baseline and policy context for Westhill. This *Baseline Report* represents the key output from this stage of the project.

5) Workshop (3rd February 2014)

A Workshop was undertaken to inform the update of the Capacity Study. The purpose of the Workshop was:

- To agree on the **approach** in undertaking the Study;
- To consider, reflect and agree on the **baseline** findings in terms of current characteristics, recent trends and predicted future trends;
- To consider the absolute and relative geographical, infrastructure and environmental & cultural heritage **constraints**;
- To consider the **key drivers of change** that will condition the development of Westhill over the next 20 to 25 years;
- To give preliminary consideration to the **vision and strategic objectives** for Westhill over the next 20 to 25 years; and
- To consider the **potential growth options** for Westhill over the next 20 to 25 years.

6) Preparation of Interim Report (February 2014)

The *Interim Report* integrated the content of the Draft Baseline Report with the outcomes of the Workshop, including the identification of a vision statement and strategic objectives for Westhill.

7) Assessment of Potential Development Areas (March 2014)

Following agreement between AMEC E&I and Aberdeenshire Council officers regarding the methodology which would be used to assess potential development areas around the periphery of Westhill, these areas were subject to high level site appraisals to determine their relative suitability for development.

8) Preparation of Final Report (March 2014)

This *Final Report* integrated the full contents of the Interim Report with the assessment results obtained in stage seven. To conclude the study a number of recommendations relating to the spatial development of Westhill and the future work programme of Aberdeenshire Council were also devised.

1.5 Project Team & Key Stakeholders

AMEC's key project team comprises:

Stefano Smith BSc (Hons) DipUD MRTPI – Technical Director (Planning & Design)

Duncan Smart MA (Hons) MSc – Assistant Consultant (Planning & Design)

Sarah Sinclair (nee Robertson) MA (Hons) MRTPI – Senior Consultant (Planning & Design)

Key staff from Aberdeenshire Council:

James Welsh – Aberdeenshire Council, Project Delivery

Kirsty Black - Aberdeenshire Council, Project Delivery

Alistair Reid - Aberdeenshire Council, Economic Development

Peter MacCallum – Aberdeenshire Council, Transportation

1.6 Report Structure

This update to the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study is structured around multiple, distinct but fundamentally related sections:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Section 1 | Introduction outlining the background, purpose, status and approach of the updated Study. |
| Section 2 | Outlines the Site & Surroundings of Westhill. |
| Section 3 | Baseline provides a comprehensive analysis of the recent historical, current and predicted future characteristics of Westhill. |
| Section 4 | Identifies the key development constraints. |
| Section 5 | Considers the key drivers of change, including a high level analysis of the current and emerging policy context for Westhill, which will inform the growth options. |
| Section 6 | Summarises the findings of a SWOT analysis which was undertaken for Westhill, taking account of the data collated in Sections 2-5. |

- Section 7 Identifies the key issues which must be considered in identifying potential options for growth within Westhill.
- Section 8 Presents a vision and a number of strategic aims and objectives which potential options for growth must be aligned with.
- Section 9 Outlines the methodology used to assess the suitability of potential development areas around the periphery of Westhill.
- Section 10 Summarises the results of the assessment of potential development areas. The detailed results from this assessment are contained in Appendix B.
- Section 11 Sets out some concluding remarks and a series of recommendations based on sections 1-10 which should be implemented to maximise sustainable economic growth within Westhill.
- Appendix A Details the strategic and technical criteria which were used to assess the suitability of potential development areas for development.
- Appendix B Contains the detailed results of the individual assessments of potential development areas.
- Appendix C Includes the key figures from the Westhill Capacity Study 2008 final report to enable comparison with the results of this updated study.

2. Strategic Context

The town of Westhill lies approximately 6.5 km west of Aberdeen at its closest point and is situated at the eastern extremity of Aberdeenshire Council's land area on the A944 Aberdeen to Alford road. The town is surrounded on all sides by open countryside, with the smaller settlement of Kirkton of Skene situated approximately 1.3 km directly west of Westhill and the slightly larger settlement of Kingswells located 2.8 km to the east, within the boundary of Aberdeen City. A number of farmsteads are located both north and south of Westhill on sloping ground towards Hill of Keir and Hill of Ord respectively, and the village of Blackburn is located approximately 5.2 km to the north.

Figure 2.1 Location Plan shows the existing layout of Westhill and Figure 2.2 Site Plan identifies the town's wider geographical situation.

Figure 2.1 Location Plan

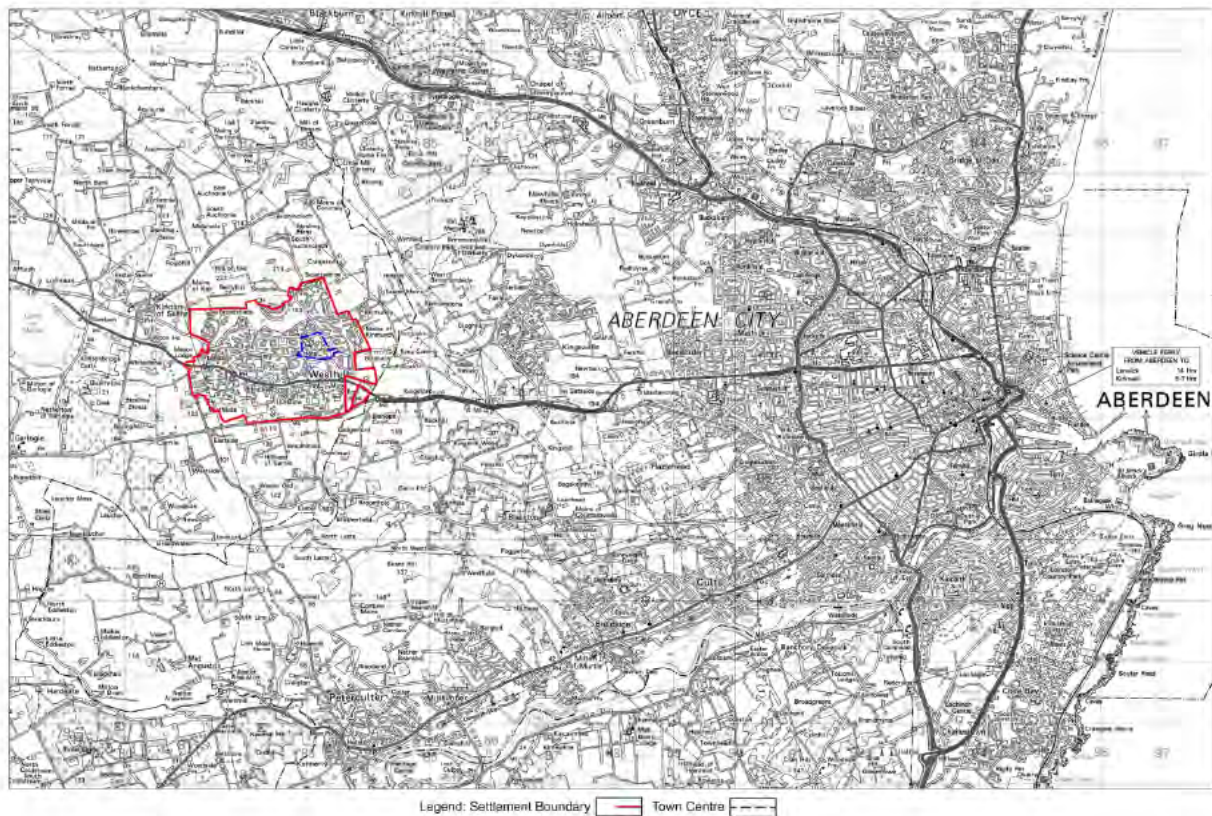
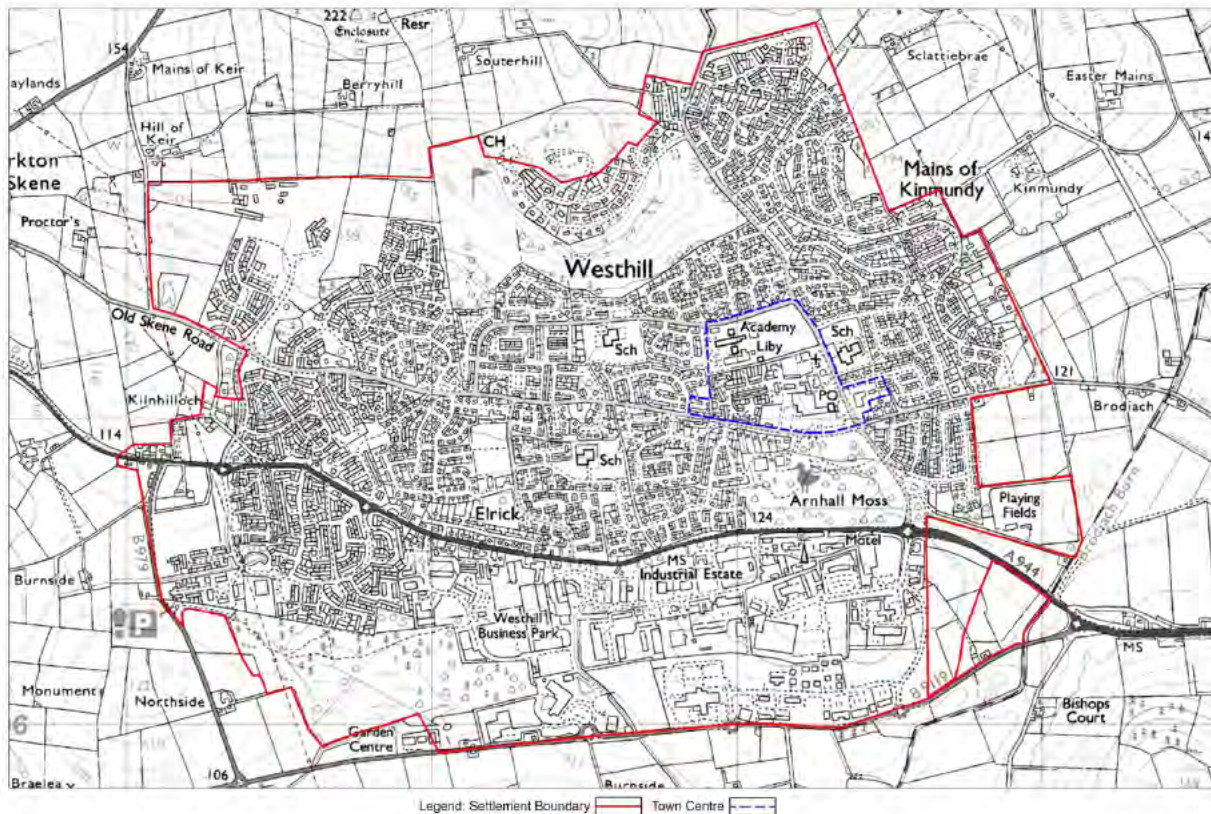


Figure 2.2 Site Plan



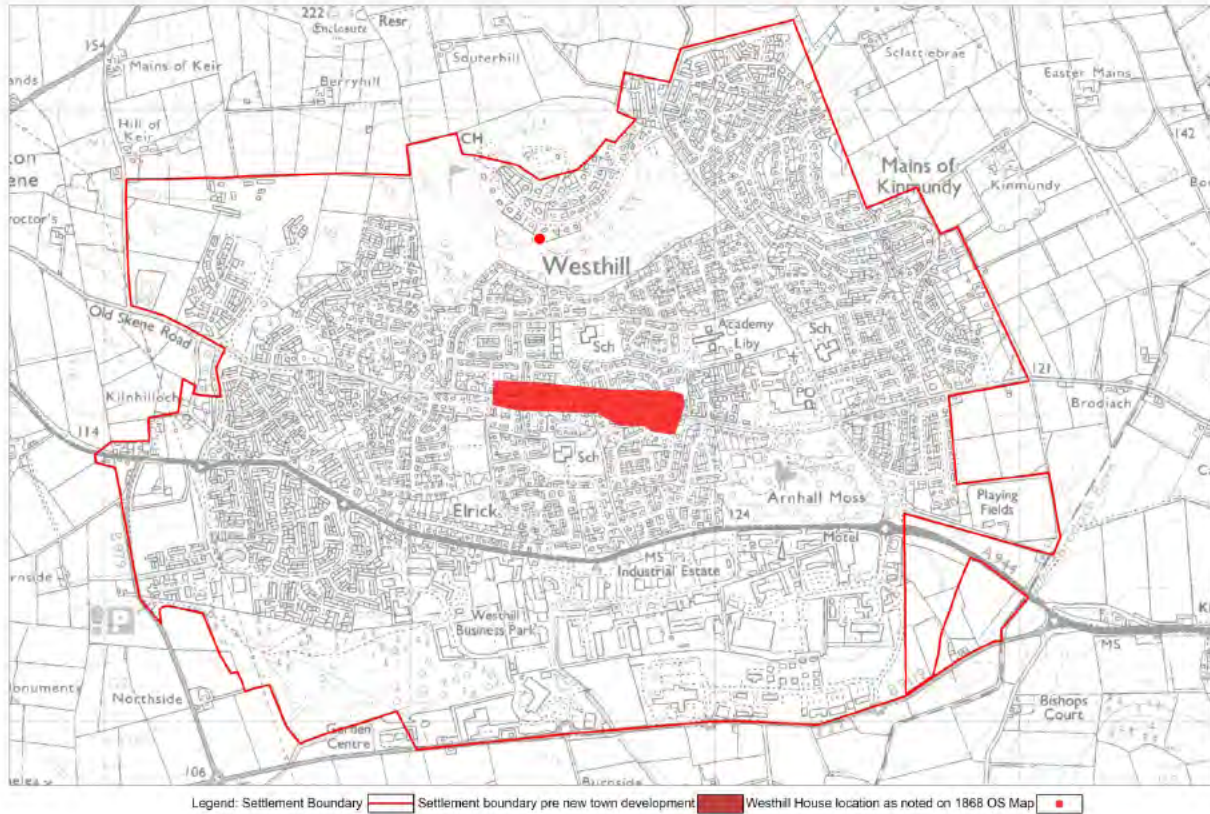
2.1 Historic Development of Westhill

Westhill is in effect the only planned new town in Aberdeenshire, having been created in 1968 as an overspill town for Aberdeen out of the existing villages of Westhill and Elrick. The former Aberdeen solicitor, Ronald Fraser Dean, backed by the former Aberdeen District Council, Secretary of State for Scotland and supported financially by Ashdale Land and Property Company Ltd, created Westhill in 1963.

A review of historic Ordnance Survey maps reveals that the land on which Westhill now sits was previously the Western Kinnundy and Elrick farming areas, comprising of agricultural land interspersed with small farmhouses and barns. Some of these agricultural buildings remain today on the peripheries of Westhill, contributing to the rural character of the town, and the surrounding land largely remains in active agricultural use.

The town of Westhill has undergone rapid expansion since its inception in 1963, linked strongly to the growth of the North East oil and gas economy. Figure 2.3 Westhill Historical Growth details the overall expansion in the extent of the town which has occurred since 1963.

Figure 2.3 Westhill Historical Growth



Today the town continues to be a popular place to live, largely because of its proximity to Aberdeen City, but also due to the number of local amenities it has to offer, including a shopping centre, schools, park and golf course.

2.2 Settlement Character

Due to the relatively new and deliberate development of Westhill, the character and townscape are quite uniform and distinct. The town has no historic core, the overall settlement structure is atypical of other towns in Aberdeenshire and the style of residential development is rather consistent: small, curvilinear developments made up of cul-de-sacs and crescents dominated by bungalows and two-storey semi-detached and detached houses. The settlement has some open spaces and other green areas acting as buffers between housing developments, and clusters of employment uses exists somewhat independently to the south of the A944. There is a large amount of traffic in Westhill, much of which is associated with the Arnhall Business Park.

3. Baseline

This section aims to present a comprehensive baseline scenario regarding the current state of Westhill in order to help identify key issues facing Westhill, and to define a vision for Westhill's future development. Therefore, while the information presented here represents a baseline position, it also informs the potential options for the future growth of Westhill.

3.1 Population

The demographic trends reported below are sourced from 2011 Census results and the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics website. The predicted trends are taken from the General Register of Scotland's Population Projections for Scottish Areas (2010-based) suite of statistics released in February 2012.

Westhill is defined according to the boundaries of the 'Westhill Locality' 2010 unit, which is an aggregation of smaller Output Areas covering the approximate land area of the settlement. Where available, statistics are also reported for the output areas and data zones which make up the continuously developed land area of Westhill.

3.1.1 Current Characteristics

Results from the 2011 census show that the total population of Westhill in 2011 was 10,984, representing 4.3% of the total recorded population of Aberdeenshire (252,973). Table 3.1 shows the age distribution of populations within Westhill, Aberdeenshire and Scotland, as recorded in the 2011 census.

Table 3.1 Age Distribution of Population in Westhill (Scottish Government, 2011 Census)

	Westhill	Aberdeenshire	Scotland
Percentage 0 to 4 years old	6	6	5.5
Percentage 5 to 15 years old	14	12.7	11.8
Percentage 16 to 29 years old	15.8	15.2	18.5
Percentage 30 to 44 years old	22.1	20.6	20
Percentage 45 to 59 years old	24.1	22.5	21.1
Percentage 60 to 74 years old	13.1	15.9	15.5
Percentage 75 and over	5	7.2	7.7

Table 3.1 indicates that the population of Westhill currently has a relatively balanced age structure, not dissimilar to the age structure of Scotland. People aged 45-59 represent the largest age cohort throughout Westhill, Aberdeenshire and Scotland, but Westhill contains a higher percentage of people in this age category. People aged 45-59 are currently of working age. However, it should be noted that within the 25 year period of this study they

will enter the retirement age group, which may necessitate changes in public service provision within Westhill, particularly in relation to healthcare. Table 3.1 also shows that there is a higher percentage of people aged 44 or younger within Westhill compared with Aberdeenshire as a whole, which can be explained by the fact that the dominant type of housing within Westhill is family oriented, low density, private dwellings with gardens set back from street edges.

Table 3.2 shows the gender distribution of populations within Westhill, Aberdeenshire and Scotland, as recorded in the 2011 census. This indicates that the gender structure of the population in Westhill is very similar to that of Scotland, although Aberdeenshire as a whole has a higher percentage of male residents than Scotland does overall.

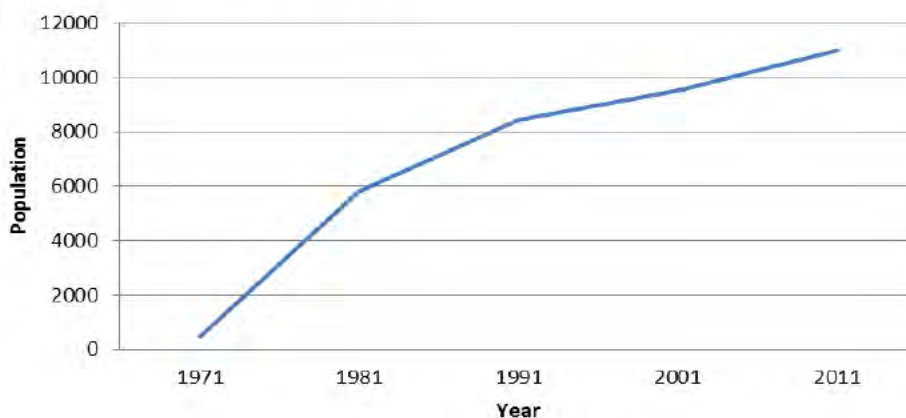
Table 3.2 Gender Distribution of Population in Westhill (Scottish Government, 2011 Census)

	Westhill	Aberdeenshire	Scotland
Percentage males	48.6	49.5	48.5
Percentage females	51.4	50.5	51.5

3.1.2 Recent Trends

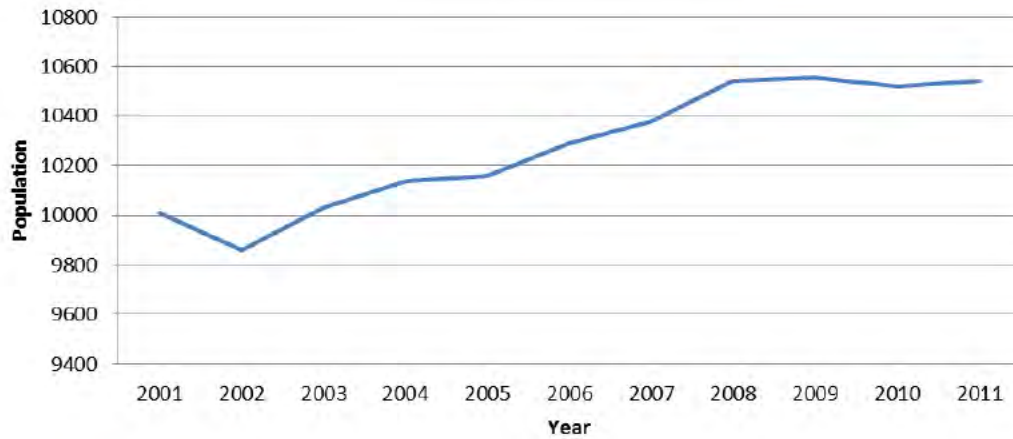
The census results plotted in Figure 3.1 indicate that the population of Westhill increased from a baseline of 470 in 1971 to 5,788 in 1981, from 8,449 in 1991 to 9,498 in the 2001 census, and most recently to 10,984 in the 2011 census.

Figure 3.1 Population Growth in Westhill: 1971-2011



Mid-year estimates published by Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics indicate that after a slight decline between 2001 and 2002 the town's population has increased steadily over recent years, as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Mid Year Population Estimates for Westhill: 2001-2011 (Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics, 2014)



3.1.3 Predicted Future Trends

Table 3.1 above (regarding age distribution) indicates that the population structure of Westhill in 2011 was younger than in the country as a whole. 57.9% of the population were below 44 years whereas this figure was 55.8% across Scotland. This means that providing net outmigration does not occur, the population of Westhill has the potential to increase substantially as the younger population ages and reaches childbearing age.

Figure 3.3 and Table 3.3 show the latest available strategic population forecasts produced by the General Register Officer for Scotland (2014) for Aberdeenshire up to 2035 in terms of expected changes in overall population numbers and up to 2037 in terms of age structure. These statistics clearly indicate that the population of Aberdeenshire is expected to experience significant growth over the next two decades, which will need to be accommodated through infrastructure investments and a substantial increase in the region's housing stock.

