

Comprehensive Treatment Area 5:
Onchan Schools



Feasibility Study and Treatment Plan
Cabinet Office
11th August 2021

Site Context

CTA 5 is situated on the edge of the urban settlement of Onchan. Countryside lies to the north but there is a rural quality to the north-western part of the CTA afforded by the playing fields to Ashley Hill School and the undeveloped part of site OE001g identified in the East Plan. The CTA includes the following key land uses accessed in the main via School Road:-

- Ashley Hill Primary School - north western area of the CTA;
- Onchan Primary School - south eastern area of the CTA;
- The Aviation Works (high-tech engineering company) - central location within the CTA;
- Predominantly residential (including an area of public housing)

School Road serves as the principle link between the Main Road in Onchan and all of the above uses in the CTA, bar Ashley Hill School which in reality has two distinct vehicular access points via School Road and Maple Avenue. A number of pedestrian routes cut through surrounding residential estates. The junction at the bottom of School Road touches the north eastern extent of the linear shaped 'mixed use area' in Onchan Village. CTA 5 is also close to the following: Onchan Precinct consisting of a pedestrianised shopping area, health centre and supermarket and the Onchan 'Rec' Area with children's play area and community centre.

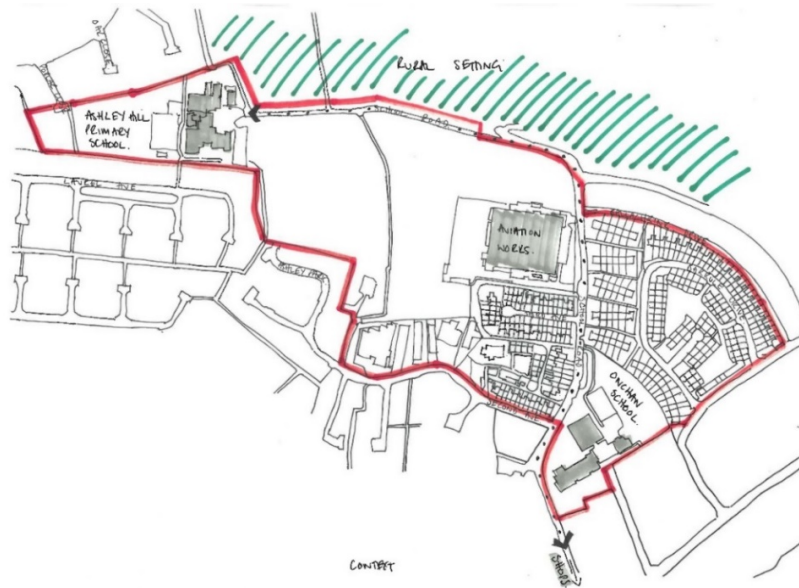
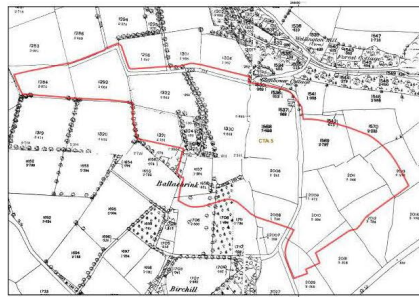


Fig. 1: Illustrative Plan to show the site context and linkages

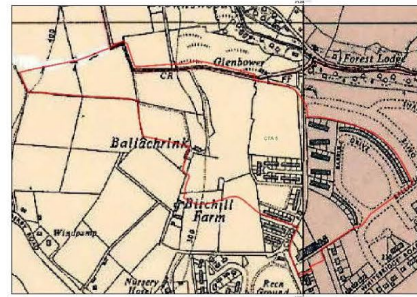
Historic Townscape Evolution

Onchan School was originally built in 1849. In 1950, this CTA was firmly in a rural setting, with the residential areas around Onchan School only partially developed and the land that would come to form the Birch Hill estate still being used for agriculture. By the publication of the 1960 Ordnance Survey map, the area had seen the development of the engineering works which is still in operation today, but was still generally a rural area.

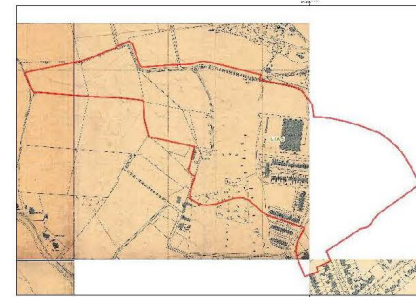
During the 1970's, the area saw significant development, with Birch Hill farm ceasing to be used as agricultural land, and being developed to form the Birch Hill estate. This in turn led to the development of Ashley Hill Primary School (1972), to cater for the increase in local population and demand for schooling.



