

# **NORTH WEST CAMBRIDGE AREA ACTION PLAN**

## **SITE FOOTPRINT ASSESSMENT - SUPPLEMENTARY PAPER – MARCH 2008**

### **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This paper presents the conclusions of a further review of the site footprint, following representations to the Preferred Options Report. It includes a revised site boundary that would be shown on the Proposals Map contained within the draft Area Action Plan for Submission to the Secretary of State. This approach remains consistent with the AAP objectives and the evidence base.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The specific purpose of releasing land in this location from the Green Belt, as set out in the Structure Plan, is to provide for predominantly University related development to address the long term development needs of Cambridge University. The importance of the location to the Green Belt was recognised but the University's needs were concluded to be of such significance that the release of land should be made, but within the context of maintaining the purposes of the Green Belt. There is therefore a difficult balance to be struck between these competing objectives.
- 2.2 In order to guide a decision on the appropriate site boundary, a study was commissioned by the Councils to advise on the landscape and Green Belt merits of this location. That report, the North West Cambridge Green Belt landscape Study by David Brown Landscape Design and Richard Morrish Associates (May 2006), forms part of the evidence base to the AAP. It concludes that the slope rising from the Washpit Brook up to a more level area is of particular importance to the Green Belt setting of Cambridge and that a boundary broadly utilising the 20m contour would be appropriate. It also recommended that other areas north of the Park & Ride should not be developed for historic landscape reasons.
- 2.3 The site footprint contained in the Preferred Options Report was based on the site recommended in the David Brown study, but in the interests of maximising the developable area to go as far as possible to meeting the development aspirations of the University compatible with Green Belt objectives, the site footprint extended further down to the Park & Ride site. This therefore incorporated areas of historic landscape importance but on the basis that some of these features such as an S-shaped field boundary thought to date from medieval field boundaries and pre-enclosure hedgerows could potentially be incorporated into the masterplanning of the site and its edge treatment.
- 2.4 The University has maintained its objection to the site footprint and argues that it does not fully meet its development aspirations of 2,500 dwellings. Whilst the Councils are of the view that there is no specific evidence supporting this

particular figure because the overall level of need identified by the University is actually higher than could be accommodated whatever site boundary was chosen (3,400 dwellings), and indeed the University itself has stated that a dwelling range of 2,000-2,500 dwellings would meet its needs, the Councils accept that it is a reasonable objective of the AAP to identify the maximum site footprint compatible with other objectives, including maintaining a workable Green Belt boundary. However, despite proposing a new development footprint as part of this consultation, the University has provided no new evidence to support its objections nor any specific objection to any of the Councils' evidence base.

- 2.5 Notwithstanding this, as part of the process of preparing the AAP for Submission, the Councils are advised in government guidance to prepare a self assessment of soundness to ensure that the plan that is submitted is sound. As part of this process, it is a last opportunity for the Councils to test that their plan is robust and can be defended at public examination. As such, officers felt that the issue of site footprint, which is fundamental to the soundness of the AAP warranted a final review before submission.

