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Landscape & Visual Assessment:

Housing Development Accrington Road, Whalley

1. Introduction.

1.1

PDP Associates were commissioned to carry out a landscape assessment of a housing development proposed by Briery Homes, on a site on Accrington Road Whalley.

The site boundary and proposals are shown the planning statement accompanying the application.

2. Methodology

2.1

This landscape assessment has been carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for Visual and Landscape Assessments produced by the Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment.

Site assessments were carried out on the 20th December 2011 in reasonably bright weather conditions.

The following accessible routes were considered, to develop a zone of visual influence for the development.

- Public rights of way, and permissive footpaths which run through, close to or adjacent the proposed development site;
- Residential roads and drives bounding the proposed site where they were publically accessible;
- Adjacent areas that might overlook the proposed site, including residential areas, public open space, the village centre and conservation area, roads and footpaths;
- Footpaths not adjacent the proposed development site but with important views overlooking the site.

Photographs were made at key view points.

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2.2

A desk study was undertaken to assess the designations that are relevant to the study area, using Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (www.magic.com), and the Ribble Valley Borough Council Local Plan.

The following designations were found to be relevant to the assessment:

- Whalley Conservation Area
- Listed structures
- Sites of ancient woodland - Spring Wood, Sir Johns Wood and Planes Wood

3. Landscape Character and Sensitivity

3.1

The site is set within landscape character areas defined at both the national and local level. Landscape character at the national level is defined by the former Countryside Agency's publication 'The Character of England Map' (Ref. 4-10). The map divides England into 159 Joint Character Areas (JCAs). The JCAs are used to help in the production of more specific landscape character assessments at the regional / district and local level. Details of the character areas are contained within the 'The Character of England Map'. Ribble Valley Borough Council does not have a local landscape character assessment. A Landscape Character Assessment of the county was published by Lancashire County Council in December 2000. This document, "A landscape strategy for Lancashire", builds on the national level information to provide assessment at local level within the County.

3.2

The site falls within Character Area 35; 'Lancashire Valleys', as defined in the 'The Character of England Map'. The key characteristics relating to the study area are as follows:

- The broad valley of the river Calder and its tributaries running northeast/southwest between
- Natural backdrops of Pendle Hill and the Southern Pennines.
- Intensely urban character derived from main towns of Blackburn, Accrington and Burnley which have developed rapidly since the industrial revolution.
- A strong industrial heritage, associated with cotton weaving and textile industries. Redundant or underutilized mill buildings, mill lodges and ponds.
- Profusion of communication routes along the valley bottom including the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, the Preston-Colne rail link and M65 motorway.
- Victorian stone buildings well-integrated into the landscape
- Numerous large country houses with associated parklands particularly on northern valley sides away from major urban areas.
- Remnants of agricultural land fragmented by industry and scattered development.

- Field boundaries, regular to the west and irregular to the east are degraded around the urban areas, formed of hedges with few hedgerow trees and, at higher elevations, of stone walls and post and wire fences.
- Small woodlands are limited to cloughs on valley sides

3.3

At the County level the site falls within the area described as Character Area 5, "Undulating lowland farming". The landscape character of this area is described as;

"Generally below 150m, the Undulating Lowland Farmland lies between the major valleys and the moorland fringes. The underlying geology is largely masked by heavy boulder clays and hedgerows predominate over stone walls. This lowland landscape is traversed by deeply incised, wooded cloughs and gorges. There are also many mixed farm woodlands, copses and hedgerow trees, creating an impression of a well wooded landscape from ground level and a patchwork of wood and pasture from raised viewpoints on the fells. Some of the most picturesque stone villages of the county occur within this well settled landscape type. The towns of Longridge and Clitheroe also occur within this type, but are not typical of the settlement pattern. The area also has many country houses whose boundary walls and designed landscapes add to the species diversity and visual appeal. There is a high density of farms and scattered cottages outside the clustered settlements, linked by a network of slight roads"

At a local level the site falls within the area described as area 5e, Lower Ribblesdale, Clitheroe to Guisburn. The description of this area is as follows;

"This area forms the southern valley side of the Ribble, between Copster Green and Gisburn, on the lowland fringes of Pendle Hill. It is a particularly well settled area and provides a corridor for communication routes along the Ribble Valley. The A59(T) runs the length of the area, linking the settlements of Copster Green, Whalley, Clitheroe, Chatburn and Gisburn. The railway links the valley to Blackburn and Yorkshire. This communication structure has encouraged built development and industry; the large cement works at Clitheroe is a prominent visual landmark for miles around. This character area is underlain by limestone and has some good examples of limestone reef knolls, particularly around Clitheroe; Clitheroe Castle is located on top of one of these knolls."