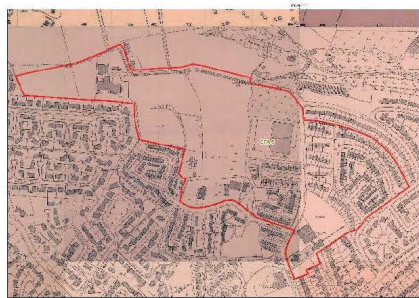
1869 Map



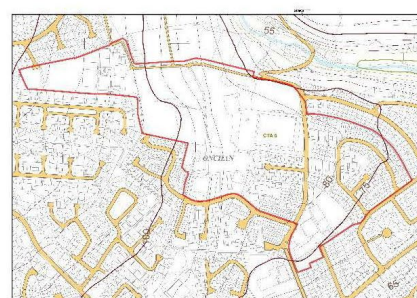
1950 Map



1960 Map



1980 Map



Present Day Map

Fig. 2: Historic Map Progression

Land Uses

A significant portion of land within the central section of this CTA is used as open space, which acts as a buffer for existing industrial uses within the CTA, including the Aviation Works and light industrial uses (partly occupied) to the north of Second Avenue. Civic Uses (educational) are located to the west and south east of the CTA and residential land uses wrap around both schools. Sui generis (no specific use class) and civic uses (worship) are situated on the southern site boundary, together with specialist residential land uses. This mix of uses supports the local community well. These land uses reflect the historic designations found within the Onchan Local Plan (2000).

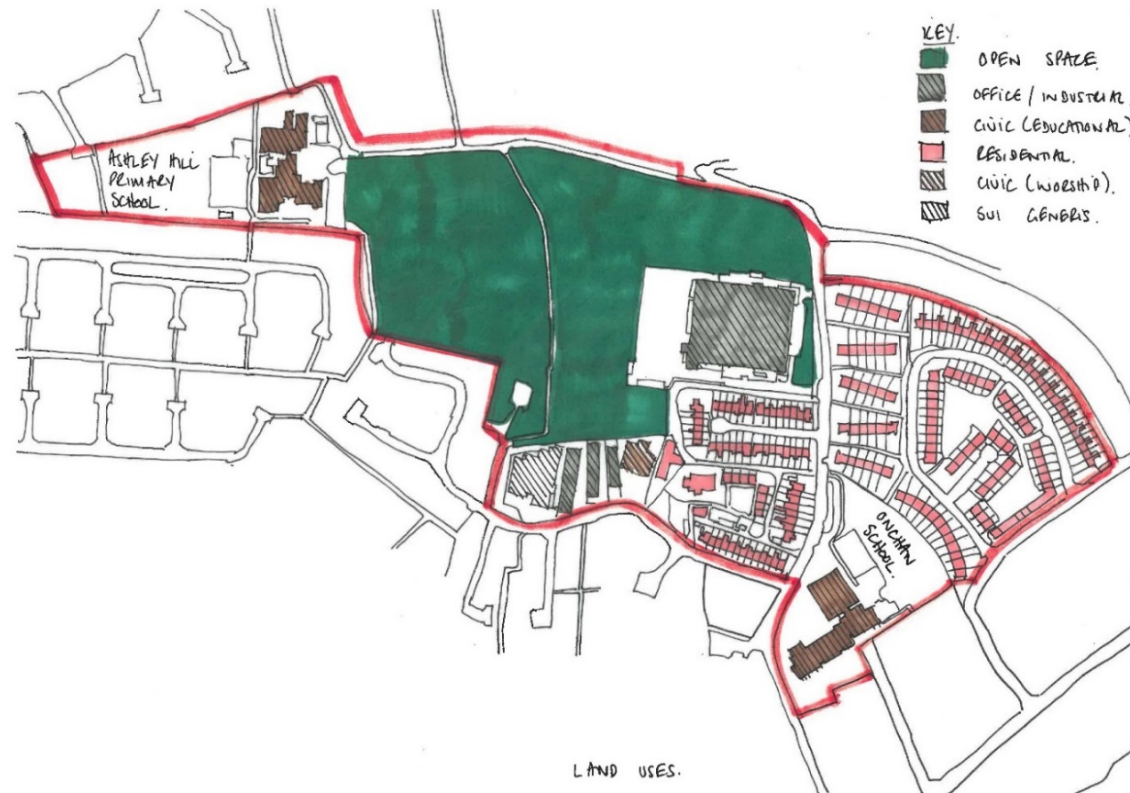


Fig. 3: Illustrative Plan to show existing land uses

Urban Block Form

A typical grid layout to the south east of the CTA gives way to a superblock structure that aligns with Radburn principles. The urban elements found within the CTA that indicate a Radburn layout are as follows:

- Mixed uses, including residential, industrial and civic;
- Cul de sacs;
- Separate vehicular and pedestrian routes;
- An interior park, and
- Turned around houses, set within communal green space.

