



Yeargate Limited

LAND NORTH OF BIRCH BUSINESS PARK

Environmental Statement Volume I

Chapter 2 - The Existing Site

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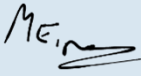
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CONTENTS

2	THE EXISTING SITE	1
2.1	INTRODUCTION	1
2.2	THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AND SURROUNDING AREA	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
2.3	ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS	2
2.4	KEY SENSITIVE RECEPTORS	3
2.5	FUTURE BASELINE	6
2.6	REFERENCES	7

TABLES

Table 2-1 - Key Sensitive Receptors	3
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2 THE EXISTING SITE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1. This chapter provides an overview of both the Site (shown on **Figure 1-1: Proposed Development Location Plan**) and the surrounding area. In terms of key environmental receptors of the Proposed Development; further information is provided within the technical chapters 6 to 16.
- 2.1.2. The Site is approximately 4 hectares (ha), located to the north of existing Birch Business Park area of Heywood, Rochdale, with the settlement of Heywood located 2.5km north and town of Rochdale located 7.5 km north.
- 2.1.3. The Proposed Development is located within the administrative area of Rochdale Borough Council (RBC). The OS Grid Reference for the approximate centre of the Proposed Development is National Grid Reference SD 84243 08688. The Proposed Development location is illustrated in **Figure 1-1: Proposed Development Location Plan**.
- 2.1.4. The Site comprises open vacant land. There are visible signs of earthworks at the site associated with construction derived materials generated as part of the wider existing Birch Business Park development. The site also retains a mixture of unmanaged vegetation.
- 2.1.5. Existing employment related uses and buildings are located towards the southern boundary of the site. The business park comprises a range of buildings and units in B2/B8 use classes.
- 2.1.6. Heywood Distribution park lies circa 600m north west of the site. There is also a major application currently under determination by the Council for a large parcel of the wider Northern Gateway allocation (ref: 25/00418/OUT) which lies west of the site. As such, despite the existing rural surroundings, the wider character of the site will be transformed by development and built form in the coming years.
- 2.1.7. Access into the business park is currently taken off Whittle Lane with a series of internal roads providing access to each individual unit.
- 2.1.8. The Rochdale Core Strategy (2012-2028) indicates the Proposed Development to sit within Green Belt.
- 2.1.9. The Place for Everyone Joint Plan (2022-2039) indicates the Proposed Development to sit within an Allocation and thus released from the Green Belt under 'Policy JP Allocation 1.1 Heywood / Pilsworth (Northern Gateway)'.
- 2.1.10. Further details on current land use within the surrounding area are provided in technical chapters 6 to 16.

POPULATION AND SETTLEMENTS

- 2.1.11. The Proposed Development is located adjacent to Birch Industrial Estate, within the administrative boundary of RBC. The Proposed Development is approximately 7 km south west of the town of Rochdale. It is also located approximately 2.5 kilometres south of Heywood area of Rochdale. It is also located 2.5km east of the Unsworth area of Bury.

UTILITIES

- 2.1.12. The local electricity distribution network in the Rochdale area is operated by Electricity North West (ENWL).
- 2.1.13. The regulated water and sewage company in the area is United Utilities Water (UU).

ACCESS

- 2.1.14. Vehicular and pedestrian access to the Site will be provided via a priority junction situated on the internal access road within Birch Business Park, to the south of the Site. This existing access point connects the Site to the wider highway network via the established industrial estate roads, enabling movement for both vehicles and pedestrians.
- 2.1.15. To the west of the site access, footways are available on both sides of the road, although the northern footway ends shortly after the frontage of Birch Business Park. Beyond this point, pedestrian access is only available on the southern side of the carriageway. Further west, after passing a farm located on the northern side of the road, footways resume on both sides as Moss Hall Road approaches Heywood Distribution Park.
- 2.1.16. The following Public Rights of Way (PROWs) are located within the Proposed Development:
- Footpaths:
 - HeyFp74
- 2.1.17. The following PROWs are located in the surrounding area:
- Footpaths:
 - HeyFp75;
 - HeyFp72;
 - HeyFp142