3.4

The study area falls within a single local Character Area. The character area contains a number of different landscape elements, including settlement, industrial features, farmland as well as high quality natural features such as the river valley and prominent hills. A proportion of the land is designated as green belt. The landscape character in the study area is generally small scale associated with the settlement of Whalley, the meander of the River Calder, and higher land of Whalley Banks and Clerk Hill

3.5

The visual sensitivity of the area is judged as medium due to the varied nature of landscape elements. Although a number of visually sensitive elements exist in the study area, these are associated with settlement edge and transport links. The meander of the river Calder, the bridge and Whalley Banks are particularly sensitive receptors. A number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments exist within the settlement of Whalley which are also considered sensitive receptors.

3.6

Overall landscape sensitivity to change has been judged using a three point scale of high medium or low. Judgements are then made of each of the constituent aspects of sensitivity and these assessments are arranged in Table 1.

Table 1 Landscape Sensitivity to Change

Landscape area	Landscape character sensitivity	Sensitivity of individual elements	Sensitivity of aesthetic aspects	Visual sensitivity	Landscape sensitivity	Value of landscape	Landscape sensitivity to change
Area 5, Undulating lowland farmland	medium	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	MEDIUM

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4. Overview of the proposed development

4.1

The site slopes at elevations of between 59m and 47m. The general grade of the site is from north east to south west with a steep grade away from road level in the north east corner.

The study area can be divided north west - south east. The higher ground to the south east has been divided by the valley of the river Calder. The higher ground reaches elevations of over 185m on Whalley banks and 180m on Clerk Hill. The settlement of Whalley sits at the base of the slope at an elevation of around 50m. Flatter land grades northwest wards to the River Ribble.

5. Proposed development site and context

5.1

The proposed development site lies to the south east of the settlement of Whalley at grid reference SD 736 360. The northern boundary with the B6246 has some hedge and tree planting. The site is bounded to west by the rear elevations of properties of Woodfield View. The southern boundary of the site adjoins the bank of the River Calder. To the east of the site are disused poultry houses. The site is agricultural grassland, with a remnant private track running east - west across the southern field.

5.2

The significant landscape features of the site are the hedgerow with trees on both the eastern boundary and the boundary between the two fields that comprise the site, and the existing bankside vegetation along the River Calder. The key landscape feature associated with the site is the River Calder. Although not on the site, its northern bank forms the southern boundary of the site and the river itself has a significant influence on the site.

5.3

Residential development is present on the western boundary of the site. The northern boundary of the site is the B6246, with further residential development on the northern side of the road. To the east of the site are former poultry houses, with Sir Johns Wood beyond. A proportion of the Settlement of Whalley is a conservation area, containing a number of scheduled ancient monuments, the most significant of which are the remains of the abbey, the settlement gateway and the bridge over the River Calder. Spring Wood, Sir Johns Wood and Planes Wood are sites of ancient woodland.

The southern boundary of the site is composed of the River Calder with the higher ground of Whalley Banks beyond. The adjacent agricultural land to the south is significant due to its topography, forming a ridge around which a meander of the River Calder bends.

6. Landscape Impacts of the proposals

6.1

Primary mitigation measures are those that intrinsically comprise part of the development design through an iterative process.

The proposal has been sited in a gap in development linking to the settlement of Whalley to the west and the former poultry houses. The northern boundary of the site is defined by the B6246, the main road into Whalley from the east, with housing to the north of this. The site is at a lower level than the road, and some boundary screening exists. The site is adjacent to the built form of Whalley to the west and St John's Wood to the east. Views from roads are limited to views both east and west on the B6246 between Whalley and St John's Wood, and views north from Moor Lane on Whalley Banks. The proposal thus sits within open space that is enclosed by development on the all but the southern boundary.

The overall effect on the landscape character is mitigated by the capacity of the study area to absorb a development of this scale due to existing adjacent development.

In addition to the primary mitigation measures of siting, significant secondary mitigation are proposed. The scheme includes for a 16m band of buffer planting to add to the existing riverside vegetation, as well as a comprehensive landscape scheme to soften the development as a whole. This will develop over time and soften the overall impact of the development on the landscape.

6.2

As previously stated the Landscape sensitivity to change has been judged as **medium**. The significance of impact of the proposal on the Landscape Character is considered to be **slight/medium** due to the primary mitigation measures associated with the site.

