

BLACKPOOL CORE STRATEGY

THE POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF LANDS AT MARTON MOSS

INTRODUCTION

The Council at its meeting on 11th March 2009 noted concerns over the inclusion of Marton Moss as part of the preferred spatial option of the Blackpool Core Strategy, as resolved by the Executive on 23rd February 2009.

The Council emphasised its priority for delivering houses in the inner wards subject to Government funding needed to transform the inner areas and requested the Executive to give further consideration to the scope to increase housing supply on brownfield land, to reduce the pressure for greenfield development.

To this end, the Executive was asked to prepare a comprehensive report on the future of Marton Moss, including open space requirements, recreation, horticulture and all other aspects, as well as housing, so as best to plan for an area which is *“regarded as precious by many Blackpool residents”*.

BACKGROUND

The Core Strategy is the statutory planning document that will set out the Council's strategic development plan and planning policies for the next 15-20 years. The Core Strategy Issues and Options document was approved by Blackpool Council in June 2008, and was subject to public consultation from mid July until the end of September 2008.

An interim report was made to Executive on February 23rd 2009 on the key conclusions arising from the Issues and Options document and sought agreement of a preferred spatial option. Earlier presentations were made to the Local Development Framework Members Working Group and to a Blackpool/Fylde Joint Member Working Group in January 2009.

The Executive resolved on 23rd February that a mix of Options 2, 4, and 5 (Inner Area Regeneration, Marton Moss, and wider M55 Hub Growth Point) be approved as the Blackpool Core Strategy Preferred Option, and that this Preferred Option should be the basis for the draft Core Strategy to be prepared for consideration by Executive and for subsequent consultation.

Following the concerns expressed at Council at its meeting on 11th March 2009, the attached report sets out the steps that have now been taken to provide the comprehensive further information requested on Marton Moss, to inform the detailed preparation of the Council's draft Core Strategy Preferred Option document.

The sections that follow set out the detailed information which has now been researched and provided to address these concerns:

- Housing Capacity issues - a review of Blackpool's housing supply and the potential to maximize the contribution to future development from brownfield sites including inner area regeneration;
- David Lock Associates (jointly commissioned by Blackpool and Fylde Councils) is currently finalising a preferred master planning option for the wider M55 Hub lands (including Marton Moss) to inform Core Strategy preparation of both Councils;
- A background paper has been prepared by the Council Planning Department setting out key development issues, demographic data and land use characteristics of Marton Moss.;
- A Characterisation Study of the Moss has been commissioned, and an interim report by Archaeo-Environment Ltd has been completed;
- An Ecological Assessment of the Moss has been commissioned, and an interim report by Bowland Ecology has been completed;

HOUSING REQUIREMENT AND CAPACITY

The Blackpool Housing Requirement

- The North West Regional Spatial Strategy requires that Blackpool provide through its planning policies and land allocations and the granting of planning permissions for the development of **8,000 homes** 2003-2021. This represents double the previous requirement. Despite the recent downturn in the economy and the housing market, Government has reaffirmed the need to provide considerably more housing to meet the need from existing and projected future households and that this will be afforded considerable weight where housing proposals are considered at appeal.
- The time horizon for the Core Strategy is required to look to 2026. The pro-rata provision of an additional 5 years supply of housing would require an additional 2,200 dwellings, with a consequent requirement for **10,200** homes 2003-2026. Of these 10,200 homes:
 - A total of **1,738** homes have already been built, at April 1st 2009.
 - A total of **1,261** homes were either under construction or already had planning permission for development.
- The outstanding net requirement for new sites to be identified for development 2009-2026 is therefore around **7,200** homes.

