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Potential Growth to East of A6 at Rushden/Higham Ferrers  
Initial Study for Duchy of Lancaster

11/10/2012



## Quality Management

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## **Potential Growth to East of A6 at Rushden/Higham Ferrers Initial Study for Duchy of Lancaster**

11/10/2012

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# 1 Introduction

This Report summarises work undertaken by WSP in September 2012 to appraise land to the east of Rushden and Higham Ferrers in Northamptonshire as a potential location for a sustainable urban extension.

The work has been undertaken to inform representations by the Duchy of Lancaster to the Emerging Core Strategy for North Northamptonshire in respect of the most appropriate location for major growth in Rushden and Higham Ferrers.

The aim of this high level appraisal is to understand issues relating to accessibility, topography, landscape, land use and ownership that may inform the most appropriate location for an urban extension of up to 2500 dwellings in the period up to 2031.

Though the Duchy of Lancaster owns significant land to the east of the A6, this study has ignored land ownership in terms of appraising the physical characteristics of the area and its propensity to accommodate new development.

Land ownership has however been considered with respect to delivery issues.

Given the scale of urban development being considered within the emerging Joint Core Strategy, it is essential that due consideration is now given, to defining the most appropriate location that is well connected to Rushden/Higham Ferrers and has the best chance of delivering sustainable development and being deliverable within the planned period to 2031.



## 2 The Study Area

The area covered by this high level appraisal is shown in Figure 1. This “Study Area” covers land to the east of the A6, from the A45 in the north to Avenue Road in Higham Park to the south and for about 2 kilometres eastwards from the A6. For the purposes of this high level appraisal, the study area specifically excludes land within 1km of Stanwick, Chelveston, Caldecote and Newton Bromswold to avoid potential coalescence of these rural settlements with any new urban extension.

This high level appraisal has however not just been confined to land to the east of the A6 as it is essential that the layout, land use and movement network within the existing urban area to the west of the A6 is understood and that opportunities to connect and link to new development are identified and explored.

A new urban extension of 2500 homes would generate an increase in population of about 6,000 persons based on an average household size of 2.4 (ONS 2006). This would represent an increase in the order of 16% to the current population of about 36,600 of the Rushden/Higham Ferrers urban area.

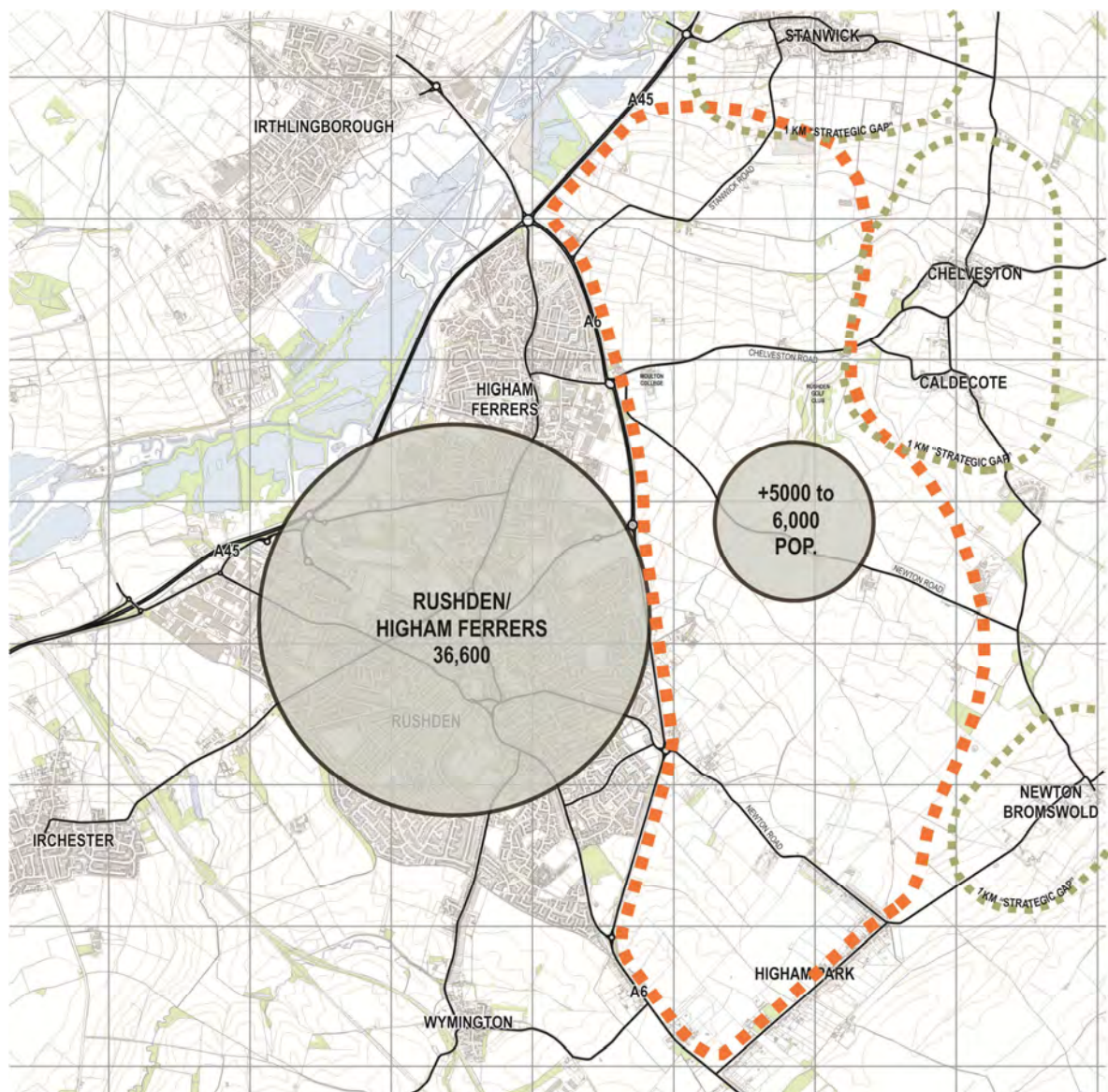


Figure 1 – Extent of Study Area

Though Rushden and Higham have different histories and are separate civic entities, on a day-to-day basis they function as a single urban area, sharing employment, commercial, educational and other community facilities.

Up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the two towns remained as separate entities. With the rapid expansion of boot and shoemaking alongside the historic lace and brick making industries, Rushden grew rapidly towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and began to join with Higham Ferrers. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century any remaining countryside along the main road between the two towns had largely disappeared. Further expansion together with the construction of the A6 and subsequent infilling of land has cemented the relationship between the two towns and they now comprise a single functioning urban area. Figure 2 below illustrates the existing urban grain ground in a figure ground diagram and confirms the joined-up nature of the two towns in 2012. Further development on allocated sites will continue to infill gaps.



*Figure 2 – Figure Ground Diagram indicating existing urban form of Rushden/Higham Ferrers*

## 3 Topography and Landscape Issues

This section provides an overview of landscape character and topography including key views and flooding issues.

### 3.1 Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Assessment produced as part of the development of a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Northamptonshire, provides a useful summary of the prevailing landscape character of the Study Area.

This report defines the northern part of the study area (north of the B645 Chelveston Road) as falling within the “Limestone Valley Slopes” character area. The report notes the following with regard to the study area:

- “Bordered by the River Nene floodplain to the west and Chelverston and Caldecote Farmed Claylands to the east”.
- A predominance of arable cereals interspersed with fields of arable horticulture.
- Generally large and medium size fields emphasising the subtle undulations of the landscape.
- Small pockets of improved pastures and calcareous grassland around settlements including Stanwick and on the north-eastern edge of Higham Ferrers.
- Limited woodland cover with scattered hedgerow trees.
- The urban centre of Higham Ferrers borders the character area resulting in a strong urban influences in places.
- Noise intrusion from the A45 contributes to urbanising elements within the landscape.

The southern portion of the study area is defined as “Chelverston and Caldecote Claylands” with the following key characteristics:

- Characterised by a predominance of arable cereals with fields of arable horticulture and occasional areas of improved pasture and calcareous grassland.
- A significant area of calcareous grassland around Higham Park and Newton Bromswold.
- Sparse woodland cover, an open character across a largely flat and expansive landscape.
- Scattered hedgerow trees.
- A rural landscape of scattered farms and villages.
- The radio mast at Hare Spinney and the water towers near Higham Park being prominent features within the landscape.
- Church spires providing important focal points.
- Limited recreational opportunities, with Rushden Golf Course being the only facility.
- Limited heritage features with only scattered fields of ridge and furrow.

In summary the above assessment did not highlight any significant natural features or areas of particularly high landscape quality, whilst noise intrusion from the A45 and an urban influence from nearby urban centres is noted.

### 3.2 Topography

Landform within the study area generally rises some 60m, from about 40m close to the A45 at the northern end of the study area to about 100m at Higham Park in the south. From east to west

landform is relatively level, though a series of small streams run north-westwards in shallow valleys separated by gentle ridgelines as shown in Figure 3 below. These small streams discharge into a more substantial watercourse that turns north east before turning north west again close to Chelveston before discharging into the River Nene to the north of the A45. The shallow but well-defined valley created by this larger watercourse running north westwards from Chelveston towards the A45 is the most notable landform within the study area.

