

East Devon Local Plan 2020-2042

Site Selection report

Employment Site, Venn's Farm,
Sowton



February 2025

Contact details

Planning Policy
East Devon District Council
Blackdown House, Border Road, Heathpark Industrial Estate, HONITON,
EX14 1EJ

Phone: 01404 515616

Email: planningpolicy@eastdevon.gov.uk

www.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/
[@eastdevon](https://www.instagram.com/eastdevon)

To request this information in an
alternative format or language
please phone 01404 515616 or
email csc@eastdevon.gov.uk

Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Site Reference GH/ED/66.....	6

1 Introduction

- 1.1 East Devon District Council is preparing a Local Plan covering the period 2020 to 2042 that will allocate sites for development. The Site Selection methodology explains the process of how sites are identified, assessed, and selected for allocation, or not.¹ The selection process is a judgement that balances top-down strategic issues relating to the Local Plan district-wide housing and employment requirements and the spatial strategy for the distribution of development, with the specific factors in the site assessments.
- 1.2 For each settlement, a Site Selection report contains the assessment of sites and identifies those which will be allocated, alongside those that will not, with reasons why. It collates evidence from numerous other sources in assessing whether to allocate sites.²
- 1.3 For each site, the report contains identifying details, a map and photos, followed by a summary of the site assessment and conclusion on whether to allocate the site. This is followed by a more detailed assessment of the landscape, historic environment, and ecological impacts of each site.
- 1.4 This report contains the assessment and selection of one site at Venn’s Farm, Sowton. A map of the site which has been assessed is below, followed by a table which highlights the site selection findings.
- 1.5 In addition to the sites which have been subject to assessment, other sites were not assessed because they did not pass ‘site sifting’. This stage of the process rules out sites that are not ‘reasonable alternatives’ and therefore not considered as potential allocations in the Local Plan. In summary, to pass site sifting and therefore be considered as a potential allocation, the site should be identified as suitable, available, achievable in the HELAA; in a suitable location; not already allocated in a ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plan; and not already have planning permission. For obvious reasons, overlapping sites will only be assessed once. Further detail is contained in the Site Selection methodology.
- 1.6 The following sites did not pass site sifting at Venn’s Farm, Sowton:
 - GH/ED/67 unachievable in the HELAA for strategic employment development, even alongside HELAA sites GH/ED/66 and 68. This is due to highways access constraints, which will limit the scale and type of development that could be delivered.

¹ Site Selection Methodology (2024): [sal-001-site-selection-methodology_v2-2020-2042.pdf](#); Landscape Assessment: [sal-002-landscape-sensitivity-assessment-methodology.pdf](#) ; HESA Methodology: [sal-003-historic-environment-site-assessment-methodology.pdf](#); Ecology Guidelines: [sal-004-ecology-guidelines-for-housing-allocation.pdf](#)

² Following the approach advocated by the Planning Advisory Service – see Topic 5 – Site Selection Process: [Future Proofing the Plan Making Process | Local Government Association](#)

- GH/ED/68 unachievable in the HELAA for strategic employment development, even alongside HELAA sites GH/ED/66 and 67. This is due to highways access constraints, which will limit the scale and type of development that could be delivered.
- Sowt_10 not suitable in the HELAA for housing development.

