



Willesborough Dykes Greenway

**Combined cyclist and pedestrian path connecting,
Park Farm, Kingsnorth with Central Ashford.**

Planning and Design and Access Statement

Ashford Borough Council
Project Office
Civic Centre
Tannery Lane
Ashford
Kent

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Report Produced by Ashford Borough Council Project Office

Project Office Engineer – Steve ParishJanuary 2010

Project Office Architect – Gary VinceJanuary 2010

Willesborough Dykes Greenway Path

1.0 Introduction

This statement has been produced to accompany the planning application submitted to Ashford Borough Council seeking permission to construct a 2.5m wide, bound surface, greenway path across the area of land known locally as Willesborough Dykes, Ashford.

[See Planning Application Drawing No. PO / 047 / PA 001 Rev 0 – Site Location Plan.](#)

This report presents the proposed path specification and design rationale detailing pavement surface design and materials, river crossing proposals, street lighting, fencing, landscape proposals and environmental considerations.

2.0 The Development Site and Its Setting.

The proposed development is contained within an extensive rural area known as Willesborough Dykes. The site is identified in the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) which designates the Willesborough Dykes Area as a future nature conservation park. Located 2 km south of Ashford Town Centre the overall Willesborough Dykes core area measures approximately 50 hectares and is a site of nature conservation interest, (SNCI). The site is bounded to the south and west by the Bad Munstereifel Road and Romney Marsh Road. The Ashford to Hastings railway line runs along the eastern boundary of the site whilst to the north the site is bounded by the Aylesford Stream, (main river). The site is also bisected by the East Stour River and contains a network of small watercourses (dykes).

The current site usage is agricultural, providing grazing for sheep and horses. The public currently have no right of access over the site.

[See Appendix C – Site Photographs](#)

The proposed development is non-residential and made up of a bound surface path, improvements to an existing brick arch bridge and construction of a new steel foot bridge. The route of the proposed path within the Willesborough Dykes area will occupy a narrow linear site to the east measuring approximately 0.6 hectares in total. In addition to the construction of the path it will be necessary to adjust existing ground levels over an area of approximately 1 hectare to the north of the East Stour River to provide compensatory flood water storage.

[See Planning Application Drawing No. PO / 047 / PA 001, PA007 and PA101 to PA016 – Site Location and General Arrangement Plans.](#)

3.0 The Proposed Path

Why do we need the path? – Extensive recent development at Park Farm South has delivered in excess of 750 residential dwellings and a further 220 dwellings are under construction at Park Farm East on the eastern side of the A2070 Hamstreet Road.

No dedicated direct cycle or pedestrian link currently exists between Park Farm and Ashford Town Centre. There is an existing un-segregated pedestrian footway directly adjacent to the northern section of the Romney Marsh Road, but this has no dedicated link into the Park Farm development. In addition Romney Marsh Road is a de-restricted 70 mph section of highway that is unattractive to pedestrians and cyclists due to vehicle speeds.

Options to provide a segregated combined cycle / pedestrian path adjacent to the Romney Marsh Road have been investigated, but are prohibited by the available width of verge on either side of the road and would require very extensive engineering works to widen the embankment on which the road is built to support the path.

The need for a strategic traffic free combined pedestrian and cycle path in this location away from the public highway is identified in the “Blue Green Grid Strategy” produced by Ashford Borough Council in 2008 and soon to be incorporated into Ashford Borough Council’s “Green Spaces and Water Environments Supplementary Planning Guidance Document” to be published in early 2010. The Strategy aims to create and improve Ashford's green spaces and waterways, developing an even better network of places.

The path will also benefit and add value to Ashford Borough Council’s wider vision identified in the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) which designates the Willesborough Dykes Core Area as a future nature conservation park. The pathway will provide public access across the proposed nature park site with the potential to provide future access into the wider site contributing to the realisation of the vision for the area.

Path Route - The proposed path will link Park Farm, Kingsnorh to Central Ashford giving the user traffic free access to National Cycle Route 18 and the wider network of cycle / pedestrian paths to the north, east and west of the town. At its southern end, the path will connect to the existing cycle path at Sheepfold Way, Park Farm, Kingsnorth. At its northern end, the path links with the existing pedestrian / cycle path that runs along the northern bank of the Aylesford Stream immediately south of Ashford’s Asda Store and the McArthur Glen Shopping Outlet.