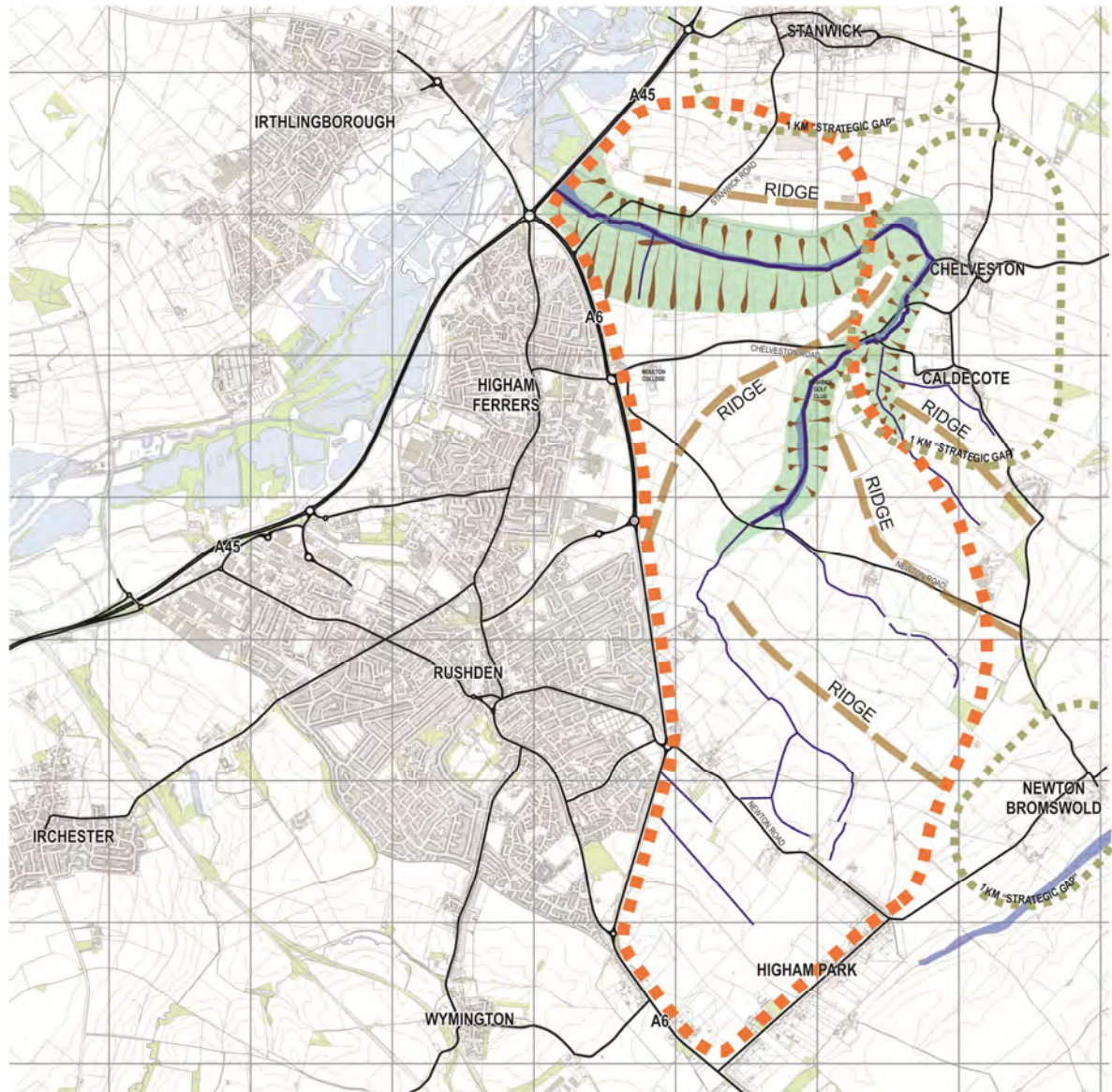


Figure 3 – Landform Within the Study Area

### 3.3 Flood Risk

Initial inspection of the Environment Agency's website indicates that the stream in the northern part of the study area is subject to flooding. The area prone to flooding which is shown in Figure 3 above, is limited to the valley bottom and is unlikely to pose any significant constraint to development as any proposal for an urban extension would need to develop a Water Cycle Management Strategy and incorporate the stream within a proposed Green Infrastructure network.

### 3.4 Views

The most significant views are in the northern part of the Study Area where the falling land provides longer views out across the River Nene valley towards Irtlingborough and the north. This northern part of the study area is also visible from the north and the passing A45 corridor.

Elsewhere within the study area, views are limited by the relatively level landscape, trees and hedgerows. The new industrial units on John Clark Way, the spire of St Mary The Virgin Church in Higham Ferrers, the radio mast at Hare Spinney and water towers at Higham Park are notable features in glimpsed views from various points across the study area.

Key views that were noted during the site visit are shown in Figure 4.

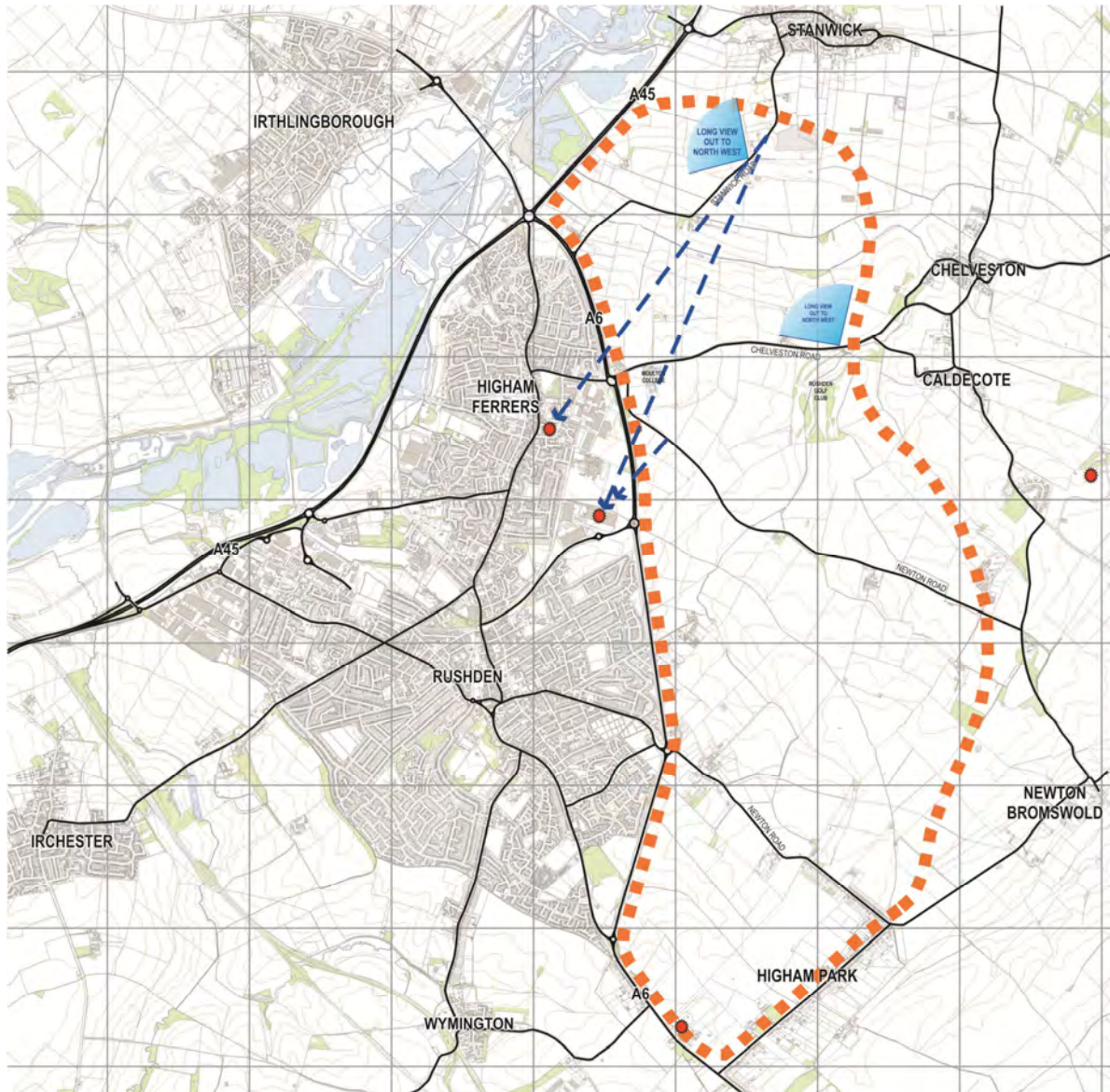


Figure 4 – Key Views identified during study area appraisal

Figure 5 illustrates a series of Landscape Character areas that reflect landform and key features that were identified during the site appraisal. They are described below.

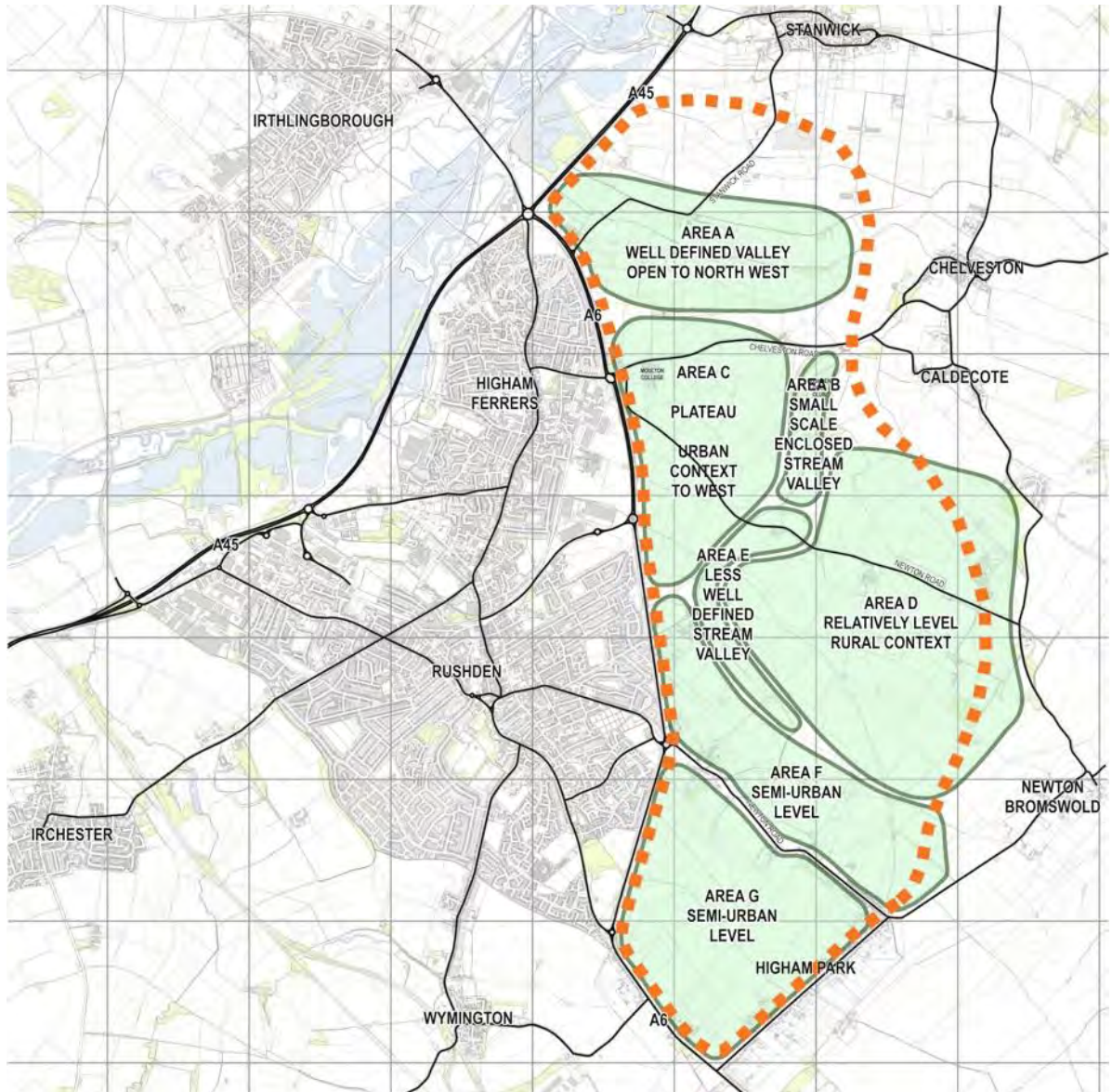


Figure 5 – Landscape Character Areas

**Area A** – shallow but well defined stream valley running north-westwards from Chelveston to A45. The photograph below taken from the footbridge crossing the A6 looks eastwards towards Stanwick on the higher ground in the distance (the spire of St Laurence’s Church can just be seen). In the foreground is Glebe Farm which is run as East Northants Riding Centre. Behind the farm buildings Stanwick Road can be seen climbing the rise from the valley bottom. The area has good views out to the north and likewise is visible from the north and passing A45.