2.2 ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

- 2.2.1. Key environmental features are summarised below, with further detail available in technical chapters 6 to 16.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNATIONS

Ground Conditions

- 2.2.2. Localised layers of thin Made Ground is anticipated to underlie parts of the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development is underlain by the Glacial Till Formation superficial deposits, predominantly likely to comprise of sand and gravel lenses and large boulders (**Ref. 2.1**).
- 2.2.3. The Proposed Development's bedrock geology comprises of the Diamincton, and siltstone (**Ref. 2.1**).
- 2.2.4. The Proposed Development is located within a Coal Mining Reporting area however there are no records of underground coal mining within the Proposed Development including mine entries, geology, surface hazards.

Ecology

- 2.2.5. No statutory designated areas for nature conservation are located within the Proposed Development. No statutory designated areas are located within 1km of the proposed development. The Rochdale Canal Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Special Area of Conservation (SAC) are located 3.7km east of the Proposed Development.
- 2.2.6. A number of non-statutory designated sites are located near the Proposed Development. The Pilsworth site of Biological Importance (SBI) is located 860m west of the Proposed Development.
- 2.2.7. West Pennine Moors SSSI is located 9.7 km northwest of the site. This site is designated for its extensive mosaic of upland and upland fringe habitats.

Landscape

- 2.2.8. There are no known landscape designations within the Proposed Development.
- 2.2.9. The Proposed Development is located entirely within National Character Area No 54 Manchester Pennine Fringe, one of the 159 broad landscape character areas identified in the National Character Map (**Ref. 2.2**).

Air Quality

- 2.2.10. The Proposed Development is not located within an Air Quality Management Area. The nearest Air Quality Management Area is located around 850m south east from the site.

Noise and Vibration

- 2.2.11. There are no Noise Important Areas (NIA) within the Proposed Development.
- 2.2.12. The closest noise and vibration sensitive receptors identified include Moss Hall Farm and Dr Fold Lane.

Water Resources, Flood Risk and Drainage

- 2.2.13. The closest surface water feature is an unnamed tributary of Brightley Brook designated as Main River to the north of the site. Its outfall to Brightley Brook is approximately 1km to the northwest of the site. The current private drainage for the Business Park discharges into the Ordinary Watercourse that forms the head of the tributary.
- 2.2.14. The Proposed Development lies entirely within Flood Zone 1 (Low probability).
- 2.2.15. The Proposed Development is classified as a Greenfield Proposed Development.
- 2.2.16. The Proposed Development is not located within a Groundwater Source Protection Zone or area of Groundwater Vulnerability.

2.3 KEY SENSITIVE RECEPTORS

- 2.3.1. There are a number of sensitive receptors that have been identified as relevant to the Proposed Development, and these have been taken into consideration within the assessments presented in technical chapters 6 to 16. The key sensitive receptors are summarised in **Table 2-1** below.

Table 2-1 - Key Sensitive Receptors

Topic	Sensitive Receptor
Archaeology	■ Potential archaeological remains of Post-Medieval cottages within the south-west extent of the site; ■ Potential archaeological remains of Post-Medieval field boundaries within the central area of the site; and ■ any as-yet unknown archaeological remains of all periods within the site boundary.
Air Quality	■ Local human receptors affected by fugitive dust/PM10 and road vehicle exhaust emissions; ■ local ecological receptors affected by operational road vehicle exhaust emissions; ■ construction dust receptor categories include residential properties, hospitals, schools, residential care homes, parks/places of work, public footpaths, playing fields, farmland, short-term car parks and roads; ■ operational receptor modelling includes R1–R56, such as residential locations and schools including Hazel Wood High School and Unsworth Academy
Ecology	■ Habitats: priority and non-priority habitats, including reedbed; ■ protected/notable species: great crested newts, common amphibians, commuting and foraging bats, badger, hedgehog, brown hare, breeding birds and notable invertebrates; ■ other receptor: invasive non-native species, specifically Himalayan balsam
Landscape and Visual	■ Landscape receptors: ● defined aspects of the landscape with potential to be affected by the proposed development; and visual receptors, including residents at home with views, users of public rights of way/outdoor recreation routes; ● visitors to heritage assets/attractions where views are important, communities where views contribute to setting, people travelling through the landscape, cyclists/horse riders, people at work, and vehicle/train users.
Heritage	■ Lower Whittle Farmhouse (NHLE: 1068502); Birch Village Conservation Area; ■ Broom Hill Farm (non-designated heritage asset);

