

Joint Position Statement: Site H442 and Green Belt Review edge RT6

At the Matter 37 Hearing Session concerning accepted housing option H442 at Roberttown Lane the Inspector raised concerns that the role of this area of Green Belt could be considered as a strategic gap separating Roberttown from Liversedge and Norristhorpe, and also explored whether Roberttown retained a distinctive character. This additional note sets out a joint position statement between the Council and Strata Homes to confirm that the Green Belt Review, which did not identify edge RT6 as a strategic gap is a justifiable assessment of the role and function of this area of Green Belt and that, on balance, the decision to accept site H442 will not fundamentally undermine any Green Belt purpose.

The note will concentrate on two aspects of the Green Belt assessment:

1. The role and function of the Green Belt in terms of preventing the merger of settlements (edge ref. RT6 test 2a in SD19); and
2. The site specific assessment against five Green Belt purposes (Matter 37.1).

1. The role and function of the Green Belt in terms of the relationship between Roberttown and Liversedge (RT6 test 2a in SD19)

NPPF paragraph 80 states that one of the purposes of the Green Belt is to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another. Site H442 encompasses the whole of the existing green wedge of land that extends into the urban area of which Roberttown and Liversedge are a part. As the whole of the site is proposed to be released from the Green Belt, it is important to be definitive on whether the site is performing a Green Belt role in retaining separation between these settlements.

This note explains the Council's and Strata's position that Roberttown, Liversedge and Norristhorpe have grown together over time and now form one large urban area. The site of H442 does not therefore prevent actual merger as the settlements are already joined, nor is it structural landscape maintaining the appearance of separation.

The historical growth of Roberttown

Please see maps 1 to 4 at Appendix 1 which illustrate the urban expansion outlined below, and maps 5 and 6 which illustrate when the Green Belt was designated in this area through previous development plans.

Roberttown village originally centred on the triangle of land formed by what is now Church Road, Commonsie and Roberttown Lane and along Roberttown Lane to the Child Lane junction (Map 1). By the late 1800s (Map 2) development had occurred at Balmfield and on the north side of Lumb Lane, presumably to serve the adjacent Southfield Colliery (now gone), and also spread north along Huddersfield Road. Balmfield is considered to be part of Roberttown, while the properties north of Lumb Lane are in Norristhorpe. Properties along Huddersfield Road are mixed between Liversedge and Roberttown. The early 20th century expansion of the urban area either side of Huddersfield Road, at Fountain Street, Lincoln Avenue and either side of Lumb Lane resulted in a significant degree of merger both of the expanding Roberttown and the emerging Norristhorpe and Liversedge (Map 3). The development of the Sunnyside estate in the 1950s significantly reinforced this merger. In addition, the later development at Richmond Park Avenue to the north of site H442 and all the properties between Richmond Park Avenue and the Roberttown Lane/Huddersfield Road junction are considered to form part of Roberttown (Map 4). In effect Roberttown is now part of a much

larger and continuous urban area that also includes Norristhorpe and Liversedge and extending into Heckmondwike and beyond.

Roberttown originated as a separate village and retains a village characteristic at its historic core, which is still the local shopping and service centre and where there is a public house, church and school. The development at Norristhorpe and along Huddersfield Road is a product of the urban expansion of the early part of the 20th century. However, these different origins do not alter the fact that Roberttown as a settlement has already expanded significantly and merged with the large urban area to the east, and as this expansion largely took place at the same time the areas now display very similar urban characteristics. Site H442 does not form part of any open setting to Roberttown's old village core as it is neither contiguous with it nor visible from it. It is also not considered that this area of land functions as a structural gap between settlements. The urban edge is visible in almost all views across the site and this has been significantly reinforced by the recent development at the Lumb Lane/Huddersfield Road junction, nos. 4/4a/6/6a Lumb Lane.

Green Belt Review edge RT6 test 2a

The Green Belt was first designated in this area through the Town Map approved in the 1960s. The site of H442 was not initially included in the Green Belt (Map 5). The Green Belt was extended to include the area of H442 within it when the Heavy Woollen District Local Plan was approved in the 1980s (Map 6) and it was retained within the Green Belt in the Unitary Development Plan which was approved in 1999.

