

Landscape Technical Note

Strutt & Parker – Land at Bowlers Lea, Cam

17th January 2019

1 Introduction

1.1. Aspect have been instructed by Strutt & Parker to review the potential landscape and visual effects relating to a promotion of residential development on land at Bowlers Lea, Cam. This technical note has been produced in support of the site for allocation within the emerging strategy of the Stroud District Council Local Plan.

1.2. It is noted that the site is identified as parcel ‘CAM024’ within the Strategic Assessment of Land Availability (SALA), which is assessed as not being suitable for development. The SALA states:

“This site is not suitable for development because of the likely high landscape impact. Development on the rising slopes would impinge on their function as backcloth to the settlement as well as potentially being highly visible to the wider countryside and the M5 to the north. There are therefore potential impact preventing sustainable development in this location.”

1.3. The purpose of this technical note is to provide a review of the existing landscape character and visibility of the site in relation to the comments within the SALA and the site’s ability to accommodate residential development and its associated infrastructure.

2 Baseline Assessment

2.1. The site is located on the western settlement edge of Lower Cam, comprising a parcel of unmanaged scrubland and rough grassland largely bound by established vegetation structure. Whilst the site itself is not locally or nationally designated, it is noted that the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located to the south and east, beyond the wider settlement setting of Lower Cam and Dursley, approximately 800m from the site at its closest point. The site’s location is shown on ASP1 Site Location Plan and ASP2 Site and Setting Plan, included within Enclosure 1.

2.2. The northern site boundary is defined by a pocket of mature trees and understorey scrub which extends to cover the northern extent of the site, offering a strong degree of visual containment to the site from the wider landscape setting to the north. Bowlers Lea [road] is located in the north eastern corner of the site providing vehicular access to a number of residential dwellings to the north east. The eastern site boundary is defined by a cycleway / footpath corridor which is lined by mature vegetation structure on both sides, with the rear curtilages of existing residential development located off Povelands [road] backing onto the cycleway along the full length of the eastern site boundary. The existing cycleway / footpath corridor extends along the southern site boundary lined by mature vegetation structure which affords a strong degree of containment to the site from the south. The western site

boundary is defined by an intermittent hedgerow / self set scrub allowing for more open views into the site from the immediate and localised context to the west.

Topography

- 2.3. The site itself falls from approximately 80m Above Ordinance Datum (AOD) in the south western corner of the site. The southern, eastern and north eastern site boundaries are defined by a degree of earth mounding, with the site sitting higher than the adjacent land at these points. The site is located on the east facing slope of a localised hill which rises to approximately 100m AOD to the west.
- 2.4. The wider landscape setting to the east and south of the site is characterised by the Cotswolds AONB hill ranges, which rise to approximately 250m AOD, offering longer distance views towards the site and the wider settlement settings of Lower Cam and Dursley.

Landscape Character

- 2.5. At a national level, the site is located on the border of the 'Cotswolds' National Character Area: NCA107 and the 'Severn and Avon Vales' National Character Area: NCA106. The map includes large tracks of countryside which have similar characteristics in terms of landform, geology, land use and other landscape elements.
- 2.6. At a more local level, the Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment (2006) identifies the site within the 'Rolling Hills and Valleys' Landscape Character Area: SV13A Dursley, Cam and Uley Valley. The key characteristics of which are identified as being:
 - *A generally enclosed and secluded 'secret' character in the upper sections of valleys and within the narrow valley bottoms;*
 - *Broader and more open valley form and developed character where the valleys meet the Severn Vale;*
 - *Elevated views over the vale landscape are possible from the western and northern limits of the landscape type within the Severn Vale study area;*
 - *Woodland is limited beyond the adjoining Cotswolds AONB, although in the wider landscape type the steep sided concave valleys frequently have woodland dominating the steeper upper slopes;*
 - *Valleys drained by several tributary streams that flow into the Little Avon River and River Cam before entering the River Severn;*
 - *Area largely under pastoral use, with occasional areas under arable cultivation, confined largely to the valley slopes and bottom. Areas of scrubby pasture often evident on some upper slopes;*
 - *Fields are generally small to medium scale, enclosed by hedgerows with hedgerow trees frequent on valley slopes and post and wire fences;*
 - *Larger settlements with more pronounced urban influences are frequently located at valley mouths, with smaller, rural settlements along valley bottoms and stream sides and upper valley slopes; and*

