

## **Chapter 2 Description of the Site**

## 2. Description of the Site

- 2.1 The proposed site is located at Hightown Quarry, approximately 7.5km north-west of Belfast City Centre and 3km from the existing Biffa Cottonmount Landfill at Mallusk. It is located within close proximity to Junction 4 of the M2, well known as the Sandyknowes junction (refer to earlier Fig 1.1).
- 2.2 Irregular in shape, the application site is 52.4ha (129.6 acres), which comprises the main development site including the area to be used as a construction compound and the lands that form part of the access route to the site, specifically Boghill Road which is to be upgraded as part of the proposed development. The application site is identified in red on Figure 2.1.
- 2.3 The main development area comprises an active basalt extraction quarry, a decommissioned asphalt plant and, until recently, a permitted inert waste recycling facility.
- 2.4 The southern, eastern and western boundaries comprise vertical quarry rock faces while the northern boundary comprises security fencing. The existing workings face the slopes of Sheepheads Hill overlooking the Ballymartin Valley and Three Mile Water beyond that.
- 2.5 The application site is located within the Antrim Borough Council and Newtownabbey Borough Council areas, and is adjacent to Belfast City Council area. The quarry component of the application site is located within the Antrim Borough Council area with the proposed upgrading of the Boghill Road within Newtownabbey Borough Council's area. Belfast City Council's administrative area is located a short distance to the east of the proposed application site.
- 2.6 The application site is located on the north eastern slopes of Belfast Hills approximately 1 km southwest of Hightown and 2.5 km southwest of Glengormley.
- 2.7 Hightown Quarry is accessed from the Boghill Road, a rural road connecting Hightown and Glengormley to the wider rural areas between Belfast and Antrim.
- 2.8 Access to the M2 Motorway from the application site is via Boghill Road, Hydepark Road, Upper Hightown Road, Mallusk Road and Scullions Road (onto Sandyknowes Roundabout). This distance to Sandyknowes Roundabout from the application site by road is approximately 3km.
- 2.9 All of the proposed built form associated with the proposed development will be located within the existing quarry. Infrastructural improvement to facilitate the delivery of waste vehicles to the site is proposed with works identified to widen and upgrade the existing Boghill Road from its junction with Hydepark Road to west of the existing access road to the quarry site.
- 2.10 The section of the Boghill Road to be upgraded extends to some 1.4km. The proposed works vary in width over its length where at present the width ranges from just under 4m at localised pinch points to over 6.3m on the approach to the Hydepark Road junction.