View from northern footbridge looking east towards Stanwick across stream valley

**Area B** – This area is based around the small stream valley that passes through Rushden Golf Course and to the south west of Chelveston. It has comparatively high level of hedgerows and trees giving it a relatively enclosed and intimate character.

This stream valley and the golf course would provide a clear but natural eastern limit to development should it be considered in this area.

**Area C** – This area adjoins the A6 and is crossed by the B645 Chelveston Road in the north. Newton Road passes south eastward through this area from its junction with the B645 to the west of Moulton College.

The East Northants Academy, a Campus of Moulton College is located in the north western corner of this area. This purpose-built centre, extended during the past three years, offers courses in construction, animal management and horticulture. Facilities include fully equipped teaching workshops and classrooms, learning resource centre, horticultural unit and landscaped areas, catering and recreation facilities and an animal welfare centre that houses a range of species relevant to the academy's animal management courses. There are also a number of business subsidised office and workshop incubator units for new businesses, who can also access the college's marketing, management and administrative resources. To help students from east Northamptonshire, Northampton town and parts of Bedfordshire travel to the academy, the college operate an extensive transport network.

Two fields to the south of the academy are laid out with 5 football pitches, changing rooms and car parking for a local football club.

Landform within this area is gently domed rising to about 80m by the John Clark Way roundabout on the A6, from a low point of about 65m close to the golf course to the east. A regular shaped series of medium sized fields enclosed by low hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees are mostly in arable use at present. Traffic noise from the A6 is evident in the western part of this area and glimpsed views of development in Higham Ferrers confers more of an urban feel on this area than land further east.

**Area D** – is within the eastern part of the study area and rises about 20m from north west to south east towards a high point of about 90m. Field sizes are larger than further west and most land is currently in arable use. A significant complex of industrial buildings including a tyre recycling business as well as warehousing and logistics is located on the northern side of Upper Higham Lane. Garrett Spinney and Newton Spinney, the two most significant blocks of woodland within the study area are located on the eastern side of this area.

The area has a definite rural character being further away from Rushden/Higham Ferrers.

**Area E** – this area comprises the shallow stream valley stretching south westwards from the golf course before turning southwards by High Hayden Farm. This stream is not a very significant landscape feature but given that the study contains few notable landscape features, it does provide a point of interest and a potential structural element around which to develop a green infrastructure framework. It may also help to define an easterly "edge" to development.

**Area F** – This area comprises a relatively flat tract of land to the north of Higham Park. It has a semi-urban feel and contains a number of agricultural and employment uses along the A6 and Newton Road as well as residential ribbon development. There are no significant natural features. Field sizes are large with low hedgerows and a paucity of hedgerow trees.



## 4 Accessibility

### 4.1 Highways

The current highway network within the study area is shown in Figure 6 below.

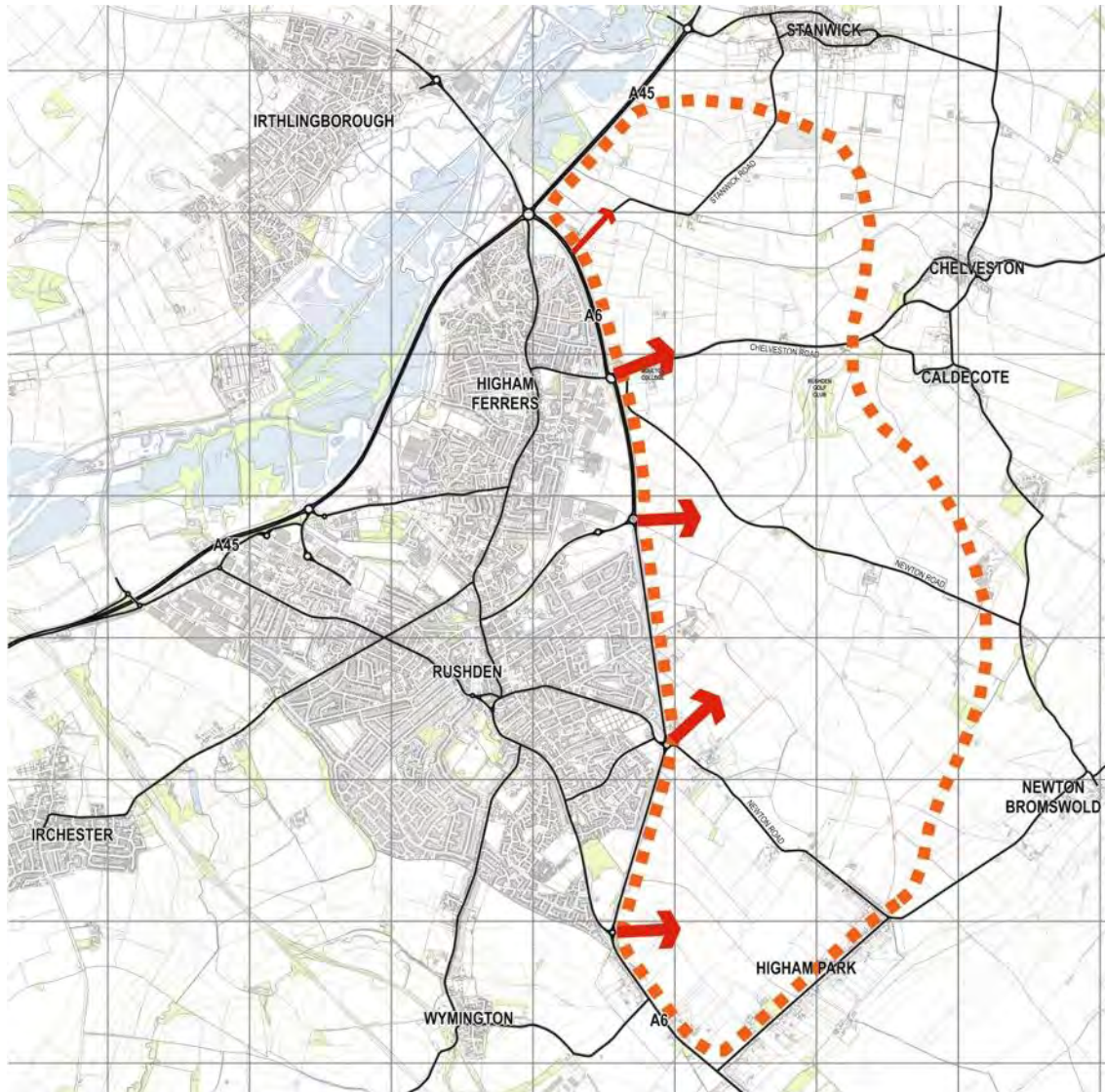


Figure 6 – Existing Highway Network and Potential Access Points

The study area is separated from the existing urban area of Rushden/Higham Ferrers by the A6 that runs north south down the western edge of the study area. In the vicinity of the study area, the A6 is divided into five sections, each separated by a roundabout providing access to Rushden/Higham Ferrers to the west and rural communities to the east. The two northernmost sections of the A6 are dual carriageway with the remaining sections further south being single carriageway. The National speed limit is in operation along all of the five sections of the A6.

Just to the south of the junction with the A45, Stanwick Road an unclassified single carriageway links to the village of Stanwick, just over 2km to the north-east.

Further south a further small cul-de sac (Alexandra Road) provides access to a group of houses, agricultural and employment uses clustered around High Hayden Farm.

There is no frontage development along the A6 except for the most southerly section that serves a significant amount of mostly ribbon development within Higham Park.

Chelveston Road and Newton Road provide access from two of the A6 roundabouts to the rural area to the east as shown in Figure 6.

#### 4.2 Vehicular Access Opportunities

Access to any new development areas to the east of the A6 will primarily be from the existing roads linking to the A6. The roundabout at John Clark Way does not currently have an easterly leg and would provide a direct route into Rushden Town Centre. It is thus likely to be a good first main point of connection to an urban extension. In the longer term an urban extension would require at least two connections to the A6 to distribute traffic effectively and reduce potential peak hour congestion. Locating new development so that it links to 3 points on the A6 would further help to distribute traffic and mitigate any potential congestion at the A6 roundabouts.

#### 4.3 Public Transport

Existing bus routes are shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7 – Existing Bus Services

The existing urban area benefits from a comprehensive bus service that provides a good network of routes within the urban area. External Services also link the urban area with Wellingborough, Northampton, Bedford, Irthlingborough, Kettering, Raunds and Thrapston.

The outlying settlements of Chelveston, Caldecote and Newton Bromswold are not directly connected to Rushden/Higham Ferrers by public transport but are served by the demand responsive County Connect Service. Stanwick is served by four bus routes which link back to Rushden via Higham Ferrers.

#### 4.4 Public Transport Opportunities

Any development to the east of the A6 will provide the opportunity to introduce new services that connect to the existing outlying rural areas.

The severance of the A6 and impermeable form of the existing urban area means that new services connecting to an urban extension to the east will need to utilise the existing highway network in most cases.

There is however the potential to consider the introduction of a new bus only link utilising the old railway line north of Rushden town centre before linking to new residential development to the west of the A6 in the vicinity of the Ferrers Specialist Arts College and then potentially across the A6.