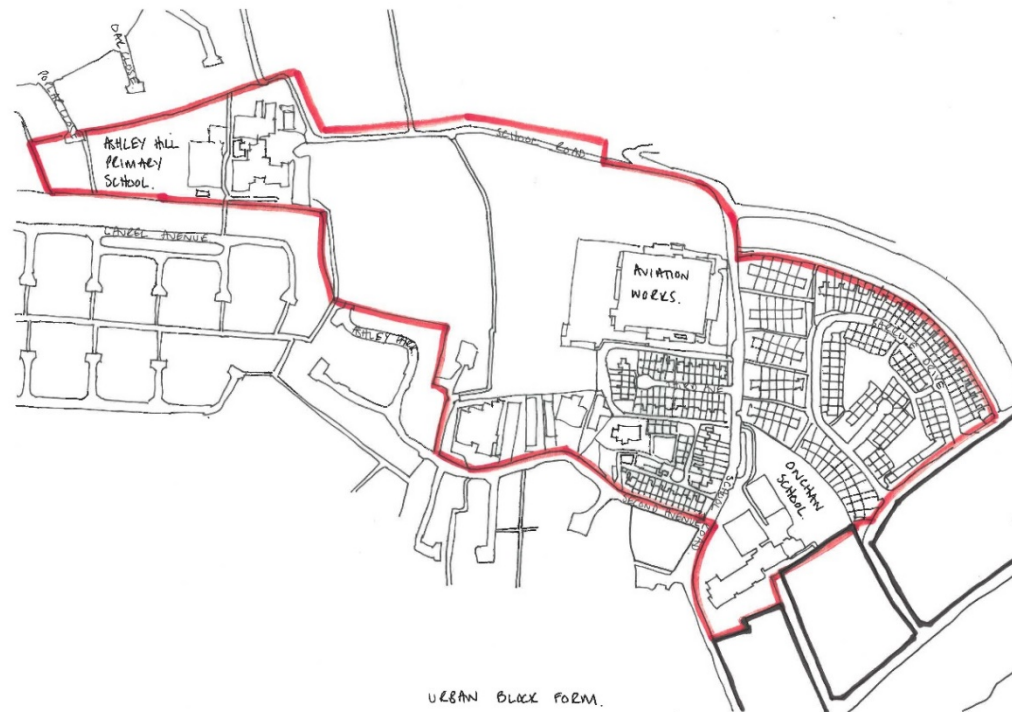


Fig. 4: Illustrative Plan to show the urban block form

Levels and Vehicular Site Access

Layouts within the CTA are strongly defined by existing site levels, with building floorplates and footpaths aligning with contours. Major level changes occur within the green space between Ashley Hill and the Aviation Works. The engineering works is situated on relatively level ground, as is Onchan School.

School Road serves as an important access route, linking the two Schools, the engineering works and residential areas. The main vehicular access points for parents to Ashley Hill School is gained from Poplar Close and Laurel Avenue. These three access points to Ashley Hill School help to reduce congestion, but complicate movement patterns to and from the School. Ballachrink Drive provides access to Barrule Drive and an alternative highway route to School Road.