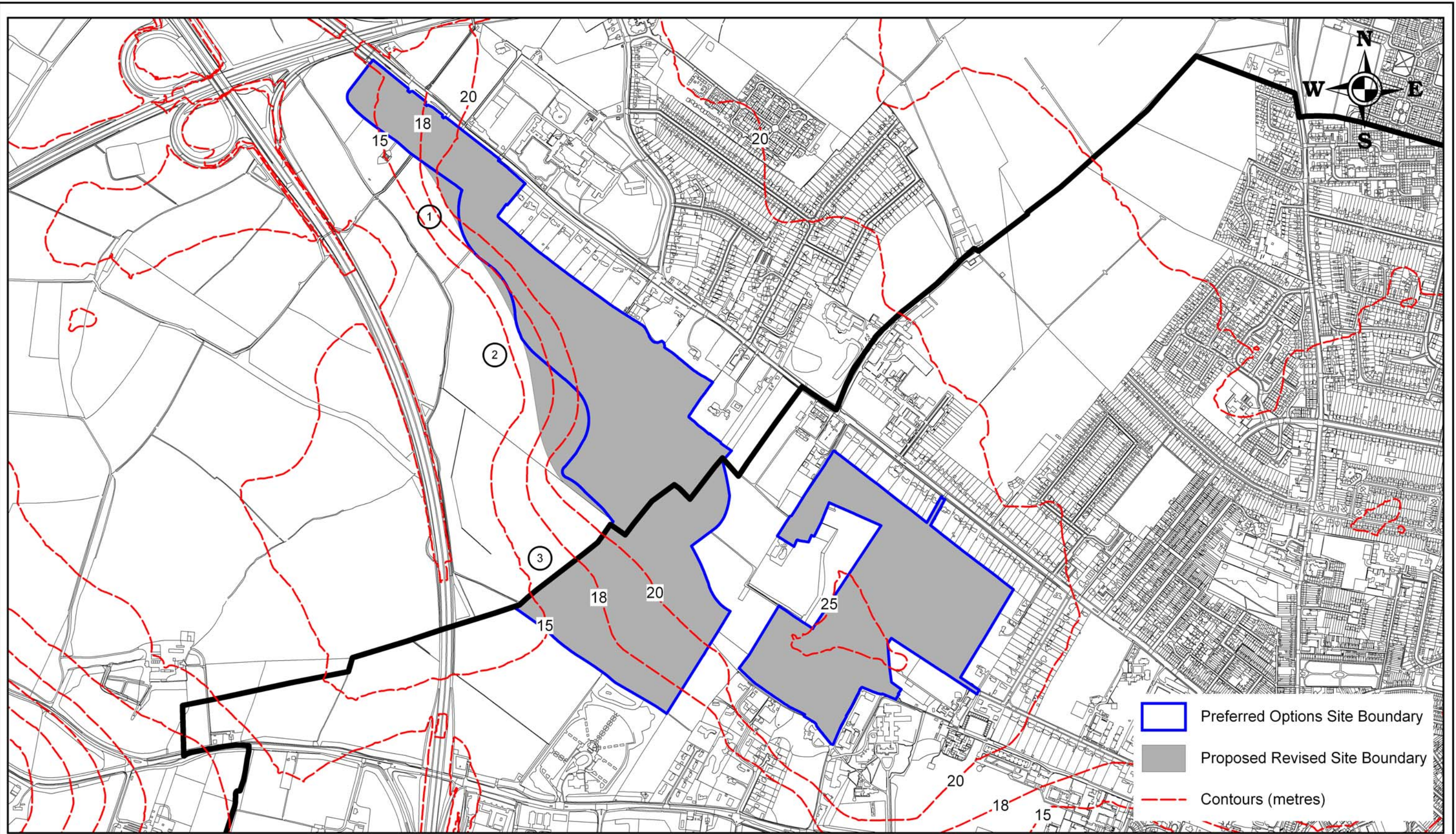
### **3. Site Footprint Review**


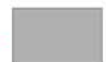

- 3.1 The Councils remain firmly of the view that the objectives underpinning the AAP are sound. Also that the approach to defining the outer boundary of the site footprint is the most appropriate in all the circumstances and that the principle of retaining a green foreground of rising land to the development should be maintained.
- 3.2 The evidence base indicates that a boundary based on the 20m contour is the most appropriate, with the emphasis being on retaining development at the top of the slope rising up from the Washpit Brook (on the Girton ridge). Officers have carried out sensitivity testing by drawing on old maps with imperial contours on to interpolate a finer grain of contour on this slope than the 5m intervals on modern OS maps, and the 18m contour has been added as an indicator between the 15m and 20m contours. This process highlighted that there are 2 areas of the Preferred Options boundary that are above the 20m contour and that part of the boundary extends below the 20m contour where it runs parallel to the Huntingdon Road properties in order to provide an area capable of being developed.
- 3.3 A further site visit to re-scrutinise the effects of the contours on the ground and the potential impacts on the Green Belt setting of Cambridge in public views has been undertaken. This site has a complex topography which needs to be viewed from a number of vantage points to be properly assessed and the potential impacts of development understood.
- 3.4 A map is attached as Appendix A which shows the contours, the Preferred Option site boundary and a proposed alternative outer boundary. Looking at the outer boundary from north to south (as indicated on the map):
- (1) Northern area by University Farm – the Preferred Options site does not fully extend to the 20m contour. From observations on the ground, there