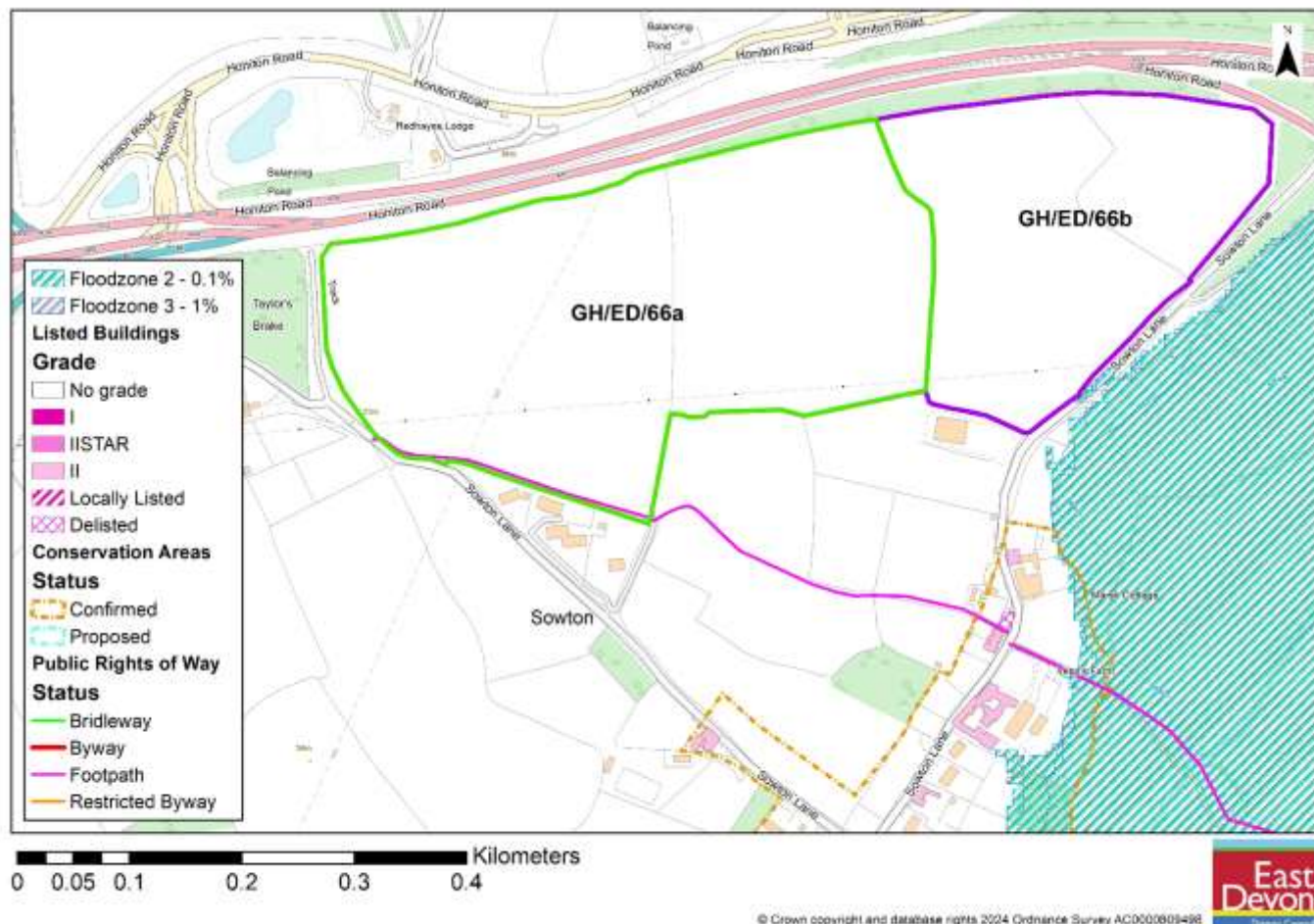


Figure 1.1: Overview of Site Selection findings on land at Venn’s Farm, Sowton

Site reference	Number of dwellings / hectares of employment land	Allocate?
GH/ED/66	19.29 hectares	No

Photos



Looking north across the easternmost fields (GH/ED/66b) from the gateway onto Sowton Lane.



Looking north towards the site from the northern edge of the conservation area. The eastern fields are clearly visible and the land rises up towards the A30



Looking eastwards from the western end of Sowton Lane across the western part of the site (GH/ED/66a).



Looking north across the western part of the site. The Science Park buildings on the north of the A30 can just be seen in the middle distance.

