

Eden District Council

Housing Development Plan



Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisals

Alston

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1.0 Introduction

PDP Associates has been instructed by Eden District Council to undertake landscape and visual impact appraisals on various sites in Alston. This information will inform the Housing Development Plan by helping to assess individual site's suitability for incorporating housing (landscape impact), and the impact any such development might have on the wider area (visual impact).

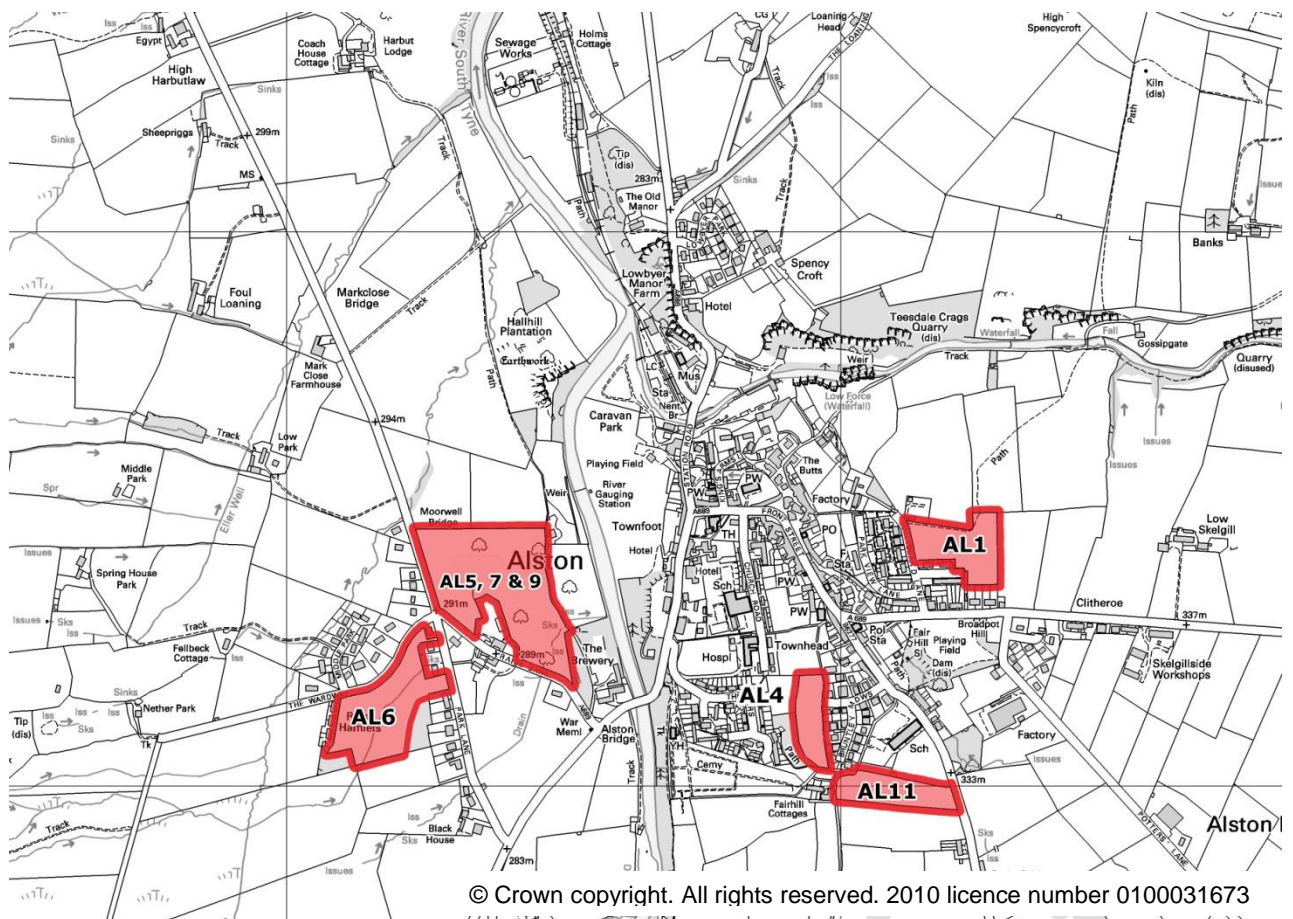
By following a structured assessment method, it has been possible to rank each site according to its overall suitability for use for housing. It has also been possible to highlight individual areas within each site which are particularly suitable or unsuitable for housing, and suggest mitigation methods which may improve a site's suitability.

Alston is a small town in the Eden District of Cumbria, with a population of approximately 1100. The town lies at the confluence of the Rivers South Tyne and Nent, and is the highest market town in England, at an elevation of approximately 470m (1000ft). The town's facilities far exceed that which would be expected of such a small town, and it is the hub for a wide, exceedingly rural area, with the nearest sizeable towns; Penrith and Hexham, both being approximately 20 miles away.

The town is perhaps best known for being set high in the north Pennines, within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is an important tourist destination, being located on the Pennine Way and C2C cycle route. Alston also has a popular narrow-gauge railway; the South Tynedale Railway.

1.1 The proposed parcels

Five separate parcels of land have been assessed.



- Parcel AL1 – Approximately 1.3 hectares to the east of Jollybeard Lane.
- Parcel AL4 – Approximately 0.7 hectares to the west of Bruntley Meadows.
- Parcels AL5, 7 & 9 – Three separate parcels (and additional land to their north), totalling approximately 4.2 hectares, located to the north and east of Raise Bank and immediately adjacent to a section of the Pennine Way.
- Parcel AL6 – Approximately 2.1 hectares to the west of existing properties along Park Lane and to the south of The Wardway.
- Parcel AL11 – Approximately 1.0 hectare to the south of Bruntley Meadows, and the east of Fairhill Cottages

2.0 Methodology

Guidance for the undertaking of this report has been sourced primarily from:

The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (second edition), published April 2002 by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (hereafter referred to as GLVIA)

and

Landscape Character of Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland, published April 2002 by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Unlike a standard Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, where specific, detailed proposals are assessed, in this report, assumptions and generalisations have had to be made; that the areas are to be used for standard national house-builder type housing will be proposed on these sites. This report describes and considers all of the potential effects which are likely to arise from such development and generally assumes that an impact could lead to a positive or adverse effect. The definition of impact terminology has been developed to ensure that, wherever possible, an objective assessment has been made and that the terminology used is appropriate to the development and the landscape setting.