Meeting the Blackpool Requirement

The outstanding requirement for 7,200 new homes will be met from the following sources:

1. **Sites within the existing Blackpool urban area on vacant, derelict and underused land.** The 2008 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment undertook a detailed assessment of housing sites in the existing urban area, and identified further potential for about 2,100 new dwellings from existing sites. Around 200 dwellings need to be deducted from this figure as they have since been granted planning permission (and thus already counted above). This reduces the figure to 1,900. It is estimated around 90% (1,700 dwellings) could potentially come forward from such sites.
2. **Conversions and the re-use of existing buildings.** Based on past trends an allowance of 800 new dwellings is made for further conversions, over and above existing committed sites.
3. **The identification of new sites within the Development Plan.** Taking account of the “windfall” allowance in 1 and 2 above means that the Core Strategy needs to identify sites for 4,700 new homes between 2009 and 2026 (7,200 minus 2,500).

The Preferred Option spatial strategy seeks to identify locations for the required new **4,700 homes** from two main sources:

Inner Area Regeneration

In line with the March Council resolution, the Core Strategy seeks to prioritise new development within Blackpool’s central area in order to:

- Redress the housing and holiday accommodation market challenges that are an integral cause of the economic and social problems facing Blackpool;
- Create quality places and provide a choice of quality homes in the inner areas that people can afford and where people want to live;
- Create strong, vibrant and desirable neighbourhoods that contribute positively to the image of Blackpool.

Significant steps are being taken towards achieving this through the evolving regeneration plans, including Action Area Plans being progressed for North Beach, Foxhall and South Beach. Based on the evolving plans for the resort, it is estimated that 1,500 additional homes could come forward through inner area regeneration initiatives currently being pursued in North Beach, Foxhall and South Beach. In addition, an allowance could appropriately be made for private sector market led seafront developments which could increase this figure towards 2,000 homes.

How much can be achieved will be dependent on the level of public funding that can be harnessed to deliver the scale of change required for the regeneration of the resort core. Bids to use £35 million funding from the HCA (Homes and Communities Agency) are currently being appraised and assessed. An initial £35m may gap fund no more than about 400 homes. It is currently estimated the potential delivery of around 2,000 additional new homes from regeneration in the resort core would require around £150 million public funding. These figures are drawn from the work done by GVA Grimley on behalf of the Council to assess the options and costs relating to housing intervention.

The overall cost of intervention to change the housing market over a 15 year period and deliver a higher figure of around 3,500 new homes was estimated at £900m, with approximately £650m being private sector investment and £250m being public investment. The work predated the current economic situation so it is likely that the balance between public and private spend will require a greater input from the public purse to achieve matching private investment, with £350m now a required figure.

With investment of around £350 million, inner area redevelopment could be increased to around 3,500 homes, reducing requirements to be met on the edge of Blackpool to about 1,200 homes (4,700 minus 3,500). This is not considered a tenable stance for the Council to adopt for the following reasons:

- a) The requirement to demonstrate to a Government Inspector that the identified 15 year housing supply is realistically deliverable. The prospect of the Council securing a Government commitment to a long term programme of financial support for inner area intervention and housing delivery on this scale must be considered extremely slim. Without such commitment, an Inspector examining the soundness of the Council's Core Strategy within the next 2 years could not accept an assumption that such funding will be forthcoming.

This would create a high risk that the Inspector would either direct the Council to allocate other sites put forward by the house building industry or review its proposals. In either instance, the consequent delays are likely to lead to the determination of major house building decisions through planning appeals. The form of housing growth would be determined by others rather than being decided by the Council in a sustainable way to support Blackpool's regeneration. Currently Kensington Developments alone has appeals for approval of around 2,000 homes at Moss House Road (within Blackpool) and at Hollywood Nurseries, Whitehills; at Queensway and at Lytham Quays (within Fylde Borough).

- b) A range of housing choice is required to create a more balanced housing market in terms of supporting Blackpool's regeneration. Undue reliance upon inner area sites and sea front apartments, even should such an approach be realistically achievable, would be unlikely, in isolation, to achieve this.

It remains essential that the Core Strategy is based on a realistic assessment of change that can be achieved. The delivery of 2,000 new homes would require a major scale of public funding which is not assured. If the Council is not to run very serious risks in terms of the future development of the Town, then 2,000 net additional homes from Inner Area Regeneration (over and above the strategic land assessment figure) is considered the highest figure that could appropriately and tenably be put forward.