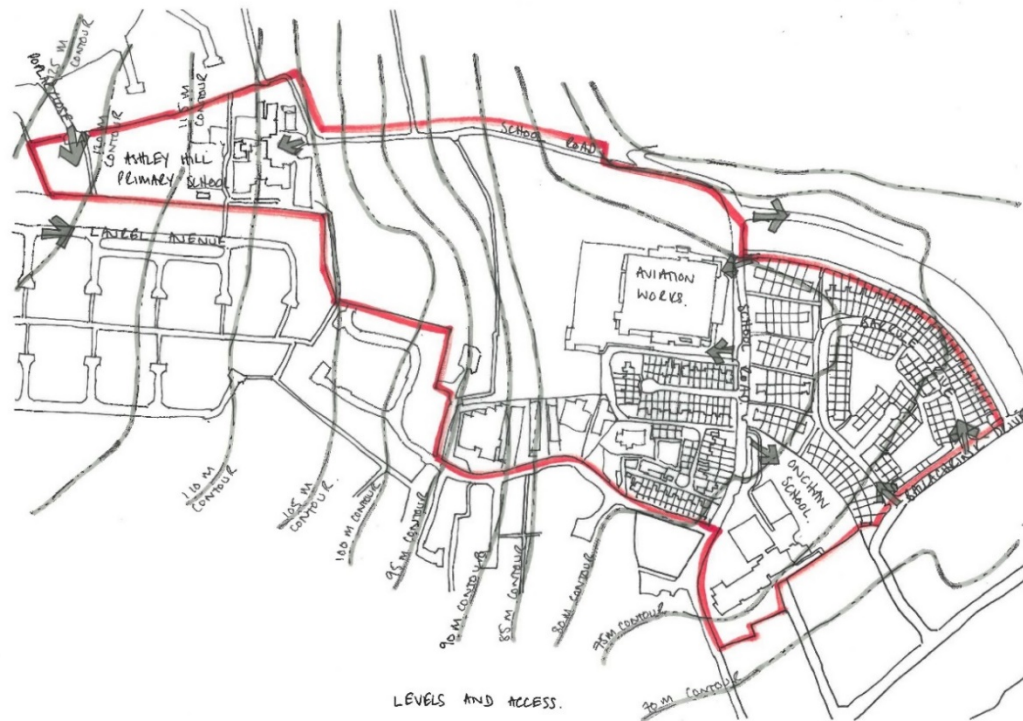


Fig. 5: Illustrative Plan to show the site contours and access

Vehicular and Pedestrian Permeability

Within the extent of the CTA, pedestrian permeability is excellent, with many pedestrian pathways following existing contours across the site. Vehicular permeability is much more restricted due to the cul de sac layout. School Road serves as the principle access route within the extent of the CTA. The road is not designed to serve as the principle route, and is substandard in design for its current purpose. As School Road skirts around the northern boundary of the CTA, the road becomes very narrow and winding. A movement node occurs outside of Onchan School on School Road during school drop off and pick up. Any interventions that would help to alleviate vehicular and pedestrian conflicts within this area would significantly ease movement pressures within the CTA, including provision for active travel. Currently there are major highway safety concerns relating to poor layout of junctions, carriageway width, and on-street parking.

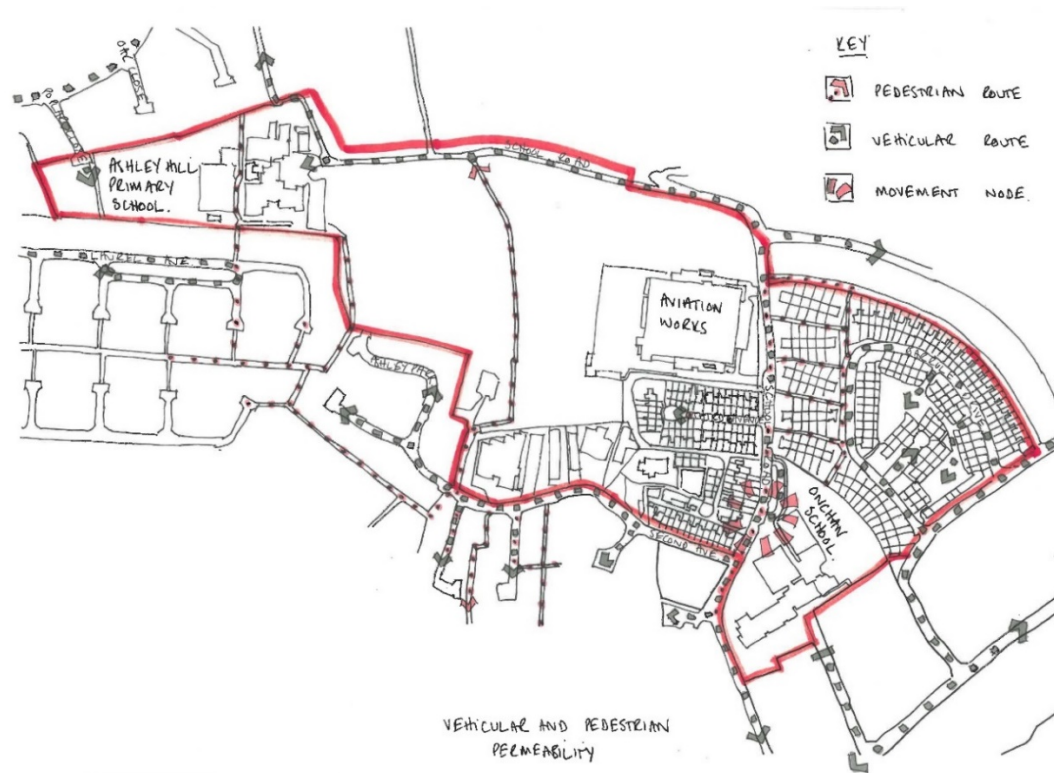


Fig. 6: Illustrative Plan to show vehicular and pedestrian permeability

Visual Assets and Detractors

The mature avenue of trees that borders the pedestrian pathway through the green space between Ashley Hill School and the Aviation Works is a significant visual asset for this area. Views northwards out of the CTA towards the rural landscape setting also serve as an asset to this site.