Current guidelines advise that the assessment of an impact on the visual amenity resulting from a particular development should take full account of the landscape (character) impacts as well as the potential visual impacts. Although they are separate, it is difficult to isolate each category and so both landscape and visual effects are considered as part of the assessment process.

2.1 Landscape Effects

Landscape impact assessment describes the likely nature and scale of changes to individual landscape elements and characteristics, and the consequential effect on the landscape character.

Changes can vary between small and large scale, or be so small that there is, in effect, no change.

To assess the effects of development on a given landscape, it is necessary to examine the different factors which make up a landscape:

- Quantifiable elements, such as hills, valleys, woods, hedges, roads etc.
- Characteristics, such as tranquillity and derived from the combined effect of individual elements.
- Character; the sense of place of a given landscape, created by the pattern of elements that occur consistently.

2.2 Magnitude of landscape impacts

The magnitude of landscape impacts, which are categorised as high, medium, low or negligible depends on the following factors:

- The scale or degree of change to the existing landscape character.
- The nature of the change caused by the proposed development (beneficial, adverse or neutral).

Without specific, detailed proposals, it is difficult to assess the landscape impact on any individual area. However, it can generally be considered that placing housing on Greenfield sites, such as these, will have a high impact. On areas with a low existing landscape quality, this could be a beneficial impact. Conversely, on areas with a high landscape quality, this could be a negative impact. Mitigation can be applied through careful design, variation in density (according to a landscape's ability to accommodate change) and through landscape enhancement of certain features, or even the re-introduction of landscape features currently missing from a given specific area, but evident in the wider surroundings.

2.3 Visual Effects

Visual impact assessment describes the changes of the available views resulting from the development, and the changes in the visual amenity of the visual receptors, including:

- The magnitude or scale of visual change is described by reference to elements such as:
 - The extent/proportion of change within the view.
 - The degree of contrast.
 - The duration of the effect (temporary or permanent).
 - The nature of the effect.
 - The angle of view.
 - The distance of receptor (viewpoint) from the development.
 - The area where changes would be visible.

Assessment needs to allow for an average as well as worst-case scenario. Although residents may be particularly sensitive to changes in visual amenity, most land use planning regimes consider that public views are of greater value than those from private property.

2.4 Sensitivity of viewpoints

The sensitivity of individual viewpoints can be categorised as high, medium, low or negligible. Sensitivity depends on the following factors:

- The location and context of the viewpoint; viewpoints which are closer to the site are generally more sensitive.
- The number of viewers who commonly use the viewpoint. Some viewpoints are commonly used by the public, such as formal viewing platforms, picnic areas or recreational rights of way. Other viewpoints may be difficult to gain access to.
- The nature of the viewpoint. Residential properties are sensitive to visual impacts as the residents experience the impacts on a regular and prolonged basis. Public footpaths can also be sensitive, since the users' attention is often focussed on the landscape. By contrast, views from outdoor sports facilities, transport routes or places of work are less sensitive.
- Movement of viewers at the viewpoint. More transitory views, for example from a motorway, are generally less sensitive than views experienced from residential properties and footpaths.
- The cultural significance of the viewpoint, including its appearance in guidebooks and tourist maps, or cultural and historical associations.

2.5 Magnitude of visual impacts

The magnitude of impact for individual viewpoints can be categorised as negligible, low, medium or high depending on;

- The proportion of the existing view would change as a result of the proposed development.
- The number of features or elements within the view that would change.
- The appropriateness of the proposed development in the context of the existing view.
- The angle of the view.
- Whether any impact has a beneficial nature.

2.6 Terminology

The potential significance of landscape and visual impacts is determined by combining the magnitude of the potential impact with the sensitivity of the landscape or visual receptor to change.

The following terminology is used for the definition of magnitude of change for both the landscape and visual effects at an individual viewpoint:

- Negligible – Where the change is so small that there is, in effect, no change at all within the viewed landscape.
- Small – Where proposals constitute only a minor component of the wider view, which could be missed by the casual observer or where awareness does not affect the overall quality of the scene.
- Medium – Where proposals would form a visible and recognisable new development but where it is not intrusive within the overall view.
- Large – Where the proposals would form a significant and immediately apparent element of the scene, and would affect the overall impression of the view.

The following terminology is used to describe sensitivity of individual viewpoints:

- Negligible – Where views either don't exist or contribute an insignificant amount.
- Low – Where views are incidental to other activities, such as viewers at work or travelling through or past the site on a train or by road.
- Medium – Where views are noticeable, but not prominent. Includes residents of outlying areas of residential/urban areas, but from where no particular direct or notable view can be ascertained.
- High – Where the view forms a strong component of the activity at the viewpoint location. Includes users of recreational footpaths with specific viewpoints to the subject site and direct, close range views.

The following terminology is used to describe sensitivity with regard to the effect on the landscape:

- Low – Where little, or no landscape structure dominates, and landform and land cover are masked by land use. Where lack of management and intervention has resulted in a degraded appearance or there are frequent detracting features.
- Medium – Where there is a recognisable landscape structure and where there are characteristic patterns and combinations of landform and land cover. Some may be masked by developed land cover. Where there are some features worthy of conservation but also some detracting features.
- High – Where there is a strong landscape structure, characteristic pattern and balanced combination of landform and land cover. It includes features worthy of conservation and a strong sense of place.