is a perceivable break in slope at the 20m contour and it would be reasonable for the site to be extended to the 20m contour which extends to its furthest point approximately a quarter of the way into this field from the northeast boundary. To allow the development to extend any further in this central part of the field would bring it down a pronounced slope where it would be prominent in views and reduce the green foreground as perceived in views towards Cambridge to a degree where very little foreground would be seen because of the nature of the topography. The Washpit Brook is at a low level and the land between it and the M11 falls away from the motorway such that it provides no visible green foreground in views from the west. It is only land on the east side of the Brook that performs this particular Green Belt setting function. The boundary to the south east of this field is prominent in views and has a very clearly perceived break in slope roughly half way between the farm and the Washpit Brook, around the 18m contour. This is reflected in the Preferred Options boundary and is therefore appropriately drawn at this point. The north western boundary of this field is marked by a strong mature hedgeline which helps mitigate impacts on views both from the A14 and Girton interchange and to that area from the site. The break in slope is less discernable on the parts of the field either side of the prominent central break described above and there is scope to take the boundary smoothly across the field from the 18m contour at the mid point of the southeast boundary, to the 20m contour at its furthest point into the field and on to rejoin the Preferred Option boundary at the north corner of the field, as shown on the map. This would provide a sensible development area whilst respecting the topography and the AAP objectives.

- (2) This central part of the outer boundary is a key area in views travelling both north and south along the M11. The southern part of this sector is marked by a post and wire fence and a hedge closer towards the M11. The Preferred Options boundary follows the post and wire fence for part of its length and then, where there is a perceptible break in slope, it turns north. This is an appropriate boundary. The topography is more gentle through the central part of this sector and this is reflected in the Preferred Options site boundary which has a prominent area that already extends down below the 18m contour. Having reviewed this area, it is considered that the Preferred Options boundary could be amended without harm to the AAP objectives if the boundary were drawn more evenly across the gentle slope, between the field boundaries at either end of the sector and the prominent area that extends below the 18m contour. Whilst this would bring development below the 18m contour in places, in light of the gentle nature of the gradient in this part of the slope and the extent of green foreground that would still be provided, it is considered that this extension to the site boundary could be included without fundamentally undermining the purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt.
- (3) The southern part of the site is bounded by a strong hedgeline which is prominent in views travelling down the M11 and is also an historic feature identified in the Green Belt Landscape Study as an S-shaped field boundary thought to date from medieval field boundaries. It provides an appropriate and suitable boundary for the Green Belt and maintains the setting of Cambridge.

- 3.5 The effect of the proposed revisions to the outer site boundary would be to provide a modest increase in the development footprint of 3.9ha. As the land use budget takes account of the non-residential uses, this addition can contribute towards housing provision on the site.
- 3.6 For reference purposes, Appendix B consists of a map showing the most recent footprint boundary proposed by Cambridge University overlaid with the new proposed AAP preferred revised site boundary as shown on the map at Appendix A.