The purpose of test 2a of the Green Belt Review methodology was to assess the Green Belt for its role in preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another. Those areas of Green Belt deemed to constitute strategic gaps where any development would fundamentally undermine that role were shown in the Green Belt Review as 'red' edges, as exists between Roberttown and Mirfield to the south (edges RT5, HK3, MF15 and MF16). There is no doubt that there appears to be a 'pinch-point', or narrow width of urban area at the Lumb Lane/Huddersfield Road junction and it is at this point that the existing Green Belt (edge RT6) extends almost to Huddersfield Road. This does prevent further merger between Sunnyside Avenue/Lumb Lane (Roberttown) and the frontage properties west of Huddersfield Road that are in Liversedge and this is acknowledged in Appendix 2a of the Green Belt Review for edge RT6 as "restricted gap to Liversedge". However, it also states that the settlements have already joined, and therefore the Green Belt beyond edge RT6 progressed through the review methodology to be assessed against further Green Belt purposes. The fact that the edge progresses through the review methodology is evidence that the Council considers that the role of the land in preventing the actual merger of towns is not critical.

It is maintained that edge ref RT6 correctly acknowledges, through its amber assessment at Test 2a, that its purpose in preventing actual merger is not strong. The conclusion for RT6 reads "Green Belt in this location prevents the further coalescence of Roberttown and Liversedge but the settlements are already joined. Field boundaries and land use pattern provides opportunities for infilling."

2. The site specific assessment against further Green Belt purposes (Matter 37.1).

The following clarifies the position in relation to the site specific Green Belt assessment.

Test 2a: prevents the coalescence of towns

The amber assessment at Test 2a in the site-specific Green Belt assessment for H442 and the words "Reinforcement of coalescence with Liversedge" is consistent with the edge review and this would

be expected as H442 is relevant to the whole of edge RT6. This assessment acknowledges that the settlements are already joined.

It is maintained that H442 is correctly assessed as not compromising a strategic gap preventing the merger of settlements.

Test 2b: checks sprawl

This is a large site but as a whole is well contained by existing development to the north and south and by the ribbon development along Roberttown Lane. While the amber assessment is evidence that the site has a role in preventing sprawl, its release would not fundamentally undermine the purpose of the Green Belt.

It is maintained that H442 is correctly assessed as amber for test 2b.

Test 2c: safeguards the countryside from encroachment

This is an area of undeveloped grazing land in close proximity to the urban edge. It is crossed by 2 public rights of way and as such it allows for easy access to land that can be perceived as countryside. The area is also visually linked to the wider countryside in views out of it to the west. The Council maintains that this land does perform a role in preventing the encroachment of built form into the countryside and that this is the Green Belt purpose that would be most harmed by its release.

The Council maintains that site H442 is correctly assessed as red for test 2c.

Green Belt purposes are by their very nature subjective. Strata Homes maintains that the degree of overlooking of this site from the houses at the edge of the urban area limits its open character, as there are no close views across the site that are free from development on the horizon. This gives the site more of an urban fringe characteristic than an open countryside characteristic. If this were to be the case the site would be better assessed as amber at test 2c as its countryside character has been compromised by the degree of overlooking from, and close proximity to the urban edge.

If the site were to be assessed as amber at test 2c rather than red the overall assessment would be unaffected.

Test 2d: preserves the setting and character of historic towns

Roberttown is not a historic town therefore the Green Belt does not perform the role of preserving its setting.

Other Green Belt considerations in the site specific methodology

Site H442 presents a very strong Green Belt boundary along Roberttown Lane and therefore the potential position of a new Green Belt boundary is acceptable.

The site would represent infill within the existing settlement pattern and would not project development out into open countryside. It is therefore well related to the existing development form. Although additional land would need to be released from the Green Belt to create new a Green Belt boundary along Roberttown Lane, the amount of this consequential change is not excessive in relation to the size of H442, largely consists of existing developed land and is very well related to the site.

Conclusion

Site H442 is an area of open land within a large and continuous urban area comprising Roberttown, Norristhorpe and Liversedge. There are no clear boundaries or characteristics that mark the transition from one settlement to another because of their parallel expansion in the late 19th and early 20th century. The site does not therefore function as a strategic gap preventing the coalescence of settlements.