This bus route could potentially be combined with a pedestrian/cycle corridor and integrated within a new Green Infrastructure network to provide a high quality link with the existing urban area.

#### 4.5 Existing Pedestrian and Cycle Links

The A6 currently provides a high level of severance between the urban area of Rushden/Higham Ferrers and rural hinterland to the east. There are a very limited number of pedestrian and cycle connections.

Two pedestrian and cycle bridges currently provide links across the A6. The northernmost of these joins the two sections of Stanwick Road in Higham Ferrers either side of the A6. The southern bridge provides a link between Ennerdale Road in Rushden, to the east side of the A6 just to the north of High Hayden Farm and Alexandra Road.



*Footbridge across A6 at Stanwick Road*

Both footbridges have ramps for cycles and pushchairs, though cyclists are instructed to dismount when crossing the bridge. Neither of the pedestrian routes that link to the footbridges on the east side are well signposted and there is likely to be a perceived threat to personal safety in the dark. In particular the route to the southern bridge from Ennerdale Road is poor, passing down a narrow alley between two houses before turning north along an overgrown and unlit track.



*Threatening and insecure footpath link to footbridge from Ennerdale Road*

There are two at-grade crossings of the A6. The first is a path from the eastern end of Hayden Road in Rushden which links to a small section of footways on either side of the A6 providing a crossing to Alexandra Road. A central refuge is provided between the northbound and southbound carriageways and visibility is good, but pedestrians still have to cross a busy and high speed road.



*At-grade footpath crossing from Hayden Road.*

The second is a statutory footpath that crosses the A6 immediately to the north of the rugby football ground in Rushden. No footpath or track is evident, so persons using this track have to negotiate an overgrown grassy embankment and crash barriers when crossing.

Figure 8 below shows current pedestrian and cycle routes across the A6 as (red circles) and statutory footpaths within the study area (green broken lines).

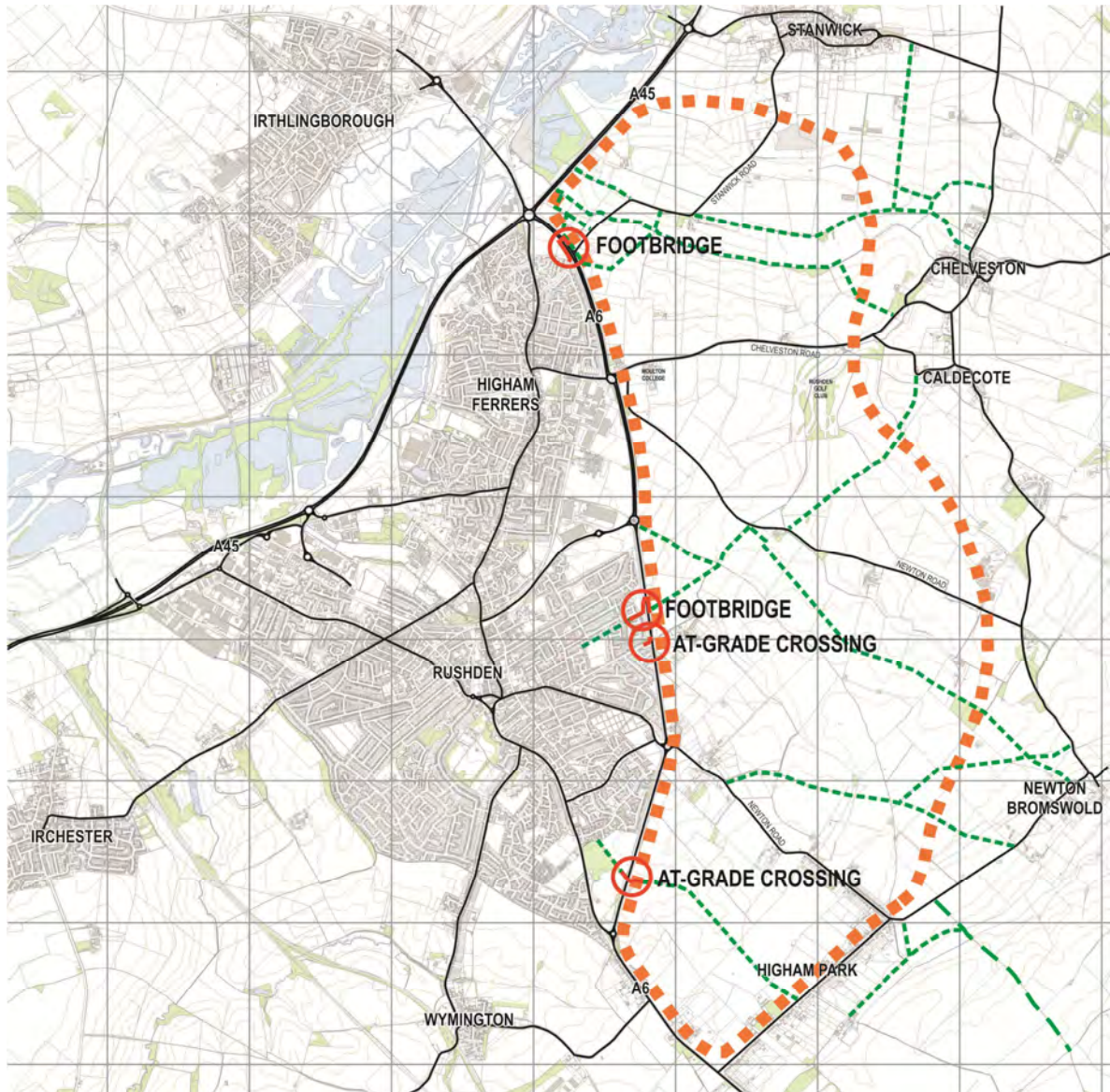


Figure 8 – Existing Footpaths and Road Crossings

#### 4.5.1 Potential Pedestrian and Cycle Routes

An appraisal of urban form along the eastern edge of Rushden/Higham Ferrers shows that most development turns its back on the A6 and that there are very few gaps where new high quality pedestrian and cycle links to an urban extension to the east could be created.

Given the design and nature of the A6 and its relationship with surrounding development it is difficult to envisage how the character of the road corridor could be changed from a high speed rural road to an urban street. Levels of traffic and the function of the road as a by-pass to Rushden/Higham suggests that it is unlikely to be feasible to fully integrate the road in urban design terms into a conjoined urban area with development either side of the A6. Whilst new links can be made to join up development, our feeling is that the A6 is likely to remain in its current form for the foreseeable future, and certainly in the period to 2031. If high quality and safe pedestrian and cycle routes are to be created these are likely to be grade separated.

Our appraisal of urban form has highlighted 10 locations where gaps currently exist and where in theory additional crossings of the A6 corridor could be provided. In reality few of these gaps are

located on key desire lines and a number would result in very indirect routes along winding residential roads.

Figure 9 shows the potential crossing points:

1. Existing footbridge crossing at Stanwick Road – at extreme northern end of study area, and unlikely to be main link as development is more likely to be located further south.
2. Gap between houses at end of cul-de-sac off Philip Way – possible route into Higham Ferrers but not on major desire line and unlikely to be sufficient space to construct high quality link. Insufficient distance to A6 to achieve appropriate ramp gradient.
3. Gap between houses at end of Wykeham Road - possible route into Higham Ferrers but not on major desire line and unlikely to be sufficient space to construct high quality link. Insufficient distance to A6 to achieve appropriate ramp gradient.
4. Land adjoining The Ferrers Specialist Arts College - Land surrounding the college is likely to be brought forward for residential development. This location provides an excellent opportunity for integrating a new high quality pedestrian and cycle crossing of the A6 within new development. A bus link could also be considered. This route can link to the route of the former rail line thus providing a safe and reasonably direct route to both Higham Ferrers and Rushden. The layout of residential development on this land should therefore be designed so that it does not compromise the potential for establishing future pedestrian and cycle links across the A6, to a new urban extension.
5. Existing footpath linking to footbridge at Ennerdale Road - Established link but gap between houses is insufficient to enable this route to be upgraded to provide high quality route.
6. Existing footpath link from Hayden Road – potential link to Rushden town centre – it would appear that there is insufficient distance (only 30m) between the end of Hayden Road and the carriageway edge of the A6 to achieve an adequate gradient (1:21 desirable) for a ramped bridge approach in this location.
7. Potential route through small allotment site at rear of Grafton Road. Sufficient space may be available but route to Rushden would be indirect and inappropriate along quiet winding residential street. Ownership of allotments unknown.
8. Route through children's play area at eastern end of Springfield Road - Sufficient space may be available but route to Rushden would be indirect and inappropriate along quiet winding residential streets. Ownership of play area unknown.
9. Route from the end of Goulsbra Road through vacant field to south east. Sufficient space available but route to Rushden is indirect through winding residential streets. Vacant field zoned for residential development. Route will probably not connect to the urban extension which is likely to be further north.
10. Statutory footpath along eastern edge of Rushden and Higham Rugby Football Club – sufficient land available but route will probably not connect to SUE which is likely to be further north.