[See Appendix B – Explore Ashford, Cycle Routes Map](#)

User Access - The path will be a “Green Way” as defined by Sustrans. It will measure approximately 0.9 km in length within the Willesborough Dykes Site and have a bound surface. The path is designed to accommodate pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users and will be lit by street lights. Measures will be put in place to prevent unauthorised access to motor vehicles. The path will be fenced along its route and

bordered by narrow grass landscape strips. With the exception of the bridges, where the path will be 3m wide between parapets, the path will be 2.5m wide with a minimum of 500mm clearance on either side between the edge of the path and any structures, signs, lamp columns and fence posts.

River Crossings - It will be necessary to improve the condition of an existing brick arch bridge to carry the path over the East Stour River and construct an entirely new steel footbridge bridge where the path passes over the Aylesford Stream.

Flood Risk - The route of the proposed path passes through the Environment Agency (EA) designated flood zone. The EA require the creation of compensatory flood water storage within the catchment of the site equal in volume to the proportion of the path above existing ground level. This will be achieved by re-profiling existing ground levels on land within the site to the north of the East Stour River.

Ecology - Two areas of enhanced habitat improvement will be created as part of the proposals to mitigate habitat loss resulting from the construction of the path. These areas will be created immediately adjacent to the route of the path to the north and south of the East Stour River.

[See Appendix K – Ecological Impact Assessment December 2009](#)

Accommodation works, permitted development - The southern most section of the proposed path from the southern boundary of the Willesborough Dykes site to Sheepfold Way is located within existing highway boundaries. The construction of this length of path is an improvement to the existing highways and classified as permitted development under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This section does not form part of the planning application and details are provided for continuity purposes only.

4.0 Rationale Behind Path Pavement Design.

When considering a new path, the designer must decide between a bound surface of tarmac / concrete or an unbound stone / gravel surface finish.

The choice of pavement design for the proposed greenway path has considered the following factors:-

Path user types and purpose of journey – Although the path will run across a rural park it connects two distinctly urban areas and will be used primarily by commuters and school children travelling between Park Farm and Ashford Town Centre / Ashford Station. These user types will require a clean pathway that can be used in all weathers allowing them to arrive at their destination free of mud and dust.

Location of the path within the flood plain – Where the path crosses the Willesborough Dykes Core Area it passes through the EA designated flood zone. The

EA has confirmed that at the proposed elevation of the path it can be expected to flood on average once in every ten years for a period of several days. This is well within Sustrans recommended acceptable frequency for paths in flood zones. During a flood event the waters will saturate the surrounding ground and can have a scouring effect on its surface. Muddy / silty deposits will be left behind by the receding flood waters that could be up to 50mm thick in locations adjacent to the rivers.

A pavement design with a bound sealed surface will resist the effects of flood water and be easily cleaned of mud and silt.

Path durability – Best practice guidance identifies that a well designed path which creates an attractive off-road commuter route that will attract considerably higher user numbers than a recreational route. On this basis they recommend a durable bound pavement surface be provided to resist wear and tear and minimise future maintenance costs.

Path appearance – The route of the path passes through two distinctly different environments, the very rural nature park site and the more urban section adjacent to the public highway at its southern end, (permitted development). The need to soften the impact of the paths appearance within the rural location is recognised and a number of surface treatment options were considered to improve the paths appearance.

Information has been drawn from the following best practice guidance publications:-

- Sustrans – Connect2 and Greenway Design Guide, Part 7
- Cycling England – Doc C.02 Surfaces
- Transport for London – London Cycling Design Standards, Chapter 7

Provision will be made to allow access for small service vehicles to maintain the lamp columns, verges and sweep the path. The surface has been designed to be of sufficient strength to accommodate these service requirements.

Accommodation of adjacent land users – The path has been designed with a number of field gates and crossing points strategically placed to accommodate the requirements of adjacent land users who have a requirement to cross over the route of the path with farm vehicles and heavy plant to gain access to land on either side. Users include the adjacent land owners, tenant farmers, the Environment Agency, Network Rail and utility companies.

