7.0 Conclusions
7.1 Summary of the Baseline Report

The baseline report has been assembled from layers at different scales, examining the site on a national, regional, town-wide and site-wide level. Each layer influences the site and informs its context, constraints and opportunities for the regeneration of Cinderford. The layered approach creates a holistic picture leading to an understanding of what the Northern Quarter is as a place and identifying appropriate, deliverable potentials of the site.

On the national level, Cinderford is poorly located with regard to the strategic transport network, and the town is hampered by its lack of a rail station. However, being off the main network in this way has created a town with a distinctive identity and culture that has not been diluted by national or global interests. In addition, Cinderford, by being beyond the commuting belt for any major cities, avoids the blight of a dormitory town.

Cinderford's location in the Forest of Dean is hugely significant to the town. Since ancient times, the culture and industries of the region have been shaped by the exploitation of the natural resources of the Forest. The Forest's importance was formally recognised over 800 years ago and the area accorded Crown protection, preventing settlement within the borders and establishing systems of managed logging, hunting and mining. This unique history resulted in distinctive scattered development around the Forest's extents, through the process of encroachment - the growth of communities dependent on the Forest's resources for their livelihoods. This pattern persisted even throughout the Industrial Revolution, when, against national trends, the Forest experienced a surge in in-migration and intensive, small-scale mining by local Freeminers (Fig. 7.1.1).

For Forest communities, a fundamental shift occurred with the decline of mining and its associated industries in the mid 20th century. Since then, local people have often found it necessary to commute out of the area for work instead of turning to the Forest for their livelihood, but despite this, a strong sense of local identity and independence has prevailed, illustrated by the valued sports clubs and cultural groups of Forest towns and villages (Fig. 7.1.2).

The Forest remains a resource for leisure, recreation and tourism, although the main attractors for leisure, culture, education and health facilities are located outside the Forest in the larger, more established and accessible towns of the region (Fig. 7.1.3).

Cinderford's contemporary lack of higher education facilities, advanced employment opportunities and limited cultural and retail amenities are unlikely to make the town the first choice for people looking to settle in the region. As observed in the 2001 Census and the Population Monitor study of 2006, high proportions of low-skilled workers, social housing, household deprivation and out-commuting clearly illustrate these issues.

Cinderford is a relatively recent development, established in the early 19th century as a result of the local mining opportunities. Rapid urbanisation - frequently manifested in ad-hoc, uncontrolled development - shaped the early town. Cinderford continued to grow and is now characterised by housing from a wide range of periods and a large business park.

Without a railway since the 1960s, and with limited public transport, movement of people and goods in Cinderford relies primarily on private cars and lorries, increasing pressure on narrow local roads. Neither are the two A-roads serving the town (A1436 and A1451) ideal for transport, thanks to their bottlenecks, steep inclines and bends.

Cinderford is, however, an attractive place to live. It has an exceptional setting as the only town within the statutory Forest boundary, and the local vernacular is not without charm. The scale and grain of the town respects the human scale, and the independent shops and recreation spaces enable the community to interact and foster a sense of ownership.
7.1 Summary of the Baseline Report

The Northern Quarter site lies at the fringe of Forest Vale Industrial Park, bounded by the Forest and the village of Steam Mills. It has been identified in the Local Development Framework for employment, access, residential and recreational uses. A Business Plan was also developed for the town and the site. This will lead to a new Area Action Plan for the site.

The site is characterised by beautiful landscape, including the lake. It has extensive areas of high ecological value and the undulating topography allows for various views and intimate spaces across the entire site. There are existing buildings and developments within the site boundary, a number of which are still in use. The unoccupied buildings are on the Northern United site, a former colliery which provides a tangible link to the site’s industrial history. The site has been intensively mined in the last couple of centuries and this mining legacy imposes considerable constraints on any development.

The site is well located in relation to the local and regional road network, and is also well connected with recreational walking and cycling paths. Its location north of Cinderford also lends itself to links with the communities of Ruardean Hill and Drybrook, but it is less well connected to the town centre because of the barrier of the industrial estate.

In summary, the site holds the opportunity to address some of the weaknesses of Cinderford on a regional level and its development will make an important contribution to the regeneration of the town (Fig. 7.1.4). The potential of the site lies in its proximity to the Forest and the regional road network, making it both accessible and attractive. As shown in Fig. 7.1.5, the complexity of the site in terms of landscape, topography and mining legacy creates an opportunity for a sustainable development which is sensitive to its context and will become a unique response to the specific challenges of building in the Forest of Dean in the 21st century.
Cinderford is:

1. National level
   - Poorly connected to the national highway and railway networks;
   - Over one hour’s drive from the nearest major town and airport;
   - Home to above national average proportions of household deprivation, social landlord tenure, and workforce employed in the manufacturing sector.

2. Regional level
   - Characterised by the Forest of Dean’s unique history in social and economic terms (independent spirit, post-mining legacy, manufacturing industries);
   - A mid-sized town depending on larger towns in terms of health, higher education, employment and cultural provision;
   - A relatively recent development (early 19th century origins);
   - Well connected to the regional highway network;
   - Poorly connected to the regional rail network and public transport;
   - Well connected to the walking network;
   - A place for manufacturing, recycling and light industry;
   - A place with low numbers of regionally-important historic buildings;
   - A place with low land values in the commercial sector;
   - The only town located within the Forest of Dean boundary.

3. Local level
   - A well-contained, walkable and well-proportioned town;
   - A legible town with a small defined centre surrounded by residential development;
   - Set on sloping land in a beautiful landscape surrounded by forest;
   - Dominated by a large manufacturing sector, contained in the west side of the town;
   - Lacking higher education facilities and higher-skilled jobs;
   - Well-connected to the local walking and cycling network;
   - Lacking investment in the town centre;
   - Suffering high levels of HGVs on unsuitable roads;
   - A place of historically uncontrolled, organic growth and settlement patterns;
   - A place with a strong connection to team sports (rugby, football, cricket), and;
   - Not established as a tourism destination.

4. Site level
   - The Northern Quarter site is:
     - Well-connected to the regional road network;
     - Well-connected to the local and regional recreational walking and cycling network;
     - Set in, and part of, a beautiful landscape, including the lake;
     - Undulating in topography;
     - A link between the forest and the village of Steam Mills;
     - A place of high ecological value (bats, reptiles, grassland and woodland);
     - A place of high local cultural importance (Northern United buildings), and;
     - Constrained by its mining legacy.

5. Site level
   - The potential of the site is:
     - To provide space for higher education, tourism and higher-skilled employment;
     - To provide housing in an exceptionally attractive landscape setting;
     - To address transport issues at the northern gateway to Cinderford;
     - To link to the forest and draw upon its resources;
     - To act as a stepping stone between the communities to the north and Cinderford, providing facilities closer to their homes;
     - To integrate and enhance the local landscape, and;
     - To promote local identity and values by integrating existing buildings on site.