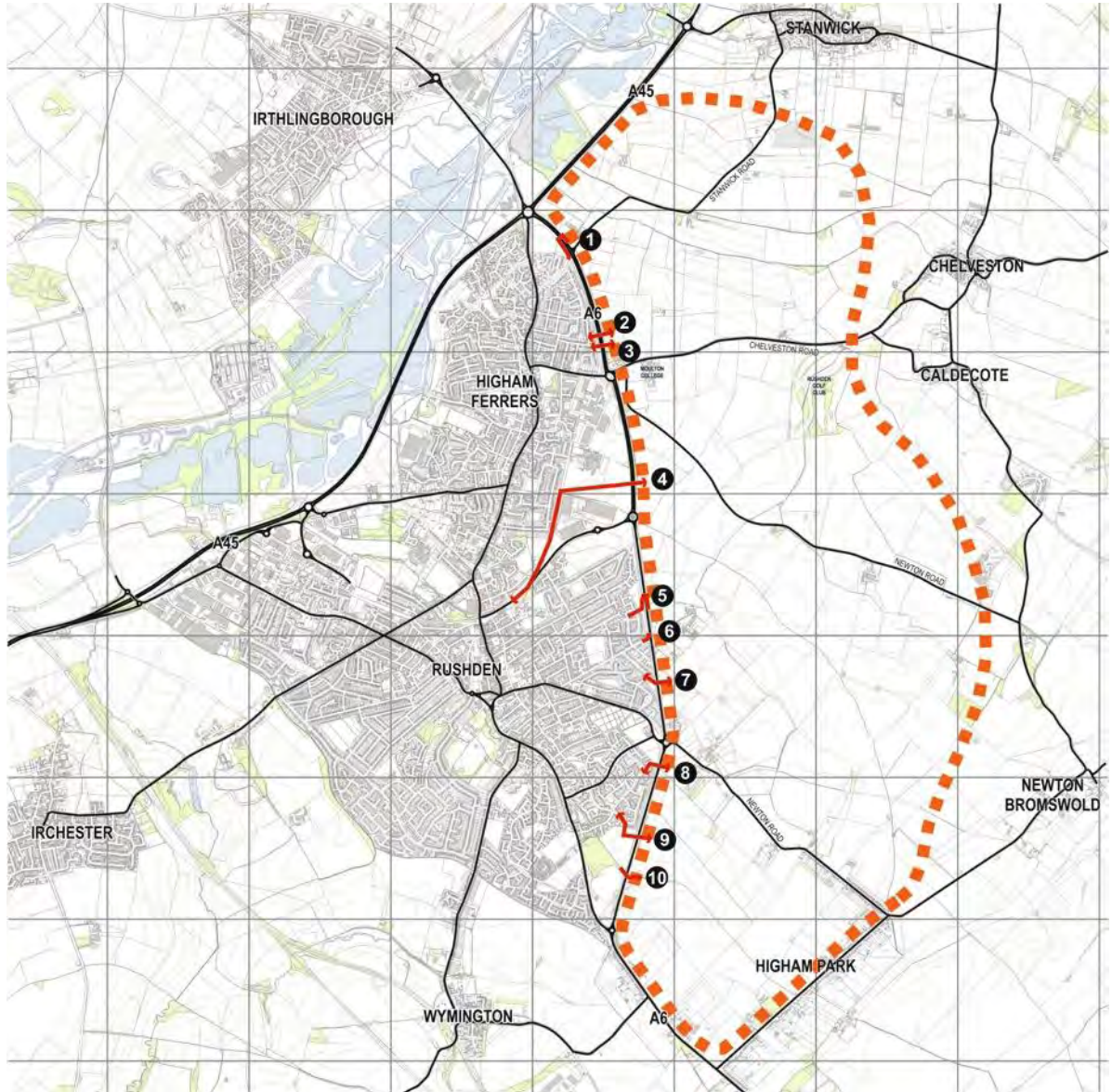


Figure 9 – Potential Pedestrian and Cycle Crossing Points



## 5 Land Use and Ownership

### 5.1 Existing Land Uses

Figure 10 indicates the location of key land uses within the study area.

The majority of the study area is in arable agricultural use.

Moulton College on Chelveston Road is the most prominent and well established use comprising a series of 2 storey educational buildings and workshops with associated car parking and landscaping. To the south of Moulton College a number of fields are laid out as football pitches with associated changing rooms and car parking. This group of activities would form a suitable node around which a first stepping stone of new development can be created.

Further east a large group of industrial buildings are occupied by a tyre reprocessing business and warehousing and logistics uses. Though this complex is significant it lies about 2.5km east of the A6 and sits relatively isolated within the rural landscape.

Other non-agricultural uses mostly inhabit former agricultural buildings and farm complexes at High Hayden Farm, Knights Farm and Rectory Farm. Though these various groups of buildings generate local jobs and comprise viable businesses, the quality of accommodation is very varied and is likely to require significant re-planning and upgrading if it is to form a long-term basis for employment uses within an urban extension.

To the south, the residential ribbon development in Higham Park provides a semi-urban character.

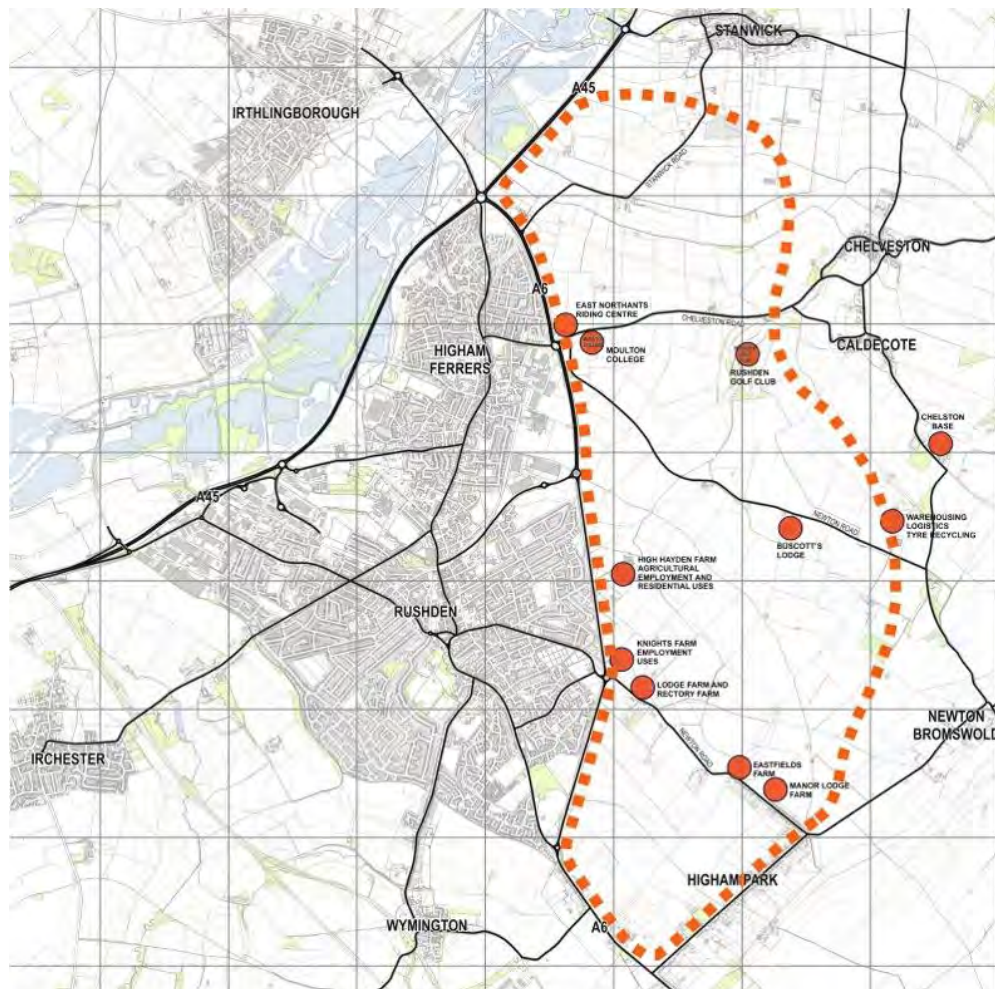


Figure 10 – Existing Land Use and Activity Within Study Area

## 5.2 Existing Duchy Land Ownership

Land in the Ownership of the Duchy of Lancaster is shown in Figure 11. There are two main parcels within the study area:

- Either side of Chelveston Road extending as far eastwards as Chelveston village.
- A rectangular parcel of land north of Newton Road.

Other than the Moulton College site, Duchy Land is in agricultural use and therefore unconstrained and available for development.

Access into the land east of the A6 from either Chelveston Road or the John Clark Way roundabout will require use of Duchy land. Access from Newton Road to the south may require Duchy Land.

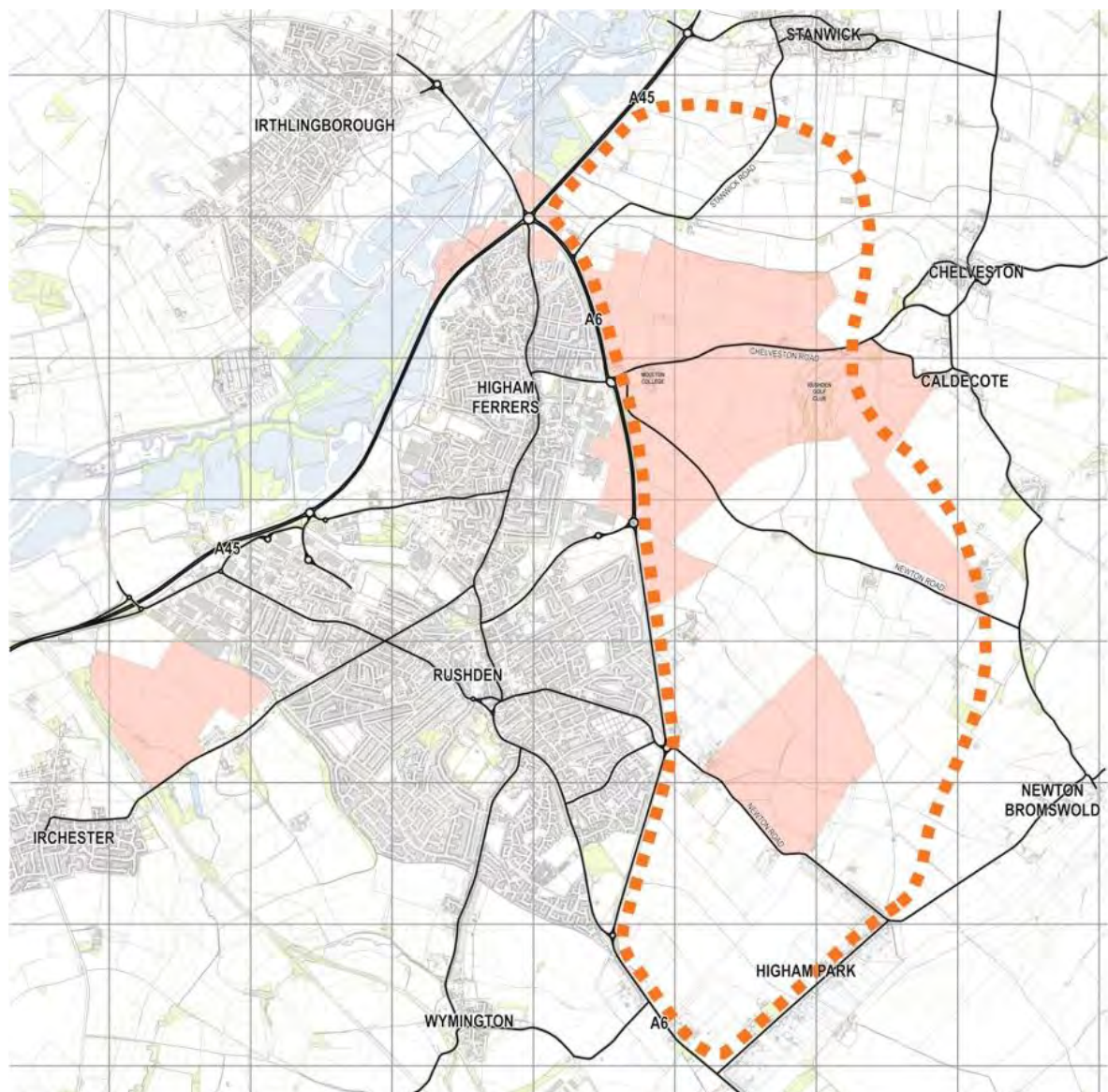


Figure 11 – Duchy of Lancaster Land Ownership

## 6 Proximity to Local Facilities

Few local facilities are available within the study area at present. A new urban extension will need to provide an appropriate range of facilities including educational, health and other community facilities as well as employment and commercial uses including retail to cater for local needs.

