6.0 Constraints and opportunities
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This chapter of the report summarises the key constraints and opportunities for the Northern Quarter site through five drawings:

1. Strategic weaknesses
2. Site constraints
3. Summary of site constraints (traffic light summary)
4. Strategic potential
5. Site opportunities

These five drawings summarise the more detailed work found in the first five chapters of this report.

6.1 Strategic weaknesses

There are four key strategic weaknesses to the Northern Quarter site that have been identified as part of the baseline analysis.

The first strategic weakness is the Northern Quarter site’s disconnection from Cinderford town centre. The site is approximately 2km from the town centre, and therefore a 20min walk. This dislocation is exacerbated by the Forest Vale Industrial Park, which creates a barrier for direct access to the town centre. In addition, the industrial park does not create the most attractive pedestrian environment for anyone walking between the Northern Quarter site and the town centre.

The second strategic weakness is the poor gateway to Cinderford around the Nailbridge junction. Those approaching Cinderford from the north do not have a strong and positive sense of arrival at present. Furthermore, Nailbridge junction is complex in terms of traffic movement, levels and has a narrow pavement. The poor sense of arrival is made worse by the poor quality environment around Steam Mills Road travelling south into the centre of the town.

The third strategic weakness is the poor link to the settlements to the north of Cinderford. The pedestrian and cycle links from the site to Drybrook and Ruardean Hill are poor. Furthermore, there is no direct vehicle link from the site to Steam Mills, despite its proximity.

The fourth strategic weakness is the disparate built environment around the Northern Quarter site, with no clear urban character. There are the sheds of the Forest Vale Industrial Park, the small street of the Newtown terrace cottages, and the ribbon development of Steam Mills, all of which are very different in character and appearance.
6.0 Constraints and opportunities

6.2 Site constraints

The constraints of the site are a combination of the layers of physical and environmental constraints. These have been supplied by third party consultants, and in the cases of ecology, mining legacy and flooding are not finalised, and are subject to on-going or further work. They present the constraints for the purpose of this masterplan and may be subject to change in the long-term.

There are three areas of landscape that are non-developable due to being protected forest land. These areas are the forest area in the north and the west of the site. The forest land in the south of the site is the Linear Park, which is also protected under a designation in the Forest of Dean Local Plan.

The group of Northern United mining buildings in the north west corner of the site have been identified as having cultural value, but not building conservation value. While this is a constraint, it can be overcome.

The mine shafts and the open-cast mining highwall are all constraints, especially in areas of potential development. At the time of writing, the mining legacy constraint is not fully quantifiable, given that the locations, depth, level of mediation and extent of underground workings all require further work.

The Forest Vale Industrial Park and the roads to the east and the north of the site all create barriers to the development.

Ecological constraints scatter the site. Common reptiles are to be found around the Northern United buildings, the forest land to the west of the site and the linear park. Only in the case of the Northern United buildings will this create a constraint, as the forest land and Linear Park are undevelopable.

A large population of Lesser Horseshoe bats is also to be found in the Northern United buildings. There is a possibility that otters and water voles inhabit the site, around the pond, to the north of the pond and along the brook. Further monitoring work is currently underway. Badgers and Great Crested newts are present in the Linear Park; again, further surveys are being carried out.

Clay extraction from the smaller pond is being carried out by the brickworks: this requires that land around the pond is constrained. Furthermore, the IPPC designation relating to the brickworks prevents residential development within a certain radius of the building. It is understood that the brickworks will stay on the site, but in the long term this could change.

The garage on the site, to the north of the brickworks, is also currently being retained; however, this could also change in the future. Three clusters of properties are being retained within the site boundary in the east of the site, in Newtown and Steam Mills.

The floodplain of Cinderford Brook runs across the east of the site. This is a constraint that is subject to further work and can be overcome.
6.0 Constraints and opportunities

6.3 Summary of site constraints (traffic light summary)

The traffic light drawing summarises the site constraints drawing on the previous page.