The service area associated with the aviation works forms a significant visual detractor to the area, diminishing the attributes associated with the green space surrounding the works. Tree and hedge planting around the perimeter of the service area would help to screen the service area from view.



Fig. 8: Mature avenue of trees to east of Ashley Hill School



Fig. 9: Views towards the countryside



Fig. 10: service yard for the aviation works

Relevant Planning Considerations

Within CTA 5, there are two schools that are designated as Civic Land Use on the Onchan Map for the Area Plan for the East (peach colour – below extract). An industrial land use designation is attached to the factory premises occupying the central section of the site, accessed via School Road (dark purple – extract below). A residential land use designation is also showing within this CTA (light purple – below extract). There are no existing heritage designations located within CTA 5. The broad extent of CTA 5 is denoted as an orange diagonal hatch on the map extract above.

Paragraph 11.5.3 of the Area Plan recognises that there may in the future need to be additional educational provision to serve additional development on the edge of Onchan.

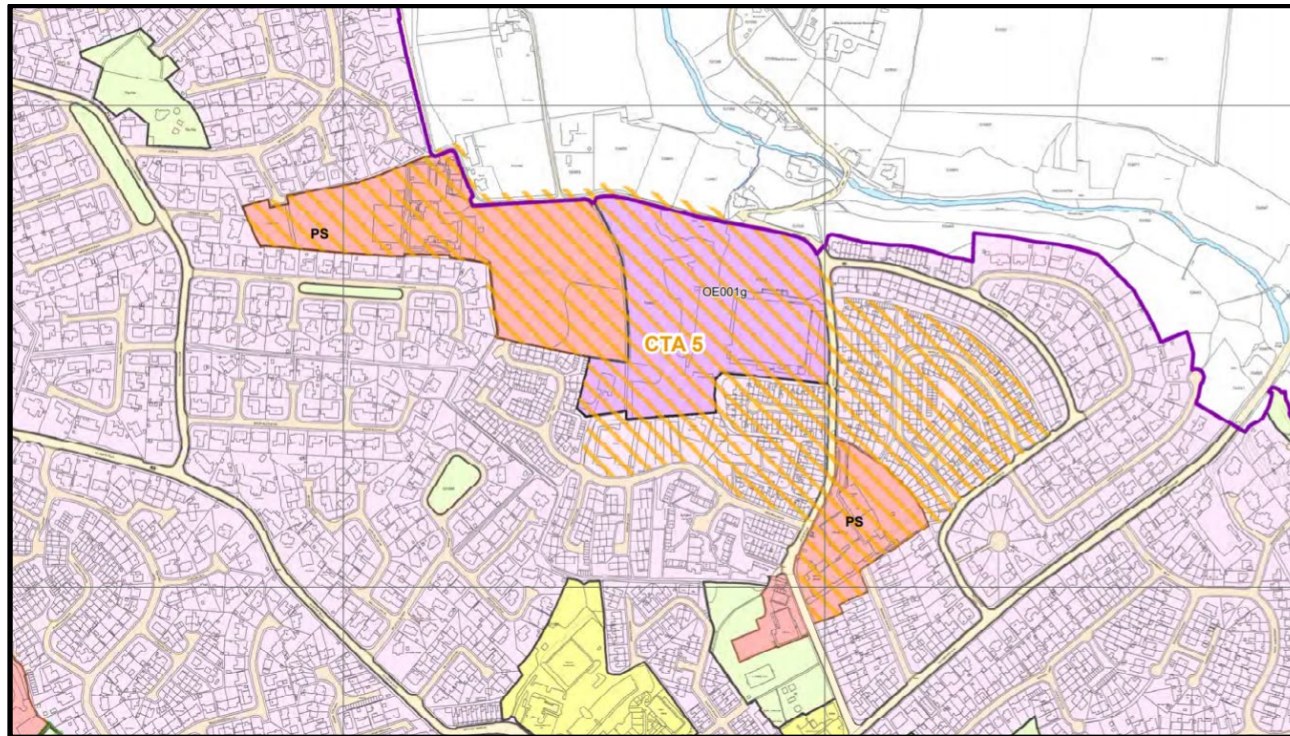


Figure 11 – Extract from Map 6: Onchan, an accompanying map for the Area Plan for the East

Relevant Planning Considerations (cont...)