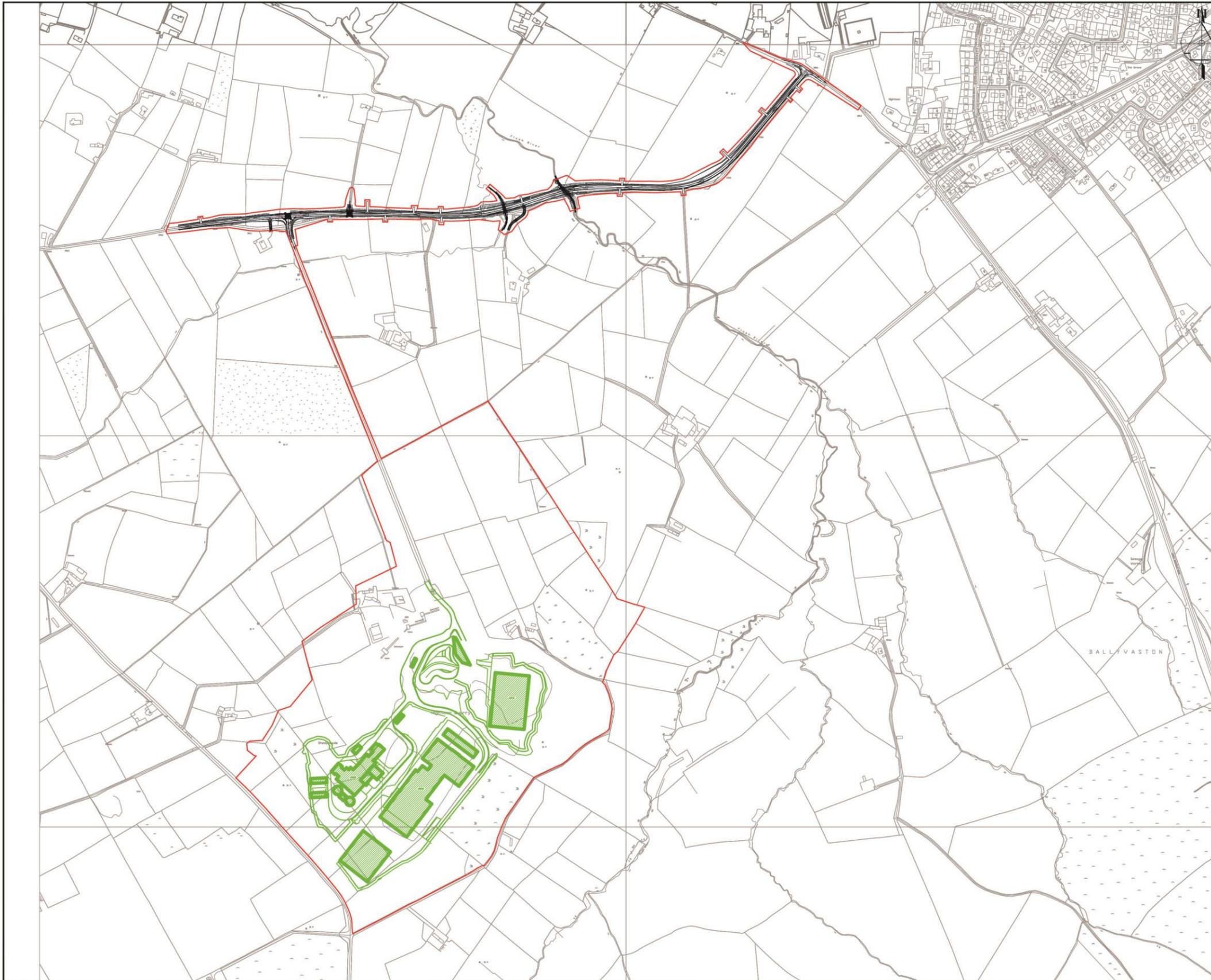


FIG 2.1

- 2.11 The existing road is bounded by agricultural fields of mainly improved pasture with a mix of boundary types including hedgerow, post and wire / rail fencing, stone walls (at bridges) with an inter-mixing of mature / semi-mature trees of mixed species. There are a number of residential properties immediately bounding or in relatively close proximity to the section of Boghill Road to be improved.
- 2.12 The access road to the quarry is also bounded by agricultural fields of mainly improved pasture with a mix of boundary types – for example hedgerow, post and wire / rail fencing, with an inter-mixing of mature / semi-mature trees of mixed species. This access road is adjoined by residential properties at its entrance and approximately half way along it.
- 2.13 The quarry site has been operational since 1965. Planning permission was formally granted by the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) for the existing operations in July 1999 with operational planning consent for mobile crushing issued in July 2001.
- 2.14 Wimpey Minerals Ltd purchased the site from the owner, W J Kane, in June 1991. Tarmac Ltd. bought the quarry in June 1996 and remain the current owners.
- 2.15 Hightown Quarry has full planning consent for mineral extraction and associated activities. The quarry has operated on a contract by contract basis in the period since 2008 due to the downturn in the construction industry. The quarry remains in a position to scale up to full-time production at any time in response to market demand.
- 2.16 Detailed information on the level of traffic generation into and out of the site over the period 1999-2008 has been examined from weighbridge data and forms part of the Transport Assessment in Appendix 12.1.
- 2.17 The quarry has approximately 16 million tonnes of consented rock still in place that can be extracted. Approximately 5 million tonnes of rock have been extracted by Tarmac to date. Prior to Tarmac owning the quarry it is estimated that 6.2 million tonnes of rock was extracted.
- 2.18 As a working quarry the site comprises a number of terraces ranging from 285m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) at the highest terrace to 227m AOD at the bottom terrace.
- 2.19 The quarry is broadly segregated into an initial void area to the north and a second larger void to the south. The southern void is, in turn, spilt along a north-east south-west line to create two terraces approximately 15m apart vertically with the higher terrace to the east.
- 2.20 The southern void area is approximately 11m higher than the northern. The site is accessed from the north by a common access road and the three principal areas within the site essentially rise up in a series of steps.

#### **Buildings and Plant within Quarry**

- 2.21 To facilitate quarrying operations a number of permanent structures are located on the quarry site as follows:
- Aggregate storage sheds;

- Maintenance building;
- Bunded oil tanks;
- Electricity substation;
- Weighbridge;
- Weighbridge office;
- Administration buildings; and
- Pump house.