Figure 3.3 2012 Based Aberdeenshire Population Projections (GROS, 2014)

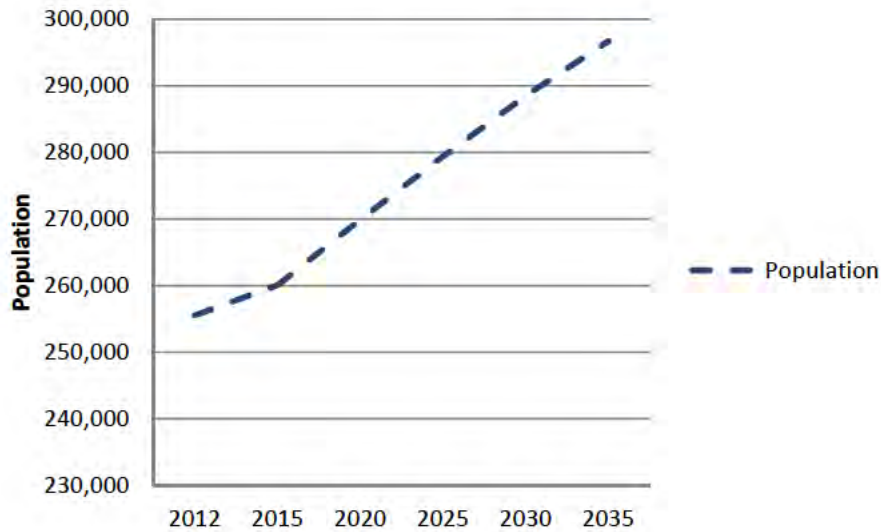


Table 3.3 2012 Based Aberdeenshire Population Projections to 2037 (000's) (GROS, 2014)¹

	2015	2020	2025	2030	2037
All Ages	260.6	269.9	279.4	288.5	299.8
0-15	47.8	49.8	51.0	52.3	54.3
16-29	40.1	40.2	40.2	41.1	43.5
30-49	70.3	68.9	70.6	73.6	75.3
50-64	55.0	57.6	57.6	54.3	51.7
65-74	27.1	30.0	30.3	33.2	35.0
75+	20.1	23.3	29.4	34.0	40.0

The projected age structure for Aberdeenshire up to the year 2037 indicates that:

- The number of school children (age 0 to 15 years) is forecast to increase, although in percentage terms this will fall from 18.7% in the 2011 Census to 18.1% in 2037;
- The number of working age people (age 16 to 64 years) is expected to increase sharply;
- The number of people of retirement age (age 65 and older) is expected to experience the largest growth, with the number of people aged 75 or over expected to double by 2037.

¹ All figures in Table 3.3 are rounded to 1 decimal place

The projected population increase across Aberdeenshire is expected to result from a combination of factors, including increased life expectancy, net immigration and an increase in the birth rate. Population projections are not available specifically for Westhill; however this analysis has not identified any factors which suggest that population projections for Westhill would differ materially from the Aberdeenshire projections reported above.

3.2 Housing

3.2.1 Current Characteristics

According to the 2011 census there were 4,256 occupied households and a total of 4,320 dwellings within Westhill in 2011. The housing stock comprises largely of semi-detached and detached houses which have been developed in small estate groupings since the inception of Westhill in 1963. The newest housing stock is located on the western fringe of Westhill within the Broadshade development, and the oldest dwellings are clustered in central and north eastern areas of the town. There are very few flatted developments within Westhill. Figures 3.4 to 3.6 provide details of local, regional and national tenure breakdown and indicate that there is a high percentage of privately owned homes and a low percentage of socially rented dwellings within Westhill. The lack of socially rented housing is confirmed within the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (2012), which notes that there is currently a waiting list of over 1200 people for council housing in the town and states that Westhill is afforded 'Pressured Area Status'. This allows Aberdeenshire Council to set a 40% affordable housing target for Westhill, instead of the 25% standard target.

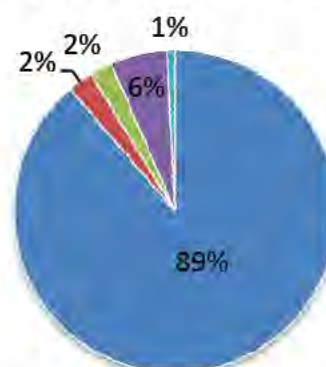
Figure 3.4 Housing Tenure in Westhill (Scottish Government, 2011 Census)

Figure 3.5 Housing Tenure in Aberdeenshire (Scottish Government, 2011 Census)

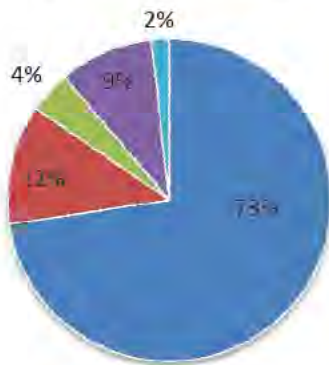
Figure 3.6 Housing Tenure across Scotland (Scottish Government, 2011 Census)

- Percentage of households - Owned
- Percentage of households - Rented from Council
- Percentage of households - Other social rented
- Percentage of households - Private rented
- Percentage of households - Living rent free

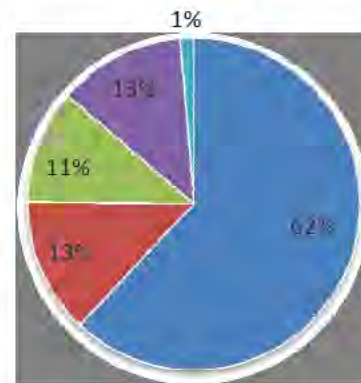
Housing Tenure in Westhill (2011 Census)



Housing Tenure in Aberdeenshire (2011 Census)



Housing Tenure Across Scotland (2011 Census)



3.2.2 Recent Trends

Tables 3.4 and 3.5 show the level of increase in Westhill's housing stock between 2001 and 2013.

Table 3.4 Change in Westhill's Housing Stock between 2001 and 2013 (Aberdeenshire Council, 2014)

Housing Stock	2001	2013	Change
No. of Units	3,424	4588	34%

Table 3.5 Recent Completions in Westhill (Aberdeenshire Council, 2013)

Past Completions	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
No. of Units	59	80	87	132	59	110	527

Table 3.5 shows that between 2008 and the end of 2013 527 additional dwellings were constructed in Westhill. A significant amount of this recent housebuilding activity has occurred immediately to the west of Westhill within the Broadshade site; by 2012 this site had delivered 274 new dwellings, with an additional 31 dwellings expected to be built out during 2014 (Aberdeenshire Council, 2014). It should be noted that all of the land within Westhill that was allocated for housing development within the previous Aberdeenshire Local Plan (2006) has now been built out.

Notable housing related planning applications within Westhill which have been determined between 1st January 2011 and 15th May 2014 are listed in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6 Recently Determined Notable Housing Related Planning Applications (Aberdeenshire Council, 2014)

Reference Number	Site Address	Development Description	Decision
APP/2013/2156	Land at Westhill Golf Club, Westhill Heights, Westhill, AB32 6RY	Erection of 7 No. Dwellinghouses	Withdrawn
APP/2013/1692	Area H1, Broadshade, Westhill, AB32 6AS	Residential Development and Associated Works	Granted
APP/2013/0478	Berryhill, Broadshade, Westhill	Erection of 41 Dwellinghouses with Associated Infrastructure (Compliance with Conditions 3 (Siting, Design, External Appearance, Landscaping & Means of Access); 4 (Compliance with Development Brief); 6 (Landscaping); 7 (Golf Course Buffer); 9 (Wildlife Survey) and 12 (Energy Efficiency Statement) of Outline Planning Permission Reference APP/2005/2608 for Residential Development, Church, Retail Facility, Access Road and Landscaping)	Granted

3.2.3 Predicted Future Trends

Short Term Trends

The adopted Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (2012) includes two land allocations for housing development within Westhill, as detailed in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7 Housing Land Allocations within Adopted Aberdeenshire LDP (Aberdeenshire Council, 2013)

Site Name	Location	NGR (Approximate)	Allocated Capacity	Developer
H1	North West of Westhill - accessed from Broadshade Road off Old Skene Road	(E)381293 (N)807605	190 houses (95 houses in the first phase and 95 houses in the second phase of the plan)	Stewart Milne Homes
H2	Strawberry Field Road, Elrick	(E)381299 (N)806901	10 houses in the first phase of the plan	Private

The 2014 Draft Housing Land Audit for Aberdeenshire states that 4 sites within Westhill have been identified as forming part of Aberdeenshire's effective housing land supply to 2017, including the two sites allocated in the LDP as noted above. Taken together the four identified sites have the potential to contribute 231 units towards Aberdeenshire Council's 5 year effective land supply. Table 3.8 details the expected build programme to 2018 at each potential housing site.

Table 3.8 Westhill Sites within 2013 Draft Housing Land Audit (Aberdeenshire Council, 2013)

Site Reference	Location	Remaining Capacity	5 Year Effective	Developer	Status	Anticipated Build Programme				
						2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
G/WH/H/040	Broadshade	31	31	Stewart Milne Homes	Allocated Under Construction	31	0	0	0	0
G/WH/H/041a	Burnland, Adj Broadstraik Farm	38	0	Gladedale	Full Planning Permission	30	0	0	0	0
G/WH/H/044	West of Broadshade	190	190	Stewart Milne Homes	Full Planning Permission	70	25	35	70	25
G/WH/H/043	Strawberry Field Road, Elrick	10 houses in the first phase of the plan	10	Private	Allocated	0	10	0	0	0

In reference to the aforementioned 40% affordable housing target for Westhill, it should be noted that the Broadshade development complies with this under the terms of planning permission APP/2013/1692. As such affordable housing units will be provided as part of the programmed 190 units coming forward on this site.

Notable housing related planning applications within Westhill which are currently pending consideration (15th May 2014) are listed in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9 Notable Housing Related Planning Applications Currently Pending Consideration (Aberdeenshire Council, 2014)

Reference Number	Site Address	Development Description
APP/2014/0146	Land at Westhill Golf Club Westhill Heights Westhill Aberdeen AB32 6RY	Erection of 7 Dwellinghouses
APP/2010/0289	Land to the South of Strawberry Field Road Westhill	Erection of 10 Houses and Associated Infrastructure

In view of the identified shortage of affordable housing within Westhill, Aberdeenshire Council have established a target of securing 40% affordable housing over the period of the LDP.

Long Term Trends

Between 2010 and 2035 the number of households in Scotland is projected to increase by 23 per cent to 2.89 million – an average of 21,230 additional households per year. Over the same period, Scotland's population is

projected to increase by 10 per cent. Most of the projected increase in households is therefore the result of more people living alone or in smaller households. The average household size is projected to decrease from 2.17 people in 2010 to 1.95 people in 2035 (GROS, June 2012).

3.3 Employment

3.3.1 Current Characteristics

Overview

Employment sites within Westhill are concentrated around the Arnhall and Westhill Business Parks located south of the A944, although some service based employment is associated with the three main retail sites detailed in Section 2.7. Arnhall and Westhill Business Parks comprise of office blocks interspersed with workshops and storage yards, with spacious parking and landscaped grounds positioned around most of the office blocks. Westhill Business Park is owned by Aberdeenshire Council whereas Arnhall Business Park is owned privately.

Employment Land

Data extracted from the 2012 Aberdeenshire Employment Land Audit and shown in Table 3.10 indicates that the established supply of employment land in Westhill is 7.42 hectares split across four sites, three of which are located to the south of the town within the Arnhall and Westhill Business Parks. All of the sites identified in the land audit are considered as marketable and indeed all are currently under construction.

Table 3.10 Employment Land Allocations within Adopted Aberdeenshire LDP (Aberdeenshire Council, 2014)

Location	Established Land Supply (ha)	Developer
Arnhall Business Park	0.34	Westhill Development Co
Westhill Business Park	0.68	Stewart Milne
Arnhall Phase 2	2.46	Private
Westhill ALDP E1	9.60	N/A
Total	13.08	

Economic Activity, Employment & Unemployment

Table 3.11 shows the percentage of people within Westhill, Aberdeenshire and Scotland who are economically active, as recorded by the 2011 Census. The data for Westhill is reproduced in Figure 3.7 (pie chart).

Table 3.11 Rates of Economic Activity (Scottish Government, 2011 Census)

	Westhill	Aberdeenshire	Scotland
All persons 16 to 74	8244	187492	3970530
Percentage economically active	78.3	74.9	69
Percentage Employees - part-time	15.3	15.2	13.3
Percentage Employees - full-time	48.8	44.1	39.6
Percentage self-employed	7.9	10.2	7.5
Percentage unemployed	1.8	2.5	4.8
Percentage full-time student - employed	4.2	2.5	2.9
Percentage full-time student - unemployed	0.3	0.4	0.8
Percentage economically inactive	21.7	25.1	31
Percentage retired	11.6	13.6	14.9
Percentage student	3.7	3.1	5.5
Percentage looking after home or family	4.3	4.2	3.6
Percentage long-term sick or disabled	1.3	2.7	5.1
Percentage Other	0.8	1.4	1.9

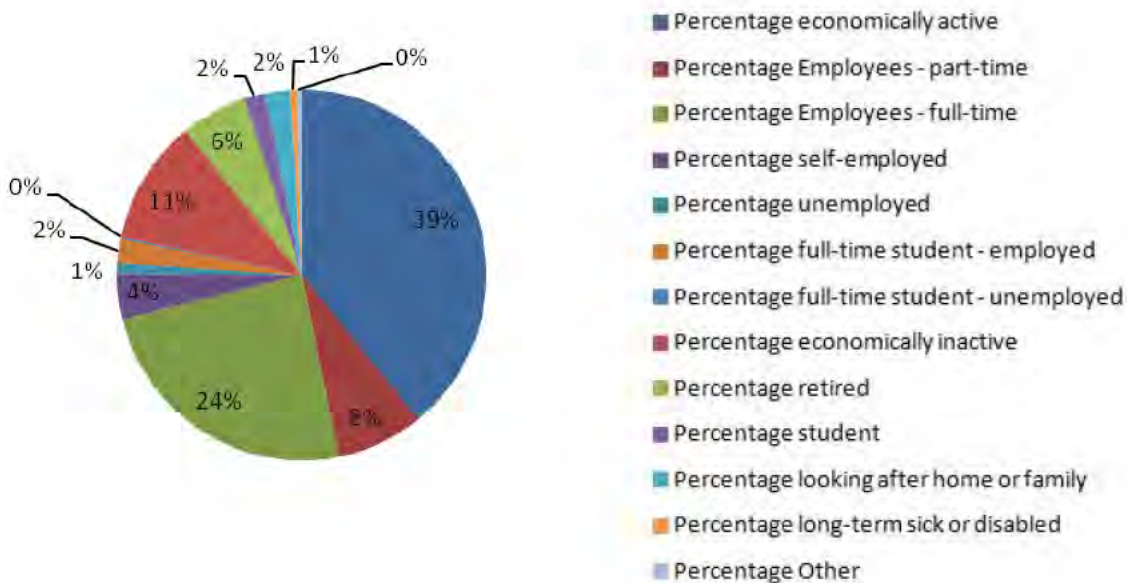
Figure 3.7 Rates of Economic Activity within Westhill (Scottish Government, 2011 Census)


Table 3.11 indicates that Westhill has a significantly higher percentage of economically active residents compared with Aberdeenshire and Scotland. The data also shows that a significantly higher percentage of the population of Westhill is in full-time employment compared with Aberdeenshire, although the town has a lower percentage of students than across Scotland as a whole. The unemployment statistics included in Table 3.11 are not considered representative of official unemployment rates. However, their relative scale suggests that Westhill is highly prosperous and has very low unemployment. This is confirmed within Table 3.12, which provides details of the official unemployment rate during 2012 across Westhill, Aberdeenshire and Scotland.

Table 3.12 Unemployment Statistics (NOMIS, 2013)

Unemployment (2012 Monthly Average)	Male	Female	Total	Rate (%)
Westhill	12	10	22	0.4
Aberdeenshire	1,420	731	2,151	1.3
Scotland	98,153	44,304	142,457	4

Westhill is defined as 2003 CAS (Census Area Statistic) Wards of Westhill Central and Elrick. Information is aggregated from ward data

Separate statistics published by Aberdeenshire Council (Aberdeenshire Council, 2013) indicate that as of September 2013 Aberdeenshire had the second lowest unemployment rate as measured by the Job Seekers Allowance Claimant Count (0.9%) of the 32 Scottish local authorities after the Shetland Isles (0.8%). This compares extremely favourably to the average rate for Scotland of 3.3% and the UK average of 3.2%. The number of claimants of Jobseekers Allowance within Aberdeenshire stood at 1,453 in September 2013.

Travel to Work

Westhill falls within the Aberdeen Travel to Work area, which covers all of Aberdeen City and the majority of land within Aberdeenshire, except northern parts of the Council area. Table 3.13 shows the breakdown of commuting modes for employed residents of Westhill.

Table 3.13 Travel to Work Modes (Scottish Government, 2011 Census)

	Westhill	Aberdeenshire	Scotland
% Car (including passengers car pools and taxis)	77.4	71	62.4
% Train	0.2	1	3.7
% Bus	5.1	3.5	10
% On foot	5.6	7.8	9.9
% Other	4.5	4.6	3.1
% Works mainly at or from home	7.2	12.1	10.8

The data in Table 3.13 shows that a high percentage of residents within Westhill commute by car, and in contrast, lower than average percentages of workers commute by bus or on foot. These findings raise a number of potential implications, including:

- The high dependency on car commuting implies that the road network within and around Westhill is likely to experience significant pressures, especially during peak periods.
- The low percentage of residents who commute on foot could be explained by the clear separation of residential and employment land uses within Westhill, in that only a small percentage of Westhill's employed workforce may live within walking distance of their employment location. Alternatively a higher percentage of the population may live within walking distance of their employment location but are prevented or discouraged from walking to work by physical and other constraints. Such constraints could include vehicle-dominated street layouts and limited road crossing points for pedestrians.
- The low percentage of residents who commute by bus could imply that the bus routes which pass through Westhill and the Park & Ride facility located in Kingswells (approximately 3 km east of Westhill) have only a limited influence on the commuting patterns of Westhill's residents. See section 3.5.1 of this report for additional details regarding the Kingswells Park & Ride Facility.
- Taken together the high dependency on car commuting and the low percentages of commuting by bus or on foot, suggest that the majority of employed residents are likely to commute relatively long distances, and thus may not work within Westhill, despite the significant employment opportunities which exist within the town.

Employment Sectors

The sectoral breakdown of employment held by residents of Westhill, Aberdeenshire and Scotland as a whole is detailed in Table 3.14.

Table 3.14 Employees by Employment Sector (2011 Census)

	Westhill	Aberdeenshire	Scotland
% all in employment who work in agriculture and fishing	0.5	4.7	2
% all in employment who work in mining and quarrying	10.8	7.4	1.4
% all in employment who work in manufacturing	6.4	9.9	7.7
% all in employment who work in electricity gas steam and air conditioning	0.4	0.5	0.8
% all in employment who work in water supply, sewage waste management and remediation activities	0.2	0.6	0.8
% all in employment who work in construction	6.3	8.8	8.0
% all in employment who work in wholesale and retail trade, including repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	13.6	14.4	15.0

	Westhill	Aberdeenshire	Scotland
% all in employment who work in transport and storage	4.4	5.1	5.0
% all in employment who work in accommodation and food service activities	4.4	4.8	6.3
% all in employment who work in information and communication	2.6	1.6	2.7
% all in employment who work in financial and insurance activities	2.5	1.3	4.5
% all in employment who work in real estate activities	1.2	1.0	1.2
% all in employment who work in professional scientific and technical activities	12.7	8.3	5.2
% all in employment who work in administrative and support service activities	3.4	3.7	4.3
% all in employment who work in public administration and defence - compulsory social security	4.7	4.3	7.0
% all in employment who work in education	9.7	8.1	8.4
% all in employment who work in human health and social work activities	12.9	11.8	15.0
% all in employment who work in other industries	3.3	3.8	4.9

Table 3.14 emphasises the diverse employment sectors which residents of Westhill are employed in. However, it should be noted that this data does not represent the breakdown of employment within Westhill. The data shows that some economic sectors are particularly important employment providers; in particular a relatively high percentage of employed residents in Westhill work in “professional scientific and technical activities”. This could relate to the cluster of subsea-engineering firms located within Westhill, or alternatively this could be explained by the dominance of the oil and gas sector across the North East region, most particularly within Aberdeen City. It should also be noted that a significant number of firms from the renewable energy sector are located within Westhill.

Table 3.15 lists Westhill’s main employers, as identified within Aberdeenshire Council’s Westhill Profile Factsheet 2013.

Table 3.15 Main Westhill Employers

Baker Hughes	Mi Swaco
Bibby Offshore	NCS Survey
Cameron	Nessco Group
Central Insurance Services	Proserv
Chap (Holdings)	Prospect Hallin

Clydesdale Bank	Red Spider
Cooperative Insurance Society	Schlumberger Oilfield Services
Costco Wholesale UK	Scottish Water
Divex	Skene Medical Centre
Elmar Services	Stewart Milne Group
Helix RDS	Subsea 7
Holiday Inn	TAQA Bratani
Instalec Networking	Technip Offshore
Marks and Spencer	Tesco Stores
McIntosh Plant Hire	Tritech International

As evidenced by Table 3.15, subsea engineering is a key growth sector and major employer within Westhill. There are around 290 subsea companies located in Aberdeen City and Shire, with the companies located in Westhill alone accounting for over 6,000 employees. Aberdeenshire Council declared in May 2012 that Westhill is a global subsea centre of excellence, and they have committed to supporting the growth of the Westhill subsea cluster, including through releasing additional employment land where necessary and appropriate.

3.3.2 Recent Trends

Table 3.16 shows the level of industrial land supply within Westhill over the period 2005-2011:

Table 3.16 Industrial Land Supply (Aberdeenshire Council, 2012)

Industrial Land	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Build Rate (ha)	0.9	4.1	0.6	14.7	3.1	0.3	2.5

As shown in Table 3.15, Westhill experienced low employment land take-up in 2010. A similar situation occurred across Aberdeen City and Shire due to the high risk in lending in the current financial climate, compounded by a historic lack of serviced and ready to be developed, commercial development land. However, take up of employment land increased in Westhill and across Aberdeenshire in 2011.