Paragraph 13.11.1

A brief spatial analysis and policy intent for the Onchan Schools area is set out in paragraph 13.11.1 of the Area Plan for the East:

The site comprises two schools, a factory and some residential streets;

The highway network is substandard and needs re-configuration;

Re-development of the area could rationalise the uses, make a more efficient use of land and allow for schools to expand as is necessary, and

There would remain the opportunity for employment uses and if appropriate the redevelopment of the existing houses as part of a regeneration scheme.

Treatment Plan

A treatment plan for the Onchan Schools area is included within the Area Plan for the East, and is provided below for reference:

CTA Proposal 5 – Onchan Schools (Treatment Plan)

Redevelopment of this area for education, light industrial and residential purposes would be supported. Any redevelopment would need to be subject to a development brief setting out the various uses, highway and drainage improvements, public realm enhancement and phasing of development.

Sites OE001g (Onchan) is located within this treatment area. It is identified as an available site for employment use within the Employment Land Review [ELR] (2015), and is accordingly designated for industrial land use.

The Unoccupied Urban Sites Register does not recognise any such sites within CTA 5.

Relevant Planning Considerations (cont...)

Planning History

Notable planning applications are detailed in the table below:

| Application Reference | Description |
|--|---|
| (04/00998/B) and (17/00583/B). | Both schools have a varied planning history which includes applications for mobile classrooms, extensions, disabled access, and highways infrastructure improvements. Onchan School's last application for expansion was in 2004, with Ashley Hill's being more recent in 2017. |
| (90/00782/A). | An application was approved in 1994 on the large plot of land between Ashley Hill School and the Aviation Factory. The application sought to develop both residential and light industrial uses that would be accessed via School Road. Development of this never commenced and so the permission has lapsed. |
| 86/00320/B | An area of previously developed land between the former optics factory and Ashley Hill School, was developed through application (approved 1994), as a gas plant. The former Onchan Gas Plant has now been demolished and the land is vacant. |
| 14/01384/C | The former Optics site (situated to the south of site OE001g) received an application for change of use from a factory to commercial and office use permitted in 2015 (14/01384/C). |
| 92/00599/B | A planning application was approved for a mental health centre at Meadow View in 1994. |
| 91/01655/A, 15/01002/C, and 07/00379/B | An application for sheltered accommodation at 9 Meadow Avenue was approved in 1994. Adjacent sites evidence planning approvals for change of use from residential to consulting rooms for health care professionals and change of use from manufacturing to community use. |

Land Ownership and Legal Tenure

The proportion of land owned by Government within the extent of the CTA is significant. The Government own land associated with Ashley Hill Primary School, including the playing fields to the east, Onchan School and the Aviation Works. Whilst this land is in government ownership, any future proposals on this site would be constrained by the lease agreement with the current business tenants. The Government also owns land incorporating sheltered housing. Existing lease agreements and specialist needs would make it difficult to re-locate current land uses within the extent of this land title.

Residential housing within and surrounding CTA 5 is likely to be held by Onchan District Commissioners, or in private ownership. Early discussions with Onchan District Commissioners would help to identify the extent of land held by them within CTA 5, and future plans.

It is also worth exploring the registered land title relating to existing light industrial premises fronting onto Second Avenue. Some appear empty/underused and are an opportunity to expand options in terms of the rationalisation and reconfiguration of land uses.