7. Visual impact of the proposals

7.1

A detailed visual assessment of the site has been carried out to assess the approximate visibility of the site from both the immediate area and wider landscape context. The extents of the visual assessment have been determined through a desktop study of the surrounding landform and field assessments to verify the approximate visual envelope and to identify key receptors. Determining the extent, to which the site is currently visible, will assist in determining the design of the building layout, proposed materials and landscape works to limit the impact of the Proposed Development on the surrounding landscape.

7.2

A series of photographs have been taken from within the landscape surrounding the site and these are included in the technical appendix. The photographs have been taken primarily from where there is public access and illustrate the current visibility of the site from these public areas. The locations of the viewpoints are shown on each figure and are listed below:

Visual Receptor		GPS Grid reference	Distance from centre of site
1	Public footpath at south west corner of the site	Lat 53.81910 Long -2.40431	150m
2	Riverside public footpath to the south of the site	Lat 53.81901 Long -2.40297	71m
3	Junction of public footpath and B6246 at north east corner of site	Lat 53.82026 Long -2.40082	153m
4	Public footpath to the north of the B6246	Lat 53.82135 Long -2.39846	332m
5	Southern end of Bridge	Lat 53.81841 Long -2.40725	327m
6	Bridleway Whalley Banks	Lat 53.81536 Long -2.40466	497m
7	Public Footpath, Whalley Banks	Lat 53.81647 Long -2.40519	374m
8	Moor Lane, view over weir	Lat 53.81833 Lon -2.40729	325m
9	Bridge viewpoint	Lat 53.81870 Long -2.40713	308m
10	Clerk Hill	Lat 53.82317 Long -2.38552	162m

