



**DRAFT**

## **Planning and Design Brief**

**Site He 4**

**Darlington Borough Council**

**May 2016**

## **Background**

### **Introduction**

1. This Planning and Design Brief relates to the area of the former Blackwell Grange Golf Course known as Site He4, as shown edged red on the plan at page 6. It has been prepared to ensure that the development of the area is of the highest quality and respects the existing landscape and wildlife habitats. While the site area extends to almost 10 hectares, the Council expects approximately 4 to 5 hectares to be public open space.
2. Through identifying the pertinent issues, the Council aims to promote its aspirations for the site, identify opportunities and constraints and provide clear guidance for developers in terms of planning and design. It is intended that this brief will provide certainty to developers that proposals, in accordance with the parameters set out, will be welcomed and encouraged. A Masterplan illustration is shown at Appendix 3.
3. This Brief has been prepared in conjunction with the Blackwell Grange Neighbourhood Forum and the Council is grateful to the Forum for their comments and their positive attitudes to the Brief.

### **Objectives**

4. A number of strategic objectives have been identified :-
  - (a) Attainment of outstanding design quality which will create a highly desirable place to live
  - (b) Delivery of development which reflects the Local Wildlife Site designation and improves the habitat for the great crested newts
  - (c) Delivery of development which increases public access from what it was when the golf course was operational
  - (d) Delivery of development which will pay for improvements and enhancements to the public open space and provide financial sustainability to maintain it in perpetuity
  - (e) Delivery of development which creates good pedestrian and cycle links to the Town Centre

### **The Brief**

5. Darlington Borough Council has prepared this brief following consultation with statutory consultees and Blackwell residents on the Council's proposal to allocate land on the former golf course for high quality housing, including top-end executive housing. Top-end executive housing is normally set in its own grounds at a density of no more than 6 dwellings per hectare. It has 4 or more bedrooms, above average levels of garaging, security and privacy and individual, high quality designs and finishings. It comprises both new and older period homes.

## **The Status of the Brief**

6. This Brief will form the basis of discussions and dialogue between the Council and prospective developers regarding the sale of the land for residential development. The brief will also form the framework for the material considerations of a planning application for development. The Brief has been prepared by a multi-disciplinary Project Team involving representatives from; Planning; Urban Design; Conservation; Ecology; Highways; Sustainable Transport and Estates.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **Context and Connectivity**

7. Darlington is located in the North East of England and forms part of the Tees Valley sub-region, but also has strong cultural, social and economic links with neighbouring parts of North Yorkshire and South Durham. The Borough retains its market town character and functions as a sub-regional centre for employment, shopping and culture. It has a distinctive character with a rich heritage based on its industrial history, development of the nation's railways and a legacy of fine Victorian architecture. The town is surrounded by attractive and increasingly accessible countryside.
8. Darlington benefits from excellent transport links. It is located on the East Coast Mainline railway – London and Edinburgh can be reached within two and a half hours and two hours, respectively. Good road connections are provided outside the region via the A1 (M) and A66. Durham Tees Valley Airport is approximately 10 kilometres to the east of Darlington Town Centre.
9. The Borough Council is actively pursuing both national and local objectives to grow the economy of the town over the next 20 years. It has major growth opportunities in Business Services, Logistics, Life Sciences and Advanced Manufacturers. 6,000 new jobs are forecast and 10,000 new homes are being planned.
10. The Blackwell area is located on the southern fringe of the town, approximately one kilometre from the town centre, just inside the A66 Bypass. Beyond the Bypass is the former Stressholme Golf Course (recently renamed Blackwell Grange Golf Course) and agricultural land. The Blackwell Grange Hotel site is located nearby and further residential development is proposed adjacent to it and within the former Golf Course. All of site He4 is owned by the Council. The site, together with the former golf course, Blackwell Meadows and South Park, form an attractive transition between the countryside and the urban area.

### **Site Description**

11. The site (see map on page 6) looks like a former golf course. The tees, some of them raised, the fairways, the bunkers and the greens are still visible. Between the fairways are rows of trees, some of them substantial others fairly young and many self-seeded. The boundaries along Carmel Road South and Bridge Road, contain mature trees or hedges. Wooden post and rail fencing runs alongside both roads down to the roundabout at Blands Corner. Where the site is adjacent to existing

residential development, the boundaries are a mix of trees, hedges, wooden close board fences and metal post and rail fencing. The study area contains two ponds, both of which are colonised by great crested newts (a protected species). Since the golf course closed, the grass cutting regime has been reduced to encourage wildlife and create a wildlife friendly habitat.