Notable planning applications regarding proposed retail and other town centre developments within Westhill which were determined between 1st January 2011 and 15th May 2014 are detailed in Table 3.17:

Table 3.17 Recently Determined Notable Employment Related Planning Applications (Aberdeenshire Council, 2014)

Reference Number	Site Address	Development Description	Decision
APP/2013/3963	Bibby Offshore Ltd Peregrine Road Westhill	Erection of Industrial Unit and Associated Ancillary Office Space, External Compound Area and Parking without Complying with Condition 2 (Office Space to not exceed 545 square metres) and Condition 3 (Gross Floor Area to not exceed 2,109 square metres) of Planning Permission Reference APP/2012/4120	Granted
APP/2013/3963	Peregrine House Peregrine Road Westhill Business Park Westhill AB32 6JL	Alterations and Extension to Office	Granted
APP/2013/4060	Site C Peregrine Road Westhill Aberdeen	Erection of Warehouse Unit and Associated Ancillary Office Space, External Compound Area and Parking. Use of Classes 4, 5 and 6	Granted
APP/2013/4098	Site at Silvertrees Drive Silvertrees Business Park Westhill AB32 6BH	Conditions 3 (Siting, Design, External Appearance, Landscaping, Means of Access, Finished Levels, Drainage), 4 (Landscaping), 5 (Drainage) and 9 (Loading, Turning and Parking) of Planning Permission in Principle Reference G/APP/2010/2456	Granted
APP/2013/2476	Site C Peregrine Road Westhill Business Park Westhill	Erection of Warehouse and Ancillary Office Space, External Compound Area and Parking (Use Classes 4, 5 and 6)	Refused
APP/2013/2529	Site at Silvertrees Drive Silvertrees Business Park Westhill AB32 6BH	Erection of Workshop and Office (Class 5) with Associated Services, Yard and Car Parking	Granted
APP/2013/2371	Subsea 7 Prospect Road Amhall Business Park Westhill AB32 6FE	Extension to Office Building and Erection of Raised Parking Area	Granted
APP/2013/0772	Site at Peregrine Road Westhill	Erection of Industrial Unit and associated Ancillary Office Space with External Compound Area and Parking	Granted
APP/2013/1166	East Lochside Steading Skene Westhill AB32 6YJ	Conversion and Extension to Steading to form Offices with Associated Car Parking and Footpath	Withdrawn
APP/2013/0813	Schlumberger Oilfield (Uk) Plc Enterprise Drive Westhill Industrial Estate Westhill AB32 6TQ	Extension to Lab Building	Granted
APP/2013/0677	Phase 2/3 Amhall Business Park Prospect Road Westhill AB32 6UF	Erection of 6 no. 2 Storey Office Buildings	Granted

Reference Number	Site Address	Development Description	Decision
APP/2013/0617	Sub-drill Endeavour Drive Amhall Business Park Westhill AB32 6UF	Extension to Warehouse and Redevelopment of Car Park	Granted
APP/2012/4120	Warehouse Unit Peregrine Road Westhill	Erection of Industrial Unit and Associated Ancillary Office Space, External Compound Area and Parking	Granted
APP/2012/3569	Site at Peregrine Road Westhill	Erection of Warehouse Unit and Associated Ancillary Office Space, External Compound Area and Parking	Granted
APP/2012/1030	Vacant Site North East of Prospect Road Amhall Business Park Westhill AB32 6FE	Erection of 2 Office Buildings and Cafe	Granted
APP/2012/1016	Site at Prospect Road Westhill	Erection of Office Accommodation and Car Parking	Granted
APP/2012/0755	Technip Uk Ltd Enterprise Drive Westhill Industrial Estate Westhill AB32 6TQ	Erection of Building for Use as High Pressure Test Facility	Granted
APP/2012/0654	Site at Prospect Road Westhill	Erection of Office Accommodation and Car Parking	Withdrawn
APP/2012/0247	Prospect Point Prospect Road Amhall Business Park Westhill	Erection of 2 Office Buildings and Cafe	Withdrawn
APP/2011/3134	Silvertrees Tarland Road Westhill	Erection of Warehouse/Workshop and Offices with Associated Services, Yard and Parking	Granted
APP/2011/2294	Technip UK Ltd (Aberdeen) Enterprise Drive Westhill Industrial Estate Westhill AB32 6TQ	Demolish Existing Buildings and Erection of New Office Development, Multi-Storey Car Park and Covered Walkway	Granted

Reference Number	Site Address	Development Description	Decision
APP/2011/0747	Site 7 Prospect Road Arnhall Business Park Westhill AB32 6FE	Erection of Office Building and Associated Car Parking	Granted
APP/2009/0318	Land at Enterprise Drive Westhill Industrial Estate Westhill AB32 6TQ	Erection of 2 no Office Units, Associated Parking and Site Landscaping	Granted

3.3.3 Predicted Future Trends

The adopted Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (2012) includes one land allocation for employment uses within Westhill; Area E1. This site is situated south of the A944 on the south eastern fringe of the town and currently has planning permission in principle for the construction of Arnhall Business Park Phase 3. In addition, two sites within Arnhall and Westhill Business Parks are allocated as existing employment land which requires to be safeguarded for future employment uses.

Notable employment related planning applications within Westhill which are currently pending consideration (as of 15th May 2014) are listed in Table 3.18.

Table 3.18 Employment Related Planning Applications Currently Pending Consideration (Aberdeenshire Council, 2014)

Reference Number	Site Address	Development Description
APP/2014/1419	Plots 1 & 2 Kingshill Park Venture Drive Westhill AB32 6FL	Erection of 2 No. 2-Storey Office Buildings (Revised Layout of Plots E & F)
APP/2014/1384	Site At Silvertrees Drive Silvertrees Business Park Westhill Aberdeenshire AB32 6BH	Conditions: 3 (Siting, Design, External Appearance, Landscaping, Means of Access, Finished Levels and Drainage); 4 Landscaping 5: External Drainage and 9: Loading and Parking of Planning Permission in Principle Reference G/APP/2010/2456
APP/2014/1356	Land To The East Of Arnhall Business Park Bound To The North By A944 And To The South By B9119 (Tarlard Road), Westhill (Arnhall Phase 3).	Variation of Conditions on Planning Permission Reference: APP/2006/2551: Condition 1: Extend Time Limit for Submission of Matters Specified and Condition 14: Adjust Floorspace in Accordance with Revised Transport Assessment

Reference Number	Site Address	Development Description
APP/2013/3560	Phase 2/3 Amhall Business Park Prospect Road Westhill AB32 6UF	Erection of 5 Office Buildings (Revised Scheme)
: APP/2013/3019	Amhall Phase 3 Amhall Business Park Westhill	Conditions 3 (Phasing), 4 (Design Statement), 5 (Strategic Landscaping), 7 (Travel Plan), 8 (Tree Management Scheme), 9 (Waste Management Scheme), 10 (Construction Method Statement), 11 (Noise Assessment), 12 (Archaeological Investigation) and 13 (details of ground preparation works phase only) of Planning Permission in Principle (Ref: APP/2006/2551) (Revised Scheme)
APP/2014/0385	Holiday Inn Westhill Drive Westhill AB32 6TT	Alterations and Extension to Hotel to Form 43 Additional Rooms

3.4 Retail & Town Centre

3.4.1 Current Characteristics

The retail landscape of Westhill is dominated by a small number of sites: two supermarkets, a Costco warehouse store, a garden centre and Westhill Shopping Centre.

Westhill Shopping Centre, an indoor complex located at the junction of Old Skene Road and Westhill Drive, was planned in the mid 1970s for completion in five phases to suit the towns growing population. Work started with an arcade of nine shop units plus associated offices above which was completed in 1980; phase two then included the bank at the eastern end of the centre, plus a return leg of seven more shop units; phase three marked the construction of a supermarket, with four additional shop units, and associated car parking; and phases four and five subsequently added small extensions. The centre was designed in the prevailing rationalised vernacular style of the 1970's using concrete block work walls with concrete interlocking tiles on monopitch roofs. The shopping centre currently houses a range of convenience and comparison retail shops including Marks & Spencers.

The Aberdeenshire LDP 2012 designates a town centre area for planning purposes, which is situated around the Westhill Shopping Centre at the junction of Old Skene Road and Westhill Drive. However, Westhill does not have an identifiable high street and convenience retail outlets are dispersed throughout the town, with notable clusters located along Westhill Drive.

3.4.2 Recent Trends

Local level retail statistics are not available for Westhill. However, Aberdeenshire Council has collated statistics regarding the provision of shops across the Garioch Committee Area of Aberdeenshire, which Westhill is situated within. Figure 3.8 shows that the number of shops in the Garioch area decreased by 18% from 1981 to 2013. However, against a backdrop of national economic recession commencing in 2008, no shops within the Garioch area are recorded as closing between 2008 and 2013. This indicates that the retail sector within Garioch is

relatively resilient, which is perhaps due to the dominance of convenience retail outlets and the dependency of the population across this largely rural area on these.

Figure 3.8 Retail Trends across Garioch (Aberdeenshire Council, 2013)

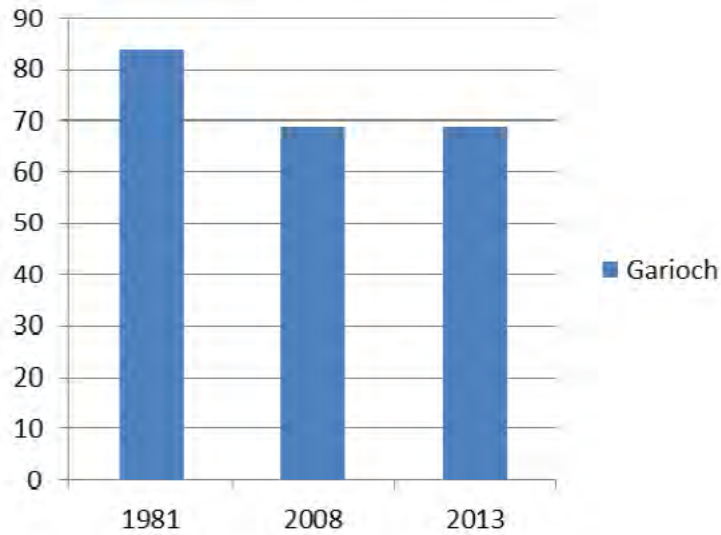
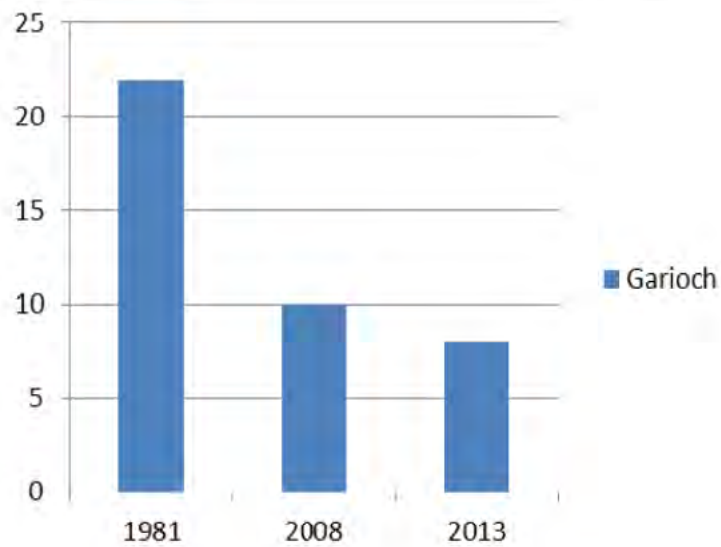


Figure 3.9 indicates that the number of post offices across Garioch fell by 64% from 1981 to 2013, including a 20% fall between 2008 and 2013. Despite this decline Westhill has retained its post office, which is located within Westhill Shopping Centre on Old Skene Road.

Figure 3.9 Levels of Economic Activity within Westhill (Aberdeenshire Council, 2013)



Notable planning applications regarding proposed retail and other town centre developments within Westhill which have been determined since 1st January 2009 are detailed in Table 3.19:

Table 3.19 Recent Retail Planning Applications (Aberdeenshire Council, 2014)

Reference Number	Site Address	Development Description	Decision
Westhill Shopping Centre Old Skene Road Skene Westhill AB32 6LR	APP/2012/2154	Erection of Retail Development, Alterations to Shopping Centre, Car Park Reconfiguration, Landscaping and Access	Granted

3.4.3 Predicted Future Trends

No specific retail projections are available for Westhill or Aberdeenshire. However, if the population growth projections reported in the baseline report materialise this would significantly increase demand for retail and service industries within the town. Therefore there is likely to be a need for the current level of retail provision to be enhanced over the 25 year period of this study.

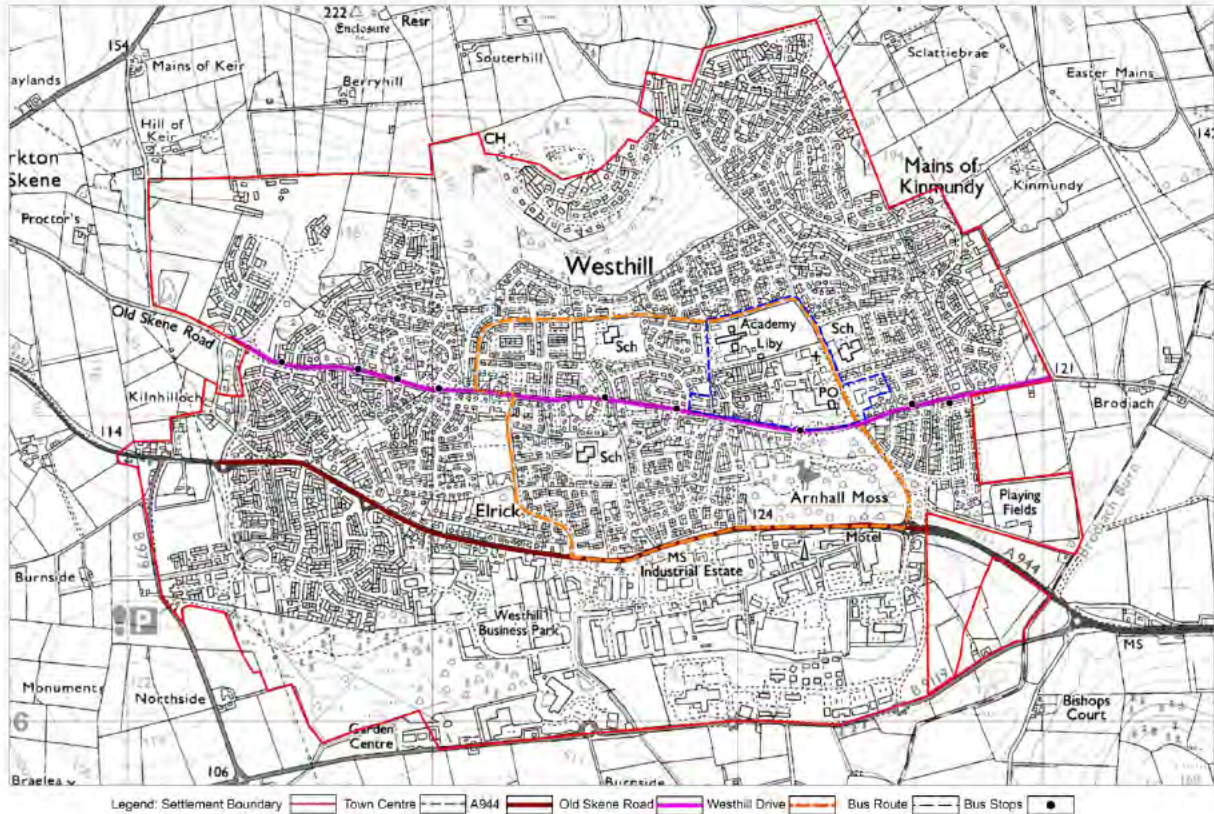
3.5 Transport

Numerous reports including the Westhill Capacity Study (2008) and the Aberdeenshire LDP MIR (2013) have identified transport as a key issue likely to affect the future growth of Westhill. Consequently issues related to transport have been afforded dedicated subsections throughout this report.

3.5.1 Current Characteristics

Figure 3.10 provides an overview of the current road network within Westhill.

Figure 3.10 Main Roads in Westhill



Road Network

Westhill lies approximately 6.5 km west of Aberdeen at its nearest point and is situated on the A944 Aberdeen to Alford road. The A944 provides access to Westhill from the east and west, with minor roads, including the B979, providing access to the north and south. The A944 is constrained by speed restrictions and a number of roundabouts, including Six Mile Roundabout at NGR 384123 806316 which currently serves as a gateway feature on the eastern approach to Westhill.

Two road characters are present: main streets, which aim to move large volumes of traffic through Westhill efficiently; and local streets, which provide connectivity around neighbourhoods and access to properties. Due to the fact that many of the industrial/commercial and residential estates in Westhill have been individually planned and developed, some parts of the road network are inefficient and hinder permeability, particularly for non-vehicular transport modes.

Public Transport

Data obtained from Aberdeenshire Council indicates that 6 bus routes operating from Aberdeen currently serve Westhill, passing along Old Skene Road and/or Westhill Drive:

218 Alford - Dunecht - Elrick - Westhill - Aberdeen

N17 Aberdeen - Westhill - Elrick (Night Service)

X17 Aberdeen - Woodend - Westhill - Elrick (Circular)

210 Aberdeen - Westhill - Torphins - Aboyne - Ballater

402A Elgin - Rothes - Rhynie – Aberdeen

777 Oldmeldrum - Inverurie - Westhill - Kingswells - Aberdeen Airport Kirkhills Industrial Estate

In addition, a local Dial-a-bus provides internal transport within Westhill and a Park & Ride facility provides bus regular transport from Kingswells, approximately 3 km east of Westhill, to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, Aberdeen City Centre, Bridge of Don Park & Ride and Dubford. This Park & Ride facility includes an indoor heated and lit waiting room, accessible toilets and a covered outdoor cycle canopy.

The nearest train station to Westhill is located approximately 6 km north east in Dyce on the mainline line between Inverurie and Aberdeen. This railway offers direct links to major cities including Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Cycle Network

Westhill benefits from an established network of cycle routes within and around the town. A largely off road cycle route links Westhill with Aberdeen via the A944 and Old Skene Road. This route was partially funded by Nestrans. In addition, within the settlement of Westhill there a number of off-road cycle paths and on-road cycle lanes which connect almost all of the town's main streets. In recognition of this cycle network Aberdeenshire Council have designated Westhill as a 'No Excuse Zone' for cycling.

3.5.2 Recent Trends

The street network within Westhill has expanded southwards and westwards in recent years to accommodate housing developments and Arnhall Business Park, linked to the growth of the subsea sector within the town.

To enable development of Arnhall Business Park Phase 3 to proceed, work is currently ongoing to convert the Six Mile Roundabout on the A944 immediately east of Westhill into a controlled junction. This should help to alleviate traffic congestion, particularly at peak periods, and may enable limited further development on the eastern edge of Westhill.

3.5.3 Predicted Future Trends

The most significant planned change to the transport infrastructure around Westhill is the forthcoming construction of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR), which is scheduled to begin in 2015 and be completed by 2018. The AWPR will pass east of Westhill in a north-south orientation, with a new junction being created to connect the AWPR to the A944 east of Westhill. In addition, Transport Scotland has committed to a phased programme of dualing the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness. The A96 is approximately 4 km north of Westhill at its closest point and can be accessed via the A944 and B979.

Although no specific plans have yet been devised, officers from Aberdeenshire Council have indicated that the Council is eager to expand the cycle network within and around Westhill. If the cycle network was substantially upgraded Aberdeenshire Council could submit a bid for Westhill to be recognised nationally as a 'Cycle Town', in line with provisions within the NPF3 Proposed Plan (see section 5.1.3 of this report).

3.6 Education

Numerous reports including the Westhill Capacity Study (2008) and the Aberdeenshire LDP Main Issues Report (2013) have identified education provision as a key issue likely to affect the future growth of Westhill. Consequently issues related to education have been afforded dedicated subsections throughout this report.

3.6.1 Current Characteristics & Predicted Future Trends

Primary School rolls are forecasted to increase by 14.2% and academies by 5.0% across Aberdeenshire between 2012 and 2018. Overall, it is forecast that there will be a considerable increase in pupil numbers – of the order of 10% - across most of Aberdeenshire up to 2018. Westhill is identified as one of the educational clusters likely to see significant growth in rolls, and projected school roll increases across Garioch account for half of the total forecasted net increase in school rolls within Aberdeenshire to 2018.

Table 3.20 details the capacities, current rolls and forecasted rolls at each of the five schools within Westhill. The catchment area of each school is shown on Figure 3.11.