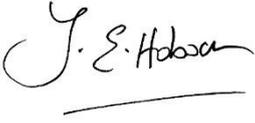
The Council maintains that the site functions as countryside, while Strata Homes maintains that the site functions as an area of urban fringe. The degree of harm to Green Belt purposes from its release is a subjective judgement between its role in allowing easy access to open land at the urban edge and the degree to which its countryside characteristic has been compromised both by overlooking and by the degree of containment by urban form. In either case however, the overall assessment would be unaffected.

On balance, the degree of harm to green belt purposes by the release of site H442 is outweighed by the need to provide additional land for housing development.

Signatures

This Joint Position Statement has been prepared, agreed and signed.

WYG (on behalf of Strata Homes)

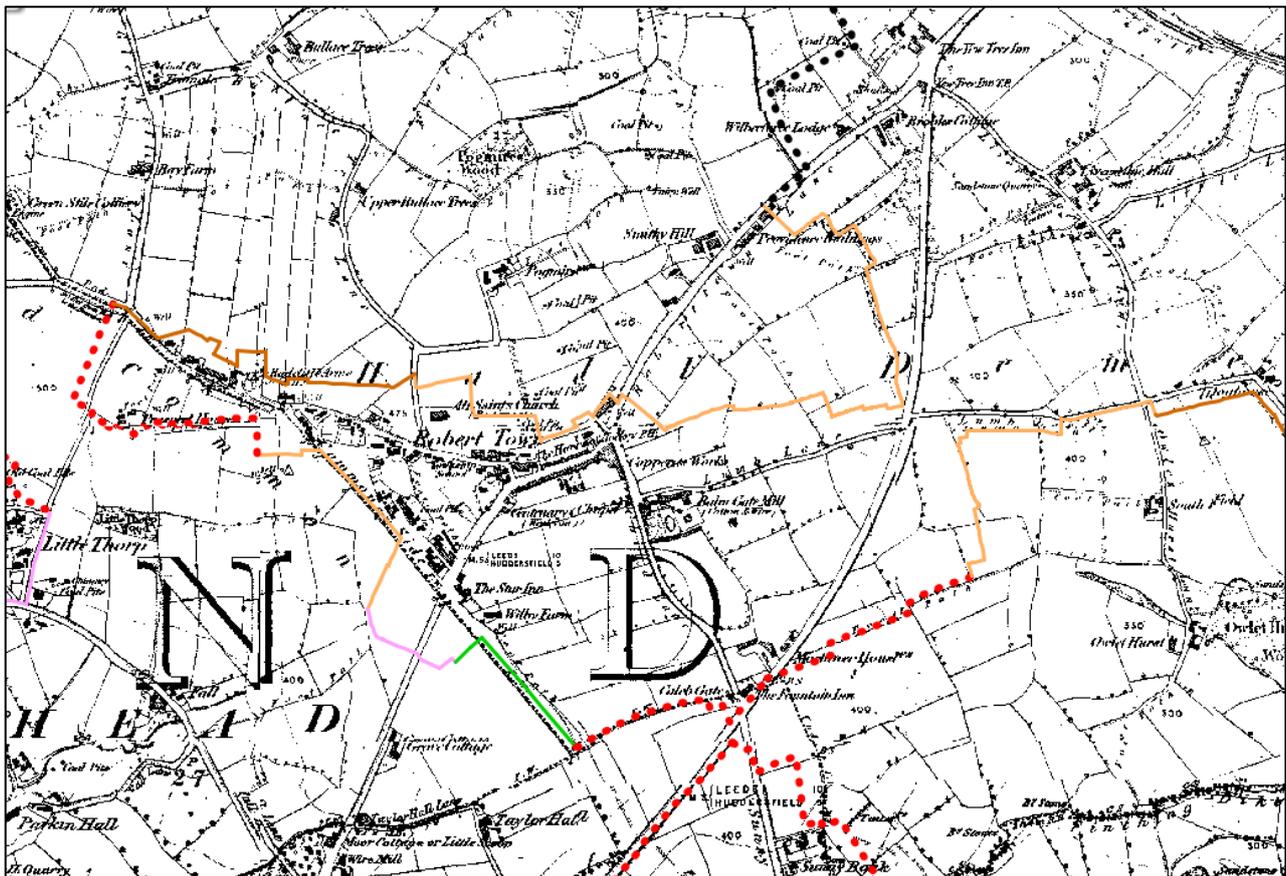
Name	Signature	Date
James Hobson		11 th May 2018