With potential planned provision of around **2,000 additional homes** from resort regeneration, there would remain an outstanding requirement of **2,700 homes** to be met by new, largely greenfield, development on the edge of Blackpool.

New edge of Blackpool development

To meet this need, preparation of the Council's Core Strategy will seek to prioritise a range of new housing through a sustainable extension on the edge of Blackpool - with Marton Moss and the M55 Hub identified as the other main elements of the Council's Core Strategy Preferred Option.

The figure of **2,700 dwellings** represents a significant reduction from the figure set out at the earlier Issues and Options stage of the Core Strategy, reflecting the updated housing supply information, and increased allowances set out above for both windfall developments and resort regeneration.

Such new edge of Blackpool development is seen as not just meeting a quantitative need, but is fundamentally required to address the lack of wider quality new housing, attract higher income earning households and provide sufficient choice for Blackpool's resident population, particularly for family housing.

THE M.55 HUB

David Lock Associates has been commissioned by Blackpool and Fylde Councils to produce a master plan for the M.55 Hub. This looks at the optimum form for potential extension of the Blackpool urban area to the south east. Housing, employment land, community infrastructure and green space would be incorporated within a high quality and sustainable mixed use development. DLA has been briefed to be blind to local authority boundaries and Development Plan timescales in order to plan for a development that would have the greatest long term benefits for Blackpool and the Fylde as well as making a significant contribution to meeting the long term housing needs of both authorities.

DLA's preferred master planning option is appended to this report. In order to set out the key aspects of this plan in a readily digestible form, DLA has produced a prospectus for the M.55 Hub and this can be viewed in the member's library and at www.blackpool.gov.uk

The conceptual master plan that sits at the heart of this prospectus encapsulates the following vision.

The Vision

The Plan is to create a cluster of residential neighbourhoods around a new District Centre at the junction of Progress Way and Cropper Road. These neighbourhoods would accommodate approximately 7,000 new homes supported by a range of community facilities. The District Centre would incorporate a new secondary school, shops and other facilities. Whitehills Business Park would be extended and potentially supplemented by new business land between Preston New Road and the M.55.

The Hub would create new gateways to Blackpool and the Fylde, characterised by woodland and water. A strong emphasis on landscaping throughout the development would create parkland corridors out into a new Country Park between Blackpool and St. Anne's. The green belt would be extended.

Walking and cycling would be the preferred methods of travel within the Hub. Express bus links would connect directly into Blackpool Town Centre.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MARTON MOSS

This report has set out the outstanding requirement to identify land for 2,700 new homes on the edge of Blackpool. In response to the Council's resolution, we have undertaken further detailed work on Marton Moss and this is set out in the following sections of this report. The conclusion of this work has led us to re-visit, whether, how much and how the Moss could be developed to meet Blackpool's requirement.

It remains the case that Marton Moss is the only major area of undeveloped land within the Blackpool local authority boundary. If Blackpool is to provide the new homes that Blackpool needs and provide a re-balancing of the overall housing market, development of some of the Moss lands is a necessity.

Although our estimates for housing delivery within Inner Blackpool do require considerable Government assistance, we have increased the potential housing numbers against the inner areas and reduced the edge of Blackpool requirement by 1,000+ homes.

Our estimated need for 2,700 homes would **not** require the Moss to be developed in its entirety. The reduced number also provides flexibility in how intensively any developed Moss lands would be built out.

In considering how this requirement is best accommodated and in shaping the development of the DLA work we have taken into account three other areas of work as follows:-

- A Marton Moss background paper prepared within the department. This was already in draft form at the time of the March Council Motion but has been extended in its scope and depth in response to the concerns raised;
- The commissioning of Archaeo Environments to undertake a "characterisation" of the built and natural environment. This looks at the historic development of Marton Moss and the particular built and landscape characteristics that the Council should take on board in considering the future of the area;
- The commissioning of Bowland Ecology to undertake a Phase 1 Habitats Survey. This identifies species or habitats of importance and the measures required to protect or enhance these.

It should be stressed that we have been cognisant of the issues that are being detailed in the three reports in developing the Core Strategy. Nonetheless, the aforementioned reports will further inform the development of the Strategy as well as the Master Plan for the M.55 Hub if the principle of this is supported by Blackpool and Fylde Councils.