12. Adjoining uses to the site include; residential to the north and west, part of the former golf course to the east, and a golf course and agricultural land to the south.

### **Topography**

13. The land generally slopes down from north to south. However, there are undulations and evidence of ridge and furrow. A topographical survey has been undertaken and will be made available.

### **Site History**

14. The 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey map, published in the 1860s, shows the site as a collection of fields associated with Blackwell Hall which was located just outside the site boundary to the north-west. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition OS map, dated 1915, shows houses along the western boundary, fronting onto Blackwell. The field boundaries have disappeared and the current site boundary has been established. The Hall and fields were sold in 1930 and a nine hole golf course opened in 1931. The land remained as a golf course until 2013 when the course was closed. Blackwell Hall itself was acquired by builders and demolished in 1965 to make way for houses in Blackwell Grove.
15. There are no current planning applications for any part of the site. However, the Council, through the Local Plan, was proposing a mix of residential development for approximately 55 dwellings. The Council's proposal is supported by The Blackwell Neighbourhood Forum.

### **Heritage and Archaeology**

16. This site has no listed structures, or boundary treatment, within it, and its development would not impact on the setting of Blackwell Grange Hotel Grade II\* listed building or any other listed structures.
17. LIDAR surveying data (more information can be found on the Historic England website about this research method) shows some slight earthworks which may be the remains of medieval or post-medieval ploughing. Some other features possibly relate to former landscape features (e.g. a copse shown on early maps).
18. The site is shown as undeveloped on the first edition maps, and the golf course doesn't appear until circa the 1930's. Significant landscaping does not appear to have taken place to facilitate the golf course development, therefore the land has essentially remained green field since the 1850's.
19. Any application would therefore need to include a report to show that the archaeological potential has been assessed prior to any planning permission being

granted. This should include a field-based evaluation of the site, as per paragraph 128 of the NPPF.

20. The assessment would seek to identify if any archaeological heritage assets are present, and what their significance might be. This would include any features of national significance that may warrant efforts to preserve them in-situ, in addition to any locally or regionally significant features that would require mitigation measures during the development phase.
21. This assessment should take the form of a geophysical survey and, if necessary, trial trenching of anomalies identified during the geophysics exercise. A full desk-based assessment is not required. However, an element of desk-based research sufficient to understand how the results of the geophysical survey relate to the history of the site and surrounding area is expected to be included in the geophysics report.

## **SITE ANALYSIS**

### **Landscape and Topography**

22. The site, a former golf course, retains much of the landscaping associated with this use. The landscape is divided by the former fairways and has been modified to create greens. To the north and west the site is bounded by garden boundaries and to the south and east there are lines of mature trees, shrubs and low fences. Overall the site slopes towards the south with an increasing gradient towards the south east corner. There are two existing water bodies on site that form a habitat for great crested newts (see Habitats, Biodiversity and Trees below). There are a number of good quality trees on site that form an attractive part of the existing landscape and that contribute to the boundary to the south.

### **Access**

23. The site is bounded by Carmel Road South to the east and Bridge Road to the south. Analysis has demonstrated few feasible access points. The preferred access point takes into consideration highway safety and the impact on the existing trees.
24. The site is currently used for informal recreation and is currently being accessed by the public at a number of points.

### **Local Character**

25. The surrounding area of Blackwell is typically made up of residential properties that are either detached or semi-detached and between one and two and a half storeys in height. There is a wide variety of ages, although predominantly development is typically representative of the mid to late twentieth century. In terms of materials, properties in the area are typically constructed of brick with details occasionally picked out in stone and many have a rendered finish. Roof materials are typically tiles with the occasional use of slate. Roofs are typically pitched or hipped with only penetrating gables being presented to the street. Houses are typically set back from the street with long front gardens and have proportionately narrow plots. Front

boundaries are typically brick or stone walls with occasional hedges, usually at a low level allowing views of the house beyond.