Site Assessment Summary and Conclusion

Infrastructure

Vehicular access could be gained to the south of the fly-over embankment on Sowton Lane, where the road levels to the same height as the land. There are issues providing access off the A30, due to proximity to the Junction 29 M5/A30. A developer contribution to the “Clyst Valley Cycle Trail” would be required. The nearest bus stop is 200m away at Blackhorse, which has an hourly or better bus service to Exeter City Centre. Currently no cycle route, but potential to link up to existing cycle infrastructure to Cranbrook and Exeter at Blackhorse. A cycle bridge over the A30 linking to the Science Park and park and change facility on Tithebarn Green would be required to help address access issues. Site would need to provide improved road, public transport, cycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Landscape

Medium sensitivity. Not within a protected landscape. The site is several adjoining, sloping paddocks. The eastern half of the site is more visible and could impact on the setting of the conservation area to the south.

Historic environment

Medium-High- there is an impact on the conservation area to the south east of the site and individual HERs within the north eastern section of the site. This could be reduced by limiting development to the western half of the site

Ecology

Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant).

Accessibility

Vehicular access could be achieved from Sowton Lane although there are capacity issues at the nearby M5 junction. The nearest bus stop is 200m away at Blackhorse, which has an hourly or better bus service to Exeter City Centre. A cycle bridge over the A30 linking to the Science Park and park and change facility on Tithebarn Green would be required to help address access issues. Site would need to provide improved road, public transport, cycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Other constraints

Within the Clyst Valley Regional Park. Work is required to ensure that an adequate access can be achieved from Sowton Lane. Archeological assessment is required due to the proximity of HER's. Conservation assessment required to confirm that the CA and listed buildings will not be impacted (including assessing potential for a reduced area designation)

Within Green Wedge in adopted Local Plan 2013-31 or made Neighbourhood Plan?

Yes

Opportunities

The site could provide a new employment site and new pedestrian/cycle links through it and to the wider area, including the wider Clyst Valley Regional Park.

Yield (number of dwellings or hectares of employment land)

19.2 hectares

Contribution to spatial strategy

The site is not directly adjacent to an existing settlement or employment site however it is strategically located in the West End and, if developed, could be linked to the Science Park by a cycle bridge.

Should the site be allocated?

No

Reasons for allocating or not allocating

The site is strategically well located, opposite the Science Park and close to the M5 and West End development. However, close proximity to the Sowton Conservation Area and potential impact on heritage assets reduces the site capacity and would restrict development to the western part of the site (shown on the map as GH/ED/66a). Even with this reduced area, the need for a cycle bridge and complex access arrangements will result in potential further harm to the heritage assets and impact upon the financial viability of the scheme, and these impacts cannot be quantified or satisfactorily assessed without much more detailed information.

If whole site is not suitable for allocation, could a smaller part be allocated?

No.

Note- the map identifies two areas ‘A’ and ‘B’. Area A could be a potential allocation if heritage concerns associated with vehicular and cycle access could be overcome. There is insufficient evidence to support an allocation at the time of undertaking the assessment.

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

Context

Landscape designation context

Outside of National Landscape

For sites within National Landscape, applicable special qualities

Not applicable

Other relevant biodiversity, historic environment and/or geological designations

Site lies partially within the Clyst Valley Regional Park. Site lies close to Sowton Conservation Area other heritage assets. There is evidence of historic field patterns. Agricultural land grades 2, 3a and 3b.

Landscape Character Type and relevant key characteristics

3B. Lower rolling farmed and settled valley slopes

- Gently rolling lower valley slopes
- Pastoral farmland, with a wooded appearance
- Variable field patterns and sizes with either wide, low boundaries and irregular patterns or small fields with medium to tall boundaries and a regular pattern.
- Many hedgerow trees, copses and streamside tree rows
- Settled, with varied settlement size, building ages and styles, sometimes with unity of materials in places through use of stone.
- Presence of leisure-related development often associated with coast
- Winding, often narrow sunken lanes with very tall earth banks. Main roads may dominate locally.
- Streams and ditches
- Some parts tranquil and intimate all year round, except near main transport routes.
- Enclosed and sheltered landscape and wider views often restricted by vegetation

Local landscape character of site and immediate surrounds

The site consists of several adjoining, sloping fields accessed to the east and west from a narrow country lane but bounded to the north by the A30. The landscape is a medium scale, predominantly agricultural, with some long views. Key characteristics include a gently rolling landform, predominantly pastoral farmland with variable sized fields contained in wide low hedged boundaries and that it is well settled. It is special for expansive views from higher ground.