A summary of the above documents is attached as Appendix B. The Full Background Paper and the Interim Characterisation and Habitats reports can be viewed in the member's library and at www.Blackpool.gov.uk

OUR RECOMMENDED APPROACH TO MARTON MOSS DEVELOPMENT

On the basis of the extensive survey, analysis and master planning work summarised above we are proposing an approach that seeks to:

1. Allow for the majority of existing homes, businesses and community facilities within Marton Moss to be retained. We believe that many businesses and facilities would be considerably strengthened by the presence of a new population catchment on their doorstep;
2. Maintain the horticultural heritage of the Moss by retaining an emphasis on locally grown produce and providing allotments;
3. Strengthen the pattern of trees, woodlands and hedgerows that bisect the Moss as a basis for creating “pockets” of development well screened from existing homes and from each other;
4. Improve and extend the existing limited network of public footpaths. The connection of these into the proposed new Country Park would considerably improve local opportunities for passive recreation;
5. Take a very sensitive and organic approach to developing individual fields and plots of land within the Moss - individual developments of character rather than the blanket developments of the past;

This approach would be manifested within the three main areas of the Moss as follows:

Land Between Yeadon Way and Progress Way

These lands would be allocated for development within the Core Strategy with a reduction in housing numbers from the approximately 2,000 originally envisaged to approximately 1,500. Approximately 500 homes could be developed on the Moss House Road site with 1,000 on the land to the east of Midgeland Road. This would enable the provision of substantial green areas within and between new development areas.

Land Between Progress Way and School Road

These lands would be allocated for development within the Core Strategy for approximately 1,200 new homes at much lower densities than originally envisaged

Land Between School Road, Midgeland Road and Division Lane

These lands would be safeguarded from development with their existing character maintained

It would be misleading to claim that the developed Moss lands would not change in character. They would become more suburban than semi rural but in the form set out above rather than as manifested in some of the suburban areas of south east Blackpool developed in the 20th century (the *eighty acres* lands to the north of the Moss House Road application site). We believe that the benefits of this approach to Blackpool and indeed to the local area considerably outweigh the loss of openness that currently characterises the Moss.