2.22 Also located within the confines of the quarry site is a demolished property and a derelict building (see Figure 2.2 for existing structures located on the site).

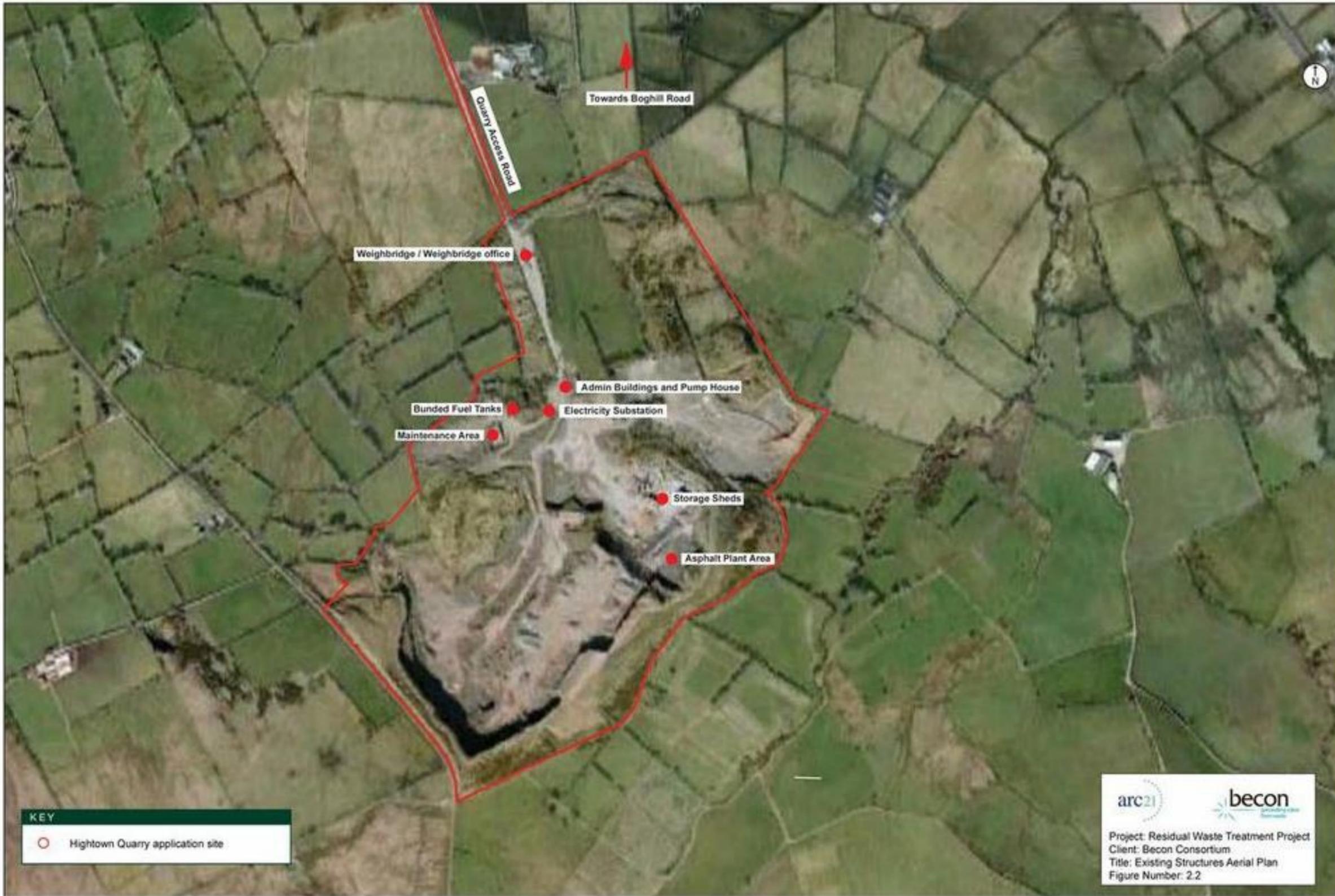
### **The Surrounding Area**

2.23 The most prominent landforms in the area surrounding the application site are the Belfast Hills, to the east and south of the application site, which reach their highest point at the summit of Divis, 478M AOD, situated approximately 4.4km to the south of the application site. Other peaks within this range of hills include Collinward, Squires Hill, Cave Hill, Black Mountain and McIlwhans, which lies immediately to the south-west of the application site.