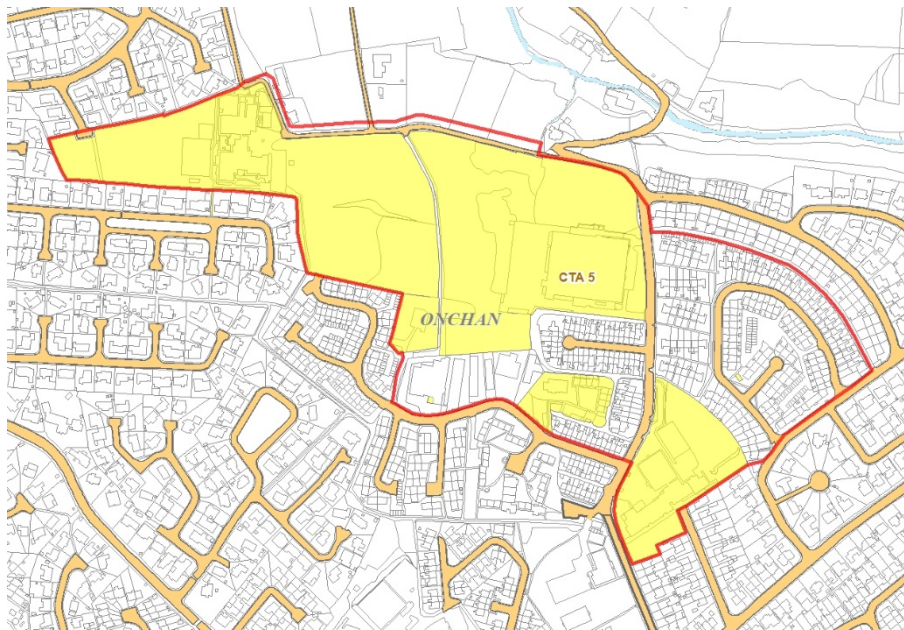


Fig. 12: Plan to show government land ownership within CTA 5

Opportunities and Possible Outcomes

Flanked by an attractive rural setting to the north, CTA 5 enjoys easy access to a range of community facilities in Onchan, and existing open space between the playing fields of Ashley Hill School and the Aviation Works helps to bring this rural setting into the extent of CTA 5, whilst providing an appropriate buffer between uses. The mature avenue of trees that borders the pedestrian pathway through the open space referred to above is a significant visual asset for this area and views northwards out of the CTA towards the rural landscape setting help to provide a distinctive sense of place for this area.

Should future development come forward in the wider settlement area of Onchan, additional educational provision will be required to meet an additional need associated with a growing population. Whilst the development brief for the Strategic Reserve sites to the north west of Johnny Watterson's Lane refer to the need for a new primary school in the long term, the two primary schools in Onchan continue to have unresolved issues.

A significant portion of land within CTA 5 is owned by Government, and subject to current leasehold agreements, there is scope in the future to rationalise the layout of land use in this area to provide a new school site that can share improved educational facilities and ancillary uses with Ashley Hill School. With an outlook over the wider rural setting, this could become a major community asset that resolves many of the current transport issues in this area in the longer term.

It is recognised that rationalisation of land uses would involve the re-location of the existing Aviation Works to an alternative site, but this is possible. Indeed, there may be commercial benefits associated with relocation, if the right site can be found.

Onchan District Commissioners form a major stakeholder within CTA 5, and there may be future development opportunities associated with housing provision also. In the event that Onchan School is re-located to the site of the aviation works, land would become available for residential land uses on the former school site, and re-development of this site could make a significant contribution to the financing and funding of a new and improved educational offer.

Any future design proposals should aim to introduce a clearer urban block form within CTA 5. A new civic space, incorporating a new/additional civic uses/facilities could allow for better facilities for members of the public, and allotments could form part of an enhanced civic offer for this area.