Topic	Sensitive Receptor
	■ Higher Fields Farm (non-designated heritage asset); ■ Stock Nook (non-designated heritage asset). ■ Birch Village Conservation Area; ■ Heaton Park (Grade II Registered Park and Garden); ■ Temple to the north east of Heaton Hall (Grade II* listed building, HAP 1); ■ Alkington Hall (Grade II* listed building, HAP 2); Brick Farmhouse (Grade II listed building, HAP 3); ■ Lower Whittle Farmhouse (Grade II listed building, HAP 4); ■ Moss Side Barn/Farm Griffe Lane (HAP 15); Meadowcroft Fold Farmhouse and Barns (HAP 19); ■ Thurston Fold (HAP 22); ■ Birch Mill (HAP 34); ■ Lodge View (HAP 54); ■ Higher Fields Farm (HAP 45); ■ Broomhill Farm (HAP 50).
Ground Conditions and Contamination	■ Human health receptors including construction workers and future commercial/industrial site users; ■ controlled waters including secondary aquifers and adjacent surface water features; ■ buried concrete foundations/sub-structures and water supply services; and ■ the site surface in relation to coal mining legacy/crown-hole risk
Noise and Vibration	■ Residential receptors: ● Receptor on Dr Fold Lane; Moss Hall Farm; Moss Hall Road.
Population and Human Health	■ Local population and vulnerable groups, including children, young adults, unborn children and their mothers, ■ older/frail older people, ■ low-income or insecure-income groups, ■ unemployed/economically inactive/homeless people, ■ people unable to work due to poor health, people with existing poor physical or mental health,

Topic	Sensitive Receptor
	- disabled people, carers, and socially disadvantaged groups - Local residents, all demographic profiles, residing within the neighbourhood impact area
Traffic and Transport	- The following sensitive receptors have been identified for Traffic and Transport: - Users of the local highway network within the study area; - existing businesses located within Birch Business Park; and residential/agricultural receptors in the vicinity of affected highway links, including Broom Hill Farm off Whittle Lane and Higher Barn Farm off Moss Hall Road North.
Water Resources, Flood Risk and Drainage	- The following sensitive receptors have been identified: - Proposed industrial buildings (Units 1 and 2); - future occupants and operational users of the site; unnamed Ordinary Watercourse at the eastern site boundary; - Main River tributary of Brightley Brook approximately 35m north; - adjacent agricultural land and existing Birch Business Park; - external hardstanding, car parks and access roads; and the underlying Secondary A Aquifer, Pennine Lower Coal Measures

2.4 FUTURE BASELINE

- 2.4.1. Schedule 4(3) of the EIA Regulations 2017 requires an outline of the likely evolution of the current state of the environment (baseline scenario) without implementation of the Proposed Development, as far as natural changes from the baseline scenario can be assessed with reasonable effort on the basis of the availability of environmental information and scientific knowledge. Whilst there are considerable limitations to the predictions that can be made about baseline conditions at a future point in time, some assessments require projections to account for future change, such as traffic growth. This section summarises the future baseline that will be used to inform these elements of the assessment.
- 2.4.2. It is expected that, should the Proposed Development not proceed, the baseline conditions within the Proposed Development would effectively remain the same. This is because the Proposed Development is primarily made up of vacant land, it can be assumed that the existing site conditions would remain.
- 2.4.3. Further detail on the future baseline conditions considered in elements of the assessment can be found in technical chapters 6 to 16.

2.5 REFERENCES

- **Reference 2.1:** British Geological Survey, Geology of Britain Viewer. [Online] accessed via geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk [Accessed November 2025]
- **Reference 2.2:** National Character Areas: North West England, published on-line by Natural England: Manchester Pennine Fringe (Area 54)

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