26. The site lies within Zone 4 of the adopted 'Distinctly Darlington' Design of New Development SPD being in the outer suburbs of Darlington. The current shopping offer in Blackwell is limited to the local convenience store and Post Office that provides a number of services to the community.

## Constraints

27. To the south of the site there is significant intrusion from road noise emanating from Bland's Corner roundabout and the junction with Carmel Road South. On the eastern flank of the site there is telecommunications equipment and masts. A Utilities Service Plan is shown at Appendix 1. There are two ponds that are a habitat for great crested newts, discussed elsewhere in this Brief and a number of Grade A Trees under tree protection orders.



Site Boundary for Illustration Only - Not to Scale

## Habitats, Biodiversity and Trees

28. The site has two breeding Great Crested Newt (GCN) ponds, with all land lying within 250m of these features. This results in the whole site being considered a high risk for this protected species. The impact of this risk is that any works on site would need to be carried out under a Natural England (NE) development licence. The

granting of this licence will depend upon the quality of the survey data, the methodology of carrying out works and the quality of the post development mitigation/habitat enhancement.

29. The master plan has been produced and consultations undertaken with NE throughout the process in order to de-risk the possibility of future licence application being refused to the developer on design fundamental grounds, e.g. proximity of development, connectivity between breeding ponds, etc.
30. It is also proposed to utilise on site surface water ponds through a sustainable urban drainage scheme (SUDS) for additional habitat, along with specific, non-connected ponds which are more tailored to GCN breeding requirements. Complementary habitat management can be created through meadow creation, with additional scrub and woodland provision.
31. Other considerations on site would focus on extensive use of the site by foraging and commuting bats, along mature tree lines, with the added potential of these species to utilise more mature trees as roosts, which are also protected. It is recommended that any tree works to mature trees showing potential features for roosting bats be investigated by an ecologist, including arboreal searches, prior to any works.

### **Landscape**

32. There are significant opportunities to enhance the landscape through development, removing detractive features and increasing the potential of the site for habitats and biodiversity. Additionally, the good management of the existing boundaries to the south and east will make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. Overall, the landscape of the site offers outstanding potential to frame the proposed new development providing ready-made features and character.

### **Flood Risk**

33. The whole of the study area lies within Flood Zone 1 and, therefore, is unlikely to be at significant risk of flooding with the area having a less than 1 in 1,000 year chance of flooding.
34. For residential development proposals of 0.5ha and above, as well as assessing the vulnerability to flooding, the potential to increase flood risk elsewhere, should also be incorporated in a site specific flood risk assessment (FRA). When considering the potential impact of the proposed development compared to the current situation, there is likely to be an increase in the rate and volume of surface water run-off. In order to control and limit surface water discharge, a Surface Water Management Plan will need to be incorporated into the overall design of the development. The Council would welcome the use of SUDS, including the creation of balancing ponds on the open space, to manage all surface water run-offs. These new ponds should be wildlife friendly and provide suitable habitats for Great Crested Newts.

### **Ground Conditions**

35. No borehole site investigation works have been undertaken by the Council.

### **Contamination**

36. Environmental searches undertaken by the Environmental Health Section of the Council confirm that the site is within 250 metres of a former landfill site and adjacent to Croft Road Garage which was formerly a filling station. Environmental Health records show that the tanks associated with the garage have possibly been decommissioned and in filled with concrete. Therefore the site is considered to be at low to moderate risk. As with any housing development land contamination is a material planning consideration and a Phase 1 Preliminary Risk Assessment will need to be submitted with any planning application.

### **Noise**

37. The southern and eastern part of the site borders the A66 and A67. Hence, road traffic noise will have the potential to have an adverse effect on residential amenity. A noise impact assessment will be required to be carried out as part of the planning process to ensure that the required internal and external noise levels are met. The result may be that the houses nearest to the A66 and A67 will require increased glazing specification in terms of sound insulation and the installation of acoustic trickle vents etc. The noise impact assessment will also determine; whether the houses closest to the road will be required to be set back a certain distance from the road; the orientation of any gardens/internal layout and, whether the installation of an acoustic barrier will be required.

### **Vehicular Access**

38. Based on the Council's proposed vehicle access points (see plan in Appendix 2), C3 service enquiries have been sent out and all have been received back with the exception of NWL mains supply which is still outstanding.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

### **Planning Policy**

39. In planning policy terms, the key considerations for any future development are the impacts on the :-
- (a) Protected trees;
  - (b) Protected wildlife.
  - (c) Green Wedge and open space;
  - (d) Any elements of historic or archaeological interest.