Views of much of the site are localised, with the principal views obtained from the A30 to the north where it is relatively open. There are also long views across the eastern part of the site from Sowton Conservation Area which lies to the south.

Does the local landscape character of the site and immediate surrounds conform to published assessments?

Yes

General and site-specific affects that could arise from development

- Introduction of built form and associated infrastructure
- Impact of light spill from street lighting or windows
- Impact on tranquillity through increased levels of site activity and increased traffic movement on surrounding roads
- Site access requirements- major alteration/ new access provision required
- Typical access works- grading to accommodate level differences, visibility splays, highway infrastructure, tree/ hedgerow loss
- Loss of trees/ hedgerow
- Impact on boundaries –tree and hedgerow root protection areas,
- Offsite access to services – eg need for extended footways/ cycleways/ bus stops
- Construction phase impacts including potential off site impacts eg large delivery vehicles/ construction plant

Analysis

Physical and natural characteristics	
Medium	Not in National Landscape. Landscape character LCT 3B. Site consists of agricultural fields sloping up to the A30. Site lies within the Clyst Valley Regional Park
Cultural and historic associations	

Medium	Historic boundary hedgerows, present on 1890 OS map. The conservation area and several listed buildings lie just outside the site.
Relationship to existing settlement edge	
Low-medium	The site is clearly physically separated from Sowton village. Topography means that the eastern section of the site is visually prominent from the northern part of the village (Sowton is linear, running north south along a lane). There is considerable urban development north of the site but this is separated by a main road and ridgeline so is barely visible.
Experiential landscape character	
Low-medium	The site feels quite rural despite proximity to the A30 and M5.
Views	
Medium	Views into, out of and of the site vary across the site. There are several long range views, especially from the A30 to the north and from the northern edge of Sowton village. The western section of the site is not as visible as the eastern section. It is seen in the context of Taylor's Brake, a small woodland to the west, and the Science Park is just visible to the north of the A30.
Overall landscape susceptibility	
Medium	The site has a pleasant agricultural character but development impacts would be localised and seen in the context of surrounding urban development when viewed from the A30. The eastern part of the site is more susceptible to change because it forms the setting to the Sowton Conservation Area
Within nationally designated landscape?	
Site is not within a designated landscape.	
Degree of intervisibility with nationally designated landscape	
None	
If outside designated landscape, factors which may raise or lower value from moderate	
Medium – An ordinary landscape which is appreciated by the community but has little or no wider recognition of its value	
Landscape value	
Medium – An ordinary landscape which is appreciated by the community but has little or no wider recognition of its value	
Overall landscape sensitivity	

Medium. Part of the site forms the setting to the Sowton conservation area but the whole site is located adjacent to busy roads and existing urban development.

Landscape guidance: opportunities in relation to development

There is an opportunity to provide cycle and pedestrian links and contribute to the Clyst Valley Regional Park as well as softening the appearance of buildings and hard surfaces with trees and soft landscaping. If a cycle bridge is required this will be a dominant landscape feature.

Historic Environment Site Assessment

Notes on history of area

Sowton was originally a small, rural hamlet of farmworkers with much of the surrounding land being orchards and woodland. It retains a working agricultural character despite the proximity of Exeter and is cut off from the wider urban development in the area by the A30 and M5. Since the A30 was constructed, it is described in the Conservation Area Appraisal as one of the longest cul-de-sacs in England.

Overall conclusion

High: significant effect predicted. Mitigation unlikely to be possible. An impact that would compromise the asset(s) cultural heritage value to the extent that the attributes that led to its designation, or ability to understand or appreciate its value, are diminished and compromised. This would involve a loss of significance that could not be resolved through mitigation.