Appendix 1

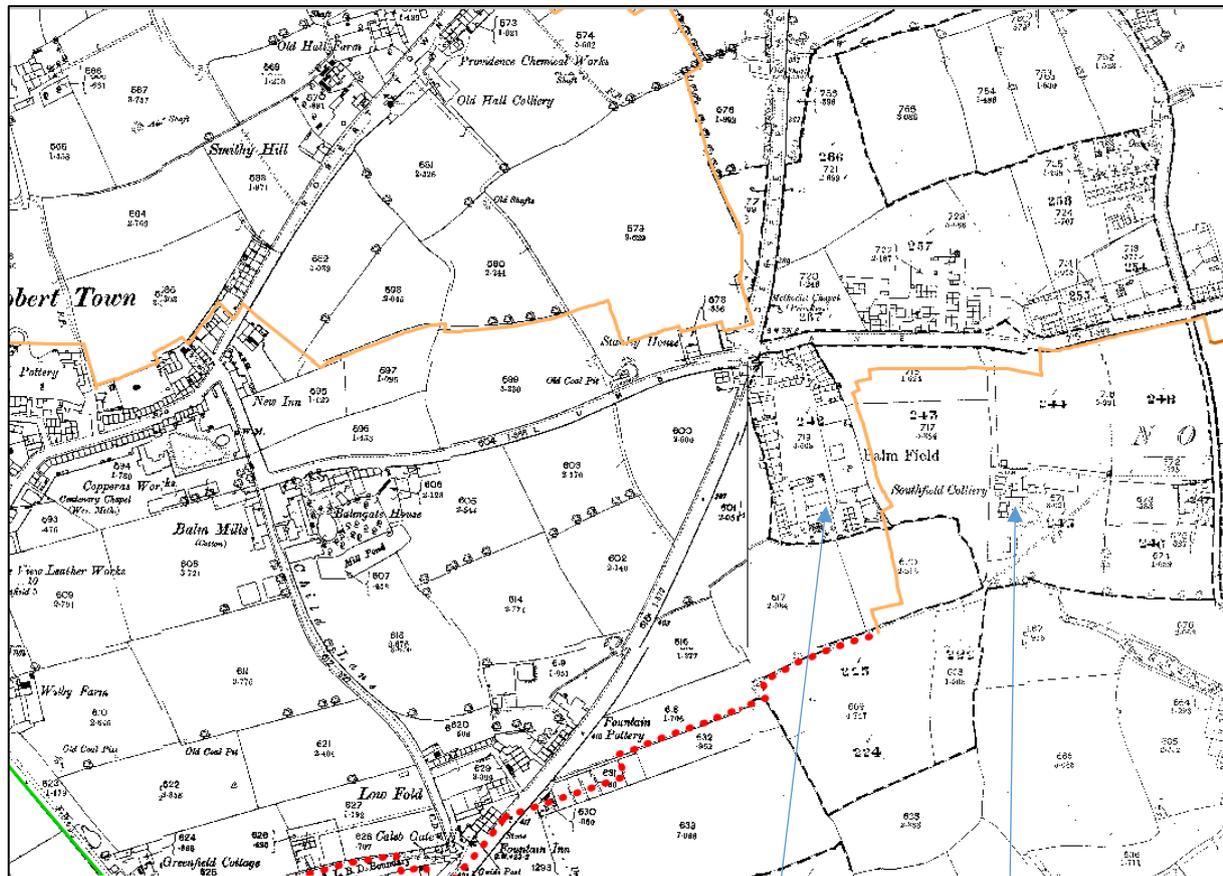
Historic maps and the emergence of the Green Belt

The existing Green Belt Review edge has been left on the maps to show the extent of the present day settlement.