### **National Planning Policy Framework**

40. This Brief provides design guidance to ensure that any new development makes a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness of the area. However, developers should also consider how the public benefits of their proposal could be increased.



41. In terms of the natural environment, the NPPF advises:

“**109.** The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:-

- (a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
  - (b) recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
  - (c) minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government’s commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
  - (d) preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and
  - (e) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.”
42. The third bullet point above is particularly relevant to proposals for development within the site in terms of minimising the impacts and providing net gains in biodiversity.

### **Local Plan Policy**

43. The adopted Core Strategy provides the local planning framework for the Borough and includes policies relevant to the key considerations for development on this site.
44. Policy CS14 seeks to protect and enhance the distinctive character of the Borough’s built, historic, natural and environmental townscapes, landscapes and strong sense of place. It highlights the importance of the tree canopy skyline of the south west area and the green wedge at Blackwell/Skerne Park as important characteristics of the town. Development proposals should, therefore, maintain the integrity of the green wedge and the tree canopy skyline.
45. Policy CS15 attempts to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity by :-
- (a) Conserving, restoring and enhancing the condition of sites and areas identified as having high biodiversity and geodiversity value including:
    - (i) Strategic wildlife corridors, for example along the River Tees and River Skerne
    - (ii) Local Nature Reserves
    - (iii) Local Wildlife Sites

- (b) Ensuring that new development would not result in any net loss of existing biodiversity value by protecting and enhancing the priority habitats, biodiversity features and the geological network through the design of new development, including public and private spaces and landscaping;
  - (c) Restricting or managing access and use where appropriate, to conserve an area's existing biodiversity value whilst enhancing biodiversity along access corridors and linking habitat networks with high biodiversity and geodiversity value;
  - (d) Protecting and enhancing healthy ancient woodland, mature trees, street trees, hedgerows and community forestry; and
  - (e) Protecting and improving watercourses, buffer strips and wetland, incorporating integrated surface water management and flood water storage, where appropriate.
46. New development should, therefore, minimise its impact on the protected trees and hedgerows and make a contribution to enhancing or improving the biodiversity of the study area and the priority habitats. The Council has had a tree survey carried out, by Elliott Consultancy Ltd, which provides arboricultural information and advice about the quality, retention and protection of the existing trees. A copy of this report will be provided.
47. Policy CS17 includes the Blackwell/Skerne Park green wedge as part of the green infrastructure network and states that:
- “The loss of any part of the green infrastructure network will only be considered in exceptional circumstances for the provision of essential infrastructure or where it has been demonstrated that the site no longer has any value to the community in terms of access and usage, is not required to perform an alternative green infrastructure function, is not required to meet a shortfall in the provision of that open space type or another open space type, and an alternative equivalent or better space in terms of quality, quantity, accessibility, biodiversity, flood storage, attractiveness and functionality is available”.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

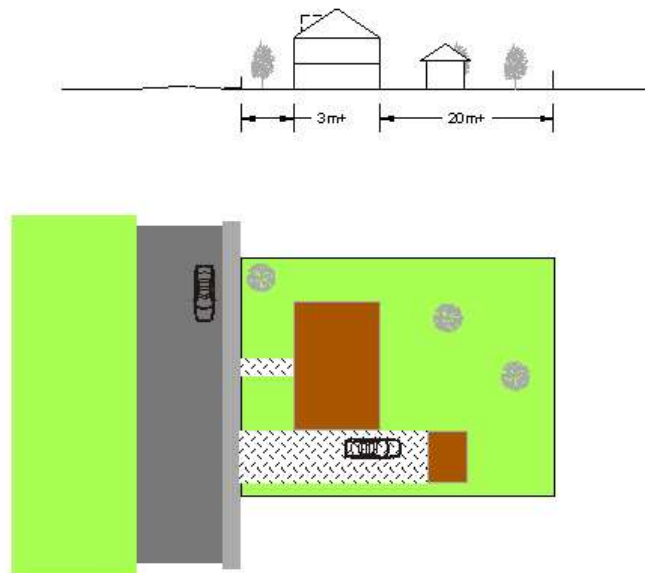
The site lies in Zone 4 of the adopted 'Distinctly Darlington' Design of New Development SPD and the guidance below is based on this, adding additional site-specific requirements. Please consult this document when formulating proposals