Magnitude/Sensitivity	Negligible	Low	Moderate	High
Negligible	Negligible impact	Negligible/ slight impact	Slight impact	Slight/ moderate impact
Small	Negligible/ slight impact	Slight impact	Slight/moderate impact	Moderate impact
Medium	Slight impact	Slight/ moderate impact	Moderate impact	Moderate/ substantial impact
Large	Slight/ moderate impact	Moderate impact	Moderate/ substantial impact	Substantial impact

Table 1. Criteria for assessing significance

Level of significance	Definition
No impact	The proposed scheme would affect no landscape or visual receptors
Negligible	The proposed scheme is largely appropriate in its context and would have very little effect on its surround and affect very few receptors
Negligible/slight	The proposed scheme would have a minimal change on the landscape and would affect very few receptors
Slight	The proposed scheme would have a slight change on the landscape and would affect few receptors
Slight/moderate	The proposed scheme would have a noticeable effect on the landscape and would affect several receptors, therefore changing the character of the landscape or the character of a view
Moderate/substantial	The proposed scheme would have a very noticeable effect on the landscape and would affect several or many receptors, therefore changing the character of the landscape or the character of a view
Substantial	The proposed scheme would change the character and appearance of the landscape, either for a long period or permanently. It would affect many receptors and would therefore alter the character of the landscape or of a view

Table 2. Significance criteria for landscape and visual impact

2.7 Key Issues

Without specific proposals, at this stage, the key issues are limited to:

- Landscape Character
- Visual Qualities
- Mitigation Measures

Computer-generated mapping showing each parcel's theoretical visibility were not produced for this study. Instead, careful analysis of the likely visual receptors was made at each parcel, and the impact from each receptor was then made.

Site visits took place during January and February 2010. For each viewpoint, either a panoramic or a single-frame photograph, (shot at the equivalent to a 35mm SLR with a 50mm focal-length lens as this best replicates the view a human eye sees) was taken. For distance views, a subsequent 85mm (equivalent) panorama was also taken.

3.0 Policy context/framework

3.1 Policy guidance

3.1.1 Regional Policy Guidance

Regional policy guidance is offered through the Northwest of England Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 (NWRSS) and The Cumbria and Lake District Joint Structure Plan 2001-2016 (Structure Plan), in which Cumbria's **"fine landscapes, wildlife, buildings and features of archaeological and historic importance"** are identified as being a major factor in attracting tourists, businesses and residents to the area. The Structure Plan sets out to protect, conserve and enhance the local environment by promoting sustainable development which **"relate[s] well to the existing built and natural environment and to the capacity of the landscape to accommodate new development"** and recommends that there are **"high standards of design including siting, scale, use of materials and landscaping which respect and, where possible, enhance the distinctive character of townscape and landscape' and wherever possible should look to minimise levels of light pollution and noise"**.

The most relevant policy within the Structure Plan is Policy E37 (Landscape Character) which states;

"Development and land use change should be compatible with the distinctive characteristics and features of Cumbria's landscape types and sub types. Proposals would be assessed in relation to:

- 1. Locally distinctive natural or built features.**
- 2. Visual intrusion or impact.**
- 3. Scale in relation to the landscape and features.**
- 4. The character of the built environment.**
- 5. Public access and community value of the landscape.**
- 6. Historic patterns and attributes.**
- 7. Biodiversity features, ecological networks and semi-natural habitats.**
- 8. Openness, remoteness and tranquillity."**

RSS Policies EM1(A): Integrated Enhancement and Protection of the Region's Environmental Assets and DP7 (Promote Environmental Quality) are also relevant.

DP7 (Promote Environmental Quality) and EM1 (Integrated Enhancement and Protection of the Region's Environmental Assets) may also be relevant, although indirectly so.

3.12 Local Policy Guidance

The Eden Core Strategy was formally adopted in March 2010 and recognises the District's "exceptionally high quality of environment" and the fact that much of the District is covered by either national or local landscape or conservation designations.

CS1 – Sustainable Development Principles (point 12) states **“Development should reflect and enhance landscape character having regard to the sensitivity of the Eden Valley, the North Pennines AONB, the Lake District National Park, and their settings.”**

CS16 – Principles for the Natural Environment states that **“Development should accord with the principles of protection and enhancement of the natural environment of the District, including landscape, biodiversity and geodiversity and especially those areas designated as being of international, national and local importance.”**

It then goes on to list the aims as:-

To further protect the natural environment within the District as a whole:

- 1. The relationship between development and the natural environment would be managed to minimise the risk of environmental damage.**
- 2. Loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land would be avoided.**
- 3. Encouragement would be given to the creation of opportunities for species to spread out and create niches elsewhere in order to reduce any negative impacts of development and to allow species to migrate as a result of climate change.**
- 4. The re-creation and restoration of traditional habitats would be encouraged and existing wildlife and habitats such as hedges, ponds, woodlands, ancient woodlands, wetlands and species rich grasslands would be protected and enhanced.**
- 5. Where possible, developments would be expected to include suitable measures to contribute positively to overall biodiversity in the District or to mitigate harm caused by the development.**
- 6. Areas of open space and unbuilt frontages within towns and villages would be protected and enhanced where they are important to the character and amenity of the area.**
- 7. Promote improvements in accessibility to the natural environment for all people regardless of disability, age, gender or ethnicity.**
- 8. Development should reflect and where possible enhance local landscape character.**

CS18 – Design of New Development and CS24 – Open Space and Recreation Land are also relevant.

In terms of specific saved policies within the Local Plan:-

- Policy NE1** **The countryside of the District is valued for its undeveloped character. To protect its character, new development in the undeveloped countryside outside settlements and groups of dwellings will only be permitted to meet local infrastructure needs or if a need is established for the development in a specific location which is sufficient to outweigh environmental cost and if all of the following criteria are satisfied:**
- i) the siting of the development and any landscaping proposed will minimise impact;**
 - ii) the design and materials proposed are appropriate to the location; and**
 - iii) an unacceptable level of harm will not be caused to any interests of acknowledged importance.**
- Policy NE13** **In considering development proposals particular regard would be given to the retention of trees of amenity value, including those the subject of Tree Preservation Orders, and to their protection during development. Where appropriate, Tree Preservation Orders would be used to afford the necessary level of control.**
- Policy BE18** **Proposals involving environmental improvement including landscaping schemes, the enhancements of open spaces ...would be permitted if the design and materials to be used are appropriate to the location concerned.**
- Policy BE20** **In all new housing developments containing ten or more dwellings the Council will seek the provision of publicly accessible open space to a minimum standard of 15 square metres per dwelling as an integral part of the proposal.**
- Policy BE21** **Applications for development requiring or likely to require external lighting shall include details of lighting schemes. Such schemes would be assessed against the following criteria:**
- i) that the lighting scheme proposed is the minimum to undertake the task;**
 - ii) that light spillage is minimised;**
 - iii) in edge-of-town or village locations, or in rural areas, that landscaping measures would be provided to screen the lighting installation from neighbouring countryside areas; and**
 - iv) that road safety will not be compromised as a result of dazzling or distraction**

Policy RE5 **Proposals that would affect any rights of way will only be permitted where an acceptable diversion is provided by the developer and a legal diversion order obtained, or if a clear benefit arises from the change sufficient to outweigh the loss to the rights of way network.**

3.2 The landscape setting

Landscape types can be categorised at national, regional and local levels, with each level adding detail.