If the western fields only are allocated, the effect reduces (although the impact of a possible cycle bridge and the access arrangements are unknown and these could potentially raise the effect to high):

Medium: no significant effects which cannot be mitigated. An impact is predicted, but would not compromise the asset(s) cultural heritage value to the extent that the attributes that led to its designation, or ability to understand or appreciate its value, are diminished or compromised. Mitigation may make the impact acceptable. The overall significance of the asset would not therefore be materially changed.

Step 1. Identify any heritage assets potentially affected	
Is the site within 100 metres of a designated heritage asset?	Yes
Could development of the site affect any heritage asset (designated or non-designated) or its setting?	Yes
List any heritage assets potentially affected.	Conservation Area. And non-designated archaeological features. Several Grade 2 listed buildings lie just beyond the 100m distance (but noting this is from the very edge of the site) but the topography and

	intervening landscape features reduce the likely affects
--	--

Step 2. Existing contribution of site to significance of heritage asset	
Heritage asset 1	
Description of asset	Sowton Conservation Area
Significance of asset and setting	Higher
Relationship of site with heritage asset	<p>The CA is located to the south east of the site, at a lower level. The significance increases to the south east and east of the site due to proximity and visibility. Although it is some distance away, the site slopes up so that the eastern part is visible as a rural backdrop to the main approach to Sowton Conservation Area.</p> <p>Despite proximity to M5 and Exeter, the CA retains a working, small village agricultural character and the rural approach contributes to this. Beyond these roads lies an intensely urban environment and they create a stark transition between that urbanisation and the unspoilt rural village character. Includes whole village, adjoining home fields and paddocks. Contains 25 listed buildings. Served by a 3/4 mile cul-de-sac. Northern half of the village contains good examples of early vernacular, red brick and cob under slate, thatch and tile. Impressive landscape setting, with trees forming a tunnel approach to the village. Conscious screening around major buildings. Post 1945 development is increasingly a detracting feature</p>
Level of contribution (site to heritage asset)	Medium
Further assessment required?	Yes, but full details of a proposed scheme would be required in order to assess the likely impact. Further assessment is required but it is likely to be possible to reduce impact by restricting development to the western half of the site

Step 3. Identifying potential impact on significance of heritage asset

Heritage asset 1

What impact would development have on the heritage asset and its setting?	Significant Development could potentially impact upon the agricultural setting of the conservation area. The significance increases to the eastern end of the site due to proximity and visibility.
Could the site be developed in a way that minimised potential impact?	Potential impact could be minimised by restricting development to the western section of the site, however a requirement for a cycle bridge and works to achieve an access are still likely to have an impact. An archaeological assessment should be undertaken as part of the development to properly assess and record and subterranean evidence.
Would the development affect the heritage asset in other ways?	Unknown

Step 4. How to maximise enhancements and avoid harm	
Heritage asset 1 maximising enhancement	
Could the development improve public access to and interpretation of the heritage asset?	No
Would development enable further research and recording of the heritage asset?	Possibly
Would development enable better revealing of the significance of the heritage asset?	No
Would development enable the asset to be removed from the at risk register?	No
Heritage asset 1 avoiding harm	
Are there reasonable alternative sites?	Yes
Could the site boundary be changed to avoid harm?	Possibly
Could the amount of development be reduced to avoid harm?	Possibly
Would a different type of development (use) avoid harm?	No
Could design avoid harm?	Possibly
Notes	<p>Development of the eastern half of the site would be visually and physically prominent above the conservation area. This would be exacerbated by the likely scale of employment buildings (whilst noting that agricultural buildings are already a feature of the landscape).</p> <p>Potential impact could be minimised by restricting development to the western half of the site (although an access would need to be taken from Sowton Lane to the East) and through landscape planting (noting that the access to the village is a distinctive CA feature due to the 'tunnel' planting on the approach).</p> <p>It is likely that traffic, noise and lighting would have an impact, but it should be noted that the proximity of the A30 and M5 are already detracting features</p>