Proposed Pavement Design - The above influencing factors identify that the proposed path surface must be of bound construction to resist wear and tear / flood waters and provide a clean all weather commuter route to encourage a modal shift in travel between Park Farm and Ashford. The path must also blend into its environment with the minimum of visual impact.

Two different bound surfacing materials are proposed for the path construction.

- The majority of the path will be constructed in tarmac with a buff coloured surface dressing.
- Where gated field accesses cross the route of the path the pavement will be constructed in reinforced concrete and widened to extend between the gates on either side of the path. Concrete is the only suitable material that can accommodate the heavy caterpillar tracked plant used by the EA to maintain the rivers within the site.

[See Planning Application Drawing No. PO / 047 / PA 020 Rev 0 – Path Sections.](#)

5.0 Path Lighting

The most important and obvious function of lighting the path is to extend the hours of the day when it can be safely accessed by the public. This is of particular importance in the winter months to fulfill its primary function as an alternative route for commuters and school children. If the maximum benefit is to be obtained from providing the path, it must be lit.

The impact of lighting on local wildlife , (particularly bats) and their habitats is considered in the EclA and it is recommended that simple un-intrusive lamp columns be specified equipped with low light polluting lamps that concentrate the light on the path with minimal overspill into the surrounding area. Lighting levels are to be kept to the minimum necessary to achieve a safe route for users and consideration will be given to reducing light levels out of peak times. The columns will be painted grey to blend in with the local environment.

[See Appendix G – Street Lighting Design Proposals](#)

6.0 Path Fencing and Gates

It is necessary to fence the route of the path where it passes through the nature park site to provide a secure boundary with the railway line to the east and the fields to the west, which contain livestock.

Sustrans provide useful guidance on the choice of suitable fencing adjacent to cycle paths and recommend that the least intrusive option be selected on the grounds of stock control, security for neighbors and path user's safety.

1050 mm high timber post and wire stock-proof fence is specified on all field boundaries and adjacent to the railway line fence with galvanized steel field gates at points of access.

It is recognised that the existing arrangement of gates at the private level crossing over the railway line adjacent to the northern section of the path are climbable. Path users may try to take a short cut over the level crossing to access the path adjacent to Bushy Royds on the eastern side of the line. To prevent this it is proposed to replace the existing five bar field gate on the western side of the level crossing with a 1.8m high steel security gate similar to Jacksons Fencing “Barbican” style gates.

[See Appendix G – Examples of Proposed Materials](#)

7.0 Path Drainage

The path will be constructed in impermeable materials with an average cross fall of 1 in 40 and be elevated by an average of 100mm above the surrounding ground. The development will not increase surface water within the site and the volume of run off from the path will be minimal, equivalent to green field run off. Surface water run-off from the path will drain to the surrounding ground where it will soak away naturally.

8.0 River Crossings and Ditch Culverting

River Crossings - The route of the proposed path within the Willesborough Dykes site carries it over the East Stour River and the Aylesford Stream. Both watercourses are designated main river by the EA. Prior approval and licensed consent from the EA is required before construction works can commence.

The existing brick arch bridge over the East Stour River will be renovated and improved to accommodate the new path and a new steel footbridge constructed over the Aylesford Stream to connect the path to the existing cycle/pedestrian path network.

Factors considered when investigating the bridge options available:-

- User requirements and safety
- Crossing locations
- Visual Appearance
- Environmental Impact
- Construction materials
- Loading requirements
- Construction access requirements
- Utilisation of existing historic structures
- Future maintenance
- Design Life
- Impact on river flows (EA requirements).
- Impact on flood plain and surface water storage compensation measures (EA requirements).
- Cost

The proposals for each crossing location are detailed below.

East Stour River Crossing – Existing Brick Arch Bridge

Two options were considered to carry the path over the River Stour;

- Improve the existing historic brick arch bridge.
- Construct an entirely new steel footbridge.

The existing historic three arch brick bridge is recognised as a part of the local heritage worthy of preservation. Although the foundations and arches of the bridge are structurally sound, the bridge's general condition is poor and it is in urgent need of renovation if it is to be preserved. After restorations the bridge would be capable of carrying light service vehicles necessary for the future maintenance of the path and in time the surrounding nature park.