At a national level, Alston lies within Joint Character Area 10 – North Pennines, as defined by Natural England.

The characteristics of the North Pennines are:

- An upland landscape of high moorland ridges divided by broad pastoral dales.
- Remote moorland summits and high plateaux of blanket bog with a severe climate of high rainfall, cold winters and short summers and a unique wilderness quality.
- Broad ridges of heather moorland and acidic grassland managed for sheep and grouse.
- Sheltered dales of pastures and hay meadows bounded by dry stone walls and hedgerows containing small stone built villages and scattered farmsteads of a strong vernacular character.
- Alternating limestones, sandstones and shales of the Yoredale series with a stepped profile to hills and dalesides. Millstone Grits cap the higher fells and form distinctive flat topped summits.
- The high summit ridge in the west falling in a dramatic escarpment to the Vale of Eden.
- Igneous intrusions of the Great Whin Sill forming dramatic outcrops and waterfalls.
- A heavily scarred landscape of mineral extraction, with many active and abandoned quarries and the relics of widespread lead workings. Sparse tree cover with woodlands restricted to river gorges, gills and streamsides and larger coniferous plantations in the moorland fringes.
- Reservoirs scattered throughout the dales and moorland margins.
- A landscape of slow change and cultural continuity.

At a regional level, Alston falls within Landscape Type 8d (a sub-section of Landscape Type 8); Main Valleys; Dales, as defined within the Cumbria and Lake District Joint Structure Plan 2001 – 2016.

Landscape Type 8 is described as having “linear landscape features with significant alterations in topography and rural elements. Such landscapes are common within the county. Height and location determine many of the features, although streams, rivers, hanging woodlands, pasture, scrub and woodland are common throughout. The orientation, population density and scale of these landscapes vary, affecting perceptions and the experience gained”.

The key characteristics are described as:

- Distinctive, wide V-form upland valley with limestone scarps and steep slopes.
- Dominated by rough pasture with woodlands on the river banks and stone wall boundaries, steeper slopes are covered in bracken and scrub.
- Roads in the valley bottom; settlements are generally absent, except for the random isolated field barns.

Mention is made within the joint structure plan of the important ecological qualities of the Alston area and the cultural associations with lead mining.

3.3 General Descriptions of the Sites

3.31 Parcel AL1

Parcel AL1 lies on the eastern edge of the town, and is elevated approximately 30m above the town centre, ranging between 320m and 330m above sea level. To the immediate south and west of the parcel lies existing housing along Jollybeard Lane. The housing is unattractive dashed units, highly exposed and with little architectural or aesthetic merit. The housing to the west is separated by Jollybeard Lane, whilst the rear gardens of the housing to the south abuts the parcel's boundary. Beyond the parcel's north west corner lies an electricity substation, surround by high chain link fencing with no screening. The remainder of the northern boundary and the entire eastern boundary is formed by dry stone walling.

The parcel is devoid of any vegetation other than the unimproved/semi-improved grassland which appears to be currently used for grazing.

The site has a desolate, exposed feel, despite being close to existing housing. Views across the site are to open countryside, and the surrounding area is undeveloped with little movement or evidence of development. However, the immediate surroundings have a neglected air, and the abrupt interface between the housing and open countryside does not sit well.

3.32 Parcel AL4

Parcel AL4 lies just approximately 400m to the south of the town centre, on a slope between The Firs to the west and Bruntley Meadows to the east. The parcel is currently improved grassland with the only sizeable vegetation being two mature Ash trees in the north east corner.

The parcel is well contained on all sides by a dry stone wall. Beyond the eastern boundary lies a footpath giving pedestrian access to Front Street and the houses of Bruntley Meadows. Beyond the western boundary lies a further field of improved grassland for half the boundary, and a mature tree planting belt for the other half. Beyond the southern boundary lies a footpath linking the cemetery with a local lane, the footpath running along the eastern boundary and Bruntley Meadows and the rear gardens of a small grouping of houses. Beyond the northern boundary lies a further field of semi-improved pasture. To the site's south east lies Parcel AL11.

The parcel rises from approximately 304m along the western boundary to approximately 310m in the north east corner, presenting a slope of approximately 1 in 7 in places.

The parcel is a peaceful area of land, offering attractive views to the west, and bounded by well-maintained detached properties. The footpath running north/south offers good pedestrian access to the site and it is assumed heavily used by people taking children to the primary school from the northern areas of the town.

3.33 Parcel AL5, 7 and 9 (and land to the north)

Parcels AL5, 7 and 9 lie immediately adjacent to each other to the town centre's west, and are currently used as grazing land but dotted with several mature trees, some of which are highly attractive and in good condition.

The northern boundaries of parcels AL7 and 9 are unmarked lines in the field, but the northern boundary of the wider study area is a dry stone wall with individual mature tree planting and beyond which lies further semi-improved grazing land and further open countryside. Immediately beyond the majority of the eastern boundary lies a short section of the Pennine Way, beyond which is some mature woodland. There are numerous mature trees along this boundary, including Oak, Ash and Horse Chestnut, all worthy of protection and retention. The south easternmost portion of the area, occupied by AL5, has recently had an application for a small housing development approved. This area is immediately adjacent to Raise Bank which rises above the parcel as it heads north west. Adjacent to AL5's western boundary is a small area of woodland beyond which lies parcel AL9.