### Layout

48. New development on the site must provide a wildlife and habitat corridor between the two existing ponds on site that could also provide an element of public access, recreation, amenity and natural play. An appropriate buffer around the existing ponds must be retained. Buildings must provide natural surveillance over the street and should back onto the backs of the existing properties that adjoin the site, providing secure rear areas. This also applies to Carmel Road South, however there

is no expectation that access for individual houses will be gained directly from the road. All new and existing green spaces must benefit from natural surveillance. Where the highway adjoins a green space there is no need to create a footway on that side of the road. An example of an indicative layout is in Appendix 3. Note that this Brief only refers to the site to the west of the A67, Carmel Road South.

49. Regarding layouts within individual plots, houses should be set back by a minimum of 3 metres and create a coherent building line across the development. Rear gardens which back on to existing properties should be a minimum of 20m long and it is recommended that this is exceeded wherever possible. Parking and garages must be provided to the side or rear of new housing and should not be integral. Front boundaries must not exceed 1.2 m in height and should be formed of brick, stone or an estate railing. Boundaries should be designed to create a coherent street frontage.



## Scale and Massing

50. New houses must not exceed two and a half storeys and should have a pitched or hipped roof, presenting an eaves line to the street, with the possibility of penetrating gables or dormers. Overall it is envisaged that new houses will be detached. To the north west of the site there are a number of existing bungalows and to prevent overlooking it is recommended that one and a half storey houses are provided on the

adjoining plots. Research undertaken by the Blackwell Neighbourhood Forum suggests that there is a demand for five or six bungalows in the area.

## **Materials**

51. Buildings should be constructed and finished in brick with appropriate detailing for this material including headers and footers, mullions and eaves decoration. The use of stone for details is encouraged rather than the use of concrete. In line with the adopted Design SPD, windows must be taller than they are wide with masonry or brick mullions provided where the overall opening is wider than one window. The materials should be based on the historical character and appearance of Blackwell Village. Slate or tile roofs are considered appropriate, detailed correctly in line with the architectural style and construction of the proposed buildings.
52. High quality street and public realm materials are recommended, and the use of tarmac should be minimal.

## **Landscaping**

53. It is proposed that Grade A trees are to be retained within proposed schemes. The existing tree belts to the east and south are to be retained and a management scheme proposed to reinforce these. The site boundary needs to be improved through the use of estate railings. Pedestrian access (see below) should be provided through specific entry points with gates avoiding damaging existing trees and landscaping and must be usable by disabled people. Greenspaces created through the development must be accompanied by a management plan and funding mechanisms for their long term maintenance. A SUDS scheme within the new green spaces is encouraged to deal with surface water drainage, creating habitat opportunities. Where noise would be intrusive to the south of the site it is anticipated that this will be given over to public open space. Seating and creative play opportunities are encouraged across the site, with specific areas given over to rest and enjoy the space.

## **Access**

54. Pedestrian access into the site must be provided at regular intervals and be suitable for disabled people in terms of width, gradient and surface treatment, although this is not envisaged coming from the west. Direct access to the existing bus stops on Bridge Road must be provided on a surfaced path from the site and contributions will be sought to improve the pavements and public realm to the south and east of the site. To the north of the site access is required to enable pedestrians and cyclists a convenient route to the local shop.
55. There is a need for footway/cycleway connections to the local highway network in order for residents to access their properties. The layout and design of the housing development should encourage walking and cycling, providing good connectivity to the adopted highway
56. Planning policy seeks to achieve 80% of the development is within 400m of a bus stop. The nearest bus stops are on Bridge Road, immediately to the south of the development. In order to comply with this requirement a direct walking route is required from Bridge Road into the development crossing its southern boundary and

providing a continuous walking route that enables 80% of the development to be within 400m.

57. The alternative walking route is along Bridge Road and Carmel Road South and if this route is used, very little of the development area would be within 400m of the bus stops.
58. Bus services do not operate along Carmel Road South.
59. A cycle route is also proposed to be constructed by Highways England alongside Bridge Road. The walking route into the development site should, therefore, be constructed as a shared use path to enable those travelling by cycle to egress the site.