-  Preferred Options Site Boundary
-  Proposed Revised Site Boundary
-  Contours (metres)

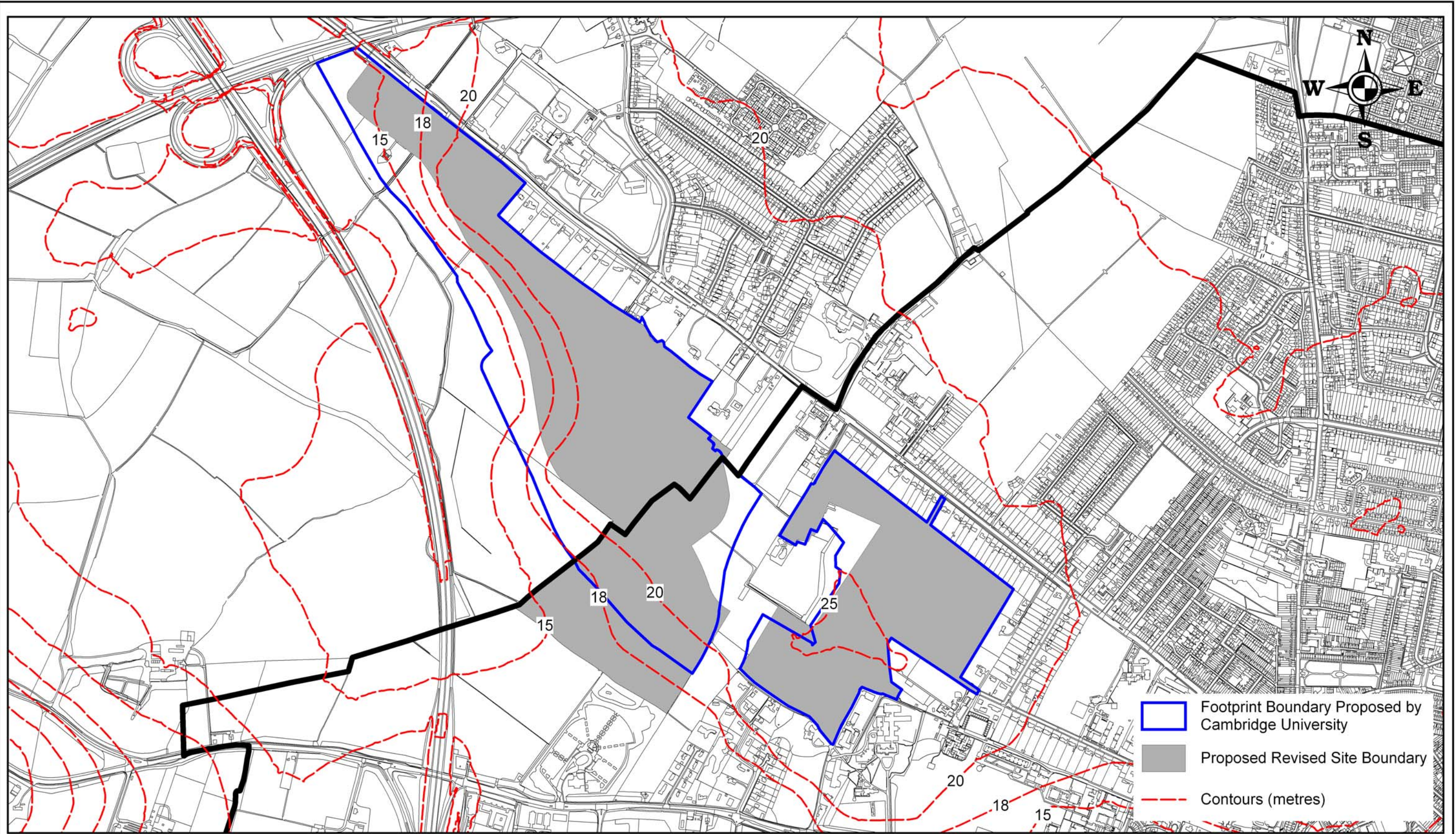





## Appendix A

### North West Cambridge Area Action Plan - Proposed Revised Site Boundary

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Scale:	1:9500 @ A3



-  Footprint Boundary Proposed by Cambridge University
-  Proposed Revised Site Boundary
-  Contours (metres)

## Appendix B

### North West Cambridge AAP - Footprint Boundary Proposed by Cambridge University overlaid with the new Proposed AAP Preferred Site Boundary

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