CONCLUSION

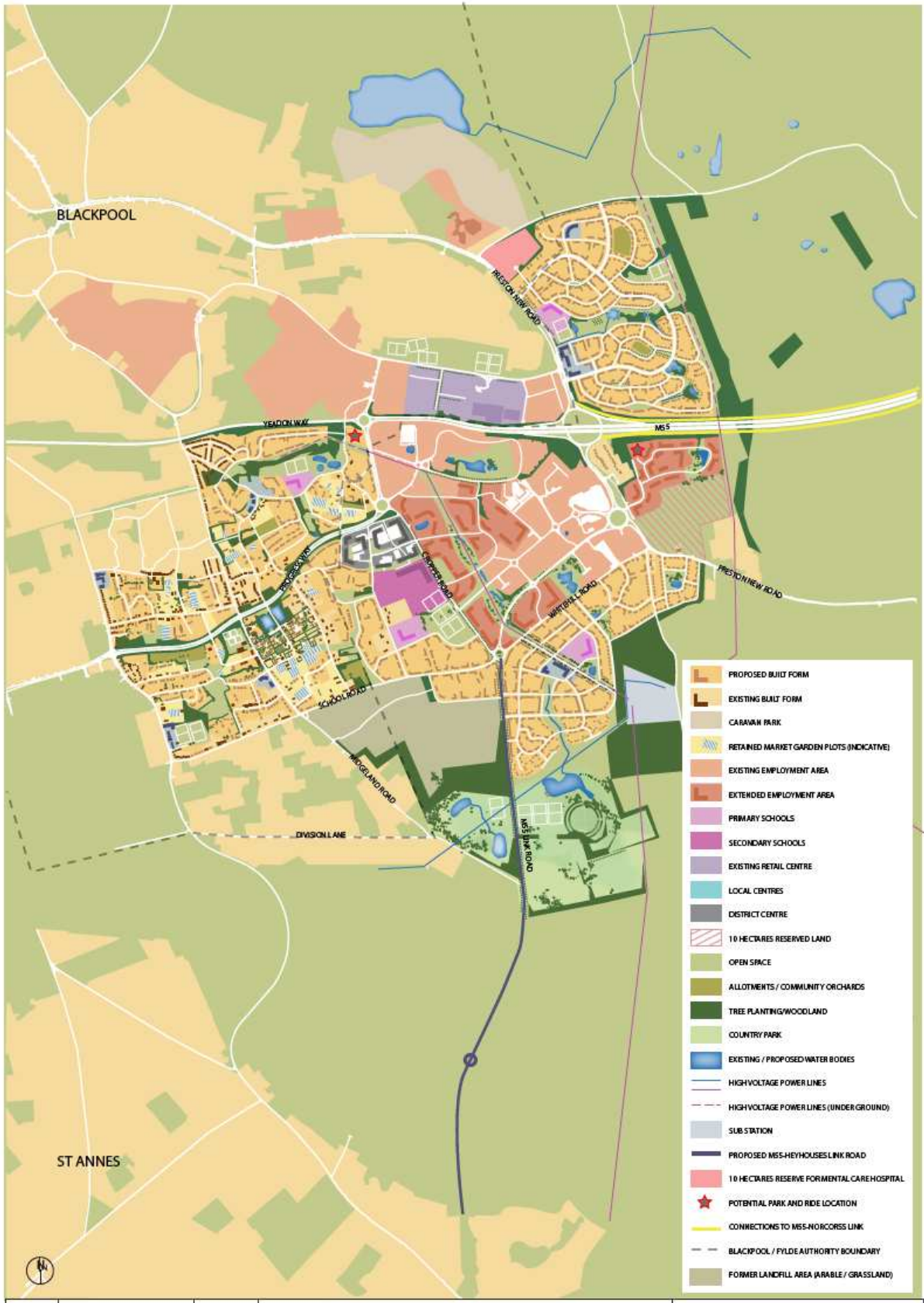
Blackpool needs to find land to accommodate 7,200 new homes between 2009 and 2026. Sites for approximately 2,500 new homes have been identified on vacant, derelict and underused land or through property conversions. The Core Strategy requires to identify land for a further 4,700 new homes. With substantial Government investment into Inner Blackpool, it is considered that a further 2,000 new homes could be developed within Inner Blackpool. There would remain an outstanding requirement of 2,700 homes to be met by new, largely greenfield, development on the edge of Blackpool.

New development on the edge of Blackpool is also fundamentally required to address the lack of wider quality new housing, attract higher income households and provide choice for Blackpool's resident population, particularly for family housing. A major sustainable mixed use development on the edge of Blackpool is considered to have substantial additional benefits, particularly in terms of jobs, facilities, enhancements of the gateways into Blackpool and the Fylde, the creation of parks and green space and helping to enhance Blackpool's image to the outside world.

David Lock Associates has produced a preferred master planning option for this new Gateway development which also extends into lands within Fylde. A development of approximately 7,000 new homes is considered to be the optimum size to meet Blackpool and Fylde's housing requirements (both within and potentially beyond the current Plan periods) and to secure the ancillary benefits set out above. This development option includes lands at Marton Moss which is the only major area of undeveloped land within the Blackpool boundary able to accommodate the 2,700 new homes.

We are proposing an organic approach to development of the Moss lands between Yeadon Way and School Road (but not to Division Lane) that seeks to maintain and where appropriate enhance the majority of existing homes, businesses and facilities on the Moss, maintain and develop the horticultural heritage of the Moss and strengthen the Moss landscape, wildlife habitats and access. This will lead to these areas of the Moss becoming more suburban than semi rural but the overall benefits to Blackpool of pursuing the M.55 Hub development including lands within Marton Moss are considered to significantly outweigh any disadvantages.