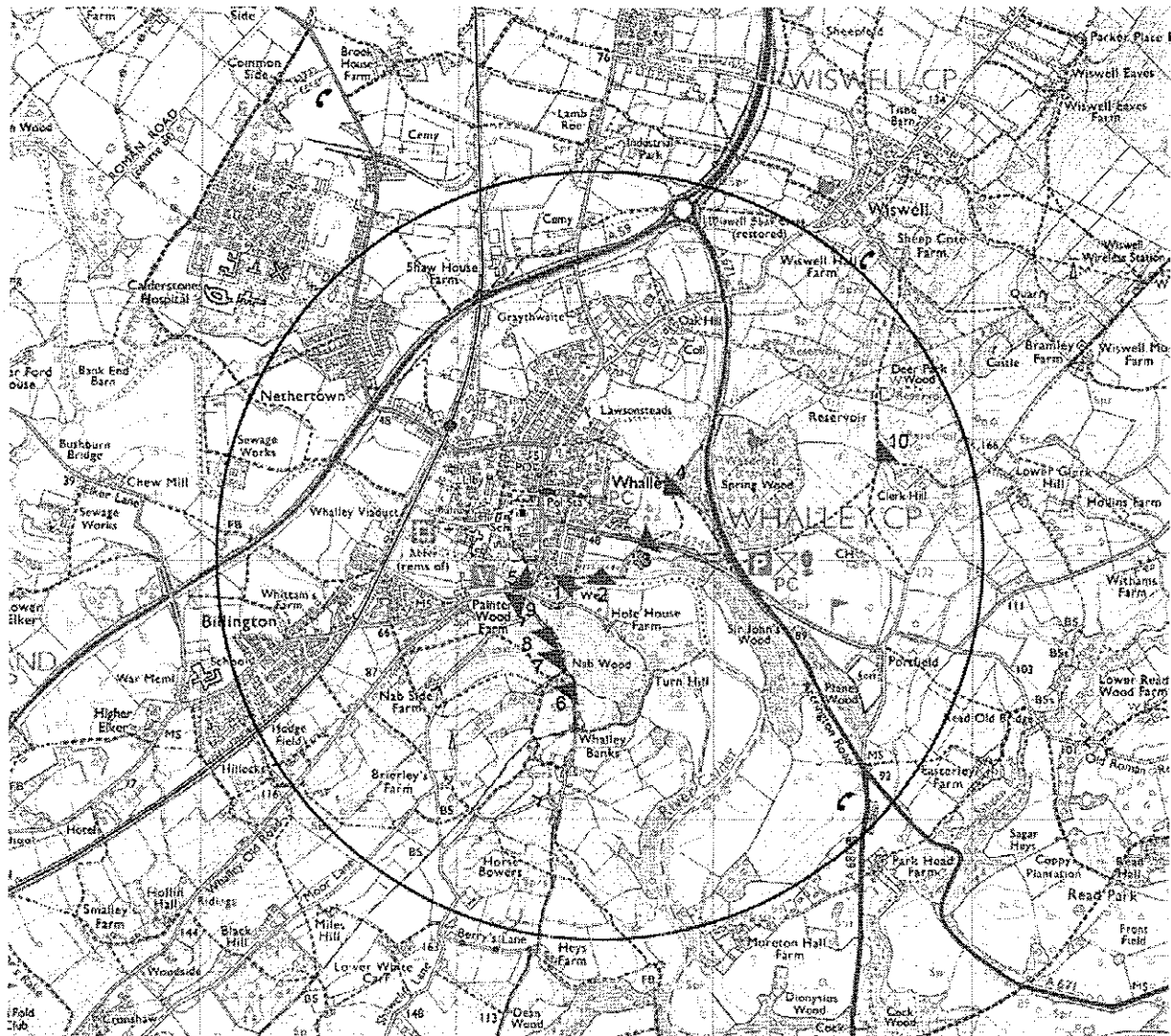


Figure 1 – Assess viewpoints

7.3

Views from the North

The views from the north into the site are from the B6246 and the land and properties to the north of the road. Views will predominantly be from pedestrians and traffic using the B6246 travelling both east and west. Views are restricted between the Settlement of Whalley to the west and the Sir Johns Wood to the east. Views will be moving from traffic and both moving and static from pedestrians. The road and footpath are generally at a higher level than the site, particularly at the eastern end.

Views from the East

Although the the topography implies extensive views from the east, the site is effectively visually contained by Sir Johns Wood on the eastern meander of the River Calder. The principal views into the site are from the public footpath that runs along the eastern boundary between the site and the former poultry buildings.

Views from the South

The ZVI is most extensive to the South of the site due to the broad river valley and elevated topography of Whalley Banks. Close views will be obtained from the public footpath on the southern boundary of the site, and the system of public footpaths and bridleways on Whalley Banks.

The River Calder is not navigable at this point, and views are therefore restricted to the surrounding land.

Views from the west

Views of the site from the west are restricted to the rear of properties on the edge of the settlement of Whalley. The built form of Whalley effectively screens the site from the west. The sensitive Scheduled Ancient Monument sites of The Gateway and the Abbey are effectively screened. Views from the bridge are almost entirely screened by adjacent housing. The site is partially visible travelling south on Moor Lane, although this is intermittent due to screening by trees.

7.4

Key visual receptors

The baseline study, and in particular the visual assessment, has helped identified key landscape and visual receptors that any development on the site is likely to affect. The potential impacts of the development on the receptors will be assessed at the construction and operational phases.

In order to fully establish the landscape and visual receptors, one needs to be mindful of the key elements of the Proposed Development, as follows:

- 38 single storey bungalows
- 2 storey retirement apartments
- New road layout with associated lighting
- Associated landscaping
- Screening planting in 16m belt between development and the River Calder

Key visual receptors are as follows

- The local residents of the western edge of Whalley
- The local residents to the north of B6246
- Vehicle users of the B6246
- Pedestrian users of the B6246
- Pedestrian users of the footpath to site boundaries
- Pedestrian users of the bridge
- Pedestrian users of footpaths to the north of B6246
- Pedestrian users of the footpaths on Whalley Banks
- Horseback users of bridleways of Whalley banks

Other visual receptors

- Residents of Hole House Farm
- Vehicle users of Moor Lane
- Users of the former poultry farm

7.5

Operational phase – Year 1

The potential impacts of the year 1 operational phase are as follows

- The visual impact of the proposed housing development, on the surrounding visual receptors;
- The visual impact of housing development on the setting of the site
- The impact of the housing development on the setting of the Bridge
- The impact of housing development on the character of the River Calder
- The change in landscape character on the site

The year 1 operational phase of the housing development will see the completion of the construction and landscape works. The benefit of any mitigation from the landscape works at this stage will be at its minimum, although this will increase with time as the planting becomes established. The housing development will include street lighting which will have an impact on the site and adjacent uses in evenings, night and early mornings.

There will be some impact on the River Calder and weir due to proximity to the housing development. The landscape setting of the site will be effected due to the loss of green open space. The impact on the settlement of Whalley will be the loss of open space adjacent to the River Calder, and increase in settlement size.

The most significant effect on visual receptors will be the footpaths of Whalley Banks (viewpoints 5, 6, 7 & 8) and users of public footpaths adjacent to the site (viewpoints 1, 2 & 3) due to the change in character of the site.