The red areas illustrate land that is non-developable due to forest designation, clay extraction or existing buildings to be retained. The forest constraint is highly unlikely to change over time and these areas will remain undevelopable. However, existing building uses and clay extraction could in time relocate.

The amber areas show sensitive areas. These areas are potentially developable, but currently contain constraints that can hopefully be mitigated, such as ecology or the flood plain.

The green areas illustrate developable land without constraints.

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Key:
- Red: Non-developable land
- Yellow: Sensitive areas
- Green: Developable land
- IPPC
- Water
6.4 Strategic potential

The potential of the Northern Quarter for Cinderford lies in its location and surrounding context. The site has the potential to deliver some of Cinderford’s demands for housing, education and employment. These tie in with the strategic objectives for Cinderford previously defined in the Business Plan. Beyond this, and most importantly, is the site’s relationship to the forest and the potential that can grow from this relationship.

The strategic aims for Cinderford are:
- A model of sustainable new development;
- A more desirable and affordable place to live;
- A more exiting place to work and do business;
- A more fun and imaginative place to play and visit;
- A more accessible place which is well connected;
- A more attractive, green and sustainable environment;
- A more active community with better facilities; and
- A more supportive and inclusive place to learn.

The site can meet these strategic aims through its location near the A4136 and Steam Mills road and just north of Cinderford. Its setting allows the creation of sustainable development, as it can:
- Connect and complement the existing town;
- Provide easy access for employment and higher education;
- Improve links from Ruardean Hill, Drybrook and Steam Mills with Cinderford, and can act as a stepping stone and new local centre for these communities, providing facilities closer to their homes;
- Provide housing in an exceptional green setting; and
- Draw from the potential of the forest.

The key potential for the site is its relation to the forest, which should define the development at every level and will make it a unique response of new development in the Forest of Dean. This potential lies in:
- The integration of links in and out of the forest;
- The various uses of the products of the forest;
- Land uses that support the local economy and attraction of the forest, such as a green hotel and visitor centre;
- An architectural response that integrates well with the local vernacular;
- An integrated landscape approach which supports and enhances the specific flora and fauna of the forest; and
- An integration of existing buildings and features of the mining legacy of the forest where possible.
6.0 Constraints and opportunities

6.5 Site opportunities & assets

The site opportunities respond to the strategic weaknesses and site constraints identified in the first three drawings in this chapter and arise from the assets the site can provide.

The opportunities are as follows:
- Complete the development of Steam Mills and Newtown;
- Integrate existing facilities and assets of and around the site, such as the school, sport pitches and landscape;
- Create a stepping stone and new gateway to Cinderford and improve the links to Ruardean and Drybrook;
- Improve the links from the site to its surrounds through clear gateways, new streets and cycle and pedestrian links;
- Improve the access and transport for the site to the forest, the outlying communities and the town;
- Environmental improvements to Steam Mills Road and highway improvements in conjunction with new access;
- Draw from the cultural assets of the Northern United buildings, Steam Mills and New Town in terms of identity and character if possible; and
- Integrate and enhance the high quality landscape setting, in particular the lake.

With respect to nature conservation and biodiversity, following opportunities are of note:

Key areas of nature conservation interest including the local wildlife sites will be retained and enhanced within the design of the masterplan. Notable species associated with the site will be protected through disturbance licensing during construction and mitigation measures to ensure there continued presence will be included within the scheme design. These measures will broadly include maintaining and enhancing wildlife links through the development, enhancing species rich grassland, wetland and woodland habitats.

Further biodiversity enhancements will be included within the built development through the development of a biodiversity checklist of additional features such as bird nesting, nectar rich planting, green roofs and living walls as appropriate.

Key:
- Potential for completion of existing settlement
- Sports pitches
- Gateway
- Landscape
- Pedestrian Gateway
- Links
- Green links
- School
- Habitat links
- Local cultural heritage
- Environmental improvements
- Water
- Site boundary