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INDICATIVE OPTION

M55 Hub Growth Point Conceptual Masterplan

David Lock Associates
Town Planning and Urban Design



APPENDIX B

THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF MARTON MOSS

The Planning Department has produced a Marton Moss background paper to outline the key issues that have been considered in determining the planning approach set out in the foregoing section. To supplement this, we have appointed Archaeo Environments to undertake a “characterisation” of the built and natural environment. This is looking at the historic development of Marton Moss and the particular built and landscape characteristics that the Council should take on board in considering the future of the area. We have also appointed Bowland Ecology to undertake a Phase 1 Habitats Survey. This will identify any species or habitats of importance and the measures required to protect or enhance these.

It should be stressed that we have been cognisant of the issues that are being detailed in the three reports in developing the Core Strategy. Nonetheless, these will further inform the development of the Strategy as well as the Master Plan for the M.55 Hub if the principle of this is supported by Blackpool and Fylde Councils.

The Background Paper and Interim Characterisation and Habitats reports can be viewed in the member’s library and at [insert weblink]. The main findings and how these have influenced our proposed approach are as follows:

Description

Marton Moss covers an area of 207 hectares – 6% of Blackpool’s land area. Its character is different from the more open countryside to the south and east with the area now largely a mix of horse grazing land, dwellings set in large gardens, together with former and remaining glass houses. It contains a number of agricultural, horticultural and urban fringe businesses as well as sports pitches and other recreational facilities. The majority of the Moss is good quality grade 2 agricultural land with some moderate quality grade 3 land to the north. The agricultural productivity of the area has dropped considerably since the heyday of the Moss horticultural industry.

The Moss is bounded by Yeadon Way to the north and Division Lane to the south. To the west is Common Edge Road. To the east, the Blackpool/Fylde boundary separates it from wider areas of adjoining moss lands and more open countryside within Fylde Borough. The Moss lands are flat and relatively low lying.

Employment

More than 300 people are employed on Marton Moss but only around 20 remain in agriculture and horticulture, highlighting the loss of glass houses and the declining horticultural importance of an area that historically provided many of Blackpool’s fruit and vegetables.

Population

More than 1,400 people live on the Moss in a mixture of individual houses along the lanes that are characteristic of the area and within small housing schemes.

Character

The Moss is criss crossed by roads and lanes, most of which are lined by scattered dwellings and small businesses. Behind these lanes, the land is more open, with small fields and agricultural/horticultural buildings. This land use pattern is not evident on the ground but can be well seen on the attached aerial photograph.

There are few original buildings typical of the historic origins of the Moss. Most buildings have been developed gradually in a dispersed pattern throughout the 20th century. The Moss contains a wide variety of building types and ages and there is no defining architectural style. Indeed, this variety is what defines much of the moss land character and the way in which the Council would approach any development.

The hedgerows and trees that line many of the lanes give the impression of a well treed semi rural landscape. However, the aerial photograph demonstrates that the Moss as a whole contains no more than a few pockets of woodland and that many of the trees and shelter belts are somewhat denuded.