Map 1. 1854 shows the historic village of Roberttown isolated in the landscape



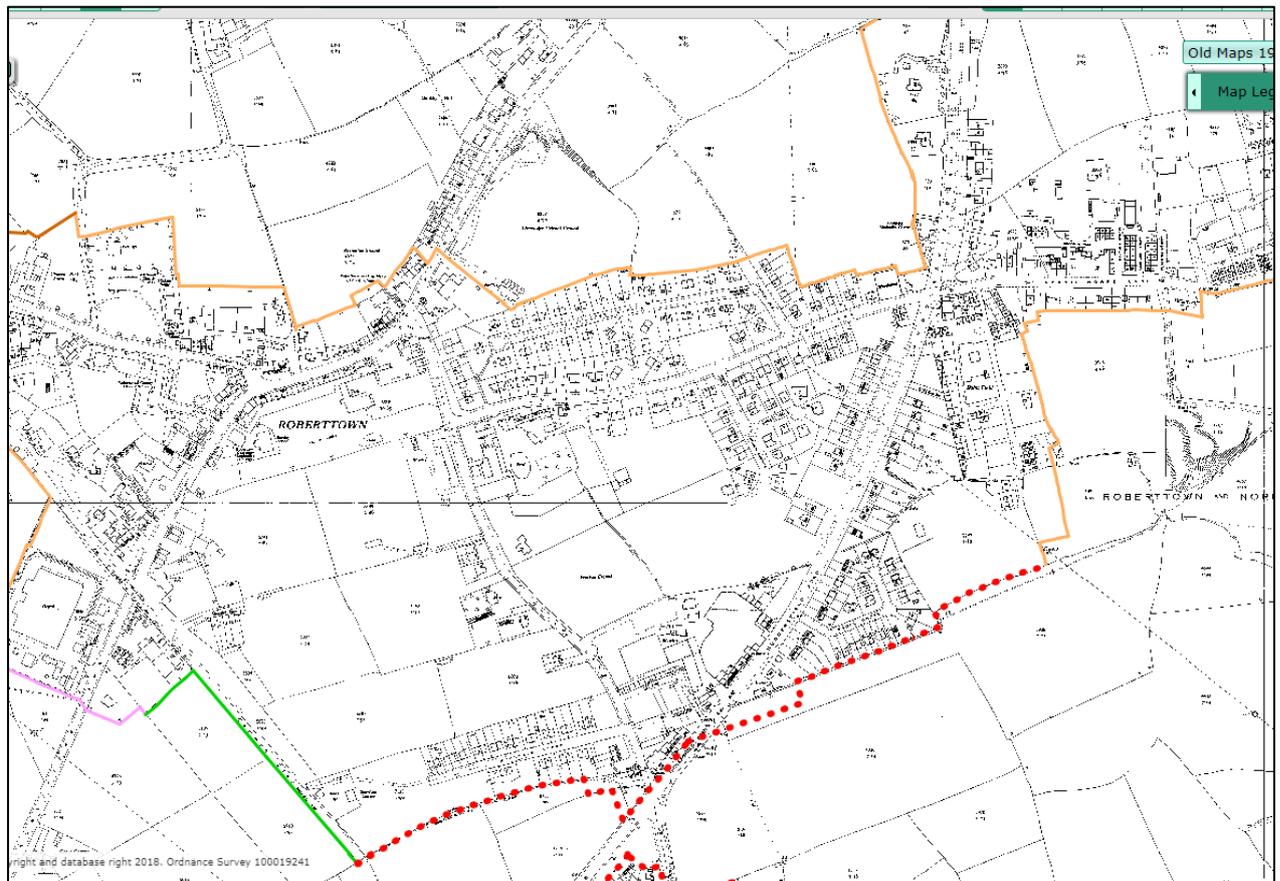
Map 2. 1893 development had occurred at the road junction with housing at Balmfield and on the north side of Lumb Lane, presumably to serve the adjacent Southfield Colliery