Figure 3.11 School Catchments serving Westhill

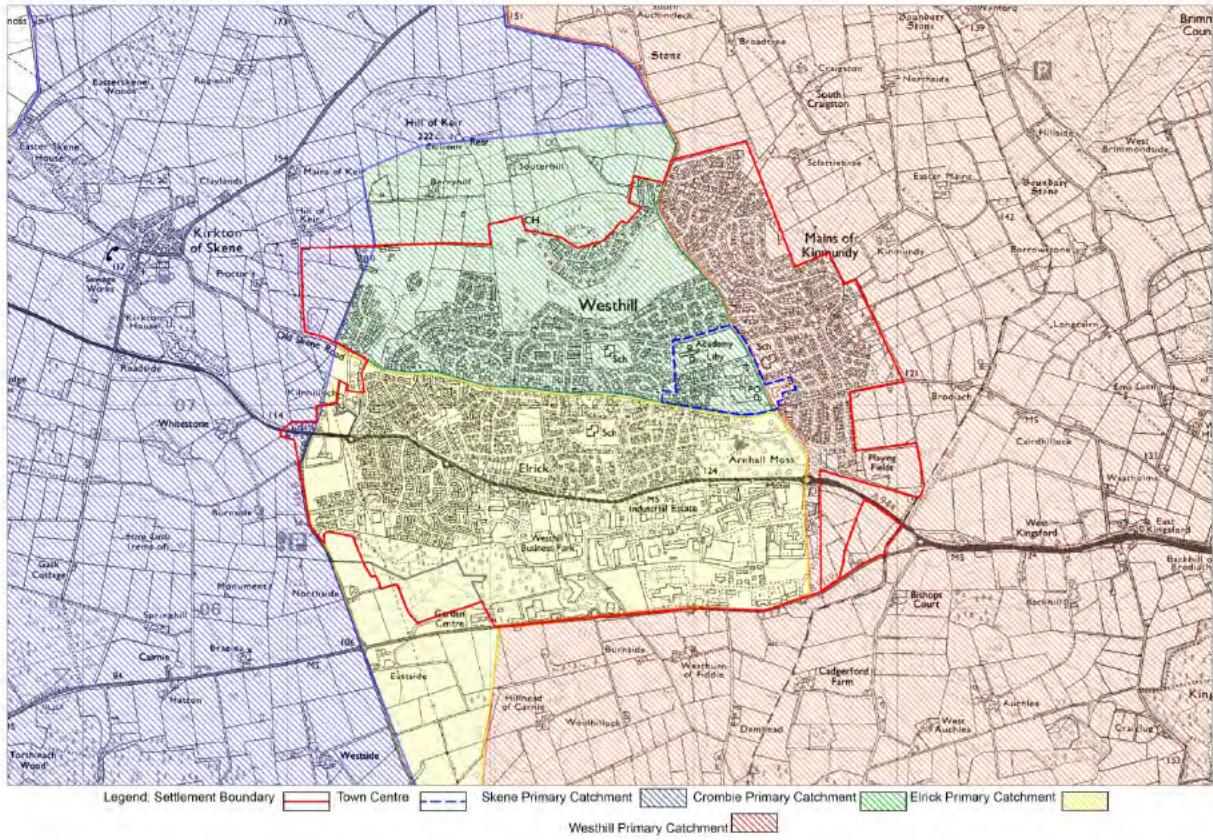


Table 3.20 School Capacities & Forecasted Rolls

	Predicted Pupils per Household (2013+)	2012 (Actual Role)	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Westhill Academy	0.25							
Forecasted Roll		897	889	907	890	887	868	839
Capacity		970	970	970	970	970	970	970
Crombie Primary School	0.4							
Forecasted Roll		295	307	305	307	306	303	297
Capacity		333	333	333	333	333	333	333
Elrick Primary School								
Forecasted Roll		398	421 actual roll, forecasted roll was 405	411	416	408	394	386
Capacity		387	387	387	387	387	387	387
Working Capacity			415	469	469	469	469	469
Skene Primary School	0.4							
Forecasted Roll		25	39 actual roll, forecasted roll was 54	87	117	140	164	188
Capacity		71	71	71	71	71	71	71
Working Capacity			96	96	96	96	96	96
Westhill Primary School	0.4							
Forecasted Roll		249	256	237	235	211	202	195
Capacity		333	333	333	333	333	333	333
Total Primary Roll		967	1,022	1,040	1,074	1,066	1,064	1,066
Capacity – Primary ()		1,124	1,177	1,1231	1,231	1,231	1,231	1,231

Table 3.20 indicates that although Westhill Academy, Crombie Primary and Westhill Primary are expected to have sufficient capacity to accommodate the forecasted pupil roll to 2018 and beyond, Elrick Primary is already operating above normal capacity levels and the roll at Skene Primary is forecasted to exceed ‘working capacity’ in 2015. However, a report to the Garioch Area Committee of Aberdeenshire Council in January 2014 regarding school accommodation management noted that “*pupils expected from the Skene development (the Broadshade site) are currently presenting at Elrick (Primary Schools) which has caused the greater than expected roll whilst Skene is presenting as lower than (previously) forecast*”. To address capacity issues at Elrick Primary School an additional classroom has been created, giving an interim working capacity of 415, and two additional classrooms are planned to be completed within the school’s existing buildings by August 2014. No immediate capacity management measures are planned for Skene School, as the aforementioned school accommodation management report states that “*owing to the roll being lower than that which is predicted officers shall monitor this on a monthly basis and action further accommodation when appropriate to meet the demands*”.

Table 3.20 demonstrates that despite capacity issues arising at Elrick and Skene schools, overall the school estate within Westhill should be capable of accommodating forecasted rolls until 2018 and beyond. However, it should be noted that Aberdeenshire Council plan to undertake a catchment rezoning exercise in Westhill late in 2014 to address short term capacity issues at individual schools. In terms of any new school provision beyond 2018, Aberdeenshire Council Education Service standards suggest that any proposed new site for a primary school should be capable of taking up to 462 pupils, even if a school is not initially built of that size. Any potential new primary school site should be rectangular in shape, reasonably level and be at least 3.0 ha; with an upper limit of 5ha. Aberdeenshire Council Education Service has also indicated that a rezoning exercise may be undertaken towards the end of 2014.

3.7 Community Infrastructure (excluding Transport & Education)

3.7.1 Current Characteristics

Existing public services and leisure facilities within Westhill include²:

- Free standing swimming pool on Westhill Academy campus (Hays Way)
- Westhill Community Centre (Hays Way)
- Westhill Library (Westhill Drive)
- Westhill Golf Course (Westhill Heights)
- Ashdale Hall: multi-purpose community hall (Westhill Road)
- Denmen Park: bowling green, tennis court, Pavilion function room & kitchen (Old Skene Road)
- Lawsondale Pavilion: two meeting rooms and outdoor pitches (Arnhall Crescent)

² Access point/location denoted in brackets.

- Peter Nicol Squash & Fitness Centre: private gym (Straik Road.A944)
- Skene Health Centre. This incorporates Skene Medical Group GP practice, Westhill Clinic (providing District Nurses, Health Visitors, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapy, Podiatrist and Speech Therapist, Community Psychiatric Nurse), the Westhill Social Work Department and an NHS Dental Practice. Visiting Consultants also hold clinics in Skene Healthcare Centre. (Discovery Drive)
- Westdyke Leisure Centre (Westdyke Avenue)
- Carnie all-weather pitch (Carnie Crescent)
- Westhill Men's Shed (Hays Way)

3.7.2 Predicted Future Trends

In the short term, the Garioch area Community Planning Group (part of the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership) is currently undertaking feasibility work regarding the provision of additional community facilities, potentially including the establishment of a youth cafe, within Westhill.

In the longer term, changes in the age profile of Westhill, and in particular an increase in the proportion of the population over 60 will likely result in an increased demand for healthcare within the town. Coupled with the population projections this may necessitate increased provision of GP and other primary care services.

3.8 Public Open Space & Public Realm

3.8.1 Current Characteristics

Open spaces serve a variety of functions including the provision of formal and informal recreation, shelter and natural habitat. The following areas of natural heritage significance contribute to the setting and character of Westhill:

- Arnhall Moss;
- Hill of Keir;
- Denman Park;
- Carnie Woods.

3.9 Utilities & Services

3.9.1 Current Characteristics

The 2008 capacity study stated that combined drainage from Westhill is pumped into the Aberdeen trunk sewer system, and while there are no capacity issues with the treatment works in Aberdeen City the trunk sewer system has limited capacity to cope with further flows. The 2008 capacity study also noted that due to current and planned development some of the sewage pumping stations in the area are at capacity and some of the water service reservoirs are close to capacity.

In terms of electricity infrastructure, a review of Ordnance Survey maps indicates that a high voltage overhead transmission line (OHL) passes immediately west of Westhill. This OHL crosses the A944 at (E)381268 (N)806849 and runs directly south through the recently constructed Burnland housing development. The location and capacities of substations serving Westhill are not known to AMEC E&I at the time of writing this report.

3.9.2 Recent Trends

Available information suggests that no significant upgrades of the water and sewerage network which serves Westhill have taken place since the previous capacity study was prepared. However, the Aberdeenshire LDP 2016 Main Issues Report (2012) indicates that there is sufficient water treatment capacity available to support growth within the town.

3.9.3 Predicted Future Trends

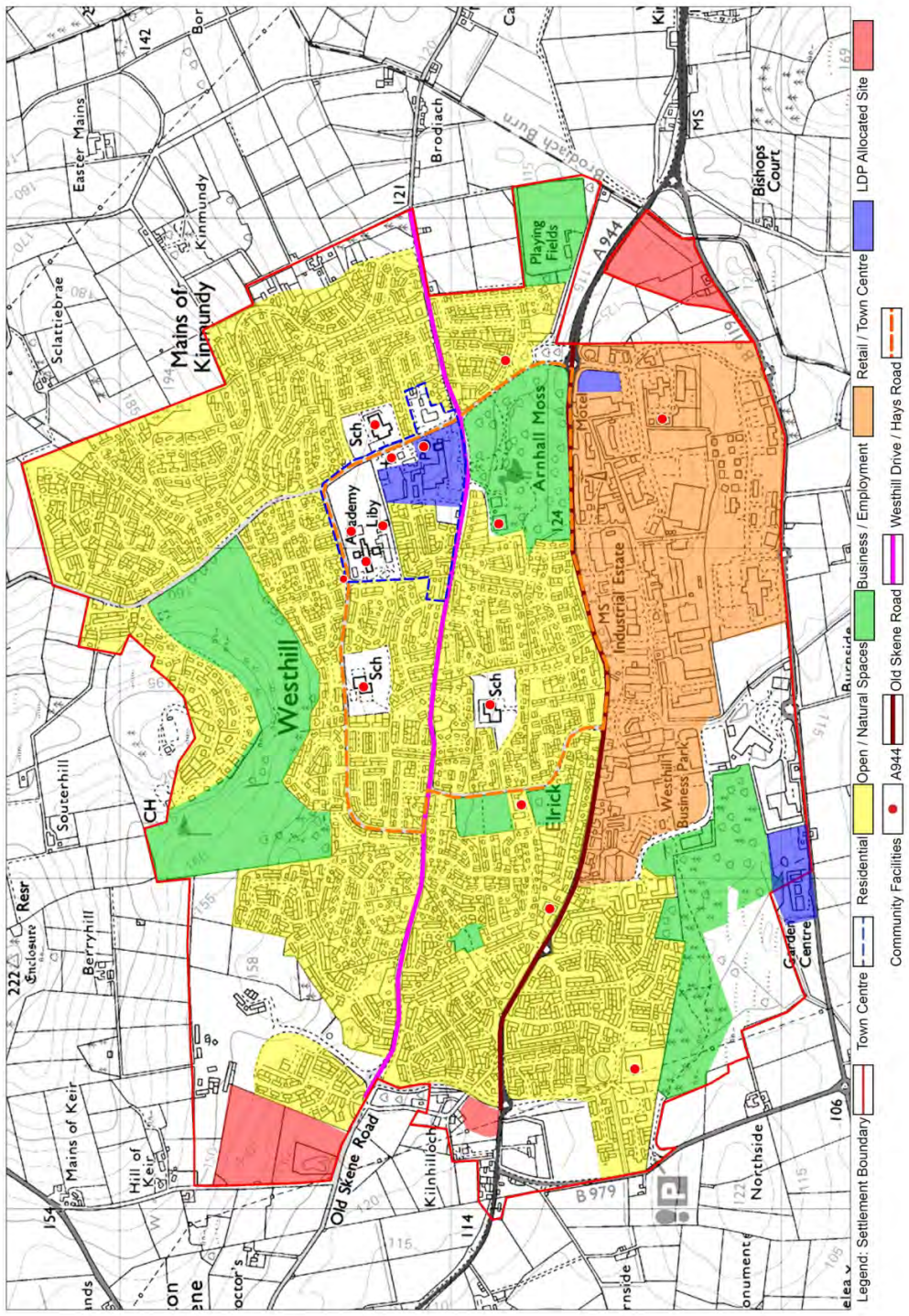
Significant future development in Westhill will require the construction of a new wastewater pumping station to take flows from the site to the main pumping station. In addition to upgrading of the pumping system and improvements to the offsite sewers, such as the existing trunk sewer to Aberdeen, part of the receiving sewer network within Aberdeen may possibly require improvements. Under Scottish Water's funding arrangements, new investment in drainage to service the level of expansion of Westhill envisaged in this study would have to be met by developers.

It should be noted that the provision of water and electricity infrastructure is inherently demand-led. Scottish Water and SSE Power Distribution have statutory obligations to provide connections to new development, although the cost of this must be met in full by developers.

3.10 Baseline Summary

Figure 3.12 identifies the main blocks of land use, the transport network and key facilities within Westhill, and also identifies sites in Westhill which are allocated within the Aberdeenshire LDP.

Figure 3.12 Baseline Summary Map



4. Constraints

Two broad magnitudes of geographical, technical and infrastructure constraints have been identified:

- **Absolute Constraints** - issues which cannot be overcome due to cost or technical reasons within the 20 to 25 year period of this study and therefore require no further consideration; and;
- **Relative Constraints** – issues which present difficulties but which could be tolerated or resolved within reasonable limits of cost and timescales. There is therefore merit in considering options to resolve these constraints within this study.

4.1 Geographic Constraints

4.1.1 Absolute Constraints

- **Topography:** Steep slopes at Berryhill and Kiers Hill constrain development opportunities to the north of Westhill, while Hill of Ord constrains potential development south of Westhill.

4.1.2 Relative Constraints

- **The town's rural setting and current greenbelt boundaries.** Within the context of a planning application the Greenbelt land which surrounds Westhill would be considered as an absolute constraint, depending on the nature of the proposed development. The Aberdeen Green Belt was first established in 1958 and has largely remained in its present form since the last major review in 1986, although a technical review of Greenbelt land in Aberdeenshire was most undertaken in 2010 during the early stages of preparation for the Aberdeenshire LDP 2012. This confirmed that land to the east of Westhill should remain within the Greenbelt on the basis of the need to prevent coalescence between Westhill and Kingswells. However, given that this study is not concerned with individual developments and is predicated on the need to facilitate the growth of Westhill over a 20 to 25 year period, during which further Greenbelt reviews could occur, it is considered reasonable to categorise the current greenbelt boundary to the east of Westhill as a relative constraint.
- **Aberdeen City Boundary.** Located approximately 0.5 km east of Westhill this political constraint does not itself prevent development from occurring south and east of Westhill. However, it limits the land area able to be planned by Aberdeenshire Council through its LDP. Any proposals to comprehensively develop land transcending the Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council boundaries would be likely to generate significant cross boundary impacts and therefore should be considered within the next iteration of the Aberdeen City & Shire SDP.

4.2 Infrastructure Constraints

4.2.1 Absolute Constraints

- **The current alignment of the A944:** this arterial route passes through central areas of Westhill in an east-west alignment and results in significant severance between housing land uses north of the A944, and predominantly employment land uses south of the A944. The land along either side of the A944 has been built on thereby restricting the opportunity to feasibly realign the A944.
- **Safeguarded areas for major gas and oil pipelines to the east and west of Westhill:** these restrict development activity within the consultation distances³ of the pipelines to the outer zone and constrain opportunities to create a coherent settlement structure which integrates new development into the existing settlement pattern. The BP Forties oil pipeline runs to the east of Westhill and has an overall consultation distance of 485 metres either side of it. The consultation distance is subdivided into three zones:

Inner Zone: 0 – 110 metres;

Middle Zone: 110 – 380 metres;

Outer Zone 380 – 485 metres

The natural gas pipeline Leuchars Moss to Craibstone runs to the west of Westhill and has an overall consultation distance of 150 metres either side of the pipeline. Again, the consultation distance is subdivided into three zones:

Inner Zone: 0 – 32 metres;

Middle Zone: 32 – 105 metres;

Outer Zone 105 – 150 metres.

The consultation zones around these oil and gas pipelines restrict the amount and type of development which can take place in specific locations around Westhill. To remove this constraint it would be necessary to explore the possibility of relaying the pipelines in thicker walled pipe, which may reduce the overall consultation distance. Relaying the pipes would entail considerable expense and interruption to the supply of materials from the North Sea. If this was considered a viable option then sufficient pipe would need to be replaced to take account of further future development of Westhill beyond the scope of this Study.

- **Main electricity pylons to the west of Westhill.** Similar to the gas and oil pipelines, a corridor around electricity pylons is subject to development constraints, particularly in terms of residential development.

³ The consultation distances listed in this section (4.2.1) are taken from the Westhill Capacity Study 2008. Research undertaken by AMEC E&I has not identified any evidence to indicate that these consultation distances have subsequently been altered by the UK Health & Safety Executive.

4.2.2 Relative Constraints

- The lack of capacity in the **existing local road network** within Westhill. Congestion is a significant issue in Westhill. Problem junctions include the 'six mile' and Tarland junctions. Improvements to the 'six mile' junction are being delivered in conjunction with development at the Arnhall Business Park. However, a strategic solution to current congestion issues that would allow the long term expansion of Westhill has not yet been identified.
- The lack of **capacity of the education infrastructure** within Westhill. According to the latest available school roll data Westhill Academy is projected to be at 91% capacity in 2016 and Skene Primary School is projected to be over capacity by 2015. However, it should be noted that the actual roll presented at Skene Primary School in 2013 (39 pupils) is significantly lower than projected roll (54 pupils), which implies that capacity constraints may not arise until after 2015.

4.3 Environmental & Cultural Heritage Constraints

Land covered by international, national or local environmental and cultural heritage designations requires to be protected from significant negative impacts which may arise from development. Therefore sites designated for their environmental or archaeological significance may constitute both absolute and relative constraints for the purposes of this study, depending upon the importance of the site and the scale of potential impacts.

Any new development within Westhill should address the following criteria:

- protecting existing semi-natural areas,
- developing habitat networks,
- protecting water courses and wetlands, and
- providing natural space within new development areas.

Following this process will ensure that existing open space is not fragmented by development and any new development itself can contribute to nature conservation and open space provision.

4.3.1 Statutory Designations

There are no statutory designated sites within the settlement boundary of Westhill, however protected sites within the wider study area include:

- Loch of Skene SSSI and Special Protection Area – located approximately 2.3 km west of Westhill
- Catchment of the River Dee Special Area of Conservation – located approximately 6.2 km south east of Westhill

4.3.2 Non Statutory Designations

Table 4.1 Non-statutory designated sites within close proximity of Westhill:

Site Name	Location	Designation Type
Arnhall Moss	Eastern Westhill, north of A944 Straik Road	Local Nature Reserve
Carnie Woods	South West of Westhill	Local Nature Reserve

In addition to the sites listed in Table 4.1 it should be noted that the points raised in Section 4.1 ‘Geographic Constraints’, notably in relation to existing Greenbelt land east of Westhill, could also be considered as non-statutory environmental constraints.

Ancient & Native Woodland

One area of ancient woodland is located approximately 0.9 km east of Westhill. A review of the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (2014) indicates that small clusters of native woodland are located in multiple areas around the periphery of Westhill. Individual clusters of native woodland have been considered within the assessments of individual potential development areas detailed in Appendix B of this report.

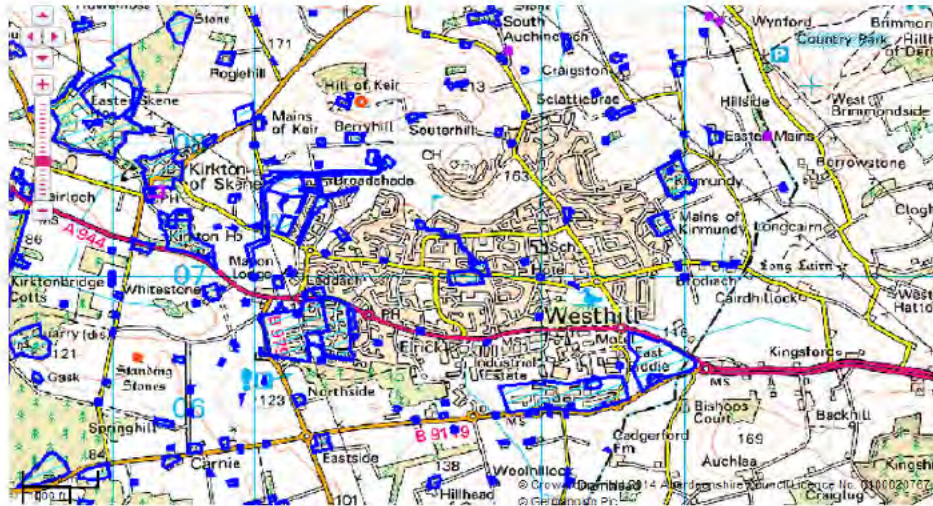
Flooding

Indicative flood maps published by SEPA (2014) indicate that Brodiach Burn, which is situated immediately east of Westhill, is liable to flood downstream of the town.

Archaeology

A review of the Aberdeenshire SMR indicates that there is a relatively high concentration of archaeological finds within Westhill, particularly towards the north western extent of the town. The nearest Scheduled Monument is located north of Westhill at Hill of Keir.

Figure 4.1 Aberdeenshire SMR



Listed Buildings

A review of PastMap suggests that there is only one listed building within Westhill: Hopeman Cottage (Old Toll House), an early 19th century category B listed building located on the A944 in the central area of Westhill.

4.4 Other Constraints

4.4.1 The need to avoid coalescence between Westhill and Kirkton of Skene

Kirkton of Skene is a small rural village located 1km west of Westhill. The village has grown around the village square and 'B' listed church, the latter of which provides an attractive entrance feature to the village when approaching from the west. The surrounding landscape is characterised by open farmland interspersed with areas of dense woodland. Kirkton of Skene has been subject to significant development pressures in recent years because of its attractive environment and proximity to Westhill and Aberdeen. A planning objective for the settlement, which may be a relative constraint to the western development of Westhill, may be the preservation of the character and setting of the village, including the countryside between Kirkton of Skene and Westhill.

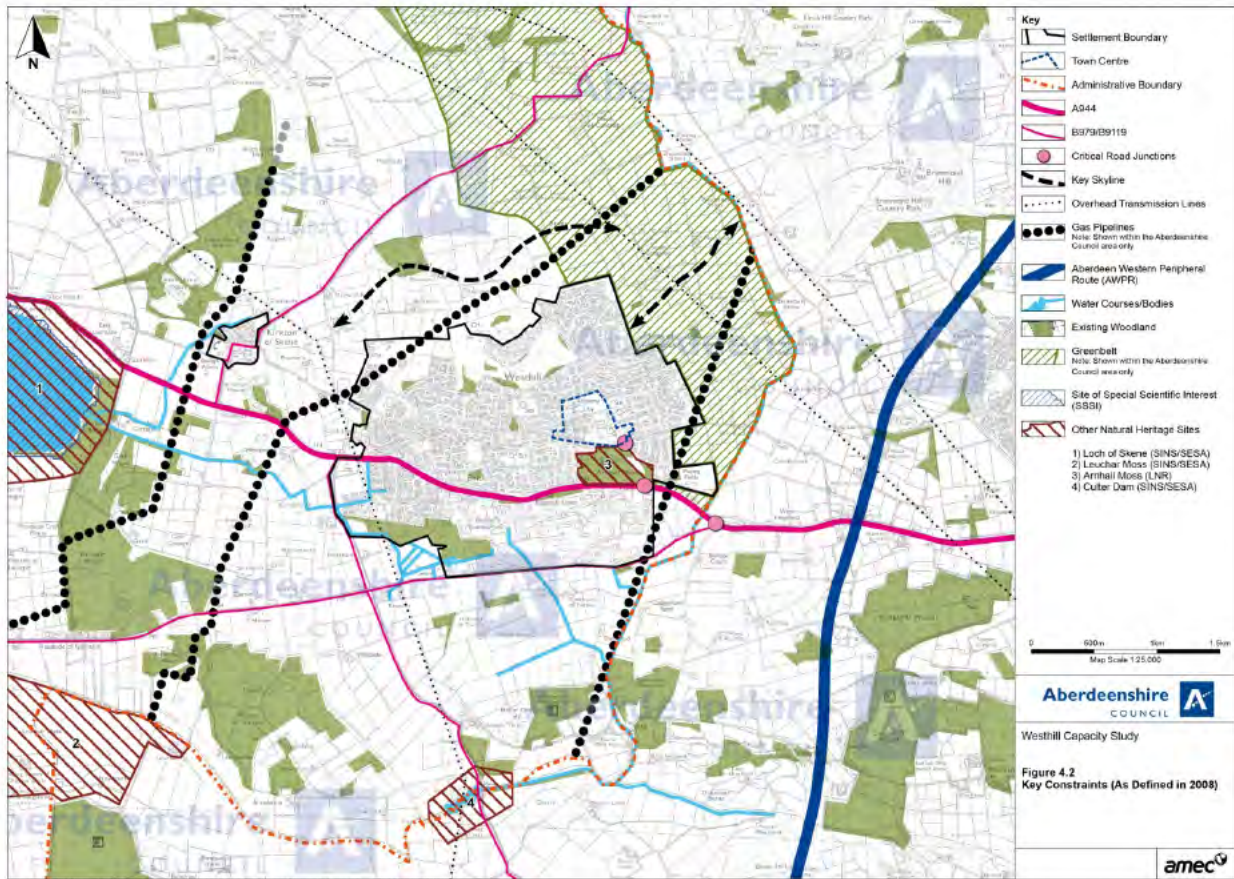
4.4.2 Land ownership

The willingness of land owners to permit the current use of their land to change is evidently a potential development constraint. However, given that land ownership may be subject to change over the relatively long period of this study, the current land ownership of a particular site has not been considered as a specific development constraint within the site appraisal process conducted as part of this study.