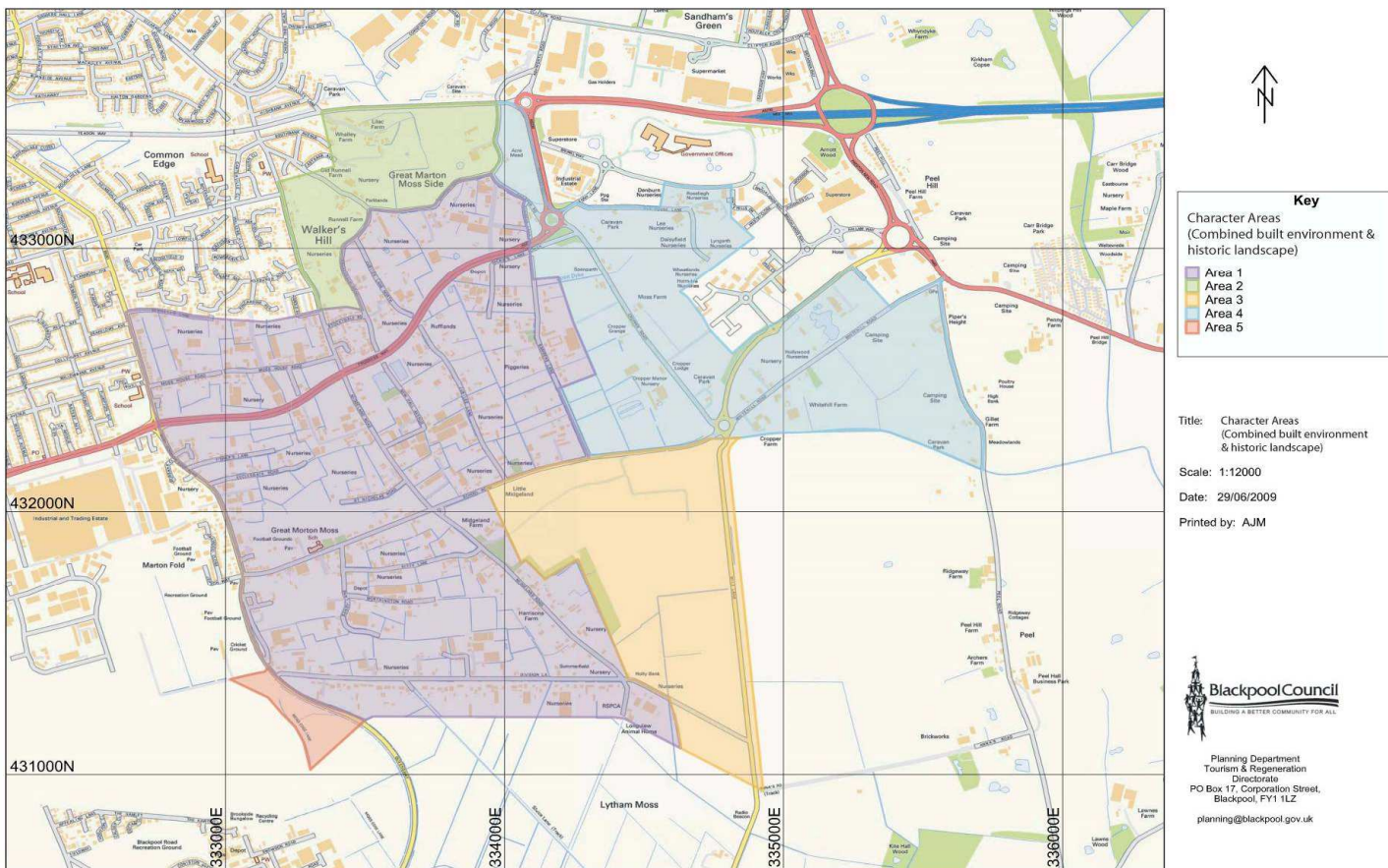
There are a number of footpaths on the Moss, mainly utilising unmade tracks and lanes. Beyond these relatively few paths, public access is limited.

The Council has appointed ArchaeoEnvironments to undertake a comprehensive “characterisation of Marton Moss” which is subject to a separate report. This breaks the area into five separate “character areas” (see plan on page 12) which are summarised as follows:

- 1. Character Area 1 (The Mosslands) consists of the areas of small piecemeal post medieval enclosure along Division Lane, Midgeland Road up to Chapel Road and west to Common Edge Road, surrounding by busy arterial routes. It consists of the earliest cobbled buildings through to modern detached bungalows. Within the busy communication infrastructure it is an enclosed leafy landscape based around lanes, rectangular fields and drains with views limited to gaps in hedgerows across open paddocks. Any future development within this character area has the opportunity to be creative while exploring the use of red brick, ridge tiles, bargeboarding and a similar scale to fit in with traditional styles, or it has the opportunity to create a new vernacular for the mossland built from sustainable materials and energy sources in the way that development in this area started in the 18th century with locally available materials. There are means to absorb development into the area whilst retaining many of its essential characteristics i.e., by keeping the main infrastructure of quiet lanes, drains and hedgerows and by retaining the overall field pattern and some open space. In either case the original field boundaries should be retained as a link with the past, as wildlife corridors and as a way of softening the effects of development. This will create challenges in terms of highways requirements if the rural character is to be maintained.*