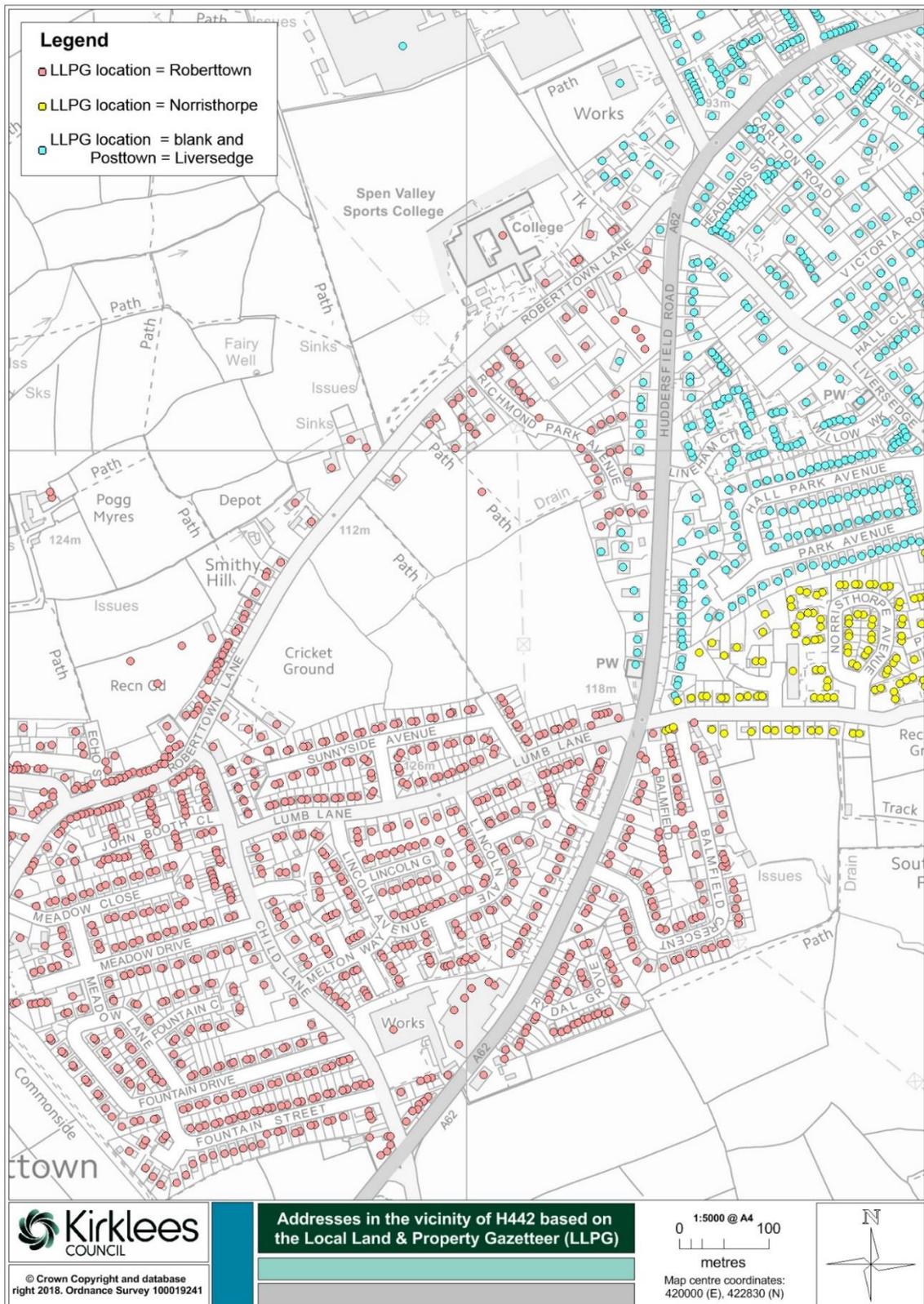
Balmfield

Colliery

Map 3. 1955 the period between 1933 and 1955 saw significant growth along and at the junctions of the main roads. By 1955 Sunnyside Avenue had appeared and the settlements are merged.