A new footbridge would be an intrusion into the environment and would not allow the added benefit of vehicle access, nor would it contribute to the preservation of the existing brick bridge. In the interests of flood risk reduction, the EA would require the clearance below any new structure over the river to be significantly greater than that of the existing bridge resulting in the new structure being higher and having a significant visual impact on its surrounding location.

After careful consideration it is proposed to renovate and improve the existing brick arch bridge to carry the path over the East Stour River and accommodate pedestrians, cyclists and light service vehicles required to maintain the path and in time, the future nature park.

This decision has the following advantages :-

- Renovation of the existing historic bridge will deliver a structure capable of carrying contractor's construction plant and future site service vehicles.
- Utilising the existing bridge will have limited visual impact on the present environment.
- Re-cycling of this existing historic asset will add value and bring additional benefits to the future nature park proposals whilst restoring a piece of local heritage.
- Choosing this option will eliminate the need for a temporary bridge to create construction access over the river.
- As the bridge is an existing structure the EA will not impose restrictions on height or require flood water storage compensation measures.

The extent of the renovations will not extend to the bridge foundations and will not require any works to take place within the East Stour River itself.

Design Philosophy - The original bridge was constructed in brickwork with parapets approximately 700mm high. However, for a cycleway, guarded parapet heights of 1400mm are required. To construct these in brickwork would change the historic appearance of the bridge and make the structure visually very heavy. The decision was taken to, as far as practical, express the bridge in its original brick form by forming brick parapets at the original height but to raise the overall parapet to the height needed in a visually light steel structure to echo the steel agricultural field gates elsewhere in the scheme.

[See Appendix I – Structural Assessment, Brick Arch Bridge.](#)

[See Planning Application Drawing No. PT 57 / 01 Rev P4 – Bridge Over East Stour River.](#)

Aylesford Stream Crossing – New Steel Footbridge

The specification for the new bridge over the Aylesford Stream requires a simple design that can accommodate pedestrians and cyclist. It is not intended that motor vehicles of any sort will have access over this bridge.

The location of the proposed bridge has been chosen to minimize the length of span and take maximum advantage of the bank height on the northern side, thus minimising the abutment design and cost.

The proposed bridge will be 3m wide and of steel construction with an anti slip surface applied to the deck. The bridge will be painted two tone silver grey to echo the appearance of the adjacent Asda building and other elements of the path proposals.

[See Planning Application Drawing No. PT 57 / 02 Rev P3 – Bridge Over Aylesford Stream.](#)

Ditch Crossing - It is proposed to culvert two short stretches of field ditch to accommodate the route of the path. Prior approval from the Local Land Drainage Authority, (ABC) and a license from the EA is required before construction works can commence.

[See Appendix H – Flood Risk Assessment.](#)

9.0 Flood Risk Assessment and Compensatory Flood Water Storage Measures.

The route of the proposed path within the nature park site passes through the flood plain. EA prior approval and licensed consent is required to place any above ground structure within this area to ensure the works do not increase the flood risk in the local area.

The EA will require the creation of compensatory flood water storage areas within the catchment of the site equal in volume to that proportion of any new structures built in the

flood plain above existing ground level and below the EA 1 in 100 year predicted flood level of 37.940m above ordnance datum.(AOD). This will be achieved by re-profiling existing ground levels north of the East Stour River and the dredging of existing field ditches on the Ashford Borough Council owned land within the site.

[See Planning Application Drawing No. PO/47 PA 007 – Flood Mitigation Areas.](#)

Each element of design undertaken within the flood plain area has been considered with the above requirements in mind.

Following extensive consultation with the EA a flood risk assessment (FRA) of the path proposals has been undertaken and measures proposed to minimise the impact of the flooding on the new path and its users. As detailed above compensatory flood water storage areas will be created as part of the path construction to ensure the proposals do not increase the flood risk in the local area.

[See Appendix H – Flood Risk Assessment.](#)

10.0 Temporary Construction Site Access, Compound and Working Areas.

In order to construct the proposed path it is necessary to establish a temporary working area, site compound and access route into the Willesborough Dykes Site. This will be taken from the Marsh Road just south of the Asda roundabout. The creation of the access and associated traffic management proposals have been agreed with Kent Highways Services (KHS) and the appropriate traffic orders and road space provisionally booked.