Parcel AL9 lies at the junction of Raise Bank and Park Lane, and as such, traffic is more evident than within parcel AL7, although still at a relatively low level. The parcel has further mature trees along its boundary with Raise Bank. The parcel's south west boundary is a dry stone wall, in declining condition, along Raise Bank.

The area slopes gently to the northwest with the lowest point being approximately 280m in the south east corner and the highest point being approximately 293m in the north west corner adjacent to Raise Bank. No public footpaths cross the parcel.

The area has an 'edge of town' feel, towards its southern extents, but more tranquil and rural towards the northern boundary. Existing houses of Raise Bank and Park Lane are evident from much of the area, and traffic along the A689 noticeable. It does feel detached from the town centre, as there are no visual links beyond its immediate vicinity. The majority of the area is well screened, with distance views being limited to the north of the parcels. Any existing development visible is limited to individual properties, rather than high density housing. As a result, the site has a relatively tranquil nature and a rural character.

3.34 Parcel AL6

Parcel AL6 lies to the east of the town centre, behind existing properties of Raise Bank and in front of the existing properties of Raise Hamlets. Across The Wardway lies the relatively recent development of Middle Park. The site is predominantly semi-improved pasture, although there are areas of mature tree planting in the north east corner and a more substantial area of woodland adjacent to the rear of some of the properties along Park Lane. A temporary water course appears to run through the site from the south west corner to the north east corner, but during any survey work, was found to be dry.

The parcel's eastern boundary is formed by the rear of existing executive-style housing along Park Lane. There is a small section of the parcel which bounds directly onto Park Lane, but this has been recently developed with an additional detached property. The existing block of woodland forms a substantial buffer between several existing properties and the parcel, and includes some evergreen species ensuring the screening is year-round. The northern boundary is formed by a dry stone wall, beyond which lies The Wardway; a local road serving the recent development of Middle Park and leading to a stone track/bridleway. The western boundary is formed by a timber post and rail fence, beyond which lies the access driveway to the bungalows of Raise Hamlet. The southern boundary is another dry stone wall, beyond which lies further grazing land, except for the south west corner, where there is a small wooded copse. The parcel rises from approximately 295m along its eastern boundary with Park Lane to 304m along its western boundary with Raise Hamlet. No public footpath crosses the parcel.

The parcel has a moderate landscape quality, aided by the presence of mature tree planting. It does form a major component of several residential properties. The presence of existing housing on three sides, however, prevents the site from having a rural feel, despite distant views of the north Pennines. The site is relatively tranquil though, as traffic volumes along both The Wardway and Park Lane appear slight, with low speeds.

3.35 Parcel AL11

Parcel AP11 lies to the south of the town and to the east of the cemetery. It is by far the largest parcel, and is the most open, with views over open countryside and towards the Cross Fell area of the Pennines. It is currently improved pasture, used for haymaking, bounded by dry stone walls. It has no sizeable shrubs or trees either within it or along its boundary.

The parcel's western boundary is a dry stone wall beyond which lies an unsurfaced track leading from the primary school, past Fairhill Cottages towards Fairhill. The northern boundary is a dry stone wall which partly abuts a small garth, and partly a larger additional pasture field. The eastern boundary is further dry stone walling beyond which lies the B6277 to Garrigill, while the southern boundary is another dry stone wall beyond which lies another pasture field.

The parcel slopes markedly, from approximately 312m at the western end, to approximately 335m at the eastern end. Within the parcel itself, the site also undulates, sloping down from the southern boundary to a low point of approximately 316m in the middle of the site.

The parcel has a high landscape quality within it, and is set within a high quality wider landscape, displaying many characteristics typical of the area. It currently has a rural feel, with Alston being little in evidence, and relatively light traffic levels along the road on its eastern boundary. The parcel has extensive views towards the south and south east and clearly has the feel of open countryside.

4.0 Landscape and visual impacts and their significance

4.1 Visual baseline

Visual impact assessment relates to “**changes that arise in the composition of the available views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people’s responses to the changes and to the overall effects with respect to the visual amenity**” (GLVIA).

Potential visual receptors can include the public or community at large, residents, visitors and other groups of viewers as well as the visual amenity of people affected.

During the site surveys, careful notes were taken as to likely viewpoints of the parcels, and those viewpoints were subsequently visited, and the views recorded and analysed.

4.2 Landscape sensitivity

Sensitivity is categorised as high, medium, low or negligible, according to the degree to which a particular landscape or area can accommodate change arising from a particular development, without detrimental effects on its character, as based on the following factors:

- Compatibility of the proposed development with the existing land-uses and landscape character.
- The pattern and scale of the landscape in relation to the development.
- Visual enclosure/openness and potential extent of visibility.
- The scope for mitigation of the proposed development, which would be in character with the existing landscape.
- The value placed on the landscape.

In order to provide comparisons between Option Areas (and/or individual parcels), scores have been assigned to each impact level.

Significance of landscape or visual effect	Score
No impact	0
Negligible impact	1
Negligible/slight impact	2
Slight impact	3
Slight/moderate impact	4
Moderate impact	5
Moderate/substantial	6
Substantial impact	7

Table 3. Scores allocated to each given impact level

4.21 Parcel AL1

Landscape element	Sensitivity	Nature of impact	Predicted magnitude	Significance of impact	Score
Landform	Low	Earthworks typical of housing and infrastructure development.	Small	Slight	3
Land cover	Low	Change of use from agricultural to developed.	Large	Moderate	5
Trees and woodland	N/A	No tree cover.	None	No impact	0
Hedgerows	N/A	No hedgerows.	None	No impact	0
Water bodies	N/A	None.	None	No impact	0
Rights of way	Low	Route will be unlikely to require alteration as it is on the boundary.	Small	Slight	3
Landscape character	Moderate	Change from agricultural-use, to developed housing land. Visible from large area of AONB. Existing housing immediately beyond however, already causes impact.	Small	Slight/moderate	4
					15