- *Roads located along valley bottoms and tops, frequently cutting across the slopes.*
- 2.7. The Stroud District Landscape Character Assessment (2000) identifies the site as being located within the 'Rolling Agricultural Plain' Character, and sub character 'Escarpment Foot Slopes' Character Area 5A. The key characteristics of the Rolling Agricultural Plain Character Area are identified as being:
- *Varied landscape of open flat plain to more undulating landform towards limestone escarpment.*
 - *Established, old, rich rural lowland, with some woodlands and mature hedgerow trees and occasional orchards.*
 - *Land is dissected by River Cam and Frome to the east.*
 - *Traversed from north to south by M5, railway, Gloucester-Sharpness canal and the A38.*
 - *Semi-enclosed landscape with some distant views, and more restrained views from Frome Valley.*
 - *Churches act as strong foci and landmarks.*
 - *Dispersed pattern of isolated villages.*
 - *Land use is a mix of arable and pasture.*
 - *Strong field pattern medium to small in scale.*
- 2.8. Stroud District Council have also undertaken a Landscape Sensitivity Appraisal (July 2013), in which the site is included within a wider site parcel, located on the eastern extent of Parcel 18. The assessment identifies this parcel as being of high – medium sensitivity, with the key characteristics and justifications being:
- *Rural agricultural on locally elevated plateau landscape comprising a mix of arable and pastoral land uses;*
 - *Bound to the south and east by the residential edge of Cam, to the west by Field Lane and to the north by Woodend lane;*
 - *The elevated location affords an open character and extensive wide panoramic views from a number of locations, although in some locations, hedge lined, narrow lanes create a more intimate character;*
 - *Strong visual association with the wider landscape context with prominent intermediate to long distance views of the Severn Estuary, western lowland plain and Forest of Dean AONB to the west and the Cotswolds AONB, Peaked Down and Cam Long Down to the east;*
 - *Despite being located to the north western edge of Cam the PL displays a largely rural character with the natural topography precluding views east into the valley from many locations;*

- *Landscape features include mature boundary trees and hedgerows of varying condition, with some degraded hedgerows apparent;*
- *The network of PRoWs including footpaths and bridleways, denote its importance as a recreation/amenity resource;*
- *Receptors primarily consist of users of local roads / PRoWs and residents those viewing the landscape at distanced from upland areas from which the PL would be conspicuous due to the topography;*
- *The PL is valuable in limiting the coalescence of built development and retaining the identity of Cam;*
- *Tranquillity interrupted by traffic noise associated with the M5 Road corridor to the west.*

2.9. Whilst it is acknowledged that the wider land parcel (18) is identified as being of high – medium landscape sensitivity, it is considered that this assessment does not reflect the particular qualities of the site itself. The unmanaged and overgrown nature of the site does not readily relate to the adjacent arable land uses, with the site itself being more closely related to the immediately adjacent settlement edge of Lower Cam to the east. Furthermore, the site’s location on falling topography reduces its visual prominence within the wider landscape setting. As such, it is considered that the landscape sensitivity of the site itself is reduced.

3 Potential Landscape and Visual Effects

- 3.1. This Landscape Technical Note does not include a detailed assessment of effects but seeks to assess the principle of introducing the development of the site to a residential use. This will be considered within the context of the receiving landscape and visual environment as identified within the baseline assessment.
- 3.2. An illustrative Landscape Capacity Plan has also been produced (Enclosure 1) which demonstrates how residential development could be successfully accommodated within the site.

Potential Landscape Effects

- 3.3. The site comprises an area of unmanaged scrubland and rough grassland immediately adjacent to the existing settlement edge of Lower Cam. The immediate presence of the existing settlement edge combined with the localised road corridors detracts from the remoteness and tranquillity of the site itself. As such, the introduction of a sensitively designed residential development will not introduce new or alien features that do not already exist within the immediate setting of the site or the localised receiving landscape context.
- 3.4. It is considered that alongside any proposed development, the majority of boundary vegetation will be retained and enhanced, with additional tree and shrub planting gapping up any breaks in the existing vegetation structure, ensuring that the proposed built form is successfully integrated into the receiving landscape character. Whilst it is acknowledged that a limited extent of vegetation will be removed to facilitate the proposals and associated access, it is considered that the vegetated nature of the site will be maintained. There are

opportunities for the key existing vegetation to be retained within the proposed layout, with proposed planting mitigating the loss of any vegetation within the site.

- 3.5. It is considered that the introduction of a sensitively designed residential development into the site will not result in significant impacts upon the receiving landscape character, with the key characteristics of the landscape character area remaining unaltered.