### **Planning Obligations**

60. The adopted Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets out the Council's approach to securing developer contributions. Prospective developers must consider this SPD prior to submitting a planning application. The SPD covers the more commonly sought obligations such as :-
  - (a) Cycling and walking facilities -. A standard charge of £750 per 3 bedroomed dwelling and £1,000 per 4+ bedroomed dwelling will be sought to support the provision of connections and access to support walking and cycling, connecting to the existing network outside the site.. New accesses within and to and from the site must be lit and surfaced.
  - (b) Public transport – To accord with the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document, 80% of the development shall be within 400m walking distance of a bus stop which is served by at least one service. There are existing bus stops on Bridge Road which are well served by bus services. There are no bus services along A67, Carmel Road South. Therefore, 80% of the houses developed within He4 should be within 400m of the Bridge Road bus stops. A walking route within the site should be provided directly onto Bridge Road rather than forcing residents to walk the longer route along Carmel Road South. Improvements to the Briar Walk bus stops (inbound and outbound) on Blackwell and the Blackwell House bus stops on Bridge Road (inbound and outbound) would require the installation of raised kerbs. A financial contribution of approximately £18,000 will be sought.
  - (c) Renewable energy provision - at least 10% of predicted energy supply should be provided by renewable energy generated on-site.
  - (d) Education – the focus will be to secure sufficient primary school places to meet the needs of the new development. A standard charge of £3,055 per dwelling will be sought.
  - (e) Affordable housing – Blackwell is a high value housing market area. Therefore, 20% of the proposed development would normally be required to be affordable housing. However, this site is intended for predominantly top-end executive homes. Therefore, the Council will require a financial contribution in lieu of on-

site provision. The financial contribution will be 30% of the expected on-site market price for each affordable unit for a notional affordable housing scheme. The notional scheme will comprise a mix of dwelling types and sizes based on the recommendations in Figure 41 of the Darlington Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2015 i.e. :

- (i) 1/2 bedroom flat – 27%
- (ii) 2 bedroom house – 34%
- (iii) 3 bedroom house – 34%
- (iv) 4+ bedroom house – 5%

(f) Employment skills and training – New development can provide a range of employment and training opportunities for Darlington’s residents. Therefore, a minimum of 10% of the construction workforce is required to be delivered by new entrant trainees and/or apprenticeships where appropriate.

(g) Open spaces – Good quality, multi-functional, well-planned open spaces provide opportunities for the community to relax, play, move around and learn about wildlife. The open space must be wildlife friendly and include enhancements to the wildlife habitats. The design of the development must incorporate an unbroken green corridor linking the two ponds to the north and to the south of the site. It is proposed that the Council would retain the freehold of the open space with the developer setting up a management company funded by a levy from the development.