2.24 To the north of the application site, the land falls gradually into the valley of the Ballymartin Water. Flush River extends north from its source in high ground approximately 1.1km to the south of the application site, passing approximately 100m to the east of the quarry area of the application site and under the Boghill Road area of the Application Site, before flowing into Hydepark Dam reservoir and on to the Ballymartin Water in the vicinity of Mallusk. The Ballymartin Water flows north-west to meet the Six Mile Water on the northern edge of Templepatrick, approximately 8km to the north-west of the application site.

2.25 To the north of the valley of the Ballymartin Water lies a low ridge, to the north of which lies the valley of Three Mile Water which flows parallel to Ballymartin Water to meet the Six Mile Water in the vicinity of Doagh, approximately 7.7km to the north-west of the application site. North of this valley lies a range of hills, the southern part of which includes hills at My Lord's Mountain (273m AOD) and Knockagh (270m AOD).

2.26 The immediate surrounds of the application site include moorland to the south and south-west of the quarry and enclosed pasture fields flanking Boghill Road to the north, west and east of the quarry. The transition between the pasture fields and moorland occurs at approximately 300m AOD. Below this height, the field pattern is predominantly formed of regular, small to medium sized fields, enclosed by hedgerows. On more elevated ground, the land comprises areas of rough grazing and open moorland, with limited hedgerow or fenced enclosure subdividing these areas. Communications masts are a feature on a number of the summits of the moorland area of the Belfast Hills, including at Collinward, Squires Hill, Divis and Black Mountain.



- 2.27 Farmsteads and residential properties are scattered across the rural area and connected by a generally irregular network of lanes (public highways) and private access tracks between the more regular alignment of routes including the B39 Seven Mile Straight; the A52, in stretches between Ballyutoag and Lough Neagh; and the B95 from Mallusk to Templepatrick. To the north and north-east of the application site, beyond Hydepark Road, lies residential development within Hightown, including the on-going development at the Blackrock neighbourhood. Further development is anticipated in this area. Further to the north-east within Glengormley is a large area of industrial and commercial development, extending along the flanks of Mallusk Road and the M2 motorway which extends through the urban area on a north-west to south-east axis.
- 2.28 In addition to the industrial and commercial development in the vicinity of Glengormley and the wider urban area, there are a number of active and disused quarries in the wider landscape, including a number within upland areas to the east and south. Lines of electricity pylons traverse the landscape in the vicinity of the application site, including two roughly parallel routes on a north-south axis, passing immediately to the east and west of Hightown.
- 2.29 The area surrounding the application site contains a variety of vegetation, including a network of hedgerows forming field boundaries and flanking roadways to the west, north and east. Scrub and canopy trees are also evident along watercourses, such as the Flush River, to the north and east, providing a more sinuous, irregular pattern of vegetation, amid the largely regular alignment of field boundaries.
- 2.30 There are no substantial areas of woodland in the landscape surrounding the application site. In the upland areas, predominantly to the south, there is very limited canopy tree planting but hedgerows, often intermittent, of hawthorn shrubs/small trees can be found flanking some roadways. The open moorland areas typically comprise rough grassland, with limited areas of scrub including gorse species.
- 2.31 The factors described above combine to contribute to landscape character, which has been assessed across Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). The southern part of the application site lies within the Divis Summits Landscape Character Area, which is described as including the following key characteristics:
- Broad, rounded summits on the edge of the Antrim basalt plateau with a distinctive and dramatic escarpment overlooking Belfast;
  - Open, windswept marginal farmland, with expanses of moss on flat, waterlogged plateau;
  - Angular, straight field boundaries and narrow roads;
  - Pockets of small-scale farmland and paddocks on some edges of the moss;
  - Occasional groups of trees shelter isolated farmsteads;
  - Dense lines of hedgerow beech trees along some roads and farm tracks at lower elevations;

- Derelict buildings; and
- Quarries, both active and abandoned.

2.32 Boghill Road to the east of Flush River, lies within the Three and Six Mile Water Valleys Landscape Character Area, which is described as having the following key characteristics:

- Gently rolling ridges within the broad lowland valleys of the Three Mile Water and Six Mile Water;
- Large open pastures are divided by hedgerows with numerous hedgerow trees;
- Densely settled, with many large farms and a variety of architectural styles;
- Widespread, prominent and large scale industrial development is scattered throughout the valleys, especially on the outskirts of Newtownabbey;
- Dense transport infrastructure including the M2, A6, A57 and the Ballymena to Belfast railway line; and
- No coherent visual relationship between the buildings and their rural setting.