Facilities provided within the wider Rushden/Higham Ferrers urban area will however continue to be an important element of day to day life for new residents so proximity to facilities outside the urban area is important.

Figure 12 indicates the location of the existing centres in Rushden/Higham Ferrers and proximity (as the crow flies) to the study area. Though no detailed study of driving distance has been undertaken at this stage, it is clear that any point within the study area is unlikely to be more than 10 to 15 minutes drive from established local centres and major food stores. The central parts of the study area would be within a reasonable cycling distance to existing centres.

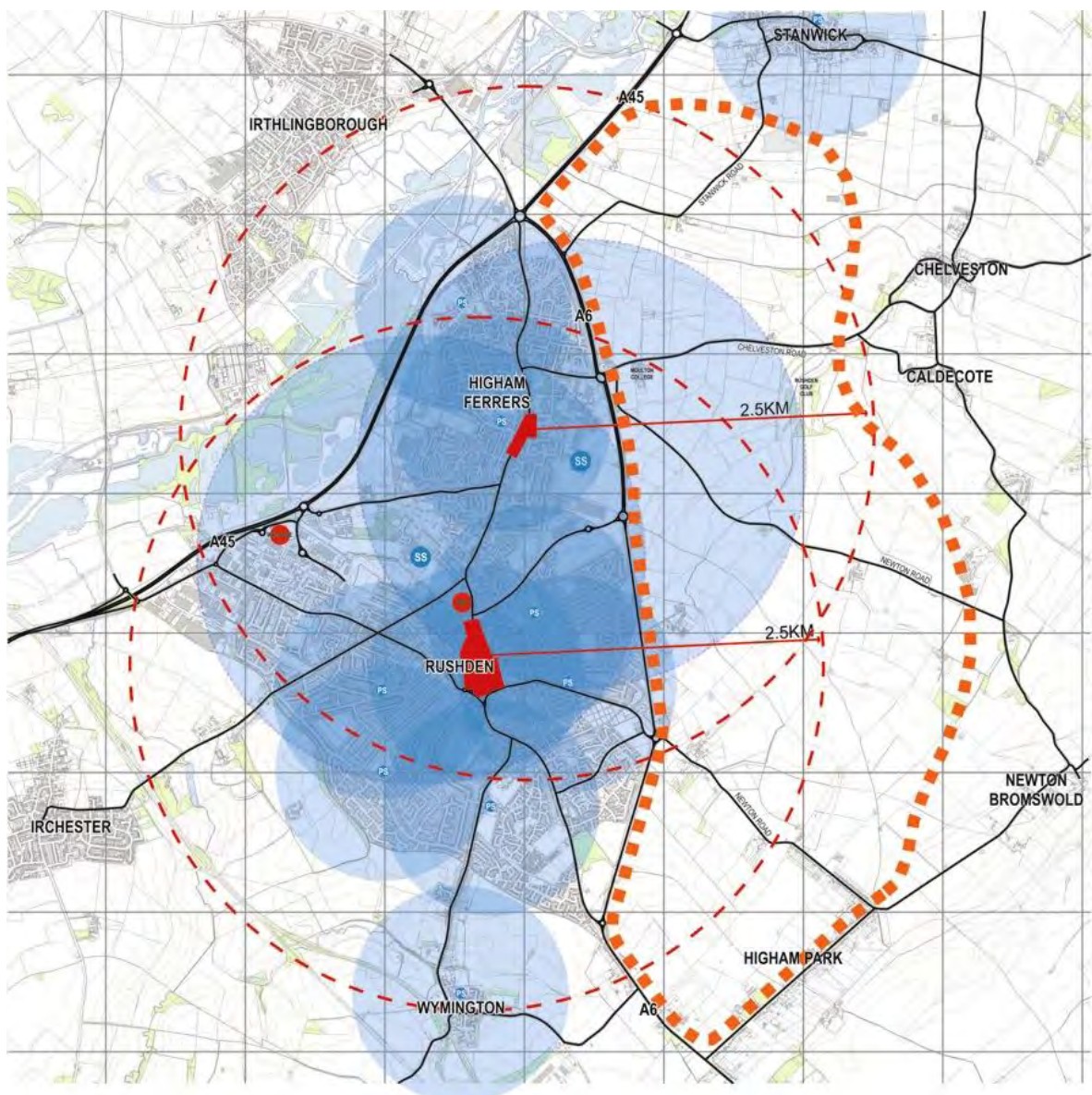


Figure 12 – Existing Local Facilities

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Figure 12 also shows existing nearby primary and secondary schools. Indicative 800m and 1600m catchments are shown for primary and secondary schools respectively. New primary school provision will need to be provided within the urban extension, so other than the potential need for school places in the very early stages of development the location and proximity to primary schools is not a critical factor in locating new development.

New secondary school provision will be dependent upon the scale of the urban extension and as yet it is uncertain as to whether a new secondary school would be viable for an urban extension of say 2500 dwellings. The Higham Ferrers Arts College is within a reasonable walking distance of central parts of the study area and within cycling distance of a wider catchment.

Pupils from development in the northern or southern parts of the study area are unlikely to walk, might cycle but will probably travel to one of the existing secondary schools by car or bus.

Moulton College may be a suitable educational hub around which further secondary school provision could be delivered incrementally.

## 7 Spatial Scenarios

### 7.1 Land Use Budget

In order to provide a basis for considering possible spatial scenarios for a new urban extension, we have calculated the required land budget for an urban extension of 2500 dwellings with associated facilities. The table below indicates notional land requirements for each main use:

#### Residential

2500 dwellings at average density of 35dw/ha. 71.4ha.

#### Employment

At 1.6 jobs per household = 4000 jobs

Split 50/50 between B1 and B2 uses

1 job per 18m<sup>2</sup> for B1, 1 job per 35m<sup>2</sup> for B2

Plot ratio = 40%

Total land area required 26.5ha.

#### Education

Site for secondary school 10ha.

Primary schools (2 sites @ 2.5ha.) 5ha.

**Local Centre etc.** 1ha.

**Open Space** 34.8ha.

#### Infrastructure

Primary roads, key infrastructure etc say 15ha.

**Total land requirements** **163.7ha.**

**Say 164ha.**

### 7.2 Spatial Scenarios

We have considered below three scenarios for locating an urban extension of 2500 dwellings within the study area. For each scenario we highlight key issues.

Scenario A – southern focus.

Scenario B – northern focus.

Scenario C – linear development.

### 7.2.1 Scenario A – Southern Focus

Scenario A is illustrated in Figure 13. Development in this approach is focussed to the east of Rushden and confined to an area between the John Clarke Way and Newton Road roundabouts. Access from the A6 is from these two junctions. A main spine road links the development together. A link to Newton Road in the north is also provided.

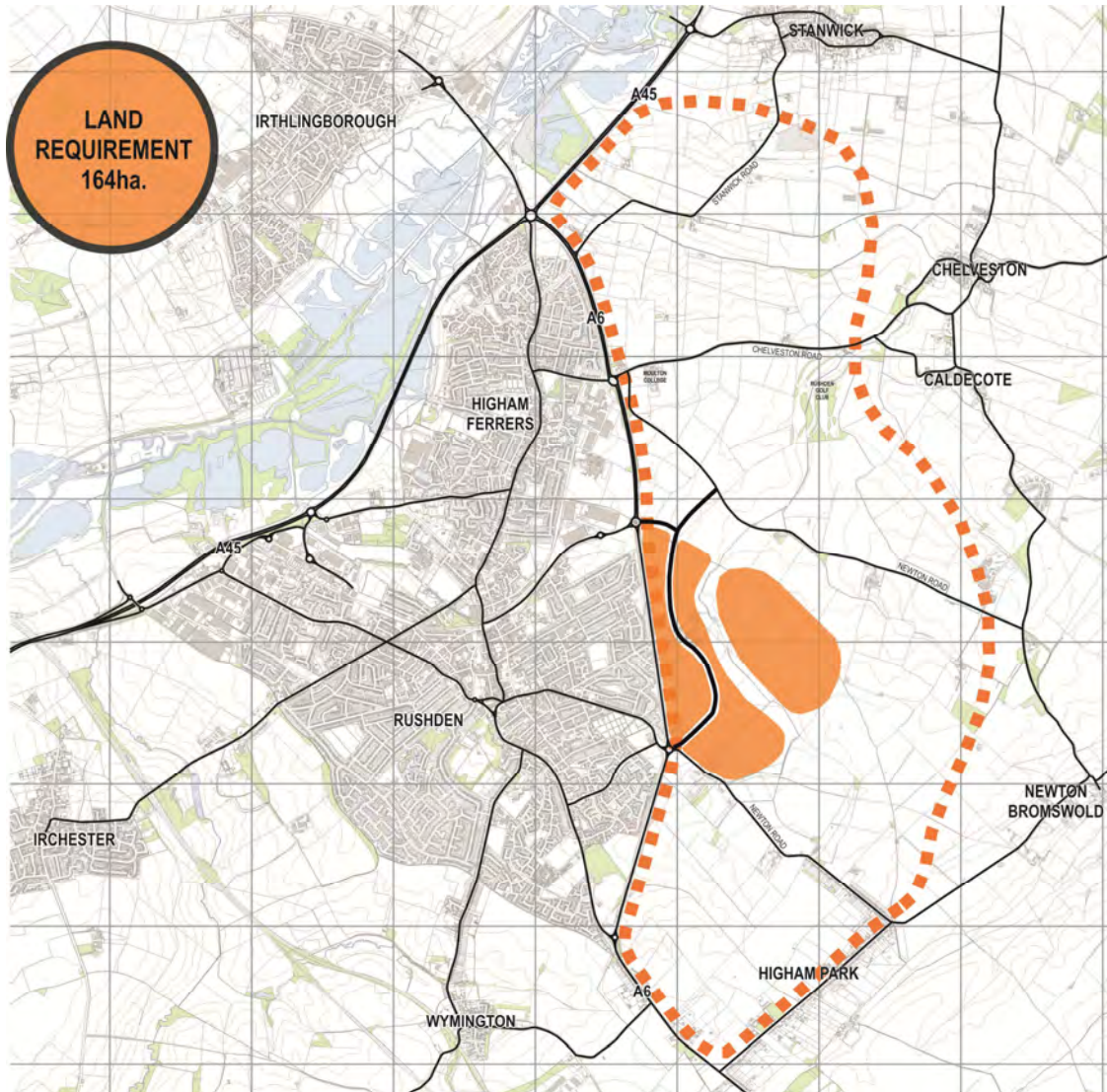


Figure 13 – Development Scenario A

Key issues include:

- Fragmented land ownership so there may be issues re delivery and comprehensive development framework.
- Existing uses to be accommodated, so overall land-take to deliver development may be greater and need to push development further east.
- Restricting development between these two junctions also means development has to push further east.
- Moulton College not integrated within urban extension.
- 2 access points from A6.