Step 2. Existing contribution of site to significance of heritage asset	
Heritage asset 2 (Group)	
Description of asset	<p>Archaeological features- paleolithic hand axe (MDV113243), cropmarks suggesting rectilinear enclosures (MDV28619)- note that these should be treated with caution as more likely to be a geological feature), prehistoric rectangular enclosure (MDV28620),</p> <p>These features are within the site but lie to the eastern end. Development of this area could destroy them but their significance is unknown.</p>

Significance of asset and setting	Unknown Further assessment is required as part of any planning permission.
Relationship of site with heritage asset	The assets are within the site but their significance is not known (the cropmarks are unconfirmed)
Level of contribution (site to heritage asset)	Moderate
Further assessment required?	It is not proposed to allocate the eastern section of the site where the assets are located due to the unacceptable impact on the Conservation Area. Unless development is proposed then further assessment is not required.

Step 3. Identifying potential impact on significance of heritage asset	
Heritage asset 2 (Group)	
What impact would development have on the heritage asset and its setting?	Moderate Depending on the significance of the assets then development could have a moderate impact. The HERs are small scale and a scheme could be devised to avoid them.
Could the site be developed in a way that minimised potential impact?	Yes
Would the development affect the heritage asset in other ways?	No

Step 4. How to maximise enhancements and avoid harm	
Heritage asset 5 maximising enhancement	
Could the development improve public access to and interpretation of the heritage asset?	No
Would development enable further research and recording of the heritage asset?	Yes
Would development enable better revealing of the significance of the heritage asset?	Yes
Would development enable the asset to be removed from the at risk register?	No
Heritage asset 5 avoiding harm	
Are there reasonable alternative sites?	Yes
Could the site boundary be changed to avoid harm?	Yes
Could the amount of development be reduced to avoid harm?	Yes
Would a different type of development (use) avoid harm?	No
Could design avoid harm?	Yes
Notes	Developing the western half of the site only would avoid the heritage assets

Ecological assessment

Context – Sites and features (desk study)

Site / feature name	Geographic value	Distance from site / feature (metres) Note- size of site means distances are approx	Predicted impact
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	International	7400	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)
Special Protection Area (SPA)	International	7400	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)

Ramsar site	International	4800	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)
Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)	National	27000	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	National	4800	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	National	7400	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	Regional	5000	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)
Ancient Woodland Inventory Site (AWSI)	Regional	3200	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)
County Wildlife Site (CWS)	County	2200	Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)
Unconfirmed Wildlife Site (UWS)	County	527	Minor adverse effect

			predicted (not significant)
Draft Nature Recovery Network areas (NRN)	County	1	Significant moderate adverse effect predicted
Section 41 Habitat of Principle Importance (including rivers and streams, excluding hedgerow)	County	1	Significant moderate adverse effect predicted

Comments

Site lies immediately adjacent to woodland priority habitat and nature recovery network.

Within River Axe SAC Nutrient catchment zone? No

Within Beer Quarry and Caves SAC bat consultation zone? No

Within East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SAC HRA mitigation zone? Yes

Within Exe Estuary SPA HRA mitigation zone? Yes

Within East Devon Pebblebed Heaths 400m exclusion zone? No

Number of European sites potentially impacted by site: 2

On site assessment

Does the site consist of any habitats other than agriculturally improved grassland or arable (excluding small/negligible areas of habitat)?

No

Presence of veteran or ancient trees

No

Large numbers of mature trees within hedgerows or otherwise

Yes.

Presence of ponds not identified on aerial imagery

No.

Networks of small field parcel and hedgerows (any areas where allocation is likely to require removal of substantial areas of hedgerow to facilitate a suitable development footprint)

No.

Any other incidental features of ecological interest (protected/notable species incidentally recorded)

No.

Is there any evidence which contradicts the desk study results?

No.

Conclusion

Minor adverse effect predicted (not significant)