4.5 Constraints Summary

Figure 4.2 below summarises the key constraints which are likely to affect potential development opportunities around the periphery of Westhill. It should be noted that these constraints are identical to those illustrated on Diagram B – Key Constraints of the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study (see Appendix C).

Figure 4.2 Key Constraints Map



5. Key Drivers of Change

5.1 Policy

National, regional and local planning policies as well as strategies in respect of economic and social development all have a significant influence on the current and future development of Westhill. To successfully implement the growth strategy which will be set out in Section 6 of this study there is a need to closely consider this policy context, therefore this section of the report provides a brief overview of relevant current and emerging policy documents.

5.1.1 Development Plan

The statutory development plan for Westhill currently comprises the approved Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan (2014) and the adopted Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) (2012).

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (2014)

The Aberdeen City and Shire SDP (2014) sets out a high level spatial strategy for the development of the region up to 2035, thus the document covers the entirety of the period which this study is concerned with. The document is underpinned by an over arching vision statement:

“Aberdeen City and Shire will be an even more attractive, prosperous and sustainable European city region and an excellent place to live, visit and do business. We will be recognised for: our enterprise and inventiveness, particularly in the knowledge economy and in high-value markets; the unique qualities of our environment; and our high quality of life. We will have acted confidently and taken the courageous decisions necessary to further develop a robust and resilient economy and to lead the way towards development being sustainable, including dealing with climate change and creating a more inclusive society.”

To implement this vision the introduction section of the SDP identifies two “main aims” and four “supporting aims”: The main aims of the plan are to:

- *“provide a strong framework for investment decisions which help to grow and diversify the regional economy, supported by promoting the need to use resources more efficiently and effectively; and*
- *take on the urgent challenges of sustainable development and climate change”.*

To support these main aims the plan also aims to:

- *“make sure the area has enough people, homes and jobs to support the level of services and facilities needed to maintain and improve the quality of life;*
- *protect and improve our valued assets and resources, including the built and natural environment and our cultural heritage;*
- *help create sustainable mixed communities, and the associated infrastructure, which meet the highest standards of urban and rural design and cater for the needs of the whole population; and*
- *make the most efficient use of the transport network, reducing the need for people to travel and making sure that walking, cycling and public transport are attractive choices”.*

All of these aims are relevant to this study given that it seeks to identify potential options for the sustainable growth of Westhill, including the identification of infrastructure requirements and measures to protect important natural and cultural heritage resources.

It should be noted that the vision and aims of the SDP summarised above are identical to those which were contained within the approved Aberdeen City & Shire Structure Plan which the SDP supersedes. This signifies that the SDP intends to continue along the established development trajectory, focusing in particular on exploiting opportunities for widespread economic growth as well as population growth within key settlements.

The SDP identifies that Westhill is located in a Local Growth and Diversification Area (LGDA) (rather than a Strategic Growth Area). The SDP includes a target that *“at least 75% of all homes built, and employment land developed should be in the strategic growth areas”*, which implies that all other areas of Aberdeenshire, including Westhill, should only be subject to limited growth. As such there is a clear requirement to closely relate the options for the growth of Westhill which is set out in Section 6 of this Study to the needs of the existing settlement. One implication of Westhill being located within a LGDA is that the SDP does not impose specific targets for the allocation of employment land within the settlement.

The “Objectives” section of the SDP identifies the importance of the oil and gas industry across North East Scotland and the need to support its future development, as well as the need to support traditional primary industries. This is important to Westhill given that the local economy is currently dominated by subsea engineering, which largely forms part of the wider oil and gas sector, and that a significant amount of the land which surrounds the existing settlement is in active agricultural use.

The SDP notes that Westhill is situated within the Aberdeen Housing Market Area (HMA) and notes that the adopted Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City LDP’s currently allocate land for 1,000 dwellings within the LGDAs of the HMA up to 2016. The SDP identifies a further need to allocate land within the LGDAs of the Aberdeen HMA through a two phased approach: 1,350 dwellings from 2017-2026 and 1,350 dwellings from 2027-2035.

Schedule 2 of the SDP sets out a number of proposed infrastructure improvements which will help to implement the vision and aims of the plan. This includes reference to the Aberdeen Western Periphery Route. However, the SDP does not include any specific references, proposals or allocations which directly affect Westhill.

Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan

Adopted in 2012, the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) sets out a detailed spatial strategy for the development of the Council area to 2023, together with a number of development management policies which all development proposals must be assessed against.

The introduction to the LDP explains how each of the five objectives contained within the Structure Plan (and SDP) will be achieved through this document. There is a clear focus on ensuring that development supports the existing rural character of the majority of Aberdeenshire, including areas around Westhill. The document states that while Westhill is not located within a Strategic Growth Area Aberdeenshire Council propose “significant development” within the town. The LDP makes clear that Aberdeenshire Council wish to support the growth and prosperity of Westhill in line with the stated aims of the Strategic Development Plan.

The LDP includes fourteen subject specific policies, each of which relates directly to supporting policies which are detailed in a separate Supplementary Guidance document. A number of these policies, notably those relating to business development, greenbelt protection, housing land supply and developer contributions are of particular importance to this study. However, the relevance of individual policies to specific development opportunities within and around Westhill depends largely on the detailed characteristics of individual development proposals; therefore a detailed policy analysis of specific LDP policies would not be appropriate within this updated capacity study.

The LDP sets out a high level spatial strategy for Westhill, which is orientated around the following objectives:

- *“Meet the need for housing in the settlement, and the Aberdeen Housing Market Area.*
- *Sustain existing services in a sub-regional centre.*
- *Provide affordable housing in the settlement.*
- *Maintain function as a successful employment centre.*
- *Allow scale of development which does not cause problems for current infrastructure”*

These objectives set out Aberdeenshire Council’s aspirations for Westhill and are therefore important to this study.

Overall the Aberdeenshire LDP promotes an ‘open for business’ approach and considers the development of business as being important to the economic health of the region. It supports the development of business and sustainable economic growth in all areas by taking account of the economic benefits of proposed development when making decisions in development management. Within the context of Westhill and the LDP this commitment to supporting economic growth is currently demonstrated through the allocation of employment land on the south eastern fringe of the town (site E1). The commissioning of this study with a specific remit to focus on opportunities for the expansion of employment land, provides further evidence of the commitment of Aberdeenshire Council to supporting sustainable economic growth within Westhill.

As detailed within earlier sections of this report, the LDP includes a number of land allocations within Westhill, in order to achieve the objectives noted above. These are summarised in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1 Summary of LDP Allocations in Westhill (Aberdeenshire Council, 2013)

Allocation/Proposal	Details
Protected Land	Development should not detrimentally affect these sites and their existing land uses.
P1	Site P1 is protected to conserve the nature reserve and provide land for access improvements.
P2	Site P2 is protected to conserve the Amhall Moss Local Nature Reserve
P3	Site P3 is protected to conserve the playing fields.
P4	Site P4 is protected to conserve the playing fields.
P5	Site P5 is protected to conserve the playing fields.
P6	Site P6 is protected to conserve the playing fields.
P7	Site P7 is protected to conserve the amenity area
P8	Site P8 is protected to conserve the playing fields
P9	Site P9 is protected to conserve the play area.
P10	Site P10 is protected to conserve the golf course.
BUS	Site BUS is safeguarded for employment uses.
TC	The proposals map defines the extent of Westhill Town Centre.
Proposed Sites	
H1	Site H1 is allocated for up to 190 houses (95 houses in the first phase and 95 houses in the second phase of the plan). A masterplan which details integration with the adjoining existing housing site is required. A recycling point should be provided on the site
H2	Site H2 is allocated for up to 10 houses in the first phase of the plan.
E1	Site E1 is allocated for employment land.
Infrastructure Requirements	
There is need for 40% affordable housing on new housing developments within Westhill	
H1	Developer contributions are required towards the provision of a replacement Household Waste Recycling Centre in Westhill. A recycling point is required within site H1.
Development Constraints	
Pipelines	There are various pipeline consultation zones in Westhill which must inform development proposals on existing and new sites.
Flood Risk	A small watercourse runs alongside site E1.

5.1.2 Emerging Development Plan

Aberdeenshire LDP 2016

Despite Aberdeenshire Council only having adopted their first LDP in 2012, work has commenced on the next iteration of the LDP. The Main Issues Report (MIR) for the next LDP was subject to consultation until 1st February 2014. Question 18 and paragraphs 6.52-6.60 within the MIR relates to the provision of employment land specifically to support the growth of the subsea sector within Westhill. After setting out the recent history of Westhill's housing and employment land allocations, the MIR notes the importance of the subsea sector and suggests that there may be a need to allocate additional employment land specifically to support the retention and expansion of subsea industries in Westhill. This Capacity Study responds to the MIR by examining potential development areas around Westhill which may be suitable for future employment land allocations.

1822 responses were received during the MIR consultation period, raising in excess of 5,000 individual issues. These will be reported to Aberdeenshire Council's Area Committees and Infrastructure Services Committee during May and June 2014. Once all responses have been considered the LDP Proposed Plan will be prepared and published for consultation, which as of May 2014 is currently programmed for late Autumn 2014. The LDP Proposed Plan will then undergo a public examination process, expected to commence in winter 2015/2016, before being adopted. Aberdeenshire Council intend that the new LDP will be adopted for use at the beginning of 2017.

5.1.3 National Strategies, Plans & Policies

Government Economic Strategy (Scottish Government, 2011)

The SNP government's first Government Economic Strategy (2007) identified the achievement of sustainable economic growth as the core purpose of the Scottish Government and this updated strategy re-confirms the importance of this central objective. The document gives clear priority to accelerating economic recovery, with a range of measures to tackle unemployment and promote employability. Actions are grouped around six strategic priorities which will drive sustainable economic growth and develop a more resilient and adaptable economy:

- **Supportive Business Environment** –focused around supporting key growth sectors and growth companies and enabling Scottish firms to exploit international growth markets. This is directly relevant to Westhill given that the town's subsea engineering sector has recently experienced significant growth, and although subsea engineering is not identified as one of six national growth sectors the document does identify "*significant opportunities from Scotland's science, technology and advanced engineering assets across sectors*". This provides high level policy support for the development of plans and strategies to facilitate sustainable growth of the subsea sector in Westhill.
- **Transition to a Low Carbon Economy** – focused around a shift to renewable energy as well as resource and energy efficiency to reduce Scotland's carbon emissions and adapt to climate change. This priority is relevant to Westhill given that offshore renewables is a potential growth sector for the subsea engineering industry, which has historically been dependant on oil and gas related work. In addition there is a need to ensure that the development of Westhill maximises resource efficiency, including in relation to the use of land, and supports sustainable travel options.

- **Learning, Skills and Well-being** – focused around ensuring that Scotland’s population is equipped with the skills necessary to maximise their contribution to economic growth. This priority is relevant to Westhill given that the town’s main economic sector, subsea engineering, is dependent upon a highly skilled labour force. The priority is also relevant in terms of closing the spatial mismatch which currently exists between available jobs and the skills of the population in Westhill.
- **Infrastructure Development and Place** – focused around ensuring adequate provision of physical and electronic infrastructures in order to maximise opportunities for economic growth, as well as enhancing the quality of areas as places to work and live. Enhanced infrastructure provision, notably in the local transport network, may be required in order to facilitate the enlargement of employment areas and the predicted growth in Westhill’s population. A focus on placemaking is of relevance to Westhill given that the settlement is home to a significant residential population yet arguably does not currently have a legible spatial structure.
- **Effective Government** – focused around increasing the speed of decision making and enhancing co-ordination between public bodies. This priority is of relevance to Westhill given its close proximity to the Aberdeen City boundary and the fact that the majority of workers based in Westhill currently commute from Aberdeen. As such there is a clear need for Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council to work together to enhance the integration of housing and labour markets and transport networks across the two areas.
- **Equity** – focused on providing opportunities for the most disadvantaged areas and people in society to prosper. Although recent economic statistics indicate that Westhill is a prosperous area the long waiting list for council housing in the town points to This priority is also relevant in terms of ensuring that the community of Westhill is able to gain from the rapid growth of the subsea engineering economic sector in the town through enhancing opportunities for local employment and securing developer contributions towards infrastructure provision.

SPP (Scottish Government, 2010)

This document sets out the Scottish Government’s objectives, aspirations and expectations for the Scottish Planning System. In doing so the SPP aims to contribute to the achievement of the Scottish Government’s overarching purpose of realising sustainable economic growth, and the document is an important material consideration in all planning decisions.

The SPP aims to contribute to the achievement of the Scottish Government’s overarching purpose, sustainable economic growth. Paragraph 35 defines sustainable development in accordance with the five guiding principles contained within the UK Shared Framework for Sustainable Development (2005) and states that “*the fundamental principle of sustainable development is that it integrates economic, social and environmental objectives*”.

The significance of planning for achieving sustainable development is highlighted in paragraph 37, which states that “*the planning system has an important role in supporting the achievement of sustainable development through its influence on the location, layout and design of new development*”. In addition paragraph 37 notes that planning decisions should “*contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in line with the commitment to reduce emissions by 42% by 2020 and 80% by 2050, contribute to reducing energy consumption and to the development of renewable energy generation opportunities*”.

Paragraph 45 identifies 5 ways in which the planning system should support economic development:

- *“Taking account of the economic benefits of proposed development in development plans and development management decisions,*
- *Promoting development in sustainable locations, particularly in terms of accessibility,*
- *Promoting regeneration and the full and appropriate use of land, buildings and infrastructure,*
- *Supporting development which will provide new employment opportunities and enhance local competitiveness, and*
- *Promoting the integration of employment generation opportunities with supporting infrastructure and housing development.”*

Paragraph 46 states that *“planning authorities should ensure that there is a range and choice of marketable sites and locations for businesses allocated in development plans, including opportunities for mixed use development, to meet anticipated requirements and a variety of size and quality requirements. Marketable land should meet business requirements, be serviced or serviceable within 5 years, be accessible by walking, cycling and public transport, and have a secure planning status”*. The need to identify and allocate suitable land to meet business requirements provides a key rationale for this study.

Paragraphs 47 and 48 discuss the relationship between accommodating business development, supporting other land uses and protecting the environment. The SPP therefore prioritises development on brownfield land and states that *“development plans should support small business development and growth and promote opportunities for low impact industrial, business and service uses which can co-exist with housing and other sensitive uses without eroding amenity”*.

The SPP also includes a wide range of other subject specific policies, the following of which are considered to be of particular relevance to this study:

- Rural Development;
- Historic Environment;
- Landscape and Natural Heritage;
- Housing
- Transport; and
- Flooding and Drainage.

Draft Revised SPP (Scottish Government, April 2013)

This draft document sets out proposed changes to national planning policies in order to more clearly reflect Scottish Ministers’ priorities for the development and use of land. A position statement issued in January 2014 outlines the

current thinking of the Scottish Government in relation to proposed key changes to the SPP and confirms that the Scottish Government expect to publish the finalised version of the SPP in June 2014.

Paragraphs 15-23 of the draft SPP explain how the planning system should contribute towards achieving the Scottish Government's core purpose of achieving sustainable economic growth, and paragraphs 24-27 provides policies regarding how planning should contribute to sustainable development. It should be noted that since the publication of the draft SPP in April 2013 the Scottish Government has consulted on replacing these draft policies regarding sustainable development and sustainable economic growth with a revised 'sustainability & planning' section; this would establish a presumption in favour of sustainable development and define the concept of sustainable development in accordance with the recognised Brundtland definition.

Paragraph 17 of the draft SPP identifies four roles for the Scottish planning system in achieving sustainable economic growth, all of which are relevant to this study:

"The planning system should:

- *through the development plan, set out a spatial strategy to deliver sustainable economic growth. This should harness the strengths and qualities of cities, towns and rural areas;*
- *foster a business environment which is supportive to new investment across Scotland while protecting and enhancing the quality of the natural and built environments as assets of national importance;*
- *attach significant weight to economic benefit of proposed development as a material consideration, particularly the creation of new jobs, recognising and responding to economic and financial conditions; and*
- *support infrastructure delivery and innovation in the energy, transport, construction, digital, waste, water and environmental management sectors to support the transition to a low carbon economy"*

The weight to be afforded to economic development considerations in planning decisions is clarified in paragraph 23, which states that *"decision makers should give full consideration to the need for planning to support sustainable economic growth"*.

The draft revised SPP sets out a number of principle and subject policies which are relevant to specific development types and cross-sectoral planning issues. In relation to business and employment provisions, the draft revised SPP at paragraph 106 states that development plans *"should meet the needs and opportunities of indigenous firms and inward investors"*, and in this regard paragraph 110 requires LDPs to allocate and regularly review a range of marketable sites for business uses. In relation to the protection of town centres, the draft revised SPP at paragraph 55 advises that regular town centre health checks should be undertaken by local authorities, while paragraph 56 lists a number of actions which should be undertaken to support town centres, including the preparation of town centre strategies and the establishment of Business Improvement District.

NPF 2

Scotland's Second National Planning Framework (NPF2) provides a national spatial vision around which to orientate socio-economic development and highlights the spatial planning implications arising from other Scottish Government policy documents, including the updated Government Economic Strategy (2011). Paragraph 12 of NPF2 explains that the NPF2 *"takes forward the spatial aspects of the Government Economic Strategy, to ensure that each part of the country is able to play to its strengths in building a Scotland that is wealthier and fairer, smarter and greener, healthier, safer and stronger"*.

NPF2 identifies several key challenges which currently influence Scotland's socio-economic development and are likely to develop over the lifetime of the framework, before providing a spatial strategy to address these issues. Identified key challenges of relevance to this study include:

- The importance of placemaking to attract and retain both investment from firms and a highly skilled workforce;
- The need to tackle climate change through reducing carbon emissions and adapting to a changing environment. In particular there is a need to *"improve the accessibility of education, employment and services and encourage a shift to more active and sustainable modes of travel and transport"*. The planning system can contribute to this by promoting *"compact settlements, mixed use development, effective active travel networks and efficient public transport systems"*.
- Ensuring that housing, transport and community facility provision reflects Scotland's demography, in particular the ageing population.

Four key aims underpin the spatial strategy contained within NPF2. These aims are:

- *"to contribute to a wealthier and fairer Scotland by supporting sustainable economic growth and improved competitiveness and connectivity;*
- *to promote a greener Scotland by contributing to the achievement of climate change targets and protecting and enhancing the quality of the natural and built environments;*
- *to help build safer, stronger and healthier communities, by promoting improved opportunities and a better quality of life; and*
- *to contribute to a smarter Scotland by supporting the development of the knowledge economy"*.

To achieve these key aims NPF2 identifies the need to:

- Create a knowledge driven economy with a highly skilled labour force. This requires Scotland to be *"well connected economically, physically, digitally and intellectually to the rest of the world"*.
- Maximise energy efficiency and opportunities for the exploitation of Scotland's renewable energy resources. In relation to climate change paragraph 48 states that *"planning and transport policies can make an important contribution by promoting more sustainable patterns of land use and travel"*.
- Integrate economic development with environmental protection and sustainable resource management.

Paragraph 53 summarises the development strategy contained within the NPF2. Pertinent aspects of the strategy for the purposes of this study include the need to:

- *“Support strong, sustainable growth for the benefit of all parts of Scotland;*
- *promote development which helps to reduce Scotland’s carbon footprint and facilitates adaptation to climate change;*
- *support sustainable growth in the rural economy;*
- *conserve and enhance Scotland’s distinctive natural and cultural heritage, and continue to safeguard internationally protected sites, habitats and species;*
- *expand opportunities for communities and businesses by promoting environmental quality and good connectivity;*
- *promote more sustainable patterns of travel, transport and land use;*
- *realise the potential of Scotland’s renewable energy resources and facilitate the generation of power and heat from all clean, low carbon sources; and,*
- *encourage a sufficient supply of homes which are affordable in places where people want to live.*

NPF3 Proposed Plan

As required under the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006, the NPF3 Proposed Plan was laid in the Scottish Parliament on 14th January 2014 for its formal consideration. It is expected that following a period of parliamentary scrutiny the finalised version of the NPF3 will be published in June 2014.

The NPF3 Proposed Plan confirms the Scottish Government’s commitment to increasing sustainable economic growth and therefore orientates the efforts of Scotland’s planning system towards this purpose. The document sets out a national spatial strategy structured around four key themes:

- **A successful, sustainable place:** This theme is underpinned by the objective of creating *“high quality, diverse and sustainable places that promote well-being and attract investment”*. The document calls for a renewed focus on exploiting the Scotland’s natural resources and a focus on emerging growth sectors. This is of critical importance to this study given that Westhill has recently become a subsea engineering centre of excellence yet and surrounded by agricultural land. Page 12 of the NPF3 Proposed Plan sets out a detailed spatial strategy for Aberdeen and North East Scotland which acknowledges the importance of supporting energy related industries and identifies a particular need to provide additional affordable housing across the region.
- **A low carbon place:** This theme relates to the legally binding target of reducing Scotland’s greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 compared with 1990 levels, as set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. The document notes that the Scottish Government has adopted several renewable energy targets including the aim of generating *“at least 30% of overall energy demand from renewables by 2020 – this includes generating the equivalent of at least 100% of gross electricity consumption from renewables, with an interim target of 50% by 2015”*. The Scottish Government’s

support for the deployment of renewable energy is indirectly of relevance to this study given that the offshore renewables industry is an emerging growth market for the subsea engineering sector which has established itself in Westhill.