Table 4. Landscape sensitivity of Parcel AL1

4.22 Parcel AL4

Landscape element	Sensitivity	Nature of impact	Predicted magnitude	Significance of impact	Score
Landform	Moderate	Steeply sloping from east to west and may require some topographical alterations if developed.	Medium	Moderate	5
Land cover	Low	Change of use from agricultural to developed.	Large	Moderate	5
Trees and woodland	Low	Mature trees in north east corner of site, but easy to accommodate within any design.	Small	Slight	3
Hedgerows	N/A	No hedgerows.	None	No impact	0
Water bodies	N/A	None.	None	No impact	0
Rights of way	N/A	None.	None	No impact	0
Landscape character	Low	The parcel is small, enclosed within developed areas and displays no characteristics of the wider landscape type.	Small	Slight	3
					16

Table 5. Landscape sensitivity of Parcel AL4

4.23 Parcels AL5, 7 and 9 (including land to their north)

Landscape element	Sensitivity	Nature of impact	Predicted magnitude	Significance of impact	Score
Landform	Low	Existing undulating land unlikely to require any alteration.	Small	Slight	3
Land cover	Low	Change of use from agricultural to developed.	Large	Moderate	5
Trees and woodland	Moderate	Some significant mature trees which may be impacted by development, although their retention could be secured.	Medium	Moderate	5
Hedgerows	Low	Intermittent sections of hedgerow which could easily be retained.	Small	Slight	3
Water bodies	Moderate	Possible alterations to drainage and water tables could affect small water courses.	Medium	Moderate	5
Rights of way	N/A	None on site, although Pennine Way immediately adjacent to site.	None	No impact	0
Landscape character	Moderate	Sections of the parcels display characteristics typical of the wider landscape type which could be eroded by development, although areas within the parcels appear less sensitive.	Medium	Moderate	5
					26

Table 6. Landscape sensitivity of Parcels AL5, 7 and 9

4.24 Parcel AL6

Landscape element	Sensitivity	Nature of impact	Predicted magnitude	Significance of impact	Score
Landform	Low	Existing undulating land unlikely to require any alteration.	Small	Slight	3
Land cover	Low	Change of use from agricultural to developed.	High	Moderate	5
Trees and woodland	Moderate	Some significant mature trees which may be impacted by development, although along boundary and therefore their retention could be secured.	Small	Slight/moderate	4
Hedgerows	N/A	None.	No impact	None	0
Water bodies	Moderate	Possible alterations to drainage and water tables could affect small water courses although space sufficient to secure if deemed necessary.	Small	Slight/moderate	4
Rights of way	N/A	None on site.	None	No impact	0
Landscape character	Moderate	Sections of the parcels display characteristics typical of the wider landscape type which could be eroded by development.	Medium	Moderate	5
					21

Table 7. Landscape sensitivity of Parcel AL6

4.25 Parcel AL11

Landscape element	Sensitivity	Nature of impact	Predicted magnitude	Significance of impact	Score
Landform	High	Steeply sloping site with considerable level changes throughout, requiring engineering if entire parcel were to be developed.	Large	Substantial	7
Land cover	Low	Change of use from agricultural to developed.	Large	Moderate	5
Trees and woodland	N/A	No tree cover.	None	No impact	0
Hedgerows	N/A	No hedgerows.	None	No impact	0
Water bodies	N/A	None.	None	No impact	0
Rights of way	Moderate	Existing footpath immediately adjacent to parcel. Land use change would create impact.	Medium	Moderate	5
Landscape character	High	Currently rural feel and characteristics with little sense of Alston beyond.	Large	Substantial	7
					24

Table 8. Landscape sensitivity of Parcel AL11

4.3 Summary of landscape impacts

By scoring the anticipated impact of each factor assessed, a cumulative significance score has been given to each Option Area. The higher the score, the greater the significance of the impact on the landscape through developing an area would be.

Parcel AL1	15
Parcel AL4	16
Parcels AL5, 7 & 9	26
Parcel AL6	21
Parcel AL11	24

Table 9.

4.4 Visual impact

Visual impact assessment relates to **“changes that arise in the composition of the available views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people’s responses to the changes and to the overall effects with respect to the visual amenity”** (GLVIA)

Potential visual receptors can include the public or community at large, residents, visitors and other groups of viewers as well as the visual amenity of people affected.

Rather than identify individual locations considered to be a visual receptor to each parcel, an overview has been taken to assess visual impact in the immediate vicinity, mid distance (up to 2km) and beyond 2km. This is sufficient to give a gauge to the likely visual impact development may create.

As with landscape impact, in order to provide comparisons between parcels, scores have been assigned to each impact level.

Significance of landscape or visual effect	Score
No impact	0
Negligible impact	1
Negligible/slight impact	2
Slight impact	3
Slight/moderate impact	4
Moderate impact	5
Moderate/substantial	6
Substantial impact	7

Table 10. Scores allocated to each given impact level

4.41 Visual impact from Parcel AL1

The visual receptors in the immediate vicinity to this parcel comprise residential properties facing the parcel along Jollybeard Lane. Such receptors can be considered to have a high sensitivity to change as they experience the view on a permanent basis. However, the existing views are already impacted by the adjacent housing and the substation. Development would have a Medium magnitude of change, meaning any impact would be moderate.

In the mid distance (up to 2km), visual receptors are limited to users of the local footpath network and users of the B6294. Whilst receptors are within an AONB, there are relatively few footpaths in this area with a view of the parcel. Those which do exist are already impacted by both the substation and the existing housing along Jollybeard Lane. The interface between development and open countryside is currently stark and poorly designed, creating a large impact in its own right. Any new development could be far more sympathetic to this interface and screen what is currently an unattractive area of housing, considering the quality of the surrounding countryside. Access may have to be gained from the A689 following Highways objections about access off Jollybeard Lane. The land to the immediate east of the site offers sufficient level changes to allow an access way to be created joining the parcel to the road, without creating a visual impact from any receptor.

Mid distance receptors can be considered to be of moderate sensitivity, with any development creating a small magnitude of change, therefore resulting in a slight impact.

Far distance views (2km+) of this parcel are not generally available. Any receptors from this distance would be considered to have a low sensitivity, and any development would create a negligible magnitude of change, resulting in negligible impact.