- Northern access requires land in ownership of Duchy of Lancaster.
- Does not make good use of new access from John Clark Way with single sided development.
- Very much a stand-alone settlement.
- Little opportunity for creating good pedestrian and cycle links to Rushden or Higham Ferrers.
- Opportunity to expand to north or south for longer term growth.

### 7.2.2 Scenario B – Northern Focus

Scenario B is illustrated in Figure 14 below. In this approach, development is located to the north of the John Clarke Way roundabout up to and across Chelveston Road. An internal road network joins the development up and provides links to Newton Road and Chelveston Road. Development is all to the west of the stream valley and thus the potential to create a more compact and sustainable urban form than Scenario A. Key issues are identified below.

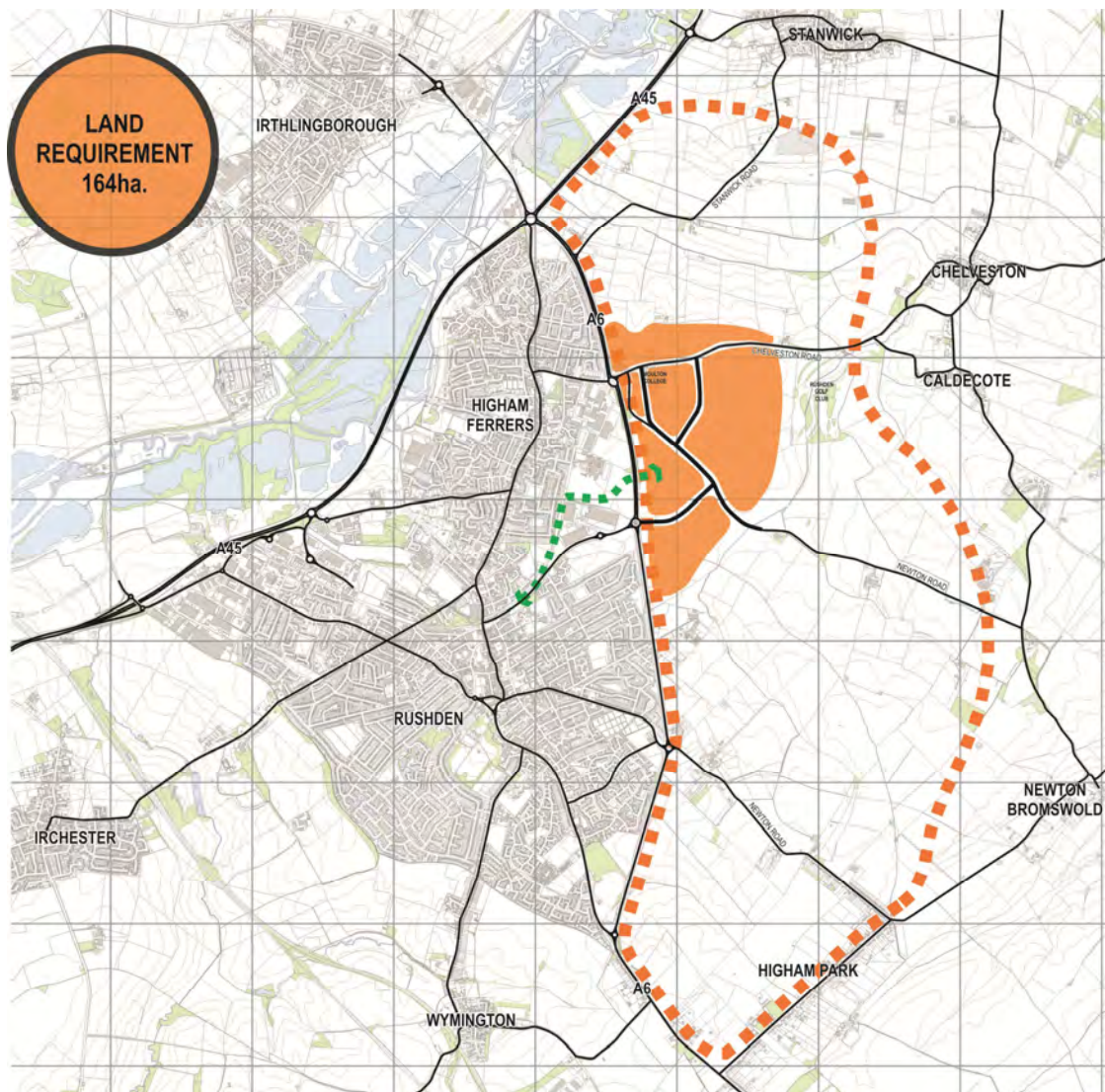


Figure 14 – Development Scenario B

- Mostly single land ownership of Duchy of Lancaster which is unconstrained and available.
- Few existing uses so largely unconstrained requiring less overall land-take.

- Integrates Moulton College with urban extension.
- 2 access points from the A6, the northernmost of which requires land in the ownership of the Duchy of Lancaster.
- Makes better use of new access from John Clark Way with double sided development.
- Potentially better integration with existing urban area but still largely stand-alone.
- Excellent opportunities for creating good pedestrian and cycle links to Rushden and Higham Ferrers via Duchy land to west of A6 – possible use of railway line for link to Rushden town centre.
- Opportunity to expand to south.

### 7.2.3 Scenario C – Linear Form

Scenario C is illustrated in Figure 15 below. This approach illustrates a more linear approach with a narrower development area set alongside the A6 straddling three junctions. The development is less intrusive into rural areas to the east and has better connectivity with the existing urban area through using 3 key vehicular connections that also distribute traffic more effectively and potentially mitigate congestion at the key junctions with the A6. Key issues are set-out below.

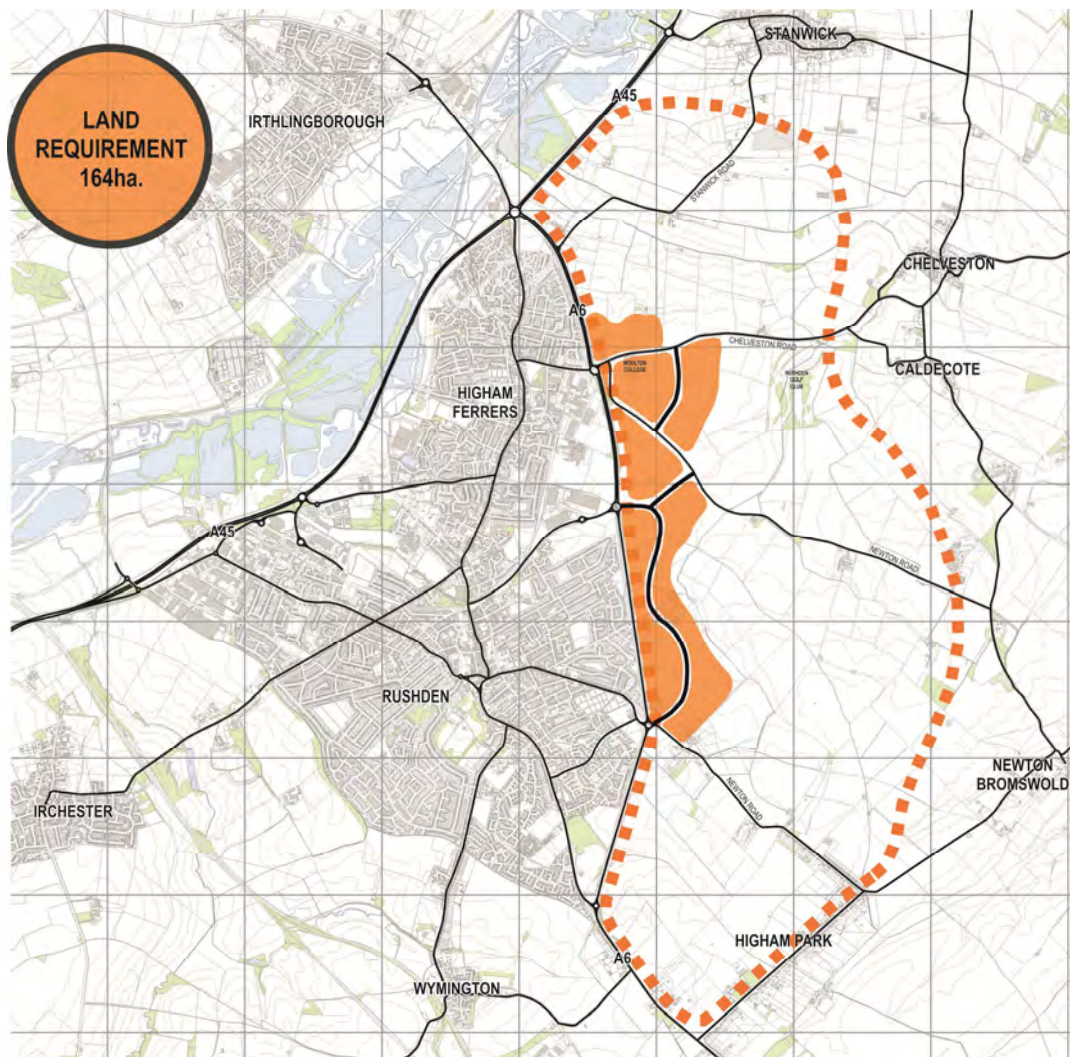


Figure 15 – Scenario C

- 
- Northern area on Duchy of Lancaster owned land.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> party land to south, so potentially some land assembly issues requiring land co-operation agreement.
  - Some uses to be accommodated so development form in southern area may not be efficient.
  - Moulton College integrated into urban extension but with space to expand.
  - 3 access points from A6 with better traffic distribution and connectivity to existing urban area.
  - Northern two access points require land in the ownership of the Duchy of Lancaster.
  - Efficient use of new connections into development.
  - Less intrusive into rural landscape to east.
  - Excellent opportunities for creating good pedestrian and cycle links to Rushden and Higham Ferrers via Duchy land to west of A6 – possible use of railway line for link to Rushden town centre.
  - Opportunity to expand to east, south and potentially north.