The effect on viewpoints 6 will be major adverse. This is due to elevation of the viewpoint which means that views are effectively over the whole site. The effect on viewpoints 7 and 8 are less significant (moderate adverse impact). Although the change to the landscape will register with the viewer, this will be from a lower elevation, with associated foreshortening of views.

The effect on viewpoint 4 will be slight/moderate adverse impact due to the change in character of the site, but this is mitigated by distance and existing screening. The effects on viewpoint 5 will be a slight/moderate adverse impact due to a lower elevation and screening of the site by adjacent housing and existing roadside planting.

The effect on viewpoints 1 will be moderate adverse due to the change in character on the site and proximity to viewpoints. The effect on viewpoint 2 will be major and adverse due to the proximity of the site and sensitivity of the viewpoint, adjacent to the River Calder. Boundary screen planting will not be established and effective in year 1. The effect on viewpoint 4 will be moderate adverse impact due to the change in character of the site, but this is mitigated by distance and existing screening. The impact on viewpoint 9 will be slight/moderate and adverse due to partial screening by existing development.

The site is not visible from viewpoint 10.

7.6

Operational phase – Year 15 (establishment of screen planting)

The potential impacts of the year 15 operational phase are as follows

- The visual impact of the proposed housing development, on the surrounding visual receptors
- The visual impact of housing development on the setting of the site
- The impact of the housing development on the setting of the Bridge
- The impact of housing development on the character of the River Calder
- The change in landscape character on the site.

Year 15 of the operational phase will see the establishment of the 16m planting zone along the river frontage to form an effective screen. The associated landscape planting within the site will have also matured, along with a general weathering of construction materials.

Generally impacts on viewpoints in year 15 of the operational phase will be much reduced due to primary and secondary mitigation. The effect on the River Calder will be softened and screened by the river side planting zone. The effect on the landscape setting of the site will be mitigated through the maturation the riverside and on site planting. The impacts on the landscape character of the study area will be reduced due to primary mitigation measures, previously discussed and maturation of the riverside screen planting and landscape proposals of the development scheme itself.

The effect on viewpoints associated with the Whalley Bank footpaths (viewpoints 6, 7 and 8) is significant but reduced due to the establishment of screen planting. The effect on viewpoints 6 and 7 will be moderate adverse impact and the effect on viewpoint 8 is slight/moderate and adverse due to lower elevation.

The effect on viewpoint 1 will be slight/moderate adverse, due to mitigation from planting within the scheme and changes to the retained boundary planting along the eastern edge of the site. The effect on viewpoints 2 & 3 will be similar but moderate adverse impact, due to the increased sensitivity of the viewpoint, although mitigated through screen planting. The effect on viewpoints 4 & 5 are mitigated through distance from site and the effect of screen planting. The effect at these viewpoints will be slight/moderate adverse.

The effect at viewpoint 9 will be slight/moderate adverse due to a combination of existing screening and established screen planting.

The site is not visible from viewpoint 10.

8. Summary of impacts

The landscape and visual impacts of the development will vary with viewpoint and time. The development will have **slight/moderate** impacts on the surrounding landscape. Visual impacts at year 15 can be summarized as **slight/moderate**. Impacts will be higher in year 1 of operation of the development will be higher as planting mitigation will have not yet established.

The most significant visual impacts are to the footpath and bridleway system of Whalley banks, due to the elevation viewing position that allows for the effect of the development to be set in its wider landscape context. Impacts are significant on the footpaths from the southern and eastern boundary of the site, due to proximity of the development.

The effect on the bridge (Scheduled Ancient Monument) as a visual receptor is negligible with slight adverse impact from its viewpoint.

9. Mitigation proposals

Having assessed and identified the potential impacts of the Proposed Development on the proposed development site upon the current landscape and visual receptors, mitigation measures have been considered to reduce these impacts. This section reviews the proposals in detail as to effectiveness and impact.

The **primary mitigation** proposals have been developed as part of the design process and have been previously described. In summary these are:

- **Site selection** – enclosure of site by existing development on all but southern boundary.
- Provision of **16m screen buffer planting** to southern boundary of the development.
- Provision of comprehensive **internal landscape scheme** to the development

In additional consideration should be given to selection of visually appropriate materials, particularly roofing materials, to minimize the visual impact. Consideration should also be given to the detail and ageing of construction materials and detail design of an appropriate planting scheme to ensure that the development is integrated as far as possible with the surrounding landscape.