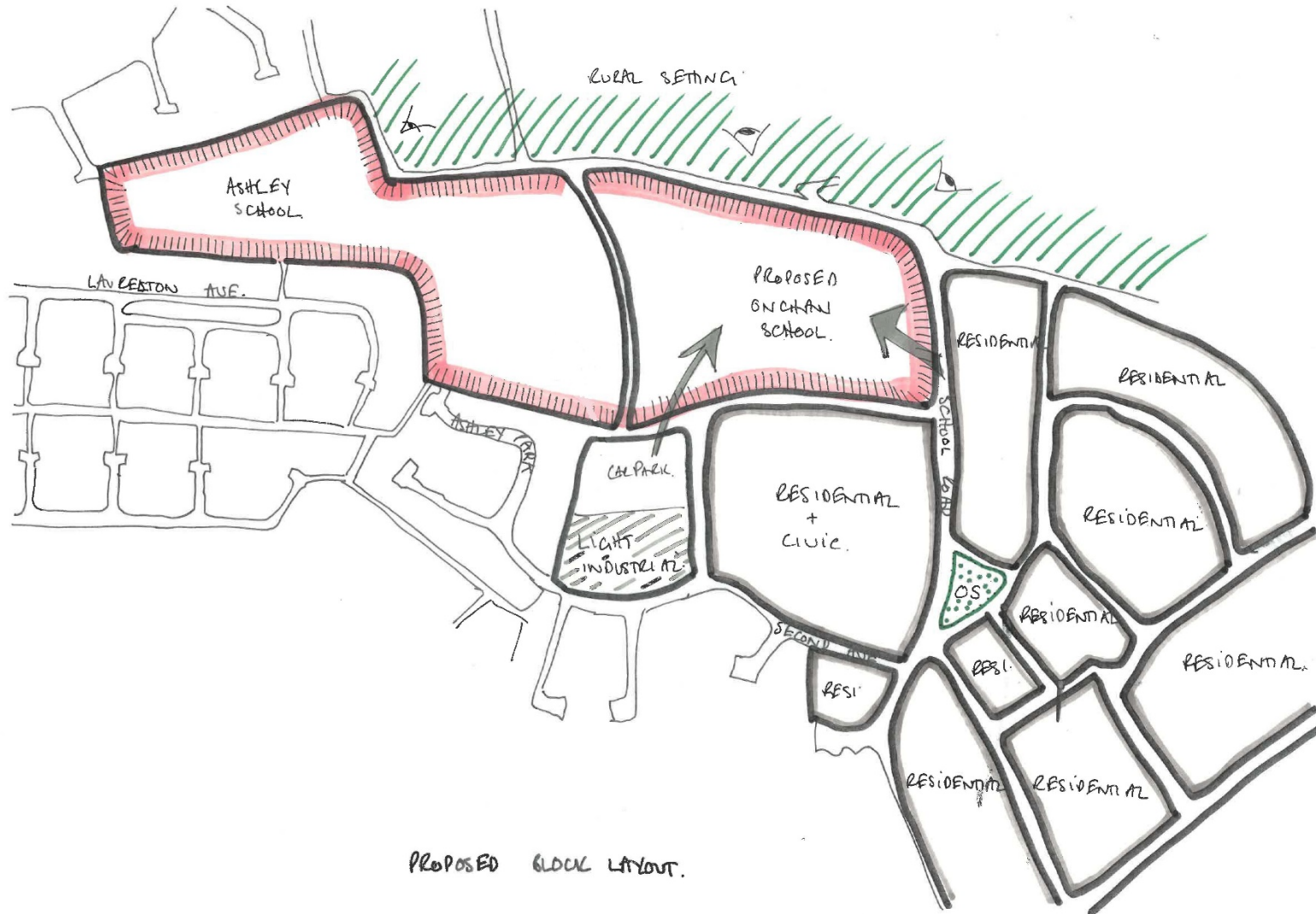


Fig. 13: Illustrative Plan to show possible consolidated block layout

Development Barriers

Due to the Radburn layout, the area suffers from a poorly defined sense of place. Urban interventions that depart from the Radburn layout could make a significant contribution to defining a stronger sense of place in this area.

Layouts within the CTA are strongly defined by existing site levels, with building floorplates and footpaths aligning with contours, and any future development in this area would need to take into account existing site levels. That said, both the aviation works and Onchan School are located on relatively level ground, making both sites more viable for future re-development.

Whilst pedestrian permeability in the area is excellent, vehicular permeability is much more restricted due to the cul de sac layout. School Road serves as an important link for the two schools, the engineering works and residential areas, but is currently substandard in design to meet current needs. Highways infrastructure will be a high priority issue to resolve to enable future development within CTA 5 to take place. Any interventions that would help to alleviate vehicular and pedestrian conflicts within this area would significantly ease movement pressures within the CTA. Existing provision of public realm doesn't accommodate current traffic and pedestrian flows easily and future discussions with the DOI would be required to ascertain future requirements, should existing sites be re-developed, including improvements to the public realm.

Leasehold agreements with the aviation works will determine a time frame for any future rationalisation of land uses in this area.

The Flood Risk Viewer Map suggests that the area suffers from surface water flooding, and any future proposals for this area would need to consider how drainage provision could be improved in this area.

A full assessment of utilities provision is recommended, to better understand the relevant constraints in this respect.

Recommendations

Land uses within the extent of the CTA could be rationalised and consolidated. Redevelopment of this area for education and residential purposes is desirable. Sensitive commercial discussions will need to be entered into, and an alternative light industrial site found to enable this consolidation process. However, should relocation of the industrial premises be made possible, a phased development over time could allow for the formation of a new school site adjacent to Ashley Hill School that benefits from shared educational facilities and better traffic circulation/management. A masterplan should be prepared to further explore this option.

Any future design proposals should aim to introduce a clearer urban block form within CTA 5, to further articulate a sense of place, and views towards the rural setting should be capitalised upon. Early discussions with Onchan District Commissioners would help to identify the extent of land held by them within CTA 5, the future needs in the district and future development plans they may have. It is also worth exploring the registered land title relating to existing light industrial premises fronting onto Second Avenue.

A future masterplan would need to address required highway and drainage improvements and public realm enhancements, and future travel plans should assess the suitability of existing infrastructure to support active travel and provide recommendations for enhanced infrastructure for active travel. Discussions with the DOI are essential to achieving these improvements, as too are continued discussions with the Department of Education, Sport and Culture.

A full assessment of drainage and utilities provision is recommended, to better understand the relevant constraints in this respect, and improve the current provision.

A phasing plan for redevelopment of previously developed sites resulting from any future consolidation of land uses within the CTA should be prepared, to support the financing and funding of this initiative through development enablement.