- **A natural, resilient place:** This theme is concerned with environmental protection and the sustainable use of Scotland's natural resources. It is noted that Scotland's principal asset is the land, which must be managed sustainably as both an economic resource and environmental asset. In addition the document states that "*water management and flooding issues will become increasingly important*" due to the effects of climate change, and it identifies the need to manage tensions between accommodating development pressures and protecting productive agricultural land which surrounds urban areas. This issue is of critical importance for Westhill given that any potential growth of the settlement is likely to encroach upon active agricultural and/or greenbelt land.
- **A connected place:** This theme is orientated around maximising physical and digital connectivity around Scotland and between Scotland and the rest of the world. In relation to Aberdeen the consented Aberdeen Periphery Route and the proposed dualing of the A90 between Balmedie and Tipperty are cited as key infrastructure projects, and the document notes the overall need to improve the accessibility of rural areas through improvements to digital and transport infrastructure. Of specific relevance is that the NPF3 Proposed Plan at paragraph 5. 26 encourages local authorities to "*identify one walking- and cycling-friendly settlement where accessibility will be significantly improved by 2030*". Given that an extensive cycle network already exists within and around Westhill, potential future upgrades to the network could enable Westhill to bid for national recognition as a 'Sustainable Transport Town' or 'Cycle Town'.

The NPF3 Proposed Plan identifies 14 proposed National Developments, none of which are in close proximity to Westhill. Therefore they are not expected to directly affect the settlement's development. However, a National Long Distance Cycling and Walking Network is identified as the 7th proposed National Development, and despite Westhill not being identified within the scope of this proposed National Development, this designation could still provide indirect policy support for future improvements to long distance walking and cycle routes close to Westhill.

5.1.4 Regional and Local Plans & Strategies

This section identifies key points within current regional and local policy documents which have the potential to influence the development of Westhill. It should be noted that this section does not aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Aberdeenshire or North East Scotland policy environments. As such a range of other policy documents not addressed within this section may also influence the development of Westhill over the next 25 years.

The Economic Manifesto for Aberdeen City and Shire (ACSEF, 2007)

This document sets out a vision and strategic priorities for the region to work towards by 2025. It identifies eight priorities, the first being for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire to be the top of the Quality of Life "league table", making it a place where people choose to work, live study and visit. The remaining seven are:-

- Deliver a fully integrated transport network
- Maximise our intellectual capital - people and expertise

- Deliver city centre redevelopment
- Anchor the oil and gas industry
- Attract and develop skilled people
- Improve the efficiency of planning decision making
- Aberdeen City and Shire as the location of choice for company headquarters

Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy Refresh 2013

The Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) for Aberdeen City and Shire was first adopted as a statutory document in 2008 following approval by Scottish Ministers. This RTS built on the previous strategy to 2011, referred to as the Modern Transport Strategy or MTS. In 2013 Nestrans undertook a review of the RTS to take account of a number of changes in policy, in particular to better align the document with the approved Structure Plan and emerging Strategic Development Plan. This resulted in the publication of this refreshed RTS, which was approved by Scottish Ministers on 16th January 2014.

The refreshed RTS is underpinned by the vision of creating:

“A transport system for the north east of Scotland which enables a more economically competitive, sustainable and socially inclusive society”

To implement this vision the document identifies four strategic objectives and a number of constituent aims. The strategic objectives are to:

- *“To enhance and exploit the north east’s competitive economic advantages, and reduce the impacts of peripherality.*
- *To enhance choice, accessibility and safety of transport for all in the north east, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable members of society and those living in areas where transport options are limited.*
- *To conserve and enhance the north east’s natural and built environment and heritage and reduce the effects of transport on climate, noise and air quality.*
- *To support transport integration and a strong, vibrant and dynamic city centre and town centres across the north east”.*

The RTS sets out a strategic framework of integrated measures and interventions in order to achieve these strategic objectives and the overall vision. Table 5.1 within the RTS identifies routes where strategic transport infrastructure improvements are required to cope with the cumulative impact of development; the ‘A944 corridor’ is identified as one such route where upgrades to key junctions are needed in order to improve safety and increase capacity. However, this high level strategy does not detail the characteristics of potential upgrades to the A944, as it states that *“a full appraisal and assessment, detailed engineering design and environmental assessment of each location will be required in order to progress these interventions and identify the most appropriate solution for each”*.

In addition to infrastructure improvements required to alleviate cumulative development pressures the RTS focuses on:

- reducing congestion on strategic roads,
- reducing journey times using rail transport,
- creating transport interchanges to facilitate connections between local and regional bus services
- undertaking quality bus corridor improvements to improve bus service frequencies and reliability
- undertaking urban realm improvements to improve pedestrian environments
- implement measures to increase safety and security of walking

These themes emphasise the importance of improving the performance of existing transport infrastructure. Due to the limited public transport network around Westhill and its lack of proximity to strategic roads and the rail network many of these themes are of limited relevance to Westhill. However, in line with the RTS measures could be taken to increase patronage on bus services which pass through Westhill by upgrading interchange points.

It should be noted that although the RTS does refer to the consented Aberdeen Western Periphery Route this project is considered to be part of the “reference case” (i.e. the baseline position) for the future development of the region’s transport network and therefore the merits and potential impacts of the AWPR are not discussed within this document.

Aberdeenshire Local Transport Strategy 2012

In January 2012 Aberdeenshire Council adopted its new Local Transport Strategy (LTS) which outlines the key transport issues affecting Aberdeenshire and sets out a series of actions to support delivery of a transport vision for the area. The overall aim of the LTS is to “*to encourage individuals and businesses to consider ways to travel less, travel more actively and, where vehicular travel is necessary, how journeys could be made more effectively*”. The LTS identifies five main issues which require to be addressed:

- Economic issues – there is a need to “to support the traffic growth associated with economic development while ensuring that network capacity is safeguarded”. An associated challenge is providing adequate public transport across rural areas of Aberdeenshire at a time when bus/rail fares are rising rapidly. Both of these issues are of direct relevance to Westhill due to the existing road capacity constraints which exist in the town and the relatively limited availability of public transport.
- Environmental issues – there is a need to reduce the environmental impact of transportation within Aberdeenshire, particularly in terms of carbon emissions. This is challenging given the rural nature of Aberdeenshire.
- Safety issues – there is a need to ensure the safety of all users of the transport network in Aberdeenshire, including through reducing road casualty rates. The LTS supports the delivery of the Joint Road Safety Plan for Aberdeen City & Shire 2011-2015.

- Integration issues –to enhance accessibility and encourage sustainable modal shifts there is a need to achieve greater inter-modality and seamlessness within local transport networks.

To respond to these main issues the LTS is underpinned by five objectives:

- Promote Sustainable Economic Growth – maximise the effectiveness of the transport network, services and facilities;
- Promote Social Inclusion and Accessibility – improve connections within and between communities, increasing accessibility of the transport network;
- Protect the Environment – remove barriers to active and sustainable travel helping to improve health and reduce emissions.
- Improve Safety – enhance the safety of all users of the transport network.
- Improve Integration – develop and improve integration between all forms of transport and improve connectivity within and beyond Aberdeenshire.

It should be noted that whilst the LTS is an important document it does not include any specific references or proposals in relation to Westhill.

5.2 Other Drivers of Change

Local & Regional Governance Interactions

The geographical situation of Westhill, located within the Aberdeenshire Council area but adjacent to the eastern boundary with Aberdeen City, necessitates that the future development of Westhill should involve at least a degree of collaboration between relevant governance bodies. This study has not undertaken a full mapping exercise to comprehensively identify all governance bodies of relevance to Westhill; however it is evident that relevant governance bodies include Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership, Aberdeen City Council, Nestrans, the Aberdeen City & Shire Economic Forum and the Aberdeen City & Shire SDPA. All of these bodies effectively control at least one aspect of the policy environment which will influence change in Westhill over the next 25 years, so any coherent strategy to facilitate the future development of Westhill should be informed by the priorities and aspiration of these different governance bodies and ideally should be co-ordinated between them.

Long Term Drivers

In addition to the influence of national, regional and local policies the development of Westhill will be conditioned by a large number of external factors which cannot be considered in detail within this study. These factors include: constitutional change, volatility in the North Sea oil and gas economy and the international and national economy more widely, climate change, technological innovation, changes in consumer behaviour and lifestyle shifts. Although all of these factors could have a significant influence on the future development of Westhill, fluctuations in oil and gas prices are particularly important given the dominance of the oil and gas sector in the north east

economy. Major shifts in oil prices have a direct impact on the oil and gas supply chain, including the subsea engineering sector, and therefore can influence companies' aspirations and appetite for expansion in Westhill.

6. Spatial Analysis

This section seeks to identify the key issues which a growth oriented spatial strategy should address. The key issues detailed in section 4.2 are closely informed by the information contained within sections 2-5 of this report, as well as the analysis of current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in Westhill which is outlined below.

6.1 SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis was undertaken to identify issues of potential relevance within Westhill and to help identify the key issues (section 4.2) which should be considered in the options for growth detailed in Section 8.

6.1.1 Strengths

Population

- Westhill has experienced significant population growth since its inception and this is projected to continue, indicating that the settlement is a popular place to live. Coupled with the recent surge of employment related development this provides opportunities to promote mixed use development and to create a 'liveable' settlement, whereby the majority of the population live, work and relax within Westhill.
- The significant and rising population provides a potential labour pool for businesses within Westhill.

Housing

- Recent housing developments in Westhill at the Broadshade and Burnland sites indicate that the town has a thriving housing market. Major housebuilders appear eager to invest in new development sites, with several having headquarter/regional offices in Westhill. Such investment will contribute to the development of the town's infrastructure through planning agreements or other developer contributions.
- The dominance of family housing within Westhill supports the retention of a mixed age community within the town.

Economy & Retail

- Westhill is demonstrably able to attract inward investment from world leading firms, particularly in the subsea engineering sector.
- Much of subsea sector's work in Westhill currently revolves around the oil and gas industry. However, some activity does take place in the growth sector of renewables; Technip Offshore Wind moved its world offshore wind HQ from Paris to Westhill. Thus the subsea cluster in Westhill has a diverse range of clients and is relatively resilient to changes in the circumstances of individual clients.

- Although fossil fuel recovery rates in the North Sea are declining, conservative estimates suggest that a further 40 years of activity is expected and the value of unrecovered oil and gas is estimated at £1 trillion. Subsea technologies are likely to become more important for increasing extraction rates in brownfield wells and for extracting oil and gas from hard to reach new fields.
- Engineering design and project management work is undertaken in Westhill for projects around the world, indicating that the subsea engineering cluster in Westhill is not solely reliant on North Sea oil and gas industries.
- A number of public sector bodies including Scottish Water have an employment presence within Westhill.
- The growing subsea engineering sector within Westhill induces an unknown economic multiplier effect, particularly for 'local' service based industries and the associated workforce.
- The Westhill Shopping Centre acts as the designated Town Centre for Westhill, providing a focus in the settlement, comprising a reasonable range of convenience and comparison retail units. Planning permission for an extension to the centre was granted in 2013; this indicates that it is performing well financially and that the range of shops & services is expected to increase.
- There is a retail presence within the Arnhall Business Park area of Westhill, in the form of large Tesco and Costco outlets. In particular the Tesco store provides a source of low order convenience goods for employees based within the Westhill and Arnhall Business Parks.

Open Space

- Despite experiencing significant housing and employment related growth Westhill has managed to retain important open spaces, including playing fields and the Arnhall Moss Local Nature Reserve.
- Westhill is almost entirely surrounded by open countryside, much of which is in active agricultural use. Agriculture is a historically important industry across Aberdeenshire and the sector continues to thrive.
- The land which surrounds Westhill is largely undeveloped (although in active agricultural use), therefore providing a range of potential development sites.

Infrastructure

- The A944 provides a direct route from Westhill to Aberdeen, thereby facilitating cross-commuting.
- Work is ongoing to reconfigure the Six Mile Roundabout on the A944 into a controlled junction, which should help to alleviate traffic congestion on the eastern approach to Westhill.
- The forthcoming AWPR will be located east of Westhill and will include a junction with the A944. The new road is intended to alleviate current pressures on the A944 and will provide a direct and quick link from Westhill to many areas of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City.

- The creation of the AWPR within the Greenbelt east of Westhill provides an opportunity to review the effectiveness of current Green Belt boundaries, and potentially facilitate limited development of appropriate land uses on suitable sites immediately east of the existing settlement.
- Although the A944 provides the main access road into Westhill there are a number of 'B' class roads which connect northern and southern areas of the town to the wider area. The capacity of these roads is likely to be of critical importance for determining suitable options for new development on land around Westhill.
- Westhill has relatively good bus connectivity, considering the size and semi-rural situation of the settlement, and good pedestrian and cycle links to the east.
- The existing and planned future transport network provides good connectivity between Westhill and Aberdeen, which acts as an important investment driver for firms locating in the town.

Community Facilities

- The total primary and secondary school capacities are predicted to exceed forecasted roles from at least 2018. This provides an opportunity to facilitate limited additional housing development in Westhill over the short term if required in order to support employment related growth.
- Skene Health Centre provides a comprehensive range of health services in a modern and reasonably centrally located building to residents of Westhill. This removes the need to travel outwith the town for many medical appointments.
- Westhill is served by a relatively wide range of public and private leisure facilities, including a community swimming pool and a new library. The provision of high quality amenities within Westhill helps to attract businesses and people to live, work and invest in the town.

6.1.2 Weaknesses

Population

- Like many parts of Scotland the population of Westhill, is expected to undergo significant ageing over the next 25 years, which could result in increased pressure on health and social care services within the town. This is potentially of concern given that the existing GP practice, Skene Medical Group, which currently serves a large population and is operating at near capacity. Population ageing is likely to reduce mobility and therefore constrain access to important high order services located in Aberdeen for elderly residents of Westhill.

Housing

- Although absolute numbers of housing in Westhill are currently adequate there is a lack of diversity and choice in housing provision, in terms of both housing tenure and type. Westhill is dominated by owner occupied private family dwellings and currently has a very low percentage of council and socially rented housing. In addition the town has limited provision of flatted dwellings and small homes suitable either for young professionals without families or older residents who wish to downsize.

- Housing and employment land uses are relatively detached and homogenous, with little evidence of true mixed use development within Westhill. This undermines the spatial identity and sense of place within the town.

Economy & Retail

- The rapid take up of allocated employment land in 2012/2013 means that the only site allocated for employment in the 2012 LDP is now under construction. Therefore there is effectively no established employment land supply in Westhill. Therefore, to respond to development pressures and support economic growth new areas of suitable land should be allocated for employment uses.
- Economic growth and employment in Westhill is currently underpinned by a small number of key economic sectors, notably subsea engineering which is largely reliant on work related to oil and gas extraction. This lack of economic diversity is arguably a weakness as it undermines the economic resilience of the town. Without the subsea engineering sector it is likely that Westhill would not have experienced the recent employment related growth that has occurred.
- The majority of the office developments which house Westhill's subsea engineering cluster are owned by commercial landlords rather than subsea engineering firms. Therefore the subsea engineering sector is not physically tied to Westhill and these firms could choose to relocate to (lower cost) locations outside of Westhill at the end of their leases. If this was to occur it would significantly reduce the growth potential of Westhill, at least in the short term, due to the current dominance of the subsea sector within the town.
- Housing and employment land uses are relatively detached and homogenous, with little evidence of true mixed use development within Westhill. This undermines the spatial identity and sense of place within the town.
- Although the Westhill Shopping Centre and surrounding land is designated a Town Centre, in reality this area is currently unable to fulfil some important Town Centre functions. In particular the poor quality of public realm around the shopping centre prevents it from being a well frequented meeting point and social space, despite its relatively central location.
- There is currently no provision for high order retail shops or services within Westhill. This necessitates travelling to Aberdeen City for specialist purchases.

Open Space

- Carnie Woods Local Nature Conservation Site, located on the south west fringe of Westhill, is now enclosed by development on several sides.
- There are a limited number of footpaths running from Westhill into the surrounding area.

Infrastructure

- A key weakness is that there is only one arterial route into and through Westhill, the A944. This road is subject to significant congestion during peak periods, as well as air pollution (nitrogen oxide and particulate matter) and carbon emissions associated with high volumes of traffic.

- Capacity issues on the B9119 and B979 and at junctions on the A944 currently constrain development opportunities immediately south of Westhill.
- Traffic congestion affects local distributor roads within Westhill, as well as on the A944.
- There is lack of connectivity between the A944 and B9119.
- Due to separate street design processes for each development poor connectivity exists within and between areas of the Westhill Business Park and the Arnhall Business Park.
- Some utilities infrastructure within Westhill may be operating near to capacity and thus may require to be upgraded in order to facilitate development.
- Oil and gas pipeline infrastructure means that particular corridors within Westhill simply cannot be built on. As well as preventing development of specific sites this restricts opportunities to create a coherent and integrated spatial structure across Westhill.

Community Facilities

- The population of Westhill is expected to grow however capacity issues already exist at several primary schools. This could impede future housing or mixed use development within the town.
- Existing public service provision is predominately on the eastern side of Westhill. Any strategy to develop Westhill should address this imbalance by providing additional community facilities in western areas of the town. This is particularly important given that the west of Westhill has recently experienced substantial housing growth through the Burnland and Broadshade developments.

6.1.3 Opportunities

- Westhill has clearly seen significant growth in recent years
- Westhill provides a mix of housing and employment opportunities and there appears to be demand for further such provision
- There is considerable opportunity for development of a sub-sea centre of excellence in Westhill, building on its existing strengths
- The AWPR, when developed, will be in close proximity to Westhill and will considerably improve accessibility.
- Westhill is an important strategic town in the City and Shire area and this is demonstrated by the demand for housing and employment in the town.
- Scottish Planning Policy advises (para.46) that development plans should provide a range and choice of marketable employment sites to meet anticipated requirements.
- The sub-sea sector is a key driver of economic growth of Westhill, as well as the sub-regional, regional and national economies. In this context, there is the opportunity to specifically recognise Westhill's status and contribution to the economic growth of the area

- The land immediately south of Westhill & Arnhall Business Parks may represent a logical extension to the established employment land supply, particularly if new sites are to be tailored to the needs of the subsea cluster which is located within the Business Parks. However, to accommodate new development on land south of Westhill significant infrastructure would be required to address capacity issues on the B9119 and B979.
- Despite the presence of the Greenbelt and Aberdeen City boundaries there may be scope to develop mixed use areas immediately east and north east of Westhill.
- A sufficient and growing population base (together with the homes and jobs that that entails) provides the opportunity, and is required, to support services and facilities at a level appropriate to improve the quality of life.
- Given current and anticipated economic activity it is prudent to plan for growth and ensure sufficient land is available to satisfy market demand.
- The faster the level of population growth inevitably means that business also requires a more generous supply of land to be made available, which will in turn provide sufficient confidence to encourage continued inward investment
- Economic activity west of Aberdeen City has increased significantly since 2009 (e.g. Westhill), despite the Strategic Growth Areas designation not including this area. The A944 is of strategic importance to Westhill/Aberdeen; opportunity for more housing development west of the City so that housing is close to employment opportunities at Westhill. Opportunity to develop and deliver accessible transport links.
- Housing diversity and choice in Westhill could be enhanced by integrating relatively high density flats with areas of office blocks and low order retail in order to provide housing for young professionals and create mixed use, 'livable' neighbourhoods.
- Westhill Business Park is owned by Aberdeenshire Council, which may facilitate the reconfiguration of the Business Park and improve its efficiency.

6.1.4 Threats

- Although Westhill is expected to retain a sizeable working age population over the next 20 to 25 years, a rapidly ageing population combined with low levels of immigration could reduce the town's labour pool.
- If the identified lack of housing diversity and choice is left unresolved this could cause a blockage in the local housing market and present difficulties for attracting and retaining the highly skilled labour force required to service the growing subsea engineering sector.
- A lack of planned new land for housing may encourage speculative applications for residential development, which may exacerbate rather than improve issues related to housing tenure/type, with a commensurate impact on infrastructure capacity. Speculative housing development could also exacerbate existing deficiencies in Westhill's overall spatial structure.

- If educational capacity issues are not resolved this may constrain future housing development in Westhill, which could have a knock-on effect on the town's labour market.
- If sufficient employment land is not provided to meet local needs, this may prevent economic development from occurring. Specifically, if suitable sites are not identified for the growing subsea cluster this would constrain the sector's growth and could ultimately lead to the relocation of one or more subsea firms out of Westhill. If this were to happen it could threaten the viability of the Westhill subsea cluster, as the main reason why the subsea industry has developed a centre of excellence in the town relates to the economic benefits generated through agglomeration.
- Potentially increasing competition from outwith Aberdeenshire to attract the sub-sea market sector. The Employment Land Audit 2012 (published May 2013) states, for example, that in recent years take up of land has been much higher in Aberdeenshire, partly as a result of the shortage of suitable sites in Aberdeen, but there are indications that take up in both areas is increasing.
- The Reporter of the Proposed ACSSDP Examination Report (p.132 para.15) supported the contention of the SDP Authority that the significant expansion of Westhill took place at a time when such development opportunities within Aberdeen itself were limited. This is no longer the case, with significant allocations being brought forward within the A944 corridor at Kingswells and at Countesswells. The reporter concluded *'that significant expansion at those locations would represent a better fit with the spatial strategy and sustainability objectives of the plan than would be the case at Westhill.'*
- If Westhill depends upon the subsea engineering sector for its prosperity this could limit local employment opportunities, as only a limited number of potential employees who reside in Westhill are likely to have appropriate skills and qualifications for the subsea industry. One consequence of this would be a need for increased commuting, which would generate significant negative social and environmental impacts.
- If Westhill depends upon the subsea engineering sector for its prosperity and the sector experiences rapid decline, the socio-economic prosperity of the town would also sharply decline.
- Historically poor recognition to the role of community facilities in supporting growth, and the ability of the existing public facilities to support existing, new and expanded communities. Need to ensure that future growth is not constrained by lack of infrastructure (e.g. health care, community and leisure facilities); the local communities should benefit/gain from growth.
- Development without appropriate infrastructure could lead to under capacity on the road network and result in significant social, economic and environmental impacts. If development continues without appropriate and reasonable infrastructure improvements this could weaken the attractiveness of Westhill to employers/investors.
- Increased traffic on the A944 as a result of new development could exacerbate existing severance issues.