Parcel AL1	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Impact	Score
Immediate vicinity	High	Medium	Moderate/substantial	6
Mid-distance	Moderate	Small	Slight/ moderate	4
Far-distance	Low	Small	Slight	3
				13

Table 11.

4.42 Visual impact from Parcel AL4

The visual receptors in the immediate vicinity to this parcel comprise residential properties at the south end of Bruntley Meadows, and users of the footpath to the east of the site. The parcel is lower than these properties, and therefore views over towards to hills west of Alston, will be retained, providing low-rise properties were developed. Such receptors can be considered to have a high sensitivity to change as they experience the view on a permanent basis. Development would have a medium magnitude of change, meaning any impact would be moderate.

In the mid distance (up to 2km), views towards the site are very limited, with only occasional glimpses of the parcel being available. At all such viewpoints, the parcel comprises only a small part of the view, and the parcel is read in conjunction with the surrounding existing development. Mid distance receptors can be considered to be of low sensitivity, with any development creating a small magnitude of change, therefore resulting in a negligible/slight impact.

Far distance views (2km+) of this parcel are only available from the hills to the west of Alston, which have very few public rights of way, or roads, and therefore reduce visual receptors to negligible levels. Any development would be hard to distinguish within the existing form of the town. Any receptors from this distance would be considered to have a low sensitivity, and any development would create a negligible magnitude of change, resulting in negligible impact.

Parcel AL4	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Impact	Score
Immediate vicinity	High	Medium	Moderate/ substantial	6
Mid-distance	Low	Small	Slight	3
Far-distance	Low	Negligible	Negligible/ slight	2
				11

Table 12.

4.43 Visual impact from Parcels AL5, 7 and 9

The visual receptors in the immediate vicinity to this parcel comprise road users and residential properties along Raise Bank and Park Lane, and users of the Pennine Way to the parcels' immediate east. Residential receptors can be considered to have a moderate sensitivity to change. Whilst they experience the view on a permanent basis, there is substantial screening between the parcels and the existing houses, which could easily be increased. Similarly, road users and walkers along the Pennine Way, have a moderate sensitivity as they only experience the parcels for a short period of time, and read them in conjunction with the rest of Alston's development. Development could help associate the existing properties of Raise Bank and the immediate area, with Alston, as opposed to the currently isolated and separated character the area currently has. The overall sensitivity of receptors in the immediate area can be considered to be moderate. Development of the entire extent of parcels would have a large magnitude of change, but carefully selected areas, fitting within areas with lower sensitivity would reduce this to a medium magnitude of change. In that scenario, any impact would be slight/moderate.

From the mid distance (up to 2km), views towards sections of the parcels are frequent, including the A689 as it approaches Alston, and the Pennine Way. From such locations, the current extent of Alston is not evident, and therefore development might appear particularly stark in otherwise open countryside. This impact could be reduced by focusing development away from the northern portions, and concentrating any development along the main road itself, and ensuring any development within the parcels sat within naturally screened areas, and integrated into the open countryside well, rather than with a stark, artificial boundary. Mid distance receptors can be considered to be of moderate sensitivity, with the parcels being in direct view for considerable distances. If carried out as suggested, any development would create a small magnitude of change, resulting in a medium impact.

Far distance views (2km+) of this parcel are only available from the hills to the west of Alston, which have very few public rights of way, or roads, and therefore reduce visual receptors to negligible levels. From such viewpoints, the existing town centre of Alston would appear in the same view, ensuring the site was read in conjunction with this. Any receptors from this distance would be considered to have a low sensitivity, and any development would create a negligible magnitude of change, resulting in negligible impact.

Parcels AL5, 7 & 9	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Impact	Score
Immediate vicinity	Moderate	Medium	Moderate	5
Mid-distance	Moderate	Medium	Moderate	5
Far-distance	Low	Negligible	Negligible/slight	2
				12

Table 13.

4.44 Visual impact from Parcel AL6

The visual receptors in the immediate vicinity to this parcel comprise residential properties of Raise Hamlet and Park Lane, to the parcel's west and east respectively, and walkers along the Wardway towards either Middle Park or the track leading up to Nether Park. Residents of Raise Hamlet will have a high sensitivity to change as they have an unobstructed view of the site. Residents of Park Lane and users of The Wardway will have a lower sensitivity as there is some existing screening of the parcel, and views towards the hills to the west of Alston will be retained. From any receptor, the parcel is read in conjunction with existing development, some of it recent. Overall, receptors in the immediate vicinity can be considered to have a moderate sensitivity to change, and any development would have a medium magnitude of change, meaning any impact would be slight/moderate.

In the mid distance (up to 2km), views towards the site can be gained from the A686 as it approaches Alston from the west. The site appears distinct from Alston itself, which is hidden from most of the approach in, but is read in conjunction with the houses along Park Lane and, in particular, the development of Middle Park. This recent development currently appears unattached to Alston or Park Lane and does not blend into the landscape, with its modern design of houses centred on an access cul-de-sac. Development of parcel AL6, particularly if it had a linear nature to mirror that of Park Lane, could help sit this development better and link Middle Park with Park Lane, reducing the piecemeal appearance it currently has. Mid distance receptors can be considered to be of moderate sensitivity, as they are approaching from a very remote and rural area and are within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Development would create a small magnitude of change, some of which could be beneficial, therefore resulting in a slight impact.

Far distance views (2km+) of this parcel are only available from the hills to the west and south west of Alston, which has very few public rights of way and therefore reduce visual receptors to negligible levels. Any development would be hard to distinguish as an individual element. Any receptors from this distance would be considered to have a low sensitivity, and any development would create a negligible magnitude of change, resulting in negligible slight impact.

Parcel AL6	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Impact	Score
Immediate vicinity	Moderate	Medium	Moderate	5
Mid-distance	Moderate	Small	Slight/moderate	4
Far-distance	Low	Negligible	Negligible/slight	2
				11

Table 14.

4.45 Visual impact from Parcel AL11

This parcel has few permanent visual receptors, but is highly visible from a wide surrounding area of open countryside designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, whilst the existing extent of Alston is not.