## 8 2006 Urban Extensions Study

In undertaking this appraisal we have also considered the conclusion of the East Northamptonshire Urban Extensions Study undertaken by East Northamptonshire Council and published in August 2006.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the potential for further growth around Rushden and Higham Ferrers. A 1km buffer (effectively an area of search) was drawn around the existing urban area. The buffer was then sub-divided into sectors defined by topographical features. The buffers were not intended to form definitive growth options but as a means of assessing constraints and opportunities within broad areas of growth.

A colour coding system was devised to try and differentiate between the seriousness of the identified constraints. The colour coding system related to the following descriptions:

Green – No constraints identified, development acceptable in principle.

Yellow – there may be constraints, but mitigation is possible.

Amber – Significant constraints, although mitigation should be possible.

Red – absolute constraints where mitigation is unlikely to be possible and development is probably unacceptable.

For the purposes of this report we have looked at the marking of the four sectors contained within the study area. These are shown in Figure 16 overlaid on the landscape character areas identified in this study.

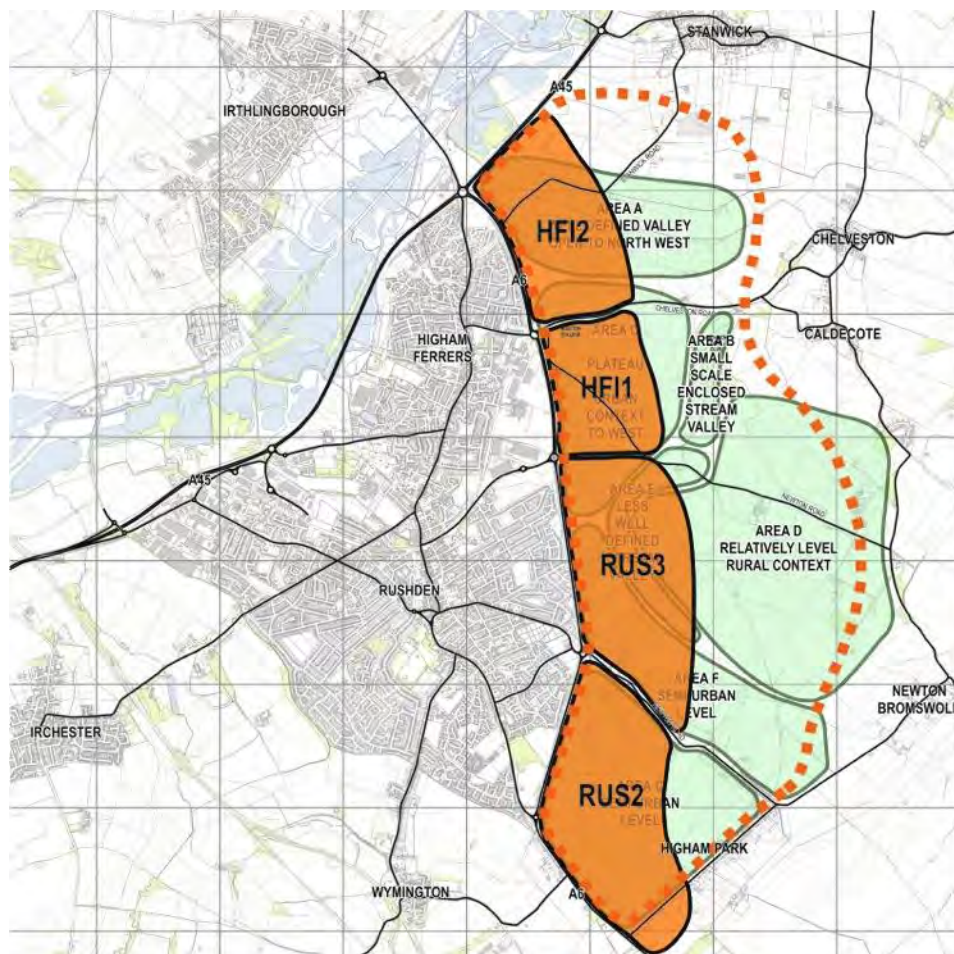


Figure 16 – 2006 Urban Extensions Study Sectors

The table below reproduces the assessment of the four sectors highlighted above.

| Criterion                            | HFI 1  | HFI 2  | RUS 2  | RUS 3  |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Accessibility to services/facilities | Green  | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| Accessibility to employment sites    | Green  | Green  | Orange | Green  |
| Accessibility to public transport    | Green  | Green  | Green  | Yellow |
| Health                               | Orange | Orange | Orange | Orange |
| Community                            | Green  | Green  | Yellow | Green  |
| Liveability                          | Yellow | Yellow | Orange | Orange |
| Biodiversity                         | Orange | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| Landscape                            | Orange | Orange | Yellow | Orange |
| Coalescence                          | Red    | Orange | Yellow | Orange |
| Cultural Heritage                    | Orange | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| Water conservation and management    | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| Soil and open land                   | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| Minerals                             | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| Renewable energy                     | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| Wealth creation                      | Orange | Orange | Orange | Orange |
| Town centres                         | Green  | Orange | Orange | Orange |
| Access to highway network            | Green  | Green  | Green  | Green  |

Rather than analyse all the rankings it may be useful to consider the key differences between the four sectors.

**Accessibility to facilities** – The first 3 criterion relate to accessibility to existing facilities and infrastructure. As any sustainable urban extension would be expected to provide an appropriate mix of uses and activities including employment this is not necessarily a useful indicator and comparison. We do however note that all sectors score relatively well.

**Health** – No difference between sectors.

**Community** – all sectors apart from RUS2 are adjacent to a deprived area and thus there are considered to be potential benefits to these areas from being close to new development.

**Liveability** – this criterion appears to relate to potential impacts from noise, odour or other environmental impacts. As none of the sectors are said to be subject to odours and all are adjacent to the A6, it is difficult to ascertain why sectors HFI1 and HFI2 are marked higher. If anything HFI2 should be marked lower as the northern end of this sector is adjacent to the A45 and A6 so is subject to higher levels of traffic noise and impacts.

**Biodiversity** – HFI1 is marked lower as it contains a County Wildlife site.

**Landscape** – HFI1, HFI2 and RUS3 received an amber ranking because of their location next to the A6 but also because of the impact of development on rural areas to the east. Presumably RUS2 receives a yellow (higher) ranking because it is close to the existing development in Higham Park so is perceived to have less impact on rural areas.

**Coalescence** – HFI1 receives a red ranking in terms of coalescence, as it would “reduce the gap between the two towns”. Given the current conjoined urban areas and the location of an urban extension on the eastern side of the A6, it is difficult to see how in reality development in sector HFI1 will “reduce the gap” HFI2 and RUS3 are also considered to threaten coalescence to some degree, whereas RUS2 does not.

**Cultural Heritage** – HF11 receives an amber ranking as it is closer to the historic core of Higham Ferrers and is therefore supposedly considered to provide more of a threat to the cultural heritage of the area. However given that this sector is on the eastern side of the A6, it is difficult to see how development here can have any direct impact on the cultural heritage of Higham Ferrers.

**Water Conservation and Management** – No difference.

**Soil and Open Land** – No difference.

**Minerals** – No difference.

**Renewable Energy** – No difference.

**Wealth creation** – No difference.

**Town Centres** – HF11 receives a higher ranking as it is closer to Higham Ferrers town centre.

**Access to Highway Network** – No difference.

## 8.1 **Comments on 2006 Urban Extensions Study**

Though the Urban Extensions study specifically avoided allocating a weighting to the rankings, it is interesting to consider a ranking if 3 points were awarded for a green ranking down to zero points for a red ranking.

If this were the case the following “suitability for development” would result:

HF11 – 1<sup>st</sup>

HF12 – 2<sup>nd</sup>

RUS3 – 3<sup>rd</sup>

RUS2 – 4<sup>th</sup>

The only criterion that is considered to rule out development completely from any sector is the coalescence raised in relation to sector HF11.

Overall the study is high level and does not appear to be supported by a robust evidence base and hence we believe is open to question in a number of areas.



## 9 Initial Conclusions

Our initial conclusions from this study are:

- The 2006 Urban Extensions Study is not robust and is open to question.
- The current proposal in the emerging Joint Core Strategy to zone land for urban expansion only to the east of Rushden is not to our knowledge supported by a robust evidence base.
- The coalescence issue presented in relation to sector HF11 is not really logical - though there will be good connections between the urban extension and existing urban area, there will be greater physical separation due to the A6, between new development and Higham Ferrers than currently exists between Higham Ferrers and Rushden.
- Topography is an informant but not a key issue in terms of locating development however it does suggest a north and north-eastern limit to development.
- Land assembly is a key issue and the single land ownership provided by the Duchy of Lancaster would clearly help in the early delivery of a sustainable urban extension.
- The key access point (and probably first) into the development from the John Clark Way roundabout will need to pass through Duchy of Lancaster land.
- Creating good pedestrian and cycle links is challenging, with the only good opportunity to create a high quality link being in conjunction with new residential development to the west of the A6 adjoining The Ferrers Specialist Arts College. The potential for a bus link should also be considered along this corridor.
- The layout of residential development on land to the west of the A6 (as above) should be designed in conjunction with land to the east, to protect the potential for future pedestrian and cycle links across the A6.
- As a minimum, representations should request a wider "Area of Search" to be indicated followed by further appraisal leading to a Concept Plan.
- Following adoption of the Joint Core Strategy further concept master planning work should be undertaken to investigate constraints and opportunities in more detail leading to the production of a Concept Development Framework Plan as the basis for the long term planning and development of a sustainable urban extension to the east of the Rushden/Higham Ferrers urban area and the A6.

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