Details of the temporary construction access, compound and working areas together with Kent Highways Services (KHS) correspondence and traffic management proposals are provided in the following documents:-

[See Planning Application Drawing No. PT 57 / 02 Rev P3 – Bridge Over Aylesford Stream.](#)

[See Appendix H – Flood Risk Assessment.](#)

Within the site, designated access routes will be fenced to reduce the impact of the construction works on the local ecology. Measures to minimise the impact of the temporary working areas on the local ecological are discussed in the Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) and mitigation measures proposed.

[See Appendix K – Ecological Impact Assessment.](#)

11.0 Landscaping

Landscaping associated with the paths construction will comprise the reinstatement of all land disturbed by the works to grass land, (other than the tarmac / concrete path areas themselves).

Areas of land contained within the new paths boundaries will be removed from grazing and be enhanced / improved to provide a more diverse habitat for local ecology. This will be achieved through additional seeding with selected wild flower species to be specified by Kent Wildlife Trust at detailed design stage. More details of these proposals can be found in the EclA and on the Planning application drawings.

[See Appendix K – Ecological Impact Assessment.](#)

[See Planning Application Drawing No. PO 47 / PA 010 to PA 0165 – General arrangement Plans.](#)

12.0 Environmental Screening Opinion

Following early consultation with the local planning authority, (ABC) an Environmental Screening Opinion Report was produced and submitted on the 18th December 2009. Application No 09/00012/EA.

The planning authority has considered the report and stated that an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required for the proposed development.

[See Appendix J – Environmental Screening Opinion.](#)

13.0 Ecological Impact Assessment.

An Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) has been undertaken by Kent Wildlife Trust on behalf of the applicant and is appended to this report. The site is of significant nature conservation interest (SNCI). The assessment has identified the presence of bats, reptiles and valuable habitats. A program of detailed mitigation measures and enhancements has been produced to address both the construction and operational impacts of the development on the site ecology.

The assessment concludes that once all the mitigation has been adopted, the overall residual impact on the features identified as being of at least local significance for biodiversity conservation is considered to be not significant.

[See Appendix K – Ecological Impact Assessment.](#)

14.0 Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

Part of the site is located in an Area of Archaeological Interest.

[See Appendix L - Drawing No PO/047/SO 001.](#)

There are specific matters of cultural significance or heritage within the immediate neighbourhood. An Archaeological Desktop Study of the development site and the wider Willesborough Dykes Proposed Nature Park area was completed in 2006 by Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT).

The most significant item of interest identified by the study within the development site is the existing late nineteenth century three arch brick bridge over the East Stour River that will be improved and restored as part of the development.

A structural assessment of the two bridges on the site was undertaken by Knapp Hicks & Partners Consulting Structural, Civil and Geotechnical Engineers in Feb 2008. The contents of the report relating to the eastern bridge, (bridge 1), in particular the abutments and foundations have subsequently been reviewed with the report author and it is proposed to renovate and improve the bridge to carry pedestrians, cyclists and light service vehicles. The extent of the renovations will not extend to the underpinning of the bridges foundations and will not require any works to take place within the East Stour River itself.

[See Appendix L – Archaeological Study.](#)

[See Appendix I – Structural Assessment, Brick Arch Bridge.](#)

Please note the bridge being improved under these proposals is referred to as “Bridge 1” in the structural report.

It is anticipated that an archaeological watching brief will be required where the path passes through the Area of Archaeological Interest.

15.0 Consultation

The following organisations have been consulted throughout the development of the path proposals.

Ashford Borough Council Planning Department
Sustrans
Environment Agency
Kent Wildlife Trust
Network Rail
Kent Highway Services
The Highways Agency

Some ABC Members

Issues raised and comments received from consultees via presentations, meetings and correspondence have, where appropriate, been incorporated into the design.

16.0 Utilities Statement

Service requirements - The proposed path will require a mains electricity supply to power the lamp columns. EDF Energy Networks has been consulted and provided proposals for the provision of power to the site.

This is the only utility provision required by the development.

Impact of the proposals on utility companies existing plant – Details of statutory utility companies existing plant within the development site have been obtained. The path has been designed to have no impact on the existing services or require any plant diversions.