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Accrington Road, Whalley

Technical Appendix



Viewpoint 1 – Footpath at south west corner of the site



Viewpoint 2 – Riverside public footpath to the south of the site



Viewpoint 3 – Junction of public footpath and B6246 at north east corner of the site



Viewpoint 4 – Public footpath to the north of the B6246

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Viewpoint 5 – Southern end of bridge with view of the weir

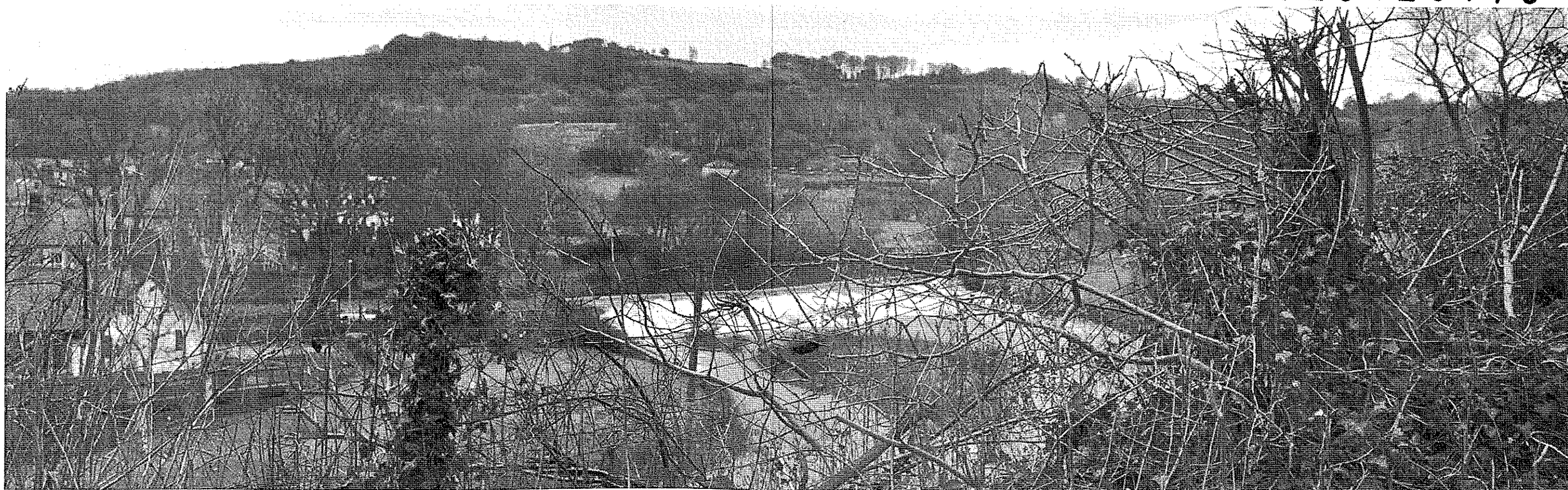


Viewpoint 6 – Bridleway, Whalley Banks



Viewpoint 7 – Public footpath, Whalley Banks

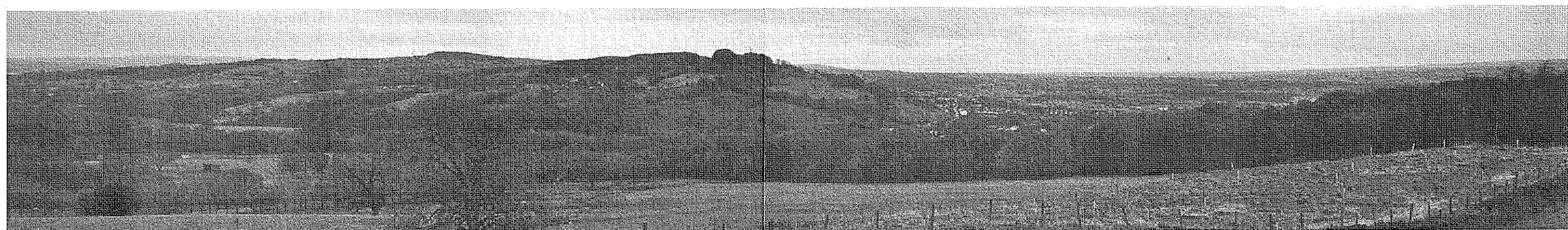
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Viewpoint 8- Moor Lane



Viewpoint 9 – Bridge viewpoint



Viewpoint 10 – View from Clerk Hill public footpath