6.2 Key Issues

The contextual information, spatial analysis and sustainability objectives reported earlier in this report highlights multiple key issues which are of key importance to the future development of Westhill. Of particular importance

and relevance to the framework for the future growth of Westhill over the next 20 to 25 years is the **spatial strategy** and **sustainability objectives** contained within the approved Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan (2014) which identifies Westhill as being located within a **Local Growth and Diversification (LGD) area**. These means that any further development should be integrated with and compliment the existing settlement. Paragraph 3.11-3.15 identifies specific requirements for the development of LGD areas:

- *“There is a need for **diversification and growth in the economy** in this area to meet local needs”*
- ***Employment related development** will be encouraged to help diversify the economy*
- *Levels of growth in individual settlements should relate to **local needs** rather than be driven by external pressures*
- ***Mixed use development** should be prioritised*
- *Development must “**respect the character of the landscape and local identity**”*

The spatial strategy and sustainability objectives in the adopted **Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) (2012)**, which is in conformity with the approved Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan (2014), , outlines a spatial strategy for the development of the Council area to 2023. The LDP sets out a high level spatial strategy for Westhill, which is orientated around the following objectives:

- *“Meet the **need for housing** in the settlement, and the Aberdeen Housing Market Area.*
- ***Sustain existing services** in a sub-regional centre.*
- *Provide **affordable housing** in the settlement.*
- *Maintain function as a successful **employment centre**.*
- *Allow **scale of development** which does not cause problems for **current infrastructure**”*

The Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan (2014) is important in shaping the development framework for Westhill over the next 20 to 25 years, as it sets out a high level spatial strategy for the development of the region up to 2035. The vision and aims of the SDP focuses in particular on exploiting opportunities for widespread economic growth, as well as population growth within key settlements.

As such these key issues should be fully addressed within any proposals to expand Westhill.

6.2.1 Supporting Economic Growth in Westhill

There are two strands to this key issue:

Facilitating the Growth of Westhill Subsea Cluster

The rapid expansion of the subsea engineering sector in Westhill over recent years has eroded the established land supply to the extent that new employment land is urgently required, yet few vacant and suitable sites currently exist within the town. This presents difficulties for all economic sectors, but in particular the lack of suitable employment sites currently acts as a major constraint to the continued development of the highly successful subsea engineering cluster. Thus there is a need to propose new employment land allocations which are suitable for general employment use, but also reflect the specific needs of the subsea sector. These requirements are likely to include adequate land for demonstration/testing facilities and equipment storage yards alongside the provision of grade A office space and ancillary development. In addition, subsea sector firms locating in Westhill may demand sites close to the existing subsea industries cluster within the Westhill, Arnhall and Silvertrees Business Parks, in order to maximise the agglomeration benefits which can be derived from locating within the town.

Economic Diversification & Resilience

Economic growth and employment in Westhill is currently underpinned by a small number of key economic sectors, notably subsea engineering. The subsea engineering sector's involvement with renewables industries is expanding - as evidenced by the recent development of Technip Offshore Wind Ltd's headquarters in Westhill. However, subsea engineering is currently largely reliant on work related to oil and gas extraction. This lack of economic diversity undermines the economic resilience of the town because it ties the prosperity of Westhill to the success of individual subsea engineering firms and the performance of the global oil and gas economy, particularly in terms of oil price volatility. The current dependency of Westhill and the wider North East economy on the oil and gas sector also raises environmental sustainability concerns, given that fossil fuels are finite natural resources and that their extraction and consumption contribute to anthropogenically enhanced global climate change. Therefore while there is a clear need for this study to identify potential options for the growth of the Westhill subsea cluster, there is also a need to develop other sectors of the local economy to provide mixed use development.

6.2.2 Housing Provision

There is a critical lack of diversity and choice in terms of housing tenure and type in Westhill. Residential areas of Westhill are dominated by owner occupied private family dwellings, resulting in there being a low percentage of council and socially rented housing. In addition, the town has limited provision of flatted dwellings and small homes suitable either for young professionals without families or for older residents who wish to downsize. If left unresolved the lack of housing choice could eventually cause a blockage in the local housing market and present difficulties for attracting and retaining the highly skilled labour force required to service the town's growing subsea engineering sector.

To alleviate the current shortage of affordable housing in Westhill, Aberdeenshire Council have designated the settlement as having 'Pressured Area Status' and established a 40% affordable housing target for new developments. At present this approach is successfully delivering affordable housing units within the Broadshade development. However, the ability of Aberdeenshire Council to continue to require high percentages of affordable housing in the future could potentially be undermined by the statement within paragraph 97 of the Draft Revised

SPP that “the level of affordable housing requirement should generally be no more than 25%”. If the finalised version of the new SPP identifies a general 25% affordable requirement and provides less flexibility for local variations, as compared within the wording of the current SPP, this policy shift would need to be factored into the emerging Aberdeenshire LDP 2016, and alternative approaches to delivering affordable housing in Westhill would need to be found. Therefore, while increasing overall housing provision is not necessarily a priority for this study, there is a need to develop proposals to increase the diversity of housing tenure and type, potentially through the creation of high density mixed use developments.

6.2.3 Accessibility & Sustainability

There are two strands to this key issue:

Connectivity, Congestion & Emissions

The economy and population of Westhill are growing simultaneously. However, the specialist nature of the dominant economic sector, subsea engineering, means that the majority of residents do not work in the town and the majority of the workforce do not live in Westhill. This necessitates significant cross-commuting between Westhill and other settlements, principally Aberdeen, which presently results in congestion as well as carbon emissions. Congestion is exacerbated by the fact that the A944 is the only strategic route into and out of the town. Therefore, there is a need to understand the traffic flows and infrastructure requirements within Westhill and devise a strategy for development which resolves, or at the very least, does not exacerbate existing congestion problems on the A944. Any strategy to tackle congestion could involve measures to increase the relative attractiveness of bus transport compared with car travel for commuters, and actions could also be taken to more fully exploit the use of existing cycle networks located east of Westhill. It should be noted that the effectiveness and efficiency of any major infrastructure improvements would likely be maximised through being co-ordinated with a small number of large development proposals, as opposed to a larger number of individual proposals for development sites.

Severance & Permeability

The A944 runs east to west through the central area of Westhill, creating physical severance points and significantly affecting the spatial structure of the town. The dominance of the A944 also impedes non-vehicle permeability between housing areas north of the A944 and employment areas/business park to the south. The A944 cannot feasibly be realigned. However, there is a need to consider what measures could be taken to reduce severance and increase permeability within Westhill. In terms of non-vehicular transport routes an existing cycle route runs to the east of Westhill. However, there is a need to consider whether this route could be better integrated with the street network within Westhill.

6.2.4 Community Infrastructure Provision

There are two strands to this key issue:

Education Capacity

It is considered likely that additional employment related growth in Westhill would, at least in the medium term, require to be supported by new housing provision, which would likely generate additional pupils and therefore exacerbate existing education capacity constraints within the Westhill school estate.

Maximising Local Gains from Economic Growth

Related to efforts to better integrate land uses within Westhill, there is a need to assess the quantity, quality and distribution of community facilities across the town and to determine how employment-led development could be leveraged in order to enhance these facilities. Without this partnership approach there is the potential that employment land uses will continue to be relatively detached and poorly integrated with the rest of Westhill.

6.2.5 Enhancing Westhill's Spatial Identity

There are two strands to this key issue:

Develop a Coherent Internal Spatial Structure:

To enhance Westhill's spatial and socio-cultural identity there is a need to address severance issues caused by the route of the A944 and to improve the relationship between currently detached housing, retail and employment land uses. The public realm is a key component of the built environment which physically connects disparate land uses, therefore opportunities should be examined to improve public realm, particularly in central areas of Westhill.

The Relationship between Westhill and Surrounding Areas

The eastern and western approaches to Westhill from the A944 are poorly defined, with roundabouts at each end of the town serving purely functional roles rather than also symbolic ones. As a result there is a lack of visual clarity over the boundaries of the Westhill, particularly in relation to Green Belt land to the east, and if left unchecked this could encourage the proliferation of inappropriate development in semi-rural areas. Therefore, there is a need to improve the delineation of Westhill's settlement boundaries and to provide distinctive gateway features at appropriate entrance points. Consideration could also be given to reviewing the Green Belt east of Westhill to release limited land for development and to improve the legibility of this boundary, thereby increasing protection against inappropriate development on the fringes of Westhill.

7. A Vision for Westhill

This section outlines a vision for Westhill and identifies Strategic Objectives in order to respond to the key issues identified in Section 6.2 and frame potential options for growth. The vision and objectives provide the rationale for the ‘Options for Growth’ outlined in Section 8 and for the assessment of potential development areas which will be included in the final report of this capacity study. The visioning section outlined below is intentionally brief and high level in nature given that a detailed visioning chapter would be more appropriate in a potential future masterplan for Westhill.

7.1 Vision Statement

The Options for Growth (see Section 8) and the subsequent assessment of potential development areas are underpinned by the following vision:

Westhill will continue to be a place where people choose to live, work, visit and invest in. The town will fully exploit its position as the world centre of excellence for subsea engineering, and it will seek to attract a wide range of businesses and skilled workers. Westhill will develop a distinctive spatial character and a high quality physical environment, with enhanced provision of services for residents and businesses. This will be achieved through creating a sustainable mixed community, balancing residential, commercial and employment related development in such a way as to reduce the need to travel and create a vibrant place.

7.2 Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objectives for the development of Westhill comprise:

- Strategic Objective 1 - To enhance its function as a successful employment centre;
- Strategic Objective 2 - To enhance services and the role of Westhill as one of Aberdeenshire’s Main Towns;
- Strategic Objective 3 - To meet the need for housing in Westhill and the Aberdeen Housing Market Area, including the specific housing needs of workers associated with the subsea engineering sector and of the town’s ageing population;
- Strategic Objective 4 - To enhance connectivity and permeability through reducing traffic congestion and severance impacts;
- Strategic Objective 5 - To integrate land uses within Westhill and enhance the town’s spatial identity; and,
- Strategic Objective 6 - To maintain the separate identities of Kirkton of Skene and Westhill through preventing the coalescence of these settlements.

8. Options for Growth

This section outlines the three potential high level options for growth which were identified by AMEC E&I and discussed with Aberdeenshire Council officers before proceeding to the final stage of the study.

8.1 Possible Growth Options

8.1.1 Option 1 – Maximise Growth

In order to maintain Westhill's place as a global centre of excellence for subsea engineering this option would seek to identify land for significant employment related development, and measures would also be proposed to address the key issues identified in section 6.2 of this report. This option would therefore address current specific challenges within Westhill, including those related to accommodation and transport pressures, whilst allowing the subsea sector to expand on or close to the cluster's existing sites.

Despite the disadvantages of additional development in Westhill, such as congestion, these are arguably outweighed by the need to maintain the success of Westhill as a centre of sub-sea engineering excellence. Albeit the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Plan Examination Report and subsequent approved Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan does not identify Westhill as a Strategic Growth Area (SGA), and therefore not an area expected to contribute to strategic growth, however the current objectives of the approved SDP and adopted LDP include objectives regarding economic growth and diversification. The approved SDP makes specific reference to stimulating the wider economic growth where a need can be identified, and Policy 1 of the SDP requires that the locational requirements of different business sectors should be met.

8.1.2 Option 2 – Limited Growth

This option would consider limited employment land development specifically to support the 'sub-sea cluster' at Westhill. The option would also consider other measures that could be taken to support this international success. The main aim of this option would be to maintain Westhill's function as a successful employment centre.

8.1.3 Option 3 – No Growth

Given the current and emerging planning policy context an option is to disregard concerns regarding the relocation of the sub-sea sector away from Westhill, on the basis that sufficient land has already been allocated, or could be made available through the development of previously developed sites to accommodate the expansion of the subsea cluster. This could potentially be achieved through the rationalisation and reconfiguration of existing industrial estates within Westhill to maximise their development capacity, rather than seeking to allocate new land for employment related development.

This option trades on the reputation of Aberdeenshire as an acknowledged high quality place to live and with a skills base transferable to the sub-sea sector. It questions whether the sub-sea sector is specifically dependant on Westhill, or could be accommodated on a range of sites within the wider region, including the Aberdeen City area, with no diminution of the advantages of clustering or through the redevelopment of existing land within Westhill. The conclusion of this option would be to make no additional land allocations in Westhill.

9. Assessment Process

Following feedback from Council officers on the findings discussed in the Interim Report it was decided to progress **Option 1 – Maximum Growth** to the final stage of this study. This involved reviewing and revising the Goal Achievement Matrix (GAM) detailed in the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study to take account of:

- Physical development which has occurred in Westhill since the publication of the 2008 Capacity Study;
- The vision statement and six strategic objectives set out within the Interim Report;
- Each of the Development Bid Sites for Westhill and Kirkton of Skene which were submitted in response to the Aberdeenshire LDP 2016 Main Issues Report consultation;
- The implications for Westhill of the forthcoming AWPR; and,
- Other potential development opportunities, constraints and associated infrastructure requirements.

This exercise generated a %age GAM score for each site, allowing them to be ranked in terms of development suitability.

The assessment process is underpinned by the following vision:

Westhill will continue to be a place where people choose to live, work, visit and invest in. The town will fully exploit its position as the world centre of excellence for subsea engineering, and it will seek to attract a wide range of businesses and skilled workers. Westhill will develop a distinctive spatial character and a high quality physical environment, with enhanced provision of services for residents and businesses. This will be achieved through creating a sustainable mixed community, balancing residential, commercial and employment related development in such a way as to reduce the need to travel and create a vibrant place.

In addition, the assessment will be framed around the achievement of six strategic objectives, each of which has been built into the proposed assessment criteria. These strategic objectives are:

- Strategic Objective 1 - To enhance its function as a successful employment centre;
- Strategic Objective 2 - To enhance services and the role of Westhill as one of Aberdeenshire's Main Towns;
- Strategic Objective 3 - To meet the need for housing in Westhill and the Aberdeen Housing Market Area, including the specific housing needs of workers associated with the subsea engineering sector and of the town's ageing population;
- Strategic Objective 4 - To enhance connectivity and permeability through reducing traffic congestion and severance impacts;

- Strategic Objective 5 - To integrate land uses within Westhill and enhance the town's spatial identity; and,
- Strategic Objective 6 - To maintain the separate identities of Kirkton of Skene and Westhill through preventing the coalescence of these settlements.

9.1 Assessment Methodology

9.1.1 Assessment Criteria

The assessment criteria which were used in the GAM review exercise are detailed in Appendix A. These criteria included eight strategic assessment criteria, relating directly to the aforementioned strategic objectives, and 32 technical assessment criteria, relating to site specific constraints.

The assessment criteria were devised based on:

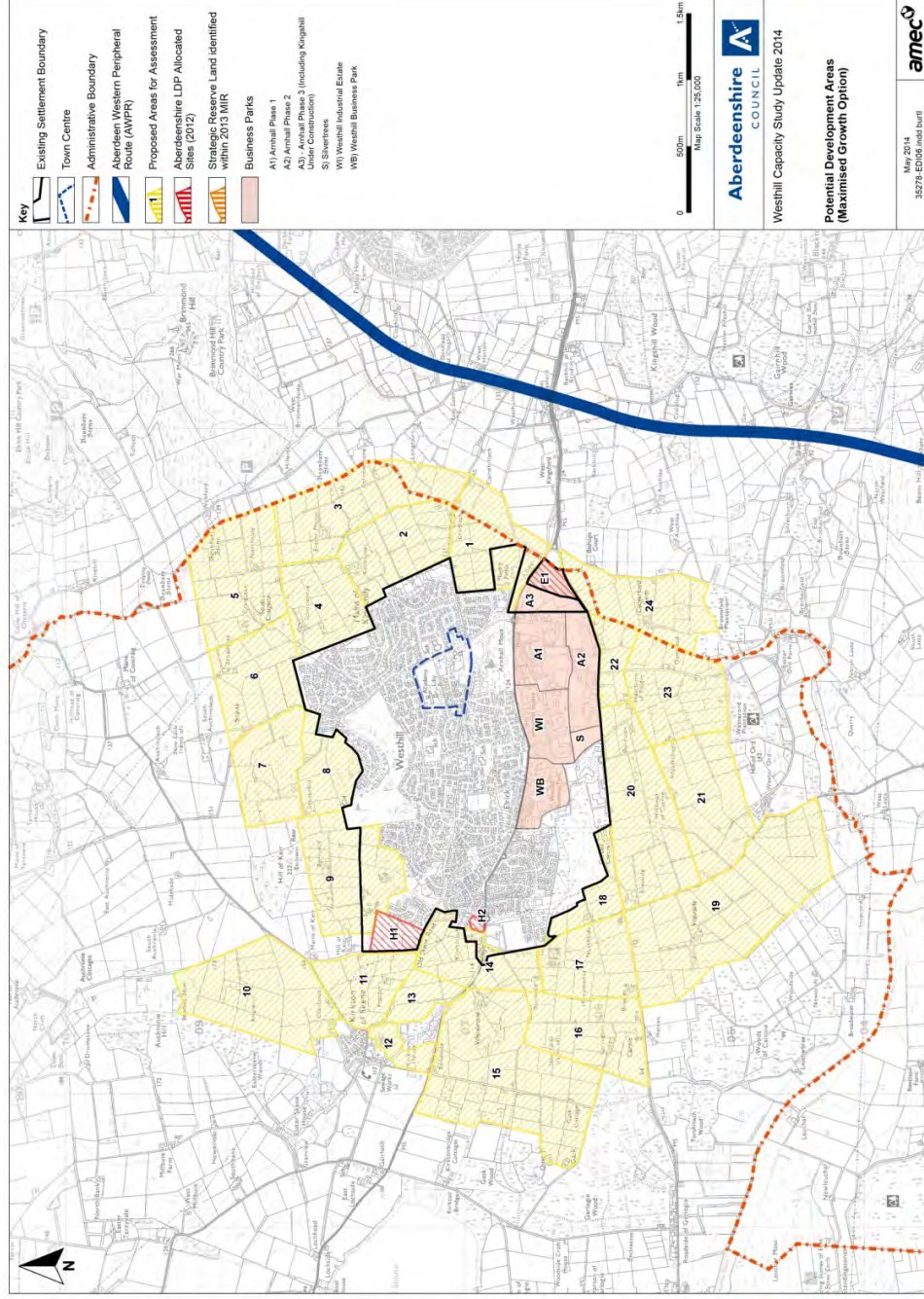
- The assessment criteria used in the Westhill Capacity Study 2008;
- The vision statement and six strategic objectives set out above;
- The criteria which were used by Aberdeenshire Council in their mini-GAM exercise undertaken in 2013 to appraise Development Bid Sites for the purposes of the Aberdeenshire LDP 2016 Main Issues Report;
- Index 21, a joint research project between Aberdeenshire Council and Robert Gordon University which informed the assessment criteria used in the 2008 Capacity Study; and,
- Relevant policy considerations which have emerged since 2008, notably the Scottish Government's Designing Streets Planning Policy.

9.1.2 Assessment Areas

The areas which were subject to assessment are shown below on Figure 9.1. These areas were selected for assessment based on:

- The areas identified for assessment in the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study;
- Each of the Development Bid Sites for Westhill and Kirkton of Skene which were submitted in response to the Aberdeenshire LDP 2016 Main Issues Report consultation;
- Other potential development opportunities, constraints and associated infrastructure requirements, taking into account the 25 year period of this study. In particular, the existing Greenbelt boundary and administrative boundary between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City have been considered as relative rather than absolute constraints.

Figure 9.1 Potential Development Areas



9.1.3 Assessment Criteria Weighting & Thresholds

To reflect the importance of the strategic objectives a 43% (rounded to no decimal places) weighting was applied to the strategic assessment criteria aggregate score by multiplying this aggregate score by three. The weighted strategic assessment criteria aggregate score was then aggregated with the technical assessment aggregate score to generate a final score for each assessment area, which was then converted into a percentage score and ranked against all other assessed areas.

It should be noted that this updated capacity study has assessed different land areas from those assessed in the 2008 Westhill Capacity Study. However, to enable a degree of consistency between the studies the same thresholds were used to categorise areas as either 'most suitable', 'suitable' or 'less suitable' for development. These thresholds are:

- 'Most Suitable' = 70% or over
- 'Suitable' = 61-69%
- 'Less Suitable' = Lower than 60%

References within Section 10 and 11 of this report to 'most suitable', 'suitable' and 'less suitable' areas relate solely to the scoring of assessed areas against the above quantitative threshold, rather than to any qualitative judgement.