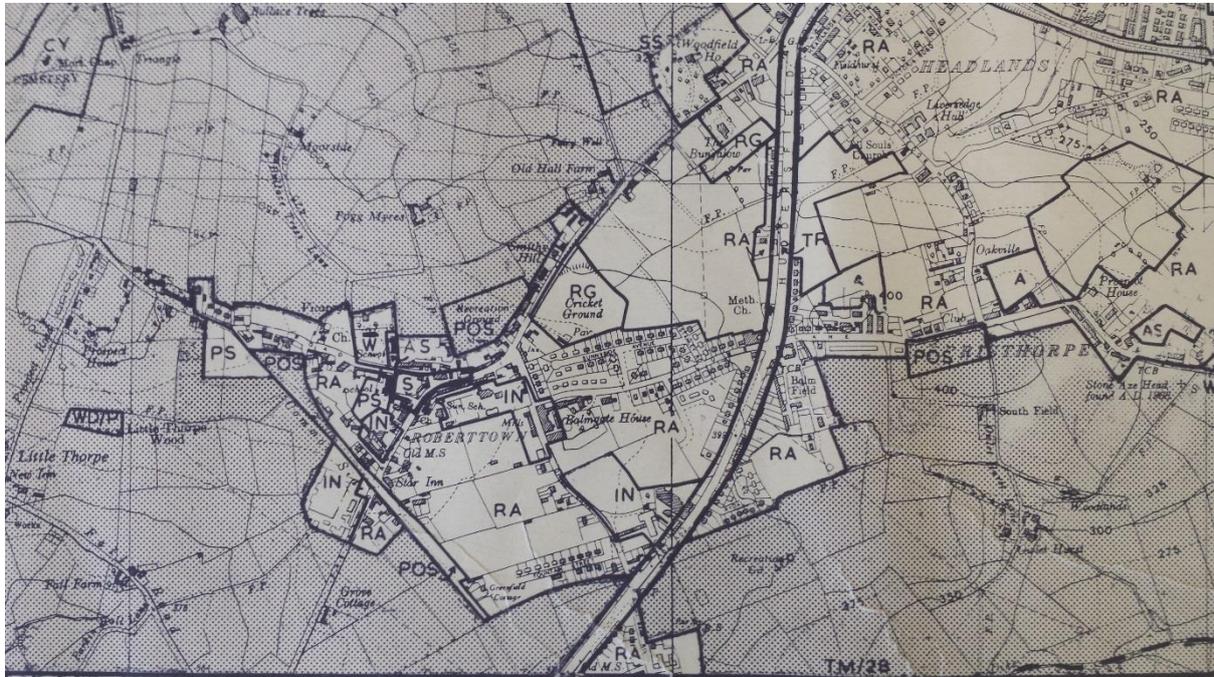
Map 4. Current property addresses



The Town map and the emergence of the Green Belt.

In 1966 the County of the West Riding of Yorkshire Development Plan was approved for Spensborough and Heckmondwike, including Roberttown, and delineated the Green Belt in this area for the first time. The site of H442 was not included within the Green Belt.

Map 5. 1966 Town Map



All of the remaining undeveloped areas south of Lumb Lane were allocated for residential development and most were subsequently built.

Map 6. 1985 Heavy Woollen District Local Plan

The Town Map was superseded by the Heavy Woollen District (HWD) Local Plan which was approved in 1985 and which extended the Green Belt over the site of H442. Unfortunately there is no site specific documentation that sets out the reasoning for the change to the extent of the Green Belt, although referring to the Green Belt the HWD Local Plan states at paragraph 2.1.6 of the Written Statement that “It (the Green Belt) should also be defined to control urban sprawl, and to maintain the green wedges between and extending into the urban areas.” At paragraph 8.1.6 it states that Green Belt policies aim to extend the amount of open land protected by the Green Belt designation. This resulted from Structure Plan Policy N10 which set out criteria which should be taken into account when defining Green Belt boundaries, including “the need to preserve areas of open land extending into the urban area from the countryside which have an existing or potential recreation or amenity value.” This is separate from the criterion that sets out the need to prevent the coalescence of existing settlements. From this it can be inferred, although it is not explicitly stated, that the area of H442 was included in the Green Belt in order to preserve an area of open land extending into the urban area, rather than any role it was assumed to have in preventing the merger of settlements.



1999 Unitary Development Plan

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) did not need to remove land from the Green Belt to provide additional development land and so did not propose to change the position of the Green Belt boundary in this location. UDP Inquiry site HL4 largely equates to site H442 and the conclusion of the UDP Inquiry Inspector in relation to the Green Belt role and function is set out as follows¹.

17.52.3 That part of the site within the Green Belt is rough grazing land or meadow, sloping down from south to north. It is bounded by housing or proposed housing areas on three sides, but retains a connection with other open land as there is a cricket ground at a higher level to the south-west and extensive open countryside to the west. Existing development on the opposite side of Roberttown Lane is of no more than frontage depth, mostly of well spaced houses. It does not visually separate the site from the wider countryside, the connection between the two being apparent in longer distance views towards the site from the north-east and north-west and in views out from public footpaths across the site. The openness of this part of the site is also appreciated from Roberttown Lane and contributes to the more rural atmosphere experienced along this part of the road than further to the north-east and south-west. As a continuation of the wider countryside, the site remains capable of serving a Green Belt purpose and its development would be an encroachment.

The UDP Inquiry Inspector concluded that the Green Belt role of H442 was as countryside, where development would be encroachment.

¹ UDP Inquiry Inspector's report Volume 2 p332