17.0 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

The Landscape Assessment for Kent 2004 (produced for the Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbie), characterises the landscape in which the development site is situated as follows :-

“Upper Stour Valley”

“A flat generally open landscape of the Great Stour and East Stour rivers, the land use is one of mixed farming with crest top woodlands, as at Godinton Park, enclosing views in middle distance. These hills are formed from Greensand outliers which intrude into the clay vale in this area. These low ridges also include Hothfield, the site of Godinton House itself, and the outlier that forms Hurst Hill, Clap Hill and that at Great Chart. Occasionally, east of Ashford, there are views north-east over the low rise of the Greensand to the North Downs beyond.

Clumps of field trees and copses provide interest as does the irregular presence of riparian vegetation along the river. Where the river has lost its associated vegetation, however, it is often inconspicuous. Hedgerows are relatively infrequent and often gappy, with many of the field trees being of a similar age with no sign of renewal of the stock. A more intimate enclosure landscape of hedged fields can be found south of The Forstal, on the East Stour, and several old mills add to the historic scene. The loss of hedgerows is associated with the conversion of unimproved pasture to vast, arable or improved pastureland and it is likely that the remaining pasture may be vulnerable to further conversion. The advent of under field drainage and improved mechanisation has allowed this blurring of the traditional land use boundaries between the river floodplain, the clay soils and the free draining Greensand.

The loss of hedgerows and trees contributes to a loss of visual unity, and is eroding the traditional wildlife corridors along the river and between the fields.

Diversity is limited to the tree copses, hill top woodlands beyond the character area and residual riverside vegetation, but often the fragmentation of these elements contributes to a discordant sense of change, coupled with an increasingly bland picture, starved of variety, formed by a flat, arable and improved grass fields.

The landscape around the South Willesborough Dykes is similarly open but has long views to the suburbs of Ashford. Fingers of pasture and neglected farmland extend right up the A2042 to the town centre. The Ashford to Folkestone railway line cuts across to the north of the area, rarely impinging on the landscape, but this may change significantly when the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is constructed. A major part of the remaining valley character is under pressure for a mixed development at Cheeseman's Green and Conscience Farm which may be contributing to the sense of neglect and degradation".

The path proposals will be sympathetic to the existing landscape and seek to enhance rather than destroy its historic character.

Once complete the new path will pave the way for the wider vision to create a nature park on the adjacent land providing much needed public access into the site.

The renovation of the existing brick bridge over the East Stour River will utilise materials to blend and match existing and preserve this historic piece of heritage for years to come.

The proposals include habitat improvements by removing some areas of the site from grazing and introducing a managed grazing program on others. Opportunities to improve and enhance existing landscape areas and habitats identified by KWT in the EclA will be implemented by means of mitigation for the loss of areas resulting from the path construction.

The final appearance of the path will be softened by applying a buff coloured surface dressing to the tarmac path to help it blend into the local environment.

Other elements of the proposals have been kept simple reflecting the rural nature of the location.

18.0 Contaminated Land Statement.

The proposed development is not located on land within any known contamination areas.

There are two identified areas of contaminated land located adjacent to, but just outside the developable site.

[These are identified in Appendix M – Adjacent Contaminated Land Sites.](#)

The path design proposals have been deliberately routed to avoid these locations.

19.0 Land Owner and Tenant Notifications.

The proposed development site and temporary construction access spans a number of third party land holdings.

Appropriate notices have been sent to the landowners and any tenants in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning Act.

[See Appendix E – Copies of landowner and Tenant Notices.](#)

Appendices

Appendix A – Planning Application Drawings

Appendix B – Explore Ashford – Cycle Routes Map

Appendix C – Site Photographs

Appendix D – Examples of Proposed Materials

Appendix E – Copies of Landowners and Tenants Notices

Appendix F – Kent Highways Services Correspondence

Appendix G – Street Lighting Design Proposals

Appendix H – Flood Risk Assessment

Appendix I – Structural Assessment – Brick Arch Bridge

Appendix J – Environmental Screening Opinion December 2009

Appendix K – Ecological Impact Assessment December 2009

Appendix L – Archaeological Study

Appendix M – Adjacent Contaminated Land Sites.