Potential Visual Effects

- 3.6. A number of viewpoints have been identified in order to demonstrate the visibility of the site within the localised and wider setting. The views have been informed by a thorough desk study and a number of field assessments. The views are taken from publicly accessible viewpoints and although are not exhaustive, are considered to provide a fair representation of the visual environment within which the site is set. The visual analysis seeks to identify the views that will, potentially, experience the greatest degree of change as a result of the proposals. The visual assessment is included within Enclosure 2.
- 3.7. Due to the topographical setting of the site on an east facing slope and its immediate proximity to the existing settlement edge, views towards the site are largely limited to the localised footpath and road network. It is however noted that longer distance views from the Cotswolds AONB to the south and east are available, where the site is seen beyond the wider settlement settings of Lower Cam and Dursley. The mature vegetation which lines the northern, eastern and southern site boundaries affords a strong degree of visual containment to the site, with only occasional breaks in vegetation structure allowing for passing views into the site. It is however considered that alongside any proposed development, this boundary vegetation would be retained and enhanced with additional native tree and shrub planting, affording an enhanced degree of containment to the site to that which currently exists.
- 3.8. The intermittent vegetation along the western site boundary combined with the rising topography allows for more open views into the site from the localised footpath network to the west (refer Viewpoints 3 & 4 within Enclosure 2). The more elevated nature of these viewpoints allows for longer distance views towards the east, with the site being seen within the context of the existing settlement edge of Lower Cam. It is considered that alongside any proposed development, the western site boundary would be redefined with additional native tree, shrub and hedgerow planting which will assist in the successful integration of any proposed residential development and the existing settlement edge of Lower Cam into the receiving landscape setting and visual environment.
- 3.9. When considering views from the north, the localised topography and extent of mature vegetation within the northern extent of the site affords a strong degree of visual containment. Viewpoint 2 within Enclosure 2 illustrates the rising topography within the localised context to the north, which largely contains the site from this location. When considering longer distance views from the M5 motorway corridor to the north, it is considered that views of the site are entirely contained by intervening topography and vegetation structure. Viewpoint 8 within Enclosure 2 is taken from the A4135 bridging point over the M5 corridor and illustrates the extent of containment afforded by the motorway embankment planting which entirely contains views of the site and wider settlement setting of Lower Cam during both summer and winter months.

- 3.10. The site's location on an east facing slope allows for longer distance views from the wider Cotswolds AONB setting to the south and east (refer Viewpoints 6 & 7). Within these views the site is seen beyond the wider settlement setting of Lower Cam and due to its distance, is considered to represent a minor component within the field of view. It is acknowledged that the undeveloped nature of the site provides some contribution to the backcloth of Lower Cam from the wider landscape setting to the east, however the green ribbon of backcloth land perceived from the AONB (Viewpoint 7) largely precludes the site itself. The apparent backcloth land comprises the higher east facing slopes of the localised hill to the west of the site. It is considered that any proposed development within the site would resect this backcloth setting, with any development being appropriately offset from the higher areas of the site.
- 3.11. It is considered that the retention and enhancement of the boundary vegetation will create an established landscape setting for any proposed development. The existing vegetation structure provides a strong degree of visual containment to the site, largely restricting views to the localised context to the west, with some longer distance views available from the east. Where any proposed development would be perceptible, it will be seen within a mature green setting. Furthermore, existing development already forms a notable feature within the immediate landscape setting, and as such the introduction of residential development into the site will not introduce new or alien features into the receiving streetscenes or visual environment. It is therefore considered that residential development can be integrated within this site without significant, long term harm.

4 Summary and Conclusion

- 4.1. It is considered that the site is clearly well contained by existing vegetation and topography, with views towards the site only being readily apparent from its immediate setting, rising landscape to the west and the wider landscape setting to the east and south. It is not considered that the site is 'highly visible' from the M5 to the north, with the motorway corridor being lined by mature vegetation associated with the embankments, which when combined with the localised topography, entirely contain views of the site. Whilst it is acknowledged that the undeveloped nature of the site provides some contribution to the backcloth of Lower Cam from the wider landscape setting to the east, the green ribbon of backcloth land perceived from the AONB largely precludes the site itself. The apparent backcloth land comprises the higher east facing slopes of the localised hill to the west of the site.
- 4.2. It is therefore considered that the site and receiving environment have the capacity to accommodate sensitively designed residential development. The proposals will not result in significant harm to the landscape character or visual environment and, as such, it is considered that proposed development can be successfully integrated in this location and is supportable from a landscape and visual perspective.

Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd

Dated 17th January 2019

Enclosure 1 – Baseline Plans

Key:

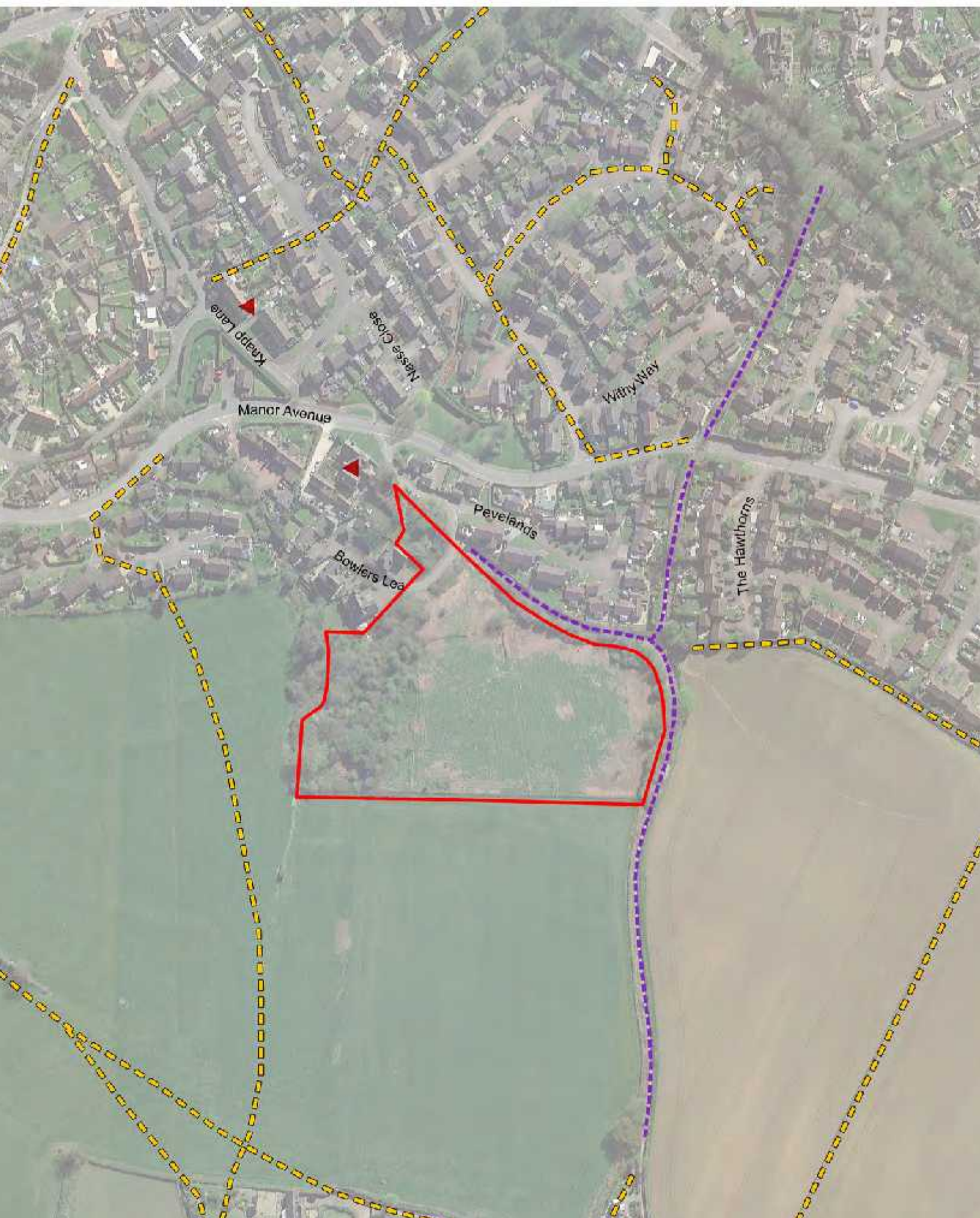


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Proposed vehicular access into the site from Bowlers Lea in the north eastern corner.

Existing boundary vegetation to be retained and enhanced where appropriate, with suitable development offsets being maintained to ensure their future health and long term growth.

Existing pocket of scrub and tree site management regime being stock with native species where vegetation in the northern extent of views of the proposals whilst providing opportunities for diversity enhancements.

iated with the western site with a mixed native hedgerow and a robust green edge to the site useful integration of the proposals in views from the west.

focussed along the western site perimeter ground in the south western area to comprise native tree and posed development being offset cloth to the settlement of Dursley

and facing development, providing open space areas.

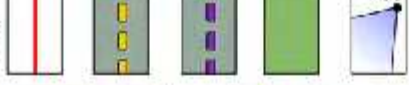
a children's playspace in the



Enclosure 2 – Visual Assessment



Key:



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ent located off

Vegetation associated with the northern site boundary



Main body of site located in intervening topography





g of Dursley

Perceived backcloth to Lower Cam

Site





Approximate direction of the site and wider setting of
Lower Cam located beyond intervening vegetation