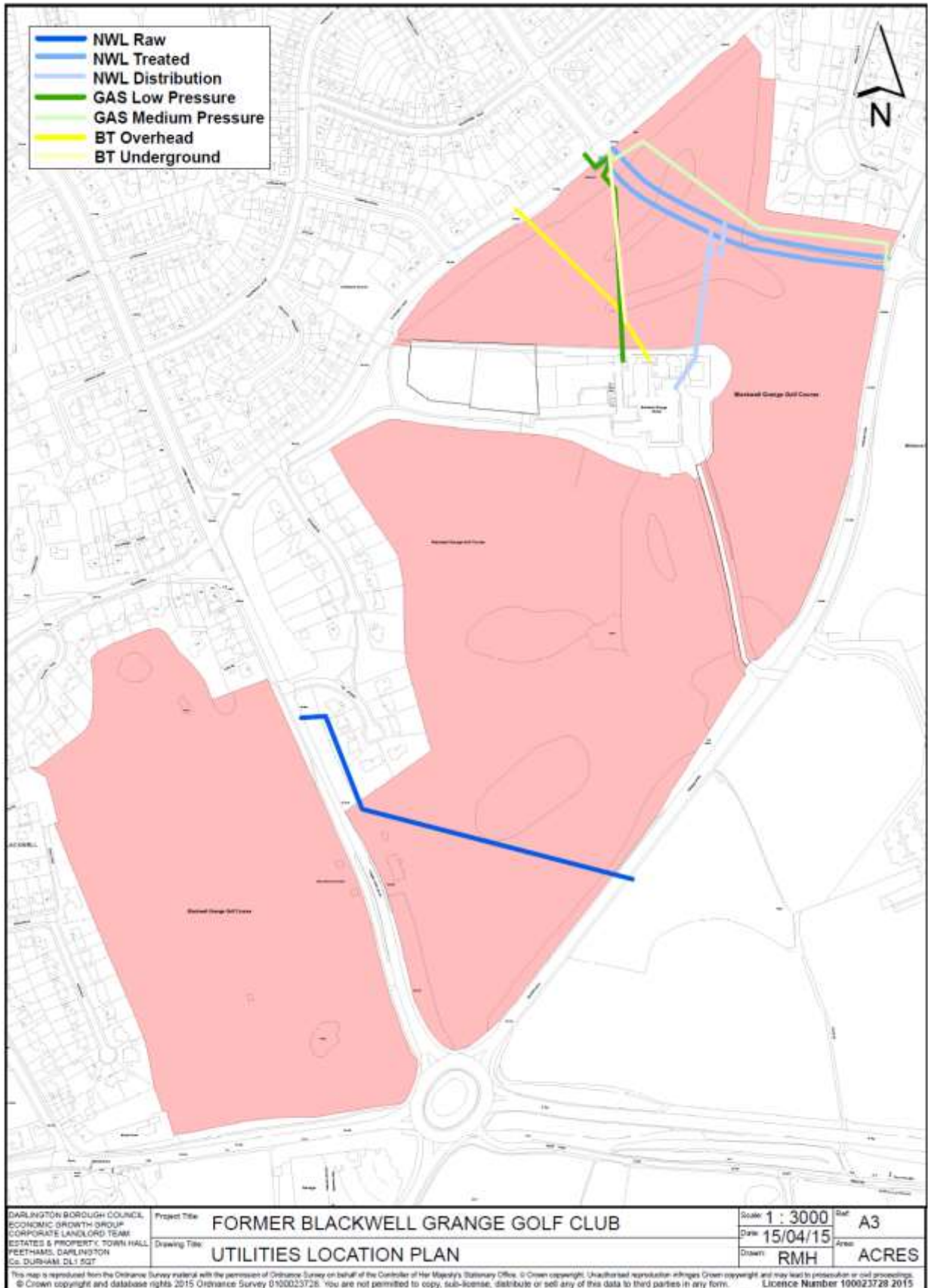
61. Potential developers are also reminded of the strategic objectives which will be an important focus in negotiations over appropriate planning obligations. In summary, those strategic objectives should lead to :-

- (a) A place-making approach - distinctive, clear sense of place, NOT just highways, plots, planting left-over bits.
- (b) Consideration of home zones, shared space and other means to create high quality public realm.
- (c) High quality green space.
- (d) Preservation of ecology, wildlife habitats, landscape, trees and foliage.
- (e) Green spaces and streets to be fronted and overlooked by active frontages (windows and doors) to create overlooking and natural surveillance.
- (f) No garden fencing adjacent to green spaces or streets (clear separation of public and private space).
- (g) Pedestrian convenience - link to surrounding paths and create safe, attractive environment.

- (h) Highways and parking carefully integrated to avoid creating a traffic-dominated public realm.
- (i) Good access to nearby public transport facilities.
- (j) Consideration of green construction.
- (k) Professional design team to include skills in architecture, urban design and landscape design.

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# Appendix 1





**Appendix 2 – Access Point to He 4.**



# Appendix 3 – Master Plan Illustration



**Key (As applicable)**

A	Restored historic parkland environment.
B	Sustainable Urban Drainage ponds and wetland habitat
C	Paths and public access around the site
D	Restoration of the historic watercourse providing additional drainage
E	Restoration of the historic Mill Lane

	Preferred Access
	Feasibility Access
	Improved Tree Planting and Management
	Existing Pond
	Proposed Pond
	Open Space
	Grade A Tree
	Historically Significant Tree Clump
	Proposed Housing Area
	Historically Significant Building
	Footpath (historic Mill Lane in brown)

**Blackwell Site He4 - Indicative Layout - Not to Scale for Illustration Only**

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