2. *Character Area 2 (Walkers Hill) consists of an area of Ancient Enclosure with some amalgamation around Runnells Farm in the north west. This landscape also has some old historic buildings, but this is combined with some degradation and traffic noise from the adjacent Yeadon Way. Although the building stock is much degraded historically, the modern exteriors may mask earlier building fabric. They should therefore be recorded with historic analysis carried out prior to development decisions being made; this will help to identify what features should be retained. This may also require some historic building recording during works so that intrusive recording can take place and provision has been made for this in PPGs 15 and 16. This area is also of high archaeological potential and therefore any development proposals should be accompanied by a desk based assessment and if necessary and archaeological evaluation exploring this further.*
3. *Character Area 3 is a featureless area of modern enclosure around Wild Lane which has been rationalised into larger fields. It is largely devoid of settlement and is marred by tall pylons. As a landscape which has undergone significant recent change it has the capacity to withstand further change, although this will result in a change of character. It offers the opportunity for high quality design and the possibility of creating a new vernacular and local distinctiveness.*
4. *Character Area 4 is an area of post medieval planned enclosure and modern enclosure with a mixture of open and enclosed views. It is suffering from the creep of light industrial units and encroaching busy roads. It is still semi-rural in most places and the retention of the leafy lanes and hedgerows where they exist, will limit the impact of development.*
5. *Character Area 5 is a small plot of land now divorced from the rest of the study area by the rerouting of Common Edge Road. It contains no buildings but does include the former Moss Lane. The retention of hedgerows will help to protect any future development from noise pollution and soften the impact of development, but the old Moss Land should be retained as a quiet lane or bridleway.*

Many of the buildings in all character areas have suffered through the inappropriate replacement of windows and doors and in some cases, new renders and elevation treatments. However a number of buildings have also been tentatively identified for inclusion in the local list as well as recommendations on the significance of each building type. Recommendations have also been made to continue the tradition of using sustainable local materials and local energy wherever possible.



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Ecology

Habitat on the Moss consists primarily of trees and hedgerows, small wooded areas, ditches and a limited number of ponds. Typical of many such countryside areas, the water bodies could house water voles and/or great crested newts which are protected species. These require more detailed Phase 2 survey which will be taken forward. If their presence is confirmed, mitigation/re-location measures would require to be put in place if these habitats are disturbed.

The Council has appointed Bowland Ecology to undertake a Phase 1 habitats survey of the M.55 Hub which is subject to a separate report. The main "findings" in respect of Marton Moss are as follows:

The remaining area along the western boundary of the study area is predominately residential interspersed by small holdings. Areas of interest include an area of marshy grassland in the north eastern corner which is also designated in part as a Biological Heritage Site. There are a number of ponds in this area that could support great crested newts and the dyke system in the south is known to have supported water voles. The network of gardens, hedgerow and pasture will provide a number of suitable nesting sites for birds. Natural England have also identified two UK BAP habitats in this area (reed bed and coastal floodplain grazing marsh).

We would expect the incorporation of new habitats to be a priority for any development of the wider M.55 hub and that the end state ecological value would significantly exceed the current state.

Infrastructure

Yeadon Way, Progress Way and Whitehills Road are the major roads servicing Marton Moss. These would form the basis for major access into any future development. There is a need for such development to respect the network of lanes throughout the Moss although some of these would inevitably require to be re-modelled to service new development areas.

There is no risk to the Moss of tidal or alluvial flooding. The main issue is the drainage of surface water. The Moss is currently bisected by numerous ditches. These create the potential for larger water bodies to operate as sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS). Any development would require to be accompanied by a Drainage Area Plan that would demonstrate how foul and surface water would be drained from the Moss areas.

There are numerous community facilities already on the Moss – St. Nicholas C of E School, a GP and a dentist, numerous sports clubs, a grocery store and a newsagent. There is no reason that these facilities would not continue to operate. Indeed, they would potentially be considerably strengthened by an increase in population around the M.55 hub.]