The visual receptors in the immediate vicinity to this parcel comprise residential properties which overlook the parcel; to the end of Bruntley Meadows, Fairhill Cottages and a residential property along the B6277. These properties will have a high sensitivity to development as they currently overlook open countryside with many characteristics of the wider area. Development would create a large magnitude of change and therefore a substantial impact.

In the mid distance (up to 2km), the parcel is highly visible from numerous points along the approach to Alston from Penrith, whilst Alston itself remains out of view. It is also visible from the road leading to and from Leadgate, and from the Pennine Way to the south of Alston as it runs alongside the River South Tyne. The parcel is very prominent, helping to screen Alston and development would be very apparent over much of the parcel, appearing isolated and intruding into open countryside. Receptors at this range can be considered to have a high sensitivity to change, as they are frequently tourists visiting the area because of its existing qualities and because they are either approaching Alston from a very remote area, or recreational users visiting for the high quality landscape. Development would have a moderate magnitude of change, and this would result in a moderate impact.

Far distance views (2km+) of this parcel are also important as the parcel would be highly noticeable in an otherwise undeveloped landscape, and from an AONB. Views from the Pennine Way and A686 from Penrith would still be affected as despite the distance, development would be very noticeable. As with mid-distance receptors, sensitivity would be high and development would still cause a moderate magnitude of change.

Parcel AL11	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Impact	Score
Immediate vicinity	High	Large	Substantial	7
Mid-distance	High	Medium	Moderate/substantial	6
Far-distance	High	Medium	Moderate/substantial	6
				19

Table 15.

4.5 Summary of Visual Impacts

Using the scoring system described in 4.2, the cumulative visual impact of each Parcel (or parcels) from differing visual receptors is:

Parcel(s)	Total Score
AL1	13
AL4	11
AL5, 7 & 9	12
AL6	11
AL11	19

Table 16.

From this, it can clearly be seen that in general terms, development of all parcels except AL11 would create similar levels of visual impact, whilst development of parcel AL11 would create significantly more visual impact than the others. However, what the results don't show is that the development of some portions of the parcels would create far more visual impact than others, and if these areas were left un-developed, or used for open space, etc, the visual impact of any given parcel as a whole could be greatly reduced.

5.0 Summary

If the scoring of both landscape and visual impact were combined to rank each parcel in terms of its suitability for development, the parcels would rank, with least impact (and therefore highest suitability) first;

1. Parcels AL1 & AL4 (total score 27)
2. Parcel AL6 (total score 36)
3. Parcels AL5, 7 & 9 (total score 38)
4. Parcel AL11 (total score 43)

However, each parcel has constraints and opportunities that a simple scoring system cannot identify.

5.1 Parcel AL1

Despite being exposed and adjacent to existing open countryside, views towards this area are already compromised by the existing housing of Jollybeard Lane and the electricity substation. Development of the entire parcel would extend the visibility of housing into the area around the River Nent, as it flows towards Alston, and the footpaths which run alongside it. However, by avoiding development along the north east corner of the site, development could occur without increasing the visibility of the area any more than is already the case. It would also present an opportunity to reduce the impact of the existing housing, which sits starkly next to, and integrate poorly into, open countryside. An access road leading from the A689 would offer an opportunity to create house frontages onto this open countryside, and perhaps trying to create a traditional roadside street scene, as can be found along Front Street or Park Lane, with a strong structural landscape scheme helping to both reduce the visual impact and add landscape character.

5.2 Parcel AL4

Parcel AL4 appears an entirely logical extension of Bruntley Meadows, with obvious access and a strong sense of enclosure. There are steep gradients to contend with, but Bruntley Meadows already extends down the hillside, so development could appear seamless. A continuation of single storey units would reduce any visual impact and ensure existing residents on the western side of Bruntley Meadows, and pedestrians using the footpath, retained much of their current views over towards the west.

5.3 Parcel AL6

This parcel is the most distant from Alston town centre and feels distinct from it, with few visual clues that the town is nearby, and the River South Tyne also providing a very obvious barrier. However, there are currently two areas of housing; Raise Hamlet and Middle Park, which are highly visible, but currently appear isolated and poorly located within the wider landscape. Development of parcel AL6 would help link the two areas of housing with Park Lane, and give a critical mass to the area, making it appear more meaningful and logical. With excellent views towards open countryside to the south, this parcel offers another opportunity to create a strong street scene along The Wardway, and the nearby properties would suggest that this is an area which could warrant larger detached units. By avoiding the southern boundary, or at least ensuring there is no sudden change between developed land and open countryside, much of the visual impact could be prevented.

5.4 Parcels AL5, 7 and 9

These parcels have been assessed as one entity due to their immediate proximity to each other. The study area has also been extended north to meet an existing stone wall.

Permission has already been granted for a small development of executive-style homes in the area comprising Parcel AL5. Development of this area will have relatively little visual impact as it is well screened by both topography and vegetation. It does, however, seem to make the land to its immediate north, and further round towards the A689, more viable for housing. As with Parcel AL6, development of parts of parcels AL7 and 9 would add mass to, and be a logical extension of pockets of recent development west of the South Tyne. Sitting any development tightly against the A689 and Raise Bank would reduce visual impact to the north and it would be very important to ensure that any boundary between development and open countryside is designed sympathetically, and is not simply a straight line of close-board timber fences. New dry stone walling would be in keeping and hedgerow planting with specimen trees could help it fit in with the existing landscape character of the area.

A high quality, low density development would be required to justify developing in this area, to help ensure good integration and to blend in with the existing housing nearby.

5.5 Parcel AL11

Of all the parcels assessed, this one has, by far, the most rural feel. All views are directed towards the open countryside of the AONB, and despite being relatively close to Alston town centre (approx 575m), there is little visual linkage with the rest of the town. The parcel itself is highly attractive, with a strongly rolling topography, well enclosed by dry stone walls and surrounded by open countryside. The rolling topography, however, makes it highly visible from a very wide area; an area from which Alston itself isn't visible. Development of all but the western end of the parcel would greatly extend Alston's visibility into an extremely rural landscape. Development of the western end, however, would appear a logical extension of any development of Parcel AL4, along with the existing houses of Bruntley Meadows and Fairhill Cottages. It would also create a large visual impact to those residents though.

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