10. Assessment Results

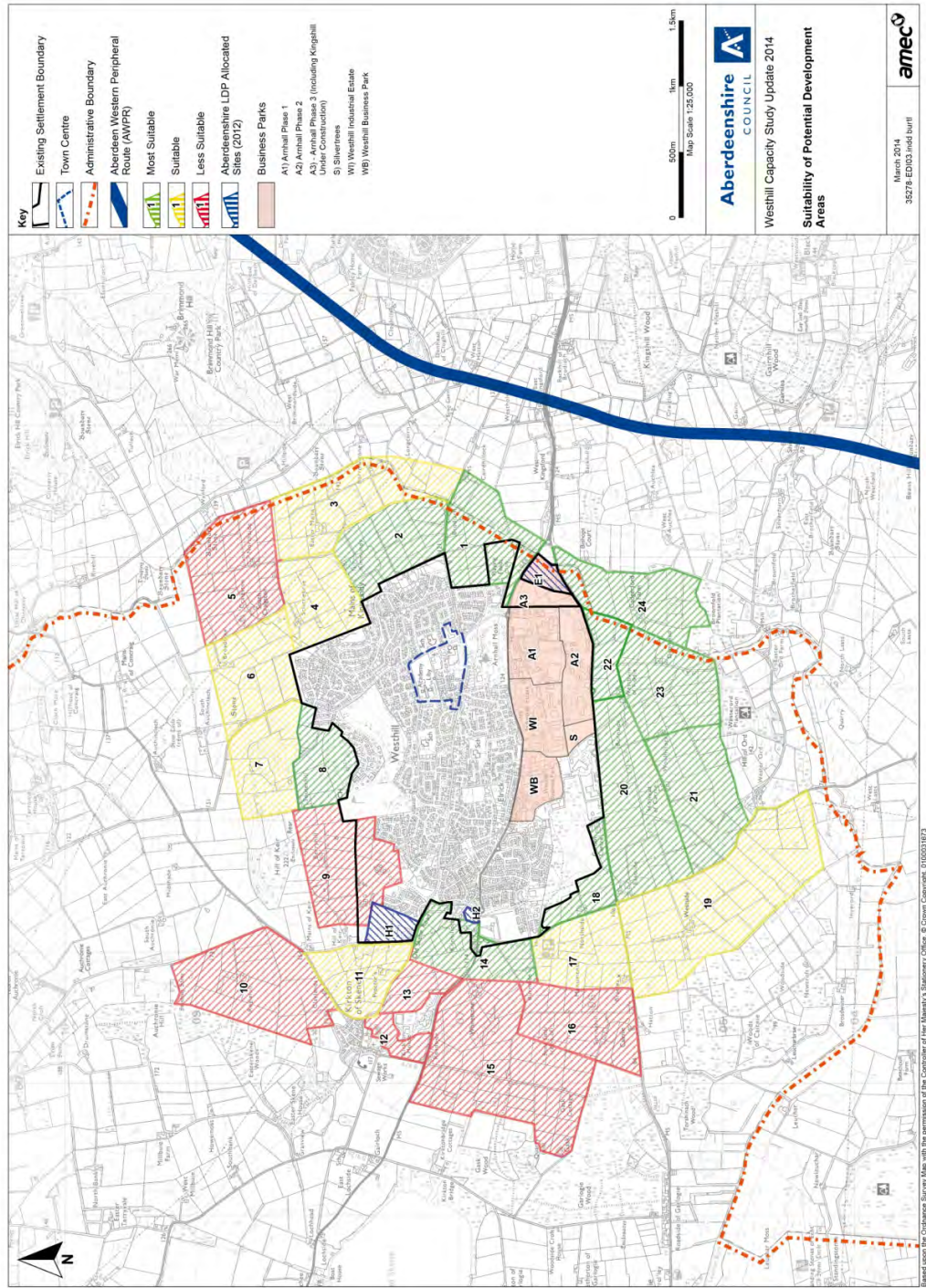
The full results of individual assessments of all potential development areas are detailed in Appendix B, while the ranking and final score achieved by each area is detailed below in Table 10.1. Areas highlighted in green achieved a score of 70% or greater and therefore are considered to be ‘most suitable’ for development; areas highlighted in yellow achieved a score of 60-69% and are therefore considered to be ‘suitable’ for development; and areas highlighted in red achieved a score of less than 60% and are therefore considered to be ‘less suitable’ for development.

Table 10.1 Summary Results of Potential Development Areas Assessment

Ranking	Area	% Score
1	1	81%
2	22	78%
3	14	77%
4	18	77%
5	20	77%
6	23	74%
7	21	74%
8	2	74%
9	8	74%
10	24	73%
11	6	67%
12	4	67%
13	17	67%
14	7	63%
15	19	63%
16	3	61%
17	11	61%
18	12	58%
19	9	57%
20	13	56%
21	16	54%
22	15	54%
23	5	53%
24	10	49%

The results detailed in Table 10.1 are illustrated in Figure 10.1 below. This shows that in general the 'most suitable' sites are located to the south and east of Westhill, while the 'less suitable sites' generally lie to the west of Westhill.

Figure 10.1 Suitability of Potential Development Areas



These results indicate that 10 potential development areas are categorised as ‘most suitable’, due to their proximity to employment and retail nodes, the capacity of nearby roads and their potential ability to enhance the spatial structure of Westhill. Areas that scored lower did so primarily because of their location relative to employment and other built up land uses, access constraints, and due to the presence of pipelines or high voltage power lines in particular areas. It should be noted that in many cases the difference between the scores of potential development areas is minimal, which implies that other considerations, notably economic and policy drivers, will play a key role in determining the suitability of specific areas for development.

11. Recommendations

This concluding section of the study outlines a number of recommendations which Aberdeenshire Council should consider in order to maximise sustainable economic growth within and around Westhill. These recommendations have been informed by various aspects of this study, including: the analysis of contextual and baseline data (Sections 2-3), the identification of key constraints (Section 4), consideration of relevant plans & policies (Section 5), the identification of key spatial issues within Westhill (Sections 6 and 7), the formulation of a vision statement and strategic objectives for Westhill (Section 8) and the assessment of the development potential of land around the periphery of Westhill (Section 10).

11.1 Potential Development Areas

The study has identified 10 potential development areas as ‘most suitable’ for development to meet the desired spatial objectives for Westhill. In order of their ranking within the quantitative assessment exercise, these are:

- Area 1
- Area 22
- Area 14
- Area 18
- Area 20
- Area 23
- Area 21
- Area 2
- Area 8
- Area 24

11.2 Phasing of Development

To ensure that development around the periphery of Westhill contributes to the delivery of the vision statement articulated within this capacity study, the phasing and type of development within each of the ‘most suitable’ and ‘suitable’ areas should be considered carefully.

Overall there is a strong preference for ‘most suitable’ areas to be developed first, as these have been proven to be the ‘most sustainable’. Developing the ‘most suitable’ areas before considering development within the ‘suitable’

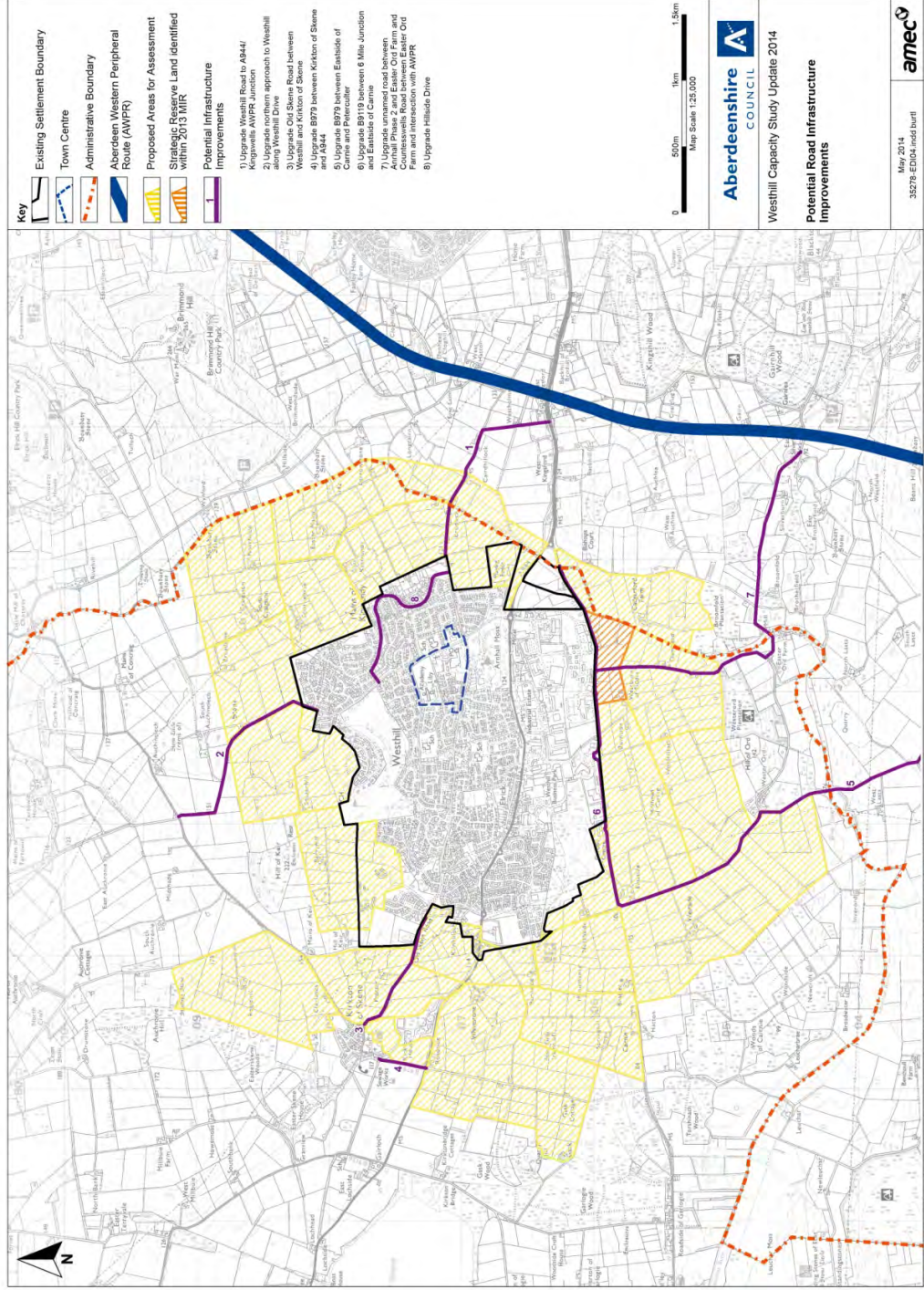
areas would minimise the impacts of site specific constraints upon development and avoid the creation of areas of development which are detached from Westhill. Once the ‘most suitable’ areas of land have been built, the ‘suitable’ areas may then become ‘more suitable’, given that these will be located closer to transport networks and services, thereby increasing their sustainability. However, even in the long term some of the ‘suitable’ areas for development will not become ‘most suitable’ areas due to the persistence of significant site specific constraints, notably pipeline infrastructure, as well as potentially landownership.

The ‘less suitable’ areas are generally considered to be inappropriate locations for development due to the presence of significant constraints, to the extent that it is unlikely that these areas will become suitable for significant development over the period of this study. However, this updated capacity study has avoided describing these areas as ‘unsuitable’ for development, as it is important not to prejudge the merits of any individual planning applications which may be submitted in these areas over the period of this study. Several of the development bids submitted to Aberdeenshire in advance of the publication of the Main Issues Report 2013 suggest that several of these ‘less suitable’ sites may be subject to future planning applications.

11.3 **Transport Infrastructure requirements**

To facilitate development within several of the ‘most suitable’ and ‘suitable’ potential development areas it would be necessary to undertake a number of significant improvements to the transport network around Westhill, as identified on Figure 11.1.

Figure 11.1 Potential Infrastructure Improvements



The potential infrastructure improvements identified on Figure 11.1 are:

- Upgrade Westhill Road to A944/Kingswells AWPR Junction
- Upgrade northern approach to Westhill along Westhill Drive
- Upgrade Old Skene Road between Westhill and Kirkton of Skene
- Upgrade B979 between Kirkton of Skene and A944
- Upgrade B979 between Eastside of Carnie and Peterculter
- Upgrade B9119 between 6 Mile Junction and Eastside of Carnie
- Upgrade unnamed road between Anrhall Phase 2 and Easter Ord Farm and Countesswells Road between Easter Ord Farm and intersection with AWPR
- Upgrade Hillside Drive

This study has not considered the detailed specification, potential cost and prioritisation of individual possible road infrastructure improvements. However, any improvement projects would be expected to include the provision of footpaths, segregated cycle routes and safe crossing points. In addition, potential improvements to approach roads around the periphery of Westhill should consider the feasibility of road widening and junction realignments where appropriate. Given all of these considerations it would be prudent to undertake S-Paramics modelling and detailed feasibility studies for each potential road upgrade.

In addition, during the Stakeholder Workshop held on 3rd February 2014 initial consideration was given to the merits of relocating the existing Park & Ride facility from the western edge of Kingswells to Westhill. It should be noted that relocating this facility to Westhill would require the reconfiguration of bus routes and the identification of land within Westhill for dedicated car parking, and such relocation could also potentially affect traffic flows on the A944.

11.4 **Establishment of Westhill Business Improvement District**

National policy documents including the Town Centre Action Plan (Scottish Government, 2013) and the draft revised SPP encourage local authorities to support the vitality of town centres through measures including the establishment of Business Improvement Districts (BID). Therefore, it is recommended that Aberdeenshire Council should seek to establish a BID for Westhill. The main purpose of the Westhill BID should be to co-ordinate actions which aim to simultaneously enhance the vitality of the 'town centre' of Westhill (as defined in the Aberdeenshire LDP 2012), the business parks located south of the A944 and potential future development areas around the town's periphery.

11.5 Further Studies

This update of the Westhill Development Capacity Study has identified the optimal pattern of development within Westhill over the next 20 to 25 years. However, it has not been possible within the bounds of this study to consider detailed site specific or design related issues, nor has it been feasible to develop detailed options for the reconfiguration of land within the existing settlement boundary of Westhill. All of these factors should be considered in detail to maximise the sustainability of future development. Therefore, it is recommended that a series of further studies be undertaken:

- **Transport Infrastructure Feasibility Study:** The potential road infrastructure improvements identified in Figure 11.1 should be subject to detailed examination through an engineering based feasibility study. The study should also consider the possible benefits and implications of relocating the Kingswells Park & Ride facility to Westhill. This study should seek to incorporate the models of traffic flows around Westhill which are presently in an advanced state of preparation by Aberdeenshire Council Transportation Services.
- **Greenbelt Review:** In the context of the forthcoming construction of the AWPR it is recommended that Aberdeenshire Council re-examine the current policy of providing a ‘belt’ of Greenbelt between settlements and the AWPR route, on the basis that maintaining this position could significantly constrain the economic opportunities which would otherwise be delivered to Aberdeenshire by the AWPR. It should also be noted that the construction of the AWPR is likely to alter the character of existing rural landscapes, and the AWPR route itself may act as a buffer between settlements. Therefore, it is recommended that an independent review of Greenbelt land in close proximity to the AWPR route be undertaken, most particularly land east of Westhill, in order to assess whether any of this land should be released in the short, medium or long term.
- **Community Asset Review:** It is recommended that a detailed study of existing community assets within Westhill be undertaken, to identify existing and potential future gaps in the provision of public services and community facilities in Westhill. The findings from this study suggest that western areas of Westhill have a relative deficit of community facilities and services, and this issue should be probed further within a detailed review of community assets. Given that many of the existing community assets in Westhill are owned and operated by Aberdeenshire Council this review may be relatively straightforward to be undertaken.
- **Town Centre Urban Design Strategy:** It is recommended that an urban design strategy for Westhill Town Centre (as defined in the 2012 LDP) is undertaken, to identify options for improving connectivity between the Town Centre and other areas of Westhill, and to explore the feasibility of reconfiguring spaces within the Town Centre, notably the Westhill Shopping Centre car park. The overarching objective of this design led strategy should be to improve the vibrancy of the Town Centre.
- **Westhill Strategic Masterplan:** It is recommended that a ‘strategic masterplan’ of Westhill (to include the existing settlement and the areas deemed to be ‘most suitable’ and ‘suitable’ within this study) be undertaken. The focus of this study should consider the longer term vision of Greenfield sites, brownfield sites/opportunities, town centre issues, community/recreation facilities, effective and efficient travel options and strategies for ensuring compatibility between different land uses. Consideration should be given to identifying specific sites and routes for the provision of new or upgraded community facilities, public services, public open space and publicly funded infrastructure, and the strategic masterplan should consider the spatial relationship between all of these assets. This

strategic masterplan could usefully be informed by the Transport Infrastructure Feasibility Study, Greenbelt Review, Community Asset Review and the Town Centre Urban Design Strategy work streams which are also recommended to be undertaken.

- **Preparation of Site Specific Masterplans:** In line with the guidance contained within Planning Advice: Number 7 /2012, developers intending to submit planning applications to Aberdeenshire Council for proposals which would constitute ‘major development’ are required to produce site masterplans. It is strongly recommended that proposals for ‘major’ development on any of the potential development areas identified within this updated capacity study should fully consider all of the site specific issues, constraints and opportunities which this study has identified. Proposals for development on the periphery of Westhill – in particular on sites that are bounded by the approach roads to the town (i.e. the A944, Old Skene Road, Westhill Drive, the B9119 and the B979) - should consider how appropriate gateway features could be incorporated into the development.
- **Rationalisation studies of existing industrial estates within Westhill:** To undertake feasibility studies to examine the opportunities to maximise the development capacity of the existing industrial estates within Westhill, and consider the physical and spatial requirements of potential inward investors and sectors.

11.6 Summary & Conclusion

This update to the Westhill Capacity Study (2008) has considered the capacity for future growth of the town over a period of 20-25 years. This differs from the target of achieving 50% growth in housing stock which underpinned the initial 2008 Study; therefore the findings and recommendations arising from this updated study differ significantly from the conclusions reached by the 2008 study.

Due to the time that has lapsed since the initial capacity study, and the increasing pressure from businesses and developers regarding Westhill, this updated capacity study has been undertaken to understand the future growth potential of the settlement. The preparation of this updated Capacity Study has been informed by the latest available statistical and planning data, a workshop comprising AMEC E&I staff and Aberdeenshire Council officers from the Transportation and Economic Development, and regular correspondence between members of the Project Delivery client group.

A Draft Baseline report and an Interim Report were prepared in advance of this Final Report to collate relevant data and to identify the spatial objectives which would underpin the site assessment stage of the study. The Interim Report included an analysis of current characteristics and predicted trends in Westhill, together with the identification of key development constraints and a high level assessment of the key drivers of change, including an analysis of the policy context for Westhill. The Interim Report also identified key issues which are likely to affect the future development of Westhill and outlined a vision and set of strategic objectives to underpin Westhill’s future development. In addition the Interim Report detailed three potential growth trajectories for Westhill, and following instructions from Aberdeenshire Council officers it was decided to progress a ‘maximised growth option’ within the final (site assessment) stage of the study.

This Final Report includes the complete contents of the Interim Report, together with the results of the site assessment stage of the study and a number of recommendations for further work which should be undertaken to maximise sustainable economic growth in Westhill.

Of particular importance and relevance to the framework for the future growth of Westhill over the next 20 to 25 years is the **spatial strategy** and **sustainability objectives** contained within the approved Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan (2014), which identifies Westhill as being located within a **Local Growth and Diversification (LGD)** area. Consequently, any further development in Westhill should be integrated with and complement the existing settlement. Specific requirements for the development of LGD areas include:

- *“There is a need for **diversification and growth in the economy** in this area to meet local needs”*
- ***Employment related development** will be encouraged to help diversify the economy*
- *Levels of growth in individual settlements should relate to local needs rather than be driven by external pressures*
- ***Mixed use development** should be prioritised*
- *Development must “**respect the character of the landscape and local identity**”*

The spatial strategy and sustainability objectives in the adopted **Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) (2012)**, which is in conformity with the approved Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan (2014) which outlines a spatial strategy for the development of the Council area to 2035.. The LDP sets out a high level spatial strategy for Westhill, which is orientated around the following objectives:

- *“Meet the **need for housing** in the settlement, and the Aberdeen Housing Market Area.*
- ***Sustain existing services** in a sub-regional centre.*
- *Provide **affordable housing** in the settlement.*
- *Maintain function as a **successful employment centre**.*
- *Allow **scale of development** which does not cause problems for **current infrastructure**”*

The vision and aims of the SDP focuses in particular on exploiting opportunities for widespread economic growth as well as population growth within key settlements. The approved SDP identifies that Westhill is located in a LGD area rather than a Strategic Growth Area.

This capacity study is underpinned by the assumption that development pressures recently experienced in Westhill will continue, at least in the short-medium term, particularly in relation to employment land and the development of business parks. A related assumption is that, providing suitable development opportunities exist, subsea engineering firms will continue to choose to locate in the established subsea cluster within Westhill, at least in the short-medium term. It is assumed that the Aberdeen Western Periphery Route (AWPR), which at its nearest point is situated approximately 1km east of Westhill, will be fully operational within the 20-25 year timeframe of this

capacity study. The AWPR currently has a three year build programme scheduled for 2015-2018. A further assumption is that the vast majority of potential development in Westhill over the next 25 years will be funded by the private sector, although limited public sector funding may become available for infrastructure interventions.

The areas assessed for potential development within this study differ from the areas assessed in the 2008 study. However, the overall study area used within both studies is identical. In terms of geographic limitations this area extends as far east as the administrative boundary with Aberdeen City, south also as far as the administrative boundary, west as far as Kirkton of Skene and north to include Berryhill and Souterhill.

Two broad magnitudes of geographical, technical and infrastructure constraints have been identified:

- **Absolute Constraints** - issues which cannot be overcome due to cost or technical reasons within the 20 to 25 year period of this study and therefore require no further consideration; and;
- **Relative Constraints** – issues which present difficulties but which could be tolerated or resolved within reasonable limits of cost and timescales. There is therefore merit in considering options to resolve these constraints within this study.

Specific constraints identified within this study include topography, the town's rural setting, current greenbelt boundaries and the Aberdeen City Boundary. Of key importance is that these vary between absolute and relative constraint. For example, in terms of topography, while there is a need to avoid development spilling over ridgelines into valleys separate from Westhill, the whole of the north of Westhill is not necessarily absolutely constrained as there are potentially less steep slopes which may have some development capacity. Similarly, with regard to green belt, the form and function of the green belt may have changed over time, most recently as a result of the approved AWPR, to the extent that a future green belt review could potentially identify some development capacity within current Greenbelt areas. In addition, recent examples of transboundary developments along the boundary between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City demonstrate that this administrative boundary should only be considered as a relative constraint to development, subject to appropriate collaboration and partnership working between the Shire and the City.

To unlock potential development areas significant investment in the transport infrastructure would inevitably be required. However, the potential infrastructure enhancements identified in this study focus upon improving existing linkages rather than constructing substantially new infrastructure and roads, as this may simply result in capacity issues further along the existing road network. The funding of such improvements would be sought through developer contributions based on infrastructure requirements that are fairly and reasonably related to development, and as such the phasing of new development and land releases around Westhill are of key importance.

Key issues emanating from this updated Westhill Capacity Study can be considered by policy-makers through the emerging Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2016, as well as through other development planning activities. Such key issues include the identified six Strategic Objectives, including the desire to maintain the character of Kirkton of Skene by resisting development (and ultimately coalescence) between Kirkton of Skene and Westhill. Other objectives which have been identified within this study include the need to enhance Westhill's spatial structure and the need to address existing pressures on the transport network through the provision of upgraded road infrastructure.

This study has focused on opportunities to provide extensive employment land in order to sustain Westhill as a centre of excellence in subsea engineering, in addition to providing opportunities to diversify the local economy. Significant provision of employment land in Westhill would clearly have a positive impact on sustainability objectives. However, this should be achieved alongside suitable allocations for other land uses. Due to the high level nature of this study it has not been possible to consider detailed site specific issues or design related issues. Nevertheless, this study does suggest that mixed use development should be encouraged as an appropriate way of achieving the overall vision for Westhill of creating a sustainable mixed community which balances residential, commercial and employment related development in such a way as to reduce the need to travel and create a vibrant place.

12. Information Sources

This section lists all of the key information sourced which are cited in this report. For ease of use all references are allocated against relevant subheadings from the report. In addition it should be noted that the original Westhill Capacity Study (ENTEC UK, 2008) and current Ordnance Survey maps at multiple scales have informed all sections of this report.

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